

Des chambres dans la ville dense



the post-garages district of Heyvaert in Brussels

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Abstract

ENG

In the ‘small global city’ of Brussels, the working-class neighbourhoods located in the so-called ‘poor crescent’ along the Charleroi Canal have been the subject of transformation plans and real estate pressure for several years.

The Heyvaert district in Cureghem (located halfway between the municipality of Molenbeek St. Jean and Anderlecht, on the immediate western outskirts of the city centre) is being been and is going to be in the next future deeply involved in this kind of dynamics. Known in Brussels as the ‘garages district’, it has for years represented an economic cluster hosting an intense buying and selling of used vehicles mainly destined for the African continent. Given an (albeit gradual) relocation of the garage business (as well as an intrinsic decline

of the business itself), several lots in Heyvaert would soon be available for new real estate developments and public projects. Although the proposed plan for the area proposes a general vision of quality, some of the suggested transformations seem to have a significant impact on the existing fabric, which to date is deeply fragmented, discontinuous, and opaque.

Starting precisely from a critical reading of the current plan, seeking to exploit its general qualities while at the same time making modifications, especially from a typological point of view, this thesis proposes a series of three site-specific proposals that aim to safeguard the quality of spaces through design.

IT

All’interno della “piccola città globale” di Bruxelles, i quartieri popolari (un tempo quartieri operai) situati nella cosiddetta “mezzaluna povera” lungo il Canale Charleroi sono da diversi anni oggetto di piani di trasformazione e pressione immobiliare. Il quartiere Heyvaert a Cureghem (situato a metà tra la municipalità di Molenbeek St. Jean e Anderlecht, nell’immediata periferia occidentale del centro storico) è stato e sarà in modo particolare estremamente coinvolto in questo tipo di dinamica. Conosciuto a Bruxelles come il “quartiere dei garages”, rappresenta da anni un cluster economico che ospita un’intensa attività di compravendita di veicoli usati diretti principalmente verso il continente africano. Nell’ottica di un trasferimento (seppur graduale) dell’attività legata ai garages (nonchè

di un declino intrinseco dell’attività stessa), numerosi lotti ad Heyvaert risulterebbero a breve disponibili per la realizzazione di nuovi sviluppi immobiliari e progetti pubblici.

Sebbene il piano proposto per l’area proponga una visione generale di qualità, alcune delle trasformazioni suggerite sembrano avere un impatto significativo sul tessuto esistente, ad oggi profondamente frammentato, discontinuo, opaco.

Partendo proprio da una lettura critica del piano attuale, cercando di sfruttarne le qualità generali andando al tempo stesso ad effettuare delle modifiche, soprattutto da un punto di vista tipologico, questa tesi propone una serie di tre proposte site-specific che si pongono come obiettivo quello di salvaguardare la qualità degli spazi attraverso il progetto.

Introduction

Brussels is a small global city (Vandermotten, 2014). ‘Small’ because of its size, which is modest compared to other global cities, and because of its actual weight in the global economy. Its ‘global’ dimension derives above all from its political role at the international level and the economical repercussions of this role, as well as the great diversity of its population, which makes Brussels one of the most historically multicultural metropolises in Europe. Like many other big cities, the Belgian capital is both a great generator of wealth and a reservoir of poverty and unemployment. Brussels socio-economic divide is spatially expressed at different levels and scales.

The first chapter of this thesis examines the socio-spatial fracture that can be observed at the scale of the metropolis but also at the scale of the single municipalities. While Brussels has a very high concentration of power related to national, transnational institutions and companies, the economically disadvantaged population seem to be concentrated in certain areas of the city. This is not an uncommon phenomenon for a metropolis, which in many cases has led to the social stigmatisation of certain neighbourhoods over the years, particularly within what is referred to as the “poor crescent”, which largely corresponds to the former working-class neighbourhoods along the Charleroi Canal.

The second chapter provides a narrative on the state of the art of a portion of the city having the Canal as its axis. In particular, the neighbourhoods of Old Molenbeek and Cureghem, located on the immediate western outskirts of the city centre, are today - in spite of numerous recent and ongoing transformations - among the poorest and most unemployed areas, so that they have been defined as spaces of social relegation (Rosenfeld, 2015). A key characteristic of these neighbourhoods is the high concentration of an architectural heritage that testifies to the industrial character of this part of the city (in fact, it was called ‘the little Belgian Manchester’). In addition to the monumental complexes, most of which have undergone reconversion in recent years, there is a wealth of more modest architecture (warehou-

ses, sheds, workshops) integrated into the blocks (sometimes visible, sometimes hidden within them), some of which are now empty, while others still house small manufacturing activities. The latter benefit from a combination of three factors: the low price of devalued land, the central location and the diversity of building surfaces, which are generally located in the heart of a block on originally wide and deep lots (Le Fort, 2017).

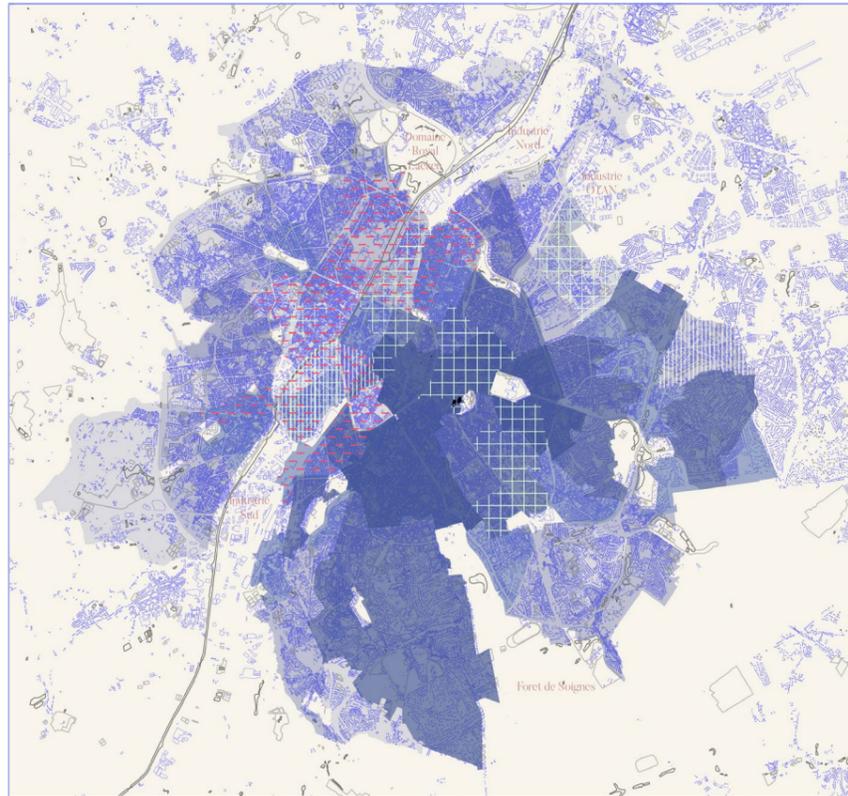
As the third chapter shows, in recent years, the Canal area has been looked at as decisive development capital for the region, to meet the need for new housing and the challenge of revitalising a manufacturing-type economy within the metropolitan area. The high availability of a ‘small industrial legacy’ characterised by the factors listed above attracted both public and private urban renewal actors, who saw these plots as project opportunities within the poor crescent of Brussels. Numerous plots have thus been the subject of densifying transformations, with a certain amount of real estate speculation. In order to cope with this kind of speculation and to ensure certain accessibility to housing, the public sector (both the municipalities and the Region) implemented regulatory measures within the so-called strategic areas.

The fourth chapter focus on one of the strategic and most under pressure areas is the Heyvaert district in Cureghem, mainly known as the ‘garages district’. This is an area that is home to a particular business activity, which consists of the buying and selling of second-hand vehicles mainly destined for countries on the African continent. The numerous industrial buildings (of various sizes, preservation and historical interest) in this area are in fact mainly used as garages. Anticipating, on the one hand, a willingness on the part of the authorities to relocate this trade and, on the other hand, an intrinsic decline of the business itself, the region has proposed a transformation plan for the area, whose main objectives are the creation of housing (densification), the transition to a different type of economy, and the partial de-densification of certain blocks. While the plan aims to set certain limits to avoid real estate speculation, several questions remain open

and a wide margin of freedom is granted to those who will develop future individual projects within the area. One pillar of the transformation is the creation of a linear park following the old course of the river Senne, which once flowed through blocks. The plan recognises the presence of built heritage of great quality that is today undervalued and often threatened by demolition and reconstruction projects.

A critical reading of the master plan proposed by the region provides the starting point for the development of the fifth chapter and the final part of the thesis. Although schematic, the vision proposed by the plan appears quite clear: the neighbourhood is painted, almost re-shaped with a new face, profoundly characterised by attributes such as transparency, homogeneity and restraint of both built surfaces and open spaces. The translation of this vision into practice entails a rather heavy transformation of the existing fabric, characterised by almost opposite attributes: it is in fact deeply fragmented, discontinuous, and uneven. Through the identification of some small clusters of edifices with the function of a garage (or connected to it), three design proposals are developed that imagine an alternative vision, while providing a greater degree of detail than the masterplan scheme.





1.

Bruxelles, Brussel, Brussels

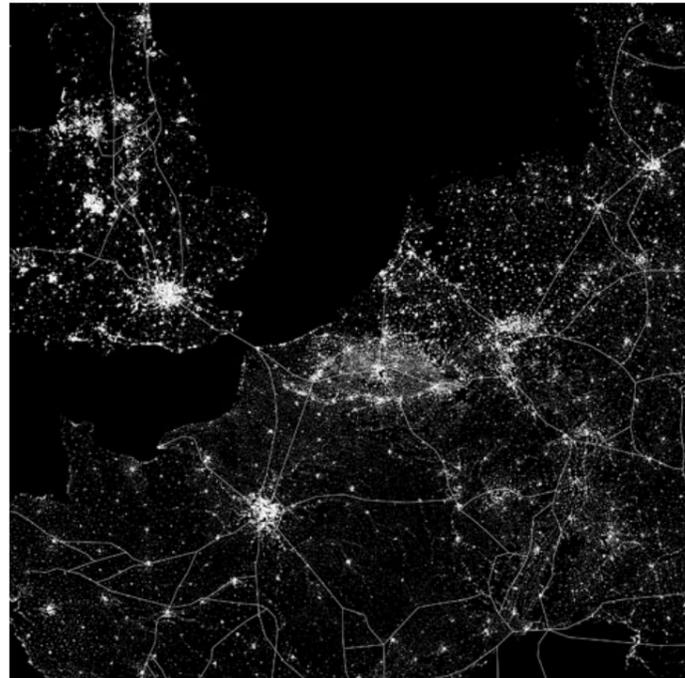
**international city, multicultural city,
divided city**

«Brussels and her conflict situations are the spitting image of Europe»

Secchi B., 2011

Nestled in the Flemish region and three kilometres distant from the Walloon border in a bird's eye view, Brussels¹ is a bilingual metropolis-region that could be described as «a compact city in a diffuse network», a «small global city» (51n4e et al., 2011). The city is part of a large network of cities, both at a national and at an international level. Its role on the international scene, its very diverse population, and an economy that is largely oriented towards the international arena are all features that needs to be considered and analysed within the framework of this network dynamic (Prdd, 2018).

The development of the Region follows in many ways the evolution of the major metropolises. These metropolises are at the heart of a market economy characterised by the increasing mobility of capital, ideas and people. They are also the receptacle of the tensions of contemporary societies marked by pressure on the environment and on social cohesion when the wealth produced by cities is accompanied by high unemployment or social difficulties (Picqué, 2011).



¹ Brussels can have different designations. BCR (Region Bruxelles Capitale) is one of the three regions of federal Belgium, which is made up of nineteen municipalities. Often it is considered as “Brussels” the whole metropolitan area that develops in the Region outskirts, which also corresponds to Brussels pool of employment. Although this area is technically outside the region border and belonging to the regions of Flemish and Walloon Brabant, «in evidence, the metropolitan body of Brussels is way broader than the political-administrative limits of the region» (Vandermotten, 2014). Brussels (*ville de Bruxelles*) is also one of the municipalities of the Region, notably the most ancient one. The thesis will always refer to Brussels in the first of its designation, unless differently specified.

Due to the presence of the European institutions, the NATO and its major position in global networks, «Brussels appears as a global city, but a small, partial and atypical global city» (Vandermotten, 2014). Its position is maybe comparable to Washington: very strong in political terms, but more modest in terms of the direction of the global economy (Hermia & Vandermotten, 2015) if compared to major cities such as Paris or London. Its “atypicality” as a global city² is therefore based on its major role as a mediator between politics and economy, and the fact that its importance is not really linked to a role of economic headquarter, but more to its European and international role (Vandermotten, 2014).

One of the main sectors of the region's urban economy is indeed the one related to decision-making and supervision roles, which includes all the national and international authorities and companies headquarters and the whole network of activities surrounding the fields of finance, legal services and marketing. Other major sectors are the cultural and creative sector, the tourism sector (both leisure and business-related) and the service sector, which is extremely dominant in Brussels economy, consisting in 91% of total employment in 2020 (European Commission, 2020). According to the European Commission data, public administration, healthcare and social work, teaching, commerce, and clerical and support services sectors together account for 49.9% of paid employment in Brussels. Additionally, the presence of international institutions, especially those of the European Union, attracts a large number of businesses providing support services for those institutions. In 2019, the presence of international institutions in Brussels was estimated to provide for 23.2% of total employment in the region and with around 15% of its GDP, directly and indirectly (Hermia & Vandermotten, 2015).

The very high degree of internationalisation of the Brussels economy is linked with the particular intensity of the deindustrialisation process of a city that was a pioneer in urban manufacturing during Industrial Revolution. Indeed, it appears among the biggest European cities whose economy is less linked to the industrial sector (in 2018, BCR manufacturing industry accounted for only 3% of employment, and the share of value added from industry was 3%, which is very low compared to other large Belgian cities).

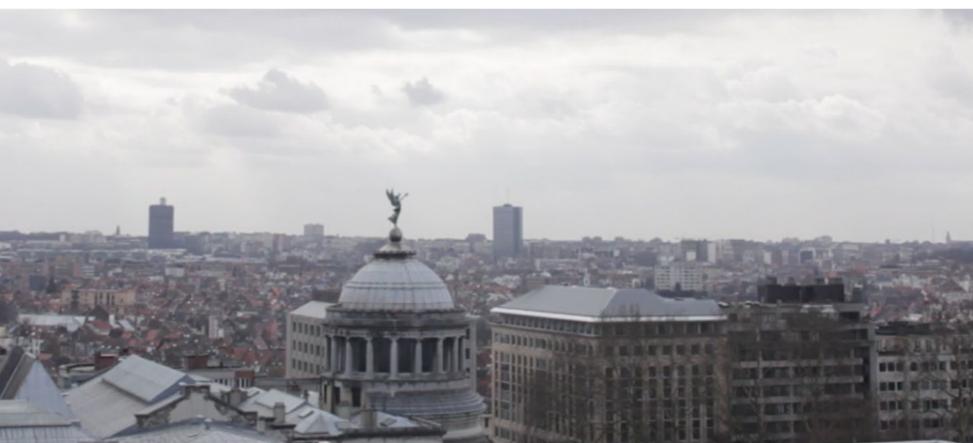
^
Studio Associato Bernardo
Secchi Paola Viganò, Bruxelles
2040 (2010-2011)

² A global city can be defined as “an urban centre that enjoys significant competitive advantages and that serves as a hub within a globalized economic system (Sassen, 2005)



Views over the North District.

The district, which covers the area between Willebroek Quay, the railways along the Gare du Nord and the north perimeter of the inner city. It consists of a concentrated collection of high-rise buildings where many Belgian and multinational companies have their headquarters.



- From the top to the bottom:*
1. Place du Luxembourg, European district
 2. Offices, European district
 3. View from above the Justice Palace

All the frames come from the videos:
 Jo Ackermans and Robin Ramaekers,
Brussels 2040. Three visions for a metropolis//51n4e, Studio 012, KCAP, 2012





*Industrial “leftover” on Tour and Taxis site,
Quartier Maritime (Molenbeek-St-Jean)*



*Ceres beer production site in Haren, a
municipality in northern Brussels.*

All the frames come from the videos:
Jo Ackermans and Robin Ramaekers,
*Brussels 2040. Three visions for a metropo-
lis/51n4e*, Studio 012, KCAP, 2012

Multicultural city

The Brussels Region is an international city-region, with a significant proportion of foreign people. In 2020, around 35% of people living in Brussels did not have a Belgian nationality (IBSA, 2020)⁵, and only 33% of Belgian people were born Belgian, which means that a significant number of Brussels residents swapped their nationality of origin for the Belgian one.

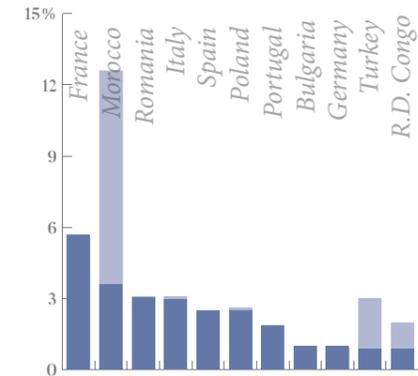
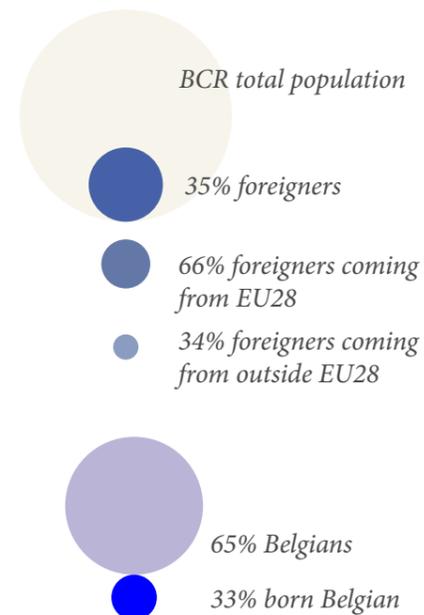
The majority of these foreigners⁶ (66%) are coming from the 28 countries that are members of the European Union. In 11% of the Region districts the presence of non-Belgian Europeans is more than 35%, with a maximum of 58% in the European district.

The intensity of the process of demographic growth that characterised Brussels Capital Region in the last twenty years was mostly determined by international migration (Hermia, 2018). Thus, together with this general increase of the BCR population, the twenty years from 2000 to 2020 have also seen a 25% increase in the numbers of immigra-

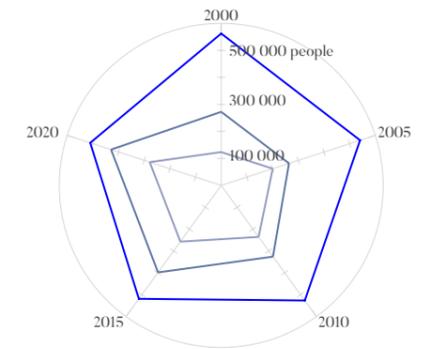
tion in the capital city, especially in the number of those immigrants coming from countries belonging to the EU, contributing to giving Brussels a more and more marked European identity (Delwit et al., 2007). This increasingly significant presence of European nationals in Brussels since the beginning of the 2000s can be seen as the result of the high level of immigration from the new member states (i.e. Poland, Romania, Bulgaria), the continued growth in the number of French nationals and the resumption of emigration in the countries of southern Europe as of 2008 (Casier, 2019; Pion, 2016). On the other hand, the migrant crisis of 2015 has undoubtedly contributed to the increase in the arrival of extra-European people to the Belgian capital.

⁵ The data from IBSA concerns the legal population, i.e. individuals who are legally domiciled with their municipal administration. Thus, undocumented migrants, some components of the European presence (such as diplomats) and, more generally, non-domiciled individuals (i.e. students and temporary workers) are not included in the statistics, leading to an underestimation of the actual foreign presence in the official figures.

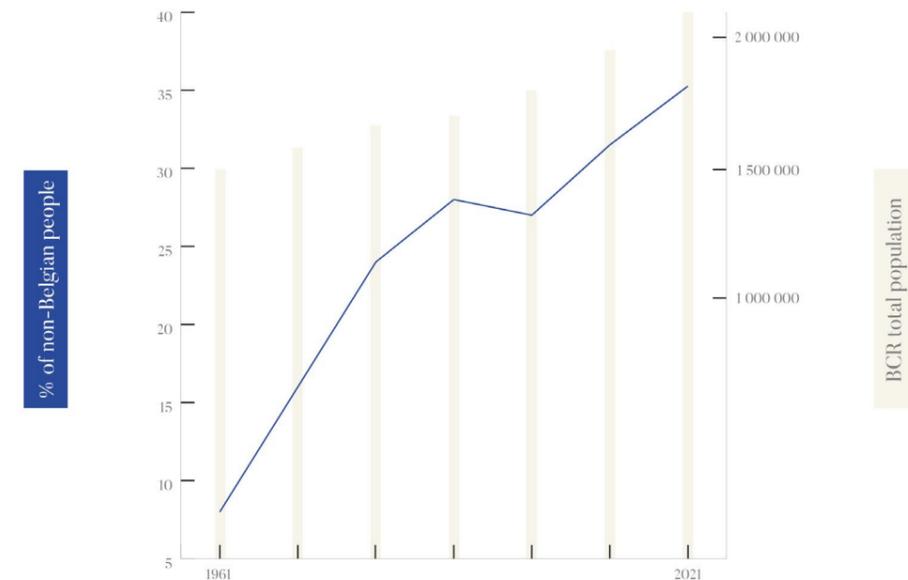
⁶ The National Register considers any person who doesn't have Belgian nationality as foreign, while residents who have Belgian nationality and another nationality are considered as Belgians (IBSA, 2017)



BCR foreign population, the most common nationalities. The lighter colour represents the percentage of foreigners who acquired Belgian nationality.



Evolution (2000-2020) of the numbers of foreigners who kept their nationality of origin vs. the ones who became Belgian, compared to the Belgian born population.



Evolution in the numbers of non-Belgian people in Brussels from 1961 to 2021 (in blue), in relation to the general increase of the Region's population in the same period.

It is widely known that during the Sixties and the Seventies the immigration of a large numbers of foreign minorities brought a significant evolution in the social geography of major West European cities. Brussels mirrors pretty well this phenomenon, however what distinguish the Belgian capital from other major cities is the nature of its multiculturalism, which can be defined as the outcome of a double movement.

On the one hand, the foreign presence is mainly represented by Mediterranean (Moroccans, Italians, Spanish, Turks, Greeks) “guest workers” and their descendants (De Lannoy & De Corte, 2000). Immigration from these countries was originally rather organised⁷ (Vandermotten, 2014), becoming later a more spontaneous phenomenon.

Today, migrants mostly arrive in a scattered order, sometimes using ethnic networks, sometimes illegal, unregulated or temporary (which contributes to underestimating the size of the Brussels population and its growth) and with much more diversified origins. Due to the acquisition of the Belgian nationality by many people with foreign origins, especially Turkish and Moroccans, the statistics concerning the more common



Place Communale de Molenbeek & rue du Prado.
“The Moroccan Heart of Brussels”

nationalities in Brussels correspond less and less to the perceived ethnic and cultural diversity of Brussels⁸ (Delwit et al., 2007). Some areas might indeed be perceived as “foreign minorities centres”. They are usually characterised the high visibility of certain ethnic groups and by the presence of a concentration of many ethnic shops, restaurants and services. These businesses are usually run by members of the community (ethnic entrepreneurs). Two very well known examples are Old Molenbeek,

⁸ According to IBSA, in 2015 only 3.3% of Brussels population had a Moroccan nationality, while 12,8% of the population has a Belgian nationality but was born Moroccan, which means that around three quarters of Moroccan origin people were naturalised as Belgians. More than half of Congolese origin people acquired the Belgian nationality as well.



Young Moroccans in the 80s.
Unknown author, Zoulika Atarhouch et Khalid Zian devant le local du Regroupement démocratique marocain, en 1982, in “1976-1986 : La Jeunesse maghrébine à Bruxelles” (2021).



Matongé, Ixelles. “The African Heart of Brussels”

⁷ An example of “organised migration movements” can be found in the arrivals of many Moroccan people in the Sixties. They were directly integrated in the labour market, as in the STIB case. Another example is the immigration of Turkish and Italian people to the coal mines in Wallonia and Limbourg region, who migrated to Brussels later on.

associated respectively with Moroccan community⁹ and Matongé, an area of Ixelles, which is deeply associated with Congolese and other sub-Saharan African countries¹⁰. The existence of small scale spatial segregation patterns in the city will be examined further on.

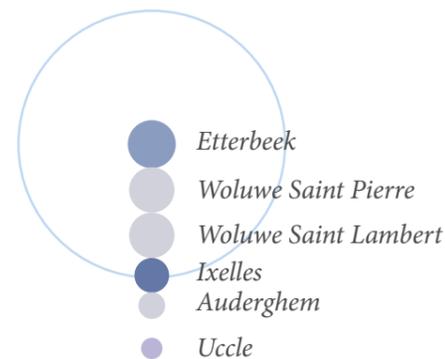
Brussels cultural diversity does not only take into account the presence of the many immigrant workers from poorer countries and their descendants.

The settlement of NATO in 1967 and of European Institutions and international firms later contributed to the arrival of other foreigners, often highly qualified, who mostly define themselves as expats. Over the years, each expansion of the European Union has seen high-skilled people from the new member countries arriving in Brussels and mostly settling in the well-heeled districts of the east and south-east of the city and in its periphery. The “classical” geography of European presence in Brussels has slightly evolved with the increase in immigration from the newest EU members countries. This process brought a

significant increase in the number of Europeans (mostly Polish, Romanian and Bulgarian) in the western working class districts, thus creating “new fronts of the European presence” in Brussels (Casier, 2019). In some cases, the tendency of European compatriots to concentrate in the same area is the same as noticed for extra-EU population, while in other cases other populations tend to be more diffuse.

The difference of designation between immigrants and expats could show a certain social distance and socio-spatial division that can be observed in the urban space and will be examined in the following pages.

Where do the European institutions workers live?

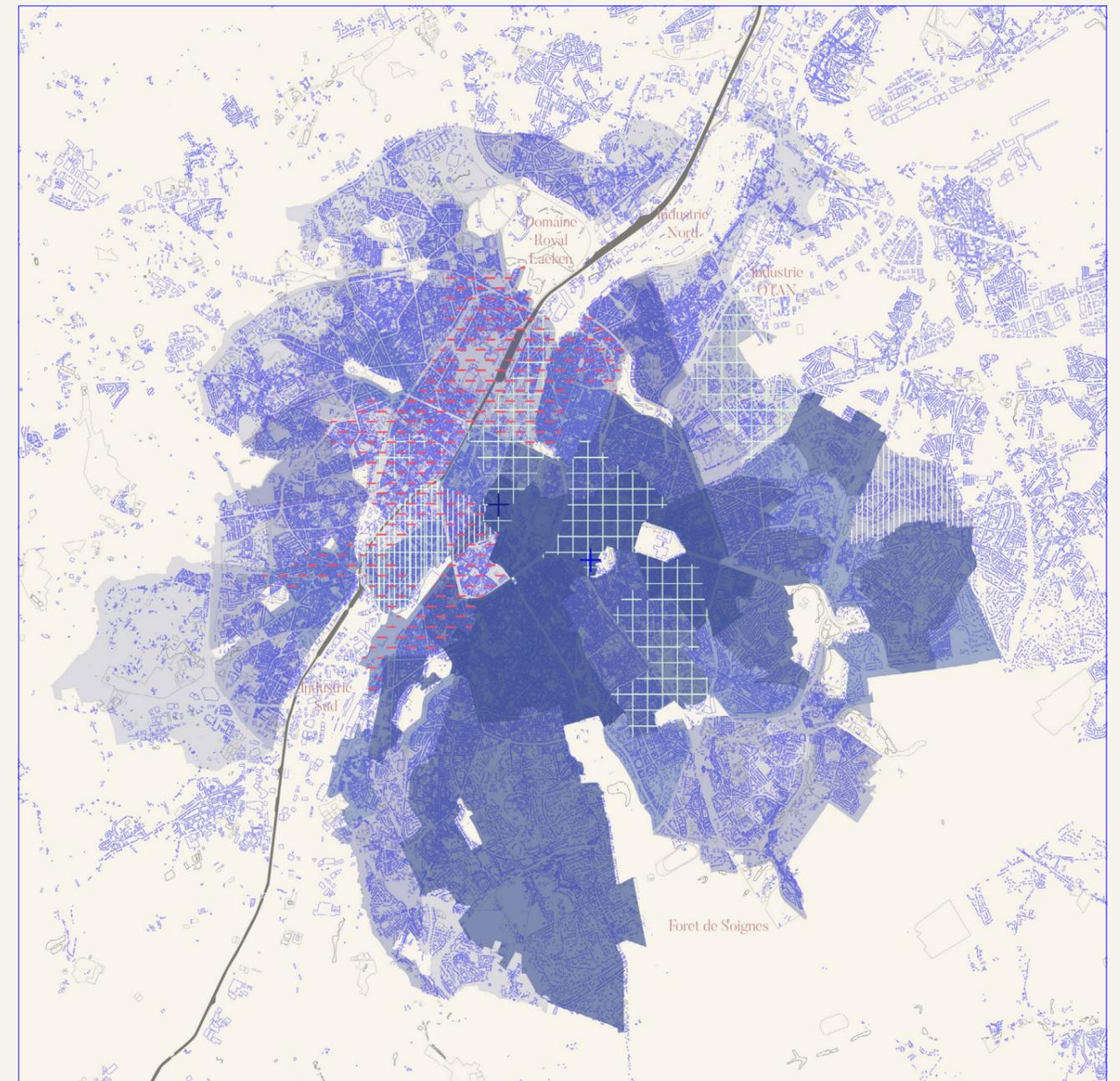


The colour of the circles is related to the median taxable income per municipality (see colour legend page x).

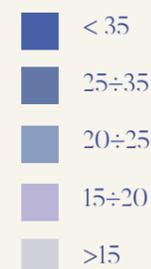
9 Although many have acquired Belgian citizenship in the last twenty years, the presence of North African nationalities in all the districts of Old Molenbeek (i.e. eastern side of the municipality) goes beyond the 7%.

10 Most of Congolese people in Brussels live in St.Josse and Molenbeek, especially in Cureghem area, but for many of them Matongé was the first stop when they first arrived in Belgium. It is important to note that a large number of Congolese living in Matongé now have a Belgian citizenship.

European city, multicultural city



European (28) population (%)



North-african population (%)



+ Grand Place

+ European Parliament

Source: Monitoring des quartiers

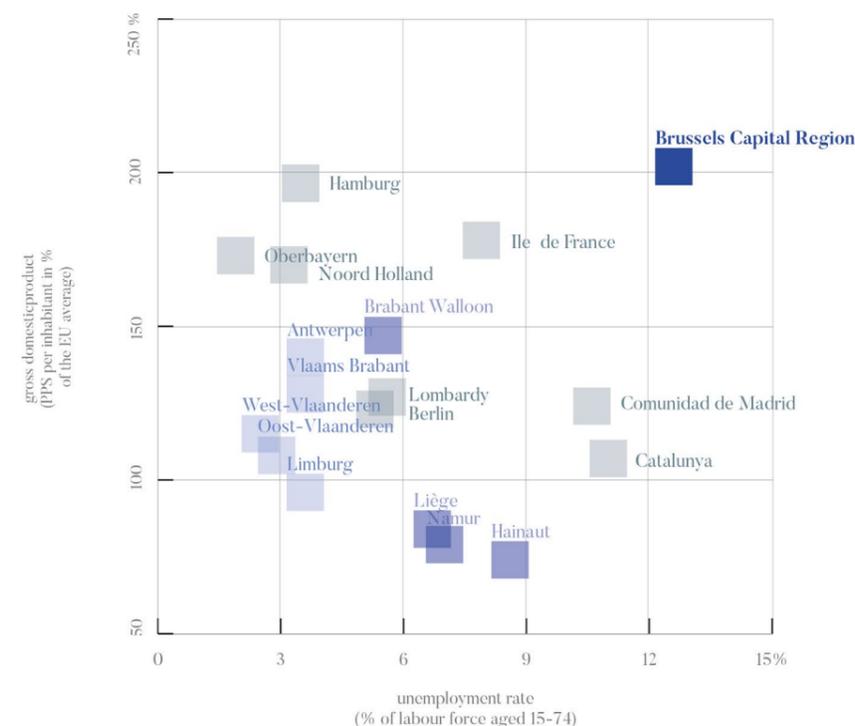
Divided city

As a metropolitan area, Brussels Capital Region is today one of the richest in Europe in terms of GDP³, beside being Belgium's richest area. If the production of wealth in the BCR is high, the inhabitants are relatively poorer than the other Belgian regions, with a large number of inhabitants living on low incomes. In the Brussels Region, the at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate lies between 35% and 42%, which is significantly higher than in the other two regions (where it is between 12% and 15% in Flanders and between 23% and 30% in Wallonia). In particular, over the last ten years one third of Brussels inhabitants have lived on an income below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold (Observatoire de la santé et du social Bruxelles, 2019), without considering the "hidden poor"⁴.

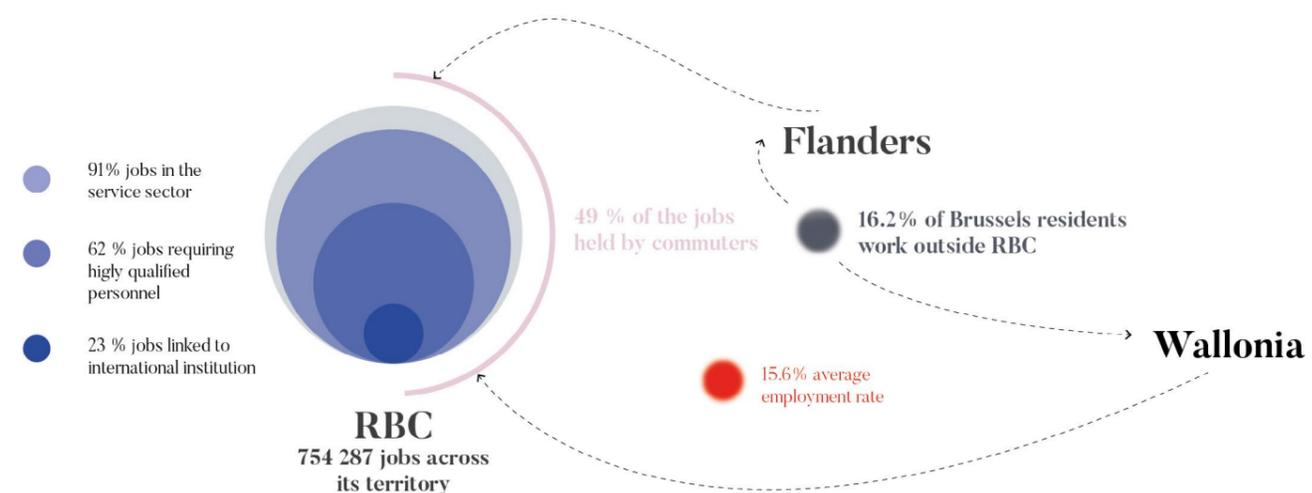
Brussels is also Belgium's largest employment area, but paradoxically it is characterised by a high rate of unemployment, especially among young and low-skilled people. The unemployment rate in the BCR is higher than the two other Belgian regions (in 2021, the registered unemployment rate in the region was 11.8%, compared to 4% in the Flanders and 8.5% in Wallonia), than the Belgian average (6.2%) and also higher than the European average (6.7%)(Statbel, 2019). These paradoxes are partly explained by the high proportion of commuters. Half of the jobs in the Brussels Region, which contribute to the Brussels GDP, are occupied by workers who live in the other two regions of the country (European Commission, 2020). Moreover, most of the jobs require a certain level of qualification (Van Hamme et al., 2011) and/or language skills (most of the time bilingualism or even trilingualism are required). Thus, low-skilled and low-qualified Brussels residents job seekers have greater difficulty finding a job, in particular if their knowledge of languages is limited.

³ According to the data provided by Eurostat concerning the "Gross domestic product (GDP) at current market prices by metropolitan regions", the BCR gross domestic product in 2018 was 142 billion euros. Thus, the BCR was ranked as the richest metropolitan area in Europe, after Paris Metropolitan Area, Madrid Metropolitan Area, Milan Metropolitan Area, Munich Metropolitan Region, Berlin Metropolitan Region, Amsterdam Metropolitan Area, Barcelona Metropolitan Area, the Ruhr area, Rome Metropolitan Area, Hamburg Metropolitan Region, Dublin Metropolitan Area, Stuttgart Region, Frankfurt/Rhine-Main, and Stockholm Metropolitan Area.

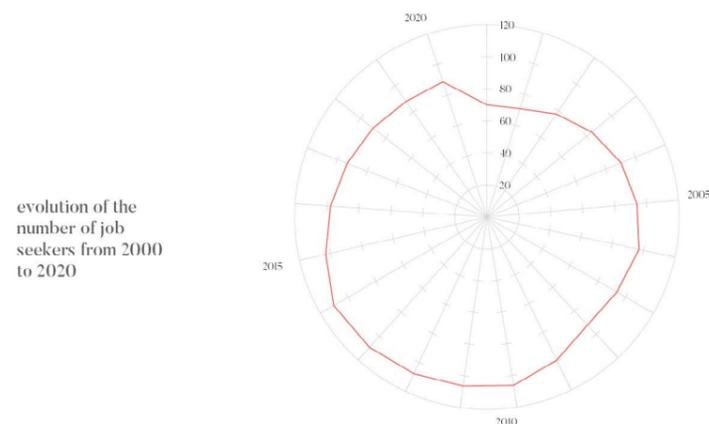
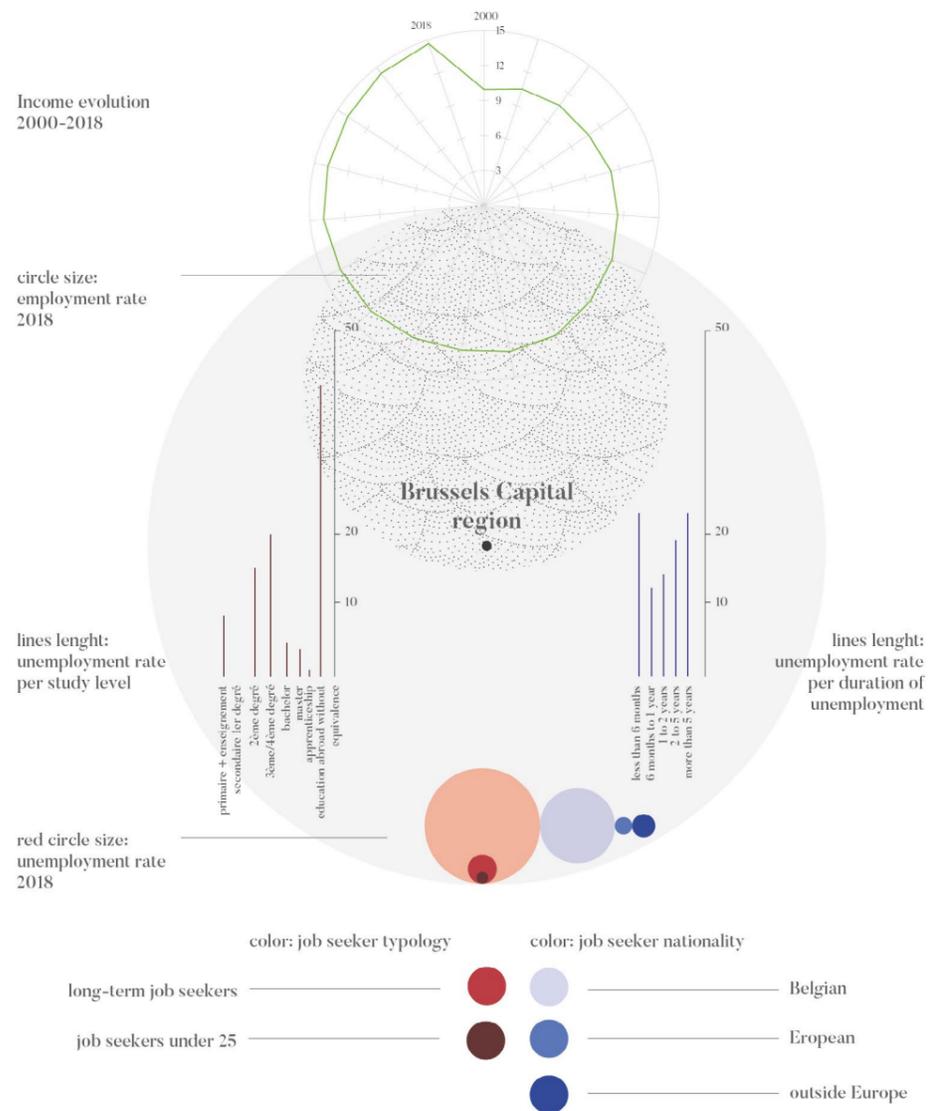
⁴ The survey does not reach certain groups of people in very precarious situations. In 2010, a survey was conducted by the research centre HIVA (Schockaert et al., 2012) on the living of two types of populations of the 'hidden poor': the homeless people and people in an irregular situation. This survey reveals the extremely difficult living conditions of these people in extreme poverty: the at-risk-of-poverty rate 72% among the homeless and 96% among those in an irregular situation (who also experience a high poverty gap, that is an indicator that measures how far to assess the extent to which the standard of living of the poor population is far from the at-risk-of-poverty line)



Gross domestic product and unemployment rate intersection.
Comparison between BCR and the other Belgian regions,
and BCR and ten among the richest regions in Europe (Eurostat, 2019)



Brussels market labour (European commission website, 2020)



Brussels market labour and evolution of the unemployment and average income from 2000 to 2018 (European commission website, 2020; IBSA Brussels; actiris.brussels)

Socio-spatial differences

Dichotomous situations are often typical in large cities, where significant social inequalities in terms of participation in the labour market and access to employment are usually linked to multiple factors, like gender, household type, age, educational level and nationality.

