

Fostering Brussels democracy: an exploration

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Addendum

Graduation Project

FOSTERING BRUSSELS DEMOCRACY:
AN EXPLORATION

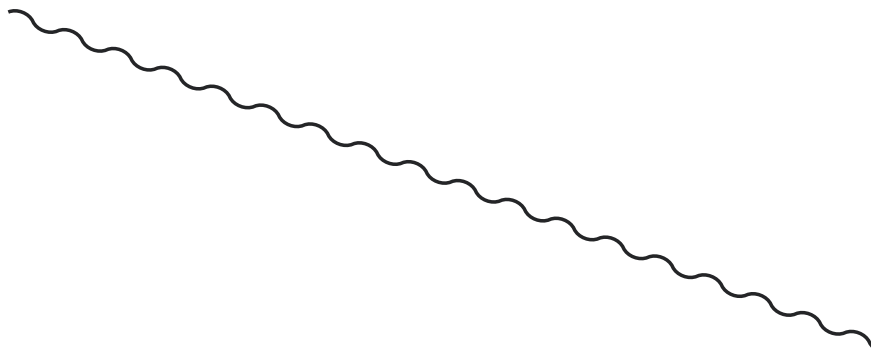
Addendum

Introduction.

This graduation project: “Fostering Brussels Democracy: *through interaction, self-organization and expression in public space*”, results in a design that integrates politicians, enables participation opportunities and facilitates expression. It has been written to fulfill the graduation requirements for the Msc in Architecture, Urbanism and the Built Environment at the TU Delft. I was engaged in this project from September 2016 till June 2017. The research-objectives were grant, but through extensive work and investigation together with both my tutors, I’m happy to say it’s completed successfully. My gratitude goes out to my tutors for the last year of support and guidance, my close friends who always kept me on track and a particular note goes out to my family: your never-ending critical but loving notes, as always, served me well. Enjoy,

VERA KUIPERS
Graduate student

introduction
|
how to read



the background

|
social
scientific
ethical

reflection

HOW TO READ

Preface: how to read and interpreted this project

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The importance of this project is not to tackle a question, do research and put something aesthetic together for a portfolio. The importance of this project is to **explore** what urbanists and the urban realm can mean for politics.

Read the following books in such a way, as a discovery of the relation between urbanity and politics, to find the secret in urbanism where the improvement for political life is possible.

As I've always been fascinated by diverging people in society, people who are different, who stand out, who clearly don't belong, I noticed a couple of years ago that nowadays, and in a growing matter, no one truly belongs. Reading poems about your body as a house, seeing images of mass-migration on television and having friends who come from all over the world and all give very different meanings to 'belonging', I started wondering.

But before I could finish wondering, this 'belonging' turned into a troublesome notion. Terrorist-claims from far-away countries who were committed not by far-away people but by the very neighbors of the victims.

Apparently, there are more people that feel like they don't belong, and more so, that feel like they have no chance in belonging if they don't attack the alien envi-

ronment.

This research is ultimately aiming at this type of process, and the current society that theoretically should have the answer. As, in a democracy, no individual should feel as powerless that the only solution is a harmful attack.

This continues into less troublesome stories of neglect in society, of people that are not taken seriously by democracy because they vote for a certain party. People that refrain 100% from society as they've lost all hope. I believe that western democracy is worth it to try one last time to breath new life into citizen authority and diminish the hopelessness so many of us feel.

I like to look at the city and it's public space and imagine what we can do to give people back their power, to give reason back to democracy and to discover the secret ingredient to combine them.

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The background of the graduation project in a larger social, scientific and ethical framework.

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RELEVANCE

SOCIAL

How does this research add value to society?

The issues Brussels is facing are on socio-spatial and socio-economic segregation, as well as discussions about religion, investment, equality and power relations. It is therefore important to explore strategies that consider the whole democratic system and the way this influences any social, economic or political opportunities. As this research is focussing on fostering democracy to decrease inequality, it's exactly this focus point that might add something to process. Especially the combination of fostering democracy, together with the whole spectrum of social, economic and political opportunities, is a valuable perspective in a more or less singular debate.

