Designing Urban Inclusion
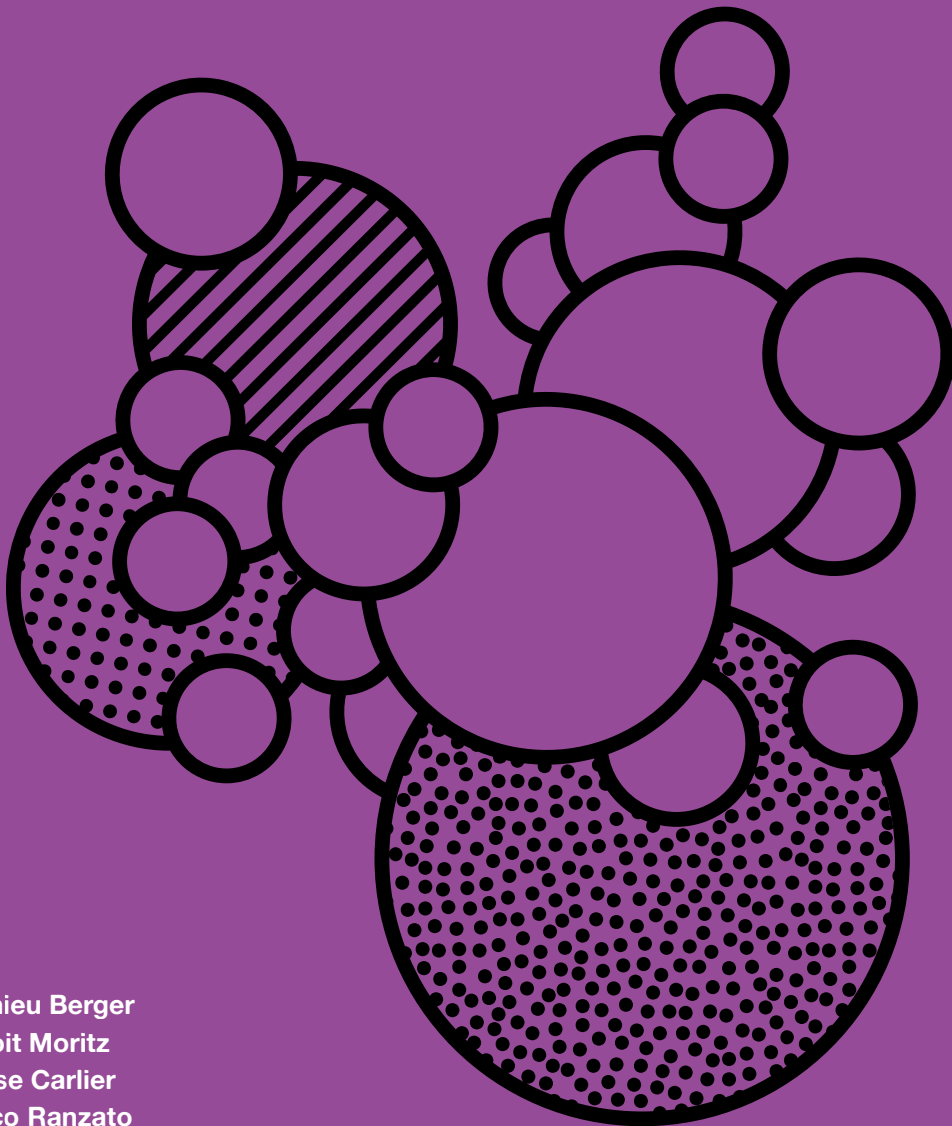
Metrolab Brussels MasterClass I

Mathieu Berger
Benoit Moritz
Louise Carlier
Marco Ranzato

(eds)

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Designing Infrastructures of Inclusion

