

Democratizing Influence

A Spatial Transformation of EU Lobbying in Brussels

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Thesis Program spring 2020
The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts
School of Architecture
Political Architecture : Critical Sustainability
Thesis Supervisors: Niels Grønbæk and Runa Johannessen

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Copenhagen, February 2020

Reading guide

The program is divided into five main parts. The first part introduces our field of interest and intentions. These are further unfolded in the two following chapters: Europe and Brussels, which outline the thematic and the physical context and program of the project. The Process chapter describes thoughts on the methodological framework.

Throughout the program, each paragraph shifts between being descriptive/analytical and propositional/programmatic. Every time the text becomes propositional it is marked with bold and with a small red arrow. The main statements are collected as bullets in a programmatic summary on page 51.

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Introduction

The European Quarter in Brussels, does not only host the most powerful institutions of the EU, but also thousands of lobby organizations residing in office buildings around the institutions. Estimates suggest that more than 25.000 lobbyists work in Brussels with the aim of influencing EU policies.¹

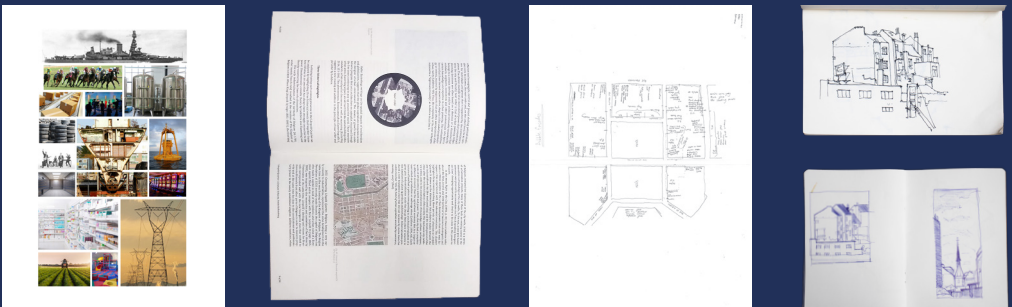
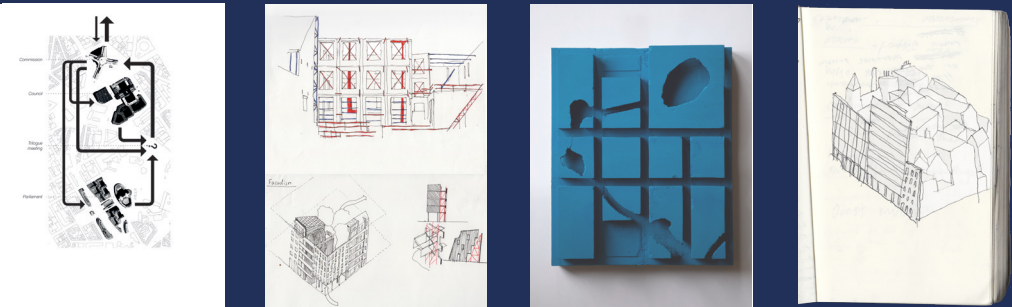
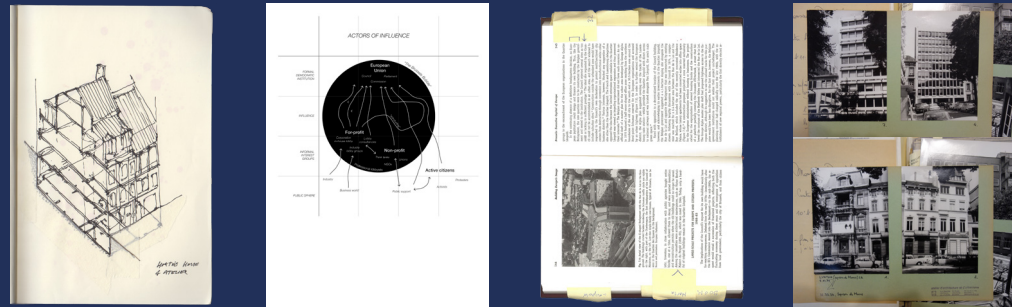
The high demand for office space in proximity to the EU institutions together with a lack of urban planning has made the European Quarter a business district. Today, the area is sometimes referred to as the 'Brussels Bubble', because it is so detached from the rest of the city. This divide is probably most visible when walking from the *European Quarter*, with its reflective facades and expensive cars, down the hill to *Saint-Josse-ten-Noode* - the poorest and most densely populated municipality in Belgium. Somehow this urban segregation reflects the criticism often leveled against the EU of being too elitist and detached from the citizens.

- **This project addresses the issues related to EU lobbying on both scales. On one hand it proposes establishing a new hinge between the EU and its citizens, creating a new infrastructure which can allow citizens to have more influence on politics. On the other hand the project intervenes in the urban context of Brussels in order to make the professional lobbying public.**

The program suggests two sites of intervention. One is woven both into the urban fabric of Saint-Josse and into a larger citizen network. Thereby, it constitutes a new channel of influence on EU policy-making. The other transforms an office block at the most prominent square of the European Quarter, which will institutionalize the lobbying and encourage public scrutiny.



a The transition from the European Quarter to Saint-Josse feels like an urban barrier (Photo collage)



Intentions

- > The project seeks to rethink the way influence works in the EU. It imagines a new kind of political infrastructure which can make hidden influence public and give the citizens a stronger voice in the EU. The project aims at developing new architectural typologies which can accommodate such programs.
- > Lobbying is a spatial practice which, to a large extent, happens in cafés, meeting rooms and conference spaces within the European Quarter in Brussels. With the project, we want to look into how a changing of the the physical setting can have an impact on this political practice.
- > On a more architectural level, the project investigates potentials in transforming office buildings. How can the spaces be made public and how can the structures be adjusted to new functions with a new architectural language?

Political Architecture

The project is situated within the *KADK* master program *Political Architecture: Critical Sustainability*, which builds on methods of fieldwork and critical thinking. The first interaction with the European Quarter was during a three week field trip to Brussels and Calais in October 2019. Through interviews with stakeholders and site surveys we found an interest in the world of lobbying around the EU institutions - especially the correlation between the urban layout and the political struggle for influence. This theme was later explored in a thorough research, complemented by a continuous testing of architectural ideas, which pointed towards a potential challenging of the current spatial condition.

- > This exchange between reading, drawing, site re-visiting, writing and model building is also going to be the basis of the coming study.

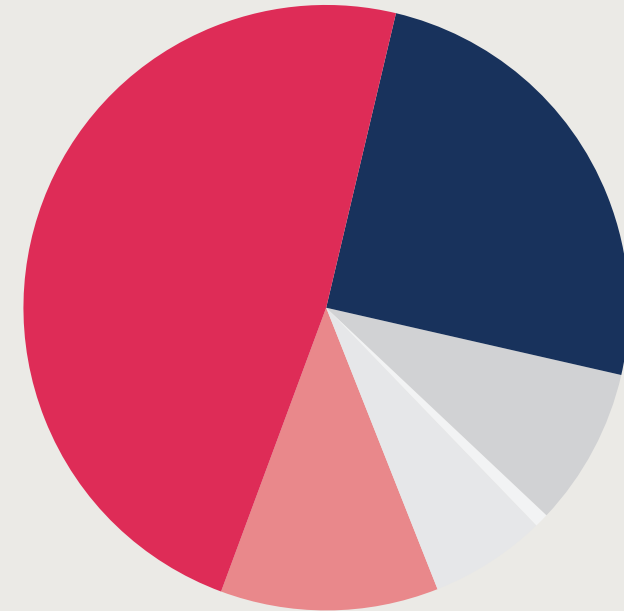
b Field work registrations, sketches, mappings, speculations, writings and archive material from fieldtrip and research.

Sustainable Development Goals

In order to tie the relevance of this program to a global perspective, we will view the 17 *Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)* from a critical angle as well as productive tools. With the SDGs, the UN provides an extensive framework for a global shift towards an “inclusive, sustainable and resilient future for people and planet.”² However, just as this project challenges the political power of the private interests in an European context, it is also relevant to question how much influence private stakeholders have had on the goals themselves.

