The Great Repair II

Everecity Project

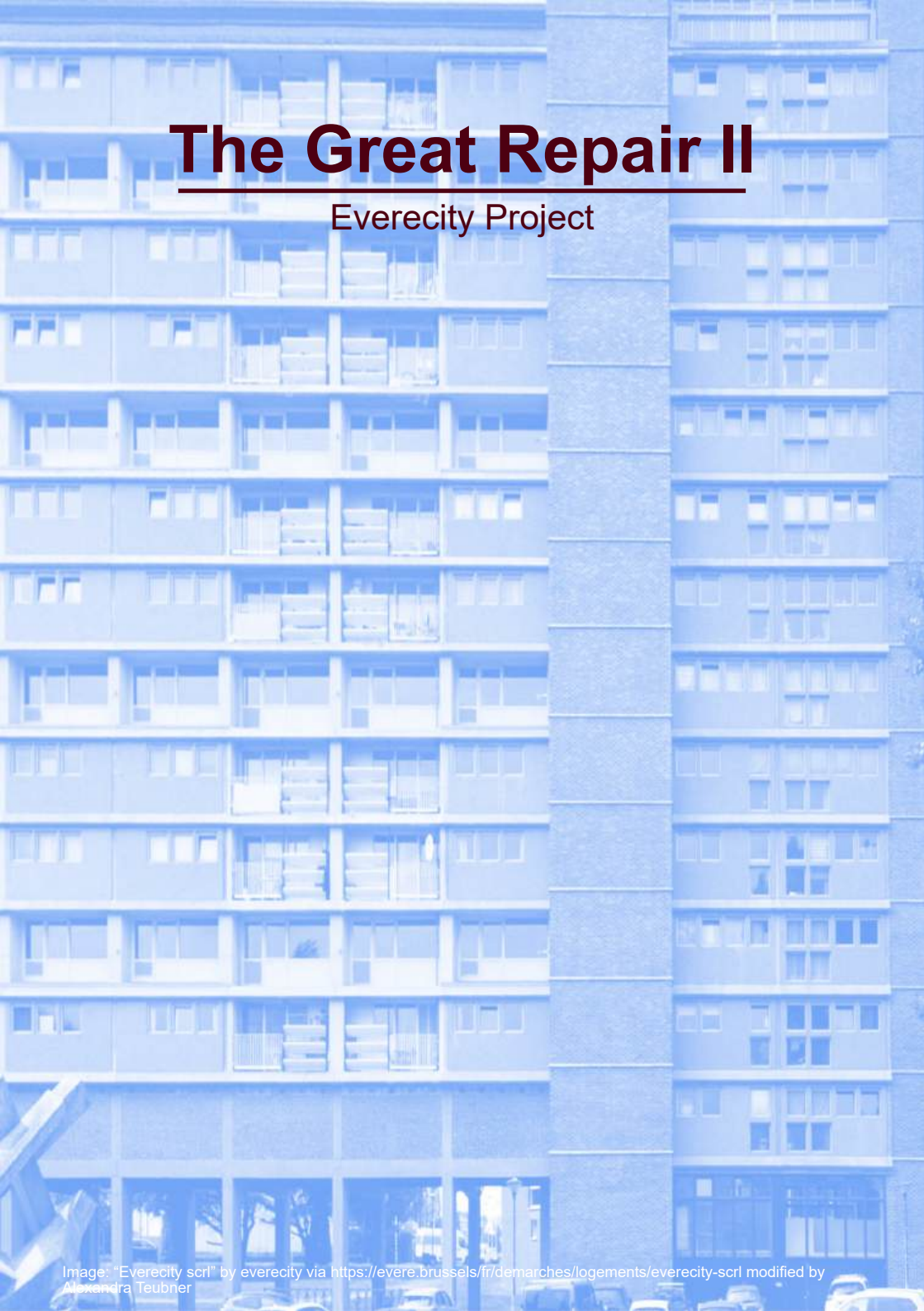


Image: “Everecity scrl” by everecity via https://evere.brussels/fr/demarches/logements/everecity-scrl modified by Alexandra Teubner

We would like to thank the BMA and the SLRB for the opportunity to collaborate on this project. Special thanks go to Tine, Sebastien, Guenaëlle, and Ingrid for their guidance during our monthly meetings and feedback sessions. Furthermore, we are grateful to everyone who met with us and provided the crucial insights that shaped this brochure. Finally, we wish to acknowledge the residents of the social housing complexes in Brussels. This research was conducted for them, to highlight their daily needs and the precarities they navigate every day.

