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Introduction

- 1 Since 2014, the productive sectors' urban anchoring has been explicitly on the Brussels-Capital Region's (BCR) political and academic agenda. Chemetoff's Plan Canal reintroduced the idea of production in a liveable and urbanized form along the Brussels canal banks. At the same time, the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and the Université libre de Bruxelles worked together in their design studios on ways to combine production and living [Moritz *et al.*, 2013], the zoning plans of the BCR were changed to introduce mixed use, and a new architect with a lot of attention for urban production [Borret, 2018] was appointed. Initiatives around and research into the productive city increased exponentially and the construction sector also received specific attention. Compared to many other European cities and countries, waste flows from construction materials and recycling in relation to the circular economy are well studied in the BCR. While in recent years Brussels policymakers have become increasingly convinced of the necessity of production in the city, this article draws attention to the imminent and persistent loss of a large part of the small-scale production space.

- 2 The disappearance of this small-scale production space is part of a continuous process of de-industrialization through intensified real estate dynamics [Ferm and Jones, 2016, 2017]. The combination of housing shortage due to population growth [Ibsa, 2020; Dessouroux *et al.*, 2016], the growing need for municipal income from taxes on property and work [Kesteloot, 2013], and a highly regulated and competitive real estate market [Van Crielingen, 2010] mean that productive functions are systematically losing out to residential functions. This results in a conversion of the industrial heritage's workspace to living space, either through reconversion or redevelopment of the large-scale land. More recently – also for sustainability considerations – this production heritage is increasingly exposed to competition because the inner areas are greened to prevent urban heating.
- 3 There is currently little data on the production space of some economic sectors operating within the BCR's territory. Neither governments, nor trade unions, training and sector organizations – apart from mobility problems – pay attention to the spatial needs of construction companies. This article aims to fill that gap through the study of the construction industry.
- 4 Even though small-scale workspaces often house economic activities that are essential to the daily functioning of the city – like the construction sector – they are often valued only in terms of their current market value, also called “point value” [Bentham *et al.*, 2013]. However, the functions with low “point-value” can be valued differently if we consider the city from a Foundational Economy perspective in which certain goods and services are essential for daily functioning [Bentham *et al.*, 2013]. In that case Bowman *et al.* [2014] speak of “chain value”, which means looking at the value of the entire and interrelated production process. Production space is then to be valued not only as an isolated good, but rather as an essential part in the functioning of the city.

1. Methodology

- 5 Research into production activities that operate from large parcels has already been conducted in the BCR [Perspective.brussels, 2018; Port.brussels, 2015]. However, production activities taking place on smaller surfaces (< 1 000m²) are understudied. This article aims to fill that gap by focusing on small and medium-sized construction companies (SMEs) which make up 93 % of all construction companies in the BCR and are located on smaller plots.
- 6 Moreover, there is no long-term perspective on the evolution of production activities in the BCR. We introduce a historical perspective by comparing today's construction industry with the situation in the 1960s, just before the great de-industrialization of the late twentieth century. Historically, construction companies have a diversified geography and an atypical small-scale organization compared to companies in other sectors [Hillebrandt, 1985; Lacoste, 1959]. According to the Federal Public Service Economy (FPS Economy), the Brussels region's construction sector comprised 13 318 companies in 2016, of which 5 695 were self-employed. When we compared these numbers with our own calculations, we noticed some major differences. Based on the unique company numbers in the Crossroads Bank for Enterprises (CBE) database, we counted a total of 3 830 construction companies. Following the occupational codes related to the construction sector of the National Institute for the Social Security of the Self-employed (NISSE), we counted 21 950 self-employed persons. We suspect that these

differences in the number of construction companies are partly due to (1) the choice we made to select the construction companies based on unique companies (company numbers) instead of on addresses, and (2) the absence of official comparison tables between the different registration systems via NACE codes (NSSO, CBE, VAT authority) on the one hand, and professional codes (NISSE) on the other hand, using a larger selection margin.

