BRUSSELS STUDIES the e-journal for academic research on Brussels

www.brusselsstudies.be Issue 25, 11 may 2009. ISSN 2031-0293

Jean-Michel Decroly and Mathieu Van Criekingen

The Brussels International Development Plan (IDP).

Real estate development promises and growing inequalities?

Translation : Jane Corrigan

The adoption of an International Development Plan (IDP) by the regional government at the end of 2007 marks a significant transition in urban policies in Brussels. This text seeks to highlight the essential options of the IDP and presents a critical analysis of it. In our view, the IDP indicates essentially the formalisation of a relatively new strategy in Brussels, aimed at the development of significant portions of the regional territory for the purposes of private real estate developments of a speculative character which are supposed to function as new levers in urban 'revitalisation'. As such, the Brussels IDP is in keeping with a serious tendency towards the widespread use of urban policies of neoliberal inspiration, which encourage the rehabilitation of city centres without taking into account the effects they have on intensifying the city's social and spatial divisions.

Mathieu Van Criekingen *was born in 1974. He is researcher with the FNRS, working with the* Laboratoire de Géographie Humaine *at the* Université Libre de Bruxelles*. He has written, among others, "Moving In/Out of Brussels' Historical Core in the Early 2000s: Migration and the Effects of Gentrification",* Urban Studies*, 2009, 46, 4, 825-848; "Réurbanisation ou gentrification? Parcours d'entrée dans la vie adulte et changements urbains à Bruxelles",* Espaces et Sociétés*, 2008, 134, 3, 149-166.*

Jean-Michel Decroly *is a professor of human, urban and tourism geography at the* Université Libre de Bruxelles*. He is co-director of the* Laboratoire Interdisciplinaire Tourisme Territoires et Société *(LIToTeS) and chairs the* Institut de Gestion de l'Environnement et d'Aménagement du Territoire *(IGEAT). He has recently co-edited* Tourisme et société : mutations, enjeux et défis *published by Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles and* Mutations des territoires dans le Monde à l'aube du XXIe siècle *published by Harmattan.*

Contacts :

Mathieu Van Criekingen, 02/650 51 20 - mvancrie@ulb.ac.be

Jean-Michel Decroly, 02/650 50 91 - jmdecrol@ulb.ac.be

Michel Hubert (ed. in chief), 02/211 78 53 – 0485/41 67 64 – hubert@fusl.ac.be

Brussels Studies is published thanks to the support of the ISRIB (Institute for the encouragement of Scientific Research and Innovation of Brussels - Brussels-Capital Region)

Introduction

The marked increase in social and spatial inequalities is a significant evolution observed in contemporary cities, particularly in Brussels (Kesteloot & Loopmans 2009). Although this tendency is closely related to the contemporary restructuring of the world economy, the relationship between 'global' changes and the transformations of cities is neither direct nor unambiguous. It is mediated by the urban policies and strategies implemented locally, which have evolved greatly over the past 30 years as regards their objectives as well as their tools and reasoning. In particular, recent urban policies place new emphasis on the promotion of 'territorial resources' (e.g. available and well-situated pieces of vacant land, a qualified and multilingual workforce, enhanced architectural heritage, etc.). The organisation of events with wide media coverage or the realisation of large-scale real estate projects (e.g. museums, stadiums, blocks of flats or office towers, stations or air terminals, etc., adorned with the signature of a world-famous architect) are recurring characteristics of these new urban policies.

In Brussels, the recent (October 2007) adoption of the International Development Plan (IDP) pushed this new type of urban political action into the foreground.[1] Presented as a '*helm which will steer the regional policies in the years to come*' (*Feuille de route*, p.1), the IDP distinguishes itself on several accounts from the city project in force in Brussels as described in the Regional Development Plan (RDP). The latter places emphasis on the 'revitalisation' of neighbourhoods (in the central parts of the city in particular)[2] and the internal organisation of the regional territory, whilst the international development of the city is dealt with as a theme of secondary importance. The IDP therefore marks a change in political priorities, even though it underlines the complementary nature of both 'revitalisation' and 'international development' projects: '*these development policies may be endangered in the context of competition between cities if, at the same time, a policy of international develop-*

[1] We shall not detail the stages in the rise of a system of reference of Brussels as an international city since the year 2000 (see Calay 2009).

[2] That is, the Pentagon and the inner suburbs urbanised mainly in the 19th century.

ment is not established' (*Feuille de route*, p.1). This view on the complementary nature – which is often brought to the fore by politicians (see Debruyne *et al.* 2008 on Ghent for example) – cannot obscure the issue of the priorities of urban policies, however, if only because the territory of the city and the financial means are limited.

The IDP places new emphasis on the realisation of large-scale supra-regional facilities (conference centre, event hall, Europe House, etc.) and for this purpose introduces a model of project-based planning (also called 'operational' planning) which focuses only on certain portions of the city's territory, designated as 'strategic areas'. The model is therefore no longer one of comprehensive town planning dealing with the whole territory, as is the case for the RDP. In certain respects, the IDP is even in contradiction with the RDP. For example, the RDP emphasises the reinforcement of existing commercial neighbourhoods, whereas the IDP supports the realisation of a large shopping centre in the north of the Region dominated by international chains whose effects on existing businesses in terms of competition cannot be ignored.

