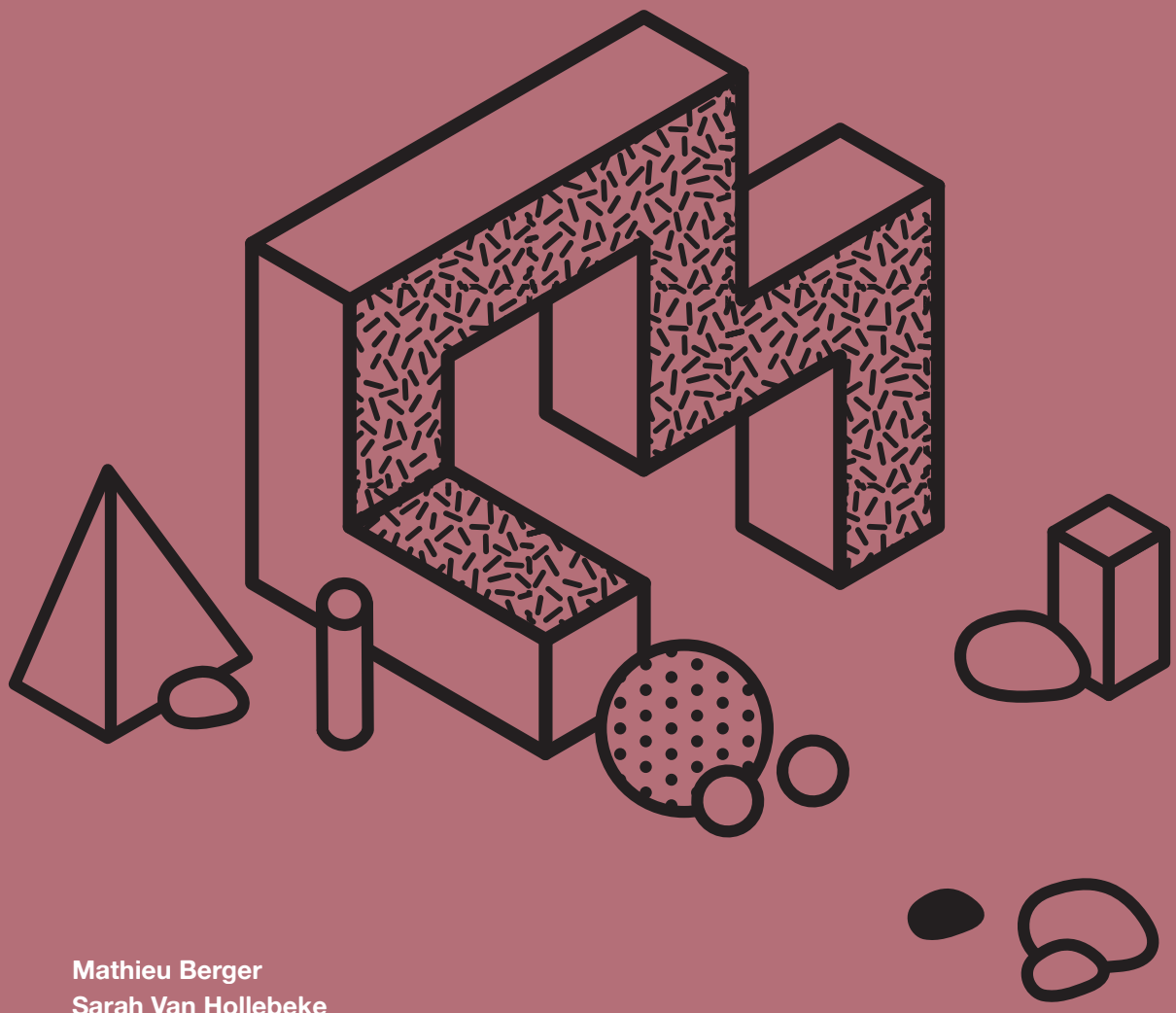
Designing Transdisciplinarity in Urban Research

Metrolab Brussels (2015-2023)



Mathieu Berger
Sarah Van Hollebeke
(Eds.)

Metrolab series

Designing Transdisciplinarity in Urban Research

Metrolab Brussels (2015-2023)

Mathieu Berger
Sarah Van Hollebeke
(Eds.)

‘When novelties take the form of mechanical appliances, we incline to welcome them (…). The organised community is still hesitant with reference to new ideas of a non-technical and non-technological nature. For an innovation is a departure, and one which brings in its train some incalculable disturbance of the behavior to which we have grown used and which seems natural.’

— John Dewey, 1927, p. 57

Foreword

Rudi Vervoort, Minister-President Brussels-Capital Region

The European cohesion policy, of which the ERDF programs are a part, constitutes the primary tool for investment and solidarity within the European Union. It serves to reduce regional disparities, promote innovation, foster economic growth, and support sustainability at both regional and European scales. For its 2014-2020 program, the Brussels-Capital Region decided to allocate European funds towards the development of economic, social, and environmental objectives, as well as to promote and support applied urban research. In total, my Government selected 58 projects in 2015, with a combined budget of nearly 195 million Euros, evenly split between the European Union and the Brussels-Capital Region.

As part of Axis 1 of the Brussels 2014-2020 ERDF program dedicated to 'strengthening innovation and research,' my Government had approved the application for 'Metrolab — Brussels Metropolitan Laboratory,' a research laboratory project serving urban development.

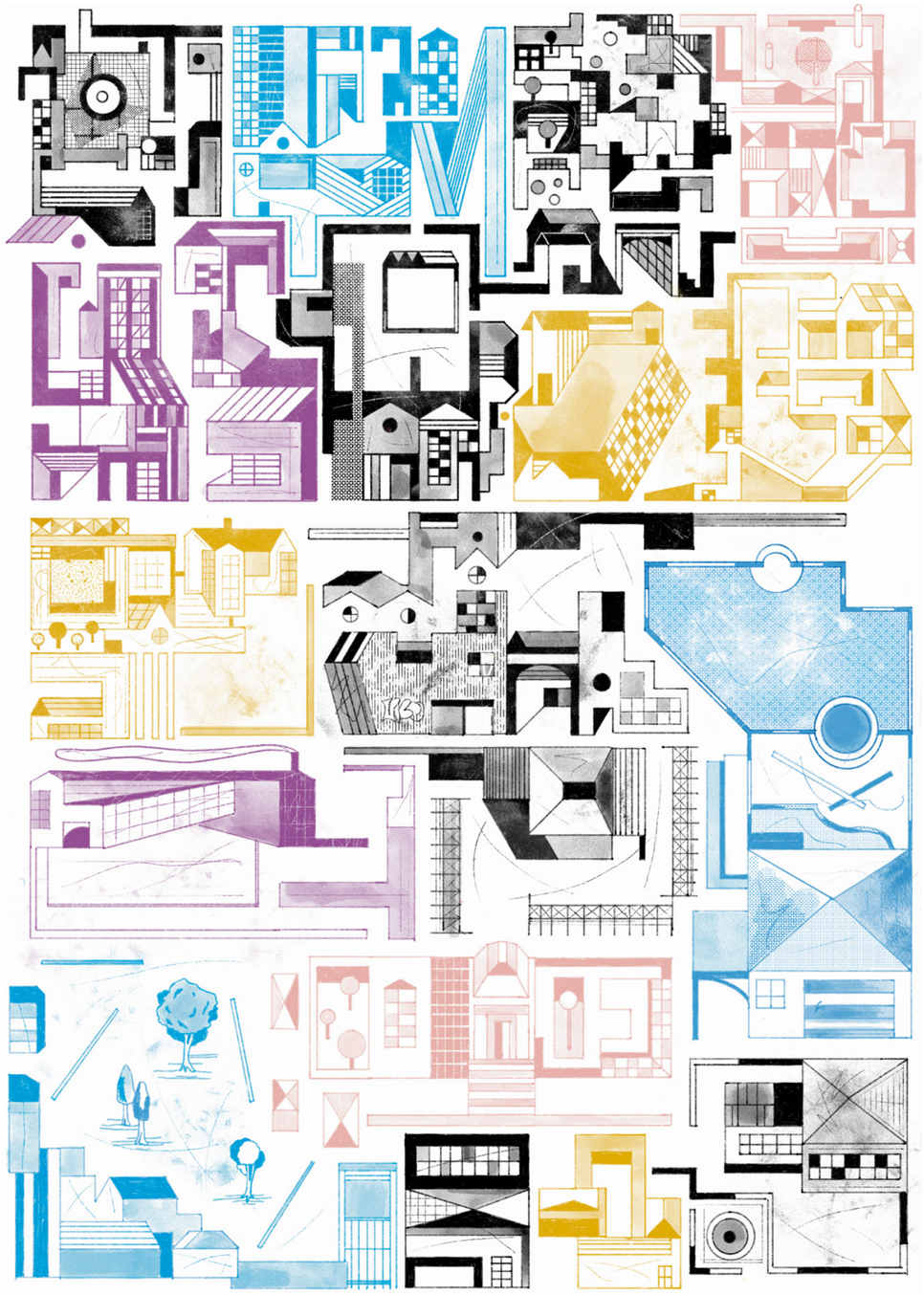
The work carried out by Metrolab has yielded genuinely innovative pathways, both in terms of the research conducted and the actions undertaken. To illustrate my point, I will mention one example: supporting regional development through the use of scientific resources and experimentation. I am convinced that this exercise was prompted by the interdisciplinary approach favoured by the various actors within the consortium that initiated this ambitious project.

Indeed, Metrolab was initiated and led by UCLouvain, in collaboration with ULB (Free University of Brussels), and four research centres: CriDIS (UCLouvain, social sciences), LOCI (UCLouvain, architecture and urban planning), LoUIsE (ULB, urban planning, infrastructure, and environment), and IGEAT (ULB, geography). Interdisciplinary and versatile, this consortium has been committed to generating knowledge about the city and urban 'know-how' by working on projects within the 2014-2020 ERDF program, thereby grounding itself in the reality of our city-region and its development. Furthermore, it is worth noting that this experience has yielded significant added value both for the universities and for the project leaders who, in turn, received support in their endeavours.

The collective and interdisciplinary approach adopted by Metrolab aimed to broaden the understanding of problematic urban situations and to create new practical perspectives. Through the ongoing scientific coordination of a network of stakeholders and projects supported by the 2014-2020 ERDF funds, Metrolab facilitated the exchange of knowledge and practices. The laboratory has provided an opportunity to test the universities' ability to contribute to both the conceptualisation and the practical implementation of public policies — particularly in the fields of territorial planning and sustainable urban development — in order to further enrich the dialogue between research and urban policies.

The Brussels-Capital Region is confronted with numerous challenges in terms of urban development, including social disparities, environmental transition, and rising land prices. To address these issues effectively, it is crucial to work in a multidisciplinary manner, comprehending the implications and interactions while promoting dialogue. I am convinced that only an integrated vision will enable us to respond in a creative and effective manner to the challenges that await us in the future and beyond. The Metrolab project demonstrates that research encourages and enhances this approach, assisting the Region and its institutions in addressing the constantly evolving and increasingly complex challenges.

To achieve this, the Brussels-Capital Region can now rely on the support of Metrolab to enrich our thinking and help generate solutions that effectively address the challenges and issues that benefit the greatest number of people.



© Lucas Gicquel

Preamble

Metrolab's transdisciplinarity: attempts at communication across knowledge ecosystems

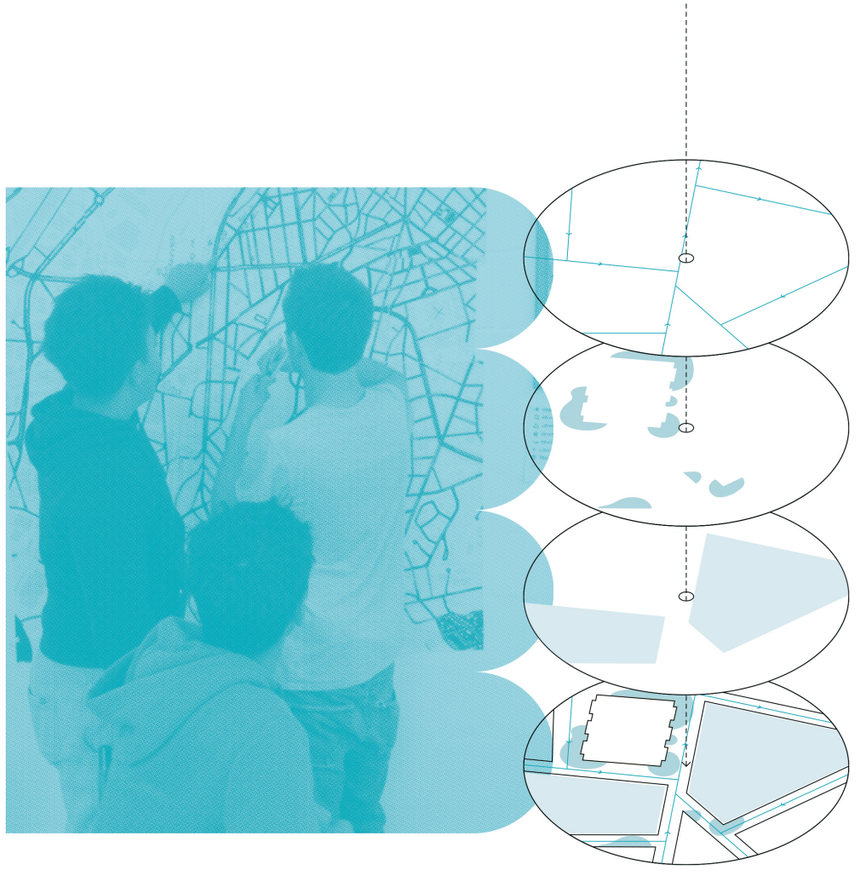
Mathieu Berger and Sarah Van Hollebeke

This book proposes a reflexive, self-critical and largely collective look back at the Metrolab experience: eight years of transdisciplinary urban research in Brussels. The book explores in-depth questions on the collaboration between academic knowledge and the urban actors' know-how; between scientific, technical or administrative expertise and the experience of users, residents and citizens. It has been designed as a reflexive tool for use by any research group wishing to set up this kind of lab, and develop a similar transdisciplinary approach in urban research.

Metrolab is a transdisciplinary and inter-university laboratory for applied and critical urban research, funded by the Brussels-Capital Region through its European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) programme (2014-2020). This laboratory, created by UCLouvain (Université Catholique de Louvain) and ULB (Université libre de Bruxelles), is a collaboration between four research centres: CriDIS (social sciences), LOCI (architecture and urban planning), LoUIsE (urbanism, infrastructure and ecologies), and IGEAT (geography).

Since 2015, Metrolab has offered a unique opportunity to experiment with new forms of transdisciplinary urban research, embedded in the socio-spatial, practical and institutional settings of the Brussels-Capital Region. The European Regional Development Fund for the Brussels-Capital Region provided Metrolab with the means to conduct action research studies, as one of the 58 projects subsidised under the 2014-2020 programme.

One of the objectives of this academic support to the ERDF programme was to test the ability of researchers to offer reflection and foster dialogue and collaboration in urban policies and projects. This objective was first and foremost pragmatic, result-driven, but it also had scientific and epistemological implications, as Metrolab wished to test new scientific forms of engagement and positioning in urban research. Reconnecting academic urban research with more involved, applied and experimental forms of knowledge represented and still represents a significant mission for universities. The complexity of the city and urban policies indeed requires not only a better dialogue between urban policies and academic research, but also a better



© Sébastien Gairaud

extension of academic research into action research.

By accompanying a dozen projects of the 58 projects financed by European policies in the Brussels-Capital Region, Metrolab researchers have tested new ways of collaborating with the various publics concerned. Through a scientific mediation of the network and projects supported by ERDF, it aimed to develop synergies at a transversal level between sectors and to facilitate the various ERDF projects' grounding in Brussels territorial realities.

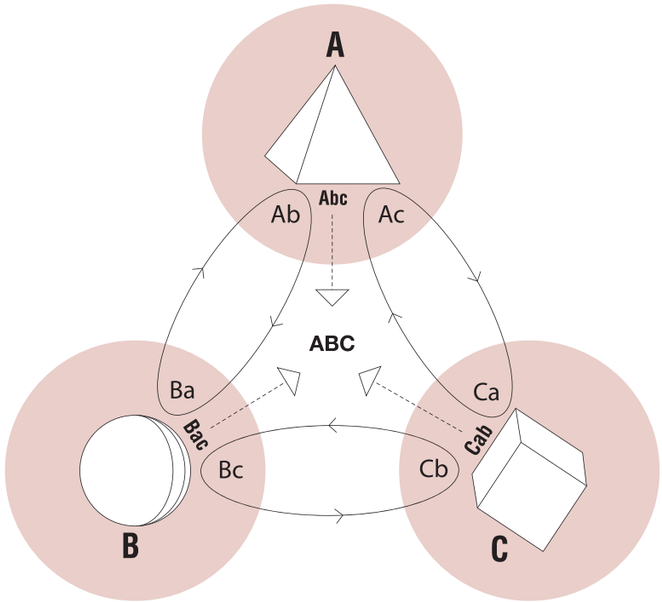
Metrolab's scientific programme covered three thematic areas: urban inclusion, urban ecology, and urban production, according to the focuses of European urban policies on the social, environmental, and economic dimensions of sustainable urban development. In terms of timing, these axes of research have formed three successive cycles of work.

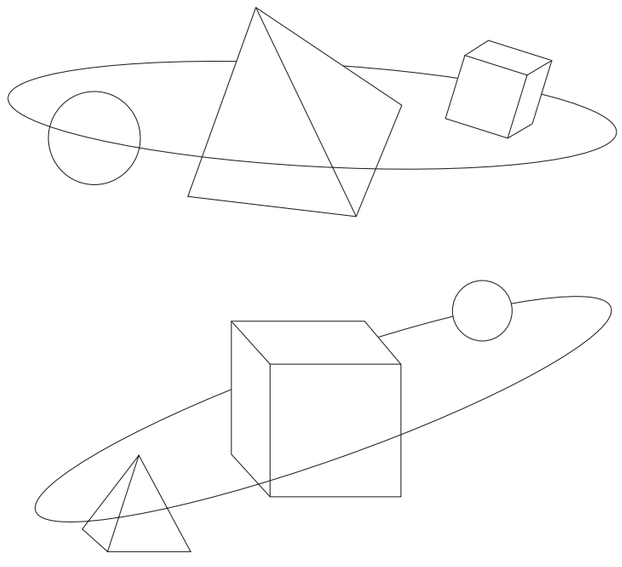
Reflections on the theme of urban inclusion began in 2015. During the year 2015 and 2016, ethnographic surveys, mapping and co-design workshops were organised around several ERDF projects in collaboration with local actors, including project leaders and stakeholders. These investigations on urban inclusion and hospitality in Brussels culminated in the conference and MasterClass *In/Out: Designing Urban Inclusion*, organised in January and February 2017. The MasterClass explored how to practically approach the quality of inclusion and hospitality of urban projects and environments, taking four Brussels sites as study cases. From a socio-spatial perspective, the issues of inclusion were addressed as much as questions of (architectural) design as of (socio-political) processes. The results of this work were published in the book *Designing urban inclusion* (2018).

The theme of Brussels' urban ecology has been explored since 2016. During two years, it has unfolded through seminars exploring the field of political ecology, human ecology, metropolitan agriculture, urban metabolism, socio-ecological transition, etc. In October 2018, the Brussels Ecosystems international conference looked into an integrated approach to environmental, social and political ecosystems. In January and February 2019, the *Designing Brussels Ecosystems* MasterClass was organised as a testing ground for this transdisciplinary approach to urban ecosystems. The results were published in spring 2020. The book explores the ecosystems of innovative projects (such as the one subsidised by ERDF), niche situations and pioneering practices in four thematic ecosystems: agroecology, construction, social economy and 'temporary occupation'. The conclusion emphasises the importance of grounding innovative projects and suggests a compass to navigate toward the socio-ecological transition of Brussels.

The cycle on the theme urban production began in 2017, in a context where European and local public authorities are promoting the preservation and/or reinforcement of productive functions in the city. After two years of investigations on this topic, the conference and MasterClass *Urban Production* were organised in November 2019 and January 2020. The aim of these events was to gain a better understanding of the interactions between production *in* the city (productive activities in the urban environment) and production *of* the city (daily manufacture of fabrics and urban projects), and identifying the issues at stake. To address this question, the MasterClass proposed to work on two analytical and methodological axes: one relating to the different types of productive activities in the city, the other to their modes of integration in the urban fabric and the role of urban policies in this regard.

Each thematic cycle ended with a MasterClass where all the members of Metrolab (researchers, coordinators,





© Sébastien Gairaud

Figure 1. With three shapes (a square, a sphere and a pyramid) the first diagram developed by Sarah Van Hollebeke (2021) during her doctoral thesis with Mathieu Berger intends to represent the multiplicity of encounters and interactions between forms of knowledge from the worlds of architecture, social sciences (including sociology, economy, geography, history) or the political world. The second diagram illustrates situations in which one of these worlds is in position to host the others who gravitate around him and thereby set the framework and the tone.

professors, administrators) apply methodological innovation to real situations and case studies in co-creation with Brussels urban project stakeholders and local operators (including actors of several Brussels ERDF projects). This is why Metrolab's MasterClass is a unique occasion for transdisciplinary experimentation and co-creation: it calls upon the skills and knowledge of our researchers; it builds relationships with those in charge of ERDF projects and other urban projects; it experiments new methods for urban analysis, idea development and urban project improvement. It offers the chance for international researchers in various disciplines (sociology, architecture, political science, landscape architecture, urbanism, geography, etc.) to gather in Brussels, in order to reflect on the local ERDF programme and develop new and future-oriented suggestions aiming to improve urban policies.

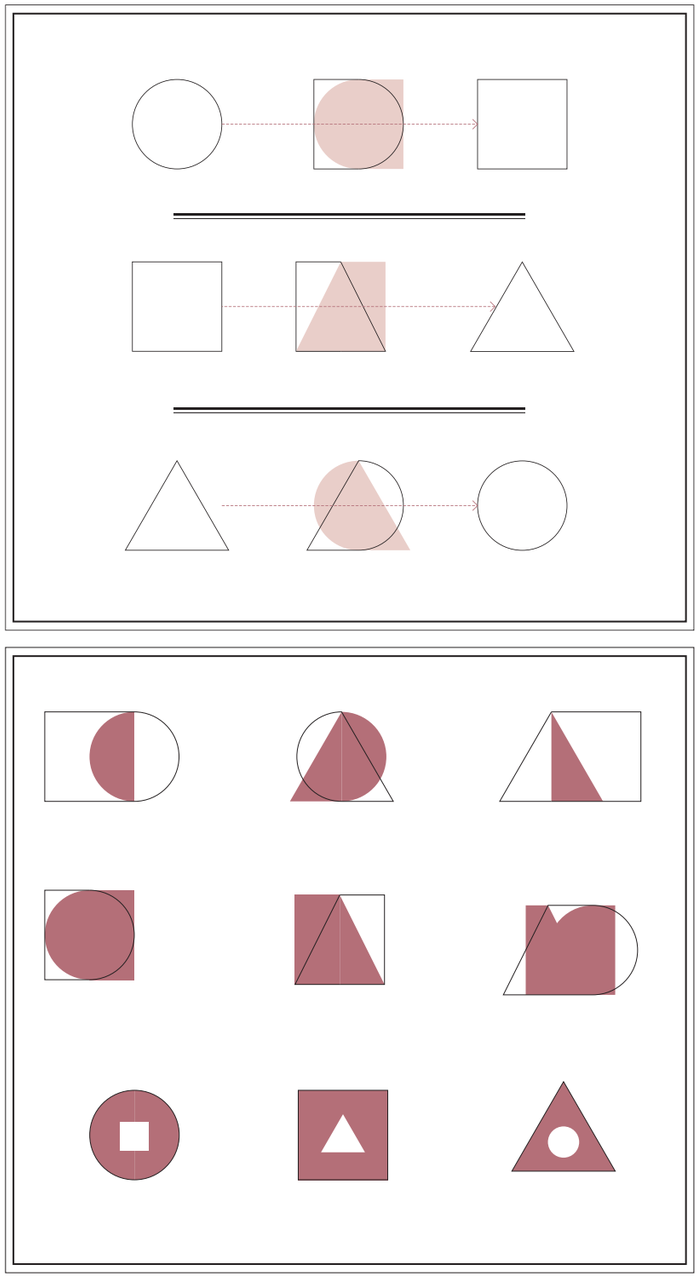
The book you are currently reading, our fourth one, presents the results of the final reflections of the Metrolab which aimed to assess these new forms of transdisciplinary urban research, both theoretically elaborated and pragmatically realistic. Since the beginning of the process, but more intensely over the last two years, Metrolab researchers, together with the project managers, have examined the various innovative tools that have been implemented and tested by Metrolab such as co-design practices, MasterClasses or participatory mapping, and discussed their value for 'sustainable urban development strategies' (Fioretti et al., 2020). We believed that the experiments we have carried out should be documented and disseminated, not only in Brussels but also on an European and international level, for those who would like to start their own laboratory of applied urban research, and are eager to learn from practices, that is, from our trials and errors, successes and failures. With this final book, we saw the possibility to promote our methods and results beyond the 2014-2020 time-frame and at a larger scale, while presenting them in a realistic, sincere and self-critical way.

This book provides a set of reflections and solutions for researchers seeking to accompany and support the action of Europe and the Regions in favour of the transition towards more inclusive and sustainable cities, and to question their resilience in the face of climate change, migratory crisis and urban growth: How can these challenges for our cities be approached from a transdisciplinary perspective? How can social scientists, geographers, urban planners, architects, designers, today engage with public authorities and citizens in a relevant and effective way? What skills do they need to be able to intervene practically and appropriately in urban design or urban planning issues? What is their capacity to produce knowledge about the city for the purposes of urban intervention or urban projects? What are the conditions for the acceptance of their knowledge in the public sphere dealing with urban problems? What practical, institutional, cognitive, semiotic, communicational (…) obstacles do they encounter?

Knowledge ecosystems

The publication presents the process of knowledge-building and the epistemological framework that guides the activities of Metrolab, through the concept of 'knowledge ecosystems'. A seminal work in this field is Gregory Bateson's *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, which develops the idea that the production of knowledge is linked to the interaction between individuals, their mind, and environments in which they evolve, the experiences that affect them and lead them to act and think.

This theory enables an understanding of knowledge-building as a



© Sébastien Gairaud

Figure 2. This set of pictograms suggests the many ways knowledge milieus and epistemic ecosystems evolve and mutate when they interact, overlap and encroach on one another. They may include the knowledge generated by others; they may mirror each other; they may respond, absorb or translate knowledge from others to adapt it to their own expectations and rationale.

practical experience, an activity situated in a space-time context and embodied in a place and a body that is sensitive and mobile. While some authors (influenced by American pragmatism) consider this ecological generation of knowledge as the result of an open 'transaction' between a form of life and its milieu, others (trained in German systems theory) insist on the necessary processes of closure inherent in the organisation and perpetuation of life, and of knowledge as a vital process. For them, knowledge processes are grounded in 'ecological milieus' and develop within the boundaries of 'ecosystems', characterised by closure, proper operations, meanings, semiotic modes and codes (See Figure 1. and Figure 2.).

The first chapter of this volume, entitled 'Further Steps To an Ecology of Urban Knowledge', provides an overall introduction to the topic of this book, by examining dynamics of opening, closure, overlapping and encroachment between multiple knowledge milieus involved in Metrolab, and 'coopetitive' interactions between different 'cognitive sensibilities' (Berger, 2017) and concurrent modes of meaning-making.

Methodology

This approach has been further developed by a group of Metrolab researchers (Mathieu Berger, Sarah Van Hollebeke, Louise Carlier) and managers (Sara Cesari, Louise Prouteau), in close collaboration with a creative agency (Critical Narratives) that combines university expertise with the production of various media (films, booklets, brochures, exhibitions) to facilitate academic communication. We have also collaborated with two graphic designers (Lucas Gicquel, Sébastien Gairaud) to illustrate some of the concepts that run through the chapters gathered in this publication, taking the work of combining visual and textual knowledge one step further.

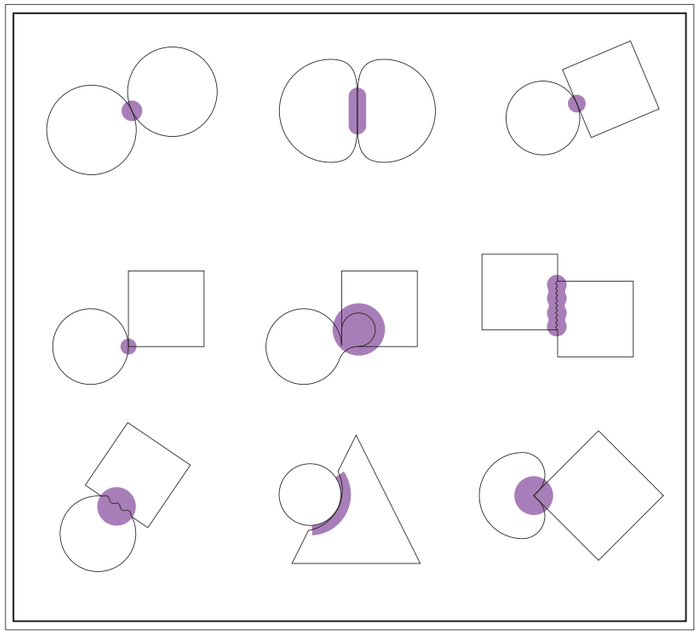
This 'meta-research' (or research about our research process) involves ethnographic work conducted by Metrolab insiders on the action research activities of their colleagues, and draws on personal experiences of Metrolab's members and partners, collected between January 2016 and May 2021 in the form of observations, internal workshops and interviews, as well as archived notes, reports and other written material. Thanks to these documents, we were able to keep track of the doubts, hurdles and uncertainties that punctuated the project, as well as the solutions developed in response.

As a result of this reflexive work, a digital platform has been created to present the Metrolab project in a clear and attractive way to regional, national and international actors, whether from civil society or state organisations. Our communication tools include a brochure in three languages (FR, NL, EN) and videos produced to publicise the work carried out around the themes of urban inclusion, urban ecology and urban production. Each was filmed with researchers and project managers on the site of an ERDF project that had been supported by Metrolab. Their purpose is to document Metrolab's collaboration with local actors and to present the views of project managers on these three themes.

Book structure

The following chapters analyse the experience of Metrolab through the challenges of communication, mutual understanding and dialogical knowledge-building that have arisen at three levels: (1) internal communication between the urban disciplines that make up the lab; (2) communication between Metrolab and leaders of the other projects subsidised by ERDF; (3) communication between institutional public action and urban activists / social movements.

The book is structured in three



© Sébastien Gairaud
Figure 2 bis

parts. Following the general introduction of ‘Further steps to an ecology of urban knowledge’ (M. Berger), the first part entitled ‘Mediation of transdisciplinarity’ includes several texts that provide an understanding of the methods and postures that have been experimented by Metrolab’ researchers. The first chapter gives an overview of different approaches developed to conduct urban action research. The authors intend to show how interdisciplinarity can be used as a tool to meet the ambitions of applied and involved research (L. Carlier et al.). In the next chapter, Sarah Van Hollebeke, describes situations of interdisciplinary exchange. Based on a concept initially inspired by the sociology of Erving Goffman, she analyses the *embarrassment* of speech professionals when they are working together with visual specialists on urban projects. Finally, Louise Carlier and Andrea Bortolotti, explore the methodology and practical solutions that has been set up to approach urban issues in a transversal way.

The second part of the book, entitled ‘critical insights’ brings reflexive and self-critical articles written by Metrolab researchers and principals, or based on their experiences. It begins with a critical narrative inspired by storytelling techniques. Sophie Feyder and Lucile Gruntz, taking the perspective of fictional Metrolab members — two junior female researchers —, retrace the trials of transdisciplinary action research, and the gender-related challenges of balancing a private life with a scientific career. The next chapter, written by Sara Cesari and Louise Prouteau, offers reflections on managing a substantial action research project like Metrolab, while having to deal with the hierarchies and rationales of academia. In the last chapter of that section, Mathieu Berger and Louise Carlier present ‘a pragmatist critique of experimentation’, discussing both Metrolab’s epistemological approach — ‘deep experimentalism’ — and its actual implementation in concrete experience and real-life situations. The authors conclude their self-critical account with a number of epistemological remarks addressed to pragmatist theorists.

The third and last part of the book, entitled ‘external inputs’, gathers conversations with international experts and scientific collaborators that have been directly involved in the activities of Metrolab (conferences, MasterClasses, publications, etc.) or whose work has inspired our epistemology of transdisciplinarity. It begins with a conversation with sociologist Harvey Molotch (NYU) on the perspectives, forms and media for a more practical sociology one that goes beyond the classical posture of ‘resistance and rebellion’ that is usually attached to social sciences; a sociology that would develop a specific capacity for proposition, beyond vague discourses on social change. In the next chapter, Luca Pattaroni looks back on the common heritage and the collaborations between Metrolab and LaSUR (EPFL’s laboratory of urban sociology). He defines what he calls a ‘polytechnic sociology’, a sociology that recognises the institutional and political power of architecture and engineering. The three following chapters focus on the Metrolab’s main topics (ecology, inclusion, production), as they are shared with other partner research centres. First, Daniel Cefaï outlines the approach of ‘Human Ecology’, as developed at the Centre for the Study of Social Movements (CEMS — EHESS), in Paris. Next, the conversation with Miodrag Mitrašinović explores the issue of ‘Urban Ecology and Inclusion’ that inspires the work of the Parsons School of Design. Finally, the topic of ‘Urban Production’ is analysed by Marc Zune through the prism of the redeployment of new urban craft.

Finally, the last two chapters address the challenges of comparative research on a European scale. First, Patrick Le Galès, the founding dean of the Sciences

Po Urban School, gives us a look back on his research and teaching experience in several European cities and universities. At the end of this chapter, he emphasises the different ways for social scientists to develop forms of critique and offers piece of advice for young researchers in urban studies. Lastly, Carlotta Fioretti explains how she, together with her colleagues of the Joint Research Centre (JRC), try to promote research on the urban dimension of European policies.

We hope this publication will provide insights for reflection and action on these issues and offer tools for further transdisciplinary research on these questions. Together with the other academic leaders (Profs. G. Grulois, B. Moritz, J-M Decroly and Ch. Cavalieri) and the whole team of Metrolab, we would like to thank all the persons, groups and institutions involved in the process for the last eight years. In particular, we thank ERDF and Brussels-Capital Region for believing in the relevance and significance of our project, selecting our application and supporting us since 2016.

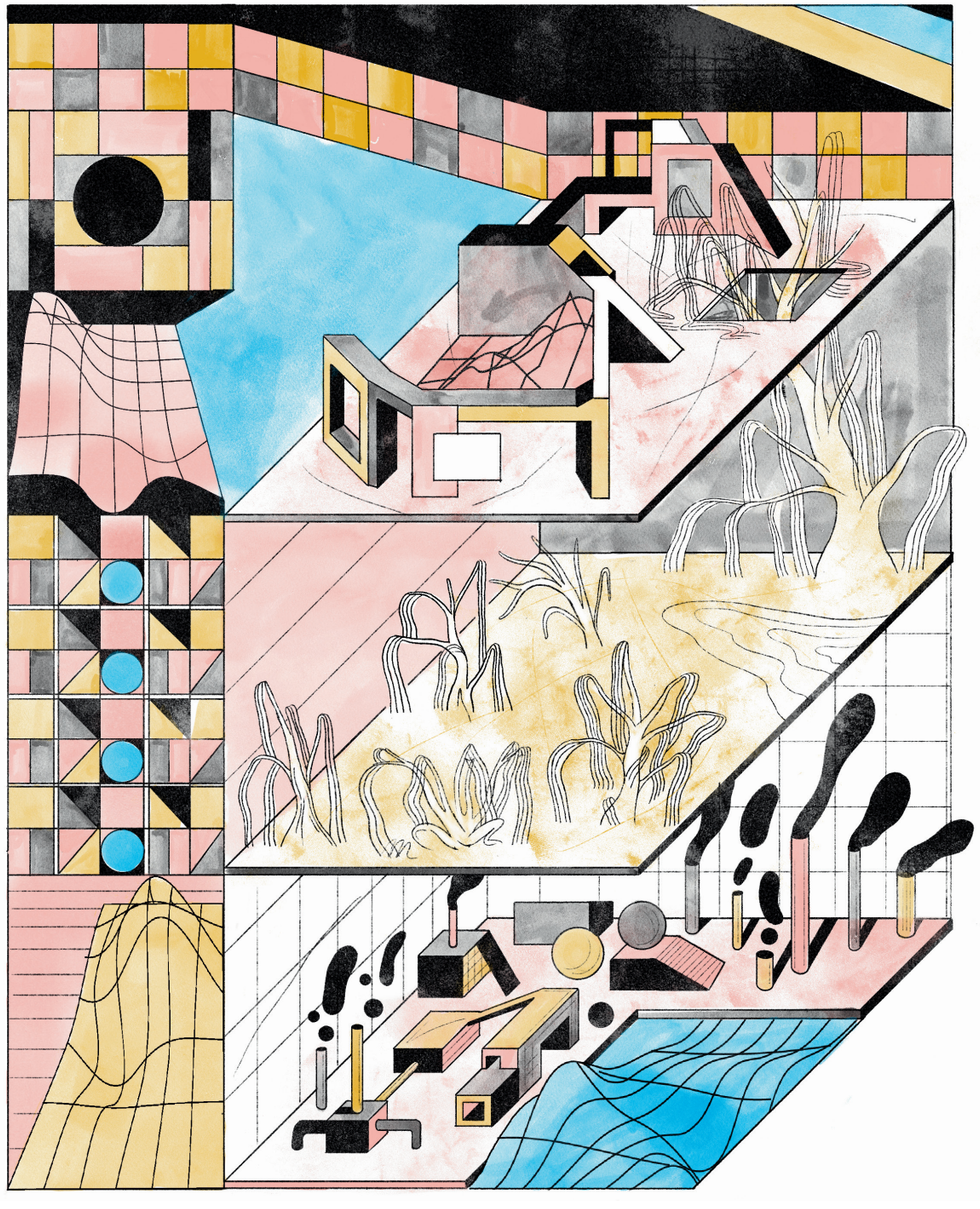
References

Bateson, G. (1973). *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. University of Chicago Press.

Berger, M. (2017). Vers une théorie du pâtir communicationnel. Sensibiliser Habermas. *Cahiers de recherche sociologique*, 62, 69-108.

Fioretti, C., Pertoldi, M., Busti, M., & Van Heerden, S. (2020). *Handbook of Sustainable Urban Development Strategies*. Publications Office of the European Union.

Van Hollebeke, S. (2021). *Professionnels du discours et spécialistes de l'image dans le projet urbain. Enquête à Bruxelles sur une asymétrie des collaborations entre experts de la ville*. PhD thesis in Social Sciences and Urban Planning, directed by M. Berger and J.-P. Thibaud, UCLouvain and Université Grenoble Alpes.



© Lucas Gicquel

Introduction

Further steps to an ecology of urban knowledge

Mathieu Berger

Urban policy as social laboratory

Since 2015, Metrolab has brought together sociologists, architects, urban planners and geographers from UCLouvain and the Université Libre de Bruxelles around action research conducted within and alongside the ERDF-Brussels 2014-2020 program[1]. This program, which represents an investment of around €200M and includes 58 very different projects, pursues a strategy of social, environmental and economic urban development, followed at the Metrolab by specific research units, each specialised in one of these issues. In their application submitted in response to the 2014 ERDF call, Metrolab's founders inscribed their project in the legacy of the research practices of the Chicago School and the epistemological principles of American pragmatism[2]. The collective sees Brussels as its 'social laboratory', according to the metaphor dear to Robert Park; however, here, it is not just an urban milieu, but an urban policy that offers such a laboratory.

1 This text is a much expanded version of 'Ecology of Urban Knowledge. Notes from the Metrolab Experience', released in *Designing Brussels Ecosystems* (Declève et al., 2020). It has also been published in French in the journal *Pragmata*, in 2020 (Berger, 2020a). It seemed appropriate to use this text as a general introduction to our final book, as it sets a theoretical and narrative framework for the contributions that follow. Thanks to Daniel Cefaï, Louise Carlier and Benoît Moritz for their comments, suggestions and contributions.

2 It is thanks to the work of French sociologists who gravitated around Nanterre and EHESS-Paris, in permeated urban sociology in French-speaking Belgium. Key works have been: Joseph & Grafmeyer (1979); Joseph (1998); Cefaï & Joseph (2002); Cefaï & Pasquier (2003); Cefaï et al. (2015). Isaac Joseph's experiments in collaborative observation and sociological contributions to the design of urban spaces were also important inspirations for those in Brussels who saw sociology as practical knowledge.

After a former 2007-2013 program focused exclusively on the creation of new urban infrastructures, ERDF-Brussels 2014-2020 opened up to research projects as well. The Metrolab application proposed a project that deviated from the types of research suggested by the call, which focused on medical sciences and technological innovation. The innovation proposed by Metrolab concerned public policy itself, and was institutional rather than technological. The proposal was not to equip ERDF-Brussels with a 'smart governance app', but more simply (and perhaps more radically), to introduce into this public policy the principles and practices of 'inquiry', in the sense of John Dewey (1938). The aim was to sensitize the Brussels Region to a pragmatist conception of public policy; a conception according to which public policy should not only give rise to surveys and evaluations once completed, but is itself an inquiry and a process of 'valuation' (Dewey, 1939).

Although at the time of the 2014 call, ERDF-Brussels did have data and indicators enabling it to monitor the annual progress of each of its projects, and although an independent evaluation was planned at the end of each programming period, this policy was not given the opportunity to observe and reflect on *itself* in the process of being carried out, based on concerns that would not only relate to a 'rationality in means', but also to a 'rationality in purpose'. With the Metrolab project, we proposed ERDF-Brussels policy to objectify its relationship to itself, not in the mode of administrative monitoring, but through a collective and multidisciplinary inquiry into the facts and values of this policy. The 58 projects from the 2014-2020 program could not be reduced to 58 lines in an Excel spreadsheet; taken together, they opened up a vast field of experience and inquiry, just waiting to be explored.

After convincing the Region and securing funding, it was time to build a team and establish a presence in Brussels: to bring a collective into existence and bring a place to life. As far as the team was concerned, the project's academic principals turned to specific profiles. On the one hand, young researchers interested in training in an interdisciplinary environment, a collaborative conception of research, and the challenge of completing a doctoral thesis with a certain theoretical ambition while having to meet the practical requirements of applied research. On the other hand, post-doctoral researchers interested in giving more practical extensions to their thesis work, becoming players in urban policy and coordinating the work of interdisciplinary research units. Finally, project managers who were prepared to take on the practical and administrative management of an institutional experiment — by definition uncertain and deviant[3] — within the codified and strict framework of a European public policy, and who therefore also had to be fully committed to the project and sensitive to its pragmatist mission.

All members of the scientific team were expected to demonstrate both a reflexive and a practical sensibility, a pronounced interest in both lab seminars and field research, in theoretical elaboration and empirical indexicality, in dialogue with international colleagues abroad, and in dialogue with a local-regional audience, whether they be subsidised project leaders, regional civil servants or minister advisors, technicians and specialists in social, environmental and economic matters, urban activists engaged in social movements, or Brussels residents concerned by the consequences of this policy. It was understood

3 'When novelties take the form of mechanical appliances, we incline to welcome them (…). The organised community is still hesitant with reference to new ideas of a non-technical and nontechnological nature. For an innovation is a departure, and one which brings in its train some incalculable disturbance of the behavior to which we have grown used and which seems natural' (Dewey, 1927, p.57).

that, if the 'state is ever something to be scrutinized, investigated, searched for (…), the problem of discovering the State is (…) not a problem for theoretical inquirers engaged solely in surveying institutions which already exist' (Dewey, 1927, p.28), but rather for a 'community of inquiry' engaged in the experimental and critical practice of a public policy, and co-responsible for solving the problems that arise within it.

Inquiry takes place

The Metrolab studio opened in April 2016 at 48 Quai du Commerce 1000 Brussels, played an important and revealing role in itself. For the university officially behind the project, UCLouvain, based forty kilometres away, seeing its researchers rent a space in the heart of Brussels, on the banks of the Canal, to open it up to ULB, in a context of tensions between these institutions (historical tensions but intensified by the current situation, the planned merger of UCLouvain with another Brussels institution, Université Saint-Louis), was not a matter of course. This space was created in spite of these difficulties linked to university politics, in order to better anticipate difficulties linked to city policies. It could count on the determination of colleagues from both universities and from different disciplines who were sufficiently 'solicited' (Bidet *et al.*, 2015) by the troubles and problems of Brussels' urban reality and the investigation, reflection and practical experimentation they called for. This solicitation was all the stronger for the fact that it concerned a number of academics who, at the time, were perplexed and hesitant about the ultimate aims and ends of the urban studies they practiced and taught at university, aware of their respective disciplinary shortcomings (architecture, urban planning, sociology, geography) in their isolated efforts to elucidate the problems posed by the city, and eager to learn from others, to recognise their epistemic interdependencies and to join forces in the face of the complexity of the urban environment.

More than just a place for a group of researchers, the Metrolab space was also intended to host a 'public' around the process of collective inquiry. Indeed, another observation that could be made about the previous ERDF-Brussels program (2007-2013) was that Brussels residents' interest in this policy, its issues and achievements, seemed inversely proportional to the substantial resources invested in it and the actual transformations of the urban landscape that it caused, particularly on Brussels' so-called 'Canal territory'. The distance from the funder — 'Europe' — and the cryptic nature of its programs contributed to 'eclipsing' a possible public (Dewey, 1927), while the Brussels Region government retained full control over its programming. One of Metrolab's challenges was to gradually expand its 'community of inquiry' and facilitate the emergence of a public, through the scientific facilitation of the ERDF-Brussels policy.

The lab's location in the heart of the Canal area, at the interface of numerous ERDF projects and at the crossroads of major urban issues (the Yser district is both the future culture & arts hub of the city center and a space occupied by migrants and refugees), was an asset. Activities and events at 48 Quai du Commerce were particularly diverse: team seminars of a methodological nature, seminars for a few ERDF project leaders on solving specific problems, participative workshops for co-designing spaces and layouts, socialisation events for all ERDF projects, educational and experimental activities for the benefit of hundreds of local and international students, organisation of doctoral thesis defenses, civic activities with local associations and players (notably around the reception of refugees in this area of Brussels), events on urban issues organised by the Brussels Region or the European Commission, etc.

Heterogeneity of publics even marked the building's occupancy. Metrolab, located on the second floor, had as its

Map inventory of development and architectural projects that received European funding between 1993-2020 (Source: Varloteaux, 2024). The location of the Metrolab studio at 48 quai du Commerce, 1000 Brussels, is indicated by a cross.

upstairs neighbour a tutoring association targeting local youth of North-African origin who had dropped out of school, and as its downstairs neighbour a large contemporary architecture office installed in luxuriously renovated premises; all these people crossed paths with embarrassment, indifference or amusement in the building's stairwell or courtyard. Outside, leaning against the building walls or pacing the sidewalk, are usually half a dozen African migrant workers, waiting to be taken to a construction site for the day.

The building itself gradually acquired a special meaning for Metrolab members, with the team's sociologists sometimes jokingly referring to it as 'the Hull House', in reference to the settlement house on Halsted Street in Chicago, where Jane Addams and her colleagues carried out their action research at the end of the 19th century. A listed building representative of the industrial architecture of the 1930s, 48 Quai du Commerce was built and occupied by the Charlet family for their saddlery and leather manufacturing business. After being bought by the Benz companies after the war and reappropriated for the car industry, the building was used for the textile industry, before being partially disused. The current owner has been working on its redevelopment since the early 1990s. An architect and entrepreneur from a large family, he divides his time between property management and philanthropic involvement, notably through the nonprofit organisation he chairs, *Habitat & Humanisme*, which is engaged in issues of housing and homelessness in Brussels. This explains the mixed and inclusive character of the building in its current occupancy, as well as the owner's sensitivity to the Metrolab project when we met with him in 2015. Indeed, a certain sensitivity to the idea of urban research-action was required to accept an atypical rental, with the rented space regularly hosting from fifty to one hundred external participants for activities (workshops, MasterClasses, conferences).

Entrance to 48 Quai du Commerce in 1978
(Picture: Ministry of Brussels-Capital Region)

For Metrolab's researchers, it was important that this working and meeting space, designed as a hub for the various ERDF projects, should be located at the heart of this policy's action zone, which, despite a recent expansion, remains the Canal area. These projects, categorised by the ERDF according to different axes (innovation, economic development, environmental transition, social inclusion) and different sectors (health, food, tourism, etc.), form a heterogeneous set of interventions, some involving the creation, renovation or transformation of infrastructures, others not.

Among this variety of projects are: the development of care centres in Cureghem for vulnerable groups excluded from the official healthcare system (homeless, asylum seekers, transmigrants); the transformation of Brussels' Stock Exchange building (*Bourse/Beurs*) in the heart of the city into a 'beer palace'; the redevelopment and re-programming of the Anderlecht Slaughterhouses, with a view to diversifying their activities and functions; the redevelopment, on the banks of the

Canal, of a vast automobile import-export warehouse into a public ‘winter garden’; the renovation of the site of a former abbey into a cultural and artistic centre in a working-class neighbourhood; the renovation of a former racecourse (*hippodrome*) into a multi-sport and leisure area in a more affluent commune on the edge of the Sonian Forest; the creation of a laboratory on energy performance and building renovation techniques; training and entrepreneurial empowerment activities for school dropouts in Molenbeek; the setting up of an urban agriculture project and support for market gardeners in Anderlecht; a project to support entrepreneurs in the fashion and design sector; etc. These projects also differ in terms of the players behind them, whose legal status is sometimes public, sometimes private, and sometimes linked by a public-private partnership (PPP).

Metrolab’s collaborations with these different project leaders have been organised around different themes (in line with the priorities of the European strategy for sustainable urban development) and different methods of observation and follow-up (depending on the characteristics of the project and its state of progress).

The thematic approach to the ERDF program led us to identify, from among all projects, those for which the issues of urban inclusion, urban ecology or urban production were significant. These three themes were then the focus of consecutive work cycles (inclusion in 2016-2018, ecology in 2017-2019, production in 2018-2020), through which investigations were carried out, workshops and seminars were organised, and which were each punctuated by the hosting of a conference bringing together international specialists in these issues and Brussels-based players, and an intensive MasterClass. Each thematic masterclass brought together 25 to 40 international students and PhD students in Brussels for two weeks, around four sites chosen as study cases from the 58 projects in the program, in a process of collective and transdisciplinary experimentation culminating in the production and presentation, before a jury, of concrete, forward-looking or alternative proposals addressed to the ERDF project managers concerned. These three cycles of work have each given rise to a book (Berger *et al.*, 2018; Declève *et al.*, 2020; Carlier *et al.*, 2021).

The ways in which the lab was involved in the projects followed up varied according to the type of project promoter (public, private, PPP), their sensitivity to the potential contributions of collective inquiry, the level of trust placed in our researchers, the quality and quantity of information on the project shared with the investigators, the scale of the project, its state of progress, whether it was more or less strategic for the Region, more or less sensitive or controversial, etc. In some cases, support was provided in a rather distant way, through non-participatory observation of public activities organised by the project leaders, or in ways in which the researchers maintained an academic posture. In some cases, support was provided from a distance, through non-participatory observation of public activities organised by the project leaders, or in other ways in which the researchers maintained a classic academic posture (by organising, for instance, a conference benefiting ERDF projects concerned with the theme of urban agriculture). In other cases, Metrolab researchers were called upon by project leaders to provide expertise on purely technical issues, to provide consultancy on management issues, or even to take on a public relations role in the service of the ERDF project concerned; situations in which, since the collaboration was particularly close, it was sometimes necessary to restate both the independence of the university researcher and the need for her or him to produce,

through their collaboration, knowledge of a more general scope. On the other hand, the practical involvement of Metrolab members in the concrete activities associated with the projects gave rise to interesting situations, provoking reflection and rekindling research.

Eco-semiotic challenges: tensions between ways/worlds of meaning

These five years of experience, spent in this workspace and involving a host of interlocutors and co-investigators in a process of inquiry, have been as exciting and productive as they have been challenging. Among the many trials and tribulations that have marked the Metrolab experience, let’s focus here on the challenges of communication and mutual understanding between a plurality of observers and players. Urban situations are defined at the intersection of a plurality of perspectives (Mead, 1926). The purpose of a space like Metrolab is to offer a platform capable of accommodating and encouraging the cooperation of different types of knowledge about the city, various modes of engagement and perceptions of urban reality. Before considering some of these challenges, it is worth clarifying their nature.

We have said that these are challenges, trials, or tests of communication and mutual understanding. Since these tests and the tensions they generate concern not only individuals, but also cognitive, perceptual, interpretative and expressive *ways*, and since these transactions between knowledges do not always involve argumentative discourse (*Diskurs* in Habermas’s sense), but different genres of language and different regimes of signs, it is preferable to understand them as meaning-making tests, or *semiotic tests*. Secondly, because these plural *ways of meaning* (potentially complementary and partially concurrent) are rooted and cultivated in different *worlds of meaning* with their material and *ecological* reality (Cefaï, 2015), the interactions they maintain can be defined as ‘eco-semiotic’ (Berger, 2018a).

The first-person experience of these interactions was an opportunity to apply to their understanding an approach I had been using since the beginning of my work to describe and analyse enunciative difficulties in political gatherings (Berger, 2008), an approach I then called ‘ethno-pragmatic’, following Alessandro Duranti’s works in ethnography of communication (1994). In the end, eco-semiotics merely refines the meaning already placed in ethno-pragmatics, with ‘eco-’ replacing ‘ethno-’ to reinforce the material and living, rather than merely cultural, dimension of the ‘reception milieu’ (Berger, 2018a) in which enunciations are attempted; ‘semiotic’ replacing ‘pragmatic’, insofar as the meaning-making work that concerns the participants in these situations is not limited to the speech acts of Austin’s or Searle’s pragmatics (Berger, 2014). This evolution in approach is indicative of more general epistemological advances in communication ethnography, a field of the social sciences marked like many others by a recent spatial/ecological turn and which, among the pragmatist authors of reference, has in recent years rediscovered the semiotic pragmatism of Charles S. Peirce (Berger et al., 2017). Thus, for example, the approach of Charles Goodwin, a close collaborator of Duranti (Duranti & Goodwin, 1992), has itself recently been described as ‘semiotic ecology’ (Quéré, 2016).

While these great names in the ethnography of communication remain important references, the eco-semiotics I deal with in my work are less interested in the isolated situations often chosen by Goodwin or Duranti, than in situations housed in a certain ‘semiotic niche’ (Hoffmeyer, 2008) and participating in a wider ‘semiosphere’

(Lotman, 1991).[4] The latter, given the object around which it is constituted (a public problem or public policy), has the spatiality of a 'public arena' with multiple scenes (Cefaï, 2016). However, contrary to what an agonistic or dramaturgical acception of the notion of arena suggests, each of these 'scenes' is approached not simply as a place of struggle or representation, but as a milieu previously occupied, inhabited, appropriated by some of the participants, as a region of their 'social world' (Cefaï, 2015), and within which they make prevail, among other things, specific sign regimes, modes of interpretation and a particular 'cognitive style' (Schütz, 1945).

The following pages will consider three varieties of these eco-semiotic tests, the tensions between ways/worlds of meaning, which were played out during the Metrolab experience…

— between representatives of different 'faculties' — in both the cognitive or capacity sense and the institutional sense — within the laboratory-observatory;
— between the laboratory-observatory and the players involved in ERDF projects, with whom it has sought to collaborate in a wider 'community of inquiry';
— between the observatory and its own observers, whether these be — at very different levels — the regional authority responsible for funding and monitoring the project, or, at local level, critical citizens and activists.

4 The eco-semiotic approach favoured here, and indeed Charles Goodwin's 'semiotic ecology', are based on a metaphorical conception of ecology applied to human interactions, to emphasise the importance of the 'reception environment' (Berger, 2018a), 'ground' (Berger, 2020b) or 'substratum' (Goodwin, 2011 and 2016) of communication; just as the Chicago human ecology of the 1920s-30s developed its concepts in analogy with those of animal and plant ecology, or as Goffman's micro-ecology of interactions drew on a number of ethological analogies, on a certain use of the Umwelt originally conceived by Von Uexküll (1934/2010) to capture the emergence of meaning for elementary life forms. The human eco-semiotics we are interested in are then to be distinguished from those stemming from biosemiotics and zoosemiotics, and introduced by Winfried Nöth (1998 and 2001) in the 'Semiotics of Nature' dossier of the journal *Sign Systems Studies* (see also: Levesque & Caccamo, 2017, as well as, in its entirety, the 'Ecologie et sémiotique' dossier in the journal *Cygne noir*). If the former mobilises the latter, it is assumed to be through a transformation by 'modalisation' (Goffman, 1974) of its concepts and their meanings. For example, we borrow the idea of the 'semiotic niche' from biosemiotician Jesper Hoffmeyer (2008), just as Park (1936), following in the footsteps of J. Arthur Thompson and Ernst Haeckel, spoke of 'ecological niches' to describe urban environments. Yuri Lotman, for his part, developed a concept of 'semiosphere' inspired by Vernadsky's biosphere, but put to work in a semiotic theory of culture (Lotman, 1991). In turn, Lotman's semiosphere, via the Tartu School, influenced bio- and zoosemiotics, suggesting that human and animal eco-semiotics can be mutually fertile.

Productive tensions between 'faculties'

In the following pages, I will first consider from this eco-semiotic angle the general problem of the plurality of intelligence, and the necessary tensions and encroachments between faculties, expertises or disciplines as they seek to coordinate around a single object of investigation. I will then present the particular (and often productive) forms this problem took at Metrolab.

The Artist, the Bulldog and the Mathematician

The ecology of knowledge begins at the individual level, with an ecological development of the mind: the subject of knowledge recognises and appreciates the plurality and interdependence of the forms of intelligence of a phenomenon. For example, American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1903/1998, pp. 146–147) believed that a proper appreciation of the phenomena of the world required philosophy to bring together different *faculties* of human intelligence:

> The first and foremost is that rare faculty, the faculty of seeing what stares one in the face, just as it presents itself (…). This is the faculty of the artist who sees for example the apparent colours of nature as they appear. When the ground is covered by snow on which the sun shines brightly except where shadows fall, if you ask any ordinary man what its colour appears to be, he will tell you white, pure white, whiter in the sunlight, a little greyish in the shadow. (…) The artist will tell him that the shadows are not grey but a dull blue and that the snow in the sunshine is of a rich yellow. That artist's observational power is what is most wanted (…). The second faculty we must strive to arm ourselves with is a resolute discrimination which fastens itself like a bulldog upon the particular feature that we are studying, follows it wherever it may lurk, and detects it beneath all its disguises. The third faculty we shall need is the generalising power of the mathematician who produces the abstract formula that comprehends the very essence of the feature under examination (…).

Each of these faculties corresponds to a certain way of grasping the world, which Peirce calls *firstness* (the phenomenon is grasped as a mere quality), *secondness* (the phenomenon is grasped in its actuality and tangibility) and *thirdness* (the phenomenon is grasped in its generality); and a comprehensive phenomenology examines how they are constantly mobilised, in turn and in concert, in the ordinary experience of situations. Inquiry enables us to elaborate each of these relationships to the world, in modes that are more or less dissociated or associated. And it may be that these different faculties, which together produce a complete phenomenology — not reduced to aesthetic sensitivity (the artist), nor to a watchful eye for facts (the bulldog) or to abstract logic (the mathematician) — are combined in the intelligence of a single individual. If Peirce is considered an authentic genius, it is because of an intellectual ethics that falls within what Gregory Bateson later called 'an ecology of the mind' (1972), and which led Peirce to distinguish himself as a logician and mathematician, but also as an oenologist and even a detective (Eco and Sebeok, 1983)! These diverse — but intimately connected — abilities came together in his unique approach to philosophy.

Interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity

While the faculties referred to can be elaborated and articulated by a single brilliant mind, an ecology of knowledge also invites us to pursue this cooperation of faculties through communication and collaboration. Is it not preferable to have the artist, the bulldog — or say, the tracker — and the mathematician

collaborate, through a certain division of labour, within an interdisciplinary team? The answer is less obvious than it seems. One must first ask whether these different faculties can together compose a phenomenology, which seems to require a fourth faculty, a faculty of articulation of the other three, and which is not necessarily represented in this team. Other problems arise.

Who (artist, tracker or mathematician) initiates the collaboration; who sets the framework, formulates the problem and defines the objectives? Who is the host, who 'plays at home'; who is the guest, who 'plays away'? Where does the exchange take place? In the office of a mathematics department, among books and exam papers? In the studio of an artists' collective, among unfinished canvases and leftover pizza? In the open air and on the move, on the tracker's familiar ground? What is the atmosphere and what 'cognitive mood' does it stimulate? What objects, instruments, equipments are available? What medium (visual, verbal, textual, etc.) is emphasised, indicated or suggested by the situation? What categories of signs dominate the exchanges (Peirce, 1991)? *Icons*, which signify by resemblance, evocation, open up potential significations? *Indexes*, which stick to the facts and actual features of a situation, and which we use to ensure that we have a grip on reality? *Symbols*, which develop a general signification, based on laws, conventions or habits?

These puzzles and challenges, which characterise interdisciplinary collaborations, are 'eco-semiotic' ones. Let us try to clarify the meaning and relevance of this term. The artist, the tracker and the mathematician develop different faculties because they become familiar with different modes of significations, paying attention to a certain type of signs rather than to others. The first is distinguished by iconic intelligence, the second by indexical intelligence, and the third by symbolic intelligence (Ferry, 2007). The development of interdisciplinary communication and intelligence in this group involves 'inter-semiotic' transactions between different universes of meaning, and these transactions must be understood and controlled using certain methods and procedures[5].

Again, speaking of eco-semiotic obstacles rather than simply semiotic ones adds this important aspect: if the artist, the tracker and the mathematician do not pay attention to the same signs, if they draw from different universes of meaning, it is also simply because they 'do not live in the same world', because they inhabit different social worlds (Cefaï, 2015), where 'meaning is cultivated' differently (Rochberg-Halton, 1986). For instance, the indexical intelligence of the tracker or the hunter imposes itself as an adaptation to a world (a hostile forest, for example) and to the 'knowledge interests' that it encourages (knowledge = feeding oneself; being intelligent = surviving); this world and these knowledge interests are in principle foreign to the eminent mathematics scholar. An epistemology of interdisciplinarity must take an interest in the matter: the problems of interdisciplinarity are not limited to technical questions of transcoding one 'language' into another, or of the choice of medium (oral speech, drawing pencil, PowerPoint slideshow, etc.), but raise the socio-anthropological question of the belonging of these three characters to *semiotic niches* that are themselves embedded in different *ecological niches*. When re-examined in these new terms, the difficulties of interdisciplinary communication can no longer be thought of as mere problems of translation from one language to another, but rather as problems of circulation and accessibility from one niche to another; as problems of reception within the host environment, where exchanges take place; in short, as problems of hospitality (Stavo-Debauge, 2018; Berger, 2018a).

5 While Jürgen Habermas has theorised in detail the procedures for controlling the quality of linguistic exchanges between interlocutors and for promoting the 'communicative rationality' of a deliberation, he has left aside the problems of semiotic heterogeneity and the plurality of intelligences that mark human communication (Ferry, 2007; Berger, 2017; Genard, 2017).

This eco-semiotic approach also casts a singular light on the notion of 'transdisciplinarity'. While the word 'interdisciplinarity' postulates — in a consensual but unrealistic way — the symmetry and complementarity between the disciplines represented, between equally respectable intelligences in a supposedly neutral communication space, 'transdisciplinarity' better recognises the irreducible asymmetry of these collaborations between *host* and *guest disciplines*, and the fact that the latter can only step into the communication space by encroaching on the former's 'domain', which must be understood both as a field of expertise and as a territory. Transdisciplinarity occurs when episodes of encroachment introduce a productive tension within the host epistemic milieu.

What is meant by 'productive tension'? Not disruption or transgression celebrated for its own sake, for the 'beauty of the gesture', the thrill of breaking into the domain of the other (on the contrary, such an aesthetic conception of encroachment between disciplines is detrimental to transdisciplinary initiatives). Nor is it a mere 'irritation' between knowledge systems, to which the hosts react allergically, after which they become defensive and withdraw into their own discipline. Rather, productive tension' characterises what might be called *problematic encroachments*, encroachments that have the merit of giving rise to a problem within the hybrid collective that mobilise its members (hosts and guests) in a process of investigation, of progressive and collective clarification of the difficulty; this process is intended to clarify this epistemic dispute and to evaluate together the gain or loss in intelligence caused by the encroachment.

Metrolab: hosting and cultivating urban transdisciplinarity

Let us now leave Peirce's example aside to consider the Metrolab experience. This collective adventure involving architects, urban planners, sociologists and geographers, initially thought of as 'interdisciplinary' and now experienced as 'transdisciplinary', has given rise to all sorts of tensions — not all of them 'productive', by the way! The most interesting tensions happened, for example, when a geographer or an urban planner tried to tackle a sociological problematisation, or when a sociologist attempted to appropriate the cartographic tool or to sketch a design of a public space or building. While these attempts have occasionally given rise to irritation or even rupture, they have also, fortunately, been 'problematic' in the good sense of the word: taking these encroachments seriously required the group to question their potential to examine new, possibly relevant insights into the phenomenon under study; insights that had hitherto been absent from the disciplinary corpus of reference.

While the sociologist's encroachment into the architect's field and their appropriation of the instruments of architectural/urbanistic design can only produce 'pseudo-architecture' or 'quasi-urbanism', several possibilities arise: this attempt may provoke annoyance, mockery, contempt and be dismissed out of hand; it may be considered seriously by the architect but rejected on the basis of an argument; lastly, it may be taken up, reworked by the architect in order to give it a finished and elegant form. In the latter case, the sociologist has initiated a design (in itself unfinished) on the basis of premises, ideas and intentions that are 'undisciplined' and therefore perhaps innovative. Conversely, sociologists will benefit from paying attention to the attempts by which architects or geographers 'sociologize'. Mastery of spatial configurations and relations, attention to

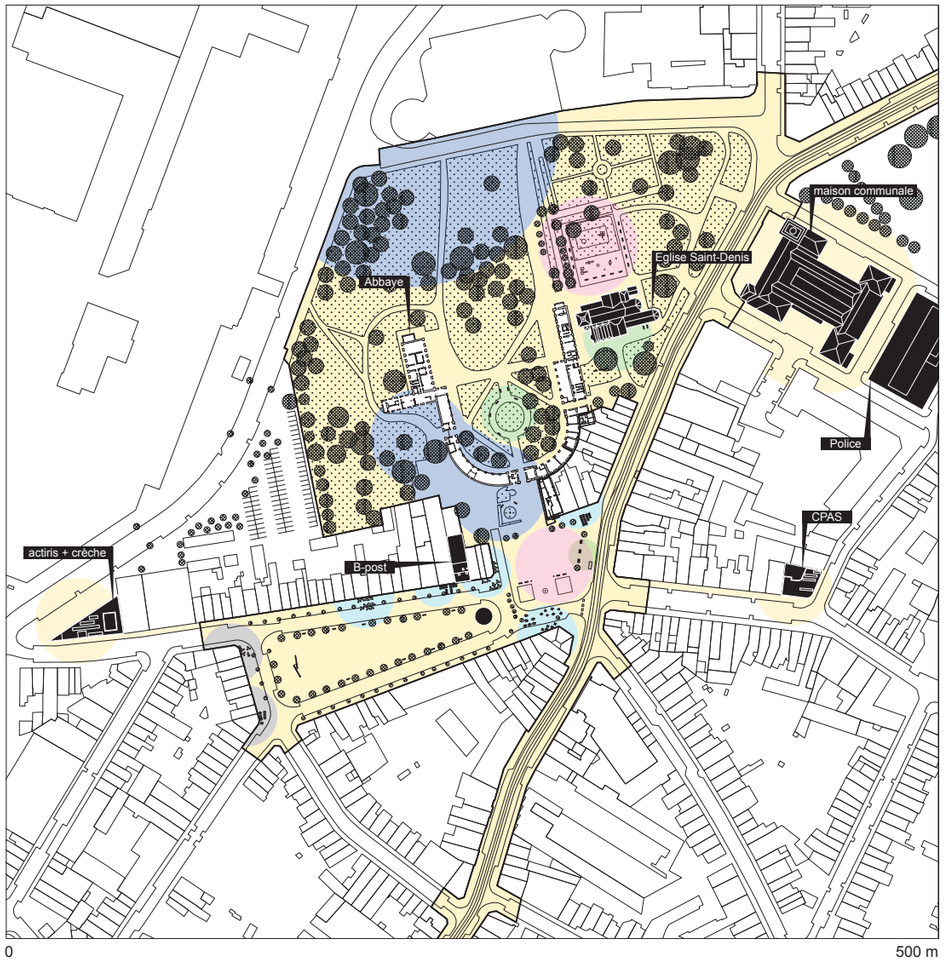


Figure 5.
Schématisation de la distribution spatiale - échelle de l'espace public

Differentiation and interaction of life spaces according to user type, around the Forest Abbey site (map by Pauline Varloteaux based on observations by Louise Carlier. Source: Carlier et al., 2020).

practical details, aesthetic sensitivity to the qualities of experience and to atmospheres, all these skills that architects are likely to possess can give rise to intuitions or sociological hypotheses that will have the originality and strength to grasp a social relationship in its most concrete, situated and material form (Trossat, 2023). The geographer's intelligence of territorial scales, as well as their understanding of urban situations in their relativity and interdependence, can help initiate sociological reasoning that avoids short-sightedness.

Whatever the collaborations that have brought together these disciplines, sometimes two by two (architecture and sociology, urban planning and geography) and sometimes all three at the same time, transdisciplinarity within Metrolab was also expressed through processes of socialisation, sociability and acquaintanceship that were determined neither by disciplinary affiliations, nor by institutional affiliations (between researchers at UCLouvain and researchers at ULB). After all, another way to ascertain the 'transdisciplinary' ability achieved by the Metrolab collective is the fact that, after four years of intense collaboration, I no longer work, talk, laugh or argue with a sociologist, an architect or a geographer, but rather with Louise, Pauline, Christian, Geoffrey, Sarah, Simon…

This is undoubtedly because, over time, through the multiplication and deepening of collaborations whose leadership was provided in turn by sociologists, architects and geographers, Metrolab has opened and then consolidated a new habitat for urban research, a 'semiotic niche' where shared significations have flourished; maps, designs, problematisations and concepts that have become inseparably sociological, geographical and architectural.

A transdisciplinary tool: mapping the social environment of an urban project

This led, for example, to the development of a cartographic method for describing and representing the social environment of urban projects, applied to the case of 'Forest Abbey' ERDF project (Carlier et al., 2020). The research team for this case study, made up of two sociologists, an architect, an urban planner and a geographer, was formed in the wake of a MasterClass devoted to the challenges of urban inclusion. On this occasion, a collective brainstorming session was held around the redevelopment (in the southwestern Brussels district of Forest) of a former abbey and its gardens into a cultural and artistic hub. This initial work highlighted the low level of participation by people from the surrounding working-class neighbourhoods in the consultation activities organised by the municipality.

It was in response to this problematic situation that this research unit was set up. The eco-semiotic challenge for them was to enable the representation (in both the descriptive and political sense) in the project of otherwise absent 'worlds'; a representation that, to be locally meaningful in the official committee where the urban project is established and evolves, must consider the semiotic modes and mediations that prevail there: the visualisation of urban realities, the map.

The work of this unit therefore involved combining the approaches and tools of the sociologist, the geographer and the architect-urban planner to propose a method for mapping the 'life space' (Muchow & Muchow, 1935/2015; Berger, 2024) of sections of the local population not represented in the public meetings

organised by the municipality of Forest[6]. Eight participatory mapping workshops were organised with eight associations located near the abbey, whose members represented regular users of the site. Workshops focused on their uses and experiences of this shared environment, and on the relationships of coexistence between the different publics. A map depicting the 'life space' of a specific group of users was produced for each workshop, and from the eight maps produced, a synthesis map was drawn up.

By showing the organisation, overlap and interpenetration of the life spaces of these different, previously unrepresented types of users, these maps added a further layer to the levels of meaning and complexity considered by the municipality and other official actors involved in the process. In particular, the design team working on the redevelopment of the abbey site realised, thanks to these visualisations, that the space under consideration was not only significant as a potential space, in the making, but also as an actual space, already truly appropriated by different, little-known types of use(r). Suddenly, it became clear that transforming the former abbey into a cultural-artistic hub would require a transformation of the life spaces established in this part of Forest. This consideration encouraged the municipality to increase the inclusive nature of the site's programming (integration of working-class cultural practices into the hub) and to think about the ways in which the future site, in its new cultural functions, could continue to host some of the resident uses that had been deployed there until then.

If the social pluralism of place — the coexistence and interweaving of a multitude of 'worlds' around a single urban site — is commonplace for the sociologist, and quite accessible in principle to planners, it only seems to impose itself on the latter as a binding reality for the project when it can be *shown* to them, and thus made *visible*. If Metrolab's researchers were to effectively mediate between lived spaces and designed spaces, they had to adopt an eco-semiotic realism and set up a quintet of investigators capable of presenting sociological results in the 'right' medium[7].

A transdisciplinary concept: the 'inclusive enclave'

Another example of this transdisciplinary effectiveness is provided by the development, circulation and application of a concept whose journey will be briefly retraced here. In 2017, the MasterClass devoted to collective inquiry into the spatial conditions of inclusion and hospitality, focused on four ERDF infrastructure projects, each illustrating an issue of urban inclusion in Brussels: access to food (Anderlecht Slaughterhouses project), access to healthcare (Doctors of the World health centre project in Cureghem), access to culture (Forest Abbey project), access to green and recreational areas (Boitsfort Racecourse project). Analysing these projects through the lens of inclusion and hospitality (Stavo-Debauge, 2018; Berger, 2018b), the participants produced, over short periods of time, a diagnosis and a set of design proposals addressed to the promoters of the projects concerned. The MasterClass experience was the starting point for sustained collaborations, conducted over longer periods, and involving not just groups of students and PhD students, but Metrolab members organised into different research units.

To conclude this collective investigation, in an effort to synthesise and theorise, we have proposed, together with architect-urban planner Benoît Moritz, a notion to guide the design of places of inclusion and diversity, whether in Brussels or elsewhere: the 'inclusive enclave' (Berger and Moritz, 2018; 2020). Indeed, it appeared from observing three of the four cases selected for the study that expectations of urban inclusion involved sites characterised by a certain degree of enclavement, due to a very specific original function — a function that each of these projects is now working to transform considerably:

— Anderlecht Slaughterhouses: the meat production function is becoming secondary to the market, food market and cultural functions.
— Forest Abbey: the former religious function gives way to a cultural-artistic hub and a qualitative green space.
— Boitsfort Racetrack: the former horseracing track is transformed into a metropolitan-scale recreational and sports green space.

The aim of each of these projects was to turn the site concerned into a place of urban sociability and cosmopolitan diversity, bringing together people with different profiles who would converge there for different reasons, seeking different services, uses or goods. The question — *both sociological and architectural* — was whether or not the introversion of these sites and their disconnection from their direct urban environment represented obstacles to these objectives of inclusion and diversity. Is the enclave, by its very nature, an exclusionary urban form? If urban enclaves tend to be exclusive and excluding places in many cases, in our view this was not an inherent flaw of the 'enclave form'. Anderlecht Slaughterhouses demonstrated this through the frequentation of their very popular markets: a physical enclave can also be a space of inclusion and hyperdiversity. Better still, the enclave, precisely because of its qualities of containment, interiority and disconnection, can accommodate and shelter urban sociability and civil interaction between strangers in a calmer mode, which distinguishes it from what can be offered by the open, continuous outdoor public space, which is more exposed to the tumult of the city — in particular to car traffic. Hence the concept of the *inclusive enclave*, defined as an urban space enclosed on a morpho-topological level, but programmed for a broad public, made accessible and hospitable to a diversity of users and prepared, in particular, to receive the most vulnerable of them (Berger and Moritz, 2020).

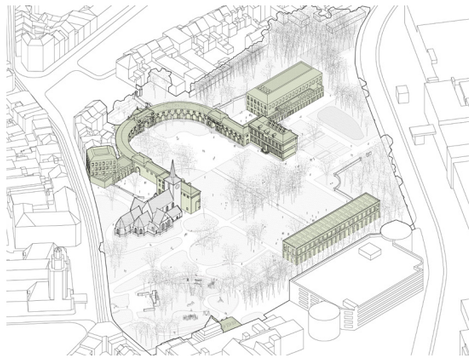
Visual from the Development Plan for Anderlecht Slaughterhouses 'The Brussels' Belly' (ORG, 2013).

Once this concept had been defined in its general principles, its spatial formalisation and operationalisation in architectural and urban planning projects had to be considered in greater detail. The study of ERDF projects associated with this concept and discussions with their promoters or authors were particularly valuable. In the case of Anderlecht Slaughterhouses, the challenge was to integrate new functions (cultural, educational, economic and housing)

6 This reflection on 'life spaces', and the social environment of urban projects benefited in particular from the workshop 'The space of human ecology: from Chicago to Brussels', organised at Metrolab in August 2017 in the presence of Daniel Cefaï (Cefaï et al., 2024). In particular, this workshop examined the ways in which urban coexistence has been visually represented since the maps of Chicago produced by Park and his colleagues in the 1920s, and envisaged new spatial concepts and mapping practices for ecologically inspired urban sociology, better able to capture the experiential constitution of urban environments and their complex topology (Berger, 2024).

7 On these issues, see Sarah Van Hollebeke's PhD dissertation (2021).

in the development of the site, maintain the slaughtering activity on site by rationalising it (new 'compact slaughterhouse'), and in so doing free up a 60,000m² 'large urban plain' for markets and other outdoor events. The master plan produced for the owner by the ORG planning office addresses and reinterprets the site's enclavement[8]: it calls for the creation of 'physical and visual openings' to the site, while 'surrounding[ing] the plain' with a group of buildings of a singular architectural typology (urban warehouses). This spatial strategy, which seeks to increase the accessibility and openness of a site while marking its surroundings, and thus its own interiority and capacity, is an important aspect of the inclusive enclave.



Axonometry of the transformation of Forest Abbey into a regional cultural pole proposed by A Practice (2023).

An equally subtle treatment of the enclave can be found in the project for the Forest Abbey proposed by the agence A Practice, whose director, Cécile Chanvillard, also a professor at UCLouvain, has contributed in her research to an architectural theory of the 'threshold', as a liminal space where the complexity of the relationship between inside and outside, opening and closing, is revealed (Chanvillard, 2011). In their proposal to rehabilitate and convert the abbey into a cultural centre, A Practice maintains the structure of the neo-classical abbey complex and complements it with new contemporary volumes. The horseshoe-shaped complex opens out onto a qualitative green space (around which are organised the cultural-artistic spaces housed in the curved wings of the building and their alcoves) and 'turns its back' on the Saint-Denis district, a dense, mineral and poverty-stricken urban neighbourhood. While the site is spatially and visually disconnected from the urban environment in which it is located, it is nonetheless immediately adjacent to it and directly accessible through its gateway; if it turns away from the neighbourhood, it is only to better welcome it within, and offer its residents a nearby retreat. It is at the price of this physical enclosure that the site is able to develop its architectural coherence, autonomous functioning and unique atmosphere. One of the challenges of the new volumes created on the 'neighbourhood side', including a library and a music centre, is precisely to play this role of attraction and invitation in relation to the site's direct environment, and in the sense of its openness.

Beyond architectural considerations and principles of spatial composition, it is understood that these places can only exist as 'inclusive enclaves' if a real diversity of uses and users is demonstrated in the actual practice of the place. In this respect, the authors of these projects have shown a real interest in sociologically enriching their procedures, forms and discourses. The company that owns Anderlecht Slaughterhouses is keen to honour its role as a welcoming place for the modest population of Cureghem, a neighbourhood of arrival and transition near the Brussels South Station, where the 'slaughterhouse

8 See: ORG – The Organisation for Permanent Modernity, 'Projet de développement global Abattoir: le ventre de Bruxelles', document submitted in November 2011 (reprinted in July 2013) to the Brussels-Capital Region in the context of ERDF subsidies.

market' is an institution. The spokesperson for the site's owner, architect Jo Huygh, was enthusiastic about the proposals put forward by a Metrolab working group to consider the place on the site not only of the 'belly' (food) and 'brain' (cultural-educational) functions of the site, but also of 'heart' functions linked to hospitality, information and social assistance for its most vulnerable publics, functions which could also form a specific pole in the redeveloped site. Subsequently, Metrolab members worked with the project leaders to strengthen their links with the neighbourhood and its associations, notably through a platform for dialogue and enlarged governance called Forum Abattoirs.

As for Forest Abbey, the participatory mapping work carried out by Louise Carlier and the Metrolab unit she coordinated provided a tool for mediation between project owners and authors, on the one hand, and certain cultural players, on the other, such as the Forest Youth Centre (*Maison des Jeunes de Forest*), which subsequently became a partner in the project. The dialogue initiated with architect Cécile Chanvillard around the notion of an inclusive enclave was continued, as we were asked by Brussels Region to reflect together on the operationalisation of this concept, and to contribute to the definition of the architectural specifications for the future spaces of this vast site of the former Military Barracks of Ixelles, also rehabilitated and redeveloped as part of the ERDF policy ('Usquare' project[9]).

