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## The Master Class: A New Perspective on ]bridges[

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The Interdisciplinary Centre for Urban Culture and Public space at TU Wien, together with five students from the Faculty of Architecture and Planning, was invited to take part in an international master class organized by guest professor Aglaée Degros and Stefan Bendiks, founders of the office Artgineering and jointly organized by ULB, Faculté d'Architecture, Laboratory on Urbanism, Infrastructure and Ecologies (Louise) and VUB, Cosmopolis research centre, Master of Urban and Regional Planning (STeR). Bringing together students and researchers from Berlin, Brussels, Oslo, Tokyo, Venice and Vienna, the master class dealt with the topic of Bridges in a city that is characterized by its various fractures, Belgium’s capital city Brussels. The fractures this two-week workshop addressed are firstly those caused by infrastructures, enhancing mobility and speed for some, but at the same time inhibiting other uses or users from accessing these spaces which often go unnoticed as public: Rail-, road-, and water-ways.

The acclaimed capital of Europe’s fractures though do not only concern spaces of the city’s complex infrastructures, but also the socio-economic character of Brussels and its population, suggesting a second interpretation of fractures as urban inequalities. Three of the places of intervention featured in the Brussels master class were located in the Canal Zone and in Molenbeek. These neighbourhoods have been socially fractured from the rest of Brussels for a long time but the recent investments in public space in those areas, funded by the Brussels Capital Region (BCR), have neither lead to an improvement of living conditions of the local population, although those investments are legitimized with the political goal of enhancing social cohesion and urban peace. Instead, the beautification of public squares pushes a process of gentrification while issues such as access to the labour or housing markets are neglected by the state, the region and the commune likewise.

While the area still – if deficiently – fulfils a residential role for a marginalized and deprived population, many of them Non-EU citizens living below the poverty line and in precarious housing conditions, the Molenbeek commune thinks of it as an area of opportunity to attract wealthier inhabitants, and the city authorities see it as a place to continue developing Brussels’ role as a global city. The process of revalorization of the central areas of cities is clashing with other previous effects of neoliberal globalization, namely the function of certain urban areas as arrival city for newcomers from the Global South. Thus it is crucial to also reflect about the socio-economic state of a neighbourhood as the context of its public spaces, and to go beyond an analysis of just the physical aspects of public spaces but to also involve the population (not yet) using these public spaces.
The approach practiced in the Bridges master class employed the idea of Research by Design to explore and analyse the city beyond the built environment. In site visits and urban interventions, from connecting two sides of the Canal with a simple phone, to improvised Zebra crossings and light installations, the students re-invented neglected spaces and engaged actively with its users to learn about the hidden potentials of previously fractured public space. Through these punctuated interventions the international student groups achieved to develop project designs marked by interaction in two intensive workshop weeks.

The outcome of the students' work was not a grand masterplan, but a transition plan delineating the gradual implementation of a project in a longer period of time:

**in crossing rails (group a)** the no-man's land surrounding the West Station which segregates two quarters, is turned into a new centrality with visual relations and an improved pedestrian and cycling bridge connecting the neighbourhoods and the traffic node.

**crossing water (group b)** introduces a modular bridging structure to the functionally fractured area around Quai de Demet and the Abattoir weekend market. With this adaptive bridge made of movable cranes and platforms new public space is created connecting and extending different functions across the canal, according to the temporality of its various uses. One of the city's most frequented urban highway, Reyers Boulevard has recently been subject to major reconstruction.

**crossing roads (group c)** transforms a remnant of the car-centred city, the Reyers viaduct, into a car-free public space. *this stairway to heaven* exploits the space in the middle of the Boulevard as well as the vertical potential of the ramp.

**multiple crossings (group d)** criticizes the unequal share of space for the different modes and users of Saintelette square. In their plan pedestrians and cyclists are entitled to half of the traffic space instead of being aliens on car-centred roads. The space under the bridge is explored for new accesses to public transport as well as for recreational space close to the water of the canal.

