

Urban vacancy, in/visibility and politics at the margins of the city

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1. some theoretical elements about urban margins and their heuristic potential
2. Brussels and homelessness contextualisation and data from the fieldwork
3. how can this analysis help to rethink urban vacancies within public space and what questions this brings about



what is the place and the role of the margins within the design of public space?

- the margin – a ‘potential’ space, a resource, a possibility of existence, a relational space, open to emancipatory trajectories (Deleuze)
- public space – the privileged space for the encounter with l’Autre ; the synecdoque of the city
- *the design of public space* - the synthesis and the representation of the multiple becoming of the city, concretisation of the desire for coexistence (Remy 1992)



the homeless and the margins

homeless (ETHOS 2007) : people living rough or in emergency shelters

- an “extreme” case of socio-spatial marginalization (according to dominant representations): through their bodies (their only remaining private space) they territorialise the margin
- at the same time: the way they practice urban space reveals the interstices of the systems of power, including those conveyed by the urban project -> possibilities of deterritorialisation



public space and the margins

- when the urban project takes into account margins it is either to erase, exploit or transform them by regulation, securing, normalization or (at best) recovery
- a model of a clean, safe and secure public space is asserted by neoliberal logics and as an extent of the private sphere
- the design and transformation of public space, while aiming at eliminating the margins, multiply them - and make them all more visible



Brussels – context and contemporary issues

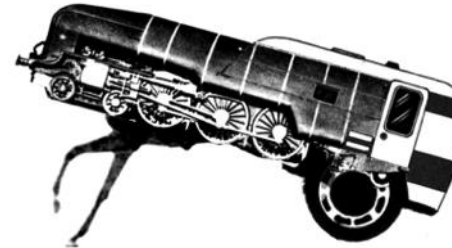
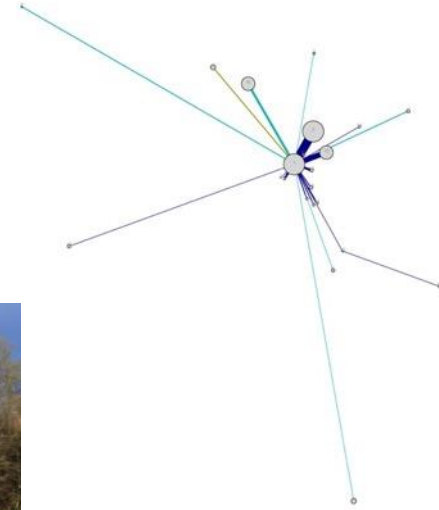
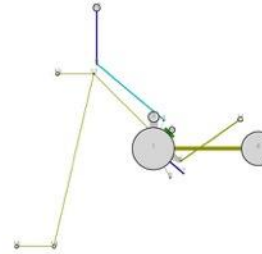
from the welfare state to individual's empowerment

refugees and citizens solidarity

from the industrial city to the neo-liberal city

how is public space inhabited?

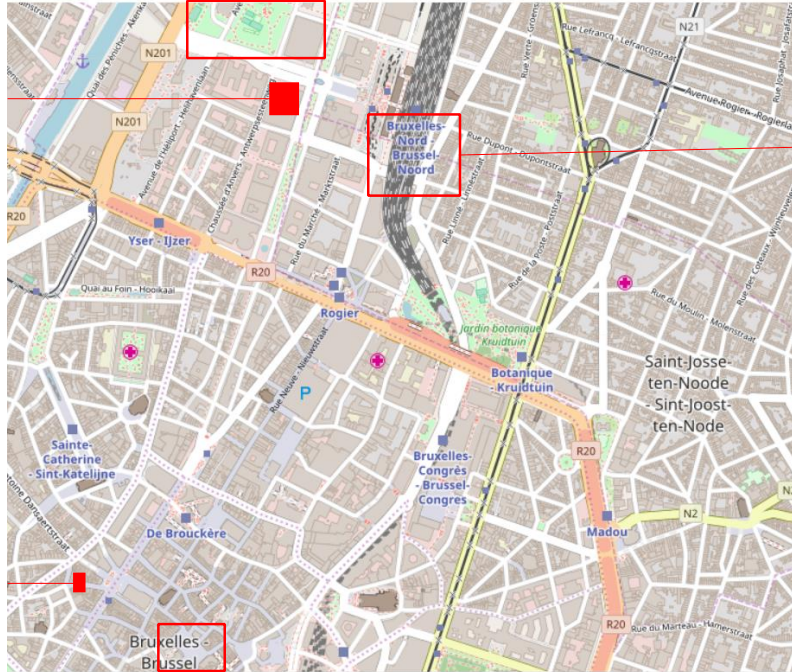
how is it a resource for vulnerable people?



