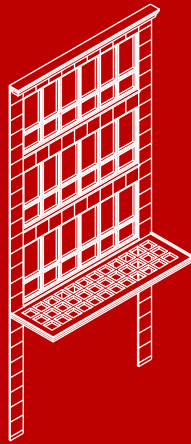


THE ESSENCE OF THE IN-BETWEEN



TRANSFORMING GALERIE MATONGÉ THROUGH APPROPRIATION

Elise Kinsoen

Udouvain

Faculté d'architecture, d'ingénierie architecturale et d'urbanisme (Site de Bruxelles)

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TRANSFORMING GALERIE MATONGÉ THROUGH APPROPRIATION

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Co-promoteurs expert

Sarah Demart

Co-promoteurs

Cécile Chanvillard

Christine Fontaine

Gérald Ledent

UCLouvain

Faculté d'architecture, d'ingénierie architecturale, d'urbanisme (Site de Bruxelles)

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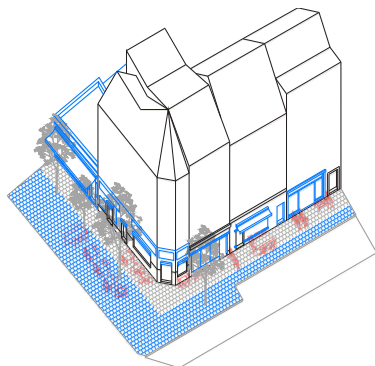
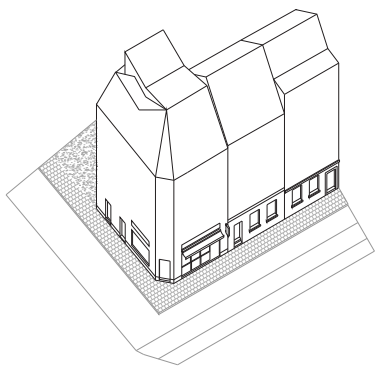
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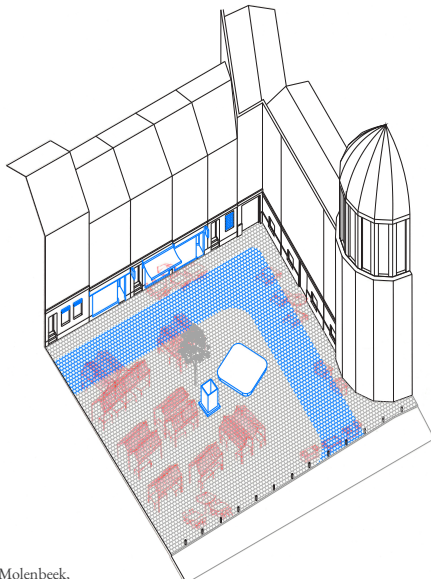
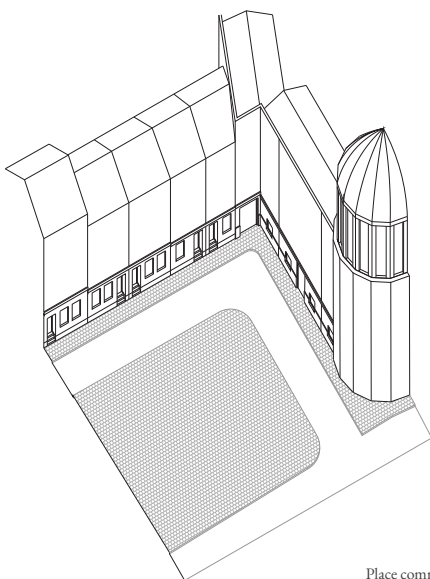
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Rue du Brabant,
Schaerbeek, Belgique



Place communale Molenbeek,
Molenbeek, Belgique

Figure 1: Appropriation of a public space - By author

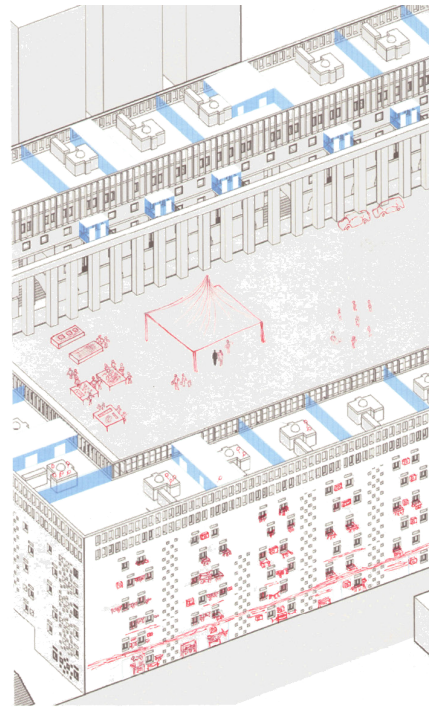
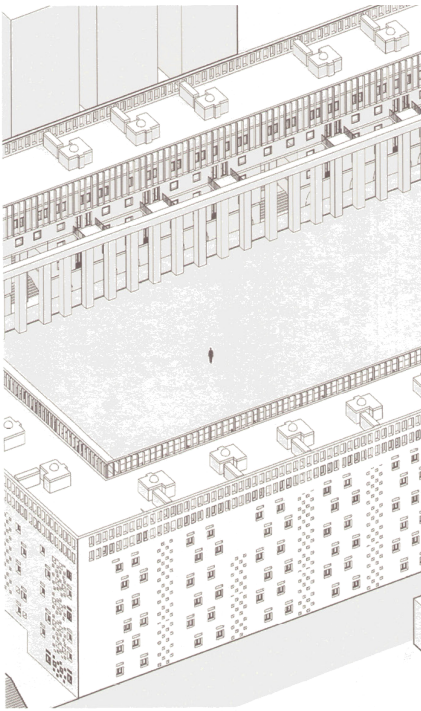
FROM PROJECTED TO LIVED SPACE

As part of the thesis process, a group reflection on the theme of spatial appropriation, focusing on the on the transition of designed space to lived space. To create a common basis and link our separate research, an introductive text, written in French, was created within the collective research framework. What follow is the concluding section of that collaborative exploration.

« Vous savez, c'est toujours la vie qui a raison, l'architecte qui a tort ... »

Lefebvre distingue l'espace conçu, imposé, de l'espace vécu, façonné par l'usage quotidien et les besoins réels des habitants. L'appropriation, loin de se limiter à la propriété légale, désigne la manière dont un espace est habité, pratiqué, transformé, jusqu'à devenir un « chez-soi » ou un lieu porteur de sens. L'exemple d'Hausmann illustre une appropriation par le pouvoir, via le contrôle visuel et la transformation autoritaire de la ville, là où Lefebvre valorise des formes d'appropriation plus populaires, plus libres. Même dans des espaces contraints, comme les logements conçus par d'autres, les habitants adaptent, détournent, personnalisent. L'espace est donc une production sociale, et l'acte d'habiter devient un acte d'ajustement, de résistance ou de réinvention.

Dans son livre consacré à Pessac, Philippe Boudon met en lumière ces tensions entre les intentions de l'architecte et les usages réels des habitants. Il s'appuie pour cela sur l'analyse des 70 maisons construites par Le Corbusier à Pessac, près de Bordeaux. Quarante ans après leur réalisation, les 70 maisons ont été largement modifiées ; couleurs effacées, fenêtres raccourcies, patios refermés, terrasses recouvertes, pilotis comblés, cabanes ajoutées... Malgré la standardisation d'origine, les habitants ont personnalisé leurs logements, générant un fort sentiment d'appropriation et de valorisation. L'ensemble semblait délabré mais reflétait surtout un décalage profond entre les intentions de l'architecte et les besoins concrets et évolutifs des habitants. Ce débat dépasse le cas de Pessac : il touche à un phénomène plus large, celui du décalage structurel entre la conception architecturale et l'appropriation par les habitants, dont les besoins et usages évoluent dans le temps. Si l'on considère l'architecture comme une forme figée, pensée pour durer dans sa forme d'origine, alors Pessac pourrait sembler un échec. Mais si, au contraire, on y voit une matière vivante, faite pour être habitée, adaptée, parfois même détournée, alors ces transformations deviennent le signe même de sa réussite.



Climat de France,
Algiers, Algeria

Figure 2: Collective appropriation of housing - By Guennouni, K.

A l'échelle du public, l'appropriation de l'espace prend la forme d'"usage autonome", fondé sur la possibilité d'interagir librement avec son espace, sans contraintes.¹ A l'instar du plan haussmannien à Paris, conçu pour cadrer les comportements dans l'espace public, les politiques actuelles de régulation visent à encadrer les pratiques informelles observées notamment sur la rue du Brabant à Schaerbeek et la place Communale de Molenbeek. Face à ces interventions, les individus peuvent réagir de façons passive, en s'y confrontant, ou activement, en adaptant l'espace à leurs besoins.²

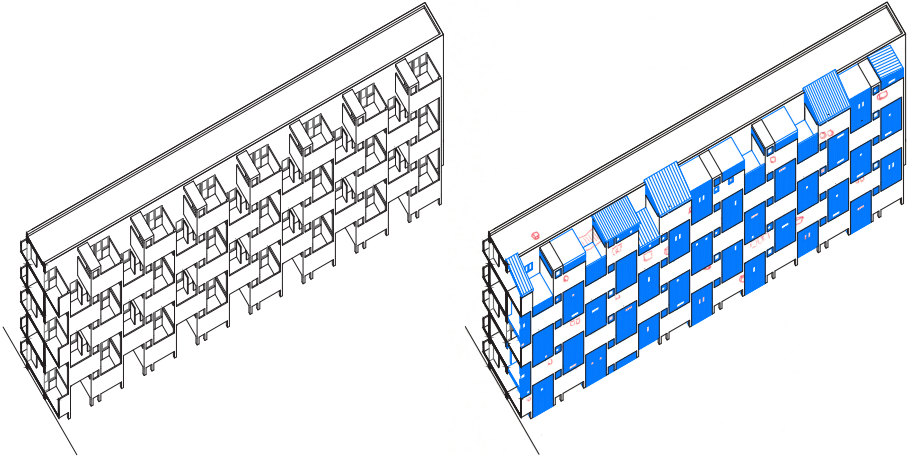
La rue du Brabant et la place Communale partagent une ambiance animée où les activités commerciales débordent sur l'espace public : marchandises à l'extérieurs, vitrines chargées, interactions sociales sur les trottoirs. Cette appropriation s'explique par le statut semi-public des commerces : bien qu'ils appartiennent au domaine privé, leur ouverture sur la rue facilite leur extension dans l'espace public. Leurs pratiques quotidiennes transforment ces espaces en lieux d'échange, de sociabilité et d'affirmation identitaire.

Ce phénomène témoigne d'une appropriation de la ville et interroge les politiques urbaines. Comment encadrer sans étouffer ? Comment reconnaître la légitimité de ces activités sans imposer des normes déconnectées des réalités locales ?

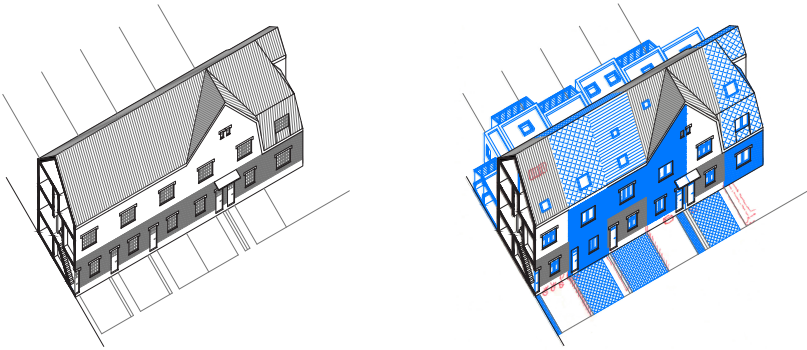
Le projet Climat de France met en lumière les limites d'une conception figée. Pensés à l'origine pour des familles restreintes, les logements ont dû être adaptés par leurs occupants pour répondre à des réalités plus complexes : familles nombreuses, séparation des genres, manque d'intimité. Des cloisons sont rajoutées pour créer de l'intimité au sein du logement, des modifications qui condamnent l'usage du séjour, devenu un espace reconfiguré chaque matin, par la pose d'une simple table basse autour de laquelle la famille se rassemble, à même le sol, une fois les matelas rangés. À l'échelle de l'immeuble, les habitants s'approprient les rez-de-chaussée en ouvrant des accès secondaires ou en agrandissant les logements sur les coursives. Et à l'échelle du grand collectif, la place centrale, laissée vide à l'origine, se transforme en marché informel le matin, terrain de football le soir, et lieu de sociabilité pour les jeunes garçons. L'écart entre l'espace conçu et l'espace vécu a donné lieu à une multitude d'appropriations, éphémères ou permanentes, révélant la richesse des usages réels face à la rigidité du projet initial.

1 Bourdier, M., (2022). *L'étude des usages et des formes d'appropriation de l'espace public par l'étude de cas de la place de la République à Metz*

2 Bourdier, M., (2022). *L'étude des usages et des formes d'appropriation de l'espace public par l'étude de cas de la place de la République à Metz*



Nid d'abeille,
Casablanca, Morocco



La Roue Cité Jardin,
Anderlecht, Belgium

Figure 3: Individual appropriation of housing - By Guénézan, C.

Bien que les logements d'un grand ensemble moderniste partagent un même plan, leur appropriation par ceux qui les habitent sont bien différentes. Cependant, ces appropriations naissent d'un besoin, mais aussi d'une opportunité. Les petites superficies des logements du bâtiment Nid d'abeille à Casablanca ont poussées les habitants à s'approprier les espaces extérieurs, devant une extension essentielle pour améliorer leur cadre de vie. La présence initiale des sanitaires sur les balcons a renforcé cette dynamique d'occupation. La façade en damier, alternant pleins et vides, génère des zones semi-intimes (à l'image du patio marocain) et favorise des formes d'appropriation individualisées. Cette configuration, combinée à la hauteur inhabituelle des murets (1,80 m), a contribué à créer des espaces clos, propices à leur transformation. Progressivement, les balcons ont été fermés par de la maçonnerie et des fenêtres, devenant de véritables pièces supplémentaires, venant compenser les limites des intérieurs. Par ailleurs, la structure porteuse des balcons, soutenue par des piliers plutôt que suspendue, a permis l'extension des planchers et a élargi les possibilités d'aménagement. Ce processus d'adaptation illustre la manière dont les habitants ont su détourner les contraintes architecturales pour modeler des espaces à leur image, entre exigence fonctionnelle et quête d'intimité.

Dans de nombreux quartiers résidentiels conçus au début du XX^e siècle, les habitations pouvaient disposer individuellement d'un jardin à l'avant et à l'arrière, ainsi que de combles sous les toits. C'est par exemple le cas pour la cité jardin de La Roue à Anderlecht construite à partir de 1920. On peut associer ces éléments à une vision hygiéniste et familiale de l'habitat, mais ces éléments d'architectures sont devenus des atouts pour l'appropriation et de transformation du logement par les habitants. Le jardin arrière, espace intime et protégé, offre une opportunité naturelle pour agrandir les habitations. De nombreux foyers y ont construit des annexes, qu'il s'agisse de vérandas, de cuisines étendues, d'ateliers ou de pièces de vie supplémentaires. Ces extensions permettent d'adapter le logement à des besoins évolutifs, sans en modifier la façade principale. À l'avant, l'espace initialement prévu pour la mise à distance de la rue a souvent été converti en place de stationnement. Cette réaffectation traduit les changements dans les modes de vie, et répond à des besoins contemporains. Les combles sous les toits, autrefois peu utilisés ou relégués au simple rôle de grenier, sont devenus une ressource précieuse pour pallier le manque d'espace. Leur aménagement en chambres ou bureaux, a permis d'augmenter la surface habitable. Aujourd'hui, certaines maisons arborent des couleurs, des matériaux ou des détails architecturaux qui rompent avec le style d'origine. Le processus d'appropriation se prolonge à l'extérieur et devient un symbole qui rompt avec "l'ensemble" et se voit depuis l'espace public.

Conclusion

On remarque alors, qu'à toutes les échelles de l'espace, l'appropriation apparaît, passant de l'espace conçu à l'espace vécu. Pour beaucoup, l'appropriation naît du besoin d'adaptation, que cela soit pour combler des manques, ou mieux répondre à des pratiques culturelles. Bien que ces espaces aient tous été conçus pour répondre à un usage spécifique, l'architecture est en réalité devenue une opportunité, comme une toile de tableau que l'on viendrait compléter. Toutes ces appropriations nous rappellent que la ville n'est jamais réellement figée. La ville reste en perpétuelle négociation entre cadre formel et les usages réels. Toutefois, il est important de retenir qu'à travers ces projets, l'appropriation ne traduit pas un échec de conception, mais constitue au contraire une richesse d'usages, même si dans certains cas, tous les usages n'avaient pas été anticipés. Lors de la conception d'un projet, il faut donc toujours garder cela à l'esprit, c'est-à-dire penser en termes d'espaces flexibles, évolutifs avec des marges de liberté : seuils actifs, volumes latents, structures prédisposées ou même structures qui appellent aux transformations. C'est aussi reconnaître la diversité des manières d'habiter, et concevoir des cadres qui laissent place à cette diversité.



We can't always be on the same wavelength, so we stay among ourselves, and circumstances force us to do so. Look here, we are all African students, we have Belgian friends, but where are they, how many of them come to see us to grab a drink? Unfortunately, they don't.

It is called Maison Africaine but it is open to everyone. However, most of the time you only see African student, which does not make it a ghetto like everyone might think.

- Resident of the Maison Africaine (1984)



You can find everything in the gallery, including jewellery, food and hair salons. We are really in the heart of the neighbourhood. It is full of life especially on Saturdays. It's all about positive energy, everything is decorated and there are mamas everywhere.

As soon as you are on Chaussée de Wavre, you are in Congo. But when you come here (Chaussée d'Ixelles), you are back in Brussels. It is very small, we are all together, but still in our little corner.

- Dalsim, rapper (2023)



Matongé is, in my opinion, at a very interesting juncture right now. We have seen the entire African story come to life in the gallery and in addition, there is also the multicultural and cosmopolitan element that has emerged in the neighbourhood.

- Karel, anthropologist and resident of the neighbourhood (2011)



We tend to be a very lively crowd, with the majority being Congolese. There is a lot of dancing, fashion, music and positive energy. When you add other nationalities, it becomes a very diverse place.

Everyone is welcome here, but there are issues with the police, and the Gallery isn't in its best shape.

- Hairdresser in Galerie Matongé (2025)

Figure 4a : Matongé's actors and their thoughts - By author

ENTERING THE IN-BETWEEN

“With everything said about Matongé, through media, and stories of friends or mutual friends, it is scary to go inside Galerie Matongé.

I understand how from the outside it can feel unwelcoming and intimidating. Dealers stand at the entrance on Chaussée de Wavre, the building looks dirty from the outside, there is a lot of noise coming from the inside, and things are not displayed like in typical ‘European’ shopping malls. Overall, it might look a bit chaotic when you have not really been exposed to African culture.

In reality, it reflects the African lifestyle, the warmth, the community and the lack of hierarchy that places everyone on the same level.

It is very lively, like an African market.”³

Architecture always lies between defined categories: between public and private, between formal and informal, and between projected and lived. This master thesis aims to explore the *in-between*, by examining how Galerie Matongé functions as a hybrid space, both a commercial gallery and an environment for community life, influenced by the spontaneous appropriation of its users.

Located at the heart of a neighbourhood rich in history and cultural heritage, but also marked by identity tensions, Galerie Matongé can be considered as an interesting study case that tests the limits of urban space. It embodies a specific architectural typology, the covered passage, while also revealing how local practices, social interactions and appropriation can shape a space over time.

This research is part of a broader reflection, as previously discussed, on the capacity of architecture to accommodate the unexpected. It acknowledges that the actual use of a public space does not always coincide with its initial intended purpose. Whether through improvised interventions, the act of expanding beyond predefined limits, or a spontaneous reconfiguration of space, appropriation shows how users adapt their environment to fit their needs, cultures, in a given period. These transformations should not be viewed as a design failure, but a richness, something to be anticipated, welcomed and even encouraged.

³ Extract from a personal recording done after a first visit in Galerie Matongé



In general it's in Brussel's Matongé that Kinshasa's fashion is made. New clothing trends in Dutch Wax fabrics arrive here first before travelling to Kinshasa

- Client in Galerie Matongé (1984)



What kind of clientele do you have here? All Kinds. Both Belgians who lived in Africa as well as Africans who are living in Belgium

- Vinyl shopowner in Galerie Matongé (1984)



Like in every country, people try to find a sense of belonging and to do so, they need to be among their own. That's why there are distinct neighbourhoods which can generate a sort of segregation. There are many neighbourhoods like that but here, Matongé is essentially African.

I believe the shops in Matongé honour both African and Belgian culture. The Africanization of the neighbourhood is not a bad thing. There is a lot of life and energy, with some occasional incidents, but they remind you of Africa.

People come here from all-over, it's what they would call a 'must-visit' spot.

- Madame Nicole, hairdresser in Galerie Matongé (1984 & 2011)



Most of the white Belgians who come into the gallery are nostalgic from when they used to live in Africa, so they come here to have a drink, grab a bite, ... But people who do not know Matongé, or African culture, are afraid to come inside the gallery.

There was a quiet period during the 60s-70s that lasted two years while people were moving to Galerie Louise. But now that there are more Africans in the gallery, it has come back to life, there is a lot more activity.

People tend to gather, have a drink and socialize when there are more snack bars and places to hang out. It's different from regular shops where you just buy something and leave. Little by little, everyone comes together, and that's what creates this dynamic atmosphere.

- Madame Chapeau, hatter and seamstress in Galerie Matongé (1984 & 2011)

Figure 4b : Matongé's actors and their thoughts - By author

At first glance, Galerie Matongé may seem chaotic and uninviting. With its weathered façade, the noise coming from the inside and the way displays spill onto the already narrow alley, its atmosphere is far from that of a conventional European shopping gallery. Yet for those who go there regularly, it offers a vibrant, dynamic, social and community environment. Here, architecture is not just a container for activity, it is part of a living space that evolves through time and use.

Through interviews from people in the gallery, during on-site conversations or drawn from local documentaries, it is evident that its gradual reappropriation has transformed it into more than a place of commerce. It is now a lively meeting point and has a strong identity.

From these voices, one thing stands out, Galerie Matongé is a cultural symbol, a landmark, for Brussel's African diaspora. As a result of a gradual transition from European to Africans businesses, it is now the place where you will find the spirit of Kinshasa's Matongé district. With hairdressers, music, clothing, food and more, everyday life and celebrations are done the African way.

Beyond its commercial and folkloric character, the gallery plays an important social role as people come to shop but also reconnect with friends and family. Despite some tensions and somewhat anarchic ways, shop owners describe the space as warm and familial. It welcomes Africans, nostalgic former residents of the continent and curious visitors. While it suffers from a negative public image, Matongé remains an open and essential part of Brussels' multicultural identity.

This master thesis began with a simple question: How can we create space for informal uses? How can architecture coexist with spontaneous and unpredictable activities? Is an architectural project successful if it remains true to its initial design, or should it be capable of being reappropriated and of evolving with its users?

THE COVERED PASSAGE - GALERIE

<u>French term and translation</u>	<u>Definition</u>
Galerie - <i>Gallery</i>	covered passageway, longer than it is wide, on the outside of a building. <i>Usually used in French to refer to the most luxuriously decorated</i> ⁴
Galerie marchande – shopping mall	covered pedestrian area with a predominantly commercial function
Passage - <i>Passage</i>	a public or private alleyway, established across one or more plots of land, and completely, or partially, crossing a block of land
Passage couvert - <i>Covered passageway</i>	pedestrian street covered by a glass roof. Created in the 18 th century, it serves as a link and is often used for shopping.

<u>English term</u>	<u>Definition</u>
Arcade	Succession of arches and pillars
Colonnade	Straight or circular alignment of similar columns
Corridor	A long narrow passageway in a building, with doors opening to rooms on either side

⁴ Lemoine, B., (1989). *Les passages couverts*, p.14. Translated to English

1.1 WHAT IS A PASSAGE?

TERMINOLOGY

Passage, Arcade, Gallery, ...? What do they mean, and which term fits the best?

The most used term in French is *Galerie*. However, in his book “Le passage: un type architectural du XIXe siècle”, J.F.Geist quickly settles for the word *passage* to emphasize the transitory nature of this architectural archetype. The passage is originally from French and refers to “narrow private streets running through the interior of large residential areas.”

In European urban planning, the origin of passages appeared as a response to increasing pedestrian traffic and urban growth. That said, other cultures have developed similar structures under different names such as *Bazaars* or *Souks*, Persian and Arabic term for market, each influenced by their own urban layout, social habits and needs.

