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Refuse of the city: rethinking waste management in Brussels

Les détritus de la ville : repenser la gestion des déchets à Bruxelles
Afval van de stad: nood aan een hervorming van het Brusselse afvalbeheer

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EDITOR'S NOTE

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

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1. Cureghem: a “rubbish neighbourhood”

1 Street cleanliness is ranked high among the problems pointed out by the inhabitants of Brussels, Belgium with respect to their neighbourhoods [Mincke, 2010]. The poor state of certain parts of the city often leaves visitors and inhabitants of the capital of Europe perplexed and dismayed. This is the case in particular for the residents of the poor area of the city – the working-class neighbourhoods in the municipalities of Anderlecht, Molenbeek, Schaerbeek and Saint-Josse – who have long been dissatisfied with the cleanliness of the immediate surroundings of their dwellings [IBSA, n.d.]. Low levels of street cleanliness impact the quality of the living environment, hamper the attempts to create more socially mixed neighbourhoods and social cohesion, and are commonly

linked to other forms of disorder and crime [see Hastings, 2007; Hastings *et al.*, 2009]. In the working-class neighbourhoods of Brussels, the low level of cleanliness of the public space amounts to other forms of segregation and social problems – such as access to proper education and employment – amplifying the lack of public service provision [Vandermotten, 2014].

2 Cureghem, in Anderlecht, is one such neighbourhood, presenting the typical features of a disadvantaged urban area: the population density is double the regional average; the unemployment rate for young people is 10 per cent higher; the average surface area per dwelling is 60 m^2 compared to 74 m^2 at regional level; and 40 per cent of the total population are of foreign origin, a number which does not include people without resident status or people of foreign origin who have obtained the Belgian nationality [IBSA, *Monitoring des Quartiers*]. Like neighbourhoods in other cities in the western world, Cureghem is a former working-class neighbourhood which still bears the marks of decades of disinvestment and political abandonment following the de-industrialisation process of the 1970s [Kesteloot and Meert, 1999; Mistiaen *et al.*, 1995; Sacco, 2010]. The built environment consists of a mix of cramped living quarters, terraced brick houses (often divided into flats), workshops, businesses and warehouses, which have been gradually emptied and occupied by newcomers and people with immigrant backgrounds often in precarious situations.

3 Historically, Cureghem has been a place of "arrival" and "transition" for immigrant people in Brussels for different reasons. Property rentals are relatively cheap and lease contracts are easy to obtain [Chabrol and Rozenholc, 2015]. The vibrant neighbourhood economy and ethnic entrepreneurship – centred on the second-hand car market, the Anderlecht market and abattoir and the textile "triangle" – offer job opportunities for low-skilled people [Orban *et al.*, 2021]. Migrants can also find other valuable socio-cultural reference points, such as the presence of members of their community in businesses and associations and access to places of worship. For those reasons, Cureghem also attracts people who live in other neighbourhoods. This being said, people generally settle here with a short-term perspective, as they tend to move to other neighbourhoods which offer better housing conditions and buying opportunities [Grippa *et al.*, 2015; Van der Linden *et al.*, n.d.]. This results in a very frequent turnover of the local population [Van Hamme *et al.*, 2016].

4 To varying degrees, the inhabitants and public officials feel that the frequent moving, coupled with the concentration of wholesale and retail shops and the many visitors, is at the origin of the rubbish heaps which are visible at all times throughout the neighbourhood. In addition to house removals which generate the need to get rid of bulky household furniture and appliances which are often left on pavements, at crossroads and in squares, businesses discard large volumes of residual waste, wooden pallets, plastic crates and packaging of all sorts, and car maintenance in public spaces results in spillage and debris, etc. To this must be added the alleged negligence of inhabitants who do not respect or are not familiar with the waste regulations, as well as the people from outside the neighbourhood who are said to take advantage of the situation and dump their rubbish there. In this context, the inhabitants of the neighbourhood regularly express via social media and local newspapers the feeling of living in a dump and of being abandoned by the public authorities [Deffet, 2018]. There have basically been two proposals to address the waste problem in the neighbourhood and elsewhere in Brussels: to put more litter bins and recycling bins in the street, and

to increase controls and sanctions for those who do not respect the rules. Ultimately, the waste problem is dismissed as a lack of civic mindedness by the local population and a lack of control by the local administration in a rather patronising way.

