

Europeanization and socio-spatial polarization in Brussels¹

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ABSTRACT

The Europeanization of Brussels—that is, the clustering of major EU institutions and a vast array of EU-related transnational protagonists in the city over the second half of the twentieth century—has thoroughly transformed the role of the city in global terms. At the same time, it has triggered significant change in the urban environment. This paper analyzes the interaction of the Europeanization process with existing socio-spatial and political configurations in the city. It shows how Europeanization makes a significant contribution to the increasing socio-spatial polarization in Brussels, notably through labor market restructuring and office and housing market dynamics. This outcome is linked to a lack of strategic and democratically negotiated forms of governance of the EU and of the transnational presence in Brussels.

Introduction

Increasing economic, political and cultural globalization over the past decades has generated considerable interest among urban analysts in terms of how macro-structural processes interact with urban space (e.g., Beauregard, 2001). Although a series of broad parameters of social and economic change are set at the global level for any given city (i.e., new flexible organization of production and increased inter-urban competition for investment; see Harvey, 1989), global forces effectively materialize in cities through

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complex interactions with place-specific patterns of socio-spatial and political organization of the urban environment, bringing significant variations in the extent and form of urban restructuring. Hence, following Kesteloot (2000), I consider the contemporary reshaping of the city as resulting from the complex set of interactions between historically produced layers of socio-spatial organization and present-day dynamics whose momentum is set at the global level.

Brussels is an interesting case in this respect, as the city has gained a prominent, yet highly specific place in the world city network in post-war decades. Referring to classical, business-oriented functions of world cities, Brussels is characterized by a very limited control capacity over international capital, with only four among Europe's largest transnational corporations being headquartered in the city—compared to 43 in Paris or 60 in London (Rozenblat and Cicille, 2003). This modest position notably reflects the weaknesses of the Belgian state in supporting the development of nationally based transnational corporations (Vandermotten and Marissal, 1998). In contrast, Brussels has gained considerable visibility at the global level through concentration of the core executive and administrative bodies of the European Union (EU) from the late 1950s onwards. From a relatively insignificant national capital, the city has evolved into an important political world city, a major locus of transnational political centrality. Globalization in Brussels can thus be largely summed up in the process of “Europeanization” of the city (Baeten, 2001). I refer to Europeanization as the concentration of a large set of transnational protagonists in the city, including, apart from the EU institutions themselves, a vast array of region, city and state representation offices, international (non-)governmental organizations, lobbyists, subsidiaries of foreign-based financial, law or consultancy firms and many other EU-dependent or EU-related activities (Elmhorn, 2001; Vandermotten, 1999).

Europeanization also involves significant change in the social and cultural composition of the city. On January 1, 2004, about one quarter (26%) of Brussels' population had non-Belgian citizenship (263,500 people, compared to only 8% in the whole of Belgium), amongst which about 60% had an EU member-state citizenship (National Institute of Statistics, own calculations). This figure gives a rough view of the present-day cosmopolitan nature of Brussels. Nevertheless, it does not distinguish between middle-class expatriates working in professional occupations in the EU administration, EU-related organizations or other transnational activities, on the one hand, and working-class migrants (including numbers of EU citizens such as Italians, Spanish, Portuguese or Polish) who settle in the city independently from the presence of the EU institutions, on the other hand.

The impact of Europeanization on Brussels' urban environment is disputed. While some stress the role of Europeanization as a major catalyst for local economic growth, others strongly emphasize the contribution of the process to spatial segmentation and impoverishment in the city (Baeten, 2003). In 2001, the Group of Policy Advisors

(GOPA), a dedicated group of 12 European intellectuals² appointed by the then President of the EU Commission (Romano Prodi) and Belgian Prime Minister (Guy Verhofstadt) to discuss the expectations, needs and functions of Brussels as capital of Europe, stated that “the relations between the European institutions and Brussels in the past have not been an example of good practice and could be improved on many fronts” (GOPA, 2001:22). A significant part of GOPA’s debates focused on the physical impact of EU presence in the city, including issues of office provision, architectural design, planning frameworks and monuments. Amongst the participants, Rem Koolhaas, a well known architect, was particularly radical in describing how the presence of the EU institutions had affected the urban fabric, using striking terms, such as “trauma,” “flatness” and “megalomania.” Moreover, there was a large consensus among GOPA participants that other, still largely under-debated effects of the EU presence in the city needed to be considered. These concerns refer to diverse problem areas related to the activities and everyday life of expatriate European residents in Brussels, including employment, housing, schools and transportation. What is at stake here is Brussels’ ability to build networks between the multiple population groups that shape its cosmopolitan socio-cultural landscape. In sum, GOPA’s debates have underlined that Europeanization reshapes the local urban environment in various ways, physically (i.e., the impact of the massive growth of office space in the city), as well as socially and culturally. It is therefore important to look at the imprints of Europeanization in Brussels beyond the spatial limits of the Léopold Quarter, today’s central EU business district in the city.

In this paper, I analyze how Europeanization interacts with existing socio-spatial and political configurations in Brussels, taking the whole city into account (i.e., the Brussels Capital Region, about 1 million inhabitants). The first section focuses on the nature and agents of Europeanization in Brussels, stressing the agglomerative strategies of a large set of transnational protagonists as the main drivers of this process. Building on this background, the second section analyzes the imprints of Europeanization on the urban environment. My point is that, under present-day conditions, Europeanization makes a significant contribution to socio-spatial polarization in Brussels. Particular attention is paid to labor market restructuring and to office and housing market dynamics. Finally, the third section links these developments to the (still weak and incomplete) governance of the Europeanization process in Brussels.

comments.

