

(How) can you plan an urban common?

Place-making, visioning and negotiating for a common on the Josaphat site in Brussels.

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THEMATIC TRACK - Designing and Governing the City as a Commons Resource?

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INTRODUCTION

“We hope to be politically recuperated and for this to happen in the right way.”

The former railway site of Josaphat, in Brussels, is mainly lying bare. The Brussels Capital Region, the owner of the terrain, is finalising its development scheme (Schéma directeur) in the hope to provide a solid answer to the critical housing need in Brussels. Recognising this need but raising questions on the decision-making and management process for the future development, the citizen collective Commons Josaphat (CJ) aims to negotiate the future development of the Josaphat site as an urban common. This is not an easy target within the Brussels urban development setting; most of the bottom-up city-making ventures cross upon rigorous barriers when reaching out to the decision-making level⁴.

In this endeavour, CJ actualises its own, context-based and continuous adjusted trajectory to manoeuvre its way in in the practice of an urban planning alternative, while following the self-outlined and negotiable principles. CJ is only one of many rich examples that aim to fight for and defend the urban commons. Though, we argue, CJ particularly situates itself in this global surge by its experimental approach to practice the commons on an explicit urbanistic scale, exploiting the opportunities the Josaphat site offers as zone of regional interest. With the focus on the making-process itself, highlighting the importance of negotiating spatial planning processes from the very beginning, CJ in essence targets to create favourable conditions for the implementation of urban commons.

In its quest CJ outlines a mutual trajectory of parallel and related processes of collective visioning and local place-making : on the one hand the creation of a coherent idea of what the fundamental principles would be, in order to develop the area as an urban common; on the other hand the practice, support and encouragement of on-site activities. These more tangible activities bring life to the Josaphat site and foster knowledge about and care for this area, while the commons ideation is used as anchor point to rethink a critical alternative for the way the Josaphat site might be developed.

⁴ Brussels, being a city known for the richness of its civil society, hosts a long list of collective projects that each in their own way target(ed) to influence official urban planning decisions through concrete place-making initiatives. However the encounters between a complexly organised public power (not always welcoming towards spontaneous initiatives) and the ambitions and demands of citizen collectives (PUM, picnic the streets, free 54, Plateforme Pentagone, Cyclo Guerilla BXL, ...) met very mixed results, despite some successes (Parckdesign 2014 and partly Plateforme Flagey).

This paper is written from an insider's perspective as both first authors are active members of the collective; however, the analyses and opinions we formulate are not representative for the collective as such. In the context of the IASC 1st conference on the commons, we aim to describe how the process of commoning by CJ attempted to install a planning process, and how this has brought the collective to deal with numerous interesting but sometimes confronting questions.

While the richness of combining what could be called 'citizen-driven top-down' visioning and a 'neighbourhood bottom-up' place-making in one and the same endeavour is hardly questionable, we will see that this process is accompanied by a set of contradictions that needed and need to be overcome by different means. Four concerns are being recognised and subjected to an effort of articulation, concerning both the internal organisation of the collective and its relation with the broader public and official agencies.

These tensions revolve around the limited availability of time and energy, a balancing between focus on the current place or principles for the future, questions of representativeness and legitimacy. As an additional final feature, the aspiration to operate in a horizontal and open manner has shown a two-sided effect, resulting in a vague identity and a radical openness, making it a hard job to position CJ and define its autonomy and whether or not desired institutionalisation.

As a conclusion we will argue that this contradictory and tense advancement represents the never-ending search for a balance between legitimacy and efficiency⁵ within decision-making. As such, the CJ process of designing and governing Josaphat as an urban common is a tightrope walk between the own envisioned ideology and an actual realisation. It has been a constant learning process of which we hope to share and, in a way, to 'open source' the experience including its uncertainties, hesitations and failures so as to constitute a precedent to build upon.



⁵ Van Reybrouck, D. (2013). Tegen verkiezingen. Amsterdam / Antwerpen: De Bezige Bij.

In the first part of this paper we will provide a background on the particular Brussels urban planning context and its inextricable relation with civil society. It is within this sphere of a need for more profound participatory planning that the practice of CJ is embedded, with the Josaphat site as a remarkable ground around which to unfold this claim.

Subsequently the second section will contextualise the locally anchored approach of CJ in the global phenomenon of commoning, after which we will focus on the particularities of the experimental methodology practiced by this autonomous citizen collective.

Thirdly, we will summarise the dual, often mutual course of visionen and place-making that CJ has run through by the means of a chronological description.

As a fourth partition, the main concerns that are recognised in this parallel and (dis)connected process will be discussed; (1) the limited amount of time and energy to support this endeavour, (2) a duality on the urban common as both a practice of current place and a principle for future place, (3) the dubiousness on the representativity and legitimacy of the CJ collective and its work and (4) a latent tension between the institutionalisation and autonomy of this practice as matters of a vague identity.

The fifth and final part will describe the complexity and tension of this specific process of (attempted) spatial planning of an urban common, rather than offering a clear-cut conclusion. It is our argument that the radical openness of the collective, although source of many tensions, contributes to the continuous rebalancing between efficiency and legitimacy that allows adaptation to shifting practical and institutional contexts.

1. COMMONING IN BRUSSELS

Civil society and the Brussels Trauma

Brussels is characterized by a strong mobilisation of civil society, which came to proliferate following a surge of urban traumas, starting with the wide-scale developments in the wake of the World Expo 1958. Brussels needed to welcome visitors in a modern city, which was understood mainly in terms of an adaptation of the city to the automobile through highways, urban highways and viaducts. More generally, however, Brussels was mainly seen as the economic motor of Belgium by the Nation-State, more so than as an inhabited city, which was long felt in the developed projects: office buildings and hotels, often as high-rise, were implemented with little regard to their surroundings or the quality of the city itself, their main goal being the concentration of employment in the city center. Entire neighbourhoods got razed for the construction of American inspired office towers (Manhattan project) or were simply cut through to connect the North and South railway stations.

This profit-driven development emerged so fierce it got its own moniker of “brusselisation”. Hence the notable strength and momentum of emerging urban struggles⁶ initiated by citizens in the 1970s and 1980s, as compared to the rest of Europe. A vast number of neighborhood committees were formed to protect themselves from this unfettered development. They would soon federate themselves into wider organisations (known today as the dutch-speaking Bral vzw and the french-speaking Inter-Environnement Bruxelles), while a group of urban activists will create the Atelier de Recherche et d’Action Urbaine to demand a more open and participatory approach to urban development. It also explains a widespread distrust of the Brussels citizen towards urban development, especially for projects of a larger scale.

The demands of these associations resulted in the adoption for the Sector Plan of 1979 of basic participatory measures accompanying building permits that are either in specific situations or requesting derogations. Up to this day, these extremely administrative, rigid and indirect measures⁷ consists as the biggest tool for citizen involvement in planning. It has, however, consisted in a historical improvement of the possible role of the larger

⁶ Doucet, I. (2010). Chapter 1 - 6. Brussels and '68: towards a decade of luttés urbaines. In I. Doucet, *From Penser la Ville to Faire la Ville. Brussels' and Architecture's Engagement with the Real* (pp. 35-40). TU Delft.

⁷ The process is twofold: first the building permit documents are made available to the public at the municipality for a period of fifteen days, and the existence and availability of this project is communicated through an official announcement in front of the plot or building in question. During this period, one can consult the document and make a written request to be heard in the second step of the process: the concertation commission. This commission is in charge of emitting a (non-binding) advice on the deliverance of the permit or not, and if so under what conditions. Having heard the intervenants who made this explicit request, the commission retreats behind closed doors to make its verdict. This process is thus essentially reactive (no form of co-design or propositional debate) and very late in the process of design (the project is practically finished, awaiting realisation).

public in city development, and has been an integral part of what Jacques Aron has called the “Turning Point in Brussels Urbanism”⁸.

Since the creation of the autonomous Brussels-Capital Region in 1989, allowing the city to think about its own future, several other experiments have been taking place on smaller scales (neighborhood contracts, call for neighborhood projects). While often valuable, those experiences do not at all amount to a structural culture of participation. The only limited contribution citizens can have through these official participatory mechanisms, is criticised to not go beyond tokenism⁹, while private developers, owning most of the territorial reserves in Brussels, are gaining control in the spatial planning of the city.

