

SPATIALIZING FLUID PATTERNS OF CARE



Identifying Spaces and Needs of an Unseen and
Overlooked Group in Brussels

toward a careful imagination for the
liveability of young fluidly housed
adults in Brussels

Master Thesis – Fieldwork Diary
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tioning this report as a reference.

Why a Fieldwork Journal?

During my P2, I realized that this thesis was the first time I did not start with a
specific location or a clearly defined spatial focus. Instead, I explored a topic
that is highly underexamined, particularly in its spatial dimensions. This made it
challenging to spatialize. While reading different reports, I often wondered how
others approached their fieldwork and spatialization. To make my own process
transparent I decided to document the most relevant methods and appoa-
ches I used.

What is it (not)?

This booklet provides insights into how fieldwork and research shaped my
perspective on this group and their specific challenges. It outlines the process
I undertook to spatialize fluidly housed adults in Brussels and identify their
needs.

It is not a finished or perfect product—it is a work in progress, developed over
the course of 10 months. It is also not a complete story; there were many
steps along the way, some of which did not succeed. Still, I have tried to
document the key moments that led to my conclusions in the report. If en-
countered by others, these findings might have been interpreted differently.
Therefore, to leave room for further exploration and improvement, I decided to
document the fieldwork in a rough, story-like format that offers glimpses into
the situations I encountered, as well as the conversations and thoughts I had.

The interpretation of these findings can be found detailed in the report.

Who is it for?

This journal is for anyone looking to improve the quality of life for marginalized
people in the built environment and explore how spatial factors shape their
daily experiences. I hope it offers insight into different ways to approach such
a topic.

Cover: author
doing fieldwork,
Brussels
Photograph by
Max Schuska
2023



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Fig. 1.1: Rue de la Loi, Brussels
Photograph by Max Schuska

,Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody.'

Jane Jacobs



Fig. 1.2: Hostile Architecture preventing unhoused people to sleep, found in metro station in Brussels, made by author



Fig. 1.3: beds and storage in front of Gare du Midi in April, 2024, made by author

In the Leopold district, home to towering office buildings and European Union governance structures, we witnessed a striking juxtaposition. While professionals in suits briskly entered European Commission buildings, they passed by small tents swaying in the wind. Conversations with both groups highlighted a stark contrast: the professionals admitted they disliked this part of the city and only visited for work, leaving as soon as possible. Meanwhile, unhoused individuals expressed a desire to stay in the area but shared that they were not allowed to. This paradox - where some have the privilege to inhabit the space but choose not to, while others wish to stay but are excluded - sparked the idea for my thesis.

T. (2023): “We walked home at night,” he says, “and there were so many people sleeping in the station. The whole Midi was full.”

A. (2024): “One of my friends got hired to keep homeless people out of Midi,” she says. “He’s a security guard there now.”



Photographs by Max Schuska



Photographs by Max Schuska

5 lenses on possible methods

understand the socio-spatial environment

1. Approach: Camera Distribution

Method: Distribute cameras to your focus group and ask them to capture images of places that are significant to them in their daily lives. Afterward, collect the cameras and discuss the photos with the participants. Ask them to explain the spatial elements they chose to capture and their significance. This helps you understand their perspective on the environment and what matters most to them.

Limitation: It may be difficult to retrieve the cameras and ensure participants actually take the photos as requested.

2. Approach: Observational and Interview-Based Exploration

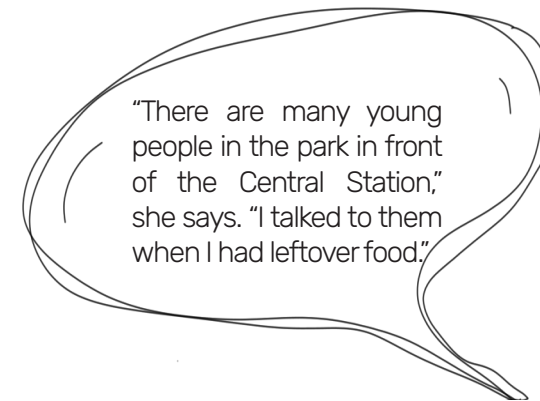
Method: Observe the group in their natural environment and conduct informal interviews. Ask open-ended questions to explore social patterns and informal rules within the space. For example: (Do you always return to the same spot?, Do you prefer seeing familiar faces or encountering new people?, Are there informal rules or expectations in the space (e.g., maintaining cleanliness, respecting boundaries)?).

Limitation: People may not be aware of existing rules, especially if they weren't involved in creating them or if they choose not to follow them.

3. Approach: Structured yet Flexible Interviews

Method: Organize your fieldwork with a clear structure, but remain flexible enough to adapt to participants' responses. Ask about their daily routines and spaces (e.g., Where do you sit/eat/sleep? What tools or objects do you use?), allowing them to share freely about their lives. Let them point to things they use to guide the conversation. Consider bringing sketching paper to allow them to sketch places that are important to them or have them sketch themselves.

Limitation: People not deeply involved in the built environment may not always be aware of spatial aspects. Other factors might be more important to them, and some may not feel comfortable sketching.



4. Approach: Casual Interaction and Visual Analysis

Method: Start with casual, approachable questions, such as asking about their favorite music or sharing a meal to establish rapport. Ask them about their daily lives, then deduce the spatial aspects from the conversation.

Limitation: This approach may not provide as much direct insight into spatial aspects, as it relies on indirect observations and self-reflection.

5. Approach: Reading the Built Environment

Method: Observe the facades of buildings to understand which ones are located in more important places. Historically, facades with the most windows were positioned along major roads or significant locations, while those intended for servants had fewer windows, reflecting their lower status. By analyzing these patterns, you can "read" the built environment. A well-known example is Charles Booth's poverty maps of London, which analyzed mews and their socio-economic significance.

Limitation: This method provides historical and spatial insights but might need to be adapted to fit this topic.



Fig. 1.4: Sketch of area of informal conversation with young fluidly housed adults, made by author

process diagram

In my thesis Carescapes: Toward a Careful Imagination for the Livability of Young Fluidly Housed Adults in Brussels, I employed a radical spatial imagination—one that seeks to uncover the root causes of systemic marginalization and to ‘hack’ oppressive systems through a network of socio-spatial interventions.

Drawing on the concept of the production of space, which understands space not as a passive backdrop but as something that is both shaped by and actively shapes society (Lefebvre, 1997), I used multiple methods to spatialize this topic. These helped me locate and engage with young fluidly housed adults, and to begin mapping their socio-spatial patterns of care.

While the full set of conclusions is presented in the final thesis report, this booklet offers insight into the fieldwork and mapping processes that informed and grounded the work.

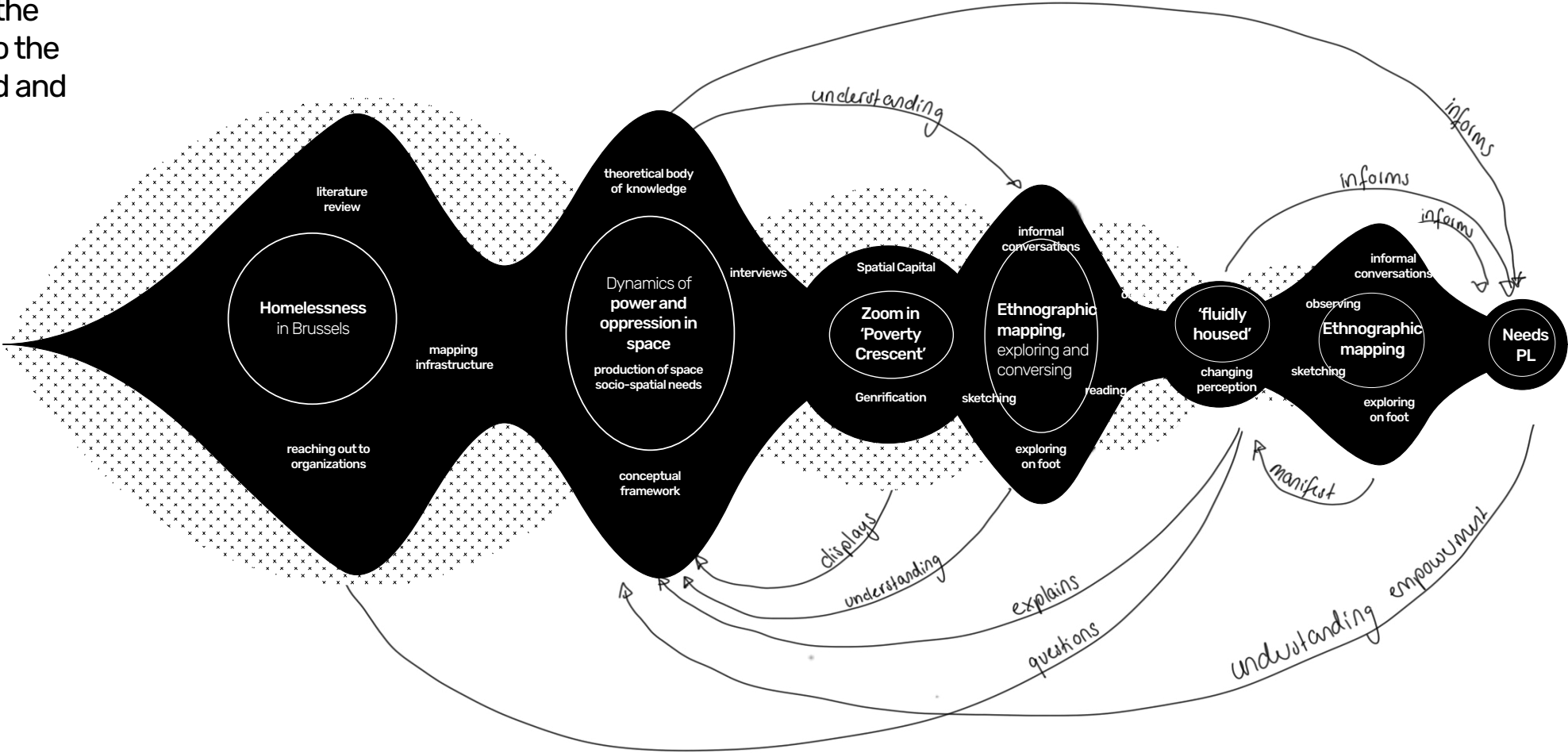


Fig. 1.5: Diagramm showing the process of spatializing this topic, made by author

I attend the biannual homeless count organized by Bruss'Help. We meet at La Tricoterie in Saint-Gilles at 20:00, a collectively managed café with a huge space on the inside. Many people enter. I read the regulations—don't take pictures, respect the privacy of the homeless you count, don't talk to them, and the count starts at 23:00 and ends at midnight. Only count people who are sleeping or showing signs of having a bed. Do not count people who are begging. Also, don't go into the stations; other groups are counting those. I register and am placed in area 42, near the Leopold district. After getting my sticker, I wait for the other volunteers in my group. The organizers told me they pair me with two experienced ones, so I can ask questions. People begin to find their groups, but no one shows up for mine.

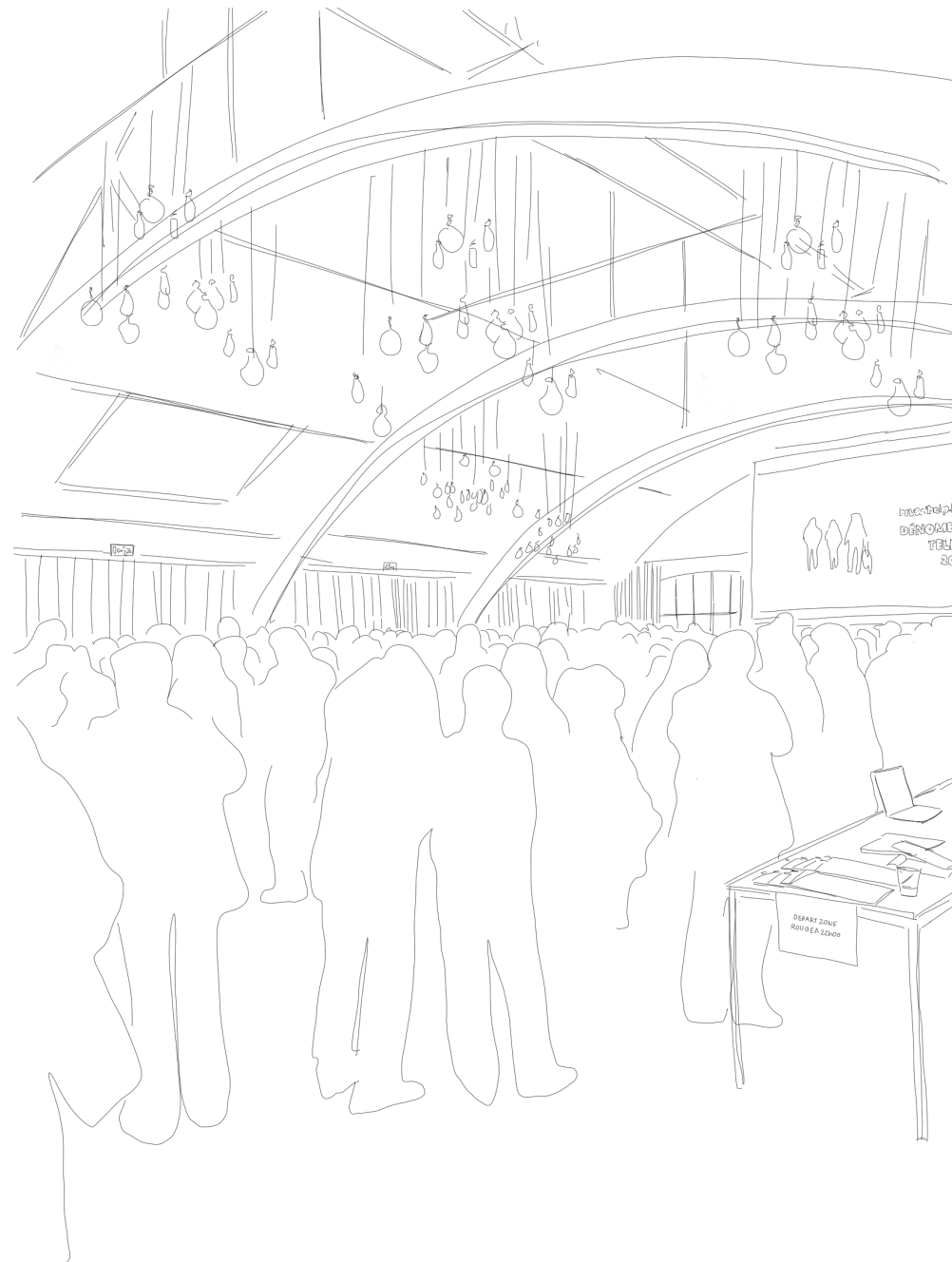


Fig. 2.1: Sketch of area of informal conversation with young fluidly housed adults, made by author

I end up paired with two guys—one speaks only French, and I speak only English. The third, tasked with translating, eventually leaves to join another group. Then, a young woman joins us. She says, "The two of us work together. I hear you only speak English. I'm from Switzerland, but my English isn't good. I'll join you two and try to translate as much as I can."

We need to head out to be on time. On the way, we meet other groups, everyone speaking French. We discuss our strategy, then start the count. At midnight, we counted 3, but the area was too big to finish on time.

The Outreach Guy

"I grew up in Anderlecht. That's what inspired me to work with the homeless," he says. He works in outreach at the GATE, the first supervised drug consumption facility in Brussels, near Gare du Midi. "I talk to the neighbors because they don't like the facility, but I can show them that it's a good one. I also talk to people on the streets, tell them about us, and carry clean needles. If I can't cure them, at least I can help them stay safe."

The Nurse

"I study urban health and work as a nurse at GATE on the side. All kinds of people come in. You can't really divide them into Belgian or non-Belgian—they all have it rough and struggle with addiction."

The GATE is a space for people to consume drugs under medical supervision, with a goal of reducing public drug use and the health risks associated with it. It's run by the non-profit organization Transit, which offers medical care, social support, and harm reduction services. There are plans to open a second facility in the northern part of Brussels to address the drug use in that area. Outreach-ing to neighbors and providing clean syringes are just a part of the work they do.

The next day, with some time to spare before my train, I decide to look up facilities that aim to help young unhoused individuals. I head out, walking between 11:00 and 14:00 to visit them, but each one I reach is closed. Are they closed because no one comes, or does no one come because they're closed? I wonder to myself. How can I find them?

I remember that someone told me that there is an informal camp of many refugees in Maximiliaan Park, so I decide to go there and see if anyone wants to talk to me. It's cold and windy. When I arrive, there's no one around, no tents set up—just one guy walking his dog. I google it: In 2015, the reception center was set up in Maximiliaan Park. Many volunteers and NGOs helped them set up an informal camp with help facilities. But the conditions were not nice and the NGOs advocated for more formal infrastructures. Now, the reception center at Maximiliaan Park has been closed, and the camp was dissolved. The refugees were moved to other facilities. But where are they now? I don't know. I keep walking and pass a couple in their 40s sitting on the streets. They don't speak English.

Tuesday, 12.11. - 18.11.2024 - Mapping Infrastructures

Y. and I map the help facilities for the unhoused in Brussels, and I conduct a space syntax analysis to see which areas are within a 1000-meter walking distance. I realize that all of them are concentrated around the city center, especially in the area around the 'Croissant de Pauvre'.

I discuss this with Birgit and Caroline. "There's a reason for this distribution," they explain. I dive into the literature and also read the 2022 report from Bruss'Help again. As I translate it, I learn that most homeless people have moved toward the center due to the mobile facilities provided there. They need to be close to these resources in order to access them (maps in full size in appendix).

Friday 06.+13.12.2024 - MEP Studio Fieldwork Lectures

We test some different fieldwork methods that help us get an idea of how to gather data. There are digital and analog qualitative methods, such as filming, distributing cameras and collect the pictures from people that should photograph the places they are. teh talk to them. I have some ideas of what I want to do, but I need to get in touch with my focus group first. 'Don't go on your own, you never know what might happen' they say.

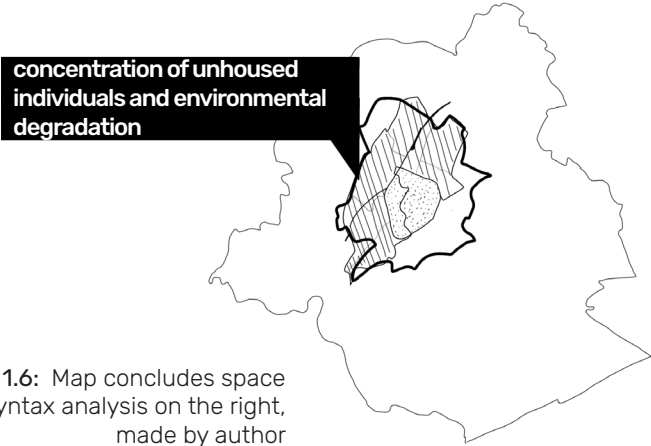


Fig. 1.6: Map concludes space syntax analysis on the right, made by author

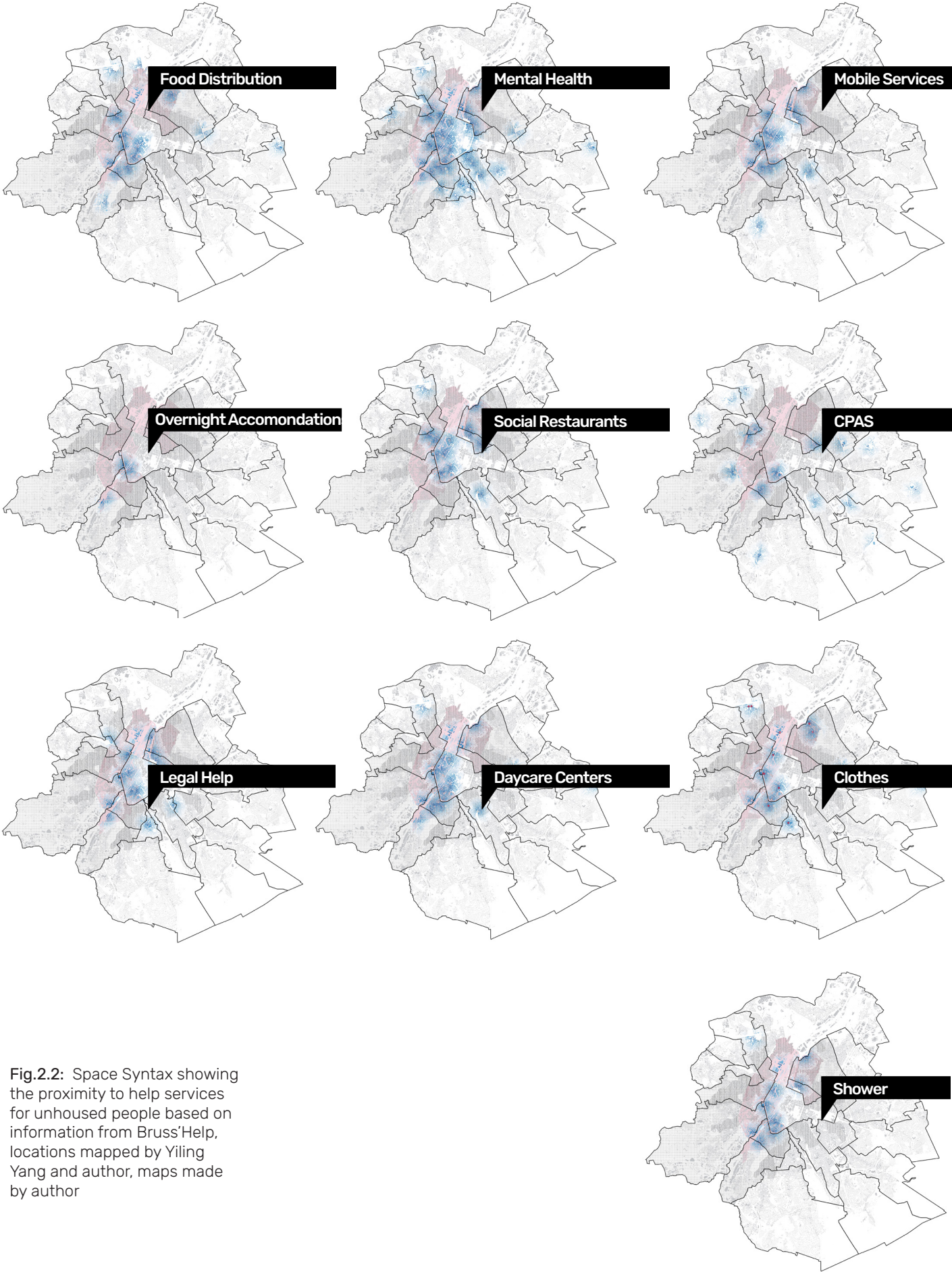


Fig.2.2: Space Syntax showing the proximity to help services for unhoused people based on information from Bruss'Help, locations mapped by Yiling Yang and author, maps made by author

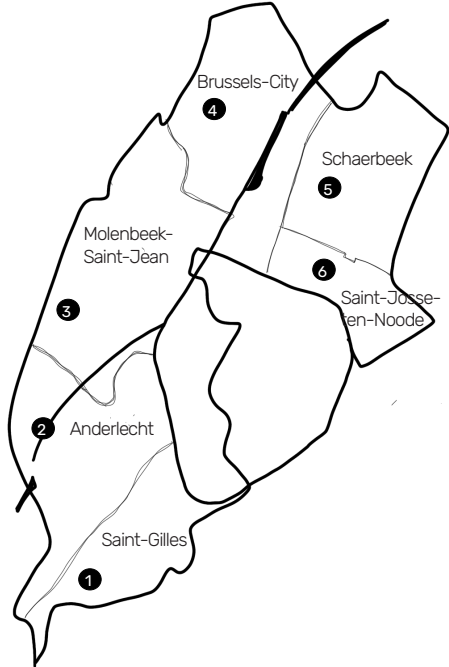


Fig. 2.3: Impressions from Fieldwork

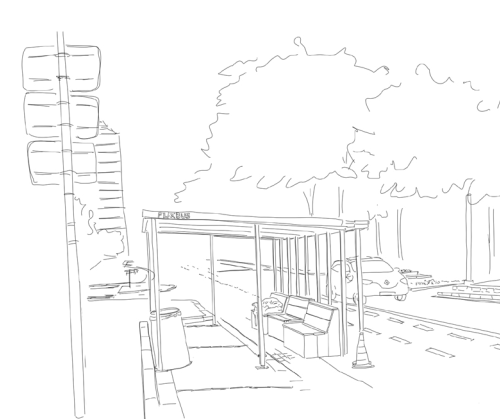
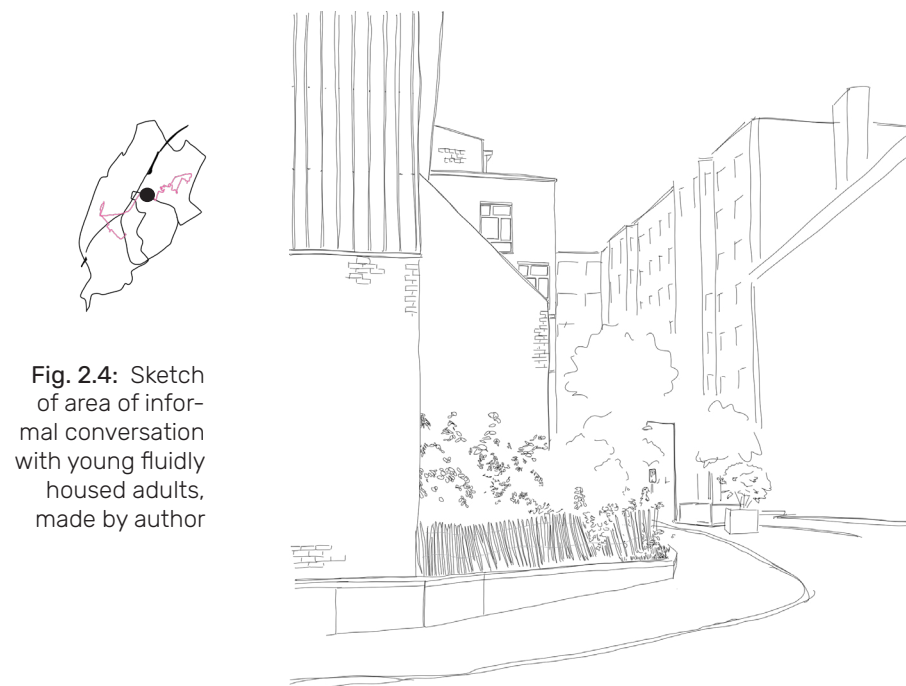
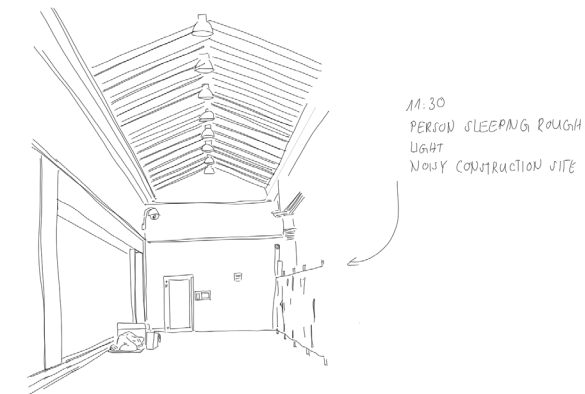
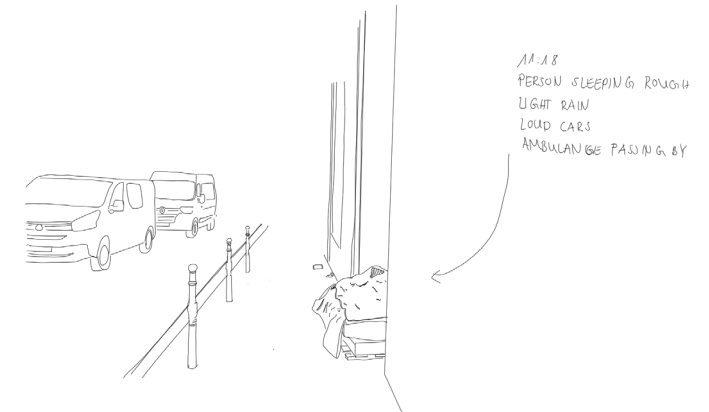


Monday 16.12.2024 - Exploring *le Croissant Pauvre*

We start early in the morning; the bus leaves at 8:00 from Rotterdam. I'm late and barely make it onto the bus before the doors close. I call Y., but I can't find her. She mixed up the time and will come by train instead. So, we plan to meet in Brussels. She gets off at Gare du Midi before I reach Gare du Noord, so we agree to meet in the middle.

