

the independent group
msc 3 - 4

destruction
construction
& the inbetween

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destruction construction & the inbetween

The city of Sophronia is made up of two half-cities. In one, there is the great roller coaster with its steep humps, the carousel with its chain spokes, the Ferris wheel of spinning cages, the death-ride with crouching motorcyclists, the big top with the clump of trapezes hanging in the middle. The other half-city is of stone and marble and cement, with the bank, the factories, the palaces, the slaughterhouse, the school, and all the rest. One of the half-cities is permanent, the other is temporary, and when the period of its sojourn is over, they uproot, dismantle it, and take it off, transplanting it to the vacant lots of another half-city.

And so every year the day comes when the workmen remove the marble pediment, lower the stone walls, the cement pylons, take down the Ministry, the monument, the docks, the petroleum refinery, the hospital, load them on trailers, to follow from stand to stand their annual itinerary. Here remains the half-Sophronia of the shooting-galleries and the carousels, the shout suspended from the cart of the headlong roller coaster, and it begins to count the months, the days it must wait before the caravan returns and a complete life can begin again.

- Italo Calvino
The invisible city (1972)

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introduction

Since its independence in 1830, Brussels has had the constant desire to renew itself and be modern. The city has been a tabula rasa for several utopian city views, created from a top-down political system, which led to the destruction of Brussels. These views created a highly artificial landscape, a landscape that is designed without traces of history. As seen in Brussels, the constant desire for the tabula rasa made scars in the urban fabric. These scars became places for a palimpsest of history, where the past was not whipped out but stacked on top of each other. These places will be called terrain vague, the unoccupied, uncertain, and unbounded spaces that are internal to the city, yet external to its everyday use. The ambiguity within the character of terrain vague shows informal events where the mind can construct an entire narrative of what happened by itself. Terrain vague is seen as the outcome of Brussels's construction-destruction cycle and is seen as the in-between. Terrain vague is a temporal soil condition, an unproductive ground part of the productive post-modern city.

Within this research, the desire for the tabula rasa will be understood. When understanding the need for the tabula rasa, the product of the terrain vague is also understood.

The research will answer the question 'What leads to the construction of terrain vague?', 'How can ambiguity, seen within terrain vague, figure as an identity for a common ground in Brussels?' and 'How can terrain vague become an alternative productive ground for Brussels?'. These questions will be researched by typological research, literature studies and historical research.

1.1 history of destruction

After the independence of Belgium in 1830, the country was lost from other, foreign forces. This became the period where it had to build its own character; something new that should be 'truly Belgium'. This creation started during the reign of King Leopold the second, who gained his fortune by exploiting people in his private colony Congo (which later became the property of the state). The colonization of Congo, in combination with the early industrial revolution, made this new state a rich country. This fortune gave Belgium the feeling that it could become a tabula rasa for any utopian city view projected on the capital: Brussels.

However, how we see Brussels today, it is a city in poverty, in chaos, in decay, and is seen as the embodiment of the bureaucratic European Union. This decay, seen within several aspects of the social-cultural landscape of Brussels, can be seen as the constant desire to be modern and, therefore, constantly try to reinvent itself from the ground up; destroying what is already there and starting again, and again, and again.

This constant projection of utopia city views is seen in three chapters from the beginning of the independent state of Belgium. These chapters start from the independence of Belgium in the 19th century and continue until this very moment; the Leopold II plan, the Manhattan project, and the European Quarter.

The Leopold II plan was based on allure and organization and aimed to make Brussels the capital of culture, as seen in Paris. Plans were made where entire neighborhoods should be replaced by enormous buildings, such as the palace of Justice, or by large boulevards crossing the city center.

The Manhattan plan was seen as a need for Brussels to coop with the fastly globalizing world after the second world war. The city needed to modernize and change its picturesque, aesthetic character to one that could be seen around the world. One of generic office towers, clad with mirroring glass, large roads crossing the city, and new infrastructures that could host this mobility change in Brussels. The Manhattan plan is orientated in the Northern part of Brussels, on top of a former working-class neighborhood.

The last chapter of this brutal urban projection, seen as the desire to be modern, followed by disastrous city renewal with the aim to create a new utopia, is the European Quarter, the former Leopold quarter. This neighborhood is located in the East of Brussels, strongly influenced by the Leopold II plan. This neighborhood used to be a place where the upper class of the city used to live. However, since the arrival of the coal and steel treaty, later renamed to the European Union, in 1951, the neighborhood changed into the political center of Europe and left the allure it had behind.

These chapters show a projection of power that is much bigger than Brussels itself. It shows the constant desire for a tabula rasa, the destruction of existing social and cultural spaces, done by top-down politics. The urge for bigness and the continuous need for modernity, in whatever shape or utopian view it might arrive. However, looking back on this utopian views, it is seen as a story of destruction and decay.



Gustaaf Wappers
De episode van de
Septemberdagen 1830
op het stadshuisplein te
Brussel.



Belgium Congo
Size of the colony in
1914.

1.2 Leopold II & Besme plan

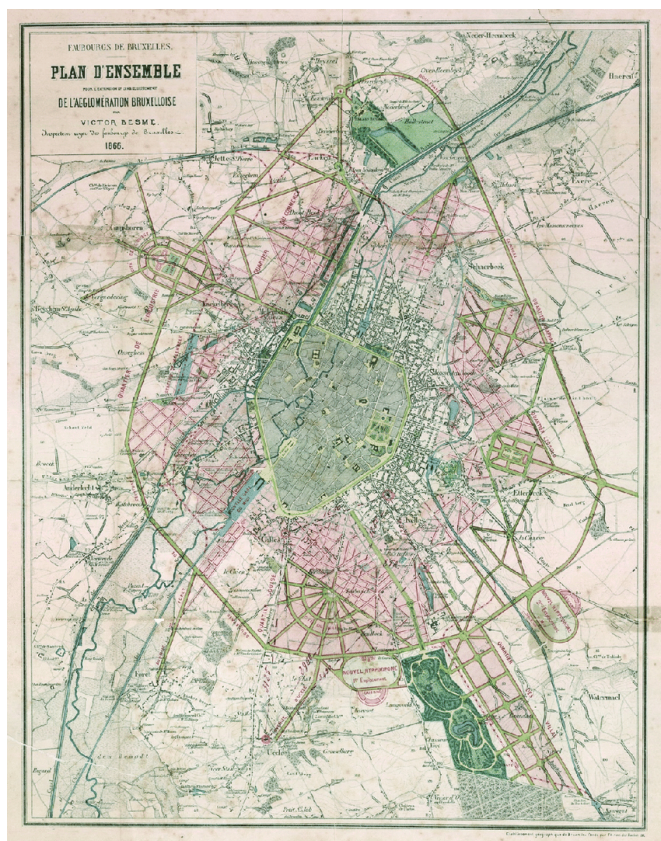
After the independence of Belgium in 1831, Brussels became a tabula rasa for utopian city views. During the reign of king Leopold I, small plans were made for the redevelopment of existing city parks, such as the Warandepark and the forest landscapes outside the city, and the development of small-scale city interventions. However, this idea of punctual city renewal changed during the reign of king Leopold II in 1865. Leopold commissioned Victor Besme to collect the current city renewal plans combined with a much larger project that envisioned a change in the entire city; the Leopold II plan. Besme plan was to make an optimum living place for the different layers of society. This segregating plan was the first utopian view of the city; a collection of cities where different layers of society had their own territory, without any form of coexistence.

However, Besme his plan is also seen as a philanthropist plan where the poor were protected and got better opportunities within the city. The plan started with the first signs of a welfare state combined with his criticism on capitalism. His plan began with new neighborhoods at the periphery of the city: Oostwijk (East Neighbourhood), Zuid wijk (Southern Neighborhood), and Westwijk (Western Neighbourhood). With the replacement of the poor and the working class, contact between them and the elite of the city became purposely impossible. This vision was reinforced by adding industrial functions within these new neighborhoods. The initiative for the poor was also seen within the construction of new housing; in 1868 the Naamloze Vennootschap van de Arbeiderswoning was founded. This partnership constructed 133 houses in the new working-class neighborhoods.

On the other hand, Besme also envisioned new water and sewage systems around the city; these systems were projected on former working-class neighborhoods and were before demolished.

New, imposing buildings were created within the historical center of the city, such as the Palais of Justice or the stock exchange market; for these, entire neighborhoods were demolished. These new buildings were connected to each other with imposing boulevards, inspired by what happened in Hausman his plans for Paris. New infrastructural interventions were projected on the city as well, seen by connecting the different rail tracks together. The focus for the renewal plays was put on safety and security for the city; the palais of justice was build as the main embodiment for these thoughts, however, smaller military were also erected within the city center.

This shows the skewed balance between the ideals of the plans and the reality. A plan based on making the city better for everyone by making better housing, cleaner neighborhoods, and a city with allure. But by constructing this, many inhabitants were disposed of their domestic property without any form of compensation. It shows how top-down planning works in a city that was not known with these amounts of power.

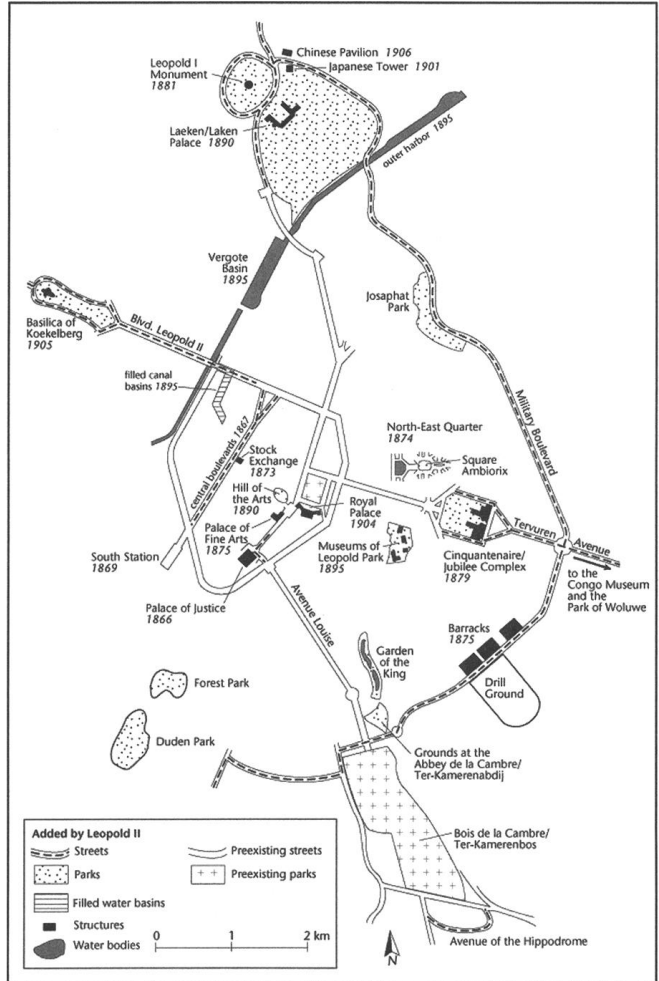


Victor Besme
Plan d'ensemble pour
l'extension et l'embel-
lissement de la ville de
Bruxelles (1866).



Brussels garden city
neighbourhood Verre-
gat 1919.

destruction



Brussels garden city
neighbourhood
Verregat 1919.

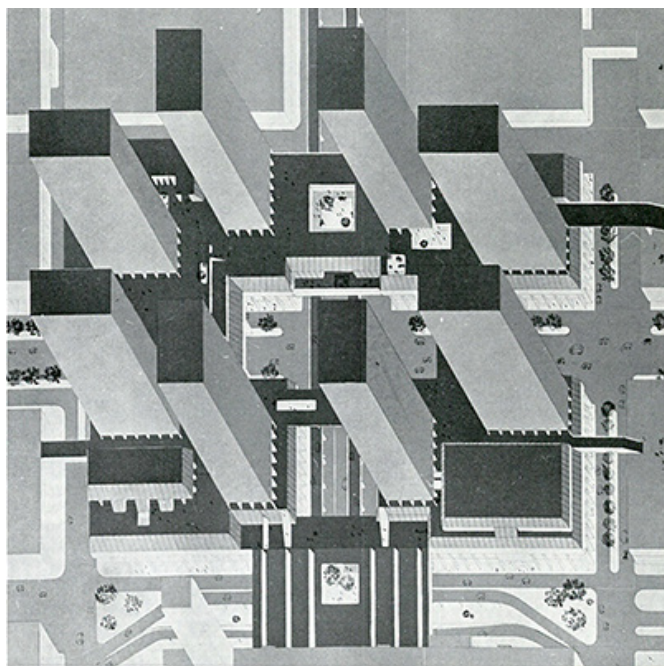
1.3 manhattan project

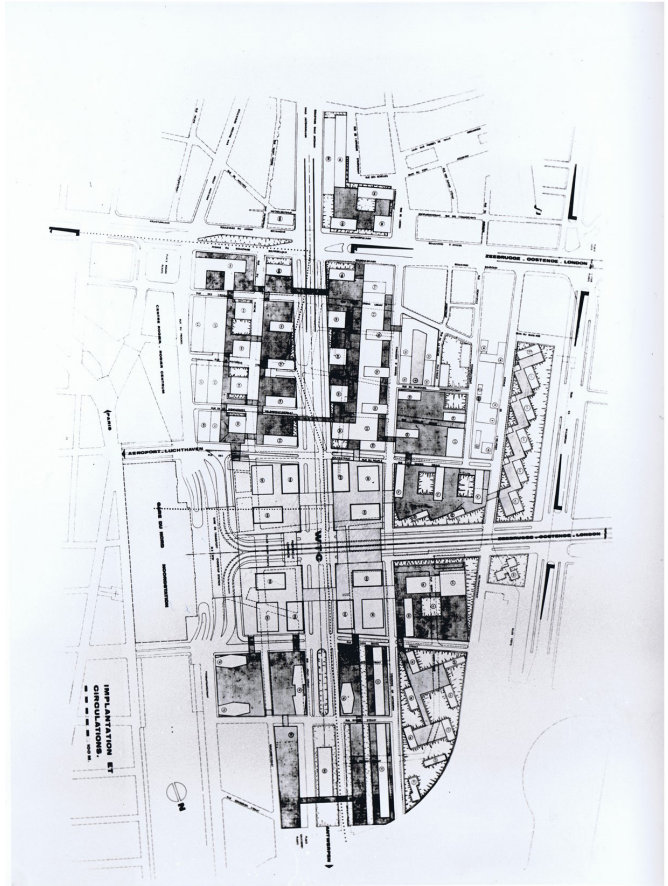
The second chapter of brutal urban projections is seen in Brussels is the Manhattan project. This city development started with the third CIAM congress in 1930, organized by Victor Bourgeois in Brussels. According to him, architecture is the 'organizer of all human needs' (Ledent, 2019). After the second world war, Belgium was a welfare state, together with a flourishing industrial apparatus and a territorial tabula rasa. This combination led to euphoria, where the modernist ideology flourished; it became a body for optimism. After the second economic bloom in 1958, the city organized the world expo, which was the start of a period led by internationalization and top-down planning in Brussels, seen as an effect produced by postmodernity (Haberman & Benhabib, 1981). The Manhattan plan shows Brussels' desire to change its cultural ideals to one that envisioned the city as a business capital of Europe. This bloom led to the construction of new infrastructure and housing developed according to old dreams. With these ideals, the Manhattan plan was developed, seen as a generic city in the Northern part of the city. Here, the existing working-class neighborhood was demolished with the political device of the 1962 town and planning act which gave the right to the expropriation of land to private investors. Together with the 1967 decree for the expropriation of ground in the Northern Quarter, consented by the national government and signed by King Baudouin made the Manhattan plan possible.

A tabula rasa was created, totally uncoupled from its grounds' history. The existing was demolished and replaced by objects of postmodernity, designed by Groupe Structures. Where the construction started with the demolition of social and cultural spaces, together with domestic spaces, the reconstruction was paused because of the 1973 oil crisis. The Manhattan project was finished in 1998 and changed the inhabitants' lives by political decisions. This projection shows the gap between ideals seen within modernism and its implementation on the inhabitants.

Ledent, G. (2019). From Ideal Proposals to Serial Developments: Victor Bourgeois's Schemes in the Light of Post-War Developments in Brussels. 4, X-X. <https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v4i3.2115>

Habermas, J., & Ben-Habib, S. (1981). Modernity versus Postmodernity. *New German Critique*, 22, 3-14. <https://doi.org/10.2307/487859>





urban plan, Manhattan project by groupe structures.

destruction



the (slow) destruction of the existing Noordwijk and the replacement of structures by modernity. (1979)

1.4 the european quarter

treaty developed into the modern European Union as how we know it today. The Union was founded during a period of rapid internationalization, which led to the disappearance of country borders within Europe. While the Union was growing, the need for office buildings also did. Strassbourg and Brussels are both figuring as the home base for the parliament. The former Leopold quarter, which was seen as a neighborhood for the upper-class of the city, slowly changed its character into one that is based on politics and international businesses.