The students explored four public spaces shaped by mobility infrastructures and inventively re-imagined those spaces as public, as spaces of social interaction. Introducing Research by Design as a methodology for architects and planners opens up a new way to study the city and its public spaces as relational spaces. Coming back to the title of the master class, Bridges not only serves as a physical connection from A to B, but can also be interpreted as a bridge in time, a catalyst for urban change.
Just one day after the master class had finished, Molenbeek became sadly known for its connection to the 2015 Paris Attacks. With the Brussels lockdown, and military tanks entering the streets of Molenbeek in particular and Brussels in general, the historic process of stigmatization was once again echoed on another level. While the news detected Molenbeek as the urban cradle of all evil, with banners reading *je suis 1080* (Molenbeek’s postal code) citizens of Molenbeek went on the street to protest against this media and military capturing of their places of everyday life. The military interventions realized in the name of *the war against terrorism* radically suspended public life, bringing all societal exchange in the streets to a hold.

In contrast to this new urban reality in Molenbeek, the master class highlighted the possibilities of inclusive public spaces marked by public life and social exchange, when the diverse local population becomes part of its imagination and implementation. It also revealed the long-lasting lines of discrimination and social exclusion and the high pressure of gentrification that lead to an increasing urban inequality in Molenbeek. In that sense, Molenbeek is not the cause for the evil, but the symptom of failed state, regional and urban policies.

In our view, the published projects contribute to integrating inventive methodology in planning and architecture and help to nurture an understanding of public space as relational space where collectives strive for a decrease in the (infrastructural and social) conditions that frame urban inequality. For Molenbeek, for its everyday life and its dwellers, we hope that their claim for a right to the city and to everyday life will make a difference in the future conception of the district, where public space will not just be improved, but public life, exchange, and interaction will be stimulated.
Not unlike many European and global metropolises, Brussels is heavily affected with a number of fractures. From heavy infrastructure to large built complexes, there are many entities that tend to divide the territory and generate stark socio-economic inequalities. The approach of the master class addressed these fractures by designing bridges, thereby focusing less on the technical aspect of the connection, but rather on unveiling the potentials of the compounds, and reimagining new active urban places and public spaces intervening in key socio-economic nodes of Brussels. During two weeks, the students from the universities of Barcelona, Wien, Tokyo, Berlin, Venice and Brussels were invited to explore two ways of understanding the notion of bridges: on the one hand in a spatial way - by simply bridging the fracture; and on the other hand in relation to time - by bridging a place through a project towards an envisioned future vision of the city.

The past, that is the divided city inherited from the industrial age: massive infrastructures, zoning urbanism and social segregation. The future is a city that mixes infrastructure and building fabric, living, working (producing) and recreating and that gives space to social inclusion. To reach this future, we have to re-connect. But to do so, we do not have to reproduce the methods of the past, using huge infrastructures. We rather have to recycle, using the potentials that are already there, for the transformation of the city. What we need is a profound understanding of the existing systems and the urban fabric. On the basis of that one can use Certeau's art of trickery to create new smart links; not from scratch, but anchored in the existing situation; creating maximum effect with minimal means. Reconnecting beyond the spatial, also requires a work of collaboration with inhabitants, institutions and other relevant actors: an urbanism of reflexion where a project is tested in the field with the actual users.

The specific spatial, political, administrative and budgetary situation in Brussels underlines the necessity to think about different ways of intervening in the city. Rather than trying hard to realise the ideal image of a top-down masterplan as quickly as possible, the solution might be to accept and cherish the gradual transition of urban spaces. This approach is also more suitable to have inhabitants, users, entrepreneurs and all kind of private and public organisations actively participate in the transformation of a given territory instead of undergoing a project. The methodology proposed during the master class aimed at exploring a transitory approach in urban planning by working on a number of specific sites in Brussels, each with a specific fracture to bridge:
weststation in Molenbeek is an unused and mostly inaccessible wasteland, cut by a railway and hosting one of the most important nodes in the city’s metro network. It separates an old industrial area, a densely populated twentieth-century neighbourhood, new urban developments and green spaces.