- 2 Among participants were a writer (Umberto Eco), an architect (Rem Koolhaas), a film director (Agnès Jaoui), an entrepreneur (Nicolas Hayek, head of Swatch Group), politicians (Pasqual Maragall, former mayor of Barcelona, and Bronislaw Geremek, deputy of Polish Parliament), high-level academics and managers of international cultural venues (e.g., Juan Ignacio Vidarte, Director of the Bilbao’s Guggenheim museum). Participants met for two brainstorming sessions in May and September 2001 in Brussels, which focused respectively on two issues: what type of capital Europe should have, and

Brussels as a political world city

The concentration of the core executive and administrative bodies of the EU in Brussels since the city was chosen as an EU capital in the late 1950s has radically transformed Brussels' place and role in the world city network. The city has evolved from the national capital of the (increasingly weakened) Belgian state to a place with considerable transnational visibility. Brussels is now classically categorized within international urban hierarchies as a second-tier world city, on a similar footing with cities like Amsterdam, Madrid, Milan, Vienna or Zurich in Europe—depending on the particular combination of empirical measures used (see, e.g., Beaverstock et al., 1999; Rozenblat and Cicille, 2003; Vandermorten, 1999). About two thirds of the workforce employed by the EU are in Brussels, the rest working mostly in Strasburg (e.g., Parliament, European Ombudsman), Luxemburg (e.g., European Court of Justice, European Court of Auditors, Directorate-General for Translation), Frankfurt (European Central Bank) or Ispra, Italy (e.g., Institute for Environment and Sustainability). Following decades of political indecision, substantial institutional stability was given to the role of Brussels as capital of the EU at the 1993 Edinburgh summit, later confirmed in the 2002 Nice Treaty. Moreover, the city also hosts NATO headquarters (since 1967) and other international institutions (e.g., Western European Union, Eurocontrol).

The EU institutions account today for about 21,000 jobs in Brussels (Table 1). This figure has been growing very rapidly over the last two decades, with 9,271 employees in 1981, 14,519 in 1990 and 21,182 in 2001 (i.e., an increase of 130% over thirty years) (Iris Consulting, 1998, 2001). This trend is currently further consolidating with the continuation of the EU enlargement process, notably thanks to the inclusion of 10 new member states in 2004. Moreover, another 30,000 jobs have to be added when taking into account employees in the vast array of international non-governmental organizations, legal and consultancy firms, international media, region and city representation offices and the like that have clustered in the city over the last decades owing to Brussels' transnational political role. In sum, employment in international institutions (EU and others), EU-dependent or EU-related transnational activities in Brussels account today for about 55,000 jobs (i.e., 8% of the local labor market) and 13% of the city's GDP (Table 1).

The rationale behind the concentration of these transnational agents in Brussels relates basically to the play of agglomeration economies. Through spatial concentration, transnational organizations and firms whose activities are specifically linked to EU matters generate specific knowledge that is, in turn, vital for additional transnational protagonists to gain access to and exploit for their own profit. As these economic players operate through dense and complex interpersonal relationships and face-to-face contact with a wide range of individuals in diverse institutions, firms and organizations, the production of this specific knowledge can only be sustained in a context of direct proximity between these multiple protagonists (Storper, 1997; Veltz, 1996). Elmhorn

Table 1. Total employment in international institutions, EU-dependent and EU-related activities in Brussels, 2001

	Employees
European Commission	16,077
Council of Ministers	2,638
European Parliament and Ombudsman	1,670
Economic and Social Committee and Committee of the Regions	797
Total EU institutions	21,182
NATO, WEU, Eurocontrol and other international institutions	3,397
Permanent representations of member states and third countries, international press, region and city representations, other	
EU-dependent activities	10,166
International organizations, international finance sector, law and consultancy firms, congress organizers, other EU-related activities	20,151
Total	54,896

Source: Adapted from Iris Consulting, 2001.

(1998, 2001) has labelled this cohesive set of localized relations between specialized service activities under the header of the “European agglomeration economy” (1998:82). Brussels is conceptualized in this way as “the place to be” for international organizations, representation offices and various specialist knowledge firms in order to access strategic information, take advantage of high-level knowledge transfer, implement lobbying activities and provide services to transnational clients or affiliated members.

For instance, an EU-related commercial-law niche market has been booming in Brussels since the early 1990s. With the advent of the Single European Act (1987) and the Merger Regulation (1990), the European Commission has now acquired jurisdiction over a wide range of financial and commercial affairs that directly affects the business of transnational companies operating in Europe. Consequently, the latter have found themselves in need of specialized legal knowledge and expertise in EU matters (e.g., legal consultancy services in order to get an EU merger clearance), generating a new demand for legal and advisory work to be done in Brussels by a set of specialist knowledge service firms (e.g., law firms, consultancy firms, lobbyists). The bulk of this new EU-related work has been taken over by foreign law firms, while Belgian firms, historically ill-equipped to offer commercial advisory work rather than litigation, have been unable to capitalize on their geographical advantage to gain control over this new market (Parnham, 2001). As a result, Brussels appears now as a “prime center” for global legal services and tops the ranking of world cities by number of London’s law firm foreign branch offices (Beaverstock et al., 1999).