The same 1962 town and planning act that is seen within the Nothern Quarter was used for the expropriation of domestic ground from the inhabitants of the Leopold quarter. This led to the fast development of entire city blocks. Compared with the pre-WO II maps of the Leopold quarter and the map of how we perceive the neighborhood today, the urban structure is untouched; however, the fill-in of these blocks is reconstructed. This is done because of the 1962 act; when someone owns 50% of a city block, they have the private right to 'claim' the entire block.

The arrival of the European Union within the quarter made it also change quickly functional; the urban blocks changed into functional office towers to give space for the upcoming lobby businesses that arrived in Brussels. This also shows the power of the Union: they create a specific demand for a particular place in the city.

After the unstructured development of the quarter, the Commission established in 1989 the Brussels Capital Region as a sufficient planning authority within the district. Since the Union is still growing, this political body is used for a better expansion strategy. Now, we see that the Union is spreading the Place de Luxembourg; the Brusselization domino effect continues.

The Union itself, together with the attraction that is given to the city and international offices, led to the creation of a job and money machine: in 2009, 110.000 people were working for global businesses in Brussels, earning fourteen percent of all the money made in Brussels. However, these high-income employees do not have a place within Brussels itself; since this group's needs are only justified within the outer areas of the city, they are not paying city taxes.

destruction



monoliths seen in the European Quarter, Brussels.

1.5 the desire for being modern

The different characters 'construced' in Brussels come from an elites desire. It's a projection of contemporary thoughts on the city and its inhabitants; the desire to be cultural developed, safe, and secure, a desire for a new start in Europe; a new world for international businesses, and a desire to become the capital of Europe, seen with the arriving of the European Union. These desires are not from Brussels men; they come from a government that keeps trying to be a contemporary city. However, this schizophrenic character developed led to the unidentification of the city and its citizens, leading to an average living span of just five years in Brussels.

After the independence of the state in 1830, Belgium needed to create its own character, something free from the French, Germans, and the Dutch influence. Belgium already has a rich history, seen celebrating with the middle-ages cities. However, after England and America, Belgium had an early industrial revolution, which allowed them to develop themselves faster than the surrounding countries. Here, king Leopold and Leopold II became inspired by Hausmann's city renewals of Paris. Within Paris, it was seen that the country was flourishing; it had money to spend on new cultural institutions, such as operas and theaters, new boulevards, focussing on the city's safety, and new hygenic solutions, such as a new sewer system under the city. This changed how Europe looked at cities; they became a place for development. Here, Brussels needed to become the cultural capital of Europe, overtaking Paris its character.

After the second world war, Europe needed several years to redevelop itself again. With the Marshall plan's money, countries could resurrect themselves. However, Belgium was not hit hard during the second world war, the Antwerp harbor was untouched, and the country could be back on track quicker than their surrounding countries.

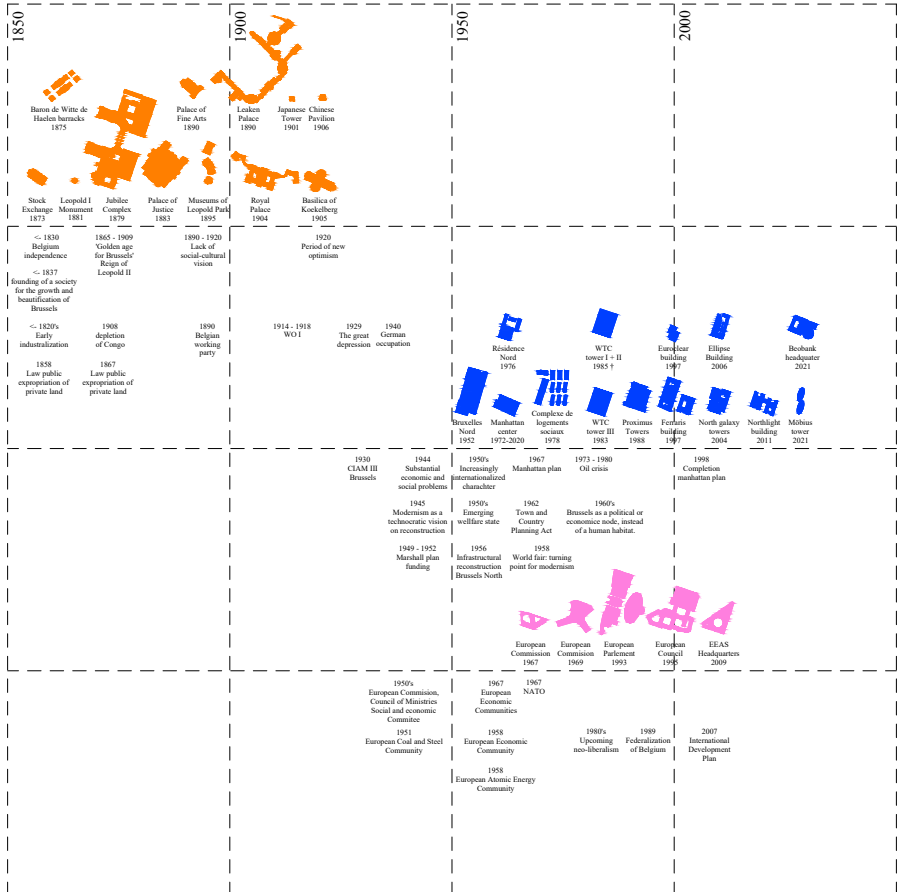
Fourteen years after the second world war, the world was able to reconnect to each other during the 1958 World Expo in Brussels. Here, a new 'humanity' should be founded. All countries were showing their developments in the years after the war. The countries were reunited with each other on the same soil. This was the start of the fast growth of global businesses; Brussels presented itself as the perfect host for events, businesses, and human wellbeing.

This reunion of countries after the second war also ended within the beginning of a new character of European collaboration; the European Union. With the treaty of Paris, Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherland, and West Germany were starting to open their country borders and invest in strong collaboration with the 1950 European Coal and Steel Community. Over the years, this collaboration in coal and steel worked well for these countries, and the participating countries were growing. Therefore, seven years after the treaty of Paris, the treaty of Rome was signed. This treaty was seen as the next chapter of the Coal and steel community, the European Economic Community, and the European Atomic Energy Community, later renamed the European Union with the treaty of Maastricht. Here, Brussels found themselves a unique opportunity; to become the capital of these international collaborations. However, the competition was minor; the role of becoming the host of the European Union was split into two, Strassbourg and Brussels. With this, the internationalization of Brussels, which was already presented during the 1958 Expo, grew significantly. Brussels required new offices, seen with the Manhattan plan and the developments around and in the city itself.

With these character developments in Brussels, the question arises why the city has this desire to be modern; why does it need to transform itself into a contemporary utopia in need of a tabula rasa? Where does this desire come from?

And is it a desire or an accumulation of events that lead to this outcome? The effects of the elements that raise these questions could be seen in the inhabitants of Brussels. Inhabitants of the city were never able to identify themselves with Brussels; because of its geological location, located in Flanders, but French as its main langue, a city fragmented within several smaller municipalities (which do not communicate with each other), and continuous city renewal. Because of this unidentification, Brussels men only live an average of five years in the city.

destruction



Timeline of the three brutal projections: Leopold II plan (orange), Manhattan project (blue) and the European Quarter (pink), juxtaposed with historical events.

destruction



The nineteen municipalities seen in the city Brussels.

1.6 the effect of top-down urban strategies

During the beginning of the 19th century, houses for the people, Maison du Peuple, were built around Europe as a collective gesture from the factory owners to their workers. These buildings, which should be seen as communal houses according to Victor Horta, are seen as a classroom for social relationships and are there to 'educate the proletariat' (Scascighini, 1991).

The Maison du Peuple in Brussels, designed by Victor Horta and opened in 1899 at the Joseph Stevensstraat, was seen as a communal space for the socialist movement seen by the factory workers in the city. The development of this 'house for the people' was led by industrial development in the second half of the 19th century. It was designed according to the strong segregation of social space seen in Brussels: 'We don't mix genres: clogs on one side, polished shoes on the other' (Scascighini, 1991). This segregation of people with different economic statuses is also seen within Besme/Leopold II city renewal plans.

The Maison du Peuple was seen as a collective house for the socialist workers. However, this house was built by the capitalist factory owners. Therefore, it is seen as a trojan horse in a fastly developing capitalistic city. The buildings housed the luxury of air and light and were in heavy contrast with the 'slumbs' the workers were living in. Also, the education and manners displayed in the house were projections of the ideas of the factory owners; it was a projection of capitalism seen for the workers.

It seems like Brussels cannot or is not willing to see its historical value. The people that used to live in the city, those who used the advanced of Brussels, made the city how we know it today.

This absolute freedom, which is seen as a main characteristic of the city, has existed already for many years. Therefore, this character has a strong attraction to political and social thinkers. One of the most famous ones, who was searching for a state where he could develop his thoughts further without any risk from the national government, was Karl Marx. Marx moved to Brussels in 1845 and had to ask for permission to King Leopold himself. However, after the French revolution, his communistic way of thinking became a risk for the state, wherefore he had to leave the city in 1848.

As seen, Marx was a political refugee. He fled from Germany to the French, ending up in Belgium; this is because here, there was a strong separation between church and state. These three years were one of the most productive for Marx. His ideas about inequality were also seen within Brussels: the difference between the lower and upper cities was significant. During these three years, he enriched himself with the company of his two neighbors, living at the Verbondstraat. His neighbors were Mozes Hess and Friedrich Engels, which became part of the productive machine for the understanding of communism. During this era, Marx and Engels wrote the communism manifest.

While having such a significant effect on the city, there are no signs of this historical event in Brussels. No signs, no street names, not even the house is there where Marx was living. Brussels does not or is not willing to show the importance it had during the era. However, Brussels (and Belgium) is still largely this Freestate it used to be. In Brussels, extreme thoughts are developed and presented to the world.

While offering a safe place to many in Brussels, the city is also coping with a significant homeless issue. The amount of homeless people is on a constant rise since this century; nowadays, 5.313 people are living on the street, a 27,8% increase from November 2020. In a city where the GDP is one of the highest in Europe (71.200 euro), an increase of 300% happened within the last 12 years.

However, this number might be higher; this is because the government is counting people on the streets. The real number might therefore be higher since many homeless people are living with friends or family. This significant problem within Brussels is being worked on; there are around 150 homeless shelters pred around the city. However, in the course of this problem, it not work.



Victor Horta, Maison du Peuple. Print made during the late 19th century.



Homelessness seen
around Brussels metro
stations (Maelbeek).

1.7 brusselization

Where this cultural and social space was important for the workers in the first half of the 20th century, their situation improved during the last part of the 20th century. Herefore, the Maison du Peuple became slowly obsolete for this function. After being vacant for several years, standing on the highly valuable ground, the city decided to demolish Maison Du People of Victor Horta in 1965 and replace it with the 26-story Zaveltoeren.

The destruction of Maison du Peuple is nowadays seen as one of the main ingredients of the definition of 'Brusselization', which describes Brussel's brutal vision of city renewal despite all costs. After the second world war, Belgium's main port in Antwerp was untouched, so the country was able to quickly repower its economy. This led to fast post-war development of the country, mainly projected on Brussels. The 1958 International Exhibition was seen as the starting point for a new era of modernity. The Expo was a turning point for Belgium and Brussels; it placed itself on the map and became a crucial center of power, seen with the European integration and the internationalization of the city. During this flourishing period, residential neighborhoods were replaced by business districts, as seen in the Manhattan plan and the European Quarter, under the pressure of the real-estate lobby. The 1962 Town and Country Planning act strengthened this effect of Brusselization.

The term was first used by Atelier Recherche et d'Action Urbaines (Schoonbrodt, 2007) to understand the processes going that were going on in the Northern and European Quarter; it was seen as a landscape transformation in districts where investments were lacking in esthetics. Other examples of this were seen in the extremely fast phase of office and apartment blocks in the city, without any integration into the existing urban landscape; it created the fragmented/ wild landscape that is still seen in Brussels today.

destruction

The term is unique to Brussels since it is the outcome of the European institutions and the stimulated demand for more offices, the influence of urban policies and the 1962 Act, the architectural shortcomings of the buildings, the destruction of existing urban spaces, and the expropriation of Brussels men and the replacement of business people into the city center. The process of Brusselization is strongly influenced by the Brussels elite, seen within their business and political elites of the city. There is a strong collaboration seen between these two; where the office is scarce, policies were made together with the developers and the local authorities.



Grand boulevard with the atomium, seen at the Brussels world expo in 1958.



'Celebration of culture'
seen in the exploitation
and objectivation of
inhabitens of Belgium's
colony in Congo (1958).



Philips pavillion by Le Corbusier (1958). A celebration of modern technologies, seen in light and sound.

destruction



Grand infrastructural renewals during the late '50s and '60s, picture taken in the south of Brussels.



The juxtaposition of the 'old life,' seen as the classical stores (parfumerie) and the upcoming internationalization of the city, seen in the construction of the skyscraper in the back.

1.8 *tabula rasa*

As seen in many Northern European cities, Brussels is a city where every square meter is designed and planned out. Every ground in Brussels has multiple histories; soil that became part of the city in the middle-ages later became a place for domestic villas, and is now received as a business district. To understand this palimpsest of historical layers, archival research should be done. Since there is no visual evidence of other historical layers, there is no other way to understand the city's history. The constant desire to start again erased historical layers in the city and thereby constantly returned to a *tabula rasa* where every contemporary city view could be executed.

The *tabula rasa* is seen as the complete erasure of history and making the ground ready for a new start, caught within a contemporary modernism tradition since the interbellum period. The ground is seen as the outcome of a highly designed space, born from the desire to start over again, to be contemporary again. This tradition started during the era of Le Corbusier's 'towards a new architecture'. Architecture should become efficient and work as a living machine. History was then seen as non-efficient; the essays of Le Corbusier focus on the destruction of ornamentation seen within Victorian architecture. However, these ideas were having a significant impact on the ideas of how we build cities.

The three plans being researched in this thesis, The Leopold II – Besme plan, the Manhattan plan, and the European quarter, all share the same affection with the *tabula rasa* – the desire to be contemporary. The need for the contemporary also meant the destruction of the past, a history of value to many. With the *tabula rasa*, the destruction of social and cultural spaces began. Domestic neighborhoods were erased; even the street patterns were destroyed.

The photo of three young children shows the landscape where they lived in – a world of nothingness, a period between destruction and construction; a true *tabula rasa*.

Buildings that were seen as cultural spaces, such as the *Maison du Peuple*, where workers were founding their common ground, were demolished for city renewal. Together with the erased heritage of Brussels, seen in historical events in the city. The houses of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who were writing world history in the city, were demolished without any memory of these events. Cultural houses designed by Victor Horta were destroyed during the 20th century. Other than well-known destroyed spaces, community space was also destroyed to fulfill the contemporary mindset. The European Commission building – *Le Berlaymont* – is constructed on a former park, the *Nothern* district is constructed in a domestic neighborhood, where many cultural and social spaces used to be housed, and the ground that is used for the *Leopold II – Besme* plans that used to be a common territory for the domestic life that was hosted in the *Marollen* neighborhood.

The urge for the *tabula rasa* led to the destruction of emotional space, seen as a common territory within an area. This common ground could be a memory of the past and spaces where everyday life took place. The reckless or careless vision of these spaces led to an unidentification of Brussels men. The *tabula rasa* makes people forget where they come from, what they used to have, and what life used to be. It is the embodiment of thoughts by people who are unaffected by the drawbacks of these renewals.

destruction



Children living in a no-mans land, a tabula rasa, seen during the construction of the Manhattan project in the '60s.

1.9 displacement of people

The lives of those who are impacted by temporary thoughts will change forever. Most of the time, these lives are from the vulnerable of society, the unprivileged, those who are not able to get a house, not able to get a secure job, and those who are living on unstable ground. In Brussels, the idea of temporality is seen within every chapter of utopian city views, seen in the projections on the city itself. These views, seen in beauty, safety, or political power, have a temporal effect on the city, but an internal impact on the life of the citizens. The story of the displacement of people is seen throughout Brussels history; the government actively contributed to this displacement, seen with the Leopold II plan with the ancillary political acts, together with the 1962 town and planning act, which both had the same characteristics. Here, the vulnerable of the city are displaced. These utopian city views were a projection of the city's elite, in need of cultural or economic development, something that those who are immitailly affected by these changes are not benefiting from. Brussels became a place for those with a public voice, those who can project their thoughts on the city, and those who are safe.