While the inclusive enclave may have been of interest to regional institutions, urban project developers and authors wishing to turn their vast sites into places of diversity, it has also been reinterpreted by activists, associations and NGOs committed to solidarity and welcoming migrants. In early 2019, at the temporary Decoratelier art space in Molenbeek, scenographer Jozef Wouters worked with a group of newcomers to create a 'secret garden' in a hangar, which was staged and presented as part of the KunstenFestivaldesArts. Citing the notion of 'inclusive enclave', the producer of this project presented the enclosed and concealed aspect of the place as a condition for its hospitality to a public of 'newcomers' and the expression of their aesthetic capacities (Gypens, 2019). In the same year, as part of the Action Research Collective for Hospitality initiative (ARCH, 2019), Metrolab researchers accompanied the BXLRefugees Citizen Platform in the move of its 'humanitarian hub', which, after having had to leave facilities at Gare du Nord, moved to Avenue du Port. Its re-organisation, inspired by the principles of the inclusive enclave as interpreted by ARCH architect Marie Lemaître (2019), benefited from specific research and co-design workshops (Lemaître and Ranzato, 2019).

Beyond the Brussels setting, this research has led us to interact with international examples of the implicit application of the inclusive enclave, such as the redevelopment of the Saint-Vincent de Paul site in the heart of Paris[10], or the reallocation of the Carcel Modelo prison in Barcelona into a social and cultural facility that opens up to the city[11]. The latter site was the focus of an urban planning competition, in which Metrolab's Benoît Moritz suggested working on maintaining boundaries as a project possibility. Finally, we had the opportunity to present these reflections and experiments in laboratories specialising in 'social infrastructures' and their democratic stakes in major cities, such as at New York University, the Urban Democracy Lab led by Gianpaolo Baiocchi and the Institute for Public Knowledge directed by Eric Klinenberg — whose work, notably the recent *Palaces for*

9 https://usquare.brussels/en

10 https://www.parisetmetropole- amenagement.fr/fr/saint-vincent-de-paul-paris-14e

11 https://lamodel.barcelona

The People (2018), has popularised the notion of 'social infrastructure'.

Research and action

In this way, the relationship to practical commitment and action is a further eco-semiotic challenge, and one that is, of course, quite decisive for our work. The difficulties raised in the previous paragraphs, while significant and not to be taken lightly, are mere 'in-house arrangements' from the perspective of the urban players we intend to work with. The fact that we have managed to establish proper conditions for transdisciplinarity within the Metrolab niche, within the framework of our seminars, is of little value if it cannot guide and assist the practices of the actors involved. Moreover, the question could be asked: does the eco-semiotic challenge encountered in the context of exchanges and attempts at communication between the disciplines represented in Metrolab distract us from the more crucial eco-semiotic challenge that the mission of 'action research' — that is, the situation of communication and collaboration that unites the researcher and the practitioner — opens up? If opening up and strengthening a new sphere of transdisciplinary knowledge increases internal complexity, researchers who are engaged in these efforts may be tempted to limit transactions with the outside world; to avoid a new increase in complexity, by opening up to the reality of the actor.

These concerns, very much in evidence during the first two years of the Metrolab adventure, have lessened with the practical experimentation around sites such as the Anderlecht Slaughterhouses, the Forest Abbey, or ARCH's activities with the hospitality actors in the North Quarter. More generally, practical collaborations have multiplied, with a number of ERDF project leaders and other public or citizen players, and have led, we believe, to a gradual recognition by these different players of the Metrolab's role. The MasterClass devoted to 'Brussels ecosystems' in January 2018 (Declève et al., 2020) marked an interesting development, compared with that of 2017, in terms of more fluid communication and closer relationships between researchers and Brussels players, around work presented by international PhD students.

Reconnect with actors' fields of experience, upstream and downstream of inquiry

For the Metrolab researchers, the test of transdisciplinary communication and collaboration within the scientific team was therefore an important prerequisite for this other, more decisive eco-semiotic test, of communication and collaboration with Brussels' non-academic urban players. Nobody in the group lost sight, throughout the seminars and conferences with sometimes very theoretical contents that we organised, that these reflexive activities were justified by their necessary extension into practical commitments with the actors involved. The transdisciplinary communication operating within the laboratory would have been in vain if it had not received 'its goal, its specificities and its mandate' (Dewey, 1920) from the urban reality with which the Brussels actors are grappling. The aim of these exchanges between disciplines and across disciplinary boundaries remains, in the end, to clarify 'a confusing situation so that reasonable ways of dealing with it can be suggested' (*Ibid.*, 1920). It is only because real-world problems know no boundaries between disciplines or fields of study that spheres like Metrolab and many others are needed. The real world is transdisciplinary!

It imposes itself on the practices of observation, investigation and experimentation that attempt to apprehend, evaluate, explain and transform it. In the open-air laboratory that is the city, researchers must at the same time, *upstream*, ground their approach in the fields of experience of urban actors, from

the most expert to the layperson, and make the most of the collective intelligence that is already at work among citizens; *and downstream*, transmit their results, making them accessible to all, translate them to make them operational, and track their technical, civic and political consequences — thus coming full circle to a kind of 'ethnographic pragmatism' (Cefaï, 2010). Action research is born of public experience and returns to it, while striving to introduce differentials of experience, knowledge and action. Reception, resumption, translation, transmission: all these operations involve eco-semiotic challenges.

Knowing that, Knowing how

Having raised the issue of closer collaboration between academic researchers and urban actors in urban policies, we must now consider the desirable forms of such collaboration. Even if things have changed in recent years, with a multiplication of living labs and applied research experiments, the interaction between researchers and actors is still conceived most of the time in terms of a caricatured complementarity whereby researchers bring their 'knowledge' and actors bring their 'practical skills'. Such a stereotypical division of labour is at the origin of many collaborations that are not very fruitful, because they depend on miscommunications between subjects of knowledge on the one hand and subjects of action on the other, engaged in relationships to the world that are very different, and probably more incompatible than complementary. More often than not, the actor *does not know what to do with* the knowledge acquired through contemplative observation of urban phenomena (a relationship to phenomena freed from the constraints of action). The scholar, on the other hand, *does not know what to think of* the practical skills of actors, which are best demonstrated in situ, through the reproduction of daily acts, the formation of habits and know-how that are difficult to convey through discourse.

It is important to rethink the terms of the collaborative interaction between researchers and urban actors, starting with a more realistic and symmetrical approach to the relationship that each of them has with knowledge and practice, i.e. with 'knowing that' and 'knowing how', in the words of Gilbert Ryle (1945). The idea that researchers engage only in the 'knowledge-that' mode in the context of a complementary relationship in which actors would limit themselves to mobilising a know-how (or 'knowledge-how') is flawed. Such a conception is excessive and immodest (it presupposes a superiority of the researcher's 'knowledge-that' over that of the actor) and, at the same time, too timid and falsely modest (the researcher renounces their own use of practical know-how). To put it another way, academics engaged in collaborative research processes have an unfortunate tendency to overestimate the depth and relevance of their knowledge, while underestimating the usefulness and interest of their know-how.

If academic researchers tend to overestimate their own knowledge ('knowledge-that'), it is, first of all, because they misunderstand the extent, diversity and complexity of the knowledge developed by the actors. For example, after years of practice, a given actor in a given policy will have gained detailed knowledge not only of the thematic area of their action (e.g. green spaces), but also of the plans in force, the legal provisions, the budgetary realities, the political and electoral strategies, the institutional relations between the different levels of government involved and the interpersonal relations between the protagonists of this policy. They will have memorised thousands of names of people, bodies, agencies, streets, places, buildings, projects, etc., giving a very concrete and specific character to their knowledge of these entities that make the city and intervene

in a project or policy. In fact, it is rare that an academic researcher working in urban studies, even if they have specialised in a city or a territory, develops such a rich, diversified and contextualised knowledge ('indexicalized', we might say with Garfinkel [1967], precisely to underline that the type of sign that characterises this knowledge and intelligence is the 'index', the concrete and contextualised sign).

If academic researchers overestimate their own knowledge (knowledge-that) in relation to knowledge built in the sphere of action, it is then because they often misunderstand the simplifications and reductions that academic research uses to generate knowledge. These 'scholastic reductions' (Bourdieu, 2000), due to the academic's seclusion in campus life and active avoidance of practical concerns, far from fading with experience, generally only worsen as the academic becomes more established in both their professional field and their cognitive mode, and gains exposure and prestige. It is difficult for academics (who tend to see themselves as repositories of the world's complexity) to acknowledge that their mode of knowledge, both theoretical and conceptual, considerably reduces complexity, through, among other things:

— operations of generalisation and decontextualisation;
— bracketing praxeological constraints and practical consequences related to the production of their discourse;
— the selective shaping of the reality represented by their research problem, adopting a certain focus (micro or macro), concentrating on this or that aspect of urban reality (social, or ecological, or economic, etc.) to the exclusion of others.

Some of these reductions are inevitable, inherent to the profession of researcher. But acknowledging them should encourage an attitude of modesty; it should at the same time make the researcher aware of the very particular complexity of the knowledge developed by a number of actors, these subjects-knowing-under-constraint-of-action. Once this type of knowledge is better recognised, better understood in its importance and depth, the challenge is to open and organise spaces for the co-constitution of knowledge about the city in which the knowledge of academic experts and the knowledge of urban actors are placed in a more symmetrical relationship, rather than spaces in which one form of knowledge dominates, crushes, scorns the other.

In addition to these considerations on the need for sharing and the symmetrisation of knowledge (knowledge-that) between academic observers and urban actors, it is necessary to look at interactions and exchanges concerning their respective know-how. The problem is reversed here. From the point of view of promoting and sharing their own know-how, researchers are often too reserved. Intimidated by the practical skills of urban actors, accustomed to the idea that their knowledge is not directly useful for action, or even that their knowledge is 'useless' outside the academic semiosphere, scholars often too quickly abandon the idea that they are the bearers of a know-how and that this know-how can legitimately be considered valid and useful by the stakeholders of a policy or a project. While they are indeed 'observers' of urban life, academic researchers must also understand themselves as 'operators' (since their observations are in principle taken in an investigative process, it is based on methods, on a certain modus operandi). These investigation skills, drawn from their interest and taste for problems (identifying, imagining, formulating, solving problems), are relevant and needed in the worlds of action.

Just like it is well understood today that urban actors, including citizens, must invite themselves into scientific research

circles (i.e. the idea of 'collaborative research'), too little emphasis is placed on the importance of the reverse movement: more professional researchers must seek to invite themselves into the field of urban public action and to engage their own knowledge-how, that particular practical knowledge produced by an ability to investigate, problematise and solve problems (Dewey, 1938).

Administration, activism, inquiry: dissensus over reality

Finally, while the eco-semiotic tests were played out at the level of interactions-transactions between faculties and between disciplines, and at the level of the coordination of knowledge and urban know-how between observers and actors in the ERDF policy, they also characterised the interactions between the observatory and those who observe it, interlocutors maintaining a position of critical exteriority towards the project. While communication was easy with a range of urban players and city specialists sensitive to the approach (especially, of course, with various similar initiatives to Metrolab active in other European and North American metropolises), eco-semiotic challenges marked the communications associating Metrolab with two types of interlocutors: the regional managing authority in charge of ERDF policy and project monitoring, on the one hand; urban activists working on social issues at local level, on the other. We will not go into detail about the challenges posed by these interactions, and we will limit ourselves to highlighting one of their common features: they gave rise, in both cases, to a disagreement about urban reality and (reciprocal) criticisms of unrealism.

The Metrolab community and its external interlocutors observe the city and its issues from different 'limited provinces of meaning' (Schütz, 1945), housed in different ecological niches and corresponding to different vantage points: experimental action research conducted within the laboratory-observatory and across the territory of ERDF projects, for Metrolab investigators; remote steering and monitoring of a public policy, for the regional authority; immersion in the reality of the Quartier Nord and direct, sensory confrontation with the social misery that marks it, for local activists; immersion in reading and writing activity on campus, possibly in a non-participatory/collaborative field survey for academic researchers. As with the 'provinces of meaning' conceived by Schütz, the circulation between these microcosms is accompanied by small and large 'shocks'. This happens when these different types of interlocutor join Metrolab's activities at 48 Quai du Commerce, but also when Metrolab representatives visit the regional authority at the Office of the Minister-President for a steering committee, when they plunge into the raw reality of the North Quarter where they are guided by local activists, meeting migrants and refugees occupying the area in tragic conditions, or when they return to their theoretical discussions in seminar rooms at the university.

And yet, if the representatives of these collectives and the occupants of these worlds may find themselves 'shocked', it's not just because they discover that their interlocutors cultivate a different 'cognitive style', that they make sense of urban reality differently; it's often, more profoundly, because they are convinced that, in so doing, the other is *missing out on urban reality*.

For example, the managing authority in charge of monitoring Metrolab may have regretted that the latter did not produce more concrete results, directly serving the progress of other projects, or that these results could not be interpreted on the basis of the few indicators enabling them to be quantified. For the regional authority framing the action of ERDF projects in the terms and conditions of a 'government by objective' (Thévenot, 2014) which tends to keep this action within the sole 'regime of the plan', the contribution expected

from Metrolab was that of a group of experts working to strengthen the instrumental rationality of some of the 58 projects financed, in order to facilitate their implementation according to the planned phasing and so that they can respect the rhythm of budget flow agreed with the European Commission. When action research focused not only on the means employed by an ERDF project, but sometimes also on the aims and meaning of its operations, the reflexivity and critical dialogue generated tended to be interpreted as hindering the smooth development of the project and a sign of the researchers' lack of realism. These situations were also an opportunity for the political-administrative actor to assert his own positivist conception of science, a conception for which any critical dimension in Metrolab's action drifted away from its role as scientific operator.

Faced with these reframings by the management authority, Metrolab's researchers sought to assert their own relationship with reality, to claim realism on their side, in the exercise of reflexive prudence in the implementation of the projects they followed up and assisted. Some of the applications selected by the Brussels Region in its 2014-2020 ERDF programming, and for significant budgets, required, in our view, to be completed by a work of collective intelligence and public inquiry before the proposed project could be implemented. This was particularly true of PPP (public-private partnership) projects, whose social accessibility, public contribution and modes of governance raised major questions and promised controversy and opposition from the outset. To rush into the immediate implementation of 'paper' projects, in order to meet deadlines and ensure the autonomy of the private player behind the project, was, in our view, a form of unrealism, in other words, a denial of what makes up the reality and 'culture of the Brussels urban project' (in particular, strong expectations of processuality and dialogue), a strategy of avoidance that risked proving counter-productive in terms of efficiency and speed of execution (and, for a major project, did in fact prove counter-productive). The sense of reality cultivated within the laboratory-observatory, sometimes competing with that nurtured in the Region's political-administrative units, only really appeared to be considered by the latter once the Metrolab had been recognised and valorised (late in the project) by the European Commission itself, in its *Handbook of Sustainable Urban Development Strategies*, presenting the Metrolab as a European reference practice in terms of policy science (Joint Research Centre, 2019, p. 26-27).

This difference of opinion on the real — those objects taken for granted from the steering position of regional public policy, as opposed to the multiple semiotic processes revealed by action research — is also expressed in the very different relationship that each of these actors has with 'indexes', those signs whose role is precisely to inform us about the state of the real and to have a grip on it. For Metrolab, the research carried out on ERDF project sites, with the individuals and organisations behind these projects, shows — those who want to know about it — an urban policy in the making, in situ and in vivo. Ethnographic descriptions, spatial analyses and workshop reports all point to the real-life situations of this policy. These documents function as 'indexes' both in the monstrative sense of *pointers*, and in the sense of *clues* provided by the semantics of inquiry: fragmentary information which, once assembled through inventive connections, can be used to establish and then follow up paths of interpretation and action, whether in this case to improve policy steering and decision-making in relation to current ERDF programming or, with a view to future programming, to improve the overall system. This certainly requires an interest in the particularity and haecceity of the real (the phenomenological category Peirce calls 'secondness'). For example, according to Metrolab's pragmatist action-research approach, we only recognise the value of 'inclusion', symbolically declared by the ERDF policy, once it has been indexicalized and achieved, each time in a specific form, in a governance procedure, a spatial development or a rule of use corresponding to such and such a project, on such and such a site, in such and such a part of Brussels, targeting such and such a category of actors, because of such and such an urban issue (access to food, health, culture, green spaces, etc.) and expecting such and such effects. To reiterate a distinction made by Peirce, it is as a *token* rather than a *type* that the inclusive quality of a project is examined, assessed and valued.

Yet this interest in the particular and the qualitative is difficult to share in 'reception milieus' which, like that of the regional administration, are essentially concerned with conventional signs and numbers. In such cases, what inquiry indicates does not become an index or a clue. To ensure the monitoring — rather than, strictly speaking, the follow-up — of the subsidised projects, the administration has its own 'indicators'. However, these indicators only provide the administration with information on the measurable match/gap between what the operator had announced in its application and what it actually achieved. Essentially, this is what indexes enable regional authorities to grasp concerning the policy they are steering: has the project achieved what was planned, or not? While they are necessary for managing the overall programming of the 58 projects and *monitoring* the execution of each of them, it is clear that these indicators do not in themselves enable us to *follow* an experimental initiative in all its accomplishments, which, by definition, could not be determined *ex ante* in an application file.

These difficulties are therefore those of communicating knowledge and, more fundamentally, of meaning-making interaction between two types of 'observers' of a public policy: a first observer who continuously traces the manifestations of this policy through the profusion of particular signs it emits, and apprehends it in a *kaleidoscopic* mode (Côté, 2015); a second observer who limits her attention to a certain type of conventional and synthetic signs, indicators, which she learns about discontinuously, *oligoptically* — in this case with annual frequency.

As these latter types of signs are essentially intended to trigger a reaction from the administration and/or the minister in charge, the indicators used by the regional steering authority is better understood as *signals* rather than *indexes*. The semiotic aspect that prevails here is that by which the sign produces an emotional interpretant (the administration is worried about seeing a project tip 'into the red') and energetic (the administration reacts by increasing its level of vigilance and surveillance of the bad pupil), i.e. the sign taken in its function of 'call' or 'trigger' and heard as a signal (Bühler, 1934/2011). Much more, in fact, than the semiotic aspect of index, by which the sign points to its object and invites us to take note of it. As Paul-Marie Boulanger (2014) points out in a report addressed to the European Commission, very few of these 'indicators' do justice to their etymological origin, by not enabling an index-based inquiry. The semioses to which the use of public indicators gives rise seem to have little in common with those implied by the 'index paradigm' defined by Ginzburg (1980). In fact, they often appear to be the exact opposite of this 'intrinsically qualitative' approach, 'dealing with individual cases', and engaging 'a hermeneutic, a practice of deciphering and interpreting signs' based on 'abduction' — imaginative, creative inferences (Boulanger, 2014, p. 14).

In the specific world of this public policy steering position, indicators are signals that reassure — in which case, like Goffman's 'normal appearances' (1971), they are barely noticed — or that worry and provoke reaction,

but do not seem to lead to any hermeneutic effort. Moreover, it is disturbing to realise that these same triggering signs, by which the political-administrative authority comes to be actively concerned with one of the projects to which it grants its subsidies, correspond to 'fabrications', 'versions of an organisation that do not exist, that are produced solely for the precise purpose of accountability' (Ball, 2003, p. 224-225).

Another disagreement over 'the real and [its] doubles' (Rosset, 1976) — i.e. over the claim to privileged access to the urban real and the rejection of 'doubles' as presented by our interlocutor — was played out in a different way in the relations that Metrolab researchers maintained with critical urban activists, around the situation of Brussels North Quarter. In this case, it was no longer the regional administration that was considered too distant or too little grounded in the field, or which was criticised for developing too loose a grip on reality by relying on 'fabrications', but the action research laboratory itself.

The aforementioned Action Research Collective for Hospitality (ARCH) initiative led Metrolab researchers to join forces with residents hosting migrant, local artists and members of critical associations and citizens' groups active in social movements, particularly in the squatting movement. The collaboration, which was quite productive, was nonetheless punctuated by predictable eco-semiotic trials. If these field actors were interested in the researchers' urban expertise, and sensitive to their intention to aim for forms of application of their research in this context of aid to migrants, they could nevertheless criticise Metrolab researchers for not having the same depth of rootedness in the North Quarter and its milieus; for not matching the intensity of their commitment, the level of their inter-knowledge and solidarity with migrants, the immediacy of their confrontation with the tragic situations experienced in the neighbourhood; or even for not sharing (with squatters, for example) a personal situation of socio-economic precariousness or material vulnerability. The 'realism' of the relationship with the neighbourhood claimed by some of ARCH's non-academic members was not a matter of observing the situations that characterise this neighbourhood, but of experiencing them in person, in the flesh. For them, if ARCH's engagement was to serve those involved in hospitality and the migrant population occupying the area, it was through an affective rather than a cognitive approach that this was to be achieved. In their view, our collective needed to gain a firm foothold in the North Quarter before it could hope to touch the reality of the neighbourhood and claim to be able to teach the players about it. Hence the importance, for some of them, of ARCH's immersion in the urban spaces concerned, of the possibility of having our meetings in the open air, of finding ourselves on the spot, for example in the middle of Maximilian Park (i.e. the park occupied by migrant tents) when it came to discussing situations linked to the park, as if the discussion object and the discussion setting had to coincide.

But the search for a direct relationship with urban situations was not just a matter of 'being present' and allowing oneself to be affected by them. After all, the Metrolab researchers involved in ARCH, trained in pragmatism, also value in situ investigation, the need for the ethnographer to be present on site and available to the reality being studied. For them too, inquiry, as an experience that finds its impetus in a disturbance, necessarily has an affective and aesthetic dimension. It was on another level, however, that the dispute was played out: beyond this sensitivity common to the members of ARCH, some members of the collective seemed to be seeking a more radical *immediate* relationship with urban spaces and their problems, i.e. a relationship that is experienced through the body and the naked senses, and *free of mediations*. Not

only technological or telescopic mediations (which, by enabling us to examine the neighbourhood from a distance, relieve us of the need to visit them in person), but also linguistic mediations, those of scholarly discourse in particular. Thus, one ARCH member sought to extend the collective work that had led to our book (ARCH, 2019) with a project in which he intended to give a central place to body language, dance in particular, to renew the sign regimes from which to resume meaningful interaction with the neighbourhood's occupants and inhabitants, in view of forms of mobilisation and participation of an essentially expressive kind.

Some of us Metrolab researchers, members of ARCH, found it difficult to commit fully to this approach[12]. If we were critical of an administrative observation of urban reality mediated through and through by monitoring instruments, we were also wary of a 'metaphysics of presence' (Derrida, 1967) and 'delusions of unmediated reality' (Kaufmann, 2018). One of these illusions, for advocates of a direct and essentially embodied relationship with the neighbourhood, consists in failing to recognise as mediations the alternative 'frames' (choreography, sport, play, theatre, film, etc.) implied by their avoidance of argumentative discourse, and the 'transformations' (Goffman, 1974) they apply to this raw reality that matters so much to them.

To conclude, let us summarise all these difficulties in Peirce's terms, at the risk of oversimplifying: as investigators evolving in a relationship to the world organised by the indexical paradigm and granting primacy to 'secondness', we cannot follow beyond a certain limit interlocutors who intend to contain their experience in an immediate relationship, in 'firstness', to urban situations, any more than those who relate to them only in 'thirdness', solely through the intermediary of conventional signs and general categories. If these other modes of grasping reality, and the sign regimes from which they draw, are to be taken into account, they must be re-articulated (in collaborative spaces capable of accommodating part of the 'Other's meaning' and its expressions, spaces capable of envisaging the semiotic encroachments mentioned above) and not isolated, within exclusive and inhospitable semiotic niches. The trio presented by Peirce in his vignette (1903/1998, pp.46-147), and the stakes involved in their collaboration, are refigured. The 'bulldog', whose commitment is to 'cling to the facts', does not operate alone. The 'resolute discernment' that is its own contribution is best thought of as a mediation between the commitment of the 'artist' and that of the 'mathematician'. The 'secondness', which characterises a relationship with the world in search of *indexes* and clues, becomes a necessary link between 'firstness' and 'thirdness', between intelligences developed in semiotic environments dominated respectively by *icons* and *symbols*. So, if the eco-semiotic tests presented in this text, and the criticisms of unrealism that were voiced by their interlocutors, were rich in learning and adjustments for the Metrolab researchers, we leave this experience convinced of our duty to affirm, more than ever, *the reality of inquiry*. Indeed, it is only once it is recognised as such, rather than as an academic fantasy, that it will be able to fulfill its role, which is not only scientific but also democratic, and which consists of both facilitating the emergence of the publics concerned and mediating between a reality immanent to the inhabitant's experience of urban spaces and the institutional reality of a public policy such as ERDF.

12 I had the opportunity to develop a semiotic critique of various kinds of 'participation without discourse' in: Berger, 2014.

References

ARCH (Eds.). (2019). *Whose Future is Here? Searching for Hospitality in Brussels Northern Quarter.* Metrolab Series.

Ball, S. (2003). The Teacher's Soul and The Terrors of Performativity. *Journal of Education Policy*, 18(2), 215-228.

Bateson, G. (1972). *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. Ballantine.

Berger, M. (2008). Répondre en citoyen ordinaire. Pour une étude ethnopragmatique des engagements profanes. *Tracés*, 15, 191-208.

Berger, M. (2014). La participation sans le discours. Enquête sur un tournant sémiotique dans les pratiques de démocratie participative. *Espaces Temps.net*, Travaux [Online] http://www.espacestemps.net/articles/la-participation-sans-le-discours.

Berger, M. (2017). Vers une théorie du pâtir communicationnel. Sensibiliser Habermas. *Cahiers de recherche sociologique*, 62, 69-108.

Berger, M. (2018). S'inviter dans l'espace public. La participation comme épreuve de venue et de réception. *SociologieS*, [Online] https://journals.openedition.org/sociologies/6865.

Berger, M. (2018b). Questioning some Forms and Qualities of Urban Togetherness. In M. Berger, B. Moritz, L. Carlier, & M. Ranzato (Eds.), *Designing Urban Inclusion* (pp.176-181). Metrolab Series.

Berger, M. (2020). Écologie des savoirs urbains. Épreuves de la recherche-action au Metrolab Brussels. *Pragmata*, 3, 430-488.

Berger, M. (2020b). *Locked Together Screaming*. Une assemblée municipale américaine enfermée dans l'offense. In L. Kaufmann, & L. Quéré (Eds.), *Les émotions collectives* (pp.381-417). EHESS (Raisons pratiques n°29).

Berger, M. (2024). L'espace de l'interaction. Sources écologiques et topologiques de l'espace goffmanien. In D. Cefaï, M. Berger, L. Carlier, & O. Gaudin (Eds.), *Écologie humaine. Une science sociale des milieux de vie*. Créaphis.

Berger, M., Gonzalez, P., & Létourneau, A. (2017). Présentation. Peirce et les sciences sociales. Une sociologie pragmaticiste? *Cahiers de recherche sociologique*, 62, 7–19

Berger, M., & Moritz, B. (2018). Inclusive Urbanism As GateKeeping. In M. Berger, B. Moritz, L. Carlier, & M. Ranzato (Eds.), *Designing Urban Inclusion* (pp. 145-157). Metrolab Series.

Berger, M., & Moritz, B. (2020). Enclaves inclusives: concevoir l'hospitalité urbaine en archipel. In A. Mezoued, S. Vermeulen, & J.-Ph. De Visscher (Eds.), *Au-delà du Pentagone. Le centre-ville métropolitain de Bruxelles* (pp. 120-128). Éditions de l'ULB / VUB Press.

Berger, M., Moritz, B., Carlier, L., & Ranzato, M. (Eds.). (2018). *Designing Urban Inclusion: Metrolab Brussels MasterClass I*. Metrolab Series.

Bidet, A., Boutet, M., Chave, F., Gayet-Viaud, C., & Le Méner E. (2015). Publicité, sollicitation, intervention. Pistes pour une étude pragmatiste de l'expérience citoyenne. *SociologieS*. [Online] https://journals.openedition.org/sociologies/4941.

Boulanger, P.-M. (2014). *Elements for a Comprehensive Assessment of Public Indicators*. Joint Research Centre (European Commission).

Bourdieu, P. (2000). *Pascalian Meditations*. Stanford University Press.

Bühler, K. (1934/2011). *Theory of Language*. John Benjamins Publishing.

Carlier, L., Debersaques, S., Declève, M., Ranzato, M., & Van Hollebeke, S. (2021). *Cartographier l'environnement social d'un projet urbain*. Metrolab.

Cefaï, D. (2016). Publics, problèmes publics, arènes publiques… Que nous apprend le pragmatisme? *Questions de communication*, 30, 25-64.

Cefaï, D. (2010). Un pragmatisme ethnographique. L'enquête coopérative et impliquée. In D. Cefaï, P. Costey, E. Gardella, C. Gayet-Viaud, P. Gonzalez, E. Le Méner, & C. Terzi (Eds.), *L'engagement ethnographique* (pp. 447-472). Éditions de l'EHESS.

Cefaï, D. (2015). Mondes sociaux. Enquête sur un héritage de l'écologie humaine à Chicago. *SociologieS*, [Online] https://journals.openedition.org/sociologies/4921

Cefaï, D., & Joseph, I. (Eds.) (2002). *L'Héritage du pragmatisme. Conflits d'urbanité et épreuves de civisme*. Éditions de l'Aube.

Cefaï, D., & Pasquier, D. (2003). *Les sens du public*. PUF.

Cefaï, D., Costey, P., Gardella, É., Gayet-Viaud, C., Gonzalez, P., Le Méner, E., & Terzi, C. (2010). *L'engagement ethnographique*. Éditions de l'EHESS.

Cefaï, D., Bidet, A., Stavo-Debauge, J., Frega, R., Hennion, A., & Terzi, C. (2015). Introduction du Dossier 'Pragmatisme et sciences sociales: explorations, enquêtes, expérimentations'. *SociologieS*, [Online] https://journals.openedition.org/sociologies/4915

Cefaï, D., Berger, M., Carlier, L., & Gaudin, O. (Eds.) (2024, forthcoming). *Écologie humaine: une science sociale des milieux de vie.* Creaphis.

Chanvillard, C. (2011). *Au seuil de l'architecture, le sacré*. PhD Dissertation in Architecture, Louvain-La-Neuve, UCLouvain.

Côté, J.-F. (2015). Du pragmatisme de G. H. Mead à la sociologie de Chicago: les prolongements d'une vision kaléidoscopique de la société. *SociologieS*.

Declève, B., Grulois, G., de Lestrange, R., Bortolotti, A., & Sanchez Trenado, C. (Eds.). (2020). *Designing Brussels Ecosystems. Brussels Masterclass II*. Metrolab Series.

Decroly, J.-M., Grulois, G., Carlier, L., & Dessouroux, C. (Eds.) (2021). *(Designing) Urban Production*. Metrolab Series.

Derrida, J. (1967). *La voix et le phénomène*. PUF.

Dewey, J. (1938). *Logic. The Theory of Inquiry*. Holt.

Dewey, J. (1927). *The Public and its Problem*. Holt.

Dewey, J. (1939). *Theory of Valuation*. University of Chicago Press.

Dewey, J. (1920). *Reconstruction in Philosophy*. Holt.

Duranti, A. (1994). *From Grammar to Politics*. University of California Press.

Duranti, A., & Goodwin, C. (Eds.) (1992). *Rethinking Context: Language As An Interactive Phenomenon*. Cambridge University Press.

Eco, U. & Sebeok, T. (Eds.) (1983). *The Sign of Three*. Dupin, Holmes, Peirce. Indiana University Press

Ferry, J.-M. (2007). *Les grammaires de l'intelligence*. Editions du Cerf.

Garfinkel, H. (1967). *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Prentice-Hall.

Genard, J-L. (2017). Penser avec Peirce la conception architecturale. *Cahiers de recherche sociologique*, 62, 109-135.

Ginzburg, C. (1980). Signes, traces, pistes. Racines d'un paradigme indiciaire. *Le Débat*, 6, 3-44.

Goffman, E. (1971). *Relations in Public: Microstudies of the Public Order*. Basic Books.

Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame Analysis*. Harvard.

Goodwin, C. (2011). Contextures of Action. In J. Streeck et al. (Eds.), *Embodied Interaction*. Cambridge University Press.

Goodwin, C. (2016). L'organisation co-opérative et transformative de l'action et du savoir humains (traduction: Yaël Keplak). *Tracés*, 19-46 (Hors-série #16).

Gypens, G. (2019). 'Secret Gardens ' <https://www.kaaitheater.be/fr/articles/secret-gardens>.

Hoffmeyer, J. (2008). The Semiotic Niche. *Journal of Mediterranean Ecology*, 9, 5-30.

Joint Research Centre. (2020). *Handbook of Sustainable Urban Development Strategies.* Publications Office of the European Union.

Joseph, I. (1998). *La ville sans qualités.* Editions de l'Aube.

Joseph, I. (2015). L'enquête au sens pragmatiste et ses conséquences. Vulnérabilité du public, observation coopérative et communauté d'exploration. *Sociologies* (Online).

Joseph, I., & Grafmeyer, Y. (1979). *L'École de Chicago*. Champ Urbain.

Kaufmann, L. (2018). Debunking Deference: The Delusions of Unmediated Reality in the Contemporary Public Sphere. *Javnost — The Public, 25* (1-2)*,* 11-19.

Klinenberg, E. (2018). *Palaces for The People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarisation and The Decline of Civic Life*. Crown.

Lemaître, M. (2019). *Accueillir dignement l'étranger. Composition d'un lieu d'hospitalité pour les migrants à Bruxelles*, Thesis of Master in Architecture, UCLouvain.

Lemaître, M., & Ranzato, M. (2019). Moving out/Fitting in: Penser ensemble le déplacement du Hub Humanitaire. In ARCH (Eds.), *Whose Future is Here? Searching for Hospitality in Brussels Northern Quarter* (pp.139-150). Metrolab Series.

Levesque, S., & Caccamo, E. (2017). Sémiotique et écologie: une alliance naturelle. *Cygne Noir*, 5.

Lotman, Y. (1991). *Universe of The Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*. Indiana University Press.

Mead, G. H. (1926). The Objective Reality of Perspectives. In E. S. Brightman (Ed.), *Proceedings of the Sixth International Congress of Philosophy (*pp. 75-85). Longmans, Green and Co.

Muchow, M., & Muchow, H. (1935/2015). The Life Space of The Urban Child. In Günter Mey and Hartmuth Günther (Eds.), *The Life Space of The Urban Child: Perspectives on Martha Muchow's Classic Study*. Transaction Publishers.

Nöth, W. (1998). Ecosemiotics. *Sign Systems Studies*, 26, 332–343.

Nöth, W. (2001). Ecosemiotics and the Semiotics of Nature. *Sign Systems Studies,* 29*,* 71-81.

Park, R. E. (1936). Human Ecology. *American Journal of Sociology,* 42(1), 1-15.

Peirce, C.S. (1991). *Peirce on Signs*. University of Northern Carolina Press.

Peirce, C.S. (1903/1998). *On Phenomenology. The Essential Peirce, vol. 2 (1893-1913): Selected Philosophical Writings* (edited by Peirce Edition Project). Indiana University Press.

Quéré, L. (2016). L'écologie sémiotique de Charles Goodwin. *Tracés*, 16, 47-60.

Rochberg-Halton, E. (1986). *Meaning and Modernity. Social Theory in The Pragmatic Attitude*. University of Chicago Press.

Rosset, C. (1976). *Le réel et son double*. Gallimard.

Ryle, G. (1945). Knowing How And Knowing That: The Presidential Address. *Proceedings of The Aristotelian Society*. 46, 1-16.

Schütz, A. (1945). On Multiple Realities. In A. Schütz (Ed.), *Collected Papers vol. 1: The Problem of Social Reality* (pp. 207-259). Martinus Nijhoff.

Stavo-Debauge, J. (2018). Towards a Hospitable and Inclusive City. In M. Berger, B. Moritz, L. Carlier, M. Ranzato (Eds.), *Designing Urban Inclusion* (pp. 165-176). Metrolab Series.

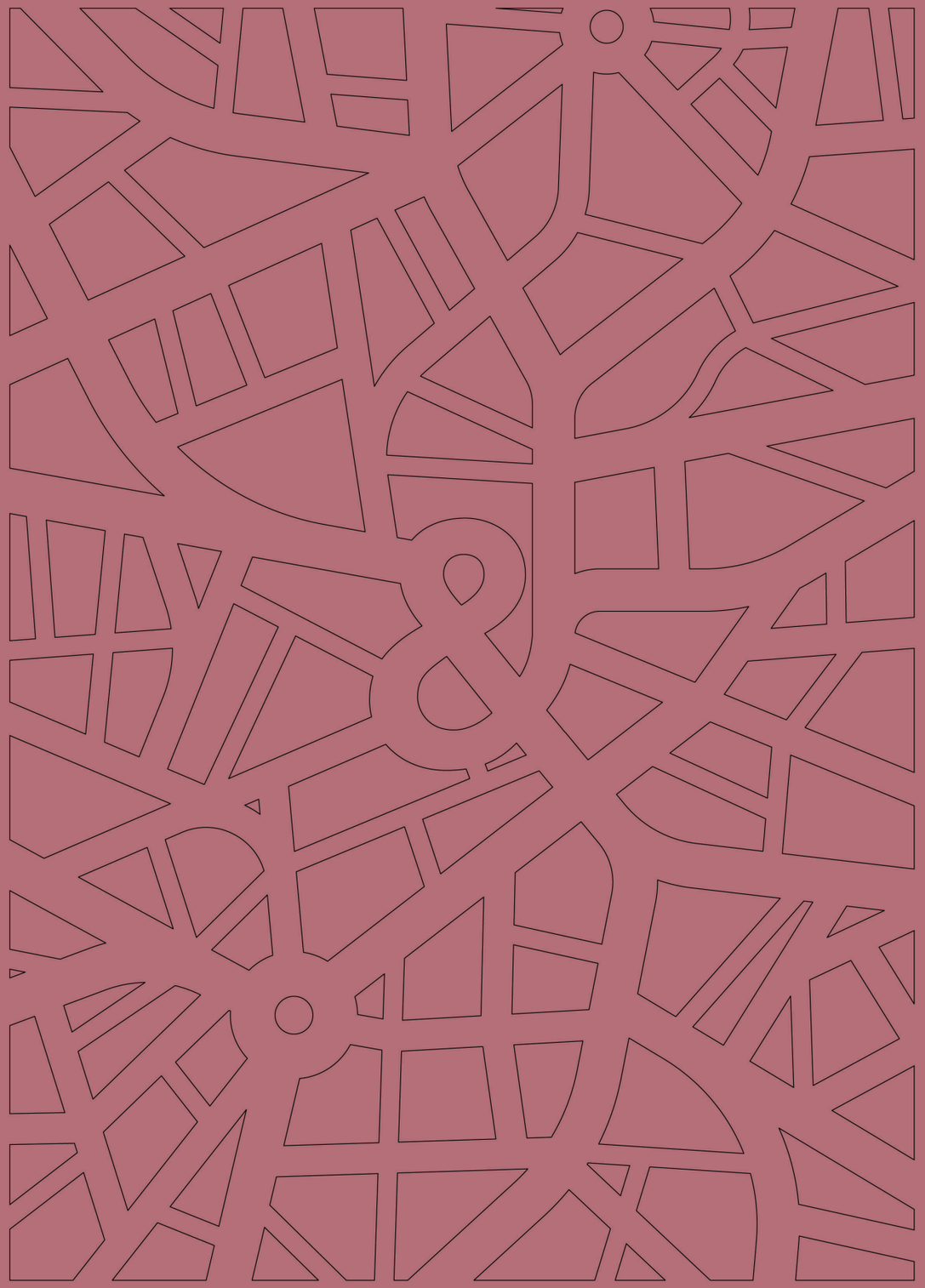
Thévenot, L. (2014). Autorités à l'épreuve de la critique. Jusqu'aux oppressions du gouvernement par l'objectif. In B. Frère (Ed.), *Le tournant de la théorie critique* (pp. 269-292). Desclée De Brouwer.

Trossat, M. (2023). *Architecture de l'(in)hospitalité. Urbanité, spatialité et matérialité des politiques d'accueil à Bruxelles*, PhD Dissertation in City Science, Lausanne, EPFL.

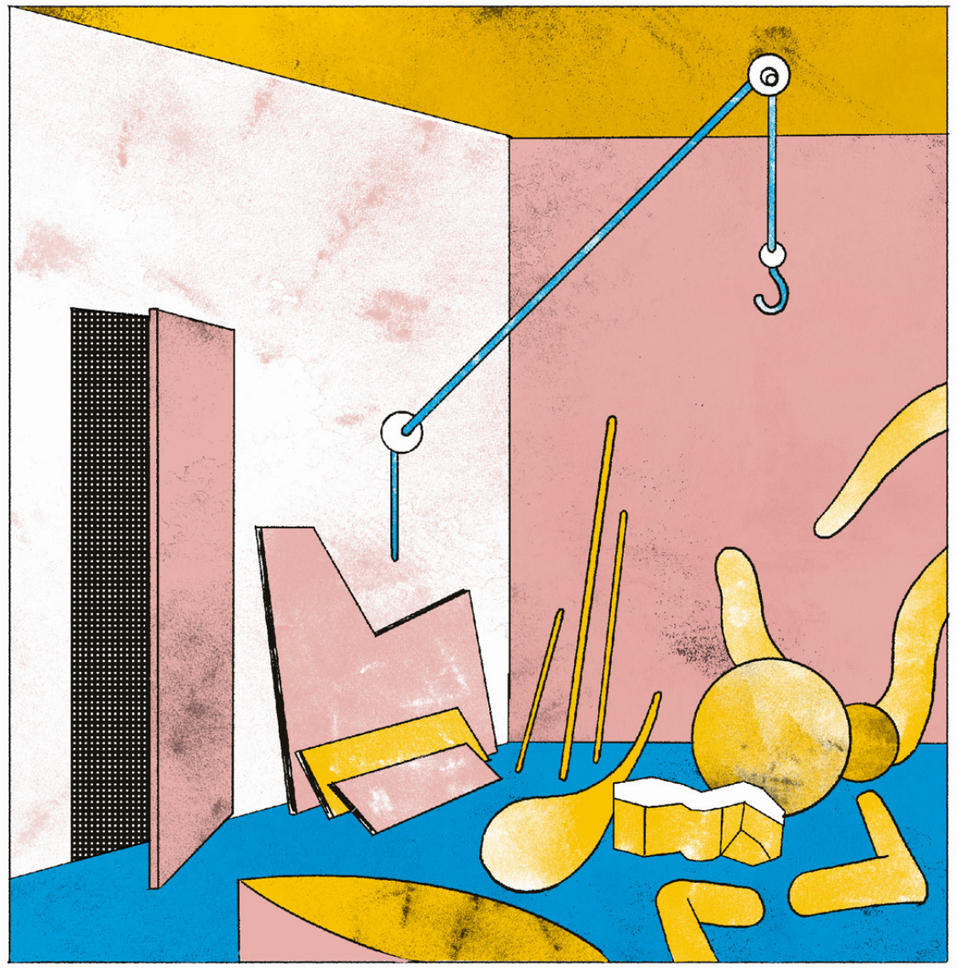
Uexküll (Von), J. (1934/2010). *A Foray Into the Worlds of Animals and Humans*. University of Minnesota Press.

Van Hollebeke, S. (2021). *Professionnels du discours et spécialistes de l'image dans le projet urbain. Enquête à Bruxelles sur une asymétrie des collaborations entre experts de la ville*, PhD Dissertation in Social Sciences and Urbanism, UCLouvain and ENSA Grenoble.

Varloteaux, P. (2024) (in progress). *Anatomie des projets urbains bruxellois*, PhD Dissertation in Urban Planning, Brussels, Université Libre de Bruxelles.



Mediations of transdisciplinarity



© Lucas Gicquel

Interdisciplinarity as a tool for applied and involved research

Louise Carlier, Sara Cesari, Marco Ranzato, Roselyne de Lestrange, Christian Dessouroux, Louise Prouteau

Metrolab was conceived as a reflexive device to support ERDF projects and to address metropolitan issues of inclusion, ecology and urban production, following the three pillars of the European strategy. Metrolab's researchers have designed this laboratory as a place to conduct interdisciplinary urban research aimed at application and involvement. By this, we mean that its work aims to:

- **empirically study metropolitan (social, economic and ecological) processes by focusing on various projects carried out as part of European territorial development policies and/or regional policies and on the dynamics produced by civil society in studies conducted among and with public stakeholders like ERDF project actors, regional and municipal administrations, users, civil society and associations;**
- **develop methods enriched by interdisciplinarity;**
- **and produce different forms of knowledge likely to find practical extensions with the actors involved in the projects or the urban policies followed.**

Researchers in their fields of investigation aim to produce and contribute to a reflexive and critical (descriptive or prospective) analysis of urban public action, whether carried out on the scale of the urban project or on metropolitan dynamics, in Brussels or elsewhere. These objectives lead us to experiment with different approaches that update the applied and involved dimensions of research and to develop methodological tools that meet the principles of interdisciplinarity. This chapter reviews these different approaches and intends to show how interdisciplinarity can be used as a tool to meet the ambitions of applied and involved research.

Positions and approaches of applied research

How can a reflective approach be anchored in the projects[1] carried out by the actors, be articulated in their approach and enrich their practices?

Inviting ourselves into the project is a key moment that shapes the possibility of conducting our work. The actors are not necessarily convinced that university research can contribute to their project, even if it is presented as applied-meaning concerned with articulating the actors' practices. Research is also often perceived as a process likely to hinder the smooth operation of the project, to raise critical points and to thwart its implementation. However, the ERDF project actors must respect the timetable for the different stages of implementation (i.e., they must comply with the rate of expenditure for each stage). Since ERDF funding comes after the project has been designed and its objectives defined, Metrolab's research can best intervene during the implementation stage (spatial design, activity programming, implementation). This stage is no longer the time for the actors involved to rethink the project's goals, format, partners or targeted beneficiaries, all of which, however, are necessarily part of a researcher's field of analysis for a project. The researchers' involvement therefore implies that the time that they conduct the research must be structured with the timetable of the public action.

During our time at Metrolab, we have experimented with different ways of entering and supporting projects, which can schematically fall between two extremes. First, certain practices are similar to *consulting*: research is done at the service of the actors. Project leaders come to the researchers with a specific question or request; the researchers then set up an *ad hoc* methodological scheme to support the actors and respond to their request without questioning the aims of the project and without disrupting it from running smoothly. This methodological support often takes the form of workshops or roundtable discussions with the actors or beneficiaries directly involved or concerned by the project to be developed. The research is often carried out prospectively to contribute to the proper development of places to be conceived, to better ways of conducting urban projects, to defining strategies to keep the initiatives running and so on. The researchers provide technical expertise through their production.[2] In this case, the research then fully meets the challenges of application and involvement, but the possibilities of criticism are restricted, as there is no room for questioning the aims of the project. The criticism must be propositional, audible and graspable by the actors, at the service of the project.

At the opposite end of the spectrum are research practices that maintain an outsider approach towards the actors. This outsider approach may be the result of difficulties in getting the actors to invite the researchers to participate in the projects, either because the actors do not want to be supported by research or because the research subject is not of direct interest to them. It can also be

1 Before tackling this question, it is important to specify that the researchers chose the projects they followed freely, as long as they were part of the ERDF programme.

2 See, for example, Carlier, L., & Berger, M. (Eds.). (2021). *Design social et enquête collective. Les espaces d'accueil et de soins*. Metrolab Logbook III; and de Lestrange, R., & Fierens, C. (Eds.). (2020). *Agropolis. D'un projet pilote à un réseau nourricier métropolitain.* Bruxelles Environnement/Metrolab.

linked to a critical approach that the researchers take to the projects, which complicates their potential involvement in the project process.

Finally, this outsider approach may also be linked to the format of the research conducted: different members of Metrolab were pursuing a PhD[3], entailing greater autonomy and independence from the actors. Here, the definition of a subject and a research question are guided less by the actors' practical interests than by the state of inquiry in a given scientific field, as the academic environment expects a consequent theoretical production that is often less accessible to those who do not come from the same environment. In practices that take an outsider approach to the actors, the methodological devices used rely on non-participatory observation, document analysis, interviews and fieldwork. It is harder for the research to play a role of application and involvement, yet the critical dimension, based on theoretical frameworks, is strengthened.

Between these two extremes, we find a wide range of different approaches, which are what we have most often experienced. For example, there are situations in which the researchers propose to the project actors an investigation that meets their own research interests first and foremost. Though this does not directly respond to a need previously identified by the actors, it might still arouse their interest. A relatively robust and flexible collaboration is then established between the researchers and actors; the different stages of the investigation are punctuated by meetings and discussions; both parties maintain a certain distance and a certain dialogue and a relationship of distance and rapprochement develops over the course of the study. Furthermore, practical extensions of the research are not provided. Although the results are delivered to the actors in a format that they can grasp and that are likely to enrich their practices and thinking, the way they integrate them often eludes the researchers themselves. As such, the applied dimension of the research prompts concern about how its results are delivered. In each case, we have tried to present the results of our research in ways that can be understood by institutional actors and that are likely to be used in their practice. In this respect, various formats were tested, both formal (exhibitions, brochures, book launches, etc.) and informal (exchanges and discussions during meetings or interviews).

To illustrate this intermediary position, let us take the collective research carried out on Forest Abbey, aiming to understand and visualise the social environment of the project based on mapping workshops carried out with the current users of the places (Carlier, Debersaques, Declève, Ranzato and Van Hollebeke, 2021). This research was intended to focus on the current uses of the Abbey site and the surrounding public spaces and on the perceptions of different people who frequented these spaces on a daily basis, who were therefore concerned by their transformation, but who did not get involved in the

3 Let us quote some of the theses already defended: Debersaques, S. (2020). *'Et en plus, on travaille avec le quartier': Analyse des tensions entre équipements culturels hybrides et quartiers populaires en voie de gentrification*. PhD thesis in Geography, directed by M. Van Criekingen, ULB; Declève, M. (2021). *Travail artisanal et production de l'espace bruxellois. Prototype d'atlas visuel.* PhD thesis in Urban Planning, directed by E. Cogato Lanza, UCLouvain/EPFL; Van Hollebeke, S. (2021). *Professionnels du discours et spécialistes de l'image dans le projet urbain. Enquête à Bruxelles sur une asymétrie des collaborations entre experts de la ville.* PhD thesis in Social Sciences and Urban Planning, directed by M. Berger and J.-P. Thibaud, UCLouvain and Université Grenoble Alpes.

participatory spaces set up as part of the project. Interest in this issue emerged following the MasterClass on urban inclusion, where the Abbey was taken as a case study, and where the analyses concluded that considerations of these people spatially and politically, which had been absent from the discussion spaces, were at stake. Even if the actors involved in the project were not initially interested in working on these issues through this kind of approach, it seemed that our research could contribute to public action by developing some tools that would make it possible to understand and visualise this social dimension of space. This is only marginally taken into account by the instruments of knowledge that usually support urban policies. We met with the project leaders on several occasions to clarify our approach, to define our field of investigation and to identify the links between their action processes and our own. We published the results of our work in formats that could be grasped by the associative actors with whom we had organised the workshops, the members of the public we met and the project leaders in the form of a brochure and an exhibition in the Abbey's premises in particular.

The different positions mentioned rather schematically above are not set in stone in the research process, but vary over time. The same study often oscillates between these two extremes over a certain period, becoming more or less involved at different times. For each research project, and at different times, researchers must negotiate their place within the project and with the actors. Some researchers started off as involved and committed to the project and its leaders, but found themselves excluded from discussions and decision-making as their investigations went on; others, who initially preferred to work on the outside, gradually became integrated into key parts of a project. Researchers' roles in a project also vary according to the importance they give to the operational, critical, experimental, explanatory or other dimension of their work.

In any case, all Metrolab researchers share the ambition to link the heuristic and practical purposes of their work and to develop methodological tools derived from the different knowledge and disciplines used in the laboratory.

Interdisciplinarity as a research tool

Over the course of several years of research carried out at Metrolab, we have developed different tools to inform our practices and our sociological, urban planning, architectural, and geographical knowledge. These tools were developed in *research cells* that gathered several researchers from different disciplines around common fields of investigation or common working themes. These cells are collaborative research devices that experiment with and develop different methodological tools to meet the laboratory's application and involvement objectives. Examples include social design, participatory mapping and multi-actor seminars.

Social design considers the social, political and critical role of design, putting it at the service of social inclusion (Carlier and Berger, 2021). It aims to improve the living conditions of vulnerable or marginalised people by taking their needs and their environment into account in co-design practices based on public user participation. Social design involves a collaborative research process aimed at social intervention. Methodologically, it combines methods of interviewing,

observation, data analysis and drawing, so it requires skills from different disciplines. At Metrolab, co-design research has been pursued in different projects to contribute to the design of reception and care facilities for vulnerable users. The researchers sought to understand the needs of these users and the professionals attending to them to identify design principles that improve the premises' qualities of hospitality and social inclusion. These principles were then considered by the actors involved in the projects. The co-design practices therefore made it possible to play a mediating role between different groups of people (project leaders, designers and users) by bringing together different types of knowledge.

Participatory mapping considers the map as a tool for reading the territory, as well as a tool for public discussion and research-action, by involving the actors concerned in the mapping process. At Metrolab, different researchers worked on mapping for the aforementioned research on Forest Abbey (Carlier et al., 2020). Mapping workshops were organised to understand and represent current practices and uses of the area by different groups of people who frequent it daily. By mapping these elements, the researchers intended to show the social dimension of a territory in a way that could be useful to the actors involved in designing and implementing the project. This methodological experimentation allowed us to play a mediating role between different groups of people: our intervention helped to restore the point of view, experiences and expectations of certain groups underrepresented in formal participatory spaces, as well as of the actors involved in developing the project. The results of our research were taken into account by the offices in charge of designing the places and organising participation, which used it as a tool to complete existing territorial diagnoses and to better consider users and needs that had not been identified in the project thus far.

Multi-stakeholder seminars cross-fertilise practical and academic knowledge. Combining action and foresight, these seminars aim at mutual enrichment around a theme for researchers from different disciplines and actors in the field. One example is Agropolis, which has taken up the issue of agroecology in and for the city. Based on issues arising from the field practice of the BoerenBruxselPaysans project that the many project partners collectively identified, a series of meetings was co-designed with Metrolab. The format of these meetings, organised as moments of prospective reflection, encouraged dialogue between Brussels and foreign practitioners, researchers and representatives of the many fields of public action concerned with food issues. These seminars allowed researchers to test their hypotheses and theories against the most concrete field reality. Symmetrically, producers, project managers and public technical bodies could compare their experiences and questions and transpose them onto theoretical frameworks. Through a shift in perspective, this helped them to grasp paradoxes, understand the potential of pooling resources and share action priorities and scales of intervention. After the first stage of co-designing the cycle, followed by the meetings themselves, the final stage consisted of the collective writing of a book[4] by combining views and territories. This book concludes with a series of specific recommendations for Brussels public policy, as well as a committed and scientifically founded interdisciplinary

4 See de Lestrange, R., & Fierens, C. (Eds.). (2020). Op. cit.

and intersectoral call to position agriculture as an agent of socio-ecological territorial transition.

As these examples show, the various methodological tools we have developed by combining our disciplines have helped us to meet the application and involvement objectives that we had set for ourselves. First, they allowed us to play a mediating role between different types of knowledge (that of the researchers and that of the actors) and different types of people (users, project leaders and members of public administrations). The research work has very often been supported by the networking of different actors, with Metrolab gradually playing the role of a *platform*. However, these tools have also made it possible to take different issues into account, such as inclusion, ecology and production, and to cross-reference different themes that are not well articulated in public policies that are often divided into sectors[5].

The interdisciplinary and applied nature of our work was most often based on a collective approach to a common issue, leading to the cross-fertilisation of points of view: ours, as researchers, and those of the actors we met.

Amplifying practical research outcomes

In conclusion, we raise three points that could amplify the practical extensions of a research laboratory if addressed.

The first point concerns the relationship between the timeline of the research and the timeline of the projects monitored. Metrolab's mission was to support projects whose goals, different stages of implementation and actors involved in the decision-making processes had already been established. Our contribution was therefore limited to supporting the implementation stage, hence our investigations' focus on the premises' qualities of inclusion and hospitality and on the projects' social and spatial environments. We are convinced that the practical extensions of the research could be amplified if it could support the project creation process upstream from these stages, when design, implementation and governance aims and issues are discussed.

The second point concerns the relationship between actors and researchers. The entire range of types of involvement that could be envisaged and tested in the laboratory sprang from the relative vagueness of our involvement with the project leaders and public authorities. The researchers had to adapt to the situations and positions of the actors they met. This murky definition of the relationships between researchers and actors had certain advantages: it granted a certain flexibility to how we engaged and allowed to adjust to different situations. It also possessed certain weaknesses, as our role with the project leaders, never assumed or obvious, very often had to be negotiated and justified. At the end of our journey, we were left wondering what would have happened regarding issues of involvement and application if there had been a more determined, formal and conventional framework for relations between researchers and actors.

The third point concerns the different stages involved in developing an applied and involved urban research laboratory. We have not honoured the

5 See the article 'Towards a transversal approach to urban issues' by A. Bortolotti and L. Carlier in this publication.

practical requirements of our research from the outset. We first spent some time understanding our distinct perspectives on the purposes and methods of the research and our singular or disciplined approaches to urban environments, while experimenting internally with tools to open up dialogue and produce some cross-fertilisation. This stage was necessary to present ourselves to the actors as a collective, to get invited to the projects and to understand the role that we could play together. It was essential to grasp our complementarities and to help us to understand the projects and situations studied in their context, which is necessarily complex and multidimensional. Behind the scenes in the laboratory, it was also crucial to support each other during times of failure and misfortune that experimentation entails, as well as the trying moments that we underwent during our research. Our experience at Metrolab is coming to an end because the laboratory, financed as part the ERDF programme, shares a *project*[6] mindset and is necessarily limited in time. We note that the practical consequences of our work have been amplified over time. Here at the end of our journey, we are compelled to ask ourselves what we have accomplished, as well as what we could have developed and improved, if our common experience had been prolonged.

References

Berger, M., Moritz, B., Carlier, L., & Ranzato, M. (Eds.). (2018). *Designing Urban Inclusion: Metrolab Brussels MasterClass I*. Metrolab Series.

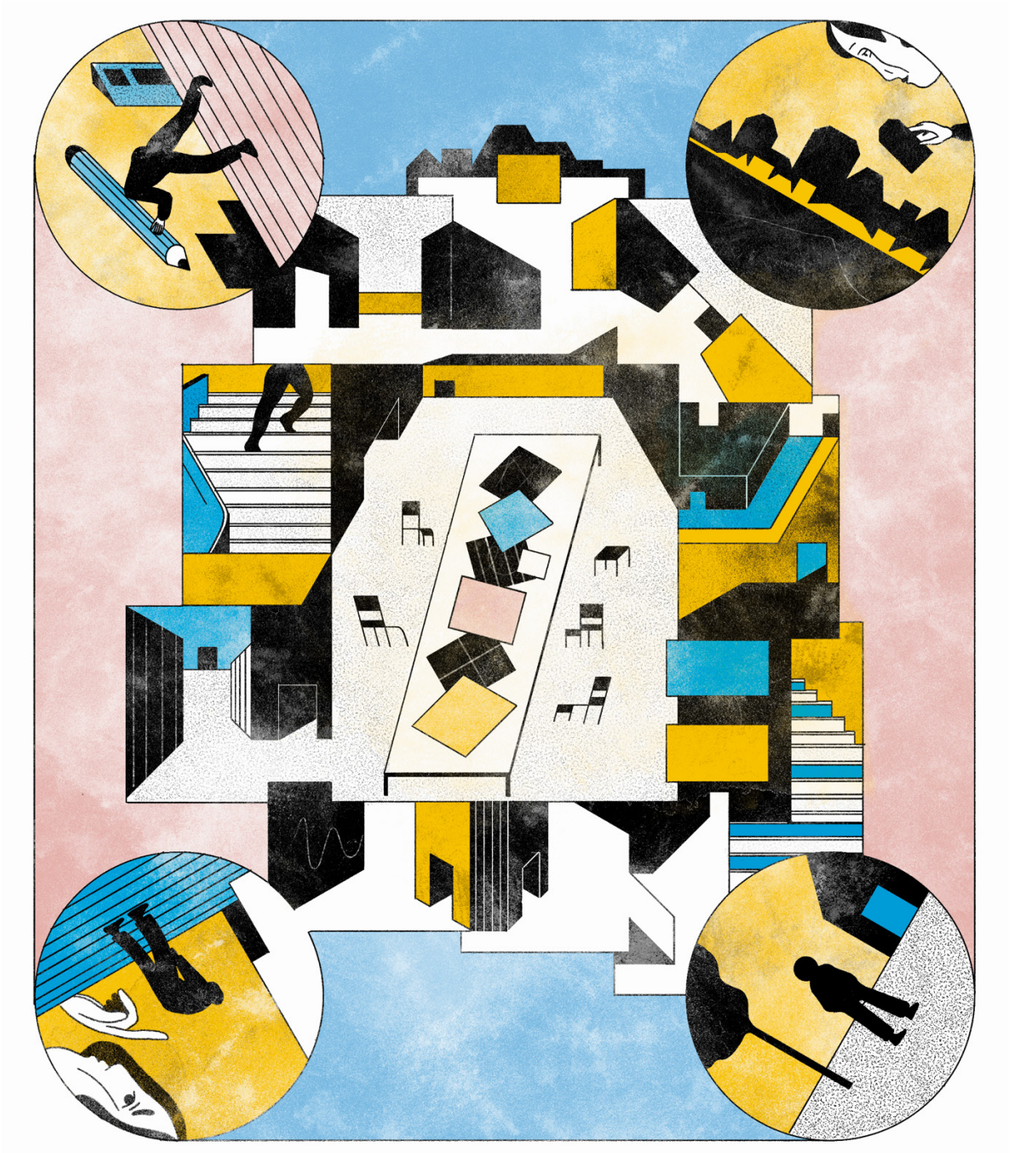
Boltanski, L., & Chiapello, E. (1999). *Le Nouvel esprit du capitalisme.* Gallimard.

Carlier, L., & Berger, M. (Eds.). (2021). *Design social et enquête collective. Les espaces d'accueil et de soin.* Metrolab Logbook III.

Carlier, L., Debersaques, S., Declève, M., Ranzato, M., & Van Hollebeke, S. (2021). *Cartographier l'environnement social d'un projet urbain.* Metrolab Logbook I.

de Lestrange, R., & Fierens, C. (Eds.). (2020). *Agropolis. D'un projet pilote à un réseau nourricier métropolitain.* Bruxelles Environnement /Metrolab.

6 For a critical approach to the 'city by projects', see Boltanski, L., & Chiapello, E. (1999). *Le Nouvel esprit du capitalisme*. Gallimard. We also refer the reader to the article 'Reflections on managing a research project in academia' by S. Cesari and L. Prouteau in this book.



© Lucas Gicquel

Speech professionals and visual specialists in the urban project

Sarah Van Hollebeke

The first scene takes place on Friday, 24 June 2016 in a small space — the rooms of a building in the centre of Brussels — that houses the offices, conference space and workshops of the Metrolab members. The latter are gathered in small groups of five researchers with the aim of initial testing of the ways that sociologists, architect-urbanists and geographers can work together. The exercise is based on the analysis of different projects, newly financed by ERDF funds, that they visited earlier that day. In one afternoon, they need to put themselves in the shoes of project leaders to draw up a diagnosis of the site, along with concrete proposals to reinforce its anchorage in the city. To facilitate this interdisciplinary work, the three small glass rooms adjoining the vast modular central space have been prepared in advance by the laboratory's managers and directors. A set of materials is provided: a table, chairs, a large map of the area, post-it notes in different colours, three blank sheets of paper, coloured markers, etc.

After a brief discussion to identify how they will work together, one of the young researchers in architecture and urban planning, sitting at the table as me, takes a tracing paper out of her bag. She places it in front of her on the map of the studied area. Without further explanation, she begins by tracing the outlines of the buildings in a specific colour. Then, she decides to use a second colour to draw the projected situation, i.e., the reallocation of the former Brussels Stock Exchange into a Belgian beer experience centre. The geographer present at the table gradually begins to follow her in a spontaneous and uncoordinated way. I stand back, less at ease with the proposed exercise, observing for long minutes the gestures made by the other two before participating in the drawing in a less confident and more hesitant manner. Similarly, Leïla, a doctor in political and social sciences, first writes a legend for the map being drawn before she decides to follow the movement. She hesitates about the colour to use to indicate interactions she observed on the site and expresses her embarrassment by poking fun at herself: 'Well, I'm letting myself go a bit, but you tell me if it doesn't work!'. After more than an hour's work and a quick summary, the researchers return to the central space to present the results of their collective analysis and the proposals that have emerged to the other members of the laboratory.

Reception test between professional worlds

The above scene illustrates how the space of confrontation between different types of urban knowledge functions first of all as a *milieu of reception* (Berger, 2018), i.e. a space already inhabited, with its own meanings and references, that allows itself to be inhabited by others[1]. While a plurality of intelligence and different worlds of meaning are invited, the communication space seems to be organised at the initiative of one of these worlds, which fixes the rules of the game. Indeed, the proposed exercise is largely framed by visual modes of expression and is inspired by workshops and project-based research that is specific to the world of architecture and urban planning. This scene also gives us a glimpse of the 'asymmetries of grasp' (Chateauraynaud, 2015) between researchers, which, according to my investigation, is due to the ability to master visualisation tools to represent urban reality. In this situation, those who do not manage to use these preferred modes of expression feel less legitimate to intervene and fear being disqualified, mocked or scorned. In my opinion, this scene reveals the ease with which some people set the tempo and the difficulty the others have following it. It shows us the ease of the former in manipulating maps, tracings or projecting a desired situation and the hesitation, even embarrassment, of the latter in taking part in this exercise to achieve a collective description of a site.

At the end of the workshop, a researcher in geography shares his feeling with me. For him, there was no added value to the exercise. The visualisation methods and techniques used for the occasion are familiar to him. They have 'nothing innovative or transdisciplinary'[2] in his eyes. While this professional of mapping and spatial representation managed to engage in the proposed exercise with ease, this was not entirely the case for the other social science researchers who were more used to focusing on the discourse of the actors and observation of their habits, lifestyles and practices. The latter had the impression they needed to go beyond their discipline in order to take part in the action, and were even afraid they would disrupt the process. One young doctoral student in sociology confessed to me that he was worried that he would be expected to come up with concrete proposals based on observations made a few hours earlier. According to him, the essence of a sociologist's work is to take time and not draw hasty conclusions. Lastly, this first exercise revealed that communication between these worlds of meaning seems incredibly difficult, or even improbable (Luhmann, 1981). It appears that the researchers here rely on different approaches to understanding the city based on the professional backgrounds in which they were previously trained. While one group has developed a capacity for visual representation of the territory, for imagining the possible layouts of a space, or a graphic language, the other has developed more qualities of description, synthesis, theorisation or conceptualisation. They have developed a capacity to study the social, essentially on the basis of discourses, and to produce their own discourses on the social.

In order to produce admissible forms of knowledge and performative discourses, i.e., discourses that are followed by consequences when they are

1 For more information about this Eco-semiotic theory, see the introduction of this book "Further Steps To an Ecology of Urban Knowledge" by Mathieu Berger.

2 In this chapter, the quotations in single quotation marks correspond to expressions of actors collected on the fly in my field notebook.

heard and received, the researchers from these professional worlds first of all experiment with several positions and tools intended to facilitate communication, exchange and debate and, in the end, facilitate reception of the results of these collective investigations. In this chapter, I will show how these *mediations* can affect researchers, generate their engagement, activate or not their action and give them grips in the project process when discourse alone is not enough (Chateauraynaud, 2015). More specifically, I will look into the relationship between the production of visuals, possibilities for transdisciplinary work and admissibility of the knowledge produced by these scholars.

Unwelcome critical discourse

It is precisely because this concern occupies a central place within the laboratory that it became an object of my investigation. Indeed, the researchers I accompanied seemed to be largely concerned about the conditions for audibility and admissibility of their critical discourse in urban projects that had previously got by well without their intervention. During an initial meeting, one of the Metrolab' pilots asked himself: 'How do we bring critical academic knowledge to the table in a way that is not unwelcome?'

This way of anticipating the undesirability of expert discourse is based on negative situations experienced in the past. Indeed, the work of these scientists suffers from the negative image that scholarly and critical discourses inspires in the world of urban planning. The pilots of the laboratory want to distinguish themselves from these types of urban expertise which, by repeatedly denouncing institutional urbanism, have locked themselves into a critical and deconstructive position. Today, the essentially discursive disciplines that were 'schooled in' criticism of technocratic knowledge are used to leaving the visualisations of urban problems to others and dislike schematisations for their reductive nature. Some of the pilots want to break from this attitude of radical denunciation which sticks to some social scientists and prevents any form of collaboration. From the start, the researchers set themselves the goal of developing a critique that is 'not frontal, but supported by an investigation of the city in the making' and mediated by different tools. The pilots of the laboratory want to go beyond the level of an external and uninvolved criticism. It is above all a question of demonstrating the possibilities of collaboration, that is, of working with a plurality of actors even without being a 'collaborator' (in the sens of 'collabo', i.e. someone who just goes along even if they don't agree) and on the other hand, without falling into mere criticism of a science seen as instrumentalized by the authorities or serving as a guarantee for a policy.

This posture of criticism anchored in practice and in a collective inquiry is presented as a first indispensable condition to 'have the attention of the project leader' and to develop more adjusted ways of collaboration. Our study shows that expression by scientists of this critical discourse still seems unacceptable, even undesirable for the public authorities. These discourses, which intend to denounce dysfunctions, are rarely treated seriously. Thus, the expert's public speech alone does not guarantee the performativity of their action. On the contrary, those who favour abstractions and generalisations may often be scorned (Berger, 2020).

These professionals must therefore deploy a range of skills in order to intervene in an acceptable, relevant and effective manner in these urban project processes.

The embarrassment of speech professionals in the urban project

Starting from the scene described in the introduction and tracing the adjustments that arose from it in the situations of transdisciplinary exchange and the moments of confrontation of different forms of urban knowledge, I would like to show that what is played out in these situations is above all an *embarrassment*, a concept initially inspired by the sociology of Erving Goffman. The interest in studying these instances of embarrassment does not respond to a perverse curiosity about discomfort, nor does it reflect a kind of lamentation about how experts in discourse and experience would not be listened to in these situations of collaborative exchange dominated by visual knowledges. Based on the work of Erving Goffman — this discomfort seemed to be a good indicator of the interactional expectations that people have of each other and of the forms of knowledge that are valued and embodied in these situations. It also reveals the ways in which researchers think about how they appear to others, about the image they have of themselves and of others.

While my own observations and experience as a researcher in sociology certainly influence the way I look at this field, I am also trying to show that what could be perceived as an individual emotion, not worthy of interest a priori, must in fact be analysed as a genuine collective emotion (Kaufmann and Quéré, 2020). It is an emotion felt by a subject as a member of a group, which also feeds on a long history, and which acts on the conduct of actors in a situation, as Joan Stavo-Debauge (2020) explains. Furthermore, he shows that the public expression of speech embarrassments differs in their nature and in their consequences depending on whether they affect the speech of the enunciator or the person who receives this speech (Stavo-Debauge, 2020). As such, they not only translate the speaker's discomfort or lack of confidence but they also reveal in a more or less striking way what is required to maintain the framework and the rules to be followed in a situation (Cefaï and Gardella, 2013, p. 240).

Today we know that those who do not follow the expected roles or who lack sufficient skills in the ways to behave, interact and speak in public according to the situation can be disqualified (Goffman, 1963). This is also the case for those who fail to master the 'semiotic modes' privileged in these situations (Berger and De Munck, 2015). In the world of urban planning, social scientists must therefore take a series of precautions in their public relations in order to avoid being perceived as ill-adapted to the situation and suffer from scorn and mockery. These researchers, who potentially could be the bearers of a critical discourse that has low legitimacy, are therefore condemned to using a second degree, to using humour and self-mockery and showing a certain caution in these situations. This caution also translates into expressing embarrassment, as the scene described at the beginning of the article shows. As Céline Bonicco-Donato writes, referring to Erving Goffman (2016, pp. 119-120):

> Embarrassment is an emotion that arises for the actor when he or she has disrupted the course of the interaction, or for others present when they see their own definition of the situation wavering, as a result of the offence committed by a third party. (…) Embarrassment reflects an awareness of the profanation of ceremonial rules and constitutes an expiatory attitude. To feel confusion is therefore still to honour the rules. [Free translation].

In a series of situations observed, the sociologists in the laboratory expressed the feeling of being without support and felt the need to equip themselves, grasp the privileged mediations and train themselves in techniques of visualisation and mapping representation. For example, on several occasions, a sociologist tried to draw a diagram or a schema in a meeting and did so in an embarrassed manner, taking a series of precautions: 'I draw badly but you see what I mean' or 'I don't know how to make a map', 'I don't know how to draw, it's something new for me, you know, I'm only a sociologist'.

If they failed to show embarrassment, the individual committing the violation would be perceived as crazy, arrogant or too daredevil. They would commit a 'double violation' (Bonicco-Donato, 2016): giving a non-conforming self-image and also not accepting the image projected by the other. This is the case of the researcher-sociologist, expected to be in the field of discourse, who oversteps their position by confidently showing maps they have drawn up without following the codes of geography, or who intrudes in a frontal and reckless manner into a technical conversation about the design of a building, without fully understanding the implications. When some tried more confidently and without embarrassment to produce visualisations to communicate their observations, their interventions were laughed by the interlocutors, provoking a few jokes or causing tension.

On the contrary, disorder could also arise from an insufficient involvement of the researcher in the situation of interaction, if they hide too much behind this inability to mobilise visual modes of expressions. The anticipation of this more marginal posture can also lead to forms of discouragement for researchers who retreat into positions that render them less effective. They may then be called to order.

These 'over- or under-engagements' can interfere with the smooth running of the action as desired by those who set the pace and define the framework (Bonicco-Donato, 2016). Therefore, the intervention of these professionals who potentially carry a critical discourse may represent an intrusion and may interfere with the desired collaborative experience. The people considered as intrusive who stand in the way of an expectation horizon are, by default, left out or keep themselves out. These behaviours show that the researcher is stepping into an environment that is largely imbued with visual knowledge from the world of urbanism and geography. This requires those unfamiliar with such knowledge and ways of working to step out of their usual comfort zone, to 'play the game' and place themselves in a more vulnerable position.

The shapes of urban knowledge: from Rubik's cube to lexicon

This is shown in a second scene that takes place a few weeks later, in early October 2016. Six researchers[3] from the laboratory are sitting in a meeting room discussing various possible ways to accompany the members of the 'urban revitalisation' department of the Municipality of Forest. From the outset, the 'urban revitalisation' group explain their wish to create a 'community' around the project they are conducting, namely rehabilitation of the former abbey into a socio-cultural centre. In order to facilitate communication during the general assemblies and citizen participation meetings, they wish to develop visualisations tools of the future transformations.

One of the coordinators of the 'Interdisciplinary Cell' explains to the other researchers: 'they would like a model [of the project's engineering] that can be, at the same time, a pedagogical, mediation and working tool' because 'they themselves get confused' with the complexity of the project. For the second coordinator, it is more a question of proposing a 'tool that makes it possible to represent a common vision for the information and participation sessions that start in January'. She adds that this tool should not be 'too complex' and 'not too rigid' so that it can be 'rediscussed and reworked' with the project managers.

During this meeting, several tools are discussed. Zoé, one of the Interdisciplinary Cell's architect-urban planners, suggests adapting the square shape already used by the project managers to visualise the different scales, actors and stages of the project. She believes that this geometric shape 'does not work' and must be improved. She proposes to render it more complex and make it evolve towards a kind of Rubik's cube. She believes that will help to represent the multiple dimensions of the project more finely.

The dimensionality of this cube, instead of a square, means we can move around it, turn things over and upside down, to change our standpoint and reveal the 'hidden sides' and unseen aspects of the current shape. It opens new possibilities and expands our understanding of the project.

With this geometric shape, she hopes to be able to represent the various aspects of the project (financing, temporality, actors involved, legal framework, etc.). This proposal, which remains abstract for some members of the Cell, is nevertheless perceived as potentially innovative and effective. This tool appears to be a first means of working collectively as well as an effective communication tool to synthesise the project, delimit what is part of it or clarify what is not covered by their intervention. It is a means of helping actors who have their 'nose to the grindstone' shift their gaze and 'think outside the box'. In the mind of the researchers, this is a necessary condition to help them 'increase their reflexive capacities and their critical skills'.

Later on in the meeting, Leïla proposes a second way to look at the project. She points out a contradiction in the vocabulary used in the project managers' files: the notion of 'urbanity and public spaces is understood through the idea of village relationships', whereas according to the sociological theories she mobilises, this notion refers rather to 'relations of co-presence between

3 Two of them have a doctorate (in political and social sciences; in urban planning) and the other four are young doctoral students in geography, sociology, urban planning and landscape, art history and architecture.

anonymous people' in the city. She proposes to return to these theories to give a more precise definition of the desired urban interactions. In her view, this conceptual elaboration of the notion of urbanity and public space is likely to improve the inclusive dimension of the project and would give normative principles to follow for the design work.

However, this definition is not unanimously accepted by the Cell researchers. This way of using sociological concepts and theoretical references is met with some resistance. The researchers, amused by this concept that does not correspond to their own, finally express their discomfort with the idea of mobilising these categories and definitions which, in their eyes, are non-intuitive. Everyone seems to want to impose their own definitions and to hold on to their position.

Nonetheless, the little verbal joust I observed between the researchers reveals the need to 'find the right words' and to find a common language in order to transcend boundaries between disciplines. This does not mean erasing or ignoring differences. Leïla proposes to synthesise these definitions and to produce an 'interdisciplinary lexicon'. She adds once again with self-derision: 'I can write pages and pages on public space but that is all I can do.'

Faced with the resistance of others to the theories she mobilises, she ends up expressing with humour and a touch of annoyance her 'desire to impose', in his turn, her sociological definitions 'in a somewhat authoritarian manner.'

The displacement that the researchers expect of her in order to bring together the different and sometimes contradictory meanings of this notion represents a burden that is experienced in an almost 'schizophrenic' manner, as this researcher testifies. This displacement can result in a loss of coherence in the ways of proceeding or in a dissociation of what forms the researcher's personality and identity.

The discomfort that accompanies this posture can also lead to a withdrawal from the action in progress. At the end of this meeting, while everyone is explaining what they would like to work on within the Cell, one of the architects turns to me and asks some questions. I explain that I am interested in studying the reception of the tools created by the team within the framework of the project, and the way it will be negotiated with the actors. She reacts with a tone of half-mockery, half-accusation: 'it's a good plan, you sociologists are strategists, I should have done that too'. I go along with her and answer in an ironic tone 'so you don't have to do anything' and I add a bit embarrassed that 'I'm just waiting for that, to get my hands to the tasks'. Leïla, more convinced of the interest of this part of the work, explains that 'it's a way of putting ourselves and our work into perspective, so that we can see the effect of our presence. It is a *mise en abyme* of our work.'

The architect's use of the pronoun 'you' indicates the need to make a clear distinction between herself and the sociologists, to place them outside the community of applied researchers. This exchange reveals contempt for the intellectual who do not want get their hands dirty, who would stick to critical and theorising discourse. In these situations, the minimal trust that exists between two individuals can break down. Indeed, the posture that I adopt, as an observer who proposes a critical look on visual tools designed by the researchers, is perceived by some during these first meetings as intrusive, which earned me several qualifications such as 'spy' and 'the eye of Moscow'.

