



An innovative concept on inclusive economic participation: The governance of inclusive economic participation sites in Flemish cities

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Abstract

Presently, the numerous initiatives within Flanders (Belgium) that focus on an (more) inclusive economic participation are often poorly coordinated and physically dispersed in nature. As such, there exist considerable thresholds for socially deprived urban citizens to actually find, use and benefit from these initiatives. Together with some Flemish cities and social enterprises, a multi-disciplinary research team of the University of Antwerp has therefore launched the innovative concept of “inclusive economic participation sites”. In view of the actual use of these inclusive economic participation sites by Flemish policy makers, the research team has started to specify relevant governance items and requirements for the creation, development and exploitation of these inclusive economic participation sites. Inductive inspiration is found within two explorative research projects consisting of 25 inclusive economic participation sites “related” practices and six focus group debates with social and economic policy experts (i.e. inclusive economic participation-Reference-Platforms). As such, the researchers inductively uncover seven strategic and four spatial governance requirements as well as one strategic–spatial interaction governance requirement. All requirements are defined, explained and illustrated within the article.

Keywords

Flemish cities, inclusive economic policy, social enterprises, urban governments

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Introduction

Since the beginning of the economic crises in 2007, the increasing amount of socially deprived urban citizens is a major concern for many public organizations and social enterprises (Bouchard, 2013; Conforth and Brown, 2014; Monzon and Chavez, 2008; Moulaert and Ailenei, 2005). As their socially deprived position is often related to a weakened economic position, the need for (more) inclusive economic participation (IEP) initiatives rises (Bouchard, 2009; Spear et al 2001). In particular, policy makers of public organizations and social enterprises are interested in the question: How can socially deprived urban citizens participate economically, as a consumer and as a provider of labor, in a more solid way? What kind of joint innovative initiatives or practices can be undertaken in order to tackle this growing societal challenge?

Within this article we report on the results of two explorative research projects that focus on a particular innovative practice developed within Flemish cities, being that of the so-called IEP sites. The central research question of this paper is: What are, given the definition of an IEP site and the results of both explorative research projects, relevant items and requirements for the governance of these IEP sites? How can they jointly be created, developed and exploited?

As far as the structure of this article is concerned, we subsequently report on (i) the definition of an IEP site and the theoretical framework, (ii) the explorative research design of both research projects and (iii) the respective research findings that inspire us to identify relevant governance items and requirements.

The innovative ambition of an IEP site

When making an inventory of already existing practices on the economic participation of

vulnerable urban citizens within Flanders, we discover a relatively large amount of geographically scattered initiatives. According to the experience-based insights of contacted academic colleagues and practitioners, this considerable spatial spreading makes it very difficult for socially deprived urban citizens to actually get a clear overview of all the existing initiatives, let alone to find and obtain the best fitting support.

To remedy these spatial thresholds, we have launched together with several Flemish cities and social enterprises the innovative concept of the so-called IEP site. Inspired by the ideas of the urbanist Manuel Castells (Castells, 1989, 1996, 2010; Stock, 2011), we define such an IEP site as a spatially concentrated hub or location within Flemish cities that accommodates social enterprises and public organizations that jointly strive and guarantee a (more) solid economic participation of socially deprived citizens, both as a consumer and as a provider of labor. We assume and hypothesize that the spatial concentration on an IEP site will minimize the previously described thresholds as well as simplify information, coordination and mobility efforts made by socially deprived citizens.

According to Castells, the idea of urban hubs is related to three phenomena within our modern society. The first concerns the emergence of the knowledge society and the associated informational and digital revolution. As mentioned by Castells (1989), this revolution is a transition phase following the earlier industrial and service revolutions and transforming especially the notions of *space* and *time* in human life. As such, the knowledge society did not only bring people closer (i.e. space), but – and presumably hereby – also accelerated (i.e. time) for instance creativity, innovation and change. Consequently, a new spatial logic was introduced within the modern society. Not only the direct presence or relation between

physical acreage or “places” structured society, but also the exchange of information, capital and power (Stock, 2011). The second phenomenon is closely related to the knowledge society and concerns the emergence of the so-called network society. According to Castells (1996), a knowledge society is inevitably also a network-based society. Closely intertwined constructions of technical devices and of numerous actors or humans support the mere existence of the knowledge society. As Stock (2011) however correctly remarks, networks are very old forms of social organizations, mainly conceptualized long before Castells. But what is rather new is that Castells relates the existence of these networks directly to the knowledge society and the associated informational revolution. Finally, there is the third phenomenon, being that of the informational city. Castells somehow emphasizes the central position and leading role of cities within the knowledge and network society. As such and on a world-wide scale, cities can be considered to be important junctions in the overall knowledge and network society. Accordingly, cities are supported by technical/digital and social/human networks that master urban flows of information, capital and power. Empirical research results indicate however that digital media often create dual cities facing a serious knowledge and network divide within the urban population (Castells, 1999; Castells and Hall, 1994; Cartier et al., 2005; Serron, 2002). As such, not all urban citizens share the same cultural, social and economic information, capital and power. This is where the notion of economic exclusion comes into the picture. Although it is not yet entirely clear how to remedy this urban divide, most studies do emphasize the need for an explicit intervention of public and/or social institutions to guarantee the democratic access and inclusive nature of the urban knowledge and network society (Stock, 2011). An IEP site can be seen as such an

intervention focusing in particular on the economic inclusiveness.