5 Recognising that there is potentially more than control and sanctions at stake here, this paper provides an interpretation of the waste problem in Brussels and an in-depth analysis of the case of Chaussée de Mons, a main shopping street in Cureghem, with an abundance of ethnic restaurants, bars and greengrocers, where rubbish accumulation is largely attributed to the vibrant commercial activity. This work therefore focuses in particular on commercial waste, which has recently received increased attention in research in Brussels [Godart and Strale, 2019]. It is based on information collected through document review and fieldwork conducted in the framework of transdisciplinary research for more than a year between October 2019 and December 2020 by a group composed of an architect/researcher, two social workers trained in sociology and anthropology, and an intercultural mediator/translator [Dessouroux *et al.*, 2021]. To gain insight into waste handling strategies and practices in this particular street, we met and interviewed two public officials and 11 local shopkeepers. Moreover, we organised a one-day workshop with more than 30 people among public stakeholders, shopkeepers and experts, to redefine the waste issue and discuss possible solutions together.

6 This paper is organised as follows: the next section reviews the literature on the relationships between neighbourhood context, the state of cleanliness and the need for service provision to be adapted. Section 3 offers an overview of current waste collection services and regulations in Brussels and how they translate into practice. Section 4 provides insight into the case of Chaussée de Mons, highlighting the specificities and emphasising individual and makeshift solutions. Section 5 concludes by exploring the measures which emerge in the perspective of reorganising the waste service in this particular area and the ideas for more spatially sensitive urban waste management in Brussels.

2. Poor neighbourhoods, poor cleanliness

7 It is a common observation that poor neighbourhoods tend to receive poor or inadequate public services with respect to the challenges they face in terms of littering, and more generally in public space maintenance. Why this happens is less clear. Urban studies literature focusing on the question of whether there is a structural bias in public service provision towards poor (in the UK) or black neighbourhoods (in the US), assumes that there are groups with greater resources, such as money, influence and information, which dominate political decisions in specific localities usually at the expense of ethnically diverse, poorer and less educated groups [Harvey, 2009; Pellow, 2002]. A more nuanced perspective suggests that it is the combination of intensity and concentration of demand for public service provision (schools, jobs, social services, street lightening, rubbish collection, etc.) which makes it more challenging to meet the demand in these neighbourhoods, despite additional efforts and resources which might be abundant there [Duffy, 2000]. Looking more in detail into street cleaning in some poor neighbourhoods in the UK, [Hastings, 2007, 2009] points out some intertwined physical and social characteristics which can explain the poor outcomes of service provision.

8 High housing density, the absence of gardens, the presence of vacant land and abandoned buildings are some of the physical characteristics which entail a higher risk of poor cleanliness [Hastings, 2007]. The latter is related to the "nature" of open space, where places with unclear ownership and unclear boundaries are more likely to become spaces for waste accumulation [see also Yatmo *et al.*, 2013]. The former is associated with smaller homes and thus less storage capacity for recyclables and less opportunities to store bulky refuse, resulting in more pressure on ordinary refuse collection. The suitability of household waste recycling schemes for specific locations and socio-spatial conditions is also discussed by Glad [2018] and Bulkeley and Gregson [2009]. Inner city terraced houses and social housing, for instance, usually have lower recycling rates than other types of property [Hellwig *et al.*, 2019].

9 As the occupants of these properties are often people with immigrant backgrounds, ethnic minorities are often reported to recycle less than the rest of the population according to official statistics [Robinson *et al.*, 2013]. Moreover, newcomers can encounter difficulties in becoming familiar with municipal regulations in the cities of arrival and in complying with household waste regulations, as they might not understand the language or might not even be able to read [Hellwig *et al.*, 2019].

10 This connects with demographic characteristics indicated by Hastings [2007] which are associated with more complex challenges such as high unemployment rates, the concentration of children and a young population and low average incomes. Higher levels of economic inactivity entail increased daily routines in the neighbourhood, resulting in more rubbish, litter and wear and tear of the public space. The density of children and youth also entails more gatherings of young people and more "unpleasant" refuse (e.g. nappies). Lower incomes are associated with the tendency to purchase less expensive and durable goods and thus with the generation of more bulk refuse to dispose of, which, coupled with lower levels of car ownership, results in increased reliance on public services for its removal.

11 In addition to the adaptation of service provision through the establishment of public figures appointed as neighbourhood managers, as seen in England [Power, 2004], extensive literature exists on the co-production of public services through the involvement and participation of non-state stakeholders – individuals, associations and businesses – which has proven effective in adapting the service provision to local variations and budgetary constraints [Ostrom, 1996; Joshi and Moore, 2004; Mitlin, 2008]. Co-production in waste management ranges from the shift from back-door pickup to kerbside collection, to the inclusion of informal waste pickers and recycling cooperatives in waste collection [Gutberlet, 2015; Ezeudu *et al.*, 2020]. The former requires residents to place their garbage bins at the kerb on collection days to save time and the number of staff required during collection rounds [Whitaker, 1980], while the latter fills the gaps in the official service provision and material recovery capacity. Awareness raising (e.g. about waste minimisation, separation, remuneration) and user participation through continuous dialogue with stakeholders in waste management are essential elements in order to enable users to understand the system and behave accordingly, as well as to adapt the system to users' needs [Ordoñez *et al.*, 2017, Hellwig *et al.*, 2019].

