

INSIDE-OUT // OUTSIDE-IN

EMPOWERING URBAN DESIGN

MEREL GARRITSEN

COLOPHON

MEREL GARRITSEN
5055253

P5 report

first mentor:

Maurice Harteveld, section of Urban Design

second mentor:

Tess Broekmans, section of Urban Design

delegate from the board of examiners:

Yawei Chen, section of Urban Development Management

graduation studio:

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Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment

Urbanism track

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every attempt has been made to correctly refer to material that is not made by the author.

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ABSTRACT

keywords: urban design / inside-out / urban acupuncture / porosity
of fracture / urban living rooms

The deprived district of Molenbeek is globally known as Europe's terrorism capital, as worldwide news outlets have drawn attention to the involvement of multiple Molenbeek residents in terrorist attacks in the past. This has resulted in a pressuring reputation disproportionately affecting all residents, causing them to develop adverse feelings towards their neighbourhood.

Extremism is not at all apparent in everyday life, opposing the radical reputation composed by the outside-in perspective. The residents within the inside-out perspective seek justice through a re-appreciation of their culturally rich neighbourhood. The current lack of qualitative public space and active public life results in the expression of fear of crime and vandalism. The streetscape is littered by locked gates, closed blinds and garage doors, negatively influencing the perceived safety in the public realm.

This thesis aims to reactivate the porosity embedded in the urban fabric of Molenbeek. Developing these pockets of porous potential according to the needs of the local population creates urban spaces for clear user groups to express their desired behavioural patterns in the public realm. The design of these urban living rooms activates confidence and comfort among users, activating public life through the empowerment of residents.

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01 INTRODUCTION

PERSONAL MANIFESTO

INTRODUCTION

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As the capital of a linguistically divided Belgium, Brussels simultaneously operates as the capital of a strongly united Europe, as the host of the European parliament. Attracting wealthy men in hand-tailored suits and providing them with a luxury hotel room during their business-related short stay. On their way to their next important meeting, they are tempted to stop by an organic bakery for homemade pastries and freshly squeezed juice. Whilst on the opposite side of the city, approximately half an hour's metro ride away, residents are living a totally different life, struggling to make ends meet below the poverty line. The harsh reality of 1 in 4 residents of Brussels looks like this (Risk of Poverty or Social Exclusion | Statbel, 2023).

This project attends to the residents of the district of Molenbeek, where poverty, unemployment, violence and decay have seamlessly integrated into daily life. Molenbeek is one of the most densely populated areas in Belgium, with 100.000 inhabitants living on only 6 square kilometres. Despite the notorious reputation of the municipality, Molenbeek encompasses a serious potential for amelioration. The closed-block morphology fosters a pattern of courtyards and inner-block industrial halls, that presently host deserted storage spaces and parking

lots. These pores in the dense urban fabric have the potential to complement the public space, by strategically transforming them according to the needs of current residents and users. This project's incentive is my broad interest in the public space and its degrees and perceptions. This project manifests the revival of the Molenbeek urban fabric through the empowerment of residents, by reactivating its porosities as public spaces that are complementary to the functions in the public realm.

SITE CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

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Molenbeek-Saint-Jean, or Sint-Jans-Molenbeek is one of nineteen municipalities that form the metropolitan capital area of Brussels. The municipality consists of twelve distinct neighbourhoods.

What once was a small medieval settlement has grown out to be one of the most densely populated districts in Belgium, with 98.270 inhabitants dwelling in an area of only 5,9 km². Resulting in extreme densities of up to 26.810 people per square kilometre in the historical part of the district (Van der Saag, 2023). Molenbeek also belongs among the poorest settlements in Belgium, as over half the population of the district lives below the poverty line (Laumonier, 2015). The unemployment rate in Molenbeek is 23,2%, significantly higher than the Belgian average of 5,7% (Employment and Unemployment | Statbel, 2023 and Sint-Jans-Molenbeek | IBSA, n.d.).

Despite these unfavourable numbers, Molenbeek has quite a central position within the metropolitan area of Brussels and is well-connected with neighbouring municipalities through public transport facilities, with close access to bus, tram, train and metro lines.



figure 1. belgium



figure 2. brussels

figure 3. molenbeek

FASCINATION

INTRODUCTION

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‘CHANGING BRUSSELS NEIGHBOURHOOD TRIES TO LEAVE STIGMA OF TERRORISM BEHIND’

After the Parisian Bataclan was marked by an act of terrorism in 2015, the forgotten municipality of Molenbeek headlined all major global news outlets. Identifying and marking the entire district as an extremist ‘jihadi haven’. Since then, Molenbeek has been under critical international surveillance. The stigmatising reputation has been shaped and reinforced by various news outlets and governmental policies over the past years.

However, the reputation of the breeding ground for extremist and criminal practices does not rhyme with the immense behind-the-scenes efforts that have been continuously made to bring the local community together and to foster a safe environment in which vulnerable youth can explore and develop their talents. This very misunderstanding goes to the core of the socioeconomic obstacles that challenge the residents of Molenbeek. The inherent enthusiasm and drive for improvement were first highlighted by Peltier in the New York Times (2022).

Peltier excessively addresses the efforts of the local community, actively opposing the stigmatising reputation of the neighbourhood.

By helping and guiding younger residents in developing their talents, the power of various committed community centres will result in augmenting chances for vulnerable youth. Focusing on their wellbeing and staying out of the reach of the public eye.

This intrinsic motivation of the local population opens up great chances and possibilities for successful amelioration.

Changing Brussels Neighborhood Tries to Leave Stigma of Terrorism Behind

Molenbeek was where a terrorist cell planned attacks that killed 162 in Paris and Brussels. Six years later, residents are trying to reinvent the area as a trial rekindles an awful association.



figure 4. place communale in molenbeek. image source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/04/world/europe/molenbeek-attack-brussels-paris.html>

REPUTATION

INTRODUCTION

The notion of reputation is of great importance for the future development of the municipality of Molenbeek. Possible definitions of reputation (Oxford Languages, 2022) include:

‘BELIEFS OR OPINIONS THAT ARE GENERALLY HELD ABOUT SOMEONE OR SOMETHING, BASED ON WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN THE PAST’

‘ A WIDESPREAD BELIEF THAT SOMEONE OR SOMETHING HAS A PARTICULAR CHARACTERISTIC ’

These definitions encompass a *belief* or an *opinion*, which simultaneously implies the collective character of a reputation (Andersen, 2008), and reflects the scale on which a reputation effectively operates. The notions of status and reputation are closely related to one another. Reputation applies to larger groups, while status navigates towards individuals. From these definitions can also be derived that a reputation should not be treated factually. It is categorised as a belief or an opinion that is substantiated by events or incidents that have occurred. The

Latin origin of the word, ‘reputare’, describes another characteristic of our contemporary definition of reputation: *to think over*. Past incidents could permanently define the reputation of a place, person, animal or object by bringing them to the surface continuously, no matter if they still correctly represent current-day practices.

Throughout this report, the reputation of Molenbeek will be used as a guiding element for diving to the core of the socioeconomic challenges that the district is facing. The fairness of the reputation will be critically analysed and questioned.

REPUTATION

rɛpjuˈteɪʃn

NOUN

the beliefs or opinions that are generally held about someone or something, based on what happened in the past

a widespread belief that someone or something has a particular characteristic

LATIN: reputare

think
over

However the actions or activities that a reputation is based upon might not be untrue, a reputation can still be unjust. Especially in the case of radical and extremist reputations like Molenbeek has been dealing with for the vast majority of the last decade.

The notorious reputation of Molenbeek has been continuously shaped and fed ever since the district captured significant global attention after the Bataclan attack in November 2015. The district's reputation had however been locally discussed and feared for many years before the international catastrophes (Staff, 2016). Foreseeing the increasing amount of extremist activity in the community, a resident of Molenbeek made a report as early as 2005 (Morocco World News, 2016). The report revealed Molenbeek as the heart of the storm, in the wake of earlier ISIS-related attacks in Belgium and France from 2001 onwards.

The escalation of the 2015 Paris attacks was the drop that pushed Molenbeek into the international spotlight. Even though the extremist activity was not new, the arrest of Salah Abdeslam was a turning point for Molenbeek. The Brussels neighbourhood has since been repeatedly characterised as a breeding ground for Islamic extremism (Staff, 2016) and

a 'jihadi haven' (Boffey et al., 2017). A police no-go zone run by Sharia law (ABC News, 2016), with an ideal infrastructure for the entrepreneurial terrorist, covered in a jihadi dress code. Even the then Belgian prime minister Charles Michel stated that preventative methods did not work and repression would be the next step (ABC News, 2016).

High crime rates, along with high rates of unemployment, extreme poverty and inadequate educational resources together form a cocktail that can effortlessly foster the radicalisation of extremist Islamic ideals. The continuous flow of new residents conveniently allows citizens to stay as anonymous as they desire (Breuklijnen | NPO Start, n.d.). These circumstances can push vulnerable citizens into the local criminal network. The number of incidents revolving around organised crime in Molenbeek, mainly drug trafficking, has visibly increased since the COVID-19 pandemic (Vohra, 2022). The prevailing violence can be linked to the highly professionalised and profitable drug-dealing network (Van Der Saag, 2023). Radicalised citizens have used these extensive drug-dealing networks to recruit vulnerable youth in the neighbourhood to join them (Vohra, 2022).

News outlets tend to emphasise

extremist radicalisation, as they financially benefit from publishing negative news articles, resulting in a notorious and unsafe reputation, repelling the success of new initiatives for growth and recovery.

Woman shot dead in Anderlecht, another injured in Molenbeek shooting

Thursday, 7 March 2024
By The Brussels Times with Belga



Brussels Neighborhood a Breeding Ground for Terror

identified Molenbeek as a launchpad for the Paris attacks and



Zo is het in Molenbeek, de beruchtste plek van Europa

Molenbeek: the Brussels borough becoming known as Europe's jihadi central

Neighbourhood on the edge of Belgian city where seven people have been arrested in connection with the Paris attacks has a reputation for its battle-hardened militants



Third shooting in Molenbeek in three days

Tuesday, 31 October 2023
By Maïthé Chini



'Je kunt je gemakkelijk verstoppen in Molenbeek'

'Na de aanslagen in Parijs werd beetje bij beetje duidelijk hoe groot de link met Molenbeek was. Omwonenden zeiden: er staat politie met mitrailleurs in de straat. Bij de invallen gisteren ben ik gaan kijken. Agenten met bivakmutsen, dat was zwaar om te zien.'

Ana van Es 17 november 2015, 21:23



Can This Brussels Neighborhood Shake Its Jihadi Reputation?

Molenbeek was labeled a hub of European extremism. Seven years later, with drug trafficking rising, alienated residents want to change the narrative.



Two suspects arrested for shooting in Molenbeek

Molenbeek, Little Morocco, the Illusion of Integration

Staff Writer Mar. 30, 2016 6:07 p.m.

• Zaterdag 19 maart 2016, 12:44

anbeek wist iedereen waar Abde



One person injured in shooting in Molenbeek-Saint-Jean

Saturday, 28 October 2023
By The Brussels Times with Belga



Wedding party in Molenbeek ends in stabbing and shooting

Thursday, 8 June 2023
By The Brussels Times with Belga



Molenbeek, broedplaats van de Parijse terroristen

Paris attacks: Is Molenbeek a haven for Belgian jihadis?

Wilders blaast verboden bezoek aan Brusselse gemeente Molenbeek af



Dochter van wethouder Molenbeek verdachte in terrorisme-onderzoek



Acht terrorismeverdachten opgepakt in Belgische Molenbeek

figure 5. collage of newspaper articles shaping the reputation of molenbeek. image sources in bibliography.

ANTI-REPUTATION

INTRODUCTION

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As Peltier (2022) stated, the local population aims to distance themselves from the extremist reputation that was forced upon the district through past incidents.

Since the rock-bottom phase after the incident in 2015, an increasing amount of local initiatives have emerged to rebuild the local social network. Presenting Molenbeek in a positive light, highlighting its chances and opportunities.

These organisations aim to unite people through shared cultural events, such as a communal iftar meal (foyerjw, 2024) or a Christmas market (academie.molenbeek, 2023). The socialist mayor of Molenbeek, Catherine Moureaux, actively attends and supports these local initiatives and often promotes them directly to her 2000 Instagram followers.

Individuals succeed in portraying the ambience in the public realm of the district through vlogs that are accessible to a broad public on YouTube. Especially the weekly markets and furniture stores are popular subjects, indicating that the residents are proud to have those elements in their proximity.

Nevertheless, these local initiatives that enable the positive frame of Molenbeek are incapable of reaching the interest of a larger audience. Their reach is

slowly expanding, but is not able to catch up with the adversities still published by the media. They however keep providing a counter-voice to the loudness of the extremist reputation while slowly turning up their own volume.



**Molenbeek
Bruxelles**

MOLEMBERK BRUXELLES/ LE GRAND MARCHÉ DE MOLENBEEK-SAINT-JEAN
JEUDI أجواء السوق الأسبوعي ببروكسيل
13K weergaven • 2 jaar geleden

BELGIUM ROUTINE

Marché السلام عليكم ورحمة الله تعالى وبركاته Molenbeek

foyerjw
Foyer vzw

IFTAR Solidair
ten voordele van onze volgende humanitaire project

20€

23 MAART 2024 18u

FOYER VZW

Adres: Werkhuizenstraat 23
1080 Sint Jans Molenbeek

Menu:
Harira • Chebakia
Couscous met kip
Dessert

Inschrijvingen:
secretariaat@foyer.be
ayoub.benabdeslam@foyer.be
02 401.74.97

18 vind-ik-leuks

foyerjw Doe mee aan onze solidaire iftaravond! Het ingezamelde geld gaat naar ons volgend humanitair project. Jullie aanwezigheid maakt een verschil.

Datum: 23/03/2024
Tijd: 18:00
Plaats: Werkhuizenstraat 23, Sint-Jans Molenbeek



FANS OF FLANDERS - THINGS TO DO: SINCE 1992
475 weergaven • 8 jaar geleden

Fans of Flanders

FANS OF FLANDERS - THINGS TO DO: SINCE 1992



I like Molenbeek
15 d. vind-ik-leuks • 16 d. volgers

academie.molenbeek
Académie des arts visuels de Molenbeek

MARCHÉ DE NOËL à l'Académie
06.12.2023 à 13h00

VENTE DES RÉALISATIONS DES ÉLÈVES • MUSIQUE • VIN CHAUD • PETITE RESTAURATION

13 vind-ik-leuks

academie.molenbeek Ce mercredi 6.12, on vous invite à notre tout premier marché de Noël, au sein même de l'Académie ... meer



I like Molenbeek
4 d •

18/05 - BRUSSELS PRIDE – IN THE CAPITAL OF EUROPE "SAFE EVERYDAY EVERYWHERE"

Molenbeek hisse fièrement le drapeau !
Durant la Pride Week (8-20/05), place aux manifestations de la "Brussels Pride the Capital of Europe".

Un jour incontournable pour la communauté LGBTQIA+ de Belgique et la de leurs droits. Cette année, la Brussels Pride met au premier plan la sécurité sentiment de sécurité.

E... Meer weergeven



Félicitations à tous les marocains mavlog au marché de Molenbeek Bruxelles
325 weergaven • 1 jaar geleden

Asmae Hamdaoui

molenbeek #bruxelles #marché #vlogs #felicitacion #football.

Met cultuur, samen eten en straatfeesten ontdoet Molenbeek zich van zijn imago als broeinest van terrorisme

Molenbeek to open Belgium's first anti-discrimination desk

Thursday, 23 November 2023
By The Brussels Times with Belga

figure 6. collage of how the neighbourhood perceives itself through local initiatives. image sources in bibliography.

DRAGO
paint

www.dragopaint.be • +32 (0)65 67 16

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astuces

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BRICO

BRICOLAGE

SANTIERE

PLUMBING

CHAUFFAGE

OUTILLAGE

ELECTRICITE

02 ASSIGNMENT

PERSPECTIVES

ASSIGNMENT

OUTSIDE-IN

The portrayal of Molenbeek as a violent, criminal, and extremist hub has been perpetuated, shaped and fed by the media during the past decade. Newspaper articles, documentaries and other publications have fed the unjust and radical image of Molenbeek while viewing the district from a ‘safe’ external perspective.

‘THE PEOPLE YOU WORK WITH KNOW YOU ARE GOING TO GO AWAY AT THE END OF THE DAY. THEY ARE STUCK HERE.’

Hobart (1996) describes the process of distancing ourselves from the people who guide our work in the city. You will always remain an outsider to them.

Moreover, Molenbeek has faced systemic disadvantages due to reinforced financial governmental policies. Refraining from being able to invest in public welfare due to the high percentage of residents who are dependent on governmental benefits. Continuous poverty keeps criminal organisations, such as drug trafficking networks alive for residents to survive.

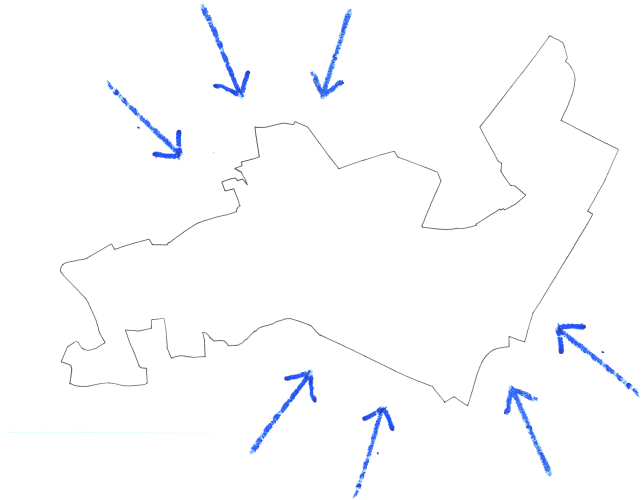
Additionally, professionals in various fields, particularly

academia, often base their research on theoretical frameworks, existing literature, and prior studies, enabling a risk of disconnecting from reality. This results in research and analysis from an external point of view.

Throughout this report, the notion of ‘outside-in perspective’ will be used to refer to these groups and their actions.

Paris attacks: Is Molenbeek a haven for Belgian jihadis?

figure 7. negative newspaper headline. image source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34839403>



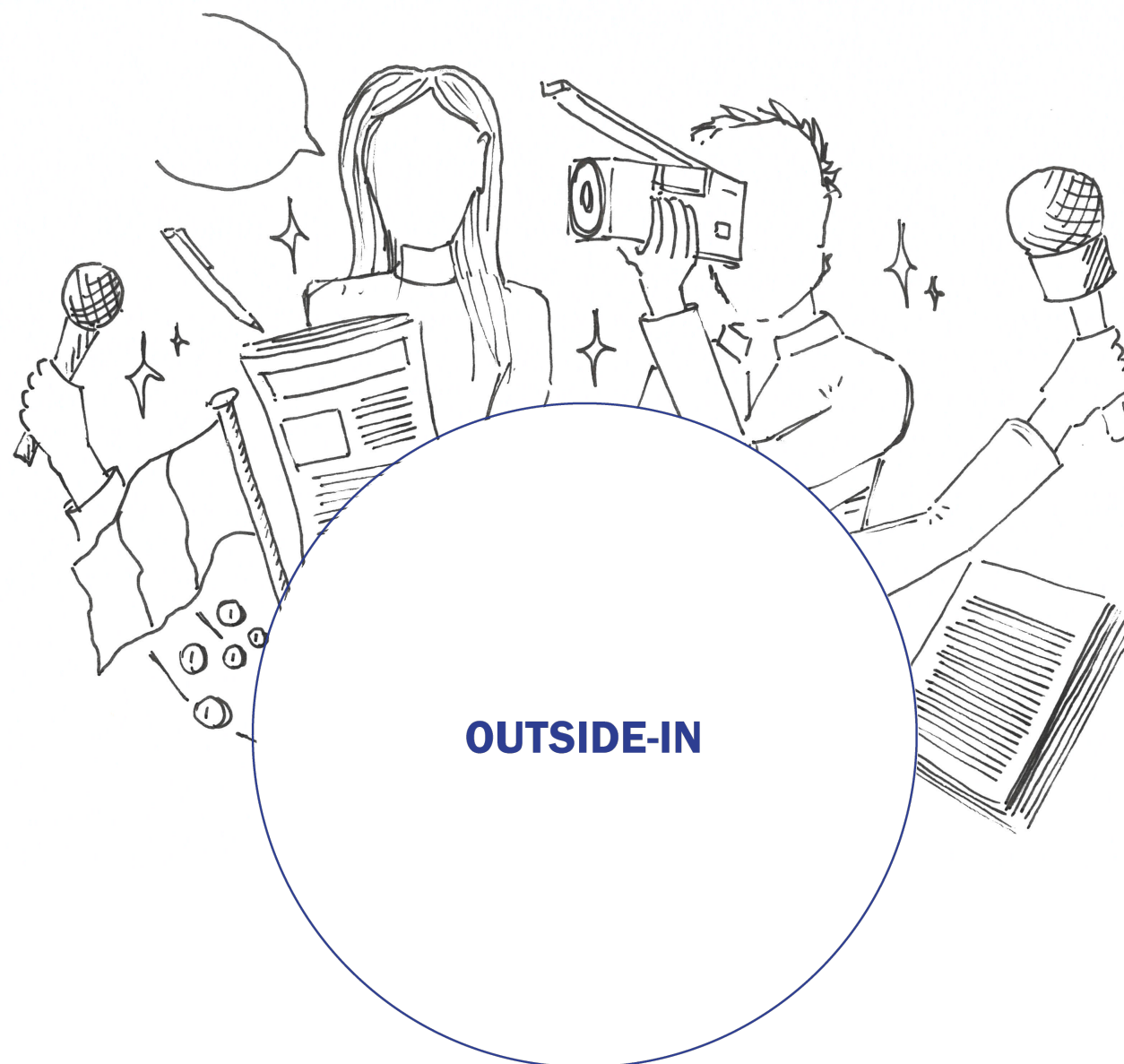


figure 8. diagrammatic visualisation of the outside-in perspective.

INSIDE-OUT

The people actually experiencing the alleged extremist daily life of Molenbeek every day are seldom heard. Their personal experiences however rarely seem to transcend the distinct barriers of the district.

The influence of external organisations oppresses those who are submerged in the actual routine of the place. The local residents are the ones who can confirm that the loudest voices do not always speak the truth. Resident’s storytelling should be a primary source for the construction of a deserving reputation, as well as for tackling local socioeconomic challenges. Therefore, the most authentic portrayal of the neighbourhood can only be constructed by those within it. This perspective will be highlighted in this research.

Throughout this report, the notion of ‘inside-out perspective’ will be used to refer to these groups and their actions.

Sifted

MolenGeek: the dropout-founded coding school that has tech moguls and royalty buzzing

Belgian tech star Ibrahim Ouassari speaks on the unlikely success of his incubator Molengeek, and his plans for a diversity fund.

5 jul 2021


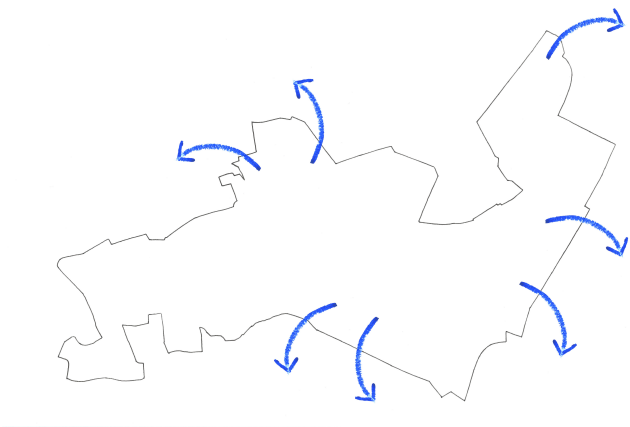


figure 9. positive headline about molenbeek. image source: <https://sifted.eu/articles/ibrahim-ouassari-molengeek>



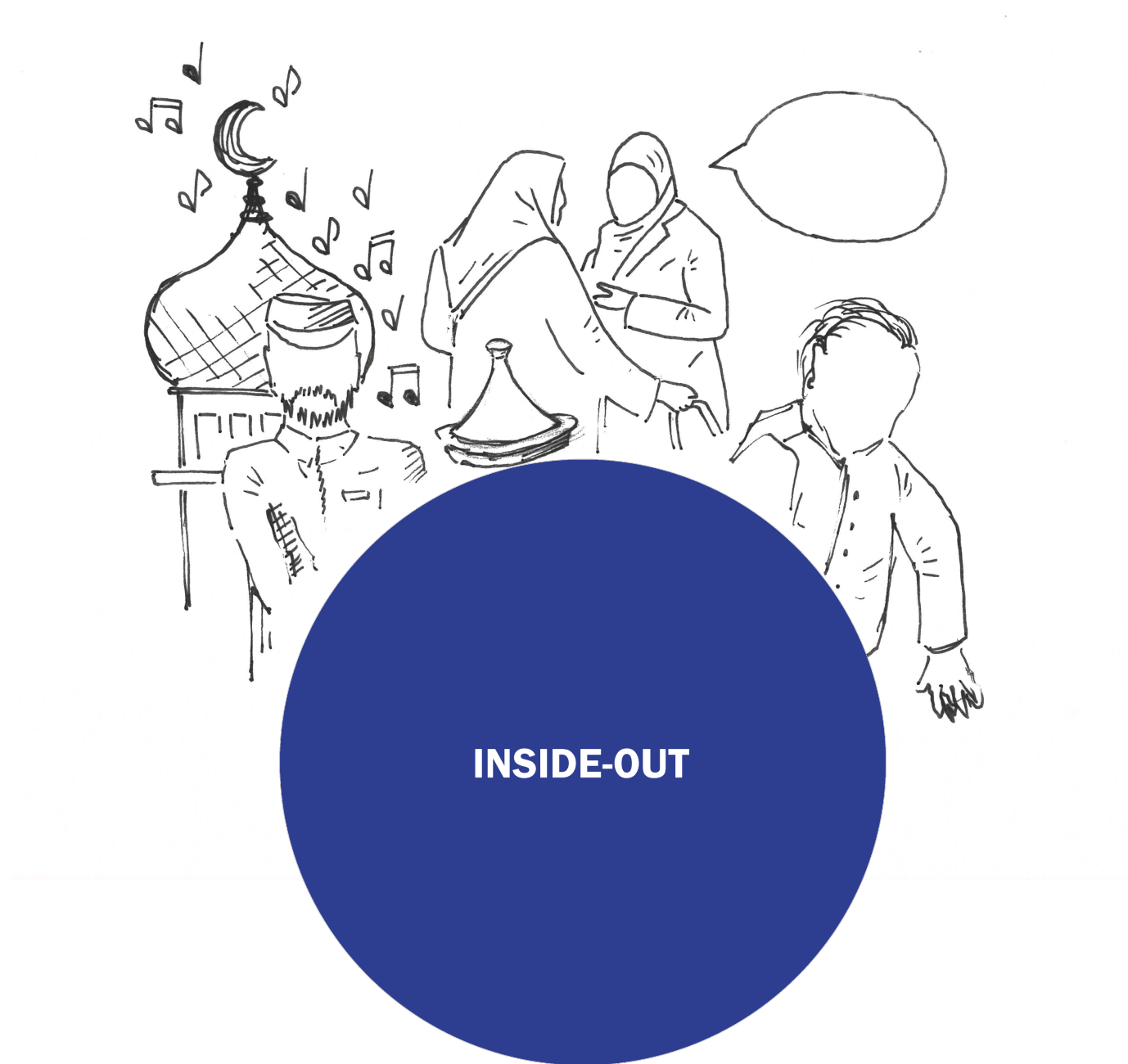


figure 10. diagrammatic visualisation of inside-out perspective.

PROBLEMATISATION

ASSIGNMENT

The comparison of the two distinct perspectives proves to be difficult. The outside-in perspective focuses on a series of incidents, linking them to radical extremism and organised crime. The extra sales generated by their negative news articles can be considered a motive for continuation.

The inside-out perspective recognises past extremist behaviour but distances itself from it. Acknowledging the tight community that grants Molenbeek a large amount of social cohesion and control by accentuating the friendliness and care among inhabitants.

THE INHERENT MISCOMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE TWO PERSPECTIVES INDICATES AN INABILITY TO UNDERSTAND THE OTHER, PARALYSING THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN UNPERTAKING ACTION TO AMELIORATE THE NEIGHBOURHOOD.

The gap between the outside-in and the inside-out perspective results in an unjust reputation that feeds a vicious cycle of poverty through persistent external pressure. The

high poverty rate hinders public investments by the local authorities because governmental benefits are distributed and deducted from the municipal budget. This poses a challenge for the local government to prioritise the construction and maintenance of qualitative urban spaces.

The local economy also suffers from a malicious reputation. Alleged safety threats are detaining visitors to shop at local vendors or eat at one of many traditional restaurants. This disconnection generates a pressure that distances Molenbeek from the general public. Cornering its residents further.

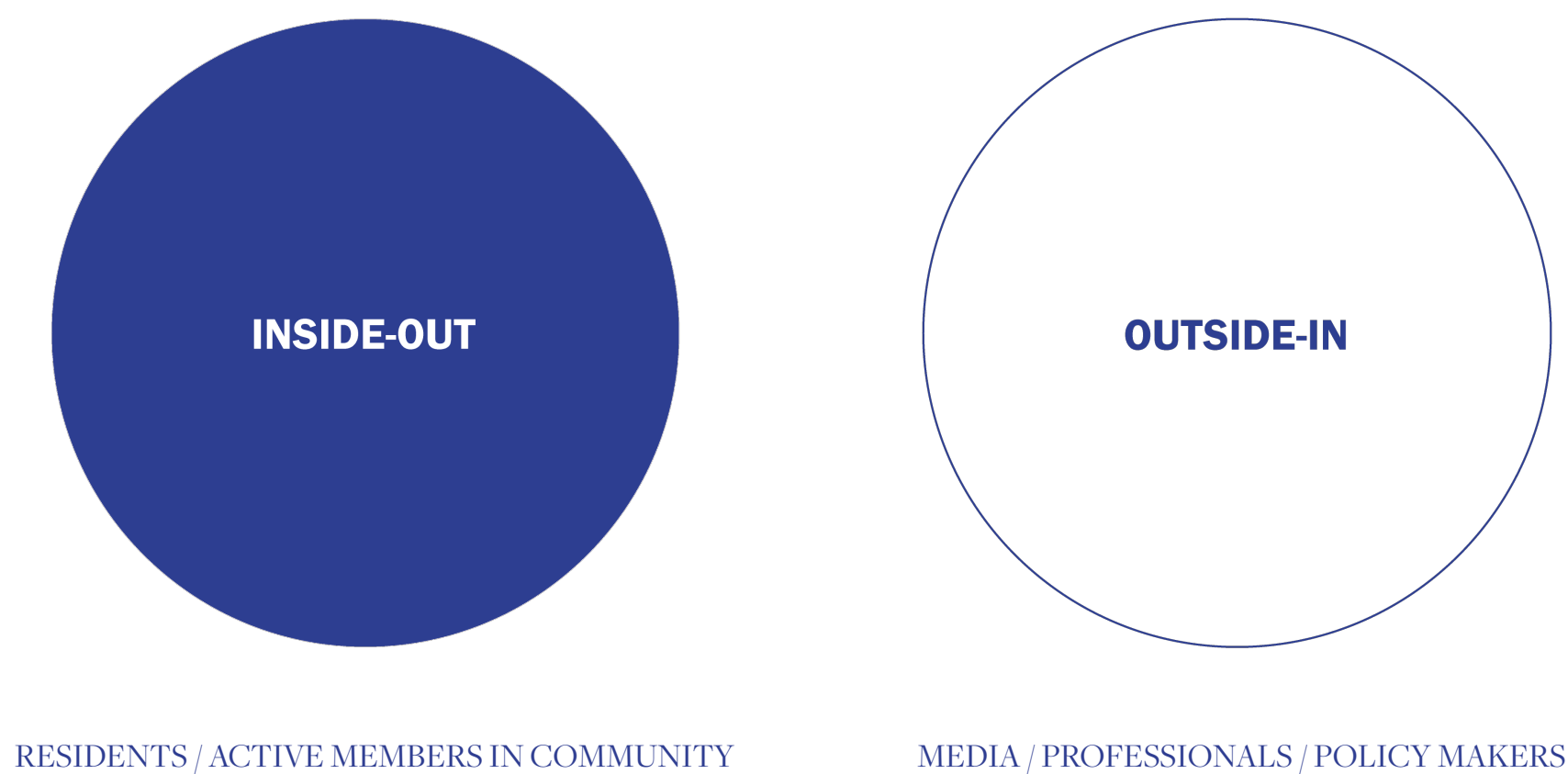


figure 11. diagrammatic visualisation of how the inside-out and outside-in perspectives are not touching.