Today the demand of Brussels citizens to be heard in the spatial planning of their city is reviving in a more constructive approach. Brussels citizens have shown to gather around place-specific urban issues and to formulate and act for a more desired alternative. An often articulated example of this strategy is the citizen-initiated open call for the design of the Flagey square that partially managed to interfere within the formal urban planning mechanisms. This movement has been argued by Brussels urbanist Benoit Moritz¹⁰ to bring about a potential 2nd turn in Brussels urbanism¹¹, referring to the initial statement made by Aron¹². Meanwhile, civic organisations rooted in the ‘70s movement such as Bral now seek to empower the emerging proliferation of civic city-making initiatives by rendering the richness of these self-organised collective place-making processes more visible, for example through the recent Selfcity project¹³.

The autonomous citizen collective of Commons Josaphat is embedded within this context of urban struggles as it has strong, yet informal, ties with the IEB and Bral grassroots organisations and takes part in the Selfcity initiative. Most of the members of CJ took part in other city-making interventions, among them the seminal case of

⁸ Aron J., *Le tournant de l’urbanisme bruxellois, 1958-1978* (Fondation J. Jacquemotte, Bruxelles, 1978)

⁹ Arnstein, S. (1969). *A ladder of citizen participation*. AIP Journal, 35(4), 216-224.

¹⁰ Moritz, B. (2009). *Comment construire Bruxelles? Une mise en question des outils contemporains de planification et de fabrication de la ville*. Opgehaald van *Penser la Science*. ULB: <http://penserlascience.ulb.ac.be/archive/ecole2009/conference/moritz/index.html>

¹¹ Levy, S. (2013). *A brief History of Planning Instruments*. In E. Corijn, *The Brussels Reader. A small World City to become the Capital of Europe* (pp. 216-227). Brussels: VUBpress.

¹² Ibid. 8

¹³ BRAL vzw initiated the Selfcity project with the goal to further unravel and support alternative practices of making city that emerge from the bottom-up. The Selfcity project offers a digital platform to provide an overview and analysis of bottom-up initiatives and experiences of 'commons' in and around Brussels. Simultaneously it functions as a meeting place to collect and share insights and experiences about these initiatives in an open and accessible manner. The final part is the conception of a more solid network and narrative through a dialogue with involved actors, amongst which Commons Josaphat is represented.

Van Reusel, H. P., Van Meerbeek, P., & Verbeke, J. (2015). *Collective city-making in Brussels. Making Research | Researching Making* (pp. 364-378). Aarhus: ADAPT-r.

the Flagey square. As such, the CJ platform can be defined as a direct offspring of the rich proliferation of urban associations, aimed at contributing to the liveability of Brussels.

From commons to Common Josaphat

The story of CJ starts halfway 2013, when some enthusiast commoners gather on a bench at the Flagey square in Brussels, a symbolically noteworthy ground to start from as we have seen above. This small group had just finished organising an event in the context of the ‘Festival des Biens Communs’, a series of events aimed at expanding the debate on the commons in Brussels and beyond. Some of the involved actors took a moment to reflect upon the collective endeavour they had been undertaking and agreed upon the need to bring the commons ideation more into practice, taking the Josaphat site as case for action.

After meeting several like-minded agents in the Brussels ‘commons network’, the group launched a collective autonomous platform known as *Commons Josaphat*, taking their name from the vast site they had laid their eyes upon as potential urban laboratory. From the beginning the collective explicitly focussed on: shared capital gains of the land development, collective management of the decision-making, respect for and enforcement of the environment, and a local and open-source based economy¹⁴.

Starting from an initial ambition to foster the idea of the commons within the Brussels context, the orientation of the commoners was directed to a specific spatial opportunity within the region as a trigger to rethink what this concept of the commons could mean on a spatial planning level. The tangible case of the wide, open and at that moment still unplanned Josaphat terrain offered the opportunity to unfold a concrete and context-based practice of commoning without losing its importance on a city scale and relation with the global.

The collective initiated an endeavour aimed at the co-creation of a culture for rethinking the city, bringing forth a redefinition of both the process of spatial planning itself as the relevant institutions within Brussels’ urban planning sphere. From this moment of reflection on, CJ went through a process of discovering, practicing, innovating, partly initiating and mainly negotiating new pathways for urban development. To resist the competitions driven sphere, CJ targets to both install and make room for a more radical alternative.

From its very start, and throughout its unfolding process, CJ states to envisage a different future in resistance of the socio-spatial model based on competition, perceived as the fundamental cause of the ‘brusselisation’ process, and to outline an approach of cooperation.¹⁵ In this sense the collective recognises the political aspect of

¹⁴ De Pauw, G., Lenna, V., & Nalpas, D. (2013). Commons Brussels Festival - Josaphat 2018. Opgehaald van http://www.egeb-sgwb.be/local/files/lettre_d_information_octobre_2013/20130421commonjosaphat.pdf

¹⁵ Text “Josaphat en Commun. D’une réserve foncière à un quartier en bien commun.” <https://commonsjosaphat.files.wordpress.com/2015/09/150915cjttextedef.pdf>

commoning, as articulated by Michael Hardt¹⁶, to provide an alternative agency in resistance of the neo-liberal (urban) politics of individualisation and profit-driven economy.

In its first year, CJ structured itself in various working groups from which the ‘transversale’ team organised general assemblies, public debates and internal meetings, while site-specific interventions and events were taken up by the ‘occup’action’ group. These two directions enlarged the scope of CJ, both claiming and negotiating it as a place for manifesting (partly) self-managed forms of urban governance and thus arguing for a more democratic urbanism on different levels.

The Josaphat site: strategic zone and white canvas

“It is a public terrain, strictly spoken it is ours.”¹⁷

The desire to elaborate the potential of the commons through a specific case within the urban context of Brussels, lead to the Josaphat site. This publically owned urban wasteland is one of the last ground reserves in the region which is not (yet) privatised and still offers the potential for an alternative development of significant scale.

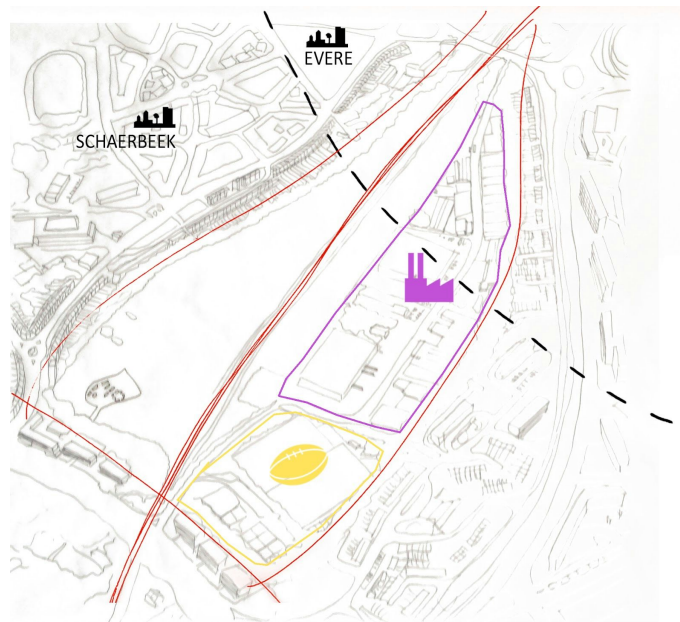


Fig. A - A schematic representation of the Josaphat site,
a field of opportunity for the creation of an urban common

¹⁶ Hardt, M. (2013) The Right to the Common (Das Recht auf das Gemeinsame). Conference organised by Bildungswerks Berlin der Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, Berlin, June 2013

¹⁷ De Pauw, G., Lenna, V., & Nalpas, D. (2013). Commons Brussels Festival - Josaphat 2018. Opgehaald van http://www.egeb-sgwb.be/local/files/lettre_d_information_octobre_2013/20130421commonjosaphat.pdf

This strategic zone (Figure A) comprises in total 44 ha of public land, extending across two municipalities (Schaerbeek and Evere). The east territory is destined and used as urban industrial area and a zone for sport and recreation, while the remaining 25 ha are still blank after the former railway infrastructure of the Josaphat station has been cleared¹⁸.

As CJ took form in 2013, the site had been unused for over 8 years. Earlier on in 2006, the SAF¹⁹, an organ of the Brussels-Capital Region commanded with the task to acquire land reserves, had bought the land from the federal railway company. The initial plan for the development of the Josaphat land as an European quarter got tackled by the economic crisis in 2008, leaving this expensively bought land undefined. In the meanwhile it got incorporated in the regional planning apparatus as a “node of priority development”, with the ambition to develop a strategic plan for the area’s development (Figure B).