However, Brussels Capital Region is characterised by important socio-spatial contrasts (Observatoire de la santé et du social Bruxelles, 2019). The Regional Plan of Sustainable Development (PRDD 2018) refers to a “social divide” (*fracture sociale*) that developed in the last decades between poor central districts that concentrate unemployment and poverty on the one hand, and a large and affluent periphery on the other. In 1994, C. Kesteloot pointed out how Brussels exhibited “three levels of socio-spatial polarisation”: the first between the city and its periphery, which is the major one, the second within the city itself and the third between individual municipalities. These three levels involve different socio-spatial processes:

«The first process is suburbanization, which created a deep spatial segregation along socio-economic, demographic and ethnic lines within the urban region. The second is the consolidation of the ethnic and poor character of the nineteenth century inner city neighbourhoods, through the mechanisms of the housing market and the impact of the economic crisis upon it. The last process concerns a few individual neighbourhoods which experience a downward spiral of environmental and social decay, bringing them to the verge of being no-go areas in the city.»
(Kesteloot, 1994)

The social differences internal to the Brussels Capital Region almost seem to follow its topography:

«The waters have shaped Brussels, with valleys, hillsides, high points and low points. These natural elements, which are part of a topographical analysis, have an important meaning for the inhabitants. Indeed, these spatial elements reflect a social structure, with the well-off in the upper part of the territory and the poorest and the activities at the bottom, along the canal. Iconic places at the top, ordinary fabrics at the bottom. Depending on whether one is located at the high or low points, the urban fabric and the morphology of the buildings change: at the bottom, the land is more densely occupied, blocks of buildings within which several

activities have been developed. At the top, more open typologies, set in the remains of the Brabant forest, gardens and a more intimate contact with nature.»

(Secchi & Viganò, 2011)

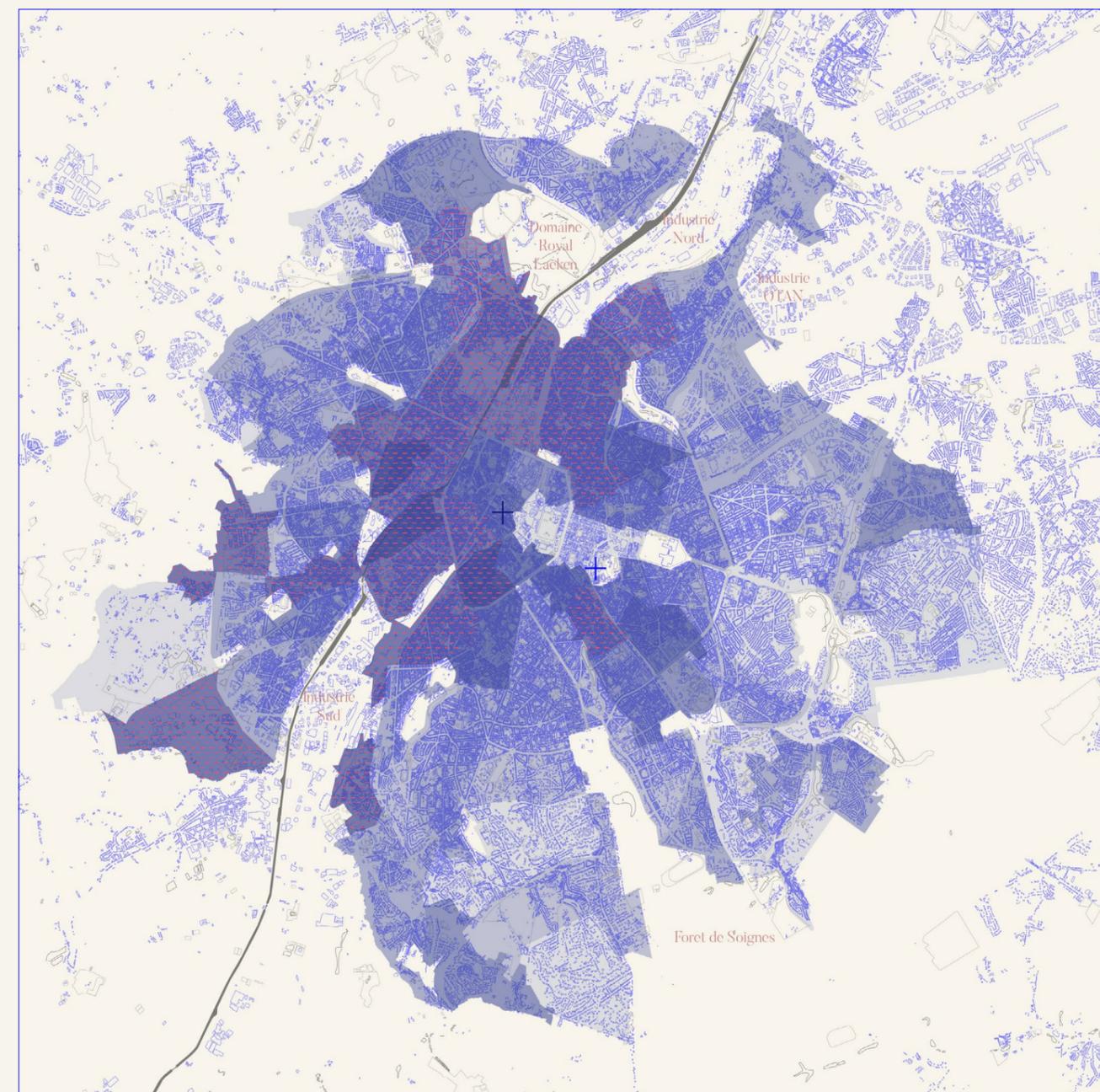
«Le développement des banlieues bruxelloises s'est accompagné d'une séparation sociale, délimitée par le tracé de la Senne, et culturelle marquée par une francisation plus ou moins rapide. Le bas de la ville (banlieue industrielle) (namely the municipalities of Molenbeek St. Jean, Anderlech and Forest, ed.), où se sont installées les principales industries, concentre les couches populaires, alors que le haut de la ville (banlieue bourgeoise) (namely the municipalities of Etterbeek, Ixelles, Saint-Gilles, Saint-Josse-ten-Noode, Schaerbeek, ed.) est réservé aux grands corps de l'État, à l'administration et aux classes aisées.»

(Eggerickx, 2013)

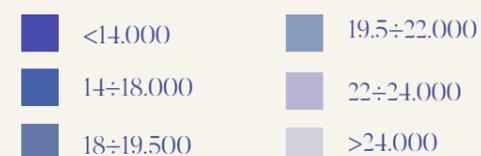
Thus, the social differences projection in the urban landscape were built across time and throughout the history of the city (Vandermotten, 2014). The urban exodus of the middle and higher classes started from the Sixties and deindustrialisation process occurred after the middle of the Seventies led not only to the urbanisation of the periphery (including beyond the borders of the Brussels Region) but also to a change in the working-class neighbourhoods of the first ring. This change is directly linked to the amplification, starting from the Sixties, of the phenomenon of immigration from poor countries, mostly Morocco and Turkey.

Unlike in France, where this type of immigration concentrated in the large peripheral areas (*grands ensembles périphériques*), in Brussels poor immigrants came to populate the degraded central districts, which were often former working class districts that, as a result of the process deindustrialisation gradually lost their traditional working class population over time. The so-called *croissant pauvre* (poor crescent) has thus developed around the Canal, in the lower part of the pentagon (the historic heart of Brussels) and the first ring districts, in the northern, western and southern periphery of the city centre (Vandermotten, 2014). This area, which form a sort of crescent around the pentagon (hence the name *croissant pauvre*), includes BCR's poorest districts. The least economically advantaged

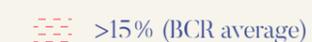
Poverty and unemployment



Median taxable income (2018)



Unemployment rate (%)



+ Grand Place

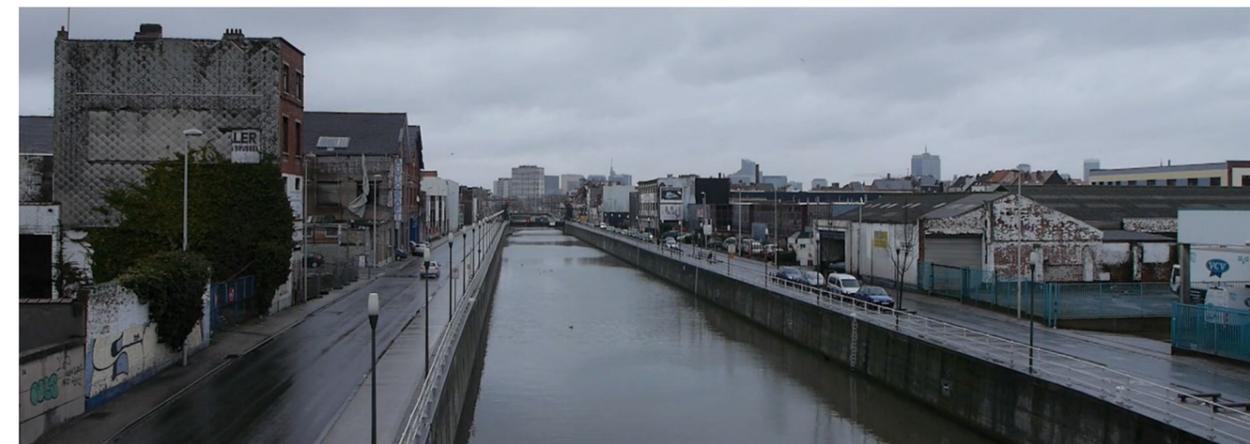
+ European Parliament

Source: Monitoring des quartiers; Actiris

populations have thus been concentrated in this area for several decades now. In addition to a higher than average level of poverty, these districts concentrate generational, cultural and health exclusion factors (Prdd, 2018). To a large extent, the various immigration waves also followed this pattern: rich immigrants settled in the periphery, mainly in the east; poorer migrants ended up in the westerly working-class districts (Kesteloot & Loopmans, 2009). This pattern has recently been partially altered by a process of gentrification, that is the process of reinvestment of some nineteenth century districts inhabited by a disadvantaged population by a more affluent population, usually with a higher cultural and/or economic status.



Vincent Peal, *Les Caravanes*. Bruxelles ville ouverte, 2017.



From top to bottom:

View over Cureghem area. The skyscraper in the background is the Tour de Midi, a 38-storey, 148 metres building constructed in the Sixties right next to the South Station.

View over the Canal.

All the frames come from the videos:
Jo Ackermans and Robin Ramaekers,
Brussels 2040. Three visions for a metropolis//51n4e, Studio 012, KCAP, 2012

If the third level could now be partly contested¹, the first and second ones are still valid, as important differences are still visible either between the city and its periphery and within the city itself. At the municipal level, an internal polarisation is observed, since in each of the central communes (eleven out of the nineteen) there is a distinction between a richer part of the territory. For this reason the available data concerning the municipalities most of the time is not representative of the internal differences, making poverty less visible.

Segregation patterns in Brussels

The question of (especially non-European) foreigners segregation² has been largely debated, in particular after the radicalisation phenomenon of some individuals that culminated in the three terrorist attacks carried out by the Islamic state in 2016. In the previous years, the municipality of Molenbeek-St-Jean became internationally known as the place of origin and shelter of several terrorists, a “police no-go zone” (The Independent, 2015) and a “ghetto”. The issue of Brussels “ghettoisation” was formerly and subsequently questioned by different voices. In 2011, Secchi and Viganò claimed that in Brussels it would have been more appropriate to talk about “community” rather than “ghettoisation”:

«In fact (and fortunately), even if the East-West social dualisation is present, we are not faced with “closed” neighbourhoods to which only the inhabitants have access, or neighbourhoods suffering from urban violence, etc. In Brussels, the growing diversity of the population leads the neighbourhoods to become “specialised”, to become more colourful. In addition to the cases that have become clichés, such as Molenbeek for the Moroccans, the Rue de Brabant for the Turks or the lower part of St Gilles-Porte de Halle

for the Polish, the French in the upper part of St Gilles. There are also a multitude of neighbourhoods that mix diverse populations and cultures.»

If we can argue that it is not correct to describe the contemporary Brussels as a “ghetto”, a certain level of spatial segregation of the migrants (especially non-European) exists, although the popular image that non-European migrants are concentrated only in migrant-dense areas is not considered as valuable according to the studies (Andersson, E. et al., 2018). It has been demonstrated how Belgian small scale segregation patterns of these migrants is similar to the ones observed in other countries like the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden.

¹ Kesteloot writes his paper in the Nineties, when many inner-city neighborhoods are experiencing a deep decay, both socially and environmentally. This neglect started to attenuate once the Region began to promote revitalisation projects in those areas that were identified as “priority neighbourhoods”, allowing a concentration of resources in the most vulnerable places of the Region (mostly on the west side of the Canal).

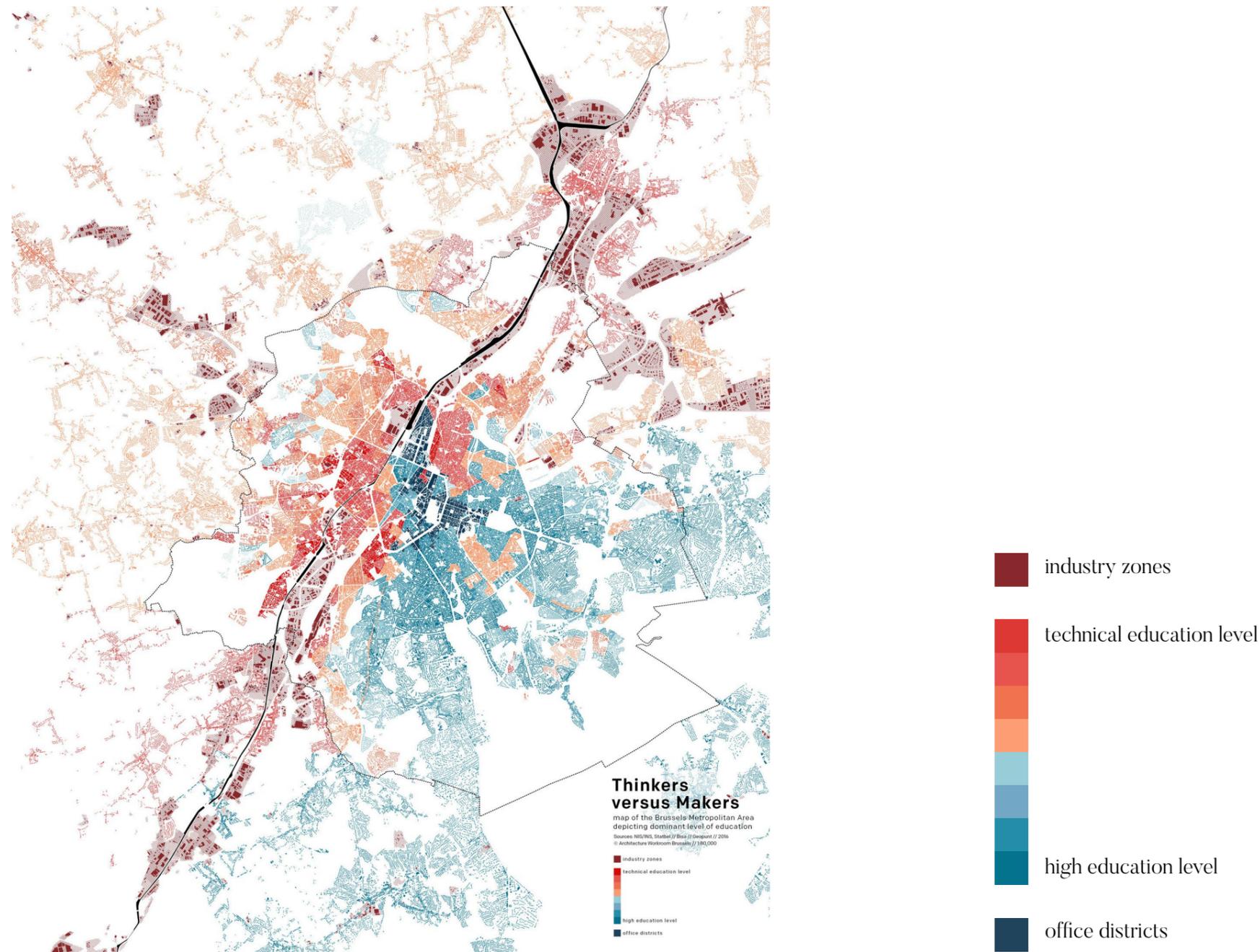
² Residential segregation implies the relatively strong presence of a specific group in some spatial units combined with a relatively low presence in others (Massey and Denton 1988).

Is Brussels a socio-economically polarised city?

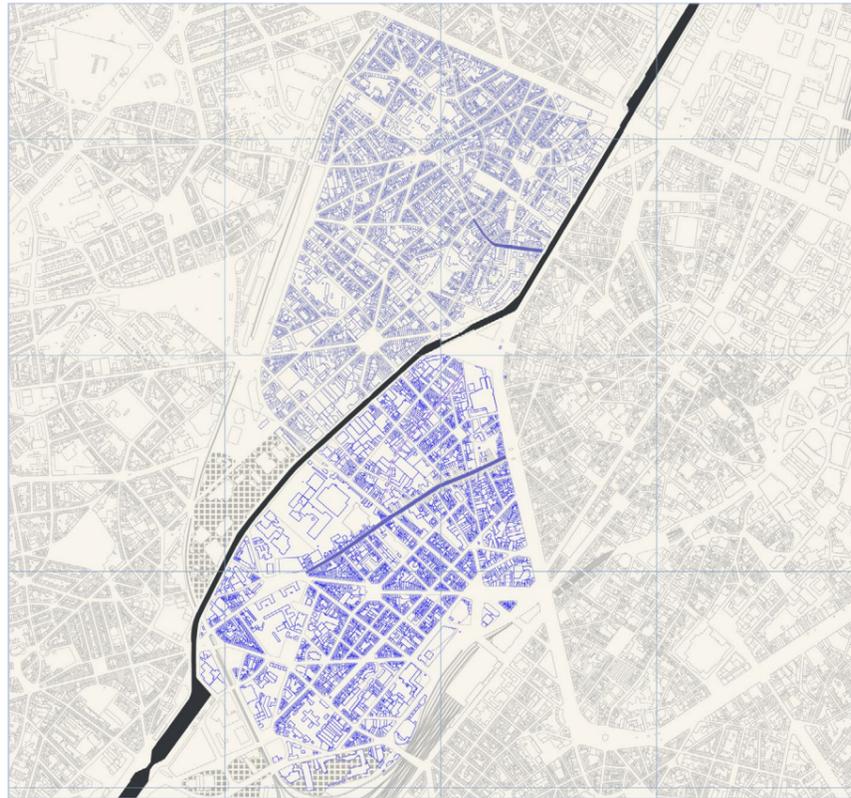
The map Thinkers vs Makers. Map of the Brussels Metropolitan Area depicting the dominant level of education was produced as part of the exhibition “A Good City Has Industry”, which was the result of the Atelier Brussels Productive Metropolis and exhibited at the Centre for Fine Arts BOZAR in 2017. The map shows the level of education of the inhabitants, identifying a high level of education with the category “thinkers” and a low level of education with that of “makers”, and at the same time identifies what are today the (mostly monofunctional) productive districts and those characterised by the presence of offices. The image that emerges is that of a city divided in two, with the makers predictably concentrated close to the industrial areas, in particular the Canal area, in the so-called croissant pauvre. Although a social divide exists and is also particularly pronounced, this does not always imply homogeneity within the different neighbourhoods.

In our society, the level of education is correlated with the social position of people. At the Belgian level, in 2017, the at-risk-of-poverty rate of people with low (with a maximum of a lower secondary diploma) reached 28%, compared to 15% for middle (upper secondary education) and 6% among people having a higher education diploma. In recent years, there has been a clear increase in poverty among people with low levels of education in Belgium, widening the gap in living standards according to the level of education. However, the Brussels Region has the highest proportion of working-age people without a higher secondary education diploma. Compared to the Belgian average, Brussels is characterised by an over-representation of low and high educated population, to the detriment of medium-level graduates. In 2018, 27% of the Brussels population aged 25 to 64 have at most a lower secondary diploma, 26% have an upper secondary diploma (as their highest diploma) and 47% have a higher education diploma.

References:
 SPF Economie-Statistics Belgium, EU-SILC
 Observatoire de la santé et du social Bruxelles, Baromètre social. Rapport bruxellois sur l'état de la pauvreté 2019 2018.



Thinkers vs Makers. Map of the Brussels Metropolitan Area depicting dominant level of education.
 Sources: NIS/INS, Statbel // Bisa // Geopunt // 2016
 © Architecture Workroom Brussels



2.

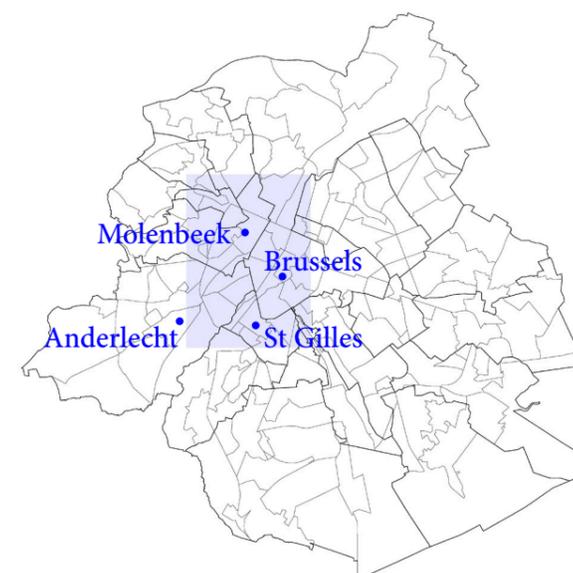
The western area of the poor crescent

**East Molenbeek & Cureghem:
past and present**

An highly diverse area

One of the three levels of socio-spatial polarisation characterising Brussels is the one that is observable within single municipalities. According to the statistics, the two *Communes* of Anderlecht and Molenbeek, both located west to the Pentagon, are especially characterised by a divide which is both social and economic. The question of a poorer, highly multiethnic area characterised by structural problems like high unemployment rates and criminality rates (especially drug dealing), as well as poor housing conditions has been highly discussed both at national level and worldwide. Indeed, the Old Molenbeek in particular was branded and stigmatised worldwide after the terrorist attacks in Paris (13.11.2015) and Brussels (23.03.2016), described by the international press as “a world of its own” and “the bastion of European jihadism” (Oriani, La Repubblica, 2016), an “Islamic State” (Cohen, NY Times, 2016), “Belgium’s ‘Jihad Central’” (Zaougui, NY Times, 2016), “the Belgian hub of Islamist terrorism” (Strobants, Le Monde, 2015) and so on.

Going back to the social divide question, a municipality territory is of course heterogeneous, and in turn some other areas belonging to different municipalities turn out to be more homogeneous not only in social terms, but also according to their urban fabric features. It is the case of the 19th century western neighbourhoods of the first ring, like Lower Molenbeek, the Maritime Quarter and Cureghem (in the northern part of Anderlecht). Whether they have a more bourgeoisie allure (like the Maritime Quarter) or a working-class character (like Cureghem), what these neighbourhoods have in common is their dense and highly mixed urban fabric, linked to the area’s industrial past. As previously discussed (ch.1), Brussels poor crescent’s social features are partly linked to the city’s industrial past, whose centre was the Canal.

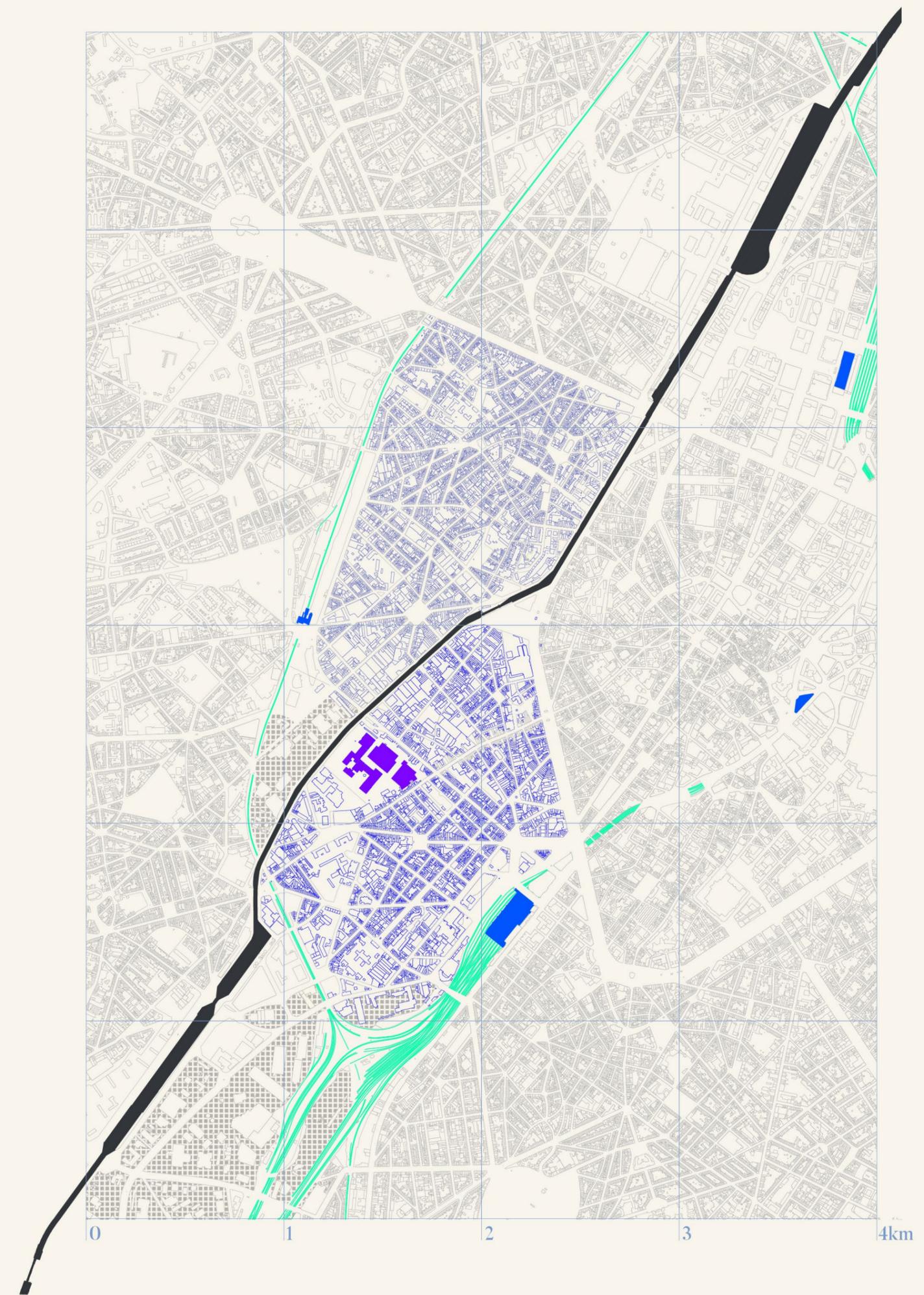


Aerial view: Quai de Mariemont - Place de la Duchesse de Brabant - Canal de Charleroi, 1982
(Source: Bruciel.Brussels)

Indeed, the Willebroek-Bruxelles-Charleroi Canal and all of its surrounding neighbourhoods were deeply shaped or transformed with the industrial boom. This area was indeed home to the many industries that settled in Brussels or started their activity starting from the industrial revolution, strengthening the working-class character of these neighbourhoods. Furthermore, as the majority of workers settled close to the factories back in the days of the industrial boom (Viganò, 2020), the neighbourhoods located between the Canal and the railway line are also historically the most densely populated. Despite the many urban transformations that followed the deindustrialisation process (but also the normal degradation process of the buildings) the industrial character is still very well recognizable within these neighbourhoods urban landscape.

The railway track separates the “Vieux Molenbeek” from the “Nouveau Molenbeek”, which is located Brussels second ring. These neighbourhoods were developed later (mainly from 1855 to 1942, and a big residential part only after the Second World War, during the 50s and the 60s). In order to preserve a residential character for this area, the municipality chose not to develop industrial zones (these will be later, but much less densely than in the east). As a result, the neighbourhoods of the second ring are greener, more residential and with a street network much less dense, in contrast to the hyper-dense and hyper-mixed historic centre of Molenbeek or Cureghem. Furthermore, the second ring districts result different from the first ring ones in terms of their population average income. Indeed, neighbourhoods like Historic Molenbeek and Gare de l’Ouest form a cluster of hou-

-  Cureghem
-  West Molenbeek
-  Gare du Midi (South Station)
-  Gare de l’Ouest (West Station)
-  Abattoir d’Anderlecht
-  Gare Centrale (Central Station)
-  Gare du Nord (North Station)



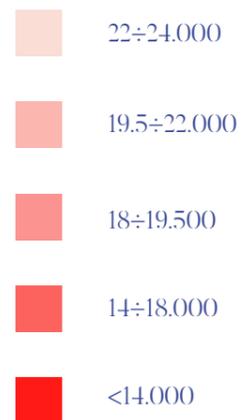
holds with a low average taxable income (lower than 18.000), while in the western parts of Molenbeek, with the exception - with the exception of the low-income social housing areas between West Station and Beekkant, and in Ossegem - the average declared household income is 30,000 per year (IBSA, 2015).

Besides being historically working-class, very highly dense populated neighbourhoods, they have also been functioning as places of arrival for the newcomers to the city for years. Indeed, after the deindustrialisation process, the former working class neighbourhoods (*quartiers ouvriers*) around the Canal are more identifiable as “popular neighbourhoods”. As a result of the various ethnic roots and the many different lifestyles of the inhabitants, the atmosphere is deeply culturally diverse. Although

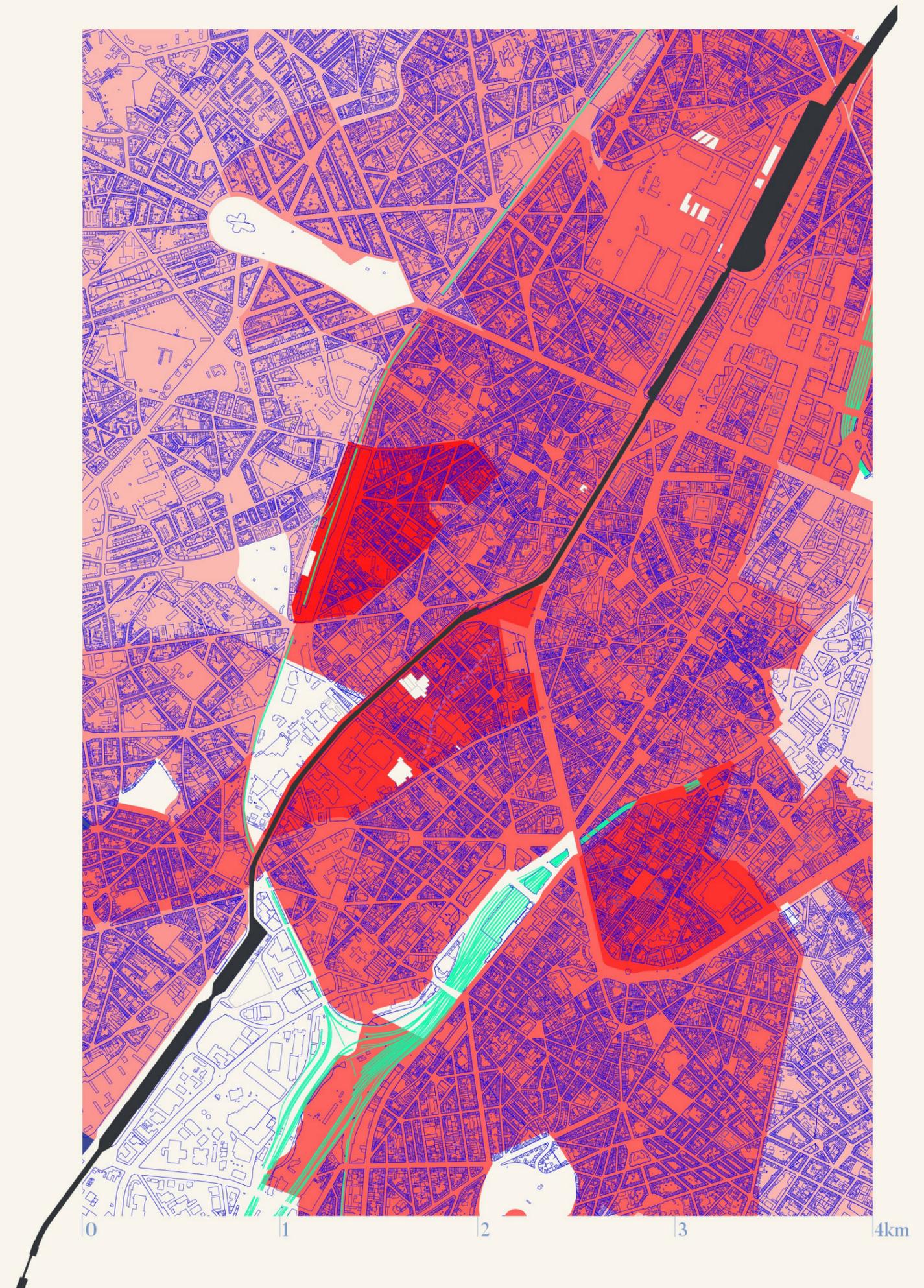
the street atmosphere in Molenbeek might be largely Moroccan at first sight, it is extremely influenced also by Mediterranean, African, Belgian, Asian and European lifestyles. Several examples of ethnic entrepreneurship are visible, especially consisting in local trade.

Like many other former industrial cities, Brussels still contains pockets of mixed-use areas and Lower Molenbeek and Cureghem are two of them. Despite the deindustrialisation process they underwent from the 1960s onwards, these neighbourhoods - which result as particularly dense, multifunctional environment marked by its industrial past - despite the deindustrialisation process still hosts different productive activities which have been able to remain there, coexisting with other function as well as different social groups were coexisting with each other.

Median taxable income (2018)



Source: Monitoring des quartiers; Actiris



Thanks to the emergence of new industries such as crockery production, carriage making and printing in the 18th century, a large number of factories was built just outside of the mediaeval walls and along the course of the Senne, especially in *fauburgs* like Anderlecht and Molenbeek. The growth of Brussels both as a political and economic epicentre and in demographic terms led to a rapid urban development outside the historical urban fabric¹, alongside the already existing networks of national roads that connected Brussels with its hinterland and other cities (Vandyck, 2020). In *Vieux Molenbeek* and Cureghem territories, these national roads are the Bergensesteenweg (Chaussée de Mons) the Gentseseesteeweg (Chaussée de Gand) and the Jetseesteeweg (Chaussée de Jette). During the Dutch period (1815-30) two major projects were launched, namely the construction of a boulevard périphérique (petite ceinture) replacing the former city walls, and the Willebroek-Bruxelles-Charleroi Canal, opened to navigation in 1832. This new watercourse connected the city to the seaport of Antwerp in the north, and the industrial coal and steel basin

around Charleroi in the south, reinforcing the traditional industrial axis of the Senne valley and facilitating the supply of coal (together with a collapse of its price). The increase in the availability of coal for both enterprises and population accelerated Brussels industrialisation, attracting more industries to its adjacent districts like Old Molenbeek and Cureghem.

«When the canal to Charleroi was opened, the land along it was still deserted. It did not take long for the first factories to set up where coal made it possible to supply energy to the growing number of steam engines.

(...) The industrialisation of Brussels took off thanks to the presence of water - the Senne and the canal - but if its development was so intensive it was thanks to the presence of a railway.»

(Brées, Renson, Scohier, 2012)

Indeed, just a few years after the opening of the Canal, the Allée Verte railway station² was inaugurated on Molenbeek territory. Soon, two other important stations became operative, the Midi (1840) and the North (1841),

¹ The end of the octroi on 21 July 1866 allowed the city of Brussels to expand outside its boundaries and a new plan was commissioned from the architect Victor Besme in 1865.

² The first Brussels station was located on the route of the first passenger railway line on the continent (Mechelen-Brussels).



Inventaire d'architecture moderne, 1980s

and many companies settled close to this transport network.

Thus, it is from the middle of the 19th century that the “crafts city” of Brussels became a “manufacturing city”. While most of the craft production used to be located in *Le Marolles* and along the Rue Haute axis (both located in the southern area of the Pentagon), the factories and industrial districts settled especially in the West, in the Senne valley, between the Canal and the railway.

«These areas consisted of a tight mix of workshops, small factories and warehouses, and residences, organised primarily in closed building blocks. Productive activities occupied the insides of the building blocks, with housing fronting the street, or organised on the upper floors.»

(Vandyck et al., 2020).



It is in this period that Lower Molenbeek (or Old Molenbeek, in French *Vieux Molenbeek*) became the “Belgium’s Little Manchester” (Vandermotten, 2014). Indeed, Brussels was at that time the second most industrialised city in the world after Manchester, England, and the municipality of Molenbeek was one of the main industrial centres in the region. The streets and quays in the areas where these brands were produced have names that explicitly the industrial character of these areas: rue de Birmingham, rue de Manchester, rue de Liverpool, rue de la Savonnerie, rue des Houilleurs, rue des Ateliers, Quai de l’Industrie, quai de Mariemont, quai des Charbonnages. With the opening of the Tour et Taxis site in 1907, the main industrial hub moved from Old Molenbeek to the Maritime Quarter (north to the avenue Léopold II), which then became one of the main centres of development for Molenbeek in the 20th century (Puissant, Dupont, 2003). Indeed, the T&T rail yard and all the raw materials arriving there from the colonies fostered the installation of several processing companies (tobacco, wine, spirits, coffee, spices etc.).

Cureghem and the slaughterhouse: when the productive space structures the urban fabric

Looking at the “Nouveau Plan de Bruxelles Industriel (avec ses suburbains)” that shows the state of the art of Brussels industrial reality in 1910, we see that Cureghem is one of the districts with the higher density of industrial buildings. The extreme proximity of the railways and the Canal made the position of Cureghem strategic, fostering the development of industrial activities mainly linked to textiles and later to animal slaughter (Claudel & Scohier, 2014). In 1841 a first big slaughterhouse (l’Abattoir de Bruxelles) was inaugurated in Cureghem close to the Ninove Porte, on the site that where later on the Arts and Crafts School was built. The presence of the slaughterhouses, which was the driving force behind the urbanisation of the district and attracted a multitude of activities linked to their presence: meat wholesalers, leather goods manufacturers, dyeing factories, oil factories, glove factories, candle factories. In the 1870s, the presence of an *abattoir* within the urban fabric started to be considered as source of nuisances. After several negotiations between the

Carte figurative des entreprises industrielles dans Bruxelles (1910), dessinée par A. Verwest et F. Xhardez. Les vignettes sont gravées par M. Vandroost. Cette carte, produite à l’occasion de l’Exposition de 1910 à l’initiative des industriels bruxellois, illustre à la fois le souci de la qualité architecturale des bâtiments industriels et leur localisation privilégiée dans le bas de la ville et les faubourgs proches (© La Fonderie).