We start walking around, and by 11:00 am, we already see many people sleeping rough in the Brussels-City municipality. It's raining and cold, so the conditions aren't ideal. Most people are huddled under small eaves, raised slightly on cardboard or mattresses if they have them. They are still getting wet, but are covered by thick blankets, hiding their faces. Some are already sitting up, asking passersby for money. But some are still sleeping in this very noisy areas—next to busy streets, construction sites, and with ambulances passing by. I am wondering if the people that sleep here truly get any rest.

We enter the Crescent, starting to walk around and talk about our different perceptions of safety. Yiling tells me that in China, there's CCTV everywhere, and in the Netherlands, it's not as common, so she doesn't feel as safe. I tell her that for me, it's the opposite.



As we continue, we make our way through Anderlecht. We see some young men standing on a sports field. "Let's walk by," I say, curious about what they are up to. When we get closer, we see that they're standing still, mostly keeping their distance from each other, each person on their own. One person talks to another, then they shake hands. One leaves, and the other stays. We pass by quickly. "I didn't feel safe here," I say, and Y. agrees.

We walk closer to the metro, and again, there are young men standing around, all by themselves. I don't feel comfortable talking to them either. We pass by, see many people waiting for the bus, and continue walking. We pass by run-down buildings and eventually arrive at the Abbatoir. "I've been here during my bachelor thesis," I say. "It used to be an old slaughterhouse, but now there's a kitchen distributing food." We go in.

A volunteer greets us and tries to explain the concept of the place. "There's the Dream Kitchen from Monday to Thursday, and Friday to Sunday, there's a market. On Sunday, you can take leftover food home." He apologizes for his lack of English and invites us to have some food. It's already 14:00, and most people are leaving. We sit down and observe for a while.

A woman approaches us and lets us know that they'll be closed during the week of Christmas and the first week of January. "This place is for everyone. You don't need to justify that you're in a precarious situation to eat here," she says. "I don't know who's homeless and who's not. But if you want to help, we meet every Tuesday with new volunteers."

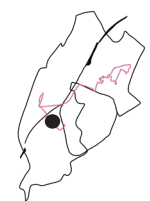
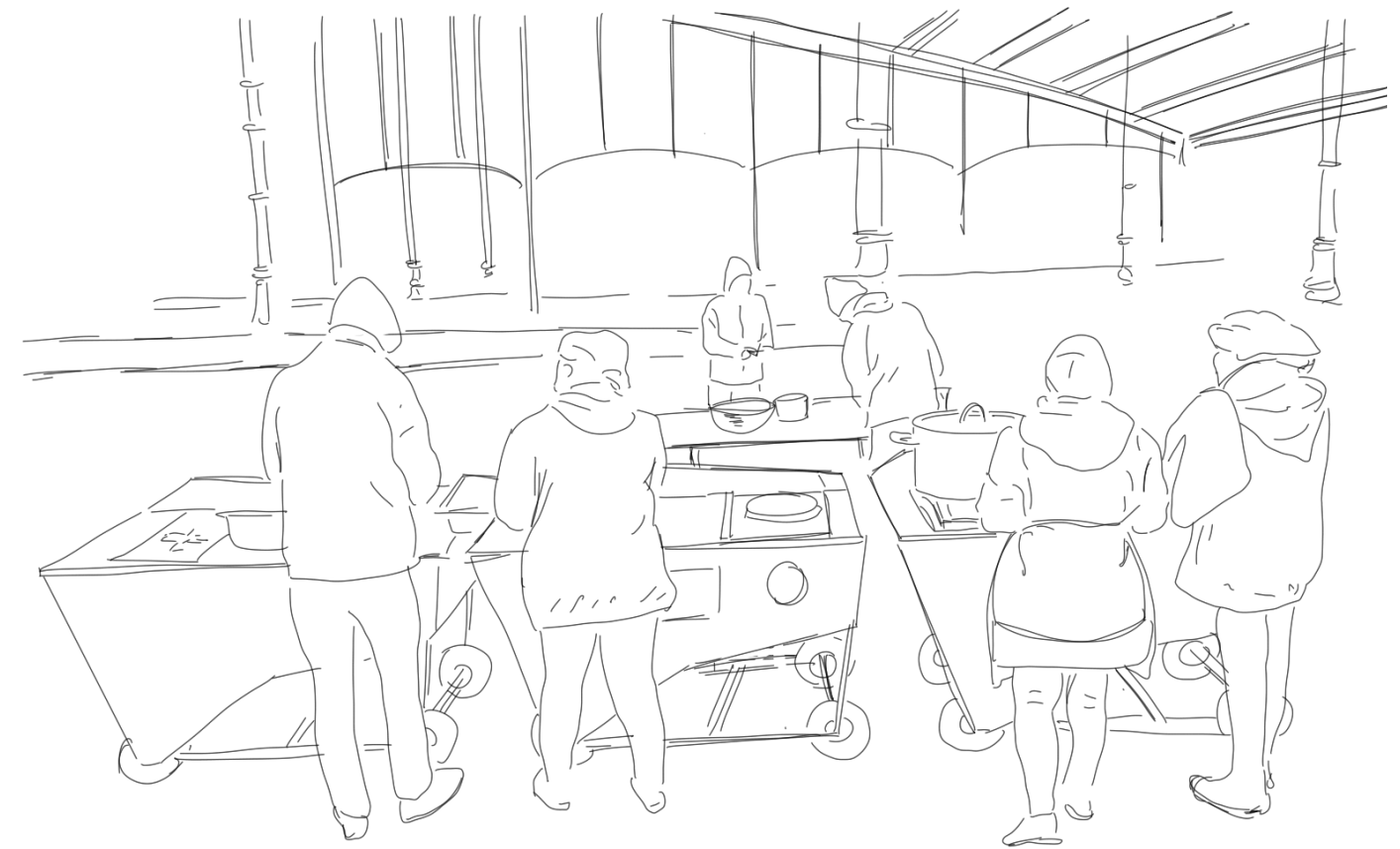


Fig. 2.5: Sketch of area of informal conversation with young fluidly housed adults, made by author

We continue walking and pass the canal. "There's no access to the water. It's a huge barrier in the city - similar to Stuttgart" I remark. We cross the bridge and enter Molenbeek. The municipality has installed small wind turbines in different colors along the canal, adding a vibrant touch to the area.

We pass by a school, where metal fences surround the outdoor spaces. They are probably there to keep the children from running onto the road or to allow them to play ball. As we walk by, a large group of children gathers at the fence and begins to scream and wave. We wave back, unsure of what else to do. I have never encountered such a situation before. It almost looks like they're imprisoned behind the fence.

We continue further, and I tell Y. that some of my peers worked on a high-risk building nearby, which might be interesting for her topic. We decide to visit it. We walk through the large parking lot, noticing cracks in the windows and the many doorbells. There must be hundreds of people living in this building. Surveillance cameras are everywhere, watching our every move.

We walk on, passing broken-down cars and open doors with bent post boxes. "Do you think it's a squat?" I ask. "Maybe," Y. replies. But from the outside, there's no way to tell for sure.

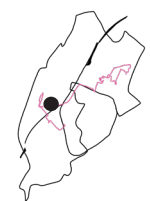


Fig. 2.6: Sketch of area of informal conversation with young fluidly housed adults, made by author

We walk further and enter Schaerbeek. "I've read that there have been many squatted buildings in Schaerbeek. Maybe I can find some people to talk to here," I say.

We pass by the red-light district, observing men shopping for women in the windows, sometimes passing by, sometimes entering. There's a urinal nearby, but for women*, there's nowhere to go to the toilet for free.

We continue walking, heading towards some of the squares that looked nice on Google Maps. In real life, the ones that seemed inviting are less used, while the ones I hadn't noticed are much livelier. It makes sense—these spaces don't have to look pretty from above, they just need to work well on street level, I think to myself. In theory, they should work—providing benches and shelter—but in reality, they feel cold and empty. I make a mental note to observe that further.

There are many beautiful buildings here, some empty or only with the façade left, but there are few signs of squatting. As it gets darker, we pass by small restaurants and supermarkets. One person sits outside a supermarket, asking people for money, sheltered from the rain under the eaves.

It's already dark, and we're both tired, so we keep walking on.

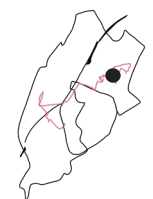
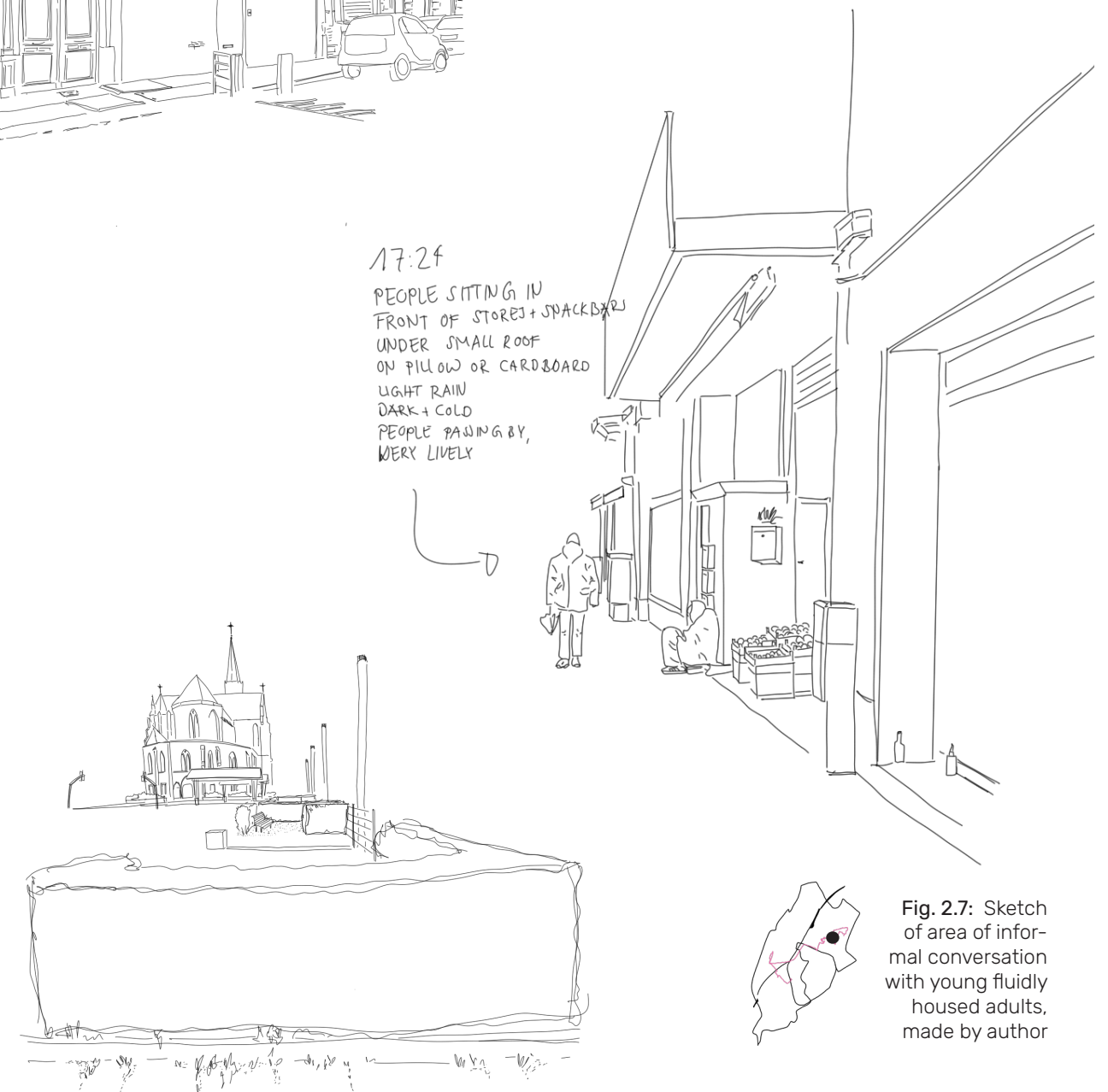
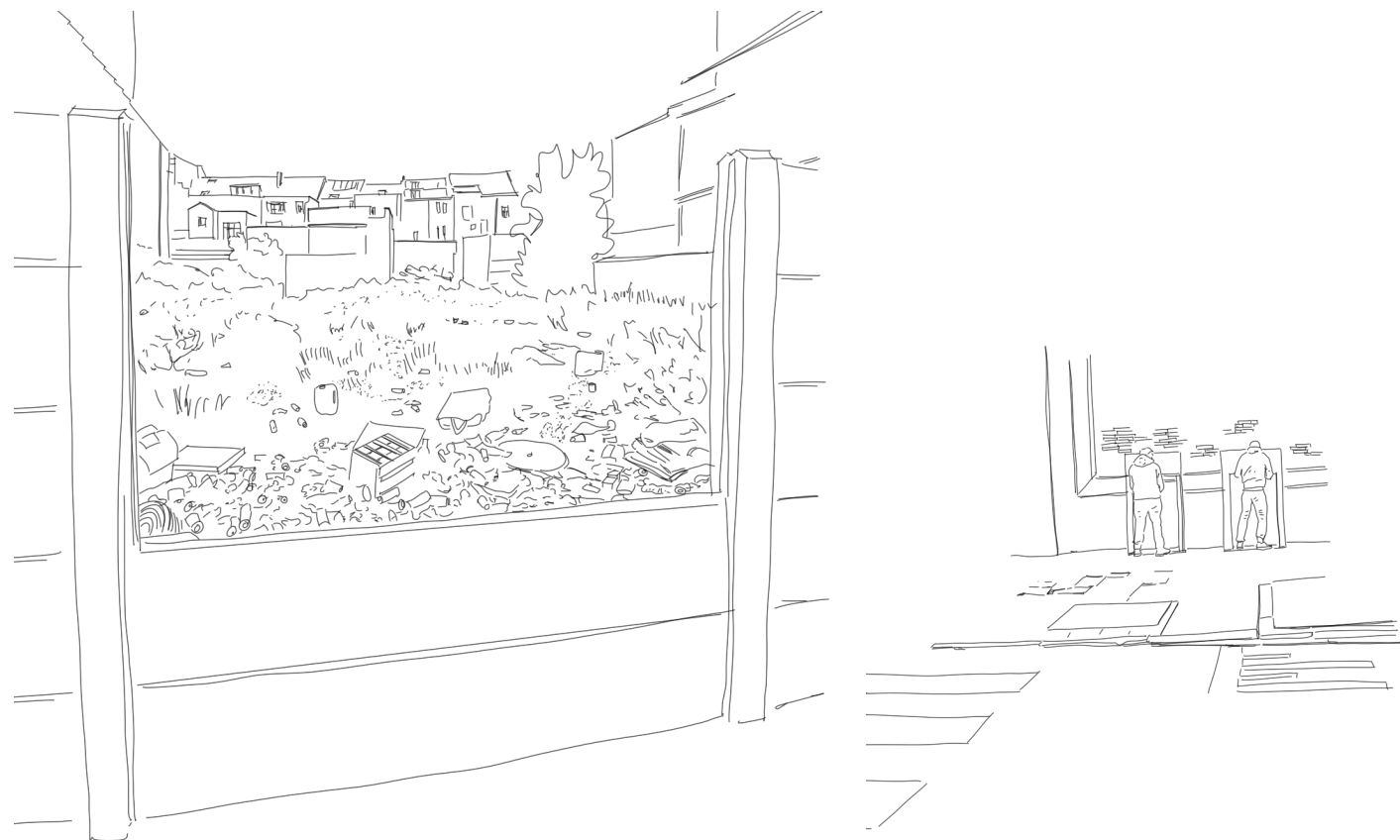


Fig. 2.7: Sketch of area of informal conversation with young fluidly housed adults, made by author

Saint-Josse-ten-Noode

This municipality seamlessly blends into the next. From here, you can see the towering buildings of the European Union in the distance. It is one of the most densely populated neighborhoods in Brussels. As you walk through the area, you come across empty buildings and closed-off green spaces. In the park, many people sit on the benches, and a small self-built shelter is tucked along the roadside.

When mapping different help facilities, I realise, there are more for rough sleepers in Anderlecht, but more for squatting in the North.

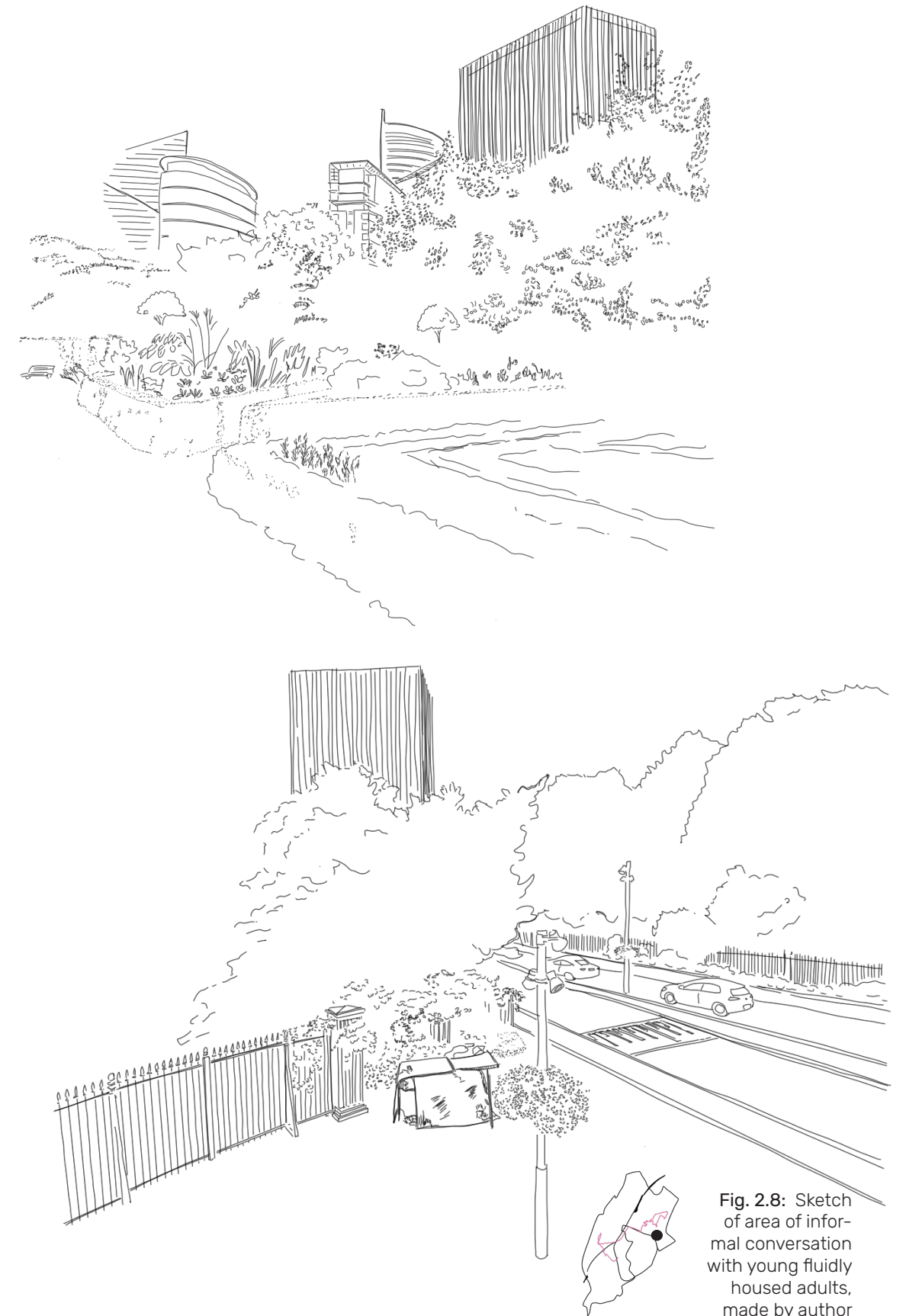


Fig. 2.8: Sketch of area of informal conversation with young fluidly housed adults, made by author

mapping existing organizations

Homelessness extends beyond those visibly living on the streets or in emergency shelters. According to FEANTSA, the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless, homelessness encompasses a broader range of living situations. Their European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS Light) offers a useful framework for classifying these various forms (FEANTSA, 2024) (Figure X).

Among young unhoused individuals in Belgium, a higher proportion of women are affected compared to older unhoused populations. Additionally, hidden homelessness (ETHOS 6) is more prevalent among younger individuals, and family or friend conflicts are more commonly cited as a cause of homelessness (Van Noppen, 2022) (Figure X).

To understand the facets of hidden homelessness and identify a smaller area for in-depth research on young unhoused individuals, I created a timeline of documented squatting instances and explored the housing market in Brussels.

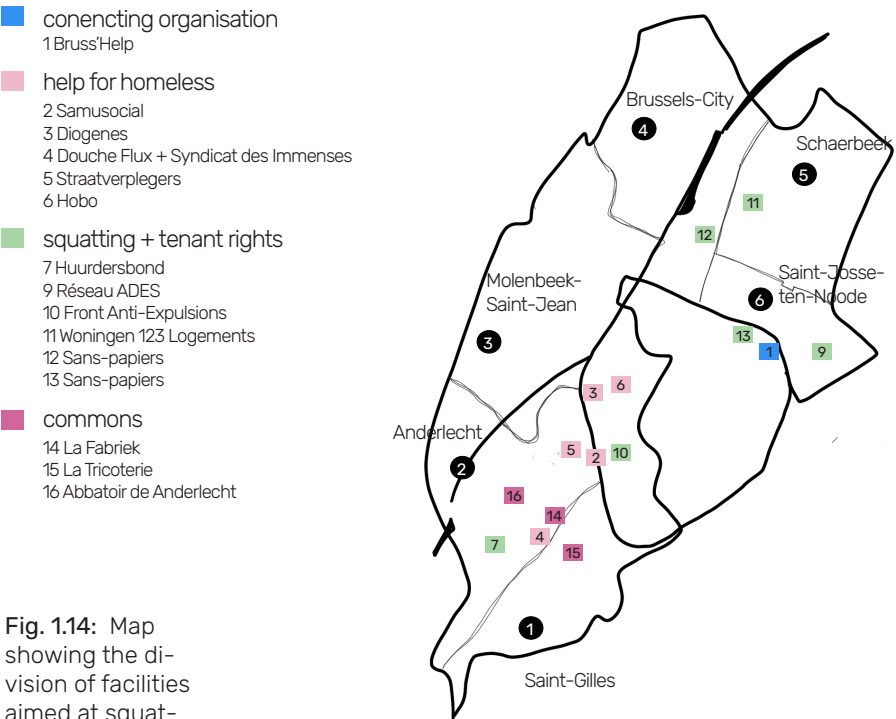
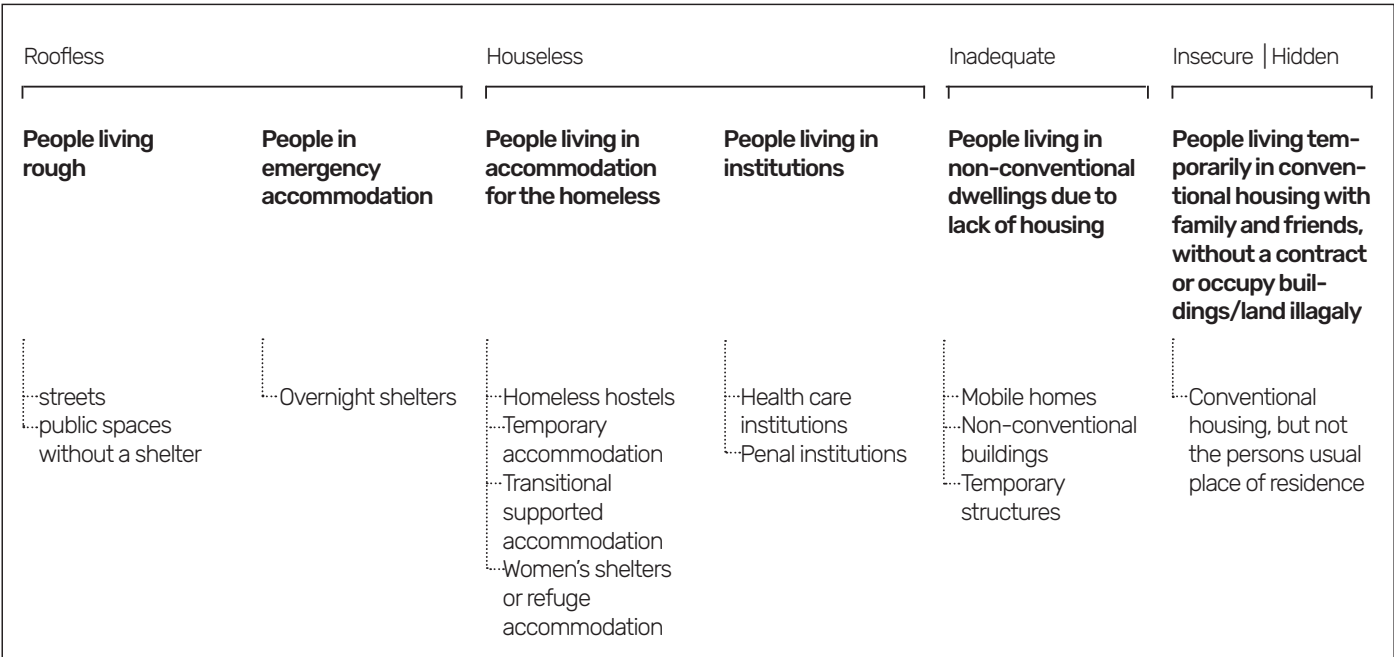


Fig. 1.14: Map showing the division of facilities aimed at squatting (green) and rough sleepers (pink), made by author

Fig. 2.9: Categorisation of homelessness in 6 different ETHOS light categories, (Feantsa, 2024).



Profiles of young adults affected by homelessness in Belgium

- percentage of women**
18 - 25
26+
- receive living wage**
18 - 25
26+
- experience hidden homelessness**
18 - 25
26+
- conflicts with family or friends as cause**
18 - 25
26+
- background of those between 18 - 25**

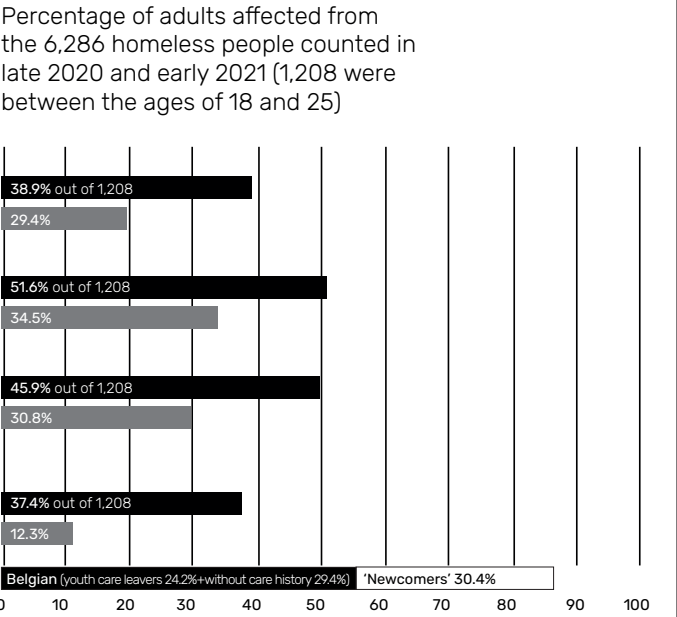


Fig. 2.10: Statistics of youth homelessness in Belgium, modified by author, (Van Noppen, 2022).



