

Building (the capital of) Europe as a heterotopy

Construyendo (la capital de) Europa como una heterotopía

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ABSTRACT

The European unification project requires imagination to achieve the support of the population. Its role should be that of a capital city, not only the location for its institutions, but also as the place for developing arts, culture and innovation related to the project. To become such a capital of Europe would be a good urban project for Brussels. But to achieve that, a critical assessment is needed of the effects of the unification process with very strong centre-periphery dialectics. In that process the Mediterranean way of life is fading away, though it represents a vital part of "Europeanness". Constructing a postnational European imaginary and investing that in the project of a capital city needs a decentered identity in a heterotopian space.

Key words: Europe, Brussels, urbanity, urban imaginaries

RESUMEN

El proyecto de unificación europea necesita de la imaginación para conseguir la adhesión de la población. Ese es el papel que puede jugar una ciudad capital, no sólo para ser la sede de las instituciones, sino también para constituirse como el lugar donde se desarrollan las artes, la cultura y la innovación relacionadas con el proyecto. Convertirse en una capital de Europa sería un buen proyecto urbano para Bruselas. Para ello, hace falta una evaluación crítica de los efectos del proceso de unificación con una fuerte dialéctica centro-periferia. En dicho proceso, el estilo de vida mediterráneo se está desvaneciendo, aun siendo una parte vital de la "europeidad". Al objeto de construir un imaginario europeo posnacional e invertir en el proyecto de una ciudad capital se necesita una identidad descentrada en un espacio heterotópico.

Palabras clave: Europa, Bruselas, capital, urbanidad, imaginarios urbanos

To be(come) the capital city of Europe, Brussels needs to take its place in the mental maps of the Europeans in such a way that it fully symbolises the European project. A capital city functions in the first place in the collective imaginary. In this essay I want to deal with some questions arising from this position. What exactly should be symbolised if we speak about a European Union? How does that relate to the urban condition of the capital city? Does Brussels offer the necessary features for such an enterprise? Who would be the central agents for such a process? And where could it take place? I would like to deal with this question as an example of a global-local nexus and show how globalisation processes have to be thought through up to the level of neighbourhood development.

Brussels is the main seat of European institutions. It houses the European Commission and the Council of the European Union. The daily activities of the Parliament are located there. The Committee of Regions has its offices in the city, as do the European Economic and Social Committee. The European Summit meetings are held in Brussels. And in 2001 the president of the Commission Romano Prodi and the Belgian Prime minister Guy Verhofstadt invited a group of intellectuals to prepare a report on “Brussels, Capital of Europe” (European Commission/Belgian Presidency (2001)). There is hardly any doubt that Brussels has become the main centre of the institutional unification process of Europe. It is the territory, the place of the main institutions. More than 40,000 EU staff work in the offices and nearly 200,000 people live in Brussels because of EU functions.

It is reported as such by the international press when reporting on EU matters. A number of titles contain the words “Brussels had decided that...” or “Brussels issues...”, where the name of the city is used to indicate European institutional decision-making. This *pars pro toto* is in many cases a way of hiding the composition of the decision-making bodies. Reports on the European Parliament do refer to the assembly, whereas a number of decisions by the Commission or even more so by the Council (of national ministers!) are referred to as being “Brussels”. The name is thus mostly related negatively to non-representative decision-making, to European “bureaucracy”, to the more opaque side of Europe, to the democratic deficit whenever a decision seems imposed upon national states or populations.

The image of Brussels is then associated with the dominant perception of the European unification process: a market-led unification, transferring national sovereignty to non-elected and non-transparent decision-making. The existing treaties do concentrate the unification into the three pillars of economic integration, a common foreign and security policy and police and judicial co-operation. The bulk of the “imaginary constitution of society” (Castoriadis, 1975) is still left to the nation-states. They remain responsible for social and cultural reproduction. That “gap” in European construction has been regularly denounced (Corijn, 1998).¹

1. See also the artist's manifesto: *Pour une Europe basée sur sa culture* (Bernard Focroulle et al., 2004)

IN SEARCH OF EUROPEAN IDENTITY

In the preparation of the Constitutional treaty, the search for a common “cultural foundation” led to a discussion about the importance of Christianity for “Europeanness” on a background of an existing transnational trend based on the organizing capacity of the Roman Catholic church. It led to a discussion about the separation between the state and the church and thus about the centrality of lay state. There has not been any other attempt to define a binding trans-national, let alone post-national culture. The European unification project is presented as a peacekeeping device of inter-national cooperation, leading to a powerful continent in a competitive world. As the debates around the constitution have shown, basically two types of opposition are expressed. On the one hand, there are the nationalist, “sovereignistic” defenders of the nation-state as the only level of legitimate regulation of social, economic and cultural affairs. On the other hand the pro-Europeans rejecting an imbalance between market-led integration and the development of income, social security and welfare insurance.

