## Fostering Brussels democracy: an exploration



**Graduation 2017** 

## **Graduation Project**

FOSTERING BRUSSELS DEMOCRACY: AN EXPLORATION

Part II: Design

12 44
Overview Case Study recommendations

14 Exploration
Reference

0.

## Introduction

The design introduced in this booklet is a spatial exploration of fostering democracy in Brussels to decrease social, economic & political inequality

True knowledge exists in knowing that you know nothing.

will not provide a solid answer for any problem, or a technical blueprint with all possible

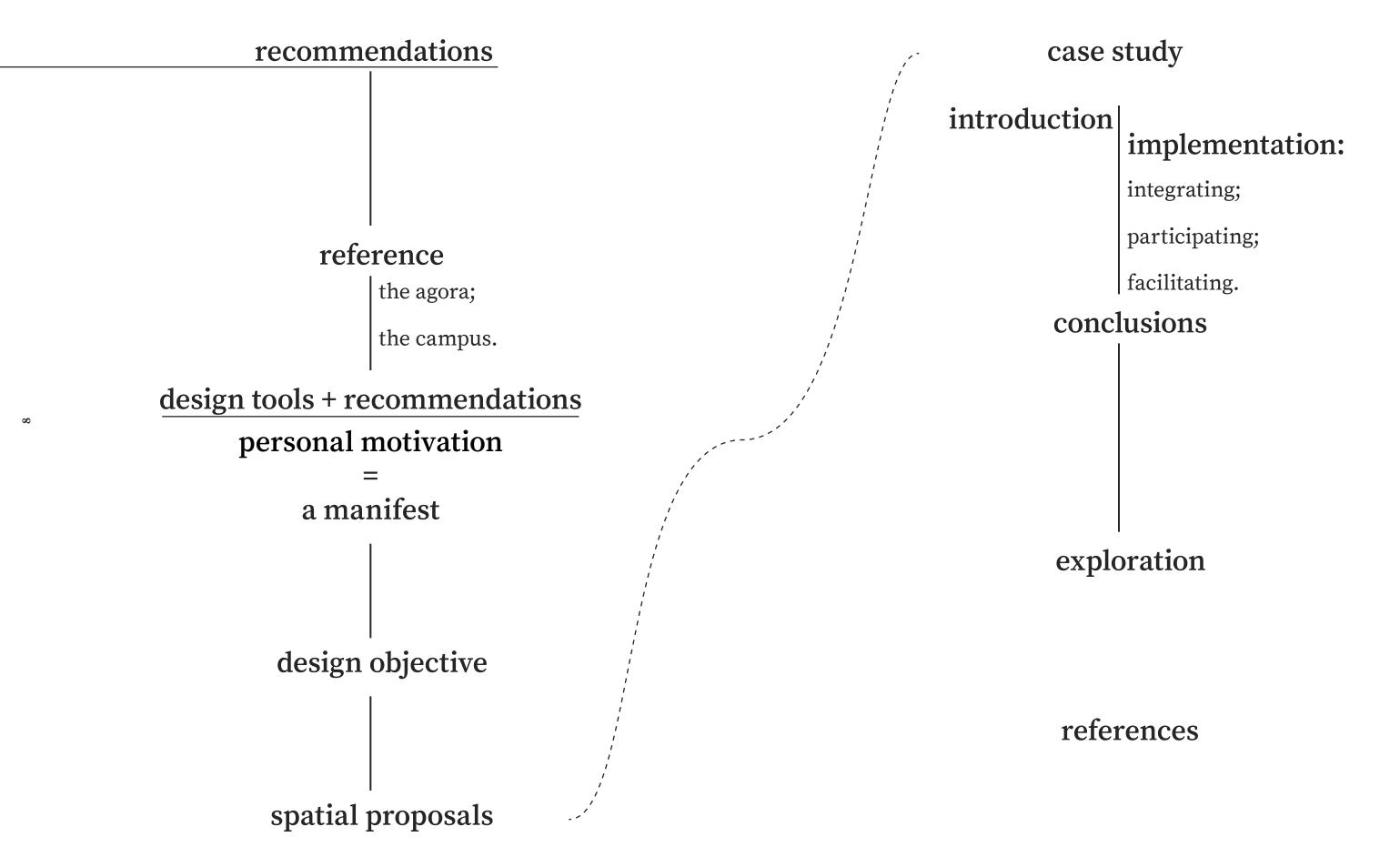
in Brussels. This design

• by Socrates

stakeholders and financial roles for execution. It is an exploration of what spatial transformations could foster the democracy to stimulate equality in Brussels, based on the research explained in part I of this graduation project.

The explanation will start with an overview of the recommendations from part I of this project. Then, a reference will be analyzed, to learn from places that reached similar objectives. The recommendations will then be translated into spatial proposals. Subsequently, a site study will be done from whereon out the proposals will be tested. Lastly, the consequences and further recommendations will be discussed.

BRUSSELS DEMOCRACY INTRODUCTION



BRUSSELS DEMOCRACY INTRODUCTION





## **OVERVIEW**

## Overview

Recommendations for Research

- 01. Integrate public spaces adjacent to political institutes with the daily patterns of different people;
- 02. Implement a multitude of use in these public spaces;
- 03. Lobby activities should be accessible to larger groups in order to use the political potential Brussels has;
- 04. Citizens with a migrant background should get more opportunity to participate in the economy, for example by giving them priority on the job market or by stimulating counter-economic practices;
- 05. Social participation should be improved by stimulating recognition but also by empowering oppressed groups;
- 06. Lobby practices should be moved to the public;
- 07. Accountability of politicians should be improved by facilitating open criticism of politicians;
- 08. It should be addressed to give a voice to people that are unheard due to the current exclusiveness of elections.

# Refer-ence

Looking at other democratic public spaces: the agora

## REFERENCE

### THE AGORA

An example of a public space that served democracy the same way this project is searching for, is the Greek agora.

## Legacy of the Greek

Many gifts have passed down to us by the Greek, and especially the Athenians. Philosophy, theatre, painting, sculpture, architecture, but one gift rules above them all: democracy. The rule by the people. An open and free society that respected the dignity, rights, and aspirations of the individual. The Greek agora, in the middle of the polis, was the beginning of this.

The agora started as a center of the polis because important civic buildings were placed around an empty assembly place. Soon, it developed not only in a civic center but also athletic, artistic and spiritual center of the city. There was painting, shelter for legal proceedings, teaching, celebrations, dramatic performances outside and houses for drama. But political importance remained, together with the freedom of speech and the reassurance of the open polis.

In the agora, everyone was free and respected. Keeping aside that there was a boundary around it, that shut out women, and homeless.

15

## Features stimulating the Polis

When looking at what made the agora so successful in promoting a free and open society, there are certain features that are important in this process.

First of all, the agora was not about one thing. The agora, as mentioned before, was the center of athletic, artistic, spiritual and political activity of the city. This means that there were multiple functions arranged around and in the open space.

The utilitarian function of the agora was the starting point and reason for its vitality along the long haul. To "go agora-ing" in Greek, means not only to seek distinction in speaking out in public, but also to buy and sell things. This combination of commerce and conversation, made it possible to mingle and stand around together in different set-ups and with a high diversity of ambiances.

Thus, it was this precise relation between the different types of uses and different types of users that made them co-dependent. Without commerce, there wouldn't have been the same stimulants or different types of conversation that are needed for a free and fair democracy, and vice versa.

## SOVEREIGNTY OF PUBLIC SPACE IN THE AGORA

The agora is an example in the way a public space ignites conversation

among different people, people that came for the arts, for theatre, for buying or selling stuff and people that came to address politics. Arendt addresses in her assessment of the agora, that the rise of capital made it impossible to preserve the political tradition of a town square, agora or piazza (Arendt, 1963).

As this rise is very present in the society of Brussels today, this notion is important to keep in mind. The sovereignty of these places are dependent on the authenticity and self-reliance of the functions in its place. As the agora was a type of town-square in a city-state, where the city was more important than the nation, it had less authenticity issues experienced in society today (Sennett, 2003). But, in nation-states like Belgium or even continent-states like the European Union, these issues are very present and should be addresses in the creation of a public space that is to serve democracy throughout these scales.