Ville de Bruxelles and the Anderlecht municipality, a new complex is built in a more decentralised area of Cureghem. The operation entailed the deviation of the river Senne and the extensions the *rue Ropsy Chaudron* -in order to connect the site to the South Station- and the *rue Heyvaert* - in order to connect it to the petite ceinture around the Pentagon (Brëes, Renson, Scohier, 2012).

«The creation of the slaughterhouses in Anderlecht is indicative of the retreat of industrial activities to the suburbs and of a change in the status of space in relation to the urban environment. The slaughterhouses do not fit into a

pre-existing fabric, but rather structure a new neighbourhood.»

(Brëes, Renson, Scohier, 2012)

The increase in the number of workers employed in the factories led to the construction of hundreds of houses between the factories, especially in the north and west of Cureghem. This was a set of alleys and dead ends where the many workers employed in the neighbouring factories were housed.



Rue Ropsy Chaudron 24, View of the slaughterhouse and market of Cureghem around the middle of the XX century. (coll. Belfius Banque- Académie Royale du Belgique, ©ARB- urban.brussels)

A sharp decline and an important heritage

Until 1960, the current Brussels-Capital Region was still the country's most important industrial agglomeration. From the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, with the explosion of tertiary functions internationalisation, the Belgian economy started its general deindustrialisation process. Today, Brussels appears among the biggest European cities whose economy is less linked to the industrial sector³ (Vandermotten, 2014).

«(...) the industrial functions have become residual in the capital⁴. They have left behind a rich industrial heritage, and it is important to question the social relevance of the forms that its conservation and reuse should take in the context of social and urbanistic changes of the region.»

(Vandermotten, 2015)

The deindustrialisation phenomenon and the consequent drop in the prices of industrial building and land brought a boom in industrial buildings conversion into other functions (mainly resi-

dential due to the strong demographic pressure that has exploded in recent years). A large part of the buildings converted for residential use are located in districts with traditional urban morphology like Old Molenbeek and Cureghem. The smaller size of the sites, in general, has obviously helped their change.

This trend of reconversion of former industrial buildings into flats (and more generally the attitude of sensitivity towards the industrial heritage) has been read in the general framework of the tertiarisation of the economy and interpreted by some scholars as

«part of a desire to (re)conquer industrial and working-class neighbourhoods by the middle and wealthy classes. (...) The industrial past of Brussels thus remains a rich heritage to be discovered, preserved and reallocated; but it would be paradoxical if the hoped-for success of this reallocation did not contribute to further increasing the social divide or to driving the most disadvantaged populations out of the formerly working-class neighbourhoods.»

(Ibid.)

³ This reflects the high degree of internationalisation of Brussels economy

⁴ The traditional urban industries, as the textile, food, tobacco and metallurgy transformation sectors have largely disappeared. Today, what is left of the industry in Brussels is mostly identified as small companies, with the exception of some isolated cases (like the Audi industrial plant in Forest.



Interieur d'ilot à Heyvaert, Cureghem, October 2021

«A Molenbeek, l'espace de la production marque le paysage urbain. Même si les cycles industriels sont définitivement fermés, la mémoire du lieu est permanente et vit encore à travers ces espaces caractéristiques, témoignage de leur existence. Il s'agit d'une variété d'espaces d'activités industrielles et commerciales des 150 dernières années, de taille et de qualité de construction variées, mais généralement de conception modulaire, flexible avec des hauts plafonds et des surfaces généreuses, ces espaces sont insérés dans le tissu de la ville et souvent encore marqués par l'architecture et les matériaux de qualité utilisés dans le passé. Un vrai capital, un capital spatial dont une grande partie a déjà été perdu (démoli) ou est actuellement occupé par de nouvelles activités : musées, centres culturels..., mais dont il subsiste néanmoins une quantité significative qui est partiellement utilisée, mais pas toujours valorisée.»

Viganò, 2021



Duchesse, Molenbeek St. Jean, october 2021.

on the next page: Old Molenbeek, Molenbeek St. Jean, october 2021.





Old Molenbeek, Molenbeek St. Jean, october 2021.



Duchesse, Molenbeek St. Jean, october 2021.



Old Molenbeek, Molenbeek St. Jean, october 2021.



Old Molenbeek, Molenbeek St. Jean, october 2021.

«While manufacturers grew up along the central axis of the Senne valley, other small to medium activities spread up within the very dense urban fabric, filling in the interior of housing blocks and replacing private gardens, adapting existing residential buildings or colonising vacant plots. That process has created highly mixed and unplanned manufacturing neighbourhoods that are still visible today in areas such as Cureghem, Saint Gilles, Evere and others that emerged in the city's rapid late 19th century growth period».

(City of making report, 2018)



Home and atelier in Rue Edmond Bonehill, Molenbeek St. Jean, 2016. © urban.brussels



Duchesse, Molenbeek St. Jean, october 2021.



Old Molenbeek, Molenbeek St. Jean, october 2021.



Duchesse, Molenbeek St. Jean, october 2021.



Old Molenbeek, Molenbeek St. Jean, october 2021.



Old Molenbeek, Molenbeek St. Jean, october 2021.

“These industrial faubourgs located in West Brussels and along the Canal axis are mainly characterised by rental housing, made of modest row houses (maisons mitoyennes) hosting one, two or three households. (...) Sometimes, the street facing working-class housing is extended in the block interior by dead ends and “square alleys”, lined with shabby little houses”.

(Vandermotten, 2014)

For what concerns the housing typology, besides the typical maisons mitoyennes we also find apartment buildings (in French *immeubles de rapport*), especially in Cureghem. Nevertheless, this typology appeared a bit later (Ibid).



Duchesse, Molenbeek St. Jean, october 2021.



Old Molenbeek, Molenbeek St. Jean, october 2021.



Duchesse, Molenbeek St. Jean, october 2021.



Old Molenbeek, Molenbeek St. Jean, october 2021.



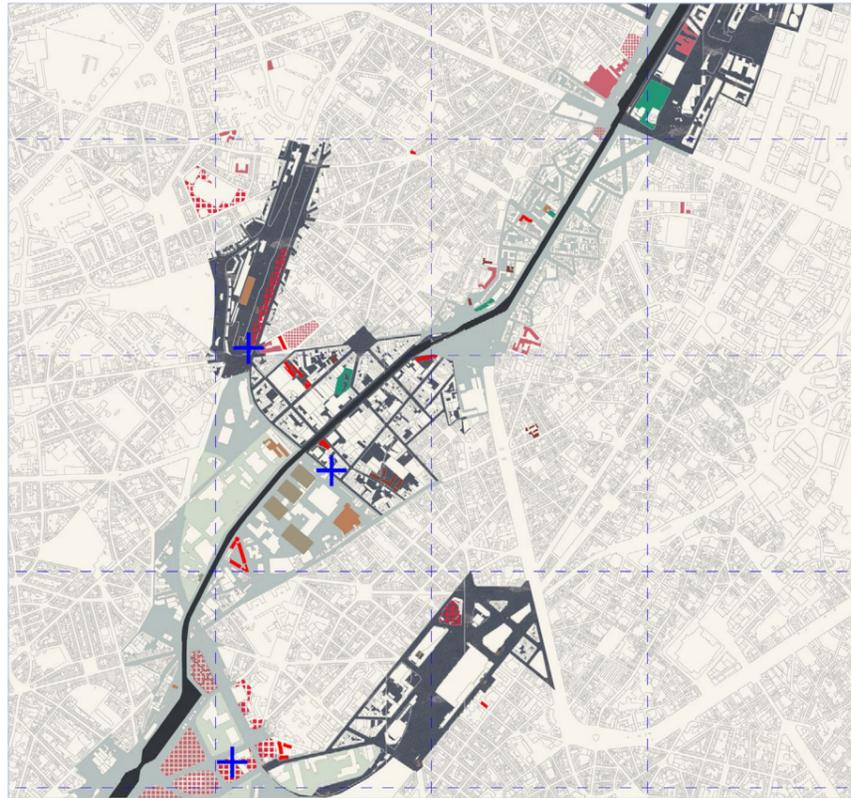
Duchesse, Molenbeek St. Jean, october 2021.



Cureghem, Anderlecht, october 2021.



Duchesse, Molenbeek St. Jean, october 2021.



3.

Under pressure

**On the Canal central area
urban transformation**

What is happening to the western first ring?

Players and actions

«Plan Canal, Plate-Forme Kanal, Festival Kanal, Kanal Centre-Pompidou, Signal Kanal... le canal bruxellois est l'objet de toutes les attentions et convoitises. Pouvoirs publics, promoteurs, créatifs et touristes de tout poil, tout le monde veut y acheter, s'y promener, s'y loger jusqu'à l'état de siège.»

(Inter Environnement Bruxelles, 2019)

The Canal area is today object of a mix of attentions by public programmes, private investors and companies which are attracted by the low prices of the estates and proximity to the city centre. On the other hand, the area is also at the object of attention by policies of protection of local inhabitants and several voices criticising the gentrification process going on. Last but not least, a will to keep a space for urban manufactu-

ring inside the city has been claimed in recent years.

The map shows a “future in the making” of the examined area, aiming at giving an idea (although probably in a non-exhaustive way) of the high concentration of projects that have been initiated and completed (or are going to be initiated in the near future) by either private, public or semi-public actors. Some of them are of a smaller scale or rather monofunctional in their envisioned functional programme. Others focus on a mixed development, both on local and larger spatial scales (Vermeulen & Corijn, 2013). Needless to say that this set of project is having and will have a big impact on the city, its image and perception, especially (in the examined case) at the local level.



Public action

Over the last twenty years, “vulnerable neighbourhood” located across the Canal area have been object of reinvestment by the public authority at a regional, federal and European level. Different types of public policies, urban (renewal) project and investment programmes have thus been initiated. This area was defined according to environmental and social indicators, such as the high concentration of derelict or vacant buildings, the lack of comfort of housing, the degradation of public spaces, the high population density and unemployment and school drop-out rates (Deloitte et. al, 2001; Sacco, 2010).

The current regional planning frame¹ defines different strategic development zones, a large number of which can be found in the Canal area (Gare de l’Ouest, Midi, Tour & Taxis, Heyvaert, Schaerbeek Formation). Besides these specific areas, a series of 37 socio-economic projects have been initiated in the frame of the European EFRO-FEDER programme on regional development (EFRO-FEDER, 2007), and are all located in (a part of) the Canal Zone, the Priority Intervention Zone (ZIP-PIZ).

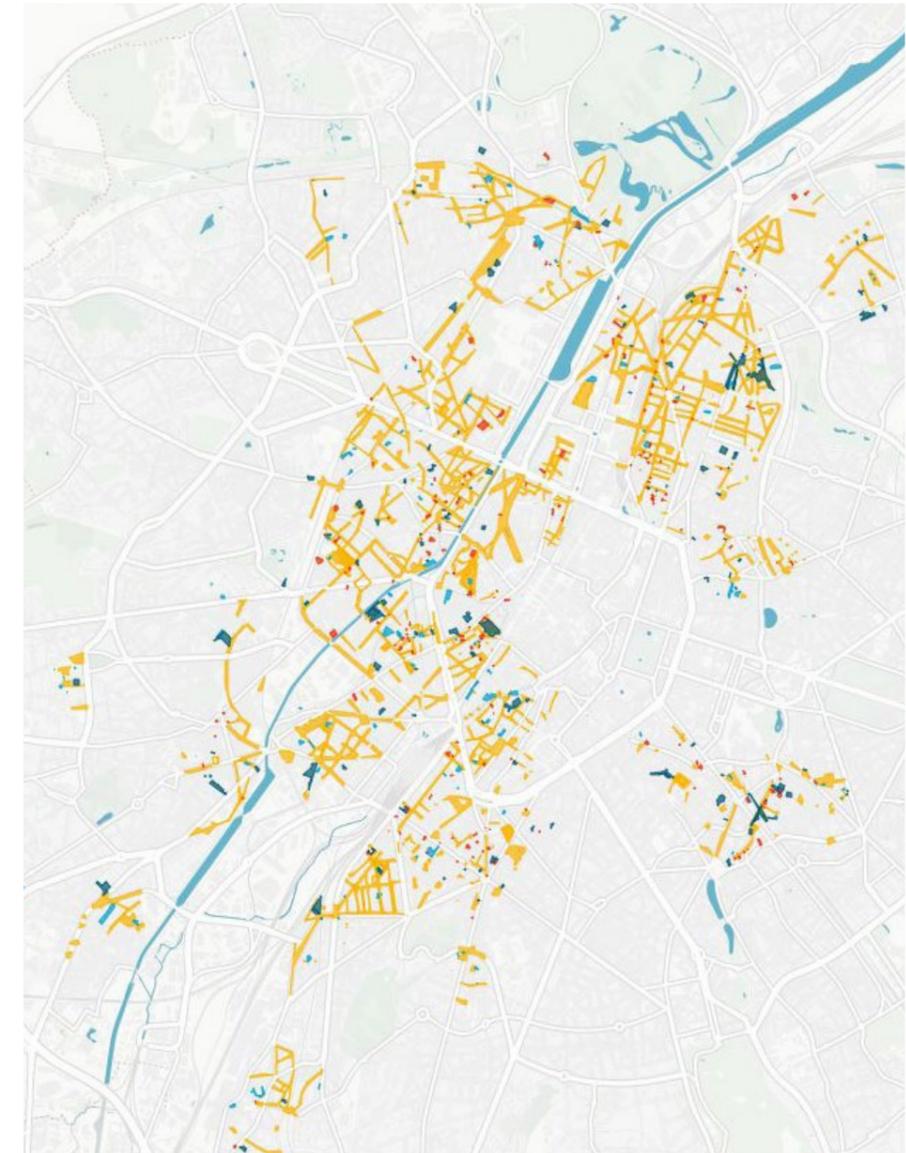
¹ A double-layered planning frame is applicable on the administrative territory of the BCR, including the PRDD (Regional plan for sustainable development, 2018) and the PRAS (Regional Land Use Plan, 2001)

In addition, the most fragile areas in the Region are involved in the Urban Renovation Contracts² (CRU) and the Sustainable Neighbourhood Contracts (CQD)³. Both programmes are underpinned by a contractual collaboration (hence the name “contract”) between the region and the municipalities, in the CQD case involving the neighbourhood inhabitants (Berger, 2008; Noël, 2009). In addition to the investment in the CQD, in the early 90s the regional government also supported the production of middle-class housing along the Canal⁴.

² Aiming at a regional scale, the CRU is a development tool for neighbourhoods spread over several municipalities. It combines urban revitalisation operations in various fields: real estate, socio-economic, environmental or public spaces. The first series of five CRUs was launched in 2017 and a second series of two in 2020.

³ Aiming at the neighbourhood scale, the first programmes were launched in the early 90s. It is an action plan limited in time and space, setting out a programme of interventions to be carried out with a defined budget. In a spirit of “strengthening” the neighbourhoods, these projects are mainly structured to meet crucial needs in terms of creating or renovating housing, rehabilitating public spaces, creating local infrastructures, improving the environment and social cohesion within the neighbourhood (quartiers.brussels, 2021)

⁴ This area was called l’Espace du Développement Renforcé du Logement (EDRL) in French.



Sustainable Neighbourhood contracts in Brussels, <https://quartiers.brussels/1/>

Types of interventions





© Mathieu Berger, *Le Temps d'une Politique — Chronique des Contrats de quartier bruxellois* (CIVA, 2019)

on the next page:

MENIN / ETANGS NOIRS, Rives Ouest (2007 - 2011). This Sustainable Neighbourhood Contract foresaw the construction of 7 social housing units, the development of a 2,000 m² park, open to the street via a small square, and the renovation of an existing building.

© Séverin Malaud - urban.brussels

CHEVAL NOIR (2010). The Fonds du Logement (Brussels Housing Found) converted the former Halleman's breweries near the canal into 35 studio flats for artists.

© Marc Detiffe



Real estate projects pressure and the Canal plan

Besides the numerous projects initiated by the government, real estate developers started showing increasing interest in the area. Indeed, they saw a great opportunity in the low-valued estates, especially along the Canal. They started investing in luxury residences, which could be seen as “pockets of privilege” in a working class neighbourhood. A very well known example is the UP-site project (completed in 2014), a 140 metres high tower that rises right in front of the Tour and Taxis site, whose patrimonialisation was turned into an element of attraction by the developer. Critical voices (such as Inter Environnement Bruxelles) underline that real estate speculation in Brussels has been particularly “massive” as it was «well facilitated through legislation and spatial planning» (CoM, 2018). Indeed, some plans such as the PRAS «give a lot of the facto power to developers, instead of distributing powers between developers and the public sector» (CoM, 2018).

The increase in real estate operations and the pressures carried out on the Canal Zone soon showed a conflict of use between low-income and middle-high income housing, as well as between housing and economic and port uses. The conflict were sufficiently acute to require the initiation of a

Canal master plan (CP) in 2012⁵. It was clear that, if Brussels wanted to cope with the consequences of its rapid demographic growth in a manner that would not be socially exclusive, the current “policy of opportunity” needed to be transformed into a development vision for the Canal Zone (Vermeulen & Corijn, 2013). The Plan’s goals are aligned to the ones proposed by Regional Sustainable Development Plan (Prdd, 2013&2018). It considers the territory’s industrial heritage, its urban characteristics and the dynamism of its population as a decisive development capital for the RBC, and its purpose is to meet a triple challenge in Brussels: the demographic boom, the development of productive urban economy and the qualitative reinforcement of public spaces to encourage the social cohesion and links between districts.

The potential of the area is the creation of 25.000 housing units and 7.500 jobs, as well as more than 200 hectares of public spaces that could be redeveloped on what Chemetoff highlighted as “Regional Estate”, that is a 313-hectare network of public plots along the 14km of the Canal. Within this “operational

⁵ The Master Plan was taken over from November 2012 by Alexandre Chemetoff, following an international urban planning competition promoted by the Regional government. In 2015, the Plan was initiated a dedicated team was formed and a time-limited action over a period of ten years to realise its ambitions was set.

zone”, both private and public projects are to be initiated on a privileged basis.

(canal.brussels, 2021)

The CP proposes solutions at a master-plan level for each sequence (which includes one or more bassins) of the Canal area. The maps on page 79 shows three of these sequences: Biestebroek, Birmingham and Saintelette. Needless to say that the “Espace Constructible du Domain Régional” (that is the space that is going to be affected by large real estate operation) is mostly concentrated in the brownfields or large industrial areas. An example can be found in the Biestebroek bassin, where large private and private-public partnerships projects are on their way to be realised on former industrial land, deeply altering the urban landscape.

Besides the several real estate operation providing new housing, it is worth mentioning the attempts led by both private and public players of investing in urban manufacturing. The topic has been object of research and publications such as Cities of Making and Urban Production by Metrolab. Researches show the complexity of this attempt that sometimes can result to be controversial, ending up to push away some kind of industries. Indeed, there seem to be only space for light industries in the urban fabric. To cite a few examples in the examied area, Recy K, Abattoirs, Circularium.

10 years

313-hectare network of public plots
along the 14km of the Canal

25.000 housing units

7.500 jobs

200 hectares of public space



From top to bottom:

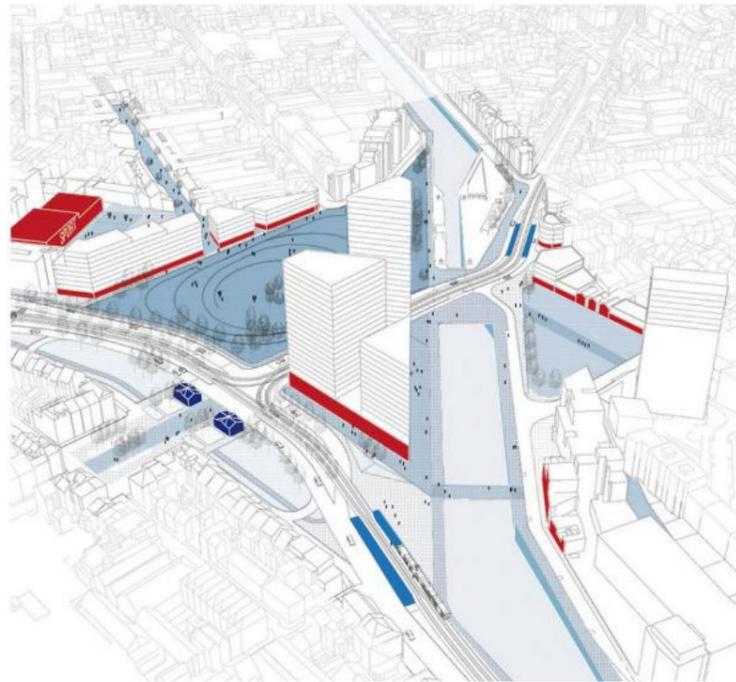
UP-Site Tower seen from Bd. Leopold II bridge on the Canal. The project (completed in 2014) consists of a 140 metres high tower rising right in front of the Tour and Taxis site, hosting luxury apartments, offices and facilities.

Tour & Taxis site, Quartier Maritime. According to Extensa, a Brussels-based real estate developer that is leading T&T redevelopment, Tour & Taxis «will offer the optimal balance of diverse accommodation, next-generation workspaces, and state-of-the-art conference and seminar venues. All will be complemented by retail and leisure facilities, as well as publicly accessible open and green spaces» (Extensa.eu)



Key West: new mixed project by the Canal in Anderlecht, with over more than 500 new apartments, shops, offices and a day-care centre. According to its developers, BPI Real Estate Belgium, Key West will revitalise the former industrial site of the Biestebroek bassin offering "quality life by the water"

On the left:



The Biestbroeck dock, located south of Cureghem, is the object of a large scale urban development (47 hectares) since 2016. Adopted in 2018, the PPAS (Plan particulier d'affectation du sol - Specific Land use plan) Biestbroeck allowed the creation of 4.000 new housing units with a total of around ten towers, one of which can be up to 90 metres high.

«This plan sets out to be ambitious from an environmental viewpoint and flexible enough in its implementation to encourage private initiatives. It creates a high-quality environment and neighbourhood while also meeting the needs of future residents of Anderlecht (...)

(Plan Canal)



3,000 jobs
11,500 inhabitants
+500 new housing units

Key West: new mixed project by the Canal in Anderlecht, with over more than 500 new apartments, shops, offices and a day-care centre. According to its developers, BPI Real Estate Belgium, Key West will revitalise the former industrial site of the Biestbroeck bassin offering "quality life by the water" (BPI real estate).

The objective of the Canal Plan, the thinking behind which is fully supported by the Anderlecht municipal board, is to make better use of unused real estate along the waterway, creating mixed-function districts there that include not just housing but businesses and sports, cultural and training facilities that serve the community. The regional authorities have therefore decided to designate these areas as a ZEMU (business zone in an urban setting).

(Plan Canal)



The quest for diversity

From its very beginning the CP claimed to place the issue of diversity and the concept of *mixité*, both social and functional, at the heart of its concerns. Indeed, both terms are mentioned multiple times in each programme. The examined neighbourhoods are intrinsically characterised by a dynamic mix. As it has been argued by some critical voices (C. Scohier, M. Van Criekingen,...) we can observe a sort of discrepancy between the policies that are put in place at an institutional level in a neighbourhood and the urban/social reality of the neighbourhood itself. Thus, they have a sort of counter effect and, as a result the intrinsic diversity of a place risks to disappear and be replaced by a new one.

Social diversity

As many critical voices have argued the *mixité* promoted by the plan is a “one-way *mixité*”, which means that what really seems to be prompted is the installation of the middle classes in the most defavorised, while the opposite is more rare:

«The difficulty of bringing these social housing projects to fruition in the more affluent suburbs is matched by a spectacular private property boom in the lower part of the city, particularly

along the canal»

(Secchi & Viganò, 2011)

When Secchi and Viganò made this observation the CP was not effective yet, but things have not been significantly changing. If the plan set as one of its major ambitions the one of producing and housing stock capable of meeting the need of the population, in particular the low income categories. In fact, the number of social, public and cooperative housing operation is much lower, and they are more modest in size than the big private real estate operations.

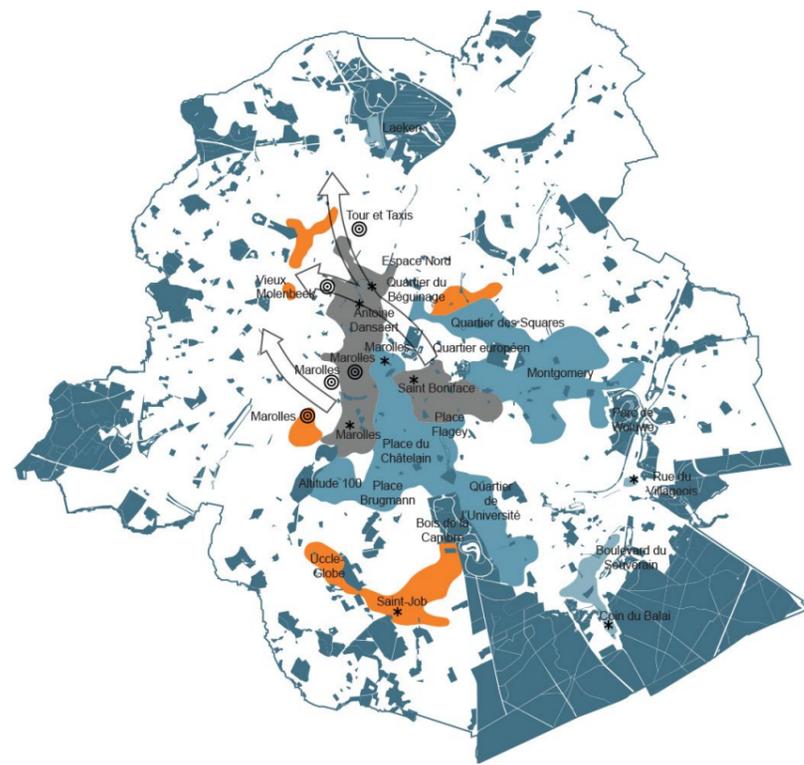
A parenthesis on the gentrification process debate in Brussels

As already mentioned in chapter one, the socio-spatial distribution in Brussels has recently been partially altered by a process of gentrification started in the early 1990s. Indeed, this period coincides with the institutional birth of the BCR (1989), the first Regional Development Plan (1995) and the launch of various urban revitalisation plans (the first CQD were launched in 1993). Moreover, the increase of the city involvement in international functions was also an important factor, fostering the *élitisation* and internationalisation of the bourgeois neighbourhoods in the

East of BCR. At the same time, some areas that were inhabited by a disadvantaged population have been interested by a process of reinvestment by a more affluent population, usually pretty young, with a higher cultural capital and a middle income (Secchi and Viganò, 2011). In the map realised in 2011, Secchi and Viganò mark as gentrified the inner city neighbourhoods on the eastern side of the Canal (mostly belonging to the Brussels municipality) and the Matongé and St. Boniface districts in Ixelles. Some critical voices summarise gentrification as «the simultaneous reappropriation (for some) and alienation (for others) of urban areas on the scale of the neighbourhood.» (Van Criekingen, 2006). In other words, the existing social fabric has been affected by a certain pressure, which might have been exerted directly and suddenly or more subtly. Despite being a phenomenon occurring in a lot of cities worldwide, when discussing it it would be more correct to talk about local forms of gentrification. Indeed, gentrification trends can considerably vary according to parameters like the urban context in which it occurs, the rate of a neighbourhood's transformation, the types of forces involved: “for example, the degree of government control over the real estate market, public and private institutional investors' attitudes, and even dominant

groups' enhanced or diminished historical interest in the downtown area vary considerably from town to town” (Van Criekingen, 2006).

The examined area, namely the nineteenth century neighbourhoods of the poor *croissant* area, west to the city centre, have been certainly subject to local forms of gentrification, just as many other once neglected districts in contemporary cities. Nevertheless, while in some areas of the city (such as St. Gilles, Ixelles, or Dansaert on the east bank of the Canal) the phenomenon is much more marked and visible through statistical indicators, neighbourhoods like Old Molenbeek or Cureghem are still among the poorest in the whole region (they have been the arrival place for the most fragile population). For this reason, it would not be correct to mark these neighbourhoods as gentrified, although it is undeniable that they might have been seeing too an increase in the number of the middle class population over the last twenty years. Thus, here the gentrification process here is more diffused and time consuming (...). From a spatial perspective, the process is visible through the appearance and increase, especially in the Canal area, of several real estate operations (most of them lead by private investors or public-private partnerships) offering a



Dynamiques de gentrification

- ★ Premiers noyaux de gentrification (liste non exhaustive)
- Gentrification
- Signes de gentrification
- Elitisation et internationalisation de quartiers bourgeois
- Signes d'élitisation
- Zones de tension (liste non exhaustive)
- Sens de déplacement des populations fragiles
- Espaces verts publics

Studio Associato Bernardo
 Secchi Paola Viganò, Bruxelles
 2040 (2010-2011)

mainly residential programme, consisting either in luxury or middle income housing. The surge in loft projects (a market segment that has been taken over by luxury real estate promoters) is another operation that constitute what Van Criekingen calls “pockets of privilege”, which are still sparse, but differ markedly from their immediate surroundings.

«In Brussels, civil society and engaged academics often perceive gentrification as a negative process a priori (Rijdsams, 2011). As a result, everything that has to do with urban development, renovation of public space, embellishment or the arrival of upper-class retail or catering industries, is a priori judged as ‘bad’. Although one has to be very cautious about policies that exclude those already marginalised, one has to

admit some neighbourhoods deal with a negative reputation in such a way that once residents are able to, they move away as quickly as possible. (...). While preconditions must be set in order to avoid social exclusion, a direct result of such an approach is the stigmatisation of particular groups: whenever highly educated, newcomers are too easily categorised as ‘gentrifiers’ that should take on this responsibility, while those that move out and who have a ‘deprived socio-economic profile’ are the victims of the gentrifiers. (...). However, it might be more correct to talk about a convergence of different processes that typify processes of gentrification. Without preconditions concerning social mobility and social mixing that strive for a minimal quality of life and level of welfare, the interaction between planning initiatives, housing market dynamics, governance and policy changes, result in social exclusion of those most vulnerable. An urban development collectively defining such principles and complementing this with multicultural and local community building could enforce the overall quality and social cohesion in neighbourhoods.

Whatever the social dynamics, nobody will ever dispute the fact that these neighbourhoods are at the centre of the Brussels metropolitan region. That centrality will determine prices of land and real estate developments and the types of activity attracted. It is only in the

declining phase of deindustrialisation and rapid suburbanisation of Brussels’ development that these central neighbourhoods have been ‘allowed’ to have an ethnocentered development. Today the metropolitan dynamics are back. The Canal Zone is the structuring axis. An enlarged centre is being developed. The challenge is to not follow a Dansaert trajectory where populations were relocated and new activities brought their own workers and their own public. This time it should be an opportunity for upward social mobility of the residents, if they are ready to broaden their public to the city as a whole. That is the tension between gentrification and upward social mobility at stake in this poor ‘croissant’ of Brussels.»

Mixed-use neighbourhoods

«For many years, we have understood “working in the city” as services and the knowledge economy. Meanwhile, we have gradually become more aware of the fact that production is something that also belongs in the city and that the city should not purely remain a showcase for consumption»

(Bouwmeester Maitre Architecte, 2018)

In recent years, the reintroduction of the spaces of production in the city have seen an increase in the interest of both urban scholars⁶ and policymakers⁷. It has been widely argued that keeping the productive enterprises in the city have economic (a diversified economy is more resilient in times of crisis) and spatial reasons

«by retaining enterprise it is also possible to maintain the slightly rough but unique character of post-industrial are-

6 ULB & Erasmus “Re:Work” (2012) and “End of Line” (2013); Architecture Workroom Brussels, BRAL & Bond Beter Leefmilieu “Productive BXL” (2014); Urban Metabolism (2015); B-MiX (2015); Cities of Making (2017-2019); “Atelier Brussels. A Good City has Industry” (2016-2017)

7 The growing awareness at the theoretical level of the need to reintegrate productive economy in the city, together with the realisation that the high rate of development of new residential districts would have brought BCR to lose its industrial land, brought the government to start encouraging mixed development between places to live and work by adding a correction mechanism to the change of land use (Bouwmeester Maitre Architecte, 2018).

as, like the canal zone, and thus exploit the authentic and local nature of such places rather than wipe it away»

(Ibid.)

But besides that, the reasons are also social. Indeed, Brussels’ socio-spatial reality, with its large “poor crescent” of low income neighbourhoods located around the Canal area, explains the interest in productive city strategies, as providing space for productive activities is seen as a policy to maintain short-term skilled jobs within the capital region (Bouwmeester Maitre Architecte, 2018; Cities of Making, 2018; Orban et al., 2021).

Although planning tools at a higher level should be able to ensure that productive economy is not omitted from the central Canal area, specific design solutions to combine living and working (which is quite essential to avoid nuisance and mutual mistrust) is not yet provided at a planning level (Bouwmeester Maitre Architecte, 2018). Nevertheless, some solutions have already been set up. Brussels public real estate operator (citydev.brussels) - which often collaborates with private real estate developers - has indeed been working for some time on large mixed projects combining living and working. Many of these projects tend to favour compact and stacked solutions, with housing units placed above a base of productive activities. As convenient as it could be

for a developer -

«the industrial spaces (developed within a mixed use-project, ed.) are the price to pay for the opportunity to access the real money maker - housing»

(CoM, 2018)

- the critique raised from many experts is whether this model of

« a raised city of residents above a city of workers down under is hardly a model of good urbanisation»

(Bouwmeester Maitre Architecte, 2018)

The mixed-use development discourse is often linked to the gentrification processes (not only social but also industrial) mentioned before, which is caused by real estate pressure for residential development, allowed in this area. Indeed, although the planning tools claim to have as a defined goal “to keep economic activity in the city, and to bring people’s workplaces and homes closer together”, former industrial neighbourhoods continue to be subject to



citydev.brussels, Nova city

this trend that sees lucrative residential pushing out the remaining productive activities from the area. In addition to this, also the new real estate developments that foresee mixed project trying to combine residential (usually middle-income housing) and productive programmes have sometimes a negative impact on the old productive activities, which, according to many researchers, will eventually slowly go outside of the city.

«While certainly some neighbourhoods are characterised by their shabby industrial character and do not provide a pleasant living environment, the impact of the PRDD and ZEMU could push issues to another extreme whereby there is no protection for existing manufacturers while all building real estate owners focus on the burgeoning housing market»

(CoM, 2018)



Circularium in Cureghem

Conclusion

The question of the “development” of Brussels “fragile” neighbourhoods, such as Old Molenbeek and Cureghem is a very complex political question, which will not be discussed in depth in this work. It is important to remind that in this work the term “development” does not mean to intend that these neighbourhoods are intrinsically problematic and are supposed to “develop”, in the sense of “improving” and reach the level of other “better”, “developed” districts in the city. Instead, we would intend this term as an attempt to overcome, or at least contrast and lessen the network of social issues (e.g. socio-financial issues or the difficulty to access to the market labour) and environmental issues (e.g. the quality of life and the housing conditions) affecting these neighbourhoods. The will to contrast these problems should not be seen as an opportunity of speculation but simply as a pursuit of socio-spatial justice in the urban environment. Due to its complexity, this type of development, which is supposed to be social and spatial and the same time, has definitely to be intended to happen in the long term. According to P.Viganò, this long-term development is «intrinsically linked to investment in the education of the current, as well as to adequate timing in the improvement of housing»(Viganò, 2021). This could happen with strategic and time-bound investments in the education of the cur-

rent population (for example through the insitution of training centres) but also for the renovation and the overall improvement of the housing stock. At a social level, the long term result would probably be close to an increase in social mobility for the original population that will remain in their neighbourhood while improving their own quality of life (we are following a vision that considers professional success one of the pillars of a better quality of life, ed.). At the same time, a moderate influx of new people will arrive, both in the form of gentrification and as a city of arrival (Viganò, 2021).

«Vu les moyens financiers importants nécessaires pour une rénovation en profondeur des logements et une amélioration globale de la qualité du bâti, il est nécessaire d'adapter et d'échelonner ces rénovations privées dans le temps, pour laisser le temps à la population d'acquérir des capacités financières suffisantes. Si les développements liés à la rénovation et l'embellissement du parc résidentiel arrivent trop rapidement, la population habitant ces logements ne pourra pas se les approprier et un scénario mêlant gentrification et déplacement de population en sera le résultat. L'enjeu est donc d'accorder le temps de l'augmentation de la qualité résidentielle au temps du développement socio-économique de la population.»

(Viganò, 2021)



4.

The garages district

Heyvaert, Cureghem

«Lorsqu'on parle des activités métropolitaines, surtout dans les grandes métropoles, on pense toujours à des activités d'excellence; aux activités financières, culturelles, scientifiques et universitaires, artistiques et de la communication; les activités qu'on imagine comme étant aptes à faire de cette métropole un point de repère pour des populations toujours plus globalisées. Mais la métropole est toujours plus complexe et souvent on y trouve des activités surprenantes qu'on ne trouve pas dans d'autres cas»

Secchi & Viganò, 2011

Located between the Abattoirs, the Chaussée de Mons, the Canal and the inner ring road, the Heyvaert district is one of a kind in Brussels, in Belgium and even in Europe. In 2015, M. Rosenfeld and M. Van Criekingen described Heyvaert as a place that was «for most of Brussels residents, an unknown neighbourhood, a blind spot on their mental map». Nevertheless, the district is mostly known for the peculiar commercial activity that has flourished there for almost forty years, which essentially revolves around the repatriation of second-hand vehicles from all over Europe to Brussels, storing them in the Heyvaert district and then reloading them onto trucks to Antwerp, from where they are loaded onto ships, mainly bound for Western Africa. The many garages located within the district and in its immediate surroundings have thus been an essential link in the export trade of second-hand vehicles from Europe to West Africa, where the cars find a second life. This intense trading activity is the reason Heyvaert is mostly known as “the cars district” or “the garages district”.

«Chaque quartier a ses grandes et ses petites histoires. Il en est ainsi aussi pour les quartiers oubliés. Les histoires du quartier Heyvaert parlent de transition, de changement. Elles relient la ville au monde, une guerre civile au Liban fait augmenter la demande de voitures d'occasion, des gens décrivent avec lyrisme le quartier comme l'Avenue Louise du commerce de voitures d'occasion, des Africains qui viennent de Paris avec le Thalys pour faire leur achats ici...»