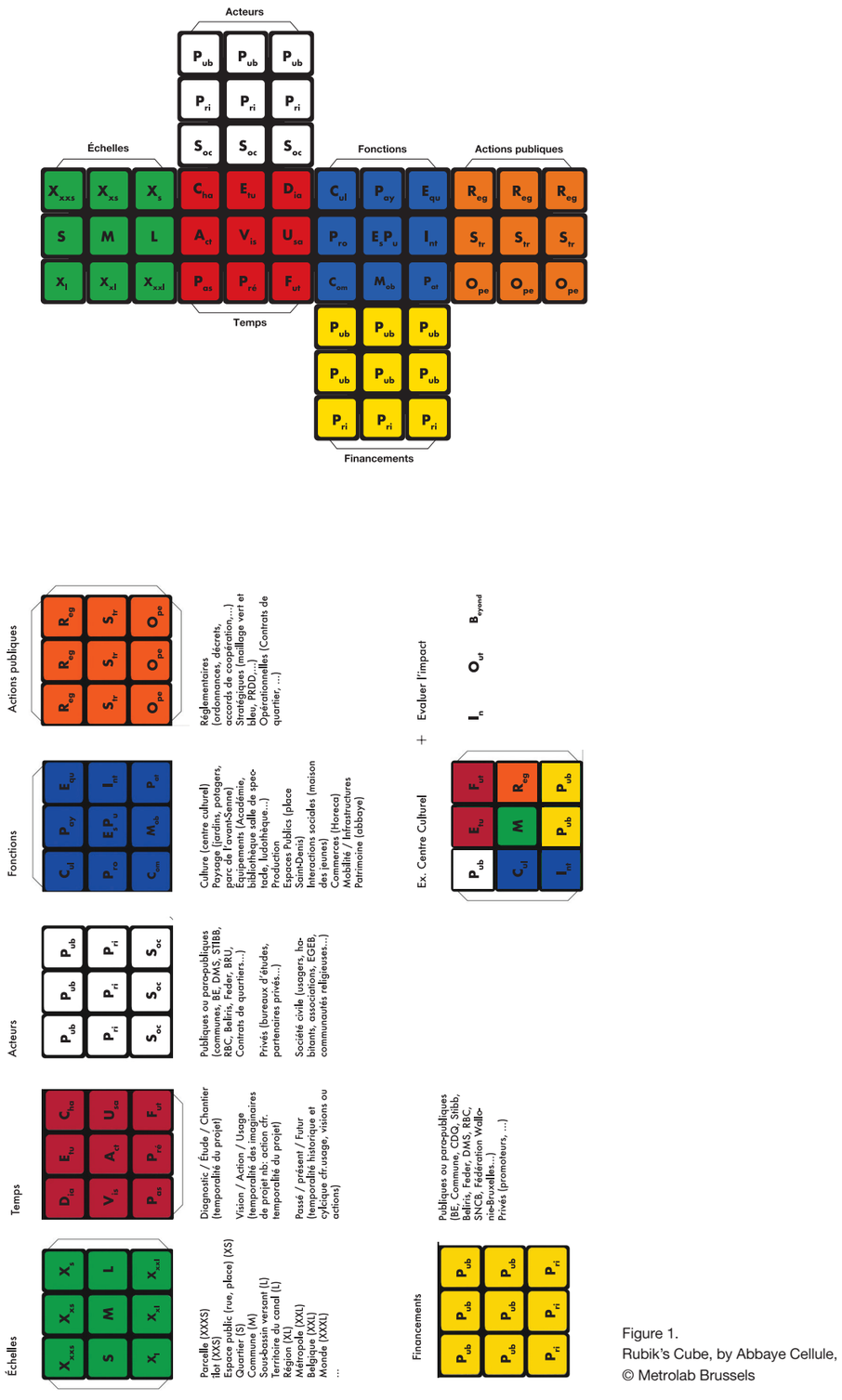


Figure 1.
Rubik's Cube, by Abbaye Cellule,
© Metrolab Brussels

These exchanges demonstrate the irritation with critical discourse and knowledge that are essentially reflexive, theoretical, discursive or textual and that cannot be schematised and reduced to graphic representations or concrete proposals. This annoyance manifests itself through fleeting impressions that are almost imperceptible if we do not pay attention to them, but which have a role in producing the situation.

When they do occur, the contempt, tension, mockery and irritation are of low intensity and often ephemeral. The atmosphere of these co-production meetings is punctuated by these brief moments of intensification which dissolve almost immediately. In these varying atmospheres, the sanctions directed at the subject are relatively minimal.

If a misfit is perceived in a shared way, this does not necessarily turn into a radical rejection of the person. This comes about in a volatile and sequential manner, not through affects or emotions whose contours would be clear and more easily defined (Richaud, 2021). However, these tensions may block commitment, or they may lead people to want to overcome them. These affects guide the action, give a certain quality to the situations and a background against which the operations carried out can make sense. Indeed, the embarrassment felt through these first moments of interaction with the researchers led some of the social scientists of the Metrolab to revise their posture and become more involved in the laboratory's operations.

Researchers who are more used to working with the discourses and narratives of actors often anticipate these negative reactions. As such, some attempt to have a grip on research areas outside their field by trying to impose some of their notions with more authority, as is the case in the situation we are dealing with here. This posture reveals, in my view, an initial asymmetry in the degree of seriousness and authority accorded to other research disciplines and in the ability of different researchers to mobilise the medium of these other scientific approaches. Beyond the disciplinary divisions, it is the confrontation between different ways of observing, talking and acting with respect to the city that we observe in this scene.

Training in the thresholds

This internal collaborative space represented by the 'Interdisciplinary Cell' can be defined as a 'threshold' in the sense given by M. Berger and J. Charles (2014, p.19), i.e., 'both the place of verification by/for the community, and the place of acclimatisation for the newcomer'. The latter is represented by the researcher who is unaccustomed to intervening in the processes of an urban project populated by objects and images. This first step has proved to be indispensable in reinforcing the expert voice and increasing the possibilities of their words being received in the public sphere. It was in this intermediate space that the researchers were able to test the first ways of welcoming the specificities of each person to guarantee their future performance in a public interdisciplinary dialogue.

The expected benefit of this physical and visual contact with the other researchers is a form of convergence and emergence of new perspectives. It is also a way to pool sufficient resources to analyse the projects in order to present more legitimacy in public places. It was a question of bringing different

© Lucas Gicquel

sensibilities to the table in order to give rise to investigative orientations that an urban planner, architect, geographer or sociologist alone would probably not have thought of. This way of adjusting to each other is seen as a first guarantee for committing oneself in an appropriate and coherent way to the project leaders. Similarly, although the analysis of the project presented in the introduction took place at a level below any active involvement of the researchers with the project owner itself, it was nevertheless perceived as a training, learning and essential preparation stage. In these two situations, it was a question of preparing the material environments, of preparing and equipping people and bodies so that interdisciplinary work and public speech could take place more effectively. In the words of one of the researchers, interdisciplinary work implies that:

> architects must submit themselves to the exercise, however short and superficial, of interviewing actors in situ; critical and hypothetico-deductive geographers must experience inductive research; sociologists must play the mind mapping game in order to compare spatial representations of the site.

The latter concluded after this first stage of the Metrolab project that ‘we all got the feeling that it is possible to work together’.[4]

As this passage indicates, collaboration between experts is also based on a vague feeling that an exchange between these types of knowledge is possible and that their meeting necessarily would be enriching and transformative (Chateauraynaud, 2015). This feeling guides the actions and leads to adjustments *in presence* that are not very formalised and expressed. In the workshop described in the introduction, the exchanges were essentially based on taking initiatives, on actions and gestures that were not very problematised and verbalised but oriented, for example, towards producing a map. It was through the observation of each other’s gestures that the researchers managed to get into phase, to agree on a collective description of a project. When disagreement is verbalised, it can lead to a breakdown in the interaction. This is in line with some approaches that say that living together and being-together are ‘underpinned by bodily know-how free of deliberation’ (Thibaud, 2015, p. 49) and would be close to a kind of ‘choreography’ between bodies. It involves the senses and perceptions in a sequential manner, such as handling maps, exchanging glances, following the finger pointing at the outline of a building, and not solely language skills.

As M. Berger (2017) points out, the agreement here instead takes place at an ‘infra-discursive level’. It is rather a question of managing to tune in to the other and to the situation in a musical sense, ‘whether this concerns the tonality (attunement) or the tempo of the interaction’ (Berger, 2017, p.100). When analysing the coordination of actions, the affective, bodily and perceptual dimension, which refers to ‘sensitive grasps’ (Bessy and Chateauraynaud, 1993), is still often put aside. However, the fact of experiencing these situations with one’s body — of bending — is also decisive for the agreement.

4 See: Document prepared by the researchers-sociologists of the laboratory and one of the managers for presentation at the AISLF International Congress, Thursday 07 July 2016.

Discomfort as experience

'Bending ourselves' to interdisciplinarity must therefore be understood here in the sense of a transformative process. This variation or inflection involves testing other ways of working. The discomfort that accompanies this movement would be a means of broadening the consideration of urban realities. Indeed, many see the laboratory as a space for experimentation that allows the usual working methods to be 'put to the test' and new forms of collaboration to be tried out between researchers from different disciplines, but also between researchers and decision-makers, designers or users. They define it as a space for 'collective intelligence', for the construction of knowledge in a context where 'we do not know where we are going'.

These comments, collected during the first internal working meetings, show us that there was, at the beginning, a form of openness in the process. While this openness was seen as fundamental for the members of the laboratory and their institutional partners, the importance of 'keeping each one's specificities' was also put forward. Indeed, the rapprochement between these worlds should not 'flatten the different forms of knowledge'.

It is also 'the place where we can take risks. We try, we fail'. In this environment, the researcher can experiment and test new hypotheses before taking them outside the laboratory with greater strength and confidence. It is a 'space where we tinker, we take the time to conduct our research, to fail and start again'. Initially, what is important for the coordinators and researchers of the laboratory being built is not so much the result to be achieved as the experimentation of 'interdisciplinary contact' as indicated in the laboratory's activity report for 2019: 'The interdisciplinary contact thus makes it possible to develop, on the one hand, an overall picture, a broader understanding, creativity and a new outlook and, on the other, to better understand the limits and potentialities of one's own discipline.'

In fact, it was first and foremost a question of testing a common mode of operation in order to succeed in bringing together hypothetical and inductive knowledges with more abductive logics of enquiry, close to architectural design. These logics of thought, which are specific to different university research environments and different ways of reasoning, often relate to each other in a mode of misunderstanding or misapprehension. This sharing cannot be taken for granted and it cannot be limited to gathering these disciplinary milieus and their specificities around a table. For this exchange to take place, the researchers concerned by these situations of interdisciplinarity try to give precedence to establishing an atmosphere of benevolence and familiarity, of mutual listening and curiosity. This initial 'familiarisation with each other's approaches' is held up as an important quality for 'working together' by some. This regime, which aims to create an attachment to the collective and a closeness between researchers, is not, however, accompanied by the ease that is generally attributed to it. Indeed, it is a question of 'stepping out of one's comfort zone' and not remaining within the safe bounds of ordinary work practices and conventional modes of thinking. Alongside the logic of experimentation, there is a strong expectation of the efficiency of research for action.

'We can't reinvent the wheel': an example of visual *infelicity*

Although schematising the discourse renders the knowledge produced by these researchers more admissible, it does not guarantee its performativity, as we will demonstrate in what follows. A few weeks later, a final preparation workshop is organised before we meet the project managers. Each of the researchers shows the productions he or she has been working on individually since the last collective meeting (maps, lexicon, Rubik's cube, graphics). Although the original goal was overlapping between these areas of knowledge, in the end the researchers have divided the work according to the skills and specificities of each of them.

A major part of the meeting is devoted to discussing and testing the potential of the Rubik's cube that Zoé created. In thinking about this shape, the researchers come to new understandings about the relatively complex anatomy of the project. During this meeting, although the first reactions to the Rubik's cube show a certain enthusiasm ('it's pretty'), a problem soon emerges. Indeed, the researchers repeatedly express that they should not get stuck with this cube shape. Some of the researchers who did not directly contribute to its production say that they 'don't understand it anymore'. They feel that they are 'beating their brains out' on the Rubik's cube and 'going around in circles'. They come to question the purpose of the tool and be self-critical. In doing so, they try to put themselves in the shoes of those who will receive these visuals and anticipate the reactions of the future recipients of these productions. They think about the best way to present their work: 'a work in progress, not finished and complementary'. In this way, they anticipate the fact that they are expected to be there as experts, which could undermine their legitimacy if they fail to meet expectations and which also requires a certain tact in the way they present themselves to the project managers. They embody a posture that can be seen as potentially dominant or intrusive in relation to work in progress which, until now, did not need their intervention.

By specifying that what they show is only a 'first draft', a 'first outline', a 'simulation', a 'constellation of intuition', they seem tempted to make themselves smaller, to be 'less ambitious' in the idea that this would make it easier to have their proposal and their criticism accepted, or at least that it would help 'make the project managers talk'. In the end, they seem to want to discuss and debate the tool, or even 'co-construct' it with the project managers in order to make it evolve and produce, in their own words, 'something that serves them and us', as the following comment by Zoé shows:

> It is good to anticipate and to know exactly how they want to use it, but I think that first we have to present it to them and see the extent to which it is understandable and interesting, and only then will we see how they will use it. They have to be able to get into it, and to confirm its accuracy and effectiveness.

By wanting to test the tool, they put the performative potential of their work on hold. They hide behind the experimental logic of a work 'in progress' that does not constrain itself to achieve a result. This caution also shows the fears they have of doing useless work for the actors, of not providing them with additional information, of doing work that is 'redundant' with the design office hired later to carry out diagnoses of the site. The emotional tone of this meeting, which is

reflected in moments of enthusiasm or irritation, physical tension and annoyance, illustrates the researchers' desire to produce visuals that are useful for their work and that manage to leave a trace in the design of the Abbey project.

On Tuesday 13 December 2016, in the atmosphere of a meeting room located in an administrative building of the municipality, the researchers present to the project managers their initial thoughts and the communication tools they have developed upstream. Using a PowerPoint presentation, they scroll through the visuals they have produced and take a series of precautions in their speech: 'some aspects were really puzzling'; 'it is an interdisciplinary Cell work, we are still adjusting our own geometry, and the project is actually quite complex'; 'we are trying to deconstruct and understand but for the moment we are still on a learning curve'. In the words of one of the Cell's researchers, the Rubik's cube and the lexicon try to give a 'third-party view and another representation' to the project managers, they tend to 'decipher the project implementation' and bring out a part of the reality that would not appear at first.

At the end of the presentation, one of the architects from the municipality lets out a 'wow' while scratching his eyes and tries to explain their problem: 'we have to find simple ways to gather information and communicate it in an understandable way'. As they had feared, the project managers considered their approach and the proposed tools 'too complicated' and out of step with the 'pragmatic/operational' side of their work. He explains: 'we are in it', 'these are things we have in mind'. He repeats several times that 'they have already thought about these questions for month' and that they are trying to 'come to a decision'. He added, 'you are researchers, so you have to research. But we know that representing a cube is not easy […] If we add new dimensions, I think that we'll hardly be able to manage'. He ends by saying: 'we have to move forward […] we can't reinvent the wheel!'

These different quotes show us how the researchers' work upsets the project managers' habits and ways of working. It generates some disturbance in the normal course of their mission and in the temporality of an action in progress. Among the tools presented, the lexicon printed in a paper brochure format is more positively assessed, even if the definitions proposed do not seem to be unanimously accepted. It is seen as a 'colour chart', an interesting tool to 'open the discussion' and debate on the multiplicity of relationships of co-presence in the studied area. One of the municipality's architects adds 'this is where your grey matter is important, to nuance the words we use and to decline them.'

While institutional actors recognise the importance of having 'moments of reflection' to put their practice to the test of academic critique, they are caught up in day-to-day work and immediate action. By proposing to revise the project's references, these tools added complexity to issues that were already sufficiently complex and which the project team was trying to simplify so they could be more easily communicated. This 'reception test' (Berger, 2018), linked to operational, 'feasibility' and time constraints, was experienced as a minor humiliation by some of the researchers. They had the feeling their work was falling apart and deplored the somewhat 'paternalistic' attitude of certain members of the project team. This episode led the researchers to question the collaboration with the project managers and the adjustments needed for the continuation of the research.

Ambiguity as a modality for collaboration

These moments of confrontation between different forms of urban knowledge also show us that coordinating actions involves sensations or impressions marked by their vague, unidentifiable character, such as the affective tone that emerges from an exchange, the atmosphere that surrounds situations and organises attention (Berger, 2017; Berger, Gonzalez and Létourneau, 2017; Genard, 2017; Thibaud, 2018). I have shown that a prominent place was given to the process of 'doing together' rather than clarifying the intentions and results to be achieved. While enthusiasm animated the first exchanges, it also seems that interdisciplinarity in practice and collaboration passed through periods of misunderstanding between researchers, of confusion, of misinterpretation… by the impression of feeling completely confused, of moments when 'we don't understand anything anymore', and when we did not know very well what we were looking for, and if what we were doing had any meaning.

Rather than resolving these difficulties by stating the differences within the Cell, adjustments were found in the situation to bypass and neutralise them. The agreement that seemed to emerge on the type of tools and images to be produced was the result of a process marked by multiple misunderstandings. It did not represent a balance between the interests of all the researchers, even if it gave the impression of a work that was making progress and that would be the fruit of an interdisciplinary exchange. This 'ambiguity' around the work is also what made it possible to maintain collaboration and communication between the researchers and the project managers. Each one wanted to keep a grip on their respective fields and, as soon as problems were posed more openly, the risk of rupture seemed to be more frequent (resignation, breakdown of the collective, conflicts). It appears, therefore, that ambiguity was one of the modalities necessary to maintain the relationship and communication between separate worlds of meaning. It is what made it possible to maintain the vague and fragile impression of sharing the same ideas and moving in the same direction. Clarification of the researchers' position and removal of the project's ambiguity also revealed the difficulties both parties had in working together. It brought to light some of the obstacles to the 'will to be together'. While the vagueness surrounding the objectives pursued generated some tensions and internal irritations, it was also beneficial for the conduct of this experimentation. It is in these vague spaces that new practices were experimented. If a form of compromise and enthusiasm for the idea of collaboration marked the exchanges at the beginning, the exposure of these first results, judged to be not very operational and too complex, led to the abandon of this research work and the exploration of new ways of collaborating.

From intuition to spatial modelling: the primacy of images over words

As I have shown, the atmosphere of these meetings is sometimes tinged with a certain contempt for the intellectual who does not get their feet wet, who sticks to protest or critical discourse. The importance of the atmosphere in these situations of public exhibition of urban knowledge was particularly striking in an episode that took place a few weeks later.

About forty students and young workers from various disciplines (design, graphic design, architecture, urban planning, sociology, political science) and from international universities have come to Brussels to participate in a MasterClass organised by the laboratory, a kind of research-training through project and pedagogical experimentation taking place within a specific time frame — two weeks. The communication difficulties arising between different professional worlds are compounded here by the difficulty, to a greater or lesser extent, of communicating and being understood in another language, since the exchanges are mainly in English.

Although the MasterClass aims to simulate a collective and interdisciplinary production process, it nevertheless tends to imitate and copy a *charette* and jury situation that is specific to the methods taught in architecture and urban planning schools and practised by architecture offices. For the participants, it is a question of placing themselves in the type of emergency in which the actors in the field often find themselves. During a short time, they must engage in diagnoses and proposals to develop a site, and formulate a vision, scenarios and an action programme. They are invited to use a form of abductive reasoning to carry out this interdisciplinary design work, using their intuitions to formulate hypotheses and develop a more inclusive project. A first jury is organised at mid-term to evaluate the productions made. At this stage, the drawings and graphics of the group working on the Abbey's conversion project and their first critical intuition about a gentrification project, provokes strong reactions and criticism from the jury, which is made up of the MasterClass organisers and external guests who are recognised in the field.

The organisers of the event repeatedly point out that the proposals must be adapted to the context studied even if they do not have to be directly operational. Although the alternative proposals developed may be free of certain institutional constraints that usually weigh on the work of actors in the field, they are nevertheless required to be realistic and 'relevant' to the context in which the projects studied are to be implemented.

For J.-L. Genard (2017, p. 110), these jury situations are often experienced as 'real humiliations' for some participants. The criticisms made indeed directly affect their analytical skills, their talent, and even the very identity of the person being evaluated. There is always a part of the student, of his or her personality, in their productions and creations. If the use of the image can show the technical competence of its creator and grant them a form of recognition, certain sketches can also make themselves totally incomprehensible, inaccessible, illegible for those who must receive them. These objects do not always guarantee the greatness or virtuosity of the person who relies on them to express a vision.

During the final presentation, which concludes these two weeks of work, the transition from the presentation of the drafts to a more elaborate PowerPoint presentation and the landing of intuitions in a concrete and spatialised proposal arouses a kind of 'wonder' on the part of certain members of the jury. The transition from the description of an existing situation to an image projecting a desired situation seems to help demonstrate the accuracy of the proposal. It should be noted, however, that it is precisely because this spatialisation is shown in this final presentation context that it manages to give the impression of a certain

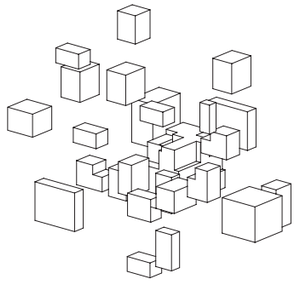
coherence to the proposal for the audience that has followed the various stages and progressive adjustments of the participants' reasoning. The atmosphere of these final moments of presentation plays an important role in the positive interpretation of these images and the impression of a finished work.

Indeed, it would not be possible to understand these forms and their meanings without the mediation of what constitutes a background, such as the memory of a pedagogical process and the festive atmosphere of a closing session of an urban design exercise carried out in a two-week period (Bohme, 1993, as cited in Thibaud, 2015). This is manifested in the impressions generated by seeing these final representations put together in a presentation that follows a logical sequence (from a specific problem to the spatial proposition). We note several expressions from the jury members who perceive these images as 'beautiful' or 'wonderful'.

Jean-Louis Genard (2017, p. 116) examines with great finesse this 'transition' from 'initial hesitant moments to the production of something satisfying, the journey towards a certain felicity'. He explains that objects, when produced, lead to 'appreciations' either of a 'technical nature' or of a more subjective nature such as 'feelings of satisfaction and dissatisfaction'. The latter 'suggest that something is wrong or […] that it is getting better, that progress is being made, that the goal is being reached… not only because the project meets the requirements of the exercise, but also because it seems to carry with it a kind of necessity, of rightness' (Ibid., p.111). He adds that 'the agreement that is shown to consider a project successful is not reduced to a submission to the best argument […] it is in the connivance of the glances, in the satisfaction of the expressions, in the "sharing of the sensitive" that it is shown' (Ibid., p. 114). Consequently, the support or enthusiasm of a jury and an assembly for a project is manifested by 'a shared satisfaction, by an excitement and sometimes, indeed, as a "vibrating together" on the part of the jury' (Ibid., p.115).

The analysis of the atmosphere of these jury moments therefore amounts to reintroducing the infra-semiotic dimension into the interdisciplinary experience of design, which occurs beyond or below the discourse delivered. This would be an 'affective tonality'; such as this ambient enthusiasm or fatigue, or this impression that something is taking or not taking shape. This shared satisfaction spreads to the audience present at the closing event of the MasterClass. The productions prepared by the participants seem to 'resonate' (Thibaud, 2015) with the sensibilities of the project managers present in the audience.

The latter express their pleasure at seeing that these proposals are in line with what they themselves had in mind. The proposal seems to echo a landmark project carried out by some members of the jury a few years earlier. This positive reference, experienced as a success for the municipality, seems to have been favourable to the reception of the group's proposal. After this MasterClass, the project managers express their wish to use these tools as inspiration, or even to rework them to increase their precision and correct certain errors so that they could then feed their own reflection and extend their vision.



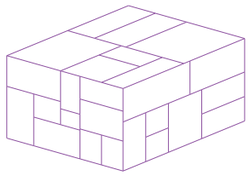
Situation 1

Underutilized Opportunities

— Scattered potential opportunities for a greater societal inclusion.

— Lack of networking between the existing organisations.

— Difficulty incorporating diversity within the current system.

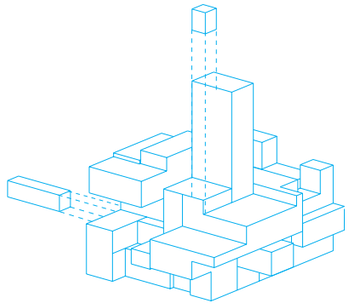


Situation 2

ERDF Proposal

— Conventional concept of a Cultural Center with rigid programming.

— The plan adresses some elements of diversity within the local area but at a limited extent.



Situation 3

Expected Co-Existance

— Designing a socio-spatial platform to produce an inclusive participatory design process/

— Improve intersections and exchanges over time in order to embrace complexity.

— Promote inclusive diversity while celebrating the heritage of the site.

Figure 2. ‘Testing box’, designed by the Master Class participants, © Metrolab Brussels

Proposing a plug-in for the project: inquiry as mediation

If the project’s critique has been received positively, it is also because it is presented only in the mode of a ‘plug-in’, as a small update to an initial programme. The proposed scenario for revising the project is represented by one of the students from a New York design school via a diagram entitled ‘testing-box’ (see Fig. 2). This diagram represents the current situation with regard to the proposal of the project managers and the situation envisaged by the MasterClass participants. By drawing cubes that were previously scattered in a disorganised manner and which, in a second phase, fit together perfectly, this young designer denounces the rigidity of the current ERDF project, and proposes a third way by making minor modifications to the project managers’ ambition.

This work helps highlight subtly and indirectly the risk of exclusion of vulnerable groups whom the project does not take into account, but who are nevertheless present in the project environment. The resulting proposal aims to strengthen the inclusion of these absent or under-represented groups and to widen participation to as many people as possible. This way of introducing a change into the project had a consequential effect as it led the project managers to revise their programme.

Based on this criticism, the researchers of the laboratory propose to play a role of mediation between the publics concerned by the transformations and the project managers. By proposing in this way to broaden participation to groups that are harder for the public authorities to reach, the enquiry is expected to be a means of filling the gaps in representation and participation of the public in the political sphere. It therefore appears to be a complement to democracy and another means of bringing certain problems that escape urban development actors to their attention.

In order to reach these groups[5] and understand their uses, the members of the Cell, decided to carry out mapping workshops. The researchers agreed that the main aim was to make the device as hospitable as possible to users and to the expression of their experiences. Contrary to the skills and expectations that generally weigh on public speaking in citizens’ assemblies (Cardon, Heurtin, Lemieux, 1995), such as the ability to ‘go into generality’ and to detach oneself from one’s own experiences, the device proposed by the researchers aimed to be hospitable to statements made in the first person and to the expression of more intimate experiences.

The particularity of these mapping workshops is that they make room for the expression of the participant’ emotions, affects and familiar attachments, which are generally not very communicable or transposable in public dialogue. The device and the elaboration of a collective map aims to facilitate what Mathieu Berger (2014) calls ‘the public exposure of trouble’, such as the discomfort felt by young women as they make their way through the neighbourhood, the places they avoid and those where they feel safe.

This methodological protocol made it possible to take into account the potential impact of the project on certain lifestyles that are not very visible,

5 Among the groups we met, we can note a cultural centre, a youth centre, a neighbourhood committee, an association that accompanies the integration process for foreigners applying for naturalisation, an interregional association of African women, etc.

unknown and difficult to grasp by urban policy professionals. These gendered uses, troubles experienced in movements and ways of living are difficult to enter into the public arena and are generally not taken seriously as something to feed urban development projects. Rather than going through long descriptions or transcribing testimonies, this format seemed easier to transmit and receive for the project design team familiar with this cartographic medium.

Inquiry as disruption: the embarrassment of urban policy professionals

Despite the reflection undertaken on these modalities for transmitting the results of the survey, their reception and their takeover by the public authorities, several difficulties can be identified today in relation to the possibility that these workshops can effectively manage to play this role of mediation between project managers and users.

A first difficulty relates to the possibility for the researchers and the users they encountered to effectively influence the urban project. Uncertainty about the results and concerns about the possibility of influencing the project were omnipresent from the start of the reflection and came up frequently in the workshops, as in the following reaction of a researcher to a participant's questioning:

> Extract from workshop # 1
> Participant: And you, at what stage do you intervene? Is it at the level of the study diagnosis?
> Researcher: We do this somewhat independently from the municipality, but we have met them several times to explain our approach and to have access to certain documents. They are fully aware of what we are doing. The idea is that afterwards we would organise a public presentation of the results with the participants of the workshops who want to come and in the presence of the municipality with the idea of opening the debate on the current uses and how the projects to transform the district come to modify this social environment of the district, roughly speaking. Afterwards, we are in a process… we are not at all familiar with… We have started to carry out our surveys each in our own discipline and we do not yet have a clear and defined idea of the overall result.

As we can see in this quote, questions relating to the objectives and expected outcomes were regularly 'put on hold' (Berger and Romijn, 2016). As M. Berger and F. Romijn (2016) have studied in the medical field, these ways of introducing mapping workshops can reveal or announce the 'improbability' of the use of the results and diminish the performative potential of this work on the project. This uncertainty about the results and expected effects was also revealed by the researchers' gradual distancing from the local government department.

If the initial intention was to be able to lead a collective discussion about living together in this district, this new form given to the enquiry seems rather to have revived old concerns and 'events' from the past that are 'hard to digest' (Stavo-Debauge, 2012) for the project managers.

This past is accompanied by a number of pervasive embarrassments[6] that prevent certain issues regarding the cohabitation of contrasting publics in the city from being dealt with, and which strongly constrain attempts to describe and understand them. Indeed, if researchers are expected to be experts in the translation of the citizens' voices, they must also take precautions to avoid generating embarrassment for the public authorities.

First, it should be noted that the enquiry took place in a period marked by a municipal election campaign, and it had the potential to threaten the re-election of the current officials if it pointed too strongly at the shortcomings of decisions taken in previous years. In addition, the project managers were in the process of defining the programme. This timing no longer allowed for a reconsideration of the initial intentions. At this stage, it was necessary to avoid creating frustrations on the part of citizens.

The project managers therefore asked the researchers to be very careful in the way they communicated about the project and the way they presented themselves to the public. The project was, in their view, creating a 'space struggle' between cultural operators that should not be fuelled further. However, despite the precautions taken by the researchers, the enquiry seems to have disturbed the balance of power between certain associations and the municipality. This was the case after the first mapping workshop carried out with the youth centre, which was not initially included in the project. Following exchanges with the laboratory researchers, the coordinators and animators of this association became very annoyed and demanded a place in the management team of the new cultural centre. One of the coordinators, who had experienced the 1991 riots in the municipality and who has extensive experience of urban revitalisation policies, threatened to send 'the young people who have the words' to stage a 'small revolt' if they were not integrated into the project.

Following this episode, the project managers became more wary of the researchers' position and asked them not to touch the building rehabilitation project itself in order to avoid the enquiry interfering with their work. They feared that the investigation would break their attempt to create this idealised 'community' and shared 'enthusiasm' for the project. It also reflected their persistent fear that the enquiry would be an invitation to criticism and that it would equip the expression of discontent with the project. The tension that emerged reveals the local authorities' dread of a possible riot and their perception of threatening youths.

These reframings of the Municipality oriented the ways the researchers presented themselves to the public being enquired. The Cell's independence and disconnection from the project were constantly recalled in the introduction to these workshops:

> Extract from workshop # 2
> The workshop takes place on 27/11/2017 in a social cohesion association's premises where a neighbourhood committee usually meets once a month to discuss the improvement of the neighbourhood and

6 On these 'topical embarrassments' see the work of Joan Stavo-Debauge (2017; 2020).

> the unsanitary conditions of the social housing called the ‘yellow blocks’ from which some of the inhabitants have been evicted in view of their renovation. Despite their use of the neighbourhood, the members of this committee report a feeling of isolation and being excluded from the projects undertaken by the local authorities. While this group of eight residents discuss informally, looking forward to expressing what they would like to improve in the neighbourhood, the researcher leading the discussion says: ‘It’s not so much about what you would like to have as about how you are living today, about your current experience. Because we don’t have any decision-making power, because we’re not the Municipality, so we’re not going to start asking you what you imagine as a project for the district, when we don’t have any decision-making power to answer that. So, all we can do is raise questions to authorities about what is important today for the people who live in the area.’

As these extracts show, the researchers abstain from expressing an opinion on future developments and refuse to assume the role of spokesperson for the demands of inhabitants to denounce their exclusion. They fall back on an analysis of the current situation and reduce their power to influence the decisions taken by the local authorities.

Visualising living spaces in tension

During the numerous internal meetings organised to analyse the workshops, several of the researchers in the Cell expressed their difficulty in grasping the meaning of work carried out on the fringe of the Abbey’s reconversion project. They wanted to formulate recommendations on issues related to the coexistence of users. To make the results of the enquiry accessible and graspable by the project managers, they decided to twist academic formats by borrowing from artistic mediums (Uribelarrea and Jouve, 2017).

To avoid disturbing the debate on the possible evolution of the site and the desired new uses, it was therefore necessary to take a few precautions regarding the ways in which these results could be made public. Without going into detail, it is worth noting that the artistic medium of an exhibition appeared to be the most appropriate way of communicating the results of the enquiry and taking up space in the Abbey project. This allowed the researchers to be part of the project by physically occupying the Abbey for a day, but without interfering with the participatory process conducted in parallel on the desired uses of the cultural centre. It made it possible, in fact, to show the productions of the workshops without leading a collective discussion on living together.

The scenography and the place of each object were carefully thought out. The drawing was combined with photos, quotes, maps and analysis texts. These different documents were testimonies on the current uses of the Abbey and the perceptions of its environment. This format was a way of pacifying the public dialogue and limiting the possibility that the enquiry would lead to further controversy about the project at this late stage.

The reception given to social mapping in the project

In the end, these formats were necessary supports for being able to describe what seemed ‘inexpressible’ and ‘indescribable’ through words and speeches, for addressing the issue of co-presence and divisions within the community imagined, projected, even fantasised by the project managers. By showing phenomena of co-isolation, connection and separation between living spaces, the exhibition gave visibility to these problems of coexistence between a diversity of worlds and users already present on the site. The aim was to present realities that are not always directly visible or debated in public assemblies. Through these mediations, the researchers attempted to grasp the project environment and make other voices and perspectives audible. These mediations served the ‘dual role of ‘linking’ and ‘representing’ or, more precisely, of linking by representing’ (Kaufmann, 2008).

The purpose of the workshops was not to discuss the Abbey’s reconversion project, but rather to give a voice to the experience of the site’s users and residents who are potentially affected by the decisions that will be taken and who find it hard to be present in the classic spaces for participation regarding the project. Even if radical changes in the project cannot be identified, some of the movements nevertheless reflect the effectiveness of the Cell’s work. The designers and managers of the project wished to strengthen the inclusive dimension of this cultural centre by paying more attention to the uses already there alongside the possible and desirable uses of the site (Berger, 2020).

These mediations circulate and weave links between people who do not necessarily meet, who are not especially in a direct face-to-face relationship. According to Laurence Kaufmann (2013), they are essential for ‘creating a collective’. They can effectively link ‘people by keeping, in their absence, the trace of their point of view’ and their subjectivity (Söderström, 2001). By producing knowledge and disseminating it in this way, the work of researchers contributes to the emergence of a ‘public’ (users, local actors, public authorities) linked by the shared experience of an enquiry carried out on a socio-cultural infrastructure (Tonnelat, 2012). However, in the end, this public ultimately has little to do with the Deweyian concept of a political and moral collective that engages in the resolution of the problems faced by its members.

Although the work of the Cell was met with a certain degree of mistrust, it was also seized upon as a means of feeding the diagnosis of the neighbourhood by including an under-represented or absent public. It was reinterpreted by the project managers as a means of studying the practices of the beneficiaries of municipal subsidies and as a form of ‘public awareness-raising’, a way of preparing them for the renewal of the Abbey.

Conclusion

In this chapter of the book, we have identified the practical and unspoken ways in which these professionals coordinate and adjust to each other in order to ‘act together’. Researchers who want to change habits, frameworks and go beyond the ordinary boundaries of disciplines cannot do so randomly. Practices that attempt to experiment with new ways of collaborating and criticising are still needed as a means of bridging the gaps in public representation and participation.

These approaches, which refer to a pragmatist philosophy, must achieve the mediation of knowledge that they have promised to achieve. My enquiry, however, reveals several obstacles to this possibility of mediating and points to the embarrassments that this posture generates.

I first point out the *practical embarrassments* of these speech professionals who bring a less legitimate knowledge to these situations and who find themselves either unequipped to speak or destabilised by the reception of material they bring to the project managers. They may also feel unauthorised to intervene in a process that was fine without their presence or else they refuse to take on the role of spokesperson for the critical actors. In an interdisciplinary situation, we have seen that the speech professionals can either develop supports to convey forms of elaboration that were not foreseen in the device (lexicon, diagram, archive, theory, concept, metaphor), or be in an unequipped speaking position and find themselves unable to give their opinion, their advice, their reflection. To bolster their confidence, they try to rely on resources and objects present in their environment, sometimes meticulously prepared, or they seize the more established mediations and appropriate them. In this way, they seek to make themselves audible (find a language), credible and acceptable.

These enquiries can also generate a disturbance when they attempt to objectify a reality and shed light on certain problematic situations that would otherwise remain in the shadow of the public authorities' attention. In their attempts to bring these problems to the attention of the authorities, these researchers are trying to reveal implicit or unthought-of issues that, in their view, cannot be ignored insofar as they are so prevalent and salient in a situation and affect these under-represented groups. In this way, they seek to generate a collective commitment to certain problems, to break with their relative indifference on certain issues and to attract the attention of the public authorities. However, some of these issues are still taboo and reveal the embarrassment of urban policy professionals. This is the case for 'ethnic' and community issues or the phenomena of occupation of public spaces by vulnerable groups and the tensions generated. By trying to raise these implicit issues and encourage dialogue on these questions, the social sciences embarrass as much as they are embarrassed themselves. They revive old debates thought to be closed, they awaken old fears and they disturb long-established relationships between public authorities and citizens. In the background of these interactions, there is always the fear of the research being instrumentalised for the benefit of politics as much as for citizen groups; the contempt for theoretical discourses that do not make the effort to simplify things; and finally the mistrust of protest.

From then on, the public expression of these researchers is normalised by the anticipation of these defects, embarrassments and judgements that they are likely to receive or generate. To avoid these embarrassing situations, a number of precautions must be taken. First, the researchers work on learning how to do things by practising in more familiar spaces. Secondly, some of them also try to make themselves smaller and less ambitious when they appear before project managers. However, this attitude can lead to their own 'infelicity' (Goffman, 1981) if they rely too heavily on the experimental dimension of a work in progress, which lacks the constraint of having to achieve a result.

This is why we argue that these speech professionals also have a share of responsibility in the inefficiency of their proposals. This is the case of those who refuse to let themselves be mobilised as mediators between a space of expertise and the inhabitants' knowledge, who refuse to wear the hat of experts on lived experience and to respond to this ready-made role for them in these processes. This would also be the case for a more scholarly or philosophical expertise that would distance itself from the empirical, thus eluding this test.

But it would also be the case for a social scientist who would take the opposite view of graphic, quantitative, statistical or geographical objectifying forms of knowledge and develop in a radically experiential and subjective mode. This counterpoint seems to be restrictive for those professionals who would too quickly renounce the possibility of producing categories and graphic representations from enquiries or combine these modes with descriptions and observations with a more strategic, operational or implicated aim. For many, schematising sociological discourse still amounts to oversimplifying it. I have also shown that researchers more accustomed to working on projects and with representational tools also questioned their own practice and the normative aspects of what they were doing, which may have also raised doubts and embarrassment among some.

In order to present themselves fairly and articulate an acceptable critique, the researchers strive to 'step out of their comfort zone', to empathise with decision-makers or designers, to embrace the urgency inherent in their workflow, or even to navigate adeptly the prevailing modes of communication. However, this transition can be experienced in a somewhat schizophrenic manner by some, an unattainable dual posture. They perceive themselves as tightrope walkers who must skilfully navigate between conflicting expectations, essentially juggling between maintaining a sense of detachment and active involvement.

I ultimately demonstrate that the encounter between these two frameworks — scientific research and public action — gives rise to a disconcerting, blurry, even awkward situation in which rules and routines are put to the test. When this unease remains unresolved, it can lead the researcher to withdraw from action or inhibit their commitments. My aim through this analysis was to illustrate the competencies that these experts must employ when engaging in urban projects and how they must navigate challenging positions. Moreover, I hope to have shown that reaching consensus in these collaborative situations requires an almost 'symbiotic adjustment' resembling a sort of choreography between bodies, by rubbing shoulders over time with these different ways of approaching the city. It entails maintaining relational ambiguity or fostering the illusion that reconciliation is possible.

To conclude, these approaches enabled me to analyse the realm of institutional urbanism as an already inhabited space that can be inhabited by others, a 'milieu of reception' to borrow a notion proposed by Mathieu Berger, complete with its own meanings and references. Consequently, alternative proposals from researchers appear to be achievable only through a 'plug-in' mode, by invoking incremental updates rather than revolutions. I believe that these are guarantees for the expression of a discourse and for considering ways of living that were previously difficult to apprehend and understand in the traditional urban planning framework.

References

Berger, M. (2017). Vers une théorie du pâtir communicationnel. Sensibiliser Habermas. *Cahiers de recherche sociologique*, 62, 69-108.

Berger, M. (2018). S'inviter dans l'espace public. La participation comme épreuve de venue et de réception. *SociologieS* [Online].

Berger, M., & Charles, J. (2014). Persona non grata. Au seuil de la participation. *Participations*, 9, 5–36.

Berger, M., & Romijn, F. (2016). Participer ou presque: Préciser les ambiguïtés de la participation dans le domaine médical. *Questions de communication*, 30, 91-118.

Berger, M., Gonzalez, P., & Létourneau, A. (2017). Présentation. Peirce et les sciences sociales. Une sociologie pragmaticiste? *Cahiers de recherche sociologique*, 62, 7–19.

Bessy, C., & Chateauraynaud, F. (1993). Les ressorts de l'expertise. Épreuves d'authenticité et engagement des corps. In B. Conein, N. Dodier, & L. Thévenot (Eds.), *Les objets dans l'action. De la maison au laboratoire* (pp. 141-164). Éditions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales (Raisons pratiques).

Bessy, C., & Chateauraynaud, F. (2014). *Experts et faussaires. Pour une sociologie de la perception*. Éditions Pétra.

Brassac, C., Lardon, S., Le Ber, F., Mondada, L., & Osty, P.-L. (2008). Analyse de l'émergence de connaissances au cours d'un processus collectif. Re-catégorisations, reformulations, stabilisation. *Revue d'anthropologie des connaissances*, 2(2), 267-289.

Cardon, D., Heurtin, J.-P., & Lemieux, C. (1995). Parler en public. *Politix. Revue des sciences sociales du politique*, 8(31), 5-19.

Chateauraynaud, F. (2015). L'emprise comme expérience. Enquêtes pragmatiques et théories du pouvoir. *SociologieS* [Online].

Genard, J-L. (2017). Penser avec Peirce la conception architecturale. *Cahiers de recherche sociologique*, 62, 109-135.

Kaufmann, L. (2008). La société de déférence: Médias, médiations et communication. *Réseaux*, 2-3(148-149), 79-116.

Kaufmann, L. (2013). Les médiations de l'expérience. *Espacestemps.net — Revue interdisciplinaire de sciences sociales* [Online].

Kaufmann, L., & Quéré, L. (Eds.). (2020). *Les émotions collectives: En quête d'un «objet» impossible*. Éditions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales.

Luhmann, N. (1981). The Improbability of Communication. *International Social Sciences Journal*, 1(33), 122-132.

Malbois, F., & Kaufmann, L. (2015). De l'espace public comme organisation. L'architecture feuilletée des énonciations publiques. *Revue française des sciences de l'information et de la communication* [Online], 6.

Söderström, O. (2001). *Des images pour agir: le visuel en urbanisme*. Payot.

Stavo-Debauge, J. (2012). Des «événements» difficiles à encaisser. Un pragmatisme pessimiste. In D. Cefaï, & C. Terzi (Eds.), *L'expérience des problèmes publics. Perspectives pragmatistes* (pp. 191-223). Éditions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales.

Stavo-Debauge, J. (2017). *Qu'est-ce que l'hospitalité? Recevoir l'étranger à la communauté.* Éditions Liber.

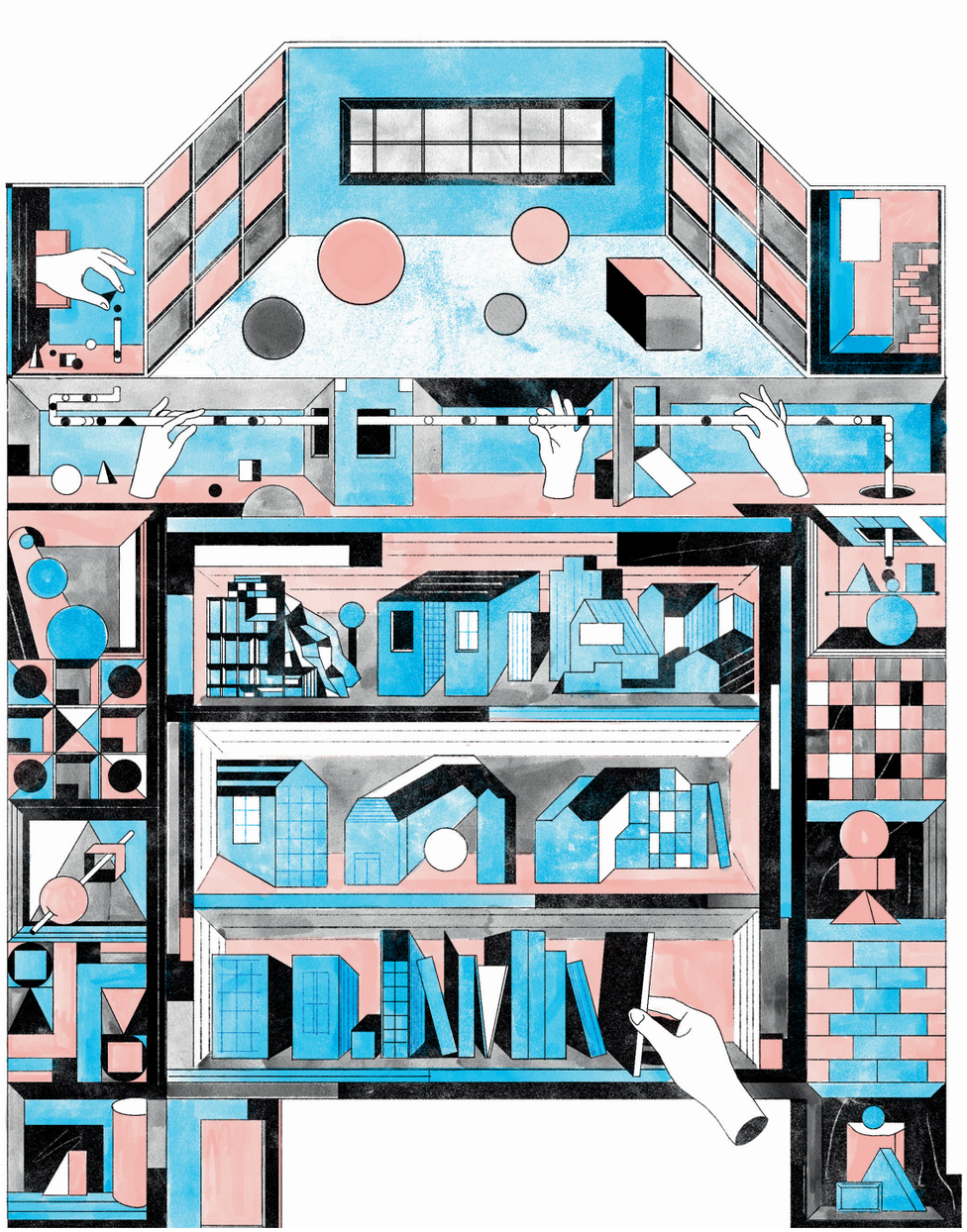
Stavo-Debauge, J. (2020). L'expression publique des embarras de la parole religieuse: De bavardages prosélytes en inhibition de la critique, l'invention d'une inédite «méthode de fixation des croyances». In L. Kaufmann, & L. Quéré (Eds.), *Les émotions collectives: En quête d'un «objet» impossible* (pp. 339-380). Éditions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales.

Thibaud, J-P. (2015). *En quête d'ambiances: éprouver la ville en passant*. MetisPresses.

Thibaud, J-P. (2018). Les puissances d'imprégnation de l'ambiance. In M. Le Calvé, & O. Gaudin (Eds.), *Exercices d'ambiances. Présences, enquêtes, écritures* (pp. 67-79). Seuil (Communications).

Tonnelat, S. (2012). La dimension sensible des problèmes publics: la plate-forme d'observation du bayou et la viabilité d'un quartier de la Nouvelle-Orléans. In D. Cefaï, & C. Terzi (Eds.), *L'expérience des problèmes publics. Perspectives pragmatistes* (pp. 163-190). Éditions de l'EHESS.

Uribelarrea, G., & Jouve, E. (2017). Chronique d'une ethnographie coopérative. Retour sur une enquête embarquée dans un établissement médico-social. *Recherches Qualitatives*, 32(2), 112-132.



© Lucas Gicquel

Towards a transversal approach to urban issues

Louise Carlier and Andrea Bortolotti

Between social, economic and environmental thematic cycles

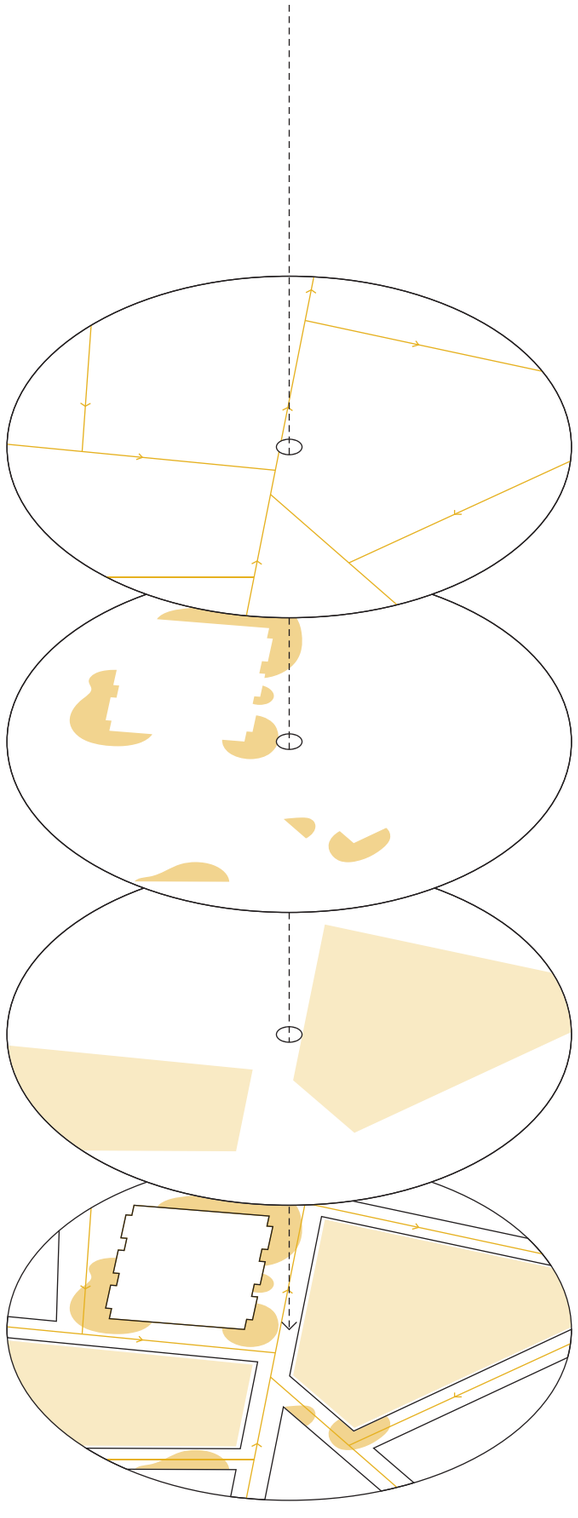
The Europe 2020 strategy, which is now coming to an end, aimed to promote 'smart, sustainable and inclusive growth'. Referring to different areas of action (employment, innovation, green growth, education and poverty reduction), the objectives were pursued through various initiatives (specific and operational actions) that were linked in turn to national targets that each member state set for itself. While there are still few evaluations and public consultations about the strategy at the end of its implementation, it is important to understand how these ambitious objectives are integrated and articulated in projects financed by European structural funds.

Taking the projects funded as part of the 2014-2020 ERDF programme for the Brussels-Capital Region as an example, Metrolab offers an interesting opportunity to reflect in theoretical and operational terms on the cross-cutting nature of major European objectives in urban projects and policies.

Metrolab is an urban research laboratory that focuses on this European policy, and more particularly on the projects funded by the regional programme. It was decided from the outset that the laboratory's work would be aligned with the three main lines of the 2020 strategy. Three work cycles, including the development of individual and collective research and scientific activities, were thereby defined and have marked Metrolab's production. First was the *urban inclusion* cycle, which ran from 2016 to 2018 (Berger et al., 2018), followed by the *urban ecology* cycle, which covered the period from 2018 to 2020 (Declève et al., 2020), and finally the *urban production* cycle, which spanned from 2019 to 2021 (Carlier et al., 2021). Note that we kept the European semantics for some of these three themes, deviating from them in particular by moving from 'smart' to 'production' issues, a category that seemed more significant and encompassing.[1]

We wanted to work on the three well-known pillars of sustainable development (social, economic and environmental) by taking each of these issues seriously. Each was the subject of a MasterClass and a specific publication. The research carried out individually or collectively by members of Metrolab also touched on one of these three themes.

1 'Smart' production issues represent only one form of economic activity in cities and therefore do not account for the entire economic pillar of sustainable development (Decroly, 2021).



© Sébastien Gairaud

At the end of this journey, we can see that the same working method was duplicated for each of these MasterClasses, though the method was not stated as such from the start. Each of these cycles began with a stage of reflection on the concepts themselves, carried out internally by a team of Metrolab researchers. First, from a multidisciplinary perspective, they had to outline and clarify contents associated with ideas of inclusion (Printz, 2018), ecology (Grulois et al., 2020) and production (Decroly, 2021). This conceptual reflection laid the groundwork for discussing the methodological aspects for conducting applied, critical and interdisciplinary research focused on these issues.

Once this theoretical and methodological framework had been clarified, the projects or situations taken as case studies during the MasterClass were selected. The preparatory fieldwork could then begin. This included observing and describing the projects, sites and situations taken as case studies; meeting with the stakeholders directly involved; organising workshops with these stakeholders to understand the major problems they had to face, as well as the project and the dynamics in progress; and organising seminars or talks that promoted deeper inquiry. The time then came for the MasterClass as such, conceived as a two-week intensive educational and practical experiment devoted to one of these three issues. Led by Metrolab members (academics, post-docs, PhD students and managers), the MasterClasses brought together students, researchers, professors, local actors and professionals from different fields to work and reflect together on issues of inclusion, ecology and production based on the selected empirical cases to provide possible ways to improve these situations. Finally, each cycle ended with a specific publication synthesising all the reflections and work carried out.

Metrolab's way of working has enabled it to refine and specify the issues associated with each of the different lines of the European strategy by considering them in a specific urban context—in other words, by moving from a global and general theme, defined on a European scale, to a concrete and situated issue, anchored in the Brussels area. With regard to urban inclusion issues, we therefore propose to work on the hospitality-related qualities of certain urban spaces and projects linked to different social goods (culture, health, etc.).

Marginal transversality

By paying specific attention to each of these issues, one of the limits of this working method was that it neglected their transversality or cross-cutting nature in some way. It is true that we paid increasing attention to how these issues intersected as the cycles progressed. While the first cycle, on urban inclusion, did not deal with ecological and economic issues, the second cycle, on ecology, did touch on the issue of social inclusion, albeit marginally, raising awareness among the lab's researchers. The publication closing this cycle specified that the objective of the MasterClass was to strengthen the interdependencies that promote 'the renewal of local resources, social inclusion and the transition of ecosystems' (Grulois et al., 2020, p.14). This attention to social inclusion issues can be seen in how the case study sites were analysed.

Informed by previous work cycles, the last one, devoted to *urban production*, did the most to grapple with related issues of social inclusion and ecological transition. The publication devoted to the subject bears witness to this: in the different types of productive activities considered, significant attention is paid to the circular economy (oriented towards a transitional perspective) and to the social economy (addressing inclusion issues). The projects proposed by the participants in the MasterClass deal for the most part with productive activities linked to the circular economy and question how developing these activities could meet the pressing needs for socio-economic inclusion in Brussels in the neighbourhoods studied. The conclusion of the book invites us to consider the economic organisation of the city and the place of productive activities from the point of view of social inclusion and ecological transition, rather than from the perspective of economic growth.

However, no study site was deliberately taken as a case in which to problematise how these three issues are articulated, work simultaneously on each and consider their intersections and tensions. Certainly, in the collective research carried out in the laboratory, outside of the MasterClasses, some working groups included researchers with interests in different issues. These groups could reflect on certain tensions and articulations. This is the case, for example, of the Abattoir of Anderlecht (ORG and Abattoir SA, 2013) market redevelopment project, which was the subject of much discussion and had included alternative proposals in its business plans to promote social inclusion since the first instalment of ERDF funding was received in 2007 (Kinnaer and Sénéchal, 2015). The Metrolab team was particularly interested in understanding the gap between the ambitions of 'greening' productive activities (through heat recovery, solar energy production, etc.) and the social issues arising in and around the marketplace, mainly related to demands to support ethnic entrepreneurship and its fragile customer base (Bortolotti et al., 2017).

The North Quarter, located in the canal zone, is a study site found in all three MasterClasses that has been taken as a common field of investigation by different researchers at different times. We therefore propose to return to the way in which inclusion, ecology and urban production issues have been considered, crossed-fertilised and articulated to outline the potential contributions of a cross-cutting approach that has only been sketched out thus far.

The Northern Quarter as a shared field of inquiry

The Northern Quarter used to be an industrial, working-class neighbourhood. It was a hospitable area for undesirable activities (its factories and production caused various inconveniences) and for populations perceived as undesirable (newcomers who historically entered the neighbourhood as the first place to settle).

In the late 1970s, the neighbourhood underwent major transformation, notably linked to the deindustrialisation and expansion of the service sector in the Brussels Region as it internationalised and prepared for its new status as the capital of Europe (Aron, 1978). These transformations resulted in the urban 'Manhattan Plan' in the Northern Quarter, aimed at turning this precarious (and unhealthy) neighbourhood into a prestigious international business centre.

Disregarding the residents' needs and flouting the democratic requirements of public debate, this plan led to much expropriation and gradually transformed the area into a mainly administrative district (Martens et al., 1975; Aron, 1978). However, the plan was only partially carried out due to overestimation of the demand for office space, leaving the area a wasteland until the late 1990s.

Today, this site mainly hosts office buildings of public or privatised institutions (Van Criekingen, 2010) with very few productive functions, as well as social housing buildings. Located in a socially and economically disadvantaged area with a high unemployment rate and many low-income households, the neighbourhood still has a high proportion of newcomers and is characterised by great ethno-cultural diversity and socio-economic conditions marked by poverty. The 'migratory crisis' of recent years has also had an impact on the social makeup of this neighbourhood, as some of its public spaces (mainly Maximilian Park) have become occupied by migrants.

This area, where a whole series of problems are intertwined, is being changed once again by a series of public and private projects. Various private residential projects aimed at more affluent people are gradually being developed, leading to different socio-economic groups living side by side. Various urban policies are also being implemented such as Neighbourhood Contracts, Urban Renewal Contracts, Master Development PLAN (e.g., MDP MAX) and others aimed at changing the area's spatial and social qualities and investing in its empty (built) or undetermined (open) spaces.

The Northern Quarter is an area where inclusion, ecology, production and other issues specific to urban environments are particularly acute. This is why it was chosen as a study site for Metrolab's work several times.

As part of the *urban inclusion* cycle, the Northern Quarter has emerged as a place to problematise inclusion and urban hospitality issues due to the humanitarian situation playing out there. The occupation of the neighbourhood by migrants is considered an 'episode' scarcely considered by urban planners and those engaged in defining local problems and development strategies. However, as a railway station district, the Northern Quarter has historically been a place of arrival and first settlement for newcomers in Brussels. The ARCH collective[2] was formed at Metrolab to address this issue and conduct action research to understand the current situation. It aims to improve the Northern Quarter's qualities of hospitality by developing reception areas (Lemaître d'Auchamp and Ranzato, 2019) such as 'inclusive enclaves' (Berger and Moritz, 2018) and 'social infrastructures' (Berger et al., 2021; Carlier et al., 2021), as well as public spaces that are hospitable to these vulnerable populations and meet their needs.

Next, the *urban ecology* MasterClass addressed (de)construction waste streams produced by the many ongoing and planned new construction sites. A renewed partnership between developers and public authorities is currently fuelling accelerated cycles to transform neighbourhood buildings. The developers aim to differentiate the available housing stock, integrating temporary uses and

2 'Action Research Collective for Hospitality' is an initiative launched to give continuity to Metrolab's work on urban inclusion. It also arose to deal with a lack of in-depth reflection on the social and humanitarian aspects of the Northern Quarter. For more information, see ARCH, 2019.

circular economy principles into their development visions. The public authorities support mixed functions and the recovery of (de)construction waste, which currently accounts for the largest regional-level waste streams (EcoRes et al., 2015). The MasterClass treated the Northern Quarter as a waste production 'hotspot' but also as a 'lever' for the circular economy by raising collective management of the selective dismantling of office towers, the creation of temporary construction material storage spaces and the development of new trades and knowledge related to circular construction.

Finally, the work carried out during the *urban production* MasterClass highlighted how undesirable productive activities were pushed out of the area while residential and commercial real estate projects were developed for privileged groups at the same time. The revaluation of the Northern Quarter is leading to gentrification, a dynamic of urban transformation that questions whether there is any room left for productive activities and the less affluent residents who have historically lived there and called it home. The work carried out during this MasterClass proposes the establishment of a circular economy space hosting different activities such as organic waste treatment, plant production and urban furniture maintenance, helping to manage and maintain the neighbourhood's public green spaces that are planned to be regenerated. This space would train and employ disadvantaged people living in the area, thereby meeting the urban challenges of inclusion, ecology and production in an attempt to address them.

Therefore, the work carried out in these three cycles proposes the undefined or planned use and development of spaces in the Northern Quarter to address certain social, environmental and/or economic issues. While some of the approaches raised in the MasterClasses aim to address these issues, it must be recognised that space is exclusive in nature (Simmel, 1999, pp. 602-605): places occupied by one activity, one use, do not easily accommodate others. The same building can hardly be used to store materials, to receive migrants or for socio-professional training. Multiplying the targeted goods within a space can reduce the scope of each. Spatial organisation is more easily accommodated by distribution of goods, than by the entanglement of those goods.

How can we make room for different goods and different issues such as social inclusion, environmental transition and the maintenance and development of productive spaces in a non-extendable space without prioritising certain issues at the expense of others, as well as a city's many inevitable needs? How can we consider their possible articulations and tensions and envisage a distribution of urban space that would take each of them into account?

Towards a transversal approach to urban issues

To answer this question in detail, we believe that a cross-cutting or transversal approach to the problems and issues facing contemporary cities is essential. We think that this transversal approach can hardly be carried out by the actors involved in specific projects, which are usually focused on a particular good (such as the fight against exclusion or the development of a circular economy). The ERDF programme that we have taken as a subject of study at Metrolab is thereby divided into lines by issue, assuming a one-sided approach. The administrative and political actors themselves tend to work in a sector-based manner. However, this transversal approach must consider the unique qualities of urban environments at different levels: spatial, social, economic, urbanistic and others. What follows is a sketch of how we can understand the role of an urban research laboratory in crafting a transversal approach, meaning one that is transdisciplinary, critical and applied.

Research as mediation

The search for conceptual solutions to complex problems (Rittel and Webber, 1973) with all their social and ecological interconnections, must necessarily be informed by a pluralistic and transdisciplinary perspective rooted in dialogue and negotiation (Wahl, 2019). At Metrolab, we organised workshops on different sites taken as case studies to grasp the different problems and issues; the laboratory thereby played a mediating role between the actors involved in delivering different social goods like social inclusion, environmental transition and sustainable development—actors who rarely meet in formal public action spaces. This type of mechanism helps to develop a dialogue between milieus that communicate little with each other (Berger, 2020). However, these workshops were set up to problematise one of the issues at the heart of our lines of work as finely as possible, and not to work directly on the relations, articulations and tensions between inclusion, ecology and production. More critical efforts are needed to reformulate the complex problems that urban actors face in a cross-cutting way.

Research as criticism

According to Foucault (Foucault, 1981), *critique* is a creative tool for transforming ways of thinking, seeing and acting. By questioning the theoretical assumption underlying our actions, critique opens up new avenues of reflection; hence the responsibility of an urban research laboratory to question the very foundations of urban policies and practices to put forward original theoretical approaches. At Metrolab, we have done so (often in an undisciplined way) by relying on theoretical perspectives that try to articulate social, environmental and economic issues, notably through the concept of ecology. Whether it is an ecology of mind (Bateson, 1973), a political ecology (Gorz, 1992) or a human ecology (Park, 1936), many authors have worked with this concept to think about how individuals or communities interact with the environment, considering the many different kinds of environments and their complexity. For André Gorz (1992, p. 68), 'political ecology thus makes ecologically necessary changes in the way we produce and consume the lever for normatively desirable changes in the way we live and in social relations. Defence of the living environment in the ecological sense, and

the reconstitution of a life-world, condition and support one another'. From this perspective, which takes a critical approach to ecological issues, the transition should also allow people to reappropriate the capacity to act in their 'life milieu', to use the author's term.

Research as design

Between criticism and mediation, Metrolab's activity is aimed at stimulating debate, striking up dialogue between actors, objectifying knowledge and supporting decision-making. The cross-cutting nature of our approach was not only to carry out research by engaging public, private and associative actors, but to reflect on the potential uses of the accumulated knowledge to meet the objectives set out in the European strategy. In doing so, regardless of their training (in sociology, geography or urban planning), Metrolab's researchers were all confronted with a certain form of *design thinking*, meaning the search for particular solutions to problems situated in the complexity of the real world (Buchanan, 1992; Rowe, 1991). In this sense, the practice of urban and architectural projects can be a way to cross-fertilise and integrate knowledge and disciplines that do not otherwise enter into dialogue.

To conclude, we have tried to learn the lessons of the Metrolab project to highlight the methodological and theoretical aspects that we deem essential for developing a transversal approach to urban issues. Mediation, criticism and the posture of design could be particularly significant for grappling with the complexity and intricacy of these issues, as well as the constraining nature of any choice in terms of urban policy and transformation.

References

ARCH (Eds.). (2019). *Whose Future is Here? Searching for Hospitality in Brussels Northern Quarter.* Metrolab Series.

Aron, J. (1978). *Le Tournant de l'urbanisme bruxellois: 1958-1978*. Fondation Joseph Jacquemotte.

Bateson, G. (1973). *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. University of Chicago Press.

Berger, M., Moritz, B., Carlier, L., & Ranzato, M. (Eds.). (2018). *Designing Urban Inclusion: Metrolab Brussels MasterClass I*. Metrolab Series.

Berger, M., & Moritz, B. (2018). Inclusive Urbanism as Gatekeeping. In M. Berger, B. Moritz, L. Carlier, & M. Ranzato (Eds.), *Designing Urban Inclusion* (pp. 149-161). Metrolab Series.

Berger, M., Grulois, G., Moritz, B., & Van Hollebeke, S. (Eds.) (2021). *La fabrique de l'infrastructure sociale (vol. 1.). Défis contemporains dans la ville post-covid.* Metrolab Logbooks.

Berger, M. (2020). Ecologie des savoirs urbains. Épreuves de la recherche-action au Metrolab Brussels. *Pragmata*, 3. 430-488.

Bortolotti, A., Dessouroux, C., Sanchez Trenado, C., & Veroone, B. (2017, 11-13 September). *Who's the 'green' for? The social inclusion/exclusion of urban renewal projects* [Conference presentation]. RC 21 Conference: Rethinking Urban Global Justice, Leeds.

Buchanan, R. (1992). Wicked Problems in Design Thinking. *Design Issues*, *8*(2), 5-21.

Decroly, J.-M., Grulois, G., Carlier, L., & Dessouroux, C. (Eds.) (2021). *(Designing) Urban Production*. Metrolab Series.

Declève, B., Grulois, G., de Lestrange, R., Bortolotti, A., & Sanchez Trenado C. (Eds.). (2020). *Designing Brussels Ecosystems*. Metrolab Series.

Decroly, J.-M. (2021). Production in the city: A critical inquiry into the question of urban industry in Brussels. In J.-M. Decroly, G. Grulois, L. Carlier, & C. Dessouroux (Eds.), *(Designing) Urban Production* (pp. 15-27). Metrolab Series.

EcoRes, ICEDD, & BATir. (2015). *Métabolisme de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale*. Bruxelles Environment.

Foucault, M. (1981, May 31). Est-il donc important de penser? Interview with Michel Foucault by Didier Eribon. *Libération*, 21.

Gorz, A. (2019/1992). *Éloge du suffisant*. PUF.

Grulois, G., Declève, B., de Lestrange, R., Sanchez Trenado, C., & Bortolotti, A. (2019). Introduction: Designing Brussels ecosystems. In B. Declève, G. Grulois, R. de Lestrange, A. Bortolotti, & C. Sanchez Trenado (Eds.), *Designing Brussels Ecosystems* (pp. 9-15). Metrolab Series.

Kinnaer, A., & Sénéchal, C. (2015). *L'abattoir illustré*. Forum Abattoir.

Lemaître d'Auchamp, M., & Ranzato M. (2019). Moving out/Fitting in: Penser ensemble le déplacement du Hub Humanitaire. In ARCH (Eds.), *Whose Future is Here? Searching for Hospitality in Brussels Northern Quarter* (pp.139-150). Metrolab Series.

Martens, A. (2009). Ten years of expropriations and evictions in the Quartier Nord in Brussels (1965-1975): what legacies? *Brussels Studies*, 29.

ORG & Abattoir SA. (2013). *Projet de développement global Abattoir. Le Ventre de Bruxelles.*

Park, R. E. (1936). Human Ecology. *American Journal of Sociology*, 42(1), 1-15.

Printz, A. (2018). The EU's social and urban policies from the perspective of inclusion. History and usage of the concept. In M. Berger, B. Moritz, L. Carlier, & M. Ranzato (Eds.), *Designing Urban Inclusion* (pp. 183-193). Metrolab Series.

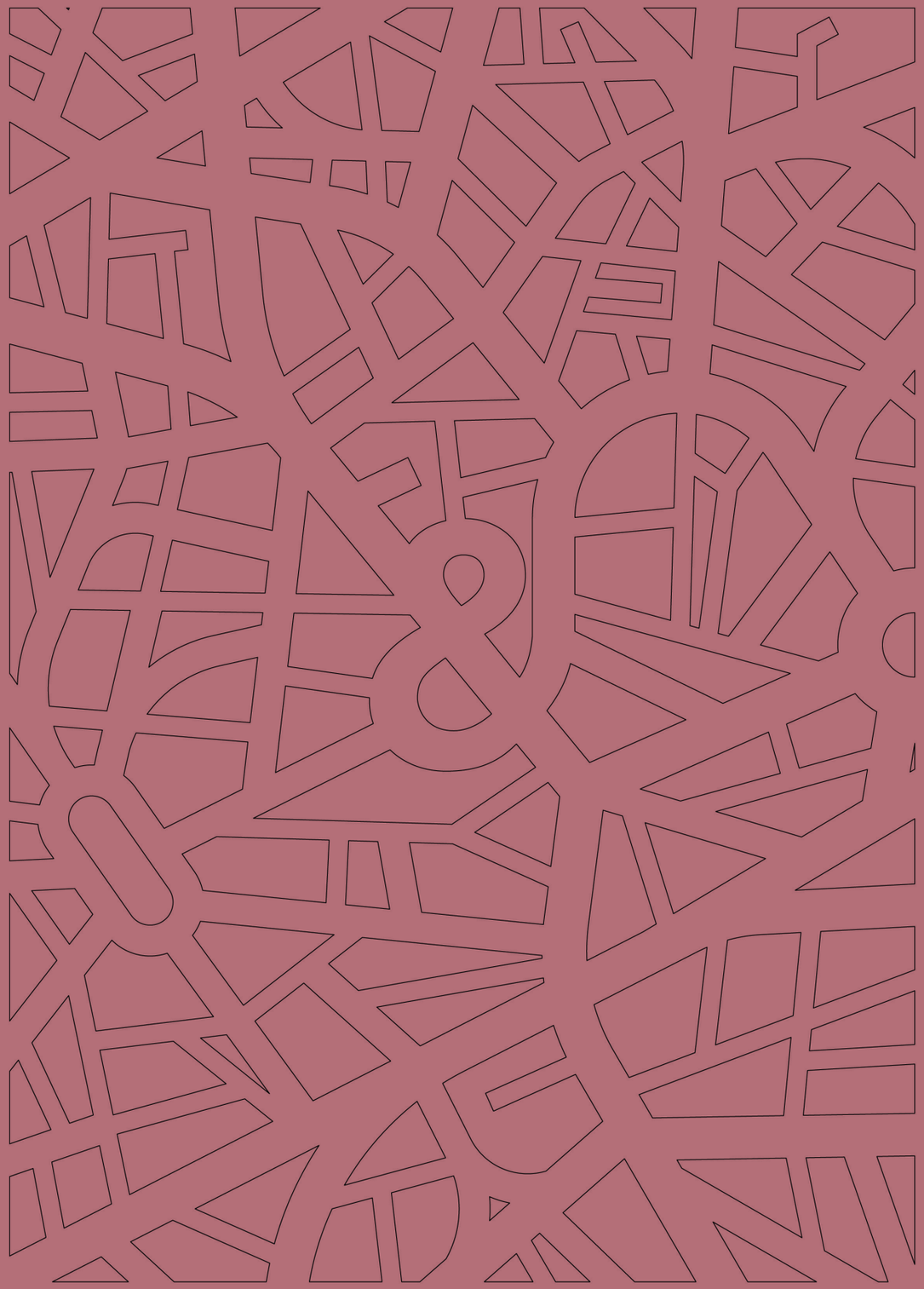
Rittel, H. W., & Webber, M. M. (1973). Dilemmas in a general theory of planning. *Policy Sciences*, *4*(2), 155-169.

Rowe, P. G. (1991). *Design Thinking*. MIT Press.

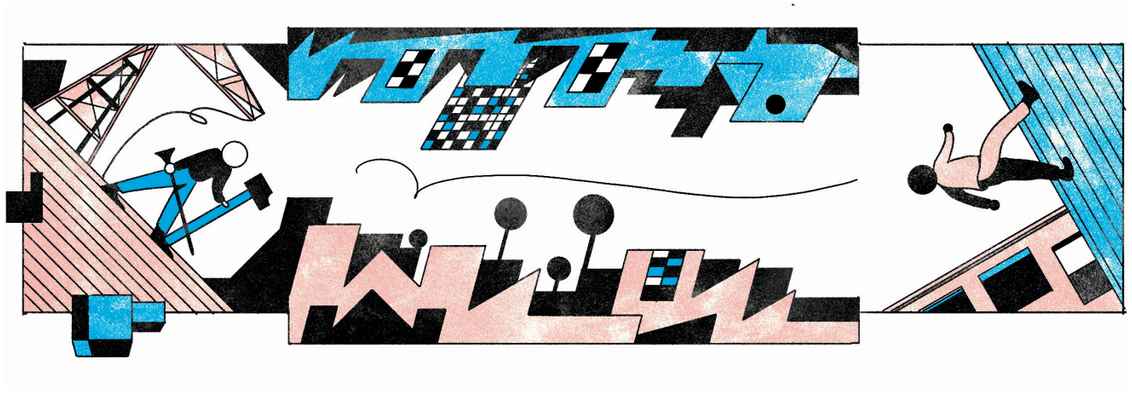
Simmel, G. (1999). *Sociologie. Etudes sur les formes de la socialisation.* PUF.

Van Criekingen, M. (2010). Du vieux vin dans de nouvelles bouteilles ? Une comparaison des opérations de réaménagement des quartiers Nord et Midi à Bruxelles. *Belgeo. Revue belge de géographie*, *1-2*, 49-64.

Wahl, D. C. (2019, April 29). Facing Complexity: Wicked Design Problems. *Age of Awareness.*



Critical insights



© Lucas Gicquel

Researchers as acrobats: a critical narrative about the ambiguities of interdisciplinary action research

Lucile Gruntz and Sophie Feyder

This fictional narrative draws on the experiences of Marvolab members. It aims to generalise the experiences of scientific researchers involved in an interdisciplinary research laboratory. Based on story-telling techniques, it was produced in 2021 by Critical Narrative, a creative agency that combines academic expertise and visual arts.

Marvolab follows projects financed by the LAFRI (Logistic Assistance Fund for Regional Improvement), in Barabas, the capital city of the eponymous administrative division. For the formal needs of the story and anonymity of its protagonists, the multiplicity of voices and experiences is expressed through two main fictional narrators. Laure is a sociologist and Claire is a geographer; they belong to two different disciplines, two different research laboratories and two different universities associated with Marvolab. They are both involved at different periods in their careers, one as a doctoral student and the other as a post-doctoral student and Marvolab scientific coordinator within her own laboratory. Likewise, the names of the research centres, the neighbourhoods where they live and work, the people they meet, the projects they have worked on and the names of the donors have been invented.

Before getting into the heart of the story, a few words about Marvolab's ambitions are in order. The first objective is to experiment new roles for the university in the territory of the Capital City. Its creation is in line with a research-action logic and the urban living labs movement, which seeks to address criticism of compartmentalized academic knowledge that is ill-adapted to the reality of the actors on the ground. To create interdisciplinary spaces for knowledge exchange and debate on the city, Marvolab brings together four research centres in spatial planning, sociology and geography and nearly thirty researchers. Together, they test multiple tools and positions needed so that their knowledge can be receivable and lead to impacts in the procedures of urban planning and public policies.

However, such an admissibility calls for building up a team, developing a language along with shared forms of work between the Marvolab researchers, before orienting the action towards the outside. The narrative attempts to

retrace the many different ways the researchers experienced their involvement, the framing of their actions and the hurdles of reception they had to confront. In particular, the aim of this narrative is to identify the gaps, adjustments and transformations that occurred between the initial ambitions — to carry out critical and applied research collectively — and what was actually accomplished in the end.

Through the voices of our two characters, Claire and Laure, the narrative unfolds a reflective and critical perspective. It presents the sequence of various key events that marked the process and reconstructs typical scenes of action and dialogue between the various protagonists. The narrative features the project's scientific coordinators, young researchers from different disciplines (architecture, urbanism, sociology, geography), the project leaders, the Marvolab managers, as well as the users of the project sites.

The story highlights asymmetries in the interdisciplinary relationship and the resulting discomfort through a series of anecdotes and concrete cases experienced by the laboratory researchers. We shall see that this discomfort also stems from the particularly ambiguous and plural nature of the researchers' position in the urban project — neither consultant nor activist — between occasional follow-up, response to institutional expectations, decision-making assistance and mediation through research. However, this ambiguity also contributed to the progress of the collective project by providing a space for the inclusion of divergent practices, commitments and interests which, when clearly stated, can generate tensions.

The chosen form, a fictional and reflexive narrative, reflects the experimental nature of the Marvolab researchers' engagement with the city of Barabas in a context where public authorities in charge of urban development seem to have a particular interest in experimentation through research, mixing an attraction for trial and error with a taste for efficiency.

Laure
How to define collective and interdisciplinary applied research?

February 10, 2021

So, I need to be more reflexive… This was the main criticism that came out of the draft of my first chapter. My thesis director has enjoined me, sympathetically of course, to rewrite it, attempting a more personal narrative. On the way I personally experienced the evolutions of Marvolab, the progress made, lessons learned, reversals, bifurcations in the situation of being at the same time involved 'as a sociologist in a collective and interdisciplinary research' (in the words of the thesis director); as a researcher in urban development projects with goals… of urban development (and not scientific analysis per se); as a doctoral student in sociology seeking to contribute to the scientific reflection on defining research-action.
My paper needs to capture the 'human story' or the internal processes behind scientific publications, according to Veronica — my thesis director. So, I must put on my investigator's glasses and look at the investigators, including myself…
To try to understand how the Marvolab researchers worked with each other and

with the public and private actors they met in the field. And in particular the urban development project leaders financed by LAFRI whom we followed. But also the inhabitants and users of the neighbourhoods and places redeveloped.

The thing is, it's already been four years since I was recruited as a PhD student by Marvolab…. Four years: as a legacy, I have a shelf full of colourful notebooks meticulously dated and filled with quotes, notes and transcripts. I've filed them all on the little pine shelf on the wall behind my worn-out office chair. But from there to making a synthesis… How can you take a reflective look at the project you have been involved in for several years? How to bring out the different voices that make up this polyphony that is Marvolab, an interdisciplinary laboratory that brings together two universities and four research centres? Between the academic 'pilots', a group of five professors, very well known in their discipline, who oversee the project, the scientific coordinators of the four research centres, the researchers, the managers… and all the external partners, that's a lot of people! Veronica advised me to bring it all together in order to find the highlights, the moments of encounter and the turning points of this collaboration at multiple scales and interlocutors, fruitful and confusing at the same time.

It's hard to know where to start. A purely chronological account? Too tedious. I have to figure out the dramatic tensions, she said. Like a movie writer. Certainly not the type of writing I was prepared for in college! I'll start with my own beginning. It was January or February 2016, February probably because, according to Esther, the first hiring contracts for Marvolab didn't start until January. Just a couple of months before the attacks… That was the Marvolab launch seminar. I'll start there.

Putting the social into the spatial environment: high expectations

I take my very first notebook off the shelf, a green-covered school notebook and look through my notes. February 2016: it is cold, but there is no fog. A notable fact, as Barabas winters are so wet. The meeting takes place early in the morning at the architecture faculty. I scribbled with a raging hand that I didn't have time for even a sip of coffee before leaving. For my first day of work, I'd better not be late… I have just become a Marvolab associate to do my thesis in sociology. I consider myself lucky to have got this contract, to be able to continue in research. I have to prove myself, show them that they did not make a mistake by integrating me into their brand new team. I timidly entered the meeting room and sat down around a table with about twenty other researchers. Classic academic furniture in creamy white plywood and dark blue carpeting. I have randomly inserted myself between Gustave and Louis, two of the five academic 'pilots' of the project. We are all sitting there, introducing ourselves by first and last names, disciplines and laboratory of affiliation. The objective of the workshop is to meet and to define collectively the notions at the heart of the project.