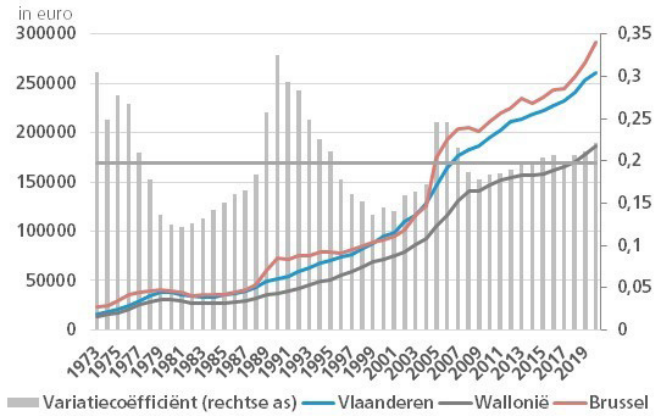
Within the development of the Leopold plan, the national government was given the exclusive right for the expropriation of private land. Homeowners were forced out of there houses with significantly less compensation than was needed. The principle that ruled here was that one should sacrifice for the greater good. However, the city renewal plans affected only the less privileged neighborhoods and areas. Also, the ground that was confiscated was later sold to the elites of the city, seen on the houses of Brussels boulevards. The community living at the Malloren neighborhood had to move to one of the garden cities for the redevelopment of the area, together with the construction of the Palais of Justice.

The Palais was a building for the city and was therefore seen as a greater good than the domestic property of those who were living there.

The 1962 Town and planning act introduced the private right for expropriation of private land to project developers. This was mainly done by article 25 of the law; when someone owns half of a city block, they gained the right to redevelop the entire block for a 'common good', which means the expropriation of others' property. The act was based on splitting the power of urban planning and development in three distinct levels; the region, the district, and the municipal. However, the real power was concentrated at a national level. The act was mainly used for the redevelopment of the Northern and European district to create office spaces for businesses and numerous European institutions, resulting in low-quality architecture and a bad connection to the current urban fabric.

Displacement is still seen within Brussels today; the lobbying industry is getting stronger every day. As seen in many European cities, having domestic property is not as normal as it used to be. Those in power are the only ones who can change the city; both for the good and the worse. The speculative ground that is seen in Brussels is part of this industry; the ground is more valuable than the domestic life of its inhabitants. The ground is not seen as cultural and social soil but only as a money machine for those who can afford it.

Figure 1 – House prices in the three Belgian regions



The growing housing price seen in Brussels - the highest of the country. Information provided by KBC Economics based on STATBEL.

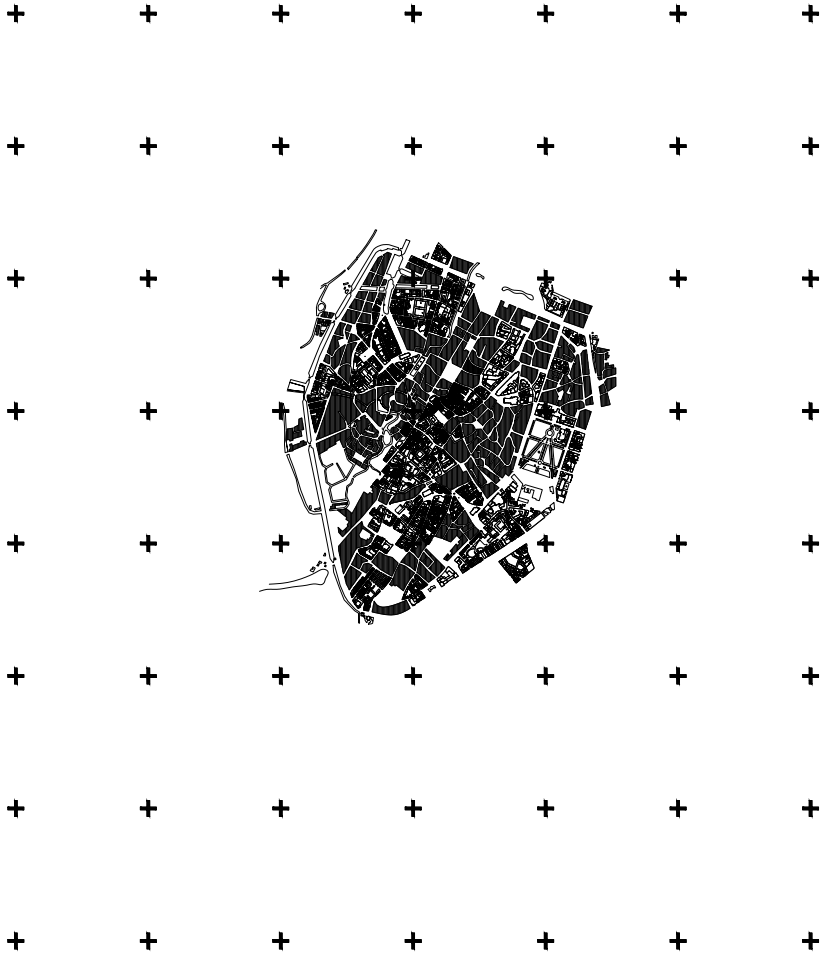
2.1 constant change in the city

All cities are subjected to continuous change; they all change parts in their historical centers, constructing new neighborhoods out of the historical center and are making a place for large districts outside the city itself. However, as seen within the research, Brussels is, instead of only expanding, also constantly changing itself within its historic grounds. With this change, the city became a patchwork of different histories, all seen within the same area. Where the city center has many buildings of the 18th and 19th century, it is also reconstructed during later centuries. The upcoming maps of Brussels show the expansion of the city, inside and outside its historical city walls. The research started after the independence of Belgium in 1830; the first map that is found after this period is from 1837. Here, we see the historical center and shape of Brussels. The map of 1901 shows the significant city renewals of Leopold the second. The 1971 map shows the internationalization in the city, one where residential neighborhoods were replaced by offices and large towers that have nothing to do with the city itself. The last map shows how we see Brussels today; a patchwork of different histories.

2.1.1 construction and change in 1837

The city center is formed according to its defense walls from the middle ages. However, as seen with many European cities, these walls were torn down after the introduction of gunpowder in the 17th and 18th centuries. Now, the city was defending itself partly with its large waterfronts on the West of the city. The location where the city walls used to be is still seen within the urban structure of the city of how we perceive it today; the wall is replaced by large boulevards around the historical center.

As seen, almost 70% of the historic buildings are now demolished; however, fragments of the Royal Palace and other parts of the city are still visible today. The organic shape of the city blocks shows the medieval construction of the city; one with narrow streets and dense city blocks.



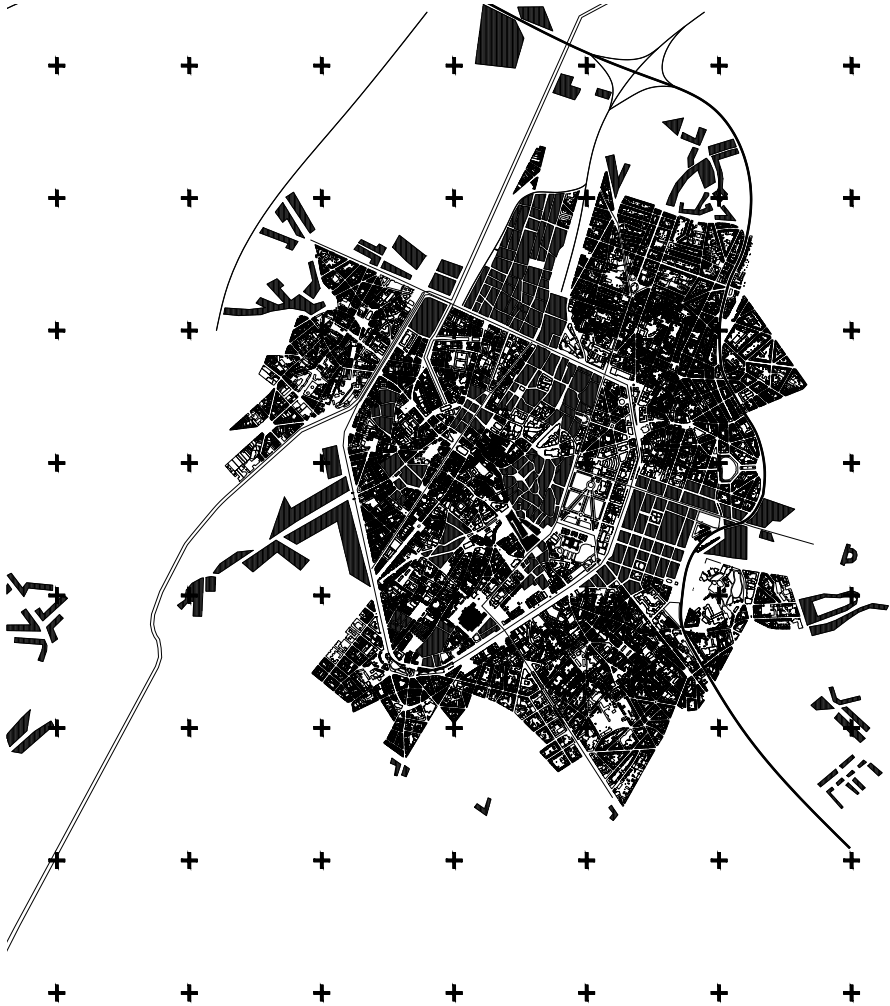
Map of Brussels in 1837. Constructed out of several historical references.

2.1.2 construction and change in 1901

In the last period of King Leopold II his reign (1865 - 1909), most of the Leopold II and Besme plans were executed. The city expanded within the urban pattern and outside the original form of Brussels. The interventions in the city itself are seen in the train tracks, which were introduced within Brussels, new city blocks, the grand boulevards, and immersive buildings, such as the Palais of Justice. However, as seen before, for these city renewals, large parts of the historical center were demolished (as seen in the Leopold II plan chapter).

New working-class neighborhoods were constructed outside the city center, posed on the idea of separation of classes, as seen in Besme his plans. Around these working-class neighborhoods and inside the historical center, new military facilities were created.

Next to the royal palace, the Leopold quarter was executed, seen as an upper-class neighborhood in the East of the city. Also, the plans for the Jubelpark, together with the planned museum, were slowly executed. Other cultural institutions were also created during the era, as seen in the museum hill in the center of Brussels.



Map of Brussels in 1901. Constructed out of several historical references.

2.1.3 construction and change in 1951

In the period between 1901 and 1951, the city still felt the influence of the Leopold II and Besme plans. The train track systems were finished, with the new connection between the different stations (North, Center, and South). The museum hill, with the Bozar museum, designed by Victor Horta, was executed before the second world war began and became a new standard for museum design around Europe.

Also, the city expanded further in the landscape in all directions. The Eastern part of the city stayed an area for the upper class of Brussels. Here, new villa neighborhoods were planned. Most of the city blocks were filled as how we see it today, with the exception of the Northern district and the Leopold quarter.



Map of Brussels in 1951. Constructed out of several historical references.

2.1.4 construction and change in 2020

In the period after the second world war, the city and its inhabitants grew a lot. Nowadays, the city is home to more than 1.2 million people. While the city stopped its outer expansion by most, Brussels is constantly renewing itself within its current borders. Between the period of 1951 and 2020, the city changed into a center for politics, as seen with the arrival of the European Union and NATO. By this arrival, the need for offices grew as well. To keep up with this change in character, the Manhattan plan was executed in the northern part of the city. The European Union was placed in the Leopold district, now seen as the European neighborhood. With this, the existing neighborhoods were both destroyed to make place for these the institutions.



Map of Brussels in 1951.
Constructed out of go-
vernmental CAD data.

2.2 precedents - palais of justice

By visiting the archives of Brussels to see the drawings they keep from Poeleart's Palais of Justice, it is clear that this structure should not be seen as a building but as a folly within the metropolitan urban landscape of Brussels. The extensive archival drawings are all perspective drawings, focussing on details such as stairs, the square, or the surrounding buildings. The elevation drawing is constantly changing with every drawing you see. Only two sections are seen within the national archive, and not even one floorplan of the building.

The Palais of Justice's design does not focus on the building itself but only on the aesthetics, it shows to the city. Within the period where the Palais were built, the 19th century, the metropolitan renewal of king Leopold the second was executed. This plan focused on the city's safety; therefore, this building is also seen as part of the 'crime fighting' policies of the government. Together with the Palais, new jail and gendarmerie barracks were constructed in the city. The Palais were seen as the main body for this policy. The building, which counts 26.000 m² per floor, was when it was constructed in the late 19th century, the largest building on earth.

The old palace of Justice, constructed at the Gerechtsplein, became too small. Therefore, in 1860, a design competition was executed for the design of the Palais of Justice, placed on a plot of two hectares. However, this ground was already in use; it was part of the garden of the Dem Merode family together with existing building blocks within the Molloren neighborhood. This ground was then expropriated, and the inhabitants of this ground were displaced to the garden cities around Brussels.

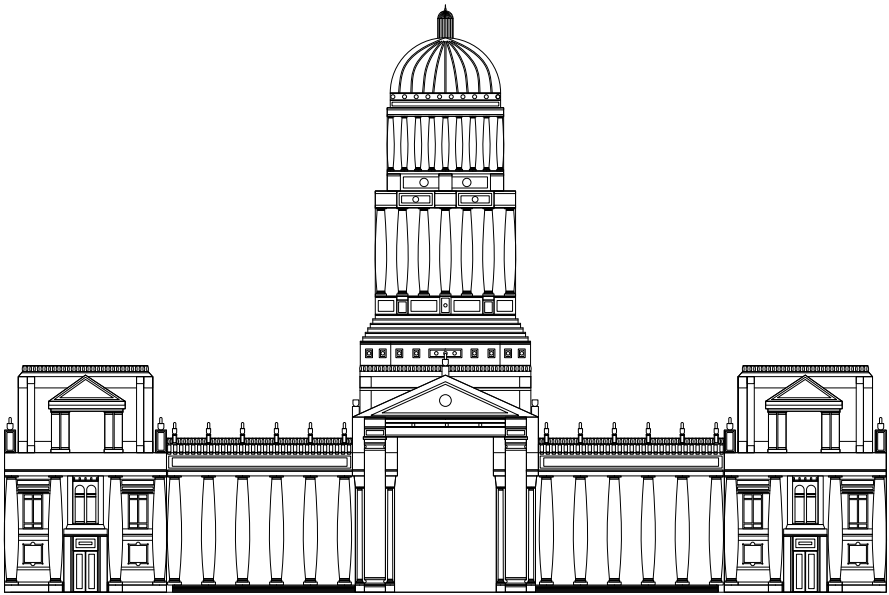
The 1860 design competition did not have a winner; therefore, the Ministry of Justice gave the assignment to the city's architect Poelaert, who was also the leading chairman of the jury during the design competition. The building Poelaert designed was, instead of two hectares, almost 5 hectares large. Also, the original budget of 12 million Belgium Frank (BF) in 1863 became 45 million BF when the building was finished in 1873.

During the second world war, Albert Speer and Adolf Hitler were amazed by the beauty of the construction and the 'contemporary interpretation of ancient times. Therefore, the building figured as a Nazi archive during the war. In the last weeks, before the second world war ended, the Nazis lighted up the Palais of Justice to destroy their archive. With this fire, the roof of the building also burned down.

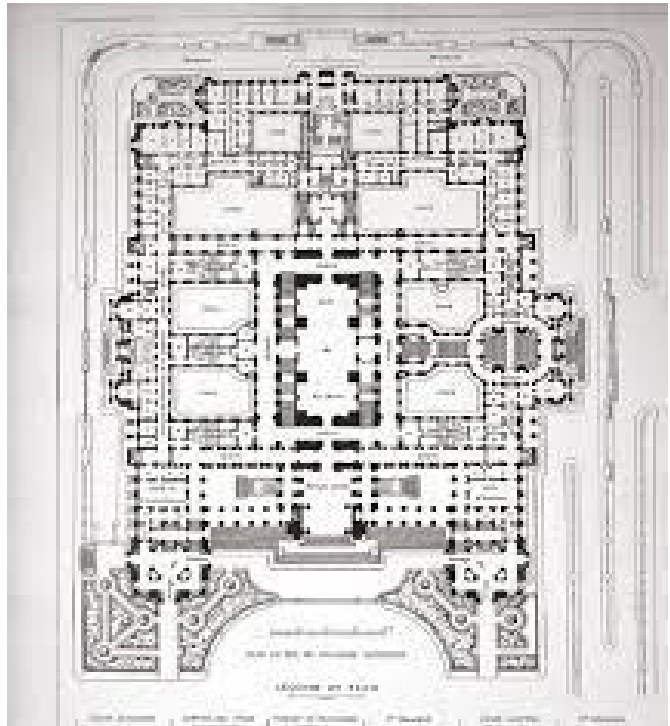
Since the ending of the second world war, the building has been in a continuous state of renovation. Where the dome construction of the roof was renovated directly after the war, the rest of the building is (still) slowly rotting away. The scaffolding that was placed during the 1960s is now officially part of the building's structure. The building, which is still one of the biggest constructions in Europe, might be too expensive to renovate. The national government started renovating the exterior of the building with a budget of 100 million Euros, and later, another 100 million Euros will be used to renovate the interior of the building.



