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The role of port and logistics activities in Brussels

Quelle place pour les activités portuaires et logistiques à Bruxelles ?

Welke plaats voor de haven- en logistieke activiteiten in Brussel?

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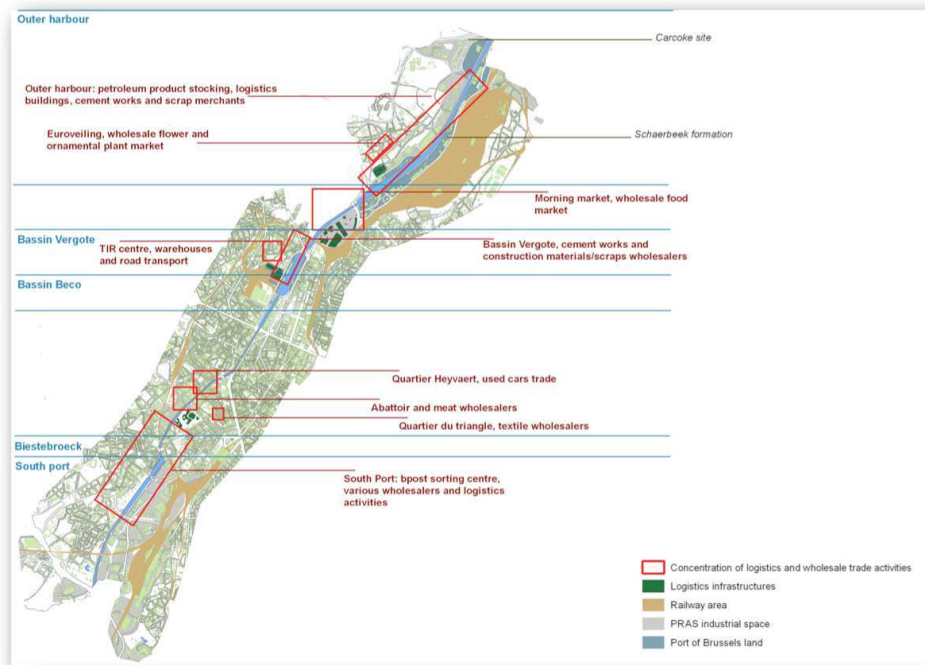
Introduction: The canal as a structuring and much sought-after space in the Brussels urban area

- 1 Logistics and goods transport are essential for a city, ensuring the supply of goods for shops, the population, worksites and industries, as well as the evacuation of rubble and waste and the marketing of economic production. In Brussels, the canal area plays a key role in this matter.
- 2 The Senne valley is a major element in the structuring of the urban area of Brussels. Historically, it constituted a key area for trade. In the 16th century, a canal was dug there, linking Brussels and Antwerp. It was then extended towards Charleroi and structured part of the Brussels space. A port was therefore built and maintained, while commercial, artisanal and then industrial activities took place in the neighbourhoods along the canal.
- 3 For this reason, a large part of the area around the canal in the Brussels-Capital Region presents the characteristics of a (post-) industrial urban space. The majority of the industries have left these neighbourhoods and have moved to outlying locations which are better adapted to the current economic context, thus creating wasteland which has gradually been taken over by other activities. Nevertheless, port and industrial activities continue and are concentrated in the outer harbour, to the north of the Region, where waterway access is better due to the larger size of the canal, and where industrial spaces meet current standards in terms of size and road access (figure 1) [Strale *et al.*, 2015]. Industrial activities have also developed to the south of the urban area. Furthermore, the

canal area still plays a major role in Brussels urban logistics, due to the infrastructures as well as distribution and wholesale trade activities which exist there.

- 4 As working-class areas, the neighbourhoods along the canal present the highest population density in the Brussels-Capital Region. Having suffered from the deindustrialisation and tertiarisation of the Brussels and Belgian economy, the populations who live there have low incomes, a high unemployment rate and a high level of socioeconomic insecurity [Van Criekingen, 2006]. A large part of these neighbourhoods are located in the poor area of Brussels, where there is a high level of socioeconomic hardship.
- 5 There has been renewed interest in this space [Van Criekingen, 2006; IEB 2013 & 2014; Vermeulen, 2015]. Private investors see it as an opportunity due to the low cost of land and its availability, the urban waterfront craze and the attractiveness of Brussels for certain wealthy sectors of the population. As regards the public authorities in charge of territorial development, the area around the canal has been the object of many initiatives amid a change in urban policy for the benefit of an entrepreneurial vision [Van Hamme & Van Criekingen, 2012; Van Criekingen, 2013; Dessouroux *et al.*, 2016]: the reconversion of the public space, the construction of housing and the development of urbanistic projects are changing the image of these neighbourhoods and, more broadly, of the Brussels-Capital Region. For their part, the port authorities aim to maintain activities related to the waterway [Strale *et al.*, 2015].
- 6 These multiple projects and interests modify the socioeconomics of the canal area, by transforming the urbanistic profile and increasing the pressure on this territory and its industries and residents, thus raising the question as to their suitability and maintenance.
- 7 In this context, this article presents an examination of the role of port and logistics activities in the Brussels-Capital Region. More precisely, we shall examine the impact of new developments and policies in the canal area on these activities. The question is also raised as to the evolution of these industrial stakeholders, their structuring and their geography, and more broadly, the organisation of the supply of goods in Brussels.
- 8 We defend the hypothesis that the property market and the balance of power in the canal area tend to reinforce the decline in logistics activities in Brussels, despite the major role played by some of them in the supply of goods and the urban economy. In addition, we feel that these changes illustrate the transformations under way in the canal area, at urbanistic, political and social level, and more broadly, the evolution of the urban development policy in Brussels.
- 9 This analysis is divided into two parts. We begin by examining the role of this area in terms of Brussels logistics, the changes in these distribution chains and their impact on the canal area. The second part explores the role of stakeholders in the canal area, its evolution and its consequences in terms of port and industrial activities. This allows us to consider the future of this territory and the consequences of transformations of this space as regards port and logistics activities.