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The Great Repair

The Great Repair is a one-year-long studio as part of a broader approach of repair, one that is both rooted in the everyday realities of social housing and guided by a utopian vision of societal transformation. In their editorial of issue 253 of the German journal *Arch+*, devoted to this theme, the editors emphasize that "*The Great Repair*" is an oxymoron, capturing two seemingly contradictory principles: the revolutionary ambition for systemic change and the evolutionary act of repair. In other words, the aim was to explore the interstices, not only to solve specific problems, but to repair the system as a whole. Architecture can thus act as a reparative force, grounded in a responsible attitude of care toward what already exists. The project is a collaboration between Master Students of Urban Studies (ULB/VUB) and the teams of *Bouwmeester Maître Architecte* (BMA) and the *Société du Logement de la Région Bruxelloise* (SLRB). The latter two have a long-standing collaboration on social housing renovation projects and bring their complementary expertise to this joint effort. Starting from the repair framework, the Urban Studies students brought two Brochures into existence that explored the act of care and repair in the social housing context of Brussels.

Context

The social housing market in Brussels is facing an increase in pressure and an affordable housing crisis. Out of the total housing stock in Brussels, only 7% is social housing, making up for around 41,000 social housing units. This leaves around 56.000 households on the waiting list for social housing, which can take up to ten years. At the same time, the social housing stock built in the post-war period is ageing. This is creating issues of physical obsolescence and outdated infrastructures. Besides this, many housing estates suffer from a lack of social participation and actively used shared ground floors. This results in underused areas, limited social interaction, and a practice of suboptimal maintenance cultures. These ground-floor spaces are crucial zones for the usage of these buildings, as they play a role in everyday life. They are used as entrances, storage rooms, and outdoor areas which can be used to create social bonds with fellow inhabitants. Faced with shrinking budgets and increasing social needs, Brussels must find alternative ways to maintain its heritage. The activation of the ground floors can, in part, create a solution for both the residents of social housing and the social housing companies, which are trying to juggle the continuous limitations of both renovating social housing and keeping residents in place. Activating ground-floor spaces can be targeted as an underexplored factor in trying to improve the liveability, care, and communal life in social housing.

This lack of activation is further exacerbated by a political climate defined by austerity and a steady retreat in government spending. In a context where social housing residents are increasingly stigmatized and marginalized, it becomes essential to bring to light what actually happens in these common areas: Who is already caring for them, and how can we support that care? However, the obstacles are significant. The immense pressure of the housing waiting list, the restricted budgets for deep renovations, and a prolonged period of political instability, following a government formation process that lasted over 600 days, have created a landscape of institutional paralysis. In this fragile context, the activation of the ground floor is more than just a spatial project but a resilient strategy to reclaim dignity and rebuild the community from the ground up.

This brochure understands ground floors as a shared resource that relies on everyday care through time, the involvement of its residents, rather than mere spatial reconfiguration. Through this lens, renovation is seen as an ongoing practice of care and reparation instead of a one-time technical operation. It specifically is about the in-between processes before big renovations start or after they end, as is the case for the Ieder Zijn Huis building. To this backdrop, we started to look at common areas on the ground floors of social housing estates. Guided by the ideas of care and repair, we looked at ground-floor activations centred around residents' participation while considering the limited budget of the current context.

Brochure I and Brochure II

Brochure I focused on how similar challenges in social housing and their renovation are addressed in other cities around the world, and what inspiration we could get from these contexts. This benchmark and literature study provided the context from which we looked at the social housing in Brussels. The analytical part led to three important building blocks that would guide our further research, which will be further discussed in the conclusion (Urban Studies Students ULB/ VUB, 2025).

In this *Brochure II*, we present phase two of The Great Repair. Taking the analysis and the building block of Brochure I into account, we looked at a specific case study in the social housing scene in Brussels. Concretely, the iconic modernist social housing building in Evere was chosen, which is managed by the SISP of Everecity. This building is known by many names, officially called *Ieder Zijn Huis*, recognized as well as the Van Der Meeren building, and nicknamed the “Brown Block” by local residents. Built in 1951 by architect Willy Van Der Meeren, it remains a living heritage that hosts 103 social housing units and was renovated in 2011 and 2014 (Origin Architecture & Engineering, n.d.).

After *Brochure I*, the project’s aim was to find a mixed agency structure that could sustain, maintain, and care for the common areas in the specific case study. Central to this is the involvement of residents in maintaining the areas and regenerating these common spaces. We chose to focus on the ground floors as a starting point for this potential alliance, not to shift the institutional burden of maintenance onto the inhabitants, but to recognize and value the skills, technical talents, and community commitment they already possess. This approach addresses a genuine need for building repairs within tight public budgets, while simultaneously fostering social cohesion and building collective trust. The long-term vision taken from this pilot was to eventually cultivate a model of empowerment, where residents gain the agency, resources, and formal support to participate in the care and repair of their own living spaces. Initially, as students, we arrived with the ambition to “install” a mixed agency structure within the *Ieder Zijn Huis* building.