As the concept of an IEP site is to some extent a self-invented analytical construct, the identification of corresponding, concrete governance features and requirements is somewhat problematic. We can however find inspiration in already existing IEP “site-related” practices throughout Flanders. It concerns urban locations where more than one public organization and/or social enterprise is facilitating and supporting the economic participation of vulnerable citizens. Given the particular nature of the so-called Social and Solidarity Economy or SSE organizations (*Sociale en Solidaire Economie*), we additionally emphasize the presence of at least one of this particular type of social enterprises in order to recognize the respective initiatives as being really IEP site “related”.

Although the concept of an IEP site is new, we can nonetheless identify a few similar theoretical notions within the IEP site-related scientific disciplines of public management, architecture and urban planning. Within the discipline of public management, an IEP site relates to the extensive and growing literature on so-called multi-actor governance networks (Bevir and Richards, 2009; Koppenjan and Klijn, 2004; Sorensen and Torfing, 2007). After all, IEP sites can be seen as networks of providers of public (e.g. employment, social housing and child care support) and social services (e.g. sheltered workshops, social restaurants, eco-design stores, recycling pop-up shops, training experts and co-working facilitators). Within this literature however – and in contrast to our IEP site definition – only a small amount of the publications refers explicitly to the facilitating spatial network features. When considering the literature on architecture and urban planning, there is the new and emerging research topic of the relationship between architectural design and subjective

well-being (Desmet and Pohlmeier, 2013; Smith et al., 2012; Stevens et al., 2014). As an IEP site focusses on the well-being of socially deprived urban citizens in their quest for an IEP, these publications are quite relevant. A third and last type of related literature concerns the publications on other hub-wise architectural typologies and their spatial features. Thus, there is for instance the literature on school campuses (Atif and Matthew, 2013), industrial sites (Mozingo, 2011) and gated communities (Lang and Danielsen, 1997). And there is the literature on particular spatial features of these hubs, as for instance the inclusiveness (Amin, 2002), the accessibility (Pasaogullari and Doratli, 2004) and the multi-functionality or interwoven character (Bomans et al., 2009). Especially these architectural and urban planning spatial features relate rather directly to the essence of our IEP site concept.

An explorative research design

As an IEP site does not yet exist, we cannot find answers to our research question on the basis of a profound literature study nor on the basis of a descriptive empirical research project of existing IEP site practices. We can however find inspiration in the empirical exploration of IEP site-related practices as defined in the previous paragraph. Thus, we select a qualitative research method, in particular the grounded theory method (Birks, 2011; Bowen, 2008; Charmaz, 2006; Morse, 2009; Stern and Porr, 2011; Strauss and Corbin, 1994). By gradually collecting and analyzing field data of IEP site-related practices, we try to unravel a coherent set of relevant items and requirements for the governance of future IEP sites. As such, we have selected a set of 25 IEP site-related practices located in different urban and semi-urban regions throughout Flanders.

During the data collection, we have focused on the importance of each practice

in view of the IEP challenges of the respective city, on the strategic policy and organizational features of the public and SSE-organizations involved, on the urban location and on the specific spatial and architectural features of this location. For the data collection, we used four complementary techniques consisting of scrutiny of written and digital documents (e.g. brochures, internal policy notes and website-information), visual representations (e.g. plans, maps, photos and self-made sketches), open and/or half-structured interviews¹ and observations (e.g. visits to the practices by the researchers).

To guarantee the overall quality of the data analysis, the intermediate results were discussed thoroughly within self-created “IEP-Reference-Platforms”. These platforms concern panels of policy experts, amongst which representatives of Flemish urban governments, social enterprises (i.e. SSE-organizations) and organizations representing socially deprived urban citizens. In total, six focus-group debates of approximately three hours each were organized. Per focus-group debate approximately 20 representatives participated.

The identification of relevant governance items

According to the overall principles of grounded theory (Birks, 2011; Stern and Porr, 2011; Strauss and Corbin, 1994), the continuous interaction between collected data and intermediate data analysis generates a list of inductively identified governance items. On the one hand, our list consists of *strategic* governance items that relate explicitly to the overall, long term and city-embedded identity of the practice involved, including:

- the urban challenge(s) that lead(s) to the creation of the practice;

- the type of (inclusive) economic activities that are undertaken or realized by the different organizations involved;
- the profile of the target group(s) that benefit from these activities;
- the identity and particular role of each organization involved;
- the strategic ambitions (e.g. mission, goals, actions) of each organization separately as well as the (ambitioned) synergistic effects of the collaboration;
- the structure and organizational features of each organization separately as well as the joint collaboration;
- the financial construction or features of the collaboration.

