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Which morphologies for “inclusion in urbanity”? Exploring practices along the Steenweg

Quelles morphologies pour « l'inclusion dans l'urbanité » ? Étude des pratiques le long du Steenweg

Welke morfologieën voor “inclusie in de stedelijkheid”? Onderzoek langs de Steenweg

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EDITOR'S NOTE

To see the figures in a better resolution, open the article online and click on “Original” below them.

Introduction

- ¹ In recent years, there has been a renewed interest for Brussels' Steenweg, an east-west axis which follows the course of the remnants of Brussels' main medieval highway [Vleminckx-Huybens, 2020 and De Visscher *et al.*, 2020] after which it was named. As a result, it has now been designated in GoodMove – Brussels' newest mobility plan [Bruxelles Mobilité, 2020] – as one of the Region's future *magistrales piétonnes* – i.e. as a prioritised pedestrian itinerary. Perspective.brussels – Brussels Capital Region's “multidisciplinary centre of expertise in urban development” is currently gathering stakeholders (amongst which Bruxelles-Mobilité, Ville de Bruxelles, the municipality of Molenbeek-Saint-Jean, the municipality of Ixelles) to work on the implementation of this decision. Within this framework, recent research carried out by Brussels Studies Institute – Brussels Centre Observatory (BSI-BCO) for perspective.brussels has stressed

the need to apprehend the Steenweg not only as a future mobility axis, but also in terms of its role on a social, ecological, economic and cultural level [De Visscher *et al.*, 2020]. Amongst others, they envisage the Steenweg as an inclusive axis and call for further research on this potential.

- 2 Building on this, the aim of this article is to provide future planning and design teams with a conceptual framework through which to analyse and reflect on the potential for social inclusion (a concept we discuss further on) along the Steenweg. The stakes for such an inclusive axis in the metropolitan centre of Brussels are high, especially as Brussels stands out on a Western-European scale in terms of segregation [Haandrikman *et al.*, 2019: 13].
- 3 Based on an exploratory fieldwork, this article brings attention to the scope of this inclusive potential and to the tools which may be of use in comprehending this potential more thoroughly. To do so, we build on Remy's proposition that *communication in distance* is necessary for urban inclusion. According to Remy, the possibility for *communication* to happen between strangers is contingent on the existence of urban morphologies that allow *distance* whilst also – but not necessarily simultaneously – enable diverse encounters. Inquiring through a dual socio-spatial lens, we present findings from our observations of *communication in distance* in one type of space: the commercial galleries. Then, mapping the numerous publicly accessible spaces within the built fabric along the Steenweg, we open up lines of thought regarding the scope of the Steenweg's urban inclusion potential. Doing so, the article aims both to feed future discussions around the refurbishment of the axis and to participate in wider debates around the need to create gates rather than to dismantle enclaves to strengthen urban inclusion [Berger and Moritz, 2018: 159].

1. *Communication in distance* revisited

- 4 Social scientists have made apparent their scepticism of the mainstreaming of the concepts of “inclusion” and “mixity” in policies in Brussels. The concept of “inclusion” often builds on the image of a model urban citizen and essentializes normality [Printz, 2018: 184]. This normality is often defined in economic terms, through production and consumption, instead of through dignified participation in the city, its making and its design [ibid.: 187]. Furthermore, social mix policies in Brussels, have a history of attempting to inject the “right kind of citizens” – i.e. middle-class households – into impoverished and migrant neighbourhoods, to bring wealth and social control into these areas [Van Criekingen, 2011: 174]. In contrast with these discourses advocating for a blended society, Remy [Remy, 2020 [1990]: 325], amongst other scholars such as Chamboredon and Lemaire [1970], has been reflecting for a long time on urbanity, i.e. on the combination of density, diversity and spatial configuration [Lussault, 1966: 2013 [2003]]. It is time to rediscover these works as they shift the focus away from mixity and inclusion as such to the need for “inclusion in urbanity”. Indeed, they reframe urban concerns around the matter of access, for people in danger of exclusion, to the social and spatial fabric of urbanity [European Commission, 2004: 13].
- 5 In an article first published in 1990 entitled “La ville cosmopolite et la coexistence interethnique¹”, Remy [2020 [1990]] argues that the rolling out of urbanity – and of access to this urbanity – are contingent on the ability for *communication in distance*². *Distance* is the term he uses to talk about the gaps that exist between groups of people

in a city, gaps created by their differences – differences in needs, in cultural and social backgrounds or in access to resources [ibid.: 326]. Ignoring the existence of this *distance*, or attempting to smooth it out by blending everyone together, will not delete it. Instead, it will often lead to an escalation in conflicts and to the disengagement and withdrawal of minority groups. On the other hand, acknowledging this gap implies allowing for the expression of contrasting identities. Interactions *in distance* will take place between groups – and may at times be conflictual. *Communication* however arises when citizens are able to “translate” their encounters with other groups, i.e. to translate their interactions across the diversity of practices, ideologies and ways of being in the city [ibid.: 325].