The report “*Hijacking the SDGs: The Private Sector and the Sustainable Development Goals*” describes how the private sector has been involved in the crafting of the goals.³ The outcome of this involvement is impossible to tell, but the report looks into the conflicts that can exist between profit-based private sector activities and sustainable development. The risks include privatization at expense of quality, greenwashing, tax evasion and resistance to important regulation. At the moment, it is also very hard to measure the private sector’s implementation of the goals which is problematic, as it plays a large role in global development. Lastly, critics have argued that sustainability will not be achieved by just more economic growth, which seems to be a premise for the goals.

Despite the critique, the goals can function as valuable tools for addressing global problems and this project does also relate to some of the individual goals. **The project first and foremost deals with Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institution. This goal aims to: “develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels”, “ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels” and “ensure public access to information”.**⁴ Our project seeks to give citizens access to information and participation in politics, but also access to the city and public space. Thereby, *Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities*, also becomes relevant for the project, as it aims at transforming the urban environment to become more inclusive by providing new public space.



48% In-house lobbyists and trade/business/professional associations

25% Non-governmental organisations

11,5% Professional consultancies/law firms/self-employed consultants

8,5% Think tank, research and academic institutions

6,5 % Organisations representing local, regional and municipal authorities, other public or mixed entities, etc.

1% Organisations representing churches and religious communities

Figures and charts presented in this program are based on data from EU Transparency Register published online by the European Commission and downloaded on december 11th 2019 as raw data. The register relies on voluntary registration by lobbyists which produce various errors and inaccuracies in the data including declaration of spendings and amount of lobbyists active.

Europe

This chapter will briefly outline the thematic context of the project. It deals with issues relating to a context beyond that of Brussels - namely the democratic processes of the European Union.

- Lobbying in the EU
- Making Influence Public
- A New Infrastructure for Influence



“Lobbying is not necessarily bad. What I am afraid of, is that there is too little lobbying on certain issues. [...] Some resources should be spent to ensure that the sides, which may not have as many resources, has the possibility to express themselves.”⁵

Interview w. Wiebke Marie Junk, Postdoc at the Department of Political Science in University of Copenhagen

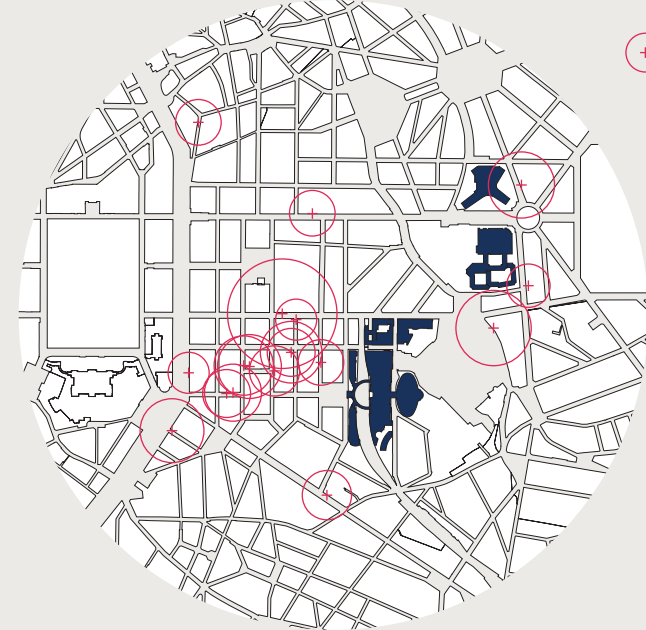
Lobbying in the EU

Lobbying in the European Union - or "interest representation" in official EU terms - is defined as "all activities designed to influence - directly or indirectly - policymaking, policy implementation and decision-making in the EU institutions"⁶

Interest representation is an integral part of the EU legislative process - and for good reasons: It allows for diverse interest groups to state their views on decisions that may affect them and provides channels for expert input on technical issues needed to inform decision-making.⁷ However, if lobbying is not regulated and made transparent, it gives certain stakeholders excess access to influence in the EU. And although legislation on interest registration has improved, the world of EU lobbying is still quite obscure to the outsider. It is difficult to figure out which stakeholders are being heard and how the information provided by lobbyists is incorporated into legislation.

At the moment, almost 12,000 lobby organizations are registered in the *EU Transparency Register*.⁸ These interest groups include a variety of NGOs, consultancies, law firms and think tanks, but corporate interests - represented by company in-house lobbyists and industry lobby groups - are prevailing in numbers and money spent on lobby campaigns.

> **With this project we want to propose a rethinking of the way interests are represented in the EU: a formalizing of lobbying to make it more equal, accessible and accountable.**



d 20 biggest spenders on lobbying in Brussels
Blue: EU institutions



Making influence public

Lobbying in the EU is often kept on a rather abstract and technical level. The practice of lobbying is often more about presenting data, than discussing the issues and concerns relating to them. This data-based decision-making does not only make it hard to understand for non-experts, but it can in some cases give industries and producers advantages in lobbying. They will sit on the data relating to their products whereas an NGO will have to do a lot of research to be able to argue against it.⁹ In Bruno Latour's essay *From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik*, he suggests bringing the things that concern people into the political discussion.¹⁰ In an EU lobby context, this implies that issues that have an actual impact on people's lives might get revealed as a part of the exchange between lobbyists and politicians.

By shifting the attention from the abstract discursive discussion to a reflection on the things that concern people, the decision process in the EU can pertain more to the public. **We want to propose a space that is programmed to contain all sorts of things.** As Bruno Latour describes the exhibition *Making Things Public*, "...we simply want to pack loads of stuff into the empty arenas where naked people were supposed to assemble simply to talk."¹¹ **A space that contains things instead of pure 'objective' exchange of opinions would draw the public's attention and awareness directly to the root of the discussed and thereby create a more direct channel for citizens to interact with the decision making.**

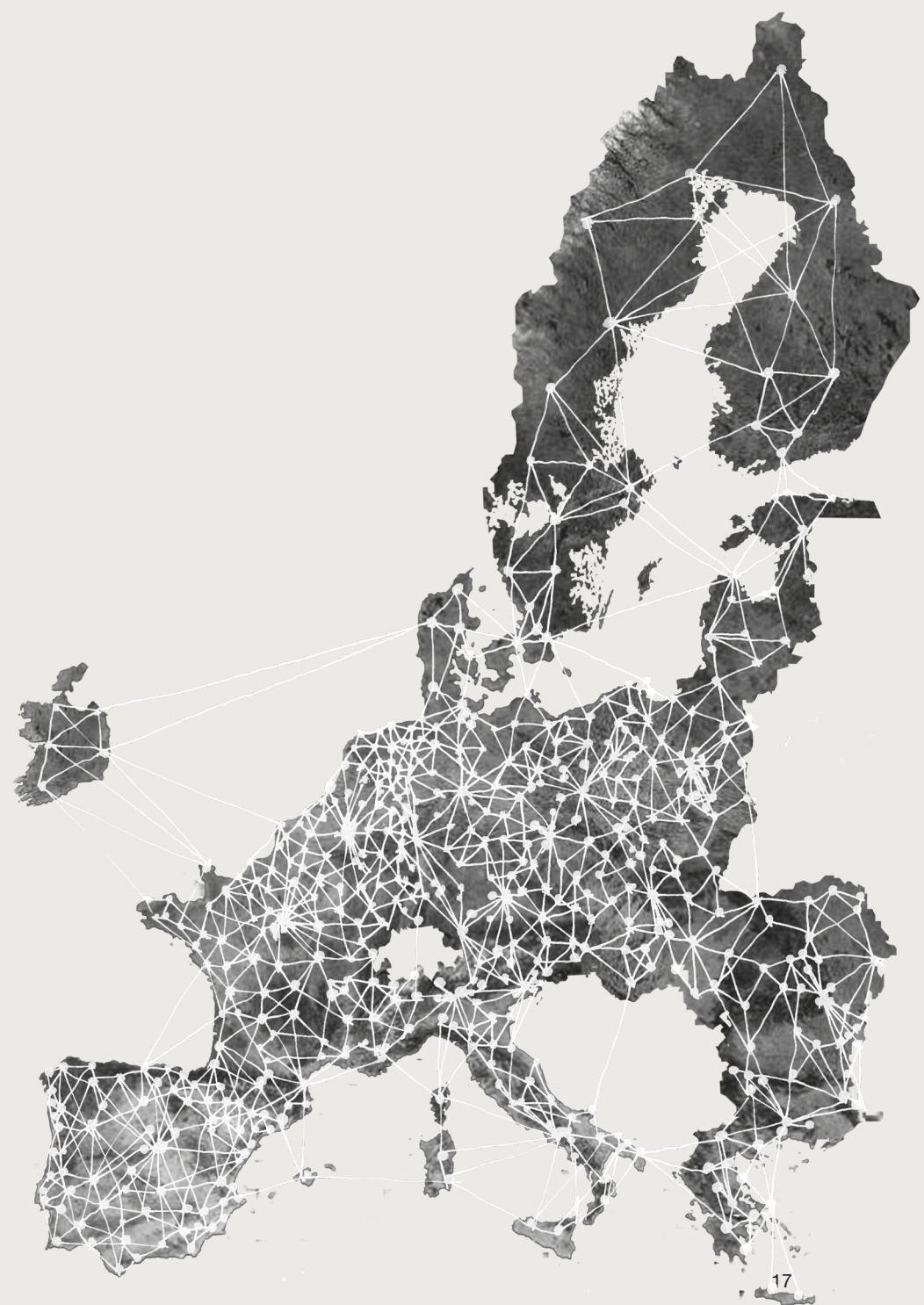
e Screen captures from 'Making Things Public' exhibition video by ZKM - Museum für Neue Kunst