quai demets along the Brussels Canal in Anderlecht was hit hard by the deindustrialization process since the 1970s. The site has developed in a chaotic and uncoordinated way. A slaughterhouse, a university college, large-scale retail, housing and a metro stop appeared on both sides of the waterway, yet without connecting to each other.

the demolition of the reyers viaduct and the abolishment of the plan to build a tunnel some hundred meters away, enabled the transformation of an urban freeway into a boulevard. Yet the road and two busy crossroads still separate a residential neighbourhood from the Brussels media pole that will soon appear to its east.

the bridge over the canal at saintelette constitutes at the same time a complex intersection between the ring road and a major access road, situated within a densely populated area, office blocks, a theatre and the Citroen building, the reconversion of which is the object of an important political debate at the moment. In an unreasonably compact way, the students went through the following steps to work on these sites:

- Reflecting on the different interpretations of bridges, gathering references, building a theoretical framework, discussing within the groups, building a body of thoughts around the concept of bridges.
- Based on this reflection, formulating a hypothesis for the concerned site.
- Testing this hypothesis in the field in the form of an intervention, documenting and assessing this intervention.
- Developing a transition plan for building a bridge on a specific site.

This lead to a hands-on reflection about the various ways of building bridges in a spatially, economically and socially fragmented metropolis like Brussels. The students explored working with methods beyond the rather static masterplan. Remarkably enough most of the students interpreted the theme of bridges in a predominantly non-technical approach, making use of a number of social or spatial interventions on site. The students were surprisingly at ease with working in the field and interacting with the people on
the locations. Based on a precise diagnosis and a series of self-invented actions in the field, they were getting in contact with the inhabitants and their everyday troubles. This resulted in proposals for site-specific transition plans comprising short- and long-term interventions for the sites.

By doing so, the students questioned en passant the traditional role of the planner and architect, as being the omniscient and omnipotent mastermind behind the transformation of the city. The rather incremental, small-scale and non-physical character of the proposed interventions, made the students reflect about the necessary means to actually change the severe fractures that they encountered in the city. They experienced that it requires architects and planners that can deal with both, establishing resilient structure and the ability to creatively and informally make use of them.

The final review of the master class took place in the afternoon and evening of November 13, just a few hours before the attacks in Paris took place. Three of the terrorists came from one of the sites we studied. Recently we hosted a group of foreign students on their field-trip in Brussels. We were asked not to take them to Molenbeek. But on the contrary - we think we should even more often go and study where it hurts, trying to improve these fractures in our cities.
weststation

gare de l’ouest
the area: Between Brussels’s West Station and the Ossegem Metro station the area is being divided into two neighbourhoods by a layer of various barriers. Not only the fences surrounding the site, but also the topography and the unmaintained green spaces create on one hand a physical, but also a very strong visual fracture between the West and East side of the district. Furthermore the different typologies, the lack of program and function create an almost palpable disconnection between the two sides, which overshadows the potential. The lot was originally strategically placed and defined by the centrality of the West Station, which now highlights its emptiness, both physical and functional. Next to the only existing bridge two forgotten public places for the neighbourhood are situated on the border of the previously mentioned barriers, encasing a potentially central space, which would offer the possibility of connecting the eastern side with various wide green spaces in the western side of the city. This connection already traverses the city, creating an interesting and surprisingly unused hot spot, which right now is determined by its void.

the idea: Beginning from the wish to break through the visibility issue, in order to create a new urbanity within the district, our project initially relies on quick, low cost but effective interventions which should help overcome not only the local but also the disconnection from the rest of the city. The backbone of our project is the reinforcement of an already existing axis, wanting to mend the fractured link and integrate this part of the city to the existing string of attractive central spots that are spread throughout Brussels. By making the now vacant and forgotten space between the fences an attractive area for future urban development, we are creating a system in order to bring those two locations together.

In the beginning we would address the current bridge situation and expand the accessibility, by adding elevators in order to increase the flow of people and also insert the possibility for bikers to use this connection. By elongating the existing train platform and raising the street level to the height of the pedestrian sidewalk, reshaping the hierarchy of the street, we are perceptively pacifying the velocity of the trains and cars.