- 7 More than 70 % of the companies are micro companies with less than 5 employees and more than 20 % of these companies have between 5 and 20 employees. Due to this small-scale organization, governments often have more difficulties to spot and reach construction companies. Nevertheless, present research shows that this small-scale nature can be an asset because the companies have long been well integrated into the BCR's urban fabric (see Figure 1, Map 1 and Map 2). Construction companies can even be called exemplary for the combination of housing and productive activities in the city. While, on the one hand, this proximity is an asset to provide the city with its essential needs from within, on the other hand, the residential real estate dynamics as a result of this proximity make the survival of the small-scale work premises precarious. With this article we want to draw attention to the fact that the central location of construction companies has an important added value. We advocate guaranteeing affordable and centrally located production space in the city for small-scale businesses, such as construction companies.

Figure 1. The embedding of Brussels construction companies in the dense urban fabric.
Contemporary construction company located in a historic workhouse in the Rue de Monténégro in Forest

Photo and editing by the authors in 2018.

- 8 The spatial organization of construction companies was investigated on the basis of qualitative data – obtained through interviews with building contractors – and quantitative data describing the distribution of construction companies on the BCR scale in 1965 and 2016.

- 9 For 2016, the CBE was used, selected on NACE codes 41.20 and 43 of the construction sector [FPS Economy, 2016]. NACE code 41 refers to the construction and project development of buildings. This research focuses on SMEs that carry out construction activities and not on large construction firms, developers or architects. Therefore, only subsector 41.20 – or the actual construction activity within sector 41 – is included, together with the general contractors who build and renovate homes and offices. Code 42 or the water and road infrastructure works is not included because this sector only contains large construction companies with more than 100 employees and no SMEs in the BCR. Code 43 contains the specialized construction activities such as electricity, plumbing, joinery, etc. and is fully included in the dataset. These small Brussels construction companies seem to work mainly in the small-scale private renovation sector or through subcontracting. Although no data is available on renovations in the BCR, we know that, due to their small size, Brussels construction companies are penalized in accessing public renovation projects. On the basis of the participation of construction companies in the Brussels Neighbourhood contracts, Kampelmann *et al.* [2015] show that larger companies from Wallonia and Flanders win these public contracts.
- 10 For the year 1965, these data were collected from the Almanacs of Trade and Industry. This historical comparative perspective indicates how the construction sector has organized itself differently over the past fifty years. Just like in the mid-1960s, Brussels today is characterized by population growth and a favourable economic climate, which is reflected in the intense construction activities. In 1968 the BCR had a demographic peak with 1 079 181 inhabitants [Brussels Health and Welfare Observatory, 2006]. After a sharp decrease to 948 122 inhabitants in 1996, by 2016 the BCR had grown again to 1 187 890 inhabitants, 10 % more than in 1968. During that period, the number of companies in the construction sector had decreased by 15 %, from 4 433 to 3 830 companies, while the total number of offices had increased more than tenfold [Dessouroux, 2010]. This decrease is partly caused by technological developments within the construction sector, by a change in the demand, and because Brussels is supplied by (often cheaper) construction firms from outside the BCR. But the reduced availability of centrally located and affordable workspaces also plays an important role, because it makes the production process more difficult and more expensive. Policy measures can guarantee the preservation of these workspaces.

2. Geography of Brussels construction companies

- 11 Although workspaces in the BCR were systematically mapped during the past decades, most construction companies fell off the map because registration only starts from 1 000 m² [see eg De Voghel *et al.*, 2018]. Most construction companies occupy small plots, with sizes varying from 130 m² to 520 m² as shown in Figure 2, and have an average plot area of 223 m². The statistical upper limit of the plot surface area of all construction companies is 1 050 m², which means that almost all construction companies occupy a surface smaller than the one measured.

Figure 2. Plot area of construction companies in 1965¹ and 2016 in m²

Sources: Almanacs, 1965; FPS Economy (CBE data), 2016, surface calculated using ArcGIS software on a contemporary plot map, authors' own editing.

- 12 In 2016, there were 3 830 construction companies that were widespread throughout the entire district and displayed a decentralised spatial pattern. Maps 1 and 2 show that in 1965 and in 2016, construction companies were often located in residential areas. The density of construction companies' locations, visible on Maps 3 and 4, shows that construction companies have historically been closely interwoven with the urban fabric. In general, we notice a shift to the west side of the canal. The strongly pronounced concentrations in Ixelles and Schaerbeek are clearly decreasing in size, while new ones are emerging in Anderlecht neighbourhoods and on the borderline between Jette and Koekelberg. It is striking how other city fragments in which construction companies thrive today, such as in the Rue Piers in Molenbeek, the University district in Ixelles or the Montenegro district in Forest, have a strong path dependence. The construction companies that were located in the Pentagon, on the other hand, have almost completely disappeared.