This type of structure can be referred to differently in each language. Depending on its purpose, the terminology can change, often emphasising a specific architectural element while still referring to the same type of building. A selection of terms taken from Geist’s work and their definition from the *Thésaurus ArchiRè*⁵ reflects this.

By capturing both its form and function, the French terminologies seem to provide a more nuanced description of the overall building. For the purpose of this research, the term *passage* will be used, as it most accurately describes the type of structure studied. The term *gallery*, or *galerie* in French, will also appear, as the study case’s original name is in French.

⁵ *Thésaurus*, (2020). Translated to English

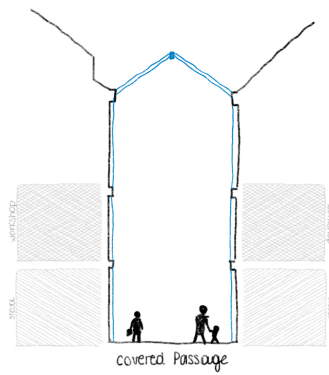
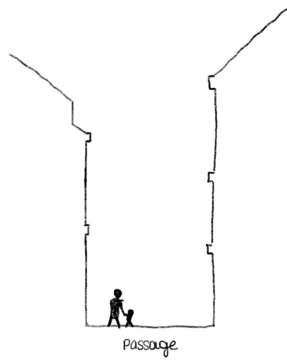
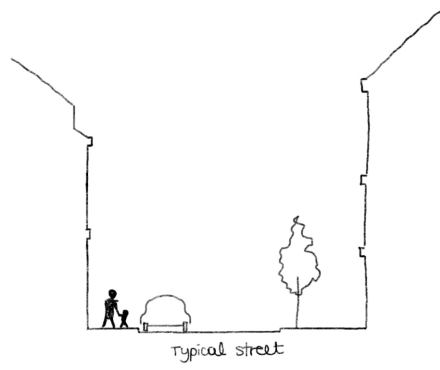


Figure 5: From the street to the covered passage - By author

DEFINITION

In architecture, a passage is a transitional space for pedestrians, with a beginning and an end, allowing movement from one side to another. While it can be covered or uncovered, the term most commonly refers to covered pedestrian routes, especially ones protected by a glass roof, transforming them into an independent monument or building with an interior-like environment.

“A glass roof, or glazed canopy, implies a thoughtful intervention on the passage as a whole, including its contents, and therefore a different use of the space, typically involving commercial and cultural activities.” – B.Lemoine ⁶

What gives it its distinct character is the space contained within. The exterior becomes interior. Unlike a street, a passage is defined by its glass roof, symmetrical façade, often with ornamental details, and its exclusive use by pedestrians, with no possible access for vehicles.

It also has a specific retail organisation, typically consisting of one or more alleys lined with shops or restaurants. Above, there can be additional functions, such as retail, storage, workshops and even accommodation, making it a multifunctional building that can balance public and private uses.

Historically, passages were built for commercial investment and property speculations. They can be considered as semi-public spaces as they were privately owned but open to the public. As J.F.Geist describes it, passages can broadly be seen as “public spaces on private land that facilitates circulation, offers a shortcut or protection from bad weather, a space reserved for pedestrians”.⁷

Passages are an early example of mixed-use urban design, where pedestrian movement, commercial life, and architectural detailing come together. Even though the context has changed, this model could make sense today for several reasons. It supports walkability and human scale experience, which many cities are trying to bring back. It also provides public indoor spaces that are protected from the weather, something public outdoor spaces can struggle with. Finally, passages show how commercial infrastructure can coexist with social life.

⁶ Lemoine, B., (1989). *Les passages couverts*, p.13. Translated to English

⁷ Geist, J.F., (1989), *Le passage : un type architectural du XIXe siècle*



Figure 6 : Dayabatyn caravanserai, central Asian arcade from Turkmenistan - By Mustard, A.

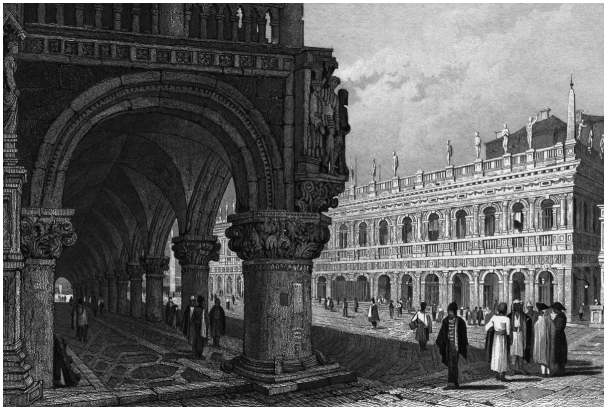


Figure 7 : Palazzo Ducale, arcades in Venice - By Prout, S.

1.2 EVOLUTION OF PASSAGES

1.2.1 The architectural origin of passages

The first project that came the closest to a covered passage is Galerie de Bois at the Palais-Royal, built in 1786. The plan was to build a continuous row of houses with arcaded shops around the edge of the palace garden. But due to a lack of funds, the full project was never completed. Instead, the remaining unbuilt foundations were covered by a wooden shed, which was converted into a retail space.

The layout of this was similar to one of a covered passage: linear circulation space with individual shops along the sides, a simple roof and windows under the roof overhang. The main issue was that from the outside, the wooden shed looked like a covered market. While it was an architectural innovation, it did not capture the interior-exterior ambiguity that defines a covered passage.

The first passages to feature a glazed roof was Passage Feydeau, built in 1791. But it really was the Passage du Caire and Passage des Panoramas that were the first to live up to the name. It was not until the construction on Passage Delorme in 1808 that fully integrated the glass roof that became the architectural identity of the passage.

If we take a step back, passages either take inspiration from architectural elements, or are a direct descendent from architectural and urban forms that predate them. Lemoine in “Le passage couvert” points out four sources of inspiration: Arcades, Markets, Commercial developments and *l’architecture savante*.

Arcades existed in many cities across Central Asia, where they were very widespread, but it seems that the French passages were more directly inspired by Italian arcades. As Balzac pointed out,⁸ when the French returned from Milan or Naples, they were always amazed by the Italian’s efforts to protect pedestrians from the intense summer heat and bad weather.

Though they already existed in France, the influence of colonnades made its way to Paris at the start of the 17th century, around the same time that covered streets and early passage were starting to appear. The intentions behind both structures were similar: to provide sheltered and comfortable walkways for pedestrians, which would also support the success of businesses placed beneath them. The only difference lies in their position in the city, where arcades typically run along the edges of buildings, while passage bring urban life into the core of building blocks.

⁸ Lemoine, B., (1989). *Les passages couverts*



Figure 8: Les Halles Baltard, a covered market in Paris - Unknown author



Figure 9: Qaysariyya Bazaar a Bazaar in Iran - By Waugh, D.

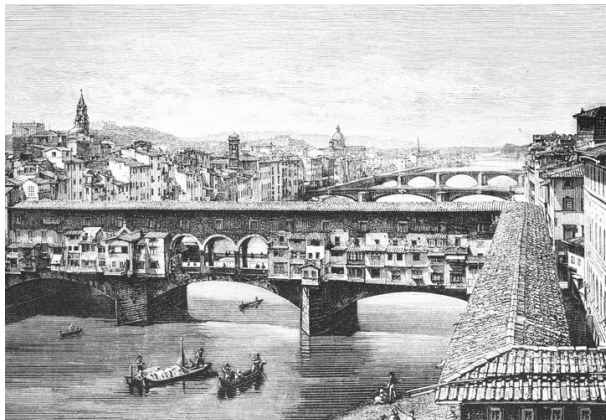


Figure 10: Ponte Vecchio, a commercial bridge in Florence - By Yriarte, C.

Another important influence on the passage typology came from covered markets. In France, these were often built with a roof or a roof truss supported by wooden or masonry pillars. This created well-defined alleys and a perspective that was unmistakably close to that of the passages. When markets could not be built in open squares, they were inserted into available parcels. Lemoine categorizes the covered markets organisation in three distinct layers: the shopping cells, which are the base element of the composition; the internal walkways, which structure circulation and gives access to the shops; and the building in its entirety, whose purpose was to separate and reorganize commercial activities into a designated space. Parallel to covered passages, this structuring stems from the idea that architecture is determined as much by the individual treatment of these elements as by the way they are assembled ⁹ and make a whole.

In addition, even if it is difficult to prove the direct link, formal, functional and urban ways of passages strongly resemble those of Persian Bazaars and Arabic Souks. The similarities lie in the series of domes, the narrow, covered alleyway for protection against the sun and the continuous, linear space dedicated to movement and commerce. Both are organized with small repetitive modules set along the sheltered pedestrian path which creates a strong rhythm and guides circulation naturally. Beyond their physical form, passages, bazaars and souks are not only spaces for shopping, but also for wandering meeting, and socializing. They create a special atmosphere where commerce and everyday life mix.

Even if the influence is hard to trace precisely, centuries of exchanges around the Mediterranean likely contributed to transmitting these spatial ideas. Architects and traveller returning from North Africa or the Middle East may have brought back impressions that later found their way into the design of the European covered passage, the same way Italian arcades influenced Parisian architecture.

Commercial developments also had a strong influence. A surprising example, which with some thought actually makes perfect sense, are such structure as the Ponte di Rialto in Venice, the Ponte Vecchio in Florence, the old London Bridge or the Pont Notre Dame in Paris. All of these were bridges lined with houses, with shops and workshops built along the edges. Their role as daily crossings allowing people to move from one side of the river to the other, naturally created constant flow of life, much more than just circulation.

Other, more conventional commercial complexes also influenced the development of passages, such as the Rotonde du Temple, La Maison du Commerce, or the Vauxhalls structures. However, the most significant influence was Le Palais Royal. According to Lemoine, covered passages might never have achieved such success if the Palais Royal

⁹ Lemoine, B., (1989). *Les passages couverts*, p.43. Translated to English

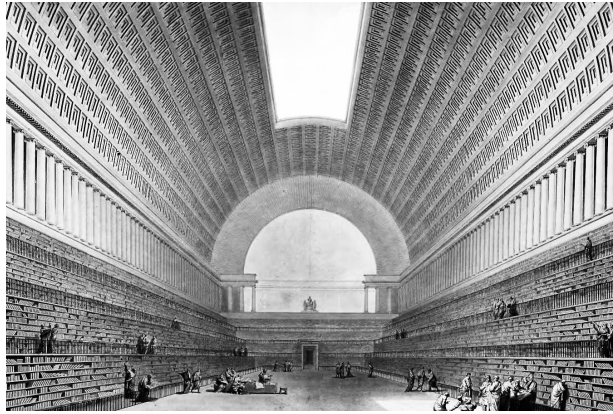


Figure 11 : A Panopticon library - By Boullée, E.L.

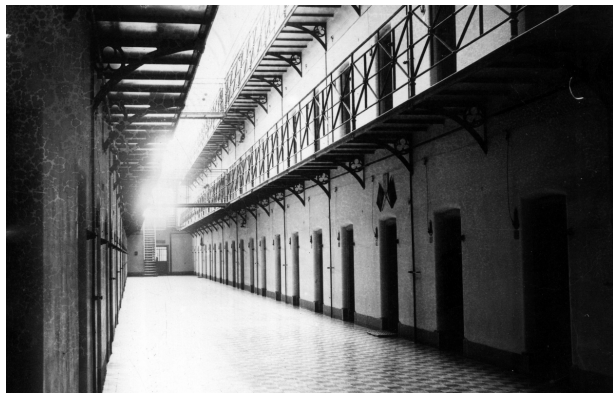


Figure 12 : Similar structuration - Unknown author

had not been built.¹⁰ Its construction triggered a wave of covered passages in this area. In fact, the decline of covered passages later is likely linked to the decline of the Palais Royal itself.

Finally, at some point, the glazed passages ended up divided in two categories. “It abolished the vulgar name of *passage*. That word smelled of the common people and irritated aristocratic tongues. *Galerie* suited much better perfumed conversations of the high society”.¹¹ *Galerie* became a way to refer to spaces that were well thought out, well decorated, and suitable for displaying works of art and for socialization, while the other type remained a simple commercial creation. *Architecture savante* pushed for this distinction.

Through strict layout organisation, the repetitive façades and full glass roof coverage that created a soft and diffuse light, *l’architecture savante* transformed passages. They were not just shortcuts anymore, but rather a carefully designed space, shaped by classical principles of symmetry, proportion and alignment.

Materials like iron and glass were used in a way that blended technical innovation with traditional architecture. Passages inserted themselves into the urban fabric almost like interior streets, while maintaining their monumental symbol. Without this influence, passages would probably have stayed simple commercial corridors, instead of the sophisticated urban spaces that they still are today.

Since covered passages are, by nature, transitional and circulation spaces inspired by different past architectural types, it is not surprising that there are multiple variations similar to covered passages or galleries. The repetition of identical modules, such as retail stores along a central alley, allowed an efficient use of space. In some cases, this spatial logic echoed panoptic principles, where visibility and control were embedded in the architectural layout. Thus, this organization was soon applied in structures like hospitals, libraries, prisons, museums, school, ...

To summarise, from its origin to its influence on other archetypes, according to Geist and Lemoine’s research, the architectural concept of the passage made its way quite anonymously through travel narratives, direct observation and word of mouth. Open and covered passages appear around the same time. The open ones were mostly linked to Open passages were usually associated to craftsmanship and located industrial districts, while the covered passages were more structured and focused on luxury commerce.

10 Lemoine, B., (1989). *Les passages couverts*, p.21

11 Luchet. A., as cited in Lemoine, B (1989). *Les passages couverts*, p.22. Translated to English

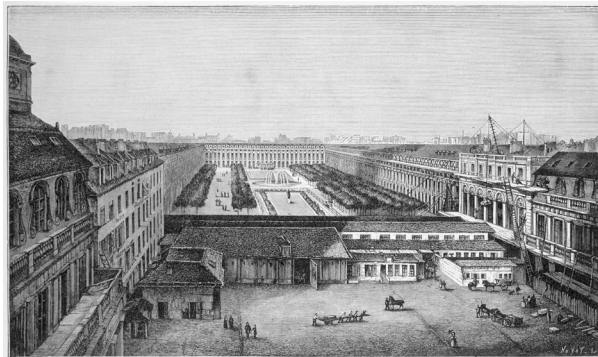


Fig. 12. — Galeries de bois au Palais-Royal, en 1828. Vue prise du palais, d'après une aqua-forte anglaise de l'époque.

Figure 13 : View of the first covered passage - By Hoffbauer, TJH.

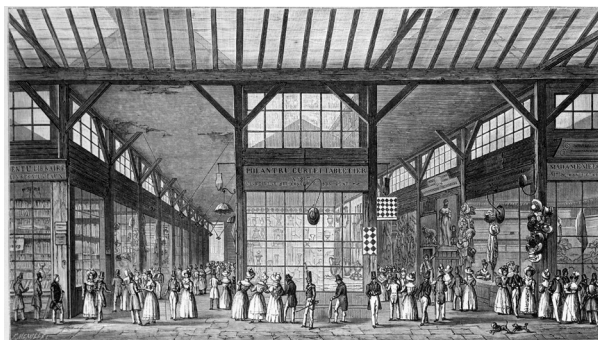


Fig. 13. — Galeries de bois (ancien camp des Tartares), au Palais-Royal (1825).

Figure 14 : Inside the first covered passage - By Hoffbauer, TJH.

1.2.2 Passages during the 19th century

The concept of passages developed steadily until around 1820. Although their evolution was blossoming and most of their basic characteristics were already in place, it came to an abrupt stop. For almost a decade, no new passages were built, mainly because of the dropping economy following the fall of Napoleon's empire and the return of the monarchy.

Between 1820 and 1840, passages once again became the objects of speculation for the bourgeoisie. Fifteen new passages were built in Paris alone, and the concept spread across France, England, Italy, Belgium, where the first passage was opened in Liège, Passage Lemonier, in 1839, and even overseas, in Philadelphia in the United States.

It was during this period that the structure started to diversify, becoming richer details inspired by temples, colonnade, bazaars and arcades, evolving towards a monumental architecture. Passages became longer, slightly taller, more decorated and pierced through multiple building blocks, like Passage Lemonier in Liège.

The passage's archetype was nearly completed by 1930. The building's street-facing façade, interior and exterior façades, continuous glass roofs and longitudinal and central spaces, had all evolved into distinctive elements. The passage started moving beyond being a simple tool for private speculation and became an essential part of public life in the city.

At the same time, the scale of passage grew bigger. Though they opened to a broader public, their owners were driven by the hope of financial gain. As passages became more popular, nobles, bankers and entrepreneur would build them without always thinking about their location. Many of these constructions remained successful as long as the trend lasted.

In Paris, very few were built during this period. The development shifted towards neighbouring cities and countries, like Brussels, where passages were part of an urban renewal project, backed by stronger public interest and preceded by long studies before construction. Their forms also evolved, become even larger and adopting new shapes like the cruciform layout in Triest.

The second half of the 19th century marked the monumental phase of passages, when they became fully accessible to the wider public and reached a status comparable to the roman baths. They were no longer exclusively dedicated to luxury products and became a solution to overcrowded cities where not a single centimetre of space remained unused.

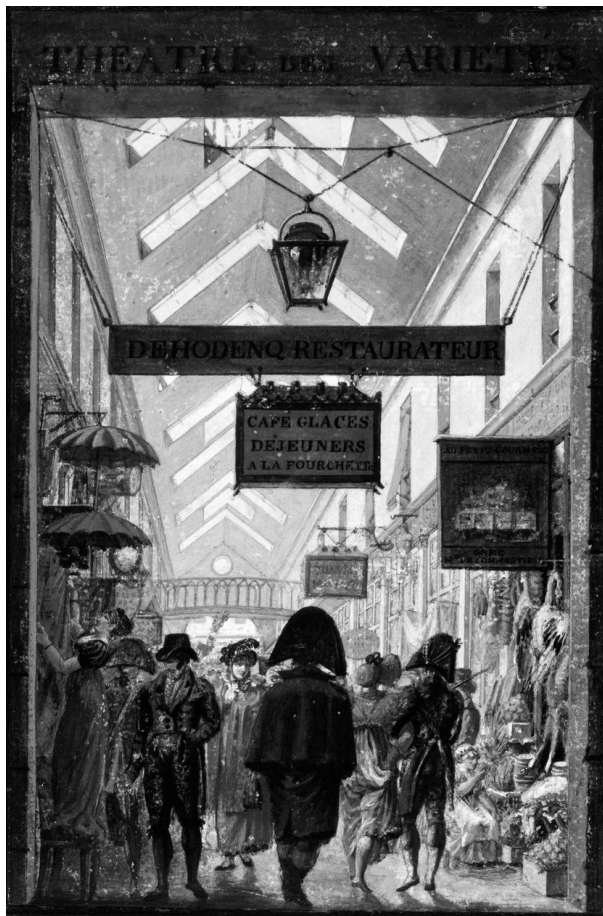


Figure 15: A beacon for modernity and innovation - Unknown author

But this phase was only temporary. As society grew more divided, the poor becoming poorer and the rich becoming richer, passages slowly turned into a memory of the good old days. Their decline began, but the few that were still built either imitated the architecture of older passages or were an uncoherent mix of styles. Passages were no longer transitional spaces, they were hiding the reality of the city behind larger and bolder forms. Their original spirit faded and was replaced by a growing obsession with spectacle and profit.

By the arrival of the 20th century, with wars looming and the critical social and sanitary conditions of cities, the passages era was coming to an end. New regulations affected almost every aspect of urban life. Medical discoveries about public health led to a prescription about the amount of air and light needed for a healthy environment. Consequently, dense constructions, the basis of passages, were banned and abandoned. At the same time, the rise of department stores and modern shopping malls offered a new consumption model which sealed the fate of covered passages.



Figure 16 : Galerie Saint-Hubert, an emblematic covered passage in Brussels - From Hulton Archive



Figure 17 : The Innovation, the department store typology in Brussels - From galacticjourney



Figure 18 : City 2, the shopping mall typology in Brussels - From issuu - By Blaise, F.

1.2.3 A second wave of passages

According to Geist, the idea of passages was slowly making its way into future urban planning. However, the concept as it once existed, officially died during World War I, and times have changed since then. If passages are to make a comeback, they will have to adapt to current economic, social and urban conditions that are very different to those of previous centuries. “Their rebirth can only happen in another form”¹² as they shifted to a department store-like form.

After the First World War, the covered passages that were built were no longer independent structures as they once were. They became solutions to other architectural problems: a corridor to bring light inside of office buildings, a pedestrian street without stores or a simple covered alley leading to residential complexes. Slowly, they lost their identity and became unrecognisable.

With industrialisation came the rise of department stores, buildings designed to be easily accessible for new means of transportation and targeting a growing middle-class public. Unlike covered passages and galleries, these new structures no longer function with the urban context and or pedestrian circulation. They are a product of modernization¹³ and consumerism, which gained momentum particularly after the Second World War.

It is around the 1960s that passages, as an independent structure, make a small return. However, their comeback is a slippery slope. Consumerism was reaching new heights and most of the new passage lost they transitional character, as well as their real mix of retail, restaurants and cultural spaces. Without that diversity, they became very similar to shopping malls and lost their anonymous quality, that sense of wandering without a purpose. The anonymous soul of the passage faded and became a showroom of consumers.

12 Geist, JF., (1989), *Le passage : un type architectural du XIXe siècle*, p.121

13 Ledent, G., (2017). *Introversion et extraversion de l'espace public commercial bruxellois*



Figure 19: Covered passages in Brussels - By author

1.3 PASSAGES IN BRUSSELS

In Brussels, we can identify two waves of construction of covered passages, each tied to important periods of city development. The first passages were built in the 19th century, like Passage de la Monnaie (1820), the first passage of the city which no longer exists, Galerie Saint-Hubert (1846) or Passage du Nord (1881). They were designed with elegance, often decorated and targeting a bourgeois clientele. These covered passages were part of a dense urban fabric and played both commercial and social roles.¹⁴

The second wave came much later, after the Second World War, when Brussels rebuilding itself and stepping into a new modern era. Galleries like Galerie Ixelles (1953), Galerie Ravenstein (1954) and Galerie Louise (1960-80) were not built to be prestigious, but rather functional: to organise circulation, connect streets and gather commercial activities in one place. These structures were less decorated, often part of a larger commercial and mixed-use complexes, and reflected the shift from monumental elegance to pragmatic commercial infrastructures. Over time, some were restored while others become barely viable, or even abandoned.

