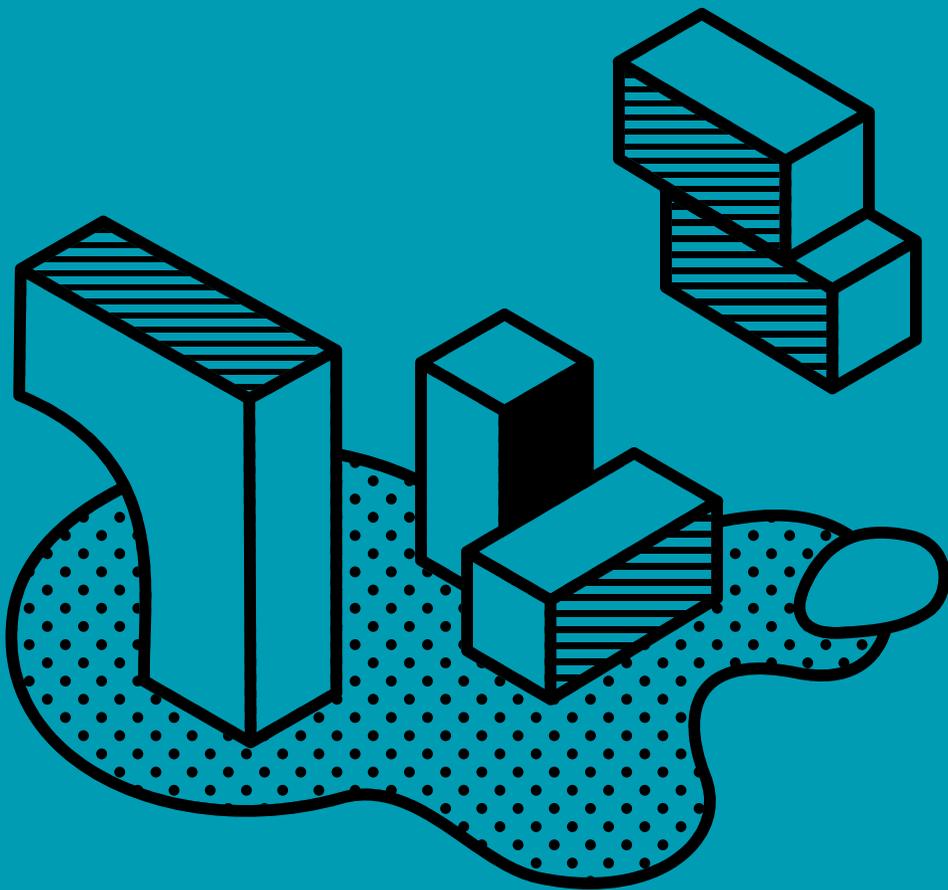


Designing Brussels Ecosystems

Metrolab Brussels MasterClass II



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(eds)



Metrolab series

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Work

Third-places of social economy and the relationship work-habitat

Marine Declève and Chloé Salembier

This article describes the context of the MasterClass workshop that launched a reflection on ecosystems, with the issue of work as a starting point. Its theoretical approach is intentionally different from the way in which economics typically tackle the issue of work. The goal is not to frame the question in economic terms, but rather to develop – based on concrete cases – a method by which work and the productive city could be placed in an ecosystemic perspective, mainly in order to describe the network of relationships between forms of work and ways of inhabiting and producing territory within a city. This investigation project is tied to three radical premises/goals: overcoming of the idea of *homo economicus*, upon which contemporary thought on work and territory is based; refusing the urban model built on the functional production of non-places dedicated to work, with no true social existence; and, lastly, the interaction premise, in which the meaning of objects is based on the relationships between people. According to us, this final premise promotes a new ‘ecology of the mind’ through a culture and symbols that emphasises the relationships within and between ecosystems as much as their structures.

Beyond homo economicus

Homo economicus is a theoretical model of human behaviour based on the idea that the rationality of human actions essentially aims to maximise profit. This portrayal has gradually taken over economic sciences and, to a certain extent, all human sciences starting in the 1960s. Accepting it amounts to reducing social relationships to business relationships and accepting the idea that

social relationships and social cohesion are governed by market conditions.

