

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

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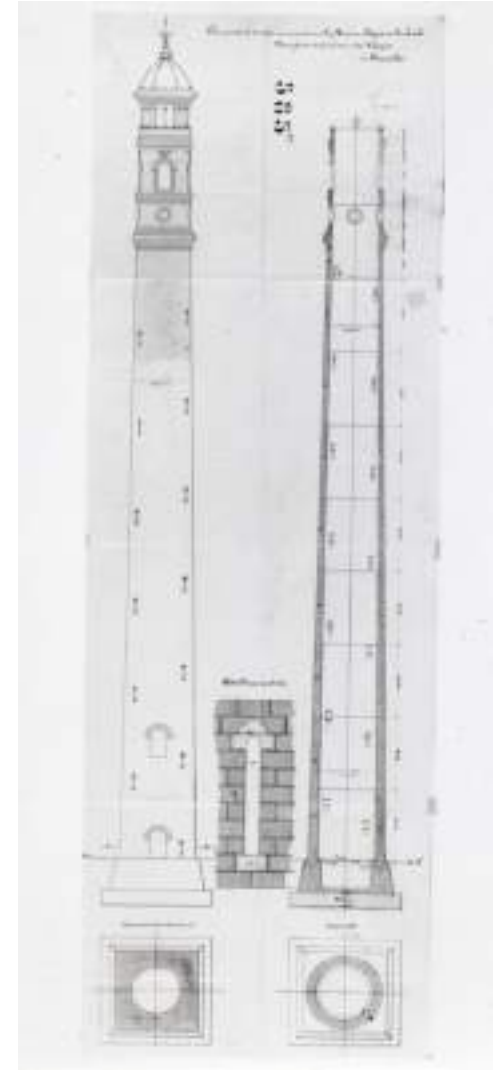
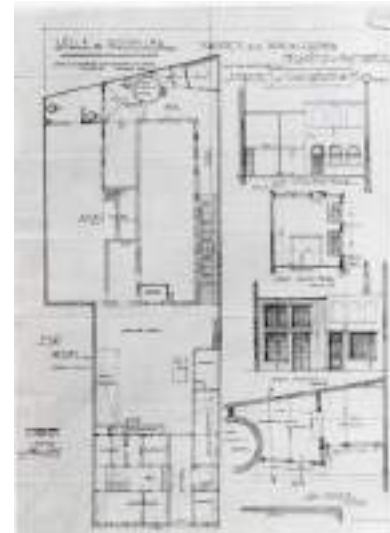
Symposium Re/Building Brussels

10/02/2022



Tour à Plomb

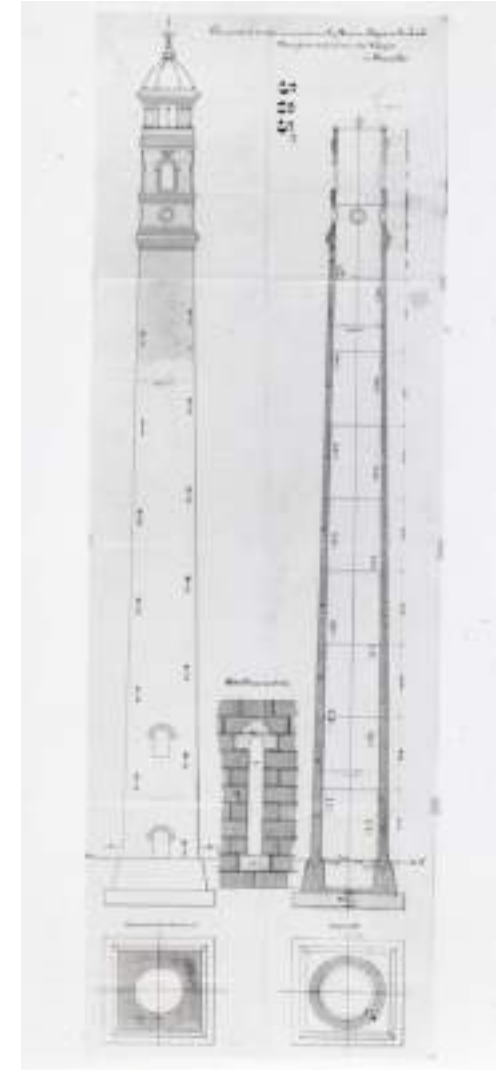
- 1832: Lead factory Hoedemaeker
- 1873: Lead and zinc factory Pelgrims & Bombeeck
- 1898: Construction of the shot tower
- 1932: Fabriques d'Overpelt-Lommel et Corphalie (→ Umicore)
- 1962: Production site abandoned
- 1975: school
- 2018: cultural centre



