

## NEEDED: AN INTELLIGENT AND INTEGRATED VISION FOR BRUSSELS' URBAN PLANNING

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**ABSTRACT:** In the aftermath of the dynamic events that Brussels endured in 2000, being one of the cultural capitals of Europe, the lack of a vision on an urban project for and by Brussels was subject of vehement debate. Almost 10 years later, small improvements have been made on integrated new practices in urban renewal. However, such an ambitious and visionary urban project is still opaque. Parallel, planning instruments and organisations have been set up, of which the democratic statute, the aims, the content and legitimacy is highly questionable. An example of such an instrument is the International Development Plan for Brussels (IDP), launched in 2007 by the Brussels Government. The priority of the plan is to attract foreign investors to develop large scale infrastructure and valorise land reserves on a regional scale. In order to legitimise the aggressive city-marketing proposed in the plan, the government aims at generating financial income, by targeting foreign business tourists. In this paper, we highlight how the IDP is an example of by-passing democratic planning policies and procedures, and reproduces a *laissez-faire* urbanism, led by strong market forces. Rethinking current planning practices, subject visioning and design processes might open up the potential of bottom-up urban strategies.

**KEYWORDS:** competitiveness, city branding, city ranking, large urban projects, planning culture, top-down and bottom-up urban strategies

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Some recent developments in Brussels' urban policy and planning, seem to indicate an important shift towards a more market-led urban planning policy which contradicts the urgent plea for an integrated vision on Brussels' urban future. One of the central elements in these changes is the International Development Plan for Brussels (IDP), launched in 2007 by the Brussels Government [1,2]. Before being presented in the democratic arena of the parliament, the intentions of the 'plan' were initially revealed on (large scale) real-estate events [3,4]. With the IDP the regional government has two aims. The first goal is the enlargement of the region's tax basis through the valorisation of large territories within the region and the development of large scale infrastructure (such as a shopping mall, a football stadium, exhibition spaces, congress and concert halls), via private-public-partnerships (PPP-constructions). The second aim is to attract business tourists. Through a stringent city-marketing strategy, the Brussels region hopes to increase its financial input and expects positive spill-over effects for its inhabitants. Such strategies are not new, and in this sense, Brussels lags behind compared to other European cities. However, with the introduction of the IDP, Brussels equally inscribes within a rationale based on interurban competition, and narrows its ambitions down in consolidating its place within international business rankings [1,5].

The IDP doesn't symbolise an urban policy that strives towards sustainability, solidarity, density, diversity and a co-producing democracy. If the IDP does not encompass an integrated urban vision, then what was the aim of the Brussels Government? The hypothesis in this paper is that the IDP is an element of by-passing statutory planning procedures and legislation, initiated by the government. Although strong indications support the idea that the IDP materialises a neo-liberal urbanism as a recent analysis demonstrates [5], we argue that the IDP is not the only 'plan' defining Brussels' urban policy. This will be shown via its positioning in a more general frame of Brussels' urban planning. In consequence, a revision of the IDP is essential when it engages in outlining a long-term global vision and strategy for Brussels' future development.

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However, the need for an integrated vision on the urban development of Brussels, exists since a long time. In its recent history, this necessity culminated when Brussels obtained the competence to set out its own urban planning policy (in 1989). This resulted in a policy instrument Regional Development Plan (RDP), in which the Brussels government engaged into the development of an ‘urban project’ for the region [6]. The second time the urgency for a trans-sectoral urban planning became influential was in the millennium year, when Brussels became one of the nine cultural capitals of Europe [7,8]. Nowadays, Brussels’ future development has again been put high on the political agenda, due to the requisite revision and updating of the second version of the Regional Development Plan [9,10].

In this paper we first frame Brussels’ current socio-economic and spatial context and its international position. The theoretical background based upon two urban planning models is subject of the third section. One model deploys the relation between urban planning policies and global dynamics. By-passing strategies are a central hallmark of such urban policies, and will serve as the analytical tool to position the IDP within its context. The other model mediates strategic structure planning between two tracks: that of urban vision/ing and urban projects. It shows how the production of visions and actions/projects are an iterative process defined by participation and co-production. The third section sketches the case of the IDP and positions the scheme within Brussels’ urban policy planning context. Afterwards we evaluate in which way the scheme is an example of a by-passing strategy. In conclusion, we will outline some alternatives, to redirect the IDP towards a more inclusive and integrated vision on Brussels’ urban future.

## 2 BRUSSELS: CONTEXT, VISIONING AND ITS INTERNATIONAL POSITION

Similar to other Western cities, Brussels experienced an intense restructuring after its industrial heyday in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Canal Zone, situated in the inner city concentrated a rich and lively industrial sector. From the 50s onwards, an important stream of labour immigration, mainly from Mediterranean backgrounds, reinforced the industrial character of this area. From the 80s onwards, the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism induced an exponential increase in jobs related to services, knowledge, technology, etc. (the so-called tertiary sector), at the extent of a decreasing employment in the industrial and manufacturing sector (the so-called secondary sector). These events repositioned Brussels on the global market, becoming a bursting pool of advanced services, attracting high-skilled (European) expatriates related to the international and European institutions, etc, but also offering a large amount of low-skilled jobs within construction and (industrial) cleaning [11-16].