Certain intellectual circles, defined as anti-utilitarian, oppose this idea. To them, social relationships are not regulated based on the market, but on a three-fold obligation: giving, receiving, and giving back¹. This is the ‘gift economy’, which Marcel Mauss theorised based on his study of a number of archaic societies, stating that in these societies,

¹ The two figureheads of this school of thought are Karl Polanyi (1886–1964) and Marcel Mauss (1872–1950).

relationships are more important than goods. This economic principle clearly results in a very different approach of ownership. It can change violence into alliance and rivalry into cooperation.

The urban situations studied as part of the workshop were chosen in this perspective: we prioritised social economy practices and forms of work based not on a requirement of capitalist profit, but rather on an attempt to create or strengthen social actors involved in the economic transition.

Identifying alternatives to non-places inherited from supermodernity

The concept of *non-place* is drawn from the anthropology of supermodernity developed in France by Marc Augé in the early 1990s. It refers to spaces inherited from an approach of urban design based on zoning and specialised functions: this place is for living, this one is for working, this other place is for learning, that one is for entertainment, and the space between all these is for circulating. Non-places are the result of the territory's functional adaptation to the economy's demands. They are spaces that reduce the relationship between human beings and the territory to one of utilitarian consumption. To those who travel through it, a non-place conveys nothing about its identity, the relationships between its users, much less about their common history. This is the opposite of an 'anthropological place'. Treating work as a form of inhabiting means going radically beyond the concept of non-place and replacing our approach of work in an anthropological perspective, showing how work creates relationships with the space, the environment, time, and human beings.

In this perspective, we are especially interested in the concept of *third place*, which manifests a will to resolve the fragmentation of our lives and of the time frames dedicated to inhabiting. This concept is built on the hypothesis that each of us, in our quest for what is necessary for life or what helps us live, builds a network of relationships between one or several homes (*first places*), one or several work places

(*second places*), and third places in which we exercise our public lives. From the Agora in ancient Athens to the pub around the corner, the history of cities is rich in references to third places (Burret, 2017). They crystallise individual and collective forms of inhabiting and reveal the meaning that individuals and collectivities give to work, by enabling professions and social skills to recreate history (Burton, 2016).

This hypothesis has led us to selecting third places for social economy, where the question of work as a process of physically transforming matter was clearly posed; this is not the case with spaces that are referred to as productive but where 'work spaces' simply consist in an individual sitting in front of a computer.

For an ecology of the relationship: the interaction hypothesis

The ecosystemic preoccupation lets us methodologically qualify this approach. It lets us design a method centred on an approach that has much in common with care theory as developed in the field of health, which looks at patients, caregivers, and the relationship between them, the idea being that the quality of this relationship affects the healing process and the overall wellbeing of those involved. Similarly, the approach of interactions as part of the work-habitat relationship will attempt to connect human, social, and economic dimensions. It will look into relationships with the territory and the environment, as well as into relationships within the production system. Here again, third places are of interest in this perspective as we see in them the development of a 'political ecology of the concrete' that is also found in care theory (Guérin, 2011). They are places where spatial, political and social structures can be tested that enable creating relationships between individual and collective needs, testing environmentally friendly development solutions and paving the way towards a fairer and more pleasant society.

Based on these hypotheses, we have suggested that MasterClass participants could analyse three situations of third places organised by renowned stakeholders

in Brussels' cultural and social economy: Recyclart, Smart and Zinneke². We will examine them as socio-spatial manifestations of an attempt to transition towards a model of city that overcomes both the figure of homo economicus and the production of non-places of work.

The three situations have all existed for some twenty years (see map p. 66), which makes it possible to evaluate their participation in the urban ecosystem with the same amount of historical perspective. They are also undergoing a transition between two lifecycles, albeit for different reasons: activity expansion (Smart), forced relocation (Recyclart), opportunity for permanent implantation (Zinneke). Changes are related to the conditions of localisation and implantation in space, as well as to the configuration of the system of stakeholders. It forces projects to completely redefine their inner workings and reinvent the system of relationships with the urban context. This is, therefore, a good time to consider how these experiments contribute to the urban ecosystem. What is their spatial and environmental footprint? Do they prefigure new ways to apprehend and transform the world, or new relationships to the city, to work, to governance? How are they appropriated by those who run them, by residents, and by the city's institutions? How do they challenge the materials and methods of urban projects?

