

BEYOND METROPOLIZATION

Exploring new hybrids



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10th International U&U PhD Seminar

Eurometropolis Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai

ENSAP de Lille, 28-30 June 2023

U&U SEMINARS

After successful editions in Leuven, Venice, Barcelona, Paris, Delft, Lausanne and Ghent, the 10th edition of the Urbanism & Urbanization International PhD Seminar will be hosted in Lille, France. The LACTH (Laboratoire de recherche de l'École d'Architecture et de Paysage de Lille) and the LAB (Louvain Research Institute for Landscape, Architecture and Built Environment, UCLouvain) are responsible for the scientific direction and organization of the Seminar.

U&U seminars seek to bring together students writing their PhD dissertations in urbanism, working within very different disciplinary traditions, combining historical research, design research and different forms of urban research. The community supporting this seminar series over the years shares an interest in work that tries to speak across the divide between urban studies and the city-making disciplines, seeking to combine the interpretation of the process of urbanization with the commitment and care for the urban condition in all its manifestations.

The seminar welcomes all PhD students working in this mixed field. The call for papers foregrounds a set of themes that will be given special attention. We invite students to respond to these thematic lines, however, papers addressing other themes and concerns will also be taken into consideration.

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HYBRIDIZATIONS...

It is increasingly difficult to use boundaries and perimeters to define 'territories', whether we are talking about physical or political, disciplinary or professional, economic or cultural ones. For these delimitations are constantly being overstepped and contradicted: by contemporary forms of urbanization, by the life, training and jobs paths of people, by the flows of resources involved in our economies, as well as the diversity of the 'circles' that now constitute our plural identities.

As a consequence, over the last decades, urban theories have already embodied three major paradigm shifts, even if they are percolating more slowly into the dominant practices and visions of urban policies. In the early 1980s, urbanized territories started to be analysed in terms of lines and *networks*¹, rather than surfaces and *functions*; this was mainly about infrastructures, but more recently the role of network actors (such as those managing services, energy, water, waste, etc.) in the organization of territories has also been highlighted².

At the same time, urbanism and urban planning research has also focused, in addition to *static* spatial descriptions, on *dynamic* approaches, investigating the trajectories of resources required by different urbanized forms, such as the territorial metabolism³. And consequently, we have become aware of the importance of the secondary effects that an urbanization process in *one place* produces *elsewhere*, sometimes very far away. The agglomerated city, a model of sustainability for some, in fact consumes resources produced in "operational landscapes"⁴ on a global level, generating widespread interdependence on a planetary scale.

In many fields, we are already thinking in terms of links, and interactions: *inter-disciplinarity* between two different defined scientific methods, cross-border cooperation

between two distinct territories, short food circuits between urban and rural areas, partnerships between public issues and private finance, etc.

But beyond making the link, we would like today to question its result, what is produced as new hybrids, as "third terms", when we go for *trans-disciplinarity*. When ecology focuses on the *lisières*, or ecotones, it is because they put in contact distinct domains, but it is mainly because that allows hybridizations, thus biodiversity. Similarly, the richness of *métissage*, for the creole poet Edouard Glissant, is to generate new identities. And in the philosophy of science, several forms of hybrids have already been conceptualised, between the scholarly and the profane⁵, or humans and non-humans⁶, etc.

... BEYOND METROPOLIZATION

The crucial questions that our territories in transition are facing today - energy, mobility, health, water, food, soil artificialisation, access to healthcare, fair remuneration of work, spatial equity, etc. - are often envisioned in polarized models, that can freeze positions. In order to better address these issues, we postulate the need to dismantle categories, to break out of univocal patterns, to build new coalitions along different dividing lines. To this end, this 10th U&U seminar wishes to explore the potential of hybridization, between different theoretical models, between diverse urbanized forms, between various working methods, etc.