In sum, Brussels' place in transnational urban networks is specifically linked to the concentration of transnational protagonists thriving on strategic flows of information and knowledge with a mainly European scope. These agglomerative strategies compose the basic forces of the Europeanization of the city.

The Europeanization of the urban environment

Over the post-war decades, Brussels has developed into a divided city, characterized by massive middle-class suburbanization (a trend that is still largely ongoing) and a concentration of most of the low qualified and poor, including working-class immigrants, in nineteenth-century inner neighborhoods (De Lannoy and Kesteloot, 1990). Since the mid-1980s, clear signs of reinvestment in some inner neighborhoods have become apparent, related to an influx of diverse types of "gentrifiers," including high-income European expatriate professionals and a vast array of highly educated but relatively cash-poor young adults of middle-class origin (Van Crielingen and Decroly, 2003). In this context, assessing the extent to which the functional transformation of the city, triggered by the concentration of EU institutions, contributes to increased levels of socio-spatial polarization is controversial. I focus my assessment of the impact of Europeanization on the socio-spatial configuration of the city on, firstly, labor market dynamics and, secondly, office and housing market dynamics.

Europeanization and labor market dynamics: Sustaining professionalization

Following a decade of steep industrial decline, a period of renewed economic growth—mostly fuelled by growth in the producer service sector—was initiated in Brussels in the early 1980s. This development has translated in the labor market into a process of unbalanced polarization or "professionalization" (Hamnett, 1994), with white-collar occupations showing much higher growth rates than blue-collar ones (Table 2). The Europeanization process contributes to this trend towards professionalization of the labor market in Brussels, as it brings a highly qualified workforce of predominantly white, middle-class European professionals to the city (Table 3).

More than 9 out of 10 jobs in the EU institutions in Brussels are in white-collar occupations, with 52% of the EU employees holding a post-secondary degree (61% among the expatriate workforce). Moreover, the lion's share of employees in transnational EU-dependent or EU-related activities is also in professional occupations (Iris Consulting, 1998). In parallel, job opportunities for the low-skilled have been shrinking sharply. Hence, despite the growth of the share of blue-collar workers employed in the service sector (32% in 1982, 40% in 2002), no evidence is provided in these aggregated figures for the supposed existence of "trickle-down effects," through which the restructuring of the labor market, partly fuelled by the Europeanization process, could benefit the low-skilled. Put another way, the decline in low-skilled

Table 2. Structure of Brussels labor market, 1972—2002

	1972	1982	1992	2002	Change 1982-2002
White Collar					
total	392,402	419,414	436,354	487,985	+16.4%
service sector	—	276,743	307,531	354,035	+28.0%
Blue Collar					
total	211,501	141,792	134,776	114,586	-19.2%
service sector	—	45,749	49,300	45,410	-0.0%
Total	603,903	561,206	571,130	602,571	+7.4%

Source: National Office for Social Security, Decentralized Statistics, 1972, 1982, 1992, 2002.

Table 3. Requirements for EU employees in Brussels

Occupation Category	Qualifications Required	EU Employees			
		Total	%	Non-Belgians	%
Administrator (A)	university education	5,832	33.3%	5,237	41.6%
Executive assistant (B)	post-secondary education	3,265	18.7%	2,208	17.6%
Administrative assistant (C)	secondary education	7,200	41.1%	4,536	36.1%
Unskilled worker (D)	primary education	1,194	6.8%	585	4.7%
Total		17,491	100.0%	12,566	100.0%

Note: Translators and interpreters are not included.

Source: Adapted from Iris Consulting, 1998.

industrial jobs has not been compensated by a concomitant increase in low-skilled white-collar service jobs (e.g., cleaning, security). This evidence firmly counters the assumption of a "... successful conversion from an industrial economy to a prosperous internationalized service economy" (Baeten, 2003:129). Rather, the low-skilled are increasingly hit by unemployment in the context of increasing professionalization. The unemployment rate in Brussels is above 20% of the economically active since 2002, and two thirds of the unemployed are poorly qualified (ORBEM, 2003). Moreover, new conditions of flexibility and casualization of the labor market strongly limit the prospects of access to the (lower) middle classes through professional advancement (see, e.g., Devillé, 2002).

Office and housing market dynamics: Deepening socio-spatial polarization

Although the spatial distribution of international organizations, advanced service firms, transnational corporations and the like are basically grounded in locational strategies at international and inter-urban levels, the intra-urban geographies of these transnational protagonists' offices, headquarters, representations and secretariats can hardly be thought of as neutral. Rather, "global players" build their own selective territories within cities, composing transnational urban spaces (Smith, 2001). In this section, I consider the territorialization patterns of a series of protagonists of the Europeanization process in Brussels, focusing on their spaces of work, residence and social life.