Recyclart

Recyclart is a collective dedicated to social economy, socio-professional integration, art creation and urban reflection, created in 1997 as part of a pilot urban project involving the transformation of the Chapelle train station in Brussels' Marolles neighbourhood. The collective is established as a non-profit association (asbl), and its project is supported by a partnership that includes the Brussels-Capital Region, the VGC /

Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie (Flemish Community Commission), the European Union, the City of Brussels, and the Brussels network of centres for social welfare (CPAS). The project includes an art centre (with exhibitions, conferences and concerts), the 'Fabrik' (workshops for woodworking, metalworking and fabricating public spaces) and a slow-food bar and restaurant; the latter two are developed as part of a socio-professional integration process.

For twenty years, the association was a landmark of underground culture in Brussels. This was due first to its location, straight beneath the tracks of Brussels' north-south connection, an urban break in the city centre that the project consistently attempted to transform into an inter-neighbourhood connection. Next, it created a link between day and night, transgressing the *modus vivendi* of the Chapelle train station and transforming it into a metropolitan third place offering, every night after the last train has departed, artistic and socio-cultural activities such as exhibitions, debates, parties, and concerts. Lastly, its team contributed to transfiguring public space through a variety of experiments in which its members systematically acted as mediators between ideas and people. This involved, for instance, creating a large skate park used by a wide variety of people where the railway goes into the city's underground; or the decoration of tunnels crossing under the railway by art collectives working with the neighbourhood children; or the installation of a 'beach' in front of the train station, used by patrons of the bar-restaurant and the art centre as well as by passersby. Like the train station's inside spaces, these outside spaces were active day and night.

From its very inception, the project had to comply with the safety requirements laid down by SNBC (Belgium's national railway company). In 2009, these requirements

2 The choice of these situations is the result of two processes: one is the progress made in two research projects dedicated to this topic within Metrolab Brussels; the other is discussions between Metrolab Brussels researchers and stakeholders. Researchers and stakeholders met twice: on 19 October 2018, during a workshop organised by Metrolab Brussels to prepare for its MasterClass, as part of the conference on 'Designing Brussels Ecosystems'; and on 22 November 2018, during a round table on the role of third places in creating urban space, organised by Metrolab Brussels in partnership with EPFL as part of the symposium on 'Scaffolds. Open Encounters with Society, Art and Architecture'. The projects that were presented during on these two events were Recyclart, Parkfarm, Smart, NovaCity, Abattoirs, Masui4Ever (Zinneke) and Libelco.

pushed the Fabrik workshops to a different area of the neighbourhood³, and in 2018, the same rules forced the art centre out of the Chapelle train station. For six months, the association continued its activities on a nomadic basis. The bar-restaurant was moved to the Brigittines chapel, where it called upon outside collaborations to ensure the survival of the association's other activities. More recently, there was an opportunity to relocate the entire project in a former printing plant at 15 Rue de Manchester, in Molenbeek. Thus, in early May of 2019, the inauguration of a 'large soundproof box' with room for 400 people — built in the printing plant's warehouse — marked the beginning of a second life for the association, which will now endeavour to recreate a neighbourhood centre and a metropolitan hub. Its members expect that a number of mental barriers will have to be overcome before Recyclart can once again offer the symbiotic formula to which it owes its success with creators, artists, workers undergoing professional integration, students and residents of the neighbouring areas. From a spatio-environmental point of view, the situation has completely changed compared to the first twenty years: the building does stimulate the imagination in a way that promotes the development of cultural activities, but it also suffers from how the locals see it, i.e. as a space dedicated to work and, as such, closed off from public life. In addition, the venue is less accessible, and it will continue to feel isolated from the city centre for as long as construction work at Porte de Ninove will continue. However, the presence of a network of cultural actors along the canal reinforces the feeling that a metropolitan hub is being created. The Kunstenfestivaldesarts's⁴ decision to set up its centre and ticket office contribute to this trend. The Festival's opening date means that the architects in charge of rehabilitating the venue must work on a short deadline,

3 In a former garage on rue de la Philanthropie, on the ground floor of a building belonging to Le Foyer Bruxellois.

4 The Kunstenfestivaldesarts is an annual international festival dedicated to contemporary artistic creation. Created in 1994, the Festival is a three-week event held in May in some twenty Brussels sites dedicated to artistic creation as well as public spaces. Fundamentally designed as a bilingual project, it involves Dutch-speaking and French-speaking institutions, and promotes a dialogue between the communities that live in the city. Every year, the Festival sets up its centre in a different cultural hub.

with the additional challenge that Recyclart's programming must be maintained during construction.