Some of the current problems Brussels is facing, are related with its institutional position in Belgium. Since the 70s, Belgium has been subject to a complex federalisation process that materialised in 5 state reforms [17]. This resulted into a division of the nation into 3 regions (Flanders, the Walloon Region and the Brussels Capital Region) and 3 communities (Dutch, French-speaking and German-speaking). Regions decide on all territorial bound matters (and thus on land use and territorial development), while communities are authorised to decide upon personal bound matters like welfare, health, education, culture and so on. In consequence, urban policy in Belgium diverges along the administrative regions Flanders, Wallonia & Brussels. In the Brussels Capital Region this translates into a profound **institutional complexity and fragmented political competences**, since several institutions are in charge: the Brussels Government, both the Flemish- and French-speaking community, and the 19 communities [18]. Hence, on the level of urban policy and planning, a trans-sectoral approach –that is required for a coherent urban policy– has always been highly complicated. Although attempts are undertaken recently, a tradition in structural collaboration between different public actors is fairly absent until now.

Being fully aware of the too brief synthesis, Brussels could be typified by several main characteristics that are well-documented [11-17]. The Brussels Capital Region is spread out over 161km<sup>2</sup> and includes 19 municipalities. One of the most important dynamics is an **increasing social-economic polarisation** that **fragmented** Brussels’ population also spatially [19, 20]. Current deprived neighbourhoods are still situated in the former industrial areas in the Canal Zone and beyond, as described above. Furthermore, from the 70s onwards, Brussels experienced an increasing suburbanisation, characterised by middle-class families leaving the city centre, or even the region. Although one cannot discern a netto-suburbanisation process in Brussels anymore, it is still this particular group that leaves the city [19]. Nowadays, the historical centre is dominantly inhabited by a rather poor population, while the more recently circumvallating urbanised zones, and especially those in the south-eastern part of the region, are dominated by merely upper-class households

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[16, 21]. As said, the region hosts many international and European-related institutions that have an important impact on multiple aspects of Brussels' urban and mental constitution [22]. Finally, Brussels' population is highly multicultural and multilingual [23]. Among others, the latter two elements both contribute to the international economic and diverse cultural character of Brussels.

**The international role of Brussels** is often related with being the capital of Europe, and not succeeding in moulding this into a global vision on Brussels' future development. But its international role is also defined by a few other elements. In the beginning of 2009, a synthesis of conducted scientific research on Brussels' international role was made, which outlines five findings [23]. Brussels is labelled as an international city, because of its 'connectedness' in the world (economic) network, on the level of advanced services and transportations nodes (1). It has an utterly international character due to its European-related functions (ngo's, lobbying, diverse services, etc.) (2). Furthermore, the population is remarkably international, multilingual and multicultural (3). In addition, Brussels has a growing, diverse and much appreciated artistic centre, renown on the international scene (4), and it is a centre of science and innovation (5). The authors conclude that the effect on Brussels' economy is not to be neglected. As we see, Brussels' international role is as much related to particular political and economic characteristics as it is related to its multicultural identity. The already present and endogenous potential of Brussels international character, is an important background when evaluating the IDP, since the 'international' aspect in the scheme is clearly underdeveloped in this 'plan'.

Furthermore, **Brussels' needs an integrated vision on its urban future**, that combines a multilevel approach and takes into account the complex interrelation between local and international processes. The need for such a vision on Brussels' urban development, has already been subject of vehement debate since 1989, when Brussels obtained autonomous competences on its proper urban planning. A first attempt was the set-up of an integrated and trans-sectoral 'urban project', embodied within the first Regional Development Plan (RDP) in 1995 [6] and indicative for a period of five years. In 2000 the necessity for a vision has been restated highly on the political agenda [7]. At the time, Brussels was selected as one of the nine cultural capitals of Europe. An utterly difficult and complex organisation of multiple events within the cultural field revealed the institutional (and cognitive) fragmentation that became an ever more painful issue. This fuelled the public debate on the lack of an integrated cultural policy for Brussels. The initiation of bi-lingual events, bottom-up actions and initiatives of ngo's, offered alternatives (and examples) by showing how a mutual collaboration is possible. (E.g. are the Zinneke Parade and BrusselBravo).