EMPOWERMENT

ASSIGNMENT

The notion of *empowerment* plays a large role in the continuation of the research. As the residents of Molenbeek experience an external pressure that hinders them from crossing their district's borders and letting their voices be heard. The empowerment of the local population is necessary for the neighbourhood to flourish. Possible definitions of empowerment (Oxford Languages, 2022) include:

**'AUTHORITY OR POWER
GIVEN TO SOMEONE TO DO
SOMETHING'**

**'THE PROCESS OF BECOMING
STRONGER AND MORE
CONFIDENT, ESPECIALLY
IN CONTROLLING ONE'S
LIFE AND CLAIMING ONE'S
RIGHTS'**

These definitions encompass the intrinsic character of empowerment, which can be linked to the residents within the inside-out perspective. The empowerment of the seldom-heard voices can establish a force that can provide pressure to the message of the outside-in perspective.

As the Latin origin of the word 'power' describes, empowerment should be an enabling practice.

Besides acquiring control and power over physical matters such as governmental policies, empowerment also influences mental wellbeing through gaining confidence. This also makes empowerment a rather personal term. Empowering a group of people requires considering the wishes and desires from all perspectives.

If inhabitants are able to be proud of their neighbourhood, they become confident in making spatial claims in the public space, indicating that they feel comfortable and empowered (Van Der Burgt, 2013). In the current streetscape of Molenbeek, these spatial claims are absent.

EMPOWERMENT

ɛm'pauəmə(ə)nt

NOUN

authority or power given to someone to do something

the social process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights

LATIN: potis (power)
to be able

AIM + QUESTIONS

ASSIGNMENT

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The methodological aim of this project is related to the empowerment of inhabitants through urban design.

The empowerment of residents generates confidence that allows them to directly participate in the amelioration of the district. This approach enables the accumulation of welfare from the inside-out perspective.

By granting the local population the power over their own environment, potential gentrification and displacement issues in the neighbourhood can be prevented. When additive qualities in urban spaces align with the wishes and desires of the current population, they generate spaces that might not be as attractive to the general public.

The urban design solution should resonate with contemporary socioeconomic challenges in the neighbourhood to achieve amelioration from inside-out. Focusing on designing publically accessible urban qualities by embedding open living rooms inside the urban tissue. These urban living rooms are focused on different target groups, who currently experience difficulty in expressing certain behavioural patterns in the public realm. The notions of empowerment, perceived ownership and comfort lead to spaces in which these

seldom-heard groups are able to feel at home. Spaces for women, elderly, children and youth are emphasised in this project. By fabricating comfortable urban living rooms for these specific groups in society, they are able to feel empowered to make spatial claims inside the public realm. Resulting in an increasing amount of 'eyes on the street' and the ability to reduce elements in the streetscape that currently radiate fear. The reciprocation between publicly and privately owned social spaces aims to accommodate and consolidate currently distanced groups in society.

Through the design of urban living rooms, the fields of architecture, urban design and anthropology are united. By not being limited to working in the classical public realm, and designing from the residents' perspective, the project is able to bridge the gap between the opposing inside-out and outside-in perspectives; empowering urbanism. Emphasising the movement of the urban design field towards the inside-out perspective, distancing itself from the classical academic bubble. Through this new perspective, the definition of urban design can be stretched, adding new meaning to the profession. This covers the scientific relevance of the project.

The methodological aim of the project could be stated as:

**THE SOCIOECONOMIC
AMELIORATION OF THE
DISTRICT OF MOLENBEEK
WHILE PREVENTING
GENTRIFICATION BY
EMPOWERING RESIDENTS
THROUGH PUBLIC DESIGN.
INVITING THEM TO MAKE
SPATIAL CLAIMS AND FEEL
THE PERCEIVED OWNERSHIP
OF SPECIFIC URBAN LIVING
ROOMS, WHICH SHAPE THE
NEW EDGE OF THE URBAN
DESIGN FIELD.**

From these methodological aims, the following main research question can be derived:

**HOW CAN THE FIELD OF
URBAN DESIGN STIMULATE
THE EMPOWERMENT
OF THE 'INSIDE-OUT
PERSPECTIVE' IN THE CASE
OF MOLENBEEK-SAINT-
JEAN?**

This main research question is supported by various sub-questions that encourage the design solutions:

- *Why does the current public realm of Molenbeek-Saint-Jean not facilitate the empowerment of its residents?*
- *What kind of urban elements encourage the empowerment of residents to make a spatial claim?*
- *What are the spatial opportunities for amelioration in the urban tissue of Molenbeek-Saint-Jean?*

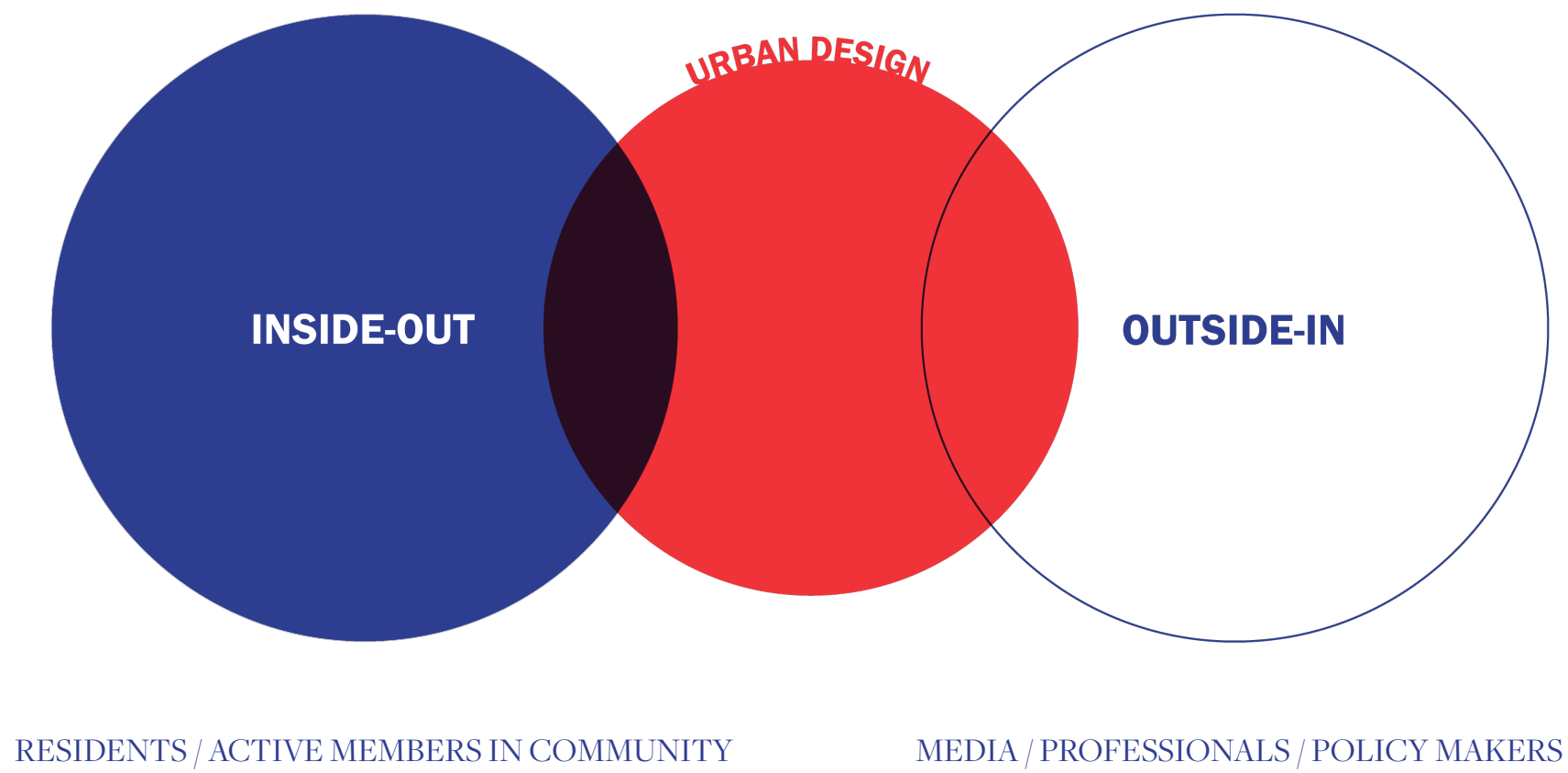


figure 12. diagrammatic visualisation of the role of urban design in relation to the inside-out and outside-in perspectives.

S
4



03 METHOD

METHODOLOGY

METHOD

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The collection of methods shaping this project is focused on the inside-out perspective. They aim to project the primary socioeconomic challenges of the site in the context of urban design research.

Ethnographic mapping is a tool based on quantitative observation practices in place. Ethnographic maps are able to capture human action and interaction in place and time (Martin, n.d.). It dynamically holds information about the spatial perception and interpretation of the ethnographer. Social rhythms, cultural interactions and user patterns can be articulated. This enables the visual communication of social and qualitative data. The difference between regular maps and ethnographic maps lies in the definitions of 'space' and 'place'.

**SPACE IS UNDERSTOOD
AS PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL
LANDSCAPE WHICH IS
IMBUED WITH MEANING
IN EVERYDAY PLACE-
BOUND SOCIAL PRACTICES
(LEFEBVRE, 1992)**

**PLACE FOR US IS SOCIALLY
CONSTRUCTED AND
OPERATING, INCLUDING
INTERACTION BETWEEN**

**PEOPLE AND GROUPS,
INSTITUTIONALISED LAND
USES, POLITICAL AND
ECONOMIC DECISIONS
AND THE LANGUAGE OF
REPRESENTATION (SAAR
& PALONG, 2009)**

Place is what enables the identity and character of space. Ethnographic mapping is able to communicate the essence and character by embodying the place and its uniqueness.

Soft mapping is an observational method developed by the visual artist Jan Rothuizen. In his drawings, the physical city and the lived city meet each other. It can be considered a graphic reportage in which the ville meets the cité. Aiming for a better understanding of the city through the subjective eyes of the observer. His work is characterised by expressing the rawness of micro-stories within the city through the fine attention to detail, however the scale and proportions of the image can be freely interpreted by the artist. The soft mapping method is derived from the concepts of the book 'soft city' (1974), by Jonathan Raban. The communication through image and drawing is what distinguishes a soft map from an ethnographic map.

Fieldwork observations aim to document the daily life on site as real as possible. Observations enable the ability to record actions, patterns or irregularities in the urban fabric. Observations are deployable through both qualitative and quantitative variations. Throughout this project, observations of interactions between the public and private realms have constructed a pattern of design possibilities. The findings in the public realm are documented through various media, such as photography, annotations, audio recordings and sketches.

Interviews, discussions and other verbal interactions introduce local perspectives to the project. These spontaneous interactions aim to gather local opinions, perspectives and insights on certain challenging topics. In the virtue of the empowerment of the residents within the inside-out perspective, local voices are a crucially important medium to emphasise their thoughts, perspectives and ideas. Conversations with residents unlock endless amounts of micro-stories that all deserve to be told.

Spatial analysis is a classical method within the field of urban design, aiming to find syntheses or relationships between certain characteristics or spatial conditions. Mapping out these

characteristics enables their comparison. For this project, the spatial analysis has influenced the design experimentation and final design.

Design experimentation aims to activate the creative mindset through explorative exercises. Resulting in new insights that provide solutions to larger urban challenges. A way to execute these experiments is through quick sketching under the pressure of a timer. Generating ideas based on instinctive processes enables the acceleration of the design process when needed.

Literature reviews are a form of descriptive analysis that can provide a sharp scientific framework, setting boundaries that frame the research. Merging diverse forms of academic literature can produce syntheses that reveal new insights on the topic. Throughout this project, both academic and non-academic literature is reviewed and reflected upon.

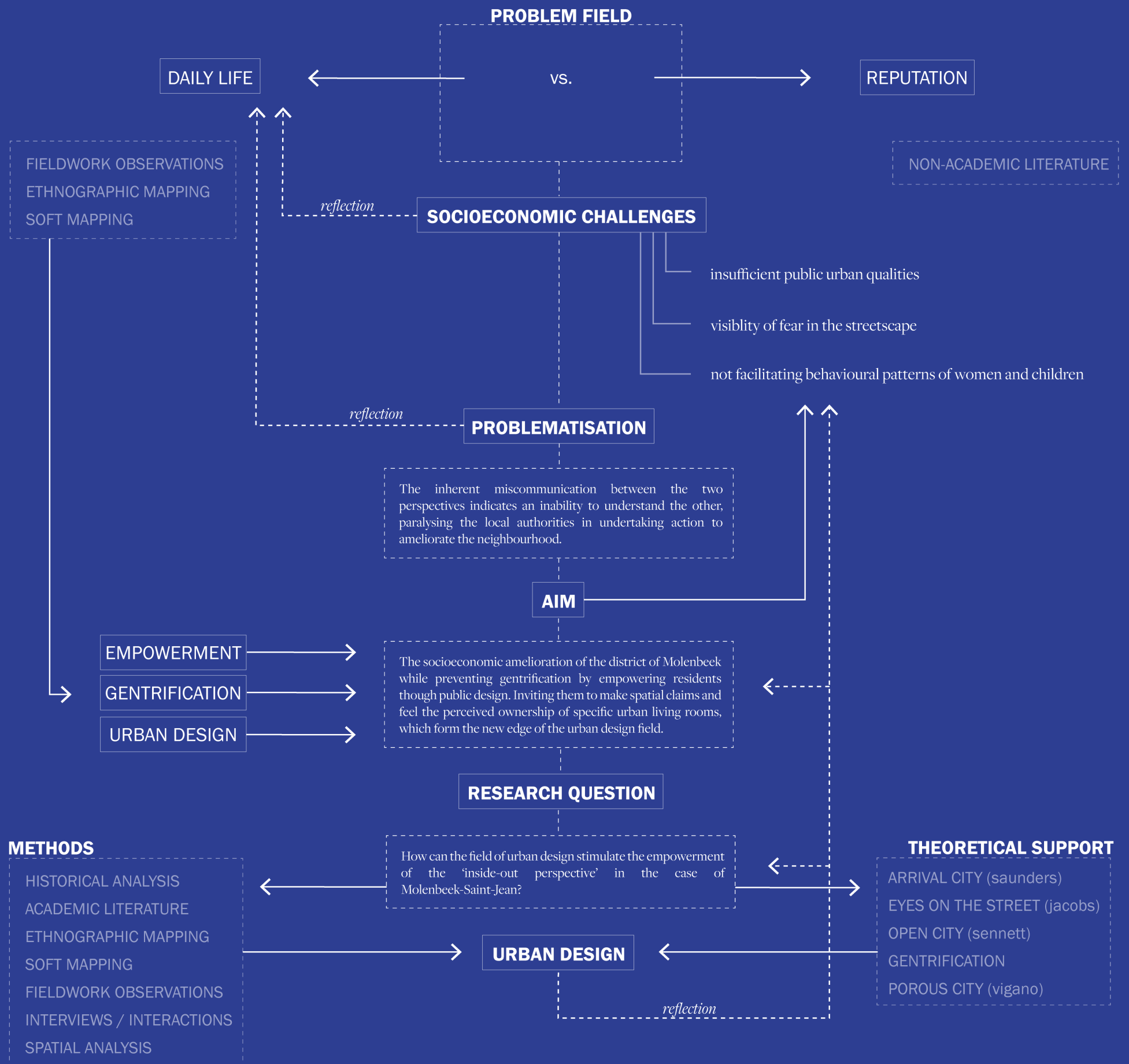


figure 13. methodological framework

The various research methods can be related to each other through an analytical framework, visible in figure 13. This describes the main body of analysis.

The analysis can be divided into a social analysis and a spatial analysis. The social analysis is very human-focused. Observations and interactions with the inside-out perspective provide a large part of the scope and context, helping to define an authentic idea of daily life in the neighbourhood. Providing a contribution to the final design by defining target groups and programme guidelines.

The spatial analysis can be considered more systematic, as design theories and literature are used as the base for maps and diagrams in which the streetscape of Molenbeek is analysed. The spatial analysis of the streetscape determines the scales in which the problematisation operates. Providing a contribution to the final design by spatially identifying design opportunities and limits.

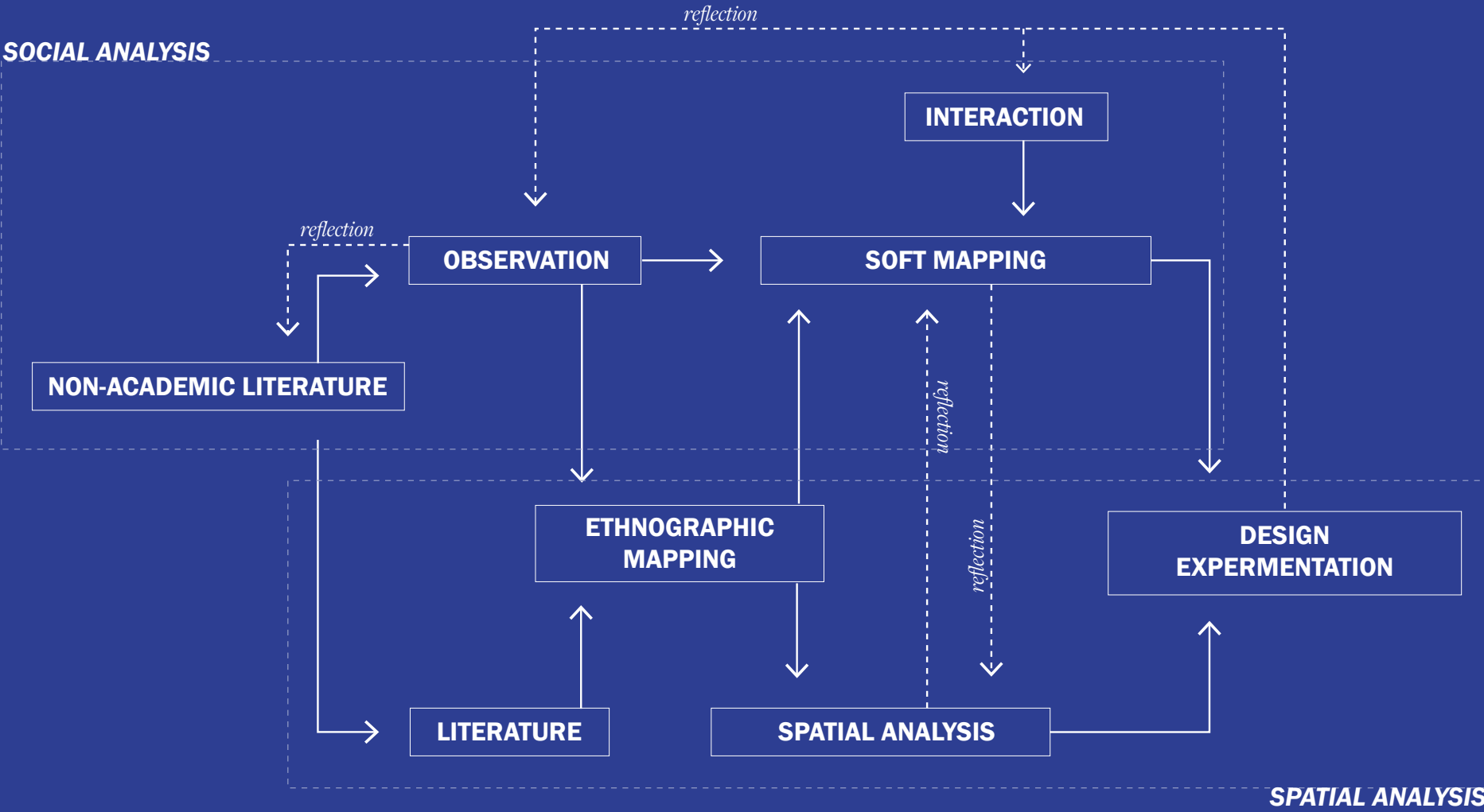


figure 14. analytical framework

ARRIVAL CITY

METHOD

40

By 2050, 68% of the global population is projected to reside in urban areas, which requires an additional 2.5 billion people to migrate in the coming decades (United Nations, 2019). In this rapidly urbanising and globalising world, rural peasants flee from field to favela in hopes of a better life in the city. European societies struggle with the large influx of migrants from other parts of the globe and their integration into their new environment (Hanhörster & Wessendorf, 2020). Migrants seek opportunity in the megacities and are welcomed by their outskirts in large numbers (Pearce, 2017). The arrival city.

These arrival cities are able to provide newcomers with specific arrival-infrastructures, which can contribute in overcoming problems that occur in the setting of daily life, as well as holding the potential to enable social mobility. The opportunities that attract large numbers of migrants are defined by the proximity of certain characteristics (Saunders, 2011), such as:

1. a surplus of cheap labour.
2. the accessibility of cheap produce and other market wares.
3. an extensive existing network of migrants from various different countries and cultures, providing a home away from home.
4. the availability of cheap

accommodations, preferably with reliable accessibility to other parts of the city.

Nevertheless, these arrival infrastructures can either facilitate or impede social mobility, as they frequently emerge in contexts of underlying disadvantage and discrimination. In such areas, resources like housing and employment often become highly contentious. These areas are often characterised by the combination of high concentrations of ethnic minorities and socioeconomic deprivation (Hanhörster & Wessendorf, 2020).

This large number of arriving migrants inevitably results in a large turnover number of residents. Arrival cities prove not to be attractive for middle-class households, hindering local economic growth.

**'YOU ARRIVE IN
MOLENBEEK AND IF YOU
SUCCEED, YOU LEAVE, BUT
IF YOU FAIL, YOU STAY
WITH THE STIGMA OF BEING
A LOSER.'**

A portion of arrivals succeeds in climbing the social escalator of these arrival cities, obtaining the

financial privilege to afford an accommodation in a wealthier, safer or more central part of the city. By moving away, the vicious cycle of the arrival city sustains itself.

Molenbeek can be characterised as an 'arrival city', as defined in the eponymous book by Saunders (2011). The district has been welcoming migrants for over a century. During the Industrial Revolution, the cheap workforce enabled the exponential growth of industries along the Willebroek Canal. In the 19th century, Flemish farmers with a ruined harvest were attracted by the opportunities that were embedded in the big city (Museum Van De Stad Brussel, 2023). As a result of the large influx of impoverished migrants and the possibility of quick industrial development, the accommodations for workers and the toxic factories were intertwined into the same urban territory. Factory halls were concealed by residential facades, to provide better urban living conditions for the working class.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Molenbeek was a popular place of arrival for Mediterranean residents, mainly Greece, Italy and Spain. They utilised the opportunities provided by the quickly developing industrial branch. Influences from the presence of Mediterranean nationalities are still visible in the

contemporary urban tissue.

In the 1960s and 1970s, a wave of migrant workers from North African countries settled in Molenbeek. Moroccan and Algerian nationalities still encompass the vast majority of the population in the historical part of Molenbeek.

Since 2000, most arrivals come from Eastern European countries, such as Romania and Bulgaria. The type of cheap labour has shifted and modernised, but the ruins of the toxic industries still compose an environment that attracts new arrivals to the city.



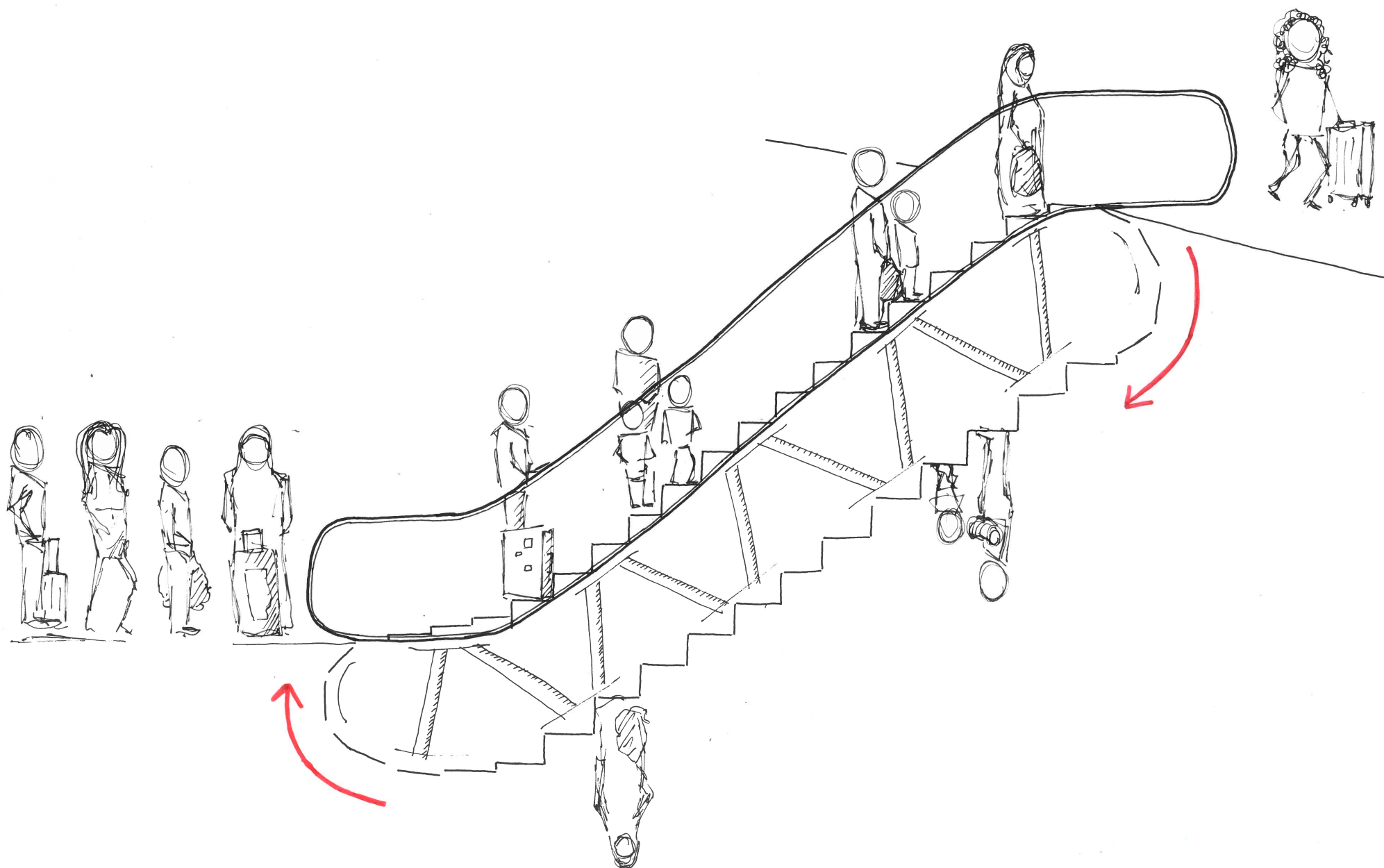


figure 15. the concept of the social escalator in the context of the arrival city theory by Saunders.

EYES ON THE STREET

METHOD

The perceived safety in the city is of significant importance for the social behaviour of people in the public realm. The perceived safety in Molenbeek can be classified as low, as the liveliness of the district is concentrated in the designated shopping streets. Streets within the inner fabric of Molenbeek are often empty and dull. The interaction between inside and outside is hindered by series of closed blinds and large garage doors, affecting the level of comfort people experience there.

In her works, Jane Jacobs has thoroughly discussed the critical importance of ‘eyes on the street’ and the relationship between the sidewalk and the interior. Her research mostly speaks about the role of streets and sidewalks as the most important organs in the city (Jacobs, 1994). They contain the capability to facilitate spontaneous interactions between strangers, acquaintances and friends. The disorder of cities is to be understood by layering it over the presence of the intricate social and economic order (Jacobs, 1961, p15).

The primary task of the sidewalk is to ensure the street safety. If a district fails to radiate street safety, the use of those streets decreases, resulting in a growing feeling of fear (Kunstler, 2022). This type of fear can be physically expressed in the streetscape of the district

by limiting and controlling public accessibility, by emphasising the presence of camera surveillance or by placing physical barriers. This results in an expanding distance between the fearful street and the comfort of the house.

‘THE ‘EYES ON THE STREET’ IS ONE OF THE SEVERAL PHRASES THAT JACOBS COINED AND ENTERED INTO THE TERMINOLOGY OF URBAN PLANNING. (WENDT, 2009)’

Jacobs argues that the public peace of cities, and particularly its sidewalks, is not primarily kept by the police, but by an intricate network of voluntary controls and standards among people themselves. This is seen prominently on busy city streets where passers-by, street-level merchants and residents keeping an eye on the street provide few opportunities for street crime (Jacobs, 1961).

Jacobs further emphasises the importance of building orientation, to naturally direct residents to watch the street life. The street activity should be a continuous flow through different time schedules. With their presence, people keep the streets safe. By strategically placing different functions

together inside the urban fabric, there will always be a sufficient number of ‘eyes on the street’. A combination of shops, dwellings, restaurants and bars assure the presence of ‘eyes on the street’ throughout the day (Wendt, 2009).

Jacobs’ concepts are broadly viewed as the first impactful attack on modernism, initiating the New Urbanism movement in the United States. In her work ‘The Life and Death of Great American Cities’, she argues that modern urban renewal does not respect the needs of city dwellers. She concluded that new projects that were appreciated by urban planners and architects showed no relation to what residents actually needed. Instead of humanising the profession of urban planning, inhabitants were treated like numbers. Contemporary urban development often still lacks inclusivity and customisation. The intricate, location-bound attention is lost in the pace of capitalism and globalisation that still dominates the lives in our metropolises.

FOR JACOBS, ONE MUST ONLY PLAN A CITY ACCORDING TO THE NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE LIVING IN IT (PETER, 2021)

Jacobs states that the practice of urban renewal is destroying liveable neighbourhoods and their social dynamics, through the continuous displacement of residents across the entire metropolitan area. Urban planners seldom seemed to be intellectually suitable for respecting and understanding the needs of locals and accommodating them through urban design (Jacobs, 1961).

Jacobs’ desired street safety levels require four preconditions that stimulate the creation and preservation of vibrant, diverse cities (Peter, 2021):

- 1. mixed land use enables a temporal spread of people.
- 2. smaller urban blocks (an increasing amount of corners) result in more frequent cross-use of the streets.
- 3. a mix of new and aged buildings that are able to house a variety of users with different cultural, social and economic characteristics.
- 4. a sufficient concentration of people who boost the local economic activity, increase sidewalk safety and increase the volume of the district’s political voice.





"THE CITY PLANNERS ARE RAVAGING OUR CITIES!"

✂ They've put up gleaming stone and glass file cabinet housing which breeds delinquency and crime.

✂ They've built spacious green park areas that are avoided by everyone but bums and hoodlums.

✂ They've condemned and destroyed entire city blocks that are not slums, but attractive places to live.

✂ They've zoned our cities into intolerable patterns of dullness.

Jane Jacobs says this and much more in her explosive new book, *THE DEATH AND LIFE OF GREAT AMERICAN CITIES*. Mrs. Jacobs shows that the city

planners have failed because they have overlooked the realities of urban life, and stripped our cities of the vitality and diversity which make them exciting places to live. She offers concrete, practical alternatives that can save our cities from the blunders of orthodox planners.

Harrison Salisbury of the *New York Times* hails this book as "the most refreshing, stimulating and exciting study of this greatest of our problems of living which I've seen. It fairly crackles with bright honesty and good sense."

William H. Whyte, author of *The Organization Man*, calls it "magnificent. One of the most remarkable books ever written about the city."

The Death and Life of Great American Cities

By JANE JACOBS

\$5.95, now at your bookstore

RANDOM HOUSE



OPEN CITY

METHOD

A good city should provide efficient public services, a lively local economy, accessible cultural elements and a safe environment for all types of people. Contemporary cities are not meeting these defined expectations of what a city should be. In his book ‘Building and Dwelling, ethics for the City’ (2019) Richard Sennett discusses the importance of opening up the city to revive these desired characteristics in the contemporary context.

Sennett highlights two different French terms to explain the relationship between the built and the social environment of which the city is composed. The *ville* represents the whole built environment, while *cit * encompasses certain (historical) characteristics and spaces within that built environment. Sennett describes the city as a question of complexity which can solely be solved by asking open questions. By connecting the *ville* to the *cit *.

THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT
IS ONE THING, HOW PEOPLE
DWELL IN IT ANOTHER
(SENNETT, 2019)

The closed system has been shaped by 20th-century capitalism, degrading the functionality of a

city to equilibrium and integration. The over-specification of form and function makes the modern urban environment peculiarly susceptible to decay (Sennett, 2019). An open city system encompasses democracy as a physical experience. Three main principles are defined by Sennett, they are incorporated in the fundament for the open city.

Ambiguous edges draw attention to the types of edges within natural ecologies. A boundary is where things end. It represents a guarded territory, a wall rejecting interactions with the other or the unknown. This means that the edge itself is dead. A border is where things interact. Borders are analogous to membranes, they enable controlled interaction with the outside. Borders and membranes are both porous and resistant, resulting in a selection of valuable interactions. These active edges should be developed in order to achieve an open city system.

On an architectural scale, porosity can indicate the synergy between inside and outside, public and private. A lively interaction on the edge between the facade and interior adds a concrete strategy to the concept of ‘eyes on the street’ by Jacobs (1961). Something Molenbeek is currently lacking.

‘THE WORLD WANTS MORE
POROUS CITIES, SO WHY
DON’T WE BUILD THEM?’

Narrative indeterminacy encompasses the stratification and complexity of contemporary city life. Representing a dialogic narrative, instead of a linear narrative. A linear narrative builds up towards a conclusion, while a dialogic emphasises the value of the process. The open city hosts spontaneous encounters and conflicts. The design process encompasses reflection and problem-finding, neglecting the linear thought process.

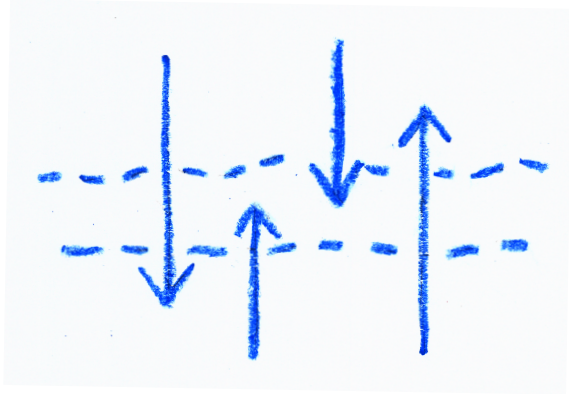
Incomplete form can be classified as a systematic characteristic of the open city. The city is never finished, so the urban design should allow for addition, change and revision as time develops. Form and function need to be loosely connected (Sennett, 2017). This makes the open city concept sustainable.

However, the conditions and elements that Sennett proposes to achieve an open city do not harmonise with the conditions that are required to acquire Molenbeek as an open city.

The membranes he describes as ideal locations for intervention are debatable in the case of Molenbeek. The canal district is a

distinct border where two different urban characteristics meet, but new urban development around the canal district would immediately kickstart the gentrification process in Molenbeek. The choice to prevent gentrification in seldom-heard neighbourhoods might result in the death of some urban edges.

The approach Sennett poses for achieving open city characteristics can be applied in the development of Molenbeek. The lived city approach, in which bottom-up interventions, social structures, spontaneous encounters and local identity create an environment where people are free to feel at home in the public space. It provides space for interaction and conflict, with attention to the human scale.



building and dwelling, richard sennett

PLANNED CITY	LIVED CITY
TOP-DOWN	BOTTOM-UP
STREETS, SQUARES, BUILDINGS	SOCIAL STRUCTURES
GOVERNMENTS, POLITICIANS, DIRECTORS, POLICYMAKERS	RESIDENTS AND USERS
VISIONS, IDEALS	REALITY
PROBLEM- AND SUPPLY-ORIENTED	SOLUTION-ORIENTED AND DEMAND-DRIVEN
THEMATIC KNOWLEDGE	AREA KNOWLEDGE
STATISTICS	STORIES
STRIVING FOR URBAN AVERAGES	NEIGHBOURHOOD IDENTITY AS A STARTING POINT
VERTICALLY BUREAUCRACIES, HIERARCHIALLY	HORIZONTAL CORPORATION, NETWORK
MAKING THE CITY	BEING THE CITY
STRUCTURE, ORGANISED	SPONTANEOUS
CITY LEVEL	INDIVIDUAL LEVEL
ORGANISING, BLUEPRINT	ORGANIC, CYCLIC PROCESS
HOUSE	HOME



figure 17. table with values derived from the open city concept. table source: Helleman, 2022 via Urban Springtime edited by author

GENTRIFICATION

METHOD

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The notion of gentrification is used to refer to an alteration in land-use patterns and changes in the composition of neighbourhood populations, which result in social restructuring of large metropolitan areas in the Western world (Pascal et al., 1985). Gentrification mostly affects inner-city working-class neighbourhoods, as their location is prone to urban renewal. Post-war city revitalisation has resulted in a new type of urban renewal, where a dominant capitalist market attracts the middle class to these working-class neighbourhoods by upgrading dwellings and adding public amenities that are designated to fit the lifestyle of the middle-class.

The nineteenth century allowed large-scale investments in inner-city neighbourhoods. The simultaneous rise in ground value generated a possibility of profitable redevelopment (Smith, 1979). The social characteristics of deprived neighbourhoods would reject the classic middle-class, but the hidden economic potential reveals the interest of pioneer groups, like young households, students and artists (Jakóbczyk-Gryszkiewicz et al., 2011). Affordability plays the largest part in the determination of the choice for a place of residence, followed by the proximity of public amenities like schools and shops. This capitalist-driven housing market pressurises the affordability within less

wealthy neighbourhoods within the metropolitan area. The social and economical interest of the middle class and their extensive budget, amplifies the pressure on these vulnerable neighbourhoods, such as Molenbeek. The rising rents within 'upcoming' districts are causing original residents to move away to other districts. This consequence is summarised by the notion of displacement.

The involuntary move of people can imply a diverse set of actors, for example; natural disasters, rent increases, decisions by the local or national government or banks engaging in redlining practices (Zuk et al., 2015).

It is of vast importance that the notion of gentrification does not apply to the plans of urban renewal within the municipality of Molenbeek. As most residents have settled as arrivals in the arrival city. They have seen their children grow up in the streets they once conquered.

The neighbouring district of Tours&Taxis juxtaposes the reality of ethnic and economic segregation, and the effects of urban planning on gentrification. The Rue Piquard forms the seemingly impermeable boundary between the two dimensions.

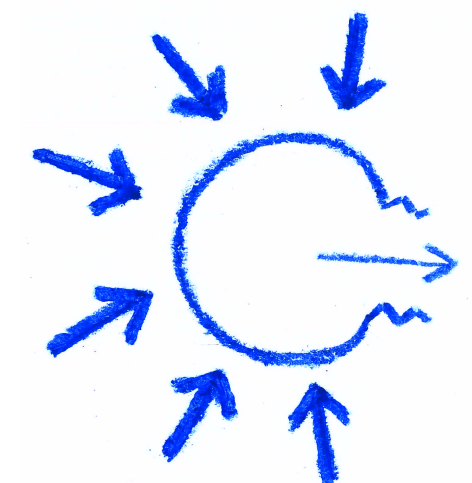




figure 18. porosity within the streetscape of molenbeek



figure 19. gentrified gare maritime within the tours&taxis neighbourhood

REPUTATION

METHOD

48

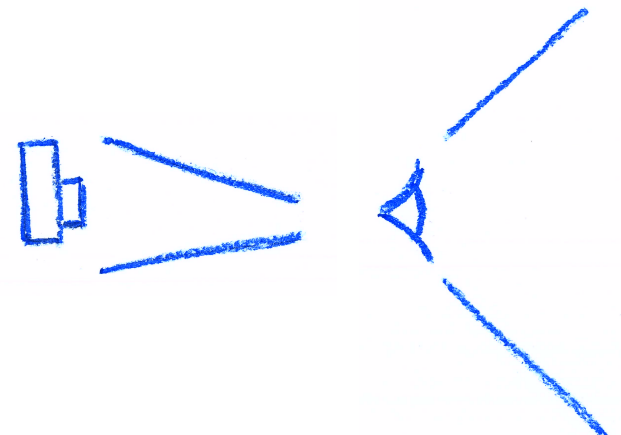
As stated by Kearns et. al. in 2013, reputation is shaped through storytelling and experiences. The storytelling is often fulfilled by the media frame, composed standpoints of various news outlets. Own experiences come from visits, friends or interactions. They often have a smaller reach.

For people who do not reside near areas such as Molenbeek, the media are very influential in shaping the reputation of such neighbourhoods, as their own experience of them is lacking. This imbalance in power is exploited by the media, as they often accentuate and feed the existing adverse reputation of notorious places, because of the additional sales that negative news stories generate (Kearns et al., 2013). Using reputation as a capitalist weapon to profit off the poor and the disadvantaged. Treating and substantiating the poor reputation of a place as a fact, rather than an opinion or belief. This one-sided view, based on inflated incidents can have serious consequences for the residents and the district.

The persistent notorious reputation of Molenbeek can lead to dissatisfaction, especially among the residents in employment. Inhabitants have experienced increased hostility since the 2015 incidents, causing them to grow adverse feelings towards their own

neighbourhood (Vohra, 2022). A negative perception is a solid reason for them to move away to different districts (Andersen, 2008). Thereby they are opening up a spot for the continuous flow of anonymous new arrivals, continuing the cycle.

To test the fairness of the current reputation of Molenbeek, the balance in the equation should be regained by expanding the field of own experiences. Site visits can enable the observations of the activities that form the daily lives of residents in Molenbeek by using different practical methods such as ethnographic mapping, soft mapping, observing and interviewing.



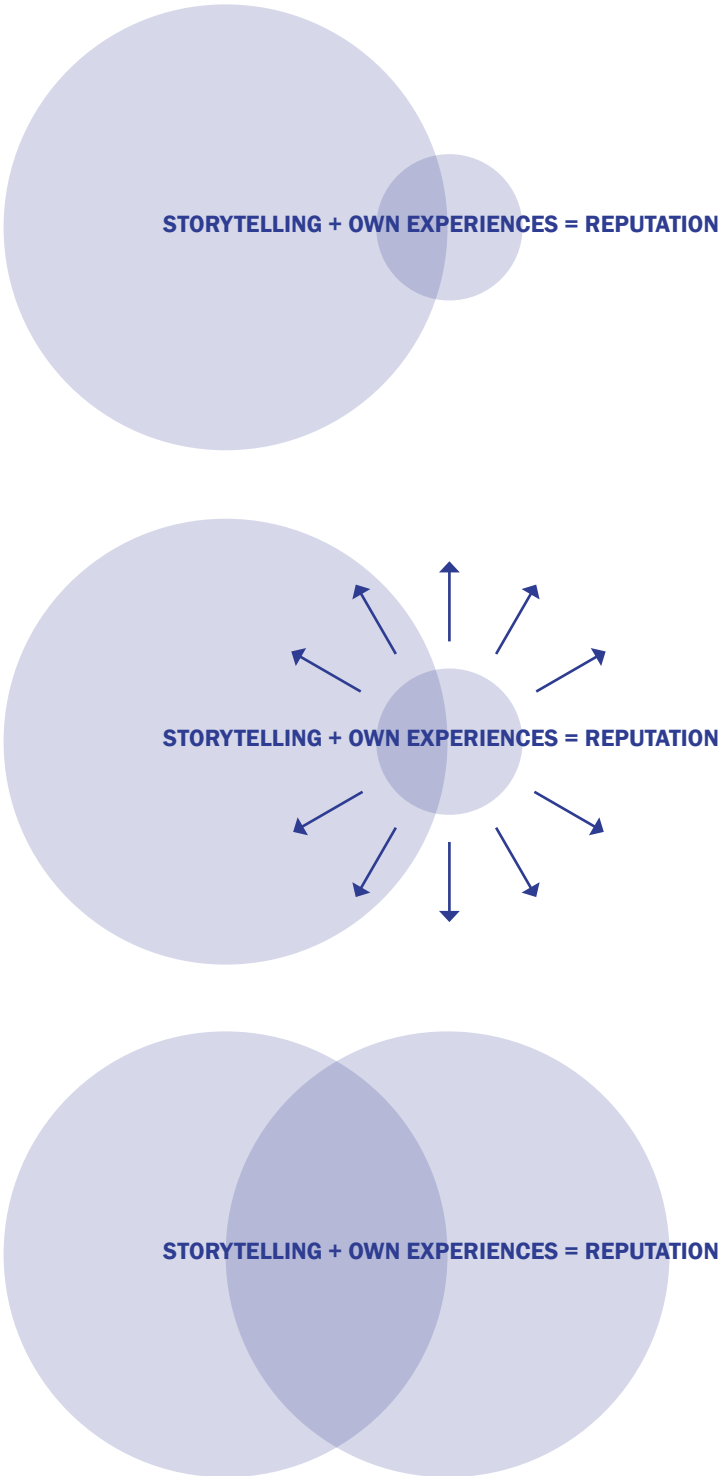


figure 20. diagrammatic visualisation of the imbalance in the process of shaping of a reputation.



04 CASE

DAILY LIFE // SOCIAL ANALYSIS

CASE

52

SEPTEMBER 28TH 2023

A site visit to Molenbeek enables insights into the daily routines and occupations of the local population. The incentive of this trip is to assess the fairness and correctness of the one-sided reputation that the media has shaped. A neutral stance towards the neighbourhood is essential for generating a non-biased first impression.

A distinct line separates Dansaert, one of the most wealthy neighbourhoods of Brussels, from Molenbeek. The Willebroekse vaart forms a physical and mental barrier through which Brussels distances itself from its neighbouring municipality. The bare concrete quay walls emphasise the size of the barrier, enlarging the threshold the bridge has become.

Every Thursday and Saturday, the Place Communale transforms into a local market. Household items, fresh produce, herbs, spices and clothing are displayed in an endless sea of stands. Women can be found on the market, meeting their close friends and family members for an informal get-together. Strolling around the market in small groups, beside them is often a trolley filled with their secured goods. Greeting or hugging acquaintances that they encounter in the mass,

suggesting a tight community. The public space around the market does not accommodate enough functions for the big mass of people. Benches and stairs are fully occupied, while nearby green spaces are deserted. Large gates express the private ownership of the qualitative pockets. Radiating hesitation to enter a space where you might not be welcomed. Keep out.

The streets that lay deeper inside the urban fabric are narrow. The line of cars on either side of the road characterises the public space. The personal vehicle has a prominent place in the streetscape, expressing wealth and status, as well as anonymity. Life happens inside the house and the car. Empty residential streets, deserted parks, closed blinds and loud music from passing vehicles confirm this thought. The poor maintenance of the streetscape has lead to an unpleasant place to stay. The smell of rotten food, radiated by the piles of trash on every corner scares off the potential for spontaneous encounters.

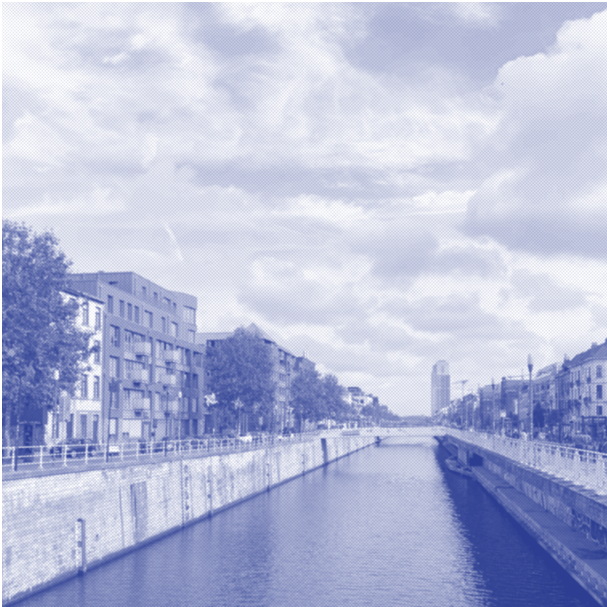


figure 21. photo gallery of daily life in molenbeek.

The space of the weekly market in Molenbeek has been visualised in an ethnographic map. The accumulation of smaller groups forms a dense sea of people. The slow movement of the mass is somewhat structured, as the stands with produce form temporary streets on the otherwise empty squares. It assigns a temporal destination that is embedded in the weekly rythms of the city and the lives of its inhabitants.

Aside from the busy market, neighbouring residential streets are deserted. Occasionally, a woman loaded with plastic shopping bags passes by on her way to her front door. The lack of ‘eyes on the street’ affects the perception of social safety in the inner tissue of the neighbourhood.

Some families are rewarding their children with a quick visit to the playground in Parc Bonnevie, but most people disappear at the nearest bus- or metro station.

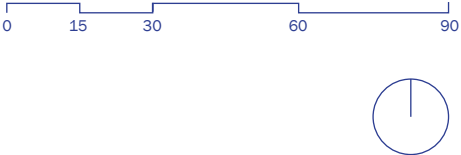
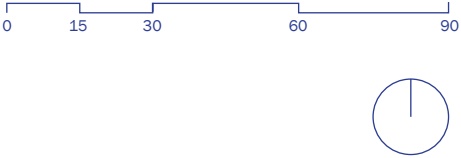




figure 22. ethnographic map of the weekly market on place communale.

The weekly market in Molenbeek is translated into a soft map, describing the subjective, personal experience of walking through the market. Small irregularities can be made tangible through detailed observations, such as Frank's peanuts stand, surrounded by stepped-on empty peanut shells. The permanent line in front of one of the local bakeries, indicates the quality of the goods sold there. And the overcrowded benches by the entrance of the metro station, where the elderly can take a break from carrying all those shopping bags. Getting to know the distinct place by visualising its daily details.



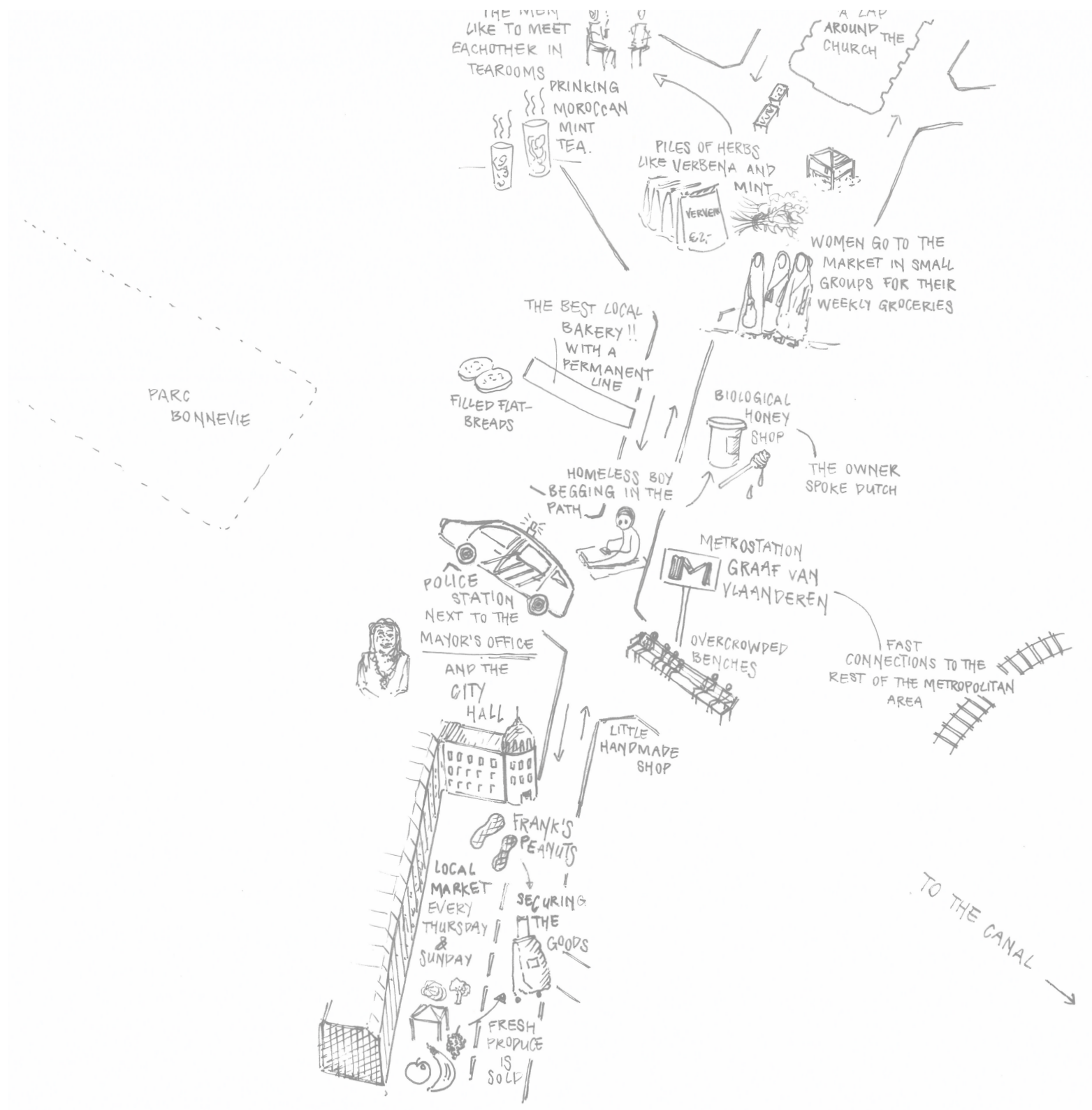


figure 23. soft map of the weekly market on place communale.

The distinct privatisation of qualitative urban spaces exudes a fear of violence, vandalism and crime. Enclosed oases within the dense urban fabric are protected from intruders by the placement of large, metal gates. Permitting exclusive access to a controlled group of people.

**VULNERABILITY PROVOKES
INACCESSIBILITY**

By regulating the accessibility and openness of such qualitative spaces, particular behavioural patterns are not facilitated in outdoor (public) places. Resulting in a social life that blooms behind closed doors.

The fear of violence and vandalism has become a major theme in the urbanity of the district. Different spatial typologies of fear can be distinguished. The gated community gardens are often accompanied by a poster with specific activities and opening times. Private parking garages are often integrated into the inside of the urban block, hiding behind a blind garage door. Schoolyards are fenced off with opaque hedges, distancing themselves from anything happening outside. Even empty plots with no use or quality are surrounded by fencing.

The constant confrontation with the presence of fear amplifies it,

until the fear grows bigger than the crime itself.

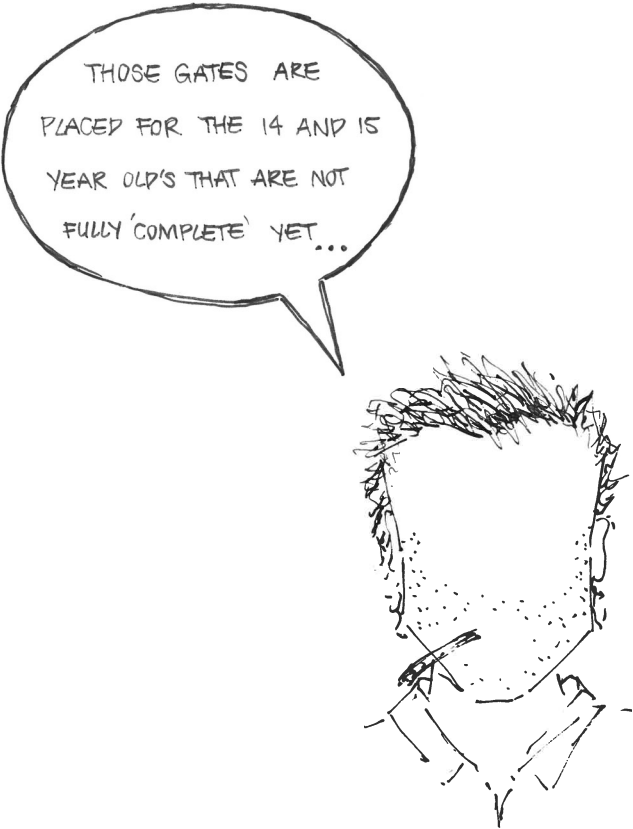




figure 24. recognition and representation of fear in the streetscape of molenbeek

SOCIAL LOCALS

CASE

60

Tea rooms, bakeries and coffee houses can be classified as spaces between the public and parochial realms where a major part of Molenbeek's social life blooms. The inviting smell of sweet Moroccan mint tea reaches beyond their facades. The men of Molenbeek spend a significant amount of time in these spaces, meeting their friends, cousins, or brothers and bonding over shared experiences.

The tea rooms have gained popularity since the seventies, when the wave of North African nationalities arrived in Molenbeek, simultaneously introducing new culture and religion. During the Ramadan period, these cafes are closed, but the imprint of their outdoor terrace remains a social space. Mirroring the behaviour of the women on the market, small groups of men gather in front of the closed tea room to socialise nevertheless.

Among Mediterranean nationalities, the cafe can also be classified as a cultural part of their daily and weekly routines. They serve a key role in sustaining the communal feeling in the neighbourhood. One of these key positions is filled by cafe 'La Rose Blanche', situated in a quiet street in the historical part of Molenbeek. What once was the first Greek cafe in Molenbeek, now also remains the last. It has been owned by

two Greek brothers since 1973 (Hendrickx, 2019).

The interior reflects the social character is the cafe, as it is filled with posters and frames of past and future activities. It is not just a cafe, but a living monument, closely maintained by the shrinking local Greek population and adopted by other prominent migrant groups that have settled in the diversity of the neighbourhood.

**'CECI N'EST PAS UN CAFÉ,
MAIS UN MONUMENT DE
QUARTIER'**

Over the past decades, La Rose Blanche has grown to become a place that unites all ethnicities and cultures through social and musical activities. The importance of the place is documented in the shape of a book and a film, expressing various micro-stories. The liveliness of such cafes and tea rooms expresses the intensity and reach of the communal network within the neighbourhood. They provide a socially controlled environment with a determined target audience. An oasis of order within the disorder of the city.

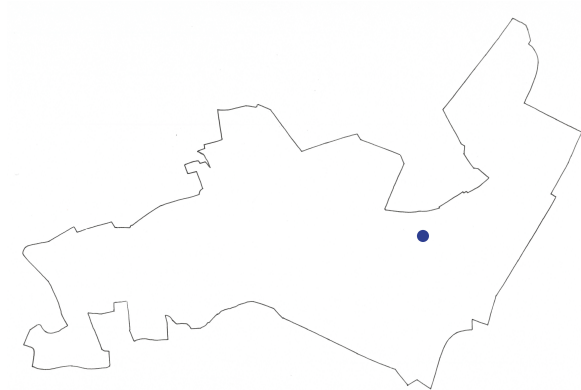




figure 25. La Rose Blanche, het laatste Griekse café van Molenbeek. (2019, October 23). BRUZZ. <https://www.bruzz.be/samenleving/la-rose-blanche-het-laatste-griekse-cafe-van-molenbeek-2019-10-2>

APRIL 8TH 2024

In conversation with the community team.

On the corner of Place Communale, four purple uniforms symbolise the presence of the community team. They take care of the safety and prevention within the neighbourhood through surveilling. Today, their task is to redirect the wrongly parked cars that have turned Place Communale into a temporal parking lot. Two questions formed the scope of the spontaneous conversation:

- 1). What is your favourite place in Molenbeek, and why?
- 2). Is there anything that you would add or change to improve Molenbeek?

MY FAVOURITE PLACE IN MOLENBEEK? HERE!

Place Communale is a great place to be according to the neighbourhood team. Other likeable places included the Gentssesteenweg, Étangs Noirs, Place de la Duchesse, the canal district, scheutbos and Chateau Karreveld. These places share a high perception of publicness and a low feeling of ownership. The number of eyes on the street (especially the surveilling eyes

from the neighbourhood team) in these overly public places directs people to behave accordingly. The residential streets in the inner fabric of Molenbeek are not classified as comfortable spaces to stay.

My question if Molenbeek needed more public green spaces, such as large parks, was answered with a firm ‘no’, even though they did agree on the fact that the spatial parks are all located on the total opposite side of the district, making them inaccessible for a large number of people who reside in the historical part of Molenbeek. The presence and accessibility of the newly opened Parc Bonnevie was sufficiently meeting the needs of residents in this part of Molenbeek, because

‘THE PROBLEMATIC LACK AND SCARCITY OF SPACE MAKES IT DIFFICULT TO FANTASISE ABOUT LARGE URBAN INTERVENTIONS’

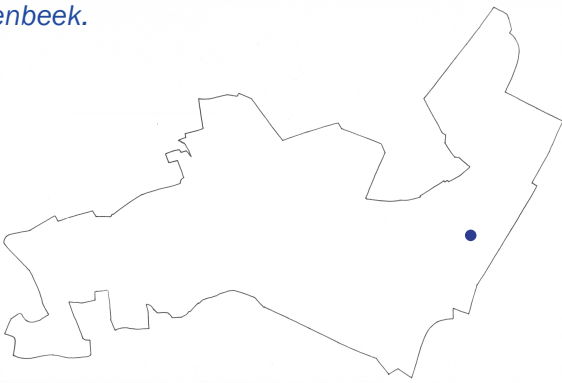
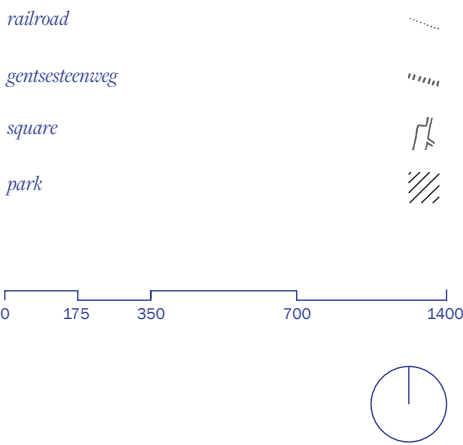
The second question was significantly more difficult to answer. Firstly concluding that there was an evident shortage of youth-oriented community centres. Safe spaces where children can make friends, develop their personalities and solve their problems. An ‘Educatoire du rue’. Smaller children experience a

lack of accessible and attractive playgrounds. The attention to children and youth in the answer indicates the concern for their development. Children are developing addictions to screen-oriented hobbies within the comfort of their own homes, resulting in the need for a very large pull to attract them to play outside (Edwards & Larson, 2020). Children do not feel safe in the car-dominated streets, initiating a vicious circle of staying inside (Lelong & Meire, 2023).

The waste processing system needs to be reviewed, as it does not function properly. Every corner of every street is lined with piles of trash bags. Some have been ripped open by the rats, who have happily settled in this waste paradise. A simple policy change initiating the introduction of collective (underground) waste bins can significantly improve the environmental qualities.

Another recurring problem is the parking situation in Molenbeek.

Even though every spare square centimetre of the district has been occupied by cars, there is a severe parking shortage. There is a bare piece of land near the railway tracks where a new parking lot could be placed. People in Molenbeek love their cars, hence why the Place Communale has been illegally transformed into a parking lot today. They are not allowed to park there, but they view the fine as the parking fee. The municipality generates a significant amount of income from this, so they do not take further action. The dependence on the car is intertwined with the mindset of the residents. Their car resembles their wealth and status; It grants them freedom to visit family who live further away and it enables mothers to take all their children along to the shops.



