



Preamble

The study of pre-1945 dwelling types starts from the end of the 17th century for several reasons:

- the Brussels pre-1695 building stock was mainly comprised of wooden structures with thatched roofs. On 15 August 1695, a large part of the city (and the administrative archives) was destroyed by a huge fire following the bombardment by French troops. The city was reconstructed very quickly but the structures were reconstructed with hard materials such as brick and stone. No dwellings in wood and thatch survived.
- the building permit and various regulations standardising construction appear from the mid-17th century to become widespread in the 18th century.

Historic context

Demographics

From the mid-18th century, the “inner city” Brussels population increases significantly despite several major cholera epidemics. During the 18th century, Brussels experiences a large influx of population from the surrounding countryside, drawn in by industrial development and the city’s need for labour. This population settles in the workers quarters, near the industrial activities, mainly along the valley of the Senne (west side).

In the 19th century, the Brussels suburbs are urbanised and become denser in a concentric pattern to go from 212,000 inhabitants in 1846 to 762,000 inhabitants in 1910, i.e. almost quadrupling.

Urban development

Until the 17th century, the densification of the building stock takes place in a process of filling voids and spaces in the limits of the second enclosure, (with an area of 449 hectares). The process of densification lasts until the independence of Belgium (1830).

The 18th century sees the appearance of many town planning operations. Some of these operations like the creation of ring type boulevards or the opening of the canal to Charleroi structured the city until the mid-20th century and, still today, form part of the main formal features.

At the end of the 18th century, Brussels is the centre of a radial network of paved roads linking it to the peripheral villages and neighbouring towns.

The urbanisation of the city’s suburbs, at the end of the 18th and start of the 19th centuries is organised around these routes. These suburbs are progressively assimilated into the urban fabric.

In 1830, Belgium becomes independent and from 1831, Brussels becomes its capital. In this era, the second enclosure is being demolished.

During the 19th century, Brussels urban development happens with two dynamics on both sides of the second enclosure:

- on the one hand urbanisation of the periphery (first crown) which happens in fragments and which is structured by the network of new boulevards, avenues and then the grands lines of Léopold II;
- on the other hand, restructuring of the “inner” city where entire quarters are demolished, reconstructed, adapted and/or remodelled to new requirements of comfort, cleanness, functionality and urban aesthetics.

This double dynamic has its origin in a series of economic, technical and social factors: development of transportation and railway, the advance of industrial capitalism, legislation on expropriation for the city’s enhancement and sanitation, the suppression of the octroi which speeds the city’s expansion, etc.



Figure 1 : Brussels urban development a) status in 1357 b) status in 1550 c) status in 1640 d) status in 1777 e) status in 1835 f) status in 1895
Source : JP De Visscher, Indivision, PhD Thesis, LOCI, UCL, 2013



Economy

Aln the 17th and 18th centuries, the emergence of large economic markets governed by state mercantile laws radically transforms the landscape and spatial organisation of Brussels urban economy, till then essentially focussed on artisanal work and characterised by diverse uses of water and land.

From 1830, the development of the railway and railway industry contributes to Brussels economic growth. Brussels rapidly becomes the centre of a national and international commercial and industrial network.

At the end of the 19th century, Brussels is the country's premier industrial employment basin. While the textile and clothing industries dominated the Brussels industrial fabric from the Middle Ages, the transformation of imported raw materials and semi-finished iron products favour the development of new activities. Mechanical construction and industries related to luxury and mass consumption take over.

Utilities (gas, electricity, drinking water, drainage)

Wood and coal were used from 11th century as fuel for heating and cooking. Each living room is equipped with a fireplace or stove. The kitchen or basement kitchen is equipped with a coal-fired cooker. It's not until 1870 that the gas supply is installed in most Brussels homes.

For lighting, most Brussels homes are lit by candles until the appearance of the oil lamp in 1860 and the electricity supply in 1880. Before the installation of a drinking water supply, all Brussels homes were equipped with a rain water tank. This water was used for everything except drinking. Access to drinking water was provided from public fountains located at different places in Brussels. In 1857, a drinking water supply is installed in Brussels homes. This entails several spatial modifications.

- more functional individualisation of some rooms in the house, previously portable baths become fixed in rooms with a specific purpose;
- vertical draining of water from these rooms becomes a technical constraint which affects house organisation.

Up to 1840, each Brussels house was equipped with toilets (located in the inner court), a cesspool and a septic tank. The first drainage systems are installed in Brussels from 1840 and the complete system is completed in 1870.