The object of this text is to shed light on the essential explicit or implicit options of the IDP, and to propose a critical analysis of them. Our analysis is not, of course, directed at the debate on the internationalisation of Brussels *per se* (Corijn *et al.* 2009), but rather at the specific 'international development' model brought forward in the IDP. It is therefore based on a theoretical framing of the recent changes in urban policies in developed capitalist countries (section 1). This then allows us to advance the hypothesis that the IDP represents a metamorphosis of town planning of neoliberal inspiration, integrating the promotion of gentrification processes[3] and forecasting an intensification of the city's social and spatial divisions (section 2).

The rapid development of 'new urban policies'

Urban policies have been influenced greatly by the neoliberal reforms of socioeconomic structures introduced in the 1980s. The opening of national markets to the flow of investments, the deregulation of financial activities and the privatisation of companies previously under state control have fuelled a powerful trend of financialisation of the economy, severely altered the post-war social compromise and considerably reduced the scope of action of collective structures capable of impeding market logic (welfare state, trade unions, associations, cooperatives, etc.) (Harvey 2005).

At territory level, the major consequence of these neoliberal reforms is an increased concentration of the production of value in large urban areas, a process commonly referred to as 'metropolitanisation' (Veltz 1996). Metropolitanisation is basically the expression of a reinforced interest on behalf of companies and private investors in agglomeration economies typical of urban territories, albeit with a different logic for

[3] Gentrification refers to the revitalisation of working-class neighbourhoods by or for the fortunate classes; the forms of gentrification processes may vary and include in particular the rehabilitation of old neighbourhoods (e.g. the Marolles, Dansaert, etc.), the reurbanisation of vacant urban sites (e.g. Tour et Taxis) or old working-class neighbourhoods (e.g. the lower part of Saint-Gilles near the South Station).

each type of activity. This interest finds expression in a variety of new requests for organised and equipped urban spaces able to provide firms with a maximum of positive externalities. This is the case, for instance, of urban sites acting as anchor points in transnational transport networks (air hubs, HST stations, logistics platforms, etc.), infrastructures facilitating interactions between firms (in the same sector or between firms and universities), urban facilities and cultural events meeting the quality-of-life criteria of qualified and very mobile staff, or vacant sites prepared for real estate investments (Haila 1997). These new pressures on metropolitan spaces are all the better received by local authorities since new aptitudes for capital mobility put cities and regions in competition, even at intranational level. The new capitalism regulation mode therefore pushes cities to 'take themselves in hand' individually and against each other.

The 'new urban policies' represent the responses of neoliberal inspiration in many cities to these pressures on spaces (Moulaert *et al.* 2003, Brenner & Théodore 2004). They signify a break with the models which predominated during the post-war decades of strong economic growth. At the time, the urban policies operated essentially as conveyor belts of national policies, and were aimed above all at the expansion of local consumer markets. These policies were mainly focused on access to home ownership in suburban areas for the middle classes, combined with programmes for the construction of public housing and motorway and parking infrastructures. In contrast, the current urban policies are first concerned with the attractiveness of territories with respect to the flow of capital, qualified labour and consumers. In order to achieve this, they aim at the reduction of costs for companies, so as to encourage them to invest in 'their' city rather than elsewhere. The wealth, tax revenues and new jobs which are generated are supposed to trickle down the entire social system. The fact is, however, that these policies go hand in hand with an increase in inequalities between social groups (OECD 2008) and territories (Marcuse & van Kempen 2000, Moulaert *et al.* 2003, Berry-Chikhaoui *et al.* 2007).

Two main variants of these new urban policies may be pointed out, namely, strategies which place emphasis on attracting companies (e.g. headquarters of transnational firms, cultural or high-tech industries) as well as policies aimed at attracting new residents, both permanent (new inhabitants) and temporary (conference delegates, tourists for business or pleasure, etc.) (Rousseau 2008). These two tactics may of course be used together, which appears to be done as a rule rather than an exception.[4] They nevertheless involve partially specific means. If the policy focus is on attracting companies, the emphasis will be placed on the planning of infrastructures such as technology parks, for example. If, on the other hand, the focus is on attracting new residents, policy programmes will be centred on rehabilitating public spaces, reviving shopping areas, promoting architectural heritage, making urban sites known to tourists, organising events (festivals of all types, urban beaches, etc.) or on other means of enhancing the 'quality of life' in the city. The use of art and culture in the development of a space for potential new residents or investors is a recurring dimension of these programmes (Hoffman *et al.* 2003).

[4] The groups targeted as new residents also make up the staff of target companies.

Finally, the new urban policies are characterised by governance methods largely inspired by corporate governance, hence the denomination of 'entrepreneurial' urban policies (Harvey 1989, OECD 2007). The naturalisation of the *city marketing* system of reference, the multiplication of public-private partnership structures and the transformation of public officers' posts into *project manager* assignments are some examples of this entrepreneurial approach (Genard 2009).

From neighbourhood 'revitalisation' to 'international development'

The adoption of the IDP marks a significant transition of the regional political project in terms of urban development in Brussels. The new plan distinguishes itself substantially from the city project defined in the RDP, centred on the theme of the 'revitalisation' of inner city neighbourhoods.