In the same vein, the Prodi-Verhofstadt report that appeared one year later, has been a catalyst to envision Brussels' future as the Capital of Europe [8]. Afterwards, a number of architectural and urban planning exhibitions, books, a manifesto, etc appeared [7]. Examples are Koolhaas' research 'Brussels, Capital of Europe', the OmbudsPlanMediateur stressing the need for a coordinating institute for urban projects, and the exhibition 'A vision for Brussels: Imagining the Capital of Europe' by the Berlage Institute in 2007. Although some planning policies and instruments (like the Neighbourhood Contracts [24]) indicate improvements on a local scale, the statement was set: Brussels still requires a coherent, sustainable and ambitious vision, that embodies a legitimate and qualitative urban project for the city as a whole and that works both on local and international scales. Now the second Regional Development Plan will be revised and updated from 2009 onwards, the region's future is again at stake.

### **3 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: VISION/ING AND URBAN PLANNING**

In order to untwine what kind of vision the IDP stands for, we draw on some insights from vision/ing research in the realm of urban planning. To frame current hegemonic visions within Western urban policies we build upon a neo-liberal model on urbanism. The second model enables us to outline some alternative scenario's that could contribute to a more integrated vision on Brussels' urban future.

#### **3.1 Vision/ing in urban planning?**

How to envision an urban project that is not solely aimed at developing projects in the built, urban realm, but also aims at introducing and enhancing a sense of urbanity? [25, 26] Visions on cities reminds of modernist perspectives like the ones of Le Corbusier, Wright and Howard. But Polak (1961) states that visions exist since we are conscious about the present, and the 'other' time and place [27]. Though, colloquial meaning of 'planning' seems to be intrinsically related with a visionary touch, since it defines a

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perspective on the future, whether it is with great imagination and intelligence or not [28]. According to Strange & Mumford (2005), a vision in planning refers to “a statement, a desired of an idealised future state and/or the image or picture of that goal” [29].

Research on visions and visioning within the realm of planning practice in the nineties, showed how these terms got introduced from the 80s onwards, through management practices. The use of vision related terms, is often highly utilitarian and the meaning of them mainly implicit. They refer to processes or products, visions can be simple or complex, deployed in a metaphorical or literal way. Furthermore the associations made can vary from utterly positive to negative [30]. Nonetheless, planners often see visions as ‘good, efficient and progressive’ [31].

Until now, the meaning of both terms remains often blurred. The notions ‘vision’ and ‘visioning’ appeared and got accepted more and more in general discussions on strategic planning on the international scene and often serve to legitimate designs and planning experiments [30]. More over, since the influential work of Patsy Healy for instance [33], vision development in (strategic) planning is often associated with collaboration and participation. Here, two important questions come to the fore: what defines the quality (spatial, architectural, socio-economic and cultural quality) and legitimization of a project? At this point, the interplay between the quality and legitimacy of both the planning and design process (participation and co-production of the overall vision) and the final product (legitimacy of ‘the final’ vision adopted) becomes essential [34].

Currently, cities increasingly deploy city-marketing and –branding strategies to secure their (international) position on tourist and business markets [35]. In these methods, the place (or city) is addressed as a complexified product with specific brand methodologies Both visitors and inhabitants become clients with specific consumer-profiles [36]. The essentialist view on identities of places and people such strategies are based upon, is deeply contradictory with the post-modern urban conditions many cities find themselves in, that are characterised by hybridisation and increasing multi-culturality, as Dear (2000) points out [37]. This has important implications on imaging and visioning processes through actions and interventions. Is it true that “the imagin(eer)ing of the city’s future is directly articulated with the visions of those who are pivotal to the formulation, planning, and implementation of the project.” [38] and thus renders a broad co-produced urban project impossible? Or might some other practices answers questions like: how to build a collective image of (a) possible future(s), co-produced with all actors involved, or that at least strives for a ‘general interest’ that includes minorities or non-represented groups that use and make the everyday of a city?

### 3.2 Two models on urban development

Neo-liberal urbanism & by-passing strategies: After a comparative study of 13 large scale development projects in Europe, Swyngedouw, Rodriguez and Moulaert (2002) deployed a model of neo-liberal urbanism that describes the interdependence between global economic dynamics and transforming urban policies among most North-American and Western European cities [38]. The following section is a brief summary of the main findings. On a local scale, urban development projects (UDP’s) materialise such urban policies. Increasing globalisation occurred during the shift from **Fordism to post-Fordism** in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Deregulation, privatisation, flexibilisation and spatial decentralisation restructured many cities throughout Western Europe and Northern America. While cities face an increasing interurban competition, since they became focal point of a number of global dynamics (economic financialisation and subsequent crises, environmental and political challenges due to climate changes), the paradigm that economic growth is a good means to increase welfare, entered within (urban) public administrations as well. Global dynamics influenced and were articulated through changes in urban planning policy as well, indicating a shift from **government to governance** in the 90s. Manager-strategies and entrepreneurial approaches entered public administrations, while the development of new urban coalitions, a shift from social to economic policy, an increasing state entrepreneurialism, a selective deregulation, city-marketing strategies, territorially targeted social policy and the production of urban rent are typical of such a ‘new’ more neo-liberal oriented urban policy.