However, while Recyclart was very much a trailblazer in 1997 when it took over the Chapelle train station, the association can now rely on an entire network of third places in Molenbeek that share similar goals and constraints. This can be seen in the spatial project. For instance, a physical breach was made in the wall between the former printing plant where Recyclart is installed and the former Graeffe sugar refinery that is now home to Charleroi Danse (the Wallonia-Brussels choreography centre). Recyclart also shares the use of its space with the De Vaartkapoen community centre, whose main site in Rue de l'École is under renovation. An ecosystem dynamic seems to be appearing, based in cooperation and sharing rather than competition.

Zinneke

The Zinneke Parade is a cultural event created as part of Brussels 2000, European Capital of Culture. Every other year, the event mobilises a loose network of social, cultural or neighbourhood organisations that prepare a large festive parade dedicated to a specific theme. This provides an opportunity to bring the public space to everyone's attention, by presenting a rich variety of socio-artistic creations that reflect the diversity and energy of cultures that contributes to Brussels' identity. The preparation and performance of this event mobilises an entire ecosystem of craftspeople and artists associated with groups formed in neighbourhoods. In the Zinneke jargon, this temporary association of partners of various statuses around a common artistic project is called a *zinnode*; the term also applies to the network of schools, academies, neighbourhood centres, vacant warehouses or ordinary production spaces in which workshops dedicated to designing and manufacturing

the costumes, floats, and decorations, as well as parade rehearsals are held. In the days leading up to the parade, the zinnodes go out into the public spaces of their respective neighbourhoods for dress rehearsals — called *soumonces* in the Zinneke jargon. On the day of the parade, all zinnodes converge towards the *zinnodrome*, a central area whose borders change every year but is always inside the city centre. So the Zinneke parade contributes to the social production of space, both on a local scale and a city-wide scale.

The organisation's centre is itself a third place. For fourteen years, it did not have a fixed location and was temporarily housed in iconic buildings such as the Galeries Anspach and the Byrrh buildings. In 2014, Zinneke took the opportunity it was offered to occupy the former Atelier général du timbre, an industrial building in the Masui neighbourhood in Schaerbeek) that belongs to the state, which it lets out to Zinneke on a 20-year contract requiring renovation work. Using a grant from the EU's ERDF programme, Zinneke can conduct a pilot project to recycle the building whose goal is to install spaces dedicated to meeting, creating, learning, and producing, in line with Zinneke's needs and following strict specifications related to circular economy⁵.

Its transition from a nomadic to a sedentary presence has forced the association to rebuild its centre while working on to concurrent projects: the biennial parade and renovation work on the building. While ensuring the parade runs smoothly, Zinneke must enable a number of activities: workshops (metal and wood) accessible to lorries from the road, warehouses (espace Matos) to store and recycle costumes and other materials, offices, reception areas and a multipurpose area. The work is carried out by people who are taught on-site to have the versatility required for artisanal renovation. These qualifications are leveraged in both the work involved in transforming the building and the creations related to the parade⁶. The challenge that Zinneke must address, however, does not stop at the building's doors: the organisation must also take root

into the Masui neighbourhood. This involves opening — physically or symbolically — series of doors, and generally reconfiguring the network of relationships between Zinneke and its partners as well as the city's institutions.

Smart

When Smart was created in 1998, its project was to build a self-funded artists' mutual organisation. Its goal is to relieve the administrative burden of freelance workers by offering them support for legal, tax-related and financial matters. Initially intended for artists, the project was later opened to freelance technical workers and other craftspeople. In 2015, a reflection was launched on the future of the organisation, leading to the establishment of a cooperative in 2016. Smart is now one of Europe's largest cooperatives with a presence in 9 countries and more than 40 cities.

One of the services it offers is the availability of shared working spaces where freelance workers can enjoy working conditions suited to their needs and rely on specific common services. The cooperative has two sites in Brussels: the Brussels Art Factory (BAF) in Saint-Gilles, an 800 m² (8,600 sq. ft.) near the Brussels-South railway station and LaVallée, a 6,000 m² (6,500 sq. ft.) space that opened in 2014 in a former laundry in Molenbeek. These coworking spaces are built on a sharing dynamic, a proximity effect between users and the cross-pollination of projects started by the cooperative's entrepreneurs. However, they remain open to residents who are not necessarily members of Smart and the cooperative⁷.