Figure 1. Structuring elements of the canal area



Source: Port of Brussels, 4^e Cahier de l'Observatoire de la mobilité, Monitoring des quartiers and PRAS

1. A major logistics role amid the reconversion of supply chains

- 10 The neighbourhoods along the canal play a major role in goods transport, the organisation of the trading of goods and the supply of goods in the urban area of Brussels.

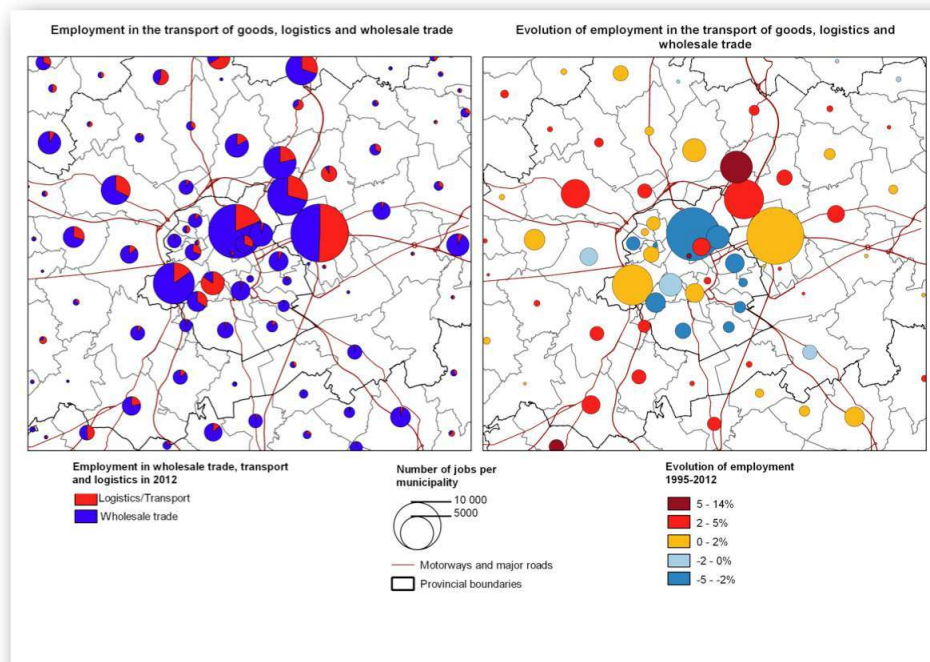
1.1. The infrastructures

- 11 Firstly, many key infrastructures are located there [Strale *et al.*, 2015]. In particular, they are sites related to wholesale trade, namely the morning market and the abattoirs in Anderlecht. The Port of Brussels is a major area for goods transport. Many companies are located on its property of 85 ha of usable area, representing approximately 6 000 direct jobs. It has a container terminal and a TIR centre, and a customs warehouse measuring 160 000 m². Let us also mention the bpost sorting centre in Anderlecht. While these infrastructures are not necessarily related to the use of the waterway, the semi-industrial structure of the area around the canal, the main roads along it and the available space explain their continued presence.
- 12 Due to the presence of these infrastructures and the economic structure of Brussels, jobs and companies related to goods transport are also concentrated around the canal (figure 2), in particular the many wholesalers near Brussels wholesale markets. Furthermore, their clients – the retailers – are concentrated in the central urban spaces [Wayens, 2006]. Due to the lack of integration of this activity, the proximity to this clientele is fundamental [Strale & Wayens, 2014]. In the neighbourhoods along the canal,

wholesalers find suitable spaces and semi-industrial buildings, which are accessible to heavy vehicles and where they are able to store goods. These companies provide approximately 10 000 jobs in the neighbourhoods along the canal [Strale *et al.*, 2015].