¹⁴ Willaumez, MF., (1983). *Les passages-galleries du XIXe siècle à Bruxelles*



PASSAGE DE LA MONNAIE (1820)
Demolished in 1968



GALERIE SAINT-HUBERT (1846-47)
Restored



PASSAGE BORTIER (1847-48)
Transformed

PASSAGE DE POSTES (1875)
Demolished in 1966



GALERIE DU COMMERCE / HIRSCH
(1879)
Destroyed & Rebuilt



PASSAGE DU NORD
(1881-82)



GALERIE DU PARLEMENT (1880)
Transformed



GRAND BAZAR DU BOULEVARD
ANSPACH (1898)
Transformed in 1984

Figure 20 : First wave of covered passages



GALERIE DU CENTRE
(1951-1952)



GALERIE D'IXELLES/MATONGÉ
(1954)



GALERIE RAVENSTEIN (1954-58)



LE BAILLI LOUISE
(1961)



GALERIE SAINT-HONORÉ
(1962-63)
Converted in 2012



GALERIE AGORA
(1963)



GALERIE LOUISE
(1963-1964)
Extended in 1987



PASSAGE 44 (1965 à 1969)
Closed in 2022



GALERIE TOISON D'OR (1968-70)



PASSAGE LINTHOUT (1972)



GALERIE PORTE DE NAMUR
Unknown date



GALERIE DU CINQUANTAIRE
Unknown date

Figure 21 : Second wave of covered passages

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100	101	102	103	104	105	106	107	108	109	110	111	112	113	114	115	116	117	118	119	120	121	122	123	124	125	126	127	128	129	130	131	132	133	134	135	136	137	138	139	140	141	142	143	144	145	146	147	148	149	150	151	152	153	154	155	156	157	158	159	160	161	162	163	164	165	166	167	168	169	170	171	172	173	174	175	176	177	178	179	180	181	182	183	184	185	186	187	188	189	190	191	192	193	194	195	196	197	198	199	200	201	202	203	204	205	206	207	208	209	210	211	212	213	214	215	216	217	218	219	220	221	222	223	224	225	226	227	228	229	230	231	232	233	234	235	236	237	238	239	240	241	242	243	244	245	246	247	248	249	250	251	252	253	254	255	256	257	258	259	260	261	262	263	264	265	266	267	268	269	270	271	272	273	274	275	276	277	278	279	280	281	282	283	284	285	286	287	288	289	290	291	292	293	294	295	296	297	298	299	300	301	302	303	304	305	306	307	308	309	310	311	312	313	314	315	316	317	318	319	320	321	322	323	324	325	326	327	328	329	330	331	332	333	334	335	336	337	338	339	340	341	342	343	344	345	346	347	348	349	350	351	352	353	354	355	356	357	358	359	360	361	362	363	364	365	366	367	368	369	370	371	372	373	374	375	376	377	378	379	380	381	382	383	384	385	386	387	388	389	390	391	392	393	394	395	396	397	398	399	400	401	402	403	404	405	406	407	408	409	410	411	412	413	414	415	416	417	418	419	420	421	422	423	424	425	426	427	428	429	430	431	432	433	434	435	436	437	438	439	440	441	442	443	444	445	446	447	448	449	450	451	452	453	454	455	456	457	458	459	460	461	462	463	464	465	466	467	468	469	470	471	472	473	474	475	476	477	478	479	480	481	482	483	484	485	486	487	488	489	490	491	492	493	494	495	496	497	498	499	500	501	502	503	504	505	506	507	508	509	510	511	512	513	514	515	516	517	518	519	520	521	522	523	524	525	526	527	528	529	530	531	532	533	534	535	536	537	538	539	540	541	542	543	544	545	546	547	548	549	550	551	552	553	554	555	556	557	558	559	560	561	562	563	564	565	566	567	568	569	570	571	572	573	574	575	576	577	578	579	580	581	582	583	584	585	586	587	588	589	590	591	592	593	594	595	596	597	598	599	600	601	602	603	604	605	606	607	608	609	610	611	612	613	614	615	616	617	618	619	620	621	622	623	624	625	626	627	628	629	630	631	632	633	634	635	636	637	638	639	640	641	642	643	644	645	646	647	648	649	650	651	652	653	654	655	656	657	658	659	660	661	662	663	664	665	666	667	668	669	670	671	672	673	674	675	676	677	678	679	680	681	682	683	684	685	686	687	688	689	690	691	692	693	694	695	696	697	698	699	700	701	702	703	704	705	706	707	708	709	710	711	712	713	714	715	716	717	718	719	720	721	722	723	724	725	726	727	728	729	730	731	732	733	734	735	736	737	738	739	740	741	742	743	744	745	746	747	748	749	750	751	752	753	754	755	756	757	758	759	760	761	762	763	764	765	766	767	768	769	770	771	772	773	774	775	776	777	778	779	780	781	782	783	784	785	786	787	788	789	790	791	792	793	794	795	796	797	798	799	800	801	802	803	804	805	806	807	808	809	810	811	812	813	814	815	816	817	818	819	820	821	822	823	824	825	826	827	828	829	830	831	832	833	834	835	836	837	838	839	840	841	842	843	844	845	846	847	848	849	850	851	852	853	854	855	856	857	858	859	860	861	862	863	864	865	866	867	868	869	870	871	872	873	874	875	876	877	878	879	880	881	882	883	884	885	886	887	888	889	890	891	892	893	894	895	896	897	898	899	900	901	902	903	904	905	906	907	908	909	910	911	912	913	914	915	916	917	918	919	920	921	922	923	924	925	926	927	928	929	930	931	932	933	934	935	936	937	938	939	940	941	942	943	944	945	946	947	948	949	950	951	952	953	954	955	956	957	958	959	960	961	962	963	964	965	966	967	968	969	970	971	972	973	974	975	976	977	978	979	980	981	982	983	984	985	986	987	988	989	990	991	992	993	994	995	996	997	998	999	1000
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100	101	102	103	104	105	106	107	108	109	110	111	112	113	114	115	116	117	118	119	120	121	122	123	124	125	126	127	128	129	130	131	132	133	134	135	136	137	138	139	140	141	142	143	144	145	146	147	148	149	150	151	152	153	154	155	156	157	158	159	160	161	162	163	164	165	166	167	168	169	170	171	172	173	174	175	176	177	178	179	180	181	182	183	184	185	186	187	188	189	190	191	192	193	194	195	196	197	198	199	200	201	202	203	204	205	206	207	208	209	210	211	212	213	214	215	216	217	218	219	220	221	222	223	224	225	226	227	228	229	230	231	232	233	234	235	236	237	238	239	240	241	242	243	244	245	246	247	248	249	250	251	252	253	254	255	256	257	258	259	260	261	262	263	264	265	266	267	268	269	270	271	272	273	274	275	276	277	278	279	280	281	282	283	284	285	286	287	288	289	290	291	292	293	294	295	296	297	298	299	300	301	302	303	304	305	306	307	308	309	310	311	312	313	314	315	316	317	318	319	320	321	322	323	324	325	326	327	328	329	330	331	332	333	334	335	336	337	338	339	340	341	342	343	344	345	346	347	348	349	350	351	352	353	354	355	356	357	358	359	360	361	362	363	364	365	366	367	368	369	370	371	372	373	374	375	376	377	378	379	380	381	382	383	384	385	386	387	388	389	390	391	392	393	394	395	396	397	398	399	400	401	402	403	404	405	406	407	408	409	410	411	412	413	414	415	416	417	418	419	420	421	422	423	424	425	426	427	428	429	430	431	432	433	434	435	436	437	438	439	440	441	442	443	444	445	446	447	448	449	450	451	452	453	454	455	456	457	458	459	460	461	462	463	464	465	466	467	468	469	470	471	472	473	474	475	476	477	478	479	480	481	482	483	484	485	486	487	488	489	490	491	492	493	494	495	496	497	498	499	500	501	502	503	504	505	506	507	508	509	510	511	512	513	514	515	516	517	518	519	520	521	522	523	524	525	526	527	528	529	530	531	532	533	534	535	536	537	538	539	540	541	542	543	544	545	546	547	548	549	550	551	552	553	554	555	556	557	558	559	560	561	562	563	564	565	566	567	568	569	570	571	572	573	5																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																											

Figure 22: The Layout: Types of connections - By Geist, JF.

	Pas de ligature		1 ligature		2 ligatures		3 ligatures		4 ligatures	
			Droite		Angle droit		1 angle		2 angles	
3 Types de bâillements	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Forme régulière										
Forme irrégulière										
Contact avec une lèvre supplémentaire du fil										
Forme obscure / flou										

Figure 23: The Layout: Types of space - By Geist, JF.

Distribution d'espaces		Positionnement d'espaces		Lignes d'espaces		Système constructif		Système d'assemblage	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 Types de systèmes Ente - pas et balustrade	1 rue	Rue + place	Unions	2 entrec	2 entrec				
2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Ente - rue et rue	2 axes	Place + place	Paville	3 entrec	3 entrec				
3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Ente - rue et rue	3 axes		En croix	4 entrec	4 entrec				
4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
	4 axes								

Figure 24: The layout : Types of connections - By Geist, JF.

1. 4 TYPOLOGY OF PASSAGES

1.4.1 The components of a passage

“The architectural effect is determined as much by the individual treatment of these parts as by the way in which they are assembled. (...) The approach to developing a passageway project can thus be summarized as the treatment of five essential components: the layout, the interior façades, the roof, the access points, and the ornamentation. Of course, there remains the work of fitting out the interior spaces, the shops and apartments, their access, construction issues, finishing work, etc. but these are not fundamentally different from those encountered in an ordinary building.”¹⁵

Geist and Lemoine both explore the typology of passages from different approaches: one with a broader lens by presenting variety of passages shape, the other through the breakdown of each essential component that make the passage. Though their approaches differ, they go hand in hand. For this section, a parallel from both perspectives will be made, structured by Lemoine’s four essential components.

One of the five components, ornamentation, will be combined with the interior façade component as they go hand in hand. In fact, the exterior-like interior of the gallery is done through the detailing of the façade.

THE LAYOUT

Passages can take on multiple layouts depending on whether they connect parallel or perpendicular streets. When connecting parallel streets, the alley should be as straight as possible but can be angled if they are connecting perpendicular streets. When the space allows it, a rotonde can be added which has several advantages: it avoids sharp turns that could break the straightness and perspective view of the passage, it becomes a strategic gathering point for shops, and allows more light in, thanks to the wider glass roof.

Since the topography of a city is not always flat, a sloped alley is generally preferred over stairs. Although a few steps do not pose a problem, slightly it interrupts the continuity of movement and reduces accessible. These slopes should, according to Lemoine, ideally be placed at turning points so they blend naturally into the path.

The alleyway itself is often paved with mosaic flooring to replicate the repetition of ornaments seen on the interior facades but also create a continuity of materials along

¹⁵ Lemoine, B., (1989). *Les passages couverts*, p.43. Translated to English

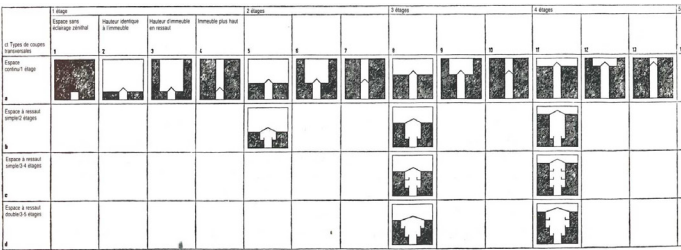
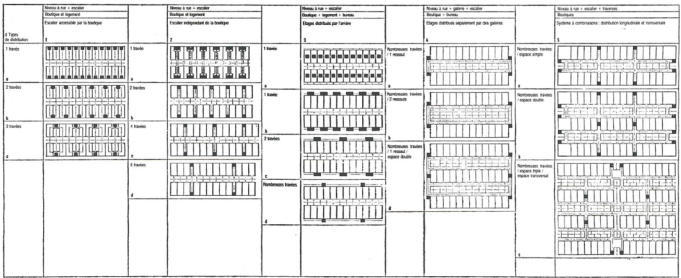


Figure 25: Interior Façades : Types of volumes - By Geist, JF.



the flooring. Sometimes, a darker line runs along the edges to indicate a resting area for pedestrians.

Finally, early on the expansion of store displays onto the alleyway was regulated by police orders. The rule was to not display any products if the passage was less than 2,5 meters wide, and even in wider alleys, the product display could not exceed 16 cm in depth, which created a very structured and display-like shopping experience.

INTERIOR FACADES

The interior facades of passages have always been treated as architectural elements: symmetrical, decorative and designed to frame the alley. This treatment was never applied to the housing facades, even when the residential entrances were located off the alley. Usually, these entrances were set back and built with a different logic than the passage, almost as if the passage was grafted onto the building but not part of the same system.

The proportions of the façade can vary but is a recurring ratio, usually 1,5 to 3. Façades heights ranged from 5,5 to 15 meters tall (in France, Belgium, and neighbouring countries) if their widths fell between 3 to 6 meters.

These façades are divided vertically into modules whose width generally corresponds to that of a shop. These modules can be composed as follows : the ground floor with display window framed by pillars; a mezzanine above, which gave retailers a space to put their workshop and was popular during the 20th century; a stringcourse that topped the mezzanine and marked the transition with upper floors, either accommodation or storage; and finally, an entablature that visually connects the façade with glass roof.

This structuring of the façade, through pilasters, window frame, mouldings, cornices, statues, engraving, and the transition between façade and glass roof, acts as a form of decor and ornamentation. Although these elements are strongly simplified during the 21st century passages due to modernism, they remain present, but in a different form.

The vertical circulation, like staircases, was usually independent for each shop or few shops. Since stores could be organised on multiple levels, they had their own internal stairs. By designing shops on multiple layers, it allowed the pillars to be closer together, giving a sense of repetition and for more smaller stores, creating diversity and continuity within the passage.

	Lanterneaux latéraux	Lantern. poncuelis	Verrères pareilles		Verrère continue		
	Bâlière	Pendentifs	Bâlière	Bâlière	Bâlière	Voûte / segment de voûte	Ogive, accolade, etc.
v Types de constructions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Vues du dessus							
Autoportantes							
a							
Sur poutres							
b							
Sur fermes parallèles							
c							
Sur poutres triangulées							
d							
Construction en fonction de l'appui							
e							
Avec câbles							
f							

Figure 27: Roofing : Types of glass roof By Geist, JF.

ROOFING

The glass roof is maybe the most essential characteristic of covered passages. It creates an enclosed space, protecting the passersby, that still feels open, thanks to its transparency and the way it brings light. The unglazed parts, often well-decorated ceilings, bring shadows into the passage, which helps emphasize the brightness of the glazed sections.

Though it is an essential element, it is also the most technical component. In early passages, the roof was simply constructed with windows under the roof overhang. At that time, large and thin glass panels were not easy to make, and the wooden structures was limiting. The arrival of metal structures, though expensive at first, evolved enough to be more present in covered passages of the 1840-50s and allowed for larger glazed spans.

ENTRANCES

Covered passages entrances are mostly done through the porch, the entrance fame itself, and not the entire building. This access represented a change in the spatial status of the building, from the public street into a private space, but open to the public. Because they are private buildings, they are usually closed at night and have set rules for shopkeepers.

1.4.2 Condition of existence

Multiple private developers built these passages with the goal of densifying urban blocks to increasing housing values, hoping they would also bring commercial glory. But many of these projects would fail when the popularity of passages declined.

The success of a passage depends heavily on the urban context in which it is built. It will only thrive if it is located in a thriving commercial district and connects two streets that are both equally busy. Since passages are not mobile, cannot be easily modified or adapted to changing tastes and audiences, it is difficult for them to evolve with their environment. Their survival depends on external factors that are beyond the architect's or owners' control.

Yet, by studying both successful and failing examples, J.F.Geist was able to identify a number of criteria that seem to influence the success of passages. While they are not rules, they are recurring elements that seem to make a difference in whether a passage thrives or fades over time.

URBAN CONTEXT

For a passage to be well located, it should preferably be in the city centre, or at least in a busy area, somewhere where people meet, shop, stroll, seek entertainment, and where there is constant movement. It is not something that can be measured, but ideally, it should be a space that is active both during the day and night.

Many cities would not be able to meet these conditions to support a passage, not even some major metropolises. In Brussels for instance, a passage would fit best in a 5-minute neighbourhood according to Geist. That means a dense, highly walkable area, where most movement happens by foot with a diverse pedestrian flow.

Galerie Saint-Hubert, the most popular passage in Belgium, is a perfect example of this. Set in a historic neighbourhood filled with commercial activity and surrounded by a dense urban fabric, it also acts as a shortcut through a city block.

Globally, a passage needs to be placed in a compact active area to be successful. The more it blends into locals' everyday routes, the more it becomes part of the urban fabric.

POSITIONING & CONNEXIONS

In addition to being part of a dense urban fabric, a passage should serve as a transitional space, connecting one place to another, preferably equally busy, as mentioned earlier. It should provide a new route that helps pedestrians move more efficiently through the city and shorten their path. Therefore, a passage must have at least two or more entrances. According to Geist, there are five possible ways a passage can be placed within an urban context:

1. A passage shortens and facilitates traffic between two points
2. The passage extends an existing street or connects two streets together
3. The passage connects a street with a square, two squares
4. The passage is part of a larger private complex, extending over several blocks
5. The passage has its own internal circuit, independent from the street network, is accessible from all sides and has interior spaces. It then becomes a structure similar to a covered market

INTERIOR ORGANISATION

A third important condition is the attractiveness of the passage, which directly affects its use, the various entrances and the design of the interior, exterior and intermediate areas.

In terms of volume, the general idea is: the more shops that can be inside, the more engaging the passage becomes. Shops are usually narrow and deep, allow a greater diversity retail space. The glazed roof covering the alley is essential for making the interior as seductive as possible. It shelters the pedestrians from the weather and creates a pleasant, peaceful environment for walking.

As for the content, the space venues inside should offer a mix of uses: shops, restaurants, cultural functions, and more. That diversity is what gives the passage the same importance as a typical commercial street, turning it into “an essential part of urban public life”.¹⁶

But in my opinion, the most important aspect is the status of the passage. People walking through should not feel like they’re entering somewhere. That feeling often suggests a specific purpose or destination, and pushes wanderers away, which goes against the nature of the passage. Instead, a passage should feel neutral, anonymous, and maintain its transitional quality. Architecturally, this can be achieved by keeping it as open, light and transparent as possible with two entrances, one to enter and another to exit.

¹⁶ Geist, JF., (1989), *Le passage : un type architectural du XIXe siècle*

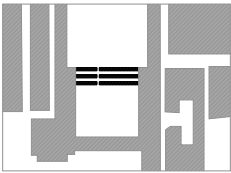
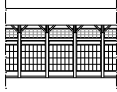
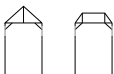
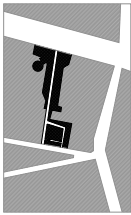
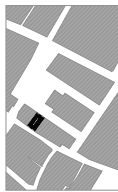
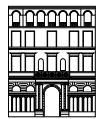
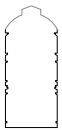
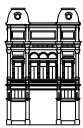
	URBAN CONTEXT	ENTRANCES	INTERIOR FACADES & DECOR	ROOFING & VOLUMES
GALERIE DE BOIS (1786-88)		No information available as it is destroyed		
PASSAGE DES PANORAMAS (1800)				
PASSAGE DE LA MONNAIE (1820)			No information available as it is destroyed	
GALERIE SAINT-HUBERT (1846-47)				
PASSAGE DU NORD (1887-82)				

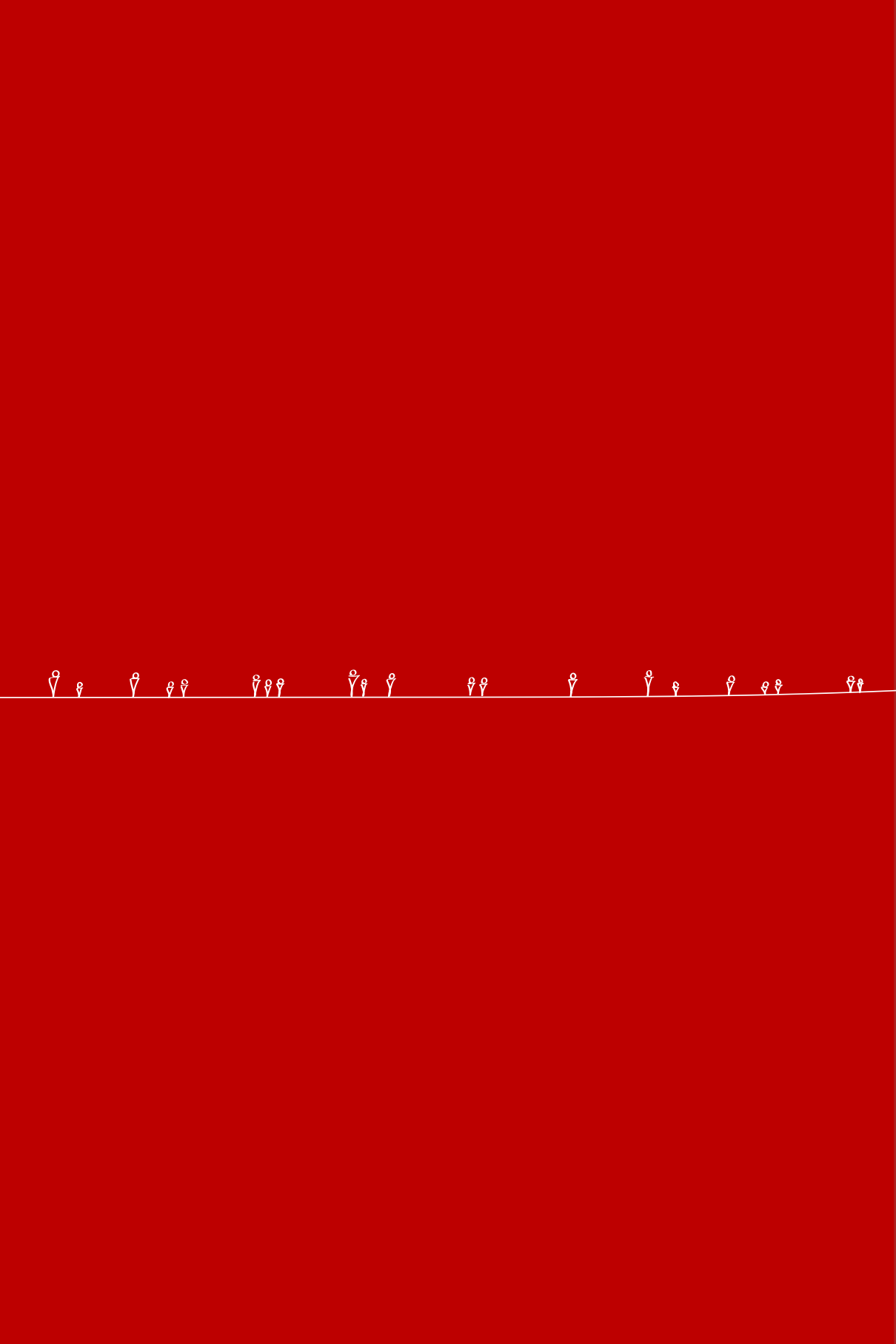
Figure 28 : Covered passages typology & condition of existence catalog - By author

THE PUBLIC

Initially, the passage a stage for luxury and fashion, a place where people went “**to see and to be seen**”,¹⁷ to wander, admire and consume. Adopted by the bourgeoisie after the French Revolution, it became a kind of a parallel modern reality for figures such as the *flâneur*, the *bohème* or the *boulevardier* to stroll.

The passage was created for a specific kind of public, that existed at the time. But the social conditions changed, the passage lost its original purpose, and with it, the potential of lasting success. Passages will work if they are built with a clear purpose, and if there is a public that needs and uses them. Though hardly talked about, it seems to be the most important condition for a gallery’s success which will be revealed through the study case.

17 Geist, JF., (1989), *Le passage : un type architectural du XIXe siècle*



AN AFRICAN PASSAGE IN BRUSSELS



Figure 29a : A growing neighbourhood - By author

2.1 EVOLUTION OF PORTE DE NAMUR

2.1.1 The birth of Porte de Namur

Located at the junction of two major axes, Porte de Namur played a major role in the social and urban evolution of Brussels since the Middle Ages. This district, once on the outskirts of the city, gradually developed into a hub for trade, luxury and nightlife, reflecting the transformation of the Belgian capital.¹⁸

Today, almost nothing remains of the old fortifications, but at the time, the area was heavily defended by Brussel's second city wall, built at the end of the 14th century. Two gates controlled the area, and the neighbourhood between them was called “quartier d'entre deux portes”, or neighbourhood between two gates.

During the 16th century, the new village Ixelles-le-Vicomte located outside the city walls, was very exposed to the constant threat of religious wars and military campaigns led by Louis XIV. The Count of Monterey decided to reinforce the area and ordered the construction of a Vauban-style bastion stretching to the intersection of Chaussée d'Ixelles and Chaussée de Wavre. This military structure drastically shaped the local landscape during that time.

However, in the 18th century, the two gates of Porte de Namur lost their defensive purpose and fell into disrepair. The oldest of the two was demolished in 1754, while the other was kept by Josph II as a barrier to urban expansion. When that gate was demolished in 1785, it led, as expected, to rapid urban expansion in the upper part of Ixelles within 30 years.

By 1812, the surroundings of the old gates were completely built up. In 1823, the creation of a ring boulevard connecting Porte de Namur to Porte de Hal reshaped the city's circulation pattern. A few years later, in 1829, a school was established on the site of the old bastion, transforming the last remaining military structure. Finally, the redevelopment of the area was symbolized by the construction of the Charles de Brouckère fountain in the 1860s, a landmark that stood until 1955 and was relocated in 1977. Meanwhile, the small streets around Chaussée d'Ixelles and Chaussée de Wavre developed considerably, especially after 1850, with the construction of Saint-Boniface Church in response to the growing public's demand.

The real boom began in 1841, when an urban project was launched to expand and embellish Brussels, which also led to the rise of the Leopold Quarter. This neighbourhood attracted an aristocratic and bourgeois population, who built elegant

¹⁸ Hainaut, M., & Bovy, P. (2000). *A la découverte de l'histoire d'Ixelles (7): Porte de Namur*

1955
The end of the belle époque



2025
Matongé, a multicultural neighbourhood



Figure 29b : A growing neighbourhood - By author

neoclassical houses. As a result, urbanization of the former outskirts around Porte de Namur, intensified dramatically.