Molenbeek-Saint-Jean
Anderlecht
Schaerbeek
Ixelles
Saint-Josse-ten-Noode
Bruxelles

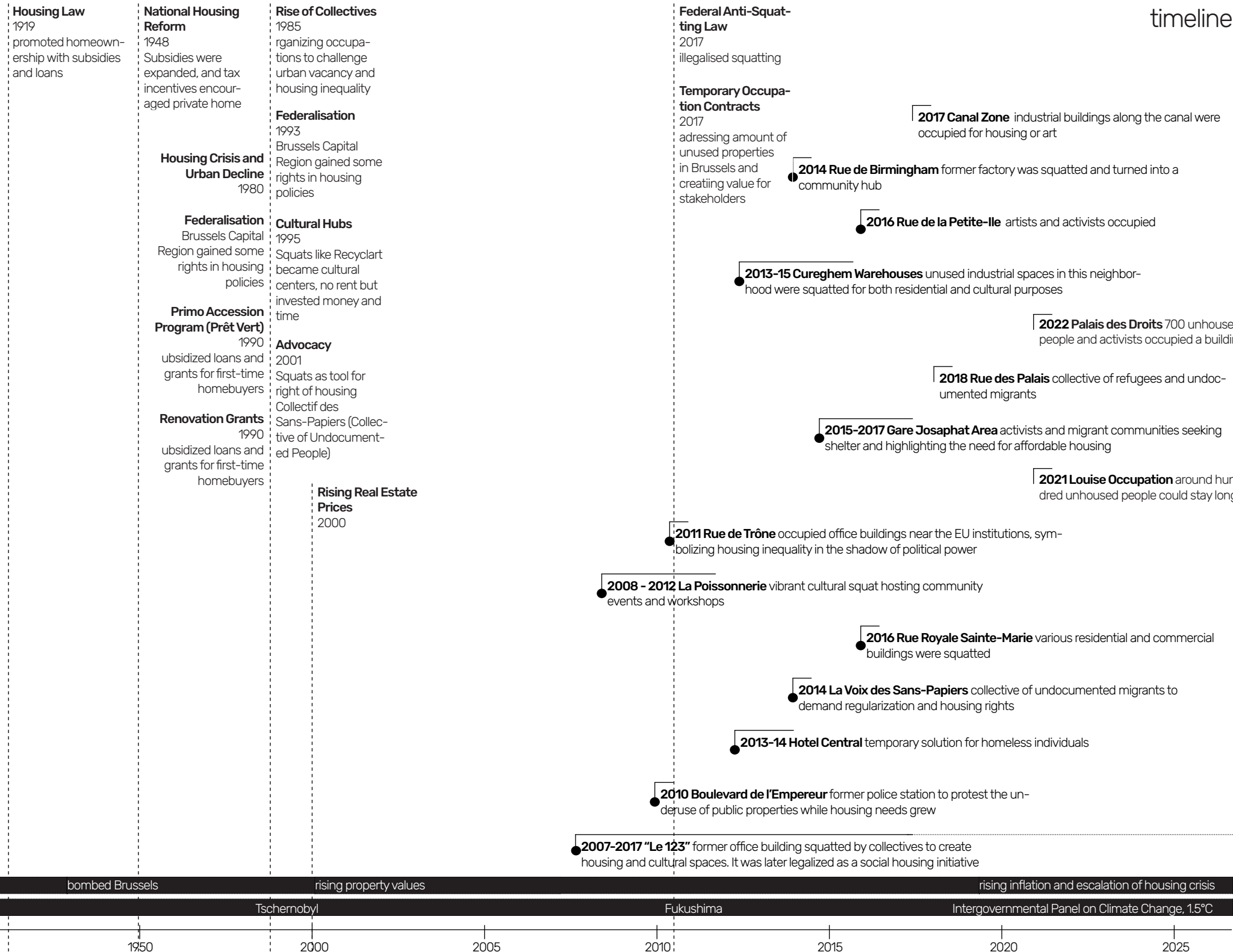
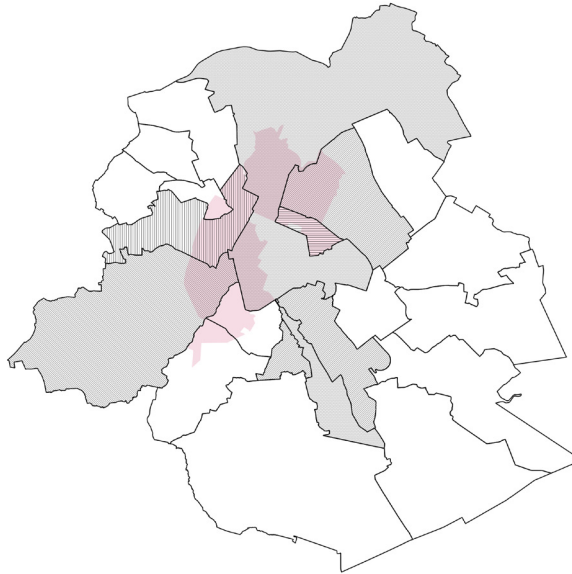
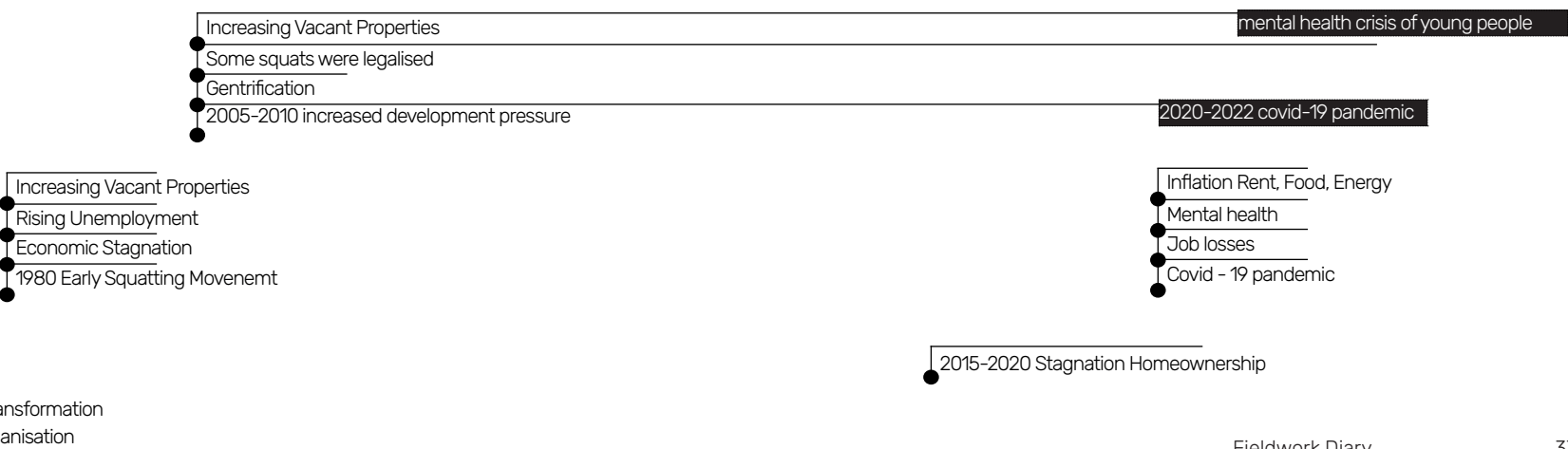
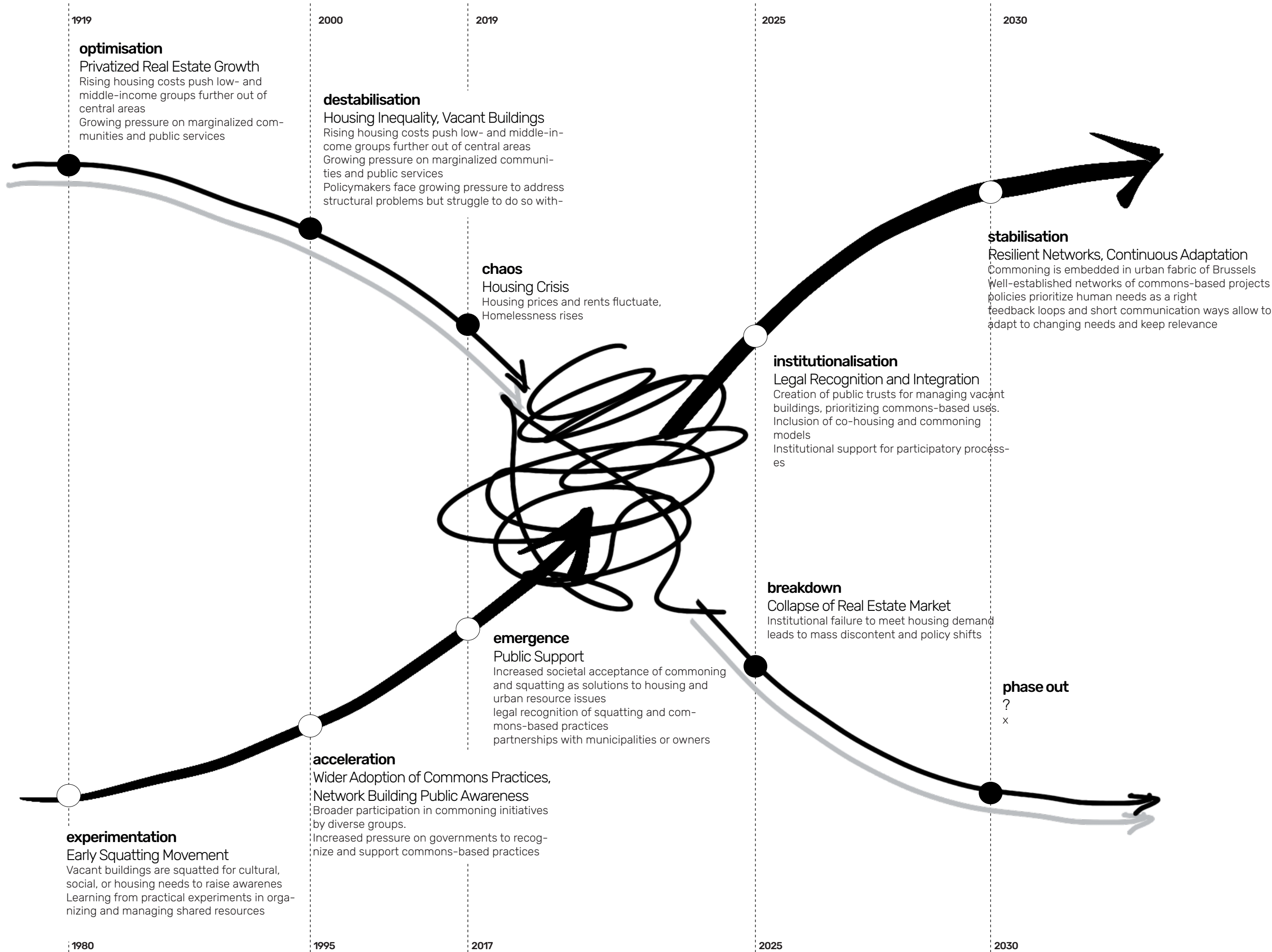


Fig. 2.11: Graph <https://www.kbc.com/en/economics/publications/the-housing-market-in-the-three-belgian-regions.html>



- Anderlecht
- Bruxelles
- Ixelles
- Schaerbeek
- Molenbeek-Saint-Jean
- Saint-Josse-ten-Noode
- Poverty Crossaint





In search of a focus group and an approach to spatializing my topic, I asked M. if she would like to join me. We planned to go during her lecture break so she wouldn't miss any classes.

I arrived in Brussels a day early, still battling a cold. We had booked an Airbnb in Saint-Gilles—cheaper for two people than a hostel. The apartment had multiple key boxes, allowing check-in without anyone being there. Inside, we found it divided into three separate rental rooms. The place felt strangely passive-aggressive, with small notes everywhere dictating what to do and what not to do. This wasn't the intention behind Airbnb in its early days, I thought.

In the morning, M. texted: "My alarm didn't go off. I'll be there at 11:12..." Shortly after, another message followed: "Someone jumped in front of a train, and now we're stuck at campus..."

Despite the delay, we managed to meet at Gare Centrale. I had suggested it as a meeting point because **C. told me that she has seen many young unhoused people there and thought it could be a good place to observe and maybe talk to someone.** However, when I arrived, the square was empty. So we decided to walk to Schaerbeek, passing numerous construction sites along the way.

"Oh look, a market," M. said. "Nice! Last time I was here, this area felt quite empty and cold. It's good to see it so lively now," I replied. M. asked, "Do you know the background of the people living in Schaerbeek? In Molenbeek, a lot of residents have Moroccan roots." "I'm not sure," I said, "but I always wonder if that's something we should even focus on. What do you think?"

As we continued walking, M. pointed out a gas station built under an apartment building. "It's so typical in Brussels to see them like this." "True! But there's also one just like that near my flat in Rotterdam. I always wonder if it's safe to live above a gas station," I said.

M. shared an approach she had used in her thesis. "I immersed myself in the area to understand how people experience it." "Who did you talk to?" I asked. "For me, it's always difficult because I don't know who is homeless, so I can't just approach anyone. That makes it harder. to find people to talk to". "It was also challenging for me," she admitted. "But in the end, I spoke with three people. One was sitting outside a café in the sun. It turned out he was the owner, and he invited me for tea. We had a long conversation."

As we passed a busy street, we saw a young woman asking for money. I gave her the last note I had with me and asked if she spoke English or Dutch, but she only spoke French. We went into a small café to warm up with something to eat and drink. The soup I wanted was sold out, so we ordered tomato soup. When it arrived, we realized it had meat in it—I had forgotten to ask.



Curious, I asked the café owner if there were many homeless people in the area. "Not here," he said, **"but at Rogier Metro station, after the shops close, many people set up their sleeping places."**

Later, in the red-light district, we spoke to two Gardiens de la Paix—municipal workers in purple vests responsible for maintaining order and assisting the public. "Are there many homeless people in this area?" we asked. "Not really," one of them replied. **"Here, the bigger issue is drugs. But if you're looking for homeless people, you'll find more around Gare du Nord."**

Tired from the day, M. headed back home while I returned to the Airbnb to rest before trying my luck later that night.

I went out with J. after he finished work. We walked past the park at Central Station—again, no one there. So, we continued to the places people in Schaerbeek had mentioned. Still no luck. "Maybe it's because it's the weekend, so people come here later," I said. We kept walking, passing different metro stations. In some, people were sleeping, but only a few here and there, and we didn't want to disturb them.

Later that day, I discovered a rave for solidarity, "for the unseen and overlooked." "Look, it's close by in Anderlecht and tomorrow. Should we go there? Maybe I can talk to someone," I said, excited. "Sure," J. replied.



Fig. 2.13: Sketch of area of informal conversation with young fluidly housed adults, made by author

In the evening, J. and I head to Gare Central. This time, there were some people there, hanging out with some friends under empty trees in front of the central station. They're chatting in French, their voices low but occasionally punctuated by laughter. When I approach them, the conversation pauses, and they exchange glances before falling silent.

"Do you speak English?" I ask, feeling a little out of place. They hesitate for a moment, then N. looks up and nods. "Yes. What do you want?" I explain my project, telling them I'm curious about life in the area and wondering if they know of any homeless people nearby. N. responds directly: "I am not homeless, but I am active in a squatting movement." His tone is calm but firm, and there's a quiet pride in how he says it.

I ask if he can tell me more—about the movement, how his day looks, and the places that matter to him apart from a home. He considers for a moment, then replies: "A home is not important. I don't need a home. The whole city is my home. That is where I live. For you, your home is important because you know it. For me, this is what I know. I don't need a home." There's no defensiveness in his words, just a certainty that challenges my assumptions.

When I ask how he is living, he says: "We look at the empty houses. They need to be empty for at least two years but still in good condition. Then we go in and get people to join us. We then need mattresses and stuff, but we usually get that. We find out the owner and call them. Then we say, 'We are here now. Your building was empty too long. You either let us stay, or we report you, and you have to pay the fine.' They usually don't want to pay, and getting us out takes time. The law is on our side. Having good buildings empty while people are on the street is not nice, so f*** them." His bluntness surprises me, but his words resonate.

When I ask if they stay in the buildings during the day, he shakes his head. "No, never during the day. The houses are in quieter areas, not in the center. But during the day, we are outside and in the city. Busy places like this one are good to get money and food. But I am an artist, and I want to find inspiration for my art. I spend my day with that. But also workshops are good. When you go there, and you can try out things and continue."

When I ask about the others, who haven't been speaking, he says: "They are not homeless. They have been, but now they are staying with their grandparents. But they are also outside all day."

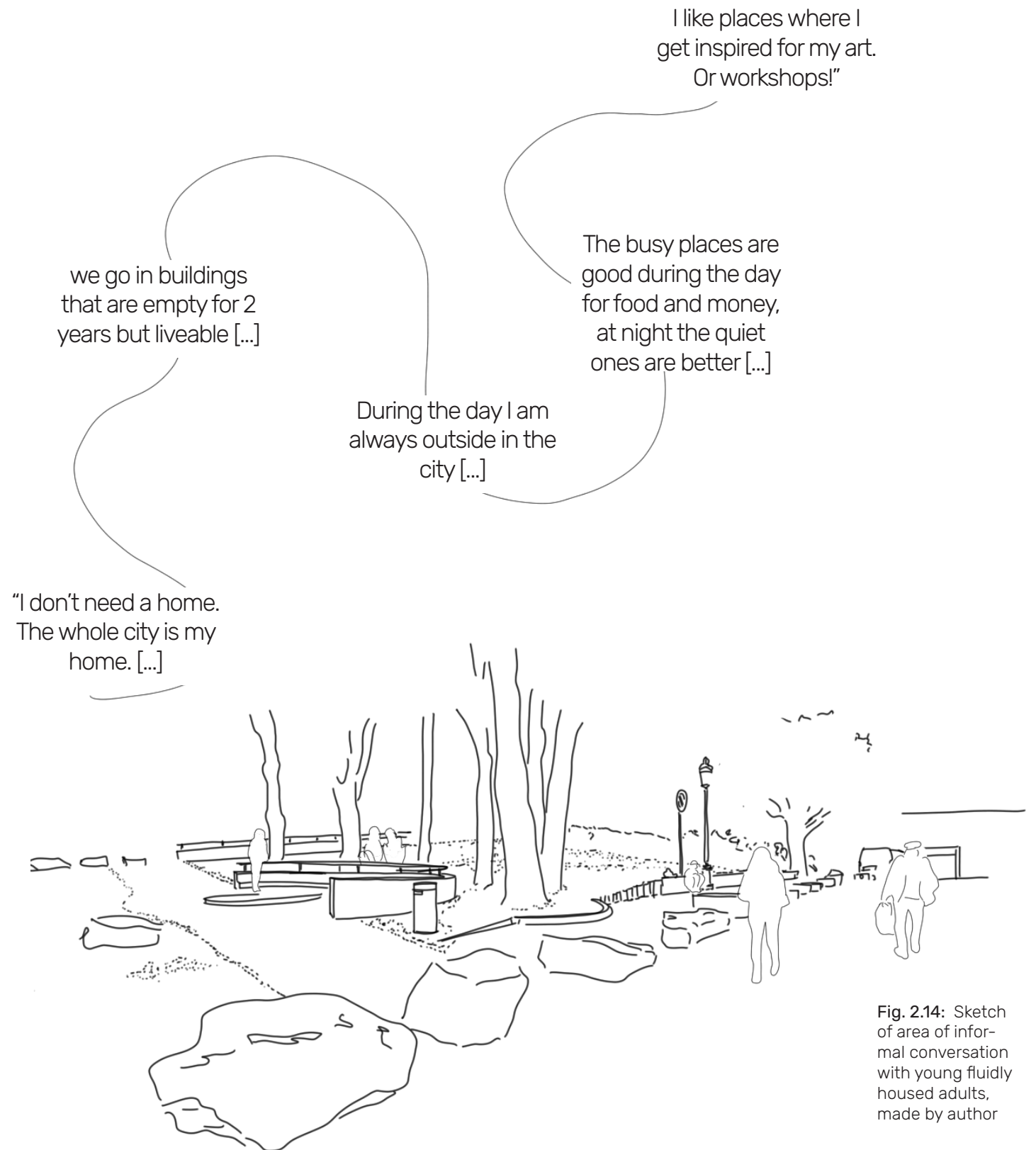


Fig. 2.14: Sketch of area of informal conversation with young fluidly housed adults, made by author

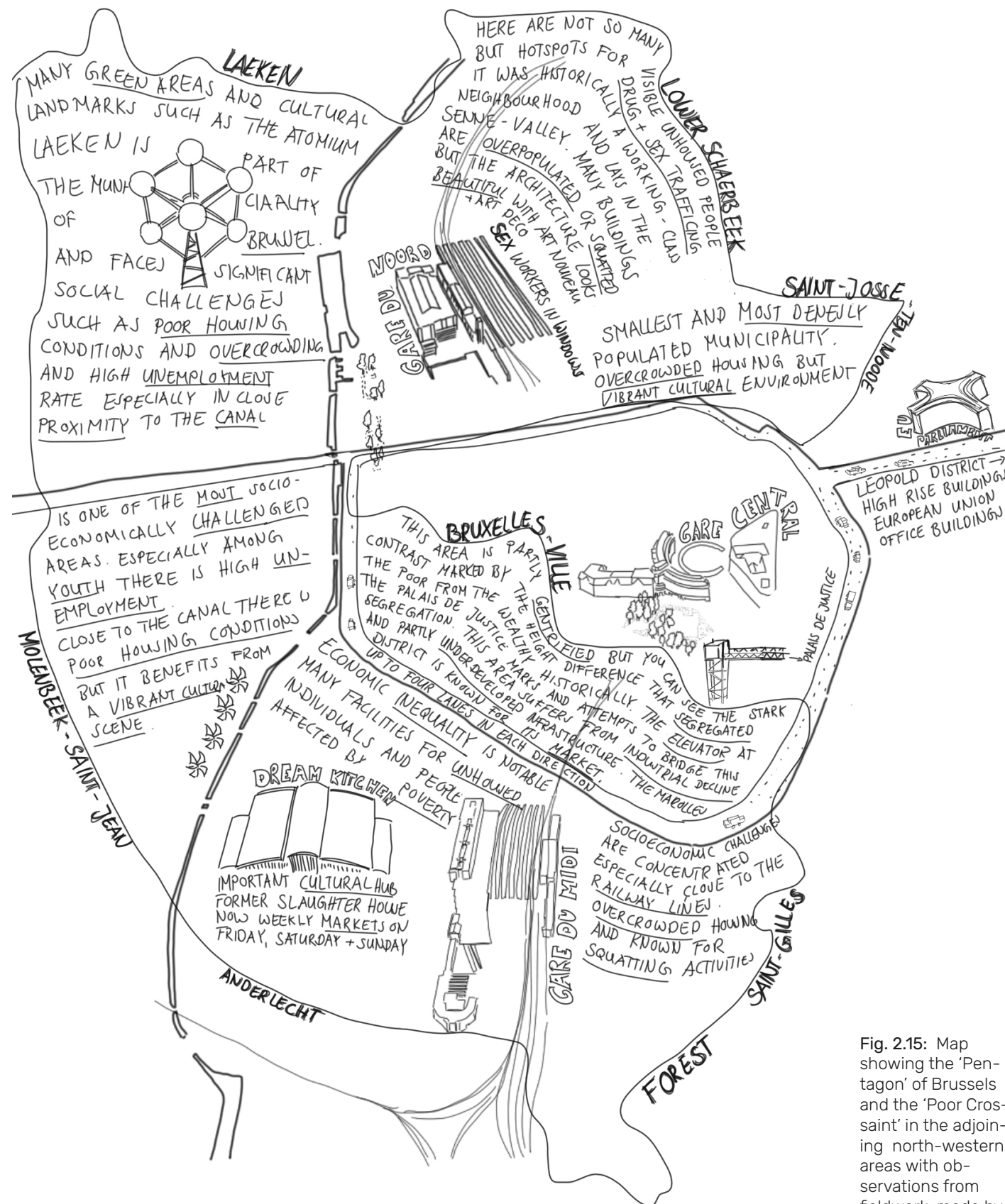


Fig. 2.15: Map showing the 'Pentagon' of Brussels and the 'Poor Crescent' in the adjoining north-western areas with observations from fieldwork, made by author

Brussels' historical socio-spatial segregation remains evident in its urban fabric, particularly in the poverty crescent. This area is highly diverse, yet access to essential resources like personal hygiene, clean drinking water, and affordable nutritious food is hindered by inadequate infrastructure. Additionally, the lack of facilities that promote autonomy—such as secure storage for personal belongings or access to mail—further exacerbates the challenges faced by fluidly housed individuals. Enhancing these infrastructures could greatly improve their quality of life by providing basic safety, dignity, and self-reliance (Brox et al., 2023).



Fig. 2.16: Map showing the distribution of facilities aimed at squatting (stripes) and rough sleepers (dots), made by author

narrowing down the area

important spaces
people living rough

Due to the concentration of support infrastructure in the Pentagon and the Poverty Crescent, many unhoused individuals can be found in close proximity to the city center (Bruss'help, 2022). Common locations include both the North and South Stations, as well as underground spaces like the Metro, particularly after shops close. Additionally, quieter areas at night, such as the Leopold District, also see a high number of people engaging in rough sleeping.

During the day, unhoused individuals are more likely to be found in busy public spaces, as these areas offer better opportunities to receive food and money.

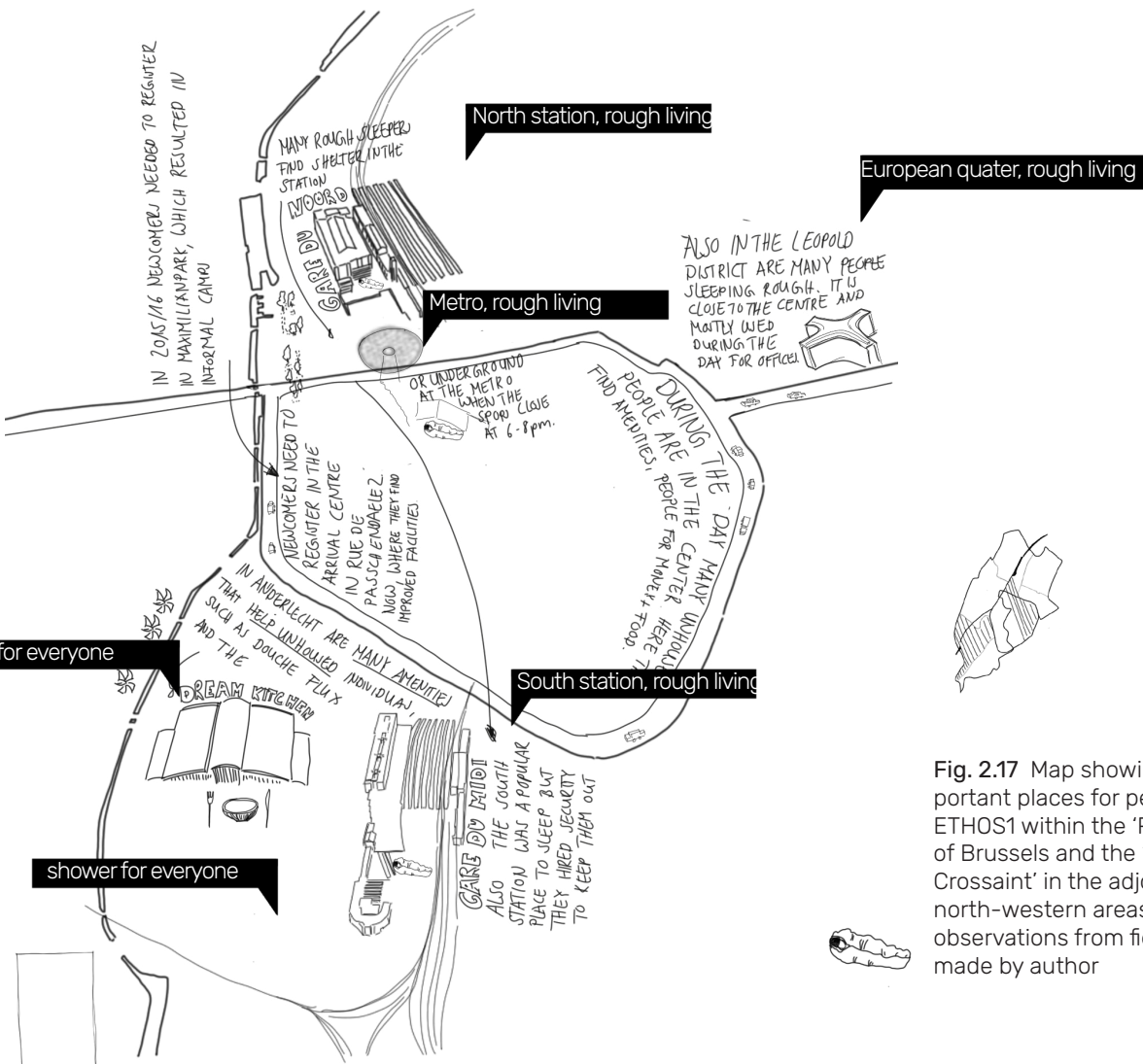


Fig. 2.17 Map showing important places for people in ETHOS1 within the 'Pentagon' of Brussels and the 'Poor Crossaint' in the adjoining north-western areas with observations from fieldwork, made by author

important spaces
people in hidden homelessness

Among young unhoused individuals, many lead transient lives, staying temporarily with family, friends, or in squats (Noppen, 2022; FEANTSA, 2020). Through informal conversations, I learned that many of these young people do not perceive themselves as homeless, as they are often not sleeping rough. As a result, they often do not seek out available support services. Instead, they tend to occupy vacant buildings in relatively good condition, scattered throughout the inner ring around the Pentagon, especially in northern neighborhoods such as Schaerbeek and Saint-Josse-ten-Noode, where squatting is more common.