The rejection of the constitutional treaty in France and the Netherlands and the subsequent delay in the ratification process sparked at least a mental crisis in the unification process. It has shown the divide between the European leadership and large fractions of the population. The crisis was deepened when non-agreement on a budget at the summer 2005 summit also divided the European leadership itself. The divide was analysed as being between the protagonists of a mere free trade unity versus the defenders of federalist, further political integration. It seems clear that the existing project is at the crossroads of lesser or more substantial unity. It is what a number of European leaders have called an “identity crisis”. Since then there has been no significant change in the situation.

The importance of a European capital city is of course completely different for the two schools of thought. The protagonists of a mere free trade zone keep all the cultural elements of society within the nation-state settings. The federalists need to deliver a societal programme in which Europe becomes a register of social identification. They have to speak about a “European way of life”, about specific elements of European “norms and values” that can specify the continent. They have, in short, to admit and support the construction of a post-national identity.

The European unification process has without any doubt favoured the emergence of a new middle-class consumer culture recognisable from within all national cultures. It has been described from the first sociological studies on ways of life in Europe (Scardigli, 1976, 1987, 1989). The basic trends of any integration in the European space are similar: industrialisation and post-industrialisation, urbanisation and commodification. Overall there is a process of de-traditionalisation of rural cultures and entry into

modern and urban consumer cultures. As in the social and economic maps of Europe, the “blue banana”² seems also to be the taste maker in lifestyle and cultural developments. The Fordist regulation at the base of early economic integration processes was culturally embedded in north-west European protestant cultures, later enforced with the Scandinavian model. Basically the so-called social capitalism, the “Rhineland model”, is grounded on productivity agreements and thus a deeply-rooted productivism. Economic growth is based upon rapid labour productivity growth. It needs a “mentality” based on labour ethics, on a clear-cut separation between work time and leisure time, on modern contract relations, and so on. It is what Weber called “the rationalisation process” and its focus on “*zweckrationalität*” (Weber, 1967).

In that sense, the “European way of life” under construction is heavily determined by “Protestant” bourgeois values as they have been integrated into the national cultures of the UK, The Netherlands, Germany, Scandinavia, etc. European integration has put the “Mediterranean way of life” under pressure (Scardigli, 1987). This seems a deficit both from the point of view of quality of life and of historical roots of “Europeanness”. Maybe herein lies the difficulty of building a collective imaginary as the historical divide between the Germanic north and the Romanic south is still reproduced through uneven but combined economic developments alongside the Roman *limes*. That is why I have always insisted upon the importance of bridging that divide and looking back at the Mediterranean origins of the European imaginary (Corijn, 1994, 1998; Corijn et al., 2000 and 2004). A number of elements of “good life” are still cultivated in the south and under great productivist pressure in the north. Of course, this remains to be seen in practice, especially through existing transnational third cultures and social practices.

URBANITY AS THE CONDITION OF GLOBALISATION

Anyhow, these laboratories of post-national “Europeanness” are to be found in cities. They offer the space for these new hybrid emergent cultures, based on constant interaction and dialogue with the “Other”. Globalisation – and the European integration

2. The core area of Europe from South-England over the Dutch “Randstad” and the Belgian urban network, the German Ruhr to Beieren, and the to northern Italy: 19% of the EU 27 + 2 area (Norway and Switzerland) are home to 60% of the population and 72% of the GDP.

process is both part of and a reaction to it – is also urbanisation. The urban condition forms the life world of the majority of mankind, and will soon be the environment of 80 to 85% of the world's population. The same is true for the European dynamics. The space of the single market, of the truly integrating social practices, is the urban network. It is and becomes more and more in Castell's terms a "space of flows" (Castells, 1996, 1998). In reality different geographies are at work. The European integration project, devised as a further collaboration between nation-states (and imagined as a puzzle or a mosaic), is doubled by an intensification of interactions via an urban network. It is the connectedness of the real integration, it is the format of the single market, it forms the itineraries of the free movement of capital, goods and services; it is the real geography of the unification process.

