

## Brussels in 8 points

### 1. Small World City

Compared to London & Paris, Brussels is a small city. It consists of 19 municipalities that house officially 1,1 million people. Even if we take the larger metropolitan region into account, we still have only +/- 1,7 million residents. Although small in size, it is ranking high on the world cities ladder. The presence of the European Institutions (EU), NATO and many related activities gives it a global status.

### 2. Richest region in Europe, poorest neighbourhoods in Belgium

Ranking between 3rd and 5th in Europe (measured in Gross Regional Product) Brussels is one of the richest regions in the world. But at the same time it has the highest amount and most deprived neighbourhoods in Belgium. Figures range from 15% of the population living below the poverty line to 40% of all families living in a deprived neighbourhood.

### 3. Shrinking Growing City

After a very long period of decline the amount of residents is growing. It is estimated that the coming ten years there will be 100.000(!) additional residents due to international migration and a high fertility rate (new born babies).

### 4. Fragmented & Segmented City

Not only the urban structure, but also the social composition, political organisation, cultural field,... is characterized by fragmentation & segmentation. It is a major characteristic of this city, making it quite unique and not always easy to understand.

### 5. The only city in the world with a prime minister but no flagship projects

Brussels is run by a regional government (with a prime minister) and 19 municipal majors. Competition rather than collaboration is the driving force in local politics. Brussels has no authority over its cultural & educational policy, which is in the hands of the Flemish & French Community. These also serve the interests of the Flemish & Walloon region making it very difficult to develop a tailor made policy for Brussels, necessary to meet for e.g. urgent needs in schooling. It also makes collaboration at the metropolitan level very difficult.

### 6. Globalizing from below

More than 50% of the population has roots or strong connections outside Belgium. Some have come to work in international institutions & companies, but most of them are in Brussels to do low paid jobs. Many political refugees have joined recently as

well as "sans papiers" (immigrants without official documents; estimated to be 56.000 people). This has led to a growing cultural diversity (a globalization from below). Rich immigrants are to be found in the south-eastern part of Brussel and in the suburbs. Poor immigrants live in the central part of the city, in the working class neighbourhoods alongside the canal which cuts through the middle of the city.