A geography of transnational workspaces. The spatial distribution of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), region representation offices to the EU and international law firms in the city are investigated here as a set of case studies highlighting broader territorialization patterns of EU-related transnational protagonists in Brussels. These three types of activities are significant contributors to the Europeanization process in Brussels. Firstly, Brussels concentrates 719 secretariats of conventional INGOs (see Figure 1) (Union of International Associations, 2003, own calculations). This figure ranks the city as having the undisputed prime concentration of INGOs secretariats worldwide, far above London and Paris (van der Wusten, 2004). These organizations deal with extremely diverse issues, ranging from the environment to welfare, human rights, health and many other aspects. INGOs, conventional and otherwise, account today for about 11,000 jobs in Brussels. Secondly, representation offices of European regions and cities have been multiplying in Brussels since the early 1990s in parallel to the increasing significance of EU regional policies and investment programs (e.g., Urban European Structural Funds Programs) (Mamadouh, 2001). A survey conducted in 2004 listed 207 such offices in the city (e.g., Lancashire Brussels Office, North Sweden European Office, Kosice Region Liaison Office), accounting for about 1,100 jobs in Brussels (Figure 2) (see Van Criekingen and Kesteloot, 2005, for further details). Thirdly, 152 branch offices of foreign-based international law firms had permanent offices in Brussels in 2003, accounting for about 1,200 jobs (Figure 3). They originate from European countries or the U.S., with London law firms dominating Brussels' international legal market. Brussels acts for these firms as a specialist legal center, with most of the foreign law firms holding small-sized satellite offices highly focused on EU-related issues (e.g., competition, trade law) (see Van Criekingen et al., 2005, for more details).

I have already argued that the ongoing Europeanization process in Brussels is fuelled by the agglomerative logic of a set of transnational protagonists in relation to the presence of EU institutions in the city. This rationale is made empirically tangible here at the intra-urban scale, as INGOs, region representation offices and international law firms show very clear patterns of spatial clustering within the city (Figures 1-3). Most are located in the eastern inner city, in and around the Léopold Quarter, i.e., the main

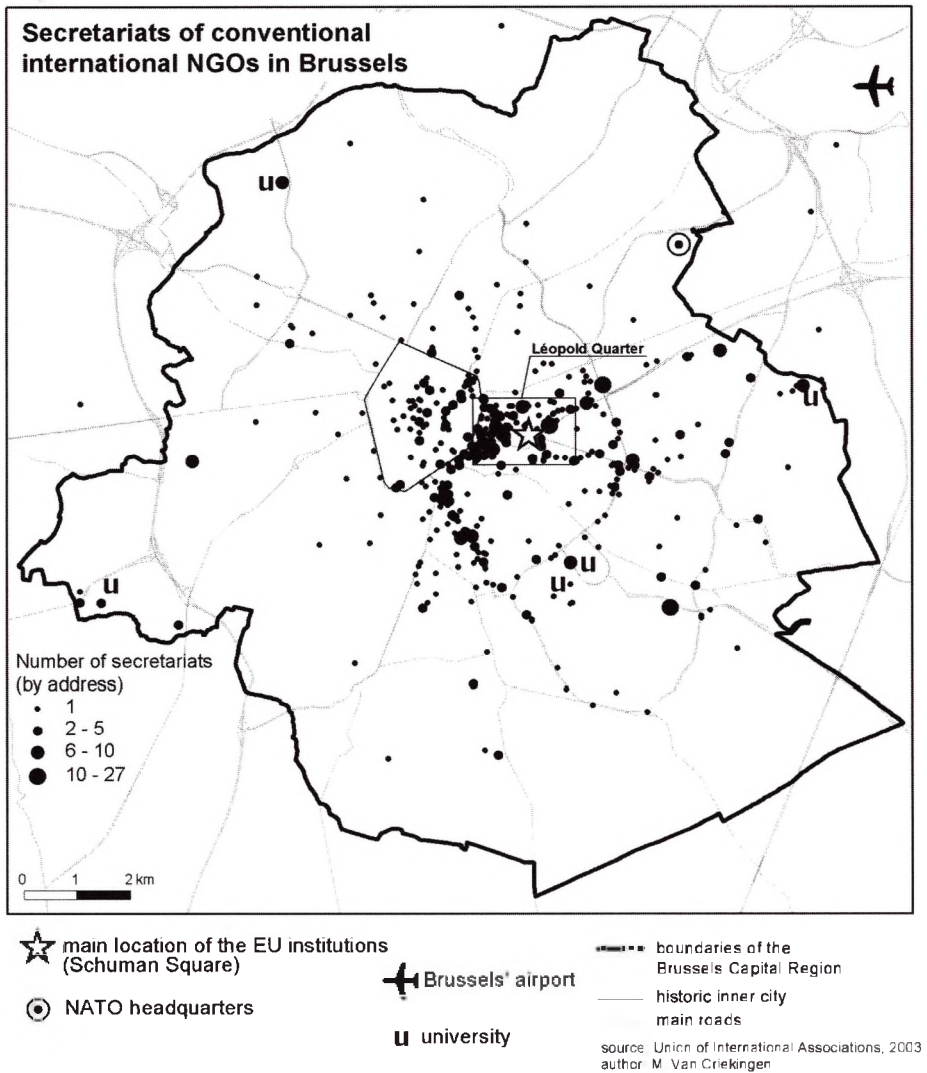


Figure 1: Secretariats of conventional international NGOs in Brussels.

