



# RETHINKING BRUSSELS MIDI STATION AREA

EVELINA OZOLA

DESIGN AS POLITICS

DEPARTMENT OF URBANISM

FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE

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## COLOPHON

Rethinking Brussels Midi station area

Final report

Evelina Ozola  
st.no. 4049306  
eve.ozo@gmail.com

Design as Politics «In the ghetto» graduation studio  
Mentors: prof.dr. Wouter Vanstiphout, dr. Machiel van Dorst

Department of Urbanism  
Faculty of Architecture  
TU Delft

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All illustrations by author if not stated otherwise

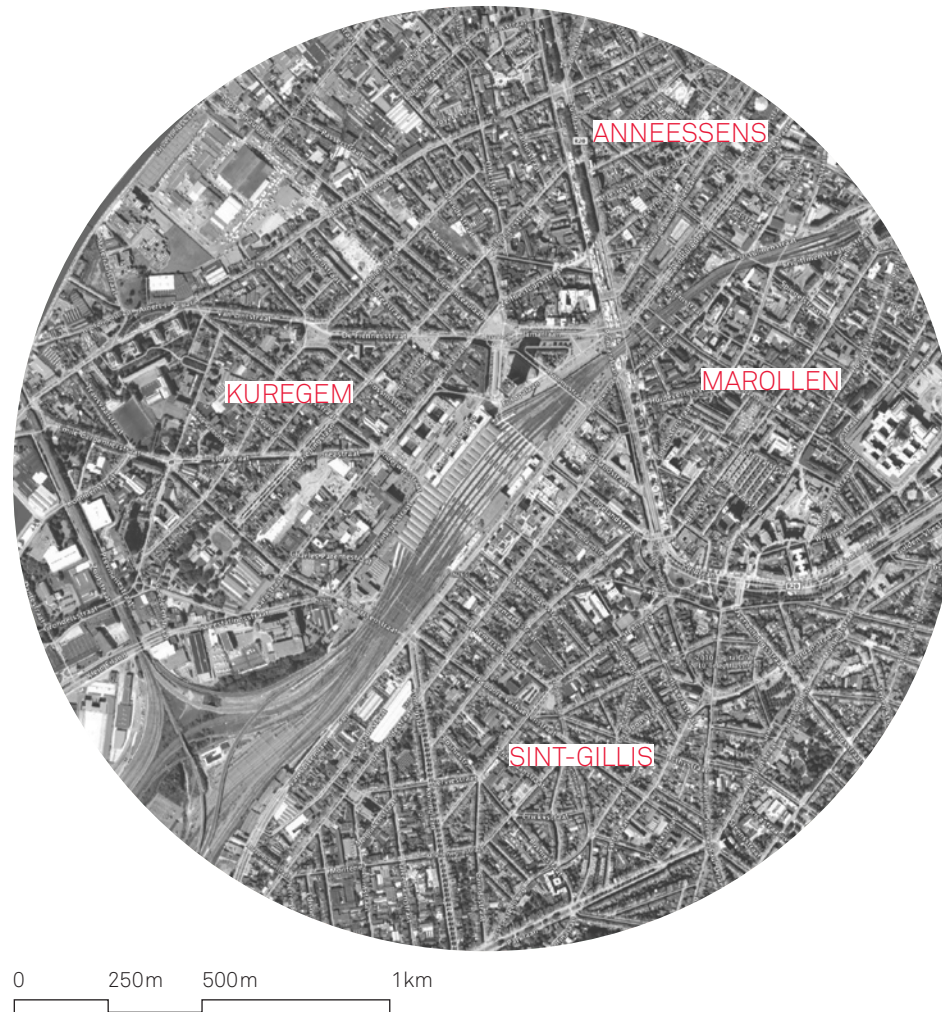
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# INTRODUCTION

## PROJECT LOCATION

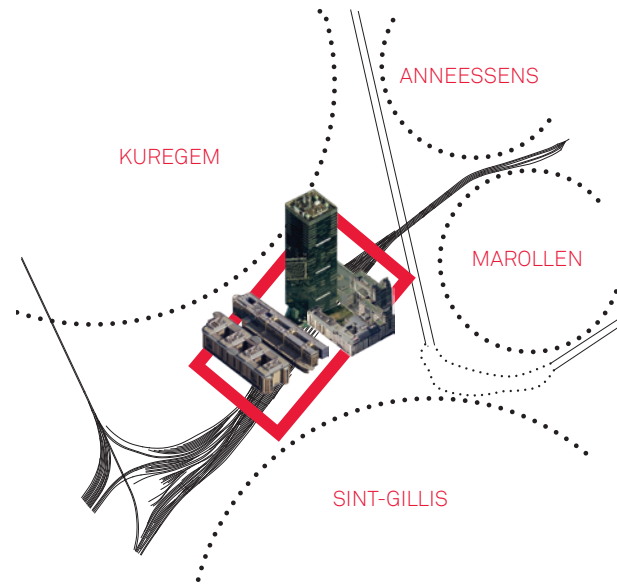


The location chosen for the graduation project lies in the South of Brussels, just outside the pentagonal city centre, with Brussel Zuid/Bruxelles Midi railway station in the middle. The circle shown here measures 1.25 kilometres in radius - a distance quite comfortably walkable in all directions from the station and coinciding with physical boundaries of the adjacent neighbourhoods. On

the western side it is the Charleroi canal, in the south-east Sint-Gillis hilltop and Forest park, in the south-west an industrial terrain. The circle includes four neighbourhoods: Kuregem (part of Anderlecht), Anneessens and Marollen (parts of Brussels centre) and Sint-Gillis.

Photo: Google Earth, 2010

## PROBLEM FIELD



Brussels Midi is the biggest railway station in Brussels and one of the five most important nodes in the European high-speed train (HST) network (others are Lille, Cologne, Frankfurt and Stuttgart). International and inland trains, metro, bus and tram lines that come together at the station serve approximately 100 000 passengers every day (TreinTramBus, 2009).

Midi station is neighbored by municipalities of Anderlecht to the west and Sint-Gillis to the south-east side. These parts of the city are often referred to as «immigrant quarters» which is rather precise, as the number of residents of non-Belgian origin in the neighbourhoods accounts 40% on average (Ministerie van het Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest, 2006). Such description is often followed by the frightening epithet «no-go area» (Diab, 2010) due to the comparatively high poverty, unemployment and criminality levels in Anderlecht and Sint-Gillis.

The immediate surroundings of Brussels Midi station display an ambition of mainstream HST location development – city blocks are being gradually replaced by large scale office buildings, and the location is spatially emphasized with a landmark - Zuidtoren or Tour du Midi, tallest building in Belgium, dating from

1967. The rigidity and emptiness of the adjacent streets and squares is striking, especially when compared to the vibrant public spaces in Anderlecht and Sint-Gillis. It is obvious that the developments around and within Midi station suffer from vacancy, which contributes to the same vandalism and crime that have secured its bad reputation.

Near the Midi tower, flags of European Union member states stand in a ring, representing a political ideal. The nearby neighbourhoods reflect the actual consequences of the attractiveness of European economic supremacy – countless Turkish corner shops, Moroccan tea rooms, Brazilian cafés and Congolese hair salons. The amount of various enterprises listed on the internet sites of expatriate communities signify that the multicultural character of Kuregem, Anneessens, Marollen and Sint-Gillis is not transitory – these people have settled in Brussels for permanent stay and are bounding with their milieu. The street atmosphere is reminiscent of a world fair – exotic smells, bright outfits and different style of music coming out from every open door. Once a week, on Sundays, the station too becomes unrecognizable – a market wraps around its northern end, bringing the immigrant quarter liveliness closer to the European flags.

Besides on-location observations and impressions, the tendency of expanding a sterile office-use-dominated, blind-ground-floor, empty-after-dark environment already has negative consequences: Midi station surroundings often enough accommodate hatred, fear, crime and aggression. A deprecatory spatial reaction to the harsh reality only widens the gap between well-off high-speed train passengers, real estate developers and government authorities on one side and less advantaged local residents on the other. Such attitude is contradictory to the basic value public transport and public spaces represent – accessibility for everyone. Brussels Midi station area is turning into a citadel of social exclusion, filtering out those less valid for a glossy picture of HST location development (Marcuse, 1997).

*Urban design on any scale needs to once again become fully aware of its impact on society and therefore of its political nature.*

*(Vanstiphout, 2010, p.15)*

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK - PUBLIC DOMAIN

It has been deliberately chosen to use the term «public domain» instead of «public space» throughout the graduation project, because it holds a broader meaning and is not strictly confined by ownership, functional or spatial definitions. Public domain crosses the boundaries between public and private, non-profit and commercial, inside and outside. The one crucial requirement is:

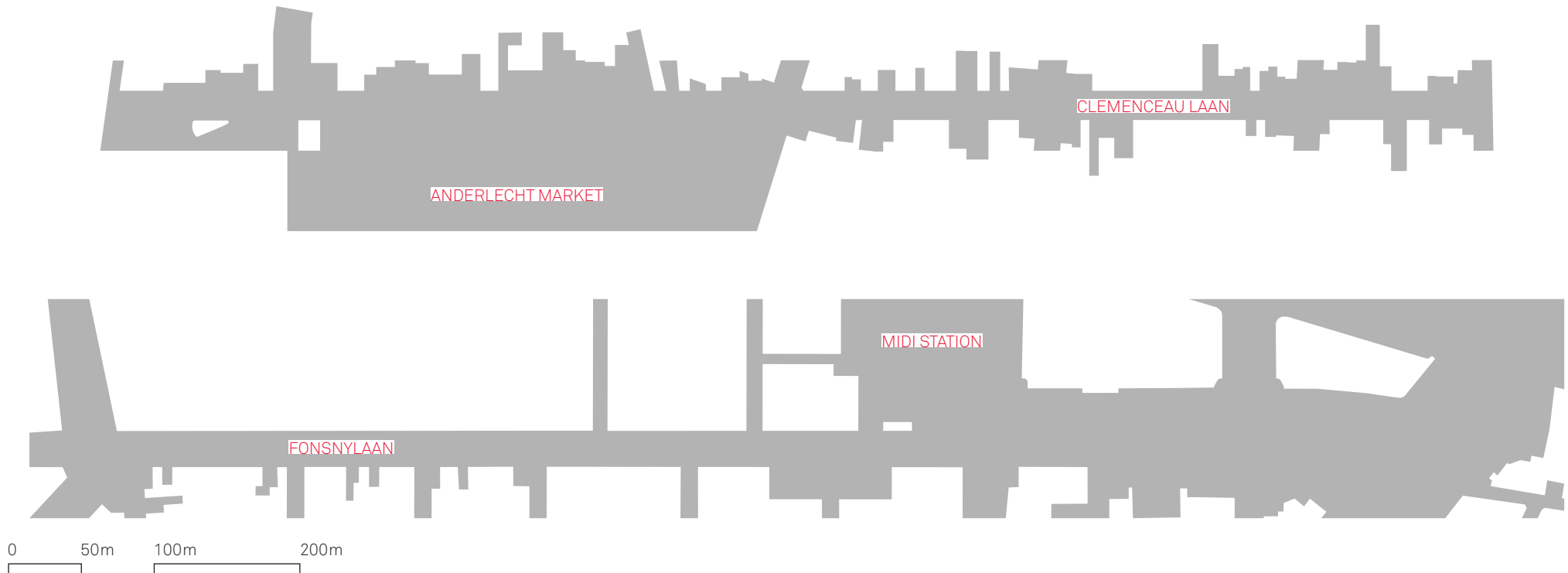
*an exchange between different social groups is possible and also actually occurs.*  
(Hajer & Reijndorp, 2001, p.11)

The importance of public domain is confrontation with otherness: appearances, behaviour, ideas, beliefs, preferences and necessities that differ from ours (Hajer & Reijndorp, 2001). Seeing, experiencing, becoming familiar with this

otherness form our personal opinions – as opposed to worldviews and stereotypes we can simply take over from mass media, acquaintances or authorities. This orientational knowledge helps in sustaining coherence in society (Hajer, 1999).

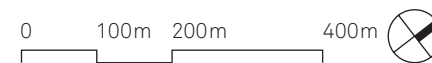
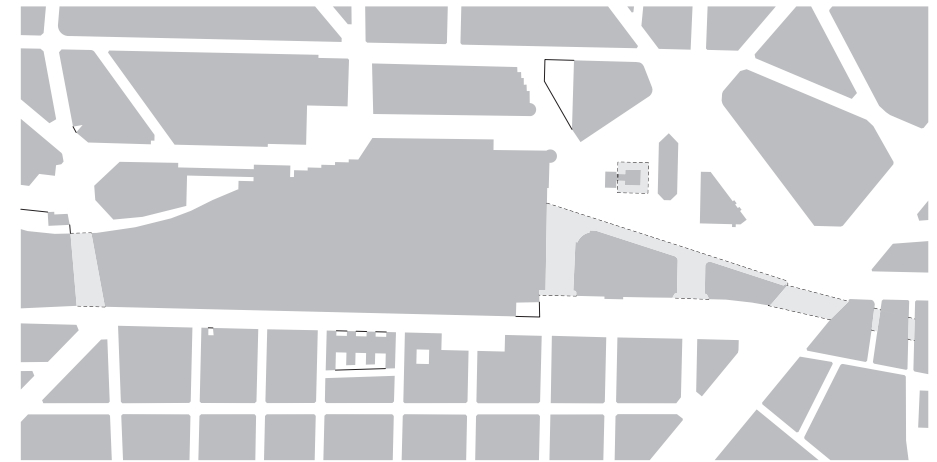
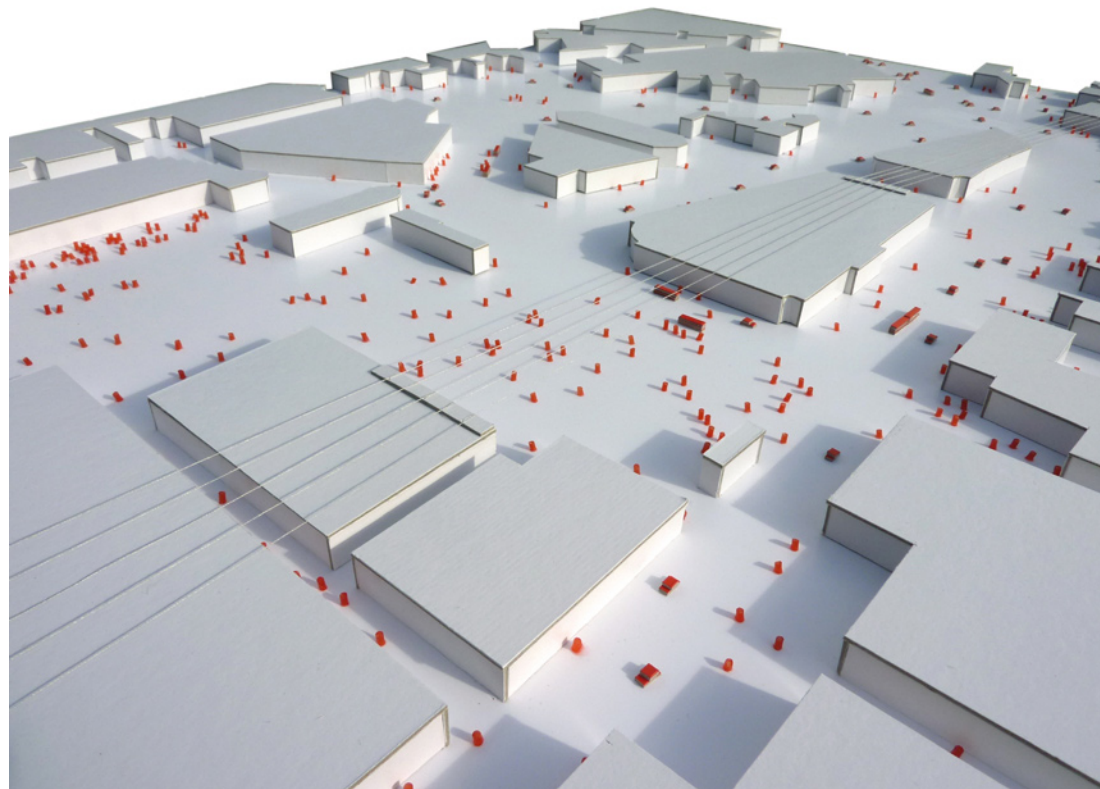
In multicultural environments, citizenship also holds the aspect of ethnic background and identity. Public domain is then the grounds for becoming familiar with and accepting cultural differences, as different groups that have become attached to a particular place have to find ways of coexistence (Hajer & Reijndorp, 2001; Rogers, 1998).

In the graduation project mapping and spatial analysis of public domain in Brussels Midi station area were carried out to compare obviously vibrant streets to those less used and to analyse the scale and form of publicly accessible places.



A comparison of the form of public domain along Clemenceau Laan - a vibrant shopping street - and Fonsnylaan - an underused street near Midi station.





Above: built structures around Brussels Midi station - spaces defined by physical elements.

Below: public domain around Brussels Midi station - spaces defined by accessibility to public.

A model (scale 1/200) that explores the publicly accessible spaces in and around Brussels Midi station

# RELEVANCE

## SOCIETAL RELEVANCE

The graduation project aims to lessen the social tension between the well-off and authoritarian and the poor and powerless, its frontier being Brussels Midi station area. Recent violent outbreaks in London show how quickly areas with a stark divide between the wealthy and the disadvantaged can turn into chaos. The frequent small scale rioting in Brussels indicates that people experience unfairness that needs to be addressed, among other means, by urban planning.

A subordinate, yet more spatial issue is the decline in authenticity and openness in HST station area developments. The positive effects on accessibility and, consequently, economical growth of HST locations, are unquestionable, however, if compared critically, these developments quite often fail in the public sphere.

*Although stations themselves are public spaces par excellence, the results of large-scale redevelopment of station areas in this respect are sometimes criticised. This is especially true for the new peripheral station areas. Most places are purely functional, privatised, controlled areas of elite consumption that feel spatially detached and hardly really «urban».*

*(Majoor & Schuiling, 2007, p.104)*

The ideology of HST companies is expressed in their corporate slogan «Enjoy seamless high-speed travel across Europe» (Railteam.co.uk). It means reduced travel time, efficient passenger handling, high security and, most importantly, conflict-free stations. At the same time one city government after another starts reciting the mantra «node – place - spatial quality - image» (Bertolini & Spit, 1998; Pol, 2007) and supporting non-contextual, generic station area developments that fail to deliver the promised urban vibrancy. Rather, they fall in a category called «non-places» – places that lack any identity and incite no sense of belonging (Augé, 1995). Indeed, if viewed from a high-speed train window, Europe is turning seamless.

Another aspect of the graduation project is acknowledgment of the effect immigrant cultural identities have on urban environments, which runs opposite the threatening tendency to exclude marginal societal groups and the increasing nationalism in the politics of numerous European countries.

## SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

The notion of public domain comes from the social sciences and has been widely discussed by philosophers, anthropologists and sociologists. It has also influenced thinking of urbanists and architects. However, the link between sociology theories and urban design methods is still not strongly established as designers tend to be unaware of the impact of their decisions on society.

The graduation project is an opportunity to explore the diversity of public domain on a specific site, which provides all the ingredients for «exchange between different social groups» (Hajer & Reijndorp, 2001, p.11): a large international traffic hub in the middle of a saturated multicultural urban area.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research question is targeted at finding a tangible framework that stimulates social interaction in a specific territory – without generalizing, but looking for answers on the ground. That implies taking an active position against generic, universal solutions.