However, after analyzing the site from both a spatial and social perspective and listening to those on the ground, we quickly came to a realization that an alliance or a mixed agency cannot be simply installed, it must be cultivated from what is already in place. Our approach changed, we realized that we had to move away from being architects of a system to becoming providers of the baselines, identifying the essential conditions that allow any project to exist. We started looking at what was already happening there: the everyday work residents put into caring for their site and the other actors already working to create a just and caring living environment. To broaden this perspective, we also visited other social housing projects in Brussels to understand the conditions they need to build community and maintenance alliances. By doing this, we shifted our focus toward the lessons that need to be drawn to build upon the existing possibilities of a cared-for social housing sector.

In *Brochure II*, we thus present our findings about the *Ieder Zijn Huis* building in Everecity. Firstly, In the *Spatial Analysis*, we look at the site from a spatial perspective by analyzing the existing urban fabric of the area and the *Ieder Zijn Huis* building itself. This way, we provide a grounded understanding of the common areas on the ground floors of the building. Secondly, the brochure provides a *Social Analysis* of the area. This chapter focuses on the institutional structure of Everecity, the social actors and projects on the site, and lastly on the existing foundation informed by the people who work there. The latter resulted in 6 crucial lessons for dealing with community projects in Brussels’ social housing. Based on this groundwork in Haut-Evere, we turn to look at neighbouring community projects in other social housing sites in Brussels. This is outlined in the *Lessons and Conditions* chapter, which is based on interviews with four different projects. The lessons learned from these conversations can inform future projects in the social housing estate of Everecity. Lastly, *Brochure II* provides a conclusion which connects the building blocks from *Brochure I* with the lessons from our site analysis, our social analysis, and our lessons and conditions from Brussels social housing projects. This informs our current understanding of conditions needed to take action in further projects. By outlining these future directions, we explore a second step in The Great Repair, moving closer to a social housing sector that is truly cared for.

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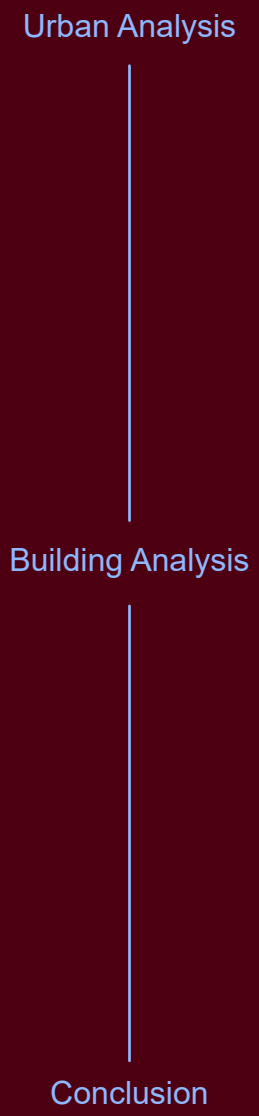
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Spatial Analysis



The chapter on the Spatial Analysis is made up of two sections: the Urban Analysis and the Building Analysis. In this section, the analysis of the site focuses on the elements and structures on the urban and building scale. The focus of this analysis is the social housing development area of Haut-Evere and the *Ieder Zijn Huis* building, specifically, which is situated in this area. This chapter will first introduce the urban elements with building typologies, open spaces, and the general urban morphology in the neighbourhood. Then, the building analysis will introduce the detailed elements of the building, considering the ground floor and the common space elements, with a focus on the building. Brochure I consists of benchmark examples of ground-floor activation and renovation projects of common spaces. With the same goal in mind for this specific site, the aim of the spatial analysis was to create an important base for the spatial conditions in the site, and to understand the living conditions of the residents living in this social housing area. With the same goal in mind for this specific site, aiming at creating an important base for a successful structure in the ground floors or common areas, and creating the groundwork for further studies in resident involvement, taking as a base the *Ieder Zijn Huis* building.