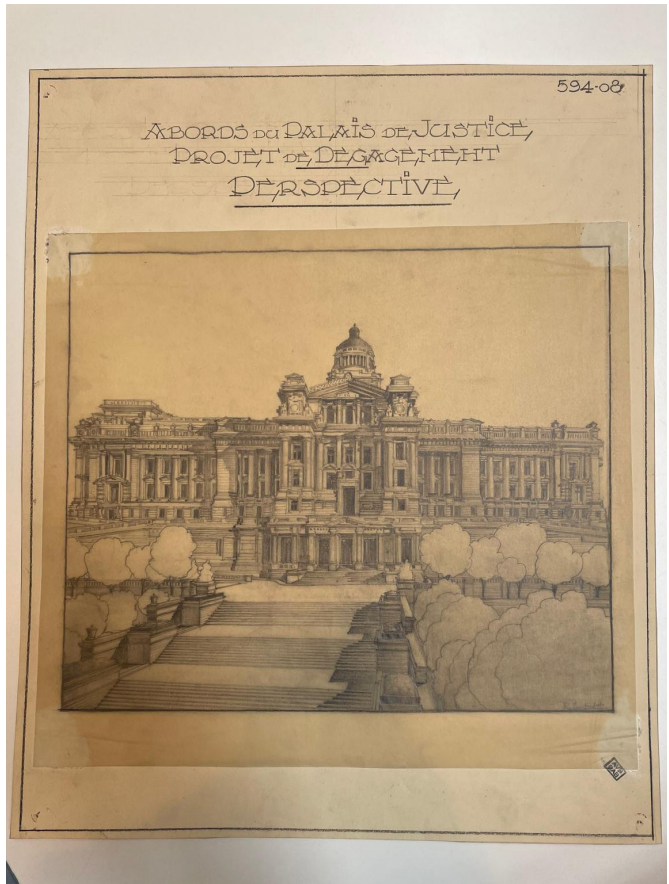
Malloren neighbourhood before the construction of the Palais of Justice.



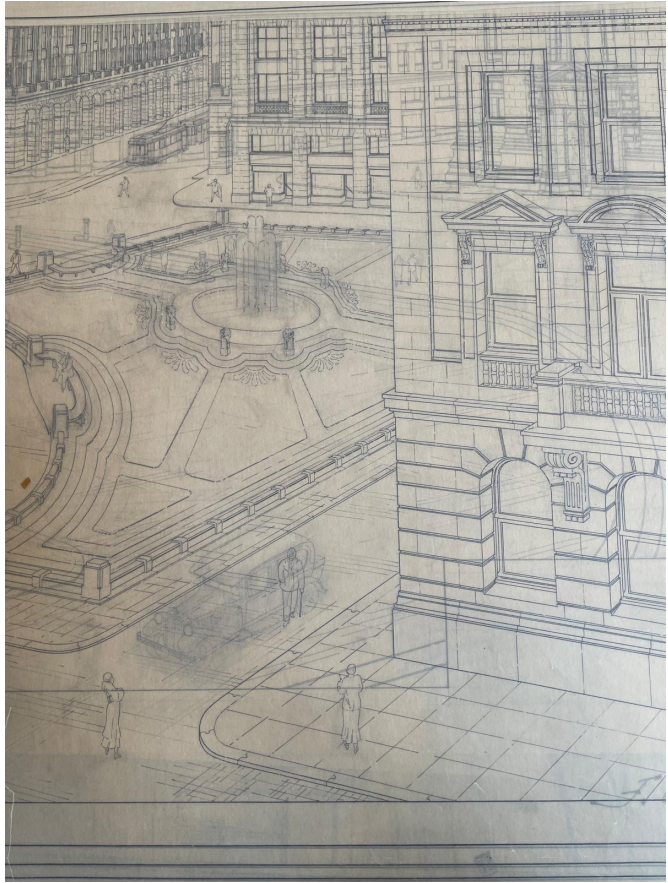
Square facade of the palace of justice of the reconstruction of the dome after the second world war.



Only existing floorplan of the Palais of Justice by Poeleart. Floorplan is not published in the national archives in Brussels.



One of the many perspective drawings of the Palais of Justice by Poeleart. Found in the national archive of Brussels.



One of the many perspective drawings of the Palais of Justice by Poeleart. Found in the national archive of Brussels.



One of the many perspective drawings of the Palais of Justice by Poeleart. Found in the national archive of Brussels.

construction





The constant construction site seen at the Palais of Justice nowadays.



The constant construction site seen at the Palais of Justice nowadays.

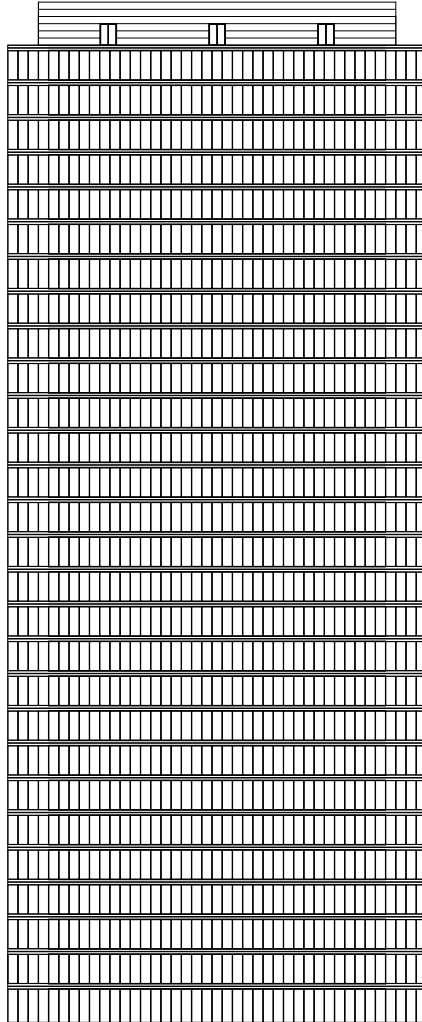
2.3 precedents - wtc 1 & 2

Where the drawings of the Palace of Justice, seen in the archive of Brussels, are all focused on beauty and esthetics, the archival material of the World Trade Center towers tells another story. From the early design drawings from the 1960s until the final design, the complex has not changed much. The grid, that is based on the much-needed parking garage under the towers, the shape of the cores, the glass façade, and the absolute ignorance of the landscape where the towers are built.

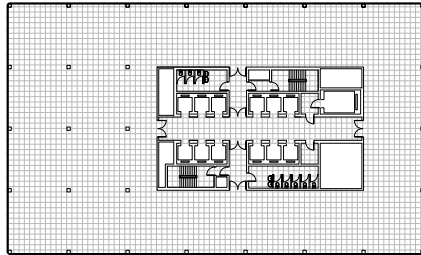
The pictures of the demolished neighborhood, the scars made within the urban fabric, and the loss of cultural spaces, followed by a picture of construction cranes that are already building the next monolith. As read before, the entire Manhattan plan is based on this continuous destruction of appropriated space in Brussels; however, seeing the pictures, the evidence of that time does impress.

That the WTC towers are seen as the absolute opposite of the Palais of Justice is no wonder. Where the base of the Palais of Justice was laid down during the Leopold II plan, which was based on aesthetics, order, and safety, the origin of the WTC towers is the Manhattan plan, which was based on post-war modernity and internationalization. The desire for becoming an international business capital is therefore seen within the structure; the structure, which has a sense of placelessness due to its generic form, could therefore be placed anywhere.

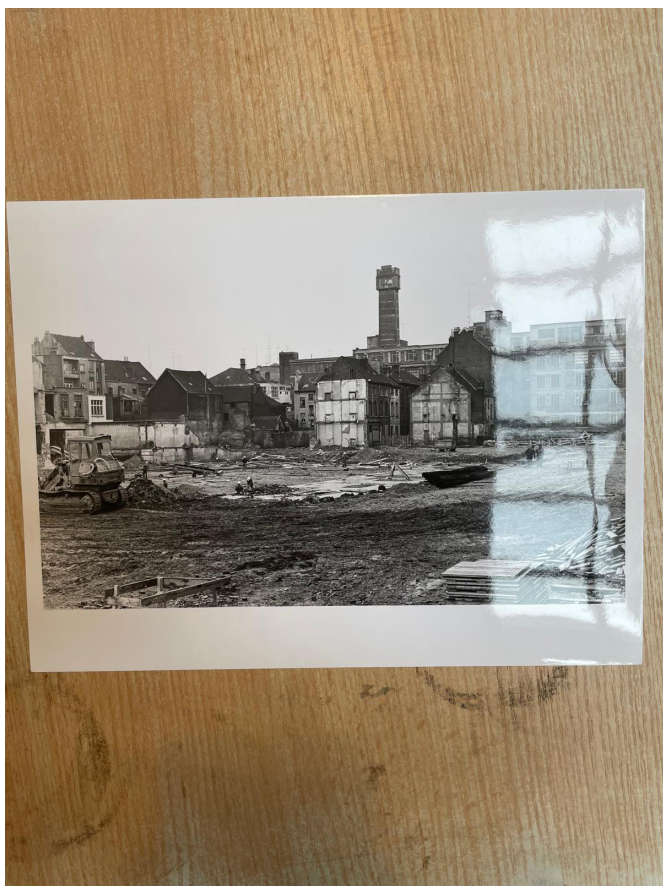
construction



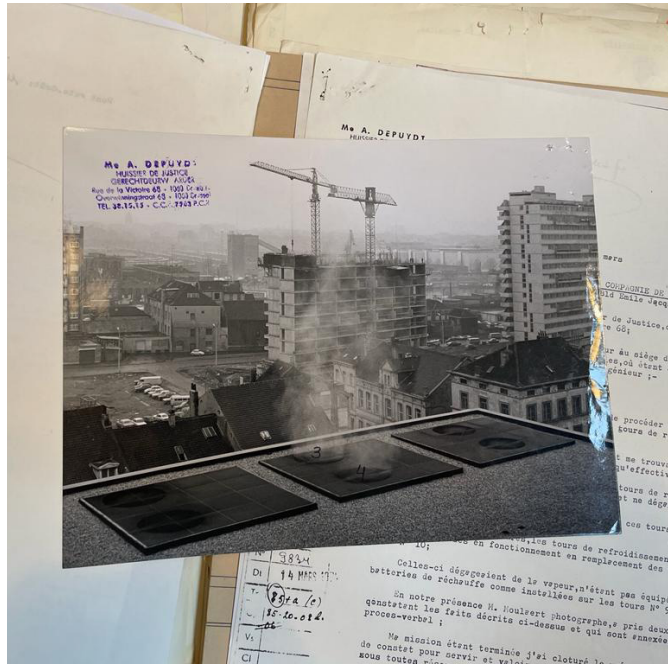
The anonymous facade of the WTC 1 tower, constructed with a curtain wall facade with a reflective glazing.



Generic office tower floor plan; grid followed by the parking garage downstairs, combined with an array of stairs, elevators and toilets.



The destruction of the existing northern neighbourhood. Image found within the national archives of Brussels.



Picture taken on the top of the Northern train station during the construction of the WTC 1 & 2 towers. In the background the original Northern neighbourhood is still visible.



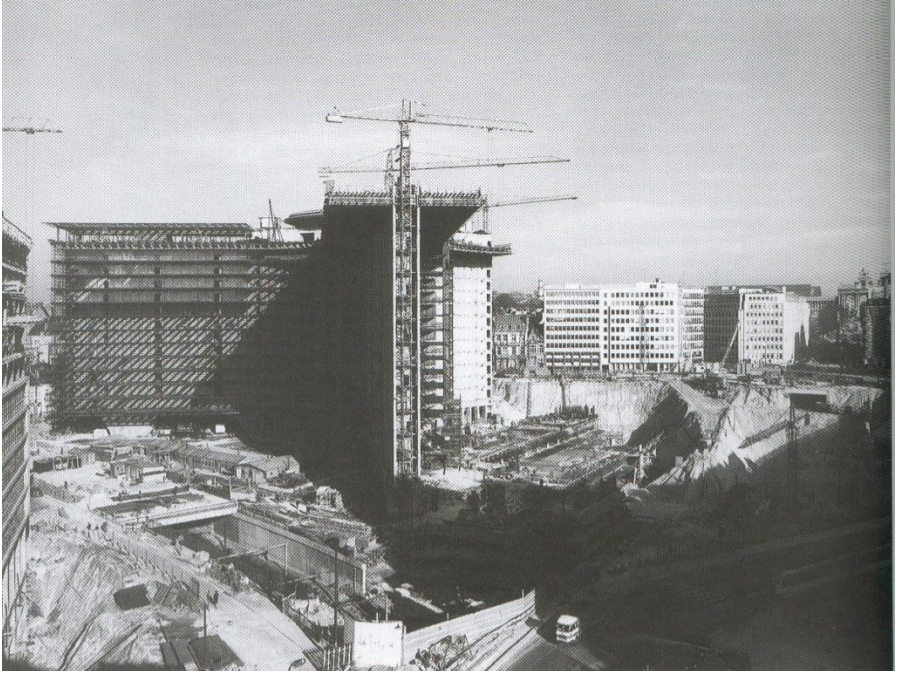
WTC 1 & 2 after the construction finished in '70s. Image found within the national archives of Brussels.

2.4 precedents - paul henri spaak building

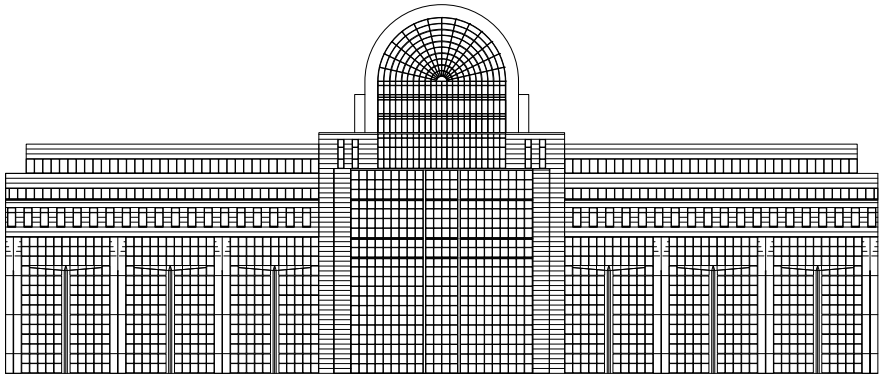
“Als je de tekeningen van het commissie gebouw wilt hebben, moet je eerst even toestemming vragen aan het Europees Parlement”, and ofcourse, the request got canceled. No surprise, since the Paul Henri Spaak building, is the heart of the European Union; it is the place for discussion, the place where new European laws are created, and ofcourse, where signs of burocracy are seen.

It can only be understood that these kinds of buildings have endless corridors, with endless offices, endless meeting rooms, with endless employees. However, pretending to be the heart of our European democracy, it is not show anything of this. With its enormous size, protruding the Leopold park, it shows a carelessness of its place. This placelessness is, however, no surprise; the Paul Henri Spaak building is not a building for Brussels, the entire set of European Parliament buildings are not made for Brussels; they are constructed to manage the European Union and nothing more than that. All these buildings are therefore holding a power that is much bigger than that of the city.

The construction of the building finished in 1995 and was part of the Leopold complex, which consists of the Paul Henri Spaak building, which is constructed as a forum, and the two wings, which are mainly used for offices. The entire construction was finished in 2008, wherefore the total construction time was around 20 years.



The enormous crater, made by the destruction of the existing park and the construction of the Le Berlaymont building, found at the Wetstraat in Brussels.



The anonymous facade of the Paul Henri Spaak building, seen in the European Quarter of Brussel. The building does not react to its environment, it only takes place in the city itself.

construction



2.3 timeline of construction and destruction

A timeline of the construction and destruction of Brussels started after the independence of the state in 1831. During this era, the Leopold quarter, which is now called the European Quarter, was developed on unused land. The neighborhood was developed next to the existing royal Palais and became a place for the upper class of the city. The urban grain, seen as the city blocks, was small with large courtyards so the natural light was able to travel deep inside the villas—the street were seen as small boulevards in the company of impressive family houses.

However, after the '58 Expo, almost 100 years after de development of the Leopold II plan, the area started to change. The Expo was a start for the internationalization of the city and was therefore in need of offices. Together with the attractiveness of the European Commission, which was also located in the then-called European Quarter, it made the started for the destruction of the existing neighborhood. Within 20 years, the entire area changed to a monofunctional office quarter.

