



Preamble

Between 1914 and 1920, almost no housing is built in Brussels. Indeed, the First World War, from 1914, marks a complete halt to building, a stop that lasts up to the 1920s. From 1920, there appear many changes both in the urban planning of Brussels and in dwelling types and styles even if the single-family house remains predominant. The city of Brussels expands greatly. The suburbs become much denser and a separation appears between living places and work places. The arrival of the motorcar and its generalisation significantly modify relationships with public spaces and also lead to modifications in individual dwellings (presence of garage or parking area). Garden cities are built for workers at the edges of the city. From 1930, after the financial crisis of 1929, apartment buildings both for the working classes and for the middle classes – returning to the city – multiply in Brussels.

Between-wars historical background

New needs

The first years following the First World War are characterised by huge shortages of goods, housing and domestic staff. The economic situation takes time to straighten, industrial production collapses and inflation is rampant.

This period of paucity also influences the Brussels housing situation because the demand for housing increases strongly given demographic growth and the influx of populations fleeing from devastated areas. Quality construction materials are scarce during this period, the middle classes are also seeking houses, the price of buildings soars. Hence it is impossible to make up for the housing shortage exclusively through private initiatives. This leads to the appearance of apartment buildings and the garden-cities.

The needs in terms of travel, linking the large new infrastructures also mark the Brussels landscape and cause a major urban shift that brings Brussels a certain modernity.

Urban development

During the between-wars period, several town planning events mark the continuation of the expansion of Brussels.

The traditional and closed islands and individual neighbouring houses undergo great change due to new economic and social data.

The completion of the North-South connection leads to the demolition of many popular quarters and the expropriation of more than 13,000 people. It also enabled the installation of large buildings and major infrastructures: the Central Station, the Sabena HQ, the Administrative Complex, the National Bank. All these structures express by means of new architecture this need for mobility and modernity.

The between-wars period also sees the clash of several movements of reflection on the city's development. The importance of the reflection of the modernists, the influence of the International Congresses of Modern Architecture (CIAM) one of which is held in Brussels in 1930, as well as the theories of Le Corbusier decidedly influence the urban landscape of Brussels and other European cities, on the eve of the Second World War.

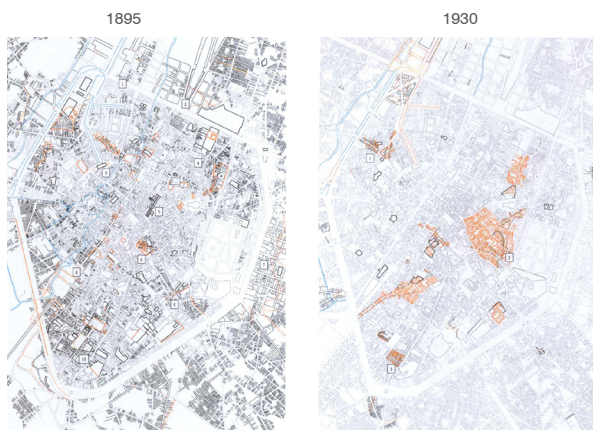


Figure 1: Brussels urban development a) status in 1895 b) status in 1930
Source : JP De Visscher, Indivision, PhD Thesis, LOCI, UCL, 2013



Figure 2:
Garden cities and public transport network (trains and trams) around Brussels - 1894-1930

1. Modern Garden city
2. Hellemans city
3. Garden cities Le Logis et Floréal

Source : JP De Visscher, *Indivision*, PhD thesis, LOCI, UCL, 2013

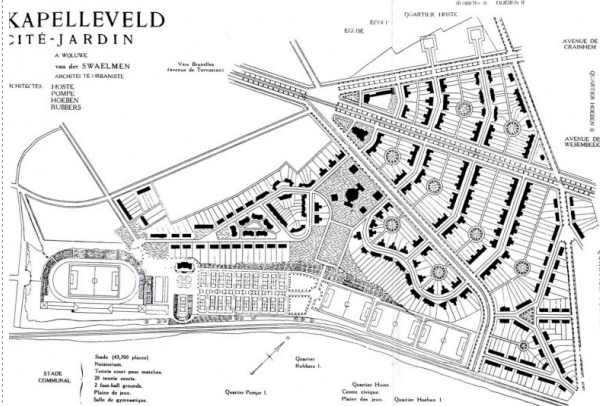


Figure 3:
Draft plan for the Garden city Kapelleveld, drawn by L. Van Der Swaelen in 1922
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Figure 4: Modest houses in Garden city Kapelleveld, drawn by L. Van Der Swaelen in 1922
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New housing types

The workers house in the garden-city

Two of the main problems after the war are the reconstruction of the damaged cities and the shortage of housing.

