An inaugural lecture about

LINKS, STRATAGEMS AND THE TERRITORY

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“Connaître, c’est être capable de distinguer, puis de relier ce qui a été distingué.”

Edgard Morin

The art of linking, bringing together spaces, people and environments, is the cornerstone of my approach to urbanism.

It is therefore necessary to think of urbanism much less as a question of territorial figure or urban form, but rather as a search for balance between collaborations and their spatial and temporal concretization, articulated within the surrounding environment. Whereas previously the boundary, the surface and the border were the main components of urban planning, we are now entering an era where the potential of the link is being realised.
Archibelge, documentary film, screenshot (S. Benoot, O. Magis and G. Coton, Brussels, 2015)
Links

Roads, as well as boulevards or motorways, are spatial links around which activities have developed, along with the sociology of the place. They illustrate the potential of infrastructures for territories. These infrastructures take various forms and evolve with the modes of transport that condition them. Currently, in times sensitive to a more sparing use of economic and ecological resources, so-called ‘soft’ or ‘active’ modes of transport provide an enormous opportunity to generate new forms of link.
The regeneration of the station area of Leuven. (Masterplan: KULeuven & Buur, Design Belle-Vue Park: Artgineering & H+N+S)
BELLE-VUE PARK

The station area in Leuven is a connection of railway and brown fields that have been transformed through carefully designed spatial links. The railway system structures the urban project, with the train station considered as the articulation of several links rather than a clearly delimited area. In this figure, the Belle-Vue Park, which runs along the rail tracks for about 1km, rather than a conventional, contained park, becomes an ecological and cycling link between train station and recreational area. Furthermore, this link has been developed in collaboration with the inhabitants and users.
The regeneration of the station area of Leuven. (Masterplan: KULeuven & Buur, Design Belle-Vue Park: Artengineering & H+N+S)
The refurbishment of the interior of the ‘Reine Verte’ block in Brussels
(Neighbourhood Contract: Cooparch, Design Reine Verte Park: Erik Dhont)

**REINE VERTE PARK**

The transformation of the interior of the ‘Reine Verte’ block is based on activating the heart of an urban islet. The ambition was to create not only a park for the district, but also a link between the upper districts of the city of Brussels and the North train station beneath. ‘Reine Verte’ proved to be a collaborative project that brought together the inhabitants of the block, as well as the children and teenagers of the neighbourhood. The project has a strong socio-economic aspect, as it is actively working on social reintegration via a training facility for gardeners and a ‘social restaurant’, where young people can learn about hospitality.
The renewal of the Belle-Vue Brewery, Brussels. (Neighbourhood Contract: Artgineering, Design Brewery: Lescaut)
The regeneration of the canal area in Brussels presented an opportunity to create a cycling link that connects different building complexes and public spaces along the canal. The Belle-Vue Brewery is part of this. This former brewery is connected through a ‘terrace’ to the public space of the canal. The brewery was transformed into a large hotel and housing development with passive dwellings, a teaching centre for the hospitality industry and a social restaurant. The transformation of the complex took place gradually and included temporary occupations of the premises. The rehabilitation of the brewery allowed for the creation of a green link between the repurposed brewery building and the River Senne, at the rear of the plot, through a garden.
Cycling Activism (a group of Belgium cycle activists from Cureghem)
To establish an urbanism of the link, in a system largely inherited from modernity, based on zoning, separation of functions and a certain fragmentation of our discipline, we require a reconsideration of the usable modes of action.

To act in a well-established and widespread system both Clauswitz and Certeau invite us to use “ruse” as a mode of action. While Clauswitz describes the “list” as “the art of making a move in the other’s fields,” Certeau invites us to associate “ruse” with the practice of twisting the rules. However, it is probably the “Fosbury-Flop revolution”, described by S. Hock Koon, which is the most interesting stratagem to be put in place. It’s about revolutionizing space by carrying out actions that interpret the rules differently. The Fosbury-Flop is an optimistic analogy showing that actions of frugally twisting the rules, may lead to profound transformations, and in some cases may even become the dominant practice.

A good example of how to work with the Fosbury-Flop approach is given by the very active cycling groups in many European and North American cities. They know the rules extremely well and therefore are able to transgress them. A collective of cyclist activists applies road paint and large stencils of fictional signs on cycle tracks in Brussels. By reproducing a standard method of marking traffic space, the activists judiciously realise missing links in the network of cycling paths by manipulating and twisting the existing system.
The transformation of the Saint-Antoine square and the Orban intersection in Brussels is a pilot project aimed at expanding the scope of the design intervention. The refurbishment of this area is frugal - its ambition is to connect the centre of the district with nearby schools via walkways – however there was still resistance caused by the suppression of transit traffic and parking spots and the general transformation of the road network. Therefore an in-situ test was carried out with schools and neighbourhood associations to convince people that the current system dominated by the car can evolve to a more pedestrian and bike friendly environment, which in turn benefits the neighbourhood.
**Rue de la Braie**

- Réduire la présence du trafic motorisé en milieu scolaire par la fermeture temporaire de la rue (4.1)
- Inviter les institutions et les écoliers dans l'espace public adjacent par la piétonisation en horaire scolaire (4.4)
- Permettre des activités variées et spontanées (4.6)
- Adapter les usages dans le temps (horaire scolaire) (4.7)
- Modifier le statut de la rue selon les besoins (4.1), (4.7)

**Points d'amélioration**

- Mieux organiser et désencombrer l'espace en limitant le nombre d'éléments séparés (4.5)
- Déplacer le parking des vélos ailleurs afin de libérer plus l'espace (4.1) (4.5)