- 6 According to Remy, and later to Berger and Moritz [2018], some spaces and morphologies in the city will play a key role in translation and therefore in *communication in distance*³. By attending such spaces citizens may gain the abilities for – and possibilities to – *communicate* with other groups whilst keeping their *distance* [ibid.: 325-328]. These morphologies are diverse, offering varying degrees of enclosure and openness, as well as interstices and permeabilities within the city [Remy, 2016]. Unlike large open spaces which, according to Remy, translate a “naive antisegregational ideal” where “all social groups meet anywhere at anytime” [Remy, 2020 [1990]: 326, translation by the authors], these morphologies are not an attempt at dismantling enclaves [Berger and Moritz, 2018: 159]. Rather, they offer the opportunity to create gates (*idem*). However, access to urbanity – its social and spatial fabric – is not only a matter of access to these spaces. Indeed, it is also contingent on the articulation of these diverse spaces at the scale of the city. It is through this articulation that encounters and confrontations between strangers may, overtime, give way to *communication in distance*.
- 7 An extensive vocabulary exists in the literature to categorize such spaces. Specifically, in this article, three types of spaces retain our attention. “Foundational neighbourhoods”, a concept inspired by the work of the Chicago school [Park *et al.*, 1925], provide security and familiarity to the newly immigrated as well as an opening towards the city’s main culture. They are places of arrival for an ethnic community. Their members tend to move out to live in other parts of the city when they are able to but retain strong ties with the place even if they do not live there anymore [Remy, 2020 [1990]:336-339]. Similarly, “inclusive enclaves” have “specific internal workings” [Berger and Moritz, 2018: 152] and act as an interface “between the surrounding territories and communities” [ibid.: 154]. These however do not cover a whole neighbourhood, nor are they necessarily bounded to an ethnic group. On the other hand, “interstitial spaces of encounter”, such as cafés in train stations, are the site of constant encounters and confrontations between groups. However, in these spaces, the encounters remain inconsequential within the social fabric of individual’s lives. Furthermore, the presence of strangers passing-by ensures the space’s neutrality [Remy, 2020 [1990]: 340-342].

2. The Steenweg, from *magistrale piétonne* to inclusive axis?

2.1. A *magistrale piétonne* structuring Brussels' expanded hypercentre

- 8 In 2016, following the controversies around the pedestrianization of the central boulevards, the BSI-BCO initiated a research programme on the challenges and opportunities of the city centre [Hubert *et al.*, 2020]. Research outcomes led to a reconceptualization of the city centre as a set of spaces with a high connectivity to multiscalar and multimodal mobility systems, a high density of different social and functional dynamics, and where public spaces act as interfaces for synergies between those dynamics. Following Henri Lefebvre, accessibility to such a city centre was seen as a fundamental aspect of everyone's “right to the city” [1968].
- 9 Consequently, the BSI-BCO proposed to expand the spatial definition of the city centre beyond the usual limits of the “pentagon” in order to include major mobility infrastructures such as the main train stations, the metro loop and the canal and a wider socio-economic diversity of neighbourhoods such as the centre of Molenbeek and the European quarter [Vanin, De Visscher, Mezoued and Vermeulen, 2020]. In 2018, the newly adopted Regional Sustainable Development Plan (PRDD) institutionalized this vision by including central Molenbeek within the perimeter of the “urban hypercentre”, and highlighting the train stations' neighbourhoods' as “urban centres”.
- 10 In early 2018, the BSI-BCO, in partnership with perspective.brussels, organized a masterclass and a series of exhibitions, lectures and workshops dedicated to the design of a new vision for public spaces in this expanded city centre. The discussions shed light on the opportunity to develop new pedestrian axes crossing the city centre from west to east, perpendicularly to the “piétonnier”. Among these axes, one emerged as particularly strategic: the historical “Steenweg” connecting the chaussée de Gand in Molenbeek with place de la Bourse, Grand-Place, Mont des Arts, Place Royale and Chaussée d'Ixelles. It crosses through highly contrasted neighbourhoods and stretches over Brussel's infamous east-west divide [Vandermotten, 2014]. In 2020, the newly adopted regional mobility plan institutionalized this vision by integrating the central segments of the Steenweg as a future major *magistrale piétonne*.

Figure. 1. Neighbourhoods crossed by the Steenweg

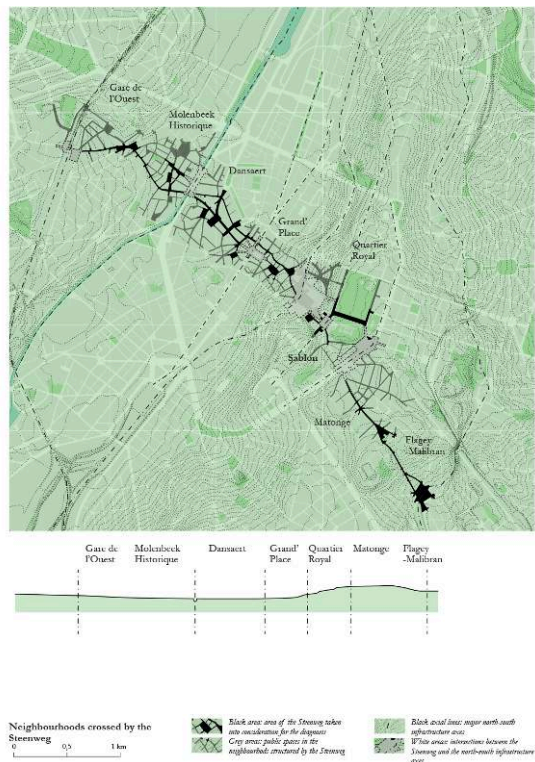


Image taken from De Visscher *et al.*, 2020: 33

- 11 In 2019, anticipating the adoption of the mobility plan, perspective.brussels commissioned the BSI-BCO for a prospective research on the redevelopment of the Steenweg. The following diagnosis [De Visscher *et al.*, 2020] stressed the opportunity to develop the Steenweg not only as a slow mobility axis, but as a major ecological, social, economic and cultural connector.

2.2. A major stake for “inclusion in urbanity”

- 12 The Steenweg is a socially diverse axis. At one end, Historical Molenbeek, on the western bank of the canal, has been the subject of “discrimination and neglect” since the eighties [Vermeulen and Corijn, 2013: 161]. This ex-industrial housing area became a place of arrival for new immigrants but offered little perspective in terms of residential mobility to its inhabitants. As a result, income-segregation overlaps here with cultural and ethnic segregation [ibid.: 173]. In 2015, nearly 40 % of Historical Molenbeek’s adult population was unemployed and the average annual income per household was 10 000 €³ lower than the regional average.
- 13 Following the Steenweg to the east over the canal, a couple hundred meters further, the Dansaert neighbourhood is marked by contrasts and has been gentrifying since the nineties. It is now a trendy area with fashionable shopping outlets [ibid.: 172]. The Steenweg then leads onto the “piétonnier”, a newly-pedestrianized space and stage to many of the cities’ controversies [Genard and Berger, 2020]. These controversies have highlighted the diversity of profiles in the area, including office-workers, homeless people, residents and tourists. The Grand-Place is immediately adjacent and participates in making the neighbourhood symbolically consequential.