On the other hand, the list also consists of the so-called *spatial* governance items:

- the precise location of the practice within the urban territory;
- the phase-wise or historic coming into existence of the site;
- the spatial lay-out and plan, including the footprints of all buildings and spaces involved;
- the façade and architectural identity and/or communication (i.e. position within the *streetscape*);
- the nature of the buildings (e.g. newly built, renovated, a combination);
- the degree of (easy) accessibility and (inter)connectedness of the site with the urban territory (e.g. a low threshold for the surrounding neighborhood).

The specification of relevant strategic governance requirements

When further analyzing the previously identified governance items, we inductively uncover additional governance requirements or specific governance considerations.

Let us first look at the requirements related to the *strategic* governance features. Taken together, we can inductively identify seven relevant governance requirements.

A set of well-considered and explicitly defined urban challenges

It is interesting to find out that the urban challenges that lead to the creation of the IEP site-related initiatives are not always explicitly defined and known by all organizations involved. When defined explicitly, mainly general references to desired economic activities and/or groups or profiles of socially vulnerable citizens within the city are used (see also “A kaleidoscope of various economic activities and alternative types of IEP sites” and “A clear notion on inclusiveness and target groups”).

From a governance perspective on future IEP sites, the absence of clear, well-defined and consciously shared and thus jointly known challenges by the organizations involved may weaken the identity and mere reason of existence of an IEP site. As such, subsequent joint investments and synergistic effects may be transient, non-structured or even completely lacking. As such, the presence of a set of well-considered and explicitly defined urban challenges by all partners involved seems to be recommendable.

A kaleidoscope of various economic activities and alternative types of IEP sites

When analyzing the different types of economic activities within the 25 IEP site-related practices, we uncover a very rich and diverse set of economic activities, including for instance (i) construction and maintenance (e.g. handyman services, laundry, cleaning), (ii) (bio)agriculture and food processing (e.g. urban agriculture and self-harvesting initiatives), (iii) creative

industries (e.g. eco-design, recycling furniture and clothing), (iv) mobility, logistics and distribution (e.g. bicycle hiring–repair–selling shops, packaging), (v) retail (e.g. social groceries), (vi) consulting and education (e.g. job-coaching, buddy-services, training, co-working facilities), (vii) tourism (e.g. farm-tourism) and (viii) care and wellness (e.g. child-care, social restaurants, services for elderly people).

Based on the comments of the IEP-Reference-Platforms, this rich set of economic activities creates opportunities for distinguishing different types of future IEP sites with *alternative* governance requirements. Other economic activities demand different profiles of organizations involved as well as other infrastructural facilities and needed investments. According to the members of the IEP-Reference-Platforms, it is therefore relevant and useful to distinguish: (i) a *specialized* IEP site focusing on only one particular economic activity, (ii) a more *generalist* IEP site focusing on a broad range of complementary products and services, (iii) a *unique* or *tailor-made* IEP site combining a well-considered selection of economic activities in accordance to the specific needs of a certain urban location, (iv) a *traditional* IEP site focusing on traditional economic activities for socially vulnerable citizens like for instance maintenance and distribution/packaging and (v) an *innovative* IEP site focusing on new activities like for instance creative industries, tourism and wellness.

A second set of relevant research findings concerns the influence of the so-called *historical* fabric of a city on the specific nature of the economic activities involved. As such, the historical evolution of a city may favor a particular type of inclusive economic activity above others (e.g. the preference for the textile industry). Mainly the local public organizations involved seem to prefer a particular economic “identity” in view of their

elaborated city marketing policy (e.g. a green city, a creative city, a touristic city). When considering the governance of future IEP sites, it is therefore presumably important to investigate why and how the economic evolution or history of a city needs to be respected and incorporated within the IEP site itself? What are the respective points of view and requirements of all public organizations and social enterprises involved?

A third and last set of inductive research findings concerns the simultaneous presence of consumption (e.g. a social restaurant, child care facilities) and employment activities (e.g. workshops, production cooperatives). In general, the underlying rationale – if present – of accommodating both types of economic activities simultaneously is the ambition of the organizations involved to offer a quasi-complete economic service to socially deprived urban citizens: “the more, the merrier”. In view of the governance of future IEP sites, a more consciously and harmoniously elaborated combination in view of real needs and demands may however be recommendable: what is actually wanted and needed by the socially deprived citizens in a particular city? Which combinations are favored above others?

A clear notion on inclusiveness and target groups

When considering the 25 IEP site-related practices as well as the comments made by the IEP-Reference-Platforms, a lot of information is collected on the inclusive profile and target groups involved. In general, these findings seem to reflect an overall struggling with defining and marking out the concept of inclusiveness. For the governance of future IEP sites, such a clarification is however vital as it relates to the mere identity and reason of existence of an IEP site.

As such, most participants of the IEP-Reference-Platforms for instance suggest that inclusiveness does not imply an “exclusive” focus on only socially deprived urban citizens. The future IEP site must avoid stigmatization and may therefore not be associated with for instance “gated” economic communities for deprived citizens only, “isolated fortresses” or socio-economic “ghettos”. In contrast, they must be open to all urban citizens, regardless of their socio-economic profile. Simultaneously, other participants however emphasize that such a mixed use may eventually scare off or even exclude socially deprived citizens as they risk not to be served, helped or supported in a proper tailor-made way. Considering the governance requirements of future IEP sites, these rather ambiguous inductive findings seem to emphasize the caution with which the notion of inclusiveness should be defined. A future IEP site should not be exclusively destined for socially deprived urban citizens alone, but should nonetheless guarantee that these citizens are and remain the principle target group of the site.