*We believe that in order for architecture, urban planning, but also project development and urban policy making to regain a credible, interesting, and useful position, it is necessary to regain its inner logic, its grounding in reality, its rootedness in the real societal and spatial structure of the city. (Crimson, 2009, p.448)*

- How can repositioning of spaces and programme enhance the emergence of public domain in Brussels Midi station area?

Research sub-questions are looking for solutions to problems that threaten public domain and subsequently social coherence:

- What tangible and intangible elements and processes shape public domain?
- How to increase safety and reduce fear with appropriately designed public domain?
- How to raise self-esteem and grow citizenship of underprivileged societal groups with urban interventions?
- How to encourage social acceptance and interaction in multicultural environments with urban interventions?
- How to avoid anonymity and stimulate the emergence of a distinctive identity in a mass transit area?

## METHODOLOGY & ACTIONS

### THEORY REVIEW

The different definitions of public domain, phenomena that put it under threat and design approaches that contribute to its emergence are discussed in the theory review paper «Setting up public domain. The threats and stimuli of social interaction in urban environments». Please see it attached on page 80.

Empirical knowledge used for the design derives from the lengthy observations made by T. Banerjee, R. Ellickson, J. Jacobs, J. Nemeth, W.C. Whyte and others. Theories that relate to the graduation project problem field concern social behavior and territorial aspects. Authors who have published works about these topics include I. Altman, D.A. Lewis & G. Salem and R.G. Studer. Please see bibliography list on page 78 for the precise titles.

### SITE ANALYSIS

To acquire a deep understanding of project location and come up with a design concept, relevant information has been collected and analysed. This includes:

- historical research – how was the current physical dimension of the site formed, how did the current image of the location develop, what are the future visions;
- statistical data collection – resident characteristics, traveller numbers;
- fieldwork – observations, photographs;
- graphical urban analysis – historical development, morphological layers, movement, use, important events displayed on maps;
- spatial urban analysis - models of various scales.

### REFERENCE STUDIES

Comparison and projections of other relevant urban situations and ideas can help in developing a critical position and formulating a design concept and are especially useful when looking for ways how to turn abstract ideas into concrete solutions.

### RESEARCH BY DESIGN

To find answers for the research questions, a cyclic process of designing, self-reflection and repeated research has been conducted.



# THE GHETTO

IMAGE

# No-go area Anderlecht

6 feb 10



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## The real no-go area in Brussels

Belgian media hysteria over crime and calls for zero-tolerance policing miss the real issue – social exclusion in the inner city

Images: Novatv.nl, Guardian.co.uk, DeMorgen.be, DePers.nl, Nos.nl, all 2010

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## Brandbrief uit de Bronx van Europa

No go Oorlogsverslaggever in Brussel

Ook de politie durft in Kuregem niet uit te stappen



Door: Arnold Karskens

Gepubliceerd: vrijdag 5 februari 2010 00:31

Update: vrijdag 27 augustus 2010 10:40

Agenten worden er beschoten, overvallen zijn schering en inslag. Arnold Karskens ging kijken in 'het nieuwe Beiroet'. Dat is in [Brussel](#).

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## URBAN VIOLENCE






The Southern neighbourhoods of Brussels possess a rather menacing image in the media and among residents of other neighbourhoods. It has been labeled «no-go area» (Diab, 2010), «Bronx of Europe» (DeMorgen.be, 2010) and «war zone Brussels» (Nos.nl, 2010). This is mainly due to the small criminality that takes place in and around Midi station and the larger scale urban violence in Kuregem, Sint-Gillis and Marollen. The tough conditions people live in, poor prospects, the indifference

and demonstrations of authority power, topped by the stigmatizing image cultivated in the media, create even more tension in already problematic neighbourhoods. In Brussels, where the contrast between the wealthy and the disadvantaged is striking, social problems are addressed by increasing security, not investing in integration and emancipatory programmes.

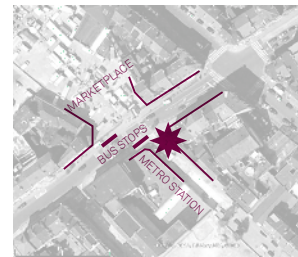
Photos: screenshots from video on Hln.be, 2010



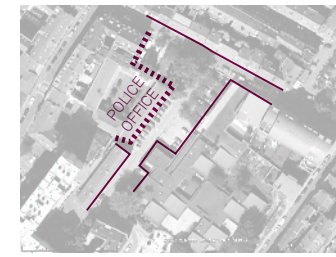
-  «Solidarity» movement
-  Tribute to a local criminal
-  Nonrelated incidents

0 250m 500m 1km

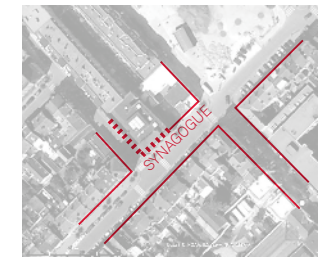
Mapping of all riots near Brussels Midi station in the past two years



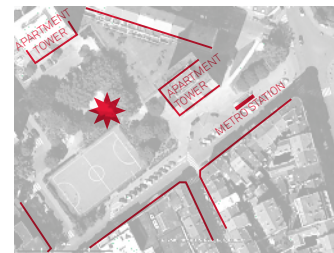
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01-OCT-2010



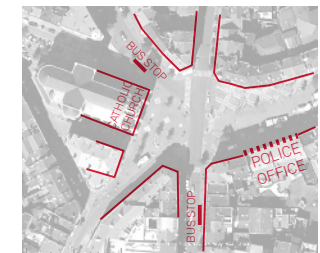
13-APR-2010



13-APR-2010



12-APR-2010



12-APR-2010



30-OCT-2010 / 29-JAN-2010 / 07-AUG-2009



20-NOV-2009



24-JAN-2008

 Attacked building

0 50m 100m 200m

Spatial analysis of riot locations  
Background photos: Google Earth, 2010

All riots in the neighbourhoods can be divided into three groups: «Solidarity» is a protest movement against all prisons and detention places. «Tribute to a local criminal» are the incidents following an arrest of a gangster from the neighbourhoods. «Nonrelated incidents» are the frequent attacks of patrolling police cars or windows of police offices.

All of the riot locations are commonly recognized as spaces for public

gatherings. In these local centralities any physical representation of authority or alien religion often becomes a target for rage. A facade of a police office is then the line where imposed control clashes with what is perceived the territory of locals.

It is worth attention that in two years of active rioting, there has been only one demonstration next to Midi station. This indicates that its surroundings are not registered as «local» by the residents.



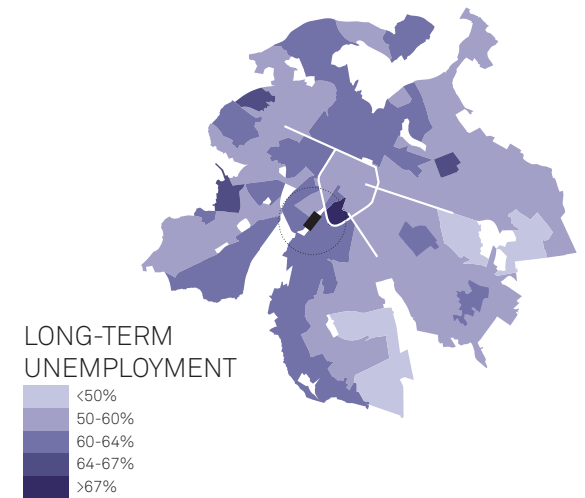
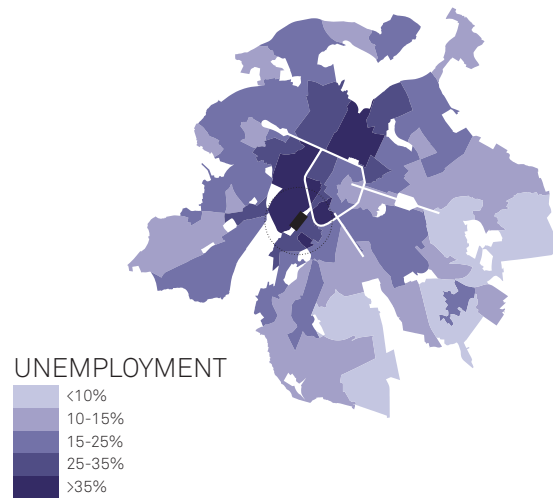
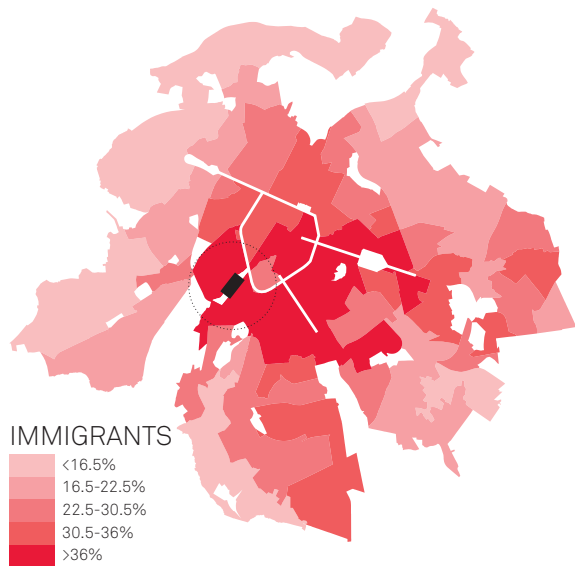
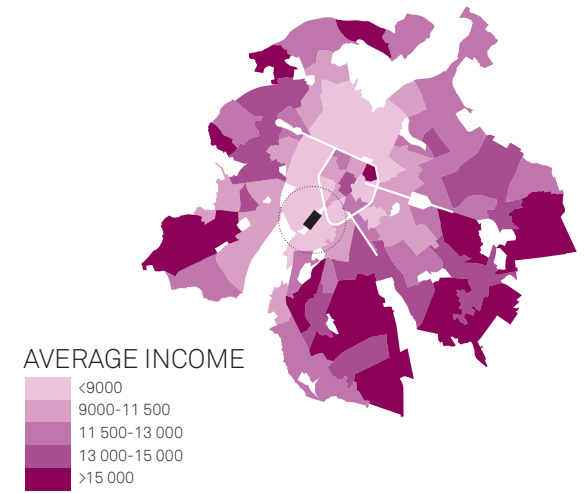
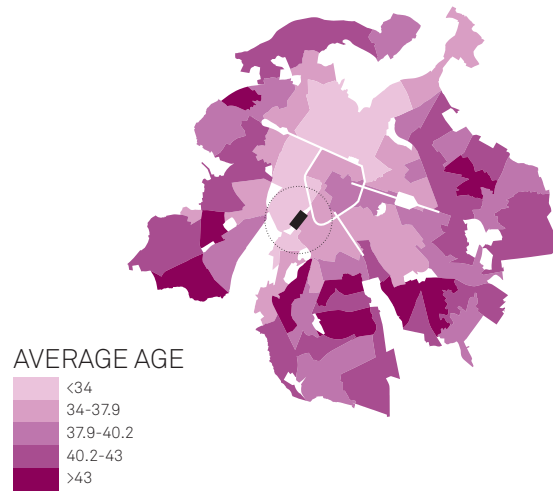
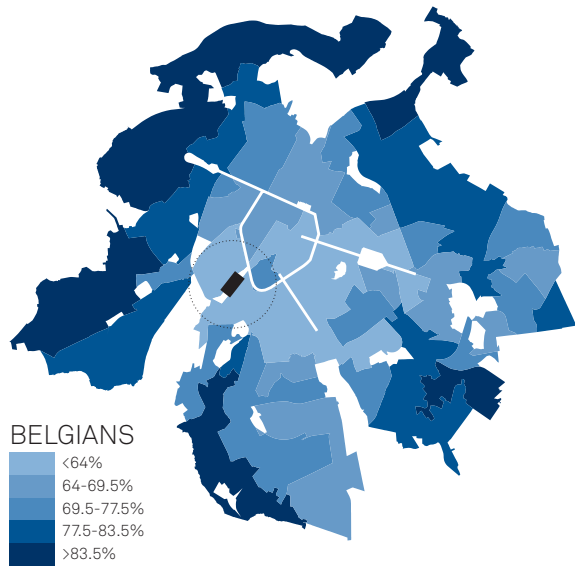
# MULTICULTURAL ENVIRONMENT



If one gets over the fear created by media hysteria and visits Kuregem, Sint-Gillis, Anneessens or Marollen, completely unexpected discoveries may follow. Economic and cultural activities of the different ethnic communities have secured a distinct atmosphere. Cultural diversity is displayed by various spatial markers: national flags in windows, colouring of shopfronts, writings in multiple languages,

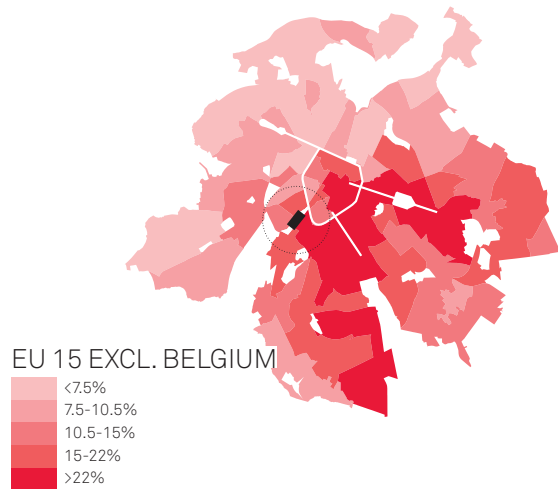
the appearance and behaviour of people. Some signs are recognizable for everyone and inviting, others - targeted at specific groups only. This public demonstration of ethnic and cultural identity is an attempt to appropriate an otherwise neutral foreign environment. As a reaction to these immigrant activities, Belgian enterprises in the area have also started advertising their national identity in a similar manner.

# SOCIAL CONTEXT

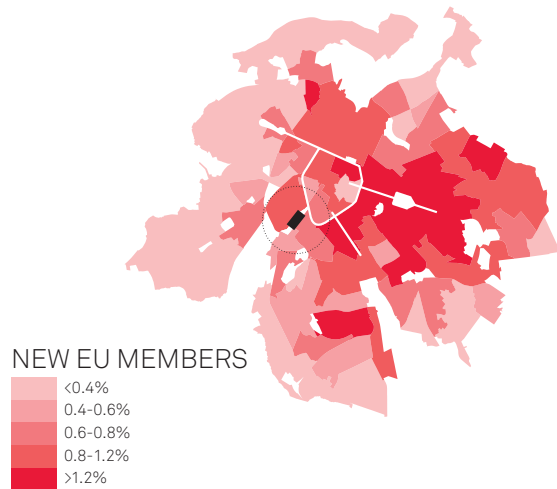


The centre of Brussels hosts a large concentration of immigrants, around 40% of population in the neighbourhoods to the south-east of the pentagonal city centre. Predominantly Belgian neighbourhoods can be found outside the inner ring, in more suburban areas with detached family residences.

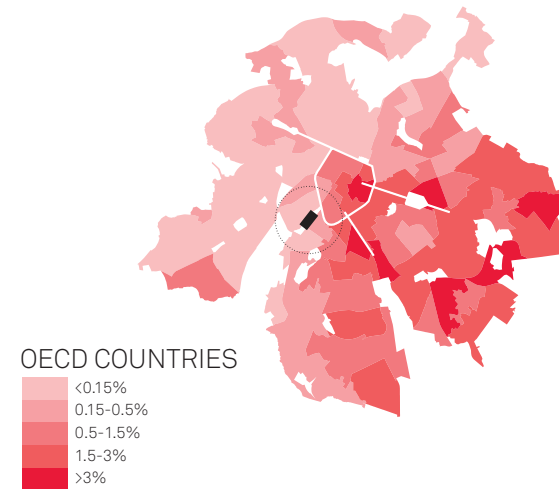
People residing in the centre are mainly young and with low income - and a large part of them are of foreign origins. In terms of unemployment, north and south-west are the heaviest areas - near the Midi station, in Kuregem, unemployment is close to 50%, and Marollen has the highest percentage of long term unemployment in Brussels.



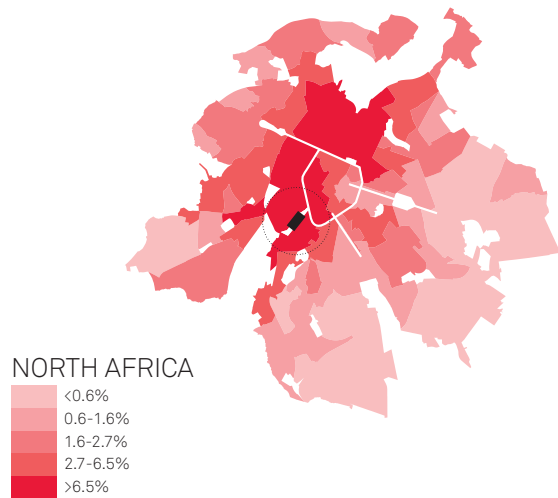
\*France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Ireland, the United Kingdom, Greece, Portugal, Spain, Austria, Sweden, Finland



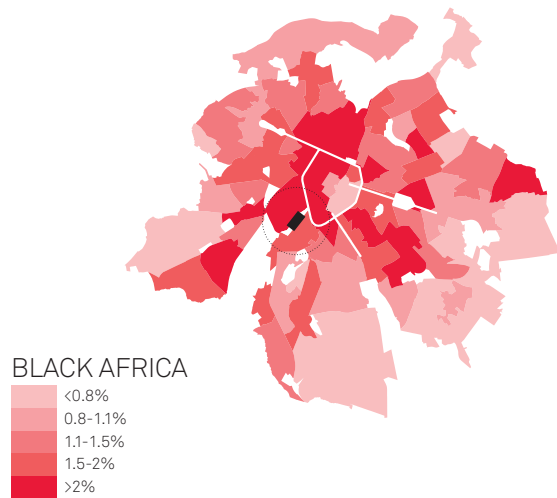
\*Malta, Cyprus, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria



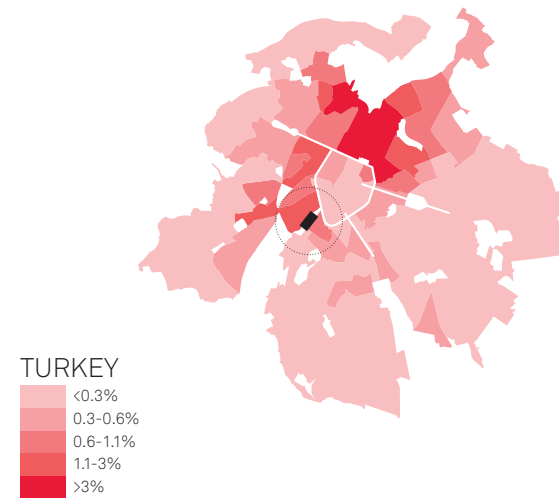
\*Canada, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Mexico, Norway, Switzerland, United States of America, Chile, Israel, South Korea



\*Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia



\*Angola, Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, São Tomé and Príncipe, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Sudan, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Botswana, Comoros, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Benin, Mali



It is interesting to take a look at the territorial disposition of immigrants of different nationalities in Brussels: people from Western Europe and North America settle mainly in the south-east side of Brussels, Eastern Europeans in the east, Turks and North Africans in the north-west, and people from Central and South Africa are spread more or less evenly around the centre.

In the areas around Brussels Midi station, there is a large clustering of people from North Africa, Turkey and Central Africa. Europe is represented by people originating mainly from the Mediterranean and Eastern regions.

