

The Research Group  
Cosmopolis Centre Urban Research

has the honor to invite you to the public defense of the PhD thesis of

## Maëlys Waiengnier

to obtain the degree of Doctor of Sciences  
Joint PhD with Université Libre de Bruxelles

Title of the PhD thesis:

**The shifting metropolitan geographies of advanced producer services: agglomeration processes, professional networks and corporate restructuring in world city Brussels**

Promotor:

**Prof. dr. David Bassens**

**Prof. dr. Gilles Van Hamme**

The defense will take place on

**Tuesday, February 2, 2021 at 3pm**

The defense can be followed via a Teams meeting on <https://bit.ly/3bAGYww>

### Members of the jury

Prof. dr. Mathieu Van Crielingen (ULB, chair)

Dr. Mariana Santos (VUB, secretary)

Prof. dr. Ben Derudder (UGent)

Prof. dr. Sabine Dörry (Luxembourg Inst. of Socio-Economic Research & University of Luxembourg)

### Curriculum vitae

Maëlys Waiengnier studied a BA in Geography at Université Libre de Bruxelles and a MA in Urban Studies, joint programme of Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Universität Wien, Københavns Universitet, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid and Universidad Complutense de Madrid. Her doctoral thesis was carried out in the framework of the four-year collective applied research project ULB-VUB “Service Brussels” sponsored by Innoviris, the Brussels Capital Region research funding institute.

### Abstract of the PhD research

Advanced producer services (APS) in the fields of accountancy, advertising, finance, legal services and management consultancy, as well as information technology help their clients to develop financial accumulation strategies and ensure the coordination and governance of global production networks in world cities. While global networks have been richly documented by research on world cities, this thesis attempts to understand the less studied processes that structure the geography of APS in world city Brussels. To do so, I re-examine two assumptions that are understudied and remain implicit. On the one hand, it is supposed that APS firms agglomerate and constitute strong collaborative networks of APS firms within cities, an APS complex. On the other hand, whereas global networks of APS firms have been thoroughly documented, the command and control role attributed to world cities often remains assumed to directly stem from these networks. The thesis develops three types of analyses applied to the case of Brussels, a city whose internationalisation is based on its political function and its strong insertion in the APS networks: a geographical analysis of APS agglomeration processes, a survey among APS professionals to characterise the interactions within and between sectors, and a case-study on the role of APS in bank restructuring processes. These analyses bring me to argue that the notion of an APS complex should be nuanced with the idea that finance functions as the central element in the relations between APS with auxiliary sectors around finance. As this explanation does not fully illuminate the notion of control and command of the economy, I recommend taking into account the constant search for profitability which puts pressure on the organisation of companies. I therefore plead for a better articulation between the global APS networks and financialised capitalism. To conclude, I discuss how Brussels occupies an intermediate position in the international division of labour and that this role is increasingly limited to the coordination of the national market alone.