Map 1. Locations of construction companies in the BCR in 1965

Sources: Almanacs 1965, authors' own editing using ArcGIS software.

Map 2. Locations of construction companies in the BCR in 2016

Sources: FPS Economy (CBE data including Nace 41, 42 and 43), authors' own editing using ArcGIS software.²

- 13 Reasons for being located in a certain area include a thorough knowledge of the neighbourhood because one lives or works there [Hayter, 1998], with the additional factors of affordable land, the site's accessibility, and in some cases the proximity of clients. A contractor from Jette explains: "At first we were located a bit further down the street. Hence we moved here in the 1960s because the space had grown a bit too small. Why this neighbourhood? I think my father and grandfather lived close by, in Koekelberg. At the time, the neighbourhood was still quite rural, yet close to Brussels. It was probably cheap land."³ A Molenbeek building contractor says: "I lived in the neighbourhood with my parents. At the time, my father rented a piece of land from the social welfare center, there on the corner, to store his equipment. That's why I stayed in the neighbourhood." A carpenter from Jette knew the area through his job: "I more or less knew the neighbourhood. And one day, I came back from the army and when coming back at night, I saw that this area was available and that is when I really took off. During this time, Jette was not yet the centre, and therefore rental prices were low. I had modest means when I first started, so I didn't know how to afford a very large workshop".

Map 3. Construction company sites' density in the BCR in 1965⁴

Sources: Almanacs 1965, authors' own editing using ArcGIS software.

Map 4. Construction company sites' density in the BCR in 2016

Sources: FPS Economy (CBE data) 2016, authors' own editing using ArcGIS software.

- 14 In the past, family-run businesses did not have trouble finding premises, because according to the owners there was a relative abundance of affordable plots. Today, everyone indicates that it has become very difficult to find available workspace. Some construction companies are looking for other locations in Brussels, but are unable to find them. Some small building contractors even work without a workshop: “I know many entrepreneurs who don't have a workshop. They've got a van. They go to the client and work in the street with two trestles.” Others try to ask for help from regional authorities, with no success: “I'm on the SDRB⁵ [Citydev] list. Every Friday, they send me a list with all of the available shops. But there are no workshops available. [...] I've already been offered warehouses at Tour & Taxis, but I don't need a warehouse – I need a workshop. If it was just a matter of plumbing and electricity, a warehouse would be enough for the pipes and all of the electrical equipment. But as a carpenter, I have to be able to saw panels, assemble doors... [...] And in Brussels, there is nothing left at all.” A comparison in m² of the construction companies' plot surfaces in 1965 and 2016 in Figure 2 with Citydev's building stock [2018] shows that today about 10 % of the property is (partly) occupied by construction companies. The average surface of Citydev's plots (5 355 m²) is twenty times that of an average construction company (223 m²). Here, it is striking that of the forty-three construction companies that are being housed in these, most opted for small buildings that are moreover located in dense urban fabric.
- 15 While storage space is relatively easy to find according to the interviewees, combining several functional spaces is a more complicated issue: “The problem is that you need a parking space, a storage space and an office space. Many functions come together. If you want a somewhat decent surface, you will soon run out of options. You will, for

example, easily find storage space only. In Kuregem for example there is a lot of storage, relatively speaking. But it often does not come with an office function. Hence, the combination is very difficult.”

- 16 Although some building contractors indicate that the industrial parks – *les zonings* – in Flanders and Wallonia would be the ideal location for their company, the desirability of these parks is not so much related to the location of these sites but also, and especially, to their morphology. Every interviewed contractor prefers to stay in Brussels with their company. For example, a carpenter in Jette loses a lot of working time due to an inappropriate workshop and the impossibility of parking on the plot: “Compared to a workshop where you can have everything on the same floor, you lose a lot of time. Go to the front, the back, prepare everything, assemble everything, bring everything down, load everything, unload... it’s a crazy amount of time that we lose.” He indicates that he is forced to invoice those extra hours to his customers and is therefore more expensive.