Metropolization particularly - as a process of political concentration, economic accumulation and spatial differentiation - has been the dominant urban model since the 19th century. And in these three areas it in terms of spatial injustice or lack of representativeness. Moreover, this model has been able to develop thanks to a historical regime of abundant cheap energy, conditions which are now declining. What are then the alternatives to current trends? S. Marot⁷, for instance, identifies four scenarios which challenge our

1 Dupuy G. (1991), *L'urbanisme des réseaux. Théories et méthodes*, A. Colin, Paris.

2 Vanier M. (2015), *Demain les territoires. Capitalisme réticulaire et espace politique*, Hermann éd., Paris.

3 Duviigneaud P. (1974), *La synthèse écologique : populations, communautés, écosystèmes, biosphère, noosphère*, Doin, Paris.

4 Brenner N. (ed.) (2014), *Implusions/Explosions: Towards a Study of Planetary Urbanization*, Jovis, Berlin.

5 Callon M. et al. (2001), *Agir dans un monde incertain. Essai sur la démocratie technique*, Seuil, Paris.

6 Latour B. (1991), *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes. Essai anthropologie symétrique*, La Découverte, Paris.

7 Marot S. (2019), *Taking the country's side. Architecture and agriculture*, Lisbon Architecture Triennale : *The Poetics of*

current categories, whether they be planning tools, urban strategies, practical action modalities, or societal paradigms.

This seminar therefore wishes to welcome contributions that explore the potential of different forms of hybridization (we suggest some possibilities below), grounded on the idea that, in light of the current climatic, energetic, geopolitical and economic crisis, urbanism and urban planning need to cross multiple thresholds. We believe that it is possible, in this way, to collectively contribute to renewing current theoretical models.

TRACK 1

RURAL AND URBAN HYBRID

Nowadays urbanism necessarily finds itself dealing with a context where boundaries between city and countryside are not delineated, and where habitat, production, leisure, services and agriculture merge into a single landscape. While many works have already contributed to the description of these fabrics - *città diffusa*, *zwischenstadt*, *nebular city*, etc.⁸ - today, actors are also considering them from the point of view of the project, whether on a local⁹ or territorial scale¹⁰, or by soft densification.

Indeed, ecologists have shown that the forms of habitat in suburbs, mixing garden plots, vegetable gardens, backyards, crafts and small industries, are intermediate environments with much higher levels of biodiversity than those in the city or the countryside. The fact of increasing the contact line between inhabited areas and cultivated plots also makes it possible to facilitate local agriculture, in terms of production by growers (easier access to land), of local distribution through short circuits, and of education of the inhabitants.

This track welcomes papers that analyse the potential of mixed fabrics in terms of quality of life, ecological diversity, social opportunities, local economies but also what the costs are, and for which communities.

Reason, Polígrafa, Barcelona.

8 Barcelloni Corte M., Viganò P. (eds) (2022), *The Horizontal Metropolis. The Anthology*. Springer Link.

9 Mariolle B., Léger J.-M. (eds.) (2018), *Densifier dédensifier. Penser les campagnes urbaines*, éd. Parenthèses, Marseille.

10 Cavalieri C., Viganò P. (eds.) (2019), *The Horizontal Metropolis: a Radical Project*, Park, Zürich.

By studying forms of values less clear-cut distributed between centres and peripheries, (economical, symbolic, cultural, political values, etc.), these papers explore alternative forms of metropolization, in the sense that the latter implies a selective policy that concentrates attractiveness in what are sometimes called 'poles of excellence', from which only spill-over effects are expected.

TRACK 2

TERRITORIALIZING POLITICAL HYBRIDS

Inter-territoriality is an increasingly important issue, as there is nowadays a growing disconnection between the perimeters of public competences and life trajectories (professional mobility, multi-residentiality, multi-culturalism), or the flow of resources that are necessary for our lifestyles. For some authors, it is even the duty of political districts today to reflect on the modalities of a shared inter-territorial power, because "it is only in the complementary of the resources of each territory (...) that we will be able to be at the same time attractive (even competitive), equitable (even supportive), and economical (even sober)"¹¹.

Cross-border territories¹² in particular are interesting situations for experimenting with inter-territoriality because they raise all the issues at stake in an enhanced manner. Unlike the classic model of the metropolis, which organizes its relations with its neighbours in terms of dependence and decision-making hierarchy, these conurbations are living areas with horizontal inter-dependencies. They are places of opportunity (for trade, leisure, employment or services) and of negative externalities (waste deposits, different regulations, disconnection from networks, lawless areas), with no real citizen counterparts and no democratic representation in their governance.