12 Cureghem and Chaussée de Mons present most of the aforementioned socio-spatial characteristics, which can explain the poor outcomes of service provision, along with the vibrant commercial life due to the central location and good connection to public

services. The question therefore remains as to how the waste collection and street cleaning service is organised in Brussels and what hypotheses exist to explain its dysfunction in Cureghem. In order to shed light on the question, the next section provides a brief outline of waste regulation and collection services in Brussels. It highlights the subtle distinction which exists between household and commercial waste service provision, and the fragmentation of responsibilities among public authorities involved in service provision, particularly in more challenging urban areas.

3. Waste governance and regulation in Brussels

13 ARP is the regional waste agency responsible for household waste collection in the Brussels-Capital Region. The agency provides conventional solid waste management with the periodic collection of waste at the source (through door-to-door collection of rubbish bags, individual containers and disposal sites) with a basic sorting system for recyclables and the incineration of the remaining amount with the recovery of energy. ARP also offers a similar pay service for businesses. Indeed, since 2013, it has been mandatory for companies of any size to sign a waste collection contract, either with ARP or a private contractor (e.g. Renewi, Veolia, etc.). Nevertheless, at the time of this study, the public operator offered highly competitive prices and provided the service for the majority of small- and medium-sized business activities in the city. In 2017, an association of private waste operators took the agency to court with the allegation that it was using state funds to lower prices artificially in the competitive market of non-domestic waste. As a result, the court of first instance ordered the suspension of the payment of part of the subsidies to the agency [*Gouvernement de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale*, 2020], which led to an abrupt reduction in the service of cardboard collection for businesses in 2020.

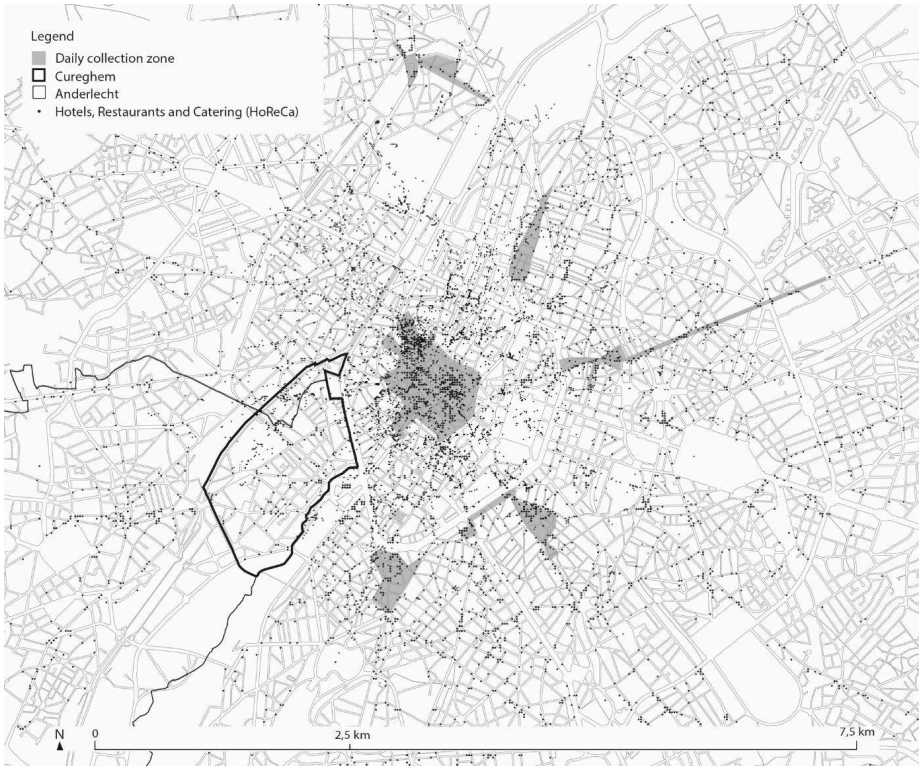
14 The obligation for the separate collection of household waste has been introduced gradually since 2005 in the Brussels Capital-Region, and includes glass bottles, paper and cardboard, aluminium and plastic containers and garden waste. Residual waste, paper, aluminium and plastic and garden waste are sorted and collected using coloured-coded bags which must be placed along the façade of the property as of the night before the collection rounds, which take place twice a week (for residual waste) and once a week (for recyclables). Since 2013, the obligation has also been extended gradually to include the commercial sector, so that the two systems – domestic and commercial – are now basically the same. The only aspect which differs in the service provided by ARP is the use of plastic bags of different colours for residual waste. Household waste is disposed of using a white bag, and commercial waste, a pink one. This differentiation was meant to enable better monitoring of commercial waste and implement a "pay-as-you-throw" system for shopkeepers, so that they pay according to the actual amount of waste produced instead of paying a fixed sum through taxes as households do. Unlike conventional household bags which are easily found in supermarkets and grocers at a low price, bags for businesses must be ordered in advance exclusively from the agency at a higher price, in quantities deemed necessary for the retailers' needs as agreed in their contract.