Considering the actual interventions in the public realm, the events described above translated into the replacement of the former classic (modernist/fordist) comprehensive *plan* and their statutory legislation into the post-fordist emblematic *project*. The latter are typified as market-led initiatives, combine advantages of flexibility, targeted actions and symbolic capacity to stimulate economic growth and turns segments of the city into symbols of restructuring, innovation and success. “The main objective of these projects is to obtain

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higher social and economic returns and to revalue prime urban land, and to re-enforce competitive positions of the economy of a city” [38]. Such UDP’s, like museums, waterfronts, concert halls, sport stadia, etc. are often represented as flagship projects in a spatially targeted area, closely linked with real estate development and realised via the privatisation of public funds, but in most cases implemented by local authorities. “Is planning completely abandoned?”, the authors ask. No, planning still has a significant role to play, they say, but the reorganisation of urban policy-making structures, gave rise to new modes of intervention, planning goals, tools, and institutions.

One of the main conclusions of the URSPIC-research is that: “Large-scale UDP’s have increasingly been used **as a vehicle to establish exceptionality measures in planning and policy procedures**”. According to the authors, this frame of exceptionality is a core element of ‘the new urban policy’ – a project-based urbanism, as mentioned above. Special plans and projects like UDP’s, replace existing planning instruments and legislation. More over, the initial conception, design and implementation of them, is often situated at the margins of formal planning structures. Thus, decision-making is equally situated in this grey area, of non-democratic decision-making, by-passing statutory procedures. Governmental justifications range from scale issues, the emblematic character of the operation, timing procedures, the need for more flexibility, efficiency criteria, etc. On the practical level, these measures of exceptionality, encompass the following by-passing strategies: (1) the freezing of conventional planning tools, (2) the bypassing of statutory regulations and institutional bodies, (3) changes in national or regional regulations and (4) the creation of project agencies with special or exceptional powers of intervention in decision-making. These results serve as the principal analytical tool for this paper, to demonstrate how the IDP is an example of by-passing democratic planning procedures.

A neo-realistic model - visioning and urban projects: The model of urban development Flanders deployed since 2000, derives from 2 strands within planning literature. The first strand starts from a model agreed upon in much of the French literature. This model comprehends urban development as an interaction between *projet de ville* and *projet urbain* [39]. The *projet de ville* encompasses a global vision on the future of a whole city or town. Different *projet de villes* materialise such a vision, but then integrated within the local socio-economic and built fabric. The second strand, derives from a rather Anglo-Saxon contingent of literature, that combines experiences of 15 years of strategic spatial planning with recent insights in urban design – namely that on the level of design by research [40].

The combination of both strands, resulted in a methodology deployed in the current urban development policy of Flanders –synthesised in the ‘*White Paper. Century of the City. City republic and grid cities.*’ (2002) [26]. On a general level, the interaction between the development of an open vision and actions or interventions, serves as starting point to develop a global vision on a cities’ future – a *projet de ville*. Such vision might strive to enlarge the civic realm, enrich urban culture, create sustainable space, enhance urban coherence, qualitative density, diversity, solidarity and democracy. In short: to endeavour a development that takes into account the urban condition we live in.

Translated into the realm of urban planning, this resulted in a three-track model drawn up by Van den Broeck [41,42]. Following the Spanish urbanist Busquets (2000) who claims that vision and actions can together be understood as an (urban) project of projects, the **three-track model** is explored as a way to combine vision-building (track 1) and actions or projects (track 3). The interaction between both tracks activates participation and co-production (track 2). The first track focuses on consensual vision-building, which works towards a long-term shared vision on the desirable future and development path and structure of the city. The second track involves actors in vision-building, planning- and decision-making processes; resolving disputes between different levels of civic society, creating urban development alliances and effective platforms for constructive and sustainable programmes and projects. The third track formulates daily action and implementation of actions and projects, testing and training, mobilising and feedback. The result is that the relation between vision and actions is not linear, nor hierarchical. Both visions and actions are open to change, and thus allows to transform initial ill-defined problems within the urban realm, into a global, powerful and activating vision, an attracting design and multiple scenario-building, without one element being the prime starting point. And indeed, this fits with what Hajer (2006) claims: visioning in urban planning predominantly starts with re-defining the initial problem [43].