The arrival of the upper class pressured the execution of an urban project in the Saint-Boniface area. Though it was initially rejected, leaving the working class into precarious and unhygienic conditions, it was quickly picked up again in 1870. Major public works were launched with the intention to open, widen and extend the main and smaller streets around Saint-Boniface Church. An indoor market, Halles d'Ixelles, was built at the intersection of Rue de la Tulipe and Rue Sans Soucis, but was barely a success, was quickly abandoned and demolished.¹⁹

Thanks to its proximity to Avenue Louise, Avenue Toison d'Or, the Royal Palace, the Leopold district and Palace of Justice, Porte de Namur gained a new reputation as a prestigious neighbourhood, attracting wealthier crowds. Luxury boutiques, famous department stores, lively cafés, theatres and cinemas brought a vibrant energy to the area, creating a Brussels version of the Parisian "Boulevard spirit".²⁰

Amidst this growth, the Théâtre Molière was founded, playing a key role in the neighbourhood's cultural life. The theatre preferred showcasing popular hits over risky new plays, with one exception: "L'Africaine à Ixelles", a bold work for its time, which ironically hinted the diversity the area would later embrace. Many other theatres, cinemas and cabaret followed, turning Porte de Namur into a cultural hotspot for Brussels.

In 1905, King Leopold II urged an ambitious project in the area. Luckily, it was rejected, as it would have completely changed the appearance of the area, leading to "the destruction of Porte de Namur (...) which is one of the liveliest districts in the Brussels agglomeration".²¹

However, modernization hit, and during the 1950s to the 70s, the construction of the small ring tunnels and the Bastion Tower marked the beginning of Porte de Namur's decline. These projects tore through the neighbourhood, brutally ending its era of elegance and social life.

19 Herla, M. (2016, 2017). *Ixelles: Histoire du développement urbanistique: Partie 1*

20 Hainaut, M., & Bovy, P. (2000). *A la découverte de l'histoire d'Ixelles (7): Porte de Namur*, p.8. Translated to English

21 Vinck, E. as cited in Hainaut, M., & Bovy, P. (2000). *A la découverte de l'histoire d'Ixelles (7): Porte de Namur*, p.8. Translated to English



Figure 30: African store and restaurants - By Wells, M.



Figure 31: Congolese voices - From Belga News Agency

2.1.2 Porte de Namur, an African Neighbourhood

Until the end of the 1950s, the Congolese presence in Brussels is relatively low with no identifiable community. It is not until Zaïre²² gained its independence in June 1960 that a presence began to take shape. The dynamic that shaped the new Congolese community was very different from the one we know today.

During that period, Congolese migrants arrived in Belgium as students with government funding, as diplomats, tourists or commercials. Even though the embassy and direct bus to the university were based in Porte de Namur, these new faces mostly moved around Gare du Midi or Saint-Josse-ten-Noode.

It is during the 70s that Petit Matongé truly emerged in Ixelles. The Brussels Matongé takes its name from a district in Kinshasa, the capital of Zaïre, famous for its vibrant nightlife. The name *Matongé* comes from the plural *Litongé*, a local fruit in the local “Lingala” language.

This new neighbourhood developed around three major locations: the housing centre Maison Africane (Maisaf), the previous Le Mambo nightclub and Galerie d’Ixelles.²³ Although the Congolese cultural footprint gave the area its vibrant and chic identity, Matongé gradually became a mix of nationalities, particularly during the 90s. Today, only 10% of the inhabitants are from African origins, with only 2% Congolese.²⁴ In fact, Matongé has long been a crossroads or *centre-ville* rather than a residential place for people coming from Africa.

It was near the Galerie d’Ixelles, Chaussée de Wavre and nearby streets, that shops sold textiles, hair salons flourished, and restaurants and grocery stores developed, all giving the neighbourhood the “multi-ethnic character it still has today”.²⁵ For many, Matongé was an essential stop, whether they were based in Belgium, France, the other side of Europe, or even in Congo itself.

The lively spirit from back in the day was centred around numerous meeting spots: Galerie d’Ixelles, restaurants, Rue de Stassart which hosted the early African cafés and nightclubs in Brussels. Le Mambo was the meeting place of choice for young students, African and Belgian diplomats, and the place to discover new music.

After this nightclub opened, Belgian retailers from the chic Ixelles gallery, slowly left to move to the new Galerie Toison d’or and Galerie Louise, leaving vacant shops for African entrepreneurs to take over. The Galerie transformed into a lively space for

²² The current Democratic Republic of Congo, RDC

²³ Demart, S., (2013). *Histoire orale à Matonge (Bruxelles): Un miroir postcolonial*

²⁴ Corijn, E., (2004). *Matongé, centre multiculturel à Bruxelles*. Translated to English

²⁵ Corijn, E., (2004). *Matongé, centre multiculturel à Bruxelles*. Translated to English



Figure 32 : Inside the African Landmark - By Ketels, C.

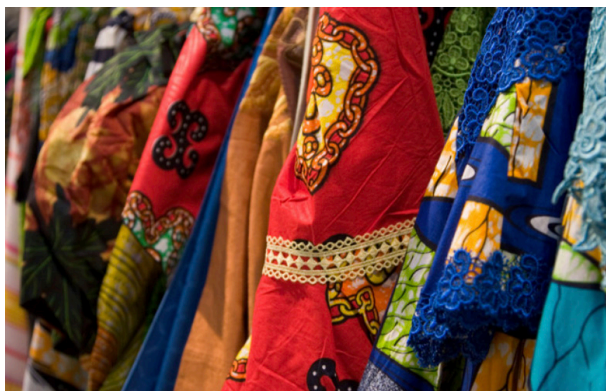


Figure 33 : A reminder of home - By Knight, O.

people “*to see and be seen*, like a theatre”²⁶, reflecting the activities of passages during the previous decade that had been lost. It was also a place for innovation, where new European and American trends often passed through Matongé before making their way to Africa. For many locals, Matongé was the place you went to get the latest news from back home.

Unfortunately, tensions within the neighbourhood began to arise along the years. Le Mambo closed its doors, just as Congo faced a severe economic crisis and wars broke out across Central Africa. The 1980s saw a new wave of migration, intensifying during the 90s with the arrival of political and economic refugees.

As a result, the Galerie d’Ixelles started deteriorating, caused by young people, mostly from immigrant backgrounds, engaging in petty crime and drug dealing. Crime rate rose along with incident of police violence. Retailers who wanted to maintain their chic clientele either relocated outside the gallery or closed their businesses altogether. Associated with delinquency, multiple neighbouring business refuse to be associated with this neighbourhood. The name Matongé, once a symbol of liveliness, was now just a memory.

In the early 2000s, Corijn believed Matongé still faces significant urban challenges: “African activities come into conflict with urban planning issues and the diversity of social groups”.²⁷ The community lacks a true public square for culture to exchange. Although cultures cohabitate, they do not necessarily mix as there is still “certain spatial segregation based on cultural background”.²⁸ This feeling still echoes today through Dalsim, a local rapper interviewed by Gab Morrison in his video “Matongé: le quartier congolais de Bruxelles”.

*“The vibe changes. On the other side, you are in Congo (Chaussée de Wavre), and here you are back in Brussels, Belgium (Chaussée d’Ixelles).
(...) We’re all here together, but each on our side” – Dalsim*²⁹

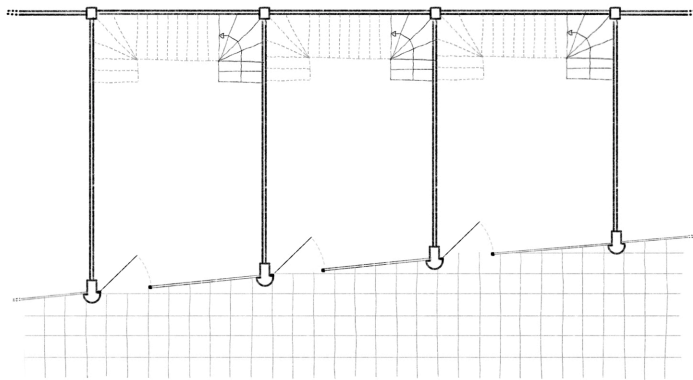
In 2018 *Galerie d’Ixelles* was renamed *Galerie Matongé*, as a sign of hope for a better future for this multicultural landmark. Caught between festive memories, cultural diversity, economic hardship and identity tensions, Matongé continues to evolve without losing its soul. As Corijn emphasizes, a neighbourhood as unique as Matongé should be supported by a more ambitious cultural policy. One that strengthens its unique character as an African hub within Brussels’ urban landscape.

26 Demart, S., (2008). *De la distinction au stigmat, Matonge, un quartier congolais dans Bruxelles*, p.3. Translated to English

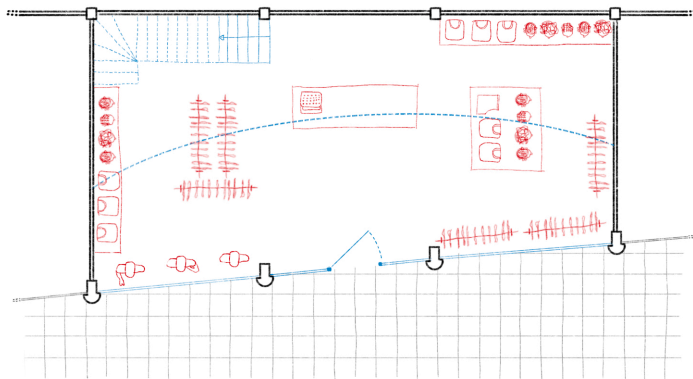
27 Corijn, E., (2004). *Matongé, centre multiculturel à Bruxelles*, p.2. Translated to English

28 Corijn, E., (2004). *Matongé, centre multiculturel à Bruxelles*, p.2. Translated to English

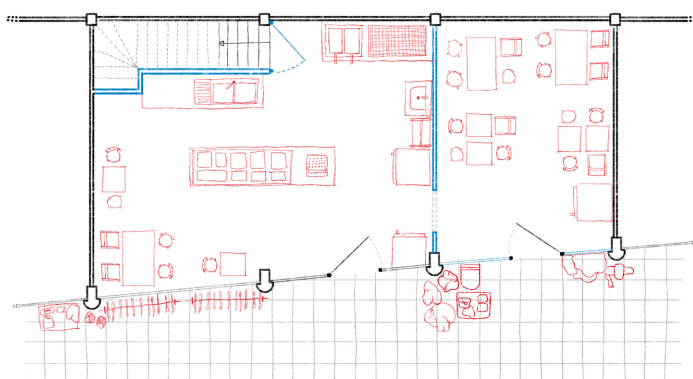
29 Dalsim, as cited in GabMorrison. (2023). *Matonge: Le quartier congolais de Bruxelles (avec Dalsim)*, 12min40 translated to English



Initially designed space (1953)



First shopowner's design (1954)



Latest modification & use (2025)

Figure 34 : Shopowners in control - By author

2.2 GALERIE MATONGÉ

Before turning to the specific case of the Matongé Gallery, it is important to introduce the concept of appropriation, which will be explored further.

The term appropriation can have multiple meanings. According to Zetlaoui -Léger: one refers to the way something is suited for a particular use, while the other expresses the idea of making an object one's own, taking possession of it.³⁰ From an architectural perspective, two definitions will be used in the context of this research. The first comes from Lécuyer, who defines spatial appropriation as “the processes by which people mark and personalise the spaces they occupy”.³¹ The second comes from Hertzberger who sees architecture as “the rules of a game, leaving each player free to choose their own strategies”.³²

Building on the ideas presented by J. Pommier and N. Thomas in “L'appropriation des logements d'Hermas Hertzberger: de l'espace conçu à l'espace vécu”, the appropriation of a space will be analysed in three steps: The Projected Space (the identification of a place), The Lived Space (taking possession and transforming it), and finally Lessons Learned or The Used Space (the uses generated by appropriation of the space). This framework seems relevant since appropriation occurs only w a given space, which in return, this act of appropriation generates its own set of activities and ways of using that space.

In fact, for a place to be transformed, it needs to be designed to leave room for these modifications. In the case of the Matongé Gallery, given the undeniable appropriation visible today, we can assume that the space was designed to allow it. Interestingly, when the building was constructed, its architect J.F.Collin was not responsible for the interior design of the shops. Whether it was an intentional choice or not, by stepping away from this part of the project, he gave the shop owners the freedom to shape a space that was truly theirs, reflected who they are and their needs. This opens the door for a form of appropriation to happen.

This situation echoes Hertzberger's idea of the building as an instrument that has a function but leaves room for “something extra” to happen inside. It is precisely that “something extra” that Hertzberger aims to make possible in his projects, that resonate with the Galerie Matongé and is a concept that can be valuable in future design approaches to create spaces that reflect each individual.³³

30 Zetlaoui-Léger, J., (2012). *Qu'est-ce que l'appropriation ?*

31 Lécuyer, R., (1976). *Psychosociologie de l'espace. - II. Rapports spatiaux interpersonnels et la notion d' "espace personnel"*

32 Pommier, J., & Thomas, N., (2023). *L'appropriation des logements d'Herman Hertzberger: De l'espace conçu à l'espace vécu*

33 Pommier, J., & Thomas, N., (2023). *L'appropriation des logements d'Herman Hertzberger: De l'espace conçu à*

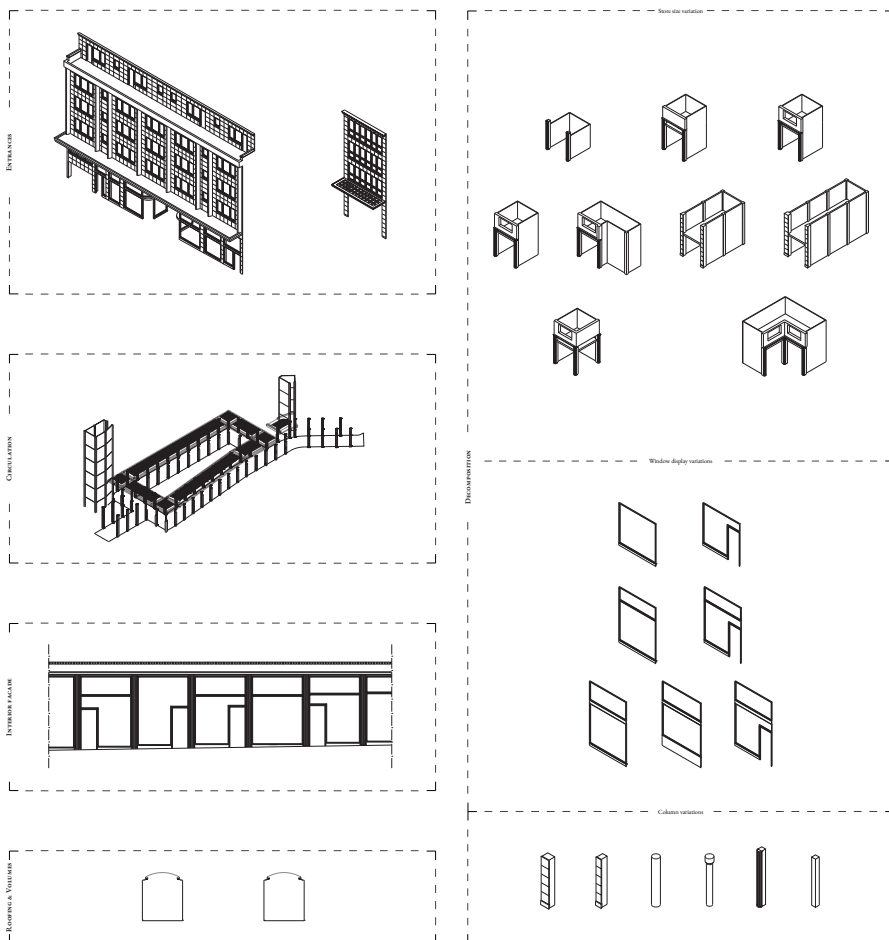


Figure 35: Elements that make Galerie d'Ixelles - By author

2.2.1 The Projected Space

The Galerie d'Ixelles, located at the intersection of Porte de Namur, was commissioned by the SA Les Galeries de Belgique in 1953. Its construction was part of a larger post-war urban renewal project aiming to create a new European capital. At the time, Brussels was expanding quickly and in need of modern spaces to accommodate a variety of functions. In this context, the birthplace of the writer Camille Lemonier was demolished to make way for a mixed-use building that would integrate commercial, residential and cultural functions.

A key feature of the post-war urbanization was the idea of the shopping gallery: A covered, safe, hygienic and weather-protected space, meant to organize small commerce into a clean and controlled environment. It was a symbol of modern consumerism where leisurely shopping was the main activity rather than going chaotic street markets. The idea and construction of these new post-war passages was heavily influenced by the success of the 19th century passage, which had died due to the great war a few decades back but reimagined in a more rational and functionalist style reflecting the new period of the 20th century.

By the early 50s, Porte de Namur and its shopping streets, were losing the public's interest as the stores were getting outdated and seen as unglamorous. Local and private investors wanted to bring back some life into the local economy by proposing a new modern commercial architecture, thus creating Galerie d'Ixelles. It was a new shopping environment, a bright, pleasant shortcut with small modular shops targeting local entrepreneurs and offering fashion and luxury goods. Unlike the later shopping centres of the 60s, like City 2 or Galerie Ravenstein, the 50s' were small-scale structures integrated into the existing urban block, which gave them a feeling of intimacy rather than a mega structure.

The building was designed between 1953 and 1954 by architect Jean-Florian Collin. It is clearly influenced by the modernist movement but also has a brutalist touch seen through elements such as simple shapes, modularity and the use of concrete. These features were intended to allow the architecture to evolve over time, designed to prioritize openness and accessibility. A flexibility that remains evident today.

Each function of the building has its floor and structural frame. On the ground floor, the gallery alley has an angular and regular shape, with shops lining it as on its outer border but also in the middle, creating a central volume. The passage links two major roads and has two entrances: a primary entrance at Chaussée de Wavre, as well as an underground two-story parking entrance, and a second narrower entrance on Chaussée

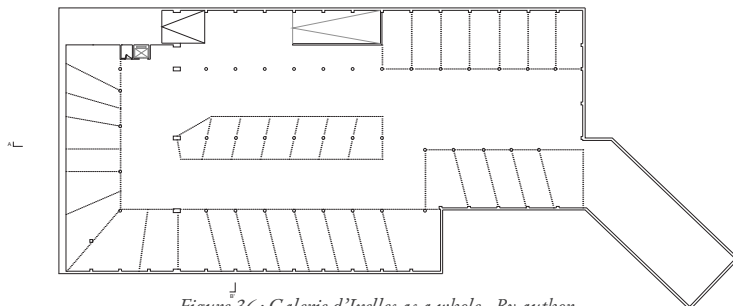
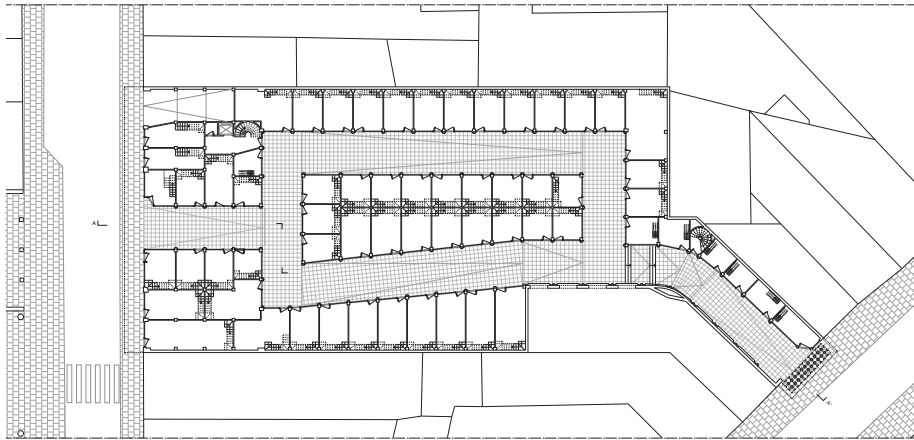
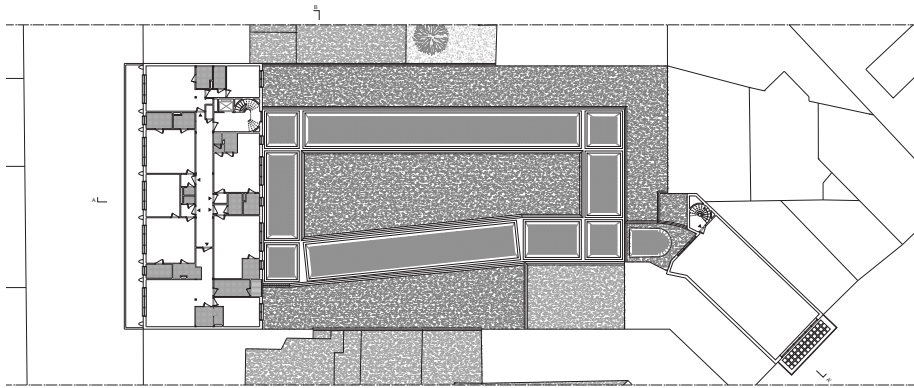
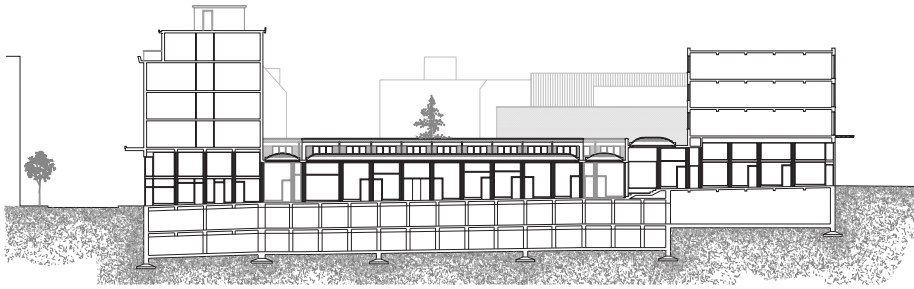


Figure 36 : Galerie d'Ixelles as a whole - By author

d'Ixelles.³⁴ Two apartment complexes are also in the parcel as well as a cinema, though its exact location remains unknown.

From the outside perspective, the design aimed to seamlessly integrate both public and private functions, which reflects the adaptable urban planning ideals of that period. However, having a multifunctional building does not necessarily mean these functions connect and work together. In the case of Galerie Matongé, there is a real stratification and separation of functions.

The private circulation core, which travels vertically through staircases close to both entrances and leads to the apartment floors above, is the only link between the different functions. In contrast, the public movement occurs horizontally, between the ruffled columns holding the concrete vaults pierced by glass bricks. This zenithal opening allows natural light to pour in, making the interior feel open and inviting.

Small storefronts, set in-between the ruffled columns, typically 3m to 3,2m wide, line the colonnade. Each store was intended to be one span wide with an additional upper floor that could either be used for storage, a workshop, offices or a store extension. The display windows rise a full one and a half storey, creating a sense of transparency for passersby to catch a glimpse of what's happening inside the workshop above.

The display windows are made of glass doors and tall glass panels framed in a golden metal, thus adding a sense of warmth, lightness and elegance to the otherwise heavy concrete structure. A small black marble plinth defines the limit between the alley and each shop, setting a clear transition between the two.

Finally, there are three window frame variants: one extends across the one and a half stories; another introduces a second frame at the level of the atelier storey of the store; and the third type uses a horizontal band that distinctly marks the shift between the store below and the workshop above.

We can say with confidence that in the Galerie d'Ixelles, Collin explores the tension between stereo tonic and tectonic architecture which is its way of decor.³⁵ The gallery's heavy concrete volume and robust entrances express a strong sense of mass and permanence, typical of stereo tonic design. The structure feels anchored, resistant to time, offering a sense of protection and stability.

34 Impali, K., (1984) *Une galerie commerciale africaine à Bruxelles*

35 Frampton, K., & Cava, J., (1995). *Studies in tectonic culture: The poetics of construction in nineteenth and twentieth century architecture*



Figure 37: Galerie d'Ixelles as a space - By Waltéry, F.

Yet he deliberately softens this weight through a tectonic gesture. The lean metal frames, the expansive glass panels and the play of natural light through zenithal openings introduce lightness. These finer details do not erase the building's mass but rather bring a touch of lightness that allows the architecture to breathe.

This tension, between solidity and lightness, shapes how the space is experienced: through robustness and formality, but also lightness and informality. The gallery shelters its visitors while keeping them connected to the outside, creating a transitional space between interiority and urban life.

It is that very duality that made the Galerie d'Ixelles so adaptable over time. Collin's work shows that spaces do not need to choose between mass and lightness, formal or informal. Architecture can hold both resilience and permeability, allowing it to evolve beyond the gallery's original commercial function, becoming a cultural and social hub. When designed with sensitivity, spaces can embody both and remain alive to the changing needs of their communities.



Figure 38 : Galerie Matongé as a lived space - By Gui Mag

2.2.2 The Lived Space

At its opening in 1954, the Galerie d'Ixelles was a luxury shopping destination for an affluent European clientele except one, an African store, but owned by a European woman. When she eventually handed over her shop, it was a Congolese retailer who took over. This marked the turning point, triggering a gradual shift in the gallery's demographics. Overtime, whenever a European retailer would close their store to move to the Galerie Louise or Toison d'Or, an African entrepreneur would take their place, shifting towards an African omnipresence in the gallery.