In order to engage a project perspective, many of these hybrid territories, under the impulse of European programs, have used the "vision" as a tool for bypassing both policies and physical borders in order to promote a long-term image of the future. Nevertheless, how it can effectively guide the more traditional "strategic" and "operational" dimensions is still to be investigated. The urban

11 Vanier M. (2008), *Le pouvoir des territoires. Essai sur l'inter-territorialité*, éd. Anthropos, Paris, p.64.

12 As for example the NWMA-North West Metropolitan Area or the conurbation Lille Kortrijk Tournai.

project in particular is identified as a “blind spot” in cross-border cooperation.

This track is therefore interested in articles presenting and analyzing forms of experimentation, whether citizen or public action, proposing specific collaborative mechanisms for implementing joint projects, aiming to overcome the objective difficulties of performing policies and operational tools, in a situation of inter-territoriality.

TRACK 3

RESOURCES HYBRIDIZATION

“Urbanizing in place” : some scholars¹³ propose to consider urbanization no longer as a linear process of land consumption but as a process ‘in place’, cumulative rather than extensive. This is clearly also an alternative to metropolization, in the sense that the latter corresponds to a mode of urban growth by sprawl, *a priori* unlimited, linked with the principle of constantly maintaining attractiveness.

This change of perspective implies keeping up the resources and grey energy that have been invested locally (infrastructures, cultures, constructions, work time, etc.), and valorizing them through circular approaches. Today, the application of the Zero Net Land Take directive (ZAN in France, Stop Beton in Belgium, etc.) raises questions throughout Europe, and one of the options announced (in the Flemish BRV, for example), is the hybridization of activities in the same space. On what scale is it fair to measure the “net” artificialisation balance? What should be considered as an artificialized area? How can we avoid the risk of suffocating already dense environments and blocking the development of others?

Another contemporary theoretical field that involves forms of hybridity is that of the commons. As described by Elinor Ostrom (1991), one of the *sine qua non* conditions for the sustainability of these self-organizing systems is the interweaving of actions (of appropriation, provision, monitoring, conflict resolution, etc.), but also the indistinguishable interweaving of everyone’s interests, and the interweaving of several complementary resources in the same system¹⁴. Still, this

is also the principle of permaculture, not to exploit each resource in autonomous and parallel channels but to favour each one by the presence of the others, by interweaving their cycles, their inputs and their outputs¹⁵.

This track is therefore interested in works that analyse experiences in the organisation of territories, ways of life and production, which go beyond zoning, sectors and linear exploitation; it questions what a “permaculture”, applied to the fields of urbanism, could produce.

TRACK 4

HYBRID DISCIPLINES

Town planning has always been interdisciplinary; it is historically grounded in economic, geographical, and social sciences. In the 2000s, urban and landscape designers find themselves working on the same scales and frameworks, blurring their boundaries, which has already given rise to the ‘landscape urbanism’, movement that some have already defined as a ‘hybrid’ of the two disciplines. Today, we can expect tools from new fields - pedology, hydrology, forestry, agronomy, archaeology, etc. - to structure urban planning, for example according to soil types, their water permeability, their topographical situation, their fertility, etc. And certain contemporary research objects, such as energy, can themselves be considered as ‘hybrid’ objects, since they belong to different regimes (material, virtual, organizational, socio-cultural, political).

But it is also the working methodologies that are now being hybridized in urban studies, by mixing different practices that have always been epistemologically sealed off until now, such as research and design, but also artistic research (video, narratives), collective action (associations, activists), fieldwork (self-construction), etc. This transdisciplinarity can be expected to produce new results, which each separate approach could not have achieved in isolation.

This track welcomes then papers working on transdisciplinary researches, coping with complex territorial structures urbanisms (environmental sciences such as ecology,

13 Dehaene M. (2013), *Tuinieren in het Stedelijk Veld / Gardening in the Urban Field*, A&S/Books, Gent University.

14 Grosjean B. (2018), “La huitième condition : l’imbrication.

Usages du territoire dans les communs d’Elinor Ostrom”, *Les carnets du paysage* n° 33, Actes Sud, pp.131-143.