Statistics: Ministerie van het Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest, 2010

# ETHNIC COMMUNITIES



All largest ethnic clusters overlaid

A careful mapping of all enterprises aimed at a specific group of residents - shops of products of different countries, restaurants, cultural centres, schools, places of worship - reveals clustering of ethnic communities on neighbourhood scale. It shows that, for example, the Portuguese are based on the hilltop of Sint-Gillis, a large concentration of Turks can be found in the centre of Kuregem and people from North Africa are settled both in the north of Kuregem and down from the hill in Sint-Gillis.

It also shows that economic and cultural activities of most immigrant communities curve around Midi station. This is because the size of available spaces



Origins of ethnic communities in Brussels Midi station area

and rent prices increase as they come nearer to the station, and the station itself is ruled by American, French and Belgian chain stores, grand cafés and souvenir shops, providing little choice for the travellers and keeping immigrant vendors at bay.

Knowing the precise distribution of different communities and the places that are used by multiple ethnic groups can help to come up with tailor-made interventions aimed at specific users.

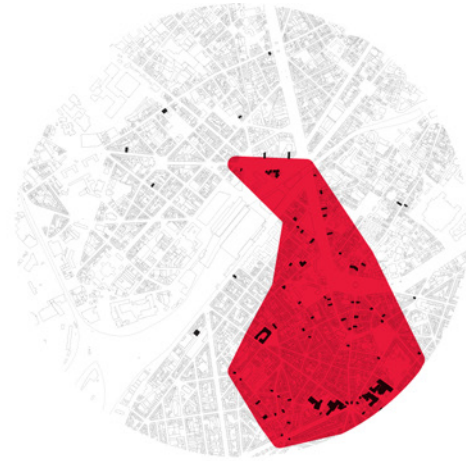
Sources: Shopinbrussels.be, Belgia.net, Rombel.com, Noscafora.be, Hispagenda.com, Islamic-events.be, Rehber.be, all 2011



BELGIUM



NORTH AFRICA & LEBANON



PORTUGAL & BRAZIL



TURKEY



SPAIN



BLACK AFRICA



EASTERN EUROPE



ITALY & GREECE

All largest ethnic clusters shown separately



How can the information gathered about riots and ethnic communities be used for an urban plan? It is precise, site-specific knowledge that indicates locations for possible interventions.

*The smallness of the world of these people is frightening, and impossible for many of us to imagine.*

*(Vanstiphout in Long, 2011)*

The quote comments on how riots mostly happen in the vicinity of rioters' homes, pointing to social problems in the area.

Distribution of ethnic communities shows where only one or a few groups circulate and where all of them come together. Combinations of different information layers on maps help in selecting and locating appropriate urban interventions - whether it is public domain that stimulates interaction between different communities and users of the Midi station or spaces for communication within one or a few resident groups.

# THE MONO-



BELGIUM



NORTH AFRICA & LEBANON



PORTUGAL & BRAZIL



TURKEY



SPAIN



BLACK AFRICA



EASTERN EUROPE



ITALY & GREECE

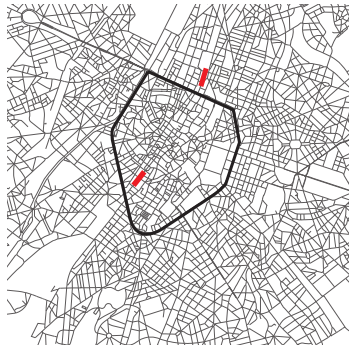
Largest ethnic clusters with their most intensively used streets in combination with riot locations, emphasizing those that are within «the territory of the locals».



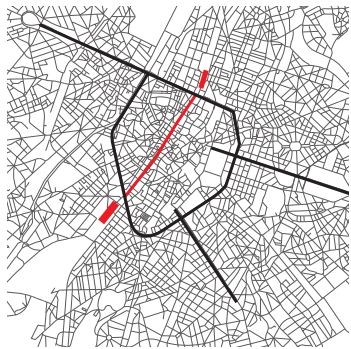


# THE CITADEL

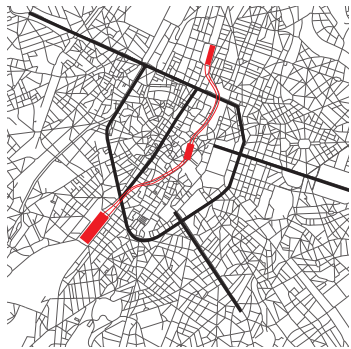
# HISTORICAL CONTEXT



1840 South station  
1841 North station



1864-1869 South station  
1868-1874 Zenne, Boulevard Anspach



1901-1956 North-South connection  
1952 Central station  
1954 South station  
1956 North station

Drawings after maps of Brussels in 1838 and 1869 in Danckaert, 1989, pp.116-117 and pp.126-127



South station from 1869 by architect A. Payen.  
Photo: Skyscrapercity.com, 2010

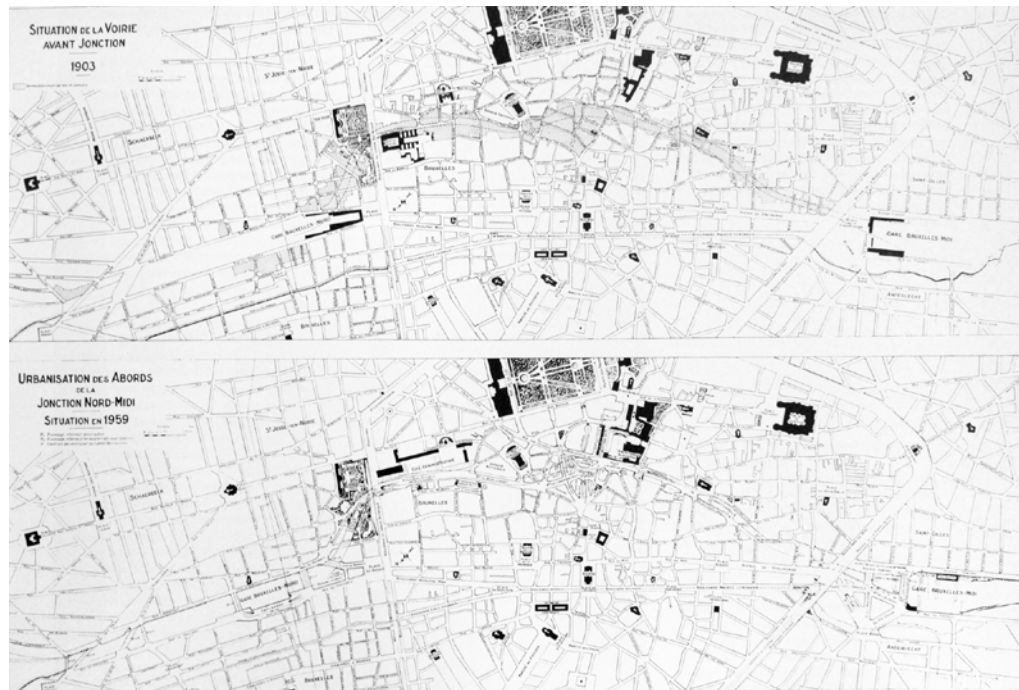


South station from 1954 by architects A. Blomme, Y. Blomme and F. Petit.  
Photo: Skyscrapercity.com, 2010

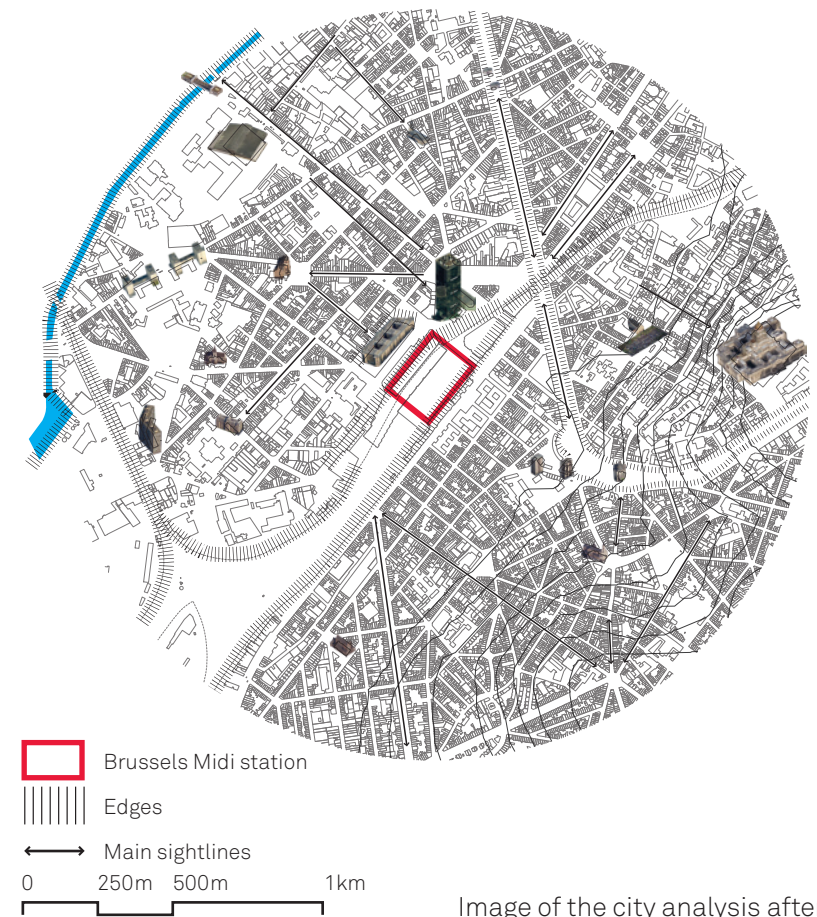
The first simple South (Midi) station in Brussels was opened in 1840 at Rouppelein, inside the pentagonal inner city. A year later the North station was inaugurated.

Soon after the opening of the first South and North stations in 1840s the idea of a direct connection between them was born. First project was made in 1858 by Victor Besme, and it proposed covering up of the Zenne river by a 30m wide lane with a railway in the middle. Zenne was eliminated in 1865 with the laying of boulevard Anspach, but the railway connection took almost another century and many more plans to complete. A new South station, now outside the pentagon, was built in 1864-1869, designed by architect A. Payen.

Works on the North-South junction started in 1901. Around 1500 buildings were demolished, 12830 residents had to leave their homes; Isabellawijk and de Ter Arkenwijk were swept off the map. Both North and South stations were built anew in a short distance from their old locations on a higher level. They lost their historical city entrance appeal, former station squares gave place to car traffic. In the South the new train viaduct run through neighbourhoods on the second floor level, in the North the Kruidtuin was permanently damaged. The underground tracks left a large wound also on ground - a wide asphalt covered lane, between lower and higher city. There was never a complete and coherent plan made to heal the trauma this massive intervention made to Brussels inner city.



Above: urban situation before the implementation of the North-South junction, 1903.  
 Below: urban situation after the implementation of the North-South junction, 1959.  
 Image: Biston et al., 1982, p.73



The Central station of Brussels was inaugurated 1952, South station in 1954 and North station in 1956. In the 1960ies the overconfident and later heavily criticised Manhattan Project erased most of the North station surroundings - to build the World Trade Centre, 53 hectares of houses were demolished and 10 000 people evicted. Economical crisis in the 1970s stopped the project, freezing a vast void in the city for several years.

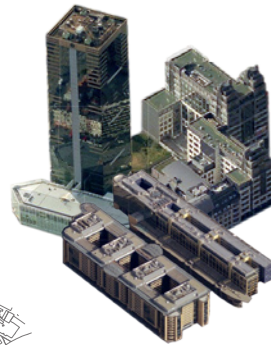
In the 1990ies HST arrived in the South station with a new terminal and plans for urban renewal, which has resulted in demolishing and merging of city

blocks in order to erect mainly office buildings. Such approach clearly follows typical HST station development trends, yet does not respond to the social and spatial problems in Brussels Midi area neither by function, nor form.

The evolution of Brussels Midi today is in a stage where railway tracks are a strong barrier between neighbourhoods and architecture of the station does not fit into the baroque layout of the city. However, there is potential for better legibility - recognizable landmarks, deep sightlines and scenic topography form a strong system that could be enhanced with an expressive and vibrant station area.

# BRUSSELS MIDI STATION TODAY

Today's situation around Brussels Midi station displays excessive control on several levels. The station itself is guarded by a special railway security squad - Securail. Surrounding neighbourhoods are constantly and obtrusively monitored by police. Urban renewal is used as a large scale control tool to keep criminal activities away from an international HST station. Unfortunately, the new buildings have also erased all potential for a lively public domain - ground floors do not host any shops or restaurants, public spaces are walled or elevated, there is hardly any seating. About 25% of the office spaces near Midi station, both newly-built and older, are vacant, constituting to the problematic safety issues in the area.



0 250m 500m 1km

Points of pressure - control on several levels



Increase in scale - new office blocks on Fonsnylaan.



Inner courtyard of a new office block on Fonsnylaan. Accessible for employees only, photographed through a glass wall.

Photo: J. Arnold, 2010



Exaggerated security measures - a new office building on Fonsnylaan.



Blind street level - a new office building on Ruslandstraat.



Office block above station hall on Fonsnylaan - 8 empty floors guarded by Securail and a construction fence.



Rossinistraat blocked by a new office building. There is a shopping passage behind the shutters, vacant and never open.



Victor Hortaplein, sheltered from the surrounding neighbourhoods by an office block, serves as the station square.  
Photo: J. Arnold, 2010



The HST terminal of Midi station accommodates a lot of empty space.

# STATION EFFICIENCY



HAMBURG HBF  
→ 450 000 passengers/day  
→ 14 train tracks



LYON PART-DIEU  
→ 140 000 passengers/day  
→ 10 train tracks



ROTTERDAM CENTRAAL  
→ 110 000 passengers/day  
→ 13 train tracks



KÖLN HBF  
→ 280 000 passengers/day  
→ 11 train tracks



MILANO CENTRALE  
→ 330 000 passengers/day  
→ 24 train tracks



NÜRNBERG HBF  
→ 180 000 passengers/day  
→ 22 train tracks



AMSTERDAM CENTRAAL  
→ 200 000 passengers daily  
→ 11 train tracks



ZÜRICH HBF  
→ 350 000 passengers/day  
→ 26 train tracks



BRUSSELS SOUTH  
→ 100 000 passengers/day  
→ 22 train tracks



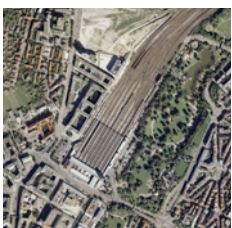
FRANKFURT HBF  
→ 350 000 passengers/day  
→ 24 tracks



PARIS GARE DU NORD  
→ 520 000 passengers daily  
→ 44 train tracks



LILLE EUROPE & FLANDRES  
→ 90 000 passengers/day  
→ 6 & 17 train tracks



STUTTGART HBF  
→ 240 000 passengers/day  
→ 17 train tracks



MÜNCHEN HBF  
→ 350 000 passengers/day  
→ 32 train tracks



LONDON ST.PANCRAS  
> 50 000 passengers/day  
> 15 train tracks



#### PLATFORMS 1-2

- Eurostar
- 9 trains per day to/from London
- 1.5-6.5hour intervals (waiting time)

#### PLATFORMS 2-6

- Thalys, TGV, ICE, NMBS
- 44 trains per day to/from France, Germany, Netherlands,
- 8min - 1.5hour intervals

#### PLATFORMS 7-12 & 17-19 & 21

- NMBS
- 6-30min intervals

#### PLATFORMS 16 & 20

- NMBS
- 10-40min intervals

#### PLATFORM 22

- not in use

To find out how important Brussels Midi station is as a rail traffic hub and to measure its efficiency, it was compared to other HST stations in Europe by the total turnover of passengers per day and the number of train tracks available.

Brussels Midi is one of the five official European HST network hubs along with Cologne, Frankfurt, Stuttgart and Lille (marked with a train icon). However, Brussels Midi is also one of the least efficient HST stations in Europe - many other stations, particularly those in Germany, manage to move more people daily using less train tracks.

A thorough analysis of the use of train tracks in Brussels Midi station shows that only 10 out of 22 platforms are used intensively. Others have large intervals between departing and arriving trains and platform no.22 is not in use at all. The large body of the station, even if decreased in size, holds a considerable reserve for possible future growth of passenger turnover.

Still, being the end station of international high speed trains in Brussels, Midi station has an important role as a gate of the city for travellers arriving and departing.

All photos: Google Earth, 2010  
Statistics: Verkehrsmittelvergleich.de, Hari.b-rail.be, 2011

## FUTURE VISION



2011 South station - Ateliers Jean Nouvel  
Images: Designboom.com, 2011



Despite the not so efficient current management of Brussels Midi and the expected passenger growth being only 4% a year, there are ambitious plans for rebuilding the station area. French star architect Jean Nouvel has been invited to draw a vision of future - and that has been done by putting a large V shaped residential block on top of the train tracks and wrapping the station body in a thick skin of offices, apartments and shopping.

The project writes the next chapter in the story of brutality, massive scale and alienation. The top view image shows dark, Gotham city like surroundings of Brussels Midi and an illuminated station building with skywalks connecting it to the nearby office developments - in the future office clerks might be able to take a high speed train without even having to set foot in the dangerous streets of Kuregem and Sint-Gillis.



## UNDISCOVERED POTENTIAL



BRUSSELS MIDI STATION: 100 000 PASSENGERS A DAY



SURROUNDING AREAS (1.25KM RADIUS): 72 250 RESIDENTS

Every day the international HST, national train and city tram, metro and bus networks serve 100 000 passengers at the node of Brussels Midi station. That is more than the permanent inhabitants of a walkable surrounding area of the station. Unfortunately, the travellers rarely try walking outside the station as its immediate surroundings are disconnected from the neighbourhoods and the vacant buildings

and scarcely used streets contribute to a negative perception of safety.

The constantly moving population of the station can provide opportunities for the permanent residents and vice versa - if only there was a spatial configuration that would accommodate their economic and social interaction.