Inventaire visuel, 1980s

Tour à Plomb

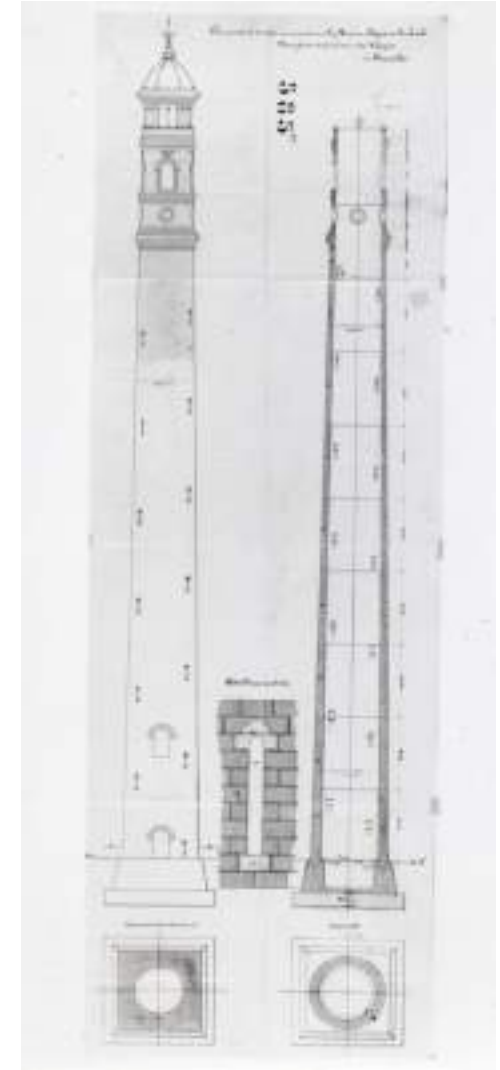
- Urban industrial geography: oriented on the Canal Antwerp-Brussels-Charleroi



Nouveau plan de Bruxelles industriel, 1910

Tour à Plomb

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



Nouveau plan de Bruxelles industriel, 1910

Database of 25 000 construction enterprises

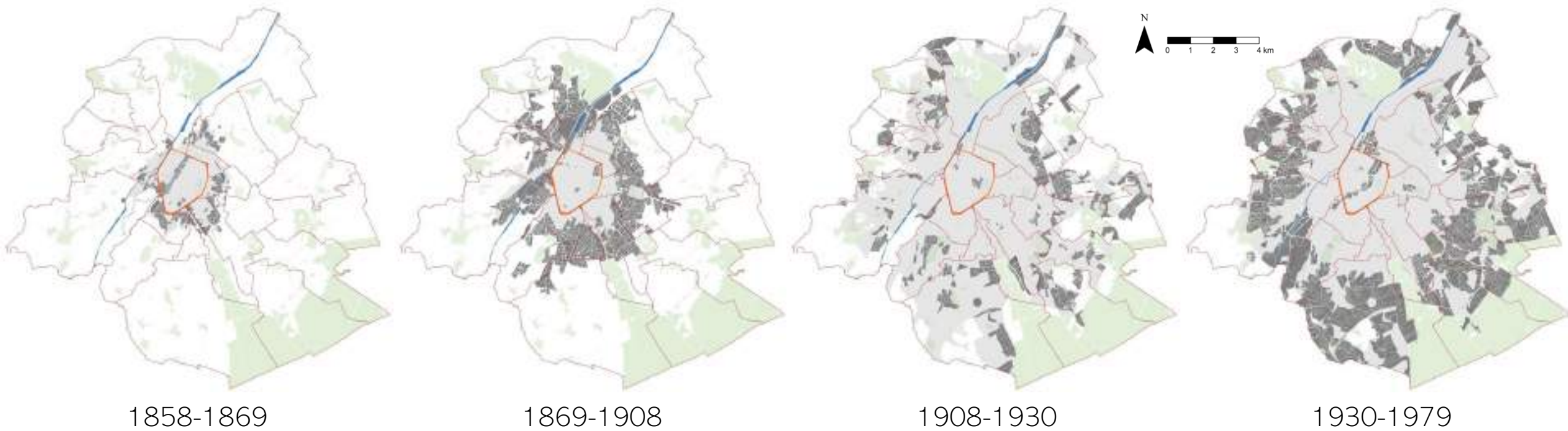
Year	Source	Records	Enterprises
1831	patent register	672	956
1833	almanac	737	
1864	patent register	948	2696
1866	almanac	2551	
1899	almanac	5986	4794
1932	almanac	8302	7778
1965	almanac	5873	5602



BCA, *Almanacs of commerce and industry* (1899)