Revitalisation, mix, gentrification

The notion of 'urban revitalisation' is impregnated with the values of the urban struggles which emerged at the end of the 1960s in Brussels. They challenged the functionalist town planning which dominated at the time, concerned about the anti-urban values of the middle class controlling the national governments whose intention was to transform the inner city into an (inter)national administrative quarter irrigated by the flow of cars (Aron 1978). Conversely, the urban struggles defended a project for the rehabilitation of the urban habitat, from which the current 'revitalisation' programme ensues (Noël 1998). The latter is based on different mechanisms targeting the inner city neighbourhoods, in particular, the Neighbourhood Contracts,[5] renovation grants (for owners of housing which is over 30 years old) and the 'medium size' dwelling construction operations[6] via *ad hoc* partnerships between a public body (*Société de Développement pour la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale* – SDRB) and private real estate companies. These mechanisms count on the spill-over effects of public investments among private stakeholders (property owners, property developers, shopkeepers, etc.) particularly for the renovation of buildings or for commercial revival. The motivations presented for the construction of medium size dwellings in the neighbourhood next to the South Station shed some light on this strategy: '*The construction of the first medium size dwellings in this neighbourhood has a very important role in terms of 'kindling' a process of revitalisation in a large neighbourhood around the biggest station in the country. [...] Unfortunately, the current sociological conditions in the neighbourhood and the high cost of land make it difficult, and even impossible, to carry out a housing project without a grant which could only come from the public sector. This grant will be recovered in the long term by an improvement in the tax base of the inhabitants who will be drawn to the renovated neighbourhood as well as the commercial companies and services which generally accompany these new migrations*' (federal state and Brussels-Capital Re-

[5] These are territorialised investment programmes for the production of housing, the renovation of public spaces and social actions, spread out over four years.

[6] That is to say, private housing intended for the middle classes, sold for less than the market price thanks to public grants. They are therefore neither public housing nor social housing.

gion, Beliris Cooperation Agreement, presentation document of amendment n°8, February 2003).[7]

The establishment of the middle classes in the city is often justified as an expected reinforcement of the capital resources of the public authorities and the social mix. It is not certain, however, that the establishment of middle classes in working-class neighbourhoods causes an increase in the level of mixing of social categories. In this respect, a rigorous study conducted in the inner city neighbourhoods of Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver shows the exact opposite effect, i.e. a relative decrease in the social mix in the neighbourhoods which had become more appealing to the middle classes (Walks & Maaranen 2008). More generally, it is unlikely that a reduction in the spatial distance between social groups alone would allow a reduction in the social distances between them (Epstein & Kirszbaum 2003).[8]

It becomes clearer that the 'revitalisation' policies are based in practice on the processes of gentrification, which are fed by private strategies for residential or commercial investment. The recent or ongoing metamorphoses of the Marolles, the Dansaert/Saint-Géry neighbourhood, the neighbourhood surrounding the Parvis de Saint-Gilles, the upper part of Ixelles, the Saint-Jacques neighbourhood, the Maritime neighbourhood, etc. are sufficient proof of this (Kesteloot & De Decker 1992, Van Criekingen 2002). Although these tactics have a bright side which is often highlighted (e.g. renovation of old buildings, opening of new shops), they also involve an increased impoverishment of certain local populations (e.g. due to the increased rent within the household budget) or the eviction of certain inhabitants of 'revitalised' neighbourhoods (Van Criekingen 2006), in short leading to a marked increase in the social polarisation of the territory.

---

[7] It should be borne in mind that the metamorphosis of this neighbourhood, which began at the beginning of the 1990s, is based on a series of expropriation plans which resulted in the departure of its initial inhabitants, shopkeepers and artisans and in the destruction of most of its buildings (Gailly & Maron 2007).

[8] In this respect, the situation in Brussels is that of a highly inequitable city: 20% of the most well-to-do households in the Brussels-Capital Region represent approximately 50% of the total revenue, whereas at the other end of the social scale, another fifth of households represent less than 5% of the total revenue. This gap has widened since the 1980s (basis of the calculation: net declared taxable income, source: *SPF Economie, Direction générale Statistique et Information économique*).

The direction given by the IDP: promises of real estate developments and a new wave of gentrification

The options presented in the International Development Plan correspond more directly to the model of new urban policies of neoliberal inspiration described above.

Firstly, the IDP is not a plan as such. It is not included in the hierarchy of town planning plans in effect in the Brussels-Capital Region[9] and does not have a legal status in itself. The IDP is instead a document expressing the intentions of the regional government, which has not been the object of a public debate.[10] It is, however, an important document, as it underlies a series of organisational and statutory reforms (such as the current reform of the *Code Bruxellois de l'Aménagement du Territoire* – COBAT) as well as the allocation of sizeable budgets.[11]

The IDP is derived from a 'Basic Outline', a document which was drafted by the Brussels branch of an advisory consulting firm (PriceWaterhouseCoopers) and despite itself became the object of public debate. This 'Basic Outline' consists essentially of a benchmarking study which was based on interviews with a series of representatives selected according to the undefined status of '*partners in the city's development*' (Basic Outline, p.5). Among these, real estate operators (brokers, consultants, developers, investors) were best represented (12 out of 45 institutions interviewed), followed by employers' federations (Brussels-based, Belgian and European – 7 out of 45 institutions), semi-public institutions in charge of the economic and commercial development of the city (7), architectural firms (5), major performing arts institutions (5) and higher education institutions (5). Trade unions or associations were not included, and nor were the 'simple' inhabitants or users of the city.