A New Infrastructure for Influence

The 513 million people living in 28 countries across Europe are affected by EU policies and regulations. Still, citizen engagement in European politics is remarkably low. Though widely debated, some scholars argue that the EU has a 'democratic deficit' meaning that the EU institutions and their decision-making procedures suffer from a lack of democracy and seem inaccessible to the citizen due to their complexity.¹²

This gap between the citizens and the institutions have created a vacuum that professional lobbyists exploit, because the lacking democratic engagement means less control with lobbying. So argues Olivier Hoedemann of *Corporate Europe Observatory*, an NGO working to expose EU lobbying. He explains that "under those conditions it is extremely important that the EU institutions protect EU decision-making from the risk of excess of lobby influence and that's not yet the case."¹³ **An infrastructure that allows people to participate, learn and discuss things that concern them is needed. This project imagines a spatial typology enables people to gather in a network across the EU to take part in and influence the political discussion.**

The Canadian public consultancy *MASS LBP*, has released a guide on how to commission a citizen 'Reference Panel', a panel that involves a group of randomly selected citizens who meet and examine an issue.¹⁴ The deliberative process results in a set of recommendations forwarded to the relevant public authority. **We will use the guidelines as inspiration and as a base for designing an infrastructure that allows the influence process to pendulate between the European Quarter and the locally grounded 'Reference Panel. We think this would be a way to "disarm" the powerful lobby in the European Quarter and spread out the possibility of influence.**



“Political buildings or urban structures that reflect the political presence are tied into urban imaginaries, and some cities have inspired motion pictures, novels, and artwork. [...] In contrast, no strong urban imaginary exists for the cities that are headquarters of the EU”¹⁵

Carola Hein, Professor of History of Architecture and Urban Planning - Department of Architecture

Brussels

In this chapter, the two sites of intervention in the two neighboring quarters in Brussels - The European Quarter and Saint-Josse - are unfolded through contextual and programmatic texts relating to the urban context.

- > Urban context
- > Spaces of Influence
- > Site: Square de Meeûs
- > Site: Place Saint-Josse



g Photograph of Berlaymont building in the 1970's

Urban context

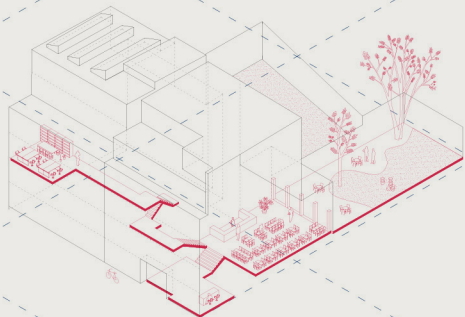
The European Quarter is dominated by office buildings. Since the 1950's the townhouses have been demolished and replaced by modern office building developments around the EU institutions. As seen on the map (fig. h) the European Quarter differs substantially from the adjacent neighborhood scoring low on housing density and high on office density. The European Quarter appears as a bubble, not only on demographic maps, but also in the experience of the city. The shift in facade type, building scale and type of pedestrians is quite noticeable when walking from the poor but populous municipality of Saint-Josse to the European Quarter. The urban reality of the neighborhood can be understood at two scales:

One dimension can be understood through Keller Easterlings concept of *Extrastatecraft* which describes the spatial consequences of large infrastructure. "Despite its relative physical durability—infrastructure space is often only regarded as a byproduct of more volatile markets and political games."¹⁶ If one starts to understand the power relation between the political and the corporate interests in the EU as a kind of infrastructure, the European Quarter is certainly the spatial byproduct. The immediate physical proximity to the EU Institutions is so crucial to lobbyists that it creates a mono culture of almost entirely office buildings. The other dimension has to do with Brussels and its laissez faire approach to being 'The Capital of Europe'. The urban presence of the EU has not resulted in a planning act to ensure a democratic development of the city.¹⁷

From the street, there are no signs of what kinds of organizations are residing behind the facades. Only at the reception desks in the foyers a sign might reveal the inhabitants. The passer-by might not even sense the tension between the highly specific topics which are represented by the organizations and the generic appearance of the architecture. **As a contrast, this project tries to establish a spatial language that can mediate power, politics and opinions to the public. It furthermore seeks to introduce a scale which is common in other parts of Brussels, but seems to have been lost in the European Quarter.**



h Density of housing, density of office



Non-Profit Lobbying
Rue de Edimbourg 26 "Mundo-b"

NGO office-cooperative shared by 55 small organizations. Outside the European Quarter. Public café and garden.

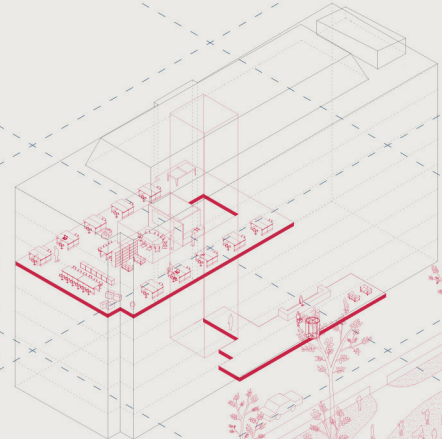


Informal Lobby Meetings
Rue de Trèves 20 "Karsmakers"

Small coffee bar near the parliament. Used for informal business meetings over lunch.