The opening up of the old bridge structure would offer the visual involvement of the residents during the upcoming development of the site. The second step of our intervention would be to clean and open up the area on both sides even more, creating new open spaces in order to emphasize the visual link. With the use of light, we would quickly create new urban spaces and make access easier and more appealing, carving out a visual tension between the two neighbourhoods. Further actions would imply revitalizing the vacant built matter step by step, and bringing in different functions, which would activate the site even more. During this measure we would also transform the bridge construction by re-using the existing pillars and expanding the platform.
forgotten space
crossing paths
layering the barriers
encapsuled passage
misusing
no man's land
crossing rails

fracturing the barrier

the vacancy of built matter

opening up

the view

power of shadow

power of light
a new centrality
lack of connections:
By highlighting the existing axes and connections one can immediately recognize the past importance of the site and how the lack of connection overshadows the potential centrality.

underused attractive spaces:
The void in-between the fences not only separates the two neighbourhoods from each other, but also disconnects Brussels from many important spaces and especially the vast green areas on the western side.

necessity of a new centrality:
Beginning from our wish to break the visual barrier, we rely on quick, low cost but effective interventions which should reinforce an already existing but forgotten central spot in the neighbourhood.

tension (a visual bridge):
By creating a visual and spatial tension between the two sides, the barrier is overcome without the need of a physical bridge.

connection (a physical bridge):
After further opening and cleaning the area, the existing bridge situation is being addressed. By adding elevators, opening and enlarging the existing structure, we create real accessibility and reinforce the flow of people.

attraction (a system bridge):
The addition of social facilities, various functions and an attractive open space creates a new system which brings together the previous undefined public spaces, offering new possibilities and a stronger identity.

phase a: In a 1st intervention we are expanding the accessibility of the existing bridge by adding elevators. By elongating the current train platforms and raising the street level on both sides to the height of the pedestrian sidewalk, we are redefining the public space and pacifying the traffic.

The 2nd intervention would focus on cleaning and opening up the area, by partially removing the barriers and creating more visibility on both sides and initiating a link between the two. With the use of light we are defining new public spaces quickly and effectively, carving out a visual tension between the two bordering neighbourhoods.
phase b: During the 3rd intervention we are redesigning the existing bridge and by reusing the present pillars, we are creating a new expanded platform for the future connection. Meanwhile the vacant built matter is getting revitalized step by step and by adding various functions the flow of people is being increased.

Our 4th and last intervention, would imply the further definition of the public space and the addition of follow-up functions, adapted to the neighbourhoods’ needs, such as social facilities, playgrounds, sports and education centres. With the development of the two additional train tracks, the centrality of the new public space is being determined and added to the future importance of the West Station.
1st intervention: expanding the accessibility

2nd intervention: redefining the public space

3rd intervention: reinforcing the connection

last intervention: adding function to built matter
reflection

resumé: The 1st phase would be completed with our last intervention, which would be defining the public space furthermore and the addition of follow-up functions, adapted to the neighbourhoods’ needs, such as social facilities, playgrounds, sports and education centres.

Once the new centrality of public space has established itself, phase two of the project can begin. The now new central spot can be an attractive urban meeting point and sets the headstone for future transformations and projects, dispersing the future flow of activity from the West Station, connecting it to the metro and the rest of the city and supplying the needed social infrastructure.

diversity of brussels: The two weeks spend in Brussels surely were two of the most interesting, diverse and informative ones that I have spent among side fellow architecture and urban design students. Right from the beginning I was struck by the diversity of the city itself – not only regarding its citizens, visitors or languages spoken but also by its architecture, infrastructure and urban structures. I have to admit that although Brussels impresses with its beautiful inner city, it’s flair and hidden melancholic spots throughout its districts, the discrepancy between what I expected from the capital of europe and what I was confronted with, left me rather awed in the beginning.

lacks and fractures: Our site clearly mirrored some of the things I had noticed and was missing. The lack of planned, thought out public spaces and the often fractured connections, often seemed to split areas of certain districts into totally different neighbourhoods. This however made our site even more interesting and opened up endless ideas of what a barrier and furthermore a connection or a bridge really is or can be.