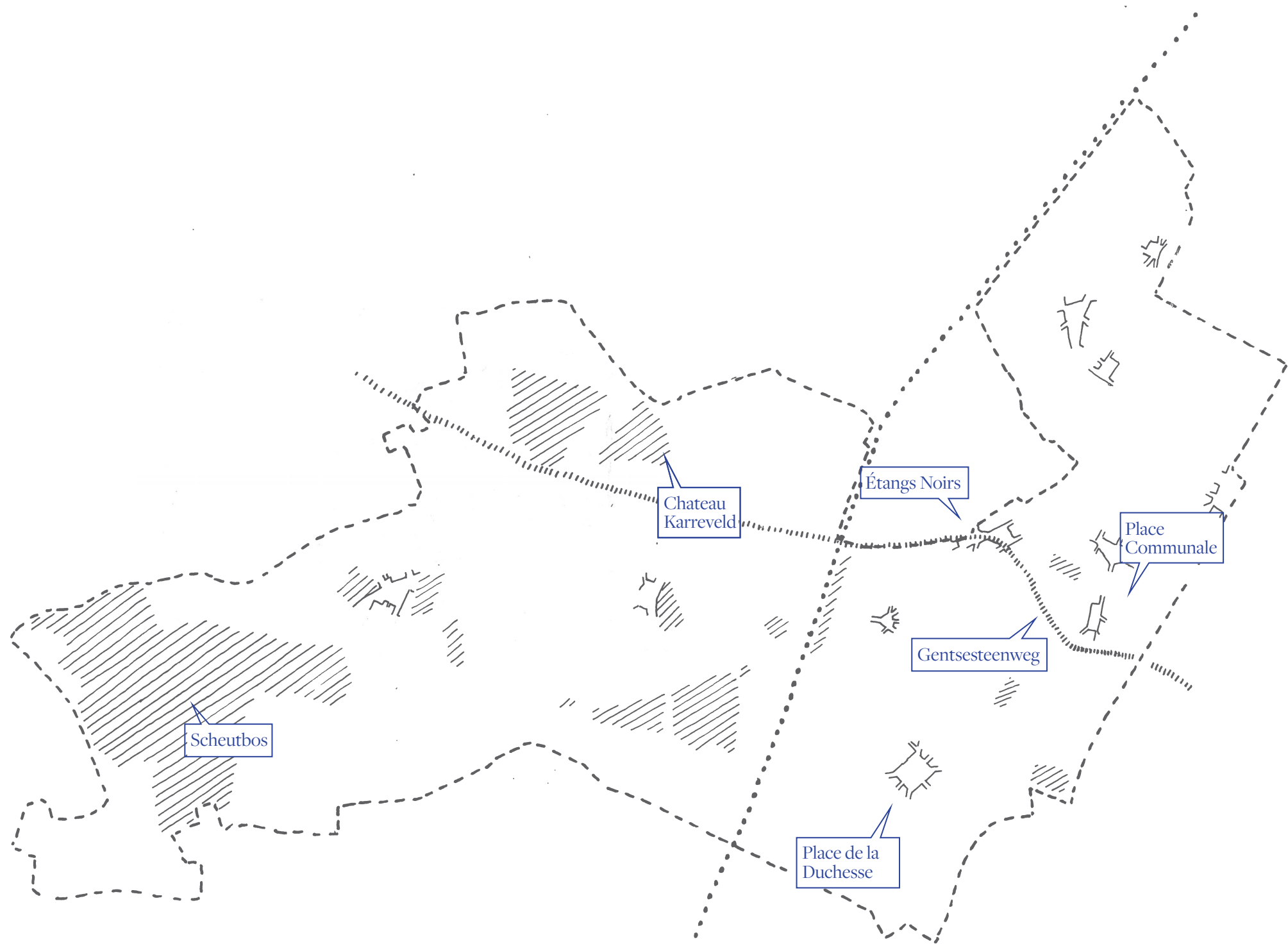


figure 26. distribution of qualitative urban spaces within the municipality of Molenbeek

APRIL 10TH, 2024

In conversation with the locals.

This morning, the streets of Molenbeek have been filled with people. The Ramadan has finally come to an end, making room for a celebratory Eid. Most people seemed in a hurry to get to their families in time with their freshly baked goods. They were not in the mood to be disturbed. On Place Communale, a man was sitting on an empty terrace. He was intrigued by the two questions I posed, and immediately showed incredible hospitality by inviting me to take a seat at the table.

1). What is your favourite place in Molenbeek, and why?

2). Is there anything that you would add or change to improve Molenbeek?

The first response set the tone for the rest of the conversation.

‘IN MIJN OGEN IS MOLENBEEK DE MOOISTE STAD VAN BELGIË.’

Place Communale is his favourite place in Molenbeek, because of its social character. It provides an environment in which people can

meet each other and enjoy the sun. The square by the Baptist church is also part of his favourites. Place Communale and the church square belong among the most active public spaces in Molenbeek. These urban spaces are well-designed and are mostly used appropriately. These spaces are capable of hosting a large market twice a week, accommodating the social needs hundreds of people on a daily basis. The city hall and police station are connected to the square, providing ‘eyes on the street’ from the local authorities.

In this neighbourhood community, people take care of others, regardless of their financial struggles or successes. Wealth does not have to be expressed through currency, as long as you have the paperwork to legally be here, you will have a good life. Even though the statistics show that a significant portion of residents of Molenbeek is living under the poverty line, the hospitality and generosity that is culturally embedded forms the backbone of the communal life in Molenbeek.

The pressure of the bad reputation is significantly affecting the inhabitants, both within and outside of Brussels. Life was better before the incident with Abdeslam in 2015. Employees from a hotel nearby warn their guests for the potential dangers of the

surrounding urban environment, prohibiting them to buy goods at local stores or explore the inner-fabric of Molenbeek further. They disseminate feelings of fear that lack foundation. Actions like these have negative consequences for the local economy. The neighbourhood is being framed negatively by those who should support it. Controlling and barricading qualitative urban spaces restrain the occurrence gatherings with bad intentions.

‘ABDESLAM HAS RUINED EVERYTHING FOR OUR COMMUNITY.’

Many residents of Molenbeek have their own company or shop, which also increases the local dependency on motored vehicles. The car is a very prominent and important part of the streetscape of Molenbeek. Most families own two to three cars. To potentially remove the cars from the streets of Molenbeek, the communal mindset needs to shift. The car is very much seen as a status symbol.

Investments in youth and children are most urgent. Additional community centres and playgrounds are needed in order to raise our children correctly. The barricaded qualitative urban spaces keep the fourteen, fifteen year old youth out and prevent them from vandalising the space. Investments in youth and children are a recurring theme among the local population. If they can be raised in a less violent environment, they will be able to develop their passions and talents accordingly, resulting in a lowered risk of encountering the criminal network and its actions.

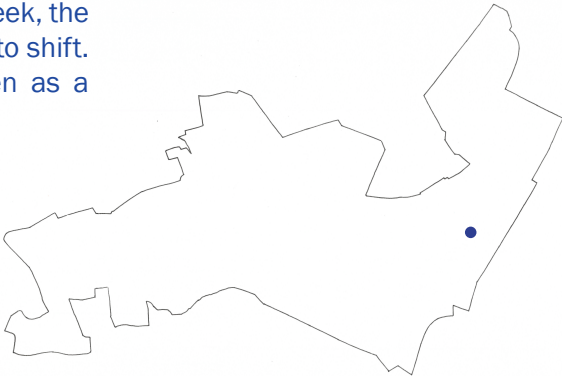




figure 27. gated jardin des quatre saisons in the vierwindenstraat.



figure 28. gated jardin urbain, accentuated by small spatial claims along the facade.

Many personal stories from neighbourhoods like Molenbeek are expressed in the lyrics of local hip-hop and rap artists. This enables a pure and genuine glimpse into local issues. Storytelling, but not glorifying. Considering the density and richness of the local cultural and associative life, the Molem' rap scene has developed into one of the most important scenes in Belgium (Khouiel, 2019). For Molenbeek, hip-hop and rap music are the thin line where the inside perspective directly interacts with the outside perspective.

'SKY' is a pure and proud product of Molenbeek, which he often integrates into his music. He describes how poverty forces young people into atrocity. His lyrics are laced with violence, drug trafficking and crime. He is a very prominent figure in the local community, as he had a job in a community centre. 'I am proud to represent the youth of Molenbeek. I come from this neighbourhood myself, I know what young people endure.' (Khouiel, 2019)

In his song 'La Zone' featuring Bosh, they rap about being involved in the extended drug-trafficking network, to escape the misery of poverty and despair. They have been pushed so deep into their neighbourhood, that they have developed a fear for what is outside.

*'In my head it's Medellín,
poverty has changed us'.*

*'It's our mothers who are
going to cry...'*

*'We sell drugs to get out,
we make music to get out,
once in, I want to get out
quickly. It's dangerous
outside'.*

‘Dans ma tête c’est *Medellín, la misère* nous a changé.’

‘C’est nos *mères* qui vont *chialer...*’

‘On vend d’la gue-dro *pour s’en sortir*, on fait d’la musique pour s’en sortir,
une fois dedans, j’veux vite en sortir. *Dehors c’est dangereux*’.



ZWANGERE GUY

BRUSSELS STATE OF MIND

68

Gorik van Oudheusden, also known as zwangere guy is a rapper from Ukkel, Brussels. Before pursuing national success with his musical career, he worked as a construction worker (Waszink, 2022). Through his extremely creative and clever way of playing with the Dutch language, he distinguishes himself from others.

Instead of bragging about designer clothing and expensive cars, his lyrics contain ingredients to ameliorate the environment around him. Often speaking about hopes and dreams for a better future, diverted by experiences from the raw reality of the neighbourhood he grew up in.

In his song 'Brussels state of mind' he raps about distancing himself from life on the streets. Taking all the chances he gets to ensure a better future for himself and his loved ones. While he does acknowledge that he grew up in an environment where that does not necessarily come naturally.

'Chances they keep coming, but the focus vanishes... I keep dreaming for days, because before I know it, I've lost them'.

'You won't see me in the club, unless I perform there for an hour'.

'I'm from a neighbourhood where all the silence get praised'

‘***Kansen*** blijven komen, maar de focus die verdwijnt... Blijf ganse dagen
dromen, voor ik weet ben ik ze ***kwijt***’

‘Zie me nie meer in de ***club***, tenzij ik er een uur ***speel***’

‘Kom uit een wijk waar dat ***zwijgen*** ook een ***pluim*** verdient’



WZ is a rap group from Molenbeek. Their name originates from 'West Zone', which is related to the municipality of Molenbeek-Saint-Jean in West-Brussels. They have gained national success with some of their songs as their most popular music video; 'Molenbeek city' has over a million views.

The lyrics often reveal details about the environment they grew up in. Illustrated by the presence of large knives and weapons in music videos. The privacy of the young artists is protected by covering their faces with masks, indicating involvement in illegal activity. All of the boys grew up in Molenbeek. They speak up about the socioeconomic problems that surround them on a daily basis.

*'I've done the 400 steps,
I've gone around the
neighbourhood'*

*'We come from afar, my
journey, in the streets your
life comes down to two,
three quarter turns'*

*'And I spend all my days in
the binks'*

‘J’ai fait les **400 coups**, du quartier j’ai fait **l’tour**’

‘On arrive d’loin gros, té-ma l’parcours, dans la rue ta vie s’résume à **deux**,
trois quarts tours’

‘Et j’ai passé **toute** ma journée dans **l’binks**’



JAZZ BRAK

HOEKEN EN MUREN

72

Jasper de Ridder, better known as Jazz Brak is one of Molenbeek's most successful offspring. In the hip-hop group STIKSTOF, including Zwangere Guy, he has achieved national recognition, before releasing a solo album. Aside from being a rapper, Brak also teaches art at a local secondary school (Boussemaere, 2023). Expressing his creativity in many different ways, such as photography, drawing, painting and writing.

The environment in which his children are growing up, but not being able to leave his own roots and history in Schaerbeek and Molenbeek behind is a recurring theme in his songs. Showing a love-hate relationship with the city he grew up in.

'There is nothing left to pick up here, buying another house in 'de rand'. Where the kids can play in the streets.

A garden that is big enough. A parking spot in front of the door. I am a child of the city, but sometimes I get stuck in the routine. Welcome to the city, BX Brussels is the base. Nine chances out of ten I will keep living where I was raised. It makes sense where I live, I know the people around me. Because the neighbourhood is like a village, 'Zwarte Vijvers, Étangs Noirs

Hier valt niks meer echt te rapen, koop een huis meer in '*de rand*'. Waar de kids spelen in straten. Een *tuin* die groot genoeg is, een parkeerplaats voor de deur. Ben *een kind hier van de stad*, maar soms genoeg van al de *sleur*. Welkom in de city, BX Brussel c'est la base. 9 kansen op de 10 blijf ik wonen waar ik ksar. Logisch waar ik woon *ken ik de mensen rond mijn dar*, want *de buurt is als een dorp*, 'Zwarte vijvers, étangs noirs'.



The social analysis of the neighbourhood has led to new insights and understandings of daily life in Molenbeek, which do not seem to match the portrait sketched by the media.

Opposing media depictions, everyday experiences are not dominated by organised criminal activity. While rap lyrics do hint at elements of illegality, notably drug trafficking, extremism is not prevalent in the day-to-day lives of inhabitants of Molenbeek. The extent of the drug trafficking network is intertwined with the high poverty rates and lack of suitable educational opportunities. Youth who do not get the opportunity to develop their talents seek a short-term solution for sustaining their families. Occupying the street corners with their illegal commerce, but not bothering bypassers with it.

Instead, daily routines involve typical tasks such as running errands, going to work, cooking family meals, socialising in local cafes and tearooms, and visiting the mosque. A positive atmosphere enveloped the market square, where acquaintances greeted each other and paused for a brief conversation.

It is evident that the radicalised reputation does not mirror the lived experiences of its residents. Rather, the pervasive concern

seems to be the fear of their own preservative reputation, evident in the numerous barricaded urban spaces. This strictly controls a limited group of people who are granted access to these pockets of urban quality. Therefore, urban qualities become an exclusive privilege for those who can afford it.

The fear of extremism is also articulated in governmental policy. After the arrest of Abdeslam in 2015, outdoor gatherings with more than five people were not allowed. This ignited a new type of fear of extremism within the local government. Social gatherings are currently limited to socially controlled places like cafes, markets and shops, but do not seem to occur in the other forms of public space. The availability of urban furniture, indicating a potentiality for a place to stay, is limited.

From observations can be derived that especially women and children experience a lack of designated public space in which they can express certain behavioural patterns. Public seating is mostly occupied by male individuals who are spending their time people-watching. The newly opened Parc Bonnevie contributes to public life by being the only active playground within a 2-kilometre radius. The narrow car-oriented streets do not provide a safe environment

for children to play outside and express their developing personalities. This results in a small living environment.

From the analysis of rap lyrics could be concluded that the pressure that the outside-in perspective exerts on the neighbourhood also results in a small living environment among adults. They experience the pressure of borders, boundaries and thresholds, keeping them in their bubble of comfort.





figure 33. representation of the daily life of residents in Molenbeek.

BARRIERS // SPATIAL ANALYSIS

CASE

76

The distinction between Molenbeek and the historical city centre of Brussels is weaved through social, political, economic, cultural and physical realms.

The Willebroek Canal has been physically separating the two municipalities since its grand opening in 1561 (Bogaerts, 2022). The canal operates as a flowing highway, serving an economic purpose by enabling the direct transportation of goods to Antwerp. It serves as a gateway to the rest of the globe. The canal brought opportunity but simultaneously brought division. As the total industrial development and growth of Molenbeek were enabled by the proximity of the canal, the physical separation also represents a clear way to distinguish the poor living conditions in Molenbeek from the wealthy city centre of Brussels.

On the side of the city centre, the canal was accessorised by a wide boulevard lined with tall trees, flanked by middle-class houses. The opposite side was covered in industrial warehouses, towpaths and storage depots to stock enormous amounts of coal, the 'black gold' of the Industrial Revolution (Bogaerts, 2022). This distinct difference amplified the threshold for the middle class to cross the canal and enter the industrial district, something that still applies nowadays, long after the fall of inner-city toxic industries.

The Willebroek Canal can thus be interpreted as a political barrier, separating two municipal entities. An economic barrier, as Molenbeek is a financially disadvantaged district, resulting from the execution of political policy. A cultural barrier, as its history of being an arrival city has naturally formed an accumulation of certain nationalities and cultures. A social barrier, as it resembles a threshold that feels difficult to cross. A physical barrier, as the bare concrete walls accentuate the gap between two worlds and the limited amount of bridges restrict the freedom to cross.

This barrier excludes Molenbeek from the continuous urbanity of the metropolitan area, resulting in a small living environment for the residents of Molenbeek.

An inside-outside boundary.

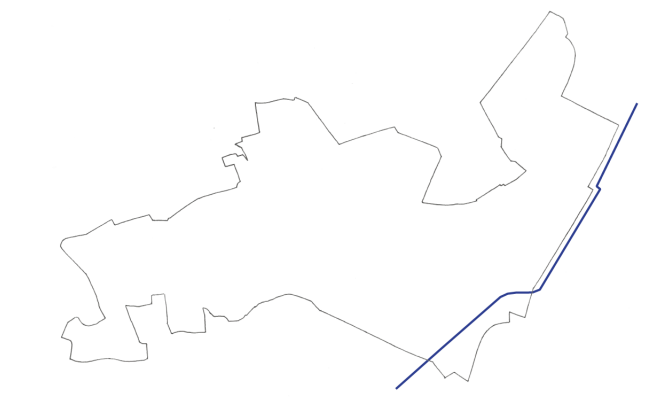




figure 34. historical photograph of the Willebroek canal, image source: Hersleven, J. (1930). Canal Bruxelles-Charleroi à hauteur de la Porte de Ninove à Molenbeek-Saint-Jean.

The railroad is an internal barrier within Molenbeek that mainly operates in the physical, and cultural realm.

The Brussels West Station was opened in 1872, fulfilling a significant position in the transport of cargo. The goods that were produced in the Molenbeek industry could directly be transported to other parts of the country. A building that once operated as a storage facility can still be found on the West side of the terrain, forming an interesting architectural reference to the past, representing the urban palimpsest.

As Molenbeek expanded to the West, the railway evolved into a barrier that divides the neighbourhood in two (Dhondt, 2022). The terrain is classified as an urban barrier, as physically crossing the tracks imposes difficulty on pedestrians, cyclists and people with restricted mobility.

The newer Eastern expansion of Molenbeek contains large parks and heterogeneous buildings. Nowadays, the newest arrivals settle in this area, distancing themselves from the active city centre. Eastern European citizens fill sidewalks and parks when they are not working for less than minimum wage.

The historical part of Molenbeek

shows a significant lack of open urban space. Northern-African nationalities settled in this part of the district in the 1960s and 1970s when they migrated there to work in the factories. They have marked their territory by introducing specific cultural elements in their shops and interiors. The high urban density of this historical part of Molenbeek prevents the majority of residents to have access to a private outdoor space, augmenting the dependence on qualitative public spaces.

The separation between these two cultural groups is sustained by the presence of the dividing railroad. The government of the Hoofdstedelijk Gewest have planned an urban intervention along the railway, creating an attractive park with public amenities. Developing the borders as Sennett suggests.

An internal border.

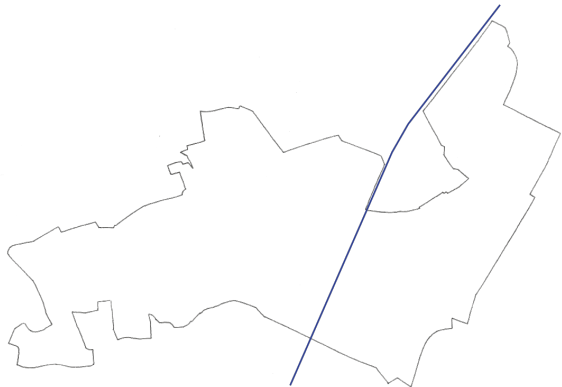




figure 35. historical photograph of the railway through Molenbeek. image source: inventaris van de industriële architectuur, 1978

CONNECTORS

CASE

The inner fabric of Molenbeek is internally connected through important historical lines.

The presence of the Gentsesteenweg enabled the first developments of the village of Molenbeek in the 18th century. The paved road, known as a ‘steenwech’ in old Flemish (Bogaerts, 2022) gave Molenbeek a reliable access route to the amenities of the city. The agriculture outside of Brussels provided food to the inhabitants of the big city, closely maintaining a symbiotic relationship. The trade allowed Molenbeek to expand along the Gentsesteenweg and the Baptist church. Nowadays, the Gentsesteenweg hosts the majority of shops in Molenbeek, an attractive space where the local population is united.

During the Industrial Revolution, Molenbeek shifted its export identity towards industrial production. Goods were first shipped to Antwerp via the Willebroek Canal, but were later transported by train. Gare Maritime developed a specialisation in cargo transport, while the West Station shifted to passenger transport. The goods that were manufactured in the Heyvaert quarter were brought to Gare Maritime through a second artery. Currently, Gare Maritime has been transformed into an attractive hotspot for people coming from

the city centre of Brussels, making the practical connection to the industrial district less valuable today.

The importance and significance of these arteries within the urban plan are expressed in the number of public spaces connected to these lines.



top to bottom; figure 36. Jacob van Deventer, 16th century via Musée de la ville de Bruxelles / figure 37. Ferraris, 1777 via arcanium maps. / figure 38. Unknown, 1846 via arcanium maps. / figure 39. ensemble de l'agglomération bruxelloise, 1866 via wikipedia commons

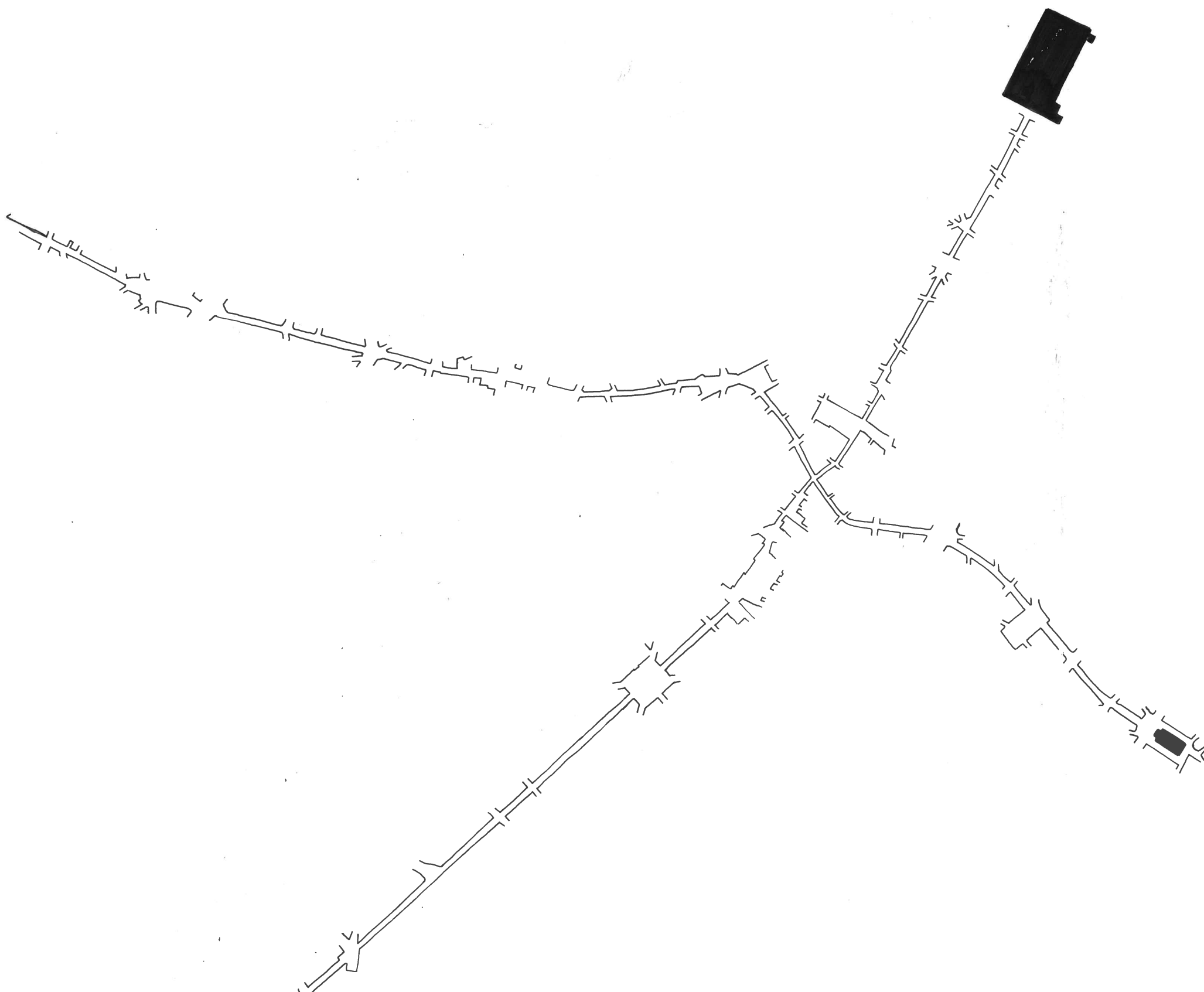


figure 40 two arteries connecting the inner fabric of Molenbeek. The Genstesteenweg and the Olifantstraat.

The following map shows the proximity of public transport stops within the urban fabric of Molenbeek. Burke and Brown (2008) established that a guideline for a walkable distance to a tram- or bus stop can be set at 400 meters. The historical part of Molenbeek, East of the railway, has significantly better connectivity to public transport. The West side shows a higher dependency on private vehicles. This is in accordance with the building typologies in the different parts of the district.

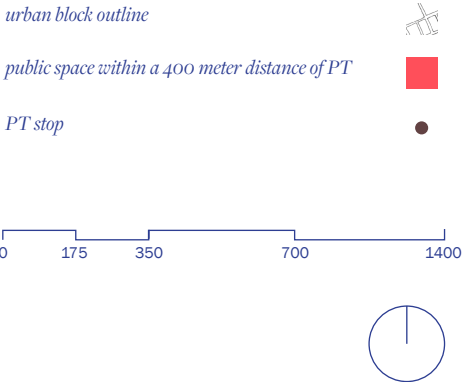




figure 41. the proximity of public transport stops within the urban fabric of molenbeek.

STREETSCAPE

CASE

84

Observation and interaction are used as tools to analyse and understand the hidden potential within the current and historical streetscape of Molenbeek. Traces of the industrial past are still evident in the current Molenbeek streetscape. Most industrial buildings have been transformed and modified to accommodate different functions as inner-city industrial activity mitigated over time. The majority of the original production facilities have been converted into housing units, engrossing a significant portion of the growing population of arrivals efficiently.

The high population density is mostly housed in mid-rise units that contain between 4 and 7 storeys. A significant part of the ground floor compositions contain blind facades, limiting the perceived social safety in residential streets. Inter alia, these blind facades host personal garages, municipal depots, storage units, shops or passages. The presence of these blind spots characterises the streetscape of Molenbeek. They fuel a sense of curiosity and interest, as they sometimes grant a small peak inside these mysterious units. They stem from the local industrial past, as they originally housed passages to inner-block factory halls that were integrated in the density of the urban fabric.

Some historical forms of inner-block industrial activity are still present in the streetscape of Molenbeek. The 'Bois Watteau' workstation, can be viewed as an excellent example. The company has been providing products and services related to woodworking since it was founded in 1903. The long-term success of the Brussels company proves that the maker's industry can seamlessly blend into a residentially dominant neighbourhood. Companies like these keep the industrial identity of Molenbeek alive.



78



figure 43. porosity within the streetscape of molenbeek

This zoom-in frame encompasses the diverse characteristics of Historical Molenbeek. Its public activity is summarised in an ethnographic map, constructed based on observations over multiple occasions.

The Gentsesteenweg is continuously occupied by people, even outside of the shops' opening times, indicating the importance of the historical artery as a space of moving through. The multifunctionality of the road is defined by the presence of people during all hours.

Within the residential tissue of the 'Zwarte Vijvers' neighbourhood, streets are quiet. Most people who are outside are carrying grocery bags back to their home, where they quickly disappear in one of many front doors. Everyone is on the move, because the streets are not appealing enough to become a place of staying. The lack of pleasant urban green spaces force the residents to spend more time indoors.

The noise from the children playing in the schoolyards fills reaches far into the street, revealing their presence as they are not visible from behind the gates that surround the schoolyard.

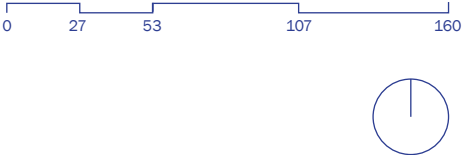
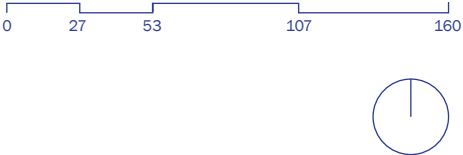




figure 44. ethnographic map of the 'zwarte vijvers' neighbourhood.

The hidden interactions, observations and encounters that occur when walking around the ‘Zwarte Vijvers’ neighbourhood are made tangible through the creation of a soft map. The personal and spontaneous interactions between traversing residents and the fixed built form synthesise the unique atmosphere. These interactions hold the potential to portray the neighbourhood in a positive and genuine way, opposing the reputation generated by the media. Holding the capacity to empower residents to showcase and publicly appreciate the characteristics of their beautiful neighbourhood.



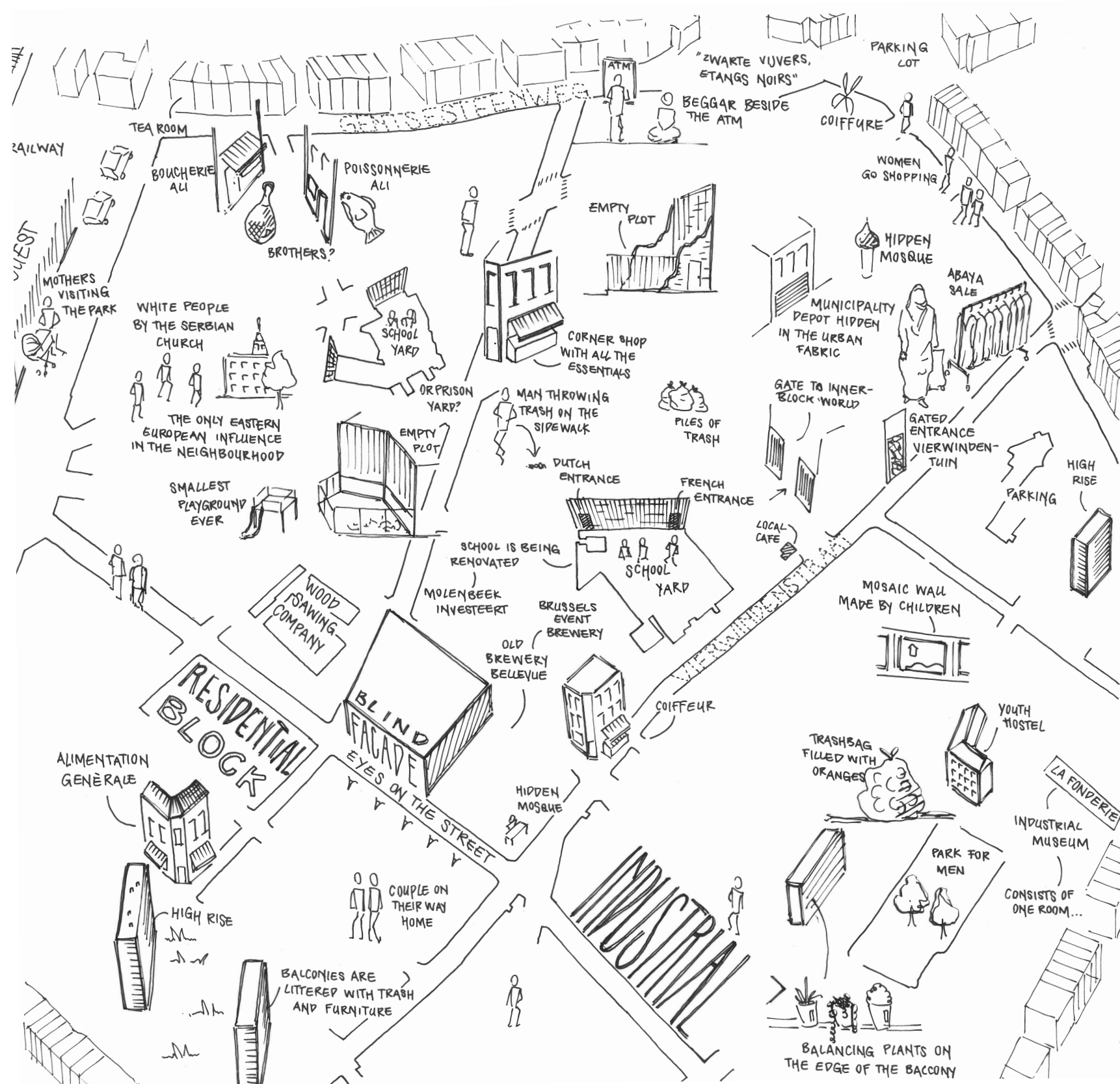


figure 45. soft map of the 'zwarte vijvers' neighbourhood

After carefully crossing the Willebroek boundary, where colourful windmills greet you as they spin, Molenbeek will welcome you into its fine network of narrow streets. It is easy to get lost in the sea of classic Brussels architecture, a collective lack of maintenance blurs the differences between the building blocks. The same white trashbags occupy the very limited public space that the street corner has to offer. The unpleasant odour repels users from staying longer than needed. An uninterrupted line of cars on both sides of the one-way street emphasises narrowness of.