- 14 Further still, the Steenweg starts climbing up, crossing over Brussels’ North-South rail junction at the Central station. Both of these were built in the last century following forty years of building works and the displacement of thousands of households, thereby leaving a long-lasting scar in the social and material fabric of the city. The Steenweg then climbs the Mont des Arts which is surrounded by markers of national “prestige” such as the Royal Library and a statue of King Albert the 1st. This large open park is however also a meeting point for young street art practitioners and for national protests. The hilltop, where the Steenweg then lands, was always the seat of decision-making institutions. Today, it is mainly occupied by Belgian institutions (and further along by the European institutions), as well as by the Royal Palace. Gravitating around these are highly contrasted demographics. The Sablon neighbourhood for instance was historically inhabited by the upper-class and income and employment rates⁶ remain superior here to the regional average. In contrast, the Matonge neighbourhood, which is historically linked to the Afro-descendant community, has a low average income and employment rate⁷.
- 15 The trajectory described (see Figure. 1) covers less than 4 kilometers. Yet, as highlighted, important cultural and social differences appear (see Figure. 2), suggesting that the Steenweg has a strong potential to contribute to “inclusion in urbanity” at the scale of the city. Indeed, it could play a key part in providing access to the social and material fabric of the city to diverse – and at times segregated against – groups.

Figure. 2. Median income per neighbourhood



Image taken from Cap and Hertoghe, 2021: 46

- 16 Furthermore, it is also a morphologically diverse axis counting numerous spaces in-between, below, above and in continuity of its streets and squares. This diversity is due to its specific topography but also to its history: after its origins as a medieval road and

the transformation of the city as it became the capital of the Low countries, the construction of the Haussmanian boulevards in the 19th C. and then of the North-South rail junction in the 20th C. profoundly altered its flow. These transformations split, thickened, blurred and covered-up parts of its trajectory, at times drawing new continuities within the city [De Visscher *et al.*, 2020: 8]. Today, the axis' counts numerous galleries, arcades, patios, undergrounds, stations, public buildings and other leftover public spaces.

- 17 Our ambition is therefore to explore whether the Steenweg could become not only a well-thought-out public space connecting culturally and socially diverse neighbourhoods, but also a set of publicly accessible interior spaces supporting communication in distance between different groups. We consider our work as a first step – that should lead to others – in providing future planners with a deeper understanding of the potential inclusive role of those spaces as well as a spatial representation of this publicly accessible domain beyond the usual perceived limits of public space [Dovey and Pafka, 2020].

3. Methodology: a socio-spatial survey

- 18 This article presents some of the results of the research report commissioned by perspective.brussels [De Visscher *et al.*, 2020] as well as the findings from an exploratory socio-spatial research which took place in 2020 and which was the combined effort of an architect, a sociologist and an anthropologist with the support of a team of architecture students from UCLouvain. Building on previous work by the BSI-BCO on the Steenweg and on the metropolitan city centre, this research aimed at providing a preliminary overview of inclusion dynamics along this axis. There were two main methodological components, undertaken in dialogue with one another.
- 19 On the one hand, we undertook qualitative observations of practices of *communication in distance* within the “inclusive enclaves” and “interstitial spaces of encounter” along the axis. After a first series of walks and general observations, we chose to focus our qualitative observations on one, seemingly representative, type of space: the commercial galleries. We focused on the articulation between the spatiality of the galleries and the practices of *communication in distance* by observing their layout, pedestrian flows, social interactions, spatial appropriations, soundscapes and through twelve interviews with store holders and caretakers. The timeframe of the study period – three months – was rather short and the scope was limited due to the Covid-19⁸ pandemic context in Autumn 2020. However, the aim of this exploratory research was not to provide extensive data, but rather to possibly bring out actual clues for the potential of “inclusion in urbanity” of the Steenweg, and develop a conceptual framework for further investigations.
- 20 On the other hand, taking inspiration from Nolli's map of Rome [Nolli, 1748] – a spatial representation of all of Rome's publicly accessible spaces in the 17th C., including churches and patios – we proceeded to survey and map-out all the other potential “inclusive enclaves” and “interstitial spaces of encounter” along the Steenweg. Firstly, we listed and located all of the different types of spaces extending the open-air public spaces inside the urban fabric. Secondly, we collected the plans of these spaces, which we then redrew and assembled into one Nolli-like map of the Steenweg. The aim was to provide future planners and researchers with a representation of all the spaces where

social practices similar to those observed in the galleries could happen, beyond the usual borders of the public space.