Urban Analysis

Urban Analysis

Building Analysis

Conclusion

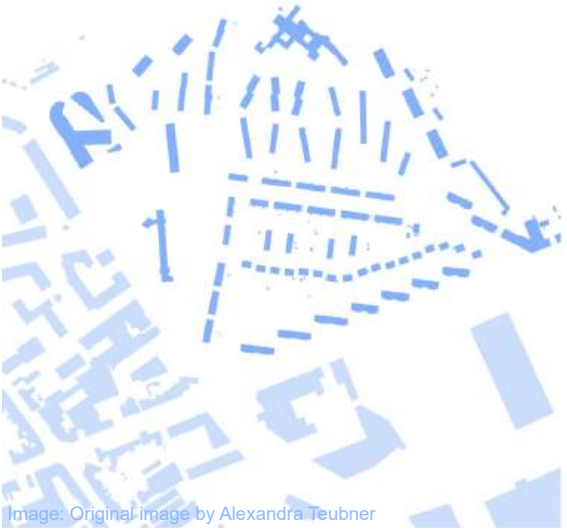


Image: Original image by Alexandra Teubner

The urban analysis is conducted through the visualization of the existing urban fabric, and the maps and analysis areas are chosen with the goal of understanding the common areas and the ground floors of the neighbourhood in focus. The focus area of this analysis is Haut-Evere, which surrounds the *Ieder Zijn Huis* building, which was built in 1951 (ORI001, n.d.). However, the area started to get built after 1945 during different stages (Bruciel, 2026). *Brochure I* consists of good benchmark examples of ground-floor activation and renovation projects of common spaces with successful participative governance models. A few aspects were chosen to analyze: solid-void, density, infrastructure, building typologies, green open spaces, land use, and the ages of the buildings. These will be expressed in detail to understand the area and the residents' living conditions.

History of the Neighborhood

The District of Evere is situated in the north-eastern part of the Brussels-Capital Region. The area was known for its agricultural cultivation for the city until the end of the 19th century. After the First World War, the Haren airfield was established. It caused a rapid urbanization in the district for the plane, aero-production. This chain caused a need for housing in the area as well; therefore, new dense housing projects were announced. After the 1960s, NATO established itself in the neighbourhood, which accelerated urbanization (Evere, n.d.).

This neighborhood was built during a period of urban expansion. It was the era of the "car-centric" lifestyle, when large districts were built on the outskirts of city centers, connected to the work and living spaces of major roads, highways, and the Brussels ring road. Construction began to rise vertically in order to increase housing density while preserving green spaces and room for roads and parking (Richon, 2019).



Image: "Overzichtsplan sociale woonwijk Ieder Zijn Huis" by Willy Van Der Meeren Archives via De Kooning et al., 2012 modified by Alexandra Teubner

This neighbourhood started to be developed from the agricultural land after the Second World War, where the first social housing units were established between the years 1944 and 1953. Two of the first three types introduced to this area were offering private attached single-family homes, where the garden city logic was more common before World War II. The third type was offering more dense mid-rise apartment buildings (Bruciel, 2026).



Image: “Overzichtstekening Hoog-Evere, circa 1954” by Willy Van Der Meeren Archives via De Kooning et al., 2012 modified by Alexandra Teubner

In the period of 1953-1961, the area’s largest and densest two housing blocks were constructed, making the area more visible on the map for the stakeholders for the future years. Starting from this period, the area represents a denser population in the Capital Region. By the year of 1987, all the areas’ housing and almost all of the building stock had been constructed. This makes this social housing area considerably old and creates a base for future renovations. And the final edition of this island was the Mary Popelin Primary school, built in 2019 (Bruciel, 2026).

The map shows the construction date of each building. Because there is no exact date for each building’s construction, the period of time for each building’s construction has been illustrated.