This means that both models work upon two levels of visioning: on a global level, when developing a cities’ future development and on a local level, when outlining a vision for an urban project, that materialises the global vision set out. In sum, processes of visioning in the neo-liberal model and three-track model are

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approached in a different way. Within the neo-liberal approach, visioning the city is seen as an “elite playing field”. Unequal power balances are reflected within particular urban development project, and encompass a particular set of aspirations – defined by economic, political, cultural and social elites. In the end, the most powerful actors shape a cities’ urban future according to their desirable future via the formulation, planning and implementation of a project [39, p. 563]. In the three-track model, vision/ing is seen as an organic part of the planning and design process, that repeatedly is confronted within the progressing design and planning process of the project. Hence, the importance of participation and co-production of involved actors addressed in both models, results in a significantly different estimation of a legitimate and qualitative urban project. The development projects selected in the International Development of Brussels, are situated on a local level, while the IDP promises to outline a global vision on Brussels’ international position and future. In a later section, we argue that some elements of the models mentioned above, will enable us to address visioning issues related to the IDP. Some aspects might inform more powerful, legitimate and qualitative alternatives for or within the IDP.

#### **4 CASE: THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN AS A BY-PASSING STRATEGY?**

Most actors involved in the debate on Brussels’ future agree upon the urgent need for a plan that takes into account the international role of Brussels. This topic was too long neglected topic within Brussels’ planning [8]. But do the recent events in Brussels’ urban planning policy encompass such a required visionary plan on its future?

##### **4.1. The IDP: content, genesis, comments and critique.**

Recent events marked Brussels’ urban policy, and indicate an important fundamental shift towards a more market-led urbanism [5]. One of the three main elements introduced, and central in this paper, is the introduction of the basic scheme ‘*the Plan for International Development of Brussels*’ (PWC-report) in August 2007 and its approved successor –*the Road Map*– in January 2008. Below both documents will be referred to as ‘IDP’ [1,2]. A second changing element in Brussels’ urban policy, is the establishment of a non-profit agency –*the Agency for Territorial Development* (ATO)– an operational instrument for the government to execute its policy intentions. The agency is responsible to valorise land, with an explicit priority to those areas selected in the IDP [2,44]. Finally, some parts of Brussels’ urban planning legislation –*The Brussels Code on Town Planning* (BWRO)– were adapted, in order to authorise the regional government to grant building permits for zones with a regional interest. In principle these permits are offered by the municipalities. Now, the regional government can operate autonomously to develop the zones delineated in the IDP in a more flexible way [2, 44].

A recent article on the International Development Plan for Brussels states how this scheme embodies a new, neo-liberal direction in Brussels’ urban policy and re-enforces further social exclusion through negative side-effects of gentrification within the city centre [5]. Indeed, we agree that the IDP indicates a shift from a rather preserving urban policy towards an intense market-led urbanism. After a brief summary of the content and genesis of the IDP, we elaborate on its position within general policy.

Content & genesis: The PWC-report is written by a world-wide known consultancy office, under authority and initiated by the Brussels Government. In the first chapter it assesses Brussels’ international position. Via a bench-marking analysis and interviews with 55 experts, this international role is evaluated via indicators referring to its international business-climate [1]. Outlining 5 directive guidelines, the IDP states that a future vision should be based upon the SWOT-analysis that resulted from the previous bench-marking analysis and expert-interviews. Such a vision, described in a second chapter, should be implemented through an ‘aggressive city-marketing strategy’. In the third chapter, the report puts the territorial development of 10 ‘strategic zones’ to the fore. Via the implementation of large scale infrastructure, they seem to be the appropriate urban territories that have an ‘international potential’. The last chapters of the report are a preliminary attempt to line up the IDP with existing regional policy. Furthermore, the IDP states being an instrument to increase life quality, to install a more efficient governance and will generate higher financial input for the region.

Several months later, the report was summarised and slightly censured into an ‘official document’, called the *Road Map* [2]. This document outlines the policy measures to be taken by the regional government with a dominant stress upon the territorial development of the ten selected areas. The guidelines stated in the

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report didn't change, but notions like 'gentrification', attraction of middle-class residents or participative measures for inhabitants are not even mentioned anymore in this version of the programme.

The **formal discourse of the regional government** is sometimes contradictory. The IDP must be seen as a global strategy, to guarantee Brussels' economic position on the international market, and to put the city on the international 'map'[45]. In this sense, the plan responds to the competitive interurban logic cities feel themselves confined to, as described in the neo-liberal model above. The government justifies this strategy in several ways. If it doesn't take into account its international role, the current policy that pursues an endogenous development, is liable to be pushed aside [2]. Via the IDP they claim that the living conditions of all Brussels' inhabitants' will improve.

Comments & critiques: But does the government engage in its own promises? Is this 'plan' really developing an integrated vision on Brussels' urban and international future? The discourse conducted by the Brussels government seems to be contradictory in many ways. The following notes are derived from the comments and critiques uttered by several actors within civil society. A summary was made by the official advisory committee for Brussels' development matters on the regional scale [46]. Three groups of critique come to the fore: the IDP shows (1) a lack of coherence and quality, (2) a lack of integration of the 10 selected zones within a global vision on urban development, and (3) gives a high level of freedom for private actors, that risks a take-over the international development by real estate developers [23,47] .