The method and contents of this document provide a wealth of information for those who wish to identify the nature and social basis of the proposed urban project. In particular, this 'Basic Outline' appears to be structured mainly around real estate stakes and interests.[12] The launch of the IDP should therefore probably be considered with respect to the situation of the Brussels real estate market and the renewal of profit strategies for this market. In this respect, the office market shows obvious signs of oversupply, with almost 2 million m^2 of unoccupied space in the

---

[9] This hierarchy includes, at the top, the RDP, followed by the PRAS (*Plan Régional d'Affectation des Sols*), the PCD (*Plans Communaux de Développement*) and the PPAS (*Plans Particuliers d'Affectation des Sols*).

[10] The IDP has nevertheless been the object of disputes, expressed in particular via the request for a moratorium on its realisations until the regional elections in June 2009 by *Inter-Environnement Bruxelles* (IEB), the *Brusselse Raad voor het Leefmilieu* (BRAL) and the *Confédération des Syndicats Chrétiens* (CSC/ACV).

[11] In particular, €130 million have been earmarked for the 'development of strategic areas of the IDP' in the cooperation agreement between the Region and the federal state (Beliris, amendment n°10, period 2008-2010).

[12] It is also revealing that the IDP was presented as a scoop during a conference gathering professionals in the real estate sector (i.e. *'Immobilier et urbanisme : les nouvelles stratégies de la Région, des communes et des promoteurs', Editions & Séminaires*, Brussels 11/09/2007). It was also the object of a presentation brochure distributed during one of the biggest European real estate fairs, i.e. the *Marché international des professionnels de l'immobilier* (MIPIM), Cannes, 11-14 March 2008.

regional territory (general vacancy rate: 18%), of which only just over one third is available on the market. The remainder (i.e. the empty offices which are not on the market) [13] doubled between 1994 and 2008 (i.e. from 600,000 to 1.2 million m^2), whereas the total stock of offices 'only' increased by 37% during the same period (AATL and SDRB, 2009). The renewal of existing offices therefore became an important stake, in particular in the city centre (administrative quarter, European quarter, e.g.). Furthermore, the production of private housing projects aimed at a well-to-do clientele (e.g. expatriate company executives) as well as the effective demand of young middle class households wishing to settle in the city have been growing since the end of the 1990s. This led to the diversification of private investments towards, for example, mixed projects combining offices, shops and housing, community facilities (stadium, event hall, cultural facilities, etc.) or the recycling of offices into exclusive housing. Generally speaking, these strategies require the availability of new vacant sites, easier access to permits or the opening of infrastructure markets to be achieved in a public-private partnership (museums, stadiums, schools, prisons, etc.) (Aveline-Dubach 2008). These options are clearly emphasised by the IDP.

The IDP *'Feuille de route'* (Road Map) – a document drafted at the beginning of 2008 by the Brussels government – begins, like the 'Basic Outline', with a reference to a threat to the position of Brussels among European cities: '*Today, most studies comparing the competitive position of European cities place Brussels between the 4th and the 6th position. The maintenance of this situation is not guaranteed.*' (*Feuille de route*, p.1) This alarmist introduction is ritual in the urban strategic plans of neoliberal inspiration. It illustrates a claim to define cities as homogeneous entities which are classifiable according to a (subjective) assessment of their 'business climate' or their 'quality of life' (Bennetot 2006). By insisting on the *relative* positioning of each city, these rankings foster a climate of anxiety as regards a risk of decline which is almost never supported *in absolute terms*. The gap between reasoning and reality is particularly spectacular in the case of Brussels. The international influence of Brussels is above all ensured by the (growing) presence of European Union institutions and their related functions – activities whose very nature excludes any risk of immediate relocation. It is based among others on the 'networks of globalisation from below' (Corijn *et al.* 2009, p.2) woven by populations of foreign nationality or origin, established in Brussels sometimes for several decades and whose numbers are growing. The role of this essential dimension in the internationalisation of the city is completely ignored in the IDP.

Beyond the rhetorical aspects, the IDP conveys a fundamental urbanistic option, i.e. making large portions of the regional territory available to private investors called to produce large-scale speculative real estate developments. In concrete terms, the IDP identifies '*ten strategic areas for the future of Brussels*' (*Feuille de route*, p.6) announcing several major projects, including a conference centre (3,000 seats), an exhibition hall (15,000 m^2), a concert hall (15,000 seats), a stadium which would meet FIFA standards (in the framework of a possible Belgian-Dutch bid for the 2018

[13] This 'hidden vacancy' is made up of offices waiting to be occupied, undergoing renovations or in need of renovations – see AATL and SDRB (2009).

football World Cup) and a new shopping centre (60,000 m²).[14] New office areas and housing are also announced in most of these areas (figure 1). This concerns large sites which are uninhabited or emptied of their inhabitants (e.g. South Station and European quarters), whose (re)development cannot take place by simply accumulating individual building renovation operations, but requires the injection of a large amount of capital. Together, these ten areas represent a combined surface area of about 7% of the regional territory, and cover the main part of the Region's last remaining land stock.