Figure.3. Map of buildings with publicly accessible spaces along the Steenweg

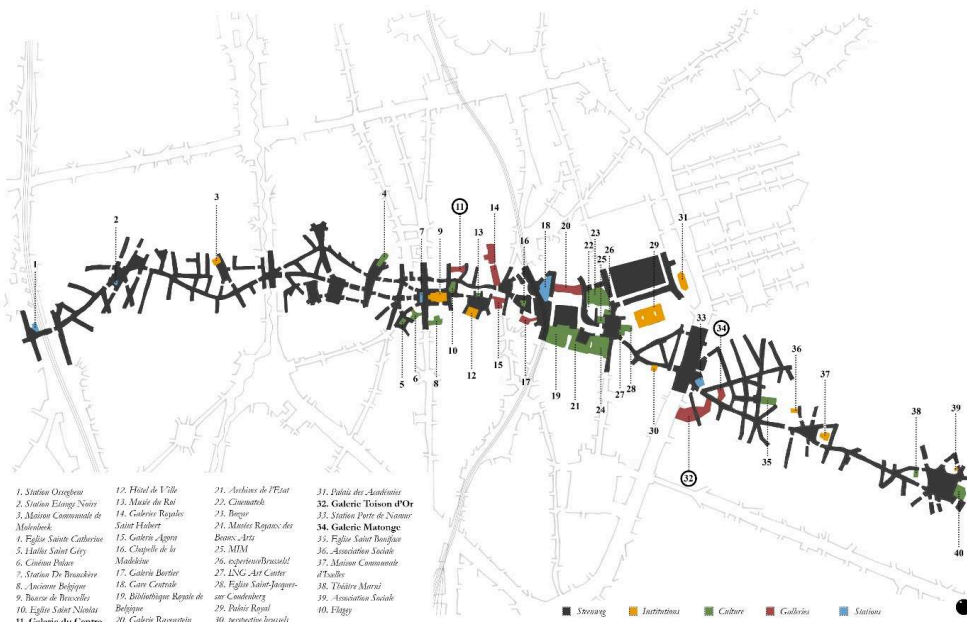


Image taken from Cap and Hertoghe, 2021: 122-123, edited by the authors to highlight the case studies

4. Case Studies: *Communication in distance* in three commercial galleries

- 21 Leading to and from streets, carparks and stations, nine galleries are interwoven, underground and aboveground, into the Steenweg's expanded public realm. They are permeable spaces: neither open nor closed, with multiple entrances and often with glass ceilings bringing in outside light [Poot, De Vos and Van Acker, 2018: 334]. It is this tension between openness and enclosure, characteristic of galleries, which led us to choose them as an exploratory case study. This ambiguity is also reflected in the galleries' functions and in the specific crossbreeding of these functions: they invite passersby to use them as transit corridors to other places whilst also retaining and anchoring people with their commercial, cultural and social functions by providing shops, theatres, art galleries, meetup spaces, etc. Specifically, our analysis focuses on three galleries (see circled numbers on Figure. 3), chosen because they exemplify the diversity of these spaces in terms of location (central or more peripheric), internal architecture and layout, as well as their type of management.

4.1. The Galerie Matonge (GM)

Figure. 4. Plan of Gallery Matonge



Extract from original drawing by Pauline Cap and Magali Hertoghe, directed by Jean-Philippe De Visscher (UCLouvain). Other contributors: Gabrielle Fenton, Margaux Legrand, Nesrine Benali, Pierre-Alexandre Lesuisse, Maria Akar, Maria Tabbal (UCLouvain)

- 22 Also known under the name of “Galerie d’Ixelles”, GM is located in the heart of the Matonge Afro-descendant neighbourhood mentioned earlier. It has narrow and winding corridors, multiple exits and access to an underground carpark. Built in the fifties, it was gradually occupied by Afro-descendant stores since the end of the seventies [Impali, 1984: 66]. Today, it is a strong hub for the Afro-descendant community⁹ and is overwhelmingly occupied by Afro-descendant hair salons and a few nail salons, clothing shops, a small art gallery, snacks and one money transfer bureau. It has an important social function: everyone seems to know each other and the sound of conversations, laughter and at times of arguments fill the air. Some people are only passing by, but most are there for long hours, often making use of the foldup chairs that are scattered in-front of the hair salons. Mixed with the sound of their voices, the sound of different overlapping music tracks reaches out from individual stores. Another striking element is the artwork which covers every corner of the gallery and which was mostly painted by the janitor (see Figure. 5).
- 23 Many of the store holders have worked here for years, coming here every day until late at night. They don’t hesitate to accommodate the common corridor space to their needs for instance with extra stalls. They participate in the upkeep of the space and of its formal and informal rules. Most of their clients are regulars and also Afro-descendant. Together, clients and store holders form a network of strong ties. The many hours of hairdressing chatter and grooming, as well as the sharing of meals and beverages in the cafés play an important role in maintaining these strong ties.
- 24 The formal upkeep of the space is under the responsibility of the janitor, Gaël, who also informally takes care of many other tasks, such as resolving conflicts. Interviewees explain that he has played a major role in making the space safe in contrast with previous gloomier years:
- “In 2011-2012, no six months passed without someone being killed here. Since then it is calm and there is peace. I can testify for Gaël because I see that he does a lot in the gallery. When we call him at midnight, he is still here. He keeps the place clean. When there are disturbances or fights, he intervenes. People know him so well that, in such circumstances, it’s not the police who they call first, but rather Gaël” (Hairdresser in GM, October 2020)¹⁰.

- 25 Gaël has lived many years in the Matonge neighbourhood and perceives his job in GM as an opportunity to participate in improving the entire neighbourhood. He sees the gallery’s cultural role as crucial to this end and it is in this line of thought that he organizes community events here. He also holds art lessons for young people whom he seeks to help build confidence. Alongside these, the Afro-descendant stalls, food and music participate in making the gallery a locus for the expression of a strong community identity. People who do not belong to this community are viewed as outsiders and passersby are referred to as “tourists” or “guests”. As white middle-class researchers, we strongly felt out-of-place here and our presence was not welcomed by everyone.