15 Ultimately, the fact that bags are the same for both sectors except for residual waste and, most importantly, that the collection rounds take place at the same time for households and businesses (unless otherwise agreed, with additional costs), makes it

difficult to distinguish who the rubbish bags belong to once they are left in the street. Moreover, commercial and residential bags are mixed during collection, making it difficult to produce separate statistics regarding the two flows [Godart and Strale, 2019]. In this confusion, it is easy for businesses to get rid of their refuse using household bags, either to avoid additional costs or simply because they have run out and have to contact the agency to order more. This seems to be a widespread practice which is not truly addressed by the public agency, as confirmed by official statistics on the low recycling rates among businesses (21 %) compared to households (41 %). This also highlights the gap which exists in Brussels between the waste agenda – which includes ambitious recycling and prevention targets (such as the ban on single-use plastic bags across the region) – and the messy reality of practices.

16 While the collection frequency for residual waste is twice a week for the region as a whole, some very specific areas benefit from a privileged status, where commercial waste (pink bags) is collected daily from Monday to Saturday. These areas were defined at the request of the HoReCa sector (hotels and restaurants) – which claimed that it was impossible to keep refuse inside their premises according to the collection cycles due to the high flow of customers – and correspond to the core of the historic centre as well as a few commercial hotspots located in the inner ring (*première couronne)*. Nevertheless, together these areas cover just a minimal proportion of the entire region, and they are located mainly near the more affluent neighbourhoods in the east of the city [Fig.1]

Figure 1. Location of Cureghem and the daily commercial waste collection areas in Brussels



Source: UrbIS; Atrium; ARP, 2019. Elaborated by the author, 2020

17 The official polyethylene rubbish bags of a 30, 60 and 100 l capacity are the main means for sorting and collecting waste in Brussels for both households and businesses. Yet rubbish bags often prove to be unable to retain their contents – liquids and organic

waste in particular – as they are often torn by use, by people looking for scraps[1] or by animals looking for food, leading to spills, overflows and the transformation of rubbish into litter. Moreover, there is a parallel market for rubbish bags which are similar to the official ones but which are of worse quality and tear more easily. As reported by a public official in Anderlecht:

18 "We have a lot of problems with white bags in the sense that they tear or someone tears them... When I look at the bags, I even see the rubbish inside because the plastic is so thin. I spoke to ARP's plastic bag supplier about it. I told him that there is a parallel market and he showed me an official roll of bags and the plastic seemed thicker. So when ARP goes through our streets they are dirty. Instead of being clean, the streets are dirty."

19 As regards the street cleaning service, ARP shares the responsibility with other public stakeholders and the cleanliness services of the 19 municipalities of Brussels in a rather complex manner: the agency operates the cleaning service – road sweeping and emptying of litter bins – for the main roads under regional competence and the sites of the public transport network (e.g. bus and trams stops), whereas the municipalities are responsible for the cleanliness of all other roads, including the removal of bulky waste and waste from fly-tipping. This service is provided according to the availability of resources, and as the Brussels municipalities are not always able to guarantee it, the service is often provided by private companies [Nassaux, 2012]. ARP's cleaning service is provided at different frequencies depending on the workload, although daily cleaning service is supposed to be provided throughout the week for the more crowded urban areas such as tourist and commercial areas or near train stations [Brussels-Capital Region, 2013].

20 All of this highlights two issues which we believe are fundamental in the discussion about why the waste collection service is not optimal in some of the city's most challenging neighbourhoods. Firstly, the unclear separation between the domestic and commercial service contributes to making it more difficult to target and adapt the service according to the demand in neighbourhoods where the high population density already puts a strain on the collection service. Secondly, the division of competences and specialised services between the region and the municipalities, as well as within the municipalities themselves, proves to be ineffective as regards the provision of an equally distributed service on a regional scale. The many different departments with their own staff working in specific geographical areas and sectors which do not necessarily share a common agenda results in a bouncing of responsibilities between public authorities and operators when it comes to adapting services in the most problematic areas. This fact leads to regional enclaves with poor service, accepted as a matter of fact by public officials, which often blame the waste problem on cultural rather than structural issues.