- 13 Likewise, small carriers and logistics service providers specialised in urban service and messaging or the storage of small volumes, represent a significant share of the industries along the canal, benefiting from the same advantages as the wholesalers, such as suitable buildings, proximity to the city and good road access. They represent approximately 5 000 jobs [Strale *et al.*, 2015].
- 14 However, large-scale storage and logistics activities tend to favour the immediate surroundings, in particular along the ring road and motorways. These operators need large areas for parking vehicles and storing goods. Furthermore, they often operate on a larger scale than the urban area of Brussels and must have easy access to the motorway network.

Figure 2. Employment in logistics, transport and wholesale trade



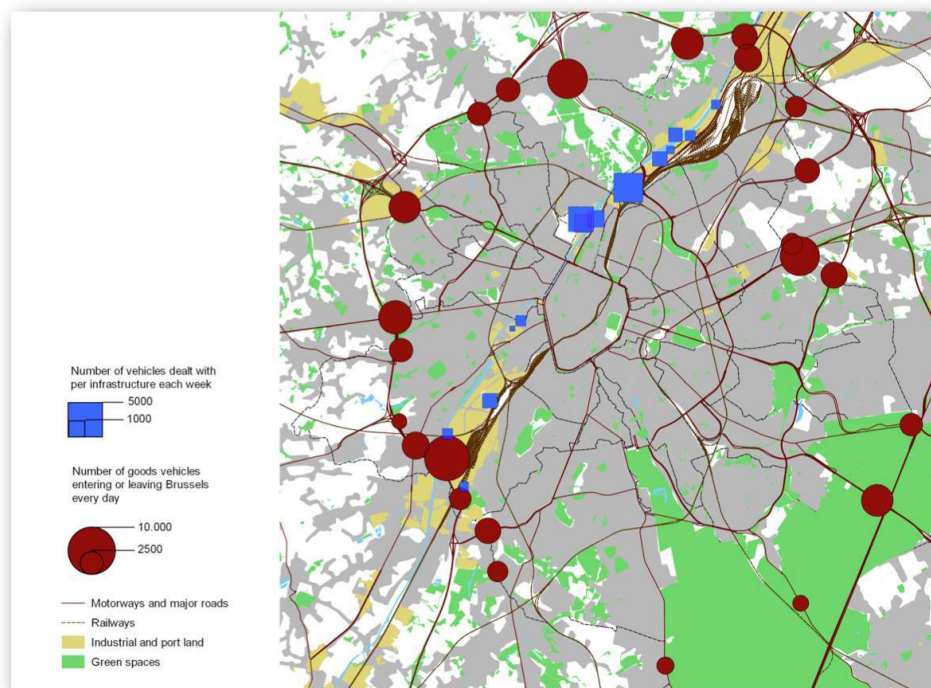
SOURCE: ONSS DATA AND IGEAT PROCESSING

1.2. Flow

- 15 As regards the flow of goods, it is estimated that the Brussels-Capital Region generates 800 000 delivery journeys per week [BCI & Technum, 2014]. This estimation does not take into account the transport of waste or the journeys of private individuals. The retail trade accounts for half of these journeys, whereas deliveries for offices, industry and worksites account for the remainder. This illustrates the importance of goods transport in the economic life of all of the neighbourhoods in Brussels, including those where there are no industrial or transport activities.

- 16 Another way to approach the issue is to examine the location of the main sites in terms of the generation and organisation of the flow of goods (figure 3). Their geography illustrates the importance of the canal area. The transport terminals as well as the sites for wholesale trade and industrial activities are concentrated there. Furthermore, the goods traffic entering and leaving the Region is concentrated there, according to counts by *Bruxelles-Mobilité*. The canal area operates as a sort of interface. Whether it is between shops and wholesalers, service activities and their suppliers, worksites and their materials, or for waste disposal, many goods are sent, exchanged and prepared in the canal area. Although there is less industrial activity there and only limited use of the waterway, this area remains crucial for the organisation of goods transport due to the availability of space, the presence of infrastructures and the adapted structure of the urban fabric.

Figure 3. Location of infrastructures generating flows of goods and of heavy goods vehicle traffic on the main inbound and outbound roads in the Brussels-Capital Region



SOURCE: BRUXELLES-MOBILITÉ 2012 AND AUTHOR'S CALCULATIONS

- 17 As regards port activity in Brussels, goods traffic is estimated at 24 million tonnes per year, 7 million of which make use of the waterway and 4.5 million of which have Brussels as their origin or destination [Port of Brussels, 2010]. The rest is transported by road. This large volume of road transport is related to port industry traffic, the TIR centre and the morning market, which are on port property. Although precise statistics do not exist regarding the flow of goods entering and leaving Brussels, it is estimated that the waterway represents a very small proportion of this, *i.e.* a few percent [Lebeau and Macharis, 2014].
- 18 The outer harbour and Vergote dock are the most active sites at the port because they are located in the north part of the canal where it is bigger [Strale *et al.*, 2015]. They account for 90 % of loading and unloading. Upstream from Beco dock, the canal is smaller. This

limitation partly explains why the port function is less developed in the southern part of the Region. Furthermore, the spaces available for port activities are also more limited than they are in the north. Thus, together, Biestebroek dock and Aa and Veeweyde quays account for less than 10 % of port traffic in Brussels.