## Keeping authenticity

So, the aspects of having a multitude of uses and users while keeping a level of authenticity and self-reliance are important for the functionality of the agora. Moreover, the relation between the uses: Commerce & Conversation, makes it possible to mix politics with general city life and have engagement with politics among all citizens.

These aspects can be concluded with one word: **collegiality**. The users and the uses of the agora are functioning as colleagues. They are different, have different positions in the city and different meanings, but they function together as a whole. Like colleagues function together in a company, needing each other precisely because of their differences.

## DESIGN-TOOLS IN THE AGORA

The agora was a specifically designed public place. Not in the way as we know it today, organized beforehand and drawn out in precision, but in the course of time, the agora developed certain design tools that stimulated the before mentioned processes.

## Translation of the tools

As mentioned before, the agora was filled with a multitude of functions, and all these functions shaped certain spaces in the agora. These spaces were: the open walkway, the boundary, the courtyard, the bema, the theater and the stoa. These 5 different spaces are not specific to one of the functions in the agora. Because these spaces had an 'open relation' with the functions, specifically because they didn't relate directly to certain functions, they were used for a multitude of reasons and by a multitude of users.

Furthermore, after analyzing these design-tools it's possible to relate

them to contemporary public spaces and learn about the way these design-tools still function in our current society instead of only in the Greek society.

## DESIGN-TOOLS OF THE AGORA IN THE CAMPUS-MODEL

One of the most clear examples of the combination of design-tools in a contemporary public space is the Campus. There are generally two types of campuses:

- 1. The corporate campus;
- 2. The educational campus.

## Processes of the Agora in the Campus

Just like in the Agora, the campus features open walkways, courtyards, covered walkways similar to the stoa, settings that resemble theaters and often speaking zones such as the bema in the Agora.

But besides these design-tools, similar processes as in the Agora can be seen there as well. Contemporary campuses are different then the original, where the origin of campuses, come from the Edenic Hortus Conclusus, with a clear boundary around a courtyard and a strong focus on isolation.

These ideas are taken from the cloister where the Agora has their initial form from as well. The contemporary campus is the advocation of an ambivalence of inclusion and isolation, creating a diversity of spaces and users through this indecision. With spaces as the corridor, the courtyard, the open space, and a high diversity of functions when integrated with existing or new developed urban form, it creates a space for interaction not only between different users of the certain specific functions such as the offices or educational institutes, but between the whole range of the city, from educated to homeless selling newspapers to elderly using the computers in the University Library.

In the Campus, the same collegiality is visible between users and uses, as is seen in the Agora, stimulating this interrelation between commerce and conversation, and taking in the whole spectrum of citizens to participate in the way they desire. This collegiality is thus taken is a starting point for the following design proposal.

COMPARISON OF THE AGORA AND THE CAMPUS

Relating the different forms creating similair processes in public

## functions: campus

the civic office

the stadium

the market

the corridor

the classroom

the library

space, to come to a conclusion about which elements stimulate what. ATHENIAN AGORA A. D. 150 5 TELEGRAPHICAN
5 ACROPOLIS
6 KLEPSYDRA SPRINGHOUSE
7 ELEUS N ON
8 HOUSES 30 EPONYMOUS HERDES 31 ALTAR OF ZEUS AGORJ 32 DOEION 33 PANATHENAIC WAY 34 TEMPLE OF ARES

the stoa

the theater

the bema

the courtyard

the boundary

the walkway

tools: agora



## Manifest

Linking the research to personal motives

## MANIFEST

As a designer, I believe it's important to underline your own subjectivity and work with this, instead of trying to work from a completely objective viewpoint and basing your design on this. Every one has their personal opinions and way of viewing their surrounding, and when becoming aware of this, you are able to use it as an argumentation in your design instead of as unconscious assumptions in your research.

## **WHY A MANIFEST**

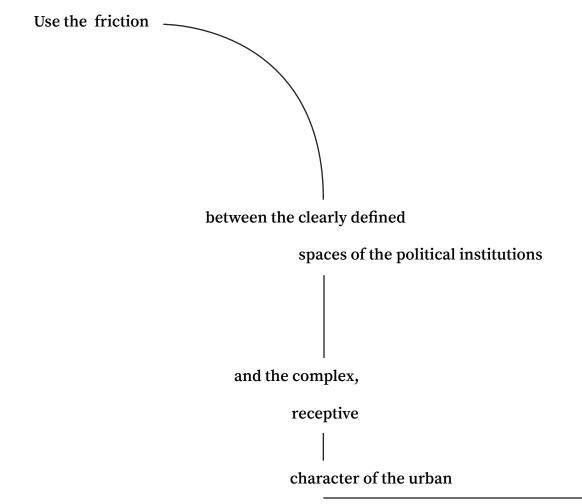
A suitable medium for communicating these beliefs is a manifesto. As a manifesto is a clear and well known declaration of intentions by the issuer, from the moment of reading a manifest the reader will be aware of the relation between research and intentions or opinion of the writer.

The manifest for this research focuses on steering the formerly found objectives and recommendations into a spatial design with clear boundaries, and describes the reason behind the choices made between these phases.

The urban is the only landscape complex, diverse and rich enough to provoke communication between dissimilar types of people. Especially in the age of distinct and monocultural experiences, complexity provides a refuge, an opportunity to revive a spirit that lies dormant in clearly defined spaces.

Ultimately, this project aims to design opportunities and not boundaries as it is the citizen who should define the change it needs in this world, not the designer.

Thus, the project aims to design ways for stimulating complexity thought opportunities and thereby dissolving mono-cultural and apathic experiences.



through designing a <u>collegial complex</u> that incorporates <u>uses and users</u> of <u>the city and the political</u>

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## Design

The overall design proposal

After taken into account the personal motivations for this project and combining them with the design tools from the agora, the next step is to relate these to the recommendations from the research. The spatial transformation will be based upon this relation.

**DESIGN** 

The most important design objectives taken from the agora are the collegiality and the danger of having capitalism take out the sovereignty that a public space needs to have space for a neutral political space.

From these 3 design objectives: collegiality, different users & different uses and sovereignty of a public space independently of capitalism, the recommendations from part I are integrated. These recommendations can be found in the beginning of this booklet. Together with the manifesto, the urban areas next to political institutes are chosen as the transformation areas. These areas can be found on the next page.

When looking at the different users as a first objective an important recommendation out Part I of the project is to integrate public spaces adjacent to political institutes with the daily patterns of different people, and to remove the current isolation of politicians. Together with the objective of improving opportunities to socially and politically participate while moving political processes like lobbying and criticizing politicians to the public, these processes reinforce each other.

The spatial transformation then is focused on three elements of transformation that influence the space all in their own way, but couldn't work separately, like in the agora. The relation is like that of the Agora, where the freedom of the citizens determines the use, the sovereignty of the public space determine the wide range of opportunities and the political functions and politicians the conversations.