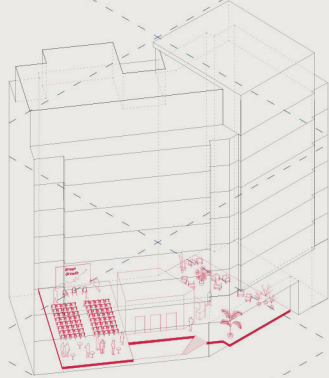
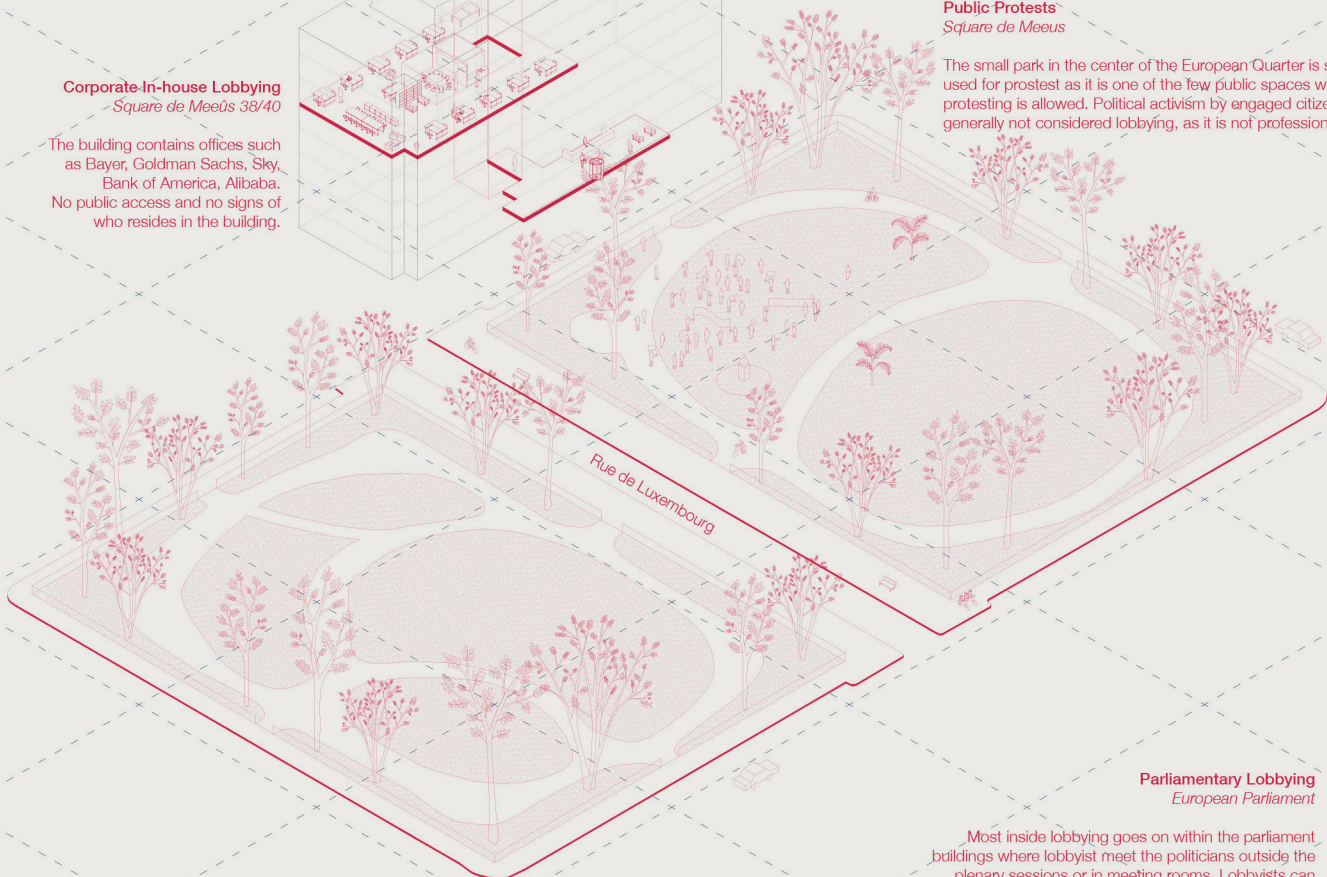
Corporate In-house Lobbying
Square de Meeüs 38/40

The building contains offices such as Bayer, Goldman Sachs, Sky, Bank of America, Alibaba. No public access and no signs of who resides in the building.



Public Protests
Square de Meeüs

The small park in the center of the European Quarter is sometimes used for protest as it is one of the few public spaces where protesting is allowed. Political activism by engaged citizens is generally not considered lobbying, as it is not professional.

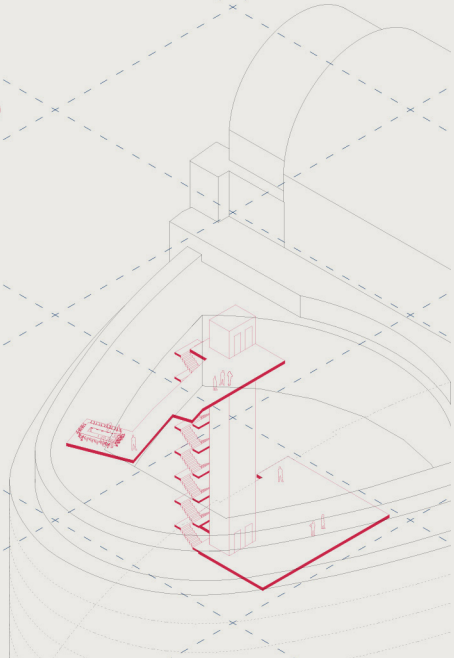


Think Tank Lobbying
Square de Meeüs 5

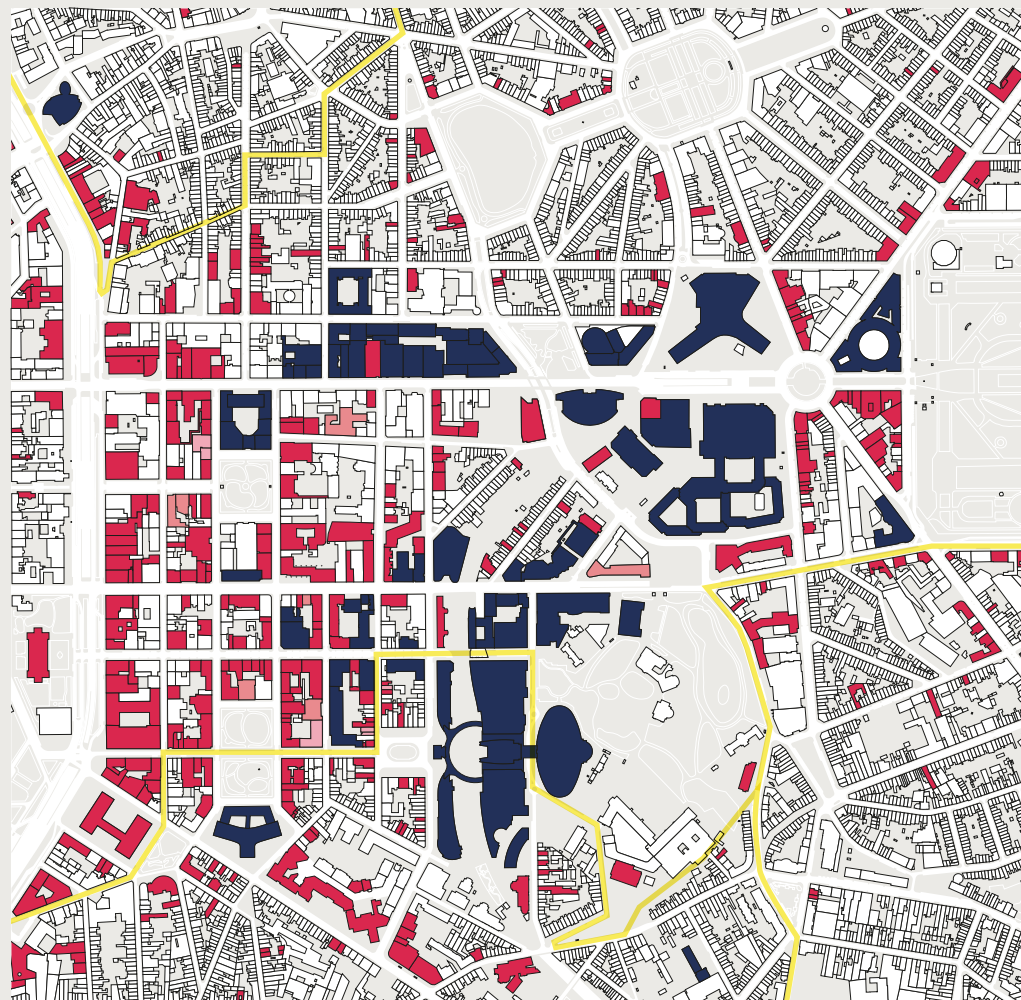
Think tank "Friends of Europe" and Conference space "TownHall Europe". Public events. Sometimes accused for disguised corporate lobbying.

Parliamentary Lobbying
European Parliament

Most inside lobbying goes on within the parliament buildings where lobbyist meet the politicians outside the plenary sessions or in meeting rooms. Lobbyists can receive Parliament passes giving them access to the buildings by registering in the Transparency Register.



i Registration of different typologies with relation to lobbying near Square de Meeüs.