21 In light of this, it is possible to understand the waste problem in Cureghem through the lens of "advanced marginality", a notion used to describe the combination of neoliberal exclusion and stigmatisation of urban places in the context of the reduction of the welfare state in advanced economies [McFarlane and Silver, 2017; Wacquant, 2008]. Cureghem is a territorial enclave peripheral to its municipality (Anderlecht), with a small part of it falling under the jurisdiction of a neighbouring municipality (Molenbeek) for a handful of house numbers (as the administrative boundary is drawn over an ancient and buried watercourse), and with a road under regional competence

running through it (Chaussée de Mons). These many layers of bureaucracy (the so-called Belgian “administrative lasagna”) translates into governmental and management drawbacks. Such conditions and the blurred boundaries of responsibility, combined with the frequent turnover of the local population, affect both individual waste-related practices and the efficiency of the public service provision in this area.

22 The next sections examine the case of Chaussée de Mons in Cureghem, investigating users’ attitudes towards the waste system and the hypotheses which arise in the context of the search for a solution to the waste problem in this particular street.

4. The case of Chaussée de Mons

23 We conducted fieldwork in Chaussée de Mons from January to June 2020 with the aim to understand which problems arise in the context of rubbish accumulation in this particular street, and reflect on possible improvements in the service provision based on the experience of end users. The study focuses on a 600-meter stretch of road between Porte d'Anderlecht and Clemenceau metro station, where there is a concentration of commercial activities. The street has two lanes with a dedicated lane for public transport which alternates in both directions. Both sides of the street have continuous rows of parking, sparse tree lines, narrow pavements and curtain walls of multi-storey blocks of flats of different heights, with commercial ground floors interrupted by warehouses and garages [Fig. 2, 3 and 4]. The road is an entry point to the municipality of Anderlecht and a main mobility axis to and from the city centre. The largest market in Brussels, which attracts up to 100 000 visitors every weekend, also has an entrance along Chaussée de Mons.

Figure 2. Chaussée de Mons in Cureghem prior to waste collection, 9 June 2020

Photo: Vital Marage

Figure 3. Chaussée de Mons in Cureghem prior to waste collection, 9 June 2020

Photo: Vital Marage

Figure 4. Chaussée de Mons in Cureghem

Source: UrbIS, Syncity team's field survey, 2019. Elaborated by the author, 2020

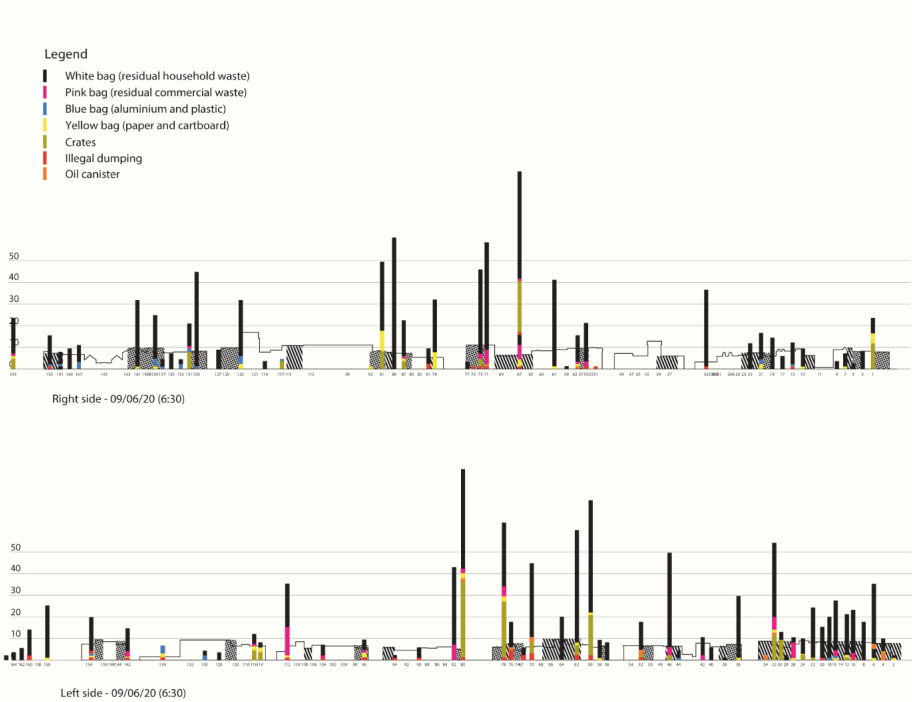
24 During our fieldwork, we addressed Syrian shopkeepers in particular for two main reasons: primarily because they represent a fairly recent group of newcomers who have contributed to revitalising the commercial life in Chaussée de Mons, opening pastry shops, greengrocers and restaurants within a few years under the impulse of few entrepreneurial families. Recently, their arrival and integration in the neighbourhood has been the focus of activities conducted by the intercultural mediators of the municipality of Anderlecht. The support from intercultural mediators is key to overcoming language barriers due to a lack of proficiency of newcomers in the two official languages of the Brussels-Capital Region (French and Dutch). The second reason is that they raised the issue of a lack of cleanliness when the research group asked them about their satisfaction with the neighbourhood.