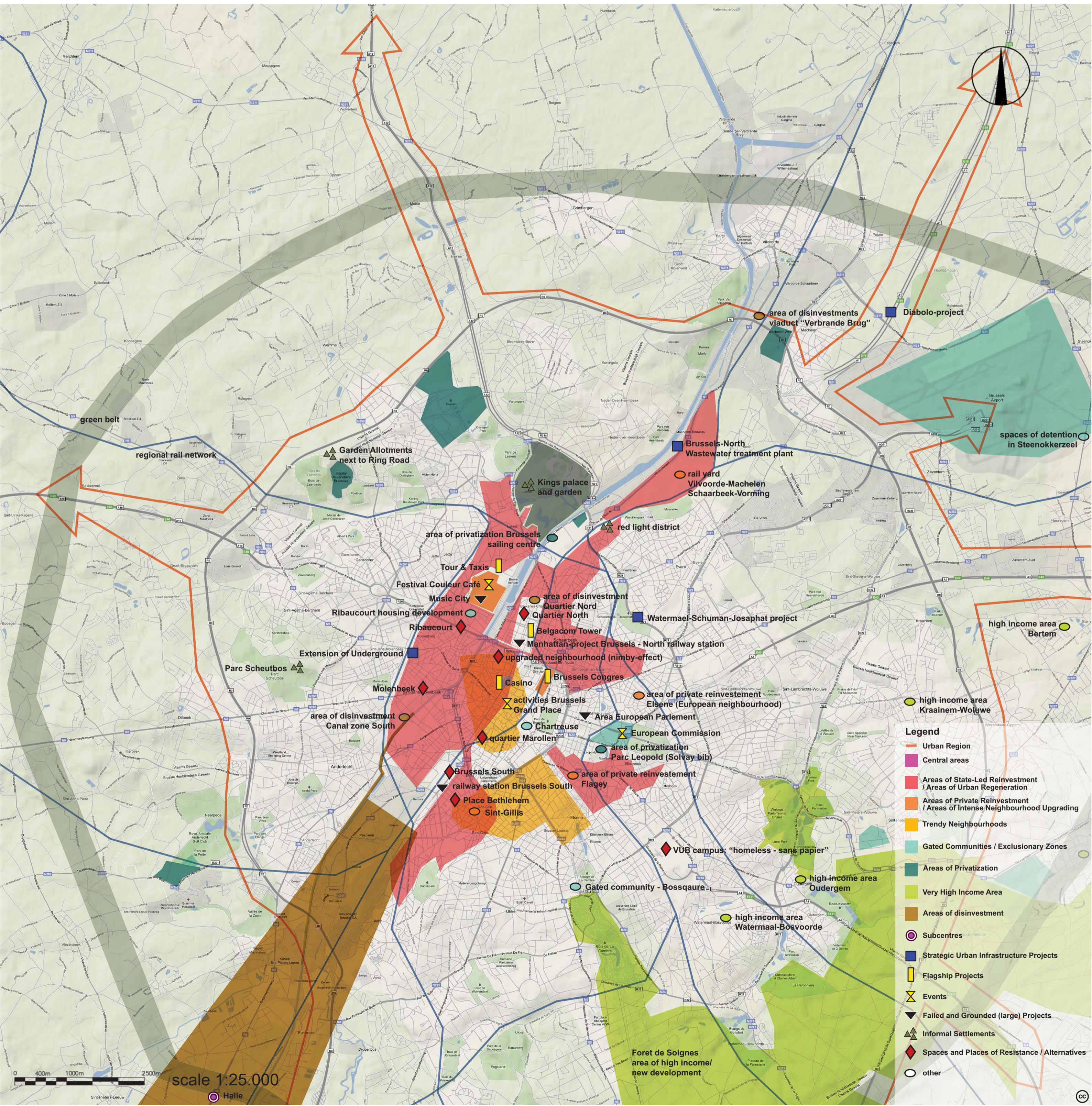
### 7. Rather insurgent than resistant

The absence of a consistent squatter movement is symptomatic for Brussels. It is a city where resistance is channeled into state-subsidised NGO's making it the world capital of organised civil society.

### 8. Old metropolitan mainstream?

Many aspects of the New Metropolitan Mainstream can be found in Brussels, but not all of them are new or outspoken. Internationalization, Public Private Partnerships and market driven politics have been around throughout the postwar period. Gentrification came later and less outspoken compared to many cities, flagship developments are rather absent. It is still an open question if the NMM paradigm can explain the dynamics of this city.

Belgium	30'528 Km2	* Inhabitants	10'666'866
Urban Region	162 Km2	* Inhabitants	1'100'000



## Two Opposing Political And Private Stakeholders In One Area

Brussels\*\* lacks an integrated spatial metropolitan vision. There also exists no institutional unit that addresses the scale of the metropolitan region. The problems emerging from the anti-urban reflex of the suburban area are imminent. To illustrate the inter-regional competition inside the metropolitan region, one can focus on the lack of cooperation and even existence of competition between Flanders and Brussels. Both regions plan very similar projects as close as 2 km one from each other