At LaVallée, the workshops and working spaces dedicated to creative activities are structured around two main open areas, with secondary common areas (kitchens, living rooms, courtyards, patios). The venue's layout is designed to encourage the application of social and solidary economy principles: association, cooperation, and resource pooling. This enables freelance workers whose activities are complimentary to work together on a project, or to share some of

5 The pilot project funded by the ERDF consists in a partnership between the Zinneke association and various organisations active in Brussels' recycling industry: Rotor, Ouest architecture, and MATRIciel, an engineering firm specialising in special techniques.

6 Innovative legal work was done to make the circularity requirements related to recycling compatible with public procurement procedures.

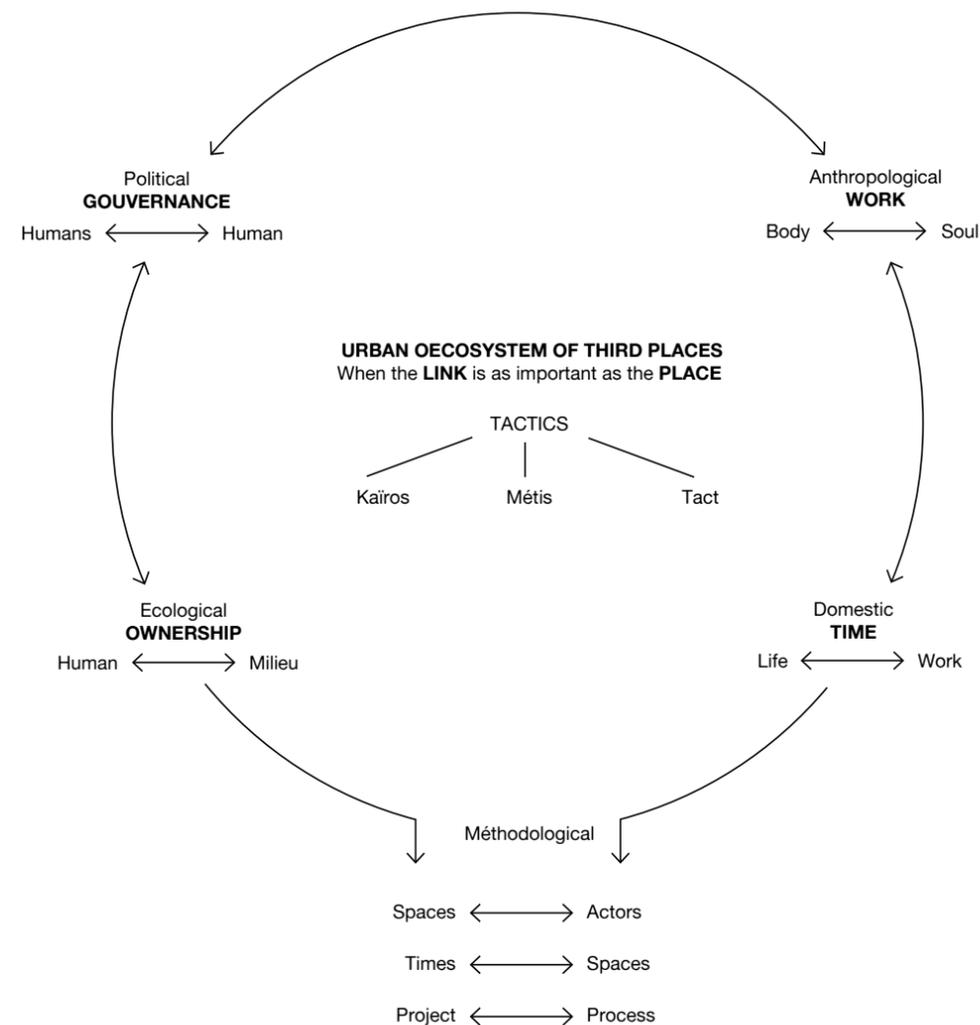
7 They may therefore have self-employed or employees' status in a traditional economic structure with no social purpose.

their activity's functional costs if they work in the same industry. The venue also has two large rooms that can be loaned or leased upon request for community activities dedicated to the neighbourhood or the city.

