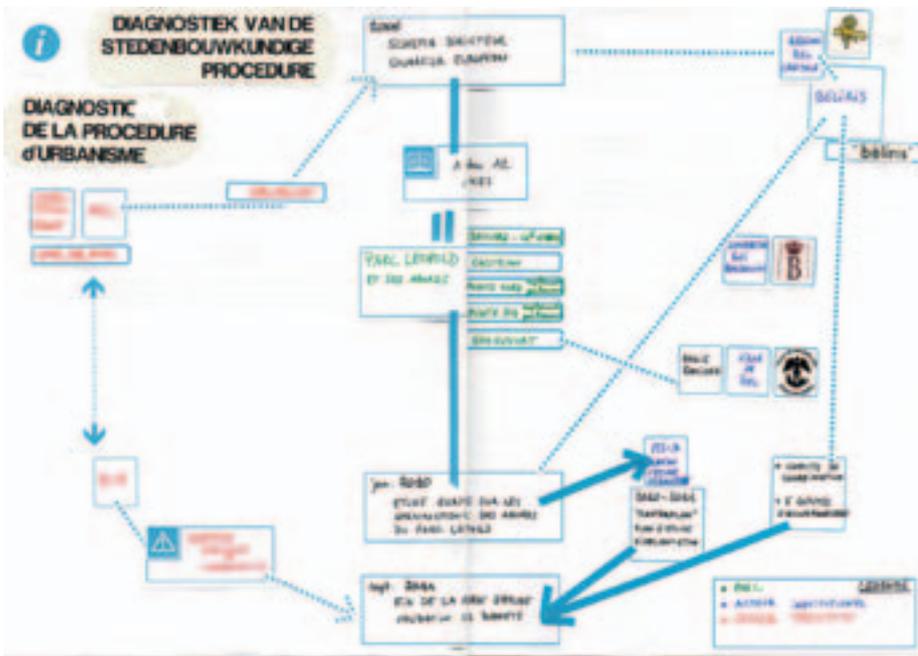


# European Neighbourhood: Where city rivers, watermachines and vertical gardens meet

When in November 2010 about 100 small-scale initiatives from all over Europe met in Brussels for their *Urban Plaform*, they set up camp in the European neighbourhood. In addition to meeting and greeting, they insisted on connecting with the locals, and, where possible, support local struggles. Hosting organisation City Mine(d) saw this as a welcome opportunity to revitalise activities in the area it had ended a decade earlier, and started involving its local contacts. Both veterans of 30 years of neighbourhood struggle in this part of Brussels as well as newly arrived agreed that new ways of tackling the development stalemate in the neighbourhood were more than welcome.



*The choice for a new map and canvas for a MAP-it session, rather than using the existing institutional or communal perimeters is essential in breaking through the existing stalemate.*

To bridge the gap between locals and visitors in terms of talking about the neighbourhood, Thomas Laureyssens, artist-researcher with experience in urban interventions was invited to present MAP-it. MAP-it is a toolbox developed by artistic research group Social Spaces of which Laureyssens is part, and that aims to map interests and stakes in a particular space, and structure the issues surrounding that space.

The success of a mapping exercise hinges a lot on determining a mean-

ingful perimeter, so this became an important part of the preparation of this MAP-it. Informed by the experience of neighbourhood comities, key topics of the exercise became a culturally diverse and vibrant North-South axis and the opening up of the Leopold Parc. The map of the European Neighbourhood used as a canvas for MAP-it was centered on the Leopold Parc and included the Place Luxembourg in the West (where Eurocrat interns like to socialise), the still desolate Place Jean Rey

and the busy Rue Belliard to the North (on the concrete East-West axis that cuts through the neighbourhood) and to the South the Chaussee de Wavre that connects the old 'town centres' of Jourdan and Matonge. The choice for a new map and canvas, rather than using the existing institutional or communal perimeters is essential in breaking through the existing stalemate.

## And... action!

The first MAP-it was considered a success and quickly leads on to a next session. This in turn inspires people to start putting the ideas proposed during the workshops into practice. A collective emerges that calls itself PUM, which stands for *Projet Urbain Maelbeek* or *Participation Urgente Maelbeek*, but even more than that is a distortion of PUL, *Projet Urbain Loi* (see page 3-5 and 14-15), the European and Regional development plans for the neighbourhood, of which they are the polar opposite in many ways: bottom-up and citizen-led versus government-imposed top-down; East-West axis versus North-South; downtown versus uptown; housing versus offices. Rather than oppose planned development, PUM wants to experiment with alternatives by means of small interventions, starting on a derelict piece of land that was discovered during one of MAP-it's mapping exercises.

The plot of land is situated at the bottom of the Leopold Parc and since it was part of the Eggevoort domain, it was rebaptised *Friche Eggevoort*. To learn more about the space and its function in the neighbourhood, a very hands-on approach of small scale interventions is applied. The first one is so simple it runs the risk of being overlooked: opening the fence that surrounds the derelict site. By demonstrating that although the place looks fenced off, it is still easily accessible, and regains its space on local residents' mental map. The place