But that urban network lacks expression, discourse. Politics and political institutions remain caught in their national constituencies, in which cities are represented as the smallest unit in a Matryoshka-structure of world, continent, country and city. Europe is still (only) represented as an addition of (sovereign) member states, and narrating Europe is a story of intercultural and interreligious dialogue. The "identity crisis" is as much the result of the deadlock of political integration mechanisms as it is the impossibility of expressing "Europeanness" only through intercultural dialogue.

A city is not a country. A country is built on the image of "commonness" that can be turned into community and become the basis of the nation. National culture constructs a tradition, a common past, legitimising identity. It is in that framework that both cultural and political representation is possible. The city, urban life, doesn't fit that framework. It is exceptional because it is based on difference, on the plurality of functions, activities and cultures, on the construction and creativity based on that encounter between strangers. Urban culture is not traditional. On the contrary, it expresses common destinies, it is projected into the future. The identity is not a given, but a hybrid product of interaction. It cannot easily be represented and thus needs constant action and interaction, constant participation to be "made". That tension between the nation and the city is even more pronounced for the capital city. Paris is not France. Berlin is not Germany. New York is not America. They are the product of the constant proximity of the national culture and the differences with the rest of the world. The capital cities produce an emergent culture, linking the nation with the world, deconstructing national identities into universality, allowing for the space of flows to take over from the space of places.

Urbanity is not only multiculturalism. Ziaudin Sardar (2004) argues that modernity introduces an inegalitarian vision on cultures as it posits itself as a distinctive and superior mode of existence. Consequently, all other modes of being, doing and knowing are implicitly seen as inferior. It does so through taking the monopoly of future and progress and developing a static vision on tradition. In that sense, "other" cultures are presented under their most fixed characteristics as if they are only past and have no other future

than to integrate (Western) modernity. Such a position is not only in continuity with enlightenment, colonialism and the “civilising” process, but also with the “romanticised imagined past” (ibid: 10) on which they base their elitist position in the intercultural dialogue. They enforce the modernist position by accepting a “backward” position that is only to be overcome through “modernisation”. All but the white cultures are presented as “ethnic”. Such a relationship between cultures installs the multicultural reality as a tolerant approach of uneven difference. Equality is then the delivery of sameness, whilst identity is a perception of difference.

This framework does not allow for equal intercultural developments. To bring parity amongst diverse cultures one should seek a modernity-free cultural space. That is what Sardar calls “transmodernity”. In such a space intercultural relations can search for aspirations on how to construct the future, they can try to go beyond cultural difference, to look for what unites. Such a space is the condition for “mutuality and trust” (Rose & Wadham-Smith, 2004) as a product of the readiness of cultures to be dynamic, to build the future, to see tradition as not fixed. Such an intercultural dialogue accepts different cultural traditions as being non-reducible and dynamic, it accepts different modernities, accepts the good and bad of all cultures and sees a common future as an open-ended construct. This leads to “mutually assured diversity” as a common acceptance of difference and of interrelated dynamics, and goes beyond the kind tolerance of multiculturalism.

EUROPEAN URBANITY AS IDENTIFICATION

In that sense “Europeanness” is a different register than “European inter-nationality”, a register that is much nearer to urban culture and the interurban network. The European capital city needs to be much more than the seat of the inter-national institutions and their cultural expression. It needs to be at the centre of an urban networking, and to be at the forefront of developing exactly that culture that emerges from being a world city, both at the level of global-continental connectedness and at the level of intra-urban conviviality. In fact such a programme is derived from exactly the same elements in a national capital city. It is also more than the seat of the state, the place of the monarchy, or the presidency, or the parliament, or the state administration... It is also the intellectual and artistic construction of the national project in as much as it shows in practice that the regional differences can be overcome, that concentration and proximity helps intellectual and artistic creativity (universities, academies, schools, exhibitions, festivals) and that the capital city offers the necessary platforms, coalitions

and think-tanks to fuel the national project and interests. At that level the capital city is always ahead of the “province”. In the same way, a European capital city needs to be “ahead” of the nations and even the EU.