Oecosystem of third places.
When the relationship is as important as the place.

To what extent does the ecosystem approach question the methodological approaches on which we rely as thinkers of the city and the roles of the architect/urbanist? When the relationship is as important as the place, must the role of the architect be reconsidered? And if so, in what way? It appears important to rethink modes of representation in order to show relationships, rather than the static and stable systems

offered by maps. Participants to the MasterClass have attempted this exercise, and a number of methodological challenges have emerged from their analytical work. The projects dealt with ecosystems, and therefore examined the relationships between spaces and the players they involve. It is about proposing research mechanisms that are close to the realities on the ground, by calling upon methods including interviews, visits and reflections between project leaders and researchers. MasterClass participants proposed some tests of representation based on their own reflections on the links between temporalities and spaces. In their proposals, they reconsidered their approach to the relationships between projects and processes. They emphasized the processes used rather than the final image produced.



A Brussels oecosystem of third places for social economy?

The overview of these three situations shows how they contribute to the birth of an oecosystem⁸ of third places dedicated to the social economy, which appears to be an emerging phenomenon of urban development in Brussels. The phenomenon's geography is not yet established, and the MasterClass's workshop can offer a helpful contribution in this regard. The figure below shows how we believe the survey project should describe the contribution of the three situations to this oecosystem.

From a **spatial** perspective, we can analyse the tactics that enable third places to make a place for themselves in the city. We are using the term 'tactic' here in reference to Michel de Certeau, to whom tactics are one of the determiners of *everyday inventions*, which he defines as a series of practices developed by ordinary people to invent or reinvent their everyday lives so that they are in line with their desires. Tactics are characterised by the ability to seize opportunities (*kairos* in Greek), call upon forms of practical intelligence (*métis* in Greek), and display *tact*, or a 'sense of touch' (from the Latin *tangere*, touch) in how one inserts oneself into a context (de Certeau, 1990).

Regarding the *kairos*, we will analyse how the three situations seize the opportunities offered by the network of interdependencies that link them to a series of public and urban institutions; how this law of opportunity has led Recyclart to its location in Rue de Manchester and Zinneke in Place Masui, in a context where neither organisation had full control over where it ended up; how they manage to benefit from their situation while also contributing to the goals of a territorial development policy that also benefits from their activity by adding value to the canal area and brownfield sites. This is how Recyclart and Zinneke were able to receive funding from neighbourhood

development contracts, urban renovation contracts, or ERDF grants, enabling them to renovate buildings. Smart follows a more independent approach, as it owns the land that it occupies in Saint-Gilles while its LaVallée site is a long-term lease. However, by investing its capital in renovating these buildings, it is also displaying tactical opportunism: it implicitly contributes to the policy because it feels that these areas have high potential.

Regarding *métis*, or practical intelligence, we can study the ability of third places to deploy installations that can change based on the cohabitation needs of the various categories of 'residents' and switch between work, leisure and civic creativity at various times of day. This form of intelligence can be seen, for instance, in the way in which the organisers transform limitations and constraints into assets and opportunities. For instance, the 'tunnel' between Recyclart and Wallonia-Brussels Centre Chorégraphique de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, in addition to being a physical link (a 'door'), hints at an ability to transform the principles of association and pooling into resources for projects and innovation, rather than into a constraint.

Lastly, *tact* is the way in which the players define their own relationship with the context. We can analyse how, from their initial position as outsiders, the three organisations create a place for themselves in the neighbourhoods and in the system of metropolitan centralities. Three figures have emerged at the workshop's conclusion that could guide a typology: magnets, which attract or repel (Recyclart), doors, which open and close (Zinneke), and bubbles, which exist on their own and fly away (Smart). We can also note that with the exception of Recyclart when it occupied the Chapelle train station, none of the three situations is directly and permanently connected to a top-level urban infrastructure. At the Chapelle train station, Recyclart was not only an outsider, but also