A second research finding is less or more related to the previous one, but is based on the analysis itself of the 25 initiatives. In line with the previously identified demand for openness, we find out that this is clearly the case for most consumption activities (e.g. recycling stores, bicycle rent-and-repair shops), but far less for employment activities (i.e. jobs, training and education facilities). Thus, the latter still focus predominantly on the support of only socially deprived urban citizens. As such, a kind of *semi-inclusive* meaning may be associated with the governance of a future IEP site.

A third set of inductive research findings relates to the profile of the socially deprived urban citizens within the 25 IEP site-related practices. Notwithstanding the use of similar criteria² and categories,³ few organizations focus on only one and/or the same

category. Additionally, mainly public organizations seem to stipulate explicit preferences for certain categories. This is related to the realization of particular policy goals (i.e. their target-group-related electoral ambitions) and serious urban challenges (e.g. target-group-related unemployment rates or social endeavors). According to the requirements of each category, other arrangements have to be made concerning the specific profile of the organizations involved and the needed support or facilities. Based on the comments of the IEP-Reference-Platforms, it is therefore important to distinguish (i) a *single* versus (ii) a *multi-category* IEP site.

Fourth, most participants of the IEP-Reference-Platforms explicitly emphasize the need to also pay attention to new or untraditional profiles of socially deprived urban citizens. Based on their experiences, these profiles are associated with the contemporary economic crises and emerging societal trends. Thus, the participants pay a lot of attention to the increasing amount of bankrupt self-employed citizens and small businessman who have no financial safety net created by successive generations within their family. Additionally, there is also the growing amount of citizens with work-stress-related illnesses (e.g. burn-out, depression) that prevent citizens to participate intensively as a provider of labor and simultaneously force them to increase their social consumptive expenditures (e.g. medical and household services). Finally, there are the citizens with family-related social challenges (e.g. the care for elderly and financially deprived family members, the mental and financial constraints of one-parent families). In view of these three new or emergent profiles, there seems to be a growing need for particular, this means more temporary, tailor-made and (also) mental coaching services. Based on the comments of the IEP-Reference-Platforms, the following types of future

IEP sites may offer the following kinds of facilities: (i) a “creative (re)energizing spot”, (ii) a “decompression zone” to recover from stress-related illnesses⁴ or (iii) “a discrete, non-stigmatizing free port”.⁵

A fifth and last set of research findings concerns once again the influence of the *historical* tissue of a city on the particular meaning of inclusiveness and the dominance of specific target-groups (e.g. low-skilled seasonal workers, deprived senior inhabitants). This raises the question in what way the governance of a future IEP site has or should consider or respect such an historical legacy?

The awareness of institutional frameworks and – vital? – dominant partners

In relation to the identity and particular role of each organization involved, we can distinguish three relevant sets of inductive research findings. Taken together, they seem to emphasize the influence of institutional frameworks and dominant organizations.

When considering first the amount of organizations within each IEP site-related practice, we notice a variation of between two to five organizations. According to the participants of the IEP-Reference-Platforms, this limited number of organizations is linked to two phenomena within Flanders. On the one hand, most IEP site-related practices are quite new and thus presumably small in size. On the other hand, recent neo-liberal changes within the SSE-legislation in Flanders⁶ have highly stimulated competition between SSE-organizations (e.g. by means of public tendering and market driven financing) and thus discouraged Flemish SSE-enterprises to cooperate with “rivals”. This second explanation emphasizes the existence of potential obstructions or threats for the future formation of consortia provoked by

changing institutional frameworks. The question is therefore: Can future IEP sites overcome these institutional obstructions? Can for instance well-considered alliance agreements or other juridical and/or governance-related constructions on the level of a particular IEP site prevent aggressive competitive behavior between residential SSE organizations?

A second set of inductive research findings concerns the many comments made by the IEP-Reference-Platforms on the dominant position of SSE-enterprises within the practices involved. Given their explicit and fundamental focus on an inclusive economy, all members agree with us as researchers that future IEP sites certainly should accommodate SSE-enterprises (see also before). Whether their position should be dominant or even exclusive is however not self-evident. From a practical point of view, the overall financial feasibility and the long-term survival of a future IEP site demands considerable cash-flow and return-on-investment that cannot be realized by SSE-enterprises alone. Their financial capacities are not only moderate because of their dominant focus on *social* instead of *economic* or financial goals but also due to recent neo-liberal changes within the Flemish SSE-legislation that restrict SSE public financing (see above). Additionally, there are comments based on a less practical and a more principled point of view. As such, there is for instance the conviction of some members that the performance of SSE-enterprises is per definition “inferior”, “less dynamic” and “worse” than that of for-profit organizations (survey respondent). Or there is the explicit denial of the uniqueness and specific added value of SSE-enterprises when it comes to helping socially vulnerable citizens. Or there is the conviction that only mixed alliances with profit organizations can generate economic success. To conclude, all of these comments suggest that the presence of SSE-enterprises

is undoubtedly vital and necessary for the bare existence of an IEP site. After all, the inclusive economy idea is embedded in their organizational DNA. But the survival of a future IEP site cannot depend entirely and alone on their presence. Because of practical and principle reasons, the presence of other, including profit organizations is therefore suggested.