Brussels' urban development

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

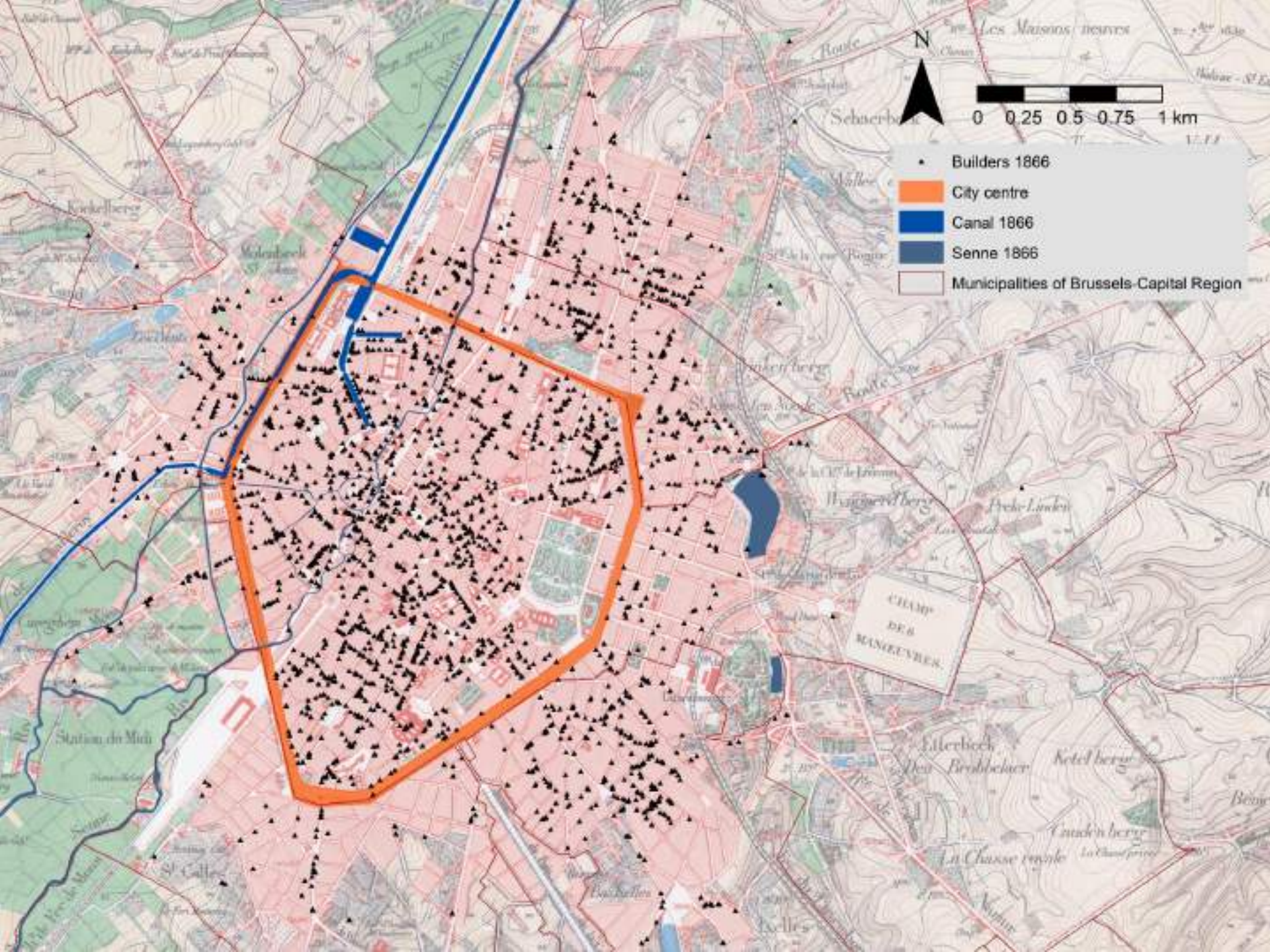


Small-scale organisation

Year	Average labour force
1831	1.9