- 19 Waterway transport activity at the port is therefore limited to a small number of segments – centred on bulk products transported in large quantities – for which the waterway is competitive with respect to the road. The cement works located there are responsible for a large part of the traffic. The supply of bulk materials lends itself well to waterway transport. On the other hand, the distribution of concrete must take place as quickly as possible in order to preserve the quality of the product. The import of construction materials makes use of the waterway for the same reasons related to low cost and bulk transport. Petroleum products imported by waterway rank second in terms of traffic. It is estimated that all of the Brussels petrol stations are supplied via the Port of Brussels. The port also serves as a storage site. Its capacity allows a strategic reserve of approximately three days of fuel for the Region. Agricultural products represent the third biggest cause of traffic. They mainly include grains intended for the flour trade in Brussels, whose production is exported partly by waterway.
- 20 Another activity which accounts for the outgoing traffic is the salvage and recycling of old metal. These materials are collected in order to ship them via the waterway towards treatment facilities or metallurgical plants which take them as secondary material. Likewise, the dredging spoil and the embankments of worksites, as well as the ashes from the incinerator, make use of the canal. Finally, the outer harbour accounts for a flow of containers. In 2013, just over 13 000 containers were unloaded, with no information regarding their contents.
- 21 However, for the other traffic – very much in the majority in Brussels urban logistics – such as the supply of shops in Brussels, the transport of parcels or the import of finished products, road transport is preferred due to its speed, flexibility and adaptation to fine distribution. Nevertheless, the port aims to develop urban distribution activities on an experimental basis.
- 22 Within the Brussels-Capital Region, there are approximately 700 000 less lorries per year thanks to the port [Macharis *et al.*, 2011], mainly on the roads between Antwerp and Brussels. The port makes use of these numbers to promote its positive environmental role [Port of Brussels, 2014]. However, the pre- or post-shipment of goods through the port takes place almost exclusively by road, leading to considerable cartage around the port. Finally, with respect to the estimated 800 000 journeys per week required to supply goods to the Region, the role of the port remains limited.
- 23 As an illustration of the difficulties introducing multimodality in urban logistics, the site of the former cokeworks Carcoke – which was intended to be used for waterway transport activities – was recently attributed in part to the new bpost sorting centre, due to the fact that there were no companies interested in the waterway [IEB, 2014b]. The calling off of the BILC project (see the following point) in its first version is also partially related to the fact that the investors could not guarantee the use of the waterway or that this infrastructure would be used for goods intended for the Brussels-Capital Region. Finally, only 29 of the 132 companies on port property use the waterway [Actiris, 2010]. The majority of companies make use of road transport.

1.3. The recent evolution in logistics activities and goods transport in Brussels

- 24 Between 1995 and 2012, both logistics service providers and wholesalers moved their operations to the outskirts of the city, to the benefit of the suburbs. In particular, the areas near the ring road and the motorways, and more broadly the municipalities between Brussels and Antwerp gained employment (figure 2). The same phenomenon is seen south of the Region, in the municipalities along the canal which offer industrial spaces.
- 25 This situation is in keeping with the observations made in the literature [Hesse, 2008; Dablanc *et al.*, 2010]. The pressure from the other urban activities and inferior road access are factors which are usually suggested to explain the periurbanisation of logistics. Certain stakeholders have also experienced the structural evolution of urban economies. Thus, the wholesale trade has seen a decline in its clientele – the independent retailers – due to the integration by mass distribution [Wayens, 2006]. Finally, logistics activities are restructuring themselves by choosing bigger sites, operating on a larger scale and preferring locations on the outskirts of the city [Strale, 2013]. In Brussels, the more central spaces as well as traditional areas with a concentration of activities, such as the canal area, have experienced the largest decreases. Furthermore, the industrial spaces in Brussels have experienced pressure from the other urban activities, as seen by the production activity observatory, which points out an 18 % decrease in regional industrial surfaces in Brussels between 1997 and 2011 [Brussels-Capital Region, 2012a].
- 26 As regards port activity in Brussels, the volumes handled have stagnated since the mid 1990s [Strale *et al.*, 2015]. This situation is related to the deindustrialisation of the Brussels economy, which has led to a decrease in the consumption of bulk products. The reorganisation of urban logistics chains comes in addition to this phenomenon, with road transport being preferred above high-volume transport such as waterway and railway.
- 27 The relative volume of activities related to the exchange of goods has therefore decreased in the centre of the urban area of Brussels, to the benefit of the immediate surroundings, due to urban restrictions and the restructuring of logistics and production chains.