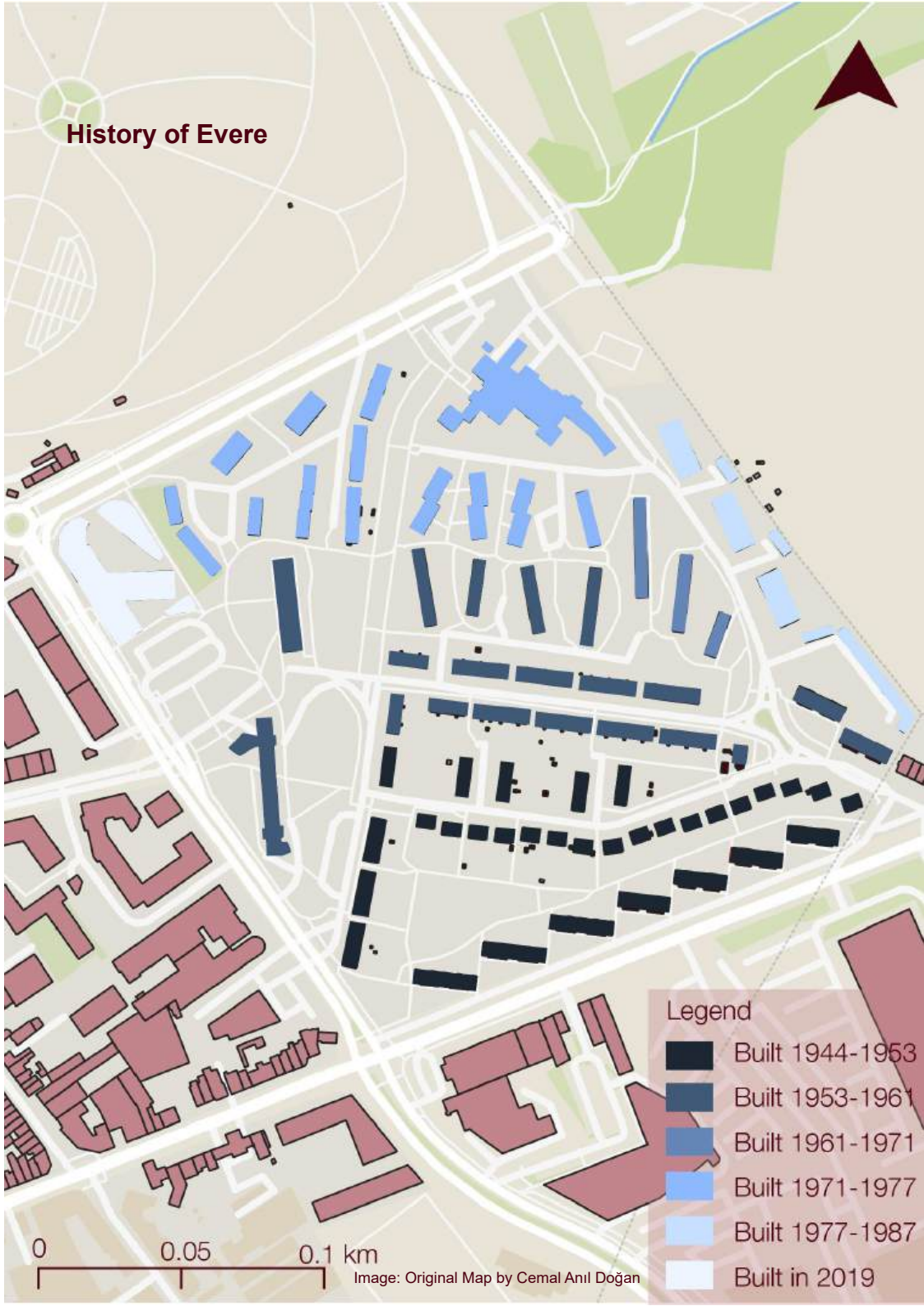


Image: Original Map by Cemal Anıl Doğan

Analysis of Urban Structure and Building Heights

This figure-ground map shows the drastic difference between the existing urban fabric around the area (light red) and the social housing blocks inside the island (dark red). This solid and void map shows how high the porosity inside the island is compared to the surrounding urban fabric. Modernist social housing blocks offer large in-between spaces with no building masses. This map alone expresses the repeating typologies in the neighbourhood.



Image: Original Map by Alexandra Teubner



Image: Original Map by Cemal Anıl Doğan

The height of the buildings in the area is mostly made up of low-rise building blocks. However, there are two buildings that dominate the skyline with over 10 storeys. They represent an important part of the population in the area with a higher density compared to the single-family houses on the east side of the area. Distances between blocks offer private gardens/ green areas for each house. While the edges of the neighborhood offer mid-rise building blocks, which is a more consistent housing typology in terms of their coherence with the surrounding urban fabric of the area.

Analysis of Building Typologies



Image: Original Map by Cemal Anıl Doğan

Building Plan



View

Floor Number

14 floors

Inhabitants

Mix of families with household size of 3-4 people.

Photo



Image: Original Image by Alexandra Teubner

Character Description

The most dense housing type in the area. Large slab of a housing block made of multiple houses for every storey. Dense housing unit has an permeable ground floor, and houses are made of multiple storeys.

Building Plan



View

Floor Number

10 floors

Inhabitants

Mix of families with household size of 3-4 people.

Photo

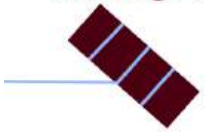


Image: Original Image by Alexandra Teubner

Character Description

Large slab of housing block with permeable groundfloor. Different then the other building, it is less dense and has less windows and balconies making it architecturally more closed.

Building Plan



View

Floor Number

2 floors

Inhabitants

Families with average size of 3-4 people.