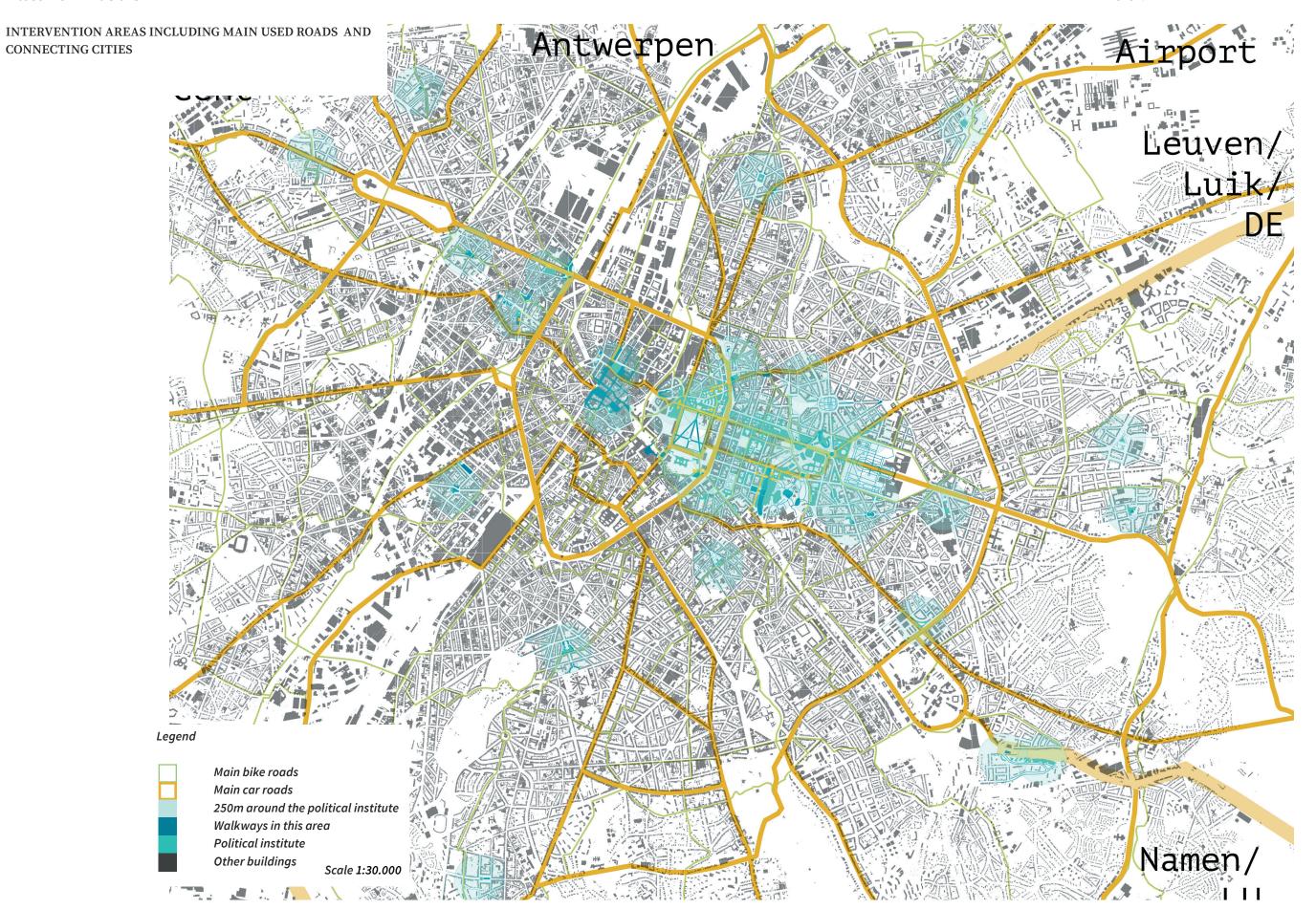
As mentioned by Arendt about the disappearance of the Agora, the town-square and the Piazza, because of the influence of capitalism through the nation-state taking away the power of the polis or localities, this is tried to diminish through the focus on all political spaces in the city, see the plan on the next page. This stimulates the importance of locality and improves the importance of citizens throughout the levels of governance. As the city has all these municipal-buildings, as well as federal and Brussels Capital governance and EU-institutes, the implementation of this transformation throughout these scales will create a singular way of increasing citizen authority throughout the scales, and through linking theses scales.

Through the transformation of all these, very different, public spaces, not only in these public spaces themselves authority will change and the analyzed problems will be lessened, but it's also important that these public spaces will create a new social infrastructure of empowerment and this social infrastructure will be able to work through the scales of governance, as Brussels is a city where all these levels are represented and able to mix in public life.

Three specific proposals

The three transformations will be introduced in this chapter and examined in depth with the case study

- -Integrating politicians in public life
- -Enabling bottom-up participation
- -Facilitating expression



INTEGRATING POLITICIANS IN PUBLIC LIFE

A visualization of the two different political institutes present in the city.

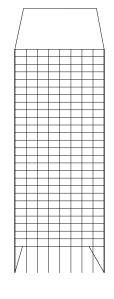
Integrating politicians with public life, through changing their daily pattern.

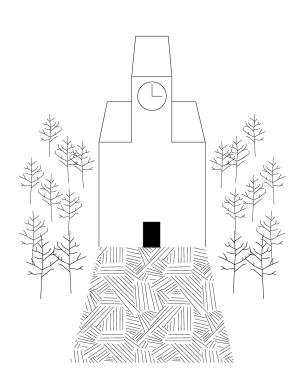
Notice the difference between the political institutes across the city: either designed traditional or modern, both having their own relation with public space and the life happening there.

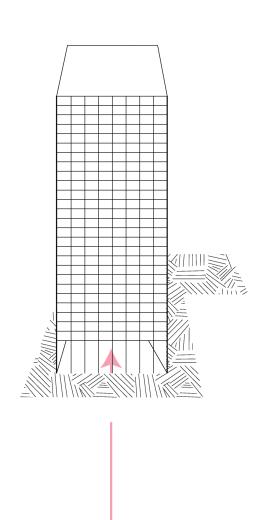
Move parking and public transport to strategic places in order to create a public space that will be crossed by the users of the political buildings.

This creates a much needed areas for interaction with politics, for different layers, within the whole city.