Similar to those in Ethos 1, these individuals spend their days outdoors not only seeking food and money but, perhaps more importantly, seeking inspiration.

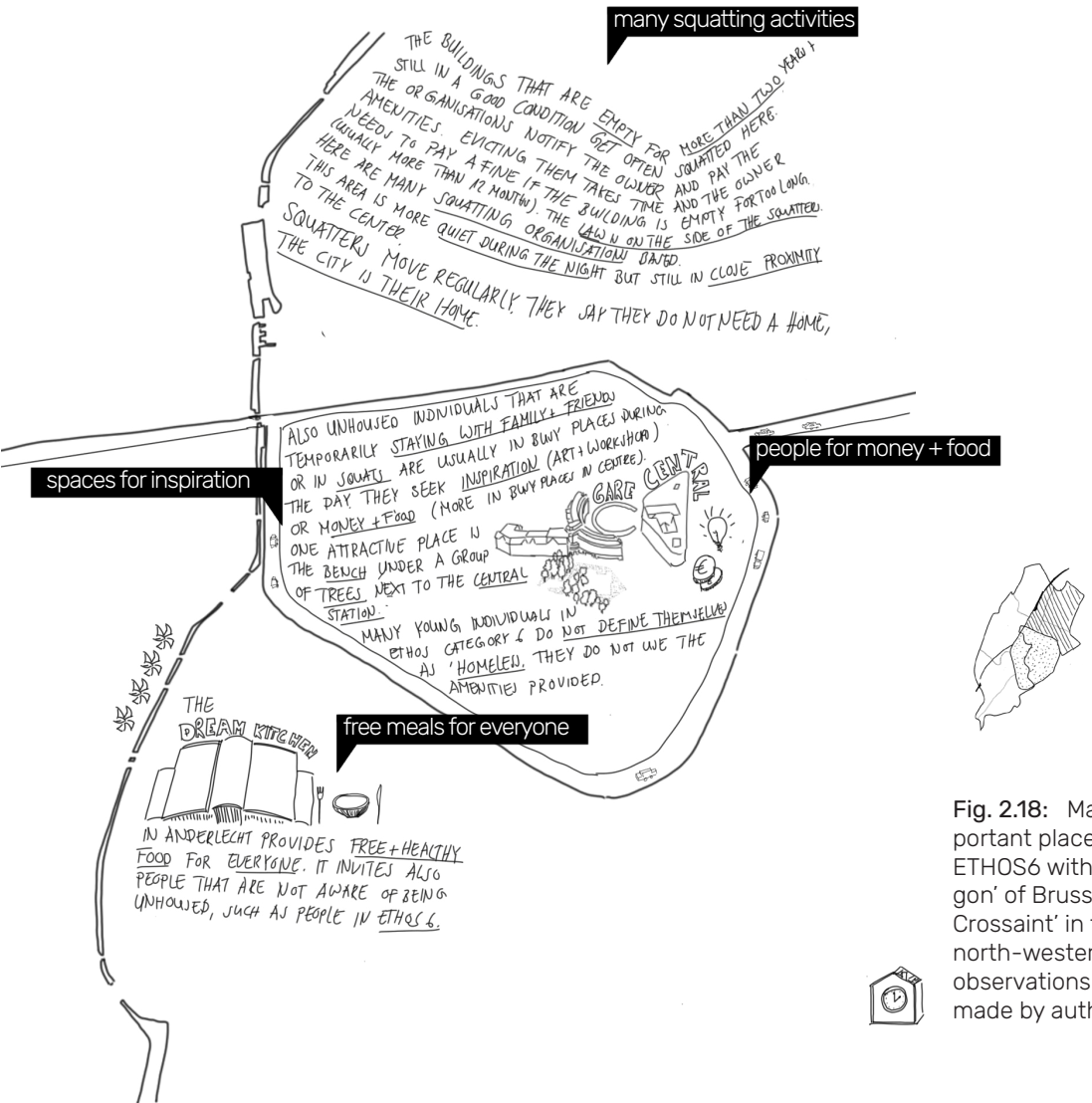


Fig. 2.18: Map showing important places for people in ETHOS6 within the 'Pentagon' of Brussels and the 'Poor Crossaint' in the adjoining north-western areas with observations from fieldwork, made by author



We want to talk to more people, get more insight into needs and challenges—especially the spatial components. “Let’s go to Gare Centrale,” I say. “That’s where I talked to some people last time. But sometimes there’s no one, so you never know when it’s a good time to go.”

The Romanian Woman

Outside the station, a woman is sitting. She doesn’t speak English, French, or Dutch, but Y. uses her phone to translate. She’s been here for two weeks, needs money to go back home. “If you could give me 60€,” she says.

“C. used to come here with leftover sandwiches and hand them out to homeless people,” I say. “But we don’t have sandwiches now.” Y. buys some bananas to give to people who are hungry.

The German-Speaker

Inside, we see an elderly guy sitting in a corner, bags and blankets piled around him. He speaks a bit of English and a bit of German. He’s been living on the streets for eight years. “Are you here often?” we ask, but he doesn’t understand us.

The Young Girl

We walk further, try to talk to some people waiting around. A girl smiles at us, happy to chat. “I’m waiting for my friend, that might take a while,” she says. “I’m not homeless, but I think a place to sleep and things to do—that’s what’s important,” she tells us.

The Stressed Guy

We walk on, approach a guy standing in a crowd staring at the screen—the train is delayed. He tells us he doesn’t think about homelessness. “I had a 10-hour workday with back-to-back meetings. I’m happy to talk but don’t ask me to fill out a questionnaire,” he says, annoyed. “But if I can give you a tip—when I had to do a survey for my thesis, I offered an incentive, people could win an iPad. You should consider that, give people a reason to talk to you.” We walk on. “It would be weird to do a survey about the needs of people who have little and then spend money to offer privileged people an incentive to talk to us,” I say.

We head to Gare du Midi. “A. told me the Red Cross distributes free food for homeless people here every Friday at 20:30,” I say. “Let’s see if we can find them. Maybe we can talk to them or observe some patterns in space.” Outside the station, a lot of police.

The Church People

Near the entrance, we see people in purple vests carrying cans of warm drinks. They’re here to distribute food and drinks to homeless people. “It’s not for everyone, only for people without a house,” they say. They come here every Friday around 19:00, but they’re not from the Red Cross. They don’t know where they might be. They hand us a card with information about their church.



Fig. 2.19: Sketch of area of informal conversation with young fluidly housed adults, made by author

J. and I are late to the free concert in a bar in Schaerbeek. No tables left. Just as I step in, a couple squeezes past me on their way out. A guy, younger than me, grabs their spot. I get a drink, then ask if we can join him. He shrugs. Fine by me.

After a while, I start talking. Ask if he's from around here. He says he lives close but grew up in Malaga, Spain. Doesn't like the Brussels weather. Different mentality too. Back home, people don't have much, but they enjoy life, make do with what they have. Here, everyone's always in a rush, working just to afford a flat. But he stays. For a girl.

He works in a food distribution center. Night shift. Midnight to eight, sometimes nine. In summer, even ten. Tough job, but he likes his colleagues. Pays enough. "We don't use names," he says, "we just say 'hi, hayvan.'" Turkish word for animal. Rough conditions. Only men work there. Only guys from the south can handle it. "You? From Germany? Not made for this kind of work."

Last week, hands froze stiff from the cold in the warehouse. But he's got a plan. "I'll be the boss someday. Step by step. Like my boss did. If you don't have a plan, you don't last long here."

He was in university once. Studied engineering. Hated it. Didn't want to be stuck at a desk all day. Dropped out. Parents weren't happy, but he didn't care.

I ask how he lives. Says he's got an apartment nearby with his wife. I see no ring. He had the place already, she just kept coming over. Left a toothbrush. Then a sweater. Then one day, she just lived there. "Here, you work and work, then pay rent and have nothing left."

He stays for her. And his plan.

"If it doesn't work out," he says, "I go back to the south."

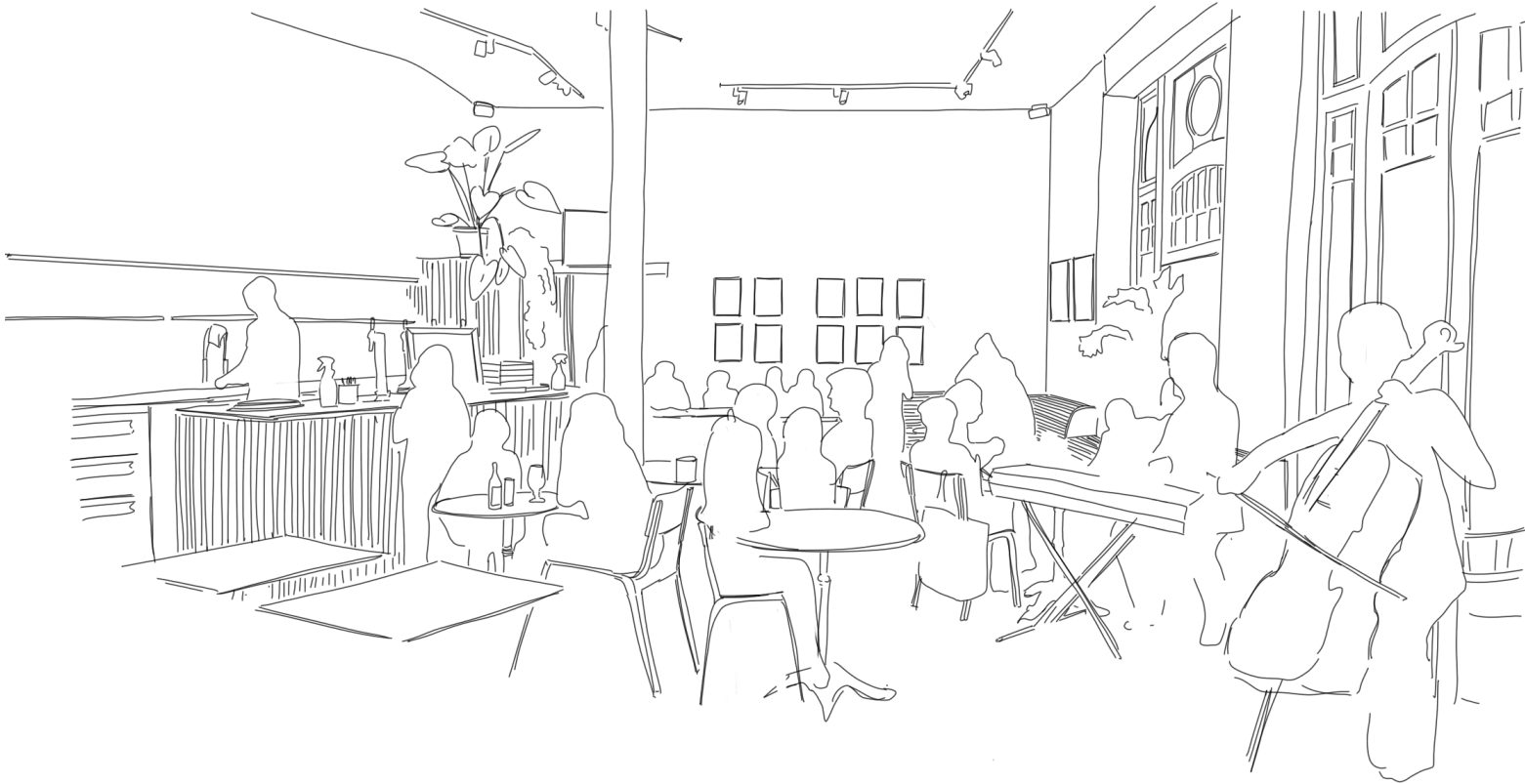


Fig. 2.20: Sketch of area of informal conversation with young fluidly housed adults, made by author

J. and I left the Airbnb at 10. You can't stay longer or leave your luggage, so we search for something to eat on the way to the train station. We didn't bring much, so it's fine. The lockers at Gare du Nord are expensive—you have to book them for the whole day, 6.50€ for a tiny one, 13.50€ for the largest and I don't trust that they are safe.

So we take our bags to the café and enter a minute after opening. "Oh no, now we're the ones being super on time, how annoying." Working in bars before, we were always a bit annoyed by these people. We step in, say hi, and see someone already sitting inside. At least we're not the first, I think.

Three young women work at the bar, a bit younger than me, I guess. They smile and tell us to sit wherever we want. We get a nice table. The place fills up quickly. We order food and drinks and watch the people in the café. It's a nice spot, and everyone is really friendly.

Later, I ask the waitresses if I can ask them some questions. "I am doing some research on the living situations of young people in Brussels," I say, avoiding the stigmatized word "homeless." "I was wondering if I can ask you some questions when you have a moment." Two of them agree immediately. I start with one.

She lives in a flat nearby in Schaerbeek. She got lucky—her boyfriend lived there, so she moved in too. At first, there were four people, all registered. "Last week, one of them had a family emergency, so his brother moved in." Now five are registered because without an official address, you don't get financial aid. "It's a problem when landlords don't register properties for rental. Then you can't register and don't receive money." Just like in the Netherlands, I think.

Many of her friends haven't found an official place. Many squat buildings, which is common in this area. Others have a 'convention d'occupation précaire', which is a temporary contract where they live in poorly maintained buildings for cheap rent. When the owner sells, they have one month to move out or end up on the streets.

I ask about legal issues, like voting for those without an address or temporary contracts. She says, "Good question. I don't know."



Fig. 2.21: Sketch of area of informal conversation with young fluidly housed adults, made by author

We meet I. at a café. It's getting late. The place was crowded, so they couldn't leave work as planned. They seem okay, but exhausted. "It's draining in the house right now," they say, rubbing their temples.

"We have an NGO and a website. The founder is an idealist—from a rich family, owns crazy huge properties. But they're an anarchist, wants to help. I envy them, their energy."

When I. moved in, the residents were constantly shifting. "It's hard. There's always a power imbalance. It's a solidarity housing project, so I don't pay much because I'm a student. Someone with a job pays more. The idea is that the five people with individual rooms also contribute—some do finances, for example."

The house operates on shared values. "It's supposed to be a place to rest, take a breath." No alcohol or drugs, unless it's a planned party—to avoid conflict. It's a typical Brussels house: multiple floors, a small garden in the back, a big space next to it. "In the beginning, 20 to 30 people lived there at times, changing regularly. Then the NGO was founded, and the goal was clear—housing for people without papers, for LGBTQ+ youth in trouble with their families. The idea was temporary stays, six months max, until they got their papers." But some have been there two, three years. Still waiting. "They're tired. They want agency, a job, a life. Their own room."

Decision-making is complicated. Weekly meetings happen, mostly in French or English. Not everyone participates. "Usually, those who pay rent get their own rooms. The ones who don't, sign that they're okay with sharing. But sometimes, they don't want to anymore. They want their own space. And I get it. I wouldn't want someone sleeping in my room either—it's my safe space, I can close the door. Then I catch myself thinking, 'but I pay.' But that's not what this is supposed to be about. It's hard." Everyone in the house shares the same values—activists, anarchists, queer-friendly, rejecting mainstream society. But not everyone comes from a culture that accepts queerness. That brings tension, too.

"Belgium is a social country—universities are cheap, transport, healthcare. Compared to the Netherlands, it's more accessible. But then you drive from the Netherlands into Belgium, and suddenly, the roads are in worse shape. Feels like a different world." The house is always changing. The youngest resident was 18. The oldest, maybe 54. But mostly, they're between 22 and 35. "People can register their address here to find work," I. says. "I think up to 15 people are officially registered, but not all of them actually live in the house." That creates another challenge. Once residents get their papers, they have to find a permanent address. "And that's not easy either," they add, shaking their head. "Even with papers, finding stable housing is a whole other struggle."

They're planning to move out but hasn't found a place yet. "I'll probably be shocked by the rent prices," they say, exhaling. "But I've invested so much energy into this place... I need to move on now."

26.02.2025
Sint-Josse

solidarity housing

When you enter, the kitchen is immediately to the right—it's big and open, connected to a cozy living room. Straight ahead, there's a spacious common area, almost as big as this café, with couches and a fireplace where people gather to hang out. To the right of this space, a small garden provides a bit of outdoor relief.

On the left, a staircase leads up. Halfway up, there's a small room that someone rents. On the first floor, there are three rooms, along with a toilet and a bathroom—one of the rooms is paid for. The second floor has two larger rooms, another bathroom, and a toilet—both rooms are paid for. On the third floor, there are two more rooms, a toilet, and a bath—one of these is also rented.

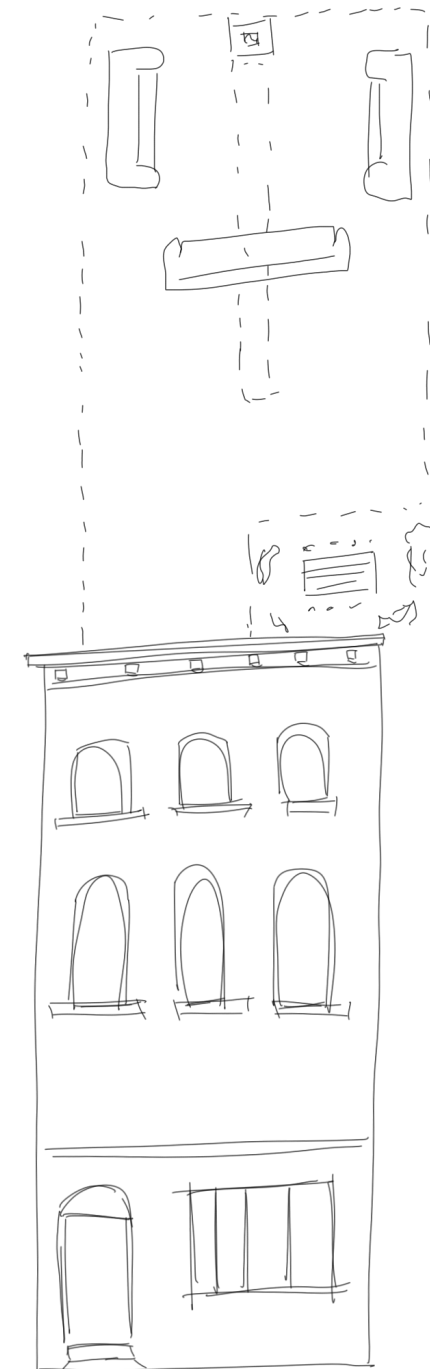


Fig. 2.22: Sketch of area of informal conversation with young fluidly housed adults, made by author

I say thank you, and she tells me I should talk to her colleague. “She lives in an interesting situation, so I think it could help you.” I ask if it’s okay, and she says, “Yes, of course! I’m happy to talk to you. I’m not on a break, but maybe we can sit for a moment.”

What this interesting situation looks like, I ask. She tells me she lives in a building close by. It once was a squat. When the owner wanted to sell it four years ago, they founded their own organization and bought it themselves. “We have seven rooms in there. Five are individual rooms for one person, and everyone pays rent. The other two are for people without papers or queer young people who have problems with their families. One room is for women and one for men, each with three beds. The five of us that pay rent also do the shopping for everyone.”

It is a nice concept, but it’s not all perfect, she says. There are conflicts and people with serious trauma. Do they get help from the organization to deal with the trauma, I ask. “I am the NGO,” she says. “We are living there and provide a network and try to help where we can. We don’t have the capacity to do everything for them, but we know people who can help, and we connect them.”

But sometimes it is tough. She has lived there for one and a half years now but feels like she needs to move out because she cannot deal with the ever-changing situations anymore. “Right now, we have a person who is an alcoholic. We tried talking to him, but nothing works. Now even people from the NGO who are not living there try to mediate. But it’s hard. Especially when you feel like you cannot help, cannot make living together work, and then you feel responsible because you know if you kick him out, you are sending him to live on the streets.”

She tells me she could talk about the house for hours. “I am back in Brussels on Tuesday,” I say. “Do you maybe have time to meet again?”

“Yes, of course. I’ll give you my number. If you text me now, I can tell you when I’m free.”



Fig. 2.23: Sketch of area of informal conversation with young fluidly housed adults, made by author

Despite the diverse backgrounds of the eight individuals and, in some cases, traumatic pasts and daily experiences, one striking commonality emerged: each of them told me, „I’m not homeless, but...”—highlighting the disconnect between formal definitions and their lived realities.

own perception of
young fluidly housed adults



Fig. 2.24:
showing fictive
faces of existing
young people
experiencing
homelessness,
made by author

conclusions of lived realities

When I asked the young adults how they live, they shared a wide range of stories that made me realize just how multifaceted the lived experiences of fluidly housed individuals are. These conversations ultimately led me to rethink existing definitions and form a new one—one that better reflects the fluctuating nature of their living conditions without reinforcing the stigma often associated with the term „homelessness.“

Among the people I spoke with were undocumented youth, students, individuals not in education and others working irregular jobs. Their daily lives were vastly different, yet all navigated unstable housing situations.

Some told me that the idea of a home was not something they aspired to. One person said, „For me, a home is not important. For you, maybe. But for me, the whole city is my home.“

Others had to leave home in the past and experienced stretches of rough sleeping, staying with friends or family, or participating in solidarity housing projects, where they did not need to pay rent or for food but had to share their room with others and follow certain rules.

Some had found temporary places that offered a sense of safety, but these were often insecure—such as squatted buildings or precarious rental agreements where the contract could be terminated at any moment. Others lived in shared apartments but no longer felt at home due to social tensions, and wanted to leave, yet had no affordable alternatives in sight.

variety of living situations of young fluidly housed adults

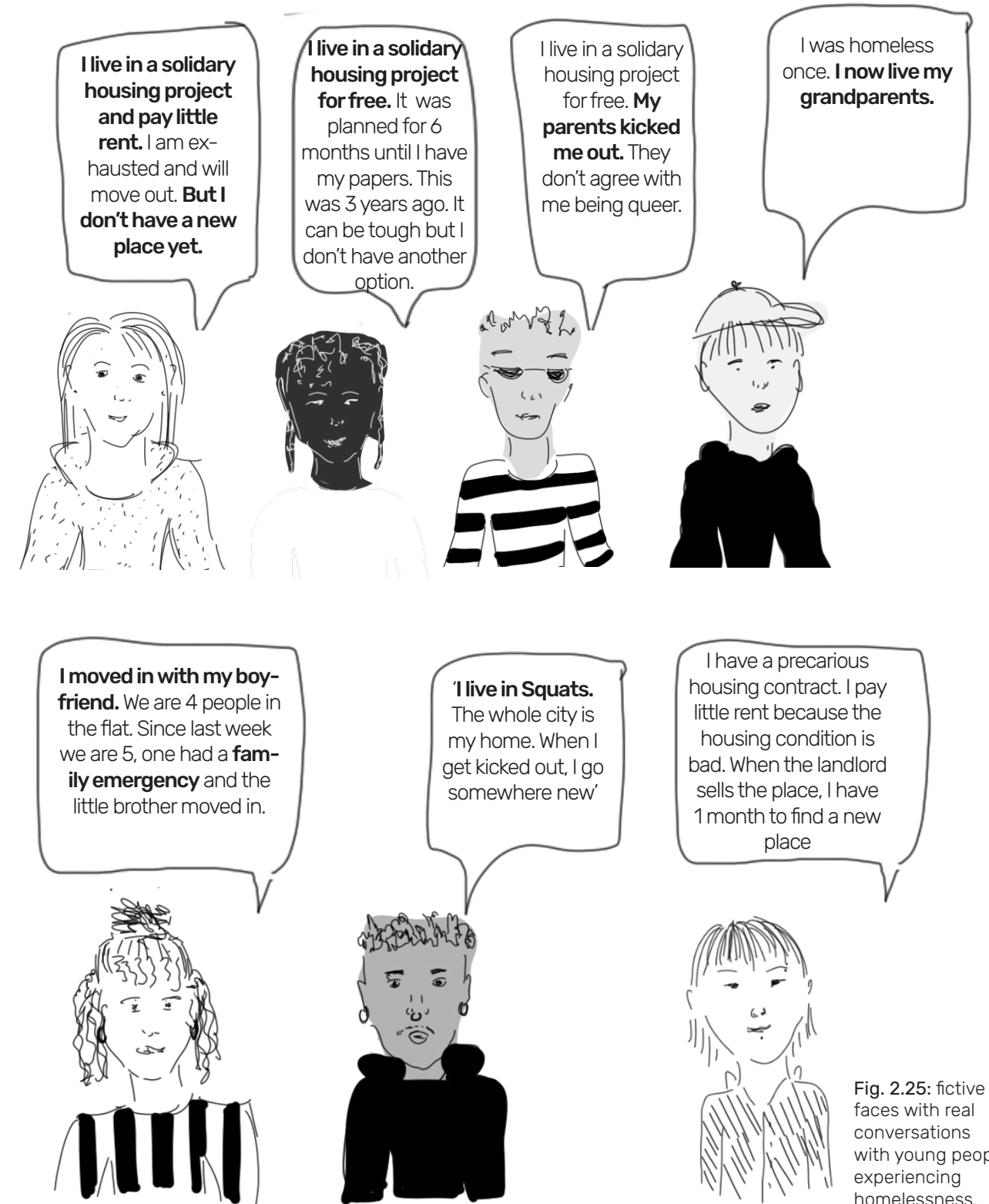


Fig. 2.25: fictive faces with real conversations with young people experiencing homelessness, made by author

After conducting fieldwork, including both informal conversations and structured interviews, I realized that the term ‘homeless’ does not accurately reflect how young unhoused individuals perceive their own living situations.

The reality is far more complex. Many homeless youth move between these various housing situations, therefore they face different challenges in their daily lives over time (homeless hub, n.d.). To better address their needs, I will differentiate between three forms of youth homelessness:

- ETHOS1
- ETHOS6
- Living rough
 - Sheltered with family/friends
 - Staying in squats

A little frustrated with the conversations I have had over the past few weeks—where everyone seems to have their own perception of who homeless people are, what they do, where they stay, and what they need—I have turned to my mentors.

“How do I make it clear who I am actually talking about?” I ask. “And how can I make sure I am not just projecting my own biases onto them—especially when some of them remind me of people I have known before?”

I reflect on the conversations and decide at some point to come up with a new definition, that reflects my observations: for young unhoused adults, home is not something fixed, instead the whole city is their home, with **changing shelters and places to sleep and the urban fabric being their living-room, where they seek to find inspiration and meet most of their needs.**

Therefore they experience fluctuating conditions of homelessness - sometimes being sheltered in occupied buildings, sometimes staying with friends, and at times enduring periods of rough living. A term that might be less stigmatised could be fluidly housed.

live rough

ETHOS 1

live and sleep outdoors as a consequence of having no proper home (ETHOS1).