exchange and new perspectives: Throughout our program we were guided absolutely amazingly by the entire team. I have never in my entire educational path, have had the opportunity to have this amount of guidance, open conversations and exchange of ideas with professionals, like I did during the Master Class. This was highly motivating and more than instructive. Also the new design process that Aglaée and Stefan proposed to us, opened up quite a new perspective when it comes to not only the procedure itself, but also the representation and communication of ideas. Even if in the beginning the strictness of the expectations regarding the daily outcome seemed restrictive, one quickly realized how different the project develops once you give it a try – something that most surely would not have happened following the old process one got used to.
quai demets
quai de l’industrie
**crossing water**

**first encounter:** During our field trips in and around Abattoir and Quai Demets, we realized different kind of functions, materialized themselves as buildings around the canal. It seemed to us that these isolated functions also separated people from each other. The lack of connection to the upper side of the site, the poorly defined spaces on the both sides, the bridge, polluted by dumped garbage, and the badly lit metro station create an unsecure feeling where people are unlikely to stay. The current situation creates a social fence and supports the existing physical fence.

**message in the cup:** While the need of a physical bridge was clear, the common opinion of the people regarding a social bridge was foggy. In order to have a deeper look at the situation, we created an intervention at the canal that allowed people to communicate to each other to the other side by using wired cup phones. The experience was quite a success and the interest and collaboration of the people cleared all the existing questions and let the answer pop out by itself: A physical as well as a social bridging should be done.

**two in one:** Our design is a proposal for bridging structures that react to the changes and the people’s behaviours in the site. Our solution constructs itself into a modular system that will be combined for different usages, not only as infrastructure but also as platforms for entertainment and public space. To understand when and where a physical or a social bridge will be needed, a timetable has been created that shows the different functions along the canal subject to time of day and weekday.

**bridge as microorganism:** In order to create that kind of flexibility, cranes on rails will be placed along the canal. These cranes will be seen as distributors, arranging the platforms for the different needs during the weekdays and also moving them vertically for ships to pass away. Each pair of cranes will operate in a radius of 200 meters along the canal and will stack up to a maximum of six platforms. The whole system will operate and maintenance by the already existing transportation factory and the new port. The moving bridges and cranes will act like microorganisms around the canal, adapting and creating solutions by themselves and vitalizing its environment.

**timeline:** After activating the canal, the system will react to the whole quarter. As 1st step a new axe between the metro station on the upper level and the canal will appear. This connection will be essential for pedestrians and bicycles. As 2nd step this axe will enlarged to the lower side of the site, removing the physical fences between the universities and Abattoir. It will activate empty spaces and will create a new entrance to Abattoir. As 3rd step a second pair of cranes will be added to extend the system. In the future the system will appear to other parts of Brussels and establish a new distinctive kind of structure in the city.
attention! shipping: we have to be flexible

link or barrier: at night it can be dangerous here

getting in touch with the neighbourhood

bridging: participation through gaming

leave something behind

it works! self-made wired cup phones
i like your idea! a student from Hogeschool

come again? overcoming linguistic barriers

almost forgotten in 2016: cable spaghetti

ça va? How are you?

salut tamara: getting rid of shyness? check!

new space to spend free time

crossing water | 21
bridge sharing

weekly usage of time:

monday - wednesday

thursday

friday

22 quai demets / quai de l'industrie
saturday

sunday

crossing water 123
phases: These drawings show the time sections of the project, how it reacts to its environment and how it will grow with the time as a microorganism until it reaches to its absolute potential.

At the 1st section there will only one crane placed with three platforms, and the connection with the upper level of metro station will be established which will also work as a pedestrian and cycling way. This is crucial in order to create flow of connection.
In the 2nd section, the crane gets three more platforms and gains it’s fully potential. This will activate the connection to the parallel street between the university campus and slaughter house while activating the non-place at the back of the university and also creating a second entrance for the market.