The rise of restaurants and snack bars, in addition to shops selling textiles and hair salons, was what really solidified this change. These venues became more than just places to eat and shop, they were social meeting points, where family and friends would gather for a drink and conversation, rather than shop and leave. *Nganda Matongé* was a snack bar known for bringing warmth, and a strong sense of community. Visiting the Galerie d'Ixelles meant feeling at home and running into familiar faces, which reinforced the gallery's role as not just a commercial hub but also a landmark for the community, which is still the case today. To represent the African profile in the gallery, its name was officially changed in 2018 from *Galerie d'Ixelles* to *Galerie Matongé*.

Walking through Galerie Matongé, we quickly notice that these spaces are used differently from conventional shopping streets, malls or galleries. Retailers extend their business beyond the confines of the store by spilling out onto the alley, making it even more narrow and difficult to navigate. Tables covered with jewellery, bags and colourful fabrics such as "Wax Hollandaise", line the walkway, while clothing hung on walls and racks display traditional African attire.

At first glance, it seems that these displays belong to the shop owners. However, a closer look reveals that some stands are set up in front of closed shops and restaurants, suggesting informal activities operating within this formal gallery space. This blending of structures commerce and spontaneous market gives the gallery its distinctive, vibrant and lively character.

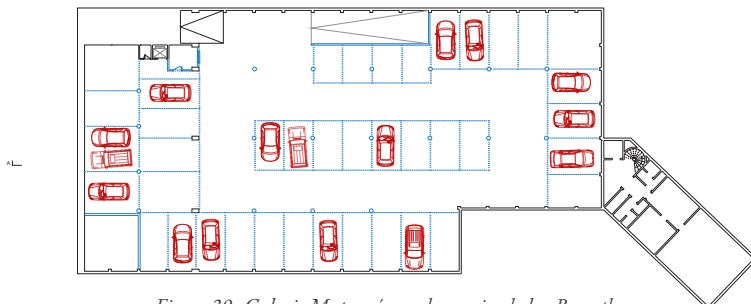
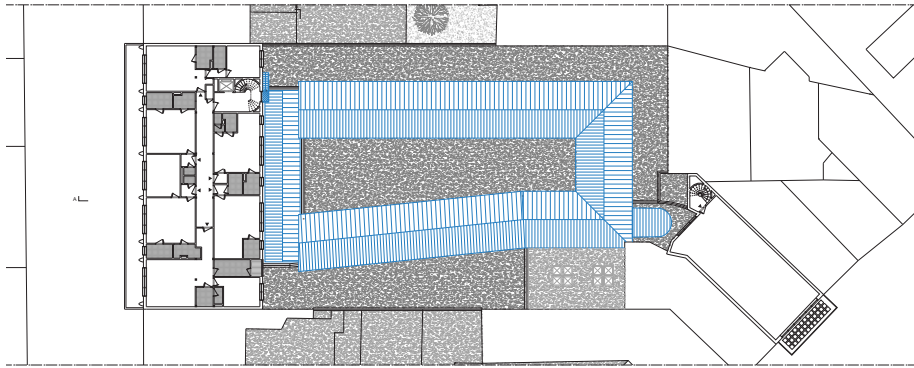
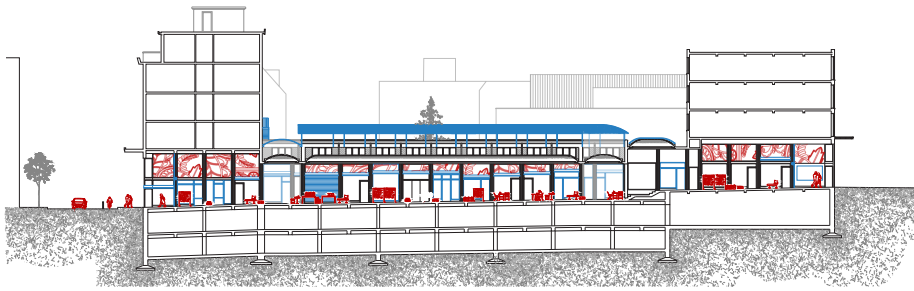


Figure 39: Galerie Matongé as a dynamic whole - By author

In addition, retailers and the few restaurants set up chairs and tables outside their store, encouraging people to sit, gather and socialize. These seating areas create once again meeting point, blurring the boundaries between shopping and other activities, thus creating a sense of community.

The Matongé gallery integrates the activity and dynamics that once characterized passages in the 19th century that had been lost almost a full century later. However, the activity is taken a step further. The lack of hierarchy makes it feel more like a living, evolving street market rather than a formal shopping centre. This spontaneity creates a very dynamic and chaotic feeling, rarely seen in modern shopping environments which tend to be more organized and controlled.

2.2.3 Lessons learnt

A flexible and adaptable space is one that is open to change, and which evolves with the people who use it. It is not about designing a perfect and rigid environment but about creating a space open to change overtime. To design a space that remains relevant and resilient, architects and urbanists must think about designing structures that will support unexpected appropriation and leave room for something extra.

The foundation is flexible design. By setting guidelines and no strict rules within the shops, Collin allowed shop owners the freedom to shape their environment according to their functional, cultural, social and economic needs. It is reflected in the building's design, through the thickness of the walls, only a few centimetres thick, which gives the possibility for retailers to expand their business across multiple spans. By creating a flexible base, architects give users the power to adapt the environment as they wish.

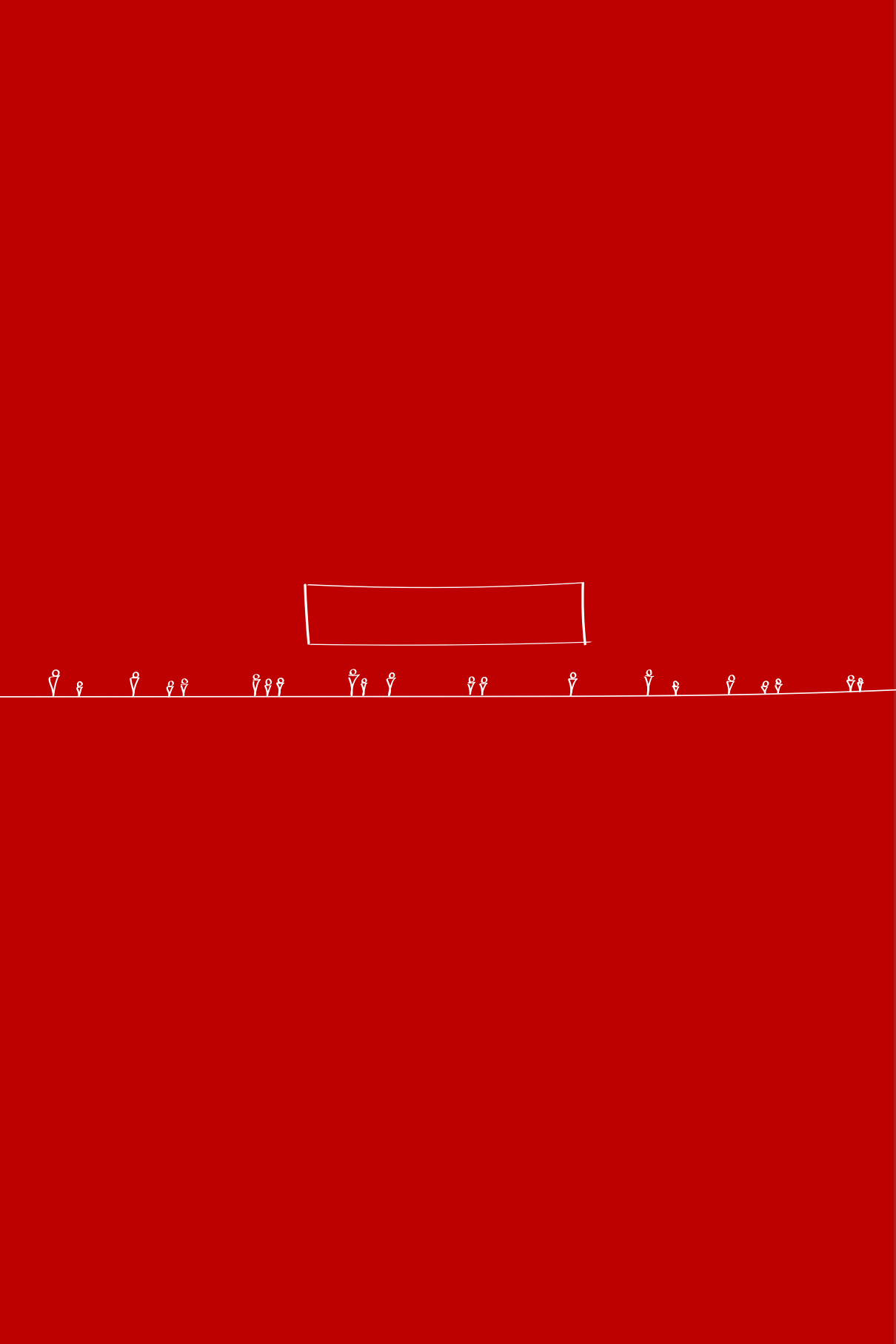
Equally as important is leaving room for the unexpected. Although the Matongé Gallery was originally built for a certain commercial format, the narrow alleys became an area for unplanned activities. African retailers for example began spilling their business into the alley. Bringing an informal touch, similar to a market, that plays a significant role in African culture. This informality should be seen as a sign of vitality, not disorder. While markets may appear chaotic, they foster dynamic interactions that are essential to neighbourhood life. Also, since there is no marketplace nearby, it installed itself in the smallest remaining space. The Matongé Gallery demonstrates how architecture cannot control everything, but it can create conditions necessary for unexpected activities to emerge.

The reduced scale of the gallery contributed to the feeling of community. The intimate layout and volumes encourage interactions, giving users the confidence to transform and re-appropriate the space collectively, unlike larger passages and shopping malls.

In addition, Galerie Matongé also reflects the social and cultural changes. As the demographics shift, the buildings evolved in response. Architecture, like in the gallery, should be able to adapt to these cultural transformations and welcome diversity instead of resisting them. Ghita Barkouch's work, "The Architectural Intelligence Behind Moroccan Interiors in Brussels",³⁶ captures how spaces are appropriated to reflect the identity and needs of their users. This demonstrates that cultural appropriation of a given space, is inevitable, no matter the type, shape, structure and boundaries set by the building's design.

Ultimately, the Galerie Matongé shows how integrating flexibility in the original design allows a space to gradually transform into a dynamic social and cultural hub. Rather than remaining a static shopping mall, it has become a community and cultural landmark for marginalized groups through the spontaneous appropriation of its users. It shows the importance of designing spaces that are open to change in order to stay relevant, to give hope and to connect to the people who inhabit them.

36 Barkouch, G., (2020). *Solving Daily-life Architecture Problems: The Architectural Intelligence Behind Moroccan Interiors in Brussels*



WHEN ARCHITECTURE AND CULTURE
MEET



Figure 40: Diversity is a fact, inclusion is an act, mural in Galerie Matongé - Unknown

3.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF INCLUSION

A study conducted by the “Fondation Roi Baudoin” in collaboration with the University of Liège, Catholic University of Louvain-La-Neuve and the Vrije Universiteit van Brussel, shows there is a lack of inclusion or a feeling of belonging among Afro-descendants in Belgium. Whether they are newcomers or Belgian citizens, many face ethno-racial discrimination or racism, often more than other immigrant groups. Yet, most of them are of Congolese, Rwandan, or Burundian origin, from countries that were once Belgian colonies, which makes their exclusion even more confusing considering the historical ties with Belgium.

Integration policies often insist on the responsibility of new citizens to adapt to the new country's national values.³⁷ Of course, every country has its own way of functioning, but it feels unfair to expect immigrants to completely set aside their identity just so they can fully blend in.

While integration does require personal effort, it also depends heavily on how open and inclusive society is. The absence of support and opportunity, especially from institutions, can make people feel left out. This can lead to misunderstandings, frustrations and, in some cases, social tension and delinquency. But this issue isn't something we can link to a particular nationality. It's more about how anyone might react when they feel they do not belong or feel unwelcomed.

Raynal and Ferguson, in their research on cultural integration, point out an important distinction between multiculturalism and interculturalism.³⁸ Yes, Brussels is multicultural, but does that really mean cultures live together and understand each other? A city can be very culturally diverse without encouraging real dialogue and connections. When someone has to adapt to an environment far from their landmarks, while feeling isolated, it can lead to a sense of injustice and rejection.

Even though this feeling of belonging improves over generations, many still have difficulties feeling fully at home in Belgium. On top of having difficulties of integration, it does not help that many people feel as they are still seen as foreigners or simply “African”, even if they are born in Belgium and have the nationality. In fact, in the study by “Fondation Roi Baudoin”, 86% of participants said they are perceived as foreigners and 91% as African.³⁹

On top of being seen as outsiders, Afro-descendants feel they are under-represented in

³⁷ *Des Citoyens Aux Racines Africaines* (n.d.)

³⁸ Raynal, S., & Ferguson, L.B., (2008). *L'intégration: Du multicultural à l'intraculturel*

³⁹ *Des Citoyens Aux Racines Africaines* (n.d.)



Figure 41 : Representation for awareness - By Papadji

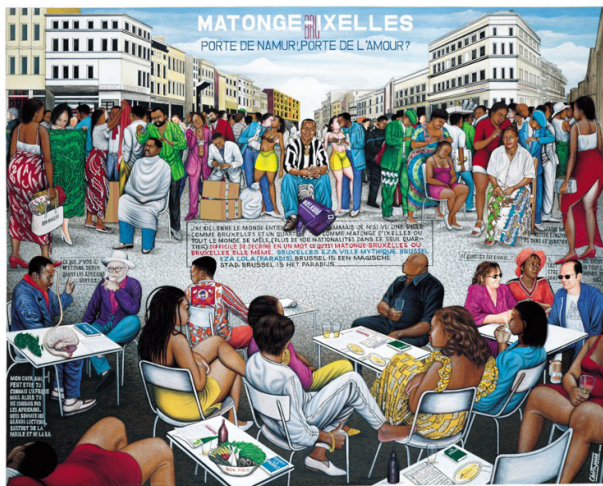


Figure 42 : Porte de Namur ! Porte de l'Amour ? - By Chéri Samba

Belgian medias who tend to reinforce stereotypes and rarely give them an opportunity of expression.⁴⁰ This feeling, of not being accepted, likely explains why many Afro-descendants choose to surround themselves with people from same origins. It's a way for them to find comfort, shared understanding and connection to their home culture.

To improve this situation, several initiatives have started. One of them is to shed light on Belgium's colonial past, to increase awareness and understanding. These demands mostly come from afro-descendants who are asking to be fully recognized and included in society. Many believe that colonial history is either barely mentioned or completely left out of public discussion which is detrimental to cultural inclusion.

“There are problems with racism, intolerance and, above all, a lack of knowledge about things”.⁴¹

Overall, the study shows that marginalization and lack of recognition from public authorities contribute to a strong feeling of exclusion. The misunderstanding and stereotypes surrounding Afro-descendant communities. Especially those from countries like Congo, Rwanda and Burundi, with historic ties to Belgium, fuel their sidelining. It is now essential to acknowledge their contribution and listen to their voices in order to build a fairer and more inclusive society for all.

In recent years, some actions have been taken. One example is Urban Brussels's plan called “Vers la décolonisation de l'espace public en région Bruxelles-Capitale”. The main idea behind it is that colonial history should not be denied or erased but rather acknowledged and talked about openly. The plan focuses on raising awareness, preserving and commemorating colonial history and heritage. Awareness can be raised by discussing, rather than denying or minimizing, and giving more visibility to symbolic places linked to Afro-descendant communities.

Amongst many, one of the proposals is to bring together existing works, statues, art, and monuments into a single space that serves both as a public and symbolic site that marks the city's shift toward a more inclusive and decolonized public landscape.

“The action plan can help create a more inclusive society by transforming public spaces and encouraging dialogue with citizens. The idea is to multiply spaces for exchange and discussion around what we, collectively, want our cities and shared spaces to represent”⁴² – Urban Brussels

40 Des Citoyens Aux Racines Africaines (n.d.)

41 Young Belgo-Burudian women, as cited in Des Citoyens Aux Racines Africaines (n.d.). p 165

42 Vers la Décolonisation de l'espace public en Région de Bruxelles-Capitale - urban.brussels, (2022). Translated to english

GALERIE MATONGÉ : A SPACE FOR INCLUSION

Through the evolution of the neighbourhood and Galerie Matongé, with the informal practices that occur inside, we can consider, without a doubt, that this structure plays an important role in fostering urban diversity and inclusion.

As Stevens argues in his work on urban porosity, diversity and inclusion are among the 21st century urban agenda. While ongoing debates focus on ethno-cultural diversity, cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism, the question of how urban spaces can support inclusion is not fully resolved.⁴³

In the case of Matongé, one key reason for the neighbourhood's multicultural character is its location around the city. The arrival of African diaspora, particularly the Congolese community, is partly due to the presence of the Congolese Embassy and other institutions nearby. But it also has to do with the way the neighbourhood developed. Unlike its neighbouring quarters, Quartier Léopold and Avenue Louise, who both underwent major urban transformations, Porte de Namur remained almost untouched for decades. Aside from some street widening, the addition of a few roads and the construction of some public institutions, the urban fabric mostly followed the medieval street pattern. As a result, Porte de Namur indirectly benefited from the new and prosperous transformations of its surroundings without directly being impacted. This gave it the status of a *secondary urban space*.

“In such secondary spaces, the enforcement of dominant spatial, social and cultural order is “looser”, the degree of control is more relaxed and less explicitly determined. This allows for a diverse and deviant urban world to germinate and persist.” -J. Stevens⁴⁴

43 Stevens, J., (2022). *Urban porosity: A chronicle of spatial inclusion in Matonge, Brussels*

44 Stevens, J., (2022). *Urban porosity: A chronicle of spatial inclusion in Matonge, Brussels*. p.10

Another factor is the status of the gallery itself. Its *porous* nature, architecturally and socially, encouraged alternative and sometimes unpredictability practices. The concept of urban porosity has been explored in different ways: originally by W. Benjamin and A. Lacis in 1925, who used it as a way to describe the urban shape based on the culture of Naples' inhabitants. But it can also simply refer to the contrast between mass and voids⁴⁵. And from a social point of view, it refers to the unexpected activities created by the fusion of different spaces⁴⁶. Paola Viganò also developed this idea, describing porosity as the capacity for an urban environment to absorb unexpected dynamics and staying resilient in the face of transformation.⁴⁷

*“As porous as this stone is the architecture. Building and action interpenetrate in the courtyards, arcades, and stairways. In everything they preserve the scope to become a theatre of new, unforeseen constellations. The stamp of the definitive is avoided. No situation appears intended forever (...)” – W.Benjamin & A.Lacis*⁴⁸

45 Tadi, M., et al., (2017). *Urban Porosity. A morphological Key Category for the optimization of the CAS's environmental and energy performance*

46 Castel'Branco, R., & Ricardo da Costa, A., (2024). *From maximum urban porosity to city's disaggregation: Evidence from the Portuguese case*

47 Pellegrini, P., & Viganò, P., (2006). *Comment vivre ensemble: Prototypes of idiorrhythmical conglomerates and shared spaces*

48 Benjamin, W., et al., (2019). *Sur Naples*. p.166

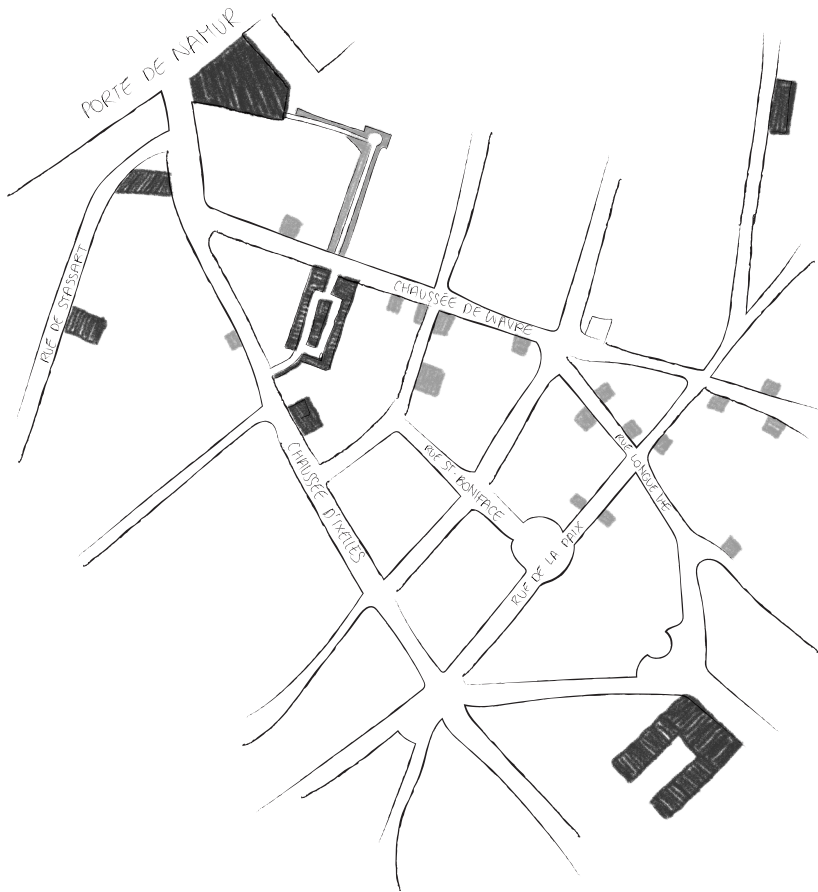


Figure 43 : Matongé and its African landmarks and meeting points - By author, inspired by Gontras, A.

3.2 APPROPRIATION FOR A RICHER URBAN LIFE

Both, Hertzberger and Lefebvre, who expand on the notion of appropriation, agree on the idea that formally designed spaces should act as a frame for social encounters, creativity, imagination and appropriation to fit one's needs.⁴⁹ Appropriation can emerge from various material, functional or social reasons but ultimately depends on the user's needs and desire.

Although there have been initiatives since Lefebvre's initial research for 'Le droit à la ville', he criticized architects and urbanites of being too rigid in their concepts and actions. Even when the intention is to design with adaptability in mind, architects and planners are still limited by their own understanding of *habiter*. They can only design based on their perception and not in alignment with how inhabitants will use the space in their everyday lives⁵⁰. According to Zetlaoui-Leger, *habiter* is an act of self-assertion, a way of building something that reflects who we are⁵¹. It is not just occupying a space but engaging with it. This leads us to question how we can design something for someone else that genuinely reflects their identity and needs?

What we can design are spaces that suggest certain uses or modes of urban life.⁵² Yet, real urban life, the real daily experience, is shaped by culture, memory, social interactions and much other immaterial elements which are constantly changing and unpredictable.

On another note, in *Betwixt and Between*, Quentin Stevens⁵³ explores architectural thresholds as loose spaces, transitional zones between two realms such as public and private or inside and outside. These thresholds function as liminal spaces where conventional ways of using a space are suspended making room for alternative behaviours and ways of expression. It is precisely because of their in-between status that they are more likely to be appropriated by users, thus offering a unique potential for transformation and personal expression.