Le Collège des Bourgmestre et Echevins (2012)

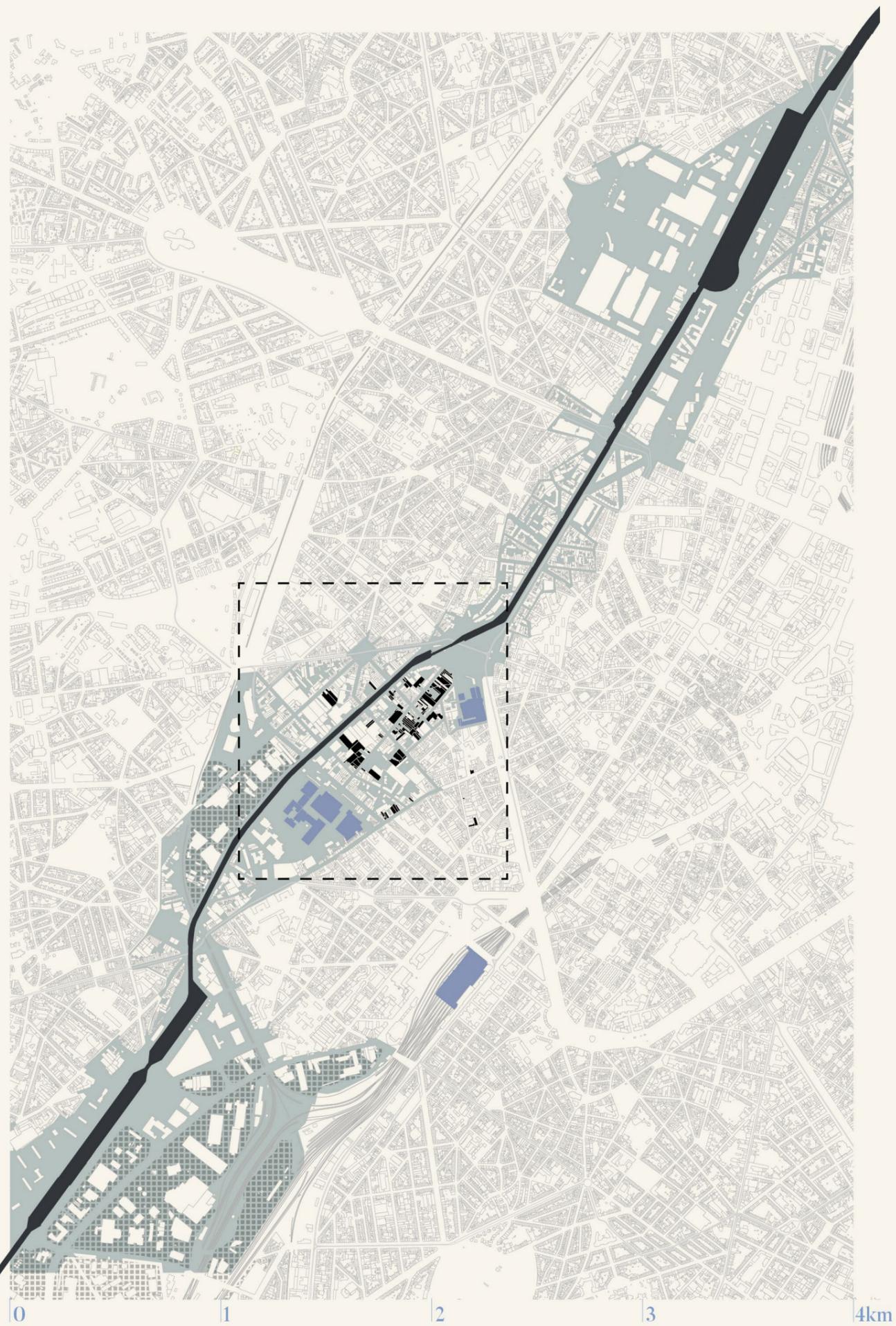
Le quartier Heyvaert: une île



< A truck transporting cars along Quai de l'Industrie.
Photo by Michiel De Cleene.

> Aerial view of Heyvaert from the Abattoirs d'Anderlech.
Frame from the short film *Brussels city of making* (2017)



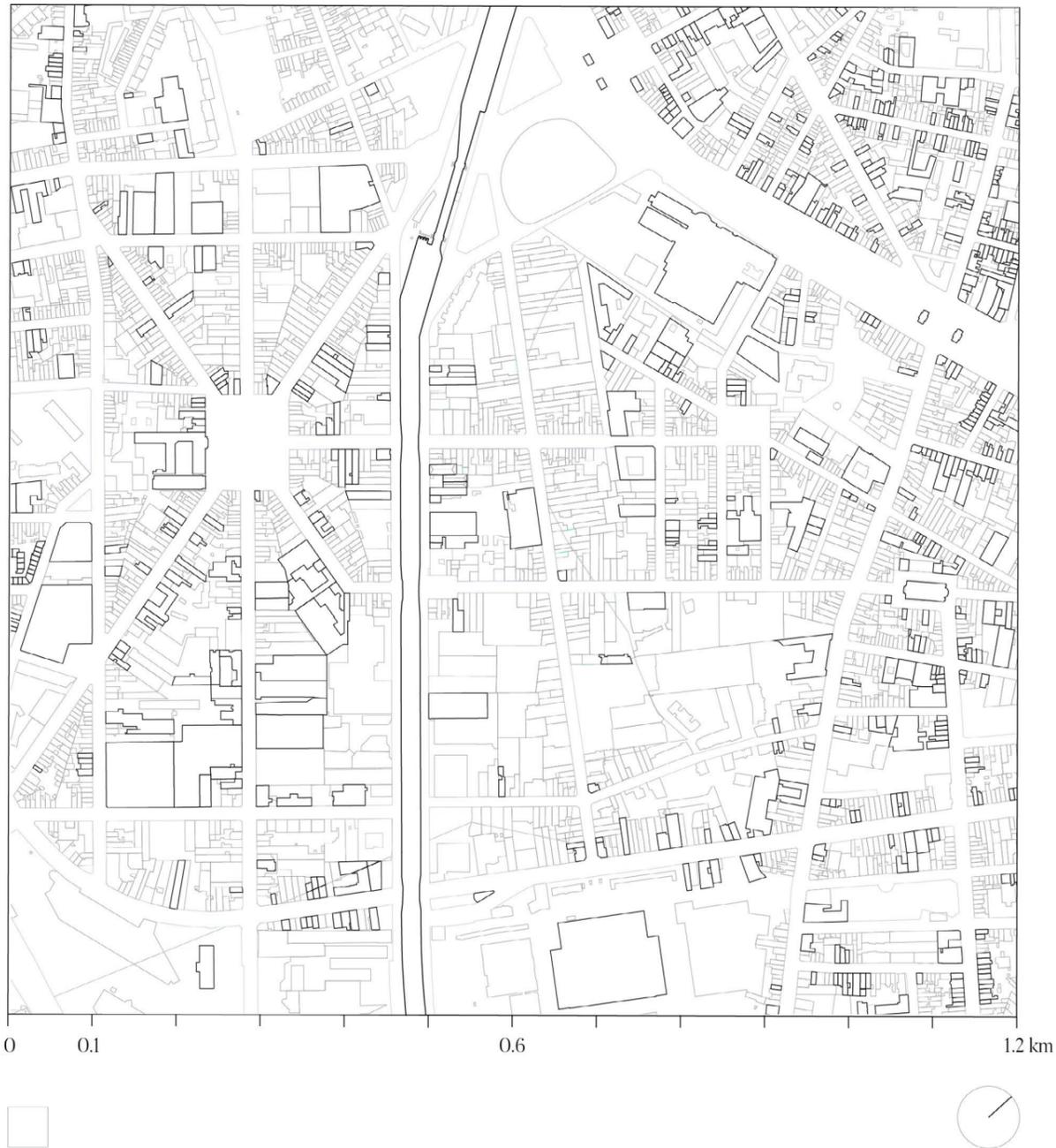


This space is characterised by the presence of strong urban markers. Once symbols of technical progress and economic dynamism, these urban markers contribute today to the physical, social and political isolation of Heyvaert (and Cureghem) from the rest of the communes and the city (Rosenfeld, 2015).

The first of these landmarks is the Charleroi Canal. Physical and symbolic boundary cutting the city into two, but also “poverty pocket” in the heart of the capital (Rosenfeld, 2015), the Canal marks the northern limit of the district. Then, the Abattoirs d’Anderlecht (Anderlecht slaughterhouses), which is one of the last European slaughterhouses still active in a city centre. With its open-air hall built on the model of the Parisian halles, it is today the market that attracts more people in Brussels (Mascia, 2015). Located at the beginning of rue Heyvaert the Abattoirs d’Anderlecht site marks the western extremity of the district. The eastern boundary corresponds to Brussels petite ceinture, that is the road built on the site of the old fortifications that protected the town in mediaeval times. Finally, although it is located more south, the presence of South Station (Gare du Midi, that is the biggest railway station in the country) has also a strong impact on the district.

- ⋮ study area
- Canal area
- big landmarks
- garages

heritage



Source: Région de Bruxelles Capitale, Inventaire du patrimoine architectural. (<https://monument.heritage.brussels>)

industrial heritage



Zoom from: *Carte figurative des entreprises industrielles dans Bruxelles (1910)*, dessinée par A. Verwest et F. Xhardez. Les vignettes sont gravées par M. Vandroost. Cette carte, produite à l'occasion de l'Exposition de 1910 à l'initiative des industriels bruxellois, illustre à la fois le souci de la qualité architecturale des bâtiments industriels et leur localisation privilégiée dans le bas de la ville et les faubourgs proches (© La Fonderie).

streetscape



The now densely populated district of Cureghem, which until the 19th century was a hamlet with a few mills and breweries, went through a big transformation during the Industrial Revolution. The construction of the Charleroi Canal accomplished in 1832 and the proximity of the railways (the *Gare du Midi* has been operating since 1840) made the position of the district strategic and fostered the development of activities mainly linked to textiles and later on to animal slaughter (Claudel & Scohier, 2014). In 1841 a first big slaughterhouse (*l'Abattoir de Bruxelles*) was inaugurated in Cureghem close to the *Ninove Porte*, on the site that where later on the Arts and Crafts School was built. The presence of the slaughterhouses, which was the driving force behind the urbanisation of the district and attracted a multitude of activities linked to their presence: meat wholesalers, leather goods manufacturers, dyeing factories, oil factories, glove factories, candle factories. In the 1870s, the presence of an *abattoir* within the urban fabric started to be considered as source of nuisances. After several negotiations between the *Ville de Bruxelles* and the Anderlecht municipality, a new complex is built in a more decentralised area of Cureghem. The operation entailed the deviation of the river Senne and the extensions the *rue Ropsy Chaudron* -in order to connect the site to the South Station- and the *rue Heyvaert* - in order to connect it to the petite ceinture

around the Pentagon (Brées, Renson, Scohier, 2012).

«The creation of the slaughterhouses in Anderlecht is indicative of the retreat of industrial activities to the suburbs and of a change in the status of space. suburbs and a change in the status of the industrial space in relation to the urban environment. The slaughterhouses do not fit into a pre-existing fabric, but rather structure a new neighbourhood.»

(Brées, Renson, Scohier, 2012)

Because of the coexistence with industry and the continuous arrival of a population of workers and craftsmen (at the beginning mainly coming from Flanders), Cureghem will never have the allure of a bourgeois neighbourhood. Most of the time the warehouses and ateliers developed in the interior of the blocks, embedded in the urban fabric, unlike the vast industrial areas on the west bank of the canal (Brées, Renson, Scohier, 2012).

After the Second World War, many new migrant workers (mostly from southern Europe, northern Africa and Turkey) came to settle in the neighbourhood. Indeed, due to their proximity to the Gare du Midi, Cureghem and therefore the Heyvaert district have been throughout the years arrival places for Belgium and Brussels newcomers, but they

Rue Heyvaert, vue du dernier tronçon côté pair en 1965, ACA/Urb. 42428bis (31.08.1965). source: monument.heritage.brussels

Vue du pont de la rue des Mégissiers ("shippers street", ed.) enjambant la Petite Senne. (VAN AUNDENHOVE, J., *Les rues d'Anderlecht*, Commémoration du vingtième anniversaire de la fondation d'*Anderlechtensia*, C.A.F.H.A, 1995, p.168). source: monument.heritage.brussels



have also been transit places for people who managed to improve their living condition and settle elsewhere. The migration movements continued in the 1970s with the arrival of South Americans and of Lebanese, African, East European people from the 1990s onwards.

From the end of 1980s onwards, a new economic activity began to develop in the Heyvaert district, that is the import-export of second-hand cars. During the 1990s, garage owners started occupying the spaces left vacant by most of the butchers and meat wholesalers that, due to the introduction of new and stricter hygiene standards, preferred to move to the outskirts of the city rather than undertake expensive compliance work on site (Claudel & Scohier, 2014). Car-related business gradually replaced the slaughterhouse and butchery trades, taking advantage of the large industrial spaces and hosting different types of businesses, from the smallest retailer or repairer to the largest vehicle exporter. The first to move into the Heyvaert district were the consignees (most of Lebanese origin) who, in the process of second-hand vehicles trade, took care of transporting the vehicles to the port of Antwerp and then transferring them by ship to western Africa. Once the consignees occupied the warehouses, a series of other

traders came to set up in the vicinity, according to a principle of concentration of activity (rosenfeld,mosaique), thus providing second-hand vehicles importers to have a set of services in the same area. Since then, Heyvaert district has been home to a very intense activity of second-hand car trade, becoming an international reference and hub in the sector. The activity is condensed in a few streets, where it is possible to compare a great variety of vehicles gathered from all around Europe: it is in this concentration that lies the strength of Heyvaert marketplace (rosenfeld,mosaique). Today, there are about sixty businesses spread over approximately 60,000 square metres (Perspective Brussels, 2021); as the activity has an hybrid status (formal+informal), it is difficult to objectify the number of jobs it generates (Claudel & Scohier, 2014). The car trade activity has been indeed a catalyst for the economic activity of the district, encouraging the activity of local shops: African food restaurants, exotic grocery shops, pentecostal churches, tele stores and money transfer services. This concentration of shops not only contributed to the affirmation of the reputation and identity among African importers, but it also made the district attractive to people of African origin who often had no connection with the used car trade (Rosenfeld, 2015).



< The Halle Libelco, located on quai de l'industrie has been for several years one of the biggest garages in Heyvaert. In this picture foreground, we see a man carrying some appliances. Indeed, it was very common to fill up the vehicles directed to Africa with other objects, from electrical appliances to mattresses.

Photo by Chris Keulemans.

> One of the many exotic shops in the neighbourhood, rue Ropsy-Chaudron, October 2021.



Second-hand car trade: neighbourhood economy and global phenomenon

Every year, hundreds of thousands of European vehicles leave from the port of Antwerp directed to the port of Cotonou, Benin, on board of specialised ships, ready to start a new life and commercial cycle in sub-saharan Africa (Perraldi, 2017). There is a sort of analogy between the position of Brussels and Cotonou: these two commercial hubs have the same role, mirrored (Rosenfeld, 2017). While Brussels gathers and concentrates vehicles from all over Europe, Cotonou, besides being sometimes their place of arrival, takes charge of re-exporting them on the West African market¹.

The second-hand vehicles trade is characterised by a double dimension, global and local at the same time. Whether in Brussels or Cotonou, the economic activity is extremely rooted in the local and highly concentrated, not only in terms of space, which is extremely limited at the urban scale, but also in terms of time of stay of the buyers (Rosenfeld, 2009). Simultaneously, this is a global phenomenon and it must thus be considered within its macroeconomic dimension as part of a transnational trade chain.

¹ It is estimated that around 95% of the vehicles that disembark in Cotonou are destined to the re-exportation. Once they are sold, a customs system is established according to their final destination. A preferential regime is set aside for the countries landlocked in the hinterland, such as Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso (Rosenfeld, 2017).

global dimension

Europe is currently the largest used light-duty vehicles exporter², mainly exporting to West and North Africa. On the other hand, Africa is now the main importer: between 2015 and 2018, the continent was the ultimate destination for 40% of used light-duty vehicles (UNEP report, 2020). The second-hand vehicles export chain is certainly a commercial activity that has been able to connect the African demand for cheap cars and the many second hand vehicles available in the world. In several sub-saharan countries, new vehicles are extremely uncommon, and to own a car means having bought it second hand (Rosenfeld, 2017).

This trade is directly linked to ecological issues. Although it can be seen as a recycling chain allowing a recirculation of goods that in Europe have reached the end of their lives, on the other hand it keeps in use vehicles that are old and often polluting and unsafe³. Most of the importing countries still have weak

² Between 2015 and 2018, The EU was the largest exporter with 54 per cent of the total followed by Japan (27%) and the USA (18%).

³ The Netherlands – one of the largest used vehicle exporters to Africa - studied used European vehicles being exported through their ports and found that many vehicles, mainly destined for West Africa, were between 16 and 20 years old, fell below European Union emission standards and did not have a valid roadworthiness certificate at the time of export. The Gambia, for example, imports vehicles on average 18.8 years old, while a quarter of those imported by Nigeria are nearly 20 years old.

policies regulating the import of used vehicles, while many of the imported vehicles would not be allowed to circulate on the roads of exporting countries (de Jong, 2020).

The trade is not supposed to weaken in the near future (quite the opposite, according to the projection, the “fleet of light duty vehicles” will at least double by 2050). Nevertheless, both exporting and importing countries will have to regulate the trade and eliminate a range of abuses. On the one hand, exporting countries will have to stop exporting vehicles that are no longer roadworthy, and fail environment and safety inspections while importing countries must adopt up-to-date regulations. Indeed, before 2020, fifteen African countries announced strict new rules

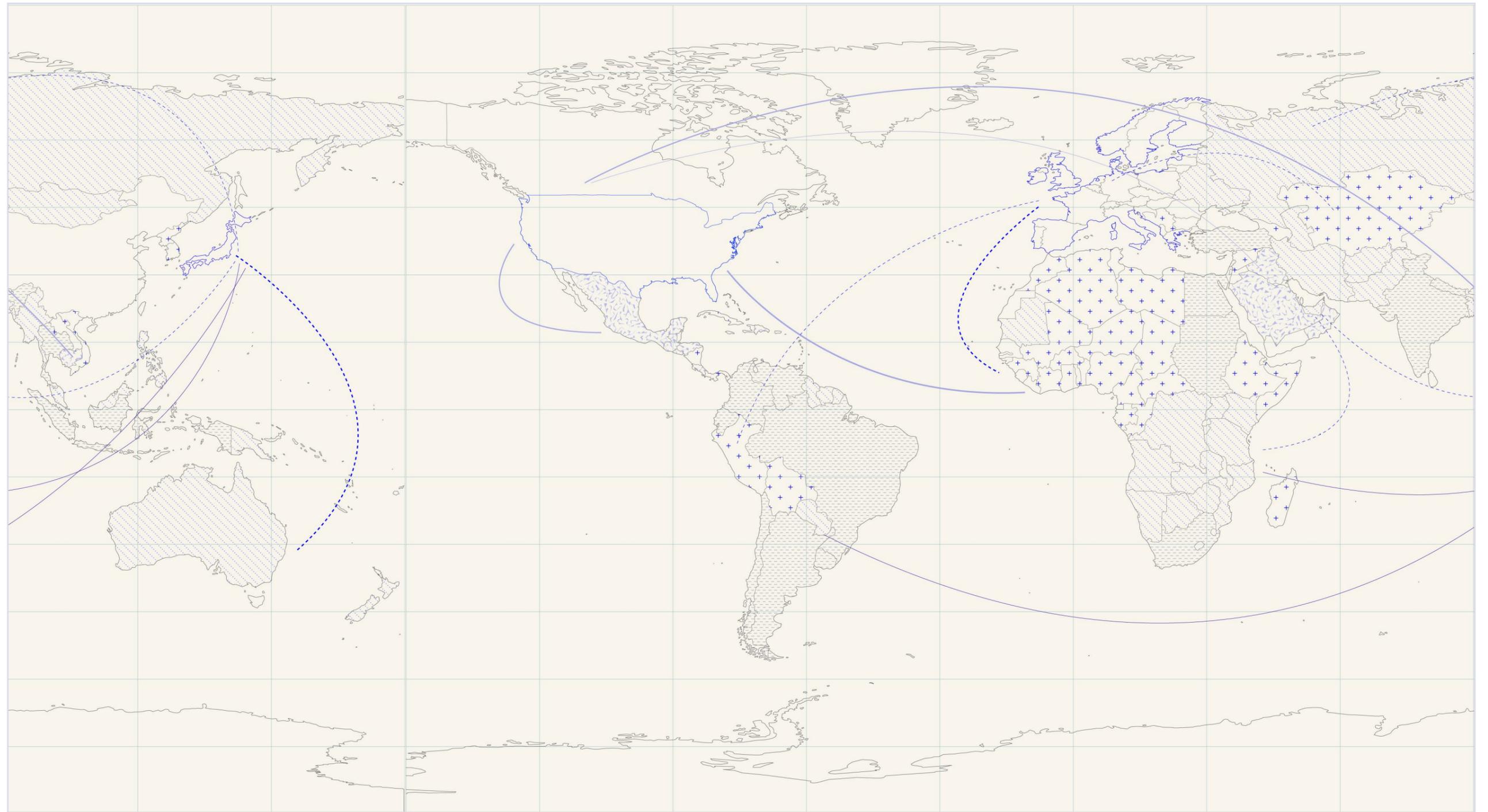
for vehicle emissions and fuel efficiency. The rules are a milestone in slashing greenhouse gas emissions in a region that is home to about 400 million people, where many vehicles are past their prime.

The organisation of the commercial chain that allows the circulation of these vehicles was related to the concept of “globalisation from below” (Rosenfeld, 2017), which was initially proposed to describe a new type of transnational immigrant entrepreneurship (Portes, 1999). In this peculiar case, it can indicate a trade chain created and led “from below” by migrant communities and based, in Heyvaert as in Africa, on migratory and diasporic networks (Claudel & Scohier, 2014).

«The export trade in second-hand vehicles offers a particular insight into the migratory movements that take place in the context of an economic activity. It is indeed interesting to observe that if the movements of people and objects that we observe today in Brussels do take place on a planetary scale, they do so in a radically different way from what we usually associate with the concept of globalisation. It is through the individual initiative of hundreds of transmigrant entrepreneurs building bridges between two worlds separated from each other by physical and cultural borders that real migratory circuits are emerging. These migratory circuits are extremely flexible and mobile, and behave in a very different way from the global flows of goods decided “from above” by multinational companies.»

(Rosenfeld 2009).

used vehicles trade worldwide

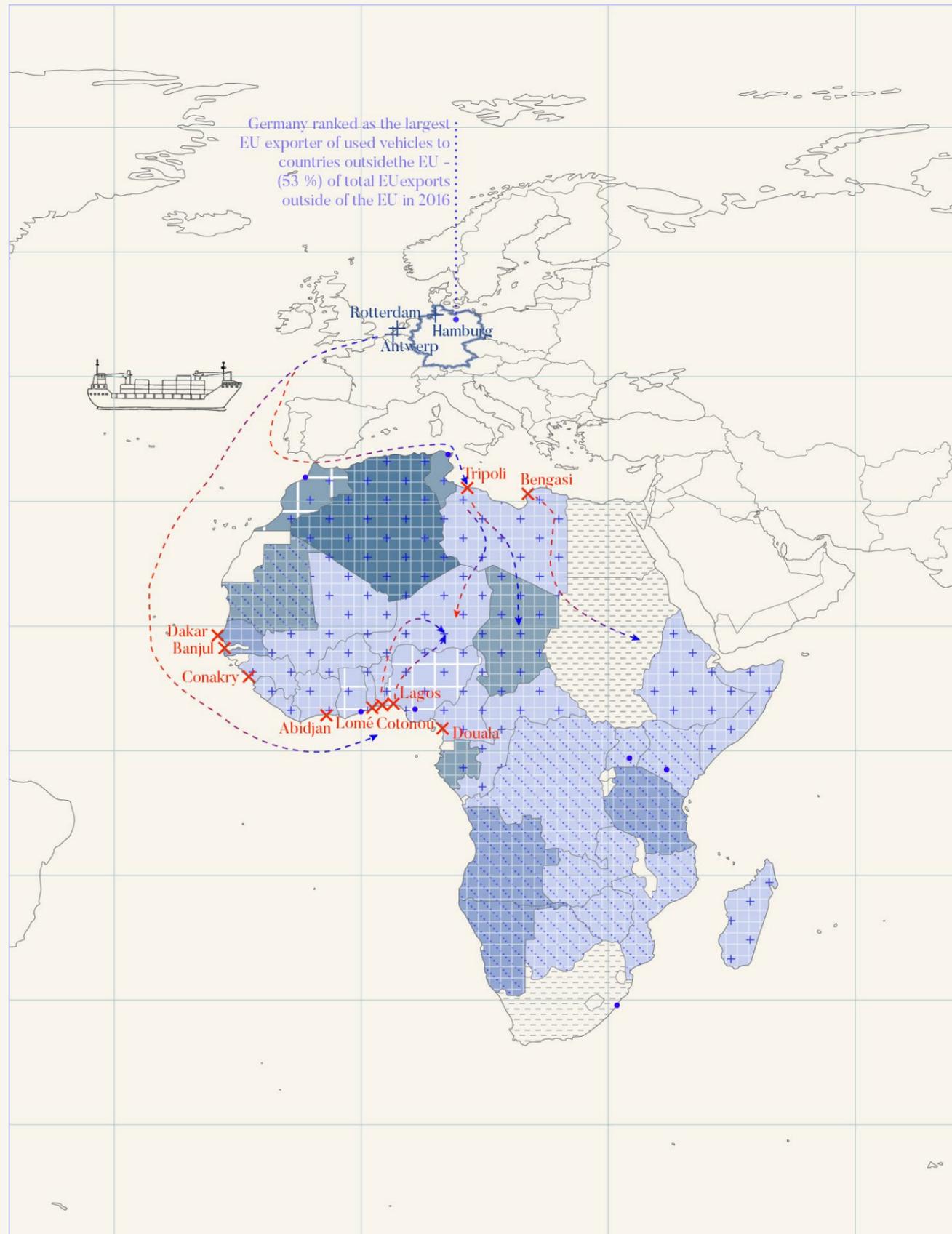


Source: UNEP, based on data collected from major exporters, 2017

- Largest exporter per destination country**
- main exporters
 - countries where the import is banned
 - Europe
 - Japan
 - USA

- Estimated number of vehicles per year**
- 20.000-145.000
 - 145.000-270.000
 - higher than 270.000

Europe to Africa



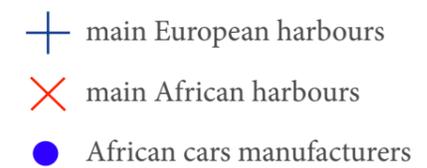
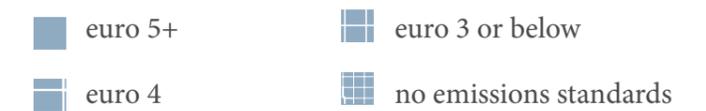
Top Markets for Used Light Duty Vehicle Exports from the Three Major Global Exporters in 2018



Used Light Duty Vehicle Import Age Limits in Africa (July 2020)



Light Duty Vehicle Emission Standards in Africa (Euro) (July 2020)



Source: UNEP, based on data collected from major exporters, 2017

local dimension

The **market place** refers to a space that manages to combine the double challenge of fragmentation and concentration. As used vehicles merchandise is produced every time someone decides to sell their old car, this production is random and, in order to be profitable, spread over a vast territory.

The marketplace contributes then to collect and organise this flux of vehicles (Rosenfeld, 2017). The purpose of concentration lies in the recreation of the conditions of a market in the place that gathers all the vehicles (“market” standing both as the economical process allowing to determine a price by comparing supply and demand, and as the physical space where this comparison takes place).



^ In 2014, it has been estimated that more than 400 vehicles pass through Heyvaert every day. (Caudel & Scohier, 2014).

the trade actors

The Euro-African second-hand vehicles export trade is a complex activity where multiple actors play a role. What allows the cost-effectiveness and efficiency of this process is the independence of its economical actors, each of them taking charge, in a compartmentalised way and with a co-dependency that is merely functional, of their part of business (Paraldi, 2017).

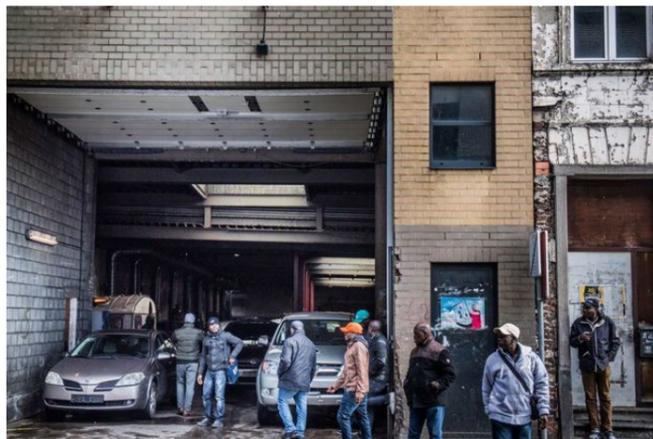
The export of second-hand vehicles involves a regular interaction between a fully formal, legal and institutionalised dimension, and a more informal one that relies more on which is based more on the relationships between individuals (Rosenfeld, 2009).

What most of the people involved in this trade have in common is that they are usually of foreign origin. Many consignees and garage owners are Lebanese or have Lebanese origins, other garage owners and sellers of second-hand goods have Maghrebi origins, while im-

porters and intermediaries are mostly people from Sub-Saharan Africa (Claudel & Scohier, 2014).

Nevertheless, if this is a common point, there are many differences that concern, beside the actors' origin and their function in the trade, also their legal status in Belgium and their migration project. People's legal status plays a major role in the distribution of functions and in the occupation of actors. For the most precarious people, such as undocumented migrants and asylum seekers, participation in these activities is a way of integrating themselves into an economic activity, even if it is informal. Due to this hybrid status of the activity (that as we said lies in its formal and informal interactions), it is difficult to objectify the number of jobs it generates.

Rosenfeld identifies nine profiles of actors, according to the role they occupy in the trade (Rosenfeld, 2017).



< Photo by Mathieu Golinvaux

bigger companies

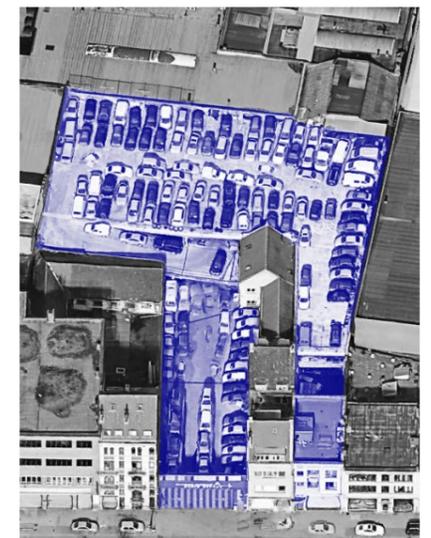
SOCAR *shipping agency*

- _ Founded in 1979
- _ 2000 cars/month
- _ 20 African destinations
- _ other locations: Paris



KARIM EXPORT *transport maritime*

- _ Founded in 1989
- _ (around) 1660 cars/month
- _ 16 African destinations



ABOU ZEID *shipping*

- _ Founded in 1984
- _ 13 African destinations
- _ other locations: Paris



Heyvaert, BCR, Belgium

SELLER

the garage owner

They run a space (whose size can vary a lot) that is specialised in purchasing and reselling of second-hand vehicles. The difference among each others lies in their vehicles supply (as there are different suppliers networks) and the kind of vehicles they sell.

the consignee

The person responsible for the whole process of vehicles transfer from Heyvaert to their final African destination. They take charge of the vehicles on behalf of importers by stocking them until their departure, then bringing them to Antwerp port and loading them on a ship that will carry out the crossing to the African continent. In Heyvaert this role has been monopolised by Lebanese origin people. They negotiate in advance with the ship owners for the purchase of a given number of spots on a ship doing the crossing every month. This spots are then individually resold to the importers for each of their vehicles.

BUYER

the importer

It's the character connecting Europe to Africa. They are entrepreneurs who come to buy a batch of vehicles they will resell on their country of origin. Some of them need to travel to see the goods, others manage to have them dispatched at a distance. In Heyvaert the importers are mostly coming from Benin.

Antwerp, Belgium

the ship owner

They never get in touch with their clients, that is the importers. The consignees, who play the role of mediators, pay in advance a price that corresponds to a precise surface on the ship.

the commissioner/ market runner

The person having a mediator role between the buyer and the seller, monetising their expertise on a precise marketplace. Once a trade is finalised, they get a commission both by the buyer they helped to find the item at its best price and by the seller, to whom they brought a client.

Cotonou, Benin, Western Africa

the retailer

This profile, which is only present in the west-African part of the commercial chain, is basically an importer that does not have a supply network of their own. **Rather than competitors, the retailers and the importers have quite a complementary role.** Indeed, they allow the importers to recover very rapidly part of the capital invested for the purchase of a stock of vehicles.

The car sales fleet manager

The manager of one of the big plots having the status of *magasins sous douane* (bonded shops), a sort of extension of the port customs exception zone.

The forwarding agent

The person taking charge of all the administrative procedures that are necessary for the customs clearance of a vehicle bought in Africa.

The customs officer

This profile is present at different levels of the trade, both at Antwerp and Cotonou harbour. In the first case, they have to verify the documents of the vehicles before they are exported, in order to assure they were not stolen and they are not filled with dangerous or illegal goods. On the other hand, the Beninese custom officers need to verify that the number of vehicles corresponds to the declared one.

sites

actors



Europe

import

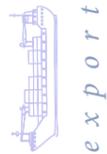


Heyvaert
(marketplace)

export

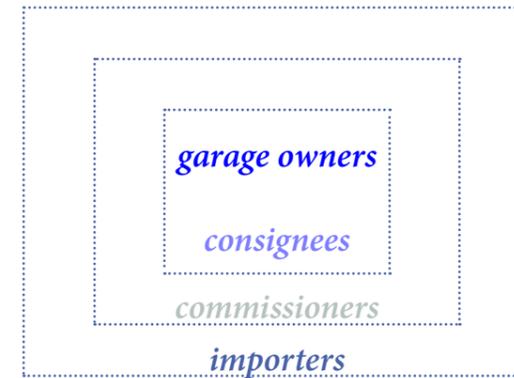


Antwerp harbour



export

Africa



consignees
customs officers
ship owners

consignees
customs officers
retailers
car sales fleet managers
forwarding agents

✓ Heyvaert economic cluster. The color blue identifies the garages still active in 2021.



In Heyvaert, the garages are spaces specialised in selling and purchasing second-hand vehicles. The **size** of these garages can vary a lot, from shop windows that can only display a few cars, to some warehouses exceeding one hundred vehicles. The tiny display spaces often have a shop window role. This means that they help guarantee a better visibility to garage owners who have much bigger spaces available, but often located in the Brussels periphery (Rosenfeld, 2017).

Beside their size, there are other parameters that characterise and distinguish the garages. One is the **depth configuration**¹. Indeed, the depth configurations of mixed street fronts provide information regarding the potential relationship that exists between the street, the built front and the economic activity in the backyard (Le Fort, 2017). Thus, the depth configuration is in turn linked to the **plot configuration** or plot distribution. This last parameter indicates

whether the plot² is a homogeneous or a mixed one.

«The homogeneous configuration concerns plots where all buildings are exclusively designed to host a productive, logistic or economic activity, including administrative spaces. They are established on large and deep plots of a street front.» (Le Fort, 2018)

One example can be seen in monumental buildings like the MBBM (Belgian Metal Boxes Manufacture), which largely outscale their contexts in the public domain. This building occupies a wide plot and have a direct relation with the street.

On the other hand, in the case of mixed configurations, the industrial typology is most of the time hidden behind the facades of an ordinary terraced house.

«The mixed configuration concerns plots with more than one building,

¹ Urban researchers call “depth” the space configurations which give access, through devices of transitions (such as doors, passages, etc.) from a space - a public one - to another space - a private one (Habraken & Teicher, 2000; Carmona, 2014; Clossick, 2017; Le Fort, 2017).

² We only take into consideration plots that are occupied by industrial or semi-industrial building typologies. Thus, plots occupied by residential building is not taken into consideration for this classification.

with a residential frontage, sometimes with ground floor shops, and small productive buildings like workshops and warehouses in the backyard. This configuration may present various readable nuances on and through the street front ground floors:

- Mixed frontage initially made up to allow access to the backyard: artisanal activities (workshop), industrial (warehouse, small factory) or logistics (stables) were integrated with the very first design of the frontage in a balanced architectural composition.
- Residential frontage, which was transformed to enable the access to the backyard: semi-industrial spaces were built as a second step after the constitution of the frontage with a high risk of architectural denaturation.» (Le Fort, 2018)

In this case, what happens many times throughout the years is that «whilst the cell wall suggests the illusion to be static, its nucleus is continually undergoing a transformation.» (Vandyck, 2020)

In the following pages a reading of the building typologies is presented. This research looked at the garage spaces in their current configuration. Besides the

plot distribution and the building typology, the reading chosed to focus on the plot sizes and the relationship of the building with the public space. Indeed, both of them can reveal interesting information both on the current state, such as the economic capacity of a garage, and on a possible plot reconfiguration in a scenario of urban renewal.