### NEO (Brussels) versus UPLACE (Flanders)

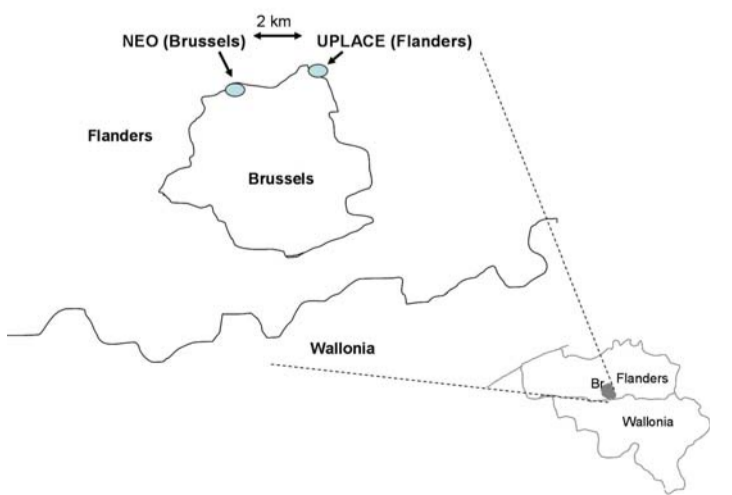


Brussels plans a large development project (international scale, international contest attracting star architects - PPP) on the Heysel Plateau (67 ha) in the northern part of Brussels, close to the border with Flanders. It includes a congress centre (3.500 places), a shopping mall (100.000 m<sup>2</sup> - said necessary to finance the congress centre), a (new) football stadium (WorldCup 2018?), an event hall (15.000 places), offices (up to 250.000 m<sup>2</sup>). At the same time, the Flemish government approved a new private shopping/leisure/experience-development (PPP) of 250.000 m<sup>2</sup> situated 2 km to the east on Flemish territory (Uplace Machelen). The financing of both projects is still uncertain.

### Brussels and Flanders both want to internationalize

"The green belt around Brussels is a blessing for Brussels", a local politician recently pointed out. Flanders development plans are made up with (almost) no consultation with Brussels; and vice versa. Brussels appears as a "blank spot" in Flemish plans and Flanders is a blank spot in Brussels plans. As a result, the contours for both large development projects are set out in separate strategic planning goals.

Brussels uses its "Plan for International Development" to frame its project, while Flanders anticipates on the private-led UPLACE-project in its development plan for the Flemish area around Brussels. In the elaboration of both plans the private sector played a decisive role. Despite the usual promise of jobs and economic growth, it is undeniable that both projects will have negative effects on the quality of life in the area. For example, both projects are situated next to the Brussels Ring Road, that already today suffers from severe congestion. Both projects furthermore promise hundreds of new jobs. Yet the impact on local commerce, such as job loss due to the competition with (and between) the shopping centers, is not taken into account.



From top to bottom:  
 - Uplace Mechelen  
 - Heizel today  
 - uncoordinated planning of two shopping centers next to each other

## The Would-be Marketing In The EU-Quarter And Brussels Southstation

The EU-Quarter (<1 km<sup>2</sup>) is situated just east of the city centre. In the second half of the 20th century this residential neighborhood transformed, yet without a real planning or development strategy, into an office area destined for the EU institutions.

The area around the Brussels South Station has since the 50s mainly been inhabited by immigrants from the Mediterranean. From the 60s onwards there was a clear disinvestment regarding public spaces and buildings and the middle class left the area. Consequently, the railway



company's plan for a TGV terminal in the end of the 80s was applauded by politicians as it would be a catalyst for revival.

### International and problematical

Although the presence of the EU-institutions has brought economic growth to Brussels, the EU-quarter does not have the urban quality and prestige one might expect. In the case of the redevelopment of the South Station-area, and partly due to the recession of the 90s, relatively few m<sup>2</sup> of offices have been built. Instead of having attracted new companies, the new office buildings were even primarily occupied by relocated government agencies or private companies. The promised jobs consequently were never generated; and the area lost a lot of its quality.

### High belief in flagships resulting in would-be flagships

The government still counts on new large scale projects with an international span to boost the areas. In the EU-quarter the government supports a project of the French star-architect Christian de Portzamparc that wants to redesign the neighborhood drastically. Also for the South Station the government trusts on a project of a French architect Jean Nouvel to reverse the degeneration of the area.

Yet both projects seem to lack the necessary confidence and the trust to meet their goals. After comments and questions in the press, the latter project is even removed from the website of the Railway Company. As for the EU-design, it was presented at the international trade show MIPIM in Cannes and only afterwards in Brussels...

Despite the incorporation of some side measures, the latest proposals are clearly property development-led and design-oriented. The consequences of the very expensive offices or residences on the local property market seem to be of less priority. The limited interest for the actual content of the development program in both cases makes it very hard to assure local or regional social embeddedness of the projects.



From top to bottom:  
 - the European quarter  
 - the South station area  
 - one street, two sides: state-led speculation in the South station area  
 - making place for offices in South station area

## Green Development As Engine For The Recent Tension Between Two Communities: Brussels And Flemish Region

Brussels and the Flemish area around Brussels are functionally part of the same metropolitan region, but planning and development for both areas is done separately. This often leads to strategies fostering competition between regions without taking into account social reality (cfr two shopping centers which are planned next to each other).