A second set of research findings is based on the analysis of the 25 IEP site-related practices and highlights the dominant role of public organizations, certainly in the start-up phase of these initiatives. As such, public organizations often support the initiative financially by means of subsidies and investments, or “spatially” by providing public domains and premises. This start-up dominance however is not always considerable and everlasting. As such, some public organizations redraw themselves once the “stimulation” job is done. Or the stimulation job is realized in a rather passive and restricted way (e.g. limited subsidies). Or the public support is even completely absent (e.g. initiatives in which no public institution is involved). As such, we are inclined to make a distinction between a (i) *publically* or formally initiated versus a (ii) *grass-roots* IEP site. After the start-up phase, public organizations can still play a dominant role in realizing the so-called intertwining nature of the IEP site-related activities. This will be explained and illustrated later in this article (see “A site-exceeding and well-elaborated notion of joint strategic ambitions”).

When reflecting on the particular identity of the public organizations involved in the 25 IEP site-related practices, we notice additionally that local urban governments often play the most dominant role. The dominant profile can however become more complex when consortia of different public agents on various policy levels are involved (e.g. the province, the Flemish community, the federal Belgian state or even European funding

agencies). In such a complex situation, considerable conflicts of public interest can emerge that result in a rather unfavorable public setting for future IEP sites (e.g. different and opposite electoral or ideological ambitions). Thus, the IEP site construction risks to be drawn into and swallowed up by a much wider and controversial debate with difficult political trade-offs (e.g. location ambitions of local governments on inclusive tourism versus Flemish ambitions on inclusive housing and work facilities). To prevent the conflicting interests of different public organizations complicating and jeopardizing the creation of future IEP sites, it is important to specify explicitly from the beginning the *joint* public ambitions and the consequences for the governance role of each public actor separately within the future IEP site to be.

A site-exceeding and well-elaborated notion of joint strategic ambitions

When analyzing the strategic ambitions of all organizations involved, we can identify again three inductive sets of relevant research findings.

A first set concerns the considerable differences of the action-radius of each organization on the IEP site-related practices. Some are focused on the immediate neighborhood, whereas others focus on the entire city. According to the comments of most members of the IEP-Reference-Platforms, a future IEP site should have a rather large and clearly site-exceeding action-radius ambition. Organizations located at the IEP site should be for instance also prepared to collaborate with organizations located outside the site itself. As such, the members emphasize that the organizations of a future IEP site should take up the role of “connector” and/or “facilitator” of region-wise IEP activities (i.e. a focus on an IEP *network*).

Another set of inductive research findings concerns the intertwining nature of the strategic ambitions of all organizations involved. In contrast to our initial IEP site definition, we discover that the 25 IEP site-related practices are mainly the result of (i) a coincidental joint *spatial* location or opportunity and/or (ii) a rather general or vague ambition of the local public government to jointly accommodate organizations that support “in some kind of way” an inclusive economy. As such, an explicit or deliberate ambition to spatially join strategic forces is often lacking. Let us further explain both findings. Indirectly, most organizations of the IEP site-related initiatives – and certainly the SSE-enterprises – do share a common concern for an inclusive economy. But, they have not deliberately chosen for each other and negotiated for instance a mutually reinforcing or complementary set of activities. In short, the shared location is often the result of a “coincidence”, rather than of a well-elaborated and negotiated strategic decision made by all organizations involved. Additionally, we notice that the most deliberate ambition to join forces is often made by the local urban government. But, even then this deliberate ambition is not always stipulated clearly and convincingly. As such, the actual development of joint or synergetic strategic activities is for instance seldom an explicit demand or prerequisite formulated by the local urban government when accepting or admitting social enterprises to be located at a public domain or area. When further investigating and discussing the possible causes of this coincidental characteristic, some members of the IEP-Reference-Platforms refer once again to recent neo-liberal changes within the Flemish SSE-legislation (see above): SSE-enterprises seem to consider themselves as mutual competitors or rivals, rather than as partners to be joined in a close strategic cooperation. A few members also

emphasize that “...the competition within the Flemish SSE-sector is much higher than generally assumed by outsiders” (survey respondent). Although it is not yet clear how to overcome these institutional obstructions in future IEP sites, a formal alliance agreement in which a set of joint strategic ambitions and associated actions is explicitly stipulated, could offer a “safe” starting point. Identifying joint strategic ambitions could however also be the result of a (gradual) growth strategy of the future IEP site: subsequently, alternative joint strategic ambitions can be elaborated, tried-out and evaluated. As such, a more organic approach of gradual confidence growing and commitment-building can take place.