The main shopping street, the Gentsesteenweg, which once connected the old agricultural village to the walled city of Brussels is always busy and lively. Behind this lively facade lie the silent streets that compose the majority of the urban fabric of Molenbeek.

These streets of the ‘Zwarte Vijvers’ neighbourhood reveal interesting patterns and peculiarities that characterise the daily life of this densely populated neighbourhood. The traces of the industrial past are unveiled and expressed through the large number of garage doors that fill the plinths of the building blocks. Most of them seem to be permanently closed, but some offer a sneak peak on what happens inside.

The diversity in these pockets of mystery reveal the urban palimpsest of the inner-block life piece by piece.



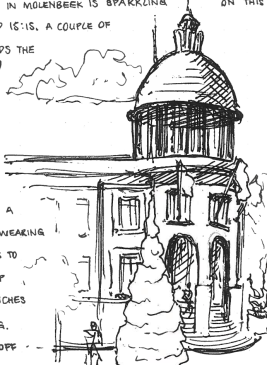
40 FOR THE STREET AND THE NEIGHBOURHOOD THAT ARE BEING FORGOTTEN, WITH THE HATE THAT COMES WITH,
OPPOSITE IT."

41 "VOOK DE STRAAT EN DE WYK DIE VERGETEN WORDT. MET DE HAAT DIE DAARBY HOORT, TEGENOVER
OF DE STAAT DIE DE SCHULD KRIJST, EERWIK OOK. NIET BESAAN OM WIE HIER WOONT, NIET 20. BX."

DE BLOKKEN ROND DE GENTSESTEENWEG ZIJN HET INTERESSANTST, MAAR KIJK OOK NAAR HET NARRATIEF VAN DE VERBINDING. DE GENTSESTEENWEG IS AL EEN VERBINDEnde WIJ DIE MEERDERE GEMEENTEN DOORKRUIST.

THE CHRISTMAS TREE ON THE MUNICIPALITY SQUARE IN MÜNCHEN IS SPARKING IN THE COLDEST AND GRAY DAY, A MONDAY AFTERNOON, AROUND 15:15, A COUPLE OF PEOPLE ARE WALKING ACROSS THE SQUARE, TOWARDS THE NORTH, THE METRO STATION, MAYBE? MOST OF THEM HAVE BAGS IN THEIR HANDS. I STRUCK DOWN ON A LARGE STONE/BENCH. NOBODY PAYS ANY ATTENTION. I CROSS THE SQUARE LIKE ALL THE LOCALS DID AND I MOVE TO THE PLAYGROUND, WHERE I SEE A BACKPACK. THEY MUST HAVE CONVINCED THEIR PARENTS TO TAKE THEM TO THE PLAYGROUND AFTER PICKING THEM UP FROM SCHOOL. PARENTS ARE WATCHING FROM THE BENCHES ON THE SIDE OR ARE ASSISTING THEIR KID ON THE SWING.

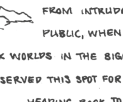
AS MY HANDS WERE FREEZING OFF FROM THE COLD, I MOVED ON ALONG THE GENTLESTERNWEG, JUST BEFORE THE 'ZWARTE VUIVERS' METRO STOP, I TURNED LEFT, TO SOME SIDE-STREETS, BESIDES ALL THE TRASH BAGS THAT NEVER SEEM TO LEAVE THESE STREETS, I WAS ON THE HUNT FOR THE



WITH TRASH, FENCES BLOCKED THIS PIECE OF LAND FROM INTRUDERS, THIS POROSITY IS MORE PUBLIC, WHEN COMPARED TO THE INNER-BLOCK WORKS IN THE BIGGER BLOCK TYPOLOGIES. I OBSERVED THIS SPOT FOR AROUND 10 MINUTES, BEFORE HEAVING BACK TO THE HOSTEL BEFORE PARK.

I PASSED BY ANOTHER FENCED OFF AREA, WITH A SIGN 'MOLENBEEK INVESTS' SIGN.

WHEN I GET BACK I MIGHT LOOK FOR WHAT THE PLANS ARE FOR THIS BLOCK!



DE BURELEN KOND JE GENTSESTENENWEG ZUN HET INTERESSANTST, MAAR KIJK OOK NAAR HET NAKRATIEF VAN DE VERBINDING, DE GENTSESTENENWEG, IS AL EEN VERBINDING WUN DE MEERDERE GEMEENTEN DOORKRIJST, OM DE WEGENNETWERK BESTAAT UIT EEN OVERLAP VAN MEERDERE PATRONEN (ANALYSEER DEZE PATRONEN OOK), WAARDOP DE HIERARCHIE IN HET WEGENNETWERK MOEILIK TE ONDERSCHEIDEN IS EN DE PUIVUWELKE VERBINDING ONTBEENT. WAT WIL JE VAN DE LOCALS WETEN? IS DIT EEN PLEK WAAR JE VAAK KOMT ZUN ER PLEKKEN IN DE WILK DE BELANGRIJK VOOR JE ZUN? JE KUNT HET PLEKVOORBEELD VRAGEN AAN MENSEN IN HET PARK, MAAR DIT GENEREERT OOK EEN BALE, OMDAT DAT OOK MENSEN ZUN DE ZICH OVERHAUPT AL BUITEN BEVAREN, EISENLIK MOET JE EEN EISENARK OF BEGRUIKRIK VINDEN VAN DE POROSITES, VRAAG ZE OF ZE OF DE KAART EEN BUIZNDERE PLEK WILLEN AANWIJZEN. EEN SOORT MENTAL MAP, 'WAAR VIND JE DAT IK HEEN MOET?' 'WAAR BEN JE TUDTS OF IN DE WILK? ZUN ER OOK MINDER PLEKKEN? WAAR ZUN DE POSITIEVE VIBES IN DE KAPS? DE VERHOUDING VAN DE TWEE NAKRATIES, OUTSIDE-IN EN INSIDE-OUT. VRAAG WAT NIET HIEG ER TOE STIGMATISEREN, LEB DE REPUTATIE UIT, MAAR STEL VERVOLGENS DE PROBLEEM OF DE REPUTATIE WEL NIET IS? AAN HET EINDE VAN HET VERKHAAL KAN JE EEN REFLECTIEVE HOUPING LATEN ZIEN, WAT ZOU JE DE BELIDMAKERS APVISEN?

ON HALF 10 I LEFT THE HOSTEL TO GET SOME QUICK BREAKFAST AT THE SUPERMARKET, & I HEADED TO Molenbeek. I STARTED IN DANSAERT, ONE OF THE FANCIEST NEIGHBOURHOODS IN BRUSSELS. CONVENIENTLY, THE ANTOINE DANSAERTSTRAAT SEEMLESSLY FLOWS INTO THE GENTESTEENWEG, WHERE MY FIELDWORK WILL TAKE PLACE TODAY.

AS I CROSSED THE CANAL, I NOTICED SOME GROCERY STORES HAD ALREADY OPENED THEIR DOORS, BUT THE MAJORITY OF THE STORES STILL HAD THEIR BLINDS CLOSED. FEW PEOPLE ARE WALKING THE STREETS. WOMEN WITH BAGS FILLED WITH GROCERIES, MEN ON THEIR WAY TO WORK. I CAREFULLY FOLLOWED THE ROUTE THAT I HAD PUZZLED TOGETHER LAST NIGHT.

I TURNED RIGHT TO THE VIER-WINDEN
STRAAT, WHERE THE FASCINATION FOR THE
FORESTS STAYED. THIS TIME, LOOKING TO FIND OUT WHAT IS
ACTUALLY BEHIND THIS NETWORK OF CLOSED
DOORS, FOR SOME, WE WILL NEVER FIND OUT.
THE LARGE DOOR THAT WAS ALSO OPENED THE
FIRST TIME IS A STORAGE AND PARKING UNIT
FROM THE MUNICIPALITY,
WHERE THE
VANS ARE STORED. MANY
OF THE OPEN DOORS HAD
COMPANIES BEHIND THEM,
A SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT OF
THOSE WERE CAR-RELATED,
EITHER A CARWASH, A
MECHANIC, A SHOP FOR
PARTS OR A DEALER.

SOME HAVE A CAR'S NUMBER
PLATE ATTACHED TO
THIS DOOR.


INDICATING THE FACT
THAT IT IS THEIR
PERSONAL GARAGE.
OTHERS SEEM LIKE A
COMMUNAL PENWAY,
WHERE MULTIPLE CARS
ARE PARKED AND DOORS
TO EVEN MORE STORAGE
SPACES ARE
VISIBLE. AN
INNER-BLOCK
PRIVATE WORLD
SOME HALLS
ARE USED AS
WAREHOUSES
FOR THOSE
SMALL COR-
NER SHOPS. IN THE

TINIEST
IS KNOWN
NUMBER OF
RELATED CRIME.
IN THAT CASE,
A HIGH NUMBER
OF PRIVATE

CLOSED OFF STORAGE BOXES FUNCTIONING AS
A SECONDARY NETWORK OF INFRASTRUCTURE
IS QUITE CONVENIENT IF YOU HAVE SOMETHING
TO HIDE FROM AUTHORITIES. THE EMPTY CORNER PLOTS

SEEM TO ATTRACT PILES OF TRASH, NOT JUST RANDOM TRASH THAT ACCIDENTALLY
HAS ENDED UP THERE BECAUSE OF THE WIND, BUT COMPLETE CARPETS,
BEDFRAMES, VACUUMS AND OTHER ITEMS THAT YOU COULD
FURNISH A COMPLETE HOUSE WITH. I WALKED BY A SERBIAN
ORTHODOX CHURCH, A KAKE SIGN OF THE EASTERN EUROPEAN
MIGRANTS THAT HAVE
SETTLED HERE DURING
THE PAST 20 YEARS. IN
THIS PART OF MOLENBEEK
THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY
IS WAY MORE PRESENT
THAN OTHER GROUPS.
NEXT TO THE SERBIAN
CHURCH, THERE IS
A DESERTED GARDEN BURIED UNDERNEATH A LAYER OF LEAVES. I

PASSED BY MORE
GARAGE BOXES AND
ALSO FOUND THE MOST
DEPRESSING SCHOOL
PLAYGROUND EVER. AN
EMPTY FIELD WITH
A FEW TINY TREES.
NO PLAYGROUND
EQUIPMENT.



BOLKHOOP WOULD BE SO MUCH BRIGHTER IF NOT EVERY SINGLE NICE PIECE OF SPACE WOULD BE FENCED OFF. I MAKE MY WAY ALONG THE GENTSESTEENWEG, PASSING THE WELL-KNOWN 'ZWAARTS VIJVERS/ÉTANGS NOIRS' METRO STOP. THE GENTSESTEENWEG IS AN IMPORTANT CONNECTING ROAD, ASK THE CITY CENTRE AND RUNS ALONG THE SIDE OF MOUWENBECK. SIMULTANEOUSLY, IT IS ALSO THE BIGGEST SHOPPING AREA OF THE DISTRICT.

I PASSED A SIGN THAT SAID THAT THE NEIGHBOURHOOD WAS LOOKING FOR ARTISTS. A SURPRISE TO ME, AS ARTISTS IN NEIGHBOURHOODS LIKE THESE USUALLY INDICATE GENTRIFICATION. SOMETHING THAT I WOULD ACTIVELY AVOID IN THIS SITUATION. I PASSED A SCHOOL WITH TWO DIFFERENT ENTRANCES, A FRENCH SPEAKING ENTRANCE AND A DUTCH SPEAKING ENTRANCE, EMPHASISING THE LANGUAGE BARRIER. I CROSSED THE TRAIN TRACKS AND ALMOST IMMEDIATELY THE VIBE CHANGED. THIS PART IS WAY LESS GOTTEN TO KNOW. AFTER PASSING, WAS GREETED BY YET ANOTHER UNDERPASS PARK. WASTED

THE RED
LINE OF WASTED
SPACE CONTINUES IN
THE TYPE OF POROSITIES
THAT LITERALLY THIS PART
OF THE CITY. EVERY
STREET SEEMS
TO BE
INTERUPTED BY EMPTY PLOTS LINED WITH TRASH. ALL PROTECTED FROM
INTRUDERS BY FENCES. IT DOES NOT HAVE A WELCOMING APPEAL. NOT TO MY
SURPRISE, THE NICER PUBLIC PARKS (WHICH
ARE FORTUNATELY MORE PRESENT IN THIS
LESS DENSELY BUILT AREA) ARE SURROUNDED
BY FENCING, SO THAT THEIR USE CAN BE
CLOSELY MONITORED. SOMETHING ELSE THAT
STOOD OUT TO ME IS THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF
THE AREA. A LOT OF EASTERN EUROPEAN
PEOPLE SEEM TO LIVE HERE. EVEN WITHIN
THE SEGREGATED MUNICIPALITIES, THERE
IS EXTRA SEGREGATION. THE ARCHITECTURE
IS COMPARABLE TO THE REST OF
THE CITY. CLASSIC BRUSSELS HOUSING,
PROBABLY DIVIDED INTO TOO MANY



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figure 47. porosity within the streetscape of molenbeek.

The lack of accessible urban space with public qualities pushes residents to appropriate and claim their own territory. The residents of the highrise on the Olifantstraat express their protest by desperately appropriating their limited outdoor space. Transforming it into an extension of their interior, by furnishing and characterising it. The action of claiming this space indicates that the residents feel empowered and confident enough to do so. However, the fear of vandalism diminishes in the unreachable vertical dimension.

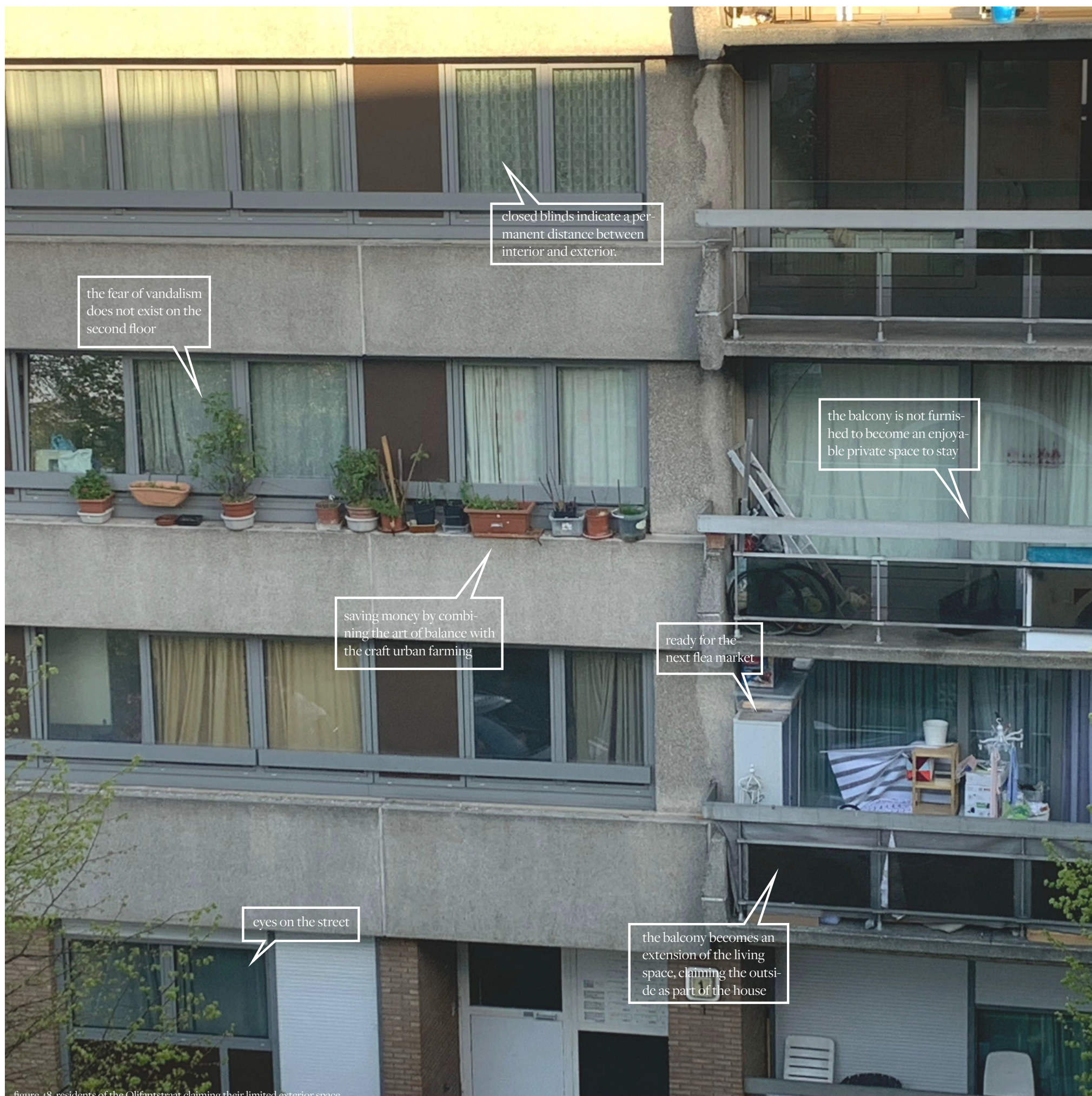


figure 48. residents of the Olifantstraat claiming their limited exterior space

The broad sidewalk behind the Baptist Church, inside the historical core of where the agricultural village was once born, has been decorated by residents. This appropriation of public space goes beyond the fear of vandalism. The displayed household items form a composition that discusses the desperate need for a quantitative and qualitative increase in public space. The visible placement of bikes objects the continuous need and presence of motored vehicles in the narrow streets. The broken mirror represents the confrontation with fear, a courageous action with a beautiful outcome. Damaged, but not ruined. Daring to accessorise the sidewalks with personal items and reclaiming urban pedestrian spaces will lead to a more comfortable social climate in which residents feel empowered to be proud of their neighbourhood and able to showcase its beautiful characteristics.



figure 49. residents leaving a spatial claim on the sidewalk in the centre of molenbeek



left: *historical image of the Schootstraat from 1979, derived from 'collectie bouwkundig erfgoed', via bruciel.brussels.*

right: *current image of the Schootstraat from 2024, image by author.*



left: *historical image of the Kortrijkstraat from 1980, derived from 'collectie industriële architectuurinventaris', via bruciel.brussels.*

right: *current image of the Kortrijkstraat from 2024, image by author.*







left: *historical image of the Kortrijkstraat from 1980, derived from 'collectie industriële architectuurinventaris', via bruciel.brussels.*

right: *current image of the Kortrijkstraat from 2024, image by author.*



left: *historical image of the Zwart Paardstraat from 1980, derived from 'collectie industriële architectuurinventaris', via bruciel.brussels.*

right: *current image of the Zwart Paardstraat from 2024, image by author.*





The application of Jane Jacobs’ concept of ‘eyes on the street’ can be assessed by analysing the activity in the plinths of the site.

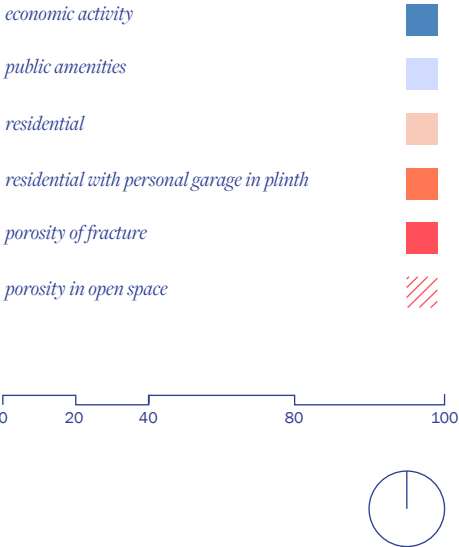
The Gentsesteeweg reveals itself through the continuous line of economic activity. The amount and variety of offered goods attract a diverse public. The corner-shop typology is evident in the inner-fabric, spreading the economic activity out. These shops ensure a reliable amount ‘of eyes on the street’ during opening hours, adding to the perceived safety in the surrounding public space.

Public functions are also spread throughout the neighbourhood. This encompasses medical clinics, social housing offices, schools, religious buildings and dental clinics. These buildings are however often closed off, because of privacy of clients, and do therefore not provide a significant amount of additional ‘eyes on the street’.

Neutral-coloured plots represent residential functions. These are distributed across the entire “Zwarte Vijvers’ neighbourhood. Areas with a smaller grain size contain more residential units. These plots provide eyes on the street, but the active interaction between outside and interior is absent, as most windows are lined with one-sided blinds.

Orange plots also have a residential function, but lack ‘eyes on the street’, because of the presence of a personal garage in the plinth of the building.

Red plots completely lack interaction between the inside and outside. These plots often have a bigger grain size, indicating a past industrial function that has modified or diminished over time. They are often underused or even abandoned, fuelling unsafe feelings within the local public space. These red plots are mostly present in the former industrial area, recognisable by the bigger grain size.



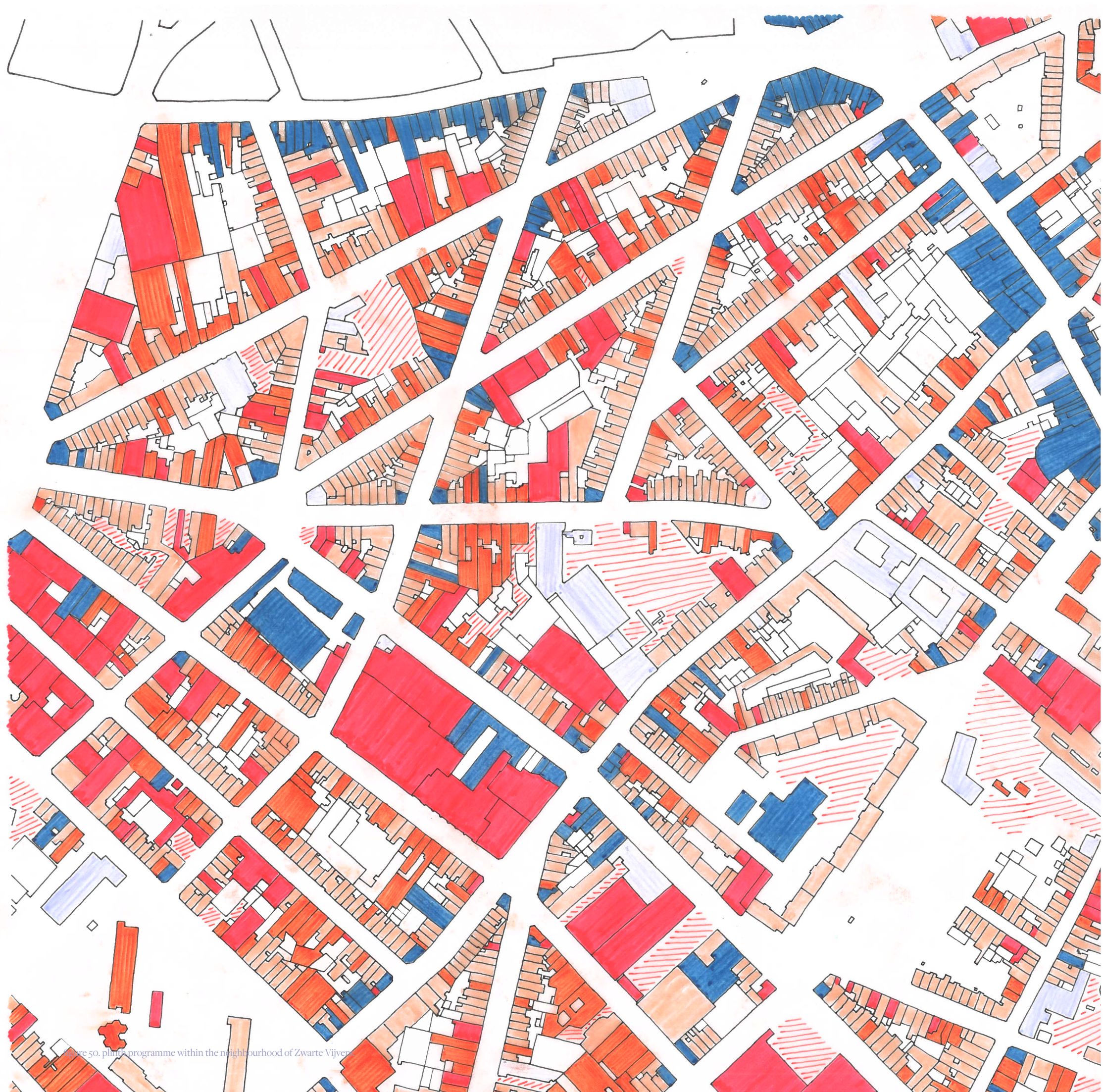
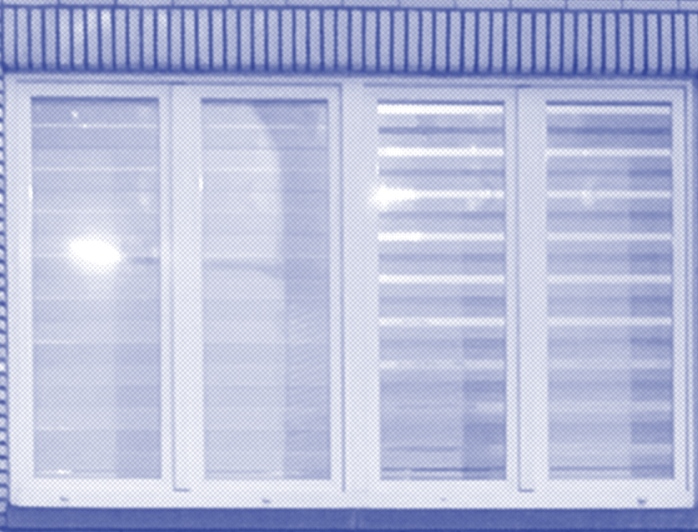


Figure 50. plinth programme within the neighbourhood of Zwarte Vijver



39



Tatcher



35



VERBODEN
TOEGANG
TOEGANG

05 CONCEPT



39



benzing



WISSEN
15.01.2020
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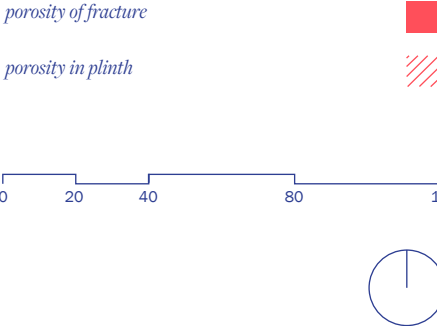
figure 52. porosity within the streetscape of molenbeek

POROSITY

CONCEPT

Porosity is a phenomenon that had been identified throughout the entirety of the ‘Zwarte Vijvers’ neighbourhood and beyond. The even distribution of porosity throughout the neighbourhood is linked to the previous industrial activities on which the neighbourhood was founded. As these industries mitigated or shifted during the 20th century, the industrial halls remained. The programme they hosted has expired, but the open plan and medium-sized dimensions of these inner-block halls encompasses an enormous resilience and flexibility. Allowing the urban fabric to breathe through different phases.

The places that are perceived as very public, such as the Gentsesteenweg or the park, show a significant gap in the distribution of porosity, indicating that porosity happens in a more private realm. The urban tissue containing smaller grain sizes contain smaller porosities, which often only contain ground floor garages. The rougher industrial site, characterised by the bigger grain size, contains larger porosities that are collectively taking all eyes off the streets in this part of the neighbourhood, critically affecting the perceived safety. The large number of porosities offer opportunities to interconnect them and weave a secondary fabric based on the urban palimpsest. The cross stitch.







From thorough observations of the streetscape of Molenbeek, five different types of porosity have been derived. The empty plot is very visible in the streetscape, as it directly borders the public street.

This emphasises the variety and broadness of the concept of porosity of fracture. Its spatial dimensions, its history, its geographical location and its social environment determine the actual potential for transformation. The hidden inner-block life will finally promote from the second rank to become equal to the life on the street side. These passages and garage doors have been slowly moved to the background of what defines the cultural significance of Molenbeek

EMPTY PLOTS



**CAR-RELATED
PREMISES**



PERSONAL GARAGES



INDUSTRIAL HALLS



**ABANDONED
BUILDINGS**



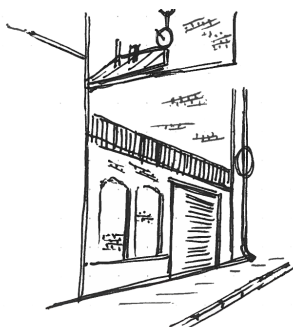
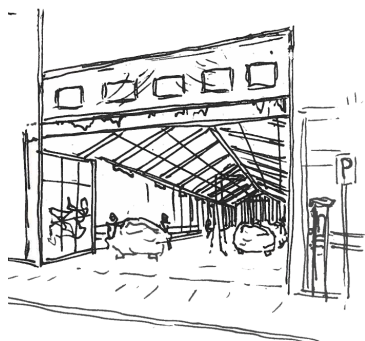
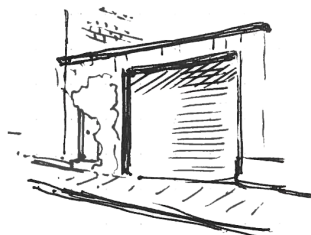
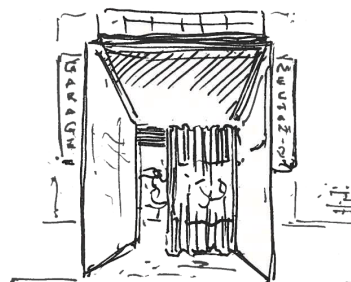
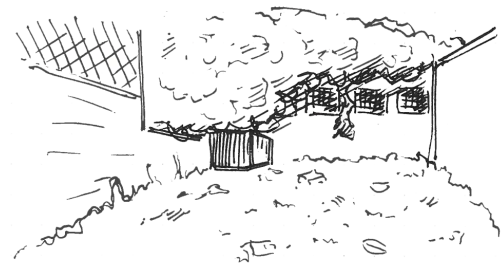
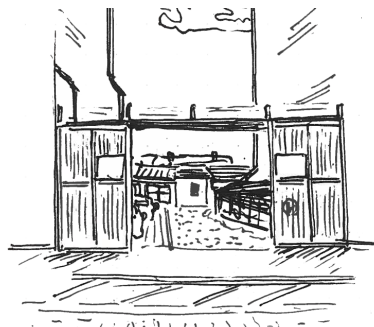
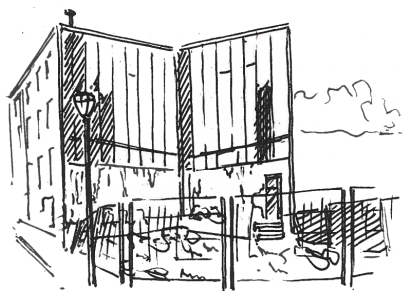


figure 54. porosity as typology

Empty plots resemble little oases of open space in the dense tissue of the Zwarte Vijvers neighbourhood. The sudden absence of built volume enriches the locality of the buildings surrounding it. The empty plots hold the potential to add to the urban quality of the neighbourhood as little pockets of public space.