Figure. 5. Example of murals from GM



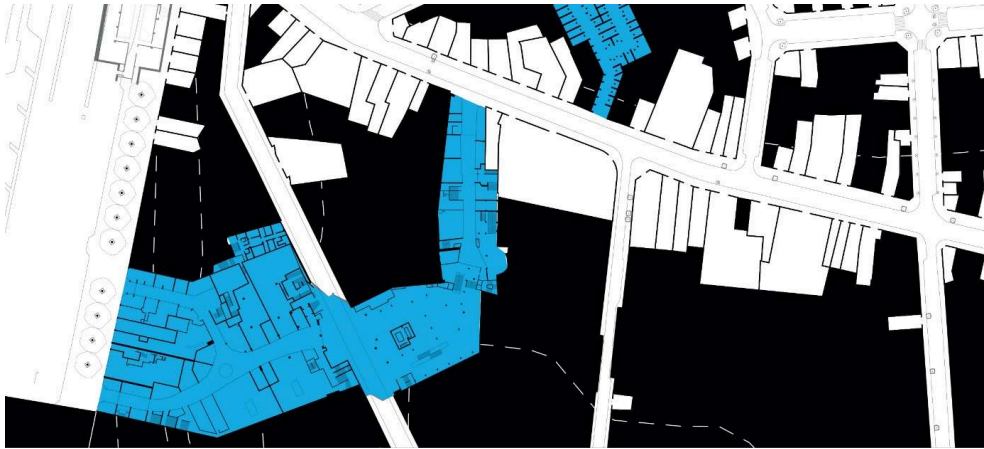
Paintings by Gaël Atumesa

Photo: Gabrielle Fenton

- 26 The strong sense of community belonging which characterizes this space contrasts with the unequal treatment and racism that members of this community often face elsewhere. Beyond the enclosure however, GM is also envisioned as a link with other spaces and communities in the city. Gaël’s wall paintings (see Figure.5) for instance communicate messages of peace, unity and integration across ethnic groups. He also proactively works with outside stakeholders, such as the city council, on questions related to the gallery. Furthermore, many of the community-members commute daily to GM from the non-Afro-descendant neighbourhoods and towns where they live and where they also spend much of their time.

4.2. Galerie Toison D’Or (GTDO)

Figure 6. Plan of Galerie Toison d’Or



Extract from original drawing by Pauline Cap and Magali Hertoghe, directed by Jean-Philippe De Visscher (UCLouvain). Other contributors: Gabrielle Fenton, Margaux Legrand, Nesrine Benali, Pierre-Alexandre Lesuisse, Maria Akar, Maria Tabbal (UCLouvain)

- 27 Built in the 1960s, this modernist style gallery is located opposite GM but contrasts heavily with it: it has large and luminous corridors, hosts nearly 40 stores – mostly chains and many considered high-end – as well as a large cinema and a theatre. It also leads to a multi-storey underground carpark. People walk through alone or in pairs to the sound of ambient “elevator-style” music. Aside from a café where a few people are chatting, the rest of the space is devoid of “lingering”. Stopping is discouraged for non-consumers. The Covid-19 distancing measures further highlighted this with the installation of flow-segregating features (see Figure.7)¹¹.

Figure 7. Trajectory segregation in GTDO

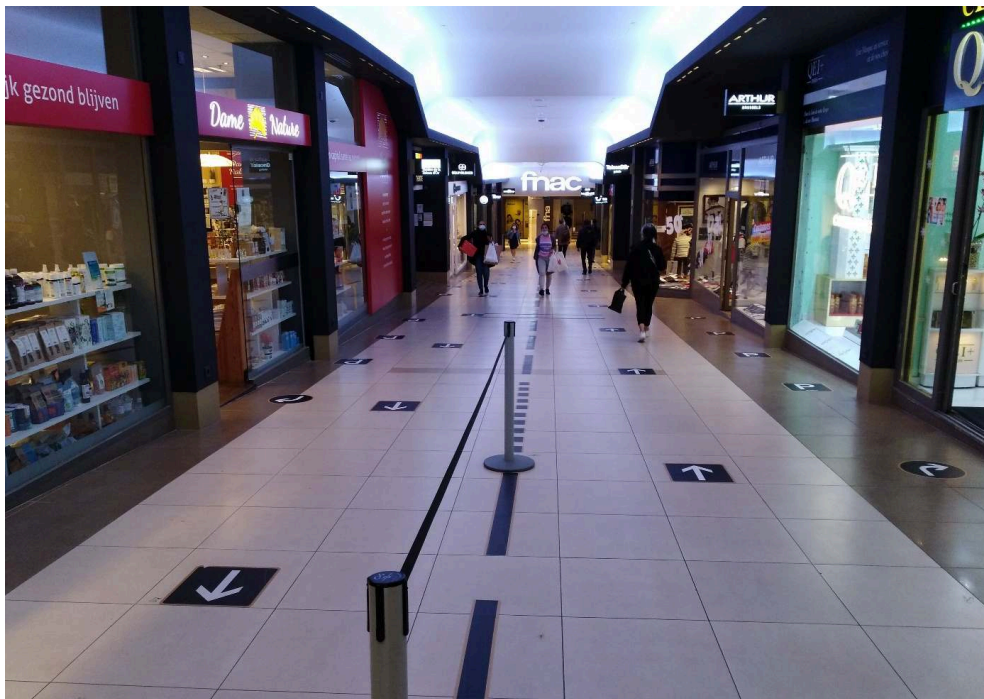


Photo: Gabrielle Fenton

- 28 The relationship between the store holders and the space differs extensively with that of GM. It is forbidden for instance to use the corridors for their business. Many stores belong to a larger commercial chain who regularly move their staff between locations, thereby limiting the social ties that can be created within GTDO. The gallery's everyday caretaking is contracted between multiple agencies, who will send in different employees throughout the month. The security guards are not in direct contact with the gallery managers. They magnetically clock-in their comings-and-goings in different spots to prove that they are providing the required surveillance. In the morning, they email the list of stores that opened late to an unknown third party who will then claim fines from these late-openers.
- 29 Transiting is encouraged and GTDO is clearly often used only as a passageway to and from nearby spaces, such as the metro station. Access to this transit seems however filtered. The gallery envisions itself as part of the *haut de la ville*¹², i.e. in cultural and commercial continuation of nearby luxurious shopping spaces, such as those found on Avenue Louise. Although it is located on the edge of an Afro-descendant neighbourhood, the socio-demographics of people walking through are mostly white and middle-aged. Furthermore, all transit filters through the Fnac multimedia store which acts as a bottleneck in the middle (see Figure. 6 and Figure. 7). Here, the presence of an escalator, the change in floor covering and the presence of Fnac security guards operate a discontinuation in the passageway. Although this discontinuation does not feel abrupt to the middle-class researcher, it can easily make other demographics feel unwelcomed or surveilled.