(Oxford Languages, 2024)

sheltered with family/friends

ETHOS 6

having a place to sleep, often in conditions of overcrowding and poverty

fluidly housed

ETHOS 1 - 6

individual experiencing fluctuating conditions of homelessness - sometimes being sheltered in occupied buildings, sometimes staying with friends, and at times enduring periods of rough living (own definition)
Also: Being at home in changing accommodations within the same city.

spaces of care

"On the most general level, we suggest that caring be viewed as a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web."



patterns of care and resistance in the poverty crescent

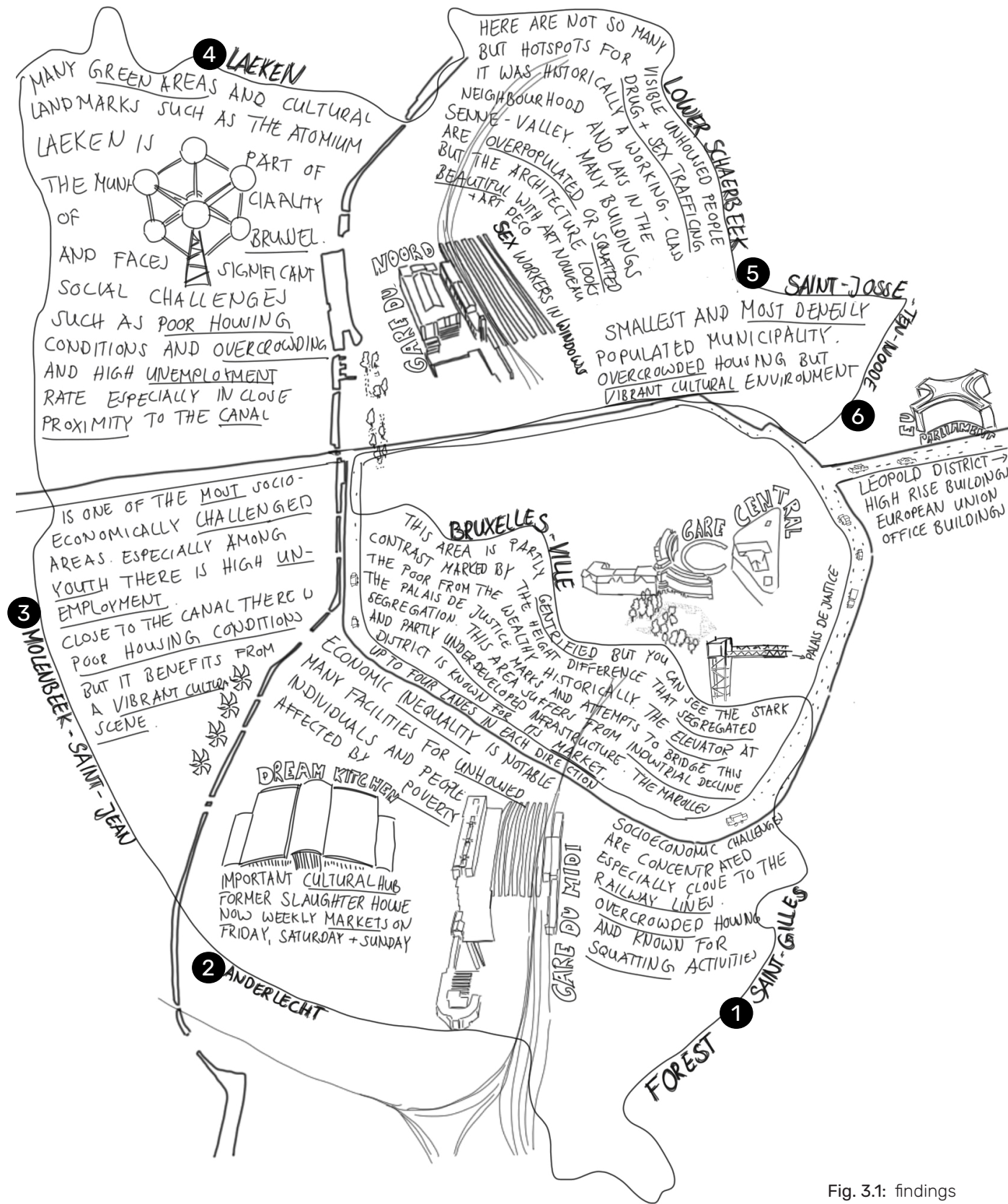


Fig. 3.1: findings in Poverty crescent, made by author



1 Saint-Gilles

Squatted building in good condition



2 Anderlecht

Dream Kitchen: Serving free, nutritious meals to nourish everyone



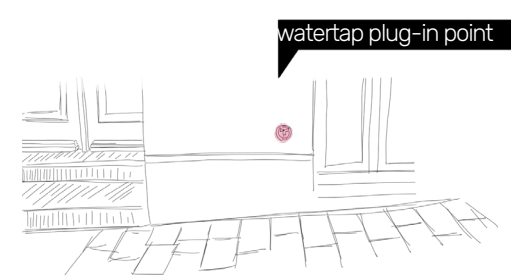
3 Molenbeek

Food placed on windowsills, freely available for everyone



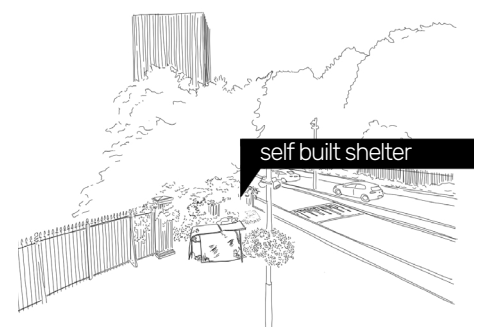
4 Brussels-City

Roofless individuals finding shelter from rain under eaves



5 Schaerbeek

existing watertaps or plug-in points in building fascades



6 Saint-Josse-ten-Noode

A small, self-built shelter located near a park and a road

patterns of care and resistance in schaerbeek west

Focusing on Schaerbeek West, I delved deeper into exploring the urban fabric and how it is activated by different individuals. My aim was to understand the spatial potentials that enable such activation and to identify patterns that could inform future interventions.

As a result, I clustered my observations into several categories that reveal how small-scale opportunities—or pockets—emerge within the streetscape. These ranged from interconnected infrastructural networks to building facades and setbacks that enabled the potential to be activated by moveable elements.

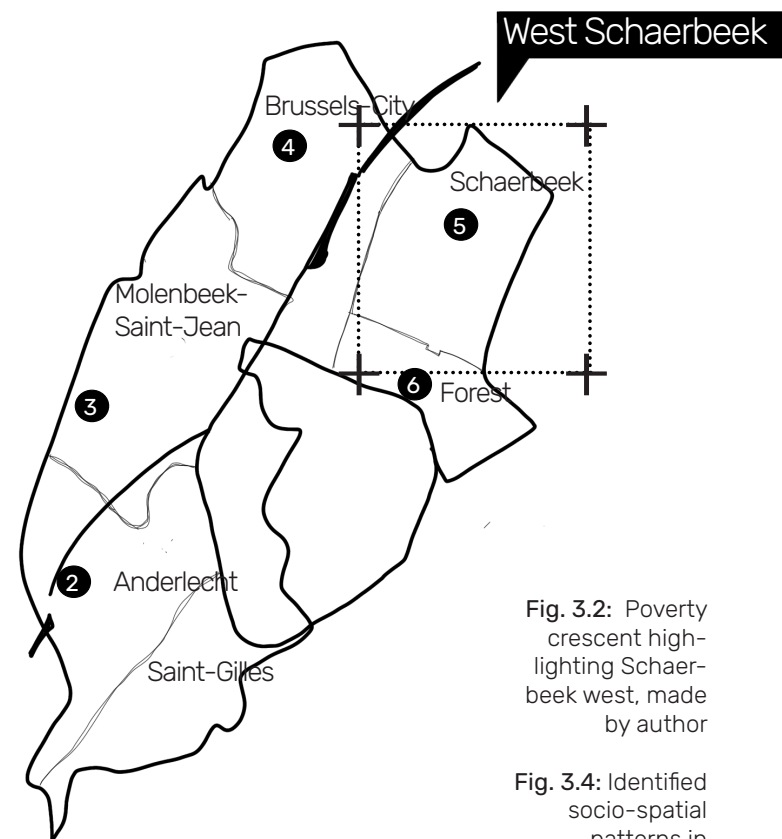
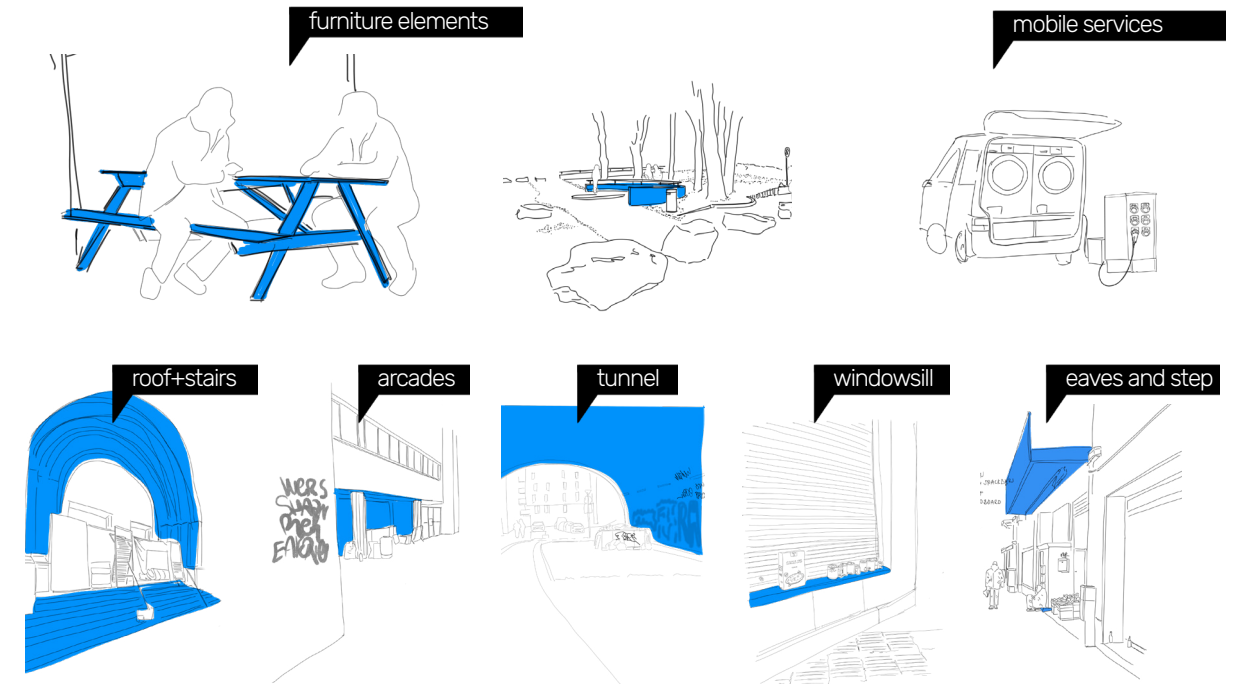


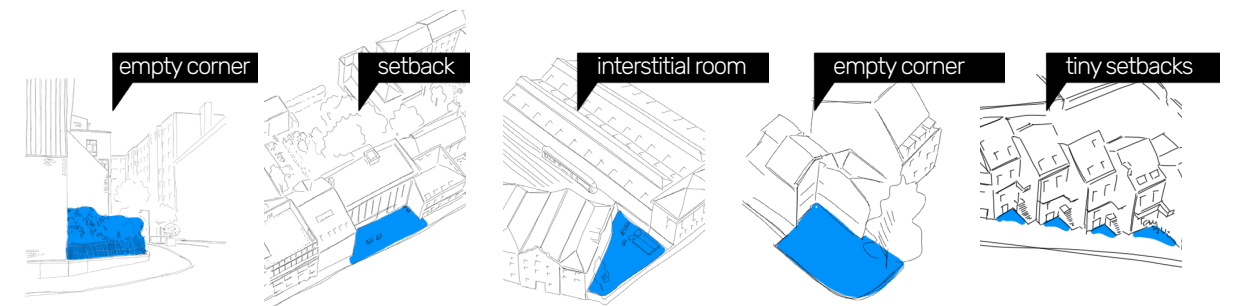
Fig. 3.2: Poverty crescent highlighting Schaerbeek west, made by author

Fig. 3.4: Identified socio-spatial patterns in Schaerbeek West, made by author

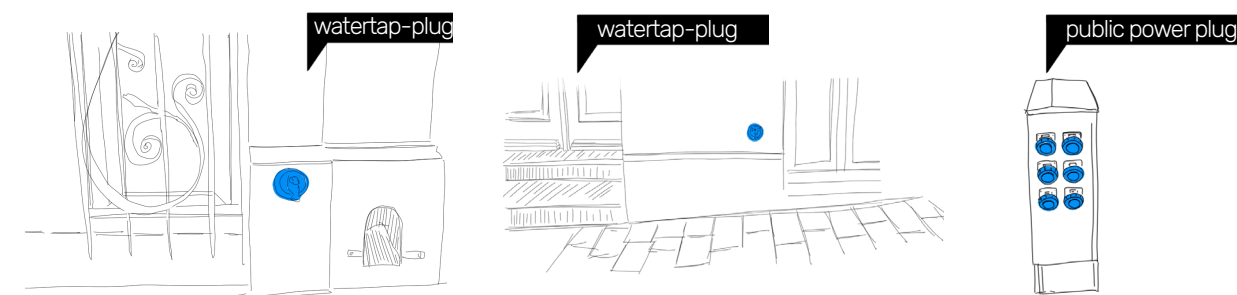
1 Moveable Elements



2 Pockets



3 Plug-In Network



plug-in elements in schaerbeek west

14.-16.02.2025
Schaerbeek

In Schaerbeek, especially in the old buildings, there are many foot scrapers embedded into the wall or ground near entrances, made of metal. Next to them are often water taps, some of which still work. Some might be turned off because it is winter. When there are no taps, sometimes the fittings for screwing in water taps can still be found on the exterior façade.

Take-Aways

- Network that allows adaptation can respond to changing needs over time
- Plug-In Water tap when needed
- Remove or adapt funtion when not needed anymore

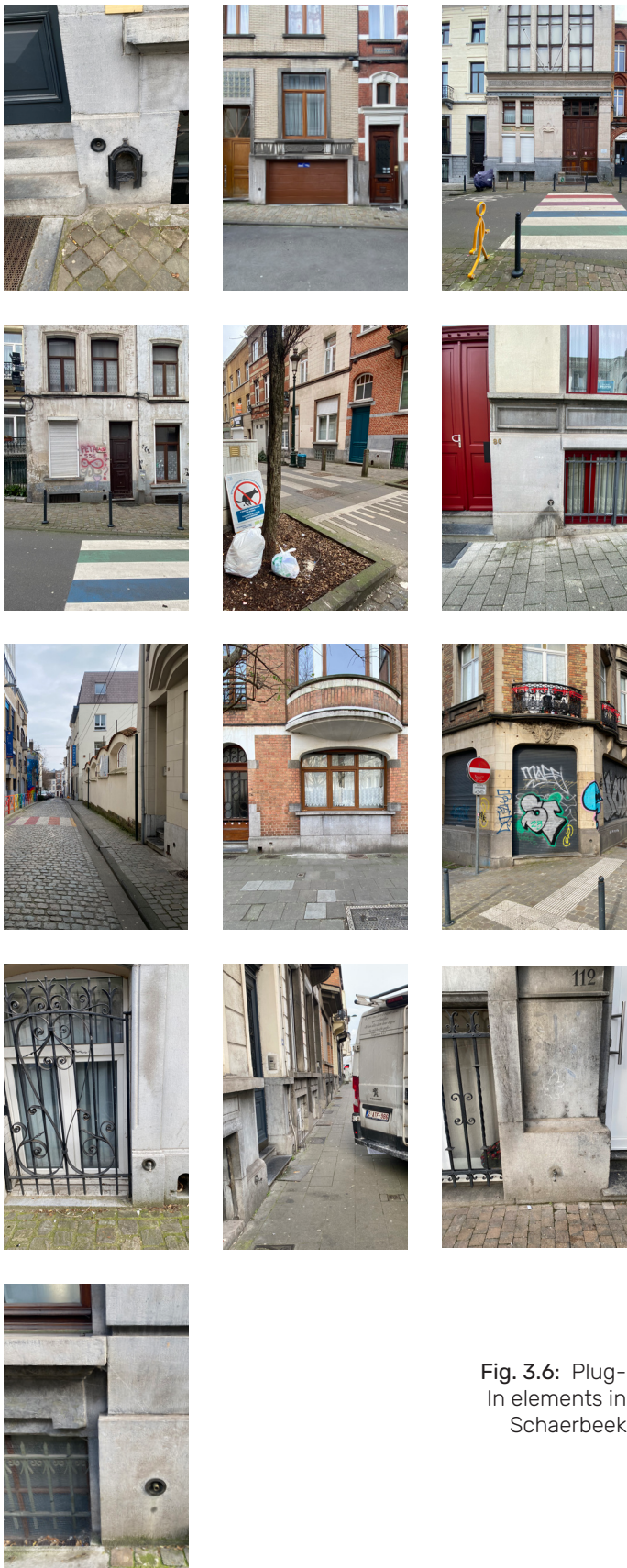
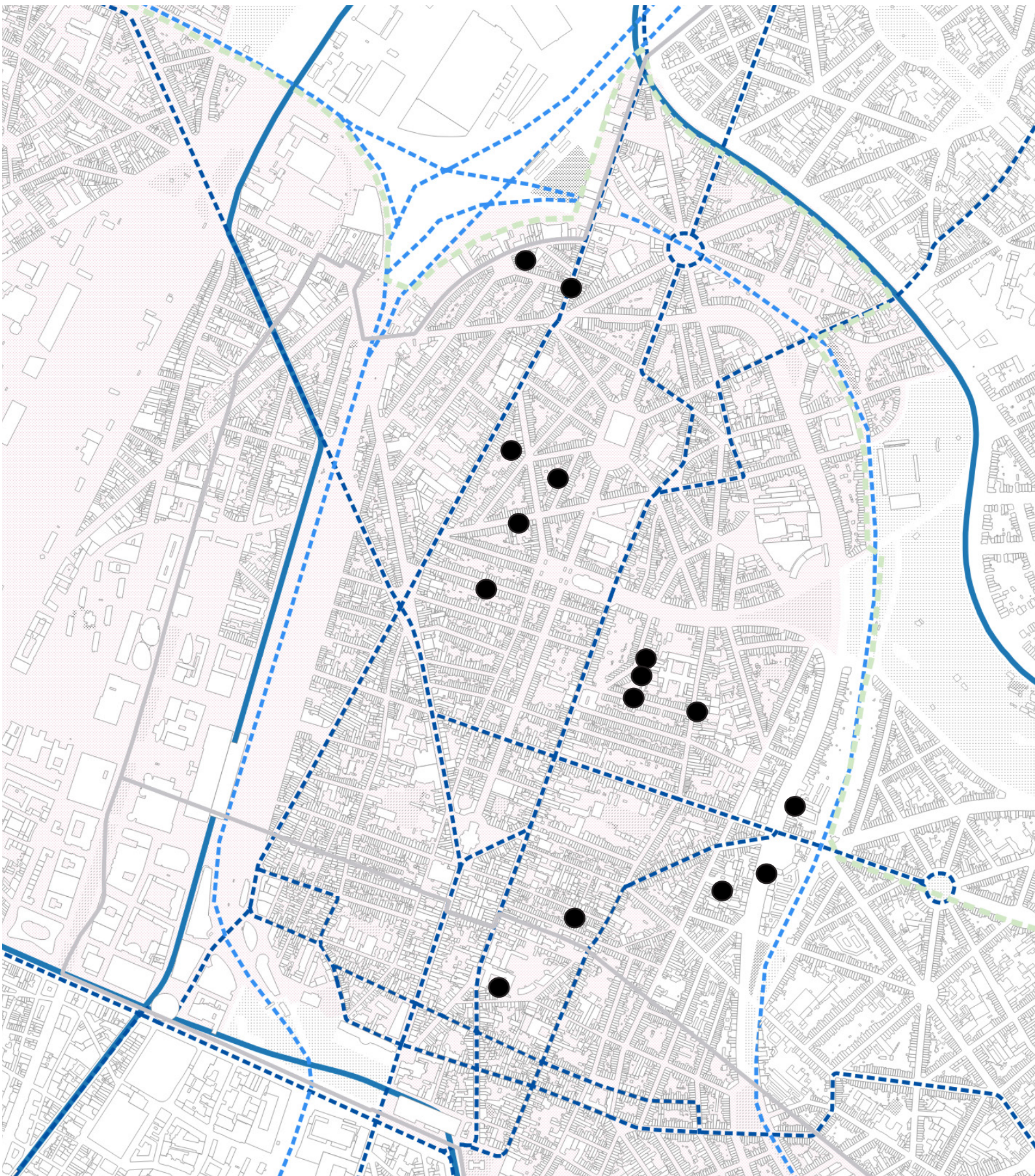
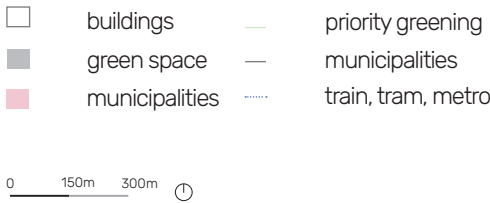


Fig. 3.6: Plug-In elements in Schaerbeek

water-access points



We step out of the station. “You know this area so well already,” Y. says. “I like how it changes how you see a place when you come here often,” I reply. “At first, I wanted to focus more on the southern part of the crescent. There was so much there that I recognized from my bachelor’s studies. I thought this area was boring. But the more I come, the more I notice. Now, I think it’s actually really interesting.” We walk towards the square to the right of the church, it’s 13:45. A van with washing machines in the back is parked there—a mobile washing service. An old man sits on a bench. Another one on a different bench. We take the third.

A group of guys, all different ages, gathers near the van. The website says: If you want to wash your clothes, drink a coffee, or get a haircut, come by. In front of us, another group of men, drinking beer, watching us. Y. sketches on her iPad. The group’s mood shifts—something about us bothers them. A little girl, sitting with two women on the other side of the square, runs up to the group, says something in Flemish, then skips away, laughing, climbing the self-built benches in the middle of the square.

Bread crumbs are scattered across the ground. Pigeons swarm in. The van is plugged into the energy supply, a modular setup. One of the guys starts rolling up cables, careful, methodical. The sun is out. More people sit in the square. Trams stop. Passengers step off, cross the square, disappear down different streets.

In the middle, there’s a board with posters. “They have a solidarity restaurant here too,” I say. The guy with the cables walks up to one of the beer drinkers. “Hi, chef,” he says, handing him a bag of wahed clothes.

I look up. A few men are staring at me. “Let’s talk to the women with the kids,” Y says.

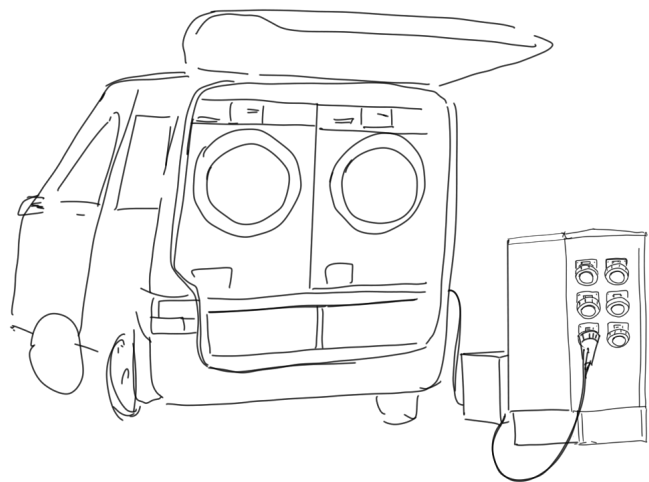


Fig. 3.7: Plug-In elements in Schaerbeek

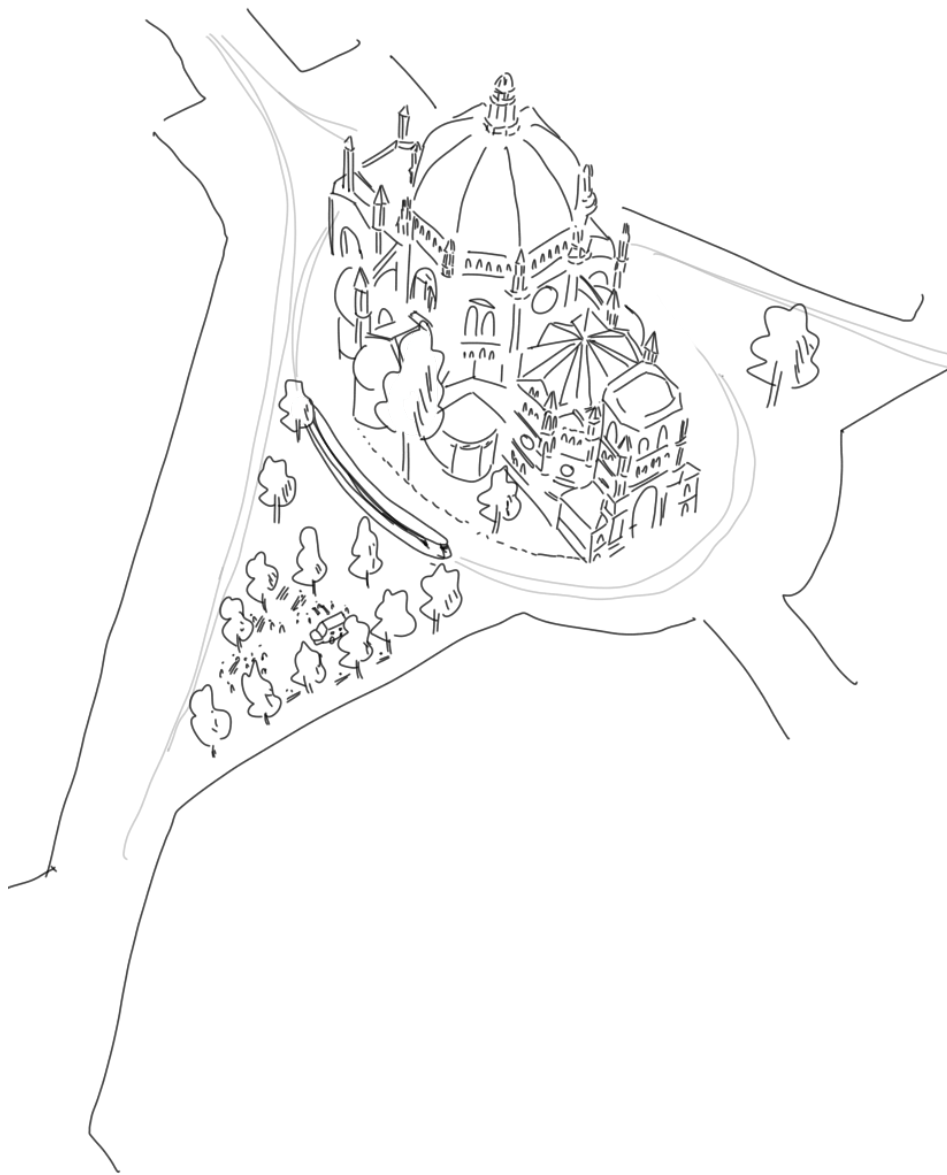


Fig. 3.6: Sketch of area of informal conversation with young fluidly housed adults, made by author

Gradient from Introvert to Extroverted Space

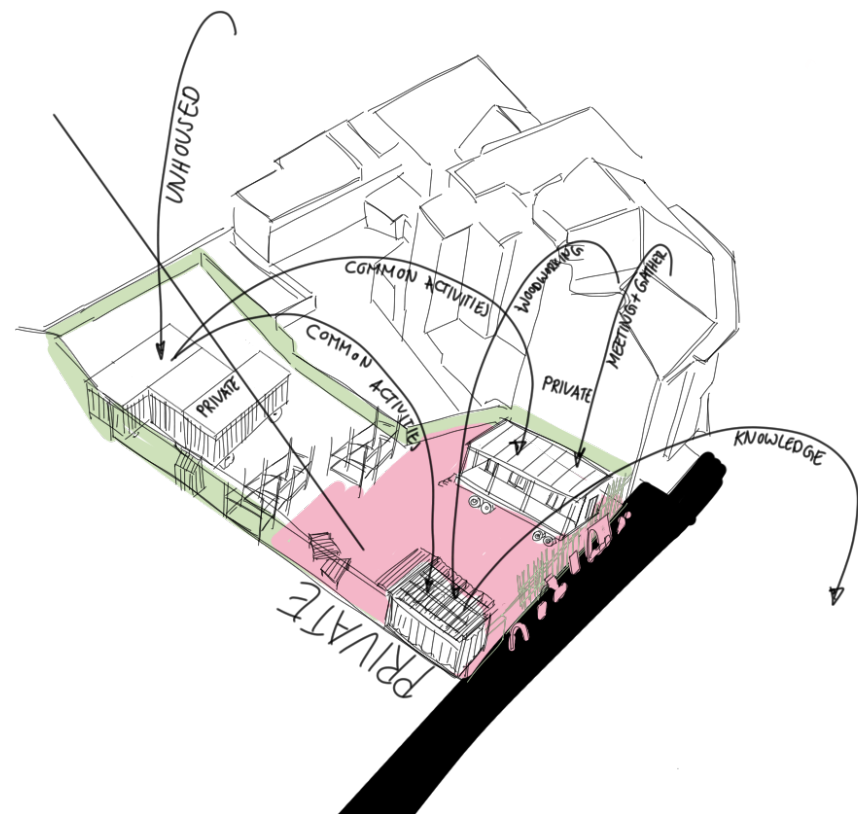
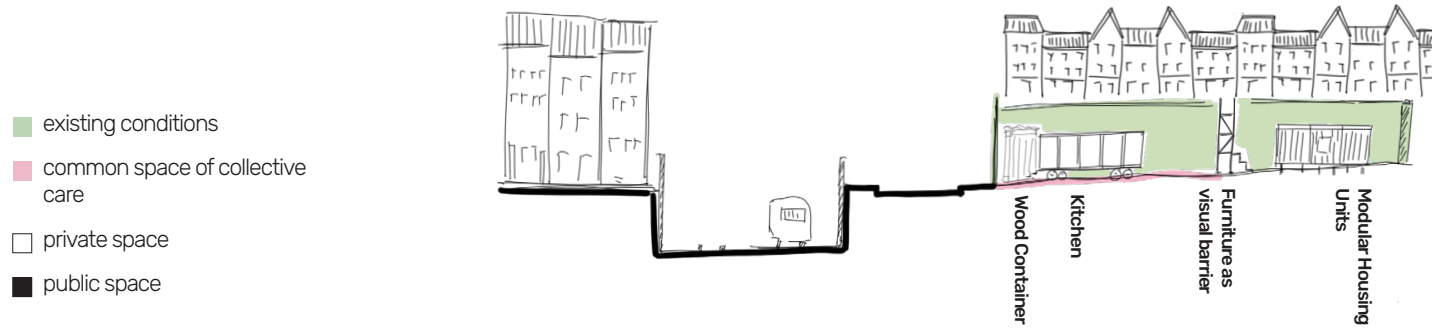


Fig. 3.8: Isometric
drawing of site

Fig. 3.9: Section
of site

Fig. 3.10:
Location of site



<https://download.geofabrik.de/europe/belgium.html>
<https://gis.urban.brussels/geoserver/ows?REQUEST=GetCapabilities&SERVICE=WFS>
<https://www.saamo.be>

0 200 400m



Solidary Mobile Housing pilot project site

14.02.2025
Koekelberg

Program

Modular Transitional Housing

mobile and modular housing units.
on underutilized urban spaces,
"Waiting Spaces." https://www.adesmet.be/research/solidary-mobile-housing/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Workshop Space

The project includes a wood contain-
er designated for collective making,
involving homeless individuals, youth
who have dropped out of school,
and local residents.