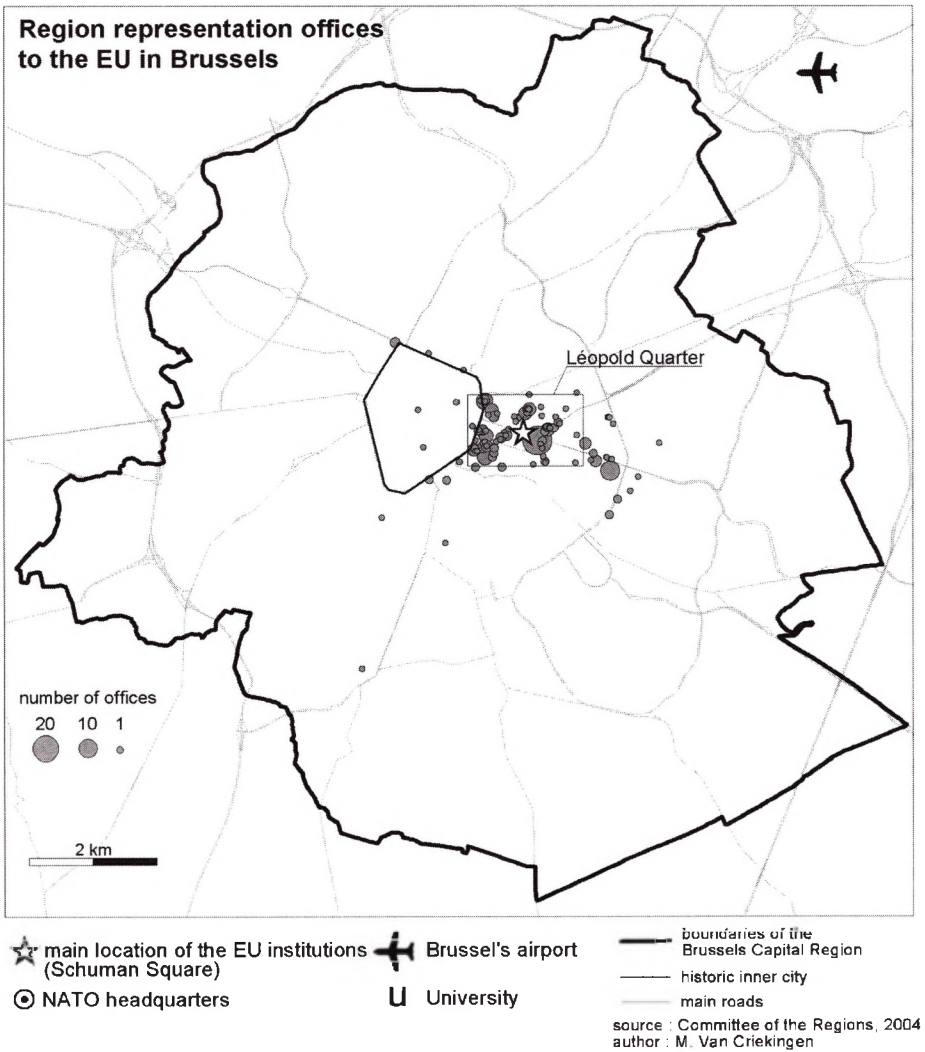


Figure 2: Region representation offices to the EU in Brussels.