4.3. Galerie du Centre (GC)

Figure. 8. Plan of Galerie du Centre



Extract from original drawing by Pauline Cap and Magali Hertoghe, directed by Jean-Philippe De Visscher (UCLouvain). Other contributors: Gabrielle Fenton, Margaux Legrand, Nesrine Benali, Pierre-Alexandre Lesuisse, Maria Akar, Maria Tabbal (UCLouvain)

- 30 This gallery is located in the town centre and is architecturally nearly identical to GM – with narrow and winding corridors – as it was designed by the same architect, Jean-Florian Collin. As well as leading to a carpark, it leads to a number of residential blocks. Interviewees explain that it was rather empty ten years ago but over the last five years, a myriad of nail salons staffed with Vietnamese people opened. Aside from these salons,

there is also a heterogeneous mix of independent commerce, such as a cinema, one of Brussels’ oldest tattoo salons, restaurants and an erotic shop. A Flemish radio station fills the gallery’s soundscape, as well as the sounds of conversations in Vietnamese.

31 The store holders who work here come every day, but, unlike in GM, many know very little about each other. A sense of community is observable amongst the Vietnamese store holders however, who visit each other’s stores for long chats. In contrast with GM, the nail salon customers are mostly Caucasian and the aestheticians speak very little French, English or Dutch.

32 The gallery is also the site of conflict between the various stakeholders. The building is derelict with recurrent water leaks from the ceiling translating a lack of concern from the landlords and/or condominium syndicate. Some stores also have mixed feelings about the nail salons: they are appreciated for the life they bring to what used to be a nearly empty gallery but a matter of concern as they are multiplying and replacing other stores. There is also a long-standing conflict around the toxicity of the smell of the products used by the nail aestheticians. In response to these disputes, some store holders voice their wish for more unity within the gallery:

“It could be nice to make this gallery take on a certain meaning, a certain homogeneity of shops, or at least a possibility of cohabitation. This would be nice for this centrally-located gallery and its shops, which, in principle, have common interests. But it doesn't really happen like that” (Store holder, GC).

33 Within this conflictual context, the eastern European janitor plays a key role. He has been living in a room on-site for nine years, is responsible for cleaning and general security and knows the building very well. Although it is not always easy to communicate with him as he speaks limited French, he is appreciated by all the store holders. His continuous yet non-intrusive and non-western European presence alongside his knowledge of the space are central to the gallery.

“I get on well with the janitor. I was thinking the other day when we had that water leak that it's fun to talk with him. He knows the gallery very well because he's there every day. I think people don't necessarily listen to him a lot because the communication is not easy and you don't understand everything he says. But you realise that he is well informed about the architecture of the building, the shops, where such and such discharge go, where the pipes go, who the inhabitants are, and all the comings and goings from the residential flats” (Store holder, GC).

Figure. 9. The Galerie du Centre’s central location

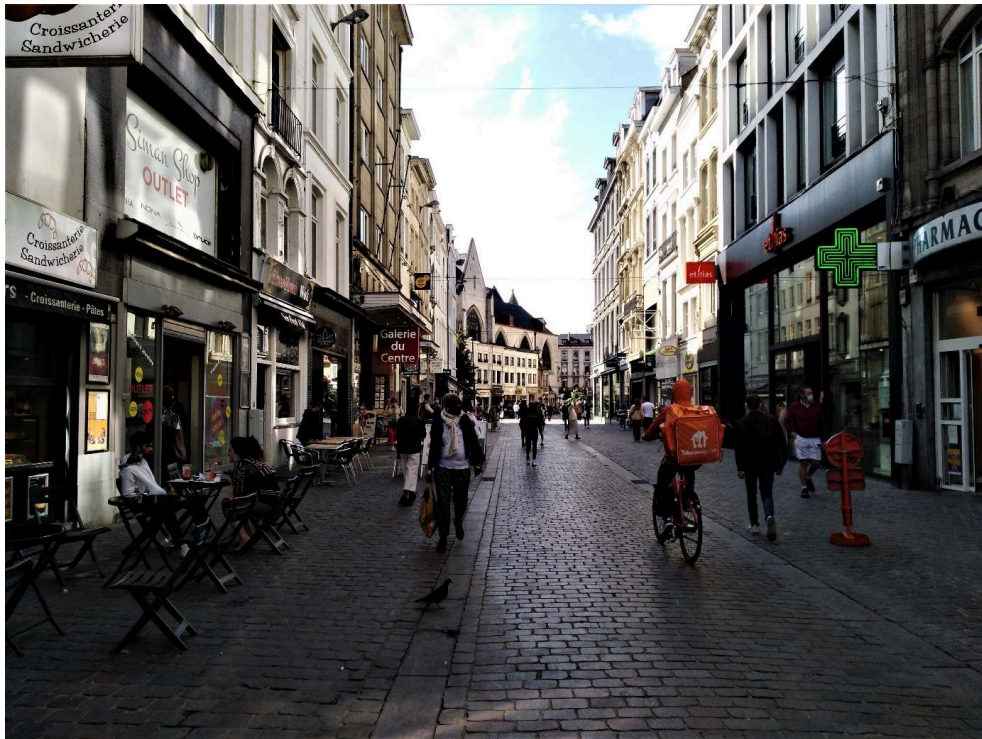


Photo: Gabrielle Fenton

- 34 GC is by far the most heterogenous of the three: it attracts a large array of profiles and types of commerce. This is no coincidence as it is located in the town centre, which is – or was before Covid-19 – a buzzing, diverse and multi-functional area. Recently, a bubble-tea store was opened by a Vietnamese man who speaks good French and English. The decoration reminds of hipster cafés in city centres around the world. With its English-language menu offering a Taiwanese-North-American beverage, it would seem that it targets a “global” kind of customer as they transit through this European capital. This example of “openness” contrasts with the gallery’s many hidden stories, such as the presence of slumlords¹³.