The **lack of coherence and quality** in the IDP, reveals itself in several ways. First, the statute of the scheme has been unclear from the beginning onwards. The IDP is a rather schematic programme, since a *plan* traditionally outlines the aims and methods, expected positive and negative impacts and eventual measures to take, financial costs and funding, division of tasks and actors involved, participative set-up and timing. The PWC-report, nor the Road Map mentioned any of these aspects. As the advisory regional development committee writes, the IDP is but '*a mere document, with intentions and programmes to line up different non-concrete or unreliable projects*'. Secondly, the research methods deployed in the PWC-report are questionable, since they resulted in a limited and biased comprehension of the cities' international position. The selected indicators are only derived from (1) a bench-marking analysis and (2) a comparison of different rankings, listing cities according to their international business-climate. To include Brussels' multicultural aspects and its endogenous economical potential, a more in-depth analysis is required. In that sense, the advisory committee refers to scientific analyses that are based upon larger series of indicators that go beyond economical factors. They propose that the core of an endogenous development, should include Brussels' economical (including trade and crafts), social, environmental, architectural potential and its landscape, nature and heritage.

Finally, the IDP stresses on the development of an international image that 'valorises and reinforces the tourist and cultural potential of the region', through a city-marketing strategy. After comparing the IDP with the Regional Development Plan, the advisory committee states that a city-marketing should be a collection of instruments that enhances tourism and the cultural image of a city, and formulates 'good' answers on the individual and collective level, for both inhabitants and enterprises. City-marketing should improve economic development, appeal and quality of the city. The key-question here is: would a city-marketing strategy that exploits Brussels' existing potential, be an appropriate instrument to arrive at a more legitimate and qualitative long-term collective vision on Brussels' urban future?

A second group of critiques, stresses the **lack of integration of the 10 zones within a global vision**. As said, the IDP stresses the territorial development of 10 large sites [5]. Most of them are already subject to ongoing development (e.g. Tour & Taxis, Brussels South Railway Station (Midi), Mont des Arts/Museum Quarter, the European Quarter, State Administrative Centre and in a limited way the West Station). For the other 4 delineated 'strategic zones' the future development is still under study and vague (Josaphat Railway Station, Heyzel, Schaarbeek Formation, Delta). Furthermore, some of these are plain brown-fields, need decontamination, or are still entangled within property negotiations between public and private actors. This territorial valorisation will be attained through the implementation of 6 large scale infrastructures with an explicit international scope, in public-private partnerships [1,2]. Intentions are: the erection of a (1) European museum that symbolises its presence in Brussels, (2) a congress hall (min. 3000 places, 15.000m<sup>2</sup> exhibition space; in total 50.000m<sup>2</sup>), (3) a concert hall (15.000 places), (4) a new sports arena, (5) a Fashion & Design museum and (6) a large shopping centre in the north of Brussels.

The spatial scattering of the zones within the region is remarkable. Although the government pursues a development from the historical centre outwards since several years, this scattering of the selected zones,

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indicates a more poly-centric induced development. Only 2 strategic zones are located in the ‘historical’ city centre (delimited by the pentagon which indicates the 2<sup>nd</sup> old circumvallation of the city). 4 sites are located in the 19<sup>th</sup> century expansions of the city. Another 4 are situated outside the 2<sup>nd</sup> ring way in Brussels. Unfortunately, the IDP doesn’t mention any spatial link with local, regional, interregional or international scales, nor its own hinterland. The lack of mutual spatial integration between the areas on the one hand and the areas within the urban fabric on the other hand, is striking. In addition, the PWC-report nor the Road Map mentions **any links with other existing regional plans**. First of all, the ten zones have particular land use and development instructions by legislation. In consequence, the development of several of the selected areas depends upon an adaptation of this legislation. Secondly, there is no link with the existing economic and employment policies with other actors in the region. Furthermore, there is a lack of connection with regional policies on local trade development, climate, sustainability and environment. Although the territorial development might hide a well thought spatial policy, we are convinced this is not the case. No impact assessments have been made on the development of the zones and the erection of the infrastructures mentioned above. The level of detail in several parts of the PWC-report and the Road map, point towards the importance of short-term valorisation of territorial property.

As Corijn et al. (2009) remark: an **integration of the 10 selected zones within a more global vision on Brussels’ international urban development is absent** [23].

The last cluster of critiques warns for the **high degree of freedom to private investors**. These comments are mainly based upon a remarkable démarche of the Brussels government. The PWC-report was initially presented within national and international real estate circles, before the parliament and other regional institutions were informed. An intense debate flared up in the parliament, civil society and among some urban organisations [3,4]. First, the plan wasn’t mentioned to become public at that particular moment [5]. Secondly, it enforces the suspicion that the government aims at attracting private investors. Finally, the IDP does not include any regulation or minimal development requirements, that translate a global vision on the city as a whole.