25 Clearly, this is not a "representative sample" of the huge diversity of the neighbourhood, and one should be cautious about making generalisations regarding waste-related practices in Cureghem based on a small group. However, Syrian shopkeepers produce considerable amounts of waste and their image suffers most due to the rubbish piling up in the street. As such, they represent potential agents for change.

26 To gain a more detailed understanding of the waste issue in this particular street, we went on site early in the morning prior to waste collection rounds to count rubbish bags. This procedure included noting on a map of the street the number, type and location of rubbish bags, as well as any other type of waste (stacks of baskets and cardboard boxes, oil containers, etc.) and illegal waste dumping. The results of this

operation have been translated into maps to facilitate the visual understanding of the location, quantity and type of rubbish bags found in the street [Fig. 5].

Figure 5. Examples of waste quantification (number of bags) counted along both sides of Chaussée de Mons with an indication of the location of businesses



Source: sample from 9 June 2020 (elaborated by the author)

27 The field survey showed that the vast majority of rubbish bags disposed of in the street are white bags of mixed household waste, followed in terms of volume by stacks of cardboard boxes produced by packaged food wholesalers and retailers, and crates of various shapes and materials (plastic, polystyrene, wood) discarded by greengrocers and fishmongers. We counted few pink bags (for shopkeepers) and blue bags (for plastic and aluminium), whereas we noticed the recurring presence of all types of litter and occasionally some bulky household waste such as mattresses, sofas, chairs and refrigerators. The map shows a higher accumulation of waste in one part of the street with a higher concentration of shops and a higher population density, and some peaks in accumulation around the central crossroads of Rue de Liverpool and Rue Dr de Meersman, an area which functions as a small commercial square. However, our survey did not allow us to determine with certainty who the refuse belonged to, i.e. shopkeepers, their customers or the inhabitants.

28 A recurring issue when dealing with waste flows is the lack of reliable data on quality and quantity, either because they are simply not available or because they are covered by business secrecy [MacBride, 2011]. Yet, the lack of reliable data leads to hasty and unsupported conclusions regarding the causes of the waste problem which in turn have an impact on solutions proposed by policy- and decision-makers. At first, the lack of regular waste collection contracts among shopkeepers was cited by municipal stakeholders as the main reason for the accumulation of waste in Chaussée de Mons.

This is a problem faced by the municipality in the recent past, as demonstrated by the control activities carried out in 2018 and 2019 in collaboration with ARP to sort out shopkeepers who had not yet fulfilled this administrative obligation. To shed light on the subject, we conducted interviews with 11 Syrian shopkeepers owning a butcher shop, 5 restaurants, 3 greengrocers, a pastry shop and a speciality food shop. An intercultural mediator from the municipality of Anderlecht took part actively in the interviews and assisted in translating questions and answers from Arabic into French and vice versa.

29 What emerged from the interviews was that most shopkeepers had a regular contract (or were in the process of making an agreement) with ARP for a twice-a-week collection service on Tuesday and Friday, like the rest of Anderlecht. Nevertheless, respondents also provided different interpretations of waste collection contracts and regulations. For instance, someone stated that they were not obliged by contract to sort their waste. An interview with an expert in the field confirmed that this is a recurring misunderstanding among businesses, as ARP does not invest many resources in instructing, controlling and monitoring individual behaviours. When asked about this, operators from ARP replied that their mission is to provide contracts, whereas the municipalities and the Brussels Environment Agency are responsible for monitoring compliance with the contracts. The result is that most of the products discarded by businesses are collected with residual waste. This poor separation at the source is in theory to the detriment of shopkeepers themselves, who by contract pay more for the collection of residual waste than for the collection of recyclables (e.g. plastic and organics). In practice, the widespread use of household bags by shopkeepers jeopardises the attempt to introduce an economic incentive to separate waste collection. Only cardboard is collected in large quantities by ARP, while other recyclables are collected by specialised private companies – e.g. frying oil, charcoal from barbeques and bones from butchers.