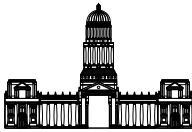
The fast phase of destruction and construction made the construction of dead spaces, spaces that are only in use shortly and are becoming already obsolete within a short time because of the fast development of the area. These death spaces are too hard to reprogram, rebuild, destruct. As seen within the historical section drawings, one of these spaces is the parking garage above the metro tunnel. The transportation tunnel, consisting of three distinct layers, has the metro tunnel almost 10 meters underground.

The phase of construction leads to the production of scars and forgotten spaces, one of which the parking tunnel is part of. However, the production of these scars starts with the speculative ground that is seen within the office market. By constructing the speculative office market, artificial scarcity is created by keeping the old office building empty. By this, the owner does not need to renovate it, and the value of the other offices will become higher (artificial scarcity). This vacancy strategy of investors was used during the bloom of offices from the late 20th century until the beginning of the 21st century. Here, we see those old offices were demolished without any plan of redevelopment of the ground afterward; another way of creating artificial scarcity.

This speculative office market created scars within the urban fabric of all cities. These scars, which are seen as vague terrain, are seen as the opposite of the ground where it started with; the tabula rasa. Now, the ground is rich in history and context, but is unproductive to the city.



Newspaper article about the construction of the new metro lines in Brussels in the second half of the 20th century (1969). Image found in the national archives of Brussels.



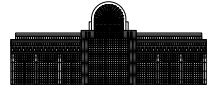
1883

Palace of Justice
Supreme court of
Belgium



1972

World trade center
Business center



1993

Paul Henri Spaak
building
European parliament

1870

Leopold II plan
Cultural capital of
Europe
Aesthetics and order

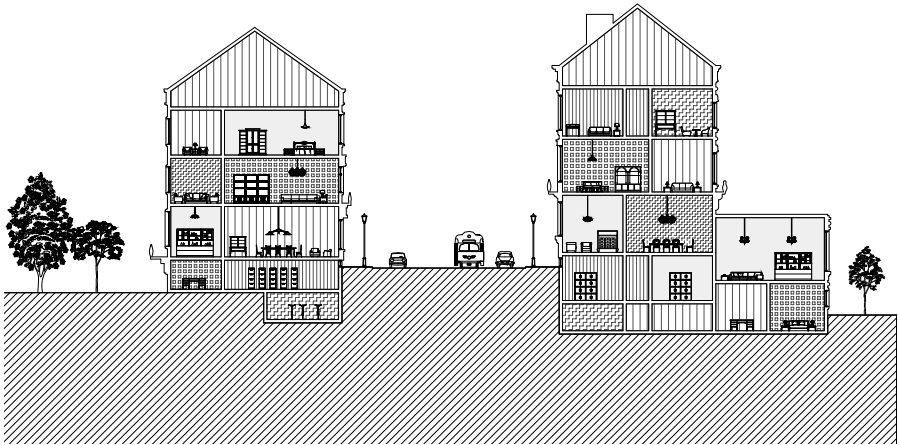
1960

Manhattan plan
International Business
capital of Europa
Speculative office
market

1970

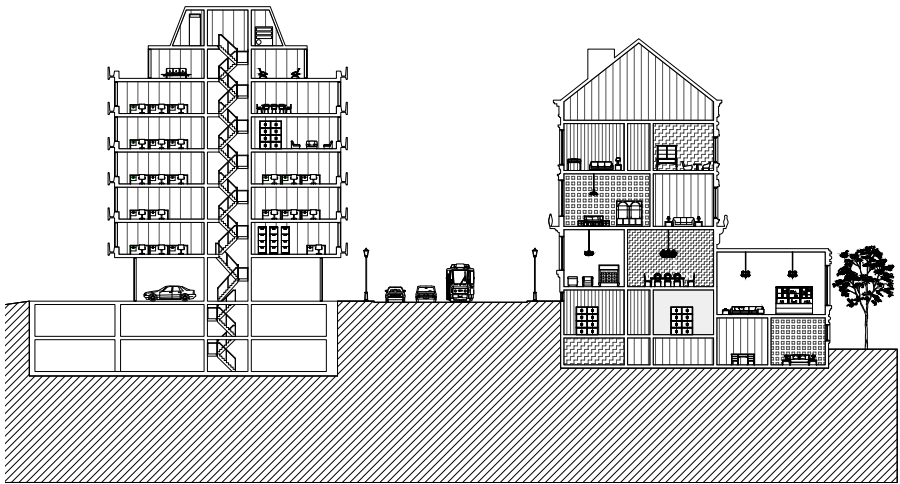
European Quarter
Political capital of Europe
International businesses

2.4.1 wetstraat 1950



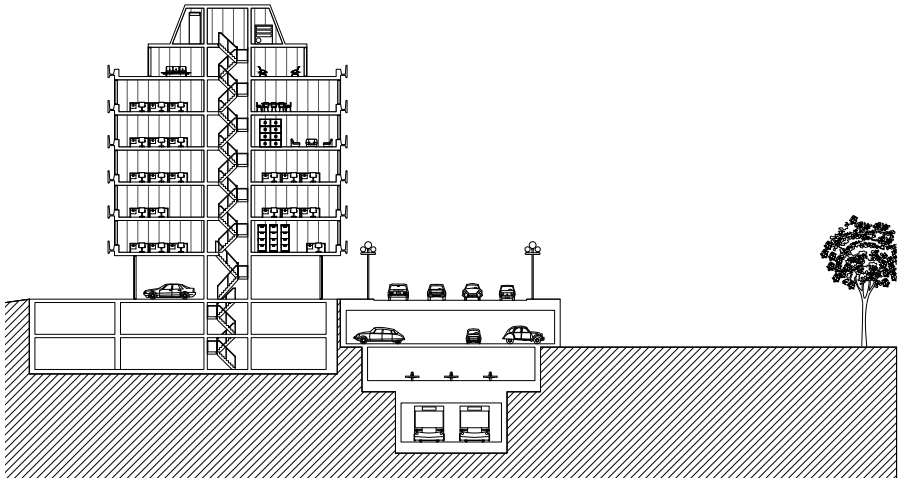
The Wetstraat did not change after its construction in the late 19th century. The street was seen as a boulevard where large villas of Brussels upper-class society were placed. In the post-war period, the Wetstraat became one of the main entrance roads to the city.

2.4.2 wetstraat 1960



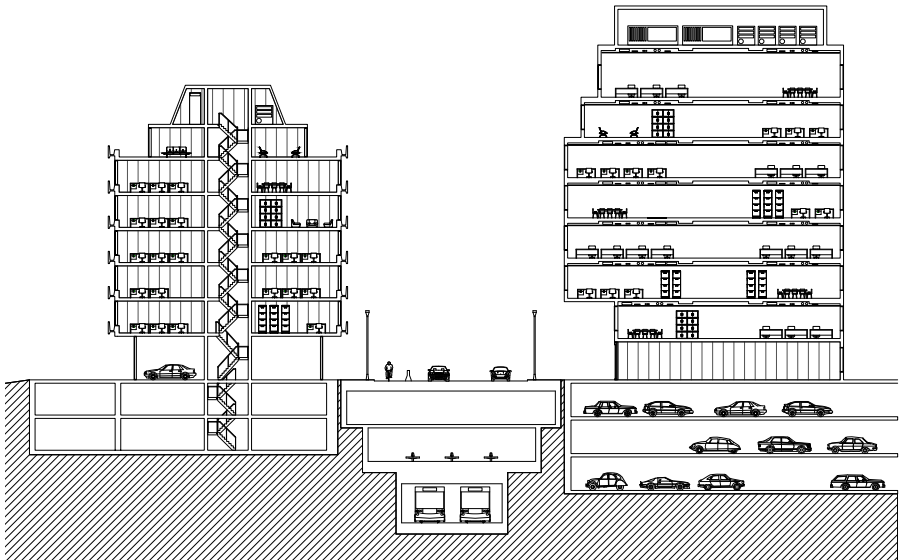
After the 1958 Expo, the city presented itself to become a business capital of Europe. This development was seen within the rise of office space. Since the European Commission settled in the old Leopold quarter, and changed its name to the European Quarter, the development of this international character gained momentum quickly. From the '60s onwards, the monumental villas were demolished and replaced by offices. Here, the shape of city blocks was not touched, only the grain of the buildings on an urban scale.

2.4.3 wetstraat 1970



With the internationalization period that started after the Expo '58, the city's office market flourished. Within these years, the entire European Quarter was redeveloped into a monofunctional office area. Since the Wetstraat was one of the main entrances to the city, the street was redeveloped as well. During these years, the tram was replaced by a metro system underground. The metro tunnel exists out of three layers; the metro tunnel itself, the entrance area for the metro's passengers, and a parking tunnel that follows the entire Wetstraat.

2.4.4 wetstraat 1980



Another European Commission building was constructed, designed by the Polak brothers. However, constructed next to the new metro and parking tunnel, the office was delivered with another 20.000 m2 of parking space. Together with the other office developments at the Wetstraat, which also all had their own private parking, the parking tunnel was already absolute.

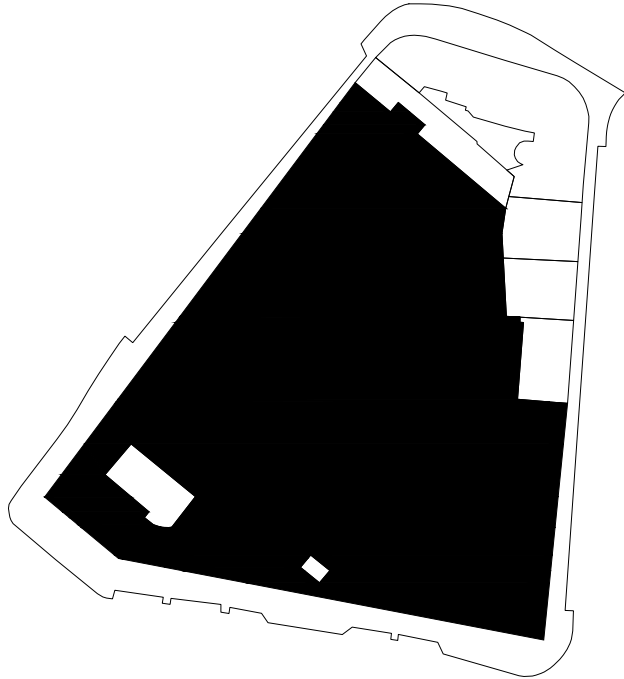
3.1 construction of terrain vague

Terrain vague is seen as a palimpsest of the city and its history; it is a ground where every layer of this history is tangible, understandable, and readable. The ground is created in a way where these histories are still there, however, in fragments. With these fragments of history, the mind is able to construct a narrative by itself. The ambiguity that is a prominent characteristic of the terrain is found in the construction of this narrative. Where signs of informal histories are seen on the site, such as used tents, mattresses or chairs, which gives the idea that the ground is temporally inhabited, other fragments of more formal histories present an idea about constructed components; parts of destructed buildings, or a foundation wall that is still visible. All these formal and informal fragments might have nothing to do with each other, since they are all from different layers of history; however, this patchwork of elements creates the character of the ground. This character is created as a product of the productive city and became an unproductive ground. This product is made during the fast development of the city, and leaves traces that cannot be demolished anymore.

Terrain vague is the opposite of the tabula rasa, which is a ground that is lose from any kind of history. However, both are products of modernity. The tabula rasa is created by plans that have a careless look at a current situation; the ground is formed, however humanity it wanted it to develop. This principle gained momentum during the beginning of the 20th century, when contemporary modernism started to grow—looking at Plan Voisin of Le Corbusier, a plan for Paris where the entire Nothern shore of the city was destructed and replaced by a standard set of structures, roads, and buildings.

The difference between Terrain Vague and the Tabula Rasa is also found in its planning. Tabula rasa is a highly designed space, where terrain vague is, again, a patchwork of differently designed spaces, but without any connection to each other.

3.2 inventarisation of terrain vague in Brussels



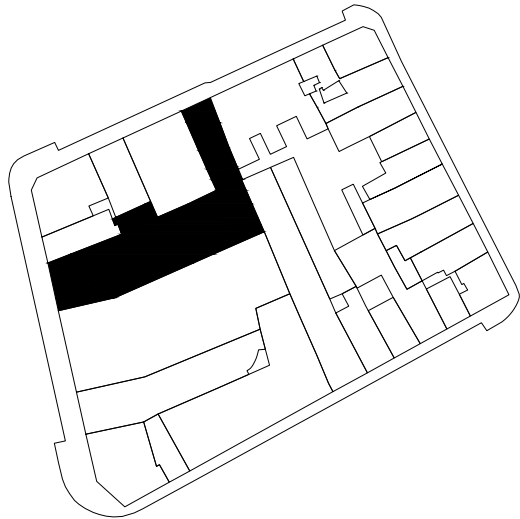
50°50'17.8"N 4°20'07.6"E

Barastraat, Anderlecht

The Anderlecht area was developed during the late 19th century according to the Leopold city expansion. It was part of the separation strategy of the plan; this neighborhood supposes to be a working-class area where the factories were integrated within the urban fabric. By doing this, the people who lived here did not need to go to the city center. By this strategy, the area was mainly cut off from the rest of the city. The working class environment is still visible today. During the second half of the 20th century, the industrial function left the town, and the neighborhood became more and more vacant. Also, during this period, migrants moved to Brussels and started to live in these neighborhoods. However, how the district is perceived today, it is still one of the most unsafe areas of the city.



The plot is located directly next to the Brussels Midi station, part of the three main stations of Brussels. The Midi, or South station, is the most important station for the city since it is connected to the international high-speed network. The station and the area around it have been in constant development since the early 1960s; as seen, the industry moved away, and the residential character remained. The plot is the embodiment of this change; it used to have a small industrial function. The plot has been empty since 2010, and there are no plans for the redevelopment of the area.



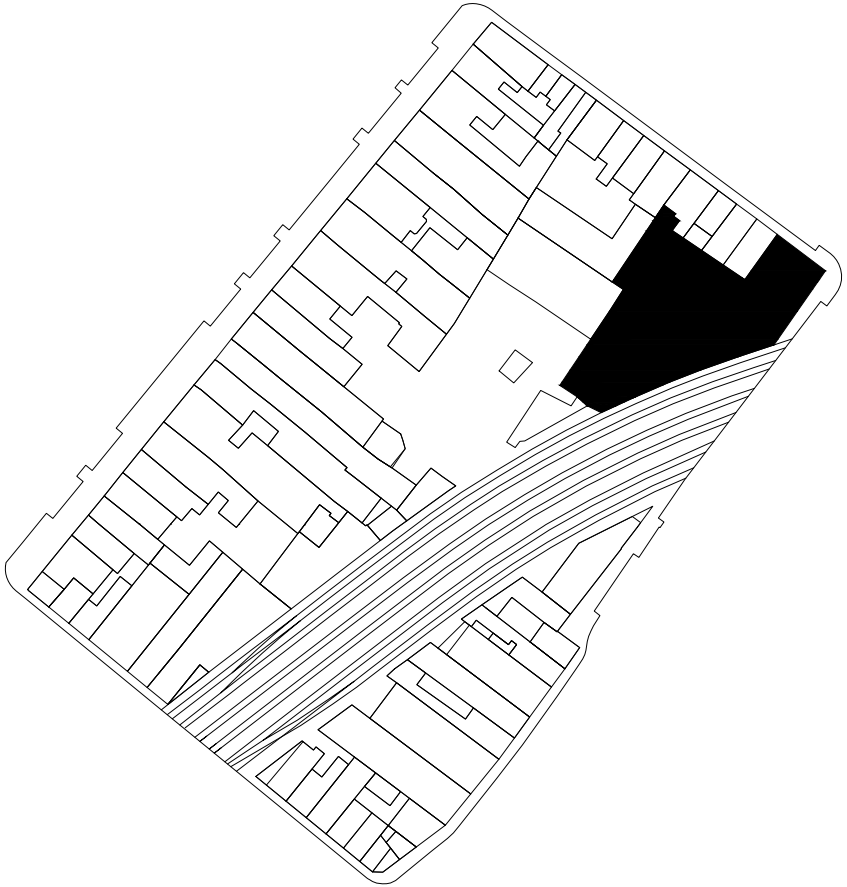
50°50'46.4"N 4°20'24.2"E

Zennestraat, Anneessenswijk

The Anneessenswijk is one of the older neighborhoods in the city. It is located on the edge of the historical center of the city. The city block itself has not changed since the last 100 years; the neighborhood was touched during the redevelopment of the city during the late 19 century. The Leopold plan constructed the Maurice Lemonnierlaan, which was a straight axis boulevard through the historical city center. Therefore, the Anneessenswijk needed to adjust to the new urban shape.