A facilitating organizational (site)design

In relation to the organizational structure of the 25 IEP site-related practices, we have collected a rather limited amount of relevant information. In line with the principles of the grounded theory method, a second data-collection phase is therefore certainly needed. On the basis of the present data, we can however already uncover some relevant governance requirements.

In general, it becomes clear that the organizational structure of the IEP site-related practices is often poorly elaborated, if not completely missing. Presumably, and according to some members of the IEP-Reference-Platforms, this is due to the previously uncovered coincidental nature of the joint strategic ambitions “...what is not well-considered in the first place, will not have further (structural) consequences afterwards” (survey respondent). Therefore, it is for them important to elaborate an organizational network structure that facilitates the formulation and realization of joint strategic ambitions for future IEP sites. In view of the target groups involved (i.e. socially deprived urban

citizens), this network structure should primarily focus on simple, transparent and tailor-made coordination mechanisms between the services offered by all organizations involved. To realize this, particular coordination mechanisms are needed like for instance the installation of a permanent liaison platform or an “easy-accessible central information desk” (Daft, 2010; Luhman and Cunliffe, 2013). This platform then receives, informs and sends on socially vulnerable citizens to the right or most suitable organization located at the future IEP site. Additionally, and according to some members, this platform can also function as an “expert mediator” when a particular, more intense or highly tailor-made support is needed. But, in order to be successful, the platform should in any case maintain structurally embedded contacts and information exchanges with all the IEP site organizations. A network structure is not only focused on the use of coordination mechanisms, but also on installing an appropriate power distribution. When the future IEP site really wants to support and help socially deprived citizens, it might be advisable to explicitly involve them as well in the (joint) strategic decision process: What are their needed and preferred priorities, and how can these be integrated into the joint strategic ambitions of the future IEP site? As such, the ideas of an *equal* power distribution and of co-governance are suggested (Bovaird, 2005; Brandsen and Pestoff, 2006; Klijn, 2008; Kooiman, 2003; Pollitt, 2016).

When considering the specific requirements of a facilitating network structure, some information mentioned earlier in this article becomes once again relevant (see also “The awareness of institutional frameworks and – vital? – dominant partners”). On the one hand, the network structure of a future IEP site should be compatible with the different structures of each organization separately (i.e. public organizations and social enterprises). As such, some members of

the IEP-Reference-Platforms emphasize the use of a “workable”, “respectful” and (thus) acceptable network structure for all organizations involved.

This suggests the use of some kind of hybrid organization or alliance structure (Borys and Jemison, 1989; Minkoff, 2002). On the other hand, the network structure seems likely to be elaborated by the dominant public organization (see also before). When however more than one public organization is involved, additional consensus-building mechanisms are needed to unite the different network preferences into “one public voice”. Otherwise, the risk of a schizophrenic network structure arises.

Finally, particular governance requirements are also needed when a future IEP site fulfills the role of a region-wise “connector” and/or “facilitator” (see also “A site-exceeding and well-elaborated notion of joint strategic ambitions”). Such an IEP site-exceeding role clearly demands for a site-exceeding network structure. However, in what way and to what extent are organizations located outside the IEP site, structurally equal to those located on the IEP site? Should their activities be for instance equally intense coordinated by the permanent liaison platform? These organization-wise questions seem to interest and pre-occupy most members of the IEP-Reference-Platforms. But, no decisive and clear answers or reflections are yet put forward by them.

The presence of financial stability and long-term engagements

In relation to the financial construction and features of a future IEP site, we have once again collected only a limited amount of relevant information. A second data-collection phase is therefore once again needed. One important point for attention however can already be identified when analyzing the 25 IEP site-related practices. Reconsidering

the information reported on the awareness of institutional frameworks and dominant partners (see before), we concluded that SSE-enterprises seem to fulfill a vital role in future IEP sites. But, due to recent neo-liberal changes within the Flemish SSE-legislation, their future presence and (long-term) survival is however not fully guaranteed (see also before). Thus, and according to most members of the IEP-Reference-Platforms, more (additional?) stable and supportive financial governance frameworks that stimulate long-term engagements of SSE-enterprises within IEP sites should be elaborated. After all, it is in joining the right expertise, stimulating mutual learning effects and building trust that a future IEP site will survive in the long run.

The specification of relevant spatial governance requirements

After having discussed the seven uncovered requirements related to the *strategic* governance features of future IEP sites, we have also uncovered inductively four additional requirements related to the so-called *spatial* governance features. As these particular research findings have been discussed more extensively in other publications (Vallet et al., 2018; Bylemans et al., 2016; De Nys-Ketels et al., 2015), we will summarize in this article the major headlines.

An awareness of the importance of spatial qualifications

When analyzing the 25 IEP site-related practices, we notice that the spatial features of a location are seldom consciously and deliberately taken into consideration. As such, the SSE-enterprises for instance have not investigated nor evaluated all potential locations in the city before choosing a preferred one (i.e. considering how different locations can contribute to the actual

realization of their IEP ambitions). Instead, they often “make the best” out of a spatial facility offered by for instance the local urban government. Deciding whether to accept or to refuse this offer is then not so much based on spatial qualifications of the location but rather on policy-wise considerations (e.g. the urgency to support a certain target group). As the spatial qualifications can however hinder or jeopardize the accessibility for socially vulnerable citizens, triggering the spatial awareness of all organizations involved on a future IEP site becomes therefore an important challenge.