#### **4.2 Positioning the IDP within Brussels urban policy, planning and development.**

Although large scale urban development exists from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, urban planning as a separate sector of the Brussels government, is a rather young tradition in Brussels. Only in 1962 a national law on regional planning was approved which introduced a detailed land use plan subordinated to strong hierarchic bureaucratic procedures. This section draws on Moritz’ (2006) comprehension of Brussels’ urbanism and focuses on two periods: the first period ranges from 1958 onwards until 1978. The second ranges from 1978 until now [48].

The first period, refers to a ‘technocratic urbanism’ and was marked by several large scale development projects that later turned out to be fiascos. Known examples are the construction of a railway through the historical city centre, the construction of highways entering the city and the development of several large scale projects in the context of the WorldExpo 1958, etc. Furthermore, the Manhattan-project in the Northern Quarter, (cf) gave way to the development of a number of office towers, leaving the neighbourhood with a dominantly mono-functional administrative character. Forced expropriations and large slum clearance were core elements in many of these projects. In general, these events are referred to as *Brusselisation*. The remembrance of this period left the urban fabric’ and its inhabitants scarred until now and still influences the collective memory on Brussels’ planning history [12,49].

The negative outcomes re-emphasised the **weak role of public actors**, that gave way to private real estate developers, and induced an overtly reactionary climate among several neighbourhood committees, academics and environmental organisations that cumulated in the 70s. Pleading for more participation and consultancy of inhabitants within urban planning, a higher protection and expansion of (social) housing, additional public transport, these organisations succeeded in transforming the prevailing technocratic urbanism into a more consultative urbanism. The organisation of consultancy committees for large urban project was one of the main achievements. The appearance of a first Regional Plan of Brussels in 1979 was a second key accomplishment [49]. Jaques Aron (1978) describes the end of this period as a **first turn in Brussels urbanism** [50].

The second stage in Brussels’ urbanism is referred to as a ‘consultancy urbanism’. When Brussels obtained its statute as a region in 1989, after the 3<sup>rd</sup> state reform, it got full authority to introduce and decide upon its proper urban planning policy. Important milestones are the approval of an ‘urban project’ called ‘the



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Regional Development Plan' (RDP) in 1995 (and its successor in 2001) and the set-up of a land use plan, called the 'Regional Zoning Plan' in 1998 (and its successor in 2001) [51]. Although there is much to say about this Brussels 'zoom-in' planning model, we only shed some light on one part, the Regional Development Plan, since it frames all other planning instruments.

The RDP is typified by a broadly supported diagnosis of Brussels' demographical and socio-spatial situation, its economic tendencies, urban planning and policy issues, etc. For a period of 5 years, about ten guidelines define policy measures that could cope with ongoing suburbanisation, transformations of the urban fabric, a lack of employment for low skilled jobs, an increasing educational problem, etc. Being the foundation of the urban development policy at the time, the region pursued a conservative planning, mainly focusing on housing and creating local employment [52]. On the level of urban renewal and redevelopment, the first RDP put much effort into the conservation of patrimony, the renovation of housing and social cohesion programmes. (The second RDP, engages further along these lines of thought but needs an urgent evaluation and update.) Although it was an interesting first attempt to cross sector-stratified planning and to elaborate an integrated visioning of Brussels' urban future, the success of the plan was limited due to the indicative, non-binding character. As mentioned in Section 2, the high infrastructural complexity in Brussels, equally chokes cooperation between public actors in the realm of urban policy and planning.

Recently, Moritz proposed the **hypothesis of a second turn** in Brussels urbanism [48]. Since 2003, a number of events occurred that are typified by a high participative and bottom-up induced character. Those developments, might point towards a second turn in Brussels' urban development, shifting from a consultative towards a participative planning. In the early 90s, Brussels introduced an instrument called 'the Neighbourhood Contracts', enhancing an integrated local redevelopment via the improvement of social cohesion and functional mix [24]. New in these instruments, was the inclusion of broad participation processes. Although information and consultancy procedures are formally inscribed in planning legislation, the planning instruments often don't provide more decision power to inhabitants. A small decade later, civil society mobilised again, when several (large) territories in Brussels –some of them also included in the IDP– became subject to (re)development. Hallmark examples of bottom-up induced events, are the renovation of a large public space (Place Flagey), the reconversion of a former office site (State Administrative Centre) and the development of a whole new district near the historical centre (Tour & Taxis), or the introduction of international competitions (Place Rogier, Rue de la Loi). These events stress positive and encouraging dynamics since 2001.

Unfortunately, the introduction of the International Development Plan in 2007 seems to refute this hypothesis of a second turn. The policy measures taken with the IDP (and the introduction of a planning agency and adaptation of planning legislation) contradicts this supposed shift towards more inclusion of civil society and inhabitants via information, consultation, coordination and co-production. The IDP rather abandons their involvement.