Miodrag Mitrašinović

The key question that the Metrolab 2017 MasterClass asked was the following: 'Can conditions of urban inclusion and hospitality, embedded in new socio-spatial infrastructures built on mutual trust, cooperation, collaboration and co-production, be designed?' Designing such social, spatial, and eventually material infrastructures depends indeed on how we understand and define 'inclusion.'[1] Needless to say, the framing of inclusion is always situated, specific, and historically determined. This is not to argue that a universal definition of inclusion is not possible, nor that normative ideals of global justice and democracy are not desirable, but to suggest that the normative and operational definitions of inclusion[2] ought to be teased out of the dialectical relations between universal characterisations and particular conditions, practices, and meanings. Definitions of inclusion we employed in this workshop were framed by our key commitment to strengthening the processes and forms of socio-spatial justice making through design(ing). In our view, the commitment to justice implies focusing on its three critical dimensions: democratic practice, structural diversity, and socio-spatial and environmental inclusion.[3] Designing in this context is a medium through which we, collectively, have envisioned, conceptualised and operationalised concrete transformative possibilities. Such possibilities are ultimately

1. For the definition of hospitality, see contributions to this volume by Mathieu Berger and Joan Stavo-Debauge, pp.165-181

2. Such as the one, for example, offered in this volume by Antoine Printz. See pp.183

3. For a discussion on how inclusion is employed as a constitutive dimension of the concept of a 'just city', see: Fainstein (2011)

'designed' to strengthen the democratic process, by expanding the inclusion of differentiated, often marginalised and historically under-represented social and cultural groups in the decision-making processes[4] related to urbanisation and urban development. In this sense, as argued by Stavo-Debauge, 'hospitality' can be seen as one of the key qualitative attributes of environments, artifacts, and processes designed, whether as a temporary or permanent dimension.[5]

In this MasterClass, all of the invited master tutors live and work in the United States: Forman and Cruz work along the border zone between Mexico and the United States, while Wiley and Mitrasinovic work in New York City. In both geographies, views and practices of inclusion (and its corollary, exclusion) are framed by deep, structural inequalities that underlie American society at large. Searching for analogies between the Brussels-Capital Region, the Tijuana-San Diego border, and New York City was a complex and productive pursuit. However, even when all the participants agreed on the principles, it was the subtle differences in interpretation, or sometimes translation, that made the participants' proposals complex and highly differentiated. Learning-by-doing, debates, reviews, regular crits, team work and group critiques, and trial-and-error sequences — all constitutive part of the MasterClass' design-process — enabled us to move beyond discursive *positionality* and towards learning from each other through *propositional* acts, thereby enriching our common understanding of inclusion and hospitality through 'concrete abstractions.'

Participants in this workshop came from six different universities: the Université Libre de Bruxelles, the Université de Louvain, The New School (Parsons School of Design), University of Sheffield, the 4cities Master Program, and the IUAV University in Venice. The 52 participants covered an array of

disciplines and fields of practice and study, including but not limited to sociology, geography, architecture, landscape architecture, urbanism, and urban policy studies. The group of eighteen Metrolab researchers who acted as team leaders and local knowledge experts — having already been engaged with the four assigned Brussels sites[6] and with corresponding external partners and communities — also embodied the disciplinary and geographic diversity noted above. Our main initial task was to design a transdisciplinary methodology that would enable and empower everyone to take part in the collective work, on equal footing, and accomplish the following major goals: open transdisciplinary perspectives in participants; re-frame concerns and problematise urban inclusion and hospitality in order to move beyond predictable, normative responses to the task at hand (i.e. 'inclusive design' or 'universal design'); enable conditions of socio-spatial coproduction to emerge; configure the inquiry-driven environment so that new questions begin to emerge through a hands-on engagement with designing; develop design-led scenarios driven by such new questions and re-framed concerns; and, advance specific, transformative proposals (courses of action) for the four Brussels sites. Given the *a priori* selection of four sites and corresponding external partners, we initially assigned four thematic domains: Culture, Food, Healthcare, and Leisure. Each theme

was researched by two teams (hereafter 'design teams') during the first week in order to conduct initial research into the assigned four situations and thematics through the lens of urban inclusion. The eight teams initially investigated variety of scales involved: from the scale of the body, community, partner organisations and their operations, the neighbourhood (actors and protagonists, as well as their relationships and spaces) to municipal, regional, and national/global scales and look into human, social and spatial infrastructures, urban and public policy, and economic patterns. Teams discussed and negotiated socio-spatial and geographic boundaries between and across the scales, and thereby also the possibilities of socio-spatial inclusion inherent in the production of urban space through the abrogation of existing social boundaries and spatial thresholds.