Meeting Space

Additionally, it features a collective
room that is accessible for use by the
neighborhood, promoting commu-
nity engagement and social integra-
tion.

Take-Aways

- Activate 'Waitingspaces'
- Gradient of Privacy creates possi-
bility to exclude people
- Collectively Used Interstitial Space
- Use Barriers for Interaction/Close-
ness
- Room for Interaction (Kitchen,
Woodcontainer, Gardening,...)
- Modular Design (Demountable,
Transportable, BIM)
- Network of small spaces empowers
to move to other locations

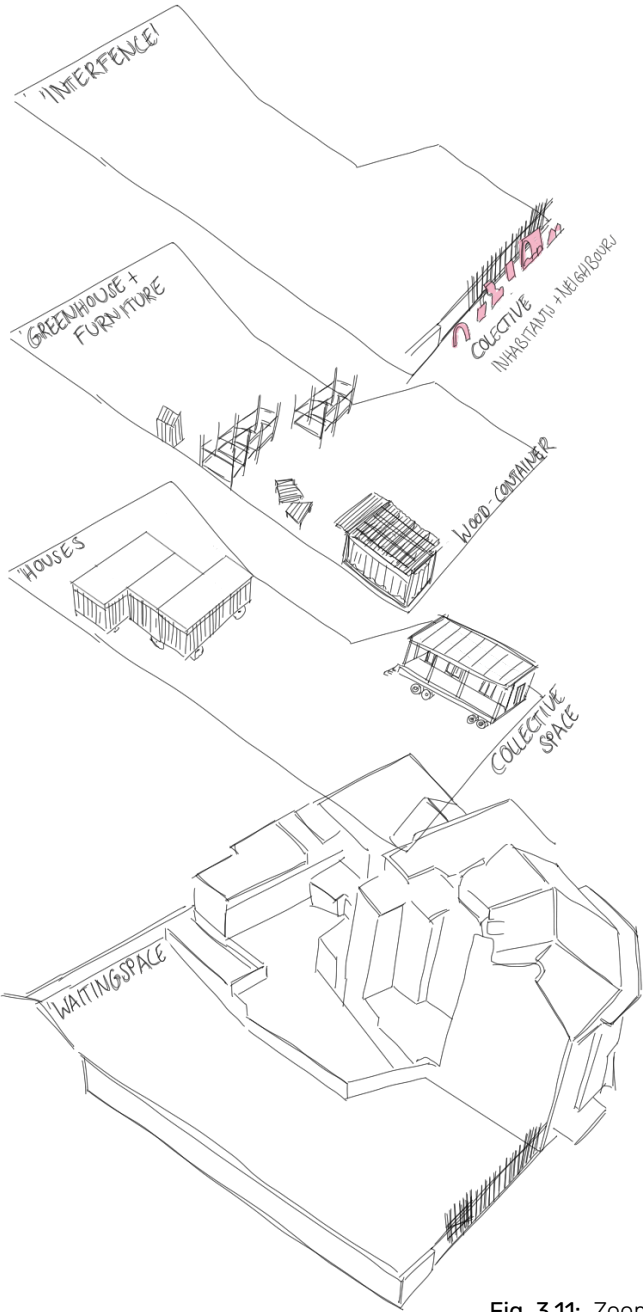
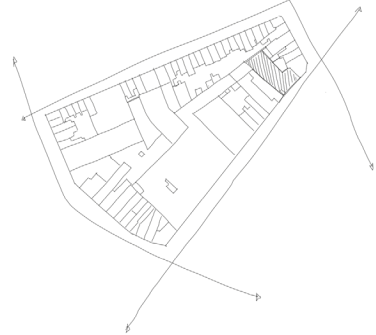


Fig. 3.11: Zoom in
Site plan

Fig. 3.12: Site
program

Fig. 3.13: Pho-
tograph of 'in-
ter-fence' in front
of SMH project
site in Koekelberg,
taken by author



Dream Kitchen Community Kitchen + Social Restaurant

18.02.2025
Abattoir de Anderlecht

Commercial use 3 days a week,
Non-comemrcial use other 4 days

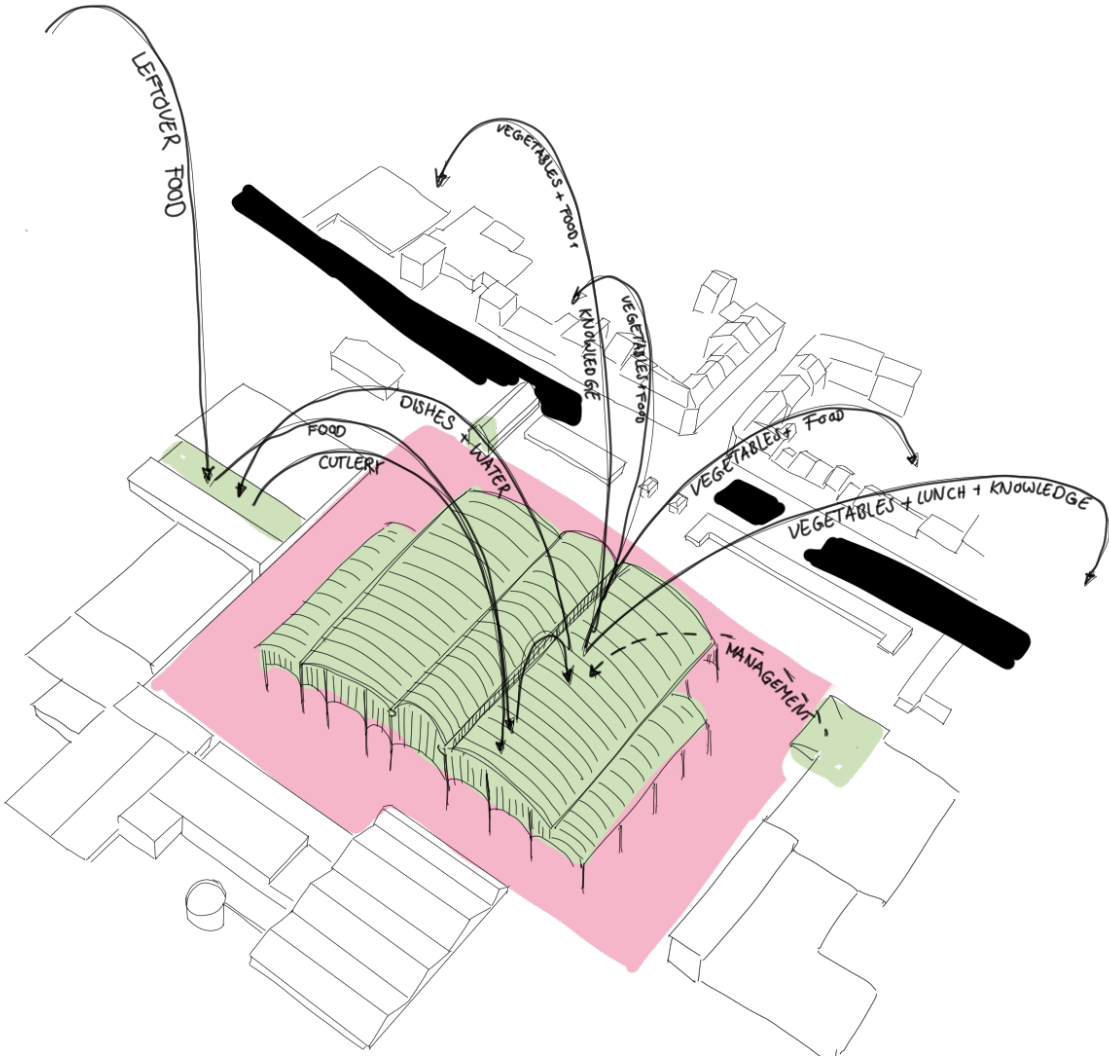
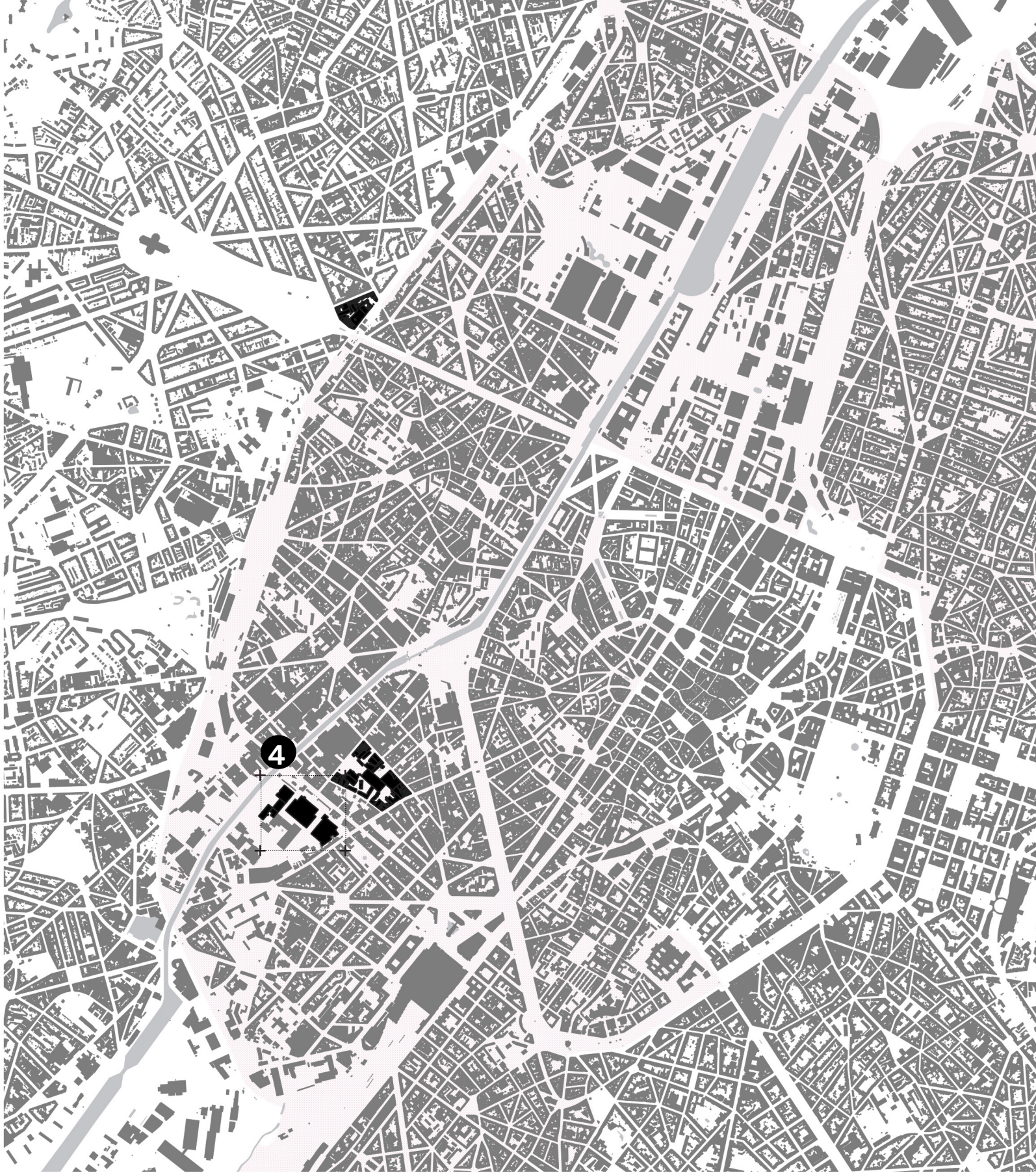


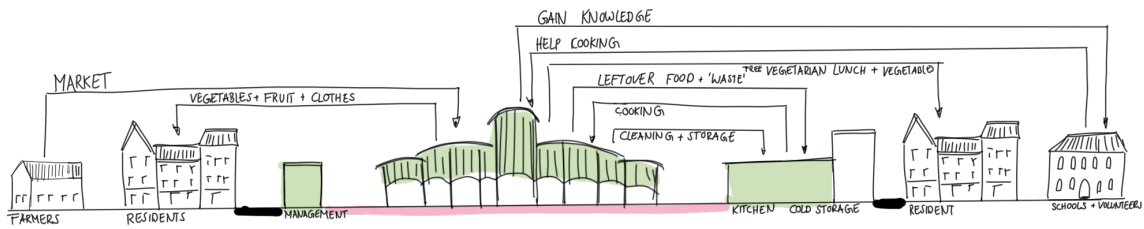
Fig. 3.14:
Isometric drawing
of site

Fig. 3.15: Section
of site

Fig. 3.16: Location
of site



- existing conditions
- common space of collective care
- private space
- public space



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<https://gis.urban.brussels/geoserver/ows?REQUEST=GetCapabilities&SERVICE=WFS>
<https://www.saamo.be>

0 200 400m



Dream Kitchen Community Kitchen + Social Restaurant

In the old slaughterhouse, there is a big market from Friday to Sunday. "It is huge, you wouldn't recognize this place," one of the volunteers tells me. "Then on Sunday, we go and collect the food. The chef decides what to collect and how much. Then he sends us out. We go there with our blue shirts and say we need 10 crates of this and so on." Sunday is the heaviest day, they tell me. It is very intense.

On Monday, the food gets sorted for the Dream Kitchen and divided for each day. "We are here from Monday to Thursday. In the winter, we have the tent; in summer, it gets pulled up, like the other one there," one says.

"We cook here, but there are also other things happening," someone tells me. "On Monday, people can come and take the leftover food we don't need for cooking home with them for free. That's nicer than shopping. You come, get a meal, and take your vegetables with you. But my daughter can't, unfortunately, you have to be older than 18."

On Wednesdays, there is a day for children, they say. "It's amazing. I come here with my daughter. She loves it. They have pillows, you can build houses. It's very busy."

We go to the kitchen to do the dishes. "This is one of the nicer chores," someone tells me and shows me the boxes they store the elements for Wednesday in. "They

18.02.2025
Abbatoir de Anderlecht

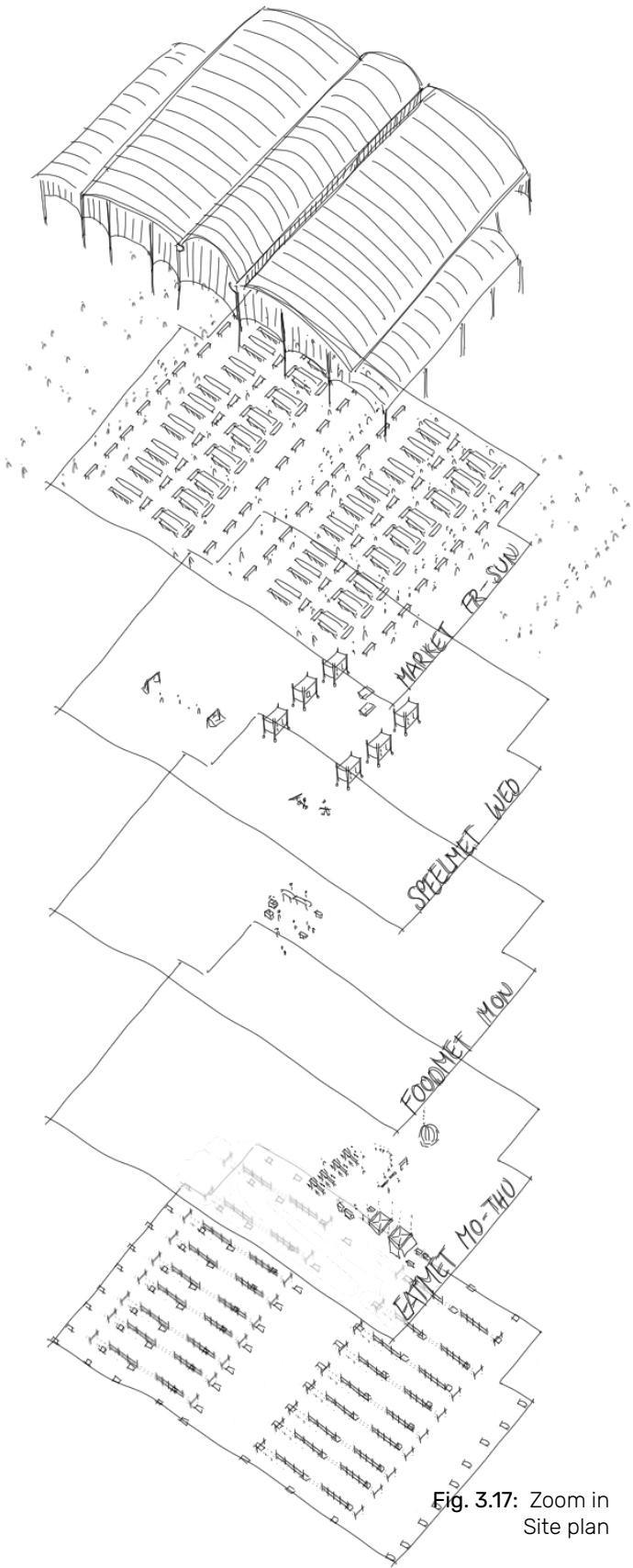


Fig. 3.17: Zoom in Site plan

Fig. 3.18: Site program

Fig. 3.19: Photograph of Dream Kitchen, Abbatoir de Anderlecht, taken by author



Close proximity of related facilities

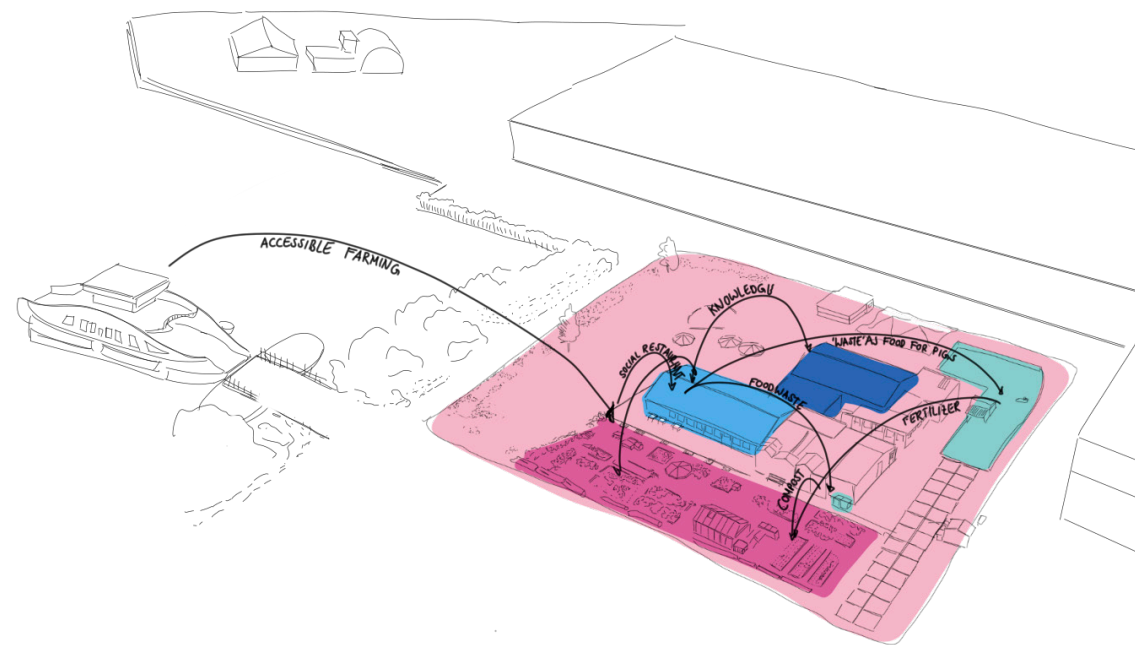
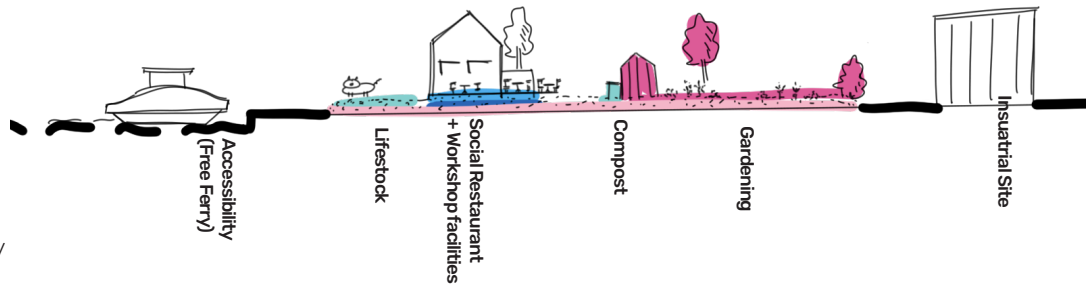


Fig. 3.20:
Isometric drawing
of site

Fig. 3.21: Section
of site

Fig. 3.22:
Location of site

- cluster friend knowledge
- cluster friend compost
- cluster friend processing
- cluster friend gardening
- common space of collective care
- private space
- public space



<https://download.geofabrik.de/europe/netherlands.html>
<https://deverbroederij.nl>



0 200 400m

De Verbroederij
Community Farm

18.09.2024
Amsterdam Noord

Program

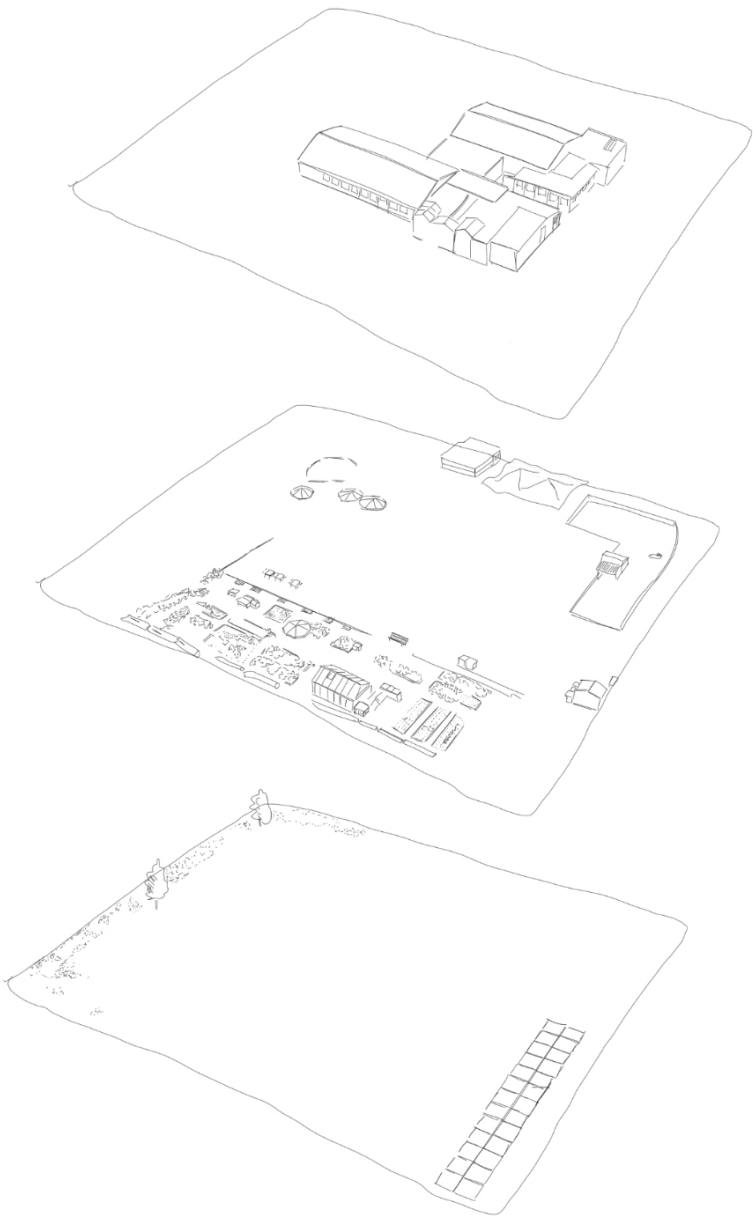
meeting place
hosts a variety of community-focused activities, including yoga, meditation, shared neighborhood meals, and gardening.

social restaurant
it offers a 50% discount to Stadspas holders with a green dot—a municipal program supporting low-income residents with discounts on food, culture, sports, and transport.

https://deverbroederij.nl/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Take-Aways

- consumption free spaces
- interstitial space in industrial area
- cluster friends (food production, processing, composting and pigs, fertilizer, knowledge)