15 Holmgren D., Mollison B. (1978), *Permaculture 1 : A Perennial Agriculture for Human Settlement*, Corgi Books, London.

agronomy, forestry, water engineering) and/or associating a variety of investigating practices, connected with action research, engaging communities, participative processes, etc. (social sciences such as sociology, anthropology, artistic research...).

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Rewriting the urban commons. A sustainable approach to urban logistics

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This research investigates how the cycle logistics affects the design and transformation of streets and public spaces. As part of an industrial PhD programme, the study considers the urban practices that affect the space for the movement of people and goods, in the broader framework of the ‘rewriting of the city’, as a critical transformative action of what already exists. Recognising the role of the bicycle in creating more sustainable, healthy and inclusive societies, the contribution interweaves several perspectives: accessibility to services, active mobility and decarbonisation. In this sense, sustainable logistics is seen as an opportunity to improve quality of life and urban well-being. The study observes the changes in the use of space promoted by citizens, companies and third sector organisations. It analyses how their practices relate to projects for the redesign of space for movement and the creation of multifunctional spaces related to cycle logistics and active mobility.

Re-writing the streets and public spaces

Recently many urban practices and transformations of spaces have been introduced in contemporary cities, not least the emergence of several green urban logistics initiatives, such as the transport of goods and people by bicycle. As part of the PhD PON programme ‘Research and Innovation’ 2014-2020, this study explores how to cycle logistics characterise contemporary society, influencing the design and transformation of streets, working and living spaces.

Starting from a reinterpretation of the specific conditions of the case studies within the broader framework of the ‘re-writing of the city’, the research observes the physical transformations produced by different actors. ‘Re-writing the city’ is understood as a critical transformative action on what already exists. *Re-writing* is a metaphor for the ongoing work of redesigning of the streets and public space, where the transformative action is conducted through both top-down and bottom-up projects. This reimagining and redesigning is part of a long process that began with the urban renewal and the ‘hygienist revolution’ of the nineteenth century (Zucconi 2022), when technological innovations emerged that undermined the consolidated landscape of the street that seemed forever unchanging. The long process of urban transformation continued in the twentieth century with the cycle plans – begun in Delft in 1979 – and, more recently with projects aimed at ensuring greater urban liveability, reducing the speed of vehicles in urban and peri-urban areas and improving accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists, such as in Barcelona with the *superillas* or ‘Milan City 30’ announced for 2024. The study then looks at innovations to improve urban spaces for cycling as a vector of well-being, making cities more accessible and equitable (Martens 2017).

The keys to interpreting the research are related to the physical and functional transformations of public space, referred to the material thickness of the ground, as well as the semantic change of the role of streets in the use of the city – of connection, meeting and coexistence of multiple flows. Particularly in the last century, streets and urban space have been reserved mainly for the circulation of cars, to the partial exclusion of various modes of mobility. The research hypothesis pursued in this sense is the need for a ‘new project’ for the street (Secchi 2011), whose forms and strategies must be dynamic and adaptive, favouring non-specialised spaces, linked to multimodal systems and integrated mobility, and taking possible *mixité* as a guiding parameter.

The choice of the context of interest is based on the exploration of possible forms of co-presence – or conflict – with other forms of mobility in contemporary urban spaces, following the adaptation of places of movement, also taking into account the different mobile populations that did not exist before, such as people with disabilities and the elderly. To test these hypotheses, case studies have been selected in which different local actors, such as administrations, cycle logistics companies and citizens’ associations, implement joint projects or experimental initiatives for the transformation and reuse of public spaces.

Objectives and methodology

According to analyses of the socio-spatial quality of streets and public spaces, light sustainable urban logistics is used as a tool and lens to observe urban transformations in terms of accessibility to services, active mobility and decarbonisation. This is done by examining case studies with different degrees of urbanity from the perspective of porosity – the ability to connect spaces, objects and subjects (Haraway 2019), to hold together movements of percolation and proliferation (Tosi 2002). This is also an opportunity to explore possible forms of coexistence or co-presence of different mobile populations. In fact, interactions between co-present actors not necessarily in collaboration, trigger opportunities for generative conflict. To study this, the research will be supported by the collaboration of companies in the sector, in cooperation with administrations and associations, with action-research pathways also involving local communities.