1846	3.8
1864	3.1
1896	4.4
1910	4.2
1937	10.9
1961	8.5
1970	12.4



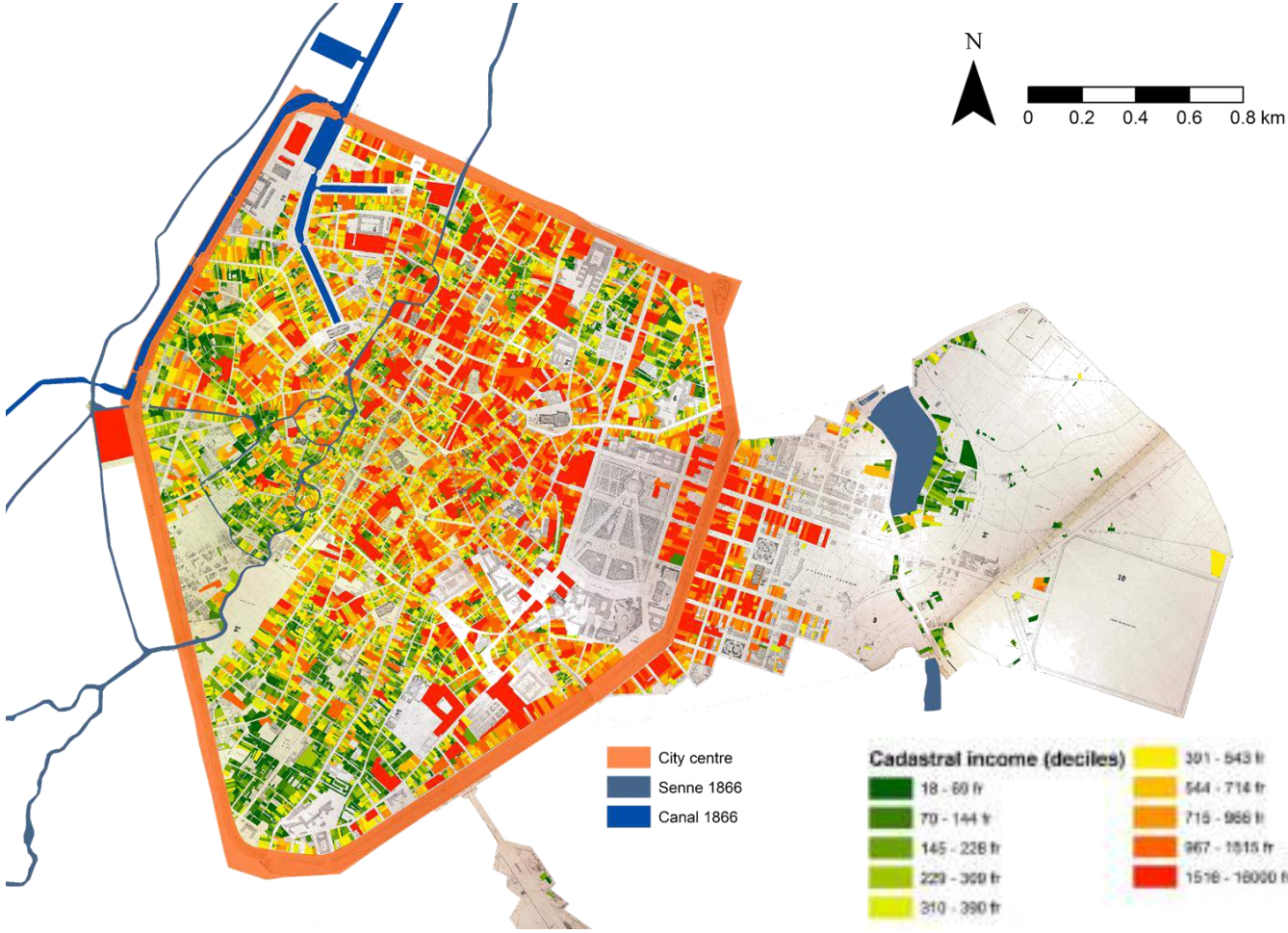
Construction workers on a roof in Brussels, ca. 1940
(BCA, CI-C1165).