Various characteristics make them recognisable in the streetscape:

- exposed brick walls
- plants reclaiming territory
- layers of graffiti artwork
- a barrier of gates, at least one is falling over
- enough furniture to furnish an entire house
- trash bags surrounded by even more trash

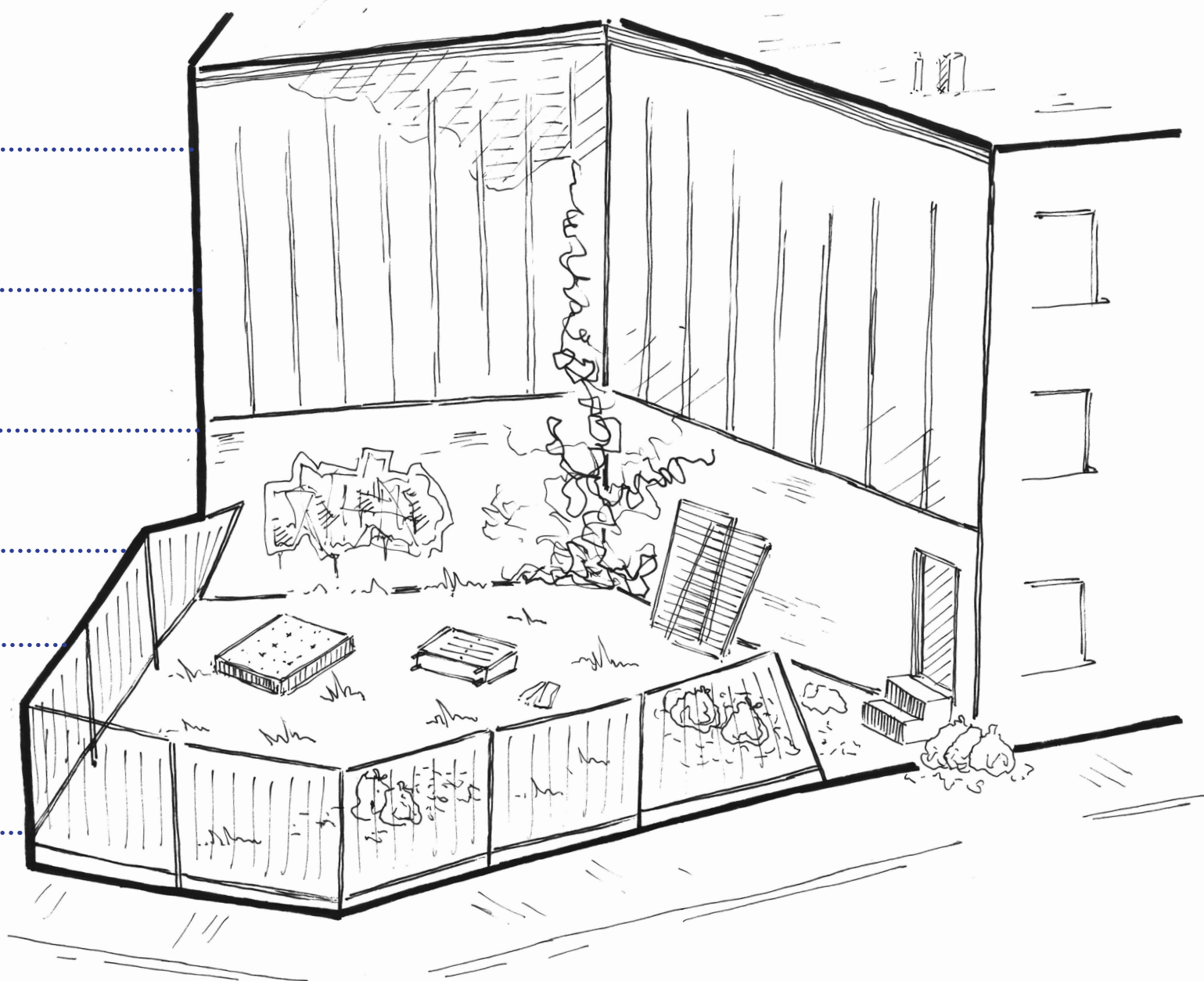


figure 55. characteristics of empty plots in the urban fabric of molenbeek.

In contemporary local society, car manufacturers are keeping the industrial character of Molenbeek alive. The carwash premises, debatable car part shops or car dealerships emerge from all sides of the streetscape. The Heyvaert quarter in Molenbeek is also known to illegally export second-hand cars from Brussels to West African countries (Simons, 2021). The local government aims to shut down these businesses but is concerned about losing the large amount of jobs that currently significantly benefit the local economy. These premises will thus likely change in the coming decades, but now still serve as part of the financial success of the local community.

Car premises can be recognised in the local streetscape through various distinct characteristics:

- ceiling windows
- large open space
- badly ventilated
- plastic curtain seperating
inside and outside
- few scattered cars
- rolled up hoses to clean the
cars

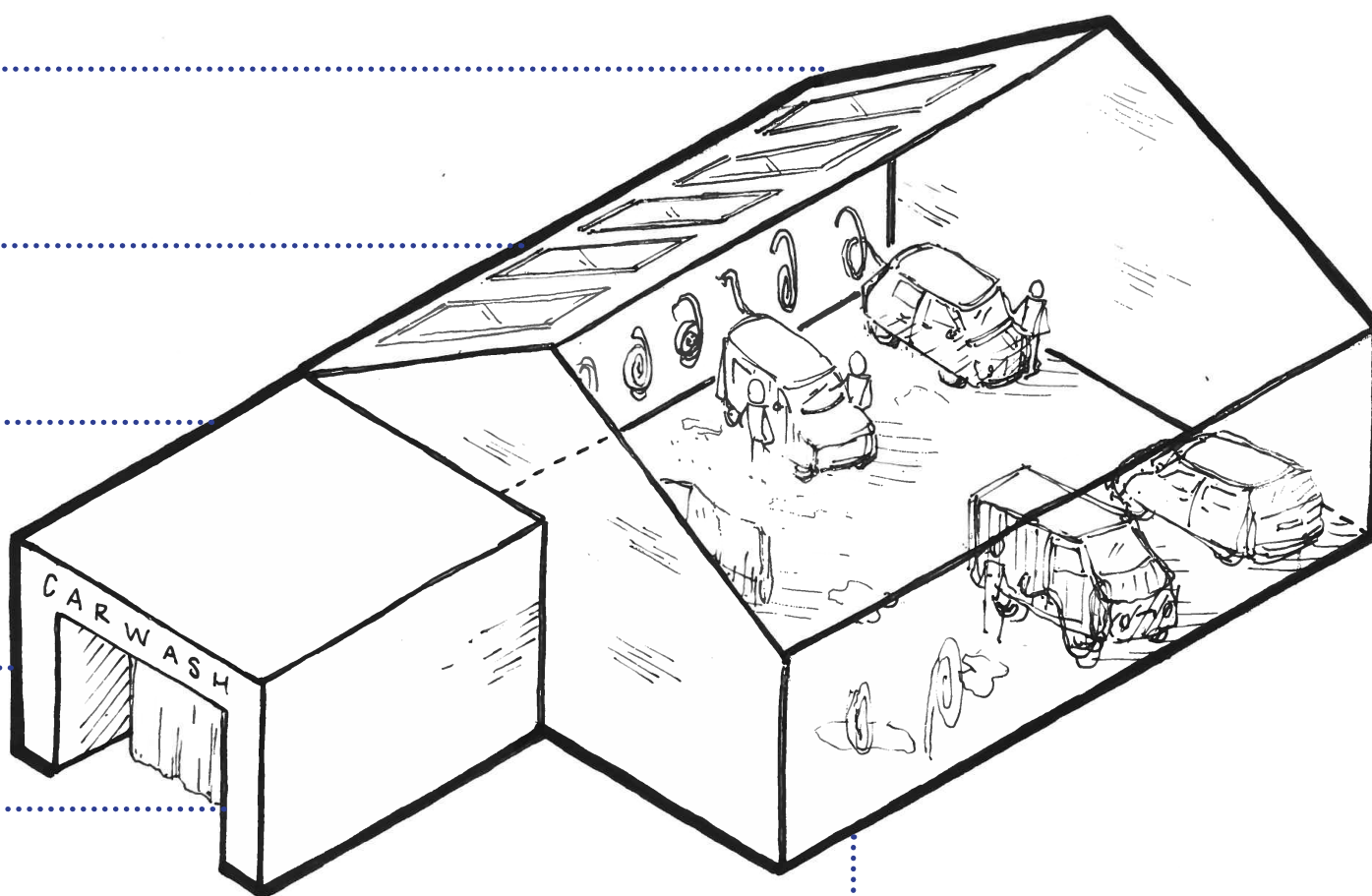


figure 56. characteristics of empty plots in the urban fabric of molenbeek.

Aside from the significant amount of cars lining the residential streets of the urban fabric, the composition of garage doors forms a rhythm in the streetscape of Molenbeek. Personal garages conceal the presence of many more vehicles. The garages are for personal use, owned by the residents who live in the accommodation above them. Some garages accommodate a passage through the building, providing access to the inner-block space. The lack of eyes on the street is emphasised by these blind plinths, generating anonymity and unsafety in the public space bordering them.

Personal garages can be characterised by the following elements:

- residential units above the garage
- long and narrow dimensions
- inner-block outdoor space is accessible
- junk collection
- singular car parked inside
- staircase to residential units
- ‘no parking’ and license plate signs on garage door

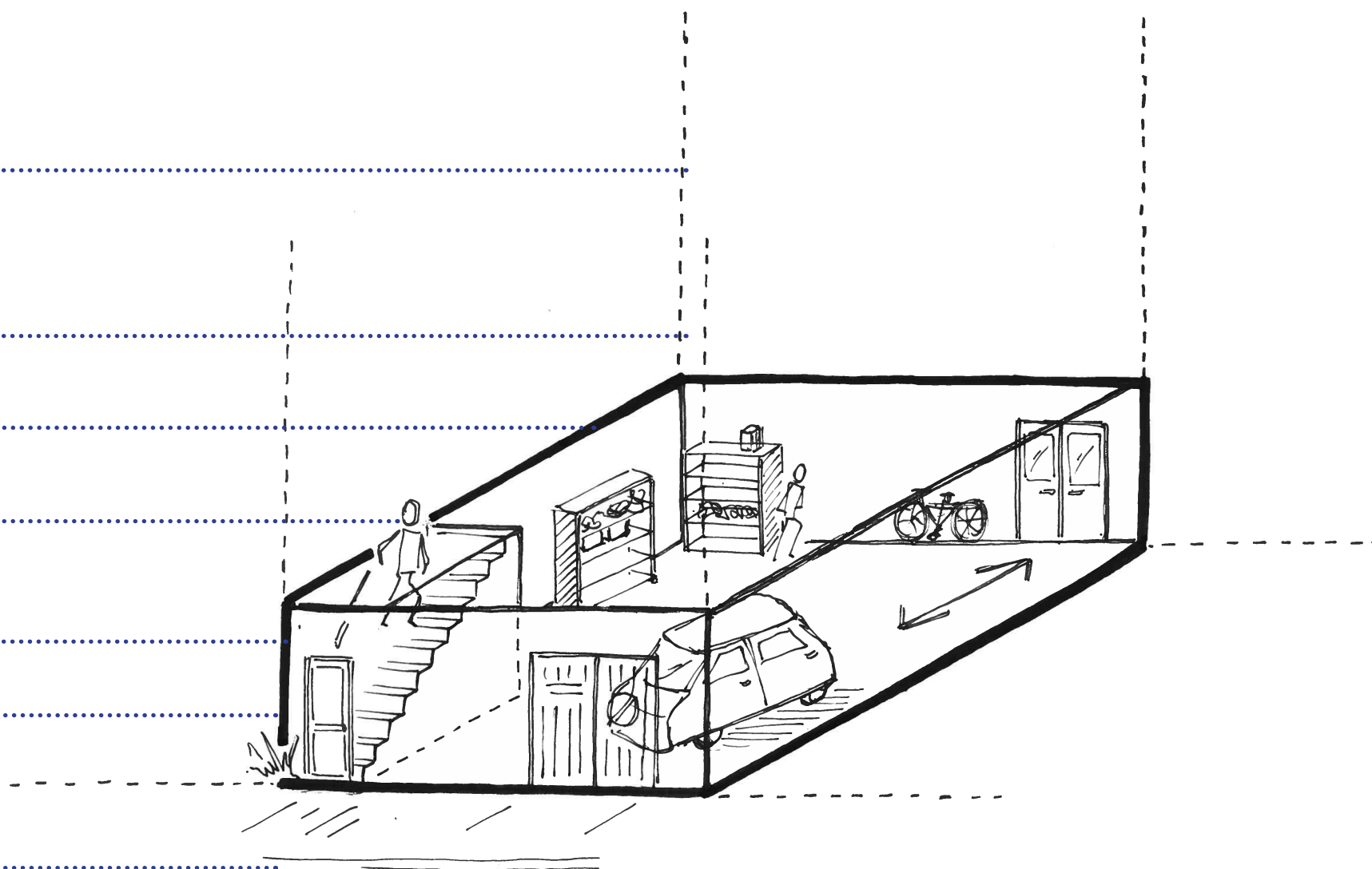


figure 57. characteristics of personal garages in the urban fabric of molenbeek.

Tangible traces of Molenbeek’s industrial past are embedded in the large numbers of industrial halls that are still present in the neighbourhood. They have been hidden from the public streetscape to improve the living conditions for the working class at the time. Some of the many garage doors, visible in the plinths of seemingly residential facades, form a gateway to a secondary inner-block world, dominated by the industrial character of the past.

The industrial halls can be identified by the following characteristics:

- ceiling windows
- visible steel contruction elements
- inner-block outdoor space is accessible
- cars parked inside
- mysterious activity or storage facility
- large open space
- passage between buildings, leading to the public street

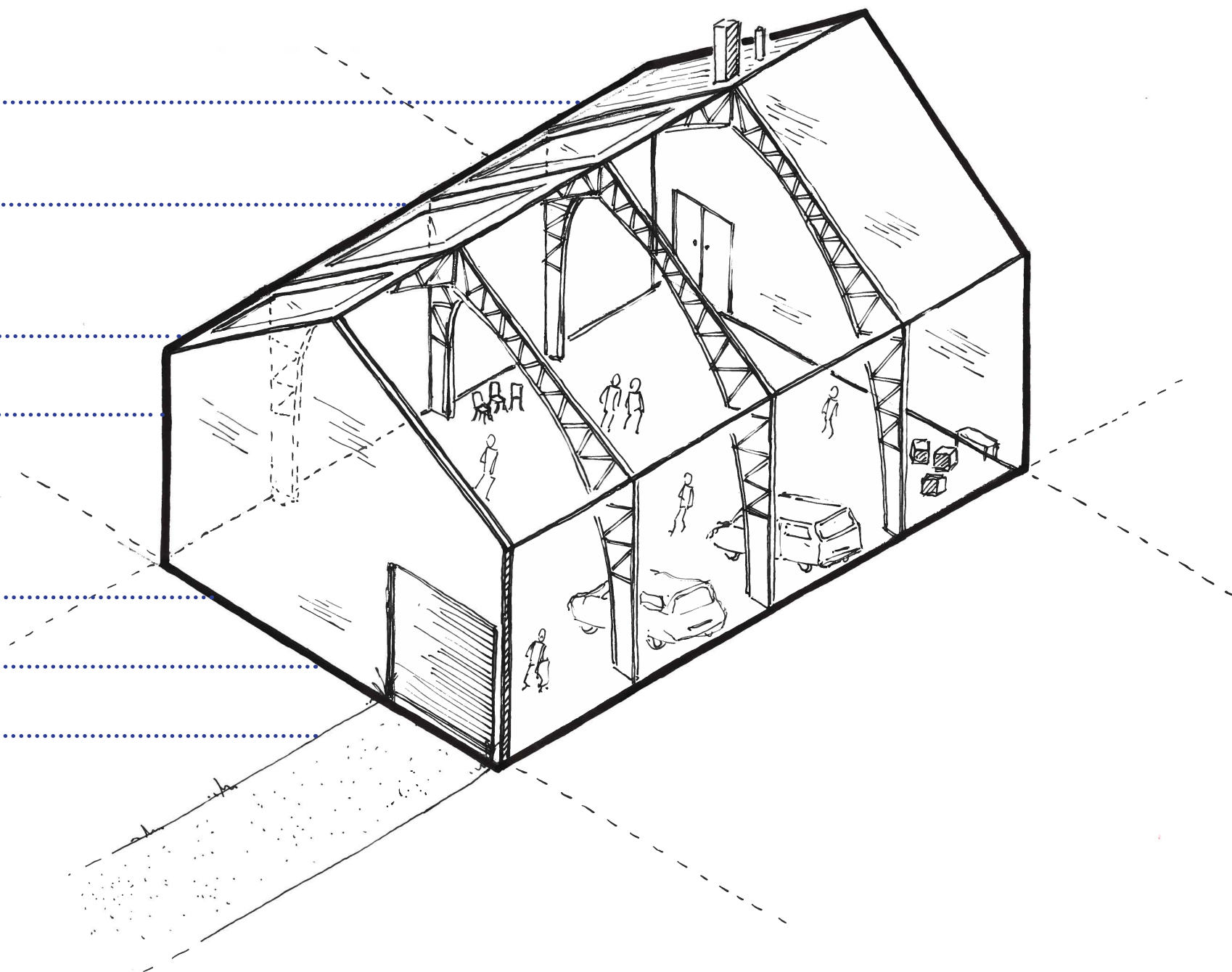


figure 58. characteristics of industrial halls in the urban fabric of molenbeek.

In low-income areas such as Molenbeek, abandoned buildings are not uncommon. The municipality of Molenbeek counted 114 permanently abandoned buildings in 2023 (Online Database Brengt Brusselse Leegstand in Kaart, 2023). Rising rents and stabilising salaries force businesses and people to move to other locations. The heavy security precautions indicate the presence of the fear of vandalism and squatters.

Abandoned buildings are characterised in the streetscape by certain elements:

crumbling walls inside

plants reclaiming territory

at least five different ways
of boarding up windows

layers of graffiti art

written note with reason
for closing

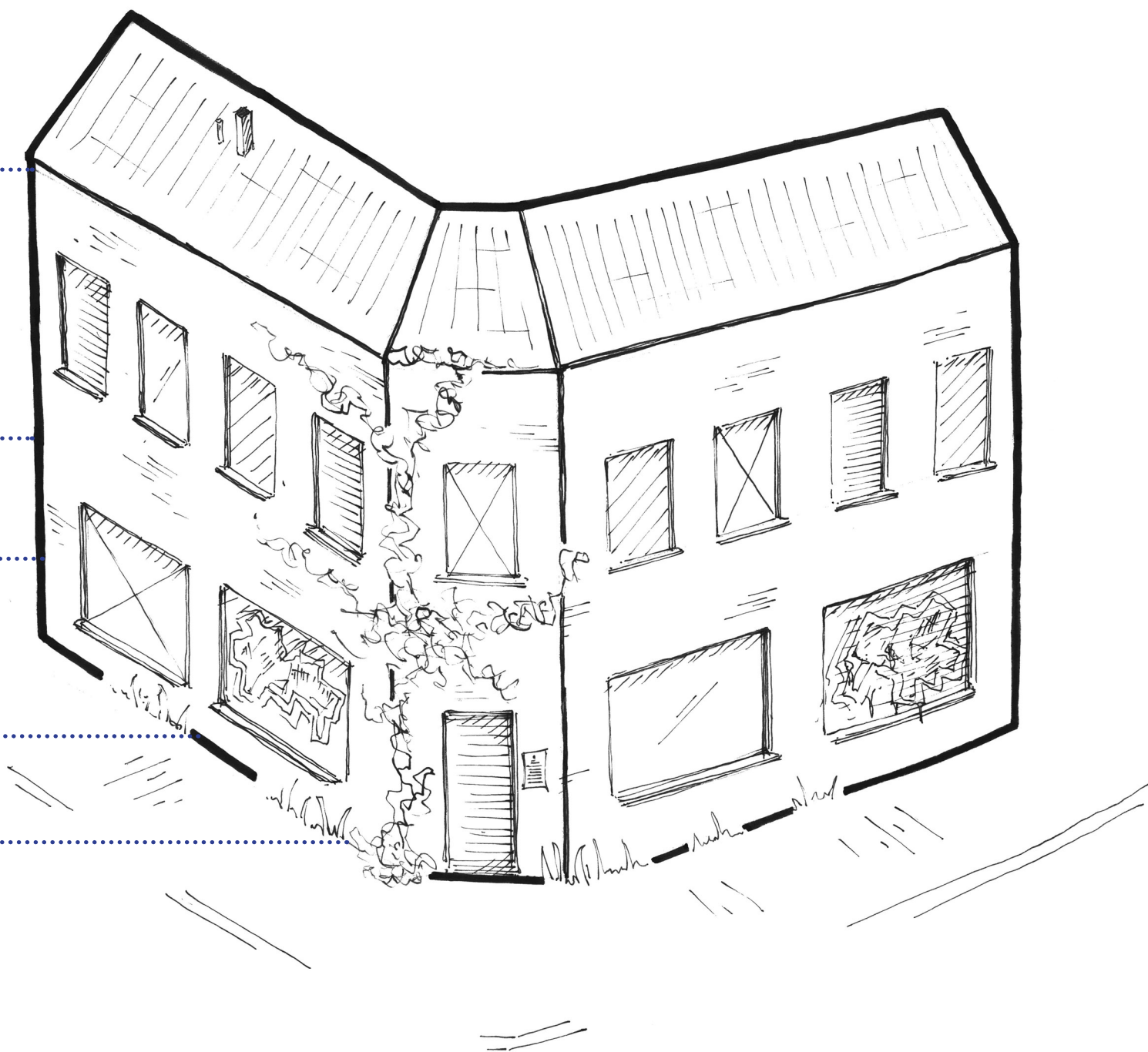


figure 59. characteristics of abandoned buildings in the urban fabric of molenbeek.

ANONYMITY

CONCEPT

The densely populated urban fabric of the 'Zwarte Vijvers' neighbourhood can be defined as a synthesis of four different urban typologies. The public, the residential, the industrial and the modern. This area is currently experiencing a severe lack of 'eyes on the streets', as Jane Jacobs introduced in her work. The feeling of anonymity invites crime and vandalism, because you will never get caught. The imposed norms of the highly public realm are less prominent in these types of quiet streets, allowing and enabling undesired behaviour. This feeling of anonymity is expressed differently in all types of fabric.

The public Gentssesteenweg can impose anonymity by the presence of the large mass of people. Within the mass, you are capable of blending in, hiding, becoming one with the public. A school of fish.

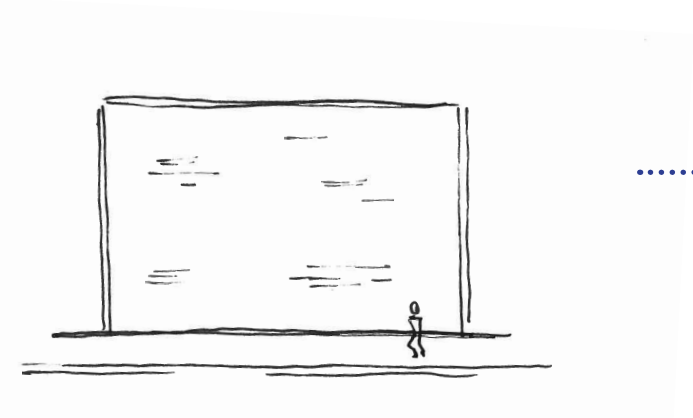
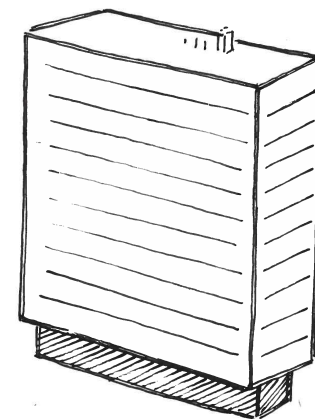
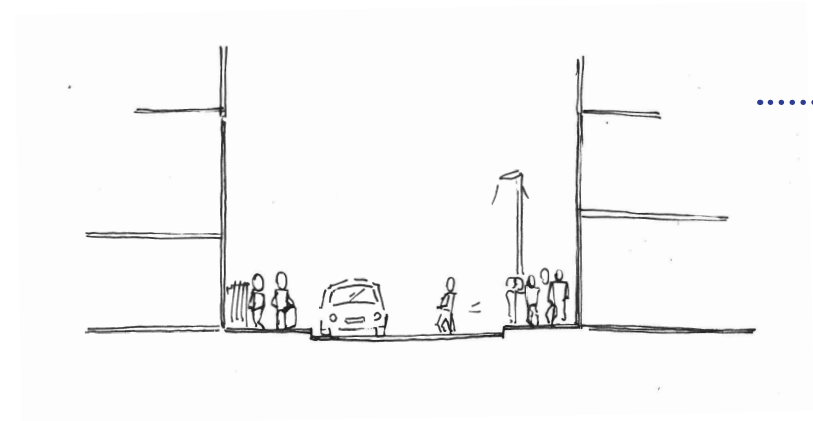
The quiet residential area has the potential to significantly increase the amount of eyes on the streets, but the culture of closed blinds prevents the interaction between the public and the interior. This is affected by the cultural and religious decision of highly valuing privacy. As a significant portion of female residents in Molenbeek wear a hijab outside, an open interaction between in- and outside would cause a religious conflict. The many garage doors, leading to former industrial halls

add to the experience of having no active eyes on the streets. This reinforces anonymity within this typology.

In the modern high rise portion of the neighbourhood, anonymity is reinforced by the spatial and social way that modernist buildings have been designed. The minimal interaction with neighbours and the continuous line of storage facilities in the plinths allow residents to stay as anonymous as they desire. This is a spatial characteristic that fosters the radicalisation and extremist problems in this district.

The industrial part of the neighbourhood is characterised by a large-grain plot size, allowing to visually interact with the original industrial buildings. The large blind facades and the limited opening times of these buildings do not add to the amount of eyes on the streets. This part of the district severely lacks perceived safety.

The collective lack of eyes on the streets in Molenbeek adds to a low feeling of perceived safety, deterring residents and visitors to feel safe in the public realm, repelling them from making spatial claims.



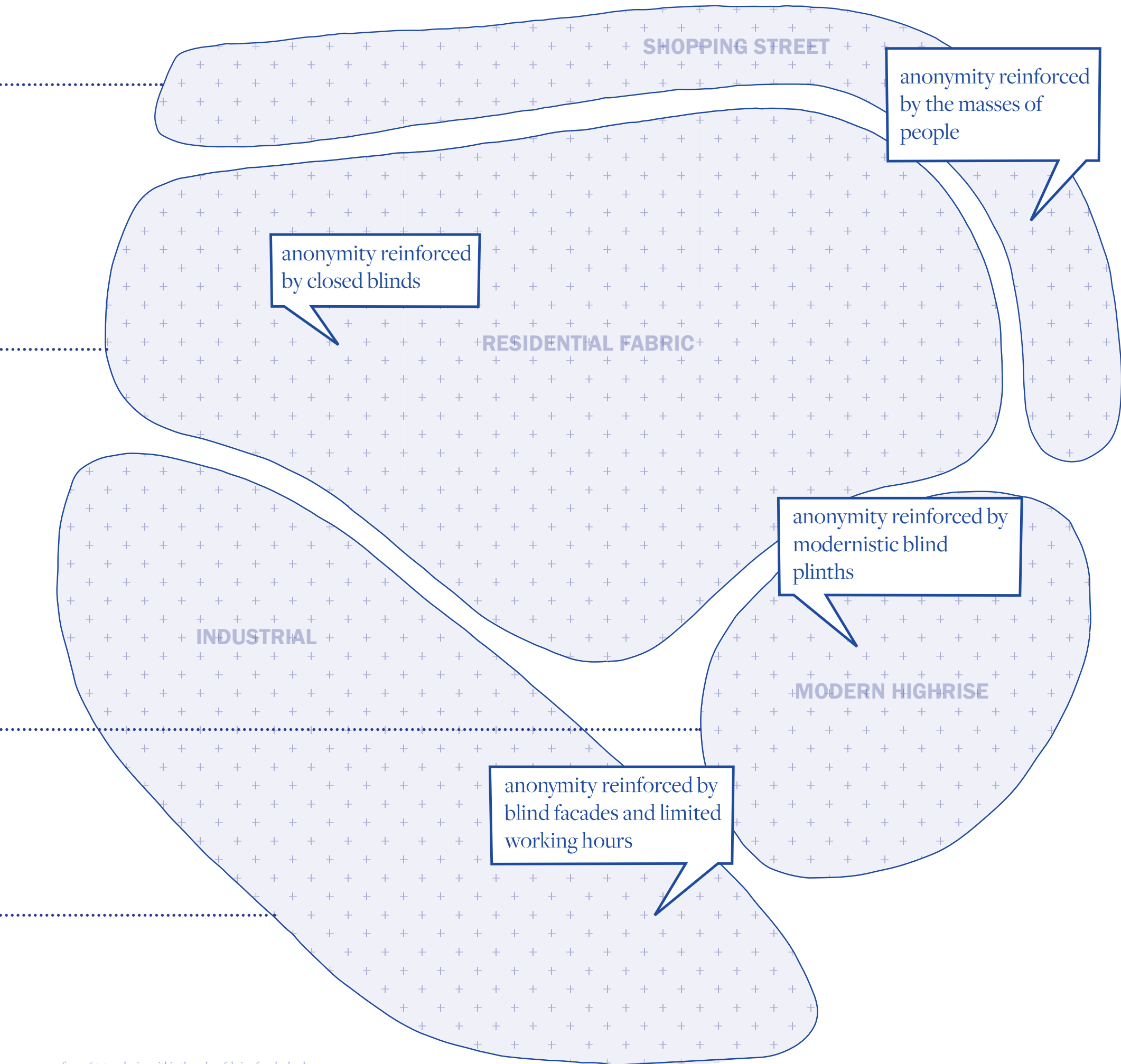


figure 60. typologies within the urban fabric of molenbeek

NO FEAR

CONCEPT

What if there would be no fear within the streetscape of Molenbeek?

Throughout Molenbeek, the fear of vandalism and crime is spatially expressed through barricading qualitative urban spaces and thereby privatising them. The urban space of Molenbeek is not public anymore. Protesting against the presence of fear within the daily streetscape, the design experimentation enabled a vision beyond this fear. As Tim Hofman stated in ‘Goede Moed’ (2024); when we eliminate fear, we will get space in return.

All spaces that do not contain the potential to contribute to an increasing amount of social safety by having ‘eyes on the street, are deleted from the following map. Resulting in a soup of disconnected plots. These buildings currently host dwellings, public functions or economic activity.

By definition, the rest of the spaces contain the potential to be transformed to contribute to a safer local environment. Resulting in the empowerment of residents and inviting them to feel comfortable enough to make spatial claims in their direct public environment.



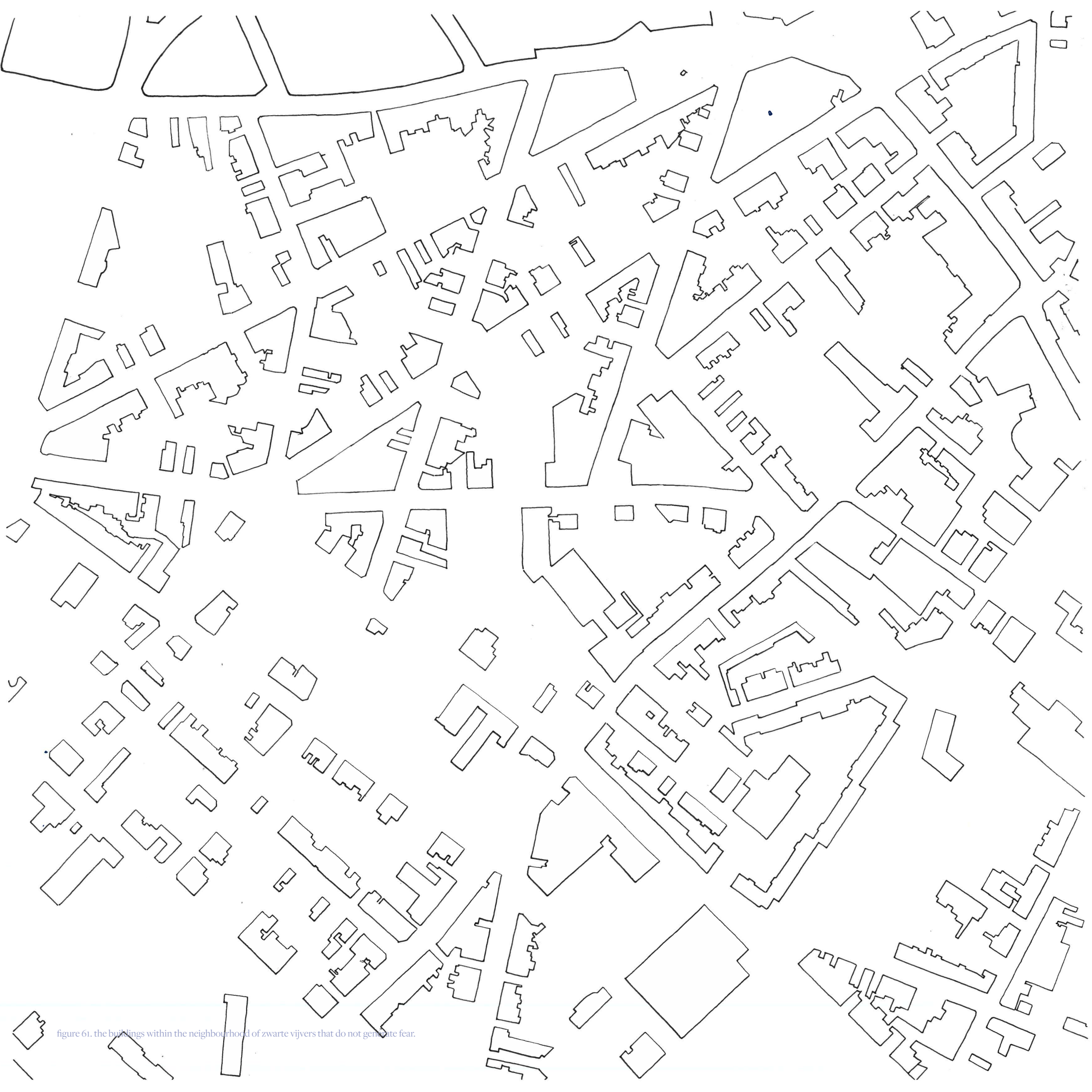
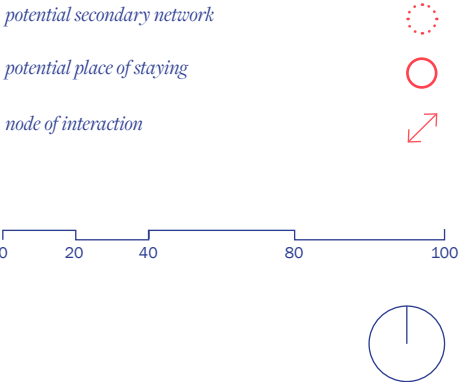


figure 61. the buildings within the neighbourhood of zwarte vijvers that do not generate fear.