The morphological variety and fit with the spatial fabric of the city

In relation to the precise location and its features, we can inductively identify two interesting research findings.

First, we see that the spatial morphology of the 25 IEP site-related initiatives clearly covers a variety of alternative forms. Thus, we are inclined to distinguish (i) a *single-building* site (i.e. all organizations are located within one single building or premises), (ii) a *campus* site (i.e. all organizations are located within a well-defined domain or restricted area), (iii) a *neighborhood* site (i.e. all organizations are located within a particular urban neighborhood) and (iv) a *satellite* site (i.e. all organizations are located along a spatial and/or digital “track” of permanent and mobile settlements throughout the entire city). When reflecting on this variety, it is plausible that another morphological form implies other governance challenges and requirements (e.g. challenges and requirements of scale, demarcation, entries, available/absent facilities, needed investments, compatibility with other functions on the same location, ownership and exploitation). Additionally, it is advisable to elaborate alternative governance scenarios for future IEP sites that fit each of these morphological forms. This will

therefore be the subject of future, more in-depth scientific research.

Second, we find out that locations are often influenced by the specific *historical* spatial fabric of a city. As such, the 25 IEP site-related practices are for instance located within a desolated factory building, a former industrial domain, a cultural heritage site, an impoverished neighborhood or the (expanding) periphery of a growing city. For grass-rooted IEP sites, this is of course not the case. Then, also privately – individually or collectively – owned locations are used. From a governance perspective, we find it important to investigate why and how the location of a future IEP site can should or should not be explicitly embedded in the historical spatial tissue of a city? Certainly from the perspective of the public organizations involved, such an explicit choice can match particular spatial policy aspirations (e.g. the re-use of old public domains). The question is however: Does the particular location of a future IEP site fit and support the actual realization of the joint strategic ambitions of all partners involved? And, does it concern an easy-to-find and highly accessible location for socially deprived citizens?

A flexible, complex and creative spatial design

In relation to the phase-wise and historic coming into existence, the spatial lay-out and the nature of the buildings, we can inductively detect three, somehow interrelated research findings.

When considering the life-cycle of the 25 IEP site-related practices, we can first identify various growth patterns. Some patterns are rather organic or spontaneously emergent, while others deliberate and carefully planned. The pace and nature of the patterns is mainly influenced by specific societal challenges (e.g. an overall economic crises, a city-specific problem with socially deprived

citizens) and financial dispositions. The latter consists of “boosting” versus “vanishing” financial resources for the social enterprises or public organizations involved. The detected growth patterns usually consist of spatial and architectural expansions versus re-developments and even scale-downsizing of the site. When new challenges and financial opportunities arise, additional space and – new, other, redesigned – architectural constructions are needed and built. When challenges however disappear and financial threats become apparent, scale-downsizing and the dismantlement of existing spaces are inevitable. As such, the spatial lay-out and composition of future IEP sites will presumably require a (very) flexible spatial design.

When subsequently analyzing the spatial lay-out, the buildings and spaces of the 25 IEP-related practices, it becomes clear that they are the result of many spatial influences and/or choices. In view of the underestimation of special qualifications (see also before), the spatial lay-out however is often coincidental. And, in view of the morphological variety (see also before), the spatial lay-out is very diverse in nature. And, in view of the historical spatial tissue of the city (see also before), the spatial lay-out is often very city-specific. As such, the spatial lay-out, buildings and spaces of future IEP sites will presumably require a complex and tailor-made spatial design taking into account the many influences and respectively made choices.

When finally analyzing the specific nature of the buildings and spaces involved, we also detect a high variety of spatial functions (e.g. for workshops, storage, trading, training, co-working, encounter and leisure), spatial constructions (e.g. new buildings, renovated premises, connective roads, public spaces, green zones) and spatial use (e.g. defined and non-defined or “open”). In view of the earlier defined complexity of the spatial design, we therefore add an extra

complexity dimension. Various combinations of spatial functions, constructions and uses require other characteristics of the buildings and spaces involved. Thus, future IEP sites clearly require also a creative and inventive spatial design.

An open and embedded site

In relation to the façade and associated architectural identity as well as the degree of accessibility and (inter)connectedness, we can identify a last set of inspiring research findings.

When reconsidering the information on the target groups and organizations of the 25 IEP site-related practices (see before), the “open” nature of some initiatives is very apparent. As such, these initiatives are not only easy accessible for socially deprived citizens but also exclusively preserved for the direct users and suppliers located on the site. Instead, the initiatives are also accessible or open for citizens living in the nearby neighborhoods and even in the entire city. And when the role of “connector” and/or “facilitator” of region-wise SSE-initiatives is taken into consideration, the site is also accessible or open from a much wider geographical territory than that of the city. Within the 25 IEP site-related initiatives, this “open” or easy-accessible and (inter)connected nature is realized by different types of spatial interventions. Thus, there is for instance the presence of interconnecting public spaces (e.g. play gardens, sport facilities, bicycle lanes, public transportation routes) that invite neighboring citizens to visit and make use of the site. Or there are the wide entrances within the façades of the buildings that make the respective initiatives very visible and appealing. Or there are the participatory design processes, in which inhabitants of the neighborhood and/or the city are explicitly asked to co-design the entire site. Or there are the investments in regional (public) transportation infrastructure. In short, an open and embedded future IEP site clearly requires

a multitude of mutually reinforcing spatial interventions.