2. Multiple projects, a complex and evolving interaction between stakeholders

- 28 The many interests and ambitions regarding the canal area are currently taking shape in various projects – sometimes conflicting – whereby the balance of power and arbitration are determining factors with respect to the preservation and development of logistics and port activities.
- 29 Until the mid 2000s, although the canal and the surrounding neighbourhoods had been presented as key spaces as soon as the Brussels-Capital Region was created (Canal Master Plan established in 1989, objective confirmed in the Regional Development Plan of 1995), the neighbourhoods along the canal have been the object of very few concrete projects by public authorities in charge of urban development or by private investors. The urban renovation policies and the concomitant phenomenon of gentrification had not yet reached this part of the city. With the exception of the KBC head office and the offices of

the *Communauté française* around Place Saintelette, as well as projects which did not materialise over the past decade at the Tours et Taxis site and Porte de Ninove, very few large-scale projects have been considered [Vermeulen, 2015]. Thus, the most active public stakeholder has been the Port of Brussels.

2.1. Port and logistics projects

- 30 As soon as it was established in 1993 as a pararegional public interest body, the port has upheld the development of transport and logistics activities [Origer, 2013]. Its strategy is based on different arguments, some of which have evolved over time. Thus, the port promotes its situation as an urban platform and port and as an alternative to road transport. At the beginning of the 2000s, the port centred its goals on its positioning as an interior port terminal of national and European scope. This strategy was supposed to materialise with the establishment of major distribution centres around the container terminal. During the same period, the port also aimed to develop a large-scale urban distribution centre, the BILC, in the vicinity of Tours et Taxis. The unclear communication regarding this project, the opposition of certain local residents and associations and the change of majority led to the calling off or postponement of these projects [Origer, 2013; Strale *et al.*, 2015].
- 31 The current positioning of the port is more modest and is based on synergies and projects which meet the concrete and immediate needs of Brussels: evacuation of earth from worksites, consolidation of activities involving the transshipment of construction materials, evacuation of used cars via the waterway and the search for urban distribution solutions [Port of Brussels, 2014]. This is materialised in different projects (figure 4). It involves the setting up of a construction village which was initially planned at Beco dock and was moved to Vergote dock, in order to keep the construction materials wholesalers together and favour the use of the waterway. The TIR centre was also extended via the construction of a warehouse of approximately 50 000 m² intended for urban logistics. Finally, the port aims to develop a transshipment platform at Biestebroek dock, in order to develop the use of the waterway within Brussels.

Figure 4. Projects related to goods transport in the canal area



SOURCE: PORT OF BRUSSELS

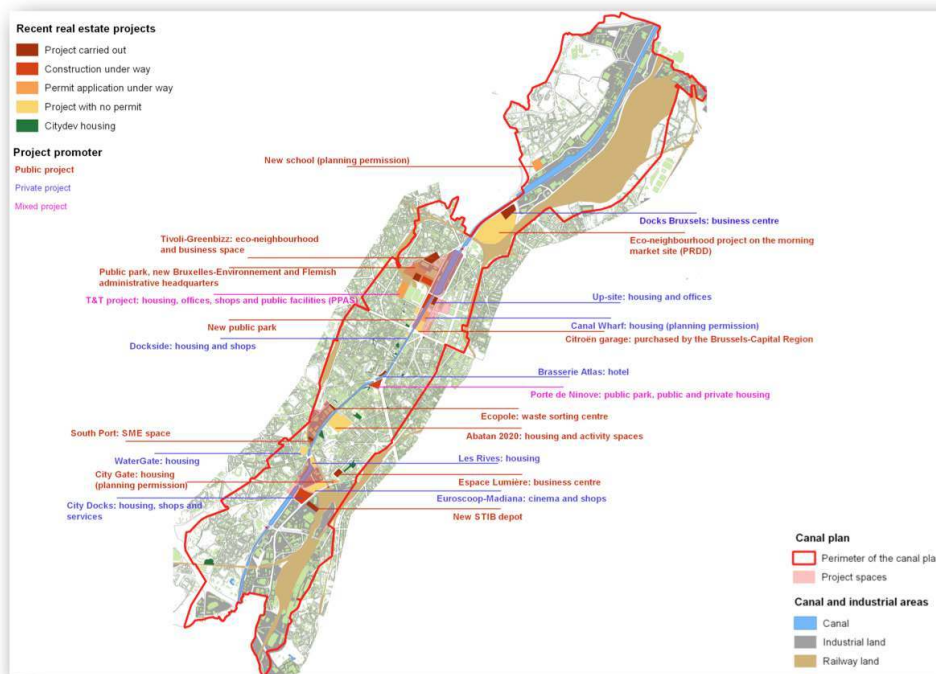
- 32 Apart from the port, the position of the regional authorities with respect to logistics and goods transport has, for a long time, been unclear [Strale *et al.*, 2015]. Thus, the regional mobility plans IRIS I and II above all put forth the pollution generated by these activities and the need to regulate it.
- 33 This situation has evolved recently towards a growing consideration of the problem. Thus, a strategic plan regarding logistics and goods transport was established in 2013 [Bruxelles-Mobilité, 2013]. In parallel, the more modest goals of the Port of Brussels facilitate dialogue with the regional mobility administration and allow a common stance to be defended. From a concrete point of view, this strategic plan is aimed at the creation of a network of urban distribution centres, where goods intended for Brussels would be grouped. These platforms should be located along the waterway, to the south and north of the region. The other major project is to create a concentration of logistics activities at the Schaerbeek formation site, where the morning market would be relocated, with storage spaces and facilities for logistics service providers and a trimodal rail/road/water terminal.