Site Plan Zoomed In

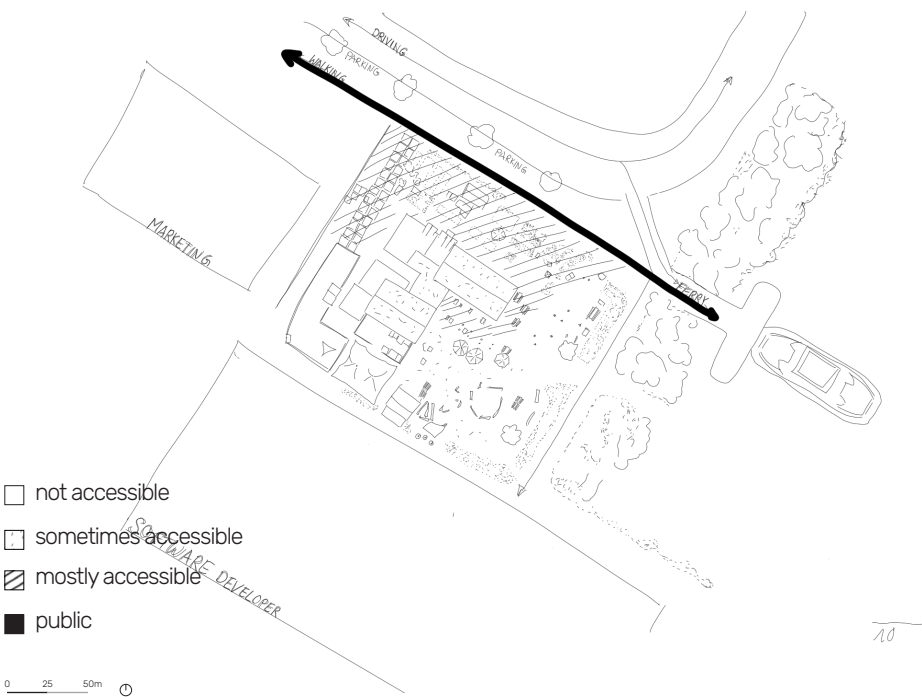


Fig. 3.23: Zoom in Site plan

Fig. 3.24: Site program

Fig. 3.25: Photograph of 'De Verbroederij, Amsterdam Noord, taken by author



Walters Way
Self-Built Houses

Lewisham, London

Entrances face collective Infrastructure

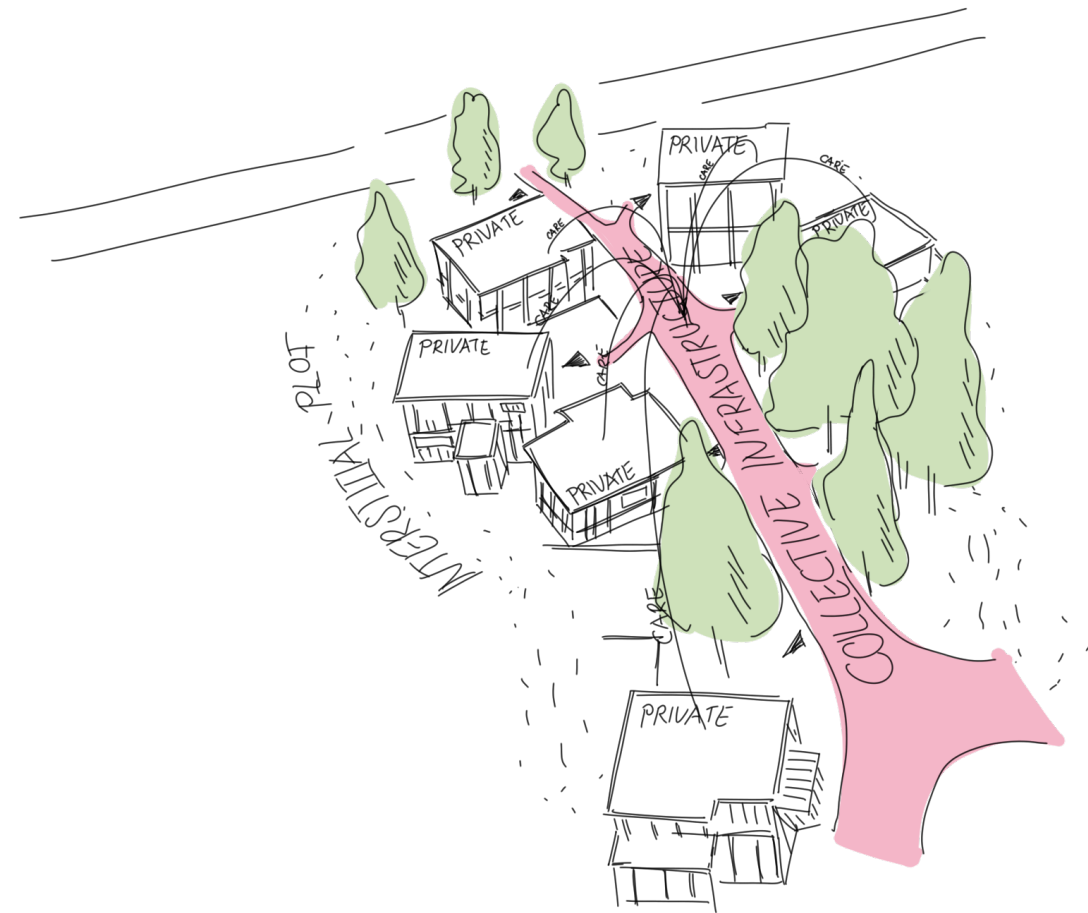
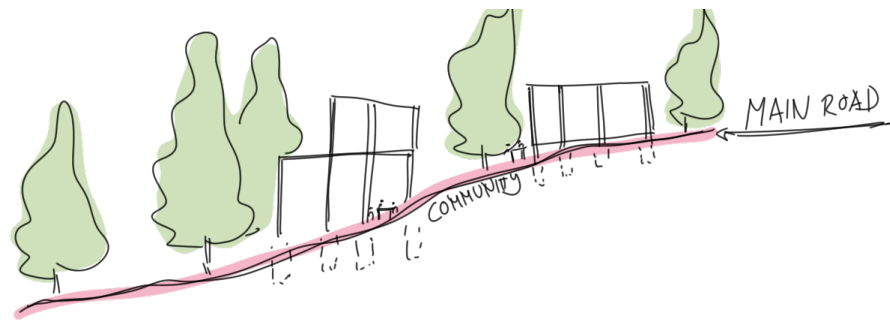


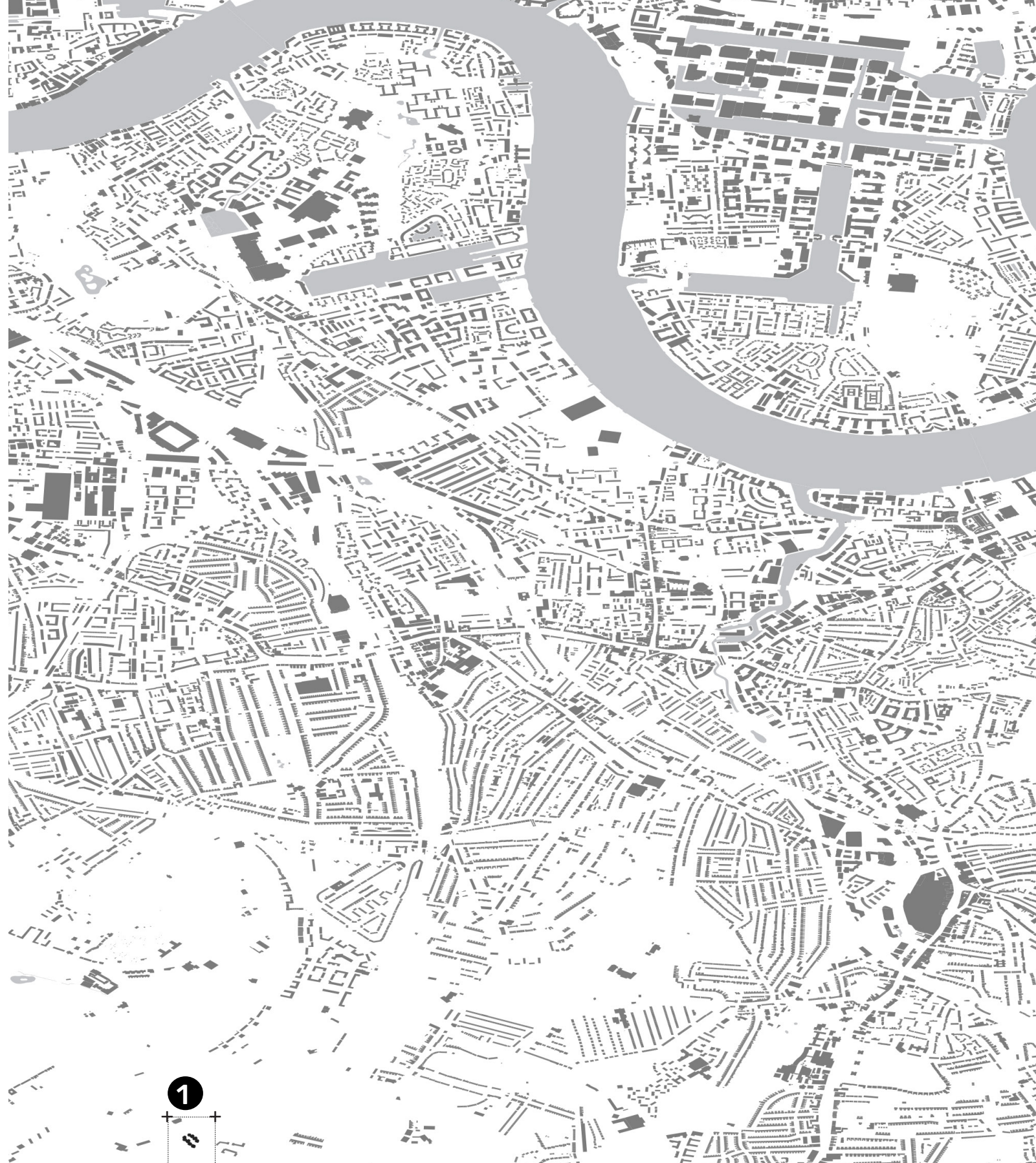
Fig. 3.26:
Isometric drawing
of site

Fig. 3.27: Section
of site

Fig. 3.28:
Location of site



- existing conditions
- common space of collective care
- private space
- public space



<https://download.geofabrik.de/europe/united-kingdom/england/greater-london.html>
<https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=walters+way&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>



Take-Aways

- Working with the existing
- Gradient of Privacy creates possibility to exclude people
- Interstitial Space as Collective Infrastructure
- Methods based on skills of users
- Adaptable within fixed grid

Site Plan Zoomed In

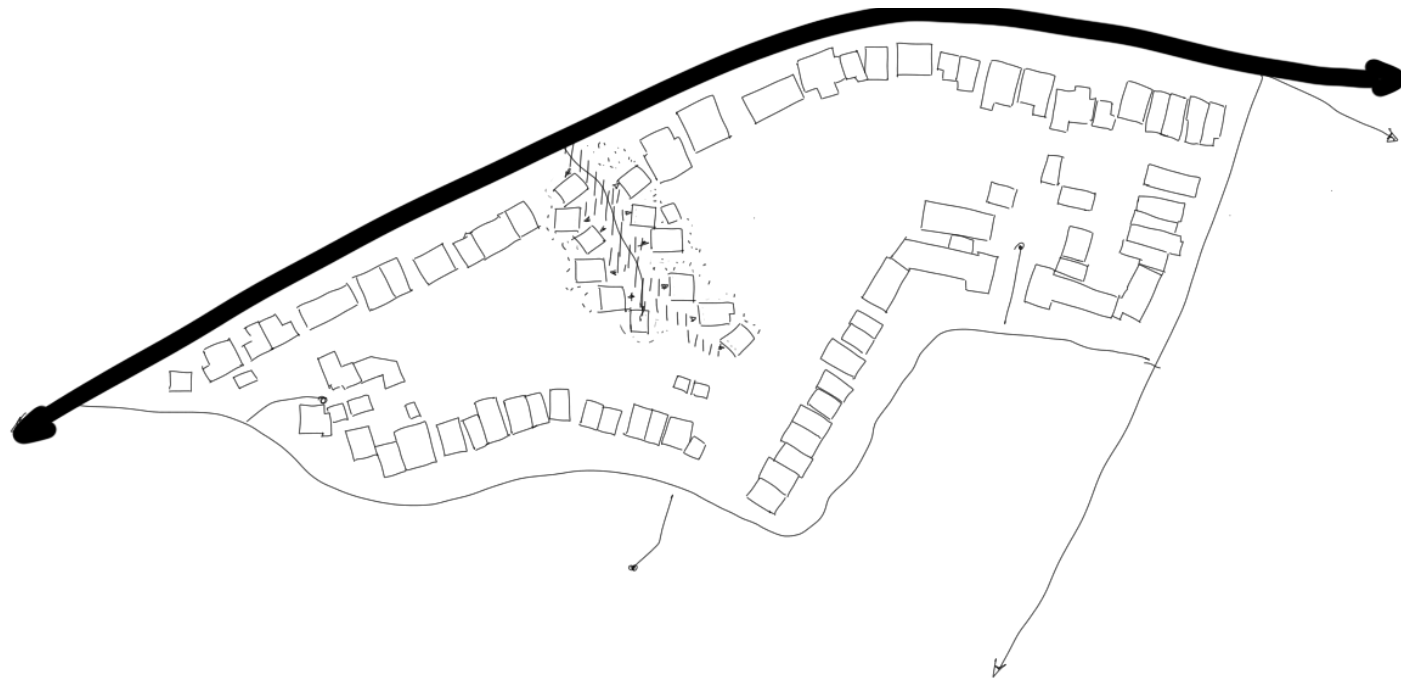


Fig. 3.29: Zoom in Site plan

- not accessible
- sometimes accessible
- ▨ mostly accessible
- public

0 25 50m



Self-Built Settlement

The 13 houses were constructed on a plot that was initially deemed unsuitable for development due to its steep incline and dense tree cover. To provide affordable housing, Walter Segal designed a modular construction system that enabled residents to build their homes themselves using standard, off-the-shelf materials.

Rather than following a top-down masterplan, the homes were built from the ground up, with the design process guided by the needs of the residents. The interior layouts were flexible, allowing for future modifications to suit changing needs, while maintaining a simple and durable load-bearing structure of small concrete foundations and timber frames. All houses are accessed via a shared road created by the community, promoting the use of collective infrastructure and fostering a sense of communal living (Harper, n.d.; Ellis, 1987; Open House Festival, 2021).

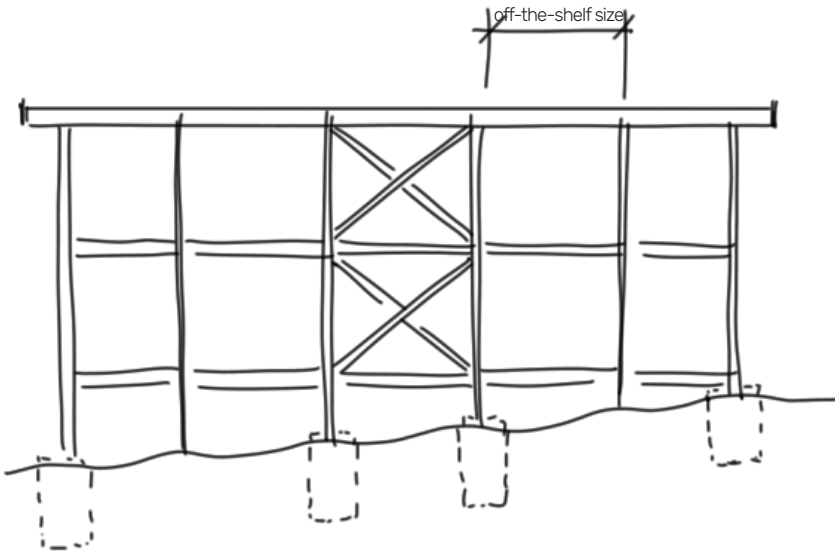


Fig. 3.30: Off-Shelf-suitable grid structure, small foundations on steep plot

Circularium and Woonbox Anderlecht, Brussels

Take-Aways

The interventions take place in an old industrial site, providing ample space for storing and producing circular products.
At the same time, the building's thick slabs, originally designed for heavier industrial use, support the weight of the housing units, though these spaces allow limited natural light inside.

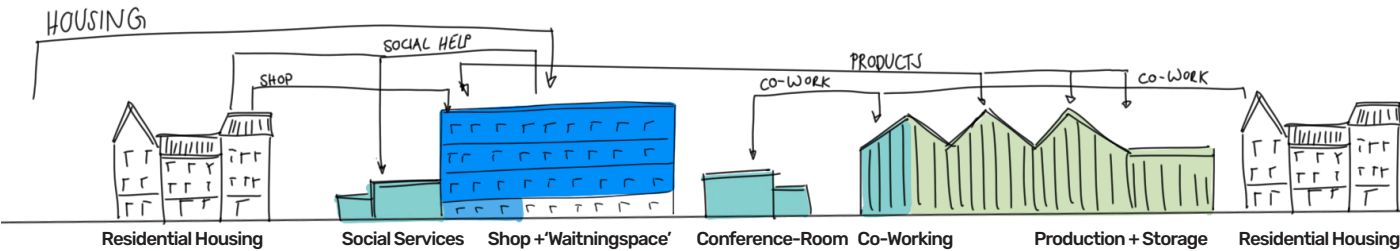
For improving liveability for fluidly housed young adults, we can learn from this example:

Industrial buildings as “waiting spaces” offer great potential for maintaining a circular economy and providing flexible housing due to their large floor plans and load-bearing capacity. However, they also present challenges, such as limited natural lighting, that need to be addressed.



Fig. 3.17: (Pak et al., 2023)

Systemic Section



Commoning Processes

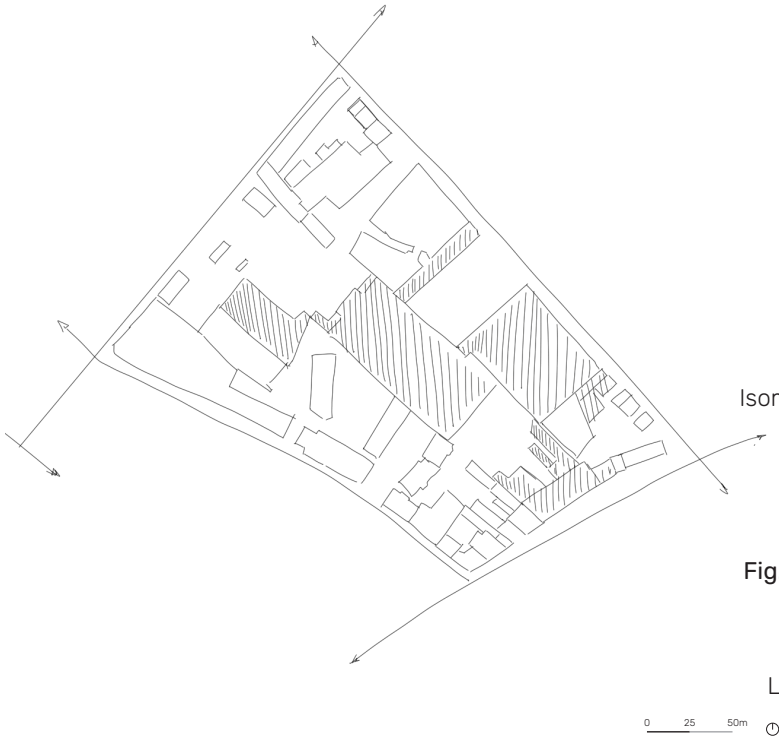
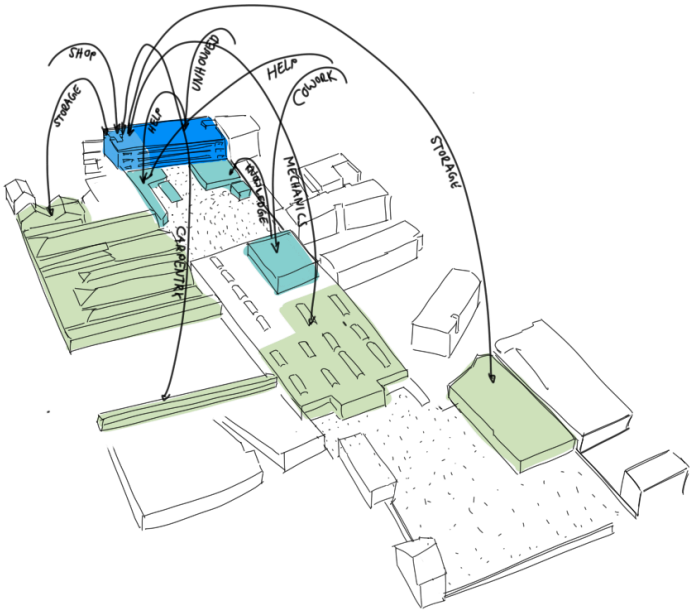


Fig. 3.26:
Isometric drawing
of site

Fig. 3.27: Site
Plan of site

Fig. 3.28: Section
of site

Fig. 3.29:
Location of site



<https://download.geofabrik.de/europe/belgium.html>
<https://gis.urban.brussels/geoserver/ows?REQUEST=GetCapabilities&SERVICE=WFS>
<http://www.circularium.be/nl/de-site/>



0 200 400m

Roetz Bikes
Amsterdam Noord

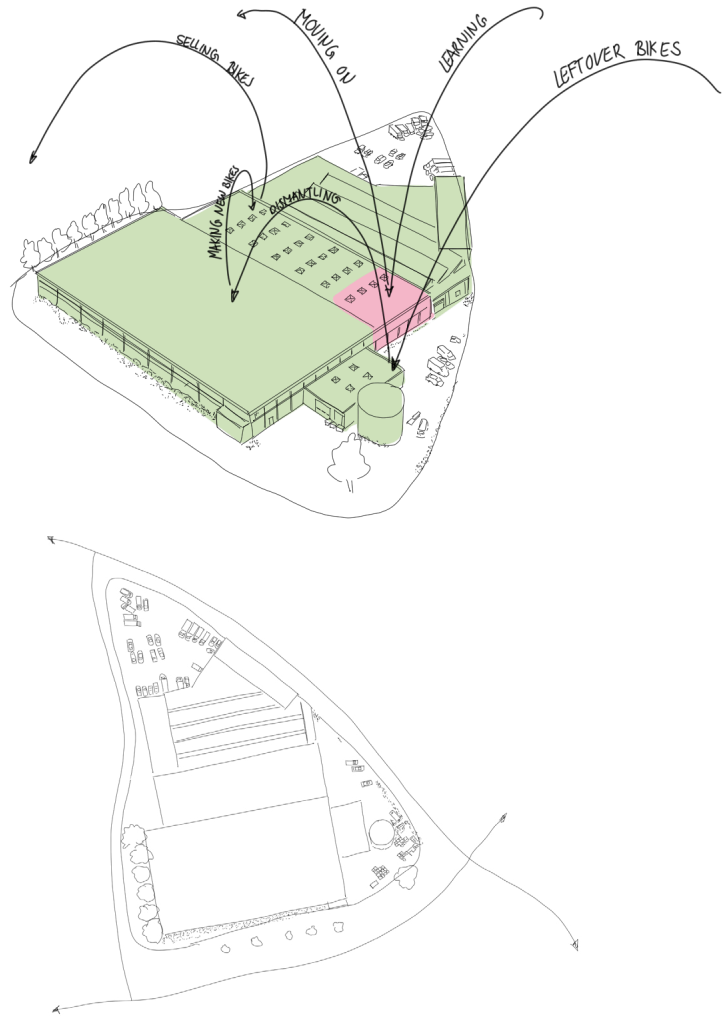
Take-Aways

This economy prioritizes both people and the planet while remaining economically sustainable. Fair factories with skill-building go hand in hand with circular production, making this model both profitable and a stepping stone for individuals entering the job market.

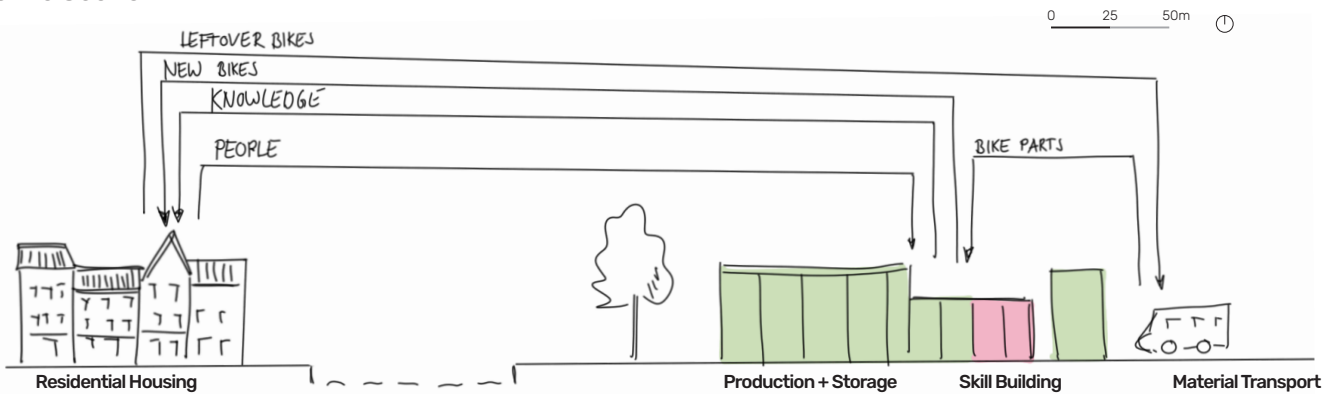
For improving liveability for fluidly housed young adults, we can learn from this example:

integrating skill-building with circular production not only creates sustainable opportunities for employment but also fosters self-sufficiency and community resilience.