So far I have dealt with the necessary characteristics of the project if one opts to construct a European capital city. It needs to develop an image that can take its place in the mental maps of the Europeans. That image needs to be positively associated with the project of the European unification process. That association gives rise to two tracks. On the one hand there is the real connection with the institutions of the project and especially with their representative function. On the other hand there is the more symbolic connection with the creativity expressing the possible futures of the project. The local smell of the capital city needs to project the citizens and the visitors to the more integrated, the more cosmopolitan future that is promised, it has in some ways to materialise the idea. The European capital city needs to be a space of flows generating illustrative elements of post-national culture, of sustainable socio-economic development and a fully redistributive social integration. The main and central actors for such a project are not the institutions, especially if they remain caught in the ambivalence of the European project. The main actors have to be sought in the urban context of the city concerned. An adapted platform, a coalition between local government, urban actors and institutions and involved “glocal” “elites” seems to me the best actor for such a mission.

EUROPE IS BRUSSELS’ DESTINY

Is Brussels the right candidate for such a programme? It is at least the city most confronted with that question, being the seat of the main institutions and designated as such by summits and media. It is of course heavily loaded with the history and the geography of the EU. It is the centre of the historic core of (Western) European integration (one of the six founding members, in the core blue banana, at the interface of Romanic and Germanic cultures, central between Paris-London and Berlin...). But it is also under pressure from the effects of the extension to the south and to the east and a possible re-equilibration of the centre towards central Europe. Van Parijs et al. (2010) have argued that it is not only a sustainable choice, but that it is very unlikely that another city will ever take that position. Today Brussels is thus the only city that can attempt to build an urban project on becoming the EU capital. Whether that will be sustainable depends largely on the urban reality itself and the success of such a programme. In the last part of this essay we will look at some of the intrinsic success factors for such a programme.

Brussels is a small world city

Brussels is a relatively small city³. Its population within the official Brussels Capital region is 1.1 million. The morphological agglomeration, however, consists of 36 municipalities with a total of 1,356,208 residents. The 250 km² of the 64 municipalities composing the wider city region counted in 2002 a total of 1,760,782 inhabitants.

It is not in the top one hundred of the most populated cities in the world, but in most rankings Brussels appears in the middle places of the top ten. In the world cities research of GaWC⁴ Brussels is shown to take a prominent place in global legal services and other globalising agencies. It is one of the global centres for non-governmental organizations. It is one of the top three richest regions in Europe. Being the host city for the European Institutions or NATO, easily 200,000 of its inhabitants are related to global political flows. It offers more than 12 million m² of office space.

Brussels is a divided city

Overall, Brussels is a rich region. With its 170% of European average GRP, it is – after London and Hamburg – one of the richest regions in Europe. But at the same time the city has a great concentration of deprived neighbourhoods. Nearly 100,000 residents are unemployed. The unemployment rate is 22%⁵. Nearly 40% of families live in deprived neighbourhoods. An estimated 16% of the population lives below the poverty line. All that leads to strong socio-spatial inequalities in the city. The central neighbourhoods around the canal tend to concentrate the lowest incomes, whereas the rich south-east municipalities host the upper social strata.

Brussels desperately needs a unifying urban vision

From the point of view of simple urban dynamics, avoiding a deadlock needs a voluntary effort in developing a mobilising urban vision. This project needs to be grounded in Brussels as such. It cannot be derived from different state functions, such as capital of Belgium or capital of Flanders or capital of the French community of

3. When I speak of Brussels, I am referring to the Brussels region, composed of the 19 Brussels municipalities.

4. Globalisation and World Cities: <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/gawc>.

5. <http://www.iristat.be>.

Belgium... Evidently these functions are under threat from the ongoing state reform in Belgium and the furthering of regional autonomy. Identity cannot be achieved through integration in a dominant culture. The multicultural reality is even developing towards more intermingling and hybridity. Today more than 40% of the households in Brussels are multilingual, and that seems to be the trend. This short overview only indicates the difficulty of deriving a strong storyline from the past. This difficulty is only made bigger by the absence of strong political leadership.

TURNING WEAKNESSES INTO OPPORTUNITIES

I have tried to indicate the historical and institutional reasons that made Brussels into a part of the Belgian state with weak means of self-expression. Brussels is not enough of a city. It is as if the urbanity of Brussels belongs to its subconscious. These weaknesses appear to be opportunities for a number of urban actors that benefit from the sociological diversity of the city without being confronted with authorities which speak that language. But they are mostly small or sector-specific parts of civil society popping up around certain spaces or projects (Groth and Corijn, 2005). Nevertheless, in the cultural sector, the energy to represent intercultural dialogue and global networking is rising. Projects such as Zinnekeparade, KunstenFestivaldesArts and BxlBravo are becoming far-reaching and very visible elements of Brussels representation, beyond the existing institutional framework. They all build exactly on the plural proximity of very different cultures and traditions and use it as a creative environment. Increasingly, these experiences influence the urban agenda and are on the verge of becoming part of the political debate.