4.4. *Communication in Distance* in the galleries

- 35 Taking a closer look at the galleries, we notice that they echo some of the morphological characteristics of “inclusion in urbanity” suggested by Remy [2020 [1990]] and Berger and Moritz [2018]. Indeed, they all articulate varying degrees of openness and enclosure within the public space. However, *communication in distance* occurs differently – if not at all.
- 36 GM provides safety to a group of insiders who are often segregated against elsewhere in the city. Outsiders do pass-by, but a clear filtering operates as they will be kept at a *distance*. Similarly to Berger and Moritz’ “inclusive enclaves” [2018: 159], GM acts as a gate to the city and its urbanity, where people in danger of exclusion can gain confidence. It also resembles Remy’s “foundational neighbourhoods” [2020 [1990]: 337], as the people who visit the gallery regularly mostly reside elsewhere. Their comings and goings between these two worlds (the “foundational neighbourhood” and the rest

of the city) create links. It is probable that newcomers benefit here from the guidance offered by long-time community members to learn how the city works.

- 37 GC is very heterogenous and hosts a continuous flow of passersby. Encounters and confrontations between individuals from differing backgrounds happen. The gallery's management is very weak but the non-intrusive janitor keeps ties with all the stores, ensuring a minimum level of safety and cleanliness. As a derelict but neutral space, GC echoes Remy's “interstitial spaces of encounter” where low-stake encounters between individuals from different groups can happen [2020 [1990]: 340-342].
- 38 GTDO is used mostly by Brussels' economically dominating group, i.e. the white middle-class. Its large corridors and wide entrances allow it to be an important passageway in the city, but this openness is articulated towards other high-end commercial spaces. Furthermore, by cancelling options for lingering GTDO does not encourage interactions between passersby.

Tab.1. Comparative table for GM, GC and GTDO

	Galerie Matonge (GM)	Galerie Toison D'Or (GTDO)	Galerie du Centre (GC)
Layout	Narrow and winding corridors	Large and straight corridors	Narrow and winding corridors
Building security and upkeep	A well-known janitor	Contracted agencies	A well-known janitor
Type of stores	Independent, linked to the Afro-descendant culture with permanent store holders	Chains, mostly high-end fashion with changing store holders	Independent, heterogenous with permanent store holders
Gallery usage	Mostly by a single community for social, cultural and commercial functions	Mostly used for transit functions	Heterogenous mix of clients and passersby, used for a mix of functions
Main role in 'inclusion in urbanity'	Resembles “Foundational neighbourhood” and “inclusive enclave”	Passageway mainly used by Brussels' dominating socio-economic group	Resembles “Interstitial space of encounter”

- 39 The cases of GM and GC illustrates that the spatial morphology of the galleries offers opportunity for a sophisticated balance between the anchorage of specific groups and the interaction with unspecified others. But the case of GTDO hints that morphology is not enough. A specific set of formal and informal rules and managerial practices is also necessary to make *communication in distance* work.
- 40 Besides, none of these spaces are “inclusive” in themselves: the diversity of users is limited, as well as the scope of *communication*. But considered altogether, the series of galleries shape a network of differentiated opportunities aside hypercentral public

spaces where a significant range of specific uses and users can build up social anchorage while maintaining *communication in distance* with others groups.

- 41 Therefore, publicly accessible spaces within the built fabric should be considered as vectors of social inclusion only under two conditions:
- a set of formal and informal rules makes them work as such;
 - they are part of a dense and diverse network of interstitial and part-permeable spaces connected to public spaces used by other groups.

5. Mapping the expansion of the public realm along the Steenweg

- 42 Our preliminary exploration into the galleries illustrates that such morphologies can support social inclusion. But it also sheds light on the necessity to consider them as part of a larger and more diverse network of publicly accessible spaces, and to take their rules and managerial practices into consideration.
- 43 In order to provide future planners with a better representation of this urban network, we carried out a spatial survey of the Steenweg’s “expanded public realm”, including spaces with different levels of publicness [Dovey and Pafka, 2020] ranging from open-air public spaces (streets, squares, parks), to public halls (stations, museums, churches), galleries, passages and courtyards, shops and underground car parks.

Figure. 10. The Steenweg’s expanded public realm: Osseghem-place Sainte Catherine; place Sainte Catherine – porte de Namur; porte de Namur – place Flagey.



Original drawing by Pauline Cap and Magali Hertoghe, directed by Jean-Philippe De Visscher (UCLouvain). Other contributors: Gabrielle Fenton, Margaux Legrand, Nesrine Benali, Pierre-Alexandre Lesuisse, Maria Akar, Maria Tabbal (UCLouvain)

- 44 The collection, redrawing and assemblage of the selected building plans generated a hybrid architectural/urban Nolli-style map that illustrates the richness of the urban fabric along the Steenweg, i.e. the diversity of its part-permeable and interstitial spaces. The role of the Steenweg in articulating these diverse morphologies at the scale of Brussels’ metropolitan city centre is made apparent and its potential to participate in the rolling out of urban inclusion stands out. Therefore, the map also points out a territory for further social research and inclusive planning experimentations.

Conclusion

- 45 As we are reminded by Remy: “La ville doit composer à des échelles spatiales différentes des lieux de séparation et des lieux d’agrégation. À partir de là, elle instaure un régime complexe de distance-proximité variable d’après les protagonistes, les activités et les enjeux” [Remy, 2020[1990]: 326]¹⁴. The coexistence and articulation of different types of spaces – some more enclosed and some more open, some strongly related to a community and others more neutral and interstitial – can enable *communication in distance* to unfold at the scale of a city. Therefore, the future redevelopment of the Steenweg as a *magistrale piétonne* should be seen as an opportunity to experiment with a new strategy for “inclusion in urbanity”. While current policies focus separately on social infrastructure within neighbourhoods undergoing urban renewal programmes and on the quality of public spaces in the city centre, our survey highlights the possibility of an integrated planning of the Steenweg’s expanded public realm. This planning would include and work with public open spaces but also interstitial and enclosed spaces spreading through a sequence of diverse neighbourhoods.