The openness of this waiting space, allowed for CJ to not only claim the area as an urban common but also to imagine a new model for its spatial planning and to rethink the mechanisms at stake in this process.

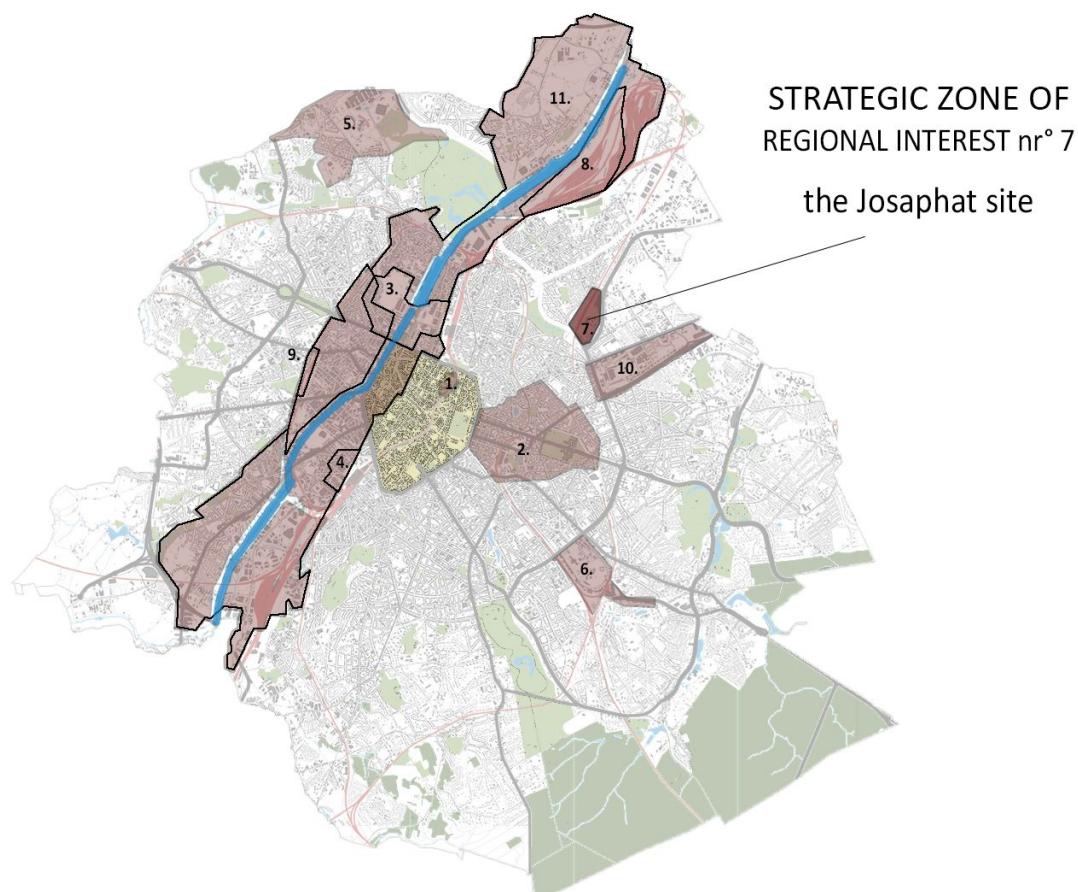


Fig. B - The Josaphat site it one of the 11 strategic zones framed by the Brussels-Capital Region as being of regional interest.

¹⁸ ADT/ATO. (2014, 03). Josaphat. Quartier Mixte. Opgehaald van Agence de développement territorial asbl. Zones stratégiques.: <http://www.adt-ato.brussels/fr/zones-strat%C3%A9giques/josaphat>

¹⁹ SAF is the French abbreviation for Society for Real Estate Acquisition and is a company of public right; SAF *Société d'Acquisition Foncière* / *MVV Maatschappij voor Verwerving van Vastgoed*

It was in the course of CJ's first year of existence that regional authorities, after a long silence, announced that the planning process had actually been initiated and that a first draft of the planning scheme ('Schéma directeur') was being finalised. The functional program for a sustainable neighbourhood targets to feature 1800 housing units with additional facilities to accommodate the housing need in Brussels.

This of course had put CJ in a complex situation. The ambition to collaborate with public authorities became delicate, as suddenly CJ had to take position on an existing planning process, next to initiating and sustaining its own dynamic: any strong decision or claim by CJ could be seen, if contradicting planning decisions, as an act of opposition. While this fact had instilled some reflections, it was never seen as a substantial problem, on the contrary the possibility to identify shared goals and ambitions in both processes constituted at the same time a major opportunity in the eyes of most CJ members.

To draw on its constructive avenue CJ decided to take over this officially planned schematic master plan as starting point for the open call for ideas (Figure C) the collective had launched shortly after the public announcement of the official 'Schéma directeur'. It has not been the intention to contradict the ambition of the regional authorities, but mainly to question the manner in which these would be operationalised and installed.

Exploiting the advantage of the area to be publically owned, CJ mainly articulated a demand for a more democratic process of urban planning - with citizens to be licensed as an equal partner - and to prevent the territory from being sold off to the highest bidder.

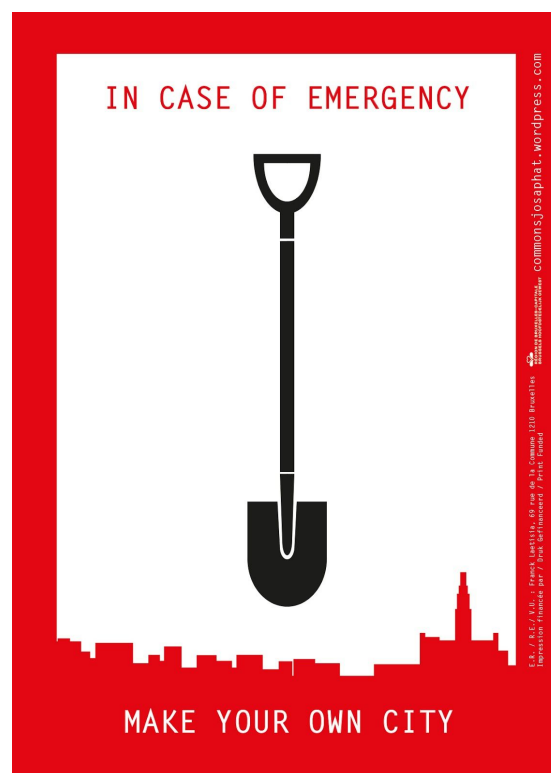


Fig. C - Under the slogan "In case of emergency, make your own city", CJ launched an open call for ideas on the Josaphat common.

2. GLOBAL SURGE SITUATED IN THE LOCAL OF THE CITY

A planetary phenomenon of commoning

Commons Josaphat is but one of many initiatives worldwide using the notion of ‘common’ both as a critical frame of reference and a principle for agency. Many militant actors and thinkers have in more recent years given new meaning to the notion, as a vastly mobilising narrative on the evolution of capitalism. Linebaugh’s *Magna Carta Manifesto*²⁰ is most explicit on the parallel that is made between on the one hand the enclosures initiated in the Middle-Ages -where poor farmers were destituted of their collective means of subsistence as the common pastures were acquired by wealthy landowners- and on the other hand a ‘second enclosure movement’²¹. This latter is understood as ‘commons’ has been extended to imply all that can be subject to propertisation, corporatisation, commodification or destruction in the name (or under the guise) of neoliberal politics²².

The commons movement today therefore translates essentially (though not at all exclusively) in urban environments²³, and in a very wide array of forms and scales from collective gardening in the city to the recognition of water as a common good which cannot be allowed to be commodified. While having the undeniable advantage of presenting the seeds of a global surge, unifying a wide array of practices and discourses, the malleability of the term can become problematic, both on the level of theory and praxis.