The gaps in the urban fabric that are enabled by the presence of underused porosity create opportunity for a secondary network of qualitative urban spaces throughout the neighbourhood. This network can provide shelter and safety to pedestrians moving through the neighbourhood. To guarantee the public accessibility of this network, the connection and interaction with existing public services can increase the perception of publicness. These nodes of interaction represent points of entry to this new public dimension.

It is of great importance that the public functions within these nodes are already embedded in the daily routine of residents, lowering the threshold to enter the secondary network. Strong examples are the existing primary schools, the mosques or the supermarkets. This network enables a re-appreciation of the inner-block liveliness that characterised Molenbeek in its industrial era. Embracing the urban palimpsest through the revival of public space. The restrictions that the severe lack of space generated, limited the local government in undertaking action. The redevelopment of underused pores within the existing network opens up the urban fabric, creating space for the development of qualitative urban spaces.



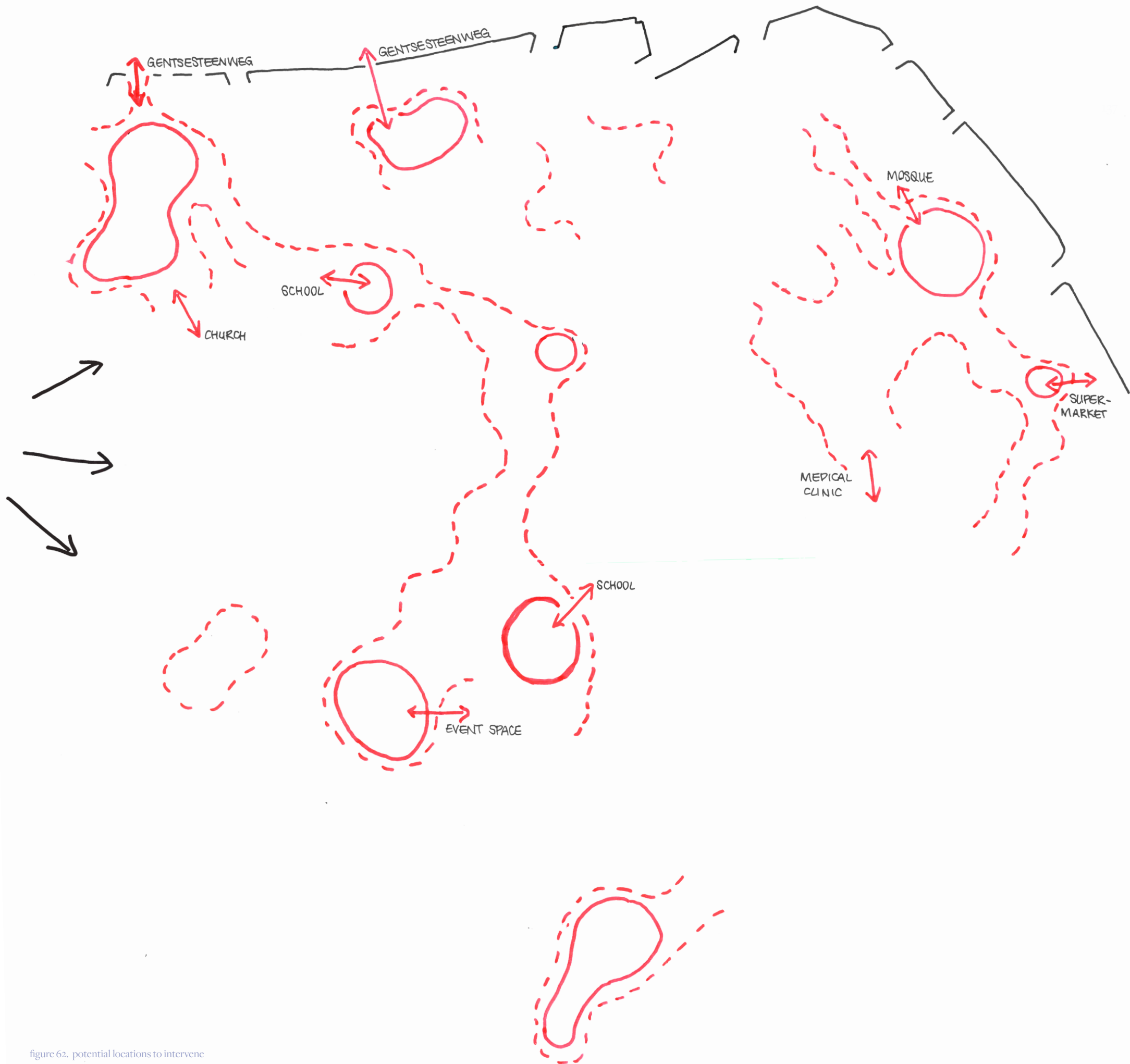


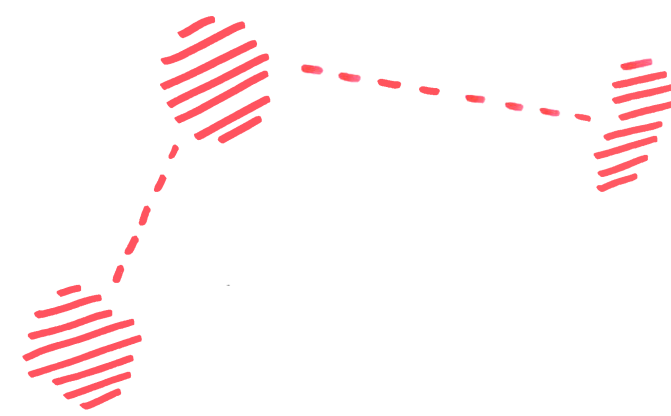
figure 62. potential locations to intervene

The interaction between the existing daily routines of residents and the potential for a secondary network of pedestrian spaces determines the first points of intervention.

The two primary schools within the ‘Zwarte Vijvers’ neighbourhood are embedded in the routines of various age groups. Molenbeek is struggling with a severe lack of playgrounds, where the children can develop themselves outside of school hours. This indirectly affects the vandalism and crime that occurs among youth at an older age. The urban block that separates the two schools contains a significant amount of porosity, allowing the establishment of a connection between them, focused on children.

The large Tanger supermarket is where the women of Molenbeek go to buy their weekly groceries. The supermarket offers a passage through the building, as the current parking lot is located on the inside of the block. This connects the inside of the block to the accessible publicness of the Genstesteenweg. This parking space is deserted outside of the opening hours, which enabled the potential to add programme to add qualities that allow people to stay there and contribute to the inner-block liveliness outside of opening hours.

The local youth are in need of a designated space to feel at home in. A larger open space offers flexibility to host multiple kinds of activities and events. The industrial part of the neighbourhood lends itself to this, as the large grain size permits the development of larger porosities. A larger space is capable of hosting bigger events, enabling the interest of the general Brusselaer as a target group.



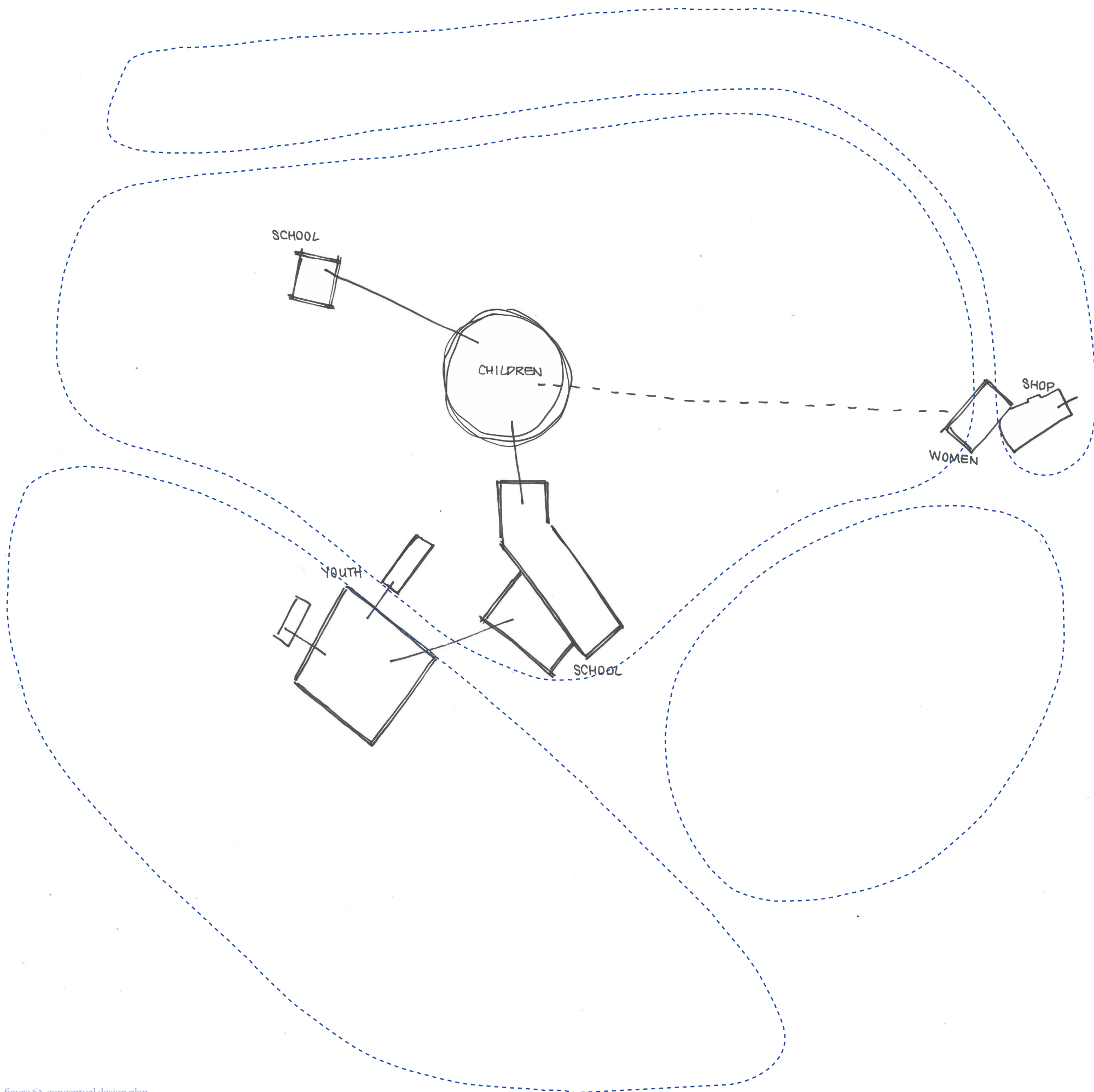


figure 63. conceptual design plan



06 INTERVENTION

PROGRAMME

INTERVENTION

142

From observation, interaction, reviewing literature and other forms of research, various target groups can be derived. These groups of people currently experience difficulty in expressing themselves and their behavioural patterns within the public environment of Molenbeek. The design of the public realm does not enable the empowerment and confidence of these groups. This results in a growing uncertainty of how to behave accordingly within the public realm.

The table in figure X synthesises the spatial limits and opportunities of the different porosity types with the wishes of the specific target groups.

The combination of certain target groups within the same intervention space aims to establish a stronger connection between them. The combination of the elderly, parents and children works in the social realm, but all groups have different programmatic needs, which might require conflicting spatial dimensions.

In general, women usually stay in the most publicly perceived spaces within the urban fabric. The ideal point of intervention to attract women must therefore be accessible from this very publicness. Interventions that are focused on children should be accessible through safe traffic

conditions, which are more apparant inside the inner fabric of the neighbourhood. This however might influence the accessibility of these interventions. Designs that are intended for a larger audience value the easy accessibility, as they need to accommodate large numbers of people.

The presence of the existing porosities, combined with the dynamics of the network together synthesise the opportunities that can be realised within the porous fabric of 'Zwarte Vijvers'

	CHILDREN	YOUTH	WOMEN	PARENTS	ELDERLY	MIGRANT	BRUSSE- LAER
EMPTY PLOT	playground	skate park	tea garden with benches	playground with benches	tea garden with benches		
CAR PREMISES	community centre study spaces	community centre study spaces		shop work			
PERSONAL GARAGE		cafe	passage communal kitchen	cafe	passage communal kitchen		art studio
INDUSTRIAL HALL	indoor play hall	event space	cafe event space	indoor play hall with seats	event space with seats	event space	event space
ABANDONED BUILDING	daycare dance studio	study spaces record studio	art studio communal kitchen	art studio	knitting club communal kitchen	library language studio	rave space record studio

figure 64. table that synergises the typologies of porosity, ther target groups and their programmatic desires

VISION

INTERVENTION

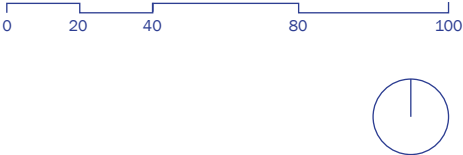
The potential secondary network of porosity will be supported by three initial design interventions.

The former supermarket parking lot will host a semi-enclosed tea garden focused on the needs and behavioural patterns of women. A communal kitchen provides an programmatic incentive. The proximity of the supermarket and the publicness of the Genstesteenweg form a combination that attracts women. The dimensions of the space are able to provide ‘geborgenheid’ (security) within the public realm.

A connection will be established between the two primary schools. The porosities within the block can be transformed to serve educational purposes. A study library will be introduced to provide a comfortable space to finish school work, as the apartments in this area are often small and the families big. This addition of programme can facilitate educational benefits for these students and increase their chances to pursue higher education. Furthermore, this inner block will contain a publicly accessible playground where children are able to meet each other. During work hours, study house employees are able to surveil and provide help if necessary. One of the porous buildings will be transformed into a daycare facility.

Combining children from different age groups within one location.

The designated space for youth is located within the former Bellevue brewery building. By opening up this building block, the residential plots alongside it will be activated simultaneously. As Molenbeek experiences a significant lack of open space, this intervention will generate a more open square, containing the capability to host larger events that attract residents from other parts of Brussels. A cafe inside the old industrial hall will attract visitors and enable them to stay on the square. To add to the creative character of the local youth, a dance and record studio will be closely connected to the public space. These organisations are able to directly perform their arts through the events that can be hosted on the public square. Allowing rap music to become an export product of the neighbourhood. The square is linked to the primary schools, providing children with a safe pedestrian connection between the two.



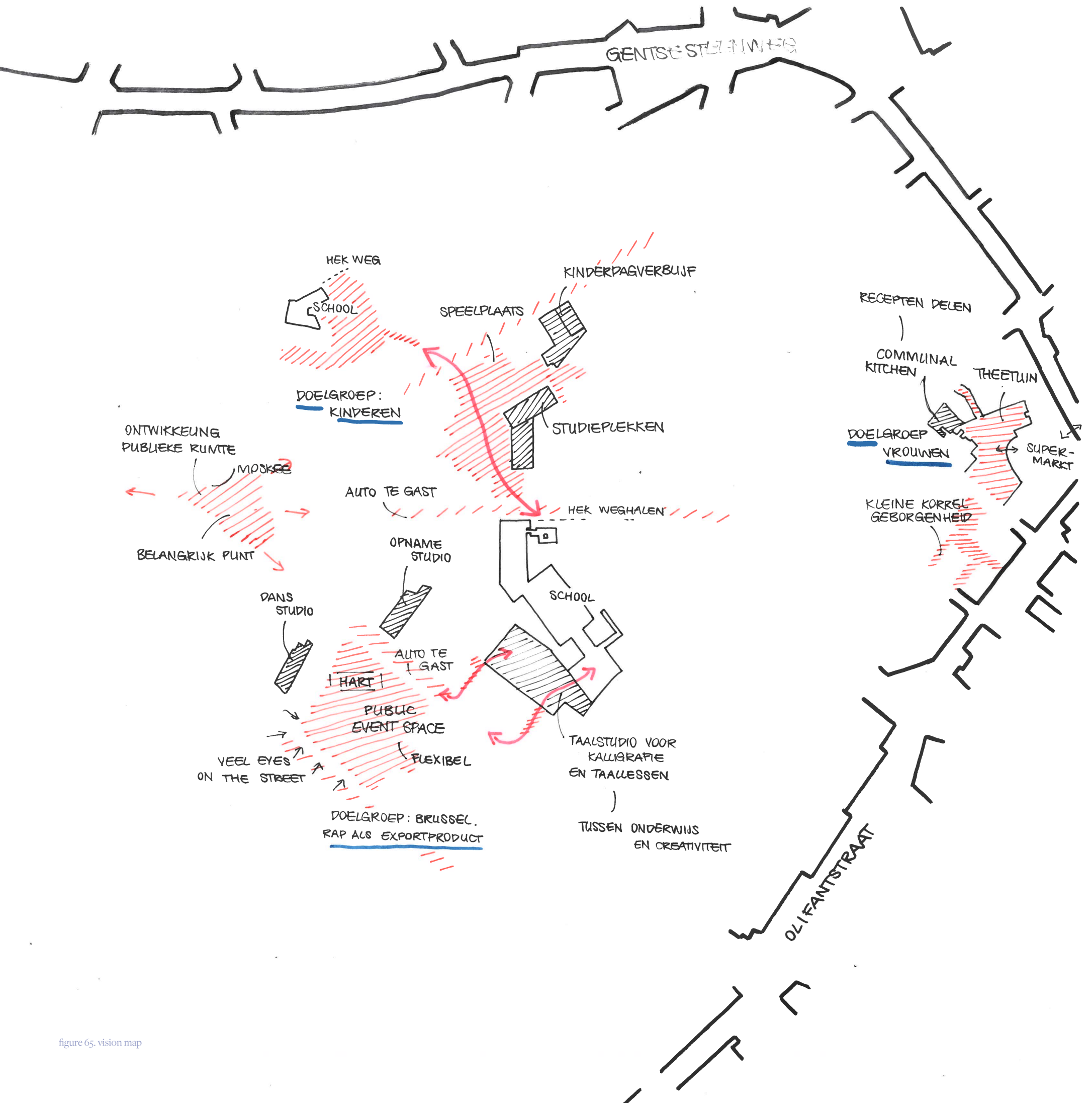


figure 65. vision map

TANGER TEA GARDEN

INTERVENTION

The proximity of the supermarket is the basic principle for this intervention site, because of its direct connection to the publicness of the Genstesteenweg. The public accessibility of the supermarket indicates the low threshold to enter the tea garden. Resulting in an approachable qualitative urban space within the dense and grey direct urban environment. By opening up the underused inner-block density, green spaces can seamlessly be integrated within the existing context.





figure 66: aerial photograph of intervention site

The current parking lot of the Tanger supermarket is transformed to accommodate a designated place of staying for women in the neighbourhood, who currently experience a lack of publicly accessible spaces where they are able to express certain behavioural patterns.

The ‘geborgenheid’ (security) that women seek in the public realm is embedded in the size, shape, location and programme of the space. The proximity of the large Moroccan supermarket, a destination that already is embedded in the daily routine of women in Molenbeek, enables the approachability and accessibility of the intervention. In the public space of Molenbeek, women mostly stay in areas with a high perceived publicness, such as the Gentseseenweg. The location in relation to these publicly perceived areas determines the likelihood of visitation. The interior of the supermarket establishes a direct connection between the public life in the Gentseseenweg and the security that the design is able to provide.

The construction of a pergola adds urban greenery to a predominantly grey environment. This provides shade and cooling on hot summer days, increasing the physical comfort of the outside space. The green plant coverage simultaneously provides shelter,

and security, guiding them to the intimate zone where the placement of urban furniture invites them to sit down, rest and meet each other.

In the programmatic addition of a communal kitchen inside a former personal garage enables the potential to host communal activities like iftar dinners or summer barbecues. Where people can bond over sharing family recipes.

The smaller building block across from the additional parking spaces is opened up and shaped into a communal garden, granting access to its neighbours. This enables a secondary pedestrian route to the supermarket, through the urban blocks. Increasing the safety for children to move through the urban fabric.

The parked cars have been removed from the ‘Van Male de Ghorainstraat’ have been removed, enabling a wider space for interaction on the sidewalk. The pedestrian realm is enlarged, providing room for small elements on the sidewalk, inviting residents to feel empowered and make a spatial claim.

	CHILDREN	YOUTH	WOMEN	PARENTS	ELDERLY	MIGRANT	BRUSSELAER
EMPTY PLOT	playground	skate park	tea garden with benches	playground with benches	tea garden with benches		
CAR PREMISES	community centre study spaces	community centre study spaces		shop work			
PERSONAL GARAGE		cafe	passage communal kitchen	cafe	passage communal kitchen		art studio
INDUSTRIAL HALL	indoor play hall	event space	cafe event space	indoor play hall with seats	event space with seats	event space	event space
ABANDONED BUILDING	daycare dance studio	study spaces record studio	art studio communal kitchen	art studio	knitting club communal kitchen	library language studio	raw space record studio



cars can be parked
along streets with
wider profiles.

patio shelter provides ‘ge-
borgenheid’ in the public
realm

the supermarket acts as a
buffer between the gent-
sesteenweg and the tea-
garden

the communal kitchen is
a place where food unites
people.

the bare concrete paving
enables the flexibility of
the space.

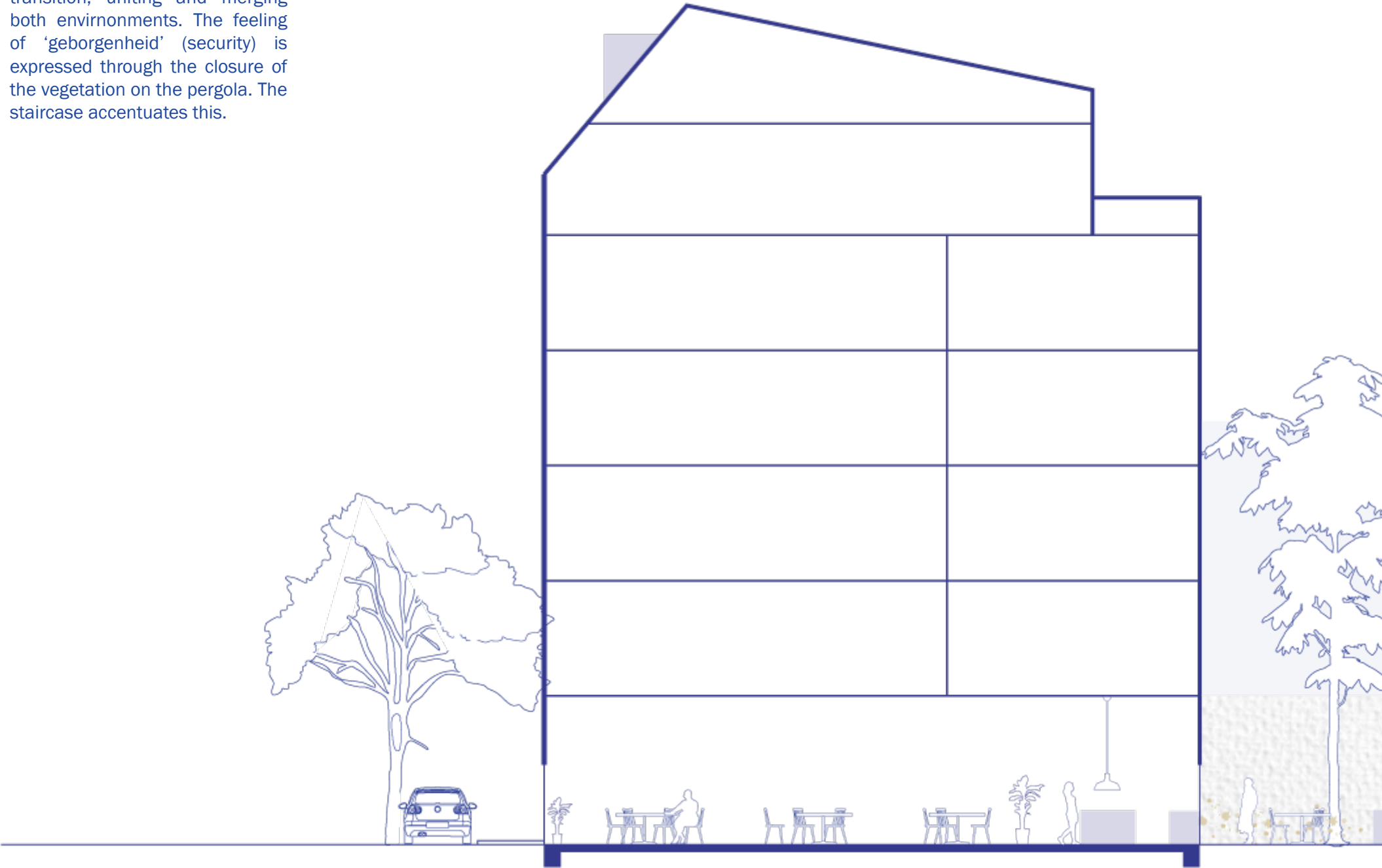
the addition of qualitative
urban green can provide a gar-
den-like space to residents
and bypassers.

the supermarket needs
parking spaces for people
doing their weekly shop.



figure 67. technical plan of tanger tea garden

The proportions of the intervention are visualised in the section. The flow from inside to outside forms a natural transition, uniting and merging both environments. The feeling of ‘geborgenheid’ (security) is expressed through the closure of the vegetation on the pergola. The staircase accentuates this.



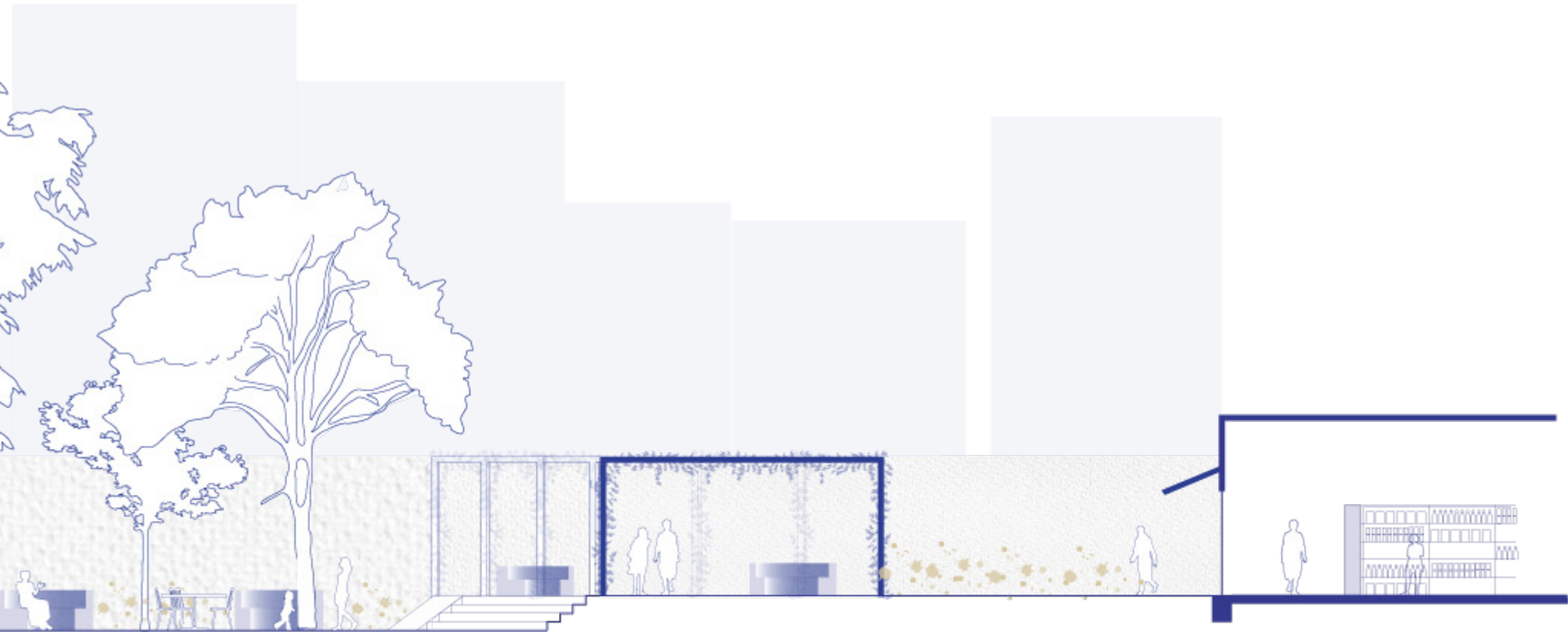


figure 68. technical section of tanger tea garden

Different details within the design decisions can be linked to the theoretical support.

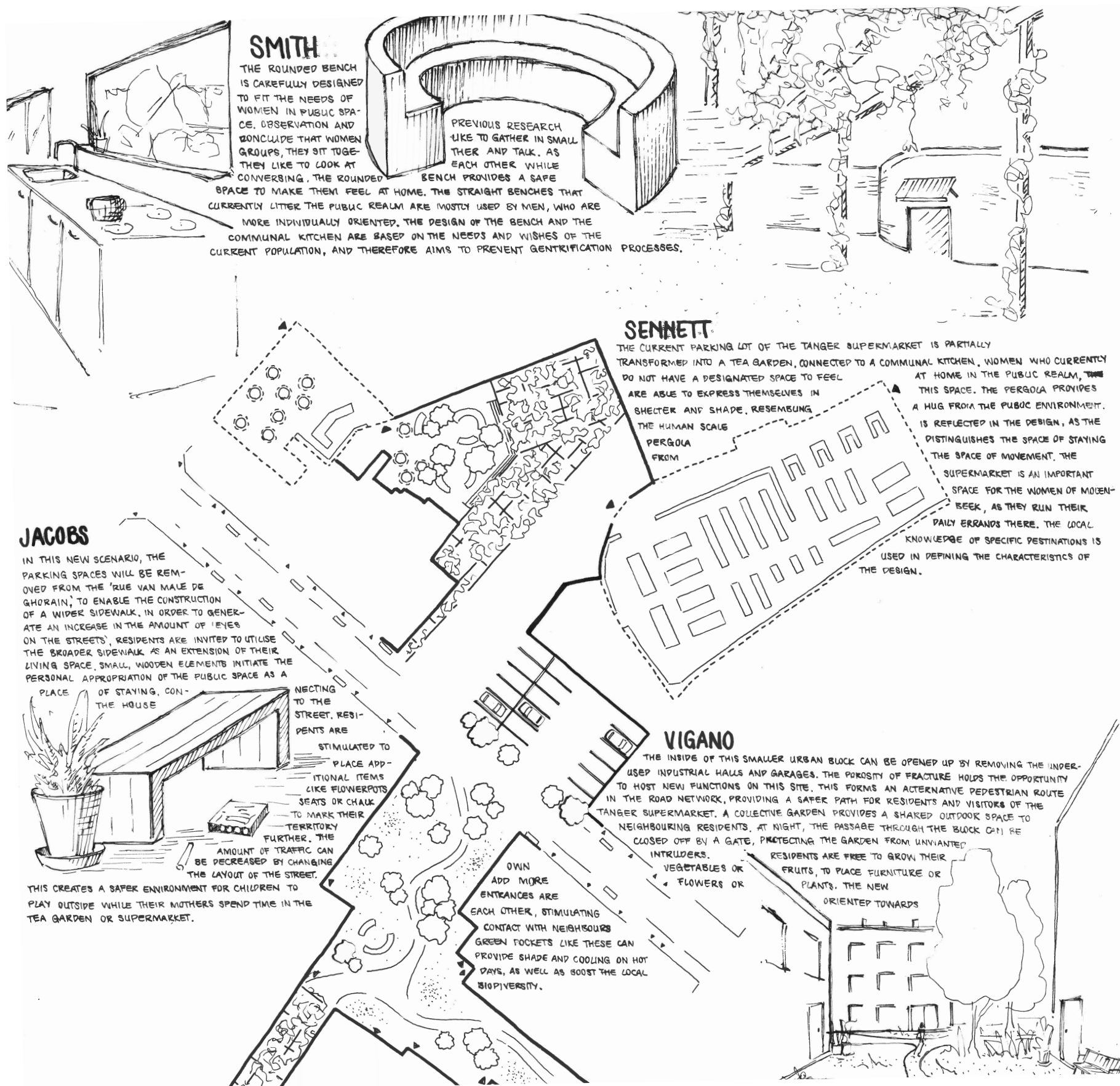


figure 69. tanger tea garden design plan connected to the theoretical support

The ambience in tea garden can be visualised in a line drawing. The various types of space that emerge are emphasised.