We can see a formal resemblance between these questions of representing Brussels as a city and the question of representing “Europeanness” legitimising a European unification process, as I argued at the start of this essay. In that sense, developing Brussels as both a (world) city and as the capital of Europe forms part of the same agenda. The urban actors expressing urbanity as a product of intercultural interaction have to encounter the actors interested in imagining the European capital city (Magosse, 2005). Such an encounter is not only a virtual question. It could – in a first phase – search for its specific space. And here I believe that the development of the European quarter takes all its importance. Transforming the EU-neighbourhood into a European city centre, into an urban centre of the European capital, should be at least one of the urban(istic) projects related to the overall European capital city “imagineering”.

For more than 40 years the European quarter has been the territory, the space for grafting the European institutions onto the urban fabric. It has been a very painful and aggressive top-down operation. Overall, local actors have been very ambivalent towards these processes. National and regional authorities and economic actors have been supportive in a simple monetary cost-benefit calculus. Local authorities and local civil society have been more critical of the negative effects on the urban tissue and on market prices. In the neighbourhood, resistance was organized in a struggle for urbanistic compensations and maintaining housing against office space. The question of how to build a European capital city was never really on the agenda. Only recently that agenda was set and influenced the debate on urban planning in the neighbourhood⁶. Every diagnosis of the European quarter will indicate the danger of the dominance of institutional monofunctionality without strong counterparts in civil society or local economy. Moreover, some of these institutions (parliament, council) are obsessed by security and prefer isolation over integration within the neighbourhood. The few inhabitants and organizations left are not strong enough to impose the necessary urban mix. That is why all plans tend to reinforce the non-institutional presence in the zone. But without an overall diagnosis of the European project itself, these alternatives mostly boil down to bringing in some other buildings and some other institutionalised activities (like the proposal for a big European concert hall in Van Maerlant square).

I would like to argue for the necessity of loading that neighbourhood up with activities in the first place. What is needed is a kind of programme to complexion that neighbourhood and to counter the institutional monofunctionality. If we accept that the neighbourhood is devoted to the European Union, that programme should be derived from the agenda analysed above. In other words, that activity should attempt to express "Europeanness". And that needs to be experimented with the elements already present in Brussels. Trying to attract a number of intercultural urban social practices, to express intercultural dialogue, to show the opportunities derived from the presence of thousands of European citizens should be a vocation of that area. Let us take that reasoning a step further. The classic response to such a proposal would be: OK let's build a special building, let's organize a special association and let's decide on a budget. In other words, let's "institutionalise" the proposal⁷.

But if one wants to incorporate the European project into the making of Brussels urbanity, things cannot be considered in such a way. One has to look for a socio-cultural

6. For a full discussion, see Magosse, 2005.

7. After the publication of the "Media plan", an urbanistic analysis with some 144 proposals for the area, the discussion rapidly boiled down to the request by the opera house for a big new theatre.

programme that can encounter a platform of urban actors of different kinds. One has to look for a programme to build an example of European public space that can be kept by the Brussels population and be recognised by different users and visitors. It thus has to be in the first place a programme for public space in the real sense of the term⁸. If one takes a closer look at the morphology of the neighbourhood, it is striking that the central public area between the buildings of the three main institutions, between the three urban quarters involved (Quartier Leopold, Squares and Jourdan) and between the smaller public spaces (Place du Luxembourg, Place Jourdan, Mail de l'Espace-Léopold, Place Jean Rey, Schuman roundabout) is... a park. Léopold Park holds a strategic position in the development of a city centre for the European capital city. This park, 11 hectares in size, was built in 1851 as a botanical garden, and became a public gardens in 1880. Historically it is part of the urban extension of King Leopold II. It has been, in former times, the venue for urban entertainment, with fairs and markets. It has become filled with scientific institutions such as the Museum of Natural History, the Pasteur Institute, five university buildings, the Eastman dental institute and so on. But gradually it lost its urban centrality. It was classified as a monument in 1976 and is now hidden behind the European Parliament as the back garden for MEP's.