On a theoretical level²⁴, the first and foremost issue lies in the fact that the notion is often invoked in an essentially ‘defensive’ manner: the unifying characteristic of commons is then ‘being under threat’ or in need to be restored. While this is hardly questionable, an overly defensive and protective approach can become an obstacle in addressing the institutional aspect of the common head-on, namely the (re)invention of new forms of institutional. However, this does not mean the question on the protection of the commons is not addressed in the practices for horizontal or hybrid governance models to accommodate citizens to make up (a part of) the decision structure, adapted to the scale and type of what is understood as a common. But, while thinkers can easily resonate on what is to be criticised and articulated as unwanted, i.e. further enclosures, they are by definition unable to define models of common practice as these are dependent on the act of commoning itself. To instill and motivate this act,

²⁰ Linebaugh P. (2009). *Magna Carta Manifesto. Liberties and Commons for all*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

²¹ Boyle, J. (2003) “The Second Enclosure Movement and the Construction of the Public Domain”, *Law and Contemporary Problems* vol. 66, 33-74

²² Dardot P., Laval C. (2014). *Commun. Essai sur la révolution au 21ème siècle*. Paris: La Découverte.

²³ Kip, M., Bieniok, M., Dellenbaugh, M., Müller, A. K., & Schwagmann, M. (2015). *Seizing th (Every)Day: Welcome to the Urban Commons!* In M. Dellenbaugh, M. Kip, M. Bieniok, A. K. Müller, & M. Schwagmann, *Urban Commons: Moving Beyond State and Market* (pp. 9-25). Basel: Birkhäuser.

²⁴ We follow here the argument developed by Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval in the third chapter of their recent work *Commun, essai sur la révolution au 21ème siècle* (2014).

theory is a valuable tool, but only one among many others, for the concrete construction practice of the commons. This directly addresses the need felt by the founders of CJ to instill a reflection on the actual creation of new commons on a wide propositional scale, and to link it with the practice of on-site uses considered as a large-scale laboratory for urban practices and of new forms of institutions.

On the other hand, as a second point, the variety of concrete emerging practices gathered under the moniker of ‘commoning’, both in terms of themes and strategies, contributes to the confusion on the exact definition the term should retain. According to the circumstances at stake, ‘commoning’ is regularly associated and even reduced – both by individuals and institutions in their attempt to grasp them – to other notions such as sustainability, participation, sharing (economy), bottom-up practices,... All of which cross in the notion of common but are insufficient to englobe its political and practical meanings. We will see that this risk of reduction became a prominent discussion within CJ when dealing with the proposals submitted to a call for ideas of commons to implement on the site.

Commons Josaphat as an experimental methodology

From the above section we can derive three characteristics that, to our best knowledge, define Commons Josaphat as rather unique in the scope of existing urban commons.

The first is its critical impulse based on a reflexion about solutions to city-scale needs and issues: the starting point of Commons Josaphat was explicitly theoretic, namely exploring “the idea that it is possible to govern our city as a common.” Hence, CJ considered the commons in all of their diversities as a possible approach to effectively and transversally tackle several major urban challenges in Brussels such as the long-lasting housing crisis, high unemployment rates, environmental preservation, the crushing congestion in terms of mobility and subsequent loss of quality in public spaces, and of course the need for a culture of shared city-making.

This translates logically in the second defining characteristic we identify, namely the intention to work on the co-construction of a new neighbourhood in the making related to very large proportions²⁵. This is a rather unique position as most processes of commoning of urban space up until now have focused on the (often urgent) recuperation/reclaiming of public space or infrastructure (Campo de Cebada, Madrid), or on the construction of a restricted surface as catalyst in pre-existing neighbourhoods (Agrocité, Colombes), when if they did not oppose any construction altogether (as was in the case of Tempelhof, Berlin).

²⁵ It is to be noted that this choice was not universally acclaimed, as some considered it put the collective too much in the role of a project developer.



Fig. D - CJ organised a political debate on the role and place given to the commons in a growingly changing world

Photo by Paula Bouffieux, 15/03/2014

Thirdly, as we have stated before, CJ wishes to articulate the construction of a public discourse based on theoretical readings and case studies combined with the precise work of holding, managing or supporting activities on site on a day-to-day basis. While most initiatives use liminal and temporary spaces and create commons on this field, after which negotiations with government can start to make these ‘temporary commons’ more sustaining, Commons Josaphat attempted to invent its own hybrid means of action. In this trajectory CJ combined classical ‘demands to the public’ and a self-made alternative practice, thereby attempting to balance between a citizen-initiated top-down visioning process negotiated with public authorities²⁶, and civic emergence of bottom-up practices through pioneer uses. One could say Commons Josaphat works on generating alternative city models as much as on generating the legal and institutional conditions that render such alternatives possible.

²⁶ Noteworthy in this respect is the attempt at influencing the development of this site while avoiding to resort to the notion of ‘counter-project’, therefore instilling an ambiguous relationship with decision-makers, somewhere between collaborating and opposing.

3. COLLECTIVE VISIONING AND PLACE-MAKING, IN SEARCH FOR THE COMMON

The process that CJ has run through so far is one of a dual, often mutual, course of visioning and place-making. The collective creation of a vision represents the more theoretical side of the practice-oriented discourse that CJ carries out through the support of an on-going public debate. This process of visioning²⁷ highlights the collective's intentions to raise the awareness, recognition and discussion on the urban commons and proposes the Josaphat site as a field of opportunity to rethink a critical alternative for the increasingly competition-driven development of the city. On the other hand, does CJ encourage and embrace on-site interventions as crucial part within this endeavour. While Brussels commoners and local actors are each within their own span highlighting the use value of the site, an appropriation and (re)claiming of this space as an urban common, whether consciously or not, is emerging. As such, (parts of) the area are being loaded with a growing identity, story and relational meaning, a process of making place²⁸ is unfolding. Both process aim to design and govern the city as a common in intermingled, yet disconnected manner.

These parallel and related processes of commoning regularly interact; though, up to this point without the ability to articulate them structurally in one undividable endeavour. This division between connected, yet proper trajectories of visioning and place-making do not entail a black and white distinction as the visioning of the future Josaphat neighbourhood also includes to unfold the story and potential identity of this place in the future, while the more physical interventions also embed a set of values, desires and needs. However, within the case of CJ, they can easily be positioned into these two categories or, when colliding, be structured in an overlap. What follows is a chronological description of the main actions undertaken on both sides of the visioning and place-making spectrum, each in separate columns or transversally if the action concerns both simultaneously.

VISIONING PROCESS	PLACE-MAKING PROCESS
Halfway 2013 a group of Brussels commoners gather to bring the debate on the commons more to practice, projecting this need on the publically owned	

²⁷ Vermeulen, S. (2015, March 13). Public PhD defense Sofie Vermeulen. Roles of Spatial Visions and Visioning in Urban Development Projects. Brussels: Cosmopolis. Centre for Urban Research.

²⁸ Augé, M. (1995). From Places to Non-Places. In M. Augé, Non-Places. Introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity (pp. 75-115). London-New York: Verso.

Josaphat site. The autonomous platform of Commons Josaphat is born.	
<p>One year later in 2014 CJ has organised itself in different groups; ‘communication’, ‘diagnostic’, ‘occup’action’, ‘appel à idées’ (open call for ideas) and ‘transversale’. The ‘transversale’ team, while always open to new members, mainly consisted and still consists out of the initial founders of CJ and takes up the overall organisation and management.</p>	<p>Within CJ, the ‘occup’action’ team takes up the role to instill use and make the site known to the public.</p> <p>During spring 2014, the neighbours and other curious citizens are invited for a drink nearby the site. Ludic (guerilla) interventions like planting potatoes, seed bombing and guerilla knitting are proposed to launch the action.</p>
<p>In March 2014, the Brussels Capital Region and the two involved municipalities, Evere and Schaerbeek, approve a first draft of a strategic development plan (Schéma directeur) for the Josaphat site. The adopted program contains 1800 housing units, from which 45% intended for public and 55% for private development; and accompanying facilities like schools, hotels, offices and green space is fixed²⁹.</p>	
<p>15th of May 2014, preceding the Federal and Regional elections, CJ invites representatives of all political parties in Brussels to join in a public debate (Figure D) on the role and place given to the commons in a growingly changing world. The unfamiliarity with the term, except for its association with public good or public services, can be heard in the reactions of all representatives but the ones of smaller, militant parties.</p>	
<p>On April 24th, a symbolic event at one of the entrances of the Josaphat site launches an open call for ideas (Figure C). Citizens, specialists, associations, etc ... are invited to send in their idea(s) under the slogan “<i>In case of emergency... make your own city!</i>”. The submission template asks to describe the idea, and to justify how the given proposal connects to the principles of the commons (with equal space give to answer both questions). Submissions include very concrete proposals but also more poetic and intangible contributions, such as ‘free zones’ that allow for transgression. The more than 40 submissions are exhibited at the ULB Faculty of Architecture La Cambre Horta at the end of June 2014.</p>	

²⁹ ADT/ATO. (2014, 03). Josaphat. Quartier Mixte. Opgehaald van Agence de développement territorial asbl. Zones stratégiques.: <http://www.adt-ato.brussels/fr/zones-strat%C3%A9giques/josaphat>

Early September 2014 an artistic-spatial intervention was realised on the ground of the Josaphat site. A ‘mirador’, meaning watchtower, has been constructed and immediately became appropriated by children as a playset in this wild garden.