Reconstruction of the historic centres is done identically, without taking into account the aspirations of the modern architects of the period. These then turn to the construction of social housing. The stays of many architects abroad during the war years plays a significant role in the construction of these dwellings. Indeed, a consensus is established and considers the garden-city concept as the best solution to the problem of workers housing.

Under the influence of the English Garden City Movement, preference is given to the construction of single-family houses located in garden-cities, in the communes surrounding Brussels.

In 1917, the Union of Belgian Cities and Communes organises three competitions for the construction of garden-cities at Couillet, Jemappes and Willebroek.

In 1919, the national union government creates the SNHLBM (Société Nationale des Habitations et Logements à Bon Marché). This is tasked to encourage and coordinate the initiatives of cooperative societies of tenants, by granting them long-term loans at low rates. In this way the public authorities provide a structural contribution to the realisation of this type of housing by proposing advantageous financial conditions to communal housing societies, so-called «foyers», for constructing modest but comfortable homes.

A new boost is given to housing construction: in a few years much social housing is constructed throughout the country, around the cities and close to public transport stops or terminuses. And the capital gets a veritable fringe of garden-cities.

At this time, the social apartment buildings, in strongly urbanised communes, are still considered to be a «necessary evil».

In Belgium, the garden-cities are limited to the construction of single quarters of housing with some community infrastructures (schools, dispensaries, shops, playing fields) and cultural and sports installations intended to reinforce links of solidarity.

But the fear of a «red» belt around the major cities and the stopping of the German war reparation payments – that are used as subsidies to the worksites – lead firstly to the suppression of the collective equipments initially planned and then to the final and rapid abandonment of these construction programmes from 1925.

In November 1930, the third CIAM, organised in Brussels, defends the apartment building as the one model for solving the social housing problem. The construction of garden-cities was gradually abandoned by the social housing societies, to the profit of apartment buildings.

The garden-cities enabled a vast field of formal and technical research: prefabricated units, building system of frames and slabs, standardised metal window frames, concrete panels, lean concrete walls poured in reusable shuttering, etc.

The architectural image of the garden-cities is influenced by the English or Dutch models but also demonstrate great variety. These garden-cities are mainly constituted of neighbouring or semi-detached single-family houses. Some apartment buildings appear and generally constitute the centre of the garden-city.

The largest assemblies (in number of dwellings constructed) around Brussels are:

- The Cité de la Roue at Anderlecht whose conception and realisation started in 1907, is interrupted during the First World War and really restarts in 1920.



Figure 5: Modest houses in Garden city «la Roue», Anderlecht
© googlemaps



Figure 6: Modest houses in Garden city «Le Logis», Watermael-Boitsfort
© googlemaps

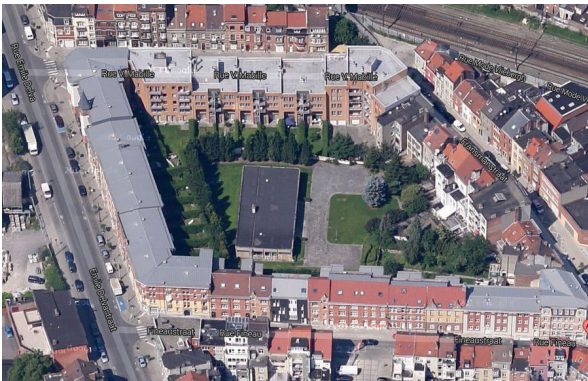


Figure 7:
Multiple dwelling houses in rue Fineau, Fransman and V. Mabile, built in 1920 by Dwellings company of Foyer laekenois. The architects are Bonduelle, Dewin, Diongre, Puissant, Robberechts, Selly and Van Neck.
Source : Google Street view

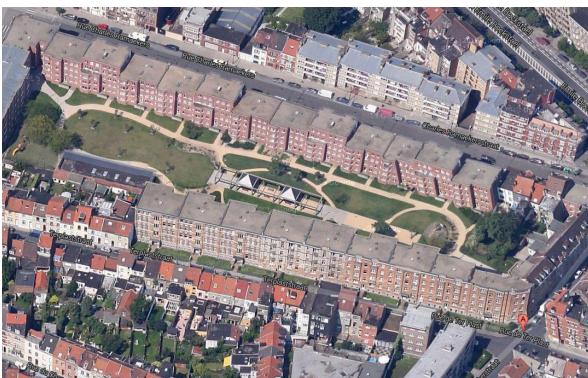


Figure 8:
Multiple dwelling houses on the city block formed by streets Ter Plast, Siphon and Fransman, built in 1922 by Dwellings company of Foyer laekenois. The architects are Dewin, Diongre et Puissant.
Source : Google Street view