Statistics: TreinTramBus, 2009; Ministerie van het Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest, 2010



EMBRACE THE GHETTO,  
BRAKE DOWN THE CITADEL

## PROJECT AIMS

To reduce the social tension between the powerful and the disadvantaged and to expand and diversify public domain in Brussels Midi station area, there are certain steps to be taken:

### → ACKNOWLEDGE AND EMPOWER THE DIFFERENT ETHNIC COMMUNITIES

- Allow more control over their closest surroundings
- Set up spaces for interaction within and between communities
- Provide learning and employment opportunities
- Engage local residents in physical regeneration works
- Display cultural identities in urban environment

### → IMPROVE THE URBAN CONDITION OF BRUSSELS MIDI STATION

- Improve legibility of the station area
- Create new connections and enhance circulation between the station and its surroundings
- Add new functions to the station surroundings
- Replace anonymity with authenticity in the design of the station surroundings

## DESIGN PROCESS

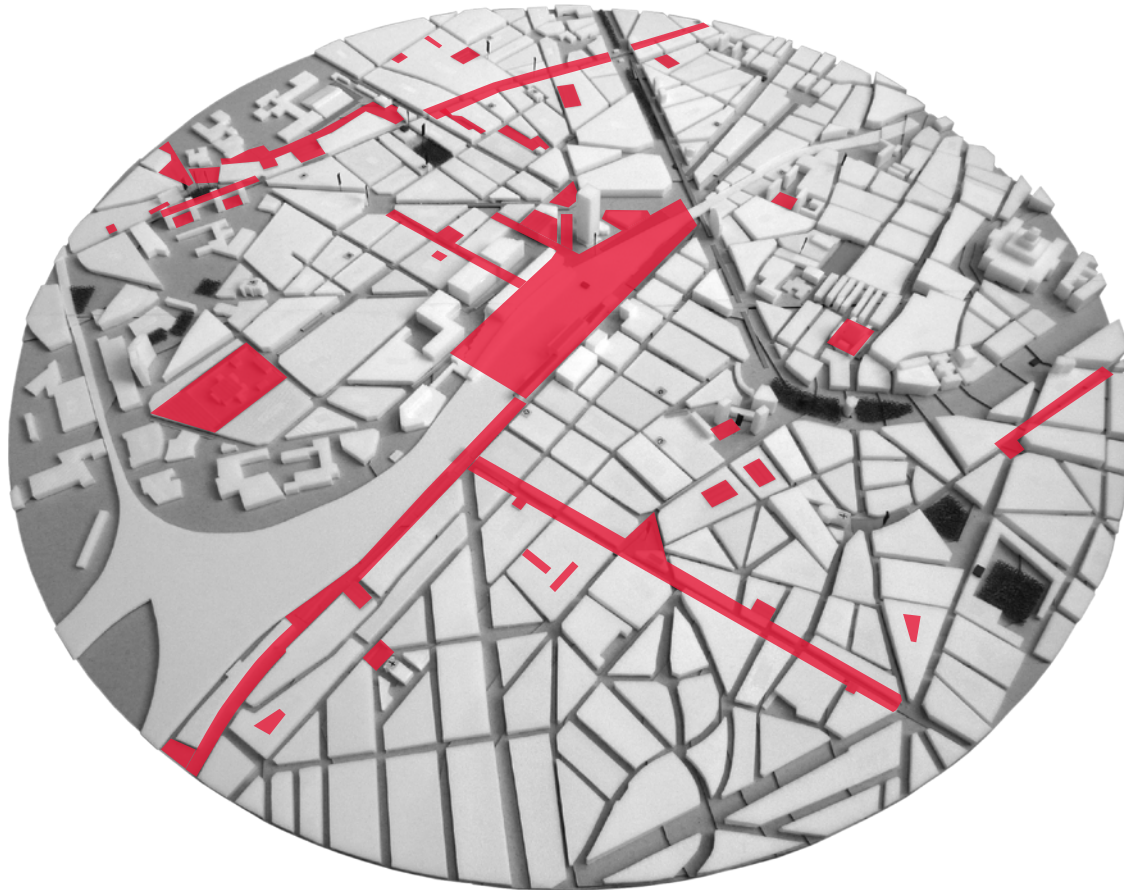


Combinations of the individual and collective ethnic community intensively used streets and public spaces, as well as riot locations are transferred onto a model (scale 1/2500) and new connections between them and the Midi station are formed. Since the project site is a densely built urban area, all empty plots and

buildings are marked as «opportunity spaces» for establishing new public domain. The model shows the topography of the site and the relationships between urban blocks, helping to connect all interventions in one spatial system.



# A SYSTEM OF INTERVENTIONS



The problem field of the graduation project stretches across several scales - from local urban violence that echoes a global tendency to an international mobility hub that fails in its physical footprint in the city.

To achieve the aims of the project, a system of urban interventions that

operates on several levels has been designed. It affects a number of user groups - local residents, people working in the area, visitors and Midi station travellers - trying to address each of them in a specific way as well as encourage their interactions.



# OPERATIVE LEVELS



## ACTIVATED COURTYARDS

### → UNUSED SPACES BETWEEN APARTMENT BLOCKS

The example case - Pieremanstraat in Marollen, where apartment blocks have two unused lower levels with a terrace that is currently fenced off.

### → OPENING & REDIVIDING GROUND FLOOR

The bottom floors are too large for the residents to use, therefore they are divided into smaller spaces and opened towards the courtyard and the surrounding streets.

### → SHARED FACILITIES

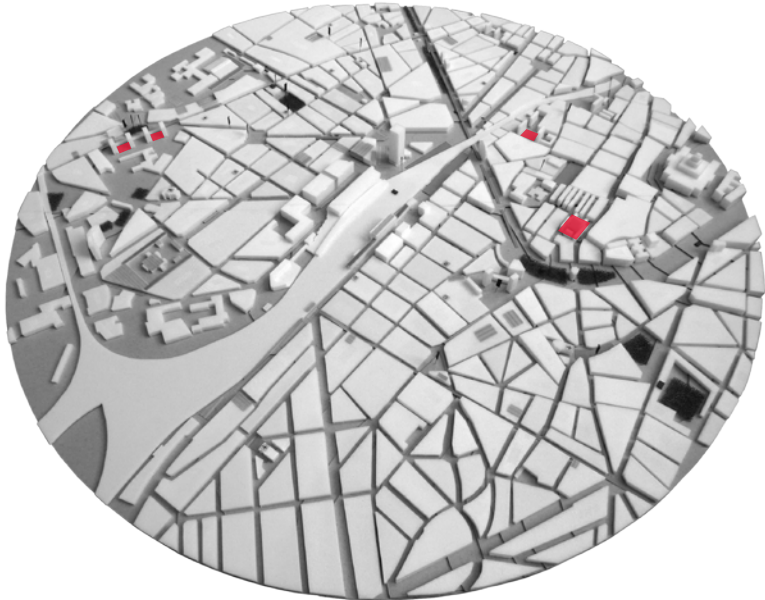
Spaces on the lower floors can be used as, for example, a launderette, a nursery or a common living room.

### → SMALL COMMERCIAL SPACES

Small shops and cafés activate circulation of people in the courtyard.

### → GREEN SPACES

The courtyard can be turned into a community garden, a place for relaxation and games.





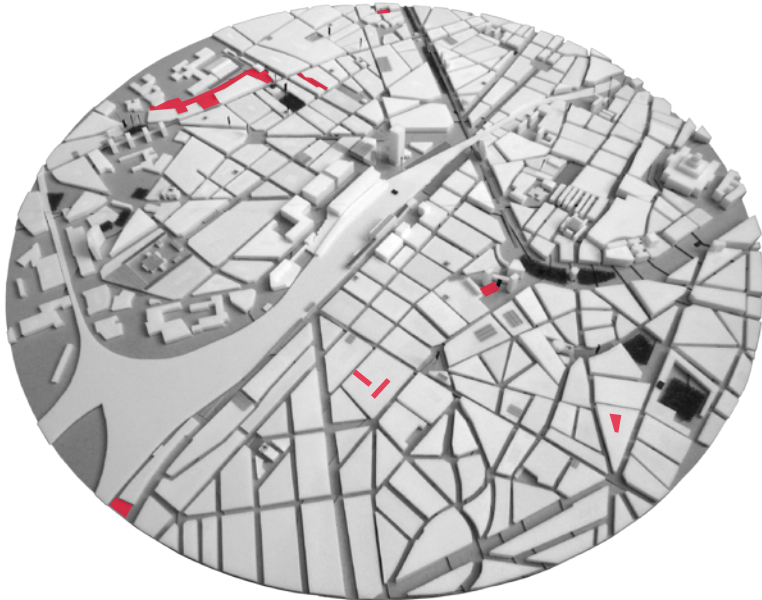
## ALLOTMENT & COMMUNITY GARDENS

### → UNUSED SPACES NEAR HOUSING

The example case - underused parking lots between Anderlecht market and a row of houses in Kuregem, suitable for both individual and collective gardens.

### → INDIVIDUAL GARDENS COMPOSE A LARGE GREEN SPACE

The area for gardening is rather large and publicly accessible - as a park - with the difference that it is set up by the residents themselves, therefore more personal and cared for.





## COMMUNITY & YOUTH CENTRES

### → UNUSED SPACES NEAR COMMUNITY CIRCULATION

The example case - an unkempt green space in between industrial buildings on Liverpoolstraat in Kuregem.

### → SHARED FACILITIES

The side buildings are opened up and divided into spaces suitable for community needs.

### → CULTURAL EXPRESSION

The architecture and landscaping is themed according to the cultural heritage of the community using it. The buildings contain spaces for cultural gatherings.

### → FREE TIME ACTIVITIES

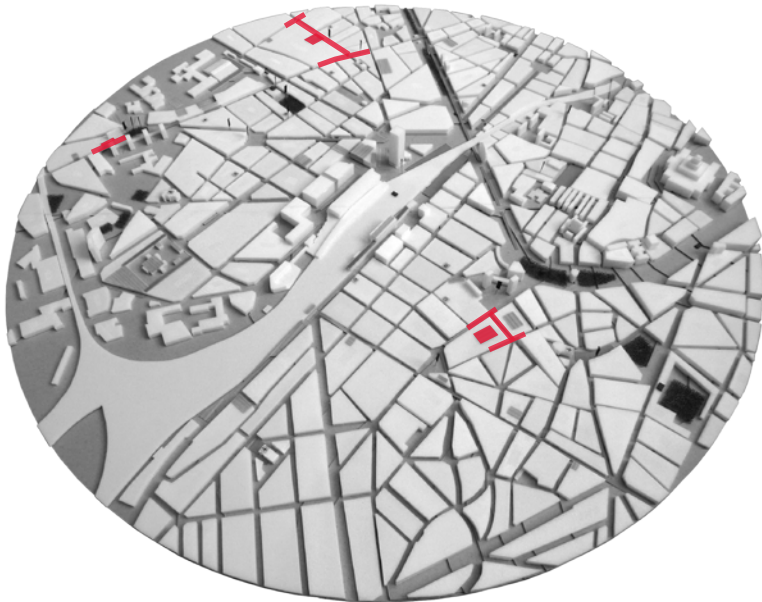
The buildings and courtyard provide spaces for sports and creative activities for the youth.

### → INTEGRATION SUPPORT

Language courses, employment agencies and juridical help can be more effective if located in a gathering place of a specific community.

### → COLLECTIVE GREEN SPACES

The courtyard can accommodate a small park, set up and taken care for by the community.





## LIGHT INDUSTRY & VOCATIONAL TRAINING

### → UNUSED INDUSTRIAL BUILDINGS

The example case - an abandoned factory on Heyvaertstraat in Kuregem.  
Reanimating some of the empty industrial buildings would make the area more lively and safe.

### → FAVOURABLE CONDITIONS FOR BUSINESSES

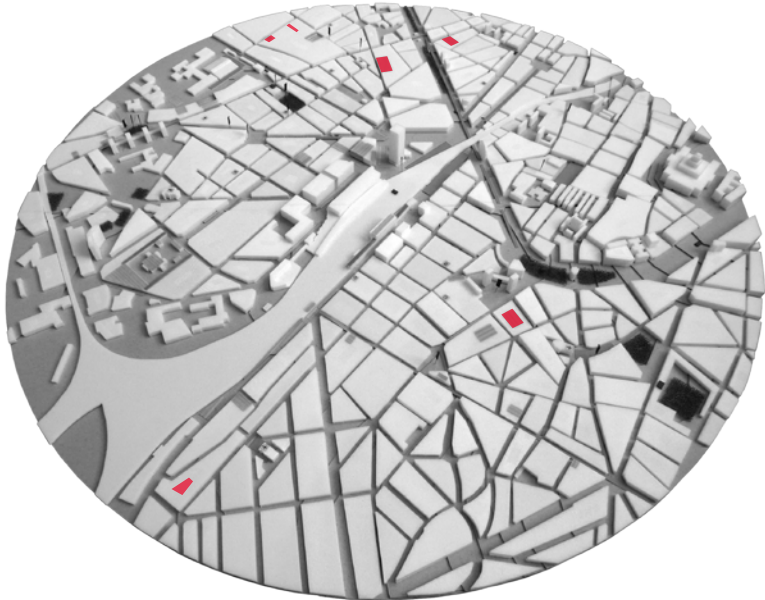
If the municipality supports owners of large industrial buildings, they can be rented out for low prices to young entrepreneurs. The businesses that typically pay less attention to tidiness of space when looking for premises are those of the creative sphere.

### → JOBS IN RENOVATION & PRODUCTION

The businesses should be subsidized if they employ local residents in renovation of the building and provide traineeships.

### → VOCATIONAL TRAINING

Local residents gain new crafts, are employed and have more career opportunities in the future.

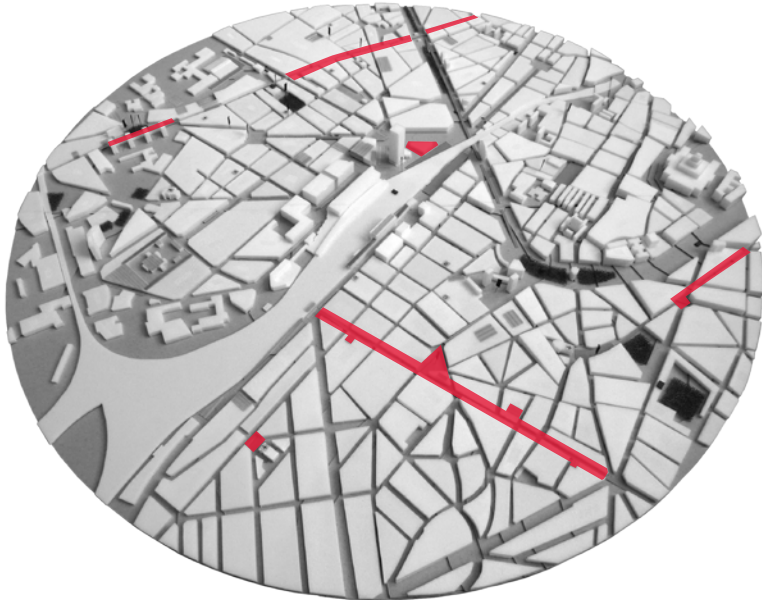






## THEMED CITY PARTS

→ PUBLIC DOMAIN IN AREAS DOMINATED BY A PARTICULAR ETHNIC COMMUNITY  
The example case - Theodore Verhaegenstraat in Sint-Gillis, leading from a predominantly Portuguese area to the Midi station.  
Themed public space is a sign of recognition, it raises self-esteem and sense of control of the community and on a larger scale grows citizenship and loyalty to the city and its local social order. As movement of people across Europe has always left its marks on architecture, the current migration processes can also be viewed in a historical perspective and be allowed to have impact on the physical appearance on cities - it is already happening by the construction of mosques in former exclusively Christian regions. It would also add to the public domain variety in Brussels and encourage the travellers to step outside the Midi station and explore remote locations in the surrounding area.





## EDUCATION & CULTURE CENTRE

### → FORMER VETERINARY SCHOOL

The example case - a large complex of buildings in Kuregem that has been standing empty for about twenty years.

### → STUDY SPACES

The main school building can be easily adapted to the needs of a contemporary educational and culture facility. Proximity to the Midi station ensures excellent connectivity.

### → PRESENTATION SPACES

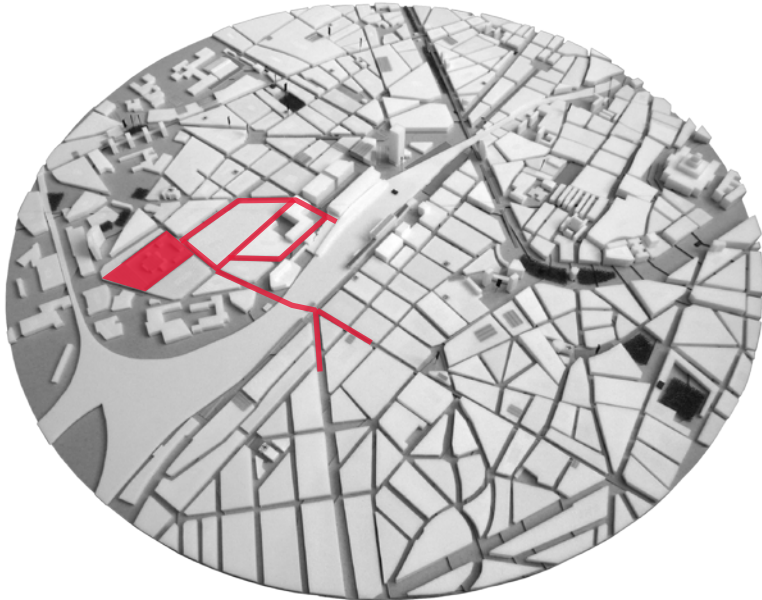
Parts of the education and culture centre should have a public function for communication with the local residents and other visitors.

### → DORMITORIES

Many of the former veterinary school buildings are suitable for accommodating students. Presence of more people in the complex would animate the nearby area.

### → OPEN COURTYARD

The heart of the building complex is its large courtyard, perfect for public shows, celebrations and other gatherings. An educational and culture centre has the creative capacity to fill the courtyard with quality content and attract visitors from other parts of Brussels. An important and open culture centre would also emancipate the local residents.

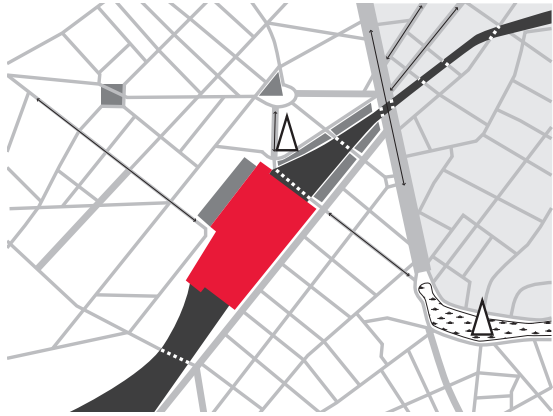




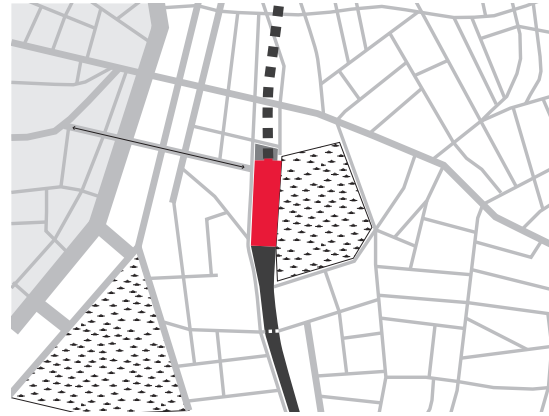


MIDI STATION AREA

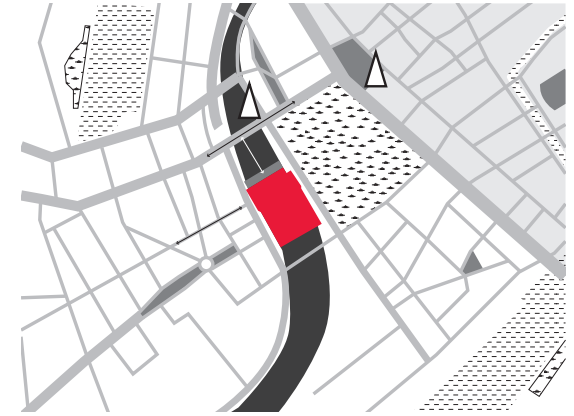
# STATION URBAN CONTEXT STUDIES



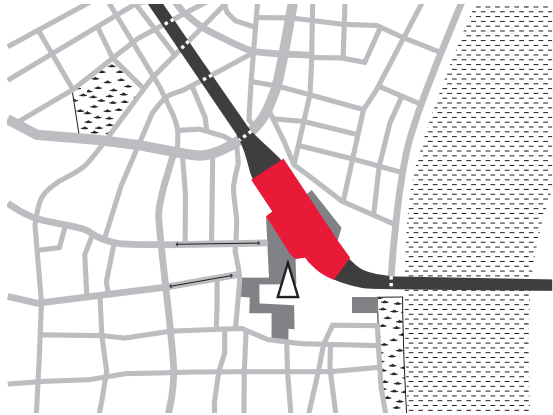
**BRUSSELS MIDI**  
 → through station  
 → double sided  
 → elevated train tracks