The novelty of this option to mobilise regional land stock should nevertheless be brought into perspective. The IDP reviews projects launched in a disorganised manner which have progressed to different levels in such a way that it also appears to be a communications operation regarding current projects. Furthermore, this option is not at all original in the European context, but instead conveys a serious tendency towards a process of imitation between cities: new conference centres in Lille, Birmingham, Frankfurt, Luzern, etc.; new multifunctional complexes in London, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Hamburg, Marseille, etc.; new museums in Newcastle, Bilbao, Valencia, etc.; new stadiums in Amsterdam, Lille, Manchester, Munich, Cardiff, etc. The repetition of similar projects in nearby cities increases the economic risks related to the realisation of each of them, which, in return, amplifies the pressure exerted by investors on the public authorities to cover these risks (Harvey 1989).

The novelty of the IDP resides in the explicit formalisation of the means of implementing the option of opening access to land stock to real estate development, i.e. (1) the use of city marketing, (2) the launch of new partnerships between public and private stakeholders and (3) the reform of certain structures of government.

In terms of city marketing ('… *which is both a section of the IDP on its own and the main cross-cutting theme of the IDP*' – *Feuille de route*, p.3), the IDP announces the launch of a communications campaign regarding a '*brand image of Brussels*' based on '*the definition of an identity for Brussels*' (ibid., p.4).[15] This approach corresponds more precisely to the city branding approach, i.e. the application of commercial advertising codes to the image of cities. This usually results in the creation of slogans and logos ('*Totally London*', '*I Amsterdam*', '*OnlyLyon*', etc.) calling for a personal and consumerist appropriation of the city (Kavaratzis 2007). City branding campaigns usually target new potential visitors as well as inhabitants and common users of the city. They are therefore also aimed at manufacturing internal consent regarding the strategy undertaken (Boudreau & Keil 2006). The IDP does not appear to be an exception as it underlines that an essential objective of *'city marketing … (is to)inform and obtain the support of the inhabitants of Brussels regarding the IDP and (to)explain the objectives and the benefits for citizens in their role of inhabitant and/or economic agent*' (ibid., p.5). Here, the IDP invalidates very clearly the hy-

[14] This retail space has less to do with the international influence of Brussels than with a concern about the profitability of the new stadium, based on a model developed recently in Amsterdam, Bruges, Ghent, Genk, etc.

[15] This mission was entrusted to a private consultant, CoManaging, whose founder and manager was one of the participants in the interviews for the IDP's Basic Outline. CoManaging works with an advertising agency, Duval Guillaume, which is a subsidiary of one of the biggest international groups in the sector (Publicis).

pothesis formulated by Mercier & Moritz (2008) regarding a widening of the scope of participative practices in terms of town planning in Brussels.

Secondly, the IDP counts on the development of new public-private partnerships (i.e. 'PPPs') for project financing. The PPPs usually enjoy a 'win-win' reputation, although evaluations of their cost in the medium and long term for the community are very rare. There is no doubt however that the PPPs offer new business opportunities to investors and that they allow the incorporation of private interests which are closest to the definition of town planning options (Hamel 2007).

Thirdly, the IDP goes hand in hand with the creation of a Territorial Development Agency (TDA), which stands out as '*the operational tool for regional strategic plans, in charge of the management of major projects such as the facilities included in the IDP*' (*Feuille de route*, p. 18). The TDA is a non-profit association under the authority of the regional government and in charge of strategic missions which are either new (city marketing, e.g.) or transferred from the regional administration. This reorganisation conforms with the recent evolution of urban management structures observed in several European cities, which are characterised by the creation of appointed bodies, placed under the direct control of the executive power and in charge of facilitating the revitalisation of strategic areas (Moulaert *et al.* 2003). Foreign examples reveal a tendency towards the establishment of exceptional urbanistic systems on these new foundations in so-called strategic areas. In this respect, the IDP announces '*the possibility of establishing special procedures for the issue of permits for certain strategic areas at European and international level*' (ibid., p.17), which is a task included in the current reform of the *Code Bruxellois de l'Aménagement du Territoire* (COBAT).[16]

In fact, the IDP appears to be structured around a central option to develop significant portions of the regional territory for the purposes of private real estate developments of a speculative character. In our view, it indicates the build-up of an urban policy in Brussels which counts on the realisation of large-scale real estate projects in order to create spill-over effects to supposedly guarantee 'urban revitalisation'. Without effective levers to regulate these spill-over effects, gentrification constitutes a dimension which is inherent to this type of strategy. The example of Bilbao, which has been cited as a model many times,[17] provides a clear illustration of this. The opening in 1997 of a branch of the Guggenheim Foundation in an impressive building which received considerable amounts of public funding led to a significant increase in the flow of tourists to the city (Plaza 2008). However, the related objectives of local authorities in terms of attracting the headquarters of transnational firms to Bilbao have not been met. Furthermore, the rehabilitation of the old port area (of which the Guggenheim Museum is the main feature) contributed to a sharp rise in the costs of housing in the inner city and therefore to its gentrification (Vicario & Martinez Monje 2003).