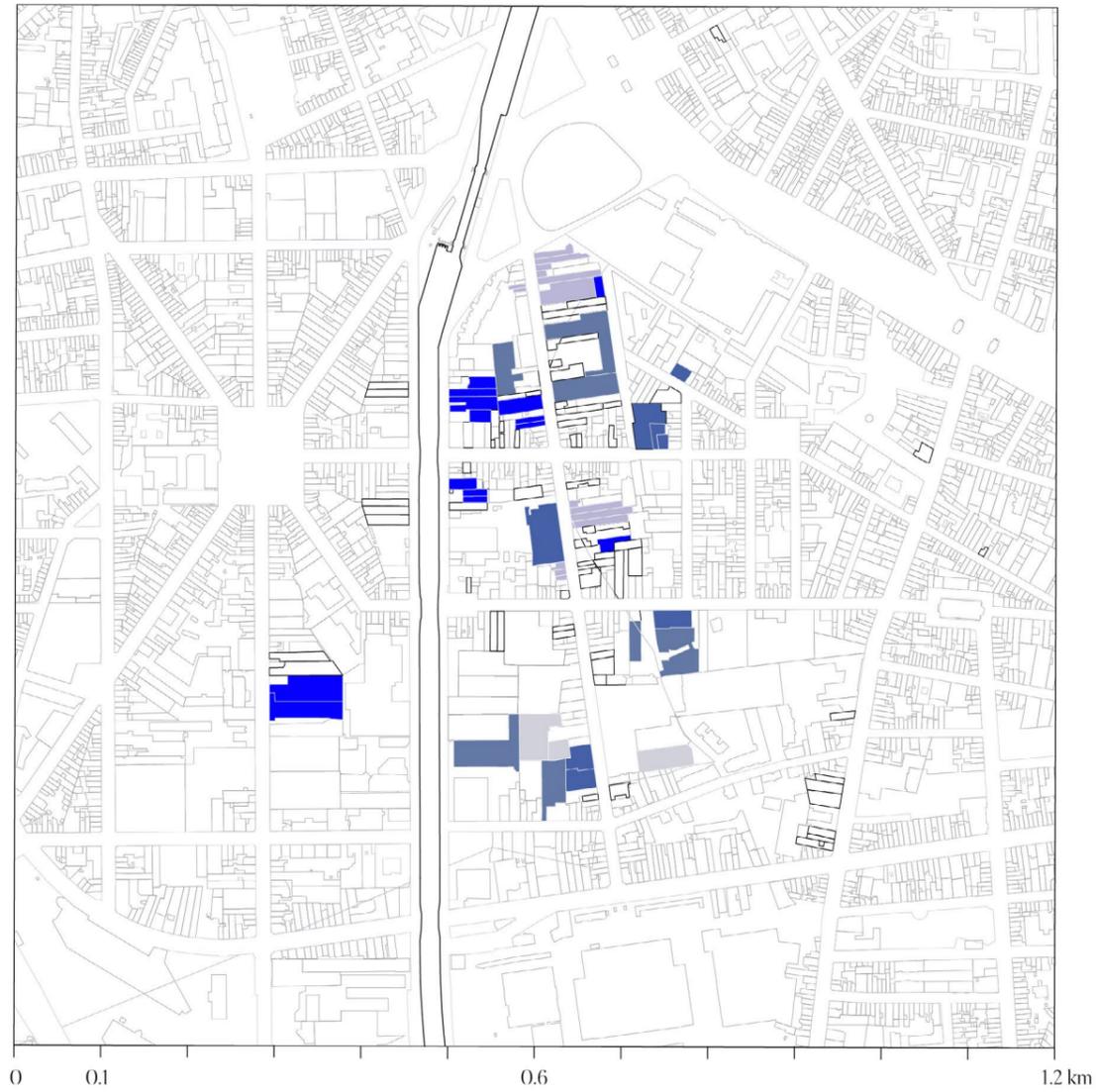
homogeneous configuration

Aerial images show that several garages were built after the middle of the 70s, that is when the traders settles in Heyvaert. Nevertheless, some warehouses were already there before, and were adapted to the new economic function.

mixed configuration

In Heyvaert there are many garages that are hidden behind a residential building, which might be related or not to the garage. In mixed-use districts like this, due to the the parcelled landscape of ownership within the extents of a building block (Vandyck, 2020), some business results in veritable labyrinths, hidden behind terraced houses or apartment buildings.

garages types



old warehouse



warehouse in the back



car park



modern warehouse

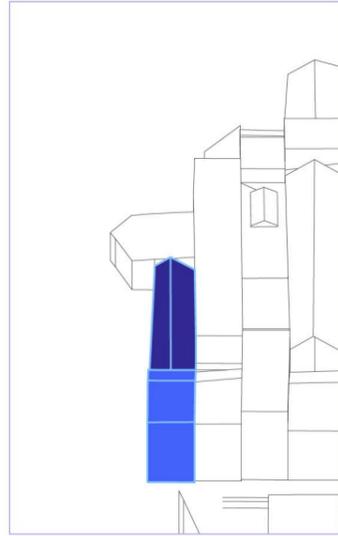
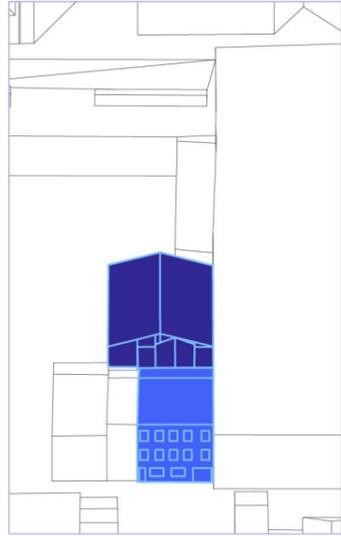


iconic industrial building

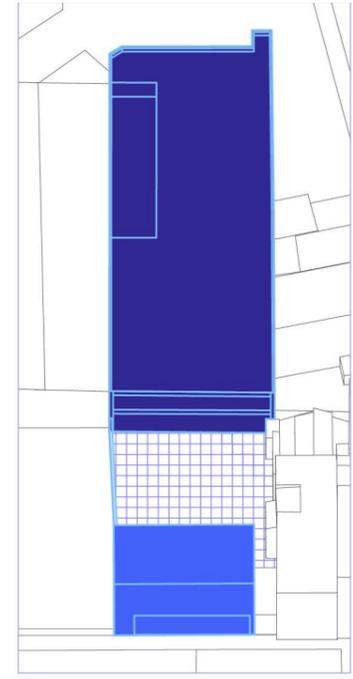
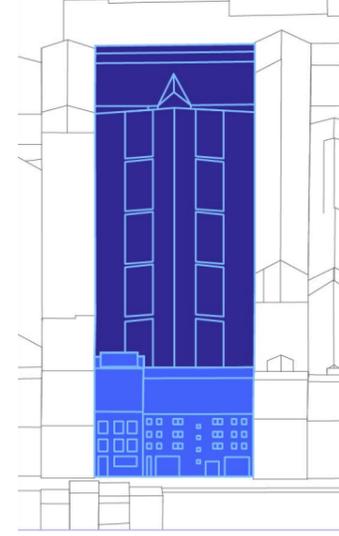
plot: mixed configuration

building: terraced house/apartment building + warehouse

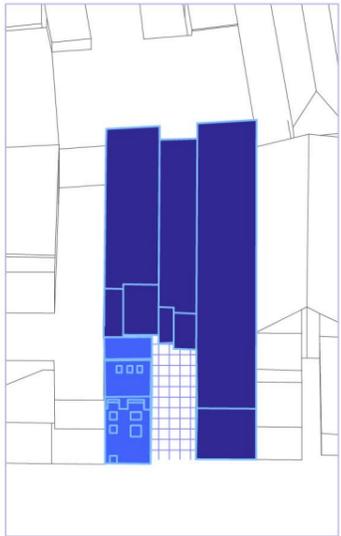
residential frontage



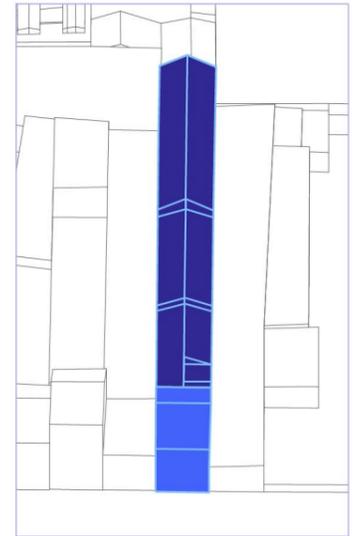
residential frontage



mixed frontage



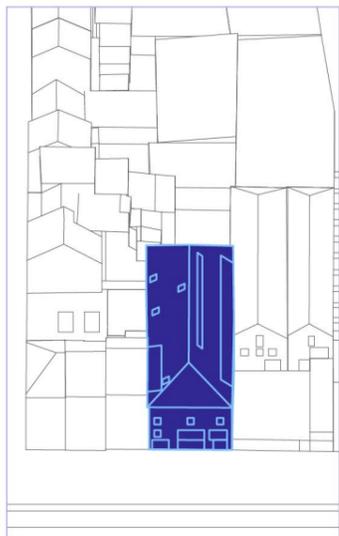
residential frontage



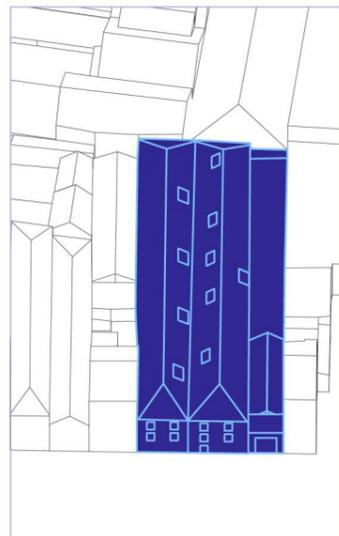
plot: homogeneous configuration

building: warehouse

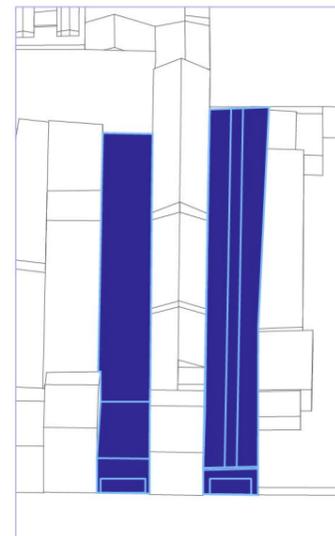
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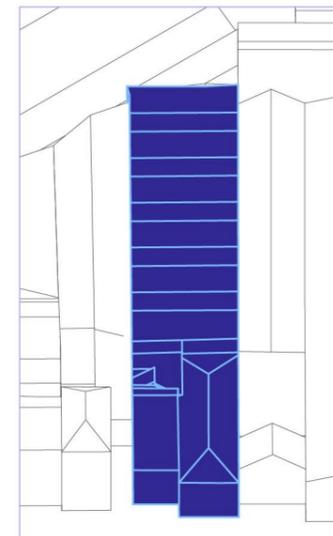
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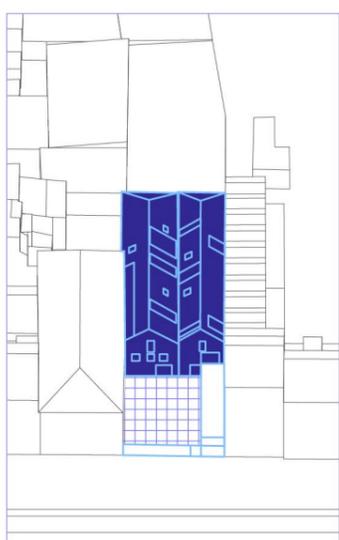
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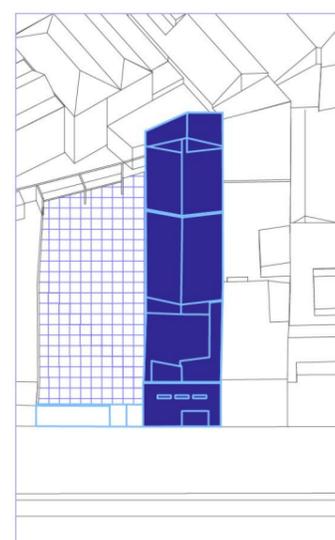
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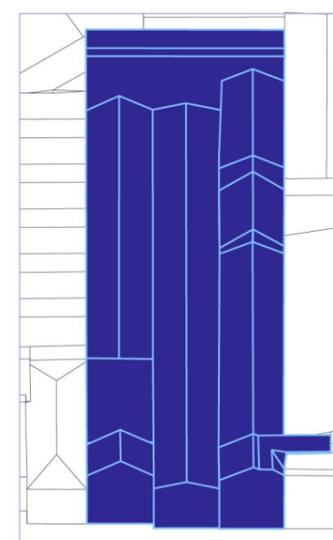
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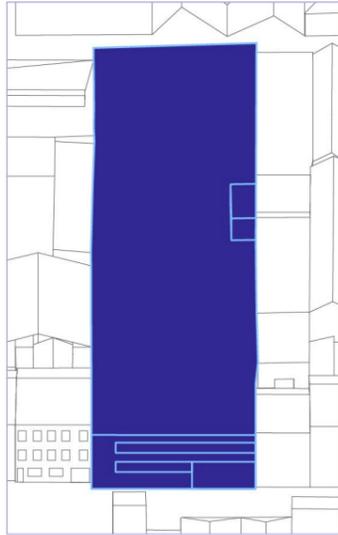
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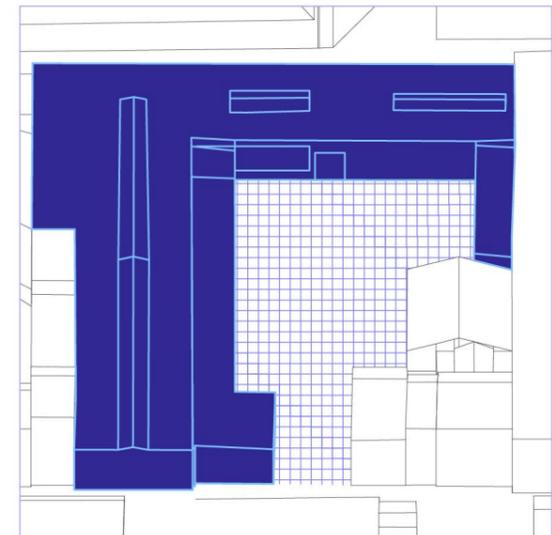
plot: homogeneous configuration

building: warehouse

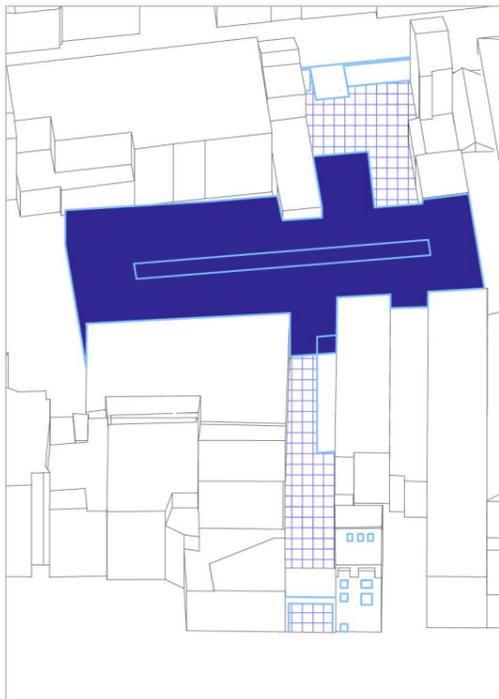
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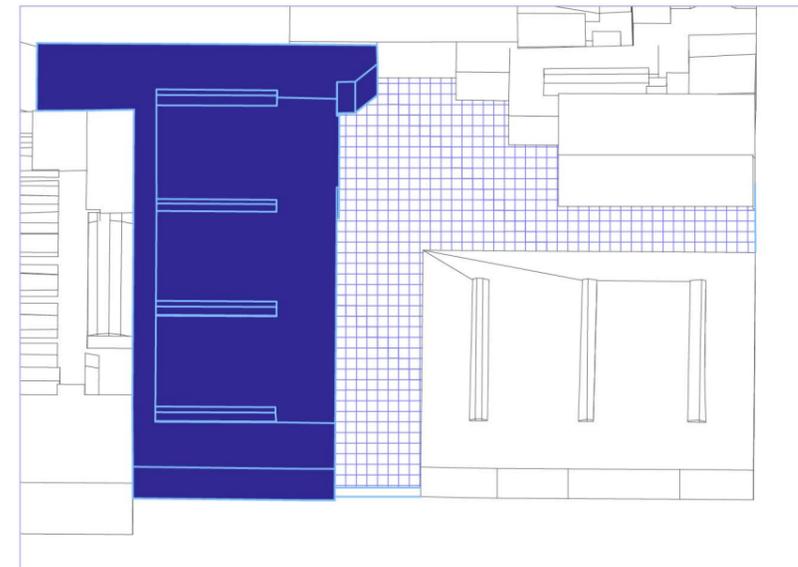
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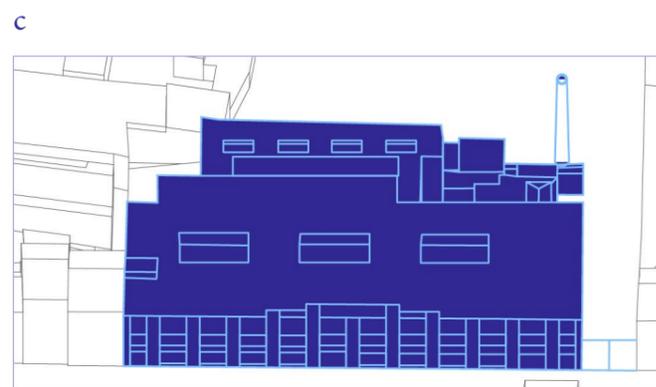


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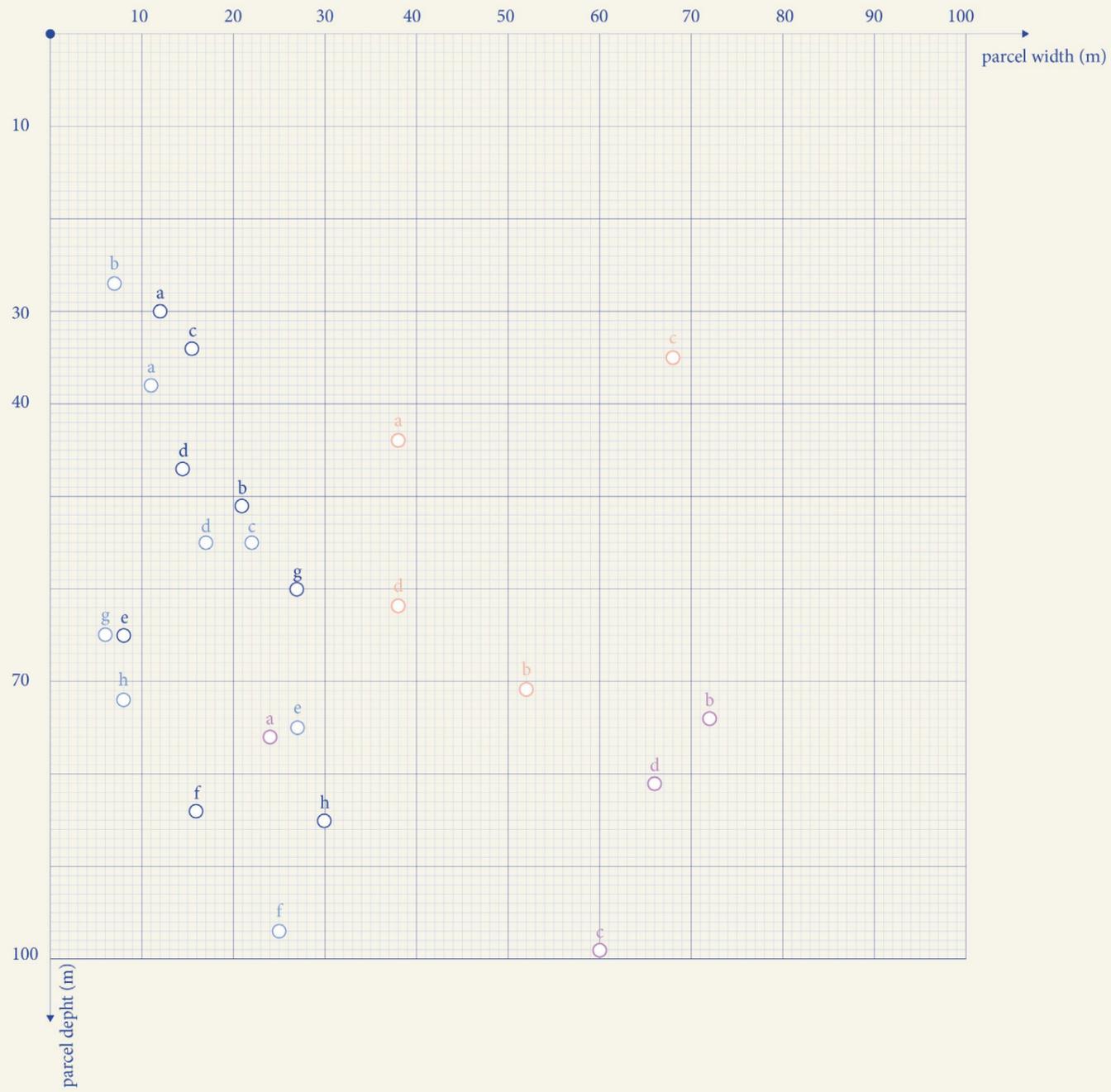


plot: homogeneous configuration

building: warehouse



garages size



plot: mixed configuration

○ terraced house/apartment building + warehouse

plot: homogeneous configuration

○ old warehouse

○ big, modern warehouse

○ iconic industrial building

The garage spaces

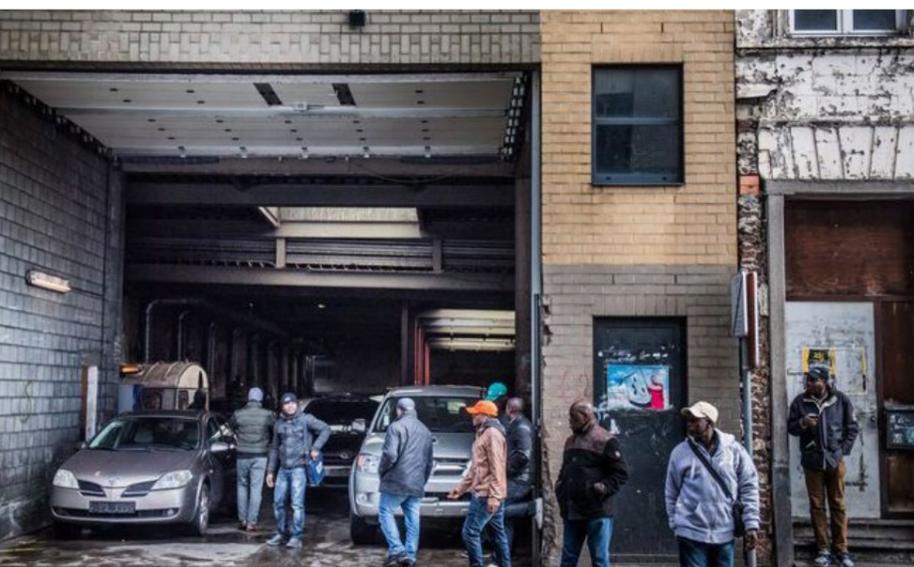






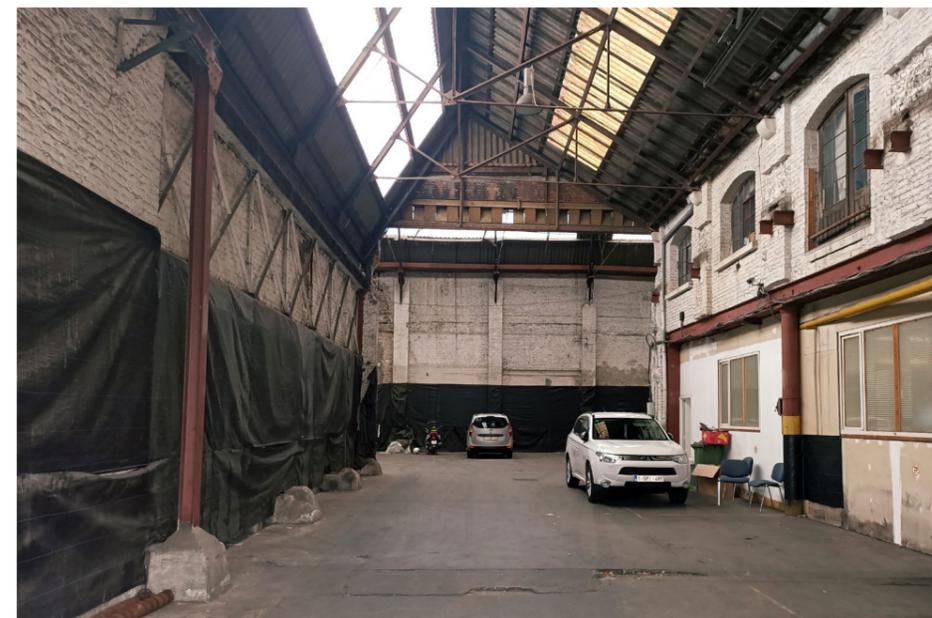
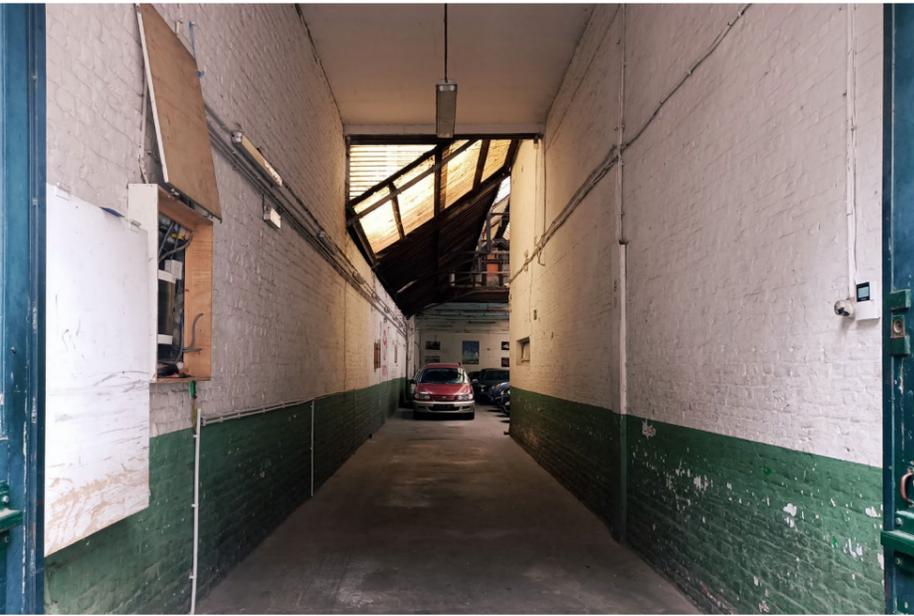














From a subterranean activity to an activity under pressure

Although the Heyvaert district had become a major market place within a transnational commercial network, this activity remained relatively unknown to Brussels inhabitants for a long time. This phenomenon could be explained by the marginal status of this district, which makes it a space rarely frequented by people from outside the neighbourhood. Another reason could be that this second-hand vehicle trade was a com-

mercial activity carried out by migrant groups and aimed only at other migrant groups. While the presence of the trade was strengthening itself, the municipality political authorities remained quite indifferent to this process. At the turn of the XXI century, the visibility of the used car export trade started to increase.

The multiplication of garages complicates or discourages the installation of other types of commercial activities; the transport and delivery of cars in a dense neighbourhood such as this one is a source of discomfort for the residents; the cohabitation in the public space between inhabitants and actors of the second-hand car trade is sometimes difficult; the floors of certain buildings in which the cars are stored are left unoccupied, accelerating the deterioration of the building.

(Rosenfeld, 2015)

This went hand in hand with a renewed interest of the political elites for Cureghem and its inhabitants, probably partly because this area became politically interesting again due to the granting, in 2004, of the right to vote to non-European foreigners during the municipal elections. The result was therefore a

mobilisation which took the form of a confrontation around the urban planning of this area.

The growing visibility of the activity led the authorities to identify the trade as a problem that needed to be removed from the area. The first measures taken can be seen as a frontal policy aimed at

driving the export trade in second-hand vehicles out of the district⁴. Since these strategies were not successful, the approach changed in favour of measures that were more aimed to supervise and regulate the presence of those activities⁵.

In addition to this, from the end of the 90s the Heyvaert district started becoming strategic in the eyes of regional and municipal authorities and different urban renewal measures started being implemented in the district announcing as a priority an objective of social mix. Similarly to many other Brussels neighbourhoods, the proximity to the Canal and the inner city and the low land and property prices favoured the beginning of a real estate development process de-

icated to a middle class.

A mass transfer attempt

In 2013, the Regional Plan for Sustainable Development affirmed an intention of moving the trade away from the city centre, towards what would have been a new monofunctional area. A Roll on - Roll off (RO-RO) terminal should have been developed by the Port of Brussels on a 2.5 hectare disused site in the outer harbour, enabling a shift in the transport of second-hand cars from road to waterway. The completion of the terminal was announced for 2018, but in the same year the Board of Directors of the Port of Brussels decided to stop the procedure for the award of a concession for the operation, due to the lack of an offer for the establishment of a terminal. The drop in the interest in the operation was apparently linked to the fact that the second-hand vehicles sector was experiencing difficulties at the moment. Indeed, the amount of garages located in Heyvaert has in fact decreased in the last decade, especially for what concerns the smaller activities⁶.

⁴ In the early 1990s, the doubling of the municipal tax for businesses involved in the export of second-hand vehicles was the first measure used against garages. After a long legal battle, the criteria on which this additional tax was established were deemed discriminatory, and the measure was withdrawn. Rapport du 4/2/1992 du Collège des bourgmestres et échevins au Conseil communal d'Anderlecht.

⁵ In 2002, the municipality of Molenbeek decided to set up a service specifically responsible for controlling garages in the Heyvaert district, called Cellule Garage. In 2007, the action was extended to the neighbouring municipality of Anderlecht. The idea was to increase administrative controls on the commercial activity. For each business, the validity of the operating permits and compliance with environmental standards were checked. This action only led to the closure of a few garages, while most of the owners managed to get compliance work done and renew their licences.

⁶ source: comparison of images on google street view



contrasting scenarios

2018
should they stay or should they go?

go

massive and collective removal of car dealers.

renewal of ownership structures with several possible evolutions.

issues of clearance, rehousing, recycling of land and buildings

_1 Vers un quartier résidentiel qualitatif?

laissez-faire, real estate speculation, arrival of middle/high income population

_2 Vers un quartier mixte, durable et qualitatif?

negotiated real estate transition: impetus to be given via CRU or PAD

_3 Vers un quartier aux schémas économiques renouvelés et durabilisés?

commercial and industrial reconversion around new sectors. development of the district's technical and training potential, capitalisation on the local and foreign labour pool

stay

stagnation of decision-making processes, political changes, desolidarisation of certain exporters, fear of loss of competitiveness

issues of cohabitation, quality of life, competition of functions

_4 Vers un quartier d'accueil et de transit?

Urban decay?

Stabilisation of the districts as a reception place of precarious/immigrant populations

negative aspects: grey economy, *sans papiers*

positive aspects: community solidarity, first step towards integration, partially qualified labour force

Towards the future Heyvaert: a projects assemblage

Despite the failure in the RO-RO operation, the current transformation scenario (like the one pictured in Heyvaert masterplan, which is going to be examined further on) foresees the departure of certain properties, mostly the ones occupying the biggest plots. Indeed, some owners see the moving of the garages as an opportunity to diversify their activity and become real estate developers (Claudel & Scohier, 2014).

The Heyvaert district has been subject or partly included in different project areas by the public authorities. It is currently one of the priority areas of intervention within the regional domain of the Canal Plan. Furthermore, it is part of an [Urban Renewal Contract \(CRU\)](#) "Heyvaert-Poincaré", as well as two neighbourhoods contracts, "Compas" and "Petite Senne". All of these public projects have a programme based on social cohesion actions and public space or building projects (perspective.brussels, 2021). The two "strategic zones" of Midi Station and the West Station are not far away, as well as the Abattoirs masterplan; the renovation of the Heyvaert district is supposed to be carried out in coherence with these neighbourhood projects.

In addition to this, the area has been involved in some private operations over the last few years. A major example is development of the Circularium project, a huge circular economy hub, on the D'Ieteren centre, which was launched by the company itself. Another private actor investing in the area is the Abattoir S.A., who is developing a masterplan in its own huge property. As already said in chapter three, these kind of investments are not only aimed at giving a new face to the area (in this specific case based on circular economy and sustainable production), but also to increase the land value in view of a future real estate operation.



Elaboration of the vision for the Brussels 2040
Bruxelles et ses territoires
 Studio 010 Bernardo Secchi Paola Viganò
 ch.2. *Lordinaire et ses potentialités méconnues. Les marchands de véhicules «de seconde main»*

Plan Canal



The Government of the Brussels-Capital Region approves the interim 'Canal Plan' report. Heyvaert is selected as a test site together with Biestebroek, Birmingham, Béco, Vergote, Buda.

Adoption of the Canal Plan implementation methodology: the formation of a dedicated team; the definition of an operational zone; ten years to realise its ambitions

«The Heyvaert district represents this very special way that the city has of putting itself together, blending industry and business activities with housing and retail shops. We need to be able to take advantage of this "intestate heritage"» (A. Chemetoff)

Atelier Brussels productive metropolis (research)

Plan Régional de Développement Durable

Development of a vision for the future of D'Ieteren centre

Launch of Circularim

until 2025 (at least)

studied since 2009

Abatan masterplan



Timeline of planning documents and decisions taken by Regional and local instances about Heyvaert districts (2010-2021)

- |||| length of the Sustainable Neighborhood Contract
- p.d. under the direction of the municipalities
- p.d. under the direction of the Region
- private projects
- size of the circle: n. of housing units
- public housing
- mixed project (ex. public housing+nursery)
- normal housing
- citydev: social housing for sale
- SLRB: social housing for rental

CRITICAL VOICES

Bruxelles-Cotonou, une anthropologie économique de la filière euro-africaine d'exportation de véhicules d'occasion, Martin Rosenfeld

Heyvaert vers une transformation, IEB, 2014

"Bienvenue à Heyvaert", Uzance, vol. 4, 2015

Heyvaert et le Ro-Ro: les deux faces d'une seule et même pièce. Claire Scohier
 Bruxelles en mouvements n°276, 2016

Des vaches et des voitures — Carnets du quartier Heyvaert. Bruxelles en mouvements n°289, 2017

Avis d'Inter-Environnement Bruxelles. Enquête publique sur le projet de plan d'aménagement directeur « Heyvaert »

Project RO-RO

The Port of Brussels acquires a 2.5 hectare site in the outer harbour for the establishment of a roll-on/roll-off terminal

The BD of the Port decided to stop the procedure for the award of a concession for the operation of a roll-on/roll-off terminal in the outer harbour of Brussels for the transport of vehicles between Brussels and Antwerp.

The 'Compas' residential project SLRB (69 social housing for rental) CityDev (60 social housing for sale)

- 1. Parc de la Sennette, along which will be located new housing (25% social housing), productive activities and facilities
 - 2. Redevelopment of Manchester site into a productive and cultural hub
 - 3. Construction, extension or change of use of more than 2,000m² of future housing units. These must include at least 25% of social housing available as low-income households.
- chaussée de ninove
 - rue de liverpool
 - rue Heyvaert
 - quai de l'industrie
 - rue abbé cuylits

new housing to be developed
 social housing

Current transformation projects

The master development plan (PAD/ *plan d'aménagement directeur*) is a planning tool of regional competence that allows the definition of the strategic and regulatory aspects of an urban transformation. In addition to determining the programme, a PAD establishes the characteristics of buildings, the organisation of mobility, the general layout of public spaces (structuring of routes, landscape design) and provides indications on the protection of heritage.

The PAD is based on the public authori-

ties' desire to convert the district in accordance with the objectives set by the Plan Canal. As one of its premises and main goals is the renewal of the district urban economy, the plan assumes a gradual abandonment of the neighbourhood by second-hand car dealers, with the consequent availability of numerous large plots of land in the neighbourhood. The idea is to keep the production activities that are better integrated into an urban context and to encourage the installation of new production activities (presumably linked to the circular economy) that are compatible with life

in the city, by "re-establishing a balance between economic function and habitability". The neighbourhood thus retains its productive character but at the same time increases its residential vocation (perspective.brussels, 2021). The plan proposes five images whose purpose is to paint fragments of the vision for the future Heyvaert. Thanks to their clarity, these images were also a crucial tool to allow the citizen to understand and questioning the plan in the discussions sessions that happened before its final approval on October 2021.



-The Post-Car District -
A place for light mobility



- The Makers District -
an economy that values local skills



- The Marshland Park -
Regenerating nature for the city



- City of Flows -
Where fluids and infrastructures structure
the urban environment



- The arrival city -
Short-term opportunities for temporary
situations

Goals and solutions

_productive boundary

The PAD designates a number of axes within the perimeter as privileged places for the (re)development and strengthening of economic activities (especially manufacturing). Thus, this economic purpose brings to a new arrangement, namely the productive boundary, which delimits spaces on the street front. Here, priority is given to productive activities (and community facilities), while other types of functions are restricted. Furthermore, the plan recommends the preservation of “a sufficient number large parcels to

meet the spatial needs of production/ logistic enterprises” and establishes that buildings ground floors with a footprint of more than 200 square metres must be intended for productive activities.

_building heritage, public space and living environment quality improvement

Recognition of the value of the industrial heritage is expressed through the desire for its enhancement mainly through a new network of public spaces that can emphasise the characteristics of the area.

The plan is based on the concept of

mixité: social, typological/architectural and of functions. It aims to preserve the diversity of the heritage, the fabric and the urban texture, to set limits to new housing development projects along the canal and the streets (in order to avoid speculation and projects that are inappropriate for the scale of the neighbourhood) and to improve the quality of the blocks (ventilation/permeability), many of which are now completely saturated.

_densification

The district is now densely built (many plots are saturated), but at the same time it has half the population density of neighbouring districts. A potential for an increase in the number of dwellings is recognised here, but this “can only be achieved if living conditions are improved”. In addition, “it is important that the housing created can also meet the needs of the district’s current inhabitants, including those with limited

incomes” (PAD, 2021). In order to increase the proportion of socially accessible housing in the neighbourhood, the PAD requires that projects of a certain size (+ 2000 m²) include a minimum percentage (20%) of social housing. The PAD gives indications regarding maximum height and distance between buildings, while still allowing future project developers great freedom of composition.

Strategic areas

The strategic areas proposed by the plan are essentially two, namely the Senne park and the Canal. Indeed, both areas form a backbone of Brussels urban renewal .



< PAD prescriptions: maintenance of a productive boundary on the ground floor and creation of a linear park “la Sennette”.
Projet de Plan d’Aménagement

-  park
-  park
-  productive boundary
- 
- 
- 



^ Project scheme: opening up of the two strategic areas through the public space.
Projet de Plan d’Aménagement Directeur Heyvaert, volet informatif, septembre 2021.



< vision: "The Marshland Park: the regenerating nature at the service of the city". One of the images-visions proposed by the Heyvaert masterplan team.

∨ Vandriessche Architecten, Conversion of old factory De Porre to city park in Ghent, Belgium, 2014.

This kind of "architectural landscape" is one of the references for the parc de la Sennette design-

Le parc de la sennette

The *parc de la Sennette* project and its connection with the *parc de la Rosée* are part of the series of projects initiated in the framework of CRU Heyvaert-Poincaré, the CRU Compas and the Heyvaert PAD. In the long term, this park will constitute an ecological, recreational and social column in the heart of the district, linking the various parks and centres of the district, such as the *parc de Porte de Ninove* and the Liverpool plain.

1: layout and rhetoric

The Senne's presence is at the origin of the district topography and urbanisation. The bed of this vanished river runs through a series of urban blocks

from north to south, and it is hardly perceptible while walking through the neighbourhood streets. Indeed, the riverbed has mostly been occupied by adjacent activities: garages, storage and parking spaces, private gardens. What reminds us of its presence is the parcel trace, a segment of the municipal border between Anderlecht and Molenbeek and a series of undeveloped spaces within the blocks. Furthermore, the distance between the buildings has remained the same almost everywhere.

The proposed route of the park will be developed on two branches, the first on the bed of the former Sennette, the other forming the connection to the Parc de la Rosée.



From bottom to top: past, present and future (vision) of parc de la Sennette.

< past: 'Marais', Edmond De Schampeleer (1824-1899). The original landscape of the area was similar to the one painted.

past vs present: historical picture of the Senne river, unknown date / a segment of the Senne today. The space is closed to the public and used as a garage. >





■ new development
 ■ valuable industrial building



^ Conceptual axonometry of the hypothetical building development along the parc de la Sennette, PAD Heyvaert, october 2021.

< Scheme showing the ecological functioning of the parc, OKRA architects.



> Multiple scenarios: two examples of possible scenarios, according to the required mix between productive activities, housing and services.

< Compas residential project, 2020. Compas is the first big real estate project in Heyvaert. The housing complex faces the future parc de la Sennette.

3: vision

The vision for the park has two main and complementary points: on the one hand, the creation of a 'lifeline' park of high environmental quality, on the other hand the definition of 'urban living rooms' as places with a high quality of use.

The first point aims at "creating a unique landscape scenography" developing a range of ecological environments that will going to be integrated with the adjacent new urban development projects. Due to the impossibility of reopening the Sennette, the river is supposed to be imagined thanks to the design of the paths, the microtopography, the choice of the planted species, the collection of rainwater.

The main path of the park will be designed in the form of a mineral meander structuring the paths and the perspectives, and connecting the various facilities, leaving space for plants and trees. The urban living rooms will form a chain of distinct places within the neighborhood. Located on the transversal routes, which are wider than the bed of the than the bed of the Kleine Senne, these rooms can become 'oasis' spaces, they will offer freshness in a very mineral neighbourhood, places to meet, to take a break, to play, to enjoy nature contact and learning about biodiversity, artistic and cultural spaces, showcasing the history and multicultural character of the district.

2: ambitions

The parc has economical, environmental and social ambitions. Together with

the Canal, the Senne is a backbone of Brussels urban renewal.

The parc project is strategic as it represents an important opportunity to create a lifeline in the district, and at the same time it anticipates changes in the district, proposing flexible and evolving development over time. At the same time, it yearns for offering open and social spaces in a very densely built neighborhood. and for creating an ecological corridor that will contribute to the green and blue network of Brussels, reduce heat islands and improving the quality of the soil.

4: design principles

The parc width will vary, with a minimum width of 12m, which could possibly be narrower at a number of singular points. The park development project wants to integrate the existing resources and heritage. Thus, the reuse of materials, demolition products and the integration and partial preservation of certain built structures are envisaged.

5: design steps

The priority is given to the *parc de la Sennette* "main branch", which goes from rue Ropsy-Chaudron to Quai de l'Industrie, and right after to the branch going towards the parc de la Rosée. Then the project studies will be developed for the Liverpool- Mégissier block, known as the priority block. The studies for the other segments of the park will be carried out according to the acquisition of land and the progress of the various projects underway in the district.



< vision: "City of flows: where fluids and infrastructures structure the urban". One of the images-visions proposed by the Heyvaert masterplan team.