Spatial organisation

- Limited spatial needs
- Dispersed over the urban space

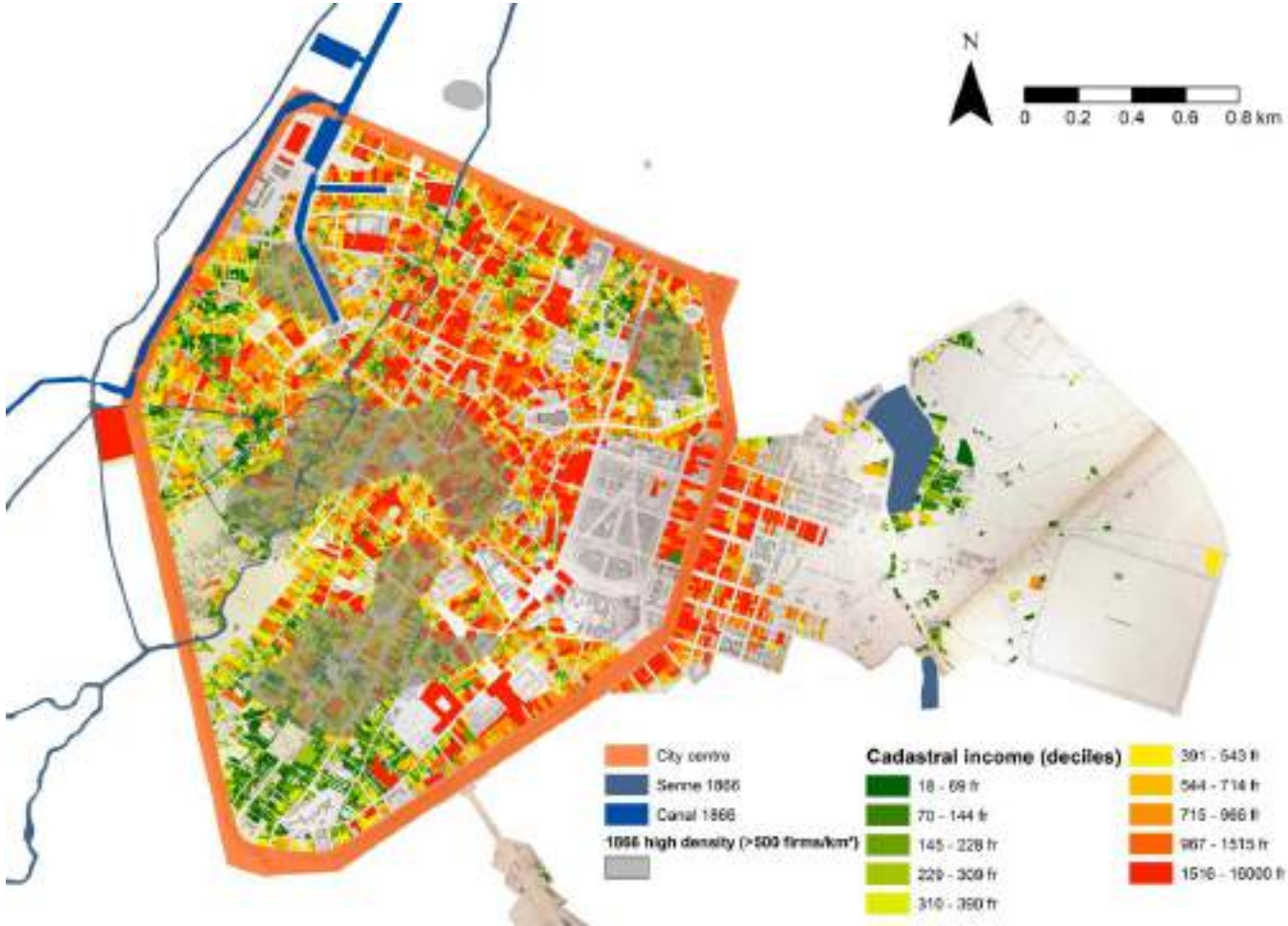
Spatial concentrations



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

Data: POPPKAD Ghent University

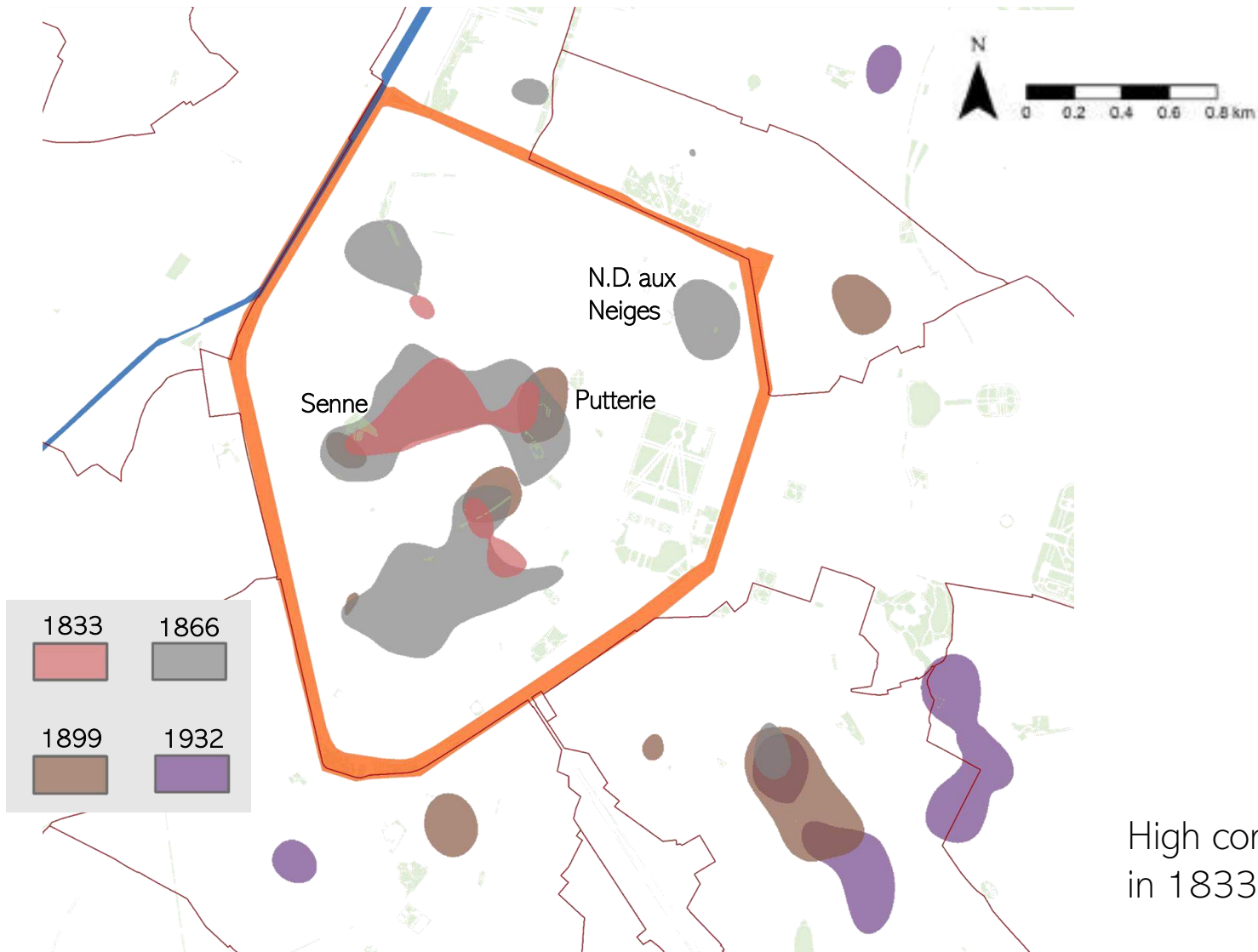
Spatial concentrations



- Formation of clusters in lower middle class neighbourhoods
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Spatial concentrations