---

[16] In short, the regional authorites should be allowed to issue town planning permits in the strategic areas, instead of the municipal authorities, as is currently the case.

[17] The IDP's 'Basic Outline' is no exception (p.44).

The repetition of a scenario in Brussels whereby the effects of gentrification are spreading due to the promotion of urban sites by major real estate projects is, according to us, to be taken very seriously. Three of the ten 'strategic areas' of the IDP correspond to portions of central working-class neighbourhoods (i.e. Tour et Taxis, West Station, South Station) in which the majority of inhabitants are tenants of private landlords. These households are therefore very sensitive to the evolution in the cost of private rent, whose regulation has a very liberal character in Brussels.[18] And what is worse, forcing the working-classes out of inner city neighbourhoods even appears to be acceptable in the 'Basic Outline' of the IDP. This document states that '*social mix must also be one of the main themes of urban development in Brussels. This involves ensuring an outgoing flow from the priority areas of intervention in order to avoid confining poverty in social ghettos, and an incoming flow by stimulating the establishment of middle classes in the priority areas of intervention*' (p.73). We feel that the force of such a proposal conveys the ideological imprint of neoliberalism, since gentrification is presented openly as a solution and not as a problem, 'collateral damage', or even less as a social injustice. But perhaps we should limit ourselves to underlining the absurdity of purporting to work towards a social mix whilst advocating the evacuation of the neighbourhoods concerned, forcing their current inhabitants to leave.

[18] i.e. very little social housing, an ineffectiveness of the rules for limiting an increase in rent between two leases, and housing benefits limited to very small segments of the total amount of housing available for rent.

Conclusion

The current debates regarding the city tend to be dominated by a series of themes which give rise to a consensus, such as the quality of town-planning projects, the effectiveness of urban management structures or the sustainability of developments. These issues each have their own pertinence, although the debates centred on them do not allow the substance of the proposed models of urban development to be questioned, and offer very few clues to understanding the relationships of domination and resistance whose outcome determines the direction of urban evolutions. This text is a partial attempt to redefine the debate on the nature of contemporary models of urban development based on a particular object, i.e. the Brussels International Development Plan.

The recent adoption of the IDP should be put in the context of the recent history of urban policies in Brussels. It indicates the formalisation of a strategy based on the development of regional land stock by speculative real estate projects which are supposed to function as new levers in the 'revitalisation' of the city. We feel that the Brussels IDP is in keeping with a serious tendency towards the widespread use of urban policies of neoliberal inspiration which encourage the rehabilitation of inner cities, with the risk of marginalising or evicting the current inhabitants. In this respect, several authors have noted the widespread existence of *gentrification policies* in a variety of urban contexts (e.g. Slater 2004 in Toronto, Badyina & Golubchikov 2005 in Moscow, Uitermark *et al.* 2007 in Rotterdam, Harris 2008 in London and Bombay, Loopmans 2008 in Antwerp, Rousseau 2008 in Roubaix and Sheffield).

Finally, without it being specific to the case of Brussels, the IDP reveals the difficulty faced by urban authorities to propose a model of urban development which is not a reproduction of the turnkey solutions provided by the business world – consultants, real estate developers, entertainment entrepreneurs, communications agencies, etc. The IDP is a concentration of such 'solutions', reproduced from city to city as 'good practices'. However, it says nothing about the regulations required in order for a development '… *to benefit the entire population*' (*Feuille de route*, p. 1). In the absence of such regulations, the implementation of the IDP forecasts an intensification of the city's social and spatial divisions, a marked increase in the difficulties for the working-classes to access housing and the decline of local democracy.

References

AATL – Région de Bruxelles-Capitale et SDRB (2008) *Observatoire des bureaux – Vacance 2007*, n°21, Bruxelles.

ARON J. (1978) *Le tournant de l'urbanisme bruxellois. 1958-1978*, Bruxelles, Fondation Jacquemotte.

AVELINE-DUBACH N. (2008) *Immobilier - L'Asie, la bulle et la mondialisation*, Paris, CNRS Editions.

BADYINA, A. and GOLUBCHIKOV, O. (2005) "Gentrification in central Moscow: a market process or a deliberate policy? Money, power and people in housing regeneration in Ostozhenka", *Geografiska Annaler B*, 87, pp. 113–129.

BENNETOT A. (2006) "Métropoles idéales pour cadres internationaux. Classement international et réalités sociales", *Les Annales de la recherche urbaine*, 101, 109-118.

BERRY-CHIKHAOUI I., DEBOULET A., ROULLEAU-BERGER L. (dir.) (2007) *Villes internationales. Entre tensions et réactions des habitants*, Paris, La Découverte.

BOUDREAU J.-A., KEIL R. (2006) "La réconciliation de la démocratie locale et de la compétitivité internationale dans le discours réformiste à Toronto : Essai d'interprétation sur le néolibéralisme normalisé", *Politique et Sociétés*, 25, 1, 83-98.