The outcome of this initial work was what we call *Lexicons of Inclusion*. By developing Lexicons, teams identified challenges and opportunities in their thematic domains by framing and visualising the complex relations discovered, and focused on both the phenomenology as well as on the evident causalities that underlie architectures of inclusion and hospitality so that the key concerns are highlighted visually (see pages 52-145 in the book). Design teams evaluated the findings in relation to the hospitality matrix assigned *a priori* in order to discuss and evaluate existing dimensions of inclusion and hospitality. They also identified and mapped out the interplay between public, commercial and civil society sectors: the organisations and institutions involved, such as civil society groups (organised groups of citizens, or community organisations), the 'third sector' (not-for-profit organisations and NGOs), city agencies as well as business organisations involved. The objective of this step was to understand the main urban actors and agencies, and map out the socio-spatial, economic and political processes that bind them together. The teams developed a tangible understanding of what kinds of connections exist between urban actors and agencies, what is missing, what needs to be re-energised, and what needs to be designed anew. The recognition was that new types of social organisation are needed in order to re-

frame inclusion and hospitality as key drivers of the process of further urbanisation.

In addition to the above, we also identified and documented existing resources and initiatives that contribute to the re-framing of environmental practices in the area, be it in the domain of everyday urbanism, everyday community practices, or institutional initiatives: community gardens and farms, new parks and playgrounds, waterfront projects and initiatives, community pilot projects for green infrastructure, recycling, and trash collection community actions. Design teams studied them as components of a complex, interconnected and interdependent socio-ecological system, a complex network of water, grasslands, woodlands, built environment and physical infrastructure (residential, commercial, and post-industrial developments), social infrastructures and spatial networks. By doing so, the teams evaluated the resilience of this ecosystem by placing a particular emphasis on the interaction between social and environmental forces in the context of inclusion and hospitality in Brussels.

Finally, the teams explored protocols and regulatory frameworks that define inclusion and hospitality from both within and without, such as public and urban policy frameworks, economic models and economies of mobility, land-use patterns and land zoning, as well as political and judicial context. The design teams considered public, common and private resources and their distribution, and existing types and conditions of ownership (state/city/common/public/private). These explorations identified institutions of power and knowledge (public and private, commercial and non-commercial) as key players with the power to influence the use of resources and practices of inclusion in the Brussels metropolitan region, particularly through the production and management of symbolic and material boundaries.

Once the preliminary explorations had generated new themes and topics vis-à-vis inclusion and hospitality, the design teams developed actionable insights in the form of specific cause-and-effect relations in the thematic domains studied, and specifically in relation to the organisations

4.   For a discussion of inclusion and justice in the context of democratic practice under conditions of structural inequality, see: Young, (2000)

5.   See Stavo-Debauge, and Forman and Cruz's essays, in this book, p.41 and p.165

6.   See introduction to this volume, p.22

and sites assigned. Themes and insights were important for us because they are sense-making devices, a form of capturing the underlying phenomena and processes we were determined to understand. They allowed us to discover the principal logic as well as operating principles, but also to begin to define the criteria for the framing teams' proposals. The themes and criteria allowed the design teams to operationalise their critical insights and frame propositions for a course of action they needed to take in order to create new social, environmental, cultural, and economic values in the context of urban inclusion and hospitality. In this way, the design teams simultaneously created tentative descriptions for how practices/systems of inclusion-hospitality work (or do not), and also a way of framing their value proposition(s) for moving forward.

Based on the above, the teams developed *design scenarios*. Scenarios address interdependencies of infrastructures and systems of inclusion and hospitality, and of the actors, organisations, and institutions identified and studied. Design scenarios are coordinated foresights ('structured visions') that aim to catalyse the capacities and capabilities of the various urban actors and agencies ('protagonists') involved in the process of framing new proposals. The purpose of design scenario is to describe proposed, future socio-spatial configurations. Design teams structured their design scenarios by defining their three basic components: 1) Vision, 2) Motivation, and 3) Strategy[7]. The strategy component of the scenario determines the viability and addresses objectives, intentions, potential alliances and partners, possible coalitions, a plan of action, and a set of decision-making criteria. We developed design scenarios as sequences of actions main protagonists ought to take in order to achieve their objectives, as well as the projected outcomes. Obviously, for a scenario to work, the design teams proposed a set of