3. Spatial relations of Brussels construction companies

3.1. Relationships with customers and construction sites

- 17 The construction sector’s spaces of production – the construction sites – are constantly on the move. Therefore, building companies do not only value having their own, city-based premises and the typological advantages and disadvantages of this space, but also the way in which they spatially organise themselves in the public spaces of the city.
- 18 Since the 1960s, the nature of the construction companies’ work has changed significantly. The (small-scale) new-build market got largely saturated by the demographic stagnation, the number of plots available for new build decreased, and new-build came into the hands of a few large construction companies. Meanwhile, the importance of renovation and maintenance work increased, which meant that construction companies had to be able to access any part of the city at all times. Various building contractors indicate that the city’s current traffic jams and parking problems are a major challenge. Transportation costs have increased sharply between the 1960s and today, not because of long distances, but because of the time it takes to travel short distances and the associated personnel costs. Due to the heavy traffic, it takes longer to get to a construction site and finding and organizing parking spaces is no easy task. In addition to the enormous pressure on parking space, due to residential densification, construction companies are confronted with decentralized parking regulations and the absence of digital payment systems. Small-scale construction companies experience similar parking problems near their own business premises. This applies in particular to companies that cannot park their fleet on their own plot, and especially in neighbourhoods that are experiencing an increase in population and a corresponding residential densification.
- 19 If a company’s premises are large enough to park work vehicles on-site, however, Brussels turns out to be an advantageous base for construction companies. Extra transport costs caused by traffic jams in Brussels are high, but still pale in comparison to transport costs involved in entering the city [Vermeersch, 2019]. For example, a building contractor from Jette indicates: “Traffic jam? You can’t solve that problem by

moving outside the city. We had a warehouse in Ternat for 24 years because we had a large lot there. But in the end I sold it because the traffic jams between the E40 and Brussels became so huge. We wasted way too much time. Now we order from suppliers and we have a warehouse here.” Or, as a Molenbeek building contractor points out: “I found the location in Brussels good. To get around, to get out of Brussels, to enter... this is how I ended up staying here. My goal was not to go to an industrial area. I wanted to stay in Brussels because the majority of my clients were in Brussels, and they still are.”

3.2. Relationships with suppliers

- 20 Brussels construction companies operate on a small scale. This means that they are not only spatially well embedded in the residential tissue, but according to interviews they are territorially well embedded as well, given their relationships with construction material suppliers ⁶. With a few exceptions, these suppliers are all located in the BCR. The morphology of the site and the accessibility of the supplier are important to the construction companies. Building contractors indicate that they save a lot of time if there are sufficient parking spaces and enough space for loading and unloading.

Figure 3. Until recently, a hundred-year-old structure functioned as a timber trade. Wood trade François Lochten in the Rue des Côteaux in Schaerbeek

Photo and editing by the authors in 2018.

- 21 Moreover, relationships with suppliers that are based on trust are as important to the organisation of the production process in the construction sector [Buzzelli and Harris, 2006]. A carpenter says, “The advantage I have is that the boss trusts me. That means that I can go into the shop, take what I need, put it all in my van, pass by the office, say what I've got and that's it. I don't have this advantage elsewhere. I'm the customer like everyone else – I wait my turn, I wait for service and I wait to pay.” These relationships based on trust also have spatial implications. On the one hand, entrepreneurs sometimes travel greater distances because they have a good relationship with a

supplier on the other side of – and in exceptional cases even outside – the city. A carpenter from Ixelles indicates that he works with suppliers in Forest, Molenbeek, Jette and Mechelen. On the other hand, relationships of trust also often take place at the neighbourhood level. The interviews show that this was not only the case in the 1960s, but that these relationships are still common today. Although you can find the same product at a better price further down the road, entrepreneurs often choose to shop locally: “Although certain products are sometimes a little more expensive, the shop is in my neighbourhood. I don't want to spend an hour on the road just to buy a panel that costs a little less.”