On the presentation projected at the back of the room, we discover the logo of the laboratory and the poster of the first colloquium which shows the image of a man in miniature about to be seized by a pair of tweezers held by a gigantic hand, with the idea of 'dissecting the urban, the human, to observe with a magnifying glass', according to Julien, the presenter. Julien is also one of the five pilots, and he's a sociology teacher. At the time, I find this image rather surprising,

a bit demiurgic for social scientists, and apparently I am not the only one. At the break, in the corridor, coffee in hand at last, we talk about it again with Iris and Esther. I walk on eggshells: when you have just joined a team, you observe. And thus, we speak coffee with Esther, one of the managers. We are talking about our common abhorrence of filter coffee when Iris joins us. She is an architect and scientific coordinator for one of Marvolab's laboratories. Older than me, with a career under her belt. That gives her confidence. It's Iris who explains, after asking what we thought of the logo and reading the mixed enthusiasm on our faces:

> I remember the discussions we had when we had to prepare ideas for the logo. It was in December…. People who know how to draw a little considered that they could do the logo. There were very different approaches and graphic sensibilities. There was a lot of discussion. It was a very good atmosphere, but well, I talked about it with Gustave afterwards, you know we are in the same laboratory, he is one of the pilots you were sitting next to, she explains. And Gustave and I said to each other: wow, this is not going to be easy! Interdisciplinarity is not going to be easy, because we have the impression that we are in a field that we know, and the others have the impression that it is their field too… whereas graphic design is not at all specific to architecture. So we said to ourselves: phew, this is going to be a discussion! But it's great, I'm sure something will come of it!

Iris's energy is communicative. She starts to exchange with Esther about their backgrounds and then we quickly return to the room. Afterwards, each of the pilots takes the floor to explain what interdisciplinarity means for the laboratory they represent.

I note down Julien's remarks. He explains that it is a question of reversing the meaning of intervention in urban areas: getting sociologists to intervene on the social climate from the start, getting them out of this way of speaking at the end, of a posteriori criticism, of putting things into perspective, to which they have become accustomed. He details his career path, his collaborations with urban planners and architects in extra-university groups and how isolated he felt once he returned to the academic fold. The idea with Marvolab is to say to ourselves, and I quote: 'What if we have a contribution from the social sciences that comes upstream from architecture, and not downstream? We don't start with the map and the numbers, but with the perceived space and the *lifeworld*. It is this element of primary framing by visuals and numbers that we would like to try to subvert in order to create a real interaction between discourse specialists and visual masters!' There, the masters of visuals and the specialists of discourse look at each other, for a short moment, both enthusiastic and pensive before the magnitude of the task thus announced. Louis, who is a geographer with a strong social dimension in his work, whispers in the ear of Claire, his neighbour, also a geographer: 'and we, at the crossroads of maps and social issues, are the chief critics?' Claire smiles.

A little later, she speaks up in response to a question from Maël, a doctoral student in sociology like me, who has also just been hired. We are now at the stage of collaboration with LAFRI. Marvolab has received substantial funding:

5.1 million euros divided between the four laboratories, a titanic figure. In short, LAFRI is funding us and Maël wonders what this will mean for us, as researchers involved in urban renewal projects supported by this programme. What is the status of the laboratory in short? This is an excellent question in retrospect: we've continued trying to answer it over the past four years. In February 2016, we did not know where the initial ambiguity of this relationship with our funders would take us. Claire responds to Maël that Marvolab was born when new projects were included in LAFRI's four-year programme, projects that presented a 'social value' and not simply a 'financial value'. The question was raised on how to give substance to such an evanescent formulation…. And it is there, in this breach of meaning, that Marvolabians must work.

At my side, leaning on the back of his chair which sways dangerously but whose balance he seems to master, Gustave rebounds on Claire's intervention, explaining that Marvolab must be a support and an accompaniment to LAFRI. Quoting him from my notes:

> Marvolab offers a different perspective. The Continent objective in 2020, and therefore that of LAFRI, would be to reduce economic and social disparities. The objective of Marvolab would be to organise workshops around urban issues and with the stakeholders selected by LAFRI, to promote innovation, develop synergies, investigate the Barabasian territorial reality. Here we are: we have a critical role to play, upstream. We will work to help project leaders take into account the social context, the socio-economic disparities, practices of the inhabitants and users of the places targeted by the renovation. And all of this with the idea of making Barabas a more hospitable, less unequal city.

Everyone is enthusiastic, nodding their heads in approval. I feel embarked in a collective adventure, where everything remains to be created, to be invented.

Nonetheless, my notebook remembers better than I do the slight protest heard to my right, from Louis' side. He murmured, more to himself than to the assembly: 'Yes, okay, we received the budget. But it's not clear what they expect from us, the fund managers…'. And it is true, with hindsight, that the whole adventure began in a climate of relative distrust. Basically, the ambitions were enormous, but the room for manoeuvre was undefined. In theory, the Barabasian region was interested in action-research logics, and wanted to experiment new practices by integrating social science researchers from the design stage of urban development projects. The idea was to draw on the critical viewpoint of researchers. But in practice, no one had any interest in shedding light on certain details of the project situations, in particular those problematic elements that the researchers' investigation could and should account for. So we progressed gradually, case by case, in dealing with the projects and the relationships to be established with the partners in the field.

***

That's enough, I have to move. The office is a bit cramped, even though the window lights it up, even when the sky is pale like today. Next time, I'll start writing

in summer. That's the problem with a thesis: writing, writing, writing, never getting off the screen. Fortunately, deep down, I really like to write. And it's stimulating to get back into that early optimism, punctuated by enthusiastic meetings and exchanges. Above all, my solitude is relative: I am not Penelope constantly putting her work back on the drawing board, isolated on her island, as so many PhD students seem to be. The advantage of collective research is the sharing. Besides Veronica, who conscientiously rereads all my texts, I've conducted all the field investigations with other researchers, from different disciplines. We have shared our thoughts before and after each workshop, each article, exhibition, meeting, each jolt and disagreement among ourselves and with our non-academic partners… And I know I can ask the other members of Marvolab for advice. This is very reassuring.

Come on, out, a few steps outside, a cup of coffee and I'll get back down to work. So, the pilots had all explained what interdisciplinarity should be, a 'collaboration between disciplines to avoid the fragmentation of knowledge, to understand the city in its totality,' according to the geographers. The idea was 'to contribute to the understanding of spaces as social. To spatialise the social and, conversely, to socialise the spatial', according to the sociologists… And how does it work for us, concretely?

By February 2016, a few research fields had already begun. Claire was working on BROOme, the renovation project for the Bosquet-Fleuri racetrack. Margaux and Luca had just received a request from Medicine For All to work with the association in the design of two integrated health centres in Craftland and Binerage. With Mathias, a post-doctoral sociologist, Delphine, a doctoral student in urban planning, and Claire, we were about to begin following the renovation project of the Dune Church. Maël would be on the grounds of the former Contrevent Slaughterhouses. Iris was focusing on the Back-to-the-Land-Barabas project in Contrevent.

We hardly knew each other, each had his or her own modes of inquiry, conceptualisation, and representation specific to his or her discipline, with extremely diverse research trajectories. And we were going to leave our ivory tower and go into the field. And not only to observe, but also to promote the social dimension of neighbourhoods to public and private project leaders. In fact, we were inventing an U.S.O: an 'unidentified scientific object'! I noted during this inaugural seminar an expression of Louis, specifying that Marvolab would be 'a place of experimentation in which we try, we fail. One expects pro-activity from the researcher, that the research can fail, that one can start again from the beginning'.

In fact, from the outset, we engaged in a research mode that implied uncertainty, regarding both the results to be achieved and the procedures for investigation and restitution to be adopted with our partners. Our task was not to provide expertise for LAFRI. Rather it was to use Barabas as a social laboratory in order to bring to light urban thinking rooted in the field, in the projects we had to accompany, in different ways each time. As researchers, we had to both investigate and highlight critical dimensions, while generating content that could be useful to project leaders. In the words of LAFRI, it was a matter of 'developing a common metropolitan problematic'.

This reminds me of the words of Dragan, in his lecture on 9 December 2015, as he shared on the excitement of the early days of the laboratory, yet with a cautioning note. Dragan is an architect, urban planner, author and professor of urban planning and architecture at the New School of Design, in the state of York. He moderated several of our meetings and participated in our first MasterClass, a truly driving and founding moment in our collective adventure. I'll have to say more on this point, when I'm done with the very beginnings of Marvolab… So, Dragan, at that conference that was a form of pre-launch for Marvolab, had said:

> I feel that there is excitement in the air, with these first discussions (about what Marvolab should be), and a very good atmosphere too… I recognise this excitement and share it. I share a little bit of this optimism and a little bit of scepticism too, which we talked about with some of you too… It's a very good thing because of course there is plenty of room for error, even failure, but as a representative of the planning world, I have to say that in planning school we say there is no failure! I never tell my students that they make mistakes, much less that they fail. And for the simple reason that planning is an iterative process, of prototyping, testing, failing, trying again… In this framework, each mistake is just a step towards what will be a new trajectory of your thinking and towards the realisation of the final project.

It was Iris who advised me to watch the video of Dragan' speech, as I had not yet been hired at the time. And she was right: looking back, there was no better way to describe the development process of Marvolab! This is another of the collective's strengths, which I can see more clearly in retrospect: at each stage of our investigations and the questions they raised, we invited foreign personalities and students, from all over the world, to reflect together, among students, researchers and city professionals, on the specific problems of Barabas and on details of the renovation projects we were following. This was the purpose of the MasterClasses, and the key to their success.

Creating a working group and groping ahead

April 16, 2021

It's been two months since I returned to my notes. The thesis has devoured my schedule. Almost spring, timid sunshine and the trees are budding in the courtyard outside… The pandemic has spread everywhere, at home too. I'm pacing around like a lion in a cage. The pandemic doesn't help the writing process, depriving the PhD student of social and physical outlets… Damn virus and damn confinement. While at first I was happy to no longer need to make excuses to cover up my end-of-thesis isolation syndrome, I quickly came around. I think back to our collective premises conveniently located near the canal that runs through Barabas. This axis that was said to be the border between the city's east and west, between the impoverished and the rich neighbourhoods. To be located near the canal was to mark our anchorage in the city, our proximity to social realities.

I think back to that first year, when the team members tacitly decided to see each other a lot. We have regular seminars to take stock of the fields, to discuss our difficulties too. Wait, in which notebook did I put the notes of Claire's interview? Claire: a communicative energy, both critical, sharp and relevant. She works as a post-doc for Marvolab. But we met last week. She explained to me her multiple hats: the cartography courses at the faculty of Brille, her personal commitment to access to quality legal support for migrants and other social services. And her two children. I don't know how she balances it all… Claire, then, with her pithy way with words, told me her experience of the Marvolab timeline. Or how uncertainty had borne its bittersweet scientific fruits:

> The first year, we did a lot of seminars to define what we mean by investigation, to try to understand each other. We wanted to do a seminar on the visualisation tools of the different disciplines, for example, but it fell through; it was just after the attacks, so it was postponed and then never got off the ground… But we had many others. There's one I remember, it wasn't on visualisation tools, but we were presenting our research and we had to do it with an image or a map. I remember I did the diagram with accessibility at BROOme, at that time. We'll come back to that, right? All this to say that at the beginning we had a lot of collective activities, we were all really embarked in this quest for a common identity.

We will come back to BROOme, but it is not yet time for that. What is important is that during this first year of regular meetings, we felt that we were making progress, that we were producing useful knowledge for project leaders, enabling them to adapt to the social contexts of the city: 'bringing the social into the spatial', our leitmotif. For example, by questioning the inhabitants, the local residents, the presumed users of the places or spaces that we followed, within the framework of the accompanied projects: at the Slaughterhouses of Contrevent, at the Church of Dune, around the racecourse of Bosquet-Fleuri… And this process of immediate immersion in the field marked us all. I remember what Maël told me, in the hallway, during a coffee break when our offices were still near the canal. Where was that again? It was in 2017, so the purple notebook…. Here it is: Maël was hired in 2016, and he found himself 'straight into the slaughterhouse with rubber boots' (at Contrevent), to think about the renovation of this huge space. Even before he was officially hired, he was already involved in the project, on the ground. 'I just started my thesis and already I'm in the middle of the slaughterhouse!' Entering like that directly through a site and through issues that emerge from the field to build the problematic of his thesis, it's not very common in his discipline, geography.

> I noted his remark, because it resonated with my own experience: I expected to spend the first months of the thesis confined in an office reading articles or books and in the end, I quickly found myself having to do interviews with field actors; so I put aside the literature to go into the field, understand what was going on there and build my problematic according to that. I did not develop the theoretical part until much later. The field just fell into my lap!

As a doctoral student, this is one of the essential contributions of integration in a research collective that favours action research: outside a structure like Marvolab, doctoral students have to manage on their own to negotiate access to their fields and to the data necessary for their research. Here, on the contrary, you can rely on the collective, on an access that is already guaranteed by conventions, agreements between the research team and public policy. The borders are more fluid. It opens doors and I must say that it is an interesting element of comfort for doctoral investigations that are just starting.

It reminds me of the first MasterClass, these meetings organised by Marvolab with personalities from our disciplines, city professionals and international students. The idea was that all these people, outside of our investigations and our daily work with the LAFRI projects in the Barabas-Capital Region, would enlighten us with a new and resolutely interdisciplinary eye. Let's go back to the present of the narrative.

January 2017. At this point, it's been hardly a year since I was hired and the Marvolab team is pretty much complete. Right now, we really feel like we're building a strong bond with each other. It's a great moment of collective emulation! But the most important for me are the preparation meetings, where we select the projects that will be part of the MasterClass — BROOme in Bosquet-Fleuri, Slaughterhouses in Contrevent, DüN in Dune, the integrated health centre of Medecins For All in Craftland. And it is where the collective comes back to us, in a nice way, after everyone has gone to investigate in their own corner…. You have to imagine: eight of us from Marvolab in a mini office of 4m², at last among colleagues.

Later, as the first week of the MasterClass started and we were working like crazy with the invited students on drawings and maps, Maël whispered to me: 'why don't we do a MasterClass between us to begin with, it would be a good start?'

Nevertheless, the collective identity was being built before our eyes. It was Jeanne, the manager linked to my laboratory, who reminded me of a small but significant event:

> Do you remember? It was during the first MasterClass, there was a conference in the evening. There were forty students and the whole Marvolab team. Everyone realised that the conference was at 8:30 pm and they were working hard and we had to feed them! So Thomas said to me: 'this is my bank card, here is my code, in the metro there is an ATM, you can withdraw some cash, I trust you and you can pay the pizzas when they arrive'. It was really a moment of shared trust and emulation. Then everyone started walking to the old amphitheatre. It had been a collective moment the kind we dream of, like we tell you it will happen…

It was exciting to share our thoughts, during two intensive weeks of work, about urban boundaries, how to overcome them, how to ensure that sharing a space is not limited to 'the photocopier', as Margaux summarised it in relation to the Medecins For All integrated health centres. I felt that we had a role to play in the city, to help make it more just, more hospitable.

But beyond the pizzas, one of the major turning point in the Marvolab

project was after the MasterClass on social inclusion, when we talked with Dragan. The meeting on 17 February 2017. He is a strong, inspiring personality. He helped establish the School of Urbanism and Design at New School of Design in the state of York, just under a decade ago. Urbanism engaged in its context, in connection with its social context. In his eyes, it is a matter of taking a professional, scientific and critical look at what urban renewal policies do to the city, in terms of reinforcing socio-spatial boundaries. Dragan told us:

> Yes, it's good, it's very stimulating to work with students and outside experts, but you need a little more involvement with the actors. You need to wake up! You have something extraordinary in your hands, you have to give it an identity, go to the field!

This is what he enjoined us to do. In concrete terms, it was this feedback after the first MasterClass that encouraged us to open slightly the research we were conducting and to integrate more of the citizens' voices. This is where the two main issues of our collective became clear: how to really work together in the field? How to assume this founding critical posture, to imbue the social into the spatial, in our interactions with the partners?

A few days later, we went to dinner in a small Ethiopian restaurant, in Craftland, with Thomas, Gustave and Julien, Claire, Louis, Luca, Margaux, Maël, Iris, Esther, Jeanne and me. Almost the whole team: we truly mirrored the different 'levels' of Marvolab among pilots, researchers, PhD students and managers. And here, I think it was Luca who said:

— We have to take what Dragan said, we have to go down to the field even more, but for this to be meaningful, we have to share, we can't do everything alone, each one in their own corner…

— Yes, in order to reach out more to the people in the field, maybe we need all our respective skills? Iris had added.

Thomas agreed, and then everyone else, as we finished the last few *injera* (Ethiopian pancakes). It was at this point I believe, in very early spring 2017, that we decided to create the 'interdisciplinary cells'. Put that way, it may sound a bit austere. We looked for a name, and then we thought it sounded a bit like the alveoli of a beehive: everyone working together, and from cell to cell, we weave an original organism. The idea behind the cells was to deepen the feeling of humility that had emerged from the first MasterClass. It was Julien who had expressed it that way, according to my notes, made a little fuzzy by the few beers ingested that evening:

> Yes, we need to bounce back on the MasterClass. This meeting of people from different disciplinary and geographical backgrounds is strong. We can reproduce this internally, at the Marvolab level. We started by immersing ourselves in the field. Now we will concretely decompartmentalize our practices by sharing these fields. It will probably be a bit humbling, as the Americans say, and we'll probably all have to get out of our comfort bubbles, but it's probably the best way to test in situ what works, both in our interactions with the users of the renovated sites and with the actors of the renovation.

His quote gives the tone of the general enthusiasm at the end of the dinner. And so, we went back to the field, and at the same time developed the cells. In concrete terms, from that point on, we made sure that we had several researchers from several disciplines in each field of investigation. And it was the right step at the right time, because it was around this time that we had to face our first 'setbacks', dealing with the project leaders in some of the fields we undertook, as well as the LAFRI funders — by ricochet. The cells and disciplinary experiments, along with the exchanges that developed there were what really allowed us, I think, to pursue the collective approach.

In fact, this fruitfulness of interdisciplinary work, this humility of constantly having to learn new methods, to understand and then try to appropriate those of others, are things that are still with us. Drawing an intelligible map when you are a sociologist; incorporating sociological data into a map when you are a geographer; to highlight the plurality of uses of a site in a programmatic model when one is an urban planner… everything we learned. Sometimes we may have lost sight of all this, during moments of 'crisis' or major questioning of our values, relations among ourselves or with regard to our partners and backers. Nevertheless, when I think back, all we learned was always there with us.

I need an example to illustrate this more concretely. Wait, I'm going to go back to the notebook from the last MasterClass, on productive activities. MasterClasses, in retrospect, are really the time when we understand where our efforts can lead. While the first one was organised in a hurry, for the two others we had more data from the field, more meetings beforehand. And always, the fresh, external and unfiltered look brought by international students and researchers or professionals from other cities and countries. Here is a quote from Thomas, the pilot urban planner, during the reflective workshop, about the MasterClass 'productive activities':

> The MasterClasses were situations where we were all more or less familiar with one of the thematic axes and therefore at ease within one of these axes. For me, it was more 'ecology', for example. I find myself there. I see what it's all about, I can talk about it for hours without any problem. And then, alongside that, there were these other thematic axes where we were less at ease, but it was necessary that each of us managed to seize the three axes while being in a relative and variable comfort in relation to these different themes.

That sums up the interest of these meetings, I think, even if I admit that I get a little lost in the chronology, the back and forth from one MasterClass to the next! But they really represented important methodological and collective markers. Lighthouses to overcome the pitfalls that could sometimes blunt our initial enthusiasm.

BROOme and the early controversies

Through this increasingly close collective work, the question of our common values arose. It actually came up quite early. After the post-MasterClass assessment with Dragan in February 2017, we defined avenues of action to make the collective expectations a reality. I remember the occasion so well. So, during

an internal seminar right after the MasterClass, and following the Ethiopian dinner, we tell ourselves that we need to develop teamwork, in a double movement: top-down by immersing ourselves in 'interdisciplinary cells' of investigation on the grounds of the projects we accompanied; and then bottom-up: starting from concrete Barabasian realities, in order to climb to the metropolitan scale, to outline a territorial vision. And then, above all, the discussion is about critical analysis, which is the essence of our know-how as researchers in architecture and social sciences, all disciplines combined. Everyone agrees on the principle that we work together not only to respond to a public policy, but also in order to adapt to a social demand and respond to it, to take into account the public who are concerned by urban policies yet remain silent. 'The researcher is a translator and a mediator', says Louis, one of the pilots. 'We translate in several directions: towards political staff, elected officials and civil servants in Barabas; between public policies and the service provided to society, to residents. Basically, we are networking knowledge and actors.'

However, the consensus regarding the importance of our critical stance, at first, failed to pass the reality test. In the words of Luca, the architect who worked on the Craftland Health Centre, 'we couldn't avoid a real political reflection, on what everyone really believed in for the city, for urban spaces. And we started it, but didn't go into it in any depth, and then it all fell apart!' The quote is taken from my notes, after the round table organised internally that autumn, in 2020, with the Marvolab researchers and collaborators. The idea was to gather reflective feedback at several levels, to identify instances of discomfort and how they were managed. Iris was there. She began the round table with an eloquent metaphor:

> Building a collective when the common link is the funding and that's all, is taking the thing in reverse. Usually it's the other way around. It's a bit like a marriage of reason, in fact. Except that here we have the date of the divorce (on amicable terms) announced from the beginning!

Without going so far as to call it a divorce, the BROOme case was the subject of internal dissension, moderating the collective momentum of the first year. It was also in February 2017, a busy month… In fact, from the very beginning of the project, in 2016, at a seminar presenting the investigations, before we formed ourselves into interdisciplinary cells, Claire had already put forward the notion of discomfort about the racetrack. Discomfort with the project itself and with those who were carrying it, first of all.

'The managing authorities are entrepreneurs converted to the event business, somewhat in the mode of the artist critics converted to the spirit of capitalism identified by Boltanski and Chiapello, you know?' The bearer's economic plan was based on 21% for the activities of the hotel-restaurant, 21% for the rental of spaces, 12% in proceeds from the parking lots, 20% on the revenues of the golf course and 13% from the sale of the Pass, a ticket allowing access to the paying activities, a price estimated between 18 and 25 euros.

I went for a walk with Claire, for a commented visit of the place and the project. In a nutshell, it's about rehabilitating the Bosquet-Fleuri racetrack in an affluent neighbourhood of Barabas. The embodiment of the affluent suburb: prices per square meter among the highest in the capital, individual houses

surrounded by well-kept gardens with hedges to delimit private spaces, schools, green spaces in abundance, gourmet restaurants, the Etire wood and the Guéries forest nearby… It's hard to imagine that we are still in Barabas. We are at the opposite pole of the canal zone, that's for sure. Quiet, green, clean and socially endogamous. And the racetrack in the middle, with its old-fashioned side. The empty bleachers that still resound with the ghostly cries of the punters. The café with its old-fashioned wooden balconies. One expects to see an aristocracy of the 1920s, in gleaming cars, silk dresses, gloves, lorgnettes and hats… The region owns the racetrack, which has not been used for racing since 1995 because it was too expensive for the city of Barabas to maintain. Since then, only joggers and dog walkers go around the track. One feels the nostalgia of an old world gone by.

The rehabilitation project involved a public-private partnership between the region and a subsidiary of the private group, which specialises in events for companies. The initial idea was to enhance the site by developing sports, leisure, environmental preservation and cultural activities, all for profit. 'Asking a private company to make a public place open to everyone was a bad start', Claire joked, showing me the bleachers:

> At Marvolab, we worked on the idea of borders from the initial project. Based on the principle that Barabas was a very socially diverse city, the public spaces, in order to be open, had to raise the question of the borders to be crossed, especially the social and economic costs. Installing a golf course and proposing super expensive activities for children, cafés and restaurants unaffordable for people on shoestring budgets,… It was a project out in nature of course, but nature transformed into a luxury product invalidated the whole inclusive dimension of the project. This is what we based our investigation and evaluation on.

From the moment she entered the field, Claire took a critical look at the forms of exclusion inherent in the project. Marvolab initially managed to maintain good relations with the promoters, who saw the regular presence of a researcher as a tool for resolving their conflicts with the local residents… However, this was where a second source of discomfort arose, with regard to the inhabitants of the surrounding district, who were opposed to the project on the basis of political values diametrically opposed to those of Claire.

How did she explain all this to me again? Ah, here is the transcript of our interview, still in a notebook, but purple this one — Claire explains:

> It started from an article in which I drew a picture of the areas of the site that would no longer be accessible under the project and the areas that would remain accessible. A very simple thing, related to spatial accessibility. Then there was a MasterClass that worked on that. And the original drawing was taken up by local residents, to dismantle the project. This served as a critique and the result was that the project did not receive its permit.

Although they disagreed on the substance, researchers and inhabitants agreed on the fact that the project was not adapted to the site and to the ambitions displayed by LAFRI and the Barabasian region, via its urban planning department. And this is where the question of Marvolab's critical capacity

exploded, literally, with this instrumentalisation of the research work by the various stakeholders.

The situation escalated with publication in the press of article against BROOme, which quoted Marvolab. The managers of the rehabilitation project saw it and referred it to LAFRI. It was an article that Claire had not been able to reread, in which only one point of view, incriminating the managing authorities, had been retained. The Marvolab report and the recommendations from the first MasterClass had been distorted. The whole thing was formulated in a dubious way, without nuance, which was not our method at all. Months of meetings, justifications and conciliation with BROOme followed, with an impact on Marvolab's relations with LAFRI. It took over a year to reconnect, to make LAFRI understand that Marvolab was not a platform to promote projects funded in the Barabas-Capital Region. To understand that as scientists, our job was to analyse the plurality of perspectives and maintain a critical distance that served the projects, even if it had contributed in some way to aborting the BROOme project. Nevertheless, as Claire reminded me, one should not overestimate the role of Marvolab in this story, because the project was highly controversial from the start.

In reality, what the 'BROOme crisis' changed is that it unearthed collective issues that we had not had the time to address together, among ourselves, as well as with our funders, nevertheless issues that we could not avoid without suffering the boomerang effect: our critical approach and our freedom of inquiry, on the one hand; the way that hierarchical relationships within Marvolab influence our ability to build a united work group, on the other.

A hierarchical research group, but in constant redefinition

Following our review seminar after the first MasterClass, in the spring of 2017 we drew up common recommendations, to give a concrete status to the collective objectives set at that time. The desire to have substantive discussions with the pilots and feedback on the scientific reports presented to LAFRI from the fields had emerged, as well as the wish to integrate a representative of the doctoral students on the board. For the record, the board includes the pilots, the scientific coordinators, one for each partner laboratory, and the two managers. The progressive integration of PhD students in the decision-making spaces of the laboratory was effective by the end of the project.

And here I must allow myself a brief digression. Of course, I am writing from my point of view as a doctoral researcher — but after all, this is what Veronica, my thesis director, advised me to do…. The example of the representation is eloquent: indeed, it is not easy to say: 'we do things horizontally!' when, for decades, the academic world has been structured by unequal logics. Nevertheless, Marvolab, once again, is an iterative process: we at least have tried, right! There have been fruitful attempts, such as the preparatory work groups for the MasterClasses, in which doctoral researchers have been progressively integrated, in their own right. But it takes more than one day, or even four years, to erase hierarchical structures that permeate job titles, ways of doing things and the expectations of interlocutors, both academic and extra-academic…

Back to the original ambitions. Also planned was sharing texts via Zotero, reading common articles, as well as choosing together an external assessor, a

personality like Dragan, who could develop a comprehensive, expert and critical eye on our fields, our analyses and our functioning. The key to getting this off the ground was to organise a first 'greening' day, an intensive group session, that would allow us to develop our interdisciplinary working relationships in a less hierarchical mode than the one implied by Marvolab's initial structure. Luca recommended that we set aside a week, despite each other's busy agendas, to have time to discuss about the fields and projects in progress.

Unfortunately, at the end of 2017, the BROOme case made everything more complicated. I'll cite Claire's words: they speak for themselves, and she probably has the most insight into the subject, having been exposed to the views of both sides on the front lines:

> After the BROOme case, everything that was possible at the outset was narrowed down considerably, and without any collective deliberation or choice. I found myself a bit lost in terms of what I could and could not do, what I could and could not work on. At the beginning, I had the impression that you could conduct research in a fairly free way, whether the project was controversial or not, that you could have a critical role. The force of this critical question was undermined by the BROOme incident.

In the aftermath of the newspaper article against the rehabilitation of the Bosquet-Fleuri racetrack, the collective dynamic that had been set up with the internal seminars, which we wanted to continue, suffered from the external communication issues that tied the pilots' hands, since they had to take responsibility for our surveys and their results to the backers. It was complicated to be involved in both internal team building and external communication. There was tension between the two and also with obligations for visibility, communication towards project leaders, administrations, etc., which were necessary for our project to be recognised, but which, on occasions, worked against what was happening internally. Not the quality of the scientific research, no. Rather, it was the human relations that we were developing. Even if no one really lost their balance in the end… We succeeded in the acrobatics test by rebuilding the collective, in our fields, in spite of or thanks to the moments of crisis. This is the 'Marvolab touch' in a way: this ability to build complex and situated knowledge about the city, its actors, its conflicts and its stakes, by learning from our mistakes, by constantly renegotiating our relationships — both internally, by shifting the hierarchical lines inherited from the academic world, and with our partners in the field and our backers.

We are touching on the delicate position of the researcher as translator. With the BROOme crisis, LAFRI's criticisms spilled over internally, onto the researchers, relayed by the pilots who acted as an interface between administrations, public authorities and Marvolab members. We finally organised a meeting on the relevance of public-private partnerships, in October 2018, with a representative of BROOme and the city's planning department, among others. But until that time, the pilots privileged external relationships, insisting internally on the need to adapt to the roles that were expected of us in the field, by the project managers. In a nutshell, the difficulties of applied research.

In short, it was through the misunderstanding over the status of the critique, both required by and granted to us, and its audibility by our collaborators

on the ground and by LAFRI, which funds us, that another set of questions about our respective statuses within Marvolab emerged. The winter of 2017 is about the time when questions became urgent, about budgets, statutes, contracts, land… This is what emerged from the interviews: a sense of hollowness, that it was becoming difficult to express and relay requests between the internal echelons.

Despite attempts to instil a maximum of horizontality in the relationships between Marvolab researchers, there are things that must be managed by the pilots. Some things never get discussed… In part, it has to do with job titles, and the differential responsibilities that are attached to them.

It is also, no doubt, a form of backlash against uncertainty, one of the godmothers of the collective adventure that is Marvolab. It was Mathias, the post-doctoral student in sociology, who addressed the budgetary question during the internal round table. The issue came up several times and strained the relations between scientific coordinators and pilots:

> Budgets were the red light. We don't talk about it! That was the problem! But I was supposed to coordinate fields, meetings, organise seminars, prepare a MasterClass, but I had nothing, neither the budgets, nor the projects, nothing. I had to coordinate a ghost ship!

And this lack of communication appeared in other areas, especially because the information sharing tools we had planned to put in place were neglected. Also, the positions were not the same. Margaux said it well, during the reflective workshop organised to take stock of our common experience. Wait, where did I put these notes…. Ah, here it is — orange notebook, number 6… The difference in status, even within Marvolab, which was a major employer. It is Margaux, therefore, who explains most eloquently what this internal statutory asymmetry generates, in terms of differences in rhythm and investment, between colleagues:

> In terms of publications, I feel like I should have taken the bull by the horns, but in fact it wasn't always clear. I wrote articles for several different publications. First, I was going to write one article, then finally it changed, we were going to do a book on it… Then it was the subject of the article that changed! And since I was ahead of schedule because I knew my contract was going to end, I worked on it before the others. My articles have been written for two years… Fortunately, I didn't finish them completely because each time I had to revise everything. I wrote for nothing, sometimes I felt like I was working for nothing. For me it was not clear enough and it also reveals a problem of governance. The timing of the projects is already not the same as the timing of the research, the timing of the various researchers is not the same because there are part-timers, full-timers…

According to Margaux, if we had implemented a way to share files from the beginning, a clearer plan of action, clearer lines of conduct also towards the field, we could have become more than a sum of individuals, than this marriage of reason with the pre-announced divorce date, described by Iris. We were a team, but, insofar as Marvolab is not an independent laboratory, our collective or horizontal ambitions were often short-circuited by the habits, and temporalities, as

Margaux well underlined, of our respective universities and laboratories.

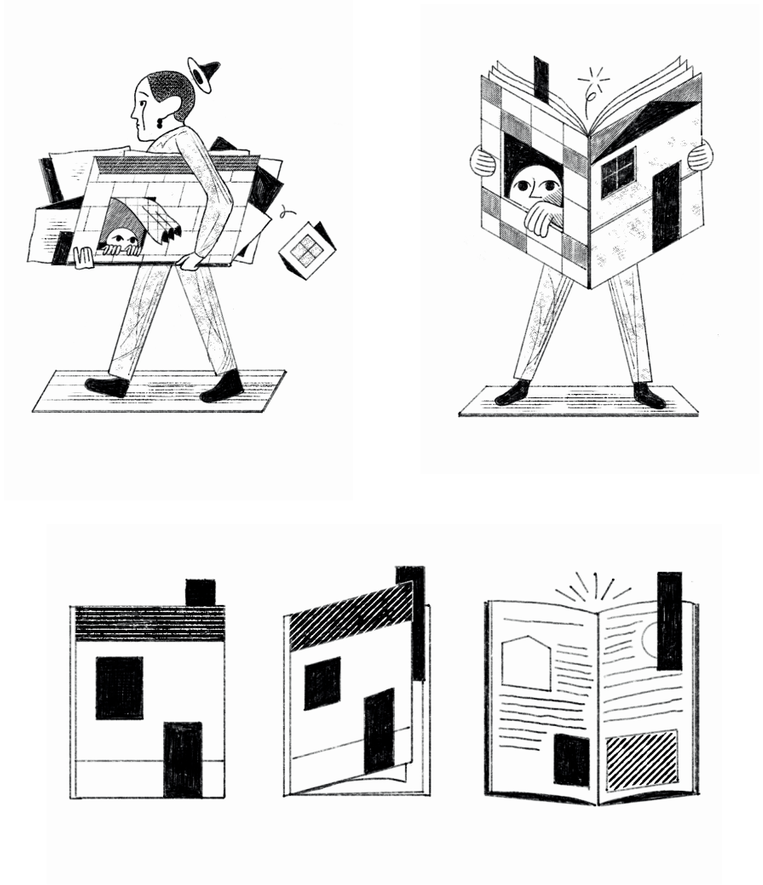
In spite of it all, passions were not missing from this original union. We had appointments missed, a few disappointments, but also moments of coming together and discoveries… A collective tango. I refer to the two episodes of 'team building', the first during an internal MasterClass in Berlin, which was supposed to take place in December 2017 and the second during the Atlas meeting, which took place in summer 2018. The Berlin project cooled the collective ardours: Luca had been enormously involved in making it happen. We had blocked the dates. The idea was that we would really share our ways of working, something very methodological: maps, drawings, interviews, synthesis… to have interdisciplinarity translated into action. To put us in difficult situations, to show us our respective weaknesses, a sine qua non condition to generate reflexivity and a common professional identification. The project went far into its planning and then it fell apart, because of each one's problems of availability. I remember the bitter taste when it ended.

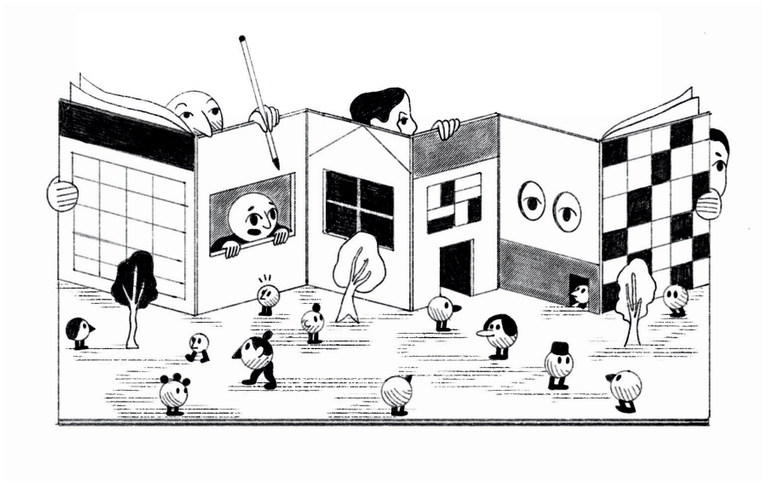
To overcome the shared feeling of lack of investment in the group that developed at that time, a second 'team building' was organised, this time in the summer. Jeanne sums up the general feeling of this week of hard work, in a very relaxed atmosphere, nevertheless. Internal hierarchies seemed to be suspended. The atomisation of the fields and inquiries as well. A project together, intense:

> The atlas, we did that for a week and we went to Antwerp with the bikes. We had put all the drawings on the floor, and I had pictures of Gustave lying down reading the sheets, Louis on his tiptoes taking pictures, the collective energy was positive, the weather was good, it was the month of June, summer was coming… We left for summer with lots of projects for this atlas, but we learned in September that it wasn't going to be done, I think there was a break in our confidence and in the group. We had the feeling that we had done it all for nothing. The collective was really stretched at that moment…

The breath is gone, it's true. But in the end, it is probably also inevitable to have movements, in the musical sense, in a collective experience. Allegros and andantes. Perhaps there is also a dimension inherited from the social sciences on the one hand, and from French-speaking approach on the other, in considering projects and relationships from a critical angle.

The fact remains that, despite the disappointments, we have all learned a lot. I think it was Luca who told me this… It was during our virtual reflective workshop — virtuality imposed by the current epidemic. Here it is: 'Finally, I think that Marvolab has been a real school of humility. It's clear that it taught us a lot, we met a lot of people with whom we don't usually have relationships.' Luca meant both other researchers, but also the links forged on the grounds of the projects we accompanied, with the project managers, the users, the associations, the inhabitants… And there, indeed, Marvolab brought us a lot.





© Lucas Gicquel

Claire

Being an acrobat and landing on your feet:
action research and interdisciplinarity in the field

20 April 2021

— *Habibti*, it's been ten minutes since your alarm went off, I think you should get up.
— Aaaaargh, nooo… Three more minutes.

Nassim smells like hot coffee and Marseille soap. The most pleasant man in the morning I know. Up two hours before me, time to shower, eat, get the kids up and ready. When I can barely drag myself out of bed, he takes the twins to school. That's something you don't learn often enough at the university: one of the most important things in life is not so much what job you choose, your career, your education, but who you make a child with… Or two.

'And here's your coffee!' He simply puts it on my bedside table. No choice, I am cornered. Forced to put my foot to the floor. Well, let's go. Panties, pair of jeans, t-shirt, sweater, socks and all the winter accessories. The cashmere scarf, a gift from Nassim, of course. The comfort of the morning, before facing the wet road. I barely had time to kiss the girls.

The door slams in my back. The subway mouth to continue the daydream, all these people in a hurry and misty, like the sky and me. I get out. It is cold, I continue on foot, towards my office, at the university. My hands in my pockets, my chin tucked into that lovely scarf. But even the cashmere cannot resist this wet blizzard. Before, it was even worse, in terms of humidity, when our premises were near the canal… But, other than that, it was very good, we were in the heart of all the tensions of the city. At least there, I was taking over my thesis, not like when I was working for LAFRI. 'Research programming'… I never felt so far away from geography as I did when I had to swallow all that management talk all day long. But at least now that the axes of the new four-year plan have been defined, it is possible to integrate a little research into this maelstrom of numbers and performance evaluations. Still, we'll see what the meeting of the two will lead to…

At least now I'm really bridging the gap! During the thesis, I grumbled about feeling disconnected from institutional issues, from public action on the city. In the department, I grumbled about having to deal with administrators with no (or little) interest in the inhabitants, the ways they lived in Barabas or their perceptions of neighbourhoods and places, and even less interest in social science analyses of all this. Now I have to reconcile the two! A connection or a great gap, we'll see. Action research demands a certain art of acrobatics. And that's the whole point.

In short, first, to take shelter. Here is finally the electronic airlock. Newer buildings within the campus, without much character. Fortunately, there is the park. Nothing to do with the charm of the building at the canal dock. There, it squeaked hard, as soon as we entered the gate: the wrought iron is like me, it hates this windy, grey mist, loaded with all the dampness the city can convey. What a building, though, we were working in! Red brick on two floors, a vast

paved courtyard, a gate made to measure for dump trucks… It smelled like a prosperous old industry, the Barabas of triumphant industry. It was enough to make Iris nostalgic, as she worked to create links for the city to weave new productive networks. More ecological, local, nourishing, short circuit.

'Hello, do you mind?' Installed in my modern campus office, I extricate myself from the architectural-meteorological divagations to raise my eyes from the screen, switched on after I tossed my winter carapace onto the chair for visitors, in black fake leather, like mine. With relief, I save and close the draft of the article being written for the magazine *Terrains*. I have just written: 'space as a place to experience otherness can be the object of a tension between a diversity of social worlds.' Funny, that would make a perfect introduction to a Marvolab presentation. We work precisely on these questions of co-presence and urban inclusion in the city, considering the dynamics of openness, reception and closure of urban spaces with regard to the most vulnerable and marginalized people. We, as researchers accompanying LAFRI-funded projects in the Barabas-Metropole Region, are balancing all these audiences. This metaphor of the balancing act returns constantly, quite a team of acrobats… So, I look up from the screen and answer my interlocutor: 'No, no problem! You saved me, I was about to develop the blank page syndrome. How are you doing?'

While answering, I look up at her. Laure is a doctoral student in sociology. She follows the DÜn project with me, at Dune, and is writing her thesis on Marvolab. She gives her all to the task, sometimes at the risk of total exhaustion. That's the great thing about kids: when they come into your life, you have to learn to let go. Learn to set limits for yourself and your colleagues.

— I am fine, but I… I need some advice, I think… I'm struggling with my first thesis chapter, and I have to hand it in to Veronica in two weeks… She asked me for a reflective point of view, on what Marvolab was, as a collective adventure, you know? I started in a chronological way and it seems to me beside the point…. Looking back, and relying a lot on the reflective workshop we just did, I don't know if my notes are valid or if my point of view is too assertive… What is important, what is less important… Where I can afford to give voice to critical discourse internally, or not…
— Calm down, let's have lunch, I'm tired of the computer and overheated neurons too. If you'd like, let's have a manaaqish first, then go to my place to eat?
— What's that?
— Syrian patties with thyme or cheese, you know?

Nassim's breakfast. A little too pungent for my taste, too early in the morning, the *zaatar*, this mixture of crushed thyme, salt and sesame that sprinkles the *manaaqish*. When I wake up, only coffee can make its way to my stomach. But for a late brunch it's perfect. Simple, warm, comforting. Just what Laure needs.

— Come on, let's go to Binerage. There are lots of new small Syrian restaurants there. So the problem is the critical point of view? Well, everyone in Marvolab is critical, right? That's a bit of our mission, as well…
— Yes, but I don't know how to make the difference anymore. I'm writing

about the Atlas that never got done and I can't imagine what we've achieved anymore, you see? Past the enthusiasm of the beginning, I mean…
— Well, the grounds, right? Look with DüN! If you want, I can help you a little. Let's start with what we know best: the church and the workshops with the inhabitants, the struggle to understand each other, to develop our tools, and then the exhibition that was organised?

Researchers as mediators: DüN and the role of schematisation

After the subway trip, a change of scenery. A few winding streets later, we push the door into a small room. Fake marble lino on the floor, stained white plywood walls, all in length. The aluminium counter is at the back, with the kitchen behind it. We pick a small table for two on the left. I order two half-*zaatar*, half-cheese *manaaqish*. Probably *halumi*, a bit rubbery but delicious once grilled… And two black teas after that, to warm us up.

Back home, a few blocks from the pancake shop, we finally have lunch, in the warmth. Until restaurants begin to open up, post pandemic, this solution spares us urban walks in the wet cold. Laure seems to appreciate it: eating creates links. We talk about DüN, this ground we share. In two words, the project is managed by the municipality of Dune, to renovate the old church of the Sainte-Thérèse district, with its huge adjacent cloister. The idea of the municipality is to renovate in order to enhance an old lower income neighbourhood, formerly working class and now rather precarious. The church and its buildings are to be converted into a 'cultural pole', centralising various associations and institutions currently scattered throughout the municipality. The idea was that the library, the cultural centre, and the associations offering musical activities, among others, could make use of spaces for their activities and that the users would be associated with management of the renovated building and the gardens. The project leaders wanted to bring together various publics in the same place in a quality setting, while ensuring that the cultural offer was in keeping with the neighbourhood. When we met the municipality representatives for the project, their main difficulty was to make the inhabitants participate, both upstream and downstream, in the reflection and then the completion of the renovation. As a result, Mathias and Laure, two sociologists — one a post-doctoral student and the other a doctoral student, Delphine, a doctoral student in urban planning, and myself, a geographer, set up a 'Church cell'. We started by surveying the field with the inhabitants, residents and users of the building. The idea was to understand the uses of the place. We also turned to the associations, to try to reach the social diversity of the Sainte-Thérèse neighbourhood.

— Actually, I think with DüN, I finally understood the point of the map. For you, I guess it's a natural way of thinking, but for me, it's just the opposite of what I'm used to doing…. So, facilitating mapping workshops! This is where we touched on the interdisciplinary (explains Laure, sipping her tea).
— Yes, it reminds me of what Mathias told me, that he had the impression, as a sociologist, that we, architects and geographers, took him for a fool when he wanted to make maps… He once told me that Louis had

complimented him on his ‘pretty little watercolours’, and that he didn’t know if it was a compliment or a sarcasm…

— Well, at the same time, that’s a big question, isn’t it? How to express the qualitative dimension in maps? How do you manage the differences in analysis temporality between urban planners and sociologists? We take an incredible amount of time to conduct interviews, transcribe them, digest them… You are in the immediacy of representing a field on paper!

— Yes, at the same time, thanks to you, I became aware of how important interviews with the inhabitants are, the time spent with them. I had already done it before, on other Brussels sites, for my thesis, I mean. But working with sociologists means accepting that everything will be complicated, that we will work with complex data, compile contradictory points of view and uses… And to render it in maps, that was a big challenge…

We leave the house and return to the university as quickly as possible. It is drizzling. A tenacious humidity that makes the cashmere scarf more and more vulnerable. I listen to Laure with only one ear, lost in my dreams of sunny shores lined with birch forests and low walls around fig trees, the country of Nassim, the twins playing in the summer heat… What does she say? Ah yes, the map and the learning…

It’s true, I do think it was with the interdisciplinary cells linked to each field, which we created starting in spring 2017, right after the first MasterClass, that the collective work began to make sense. That was the best thing we did: the fact that we weren’t working as twenty-five people but as four or five on a common project. This is what we did with the Church. It was a time when I felt carried away. For DüN, everyone had to leave their comfort zone. Delphine and I were grappling with transcripts of interviews with local residents, and did not know how to order them, synthesise them, use them…. Laure and Mathias were faced with the chain of cartographic exercises we had imposed on ourselves.

I should also mention what we did, from May 2017 to May 2018, to further involve the different publics of residents and users of the site. We set up mind mapping workshops with groups, in addition to interviews with residents, sometimes with school audiences, sometimes with associations. The idea was to understand how the neighbourhood’s users represented and appropriated the old church, before renovation. For example, young girls clearly brought out gender issues in the appropriation of spaces: the places where they could and could not go without risking their integrity or their reputation… When we talk about spatial boundaries…

We leave for the intercity journey back to the campus. I propose to Laure that we get together over coffee, along with Mathias, to talk about DüN, and about what we had gained through the experience of interdisciplinarity and diving together in a common ground. Next week if she wishes, to give her food for thought in writing the reflexive narrative. As for me, I’ll go back to the *Terrain* article for a few hours, then go pick up the girls at school. My priority will always be Nassim and the girls, and our friends. I love the academic work, it’s true, the meetings, the stimulation… But spending all your weekends writing, no! And in any case, with fixed-term contracts, or part-time contracts, like Margaux’s, and evening meetings that you can’t attend, there’s no way to commit yourself like

a PhD student, like Laure. Even if fields like DüN, or like BOAT now allow us to overcome our isolation, to share, to learn from our hesitations and discomforts…. Well, we’ll see how this coffee goes.

Off to the girls’ school. There’s no way to stop my mind from thinking about current projects. BOAT especially. It helps me ignore the annoyed motorists and the slalom of dog poop, the usual pitfalls on the way to school, from which I am beginning to perceive the screaming hubbub of children’s voices. BOAT was born out of the observation of one of the pilots, after a fruitful collaboration with Medecins For All, on social inclusion in the poor neighbourhoods of Barabas. We still had our offices on the canal at that time. Julien arrived one morning at the office and shared his morning reflection with us:

> It’s a bit incoherent, isn’t it? We work on urban projects, we come to work on the canal dock, passing by the informal workers and asylum seekers who are camped near our offices, but no research is done on them, on these populations who are nevertheless very present in the city! Like everyone else, we come to work, we badge at the gate, we pass the gate, and we leave behind all the urban reality that is supposed to be the focus of our interest.

He was right. So, we decided, Julien, Luca and I, to focus the work on the issues of welcoming migrant populations, in order to develop our connection with the neighbourhood and its inhabitants. Since he was the instigator and, as the pilot, the best placed to do so, Julien took the initiative for this action, made all the initial contacts and launched the group.

That’s how at the end of 2018, a few of us met our neighbours — the people of Ferdinand Park and in particular the Citizens’ Platform of Solidarity with Refugees of the Northern Neighbourhood — to consider with them ways of collaboration. This is how BOAT (Barabas Open to All newcomers) was born. Concretely, by means of interviews, meetings and discussions, we joined the Citizens’ Platform of Solidarity with Refugees to think about the relocation / redevelopment of the humanitarian reception centre that was supposed to open its doors in June 2021. And we are still investigating. The advantage is that we are accountable only to ourselves, among researchers involved in the field, and to our partners of the Platform and its users, all those workers and residents we used to pass by too quickly. Well, mission accomplished: my mental wanderings have led me to the school. The girls are there.

***

May 07, 2021

Today, I am almost warm. I even managed to get out of bed before Nassim’s hot coffee. An early spring perhaps. If only we weren’t locked up in our family worlds, if we could meet again outside of work, school (which is fortunately open) and home… The pandemic that eats away at us. The lack of social connection that eats away at us. So, our coffee meeting will take place at Laure’s apartment, it’s warmer than at the university.

Laure lives in Aracas, in the middle of Madinge. Long winding streets dotted with stalls selling products from all over the African continent, and elsewhere. What I like about Barabas is its ability to expose to passers-by what the official memory hides: the country has a colonial past, and as such, cannot ignore a long history of institutional racism. As a legacy of this history of violence and exploitation, the city is diverse, woven from the arrivals and settlements of people from other lands and horizons. With BOAT, we are in the middle of these topics.

I arrive at the front porch, a small building that looks crushed by its neighbours, all cramped. The door opens to a spiral staircase that is quite dark, but clean. Smell of pickled cabbage and overcooked rice. Purple faux-fur mules with tassels and a pair of swimming flip-flops in front of one front door, a green plant, mother-in-law tongue I think, in front of the next. Laure's door is decorated with just a simple doormat. All in sobriety and efficiency, this girl, decidedly. She opens the door, and we pass into her living room. It's a two-room apartment, the kitchen and the bathroom look out onto the inner courtyard, and the living room with the bed on top, in the mezzanine, looks onto the street. The desk is in the right corner of the large double window of the living room, the sofa and the armchair in which Mathias is already sitting are against the wall, partly under the mezzanine, facing the window. There is another bookcase on the left wall. A hand-painted poster of a Mexican movie from the 1970s, some knick-knacks and plants on the bookcase. Small notebooks lined up on the shelf behind the desk. This one is incredibly neat. Nothing to do with mine, always littered with bundles of articles, invoices, hastily scribbled notes, a nameless mess of papers that stresses Nassim, but comforts me. Each person's creative processes are impenetrable: we each have our own system, our own rhythm, our own temporality. If only the work world could adapt to this dimension that is so essential to human happiness: the relativity of the time needed to create, whether it is for craftsmanship or intellectual realisation… But once again I'm rambling, and I've lost the thread. Focus, old girl, otherwise you risk being seen as arrogant and distant, as too often.

Mathias explains to me that they started to discuss, with the recorder on, the relationships with the DüN project's users and publics, and the status and audibility of their words, along with the fact that we managed to relay them to the project leaders. Basically, have we really succeeded? That is the question. Laure evokes the role of the researcher as translator, which Louis had mentioned during an internal seminar when Marvolab was just starting; it's an idea she finds striking. We would thus be the translators and relays of the field to the project managers. So that 'field' rhymes with 'people', so that the renovation takes into account the diversity of the uses already present or the desired uses of the Church and the surrounding district.

— Do you remember, Claire, when we went to see the guys who were smoking grass on the Place Sainte-Thérèse? Mathias asks me.
— Yes, of course, the weather was nice and I was not very comfortable because I was wearing a summer dress… Getting leered at by these guys.
— Wait, I'm going to get Delphine's transcript, says Laure… By the way, Delphine apologises because she can't come.
— Fortunately, we managed to do the interviews before the pandemic, because in retrospect, our DüN fieldwork would have been useless without the mapping workshops and the interviews.
— I have it, the transcript, Laure interrupts, triumphantly, from her screen. I'll read it for you. I had highlighted this passage to integrate it into the story I have to write. It's a young man, in his twenties, and his friend, when asked what they thought of the renovation, they said: 'We think it's a good project and for sure it will work, but it doesn't offer jobs for the young people of the district. We think it's good that there is a 250m2 space for the youth centre. But, the activities of the TROMB, we think it's not directly addressed to the young people of the district… TROMB, they come down with their music but it's not really a music for us'.
— You're right, it's a good choice of a quote: we have the issues in a nutshell. Renovate for whom? To attract audiences who will go to hear jazz or contemporary music? Or for the local kids, who are also partly the ones who make young women feel uncomfortable in some of the spaces near the site… Basically, how do you juggle the different audiences, the desire to improve the current situation carried by the municipality?
— It reminds me of what Maël told me about the Contrevent Slaughterhouses, Mathias adds. I showed him some maps of the participants that I was reworking to improve the sharpness and all that… He was almost overwhelmed by the work we had done with the inhabitants… And he told me, basically, that in Slaughterhouse, it had been harder to integrate the residents into the discussion. He said to me, I remember, it made me laugh: 'Still, I have never seen one of the meat wholesalers that I interviewed come to a Marvolab seminar, some of the residents from the working classes, it is sometimes difficult to reach them'.
— That's why practical tools are so important, I say… I mean, we had the maps. Everything we talked about together, Laure, do you remember the day of the manaaqish? Talking about how it was hard to make the qualitative appear in maps and so on. Well, I think that it was by dealing with all that, by using the map as a communication tool both among ourselves — researchers from different disciplines, and also with the people in the neighbourhood, that we managed to short-circuit both the professional discipline and social partitions… So, yes, Laure, we MUST integrate the extract of the young man that you quoted in the story. This is important if we don't want to lock ourselves up again in an ivory tower with its jargon, under the pretext of reflexivity.
— Seriously. I agree 100%. In fact, it is by depicting things schematically that we truly become interdisciplinary,' adds Mathias. Through schemas we manage to short-circuit specialised languages, jargons, without having an established lexicon. Instead of drawing up a common lexicon, we use a drawing, a diagram, for example. This enables these forms of communication between disciplines and with non-researchers, too. Our maps were not so much to develop a real cartographic capacity as to develop a visual mediation between different types of participants.

— Absolutely, even if it was an enormous task to seek out all points of view and include people, adds Laure. Nine workshops after all! Do you remember when we had to rework the participants' maps to make three zoom views? It was quite tricky to agree on the choice of legends, symbols… The maps were for the exhibition, therefore for the public authorities as well as for the associations and users. All this work of synthesising the maps that we did at the end was something I was not at all familiar with. We even had to manage the technical tools of axonometry, a term I'd never even heard of before doing research at Marvolab! And that was an evolution: to learn a language, a vocabulary, things that were not necessarily obvious to me.

I sip my coffee while we share an approving silence. She is really a good student, Laure.

Axonometry… If I had been a sociologist, I would have done anything to avoid it, I think. Back to the bottom of my cup… I have to leave in forty minutes to take the girls to the natural history museum. We promised them an afternoon of dinosaurs… Laure's coffee is excellent, by the way. I must admit that I will always prefer Italian coffee to Ottoman coffee, as Nassim calls it with a smile. Ottoman to avoid nationalistic grabs at the beverage: Turkish, Greek, Albanian, Bosnian, Serbian, Yemeni, Egyptian coffee and so on… Each one claims it as their own. A bit like social scientists, in fact: each discipline is so convinced of its own way of doing things that when we find ourselves, as Laure mentioned, choosing legends together for a common map, it takes us by surprise. And yet, it is fruitful, this meeting between the users of the spaces on the one hand and those who think about these uses on the other…

Returning to the thread of the discussion:

— For me, the great paradox is that, in the end, it was not me, the geographer, who ended up producing the maps, but it was mainly Delphine, because she had cartographic tools that were more capable of representing qualitative data, in collaboration with you two. So I completely withdrew from that and finally, in my synthesis article on the project, I use the transcripts of the workshops instead. I completely left my discipline, geography… It also opened up new ways of thinking for me: can we use sociologist's methods in geography? And the case of Marvolab finally confirmed me in this direction. And these questions: how can we express emotions, feelings, subjective data, through cartography?

— What I find a pity, though, Mathias continues, is that in the end we did not have the posterity that we deserved. I mean, the exhibition — there is an image that marked me: in order to prepare the room made available for us to organise the event, we were the ones who did the cleaning, and afterwards the four of us were the ones who took down the picture rails and carried the trash bags. Nothing would have got done if we hadn't been so involved together, with the participants of the workshops. And yet, at the municipal level, after the enormous enthusiasm of the beginning, they remained rather lukewarm from the moment we started the work with the user groups… Saying: 'It's very interesting, thank you, but you are not here to co-design the project. Just to enrich the understanding of its context'. It's a bit frustrating, isn't it?

— Yes, it's true. But it depends on the project, fortunately, I answer him. You know, on BOAT, it's completely different. I work with Luca, who's an architect and also with Bastien, a doctoral researcher in sociology who is not part of Marvolab. And there, we have a great freedom of action, we feel useful, in fact. It was Luca who said to me: 'You see, it works better with activists!'

— What was he referring to? asks Laure.

— That's when Luca first arrived in Barabas. He came to sleep at our house, and during the dinner, we talked about Marvolab. I thought that Nassim was going to knock us out, but we cut it short! We were talking about BROOme, about common values that we never really defined together. And we were comparing the three projects, DüN, BROOme and BOAT. Luca was basically saying: 'Here, with BOAT, we've succeeded in communicating with the inhabitants and users through the collaboration with the associations. But it isn't a project supported by LAFRI, so we have more freedom! And so we can really take advantage of interdisciplinarity, among ourselves and with our partners, without wondering if our results and recommendations will be well received. And it can also work with Continent financed projects, no doubt, by the LAFRI, but then, as researchers, we have to deploy a great deal of diplomacy to find a place for ourselves and make what we bring out of the field, from the users, audible to the project leaders and financiers'. I think this is the frustrating side of the pilot's job: you are at the heart of this acrobatic diplomacy. And afterwards, either the researchers you employ grumble against you, or it's the funders who slap you on the hands. But either way, this kind of interdisciplinary action research is a unique opportunity to meet and work differently with people who are different from you. This is the main contribution of Marvolab and, at the same time, its dilemma.

Laure and Mathias laugh at this quote with such a Cornelian conclusion. I take the opportunity to tell them that I have to leave them, that I have to pick up the girls. Laure seems happy with this meeting, she has recorded everything and tells me while leaving that she will try to set up this same kind of informal meetings with the other members of Marvolab, to further her reflexive chapter. I decide to walk to the Museum, to enjoy the liveliness of the neighbourhood.

As I slowly make my way towards the museum this spring day, I think about BOAT and Luca. This is truly a turning point, for me, and for Luca as well, I think, even though he had to leave along the way. A bit like BROOme, but in contrast. The initial idea, within Marvolab, was to move from the logic of accompanying LAFRI projects, and return to a more territorial logic of a survey by district. Thus, we were planning to analyse the northern district and everything that happens there, especially in Ferdinand Park, which would shed light on certain logics that LAFRI had taken little notice of…. In itself, the idea of thinking of a decent shelter with basic services for the migrants gathered in the station

was already a political and critical starting point. In the framework of BOAT, we, the Marvolab researchers, critique public actors, but they are not LAFRI. We find a freedom of action and thought, this slightly sharpened point of view… Also, we are all in direct contact with the target audiences: the project leaders and the researchers. And that changes everything! In fact, when the managers of development or urban renewal projects know the local context, everything is different. I glimpse the shape of the museum, and perched on the giant dinosaur at the entrance, an unidentified wooden herbivore, my two kids with their incredibly eclectic outfits. I rush towards them, with open arms.

Meeting and collaborating: Marvolab at the heart of new urban synergies

May 25, 2021

'No! But why did I do that?' Laure came to see me this morning, in my lab office at the university. She was in a panic, at the end of her rope, completely overwhelmed, between writing her thesis and her fieldwork. And I, the good Samaritan, offered to help her.

Laure was stuck on Medecins For All. She followed my advice to write her reflective thesis chapter by field, and not by chronology, in order to consider the collective successes, the originality of critical and applied research as projected by Marvolab. But she doesn't really know Margaux, and doesn't dare ask her too much, knowing that she is seven months pregnant. In addition, Margaux stopped working for Marvolab to concentrate on her associative work in access to integrated care in working class neighbourhoods. As I like Margaux and we got on well during the first MasterClass on urban inclusion, I reassured Laure and took it upon myself, a modern-day heroine who is not at all overwhelmed, to record a discussion with Margaux at her home. A kind of synthesis of her Marvolab experience, seen through the prism of the Craftland Health Centre project, which she followed with Luca. Margaux was happy with my phone call:

> Actually seeing each other is still better than Zoom, even if the group workshop was cool! I should warn you, though, that I'm an uncontrolled hybrid, half whale, half bull, and you're probably going to have to help me off the couch so I can go to the bathroom every three minutes…

We laughed on the phone. Having had the distinct honour of giving birth to twins, I know only too well what dysmorphia means. It's interesting, being pregnant when working with vulnerable populations and urban boundaries. For me, it was an opportunity to experience in my own body what I could observe in the urban spaces I was studying: the mechanisms of enclosure, the difficulty of expressing one's vulnerability in front of those who do not experience it, the humiliation, too, of feeling inadequate to a city rhythm tailor-made for able-bodied, active and hurried people…

Here I am at the gate of Margaux's cottage. A tiny 1920's bungalow, with a very nice little garden behind, in Binerage. She also lives in the heart of the action! Perhaps this is one of the implicit keys to Marvolab's success: the

involvement of its researchers in the city is as intimate as it is professional. In any case, for Margaux, everything is intertwined: her partner is a doctor, she herself is a health sociologist and she accompanied the design of the health centre project carried out by Marvolab and Medecins For All in Binerage and Craftland. Quite a muddle… Here she comes, waddling on the threshold, all smiles. I follow her into the living room. It's warm: a bric-a-brac of plants, old furniture found here and there, expressionist metal sculptures and books, a bit everywhere. 'I'm more at ease with a blowtorch than with knitting', she laughs when I ask her about her sculptures:

— So, you came to the edge of Binerage to get my impressions on Marvolab? asks Margaux, slightly hilarious, while serving me a cup of hot rooibos. She falls into an old leather armchair, asking me to help her get up if necessary. It will be done.

— Yes, Laure is going in circles with this thesis writing thing. She has to write a first chapter, a kind of reflective perspective on the collective experience of Marvolab, its originality, its crossroads, its discomforts, its learnings, its successes… But she doesn't dare write it without being sure of what the others think… So I thought I'd give her a hand, because I'm interested. I guess the group workshop stimulated me! I want more… As I have an overdeveloped critical tendency, getting out to listen to each other allows me to put things into perspective, to see the adventure from a more nuanced point of view… And I think you are an indispensable piece of the puzzle! Because the Medecins For All project in Craftland was really a success, wasn't it? In terms of collaboration between you and Luca, and with the Medecins For All coordinator… What's her name again?

— Lucrèce! Margaux smiles. Yes, it worked well, it's a good example of co-design, of co-elaboration of an urban project, very early on. In fact, Lucrèce knew me, through the association where I work part-time… My partner and I had been planning this baby, you see, so I made sure I had things covered by accepting a contract alongside the one with Marvolab, because I knew that it would end after three years and making a child can take time. The proof! But that's not the point, so I met Lucrèce as an interlocutor in the actions that we lead with the association, for access to care of people with serious chronic diseases.

— And that's why they thought about you?

— Yes. Basically, Medecins For All wanted to build two integrated social health centres, ISHCs if you like acronyms. The idea, in two words, is to link social housing, neighbourhood social services such as family planning, administrative support for migrants and access to integrated health care, for people suffering from mental illnesses and for those with chronic diseases, etc. The advantage is that the centres can be used as a model for other organisations. Another advantage is that it guarantees anonymity for people: no one knows why you enter a ISHC… The challenge is to make sure that the different associations or actors who provide these services really cooperate. That it is not just a sharing of photocopiers but a real pooling of forces to fight against inequalities in access to services in the poorest districts.

— Quite a project, then!

— Yes, it's ambitious, but at the same time very challenging. Wait, if you help me out, I'll let you watch an excerpt from Lucretia's video, which we filmed during the first MasterClass… She speaks very well, better to listen to her than to paraphrase her, right?

I help Margaux get out of her chair, then watch her sway her hips to her office, adjacent to the living room. At least her working and living space is on the same level, only the bedrooms and the bathroom are upstairs, so she doesn't have to climb the stairs… She comes back with her computer and we settle down in the old bronze green leather sofa, very comfortable, facing a coffee table improvised on an empty electrical wiring reel. A blonde woman in her forties, very energetic, appears on the screen. Lucretia. She talks about her collaboration with Luca, who is an architect associated with Marvolab, and Margaux, on the *ISHC* project:

> Our partner, VillRenov, came to us and asked for a set of specifications. I didn't even know what that was since I'm a doctor. So I went to find Margaux and Luca to call on their help! Today we had to define the content of the premises for 2022, in terms of walls, doors, door handles, wall colour. It's complicated when you don't know exactly what the activities will be in 2022! So we conceived co-design workshops and brought together actors from the Barabasian territory who came from the different circles that we planned to put together in the integrated services centre. People from the Office for Birth and Childhood, from mental health, from physical health, from social services… And we also added inter-cultural mediators and experts on "urban experience" to have the view from the users. From all of this, we were able to produce a programme, an architectural flow chart and recommendations regarding the needs and perceptions of users. It was really interesting and if it came together in the end, it was thanks to interdisciplinarity. Both the interdisciplinarity between Luca, Margaux and me, because an architect-urbanist, a sociologist and a doctor together, well, it already took some time for us to understand each other, even when we were designing the workshops! And then there's the interdisciplinarity between all the actors who participated.

Margaux nods, listening to her former partner.

You see, she speaks for herself, doesn't she? In fact, what counts, I think, in retrospect, is to collaborate with actors who know the field on which urban projects are developed… It's a bit the same for BOAT, isn't it? Luca is very complimentary on the subject!

We laugh. It's true that BOAT was a breath of fresh air and a renewal of intellectual enthusiasm for Luca, Julien and me. Luca told me about his disappointments after the aborted 'green trips' to Berlin, and the disillusion of BROOme: how his enthusiasm, born from the collaboration with Margaux and Medecins for All, had dried up. And how BOAT restored his faith in what an interdisciplinary research team can bring to the city in the making, between architect, sociologist and geographer. And also that it was a way to overcome internal hierarchies, through collaboration among young doctoral researchers,

post-doctoral students and pilots on the same project. It is this encounter on shared, sustainable, intense grounds, with non-academic actors, that makes Marvolab unique and strong. And what gives it meaning. After a sip of rooibos, Margaux continues her explanation:

— We had a good coordination with Lucrèce. First, we met and designed the workshops with clear objectives. And each one found what they needed there. Lucrèce could draw lessons for her project, and we for the research. Both were nourished. It was a total win-win situation! For the design of the workshops, Lucrèce came with a lot of feedback from the field, from health professionals and associations, what they would be attentive to, what they could do, what they could not do, what could be expected of them… I was more concerned with questions of understanding the dynamics, what they could be asked to do and when, and what points should be explored in terms of knowledge about integrated care… Luca was interested in how we could get the participants to move, through the models, make them draw something and how we could get them to answer what we wanted them to answer… So he was thinking about what we could get them to do and I was thinking about what we could get out of the speeches, too. There was a good conjunction there. In fact, it was really fun. All three of us put on seven-league boots working together! And the best part was that Lucrèce was in charge of mobilising the participants each time! She told us, here is such a day we will have fifteen participants… What a luxury!

— I can imagine! For DüN, this was the hardest part: mobilising local residents, meeting with them and convincing them of the value of the workshops, without knowing how their words and maps would be integrated into the final project, and if they would even be integrated…

— The Craftland ISHC was a rare experience as a researcher. The only downside in my opinion is that we lack visibility over time. I mean, you know, my contract ended before the project was even validated. Now, the ISHC is under construction, but I haven't heard back from VillRenov or the real estate developer who is handling the project.

— You mean, you regret the time limit to the converging between researchers, inhabitants and partners?

— Yes, I know it sounds totally utopian, the idea that it will last forever… And that even if everyone goes back to business as usual, people came to what we were organising and they said we were refreshing and useful! But personally, I regret this loss of contact, especially with the architectural office that elaborated the final design brief, which takes into account a lot what we did with Lucrèce and Luca, but without mentioning Marvolab… I had looked for the design brief for a conference where I wanted to talk about the ISHC. I wanted to show how much we had contributed to the development, in fact… And then, I also had the guy from the real estate development on the phone, who told me: 'but of course, what you did was really a criterion for the design brief, and for recruiting and selecting the architectural firm. It changed everything. That's great! And indeed, when you look at the plans, there's the community space, there's the

double reception area, there's a lot of things… They made compromises, of course. But it's still interesting to see how integrated care principles were translated architecturally, including maximum accessibility to certain audiences and a broad public.

— So the co-design workshops that the three of you organised, and the synthesis produced afterwards, really had an impact on the final plan and project?

— Yes, they definitely did. Afterwards, I understand that we didn't get any feedback: there were some twists and turns in the real estate business, so for VillRenov, informing the Marvolab is the least of their worries, and I can understand that. But it's just that there's no follow-up and we were there a little bit… We were the extra soul of the project. Then, the person in charge of the project within Medecins for All changed, the building chosen in the end was not the same as at the beginning, all that… There is something that has been lost, some information that has been lost in the history of their project and it's a pity…

— Nevertheless, it's quite unique as an intensity of interdisciplinary collaboration, between the academic world and architects or developers, isn't it?

— Yes, you see, you're not the only one who is afraid of being too critical! I think that's what our research jobs are all about… Margaux smiles as she strokes her belly, then continues. But all this has reinforced my conviction: research must be more 'trans' in its ambition. I mean: collaborating with different worlds all linked by different forms of knowledge about a social and urban issue, this is crucial. For me, it's a key in the way to approach complex problems. That's where the university has to change in the way it looks at individual work. An individual thesis, no! We need to be able to increase the ability to get people to work together. For me, that's fundamental and a project like this is where we need to go.

— Do you think this is about to change? That the fact that Marvolab exists is an open door in that direction?

— Well, frankly, yes, but Marvolab is not the university… We need to multiply the experience. And above all, I think that the modes of academic evaluation evolve in parallel… Look, I'm out of the academic world now. I'm concentrating on the associative world, and it's good to get out of this constant pressure between peers, to see who will be the most ambitious, etc. Personally, what I like is to be in the field, to meet people, to listen to them, to understand their apprehension of spaces. And the problem is that all the time you spend in the field is worth like peanuts when you're in front of the rector, who looks at you and says: 'but you haven't published in this journal and you only have three journals, that's not good and you haven't published in English…'. I say, 'Well, yes, but I have forty publications with the people I worked with at Barabas and they sent me back comments that my presence, I mean, our collaboration, helped them to design their project, to run the project and to make decisions.' So, yes, I question the university's mechanism of excellence, to the extent that there are ways to give value to research work that is not just publication-based. But for

the moment, it's a bit like preaching in the desert! The proof is that I no longer have a job… She smiles. But that's not what's important, really. The important thing is to love what you do, and on that point, everything is fine!

This is what I like about Margaux: critical, synthetic and optimistic. It feels good. Thinking outside the scientific box. Marvolab connects the academic to the world, but the exit from the ivory tower will not come about in a day. What did Luca say again? 'Marvolab made us meet people we would never have known otherwise, people we would never have worked with'. It's true. Luca was talking about humility. This is where the collective adventure is powerful. The humility of the field. Becoming translators, tightrope walkers, acrobats… To create links, tenuous, fragile and sometimes durable. This is what we did best.

Building synergies and making models: rethinking city policies

June 09, 2021

Ah here it is! At last! The terraces have reopened, the summer is here, and vacations are soon as well. And I have an appointment for a coffee OUTSIDE, on the parvis Saint-Glin, with Laure and Iris. This is the final piece of the puzzle, I think. A hint of peasantry and short circuits, to have an idea of what Marvolab could concretely accomplish on the different grounds….

Iris looks very relaxed too. Getting back into social contact, getting out of the house, what a joy! Who said that culture and social relations were not essential? Iris smiles at me. As soon as I sit down, Laure joins us. She has the stressed air of the doctoral student in progress, slightly exhausted too, but still more relaxed than this winter. After the greetings, Iris resumes her story. 'You can record, if you want', she says to Laure.

Iris was telling me about the MasterClass on Ecology, which took place from January 28 to February 8, 2019. She was involved in a conflict that had erupted one morning between a market gardener participating in Retour à la terre-Barbas (RTB) and the project coordinator, from Barabas Environment. Iris had managed to defuse the argument by reopening the discussion on the question of agriculture as a yield or as an ecological issue, thus going beyond the interpersonal confrontation to broaden the horizon of the debate. A diplomat in the making… In a nutshell, the project aims to support professionals in the production of sustainable food for Barabas. RTB brings together market gardeners, cooks, a shepherd, weavers, among others, mainly in Contrevent. The idea is to set up an urban agricultural network of production, transformation and distribution in a short circuit for a local, healthy, quality food accessible to all Barabassians. In terms of actors, RTB brings together four associations and two administrations.

— And Marvolab in this, I ask, while cutting short Iris, who has collected some notes for Laure.

— Ah Marvolab, of course! Iris laughs. Well, Marvolab is kind of the ring in which the conflicts between all these actors are expressed and resolved!

— So, you are a punching bag? I ask.

— Not really, but I make sure that everyone manages to discuss

horizontally… To make the administrators understand that market gardening cannot be understood in terms of immediate profitability, for example. To stress the importance of the sustainability of the land, as well. To make people understand the different time frames. In fact, if I have to summarise, I would say that Marvolab plays an inclusive role for RTB: our role is to create encounters and sustainable interactions between agriculture seen from the economic side, on the one hand, and ecology on the other.

— So you're more like a buffer zone than a punching bag, says Laure.

— Yes, I am! That's what Marvolab is all about: a researcher collecting the voices of people, their understanding of their activities, their wishes, their annoyances, their relationships to spaces. My role is to be exposed to this multiplicity of voices. And to give an audible account of the urban complexity, thus understood. I build bridges, in fact, it's very architectural, she jokes. Or I pull slacklines, to make the image less hackneyed!

Laure notes, and Iris continues while I dream of a local organic and sustainable agriculture…

— In this work of matchmaker, if you'll allow me the expression, a whole series of actors working in separate sites meet… In fact, with RTB, what we have managed to do is to define a reticular city, to get away from the approach in terms of territorial borders. And there is a real potential for spatial revolution! I mean, we are turning the understanding of the city around by considering the open spaces, the quality of the soil and not its land value…. A striking image is that of the shepherd who uses the metropolitan territory beyond its limits and boundaries, he transhumes into the city!

I remember: his name is Thibaut and he raises long-haired white sheep with brown spots, outdoors, in permanent meadows and by making them transhumance along the green areas of Barabas. Sheep at the foot of the towers. The image seems to be inherited from the dystopian films that Nassim likes so much: when humanity is transformed into zombies, the sheep will return to the city. In the meantime, Thibaut raises them in a much more serene and less apocalyptic way, getting wool and meat from them, in collaboration with small processing workshops.

— And then you co-constructed the AgroCity seminar, didn't you? asks Laure, still studious, while resuming the dialogue.

— Yes, that came later. And it is also an indisputable contribution from Marvolab. First of all, creating synergies, getting people to express themselves, leading the dialogue. Then, to organise the reflection. This is where the spatial revolution I just mentioned comes in, when we all sit down together to develop new ways of thinking about our spaces, more adapted to the city we want to see. In the case of RTB, a city that integrates the ecological transition, that is not content with green-washing, but is committed to developing a local productive fabric that respects the environment, workers and consumers… Here, I must say, we touch the heart of what LivingLabs means: applied and critical research in the city.

Laure is super focused, yet relaxed. This is the kind of speech she needs, and I have to admit that Iris combines conviction, enthusiasm and a mind skilled in sharp synthesis. Another of Marvolab's strengths is undoubtedly that we have been able to assemble a research team of strong, competent and committed people. Even if we did not manage to work together as much as perhaps we would have liked. The fact remains that meeting each other, through seminars, MasterClasses or in the field, has nourished me intellectually. And I am not the only one. I recommend a second coffee because, despite the pleasure of savouring it on the terrace, it is too weak compared to the refined Arabica of my dear Nassim. That's it, I'm getting lost again. The beginning of summer does not help me concentrate… Laure brings me back to the present:

— Wait, that reminds me of what Julien said about TaPLace, you know, the Aracas barracks that are going to be transformed into student housing. It was at that seminar three weeks ago, where we were mostly sociologists and geographers, you were the only architect I think,' she said to Iris… Julien was doing the assessment of Marvolab. Ah, here it is! I transcribed it, he said: 'the idea is to question the Continent on its strategies for the urban and economic development of its regions. And for the moment, we have succeeded in attracting attention and obtaining credibility and legitimacy, in particular through the publication of the work and the visibility of the activities that take place at Marvolab. One example is the study day organised by the Planning Department around TaPLace, when the notion of *inclusive enclave* was discussed, with experts, politicians of the region, not so much inclined towards conceptualisation… It made them see the added value of social sciences as urban knowledge; I am not saying that it was revolutionary for them or for public action, but it was an occasion to remind them that the work we were doing had been passed on, had been understood… The other consequence is that once we have developed practical concepts, it is interesting to be able to come back to academic colleagues to develop a seminar type of talk, a scientific type, coupled with the practical dimension that is often missing from work on the issue'.

— It's true, smiles Iris… The concept of the inclusive enclave has really caught on. When you think about it, in fact, it means that, for many, urban development projects are undertaken in enclosed spaces, and therefore with social, economic, physical boundaries. So, the purpose of the renovation, and the reflection on it that Marvolab engages in with the project managers, is to connect these enclaves to their social and spatial environment…

— Yes, it's simple, but it was necessary to think about it, or rather to know how to summarise it, I add. Is it true what Gustave was saying, that Perspective Barabas is concocting a series of urban projects of a social nature inspired by the concept?

— Apparently yes, answers Laure. It's a great success: the concept has also had a certain resonance internationally, has been applied to the reconversion of a large Parisian site — the former Saint-Paul hospital — and has been discussed in various American universities…

— That's the final word, I say. To revisit the notions of openness, closure, accessibility, conviviality, inclusion and hospitality, by creating links between different actors. Then, by encouraging their reflexivity, in order to elaborate concepts that can be heard both in the academic field and in the field of urban planning… In fact, like Thibaut, the shepherd followed by Iris, we are transhumant from research to planning, passing through market gardening, community medicine, social work, etc.

— Yes, it has not always been easy, between us, vis-à-vis the donors, or the partners in the field, or even internally, but in the end, I think that this is what the Marvolab experience is: a collective adventure, with its steps forward, its doubts, its discomforts, its setbacks and its encounters. A project that aims to rethink the city in the making, at different scales…

— Well, on this grandiose final, I leave you, I interrupt… I have to go and pick up my offspring, who will no doubt be in a great hurry to attack manu militari the urban spaces near the school… Are you okay, Laure, do you have everything you need?

— Yes, I think so. It's still a bit cluttered and confusing, but it feels good to have a stimulating note to continue writing!

— And most of all, enjoy the summer, with as much sunshine as possible and as little pandemic as possible, smiled Iris, picking up her things too. See you soon!

Fictional story — Characters

Members of Marvolab

Laure:
Doctoral student in sociology at the Free University of Barabas, her doctoral research is funded (for 4 years) by Marvolab, as part of a research within the urban inclusion pole. She mainly participated in the fieldwork on DüN, as well as organisation of the first MasterClass.

Claire:
Post-doctoral student in geography at the University of Glass (near Barabas), under a 4-year research contract with Marvolab, linked to the urban inclusion pole. She participated in the interdisciplinary fields of BROOme, DüN and BOAT.