2.1. Renewed interest of urban development and property stakeholders

- 34 Nevertheless, the recent renewed interest in the canal area shown by public authorities in charge of urban development and private real estate investors is also materialised in a multiplication of non industrial projects, housing, offices and facilities [Vermeulen, 2015] (figure 5). Thus, Beco dock and the Tour et Taxis site have seen public projects, the purchase of the Citroën garage by the Region for the creation of a museum, the

establishment of the Bruxelles Environnement and Flemish administrative headquarters at Tour et Taxis, and public parks along the canal and at the Tour et Taxis site, as well as private projects such as the Up-site tower and plans for lofts along Beco dock. These projects go hand in hand with the deindustrialisation of Beco dock and the relocation of the construction village project [Port of Brussels, 2014]. Further north, the Docks Bruxsel commercial centre and the sustainable neighbourhood project at the morning market site illustrate the area's interest for real estate investors, including (semi-) industrial spaces. A similar logic is seen to the south of the city, with the development of many housing projects and public and private services between Biestebroek dock and Cureghem [IEB, 2013].

Figure 5: real estate projects in the canal area



SOURCE: ADT, IEB AND REAL ESTATE PROMOTERS

- 35 These intentions and realisations illustrate the area's interest to real estate investors and above all the key role of the public authorities in charge of urban and economic development. They carry out many projects and build infrastructures in order to change the image and use of this space and to arouse the interest of private investors, thus following the precepts of project urbanism [Decroly & Van Crieking, 2009, Genard, 2009; Van Crieking, 2013; Dessouroux *et al.*, 2016]. They also pursue investments in partnership with the private sector, in particular in the framework of Citydev housing.
- 36 This ambition is also apparent at the level of regional planning and strategic documents [Decroly & Van Crieking, 2009]. The Regional Development Plan, the Regional Sustainable Development Plan and the International Development Plan aim to allocate part of the land allotted to port or industrial activities to other urban activities. This is the case in particular for the most central sites and those situated south of the urban area. Furthermore, the demographic PRAS has opened some of these spaces to housing

- and commerce by creating ZEMUs ("*zones d'entreprises en milieu urbain*", or areas of companies in an urban setting) [Gouvernement de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale, 2013].
- 37 The Master Plan for the canal area, approved by the Region in 2014 [Brussels-Capital Region, 2012b], which must structure the territorial development of this space, confirms the desire for deindustrialisation, or at least partial. It aims to increase the area for housing, shops and offices by reinforcing mix in industrial spaces. Its main lever for action is the use of public land, for buying other land or for making it available to real estate investors. In parallel, several project perimeters have been defined, which generally correspond to the ZEMUs and where the mix of activities should be favoured. The preservation of port and industrial activities is mentioned as one of the objectives of the Master Plan. The idea advocated by its authors is that the mix of activities should protect these activities from land speculation, as they would be integrated in projects for housing, offices and shops.
- 38 We support the hypothesis that this policy and the underlying balance of power go against the preservation of spaces for port and logistics activities and that the rhetoric regarding the mix of activities is paradoxical from several points of view.
- 39 First of all, in terms of real estate income, industry and logistics generate much less than offices, housing and commerce. It is difficult to imagine that real estate investors would favour the development of these activities if they could build more lucrative buildings. This is what the first projects at Biestebroek dock seem to confirm. None of them consider the development of logistics or industrial activities. Elsewhere, the increase in property values may contribute to the continued disappearance of activities in dense neighbourhoods.
- 40 Furthermore, these activities do not lend themselves well to urban mix due to the pollution caused by the cartage activities of vehicles on and around the site. There could be conflicts with the housing, offices and luxury shops. Following the construction of the Up-Site tower or the "*terrasses de l'écluse*", the observations seem to confirm the pressure caused by the arrival of these new activities [IEB, 2013 & 2016]. This is all the more problematic since the activities which use the waterway – such as the cement works, the scrap merchants and fuel depots – are hardly compatible with other urban activities due to the pollution which is generated.
- 41 This desire for a mix of activities bears the same flaws as the desire for social mix [Lenel, 2013; Van Crieelingen, 2013]: one-way movement, in this case housing, offices and shops in industrial spaces and not the reverse, which amplifies the pressure on vulnerable activities and their departure from the sought-after spaces.
- 42 In this framework, the Region – which could regulate this balance of powers by requiring offset investments in industrial activities – on the contrary, seems to favour reconversion projects and real estate developments [IEB, 2013].
- 43 Each time an arbitration has taken place in the canal area, it has been to the detriment of transport and logistics activities: construction village at Beco dock moved to Vergote dock, sustainable neighbourhood project at the morning market site [Vervoort, 2013], project for a terminal at Biestebroek dock compromised by real estate developments (IEB, 2016), and many initiatives aimed at reconverting (semi-) industrial spaces along the canal.
- 44 The only new project for the development of goods transport activities involves the setting up of a car transshipment platform in the outer harbour [IEB, 2016]. The Region