Matongé Gallery is a perfect reflection of these ideas. As previously mentioned, it was designed with a specific commercial purpose and a clear vision of how it would function. Yet, its transitional nature, private but public, inside but outside, and the specific social and cultural reality of the neighbourhood, has entirely been transformed by the local community. This transformation shows the importance of designing

49 Lefebvre, H., (1967). *Le droit à la ville. L'Homme et La Société*

50 Lefebvre, H., (1967). *Le droit à la ville. L'Homme et La Société*

51 Zetlaoui-Leger, J., (2012). *Qu'est-ce que l'appropriation ?*

52 Lefebvre, H., (1967). *Le droit à la ville. L'Homme et La Société*

53 Franck, K., & Stevens, S., (2013). *Loose Space: Possibility and Diversity in Urban Life*

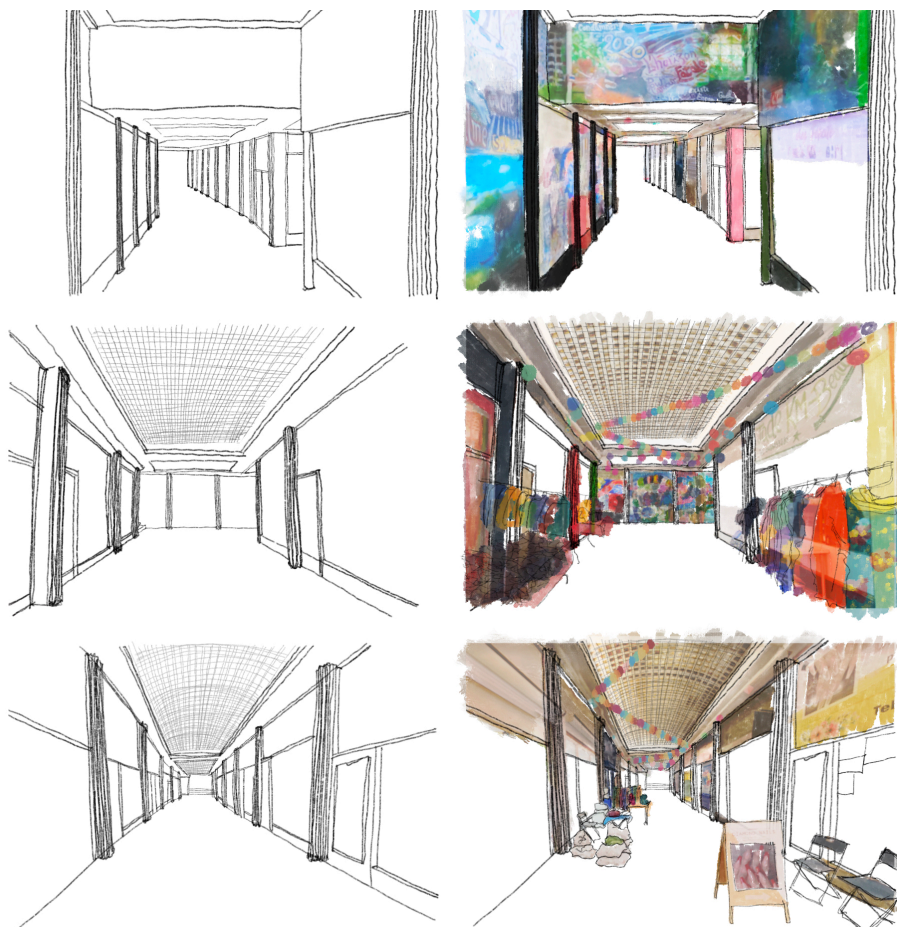


Figure 44 : The life brought by appropriation - By author

buildings with the intent of providing its inhabitant the possibility and freedom to develop this space according to their needs. Architecture must allow space for the unexpected.

PUBLIC SPACES A LEVERS FOR COMMUNITY

Public spaces are key elements in the shaping of modern cities. More than just physical spaces, they come to life through the daily activities of the people who use them, become a space for interaction, social connections and adaptation to cultural and economic realities. In some neighbourhoods marked by migration and diversity, public spaces have a particular role as they are not only places of passage, but an environment that redefine ways of occupying and interacting.

Urban spaces are constantly changing over time due to the influence of ongoing social changes. This evolution is particularly visible in spaces like Galerie Matongé, where formal stores and informal practices coexist, constantly reshaping the urban landscape. Some communities, especially those visible in spontaneous markets, help define how spaces are used and how they enhance the city's diversity, which strengthens its dynamic character.

Several spatial qualities in the area have made this appropriation possible. The location of the gallery in the heart of Matongé is important as it was a lively and multicultural district which offers easy access and visibility, making it a natural hub for dynamic exchange. Secondly, although the alleys tend to be on the smaller side compared to other passages, they allow shops to expand outwards, enabling this informal aspect of a market.

In addition, the intended workshop space on the upper floor can be used for parallel practices for craft, repairs or informal works that supports the social and economic networks of the community. Most importantly, as mentioned previously, the lack of hierarchy gives every user, from a retailer to a passerby, the freedom of doing whichever activity they want and appropriating the space as they want.

The way multicultural communities claim spaces is often reflected in the use of public and semi-public areas, like sidewalks, cafés, local shops, religious spaces and gathering spots.⁵⁴ In this context, the Galerie Matongé, based on Agier *situation de rencontre* identified in his work on *L'invention de la Ville* (1999), embodies three out of four types of situations. The first, "*situation ordinaire*", where regular interactions take place in a fixed setting like work or commercial environments. The second, "*situation de transition*", which occurs in spaces for circulation or transition, such as covered

54 Cattedra, R., (2003). *Espace public et cosmopolitisme: Naples à l'épreuve d'un inédit métissage urbain*

passages. And finally, “*situations rituelle*”, marked by cultural or religious celebrations that reinforces a sense of community.⁵⁵ These environments become anchors where new social, economic and cultural dynamics emerge.

In certain neighbourhoods, the *cosmopolitanism*⁵⁶ is visible through elements of the everyday life: the mix of languages, the music coming from shops and homes, the smell of foreign cuisine spilling out of restaurants, ... This cultural presence is evident in Galerie Matongé, where the alleys are not just for business, they become the foundation for community life.

A NEW MARKET PLACE

Even though the terms *formal* and *informal* are often seen as complete opposites, Galerie Matongé shows us that there is a complex middle ground between the two rather than a strict division. There is no doubt that in this case, there is this ‘in-between’ where formal and informal elements meet and interact.

Understanding the distinction between formal and informal helps make sense of the contrast between the stores found in the gallery and the stands set up on the alley, especially the ones held by people who are not retailers in the building. These spontaneous stands create a market within the gallery, which can be seen as an informal market. The difference between the two is that: one is *static*, a built and permanent environment, while the other is *kinetic*,⁵⁷ meaning it is temporary, mobile and constantly changing. Although informal urban elements’ legitimacy had long been doubted, it is as important as formal ones, since they simultaneously shape the city. Formal structure provides a framework on which informal spaces bring the social and cultural layer to the city.

Informality plays a big role in city-making and urban growth. Modern urban planning techniques, which tends to ignore how people live and interact with spaces, are challenged by informal dynamics. A place’s essence is not just about its physical design but also about experience and liveability.

Globally, informal markets are very important, not just in providing some sort of income for people in poorer communities but also in addressing social challenges, particularly for immigrants. These markets are not only rooted in cultural, religious, or social factors, they emerge due to economic necessity to respond to the inefficacy

55 Cattedra, R., (2003). *Espace public et cosmopolitisme: Naples à l'épreuve d'un inédit métissage urbain* p.16

56 Cattedra, R., (2003). *Espace public et cosmopolitisme: Naples à l'épreuve d'un inédit métissage urbain*

57 Lutzoni, L., (2016). *In-formalised urban space design. Rethinking the relationship between formal and informal*

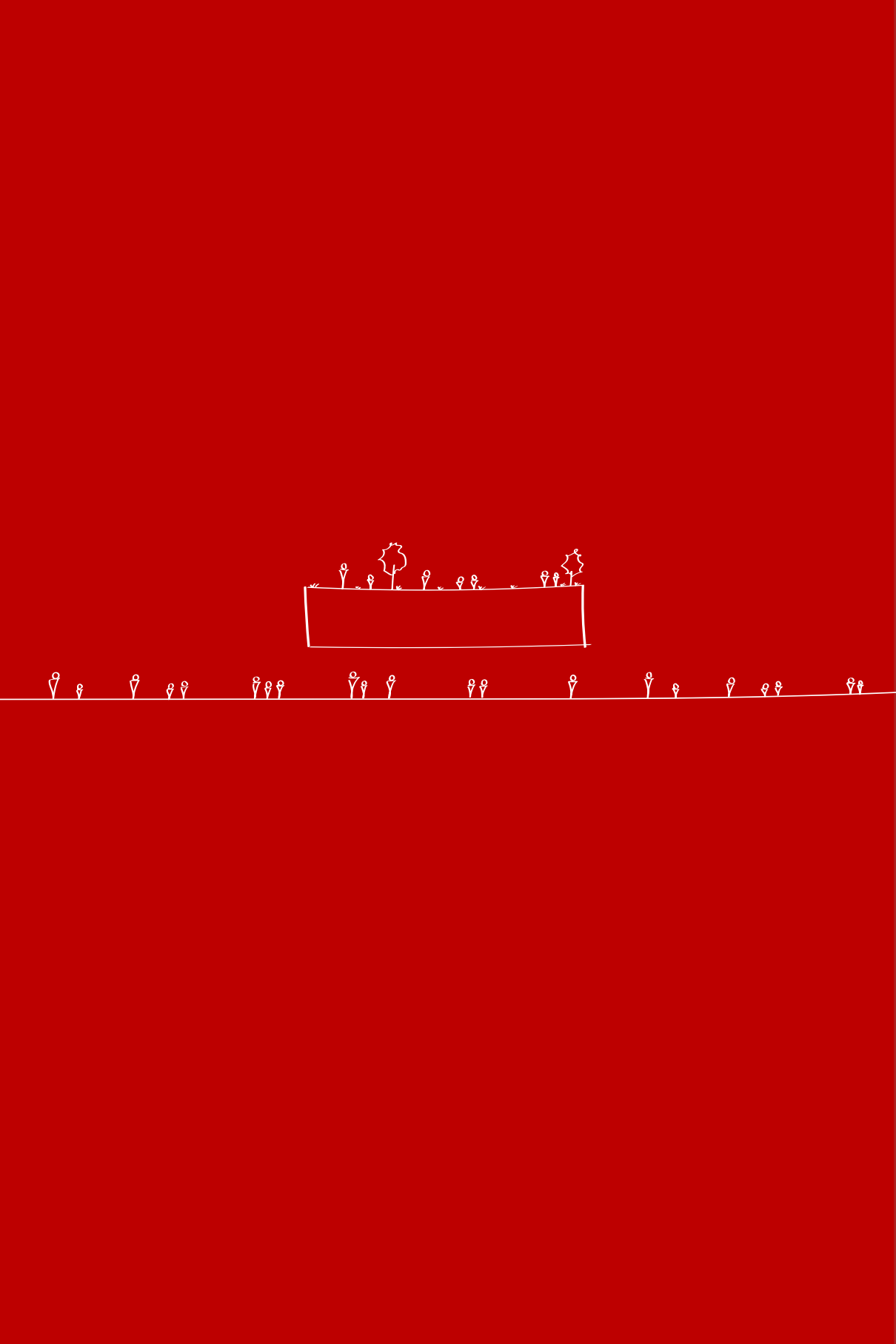
of formal economy. They offer an alternative source of income, especially when formal employment is limited. In Matongé, they are a source of opportunities for small entrepreneurs, mainly women, to operate with flexibility, without any rigid rules and by adapting to local demand.

Although the term *informal* can sometimes have a negative connotation, these spaces have a great impact on community integration in the city. The Matongé Gallery is a perfect example as it is considered as the heart of the African community of Bruxelles and even Belgium. Beyond just economic opportunities, it provides traders with a sense of belonging and a familiar environment where they can feel at ease among people in a similar situation. At the same time, it fosters relationships between buyers and sellers, creating trust and loyalty, further helping in the overall sense of community.

These markets also act as a *cultural crossroad*, attracting diverse cultural, ethnic and religious groups, thus giving space for social interaction. In Matongé, they allow Europeans that have lived in Africa to reminisce, while giving Africans or Afro-descendants a place to share news, maintain friendships and support one another. These interactions turn informal markets into more than just economic hubs, they become living social spaces that bridge different worlds.

According to Lutzoni, the modern condition of cities has evolved in a way where public spaces are losing the possibility of being spaces for dialogue and exchange. Designing intermediate spaces, those that exist between the formal and informal, requires a new approach to urban life. One that embraces its role in fostering both individual and collective practices.⁵⁸

58 Lutzoni, L., (2016). *In-formalised urban space design. Rethinking the relationship between formal and informal*



RESPONDING & GIVING SPACE TO APPROPRIATION



Figure 45: A new urban life - Unknown author

WHERE THE PASSAGE LIVES

From a theoretical standpoint, Galerie Matongé meets many of the condition of existence that define a successful passage: its urban context, the connections it creates and the internal layout, all fit. Though not located in the historic city centre, it sits within culturally rich, dense and walkable area that connects two active axes, from the commercial Chaussée d'Ixelles to the previous entertaining Chaussée the Wavre with its cinemas, theatres, bars, ... The adaptable size, layout of store and other spatial features all reflect the building's capacity to adapt over time.

Still, some limitations persist. The entrance on Chaussée d'Ixelles, despite being on the busier street, lacks visibility. As shopfront expanded over time, the entrance lost its distinct scale and blends into the surrounding façade. It no longer feels like a passage, but as a typical storefront, which removes its neutrality and sense of anonymity which are two key traits for a passage

As mentioned earlier, a passage only works as long as it serves a public that actively uses and needs it. When European retailers left the Galerie Matongé during the 60s and 70s, they were slowly replaced by African entrepreneurs. That shift gave the gallery a new identity and a second life, becoming a landmark for Brussel's African diaspora. The absence of a dedicated space for African culture to flourish, but also the absence of public and market spaces in the area, pushed shopkeepers to extend their activity beyond the store limits, occupying the alley and reconfiguring the space through informal practices.

From its location and structure to the flexibility of its interior space, its cultural role both as part of a *quartier fondateur* and as an *inclusive enclave*⁵⁹ for a marginalized group, it is no surprise that Galerie Matongé stands as a space open to diversity, transformation and new ways of urban living. It reveals that, no matter the architectural form of a passage, its success relies on the public, how the people use, adapt and inhabit it. In the case of Galerie Matongé, its survival relied on reappropriation. The same way covered passages of the 19th century created an alternative modern reality for the rising bourgeoisie. Today, it is a cavity within the city, a porous environment where other modes of urbanity can emerge. The users gave it meaning, purpose and life which is the reason for placing the social layer in the heart of the project.

59 Fenton et al., (2022). *Which morphologies for "inclusion in urbanity"? Exploring practices along the Steenweg*

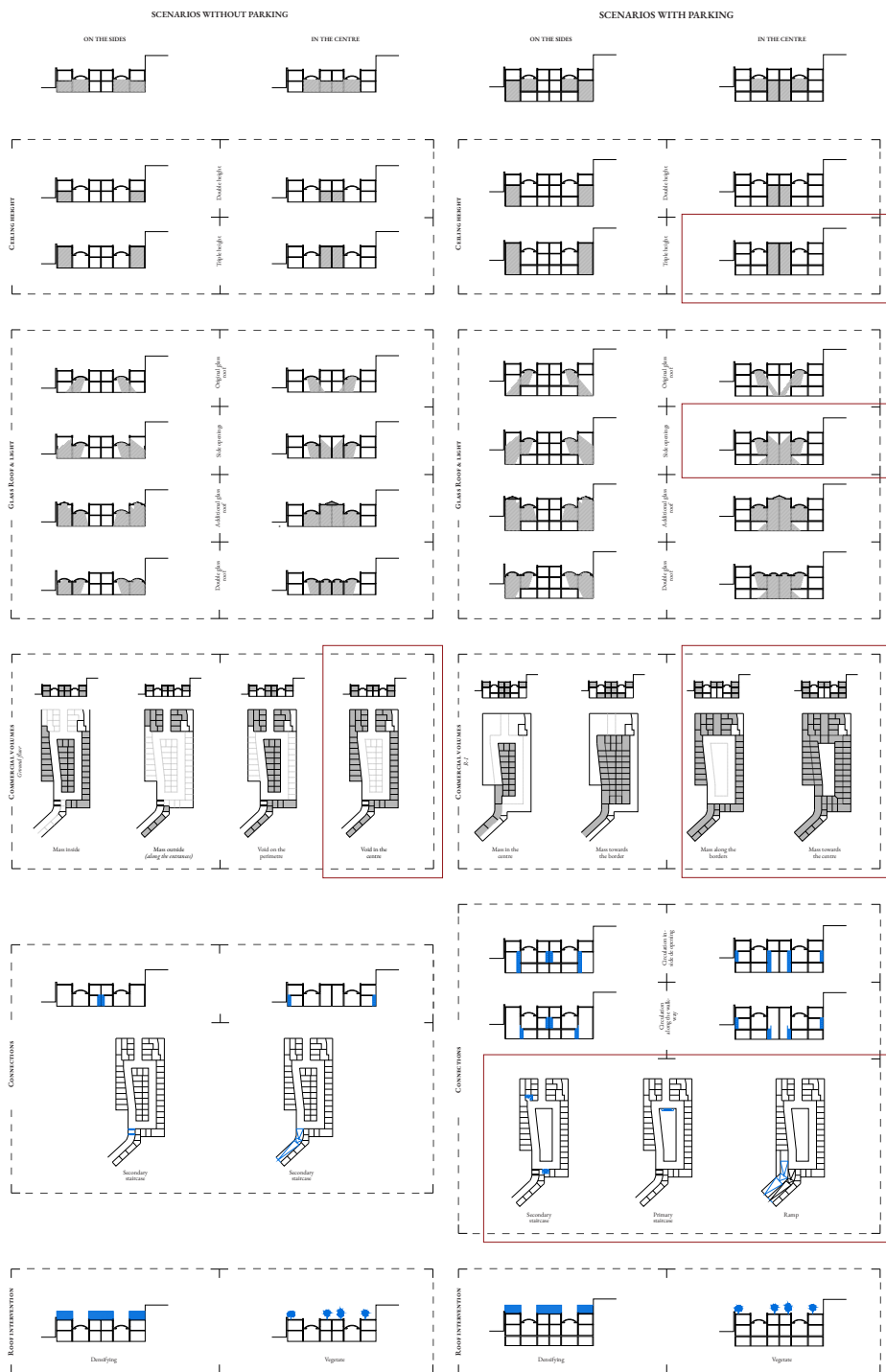


Figure 46: An adaptable structure - By author

4.1 REVEALING POTENTIALS: DESIGN VARIATIONS

Based on the observations and lessons drawn from the lived Galerie Matongé, this section explores different design options that may respond to informal practices that have emerged over time. Instead of proposing a single intervention, several architectural elements of the gallery are taken as starting points to imagine how the space could evolve. Parameters such as ceiling height, entrance layout, walkway circulation and the glazed roof are re-examined to test how the passage could better support existing uses.

Although the gallery was originally conceived with a mix of functions, commercial, residential and circulatory. These functions are clearly separated, stacked on top of the other, with little to no interaction, which limits the buildings potential to adapt due to its rigid stratification.

The goal is to speculate and imagine how small changes can impact a broader space. These are not final solutions, but rather open-ended possibilities as public needs are constantly changing and appropriation is unpredictable.



Figure 47 : A new sense to Galerie Matongé - By author

4.2 GIVING SPACE TO APPROPRIATION

When appropriation, culture and social interactions become guiding principles of a project, the first question that arises is: How can we offer more space to the users of the gallery without altering the archetype's identity? How can we reinforce connections across the passage, from one side to the other, and bottom up, both socially and spatially?

Drawing from typologies of the covered passage, while also taking inspiration from the panoptic logics where visibility and interactions organise a space, the project seeks to preserve the essence of the Matongé Gallery while opening it up to culture and community.

The project is articulated around two complementary interventions, each focusing on a different layer and user of the building.

A CULTURAL PULSE: RECLAIMING THE PUBLIC PASSAGE

Galerie Matongé holds a strong architectural and social history. The intervention aims to enhance its social potential, as a landmark for African culture, without altering its character.

More flow can be brought to the gallery from Chaussée d'Ixelles by integrating the neighbouring building, currently a store, making the entrance more visible, open and more welcoming. This additional surface will hold a ramp leading to the first floor of the underground parking (-1) creating an additional surface accessible to the public. To ensure connectivity between the new level and the existing gallery, an opening is made where the central commercial volume currently lies, thus opening the space both vertically and horizontally.

This gesture helps to visually lighten the space, remove visual obstruction and offer a new perspective view on the gallery. The existing alley at ground level remains a circulation axis, but instead of being bordered by two built volume (retail stores), it is both bordered by a built volume and an empty volume (the new vertical opening). By preserving the existing colonnade along this void, the project subtly echoes one of the gallery's inspirations: the arcade.

As for the former parking level which is a continuous space without a central commercial mass or void, it is accessible from the new ramp but also from a central staircase place near the Chaussée de Wavre entrance. The new alley is suggested by

a colonnade placed following the ones on the upper floor, every two columns. The centre stays open to enable the public to use and appropriate the space depending on their activities and needs.

Echoing the informal activities in Galerie Matongé, this new central open space on the lower floor has a double height. A possible appropriation in the area is that it could serve as an additional space for shopkeepers to expand their store and for vendors to have ample space to sell their goods. The open space is reminiscent of another reference behind the passage: the covered market.

That same open space could also serve as a place of representation for African culture, a space where decolonisation, as proposed by Urban Brussels, can take shape. At times, it could transform into a platform where monuments, artworks or statues related to colonial heritage are brought back into public view, helping to shed light on cultural diversity and spread awareness on inclusivity. In this context, Galerie Matongé, alongside its informal market activities, could also act as temporary exhibition space and a gathering point during commemorations.

The following intervention seeks to create a balance between openness and continuity, between architectural heritage and emerging social activities. Ultimately, it offers a framework that encourages appropriation while respecting the unique identity of the gallery.

A SHARED BREATH: ENHANCING COMMUNITY AND GREEN POTENTIAL

One space that is currently unused but holds a lot of potential is the rooftop of the Galerie Matongé. In addition to an already existing staircase connecting the stairwell of the building on Chaussée de Wavre to the roof, archives from the 50s suggest a small terrace space, on the roof, from the Chaussée d'Ixelles side. This suggest that there was, at some point, a clear intention to make this rooftop accessible and functional.

The architectural group MVRDV has developed a *Rooftop Catalogue*⁶⁰, identifying various rooftop typologies, their capacities and the potential strategies for either densification or reprogramming.

Given the profile of the “Galerie Matongé” roof, the high density of the surrounding urban block, and the relatively small size of the residential and workshop units, facilitating access to the rooftop presents an opportunity to create a new shared space

This space could take the form of a green communal area, open to residents, shopkeepers or other inhabitants of the block. It would offer, not only an environmental and spatial value, but also reinforce social cohesion. Both at the level of the public within the gallery and at the scale of local residential life.

⁶⁰ *Rooftop Catalogue*, (2021)

CONCLUSION

Galerie Matongé reveals the richness that lies in-between, between architectural intention and everyday use, between heritage and transformation, between formal and informal. What once was a post-war commercial passage, has been gradually transformed into an appropriated space, shaped by how people inhabit and modify it while giving it meaning rather than its original blueprint.

It seems evident that, through research and project proposals, appropriation is an act of resilience and adaptation. It reflects the architecture's ability to become a model, an infrastructure, for social and cultural expression as well as for unpredictable, informal practices. From spontaneous displays extending on the alleys and new informal uses of parking lots and rooftop, these gestures of making a space one's own are a creative and human responses to a rigid framework or system.

Galerie Matongé is not only a built space, it reflects the multicultural reality of Brussels and the world. It embodies the tension between control and freedom, between historical typology and contemporary urban life. In this sense, the transformation of Galerie Matongé is not just about restoring and reinventing the gallery, but also about giving voice to alternative ways of urbanity through social and cultural interactions. By recognizing appropriation as a vital urban force, architecture can shift from being a fixed object to a flexible framework that supports evolving needs, identities and social dynamics.

This project is a call to embrace the in-between. Architecture should not resist informality, it should embrace it! To design is to accept that architecture is never complete, it is always evolving.

The human is the foundation of all architecture, but humanity is what gives it meaning and brings the urban environment to life.

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Iconography

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Figure 2: Collective appropriation of housing - By Guennouni, K.

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Figure 7: Palazzo Ducale, arcades in Venice – Prout, S., (nd). St. Mark's Square and a corner of the Palazzo Ducale]

Figure 8: Les Halles Baltard, a covered market in Paris – Unknowk (nd).Halles centrales de Paris. Vue intérieure du pavillon central

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Figure 15 : A beacon for modernity and innovation - By Unknown, (1810). L'intérieur du passage, vue en direction du boulevard

Figure 16 : Galerie Saint-Hubert, an emblematic covered passage in Brussels – From Hulton Archive (1890), The Galeries Royales Saint-Hubert, a shopping arcade in Brussels

Figure 17 : The Innovation, the department store typology in Brussels - From galacticjourney (2022). Flames over Brussels : The à l'innovation department store fire.

Figure 18 : City 2, the shopping mall typology in Brussels - By Blaise, F., (2019).

Figure 20 : First wave of covered passages

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Figure 21 : Second wave of covered passages

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Figure 22 : The Layout : Types of connections - By Geist, JF. (1989). Le passage: Un type architectural du XIXe siècle. Types d'espaces, p.14

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Figure 31 : Congolese voices - From Belga News Agency, (September 2019). Congolese protest in the marge of the official visit of DRC Congo President Tshisekedi for several days in Belgium

Figure 32 : Inside the African Landmark - By Ketels, C., (May 2004). Matongé, the Congolese African quarter in Ixelles, Brussels

Figure 33 : A reminder of home - By Knight, O., (December 2006). The Congolese district in Brussels known as 'Matonge' taking its name from an area of Kinshasa home to people of African origin

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Figure 38 : Galerie d'Ixelles as a lived space - By Gui Mag (2022). Online database : Google Maps

Figure 40 : Diversity is a fact, inclusion is an act, mural in Galerie Matongé – Unknown

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Figure 42 : Porte de Namur ! Porte de l'Amour ? - By Chéri Samba, (2002). Porte de Namur ! Porte de l'Amour ?