Fig. E - ‘État des Lieux’ invited CJ and Erik Swyngedouw for a public discussion on the commons.

Photo by Paula Bouffieux, 27/09/2014

September 2014, CJ co-organises a public discussion on the commons with ‘État des Lieux’³⁰ (Figure E) at the marquee of ‘la compagnie des Nouveaux Disparus’, a nomadic theatre that legally uses a small perimeter of the Josaphat site. Based on the writings of Negri & Hardt³¹, Erik Swyngedouw and CJ were brought up as key speakers to instigate a debate in and on public space on the Josaphat site.

³⁰ ‘État des Lieux’ aims to bring on reflection within public spaces in Brussels. Starting from a theoretical concept, like the commons, the event brings together two key speakers to bring on a debate in and on the public space.

État des Lieux. (2014). Negri & Hardt et les "commons". Opgemaakt van Programmation: <http://www.etatdeslieux.org/fr/>

³¹ Based on the notion of the commons as described in the trilogy ‘Empire’, ‘Multitude’ and ‘Commonwealth’ by Toni Negri and Michael Hardt.

<p>The 16th of October 2014, CJ participates in the ‘Festival des Libertés’ through a poetic contribution at the conference by Christian Laval³². CJ collaborates with the collective Urbanisa’son to bring recordings of images and sounds of the Josaphat site, combined with testimonies from surrounding inhabitants and members of CJ.</p>	
<p>After the exhibition at ULB La Cambre, the open call was brought to its second phase. End 2014 - beginning 2015, several ateliers were organised (not on site) to continue the debate and to progress collaboration based on the fertile ground provided by the submitted ideas. During the ateliers the focus shifted more to a reflection on the principles that could accompany the development of this planned neighbourhood as a common, rather than orienting towards material propositions. At the final stage of the ateliers, it became the target to write a vision statement that, through its collective realisation, would become a legitimate tool to negotiate the transformation of this public territorial reserve into an urban common.</p>	<p>While the second phase of the call for ideas unfolded into a more elaborate visioning process, several meetings and presentations were still organised at the edge of the Josaphat site. The Polish Zagloba bar, which was right in front of the Latinis entrance, became the main base from which to momentarily connect the practice-oriented discourse to the physical space. With this also several encounters, meetings and presentations took place at local organisations</p>
	<p>At the Josaphat terrain, small and rather isolated interventions take place, of which the actors have an essential link with CJ, though acting independently. In February 2015 Dewey asbl³³ published a small film on the journey of a plant in a small wooden crate on its way to land at the Josaphat site. Nearby</p>

³² “Lecture by Christian Laval (sociologist, co-author with Pierre Dardot of *Commun. Essai sur la révolution au XXI^e siècle* [Communality. Essay on Revolution in the 21st Century] (2014), *La nouvelle raison du monde. Essai sur la société néolibérale* [The New Way of the World: On Neoliberal Society] (2009)). With the participation of Commons Josaphat (on one of the last pieces of untouched land in the Brussels region, a collective offers the inhabitants a “communal” city). Moderator: Sébastien Kennes (*Rencontre des Continents*). In partnership with: Commons Josaphat, Quinoa, *Rencontres des Continents*.” Festival des Libertés. (2014, 10). Une révolution pour le XXI^e siècle. Récupéré sur Festival des Libertés: <http://www.festivaldeslibertes.be/2014/fase6.php?event=14025>

³³ Dewey asbl is a non profit association association to support local information to value local resources in the Brussels Capital Region. Dewey asbl. (2015, 02). *DIY potager spontané / pop-up moestuin*. Récupéré sur Ezelstad.be: <http://www.ezelstad.be/videogallery/diy-potager-spontane-pop-up-moestuin/>

	the same place Occup'art ³⁴ buried a coffin filled with messages, wishes, testimonies, music, ... for 25 years, in order to mark a connection to the site and its memory even after it has been built upon.
In the context of the 'We-Traders' ³⁵ exhibition in Brussels, CJ organised a debate marathon in March 2015. Following the different topics around which commoners have gathered to reflect upon during the ateliers, the main principles are being presented and discussed. This vision is documented under the title " <i>Josaphat en Commun. D'une réserve foncière à un quartier en bien commun</i> " ³⁶ . The addressed topics were public space, housing, urban ecological structures, cooperative economy, an alternative financial model for Josaphat and governance.	
<p>The general assembly of CJ in March 2015 presented the reworked vision statement, including the comments and suggestions received during the debate marathon, while also shedding light on the vision and questions concerning the temporary use of the terrain.</p> <p>The conception of this ephemeral use as a first step in a phasing toward a future neighbourhood in common good is intersected by pragmatic discussions and potential collaborations. A fruitful discussion, however, with a relatively meagre attendance.</p>	

³⁴ Occup'art Josaphat is a rather vaguely presented collective with the intention to provide a (digital) platform to discuss the Josaphat wasteland and events relating to it. They initiated from the need to work on-site to raise visibility and awareness. To do this the engagement of local activists and the direct engagement with the site are perceived crucial for the realisation of 'ad hoc artistic events'.

Occup'art Josaphat. (2015, 02 14). #event Time Capsule Josaphat. Récupéré sur Occup'art Josaphat: <http://discourse.occupartjosaphat.org/t/event-time-capsule-josaphat-occupart--14-02-2015-friche-josaphat/14>

³⁵ "'We-Traders. Swapping Crisis for City' is a project by the Goethe-Institut that connects since 2013 initiatives by artists, designers, activists and many other citizens from Lisbon, Madrid, Toulouse, Turin and Berlin. In 2015 initiatives from Brussels will join the We-Traders network and share their experience."

Fitz, A., & Epple, R. (2015). We-Traders. Swapping Crisis for City. Consulté le 04 13, 2015, sur WE-TRADERS: <http://www.goethe.de/ins/be/prj/wet/zpr/enindex.htm>

³⁶ "*Josaphat in Common. From a territorial reserve to a neighbourhood in common good.*" Latest version by 23th of September 2015



Fig. F - The first 'picnic the commons' event aimed to reconnect the parallel visioning and place-making process.

Photo by Sarah Oyserman, 19/04/2015

In April 2015, commoners, neighbours, friends and local associations meet on-site around a picnic (Figure F). Under the slogan 'picnic the commons' people gather in a convivial way to talk about urban commons, the Josaphat site, Commons Josaphat and the potential of temporary use.

The 'transversale' team, the only work group that remained active throughout the process, gathers the core members of CJ around the summarisation and editing of the collective vision statement. The themes of energy and mobility are added. The main goal is to implement this carefully articulated and multiple discussed reflections as a base of principles to start off the lobbying and desired partnership with the official decision-makers, while at the same time a popularised and highly simplified version is designed to reach a broader audience.