The innovative practices of cycle logistics, together with socio-demographic changes, the dynamics of migration, the ageing of the population and the search for greater accessibility, require a redesign of the existing urban heritage, of the spaces for movement and of the facilities for urban well-being. These proposals are closely linked to the need for access to local services and active mobility – walking, cycling, public transport – as well as the need for freedom of movement and use of open spaces for leisure and social activities, work and study. In this panorama, transport services by cargo bike can be found, which, through situated practices, offer potential contributions to improving urban liveability, mitigating the impact of the goods transport sector and contributing to the diffusion of circular economy systems. The observational perspective adopted in the research considers innovative cycle logistic practices as opportunities to promote the presence of symbiotic, non-dissipative forms of organisation that guarantee greater equity and inclusivity in similar spaces of action and interaction (Tsing 2015).

In order to study this, the research will include several periods of cooperation with companies that are active in the field of cycle logistics. The selection of case studies ranges from different types of organisations to specific business activities carried out with the use of cargo bikes. Some are last-mile bike courier companies. Others are associations developing innovative activities related to urban circular economy processes. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with these subjects, shadowing their activities in order to tell, according to the ethnographic method, what services they offer and how they relate to the urban space in the contexts in which they operate. In some cases, in order to have a deeper contact with the field, it was decided to work directly as a volunteer in the companies.

Cycle logistics and the urban commons

Recent technological innovations and urban practices (many of which are consumer-oriented) have increased last-mile delivery, which in medium-sized European cities is carried out by oversized vehicles travelling short distances (Wrighton 2016). Over and above the behavioural changes encouraged during the closure period, door-to-door transport and urban delivery, which has been growing steadily in recent years, has now reached a significant level of intensity (Mastrandrea 2021). In response, various initiatives are being taken by administrations or innovative companies to promote cycling and to work with cargo bikes as a substitute for heavier vehicles in urban movement of people and goods (Schliwa 2015).

What the research seeks to reflect is that the development of goods and passenger transport by bicycle in urban areas is not only an innovative transport solution – particularly effective in dense contexts thanks to its flexibility – or a strategy for decarbonisation and energy saving. Above all, cycle logistics is an opportunity to radically rethink the road and urban public space. Not only because it uses very efficient types of cargo bikes for first and last mile transport, which in the short term could face competition from other technologies that could eventually replace them. In this sense, therefore, it will not be the 'new paradigm' that defines the city (Rifkin 2011), as the automobile did in the twentieth century, transforming urban space and conurbations, effectively becoming the means of movement that dictates the dimension of the space of movement. Instead, cycle logistics could play an important role in promoting social innovation and finding ways to rethink urban space. Thanks to its economic characteristics, it is accessible and adaptable to different types of spaces and to people of different professions, ages and physical conditions. It allows them to mix the public space that has been specialised by the car. From this perspective, the

practice of cycle logistics can contribute to respond to the global challenges of innovation and accessibility in order to reduce inequalities and develop more sustainable cities and communities, according to the objectives of the United Nations 2030 Agenda (SDGs 9, 10 and 11).

In addition, besides projects to redesign spaces for movement, new shared spaces are emerging, multifunctional spaces used in relation to sustainable mobility and intermodality practices, such as *dark stores*, *velostations* or neighbourhood logistics micro-hubs. These ‘multitasking infrastructures’ (Rappaport 2022) are implemented on the basis of principles of social justice and in response to the environmental crisis, often in cooperation with companies and local communities. These are inhabitable places, not just places to store or dispatch freights, sell goods or serve as intermodal transport stations. Such spaces are used for cooperative practices, infrastructures that therefore support the people who have access to them. These multifunctional spaces are connected to the network of paths for active mobility and host services for the use of the community. In this sense, they are urban commons.