The area has a high build density; almost the entire city block is constructed. The neighborhood used to have a small industrial character (constructed inside the city blocks); however, this function moved away and is now seen as a residential area. The Annessenswijk is slowly gaining more popularity as a residential neighborhood, and therefore, low-quality housing is changed to higher quality one, which is also seen on the plot. The terrain will be redeveloped for luxurious accommodation within the near future.

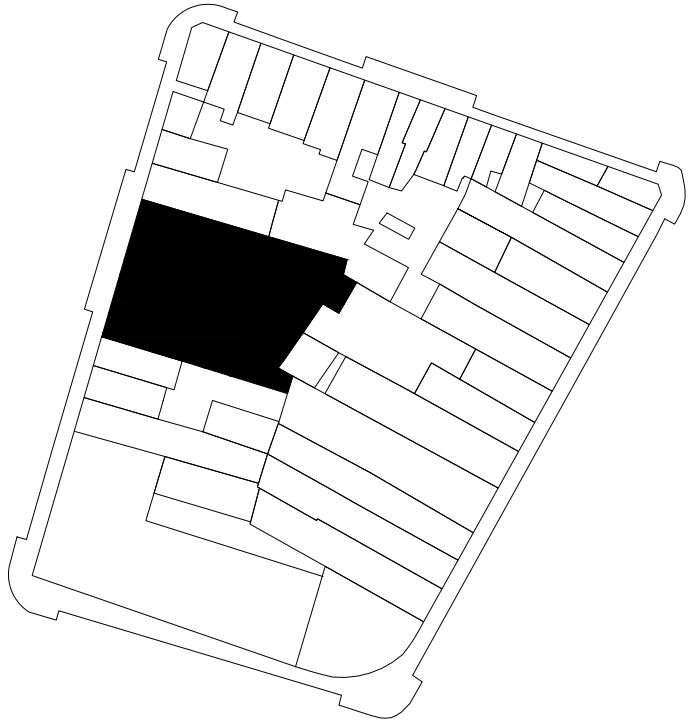


50°50'36.1"N 4°22'37.9"E
Wetstraat, Europese wijk

The old Leopold quarter, now called the European Quarter since the arrival of the Union in 1951, used to be a luxurious domestic neighborhood. But has changed to a monofunctional office area over the last 80 years. The location was developed during the reign of king Leopold II. His palace, next to the Warandepark, was already located within the edge of the neighborhood, and therefore, the area developed into a high-end living quarter. The area used to have a high density of urban villas, developed in the late 19th century. After the second world war, the area redeveloped to the business character it now has.



The plot has been empty for more than ten years, and many development plans have been made. However, none of them will be executed.



50°51'43.4"N 4°21'48.8"E
Aarschotstraat, Schaarbeek

The area directly behind the Nothern station, on the edge of the development of the Manhattan plan, is seen as the red light district of Brussels. Here, the train track is separating two different worlds; one that is focused on business on one side and one that is focused on human exploitation on the other side. Walking in this neighborhood does not feel safe; groups of men are constantly staring at you. The area is beside the red light district, mainly seen as a poor working-class area. The plot that is seen is already empty for more than ten years. Also, there are no plans for any redevelopment of the area.

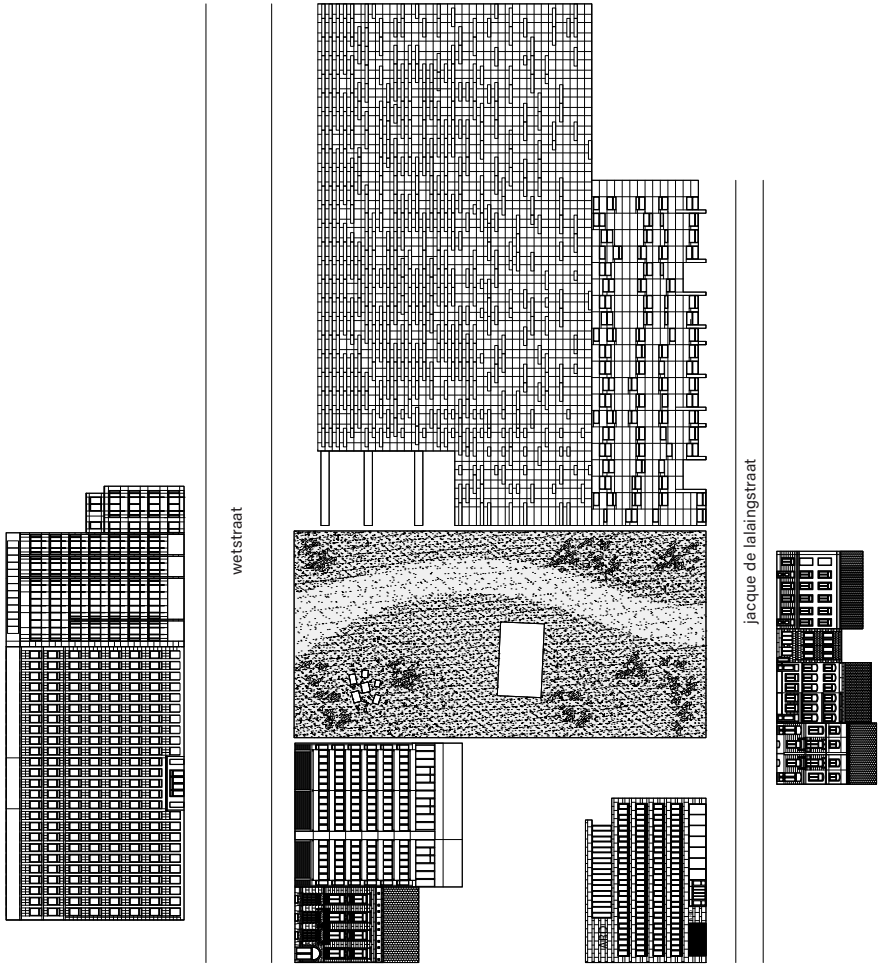
inbetween



3.3 historical analysis of site

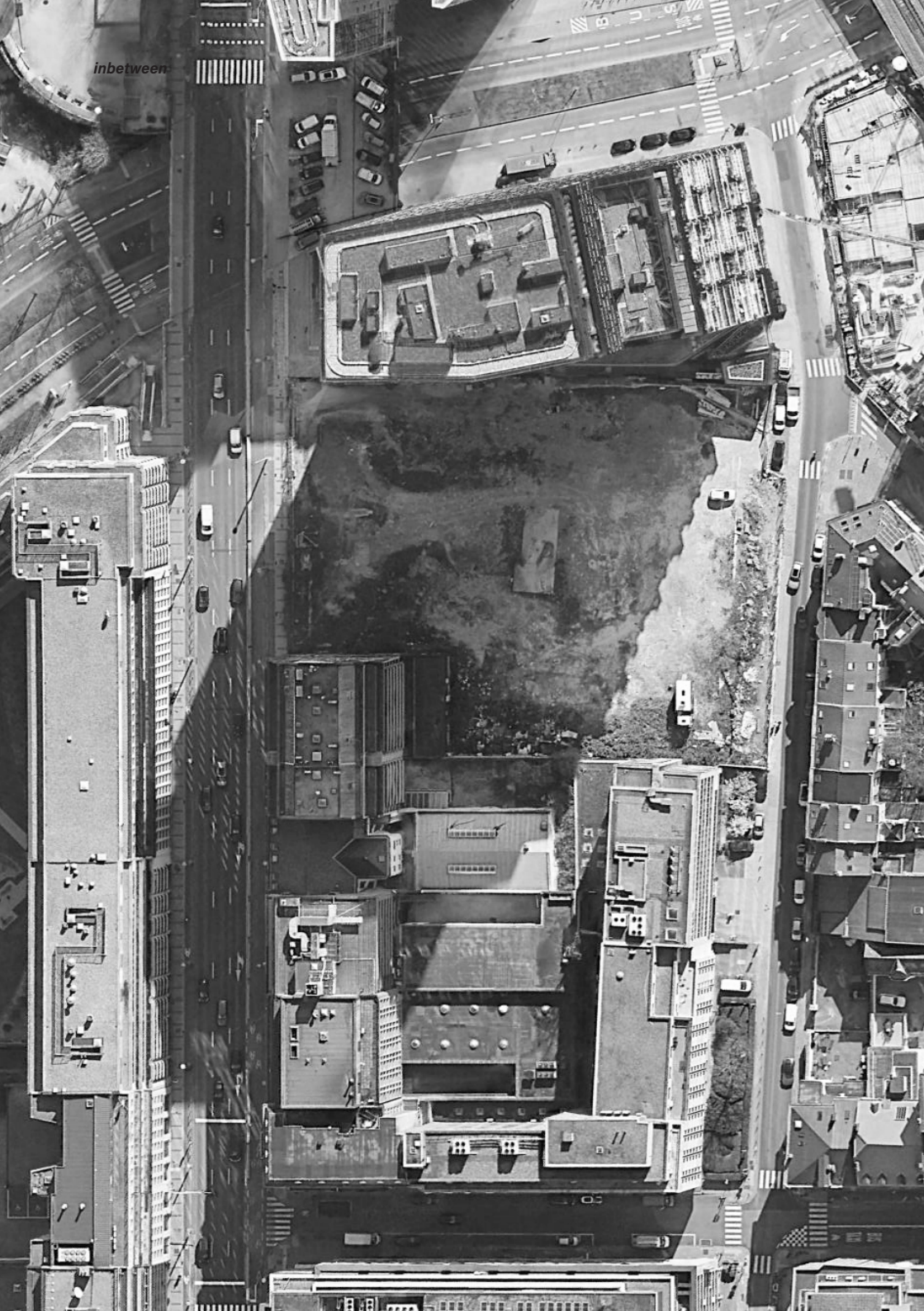
The Wetstraat has been renewed two times within its history. Now, the third time is in sight with the grand city renewals to follow the needs of the European Union. Because of this change, the area became a palimpsest of different histories. The site is enclosed by fragments of various historical events seen within the constructed elements in the area. It shows family housing of the early 20th century, a villa that was part of the Leopold the second plan, the European Commission buildings, and a recently delivered mixed high-rise building. Here, three generations of history is seen around the site. The empty terrain itself was first seen as part of the Wetstraat Boulevard, which it was known before the internationalization of the city after the second world war. The street was a place for large family villas, where now only one is left over. After the second world war, the site was redeveloped into an office area; here, the site was occupied by a newly constructed office, together with parking facilities. During the period that the Wetstraat 93-95 offices were erected, two other offices were also made. These offices were in the same formal '70s style delivered, only to have a lifespan of fewer than 40 years. These two offices were then demolished in 2009. The ground figured as a construction site for the build 'the one' mixed high-rise tower. The exact reason why these offices were demolished is not apparent.

Also, on the other side of the city block, at the Jacques de Lalaingstraat, the ground was also used for offices. During the 1980s, the ARD office was constructed, together with another office that used to stand next to this one. However, this one was also demolished before the construction of the 'the one' tower. Within the Jacques de Lalaingstraat, the tension between these two worlds is evident; on one site, city blocks that have not changed within the last 100 years, and on the other site, a city block that is redeveloped in the '60s, and still figures as a construction site.



The juxtaposition of different time periods seen in the facades found around the project site.

inbetween



3.4 perceiving of the site today

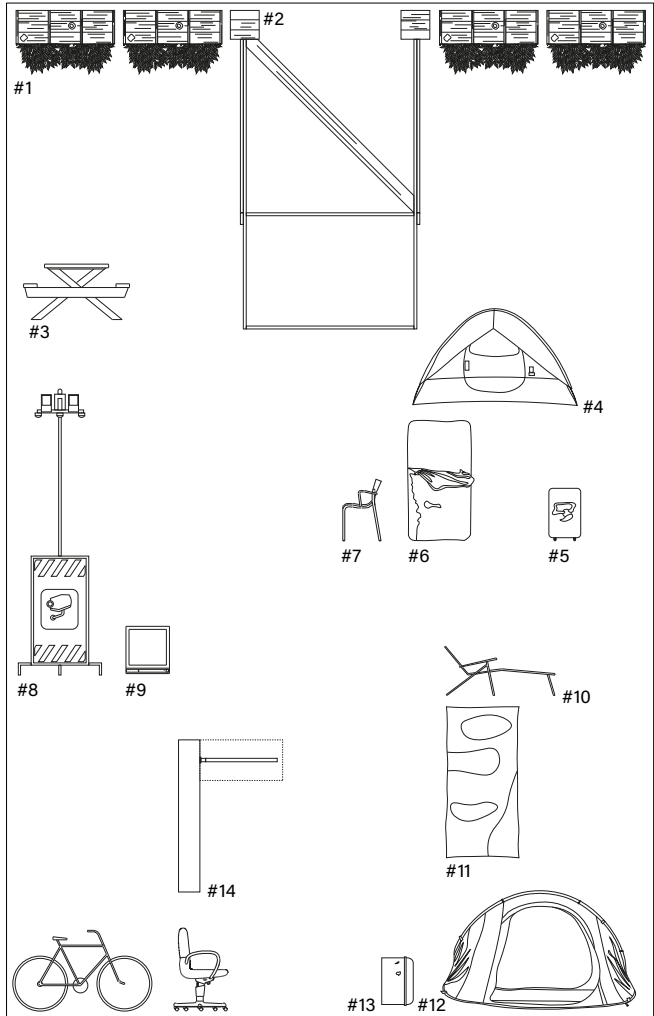
For the last 13 years, after the demolition of the existing office buildings, the site is seen as an unproductive ground. A ground that is used for many informal events and as a convenient place for the construction site next door. However, zooming out of the city, it is seen that the site is located within the middle point of different characteristics of Brussels. The site is situated in the heart of the many European commission buildings, it forms a link between the Museum Hill and the Jubelpark, it forms a connection between the two domestic zones, and it is in the middle of the strong, international European quarter.

When zooming in more on the project site itself, it is seen that the ground is formed on the interception point of both the European Commission buildings at the Wetstraat (horizontal axis) and the vertical domestic axes. Here, it is seen that the site can figure as a common ground between these two characters.

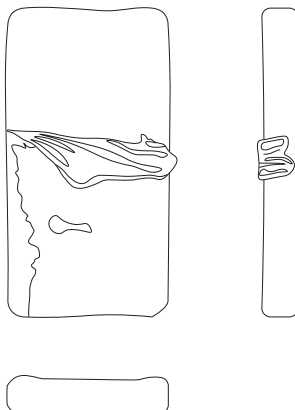
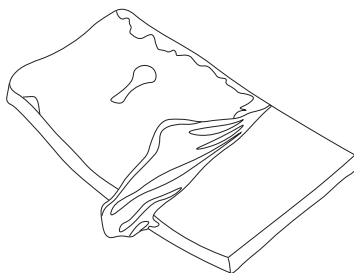
Looking at the invisible from above, the site is strongly connected to public transport of the site. East of the site, many bus stops are located. In front of the site, the Maalbeek metro stop is located, which is connected to the rest of the city.

Other unseen infrastructures are also available on the site; besides the metro tunnel, the parking garage is on the same level as the lower part of the terrain. Also, the existing buildings that are still found on the site, also have a multiple-story basement, which is connected to the terrain itself.