- 22 The territorial anchoring of the relationships between building contractors and their suppliers is under pressure. Company owners explain that trust-based relationships disappear because suppliers are systemically acquired by multinationals: “In the past, we had our regular suppliers, companies with an owner like me, whom we knew personally and were on pretty good terms with. Now they are all big boxes. Just name me a construction materials manufacturer that is not owned by a large international company. You will not find many more. We have a more casual relationship with them. We also shop hither and thither.”
- 23 Moreover, more and more suppliers are disappearing from the city. Because of their large claims on space, they are very susceptible to the prevailing real estate dynamics, with rising land and rental prices leading to “lofting” – a systematic conversion of industrial into residential space, also known as industrial or commercial gentrification [Curran, 2010; Wolf-Powers, 2005]. Building contractors, and especially suppliers with a large spatial footprint, perceive this development as a threat to the survival of their company. Owners of larger lots are concerned about being expropriated by Citydev as their lots are ideal for residential developments. Owners are also concerned about not finding a successor and fear that they will be forced to sell to a property developer. Tenants are concerned that their contract will not be renewed. A timber trading company in Schaerbeek, for example, had to close after almost one hundred years because the owner found it more lucrative to sell the land to a real estate developer [Degraeve, De Boeck and Vandyck, 2018; Vandyck and Degraeve, 2019]. Relocating the business activity to a different location is anything but self-evident. Within Brussels, the available workspace is becoming increasingly scarce due to the same trend. When moving outside of Brussels, there is concern that customers will not follow. The timber trading company in Schaerbeek that we mentioned spent a long time looking for a new location, to no avail, but would not consider a property outside Brussels: “If you move, clients don’t always follow, you know. [...] If my husband asks our customers whether they would follow, they say no.”

3.3. Relationships with workers

- 24 The construction sector has always been characterised by a high mobility of construction workers [Martini, 2016]. When demand is high, like in the 1960s [Versichelen, 1969] and today, it leads to a persistent shortage of workers in the construction industry and a permanent need for an influx of construction workers. As soon as new means of transport allowed for it, there was a sizeable commuting and (seasonal) migration flow from a low-skilled labour surplus to growth poles with a great demand for their cheap labour. As the reach of these means of transport

expanded, so did the geographic scale of labour migration. A well-developed (regional) railway network around Brussels ensured that as early as 1910, no less than 31,7 % of the 16 400 construction workers employed in the Brussels agglomeration at that time lived outside the city, especially in the surrounding Brabant villages [Scholliers, 1990]. The trade and industry census of 1961 shows that 56 % of the 45 741 workers employed by Brussels construction companies came from outside the city [NIS, 1967]. For the construction sector, this number was much higher than the general average of 32,4 % of the total Brussels employment executed by commuter workers in 1961 [NIS, 1967].⁷ Today, there is an opposite trend, with Brussels construction companies employing only 30 % commuters from outside the BCR. We suspect that this is partly due to the increased flexibilization and precarization of the construction profession, the strong tendency towards self-employment [De Boeck, Bassens and Ryckewaert, 2019], and the large number of non-Brussels construction companies that may or may not work as subcontractors. The number of companies from Flanders and Wallonia working on Brussels construction sites is difficult to quantify. There is, however, data on posted work and on the access of larger Flemish and Walloon companies to public renovation projects (see reference to [Kampelmann *et al.*, 2015], in the introduction). After all, the need for unskilled and low-skilled construction workers is largely met through intra-EU posted jobs⁸ through labour migration on a continental scale. De Wispelaere and Pacolet [2017] indicate that, for Belgium, 30 % of posted construction jobs should be added to the official employment figures. However, for the BCR, the numbers requested from the National Social Security Office [2018] indicate that it amounts to an extra 75 % (!). The interviewed Brussels building contractors indicate that this practice leads to an unsustainable price competition with companies that work with intra-EU posted jobs.

Conclusion

- 25 The construction sector remains an important player in the urban economy, for new-build, renovation and maintenance work. Moreover, it is a sector that creates local employment. This research shows that the way in which construction companies organize themselves spatially in the city plays an important role in the struggle to remain competitive. Construction companies are constantly looking for flexible adaptation strategies to organize work more efficiently and productively. However, the number of construction companies declined sharply between 1965 and 2016. In addition to technological innovation, changes in the production process and a constantly changing demand, all characteristic of the development of a sector, this is mainly due to the insufficient availability of centrally located and affordable business space.
- 26 Viewed from the “chain value” perspective and confirmed by the interviews, small-scale and centrally located production space plays a crucial role in the construction sector's production processes. We see that in a strongly regulated and competitive real estate market where residential functions and offices are financially more attractive than production space, the latter systematically loses out. This means that if production – in this case the construction industry – is to be maintained in the city, small-scale affordable production space will have to be preserved. Below we make a number of concrete proposals for urban authorities to continue to guarantee small-scale production space for construction companies.