Although this research is specifically focused on Brussels, similar problems occur in various developed cities. Therefore, the conclusions, strategies and designs of this thesis can function as a reference and inspiration for other cities with similar issues.

SCIENTIFIC

How does this research add value to the existing scientific knowledge?

The subject of Brussels democracy, or more specifically, Brussels democratic institutes, is a theme that's been discussed by many (Rifkin, 2004; Group of Policy Advisers & European Commission, 2001; Laconte & Hein, 2007; Hein, 1999; De Groof, 2006; and more). Scholars are issuing the redevelopment of Brussels democratic institutes through the role of the European Union

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in this process: this re-development was not focused on the current citizen using the area, but on future high-end users (De Groof, 2006; Hein, 1999).

While the influence of democratic institutes, and specifically those of the European Union is undoubtedly interesting, the rest of the democratic system in Brussels shouldn't be forgotten. Moreover, the influence of the European Union is only partly the reason for the increasing socio-economic segregating in the city. Thus, the focus of this paper on the whole system Brussels democracy is a valuable addition to this debate. Most of this research is from the viewpoint of sociologists, anthropologists, public theorist, architects or some other one-sided scientific viewpoint. In urbanism, there is attention for the combination between social, economic, political and development in cities. Especially in relation with contemporary situations as populism, terrorism and 'the fall of democracy' some say, exactly the integrative view of an urbanistic can shed a light on these developments that the separate scientific specialties won't be able to offer.

ETHICAL

How does this research question current values and ethics in Urbanism?

This graduation project is questioning the status quo of democracy and contemporary urban research: is democracy still valuable, and why? What effect can democracy have on equal participation opportunities in a city? What does it mean to foster democracy to equalise opportunities, instead of solely focusing on these opportunities?

A just democracy should be able to form equity in participation,

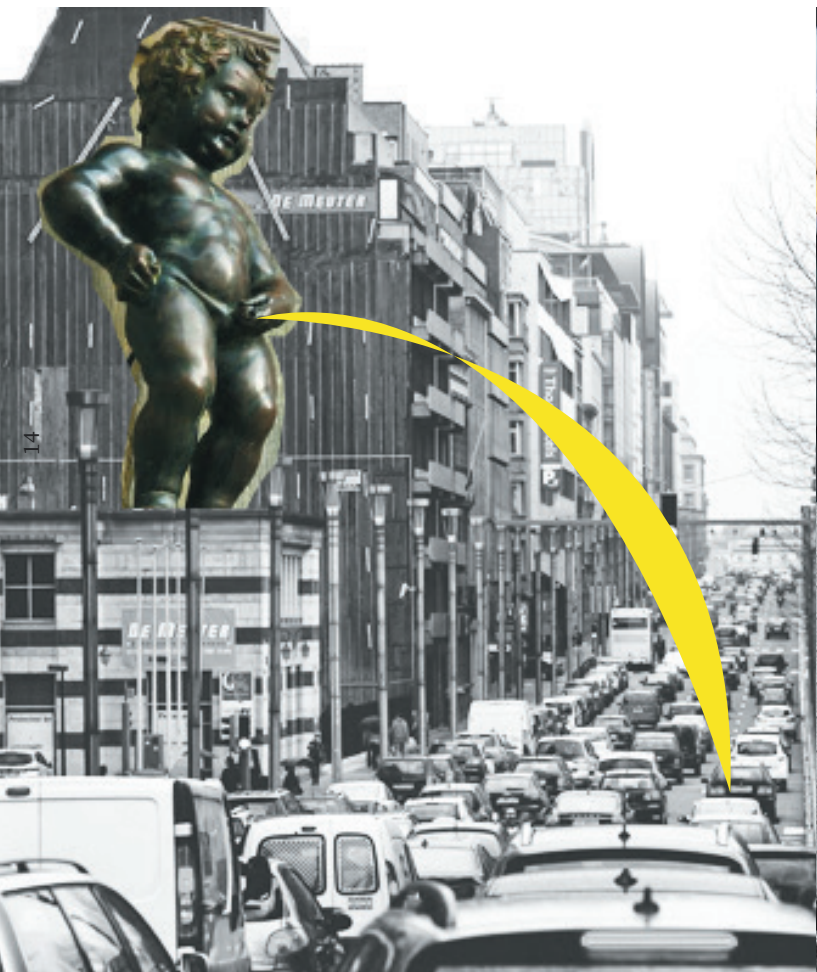
independent of any status order. In Brussels, the status order is forming an polarization between citizens. The practices of democracy contains several unethical aspects, that are to be covered by this research:

- The democratic institutes are being used as a power tool, attracting powerful people who pull money out of the city despite local disparity;

- The democratic institutes disregard any political opportunities for local citizens as they value safety and security;

- This institute is simultaneously eating away of the environment of the deprived, sending them away to the periphery with even less opportunities;

- It is the role of the urban planner/designer to influence these issues. This project aims at offering an alternative for the people that are now being pushed to the side, and looking at ways to provide a more socially, economically and politically just society. ♦



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Explanation accounting for results: The planning, the product, and the process; did the approach work? How did it work and why?

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REFLECTION

The planning is focused on a continues judgment of the Graduation Plan and time-planning in the P2 report. In late March, a change was made in this planning as it was first envisioned to start designing two weeks before the P4 presentation, which was too late. This time-planning together with the revised time-planning can be reviewed on the next page.

Because of this, the final product is of less developed quality. As the actual design was drawn for the first time only 2 weeks before the P4 presentation, the product could use more time for critical analysis and development. For example, the final product claims to answer to the recommendations from the research, but the relation between the bottom-up participation and actual needed improvements in participation opportunities found in the research, is too scarce. The part of the structure that aims to improve all these different levels of participation is an implementation that leaves too much uncertain. Only in a truly Utopian society where citizens are extremely pro-active, this would create improvements on the participation opportunities. Of course, the question of these different participation opportunities remains, and it's very difficult to find a solution that tackles all.

But the final product would have been more rational if it leaned more towards policy changes or changes within the governmental systems in order to improve on these notions of bad participation, isolation of governance, accountability of politicians and levels of authority for citizens. Now, an empty structure providing the minimal needs for participation is a improvement that leaves too much to uncertainty, especially with these levels of segregation, as found in the research.

This would've been improved when the design process would have started earlier, so there would have been time to over-think and

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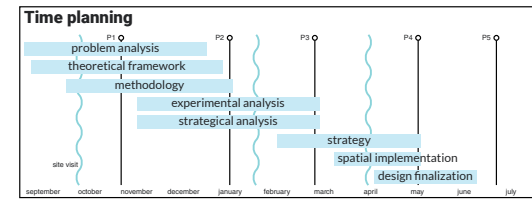
further develop the current design into a more realistic proposal.

This flaw has been caused by the way the process was set up. Although the overall process was very valuable, as drawn in the original methodology scheme for the P2 report. This scheme can be reviewed on the next page. The constant feedback loop between theory, static analysis in the form of data and the spatial experiments was very interesting. In the end, precisely the debate between these 2 boxes caused for the results that determined the recommendations in the current research: the connection between spatial collegiality and the collegiality of use, has become the focal point of the design.

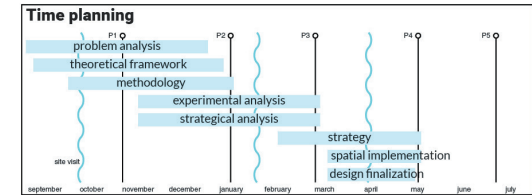
So, looking back, the methodology worked, the ratio between the different parts of the process were just out of balance. As already visible in the methodology scheme, that the 'reflection-process' is the main element of the project, and it doesn't necessarily lead to the products described at the end of this process.