3.4.1 informal histories



#1 planter #2 billboard #3 picnic table #4 tent 1 #5 suitcase #6 matras 1 #7 chair
#8 surveillance tower #9 television #10 day bed #11 matras 2 #12 tent 2
#13 dairy #14 concrete/ steel element #15 office chair #16 bicycle



matras 1

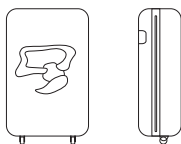
Use: place for rest

Measurements: 80 x 200 x 15 cm

Material: foam + cotton

Colour: white (original)





Suitcase

Use: moving (garments)

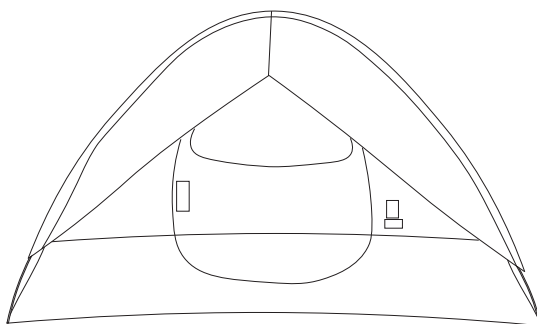
Measurements: 50 x 30 x 20 cm

Material: hard plastic + rubber

Colour: pink

inbetween





tent 1

Use: shelter

Measurements: 160 x 220 x 140 cm

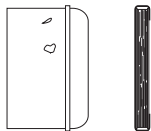
Material: plastic + aluminium

Colour: blue + silver

inbetween



inbetween



diary

Use: writing

Measurements: 9 x 14 x 2 cm

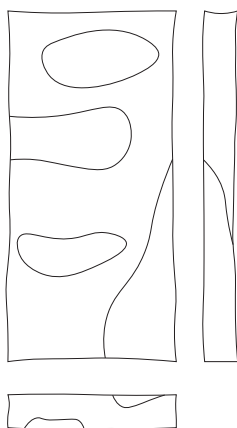
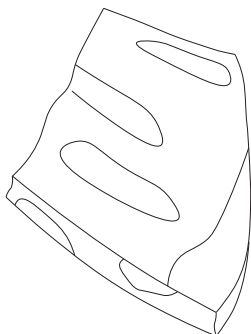
Pages:192

Material: leather + paper

Colour: red

Brand: moleskin





matras 2

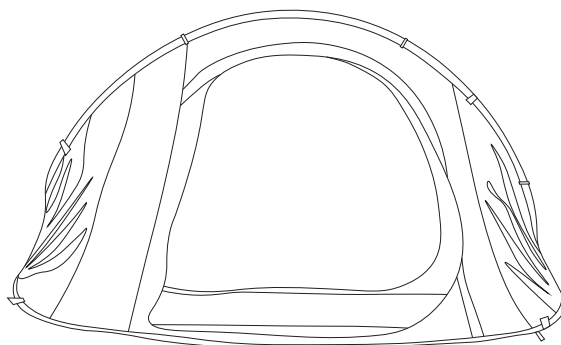
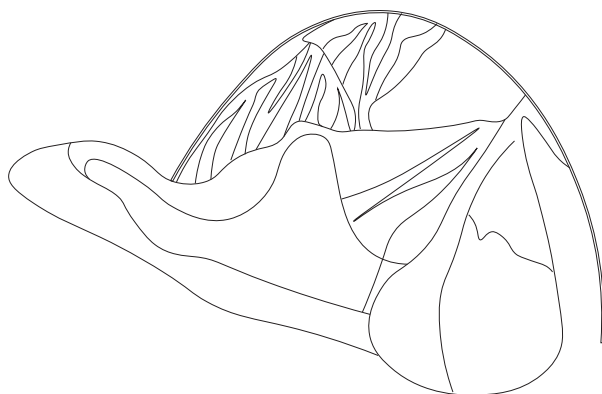
Use: place for resting

Measurements: 70 x 200 x 10 cm

Material: foam

Colour: yellow, original unknown





tent 2

Use: shelter

Measurements: 120 x 210 x 98 cm

Material: polyester + glass fiber

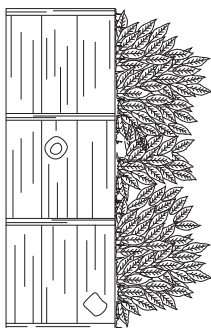
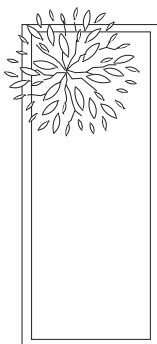
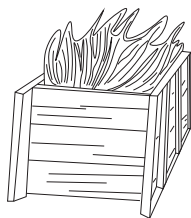
Colour: green

Brand: quechua

Price: 65 euros (decathlon)

inbetween





planters

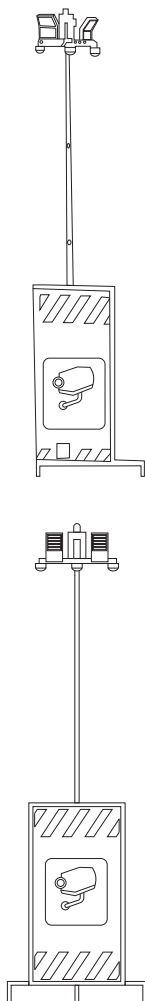
Use: to plant plants

Measurements: 40 x 120 x 50 cm

Material: wood + soil infill

Colour: brown





surveillance camera tower

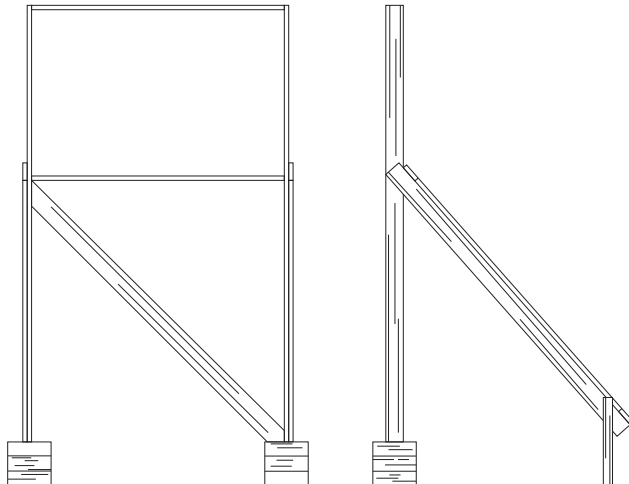
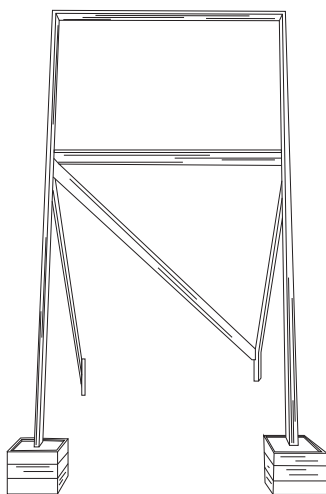
Use: surveillance of the abandoned area

Measurement: 350 x 70 x 50 cm

Material: aluminium

Colour: white + silver

Company: porteyes - www.porteyes.be



empty billboard

Use: project a possible future for the site

Measurement: 350 x 250 x 250 cm

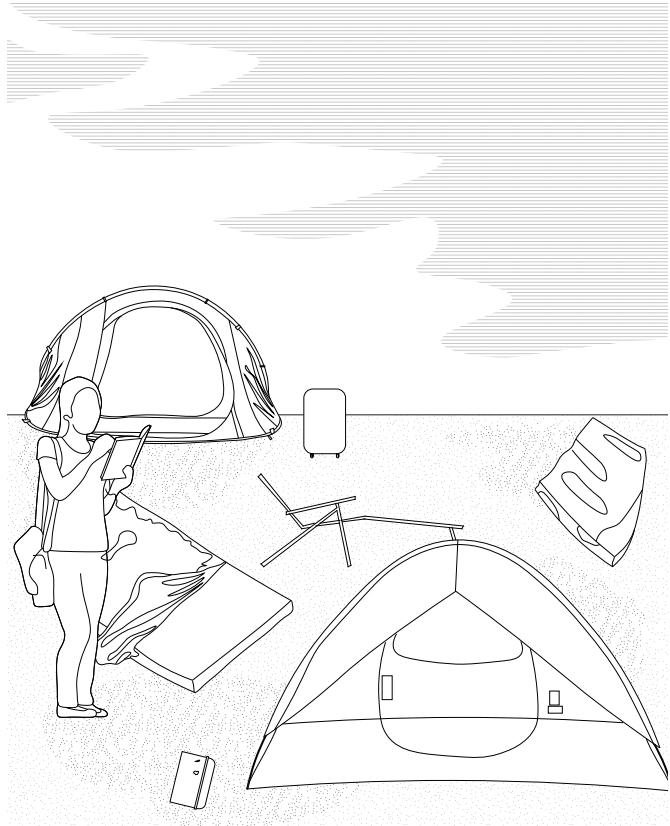
Material: wood

Colour: brown

inbetween



3.4.2 alternative histories



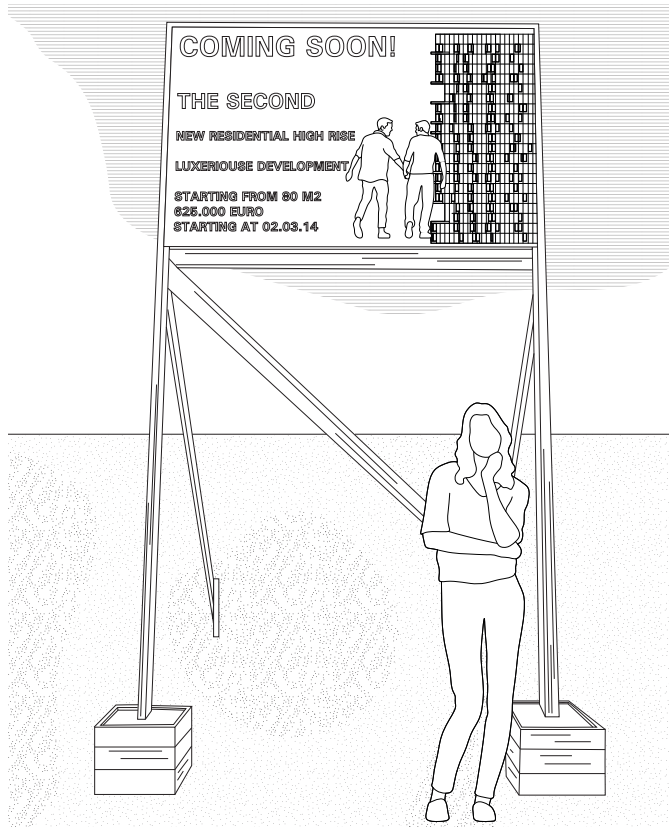
this isn't like home

The domestic objects found on the site are giving an idea that a group of people ones inhabited the ground. The inhabitation was only temporal, seen on the materials used: cheap tents, the suitcase, and other camping objects.



community gardening

Was the ground ones used as the common territory for the domestic neighbourhoods around it? Was it used as a community garden? Where every Saturday a group of volunteers was working on and in the soil.



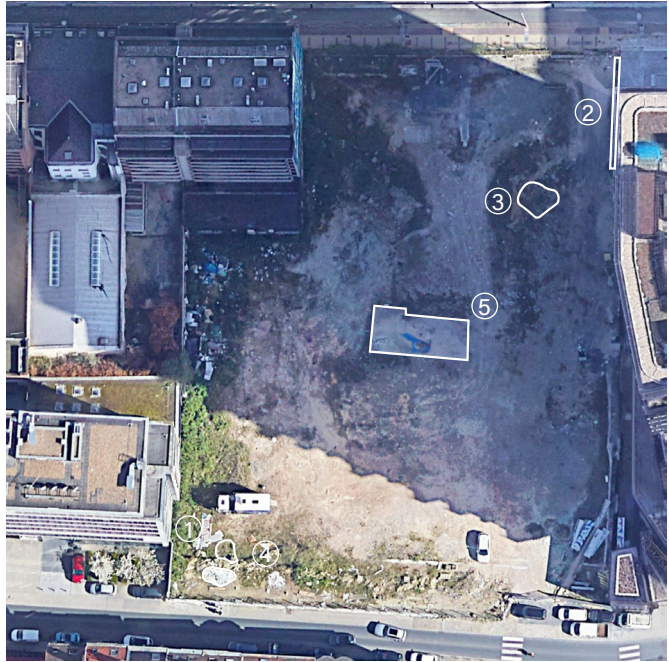
possible future

Ones there was a plan for usage of ground; a place for permanent inhabitations.
Another living tower, were families can start a new live in the city.

3.5 details seen in terrain vague

Terrain vague is seen as a collection of different historical layers, layers that are not in use anymore and therefore make an unproductive ground for the city. Terrain vague does not have a visible future, but the fragments seen on the terrain give clues away from this. The waste dumped on the terrain are fragments of structures that used to be there. Also, the terrain used to be part of the construction site of the 'the one' tower. Herefore, many dumped materials are part of the construction of this tower. Furthermore, we see fragments of old foundations, buildings, piles of paved stone, and concrete pours found around the site.

However, only by seeing the elements from a distance or google maps does not give a clear idea of what they are and what our value is. Within this research, the value of the waste, seen as fragments of different histories, is researched and understood. This will be done by a 3D reconstruction of the elements to understand them and to make a future use of them.



elements found on the site

1. fragment of stone
2. fragment of reinforced concrete
3. pile of crushed rocks
4. fragment of poured concrete
5. fragment of concrete prefab floor slabs



fragment 1

Material: stone

Use: decoration of a building or excavated from the ground

Size: 2000 x 2000 mm

Time period: unknown







fragment 2

Material: reinforced concrete

Use: old foundation wall

Size: 400 x 14000 mm

Time period: <2010

Other: almost attached to the parking garage next to the plot



inbetween





RENDER AGAIN

fragment 3

Material: pile of crusted rocks

Use: groundworks

Size: 4000 x 5000 mm

Time period: 2010-2019

Other: different sizes of stones are found in combination with sand

inbetween







fragment 4

Material: concrete

Use: waste from the other construction site

Size: 2000 x 4000 mm

Time period: 2010-2019

Other: coarse grain concrete, in natural shape on the landscape



inbetween





fragment 5

Material: concrete prefab floorpanels

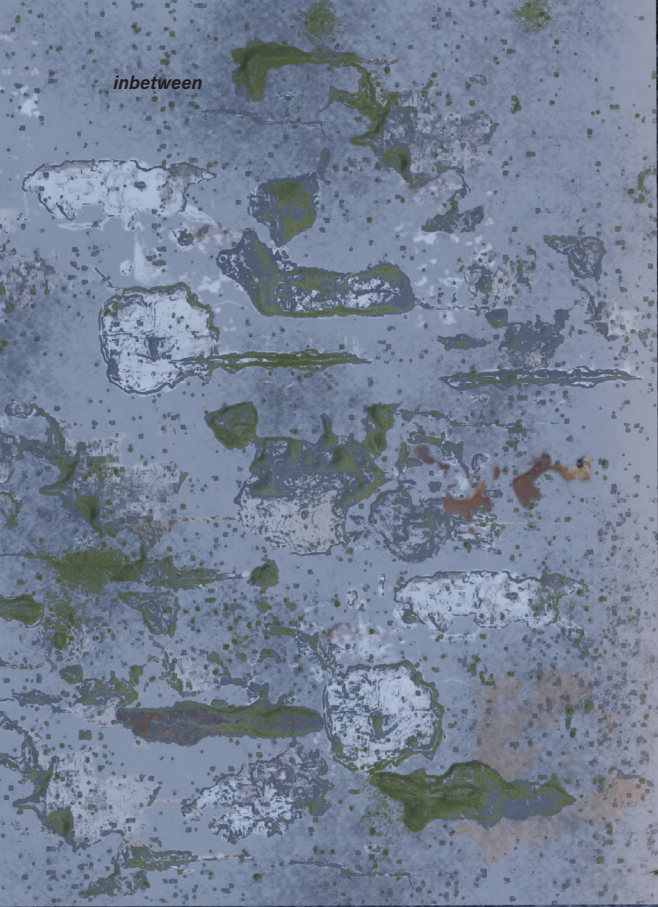
Use: floor elements

Size: 6000 x 15000 mm

Time period: <2010

Other: prefab size of 3000 x 3000 mm per tile

inbetween





3.6 existing buildings

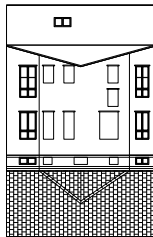
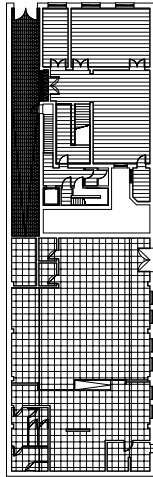
Besides, the area offers a number of interesting buildings, seen within the different timeframes they are built. The project will focus on the structures that are directly found on the site itself. These are the 1970s office building, the late 19th century villa, constructed during the Leopold II reign, and the existing parking tunnel, built during the late '70s when the metro was introduced in Brussels. These structures tell another story about Brussel's ideas of how to coop with existing buildings; one that cannot be touched, seen as a monument, one that is worthless and should be demolished according to the municipality, and one that looks like it is forgotten by everyone.

3.6.1 wetstraat 91

This neoclassical villa at the Wetstraat was constructed during the late 19th century and was finished in 1870 from the design of Henri Maquet. The villa is designed within an Italian renaissance style, as seen on the rich decoration and the several classical elements that are seen on the façade. Maquet is one of Brussel's most famous architects of the 19th century. The Wetstraat villa was one of his early constructions, but after delivering this, he designed the front façade of the royal palace in 1903 and designed the first detailed plans for the Kunstberg (art hill) in Brussels. The building used to have a residential function until the second world war. After this period, the building changed to office and education functions. Its last function was as the European headquarters of the Church of Scientology. However, this function became obsolete in 2018.

The facade and the floorplan show that the villa was made for an upper-class family. The grand door at the façade leads to a large garage by making use of the slope. The main front door opens up the hall with a central staircase. The floorplan also shows spaces that only the staff that used to serve the family was making use of.

The space at the bag was used for parking (horse and carriage and later cars). The space, which is carried by columns in the basement and trusses on the upper level, can be used for different events. During the time that the villa was in use as an office, this part was used as a canteen, where the workers were able to get lunch. For this function, a connection was made between the Wetstraat 93-95 buildings and the shed behind the Wetstraat 91 Villa.