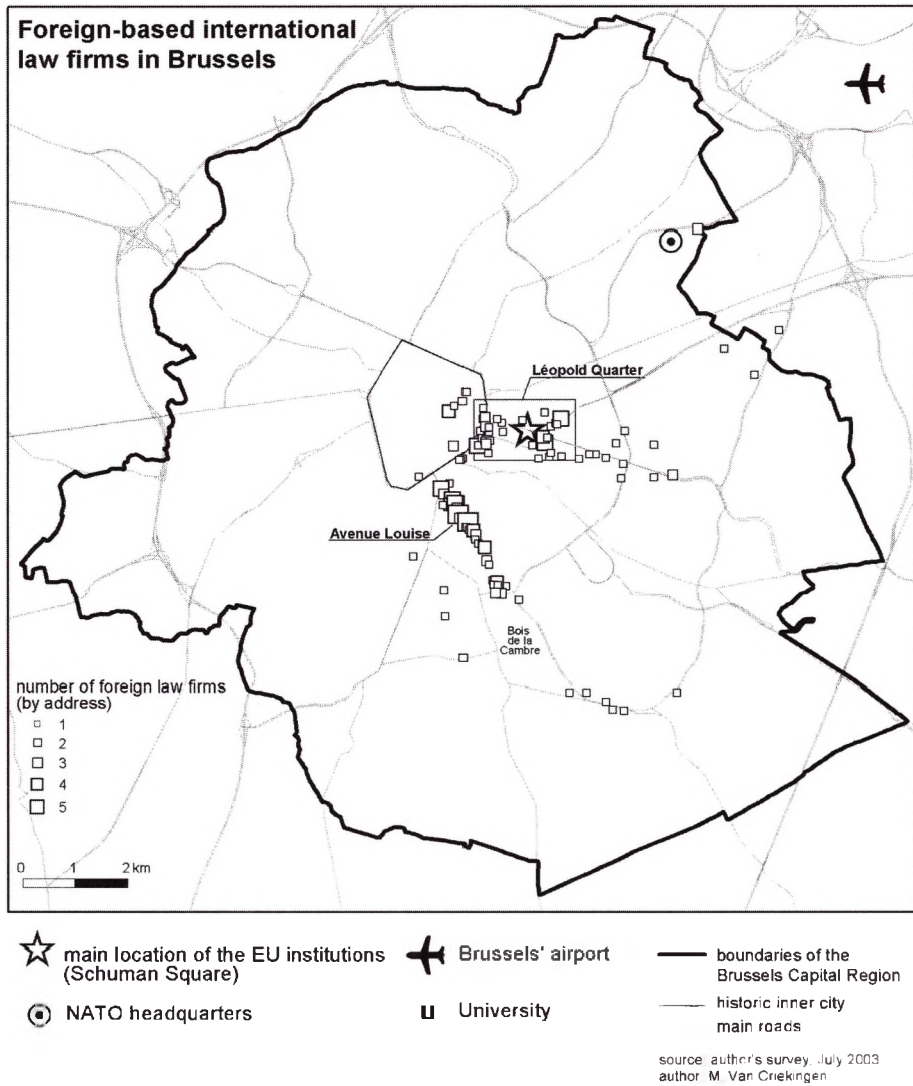


Figure 3: Foreign-based international law firms in Brussels.

location of EU institutions in Brussels centered upon Schuman Square. This pattern is most apparent for region representation offices, as all but one are located within a 3-km radius centered on the main EU Commission building in the Léopold Quarter. Three quarters of them are even located in a 1-km radius. Some concentrations of INGOs in decentralized locations are also noticeable, often corresponding to the location of university hospitals and campuses. Moreover, the spatial distribution of international foreign law firms also reflects the importance of the historical geography of the legal sector in the city, with many Belgian law firms traditionally being located along prestigious avenues in the southeastern part of the city since the early twentieth century, Louise Avenue most notably.

These highly concentrated intra-urban spatial distributions highlight the importance of transnational activities in Brussels being close to EU institutions as well as to each other. Direct proximity to EU institutions enables those activities to sustain frequent interpersonal face-to-face contact with key officials in the European Commission and other EU bodies so as to access strategic information and implement lobbying activities. The importance of direct proximity between protagonists is striking. Indicative in this respect are the many occurrences of several INGOs, region representation offices and international law firms sharing the same address, frequently reflecting practices of office pooling. These strategies not only offer savings on office costs, but also enable these firms to take direct advantage of other organizations' expertise.

Both dimensions materialize the play of Elmhorn's "European agglomeration economy" in Brussels, that is, the production and consumption of specific knowledge through intense formal (and informal) interactions and networking practices between highly specialized organizations, firms and individuals. It is through the play of these agglomeration economies at very local scales (i.e., the neighborhood, the street or even the office building) that Europeanization impacts effectively on the urban environment. The ruthless restructuring of the Léopold Quarter since the late 1950s is obviously the most spectacular expression of this imprint (Baeten, 2003; Christiaens, 2003; Papadopoulos, 1996). Once a prestigious residential neighborhood for the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, four decades of largely unplanned office development have radically transformed the area into a U.S.-style quasi-monofunctional business district of about 3 million square meters of office floor space. Uncontrolled strategies of profit maximization by office developers and investors have led to the destruction of valuable nineteenth-century dwellings and the direct eviction of about 2,500 inhabitants. Moreover, waves of speculation in residential blocks adjacent to existing (or planned) office blocks have put numerous additional households under severe threat of displacement.

As the case of the Léopold Quarter shows with extreme intensity, Europeanization places strong pressure on the urban fabric through office market dynamics. However, the imprints of Europeanization in Brussels are not limited to office development; they reshape the urban environment well beyond the limits of the Léopold Quarter.

Spaces of residence and social life of European expatriates in Brussels. About three quarters (72%) of the non-Belgian expatriates working as EU employees in Brussels live within the limits of the Brussels Capital Region. This share is significantly lower (39%) for their Belgian colleagues.³ This contrast emphasizes that residential strategies of foreign EU employees in Brussels are turned more towards the densely built urban environment than those of the Belgian EU employees, most of whom opt for an out-of-core residence, mainly in wealthy suburbs. The continuation of strong post-war state intervention favoring access to home ownership in suburban areas as the spatial component of Fordist economic growth has created a marked preference for suburban living amongst the Belgian middle classes (Kesteloot, 2000).

However, the “sense of place” (Massey, 1994) of expatriate Europeans within the city is spatially limited, leaving large parts of the urban fabric entirely unexplored. At the intra-urban level, EU employees settle mostly in affluent southeastern neighborhoods. These areas are particularly attractive to them given their location close to the Léopold Quarter and their distinctive urban yet green environment. Using mental maps drawn by British EU officials, Caillez (2004) has shown the highly selective character of the urban experiences of expatriates in Brussels, with most of the latter living, working, socializing, shopping and entertaining in the wealthy southeastern part of the agglomeration. For instance, schools used by expatriate households (i.e., the European schools financed by EU institutions for the children of their employees or other international private schools like the Deutsche Schule Brussel, the Japanese school or the Brussels American School) are very unevenly distributed in the urban fabric. As shown in Figure 4, all are located along a southeastern axis, within the city limits or in wealthy suburban municipalities outside the Brussels Capital Region (e.g., Tervueren). In parallel, the city’s lower-, middle-, and working-class western neighborhoods are typically a “terra incognita” for European expatriates (Caillez, 2004).