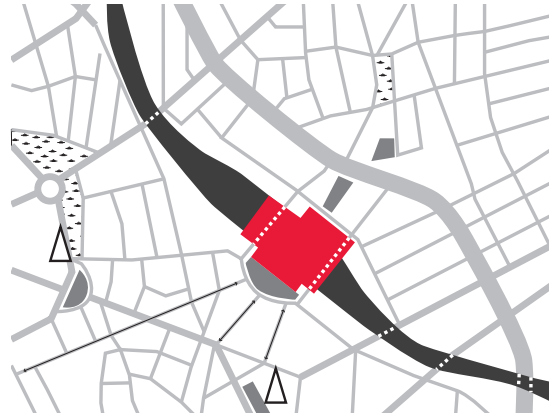
**ANTWERPEN CENTRAAL**  
 → terminus/ through station  
 → one sided + front  
 → elevated/underground train tracks



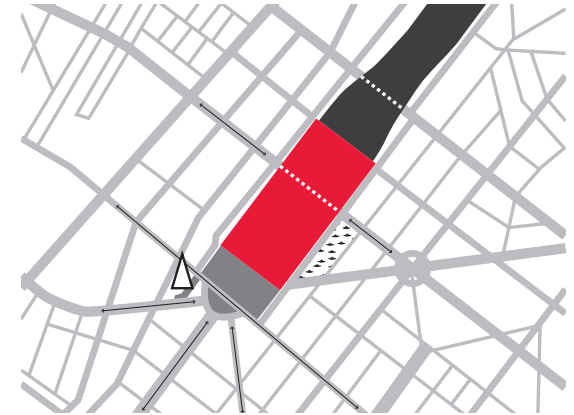
**KØBENHAVN H**  
 → terminus/ through station  
 → double sided + front  
 → surface/lowered train tracks



**KÖLN HBF**  
 → through station  
 → double sided  
 → elevated train tracks



**HANNOVER HBF**  
 → through station  
 → one sided  
 → elevated train tracks

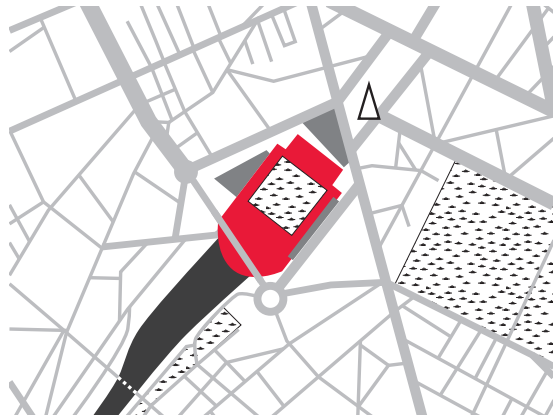


**MILANO CENTRALE**  
 → terminus station  
 → double sided + front  
 → elevated train tracks

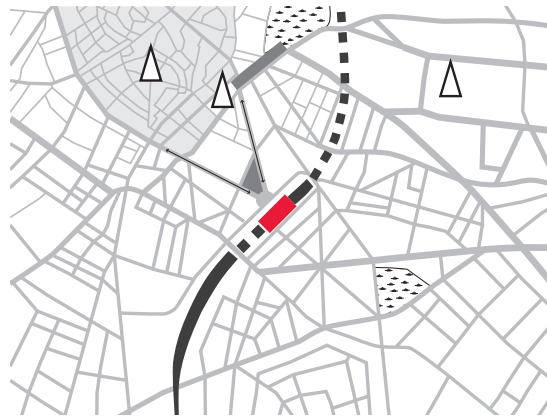
To gain a better understanding of the urban context of a station, several station areas were compared. The selection criteria for stations shown here:  
 → cities where position of the station relates to different types of urban fabric,

→ elevated or sunken train tracks - where the space below or above is functional,  
 → through and terminus stations - as Brussels Midi has features of both types.

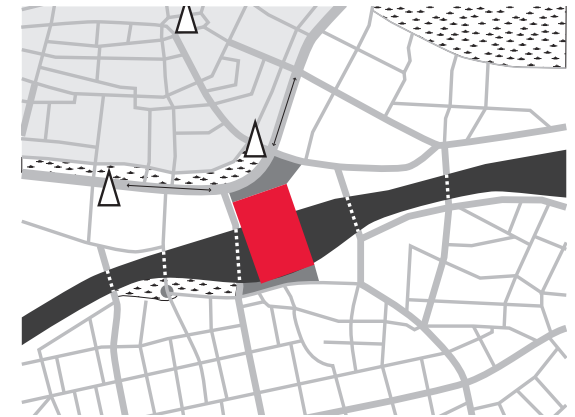




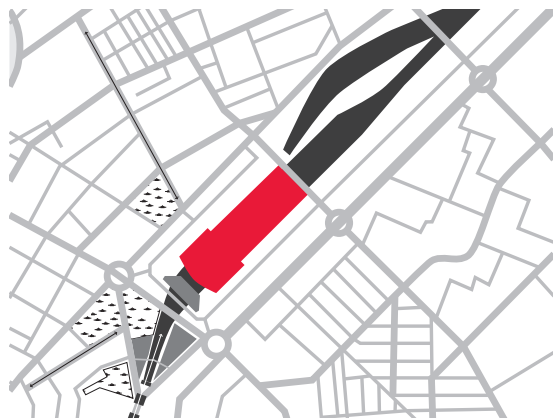
PARIS GARE MONTPARNASSE  
 → terminus station  
 → double sided + front  
 → surface/lowered train tracks



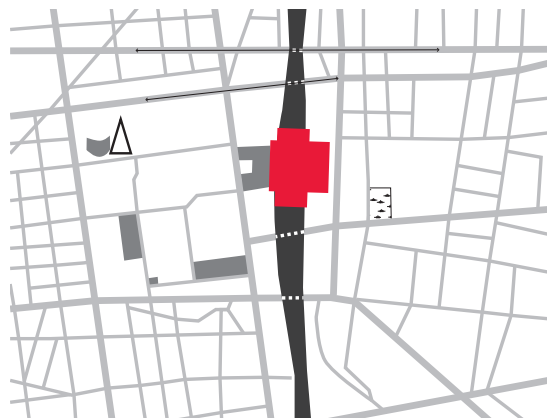
GARE DE MONTPELLIER  
 → through station  
 → one sided  
 → surface/lowered train tracks



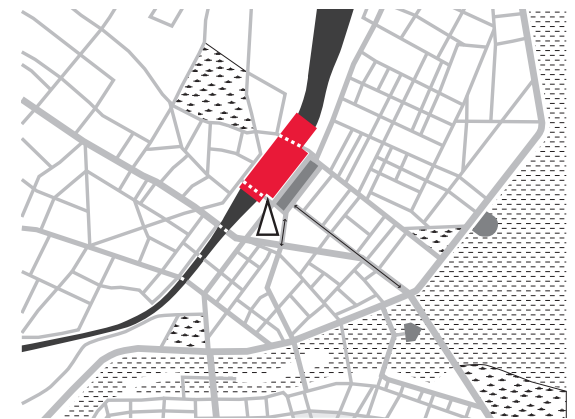
NÜRNBERG HBF  
 → through station  
 → one sided  
 → elevated train tracks



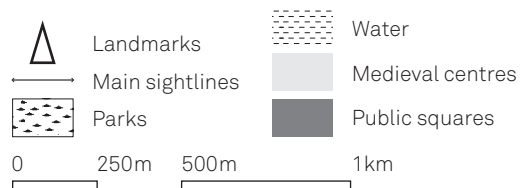
SEVILLA SANTA JUSTA  
 → terminus/through station  
 → double sided + front  
 → surface/underground train tracks



LYON PART-DIEU  
 → through station  
 → double sided  
 → elevated train tracks



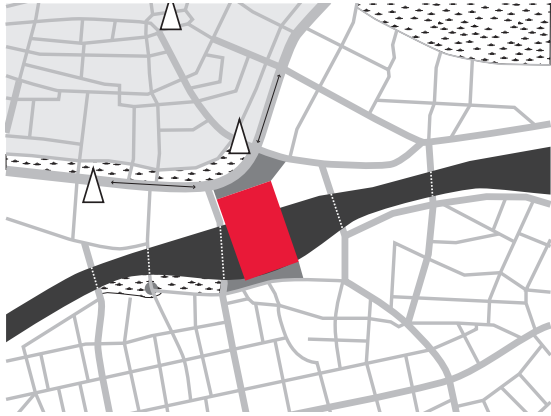
GENÈVE CORNAVIN  
 → through station  
 → one sided  
 → surface/elevated train tracks



The analysis shows how station buildings and train tracks relate to different elements of cities: densely built centres, street grids, green areas, waterfronts and public squares; the orientation of station facades towards important landmarks and sightlines; circulation of traffic through and around the stations.

The next step is to test different scenarios on Brussels Midi - by projecting some of the analysed station areas onto it.

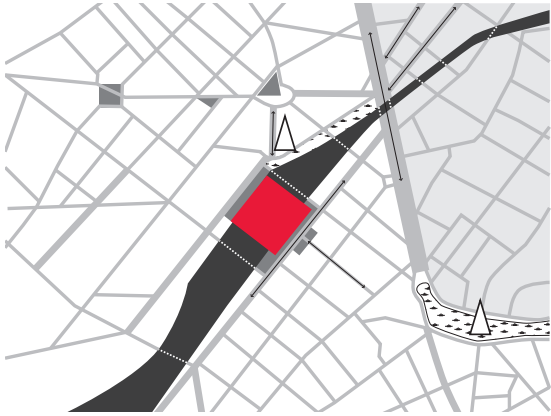
# STATION PROJECTIONS



0 250m 500m 1km

## NÜRNBERG HBF

- through station
- one sided
- railway embankment
- train tracks parallel to medieval fortification line
- Frauentorturm near crossing of Königstrasse and Königstorgraben gives orientation

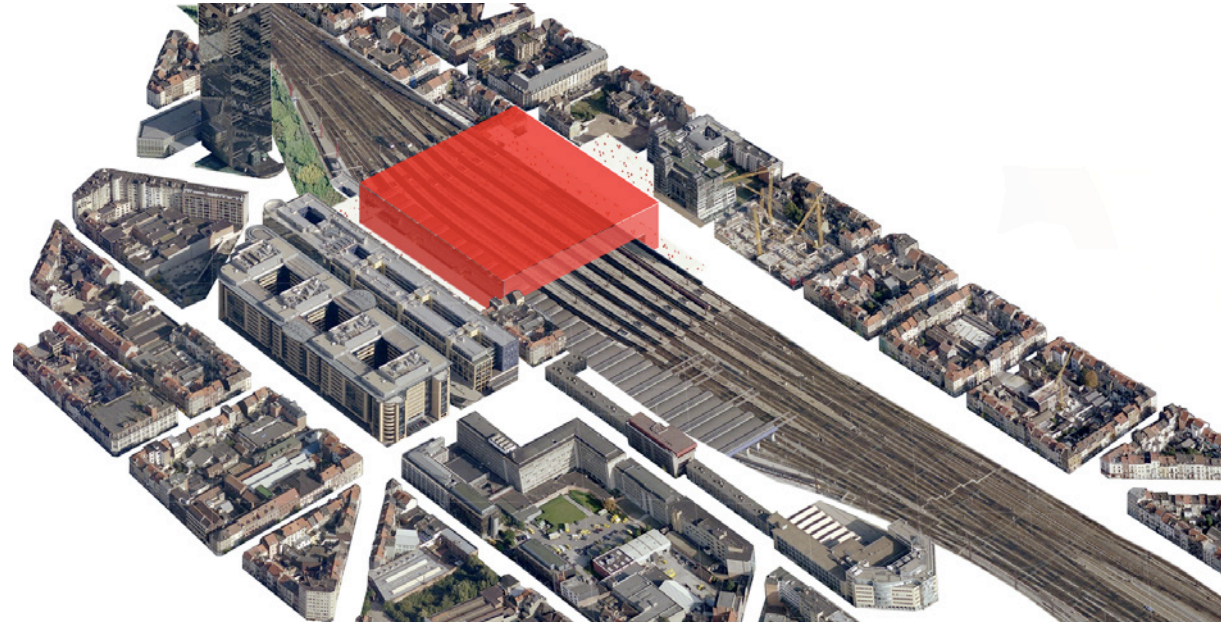


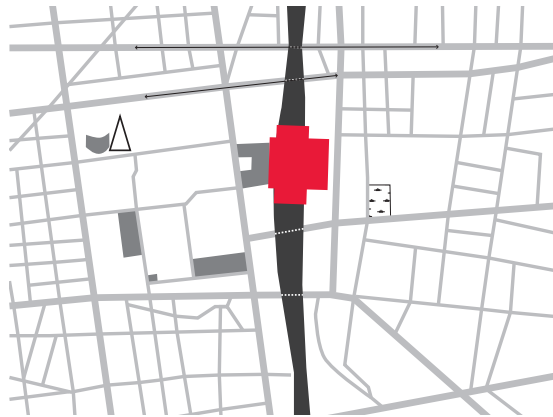
## BRUSSELS MIDI

If the urban situation of Nuremberg Central

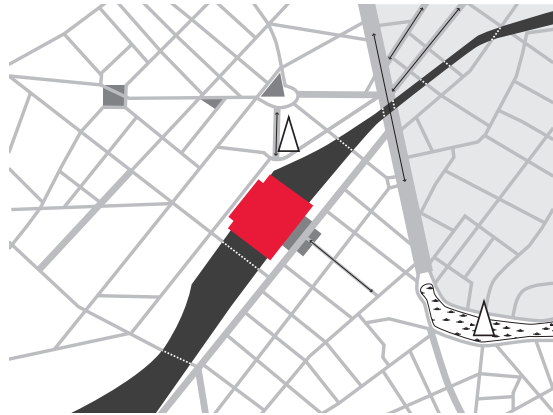
is projected on Brussels Midi:

- front facade on Fonsnylaan
- improved traffic circulation
- compact station
- park and Midi tower on the backside





0 250m 500m 1km



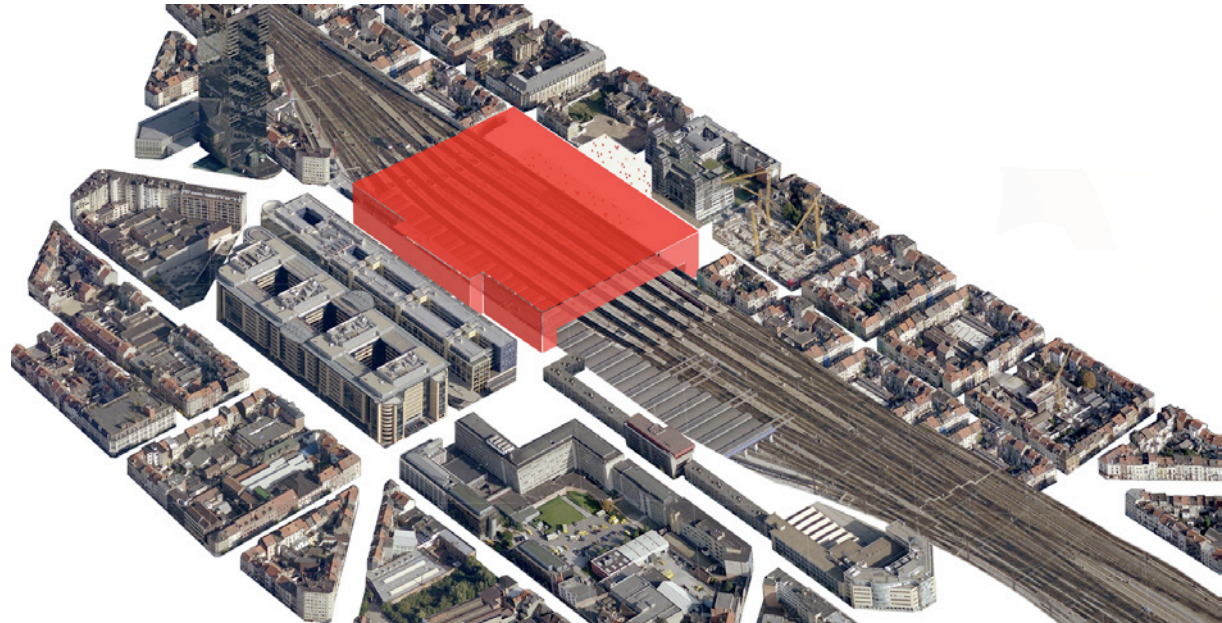
### BRUSSELS MIDI

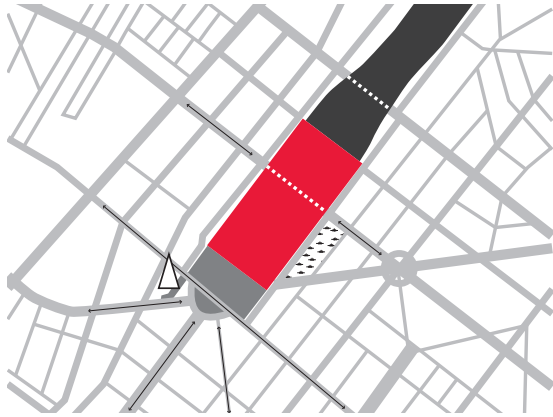
If the urban situation of Lyon Part-Dieu is projected on Brussels Midi:

- double sided station
- intensified surrounding blocks
- few open spaces

### LYON PART-DIEU

- through station
- double sided
- elevated train tracks
- railway parallel to river
- station enclosed by adjacent buildings
- compact squares
- Radisson tower and business district indicates direction to centre



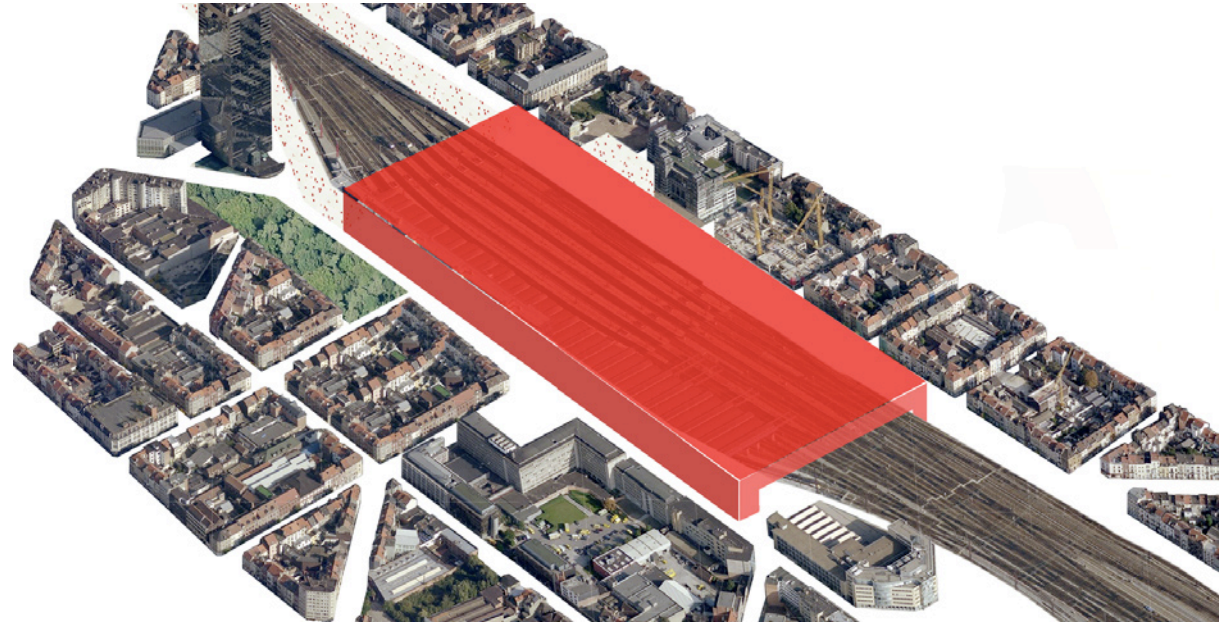


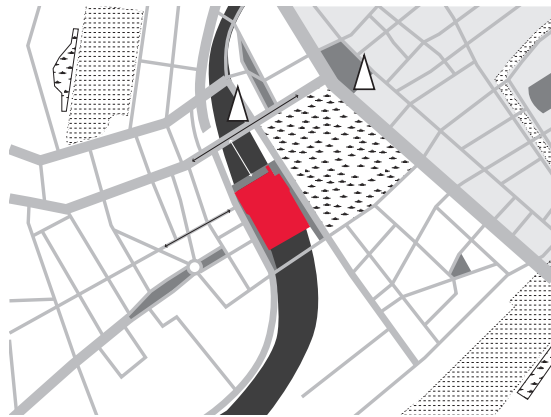
- MILANO CENTRALE
- terminus station
  - triple sided + a distinctive front facade
  - elevated train tracks
  - railway perpendicular to centre
  - representative square in front
  - clear orientation by square and tower
  - station as freestanding landmark