Lifestyles and uses

In the 16th century, the daily life of each member of the family or of each house takes place in full view of the other people. Promiscuity of every moment is the rule. Also, the same room can be used as living space and workplace.

This lifestyle leads to specific spatial organisation::

- there is no defined limit between the spaces where people stay and the spaces through which they pass. Spaces are distributed in a vertical way;
- on the same floor, the living rooms are placed one after another and are inter-communicating. They do not have specific uses, they are multipurpose spaces whose function is determined by the furniture.

In the 17th century, there appears a new type of relationship to self and others and a new lifestyle: strangers, visitors and servants are separated from family life and some spaces are dedicated to them. It's at this time that the Council of Trent formulates condemnations on the body, nudity and promiscuity. Protecting oneself and hiding become a necessity which room organisation has to satisfy. It's also the time when Pierre Le Muet gives, in



his book «Manière de bastir pour toutes sortes de personnes», the rules to be followed regarding ease and convenience. The vertical organisation of the 16th century gives way to horizontal organisation which favours everyone's intimacy and clearly limits the circulation spaces and living spaces.

In the 18th century, there is complete separation of social life, professional life and private life. Each function receives an appropriate space as regards its layout, decoration or furnishings. The family distances itself as regards society and the arrangement of the house responds to this concern; comfort born from intimacy, discretion, isolation. Also appearing at this time is a special toilet and hygiene article.

Arrangements are strongly linked to the quality of «convenience» or domestic comfort. Each space is qualified by what takes place in it. Its situation, shape and decoration are determined by its function.

In the 19th century, the arrangement of homes undergoes significant changes due to the evolution of the city and society (models of conduct set by the middle class and no longer by the aristocracy).

Types of pre-war housing studied

From 1700 to 1914 single-family dwellings constituted the most common housing type in Brussels. It is rare to see multi-family houses or investment property appear before the First World War except for some unsuccessful attempts on the boulevards of the centre.

In terms of single-family homes, there are three types of dwelling:

- **modest or worker houses** mostly located in popular and industrial quarters, in lanes or cul-de-sacs of the city centre, as well as in the outskirts (end 19th century);
- **middle-class houses** (including merchant's houses) located in middle-class quarters, mainly at the top of the city, along the grand avenues and in the extension quarters (mainly south and east);
- **private mansions** intended for the upper classes and aristocracy and located in extension quarters like the Léopold Quarter.

The **investment property** (multi-family dwelling) was also studied.

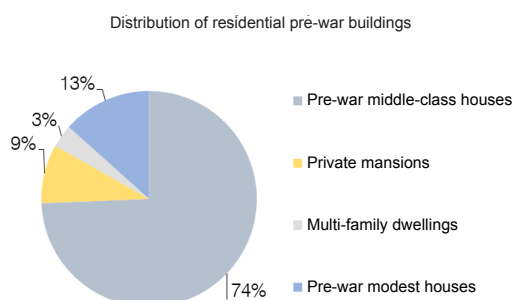


Figure 2: Distribution of residential pre-war buildings, by type.



Figure 3a:
Neoclassical middle-class house -
rue Amazone in Ixelles (1887)
© www.irismonument.be



Figure 3b:
Middle-class house in eclectic style -
rue Américaine à Ixelles (1896)
© www.irismonument.be



Figure 4a:
Neoclassical private mansion -
rue d'Angleterre (1875)
© www.irismonument.be



Figure 4b:
Private mansion, Italian Renaissance -
Chaussée de Charleroi 123 (1899)
© www.irismonument.be



Figure 5a:
Neoclassical modest houses -
Rue Garibaldi 50 à 56 (1902)
© www.irismonument.be



Figure 5b:
Modest house in eclectic style -
Rue J.Deraeck 24 (1910)
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Pre-war middle-class house (types 1a, 1b, 2a, 2b & 2c)

This housing type has its origin in the wood-frame gable end houses of the 15th and 16th century. Throughout the 19th century, they undergo significant stylistic change but nevertheless maintain a number of general characteristics. These houses have a relatively narrow façade in relation to the depth of the plots. While they are all brick built, the appearance of the fronts evolves with time, especially because of the influence first of the neo-classical style, and then the eclectic and the Art Nouveau styles.

This housing type is mainly found in the extensions of the city: Léopold Quarter, Louise Quarter, Bois de la Cambre or in some residential quarters (Ixelles, Saint-Gilles, Schaerbeek, etc.). many merchant's and middle-class houses are also located around the railway stations. These houses comprise a ground floor reserved for workshops, shops or café-bars.