From the picnic on, the rather symbolic plant box starts to incrementally grow into a small collective garden, still entirely organised in plant boxes as the ground is polluted. A more dynamic use is instigated by a rhythm of weekly events that encourage slow appropriation and the installation of a small urban common on a local and everyday level. People within CJ actively supported (and still support) this process, continuing the organisation of picnic events and taking part in the organised workshops, this nomadic garden became, through the support of the Dewey association, a locally and collectively

	<p>governed place. It is named ‘potager Latinis’ referring to a part of the surrounding neighbourhood.</p> <p>The use, which has been initiated spontaneously and without requesting any official permission by the public owner of the land, got offered a contract for temporary use in July 2015.</p>
<p>Commons Josaphat is invited to participate to the Make-City Festival in Berlin, in the panel “Defining the Commons, Designing the Commons” on June 11th.</p>	
<p>On July 12th, Commons Josaphat is invited to present their work at Agrocité, a commoning project on the crossroad of urban agriculture, culture, education and place-making initiated by the Atelier d’Architecture Autogérée un Colombes (France).</p>	
<p>Seizing the opportunity of the ephemeral architecture festival Baya (Bellastock Brussels) that took place at the Josaphat land the 12th of September 2015, CJ launched its vision statement in the media. In relation with collectif BAYA³⁷, CJ arranged a comic urban safari promenade through the ‘wild’ landscape of the site, highlighting its untouched (at least for the last 2 years) and highly eccentric biodiversity.</p>	
<p>The 21th of September 2015 a small group of CJ had an official meeting with the representatives of the public owner of the site and the cabinet of the minister-president of the Brussels Capital Region responsible for the planning of the site. The collective vision is presented focussing on certain key topics: the financial alternative, the gradual implementation of a common governance and the ideas on housing and economy.</p>	
<p>In the context of the ‘Temps des Communs’ festival, CJ organises a public debate on the 9th of</p>	

³⁷ Collectif Baya is a non-profit association for architectural experimentation that is founded by architecture students to realise this goal through the conception and realisation of projects in a sustainable and participative approach. Collaborating with related and local associations is one of their fundamental principles. Collectif BAYA. (2015, 09 12). A propos. Récupéré sur Collectif BAYA: <https://collectifbaya.wordpress.com/about/>

<p>October 2015. Presentations by ‘Association Ecoquartier’³⁸, CJ and the co-governed potager Latinis feed the discussion on the co-construction of the city. The invitation to attend this event is declined by the mayors of both municipalities concerned as well as by the cabinet of the minister-president due to other engagements.</p>	
<p>As of October 2015 CJ is organising a next general assembly to present its recent progress and to (re)define its priorities on December 3rd. The collective aims to work in a more open manner on both the realisation of a vision for the planned Josaphat neighbourhood and to discuss the overall government of the temporary uses.</p>	<p>In October 2015, one of the members of CJ initiated the co-creation of the RECUP’KITCHEN project, a mobile kitchen to install on the site, in close collaboration with Dewey and local actors. The concept aims to boost the use of the site while relating it to the collective vision as a concrete, small-scale (locally negotiated) performance of an urban common.</p>

4. RESONANCES, TENSIONS AND NEGOTIATIONS

The chronological description above clearly indicates that, while it was clear from the outset that the approaches of visioning and place-making could resonate in mutual reinforcement, be it in term of discourse, legitimacy or variety of possible ways to get involved in Commons Josaphat, such parallel process showed itself to be particularly complex to lead. In the scope of this paper we will hereby focus on this process as having been an opportunity for Commons Josaphat to reflect upon, deal with, or develop a discourse around four recurrent tensions. Of course, these four questions are but a reading of a complex process, as will attest their interconnectedness. Yet the recurring discussions around these four aspects allow us to consider them as predominant.

³⁸ Régis Niederoest, member of the Association Ecoquartier presented the case of ‘La Plaine du Loup’ in Lausanne (Switzerland), an ecological neighbourhood that is being co-designed and co-developed by the city and its citizens.

Time and energy as a renewable but limited resource

We will be short on the first major problem this ambitious project encountered, as it is obvious and recurring in uncountable practices of urban commoning, but nonetheless fundamental; the limited availability of time and energy. As the project of a call for ideas to envision the site as a common became more concrete, the activity of the ‘occup’action’ group slowed to a stop with most of its members putting their energy into the follow-up (or participation to) the call, while the remaining members got involved in other (largely unrelated) projects.

Looking back at the situation from the personal point of view of a member involved in the process at the time, it could be argued that what was witnessed is possibly a path of least resistance in terms of time and energy : the progression of the call for ideas project. The ‘abstract’ visioning process paradoxically became more concrete than undertaking local actions, that still entailed the time-consuming necessity of building up specific local knowledge (in a neighborhood most initial members of Commons Josaphat were not strongly tied to), required for a process of local place-making that depends majorly on the mobilisation of inhabitants.

This would explain why the first on-site actions that could be held were done largely in service of the visioning process that had become dominant. While the ambition and willingness to instill actual place-making was continuously expressed by the core members, there was no time to organise it, no energy to initiate it, and no funds to support it. The recent steady emergence of place-making on Josaphat is to be attributed to external actors such as Dewey and BAYA, and to the reconstitution of a dedicated group of CJ members, among them new members keen to involve themselves in this manner and having the time to do so substantially (as part of a PhD research).

Defining the urban common as practice of current place and/or as a principle for future place

Especially in early stages, the term ‘common’ was invoked with very diverse significations: as an object, as a status, as a value. The multiple ways to deal with the term led to sometimes contradictory semantics and a concomitant lack of clarity to the outside world. One such contradiction is the mention of the Josaphat site as a future common or as already being a common.

Some, considering the site as “*open to all, where anyone can dream (even in an utopian way) and imagine something else for his or her neighborhood*”³⁹, focused heavily on practice and therefore advocated the development of actions and projects as output, which were expected to later stabilise their existence in a form of negotiated governance. In this sense, as was put by Erik Swyngedouw during his atelier, the open site was already a common awaiting its use as such.

Meanwhile others remained in the open polysemy of the term and the interdependence between object, practice and organisation. Theirs was an attempt to cause the favourable conditions for the development of governance structures of co-design and co-management of the future neighbourhood. The sentence much used by the visioning

³⁹ Fragment from an interview with a member of the ‘occup’action’ team.

Dewey asbl. (2014, 03 28). Josaphat, bien commun. Opgehaald van Commons Josaphat: <https://commonsjosaphat.wordpress.com/page/5/>

group, stating the aim was for the site “*to be developed as a common*”⁴⁰, clearly attests of this perspective of a future common. In this sense, while use was always said to be essential, it could not do without a set of institutional tools that would render both its own subsistence and further development possible.

Again the complementarity of simultaneously addressing these two perspectives is clear. However, their contradictory implications on the relation to space became apparent during the process involving the call for ideas.

The original intention of this call was to propose an alternative vision in projectual terms, usable as a basis to negotiate the public sector vision, without taking form as an oppositional ‘counter project’. Eventually, however, the collective analysis and further work on the ideas moved away from the initial project-based approach and pushed the reflection to avoid the reduction of the commons to objects.

This reorientation of focus resulted in an approach that explicitly aimed to envisage the commons on a spatial planning level, which accords with the size and interest of the site at stake, and that conceived a long term and more professional claim. In the optics of agenda setting for the public sector, the organised workshops targeted to underpin the negotiation of certain aspects of city development in common.

As an illustration of this shift in priority, the discussion on the expressed proposal to put all car infrastructure (even if limited to car-sharing) underground, caused a polarised reception. By some this specific idea was seen as a good catalyst to free up qualitative public space, others criticised the amplitude of such an endeavour, for which the means could almost exclusively be found today through corporate investment.

It brought up that concrete ideas (object) could only be seen as an interesting or valid solution in the scope of CJ if it can be developed in common (principle). In this case, an underground parking would only be desirable if realised by means of an equitable collaboration between the public, citizens, and investors that cannot push the profit-driven above the common interest.

This systematic carefulness was criticised as it overshadowed the desire for and contribution of tangible interventions, even though how small or specific, by submitting them to constant scrutiny interpreted by some as a form of contempt. In this process CJ lost a part of the base it just had gained through the open call, among them several local inhabitants eager to undertake action. The connection between physical space and visioning weakened, causing the most interventions that had occurred, to not reach beyond the ephemeral.

Currently, the temporary (re)claiming of the site as a common has been living up again, mainly being manifested by local and relative independent actors. The balance between visioning and place-making has been reshuffled. This, however, revived the sometimes conflictual tension between the role of the actual socio-spatial practice and the focus on negotiating the future perspectives for the site. The less profound attention on and support for the action and on-site activism is expressed by the interventionists that feel overruled and recuperated by the more philosophical and strategic approach.

⁴⁰ Fragment from an interview with a member of Commons Josaphat in context of the public launch of the collective vision statement.
Van Garsse, S. (2015, 09 16). Josaphat mag niet aan de privé verpatst worden. Récupéré sur Brusselnieuws.be: <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/josaphat-mag-niet-aan-de-prive-verpatst-worden>

Unfolding the representativeness and legitimacy of a practice-oriented platform on the commons

The internal tension between the principle for future place and the practice of the current place also impacts the question of whom the CJ collective aims to represent in this two-folded endeavour. One could simplify it in the following way: the more strategic approach targets to outline the conditions for *future users of the site*, in the broadest understanding possible, to co-produce and co-manage the environment they will live and work in, in a common interest; the place-making, on the other hand, stresses the necessity for *existing local and extra-local communities* to be a stakeholder in the care and development of the site, in a common interest.