Front facade, floorplan,
backfacade and side
facade of Wetstraat 91.

inbetween



3.6.2 wetstraat 93 - 95

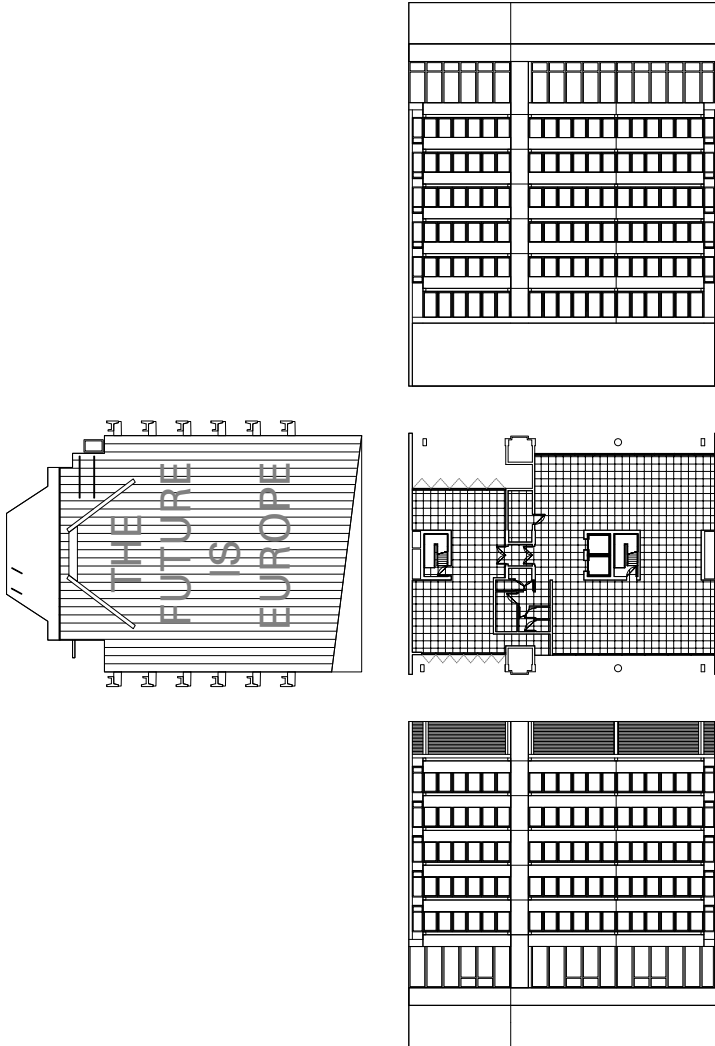
The existing office block seen at Wetstraat 93 and 95 was designed by Atelier d'architecture de Vinci. As seen in the archive drawings, the first floorplans were made in 1976. The design period of this building was relatively short, this since the design was already executed in 1978. The original idea was to slowly replace the existing family villas by this generic structure. The first villa was destroyed in 1977 and replaced by the first part of the office structure. Later, the other estate was also replaced by the same structure. Within the original idea, Wetstraat 91 was part of the third phase of the construction. However, this was never executed. The offices suppose to have a mirrored appearance: two gridlines on Wetstraat 95, one gridline on Wetstraat 93, and again two gridlines on 91; however, this plan stopped when Wetstraat 91 might reached for a monumental status.

The buildings are clear to understand. The construction seems easy; the service area is in the middle of the building, where the main column construction is outside or on the edges of the building. This construction leaves a sizeable floorplate open for any kind of use.

The ground floor is then used as an entrance area, with a reception desk and the option to drive a car through the building and park it in the back. Here, Wetstaat 91 became, instead of being demolished, part of the existing office building. The shed in the back became a canteen for the workers of the office.

Wetstraat 93 and 95 have two 740 square meters basement layers, which have the possibility to connect to the surface at the back of the building. Also, this basement is located directly next to the parking tunnel.

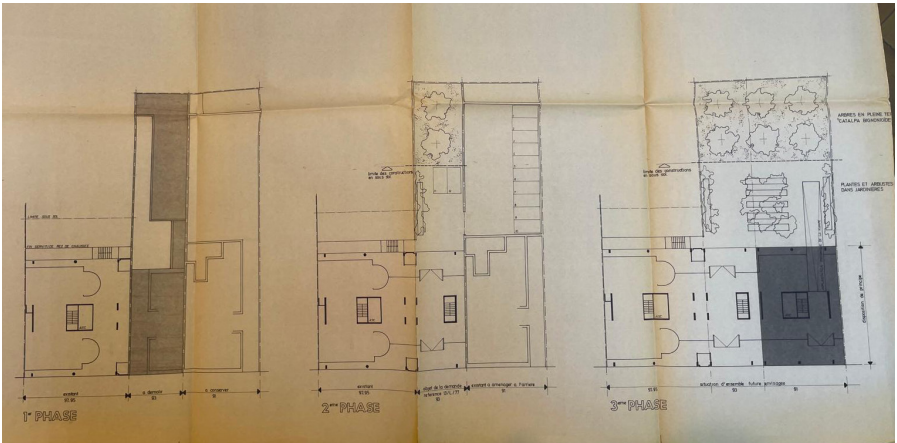
Despite being built as an office, the building had several functions. As seen on the archival drawings, the building was also used as a school. This shows how versatile the construction is.



Front facade, floorplan,
backfacade and side
facade of Wetstraat
93-95.

inbetween





The original three phase plan: first the construction of Wetstraat 95, followed by the reconstruction of Wetstraat 93, finished with the demolishment of the historical Villa and the replacement of another generic office plan. Image found within the national archive of Brussels.

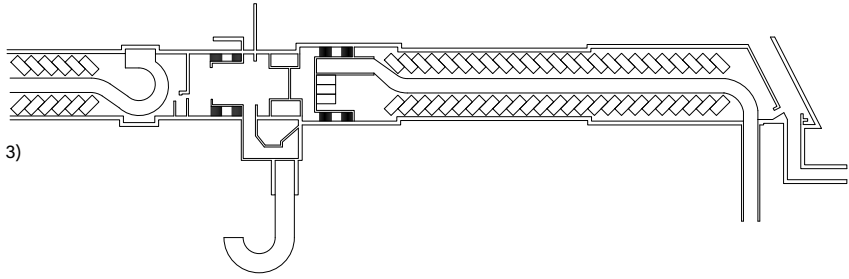
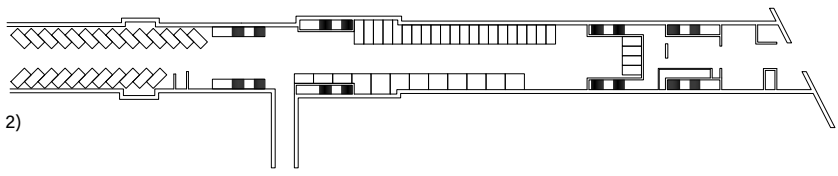
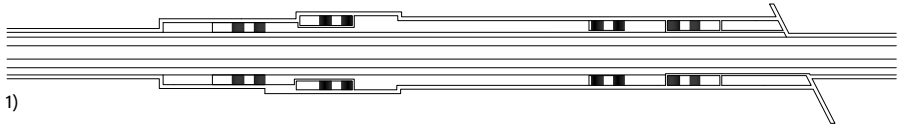
3.6.3 parking tunnel

The parking tunnel was made during the construction of the first metro line in Brussels. The metro line one, opened in 1976. The metro plan during this era was seen as an underground infrastructure that should solve many of Brussels' mobility problems, seen in transport itself but also parking possibilities.

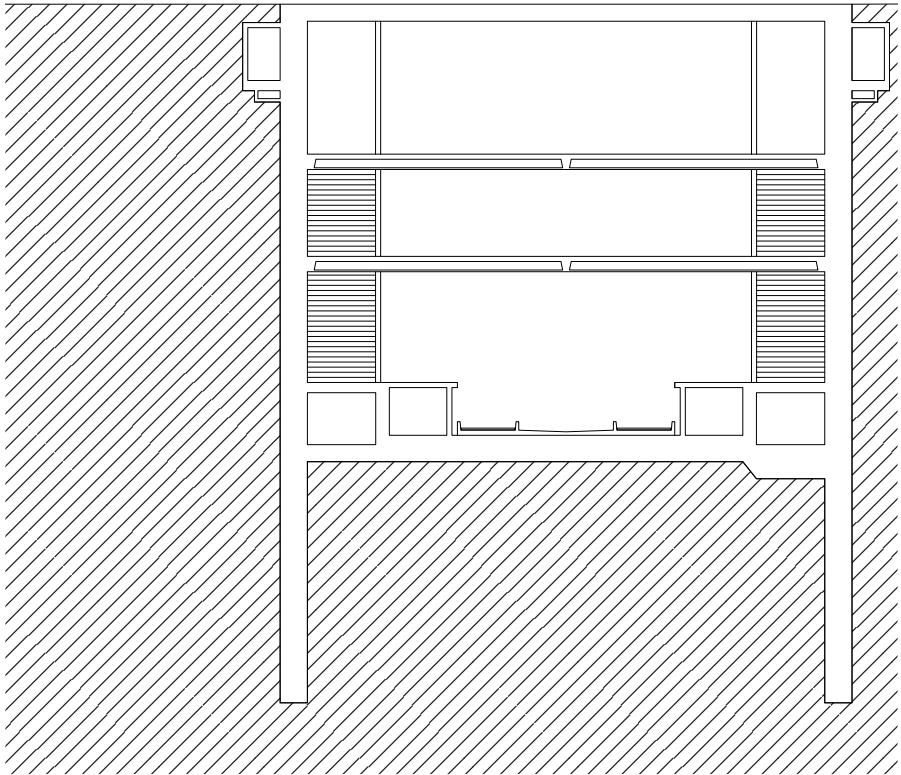
In the late '70s, the Maalbeek area had already changed to a (then) high-tech office area, one where many international offices were located, together with the European Union buildings. Here, the metro line was able to connect this traffic junction to the rest of the city by offering a direct connection to the center of the city. Besides this connection, the tunnel also provided a significant parking possibility.

The parking tunnel was constructed in three different configurations. The first configuration is three layers of parking, with the metro tunnel under this. Here, the floor-to-ceiling height is relatively low. The second configuration is a passenger tunnel, a parking layer, and the metro tube itself. The third configuration that is seen at the Wetstraat is two parking layers, followed by the metro tube. Here, the parking layers have a relatively high floor-to-ceiling level of around three meters.

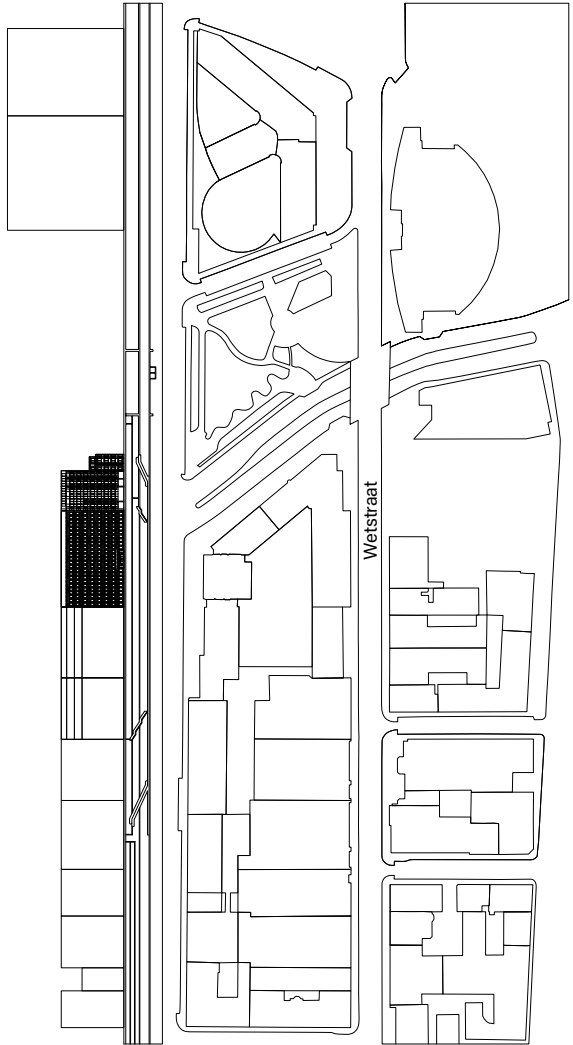
This tunnel is constructed directly next to existing offices. Also, some buildings are now connected to the parking tunnel, as seen at the 'the One' tower next to the project site. The parking tunnel also has several entrances via the Wetstraat itself.



These tunnel floorplans seen at the site.. 1) metro station 2) parking tunnel -2 3) parking tunnel -1.



Section of three-layered parking garage (seen at project location). The height of the upper parking is 4 meters.



Tunnel situation seen
under the Wetstraat.





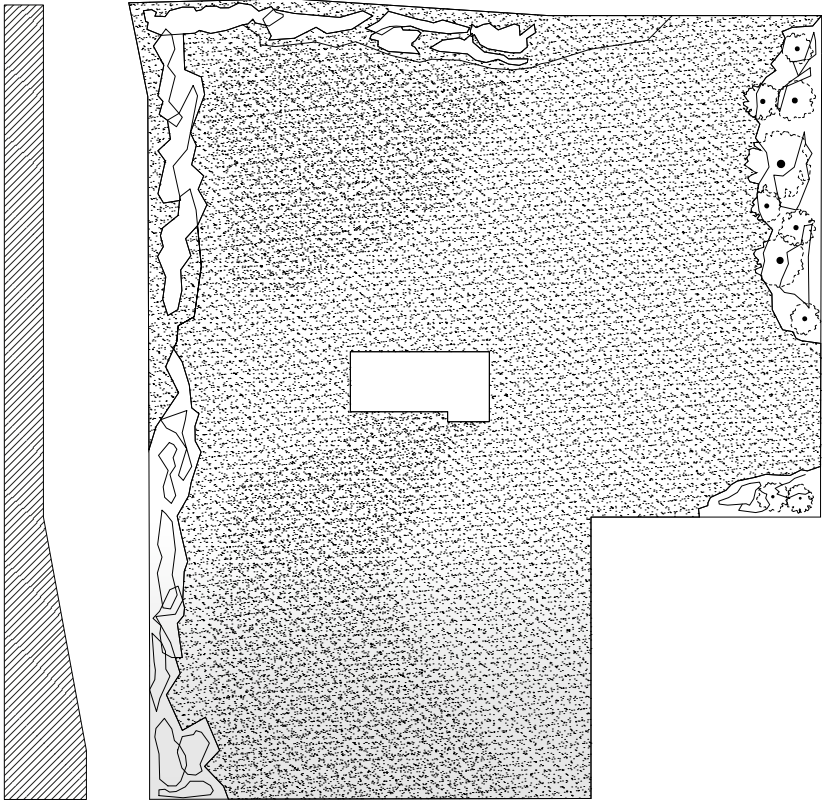
Inside the parking tunnel that is found under the Wetstraat.

3.6.4 terrain

How the ground is perceived today is in many ways valueless to human beings. It is a fenced-off area where people cannot pass or making use of. However, these restrictions for human beings have a great value to the biodiversity in the area. The terrain is filled with butterfly bushes (*Buddleja*), ferns, dog trot (*glechoma hederacea*), and many different types of grass such as cattail, yucca, flax grass, and Mexican feathergrass. These plants are making a diverse ecosystem where bees, butterflies, and other insects can live. The terrain now figures as a small biotope, one where only animals and plants can live without the interruption of humankind.

While it is unknown how these plants arrived at the terrain, two options are possible. The first one is that the seeds arrived with the wind. The grasses and ferns do not need many nutrients in the ground. They will start growing as soon as they arrive. The other option is understood in the fragments that are seen at the site. The planters show that the site used to be a community garden. Therefore, it might be possible that inhabitants of the area planted some bushes, such as the butterfly bush, which has now spread all over the terrain.

It is seen that an unproductive ground for humanity can be a productive ground for nature. Without being cultivated, the terrain can grow however it wants to. This gives a unique opportunity for nature in the city.



inbetween





Butterfly Bush (Buddleja)

color: purple

flowering period: June - September

location: full sun

height: 150 – 250 centimeters



Dog trot (Glechoma hederacea)

color: green, sometimes small blue flowers.

flowering period: May-August

location: half shadow

height: 15 - 30 centimeters



Ferns (Athyriaceae)

color: green

flowering period: never

location: shadow

height: 60 – 120 centimeters



Grasses: cattail, yucca, flax grass, Mexican feathergrass

color: shades of green and yellow

flowering period: June – September, evergreens

location: half shadow – full sun

height: 30 – 80 centimeters.

destruction construction & the inbetween