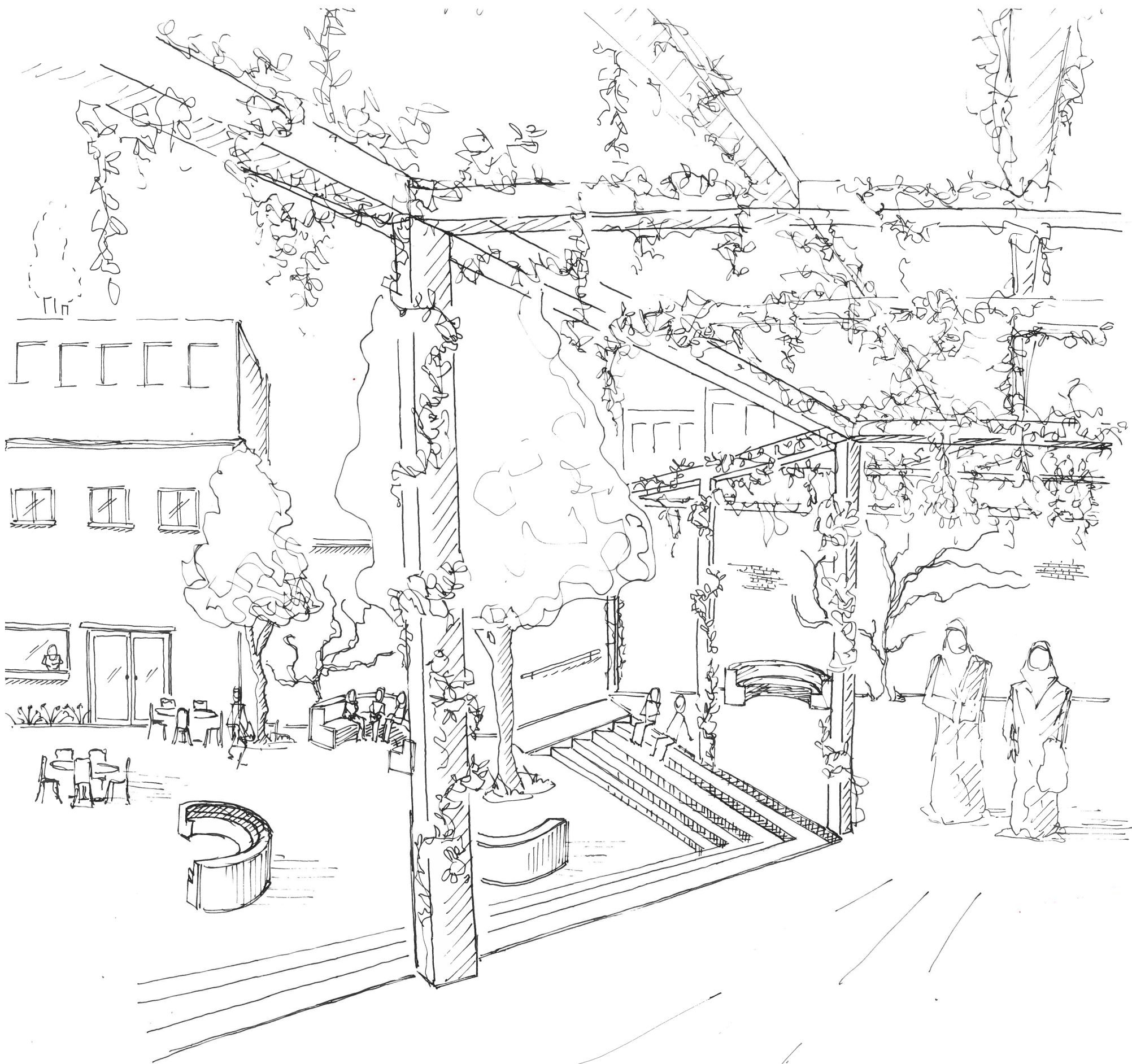


figure 70. visualisation of the tanger tea garden

PLACE BELLEVUE

INTERVENTION

In the predominantly industrial part of the site, the grain visibly bigger. The large hall is currently underused as a parking space for the employees of the neighbouring event space. The urban palimpsest shows the characteristics of the former use as the Bellevue brewery. The industrial hall can be opened up to create a public square with pleasant urban qualities. The streets surrounding this site contain a vast majority of residential units, providing the essential eyes on the street that generate sufficient levels of perceived safety in the public realm.

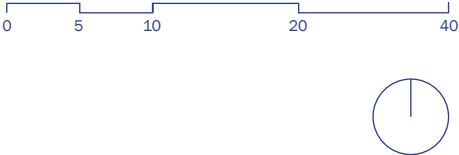




figure 71. aerial photograph of intervention site

	CHILDREN	YOUTH	WOMEN	PARENTS	ELDERLY	MIGRANT	BRUSSE- LAER
EMPTY PLOT	playground	skate park	tea garden with benches	playground with benches	tea garden with benches		
CAR PREMISES	community centre study spaces	community centre study spaces		shop work			
PERSONAL GARAGE		cafe	passage communal kitchen	cafe	passage communal kitchen		art studio
INDUSTRIAL HALL	indoor play hall	event space	cafe event space	indoor play hall with seats	event space with seats	event space	event space
ABANDONED BUILDING	daycare dance studio	study spaces record studio	art studio communal kitchen	art studio	knitting club communal kitchen	library language studio	raw space record studio



recording studio for rap music, written, produced and performed in Molenbeek.

dance studio for performing arts.

language centre connected to the neighbouring school complex

car-free road for safe access for pedestrians

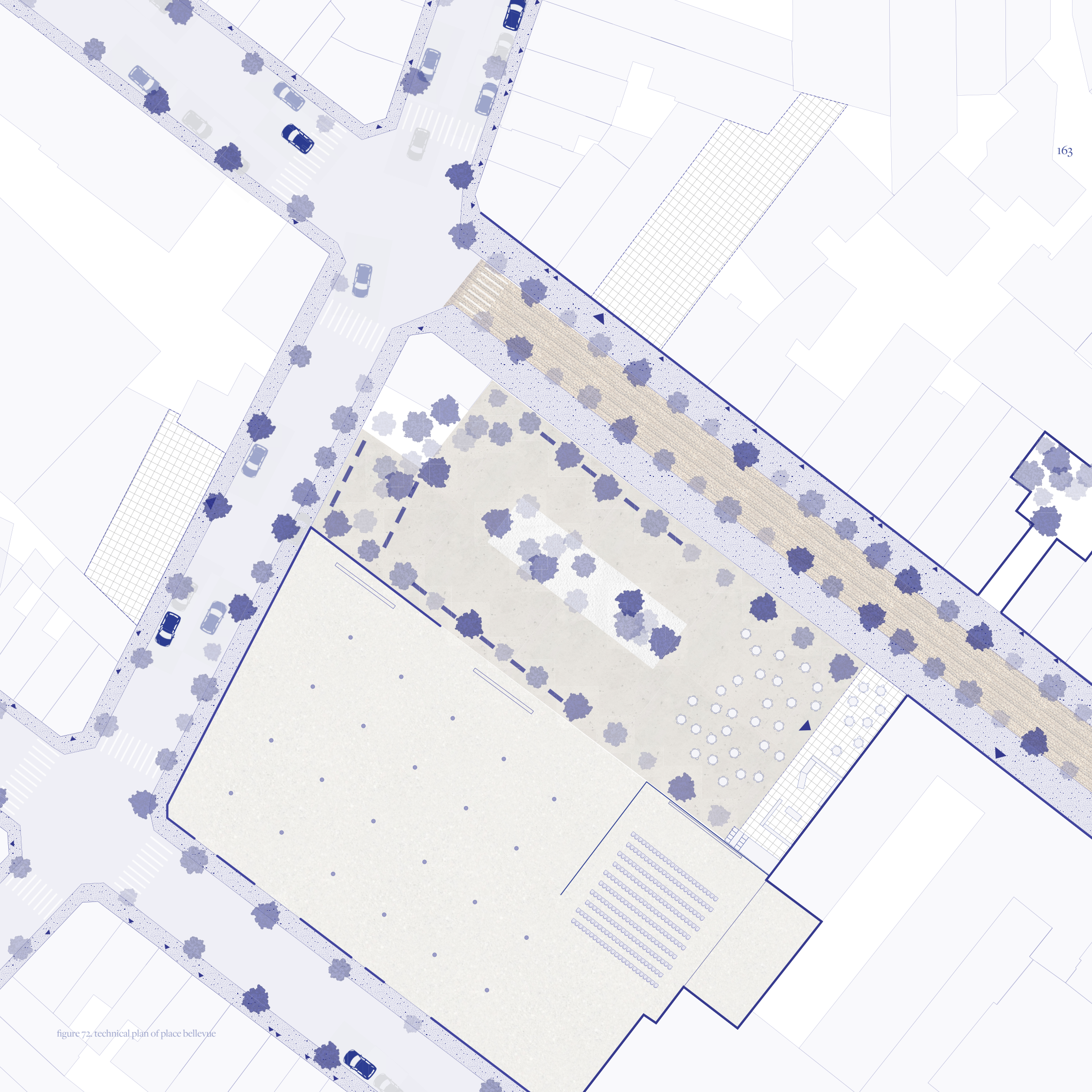
square with seating arrangement, surrounded by trees and greenery

urban interiority, weather proof multipurpose industrial hall

enclosed space with chairs for weddings, concerts and shows

Significant parts of the former Bellevue brerwery building are currently underused, solely serving the employees of the company a parking spot. The historic industrial hall can be opened up to create an open public space, something the neighbourhood is severely lacking in its current state.

Youth currently experience difficulty expressing themselves in the public realm, resulting in uncontrollable behaviour. Community centres aim to keep these teenagers off the streets and distance them from any criminal networks. The creative field

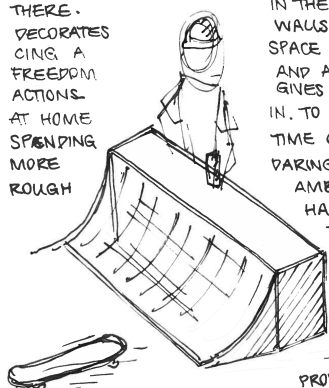


The different details within the design decisions can be linked to the theoretical support.

SMITH

AN OPEN AND FLEXIBLE PUBLIC SPACE NEEDS A CLEAR CONNECTION TO A DESIGNATED TARGET AUDIENCE, TO BE ABLE TO COMMUNICATE THAT THEY BELONG THERE.

DECORATING A FREEDOM ACTIONS AT HOME SPENDING MORE ROUGH



AND TO EMPOWER THEM TO FEEL AT HOME IN THE CURRENT STREETScape. GRAFFITI ART WALLS IN THE PUBLIC SPACE. BY INTRODUCING SPACE WHERE THE YOUTH GETS THE AND ALLOWANCE TO PERFORM THOSE GIVES THEM A PLACE TO FEEL IN. TO SUPPORT THE YOUTH IN TIME OUTSIDE, SKATE RAMPS INVITE VARIOUS FORMS OF PLAY. THE AMBIENCE OF THE INDUSTRIAL HALL MATCHES THE ELEMENTS THAT THE YOUTH NEED TO EXPRESS THEIR CHARACTERS IN THE PUBLIC REALM.

THE SHELTER PROVIDED BY THE

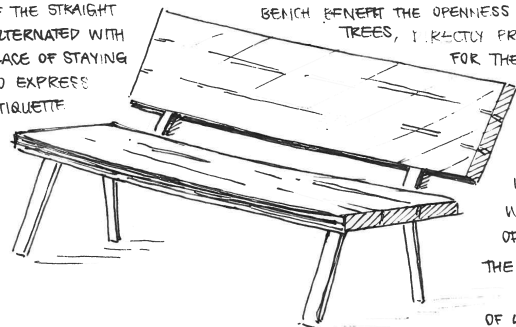
REMAINING WALLS ALLOW THE USERS TO DISTANCE THEMSELVES WITHIN A VERY CONTROLLED SPACE. A SAFE WAY TO TEACH INDEPENDENCE AND RESPONSIBILITY.

SMITH

SCARCITY OF URBAN SPACES

VIVVERS' NEIGHBOUR- BOTH NEGLECTED AND VUE PROVIDES AN OPEN AND FLEXIBLE OASIS

FOCUSSED ON YOUTH. THE MAIN SQUARE IS SURROUNDED BY TREES, PROVIDING SHADE TO INCREASE THE THERMAL AND PHYSICAL COMFORT. THIS SQUARE IS MARKED BY THE PRESENCE OF LINEAR BENCHES DIRECT TOWARDS THE DESIGNATED TARGET GROUP FOR THIS SPACE. THE WOODEN MATERIALISATION CONTRASTS AGAINST THE CONCRETE INDUSTRIAL LOOK OF THE FORMER BREWERY HALL. THE LOCAL YOUTH IS FEARED BY MANY, AS EXPRESSED IN THE STREETScape. THE OPEN AMBIENCE OF THE STRAIGHT BENCH BENEFIT THE OPENNESS OF ITS TARGET GROUP. THE BENCHES ARE ALTERNATED WITH PLACE OF STAYING TO EXPRESS ETIQUETTE



THE QUALITATIVE IN THE 'ZWARTE' HOOD RESULTED IN

GATED SPACES. PLACE BELLE- WITHIN THE DENSE URBAN FABRIC,

PROVIDING SHADE TO INCREASE THE THERMAL AND PHYSICAL COMFORT. THIS SQUARE IS MARKED BY THE PRESENCE

OF LINEAR BENCHES DIRECT TOWARDS THE DESIGNATED TARGET GROUP FOR THIS SPACE. THE WOODEN MATERIALISATION CONTRASTS AGAINST THE CONCRETE INDUSTRIAL LOOK OF THE FORMER BREWERY HALL.

THE LOCAL YOUTH IS FEARED BY MANY, AS EXPRESSED IN THE STREETScape. THE OPEN AMBIENCE OF THE STRAIGHT BENCH BENEFIT THE OPENNESS OF ITS TARGET GROUP. THE BENCHES ARE

TREES, DIRECTLY PROVIDING SHADE. THIS SQUARE IS A COMFORTABLE FOR THE LOCAL YOUTH, WHO CURRENTLY VISIBLY STRUGGLE

THEIR DESIRED BEHAVIOURAL PATTERNS WITHIN THE OF THE PUBLIC REALM. THIS IS REFLECTED IN THE PLACEMENT OF URBAN FURNITURE.

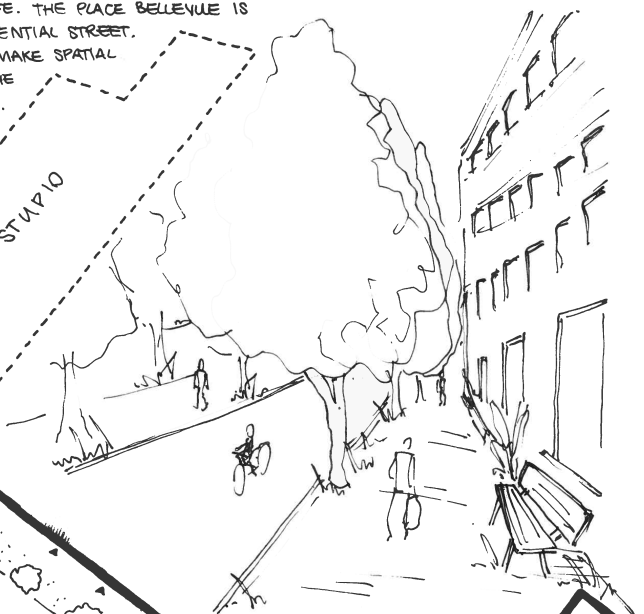
IS ABLE TO FLOURISH AND SHOW ITS FULL POTENTIAL BY HOSTING PUBLIC WITH THE URBAN PAUPPEREST, AS IT REFERS TO THE PAST USE OF THE OF THE OLD INDUSTRIAL HALL ALLOWS RADICAL TRANSFORMATION. TO DEFINE THE COMPOSITION AND SIZE OF THE POROSITY, THE NEIGHBOURHOOD HALL IS OPENED UP SLIGHTLY, TO CREATE AN ENCLOSED SPACE THAT IS CAPABLE OF HOSTING EVENTS OF LARGER SIZE. TO MAKE SURE THAT THE HALL STAYS IN CONSTANT USE, OTHER PROGRAMME IS ADDED. IT HOLDS THE POTENTIAL TO HOST SPORTS ACTIVITIES, FESTIVALS, CONCERTS, FOOD HALLS, GATHERINGS, REMOTE WORK SPACES, MARKETS OR FUNCTION AS AN URBAN INTERIORITY; SQUARE.

JACOBS

THE PERCEIVED SAFETY OF THE URBAN REALM IS IMPORTANT FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC LIFE. THE PLACE BELLEVUE IS DIRECTLY CONNECTED TO A RESIDENTIAL STREET. BY INVITING THOSE RESIDENTS TO MAKE SPATIAL CLAIMS ON A WIDENED SIDEWALK, THE EYES ON THE STREET WILL INCREASE.

THIS ENHANCES THE LEVEL OF COMFORT IN THE PUBLIC SPACE. THE INTRODUCTION OF A CAR-FREE ROAD RESULTS IN A SAFER ENVIRONMENT TO CROSS THE ROAD OR FOR CHILDREN TO PLAY OUTSIDE.

RECORD STUDIO



VIGANO

BY OPENING UP THE FORMER BELLEVUE BUILDING, THE CURRENT POROSITY OF FRACTURE FUNCTIONS. THE HOSPITALITY PROGRAMME ALIGNS BUILDING. THE RESILIENCE AND FLEXIBILITY

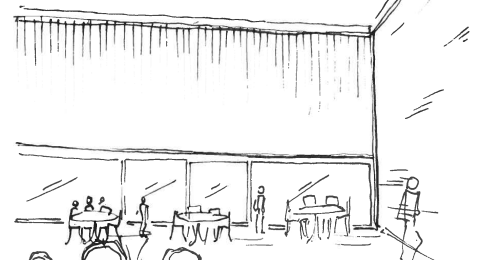


figure 73. place bellevue design plan connected to the theoretical support

The ambience in tea garden can be visualised in a line drawing. The different zones within the plan can bring multiple groups of people closer together.



figure 73. visualisation of place bellevue

CONCLUSION

INTERVENTION

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The objective of this research, is described in the main research question:

HOW CAN THE FIELD OF URBAN DESIGN STIMULATE THE EMPOWERMENT OF THE 'INSIDE-OUT PERSPECTIVE' IN THE CASE OF MOLENBEEK-SAINT-JEAN?

To be able to provide a complete answer to this main question, the subquestions that support the design decisions must be answered.

- *Why does the current public realm of Molenbeek-Saint-Jean not facilitate the empowerment of its residents?*

The current public spaces of Molenbeek are defined by anonymity. Different building typologies exert anonymity in their own way, resulting in a low feeling of responsibility among residents. This is embedded within the spatial dimension of the urban fabric, as there is a severe lack of open and accessible public spaces, the chances of spontaneous encounters in the public realm are low. The physical space on streets and sidewalks has been

completely occupied by motored vehicles, leaving little space for interaction.

The lack of 'eyes on the streets' fuels (the fear of) vandalism and crime, which slowly deters the streetscape. Residents distance themselves from their direct public environment and seek urban quality within gated urban spaces. This action of solely being able to find qualitative spaces in these privatised gardens with controlled access results in exclusivity. The perceived ownership of the public space is not felt, additionally, the lack of maintenance by the local governance does not empower the residents to feel proud of their public space.

The clear boundary between private and public leaves little room for making spatial claims. The large number of closed blinds limit the interaction between the public and the interior.

- *What kind of urban elements encourage the empowerment of residents to make a spatial claim?*

Within residential streets, a wider sidewalk can provide the air and space to place elements like a small bench or a flowerpot. This characterises the streetscape and thereby also diminishes

expressions of anonymity. By exhibiting a small part of you character on the street, expressed through the urban furniture that has been used. The removal of motored vehicles from the street allows pedestrians to see what is happening on the other side of the street, resulting in a socially safer environment.

When designing designated spaces for certain target groups, they are able to read from the space that they belong there. If the space is accommodating their needs perfectly, they are invited to feel at home in their designated space. The feeling of comfort empowers them to make spatial claims and feel proud of the urban qualities in the space, making it a pleasant place to stay. The execution of these designated spaces is done through detailed urban design, requiring close observations and research of local groups and their behavioural patterns.

- *What are the spatial opportunities for amelioration in the urban tissue of Molenbeek-Saint-Jean?*

Within the urban palimpsest of Molenbeek, the industrial past has left its mark on the urban tissue through the presence of inner-

block industries. As the inner-city industrial activity faded over the course of the past century, these former factory halls lost its initial function, but remained flexible enough to host other functions. These pockets of potential, defined as porosity, enable the enrichment of the urban spaces within the neighbourhood of 'Zwarte Vijvers' and beyond.

Summarising, the main question can be answered through the various design elements that have been applied. To provide certain target groups who are experiencing difficulty in expressing their behavioural patterns in the public realm. The porosities lend their spatial dimensions to host these programmes

these first interventions can be the start of an entire porous secondary network. A successful indication of the empowerment would be to cross the boundaries of the municipal borders and expand the development of the porous city-wide.

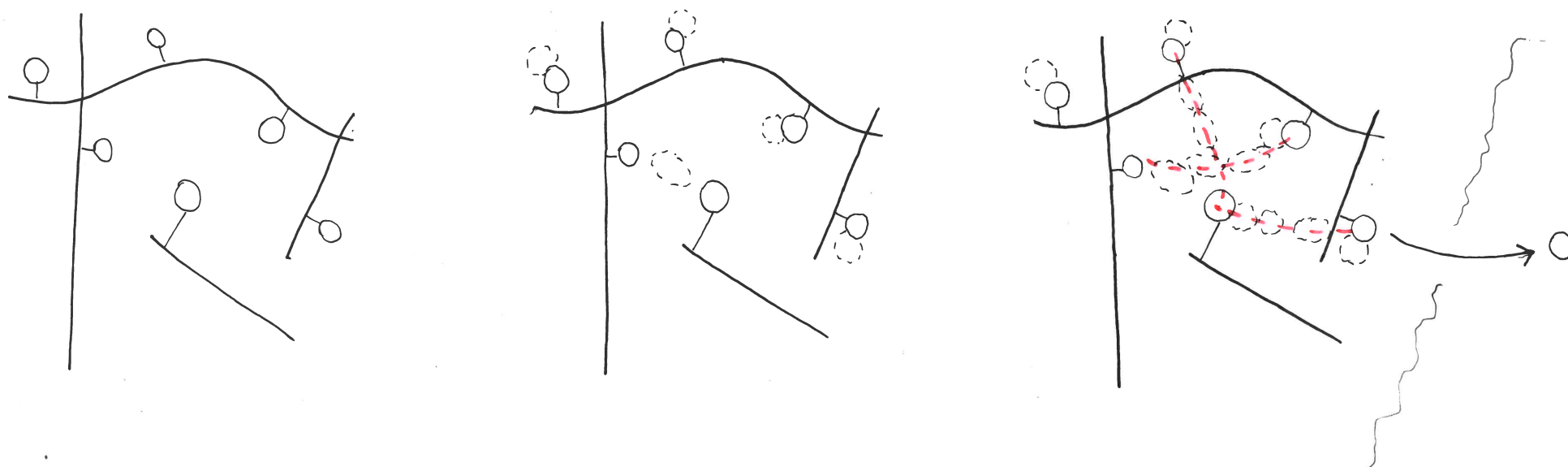


figure 74. a sequence of diagrams showing the development of the potential expansion of the secondary network within and beyond molenbeek



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13-15



SLO

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07 REFLECTION

EXISTING PROJECT

REFLECTION

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The small-scale development of porosities in the urban fabric of Molenbeek-Saint-Jean is an already occurring type of intervention. Transforming single industrial units that have lost their initial function resonates with the historical value that is embedded in the urban palimpsest.

Civic Architects, based in Amsterdam, have designed a plot in the Manchesterstraat, situated just outside of the project area. This project includes an old industrial hall bordering two inner-block courtyards that are being transformed into artistic and circular maker's spaces, a vegetarian cafe and a flexible hall for events (Civic Architects n.d.). While the ambiance is open and inviting for people like me, these functions do not resonate with the needs of the local population.

In practice, this project feels like an oasis of white people in a coloured neighbourhood. Resulting in a process of gentrification, leading to the inevitable stage of displacement of residents. This project does not seem to add any value to the lives of locals, while an enclosed tea garden with an open space to cook with family or friends does attract local people. The communal kitchen invites them to make a spatial claim while feeling the pride of cooking and serving family recipes, which provides a valuable addition to the

porous urban fabric of Molenbeek and its residents.





figure 75 : image source Civic Architects <https://www.civicarchitects.eu/projects/manchesterstraat-brussel>

REFLECTING

REFLECTION

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1. What is the relation between your graduation project topic, the studio topic, your master track, and your master programme?

During the process of developing this graduation project, various topics were touched on and reflected upon. The social values that are embedded in urbanism formed the base of a personal fascination. The translation of larger socioeconomic challenges into acupunctural urban design solutions can be defined as a recurring theme in my work. The people make the place, so the amplification of their voices is crucial in foreseeing successful design elements, because public space does not equal public life.

These topics seamlessly integrate with the social field of urban design, which concerns the composition and placement of pleasant and functional spaces within the interscalar public realm. This contemporary definition of the field of urbanism can be stretched when urban design enters the parochial realm. Extending the focus from the classic publically owned public space to the privately owned, but publically accessible space. This addition to the urban design field encompasses the scientific relevance of the thesis.

By focusing on the desires of the current residents instead of the general public, the foundations for

a new type of urbanism were laid in this project.

The small-scale design that addresses contemporary socioeconomic challenges, manifests the point where the sociological, architectural and urban territory meet. This synergy has shaped the concept of empowering urbanism.

The social methodology and themes that are present throughout the project are closely related to the graduation studio, 'The Design of the Urban Fabric'. The studio characterises itself by focusing on porosity as a metaphor as well as an operational concept, that is able to shape spaces that accommodate liveability and sustainability within the dense urban fabric. This allows social approaches to thrive. Enriching the urban palimpsest by the diverse plurality of people, embracing uncertainty and social connectivity.

Research by design can be classified as the main research method in this studio, resulting in techniques such as design experimentation, sketching, observing and testing. These techniques are reflected in this graduation project.

2. What is the relation between research and design in your project?

The studio 'The Design of the Urban Fabric' focuses on the approach of research by design. Students are challenged to implement design as a research method from the beginning stage of the project onwards. This could have been emphasised more in this project to challenge creative and critical thinking skills.

Other implemented research methods address the practical and social themes, such as observational fieldwork, interviews and spatial analyses. Various design theories have been implemented into the theoretical framework of the project, directly relating the design outcome to theoretical support. Leading to a design that grants a spatial answer to the main research question.

3. How do you assess the value of your way of working (your approach, your used methods, used methodology)?

During the entire project, the approach has been a constant and stable factor, serving as a guiding element. The methodologies that have been implemented have contained a focus on practice, granting a fantastic and fitting result. Intentionally determining a practical approach has resulted in a design solution that takes socioeconomic challenges into account through the eyes of a resident.

The inherent value of fieldwork provided various relevant insights that contributed to the research and design process. This includes the subjective feelings and experiences that are generated by walking through the urban tissue, interactions with strangers on the street or observations from afar. Observations were translated to ethnographic or soft maps, expressed in photographs or anecdotes. As the research methods focused on practical elements, the implemented design theories provided an academic backbone to the design outcome.

Observations and interactions with men have provided enough information to compose a fitting design solution, but the perspectives of women and

children are missing in the interviews and interactions, resulting in a possible incomplete frame of the experienced local problems. During the multiple fieldwork trips, women continued to radiate distance, making them less approachable.

The combination of all methods perfectly aligned with the goal of the project: to ameliorate the neighbourhood through local empowerment while preventing gentrification.

4. How do you assess the academic and societal value, scope and implication of your graduation project, including ethical aspects?

The academic value of the graduation project lies in the approach. By actively positioning myself, the urban designer, outside of the professional 'outside-in' field, experiencing the site through the eyes and approach of a resident. This movement towards the 'inside-out' perspective simultaneously acts as a connecting element between the mismatched views. The inside-out perspective has yet to be adequately represented in academia. Although some participation methods have been suggested, they have not been translated into practical applications for those experiencing the inside-out perspective. This gap highlights the scientific relevance of this thesis.

The social and professional relevance lay in the design elements that compose 'empowering urbanism'. By uniting the fields of urbanism, architecture and sociology, a new form of urbanism is enabled. Empowering urbanism is characterised by the outside-in approach, letting seldom-heard voices be spoken. From an ethical perspective, this new approach assures the amelioration while preventing gentrification. This allows current

residents to enjoy the benefits from local investments, without the risk of displacement or extreme inflation. Engaging the local middle class to stay in the neighbourhood, boosting the local economy and generating welfare.

5. How do you assess the value of the transferability of your project results?

This thesis highlights the specific location-bound socioeconomic challenges that accumulate in Molenbeek. The project itself would not directly be transferable to other sites experiencing similar challenges. The voices of locals are of major importance for the urban design outcome, as well as the spatial conditions in which the opportunities are hidden. In Molenbeek, the industrial past has left its mark in the shape of porous garages, which are very location-bound.

The overall approach of ‘empowering urbanism’ is applicable in other seldom-heard communities in need of spatial and socioeconomic improvement. By designing through the eyes of residents, the interventions can obtain a total focus on a specific target group. This prevents gentrification, as the location-bound result might not match with the interest of the general public.

6. Did the chosen approach or methodology limit the outcome of the research in any way?

The practice-focused methods have demonstrated some limits throughout the process.

In interviews and interactions with residents, women particularly appeared unapproachable. When walking alone, they often were calling, distancing themselves from spontaneous interactions with strangers on the street. Others appeared hesitant to answer personal questions, because of ties to the local criminal network or fear for local authorities. This unapproachable attitude fed some insecurity in the ability to approach others in the public realm or online.

The language barrier can be defined as another obstacle that hindered sustainable contact with residents, withholding me from organising a co-creation drawing workshop with locals. To still come to a design conclusion, the focus needed to be shifted towards observations and interviews with men. This has influenced the time management process as well as the design outcome.

7. How did your role and identity as an urban designer come forward in the project?

The graduation project can be viewed as a preparational project that reflects the start of your future career path.

Almost halfway down the double degree that I am aiming for, this graduation project has been an experimental site to deepen and combine personal interests within the field of urban design. Naturally, the small-scale urban design touches the field of architectural design, broadening my interest in the borders and boundaries between public and private realms. For the design of qualitative urban spaces can be concluded that ownership is less important than openness and accessibility. The perception of degrees in publicness allows for the composition of spaces with specific ambiances, focused on different target groups. The facade acts as the connecting element between architecture and urbanism, in the context of sociological challenges.

I am excited to continue to work on these interesting topics from an architectural perspective in September, deepening my knowledge of both disciplines.

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