- The «Le Logis – Floréal» cities at Watermael-Boitsfort, conceived by the town planner, Louis Van der Swaelmen, for developing the quarters and the layout of the houses and plantations, and by Jean-Jules Eggericx, main architect of the housing on behalf of two different cooperative societies. These two cities were built in several phases from 1922 to 1965.
- La Cité Moderne at Berchem St Agathe, conceived by the architect Victor Bourgeois, built from 1922 to 1925.
- The «Kapelleveld» city at Woluwe-Saint-Lambert conceived in the modernist spirit and due to the town planner Louis Van der Swaelmen, also author of the Logis and Floréal, and built from 1922 to 1926 by the avant-garde architects Huib Hoste and Antoine Pompe.

The apartment building

Between the wars, Brussels inhabitants, staunch supporters of individual houses, still appear reticent faced with this new dwelling type gathering several tenants under the same roof. However, various technical and socioeconomic factors favour and encourage the construction and adoption of this dwelling form by all levels of the population, including the middle classes:

- the Law of 8 July 1924 which facilitates purchasing and borrowing in co-ownership;
- the disappearance of domestic workers;
- the promotion carried out by the Société Belge Immobilière founded in 1922, with its powerful publicity and dissemination in specialist periodicals ;
- economic, technical and social progress;
- the financial crash of 1929 which obliges well-off and middle class populations to return to live in the Brussels city centre, close to their workplaces.

This housing change has an impact on the city's appearance. Indeed, middle class houses and private mansions were mainly built before the First World War, the period following 1918 sees the construction of a great variety of apartment buildings.

Very variable, the size of this dwelling type goes from the small apartment building with three to four floors to the skyscraper with eighteen storeys.

For the finishes, there are both buildings offering every luxury and comfort imaginable (Résidence Palace) and buildings housing social apartments with very simple furnishings. Also, some buildings enable the coexistence of several functions: dwellings, offices, shops, theatres and cinemas.

Diversity is also expressed aesthetically: Beaux-Arts buildings, Art-Déco buildings or again modernist buildings.



Between-war styles and variety

During the First World War, some architects go abroad and are confronted with different architecture and town planning movements. These in particular are:

- Jean-Jules Eggericx, Théo Clément, Georges Hobé and Raphael Verwilghen, refugees in England, discover the Garden City Movement
- Huib Hoste, Louis Van der Swaelmen and Louis Herman de Koninck, refugees in the Netherlands, discover certain movements like the Amsterdam School or De Stijl and get to know architects such as J. Duiker, J.A. Brinkman and L.C. Van der Vlugt (Het Nieuwe Bouwen) who champion new materials and new construction techniques like steel frames, reinforced concrete, fine metal furnishings, etc.

These architects, returning to Belgium after the First World War, influence the Brussels urban landscape, post-war reconstruction and the styles of the buildings to be constructed, essentially the apartment buildings and the between-wars garden-cities.

At the end of the First World War, Art Nouveau gives way to architectural styles that mark the reconstruction of Belgium and the between-wars period: Beaux Arts, Art Deco and Modernism, the international style, etc.

Art Deco and Modernism meet in common quests. In part, a desire for simplicity, in reaction to the decorative excesses of Eclecticism and Art Nouveau. In part a desire to make interior spaces more functional and rational. This second characteristic is related to the appearance of new living modes aimed at improving comfort in the between-war period (appearance of the telephone and elevators, popularisation of the standardised kitchen, etc.).

Beaux-Arts Style (from 1905 to 1930 approx.)

«Architectural current deriving its inspiration in the grand French styles of the 18th century. Rich and ornamented, it often features elevations in white cast stone and/or orange brick and the use of wrought iron for guardrails and entry doors» Source : <http://www.irismonument.be>

The Beaux-Arts style in architecture is a late form of neoclassicism coloured with eclecticism. It owes its name to the École des Beaux-Arts and the Académie des Beaux-Arts which are the key teaching and artistic recognition institutions in Paris. This style dominated from 1860 up to the First World War and lasts until 1930.