- 27 The analysis of the construction companies' geography reveals the need for the government to also map production areas smaller than 1 000 m². Entire sectors with a small and/or fragmented use of space – such as the construction sector – are virtually invisible to policymakers and it is precisely those sectors that benefit from a policy tailored to their concrete needs.
- 28 When we look at production space from the perspective of chain value, an intervention in the ground rent mechanisms becomes important to both safeguard this space and to keep it affordable. This applies on the one hand to the workshops and warehouses of urban construction companies, but also and especially to suppliers who find it difficult to establish themselves in Brussels with a large-scale space claim. The potential disappearance of these actors from the urban fabric puts the territorial anchoring of the entire production network under pressure. In this context, the government can play an important role in implementing strategies to “freeze” real estate dynamics in some places and to counteract expropriations of production space.
- 29 Today, private production space is almost invariably converted into residential space, causing it to disappear from the city at great speed. Strategies to safeguard this private production space would be possible through a licensing policy that limits conversion options. This may be accompanied by an extensive typological research that assesses which types of buildings need parking space on their own site, and/or where loading and unloading is accessible. Design strategies can focus on how sites can be developed in a polyvalent way and accommodate multiple functions. Building contractors are looking for locations that can accommodate all parts of the functioning of a construction company such as storage space, workshop space, office, parking and loading and unloading...
- 30 As far as public production space is concerned, the government can expand and diversify its heritage of centrally located production assets. The affordability of workspaces can be monitored through low rents and/or through leasehold systems, which means that small companies will continue to be able to settle in Brussels. Contrary to current location strategies in the periphery, Citydev could buy and/or build more small-scale production space in the inner city, manage these spaces and implement a logic of chain value in its purchasing policy in addition to a logic of property development. The first successful experiments with the development of micro-production space with workshops around 100 m² of the Newton II project already show the potential of such initiatives.

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NOTES

1. The 1965 address points were projected on a 2016 parcel map, due to the unavailability of the 1965 parcel map. An IQR (interquartile range) was set up to filter the implausible values from the database. For 1965 the IQR is 193 m², the median value is 182 m². For 2016, the IQR is 390 m², the median value is 224 m². It can therefore be concluded that the spread increases considerably.
2. The CBE data is linked to the construction companies' enterprise number - and thus to the registered office or the place where the company is registered. The data in the CBE database is not linked one to one to the space used by these companies. On the one hand, this means that the CBE database does not show some addresses that are currently used by construction companies, but that are located in Flanders or in Wallonia. An example is a company that is located in the western Flemish Periphery, but which has a large site for the storage of containers and a vehicle and machine park to carry out its construction activity on the eastern edge of the Brussels Region. On the other hand, it means that at some addresses there is no construction activity, because the company, for example a sole trader, is registered at the home address. In some cases industrial space is used elsewhere in Brussels that is not visible in the CBE data.
3. Research in the trade almanacs confirms that this family of building contractors has repeatedly resettled in close proximity to their existing base, thus in a trusted environment where existing relationships with customers, suppliers, etc. could be maintained. In 1946 the grandfather of the current manager appears for the first time in Molenbeek. By 1953 he is in Koekelberg. In 1954 he moved a few streets further to Jette, and finally in 1965, he moves again a little further down the same street, where the company is still located.
4. A hotspot analysis (getis-ordi gi* method in ArcGIS software) was performed on both datasets (2016 and 1965) in order to obtain an indication of the geographical zones housing high concentrations of construction activity and that are surrounded by similar neighbourhoods. For each coordinate in a Cartesian grid, a value "GiZScore" was calculated based on the number of construction companies around this point. That value is high or low and respectively implies a hot or a cold spot. Via the standard deviation "Std. dev." on this value, the hotspots become visible on the map. The cold spots and insignificant spots were omitted to make the map of hot spots readable (> 1.7 Std dev.).
5. SDRB or GOMB, Citydev's former name.
6. Although it is not exclusively about construction companies, this finding is indirectly confirmed by the Port of Brussels annual survey, in which companies are asked about their

collaboration with Brussels and non-Brussels suppliers [Brussels Employment Observatory, 2016]. The survey shows that companies up to 20 employees established on port grounds are more territorially anchored. The larger the company – measured on the basis of employee numbers – the less use is made of Brussels suppliers.