Clustering in cheap, densely built neighbourhoods

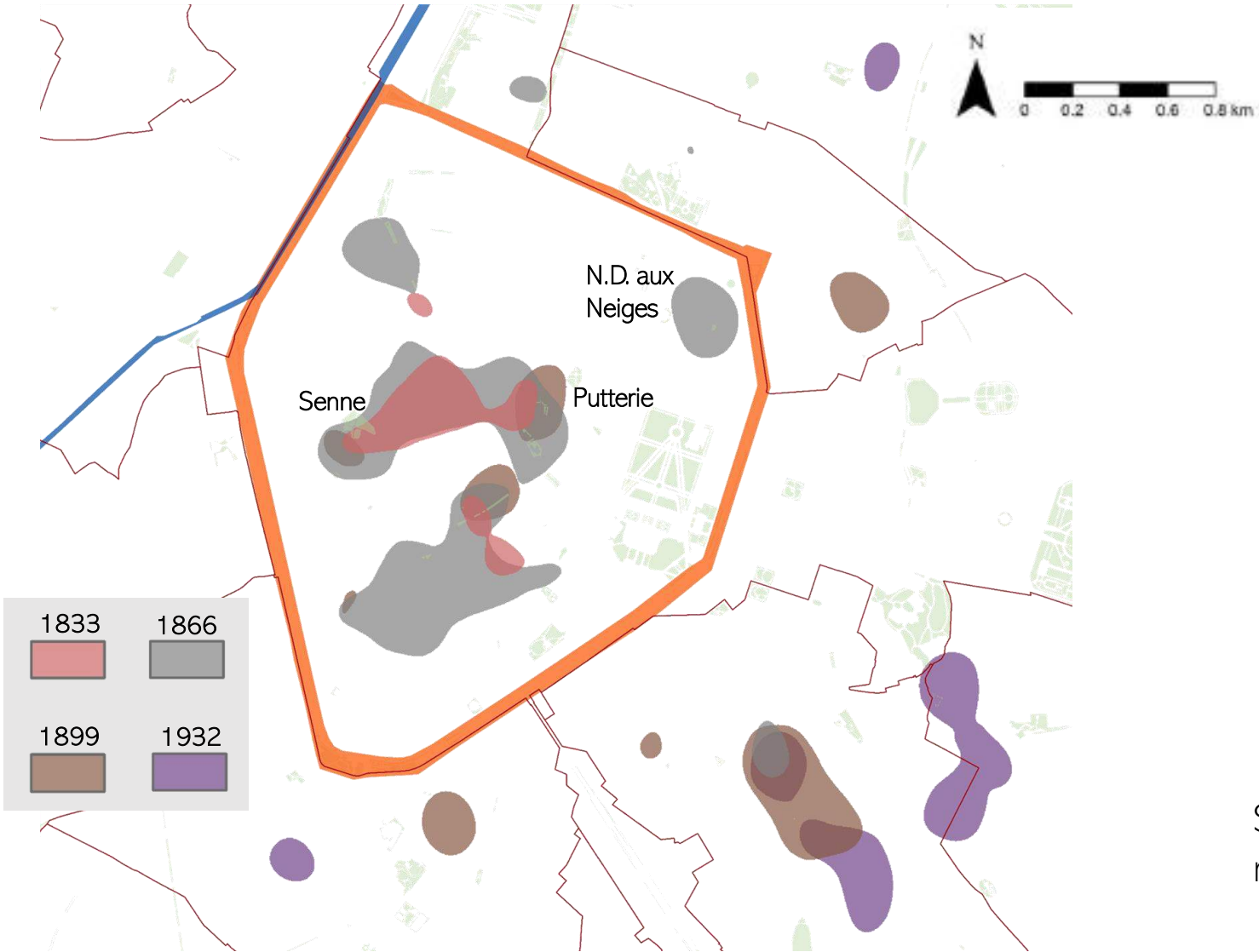
Mostly absent from wealthy areas for the urban bourgeoisie