SCALE 1/12000



Legend

- EU institution
- Lobby office
- National consulate/embassy
- Bank
- Municipal border

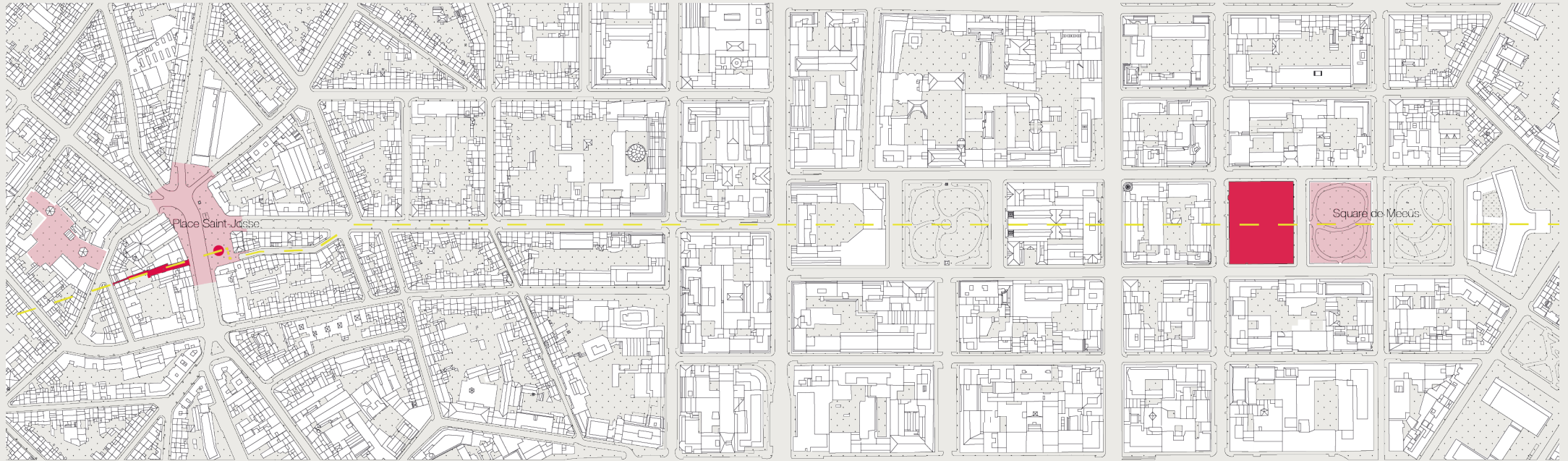
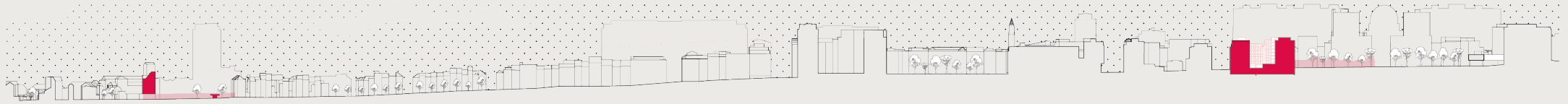
Spaces of influence

Today, in the European Quarter, not only the hallways of the institutions matter in the battle for influence but also the surrounding buildings, streets and squares, which have become highly politicized. Meetings take place in a variety of places around the institutions: in meeting rooms, conference spaces and cafes proximate to the institutions. The attractiveness of being close to these places where it is possible to meet the legislators has resulted in steep real estate prices.

- > **Through a formalization of the meetings that presently occur around the city, the project seeks to move the meetings from the informal spaces to new spaces designed specifically to host these kinds of meetings. The public should have a high level of access and say in the discussions where lobbyists play a role. The new spaces of influence though must have a delicate layering of privacy, intimacy while still maintaining transparency and publicity.**

Transparency as proposed by the EU is to have a public online register of active lobbyists in the EU. Spatial transparency can, however, have many different effects on the means of lobbying and might be able to control and make lobbying public.

- > **By intertwining the public, in its many representations, with the lobbying process we approach the design of the spaces through various venues of different types of meetings.** The mere chance that a member of the public is able to follow the lobbying act - that it takes place in public spaces - might contribute to a nuancing of the conversation and exchange of interests between the lobbyist and the politician.



SCALE 1/5000



Saint-Josse-ten-Noode

The urban fabric of Saint-Josse-ten-Noode is characterized by narrow residential townhouses and crooked streets. Saint-Josse-ten-Noode was originally a farming village on the outskirts of Brussels. But after the demolition of Brussels's ramparts, Saint-Josse was one of the first areas outside to urbanise.

The European Quarter

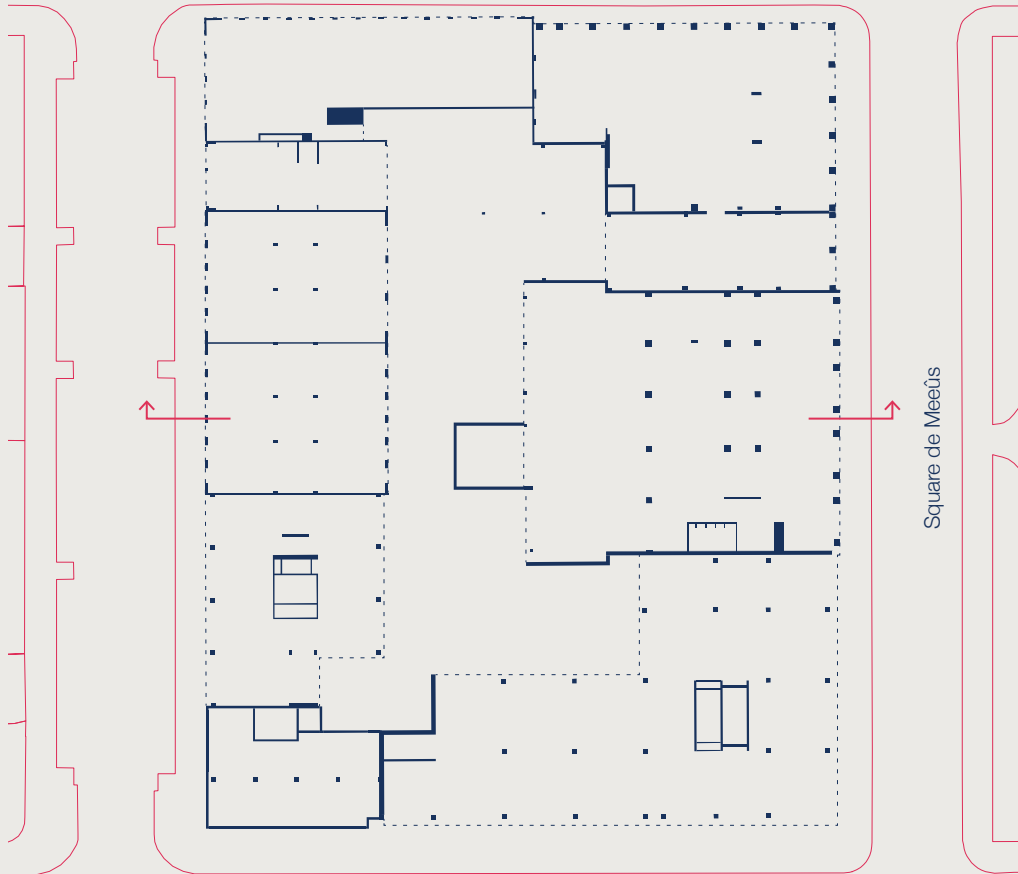
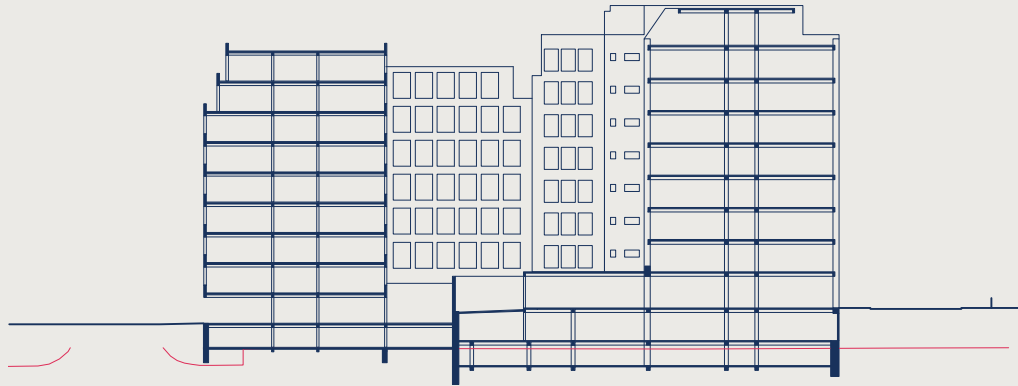
The grid of the European Quarter was laid out in 1837 as a prestigious residential area for the elite of the new Belgian capital. The area was named Leopold Quarter after King Leopold I. In the 20th century the inhabitants started to move to the suburbs and in the 1950s, it increasingly became a business area which today hosts EU's facilities.