0 250m 500m 1km



- BRUSSELS MIDI
- If the urban situation of Milano Centrale is projected on Brussels Midi:
- monumental station building
  - front facade towards city centre
  - improved orientation
  - variety of open spaces
  - extended streets connect the station to the neighbourhoods





0 250m 500m 1km



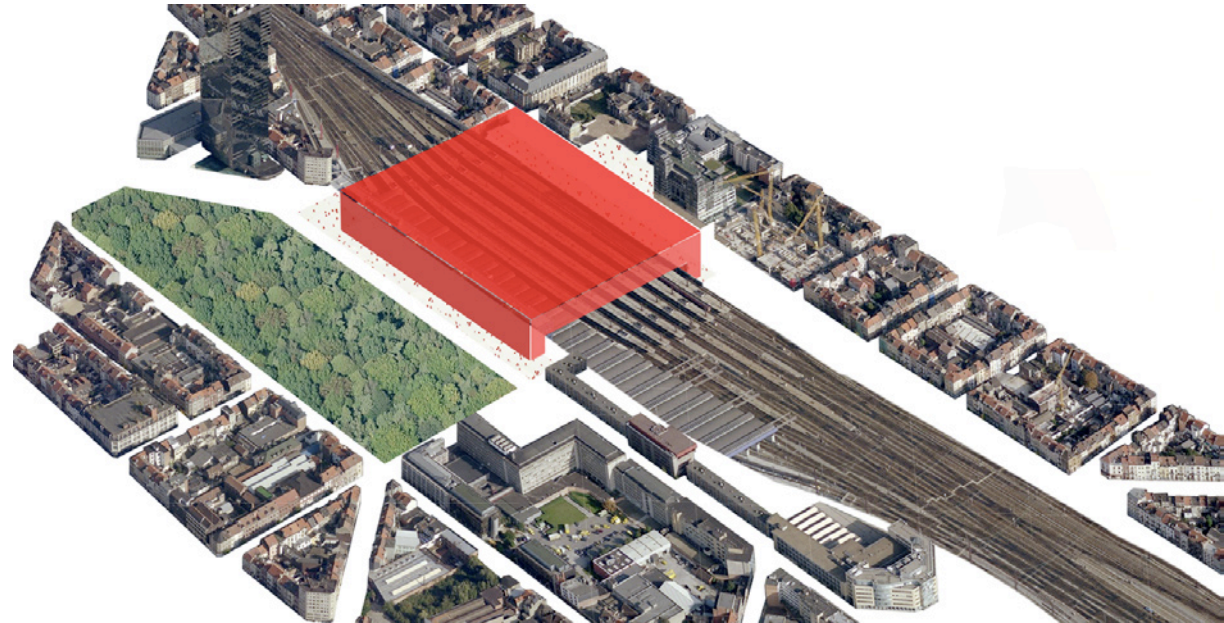
#### BRUSSELS MIDI

If the urban situation of Copenhagen Central is projected on Brussels Midi:

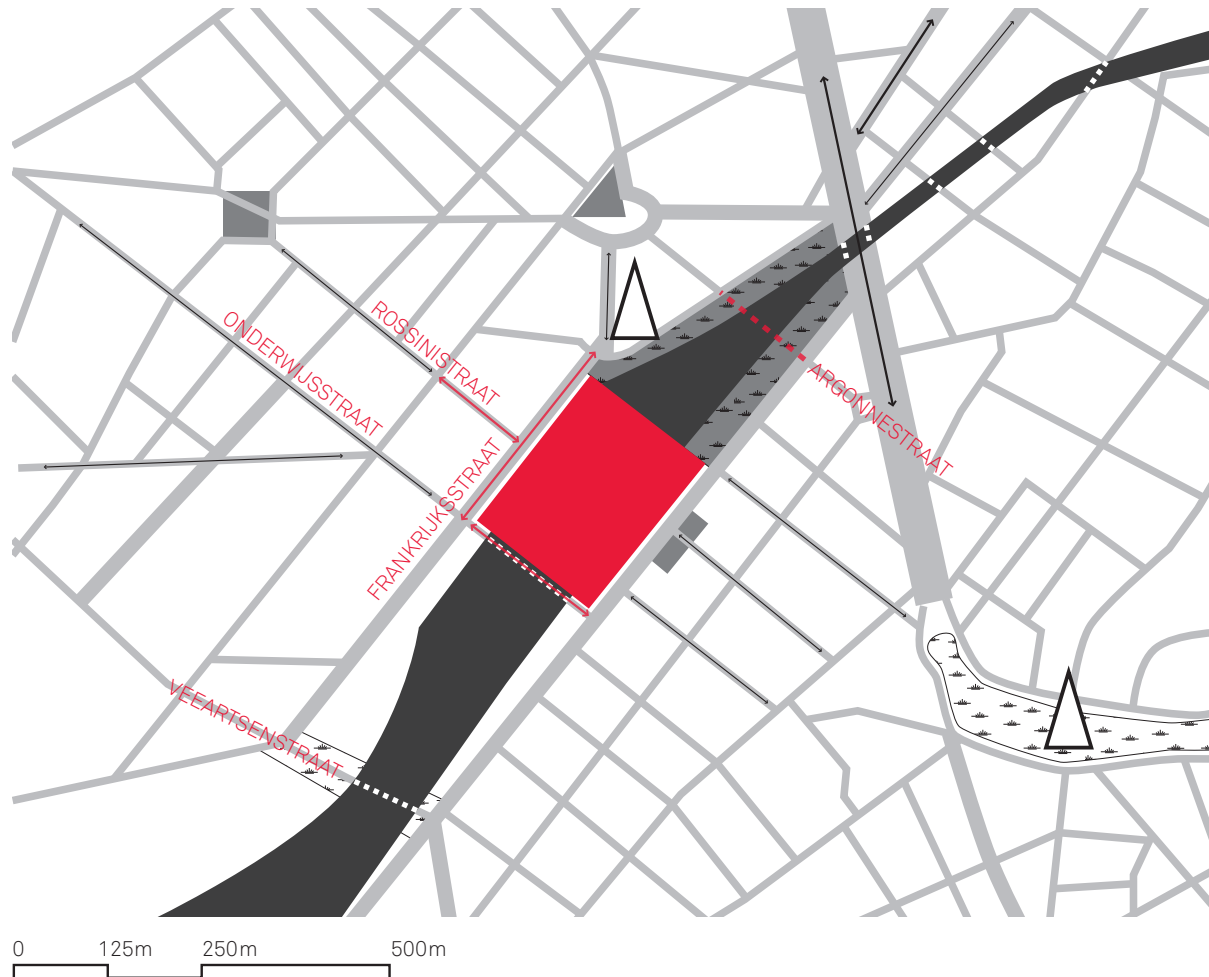
- front facade towards city centre
- park in Kuregem
- front square underneath tracks
- improved traffic circulation
- direct visual connection to Raadsplein

#### KØBENHAVN H

- terminus/ through station
- triple sided + a distinctive front facade
- surface/lowered train tracks
- railway parallel to medieval fortification line
- space above train tracks used for a square and visibility
- Tivoli right next to station, but not public park
- small square in front, linear public spaces on either side
- Royal Hotel Copenhagen in front
- Vesterbrogade in front eases orientation, connects city parts

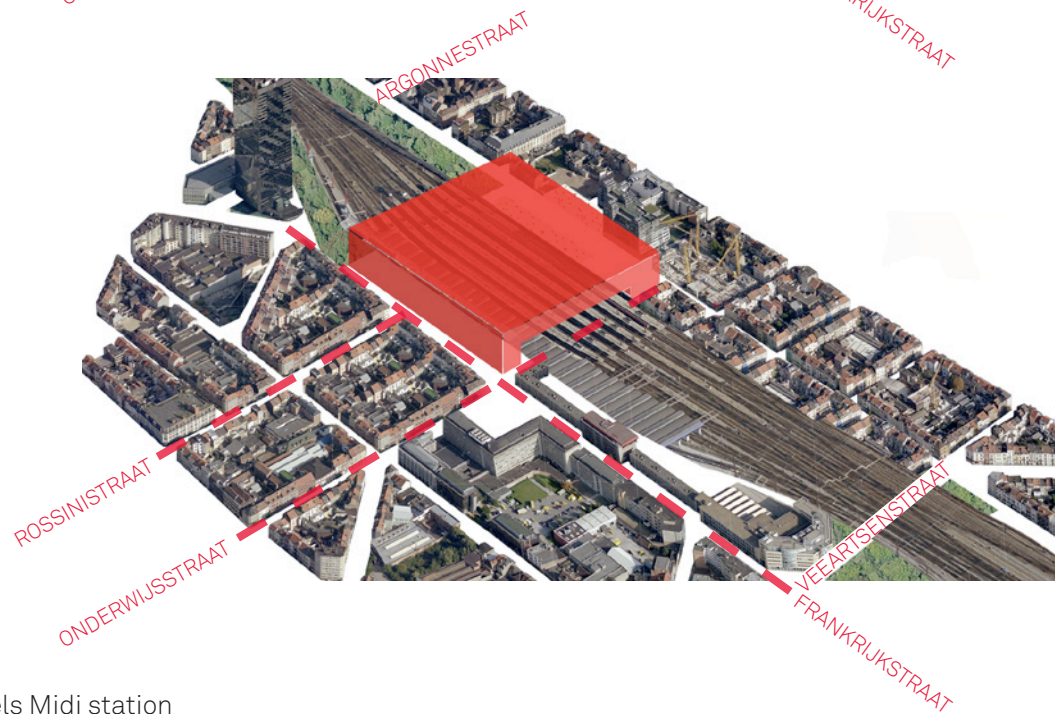
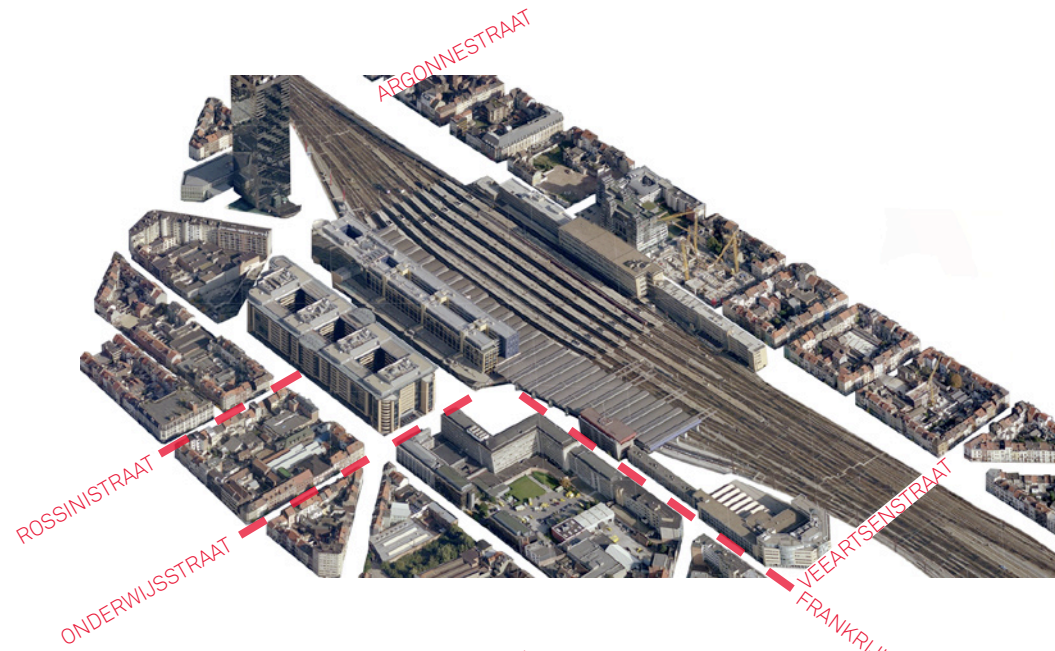


# BRUSSELS MIDI STATION TRANSFORMATION



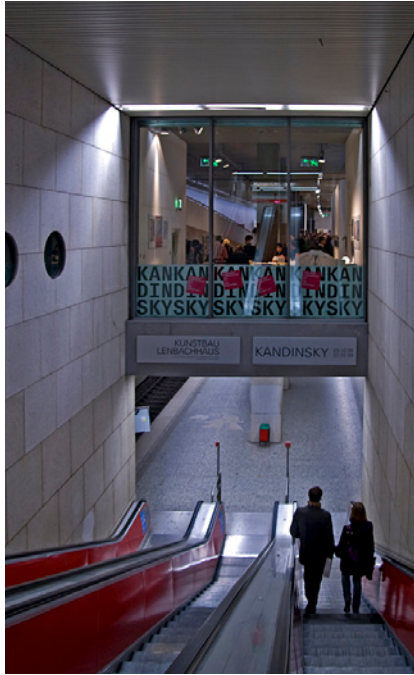
Summarizing all the advantages and disadvantages of the projective exercises, the conclusive transformation of Brussels Midi station includes:

- use space underneath train tracks for a square/park (remove car traffic)
- keep triple orientation, emphasize front facade towards city centre
- improve orientation by connecting Midi tower, Zuidlaan and station
- improve circulation by extending Frankrijkstraat, Onderwijsstraat and Rossinistraat
- make station more compact
- intensify building blocks near railway embankment
- articulate railway crossing points

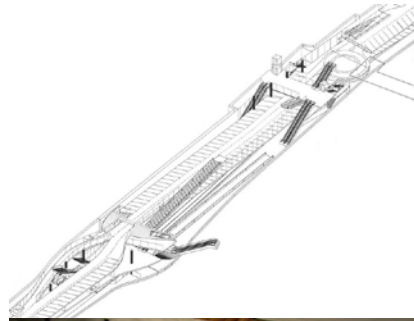


Above: current urban situation of Brussels Midi station  
Below: planned urban situation of Brussels Midi station

# STATION ADDED PROGRAMME STUDIES



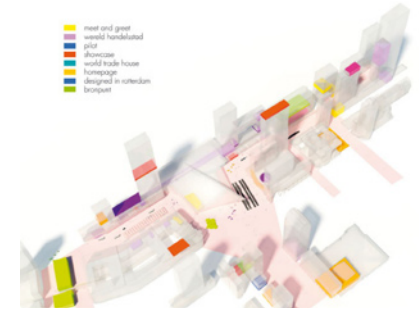
KÖNIGSPLATZ, MUNICH  
→ U-bahn station, museum



SOUTERRAIN, DEN HAAG  
→ tram stop, parking



S.CARDELL PLAZA, ALICANTE  
→ tram stop, park



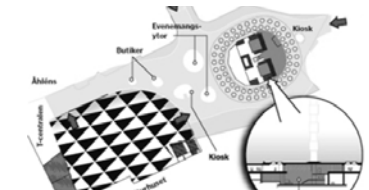
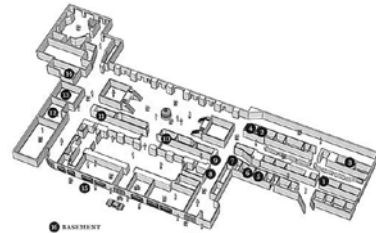
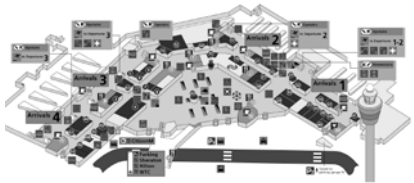
ROTTERDAM CENTRAL DISTRICT  
→ station, mixed use



MADRID ATOCHA  
→ station, tropical garden



LES HALLES, PARIS  
→ metro, mixed use



SCHIPHOL PLAZA  
→ airport, shopping, museum



NYC GRAND CENTRAL  
→ station, food court, market



LOUVRE, PARIS  
→ metro, shopping, museum



SERGELS TORG, STOCKHOLM  
→ metro, shopping, theatre





→ programmatic pressure centered around station  
 → limited circulation



→ programmatic pressure distributed over a larger area  
 → increased circulation

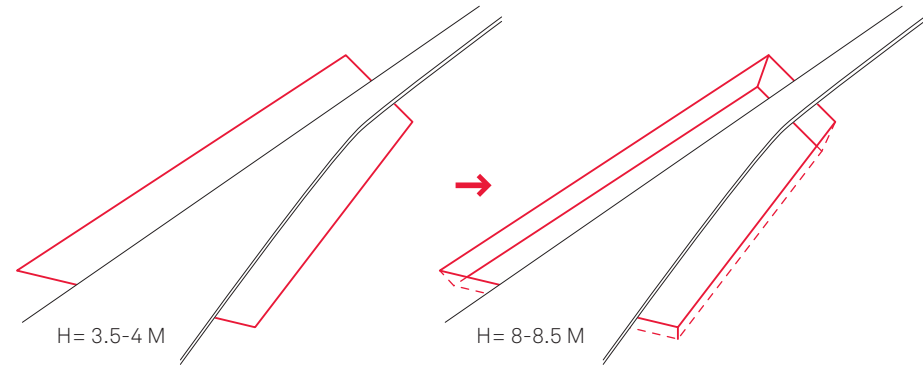


Added functionality can be divided into two groups: it either puts heavy programmatic pressure onto the station (offices, housing, shopping etc.) or appears as a simple addition (food court, exhibition space, garden etc.) and leaves the diversity of programme to the rest of the city.