Art Deco (1920 – 1935)

«Trend to the geometric approach to shapes and architectural ornaments, combined with a play of materials, textures and colours.» Source : <http://www.irismonument.be>

Art Deco appeared in Belgium immediately after the First World War when Victor Horta took on the design of the Brussels Centre for Fine Arts in 1919.

Art Deco is an artistic movement born in 1910s, which spreads its wings in the 1920s (the Golden Twenties) before declining in the 1930s. Art Deco is a style that mainly addresses the upper middle and middle classes which attempt to stand out from the rest of the population. It already has a certain functionalism while still remaining attached to the past and having indigenous features: technical variety, richness of colours and textures, etc.

This very popular style is characterised by a geometric approach to forms, by abundant ornamentation, freely using luxury marbles, ornaments in hammered wrought iron, bas-reliefs, gilt freezes and mouldings and even columns and pillars inspired by the Antique,



Figure 9:
Apartment building in Beaux-Arts style, rue des Bataves 49 in Etterbeek, built by Alphonse Boelens in 1924
© www.irismonument.be



Figure 10:
Apartment building in Beaux-Arts style, chaussée de Charleroi 70 in St Gilles, built by Charles Lefèvre in 1923
© www.irismonument.be



Figure 11:
Art-Deco apartment building, rue A.Bréart 69, in St Gilles, built by Charles De Wys in 1929
© www.irismonument.be



Figure 12:
Art-Déco apartment building, Avenue des Capucines 31 in Schaerbeek, built by Félix Dierick in 1935
© www.irismonument.be



Figure 13:
Modernist apartment building, chaussée de Boondael 119 in Ixelles, built by Adrien Blomme in 1933
© www.irismonument.be



Figure 14:
Modernist apartment building, boulevard Brand Whitlock 142, built by Jean Florian Collin in 1935
© www.irismonument.be

by plays of materials, textures and colours and by the use of polished natural stone, polished wood, mirrors, glass, copper and chrome details.

Art Deco is the only current continuing the use of purely decorative elements in architecture. It has a repertory of forms like the arc of a circle, polygons, distinct angles, parallels, and nested features.

Art Deco integrates both architecture and the decorative arts. The notion of Arts and Crafts finds its full meaning in Art Deco with the omnipresence of the artisanal in architecture: ironwork, glazing, brick arrangements, etc.

This style dominates in the construction of apartment buildings throughout the between-wars period.

Modernism (from 1919)

«Modernism (from the 1920s) is an international current. It features the use of elementary geometric volumes, flat roofs, strip windows and modern materials like reinforced concrete.» Source: <http://www.irismonument.be>

This style develops throughout the 1920s and 1930s, in competition with Art Deco and the Beaux-Arts style. It is based on thinking about society and breaks radically with the past: architecture and art are overtaken by a society living in the age of industrialisation! Modernism privileges functionality and a certain rationality of city life. There's really no aesthetic debate. Attention is drawn to the ethics of architecture and housing.

Modernist architects also consider that repairing and reconstructing is meaningless, that one should be devoted to the study of new towns that are built in the image of a new society. These architects advocate a city with separate and distinct functions.

From 1926, Le Corbusier, at the root of modernism in architecture, defines in «Une Architecture Moderne», five points for a new architecture: stilts, roof-terraces, open plan, strip windows and free façades.

Modernism turns its back on past architectural traditions, rejects all ornamentation and privileges function (form follows function). It features the use of elementary geometric volumes, flat roofs, strip windows and modern materials and techniques like steel or reinforced concrete frames.»



Distribution of residential between-wars buildings

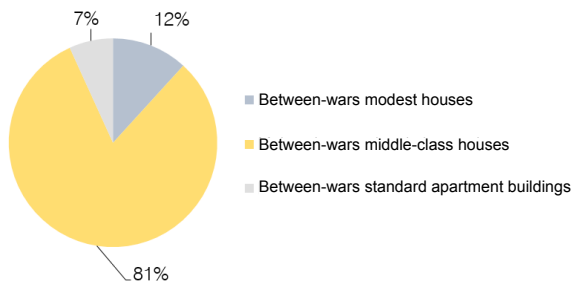


Figure 15: Distribution of residential between-wars buildings, by type.



Figure 16:
Middle-class house, avenue des Azalées 27, built by J. Michiels in 1929
© www.irismonument.be



Figure 17:
Middle-class house, rue Paul Bossu 17 in Woluwe St Pierre, built by Jean De Ligne in 1924
© www.irismonument.be



Figure 18:
Modest house in garden city «Le Logis» in Watermael-Boitsfort.