**Croisement Orban**

- Redistribuer l'espace en réduisant l'espace dédié au trafic motorisé et en l'élargissant pour les piétons (4.1), (4.2)
- Offrir la possibilité d'une appropriation variée pour l'espace de détente (4.6)
- Faire une étude sur les besoins en stationnement afin de les déplacer ailleurs (4.1)
- Prendre en compte l'enseignement pour la localisation des terrasses (4.9)
- Libérer des zones de passage, regrouper le mobilier dans des zones de détente (4.5)
- Laisser la place aux appropriations spontanées (4.8)

**Place Communale de Molenbeek**

- Partager l'espace entre mobilité active et motorisée (4.1)
- Réduire la vitesse et l'impact du trafic motorisé en aménageant la place d'une manière uniforme pour tous les usagers (4.2)
- Créer des zones de rencontre sur la place (4.1)
- Permettre différentes activités et appropriations (4.6)
- Mener une étude de faisabilité proposant des alternatives au parking sur la place (4.1)
- Déplacer les stationnements supprimés dans le garage Brunfaut sous-exploité (4.1)
- Désencombrer l'espace en regroupant le mobilier (4.5)

**Place Cardinal Mercier**

- Relier le transport en commun et individuel par des passages souterrains (4.3)
- Souligner l'entrée de la gare par un cheminement spécifique dans un matériau différent (4.3)
- Diminuer l'impact de la voiture en supprimant les stationnements et en installant une zone 30 (4.1), (4.2)
- Regrouper et déplacer les stationnements afin de libérer l'espace pour les autres usagers (4.1)
- Créer un espace ouvert pour accueillir des grands événements et des petits abris pour les petits événements (4.6)
- Installer des ascenseurs afin de garantir l'accessibilité aux PMR (4.2)

**Place Rogier**

- Supprimer des stationnements en surface au profit de l'élargissement du trottoir (4.1), (4.2)
- Enlever les voitures de la place et privilégier la circulation des piétons, des transports en commun et des taxis (4.1), (4.2)
- Sécuriser et séparer les pistes cyclables (4.2)
- Créer un espace de rencontre et de repos dans la zone la plus exposée au soleil et le moins au vent (4.8)
- Reconnecter les bâtiments donnant sur la place en éliminant les différences de niveaux (4.4)
- Faciliter l'échange modal en garantissant une transition aisé entre la surface et le sous-sol (4.3)
- Désencombrer une partie de l'espace pour assurer un usage flexible (4.5), (4.6)
- Réactiver les espaces aux rez-de-chaussée (4.4)

Vademecum of public spaces in Brussels. (Pyblik & Artgineering)
The vademecum is based on the analysis of ten exemplary projects, including the refurbishment of the Saint Antoine Square and Orban intersection. It formulates recommendations for the region of Brussels on the basis of projects realized by local entities. These recommendations concern economy, aesthetics and the sharing of public space, and are intended to become guidelines for the future refurbishment of public space in Brussels.
THE TERRITORY

If urbanism redefines itself as a discipline of establishing links using the stratagem, it must not be forgotten that urbanism is, above all, a spatial discipline. There is a risk of losing oneself in infinite processes with no concretization, or marginalising anecdotal interventions without making an impact on a wider territory; yet there are many territories in search of genuine spatial responses. These responses are necessary to help solve the challenges we all face today: climate change, social inequalities, demographic upheavals, etc. Urban planning must not be conceived as a servant to specific demands related to social or economic interests and niches, but rather as a contributor to the well-being of society as a whole. There are spatial injustices that we cannot ignore and to see them we do not have to travel overseas to far away shanty towns or slums - spatial injustices are also just around the corner.

Personally, “Le droit à l’accessibilité” interests me in particular. The recent study “Österreich unterwegs 2013/2014” highlights the growing disparity between urban and rural mobility. Despite the use of public transport in urban areas increasing, individual (auto) transport in rural areas has exploded with 56% of all journeys made via individual motorized transport, 25% more than 20 years ago. In a society anxious to use its resources sparingly this leaves us with a challenging phenomenon? The key to solving the problem of transport choices is not limited to rethinking mobility infrastructures, as many believe. We must also consider access to medical infrastructures, in times of disappearing local health care facilities in rural areas; access to work, given the growing dissociation of places of production and places for housing; and the access to (sustainable) energy and education and training.

By repeating the credo that 50% of the world’s population now live in urban areas, we tend to forget the remaining 50%. Shouldn’t we address the spatial injustices that we allowed to develop, or participated in the creation of, regardless of whether they are urban or rural? Without a proposal for a large-scale strategy, it is easy for leaner budgets to be used in maintaining a façade rather than tackling issues. Should we not begin to rethink the city in its territorial context? Should we not consider the inhabitants, the modes of transport, the availability of health care and the places of production in an integral way? Should we not practice an urbanism of links on a territorial scale?

The implementation of such a vision is very complicated because the territory is fragmented into local entities, each often with their own agendas. This is when it becomes necessary to develop stratagems in order to build up alliances and collaborations. Sharing of equipment and know-how, and sparing use of resources must be integrated into this vision.

I believe the region surrounding Graz is the perfect laboratory for testing these ideas.
Average annual population development in European Local Administrative Units

- Huler 49.7%
- Van der Bellen 50.3%

Election results 2016 (http://derstandard.at)

Average annual income in 2012 (Newsroom.sparkasse.at/bruttogehaelter-in-oesterreich/)
Many indicators - including the cleavage represented by the last presidential elections - invite us to explore this proposal! These are the issues that the research group of the institute of urbanism, URBA Graz, will tackle in the coming years, alongside creating a think tank for territorial development that addresses spatial equity using the link and the stratagem as instruments of design.
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