Iris:
Professor of Architecture at the University of Barabas and scientific coordinator of the urban ecology division within Marvolab. She was the main instigator of the Retour à la Terre – Barabas survey field and participated in the BROOme survey.

Esther:
Marvolab manager at the University of Barabas, in charge of communication, organisation of events, publications and MasterClasses initiated by Marvolab, as well as relations between universities, between researchers, with LAFRI and external partners of Marvolab.

Jeanne:
Marvolab manager at the University of Glass. She performs the same tasks as Esther, for her home university.

Maël:
Doctoral student in sociology at the University of Glass, whose doctoral research, like Laure's, is financed for 4 years by Marvolab. He is linked to the urban production pole. His main investigation is on the Contrevent Slaughterhouses project, but he also participated in the interdisciplinary fieldwork on DüN.

Margaux:
Post-doctoral student in sociology of health under contract financed by Marvolab for 4 years, at the Free University of Barabas. She is attached to the urban inclusion pole and led the survey on the Craftland and Binerage health centre, in partnership with the association Medecins for All.

Delphine:
a doctoral student in urban planning who was funded for 4 years as part of her doctoral research at the University of Glass. Associated with the urban inclusion pole, she participated in the fieldwork on DüN.

Luca:
Post-doctoral student in architecture, he has been funded for 4 years by Marvolab to work both on the urban inclusion cluster, as part of the fieldwork on the Craftland Health Centre and Binerage, as well as on the urban ecology cluster, for the partnership with Retour à la Terre-Barabas. He also participated in the fieldwork on BOAT.

Julien:
Professor of Sociology at the Free University of Barabas, he is one of the five pilots behind Marvolab. He mainly contributed to the surveys of the urban inclusion pole, notably the Slaughterhouses and DüN and is the instigator of the BOAT project.

Thomas:
Professor of urban planning at the University of Glass, he is one of the five pilots of Marvolab, and was mainly involved in the urban production axis, notably in the investigation of the TaPlace project, briefly mentioned in the narrative.

Gustave:
Professor of architecture at the Free University of Barabas, he is one of the five pilots of Marvolab. He closely followed Luca and Margaux's investigation of the Craftland Health Centre, as well as the TaPlace project.

Louis:
Professor of geography at the University of Glass, one of the five Marvolab pilots, and the interlocutor of the researchers of the urban ecology pole, notably in the framework of Retour à la Terre-Barabas.

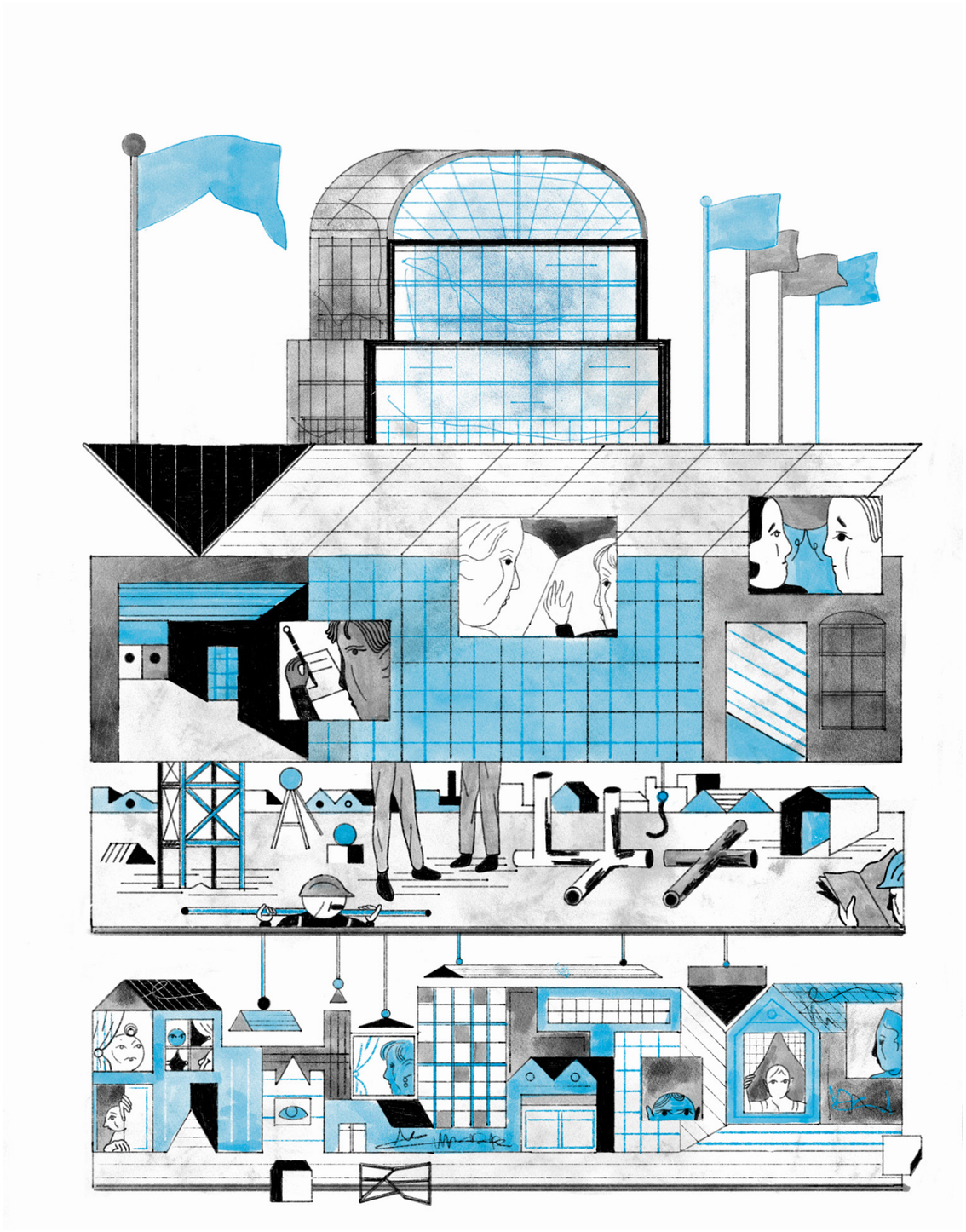
Veronica:
Professor of sociology at the Free University of Barabas, one of the five pilots and Laure's thesis director, associate researcher at Marvolab in the urban inclusion cluster. Like Laure, she is particularly involved in DüN and BROOme.

External partners of Marvolab

Lucrèce:
project leader of the Integrated Health Centre project within the association Medecins for All, in Craftland and Binerage.

Dragan:
architect, urban planner, author and professor of urban planning and architecture at School of Design, he is one of the main external speakers who played a role both before the creation of Marvolab and during the first MasterClass.

Thibaut:
an urban shepherd, he is one of the partners of the Retour à la Terre-Barabas project.



© Lucas Gicquel

Reflections on managing a research project in academia

Sara Cesari and Louise Prouteau

Sara Cesari and Louise Prouteau joined the project shortly after it began. In February 2016, a project manager at the University of Louvain-la-Neuve (UCLouvain) was recruited to manage the Metrolab project. At ULB, the situation was different since the project manager position had initially been envisioned as an administrative support until July 2016, when ULB decided to recruit a project manager under the same terms as UCLouvain had done. Funded by the 2014-2020 programming, the project involved the construction of an interdisciplinary and interuniversity laboratory for applied urban research. Five years later, Sara Cesari (Metrolab's project manager at UCLouvain) took the opportunity to write a professional report as required for the postgraduate Master's degree in Public Affairs that she completed in October 2021. She wanted to retrace her position in the process involving academia, public funds and public policy implementation practices. Under her impulse, it was decided to collectively develop some of the topics of her essay to contribute to this publication on the challenges of applied urban research and interdisciplinarity.

Introduction

Understanding and interpreting our surroundings has always been a prerogative of human beings who, driven by a desire to know, constantly wonder about the meaning of their existence. Curiosity as an inquisitive desire about the nature of an object or phenomenon is the fuel of science and human study.

Research is therefore the driving force behind the progress and development of individuals and of society in general: research is conducted to acquire new knowledge that can be used in concrete ways in everyday life and

be useful for economic well-being and for improving the quality of life. This is why there is a great deal of international attention paid to public and private investment in research.

This chapter aims to analyse the functioning of European funding for research and innovation, paying particular attention to how the way that projects work in in the public sector influences the academic world and the advancement of research more generally.

More specifically, the idea is to investigate the implications for management and communication of the implementation of a research and development project financed by ERDF funds from the perspective of two project managers.

We have chosen to adopt this perspective for two main reasons. First, we can provide our personal experience as project managers as an experiential legacy in support of the analysis. Second, the project manager is a third professional figure, as he or she is neither a researcher nor a member of the university and administrative sector, but is rather a kind of consultant or service provider, as defined by Büttner and Leopold (2015, p. 55) in charge of completing a project by pursuing specific objectives within a defined timeframe.

We therefore believe that the project manager's perspective can provide a more neutral way of understanding the dynamics of *projectification* in the academic world and in the public sector more generally.

The first section will attempt to outline the institutional framework by highlighting the existing instruments of European funding. The second part will focus on the project as a device for the implementation of public policies and the effect that this approach has in the academic world. Finally, Metrolab, a project funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) 2014-2020, will be examined as a case study in research and innovation.

At the methodological level, the paper is therefore structured around concentric sets that critically go to the heart of the problem while establishing problematic connections between them. The search for information was based on sources available online for the part concerning research funding instruments and the existing literature was reviewed for the parts on investments in research and innovation, the approach taken to projects and its impact on academia.

Relying on our field experience managing a research project financed by European Structural Development Funds, we will try to understand the problems that emerged during the implementation and development of the project. In particular, we will focus on the difficulties of communication between different levels and how it could be improved to optimise the impact of public funds overall, and in research and innovation more specifically. In approaching this research, we have chosen to explore some of the questions that came up over the course of the project. Our attempt to answer these questions could only come at the end of the project, during the time dedicated to evaluation, self-analysis and reflection to provide pathways for possible future improvement.

What are the implications of the project paradigm in academia for advancing in research? How can we manage an academic research project even if we are not researchers? What does it entail in terms of building a consensus around the project? How can we leverage the administrative, managerial and

temporary organisation-building knowledge acquired over the years to maximise the impact of public funding?

EU research funding instruments in Belgium

Research and innovation are helping to make Europe a place where people live and work better. Therefore, Research and Innovation is at the heart of the European Commission's policies to promote jobs, growth and investment by providing solutions and knowledge to address urgent problems and long-term societal challenges. All Member States have their own research policies and funding schemes, but it is more efficient to tackle certain issues by working together, which is why, as part of the European Union's shared competences, research and innovation are also funded at the European level. Based on close cooperation between the institutions in Brussels and the individual Member States, its overall aim is to transform the results of scientific research into services and products for citizens. In addition to improving citizens' quality of life, this process helps the EU to remain competitive and at the top of the global market.

The budget, beneficiaries and rules for using these instruments in the EU are defined by the strategies proposed by the Commission, which are formalised in the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). The MFF is essentially the budget of the European Union, which covers a seven-year period and is the result of months, if not years, of political compromises.[1]

To put it simply, the result of these negotiations is a series of programmes, each with its own budget, research and development component. The main ones are summarised in the following table[2].

The most important innovation policy programme listed here is certainly Horizon Europe, with a budget of more than €95 billion over seven years, making it the largest public research programme in the world. Yet for the purposes of this article, there is another, more interesting source of research funding appearing in the table: European Structural Investment Funds (ESIF), which are part of the cohesion policy.

The cohesion policy was established in 1989 as one of the main countermeasures against the expected imbalances of the single market created shortly thereafter in 1992. Since then, the cohesion policy has increased considerably in scope and budget, becoming the largest and most important policy area dedicated to the implementation of targeted project-based policies (European Commission, 2008, pp. 10-25).

The introduction of the EU's cohesion policy marked a fundamental change, both in the existing governmental system and in the reform of European regional policy and existing approaches by creating structural policies in less developed regions. Based on Article 174 of the Treaty on the Functioning of

1 For further information: Eunews. (2021, 16 June), La politica di innovazione dell'Unione Europea. https://www.eunews.it/2021/06/16/la-politica-di-innovazione-dellunione-europea/152667

2 The table was taken and translated from the following article: Lo Spiegone (2021, 8 June). The Innovation Policy of the European Union. https://lospiegone.com/2021/06/08/la-politica-di-innovazione-dellunione-europea/

PROGRAMME	AREA OF INTEREST
Programmes included in the Multiannual Financial Framework	
Common agricultural policy and rural development	Agriculture, sustainable rural development, support for farmers
COSME — Competitiveness of Enterprises and SMEs	Support for small and medium-sized enterprises
CEF — Connecting Europe Facility	Infrastructure, transport, energy
Copernicus	Climate change, security, observation of terrestrial phenomena
Creative Europe	Culture, media and cross—sectoral strands
Erasmus+	Education, international mobility
EU Health Programme	Health and care
Euratom Research and Training Programme	Nuclear research and innovation
EFSI — European Funds to Strategic Investments	Private investment incentive, formerly known as the 'Juncker Plan'
ESIF — European Structural and Investment Funds	Group of five funds covering the following areas: Regional development including ERDF Measures to support workers Rural development Fisheries and coastal development
GALILEO	Space, orbital satellites
Horizon Europe	Main EU programme for research and development
PADR — Preparatory Action on Defence Research	Defence and security
LIFE — Programme for the Environment and Climate Action	Environment, climate change
Programmes not included in the Multiannual Financial Framework	
IPCEI — Important Projects of Common European Interest	Transnational projects of strategic importance
Innovation Fund	Technologies with low environmental impact
Research Fund for Coal and Steel	Coal and steel

Figure 1. Table of the European Union's programmes with a research and development component, © Lo Spiegone, 8 June 2021.

the EU, it enhances economic, social and territorial cohesion to reduce the gap between different regions and the backwardness of less developed areas. The first ESIF programming dates to 1994-1999 and follows a seven-year scheme. It now includes the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and focuses on research and innovation, digital technologies, support for the low-carbon economy, the sustainable management of natural resources and small businesses.

Each Member State of the EU signs partnership agreements on the European structural and investment funds. A partnership agreement is defined by the European Commission as the reference document for programming structural and investment fund projects and linking them to the aims of the Europe 2020 growth strategy. It defines the strategy and investment priorities chosen by the relevant Member State and presents a list of national and regional operational programmes (OPs) that it seeks to implement, as well as an indicative annual financial allocation for each OP. For the programming period 2014-20, each Member State has produced a partnership agreement (PA) in cooperation with the European Commission.[3]

This means that the European framework is adapted to better meet the needs of each national context. Once the PA is signed, funds are managed by regional authorities, which organise calls for projects, follow up on project implementation, conduct first-level monitoring and make payments to the project leader.

In Belgium, there are three managing authorities and three different OPs corresponding to the three regions: Brussels-Capital, Wallonia and Flanders. This particular situation caused some problems for Belgium in reaching its PA, as the European Commission recalled in its summary of the negotiations[4]: 'The cohesion policy is fully devolved to the three Belgian regions. Hence the difficulty to arrive at a 'Belgian' partnership agreement. (…) The first official version was completely lacking a Belgian dimension in its analysis and choices made)'.

This adaptation to regional situations can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, it is certainly a strength, since the plans are tailored to the specific needs of each territory. On the other hand, and especially in Belgium, the approach may entail certain pitfalls and difficulties due to the complexities of governing the territory itself, which make it difficult to develop an overarching vision of the funded projects.

Having made these preliminary remarks, we can now examine the content of the ERDF policy in support of research. While the ERDF funds research and innovation projects, it is important to note that the research funded in this framework very rarely deals with the social sciences, according to our research. Indeed, in the 2014-2020 programming, the other projects funded under the priority 'Axis 1: Strengthening research and improving the transfer and emergence of innovation' are projects oriented towards technical developments, with an

3 See: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/what/glossary/p/partnership-agreement

4 See: Summary of the Partnership Agreement for Belgium, 2014-2020, 29-10-2014 (https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/partnership-agreement-belgium-summaryoct2014_en.pdf).

economic dimension or the strengthening of expertise. The following projects from the Brussels-Capital Region programme are examples of a project funded along the first Axis:

— **Living labs Brussels Retrofit:** promotes the renovation of housing in Brussels by creating special spaces dedicated to experimentation and innovation that can lead to innovative solutions to be used on the regional renovation market.
— **ONCO-TRA.bru:** creates a Brussels platform for training in cancerology.
— **ICITY-RDI.bru:** strengthens the existing ULB-VUB centres of excellence in information technology and creates a benchmark centre for digital companies.
— **TRIAXES:** supports Brussels project leaders with a group of experts for the serial development of an industrial product or to follow up on the development of a collection or fashion accessory.

If we look further in Belgium, for example in Flanders, this very same priority has been divided in eight clusters:

1. sustainable chemistry (linked to plastics, sustainable construction, technical textiles and bio-based technology)
2. specialised manufacturing
3. personalised healthcare (medical technologies: molecular diagnostics, nano technology and nano electronics)
4. specialised logistics (food sector, pharmaceuticals, recycling, etc.)
5. specialised agri-food sector
6. integrated construction-environmental-energy cluster
7. smart systems
8. creative industries and services (new media, e-health, social innovation)

In this respect, the Metrolab project is unique in that it offers applied social science research and the application submitted by Metrolab's promoters emphasised the importance of institutional innovation. As Mathieu Berger, general coordinator of the project, writes:

> The proposal to introduce principles and practices of 'inquiry' into this public policy was intended to raise awareness in the Brussels Region about a pragmatic view of public policy; a view that not only should public policy be investigated and evaluated after it is completed, but that it is a process of inquiry and evaluation unto itself[5] (Berger, 2020, pp. 432- 433).

The project is therefore original not only in terms of its scope, but also in terms of its method. This singular aspect made the project even more interesting for a series of local and European organisations such as the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, which selected Metrolab as a practical model in its *Handbook of Sustainable Urban Development Strategies.*[6]

5 Free translation.

6 See: https://urban.jrc.ec.europa.eu/urbanstrategies/

The regional character of the ERDF and the experimental and innovative aspect of Metrolab created some difficulties in mapping the ecosystems of FEDER, as we will discuss later in this article. However, we think that the particular nature of the fund and of the operational programme of the Brussels-Capital Region, which is rather welcoming to initiatives aimed at highlighting societal changes, enabled the funding and development of a project such as Metrolab, which undoubtedly represented a development opportunity for academia and the public authorities.

The project as a device for implementing public policies

As we have seen, the European Union provides funds for research and innovation through different programmes, which in turn contain different projects. In the light of our experience in project management, we deem it necessary here to think about the approach to projects in the public sector and more specifically in the European Union.

Such consideration, which is not intended to be exhaustive but only to provide paths for investigation, attempts to nourish and enrich the debate on the European Union's funding methods on the one hand and opens a necessary perspective for interpreting European policy practices on the other. Last but not least, this reflection will help to shed light on the repercussions that this type of mechanism has on research and innovation and on the academic world.

Project funding has become an integral part of EU policy over the last 50 years, with the implementation of the funding mechanisms for structural policies (part of cohesion policies) and rural development and the promotion of innovation and research. The European Union has been a catalyst in this regard. It continues to be a strong generator of project-based activities and has participated in the expansion of the project management (PM) system in contemporary public affairs.

Indeed, in recent decades we have witnessed the emergence of a characteristic 'project world' of European funding, in which a great many people are employed to deal with the various stages of this process: from the acquisition, implementation, management and evaluation to the monitoring of EU-funded projects (Büttner and Leopold, 2016, pp. 42-43).

The introduction of project financing as a tool for implementing European policies dates to the late 1970s and early 1980s, when the European Commission began to use structural funds to finance its first pilot projects in support of local development initiatives. Before that time, there were no clear initiatives for implementing structural policy, nor was there a project-based financing system at the European level. Depending on the type of policy intervention, the European Commission could only reimburse national structural policy initiatives on an annual basis through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), which began in 1975, the European Social Fund (ESF), which was created by the Treaty of Rome in 1957, and the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF) of 1962 (Ibid., 2016).

However, these procedures did not boost local responsibility for the implementation of development policies, nor did they provide clear control over

spending. Consequently, in the late 1970s, the European Commission sought a new approach to funding development by exploiting the models pioneered by small circles of international development experts. These models would later become essential to the emergence of development cooperation, an important and decisive laboratory for spreading projects as a public policy implementation device (Ibid., pp. 44-50). The reforms of 1988-1989 also transformed the EC budget in terms of time, as we moved from annual budgets to multiannual financial frameworks, which reflect the priorities of the political strategies of the European Union (Büttner and Leopold, 2016, pp. 51-52).

The Project Management Institute (2013, p. 554) defines a project as a temporary undertaking with clear goals and objectives. First and foremost, it is a managerial practice and a social governance technique that establishes new hierarchies and relationships of control in society. This approach is so widespread that several studies speak of *projectification* (Godenhjelm, Lundin and Sjöblom, 2015), which is a key strategic measure for the EU to implement actions.

In fact, *projectification* and Project Management (PM) are considered effective tools to control and supervise many types of planning processes, regardless of their nature or complexity. As interpreted in the work of Boltanski and Chiapello (2005), this new project-based order is widely considered the paradigmatic mode of social organisation in contemporary post-industrial and post-bureaucratic capitalism. It represents the expression of a new form of social organisation aimed at increasingly influencing what people think, feel and expect, how they relate to each other and how they structure their daily lives.

The project-based approach to public policies in contemporary EU governance is characterised by a strong tendency towards the formalisation of policy implementation according to project management systems, an expansion of control structures and quantification principles in public policies and an increasing specialisation, privatisation and commercialisation of policy implementation. A kind of paradox is identified here: the values described by Boltanski, such as sharing, autonomy and flexibility, seem to be combined with managerial approaches that pursue control and quantification.

For decades, the EU funding framework has been a powerful driving force behind the *projectification* of public decision-making in many European countries. The benefits expected from this system are strictly related to the strategic involvement of local and regional actors in the design and implementation of policies: on the one hand, it tends to improve efficiency and local accountability; on the other hand, it creates connections between people through many cross-border and transnational programmes, networks and projects.

In essence, project systems structure the practices and timing of the implementation of EU policies. Standardised and codified procedures, regulations and organisational features constitute a distinct social world. This informs a rhetoric based on certain technical terms and standardised codes that are reproduced and used by all actors involved.

The work of Büttner and Leopold (2016) distinguishes three macro areas of employment in project-based systems that constitute the essential social structure:

- The specialised administrative units of EU funding policies at different levels of government, meaning those who disburse the funds.
- The beneficiaries, meaning the actual recipients of the EU policy.
- Public and private service providers, who support, advise and supervise actual and potential beneficiaries and administrative units in their daily tasks.

The third actors mentioned come into play because the project system implies a certain degree of insecurity. In fact, many people working on EU-funded projects are not permanently employed and depend on continuous funding. In this context, the service provider emerges: a professional whose specialist knowledge makes him or her the main facilitator of EU funding and consequently its major indirect user (Büttner and Leopold, 2016, pp. 55-56).

From this perspective, project management involves a high level of administrative verification and quantification of project progress and results. The auditing, accounting and evaluation of projects funded in the European Union is therefore rather ritualistic and accounts for a considerable part of the work done to implement public policies (Ibid, p. 57).

It also influences the work routines of staff employed in the project world, which becomes on the one hand much more goal-oriented and on the other hand controlled and testable. However, this strictly rational approach prevents the emergence of bottom-up approaches, hindering any creative impetus and consequently excluding those who are unable to adapt to the PM system established by European funding programmes.

The implications of project systems in academia

Universities operate according to increasingly competitive and entrepreneurial models and this has also influenced how they are funded. The work of Raudla, Karo, Valdmee and Kattel (2015) reports that public funding for research can be allocated to universities through two main mechanisms. First is core funding, i.e., institutional funding characterised by a degree of flexibility for administrations, both in the distribution of funds to different departments and in timing. Second is the funding allocated directly to research teams through projects, which therefore requires an accepted and shared project proposal and a limited time frame.

This type of funding reflects the ideas of project management in the public sector where there is a strong focus on decision-making, competition, managerialism and efficiency, but also on the implementation of project-based research and the European Commission's structural and cohesion policies. Against this background, it would be certainly interesting to explore how funding systems have influenced research quality.

That said, how can we reconcile efficient resource management with high-level knowledge work, which is experimental and indeterminate by definition? This kind of management control system involves subtle and complex forms of power with political and ethical implications and risks undermining the fundamental components of scientific practices.

These developments lead to tension around researchers' role and identity, as well as their organisations and the power networks guiding them. Drawing on the existing literature (Fowler, Lindhal and Sköld, 2015), we can highlight three types of tension:

— Tension between roles. This applies, for example to the role of the researcher and the role of the project leader, where researchers perceive themselves and their research activities as part of an open-ended knowledge creation process and the leader as the bearer of a more instrumental and tightly controlled knowledge production process.
— Tension between interests and ideals underlying these processes. This can occur between sacred epistemological ideals and execution-oriented thinking that seeks to reduce uncertainty and achieve a clear set of concrete outcomes.
— Temporal tension. This can emerge in projects that promote the organisation of temporary activities and permanent practices within a scientific institution.

These tensions make it clear that *projectification* in academia is decidedly intrusive, pushing university research towards a managerial mode of working. This produces a serious conflict for researchers, who must be able to combine exploratory, indeterminate and creative research work with rational, instrumental and execution-oriented working methods carried out linearly.

The university is a multi-layered organisation consisting of the central administration and the different sub-levels (research groups, institutes, departments, faculties) featuring in the budget process. Acquiring new funding is important for the central administration, as this increases the university's total budget and prestige in the eyes of the academic community. The central administration's position towards the funding of projects generated by research groups depends on the type of funding and whether or not the acquired funds flow into the central budget of the university as a whole. The higher the overall value, the more the central administration will support acquisition of the funds (Raudla, Karo, Valdmaa and Kattel, 2015, pp. 959-960).

Several studies (Fowler, Lindhal and Sköld, 2015) show that a high level of dependence on project-based academic research funding can have some negative effects, such as gaps in cash flows, for example. However, since the university is a large structure, it creates a large buffer by providing temporary survival funds, departments and research groups to weather the negative effects of project funding with greater ease than smaller organisations or independent research institutes.

Long recognised as one of the most traditionalist sectors, academia is characterised by its own rituals and rigid ranking systems, featuring a power structure composed of distinguished professors who enjoy a certain reputation and operate as a kind of decentralised bureaucracy, allowing doctoral students or post-doctoral researchers to develop their own scientific activities. The appeal of project management therefore lies in being part of a post-bureaucratic movement that overcomes traditional bureaucratic organisational forms. For researchers

within the university, however, this aspect does not hold as much power if we consider the values of independence and autonomy that characterise research.

Case study analysis: Metrolab Brussels, challenges and opportunities

The information and analyses presented below are the result of our first-hand experience as a Metrolab project manager for the two partner universities in the project.

In the light of what has been analysed and presented above, in this section we aim to problematise the communicative relationship (understood in its entirety, meaning as an act of exchange that produces social and intellectual values) between the professional project manager and the different levels with which the project manager interacts:

A. In the relationship with the university administration
B. In dealing with academic leaders
C. In the relationship with the managing authority and the European institutions

In general, becoming part of the academic system required some adaptation on our part. As strangers to the academic world and with a professional project management mostly acquired in culture and development, we were confronted with an entirely new world in which the management narrative had to be written and defined, but also experienced gradually. While this certainly presented several challenges and the occasional conflict, it was also an innovative opportunity for professional and personal growth.

<u>Interaction between the project manager and the university administration</u>

The reason why a professional project manager position was created for the ERDF Metrolab project was to centralise information within the two partner universities, facilitating communication between the two research centres attached to the same university.

As such, the first few years of the project were devoted to creating the administrative foundations and building bridges across the different administrative sectors of both universities. Like many public services, universities actually work in organisational silos—vertical areas distinguished by their areas of responsibility. In our experience, the two partner universities in the project, UCLouvain and the ULB, each have a different work culture and a different degree of involvement in the research management activities they conduct. For example, in its biannual reporting documentation, the ULB does not verify the documents that the project manager sends to the person in charge of uploading them to the Brussels-Capital Region website. In contrast, UCLouvain not only verifies the documents after the project manager sends them, but also demands it. From this difference, we can see a very wide gap in the different ways they manage their work: in the former, a total lack of involvement in administrative responsibilities means that each organisational silo does its work without interfering in the others; while in

the latter, a sort of hyper-control reduces the margin of error to a minimum while risking to negate the responsibility of those working at the same time.

As pointed out in the works of Fowler, Lindahl and Sköld (2015) and Raudla, Karo, Valdmaa and Kattel (2015), researchers managing externally funded research projects must usually get in touch with the different administrative silos if they have specific questions to ask. The individual researcher, who works for a specific research centre, will contact its administrative department to find out who to contact to receive the desired information. In our case, the project was inter-university and conducted by two university research centres in different locations: the ULB research centres are in Brussels, a few kilometres away (Faculty of Architecture, LoUIsE Lab in Flagey and the IGEAT at the Solbosch Campus), while both UCLouvain research centres are in Louvain-la-Neuve. Several researchers, members of the latter two research centres and participants in the Metrolab project, established offices on the second floor of the Faculty of Architecture's research building in the Saint-Gilles campus in Brussels. The administrative services, however, were located in Louvain-la-Neuve.

Having two figures to centralise information, establish contacts and work together to solve problems in research management certainly brought added value to the researchers, considering the time they normally spend in dealing with administrative management. Relieved of this task, Metrolab researchers devoted more time to research in general and to the strategic structuring of the laboratory's collective and interdisciplinary work.

Therefore, we became the point of reference for Metrolab researchers as if we were a real inter-university and with research centres in different locations and a network of intersectoral administrative contacts in the respective universities. Moreover, the respective university administrations always perceived us as part of the research sector because we were directly involved in the field with the researchers. As a sort of trial, this experiment in research project management has worked rather well in hindsight.

In fact, the inter-university sharing of daily administrative management blazed a new path where what was learned by either party was pooled to optimise the work of each. This leveraged knowledge would be lost when the project ended.

Interaction between the project manager and academic leaders

Problematising communication in the relationship with the rest of the team is undoubtedly the hardest part, because there is a risk of interpreting the daily effort to strike balances between colleagues reductively, since the one observing and describing is an integral part of the process in action. We would like to stress that this is the result of our personal and professional view, as our interpretation is shaped by the role we played in the project.

We will examine a specific case that we consider important for the purpose of this analysis. While we were listened to and encouraged from a technical-strategic point of view in terms of the development and design of the communication strategy and internal coordination, the planning and timing of activities and our role as administrative managers of the project, in terms of

content we were not authorised to intervene. In general, our work was limited to giving advice and execution. Most of the proposals we put forward in recent years to intervene in external communication-related content were either dismissed or reworked to be entrusted to someone else.

In terms of internal coordination, some room to manoeuvre was created. First, after more than a year of work on the project, we were appointed as part of the Metrolab team in public presentations. Second, through the strategic coordination, we helped to create an internal perception of the laboratory as more of a permanent research centre than as a project. Finally, we grew professionally by exploiting the gaps in the spaces that were gradually left empty to increase our skills.

We consider it appropriate here to bring up a particular episode in our professional path and project as an example. As mentioned above, the first two years of the project were dedicated to creating the urban laboratory as a recognisable actor in Brussels' landscape of urban studies. This included the rental of its own space to host seminars, talks and master classes; the launch of its own website, YouTube channel and social media accounts; and the creation of its own visual identity with a defined graphic code. These factors fundamentally helped to build the laboratory and define its own narrative. As a result, Metrolab became a sort of temporary enterprise (according to the Project Management Institute's definition of a project), though without legal representation.

February 2018 marked a two-year milestone since the project had officially started and as project managers, we had to negotiate the extension of our contract. Building on the idea of Metrolab as a sort of 'temporary enterprise', we asked if we could take care of Metrolab's institutional external relations, as its academic relations were already carefully cultivated by academic leaders and researchers. Our intention was to map, study and get to know other situations in Europe that dealt with urban development, research-action and participation and thereby put Metrolab on the map. Moreover, both project managers' previous professional experience in European networks could be considered an advantage since they already well knew how European institutions and potential interesting organisations work and understood strategies to create a network.

Therefore, we prepared a community and partnership development plan to be presented to the academic leaders. It must be acknowledged that this plan received a warm welcome and some claims were made to legitimise us project managers in this mission. The idea was to make us take on the role of 'ambassadors' of the project, but in reality, no steps were taken in this direction. In our opinion, this was primarily because project managers do not belong to the academic or scientific community, but play an administrative role, which is only technical and executive. Therefore, they are not traditionally authorised to spread and democratise academic concepts.

The division between the academic/scientific and administrative spheres is clear and the mechanism for acquiring knowledge and gain recognition as a technical worker does not serve the goals of academic prestige. There is a sense that academics are apprehensive or afraid to entrust administrative workers with dissemination and networking missions, probably because of the belief there may be a risk of reducing and altering the academic knowledge developed. Metrolab

tried to shake up this established order, first by recruiting project managers whose fields of study give them understanding of the content of the project, and then by questioning the missions of project managers. However, it did not succeed in breaking out of the academic tradition.

Based on our experience in the NGO sector and in organisations gravitating around European institutions, where project managers are responsible for representing them and building relationships that can boost their visibility, our interest was in gaining a certain degree of autonomy from the university tradition to enhance the ongoing narrative that the urban laboratory had been created as a temporary enterprise.

This broadening of views was probably viewed retrospectively as an excessive impulse of emancipation from the universities. If desirable, this emancipation from the university structure could have caused some uncertainty with regard to the established system. Therefore, while there was a desire to present Metrolab as independent, the university tradition limited the ability to imagine a scenario that could have broadened future perspectives.

Interaction between the project manager and the managing authority and European Institutions

The relationship with the managing authority, i.e., the ERDF unit of the Brussels-Capital Region, was mostly limited to supervising the semi-annual review of financial receipts and to attending the annual Project Accompanying Committee, where the project's progress was presented: the individual and collective research done, the organised and planned activities, publications of the research findings, communication and the financial framework. On these occasions, especially at the beginning of the project, the Cabinet had a hard time understanding the subject and objective of the research underway and why researchers persisted in bringing out various tensions about the projects or the realities observed.

In the relationship with the managing authority, it is important to remember two episodes that we believe were crucial: the first was fundamental in showing us how to present the project's progress to the institutions and to a wider public more generally and the second was decisive in understanding the dynamics of European structural fund management.

During the 2018 Accompanying Committee, the managing authority asked for a presentation of the ongoing individual and collective research in a concrete, accessible and dynamic way just to better understand it. The managing authority wanted to better understand the project, which had been improved, refined and redefined after the application had passed the approval phase. While this did make it difficult for Metrolab's team because it supported the preconception that research and action in the field are two distinct spheres that use forms of communication proper to totally different spheres, it also forced us to build a more accessible discourse and open the content to a wider audience.

Later, while working on mapping urban development situations in Europe, we inquired about ERDF projects funded in the 2014-2020 programming for research and innovation in other Member States. Based on the assumption that the managing authority was in contact with projects financed by structural funds

in other European countries, we contacted them for more information. After exchanging a few emails, we realised that not only was the managing authority uninformed about this, but they did not even know who to ask. What could be seen as an anecdote really shows us the extent of the decentralisation of European structural fund management.

Since Member States are left alone to manage the funds, it would be beneficial to set up a European mechanism that would allow for a broader vision and could serve as a catalyst for connections and thematic knowledge beyond institutional synergies.[7] Although institutional synergies are extremely important for creating links between different programmes and different research and innovation projects, helping to get the most out of research funds, they remain largely financial in nature or on a scale that does not provide a full picture of all R&D projects.

A European catalyst mechanism would not only help to create networks and share good practices, but it would also nurture a sense of European belonging. Moreover, from our point of view, this is a major limitation for funded research and innovation projects, as it does not allow them to capitalise on knowledge and explore possibilities for research development in a faster, bottom-up way, possibly at the expense of the research progress itself.

On the European level, we also think it appropriate to open a discussion on how to measure the impact of a project like Metrolab. The only indicator we can use to meet the EU's expectations concerns how many new hires at the company (or companies, in our case the two universities) have benefited from European financial support. The indicator counts new hires as of 31 December each year. As such, it does not include researchers who were working there before the project started, nor those who joined the team for a shorter period.

As mentioned above, researchers must raise funds to remain in academia, work at the university and do research. Therefore, few new researchers are employed (PhD students, though not all of them), as researchers tend to seek outside funding to continue their academic career. For universities, this is nonsense: while it is true that a researcher who is an expert in a certain field is called on to perform a task based on said *expertise*, this system encourages the hiring of new researchers for a short period of time and at the end of each year, so that the percentage is higher than the indicator to be measured. The risk is to fall into a measurement practice that degrades the quality of the research itself and keeps researchers in a constant state of instability. We also believe that the number of people employed is not representative of the project, since it does not provide any information on the type of research and the progress to which it led.

7 Synergies between funding schemes do indeed exist in the 2014-2021 MFF and aim at achieving greater impact and effectiveness, as well as strengthening the European research and innovation ecosystem. They have been enhanced for the 2021-2026 programming through work on: a shared vision of the policies, the alignment of programmes and implementation and regulations. The new programmes include different types of synergies: the financial transfer of up to 5% from and to Horizon Europe and the cohesion programme, a Seal of Excellence to help to get alternative funding and two mechanisms of cumulative and integrated funding. For further information, see the European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban policy. (2014). *Enabling synergies between European Structural and Investment Funds, Horizon 2020 and other research, innovation and competitiveness-related Union programmes. Guidance for policymakers and implementing bodies*. Publications Office of the European Union.

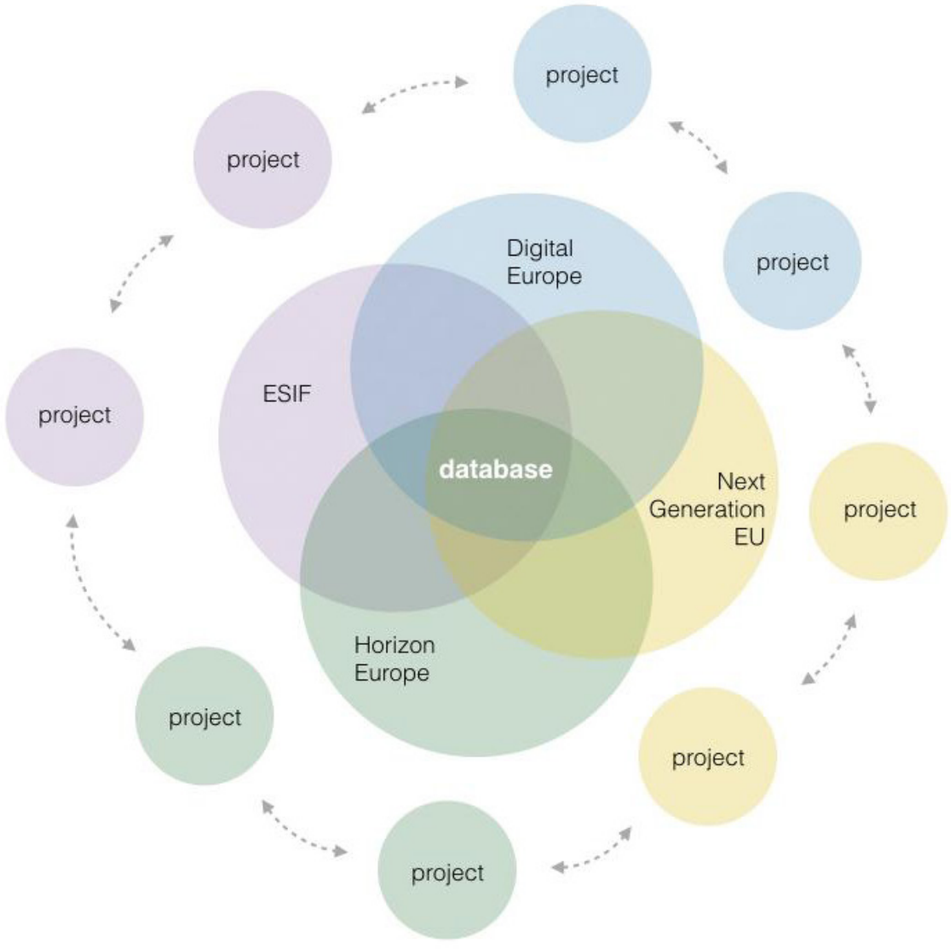


Figure 2. This Venn diagram represents the European projects' ecosystems with overlapping themes collected in a database and projects connected to each other. Note that for purposes of readability, all the relations between projects could not be represented, as each of them could be linked to all the others.

Conclusions

Investigating and retracing the last five years of the project has not been easy. It was only possible to follow the thread leading from research funding in Europe to revealing the background of public policy practices once the project was over. Our attempt at analysis aims to understand how to enhance the impact of public funds in general and of those intended for research and innovation more specifically.

Our analysis shows that one of the key challenges for the future of fund management is how to synchronise institutions, policies and instruments in increasingly complex structures. A lack of synchronisation would help asymmetric power relations to emerge between institutions and policies. Consequently, increasing attention should be paid to mechanisms of interconnection and their ability to synchronise the activities of permanent and temporary organisations such as projects.

The lack of interconnections between projects and programmes limits action, reduces the impact of public funds, precludes the possibility of follow-up funding for an update of the initiative and, finally, does not optimise the work carried out in different parts of Europe.

An initial suggestion that could be made concerns the strengthening of communication and connections between projects of different programmes and between projects of the same funding programme. As shown in the Venn diagram below, the creation of a European mechanism to be used as a database to collect all information on research and innovation projects would support all who wish to benefit from others' experience. Divided into thematic axes, this mechanism could periodically promote thematic meetings and create opportunities for comparison, the exchange of good practices and the search for new partners. It could also help to speed research up and move it forward.

In the future, in addition to the European database tool, managing authorities and EU institutions should engage in broader reflection and think about thematic synergies throughout the project's lifecycle. From drafting the programming to selecting, implementing and evaluating projects, managing authorities and EU institutions could look beyond their own regions and consult with international research networks, for example, to help them to draft their operational programmes. This could ensure dialogue between projects across regions from a very early stage, more befitting of evaluations and indicators and improving implementation of public policies. For an experience like Metrolab, such mechanisms would not only help us to broaden our perspectives and learn about other situations, but it would undoubtedly improve implementation of the initiative.

In addition to the strengthening of Europe-wide connections, our analysis informs us of the extent to which university research risks limiting research itself. The project system paradigm applied to academia should probably be adapted with tools that recognise the processual nature of research, where directions and outcomes are constantly reformulated and guiding questions and contributions can often only be formulated retroactively.

Based on our experience in the field while managing the Metrolab project, we hypothesise that in the future, universities will adopt neutral figures to manage large projects funded with external resources. As we have seen,

the institutionalisation of these figures would allow for an approach aimed at safeguarding the research process and making it easier for administrative management to link policies, institutions and instruments.

The question remains as to what kinds of duties this intermediate professional figure is to be given: either this figure will be considered purely administrative, so universities will turn to the administration and European funding experts, or specific skills and a certain sensitivity to content will be sought. The latter option would require the project managers to have some room to manoeuvre and legitimise their effort to create added value for the project both internally and in its relationships outside academia.

Cohesion policy is an expression of European solidarity that reduces economic, social and territorial disparities. It is also a policy that expresses a genuine common European interest in securing jobs and growth throughout Europe. As a consequence of the financial crisis, national public investment has decreased, making ESI funds and their respective national co-financing the main instrument for public investment in most Member States.

In this context, research and innovation play a key role. Research is not something that only interests experts, but represents one of the foundations of our society, both culturally and in terms of daily utility. Contributing to the development of research therefore means participating specifically in building the future. If we intend to have a direct impact on the lives of citizens and regain confidence in the role of public funds as drivers of innovation, then careful thought needs to be given to how their effectiveness and impact can be optimised and measured meaningfully.

References

Aresu, A. (2020). *The powers of political capitalism. United States and China*. La Nave di Teseo.

Berger, M. (2020). Écologie des savoirs urbains. Épreuves de la recherche-action au Metrolab Brussels. *Pragmata*, 3(1), 430-491.

Boltanski, L., & Chiappello, E. (2014). *The new spirit of capitalism*. Mimesis.

Büttner, S., & Leopold, L. (2016). A 'new spirit' of public policy? The project world of EU funding. *European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology*, 3(1), 41-71.

Foucault, M. (2005). *Birth of biopolitics*. Feltrinelli.

Foucault, M. (2005). *Sorvegliare e punire. Nascita della progione*. Einaudi.

Fowler, N., Lindahl, M., & Sköld, D. (2015). The projectification of university research. A study of resistance and accommodation of project management tools and techniques. *International Journal of Managing Project in Business*, 8(1), 9-32.

Godenhjelm, S., Lundin, R. A., & Sjöblom, S. (2015). Projectification in the public sector: the case of the European Union. *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business*, 8(2), 324-348.

Hodgson, D. (2002). Disciplining the professional: the case of project management. *Journal of management Studies*, 39(6), 803-820.

Kustosz, I. (2012). Contractualisation et contrôle de la recherche: une lecture critique du programme-cadre de recherche et de développement technologique de l'Union Européenne. *Mouvements*, 3(71), 25-35.

Project Management Institute. (2021). *A guide to the project management body of knowledge (PMBOK guide).* Newton Square.

Raudla, R., Karo, E., & Valdmaa, K. (2015). Implications of project-based funding of research on budgeting and financial management in public universities. *Higher Education*, 70, 957-971.

Signoles, P. (2017). Avantages et inconvénients du système de financement de la recherche sur projet. Réflexions sur un appel d'offre. *Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez*, 47(1), 337-342.

Website

Assocompositi. (2021, June 21). *Research and Development: the global opening of Horizon Europe*. https://assocompositi.it/ricerca-e-sviluppo-lapertura-globale-dihorizon-europe/

Eunews. (2021, June 16). *La politica di innovazione dell'Unione Europea*. https://www.eunews.it/2021/06/16/la-politica-di-innovazione-dellunioneeuropea/152667

European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban policy (2014, June 26). *Enabling synergies between European Structural and Investment Funds, Horizon 2020 and other research, innovation and competitiveness-related Union programmes Guidance for policy-makers and implementing bodies*. Publications Office of the European Union. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/guides/2014/enabling-synergies-between-european-structural-and-investment-funds-horizon-2020-and-other-research-innovation-and-competitiveness-related-union-programmes?fbclid=IwAR13NvobzxnZlHsD0UoaxZgqk47X5qA81nM7-dduTKH5dAp5An2spGXgT-E

European Commission. (2020). *European Innovation Scoreboard 2020*. Imprimerie Centrale. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1158

European Commission, DG Research and Innovation. (2020). Strategic Plan 2020- 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/rtd_sp_2020_2024_en.pdf

European Commission. (2010). *Politica regionale — un approccio integrato. Uno sguardo a 360°*. Inforegio Panorama. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/panorama/pdf/mag34/mag34_it.pdf

European Commission. (2008, June). *The EU Cohesion Policy 1988-2008: Investing in Europe's Future*. Inforegio Panorama. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/panorama/pdf/mag26/mag26_it.pdf

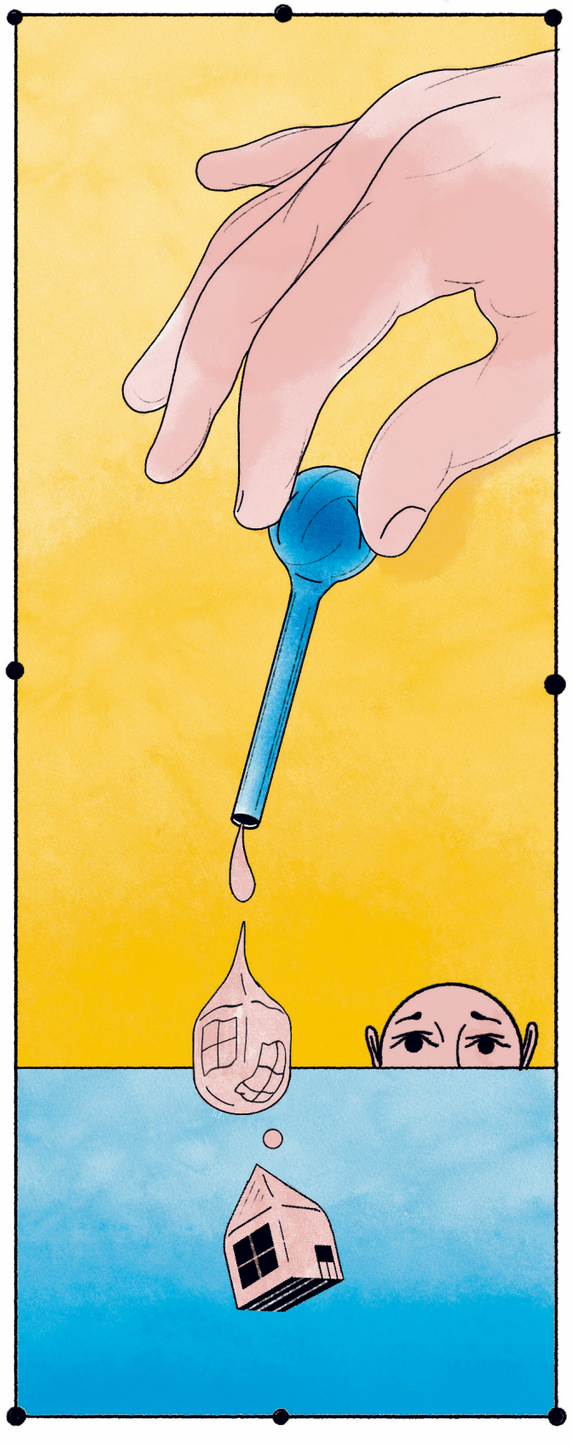
Fimap. (2021, April 27). *Horizon Europe 2021-2027: Innovation and Research in Europe.* https://www.fimap.srl/horizon-europe-programma-ue-2021-2027-finanziamenti-innovazione-ricerca/

Il Bo Live. (2019, April 30). *Spending on research and technology development grows*. Globally. https://ilbolive.unipd.it/it/news/cresce-livello-globale-spesa-ricercasviluppo

Lo Spiegone. (2021, June 8). *The Innovation Policy of the European Union.* https://lospiegone.com/2021/06/08/la-politica-di-innovazione-dellunione-europea/

Statista. (2021, June 17). *Research and development worldwide — Statistics & Facts*. https://www.statista.com/topics/6737/research-and-development-worldwide/

Webb, P. (2019, December 5). *Synergies with the EU Research programmes* [PowerPoint slides]. DG Research and Innovation A5, European Union. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/communication/regional_offices/0512_horizon_eu.pdf



© Lucas Gicquel

A pragmatist critique of experimentation: from the living lab to the community of inquiry

Mathieu Berger and Louise Carlier[1]

> **Probably my experimentalism goes deeper than any other 'ism!**
>
> **— John Dewey**[2]

Introduction

Experimentalism is the fundamental attitude underlying John Dewey's epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, pedagogy and politics[3]. The success that the semantics of experimentation enjoys today within public action would then represent a great victory for pragmatist thought. On closer inspection, however, the vast majority of practices supported by public policies for their supposed capacity to experiment are limited to flattering the taste of those in power for any 'creative' and 'innovative' initiative. It is a hollow rhetoric of experimentation, more or less articulated to that of participation, that prevails, without many of these initiatives following the principles of a demanding experimentalism or, to use the chosen exergue, a 'deep' experimentalism. Fewer still are those that formulate these principles, with serious reference to the work of pragmatists.

In this text, we would like to propose some elements for a pragmatist critique of experimentation in urban research, based on the case of the *urban living labs* that have recently multiplied in large cities. It will therefore also be a self-critique, since it will be based mainly on our own experience as experimenters within Metrolab, an interdisciplinary and applied urban research laboratory, based in Brussels, which we set up in 2016[4]. The case of Metrolab seemed to us to be of interest to the reader in that it demonstrates the ambiguities of contemporary experimentalism, even when

1 This text is the English translation of the article 'Une critique pragmatiste de l'expérimentation? De l'Urban Living Lab à la communauté d'enquête sociale' published in Pragmata, 5 (2020).

2 From a letter to Jim Cork (Cork, 1949, p. 451).

3 The authors would like to thank Daniel Cefaï for his proofreading and valuable comments, as well as all those who participated in the Metrolab adventure.

4 Mathieu Berger is the general coordinator of Metrolab, and one of the five academic leaders of the laboratory; Louise Carlier, one of the four scientific coordinators.

it is practiced by researchers who read Dewey, subscribe to the 'logic of inquiry' and claim to be pragmatists.

By tracing different key stages of the Metrolab project, we will first clarify the context in which the idea of Metrolab emerges and the motivations that, in 2014, lead us to envision an action research initiative explicitly inspired both by Dewey's pragmatism and, in its methods of inquiry and its link to public action, by the ecological sociology of Robert Ezra Park and his Chicago colleagues. We will then return to the research practices that have marked the Metrolab experience and through which the verb 'to *experiment'* has taken on a very different meaning, from the projection of a pragmatist experimentation initiative 'on paper' (the application file submitted for funding and the public presentations of the project made before its realisation), to various concessions made to a more opportunistic or benign experimentalism, in line with this new culture of research oriented towards innovation in the service of public policies, to forms that seemed to us to be closer to the Dewey perspective. This is the case, in particular, of the social inquiry *Action Research Collective for Hospitality* (ARCH) carried out in 2019 on the situation of migrants and refugees occupying a park in the North Quarter of Brussels, an inquiry improvised in the course of the Metrolab project and born of an 'impulse' allowing for the 'reorganisation of activities', and 'giving new directions to old habits' (Dewey, 1922, p.93). An adventure that is undoubtedly more in phase, *as an experience,* with the pragmatist spirit.

All's well that ends well, then, for our pragmatist experimenters, who, after being 'troubled' by the inadequacies of their initial practice, have adjusted it to develop a mode of inquiry closer to the demanding experimentalism of the Founding Fathers? Not really. We will see that the spontaneity, the overall quality, the strong ecological grounding of an experience of social inquiry, however galvanising and relevant it may be, in no way guarantees the performance to be understood here rather in the sense of Austin's performativity (1962) — of this experiment in the world and on the world, its capacity to transform, more or less, the problematic situation that had 'solicited' it (Dewey, 1894 and 1920; Bidet *et al.*, 2015). Since any effort at knowledge must, according to the pragmatist adage, be evaluated in terms of its practical consequences, we will raise a final (self-) critical point here: the quality of experience sought in the inquiry (brought here by the depth of the issues related to the inhuman conditions of migrants' stay, as much as by the enthusiastic and emotional collaboration between members of a motley community of researchers) and recommended by pragmatism can screen (or illusion) between the inquired situation and the consideration of its consequences.

In light of this trajectory of consecutive setbacks — and thus consecutive investigations (Stavo-Debauge *et al.*, 2017) — following our earnest attempts to *experiment properly*, it is finally this demanding, even heroic, experimentalism that may be subject to reservation. Is pragmatism practicable? This is the question on which we will conclude.

A typology of experimentation in urban living labs

The general problem of the impoverishment of experimentalism presented in the introduction is illustrated in particular today in the field of urban policies, through the multiplication of *urban living labs* and other initiatives of intervention on the city that value experimentation. This one is generally associated with the key word of innovation, and is driven by the dream of a new alliance between science and public policy (Béjean, 2020). These laboratories share various characteristics: they claim to be anchored in urban spaces and to practice fieldwork; they have an explicit pedagogical dimension; they involve users and alternative modes of governance of urban projects; they imply transdisciplinary, collaborative and applied research (Karvonen and van Heur, 2014; Bulkeley *et al.*, 2019; Andion, 2021). In our major European cities, they are often financed by public funds dedicated to the development of *smart* and *sustainable* cities, and constitute a new form of subsidised research, based on partnerships between academic and political institutions, confronted with the uncertainty of contemporary urbanisation and its governance.

While these new forms of applied urban research share a series of normative principles and objective conditions, a family resemblance and names (*lab*) which they play with and which often lead to confuse them, in practice they assert very different conceptions of experimentation, according to the cognitive style associated with the scientific disciplines they bring together (science and technology, architecture-urbanism, social sciences, humanities), and according to the epistemological basis (if any) from which they give meaning to an experimental approach and to an experimentalist posture. We propose here five conceptions-types of experimentation — which are also five typical conceptions of the (mi)lieu that is the laboratory — that seem to prevail today in *urban living labs*: (i) scientistic, (ii) pedagogical, (iii) aesthetic, (iv) project-based, and (v) pragmatic.

(i) First, many of them use a definition of experimentation inherited from 'science and technology', which conceives it as a set of operations, manipulations and tests performed on materials, bodies or (digital) artifacts, models or programs, carried out 'in the laboratory'. The value of experimentation carried by these *urban living labs*, by merging here with the standard protocol of science and technology, would then be 'emptied of its meaning' (Karvonen and Van Heur, 2014). The term 'urban laboratory' is simply due to the fact that the research practices and protocols of the 'hard sciences' are no longer conducted on peri-urban campuses or technological *clusters*, but are relocated to the heart of the city; possibly also because their objects concern issues encountered in the city (mobility, construction, waste, energy, health, etc.). Nevertheless, in this first case, the laboratories remain 'geographically delimited and enclosed spaces of experimentation' (Bulkeley *et al.,* 2019), forming together and combined with other places devoted to new technologies, a hermetic and introverted 'innovation niche' that tends to neglect the urban environment that hosts it (Coenen *et al.*, 2012). Here, the surrounding urban space is apprehended as a field of possibilities for 'open-air' testing,

for putting *real life situations to the test*, during test phases that are also clearly delimited in time.

(ii) Although all *urban living labs* assume an educational role with respect to the surrounding city, and are conceived as an opportunity for city dwellers to learn through contact with university research, for some of them, the educational dimension is predominant, to the point that this learning issue represents the very purpose of the experimentation. These experimental practices, directly directed towards citizens or inhabitants, often target the youngest among them. When their target audience is not young people, students, teenagers, or even children, it is generally in order to relate to adult audiences in a rather infantilising edutainment mode (Berger, 2014). Above all, this 'framing' given to researchers' experiments, their pedagogical 'transformation' (Goffman, 1974/1991), emphasising the fact that the minor action in progress is to be understood as training or *rehearsal* for a major action to come, considerably alters the meaning of what is played out in these situations and the expectations concerning their practical consequences (Eliasoph, 2011; Berger, 2015). All of them are geared towards the transformation of city dwellers/citizens (subjects supposed to be in training, in an ongoing process of empowerment through their participation in these experiments, rather than as already trained and capable interlocutors), and it is only at the second level that they address the problem of transforming the concrete environments of the city, a problem that nonetheless motivates their existence and on which they base their action. The ecological transition, for example, can be reduced to the status of the *theme* of an experiment with an educational aim.

(iii) Among the *urban living labs,* we can identify a third series of initiatives, rather stemming from the human and social sciences and the arts, consisting in experimenting for *the sake of experimenting*. In this aestheticising approach inherited from a certain situationism, experimentation is to action what poetry is to language; a creative deviation from habitual action, valued as such, for its own sake. By not being solicited by any problematic situation, and thus disconnected from the logic of inquiry, by being guided from then on by enthusiasm, curiosity, 'serendipity', but also by personal stakes of creativity and fulfilment, this third mode of experimentation often has something arbitrary in the selection of its objects, and something random in its procedures, observations, operations and results. If the scientistic *urban living lab* presented above tends to make experimentation equivalent to the classic scientific protocol of science and technology, simply displaced and implanted in an urban context, the practices associated with this third family seem to perceive, on the contrary, in the '*urban'* and the '*living'*, invitations to get out of science, to free oneself from the constraints (to creativity, in particular) imposed by a scientific investigation process. Unsurprisingly, the contributions of initiatives that remain indefinitely in a 'regime of exploratory engagement' (Auray, 2011) make little scientific

contribution. Rather than a contribution of artists to the sciences, we observe more the opposite tendency: researchers in the human and social sciences negotiate, through urban and living experimentation, their exit from science and the pursuit of their aesthetic aspirations.

(iv) Research as experimentation, while it has been (re)discovered in recent years by the social sciences, refers to more established practices in architecture and urban planning: *research by design* and 'research by project'. In these approaches, the architectural or urban planning project is taken as the starting point for diagnostic operations, conceptualisation, and the formulation of conjectures about the future, through the study of hypotheses about the transformation of space. A project-driven approach would make it possible to work within the framework of trans-scalar situations and in conditions of uncertainty. The *design* is then experimental through the projection of scenarios, questioning different possible futures (Vigano, 2014). In this fourth mode of experimentation, the figures of the researcher and the *designer* come together (Abrassart *et al.*, 2015). If this approach includes a propositional dimension likely to guide concrete transformations, we can question the distortions brought to the experimentalist approach by the 'project' format and the values associated with it (Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999). In project-based research, the researcher acts as a *mediator* as much as a *designer*: he or she ensures the networking of different expertises and actors linked to the project, and the equivalence of their contributions, at the risk of undermining their differences and potential conflicts. The experimentation aims at producing a shared 'vision' of the project, based on these communicational processes. The experimentation is then limited by the temporal and spatial framework of the project investigated, and by the network constituted around it, at the risk of neglecting the complexity, the heterogeneity and the thickness of the environment in which it is embedded.

(v) While Metrolab is indeed an *urban living lab*, adopting this semantics in its very name and some of its main characteristics, it has the particularity of having asserted from its constitution an explicitly *pragmatist* intention and orientation, requiring a conception of experimentation that is both demanding on the practical level and theoretically grounded. In this, it joined other pragmatist initiatives, not by virtue of vague concordances between elements of their action or discourse and Deweyan experimentalism, but pragmatist in intent and 'in text'; elaborated as modes of action from direct references to American philosophical pragmatism and to practices of inquiry at the foundation of Chicago's ecological sociology, influenced by Dewey's epistemology. This conception, which we will call — in reference to the quotation at the beginning — *deep experimentalism*, differs from the previous types of *urban living labs* not in that it is foreign to them, but rather in that it brings together in a continuous, integrated, and thoughtful process the *scientific*, *pedagogical*, *aesthetic*, and *research-by-project* dimensions that the other

modes of experimentation accentuate to excess and isolate. In addition to integrating the qualities of the previous types, deep experimentalism also adds this decisive factor: it requires taking into account the ecological anchoring of the observed situations and the inhabited and living character of urban environments. Experimentation is defined as a process inherent to social life itself, which refuses any process of prior delimitation of the 'data' and perspectives to be considered, and which necessarily escapes attempts to contain it in a 'niche' or even a 'project'. This process takes as its starting point a *problematic situation* that calls for a rigorous investigative approach oriented towards its resolution. This approach to experimentation finds extensions in Chicago sociology, largely influenced by this pragmatist philosophical background[5] (Joas, 2002; Joseph, 2015; Cefaï *et al.*, 2015; Cefaï, 2016) which already considered the city as a 'social laboratory'[6] (Park, 1929; Gross and Wolfgang, 2005).

The Metrolab initiative having been distinguished from other types of *urban living labs* and other modes of experimentation deemed reductive (both on the side of hard sciences and the *softest* urban research), and then briefly positioned in a pragmatist filiation, we must now enter into a longer and more complicated history of this experience, which is not sewn from white thread. From its beginnings in 2014 and its launching phase in 2015-2016, to its conclusion in 2021-2022, through its different cycles of research, our initiative has indeed oscillated between a claimed pragmatist purism and certain concessions to the modes of experimentation criticised above, concessions that our attachment to the pragmatism of the Founding Fathers made all the more painful! As announced in the introduction, we will see that the possibility for Metrolab researchers to reconnect more solidly with the spirit of Dewey, on the occasion of an unforeseen inquiry and the strong and moving collective experience that it gave rise to, was unfortunately not, for lack of concrete results, the occasion of a *happy ending*. It did, once again, only reopen the investigation, this time on the realism and the practicability of a pragmatist ethics.

5 'Pragmatism proposes a problem-centered conception of democracy (Ansell, 2011) that has its academic counterpart in the sociology of social problems, which dates back to the early xxth century in Chicago and practically merges with the birth of sociology as a discipline' (Cefaï, 2016, p. 27).

6 Park borrowed his 'laboratory' metaphor from the research accomplished by the *social settlements*, who were the first to take the urban environment, its ecological processes and its collective forces, as objects of inquiry, oriented towards the transformation of the city as a living milieu (Cefaï, 2020 and 2021). Metrolab, in its own way, inherits an articulation between pragmatist philosophy, sociology and politics that goes back to the American progressive era (Addams, 1910).

Metrolab: a self-critical account

Finding linkages between urban policy and research

The Metrolab initiative takes shape between 2013 and 2014, in a context where, in Brussels, both urban policies and urban research (and perhaps urban sociology in particular) show their limits.

(i) On the one hand, urban policy instruments are struggling to transform themselves in order to address new urban issues in an appropriate way, with the obvious obsolescence of the existing arrangements leading to only rare, timid and belated responses from the regional government (Berger, 2019a).

This is the case, first of all, for the issues of socio-spatial dualisation, which the instruments available at the time — the most reliable of which is the Neighbourhood Contract created in 1993[7] — only allow to address on the surface and through the multiplication of micro-local interventions, within reduced perimeters. When a study was finally commissioned in 2011 from independent urban planning experts[8] to transform the existing instruments and take city policy out of its localism, its routine and even 'automatic' practices (Estèbe, 2004), the new policies recommended by the study were implemented in a way that was as partial as it was laborious and opaque, leaving aside the truly innovative ideas introduced by the study. The instrument created, the Urban Renovation Contract (CRU), disappoints[9]. It is perceived as a 'big Neighbourhood Contract' that maintains on the whole the intervention software of the previous twenty years, while compromising some of the most interesting contributions of Neighbourhood Contracts[10] at the cost of a change of scale ('macro-neighbourhoods') and the production of larger infrastructures (going beyond small proximity facilities) (Berger, 2019a, pp. 175-185).

7 The 'Neighbourhood Contract' is an urban renewal and revitalisation policy designed in the wake of the creation of the Brussels-Capital Region in 1989 and implemented in 1993. Influenced by the French policy of 'Social Development of Neighbourhoods', this regional policy of aid to the Brussels municipalities aimed, in the priority intervention area now called ZRU (Urban Renewal Area), at an integrated action combining renovation and production of housing, requalification of public spaces, creation of collective infrastructures, and social and economic development of the areas concerned, through subsidies to the municipalities and to non profit organisations. For almost thirty years, it has been the main instrument of public intervention in the urban environment in the Brussels Region, at least the most effective, despite (or perhaps because of) the modesty of its interventions (Berger, 2019a; Hemeleers, 2012).

8 MSA, Idea Consult, IGEAT, Marcel Smets Consultants, 2013, 'Plan-guide de rénovation urbaine durable', Ministry of the Brussels Capital Region, Direction de la Rénovation Urbaine.

9 Recently, corrections have been made to the CRU tool: in particular, the possibility of interventions other than physical, built-up ones, as well as an increased interest in interdisciplinary territorial diagnoses and participation. The latter, however, is limited essentially to online modes of gathering, both for the potential of digital tools to mobilise and coordinate publics concerned with larger territories than the former Neighbourhood contracts, and because of the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the health restrictions on organising face-to-face participation.

10 That is to say, citizen participation, on the one hand; and the possibility of intervening in the territory other than by 'the brick', through the financing of social and economic development actions, on the other hand.

This is the case, then, with regard to a situation such as the migration crisis that Brussels is experiencing in these years. The city policies conducted at the level of the Region turn a blind eye to this situation, stubbornly insisting on considering their legitimate recipients as 'the inhabitants' or 'the Brussels residents', when we are talking about the most cosmopolitan metropolis in the world, the capital of Europe and the crossroads of its migratory flows. At the same time, they neglect the socio-spatial issues raised or encountered by those who are neither entirely 'from Brussels' nor entirely 'inhabitants' (Genard and Berger, 2020), and the possibility for regional urban planning instruments to intervene in the areas of the city most concerned by migrant occupation, to equip them with 'arrival infrastructure' (Meeus *et al.*, 2019; Felder *et al*., 2020) and to prepare them in the sense of a better 'urban hospitality' (Stavo-Debauge, 2017 and 2018; Berger, 2019b; Carlier, 2020; Carlier and Berger, 2021).

(ii) If this inertia of urban policies in the Brussels Region — an inertia reflected in the anachronism of its instruments and its blindness to the evolution of a labile 'urban question' — was mainly due to a system of public action often presented as dysfunctional[11], it also benefited from the practical ineffectiveness of *urban research* carried out on Brussels.

What are the main urban research formats around 2013 and how do they appear insufficient? On the one hand, there is of course neo-Marxist urban geography, which denounces the gentrification of working-class neighbourhoods without succeeding in proposing a credible and realistic alternative model of urbanisation, or even projecting an ecology of the city within which the rather white and capital-rich populations would find a legitimate place. In contrast, research that escapes the critical gaze of the social sciences confines itself to a register that is too strictly descriptive, down to earth, or takes refuge in the ethereal sphere of scholastic discussions (Lemieux, 2012). For their part, microsociological investigations of the city, however powerful they may be in terms of description, explanation, criticism or proposal, do not allow for significant transformations. Finally, the works that use macro-territorial analysis tools often confine themselves to expertise in the service of strategies predefined by the regional government.

These research practices, often including our own, it must be said, could seem to us to be in vain, because of their inability to draw attention of city policy to other than already established interests or functionings. Whether they were critical but not proactive, proactive but a-critical, too radically empirical or descriptive, too abstract, speculative or unnecessarily complicated, too 'micro', too positivist, too light or simply informative, this research on Brussels had its share of responsibility for the *status quo of* urban policies. While the regional government was rarely *receptive to* the countless suggestions — explicit or

11 Weak political alternation in the piloting of planning, development and urban renovation instruments; reluctance to deal with an additional layer of complexity, sociological for example, in a city that is already considered too complex institutionally; reluctance to evaluate in depth the few key instruments, their possible sterility or even their perverse effects in terms of social change; positivist and quantitative conception of territorial expertise; anti-intellectualism; etc.

implicit — contained in this research, the research itself often gave too little consideration to the problem of its *receivability* (Berger, 2018).

Interesting initiatives did exist, however, to bring research closer to public action and 'civil society'. This was — and still is — one of the objectives of the *Brussels Studies Institute* (BSI)[12]. Created to coordinate research on Brussels and to offer a common platform to researchers from different Brussels universities interested in urban issues, it also aimed at a better dissemination of this research, through the journal *Brussels Studies*. The research was to be put at the service of the Brussels public sphere, for example through the experience of the États *généraux de Bruxelles*, in 2008-2009. It aimed to promote the *empowerment of* Brussels citizens, associations and civil servants (*Brussels Academy*), or more recently, to allow public policy actors to benefit from high-level conferences (through the *CityDev Chair*). These initiatives, by relying on one-way communications, presentations, courses or conferences prepared by professors or researchers (often, established academic figures) for non-academics, were, however, part of a framework that remained fundamentally academic (right down to the logo used, a graduate's hat topped with the letters BSI). They presupposed a strong asymmetry of knowledge between lecturers and listeners, teachers and learners, trainers and students. The fairly classic framework given by the BSI to these relations between observers and actors suggested other modes of rapprochement, placing more emphasis on interaction, creating the conditions for greater symmetry between *knowledge* and know-how (Ryle, 1945; Berger, 2020) and, above all, transforming the communication situation bringing together actors and observers, from the presentations and questions/answers conducted in the classroom or conference room, to the practical experiments conducted in a collective work space, and often on the very urban sites envisaged. This is what we proposed in 2014 to the Brussels Region, via its ERDF program.

A deep experimentalism, on paper

Motivated by the respective situations in Brussels of city policy and urban research mentioned earlier, the idea of an initiative that would become Metrolab was first sketched out in 2013, on the occasion of a seminar of our research centre at UCLouvain, the CriDIS (Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Democracy, Institutions, Subjectivity), during which we proposed a critique of the notion of *public sociology* promoted by Michael Burawoy. As a reminder, Burawoy proposes a typology distinguishing between *professional sociology*, *critical sociology*, *policy sociology* and *public sociology* (see table 1) in his famous speech as president of the American Sociological Association, 'For Public Sociology' (2005 and 2007). He indicates his preference for *public sociology*, which is both reflective and directed towards a non-academic public, whereas *professional sociology* is only instrumental, serving an academic public; *critical sociology* is reflective, but remains limited to academics only; and *policy sociology* only offers instrumental knowledge to a public of non-academic actors. This

12 The Brussels Studies Institute is a multilingual and multidisciplinary scientific network that brings together researchers from different universities and research centres working on Brussels. The BSI organises various public events (colloquia, study days,…), on political and social issues.

categorisation raises a series of problems (Abbott, 2007). In particular, the clear, anti-pragmatist demarcation between reflective and instrumental knowledge seemed to be as unconvincing as it was problematic in its possible performative effects on the profession of sociology — let us recall that it was as President of the American Sociological Association that Burawoy made this appeal to *public sociology*. Of course, we could have been delighted by a call for a more 'public' sociology if, firstly, it was not promoted at the expense of sociology involved in public policies (*policy sociology*), a sociology supposedly so mediocre as to be incapable of reflexivity, let alone, undoubtedly, to interest an academic public (in spite of Burawoy's intention of renewing the discipline, we find here a contempt for public action and for the practices of expertise traditionally associated with American academic sociology!). And if, secondly, the public sociology called for by Burawoy did not have to renounce its instrumental dimension in order to gain in reflexivity — what would we think of a sociology that, placing itself on the side of the 'subalterns' and the 'dominated', would not seek to appropriate the more technical contributions of experts in order to formulate solid hypotheses and reliable tools for social reform?

	Academic Audience	Extra-Academic Audience
Instrumental Knowledge	PROFESSIONAL	POLICY
Reflexive Knowledge	CRITICAL	PUBLIC

Table 1. Types of Sociology

These relations between academic and non-academic actors, and between reflexivity and instrumentation of knowledge, seemed to us to be entirely rethought, based on pragmatism. Public sociology had to be thought of as a practical experiment carried out in a complex world ('the city', as far as we were concerned), requiring support from instrumental knowledge and expertise (for the most part, non-sociological!), and not turning its back *a priori* on public action, or even coordinating with it. The value of the reflections and hypotheses of public sociology was, according to us, in their potential of instrumentation and tooling[13] of the public (including the 'public authorities') constituted around the targeted situation. And in the same way, far from the dualism marking Burawoy's discourse, we thought that *policy sociology* (or *policy science*, given the interdisciplinary perspective that we preferred) could thus take on the noble traits of the *social inquiry* valued by Dewey (1938) and be the occasion for conceptual and theoretical elaborations worthy of interest to academic sociologists.

13 'Notions, theories, systems, no matter how elaborate and self-consistent they are, must be regarded as hypotheses. They are to be accepted as bases of actions which test them, not as finalities. To perceive this fact is to abolish rigid dogmas from the world. It is to recognise that conceptions, theories and systems of thought are always open to development through use. It is to enforce the lesson that we must be on the lookout quite as much for indications to alter them as for opportunities to assert them. They are tools. As in the case of all tools, their value resides not in themselves but in their capacity to work shown in the consequences of their use' (Dewey, 1920, p.145).

These critical reflections around the distinction between *public sociology* and *policy sociology*, envisaging rather something like a *public policy sociology* or a *policy-driven public sociology*, experimental, instrumental without cutting itself off from the reflexive, critical resources and theorising work proper to the social sciences, met with an opportunity. At the beginning of 2014, the Brussels Region published a call for projects in the framework of its ERDF 2014-2020 programming. The European Regional Development Fund aims to finance, in the European regions it supports (up to €220 million in the case of Brussels), infrastructures, developments, actions and research contributing to 'inclusive', 'green' and 'smart' urban development. During the previous ERDF programming period, 2007-2013, Brussels benefited from the creation of various infrastructures, located near the Brussels-Charleroi Canal, which represented a priority intervention zone (ZIP) for the Region. In addition to this 'infrastructure' component, the 2014 call was open to other projects, and in particular, for the first time, to research initiatives.

But would it be open to a project from the social sciences? The rumour at the time was that the research projects eligible for this call were limited to research focused on technological or medical issues, and in principle not to 'urban research'. After having surrounded ourselves with architect-urbanist colleagues benefiting from the credibility recognised by the regional administrations for science and technology, after having extended the consortium beyond the UCLouvain to research centres from the Université Libre de Bruxelles with complementary competences, institutional anchoring and solid political support in the Brussels Region, we spent a long time looking for the angle from which to profile our project. Our architect colleague Bernard Declève, who had in fact coined the name 'Metrolab', which he and a doctoral researcher under his direction (Roselyne de Lestrange) had used for a first time in the context of a smaller experiment, put forward the following idea: we were going to ask the ERDF to fund an interdisciplinary team of researchers who would focus on 'accompanying', from start to finish, the ERDF programming as a whole as well as many as possible of the fifty or so other projects (social, environmental, economic) selected for funding. In other words, we were going to offer this regional development policy its own laboratory-observatory. The project was selected for funding.

Before being submitted to the Region, this general idea had been deepened, elaborated and translated by the team's sociologists into pragmatist concepts. The application document submitted (to ERDF) and the opening speech of the project (once it was funded) presented the principles of a demanding, or deep, experimentalism. Among other things, it proposed to strengthen the communicative interaction between the disciplines involved in dealing with urban problems (sociology, architecture, urban planning, geography), the cooperation between academic research and public action, and the articulation between urban sciences and urban democracy. Research projects would be undertaken on concrete urban sites, targeted by the numerous projects of the ERDF program. Various *urban living labs*, displaying experimentalist postures, were in the running. Some of these other projects, while seeming to us to be simply riding the wave of 'creativity and innovation' and that of an 'aesthetic turn in the way we look at

the city' (Genard, 2018), mobilised in passing some elements of language taken from William James (whose radical empiricism had the advantage of dispensing the researchers concerned from a theoretical elaboration of their experimental practices), Dewey or Peirce (whose concepts of 'experience', for the first one, and of 'abduction', for the second one, were enough to make them champions of 'serendipity', in improvised and wandering research approaches, relying essentially on the sensibility and the creativity of the researchers). In contrast, we claimed a certain pragmatist purism, with Dewey's theory of inquiry and the fieldwork methods of Chicago's ecological sociology offering, in our view, more robust working hypotheses to be put to work in a public policy such as the ERDF.

Before presenting the situations in which this 'pure' pragmatism could not be maintained from start to finish, let us take a moment to recall some of its principles, which, associated with our references to the sociological tradition of Chicago, in its 1920s version, guided the formulation of our 'paper' project, and then our concrete practice of experimentation, not without a few important concessions to less inspired forms of experimentation, which we would undoubtedly have been quick to criticise in others.

The initial pragmatist and ecological inspiration

Inquiry, against intellectual somnambulism and the brutality of practice

We have seen that the critique of the paths proposed by Michael Burawoy for sociological engagement had been a first motivation in the discussions that led us to consider the constitution of a space like Metrolab. When it came to formulating a positive vision for this laboratory, it was of course first of all to Dewey that we turned to, mainly to his theory and ethics of inquiry, which would guide our research practices. His critique of 'intellectual somnambulism', in particular, resonated directly with our diagnosis of the state of Brussels urban research, our drive to conduct a public sociology that is both reflexive and instrumental, and to inscribe our reflections in a problem-solving approach that is itself born of field experience and observation (Dewey, 1920, pp.140-141):

The first distinguishing characteristic of thinking then is facing the facts inquiry, minute and extensive scrutinising, observation. Nothing has done greater harm to the successful conduct of the enterprise of thinking (and to the logics which reflect and formulate the undertaking) than the habit of treating observation as something outside of and prior to thinking, and thinking as something which can go on in the head without including observation of new facts as part of itself. Every approximation to such 'thinking' is really an approach to the method of escape and self-delusion just referred to. It substitutes an emotionally agreeable and rationally self-consistent train of meanings for inquiry into the features of the situation which cause the trouble. It leads to that type of Idealism which has well been termed intellectual somnambulism. It creates a class of thinkers who are remote from and hence practice from testing their thought by application, a socially superior and irresponsible class. This is the condition causing the tragic division of theory and practice, and leading to an unreasonable exaltation of theory on one side and an unreasonable contempt for it on the other. It confirms current practice in its hard brutalities and dead routines just because it has

transferred thinking and theory to a separate nobler region. Thus has the idealist conspired with the materialist to keep actual life impoverished and inequitable.

It was in this framework that the process of experimentation was understood: as a method for observing situations, shaking beliefs and habits of action, leading to the proposal of certain hypotheses, which were to be tested empirically with a view to solving the problems identified and modifying existing conditions (Cefaï, 2019). Avoiding the isolation of thought and theory in a 'separate sphere', trying instead to reach out to the actors through inquiry, to work with them to bring practice out of its 'routine brutality and sterility': these were exactly the issues for us. In this perspective, the investigation that Metrolab was going to carry out, and which would bring together observers and actors of the ERDF Brussels policy in a collective experimentation, was not conceived as a process *decreed* by one or the other, but, as Dewey says later in the same text, as a process *mandated* by the disorder undergone[14], imposed by the problematic situations that ERDF Brussels would encounter as a whole, as a 'public' and 'community' (Stavo-Debauge, 2010).

In subscribing to this approach, we made the following double assumption. We assumed that being clearly presented in our project file (and then validated and financed) as a *problem-solving* and *applied* approach, refusing intellectual somnambulism, the researches carried out by the Metrolab would have significant practical consequences on the situations observed and an 'impact' on the projects of the program we were following. And for this, we presupposed that problematic situations would not fail to arise, and that it would be possible to 'share' them, to look at them together, to work on them collectively, between researchers, ERDF project leaders and regional administrations. As we shall see, we were wrong to (pre)assume.