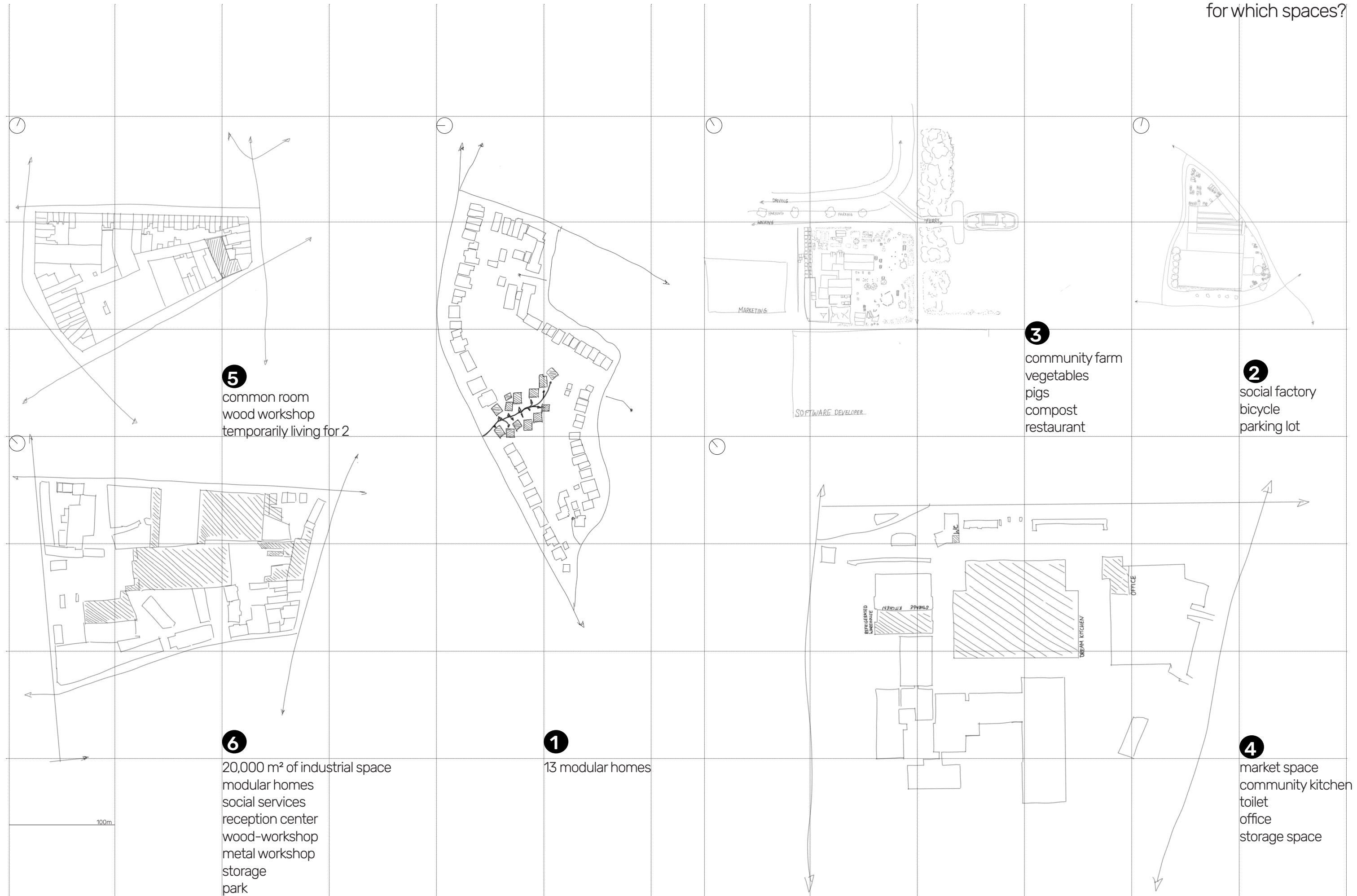
Commoning Processes



Systemic Section



<https://download.geofabrik.de/europe/netherlands.html>
<https://roetzfairfactory.nl>



commons as care

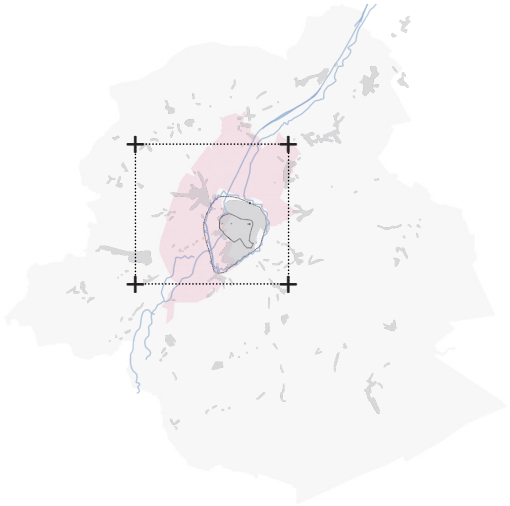
Although there is no uniform definition of the commons, they serve as an umbrella term for socio-spatial, collective, cooperative, and co-productive forms of action rooted in communal self-organization.

commons in the 15th century
in Brussels

The concept of commons historically refers to natural resources such as air, water, and land that were accessible to all and not owned by individuals. These resources were essential to the survival of communities, providing basic necessities such as food, water, and fuel (International Association for the Study of the Commons, 2023).

In medieval Europe, the manorial system dominated agriculture, with land owned by lords and worked by villagers. While fertile land was used to cultivate crops, less productive areas, referred to as „wasteland,“ were designated as common land. These commons allowed villagers to graze animals and collect vital resources like wood and turf. Access to these resources was regulated by manorial courts to prevent overuse and ensure sustainability (Students of History, 2024; Andy Grant Ltd, n.d.).

During this period, Brussels already existed as an emerging urban center, and some of its institutions operated as commons. Notably, the city had four churches and one hospital, which provided essential services to the community and continue to function as commons to this day.



Bruss'Help. (n.d.). Help in Brussels [Map]. <https://brusshelp.org/index.php/fr/portail-pro/help-in-brussels>
Ville de Bruxelles/Data management. (2024). Neighborhood houses located in the territory of the City of Brussels [Maisons de quartier situées sur le territoire de la Ville de Bruxelles] [Dataset]. https://opendata.brussel.be/explore/dataset/bruxelles_maisons_de_quartier/information/?disjunctive.id&disjunctive.nom_en&disjunctive.code_postal&disjunctive.commune_fr&disjunctive.nom_fr
Gis Urban Brussels. (n.d.). Data Brussels [WMS link]. <https://gis.urban.brussels/geoserver/ows?REQUEST=GetCapabilities&SERVICE=WMS>
Paradigm. (n.d.). UrbIS - Administrative units [WFS link]. <https://geoservices-urbis.irisnet.be/geoserver/urbisvector/wfs?request=GetCapabilities&service=WFS&version=2.0.0>
OpenStreetMap. (n.d.). Belgium—Building layer [Dataset]. <https://download.geofabrik.de/europe/belgium.html>

- settlements
- churches and convents
- socio-economic weak area

0 0.5 1 km

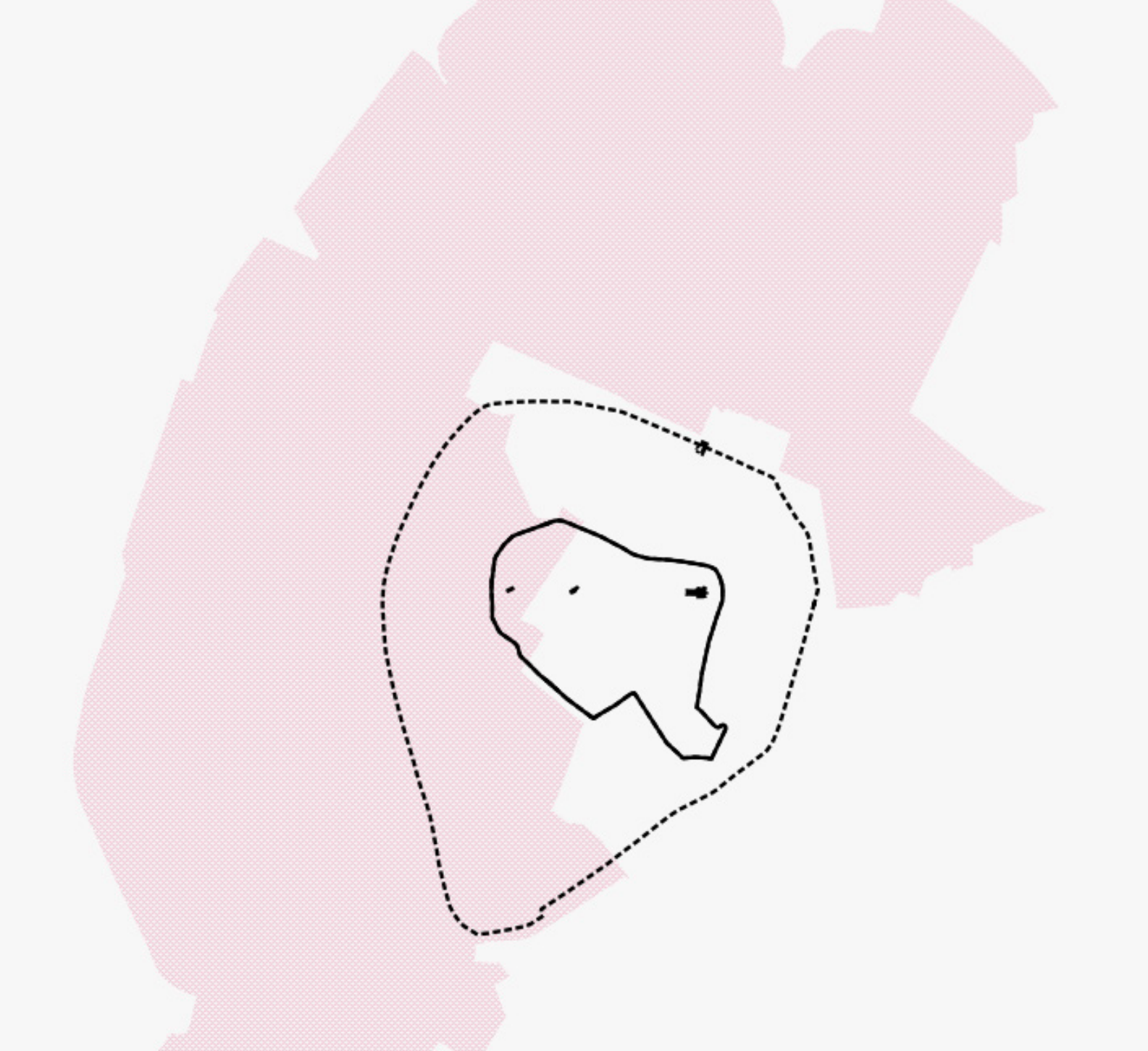


Fig. 3.31: Map showing Brussels today and the infrastructure present in the 15th century

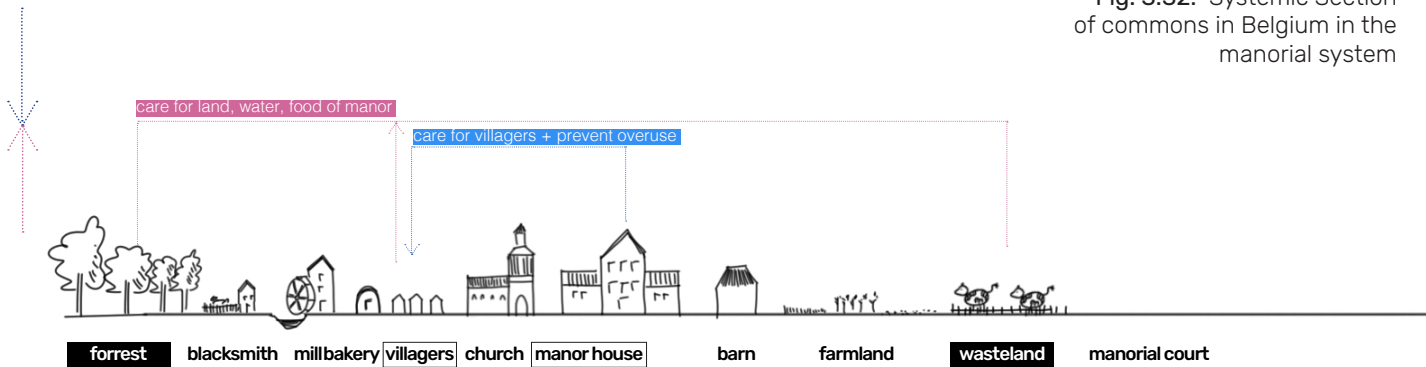


Fig. 3.32: Systemic Section of commons in Belgium in the manorial system

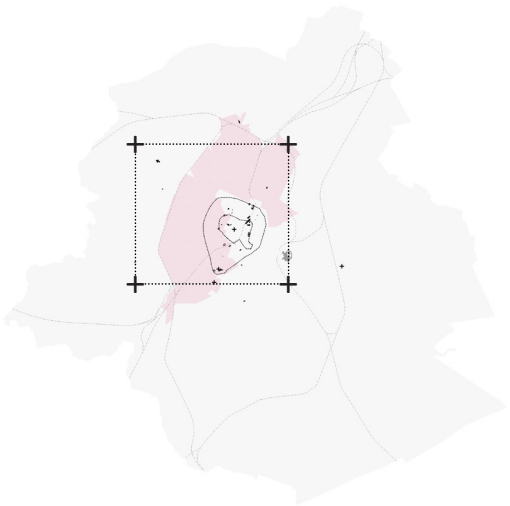
commons in the 19th century
in Brussels

As society developed, the Industrial Revolution triggered mass migration to cities, leading to the gradual disappearance of the commons as they were traditionally understood. Common land was increasingly privatized, deemed inefficient within the emerging economic models that prioritized industrial growth and productivity (Pak & Scheerlinck, 2020). The separation of living and working spaces gave rise to unpaid care work, particularly tasks associated with household maintenance and childcare, which became an undervalued and invisible form of labor (Hannemann, 2020).

Infrastructure that served industrial needs, such as railways and waterways, often replaced common resources. Marketplaces, frequently located in city centers, emerged as key hubs for commerce, symbolizing the growing dominance of market and state systems. These systems became the primary drivers of technological progress and competition, often prioritizing economic efficiency at the expense of human well-being (Helfrich, 2015).

This transformation led to a commodification of basic human needs, as access to essential resources was no longer guaranteed. Societies increasingly relied on private markets for goods and services that were once shared as commons. The nature of commons shifted from natural resources, such as land and water, to technological infrastructure, assigning a monetary value to formerly communal assets.

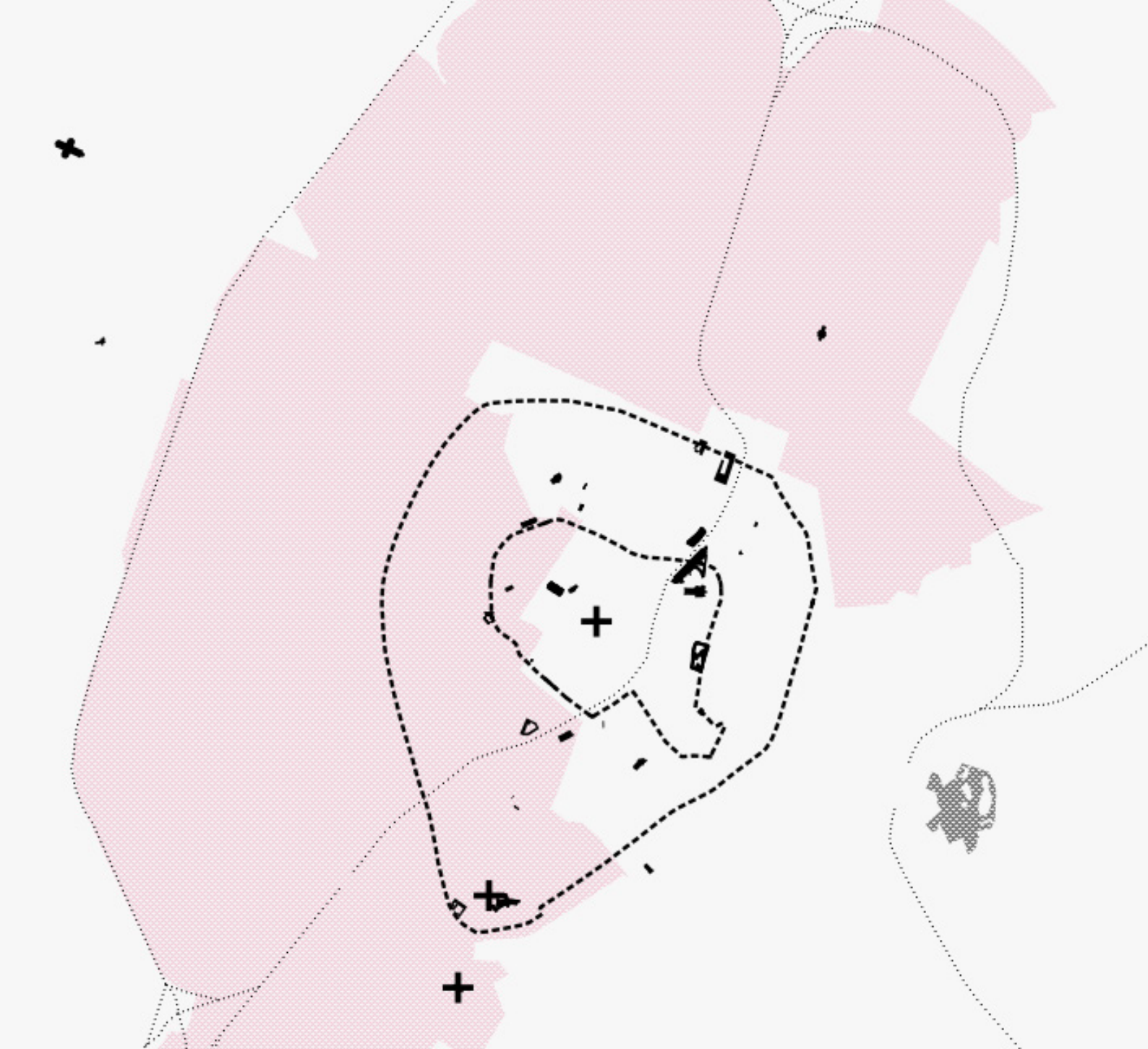
Railway lines, though originally constructed to serve industrial purposes, can also be seen as commons due to their role in enabling collective mobility and connectivity. Similarly, institutions like churches, convents, and hospitals, many of which were built up until the 19th century, continued to serve communal functions by providing spiritual, social, and medical care. These evolving forms of commons highlight the changing relationship between society, shared resources, and the pressures of industrialization.



Bruss'Help. (n.d.). Help in Brussels [Map]. <https://brusshelp.org/index.php/fr/portail-pro/help-in-brussels>
Ville de Bruxelles/Data management. (2024). Neighborhood houses located in the territory of the City of Brussels [Maisons de quartier situées sur le territoire de la Ville de Bruxelles] [Dataset]. https://opendata.brussel.be/explore/dataset/bruxelles_maisons_de_quartier/information/?disjunctive.id&disjunctive.nom_en&disjunctive.code_postal&disjunctive.commune_fr&disjunctive.nom_fr
Gis Urban Brussels. (n.d.). Data Brussels [WMS link]. <https://gis.urban.brussels/geoserver/ows?REQUEST=GetCapabilities&SERVICE=WMS>
Paradigm. (n.d.). UrbIS - Administrative units [WFS link]. <https://geoservices-urbis.irisnet.be/geoserver/urbisvector/wfs?request=GetCapabilities&service=WFS&version=2.0.0>
OpenStreetMap. (n.d.). Belgium—Building layer [Dataset]. <https://download.geofabrik.de/europe/belgium.html>

- socio-economic weak area
- Brussels
- churches and convents
- Leopold Park

0 0.5 1 km



0 0.75 1.5 km



Fig. 3.33: Map showing Brussels today and the infrastructure present in the 19th century

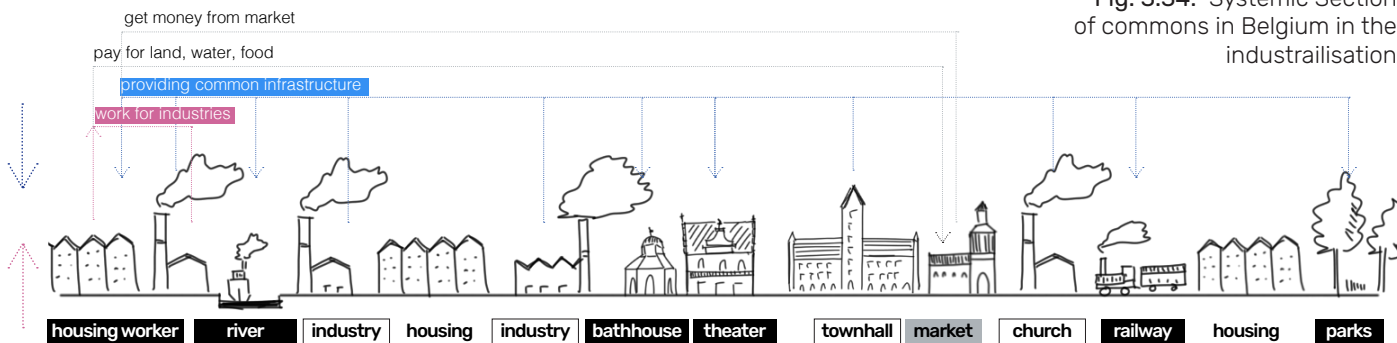


Fig. 3.34: Systemic Section of commons in Belgium in the industrialisation

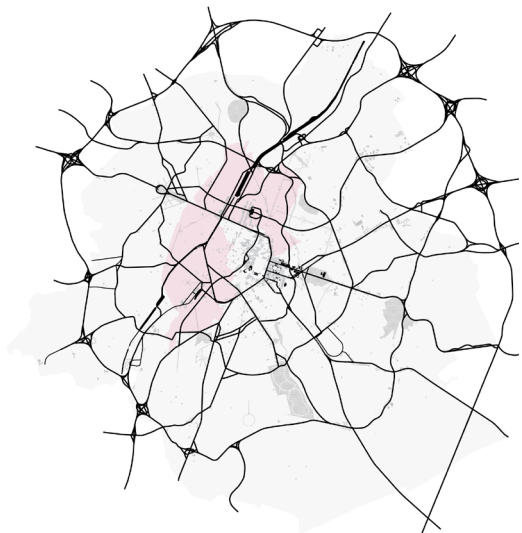
Industrialisation

commons in the 20th century
in Brussels

After the Second World War (1945), Brussels faced a significant housing shortage. Instead of prioritizing social subsidized housing, policies encouraged small-scale land ownership away from the city center through various incentives (Housing Estates in Europe, 2018).

To support this suburban shift and facilitate industrial transportation, the city invested heavily in a modernized road network. This development led to an increase in car ownership and commuting, fundamentally altering the city's urban dynamics. As Brussels began to reinvent itself, large portions of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century urban fabric were removed to make way for high-rise buildings and expanded transportation infrastructure (see map above). This process, marked by a lack of cohesive urban planning, came to be known as Brusselisation (Leloutre, 2021).

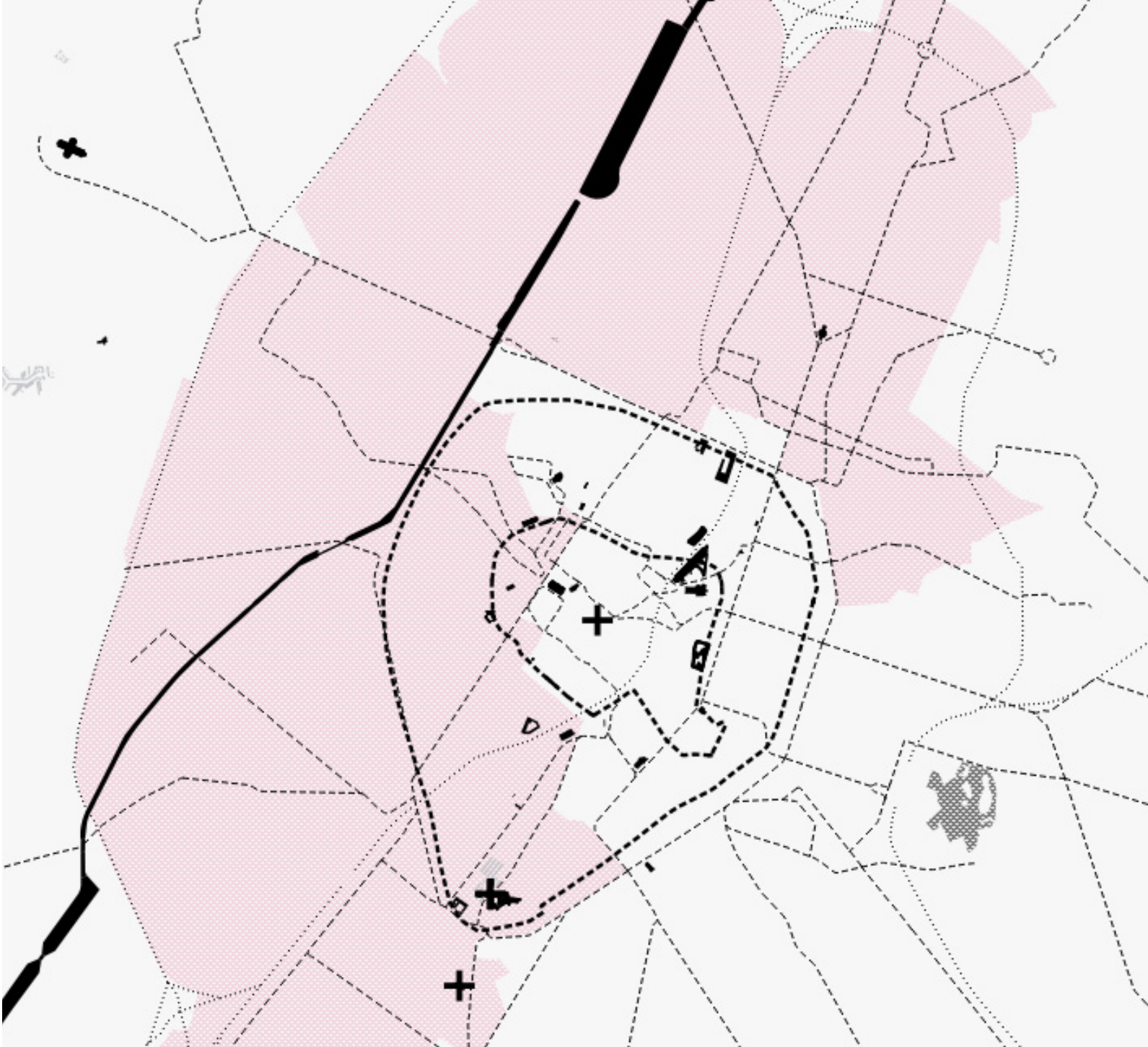
Alongside the railway network, the city introduced tram and metro lines to support public transport needs, creating vital connections across the metropolitan area. These systems can be viewed as urban commons, offering shared resources that improve mobility and accessibility. Similarly, public amenities such as the swimming pool in Laeken also function as commons, providing recreational and social spaces for the community.



Bruss'Help. (n.d.). Help in Brussels [Map]. <https://brusshelp.org/index.php/fr/portail-pro/help-in-brussels>
Ville de Bruxelles/Data management. (2024). Neighborhood houses located in the territory of the City of Brussels [Maisons de quartier situées sur le territoire de la Ville de Bruxelles] [Dataset]. https://opendata.brussel.be/explore/dataset/bruxelles_maisons_de_quartier/information/?disjunctive.id&disjunctive.nom_en&disjunctive.code_postal&disjunctive.commune_fr&disjunctive.nom_fr
Gis Urban Brussels. (n.d.). Data Brussels [WMS link]. <https://gis.urban.brussels/geoserver/ows?REQUEST=GetCapabilities&SERVICE=WMS>
Paradigm. (n.d.). UrbIS - Administrative units [WFS link]. <https://geoservices-urbis.irisnet.be/geoserver/urbisvector/wfs?request=GetCapabilities&service=WFS&version=2.0.0>
OpenStreetMap. (n.d.). Belgium - Building layer [Dataset]. <https://download.geofabrik.de/europe/belgium.html>

■ socio-economic weak area
■ Brussels
■ churches and convents, Senne, Leopold Park

0 0.5 1 km



0 0.75 1.5 km

Fig. 3.35: Map showing Brussels today and the infrastructure present after WWII

Fig. 3.36: Systemic Section of commons in Belgium after WWII



commons in the 21st century
in Brussels

Digitalization has significantly contributed to the shift from a production-based economy to a knowledge-based one, where information and digital resources are the main assets. While traditional “top-down commons,” such as public transport systems and public spaces like parks, remain important, digitalization has also given rise to “bottom-up commons.” Examples like OpenStreetMap, Wikipedia, and Linux highlight how the internet has enabled openly accessible and collaborative projects that thrive in the knowledge economy (Armstrong et al., 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic brought major changes to urban life as many people began working from home – if they had one and did not lose their jobs. This shift created challenges, especially in cities with limited living space, but it also introduced a more flexible way of life, with changes to work-life balance and reduced commuting for a few (Al-Habaibeh et al., 2021). Even after the pandemic, remote work continued, leading many companies in Brussels to reduce or repurpose their office spaces to accommodate hybrid working models (Lewark et al., 2024).

The pandemic also highlighted inequalities in access to space. In response, many urban residents began reclaiming and reusing underutilized areas, such as old industrial or transport sites. **Bottom-up initiatives like community gardens and urban farming** became more popular, offering new ways for people to come together and make use of urban spaces (Chandran, 2020). This reflects a return to commoning, where communities organize to meet basic needs such as food, but this time through grassroots efforts rather than top-down management.

In Brussels today, traditional commons like churches and hospitals remain essential, serving both practical and spiritual purposes. Schools and support services for unhoused individuals have also become part of the city’s modern commons, addressing basic needs and fostering community. These examples show how commons continue to evolve, blending historical traditions with newer bottom-up initiatives to adapt to the changing needs of society.



Bruss'Help. (n.d.). Help in Brussels [Map]. <https://brusshelp.org/index.php/fr/portail-pro/help-in-brussels>
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- socio-economic weak area
- Brussels
- churches, schools, universities, community centers, kitchen gardens
- Leopold Park

0 0.5 1 km



Fig. 3.37: Map showing Brussels today and the infrastructure present after 21st century

Fig. 3.38: Systemic Section of commons in Belgium in the 21st century