Figure 19:
Modest house in «Modern» garden city in Berchem St Agathe.

Types of housing studied

Three main types of housing can be identified in the between-wars period:

- **the evolution of the middle-class house**, located in still little urbanised areas located close to Brussels (Uccle, Ixelles, Forest, Boitsfort, Auderghem, Koekelberg, Ganshoren, etc.), thus speeding urbanisation of the second belt of suburbs;
- **the modest house (and the workers house in the garden-city)**, located in the outskirts and close to public transport;
- **the apartment building** mainly located in the quarters of the first expansions of Brussels.

The between-wars middle class house (types 5a, 5b, 5c & 5d)

The middle-class house, single-family and adjoining houses, evolves in the between-wars period, while most of the time conserving a plot similar to that of the end of the 19th century and an organisation in hermetic closed islands, the individual character of the house, an almost identical scale (limited height, façade width, construction among neighbours) and certain major principles of spatial organisation of the house of the end of the 19th century like the succession of living rooms, longitudinal and transversal divisions, etc. However the middle-class house is influenced by the various architectural currents (Art Nouveau, Art Deco, Modernism), by the disappearance of domestic workers, by the appearance of new technologies, new materials (concrete, steel) and construction processes and the appearance of the automobile. Garage construction spreads, either on the ground floor, or in a semi-basement. The kitchen migrates from the cellars (end of the 19th century) to the main or ground floor, adjacent to the dining room.

The between-wars modest house (including workers houses in the garden-city) (type 4b)

Two of the main problems after the war are the reconstruction of the damaged cities and the shortage of housing (assessed at some 200,000 dwellings in Belgium).

Under the influence of the English Garden City Movement, preference for social housing is most often given to the construction of single-family houses located in garden-cities, in the communes surrounding Brussels from 1900 to 1930.

These garden-cities mainly have two types of worker houses: the English cottage style and the modernist, cubist and functional style. These worker houses are mainly small-size neighbouring houses, with two or three façades (sometimes four façades) according to their location. Each house has a small green space in relationship with the public space.

The between-wars apartment building (types 6a & 6b)

After the 1929 financial crisis and the return of the middle classes to the centre of Brussels, certain developers turn to the construction of less luxury apartments intended for the lower middle classes. The accent is placed on the quality of the apartment properly speaking and on the advantages of modern techniques.

The apartments are provided with all the necessary comforts. Certain common equipment appears: system for routing the post, system of waste disposal, etc.

Thanks to their comfortable arrangements – without being exces-



Figure 20:
Apartment building «Etrimo» built in 1937, avenue W.Churchill 120, 1180 Uccle



Figure 21:
Apartment building «Etrimo» built in 1937- Avenue de Broqueville 101 et 103, 1200 Bruxelles



Figure 23:
Social apartment building built by Foyer St Gillois, rue de Bosnie, in St Gilles, drawn by Joseph Diongre in 1926
© www.irisonmonument.be



Figure 24:
Social apartment building, chaussée de Wavre 739 - 771 in Etterbeek, built by A. Puissant in 1931
© www.irisonmonument.be

sive – these apartments attract a wide public of buyers. This clear success is emulated and the 1930s see the realisation of a great many apartment buildings, for all the middle classes. It's the real breakthrough for the apartment building

The standard between-wars building is located in the east and south-east communes of Brussels and mainly in the communes of Ixelles, Uccle and Boitfort, on tree-lined avenues like Avenue Churchill, Avenue Louise, Avenue de Broqueville, Avenue des Nations, Avenue de Tervueren, Boulevard Witlock and the Rond-Point de l'Etoile, near the ULB, the Etangs d'Ixelles, the Jardin du Roi and the Bois de la Cambre.

These buildings generally benefit from a pleasant city situation. They are set out in alignment with the street, either directly fronting the road, or in a recessed area laid out as a small garden. Some buildings are also set out on the corner of housing islands

The construction of social buildings continues after 1920 in order to meet the shortage of affordable houses, offering an alternative to the garden-city house and a solution for the highly urbanised Brussels communes.

From a typological point of view the first buildings constructed relate to the social housing constructed pre-1914: spatial organisation, construction principles and façade materials. Over the years, the façades are developed further and some include an elevator as well as stairs and shops on the ground floor.

This building type is installed in the highly urbanised communes of Brussels, aligned with existing buildings and most of the time, directly fronting the street.

These modest buildings are either constructed as a complex located on a whole housing island, or on one or two plots in an already built island. Some buildings are also located on island corner plots.