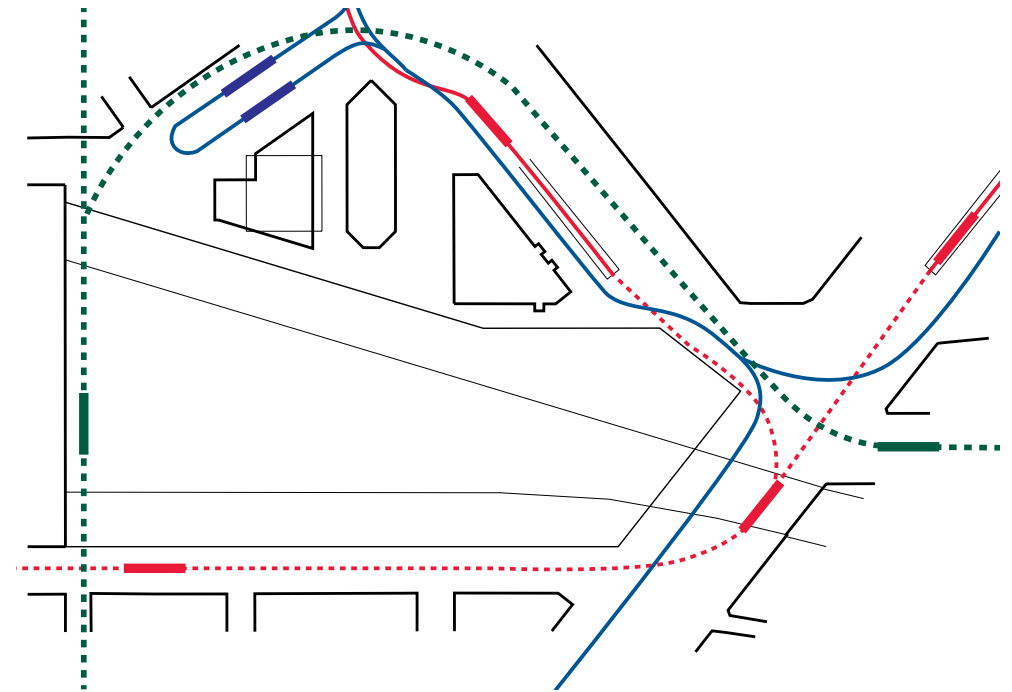
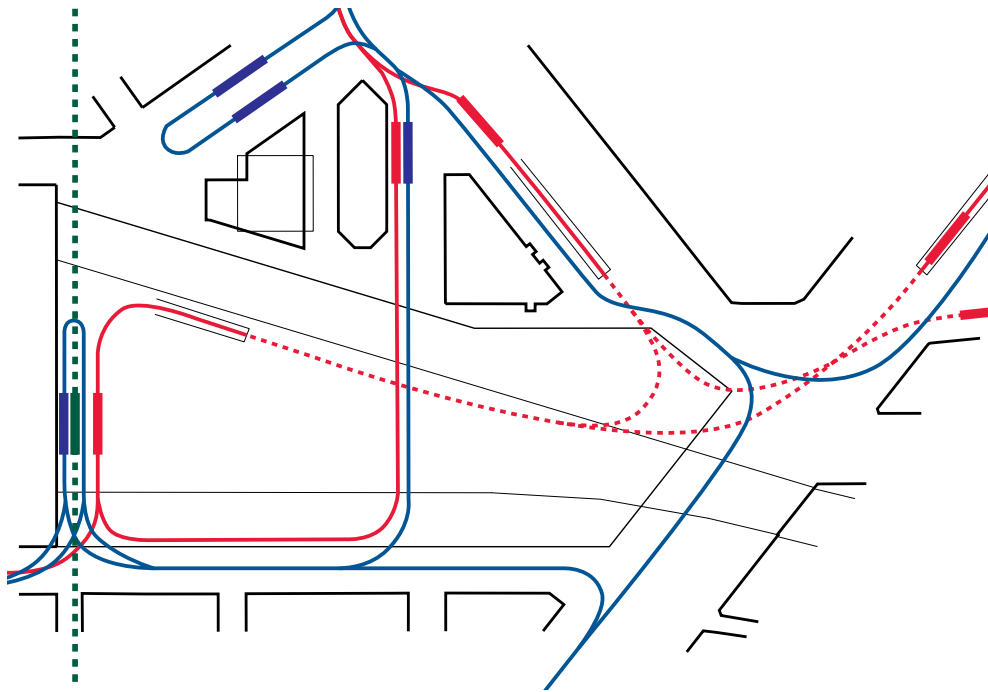
The previously shown (page 30) Jean Nouvel design for Brussels Midi station would fall in the first category. The graduation project approach is the opposite - carefully chosen additions invite travellers outside to mingle with locals and draw the locals into the station.

The strongest additional function of Midi station is already there - the Midi market on Sundays. It is turned into a permanent feature - Midi Bazaar underneath the railway tracks. The other functional addition is public galleries - space for loitering, exhibitions and performances, and informal meetings behind the main facade of the station - similarly as in Sergelstorg, Stockholm.

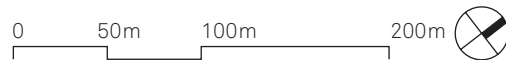
# MIDI SQUARE DESIGN



To set up a public square underneath the train tracks, it is necessary to improve the proportion of the available space by increasing its height, which is currently only 3.5-4 metres. Since the train tracks remain in their place, it is the ground level that gets sunken, by that doubling the height and creating a large public «tub».

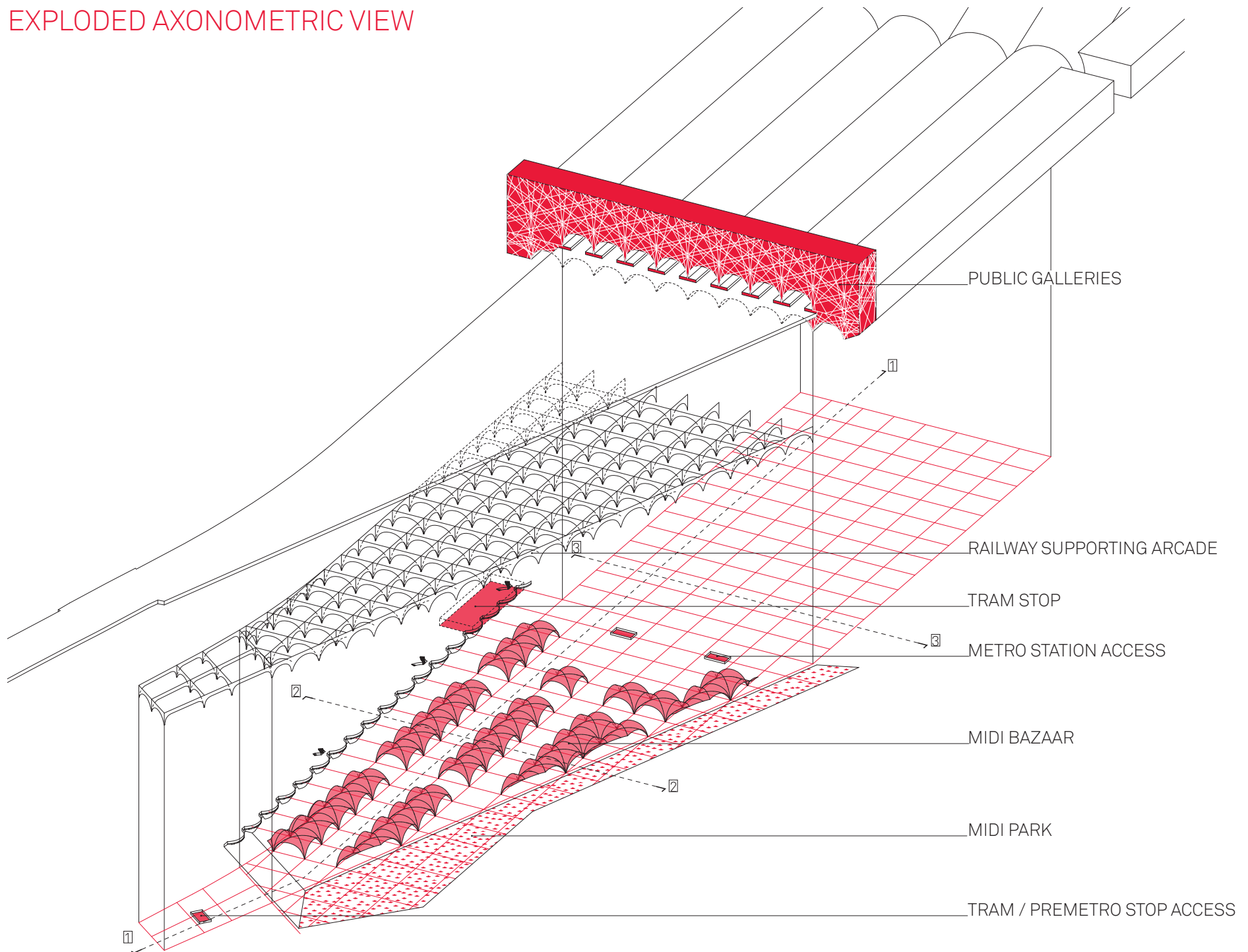


- Bus lines
- Tram lines
- - - Tram lines underground
- - - Metro lines

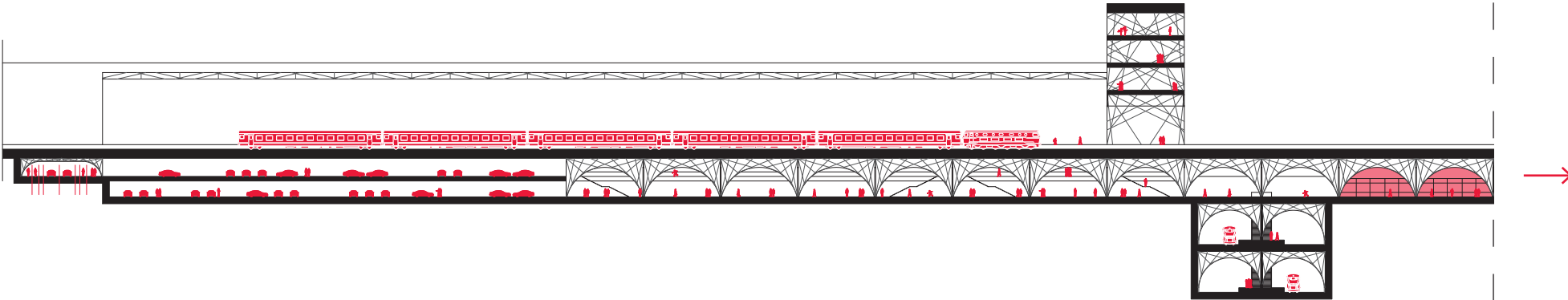


Left: current public transport layout  
 Right: planned public transport layout  
 The square is freed of all traffic that currently makes loops on and below it. Metro and tram stops are accessible directly from the square, all bus stops are concentrated near the Midi tower.

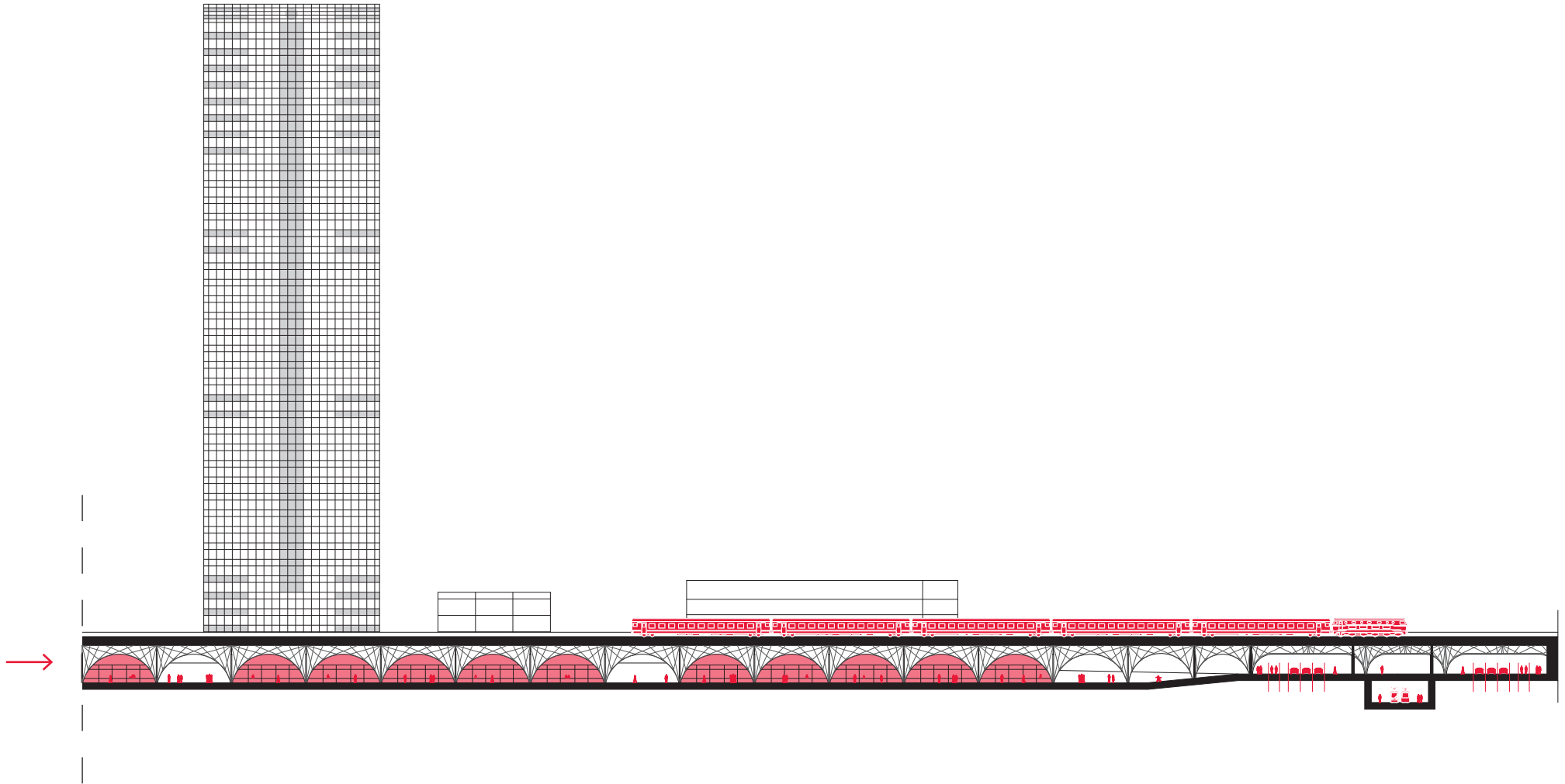
# EXPLODED AXONOMETRIC VIEW



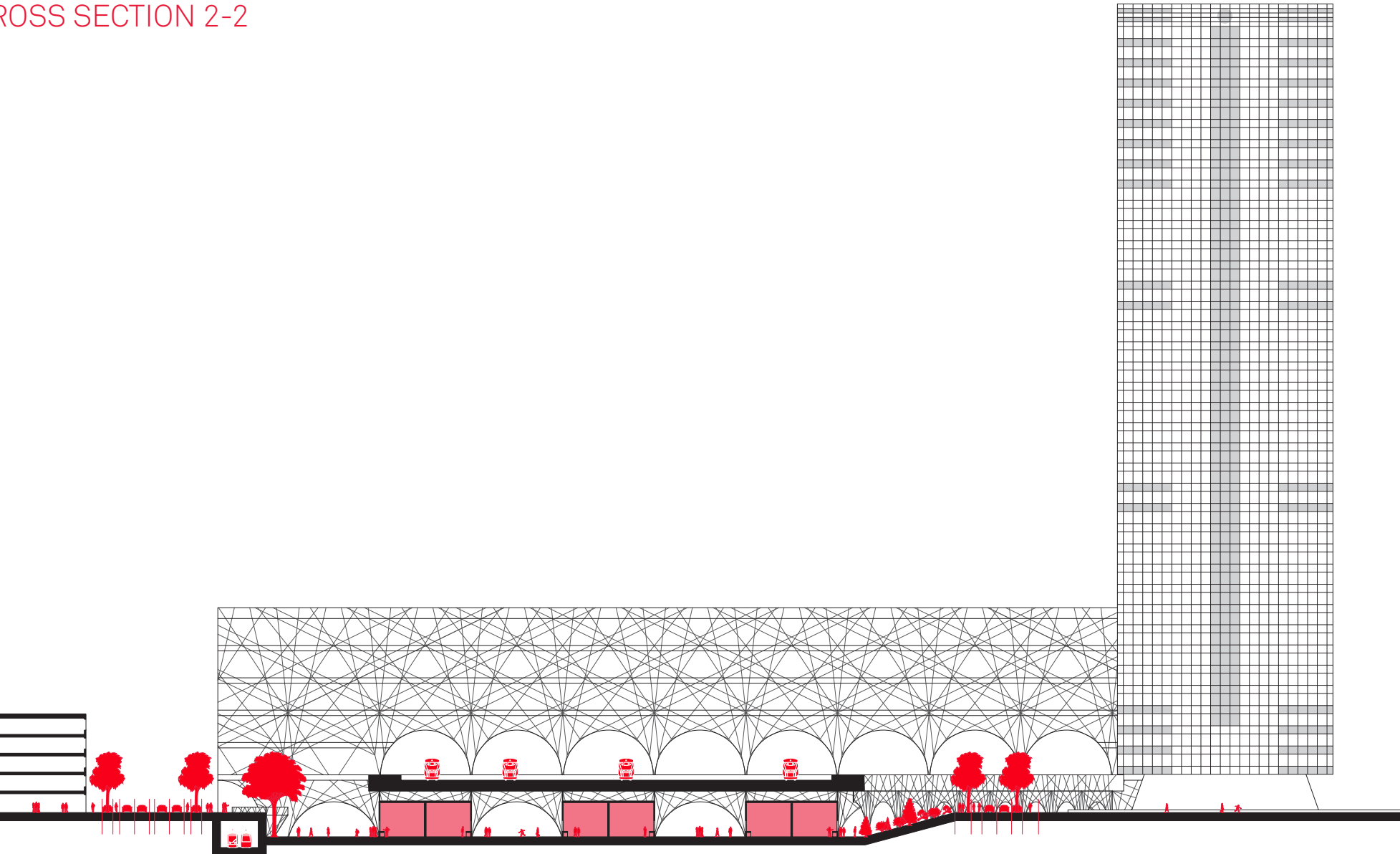
LONGITUDINAL SECTION 1-1



0 12.5m 25m 50m



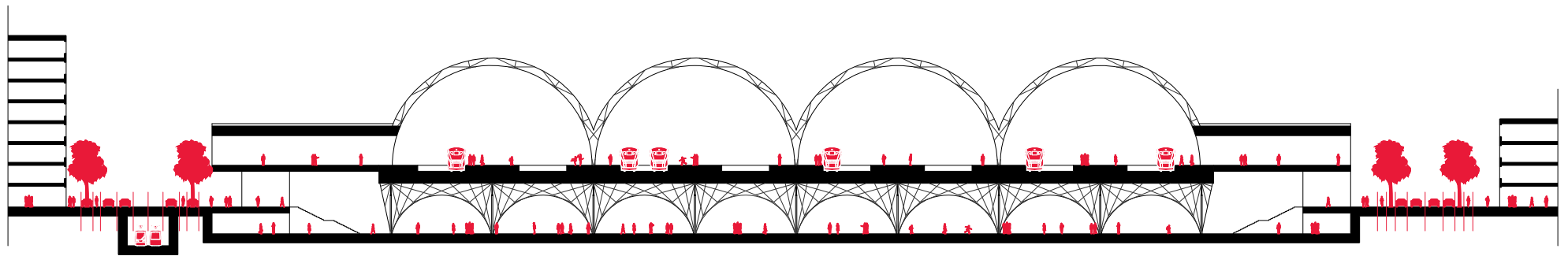
CROSS SECTION 2-2



On the Fonsnylaan side, the tub is shaped by an undulating wall with stairs leading down to the square. On Europaesplanade side, there is a gentle slope, accommodating a park.

0 12.5m 25m 50m

# CROSS SECTION 3-3



0 12.5m 25m 50m

The side facades of the station accommodate small scale shops and entrances to the main hall.