The 3rd section, shows the addition of second crane with six platforms and the second connection from upper to the lower level and activation of non-places around them. With this, whole area will be activated and connected with each other.
adapting, activating, resilience: These are the three main themes that has been aimed in bridge sharing. We all know adapting is crucial in the living world, from dinosaurs to the mankind, we saw many species that vanished from the earth just because they were not able to adapt themselves to the newly situations. Bridge sharing has a direct effect on human lives, therefore you can understand it as a living being, the functions along the canal as well as the lives, people, habits are constantly changing. If a bridge cannot adapt itself to the change it will stay as obsolete, pathology element that will have more harm than good to its environment. Using movable industrial elements lets the bridge adapt itself to the environment that constantly changes during the weekdays, which brings us to the second theme activating.

The bridges will work like selective points that connect or extend different functions in different days of the week, this will slowly react and activate the non-places around the canal. When the activation begins, the canal, bridge, and the newly formed places will complement with each other and this will bring a revitalizing era for its environment. Through activating, a better quality of living around the area will be created and through adapting it will maintain this way, with this whole program the resilience will be achieved. Cities that are able to maintain high quality of life will be and will stay resilient. A resilience that compliments to the different social characteristics.

crossing water I 27

conclusion: Bridge sharing is a flexible form of connection with different perspectives that can react spontaneously to the current demands of the environment. It gives the opportunity to the user to intervene the city according to their needs. It is a new, flexible and adaptable organism that flows with the rhythm of the city. The review of our final presentation was very positive: Dealing with the quarter as chance to develop into a flexible area, recognizing the place’s contingency; this carefully taking into account and intervene with our bridge sharing got affirmative rating.

Overall the Brussels Master Class had a positive experience for both of us. Working with international teams, learning from their way of dealing with the architectural problems and city planning was a very effective way of studying. Especially the lectures from the different professionals brought this experience to another level. We would recommend this program to any master student that needs a little push to shape their way of architectural and social thinking.
auguste reyerslaan
boulevard reyers
crossing roads

**obsession with a ramp:** Right from the start our interaction with the site was determined by a historical moment for the Schaerbeek/Schaarbeek region. It was the point in time, when die Reyers viaduct – a modern symbol for a city defined by cars – got demolished. The current appearance of the former flyover was remaining as a partly destroyed ramp. The impact of this manifestation of demolition struck us with its certain beauty and left us behind with an obsession to maintain this moment of change.

From our point of view this viaduct is a defining element in the urban identity of Brussels. It’s situated on the highest spot of the town. Furthermore it’s performing as a gateway, which guides twelve lanes – like a highway to hell – towards the inner city.

The bordering neighbourhood splits into a western residential area and a fenced eastern office district. This side quarters both media centres, the French and the Flemish one. Future developments incorporate a new media park open for the public. This one is planned to be realized by 2030. Alongside the Auguste Reyerslaan/Boulevard Auguste Reyers, to be more specific between Diamant and Meiser a new boulevard, with expanded pedestrian sidewalks, is meant to be created. Even if this proposal takes care of outside traffic participants, it however still follows the model of separation.

Our concept reinterprets the idea of a boulevard or a Rambla. We are going to occupy the vacant middle space. By using the site specific qualities, such as the vertical topography of the ramp a contemporary public space will be created. Various functions on several levels bridge both sides. Thereby it’s automatically taking effect to the hierarchy of traffic.

The Reyers situation is just one of many examples. It can be seen as an attempt how to deal with the topic of destruction. Existing infrastructure can and should be reused and through that its identity and meaning will be changed.

everything about verticality!** The project deals with two steps of architectural intervention – the first one focuses on the connection from ground-level to the subterranean one. By using the ramps capacity underneath and by designing a new square respectively – this step links public traffic with a henceforth activated public space. The second intervention revolves around the activation of the top-level. Through expanding the structure and connecting it with the upper part of the ramp and furthermore by the use of several kinds of vertical connections an upward path is created – the stairway to heaven.
30 I auguste reyerslaan / boulevard reyers
tagging the potential

dangerous priority

playing bansky

bridged

please, cross

crossed
highway to hell vs. stairway to heaven
**site analysis:** Currently the site appears as a splitted matter. But just in its y-direction! (14 lanes, 12 of them for car-traffic). In its x-direction its from opposed character, subdivisions as zebra-crossings are missing!