If Brussels wants to become the European capital city, this park – the central spot in between the European institutions – should be recovered as a part of Brussels and be recognised as such in the first place by its citizens. Turning this park into an urban park and filling it with urban life that is significant for all Brussels citizens (cf. Central Park, N.Y. or the Retiro, Madrid) could be a programme for a European image to the city and a re-integration of that neighbourhood into the urban fabric. Moreover it could serve as a space for using Mediterranean devices in open-air public life. Animations and attractions could be the expression of a multiplicity of intercultural urban social practices open to both the European functionaries and their families and the Brussels public at large. Instead of gradually occupying the buildings with diplomatic missions, preference should be given to lesser state-oriented activities. A number of recommendations from the Prodi-Verhofstadt think-tank (a language and translation centre, a virtual European library, intercultural laboratories) could invest those historic buildings, as could a number of actors from civil society (universities, churches, associations).

Without developing such a programme at this stage in more detail I only wanted to illustrate the methodology suggested: by combining existing voids into opportunities. The cultural deficit of the European project needs expression as an intercultural and post-

8. See the debate and campaign around the idea of "Le mail des citoyens" as a citizens area in front of the European Parliament as opposed to a ceremonial elitist entrance.

national construct. The Brussels multicultural reality is searching for an outcome beyond the existing institutional representations. The European quarter needs to be transformed from an office centre into a sense-bearing multifunctional city centre. Using these voids, these empty spaces, as time-spaces of least resistance for prospective laboratories, could open paths for developing an urban cultural representation of Europe.

THE CAPITAL AS A HETEROTOPY

Foucault (1967) coined the term heterotopy, “des espaces autres”, to indicate institutions and places at odds with normality and continuity. Urbanity needs such “freezones” or “indeterminate spaces” to be able to exercise exactly what it is made of: interculturality, multifunctionality, living with strangers⁹. In their attempt at a general theory of heterotopy, Dehaene and de Cauter (2005) go back to the Greek *polis*. It is there that the public and the private, politics and economy were divided in the division between *oikos* and *agora*. But there are also the third spaces: the graveyard and the temple, the theatre and the sports stadium. Dehaene and Decauter argue that from the father of urbanism Hippodamus onwards and through to Aristotle, this third space, a sacred space apart from the public and the private one, is fundamental to the *polis*. For them it is exactly that third space that is the heterotopy. It is the other space, the other of the political and the other of the economical. In a secularised form, it could be identified as the cultural space. But it is more than the cultural sector. It is the intermediate space between the political and the economical that stretches out from the temple (the acropolis) to the cemetery (the necropolis) and includes all third spaces: “theatre, stadion, palestra, hipodrome, academia” (ibid: 72).

This concept can be applied to urbanism, and plays an ever-greater role in defining urbanity as exactly that constant product of the continuous confrontation with otherness, of the impossibility of fixing identity, of the ongoing creative process. It could also be extended to the virtual space in which the European unification process is taking place. The construct of a European *polis* has been caught in the dialectics of the new *oikos* versus the new *agora*. Both the economic process and the political process are in a deep

9. See: Oswalt, Overmeyer & Misselwitz, 2004; Urban Unlimited Rotterdam et al., 2004.

crisis, as exemplified by the impossibility of an agreement on the budget and the non ratification of the constitutional treaty. Within each realm the opposition is exclusive. The choice between a free trade market and redistributive welfarism is a dilemma. The choice between a loose collaboration between sovereign nation-states and the United States of Europe is at a crossroads. To consider another agenda, third spaces are necessary. Europe needs heterotopies.

A true capital city should be characterised by that European heterotopy. And, as Dehaene and Decaeter clearly indicate, the dialectics of space is also a dialectics of time. “Heterotopy is not a space but a time-space. Therefore the division of Hippodamus is not merely a distinction between territories, rather it is a relative separation of specialised “spheres”, of time-spatial entities” (ibid: 73). The European heterotopy should not only interrupt the continuity of space. The capital city is of a different kind as the map of countries, it is even different from the new geography of networked cities. It is there to be the node in both national flows and hybrid urban flows. But the European heterotopy should also interrupt the continuity of time. The capital city needs to offer counter-times, it needs to produce discontinuity in the daily life of the European communities, the time in which Europe is suspended. Besides being the seat of daily institutional life, the place of regular summit meetings, the capital city needs also to offer its carnival, its free time, its escape, its otherness, its moments of catharsis. It could offer basic elements for an urban vision and programme for the Brussels region. It could be a very practical leverage in planning a European city centre around the existing institutions. It is a challenging mission for a Brussels urban leadership. And it will be a decisive contribution to the European unification process.

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Building (the capital of) Europe as a heterotopy

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