The Strasbourg case study

The research observes a number of experiences in European cities where bottom-up innovation initiatives and cycle logistics companies are active and where experiments have been promoted by the administration (as in the case of those involved in the City Changer Cargo Bike project). In Strasbourg, for example, the administration encouraged the use of cargo bikes by lending them out for a trial period and by setting up special parking areas in front of some public buildings in the city centre. Following these trials, they were incorporated into the fleet of bikes available through the Vélhop rental service.

Among the various cycle logistics services offered in the city, since 2018, the association Sikle - Les Composteurs de Strasbourg has set up a network to collect food waste from professionals. At the beginning of 2023, it has around a hundred partners (restaurants, canteens, caterers, etc.) and collects eight tonnes of waste per week, tripling its work compared to 2020. Sikle has forged a partnership with a market gardener near the city, which has provided him with a composting area. Two other composting microsites are located in family gardens, one to the south and one to the north of the Strasbourg *hyper centre*. The collection of organic waste is carried out using five cargo bikes with two 250W motors, which can pull one or two trailers with a maximum payload of 400kg. The team consists of nine men and three women, and the composting process is supported by a team of volunteers. There are 40 rounds per week with an average distance of 15 km.

Since 2016, the separate collection of organic waste in restaurants is mandatory for those producing more than 10 tonnes per year. From 1 September 2016, article 102 of the “Loi de transition énergétique pour la croissance verte” (energy transition law for green growth) requires all public establishments and all local authorities to implement a process to combat food waste in catering services¹. Furthermore, from 1 January 2023, the threshold has been lowered to 5 tonnes of organic waste per year, and from 31 December 2023, all administrations will have to ensure the separate collection of organic waste at source, regardless of the annual amount of organic waste produced. In addition to triggering a virtuous recycling process, those who use the collection service offered by Sikle will obtain the recovery of organic waste on site, without having to set up a designated storage area, and will not autonomously transport the waste to a recycling centre. The collection, transport and composting of organic waste is carried out entirely by means of cargo bikes and with the support of volunteers, who take turns with the employees [fig.1].

¹ Loi de transition énergétique pour la croissance verte is published on the site of Ministère de la Transition écologique et de la Cohésion des territoires, Accueil, Politiques publiques , Transition énergétique & bas carbone <https://www.ecologie.gouv.fr/loi-transition-energetique-croissance-verte>



[fig.1] Organic waste collected and transported on a cargo bike by Siklé - Les Composteurs de Strasbourg. Source: photo by the author.

In 2021, after an initial collaboration with the Eurometropole – currently underway – which plans to collect organic waste from 120 families living close to the Place de Saint Etienne, in the *hyper centre* – where there are no collection bins or microsites for composting neighbourhoods – Siklé proposed to the office of the Potagers Urbains Collectifs (which manages allotments in urban gardens) the creation of a gardening and social space in the Parc du Heyritz. The land was polluted with hydrocarbons and had been abandoned in the previous period. The proposal for the regeneration of the site included the creation of a micro-composting area to preserve the urban agricultural vocation of the site without cultivating the open land, as well as a project to create a thin forest on part of the site. The *jardins familiaux* (family gardens) department carried out important work to make the site viable: creating an access for lorries to deposit the shredded material, clearing the site, clearing the area, levelling the parts intended for composting, shredding and storing the shredded material.

The Jardin Soleil is one of two active micro-sites for delivery and composting [fig.2]. The other is at the Église Rouge in the north of the city. Siklé delivers both the organic waste collected from professionals in the city centre, which represents the material with a high nitrogen content, and the shredded branches and leaves from the maintenance of public green spaces, which represents the carbon part useful for the maturation of the compost. The citizens involved take part in the subsequent sifting operations and use the compost produced on site to cultivate vegetable gardens in greenhouses and in boxes. Relationships and economies are also created that link the composting site with family gardens in the immediate vicinity, which buy the fertiliser produced in the micro-site, thus activating a circular economy process by returning the waste produced by citizens to cultivated land in the city.



[fig.2] Jardin Soleil, a shared space in the micro-site managed by Sikle - Les Composteurs de Strasbourg, Parc du Heyritz, Strasbourg. Source: photo by the author.

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ISBN : 978-2-931069-10-3 [digital edition]

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