A renewed ecological approach to urban spaces

The pragmatist inspiration guiding our conception of inquiry and our posture as experimenters went with an ecological inspiration guiding our approach to urban spaces and inviting us to propose a properly sociological reading of them, complementary or competing with that of the architects-urbanists, geographers or projects managers, in the perspective of a social mapping of the city, similar to that developed by Robert Park and his *Chicagoan* colleagues.

The social dimension of space — which refers to the way in which it is lived, used, practiced and perceived by its dwellers and users, as well as to the relations of coexistence and cohabitation between them — is often neglected in urban policies, or reduced to quantitative data. In Brussels, the 'territorial diagnoses' carried out within the framework of urban renovation programs at the level of neighbourhoods and, even more so, in larger-scale 'urban projects', are based on a set of statistical and demographic indicators (age pyramid, unemployment rate, composition by nationality, etc.). From them are captured

14 This other paragraph from *Reconstruction in Philosophy* had indeed particularly struck us (Dewey, 1920, p.141): '[Thinking] is not aimless, random, miscellaneous, but purposeful, specific and limited by the character of the trouble undergone. The purpose is so to clarify the disturbed and confused situation that reasonable ways of dealing with it may be suggested.'

the general characteristics of the inhabitants of the territories where the public action is carried out and inferred the main social problems that arise there[15]. We are familiar with Park's skeptical view of statistics, which are not sufficient on their own to understand social problems: 'To arrive at a satisfactory explanation of urban facts, one that would pave the way for effective action based on sound policy, we need something less precise, perhaps, and more empirical, than statistics' (Park, 1929, p. 195).

In Brussels, maps based on exclusively quantitative data seemed inadequate to capture the city as a space of coexistence of different social milieus in interaction and tension (Berger and Van Hollebeke, 2017; Carlier *et al.*, 2021; Carlier, 2024; Berger, 2024). In our opinion, the contributions of an ecological approach deserve to be considered in order to describe, understand and visualise the 'life milieus' nestled — or even encapsulated within each other — in the territories of public action, and the relations of cohabitation that are played out there; milieus and relations that urban policies, by reshaping their physical environment (but also social, through the arrival or leaving of populations that their interventions bring about), necessarily impact. In order to grasp this social dimension of urban environments, Chicago sociologists developed practices of inquiry and mapping often impregnated with the pragmatist perspective. As a counterpoint to the production of statistical tables and maps, they explored the natural areas of the city, and endeavoured to observe, describe and understand the singular situations that were played out there. In this perspective, we intended to develop within the laboratory new tools of description and visualisation of the social dimension of urban environments.

We also wanted, through our researches on urban environments, to contribute to their shaping by public policy. On this point, the ecological sociology of the early days was of little help to us. While the Chicago researchers, while investigating various *social problems* (delinquent careers, racial tensions, assimilation of migrants, housing conditions, etc.), aimed to inform public action actors and redirect their means of action on these problems, the political uses of their investigations were largely beyond their control. On the one hand, the participation of the research to the political order, among the *Chicagoans,* remained rather limited: it was limited to 'sharing', to returning the information to the reformers and local actors. On the other hand, the modifications of the environment inhabited by the communities affected by these *social problems* were considered uncertain and subject to natural processes that could not be under control. Secondly, the production of urban space by architects and urban planners — professions that were emerging at the time — was left aside in order to recapture the 'biotic' dimension of the city's natural history. Curiously, the urban ecology of the 1920s, while modelling geographical, economic, demographic or technological processes, was relatively insensitive to the political processes of urban development. Apart from the most reformist of them all, Burgess and Wirth,

15 These quantitative data, in Brussels' urban policies, are based on a criterion of residence, which only allows the 'inhabitants' of a territory to be taken into account, and at the same time ignores other users (particularly those of vulnerable groups, who occupy the space without officially residing there, and whose invisibility for territorial knowledge tools only reinforces their vulnerability: homeless people, migrants, sex workers, etc.).

Chicago sociologists from the 1920s onwards took very little account of the role of actors in the urban fabric (Cefaï, 2024), except in the drawing of the map of local communities and, later, in the writing of the *Local Community Fact Book*. Not applying their ecological reading to the processes of circulation of knowledge about the urban, they have paid little attention to the different 'reception milieus' of their work (Berger, 2018 and 2020). This is also evidenced by the lack of relationship between what posterity has fixed as the 'school of sociology' and the 'school of architecture' in Chicago, that were both contemporaries and of great influence. There is thus a discrepancy between the methods of description and analysis adopted, specific to human ecology, and the practical and political ambitions associated with the sociological research conducted, linked to pragmatist influences. The practical consequences on urban environments of the researches carried out have therefore been little mastered, or even neglected.

In order to avoid these same problems, we intended to draw inspiration from the ecological approach in order to grasp the social dimension of urban spaces while integrating the actors involved in their production, development and shaping.

Urban policy as social laboratory

Within Metrolab, we wanted to develop an ecological approach to urban spaces that took into account (and involved) the actors of the urban fabric, meeting the practical requirements of pragmatic experimentation. By taking as its social laboratory a urban policy — and not a 'natural area', as a more conventional ecological approach would have invited[16] — the Metrolab research project necessarily implied considering the role of certain actors (political, institutional, socio-economic, etc.) in shaping urban spaces. This policy — the 2014-2020 Brussels ERDF programming — financed a small number of very different projects, including: the development in Molenbeek and Anderlecht of care centres for vulnerable publics who escape the official health care system (homeless, asylum seekers, transmigrants); the transformation, in the heart of the city centre, of the Bourse (an emblematic heritage building) into a 'beer palace'; the redevelopment and re-programming of the site of the Anderlecht Slaughterhouse with a view to diversifying their activities, in a first settlement area near the South Station; the redevelopment, on the banks of the Canal, of a vast automobile import-export warehouse into a public 'winter garden'; the renovation-reconversion of the site of a former abbey into a cultural and artistic centre in a working-class district of Forest; the transformation of a former racetrack into a multi-sports and recreation area in a more wealthy municipality on the edge of the Soignes Forest; the creation of a laboratory on the energetic and technical performance of building renovation; training and entrepreneurial *empowerment* activities for young people who have dropped out of school in Molenbeek; the implementation of an urban agriculture project and support for new market gardeners in Anderlecht; a support

16 If the city is a social laboratory, the sociologist's space of investigation for *Chicagoans* is more specifically delineated by the contours of a natural area, which owes its existence outside of any planning (the natural area is distinct from administrative or political territory), and which plays a function in the ecology of the city — as in the case of the *slum* (Gross and Wolfgang, 2005).

project for entrepreneurs in the fashion and design sector; and so on.

As ERDF programming is structured around the three strategic axes of European policy (in European terms, *inclusive, smart* and *green* development), it was decided at the outset of the laboratory's creation that the work to be carried out would fall within these same axes, the major urban issues identified by political actors becoming the focus of inquiry and experimentation. Three work cycles were thus defined, which would punctuate the life of the laboratory. Each of them would be the subject of a *masterclass*. The research carried out by the members of the laboratory would be articulated to one of these three themes[17].

Our project thus proposed to investigate this public policy by taking as a case study the various projects that it financed, and presented the laboratory as a place for reflection, support and evaluation of this policy. We were thus directly led to consider the role of public actors in the shaping of the urban spaces under investigation. We intended to play a role of mediation between the various actors involved in the urban fabric (administrations, users, local non profit organisations, etc.). Finally, by bringing together different disciplines, we aimed to produce a relevant and acceptable language for the actors of urban projects, likely to influence their practices.

Explorations, tests

Once the Metrolab project was selected and funded by ERDF, we set to work, inspired by these theoretical references in pragmatism and human ecology, but still groping around empirically, waiting for *real problematic situations* to come along. The ERDF projects that we proposed to follow were themselves in their launching phase and did not yet encounter any notable problems, at least not to our knowledge (we were to realise quickly that our access to information on the possibly problematic situations in which these projects were carried out had been overestimated, that neither the great majority of the project leaders nor the managing authority guaranteeing the good progress of these projects really wished to share their problems, either during this early phase or later).

In any case, in the absence of problematic situations and in conditions where, as a result, the stakes of the incipient researches remained uncertain and abstract for many of us, this start-up phase of the Metrolab project was used to experiment, in the modes of *exploration* and *testing*, with new practices of collective research nourished by interdisciplinarity.

A working group integrating the different disciplines of the lab (sociology, architecture, urbanism, geography) was formed, to develop common tools for describing and visualising the social dimension of urban environments inspired by human ecology, in view of inquiring sites and situations where problems would appear. Concretely, we sought to explore and observe together in a new way the Brussels 'poor crescent', this territory hosting ERDF projects that seemed already well known to the team members, through the consensual discourse of the socio-spatial dualisation of Brussels around the Brussels-Charleroi Canal — a discourse carried as much by the public authorities as by a *mainstream* urban sociology,

17 Metrolab has therefore worked in cycles on three major themes: inclusion (Berger *et al*., 2018), ecology (Declève *et al.*, 2020), and urban production (Carlier et al., 2021).

and that there was reason to redraw, under this interdisciplinary and ecological gaze from which could emerge new forms, new maps (Berger and Van Hollebeke, 2017).

Starting with a detailed observation of the area, we then tried collectively to identify and map the different social milieus coexisting there, whose contrasts seemed to escape both the actors of urban policies and their commentators. The development of such tools was experimental in the sense that the idea was to prepare the means for a new understanding of urban environments that could be mobilised at a later stage, of 'working on empirical facts with a view to facilitating the formation of new hypotheses' (Cefaï, 2020, p. 279) that we could take hold of when the time came. Through this workshop for the design of interdisciplinary tools, the challenge was for each individual, but also collectively, to learn from other disciplines. These situations were conceived as a *practice*, in the sporting sense of the term, a training ground where we could try to develop skills that our mono-disciplinary research practice had neglected until then. For example, for us sociologists among architects and geographers, the challenge was to develop capacities of visual analysis and production, to progressively master a language, or at least modes of meaning that would be relevant and acceptable to the actors of urban projects, who are known to be more sensitive to images and maps than to long speeches (Söderström, 1996; Van Hollebeke, 2021).

But through these activities, we also sought to sensitize team members from other disciplines to our pragmatic and ecological sociological approach. In these internal *workshops*, experimentation by exploration, free experimentation, in any case freed from important constraints, other than those consisting of training, formation, and constituting a *potential* for investigation, thus also represented a medium conducive to socialisation: socialisation between people, socialisation between disciplines, and between 'ways and worlds of meaning' (Berger, 2020). The fact that we benefited from a smooth start, where we were not suddenly solicited by a tragic reality; the fact that we took a certain pleasure in experimenting together in an almost playful mode (the experimental maps and tools that brought us together being the functional equivalent of a game board); all of this of course played a part in the possibility of teaming up, beyond the differences in disciplines, cognitive styles, and epistemic worlds of reference.

With this initial phase, therefore, we find a conjunction of the modes of experimentation identified in our typology: experimentation envisaged as a means of training and practice, and therefore focused on learning; experimentation of the scientist type, knowing that these first activities were carried out mainly in the laboratory, sheltered from the disturbances of urban spaces and their actors, with a view, in a second phase, to testing these new tools in *real life situations*; but also, on occasion, a more aesthetic practice of experimentation, 'experimentation for experimentation's sake', turned towards the possibility of a qualitative experience for the researchers — a pleasant job, made of enriching and varied exchanges with great colleagues!

If these modalities made some sense at the beginning of the project, we were obviously aware that they could not be prolonged without producing certain drifts. We were ready to try to activate this potential for collective research and these commonly designed tools in situations where it was no longer just a

question of better understanding urban environments, but of contributing to their improvement, by involving in inquiry actors shaping them.

One of the targeted ERDF projects, located in the municipality of Forest, consisted of the conversion of a former abbey site into a future cultural centre. Our first explorations around the project, selected as one of the four case studies for the first MasterClass on urban inclusion, and prior to any real collaboration with its actors, had noted the weak participation of the public concerned by its realisation in the formal spaces of discussion related to its implementation. Based on this observation, a group of researchers was formed to deepen the investigation on the Abbey and the Forest district that hosted it (Saint-Denis), in order to better understand and visualise the social environment of this project, while producing tools that could be mobilised by the actors involved in its conception and realisation. We were convinced that the collaborative research between architects, urban planners, geographers, and sociologists would not only allow us to produce tools for visualising the social dimension of urban environments, but also to effectively mediate between — to use Lefebvre's distinction (1974) — the *lived spaces*, which are not 'said' in public assemblies, and the *conceived spaces*. We set out to inventory and describe the uses of the site and its surrounding public spaces, and the perceptions of the different publics who use them on a daily basis (Carlier *et al*., 2021). Several mapping workshops were organised with different publics who were directly affected by the transformation of their environment. Based on these workshops, we produced social maps of the territory investigated, which made it possible to identify the spaces hosting the 'public realm' (Lofland, 1998), the logics of connection or separation (Strauss, 1960) between the different 'life spaces' (Muchow, 2024; Berger, 2024) of the social worlds investigated, the tensions of cohabitation and the accommodation practices at work (Carlier, 2019).

The results of our research were taken into consideration by the offices in charge of the design of the places and in charge of the participation, as a tool completing the existing diagnoses of territory, and allowing to take into account, in the process of the project, users and needs which had not been identified until then. The ecological approach was thus mobilised to propose to the actors of the urban fabric other modes of reading and understanding territories, likely to influence their practices and to contribute to their shaping. Following our initial explorations and our laboratory exchanges, we were able to sketch out the principles of a mapping tool that was then tested on an ERDF site, taken up by the project's actors, and finally formalised in a work with a practical aim, likely to be mobilised in other urban project, in Brussels or elsewhere (Carlier *et al.*, 2021).

(Squeaky) adjustments

These initial experiments, which were formative for the research team and brought results in the field, augured constructive collaborations on other sites, and the possibility for Metrolab to direct its research towards more difficult situations, where it seemed more required. This is where things got complicated, as the actors involved in problematic, contested or 'suffering' ERDF projects generally did not recognise our legitimacy to follow them, to carry out research with them — even less on them — and to initiate a *problem-solving* approach. Accepting

the hand extended by a team of university *problem-solvers* seemed to have something of a stigma attached to it for the project leaders, who feared being exposed — perhaps even publicly — as 'bad pupils' in the ERDF programming, when they were already weakened at various levels. When contact was nevertheless made and Metrolab researchers were able to intrude as best they could on the sites concerned or on the various stages of the project process, their presence was often perceived as disruptive. The reports and analyses they produced, in their reflective or more critical content, were received as interruptions in the already difficult progress of the project concerned. In other words, the more problematic the situations turned out to be — and therefore the more reason for an interdisciplinary investigation! — the more inhospitable the places and actors concerned became to the researcher.

These few cases show how much an action-research of the type pursued by Metrolab is a matter of 'reception tests', which engage 'simultaneously the *receptivity* of the whole in which one takes part and the *receivability* of the one who comes to take part, or of what he puts forward' (Berger, 2018 and 2020). This ultimate moment in the 'triple helix of public inquiry', according to Cefaï (2022b), which uses the categories of hermeneutics to account for the activities of application, reception and appropriation by the actors of the results of the inquiry, is often neglected by philosophers, even pragmatists. It is however crucial since it is towards this that the whole process of the inquiry is oriented and that the 'reception tests' fully anchor the inquiry in the reality[18]. The fact remains that these difficulties have gradually forced us to adjust our approaches, and have even led to a reframing of our activities by the management authorities, towards forms of *soft experimentalism*, collaborative practices where the requirements of inquiry in the Deweyan sense, and in particular the experimentation that it presupposes, have become more difficult to honour.

This readjustment of the research modalities occurred in the second year of the project, in 2017, following a criticism of a project of the ERDF programming by some researchers of the laboratory; a criticism that, via the press, became public. This project, selected as one of the four case studies for the first *masterclass* on urban inclusion, was carried out by a public-private partnership. It consisted of redeveloping a regional green space located in a fairly wealthy area of the city — a former racetrack, located on the edge of a wood, which until then had housed a golf club — into a leisure space, including a restaurant, rooms that could be privatised for events, an ice rink, a tree climbing course, a playground, a mediation dojo, etc. The criticism put forward by members of our team in a text presented during a seminar concerned the drastic reduction of the parts of the site accessible (free of charge) to the public; a reduction linked to the fact that a private operator was in charge of its redevelopment, activation and management. This criticism, presented in a working document for internal use, but nevertheless available on the Internet, was taken up in a press article, and then seized upon by a coalition of associations and local residents, who were already mobilised against the project for other reasons and had succeeded in blocking the obtaining

18 We have described in a previous issue of *Pragmata* (Berger, 2020) some of the disturbances, interruptions, and delays in the actors' courses of action that can undermine the researcher's inclusion in their world and impede the very possibility of a meaningful practical contribution.

of the necessary permits for its realisation. This situation led to significant tensions (which we understood could turn into legal proceedings) between Metrolab and the project owners in question, but also between Metrolab and the Brussels regional authority in charge of managing the European structural funds financing both the *lab* and the park project in question.

Following this episode, Region officials asked us to reframe our experiment, by setting clear limits on two levels. On the one hand, the public authorities would henceforth be attentive to the projects on which Metrolab proposed to intervene and to make public statements. These were to be uncontroversial and above all not explosive. On the other hand, our involvement in the projects had to directly serve the interests of the actors who carried them, and according to the understanding that these actors had of their interests. Our 'accompaniment' work should not hinder the smooth running of the projects (understood as compliance with the execution phasing and budgetary flow agreed upon upstream). Finally, our role could in no way consist in questioning the finalities of the projects, validated at the time of their selection by the regional government.

By setting a series of limits to the process of inquiry, this reframing showed us the difficulties of giving free rein to the dynamics of problematisation and publicisation that it implies, in an institutional context where strong economic and political interests are at stake. But it must be recognised that he also rightly pointed out the need for a project such as ours to better appreciate the conditions of receivability of our criticisms, and to extend the analysis of a problematic situation associated with a project, by proposing 'reasonable ways of dealing with it' (Dewey, 1927/2003). The critical text written by Metrolab researchers and made public probably did not have these qualities. In any case, this dispute forced us to make a series of concessions deemed necessary at the time to prolong the existence of the laboratory, and to adjust — not without reluctance, nor without grumbling — our practices of research, according to two major trends.

Deviations: a retreat into consulting and pedagogy

On the one hand, this disagreement led us to reframe our research practices towards forms — if we still follow the typology proposed above — of 'experimentation by project', set up for the actors. In this case, the practical effects of the research carried out are favoured, but the process of inquiry is greatly reduced and clearly delimited. The project leaders contact the researchers with a precise and largely predetermined 'problem', the resolution of which requires a certain expertise. The researcher-consultants therefore set up an *ad hoc* methodological system, in order to accompany the actors in the resolution of their problem, while meeting the goals of the project concerned and adapting to its temporality. Experimentation practices carried out in this way have been implemented, for example, in order to support project leaders in their reflection on the design of a place, in particular a health centre intended to accommodate particularly precarious and vulnerable patients. The researchers played the role of mediator and *designer*, organising workshops to take into account the needs and expectations of the various potential users, and to identify different design principles and development scenarios (Vignes and Ranzato, 2022).

On the other hand, this reframing also led us to privilege, for a time, practices of research in which experimentation takes on a pedagogical form, at the risk, contrary to the previous modality, of diminishing its practical purpose. This is the case, for example, of work carried out during *MasterClasses*, oriented towards a given theme, where participants, among whom are many students and doctoral candidates, investigate a series of situations and projects pre-identified by the Metrolab team. They are led to work by combining a first phase of description and understanding to identify various problematic points, and a second phase of formulating proposals to address them — proposals relating to the modes of development, management or implementation of the project. If the actors, often public, who carry the projects taken as case studies are invited to participate in the workshops that punctuate these work phases, the direct practical consequences of the proposals formulated by the participants of the MasterClasss are often minimal.

In spite of the initial pragmatist inspiration, these various readjustments which were operated within the Metrolab thus revealed the limits of our capacities of action, and the minor or very indirect character of the practical consequences of our research. We were approaching the modalities of 'project-based' experimentation or pedagogical experimentation, rather than rigorously pragmatic. It was not a question of constituting a community of inquiry including those who were directly affected and concerned by a problematic situation, 'mandating' researchers to accompany them in its resolution and the transformation of their conditions. The situations we worked on were certainly not of the same intensity as the *social problems* with which *Chicagoans* were confronted at the time.

For Dewey, however, '[i]n social inquiry, genuine problems are set only by actual social situations which are themselves conflicting and confused. Social conflicts and confusions exist in fact before problems for inquiry exist. The latter are intellectualisations in inquiry of these practical troubles and difficulties' (1938, p. 498). Moreover, reflection fails in its purpose and is insincere if the inquiry is 'self-serving' and has a pre-assigned goal, if various constraints are imposed on the ends and modalities of the research, if the field of experience and problems is otherwise delimited — all things that according to him present 'limitations' in the process of inquiry' (1920, p. 146).

In the end, the laboratory encountered difficulties and ambiguities common to many *urban living labs,* regardless of their epistemological or methodological orientations. The practical and normative goals are often formulated by the funders themselves, and generally limited in their capacity to generate critical problematisations (Bulkeley *et al.*, 2019) or to act on the situations observed. This criticism, which is often directed at *urban living labs*, also focuses on the vagueness surrounding the reasons for their emergence (these mechanisms are more often guided by political strategies that go far beyond the scale of the situations and concrete problems that arise) and on the weakness of their contribution 'to better urban governance' (Bulkeley *et al.*, 2019). It is in the context of this critique that Dewey is sometimes evoked to remind us of the fundamentally practical orientation of the inquiry that these devices tend to miss.

Recovering the pragmatist ethics

In the course of 2018, even as our research practices were moving away from their initial inspiration in this third year of the lab's operation, a situation, troubling to say the least, played out 'down the street,' challenging us and leading us to go beyond the reframing imposed on us.

The building that used to house Metrolab is located in the North Quarter of Brussels, near the Maximilian Park. For some years, the park has been occupied by hundreds of migrants in transit[19], due to the lack of infrastructure of reception. The park is an important landmark and stopover in the migration flows, as well as a political and media focus in the context of the 'migration crisis' that Belgium was (already) experiencing at the time. The deplorable, even indecent, reception conditions for migrants were thus revealed in a particularly manifest way in this occupied public space, through everyday situations strongly soliciting our moral sense — these links between public space, visibility, and moral and political engagement having been highlighted by Goffman (1963/2013) and in other pragmatist-inspired research (Joseph, 2005; Cefaï, 2013; Bidet *et al.*, 2015). Faced with the lack of services, the problems of reception and the urgency of the needs, different citizens and non profit organisations (mainly the Citizen Platform BxlRefugees) progressively mobilised to set up services for migrants, such as the *humanitarian hub*, conceived as a sanctuary place centralising frontline services close to the occupied places[20] (Deleixhe, 2018; Daher and d'Auria, 2018).

Even though the number of urban renewal plans and projects in the North Quarter had multiplied in previous years, and the attention of many urban actors was focused on this area, little attention was paid to the issue of migration. These projects and plans shared the objective of modifying this office district, inherited from the functionalist zoning of the 1960s — by countering its monotony linked to its mono-functionality, and its unattractive character as a transit area. The urban policies implemented at the time were expressly aimed at attracting other users to the area than those who have been mainly present — the employees of the administrations and companies located in the many office towers in the area, mainly commuters, with fixed hours, leaving the place at the end of their work day, leaving behind them dull and empty spaces. The humanitarian situation was ignored or minimised, or at least considered very secondary in the spaces of reflection and debate — essentially *architecture-centred* — concerning the development of the area. The perspective of the actors of hospitality was simply absent. The same has been true of the spaces for reflection on urban development set up by actors from civil society. A coalition of actors, close to the main real estate promoters of the district as well as to the regional administrations in charge of its renovation, was indeed set up to reflect on its future, associating architects, *designers*, artists, and other young creatives temporarily occupying a tower at the foot of the Maximilian Park. In spite of their immediate proximity to

19 In 2015, the line of refugees in front of the Office National des Étrangers, then housed in the World Trade Center II tower on the edges of the park, gradually turned into an occupation of the Maximilian Park.

20 When the research was carried out, the *hub* welcomed between 200 and 300 people every day, who went there to receive medical care, administrative assistance, psychological follow-up, clothing, etc. Between 30 and 40 permanent staff, volunteers and professionals worked there every day.

the migrants occupying the latter, the humanitarian situation of the neighbourhood was barely touched upon during the numerous evenings of debates, animations and exhibitions organised.

The occupation of the neighbourhood by migrants therefore tended to be considered by these different actors as a transitional episode that did not need to be dealt with. However, the North Quarter, as a station district, is historically an area of arrival and first settlement for newcomers in Brussels — a 'transition area' from an ecological point of view (Burgess, 1925) — from which their gradual inclusion in various areas of social and urban life is played out. The presence of migrants in this urban environment thus has a historical and structural dimension, and refers to a permanent issue of the city taking renewed forms, which deeply questions its hospitality.

It is in this context that in January 2019, the ARCH collective (*Action Research Collective for Hospitality*) was born, in the continuation of the work carried out at the Metrolab around the theme of urban inclusion and in the will to pursue observations, analyses and practical reflections on the qualities of hospitality of Brussels' urban spaces, where this issue appeared most pressing. ARCH was constituted progressively as a community of inquiry through the voluntary involvement of a whole series of researchers (some of them members of Metrolab, others not) and practitioners with diverse profiles (sociologists, architects, urban planners, artists, activists, anthropologists). As direct witnesses of the deplorable conditions of reception and the extreme vulnerability of the migrants in the North Quarter — from a variety of observation positions, that of the inhabitant, the neighbour, the lodger, the user, the association worker or the academic researcher — they all agreed on the undignified and unbearable nature of the situation. As Dewey conceives it, the inquiry thus found its source in a trouble, often inseparably affective, perceptual and moral (Quéré and Terzi, 2015; Bidet *et al.*, 2015); it was informed by a critique — the lack of 'concern' of the regional urban policy community (Berger, 2019b) and the institutionalised hostility through migration policies at the federal level — and endorsed a moral intention — to recall a duty of urban hospitality and reaffirm a common humanity (Carlier, 2016a and 2016b; Stavo-Debauge *et al.*, 2018).

The ARCH collective has thus attempted, with the limits inherent in a voluntary commitment to research carried out over a short period of time in the face of an emergency situation, to mobilise inquiry as a tool likely to contribute to the understanding of this situation; to be useful top the actors and beneficiaries of hospitality; to relay voices and experiences that are currently absent from the debate; and to promote a policy of urban hospitality in Brussels — the latter being understood as the quality of an urban environment to open up and receive newcomers who come to it (Stavo-Debauge, 2017). If pragmatist sociology, according to Quéré and Terzi (2015, p.2), 'sets itself the task of observing and describing, as closely as possible to practices, the unfolding of public inquiries,' with ARCH, it was less a matter of observing and describing than of engaging in this inquiry with those affected and concerned by the situation under consideration, and contributing to publicising the problem on stages where it had previously been only marginally addressed. And thus, to displace the very meaning of public inquiry.

Following Dewey, 'the definition of a problematic situation (*i.e.,* how it is identified, characterised, analysed, elucidated, resolved) and the composition of the communities involved (*i.e.,* the emergence of 'concern' about the situation, the work to determine what its problematic nature consists of, the development and implementation of actions to address it, and so on) are two aspects of a single process.' (Cefaï and Terzi, 2012, p. 10). ARCH thus engaged in the 'redefinition' of a problem and a situation that, on the side of the public authorities, was reduced to an episodic crisis — the 'migratory crisis' — to which, rather than a real political takeover, an emergency treatment responded, through the reinforcement of borders and deportation policies and the evacuation of migrants from the places they occupied. The redefinition of the problem, with a view to offering another understanding and intelligibility of the situation, was therefore, for ARCH members, a condition for other modalities of political management on a city scale, in other words, the emergence of a policy of urban hospitality.

A 'mandated' community of inquiry

It is undoubtedly with ARCH that Metrolab's research practices have come closest to the Deweyan perspective of social inquiry as experimentation solicited by a problematic situation, taking into account its ecological character, and concerned with its practical extensions. If this collective emerged from the laboratory, it also stood at its margins and deviated from it in various ways. It included individuals who were not affiliated with the laboratory; the research did not focus on projects indicated by the ERDF policy, but tackled a mediatised and highly controversial situation; the tools of the investigation were directly available to associative actors and citizens who were contesting the reception policies. We were faced with a situation whose problematic nature was so intense that it stood out in contrast to the less tangible and less urgent nature of the 'quasi-problems' that had motivated our researches in the previous months. These differences, signs of the overflowing dynamics of problematisation and publicisation, were not without a certain logistical and administrative vagueness. But this '*off-line*' inquiry also allowed us to temporarily escape the constraints that had weighed on the Metrolab's official research process until then, and to rediscover to a certain extent both the critical and practical dimensions of our research.

Of course, the community of inquiry formed around ARCH could hardly include those most directly affected by this situation: migrants on the one hand, and the associative actors of hospitality on the other. The latter, caught up in the urgency of the problems, did not have the time to carry out research on the issues of urban hospitality and concentrated their action on day-to-day humanitarian aid, dedicated to basic needs (distribution of food, access to medical care, installation of sanitary equipment, accommodation). However, they were systematically invited to our working meetings, we regularly accompanied them on the ground, and maintained a consistent dialogue with them.

As for the migrants, who devoted their scarce resources and energies to surviving, one can easily imagine their difficulties in constituting themselves as a public on these issues. When faced with a problematic situation, the people affected do not constitute themselves as a 'public', the potential contribution of

research consists in playing a 'mediation' role, on condition that the researcher is not 'shut off from knowledge of the needs which they are supposed to serve' (1927, p. 206). It is this mediation role that ARCH has attempted to take on, in order to make the voice of migrants and hospitality actors heard by urban policy makers. Although ARCH did not bring together those directly affected, it did attempt to serve their needs. To this end, for Dewey, the problematic of the inquiry must coincide with the problems faced by the actors. For this reason, the lines of research were co-defined with the members of the Citizen Platform, confronted every day with the situation of distress that was being played out in the park and who were tirelessly trying to provide answers.

In this way, the ARCH collective found itself 'mandated' for its research by the publics directly affected and concerned by the problematic situation. Its lines of inquiry consisted mainly of identifying and mapping the formal and informal resources of the neighbourhood for migrants; understanding the qualities that contributed to its (in)hospitable character; understanding the troubles caused by the occupation and the tensions related to their presence; as well as to contribute to the improvement of the qualities of hospitality of the *humanitarian hub* set up by the Platform, which was to move from the North Station to a new building dedicated to this function — the presence of the *hub* in the train station causing too much unrest and tension[21].

To do this, the collective was able to draw on different research methods and practices, tested previously in the laboratory (Carlier and Berger, 2021): ethnographic work based on the observation of occupied places; participation in marauding and 'militant' work — distribution of meals, 'counting' of presences, communication of important information to migrants within the park (whether it was warning of the arrival of brigades in charge of evacuating the station or the park or explaining where the different services were located); the organisation of *focus* groups within the *hub* or the park, also at the request of the platform, on specific themes (mapping of living spaces, places and times of insecurity, qualities of hospitality of the *hub* and the North Quarter); *social design* workshops to design the layout of the *hub*.

From a pragmatist perspective, the experience of a problem is not a matter of subjective or intersubjective 'representations', but is rooted in a material environment. In other words, defining and solving problems must be re-understood from an ecological perspective (Cefaï, 2019): inquiry and experimentation do not only transform representations, imagery or symbolism, they also tend to modify the living environment where the problematic situation is played out. Inspired by this approach, we therefore sought to consider the

21 When we began the survey in 2019, the *Hub* was located in the North Station, near Maximilian Park, on the second floor. A fenced-in area in the basement of the station was reserved for migrants, where they were confined. A notice for commuters written on the entrance doors of this space said: 'We hope by this action to offer more security and cleanliness in the building'. Hundreds of migrants slept there every night on cardboard boxes in very precarious conditions. The station was a key space in the migrants life, which they occupied massively, where they spent their time and tried to find shelter. Their presence in the station, however, was in direct tension with the qualities of good accessibility and circulation expected of such an infrastructure. Conflicts with commuters, transport staff, shopkeepers and employees located in the station led to the evacuation of the migrants by the local and regional police, and the relocation of the *hub* to a building dedicated solely to humanitarian aid.

ecological character of the problem and of the migrants' experience — to use Mead's words, we looked at their 'experiential habitat' (Mead, 1934/2006, p. 90), namely the transactions that forms of life maintain with their environments' (Cefaï, 2015, p. 5). We attempted, in the manner of the *Chicagoans*, to immerse ourselves in a social world in order to understand it from the inside, as a collective life milieu (Cefaï *et al*., 2024). Nels Anderson's *The Hobo,* for example, responding to these codes, has been a particularly inspiring reference to guide an ecology of the social world of migrants, despite the temporal and spatial shift[22] (Carlier, 2020).

Understanding the ecology of the migrants' world allowed for the identification of their 'life spaces' (Muchow, 1935/2024; Berger, 2024), and beyond that, the description and understanding of the qualities of hospitality that were associated with them[23] (Carlier and Printz, 2019; Carlier, 2020). This ecological approach was also essential for the collective to contribute to the redevelopment of the *humanitarian hub*, whose qualities of hospitality were perceived as a mirror image of its environment. Through the organisation of various workshops with migrants, volunteers and professionals involved, design principles were identified (Lemaître d'Auchamp and Ranzato, 2019), and directly put into practice[24]. The practices of experimentation through the project, which had been developed for other situations within the laboratory, were thus mobilised in the face of a practical and urgent problem, and articulated to an ecological perspective.

In this way, the research participated in improving the qualities of hospitality of a central place in the daily life of migrants in Brussels. It extended into a capacity for action and intervention on their milieu, at the heart of the pragmatist logic. This capacity participates indeed, according to Dewey, in the reduction of precariousness, which he understands as an adaptation to one's environment in the absence of the capacity for action and transformation (1920). Through our contribution to the reorganisation of the hub, we were therefore contributing, in a marginal but direct way, to the reduction of the precariousness of the migrant world.

22 Nels Anderson focuses on the ecology of *homeless bohemians*, 'figures of the frontier' (1923, p. 21) characterised by their mobility, deplorable living conditions, physical and psychological degradation, ecological segregation and social and political exclusion. *Hobos* are part of this 'class of undesirables' (ibid. p. 150) who arouse hostility and suspicion, considered as 'parasites' by public opinion and having no place in the community and its social life — if not in their social world, *Hobohemia*.

23 The consideration of these qualities by the actors in charge of the renovation and redevelopment of occupied public spaces seemed all the more necessary since, for migrants, public space constitutes a resource that is essential for survival — something that is shared by many social groups whose living conditions are marked by precariousness and vulnerability (Mitchell, 2003; Joseph, 2005; Snow and Anderson, 1993)

24 Three workshops were set up. Two of them took place in the *Hub* then located in the train station, on the one hand with the professionals of the different services that were gathered there, and on the other hand with its users. For each space (entrance, waiting room, psychological/ legal consultation room, toilets, clothing distribution area, etc.), the aim was to identify what needed to be improved in order to increase the qualities of hospitality. Based on this information, design principles were developed for each space. A workshop was then set up when the *Hub* moved into the new building it was to occupy, with the professionals, to determine the distribution of spaces, their layout in light of the equipment available, and the organisation of flows (for more details, see Lemaître d'Auchamp and Ranzato, 2020).

Inconclusive reception tests

Humanitarian hub's redevelopment represents the moment when inquiry carried out by the ARCH collective found its most immediate practical extension. However, the task became more difficult when we tried to contribute, through our research, to the urban policy related to the territory where the humanitarian hub was located. This capacity for action presupposed the reception of our work by the regional public authorities in charge of the redevelopment of the North Quarter.

The investigations carried out by ARCH were followed by proposals and recommendations for an urban hospitality policy, aimed at the city's actors. The inquiry, in a pragmatist perspective, 'designates actors authorised to take charge of the problem, specifies the nature of the trouble, damage or harm and provides instructions on how to repair it. By attributing causes, interpreting motives, predicting consequences, assessing risks, imputing responsibility, and devising solutions*, inquiry organises a field of intervention*.' (Cefaï, 2016, pp. 36-37). Clearly, our research emphasised their responsibility for taking charge of the problem (Gusfield, 1981/2009), condemned their blindness and apathy, and urged them to become involved in its resolution. City actors, on the other hand, placed the responsibility for the problem of newcomers reception on federal policies — something we criticised[25] . It is also clear that we spent more time establishing the conditions for dialogue with humanitarian aid actors than with politicians. In order to challenge them, however, we embarked on a process of publishing and disseminating the results of the research — an important and necessary step in the pragmatist approach, which presupposes providing decision-makers, the 'public officers' (Dewey, 1927/2010), with information enabling them to act on the problematic situation. This process took shape through the publication of our investigation in the form of a book (ARCH, 2019) and video capsules, the organisation of two days of exhibition of our work, workshops and roundtables with actors of hospitality, as well as an evening of public presentation of the book.

The urban policy actors, although invited, were not very present during the public moments that we organised. If ARCH aimed to play a role of mediation between different milieus, and to catalyse situations of cooperation and communication, we have to admit that we did not manage to configure, around the issues of urban hospitality, a 'public arena' — which 'opens transversally social and institutional worlds to each other' and which 'generates new connections between them' (Cefaï, 2016, p. 45). On the other hand, when we were invited to the spaces of participation related to the North Quarter, this was as association members or citizens and not as a collective of researchers, in spaces of communication where the topical frameworks and the ecological-institutional arrangement posed by the authorities strongly limited our possibilities

25 In fact, the federal government is competent in matters of reception and asylum, while the Region is competent in matters of integration as well as regional planning. The conclusion of the ARCH publication is as follows: 'The region does not have jurisdiction over the issue of migration, but it can be made more responsible for the interaction between these phenomena and the matters of land use and urban planning, which are indeed its own. (…) Brussels' urban policy must today once again adapt its forms and means to respond to a 'new urban question': that of responsibility and decency in the face of the tragic aspect of reality, that of the hospitality given by the city to those who take refuge there and must survive.' (Berger, 2019b, p. 216)

of intervention. Our potential contributions were thus reduced to elementary contributions according to a speech format identical to that of the 'ordinary citizen' (Berger, 2008). We wanted the possibility of another arrangement, granting social scientists a place comparable to that given to experts on environmental or architectural issues, for example. Perhaps we were then perceived as activists rather than scientists, both in tone and in substance. On the strength of our research and the relative enthusiasm that ARCH's approach in Brussels had aroused in the urban professions, we were somewhat naively expecting to have the attention of the authorities in charge of the development of the North Quarter, and greater hospitality from the 'reception milieu' (Berger, 2018) specific to urban policy actors who were, in the end, the ones who could give our investigations significant practical extensions. In other words, even as the ARCH community was committed to asserting urban hospitality, it was itself confronted with tests of (in) hospitality.

As a result, while ARCH members were committed to identifying different ways of acting practically to improve the qualities of urban hospitality of the North Quarter, they found little scope for substantially modifying the problematic situation to which they had committed themselves. The practical consequences of our research were restricted to the spaces managed and partially designed by the actors of hospitality (citizen collective, non profit organisations). The community of inquiry that we formed was thus deprived of its full capacity for action. And the public authorities that we were trying to call upon did not show any willingness to 'take charge of the problem'. These various difficulties progressively weakened the commitment of the collective, which gradually withered away, its members returning to other forms of engagement.

Thus, if the process of inquiry carried out within the framework of ARCH seems to us to have come close to the pragmatist perspective of experimentation, we must admit that, *in the end,* we have once again failed to meet its requirements. The quality of the inquiry that was carried out within this framework, and of the experience to which it gave rise, contributed only slightly to the resolution of the problem that had mandated it. We can even think that the intensity and the authenticity felt during this inquiry — the conviction that we were taking part in an important and meaningful adventure — may have fed certain illusions as to its practical consequences and led us to strategic errors.

Is pragmatism practicable?

In this text, starting from a typology of the modes of experimentation pursued in recent years in what have been called *urban living labs*, and after expressing our preference for the 'deep experimentalism' associated with Dewey's philosophical pragmatism and Park's ecological sociology, we set out to provide a self-critical account of our own initiative, conducted in Brussels since 2016: Metrolab.
As we have seen, maintaining an *ethics of inquiry* and a strong program of experimentation is no small task. Yet sincerely committed to this path from the start, Metrolab's research has continually moved out of the pragmatic approach, only to find it again a little later, and then move back out again.

Whether it is in the preparatory phase of the project, during which the deep experimentation is envisaged 'on paper', contemplated as an idea without being controlled by an actual situation; whether it is in the launching phase, when, still waiting for problematic situations, the pragmatist experimentation serves as a model for a training, a simulation, a 'scientific game' oriented towards the production of new tools and potentialities for research, but also towards a pleasure to work together and build a team; or, in a later phase of 'reframing', where institutional constraints and ethical considerations weigh in the direction of a retreat of the research into consulting for project leaders, or a pedagogy aimed at international students and doctoral candidates; finally, whether it is in a phase of re-engagement, where some members of the laboratory mark a distance from the official process and see in the more tangible, more pressing and more public problematic situation of the humanitarian crisis observed in the North Quarter a call and a mandate to inquiry, to 'have a strong and collective experience' (Dewey, 1934) of research , without nevertheless giving themselves sufficient means to 'make it land politically'… It is difficult to say if, when, and to what extent the Metrolab Initiative has honoured its pragmatic inspiration in practice.

Trying to practice Dewey's experimentalism, rather than endlessly quibble about it, is probably a good start for today's pragmatism. However, the pragmatist commitment to serious experimentation cannot be limited to a declaration of intent. It is tested in the duration and progression of the inquiry, through 'testing [its] thought by application' (Dewey, 1920, p. 140). In this respect, Metrolab did not always deliver. However, to be reflexive and self-critical in the face of the inadequacies or deviations of the inquiry, to 'inquire about the inquiry' and the problematic situations on which it stumbled, to develop a clear awareness of those moments and phases in which our enterprise deviated from a pragmatist logic; all of this perhaps brings us closer, paradoxically, to the Deweyan way.

Let us conclude with a last comment on Dewey's theory of inquiry. While it is obvious that a practical application of Dewey's experimentalism can never quite match the theory, we can, why not, ask ourselves the opposite question, whether the theory does indeed match the practice. Isn't this question actually the pragmatist question *par excellence*, as formulated already in the pioneering texts of Charles S. Peirce (1878/1992) and William James (1907/2011)?

More than any other normative theory, it is indeed crucial to pragmatist theory that the idealisations it formulates are reliable guides for practice. More than any other, it is then, supposedly, open to *feedback from experience*, to the theory's self-critique and self-amendment through the consideration of facts, the meticulous and thorough examination of concrete practices. Let's remember that, according to Dewey, nothing is more misleading than 'the habit of treating observation as something outside of and prior to thinking, and thinking as something which can go on in the head without including observation of new facts as part of itself', and this naturally applies in the first place to pragmatist thought itself. Concretely, this means that if philosophical pragmatism is a source of inspiration for concrete inquiry and experimentation in the social sciences, such as the one narrated in this text, the latter is likely to inspire in return the

developments brought today to pragmatist theory[26]. We thus propose to extend the *pragmatist critique of experimentation* on which our article focused on, by outlining an *experimental critique of pragmatism*.

What are these critical elements, of theoretical importance, that can be drawn from the experimentation traced in this article? They mainly concern a certain *rhetoric of action*, already present in Dewey's work, but amplified by certain readings of his work, a tendency to think both the action and the problem (to which the action brings an answer or a solution) *in a major mode*.

Here we have in mind, for example, his lines on Chicago, 'the place to make you appreciate at every turn the absolute opportunity which chaos affords'[27], in a letter to his wife:

> Every conceivable thing solicits you; the town seems filled with problems holding out their hands and asking somebody to please solve them—or else dump them in the lake. I had no conception that things could be so much more phenomenal and objective than they are in a country village, and simply stick themselves at you, instead of leaving you to think about them. The first effect is pretty paralysing, the after effect is stimulating—at least, subjectively so (…).

It is certain that, in examining the situations encountered by Metrolab researchers in Brussels within the framework of the ERDF policy, they were not plunged into chaos, overwhelmed by phenomenal problems that urgently required their attention, that stuck to them without giving them time to reflect. It is such a conception of problematic situations, insisting on their major character and their sensitive dimension, both affective and phenomenal, which made us turn to the situation of migrants at Maximilian Park, and at the same time turn away from other situations resulting from the ERDF policy, over which we would have had more control, but whose problematic aspect did not jump out at us. This raises the question of *minor* problems and disturbances, which are less tangible, less visible and produce fewer affects, and of their legitimacy to become matter of inquiry.

To the problem apprehended in a major, dramatic mode, corresponds for Dewey an action in a major, almost heroic mode. This appears in particular in the semantics of 'transformation', this major mode of action associated with the inquiry. The inquiry — like any quest, the narratologist would say (Greimas, 1966) — ends up in a transformation:

> Inquiry is the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one [that is] so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole (Dewey, 1938, p.105).

In the case of Metrolab — but would it be any different in the vast majority of 'applied' social science research, aimed at 'intervention' or seeking a 'societal impact'? — the transformative action expected from the inquiry fails to occur on a

26 The journal *Pragmata* plays an important role from this point of view by opening a space of communication between philosophy and social sciences, in a pragmatist perspective.

27 John Dewey, in Westbrook R.B., 1991, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, p.83-84.

practical level, concerning the problematic situation in its materiality. The absence of *practical transformation* is then all the more unbearable for the community of researchers as a *cognitive and ethical transformation* has indeed taken place. Through the inquiry, the initial confused situation is now clearly defined, determined, and forms a unified whole; the problem has been posed, then unravelled and resolved in thought and discourse. This gap between the reframing of the situation and the lack of practical transformation was most evident and painful with the ARCH initiative.

Of course, we could take refuge in demonising the public authorities, accusing them of total insensitivity to the current humanitarian situation; of intentionally closing their eyes to the issues at stake, in particular the importance of maintaining a 'station district' in Brussels that could offer an area for newcomers' arrival and transition in the city; or to turn a deaf ear to repeated calls to transform their urban intervention tools — some of which appeared obsolete (Berger, 2019a) — and to adjust their understanding of the contemporary 'urban question', which has become that of hospitality. Instead, however, we might have benefited, again, from being self-critical, not only as a group of Brussels researchers, but more generally as *pragmatists*. Indeed, as we have seen above, the ARCH inquiry produced scientific results, a progressive clarification of the situation under study, and avenues for practical solutions, but also an *adventure*, a gripping collective experience, which led to a certain excitement, and perhaps to illusions. We can think here that the primacy given by pragmatism to experience, to the quality of experience, worked against the possibility for our research to lead to more important results concerning both the spaces targeted and the policies in place. Stimulated by this collective experience, certain of the meaning of our undertaking, proud of the quality of the work we did together, we were also confident in the idea that this cognitive, argumentative and experiential elaboration, made possible by the course of the inquiry, should lead to practical transformations. A certain aestheticisation of the collective experience has, along the way, distanced us from reality (this reality that we thought was on our side!), from the 'rationality in means' and from the strategic action that, without a doubt, were necessary at this stage of the political and practical translation of the results of our research.

In the case of ARCH, as in the other lines of research followed by Metrolab, if the inquiry had practical effects, they were rather *minor*, *indirect*, *deferred, sometimes unexpected, and even involuntary*.

Thus, the work done with refugees and hospitality actors has not led to a 'transformation' of their unsuitable environment. If we have not succeeded in getting the attention of public authorities on the issue in order to change city policy in the direction of increased urban hospitality, the 'forms' of reception have remained the same, or similar. Does this mean that we have *done* nothing? For example, by accompanying the relocation of the humanitarian hub and the codesign work proposed to the actors concerned, the reception milieu has been adjusted and has gained in quality. If it is excessive (and indecent) to claim that, through this research, we have 'transformed' their environment, we have contributed to improving it somewhat. What meaning can these *minor* consequences have in pragmatist logic?

The indirect and delayed nature of these consequences represents another difficulty, another possibility for researchers held in the idea of heroic pragmatism to have their expectations disappointed, and to lose their motivation. For example, according to one of our Metrolab researchers, our work had ‘no impact’ on ERDF projects. While we cannot entirely disagree with this statement, it seems inappropriate to consider the practical consequences of a research in terms of ‘impact’, and while we may have been naïve on a number of occasions, we were not naïve enough to think, in designing the Metrolab initiative, that our research would transform a city policy or have direct and powerful effects — the kind of effect that the idea of impact denotes — on the projects monitored. Peirce’s semiotic pragmatism (Peirce, 1978; Hoopes, 1991; Short, 2007) taught us that an inquiry only produces signs, which act only insofar as they are received, grasped and interpreted by those who have the means to act, that is, to produce ‘practical interpretants’. The link of the research to concrete actions involves numerous mediations, and it was understood, on our side, that the Metrolab research could only ‘act’, at best, indirectly.

Unlike elementary *speech acts* (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), the ‘performativity’ of the productions and results of a research such as this one has nothing immediate about it; it follows an uncertain dissemination process and a complex and opaque semiosis, progressing through chains of interpretations and bearing its modest fruits incrementally. An example from the Metrolab works illustrates this well: while we had developed the socio-architectural concept of ‘inclusive enclave’ and thought out its spatial formalisation (Berger and Moritz, 2018; Berger, 2020) based on observations and analyses conducted on Brussels sites concerned by the ERDF policy and with a view to immediately serving some of the projects of this same policy, this notion underwent a complicated dissemination and course, bearing deferred and unforeseen effects. In 2021, we learned that the architects and urban planners in charge of the strategies and designs for the development of the Saint-Vincent-de-Paul site in Paris were using our concept to define and present their project — a major urban intervention on a 3.4 hectare site. ‘We want to create what the Belgians call an inclusive enclave’, said Yannick Beltrando in the architecture magazine AMC. The situation is both amusing and interesting, since the planning principle that the French urban planner brandishes to designate his Parisian project is in fact not at all — at least not yet! — a ‘Belgian speciality’, since the Brussels ERDF policy for which this principle was proposed has used it very little to guide its own projects, so far. The fact of having inspired a large-scale project with a ‘social dimension’ in Paris, even if it is due to indirect, delayed and involuntary effects of our work, is nevertheless a significant result. Similarly, now that we have reached the end of this six-year project, the Metrolab experience has given rise in recent months to a whole series of publications with the practical aim of providing tools for *future* urban policies in Brussels. The laboratory’s researchers, who feel that they have had little influence on the course of the ERDF projects that have come to an end, have, through their contribution to the development of these tools published at the end of the project, perhaps served the design and implementation of future projects, in Brussels or elsewhere.

A few years ago, Joan Stavo-Debauge showed, on the basis of an empirical research, that troubles and problematic situations were not necessarily occasions for inquiries, and invited us to consider a ‘pessimistic pragmatism’ (2012). The attempt at ‘applied public sociology’ that has been detailed in our article, on the other hand, points toward the exploration of a realistic, modest, ‘incremental’ pragmatism (Lindblom, 1959; Berger, 2019a, pp. 199-212); a pragmatism likely to guide and motivate scientific-practical endeavours, following in its broad outlines the logic of inquiry, while accepting the sometimes minor or secondary nature of the problems it takes up, the variable quality of the experiments to which they give rise, and the possibility that they will result in partial, deferred adjustments or stepwise developments, rather than overt transformations.

References

Abbott, A. (2007). For Humanist Sociology. In D. Clawson et alii (Eds.), *Public Sociology* (pp. 195-209). University of California Press.

Abrassart, C., Gauthier, P., Proulx, S., & Martel, M. D. (2015). Le design social : une sociologie des associations par le design? Le cas de deux démarches de codesign dans des projets de rénovation des bibliothèques de la Ville de Montréal. *Lien social et Politiques*, 73, 117-138.

Adams, J. (1910). *Twenty Years at Hull-House with autobiographical notes*. The Macmillan Company.

Andion, C. (2021). L'Observatoire d'innovation sociale de Florianopolis, Santa Catarina, Brésil. Enquêter et expérimenter au cœur de la vie civique. *Pragmata*, 4, 624-667.

ARCH (Eds.) (2019). *Whose Future is Here? Searching for Hospitality in Brussels Northern Quarter*. Metrolab Series.

Auray, N. (2011). Les technologies de l'information et le régime exploratoire. In P. Van Andel, & D. Boursier (Eds.), *La sérendipité. Le hasard heureux* (pp. 329-343). Hermann.

Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Oxford University Press.

Bejean, M. (2020). Expérimentation, enquête, expérience: les politiques publiques à l'épreuve de la science. *Cahiers du GRM,* 16, [Online] http://journals.openedition.org/grm/2251.

Berger, M. (2014). La participation sans le discours. Enquête sur un tournant sémiotique dans les pratiques de démocratie participative. *Espaces Temps.net*, Travaux [Online] http://www.espacestemps.net/articles/la-participation-sans-le-discours.

Berger, M. (2015). Des publics fantomatiques. Participation faible et démophobie. *SociologieS* [Online], special issue 'Pragmatism and social sciences: explorations, investigations, experiments'. http://journals.openedition.org/sociologies/4935.

Berger, M. (2018). S'inviter dans l'espace public. La participation comme épreuve de venue et de réception. *SociologieS*, [Online] https://journals.openedition.org/sociologies/6865.

Berger, M. (2019a). *Le temps d'une politique. Chronique des Contrats de quartier bruxellois*. CIVA (Centre International de la Ville et de l'Architecture).

Berger, M. (2019b). Brussels-North: City Policies Challenged by Hospitality. In ARCH (Eds.), *Whose Future is Here? Searching for Hospitality in Brussels Northern Quarter* (pp. 205-216). Metrolab Series.

Berger, M. (2020). Écologie des savoirs urbains. Épreuves de la recherche-action au Metrolab Brussels. *Pragmata*, 3, 430-488.

Berger, M. (2024, forthcoming). L'espace de l'interaction. Sources écologiques et topologiques de l'espace goffmanien. In D. Cefaï, M. Berger, L. Carlier, & O. Gaudin (Eds.), *Écologie humaine. Une science sociale des milieux de vie.* Creaphis.

Berger, M., & Van Hollebeke, S. (2017). Bruxelles sous tension. Quelques pistes pour une conceptualisation des formes et enjeux de la 'mixité sociale'. In B. Declève, & P. Ananian (Eds.), *Bruxelles et Montréal en projet(s)* (pp. 175-188). Presses universitaires de Louvain.

Berger, M., Moritz, B., Carlier, L., & Ranzato M. (Eds.). (2018). *Designing Urban Inclusion: Metrolab Brussels MasterClass I*. Metrolab Series.

Berger, M., & Moritz, B. (2018). Inclusive Urbanism as gatekeeping. In M. Berger, B. Moritz, L. Carlier, & M. Ranzato (Eds.), *Designing Urban Inclusion: Metrolab Brussels MasterClass I* (pp.145-157). Metrolab Series.

Bidet, A., Boutet, M., Chave, F., Gayet-Viaud, C., & Le Méner E. (2015). Publicité, sollicitation, intervention. Pistes pour une étude pragmatiste de l'expérience citoyenne. *SociologieS*. [Online] https://journals.openedition.org/sociologies/4941.

Boltanski, L., & Chiapello, E. (1999). *Le Nouvel esprit du capitalisme.* Gallimard.

Bulkeley, H., Marvin, S., Palgan, V. Y., McCormick, K., Breitfuss-Loidl, M., Mai, L., Von Wirth, T., & Frantzeskaki N. (2019). Urban Living Laboratories: Conducting the Experimental City? *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 26(4), 317-335.

Burawoy, M. (2005). 2004 ASA Presidential Address: For Public Sociology. *American Sociological Review*, 70(1), 4-28.

Burawoy, M. (2007). The Field of Sociology: Its Power and its Promise. In D. Clawson et alii (Eds.), *Public Sociology* (pp. 241-258). University of California Press.

Burgess, W. E. (1925). The Growth of the City: An Introduction to a Research Project. In R. E. Park, & E. W. Burgess (Eds.), *The city: Suggestions for Investigation of Human Behavior in the Urban Environment* (pp. 47-62). The University of Chicago Press.

Carlier, L. (2016a). *Le cosmopolitisme, de la ville au politique. Enquête sur les mobilisations urbaines à Bruxelles*. Peter Lang.

Carlier, L. (2016b). Les apports de R. E. Park pour une approche sociologique du cosmopolitisme. *Espaces Temps*, [Online] https://www.espacestemps.net/articles/les-apports-de-park-pour-une-approche-sociologique-du-cosmopolitisme/

Carlier, L. (2019). S'accommoder, ou taire les différends pour tenir ensemble. L'écologie d'un espace public ordinaire à Bruxelles. *Sociologie et sociétés*, 51(1-2), 149-175.

Carlier, L., & Printz, A. (2019). Espaces d'hospitalité dans le Quartier Nord. In ARCH (Eds.), *Whose Future is Here? Searching for Hospitality in Brussels Northern Quarter* (pp. 81-90). Metrolab Series.

Carlier, L. (2020). Experience of Urban Hospitality: An Ecological Approach to the Migrants' World. *Urban Planning*, 5(3), 241-251.

Carlier, L., Debersaques, S., Declève, M., Ranzato, M., & Van Hollebeke, S. (2021). *Cartographier l'environnement social d'un projet urbain.* Metrolab Logbook I.

Carlier, L., & Berger M. (Eds.) (2021). *Design social et enquête collective: les espaces d'accueil et de soin*. Metrolab Logbook III.

Carlier, L., Declève, M., Dessouroux, C., Ranzato, M., Sanchez Trenado, C., Cornejo Escudo, R., Retout, M., Varloteaux, P., Cesari, S., Prouteau, L., Decroly, J.-M., & Grulois, G. (Eds.) (2021). *(Designing) Urban Production: Metrolab Brussels MasterClass III*. Metrolab Series.

Carlier, L. (2024, forthcoming). L'écologie humaine et la coexistence urbaine: quelques malentendus dans sa réception. In D. Cefaï, M. Berger, L. Carlier, & O. Gaudin (Eds.), *Écologie humaine. Une science sociale des milieux de vie.* Creaphis.

Cefaï, D. (2002). Qu'est-ce qu'une arène publique? Quelques pistes pour une approche pragmatiste. In D. Cefaï, & I. Joseph (Eds.), *L'héritage du pragmatisme. Conflits d'urbanité et épreuves de civisme* (pp.51-82). Éditions de l'Aube.

Cefaï, D. (2013). L'ordre public. Micropolitique de Goffman. In E. Goffman, *Comment se conduire dans les lieux publics. Notes sur l'organisation sociale des rassemblements* (pp. 207-288). Economica.

Cefaï, D. (2015). Mondes sociaux. Enquête sur un héritage de l'écologie humaine à Chicago. *SociologieS*, [Online] https://journals.openedition.org/sociologies/4921

Cefaï, D. (2016). Publics, problèmes publics, arènes publiques… Que nous apprend le pragmatisme? *Questions de communication*, 30, 25-64.

Cefaï, D. (2019). Les problèmes, leurs expériences et leurs publics: Une enquête pragmatiste. *Sociologie et Sociétés,* 51(1-2), 33-91.

Cefaï, D. (2020). La naissance de l'expérimentation démocratique. Quelques hypothèses de travail du pragmatisme. *Pragmata*, 3, 270-355.

Cefaï, D. (2023). Public inquiry in social sciences: a pragmatist outlook. In V. Borghi, & L. Bifulco (Eds.), *Research Handbook on Public Sociology* (pp. 23-41). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Cefaï, D. (2024, forthcoming). La ville comme milieu de vie. Entre enquête urbaine et aménagement urbain à Chicago. In D. Cefaï, M. Berger, L. Carlier, & O. Gaudin (Eds.), *Écologie humaine. Une science sociale des milieux de vie.* Creaphis.

Cefaï, D., & Terzi, C. (Eds.) (2012). *L'expérience des problèmes publics*. Éditions de l'EHESS.

Cefaï, D., Bidet, A., Stavo-Debauge, J., Frega, R., Hennion A., & Terzi C. (2015). Introduction du Dossier 'Pragmatisme et sciences sociales: explorations, enquêtes, expérimentations'. *SociologieS*, [Online] https://journals.openedition.org/sociologies/4915

Cefaï, D., Berger, M., Carlier, L., & Gaudin, O. (Eds.) (2024, forthcoming). *Écologie humaine. Une science sociale des milieux de vie.* Creaphis.

Coenen, L., Benneworth, P., & Truffer B. (2012). Towards a spatial perspective on sustainability transitions. *Research Policy*, 41, 968-979.

Cork, J. (1949). John Dewey, Karl Marx, and Democratic Socialism. *The Antioch Review*, 9(4), 435-452.

Daher, R., & D'Auria, V. (2018). Enacting Citizenship in an Urban Borderland: the case of Maximilian Park in Brussels. *European Journal of Creative Practices in Cities and Landscapes*, 1(1), 53-72.

Declève, B., Grulois, G., de Lestrange, R., Bortolotti, A., & Sanchez Trenado C. (Eds.). (2020). *Designing Brussels Ecosystems. Brussels Masterclass II*. Metrolab Series.

Deleixhe, M. (2018). L'événement de la rencontre. La Plateforme citoyenne de soutien aux réfugiés en Belgique. *Esprit*, 446, 130-138.

Dewey, J. (1922). *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology*. Henry Holt and Company.

Dewey, J. (1938). *Logic: Theory of Inquiry*. Henry Holt & Co.

Dewey, J. (1946 [1927]). *The Public and its Problems.* Gateway Books.

Dewey, J. (1920). *Reconstruction in Philosophy.* Henri Holt & Co.

Dewey, J. (1888/1902). *Leibniz's New Essays Concerning The Human Understanding*. Scott, Foresman and Company.

Eliasoph, N. (2011). *Making Volunteers: Civic Life after Welfare's End*. Princeton University Press.

Estèbe, P. (2004). Les quartiers: une affaire d'État, un instrument territorial. In P. Lascoumes, & P. Le Galès (Eds.), *Gouverner par les instruments* (pp. 47-70). Presses de Sciences Po.

Felder, M., Stavo-Debauge, J., Pattaroni, L., Trossat, M., & Drevon, G. (2020). Between Hospitality and Inhospitality: The Janus-Faced 'Arrival Infrastructure'. *Urban Planning*, 5(3), 55-66.

Genard, J.-L. (2018). Un tournant esthétique dans le regard sur la ville. *Rhuthmos*. [online]. https://rhuthmos.eu/spip.php?article2424.

Genard, J.-L., & Berger, M. (2020). Politics, Aesthetics, Economics: Imaginaries of urban public space and their reshaping through the transformation of Brussels City Centre. In S. Vermeulen, A. Mezoued, J.-P. De Visscher (Eds.), *Towards a Metropolitan City Centre for Brussels* (pp. 163-192). VUB Press.

Goffman, E. (1974/1991). *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organisation of Experience*. Harvard University Press.

Goffman, E. (1963/2013). *Comment se conduire dans les lieux publics. Notes sur l'organisation sociale des rassemblements.* Economica.

Greimas, J. A. (1966). *Sémantique structurale. Recherche de méthode*. Larousse.

Gross, M., & Wolfgang, K. (2005). Society as Experiment: Sociological Foundations for a Self-Experimental Society. *History of the Human Sciences*, 18(2), 63-86.

Gusfield, J. (1981/2009). *La Culture des problèmes publics. L'alcool au volant: la production d'un ordre symbolique*. Economica.

Hemeleers, N. (2012). Transversality, quality and dialogue in the urban project. A history of Brussels through its scales of intervention and governance regimes. *Opinions. Pour une architecture critique*, 1, 13-21.

Hoops, J. (1991). *Peirce on Signs. Writings on Semiotic*. University of North Carolina Press.

James, W. (1907/2007). *Pragmatisme et sciences sociales. L'héritage de l'École de Chicago.* Flammarion.

Joas, H. (2002). Pragmatisme et sciences sociales. L'héritage de l'École de Chicago. In D. Cefaï, & I. Joseph (Eds.), *L'Héritage du pragmatisme. Conflits d'urbanité et épreuves de civisme* (pp. 18-61). Éditions de l'Aube.

Joseph, I. (2002). Pluralisme et Contiguïtés. In D. Cefaï, & I. Joseph (Eds.), *L'Héritage du pragmatisme. Conflits d'urbanité et épreuves de civisme* (pp. 83-105). Éditions de l'Aube.

Joseph, I. (2005). Aspects cosmopolitiques de l'errance urbaine : l'ethnographie des SDF. *Tumultes*, 24(1), 111-143.

Joseph, I. (2015). L'enquête au sens pragmatiste et ses conséquences. Vulnérabilité du public, observation coopérative et communauté d'exploration. *SociologieS*. https://journals.openedition.org/sociologies/4916.

Karvonen, A., & Van Heur, B. (2014). Urban Laboratories: Experiments in Reworking Cities. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 38(2), 379-392.

Lefebvre, H. (1974). *La production de l'espace*. Anthropos.

Lemaître d'Auchamp, M., & Ranzato M. (2019). Moving out/Fitting in: Penser ensemble le déplacement du Hub Humanitaire. In ARCH (Eds.), *Whose Future is Here? Searching for Hospitality in Brussels Northern Quarter* (pp.139-150). Metrolab Series.

Lemieux, C. (2012). Problématiser. In S. Paugam (Eds.), *L'enquête sociologique* (pp. 27-51). Presses Universitaires de France.

Lindblom, C. E. (1959). The Science of 'Muddling Through'. *Public Administration Review,* 19 (2), 79-88.

Lofland, L. H. (1998). *The Public Realm: Exploring the City's Quintessential Social Territory*. De Gruyter.

Mead, G. H. (1934/2006). *The Mind, the Self and Society*. Presses Universitaires de France.

Meeus, B., Arnaut, K., & Van Heur B. (Eds.) (2019). *Arrival Infrastructures: Migration and Urban Social Mobilities*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Mitchell, D. (2003). *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space*. The Guilford Press.

Muchow, M., & Muchow, H. (2024). La ville que l'enfant vit. In D. Cefaï, M. Berger, L. Carlier, & O. Gaudin (Eds.). *Écologie humaine. Une science sociale des milieux de vie.* Creaphis.

Park, R. E. (1929). The City as Social Laboratory. In T. V. Smith, & L. D. White (Eds.), *Chicago: An Experiment in Social Science Research* (pp. 1-19). University of Chicago Press.

Park, R. E. (2004 [1929]). The city as a social laboratory. In Y. Grafmeyer, & I. Joseph (Eds.), *The Chicago School or the Birth of Urban Ecology* (pp. 167-184). Flammarion.

Peirce, C. S. (1878/1992). How To Make Our Ideas Clear. In N. Houser, & C. Kloesel (Eds.), *The Essential Peirce. Selected Philosophical Writings — Vol. 1 (1867-1893)* (pp. 167-184). Indiana Unversity Press.

Quéré L., & Terzi, C. (2015). Pour une sociologie pragmatiste de l'expérience publique. *SociologieS* [Online], http://journals.openedition.org/sociologies/4949

Ryle, G. (1945). Knowing How and Knowing What: The Presidential Address. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 46, 1-16.

Searle J. (1969). *Speech Acts*. Cambridge University Press.

Short, T. L. (2007). *Peirce's Theory of Signs*. Cambridge University Press.

Snow, D. A., & Anderson, L. (1993). *Down on their luck: A study of homeless street people.* University of California Press.

Söderström, O. (1996). Sélectionner et projeter. *Espaces Temps*, 62-63, 104-113.

Stavo-Debauge, J. (2010). Dé-figurer la communauté? Hantises et impasses de la pensée (politique) de Jean-Luc Nancy. In L. Kaufmann, & D. Trom (Eds.), *Qu'est-ce qu'un collectif politique?* (pp. 137-171). Éditions de l'EHESS.

tavo-Debauge, J. (2012). Des « événements » difficiles à encaisser. Un pragmatisme pessimiste. In D. Cefaï, & C. Terzi (Eds.), *L'expérience des problèmes publics. Perspectives pragmatistes* (pp. 191-223). Éditions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales.

Stavo-Debauge, J. (2017). *Qu'est-ce que l'hospitalité? Recevoir l'étranger à la communauté*. Éditions Liber.

Stavo-Debauge, J., Deleixhe, M., & Carlier, L. (2018). HospitalitéS. L'urgence politique et l'appauvrissement des concepts. *SociologieS* [Online] https://journals.openedition.org/sociologies/6785#quotation.

Stavo-Debauge, J. (2018). The Qualities of Hospitality and the Concept of 'Inclusive City'. In M. Berger, B. Moritz, L. Carlier, & M. Ranzato (Eds.), *Designing Urban Inclusion: Metrolab Brussels MasterClass I* (pp. 165-175). Metrolab Series.

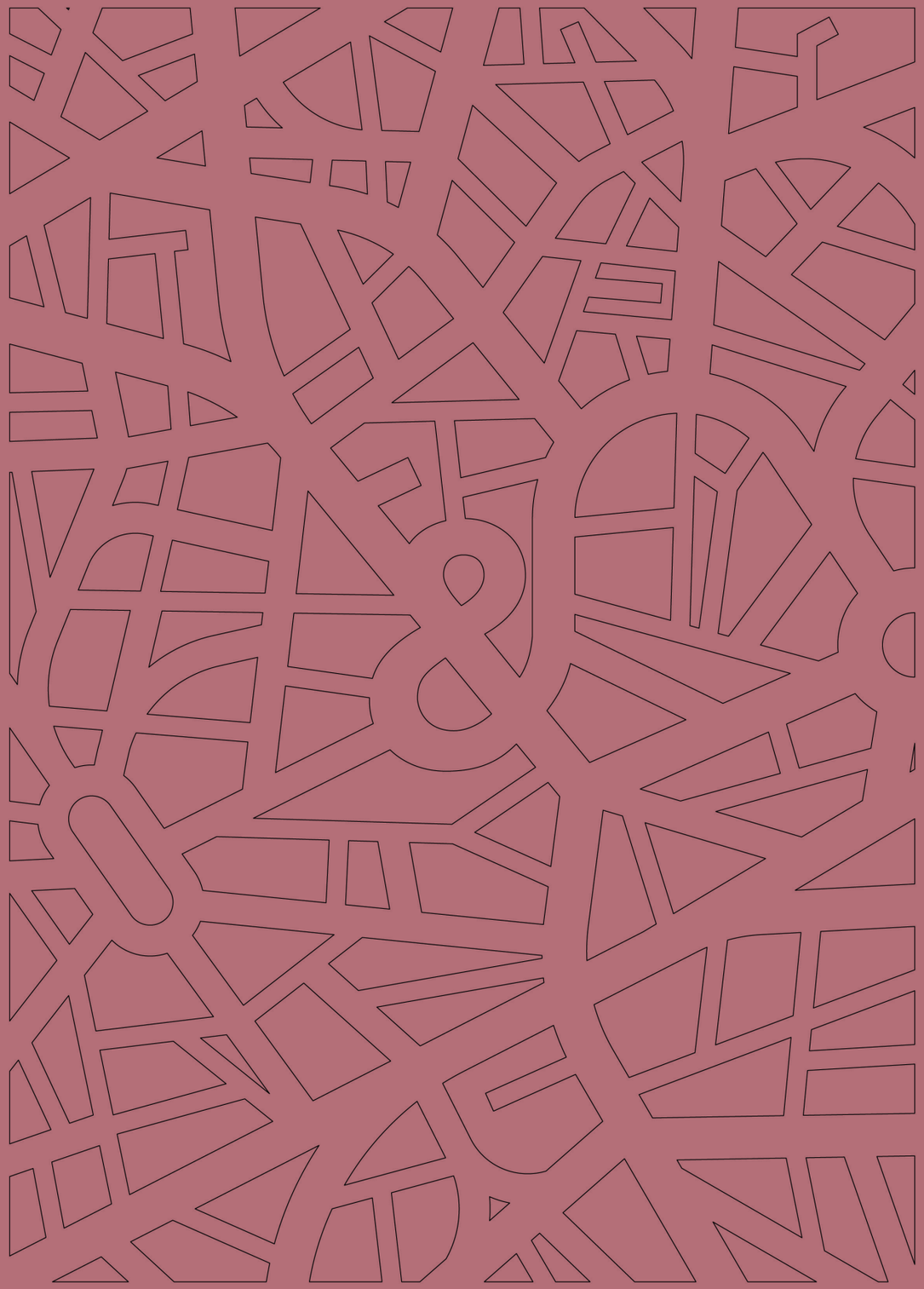
Stavo-Debauge, J., Roca I Escoda, M., & Hummel, C. (2017). Enquêter. Rater. Enquêter encore. Rater encore. Rater mieux. *SociologieS,* [Online] https://journals.openedition.org/sociologies/6084.

Strauss, A. (1960). Spatial Representation and the Orbits of City Life. *The Sociological Quarterly,* 1(3), 167-180.

Van Hollebeke, S. (2021). *Professionnels du discours et spécialistes de l'image dans le projet urbain. Enquête à Bruxelles sur une asymétrie des collaborations entre experts de la ville*, PhD thesis in social sciences and urban planning, directed by M. Berger and J.-P. Thibaud, Louvain-La-Neuve/Grenoble, UCLouvain and Université Alpes Grenoble.

Vigano, P. (2014). *The territories of urbanism: The project as a producer of knowledge*. Metis Press.

Vignes, M., & Ranzato, M. (2021). Repenser ensemble les espaces de santé. In L. Carlier, & M. Berger (Eds.), *Design social et enquête collective: les espaces d'accueil et de soin* (pp. 15-32). Metrolab Logbook III.



External inputs

© Lucas Gicquel

You wouldn’t know from sociology that there’s such a thing as solving a problem

A conversation with Harvey Molotch

This conversation between Harvey Molotch — now Emeritus Professor of Sociology and Metropolitan Studies at NYU — and Mathieu Berger took place in December 2018, in New York City. It focused on the possibility of a more practical sociology, and on the role of social sciences in design practices aimed at inventing ‘decent’ solutions to safety problems in urban spaces. Over the course of his career, Harvey Molotch has conducted research on sociology of architecture and design, city growth, inequalities and urban security. His books include *Against Security: How We Go Wrong at Airports, Subways and Other Sites of Ambiguous Danger* (Princeton University Press, 2012), *Where Stuff Comes From: How Toasters, Toilets, Cars, Computers and Many Other Things Come to Be as They Are* (Routledge, 2003), and *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place* (University of California Press, 1987).

Can you tell us about your approach, which is unusual, particularly in the US?

That’s right. Most of sociology — especially urban sociology — is not applied, here. There are a lot of reasons for that, I suppose, but one is that critical urban sociology is about documenting inequalities and domination. The applied sociology out of that is resistance and rebellion. That’s the bottom line. That’s the policy that would come out of the analysis. I suppose I tried to follow a more inviting pathway.

Are there other colleagues around you that develop this practical orientation in sociology?

I would say no. It’s a brief answer, but to me, accurate. The tradition is, you’re either for ‘us’ or ‘against us’. That’s it.

I guess your type of practical sociology also aims at going beyond a dualistic and agonistic attitude in sociology.

Right. I mean, I have been a very active critical person in my youth, certainly, but intellectually it just becomes boring. We are intellectuals, for better or worse. Thank you for recognising it in my work because it tries to develop the entire stream and all the analytic registers, including the most mundane policy recommendation, like public toilets, better lighting, etc. But, yes, it is difficult to draw attention to this kind of sociology, which does not fit with the expectations of mainstream critical sociology, and with the stereotypes that students have about what sociology is supposed to be and to do. I think there are a number of trends that lead to this particular situation, formation.

On the one hand, I believe that there is a tremendous interest in the U.S. *in design*, both in the aesthetic sense but also in the larger kind of sense. That settles in architecture, planning, in business, and the 'creative city' genre of thinking. If you take the creative city, there is enthusiasm and popularity for that set of ideas in business and in certain realms of geography and planning, but then in sociology it is supposed to be despicable. I think that starts the signal, the schism and the lack of empathy in sociology. And indeed resistance, because first of all it could make someone some money, including Richard Florida himself. And so that's scandalous, that money has been made, top to bottom, by the corporations and by the sociologist, the planner consultant, whatever. So that denigrates it. So in the Academy, economics is the most popular major now, whereas when I was younger it was sociology. Economics is, and that is also a signal of something that has shifted. And that planning of the Richard Florida's sort is popular, as is anything to do with design. And Florida allows you a fusion of some kind of social justice and some kind of design element coming together, so I think that what's going on.

And in terms of the students and what they demand, yes, a lot of sociology students are interested in resistance and rebellion. But again, sociology students are a much smaller group now than they used to be — that's the residue. There are always Marxists, and there were *lots* of Marxists. And now there are not lots of Marxist, the thing has shrunk and what you're left with is quite a bit of residue. It's not just Marxism, it's the whole *reform* orientation of sociology going, in the US, back to the Chicago School and the sort of messianic social change and reform orientation.

Many of the leaders of sociology in the US today represent the maturation of that very genre. Because they were undergraduates in the 1968, or a little later. That tradition, it is not just in the students, I think it's also in the Faculty. So although I have done a lot of work that has been indeed interesting to sociologists of all kind, I think that our common interest for practical and design-oriented sociology is not interesting to most senior sociologists either.

Have you been criticised for that?

No, just ignored.

Designed-oriented sociology is not just despised by critical sociology, it is also ignored by 'professional sociology', in Michael Burawoy's sense, that is, strictly academic sociology. At the same time, there has been a renewed interest in pragmatism in academic sociology, over the last 30 years or so. We are seeing that, on the one hand, many sociologists are fascinated by the *theory* coming from pragmatist authors like John Dewey, who constantly call for practical experimentation, and that, on the other hand, very few of them have a real interest or respect for *actual* practical experimentations.

For my undergraduate, I was a philosophy student and I was extremely excited by pragmatism. I was a John Dewey devotee. He may be big again in Europe, but I don't think that my US colleagues come from that tradition. This particular department [*i.e. NYU Department of Sociology*] is quite strong in what we used to call positivism. What we have — to me, it's quite old fashioned but it's still quite dominant in American sociology — is multivariate analysis, quantitative large scale studies having to do with and relevant to problems of race and class. But a zeal for neither reform or rebellion, a zeal for explaining variation, the causes of poverty, the causes of violence.

About this concern to make sociology more practical, in your recent book *Against Security*, each chapter ends with a list of practical recommendations. I wonder how you experienced this part of work. Where do you draw the line and set the limits of your practical engagement as a sociologist — not being a technician, an architect, an engineer, etc.? What practical insights — not too conceptual, but not too technical — can sociology offer? Do you feel limited in this exercise, or comfortable with the fact that you are not the one who has to come with the technical solution?

Well you take sort of what life brings, so sometimes I am invited to speak or be with architects and I do my best. And, it's obvious to me and to them that I don't have the technical knowledge that they have. So, I can't speak about certain technical issues, but I can speak about planning. I know from being with them that they haven't thought about of what I thought about. So, it just might be that I'm useful. I have been on a lot of architectural committees for building designs, working with universities and what not, and I enjoyed it very much, I enjoyed it every level, including the fact that it matters that if you make the decision at the end of the meeting that 'there will be a desktop like this', there will be a desktop like this. That is really… different! And I enjoy that fact. So when I'm on a committee, I try to contribute. For instance, my greatest invention in the history of the world is that, in public restrooms, when we use paper towels, the paper towel dispenser is put up too high and so when you reach for the towel, the water runs down your arm. So, we were working on a project and I said 'don't put it up high' and they didn't. And the architects then told me afterwards that, for evermore, all their buildings have the towel machine lower. That's my contribution.

I did this book on industrial design years ago, and so, I was interviewing a lot of product designers and what exited me so much was the solutions. The sociologists try to understand the problems of race, poverty, inequality and war,

and you don't have at the end of it policy recommendations. Just 'No more war'. But with them… For instance, if you are trying to create a good garlic press, that is easy to clean… I see that they have done it. It's a little thing, it's only $12 but it fuckin' works. And so I…

… you started to get jealous of that, as a sociologist?

Yeah! And it's possible that you wouldn't know it from sociology that there is such a thing as solving a problem. And you don't know it from sociology because the problems are interpreted as bullshit in the sociology of problems. The problems themselves are an enterprise of hedge-minds and the solutions are 'rebellion and resistance', or 'revolution'. You don't get experience with the concept of solution. First of all, I think it is probably really bad for morale. It's bad for appealing to a certain genre, to a certain type of students. Ordinary human beings, they like to see a solution. It's exciting to see a solution. A dentist, you go in with the toothache and you leave without one — hey!

In order to make sociology better at proposing solutions, one of the problems we face is the problem of the *medium* — traditionally, sociology is all about writing papers, reports, books and dissertations. At Metrolab, we have been exploring new ways for sociologists to conduct and present their research. The use of drawings, maps, diagrams was encouraged. What do you think of this problem and of the possibility for sociology to transcend the medium of writing, for a meaning-making process that is more practical, more directly suggestive of the action to be taken?

I'm inspired by the industrial design experience, and seeing their practice. There is such a thing as a solution, or a range of solutions. And they do come out of interaction — in the case of the product designers — with material goods. I think the Actor Network Theory people and the STS [*Science and Technology Studies*] people get close to this. There is plenty of intellectual ideology that support this, which is the interaction between the material and the intellectual bethinking, and physical movement. I mean, there is a vast intellectual ideology and psychological orientation to support that idea. And that is utterly stripped away in sociology. And so, this version of sociology that you are working on, this methodology gets close to injecting the concrete practicalities into the intellectual endeavour. So it isn't just the intellectual endeavour, but then it's preparing a better pathway or orientation. Engaging in that problem, I would guess, changes the intellect more generally.