Photo



Image: Original Image by Alexandra Teubner

Character Description

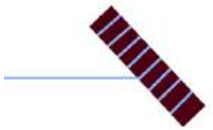
Attached single-family houses. This typology expresses 4 houses attached to each other with 2 floors and a roof floor on top. It doesn't have a private garden being the first step in private houses in the area.

Building Typologies



Image: Original Map by Cemal Anıl Doğan

Building Plan



View

Floor Number

2 floors

Inhabitants

Small household size and small families; 1-2 people.

Photo

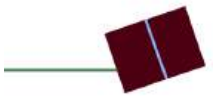


Image: Original Image by Alexandra Teubner

Character Description

This housing type is considerably small in terms of unit coverage, housing typology provides private houses in two floor slabs. Private houses on the second floor can be reached through uni-terace in front. No private gardens.

Building Plan



View

Floor Number

2 floors

Inhabitants

Family houses and possibly big families with kids; household size 4-5.

Photo



Image: Original Image by Alexandra Teubner

Character Description

Attached private houses made of two units with private gardens. Compared to the other typologies in the area these housing units provides the best and largest space indoors and outdoors.

Building Plan



View

Floor Number

4 floors

Inhabitants

Average household size with families of 3-4 people.

Photo



Image: Original Image by Alexandra Teubner

Character Description

Attached appartments made of 4 storeys with 2 units every floor, making it the main medium density typology in the neighbourhood. Each apartment has their own enterance and staircase where there is no inner connection between buildings.