refugees and citizens solidarity

Office
des
étrangers

Maximilien's Park



North Railway
Station

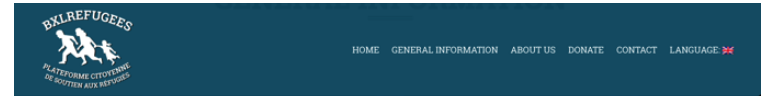
Grand-Place

Source : openstreetmap

FEDASIL



dh.be



TESTIMONIALS



MAXIMILIAN HALL



HOST A REFUGEE



VOLUNTEERING



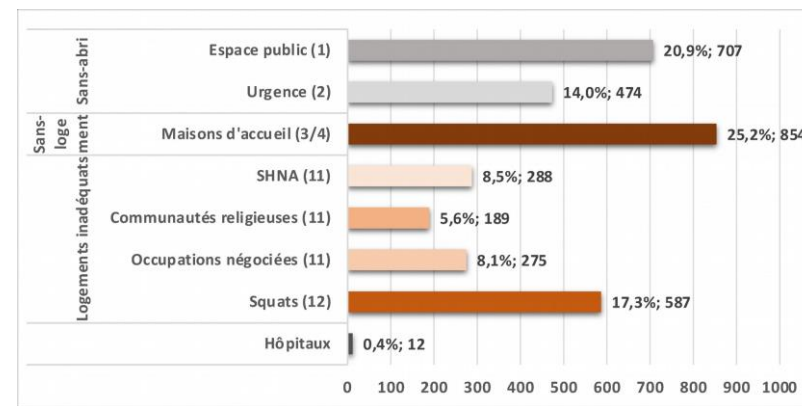
DONATE

bxlrefugees.be

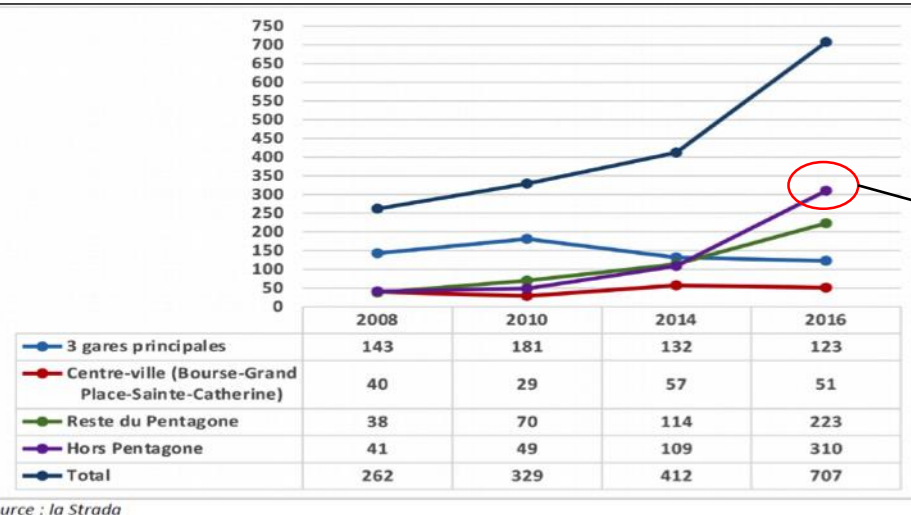
homelessness in Brussels

Catégorie	ETHOS	2008		2010		Évolution 2008 - 2010	2014		Évolution 2010 - 2014	2016		Évolution 2014 - 2016	Évolution 2008 - 2016
		Effectifs	%	Effectifs	%		Effectifs	%		Effectifs	%		
Espace public	1	269	15,6%	329	16,9%	22,3%	412	15,8%	25,2%	707	20,9%	71,6%	162,8%
Urgence	2	234	13,5%	282	14,5%	20,5%	367	14,1%	30,1%	474	14,0%	29,2%	102,6%
Maisons d'accueil	3 & 4	785	45,4%	772	39,7%	-1,7%	813	31,2%	5,3%	854	25,2%	5,0%	8,8%
SHNA	11	165	9,5%	189	9,7%	14,5%	316	12,1%	67,2%	288	8,5%	-8,9%	74,5%
Communautés religieuses	11	/		/			44	1,7%		189	5,6%	329,5%	
Occupations négociées	11	216	12,5%	275	14,1%	27,3%	193	7,4%	-29,8%	275	8,1%	42,5%	27,3%
Squats	12	60	3,5%	100	5,1%	66,7%	422	16,2%	322,0%	587	17,3%	39,1%	878,3%
Hôpitaux	6	/		/			36	1,4%		12	0,4%	-66,7%	
TOTAL		1729	100,0%	1947	100,0%	12,6%	2603	100,0%	33,7%	3386	100,0%	30,1%	95,8%

Source : La Strada (Centre d'appui au secteur bruxellois d'aide aux sans-abris)



homelessness in Brussels



a significant dispersion within the city and beyond the city centre

reinforcement of security measures after 2016 attacks



How do these geographies relate to urban transformations and how do they questions the design of public space?