Again these representations are both complementary and contrasting, resulting in a rather confused message. The matter has been discussed several times, both internally and externally; to which CJ considers it does not wish to frame the representativeness of its claims, remaining radically open to anyone wishing to explore the common interest. This sustains a blurry identity – who is CJ and what do they then actually stand for – and illustrates the assumption to act in the common good – which can unwillingly appear as a form of arrogance or insensitiveness.

This brings on a strongly related and more conflictual tension: why is the collective of CJ legitimate to demand an alternative future for the development of the Josaphat neighbourhood? The (formally lacking) legitimacy recurs in confrontation with the official decision-makers, that through their eligibility can claim to speak (and act) in the public good. There is no socio-political embedded system that could grant the actors of CJ a safeguard to claim a role in defining what is best for this place, in common good, nor to offer them the legitimacy to demand a different, participatory co-governance for the future neighbourhood.

As is often the case, criticism has also been emitted concerning the socio-economic consistency of the ‘transversale’ group that forms the core of the collective, one of predominantly white and highly educated middle class. Relatedly, remarks on the too dominant white and/or male stage presence during presentations or debates illustrate the occasional obsession with legitimacy. This is all the more seen as questionable as members of CJ had adopted a principle according to which no single person would represent Commons Josaphat alone in public events, so as to always appear to the public as a collective. This principle was rarely met as it constantly fell victim to the limited time members could spend on CJ activities.

Similarly, while on-site activities have been able to attract a more socio-cultural dynamic audience than the “professionalised” core group (consisting mainly of actors employed in civil society or architects and researchers), the socio-cultural claim that CJ imposed on the land is being questioned by the neighbours and associations that are or have been active on the terrain. Although they share the same values and both appreciate this urban common, be it in their particular perspective, as an alternative for the city, these actors take up a rather reserved position. Not all of them, despite being on good terms with CJ, feel comfortable about the philosophical (and visual) recuperation of their actions. They question the spokesman role CJ takes up on and about the emerging temporary use, while only a minor part of the collective has been concretely and actively engaged in it.

Meanwhile, other on-site gardeners are not even aware of the importance CJ projects on this urban common on the city level or within a long term time frame.

The need or desire for legitimacy has been a recurrent topic of discussion within CJ, especially in moments where energy and attendance of members were low. As the open call for ideas encouraged a more broad and mixed participation of actors to take part, the bigger the contrast with the incrementally closing down of the collective writing of the “*Josaphat en Commun*” document in fewer hands. This was countered mostly in two ways: the organisation of a public general assembly during which the first draft of the document was presented and put to discussion, and later the creation of a popularised summary as well as a public mediated launch of a finalised version of the document.

The questions that unfold around both representativeness and legitimacy are not equal but relate strongly: the moments in which the parallel process of visioning and place-making explicitly interconnected, mostly occurring during a debate or event on-site, reconnected the awareness on the importance of the Josaphat common for its current and future users. As was illustrated by a news reportage⁴¹ on the publication of the “*Josaphat en commun*” text, this more uniform approach related the principles to the place, making the message of CJ, although simplified, more clear and tangible. At the same time this event not only combined the particularity of both the main approaches, but also joined their allocated support groups. Embedding the vision within the local context and involving those people, who will be directly affected by the future development of the site, would enforce the legitimacy of the CJ collective, both for the own record (as basic principle of commoning) as well as for the broader public and the public authorities.

The local expertise on the everyday level of the city and the more professional approach, heading for a long term and more systematic change, could significantly enrich and empower each other while allowing for a deep and broad participation process at the same time.

The recent meeting with the responsible authorities confirmed the awareness that a broad and locally embedded support is of key importance, even for the targeted overriding of the taken-for-granted urban development mechanisms. As such, the future prospects of CJ is of shifting more energy to a more site-specific approach, implicitly following Gorenflo’s assertion that, for the advancing of structural and long term change, the critical action of (re)conquering the urban common is essential⁴².

⁴¹ Van Garsse, S. (2015, 09 16). Josaphat mag niet aan de privé verpatst worden. Récupéré sur Brusselnieuws.be: <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/josaphat-mag-niet-aan-de-privé-verpatst-worden>

⁴² Gorenflo, N. (2012, 09 05). Chris Carlsson Interviewed David Harvey on Rebel Cities. Opgehaald van Shareable: Sharing by Designing Blog: <http://www.shareable.net/blog/interviewed-david-harvey-on-rebel-cities>

Institutionalisation & autonomy, matters of identity?

The serendipity that characterises the overall advance of CJ, demonstrates a nimble response to internal and external criticism, which reveals an on-going tension to negotiate its own approach. This does not only surface in the magnified dichotomy ‘practice in the now’ and ‘principle for the future’ or the twofold representativeness and fragile legitimacy, but is also expressed in discussions on its identity and position to claim in the public realm. The definition CJ articulates for itself, and therefore how exactly it claims position within the development of the site and the relationship with decision-making, has been a major point of discussion. This of course has vast implications for the type of actions undertaken.

The constructive approach claimed by CJ seeks to establish a partnership with the government to, in an ideal scenario, co-design, co-develop and co-govern the Josaphat neighbourhood as a common. This form of desired institutionalisation (and recuperation), rather attempts to hack the existing systems than to get absorbed by them. Even though this position is already polemic on itself as it could endanger the collective’s autonomy, the practice of it seems to add more complexity.

A major difficulty in upholding this constructive stance is the fact that CJ, and with it all the regular citizens of Brussels, is insufficiently informed on the official plans for the Josaphat land. Except for a very brief, bullet point like, description of the planned program, no further information on the intentions or principles of the government have yet been publicly communicated. Being poorly informed on the strategic plans and vision that are being shaped by the official power-holders, makes it a hard job for CJ to position itself with or against a largely unknown dynamic. As such, the collective has had to work with sporadic information it could gather from informal contacts, and took the liberty to fill in some gaps itself.

It was therefore a pleasant surprise when, during the closed meeting with the public instance in charge of planning the site, it appeared several of the principles defended by CJ could be found in some form within their ambitions. This meeting subsequently brought up an internal questioning about how far, if at all, CJ could make use of such closed meetings to gain access to information and sustain collaborative contact with authorities, without contradicting its own ideology of openness and legitimacy.

The tension between institutionalisation and autonomy also highlights a contradiction between the need to gain or to claim the right of citizens to use this land as an urban common and / or to be treated as fully fledged partner within the planning process. In the approach of CJ, both concerning the visioning and place-making, there is a duality at stake between forcing the recognition by the government and asking them to grant it.

This duality has been most explicit in the emerging of temporary uses of the land. The on-site events organised by CJ have been permitted as long as they respected a loose set of rules that have orally been agreed up in a meeting with the public owner at the beginning of the CJ endeavour. Still, interventions and events took place that were not legal in this sense as they arose spontaneously. The recurring on-site picnics and the incrementally

expanding collective garden are examples of these uses that exploited the liminal⁴³ condition of this temporary openly available land. The opportunities offered by this space at the limits of control, permit unforeseen and site-specific appearances as the emergence of (anecdotal) urban commons that claim their place and which have been tolerated so far.

These small emergences of resistance, although not seeking confrontation, quite swiftly made place for a more constructive approach when the public owner officially recognised the collective garden by offering the responsible association a contract of temporary use. The fixed time frame of this juridical document, granting the right to use part of the site for at least half a year, offered a certainty on its continuation. With its consolidation this spontaneous intervention was both safeguarded and empowered, while the openness of the liminal condition that allows the site to be (re)claimed as an urban common got limited and controlled: too bold forms of socio-spatial resistance, like temporary housing or in-ground agricultural activities, could, through these formulated agreements, endanger what had been built up so far. Even though this situation is currently not considered as conflictual, it raises questions on the limitations implied by recognition; not only for the place-making but also within the negotiations on the urbanism level.

Finally, the matter of identity shows to be crucial in this tension between autonomy and institutionalisation, as a more clear description of what CJ entails and a framing of its intention could prove a useful guide for its own positioning. Although the internal openness on identity complicates this matter, a liminal identity is actually desired in the spirit of the commons. Probably being the only aspect about which there is a consensus, the openness of the collective should be safeguarded in order to stay away from a set of opposed rules that would frame who could or not could be a member of the collective or divide which interpretation of its principles and actions are (in)correct. This consciously vague and blurred identity remains open through debate and discussion and allows both various appropriations as potentialities. It is up to every commoner to negotiate for him- or herself what CJ stands for and through which approach they want and can contribute to its struggle to claim the use or negotiate the future of the Josaphat site as an urban common.