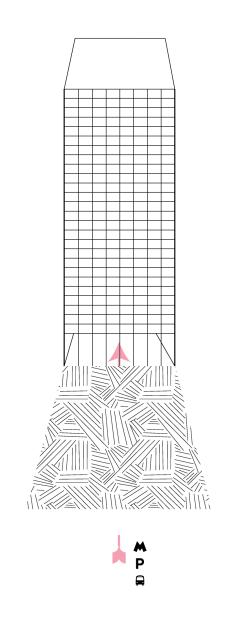
modern traditional

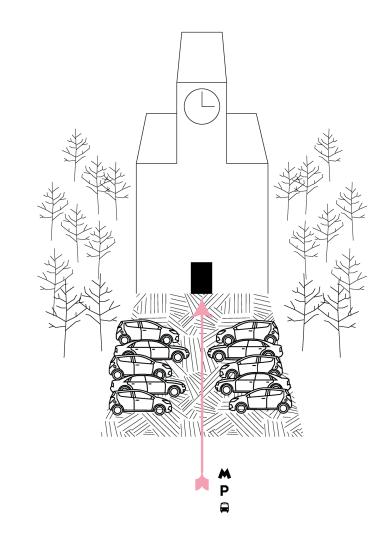


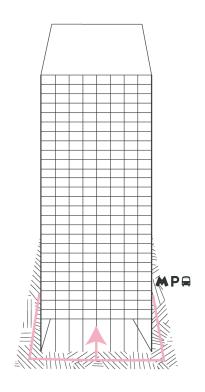


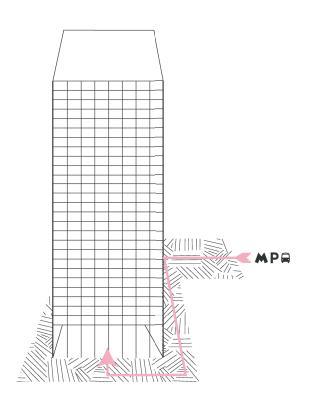


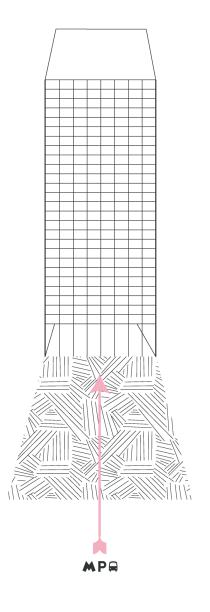
modern

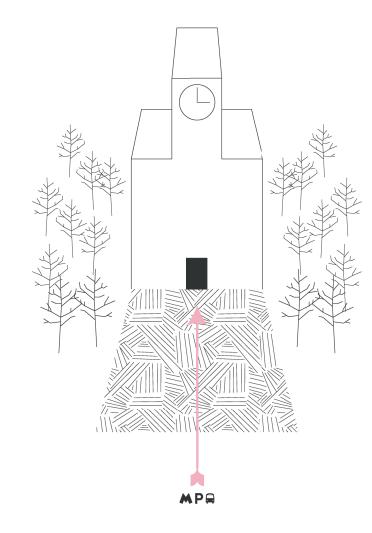












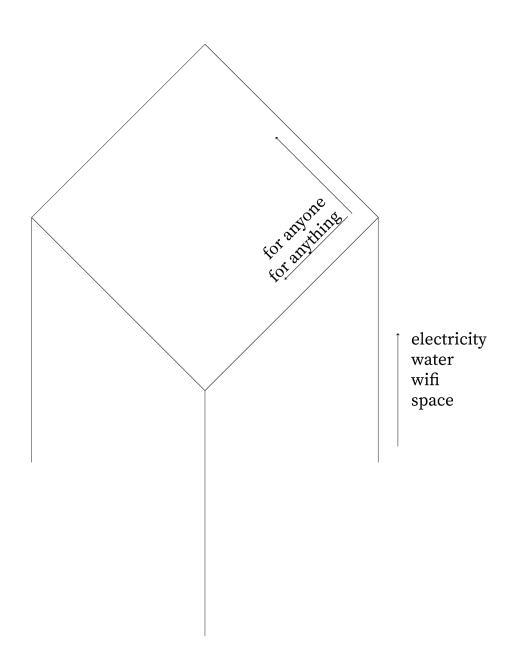
Enable bottom-up participation, through the implementation of a modifiable structure.

Through providing all necessary commons for participation a space is created for filling any local needs.

The commons, electricity, water, wifi and merely space stimulate a wide range of possibilities, while the different scales differentiate this even further.

Moreover, because these diverse possible uses, it will become a testing ground interesting for politics. See what people need, by providing them the minimum necessities to fulfill those needs.

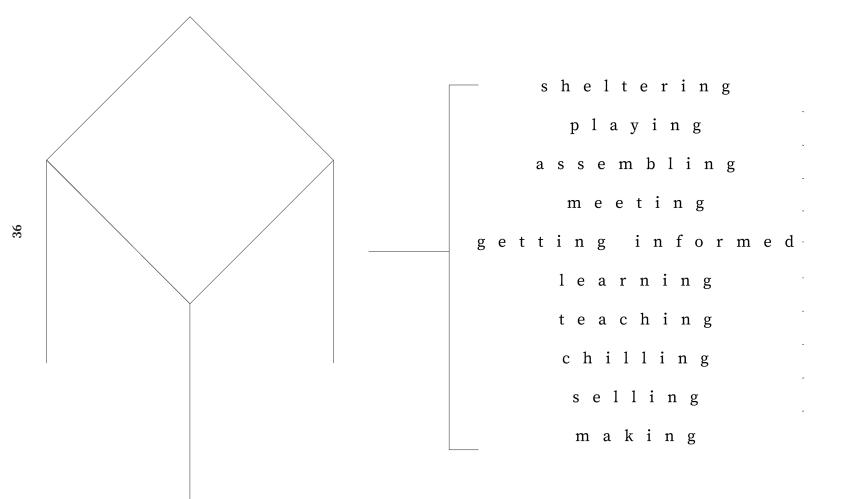
commodification

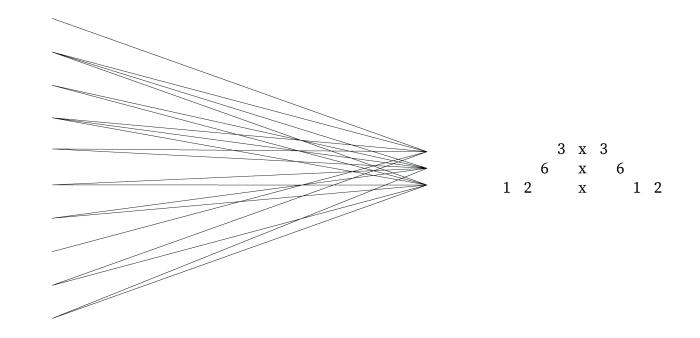


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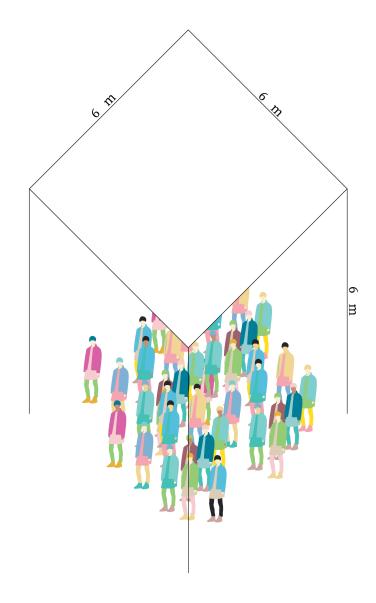
OPPORTUNITIES CREATED BY THE MODIFIABLE STRUCTURE Different uses and users will be stimulated not only through providing the commons but will also be differntiated through the sizes of the structure.

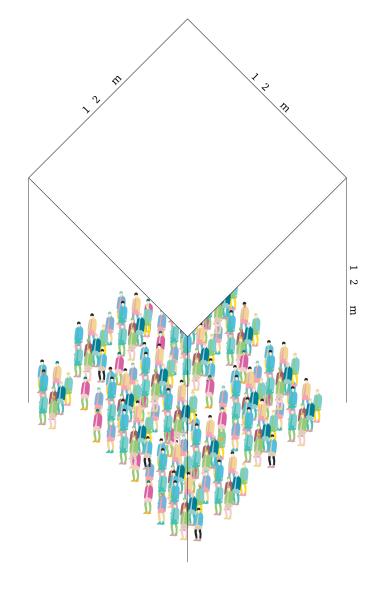
structure opportunities scale of form





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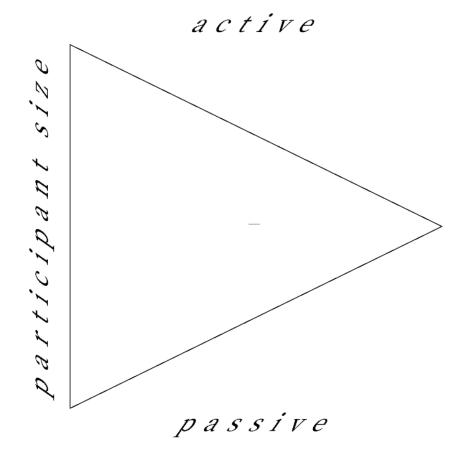


Facilitate the whole spectrum of expression in the areas of interaction, defined before.

By facilitating the whole spectrum of expression, a multitude of interaction with others becomes possible.