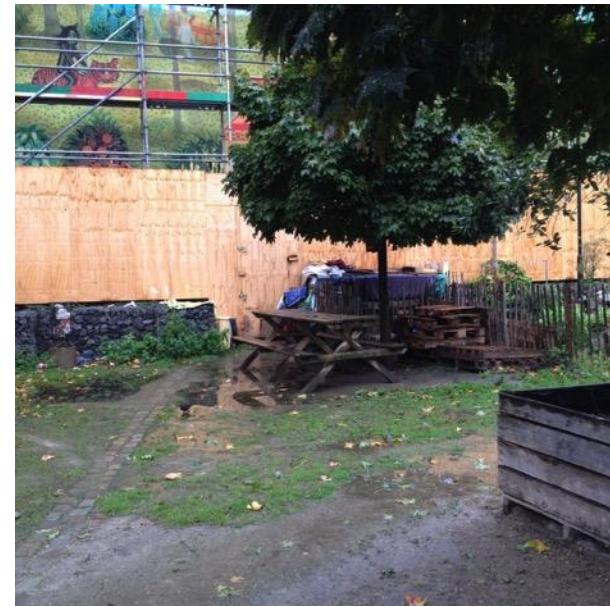
sleeping and the public space

Preliminary (non participant) observations (May 2017 - March 2018)

ethnographic fieldwork - analyse spatial practices “from below”, from the constant becoming of the daily life of homeless people

the assemblage of sleeping in public space and the resources that make it possible, first and foremost the availability of vacant spaces

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openings

Can we argue in favour of a need of margins beyond any development project or public space design? – being it temporary or permanent, led by creative class or planners?

- how does the design of public space affect the in/visibility and the recognition of the margins (social and spatial) ?
- Public space • how can public space become (or remain) inhabitable for vulnerable people / in spite of or thanks to design and transformations?
- and before: accepting homelessness within public space, does it entail the defeat of public action?
- Vacant does not mean void nor absence: the city as an assemblage – everything is a constant becoming. Where, when and how is vacant space: in the spatial, temporal and social dimension of the in-between
- Invisibility • Following homeless people practices: reveal alternative geographies of urban vacancy – that claim to remain in-visible – what does it happens when they become visible and gain attention?
- At the same time, invisibility goes with non-recognition and displacement. This applies to both people and space.

Thanks 😊

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