Site: Square de Meeûs

Square de Meeûs is situated a 300-meter walk from the main entrance of the European Parliament. This small green park, which lies in the centre of the European Quarter, has become the new prime spot for lobbyists. The symmetrical square has become very attractive, not only because of the classicist landscaping, but more importantly its proximity to the European Parliament and to Rue du la Loi, leading to the European Commission and the Council. The area around Square de Meeûs has undergone a drastic transformation throughout the last 70 years. Today the office buildings around the park host major corporations like Goldman Sachs, Bayer, Bank of America Merrill Lynch and Apple along with parliamentary offices.

- > **Right in the hot spot of the EU lobby arena we propose a new type of institution. An institution which forces lobbying into a public setting with the aim of democratizing influence. Hearings will be used to ensure a nuanced debate while giving citizens a possibility to voice concerns. In order to make the issues of the lobbying more accessible and understandable to citizens - as well as parliamentarians - part of the forum for discussion will be an exhibition space where objects, concerns and important issues can be exhibited. The new institution will allow the public to scrutinize the process of lobbying while diversifying the representation of interests.**





m Square de Meeûs site, plan section, 1/750. The drawing shows the block with only the structural elements left

- > **We propose the park's northern block as the site of intervention. We want to transform the office block into a new complex that can host new spaces of influence.** Most of the city blocks in the European Quarter, especially around Square de Meeûs are impenetrable by the public. This means that all circulation in the area happens within the grid system along the often very closed facades. The park generally serves as a recreation space for the office workers in the area. However, it does also serve as one of the few public spaces close to the European parliament where you are allowed to assemble a protest.
- > **Stripping the city block from everything but the structural concrete allows a rethinking of the urban fabric. We want to introduce urban patterns that may already exist in Brussels, but do not yet have presence in the European Quarter.**

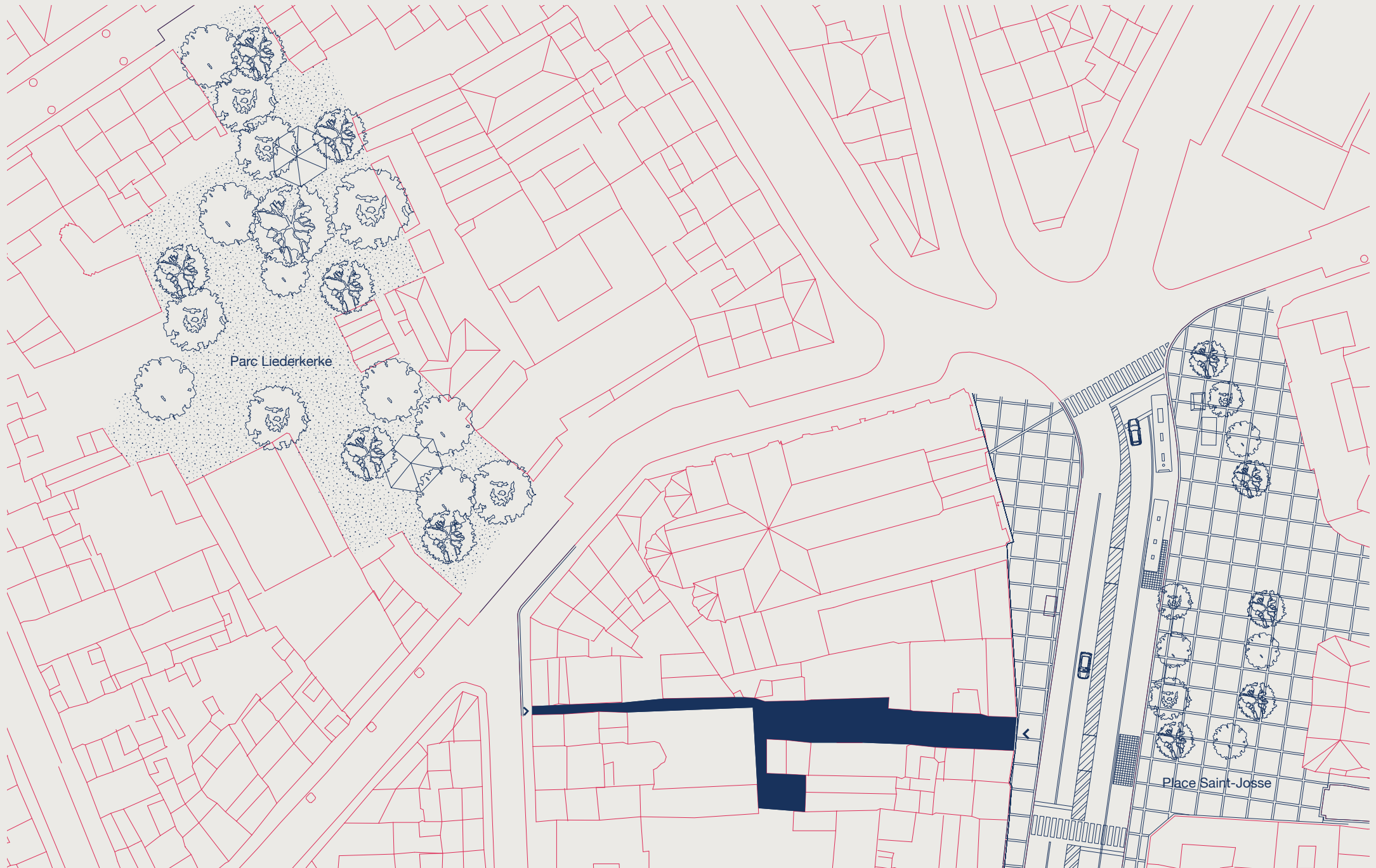


Site: Place Saint Josse

Thousand meters to the north lies Place Saint-Josse in the municipality Saint-Josse. The character of this square is substantially different from Square de Meeûs, with a diversity of buildings and uses. Around the square lies narrow townhouses with four to eight storeys, an imposing Neo-Baroque church, a residential high-rise, grocery stores, cafés, bakeries and a large elementary school.

The diversity is also reflected in the demographics of Saint-Josse with 125 nationalities living within the municipality's one square kilometer. Saint-Josse is the smallest and the most densely populated municipality of Belgium. Furthermore it is the municipality with the lowest income per inhabitant.¹⁸