#### **4.3 the IDP as a by-passing strategy and emblem of *laissez-faire* urbanism?**

Then why is the IDP an example of a by-passing strategy and risks the reproduction of a *laissez-faire* urbanism? As outlined in the theoretical section, by-passing strategies encompass four different aspects, and introduce new policy instruments, actors and institutions. The evaluation and update of the formal 'urban project' of Brussels, encompassed within the Regional Development Plan, kept waiting a long time. The adaptation of the plan traditionally needs to endure cumbersome statutory procedures, which foiled the government to develop several territories on a short term. This seems to be the initial reason why the government introduced the IDP. Furthermore, the government didn't inform the advisory regional development committee to set-up an international development plan.

From this perspective, the government bypassed statutory planning regulations and institutional bodies via the IDP (1). Concerning the freezing of conventional planning tools (2), the delay in evaluation and update of the regional development plan, might only point to pragmatic considerations instead of an overtly conscious freezing. On the other hand, the interventions that paralleled the IDP are more convincing. First of all, the introduction of the project agency ATO mirrors indeed a by-passing method (4). In addition, the adaptation of regional planning regulations –the BWRO– reflects another by-passing strategy (3). These four aspects clearly show how the IDP and the parallel interventions taken inscribes within bypassing-strategies that are so typical for 'neo-liberal urban policy'.

But then, is the IDP an excrescence of neo-liberal urbanism? The above events could support such a

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hypothesis convincingly. On the other hand, the position of the IDP within the global context of urban planning and policy should not be forgotten. And this is the crux: the place of the IDP within this context is rather unclear nowadays. On the one hand, several interventions mentioned in the IDP, are undertaken by now. A study on the international character of Brussels' was ordered, based upon a large survey on 'the' identity of Brussels' population. These results should be the core of the succeeding city-marketing strategy. The development agency ATO is in charge to coordinate the development of the territories mentioned in the IDP. But after the regional elections in June 2009 and contrary to the two years before, the general declaration of the Brussels Region redirected its ambitions from the international development of Brussels, towards a sustainable development [9]. At least in the public discourse of the governments' urban policy, the importance of the IDP decreased. Furthermore, a revision of the regional development plan is inscribed within the coalition agreement. This implies that current local development policies on social, cultural, economic, mobility, etc issues will be replaced on the political agenda. In this sense, we are convinced that although the risks involved with the launch of the IDP should be addressed seriously as the scheme is an important part of Brussels' territorial development, the position of the IDP should be equally re-balanced within the overall policy that encompasses a number of other instruments and measures.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

The bypassing process of which the International Development Plan is an essential element, seems to be the effect of two processes. On the one hand public actors seek to implement private-public partnerships in order to share financial risks when developing large scale infrastructure. In this sense, short-term territorial valorisation prevails on the development of a global vision on Brussels' urban policy and the plans which should embody such a vision. Contrary to what is desirable in PPP-construction, we must diagnose that the Brussels Government –thus the public actor– is a rather weak director in coordinating the process between visioning and developing urban projects. The IDP enforces this image of the government as a weak public director. On the other hand, a spatial process of polycentric development becomes visible when locating the 10 development zones selected in the IDP. This might indicate a further decentralisation of current socio-economic processes so prevailing in the Brussels' region. The choice of such a rather de-centralised development, increases polarisation within urban policy itself. While urban actors choose to continue with the development of neighbourhood contracts (area-based local interventions to improve social cohesion), an increasing importance is laid on the socio-economic rentable large scale development projects and infrastructure selected in the IDP.

The comments and critique on the IDP imply that both the legitimacy and quality of the plan is below par. Although an IDP is necessary to deploy and imagine Brussels on an international scope, the current version fails in its duties, as some involved environmental organisations state aptly [47]. In the very near future, the Brussels Government will start to set up a new Regional Development Plan. The question remains in which way the IDP will be included in this 'urban project' and how much power it will retain behind the scene of formal urban policy.

During 2009, an important dynamic was reached through the mobilisation of Brussels' civil society and academics, offering alternative interpretations for an integrated Brussels future, embedded within the most recent research and findings on Brussels' current challenges [53]. Although this is only a preliminary attempt, we are convinced that the application of a visioning process as proposed in the three-track model could improve the IDP in many ways. Examples are: a more elaborate approach on Brussels' international character informed by well-documented research already available in Brussels, an ambitious and integrated urban planning that combines qualitative building projects with a sustainable urban project for the city as whole, that evaluates local impacts and anticipates upon eventual negative effects, that involves all actors during the planning and design process of the projects proposed in the IDP, etc. In this sense, practices like design-by-research comport essential elements in facilitating an urban development by co-production. An urban policy that aims at the repositioning of power-balances within urban projects, that facilitates empowerment and capacity building, might improve the legitimacy and quality of both planning and design processes and the resulting projects.

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