Private mansion (type 3a)

This housing type is built and occupied by Brussels high society: aristocracy, major land owners, major industrialists, bankers and certain top civil servants.

These mansions are built in the outskirts of Brussels, on the ring type boulevards and in certain new quarters like the Léopold Quarter. The suppression of the octroi in 1860 favoured this suburban location, to the east and south-east of the Pentagone.

These mansions are big, they generally have 3 stories and more or less 5 spans in width. They are characterised by the presence of a lateral carriage entrance on the road façade, which crosses the dwelling and gives access to the outhouses and stables at the back of the plot.

Pre-war modest house (type 4a)

These simple homes are most often built in groups by a private contractor. They appear in a line along a public street, or as a cul-de-sac (the most widespread type characteristic of Brussels), or as a grouping around a small square or court inside the island, which makes them hard to see from the public street.

Following the work of sanitation and enhancement at the end of the 19th century and the work of the North-South connection at the start of the 20th century, many houses of this type were demolished.

At the end of the 19th century, modest homes are distributed in the outskirts, in small groups, in existing structures.



Figure 6:
Apartment buildings, Haussmann style, on the Anspach boulevard, Brussels



Figure 7:
Multiple dwelling house - Ch. de Boondael in Ixelles (1915)
© www.irismonument.be



Figure 8:
Multiple dwelling - Avenue du Parc in Saint-Gilles (1914)
© www.irismonument.be

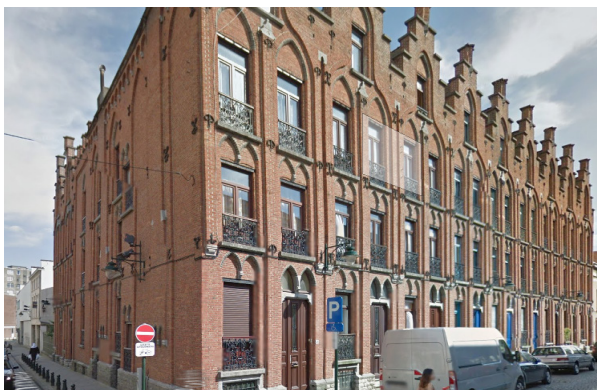


Figure 9:
A set of eleven multiple dwelling houses drawn by G. Cochaux around 1898 (Rue de la Poudrière, 1000 Brussels).
(source: Google Maps)



Figure 10:
Social multiple dwelling « cité Hellemans », between rue Haute and rue Blaes (1906)
Source : www.globalview.be

Investment property and multiple dwelling (type 3b)

The first apartment buildings appear from 1870, along the boulevards of the centre. These are monumental buildings, usually with shops on the ground floor. These buildings are designed on the model of the Parisian (Haussmann) type but have simpler design and do not satisfy the comfort criteria of the middle classes. In a few years, a great many apartment buildings are put up – mainly by Compagnie Mosnier – in the Bourse Quarter, along the Boulevard Adolphe Max, the Place De Brouckère and the Boulevard Anspach. However, the construction of apartment buildings experienced a difficult and laborious start, despite the initiatives of the City and certain property developers. Indeed, for most of the Brussels population, used to the middle-class house and a vertical life between several floors, apartment life is not very attractive and cohabitation and the proximity of other inhabitants are perceived as a social step down. Then, from 1850 the middle classes initiated an exodus movement to the outskirts and new quarters of Brussels, which is why many of these buildings do not find buyers.

However, the building of apartments is not abandoned: many investment properties and apartment buildings of more modest size are constructed. The apartment buildings have an external scale and appearance similar to the single-family house. However, they are dedicated to housing several families which each occupy one or two rooms and share the toilets. They are most often occupied by the working classes. Their façades convey a desire to improve the image of worker housing. This housing type is often inserted between two adjoining properties and has a scale similar to middle class houses. In its more luxury versions, occupied by the middle classes, each flat of the apartment building is equipped with toilets.

The first major collective social housing projects also appear in this period. In particular the properties of the Rue Marconi in Forest (1903), the Hellemans Cité between the Rue Haute and the Rue Blaes (1906), of the Olivier Cité (1902), and the Helmet Cité (1910) or again the Cité of the Rue Blaes (1912). The social apartments are simple and functional. They comprise a set of rooms dedicated to the kitchen, to sleeping and are equipped with toilets and patios.