I know you're also inspired by the way architects work, and so are we at Metrolab, as sociologists; inspired by their way to do research and what they call 'research by design'. However, while the role given to text may be excessive in sociology, it seems that text doesn't have always the place and the treatment it requires in architectural research by design. Most of architects, when doing or presenting their research, have this pulsion to show pictures and images systematically, as if visuals were required to back any of their words. We've all attended a lecture given by an architect during which there is a technical problem with his/her slide show: the interruption of the 'show' impedes the flow of the presentation and jeopardizes the 'talk'. There might be a way of drawing inspiration from architects' ways, without becoming so dependent on this rhetoric of image. I think it's very easy for us sociologists attracted by interdisciplinarity, to give in to this seduction of the visuals.

This phrase, the rhetoric of the image, I think that's a great phrase — I didn't hear that before. To switch sides, we must say that pretty often, when architecture tries to be sociology, it is just heavily bullshit. Many architects, as you know, have tasted the apple of social change. Someone says to them 'What about your social conscience?' and 'It isn't all about magnificent buildings'. And they say 'Oh, you're right' and then they get in on the social change. And, of course, some of them can't see that this is not like designing a building, and that it's much more difficult, with regard to you design variables. First of all, you don't really know what your designs do socially and you exaggerate the degree to which they do anything socially. And so the marxist sociologists ignore them totally, in part because they have the wisdom to understand that this is not the way to understand the 'means of productions'. But they also ignore it because they bored by anything that is not words, and they are just committed to words and their paradigms. So that is why we have this schism.

What you are thinking of doing and what your program is, it's to try to solve that and bridge that. By the way, in my work with designers, what I learned was that anthropologists have a presence that sociologists don't. Rarely have I run into sociologists, I mean, in the design world… Well, the architects do take sociology somewhat seriously. And Richard Sennett is a great connecting link. I taught at the London School of Economics, in Sennett's program, and they have this orientation to bridge design, architecture on the one hand, and sociology or social science on the other hand. But in my industrial design work the people who you see that the designers and the big companies take seriously are anthropologists.

In *Against Security*, the chapter 'Forting up the skyline' is about architecture and considering architecture's contribution to a more decent society. I was wondering, what sense 'decency' has in your contributions with architects and urban planners. If you're the one who reminds others of the importance of a 'decent society' in these collaborations, how do you define it?

I don't have a good definition. It's just part of my program of 'no definition'. I am also very influenced by ethnomethodology and that all realm, and they do not do definitions. Well, the nice thing about the security issue is that decency doesn't come up at all. It's radical to just bring it up. Then you embark on people's different notions of what decency is. It's like on the battlefield, nobody says 'Well let's be decent'. It'll be the last thing on the agenda. So the question is, to what the extend is constructing a city, or a product for that matter, an act of decency? And to insinuate that decency matters at all is radical in that specific context.

For example, in the US context, you have the 'environmental impact report' or 'environmental impact statement' that represented a dramatic shift,

which is that every project needs to be evaluated in terms of his environmental impact. So it injects another whole dimension to all products. It doesn't say what environmental sustainability really is, what it has to be made of, or anything. It just says that it's going to be a criterion. And then we can debate and research and all that. Well that would be the same thing then for something like this: any intervention ought to have, as a routine part of it, the degree to which it contributes to decency. Thanks to people like Richard Sennett and Jane Jacobs, urban initiatives all over the world now do think about sociality and 'are we encouraging inclusion?', and so forth. But when it comes to the security issue, the weight is overwhelmingly about the militaristic quality of the intervention.

Do you believe that this political or moral dimension of decency demands a certain quality in the form or shape of what is produced, even on an aesthetic level? Is there an aesthetic of decency? Is the decency aspect of a design has to do with the fact that it's understated and sort of low-key? We were talking about the security elements, but now I'm asking more generally. I was wondering if, in order to reach decency, you necessarily have to produce understated urban environments, or if maybe in certain situations, decency demands radical and 'bold' achievements?

It's an interesting provocation. You know, I've been friends with Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown. I admired them greatly intellectually because they opened this very topic up. So 'what is monumental?', for example. Las Vegas is monumental for them. There you go. They don't condemn it. I think interventions could be colossal and decent. It depends on the situation. Starting with whether or not the master narrative or the social formation that supports it — the goals that are baked into the intervention — emerge from decency as a set of motivations. You know, I live Downtown, close to the World Trade Center… and [this process of rebuilding,] it's horrible to me. And it's horrible because I understand the provocations, elements, sentiments that it embodies.

Can you develop a little the idea of a 'civilianisation of security' — maybe some ambivalences of this solution — that you defend in the book?

When there is trouble, and there's going to be trouble — human affairs have trouble, in our relationships, in our formal relationships and politics, there is going to be trouble, and crisis and fear — the question becomes 'how you respond to that?'. The agenda that immediately suggests itself, at least in my life, is militarism and violence. Eye for eye, tooth for tooth. And the idea that it could be different has to invite in this civilian world which is the entire apparatus of modes of intervention: the dentist, the sociologist, the social worker, the artist, the choreographer… Everyone. That's the civilian world. That is from a design sense — design in the larger sense — the appropriate way to reach a solution and to address the crisis, the problem.

This idea of civilianisation of security can give rise to misunderstandings and clichés, and be reduced to the democratisation of surveillance, where everybody is Stasi — 'If you see something, say something'. But the remarkable

things about subways is the way people do watch out for each other, in a much more complex and interesting way. People do call the police occasionally and reveal their suspicion about an Arab who is actually innocent, and so forth. But they also report that someone has had a heart attack, or there is a fire, or all kinds of other things. People who fall onto the tracks, others help them to get out of the tracks. That's the part, of course, that I was praising and encouraging, that to be acknowledged. Because when you get to the concretes of design, then if you understand that people will be doing that — helping each other — then the place where the ladder is kept needs to be accessible and not under lock and key, and there have to be platforms where people can assemble to help each other as they are making the way down the steps, at the World Trade Center. So it possibly has specific design outcomes that come from that knowledge that people will help each other. This larger question really invites intellectual attention to the distribution of authority and expectations of aid and support, and how that can be instrumentalized, however you conclude that. And of course, you will conclude it in different ways… So, in terms of the nuclear stockpiles, in Europe or the United States, I'm not for democratising access. But ladders, I think I would be.

In the book, you advise relying more on people's skills and attention, rather than rushing to technological or material solutions for security. Your book was written before ISIS, before the 2015 attacks in Paris, Brussels, Nice, etc. Since then, we have noticed new and always evolving *modus operandi* for the attacks. For instance, the use of large trucks to run over large numbers of passers-by on a busy walkway. Do these recent events and 'methods' make you change your mind about the importance of technical and material devices as ways to prevent terrorism? I mean, how else you can block a truck's access to a crowded walkway?

If you can do things that are infrastructural, in the meaning of Star and Bowker, which is that they are unseen and they are not impediments taking for granted modalities of being, then that would be a good thing, I think. One thing I stress in the book is how the attention to exotic modalities of terror — of which airplanes, to identify one — is a misconception of the threat, even in militaristic terms. Because what has happened with ISIS is that they have turned the entire materiality of civilian life into potential techniques. And we know that from 'prison studies', that whatever they have, get their hands on, can become a weapon. And so that's what they do, it's an unending product design enterprise among adversaries to take the urban infrastructure and reverse it.

My last question has to do with the political situation in the US. Today, in Donald Trump's America [*the conversation took place in 2018*], **how do you consider the possible consequences and possible impacts of propositions such as yours coming from sociology with this ideal or attention for decency? How do you experience this ongoing situation?**

Sociology survives in the United States right now in any of the form we have discussed because he [*Donald Trump*] doesn't acknowledge it as existing. He's incapable of any notion of the sociological, and so therefore we survive. He has

no interest and no intellectual capacity to even understand what would be a sociological take on anything. And that's working, I think, on our behalf, but it is completely not working on behalf of American society and the world. Because the idea of a collective action problem of any kind, is beyond him, and his people, it's not just him. So, for the specifics of what you and I might provide, there's absolutely no capacity for reception.

And where do you find capacity for reception? Abroad, in other countries interested in these more decent ways to address security? In what particular cities or nations do you find this reception?

I had spent a bit of time in Lund, in Sweden, many years ago. I always thought that social democracies were completely underattended to in the great debates about Marx, and neoliberalism and all of that; that these were living laboratories that were worth looking at, to see how they function. For instance, some of my colleagues in Lund were working on a project for people who are disabled physically. Should we have buses that come and get them, that are 'disabled buses'? Or should we outfit the buses, all the buses, so they can get on it? What's better? Just in their interest, what's better? And I thought, 'Well that's a boring problem'. You know — where's Weber, where's Marx? —, that's a boring problem. But it's not boring… because the government would do it! And that really changes — I think — what is interesting and what is boring. And in this country, even before Donald Trump, they never really done anything that sociologist recommended, or not so likely.

In your opinion, is it because US government has zero interest in sociologists' solutions that your colleagues focus on strictly academic sociology?

Right. It's licence for irrelevance.

Transcription: Sarah Van Hollebeke
Revision and edition: Mathieu Berger

References

Burawoy, M. (2005). 2004 ASA Presidential Address: For Public Sociology. *American Sociological Review*, 70(1), 4-28.

Florida, R. (2005). *Cities and The Creative Class.* Routledge.

Molotch, H. (1987). *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place*. University of California Press.

Molotch, H. (2003). *Where Stuff Comes From: How Toasters, Toilets, Cars, Computers and Many Other Things Come to Be as They Are*. Routledge.

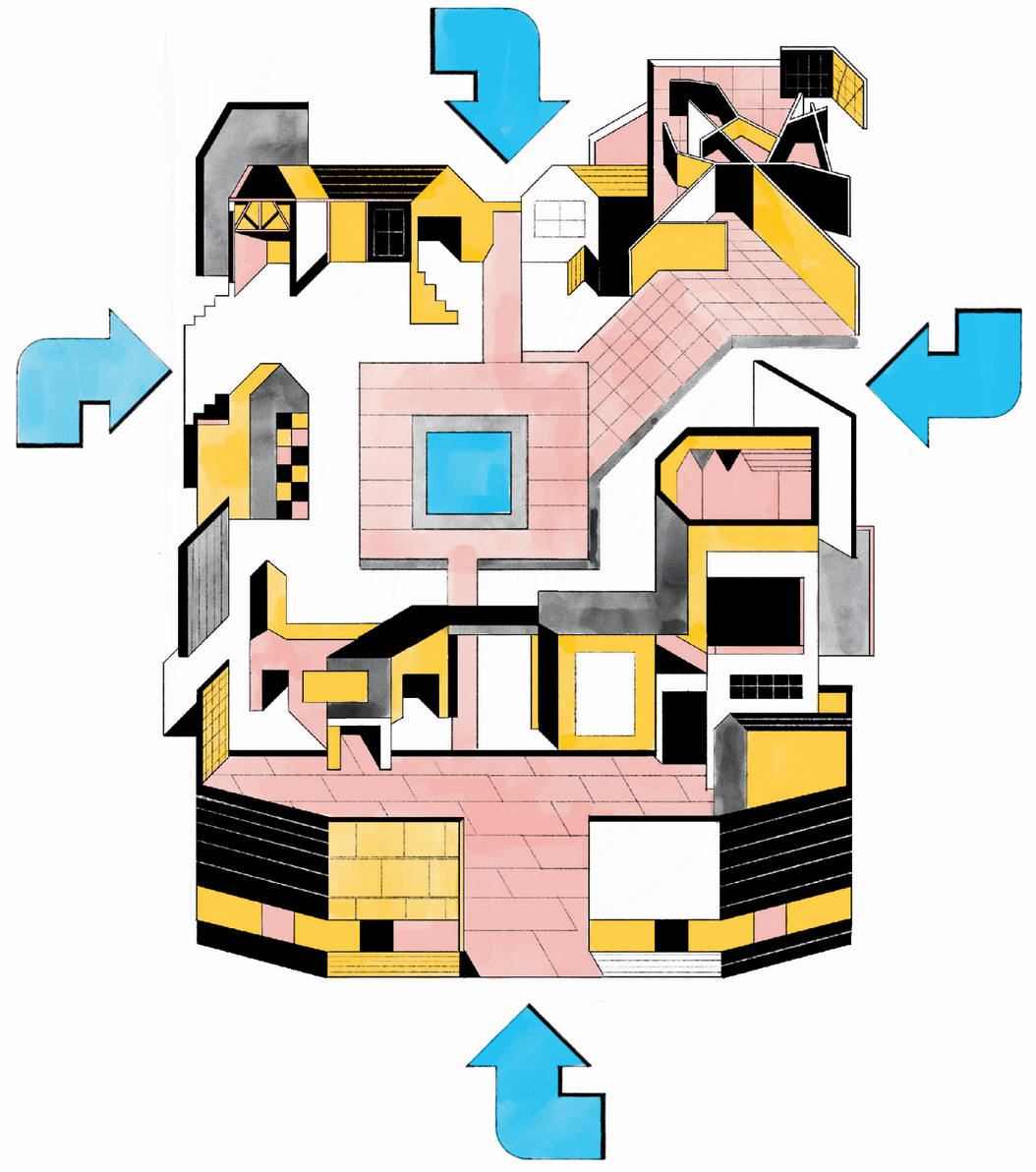
Molotch, H. (2012). *Against Security: How We Go Wrong at Airports, Subways and Other Sites of Ambiguous Danger*. Princeton University Press.

Molotch, H., & Norén, L. (Eds.). (2010). *Toilet. Public Restrooms and The Politics of Sharing*. New York University Press.

Sennett, R. (2008). *The Craftsman*. Yale University Press.

Star, S. L., & Bowker, G. (2006). How to Infrastructure. In L. Lievrouw, & S. Livingstone (Eds.), *Handbook of New Media: Social Shaping and Consequences of ICTs*. SAGE.

Venturi, R., Scott Brown, D., & Izenour, S. (1988 [1977]). *Learning From Las Vegas*. MIT Press.



© Lucas Gicquel

Anchoring sociology in the world: experiences, forms and commoning

A conversation with Luca Pattaroni

This conversation between Luca Pattaroni — Senior Scientist at the Laboratory of Urban Sociology (LaSUR) of the School of Architecture, Civil and Environmental Engineering (ENAC/EPFL) in Lausanne — and Sarah Van Hollebeke (Metrolab/UCL) took place in November 2022. In his research, Luca Pattaroni analyses housing issues, public spaces, urban migration, cultural and urban movements. He uses mixed methods to combine measurement and modelling approaches of significant societal transformations with fine-grained and dynamic descriptions of socio-spatial situations, encouraging further dialogue between urban sociology, architecture, and engineering sciences. Luca Pattaroni is also actively engaged in professional collaboration with architects and urban planners. He is author and co-author of many publications, including, among its most recent: *Politics of Urban Planning* (Springer, 2022, with A. Bihde, C. Lütringer), *Manifeste pour une politique des rythmes* (EPFL Press, 2021, with M Antionoli, G. Drevon, L. Gwiadzinski, V. Kaufmann), *La contre-culture domestiquée: art, espace et politique dans la ville gentrifiée* (MêtisPresses, 2020).

As a partner who supported Metrolab's application for the ERDF grant, you have been involved on several occasions in Metrolab's research on urban inclusion, urban ecology and urban production. Can you briefly present your laboratory and come back to the specificity of the urban research developed at LaSUR? In what way are the issues of inclusion, ecology and production addressed there?

There is quite a strong resonance with the Metrolab, which is why we also found a lot of affinity. At the urban sociology laboratory, directed by Vincent Kaufmann, we are also an interdisciplinary team. There are sociologists, engineers, architects and now even an economist. We work on different areas such as mobility, the specialty of Vincent Kaufmann, who has also collaborated with the Metrolab on different projects, and I have also done a lot of research on housing. Each time, we try to combine socio-political analyses with spatial analyses, trying to think about how spatial and architectural forms are linked to the questions of use and experience but also social and political models. In other words, we study how they interact with human agency and open up an experiential field while contributing to building up commonalities. We are interested in this double horizon of (spatial) forms. On the one hand, we conduct ethnographies of the relationship between experience and form, and on the other hand, we study the way in which forms contribute to or participate in a political construction of a shared order. We are interested in the powers of institution, i.e., politics and the question of the common. We are also working on an ongoing investigation into urban hospitality in partnership with Mathieu Berger and Metrolab.

Could you explain what form the collaboration between Metrolab and your laboratory has taken? Could you go back over these different forms of collaboration and the resulting productions?

The shared heritage of the Chicago School

With Metrolab, we share the heritage of the Chicago School. Concerned by what surrounds us, we believe it is important to study the cities we live and work in. Metrolab carries out important collective and interdisciplinary investigations, linking them to the question of education but also to the question of current political events. For example, with the ARCH project, Metrolab's researchers investigated hospitality by observing what was literally unfolding in front of their workspace. Based on that experience, they called for intellectual and militant commitment. The migrant crisis is an unprecedented political situation that requires inquiry — in the way Dewey was conceptualising it — and that is precisely what Metrolab attempted to do (with limits that Mathieu Berger and Louise Carlier have also written about). The strength of Metrolab is not only that they carry out these collective situated investigations, but that they do it with a strong spatial, ecological and political intelligence; combining detailed empirical investigations with a strong theoretical requirement. This is where the spirit of the Chicago School resonates at Metrolab because there are always philosophical questions that surface in the work.

For LaSUR, collaborations with Metrolab have always been fruitful precisely because we share this idea of an investigation that is in touch with

the world, an investigation embedded in practical aims while nourished by philosophical and theoretical discussions and an investigation that takes the time to describe, using a large array of tools of description and representation.

With ARCH, I discovered this collective power. The fact that architects and sociologists were describing situations together, producing maps and spatially analysing situations around this issue of the newcomer. It was particularly the work of Joan Stavo-Debauge that fed Metrolab's investigations into the inclusive city and which also feeds the work of LaSUR on these questions. It brings to the fore an understanding of hospitality that is not mechanically offered by institutions or yet simply by opening doors, but one that requires material and spatial affordances, along with human attentions and gestures (Stavo-Debauge, 2018). Behind this shared perspective, there is the 'pragmatic turn' we inherited from the sociology of Boltanski and Thévenot, and more broadly the comeback of pragmatism (which was not immediately there in the pragmatic turn, as shown by Joan Stavo-Debauge (2012).

The idea behind these Metrolab-LaSUR collaborations has been to carry out comparative investigations, some of which are still in progress, in order to raise awareness of urban issues in both countries. This actually goes back further. Even before Metrolab was born, we were organising teaching weeks on 'Brussels nights', notably with Jean-Louis Genard. It is therefore personal acquaintances alongside shared intellectual influences that link some of the work undertaken by LaSUR and Metrolab. In another direction, we also organised, with the Braillard Foundation in Geneva, a series of cross-conferences between Brussels and Geneva, engaging among others Bernard Declève, Panos Mantziaras, Vincent Kaufmann and myself.

Around the partnership on urban (in)hospitality, we also organised, with Louise Carlier, Mathieu Berger, Maxime Felder and Joan Stavo Debauge, a seminar series — entirely via Zoom because of Covid-1 — where we brought together scholars and in-the-field professionals and activists to discuss the challenges of a 'politics of urban hospitality' comparing case studies from Brussels and Geneva. There is this common will shared by our two laboratories to open up new arenas, outside universities, where we can bring ethnographic work into the discussion along with direct testimonies and other forms of knowledge. The Braillard Foundation seminar on the subject of 'transition' was also based on those principles. It took place in Geneva in a United Nation building where the audience was connected to another room situated in the ULB campus. The attendees were not only researchers, but also people involved in associations, professionals or people close to the political or administrative environment. So, the idea is to physically move the place of interaction and to bring into the space of debate not only the researcher's ethnographic descriptions of the field but also the critical accounts of the people who directly make up the field.

There is really this idea, at the core of Metrolab's work, of multiplying the ways in which urban realities come to be known, described and inscribed in broader transformative milieus that are at once analytical, intellectual, philosophical and political.

What is also striking about the work of Metrolab is the way they link collective enquiry, action research and teaching. This is yet another way to

perpetuate the Chicago School heritage. The MasterClasses are a good example of this. They are productive training, in the sense that they contribute to the production of knowledge and publications that are both empirically and politically relevant. They produce very handy self-edited books that share with a broader audience the results of the MasterClasses. In the same perspective, at the Laboratory of Urban Sociology, we have a series called ‘Les Cahiers du LaSUR’ notebooks where we publish our research reports mixing maps, photos, statistics and texts. This grey literature is important to us. We need to find formats that take less time than books, that are less reductive in the things they allow to assemble than academic publications. There is also the need to produce one’s own narrative descriptions and publications, to make them available on the Internet.

Studying, at the same time both the production and the experience of the city

Another important point that connects my work and a number of people at the Metrolab is the way we try to link the analysis of the production of the city and its experience. Although it isn’t discussed that much, there are traces of Marxism in the work of the Metrolab. This is very clear in the brochure they published on ‘Urban production’. There is a symmetrisation of the production *in* and *of* the city. There is a focus on questions of urban production, financialisation, but also on the functioning of political power and the complexity of norms and scales.

Speaking from Brussels, the Metrolab is engaged institutionally in the heart of the normalisation movement driven by the European Community, while experiencing an urban environment that paradoxically is less ‘under warranty’ (Breviglieri, 2013) than others cities in Europe. Indeed, to a certain extent, Brussels still escapes the normalising power of urban environments standardised by European norms, while other cities — like Lisbon for example — have been strongly normalised in recent years (Breviglieri, 2019). In Brussels, among other things, precarious migration continues to mark urban landscapes; more broadly, the boundaries of public space, as well as its many forms of occupation, are quite blurred, and certain parts of the city have not yet been renovated. This city has a certain roughness. This makes it an extremely stimulating field in which to think about both the processes of standardisation on different levels (housing, public space, urban behaviour) and what escapes these norms.

Given this urban situation, I find Metrolab’s descriptive and analytical tools very useful, the way they enable an empirically rooted discussion of the intellectual and political stakes of transformations in Brussels. After years of exchanges, we developed in partnership with Metrolab a research project on precarious urban migration, comparing Geneva and Brussels. For me, it wasn’t just about collecting rich case studies but also associating with researchers at the Metrolab, whom I appreciate, at the same time, for their intellectual tradition, their demanding descriptive and analytical requirements, but also for the kindness and openness in the exchange. I believe it is an important achievement for academia to create spaces of enquiry that are benevolent, demanding, and in touch with a world where we can observe significant changes.

Inclusive enclaves: condition of reception and care

One notion that struck me in the work of the Metrolab is that of *inclusive enclave* (Berger & Mortiz, 2020). It stems from a detailed understanding of urban realities that is made possible through an intimate dialogue between sociology and architecture. The notion of *inclusive enclave* is at the same time a spatial and a political figure. This notion, arising from political ecology, reflects the spatial conditions of reception, but also of care. It expresses something strong that is also important for me: recognition of the possibility for an emancipatory power of architecture, away from the sole criticism of its violence. It takes into account the emancipatory and oppressive dynamics of spatial formalisation, together with other conventional — legal, institutional — forms.

The *inclusive enclave* signifies that inclusion is not achieved through temporary experiments, guerrilla tactics as has often been the case in the folklore of tactical urbanism. I have been sceptical for a number of years about the ability of what is temporary to produce shifts in or respond to the challenges of inclusion and resistance to certain effects of capitalism. When we talk about an *inclusive enclave*, we are talking about the power of perpetuation allowed by building of solid walls and resistant land tenure. There is an urgency to recollect the spatial power of architecture as a way to ‘emplace’ — that is, to confirm spatially and symbolically the place of — the precarious and build up new commonalities. This entails the need to be attentive to urban and architectural work and the way it contributes to a political project. To do so with accuracy, the tools of architecture, urban planning and social sciences must be symmetrised, and not be viewed as distinct epistemologies. Indeed, I believe there is an epistemological continuity between those different disciplines. They all need to account for what human beings are capable of (and made of) and what common order is built up.

Returning to the notion of *inclusive enclave*, I started to use it in my work on the spatial stakes of contemporary post-countercultural urban policies. It enabled me to give a name to spatial configurations that I view as essential in relation to the critique of the *temporary* that I have developed over the past ten years. In 2012, the School of Art and Design invited me to give a lecture on the situationist drift and it really struck me while preparing the talk that the strategies of drift, and behind that, the strategies of the ‘temporary situations’ and ‘permanent change’ as advocated by Debord, have largely lost their subversive force. The contemporary forms of urban production now capitalise on the systematic and guaranteed management of transitory situations contributing the constant reproduction of a commercially attractive city. This argument has been developed by various authors, among others, with Mischa Piraud and Leticia Carmo in the book I directed on the domestication of counterculture (Pattaroni, 2020). Those questions were also at the core of the many discussions I had with Jean-Louis Genard on the ambiguities of the so-called creative city.

Along with this critique of the failure of the temporary came the question of renewing the capacities of resistance. It is at this point that the spatial and political issue of the *inclusive enclaves* came to the fore along with the broader importance of architecture.

In the school of architecture where I teach, I have seen in the past decade an increasing number of students arriving who no longer dare to do architecture

as they criticise its role in an extractivist capitalism and, also its normative role, its violence. Even though those critiques are essentials, they should not make us forget the strength of architecture as an instrument for spatialisation and also for perennialization. Indeed, to avoid becoming part of the 'villains', the answer those students bring to the fore is an ephemeralization of architectural structures, what I call an 'aesthetics of the pallet'. Indeed, in the framework of tactical or transitory urbanism, we have all seen in the past 20 years those temporary installations based on recycling of wooden pallets. These pallets are mobile and easy to get. It is simple to build interesting structures with them. The development of momentarily occupied spaces are undoubtedly very interesting pedagogical situations for training students in spatiality, but paradoxically they create an aesthetic that leaves out many questions about the power of perpetuation and the power of architecture institutionalisation, and more broadly, all the formalisation – material and conventional – processes.

In the investigation we carried out in Geneva and Lisbon on the ambiguities of the creative city, we realised that in the face of the saturated city – i.e., cities that are being suffocated by land and regulatory pressure – we did not need any more temporary and interstitial structures but on the contrary new counter-forms, robust 'counterspaces'. Hence the idea we had in 2016 – with some friends who have also been involved in post-squat for a decade – of founding a cooperative aiming at producing affordable working spaces for artists and artisans but also social and political activities. The idea is that this cooperative should not only occupy buildings temporarily before they are destroyed, but also needed to look for permanent buildings.

Even though we still have a majority of temporary spaces, we were now able to build our first perennial pavilions and we hope to acquire lasting buildings. Our largest building, *Les Saules* – a temporary lease that we will lose this year (2023) – hosts around hundred people, which really constitutes a multitude. We have autonomists who are very critical of the ambiguous game of our cooperative within the capitalist cities. We have jewellers and photographers, people involved in well-being, young and old artists, and so on. We are quite proud to have made this possible. We also wanted to avoid the situation of Paris where temporary use is attributed through public market calls, forcing squatters to become managers with strong restrictions on the field of possibilities. With the cooperative, even if we have also turned into managers we benefit from broader margins of manoeuvre. Hence, we were able to extend the scope of our cooperative to include craftsmen and activities belonging to the social and solidarity economy or yet social and political activities. We try to give a broader political meaning to the activity of the cooperative, in particular defending the idea that there is a need to foster new social policies aiming at the production of lasting affordable spaces for productive and experimental activities.

When I read Mathieu Berger and Benoît Moritz, I realised that our building *Les Saules* was de facto an *inclusive enclave*. Somewhere along the way, we had been working on the unifying power of the wall, reaffirming the need to have walls that protect and give a capacity for self-determination.

Recently, I was in Paris for a festival on 'third places', and now everyone has this idea that we need to make them permanent. In Brussels, we dialogue

with *Communa* who share the idea that we need to go beyond temporary use and build up new lasting solutions such as we are also trying in Geneva. This fosters a dialogue between the experiences developed in Geneva, Brussels or even Paris and other European cities in order to create emancipatory spaces and renewed margins of manoeuvre away from the commodification of the temporary use market: how to make room for precarious newcomers, for activities that are not or are barely lucrative, for alternative life forms but also for productive activities that have tended to be excluded due to tertiarization? This concern for the material conditions of urban hospitalities – which is shared between our laboratories – must be combined with an empirical understanding of the renewed capitalist forms of production of the city and their deleterious effects (Breviglieri, 2013).

Given its ability to question the social, economic and political whereabouts of human and nonhuman urban ecologies, I believe there is a real topicality of Metrolab's work in relation to what, nowadays, we call 'transition'. The Metrolab's axes seem essential as they tackle simultaneously the recomposition of economic activities, the evolution of migratory forms and the transformation of our relation to the living.

All together these societal metamorphoses call for a profound transformation of the social and spatial justice models we inherited from the xxth century, one that is a redesign at the same time of State, economic and territorial models. I speak of a need for 'reneighbouring' – '*revoisiner*' in French (Pattaroni, 2022) – just like in the 1970s we spoke of 'reinhabiting', that is to say, taking a place in a world in which we live while taking care of it, a question that has been updated by Bruno Latour with his sense of the formula. In order to achieve such a 'reneighbouring' we need a redesign that goes much further than the reforming attempt of the late xxth century constructed around the ideal of a 'compact and sustainable city' and neoliberal versions of the welfare state.

We need, as in the 1970s, to relaunch alliances between the academic world and activists because a set of experiences can be found at the basis of territorial production forms that require unravelling the dominant political and financial models. Hence, I don't believe that it is the multiplication of indicators, certificates and labels or even participation and 'pilot projects' that will allow us to achieve transition. More radical changes are needed. We need new territorial production processes. For this transition project – a political and professional project – the set-ups that I was highlighting at Metrolab and their anchoring in an intellectual and political heritage seemed rather favourable.

That is why we are sad to see the Metrolab disappear along with what it had allowed to assemble as a form of competence, as a heritage of intellectual traditions. On the contrary, political authorities should strengthen such structures in order to move forward. I have seen how the MasterClasses have energised and stimulated students and researchers. There is something disturbing about this expansion of a logic of temporary models – of pop-up labs – into academic institutions.

Could you explain how you approach the interdisciplinary work at LaSUR, which is a sociology lab in a science and technology institute? How do you participate as a sociologist in expert groups attempting to provide practical solutions with a technical, interdisciplinary, applied and comparative dimension? What skills do you think sociology needs to develop in order to be effective and provide practical solutions?

At LaSUR, we try to constitute what my colleagues Vincent Kaufmann and Yves Pedrazzini have called a 'polytechnic sociology', a sociology that recognises the institutional and political power of architecture and engineering, and more broadly of the work of shaping, rearranging and reassembling spaces. In a way it is a practice of sociology that is embedded in territorial transformations, both describing and accompanying them.

As I mentioned earlier, this polytechnic sociology is based on the idea that there is no real epistemological break between architecture, civil engineering and sociology. This is something that Ingold (2013) also defends when he aligns art, architecture, archaeology and anthropology; what he calls the 'sciences of resonance'. Such an epistemological shift implies that we don't see (urban) sociology merely as a science that aims to unveil the hidden mechanisms behind the production of forms, but also, and foremost, as a science that is concerned with the experiential and political significance of forms, in other words, the way they perform in shaping a common world, taking into account both their emancipatory and oppressive power. Architecture is also concerned with the virtues of the forms produced, not only symbolic but also robust, and this is also the case when architecture includes the question of use. Lastly, around this sociological triptych that links forms to the question of experience on one side and the question of commoning on the other, we find a way for architecture and sociology to walk side-by-side. This does not mean that we are similar – on the contrary we do not use the same tools – but we share the same interrogations about what people are able to do/feel and how we can build up/institute a just common order (one that doesn't negate ways of differing).

At the same time, by taking seriously the analytical tools and methods specific to each discipline we recall the rigor needed to develop a scientific discourse. I believe we share with Metrolab this concern for scientific rigor which goes hand in hand with the type of methodological exploration – or even bricolage – that was characteristic of the Chicago School. As Paul Feierabend (1975) advocated in his book *Against Method*, 'anything goes' in terms of methods as long as their use is embedded in a scrupulous inquiry process.

With the aim to expand the range of methods that contribute to scientific investigation, we set up a partnership with the Doctoral School of Architecture and Urban Sciences of EPFL and the Geneva School of Art and Design (HEAD). Working with the HEAD a few years ago, I realised that there was a strong tradition of critical reading – students were reading more than at EPFL – and that the questions linked to project-based thinking or visual methods accompanied designers, architects and visual artists alike. We had everything to gain by opening up new exchange venues with the aim to work on what I call 'epistemological effervescences'.

Hence, on one side we need to explore a broad range of inquiry methods and on the other side it is crucial to reassess the scientific dimension of architecture and the social sciences. In this perspective, it is possible to produce scientific knowledge – i.e., disputable, grounded in robust empirical investigation – through the methods of art. This raises the question of 'assertoric regime', i.e., the possibility of producing sentences that have regimes of veridicality, as Passeron says (1991). We must support what we can say about the world through the imagination and precision of our plans and spatial analysis, through scrupulous art-based experimentation, through reflexive design process. Indeed, what matters is the way these methods are embedded in the production of a demonstration. Within the framework of MetissPresses, I worked with Elena Cogato Lanza on a book, *Urban Differences* (Cogato et al., 2014), that was a milestone for us as we tried to build up a consolidated dialogue between architects and sociologists.

So, the 'polytechnic' sociology we try to explore borrows from and dialogues with different techniques, not only analytical ones but also techniques of territorial production. Engineers, environmental scientists, architects, all share the fact they are each engaged in spatial production. They are often criticised for not being reflective enough, or for too quickly sweeping the question of description under the carpet. On the contrary, we believe we can ask architects and engineers to be a bit more descriptive and reflective and ask sociologists to be a bit more projectual and engaged in the whereabouts of spatial production. I come back to this in the conclusion of another book that we edited with Elena Cogato Lanza on the possibility of envisioning and producing a *Post-Car World* (Cogato et al., 2021). I explain that today it is not only important to take into account the question of lifestyles but that we also need to do it in a dynamic and critical manner. In the most problematic relationships between social sciences and architecture, the social sciences document life forms typologically and statistically, and the architects translate them. In such a professional division, we end up with mechanical translations that lose their political edge. On the contrary what seemed more interesting to us in the *Post-Car* project, which was also a teaching unit, was to make architecture students aware of the tools to describe lifestyles in a political project, which was that of the 'post-car'.

So, in the teaching unit and later on in the book we developed scenarios, saying that we must welcome a large spectrum of life forms while refusing those based on the systematic use of car. To do so, we need to unravel at least 80 years of massive territorial and technological investments into the production of the 'automobility systems', that is a generalised dependence on individual car-based mobility. It isn't about making cars smarter or shaming individuals to force them to stop using cars; it's about transforming territories so that people are able to live without cars (or at least greatly reduce their daily use). This calls for a political perspective on territorial development (housing, public spaces, mobility infrastructures), the different life-forms it supports and also the commoning processes it hosts. Sociologists and architects develop together a collective project of emancipation from car dependence.

At this stage, we have not completely transformed the work of the sociologist, who continues to produce ethnographic as well as statistical

descriptions, but we have opened new venue to collaborate more closely with the architects.

Collaborative investigations where we work side by side, critically questioning what is there and what can be there. An epistemological continuity is drawn between the ethnographic narrative and the architectural drawings and plans; a continuity based on a common understanding of the relation between life forms and life milieu, that is, between bodies, spaces and politics.

This epistemological community is what will allow the tools to circulate and resonate without the sociologist necessarily becoming an architect or the architect becoming a sociologist. Yet, what we do is to reinforce mutual understanding and co-dependence. In other words, our sociological demonstrations are incomplete without the ability to map and draw; and likewise, drawing calls for an intimate understanding of the implicit anthropology and politics entailed in each 'coup de crayon'. This reciprocal condition accompanies the epistemological project of transition.

Transcription: Sarah Van Hollebeke

Revision and edition: Luca Pattaroni

References

Berger, M., & Moritz, B. (2020). Enclaves inclusives : concevoir l'hospitalité urbaine en archipel. In A. Mezoued, S. Vermeulen, & JP. De Visscher (Eds.), *Au-delà du Pentagone. Le centre-ville métropolitain de Bruxelles* (pp. 120-128). BSI Series.

Boltanski, L., & Chiapello, E. (1999). *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme*. Gallimard.

Boltanski, L., & Thévenot, L. (1991). *De la justification. Les économies de la grandeur*. Gallimard.

Breviglieri, M. (2013). Une brèche critique dans la "ville garantie"? Espaces intercalaires et architectures d'usage. In E. Cogato-Lanza, L. Pattaroni, M. Piraud, & B. Tirone (Eds.), *De la différence urbaine. Le quartier des Grottes / Genève* (pp. 213-236). MètisPress.

Breviglieri, M. (2019). Lisbonne, 21e siècle. Vers un nouvel espace référentiel du centre urbain : emprise marchande, aménagement certifié, libéralisme multiculturel. *EspacesTemps.net* [Online].

Cogato-Lanza, E., Barami, F., Berger, S., & Pattaroni, L. (2021). *Post-Car World. Futurs de la ville-territoire.* MêtisPresses.

Cogato-Lanza, E., Pattaroni, L., Piraud, M., & Tirone, B. (2013). *De la différence urbaine. Le quartier des Grottes/ Genève.* MêtisPresses.

Feyerabend, P. (2010; 1975). *Against Method. Outline of an anarchist theory of knowledge.* Verso Books.

Genard, J-L. (2019). Le concept de rythme au coeur d'un tournant esthétique de la pensée et des politiques de la ville. *EspacesTemps.net* [Online].

Ingold, T. (2013). *Making: Anthropology, archaeology, art and architecture*. Routledge.

Lordon, F. (2019). *Vivre sans ? Institutions, police, travail, argent…* La fabrique éditions.

Carlier, L., Declève, M., Dessouroux, C., Ranzato, M., Sanchez Trenado, C., Cornejo Escudo, R., Retout, M., Varloteaux, P., Cesari, S., Prouteau, L., Decroly, J.-M., Grulois, G. (Eds.) (2021). *(Designing) Urban Production: Metrolab Brussels MasterClass III*. Metrolab Series.

Passeron, J-C. (1991). *Le Raisonnement sociologique*. Nathan.

Pattaroni, L. (2022). Revoisiner. La dimension hospitalière du monde. *Faces-Journal d'architecture*, 80, 4-12.

Pattaroni, L. (2020). *La contre-culture domestiquée. Art, espace et politique dans la ville gentrifiée*. MêtisPresses.

Stavo-Debauge, J. (2018). The qualities of hospitality and the concept of 'inclusive city'. In M. Berger, B. Moritz, L. Carlier, & M. Ranzato (Eds.), *Designing Urban Inclusion. Metrolab Brussels MasterClass I* (pp. 165-175). Metrolab Book Series.

Thévenot, L. (2006). *L'Action au pluriel. Sociologie des régimes d'engagement.* Éditions La Découverte.

Thévenot, L. (2011). Le gouvernement par l'objectif à l'épreuve de la critique: métamorphose des évaluations autorisées. In G. De Larquier, O. Favereau, & A. Guirardello (Eds.), *Les Conventions dans l'économie en crise*. Éditions La Découverte.

© Lucas Gicquel

Human ecology: a joint project of Metrolab Brussels and the Centre for the Study of Social Movements-EHESS Paris

Daniel Cefaï

We were invited by Metrolab in Brussels to organise a three-day workshop, on urban ecology, from 27 to 29 August 2017, from a perspective that involved sociologists and anthropologists, geographers and urban planners.[1] 'Urban ecology', alongside 'urban production' and 'urban inclusion', is indeed one of Metrolab's main focuses. It is an investigation into the natural (water, air, land, fauna, flora, etc.) and artificial (buildings and streets, waste and rubbish, etc.), material and constructed environments that make up urban ecosystems. How do these environments shape our lifestyles? Human ecology is also a thread of research for several members of the Centre for the Study of Social Movements (CEMS) in Paris, who are interested in its genesis, in the question of environments and their experiences from a pragmatist perspective, and in the history of fieldwork that took Chicago as theme and environment.

This perspective has bequeathed to us a whole series of notions of urban morphology and dynamics — accessibility, density, mobility, nodality, concentration, centralisation, dominance, etc. It relates as much to heavy structures and processes, provided, for example, by economic, demographic and geographical modelling, as it does to *forms of life*, which develop at the crossroads of *living environments*, *life stories* and *life spaces*.

This workshop sparked a desire to continue our investigations. Five years later, our common efforts led us to a book that we are coordinating with Mathieu Berger, Louise Carlier and Olivier Gaudin: *Écologie humaine. Une science sociale des milieux de vie* (Éditions Creaphis, forthcoming 2024). Much of this research

1 See: https://Metrolab Brussels/events/atelier-dete-lespace-de-lecologie-humaine-de-chicago-a-bruxelles-fr.

has focused on Chicago. Chicago was the cradle of human ecology. This city is exceptional because it has a long history of ethnographic and biographical investigation, underpinned by cartographic and statistical analysis. One can sense this activity from the many maps prepared by the Local Community Research Committee, some of which are freely available on the website: 'Chicago in the 1920s and 1930s: The View from the Chicago School'.[2] Early on, the study of the city was part of an effort by private entrepreneurs to standardise and regulate the real estate market, and by public authorities to plan and govern the city. Researchers at the University of Chicago had a cooperative relationship with city agencies and urban planners — Ernest W. Burgess and Louis Wirth in particular. Both also had connections with reform activists, community organisers, political activists, social workers: Burgess began his career doing social surveys, along the lines of the Pittsburgh Survey, and maintained lifelong sympathies with progressive movements, while Wirth, after his beautiful book on *The Ghetto* (1928), became interested in the public problems of housing and race relations.

Two important names in human ecology, from the 1920s era, are Robert E. Park and Roderick D. McKenzie. McKenzie is the author of the first ecological thesis on Columbus, Ohio, while Park is arguably the major theorist. He coined the categories of *competition* and *conflict*, *accommodation* and *assimilation*, *succession* and *invasion*, *symbiosis* and *dominance*, which can be found in the Green Bible, the *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (1923) and in the edited books, *The City* (1925) and *Urban Community* (1926). The idea was to study the natural growth of the city, independently of any intentional intervention, and to explain the transformation of 'impersonal, sub-social, spatial and functional aspects of the community structure'. For Park and his colleagues, a whole life of human communities takes place beyond any conscious plan or intentional programming. This life makes it possible, in large part, to account for the functional differentiation of the social (occupational, institutional, ethnic, etc) worlds, the distribution of populations and the configuration of territories. Human ecology is thus related to the sociology of professions and organisations, economics, demography and geography. It also studies the moral order, which unfolds through 'the exchange of meaning through communication by symbols', as studied by Charles H. Cooley or George H. Mead, as well as the processes of coordination, regulation, integration and differentiation, super-ordination and sub-ordination that go with it. Human ecology is linked to what later became cultural anthropology, just as it is linked to pragmatist philosophy in another perspective: when things are going well, individuals and groups accommodate themselves without too much friction and partly assimilate the social habits of other groups; when conflicts break out, a dynamic of problematisation and publicisation, in the sense of John Dewey — a 'politicisation process', in the sense of Park — is initiated. Civic, trade union or partisan movements clash and organise themselves. They mobilise to transform laws and institutions while at the same time they confront forces of opposition and the law enforcement agencies. This is how arenas around public issues are created.

2 See: https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/collex/collections/chicago-1920s-and-1930s-view-chicago-school-social-science-research-committee-maps/

This opposition between community and society, nature and culture, ecology and morality, symbiosis and reason, has since been questioned: the hypothesis of an unprogrammed and unconscious development of the city as an organism is interesting, but this vision of the city as a natural organism has its limits. All ecological processes have a cultural, moral and social dimension; the articulation between ecological processes and politicisation processes is more complex than this simple scheme. Nevertheless, a number of categories still stimulate our ecological imagination. For example, when it comes to understanding waves of mass immigration leading to the cohabitation — with varying degrees of friction, tension and conflict — of a multiplicity of national, linguistic and religious groups. Human ecology, even if the cycles of race relations it had imagined can be regarded, in some way, outdated, is a cousin of the sociology of transnational migrations invented by William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, which Park often invoked; it gave an empirical flesh to 'cultural pluralism' or 'transnational America', notions which were invented by Horace Kallen and Randolph Bourne, students of William James and John Dewey. Human ecology, furthermore, inspired the first descriptions of the spatial dynamics underlying the creation of industrial and commercial zones, the emergence of music-hall, sex, gambling and alcohol markets and, what in the 1920s were called 'vice and crime districts'.

Less known, human ecology also underpinned the first inquiries on the mushrooming of satellite cities and the move of many urbanites from the centre to the peripheries, towards factory towns for some, garden cities for others. It also produced the first research in the United States on the integration of local communities, on 'rurban' and 'suburban' areas that gravitate around the 'magnet poles' of large cities, enabling economies of scale through the sharing of large transport and communication infrastructures. In parallel with human geography, the field of investigations has expanded to the 'increasing scale' of the metropolitan region.

In the first part of the book which is coming out at the end of 2024, we look beyond the historical and theoretical questions to the future of human ecology. First, we reopen the exploration of the connection between natural development and urban planning. The research of Park-Burgess-McKenzie and their students curiously overlooks emerging urbanism and new city planning practices. Andrew Abbott shows that unlike in England, where from the outset sociology had strong links to social work and social reform, in the United States it tended to distance itself from them, particularly from the 1920s onwards.

One of our lines of enquiry is nevertheless to identify the points of encounter between sociologists, reformists and urbanists, and to trace their co-implication in urban policy operations from the 1890s, when these three categories were still largely indistinct. After WWI, the most interesting process was the gradual intersection between human ecology led by Louis Wirth, the emerging science of public policy around Charles Merriam (who later came to head the New Deal's planning programmes) and the art of urban landscaping (professions that became established at the turn of the century and gained increasing power in the municipalities). More generally, from the end of the 1920s onwards, scientists learn to decipher spatial planning policies, strategies of geopolitical occupation

or commercial profitability, capitalist development or community organisation of urban spaces. And they increasingly explain the territorial, demographic, functional, technological and economic mutations of the city as the result of choices made and decisions taken by all sorts of actors. The urban environment is no longer perceived exclusively as a natural process.

Another option is, secondly, to direct human ecology, and more particularly urban ecology, towards studying the experiential fields of local residents or passers-by, dwellers or tourists, elected representatives or managers. This path had been traced by the studies on the careers of migrants or delinquents in Chicago: as a counterpoint to statistical and cartographic analyses, the problem was to understand 'how one becomes' a Polish-American immigrant or a professional thief, a member of an Italian gang or a department store saleswoman.

The appeal of a big city is the abundance of material resources found there, the opportunities for work in its factories and offices, the profusion and diversity of goods and services to which it gives access, as well as the opportunities it offers to break the law and earn a living illegally without getting caught. But how do people go about this? At what forks in the road are they steered in this or that direction? What are the factors that pull or push them in direction or another?

These questions involve reconstructing the interactional and institutional environments in which people live, understanding what capabilities they develop over the course of their lives, what resources they draw from their life spaces, who they can rely on or ally with, or what constraints — physical, legal, social, etc. — prevent them from doing this or that. Understanding their multiple life environments (family, neighbourhood, education, profession, religion, associations, etc.), which cannot be factored down to the 'social properties' of 'variable analysis' (to use Herbert Blumer's words), requires understanding the criteria of their experience — affective, evaluative, cognitive, mnemonic, imaginary — at play in their 'biographical situations', at the crossroads of their networks of interactions and their involvement in associations, organisations and institutions. City dwellers do not have an instruction manual or a roadmap to follow, nor are they determined by the tyrannical so-called 'social dispositions'. They activate repertoires of skills, beliefs and habits as matrices for understanding the situations they face; they embark on typical paths of action, they engage in patterns of practical experience, with a desire for both compliance and exploration. At key moments they define and evaluate the situation, using certain standards of what they can, should or should not, are allowed or not allowed to do, and they appreciate, within a horizon of expectations, the benefits and discomforts, the good and the bad things that will result from their actions.

This ecology of experience — personal experiences that are communalised and publicised — is at the heart of the second part of our book, which dialogues with the 1920s arsenal of categories by inflecting it or proposing additions to it. Louise Carlier starts from Wirth's *The Ghetto* and Harvey Zorbaugh's *The Gold Coast and the Slum* to rework the category of 'accommodation' and show the shift of the gaze from Park's 'natural areas' to Lyn Lofland's or Isaac Joseph's 'public spaces'. Since that time, the question of accessibility and visibility in

the orders of interaction of a society of strangers has been reworked under the angle of 'publicity', from Simmel to Goffman, at the antipodes of the vision of the community still held by progressives and sociologists a century ago. Stéphane Tonnelat, on the other hand, takes Frederic M. Thrasher's *The Gang* as a starting point to rework the notion of 'urban interstices', as a counterpoint to Burgess's 'transitional zones', supposedly territories of social and personal disorganisation, in other words, of 'anomie'. However, for Tonnelat the interstice is, on the contrary, a place of uncertainty regarding uses and encounters, a no-man's-land that is often stigmatised, but one that offers a zone of potential for exploration and invention, a frontier for planning policies on which the challenge of codes still remains possible. Kamel Boukir starts from his investigation of youth gangs in the Parisian suburbs and formulates a number of hypotheses, anchored in the field, for a 'moral ecology': He describes the 'spirit of locality' of these teenagers and their detailed knowledge of the 'moral areas' of the city; he introduces a concept of 'symbiogenesis' of ecological arrangements to account for the interactional and institutional control that is exercised over lives and, conversely, the way these interacting lives shape their environments. Boukir shows the anchor points that these cliques form and weld together over time, in sandboxes, schools, cultural centres or sports clubs; and he develops an ethnography of moral sentiments in line with the research of F. Thrasher or William F. Whyte. Last, Jack Katz bases his typology of neighbourhoods on a long-term, twenty years, field study of Hollywood, Los Angeles: we thus have 'perimeter' neighbourhoods (whose activities tend to cluster on its periphery), 'intersection' neighbourhoods (organised around a centrality that attracts culturally diverse populations); 'in-between' neighbourhoods (on the border of multiple peripheries that exert an attraction on its inhabitants); and 'conflict' neighbourhoods (whose inhabitants disagree over the limits and social identity). Katz is attentive to the centrifugal and centripetal paths that animate the inhabitants and users of five Hollywood neighbourhoods he has identified. Going beyond the political-administrative divisions, he bases his analysis on criteria of experience, collected during *in situ* observations or accounts of practices, together with morphological and historical considerations on the displacement of the city's centres of gravity. In particular, he examines the consequences that the gradual withdrawal of political regulation authorities has had on urban development since the 1980s.

The field analyses of these four authors show that human ecology has not become frozen in the quaint images that are often given: its categories remain sources of inspiration. The subject continued to be discussed until the 1960s and then gave rise to new experiments.

We could have continued to examine the observation and description methods invented in the wake of the second Chicago wave, in the interactionist legacy of the 1920s by Tamotsu Shibutani, Anselm Strauss or Howard Becker; or we could have explored the microecology of orders of interaction that Erving Goffman invented and later championed — a genuine ecology of encounter and gathering situations, in co-presence. We also could have reported on the re-composition of a group of researchers in Chicago around Morris Janowitz — Gerald Suttles, William Kornblum, Albert Hunter, etc. — who renewed urban studies with classics such as *The Social Order of the Slum*, *Symbolic*

Communities, or *Blue Collar Community*. In the 1960s and 1970s, the ecology of affective and moral, perceptual and practical experience and the ecology of groupings and associations, networks and organisations infused many studies on urban environments, although their authors were not always explicit about their debt. We could have witnessed the birth of ecological psychology at the Midwest Psychological Field Station in Oskaloosa, Kansas, where Roger G. Barker and Herbert F. Wright systematically recorded the behaviour patterns and sequences of young people from the community in 856 behavioural settings. Or we could have followed William H(olly) Whyte, walking his camera through the streets and squares of New York City, in his persistence to understand what is attractive or repulsive about public spaces, and building a body of knowledge that will be crucial in the Street Life Project, and later in the concrete achievements of the Project for Public Spaces. We mention all these experiments in the presentation of the third part of the book.

Yet we decided to opt for two other openings, crossing human ecology with other perspectives, in the last part of the book. Mathieu Berger has translated from German a classic work that is little known in the French-speaking world, *The Life Space of the Urban Child* by Martha Muchow (published by her brother Hans after her death in 1935). It was one of the first urban ethnographies, very much inspired by phenomenology, implementing a concept of 'life space' (*Lebensraum*), attached to a concept of experience as a transaction between what children experience, in the first person singular or plural, and the material environments they are confronted with. Behaviour is a function of the persons and their environment, as formulated in the topological psychology of Kurt Lewin, also the author of the film *Das Kind und die Welt* (1931); Muchow's work is also part of the 'convergence' established at the Hamburg Institute of Psychology by William Stern, between a comprehensive psychology in the tradition of *Geisteswissenschaften*, and an experimental psychology, attentive to the physical environment. Berger explores the consequences for human ecology of this very innovative research, interrupted by Nazism. Similarly, Olivier Gaudin reopens the file of an ecological psychology of city perception by Kevin Lynch and György Kepes. In fact, in the 1920s urban studies from Chicago, there was a deficit in the description of perceptions of the city and the operations of representation to which they are subjected. It is precisely this point that Lynch and Kepes focus on. They were aware, on the one hand, that the city cannot be embraced at a glance, by a synoptic gaze, but rather in the temporalisation of perceptual sketches that must be restored from the point of view of the users; on the other hand, they were aware that we only have access to our life spaces through the mediation of images and symbols in a landscape of meanings. Studying the 'imageability' of cities is essential for those who want to understand how cities can be read and understood: the intelligibility of spaces, nodes, paths and borders, landmarks and sectors is inseparable from an image-making experience, which is indissolubly affective, sensory and motor. Human ecology is no longer merely about material ecosystems, it henceforth integrates an ecology of experience into an ecosemiotics, relevant for decoding city behaviour and useful for projecting urban plans.

Redaction: Daniel Cefaï

Edition: Sarah Van Hollebeke

References

Berger, M. (2024, forthcoming). L'espace de l'interaction. Sources écologiques et topologiques de l'espace goffmanien. In D. Cefaï, M. Berger, L. Carlier, & O. Gaudin (Eds.), *Écologie humaine. Une science sociale des milieux de vie.* Creaphis.

Burgess, E.W. (1926). *The urban community*. The University of Chicago Press.

Carlier, L. (2024, forthcoming). L'écologie humaine et la coexistence urbaine: quelques malentendus dans sa réception. In D. Cefaï, M. Berger, L. Carlier, & O. Gaudin (Eds.), *Écologie humaine. Une science sociale des milieux de vie.* Creaphis.

Cefaï, D. (2024, forthcoming). La ville comme milieu de vie. Entre enquête urbaine et aménagement urbain à Chicago. In D. Cefaï, M. Berger, L. Carlier, & O. Gaudin (Eds.), *Écologie humaine. Une science sociale des milieux de vie.* Creaphis.

Cefaï, D., Berger, M., Carlier, L., & Gaudin, O. (Eds.) (2024, forthcoming). *Écologie humaine. Une science sociale des milieux de vie*. Creaphis.

Muchow, M., & Muchow, H. (2024). La ville que l'enfant vit. In D. Cefaï, M. Berger, L. Carlier, & O. Gaudin (Eds.). *Écologie humaine. Une science sociale des milieux de vie*. Creaphis.

Park, R. E., & Burgess, E. W. (1923). *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*. The University of Chicago Press.

Wirth, L. (1928). *The Ghetto*. The University of Chicago Press.

Zorbaugh, H.W. (1929). *The Gold Coast and the Slum. A sociological study of Chicago's Near North side*. The University of Chicago Press.

© Lucas Gicquel

Design, inclusion, urban ecologies: the Parsons School of Design approach

A conversation with Miodrag Mitrašinović

This conversation with Miodrag Mitrašinović, Professor of Urbanism and Architecture at Parsons School of Design, The New School, in New York City, was initially conducted in 2017. The discussion between Marco Ranzato (MLB, ULB) and Miodrag Mitrašinović focused on the capacities and potentialities of design vis-à-vis infrastructures of inclusion as discussed in his book *Concurrent Urbanities: Designing Infrastructures of Inclusion* (Routledge, 2016). Miodrag Mitrašinović is an architect and urbanist and the author of many publications, including the most recent *The Emerging Public Realm of the Greater Bay Area: Approaches to Public Space in a Chinese Megaregion* (Routledge, 2021) and the forthcoming *Architecture and the Public World: Kenneth Frampton* (Bloomsbury, 2024).

As you know, at Metrolab we are working in the context of urban ecology. How do you understand urban ecology? How do you frame it here at Parsons?

At the most basic level, I think it is about plurality, multiplicity and interconnectedness. As you know, we named one of our post-graduate urban programmes at Parsons ‘Design and Urban Ecologies’ because we believe we must talk about multiple *ecologies* and not a single *ecology*. The reasons for that are philosophical and theoretical, but also practical. We focus on ecologically-framed design-centred work and the unending process of urbanisation that certainly drives it. Whether one believes in planetary urbanisation or not, we all understand that the differences between what we thought of as distinct realities, such as the urban and rural spheres, for example, are no longer differences of kind, but differences of degree. Therefore, what was earlier thought to be unique to urban environments and processes, including the more conventional definition of urban ecology as a set of relations between human beings, the built environment and the urban landscape, is no longer quite necessarily the case.

Boundaries are much more porous; relationships and connections, flows and circulation are much more open-ended; and the issues and challenges we deal with today are different than whatever came before.

So in that context, we are interested in multivalent and complex entanglements of urban ecologies and designing, a context in which design is broadly understood to include, but not limited to, architecture and urban design. Our work here at Parsons is also certainly defined by the fact that we are a part of The New School, a progressive university with a historical commitment to the social justice, which further shapes our understanding of design as more explicitly focused on the humanities and social sciences, with a less techno-scientific approach.

Focusing on design is certainly a pragmatic and instrumental way to address 'urban ecology', but as you know, I am not a scientist… or an ecologist, for that matter. My long-term scholarly and professional interest is in *designing*, and more specifically in how the entanglements I mentioned earlier produce a more plural, inclusive and robust democratic space in the context of urban ecologies, in which designing is synonymous with political engagement. So the question is about how to create 'spaces of appearance', as Hannah Arendt (1958) called them, and how to bring out a true public realm. We had this in mind during Metrolab's 'Designing Urban Inclusion' workshop, where we addressed urgent urban issues and sites of struggle in Brussels together with Maya Wiley, Fonna Forman and Teddy Cruz, taking some of the approaches I developed in the book *Concurrent Urbanities*. For example, we used three operational devices or vectors that I believe structure the role played by designing in the space of urban ecologies: synchronisation, configuration and communication.

We also adopted concepts of 'infrastructure' and 'infrastructuring', such as in the term 'infrastructures of inclusion'. Infrastructures are commonly thought of as the systems, facilities, services, relations, networks, relationships and necessary interdependencies that all cumulatively make a society *sustain* itself. In my view, infrastructures of inclusion are what communities and civic groups cooperatively produce to catalyse and sustain processes of *transformation,* changing themselves, their communities and their societies towards more diverse, more democratic, fairer and more inclusive cities based on the principle of 'just distribution, justly arrived at' (Harvey, 1973). *Designing* in this context means identifying and using affirmative resources to address the scale of the problems and opportunities before us, configuring new collaborative practices and new ways of being and living together. My book *Concurrent Urbanities: Designing Infrastructures of Inclusion* documents a number of ways that this has been done and offers points of departure for thinking ecologically about designing in the context of socio-spatial and environmental justice. At the intersections, I see designing as an exercise in *infrastructuring*, in discovering and producing new configurative possibilities by catalysing solidarity, cooperation, mutual aid, creative collaboration, leadership and trust.

Ecological discourse frequently emphasises bringing the relationship between people and nature back into focus. At Metrolab, while designers are committed to expanding their view of urban space by taking a keen interest in natural resources, sociologists obviously come from a human-centred approach that sometimes seem to uphold the dichotomy between people and nature. So when you talk about ecologies, does your understanding of urban ecologies help you to overcome the limitations of disciplinary perspectives?

I'm really not familiar with the inner workings of Metrolab, at least not yet, so it's hard for me to answer your question with regard to it. However, speaking more generally, I think a transdisciplinary approach works best in this situation. The challenges we face are so complex that our point of entry in this work ought to be something tangible, meaning something we know best. We all want to contribute to this collective effort as best as we can! So, if we need to work on technical aspects, then we bring technical know-how to the table (pace John Dewey's quote with which this book opens). If we need to work on social relations, then we bring methods of social research. There is nothing wrong with that, but there is a catch. In my view, the work we are talking about is very often interdisciplinary, meaning that as an architect, you come to the table, you participate in the conversation and you try to solve a particular problem with a group of people with different areas of expertise. You collectively offer a *solution* for something that you see as a problem, or even better for something that is presented to you as a problem, then you walk away from this collective situation intact as an expert in architecture.

The other possibility is that this is not an interdisciplinary, but a transdisciplinary exercise. If that is the case, the collective doesn't attempt to solve a specific problem, but to use specific issues or situations at hand to first redefine and reformulate *questions*, then to eventually identify new problems that we cannot solve with the means available or the resources that we are ready to commit. In this kind of work, you don't necessarily come in as an expert (e.g., an architect) representing your field of expertise, but you do bring a perspective to the discourse, and possibly an approach as well.

In my view, transdisciplinary work is not about providing solutions to problems, but about reframing the questions we ask, particularly those we commonly take for granted and never put in doubt. At best, its purpose is to provide an environment for transdisciplinary thinking and a different mindset altogether. That is why I think that our work cannot be reductive and privilege any specific approach or body of knowledge, because it shouldn't be focused on simplistic solutions.

Ecological thinking does not strive to prioritise the social or the technological, but it does explore how they can come together into a new arrangement suggesting how we can move forward in a much more equitable and sustainable way. Needless to say, it is difficult to sustain a transdisciplinary environment over a long period of time, unless you are working in an institutionalised setting that privileges transdisciplinary approaches, but that's very rare. You can also keep one going with external funding for as long as the funding lasts. Interdisciplinary work is much easier to institutionalise, though even that shouldn't be taken for granted.

Could you please say more about how you have approached socio-ecological complexity and transdisciplinary design work at The New School?

One of the things that I have been involved in, for many years now, is this work at The New School where we have attempted to bring design and the social sciences together. How we bring them together is obviously very complex in a number of different ways: both institutional and non-institutional, formalised and informal. Yet the most difficult challenge of all was to find the time to really scrutinise what we mean by the languages and terminology we use, such as *ecology* versus *ecologies*. What do they mean in our own fields? Of course, I read books by sociologists who discuss ecology. I read books by others and I can arrive at a basic understanding of how ecology is framed across the fields and disciplines. But the invaluable part of this work is sitting with your colleagues around a table and working together, where we as a group come together around specific issues to address and develop shared thematics to tackle them. That's powerful work. And that's what I think happens at Metrolab.

For example, take some of the sites in Brussels that we studied as part of the 'Designing Urban Inclusion' workshop in January. I think the Médecins du Monde site was the most ideal, simply because it was complex enough and had just the right type of complexity. Of course, all the others were equally interesting but the Médecins du Monde site had the right layout and was well situated, as it offered integrated health services in a disadvantaged neighbourhood. However, it suffered from some miscommunication because CityDev, if I am not mistaken, made the challenging decision to include the facility in a housing regeneration project, whose future middle-class residents might be against it. On the other hand, you have come to a shared understanding of a need to arrange something that is both social, but also really ecological in a sense, where the Médecins du Monde site in that particular neighbourhood will change the way that both the neighbourhood and the city work through new relations, networks, flows and circulation. You have several issues to deal with to reframe the situation: the circulation of people puts new pressure on the local underground train stop, undocumented immigrants may be beneficiaries of the service… These issues range from social ones to policing, public health, immigration, safety, security and both local and regional politics.

Reorganising that situation brings everyone together in relation to a possible opening, a unique opportunity that may at first seem like the biggest problem Brussels has ever faced. So, the work we do together not only solves how Médecins du Monde can actually exist in that neighbourhood, but it also begins to reframe larger issues and create new urban themes to work with in Brussels and in the region.

At Metrolab, we are considering the idea of creating an Atlas. Our team members have different opinions about it and we have questions such as 'Who is it for', 'Who do we have to explain it to?' and 'How should we tell them?'

Going back to the idea of concurrencies, and to the synchronisation–configuration–communication triad, I think that it needs to be addressed to anyone who can or should be newly connected or reconnected through your work, like our workshop in January was. In other words, if you understand your work as an ecological enterprise and if you really want to begin to recreate connections, relations, circulation and flows between different stakeholders and constituencies, this work must be addressed to everyone.

The catch with ecologies, however, is that it effectively removes the audience, meaning everyone is a participant, so the hypothetical Atlas would treat everyone as a real or potential participant in the Metrolab project. It would not be a text just to read and put aside, but a *manifesto* that should move people to act. So, if you want to see this kind of change take place, this is what you can do or what you need to think about; these are the parameters, these are the criteria under which something needs to be done; these are the attributes on which the urban transformation or the ecological transformation we talk about must be built; these are the values we need to incorporate in our ethics, and so on. In that sense, going back to Hannah Arendt's work, it is not so much the *course of action* that the Atlas prescribes as the *capacity for action* that it attempts to recover.

Therefore, do you think that communication is a way that we can help people to participate or to have a say in urban transformation?

Yes, absolutely, but I do not believe that you can just put up a poster somewhere that says: 'Come to the meeting and we will talk about urban transformation' and that people will come. Even if they do come, I don't think it's going to be productive. On the other hand, a funded project like Metrolab can work as a rhetorical device and move people along a particular course of action. That is why I think it is very important and very valuable. So, your question is: 'Who?' Anyone. Just take the Médecins du Monde project we talked about earlier: civil society organisations, non-profits, NGOs, local cooperatives, neighbours and their associations, city organisations, the municipal government, technocrats, bureaucrats and administrators, entrepreneurs, small- and medium-size businesses—whoever they may be. Each of them needs to find something to identify with in this proposal. So that they say: 'If we took part, if we were connected to the new ecologies enabled by this proposal, and if we managed to co-create this kind of environment, we actually could also do something productive for all of us!'

When you talk about ecology, do you think that there is higher complexity in any urban environment? Do you think that we can talk about ecologies in Brussels?

Of course! I think that you can talk about ecologies at the farmer's market in Union Square, just around the corner here. It is a very important question, because once again it makes this crucial distinction that we must each address individually and

also collectively. To me, it certainly isn't limited to the panoramic, top-down, GIS-driven view that renders the surface of earth into zones and districts where you have 30% pavement and 70% trees, and so on and so forth. That kind of work is necessary, and I do not deny that it could be of high quality and revealing of the relations we are unaware of in our daily life and from our regular points of view. However, the most important question for me is: 'Who are the subjects and what are the objectives of ecological thinking?' I have no doubt that ecological thinking is a process that needs to be instituted: it has to do with the awareness and positioning that ecology has brought to us through scientific work, but ecological thinking is something that everyone has to engage in, at any level and on any scale.

If your work is design-driven, your question then becomes: 'How can *designing*—the creative process of cooperatively transforming the situations in which we find ourselves—be used to create dispositions towards for ecological thinking in the communities, groups and organisations with which we work?' That is the task. If they ask you what ecological thinking is, it is the awareness that everything around us is related and interdependent. For that to work, you need syncretic thinkers, and that's why I am a believer in the power of designing. If you believe that scientists will solve the problems we face on their own, forget it: it is never going to happen. They can analytically prove that we actually have problems to address, but nothing more than that.

That's one of the reasons why 'Rebuild by Design' in this city was an attempt to bring technical experts, designers, social scientists, ecologists and other scientists together to explore how the city can protect itself from future disasters. Despite the best efforts and enormous amounts of funding, the project has largely failed. In my view, that's because if you really want to position this society towards ecological thinking, the work must be explained over a very long period of time through personal and situated engagement. It cannot be done abstractly, by citing scientific analytical reports or through spectacular projects and largely nonsensical architectural renderings of the kind used for corporate clients. In a city with such developed grassroots politics, it just doesn't work that way. No one is as stupid as commercial architectural renderings assume. Most people find them to be offensive and violent.

What exactly do you mean by a potential opposition between personal engagement and scientific engagement? Could you please say more about that?

When I mention science, I'm talking about serious people with a serious investment in figuring out how human-induced natural phenomena have already changed our planet and will dramatically do so in the very near future. That is solid, analytical, evidence-based work and I believe in it. However, what I mean is that for a lot of people and communities facing the reality of climate change, the gloom and doom of scientific language is too much to handle. It confuses people and makes them angry. And there are good reasons for them to be angry, because in the United States most of the affected communities are communities of colour as well as working-class and immigrant communitie. That has nothing to do with either nature or science; that's pure politics, and they know it. Analytical facts alone do not necessarily affect their everyday practices and the injustices they face.

In order to affect their lives and make a difference, we need to think of rhetorical devices and structures that help people to understand how something that they do can have an impact on others and how what happens around them has an impact on them as well. How can such relations and interdependencies be visualised and made tangible? That aspect of the work is very discursive and rhetorical. But first you have to figure out *what* is related, then *how* it is already related and finally *why* it should be related differently. That is why I said earlier that the subjects and objects of this discourse must be defined from the start. How can people and things be linked more productively, ethically, fairly and ecologically through our work? You know, there is no escaping this simple fact: some people believe all our problems are social in nature, others believe they are ecological, and so on, but I think our most significant problems are political and can only be reframed through political means. Then again, as I indicated earlier, I believe that designing can often be synonymous with political action.

I suppose you will have the chance to project this onto Metrolab's work.

I think Metrolab is absolutely an outstanding opportunity: for all of you as a group, for both universities, the transdisciplinary environment, the funding, the sites of urgency across this metropolitan region; it is just fantastic. But it is not just a fantastic opportunity; it is also a serious responsibility to actually produce something transformative that will serve as a model. I wish we had something like that here, but unfortunately we don't! So, congratulations to all of you for making it happen. Our students will continue to attend the workshops and as I mentioned, the students who joined me in the Metrolab workshop in January told me many times that it was a transformative experience for them. The way Metrolab has structured the work is very special, particularly the collaboration with external partners, the sites of urgency, local communities and stakeholders, and the way the work is structured around social justice, inclusion and ecology—all this is really amasing and truly unique.

Transcription and edition: Marco Ranzato and Sarah Van Hollebeke

References

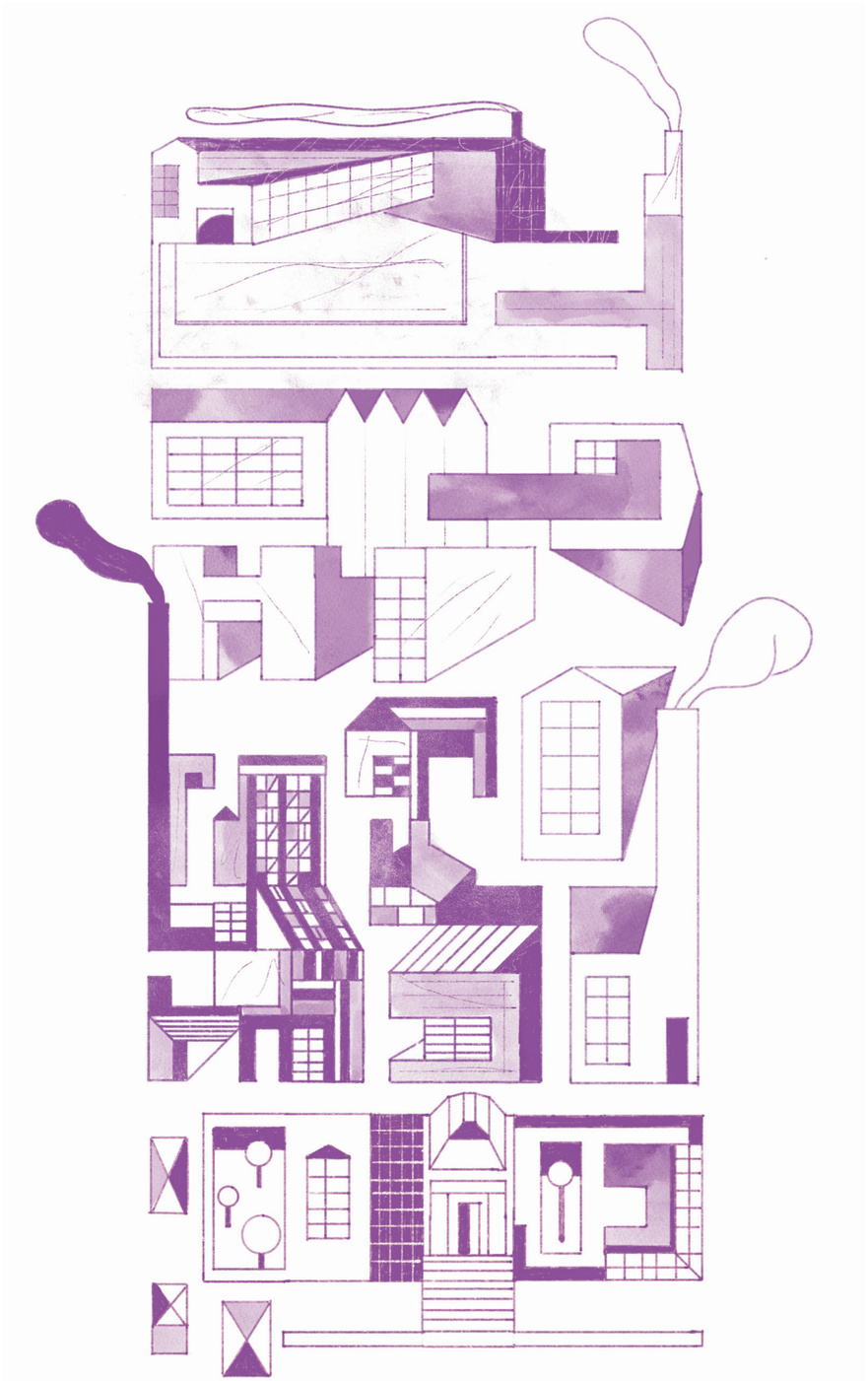
Arendt, H. (1983). (1958). *The Human Condition*. the University of Chicago Press.

Harvey, D. (1973). *Social Justice and the City*. The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Mitrašinović, M. (2016). *Concurrent Urbanities: Designing Infrastructures of Inclusion.* Routledge.

Mitrašinović, M. (2021). *The Emerging Public Realm of the Greater Bay Area: Approaches to Public Space in a Chinese Megaregion.* Routledge.

Mitrašinović, M. (2024). *Architecture and the Public World: Kenneth Frampton.* Bloomsbury.



© Lucas Gicquel

Urban production: the social science research for a new urban craft

A conversation with Marc Zune

Marc Zune is a professor of sociology at UCLouvain since 2007 and the President of the Institute for the Analysis of Change in Contemporary and Historical Societies (IACCHOS). His research at the GIRSEF Institute concerns 'the study of the construction of labor market problems'. He conducts several surveys on unemployment issues, professional training policies, and new forms of professional configurations where the meaning of work is questioned. This conversation focused on new urban craft that can be observed today, in the recent boom of micro-breweries, and participation in the so-called collaborative economy. Marc Zune is the author and co-author of many publications, including the most recent: *Embedding authenticity in production logics. The case of the microbrewery resurgence in Belgium* (Routledge, 2024, with Delperdange, Pauline); *L'épreuve temporelle du chômage* (In: *Regards Croisés sur l'Economie*, 2021, with Demazière, Didier); *Unemployed people facing future work: analysing occupational expectations as 'feasible' work* (In: *Sociologia del lavoro, 2021*, with Demazière, Didier).

How did you find out about Metrolab Project?

I was asked to participate in Metrolab programme on the issue of urban production. As a work and economic life sociologist, I am working with Pauline Delperdange to study the phenomenon of neo-crafts, and more particularly the revival of the microbrewery. Brussels is one of our fields of study. Neo-crafts are an interesting phenomenon for several reasons. In terms of work, the neo-craft is accompanied by a critique of the standard model of work associated with the way it has been rationalised by the industrial production model. Indeed, several authors have highlighted a tendency for workers to turn from classical forms

of work and return to the aspiration for work that re-articulates the hand and the head to confront the development of a service economy and the control of increasingly automated industrial processes. Artisanal work has been held up by some authors as a political and moral model for restoring meaning to work (Sennett, 2008; Crawford, 2009). Artisanal activities are supposed to be marked by values of passion and meaning in work, the desire to do one's work well in accordance with one's personal desires and self-expression through manual and creative work. It is worthwhile to take a closer look at this thesis.

On the economic side, neo-craft activities develop what some authors call 'moral market segments', which take shape in opposition to the dominant production logics by associating alternative values. This would involve a search for economic authenticity based on the rediscovery of traditions, natural processes, a spatial inscription playing on territorial identities, an ethic of relationship with the end customer, a search for sustainability or innovation. Boltanski and Esquerre (2017) speak of this in terms of an *economy of enrichment*. In this framework, the separation between the roles of producer and consumer become less clear. Campbell (2005) argues that the boundaries between production and consumption are gradually being blurred by the development of DIY and the 'artisan consumer'. These are all values that bring together, in a new configuration, this 'culturisation of economic life' (Flew, 2005).

Lastly, these trends intersect with interests in urban sociology. Richard Ocejo (2017), who was also invited to Metrolab to present his work, has analysed how fringes of workers in the 'new cultural economy' have transformed former manual trades into urban, cultural and 'cool' versions. These cultural entrepreneurs and intermediaries participate in the definition of good taste and give these occupations an exclusive status based on their cultural skills. They also play a role in shaping territories and their attractiveness, contributing, through the productive angle, to gentrification. Indeed, the development of this neo-craft would meet a demand from a niche group of consumers concerned with a detailed understanding of the methods of manufacture, their place of production, the personality and know-how of their designers, and respect for moral and ecological criteria that accompany production more transversally. This is partly in line with the trend towards cultural omnivorism, described in particular by Peterson and his colleagues (Peterson & Kern, 1996; Peterson, 1992), which characterises the changing structure of the tastes of the upper classes. The latter no longer mark their superiority by indifference or disgust for popular culture but, on the contrary, by openness to a diversity of genres and cultural goods. This openness includes a particular attitude towards cultural and consumer goods. What matters is not what is consumed per se, but how it is consumed and understood.

Consequently, the Urban Production theme, which aimed to reflect on the articulation between residential, service and production functions in urban areas such as Brussels, was a very interesting opportunity for collaboration. Neo-craft activities are not only inserted into the mesh of the city's functions, the span of opportunities the city offers for workers to develop new forms of activity and for others to become involved in it, but also through the forms of moral imagination it entails. The search for authenticity can indeed be seen from a discursive perspective. To a certain extent this neo-craft is not completely distant from the

model of industrial rationalisation — for example in the use of equipment designed in smaller versions of technical devices used in larger ensembles, or in the fact that their production is rarely situated totally in urban spaces, as part of the production is often delocalized or outsourced outside the boundaries of the city. In this case, authenticity is simply a new discourse associated with economic niches. However, the existence of these new market segments can also be considered from the point of view of the cultural imaginary that they represent. In the case of the microbrewery we are studying, for example, the issue of alcoholism and the (non-)use of alcohol by certain social groups has an influence on the scales of legitimacy for productive practices once they are present, visible and valued in certain districts. Thus, the intersection between the development of new economic activities that claim to be value-based, and the wider urban dynamics is an important point of enrichment in our investigation.

Metrolab's scope was not only about carrying out surveys on the city, but also about experimenting with a working method between researchers and actors. What did you think of it?

This second point, as a researcher, was an important discovery. The Metrolab project is certainly an exception in our research landscape, at least in the social sciences. The workshop formula, which brings together students and researchers to explore an urban problem over a dense period of a few weeks, resulting in concrete, tangible proposals that are subject to academic criticism, but also to criticism by the city's stakeholders, was quite striking. I was surprised by the creativity that emerged and by the intensity of the exchanges. But more than an exercise in style, the extension of the work done towards policy considerations was a very interesting element.

This practice is certainly usual in the disciplines of urban planning, architecture and even applied economics. It is less so in the social sciences. In this respect, it leads us to revise our conception of what is usually called 'the empirical field'. Several positions coexist in this respect. For some, the empirical field is a social relationship that requires a distance from the objects of study. When the empirical field is reduced to data gathering, it is intended for processing that must be abstracted from lived experience in order to reveal the unknown underlying logics. For others, the empirical field is a field of enquiry, a time for collecting sensitive data that are also intended for scientific processing, which may lead to a form of restitution or to the elaboration of recommendations. The workshop formula shifts again. The fieldwork becomes a collective — and interdisciplinary — experience of investigation, understanding, proposal and, of course, relationship with the actors. This 'transdisciplinary' perspective leads to integrating into research a plurality of forms of knowledge, or rather of the plurality of forms of appropriation of plural knowledge. But in reality, from the point of view of research, it is rather a posture that plays on multiple levels at the same time. On the one hand, because there is a succession and interweaving of times: disciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary. It seems to me that Metrolab is a research process that is embedded in disciplines — as evidenced by the PhD theses that have been produced during the project and the disciplinary publications it generated. It is also an interdisciplinary gamble from the outset,

aiming to bring together researchers with varied backgrounds and interests who, through the identification of themes, meeting formats and exchange times, have decided that that disciplinary expressions should structurally animate other disciplinary reflections. For example, this was how I experienced a greater consideration of urban space in my research on microbreweries. Finally, the transdisciplinary dimension aims at integrating knowledge of various formats — and therefore not strictly inscribed in the academic knowledge production process — but also at integrating the meanings of the knowledge produced in an overall movement forming a sort of protean epistemic ecology.