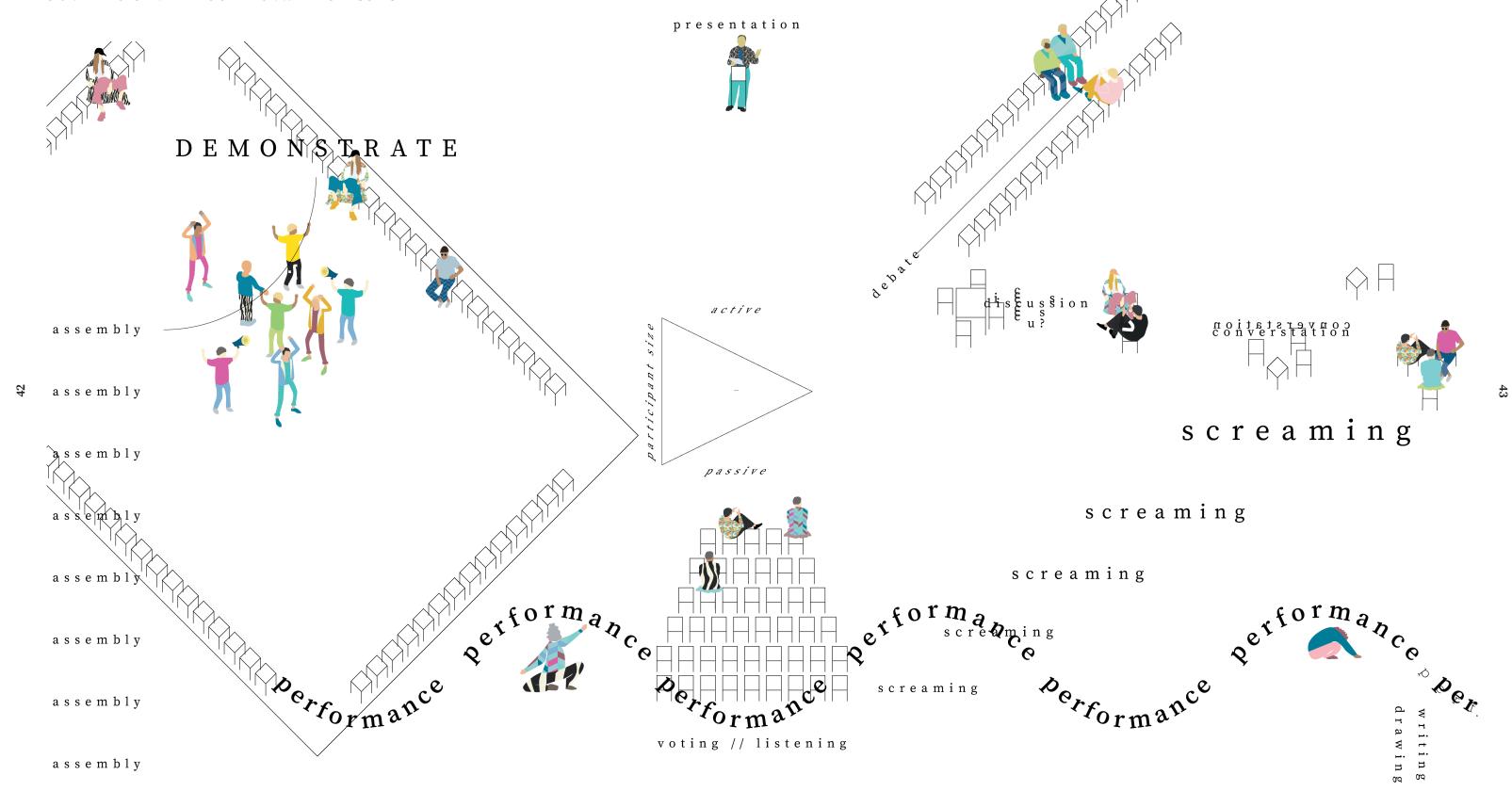
The different forms of expression are analyzed through their use of public space. All methods of expression are analyzed between active & passive expression and related with the participant size.

This creates an overview of the facilities needed for the different forms of expression, relating them with public space and with each other.



BRUSSELS DEMOCRACY DESIGN

VISUALIZATION OF WHOLE SPECTRUM OF POSSIBLE EXPRESSION METHODS AND THEIR RELATION WITH PUBLIC SPACE



45

## Case Study

The overall design proposal

## CASE STUDY

To assess the spatial implications of this design proposal, a case site is chosen where the transformations will be implemented. Because it's out of reach for this project to implement the proposal for every intervention area, this way the design can still be explored and the effects analyzed.

### LOCATION

For this case study, the Espace Léopold together with Luxemburgsquare have been chosen.

This public spaces stand out from the rest as it's adjacent to the biggest and most contested democratic institute of Europe. Besides, it seems as if the design is made in such a way to stimulate at least movement along the boulevard that parallels the parliament.

Moreover the contrast between the Luxemburgsquare and Espace Léopold, where Espace Léopold is very majestic and mainly focused on representative democracy without any actual use and Luxemburgsquare is a more small scale and used public space, with commercial terraces and taxis aligned to pick up or drop of all the MEP's or corporate employees.

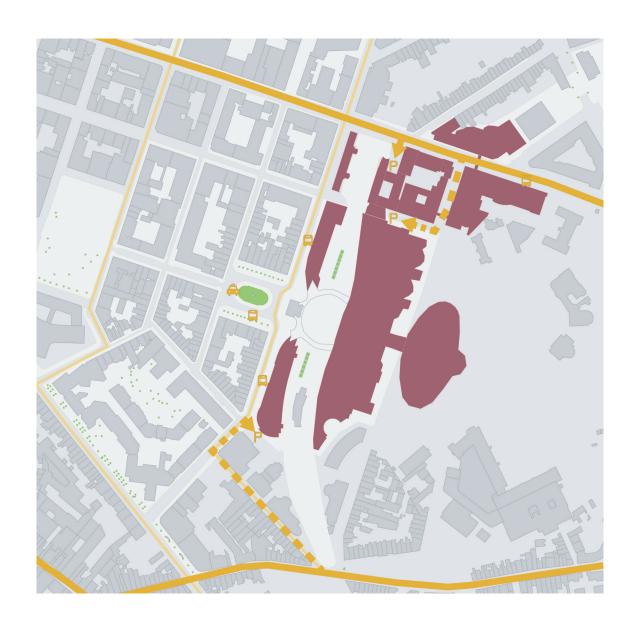
Last, the high amount of security measures on the Mall, the pedestrian area adjacent to the Parliaments building, are so extreme that there must be something improved to give democracy a form that doesn't need this extensive amount of security. If the citizens are given a place in decision-making, and their authority is being respected, this security against partners in decision-making would be possibly lower or completely removed.

## SPECIFIC INTEGRATION OF THE PROPOSALS

As the specific transformation introduced in the last chapter, will be implemented it's important to first look at the design on a step-to-step basis, from whereon out general conclusions about the effect of the design proposals can be made.

## INTEGRATING POLITICIANS WITH PUBLIC LIFE

The first step of the design is integrating the politicians with the public. Starting from the daily patterns not being integrated with any public life, as can be seen in the plan below, transformed to a situation where the daily patterns of politicians run through the designated public space, creating an area for integration, conversation and diversification. The parking lot will be placed across the Luxemburgsquare. Together with this, the public transport-routes will be replaced as well to create neuralgia, a more used site by different transport modes and different people. The effect of this transformation can be seen in the plan on the opposite page





## Legend



European parliament Integration area Walking route Car route

Scale 1:2000

## **FUNCTION ANALYSIS**

### **ENABLE BOTTOM UP PARTICIPATION**

The second transformation is the enabling of bottom-up participation.

### Reason

As became clear from the research, there are multiple obstacles for participation among different groups in Brussels. There is not just one problem, or one group, or one way of participation that is disabled or troubled in Brussels. It is political, social and economic. It is citizens with migrant backgrounds and their ability to find a job. It is neighborhoods that lack in childcare. It is groups living segregated. It is civic activity groups that don't have places to gather (Vertovec, 2007). The conclusion of this analysis together with the multitude of uses is to not to enable certain specific participation methods, but rather, enable Do It Yourself participation opportunities.

### Execution

To be able to enable bottom up / DIY participation opportunities, it's important to at least provide the elements all citizens need to participate in the broadest sense. These elements are: space, water, Wi-Fi & electricity. This structure will be open for modification and commodification, making anything possible inside. From setting up a building-lab for students nearby, to a film studio to directly report on the activities within the EU parliament or organize a brochure hand-out assembly. To make as much participation possible as necessary, the structure is differentiated in 3 scales: S: 3x3m, M: 6x6m and L: 12x12m. With these sizes, opportunities can take place in these different forms. The Smallscale is more prone for activities that generally happen in rooms. This scale has a more closed feeling, as it is the size of a mediocre bedroom. The Medium-scale can function as a small playing field, as a classroom or for example a workshop room. This size is more public when not having additions to close the sides, but can still be used for a specific group, and for that group be a private area. The L-scale is for bigger assemblies and activities. From big playing field to theater-settings, an ice-skating rink, anything is possible.

## Current uses in the site

As the case-study site has two distinct area's the uses of this structure will also be implemented according to the specific characteristics of this area. The implementation of this structure can be seen on the next page. As seen in this figure, the part at the Luxemburgsquare mostly has the S-scale structure. This is since all buildings and activity happening in this site is also 'small scale'. The buildings are mostly former houses and now house either commercial functions like restaurants or bakeries or on the south-side a small university and partly empty buildings.