This selective mode of territorial integration of European expatriates makes a significant contribution to the consolidation of socio-spatial polarization in Brussels. The influx of European expatriates, given their high disposable income, has fuelled a sharp rise in housing prices that has led to the gentrification of many neighborhoods on the eastern edge of the inner city. This process has provoked the displacement of many low- to moderate-income tenants from these areas since the early 1990s (De Lannoy and De Corte, 1994; Van Crielingen, 2002). Most of the displacees have relocated in the western part of the inner city, where they have to face worsened living conditions, as most of them are restricted to old, disinvested dwellings in the private rental sector given the dramatic lack of social housing all over the city (only 8% of the housing stock).

how Brussels could best express and benefit from being such a capital.

3 This gap is only partly explained by differences in household composition between Belgian and non-

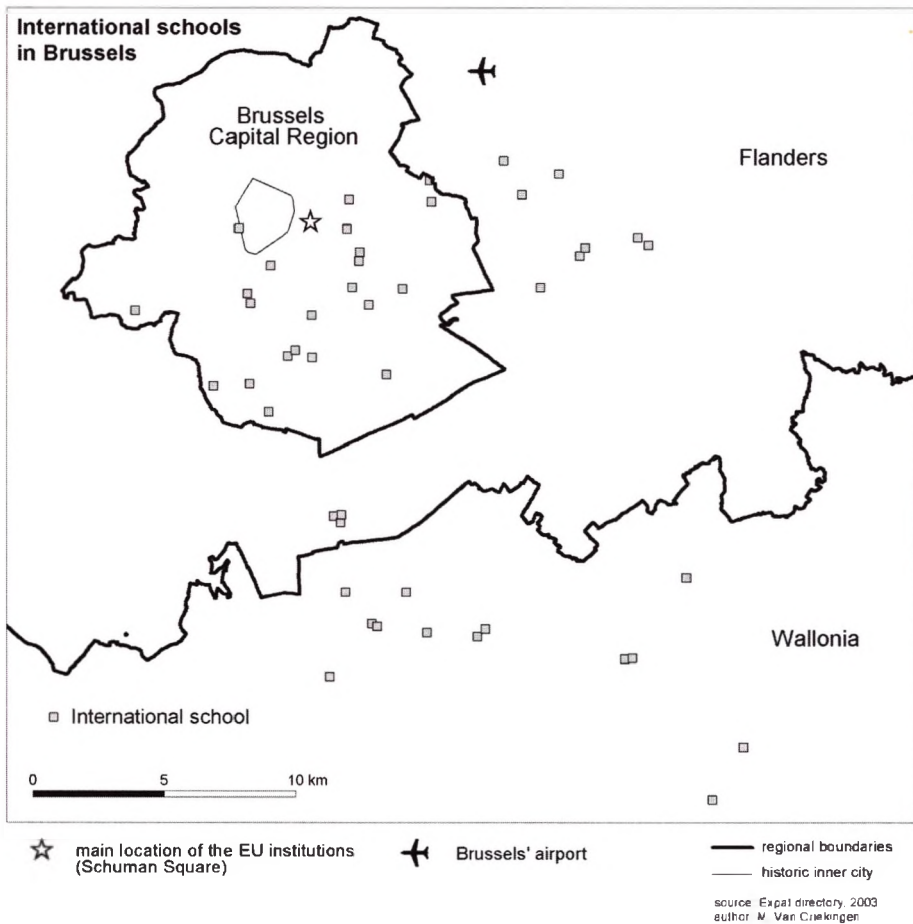


Figure 4: International schools in Brussels.

Additionally, Favell (2001) and Caillez (2004) have brought out, through in-depth interviews and ethnographic work, that the social networks of the European expatriates in Brussels rarely intersect with those of the Belgian middle classes, even though they live in the same neighborhoods. Most European expatriates remain socially and culturally largely enclosed in a kind of international “bubble” within which social networks are structured around specifically international organizations and activities, such as the European or international schools or the myriad of socio-cultural associations catering to expatriate clienteles (e.g., international clubs, sport teams, theater companies, choirs).

In sum, while European expatriates are territorially integrated in (parts of) the city, an international social enclave has developed that keeps social networks of European expatriates and Belgian middle classes largely detached from each other. Both the selective territorial integration of European expatriates and the development of an international social enclave consolidate stereotypical perceptions of expatriate European professionals by the local population and media as an imported and distant “elite” of “Eurocrats” benefiting from special “privileges” (e.g., higher incomes, lower taxes,⁴ dedicated schools).

The governance of Europeanization—Or the lack of it?

Since about a decade ago, there have been some attempts by authorities of the Brussels Capital Region to endorse an enhanced consciousness and appreciation of the European presence in the city. However, EU officials and European expatriate populations still remain very much absent from the structures and networks of power that shape the governance of the city, both at the regional and municipal levels. As Swyngedouw and Baeten (2001:836) have pointed out,

the economic rescaling of Brussels [has] not [been] accompanied by a parallel institutional and political re-scaling. ... While the key actors and drivers of Brussels' economy are international and global, the political and cultural elite actors are decidedly local and regional.

For instance, issues of urban planning related to the presence of the EU institutions in the city are dealt with on an ad hoc basis—in often contradictory terms—by various protagonists in different municipal, regional and federal governments and in different EU general directorates.