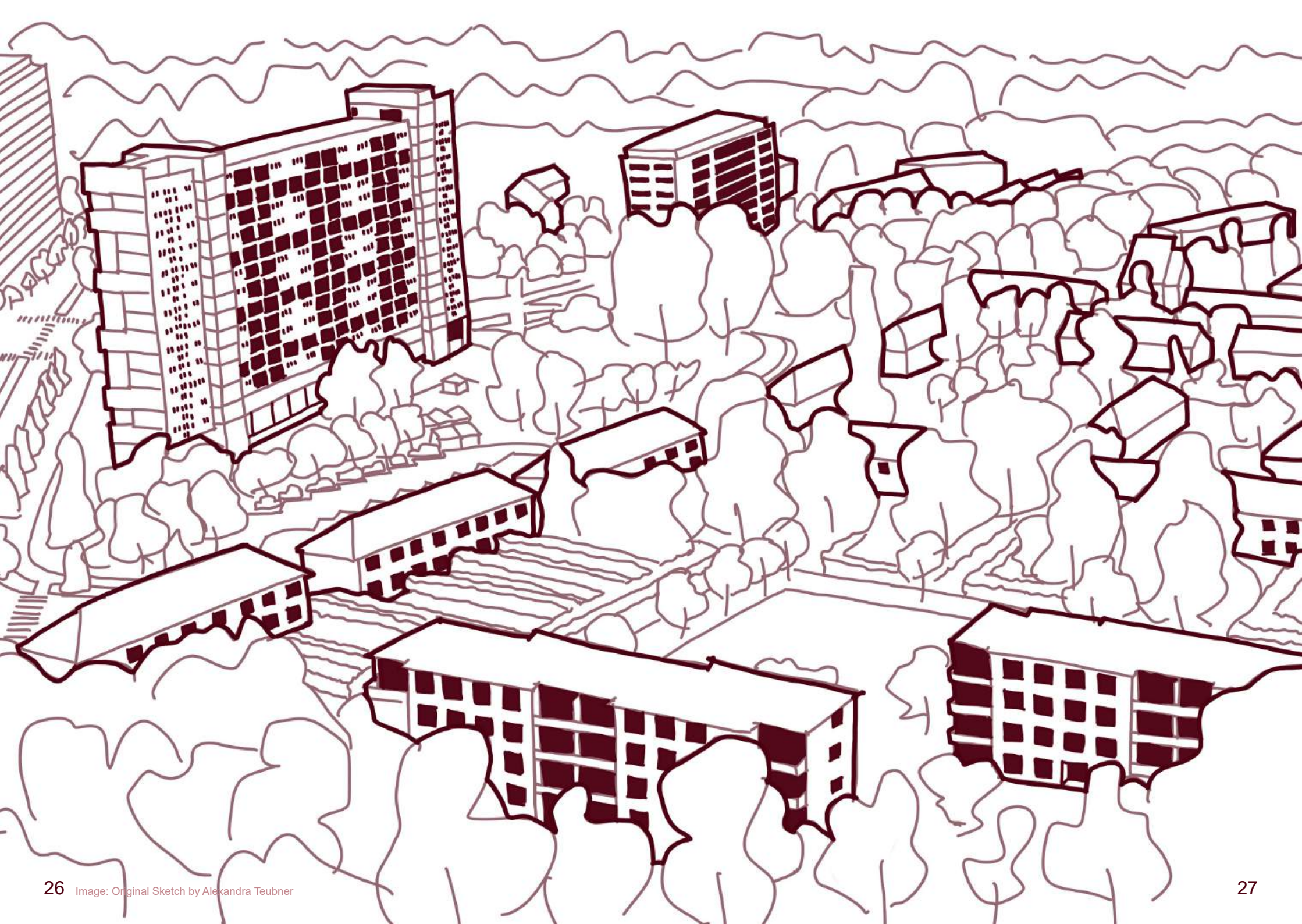


Image: Original Sketch by Alexandra Teubner



Image: Original Map by Cemal Anıl Doğan

Entrance and Permeability

The area has multiple access points with pedestrian and car entrance paths; it is well distributed around the block, increasing the overall connection with the outside urban fabric. Pedestrian entrances are placed with bus stops to encourage walking and reduce dependency on cars.

Public Transport

The area is surrounded by bus lines in the perimeter, and there are several bus stops that align with pedestrian entrances. In the southern part, no bus stop is located, while there's an important pedestrian axis.

Pedestrian Flow

Pedestrian routes connect outside the urban fabric to the separate urban fabric of Everecity. Internal routes feed every house with pedestrian access while connecting public green shared spaces. It provides car-free zones and a pedestrian-focused internal structure to the area.

Public Uses

The area, internally monofunctional as residential, stands out; however, within this island, there's a school building that is also used for the kids' clubs. Surrounding urban fabric with its commercial and urban services provides the area with the urban infrastructure it needs in general.



1. Mary Popelin Primary School

This building is a large and important land use in the mono-functional residential island of Everecity. It works as a primary school and children's cultural clubs to provide a public space for a younger age.

2. Church

Old townhouse-type church in the area, representing the only religious unit in the neighbourhood. It represents an important public space node.

3. Commercial (Department Store and Pharmacy)

Large commercial department and grocery stores under a high-rise residential block. Along with a parking lot and a large-sized pharmacy.

4. Commercial Mix

Different kinds of commercial units and small-scale shops serve the local population with diverse commercial needs.

5. Urban Storage

Large urban storage building block with individual private storage units.

6. Automotive Gallery

A large building block with vast parking lots and cars. It creates an automobile showroom at the entrance to the Brussels Capital Region.

7. Small-scale Commercial Mix

Small-scale shops, a doctor’s office, pet grooming, etc., help to create a diverse commercial area inside the monofunctional island.

8. Retirement Home

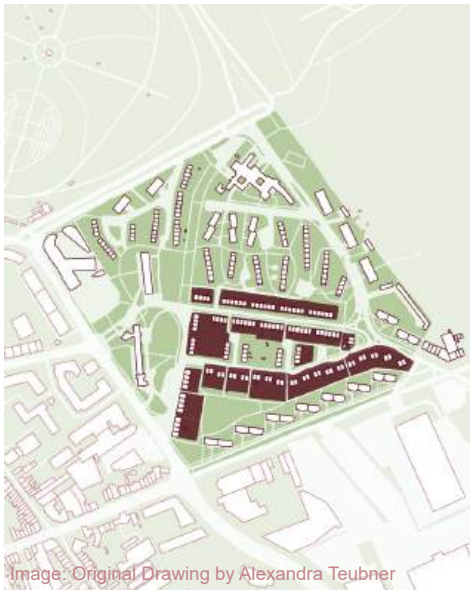
A large building block accommodating senior/ older adults, designed to be more accessible, but also more independent compared to a nursing home.

Greenery



This neighbourhood in Evere, like most of the post-war social housing areas around the world, has a lot of green spaces in terms of area. The area's urban fabric is different from the compact urban fabric of Brussels, thus providing plenty of space for green spaces. In addition to the urban texture, the area is surrounded by big green areas like the cemetery to the north, and the large grassland right outside the border of the Brussels Capital Region to the north-east. Inside the area, there are a good number of public open green spaces, as well as private green spaces.

Image: Original Drawing by Alexandra Teubner



Private Green Spaces

This map shows the private green spaces in the neighbourhood. All of them are part of the attached single-family house typology. These backyards are separated by large artificial bushes to create a private enclosure for each unit. Attached housing units with their backyards block the pedestrian flow and general permeability. Therefore, this side of the area feels more closed and impenetrable. Compared to the public green spaces, designated private green domains dominate the area in terms of number and size.