Figure 43 : Matongé and its African landmarks and meeting points - By author, inspired by Gontras, A. (nd). De waeremberg à Matongé, Suivi de « Racines de matongé »

Figure 45 : A new urban life - Unknown author (2025). Kuumba.be

SUPPORTING MATERIAL



AN EVOLVING TYPOLOGY



PASSAGE DE LA MONNAIE
1820
Demolished in 1968



GALERIE SAINT-HUBERT
1846-47
Renovated



PASSAGE RORTIER
1847-48
Transformed

PASSAGE DE PORTES
1873
Demolished in 1966



GALERIE DU COMMERCE - HÉRICHY
1879
Disrupted by Rortier - Unrecognized



PASSAGE DU NORD
1881-82



GALERIE DU PARLEMENT
1880
Transformed



GRAND BALCON DU BOULEVARD ARMAND
1889-90
Transformed in 1964

REBIRTH OF GALLERIES



GALERIE DU CENTRE
1991-1992



GALERIE D'INNOVATION
1994



GALERIE RASTENBERG
1994-95



LE BALCON LOUVRE
1961



GALERIE SAINT-HUBERT
1962-63
Completed in 2012



GALERIE AURORA
1963



GALERIE LOUVRE
1963-70
Extended in 1987



PASSAGE 44
1963-67
Closed in 2012



GALERIE THON D'OR
1968-70



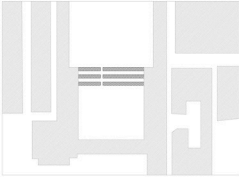
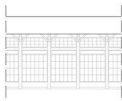
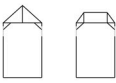
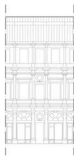
PASSAGE LINCOURT
1972



GALERIE PONT DE NEUF
Unknown date



GALERIE DU CONQUÉRANT
Unknown date

URBAN CONTEXT	ENTRANCES	INTERIOR FACADES & DECOR	ROOFING & VOLUMES
GALERIE DE BOIS (17th-18th) As the first of its kind in Paris, the Galerie de Bois was built with the intention of organizing commerce into a structured and protected space. Made from wood in the Palais-Royal, it offered a covered promenade lined with shops. It was a foundation for the passage typology: linear, sheltered and dedicated to commerce. 	No information available as it is damaged 		
PASSAGE DES PANORAMAS (1860) Passage des Panoramas, the first gas-lit passage, represents a national and commercial breakthrough. It combines leisure, commerce and innovation, which reinforced the model of the passage as a modern, comfortable and lively place. Its metal structure and visual scenography mark an evolution in the passage typology. 			
PASSAGE DE LA MONNAIE (1820) Inspired by Parisian passages, the Passage de la Monnaie introduced a safe, covered shopping area in Brussels. Despite its modesty compared to its successors, it applies the fundamental principle of the type: sheltered circulation, continuous shop windows and a controlled urban atmosphere. 		No information available as it is damaged	
GALERIE SAINT-HUBERT (1844-47) The monumental and luxurious Galerie Saint-Hubert in Brussels symbolizes passages as a cultural spot in addition to a commercial space. Its large glass roof, neoclassical architecture and mixed uses (shops, theatre...) make it an influential model emblematic of the 19th century urban modernity. 			
PASSAGE DU NORD (1897-1902) As the last major 19th century passage in Brussels, the Passage du Nord epitomizes the order of the archetype: a sheltered route, a rich décor and functional link between streets. It reflects an accomplished typology designed for walking, commerce and the control of pedestrian movement. 			

2021
 Merging of multicultural
 neighbourhoods



1991
 The end of the battle against
 segregation

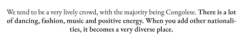


1946
 A growing city

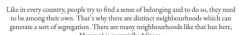


1777
 Between fortification & expansion



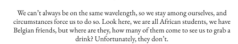


Everyone is welcome here, but there are issues with the police, and the Gallery isn't in its best shape.

- Hairstreuer in *Gallego Matosel* (2020)

I believe the shops in Matongé honour both African and Belgian culture. The Africanization of the neighbourhood is not a bad thing. There is a lot of life and energy, with some occasional incidents, but they remind you of Africa.

...came here from all over, it's what they would call a 'must-visit'.

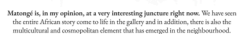


It is called *Maison Africaine* but it is open to everyone. However, most of the time you only see African student, which does not make it a ghetto like everyone might think.

- Resident of the *Maison Africaine* (1984)

What kind of clientele do you have here? All Kinds. Both Belgians who lived in Africa, as well as Africans who are living in Belgium.

* Vinyl dopoener in Galerie Maerz (1984)



- Karel, anthropologist and resident of the neighbourhood (2011)



People tend to gather, have a drink and socialize when there are more snack bars and places to hang out. It's different from regular shops where you just buy something and leave. Little by little, everyone come together, and that's

- Madame Chapeau, hatter and seamstress in *Galerie Maongé (1984 & 2011)*

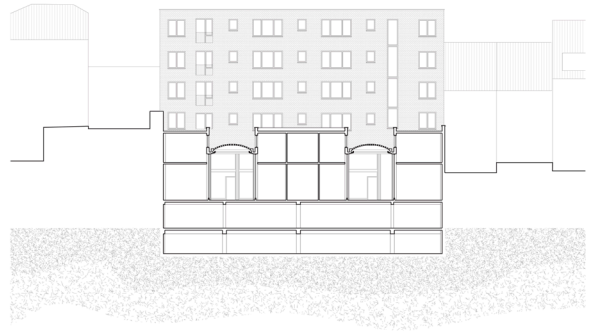
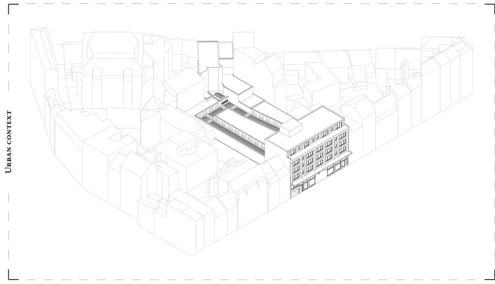


You can find everything in the gallery, including jewellery, food and hair salons. We are really in the heart of the neighbourhood. It is full of life especially on Saturdays. It's all about positive energy, everything is decorated and there are mamas everywhere.

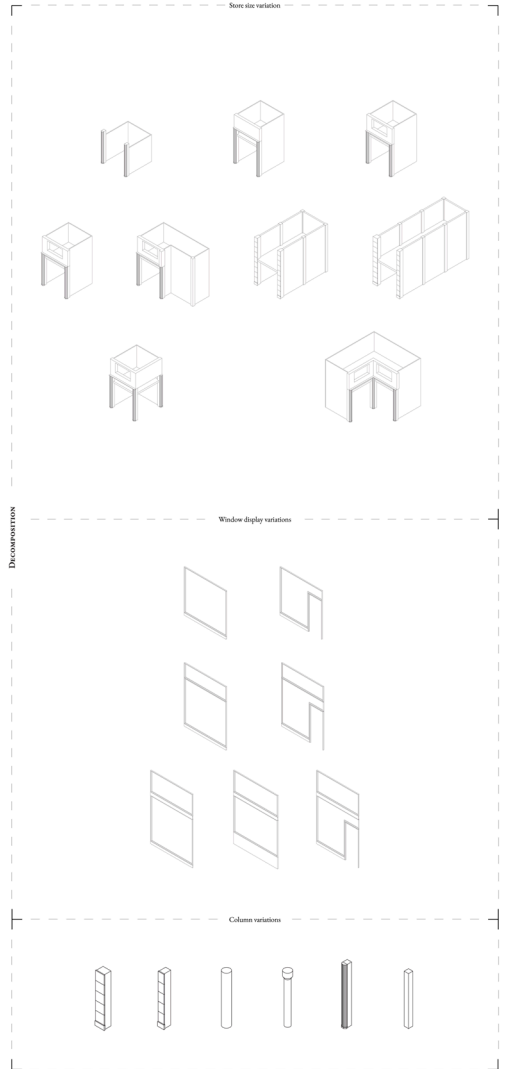
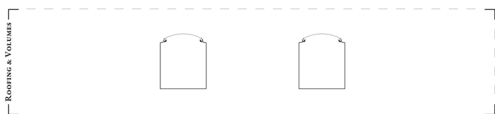
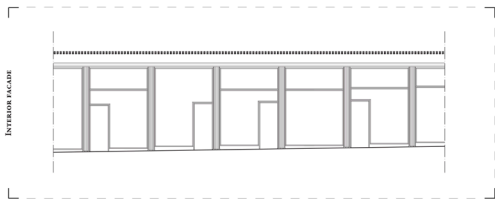
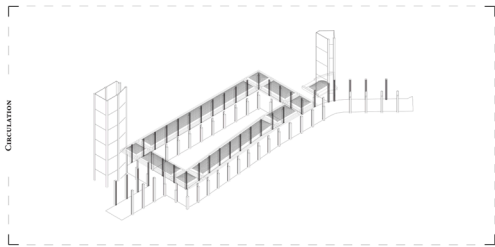
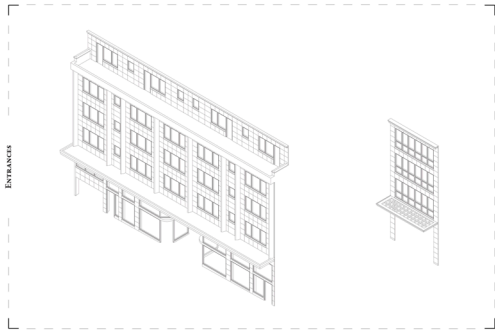
We have a bad reputation on the medias. In reality, we are just minding our business. Honestly, we welcome everyone as long as they don't cause any trouble.

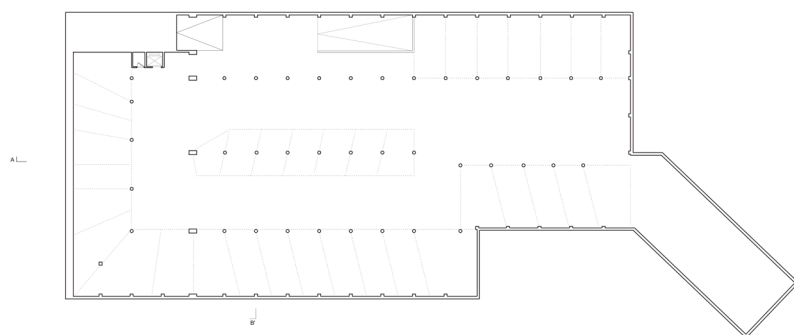
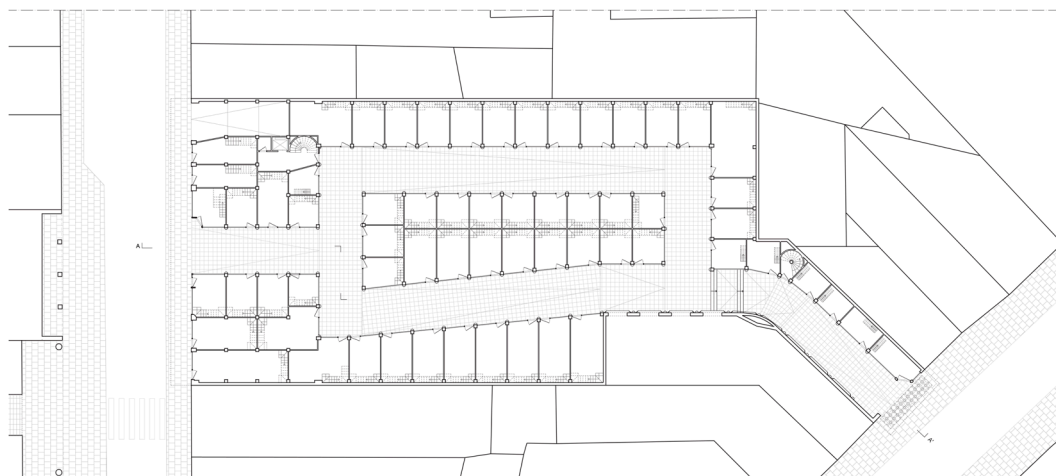
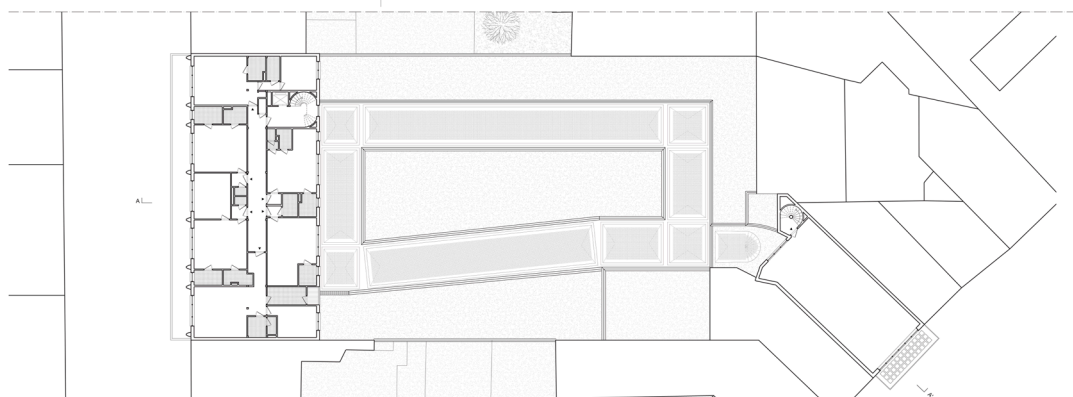
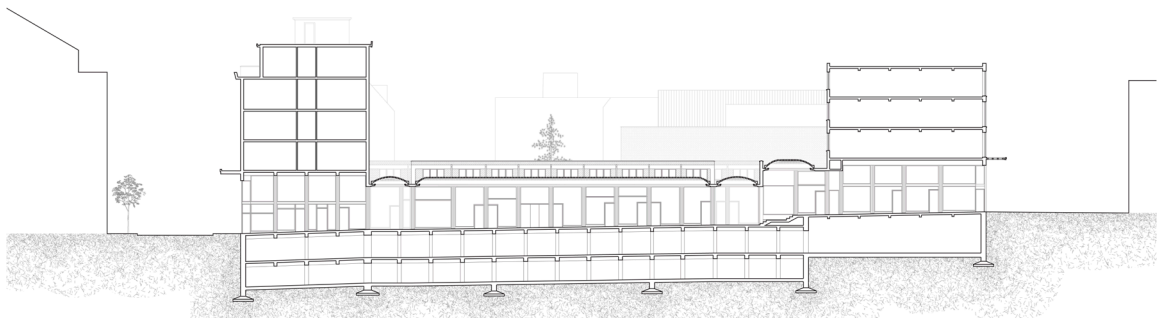
As soon as you are on Chaussée de Wavre, you are in Congo. But when you come here (Chaussée d'Ixelles), you are back in Brussels. It is very small, we are all together, but still in our little corner.

- Dalton, rapper (2023)

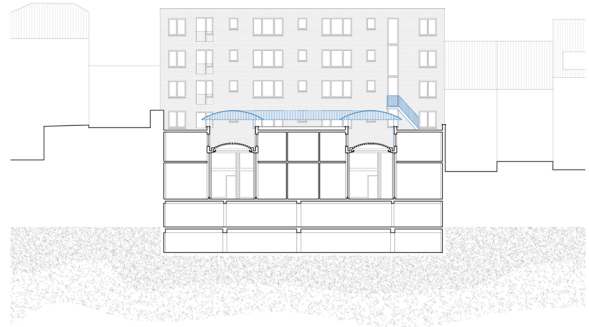
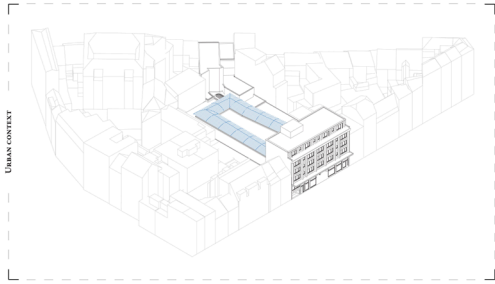


0 2 4m



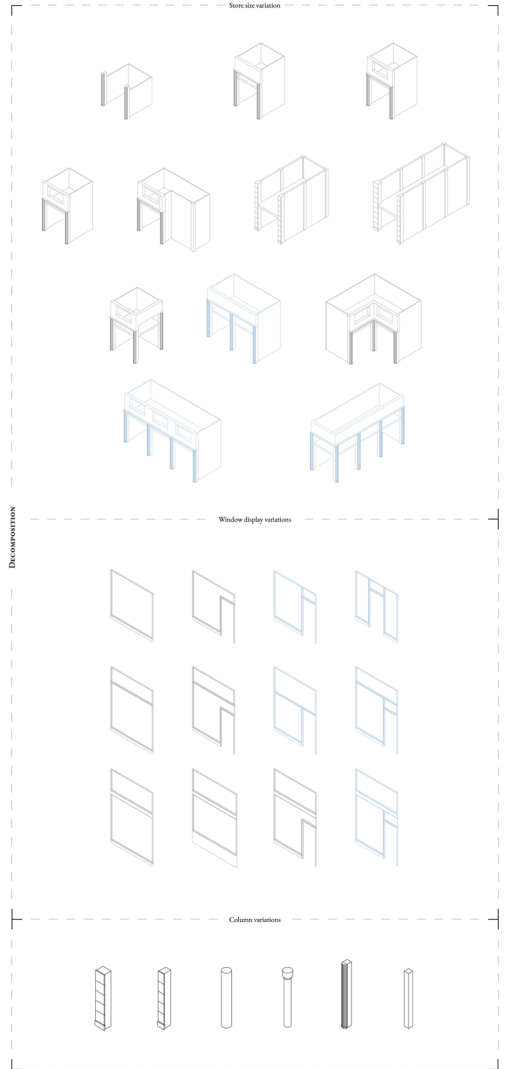
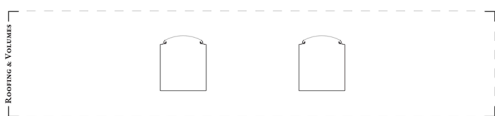
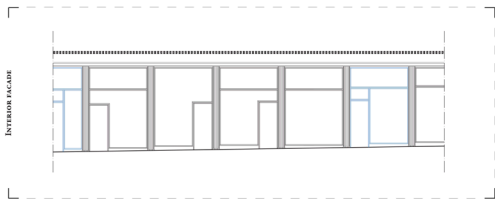
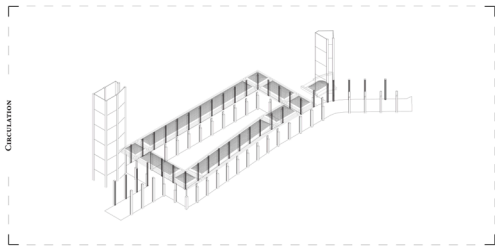
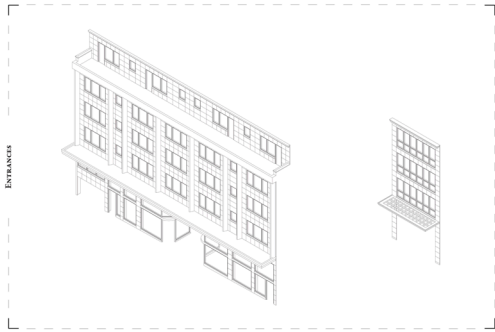


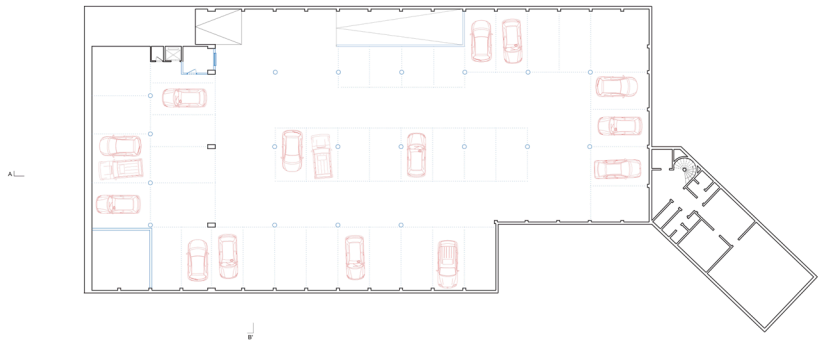
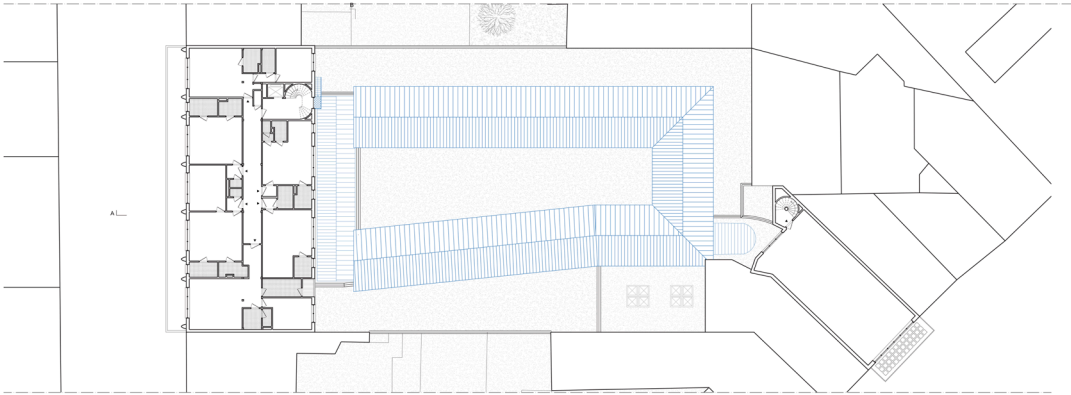
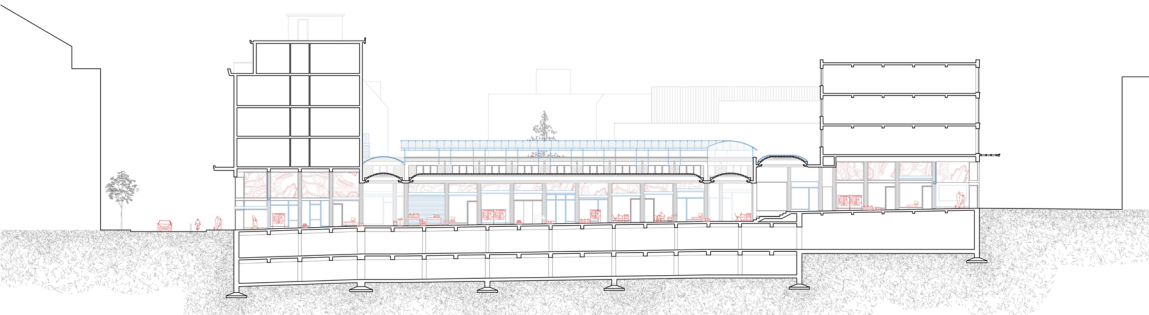




SECTION B-B'