BRENNER N., THÉODORE N. (eds.) (2004) *Spaces of Neoliberalism: Urban Restructuring in North America and Western Europe*, Oxford, Blackwell.

CALAY V. (2009) "Ville-quartier ou ville-monde", *Les Cahiers de La Cambre Architecture*, 8, 256-278.

CORIJN E., VANDERMOTTEN C., DECROLY J.-M., SWYNGEDOUW E. (2009) "États généraux de Bruxelles. Bruxelles, ville internationale", *Brussels Studies*, Note de synthèse n°13.

DEBRUYNE P., OOSTERLYNCK S., Block T. (2008) "Sociale innovatie als basis voor Stadsontwikkeling? Grootschalige stadsprojecten versus sociale stadsvernieuwing in Gent", *Ruimte & Planning*, 3, 18-33.

EPSTEIN R., KIRSZBAUM T. (2003) L'enjeu de la mixité sociale dans les politiques urbaines, *Regards sur l'actualité*, 292, juin-juillet, La Documentation Française.

GAILLY V., MARON A. (2007) *Mutation du quartier du Midi à Bruxelles : fruit d'une alliance entre pouvoirs publics et promoteurs immobiliers, contre les populations ?*, Mémoire de fin d'études, Faculté Ouverte de Politique Economique et Sociale, Université Catholique de Louvain.

GENARD J.-L. (2009) "Réflexions sur la gouvernance de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale" in *Bruxelles (dans) 20 ans*, Bruxelles, Agence de Développement Territorial, 163-183.

HAILA A. (1997) "The neglected builder of global cities", in Källtorp O. (Ed.) *Power Struggle in the City*, Aldershot : Ashgate, 51-64.

HAMEL P. J. (2007) *Les partenariats public-privé (PPP) et les municipalités : au-delà des principes, un bref survol des pratiques*, Montréal, INRS-Urbanisation, Culture et Société (rapport accessible en ligne: http://www.ucs.inrs.ca/pdf/PPPMun.pdf).

HARRIS A. (2008) "From London to Mumbai and Back Again: Gentrification and Public Policy in Comparative Perspective", *Urban Studies*, 45, 12, 2407-2428.

HARVEY D. (1989) "From managerialism to entrepreneurialism: the transformation in urban governance in late capitalism", *Geografiska Annaler B.*, 71, 3-17.

HARVEY D. (2005) *A brief history of neoliberalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

HOFFMAN L.M., FAINSTEIN S.S., JUDD D.R. (2003) *Cities and Visitors: Regulating People, Markets, and City Space*, Blackwell, Oxford.

KAVARATZIS M. (2007) "City Marketing: the past, the present and some unresolved issues", *Geography Compass*, 1, 3, 695–712.

KESTELOOT C., De DECKER P. (1992) "Territoria en migraties als geografische factoren van racisme", in DESLE E., MARTENS A. (eds.) *Gezichten van het hedendaags racisme*, Bruxelles: VUB-Press, 69-108.

KESTELOOT C., LOOPMANS M. (2009) "États généraux de Bruxelles. Inégalités sociales", *Brussels Studies*, Note de synthèse n°15.

LOOPMANS M. (2008) "Relevance, Gentrification and the Development of a New Hegemony on Urban Policies in Antwerp", Belgium, *Urban Studies*, 45, 12, 2499-2519.

MARCUSE P., VAN KEMPEN R. (eds.) (2000) Globalizing cities: a new spatial order?, Oxford, Blackwell.

MOULAERT F., RODRIGUEZ A., SWYNGEDOUW E. (eds.) (2003) *The Globalized City. Economic Restructing and Social Polarization in European Cities*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

NOËL F. (1998) *La ville rapiécée. Les stratégies de la réhabilitation à Bruxelles*, Bruxelles, Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles.

OCDE (2007) Villes et compétitivité. Un nouveau paradigme entrepreneurial, OECD Territorial Reviews, Paris, OECD publications.

OCDE (2008) Croissance et inégalités. Distribution des revenus et pauvreté dans les pays de l'OCDE, Paris, OECD publications.

PLAZA B. (2008) On Some Challenges and Conditions for the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao to be an Effective Economic Re-activator, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 32, 2, 506-517.

PRICEWATERHOUSECOOPERS (2007) *Plan de Développement International de Bruxelles - Schéma de base*, Rapport final au Ministre-Président de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale.

ROUSSEAU M. (2008) " 'Bringing politics back in' : la gentrification comme politique de développement urbain ?", *Espaces et Sociétés*, 132/133, 75-90.

SLATER T. (2004) "Municipally managed gentrification in South Parkdale, Toronto", *The Canadian Geographer*, 48, 3, 303-325.

SMITH (2002) "New urbanism, new globalism: gentrification as global urban strategy", *Antipode*, 34, 3, 427-450.

UITERMARK J., DUYVENDAK J. W. and KLEINHANS R. (2007) Gentrification as a governmental strategy: social control and social cohesion in Hoogvliet, Rotterdam, *Environment and Planning A*, 39, 1125-1141.