Redevelopments result in the disappearance of concentrations

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

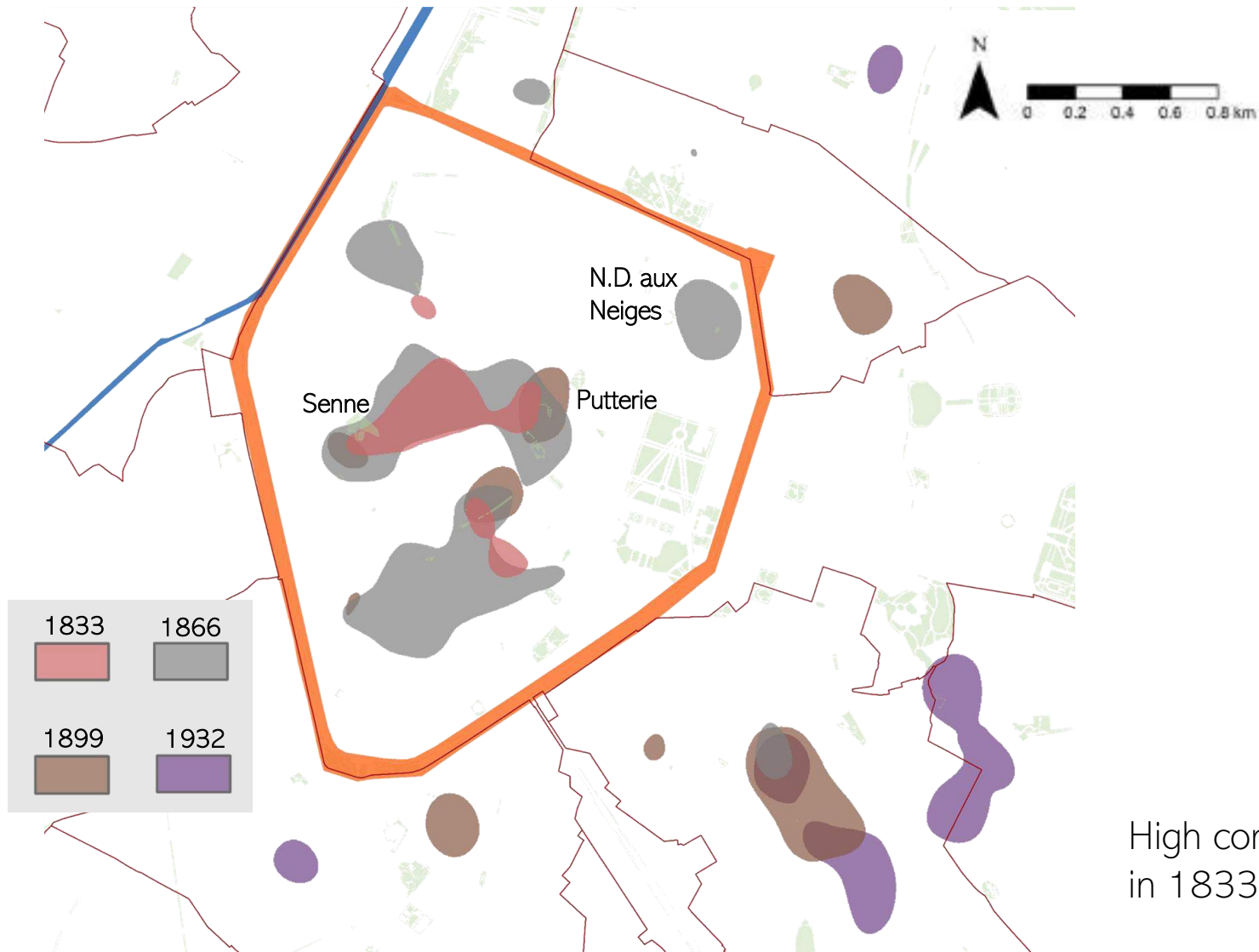
High concentrations of construction enterprises in 1833, 1866, 1899 and 1932

Spatial concentrations



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

Spatial concentrations



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

Case study: Nestor Deridder

Sanitary plumber

1901: takeover from Corneille Courtois

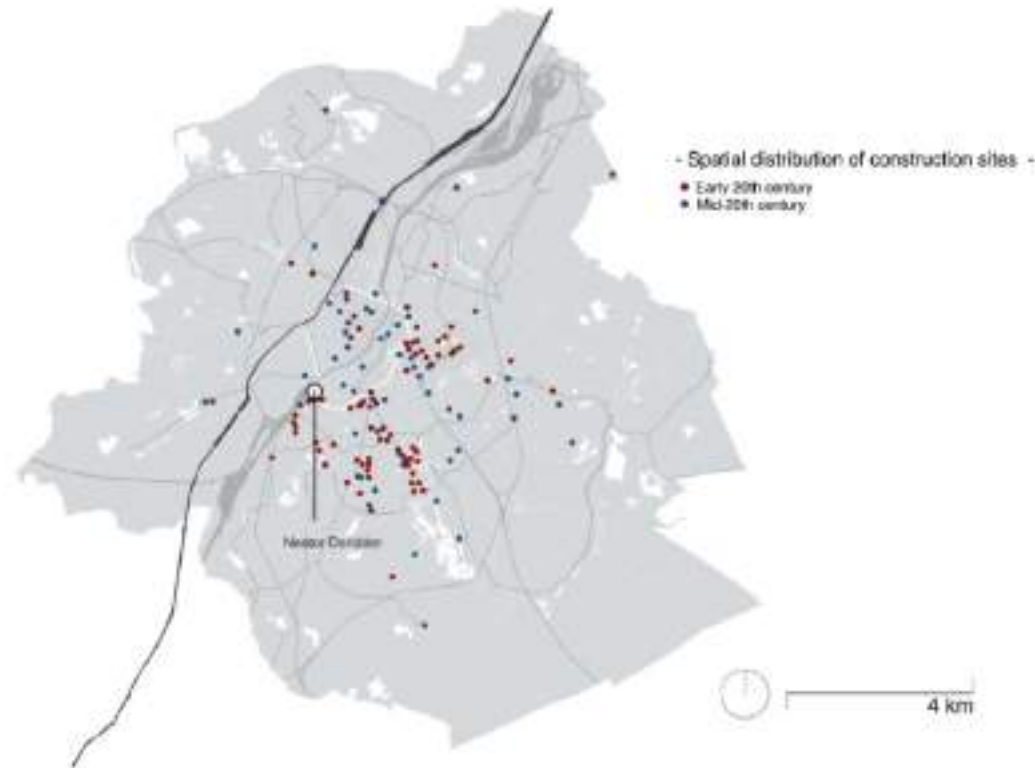
Rue de Mérode, Saint-Gilles (Brussels Midi station)