**why connect?**

**changing the hierarchy**

**slowing down**

**why in the middle?**

**using site specific qualities**

**bridging concept:** The occupancy of the newly vacant middle space means almost the inversion of the previous. Both by the enlivenment of the inner zone and by adding crossovers the attention is on its future users.
2015 potential

2015 activation of the ramp. Field action

2015 stop demolishing the ramp
2018 subterranean connection

2020 ramp connection

2030 occupying middle space: media park connection
diamant square: activation of the ground floor

stairway to heaven: level 0

contemporary boulevard: activation of the top floor

stairway to heaven: level 1
reflection

**brussels master class after a period of time:** As it was my first stay in Brussels I’m bound to say that I perceived the city itself as a diverse and divided place. To be honest, I experienced Brussels as pretty chaotic – both, its residents (if you just think about the two languages) and its urban planning, which derives most probably from its political organisation. This is what I think Brussels is primarily about and it caught me with its very certain beauty.

It was fascinating to be part of this international Master Class. To get to know all those people with their very special knowledges and skills – colleagues, tutors, lecturers from all around the world – and the possibility to work together and to profit from each individually.

Even if the structure and the timetable of the Master Class were kind of tough and the whole process was on some points pretty exhausting, I think this was necessary to learn how much we could effort in a very short period of time. There is much more to say, but I have especially put emphasis on our tutors and lecturers. At every point and within every incessantly constructive critic, I felt taken seriously. I enjoyed it a lot.

**stairway to heaven after a period of time:** Stairway to heaven wasn’t about to deliver a fully designed draft for a special site. It was mainly about to handover an idea and a concept for a new way of thinking in urban planning respectively. Of course there were ideas for a specific design for this given status of demolition. For instance to implement seating steps to convert the remaining part of the viaduct into a kind of arena – either as viewing platform or as concert area, open air cinema etc. Almost everything was about creating an exciting urban space with several uses like bars, bike storages and workshops, multicultural playgrounds and seating-accommodations, which are absent in this district. Moreover the project was about re-using, about playing with given qualities, about linking segregated parts, about planning a boulevard in a contemporary way. Actually – it was about doing it the other way around.

In the end we had to bury down our suggestion for this specific site. Right now we know, that during our stay in Brussels most of the Reyers viaduct got destroyed – even more than expected, because a little part was supposed to stay for some years as a ramp to nowhere. But still, for future developments – in fact every time when it comes to the demolition of infrastructure, stairway to heaven could be considered as a proposal how to challenge with given peculiarities.

**in memoriam:** (the Reyers viaduct)
sint-jans-molenbeek
place sainctelette
where is Saintelette square?: For the assignment of proposing an urban transition plan for the area of Saintelette square it has been rapidly identified that the square as a comprehensive place could not be localised. Deeper research on the bridge, the neighbouring area as well as historic documents presented interesting facts about the evolution of the spatial situation around the current bridges which went through several modification processes. Today we find two bridges, separated by a void and dominated by car traffic.

three key factors of the urban situation have been identified:

1. Views
2. Verticality
3. Axes (strong N-S and E-W axis)

Due to our comprehensive reflection on bridging we suggest to define the bridge as a place itself. It has the potential to be much more than just a way to get across the water, moreover it can be a place of connectivity, continuity but also a place to stay and linger, with an emphasis of accessibility for every citizen. Thus we undertook a field action in order to investigate people’s interest of the vertical dimension of the Saintelette bridges. The results have shown that the majority of citizens, living in neighbourhoods in the adjacent area, are walking across the bridges almost every day but haven’t been aware of the space around and below the bridge. The obtained data led us to propose a transition plan for Saintelette square consisting of three major steps. Each step incorporates changes of the horizontal movement on top of the bridges as well as introductions of vertical interventions.