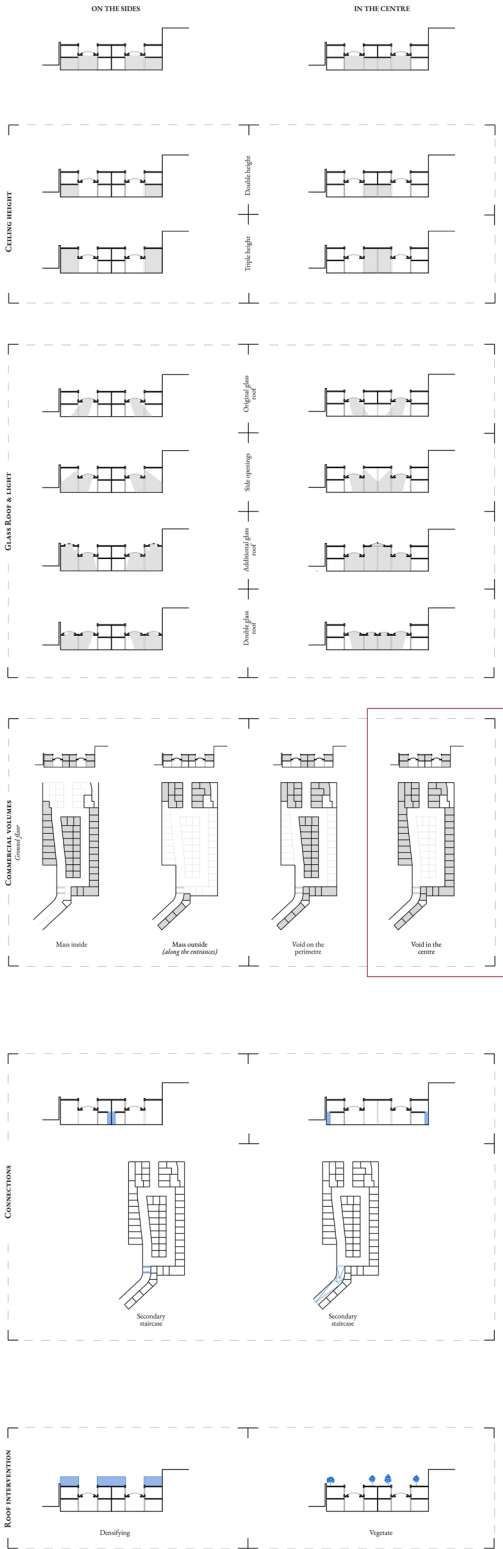
0 10m 20m



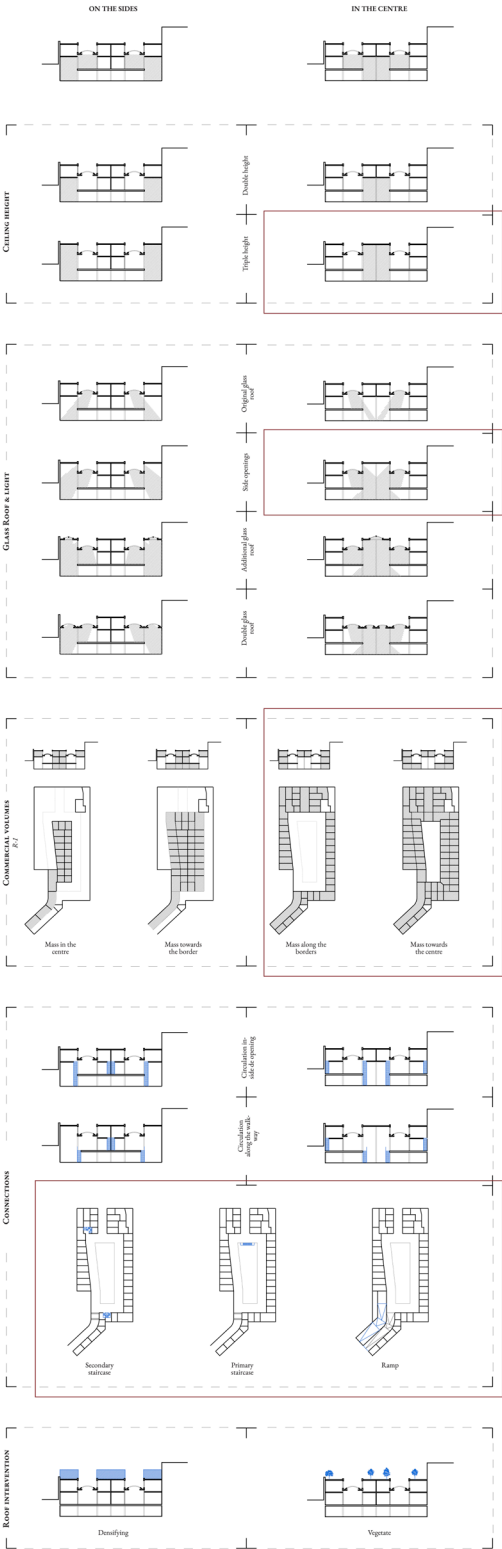


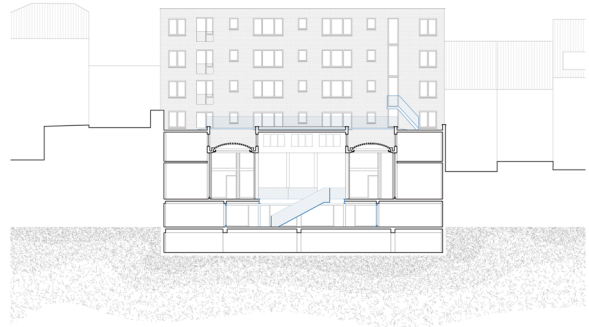
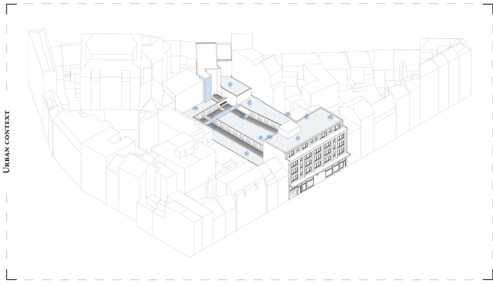


SCENARIOS WITHOUT PARKING



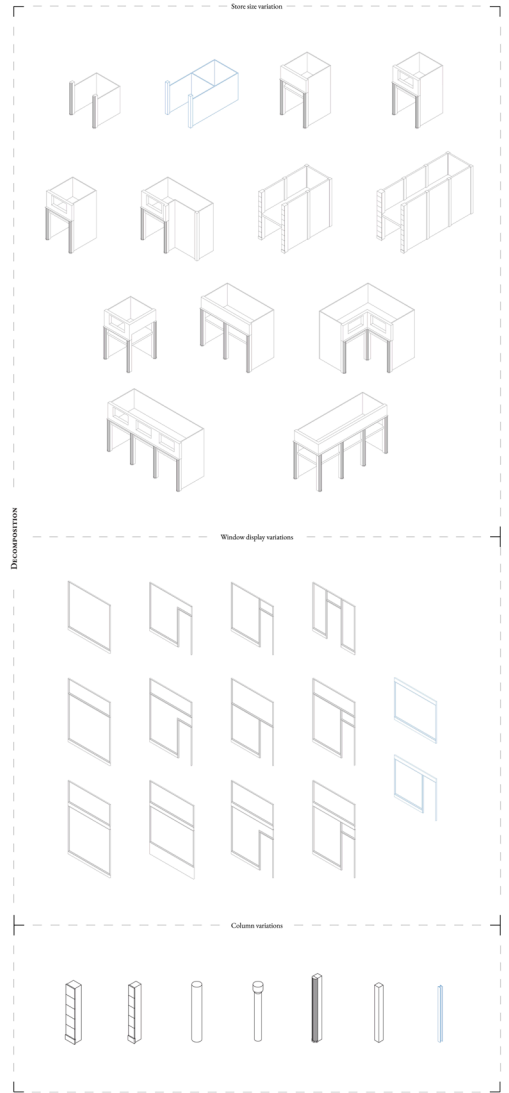
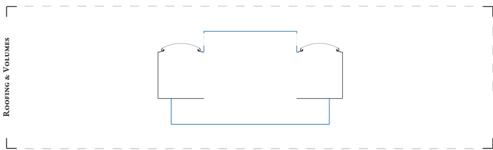
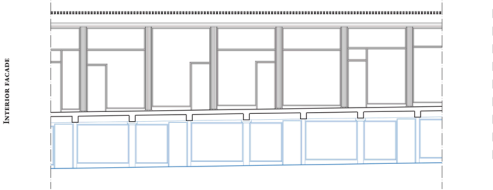
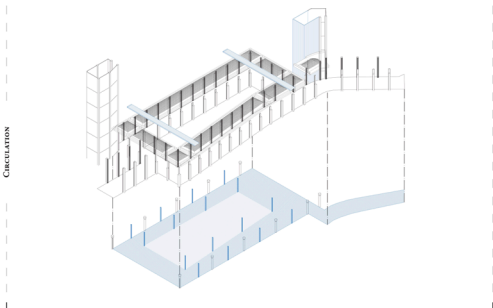
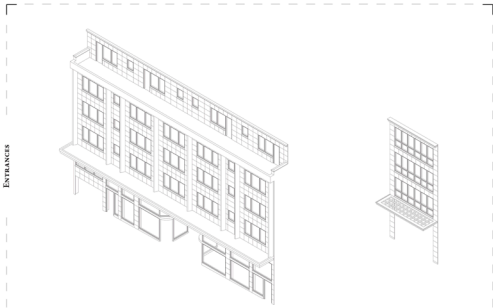
SCENARIOS WITH PARKING

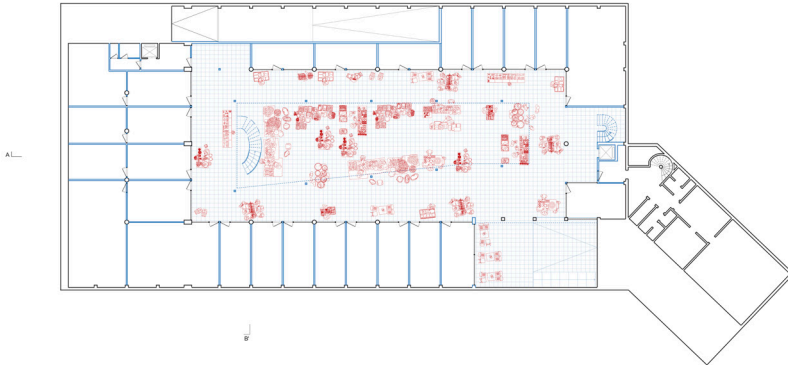
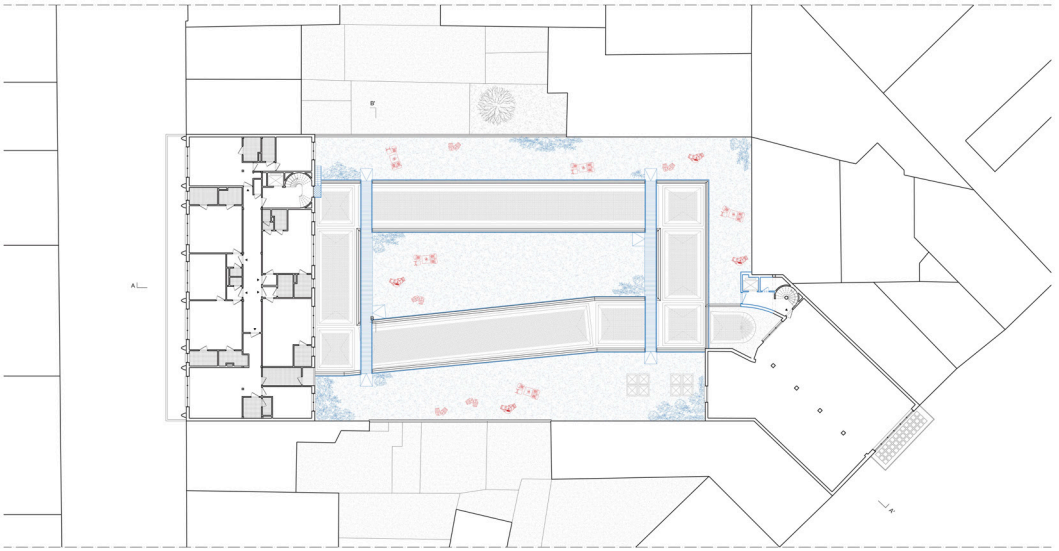




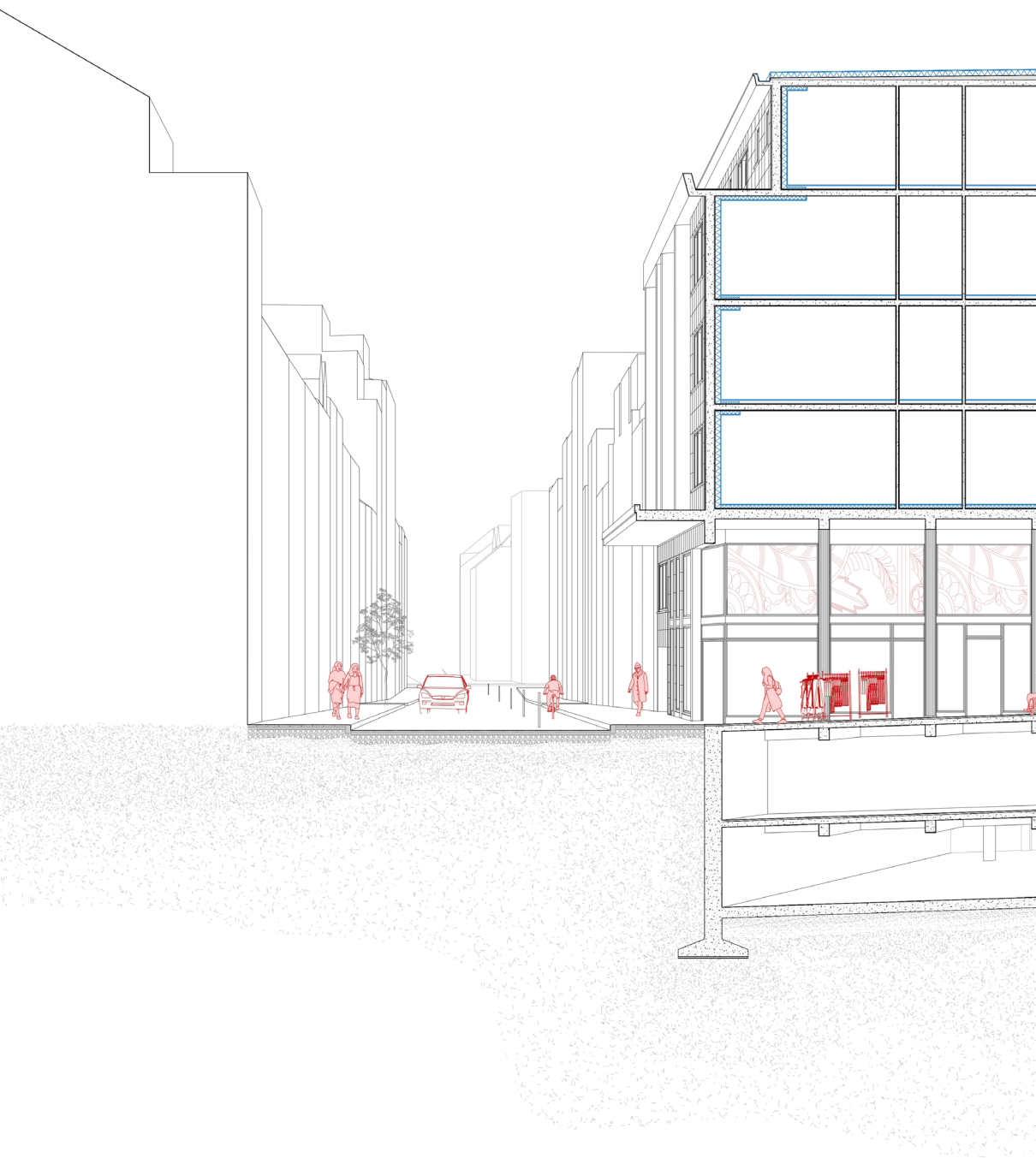
SECTION B-B'

0 2 4m

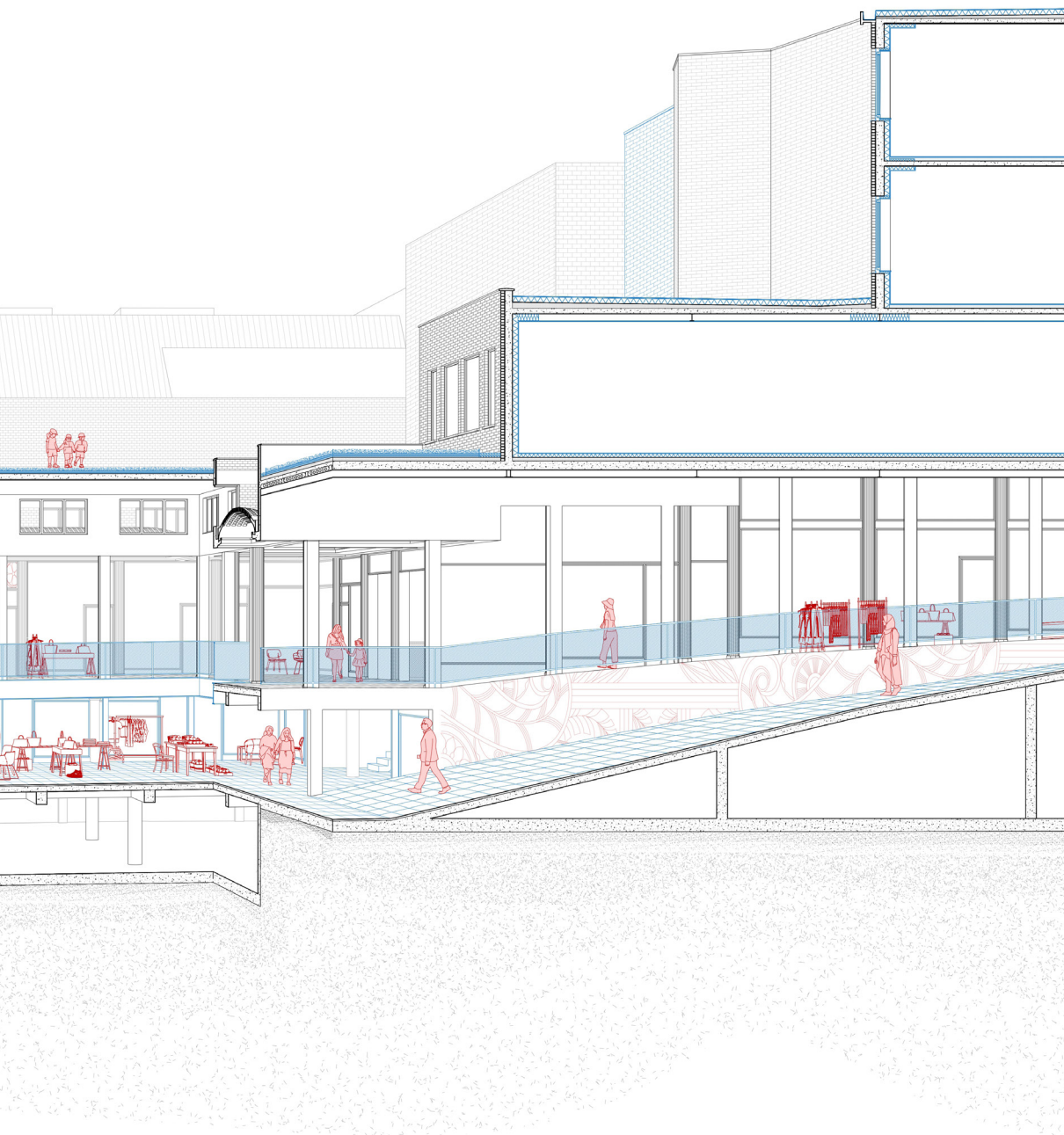


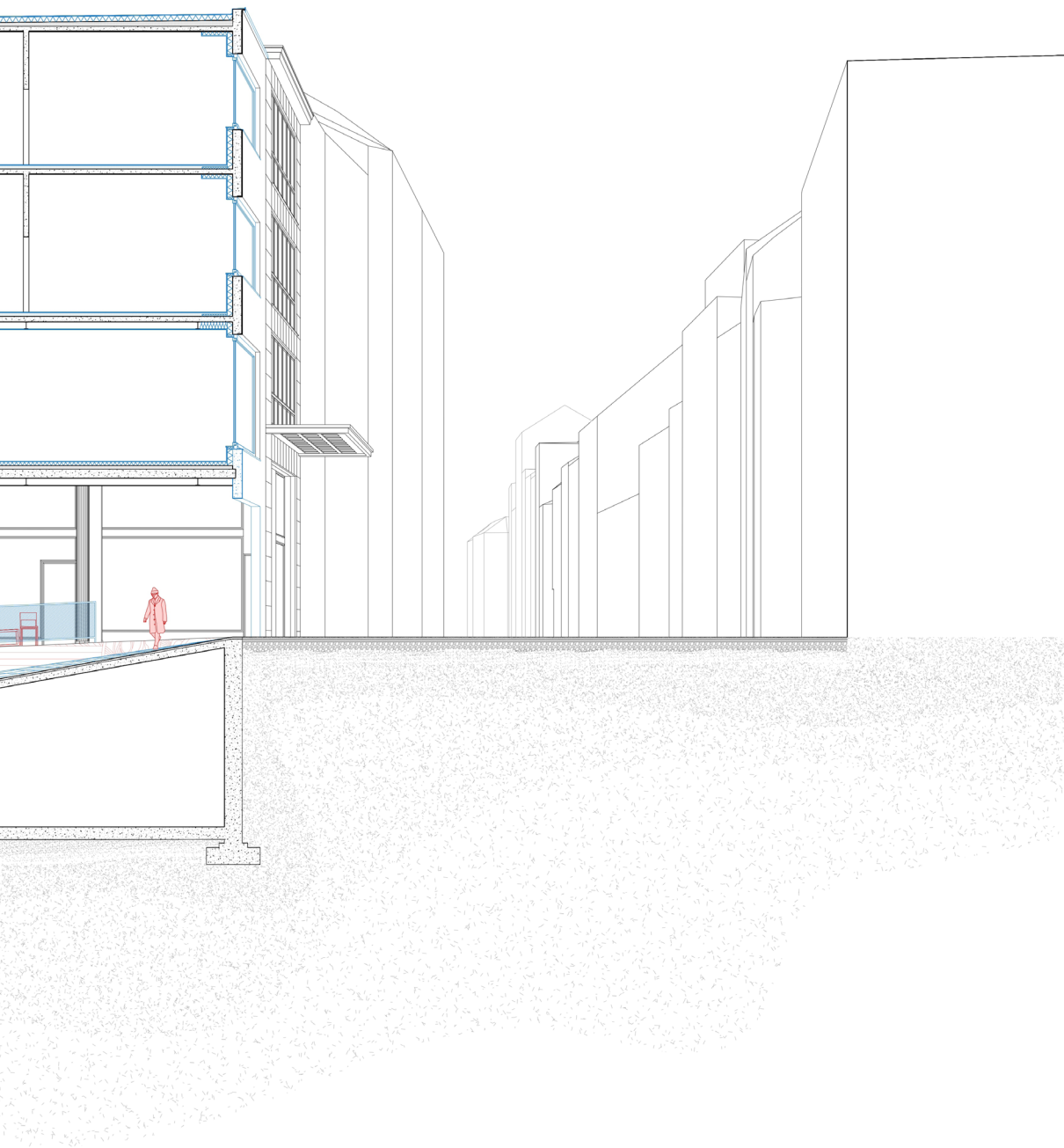


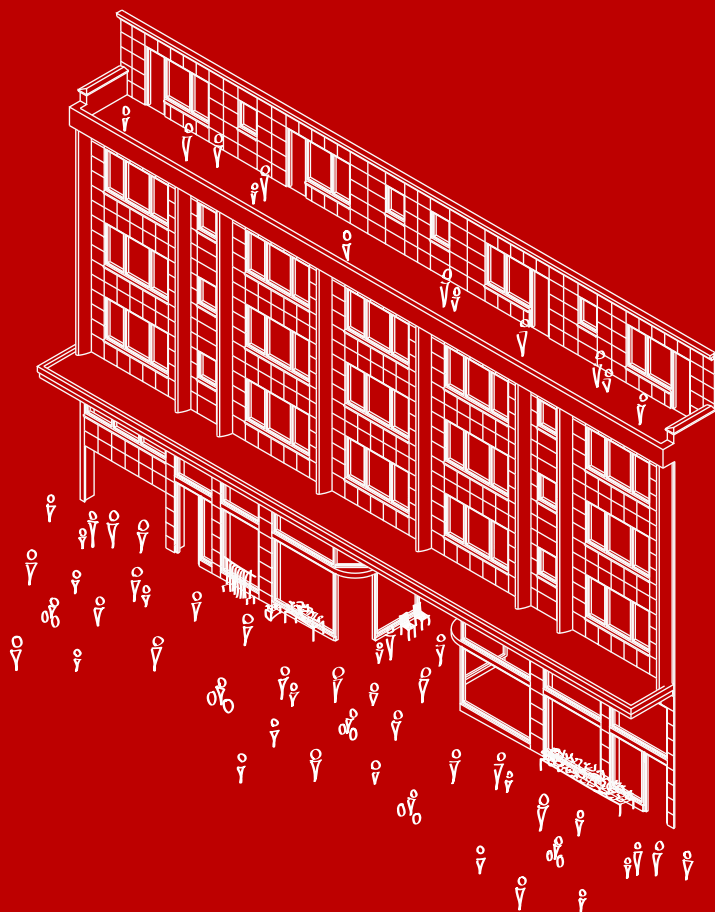












Co-promotrice experte
Sarah Demart

Co-promoteurs
Cécile Chanvillard, Christine Fontaine, G rald Ledent