⁸ We are using the term *oecosystem* as defined by Pierre Calame in his work on oecconomics. Pierre Calame has placed this concept back under the spotlight, showing that some revolutions are silent. In 1755, he explains, the encyclopedia compiled by Diderot and d'Alembert remove an 'O': what used to be called 'oeconomics' becomes 'economics'. Jean-Jacques Rousseau used both spellings of the word. In his article on 'political economy', he states: 'The word economy, or oecconomy, is derived from 'oikos', a house, and *n mos*, law, and meant originally only the wise and legitimate government of the house for the common good of the whole family. The meaning of the term was then extended to the government of that great family, the State.' (Calame, 2018)

a resister: for twenty years, the association used considerable tact to maintain its position. It has forced the railway company to cooperate and share spaces, going against its habitual practices. Eventually, the argument of fire safety overcame this resistance. Does this mean that third places for social economy are systematically pushed away from traditional structures? This is not certain, but — as we have seen — it does not keep each project from contributing, physically and socially, to the production of interfaces between various spatial scales.

From an **anthropological** point of view, we see revealed in the situations offered new forms of appropriating work as an urban value. A first approach has to do with the need for roots (enracinement), the term being a reference to a book by philosopher Simone Weil in which she lists how work must serve human beings. In it she writes: 'It is through work that reason grasps the world and takes hold of the wild imagination' (Weil, 1949). This phrase postulates two aspects of work: an objective aspect, which drives us to working in order to earn a living and improve our living conditions, and an imaginative aspect, which drives us to projecting into the real world what started as a mental prefiguration, a dream for a future society, or a model for living. The work that we can see being developed in the third places studied here appears to feature this duality. Workers in these spaces are not only paid for their work; they also have a space-time that lends itself to the quest for meaning: this is the case at Recyclart and Smart, where trainees, trainers, artists, and cultural managers can meet at the bar-restaurant or at the cafe, and get to know one another and discuss the meaning of work in society. The imaginative aspect can even overtake the objective one: for instance, at Zinneke, involvement in an artistic project is done on a voluntary basis, because the project conveys a societal message with which the participant agrees.

A second approach deals with the social division between productive work and reproductive work, or between personal and professional life. The profit imperative of production has led industrial society to

separating work time from family time, and hence to creating a strong duality between public spaces and domestic spaces. Women, especially feminist thinkers, were the first to challenge the inequality in the relationship between productive work and reproductive work, as well as the contemporary social order's rejection of activities that exist at the intersection of these two structures of everyday life. Certain practices recorded in the third places we have visited, however, promote new interrelations between the two worlds in a way that deserves some attention: for instance, when they allow music — an activity typically associated with leisure time — to freely occupy a space devoted to manual work (Zinneke); or when they offer equipment (bar, restaurants, but these could also be childcare or extracurricular activities) and services (parcel reception, etc.) that are at the intersection of productive and reproductive work; or when they transform their spaces into amenities such as a health club available to neighbourhood residents (Smart). In the case of Recyclart and Zinneke, training is also a significant part of this intersection.

These experiments cannot exist independently from **political** aspects. From this point of view, modes of internal governance reveal the ways in which the three organisations think and decide what seems to contribute to their project. Smart has adopted a cooperative model in which decisions are made following the principle of 'one person, one voice'⁹. Zinneke has a consensus-based coordination model of decision-making, intended to enable the association to speak with one voice. Recyclart has a more differentiated coordination model, which aims to call upon each participant's skills to contribute to the common project, while also taking into account the diversity in the levels of socio-professional transition represented.

Lastly, from an **ecological** perspective, we believe that these three situations of third places for social economy call for reconsidering the question of property as an embodiment of the relationship between

homo economicus and their environment. By the way in which they insert themselves into urban reality by seizing opportunities that present themselves, they prioritise a model of appropriation based on usages rather than on a legal status of property.

Conclusion

The questions raised in this document are directed at the participants of the MasterClass, but also at those involved in the next episodes of our investigation on the evolution of work-habitat relationships. The goal is to determine whether the information collected during this preliminary research truly point to an oecosystem whose geography can be described, whose spatial form can be analysed, and for which we can assess how it contributes to a transition from an urban regime governed by homo economicus to a regime that would reconsider political governance relationships (between humans), ecological relationships between humans and their environment (including through forms of appropriation of real estate) and anthropological relationships with work as a resource for building roots and as an everyday temporality that articulates — in habitable forms — economic production and domestic reproduction.

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⁹ Decisions taken according to this principle concern the strategic orientations on which the Board invites the General Assembly to choose. For the day-to-day management of the organization, decisions are taken by the direction, within a traditional hierarchical structure.