VIEW FROM FONSNYLAAN SIDE





VIEW INSIDE THE BAZAAR





CONCLUSION

In conclusion of the graduation project I would like to provide answers to a number of questions my design might raise or be criticized for.

Firstly - how does Midi station relate to the proposed interventions in the larger area surrounding it? Same way as the territory of rioters and the authorities clashes on the facade of a police office, the immediate surroundings of Brussels Midi station are the frontier of the inequality between underprivileged immigrant communities and well-off traveller crowds. There is a buffer zone between a sterile mass transit area and messy immigrant quarters, guarded by architecture and public space design. The graduation project is an attempt to even out the unfairness with spatial and programmatic rearrangements. It requires a system of interventions, both in the larger area surrounding Midi station as in the station itself, however not all proposals have direct interrelations, as they are meant to operate on different scale levels.

Second is the issue of parochialization - I have proposed functions and spaces for the use of specific communities. How is that public domain and is it not a step towards segregation? I believe that in order to integrate, we must first acknowledge the value of other cultures and give them space to be. Besides, neutral meeting places for all classes, ethnicities and lifestyles run the risk of becoming anonymous and dull.

*The paradox is that what many people experience as pleasant public space is in reality often dominated by a relatively homogeneous group. However, these are not the spaces dominated by one's own group. Anyone reflecting on personal «public-domain experiences» will notice on closer inspection that the key experiences with shared use of space often involve entering the parochial domains of «others». Public domain is thus not so much a place as an experience.*

*(Hajer & Reijndorp, 2001, p.88)*

The next point is theming of an urban environment - such approach is often criticized for being non-contextual, controlled and meaningless. In the case of Brussels Midi, however, it is exactly the opposite - the theme park is created by the different cultural identities of the people that reside in the area, expatriated

authenticity in its very essence.

The fourth doubt-triggering element of the design might be the Midi Bazaar for its overly commercial character. In fact, market is an excellent function to greet travellers arriving in Brussels. Simple activities, as browsing, buying and eating, are familiar to everyone and make people feel more comfortable in foreign locations. It also invites to participate rather than remain a passive spectator.

In an aspiration to interrupt the historical grandeur and brutality of urban transformations in Brussels the overall strategy tends to be non-spectacular. Partly, it is grounded in my personal distrust of big visionary plans as a cure to socially problematic areas, but also the global economic instability makes cities draw up and manage implementation of urban plans in a more precautious manner.

There are elements of the design that might appear kitschy, oversized or provoking. Monumentality belongs to the identity of Brussels city form and, along with bright colours and expressive shapes, is legible and relatable for most people. The issue of alien cultural manifestations on European soil is controversial and this is my entry in the discussion.

I have attempted to create a wide range of potential public domain - from small community spaces to a large public square on the edge of four neighbourhoods and an international gateway to Brussels - following a clear theoretical framework and approved practical knowledge. Testing if it actually becomes public domain can only be done by letting people try it out.

Yours sincerely,  
Evelina Ozola



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## SETTING UP PUBLIC DOMAIN

The threats and stimuli of social interaction in urban environments

Evelina Ozola

4049306 \_ eve.ozo@gmail.com

Delft University of Technology, Department of Urbanism

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ABSTRACT – Public life in urban environments unfolds in the public domain - “places where an exchange between different social groups is possible and also actually occurs” (Hajer & Reijndorp, 2001, p.11). By representing themselves publicly people exercise their right to the city (Lefebvre, 1968) and acquire knowledge and qualities, essential for sustaining a society (Hajer, 1999). Still, a decline of publicness can be witnessed in cities, as it is threatened by misconduct, crime and fear, leading to excessive control and segregation.

The focus of this paper is an explanation of the phenomena that are destructive to social exchange in publicly accessible places, and should therefore be overcome by urban design approaches that stimulate new and strengthen existing public domain. The literature reviewed includes theories of sociology and philosophy that discuss the public sphere, as well as knowledge deriving from empirical research of urban environments.

It is concluded that there are three major steps in setting up public domain. First, it requires an understanding of its role as a stage for exchanging different virtues and ideas in society. Second comes the skill – learning about the design prerequisites of safety, interaction and freedom of choice – what physical aspects are restrictive and what encourage social exchange. Third step – enlivening – is to be left up to the users.

KEY WORDS – public domain, social interaction, street nuisance, fear of crime, control in urban environment, social exclusion, types of access, adaptable design

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Public life is the essence of cities – people have not settled in spatial clusters to remain hidden from each other, on the contrary, they have come together to exchange, unite and create. The crucial setting for social interactions is public domain, the main ingredient of urbanity. Yet a decline in publicness can be witnessed in cities – ignorance, greed and fear fuel the emergence of lifeless, hostile environments. After New York City considered drastic security measures in response of 9/11, Anthony Vidler (2001) wrote in The New York Times: “[...] it is urgent that planners explore new urban designs that learn from the difficulties of past utopias as well as avoid the nostalgia of anti-city programs. We should search for design alternatives that retain the dense and vital mix of uses critical to urban life, rethinking the exclusions stemming from outdated zoning, real estate values and private ownership, to provide vital incentives for building public spaces equal to our present needs for community.” In response to this call, this paper aims for an exploration of the meaning of public domain, phenomena that cause its decay and conditions that are fertile ground for its development.

The literature selected for the review ranges from theoretical works of sociology and philosophy, dedicated to public realm, to empirical research of urban spaces. Recent studies are compared to renowned publications to encompass a broader time span and follow the development of thought.

The paper begins with an explanation of the vocabulary used – the different meanings contained in the terms that describe urban public life, - and is continued by a description of the important role of public domain in forming and sustaining a society. A deeper attention is dedicated to the phenomena that reduce social interaction in urban environments: misconduct, fear, control and segregation. Finally, a range of urban design approaches for stimulating the emergence of public domain is elaborated upon.

### 2 DEFINING PUBLIC DOMAIN

There are a number of notions related to public life in space and time, each having a different origin, meaning and use. In the discourse of urbanism and architecture, public space is one of the most popular topics of research



and discussion. Public space can be defined by ownership, management and accessibility – it is the direct opposite of private property, regulated by commonly accepted rules and freely accessible for everyone (Hajer & Reijndorp, 2001; Nemeth & Schmidt, 2007).

The less spatially bound terms of public realm and public sphere are more often used in social sciences. Reviewing the works of Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas and Richard Sennett, René Boomkens (2008, p.14) concludes: “the public sphere is a specific, value-loaded series of practices, institutions, media and localities that define the quality of modern urban life and culture.” In other words, although public sphere contains a spatial component, its much broader meaning brings it further away from judgements about the current state or possible development of public life in physical settings. According to Lyn H. Lofland (1998), public realm is all spaces used by people unknown or only categorically known to each other. Hans Teerds adds that public sphere is a large body of phenomena that unfold mostly “invisibly and infinitely”, whereas the emergence of public realm is usually “visible and finite” (2008, p.24).

In the following paper I have chosen to give priority to the notion of public domain, as explained by Maarten Hajer and Arnold Reijndorp (2001, p.11): “places where an exchange between different social groups is possible and also actually occurs.” This definition is not limited to a particular spatial layout or an ownership type; public domain manifests itself by the social interaction that takes place in it. For Hajer and Reijndorp, an essential criterion is public appreciation – it does not matter if a place is privately or collectively owned and managed, as long as many people with different social and cultural backgrounds give it a positive evaluation. Not all public spaces belong to the public domain by default, the same way as not all private spaces lay outside of it. Ray Oldenburg (1989) wrote about third places – settings outside home and work, the respective first and second places, where people relax in a circle of friends, debate about important issues, and create new ideas and concepts – most often simple cafés, bars or barber shops.

Public domain is never homogeneous, its density varies along a “continuum of relative publicness” (Nemeth & Schmidt, 2007, p.284), which is made up of various environments that can be characterized by types of ownership, management,

accessibility, functional programmes and spatial layout (Smith & Low, 2006). This variety corresponds to the diverse ideals and needs of the public – a rich and constantly transforming composition of people.

### 3 WHY PUBLIC DOMAIN MATTERS

What is the role and importance of public domain in cities and societies? How does it contribute to urbanity and citizenship? Simply put, all public places contribute to the vibrancy and sustainability of urban environments, yet they are capable of deeper societal meanings.

Henri Lefebvre (1968) states that public domain is where a person can exercise their right to the city by being in it, representing themselves in front of other people and interacting with them. For Hannah Arendt (1958), being in the public realm is to be aware of the reality of the world and to participate in its plurality. Public realm is our common world, the opposite of our privately owned places. Lyn H. Lofland (1998, p.9) believes that public realm is what distinguishes cities from other settings – “the city’s quintessential social territory.”

Public domain is where we encounter otherness: appearances, behaviour, ideas, beliefs, preferences and necessities that differ from ours (Hajer & Reijndorp, 2001). Seeing, experiencing, becoming familiar with this otherness form our personal opinions – as opposed to worldviews and stereotypes we can simply take over from mass media, acquaintances or authorities. This orientational knowledge helps in sustaining coherence in society (Hajer, 1999).

Otherness often comes in the form of street people: the homeless, vendors, beggars, prostitutes, and performers. Although encounters with the rough side of urban life might cause anxiety, it raises important questions about citizenship, public representation, tolerance and empathy – the essential properties of a city-dweller (Blomley, 2001; Hajer & Reijndorp, 2001; Rogers, 1998). In multicultural environments, citizenship also holds the aspect of ethnic background and identity. Public domain is then the grounds for becoming familiar with and accepting cultural differences, as different groups that have become attached to a particular place have to find ways of coexistence (Hajer & Reijndorp, 2001; Rogers, 1998).

#### 4 PUBLIC DOMAIN UNDER THREAT

Despite the common recognition of the importance of public domain, it is constantly put in danger by incompatible political beliefs, ignorant private interests, and inefficient management. Being in public domain requires an open-minded attitude and skill of getting along with other members of the society. Due to various cultural and historical reasons, not everybody finds it easy to confront the previously described otherness.

One of the prerequisites of a vibrant and liveable city is the perceived personal safety (Nemeth & Schmidt, 2007; Oc & Tiesdell, 1999). The unpredictability and confrontations of the public domain are not always in line with the feelings of safety and comfort, therefore in many places all risks and uncertainties are “carefully edited out” (Banerjee, 2001, p.13). Those who have the access to defining rules often consider certain groups of people undesirable. Contrary to the essence of urban life, where many different people share one environment, there is a strong tendency of setting up spaces of homogeneity. In order to understand how such antisocial tendencies come into being, one has to trace down the urban disturbances that increase fear, which leads to the desire to control public domain and segregate its users.

##### 4.1 MISCONDUCT

Public domain often suffers from inappropriate behaviour of its users and damage of the physical environment. “A space that all can enter, however, is a space that each is tempted to abuse,” states Robert C. Ellickson (1996, p.21). Even a subtle disturbance, such as staying in a public place for too long, can violate informal time limits and subsequently the rights of others to use the space. Some users of public spaces cause what is called chronic street nuisances by regularly behaving in a way that others find annoying, and in that way they decrease the perceived safety of public domain (ibid.).

Often there is confusion between the appearance and expected conduct of a person – the homeless, teenagers, tourists, street vendors are considered undesirable due to their image long before they cause any nuisance. Those more affluent are regarded as more orderly public; therefore consumption is an

increasingly present companion of publicly accessible places. People who cannot or do not wish to purchase goods, or have a physical appearance or conduct that might deter others from consuming, are not welcome (Nemeth & Schmidt, 2007).

However, many authors acknowledge that street people in fact play an important role in keeping public spaces safe by inconspicuously being on watch (Ellickson, 1996). “Like canaries in a coal mine, street people are an index of the health of a place,” is the observation of William H. Whyte (1988, p.55).

##### 4.2 FEAR

“Fear is a consequence, a response in time, of having had contact with criminal events” (Lewis & Salem, 1986, p.6). It does not, however, necessarily take negative personal experience for fear to grow – stories, distributed by word of mouth or in mass media, as well as certain characteristics of an environment have a powerful impact on people. One can distinguish real risk and risk of presumptions or fear of crime, which generates a behaviour that can become destructive for communities and the public domain (ibid.).

Fear of crime increases in the presence of strangers and in unkempt surroundings. Decay and abandonment, litter, unpleasant smells, graffiti, vandalized objects are all signs of an unpredictable and intimidating environment, and stimulate avoidance and further damage of such places (Oc & Tiesdell, 1999; Wilson & Kelling, 1982; Lewis & Salem, 1986).

Urban violence, such as riots and terrorist attacks, have even further accelerated fear in cities and initiated a massive increase in security measures, leading to militarization and segregation in cities, which in their turn generate even more suspicion and fear (Davis, 1990).

##### 4.3 CONTROL

The tendency to control urban spaces is a direct consequence of fear and the desire for safety and predictability. Under the cover of increasing safety and security, a whole arsenal of sophisticated methods of protection, filtering and exclusion has been developed, contributing to the decline of public domain in cities. Jeremy Nemeth (2009) analyses filtered spaces - environments that evolve around

consumption and attract people with eye-catching design and marketing, but are controlled by regulations and security measures. For Nemeth, accessibility of a public restroom is a crucial feature of public domain - if access is limited to paying customers only, everyone without money in the pocket is deprived of the possibility to satisfy one of the very basic necessities of a human and by that excluded of public.

Taner Oc and Steven Tiesdell (1999) distinguish four different techniques of control: fortress, panoptic, regulatory and animated approach. Walls, fences and steps belong to the arsenal of the fortress approach. Such spaces are oriented inwards, protecting those that are on the inside and preventing others from getting in. The panoptic method is implemented through explicit presence of security personnel and surveillance cameras. Criticism of this approach concerns possible abuse of the information gathered by surveillance and infringements of civil liberties. The regulatory approach employs rules and limitations of possible uses and behaviour in spaces. Limitations can be selective as well – by increasing the freedom of some at the expense of others. The animated approach uses the presence of people to enliven a place and make it safer. This involves 24-hour and evening economy strategies, assuming that more people increase safety and attract even more people. This is the most humane of the control techniques and relates to what Jane Jacobs (1961) described as “eyes on the street” – by watching others, people are simultaneously entertained and engaged in maintaining order in the streets.

#### 4.4 SEGREGATION

Excessive control in public domain leads to limited accessibility, social exclusion and flattening of cultural diversity. If something is pushed out of sight, it is denied of public existence, thus cannot be a threat to anyone anymore. To exclude someone from public domain is to deprive them of representation in public and accordingly – of citizenship (Rogers, 1998). The urge to exclude certain undesirable groups of people can be explained by fear of strangers (Lewis & Salem, 1986). The resulting “intimate and local” clustering is criticised by Richard Sennett (1977, p.295) as “the celebration of the ghetto”, which holds people back from growing

mentally.

In the combat for safer urban environments, urban renewal is a weapon of mass destruction. Whole neighbourhoods with frightening crime and unemployment statistics are being replaced by more orderly architecture and citizens, often destroying established communities and segregating cities even further (Hajer & Reijndorp, 2001; Jacobs, 1961).

#### 5 BRINGING PUBLIC DOMAIN INTO EXISTENCE

The task of an urban designer comprises both the physical facets of public spaces as well as the activities that might be taking place there – the socio-cultural public realm. Tridib Banerjee (2001, p.19) calls for a broader interpretation of the urban assignment: “focus on the concept of public life rather than public spaces.” Hajer and Reijndorp (2001, p.37) invite for a shift towards cultural geography – to think of the meaning a place can have for specific users instead of a general functionality of a space. Knowing what can restrict and what can activate social exchange are the first steps towards a more enlightened professional attitude: “Designing public domain can then become a question of the stimulation of informal manifestations of diversity and the avoidance of interventions that are intended to make such manifestations impossible.” There are several parameters relevant for the emergence of public domain that can be distilled of literature dedicated to urban design.

#### 5.1 CONTEXT

Standardized designs are economically feasible and can be easily replicated; yet they are often insensitive to specific environmental and cultural contexts. Different age, gender, nationality and income level groups have significantly varying perception, expectations and needs. A design that is detached from its context, an invented place (Banerjee, 2001) can result in turning into a rigid theme park (Sorkin, 1992) that offers entertainment, but fails in becoming a meaningful space (Hajer & Reijndorp, 2001; Loukaitou-Sideris, 1996) for the community it was intended for. A meaningful space is culturally and time bound, capable of adapting to changing needs, well connected to its surroundings

and stimulates exchange between different people. Ideally, design should be a communicative process where the potential user is engaged in making decisions and by that developing a bond to the public domain (ibid).

## 5.2 PROGRAMME

A thoughtful distribution of various functions throughout city streets can stimulate animation and vibrancy in public domain. MacCormac (1983) has developed a hierarchy of urban functions that range from no interaction with passers-by to intensive interchanges.

MacCormac's hierarchy of transactions  
(Increasing interaction with the street)

- Street markets
- Restaurants and bars
- Housing
- Small-scale shops and offices
- Supermarkets
- Blocks of flats
- Large-scale offices
- Large-scale industry
- Warehousing
- Car parks

(Decreasing interaction with the street)

In contrast to the many authors that condemn commercial activities in public domain, William H. Whyte (1988, p.84) defends them wholeheartedly: "What draws people? The merchandise itself, of course, is the key." His observations in New York confirm that shops, especially the ones with attractive windows, slow people down and encourage interaction. Mixture of functions on the first two levels of buildings, generously spaced store entrances, intensively used sidewalks are also among the features that stimulate public domain (ibid., pp.89-101).

## 5.3 ACCESS

Stephen Carr et al. (1992) differentiate three types of access - physical, visual and symbolic. Physical access concerns getting to and from, entering and leaving a place. Busy traffic, fences and steps can all be barriers for convenient physical access. Visibility is important for people to feel safe and free to use a space – "if people do not see a space, they will not use it" (Whyte, 1988, p. 129). For improved visibility, relation of buildings to streets and squares, orientation and size of entrances and windows, and articulation of ground floor need to be carefully considered (Loukaitou-Sideris, 1996). Symbolic access involves both design elements, as well as behaviour of the people present, suggesting possible uses and user range and the delicate feeling of being welcome. Having to pass through an extra gate or feeling overly watched can make people feel uncomfortable.

## 5.4 BOUNDARIES

Edges and transitions have a crucial role in defining different areas and spaces in a city. They can be difficultly penetrable and by that dividing and discontinuing; or soft and uniting, triggering along and across movement. Thick boundaries and transitional zones have a higher potential of functioning as connecting links between physically or culturally separated urban settings (Lynch, 1960; Gehl, 1987).

## 5.5 CHOICE

According to Whyte (1988), form or aesthetics of public spaces are not determinant in whether people are going to use them or not. What matters is the freedom of choice in use of spaces – if there are enough possibilities to move, relax and play freely. Choice implies adaptability of urban design – steps and ledges can be used for sitting, lawns are good for sports, picnics and napping, sunny and wind protected spaces are pleasant in cold weather, but shade and breeze – in summers. It is then a challenge for the designer to leave as much freedom as possible up to the user.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

“It is difficult to design a space that will not attract people. What is remarkable is how often this has been accomplished” (Whyte, 1988, p.109). There are three steps in creating public domain in urban environments. First, it requires an understanding of its value and fragile nature – that means taking a position in the field of urbanism and life in general. Second comes the skill – by acquiring knowledge about what works well and what has failed and by aiming for simplicity and thoughtfulness in one’s work. Third step – enlivening – is up to the users. In relation to my graduation project, this literature review has firstly provided a strong motivation and has helped in sharpening a professional attitude towards urban politics. Secondly, it has clarified the criteria for what defines public domain, so that it can be mapped and analysed; and an awareness of the many risks and possibilities that are going to be taken in consideration when developing a design approach.

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