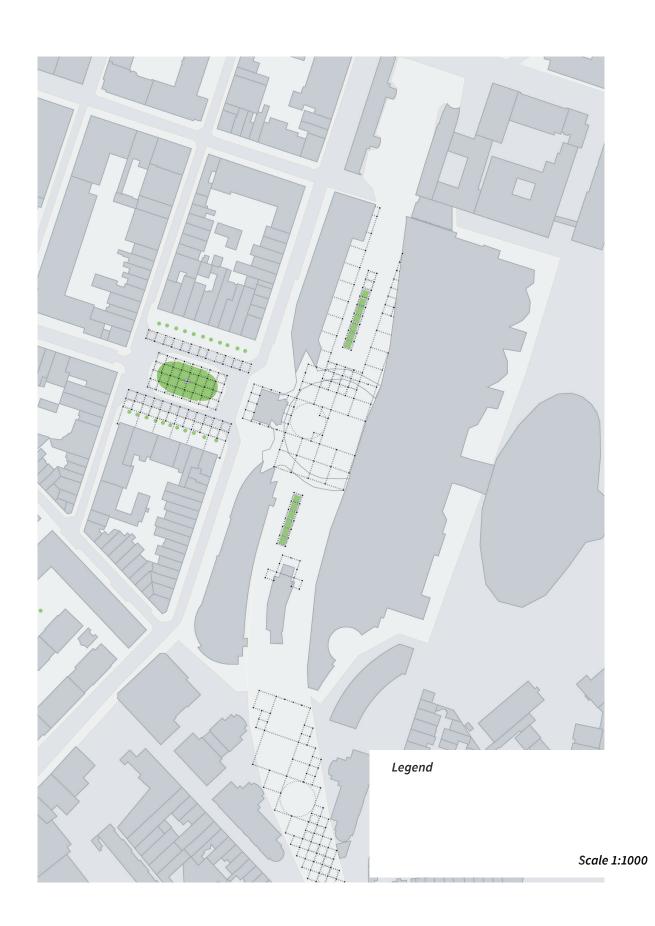
To accommodate these people and react upon the new placements of public transport and parking, there is one row of Medium-scaled structure alongside the university and partly empty building, connected to a double row of small scale structure that goes over the sidewalk. The medium-scaled structure enables a connection between the university building, as can be seen in figure and examined more thoroughly on page 61, and then creates a more intimate place for all kinds off purposes: hanging out with student-friends, waiting for the bus, parking your bike, handing out brochures for a university event, and anything else. Right above this is a maze of small-scaled structure the like. This is to give the area an impulse of activity, by placing these structures and their possibility of engaging citizens in forming their surroundings, it might become a more used area. By making it small and maze-like it stimulates more intimate activity or activity resembling a souk, like can be seen in Arabic or Northern-African countries. To grow activity outside the commercial realm a stoa resembling form of the structure is also placed on the sidewalk, Northern again.

## Implementing the design

At the Espace Léopold, 2 L-scale structures and some more medium scaled structures are placed, accompanying the big size of the mall itself and of the building, in addition to the large entrance of the building. The two large-scale structures are appropriate for the use of big assembly activities, such as spoken-word, hanging big banners, performances from or for the EU parliament or generally giving the space more form and thereby more function. The smaller scaled structure could be appropriated for selling goods or propagating ideas or campaigning. By giving everybody in society the ability to appropriate this structure according to their needs, it's made easy for oppressed to transfer into empowerment, as everything that might stand in their way of improving their situation, is diminished by being able to use this structure. Even if they don't use it, the mere possibility means that they are being less oppressed and opens doors for becoming empowered.

Obviously, these structures are to be filled with activity after being placed. Their placements and scale are determined on scenario's and possibilities, not on certainties. But this is not the goal of the structure, the goal is to give the opportunities, and use it as a reflective tool of what people might or might not need to improve their situation. Subsequently, the current set-up of the specific sites determines for a large part what set-up of structures and scale would be possible and appropriate there, the citizens further enable the rest.

The third and last spatial transformation is that of facilitating conversation or expression.



To not only give authority back to the citizens, but also making it easier to hold leaders accountable through criticizing them and through opening political processes, while making the most of the first transformative step –the integration of politicians with the public-there should be facilities that stimulate conversation and expression.

## Reason

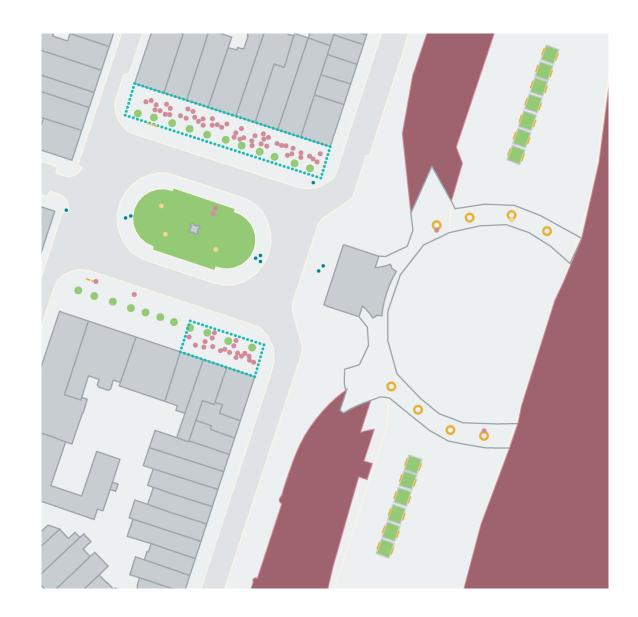
It is purposefully that this should not just be conversation or just expression, but both and the whole scala in between. Expression is defined in this project as ranging from demonstrations to listening to a presenter or doing a performance. As all these forms of expression have a different relation with space, an analysis has been done to relate them with their relation with space, and relate these relations again with each other. What an activities' relation to space is determined by the number of the participants, and the rate of activity of the expressive performance. So is an assembly always a 'big' group, where a conversation happens mostly with 2-5 people. Moreover, a conversation is a lightly passive way of expressing, where an assembly can range from an extremely active march to a silent sit-in. As visualized in on page 42-43, the different expression-activities all have a different way of being active or passive and the size of its participant group. From hereon out, conclusions can be drawn on the way these expressive activities use space and which facilities they need to use space.

## How

As seen in figure 42-43, most of them don't really need facilities, the only thing they need is something to sit on, something to stand behind, or something to sit around and lean on. With these three items, it's easy to form space and stimulate these specific forms of expression. When assembling the stools in an audience-like set-up, together with four items to stand behind, the people using these elements will automatically be transformed into audience and preachers. Thus, contrasting with the structure that enables something, when activated by participants, the facilitations of expression form the activity themselves.

## Current atmospheres in the site

Regarding the case-site, the two distinctive public spaces ask, again, for a very different approach. Where the Luxemburgsquare is an area of meeting, mingling, sitting, eating, chatting and, lobbying, the Espace Léopold and the mall is vacant and exclusively used for waiting and representing the grand face of democracy that the European Parliament is. So, these differences ask for very different forms of expression as well.

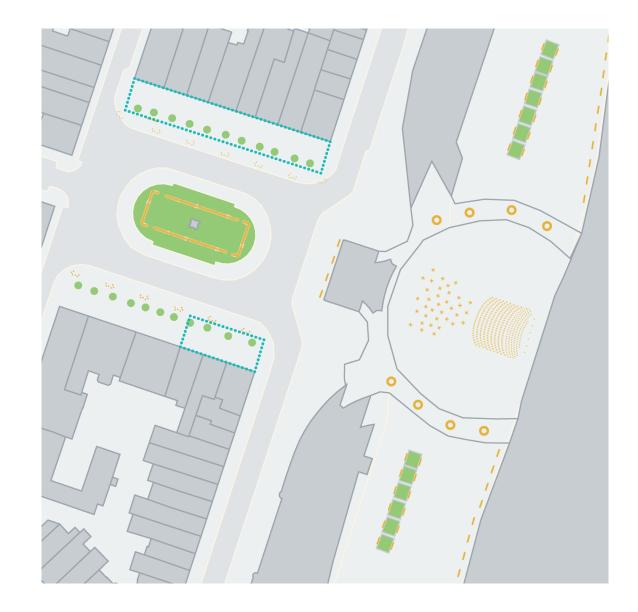


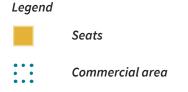


Scale 1:500

For the Luxemburgsquare, as people are now waiting on using a picnic table, and either sitting on paid terraces or sitting on the ground, one long table can stimulate the mixture of conversations that is necessary for stimulating awareness and integration. Along the small-scaled structure closer to the facades, stools are organized for multiple types of use. They can be occupied by 3 times a duo, or 6 people in advance, but they are set-up in such a way that when 2 people would sit on them, and a third of third and fourth person would join them in the same groupings of stools, they would be stimulated to interact or at least acknowledge one another.