∨ ZAmpono architecture - L'Escaut architectures, Public space and nursery Petit Senne (project under construction)

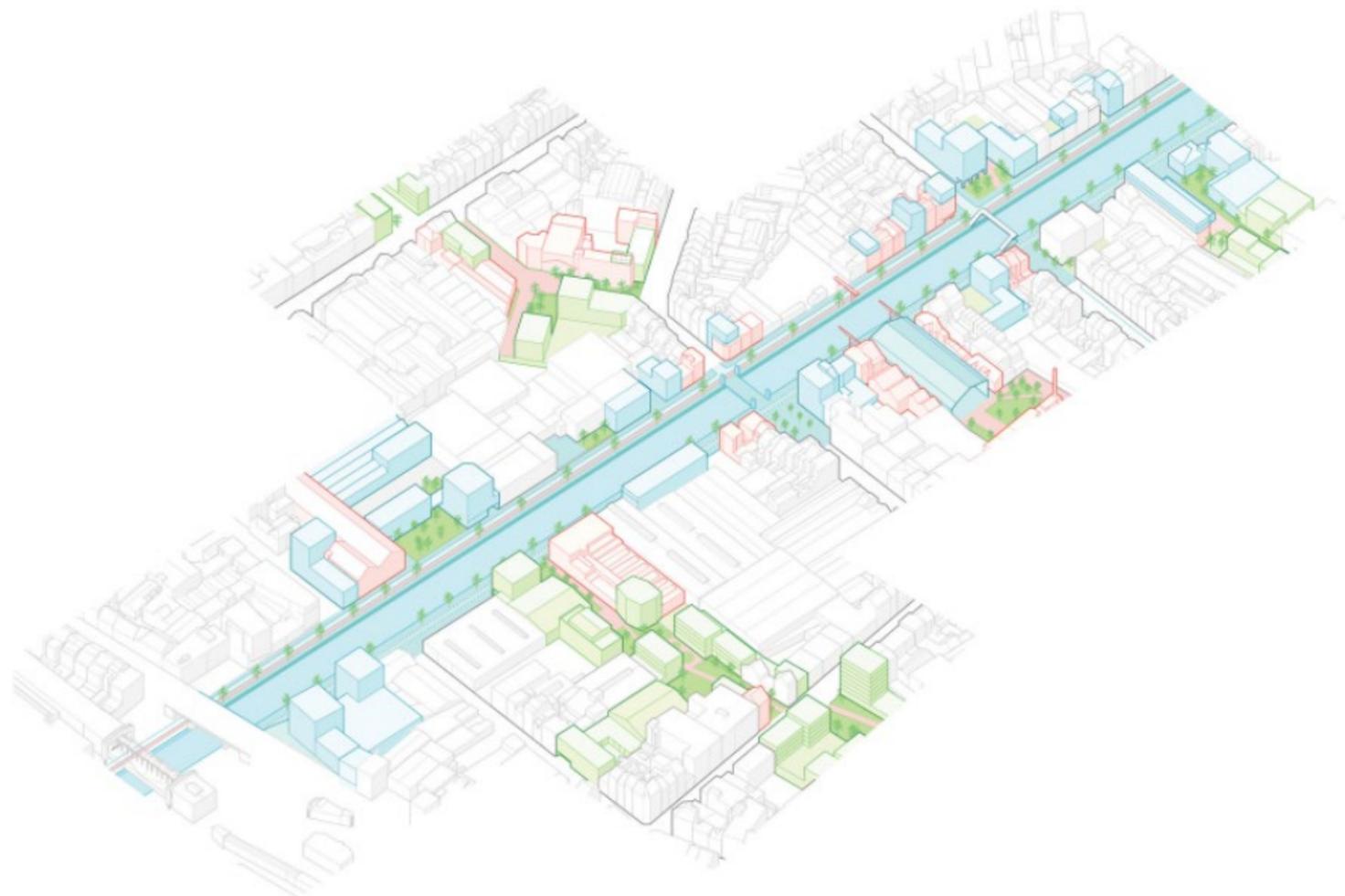
"The project relates to neighboring 'operations': a breeding ground for creative entrepreneurship, a Lab-Langue to promote diversity and cultural exchange, an intergenerational housing project, a bicycle workshop and a number of question marks and dreams for the future"

Le Canal

1: valorisation of the built landscape

The portion of the canal located within the PAD is very specific: both industrial and residential, in a relatively narrow profile and with a fairly high water level. The plan aims to preserve and enhance the specific characteristics of this section, which is made up of contrasts in size, function and typology.

2: quays as public, logistic and recreational spaces



< suggestive vision of the proper development of the area by applying the various urban planning principles of the PAD.

∨ Possible evolution of the waterfront according to the PAD recommendations and prescriptions

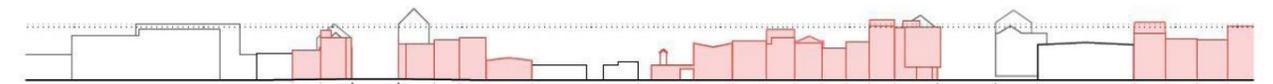
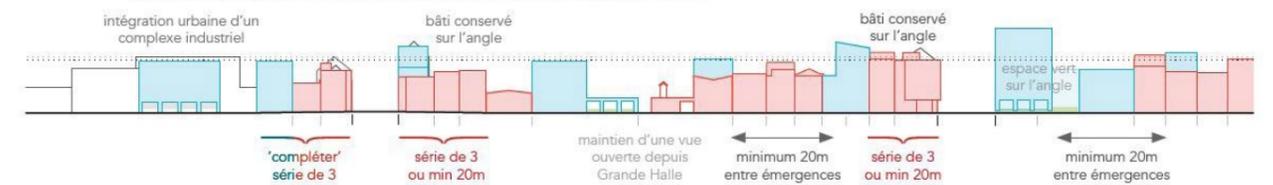
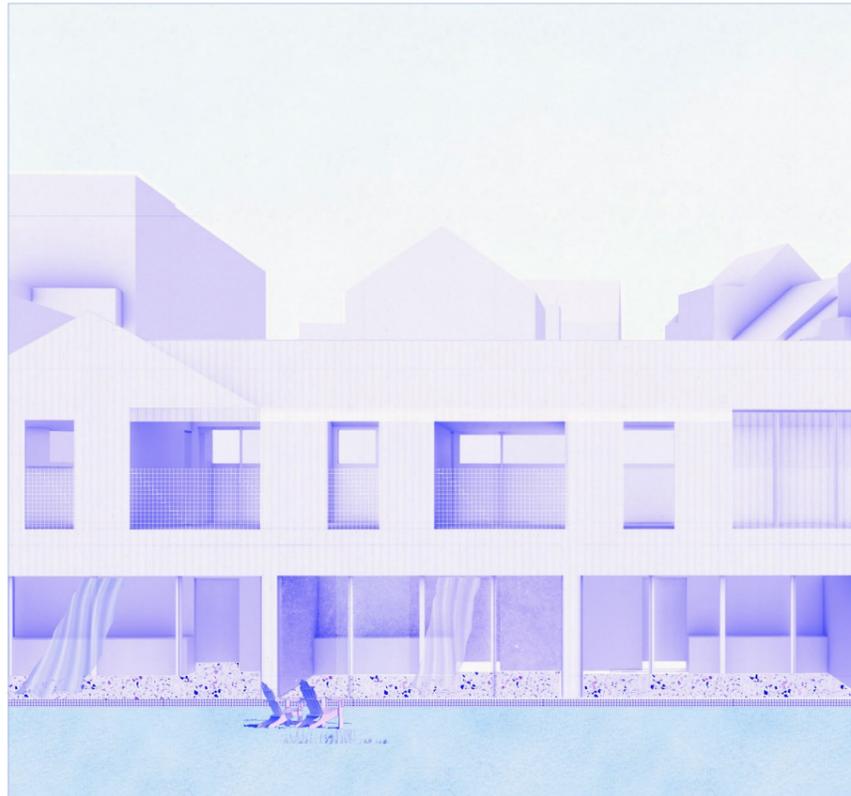


Fig.2 : évolution possible selon les recommandations et prescriptions du PAD





5.

Des chambres dans la ville dense

Projects for the post-garages district

The master plan proposed by the Region offers a vision for the “future Heyvaert” that is extremely marked by ideas such as continuity of spaces and transparency. Indeed, the proposed de-densification and densification strategies are both meant to support these objectives. The plan also highlights an idea of enhancement of the existing heritage qualities (which is almost a will of monumentalisation of the industrial character of the area).

However, when it comes to apply the ideas of continuity and transparency into the urban fabric and its current conformation, the plan has to deal with spaces that are quite the opposite of transparent and continuous ones. On the contrary, these spaces are pretty dense, opaque and fragmented, hence the plan subverts these three characters of the current fabric.

Recognising the logic of both densification and de-densification actions on this area -which will be hopefully able to “reshape” part of Heyvaert into a continuous, more “transparent” urban environment- and, more in general, its overall qualities, the project presented in this thesis positions itself within the vision proposed by the masterplan.

What this thesis wants to argue is that, in some cases, the allure of some spaces in Heyvaert lies in the fact that

they keep some opacities, they constitute some unique fragments, they don't draw attention to continuity, rather to thresholds.

This work would like to observe some possibilities that the existing urban fabric could offer in Heyvaert's current state, not really in a heritage conservation attitude, rather in an attitude of observation of the qualities offered by the existing spaces that risk to be lost in the densification-de densification operation.

As inspired by its name, the project sees the urban fabric as a series of interconnected rooms, many of them hidden inside the blocks and thus not visible from the street. The question posed is “would some of these opaque, fragmented and dense rooms, which could lose their function in the near future and perhaps be erased from the urban fabric, still be able to create quality spaces?”

In an urban fabric which is the sum of the endless transformations -additions, demolitions, and so on- and then result of the history of the last couple of centuries, some typologies and similar configurations have been identified in the previous pages. Yet, the specificity of each case has to be recognised. Three site-specific projects in the post-garages Heyvaert are thus presented in the following pages: the courtyard, the long plot and the Canal-facing plot.



51N4E, *Room in the city* (Single-family row-house transformation), Leuven, 2016.

Pictures by Maxime Delvaux

The proposals shown in the following pages are the outcome of reflections carried out at a typological level. This means that their most important features were largely thought of without taking into account the programme they could eventually host and would be associated with. Nevertheless, at some point it became useful to intersect the typological and programmatic discourse to get more detailed proposals.

Programme-speaking, it is important to remind that the area has been object of research as far as the productive activities and urban manufacturing are concerned since almost a decade. Indeed, as already mentioned in ch. 3, the concept of *mixité* is hyper-promoted in mixed urban fabric neighbourhoods like Heyvaert. Furthermore, the discourse of urban manufacturing (producing goods for the city, inside the city) is more and more promoted by policies intended to promote circular economy values. While the positive implications of urban manufacturing are indisputable, what the current debate mostly revolves around is the suitability of productive activities in the city. Indeed, it is a matter of fact that not all the activities would be compatible inside the urban fabric, due to factors as pollution, noise ... This is why the dirty, heavy, noisy activities do not usually find space within the city

and are pushed away from it instead. On the other hand, “new” productive activities are way more supported by public authority and are most likely to be able to find space in the urban renewal projects, sometimes replacing the old ones. This latter, unlike the former, claim to be based on economic models such as the circular economy, local production or sustainable development (Orban, Sanchez Trenado, Vanin, 2021). Research carried out in the Brussels context (Cities of Making, 2018; Designing Urban Production, 2021) also remarks how most urban manufacturing companies look for big sites to install. How do all of these reflections translate at a design level in the specific case of Heyvaert? The large availability of big plots and warehouses in good state of preservation which are currently empty or will be eventually left by the garage-related companies will definitely be a ground to experiment with new forms of productive activities.

However, this thesis chooses not to focus on these large plots, but to develop smaller projects instead. Thus, it is important to acknowledge that in smaller volumes the only productive activities that could eventually find space would be more akin to small workshops.

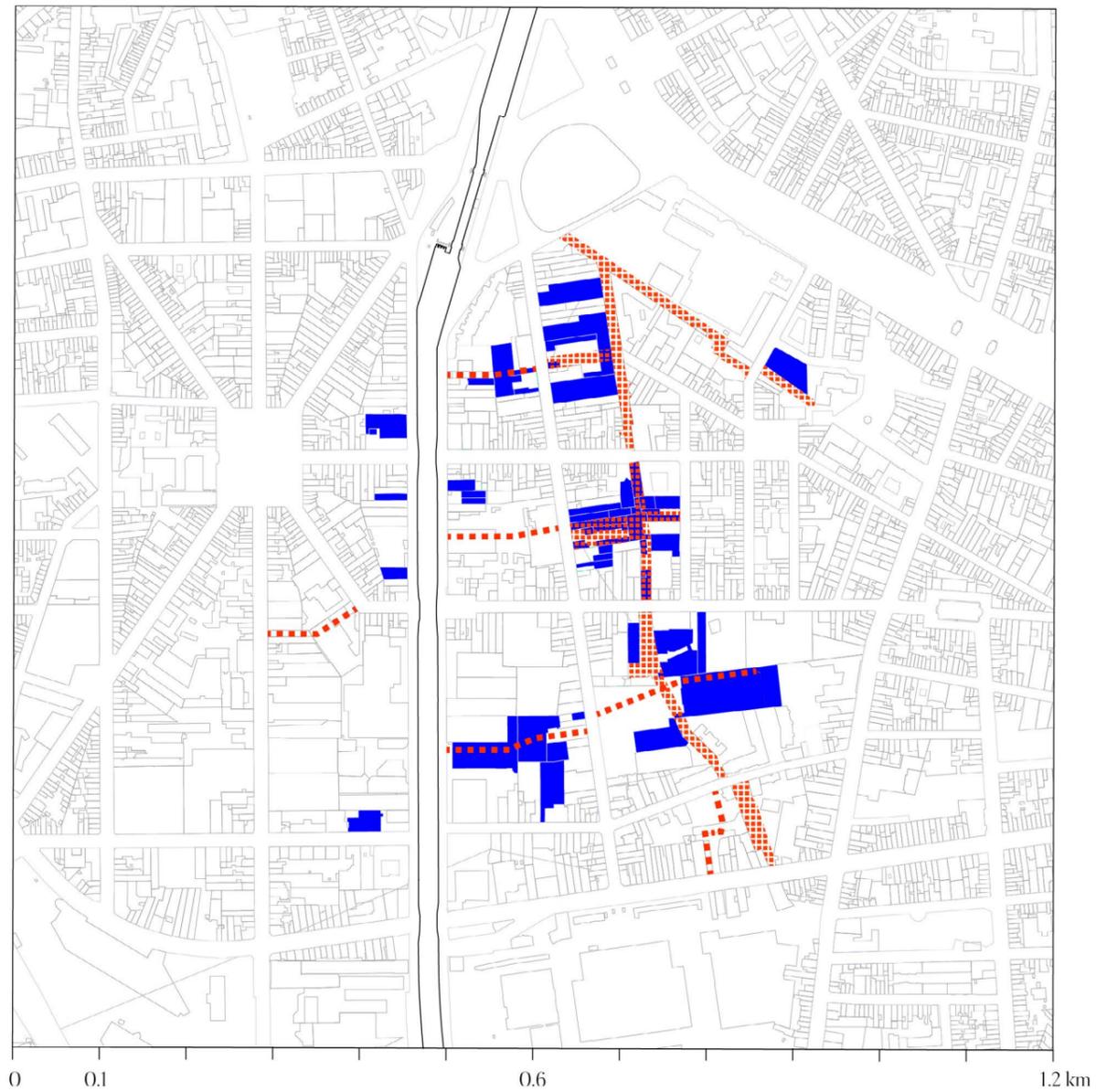


Design process

The methodology consisted in a first step of observation and interpretation of the chosen sites' existing qualities, then a critical reading of the transformation scenario proposed by the current projects. It is important to remember that these scenarios were not yet defined and clear, since only a sketch design of the whole Heyvaert area was available at the moment this thesis was written (see pages 168-170 of the previous chapter). In the design process, this sketch design was used as a starting point to develop a personal design concept for each site. As already mentio-

ned, the projects chose to focus on the residential spaces, which have therefore been designed with more detail. As far as other types of programmes are concerned (for example productive space as well as public open space), they were just designed schematically.

Masterplan Heyvaert // available plots



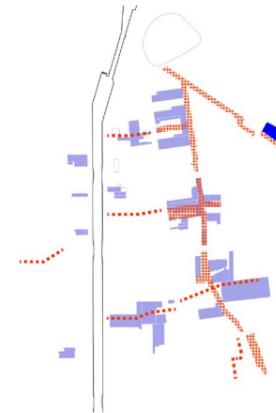
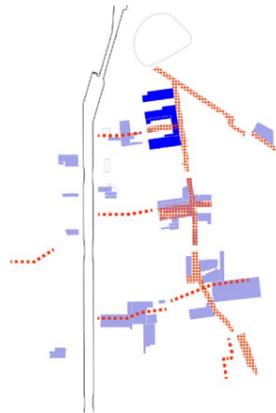
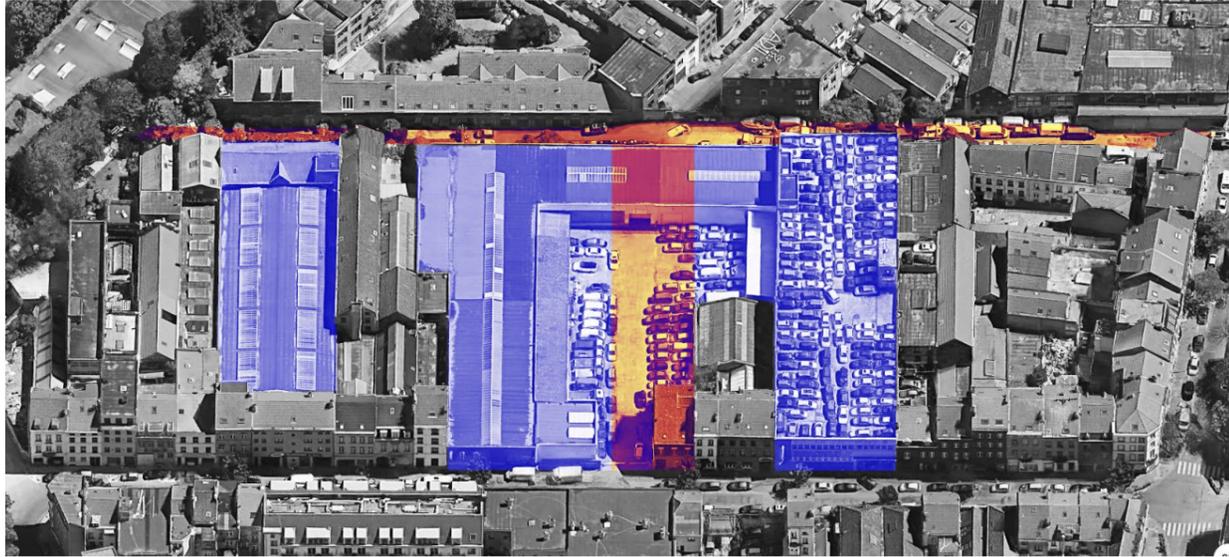
- available plots for dedensification/densification
- Parc de la Sennette layout
- suggested connections

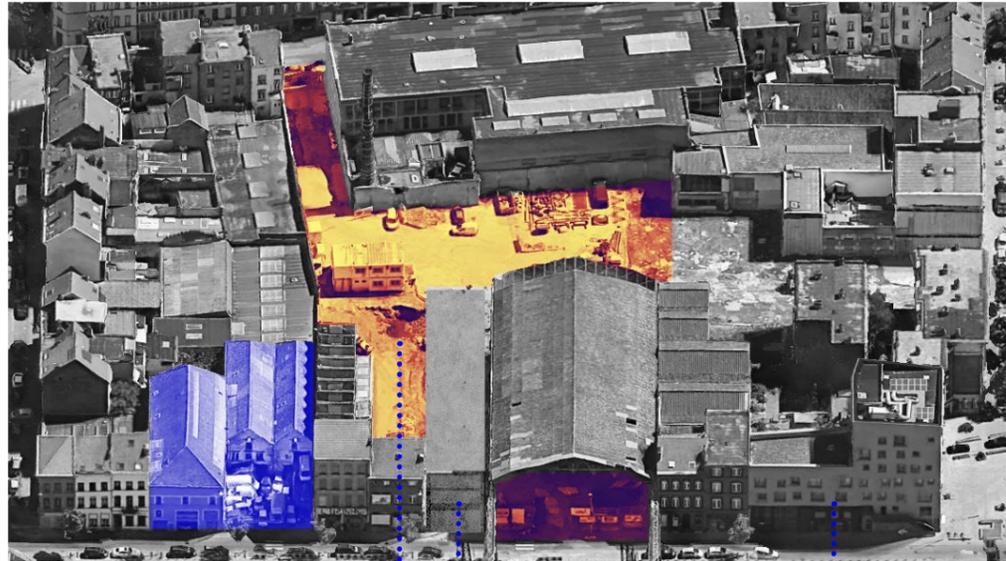
what is replaced?

As already mentioned, the bed of the vanished river runs through a series of urban from north to south. The map and the following images highlight the plots on Heyvaert district that, according to the masterplan, are a potential land for densification or de-densification actions. It is important to specify that not all of the real estate developments that we see in the conceptual axonometries show already the final layout of the plots, but rather a

potential, envisaged new layout. Also, a precise number of square meter was not indicated, but the building volumes will result from alignments with the existing volumes. The demolitions mostly involve the big plots, which are usually completely or almost totally built. The buildings interested are mostly modern warehouses (often built after the 70s, after the car trade installed in the district), with some exception for some older warehouses and row houses.



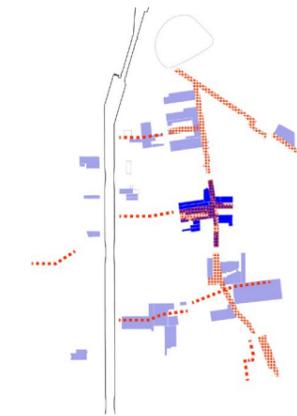
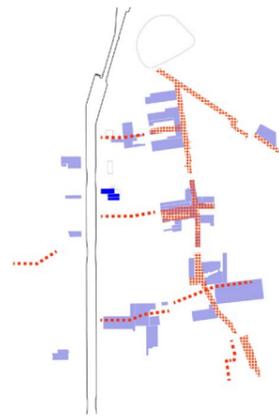


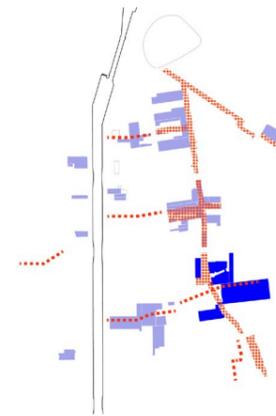
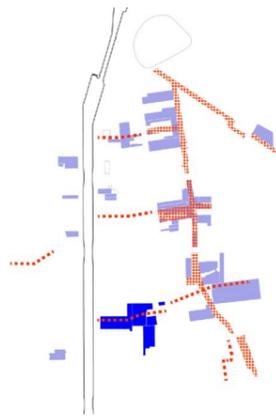
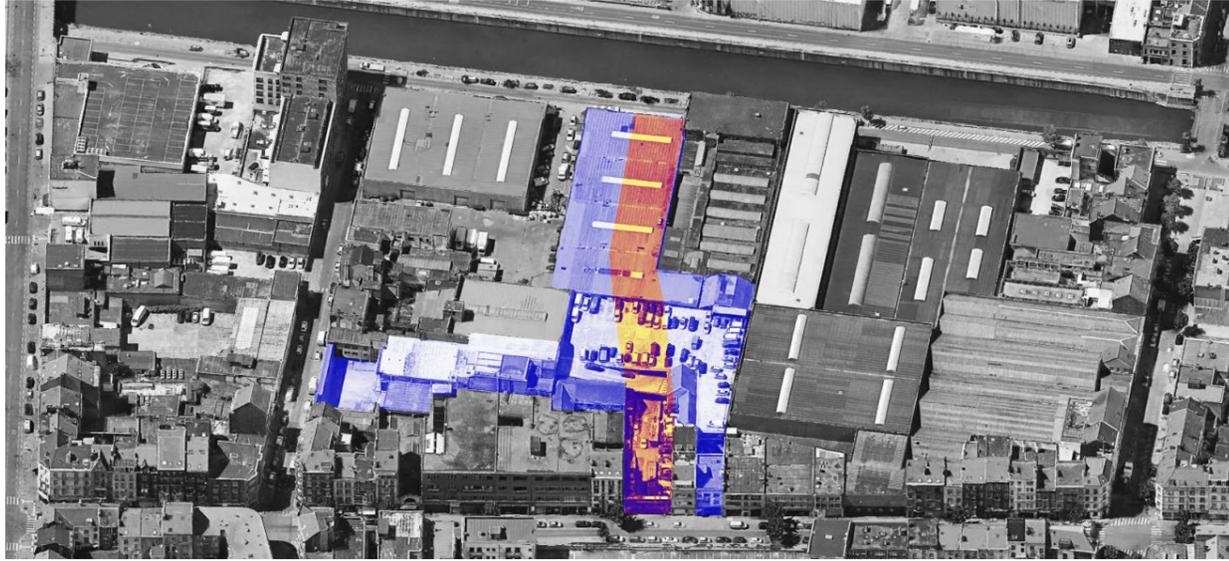


new dedensification

new densification

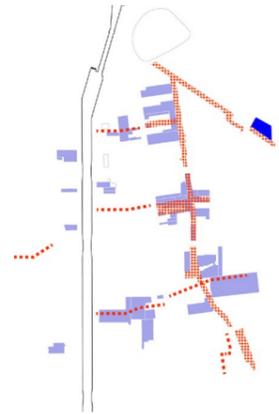
new densification





Courtyard

Rue de la Rosée, Rue de la Poterie

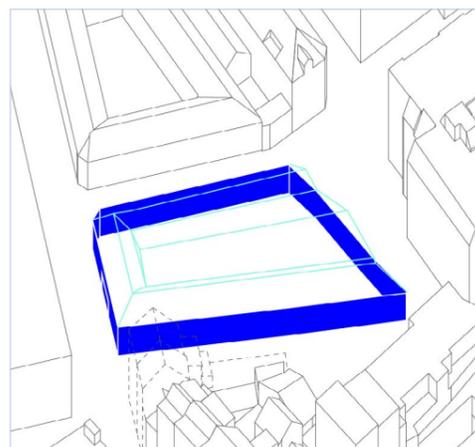


Current state

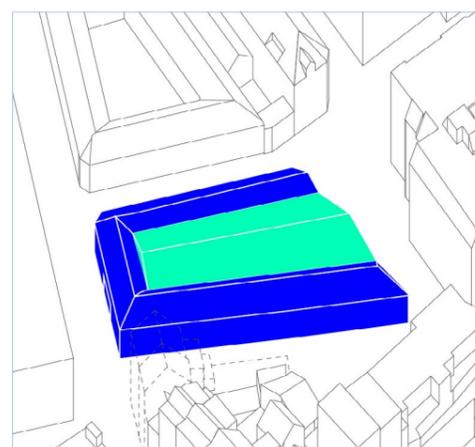
Unique fragment and highly introverted space, these two trapezoidal shape warehouses were originally built by the City of Brussels in 1886. The two buildings were originally used as coach houses of the *Abattoir*, and later converted into office buildings by a vehicle shipping agency until recent years. While rue de la Rosée n.12 was renovated into an office space in the early 2000s, n.14 is currently dismissed. The building has an irregular quadrilateral plan and it is composed of two one-storey sheds volumes with a metal frame roof, opening onto a central courtyard covered with a glazed roof structure. The two volumes were built in different phases (the

central courtyard was originally open, then covered with a glazed metal frame in 1930). With the exception of a few small windows, the brick facades are completely blind and punctuated with pilasters.

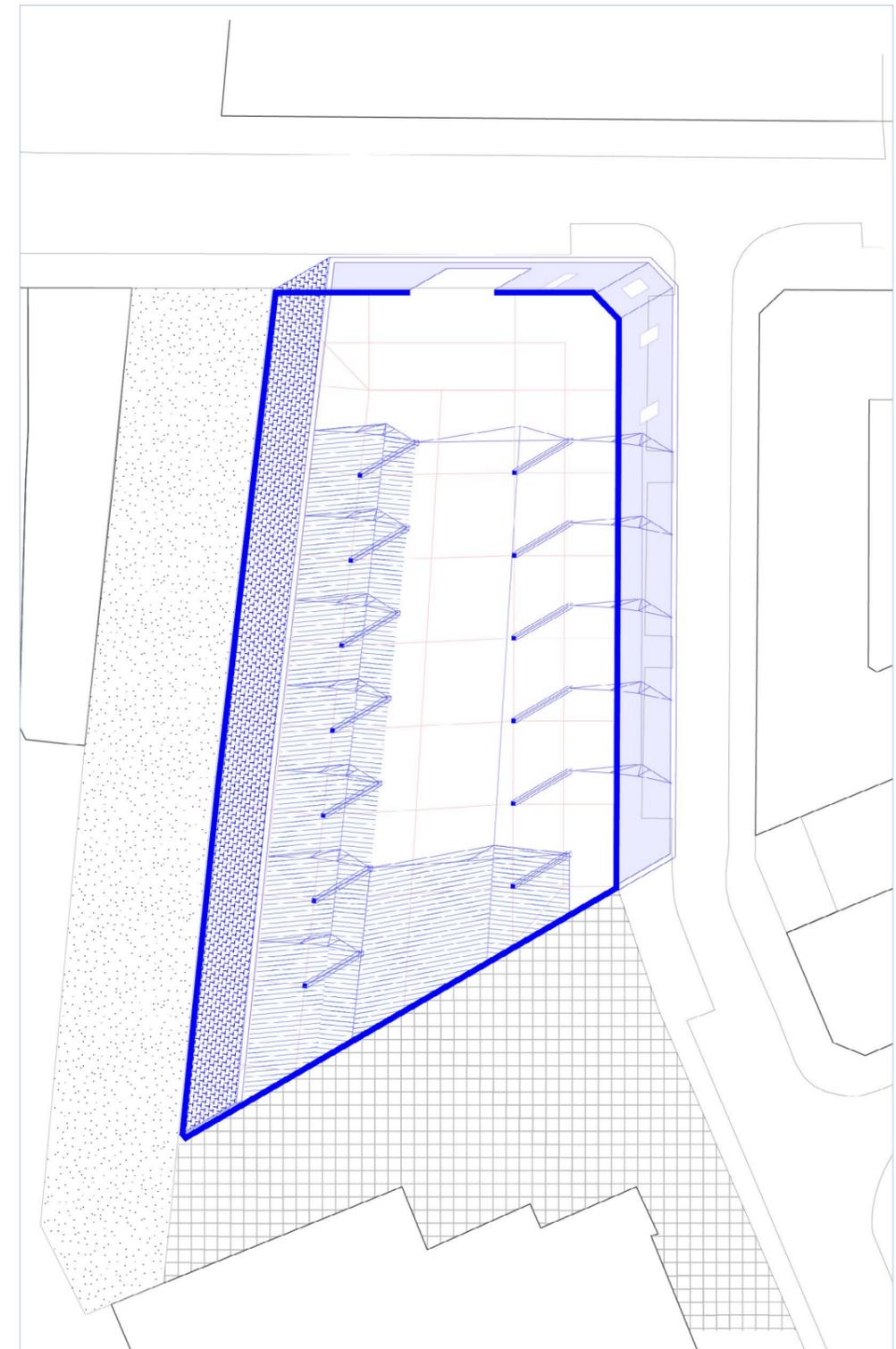
On the west side of the building there is a small linear garden called *Jardin d'Alem*, which develops along the ancient bed of the Petite Senne river (also known as Coupure de la Senne, Zinneke or Zinneke de Saint-Jean). The garden is run by a non-profit organisation and hosts different projects, such as a vegetable garden, a compost, a chicken coop and a relaxation area.



Blind brick facades on the four sides



Two volumes: the u-shaped shed and the central shed covering the former courtyard



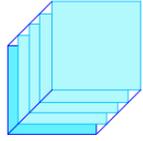


Rue de la Rosée 14 (©ARCHistory, 2019)

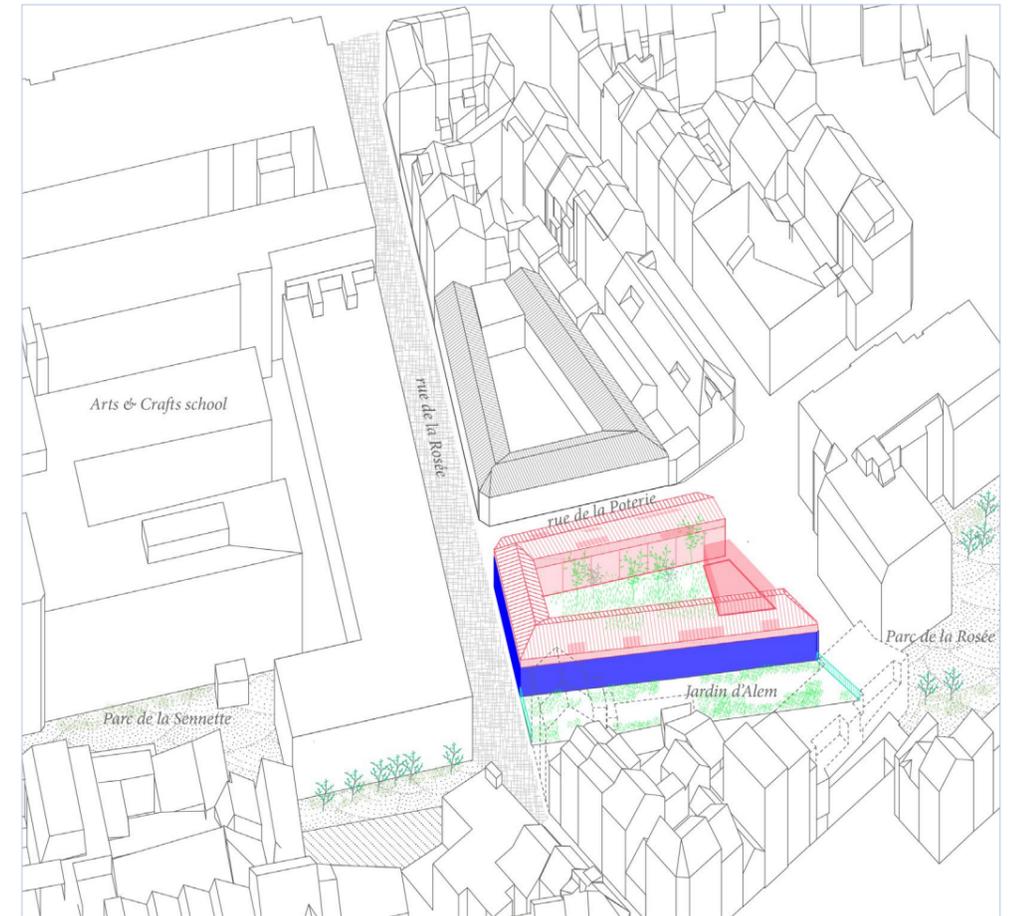
Transformation



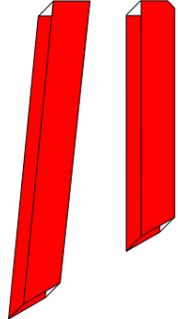
Current transformation scenario

2 buildings *  ~ 250 m²
 * 3 residential floors
 tot. ~ 1500 m²

Interpretation of the sketch desing provided by the PAD
 in order to estimate the possible volume and surface of a
 new residential programme



Alternative transformation scenario

 ~ 750 m²
 * 2 residential floors
 tot. ~ 1500 m²

Maintaining the existing volume (it only varies in terms of height)

Transformation

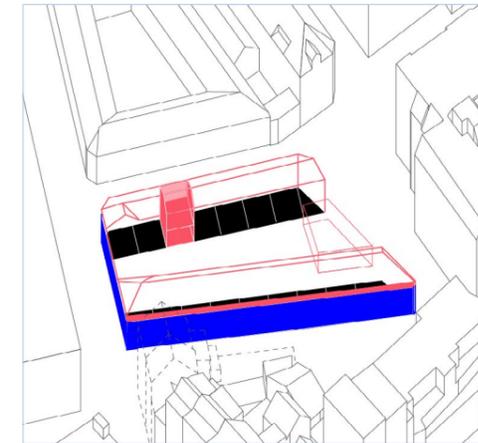
Current transformation scenario

In the scenario suggested by the PAD the courtyard building is demolished and replaced by two new apartment buildings. This brand new plot configuration would certainly make it easier to organise the buildings programme and allow a more free circulation and a connection between Parc de la Senette and Parc de la Rosée that passes through the buildings. Yet, according to the way they are sketched, these two volumes look independent and disconnected from the existing urban fabric.

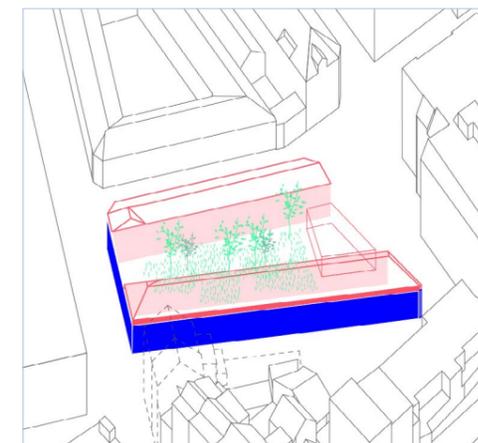
Alternative transformation scenario strategies

The project presented in this thesis follows a different scheme based on the preservation of the courtyard building. More that on the basis of its architectural qualities, what pushes this action is rather the courtyard scheme qualities and the potential that its reinterpretation could create. The project is thus based on a few simple actions: the external

brick wall is preserved (together with its sense of opacity), while the inner volume that occupied the former courtyard is removed, giving space for a new courtyard/ private garden overlooked by XX new housing units. The u-shaped volume partially keeps its former appearance by the means of a new structure inserted between the brick wall and the courtyard perimeter. This new structure keeps the same width and distances of the former one, but it gets higher, thus emerging from the existing brick wall, being well recognisable even from the street because of the different materiality of its envelope. Inside the new structure a series of housing units is positioned. Three different typologies of duplexes are proposed. The entrance to the building is flipped on the opposite side. In addition to this, the larger side of the trapezoidal plan is cut and a small, new volume is integrated, getting the role of a filter between the building and the city, the private, opaque and introverted private space and the continuum and transparency of the public space.