aims to relocate the used car trade activities, in order to reconvert the Heyvaert neighbourhood and reinforce the housing function there [Matthis, 2014]. Goods transport projects only seem to have a chance when they do not compete with – or when they contribute to – regional land and real estate ambitions.

- 45 In reality, real estate investors as well as the public authorities in charge of urban development seem to favour the policy for the reconversion and deindustrialisation of the banks of the canal. Furthermore, the port has taken a stance, by pointing out the risks constituted by the demographic PRAS with respect to the preservation of its activities [Port of Brussels, 2011].
- 46 In this context, a dissonant voice has been heard recently, namely that of the new chief architect of the Brussels-Capital Region, Kristiaan Borret, who participates in the implementation of the canal Master Plan. He claims that it is necessary to preserve production and logistics activities in the dense city, including heavy and non-hazardous operations such as the cement works, warehouses for contractors and garages [L'écho, 2016]. In future, it will be necessary to examine the changes which this rhetoric and vision could bring to the regional policy of Brussels.
- 47 Faced with these challenges, the residents and their representatives are important stakeholders. Due to the pollution caused by goods transport, the residents generally have a negative view of this activity [Strale et al., 2016]. Thus, several neighbourhood committees and their coordination body, *Inter-environnement Bruxelles*, as well as Bral and Arau, have opposed BILC and the development projects for large-scale logistics activities in general, arguing that it is useless to have such infrastructures in an urban environment. Likewise, the routes for heavy goods vehicles, and the reorganisation of roads and parking spaces may prove to be complex. Nevertheless, other dimensions intervene, compromising Manichean and simplistic opposition. Thus, in the neighbourhoods undergoing gentrification, certain committees of residents defend the preservation and even the development of logistics and industrial activities, in order to slow down or avoid the sociological changes and their impact on the most disadvantaged populations [IEB, 2013 & 2016]. Moreover, these activities may create jobs for low-skilled populations [Port of Brussels, 2011]. For example, the port's stance with respect to the canal Master Plan and the demographic PRAS is shared in part by *Inter-environnement Bruxelles* and the canal resident committees. New alliances are emerging, but they may be fragile. As we have pointed out, the arrival of more affluent populations is a vector for change due to their greater socioeconomic and political weight and their different expectations with respect to activities of little value to them.
- 48 Finally, one last stakeholder is the business world. According to the issues, it may suffer from, use or benefit from current political decisions. Of course, the main winners are the real estate investors. They benefit from the openness to new functions for inexpensive former industrial land [Bral, 2016]. In the framework of enterprise policies, which are materialised in particular by the canal Master Plan, they even become partners of the public authorities in charge of urban development. As regards the industrial and economic stakeholders, the situation is more unclear. The stakeholders established in an urban setting are concerned about the public ambitions to redeploy their operations [Rosenfeld, 2013]. The threats of the current regional policy to preserve port and industrial activities in Brussels are communicated by the port community in Brussels, which represents the interests of companies set up on port property [IEB, 2016], as well as by the *Union des Classes Moyennes*, which represents self-employed people and small and

medium-sized companies, which may be clients of port and logistics services in Brussels [UCM, 2013]. On the other hand, these industrialists also aim to increase the value of their land by taking advantage of the urbanistic changes under way around the canal and are encouraged by the regional authorities in this approach.¹

Conclusions: What does the future hold?