The interaction between strategic and spatial governance requirements

When analyzing the research findings of both explorative research projects, there is a last set of research findings that seems to be worthwhile mentioning. In particular, it concerns the way in which the *strategic* and *spatial* governance requirements do, can or should interact.

Within the 25 IEP site-related practices, we notice that most organizations involved seldom reflect on how the spatial characteristics of a location (e.g. the location, the buildings, the spaces) interact and may facilitate the realization of their IEP ambitions or vice versa. However, during the debates of the IEP-Reference-Platforms, such interactions are nonetheless perceived as very relevant, interesting and necessary for the successful installation of a future IEP site. When discussing the research results, most members suddenly become aware of the mere existence of these interactive effects (e.g. the spatial lay-out and building types can facilitate certain economic activities, the façade can influence the attraction for specific types of socially vulnerable citizens). From a governance perspective, these rather absent reflections on the interactions or synergies between the strategic and spatial governance requirements emphasize the need to explicitly trigger the spatial-strategic awareness by all organizations involved in future IEP sites. As such, it is important that all organizations look for a positive or reinforcing fit between the strategic and spatial features in a systematic and (more) conscious way. This could be seen as a last, but not unimportant governance requirement for the creation, development and exploitation of future IEP sites.

Conclusions

Within this article we have analyzed the results of two explorative research projects, in order to detect a set of relevant governance items and requirements for the creation, development and exploitation of future IEP sites in Flemish cities. This self-invented innovative solution that is inspired by the ideas of Castells is supposed to offer a (more) solid solution for the IEP of the growing amount of socially deprived urban citizens. In particular, it solves the problem of spatial thresholds due to the geographically dispersed nature of these practices. As such, the installation of an IEP site may become a key issue within the local economy policy of Flemish public organizations and social enterprises.

As far as the governance of future IEP sites is concerned, we have inductively discovered seven *strategic* and four *spatial* governance requirements or considerations. Additionally, we also discovered one strategic–spatial *interaction* governance requirement. When considering the further elaboration of this work “under construction”, we want to emphasize three future research challenges.

The first challenge concerns the further theoretical embedding of our IEP site initiative and the inductively identified governance features. According to the principles of grounded theory, such an ex-post or intermediate literature study can be quite inspiring for the future inductive developments. As suggested throughout the article, this embedding clearly relates to various themes and disciplines. Thus, references can for instance be made to the theme-related literature on network structures, hybrid organizational constructions, co-governance, stakeholder management and architectural design (see before). Or references can also be made to the disciplines of organization theory, public management, architecture and urban planning.

A second challenge concerns the additional and more in-depth analysis of data already collected. As mentioned during the presentation of some research results (see also before), we uncovered interesting *first* findings that however need to be elaborated more profoundly in order to specify their precise meaning and implications. As such, it is for instance recommendable to re-analyze the information on the suggested alternative types of IEP sites. Within the tradition of grounded theory, such an inspiring re-analysis of already collected data is quite common.

A third and last challenge concerns the actual practical use and relevance of the generated insights. Thus, the identification of practical guidelines as well as alternative scenarios to integrate the IEP site concept into the local economy policy of public organizations and social enterprises is also important. After all, our final goal is to generate a coherent set of IEP site governance items and requirements that support public organizations and social enterprises in their policy-wise ambition to obtain a more IEP within their cities by means of this innovative IEP site practice.

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Notes

1. One to three interviews with mainly management representatives or directors of the SSE-enterprises.

2. Most partners of IEP site-related initiatives define socially deprived urban citizens by means of the official criteria used by the Public Employment Service of Flanders (in Dutch: VDAB). In particular, it concerns the criteria: nationality/language (i.e. non-native), education level (i.e. low skilled), physical/mental work ability (i.e. limited and/or absent) and age (i.e. older than 50) (<http://partners.vdab.be/kansengroepen.shtml> and <http://www.vdab.be/english>).
3. A variety of categories is used amongst which (i) mentally and physically disabled citizens, (ii) non-native and low-skilled young citizens, (iii) impoverished or poor senior citizens and (iv) non-native unemployed women.
4. An idea that has been suggested in particular when it comes to the re-integration of ex-convicts as a particular type of socially deprived citizens.
5. For some “new” profiles of socially deprived urban citizens, it is a taboo to openly recognize their deteriorated socio-economic position within society.
6. Specified within the so-called Flemish “Maatwerk” decree approved by the Flemish government in 2013 but temporarily suspended since February 2016 by the Belgian Council of State (<http://www.werk.be/online-diensten/tewerkstelling-en-sociale-economie/schorsing-maatwerk>).

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