

SYNERGETIC CITIES for EUROPE

syncity

REVEALING THE POLITICAL
OF A CONTENTED SPACE

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Synopsis

Revealing the Political of a Contended Space aims at bringing to light all the levels of complexity that inhabit the vast plain of the Abattoir, one of the most vivid and controversial places of the Brussels Capital Region—the core of Europe.

For 6 days, participants from the Faculty of Architecture La Cambre-Horta as well as other European universities will dive into this unique place and inquire power dynamics, conflicting usages and diverging perspectives, but also existing synergies and congruences.

The Abattoir site is occupied by an operating slaughterhouse and a marketplace with a historic market hall, and is due to be redeveloped and densified in the coming years. The neighbourhood of Cureghem where the Abattoir is located has long been a place of arrival for migrant population groups coming mainly from poorer countries. Over the last decades, the area has been facing the challenges of a long-lasting process of deindustrialisation. Pollution, a dense stock of derelict buildings, low incomes and chronic high unemployment rates are all images commonly associated with this neighbourhood. On the other side, the size and vibrancy of Cureghem have made it a place of compelling possibilities. A number of temporary production activities, markets and workshops have been incorporated, the majority taking advantage of low rents and high levels of laissez-faire with respect to traffic, sanitary and noise limitations. Because of its vast open spaces, its central location and proximity to the Bruxelles-Charleroi Canal, the Abattoir site—as the neighbourhood—is now under the spotlight of urban renewal and the opportunism of the real estate market.

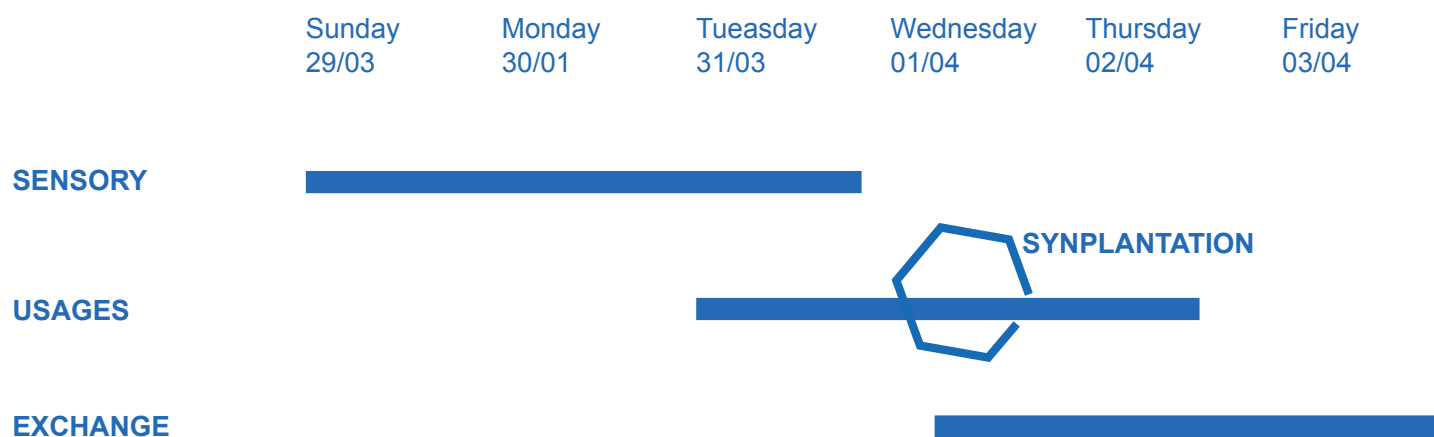
The ambition of Revealing the Political of a Contended Space is to portray the socio-spatial complexity that makes the Abattoir of Anderlecht a truly “public” space. In the words of Chantal Mouffe (2000, 754), the political is intended as “the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in all human society, antagonism that can take many different forms and can emerge in different social relations.” Portraying the antagonisms embedded in the space of the Abattoir is meant to be a necessary contribution to counteract the risk of an inexorable transformation, ordered by a few actors, as this would gradually eliminate the opportunities for some groups to remain in favour of the integration or “territorialisation” by a few others.