Although the design experiments did result in a kind of synthesis of experiments, as it was possible to get an overview and draw conclusions, this was less easy with the strategic summary. As expected and designed, the experimental analysis is a path that leads to an ending, which makes it possible to sum up all previous steps and see what was done. This is harder with the strategic analysis, where there are loose blocks to be filled with information that is rarely connecting, or at least not in the way the method of the research is set up. Furthermore, the questions that were answered inside the boxes and the relation between people, place and function with elite, deprived and average was very difficult to make and didn't make sense a lot of the time. Because of this, the results from the strategic analysis were very different than imagined at the beginning.

The methodology would have been more accurate when the communication between the two different analyses lead to an evaluation, instead of two separate conclusions, where the strategic conclusion would be more like a summary, and then an evaluation of how to combine these conclusions/summaries.



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fascination > orientation > project definition

Problem statement

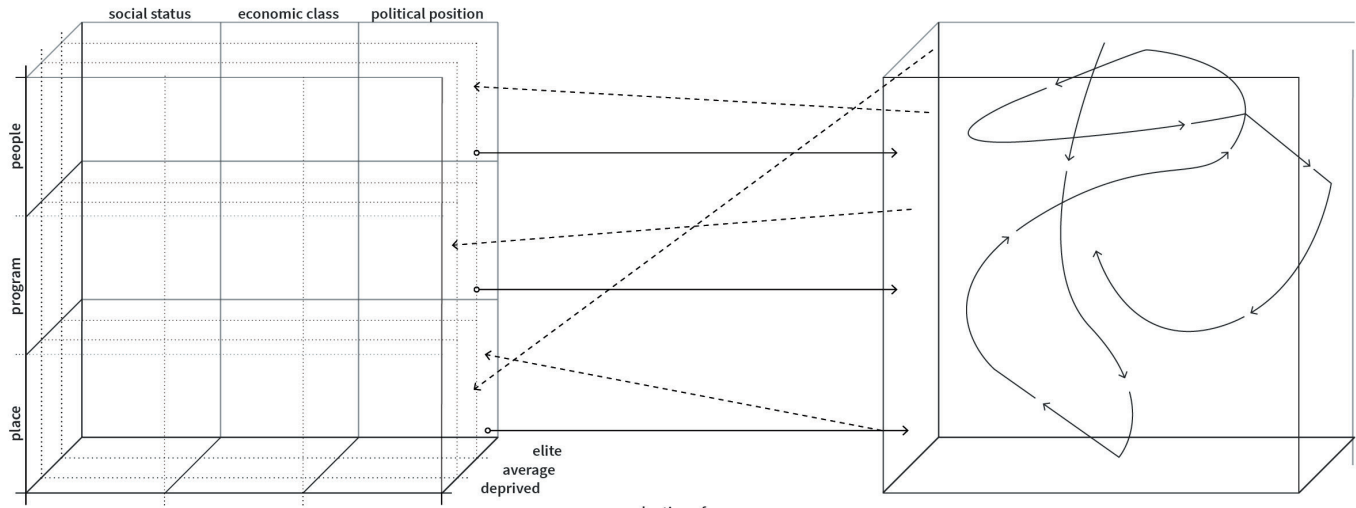
Research Question

Aim of the project:

create a spatial strategy for Brussels that creates a more equal way of living, despite differences in social status, economic class or political position

strategic analysis:
comparing the relations between status, class, position & people, program and place

experimental analysis:
creating spatial solutions without rules



strategic synthesis:
a set of challenges going through all layers of society, about social, economic and political inequality related with people, program and place.

evaluation of people, program and place guidelines

spatial proposals for implementation

detailed spatial consequences in case-study site in Brussels

experimental summary:
a synthesis of all spatial experiments conducted during the research in order to get an overview of drawn conclusions and implicit consequences or prejudices.

All images used in this booklet were
made by the author herself.

SUMMER 2017

GRADUATED