

## ***An introduction to MAP-it and its uses for a public space context.***

**MAP-it is a participatory mapping method that enables designers to moderate design processes through workshops with diverse participants. It is a low-tech and accessible toolkit that facilitates exchanges and disagreements in a playful but structured manner. MAP-it can contribute in interesting ways to engaging citizens, policy makers, private partners or other participants to participate in public space issues and finding solutions for them.**

The MAP-it method is adaptable and can be used for a wide range of aims and contexts, making it suitable for complex spatial situations in public space. It works as follows: guided by a well-defined (game) scenario, the participants – supported by a moderator – try to answer a question by (re)positioning stickers on a background map. During a mapping, participants (re)move and add components to the map in the form of stickers which are pre-printed with objects (e.g. street signs) or people (e.g. inhabitants of a certain neighbourhood) or are left blank. MAP-it also includes so-called ‘risk-stickers’ (e.g. “bombs” or “locks”) that playfully introduce friction and push people to share their opinions and give feedback to others, as they see it as a game-element (Schepers, Huybrechts & Dreessen, 2011) (see: Figure 1). MAP-it organisers start a session with a research question grounded on their knowledge of the specific spatial and social situation of their area of interest. With this question as a starting point, a custom scenario and icons can be designed or adapted from the collection on the MAP-it website ([www.MAP-it.be](http://www.MAP-it.be)).

### MAP-it in a public space context

Over the last few years, MAP-it has been used in a variety of public space projects with different types of goals and participants. Some examples:

- 1. Research in support of policy making.** In 2011, a team of 25 students conducted over 100 small MAP-it sessions in cafés and bus stops spread over the territory of the municipality of Ixelles/Elsene (Brussels). Citizens and passers-by created maps on the cultural life in the area, giving feedback on the current situation as well as generating ideas for improving it. The maps helped the municipality to formulate a long-term plan on cultural policy. A similar project, in collaboration with JES (Jeugd en Stad), was a series of mapping sessions with 9-12 year old children of the municipalities of Forest and Sint-Gilles, Brussels (Figure 2 & 3). The children used MAP-it stickers to express their use of the city: their social relations, their routes and their play-behaviour. This made the municipalities more conscious about a fragile and often forgotten age group.
- 2. Exploring design strategies.** The collective ‘Les États Généraux de l'Eau à Bruxelles’ organized a MAP-it session to redesign the Leopold park (Brussels) around the concept of ‘new city rivers’, aimed to make the water management ecological and the area more liveable. An extensive set of stickers was designed that visualized the core elements of the ‘new city river’-approach,

making the specialist hydrological knowledge accessible to both specialist and non-specialist participants.

**3. Bottom-up citizen participation.** A series of mappings took place in the context of sustainable community development work in the European Quarter in Brussels, organised by the urban interventions network 'CityMine(d)'. The mapping, in which international artists, architects, urbanists and neighbourhood organisations took part, focussed on exchanging ideas on how cities can benefit from bottom-up actions (Dreessen, Huybrechts, Laureyssens, Schepers & Baciú, 2011). The three groups of participants used 'traffic light' (risk-)stickers to indicate - on a map of the area - the places they liked, disliked and the ones that pose threats or offer opportunities. They defined points for improvement and discussed new, possible projects. The mapping particularly showed that participants experienced the European Parliament as being disconnected from the neighbourhood on a social, functional and aesthetic level. To draw conclusions from the three resulting maps, a summary map (see: Figure 4) was created that could be shared with third parties that might be interesting to realise some of the ideas generated in the mappings. This summary map served as the background map in a second mapping (see: Figure 5). In this second workshop, local artistic, social and governmental actors explored the realisation of some of the project ideas and collaborations (raised in the first mapping) by commenting, critiquing and adding elements to the map. Several participants continued to develop the mapped projects as 'Projet/participation Urbain/urgent Maalbeek' by using the maps to open up dialogue with local governments, making MAP-it a sustainable driver of action and creativity in the neighbourhood.

### MAP-it's three dynamics

The case studies show that MAP-it has an added value for discussing public space issues. The potential of MAP-it is especially demonstrated in its three, connected dynamic layers. A first layer entails the way the method allows participants to exchange about aspects that are difficult to address in a verbal manner: it **visualizes** complex public space issues through a common language. To provide participants with sufficient agency in the process of mapping, a second layer involves MAP-it's low-tech, cut-and-paste character that allows participants to **'redesign'** this language and the ideas expressed with it. Finally, in a third layer, the method facilitates **sharing** the ideas that are generated during the mapping with third parties not involved in the mapping, such as policy makers, via making "easy to read" summary maps (Figure 7).

### Links/references

Dreessen, K., Huybrechts, L., Laureyssens, T., Schepers, S. (2011). *MAP-it. A participatory mapping toolkit*. Cahiers FAK, 3. Leuven: Acco.

Huybrechts, L., Dreessen, K., Schepers, S. (2012). Mapping design practices: on risk, hybridity and participation. *Proceedings of the 12th Participatory Design Conference: Vol. 2* (12). Participatory Design Conference. Roskilde, 12-16 August 2012 (pp. 29-32). Danvers, MA: ACM.

<http://www.map-it.be>

### **Images**

*NOTES TO LAYOUT/DESIGN: the maps can be cropped if needed: when they are too small they are no longer legible.*

Figure 1: A map of the MAP-it European Quarter sessions with ‘risk-stickers’

Figure 2 + 3: Mapping social relations and play with young stakeholders on location.

Figure 4: A summary map of the MAP-it European Quarter sessions.

Figure 5: MAP-it session in the European Quarter: mapping using a summary map.

Figure 6: The three MAP-it dynamics

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