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NOTES

1. “The cosmopolitan city and interethnic coexistence” (translation by the authors)
2. In his article, Remy writes of urbanity as “a form of sociability, valorising the art of communicating in distance” [Remy, 2020 [1990]: 325].
3. As Remy points out, morphology is not at all the only factor. Possibilities for economic inclusion in the city is another important factor for instance [2020 [1990]: 340].
4. The newly pedestrianized boulevard in the centre of Brussels commonly referred to as the “piétonnier”.
5. See Monitoring des quartiers, <https://monitoringdesquartiers.brussels>
6. Idem
7. Idem
8. For most of the fieldwork, sanitary measures in Belgium included 1,5 m social distancing and wearing facemasks in public spaces, whilst restaurants and cafés were closed by the end of the fieldwork.
9. As it was beyond the scope of this article to undertake a demographic survey of the gallery's community, we have opted for the word “Afro-descendant” (following Demart *et al.* [2017]), to include people with origins (first, second or third generations) in Sub-Saharan Africa. We are aware that this is a conflation and that it is unlikely that all Belgian residents with Sub-Saharan origins would identify with the GM community.
10. The quotes are non-verbatim transcriptions of the undertaken interviews, transcribed as such to ensure the clarity of the text. They were translated from French to English by the authors.
11. The Galeries Royales Saint-Hubert chose instead to divide the whole space into squares, whilst some other galleries didn't segregate the space at all.
12. See the gallery's webpage: <https://toisondor.be/a-propos/> (retrieved 03/05/2021).
13. There are also regular investigations for illegal employment and human trafficking within the gallery. See for example this press article from the RTBF, “Bruxelles: action de contrôle des nails shops de la galerie du Centre, cinq établissements fermés” (retrieved on the 04/06/2021 from https://www.rtf.be/info/regions/detail_action-de-contrôle-des-nails-shops-de-la-galerie-du-centre-cinq-etablissements-fermes?id=10344218).

14. “The city has to devise places that separate and places that aggregate at varying spatial scales. On this basis, it establishes a complex system of distance-proximity which varies according to the protagonists, the activities and what’s at stake”. [Remy, 2020[1990]: 326, translated by the authors].

ABSTRACTS

The Steenweg, an east-west axis crossing through Brussels Metropolitan Centre, has been earmarked to play a key role in the implementation of the city’s future mobility vision. Moreover, recent research [De Visscher *et al.*, 2020] suggests that this axis presents high stakes in terms of social inclusion for Brussels. In anticipation of future refurbishments, this article delves deeper into this latter proposition, opening lines of thought regarding the potential for “inclusion in urbanity” along the Steenweg. Working from Remy’s suggestion for *communication in distance* [Remy, 2020 [1990]] and using a socio-spatial approach, the article focuses on morphologies that participate in enabling an inclusive access to the social and spatial fabric of urbanity to diverse groups. To do so, the results of an exploratory research within one type of morphology found along the Steenweg – commercial galleries – are presented. The article then suggests possibilities for thinking further about morphologies that enable *communication in distance* along the axis by mapping out all publicly accessible spaces beyond the usual limits of the Steenweg’s open air public spaces.

Le Steenweg, un axe est-ouest traversant le centre métropolitain de Bruxelles, est appelé à jouer un rôle clé dans la mise en œuvre de la vision de la mobilité future de la ville. En outre, une récente recherche [De Visscher *et al.*, 2020] tend à indiquer que cet axe présente pour Bruxelles des enjeux importants en matière d’inclusion sociale. En prévision de futurs réaménagements, le présent article examine plus avant cette dernière hypothèse, en ouvrant des pistes de réflexion sur les possibilités d’« inclusion dans l’urbanité » le long du Steenweg. À partir de la proposition de Remy en faveur de la communication dans la distance [Remy, 2020 [1990]] et selon une approche socio-spatiale, l’article se concentre sur les morphologies qui contribuent à rendre possible un accès inclusif au tissu social et spatial de l’urbanité pour des groupes divers. À cette fin sont exposés les résultats d’une recherche exploratoire sur un type de morphologie présent le long du Steenweg : les galeries commerciales. L’article propose ensuite des pistes pour approfondir la réflexion sur les morphologies qui favorisent la communication dans la distance le long de cet axe en recensant tous les espaces accessibles au public au-delà des limites habituelles de l’espace public à ciel ouvert du Steenweg.

De Steenweg, een Oost-West as die door het Centrum van de Brusselse Metropool loopt, moet een sleutelrol spelen bij de uitvoering van de toekomstige mobiliteitsvisie van de stad. Bovendien suggereert recent onderzoek [De Visscher *et al.*, 2020] dat, voor Brussel, deze as ook belangrijk is op het vlak van sociale inclusie. Vooruitlopend op toekomstige verbouwingen gaat dit artikel dieper in op deze laatste stelling en creëert denkpijlen rond de mogelijkheden voor “inclusie in stedelijkheid” langs de Steenweg. Werkend rond Remy's concept van “communicatie in de verte” [Remy, 2020 [1990]] en gebruik makend van een sociaal-ruimtelijke aanpak, richt het artikel zich op morfologieën die bijdragen aan het bieden van een inclusieve toegang tot het sociale en ruimtelijke weefsel van stedelijkheid aan diverse groepen. Hiervoor worden de bevindingen

voorgesteld uit een verkennend onderzoek over één type morfologie, aanwezig langs de Steenweg: de commerciële galerijen. Het artikel suggereert vervolgens mogelijkheden om verder na te denken over morfologieën die communicatie in de verte langs de as mogelijk maken door alle publiek toegankelijke ruimtes buiten de gebruikelijke grenzen van de openbare ruimten van de Steenweg in kaart te brengen.

INDEX

Trefwoorden openbare ruimte, stedelijke infrastructuur, mobiliteit, stadsplanning, socioprofessionele inschakeling

Keywords: public space, urban infrastructure, mobility, urban planning, social and professional integration

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