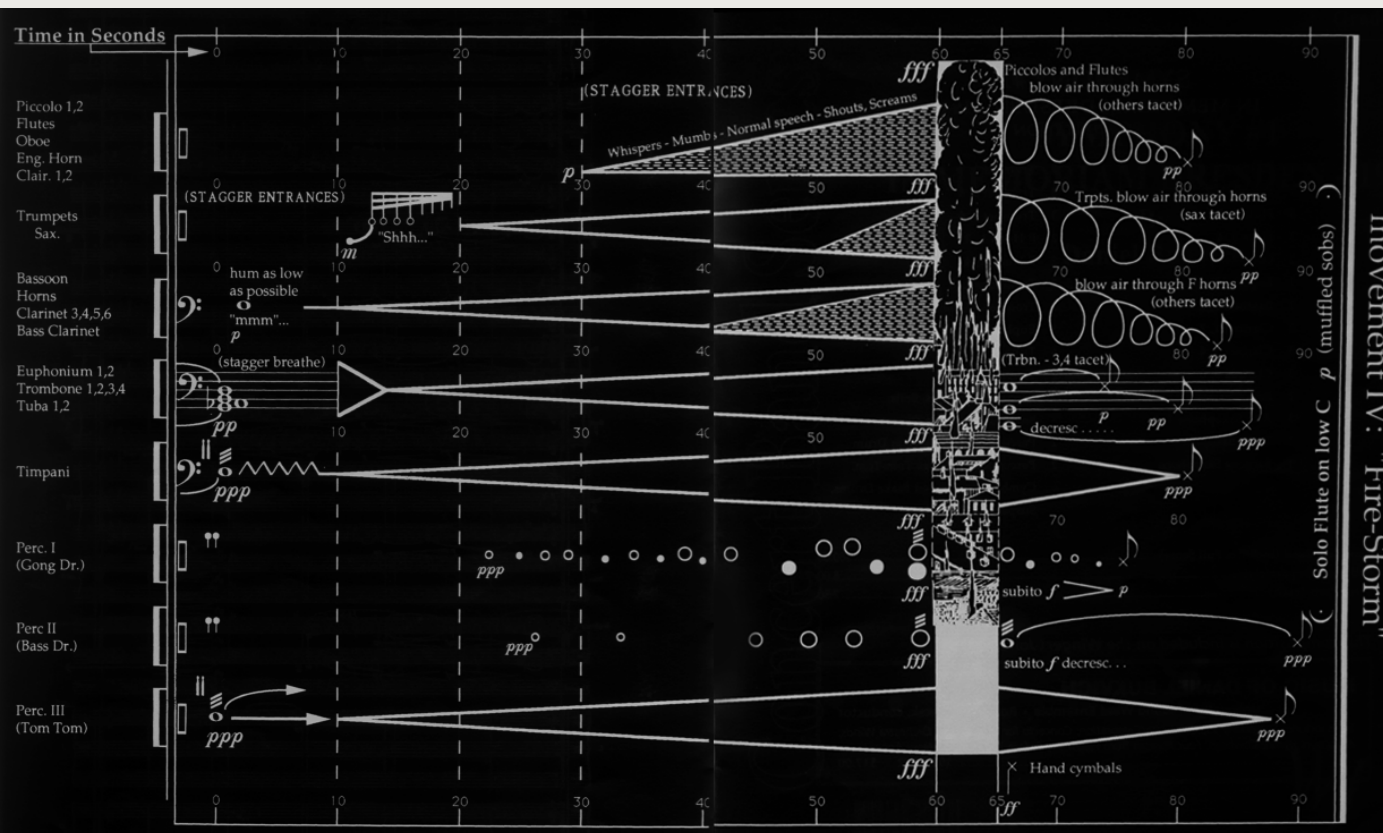
- > In this project, Place Saint-Josse represents a context that contrasts Square de Meeûs. **The project aims at giving average citizens of a neighborhood like Saint-Josse a new channel for influence in the EU. The idea is to develop a typology locally which can be multiplied and used in other contexts across Europe - forming a network of influence that can balance power of the European Quarter.**
- > **On an empty plot in the row of narrow townhouses facing the Place Saint-Josse, the project proposes a place which can gather local members of a citizen's reference panel. The new building is on one hand relating to a larger infrastructure, but it must on the other hand give something to the urban context in which it is situated. The site is chosen because of its connection with the active public square and the possibility of establishing a new public route through the block - connecting the square with the public park Parc Liederkerke.**



Parc Liedekerke

Place Saint-Josse





Process

This chapter describes the methodological framework we will base our project work on. It weaves concepts of time-planning and design process together. The chapter is a preliminary outline of approaches we want to pursue.

- > Aleatoric process
- > Shifting scales
- > Co-evolution
- > Dialogue
- > Time-table

Aleatoric process

Aleatoric music is a method of musical composition and notation where parts of the piece are left to chance. The composer might have defined when the piece begins and ends and at which point the music peaks but does not notate everything on the sheet. This leaves the music to the musicians, the conductor, the audience and the moment. Likewise, **we would like to structure our process around some specific deadlines and events that are defined timewise and are connected to a dynamic design process. The program deliberately leaves space for a process that can develop as it progresses. Production, thinking and ideas are going to be the main drivers for the project. We would like to propose a planning of the thesis period that relates to scale, time and reflection.**

Shifting scales

- > The project has a potential to span across a range of different scales. We will try to work between the specific and the broad, between the human scale and the political scale: **Between situation, sequence and system.**
On a large scale, we will spatialize specific situations we can imagine happening between the lobbyists, the politicians and the citizens and ask how the spaces can transform the meetings. On a smaller scale, we look into how these can start to form new sequences eventually becoming typologies. Which overlaps are productive and how can the whole relate to the context? On the scale of the city, we will examine the potential of the new typologies. What are the urban and political consequences of the interventions? These three strands will start to inform each other through an interwoven process of different scales and media.

Co-evolution

- > **Along with the architectural design work, the project is also developed through writing. Two different types of text will be developed parallel to the project work.**
One text will be concerned with the theoretical context of the proposal. The focus is outward and gathers ideas from relevant theories and gives the project a broader perspective, which can help specify the program of the project.
The other, a logbook, will look more inward. It will represent reflections on progress, right or wrong decisions and discussions directly concerning the project work.

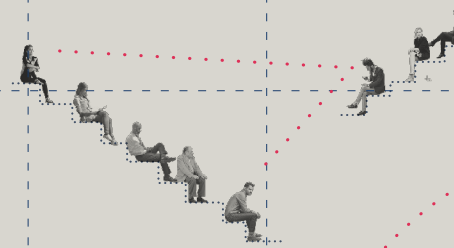
Dialogue

- > *Trial:* Throughout the process we would like to consult relevant stakeholder(s). A revisit to Brussels is included in the process which we will use to discuss our project and receive opinions from people who are either part of - or critiquing the lobby world of Brussels.
- > *Perspective:* A further perspective could be participation in the 'Conference on the Future of Europe' which will run from may 2020 to 2022.¹⁹ The conference is focussed on citizen involvement and how the EU might change in the future. We hope to potentially take the project to Brussels and discuss our studies on influence and lobbying.



Citizen panel

The building in Saint-Josse will accommodate spaces for a local citizen panel to meet, discuss and share information.



Hearings

Hearings will take the lobbying into a formal setting and make it accountable. Issues of public concern will be discussed in an forum where a citizen jury is can listen, ask questions and comment.

Displaying

On Place Saint-Josse, information about what is being legislated on and arguments from hearings will be mediated to the neighborhood.



Public space for protests

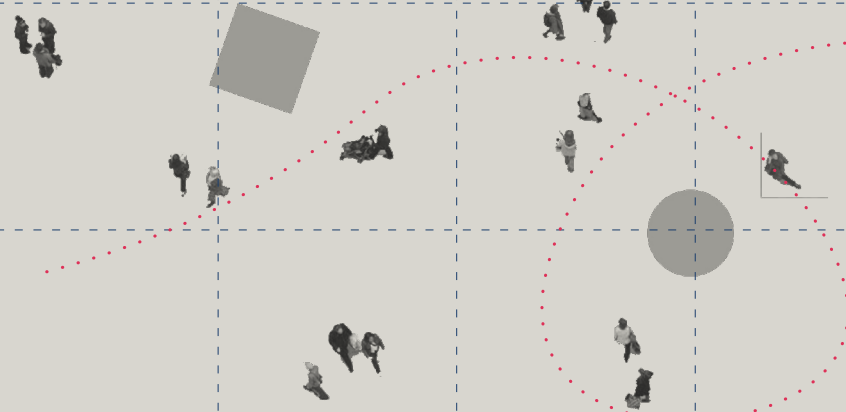
There is a lack of places to protest near the EU institutions. Therefore a new public space is created in relation to the new institution.



The project will work with transparency in a way that not only allows people to see what is going on in the meetings, but also lets the lobbyists and politicians see what people are protesting about.

