Construction Entrepreneurs in a Transforming Urban Space Brussels, 1830–1970

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Tour à Plomb

- 1832: Lead factory Hoedemaeker
- 1873: Lead and zinc factory Pelgrims & Bombeeck
- 1898: Construction of the shot tower
- 1932: Fabriques d’Overpelt-Lommel et Corphaliè (→ Umicore)
- 1962: Production site abandoned
- 1975: school
- 2018: cultural centre
Tour à Plomb

• Urban industrial geography: oriented on the Canal Antwerp-Brussels-Charleroi
Tour à Plomb

- Urban industrial geography: oriented on the Canal Antwerp-Brussels-Charleroi
- Typical case of Brussels’ large scale industrialization and de-industrialization
  - vs. construction industry?
Database of 25 000 construction enterprises

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Records</th>
<th>Enterprises</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>5873</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

BCA, *Almanacs of commerce and industry* (1899)
Brussels’ urban development

1830-1970: construction of around 170 000 buildings in Brussels-Capital Region
Small-scale organisation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Average labour force</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>1831</td>
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<td>1846</td>
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<td>1910</td>
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<td>1937</td>
<td>10.9</td>
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<td>1961</td>
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<td>1970</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Construction workers on a roof in Brussels, ca. 1940 (BCA, CI-C1165).
Spatial organisation

- Limited spatial needs
- Dispersed over the urban space

Dépôt de la Guerre 1869 (NGI).
Spatial concentrations

- Formation of clusters in lower middle class neighbourhoods
- Cadastral incomes in 1865 vs. high concentrations of construction enterprises

Data: POPPKAD Ghent University
Spatial concentrations

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• Cadastral incomes in 1865 vs. high concentrations of construction enterprises

Data: POPPKAD Ghent University
Spatial concentrations

Clustering in cheap, densely built neighbourhoods

Mostly absent from wealthy areas for the urban bourgeoisie

Redevelopments result in the disappearance of concentrations

- river Senne: 1867-71
- N.D.-aux-Neiges: 1875-84
- Putterie (railway link): 1911-14

High concentrations of construction enterprises in 1833, 1866, 1899 and 1932
Spatial concentrations

Sewage construction works and vaulting of the river Senne (ca. 1870), BCA (CI F-1441)
Spatial concentrations

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High concentrations of construction enterprises in 1833, 1866, 1899 and 1932
Case study: Nestor Deridder

Sanitary plumber
1901: takeover from Corneille Courtois
Rue de Mérode, Saint-Gilles (Brussels Midi station)

Company archives Nestor Deridder
Location and spatial relations

With clients and construction sites: in uptown areas Léopold and Avenue Louise
Location and spatial relations

With labour forces: in working-class districts in St-Gilles and the Marolles
Location and spatial relations

With suppliers: in the Canal zone, e.g. Pelgrims & Bombeeck (Tour à Plomb)
Case study: Nestor Deridder

Speculation around the railway station resulting in the displacement of the company in 1986

Google Street View, 2009

BruCiel, 1980
Conclusion

Construction enterprises: small scale and limited spatial needs

• Advantage: high locational flexibility
• Disadvantage: high susceptibility for urban transformations and rising real estate prices (gentrification)

The local embeddedness of the urban construction sector is challenged since the late 19th century – but only recently to problematic extents for the catering of essential urban needs.

Former timber trade in Schaarbeek (2018 vs 2021)