This dynamic is also reflected in the development of green, ecology and nature protection. Brussels puts a lot of effort in becoming a "green capital", through the development of green corridors etc. A strategy of cooperation works



surprisingly well for the protection and management of the immense forest located to the south of the city (Forest de Soignes/Zonienwoud), yet in many other cases environmental management becomes an element that accentuates the gap between political strategies and socio-economic realities.

As an example, Flanders focuses on the protection of undeveloped open spaces such as meadows, fields, river valleys, forests, etc. in the area around Brussels, yet for new inhabitants that are willing to integrate in the Flemish culture (language). Nevertheless, this "green" policy in the periphery of Brussels mostly attracts the well-paid citizen to move to the country-side, close to the forest, park, horse stables and golf-courts. Due to the international character of Brussels, most of them don't speak Flemish, but mostly French or English. Therefore they are determined by the Flemish community as immigrants that harm the integrity and culture of its region. This fear of further "Gallicisation" of Brussels is a historical fact that goes back to the 60s when the Flemish emancipation struggle started. Currently, local mayors attempt to stop the further spread of the French language by introducing language tests, offering integration courses, etcetera. Social housing, as an example, is reserved for inhabitants that can prove their link with the community.

The Flemish community ignores the fact that they are part of a larger metropolitan area with its own socio-economic dynamism. On the private market, property owners, mostly local inhabitants, simply seek to sell their houses for the highest price. Buyers able to afford these prices often are well-paid citizens, working in Brussels who like to live in a nice, green and beautiful urban countryside close to economically the most important area of Belgium, namely Brussels.



From top to bottom:  
 - the green area around Brussels a much wanted living area for the people that can afford  
 - rural landscape surrounding the city as a driver of property value  
 - gap between policy objectives and the private housing market  
 - "de groene gordel/the green belt" a Flemish green strategy for the area around Brussels

## Place Bethlehem "2 Hours Resistance"

Brussels, as many other urban regions, is growing increasingly diverse in terms of ethnic origins of its inhabitants. The urban region furthermore is characterized by spatial segregation with a differentiation between poorer, mixed and more affluent areas.

Place de Bethlehem, a recently refurbished triangular square in a colorful neighbourhood, only a stone's throw away from the South Station is surrounded by a few local shops, McDonald's or Zara are not interested in the area but Greek restaurants are flourishing. Cars, always in a



hurry, and school children pass by in the morning. On sunny afternoons the place becomes crowded, children run all over the place, mothers or fathers gather on benches. During a couple of hours in the evening, the restaurants attract a mix of people, including the urban professionals looking for authentic atmosphere. After dark, the plaza, as well as its streets around transform into a male environment.

April 2010. It has been reported widely in the media "several Brussels neighbourhoods are going through safety issues. Police is trapped regularly" and words such as "impunity" are used to describe the situation. On the evening of April 12th, several cars burn around Place Bethlehem that is covered in gasoline. Police forces arrive in large number on the slippery square and are welcomed by stone throwing youngsters. Two hours later, the square is back to normal.

Violent uprising was of short nature, but tensions always exist. Discontent, expressed by those that are excluded from processes of economic growth and the wealth generated by financial globalisation. Discussions after the riots are often racist; the elimination of illegal economic activities and zero-tolerance the main answer. Yet, should evenings as these not form the occasion to start thinking on how to foster processes that may bring belief in the future for the excluded in a region where about one out of three children grows up in a household that has no income from employment?

Resistance in Brussels could also have been portrayed by pointing to the enduring struggle of the sans-papiers; to the numerous associations and citizens groups working to improve life quality in their city; to the King resisting modernization of state structures. Struggles such as the riots in Saint Gillis, Anderlecht, Molenbeek, ... are ephemeral, and not part of a larger movement of organized resistance such as we have seen throughout Europe in the 1960s and 70s, and less in Brussels where everything is fragmented. Yet they point to structural problems that require adding migration to the internationalization framework, and attention for spatial and social selectivity which mainstreaming processes re-enforce.

\*\* On this poster "Brussels" refers to the Brussels Capital Region, and includes 19 municipalities.



From top to bottom:  
 - Greek restaurants surrounding the square give it an authentic touch  
 - unrest in the neighbourhood  
 - the refurbished square on a quiet afternoon  
 - chatting at Place Bethlehem