- The external wall is preserved
- A new volume (1m higher than the existing wall) is built inside the wall. Inside the structure there are duplex housing units

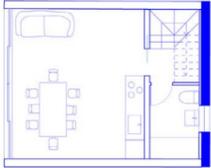
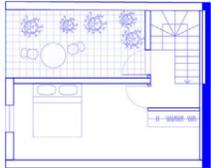
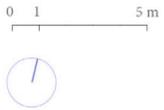


- The existing central volume is emptied and replaced by a garden
- The entrance is flipped and new volume as a filter between the private courtyard and the public space

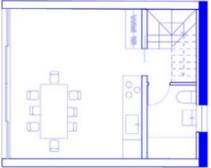
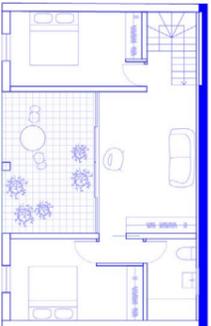
Courtyard



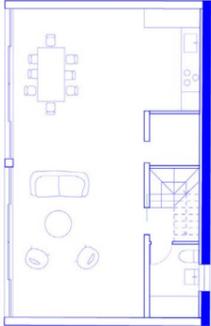
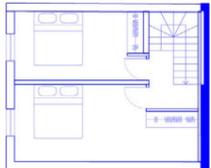
housing units typologies



A



B

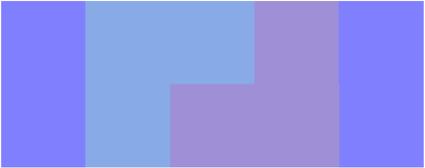


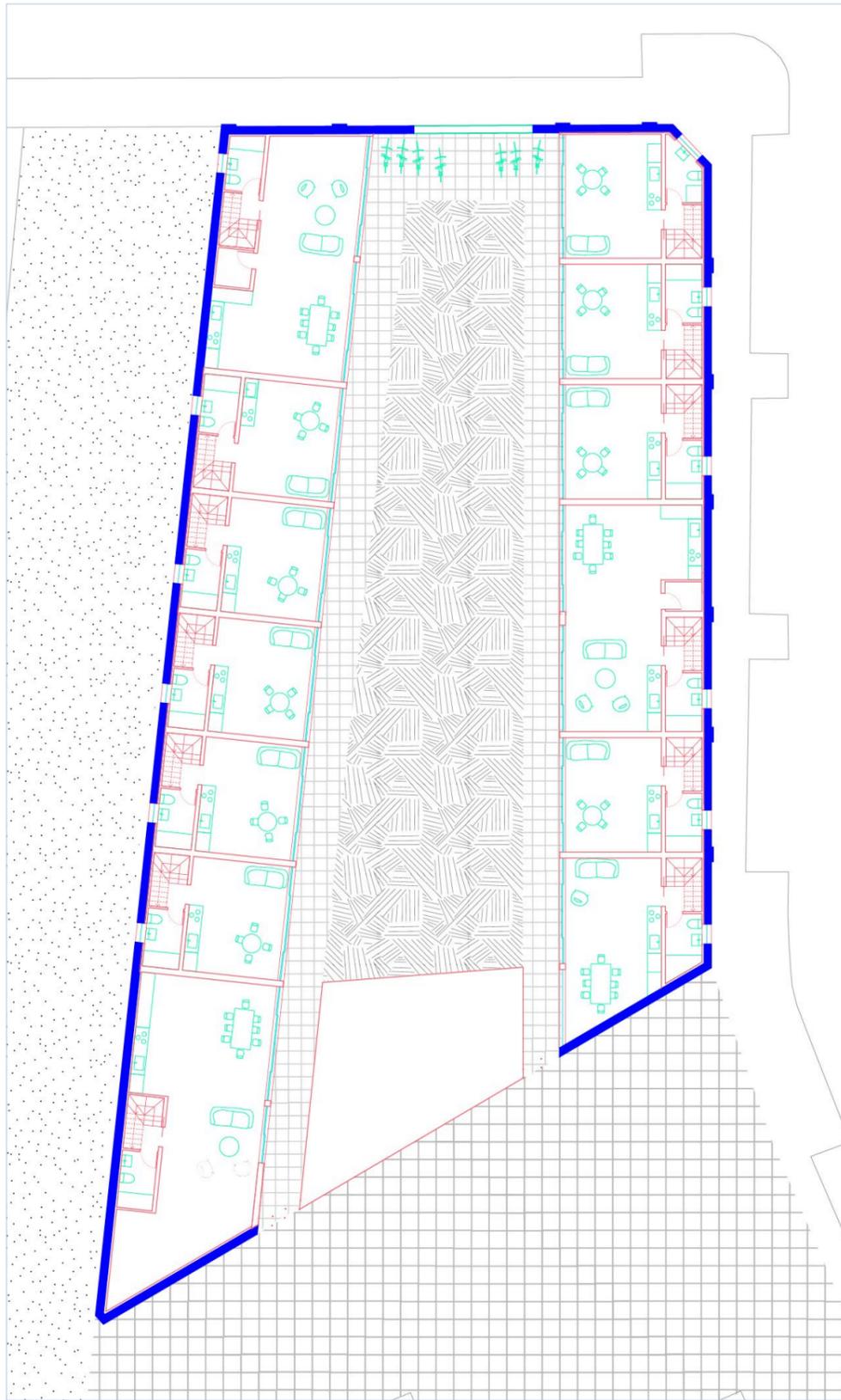
C

2

1

Combinations



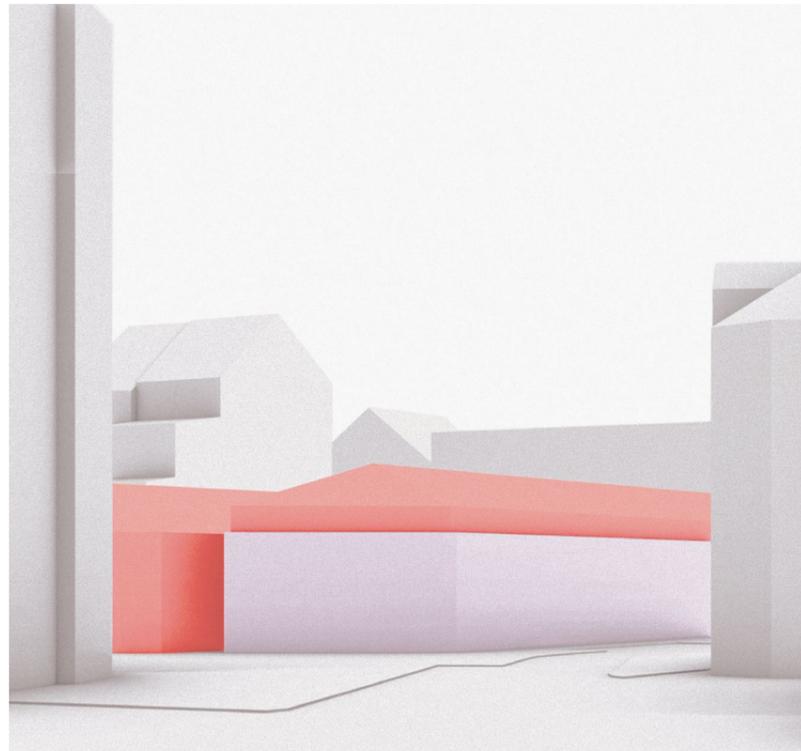


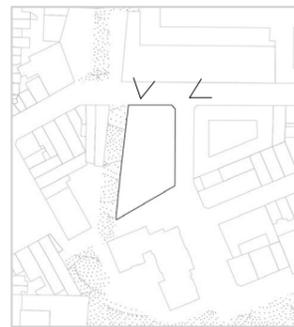
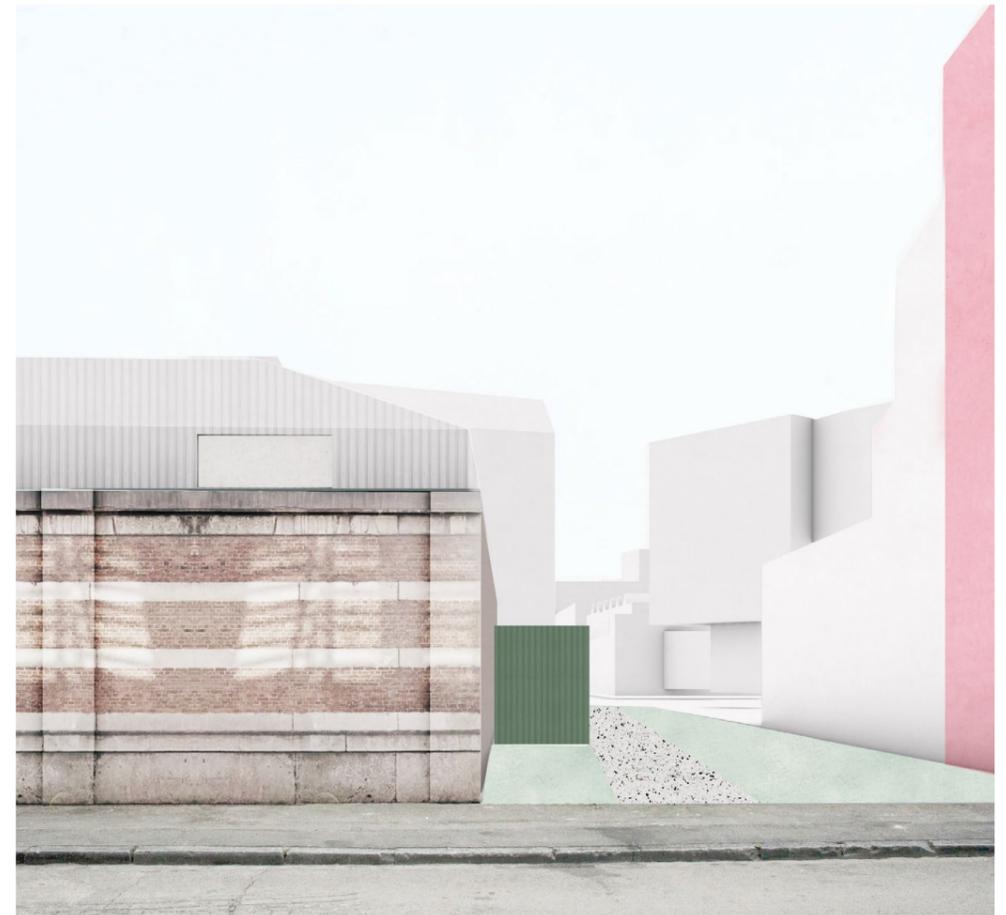
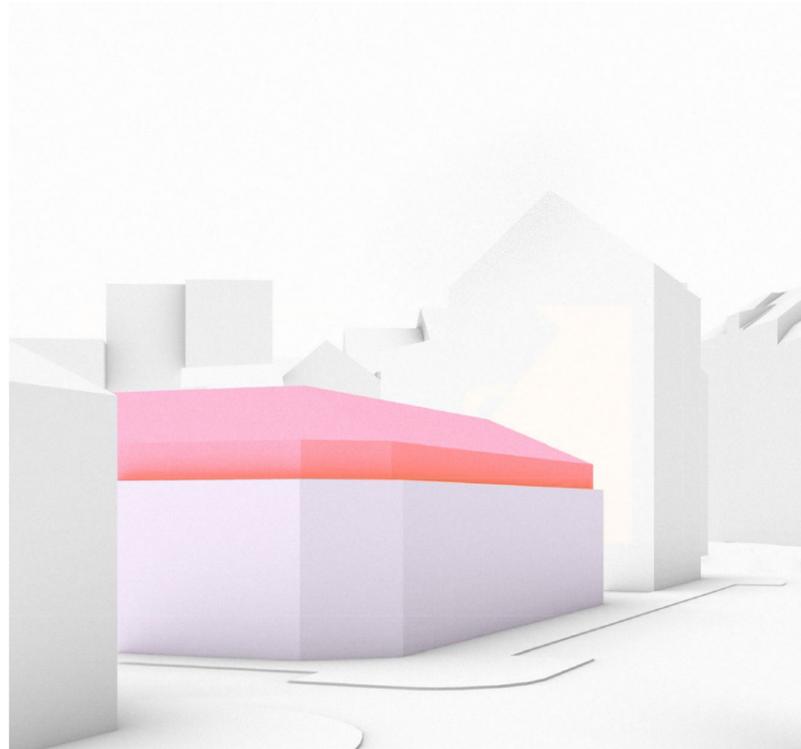
Ground floor plan

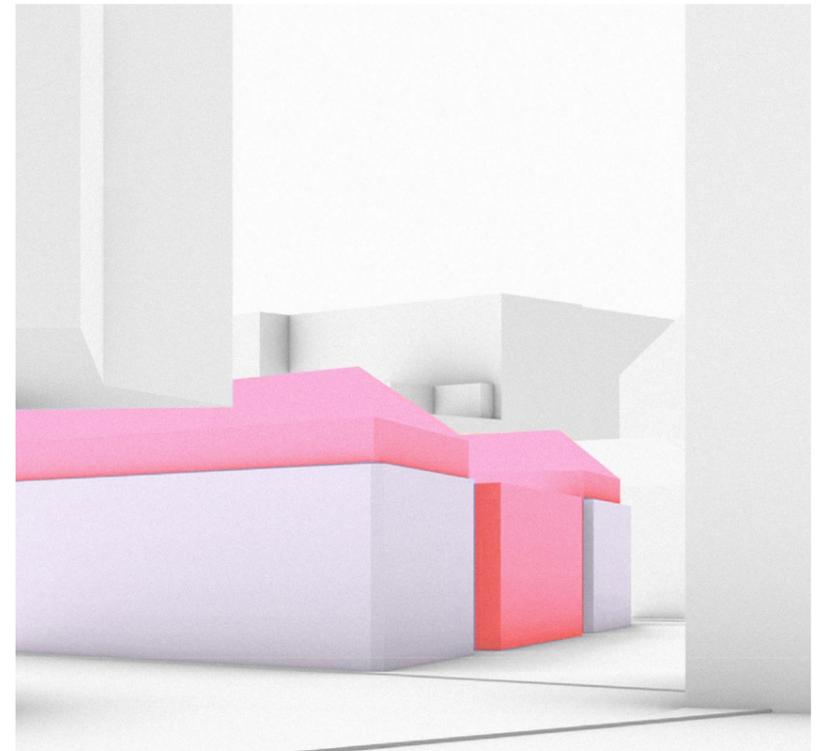
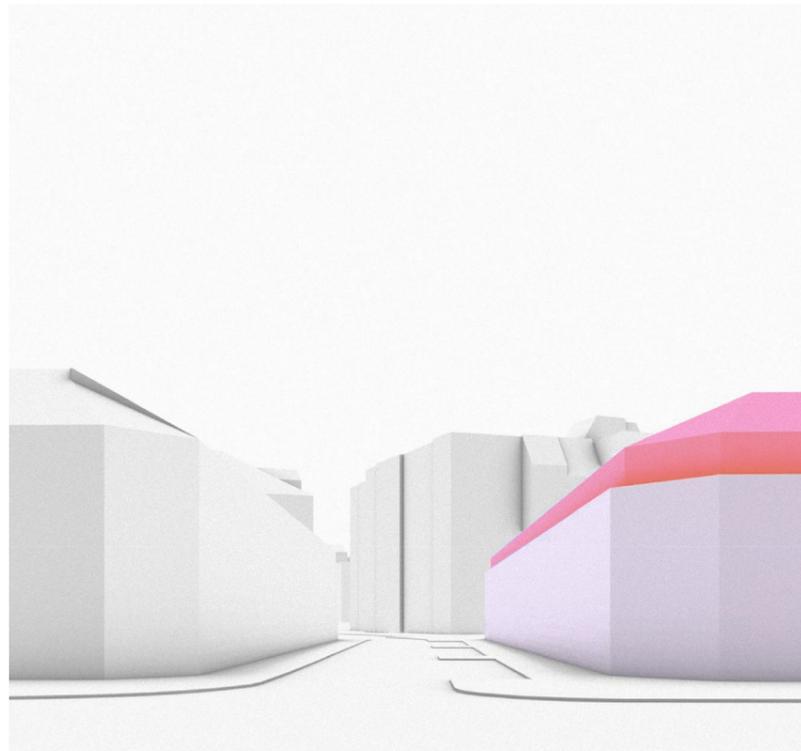


First floor plan



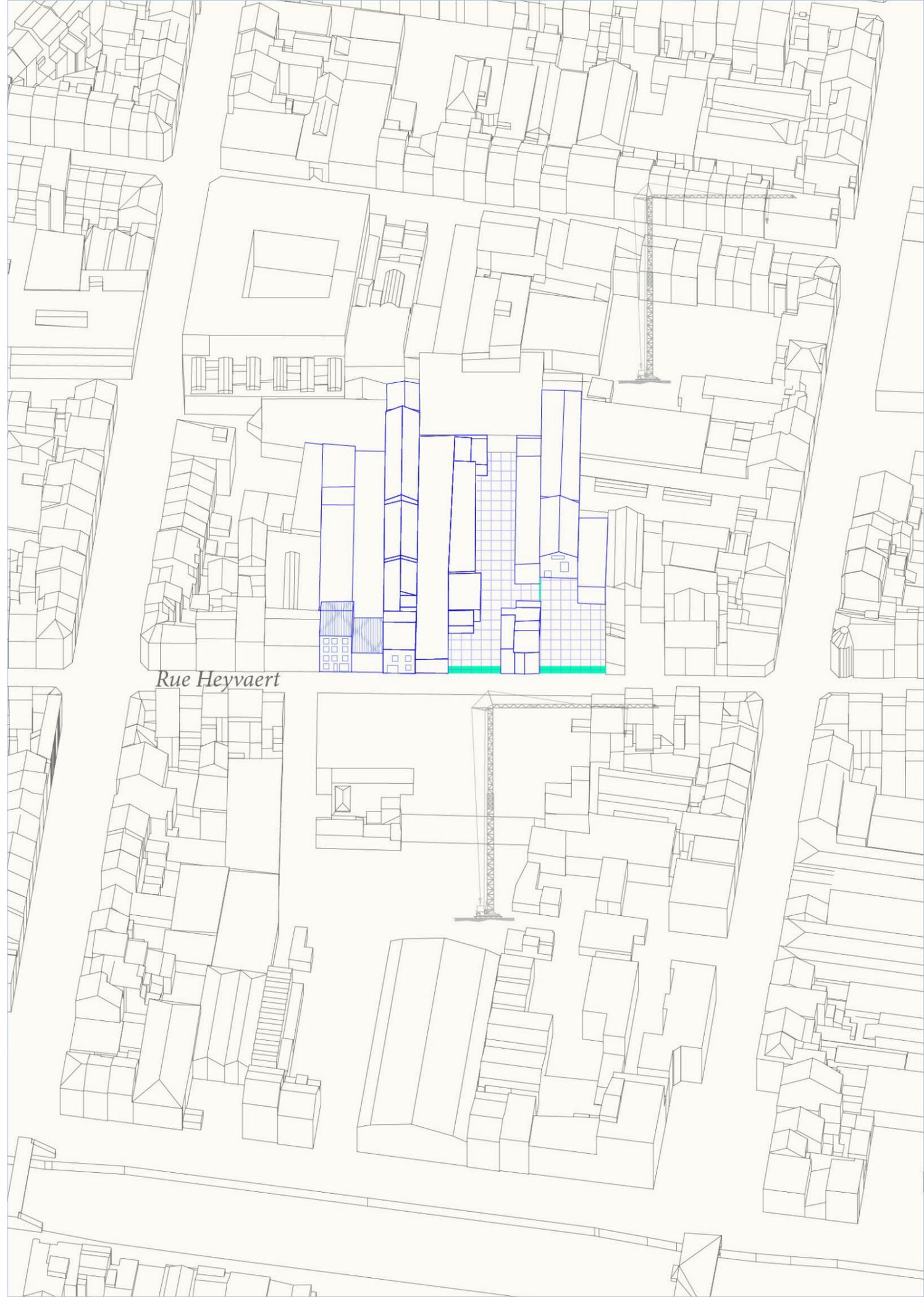
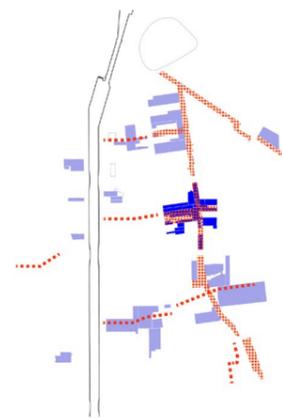






Deep, narrow plots

Rue de la Rosée, Rue de la Poterie

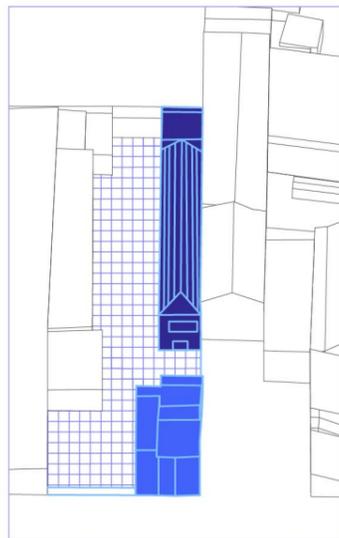


Rue Heyvaert

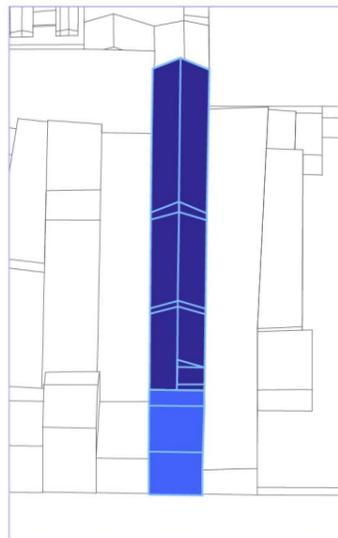
Current state

This block is maybe one of the most densely built in the neighbourhood and it is mainly occupied by garages buildings, some plots presenting and homogeneous configuration and others a mixed one. Whether homogeneous or mixed, most of the plots are deep and narrow. Since they are own by the same company, several buildings on this block are interconnected the one to the other. The examined mixed plots are squeezed

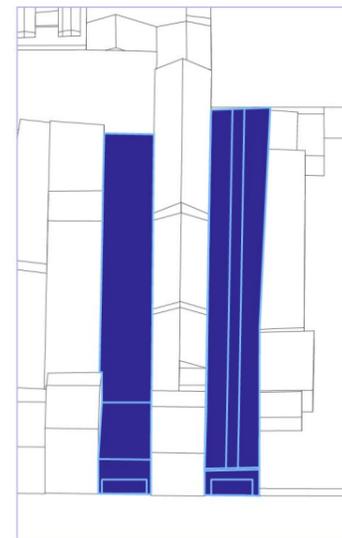
between rue Heyvaert, which is going to maintain a productive character and the new linear Parc de la Sennette.



plot: mixed configuration
building: terraced house
+ warehouse



plot: mixed configuration
building: terraced house
+ warehouse



plot: homogeneous configuration
building: warehouse





Transformation



Current transformation scenario



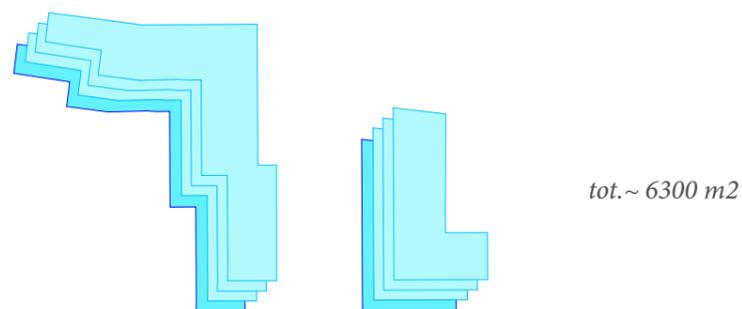
Alternative transformation scenario

Transformation

Current transformation scenario

The “Liverpool-Mégissiers” block has been one of the major interest sites presented by the CRU5 Heyvaert-Poincaré. Indeed, the block is supposed to be strategic in the Parc de la Sennette realisation process not only due to its central position (located in the middle of rue Heyvaert, namely between the Ninove parc and the Abattoirs), but also to the high concentration of warehouses functioning as garages. Most of the buildings, according to the “diagnostic” studies are currently in a bad or even very bad condition. This is the reason why the CRU shows a proposal where the current block central layout is erased, with the exception of some small portions of the existing warehouses (a wall, a paving,

some columns), that would evoke the industrial past of the area, becoming a decorative element for this post-car Heyvaert parc. The demolition of most of the central long plots allows the realisation of a large *traversée*. This cross branch of the parc is defined by new 5 storeys apartment buildings whose shape eventually contributes at defining smaller blocks within the parc-crossed block.

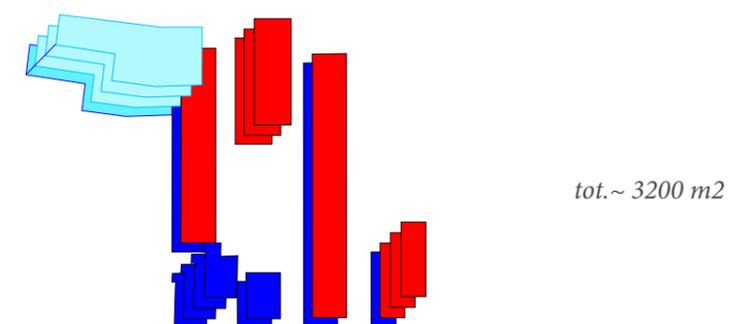


Interpretation of the sketch design provided by the PAD in order to estimate the possible volume and surface of a new residential programme

Alternative transformation scenario strategies

Zooming out from the block and looking at the Traversée design layout it is possible to get how the ideas of continuity and homogeneity of spaces and transparency can be concretely applied on the urban layout through the creation of a large parc which really differs from the hyper-dense former urban fabric. Starting from this reflection, this alternative proposal keeps the continuous, large public space in the underlying block between rue Heyvaert and the Canal and proposes a different layout for the “Liverpool-Mégissiers” block, which is based on a reconfiguration of the deep, narrow plots through a series of punctual interventions. As a result,

we get a new assemblage of “rooms” and long “corridors”. This striped layout is thus counterposed to the more homogeneous layout of the block nearby. This project is defined at the block level at a masterplan level, where a possible programme of the new configuration is indicated. In addition to this, a long, narrow building with a mixed-used programme has been imagined with a higher detail level.

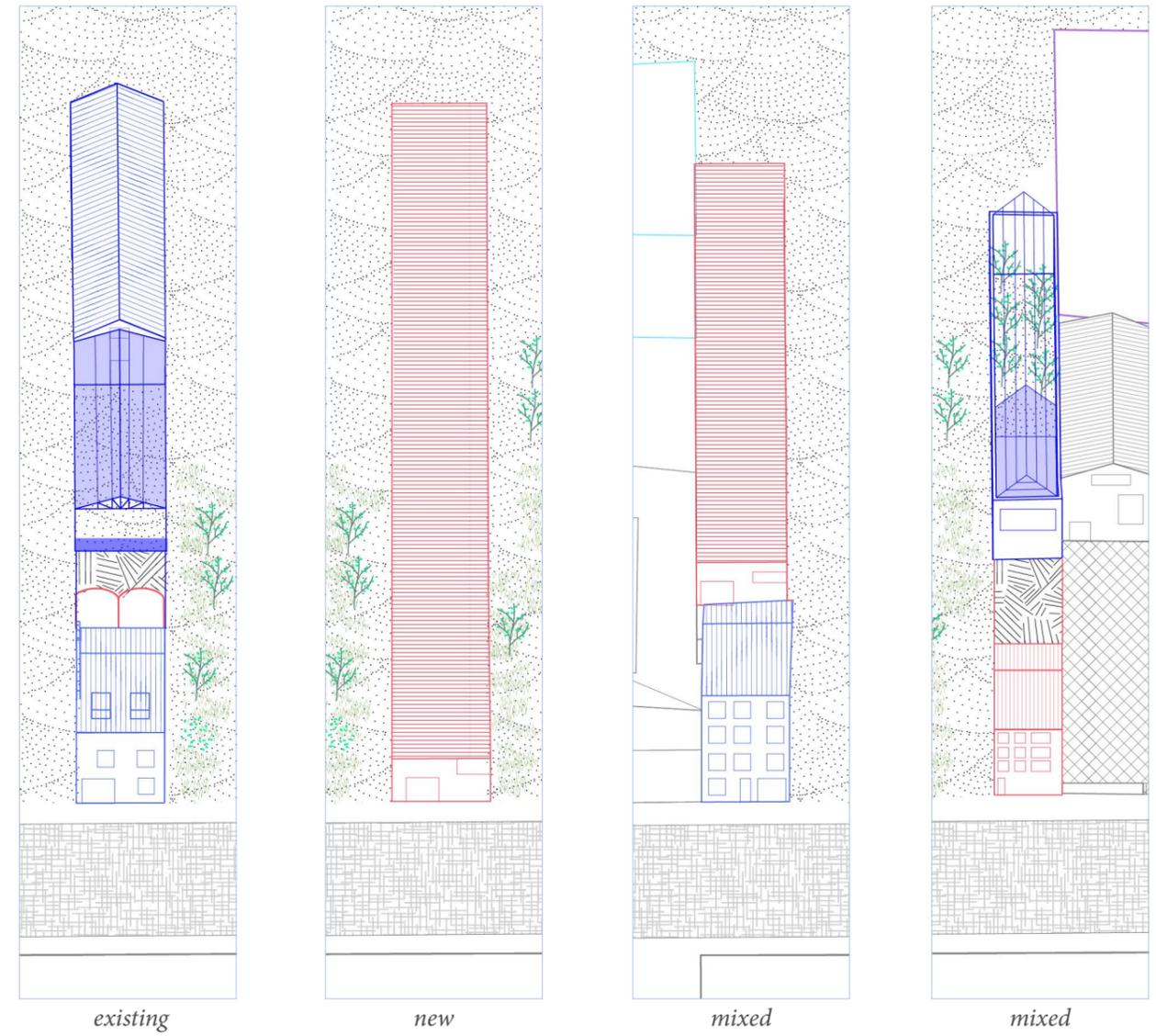


Maintaining the logic and size of the deep, long plots, alternating them with public space stripes.

Deep, narrow plots



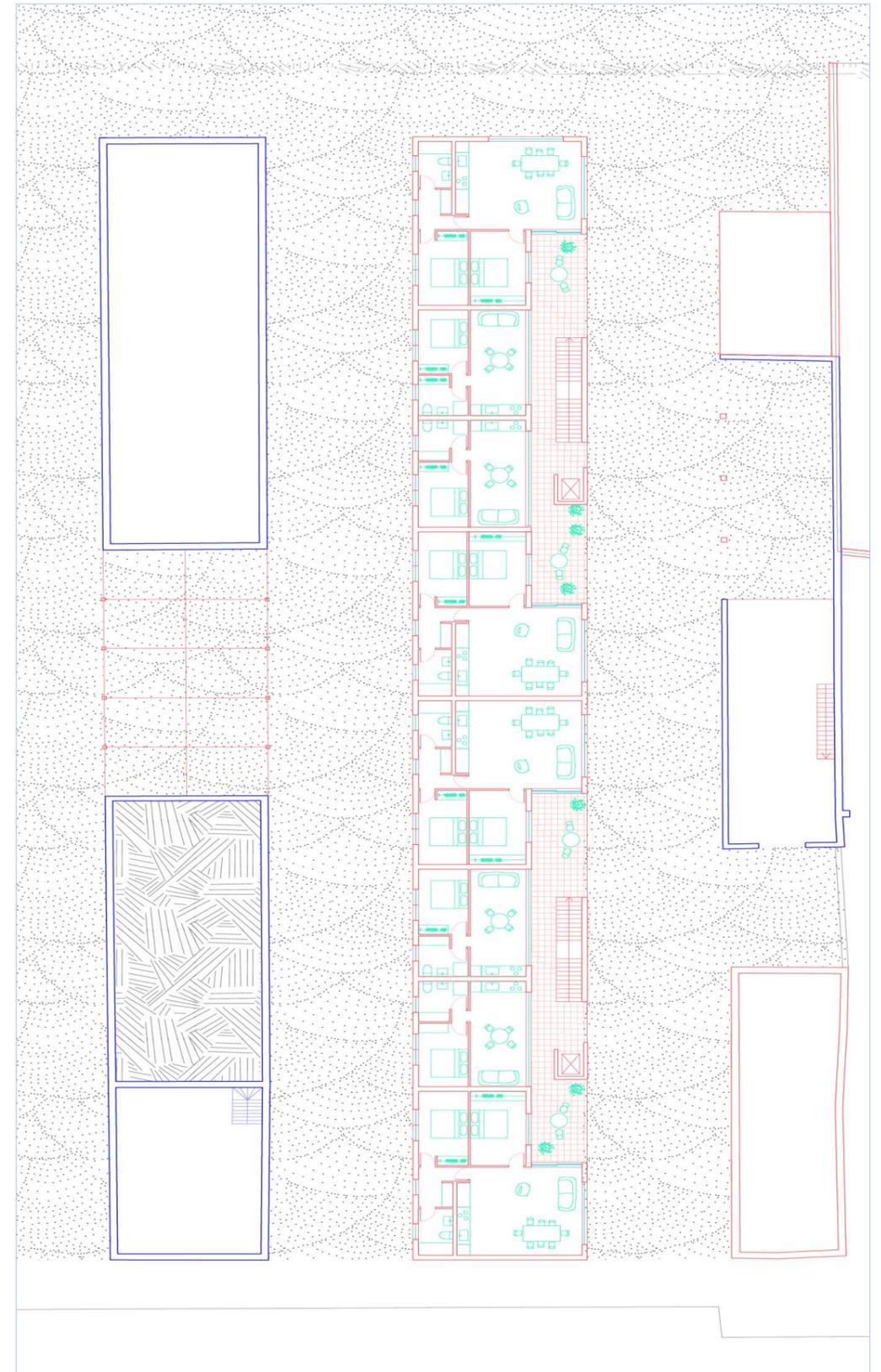
Possible solutions



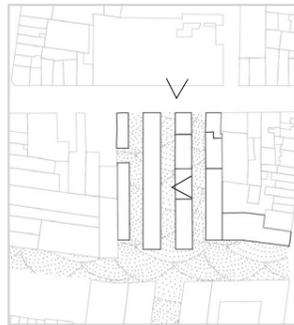
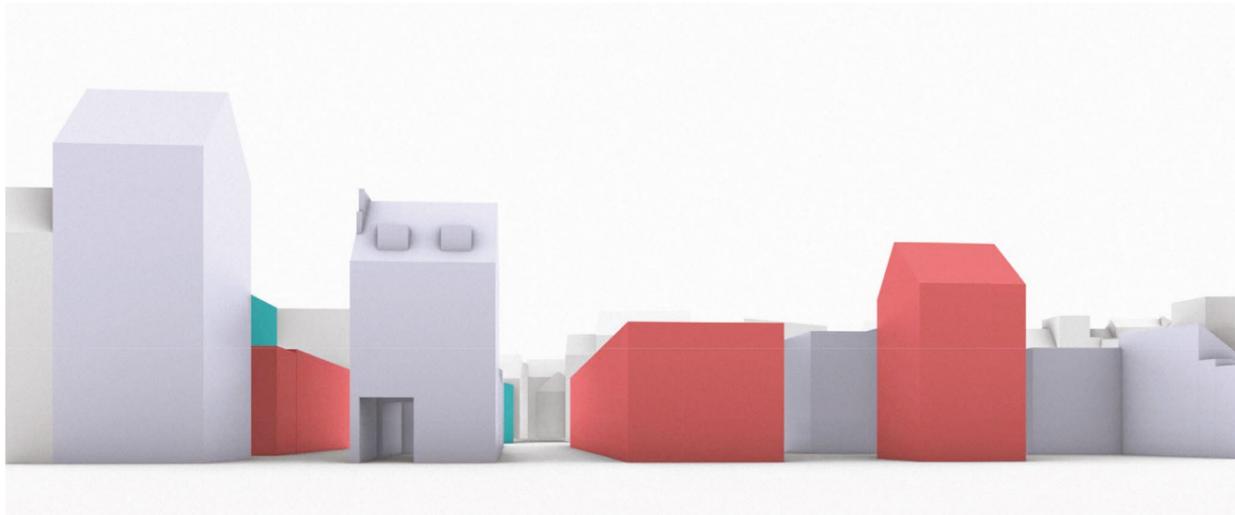
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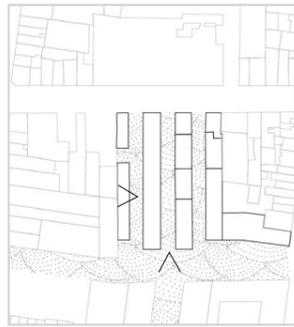
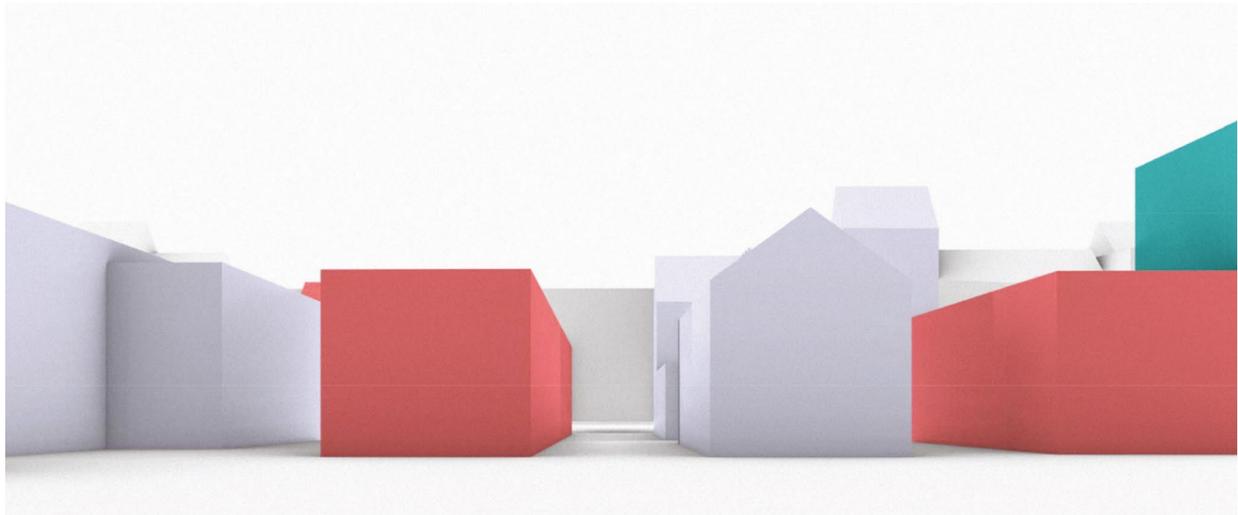


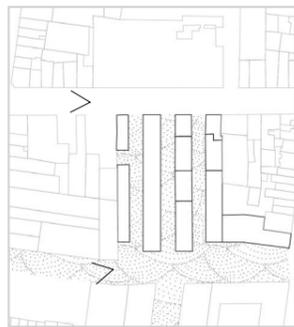
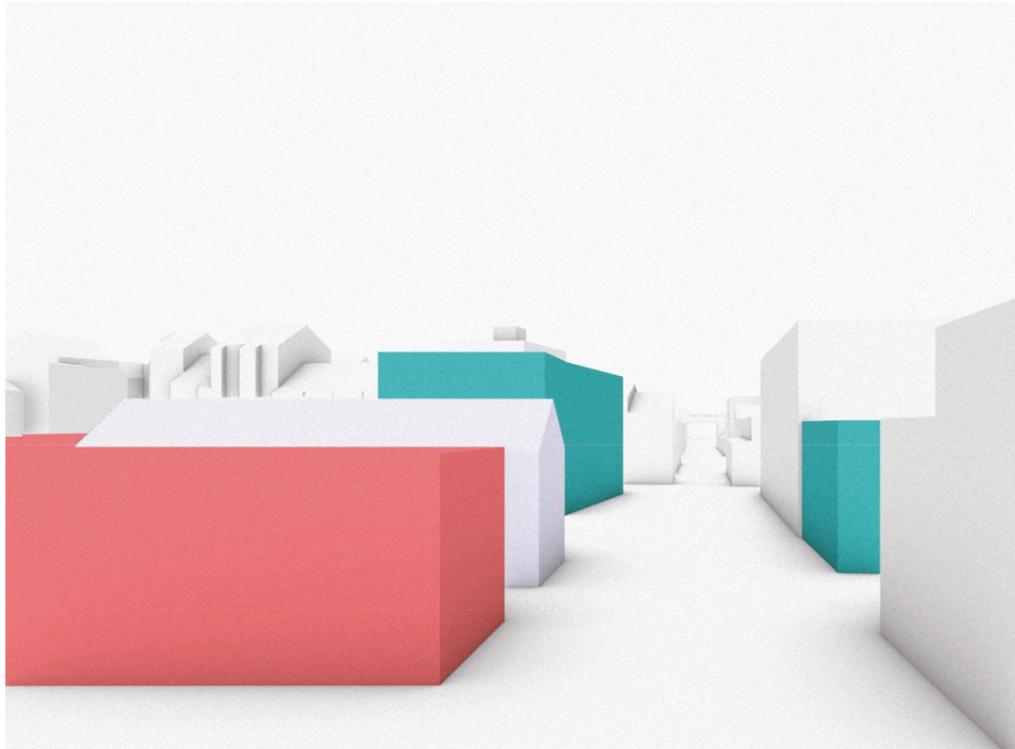
Ground floor plan