In the case of Espace Léopold it's a totally different story, as told. Because the scale of this area is bigger and the democratic value of the area is solely determined by the representative-focused character of the building, the form of expression facilitated in this area should be able to relate to this and weigh against this 'heavy' architecture. This is done by creating a copy of the general assembly room for the parliament in front of the entry, where the speakers are situated either amid two audiences, one formed by the stools on the square and one formed on the stairs in the building itself. The speakers have nowhere to hide and the audience can choose to either be on the passive or active audience side, where the passive is always behind the speaker, merely observing and silently criticizing, where the so-called active audience is in front of the speaker, ready to engage. Moreover, behind the active audience are chairs and tables that form a kind of congregate area based on a multitude of activities. Sitting there, you can still easily hear and observer the possible speakers at the pulpits. Because of this, the chairs and tables can serve as a silent observer or a distant critic but also merely as a gaming area or eating area or some other kind of activity where people would like to sit with 1-4 people around a table.

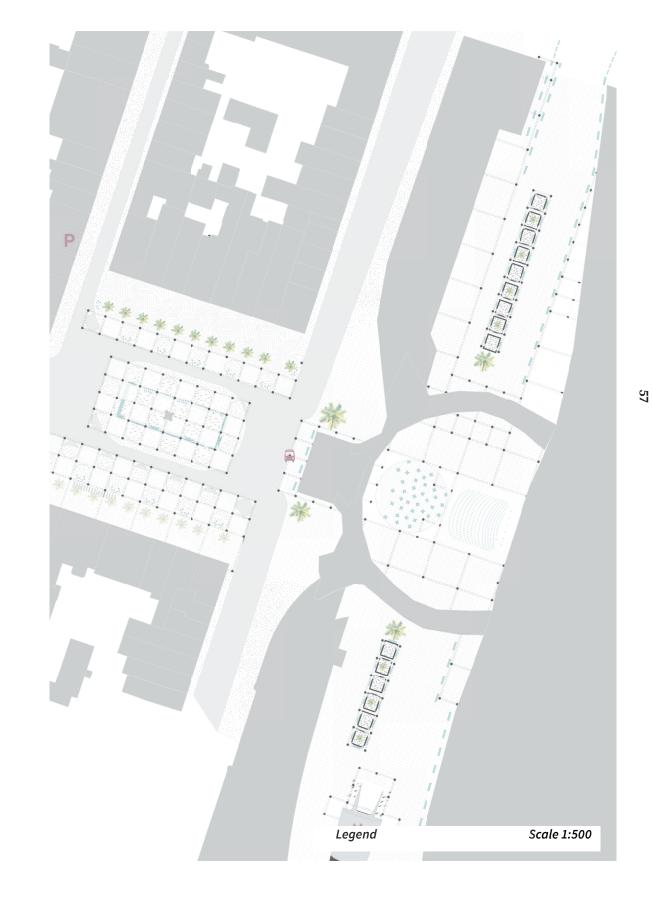




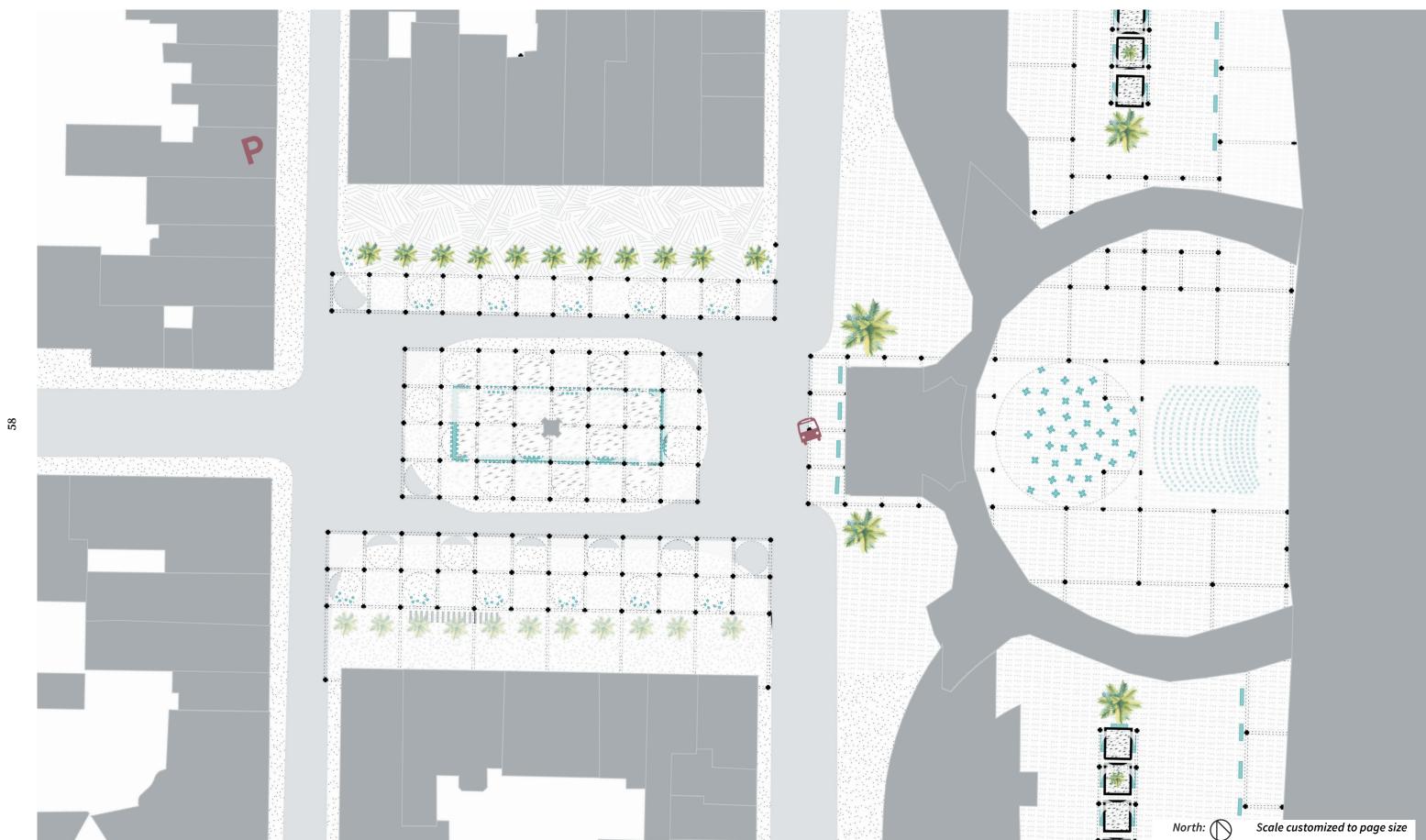
BRUSSELS DEMOCRACY CASE STUDY

## CONCLUDING

Concluding this, not these three transformations alone, but them together, mark the change that will transfer this a-political or a-democratic public space into a democratic one, and not just into a democratic one but one were equality will be improved and lives will be bettered. Because, it is not just through expressing, or just through interacting with politicians but it is the threefold of expressing in a public space where stakeholders might be mingling and participating in a way where politics and commerce are intertwining, it is integrating the politicians in a place where participation is being improved and questions and conversations about anything and everything are being held. It is this combination that makes the transformation a suitable and successful transformation for this project.