How do people use and value the plain of the Abattoir? What is ‘its’ current antagonisms? What are the different groups—the “we”, “they”—inhabiting and/or using the plain and what is the permeability of their boundaries, the very possibility of coexistence?

By sensory explorations, critical mapping, and moments of exchange in the public space, the antagonism inherent in the plain of the Abattoir will be revealed to become the material of future practices and design protocols that stand for human coexistence now and in the time to come.

Revealing the Political of a Contended Space is an initiative of SYNCITY, a larger urban exploration organised through the cities of Brussels, Belgium and Vienna, Austria under the JPI program called “Making Cities Work.” It is a two-and-a-half-year programme initiated in 2019.

Programme



Industrial heritage, productive site, marketplace, meeting place, the Abattoir is more than a slaughterhouse, it is a unique urban infrastructure embedded in a neighbourhood—Cureghem—which is one of the most dynamic, multicultural and poor of Belgium. In order to allow the students to grasp its complexity, the six-day workshop is organised in three main phases, each providing specific but complementary pedagogical activities: Sensory/social/societal Exploration, Usages/ Transformations, Exchange. And in the middle is incorporated a specific “Moment of SINCITY” called “Challenging Symplantation” (see calendar).

1 - SENSORY EXPLORATION

This phase aims to give the participants the possibility to become acquainted with the site. Participants will first bodily experience the Abattoir site via a series of exercises that enable them to connect to it thoroughly. By building on previous methods tested together with both high school and university students in the frame of the research activities of Urban Education Live, Jens Brandt will help the students to dive into the plain of the Abattoir using their own senses.

2 – USAGES

This phase is oriented at framing differences in terms of positions/uses/visions that thought legitimate are conflicting and/or irreconcilable, as well as those that are synergic if not parasitical. Through the repeated direct observation geared to understand the diverse uses of space in time, participants will formulate insights and translate them in experimental diagrams and

cartography. Participants are asked to look carefully to the materiality of the site, to all those spatial elements (from superfetation to the microtopography, to the flooring) that are often undocumented and/or unplanned and that enable certain gestures and practices more than others.W

3 – EXCHANGE

This phase is designed to ensure that the gained insights are the subject of exchanges and discussions with the same protagonists of the site. Students will elaborate a series of tools and strategies aimed to trigger interaction with the public: on the last day, their work will be exhibited onsite to serve as a basis for discussion with the very diverse publics of the market. In order to fuel the discussion, the exchange will insist on the antagonistic uses/practices/visions as much as on synergies.

CHALLENGING SYNPLANTATION

This special moment—a morning—aims to allow students to exploit their critical understanding of the site by participating to the design of an “open”/non-fix project developed for SYNCITY by Architect Richard S. Levine and the LECIT Lab.

Partners and practical info

SYNCITY PARTNERS

LoUlsE, Faculty of Architecture La Cambre-Horta,
Université libre de Bruxelles
IGEAT, Université libre de Bruxelles
Forum Abattoir, Inter-Environnement Bruxelles
SA Abattoir
Commune d' Anderlecht

Oikodrom
Oikoplus
Strateco

INVITED PARTNERS

Dipartimento di Architettura, Università degli Studi Roma
Tre
School of Architecture, Tampere University

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

28/03 arrival of foreign/international students
04/04 departure of foreign/international students

WORKING PLACE

Abattoir site, Cureghem, Anderlecht, Brussels

ACCOMMODATION

International participants will be host by the network of
Inter-Environnement Bruxelles.

INSCRIPTION

Bachelor and master students from different programmes
(Architecture, Geography, Sociology, Anthropology,
Political Science) are invited to apply by sending a
motivation letter of maximum 200 words to the reference
person at their school of affiliation.
Deadline for submission is March 13, 2020.

REFERENCE PERSONS

Jens Brandt, jens.brandt@tuni.fi - FINLAND
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Marco Ranzato, mranzato@ulb.ac.be - BELGIUM

CREDITS

The Faculty of Architecture La Cambre-Horta allocates
1ETCS to the students attending this educational activity.

SIP.20

Revealing the Political of a Contended Space is one
of the twenty pedagogical activities selected by the
Faculty of Architecture La Cambre-Horta for the Semaine
d'Innovation Pédagogique 2020 (SIP.20).

Visuals