Can we also draw more general lessons for social science research?

I am now taking up my role as President of the Iacchos Institute. This is a research institute of UCLouvain that brings together ten social science research centres that are identified either by themes (education, development, democracy, contemporary Islam, work and society, families and sexualities, etc.) or by disciplinary groupings (demography, history, didactics, anthropology, etc.). To what extent is the Metrolab model transposable? To begin with, we do not have a deep culture of this type of project. On the one hand, this is because our social science disciplines have not structurally made the workshop a collective work format. This is no doubt partly due to the fact that the professional practices associated with our disciplines (unlike urban planning and architecture) are not functionally based on this type of device. But this is not a sufficient reason not to be creative and experiment new ways of doing research. We can think of the issues of transitions, migration or education for example. But more than that, the concrete conditions for such possibilities of regrouping also rely on material conditions. Metrolab was housed in a very emblematic place in Brussels, with a spatial translation of its ambition and its operating principles. We can also mention the financial conditions, and also the academic conditions. This is why, hopefully, the feedback on the Metrolab project should enable us to make progress, in return, on our usual practices for organising research.

Transcription and redaction: Marc Zune

Revision and edition: Sarah Van Hollebeke

References

Sennett, R. (2008). *The Craftsman*. Yale University Press.

Crawford, M.B. (2009). *Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work*. Penguin Books.

Boltanski, L., & Esquerre, A. (2017). *Enrichissement. Une critique de la marchandise*. Gallimard.

Campbell, C. (2005). The Craft Consumer: Culture, craft and consumption in a postmodern society. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 5(1), 23-42.

Flew, T., (2005). *New Media. An Introduction*. Oxford University Press.

Ocejo, R. E., (2017). *Masters of Craft: Old Jobs in the New Urban Economy*. Princeton University Press.

Peterson, R. A., & Kern, R. (1996). Changing highbrow taste: From snob to omnivore. *American Sociological Review*, 61(5), 900-907.

Peterson, R. A., (1992). Understanding audience segmentation: From elite and mass to omnivore and univore. *Poetics*, 21(4), 243-258.

© Lucas Gicquel

Comparative research on European cities and policies: the Sciences Po Urban School approach

A conversation with Patrick Le Galès[1]

This conversation with Patrick Le Galès was conducted in 2015 after the Metrolab project's launch symposium, entitled 'Urban Research: What for?' by Lionel Francou and Sarah Van Hollebeke (two young PhD students from CriDIS/Metrolab at that time). Patrick Le Galès is a CNRS research professor at the Centre for European Studies and Comparative Politics at Sciences Po Paris, a professor of sociology, political science and urban studies and the founding dean of the Sciences Po Urban School. In this chapter, he gives us a look back on his research and teaching experience in several European cities and universities. At the end, he emphasises the different ways for social scientists to develop forms of critique and offers piece of advice for young researchers in urban studies.

Could you explain the influences that led you to work on urban issues? Would you call yourself a sociologist or a political scientist first?

I am a comparative social scientist working on the sociology of cities, mobility and European societies, on the governance of large global cities, on the sociology of public policy and the state and on the political economy. In the mid-1980s, urban sociology in France was at low ebb after the Marxist wave, with some exceptions, such as for instance Yves Grafmeyer in Lyon and Edmond Préteceille at the Centre for Urban Sociology (CSU). I was thinking of doing a post-graduate diploma in Urban Planning, but Henri Mendras, who was my professor at Science Po at that time, led me to get a post-graduate diploma in Sociology at Nanterre. At the same time, Odile Benoît-Guilbot, who led a major research project on local social change (Benoît-Guilbot et al., 1986), particularly in small towns and

1. This text is a translation of the article 'Penser les transformations par la comparaison. Action publique, villes et instruments. Entretien avec Patrick Le Galès' published in 2018 in *Émulations*. It was edited and updated in 2021 and 2023.

suburbs, told me that she had a research contract to work on Elbeuf, a small industrial town in crisis near Rouen. It had a Renault factory, textile manufacturers in crisis, poor neighbourhoods and so on. This was an attempt to do urban sociology with a focus on social classes, urban societies and local regulations, but also a sociology that dealt with a real working class, a real local bourgeoisie and lower-middle classes.

Odile Benoît-Guilbot, who was the editor of the journal 'Sociologie du travail', hired me to join her team to conduct my research. She then landed a big comparative research project between England and France (and more precisely Coventry and Rouen/Elbeuf) with Duncan Gallie, an English sociologist from the University of Warwick. She knew I didn't want to do a thesis, as research was not part of my world, i.e., a working-class neighbourhood from a declining industrial town in Brittany, but she did involve me in the meetings. It turned out that it went well during my Master's Degree and that there were Franco-British scholarships to spend a year in England. I decided to start a comparative thesis on urban development issues in France and England. I gave myself a year to decide whether to continue or return to Brittany. When I got the scholarship, Duncan Gallie left the University of Warwick and I was appointed at Oxford University, at Nuffield College. So I applied to join Nuffield College, which represented the research elite, without believing it. Applying to Oxford was totally unexpected! Mendras wrote me a great letter, then I passed the oral exam and was accepted (actually on a trial basis, which I didn't know) to start a comparative Franco-British thesis.

You mentioned that the type of sociology you were setting up at that time was a bit different from what was usually done in urban sociology in France, and in Nanterre, in particular. Could you explain? How was the approach different?

At that time, the gap between Nanterre, Sciences Po and Nuffield College was significant in terms of scientific culture, theories, methods and internationalisation. I really moved in a different world. It was a small college, but there must have been 100 people, including 70 students of about 40 different nationalities. In France, this was inconceivable. I met the great sociologist John Goldthorpe, who explained to me that urban sociology was not really sociology, and that French sociology was not serious enough, except for Raymond Boudon. He encouraged me to work on the sociology of social mobility.

At the same time, there was a professor of political science called Vincent Wright. He was a great political scientist, a historian by origin, a specialist of the French state, who was later one of the founders of comparative European public policy. He spotted me and said: 'Sociologists are complicated. They don't really understand what you want to do; what you want to do is to work on economic development policies in relation to social classes in cities. This can be done in public policy. It doesn't have to be in sociology. If you want, you can leave sociology and I'll take you under my direction for a comparative thesis in political science'.

So I joined him in the Political Science Department and, alongside my research on Coventry and Rennes, and on the role of the middle classes, I started to work a bit more on public policy and governance issues in France and England.

At Oxford University, I discovered several fields of research: the world of comparative political economy, the world of those who worked on the state, interest groups and the market, such as Colin Crouch, Wolfgang Streeck and Alessandro Pizzorno, then Italian economic sociology. This whole great European comparative tradition was developed in the 1970s and 1980s and led to the publication of many books on the state and capitalism in Europe. In France, no one was interested in these issues (except the School of Regulation, Robert Boyer and his colleagues). I also discovered English Marxist urban geography, since the Marxist geographer David Harvey was at the time at Oxford with his assistant, Erik Swyngedouw, who became a long-time accomplice.

At the time, decentralisation was being implemented in France and Margaret Thatcher's centralisation and privatisation reforms were being applied in Great Britain. In my fieldwork in Rennes and Norwich, Coventry and Saint-Étienne, I saw many people mobilised around economic development. In the end, I didn't go all the way with my project because I did much more in-depth fieldwork than I had planned on Coventry and Rennes, two rather contrasting cases for my thesis. So, I did two theses. As a result, I have remained a sociologist and a political scientist ever since, and I have always worked comparatively in both disciplines. Since then, I have been working permanently with historians, geographers, urban planners, economists and anthropologists from different continents.

How do you engage as a sociologist and political scientist in expert groups that try to provide practical solutions with an interdisciplinary, applied and comparative dimension on urban issues? Could you look back on these collaborations and explain what it means to be a comparative researcher in political sociology?

After I defended my PhD thesis, I became convinced I might be able to pursue a research career. At that time, Henri Mendras got funding from a local authority, the Vienne Departmental Council (Poitiers), whose president, former Minister René Monory, was a passionate European. Mendras then created an observatory of social change in Europe and organised comparative research seminars at Futuroscope in Poitiers.

To do this, he joined forces with my Oxford thesis supervisor, Vincent Wright, and Italian sociologist Arnaldo Bagnasco, who supervised thesis of my friend Marco Oberti. They appointed me as the scientific secretary of the operation. From Jon Elster (philosopher and sociologist) to Danièle Hervieu-Léger (sociologist), Colin Crouch (sociologist and political scientist), Ezra Suleiman (philosopher and political scientist), Wolfgang Streeck (sociologist), Martine Segalen (ethnologist), Alessandro Cavalli (sociologist) and Bernard Lewis (historian), we have worked with some of the most innovative social science researchers in Europe.

I saw all the pitfalls of comparative research and the different national research traditions, and all this in Poitiers where we met each time with the elected representatives of the Council. It was an extraordinary training ground for me.

So for almost 10 years after receiving my Master's degree in Sociology at Nanterre, I deepened my knowledge of European social sciences. One year after I defended my thesis, I was lucky enough to join the CNRS at Sciences Po Rennes,

which was created just at that time. I spent five years there and we developed new courses, Master's degree models, educational innovations and a comparative research programme on European cities and regions, as well as a new research laboratory, mainly in political science and sociology. It was not easy because everything was new and there were not many of us, so research resources were limited.

In 1996-1997, I spent a year at the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence as a Jean Monnet fellow and in 1999 I spent six months at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). At the EUI in Florence, I discovered European politics and worked on my first research programme on the governance of European cities, which resulted in a first collective book (Bagnasco and Le Galès, 1997) and a second book in 2002 (Le Galès, 2002). My book on European cities was the result of a decade of research on cities in France, Britain, Finland and Italy. It took shape while I was at the EUI in Florence and was first produced as my habilitation thesis submitted at the University of Rennes.

Colin Crouch, my former Oxford professor, was at EUI in Florence. Together with him, Carlo Trigilia and researchers from the Max Planck Institute in Cologne (directed by Wolfgang Streeck and Helmut Voletzkow), we started a research group on local economic systems in Europe. We started a seven-year comparative research project with both quantitative and qualitative surveys on the relationships within local industrial systems, on the evolution of small business concentration in different national systems in Europe and on the articulation between local and national regulations in the production of competitive public goods. We published two great books with Oxford University Press (Crouch et al., 2001; 2004). My year in Florence was exceptional in terms of intellectual dynamism. It was a pivotal year. At that time, I had to choose the direction that my career would take. I didn't want to go back to my old laboratory at Sciences Po. I was tempted to go to the US or the UK or to stay in Florence, but for my partner's career there was no other choice than Paris. French centralisation is about the centralisation of the labour market. So I joined Sciences Po (with its new director) and its Centre for Political Research (CEVIPOF), a classical French political science laboratory. Pierre Muller, a great public policy scholar, who came from Grenoble, convinced me to come with him to develop research on comparative public policy, Europe and territories. In 2009 a group of scholars had a major political struggle with the director of CEVIPOF, more a member of the Paris establishment than a scholar, which led to the creation of what then became a leading research centre, the Centre for European Studies and Comparative Politics at Sciences Po.

With my colleague Pierre Lascoumes, who joined us in 2002, we started a research programme on a political sociology of the instruments of government by referring to Max Weber and Michel Foucault. This is my second line of work. We taught together for over 10 years. At the time, I was still working on European politics, regional and urban politics, the politics of centralisation in Europe and especially British politics.

At the same time, I started to structure courses on urban sociology and urban policies at Sciences Po. With Marco Oberti and Edmond Préteceille, and later Michael Storper, who joined Sciences Po, we created a working group called 'Cities are back in town', which still does urban research by combining two

traditions: urban sociology on segregation and public policies on the governance of European cities. I incrementally started creating several urban Master's programmes, which will be grouped together in the Urban School, which I created at Sciences Po in 2015.

My last line of work is concerned with comparative political economy and economic sociology, which were very weak in France at the time. Using the British example, on which I have never stopped working, I have tried to understand the construction of neo-liberalism and the state's attempts to transform society into a market society (Le Galès and Scott, 2008).

In cooperation with Harvard (and later Columbia), Northwestern and the UIE in Florence, the Max Planck Institute in Cologne, co-directed by Wolfgang Streeck and Jens Beckert, offered us close and long-term cooperation through a PhD programme and an annual summer school on these issues. I was in charge of this summer school for Sciences Po for 10 years, a unique opportunity to do deeper research and to exchange with the best PhD students in our five universities.

Finally, again at the initiative of the Max Planck Institute, I worked for three years to create a joint research centre, MAXPO. It was a very dynamic research facility for 10 years, with cutting-edge research, doctoral students, postdocs and guests, symbolising a long-term intellectual alliance between us and the Institute. It has become one of my most important intellectual 'homes' after Nuffield College, UCLA and Milan Bicocca.

As these lines of research were being developed, I also edited the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* (IJURR), founded in 1977 by Chris Pickvance and Edmond Préteceille, as well as Enzo Mingione, Michael Harloe and Manuel Castells[2]. In 1995, I was co-opted onto the editorial board (review editor), then into the management of the journal. I tried to open the journal more internationally and to different urban research traditions, such as critical geography, which was then in full development, cultural studies, gender studies, anthropology, the American sociology of segregation, the analysis of the local welfare state, the Italian political economy, the economics of regulation, etc., and to diversify and get new political science and sociology authors. The journal, deeply rooted in sociology, was intended to provide a comparative and critical view of urbanisation and cities around the world. This experience of directing the journal, as well as the intellectual companionship provided by the authors and members of the editorial board, completed my intellectual training and gave me thorough knowledge of emerging urban research as well as of the material aspect of the dissemination of scientific knowledge and the functioning of publishing.

Today, I am developing a comparative long term research programme called *What is Governed and Not Governed in the Large Metropolis: Comparing Paris, Mexico City, London and São Paulo*. It is a programme that stands at the crossroads of sociology and political science. There are four research teams working together. We do comparative empirical work, each time reflecting on the

2 In 1970, they were part of Research Committee 21 (urban and regional research) of the International Sociological Association, which brought together young radical and Marxist urban researchers against the community studies committee led by American researchers.

limits of political organisation and the capacity for collective action in the social transformations of large cities. We are always somewhere between the sociology of social movements, the sociology of production, questions of governance and the sociology of elites. I like it immensely because we have created a transnational group of senior and junior scholars. We have also developed some critical analysis of the smart cities and the use of data with my colleague Antoine Courmont (2021) and some new research on the financialisation of housing.

In relation to this critical dimension of sociology that you mention, at Metrolab, we experimented with the fact that researchers' work could embarrass and disturb the habits of public authorities, revive old or 'haunting' debates and challenge long-established relationships between city professionals. How do you position yourself in relation to this observation? What skills do you think social scientists need to develop to be effective in public action?

First, there is always a form of distrust that those who govern have towards social scientists or occasional scientists. There is nothing new here. Look at history. Remember Galileo? Erasmus? Most of the time, whatever the time of the research we are doing, we tend to go beyond 'common sense', as Bourdieu argued very precisely nearly 60 years ago, to identify power relations and inequalities, have some autonomy from the dominant groups, think critically and disturb existing dominant networks. That takes different forms. Unfortunately, many business and political leaders are trained in such a way that they have no understanding, knowledge or respect for research. That's the main point: we have to live with it. Let me add some provocative nuance. There are many ways to be critical. I am not always convinced by some 'critical' social science where posturing is the dominant feature without any serious theoretical or empirical analysis. That's not the main point but avoiding cheap critical discourse would not harm us. But there is a major risk of social science abandoning some issues to avoid political risk and pressure, sometimes with methodological sophistication. That does not need to be disconnected from major social or political issues, but sometimes it is the case. One should also remember there are different ways to be critical.

In my book with Florence Faucher on the new Labour government, I read many papers that were very 'critical' of New Labour from day one. When you read them, there were some good points, but also a huge amount of cheap talk and weak arguments. Our strategy was to try to develop some informed and documented assessment and then to draw our conclusions. I thought our critique was far more effective and far reaching. Also, particularly in urban studies, comparison is essential to provide some depth to the comparison. That was a strength of Marxist urban studies: they made major efforts to provide empirical evidence of inequalities to support their evidence. I remember the work of an urban scholar writing what was supposed to be a devastating critique of gentrification in Paris, but who refused to look at figures and existing research. That's a cheap critique and I have little respect for that.

When I was in Rennes at Sciences Po I once wrote about the French public type of public-private partnership in planning, the 'société d'économie mixte' (SEM). We did some empirical research. I was threatened by powerful people in Paris, in Bordeaux (but that person was sent to jail) and we lost

some financial support from the city council. That's our life. My early work on governance was despised by politically correct civil servants in France because I (and others) dared to question the impartiality of the state, of the 'general interest' and of our formidable civil servants. Ten years later, the same people were using my research to justify forms of privatisation or their own careers in banks and with private developers and consultants. You never control the way your work will be used.

We just have to remember that there are a myriad of ways to develop different forms of critique (see Boltanski's book), including in terms of the production of knowledge and categories. We also know that in many countries, pressure on social scientists from right-wing or extreme right-wing politicians, not to mention large firms, is growing, from the US to Japan and from the UK to France and Italy. I am not part of Bourdieu's group, but his 2001 documentary *La sociologie est un sport de combat* remains essential.

Second, let's go back to Weber. There is always an illusion held by social scientists, and even more so by scientists, that their ideas should be effective for politicians and public policies. We have to understand that the political 'field' or domain has some autonomy. It writes its own rules of the game, with its own interest groups and ways of doing things. Social scientists are incredibly naïve about what their influence on public policy should be. There are many good reasons why our ideas do not come through or not directly. So what do I do about this? I never think that my ideas or research results will influence policy. It has happened sometimes, but it has never been the most likely outcome. Our direct influence is more obvious in the case of protest, to block things or prevent some policy implementation, for instance.

However, in my experience we have a lot of indirect influence that we cannot always imagine. Teaching and executive education are an initial way of doing things. I started the Urban School at Sciences Po as a social science urban research school precisely with those things in mind. Over the years, all sorts of people, including some very far away from us, have respected the quality of our students and their training that comprises a solid 'critical' part. Some of those students (including in executive education) are using and implementing our (meaning the Urban School group's) ideas or research results in relation to the climate crisis, transport, urban poverty, housing and migrants. Many are intermediaries and where they move in different professional places, they frame some issues and develop strategies and policies.

For instance, in my 'governance' class, the question 'who is governed' is central, as is the question of governance failure or corruption. Those students will never think in terms of basic 'best practice' if they do not ask 'for whom'. And some students will use those ideas and research results to increase their capacity to develop crazy projects or inequalities. It's a struggle.

In the Urban School, we have also gradually enrolled a small group of great professionals who have sympathy for the social sciences and they diffuse our work. We also enrolled a larger group that consider our work as interesting and a quite large network of professionals who now think that they must at least be aware of what we say, regardless of what they think. Like everybody else, we try to be more visible in the public debate too.

On some issues, we have failed miserably to gain any influence or to get our conclusions to be taken seriously. But remember, the political and administrative field is not homogenous. Some groups, some local authorities, some political groups and some agencies are using our work. Some others oppose it. And most do not care most of the time, but sometimes it works. My way of doing things is always to see all those people, to discuss with them, to invite them to a round table discussions, to argue with them and to see if there is room for manoeuvre. Sometimes they never want to see us again. Sometimes they learn something and the confrontation helps them to move forward. Sometimes they are very open to what we have to say. And sometimes we agree to disagree and to postpone our discussion.

Let me take the example of the Olympic games in Paris 2024. You may criticise the corruption of the IOC, the dreadful partners they have and the ridiculous amount of money that is spent and you may be opposed to sport events anyway from an environmental point of view. That's fine and we need these arguments to be well supported with some evidence or ideological points. Previous failures speak volumes. But you may also look at the project, the precise way that it is implemented, who benefits, what is going on in terms of urban renewal, and labour opportunities in new wood construction in Seine-Saint-Denis. I have decided to follow this precisely, to do research and to interview and follow all sorts of actors and groups… until 2030. By then, we'll have a good idea of what happened. Research is often a long-term thing. I am sure we'll have a more nuanced view and we may develop different kinds of critiques.

Nowadays, feminist and race-based critique have become paramount and that is generating a different kind of debate and different legitimation process for social scientists (in my mind most social scientists are critical).

Your last point is about skills. I do not know, as I do not think I have been effective from the point of view of public policy. It's difficult to do everything at the same time. Some colleagues have spent a fair amount of time in social movements, in media, in think tanks, in political circles sometimes, or with consultants. I have made my choice and concentrated on comparative research and on making innovative Master's degrees at the Urban School or elsewhere. I also speak for NGOs or trade unions from time to time at public events or at conferences for professionals. I do think we could do much better as social scientists to make our claims and analysis clearer and to learn to usually present our evidence more effectively. I do not write very well and I think that we should learn to write at different levels, both for academic journals and for a wider audience. This is an important skill to achieve. The same goes for the visual presentation of our evidence. We are making great progress thanks to the new tools we can use. The same again goes for oral presentation and clarity. There is much we can do in terms of communication without giving up the core substance of our arguments and scientific approach. But the world is not waiting for us and lots of people and organisations (not to mention AI) are able to produce arguments, some studies (if not research) and figures, so we are under a lot of pressure and possibly under threat. Finally, we must also be able to compare our skills and to articulate micro-processes with meso-processes or macro-processes and trends and to situate those in historical pathways. We should not give up the macro dimension.

Could you tell us more about how you approach these questions of 'techniques'? What is the policy instrument programme? What exactly is the project of this approach to public action?

Around 2002, Pierre Lascoumes and I delivered a course on public policy. One day, while we were preparing the course, Pierre Lascoumes told me that when he was working on the sociology of law or on the environment, he realised that what sometimes allowed actions to be coordinated were the techniques. For example, he had done work on the law concerning air pollution in France. A law was passed, but afterwards nothing happened for eight years because there were no indicators for measuring air pollution. He then explained to me that, in many public policies, he observed that people don't really know what they want to achieve, which leads them to agree on instruments while waiting to see what will happen.

I told him that when I was working on governance issues, what was very striking was the scale of public policies in many areas, which led decision-makers or elites to reflect on the way in which power was exercised and on the instruments. Each of us had observed that decisions were not so important and that, in the end, political orientation is not what really counts; what does matter is the implementation and the means made available for political authority to be exercised through mechanisms and instruments. In discussing this, we realised that there were many public policies whose aims were completely vague and that what really structured things and what really explained the way things were done were the instruments. As we initially came from sociology, we started to think of a political sociology of instruments.

At first, it was not a project. It was more about questions that emerged from our research. I was working on urban policies, economic development policies, Pierre Lascoumes on the environment, the sociology of law, issues of justice, and we realised that the usual methods could not explain everything. For example, when I worked in Lille, we could see that local leaders could not agree on a certain number of urbanisation policies, but they did agree on a map to know what they could or could not do. And representing the problems created new debate and some collective action.

It was as if the instrument was a way of partially coordinating public action. Sometimes, this had structuring effects on what public action was. We didn't have the right tools to explain what we saw in our fields, but we both realised that we were asking ourselves similar questions. We organised a research group and a research seminar. Some colleagues left, some joined and we did some original research. For instance, Philippe Estèbe told us: 'In urban policies, in neighbourhood policy, we don't really know what we want to do, but we do agree on an instrument. We define three criteria characterising a neighbourhood in difficulty and the instrument then explains part of how the policy develops'. For Gilles Pinson, collective action crystallises around urban projects whose aims are extremely vague. After we wrote a book together, *Gouverner par les instruments* (Lascoumes and Le Galès, 2005), we initiated a new round of research and held another seminar. Many young people conducted original research and we published a second book, *L'instrumentation de l'action publique* (Halpern, Lascoumes and Le Galès, 2014). Then we stopped. We never wanted to create a 'policy instrument school'.

We are just saying that there is a set of cases where instruments explain the transformations of public action, but not always: sometimes, interest groups and conflicts of interest are really what is fundamental. This also corresponds to an era. This is what Christopher Hood (2011a, 2011b) described very well when he spoke of 'blame avoidance' and the 'blame game' to explain that the more complicated societies are, the more difficult it is for states to accumulate resources to implement public policy, as they have lost legitimacy and the capacity for action and authority. It is much more complicated for elected officials to implement and achieve success in public policy. They are increasingly cautious and rely on different types of instruments, leaving the goals that will be negotiated in implementation open. This was quite significant for a whole range of public policies, but there are plenty of public policies that cannot be explained by instruments.

We see instruments as the crystallisation of interests and representations, which then have effects on the form of collective action. As with any institution, what interests us is understanding how instruments become increasingly codified, formalised, sanctioned and so on. We are interested in instrumentation, meaning both the choice of instrument and the way in which the instrument gradually becomes an institution. On the one hand, we did other empirical work; on the other, we wanted to conceptually refine our intellectual tool and discuss it with a whole range of people, including those who are very critical. The second book is therefore both a book of critical debate on what can or cannot be done with instruments, the limits of this approach and its possible extensions. After all, these questions about instruments, devices, arrangements and collective organisation are always a way of thinking about collective action.

In your work, you address the cognitive dimension of public action instruments. What do you mean by this? Is it related to what Pierre Muller has proposed with 'referentials'?

Neither Pierre Lascoumes nor I have ever been convinced by Pierre Muller's 'referential' concept. It's very nice conceptual work, but I don't understand where these referentials come from or why they disappear (see my article with Yves Surel in *Revue Française de Science Politique,* 2022). On the other hand, what I do like about referentials is the idea that we are trying to think about the macro, and I think that this is Pierre Muller's great strength. Sociology has over-invested in micro-analyses and has somewhat forgotten that not everything can be explained by individuals (even though we also do micro-research ourselves).

In a way, we are much closer to the work of Peter Hall (the Harvard political scientist), who seeks to understand changes in public policies and paradigms with several dimensions, including that of instruments. For us, an institution has a cognitive dimension, meaning that it crystallises representations, ways of doing things and conceptions of action. We think that a public policy instrument is the representation of a problem: an indicator is also a mental and intellectual construction (Lascoumes, 2007).

For example, we are working on processing and sorting algorithms in airport areas. You are led to believe that these are purely objective indicators, but you can imagine that there are a certain number of representations of the problem,

of who is dangerous and who is not dangerous, involved in making the instrument. What we see is that many technical instruments are developed to do this sorting and to make these maps, algorithms and so on. There are representations of the problem included in all these instruments, with a material dimension, a political dimension and a cognitive dimension. This has become a very common idea and is widely accepted today.

I worked for a long time on cities, regions and European policies. At some point, it became a bit complicated not to work on the state. In 2011, Desmond King and I edited a special issue of the *Revue française de sociologie* on the sociology of the state and the many research programmes on the state in different parts of the world. We then set up a working group for four or five years and brought in researchers to work on the question 'What is becoming of the state in Europe?' We tried to work on the different conceptualisations of the state: from pragmatic sociology, according to which the state is a social practice of daily interaction, to Bob Jessop's Marxist sociology, which has often been renewed, to Foucauldian sociology, Weberian sociology, etc. The idea was not to go back to the origins of the state, because there is a lot of work on that, but more on contemporary transformations and what we can show and try to conceptualise.

We published a book on the reconfiguration of the state in Europe (King and Le Galès, 2017). Everyone agrees that the state is not disappearing. The work programme is about the state undergoing transformation and reconfiguration. The first idea is to highlight the processes of state destruction on the one hand and processes of state creation on the other. The second idea of this book is to say that we must work comparatively. A third approach is a bit different than the instruments: not only do we think that the state is a matter of public policy, but it is also a matter of activity. This is one of the major lessons in method that we take from public policy instruments: we are interested in the activities, mobilised people, instruments, instrumentation and all the dynamics created around these issues that allow us to think about the recomposition of the state. This is different from the classic institutionalist approach where we look at the courts or Parliament.

One of our assumptions, following Weber, is that the state is also about bureaucracy and rationalisation. What is very striking in all European countries is how massive state reform activities have become. Foucault had a very nice expression: he called it 'le souci de soi de l'État'. Philippe Bezes (2009) works on these processes to reconfigure the state. In particular, he shows that we are increasingly observing the decline of traditional ministries throughout Europe and, conversely, the rise in power of specialised agencies and regulatory agencies. He speaks of an 'agencification' of the state. At the same time that there is this drive for decentralisation, deconcentration, the creation of agencies and the reconfiguration of the state, other state activities are also strengthening, particularly audit and control activities.

We can therefore foresee a reconfiguration of the state apparatus, including (and here we touch a bit on the sociology of science) the instrument used in particular to think about the future. Today, we are seeing development of all the instruments for scenarios for governing the future. Hence the state's deployment to manage time (both the past, governing memory, and the future,

governing via scenarios), as demonstrated by Jenny Andersson and Sibylle Duhautois (2016). We start from the principle that non-national criteria are increasingly involved in the definition of what the state is. We therefore try to show all these points of discussion and reparameterisation that constitute the state, then we ask ourselves if this can all be explained by the rise of neo-liberal managerialism or if it is simply a matter of the classic logic of rationalisation in the Weberian sense? Yet in line with Wolfgang Streeck in this book, we also examine the different forms of restructuring connected to changing forms of capitalism, including financialisation processes and the making of the austerity state identified by political economists like Jessop and Streeck.

There are many other possible hypotheses about the state in Europe, but these are the ones that seem to us to be structuring how to understand its recompositions. Therefore, in the image given of the state in Europe, we classically speak of Hobbes' Leviathan, a ship that sails on the sea following a very clear direction (the term 'governance' comes from the idea of a rudder). Pierre Lascoumes proposes the image of the crustacean, which comes from Karl Polanyi, who previously compared the nation to a crustacean. It is a bit like the idea that the contemporary European state retains a very solid and very strong institutional core: a flexible shell. It remains very institutionalised, so there is a slightly more classical image of the state, yet the action and activities of the state are more like threads. On the great seas of globalisation, the state works with threads, in constant cooperation with other actors. This crustacean is what has helped us to visualise what the state is becoming. You can see our idea of a state that retains a very institutional and almost Weberian dimension: it is recomposed, evolves and is a little more in motion. It is through its activities and its capacity to exercise political authority that we can understand this reconfiguration of the state.

The Metrolab project is coming to the end of its funding and the researchers have begun to reflect on the sustainability of the dynamics initiated over the last few years. What advice would you give to researchers involved in such projects, and to PhD students in particular?

My first piece of advice for them is to do social sciences without locking themselves into one discipline. You have to keep in mind that the boundaries between disciplines vary from one country to another. For example, if you do political sociology, in France you are clearly working in political science and in the United States it is part of sociology. You also have to bear in mind that innovation does not always happen in the discipline you are working in. For example, the sociology of science has undergone one of the greatest transformations of recent years, which has greatly influenced geography, sometimes even before it influenced sociology.

The second piece of advice is to work in comparatively: in time, in space, in the same country, between countries, etc. We are at a time when we are redefining our social science tools, as well as sociology and political science, which first emerged with the nation-state, with the modern state at the end of the xixth century. Today, we are all trying to articulate the different scales and to articulate circulations, dynamics, networks with territories, places and societies.

What is complicated is to think about these societies permanently by considering these historical pathways and these effects of place and reproduction at the same time as the dynamics of migration, networks and evolution. In all our work, I think we need to try to think about the articulation of scales on the one hand and the articulation between mobilities and territorial issues on the other. That's why I have worked with Jennifer Robinson on a handbook of comparative global urban studies bringing together all sorts of urban scholars, from the most postmodern to the most positivist. Social science is developing all over the world, not just in Europe and in the US, and this has to be seriously taken into account.

The third suggestion I always give to my students is that sociology today deals a lot with micro-issues, such as individual aggregations, interactions and the symbolic dimension, because the macro models no longer work and were heavily criticised. However, I think that, as a sociologist, if it is important to be critical of the macro, we should not completely abandon it. I find that capitalism is still an important variable to take into account. It's not just individual entrepreneurs. I think that the state and social classes are much more complicated. So we have to question these categories. Reconstruct and rework them, but we must not completely abandon the macro for all that.

Until today, social science knowledge was very much influenced by Europe and the United States and now we have an explosion of research and new issues emerging all over the world. Sometimes new models will emerge because there are different historical experiences and sometimes the European experiences and the models we have mentioned will be applied and developed with variations. There is very strong tension and discussions that are not easy for us, because we can see that there is a part of the social sciences today that is taking a post-positivist, post-modern and post-structuralist turn that questions how sociology and political science have historically been thought of to a large extent. We need to invent other models of analysis without rejecting existing models. Empirical work must help us to decide. What is not easy for young social scientists today is to know how to situate themselves in relation to all this: on the one hand, we have very strong traditions, both national, European and American, and on the other, there are developments at both the theoretical and empirical levels. I think that this is a time when we need to start looking at what is happening beyond Europe and the United States and see how we can gradually take these different elements into account.

I think that this is an interesting time to be innovative in terms of methodology and to think of comparisons that are less between France and England but that compare at different scales and are off the beaten track. We have to take risks with our conceptualisations and not be satisfied with processing data in a complex way without research questions.

So, my advice is that you have to be stronger in methodology in different areas, but you must not abandon your ideas. You shouldn't do just methodology. That's a bit automatic. One of the risks of sociology for me is to do methodology that does not renew its problems so much. The big challenge we're going to have is to find out what we're going to do with databases and Big Data. We are all very uncomfortable. We try to work with databases or data recovered from the Internet, but it is not easy. We see that there are other sources of data coming in

and we wonder how to combine different types of data in the research questions we ask. It's really important to think carefully about the questions you ask in relation to existing resources, but also in relation to the types of data you want to produce and that you can retrieve. I think this is where we need to make an effort to really construct original and interesting problems to take interest in how our societies are being transformed, because we cannot ignore the scales. It's not possible to work only on a neighbourhood, and, at the same time, we can't ignore it as if it didn't exist either. I think that our job as sociologists is to think about the constitution of society at different scales. It is clear that in Europe there are parts of society that are even more deeply rooted in particular territories and neighbourhoods or particular communities. We can see that there are parts of society that remain deeply attached to the national apparatus with extremely high levels of reproduction: I am thinking of the English elites, for example. However, other parts of society escape national societies and are structured at a European or global level. How can these differences be articulated? For me, as a researcher, you really have to work on these dimensions and not confine yourself to your city or your neighbourhood.

So you have to invest in methods. You have to read a lot, think a lot and publish regularly, but not too much. The other piece of advice is not to spread yourself too thinly in all directions, as many young researchers do. Publish little, but make sure it is quality! It's really about publishing in places that make sense and writing a book from time to time. I am very attached to this format, which allows other ways of thinking. But this is debatable. There are also researchers who think that today the production of knowledge goes through blogs, through a lot of different writing activities. So there is a real uncertainty about the way in which we evaluate the work we do today. I tell young researchers to start at the beginning: write a few really high-quality, very strong papers that make an impact on a few people, then a book. Then develop a secondary activity, but you mustn't get the order wrong, and also go and see the country!

Transcription and edition: Lionel Francou and Sarah Van Hollebeke

References

Andersson J., & Duhautois, S. (2016). Futures of Mankind: The Emergence of the Global Future. In R. Van Munster, & C. Sylvest (Eds.), *The Politics of Globality since 1945: As-sembling the Planet* (pp. 106-125). Routledge.

Andreotti, A., Moreno Fuentes, F. J., & Le Galès, P. (2016). *Un monde à la carte. Les villes européennes des cadres supérieurs*. Presses universitaires de France.

Bagnasco, A., & Le Galès, P. (Eds.). (1997). *Villes en Europe*. La Découverte.

Benoît-Guilbot, O. *et al.* (1986). *L'Esprit des lieux: localités et changement social en France*. Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique.

Bezes, P. (2009). *Réinventer l'État. Les réformes de l'administration française (1962-2008)*. Presses universitaires de France.

Courmont, A., & Le Galès P. (Eds.). *Ville et numérique*. PUF.

Crouch, C., Le Galès, P., Trigilia, C., & Voelzkow, H. (2001). *Local Production Systems in Europe: Rise or Demise?* Oxford University Press.

Crouch, C., Le Galès, P., Trigilia, C., & Voelzkow, H. (2004). *Changing Governance of Local Economies: Responses of European Local Production Systems*. Oxford University Press.

Desrosières, A. (1993). *La politique des grands nombres. Histoire de la raison statistique*. La Découverte.

Halpern, C., Lascoumes, P., & Le Galès, P. (Eds.). (2014). *L'instrumentation de l'action publique. Controverses, résistance, effets*. Presses de Sciences Po.

Harvey, D. (1989). *The condition of postmodernity an enquiry into the origins of cultural change*. Blackwell.

Hood, C. (2011a). Blame Avoidance and Accountability: Positive, Negative, or Neutral? In M. J. Dubnick, & H. G. Frederickson (Eds.), *Accountable Governance: Problems and Promises* (pp. 167-179). M. E. Sharpe.

Hood, C. (2011b). *The Blame Game: Spin, Bureaucracy and Self-Preservation in Government*. Princeton University Press.

Jessop, B. (2016). *The State. Past, Present, Future*. Polity Press.

King, D., & Le Galès, P. (2011). Sociologie de l'État en recomposition. *Revue française de sociologie*, 52(3), 453-480.

King, D., & Le Galès, P. (Eds.). (2017). *Reconfiguring European States in Crisis*. Oxford University Press.

Lascoumes, P. (2007). Gouverner par les cartes. *Genèses*, 68(3), 2-3.

Lascoumes, P., & Le Galès, P. (Eds.). (2005). *Gouverner par les instruments*. Presses de Sciences Po.

Le Galès, P. (2002). *European Cities: Social Conflicts and Governance*. Oxford University Press.

Le Galès, P. (Eds.). (2020). *Gouverner la metropole Parisienne: Etats, conflits, réseaux, institutions*. Presses de Sciences Po.

Le Galès, P., & Faucher, F. (2007). *Tony Blair, 1997-2007. Le bilan des réformes*. Presses de Sciences Po.

Le Galès, P., & Robinson J. (Eds.). (2023). *Routledge handbook of global comparative urban studies*. Routledge.

Le Galès, P., & Scott, A. (2008). Une révolution bureaucratique britannique? Autonomie sans contrôle ou "freer markets, more rules". *Revue française de sociologie*, 49(2), 301-330.

Mann, M. (1984). The autonomous power of the State: its origins, mechanisms and results. *Archives européennes de sociologie*, 25(2), 185-213.

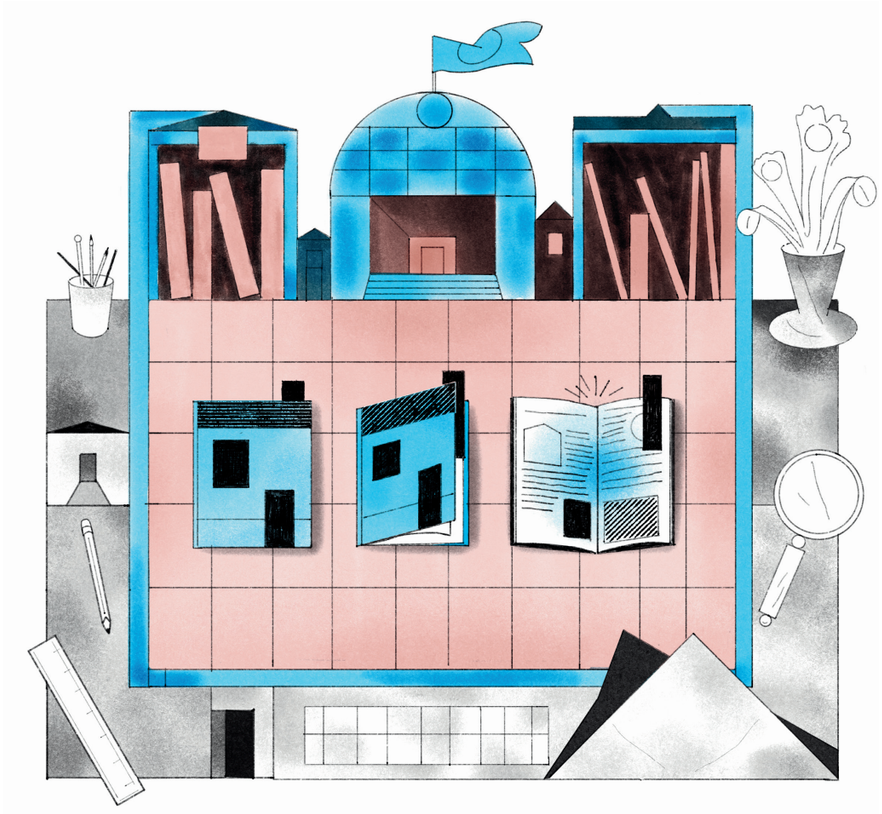
Mann, M. (2012). *The Sources of Social Power: Volume 4, Globalisations, 1945-2011*. Cambridge University Press.

Therborn, G. (1995). *European Modernity and Beyond: The Trajectory of European Societies, 1945-2000*. Sage.

Therborn, G. (2009). *Les sociétés d'Europe du XXe au XXIe siècle. La fin de la modernité européenne?* Armand Colin.

Tilly, C. (1992). *Coercion, capital, and European States, AD 990-1992*. Blackwell.

Ugalda, V., & Le Galès, P. (Eds.). (2018). *Que se Gobierna? El caso de la ciudad de Mexico*. Colejio de Mexico.



© Lucas Gicquel

Promoting research on the urban dimension of European policies at the Joint Research Centre

A conversation with Carlotta Fioretti

Carlotta Fioretti is researcher in urban policy, research fellow at the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission, Seville. She was previously postdoctoral researcher at Roma Tre University[1]. In this conversation, she explains how she, together with her colleagues of the Joint Research Centre, try to promote research on the urban dimension of European policies.

Could you briefly explain your professional background and research interests?

I'm a researcher in urban studies with a background in architecture and urban planning. Since completing my PhD, my work has focused on urban polices and planning, with an emphasis on socio-spatial justice, analysing the transformation of urban areas and examining the intertwining of immaterial processes driven by political, social and economic forces and spatial elements of the built and natural environment. My research interests touch on urban regeneration, strategic planning, migration and social inclusion, the urban dimension of EU policies.

Could you give us an outline of the Joint Research Centre? What is its role and its missions? What are the challenges of transdisciplinary and collaborative research for European cities?

The Joint Research Centre (JRC) is the European Commission's in-house science and knowledge service. Its mission is to support EU policies with independent evidence throughout the policy cycle. The JRC aims to play a central role in creating, managing and making sense of knowledge to improve EU policies in different areas. In fact, the JRC works in a variety of areas, from agriculture and food security to the environment and climate change, nuclear safety and security, innovation and growth. Moreover, the JRC has taken a nexus-driven approach

1 Neither the European Commission nor any person acting on behalf of the Commission is responsible for any use that might be made of the following information. The views expressed in this publication are the sole responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Commission.

that attempts to ensure that projects are established in a multi-disciplinary manner to tackle complex societal challenges.

At the JRC, I work for the Territorial Development Unit, where I am mainly involved in a line of research that focuses on cities. Our mission is to produce a knowledge base, provide scientific support and pursue methodological innovation for urban management and development-related policymaking, primarily but not exclusively at the EU level. This means that the output of our activities serves policy-makers at different levels of government: from local to international.

Urban challenges are complex and intertwined by definition. Thus, our research approach is also transdisciplinary and the researchers in our unit have a wide range of skills, with backgrounds in economics, spatial planning, architecture, political science and environmental engineering, just to mention the main ones. We also believe in the need for collaborative research. Since urban issues are cross-cutting, several different JRC units engage together in collaborative projects. We also work in partnerships with external experts from different universities, as well as with other EU urban stakeholders and local administrations.

To strengthen relationships with various stakeholders, share knowledge and foster collaboration, we joined forces with DG REGIO to create the Community of Practice Cities[2]. This initiative aims to maintain a discussion on cities and their sustainable development with key stakeholders both within and outside the European Commission such as cities and networks of cities, international and intergovernmental organisations and research bodies.

In 2020, you published the *Handbook of Sustainable Urban Development Strategies*. Could you explain its main recommendations and conclusions? What was the initial objective or purpose of this publication? What challenges were faced in producing it?

The EU does not have a specific mandate on urban policy, but it does consider urban matters and the role played by cities as extremely important for the sustainable development of its territories. Thus, the EU has promoted an urban discourse since the 1990s, defining a 'EU perspective' on urban issues known as 'urban aquis' and establishing a common approach to urban development that is integrated, place-based and participatory.

In operational terms, the EU's cohesion policy provides for greater investment in cities. Integrated urban development has been streamlined into cohesion policy since 2007 and became compulsory for member states in 2014. As a result, around 1000 urban authorities across the EU were directly involved in implementing sustainable urban development strategies using around €17 billion in cohesion policy funds during the 2014-2020 programming period.

At the same time, not all territories across the EU have had the same experience and ability to deliver these place-based integrated policies. There is also a gap between policy instruments as they are conceived at the EU level and

2 Please note that the Community of Practice for Cities platform will soon be migrated onto the Knowledge Centre for Territorial Policies. See: European Commission. (2023, February). *Knowledge Centre for Territorial Policies* https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/territorial_en.

the way they are concretely implemented through local strategies, where they are influenced by the local context, actors and urban planning traditions.

With that in mind, the *Handbook of Sustainable Urban Development Strategies*[3] was published by the JRC in collaboration with DG REGIO for two main purposes. The first objective was to systematise existing knowledge on the EU approach to urban development and how it is applied on the ground, then to identify the main principles that characterise it and can serve as common ground across the EU.

As a result, the Handbook is structured in six building blocks: strategic dimension, territorial focus, governance, cross-sectoral integration, funding and finance and monitoring. These building blocks are aligned with the principles promoted by documents such as the OECD Principles on Urban Policy (OECD, 2019) the New Leipzig Charter (EU Ministries, 2020) and the Urban Agenda for the EU (EC, 2021). Each building block has a separate section in the Handbook. These building blocks also form the basis for our following work, such as the Self-Assessment Tool for Sustainable Urban Development Strategies (SAT4SUD)[4], for example.

The second objective was to support policymakers involved in designing, implementing and managing EU-funded urban strategies. In this sense, the Handbook is a policy-learning tool; it is not a manual that explains how to conduct a strategy step-by-step. Instead, it identifies the most significant and recurring challenges that policymakers may encounter during the process, discusses them and suggests how to tackle them through examples, links to existing resources (tools, guidelines and studies) and recommendations.

Due to its format, the Handbook does not provide any final conclusions. In fact, it is an open tool that has been transformed into an interactive online platform[5] that can be further updated and developed.

All the same, we can still draw some lessons from it. The effectiveness of sustainable urban development (SUD) strategies depends on structured cooperation between all levels of government concerned: local authorities in particular play a key role in the process and must be involved early. Moreover, strategies work best when all potential stakeholders are properly identified and engaged throughout the process.

Integration across policy areas is essential to address complex urban problems in which social economic and environmental dimensions are intertwined. The integration of funding sources can help in this sense because it can support a mix of objectives and hard and soft interventions. The monitoring process should combine sectoral measurements with an assessment of the added effect of using an integrated approach.

The integrated approach is not easy and integrated territorial strategies require administrative and strategic capacities not available to all public authorities. Sustainable urban development strategies must be coupled with arrangements for capacity-building at all levels.

3 See: https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC118841

4 See: Self-Assessment Tool for Sustainable Urban Development Strategies

5 See: https://urban.jrc.ec.europa.eu/urbanstrategies/

A final consideration is that there is no secret recipe for urban development or one-size-fits-all solution for policy challenges. Sustainable urban development strategies rely on local contexts. They are linked to domestic policies and influenced by domestic planning traditions. The types and interpretations are highly variable across the EU. Nevertheless, it is still possible to share common ground, notably the six building blocks, and to learn from each other, such as through the examples.

Can you give us an overview of the European sustainable urban development strategy implemented in 2014-2020? How does Europe support and encourage urban transitions? What instruments were implemented to make this strategy operational? What would be your recommendations for the European strategy in 2021-2027?

I do not think that it is correct to speak of a European 'strategy' for sustainable urban development. I think it would be more appropriate to talk about a European 'approach' to sustainable urban development, which is an integrated and participatory approach.

As explained in the Handbook, this approach entails integration across different policy sectors, territorial types and scales, multi-level and multi-stakeholder governance and public engagement.

To promote this approach throughout the EU, as I mentioned previously, around €17 billion were allocated to design and implement around 1047 sustainable urban development strategies during the 2014-2020 period. The STRAT-Board tool[6] provides an overview of these strategies, to grasp the extent to which they focused on a mix of policy objectives and to discover which were the most recurrent, which key words characterised the strategies, which type of spatial area they focused on and which policy instruments were used to implement them.

In 2021-2027, the Cohesion Policy provides even more solid support to the integrated approach to sustainable urban development, with a larger minimum financial allocation (at least 8% of the ERDF) and a new dedicated policy objective: 'Europe closer to citizens.'

This support is not only financial in nature, but also embraces knowledge production, sharing and capacity-building. The JRC plays an important role here with its online tools, the STRAT-Board, the Handbook, the SAT4SUD and the workshops organised to spread knowledge about them. Other key initiatives provide support and capacity building, like for example URBACT. In 2021-2027, the Cohesion Policy is promoting the European Urban Initiative, with a dedicated axis on capacity building, and a platform to coordinate all key initiatives and actors working on urban matters at EU level.

In addition to the Cohesion Policy, there are other major sources of methodological and financial support to support cities in the just and green transitions, like Horizon Europe's Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission, for example.

6 See: https://urban.jrc.ec.europa.eu/strat-board/?lng=en#/where

I think we can see that cities and urban issues are gaining momentum in the discussion at the EU level. There is firm acknowledgement of the role cities play to meet the EU's current priorities, such as the green transition, and to respond to current challenges like the post-COVID recovery. The EU promotes several opportunities and resources for cities. It should probably now focus on enhancing communication to make this urban dimension as visible as possible. I think that universities and research centres could play a role here, because it seems to me that there is still a gap between research on urban issues and urban policy discourse at the EU level.

You describe Metrolab as among Europe's 'best practices' in the Handbook. What do you think makes it a 'good' practice? Could the kind of critical and applied urban research that we try to do at Metrolab be transposed to other contexts? Do you see other initiatives of this kind elsewhere? If so, what are they?

The examples in the Handbook are not necessarily 'best practices'. Instead, I would define them as 'learning practices'. If they are included in the Handbook, it is because we think that something can be learned from them (and you can learn from both good and bad practices!). This lesson is indeed transposable to other contexts.

Metrolab[7] shows us how dialogue between EU-supported urban policymaking and research is possible and viable. Universities and research centres are involved in sustainable urban development strategies, but primarily in the design phase, when universities act as strategy design consultants. Metrolab stands out in this regard by following the strategy throughout its implementation, allowing for improvement through feedback loops and promoting a reflective approach to policymaking.

In our view, reflective practices are key to crafting robust strategies. In fact, it is with that in mind that we created the SAT4SUD, a tool that helps policymakers to reflect on the policymaking process and engage in continuous learning. Through a set of statements related to the six building blocks of the integrated approach, the SAT4SUD guides administrators to reflect critically on the strategy design and implementation process to identify strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for improvement.

By promoting continuous strategic readjustment, we identified Metrolab's reflective practice as a 'learning practice' in the strategic dimension building block. I also think that Metrolab provides some interesting insights into other two building blocks of the integrated approach. The first is cross-sectoral integration: since the Metrolab team is interdisciplinary, its work included looking for cross-cutting threads linking the various projects, and this is precisely how to strengthen a strategy's cross-sectoral dimension. The second is governance: Metrolab also provides an example of how to create a platform of dialogue and exchange between different stakeholders, helping to strengthen a strategy's multi-stakeholder governance.

7 See: https://urban.jrc.ec.europa.eu/urbanstrategies/strategic-dimensions#lfp_metrolab_brussels-strategies-as-bridges-between-operational-programmes-and-projects

The Handbook lays out other examples of strategies where universities and research centres have a role to play. For example, collaboration between the local authorities and a research team in Brno[8] produced an evidence-based method for identifying and analysing the functional urban area. In Reggio Emilia[9], the university was involved in a stakeholder involvement and civic engagement process under the label Collaboratorio-RE. These are just a few examples showing how the connection between science and policy is important for sustainable urban development strategies. It can help to make the process more inclusive and democratic by providing evidence-based solutions, enhancing self-reflection and constant improvement and building new narratives.

At Metrolab, we try to develop more applied research, distinguishing the role we can play from that of consultancy firms that might help to design strategic plans. To make our study accessible to a broader public, we produce case studies, books, scientific articles and videos and we organise MasterClasses, workshops, conferences and more. Is effectiveness as a researcher mainly about writing articles, reports, books and dissertations? What we are trying to do in our group at Metrolab is to experiment with how to propose other tools and techniques to be more practical. Do you experiment with skills other than writing in your contributions or recommendations? Maybe more visual ones?

Research for policymaking is the bulk of the JRC's work, so we are working extensively to develop tools and techniques that can make the results of research accessible and useful for policymakers. In fact, there is a gap between the world of science and the world of policy. They act at different speeds, use different languages and have different objectives. As a researcher, I believe that it is possible to develop the skills and competences to bridge that gap.

For example, at the JRC we are working on the 'Science for Policy' competence framework[10] for researchers, which identifies five key competences: understand policy, participate in policymaking, communicate, engage with citizens and stakeholders and collaborate. Communication is indeed one of these key competences and it entails adapting communication to the target audience. Yet in the first place, I would say it involves understanding the target audience well and engaging with it.

In my team's specific work, dealing with cities and urban policy, we are committed to spreading our research findings through two channels: through more purely research products (e.g., scientific publications, participation to conferences, scientific seminars) and through one applied for policies (such as online interactive platforms and tools, handbooks and workshops).

The *Handbook of Sustainable Urban Development* is a bit hybrid in this sense, because though it primarily targets policymakers, it can also be interesting

8 See: https://urban.jrc.ec.europa.eu/urbanstrategies/territorial-focus#lfp_brno-the-functional-area-approach

9 See: https://urban.jrc.ec.europa.eu/urbanstrategies/governance#lfp_reggio_emilia-the-bottom-up-and-participatory-approach

10 See: https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/visualisation/competence-framework-%E2%80%98science-policy%E2%80%99-researchers_en

for scholars and used in teaching. It is in any case a Science for Policy report, which is the result of a process of strict collaborations with policymakers during both the research and drafting stages. The contents were validated in a workshop by representatives of policymakers at different levels.

We also transformed the original publication into a website to make it more user-friendly for policymakers, where they can browse its contents more interactively and straightforwardly. The website provides several additional resources: an executive summary, the translation of the Handbook into various EU languages and links to the recordings of webinars organised for it. Several skills and competences must be combined to build this type of product; in fact, part of our team is made of IT developers and graphic designers.

As you know, at Metrolab we work on urban ecology, urban inclusion and urban production. How do you understand these subjects? Why is it important to address them together?

These are the three keywords for sustainable urban development. They are not new, because they refer to the three vertices of the sustainability triangle, but they are still viable, as demonstrated by the fact that the New Leipzig Charter is built around the same three dimensions (just, green and productive cities).

I think that the key — and the open challenge — is not to simply understand each dimension in isolation, but to consider them together. Urban challenges are complex by definition and expert and practical knowledge shows that all three dimensions are interrelated. This is even more evident on a small scale. For example, evidence shows that the deprivation suffered in low-income neighbourhoods is multi-dimensional because it concerns the socio-economic and demographic vulnerability of the resident population, the poor quality of the built and natural environment and the lack of services and economic vitality in the area at the same time. Moreover, these dimensions are interconnected in what is defined as the spiral of decline.

The integrated and place-based approach of urban development is conceived to consider these dimensions together: targeting an area allows understanding on the ground of how the three dimensions are interrelated and makes it easier to concentrate resources and to conceive integrated actions to address them jointly. This helps to break spirals of decline and prevents negative spill-over effects from one dimension to another.

This is even more important today, considering that the key priority of EU societies is to face the pressing threat of climate change and environmental degradation. As the EU Green Deal has made clear, however, the environmental aspect must be considered together with economic and social ones.

This appears even more evident when translating the narrative of the 'just transition' to the city. To respond to climate and environmental threats, we must improve the energy efficiency of buildings, curb traffic emissions and increase nature-based solutions, for example. Yet this is not enough. We must also change the mode of production, the economy of the city, ensuring that doing so would not lead to increased unemployment, exclusion and socio-spatial polarisation.

Understanding the socio-economic implication of urban ecology means fighting for a more just, inclusive, vital and affordable city for all. In the end, the

first objective of sustainable urban development as conceived in EU Cohesion Policy is to promote harmonious development of the territory against spatial inequalities and to raise the quality of life for all inhabitants of urban areas.

This is quite readily acknowledged from a theoretical viewpoint nowadays, though from a practical viewpoint it remains an open challenge. The main barrier for policymakers is that the public administration is organised into separate sectors. This is true at all levels, from the local level to that of the European Commission.

Again, I see an important role played by applied research here. Together with experiments like Metrolab, we at the JRC can work together with cities to find a way to overcome the 'silo mentality' and develop methodologies for joint urban actions.

Redaction and transcription: Carlotta Fioretti

Edition: Sarah Van Hollebeke

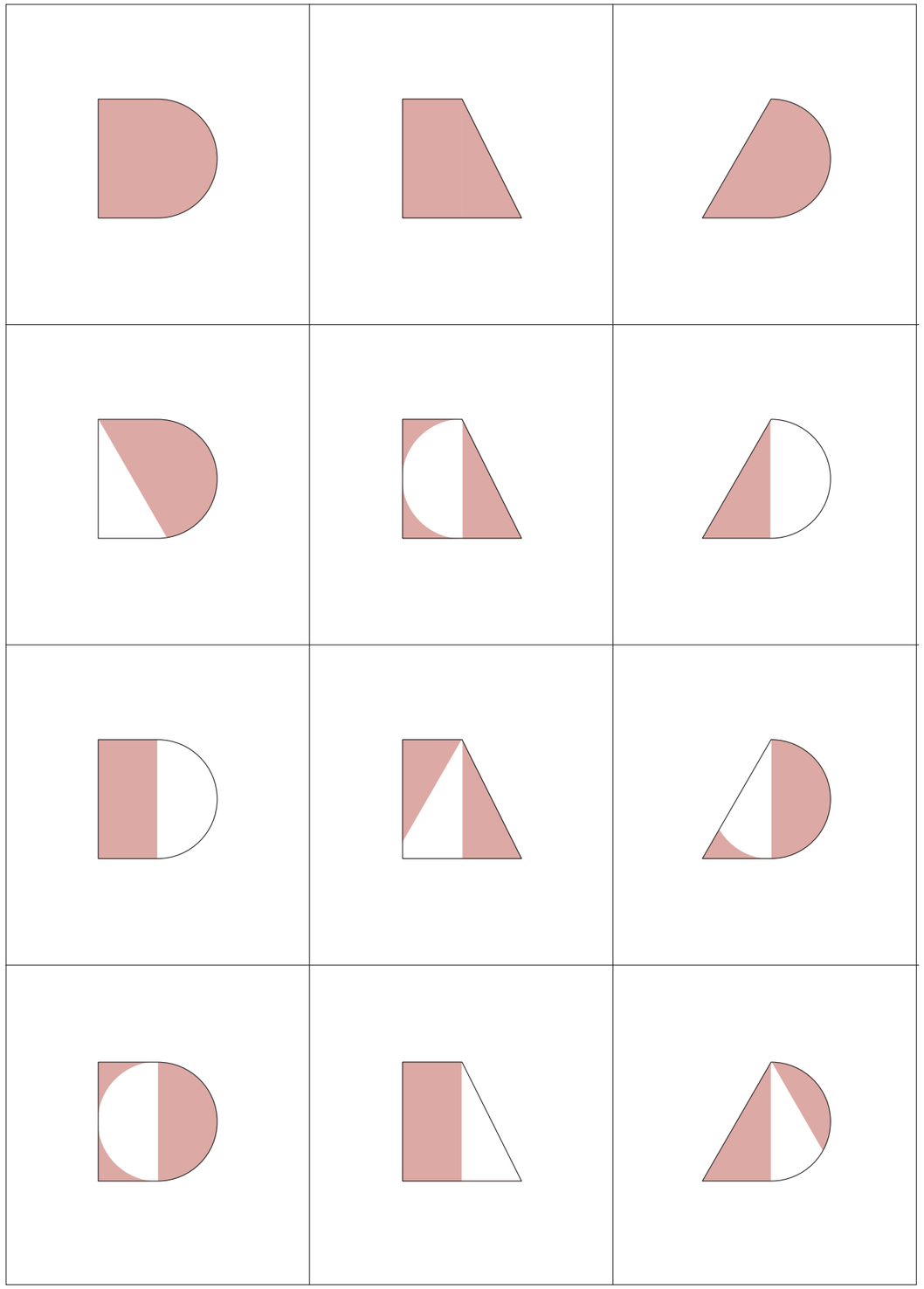
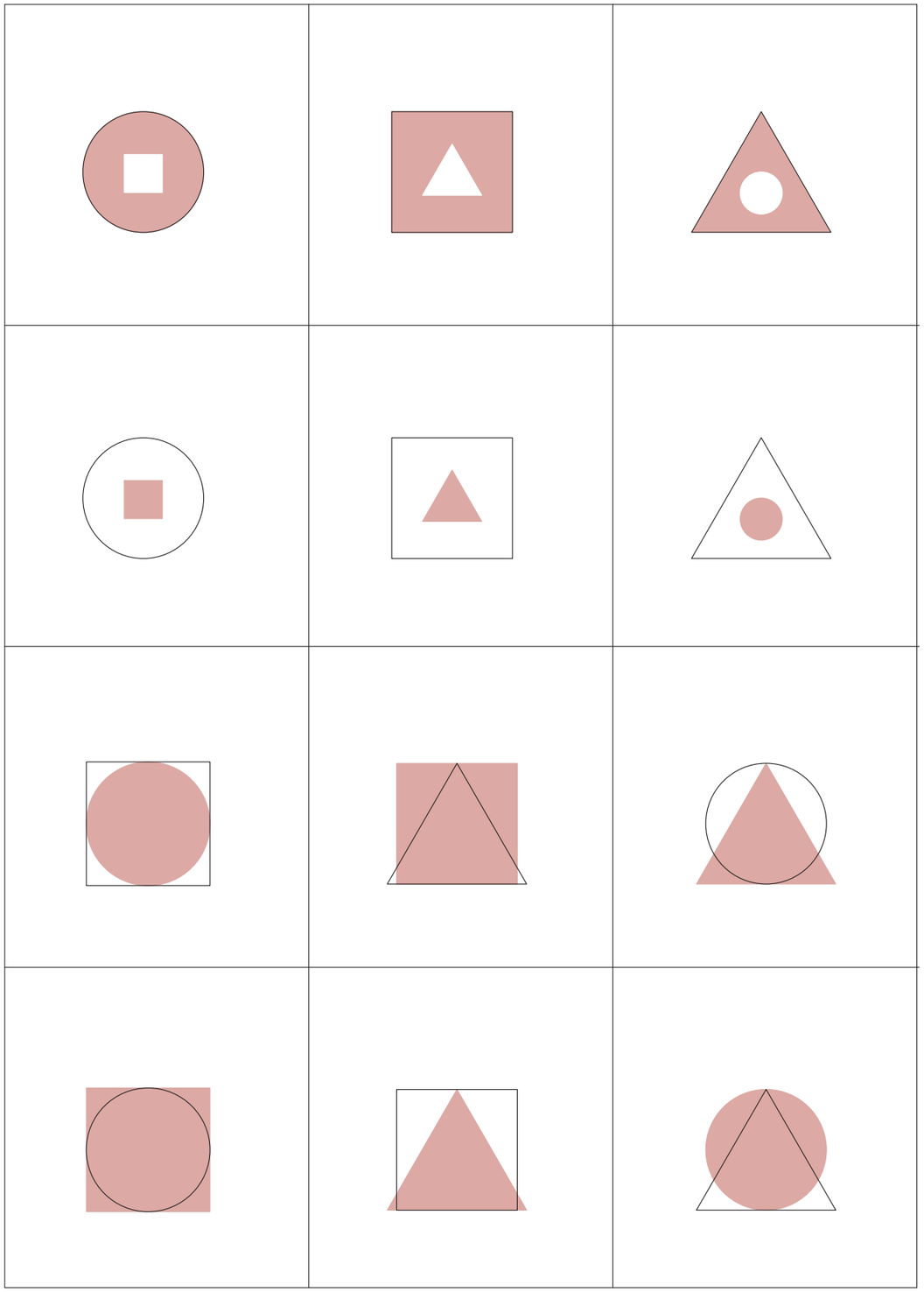
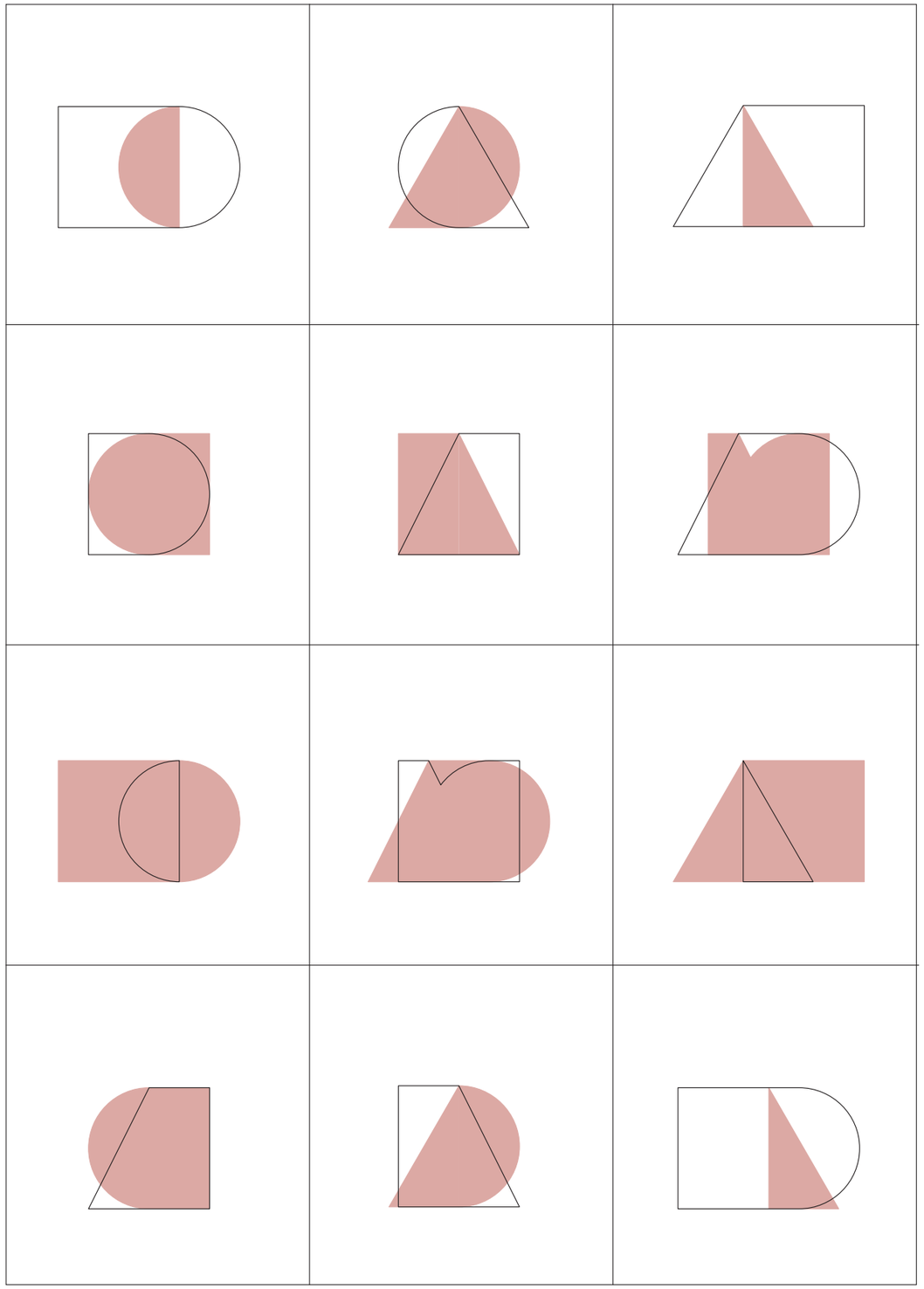


Table of transdisciplinary shapes © Sébastien Gairaud





Authors

Mathieu Berger
Mathieu Berger is a researcher and professor of sociology at the Université Catholique de Louvain (UCLouvain). He is a researcher at CriDIS (UCLouvain), a research affiliate at LASUR (EPFL), and at the Centre for the Study of Social Movements (CEMS) at EHESS-Paris. His research focuses, on the one hand, on theories of democratic public spaces and political participation, and on the other hand, on the social aspects of urban planning and urban policies in Europe and the United States. Since 2015, he has been the general coordinator of Metrolab. He has published numerous articles and several books on participation and urban (policy), including *Le temps d'une politique. Chronique des contrats de quartier bruxellois* (CIVA, 2019), and as a co-editor, *Du civil au politique. Ethnographies du vivre-ensemble* (Peter Lang, 2011), *Designing urban inclusion* (Metrolab, 2018), and *Écologie humaine. Une science sociale des milieux de vie* (Creaphis, 2024).

Andrea Bortolotti
Andrea Bortolotti is an architect and a postdoctoral researcher at the Faculty of Architecture La Cambre-Horta in Brussels (ULB) in 'Art de batir et Urbanisme'. In his PhD he has conducted research on the politics and practices of waste management and recycling through the lens of urban metabolism within the framework of Metrolab Brussels and other studies funded by the Brussels Environment Agency. In his current research he is deepening the organisation and collection of urban waste in a popular neighbourhood of Brussels (Cureghem) with the aim to improve planning for waste management.

Louise Carlier
Louise Carlier is a postdoctoral researcher at the Université Catholique de Louvain (UCLouvain), member at CriDIS (Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Democracy, Institutions and Subjectivities), and lecturer at the Université libre de Bruxelles. Her PhD in Social and Political Sciences (2015) focused on cosmopolitanism, and more specifically on the relationship between its urban and political dimensions. Her research interests are the relations of cohabitation and copresence in urban public spaces from the perspective of human ecology. She has published articles and books on these subjects including *Le cosmopolitisme, de la ville au politique. Enquête sur les mobilisations urbaines à Bruxelles* (Peter Lang, 2016), and as co-editor, *Designing urban inclusion* (Metrolab, 2018), *Cartographier l'environnement social d'un projet urbain* (Logbook Metrolab, 2021), *L'espace des infrastructures sociales. Une histoire (bruxelloise) de l'urbanisme de proximité* (Académie Royale de Belgique, 2022).

Daniel Cefaï
Daniel Cefaï is a Director of Studies at the EHESS (School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences) and a researcher at the Centre for the Study of Social Movements (CEMS). He is the editor-in-chief of the journal *Pragmata*. His research areas focus on the history of sociology in the United States and the sociology of collective mobilisations and public issues from a pragmatic perspective. He co-edited 'L'expérience des problèmes publics' (2012), a special issue of *SociologieS* titled 'Pragmatism and Social Sciences: Explorations, Investigations, Experiments' (2015), and a special issue of *Sociologie et sociétés* titled 'Publics, their Experiences, and their Audiences' (2019). He has also co-edited several books on ethnographic engagement and field research, and Human Ecology such as *Écologie humaine. Une science sociale des milieux de vie* (Creaphis, 2024).

Sara Cesari
Sara Cesari is an anthropologist and a project manager specialised in the cultural and social fields. Before joining Metrolab, she worked as a project manager in various institutions and NGOs in Morocco, Italy, and Belgium. Her professional background combines experience in the public management of culture and strategic know-how in the field of human rights. Sara Cesari holds a master's degree in Cultural Anthropology from the Università di Bologna (UNIBO), a postgraduate master in peace studies from the Università Roma Tre (UNIROMA3) and in European public affairs and communication at IHECS Academy. She recently started to work as policy officer for Science Europe.

Roselyne de Lestrange
Roselyne de Lestrange is an architect and landscape designer. She has worked as a project leader in public administrations and private offices in France, Belgium, and Argentina. Her PhD in Urbanism focused on landscape as a driver of reterritorialisation from a mesological perspective. She collaborates with the Université Catholique de Louvain (UCLouvain) both as a teacher and a researcher. Her research interests are bioregional dynamics, transition landscapes, and metropolitan agro-ecological networks. She is project officer and EU Referent for Nature, Biodiversity, Forest at Environment Brussels. She co-edited the book *Dessiner la transition. Dispositifs pour une métropole écologique* (Métis Presses, 2020) and *Agropolis. D'un projet pilote à un reseau nourricier métropolitain* (Metrolab, 2021).

Christian Dessouroux
Christian Dessouroux is a researcher in urban geography at the Institute for Environmental Management and Land-use Planning (IGEAT). Interested in cartographic analysis as well as urban history and economy, he has contributed to several publications on urban policies, transportation and the history of Brussels. His recent work focuses on the geography of urban real estate and land markets, urban reconversion processes and the challenges of participatory planning (JPI Urban Europe — Syncity).

Sophie Feyder
Sophie Feyder is an independent researcher and curator with a field of expertise in visual culture, African history and heritage. She was a 2017 Erasmus Dissertation Prize laureate and is currently working on various projects that combine academia with creative modes of dissemination. She co-founded the agency Critical Narrative, a creative agency that combines academic expertise and award-winning filmmaking & design.

Carlotta Fioretti
Carlotta Fioretti is researcher in urban policy, research fellow at the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, Seville. She graduated in Architecture at IUAV University of Venice and specialised in Urban Regeneration at Heriot-Watt University of Edinburgh. In 2011 she achieved a Ph.D. in Urban Policies at Roma Tre University. From 2007 onwards, she has been done research and consulting in urban policy and planning for different public and private institutes, such as the Scottish governmental agency 'Architecture and Design Scotland', Municipality of Arezzo (Integrated Plan for Sustainable Development), the Municipality of Rome and AUDIS association (project 'The protocol of urban quality for Rome') and CENSIS Foundation. Since 2009 she has done teaching activity in urban studies at Cornell University in Rome and Roma Tre University. Her research interests concern urban regeneration, neighbourhood studies, immigration and the city, strategic urban development.

Lucile Gruntz
Lucile Gruntz is an independent anthropologist, a former postdoctoral researcher at MucEM-Labexmed, and a literature teacher. Her research interests lie on labor migrations in the Middle East and the Mediterranean. She is also a member of the interdisciplinary collective Dékadrage, bridging social sciences and visual arts. She currently lives and teaches in a remote French village.

Patrick Le Galès
Patrick Le Galès is a research director at the CNRS (National Centre for Scientific Research) at the Centre for European Studies and Comparative Politics at Sciences Po Paris. He is a professor of sociology and political science at Sciences Po and the founding dean of the Urban School of Sciences Po. He has published and co-edited numerous articles and several books on urban governance, local democracy and public policies in Europe such as *Gouverner par les instruments* (Presses de Sciences Po, 2005), *European Cities: Social Conflicts and Governance* (Oxford University Press, 2002), *Reconfiguring European States in Crisis* (Oxford University Press, 2017), *Gouverner la métropole Parisienne:* États*, conflits, réseaux, institutions* (Presses de Sciences Po, 2020), and *Routledge handbook of global comparative urban studies* (Routledge, 2023).

Miodrag Mitrašinović
Miodrag Mitrašinović is an architect, urbanist and author. He is a Professor of Urbanism and Architecture at Parsons School of Design, The New School University. His scholarly work focuses on the role design plays as an agent of social and political change, and as catalyst for critical urban transformations; his research argues for the centrality of designing in the conceptualisation, production, and representation of democratic and participatory urban space. His work also focuses on the generative capacity and infrastructural dimensions of public space, specifically at the intersections of public policy, urban and public design, and processes of privatisation of public resources. He is the editor of *Concurrent Urbanities: Designing Infrastructures of Inclusion* (Routledge 2016), and co-editor of *Travel, Space, Architecture* (Routledge 2009) and author of *Total Landscape, Theme Parks, Public Space* (Routledge 2006).

Harvey Molotch
Harvey Molotch is Emeritus Professor of Sociology and Metropolitan Studies at New York University. He conducts research on sociology of architecture and design, city growth, inequalities and urban security as well as on neighbourhood racial integration, community studies and environmental degradations. He published several book such as: *Against Security: How We Go Wrong at Airports, Subways and Other Sites of Ambiguous Danger* (Princeton University Press, 2012), *Where Stuff Comes From: How Toasters, Toilets, Cars, Computers and Many Other Things Come to Be as They Are* (Routledge, 2003), *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place* (University of California Press, 1987).

Luca Pattaroni
Since 2012, Luca Pattaroni is a Senior Scientist at the Laboratory of Urban Sociology (LaSUR) of the School of Architecture, Civil and Environmental Engineering (ENAC/EPFL). He co-leads the Habitat-Housing Orientation of the Master of Architecture and is the liaison officer for the joint doctoral program he initiated in 2016 between the Doctoral School of Architecture and Sciences of the City (EDAR) and the Geneva School of Art and Design (HEAD). He is also the Head of the research committee "Urban Sociology" of the Swiss Sociological Association. Contributing to the field of Urban Studies, his work addresses the expression of differences and the making of the common in contemporary cities, focusing on the concomitant transformation of lifestyles, institutional settings, and spatial forms.

Louise Prouteau
Louise Prouteau graduated in Political Sciences, with a major in European Policies, after studying in France and Germany. Before joining Metrolab, she gained experience collaborating with European cultural NGOs as well as European networks in France, the Netherlands, and Belgium. In addition to project management, she has worked on communication and on the strategic monitoring of European policies. She recently started to work as Project manager for international urban development events for Perspective.brussels.

Marco Ranzato
is associate professor in urbanism at the Department of Architecture, Roma Tre University and member of LATITUDE Platform for Urban Research and Design. Previously, he researched and taught at the Faculty of Architecture La Cambre-Horta of Universitè libre de Bruxelles. His work focuses on horizontal urbanisation processes and the design of inclusive configurations of resources and infrastructure in different urban conditions. He has published articles and books on socio-ecological issues, including *Îlot d'Eau* (LATITUDE Platform, 2024), *Veneto 2100: Living with Water* (Silvana Editoriale, 2021), and, respectively as co-editor and editor, *Coproducing Water, Energy, and Waste Services* (Routledge, 2018) and *Water vs. Urban Scape* (Jovis, 2017).

Sarah Van Hollebeke
Sarah Van Hollebeke is a postdoctoral researcher at Metrolab Brussels. She holds a Ph.D. in Political and Social Sciences from UCLouvain and in Urban Planning from the National School of Architecture of Grenoble, which she obtained in September 2021. Her doctoral thesis focuses on urban expertise' collaborations and the role of discursive and visual knowledge in urban design and urban planning. In 2021, she also co-edited the special issue 'Public Spaces and their undesirables' for the journal *Les Politiques Sociales*. From 2022, she has been done research and consulting in urban sociology and urban planning for different public and private institutes.

Marc Zune
Marc Zune is a professor of sociology at UCLouvain since 2007 and the President of the Institute for the Analysis of Change in Contemporary and Historical Societies (IACCHOS). His research at the GIRSEF Institute concerns 'the study of the construction of labor market problems'. He conducts several surveys on unemployment issues, professional training policies, and new forms of professional configurations. He is the author and co-author of many publications, including the most recent: *Embedding authenticity in production logics. The case of the microbrewery resurgence in Belgium* (Routledge, 2024, with Delperdange, Pauline).

Colophon

Editors
Mathieu Berger
Sarah Van Hollebeke

Coordination
Sarah Van Hollebeke

Illustrations
Sébastien Gairaud
Lucas Gicquel

Graphic design
Els Vande Kerckhove
Something Els

Translation & English revision
Sarah Van Hollebeke
Mathieu Berger
Gail Ann Fagen
Dustin Langan

The ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) is a European regional policy tool that aims to create new opportunities for European citizens and to reduce the living standards gap between regions. Between 2007 and 2013, the ERDF programme, through the intervention of the Region and Europe, thus invested 108 million euros in 32 projects in the Brussels-Capital Region. These projects concern child care, re-employment measures, training programmes, but also sustainable development, support for economic activities, and reinforcing the infrastructure and the social cohesion in the canal area. The current programme (2014-2020) contains 58 projects pertaining to access to employment, research, circular economy, innovation and improving the living environment. Europe and the Region are investing € 200 million in this new programme. This publication and the related research activities have been made possible through the financial support of the Brussels European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) programme (2014-2020).

Bibliographic information published by the Royal Library of Belgium.
Editor ID: D/2024/14.488/01
ISBN: 978-2-931189-03-0
Printed in 2024 by Graphius

metro lab. brussels
UCL Université catholique de Louvain
ULB Université Libre de Bruxelles
La Région et l'Europe investissent dans votre avenir !
Het Gewest en Europa investeren in uw toekomst!
Région de Bruxelles-Capitale
Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest
Union Européenne
Fonds Européen de Développement Régional
Europese Unie
Europees Fonds voor Regionale Ontwikkeling