In general, the proposal foresees to allocate the north bridge to none-motorised movement and the south bridge to car traffic as well as a strong emphasis of the vertical connections in order to get closer to the water and recreational spaces.

Connecting the new spaces and the metro station offers the potential to easily access the Citroën building which is proposed to be turned into a museum as well as the neighbourhood of Molenbeek. In a long term view Saintelette square and the central bridges will be put back into place in order to provide a liveable space of connectivity and recreation.
out of place

actors of mobility

vertical layers

forgotten space

everyday’s traffic jam

potential spaces
messages on a robe

invitation to pull

what is this?

catching attention

fishing candies

award for the brave ones
where is Saintelette square?

context Saintelette square

The site of Saintelette Square is the crossing point of the canal running from north to south and the Boulevard Leopold II reaching from the basilica of the sacred heart towards Rogier, the city center. Although the place is considered as a square, one will find a two bridges with a great void in between. The banks along the canal possess the potential for new bicycle infrastructure and leisure.
During peak hours most of the traffic appears on the boulevard (A, L, G, H) going in both directions across the bridges whereas the north-south traffic only shows a peak on route E and J.
In order to set up a future scenario a transition plan has been proposed. It helps to transform the site step by step into a new urban place. The three phases suggest interventions on a horizontal and vertical level as it implements not just the traffic situation in top but also the banks of the canal below the bridge.
vertical connections

When standing on top of the bridge one will be amazed by the stunning view of Brussels. Due to that, the design proposal for the bridge incorporates a strong vertical connection consisting of a bicycle bridge inside the void, bike and pedestrian lanes along the canal as well as activation of vacant spaces under the bridge. Furthermore there was an abandoned metro station found under the car tunnel which is proposed to be reactivated again.
**proposed connectivity**

Sainctellete Square is proposed to be a spot of connections used by various actors of the urban realm. On different layers movements of pedestrians, cyclists, boats and cars will be flowing from north to south, from east to west as well as from the top to the bottom. The architecture of the place will also be connecting the banks of the canal, the proposed museum (Citroen) and the adjacent neighbourhoods.
reflection

**the design:** Our proposal for Sainctelette Square is mostly based on the reactivation of vacant spaces below the existing bridges. In order to connect this spaces new ramps, elevators and stairways will be established as well as to turn the bridge into a place itself. Perhaps one of the main interventions will be the new asymmetric street layout that allocate motorised traffic to one bridge and pedestrians, cyclists and the tram tracks to the other bridge. The transition for Sainctelette Square has the potential to build a stronger connection between the neighbourhood of Molenbeek and the City of Brussels by providing attractive public spaces and amenities, accessible for everyone. The space will be well integrated because it is located right on top of the cancel, which marks the border of the neighbourhoods, and spreads out on both sides.

There has been a critical reaction of the jury regarding the change of the street layout, as it does not follow the symmetric street layout of Boulevard Leopold II by separating different types of movement and allocating them accordingly on the bridges. It is a fact that this boulevard marks a very strong axis within the urban pattern but personally I think that it would not destroy any symmetry or views. It is more likely that the transition of the place procures a better experience of the views by the citizens which helps creating identity.

**the experience:** The Bridges Master Class was one of my greatest experiences during my studies. I have learned to make quick decisions within a design process as well as to work efficiently in teams with international students. It was overwhelming to see how much design work could be done in a few days. In my opinion it was very important to have a set methodology respectively a brief to follow in order to work quickly and focus only on the relevant issues of the project.

The methodology of the field action was exciting to experience and I hope that I will be able to apply this to a future project. It is striking to see how people interact with spaces they are using everyday but suddenly find some changes. I would have liked to get the chance to talk to more of them in order to collect their perception of space.

The strategy of the transition plan helped to think about steps in time how a place can change over years. As a designer it is mostly very easy to develop a project to its final state. For that reason I am glad that we have worked on several steps between the existing situation and the new intervention. I am sure that this methodology will be useful for my future projects.
acknowledgements

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crossing rails

crossing water

multiple crossings