30 Faced with the need to dispose of refuse in between collection cycles, some shopkeepers resorted to makeshift solutions. In two cases, shopkeepers declared that they used their vans parked in front of their shops to store rubbish bags temporarily. Another shopkeeper used a 600-litre mobile container for residual waste. Mobile containers are provided for free by ARP but are supposed to be kept inside the premises, yet in this case the container was left outside permanently, along the row of parking spaces. There is no room in these narrow ground floors, and the entrance doors are too small for containers to be brought in and out. Nor is there much space outside on the narrow pavements or in the street, where parked and moving cars take up most of the available space. Needless to say, finding somewhere to place rubbish bags on collection days can be a difficult task. Heaps of waste were seen in the few places which are not in the way of pedestrian and car movements, such as tree beds and traffic islands. At the same time, informal street furniture such as metal and wooden fencing to protect tree beds were visible during our fieldwork. Ultimately, most shopkeepers complained about the poor cleanliness of the street, blaming the city authorities for their lack of commitment. Everyone agreed on the need to find a solution.

31 The following and concluding section focuses on two areas of action which emerge in the context of the search for a solution to the waste problem in Chaussée de Mons. These proposals were made by the research group and were discussed in the

framework of a workshop with shopkeepers and other local stakeholders. They focus in particular on: i) the creation of alternative circuits of material collection and recovery through a physical platform, and ii) the improvement in the coordination between public bodies through the establishment of a neighbourhood manager, responsible for fine-tuning waste collection and the street cleaning service.

5. Conclusion: towards improved waste service provision in Chaussée de Mons

32 Cureghem has socio-spatial characteristics which make it more prone to problems related to low levels of cleanliness. In Chaussée de Mons, the transformation of many ground floors into restaurants and greengrocers over the last decade has resulted in an increase in the amount of waste, while the market liberalisation for commercial waste has led to an incomplete reform of the public service provision, which to date has proved ineffective in meeting the demand in more challenging urban areas. In addition, the bureaucratic layering and fragmentation of responsibilities makes it more complex to formulate possible solutions. The public operators feel that they cannot solve the waste problem alone, as citizens must do their part [Brussels-Capital Region, 2012]. Such a claim is understandable, but it would be more so if the service provision was more carefully tailored to the diversity of service users – or what Bulkeley and Gregson [2008] call the "primary unit of consumption" – in Brussels and in their geographical situations.

33 As recalled by Hellwig *et al.* [2019: 11]:

> "The recycling and waste sorting system needs to be adapted to the target group in order to encourage people to take part in it [...] When adapting the system further to make it inclusive despite cultural diversity, it would appear to be insightful to learn more from people who have adapted to waste systems because they can contribute to such initiatives with their experiences and perspectives."

34 Although successful urban waste management depends on the capacity of the collection service to be in tune with and drive individual behaviours [UN Habitat, 2010], what has been said so far highlights the low level of commitment in this respect, with scarce or minimal communication with final users and a lack of coordination among waste stakeholders (private and public waste collectors, regulators, waste producers).

35 In light of this, two interventions appear to be more appropriate in order to overcome the current situation in Chaussée de Mons. Firstly, there should be better separation of recyclables at the source by shopkeepers in order to reduce pressure on ordinary refuse collection. This would require an adaptation in terms of space. Since separate collection requires space, which is lacking both indoors and outdoors, one possibility would be to resort to a collective collection point located in a dedicated service room in or around Chaussée de Mons. Such an option was studied and put into practice for another shopping street in Brussels by a consortium of regional stakeholders, the local shopkeepers committee and the municipality, which provided both the human resources and the space for storing the refuse, enabling the collectivisation of individual contracts with ARP.[2] The option of having a single collection point located in a closed, controlled space, accessible only to those who sign a contract, is welcomed by ARP and could result in some savings for the shopkeepers. Nevertheless, it would require the commitment of the municipality. In the case of Chaussée de Mons, the

municipal stakeholder should provide funds for renting a room and potentially for setting up a parallel collection service. The arguments against this scenario are manifold, such as the unwillingness of the municipality to take on additional waste management duties outside their competences and in competition with private operators.

36 On the one hand, such a solution would make it possible to deal with the overflow of commercial waste between collection cycles, without resorting to a daily and costly collection service for the shopkeepers in Chaussée de Mons. On the other hand, it would allow an initial distinction to be made between household and commercial waste production, as well as subsequent actions to be identified in order to improve the overall street cleaning situation.

37 The second option involves the hypothesis of establishing a "neighbourhood manager" who would have a broader vision of a variety of issues of common interest including security, the maintenance of public spaces, street cleaning and refuse collection. This person would act as a bridge between citizens and the public administrations, with the capacity to make decisions and exercise authority with respect to identified and dedicated budgets in order to determine the tasks necessary to make things work [Power, 2004]. Since one of the main problems faced by this neighbourhood is the transient nature of its population – and the resulting lack of attachment and sense of belonging to the place – the neighbourhood manager would have the difficult task of increasing control over neighbourhood conditions, enhancing communication with the local population, examining problems and proposing concerted solutions. He or she would have to foster greater inclusion and participation of users in the waste management service while helping to adapt the cleaning service (frequency, method, etc.) according to the needs, and pass on relevant observations to higher levels of decision making. These measures are taken into account in the literature with respect to the functioning of the system despite spatial limitations [Hastings, 2007].