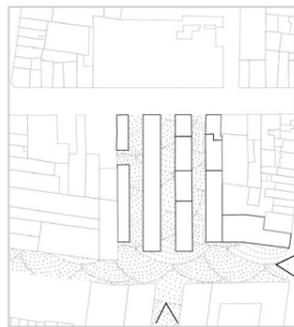
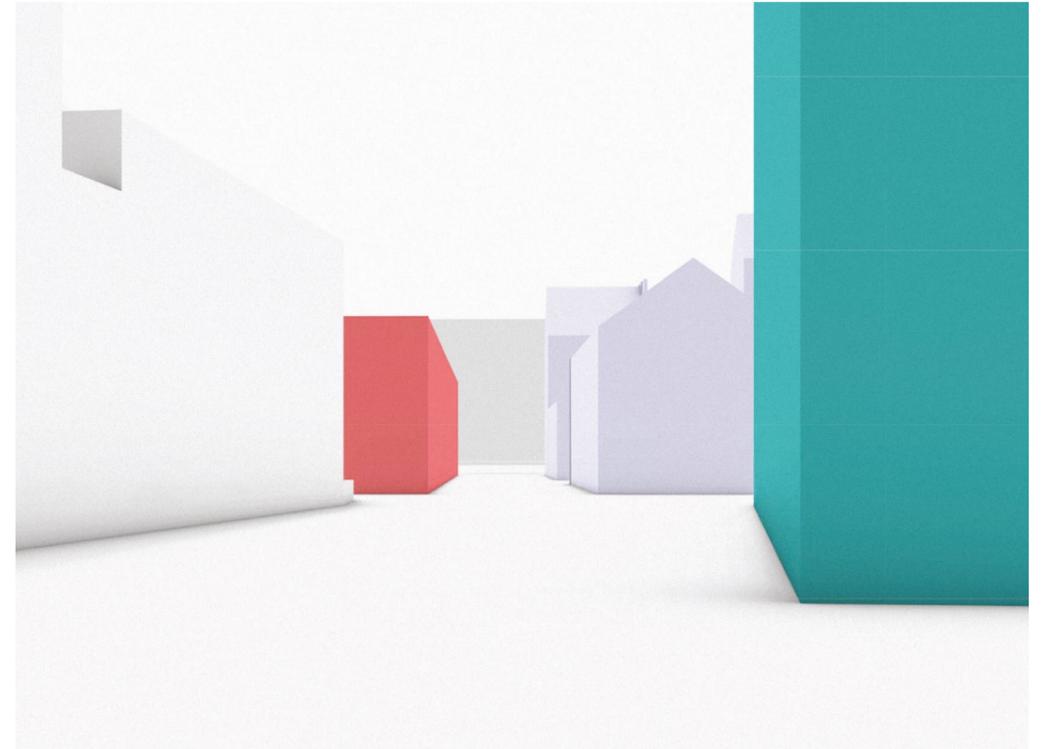
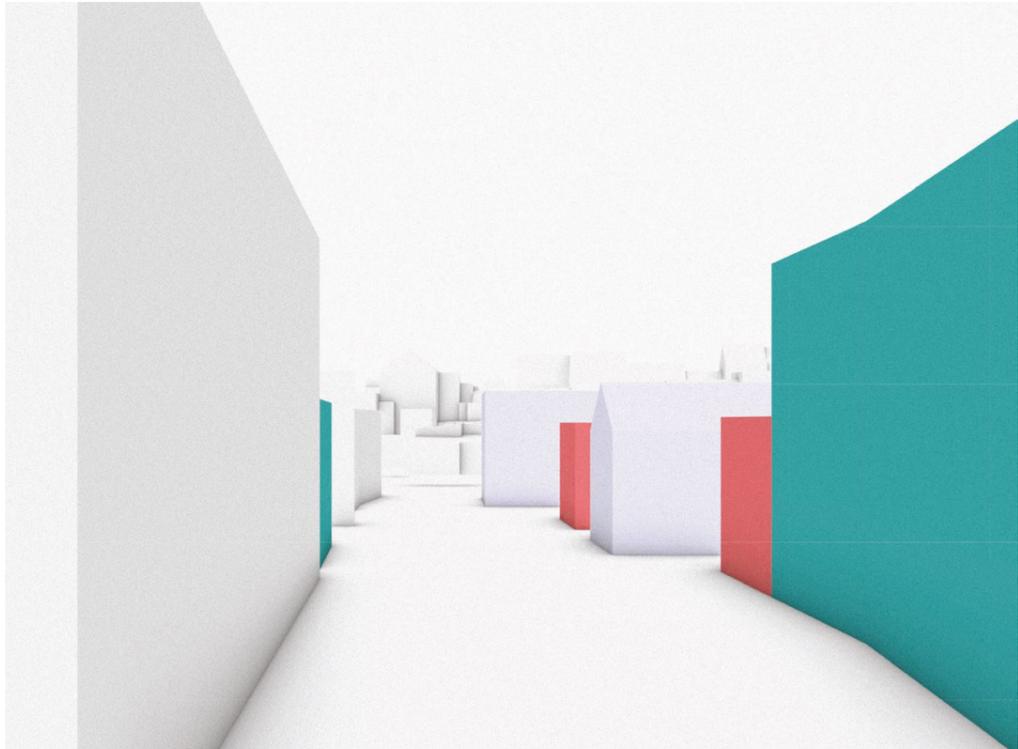


First floor plan





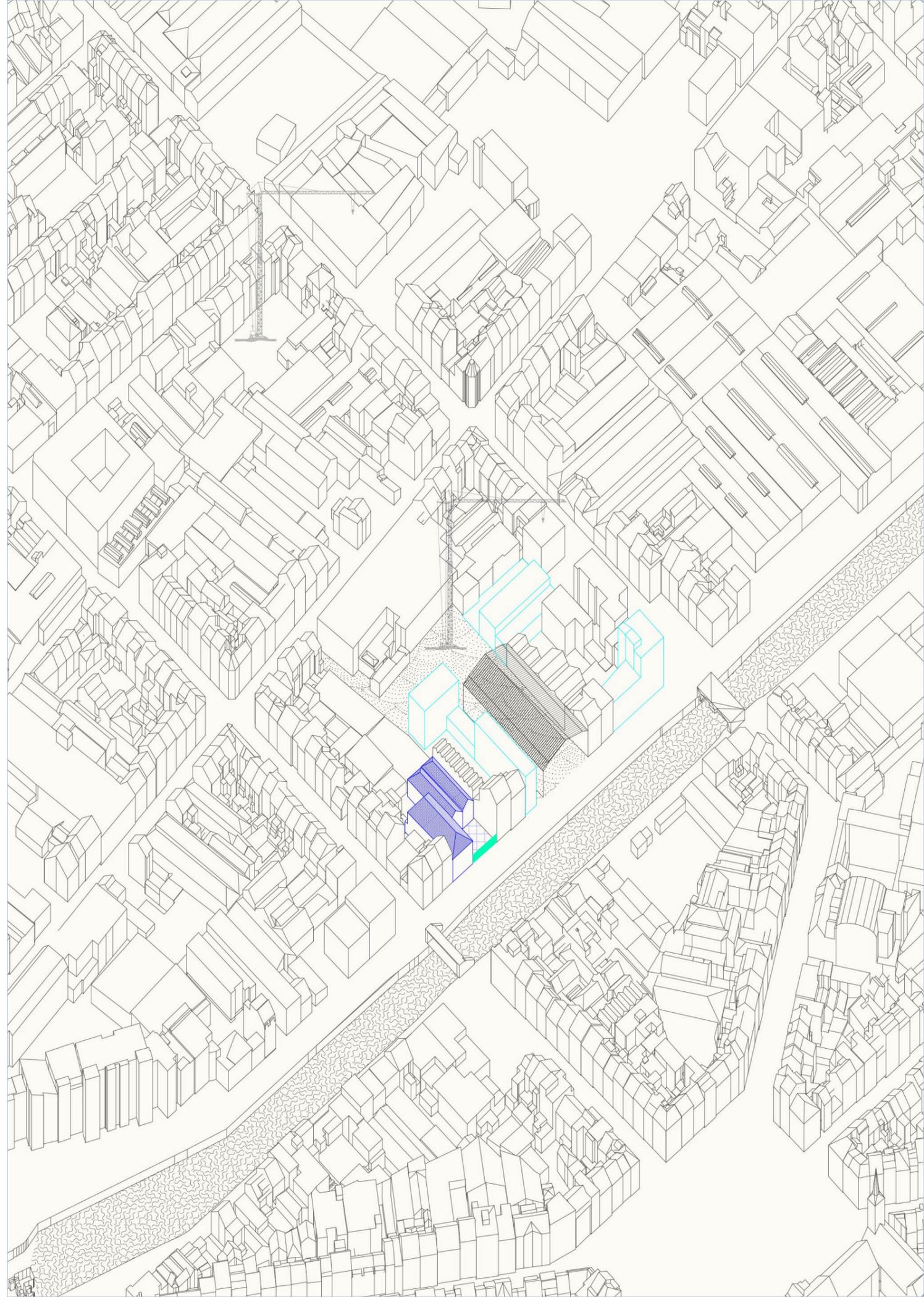
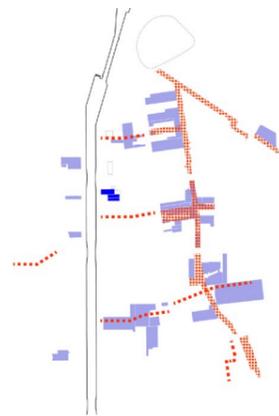
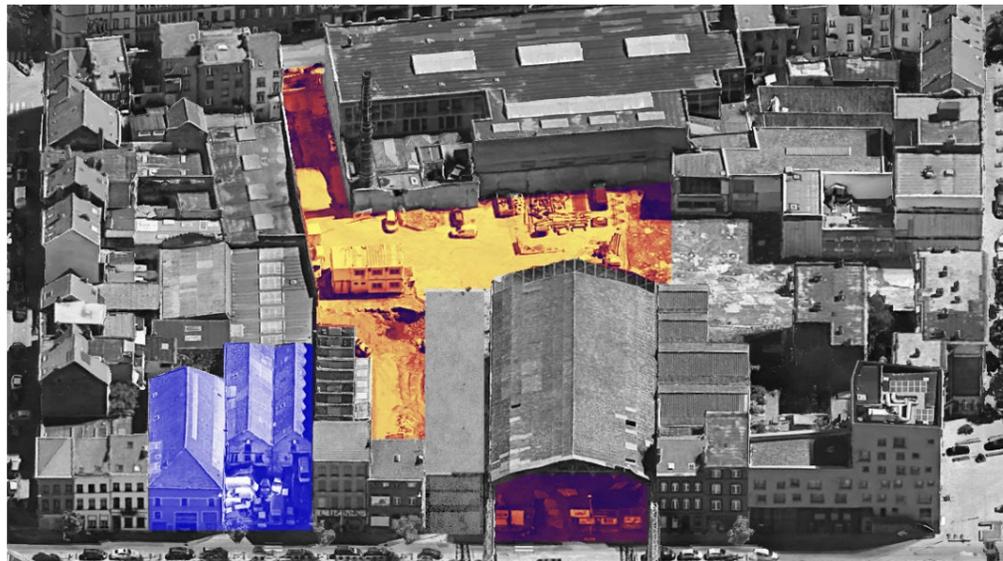




Canal facing plot

Block 3

quai de l'industrie- rue heyvaert- rue de gosselies-rue de liverpool



Current state

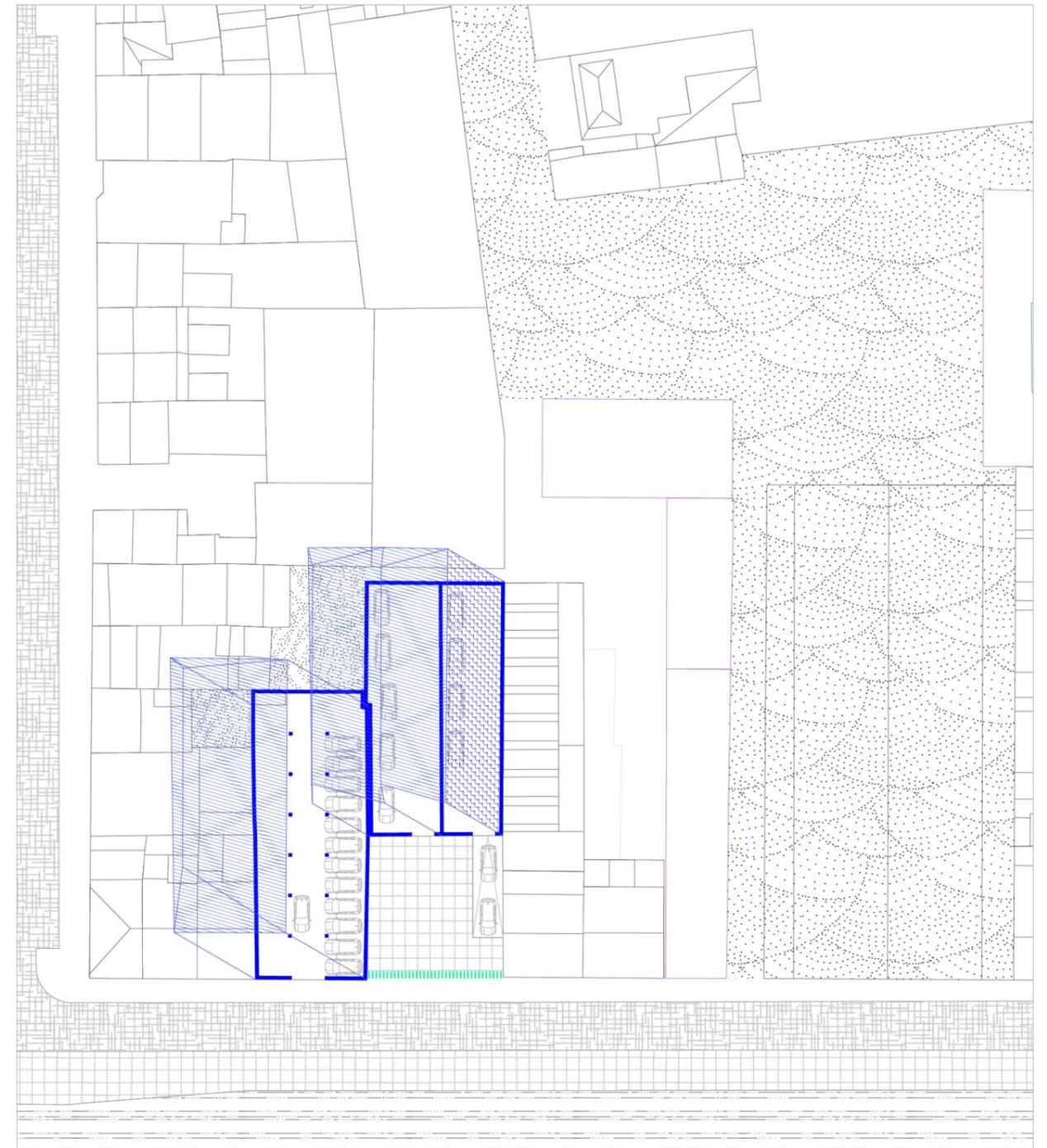
These two warehouses facing Quai de l'Industrie are part of the Canal industrial landscape and are both currently used as car storage space. They both appear on the *Inventaire du patrimoine industriel* (La Fonderie - 1993-1994) where they are recognised to have an artistic, aesthetic, historical and urban interest. Unfortunately, both buildings are currently in a bad state of preservation.

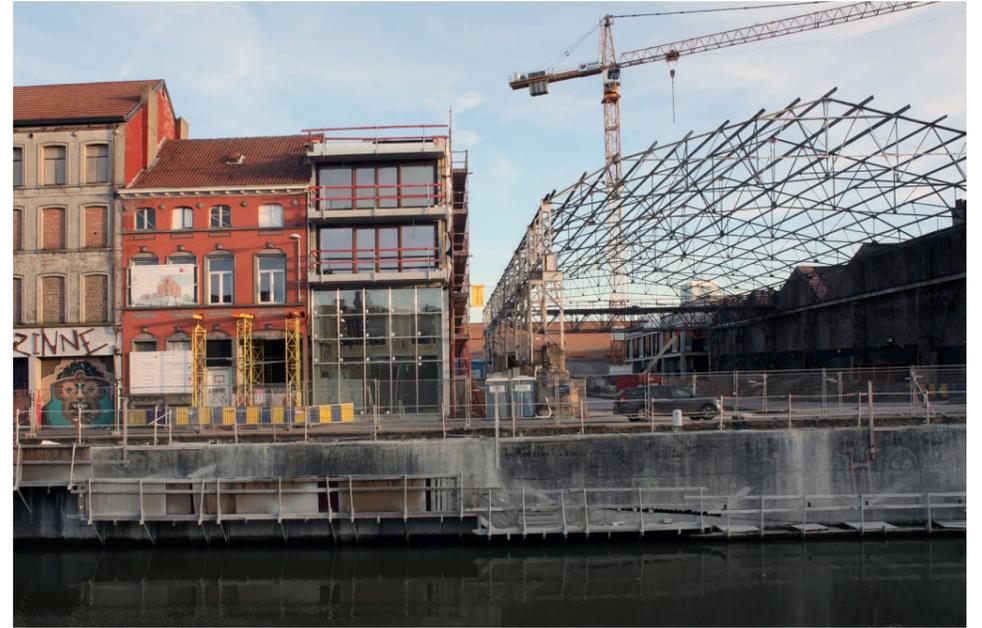
The warehouse on the right (n. 71-73) is positioned fifteen meters backward from the street. A slightly sloped courtyard with a logistical function (it is currently used as a parking/extra storage space) separates it from the quai de l'Industrie. From the courtyard it is possible to access either the basement (which is lower than the street level) or

the first floor through a ramps. Its volume consists of two almost identical sheds, one of them also used as an office space for the car-related business.

The warehouse on the left (n.69) is aligned with the row houses on quai de l'Industrie. Although the volume might originally been built in the early 1900s, its original internal and external layout has been deeply altered by renovations carried out in recent decades in order to adapt the building to a car-storage programme.

A few meters from the two buildings, a pedestrian-cycling footbridge (originally built in 1944), then rebuilt in 2019 links quai de l'Industrie and quai du Mariemont.

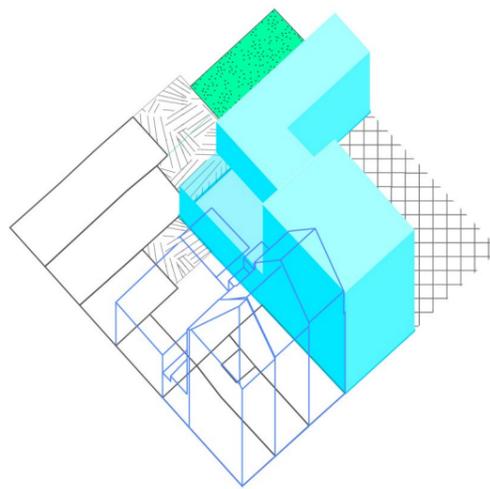




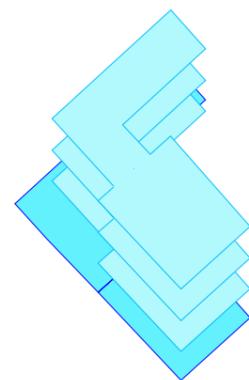
Transformation

Current transformation scenario

The urban transformation programmes show two different approximative scenarios concerning this couple of buildings. The most clear and thus considered as a starting point for the new proposal (although always represented at a conceptual level) is the PAD option, which shows a total replacement of the two warehouses by a new building (a part of which would be probably intended to host productive activities to meet the goals of the PAD). The volume recalls the former volume, with a part aligned with the street front and another one positioned backwards.



Current transformation scenario



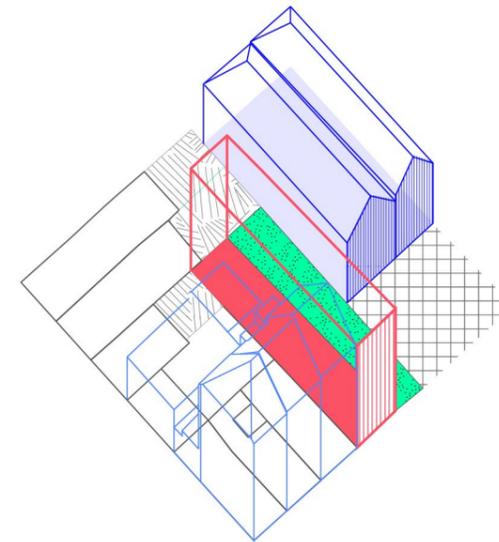
tot. ~ 1080 m²

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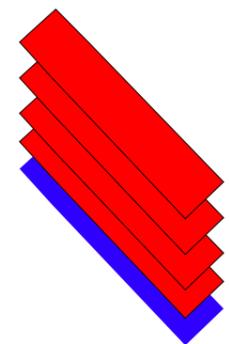
Alternative transformation scenario strategies

The project presented in this thesis changes the PAD proposal as it proposes to preserve and renovate the double-shed building, not only due to its aesthetic qualities, but also and most importantly for its configuration, which has and could still have logistical value. On the other hand, a replacement of quai de l'industrie n.69 by a new building is still proposed. Besides being in a pretty bad state, the existing building current width (12.5 meters) and the fact is partly attached to the adjacent buildings makes its interiors very dark (also

lacking air circulation). This is the reason why in this last project it was considered more appropriate to speculate a demolition of the building and the construction of a new one instead of its renovation. The new volume occupies the same plot deepness as the former one, but with a smaller width of 8 meters instead of 12. This way, a courtyard of the same length as the plot finds space next to the building (and partly next to the adjacent courtyard). The new building is thought to host a (light) productive or third sector/welfare related on the ground floor and residential programme on the upper floors.



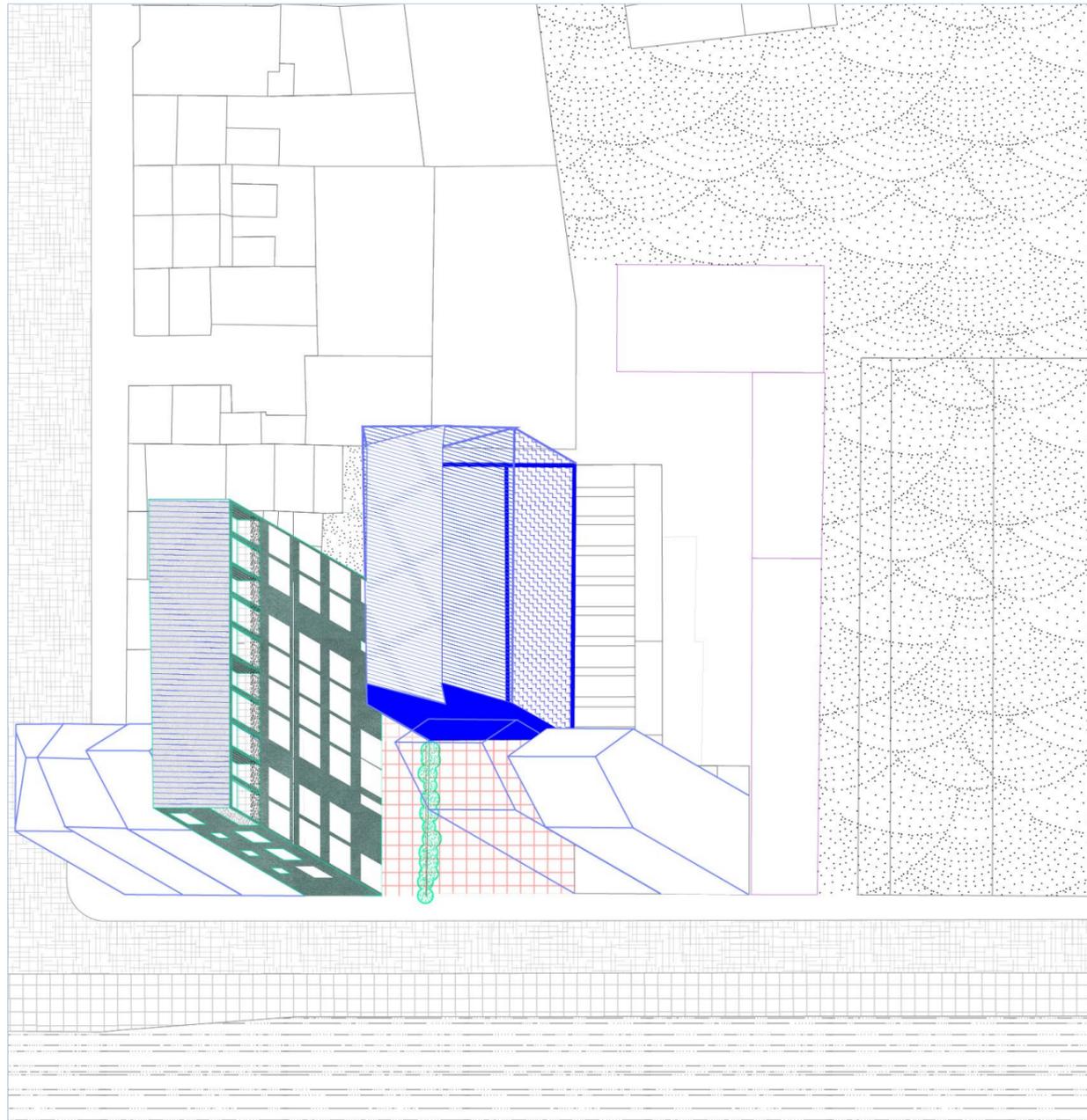
Alternative transformation scenario



tot. ~ 1000 m²

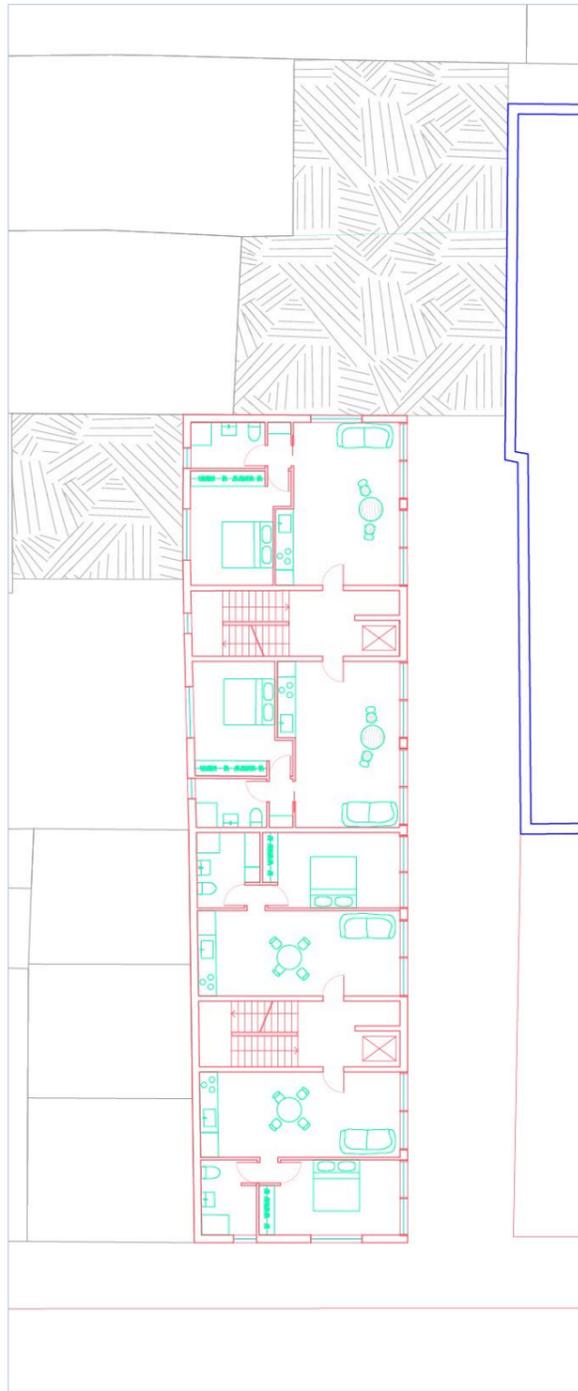
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Canal-facing plot

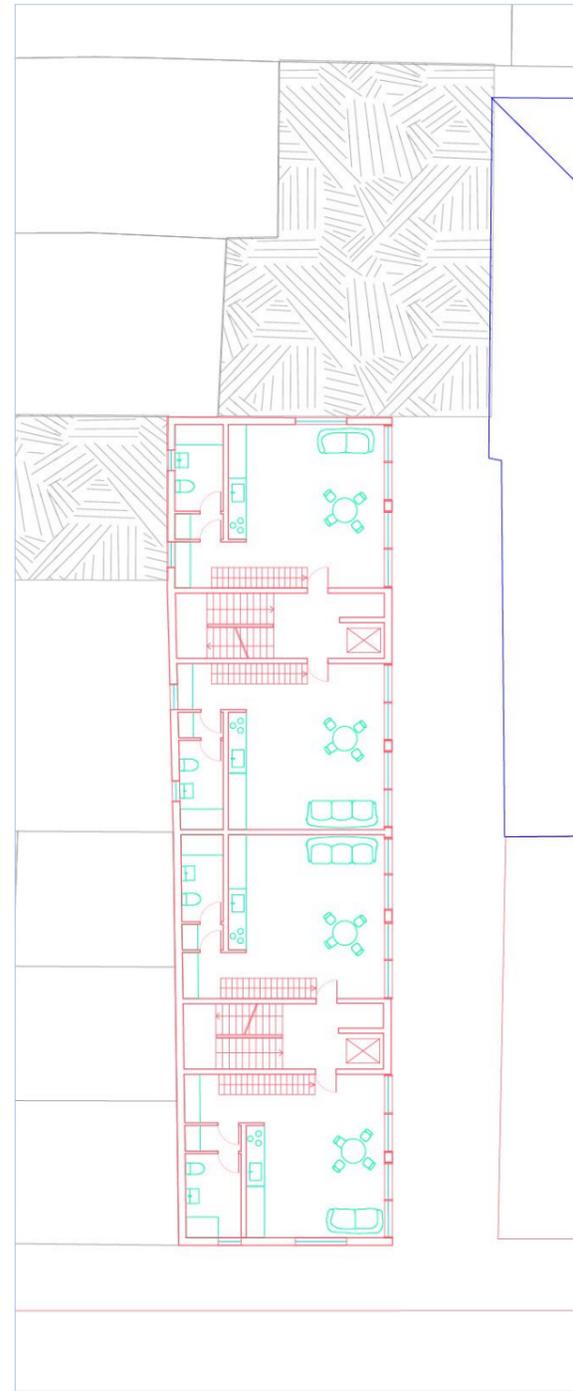


Ground floor plan

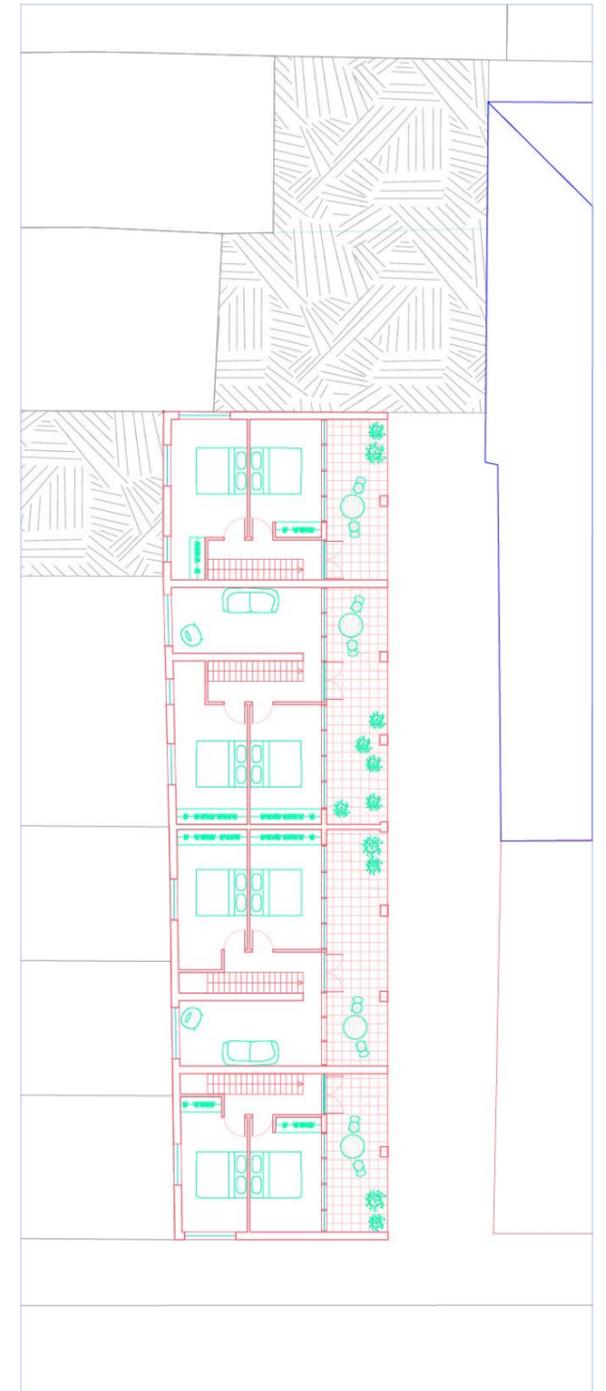




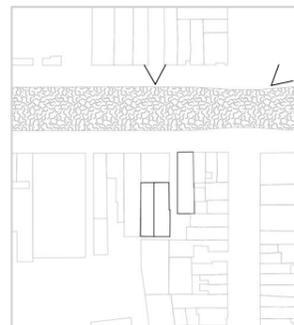
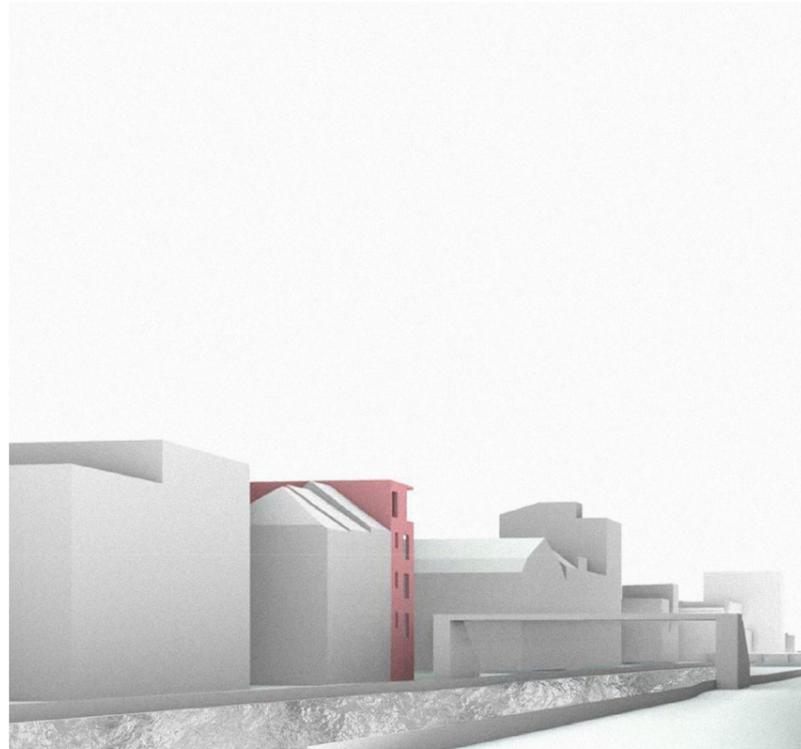
First & second floor plan

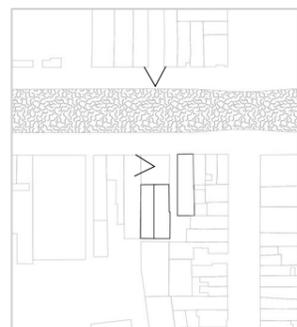
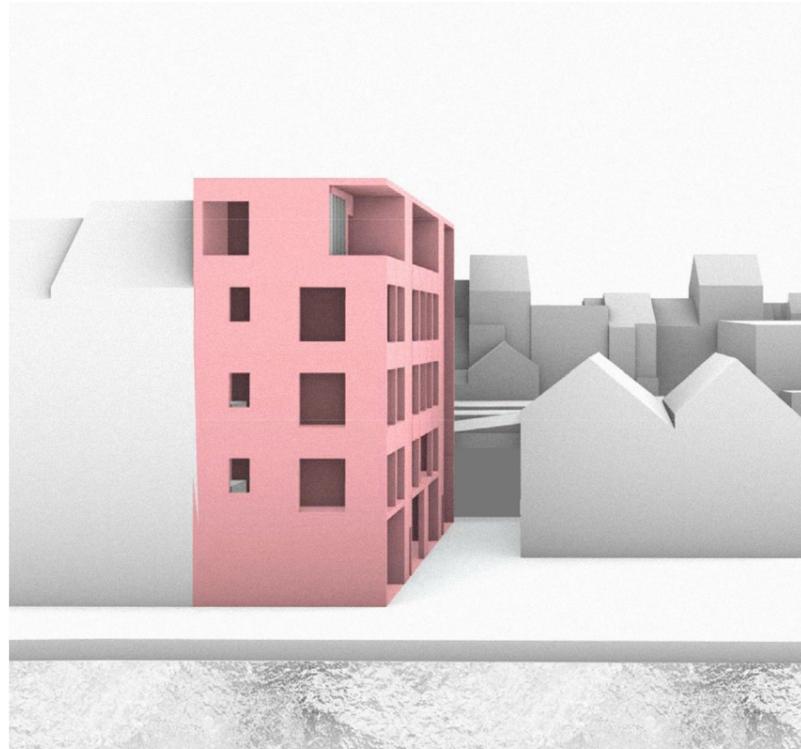


Third floor plan



Fourth floor plan





Open questions

Relevant issues concerning urban transformation in Brussels, and the European city more generally, have emerged from the design explorations carried out in the last chapter of this work. Due to the complexity of these issues, this thesis is not going to deal with them in depth; rather, this sort of conclusion is intended to provide insights into issues that are deeply interconnected with the one dealt with in more detail in this thesis, namely that of the urban transformation of working-class neighbourhoods.

The first issue concerns the socio-economic and socio-demographic dimension of urban renewal programmes concerning neglected and poor inner-city neighbourhoods. Indeed, any transformation plan concerning so-called “fragile” neighbourhoods located within an intrinsically socio-economically and spatially polarised city like Brussels potentially involves risks and counter-effects. In fact, operations like the creation of new residences and attractive public spaces often result in increased land value and cost of living (namely gentrification) within the neighbourhood and a consequent displacement of the weaker groups towards another ‘low-income’ neighbourhood, which in turn could become the target of the next transformation project. This issue implies that public policies that work with the aim of supporting the economic and social ecosystem (i.e. not only the inhabitants but also certain types of economic and commercial activities currently sustaining the neighbourhood) are essential. Such policies should not only concern the cost of housing (e.g. by determining a certain percentage of public or affordable housing), but also the production (or support) of lifestyles suitable for the current population.

The second issue, which is in some way related to the first one, has a more economical character as it concerns urban manufacturing. This topic has been largely discussed in recent years and is currently one of the hottest topics in urban discussions and research. As already mentioned in chapter 3, the idea that urban manufacturing should (partially) be maintained inside the city for both economical and social reasons is today widely shared in both academic and administrative

fields. Of course, putting this idea into practice is much more complex. Public policies emphasise and sponsor a lot the idea of a mixité of functions (for example stipulating that all ground floors of new buildings must be used for production activities), but most of the time they do not discuss in detail what urban manufacturing actually means. As the paper “Who benefits from productive activities?” (Orban, Sanchez Trenado & Vanin, 2021) highlights how the public authorities seem to only support some “new” productive activities which are based on economic models such as the circular economy, local production or sustainable development. These activities often have a troublesome social impact as they «tend to favour products of a higher standard, aimed at a middle-class clientele. (...) Finally, these activities are more easily integrated into property developments which promote housing (fitting into small spaces, generating less nuisance) and the consumption habits of the much-coveted middle classes.» (Ibid.). On the other hand, older productive activities (or even economic clusters) that might have been anchored in a certain neighbourhood for decades end up being pushed away, finding extreme difficulties in remaining in the city due to public authorities’ lack of support (the garages cluster in Heyvaert could be an example). This phenomenon is related to the issue discussed in the previous paragraph, as deeply influenced by urban dynamics such as «property pressure favouring the residential function and development plans oriented towards the middle classes and the associated vision of “quality of life”» (Ibid.). Therefore, the support of this kind of productive sector (that was supposed to be partly aimed at giving jobs to the disadvantaged population), sometimes ends up contributing to the gentrification processes in places like Cureghem. To sum up, «the continued existence of a productive activity depends fundamentally on how well it reconciles with the interests at the heart of the main urban development project and their expression in social and spatial terms» (Ibid.). This issue implies a need from the institutions, both private and public, «to take a stand

in order to promote a more endogenous and more working-class-oriented economy. Sustainable measures should be implemented, such as the promotion of productive activities which partly meet the social challenges of Brussels or the public supervision of the property market.» (Ibid.)

The third issue concerns the city's urban fabric and how the urban transformations aiming at renewing and reshaping old and neglected neighbourhoods often end up erasing part of the dense, fragmented and discontinuous urban fabric, which is wiped out, cleaned up and replaced by a newer, more transparent and continuous space. Brussels has for sure demonstrated great attention to the preservation of its built heritage, but in some cases, the "small heritage" has been erased in favour of higher quality new spaces in the framework of big urban renewal programmes. If the urban qualities offered by these projects are certainly indisputable, it could be interesting to investigate more the potential spatial qualities offered by the dense, fragmented city.



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