Paradoxically enough however this openness makes it difficult for non (yet) participants to grasp what CJ is about in order to be convinced into taking action. To add up to this confusion, the lack of time results in a not always sufficiently managed communication. A website (and Facebook page) that are often dormant or even out of order, the sometimes late reaction on mails, the continuously rotating of actors that present the collective and its principles, ... do not make the situation less complex. Although CJ is radically open in mind-set, the lacking communication hinders the highly valued transparency.

⁴³ Sennet, R. (2006) *The Open City: Towards an Urban Age* (pp. 9-11). Rpt. in W. Wang. (2013) *Culture: City* (p.53). Berlin: Akademie des Künste,

5. SO, (HOW) CAN YOU PLAN AN URBAN COMMON?

Over the course of this paper we have proposed an overview of the situation, particularity and practice of Commons Josaphat, followed by an analysis of the main issues related to the attempt at both proposing and making an urban common. It is clear that the trials, tensions and reflections faced by CJ are still far from being able to answer the question of whether an urban common can be planned. If anything, they can testify to the complexity of any possible answer. And if it should end up being positive, we are intimately convinced there will not be a method to account for, only people, time and energy.

The analysis of the four main recognised concerns within this endeavour, however, allowed a certain insight in the (attempted) process of planning an urban common. As already stressed above, these do not provide a clear-cut conclusion but highlight the on-going negotiations in order to sustain a balance within these four articulated tensions that are highly interdependent.

When the simple physical limitation to the amount of time and energy that people are able or willing to contribute is itself viewed as a common resource, efficiency becomes vital for sustaining a collective. Commons Josaphat experienced this regularly, as often the discussions, events, actions and interventions -despite the enthusiasm of the commoners- rely on the energy of an at certain points limited amount of people. An example of this is none other than this paper, where the possibility of a collective writing exercise was enthusiastically received, but not put in practice due to short time slots and limited availability.

As the limited time and energy in Commons Josaphat flowed into a collective visioning exercise that attempted to be as shared as possible, the involvement of the collective as a whole faded in the place-making initiatives that ended up developing in relative distance to most core CJ members. An illustration of this is the the launch event of the open call for ideas that took place at one of the entrances of the site, after which the collective trajectory of CJ distanced, physically and content-wise, from the actual place; albeit this practice never entirely got disconnected. In the same vein, no time could be substantially spent on both internal and external communication, which contributed to the blurry identity of the collective and its fluctuating amount of members.

Besides a fading involvement, the relationship with place-making initiatives further deteriorated as the approach to place in the definitions given to commons by both visioning and place-making actors began to differ. In this extend to reach a point where concrete projects were proposed by some while being explicitly avoided by others as being reductive to objects and not principles. Only in a later stage of the visioning process, effort was made to bring concrete (existing) cases, as examples, in the propositional documents.

The matter of legitimacy had to be addressed as contacts with public authority were established. The visioning group of CJ saw itself as representing the right of future users to have a voice in the design and management of the neighbourhood when this would take place. With this definition, the collective decoupled legitimacy from factual representativity, but the lack of local embeddedness and broad involvement of the neighbours was criticised by the government as being insufficient to claim a place within the official spatial planning process. During the meeting with the public decision-makers it became clear that the vague definition on who CJ aims to represent and who is

in support of it, although defining openness as a strength, became inefficient when being confronted with the official mechanisms.

Whereas the institutionalisation of the temporary use of the site through collective gardening managed to empower the process, involve more people and expand the practice and support of the commons, the autonomy of CJ was thereby weakened, though not to any problematic extent. In this respect the question remains how far CJ can and wants to go in this process of institutionalisation to not risk its autonomous identity, be it a vague one.

In his essay *Tegen Verkiezingen* [*Against Elections*]⁴⁴, Belgian cultural historian David Van Reybrouck states that every authority or decision-making structure has sought to achieve the equilibrium it considered optimal between on the one hand legitimacy, and on the other hand efficiency. This reading, while apparently simple, allows to perceive the complexity and richness of the spectrum between absolute direct democracy, where everyone has to agree in every situation (maximal legitimacy) which is practically impossible to achieve (no efficiency), and dictatorship, where one man decides (no legitimacy) and no time is wasted on any discussion or accountability (maximal efficiency).

The dichotomy between these values can be identified in how Commons Josaphat attempted to define and structure itself, and we believe this to be a clear demonstration that this dichotomy cannot be reduced to an ethical choice of values: even in a context unanimously critical of neoliberal managerial tendencies, more legitimacy is not undeniably a more virtuous choice, and efficiency is more than an undemocratic shortcut. Certainly, it is undeniable that efficiency-driven public authorities (in Brussels and elsewhere) often abandon ambition for true participatory processes as they would imply a substantially slower design process: legitimacy (in the form of participation) is considered if efficiency allows it (in terms of timing). But even a collective whose discourse is as strictly legitimacy-driven as Commons Josaphat has been just as much confronted with realities requiring or imposing shortcuts in the name of efficiency, if it wanted to stay true to its initial ambitions. And the most direct of these realities is an often overlooked or unmentioned aspect of collectively induced and managed initiatives, namely the exhausting character of participation⁴⁵.

We would like to conclude with a more poetic-metaphoric statement on the CJ ‘planning’ approach. These four, and probably many more, concerns all occur within a spectrum negotiating efficiency for legitimacy. However, the radical openness of the CJ collective, while source of many problems and unclarities, contributes to a constant questioning of its own approach both internally and externally. Hence, emerging out of this openness are the conditions for a constant rebalancing on the tightrope walk between efficiency and legitimacy.

⁴⁴ Van Reybrouck, D. (2013). *Tegen verkiezingen*. Amsterdam / Antwerpen: De Bezige Bij.

⁴⁵ Charles, J. (2012) *Une participation éprouvante: enquêtes sur l'autogestion, le management participatif, la participation citoyenne et l'empowerment*, Doctor's Thesis in Sociology, directed by Laurent Thévenot and Thomas Périlleux, defended in 2012 at the EHESS, Paris and the Université Catholique de Louvain-La-Neuve.

ABSTRACT

In this paper we will retrace the emergence of Commons Josaphat (CJ), an autonomous citizen collective that aims to create an open platform to negotiate the future development of the Josaphat site as an urban common, which is not an easy target within the Brussels urban development setting.

In the global surge Commons Josaphat constitutes a valuable on-going trajectory that particularly situates itself by its experimental approach to practice the commons on an explicit urbanistic scale, exploiting the opportunities the Josaphat site offers as zone of regional interest. With the focus on the making-process itself, highlighting the importance of negotiating spatial planning processes from the very beginning, CJ in essence targets to create favourable conditions for the implementation of urban commons.

In its quest CJ outlines a mutual trajectory of parallel and related processes of collective visioning and local place-making : on the one hand the creation of a coherent idea of what the fundamental principles would be, in order to develop the area as an urban common; on the other hand the practice, support and encouragement of on-site activities. These more tangible activities bring life to the Josaphat site and foster knowledge about and care for this area, while the commons ideation is used as anchor point to rethink a critical alternative for the way the Josaphat site might be developed.

While the richness of combining what could be called ‘citizen-driven top-down’ visioning and a ‘neighbourhood bottom-up’ place-making in one and the same endeavour is hardly questionable, we will see that this process is accompanied by a set of contradictions that needed and need to be overcome by different means. Four concerns are being recognised and subjected to an effort of articulation, concerning both the internal organisation of the collective and its relation with the broader public and official agencies. These tensions revolve around the limited availability of time and energy, a balancing between focus on the current place or principles for the future, questions of representativeness and legitimacy. As an additional final feature, the aspiration to operate in a horizontal and open manner has shown a two-sided effect, resulting in a vague identity and a radical openness, making it a hard job to position CJ and define its autonomy and whether or not desired institutionalisation.

As a conclusion we will argue that this contradictory and tense advancement represents the never-ending search for a balance between legitimacy and efficiency within decision-making. As such, the CJ process of designing and governing Josaphat as an urban common is a tightrope walk between the own envisioned ideology and an actual realisation. It has been a constant learning process of which we hope to share and, in a way, to ‘open source’ the experience including its uncertainties, hesitations and failures so as to constitute a precedent to build upon.