Although it may seem paradoxical at first, no substantial strategic urban project centered on Brussels' role as a first-order political world city in Europe has emerged after 40 years of EU presence in the city. Rather, Brussels' urban political agenda is very much overshadowed by struggles rooted in antagonism and divisions along linguistic lines and in the highly problematic process of federalizing the Belgian state. Since 1989, the Brussels Capital Region has its own institutional existence within the new federal configuration of Belgium, alongside the Flemish and Walloon Regions.

Belgian EU workers.

4 Actually, officials of the EU institutions do not pay their income taxes locally—neither to the Brussels Capital Region nor to the Belgian state—but directly to the EU budget by virtue of inter-governmental agreements at the European level.

However, the institutional organization of the Brussels Capital Region largely replicates Belgian internal divisions between Dutch-speaking and French-speaking communities. As a result, the whole political scene of the city is divided in two parts, including two separate electoral colleges and the need to find a majority in both of them to set up the regional government. These conditions strongly restrict local political debate to French/Flemish issues, and the city's official bilingual status does not match its much broader cosmopolitan composition. In this context, European expatriates living in Brussels hardly feel motivated to get involved in the local democracy, as the very low proportion (7%) of them who registered to vote for the 2000 local elections clearly reflects.

In addition, the emergence of a strategic urban project encompassing the whole metropolitan area is further hampered, as the Brussels Capital Region is cut off from its (wealthy) suburban areas, the latter being located either in Flanders or in Wallonia. Coordination efforts at the supra-regional level regarding cross-border issues remain very seldom, single-purposed and very much constrained by Flemish or Walloon political agendas. Hence, spatial competition and territorial rivalry rather than cooperation between the different parts of the metropolitan territory is actually the order of the day (Vandermotten, 2000). Furthermore, the territory of the Brussels Capital Region is divided internally into 19 municipalities, each of which retains much influence and power, notably as far as issues of urban planning and land allocation are concerned. To quote the expressive words of Swyngedouw and Baeten (2001:842), "the power bastions of the municipal power fiefdoms and their localist and parochial power networks ... lead to fragmentation, centripetal struggle, to condition of permanent semi-conflicts and to a perpetual displacement of problems." In sum, the ongoing Europeanization of Brussels goes hand in hand with the perpetuation of a highly fragmented local political framework and structure of urban governance from which transnational "elites" remain largely absent.

However, the EU presence has not developed in the city in the absence of any state intervention, either at the federal or regional level. Rather, public intervention has been significant but limited to a "functionalist" approach, that is, aimed at securing the provision of a sufficient amount of office space to accommodate EU and other transnational institutions (as well as whatever clients are attracted to Brussels by the city's international status) and fulfilling the latter's security requirements. The development of EU or EU-related functions in the city has been traditionally considered "automatic." Accordingly, laissez faire attitudes aimed at cashing in on the economic benefits of this development have been predominant. As a consequence, the reshaping of the urban fabric in post-war decades has been largely influenced by office developers' priorities rather than by strategic and democratically elaborated options (Baeten, 2001, 2003; Vandermotten, 2000). The production of the "EU central executive district" in the Léopold Quarter (Papadopoulos, 1996) is a spectacular case in point. It was designed and implemented by various kinds of alliances—or collusion—between real-estate interests and politicians at different government levels, while citizens were largely kept out of

the decision-making process. The whole project was actually motivated first and foremost by existing real-estate opportunities created by increasing demands for new office development in order to accommodate the ongoing enlargement of EU presence in the city. This mechanism was further reinforced between 1958 and the mid-1990s in the context of political indecision at the European level about the definitive locations of the EU institutions, as this context has supported very “accommodating” attitudes of the Belgian state and local authorities towards the EU (see also Christiaens, 2003).

The real estate-led destruction of the historic urban fabric in the Léopold Quarter and beyond has generated traumatic and much contested experiences of urban (re)development in Brussels (Noël, 1998). This has led, in turn, to the consolidation of a very defensive agenda of urban planning, putting strong emphasis on the conservation, or re-creation, of the traditional urban fabric. Accordingly, any proposal for large-scale projects in the city since then are considered a priori with suspicion (Vandermotten, 2000).

Conclusion

The clustering of major institutions of the European Union and a vast array of protagonists thriving on transnational flows of information and knowledge in Brussels has fundamentally transformed the city's place and role in world city networks over the second half of the twentieth century. In parallel, this development has triggered significant change in Brussels' urban environment. In this respect, the Europeanization process largely acts locally as a set of polarizing forces, by sustaining professionalization of the labor market and through office and housing market dynamics fuelling gentrification and related displacement of poorly resourced households. After four decades of EU presence in Brussels, feelings of the local population about the EU institutions and the presence of expatriate Europeans in the city are quite cool. This outcome has to be linked at least partially to a lack of strategic and democratically negotiated form of governance of the EU and transnational presence in Brussels. So far, shaping the Europeanization of the city has been very much left to the poorly regulated mechanisms of the real estate market (for office and housing), while public authorities have limited their role to fulfilling functional requirements of EU institutions, particularly in terms of office provision and security. Accordingly, the elaboration of a politically, economically and culturally inclusive urban project that would materialize a comprehensive vision on Brussels as a Europeanized and cosmopolitan urban agglomeration remains a highly challenging task.

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