- 49 Faced with this dual observation – the important yet slowly declining logistics role of the canal area for the urban area of Brussels, and increased land and political pressure on this space – the question is raised as to the future evolution of the balance of powers and their consequences.
- 50 Although the waterway represents a very small share of transport in Brussels, it is an interesting solution for certain segments of trade in goods. Above all, beyond its role as a waterway transport route, there are key infrastructures and logistics activities in the canal area, which ensure the supply of goods to the city and concentrate and organise the flow of goods.
- 51 A continuation of current policies may accelerate the relocation of these activities. This would contribute to lengthening distribution chains and in particular the delivery or final collection, i.e. the least optimised in terms of the grouping of flows, and therefore to increasing pollution. Furthermore, goods arriving in bulk via the waterway would have to be transported by road into Brussels, thus worsening congestion.
- 52 From a socioeconomic point of view, port and logistics activities generate many jobs, in particular low-skilled jobs, which are rare in the Brussels-Capital Region. Besides their relocation, the periurbanisation of logistics could also have an impact on the clients of these services, for example self-employed shopkeepers, who would be penalised by the lengthening of deliveries.
- 53 For residents, the urbanistic transformations and the arrival of new populations may increase the price of real estate in neighbourhoods where the proportion of tenants and disadvantaged people is high. The parallel between the policies of social mix and a mix of activities, pursued in the same entrepreneurial context and in the same space, is enlightening in this regard. The current policies seem to want to respond to socioeconomic difficulties via mix, i.e. the superposition, and even the replacing of current residents by more well-off newcomers.
- 54 It therefore becomes necessary for the authorities to arbitrate between the different interests. While the transformation of the area around the canal is at the heart of regional policy, the potential negative consequences on the preservation of port and logistics activity, the economy, mobility and the Brussels environment must be considered in detail. Increased and probably irreversible deindustrialisation would not necessarily be beneficial to Brussels and its residents. The current tools and decisions do not seem to consider – and even contribute to – the disappearance of transport activities.
- 55 A reversal would probably involve having to identify the port, logistics and goods transport activities which are beneficial to the Region in terms of jobs and mobility, for example, and to protect them by preventing land speculation and pressure from other urban activities, and with policies which are favourable to their functioning.

- 56 In order to counter or at least slow down these policies and their consequences, new alliances could emerge, for example between industrialists, wholesalers and logistics service providers who may have to leave their current sites, the residents who are experiencing socioeconomic transformations and the authorities in charge of transport, aware of the logistical importance of the canal area. It is nevertheless a complex and precarious interaction between stakeholders, with shared interests only in certain cases and diverging interests in others. Above all, they are involved in a negative balance of power, as they face the regional authorities in charge of territorial development and real estate developers, who currently appear to be objective allies in the framework of enterprise policy at work around the canal. The situation is not, however, set in stone, as reflected in the current positions of the chief architect of the Brussels-Capital Region.

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NOTES

1. On this subject, let us quote a public official responsible for the implementation of the canal Master Plan, who addressed an assembly of entrepreneurs from Brussels at a real estate fair in 2015, presenting the aforesaid plan and mentioning: *'If you have some cash to invest or some land, come and see us'*.

ABSTRACTS

Logistics activities are an essential part of the urban economy. In the Brussels-Capital Region, this sector is concentrated in the canal area, as a supplement to port activities carried out there. The neighbourhoods along the canal therefore serve as a space for the concentration and distribution of goods transport necessary for the urban area of Brussels. However, this space is experiencing strong land and political pressure, prompting reconversion and deindustrialisation, to the benefit of housing, commercial and office projects. This movement may have a negative impact on the organisation of logistics in Brussels. More broadly, it highlights the paradoxes and limits of the territorial development policy in Brussels.

Les activités logistiques sont une composante essentielle de l'économie urbaine. En Région de Bruxelles-Capitale, ce secteur se concentre dans l'axe du canal, en complément des activités portuaires qui s'y maintiennent. Dès lors, les quartiers bordant le canal agissent comme un espace de concentration et de redistribution des flux de marchandises nécessaire à l'agglomération bruxelloise. Pourtant, cet espace subit une pression foncière et politique forte, poussant à une reconversion et une désindustrialisation, au profit de projets de logements, commerce ou bureaux. Ce mouvement risque d'avoir des conséquences négatives du point de vue de l'organisation logistique bruxelloise. Plus largement, il met en exergue les paradoxes et limites de la politique de développement territorial bruxelloise.

Logistieke activiteiten zijn een essentiële component van de stedelijke economie. In het Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest is die sector geconcentreerd in de kanaalzone en complementair met de havenactiviteiten die aldaar worden uitgeoefend. Bijgevolg fungeren de wijken langs het kanaal als een ruimte waar de goederenstromen die noodzakelijk zijn voor de bevoorrading van de Brusselse agglomeratie, samenkomen en herverdeeld worden. Dat gebied is evenwel blootgesteld

aan grote vastgoed- en politieke druk om het te reconverteren en te desindustrialiseren ten gunste van woon-, handels- of kantoorprojecten. Die beweging kan negatieve gevolgen hebben voor de organisatie van de logistiek in het Brussels Gewest en onderstreept in ruimere zin de paradoxen en grenzen van het Brussels beleid inzake territoriale ontwikkeling.

INDEX

Mots-clés: aménagement du territoire, développement territorial, distribution, économie, transport de marchandises, port, canal

Subjects: 6. économie – emploi

Trefwoorden stadsplanning, territoriale ontwikkeling, distributie, economie, goederentransport, haven, kanaal

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