VAN CRIEKINGEN M. (2002) "Les impacts sociaux de la rénovation urbaine à Bruxelles : analyse des migrations intra-urbaines", *Belgeo*, 4, 355-376.

VAN CRIEKINGEN M. (2006) "Que deviennent les quartiers centraux à Bruxelles ? Des migrations sélectives au départ des quartiers bruxellois en voie de gentrification", *Brussels Studies*, 1, 1-20.

VELTZ P. (1996) *Mondialisation, Villes et Territoires*, Paris, La Découverte.

VICARIO L., MARTINEZ MONJE P. (2003) Another 'Guggenheim effect'? The gentrification of a potentially gentrifiable neighbourhood in Bilbao, *Urban Studies*, 40, 12, 2383-2400.

WALKS R.A., MAARANEN R. (2008) "Gentrification, social mix, and social polarization: Testing the linkages in large Canadian cities", *Urban Geography*, 29, 4, 293–326.

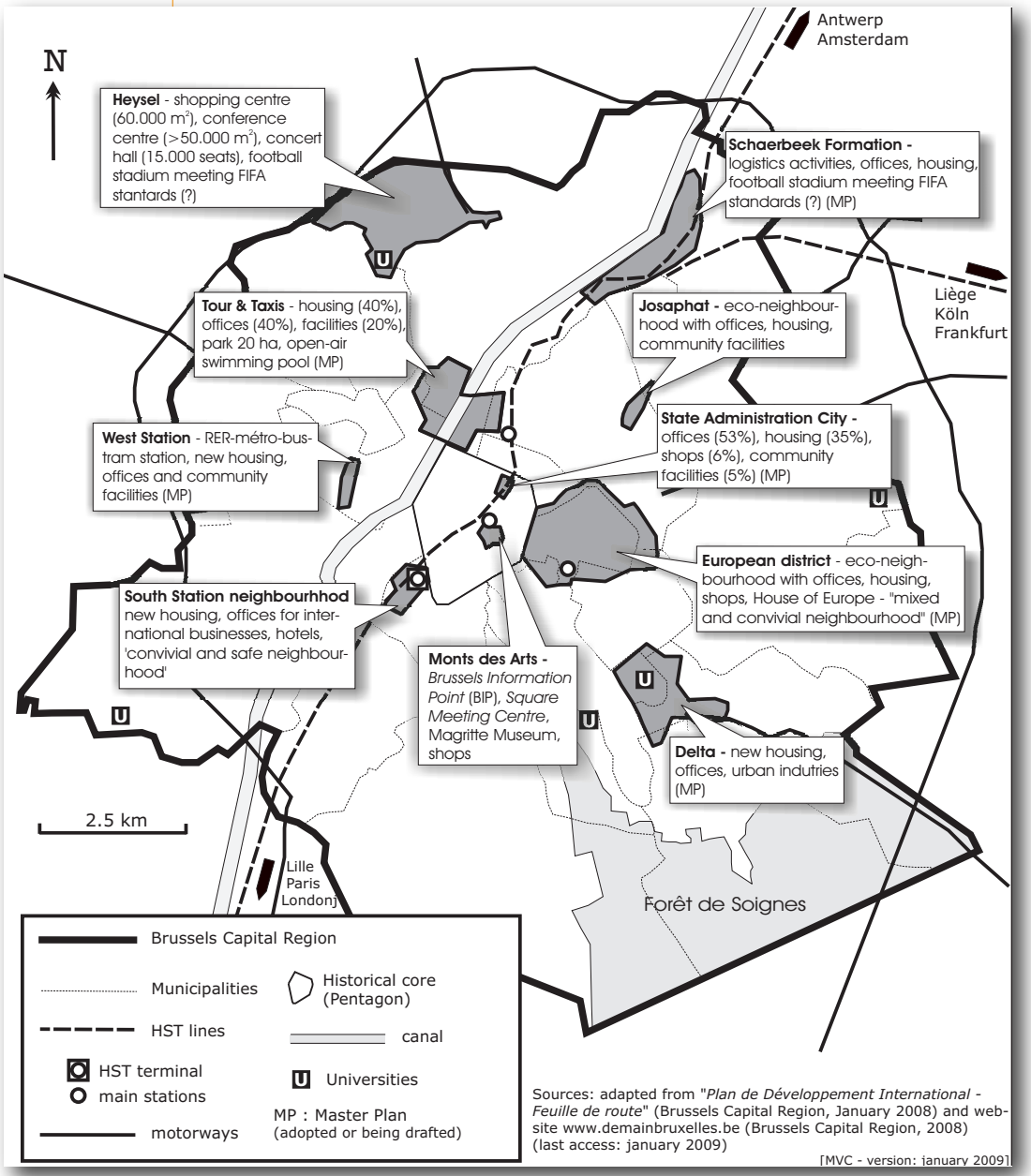

Figure 1. The ten strategic areas of the Brussels International Development Plan.
Note: in the Policy Statement made at the start of the 2008 session, the South Station neighbourhood was no longer on the list of the IDP's strategic areas and was replaced by the 'lever-area RTBF/VRT'. The South Station neighbourhood does however appear in the Basic Outline and the Feuille de route, and is still mentioned on the official website of the IDP (see www.demainbruxelles.be).