new artifacts (material as well as symbolic) that stand between people/organisations and connect them in new, very specific ways. The teams introduced them in the broader context of interactions between the key protagonists, and as a result they designed buildings and infrastructures, policy proposals, educational campaigns, urban and social cooperative schemes, new forms of urban and social solidarity, catalysts that improve self-organizational capacity of individuals and small groups of citizens, strategies that improve capabilities of the third-sector organisations, or even proposals for new social organisations. In all the proposals documented and discussed on pages 52-145 of this volume, the participants designed the conditions for their main 'protagonists' to transform the context of hospitality and inclusion in the Brussels-Capital Region. Overall, the participants successfully developed a set of comprehensive design scenarios configured to set the goals for the transformation anticipated, define ensembles of actions to accomplish the goals, and determine ways to mobilise resources (existing and proposed) in order to execute the actions proposed.

Led by the master tutors, the students developed various approaches to scripting and diagramming design scenarios — as illustrated elsewhere in this book — and designed a series of visual interfaces that scrutinise top-down and bottom-up approaches while also articulating and negotiating socio-spatial and geographic dynamics between and across the initially assigned analytical scales, boundaries, and thresholds. The idea was that it was not only physical artifacts that were designed here, but also the protocols and policies that will sustain new approaches to hospitality and inclusion over long periods of time. In order to develop each team's vision and strategy in more detail towards a realistic and applicable proposition, we further developed an aspect of each team's proposal using

specifically framed projects as key vectors for the implementation of their strategies. In doing so, the design teams configured the project(s) as a heuretic device that defines relations between: practices (of the protagonists identified, 'the stakeholders'), processes (that bring them together in forms of interaction and possibly collaboration and co-production), resources (existing as well as new required), and outcomes (the desired outcomes of the proposed project as defined by team's design scenario).
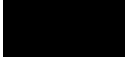
The proposals developed during this MasterClass work as 'framework projects'[8] aimed at operating as 'social catalysts' that bring together independent, previously identified protagonists into an experimental 'platform' whose purpose is to coordinate, synergise, align and sustain existing, autonomous yet related socially-innovative initiatives and projects in order to empower them. Such comprehensive projects also suggest the organisation of actual workshops where the protagonists are brought together to co-design new scenarios and shared strategies. They also suggest new coalitions, associations, assemblies, and collaborations of existing protagonists who currently work in isolation. Manzini uses the term 'infrastructuring' to describe the process of developing and sustaining framework projects as complex, structured platforms. Infrastructuring is configured by different coordinated elements that include but are not limited to physical spaces, buildings, landscape, and urban design schemes, digital platforms, social networks, logistical support systems, and communication strategies.

The eight design proposals developed in the Metrolab 2017 MasterClass actively attempt to configure new propositions for resilient civic infrastructures of socio-spatial inclusion and justice, and also thereby demonstrate the critical role that design(ing) ought to play in discussing questions central to our time: that of the political, that of the very future of democracy, and that of the emerging 'urban society.'[9]

References

Fainstein, S. (2011), The Just City. Cornell University Press.

Manzini, E. (2015), Design, When Everybody Designs: An Introduction to Design for Social Innovation. The MIT Press.

Mitrašinović, M. (2016), Concurrent Urbanities: Designing Infrastructures of Inclusion. Routledge, pp. 179-203.

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Graphic protocol

The elements of the existing context

The ERDF project as it was planned at the time of the MasterClass

The elements of hospitality present in the ERDF project as it was planned at the time of the MasterClass

The proposals of inclusion developed during the MasterClass

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7.   This aspect of design methodology was developed in reference to: Manzini, E. (2015) *Design, When Everybody Designs: An Introduction to Design for Social Innovation*. The MIT Press. For the design teams' scenarios, see this book from p.51

8.   Manzini, ibid.

9.   For an expanded discussion of the roles that design and designers play in the above, see: Mitrašinović, M. (2016) Concurrent Urbanities: *Designing Infrastructures of Inclusion*. Routledge,. pp. 179-203.