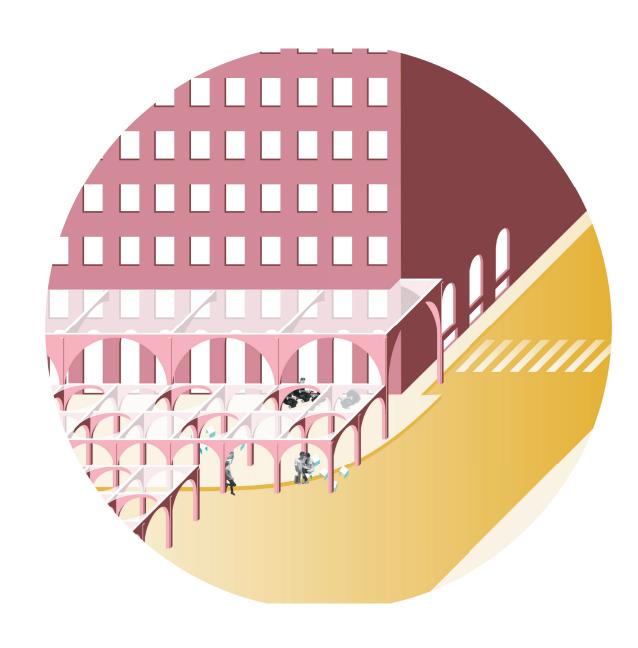


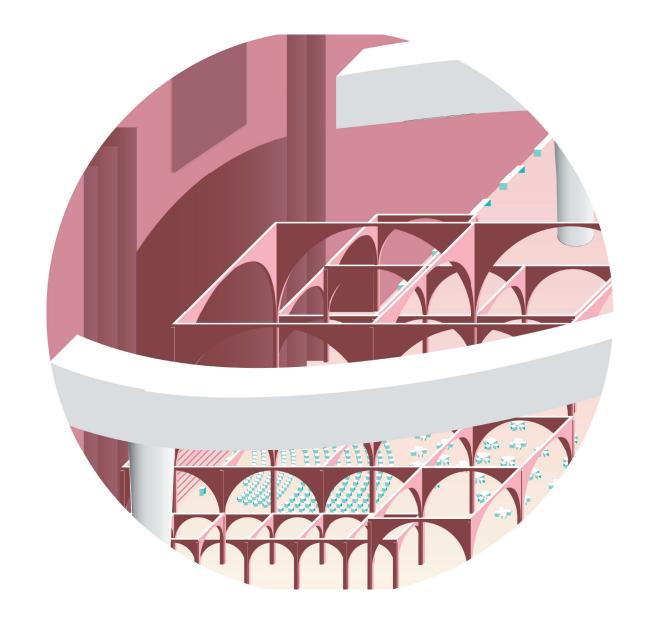
CASE STUDY

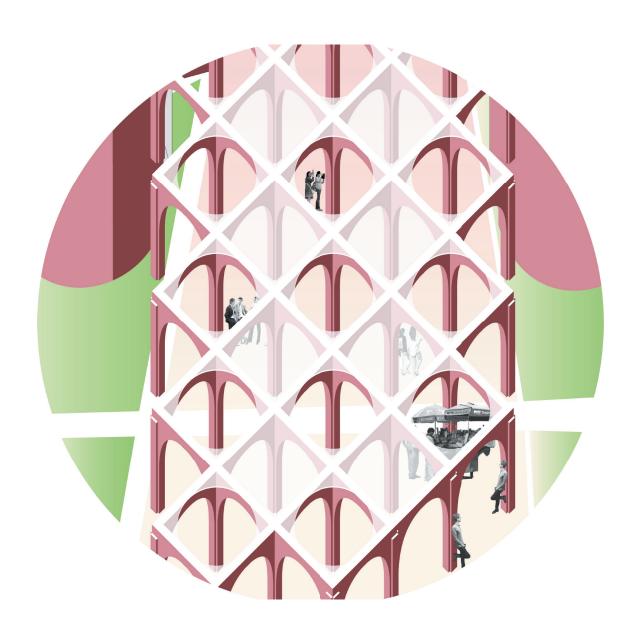


BRUSSELS DEMOCRACY









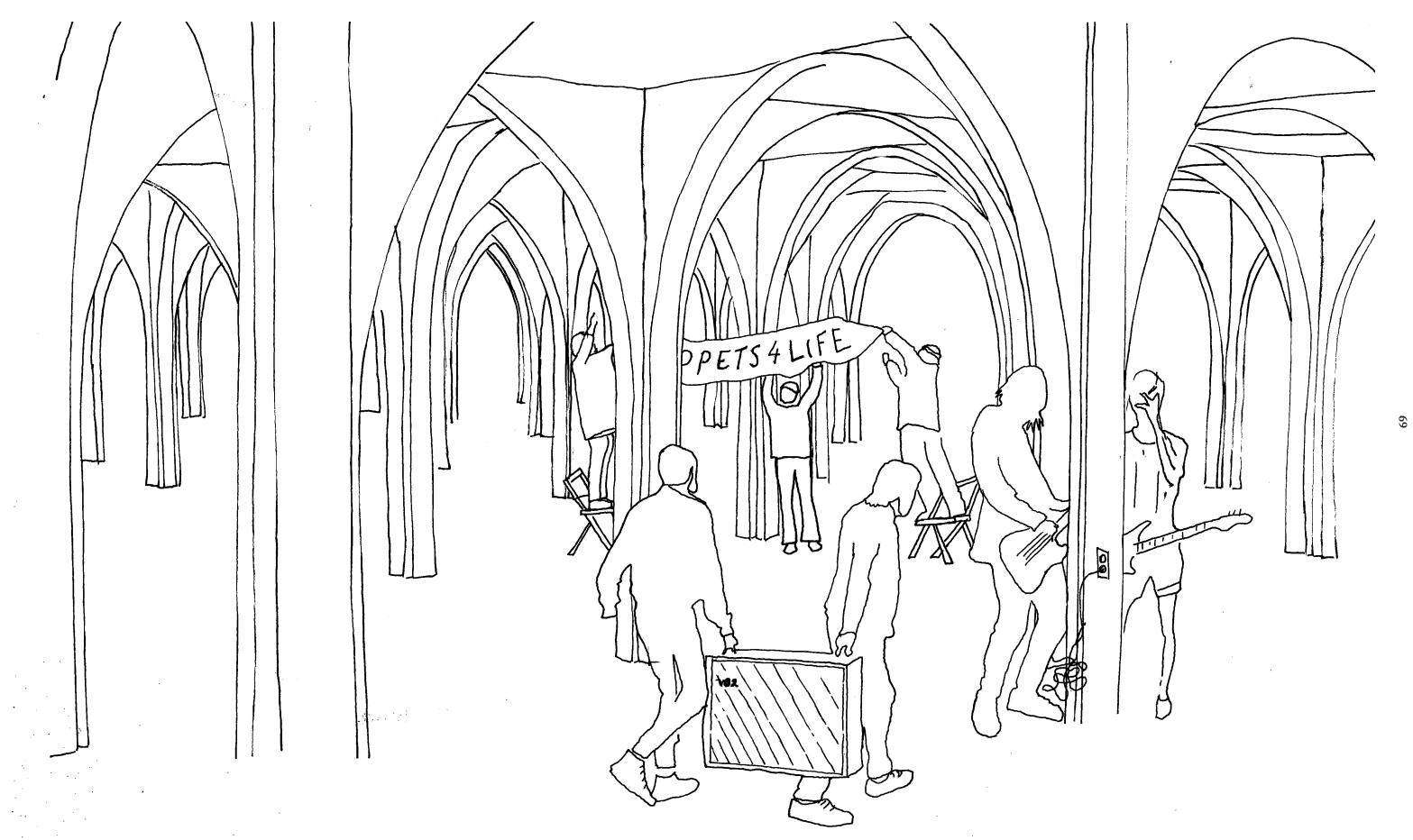
## Exploration

Exploration of further transformation of the design over time



BRUSSELS DEMOCRACY EXPLORATION YUM YUM YUM

BRUSSELS DEMOCRACY EXPLORATION





## BRUSSELS DEMOCRACY

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Vera Kuipers

Graduation Project

Fostering Brussels democracy: an exploration

Vera Kuipers, Delft



COLOPHON

Delft, June 2017

Fostering Brussels democracy: through interaction, self-organization and expression in public space.

Final Design Report -P5

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Part II: Design