Community

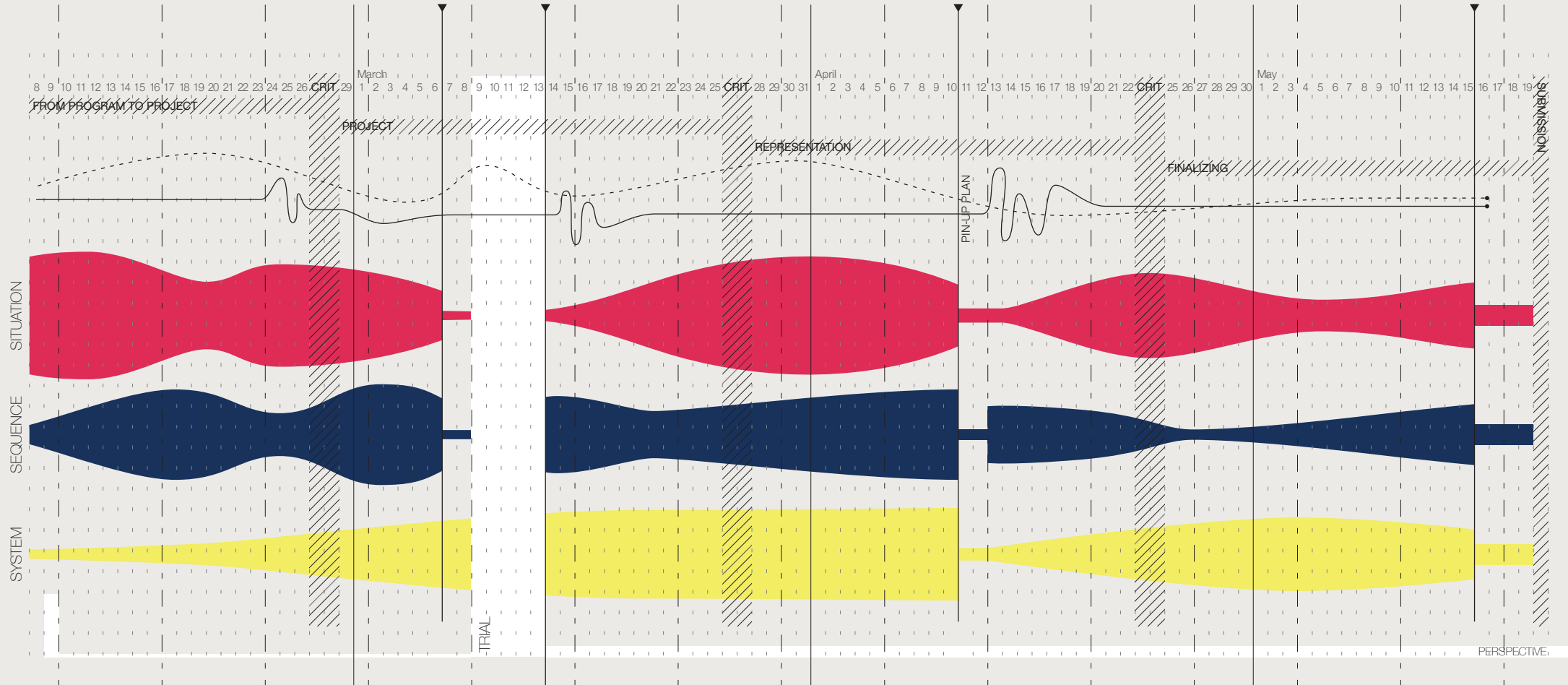
The building in Saint-Josse should give something to the community it is situated in. Along with establishing a new pathway between the square and the park, it should contain activities open to the neighbors.



Exhibition of things

A curated exhibition showcasing a multitude of opinions and things of concern.

Time-table



Sketch specific situations and meeting spaces through models and drawings.

Test and discuss different spaces relative to one another. In sequences.

Preparation for Brussels. Arrange material.

Site registration. Meeting stakeholders

Analysis and reflections on site visits.

Selection and specification of project elements.

Preparation of trial pin-up.

LEGEND:

- Focus
- Theoretical reflection
- Project reflection
- Project phase / recap
- PA:CS calendar

Endnotes

- 1 Lundy, Davis. *Lobby Planet Brussels*.
- 2 United Nations, *The Sustainable Development Agenda - United Nations Sustainable Development*.
- 3 Marie-Luise Abshagen m.fl., "Highjacking the SDGs?"
- 4 United Nations, *Peace, justice and strong institutions - United Nations Sustainable Development*.
- 5 Junk, Wiebke Marie, Interview 2019
- 6 European Commission, *Transparency Register*
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- 8 European Commission, *Transparency Register*
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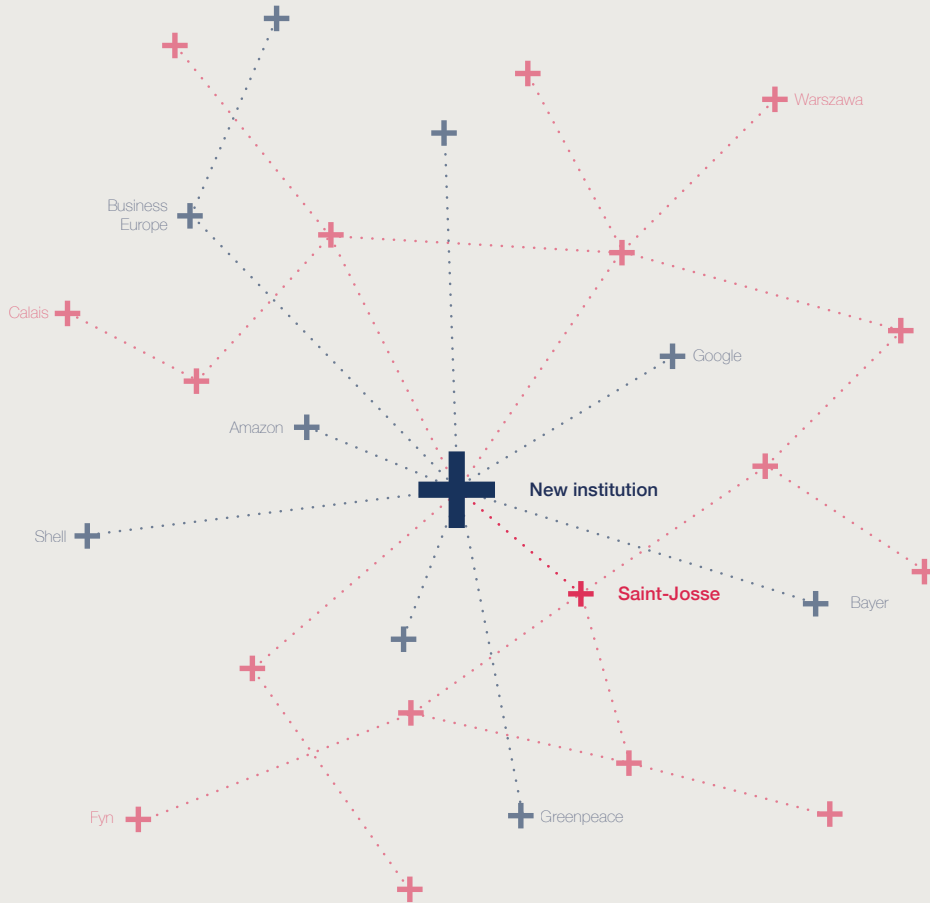
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v The project focuses on two typologies which are parts of a larger network. The building in Saint-Josse is a node in a system of citizen panels (Red). The new institution in the European Quarter formalizes the influence of professional lobbying (Blue) but also provides a connection between the citizen network and the EU institutions.

Summary

- > The project aims at giving average citizens of a neighborhood like Saint-Josse a new channel for influence in the EU.
- > Our project seeks to give citizens access to information and participation in politics, but also access to the city and public space.
- > The project aims at developing new architectural typologies which can accommodate a new kind of political infrastructure.
- > By intertwining the public, in its many representations, with the lobbying process we approach the design of the spaces through various venues of different types of meetings.
- > The project proposes a formalizing of lobbying to make it more equal, accessible and accountable.
- > We want to transform the office block into a new complex that can host new spaces of influence.
- > The project contrasts the genericness of the office buildings in the European Quarter by establishing a spatial language that can mediate power, politics and opinions to the public.
- > Stripping the city block from everything but the structural concrete it allows a rethinking of the connection to the urban context.



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