7. The 1961 census indicates that only 20 296 people, living in one of the 19 Brussels municipalities, were employed in the construction industry [NIS, 1967]. According to Versichelen [1969], 25,9 % of the interviewed Belgian structural workers indicated that they travel to work by car, while the industry census of 1961 indicates that only 14,1 % of the total active population travel to work by car.

8. A posted job is a job carried out by a person who has his domicile address in a European country and who comes to work in Belgium through a system of mobile labor migration. The social contribution is paid in the country of residence. In addition to the price advantage of a cheaper social contribution for the employer, these posted employees also appear to work more hours per week for the same wage, often under bogus self-employment statutes and in abominable working and living conditions (see also: De Boeck, Bassens and Ryckewaert [2019]).

ABSTRACTS

While productive activities are high on the academic and political agenda of the Brussels-Capital Region (BCR), small-scale production space is still rapidly disappearing. Based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative data, this article sketches a historical comparative perspective on the spatial organization of small and medium-sized construction companies in the BCR. It shows that in both 1965 and 2016 construction companies have a scattered distribution pattern over the Region's built-up area, that they follow the Region's built-up expansions and that they have a strong path dependence. The interviewed entrepreneurs, mainly focused on renovation, are locally anchored and work mainly with local customers, employees and suppliers. Although the construction companies' central location and local anchoring offer an important added value to the BCR, their presence is under pressure and, due to their small-scale organization, they often stay invisible to the authorities. In order to continue to guarantee small-scale economic activities such as the construction sector in the city, this article argues for a spatial policy that provides affordable and centrally located production space.

Alors que les activités productives occupent une place importante dans l'agenda académique et politique de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale (RBC), l'espace de production à petite échelle continue à disparaître à un rythme accéléré. Sur la base d'une combinaison de données quantitatives et qualitatives, cet article esquisse une perspective comparative historique quant à l'organisation spatiale des petites et moyennes entreprises de construction en RBC. Il en ressort qu'en 1965 et 2016, les entreprises de construction ont un schéma de distribution dispersé sur la superficie construite de la Région, qu'elles suivent l'expansion de la construction dans la Région et qu'elles connaissent une forte dépendance au sentier. Les entrepreneurs interrogés, axés principalement sur la rénovation, sont ancrés localement et travaillent principalement avec des clients, des employés et des fournisseurs locaux. Bien que la situation centrale et l'ancrage local des entreprises de construction aient une importante valeur ajoutée pour la RBC, leur présence est sous pression et, en raison de leur organisation à petite échelle, elles sont souvent invisibles aux yeux des autorités. Afin de continuer à garantir des activités économiques à petite échelle

telles que celles du secteur de la construction dans la ville, cet article plaide pour une politique spatiale offrant un espace de production abordable et situé au centre.

Terwijl productieve activiteiten hoog op de academische en politieke agenda staan van het Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest (BHG), verdwijnt kleinschalige productieruimte nog steeds aan een snel tempo. Aan de hand van een combinatie van kwantitatieve en kwalitatieve data schetst dit artikel een historisch vergelijkend perspectief op de ruimtelijke organisatie van kleine en middelgrote bouwbedrijven in het BHG. Hieruit blijkt dat bouwbedrijven zowel in 1965 als in 2016 een verspreid distributiepatroon hebben over de bebouwde oppervlakte van het gewest, dat ze de bebouwde uitbreidingen van het gewest volgen en dat ze een sterke padafhankelijkheid kennen. De geïnterviewde ondernemers, vooral werkzaam in renovatie, zijn lokaal verankerd en werken voornamelijk met lokale klanten, werknemers en leveranciers. Hoewel de centrale ligging en lokale verankering van bouwbedrijven een belangrijke meerwaarde heeft voor het BHG staat hun aanwezigheid onder druk en zijn ze door hun kleinschalige organisatie vaak onzichtbaar voor overheden. Om kleinschalige bedrijvigheid zoals de bouwsector in de stad te blijven garanderen, pleit dit artikel voor een ruimtelijk beleid dat voorziet in betaalbare en centraal gelegen productieruimte.

INDEX

Keywords: town planning, economic development, regional policy, territorial development, urban planning, real estate market

Subjects: 6. économie – emploi

Trefwoorden economische ontwikkeling, gewestelijk beleid, stadsplanning, stedelijke infrastructuur, stedenbouw, territoriale ontwikkeling, vastgoedmarkt

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