Company archives Nestor Deridder

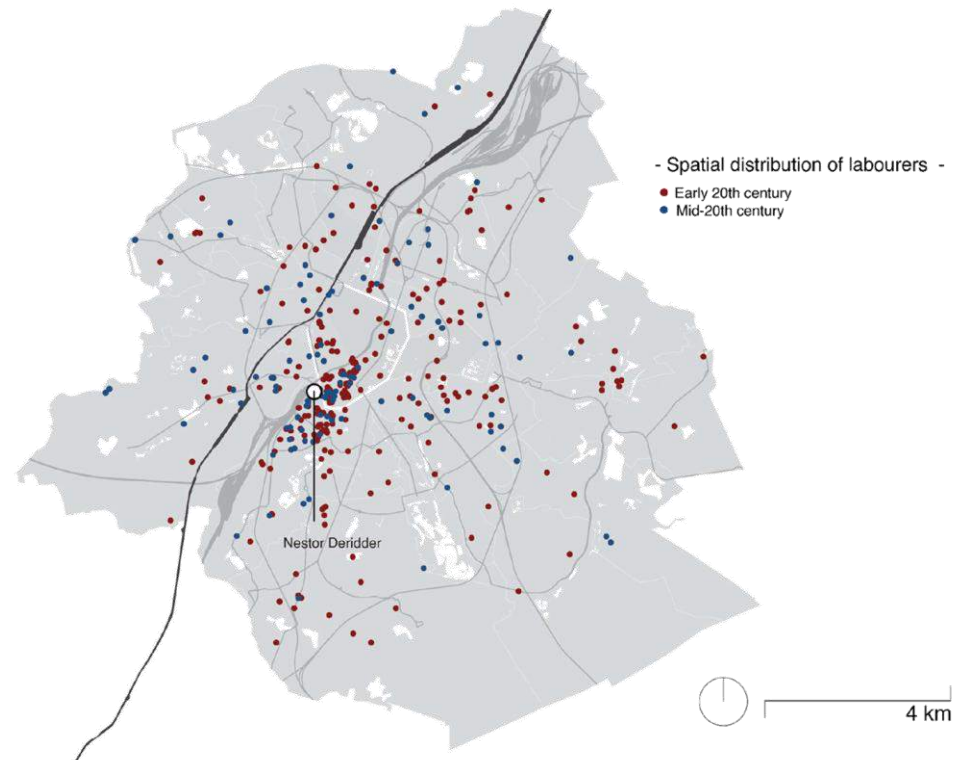
Location and spatial relations

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



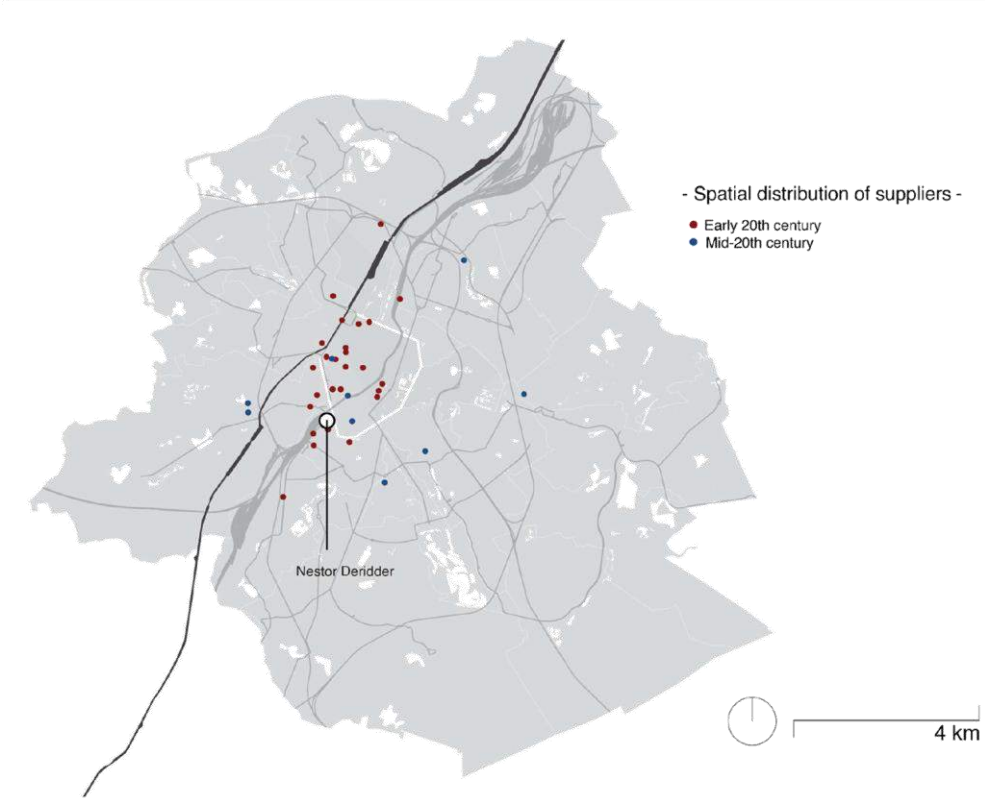
Location and spatial relations

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



Location and spatial relations

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



Case study: Nestor Deridder

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



Google Street View, 2009



BruCiel, 1980

Conclusion

Construction enterprises: small scale and limited spatial needs

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

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



Former timber trade in Schaarbeek (2018 vs 2021)