38 This option also calls for greater involvement of the local government in changing conditions and taking care of urban communities. It might not be enough to focus exclusively on some more problematic areas such as Chaussée de Mons in order to eradicate the problem at neighbourhood level, with the risk of undermining what is done in specific locations. Nevertheless, both solutions, whether they concern tangible or intangible interventions, ultimately require greater effort by public stakeholders (and dialogue between them) in order to realise the economic, social, political and cultural potential of the neighbourhood, with the active participation and empowerment of the local population. The case of Cureghem confirms the current limits of the waste collection and street cleaning service in Brussels. Potential solutions discussed in this paper highlight the need for a reform of waste management in Brussels geared towards greater commitment in the field, which would entail greater investment in personnel, training and research. This challenge should be integrated into the urban political agenda of Brussels for a fairer and more effective waste collection service throughout its diverse urban geography.

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NOTES

1. During our fieldwork we encountered a Roma woman collecting metal scraps from rubbish which she could sell at 8€/kg.

2. Based on the experience of ReReB – Resilient Retail for Brussels (Innoviris Co-create programme 2017-2020) and the diagnosis by "Freight Trails, An action plan for goods transport serving the Stalingrad-Lemonier neighborhood – Summary, April 2018" (available at: https://urbact.eu/sites/default/files/media/brussels_freight_tails_iap_english_summary._an_action_plan_for_goods_transport_serving_the_stalingrad-lemonnier_neighbourhood_-_summary._april_2018.pdf [accessed 19/02/2021].

ABSTRACTS

The image and perception of a city are intrinsically tied to its cleanliness. Everywhere in the world, working-class neighbourhoods with rubbish piling up in the streets are subject to stigma and devaluation. This is the case in Cureghem, a multi-ethnic district of Brussels, Belgium, where the lack of cleanliness and maintenance of the public space are among the main concerns and complaints expressed by inhabitants. This paper examines the rubbish collection service in Brussels, focusing in particular on a shopping street in Cureghem with an abundance of ethnic restaurants, bars and greengrocers, where rubbish accumulation is largely attributed to the vibrant commercial activity. Based on fieldwork, interviews and workshops with local stakeholders conducted in the framework of a transdisciplinary research project, it aims to shed light on the rubbish problem in Cureghem and the proposals which emerge in the search for a solution.

L'image d'une ville et la façon dont elle est perçue sont intrinsèquement liées à sa propreté. Partout dans le monde, les quartiers populaires où les détritus s'entassent dans les rues sont stigmatisés et dévalorisés. Tel est le cas à Cureghem, un quartier multiethnique de Bruxelles (Belgique), où le manque de propreté et d'entretien de l'espace public constitue l'un des principaux sujets de préoccupation et griefs exprimés par les habitants. Le présent document porte sur le service de collecte des déchets à Bruxelles, et plus particulièrement dans une rue commerçante de Cureghem qui compte une multitude de restaurants ethniques, de bars et de magasins de primeurs, et où l'accumulation de déchets est en grande partie imputable au dynamisme de l'activité commerciale. S'appuyant sur un travail de terrain ainsi que sur des entretiens et ateliers avec des acteurs locaux, réalisés dans le cadre d'un projet de recherche transdisciplinaire, l'étude vise à mettre en lumière le problème des déchets à Cureghem et les propositions qui se font jour dans la recherche d'une solution.

Het beeld en de perceptie van een stad zijn onlosmakelijk verbonden met de netheid van de stad. Overal ter wereld zijn arbeiderswijken waar het vuilnis zich in de straten opstapelt onderhevig aan stigmatisering en waardevermindering. Dat is ook het geval met Kuregem, een multi-etnische wijk in Brussel, waar de buurtbewoners vooral bezorgd zijn en klagen over het gebrek aan netheid en onderhoud van de openbare ruimte. Dit artikel onderzoekt de afvalophaling in Brussel, met bijzondere aandacht voor één welbepaalde winkelstraat in Kuregem, waar heel wat etnische restaurants, cafés en groentewinkels gevestigd zijn en waar de ophoping van vuilnis dus grotendeels toe te schrijven is aan de bruisende commerciële activiteit. Op basis van veldonderzoek, interviews en workshops met lokale belanghebbenden, die plaatsvonden in het kader van een transdisciplinair onderzoeksproject, wil dit artikel enerzijds meer inzicht

verschaffen in het afvalprobleem in Kuregem en anderzijds de voorstellen toelichten die werden geformuleerd in de zoektocht naar een oplossing voor dit probleem.

INDEX

Subjects: 7. aménagement du territoire – logement – mobilité
Keywords: Cureghem, public action, regional policy, social inequalities
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