Public Green Leisure Spaces

This map indicates the functioning public uses in the public green spaces. There are not many interventions to the public spaces, since the last renovation as well. There are only these three points that offer green space leisure for residents. The area in the north provides public parkour/ sports facilities with a sports field (soccer and basketball) as well. The southern one provides a public children's park with its own designated area with fences just right inside the private green spaces. It provides the right amount of privacy for children's leisure inside the residential area.



Parking Lots

This map represents all of the parking lots in the area. As it is shown, all of the residential parking in the area is made through street parking, which blocks the large accumulation of cars in one large spot. There is a big parking lot on the west side of the area; however, it is reserved for the use of the primary school. The parking lot on the north is also used for the retirement home. It also shows that the functions of the parking lots are visible in the spatial alignment.

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Building Analysis

Urban Analysis

Building Analysis

Conclusion



Image: “Everecity scrl” by everecity via https://evere.brussels/fr/demarches/logements/everecity-scrl modified by Alexandra Teubner



Image: “Ieder Zijn Huis” by Georges De Kinder via De Kooning et al., 2012 modified by Alexandra Teubner

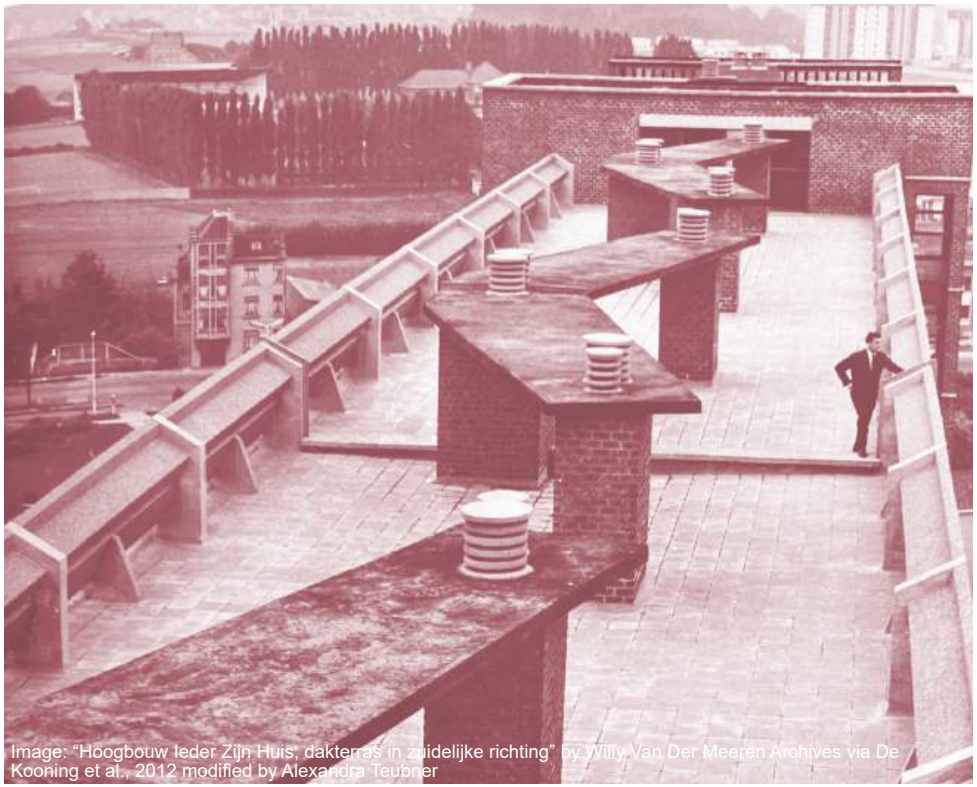


Image: “Hoogbouw Ieder Zijn Huis, dakterras in zuidelijke richting” by Willy Van Der Meeren Archives via De Kooning et al., 2012 modified by Alexandra Teubner



Image: “Hoogbouw Ieder Zijn Huis, betonnen luifel boven entree zuidkant” by Willy Van Der Meeren Archives via De Kooning et al., 2012 modified by Alexandra Teubner

This part of the brochure will explain how the building is generally structured and how the spaces are being used. This informs what needs the inhabitants have and what type of common spaces are preexisting to understand what can be built on in terms of creating a community and involving inhabitants in the creation of their surroundings.



Image: “Implanting hoogbouw Ieder Zijn Huis (fragment)” by Archieven Ieder Zijn Huis, Evere via De Kooning et al., 2012 modified by Alexandra Teubner

The *Ieder Zijn Huis* building itself, sometimes referred to as the ‘Brown Block’ was designed by Willy Van Der Meeren. The construction finished in 1961 and from then on housed 105 social housing apartments. It is situated in an open area of the site with the foodwalk continuing into the building (De Kooning et al., 2012).

Van Der Meerens Vision

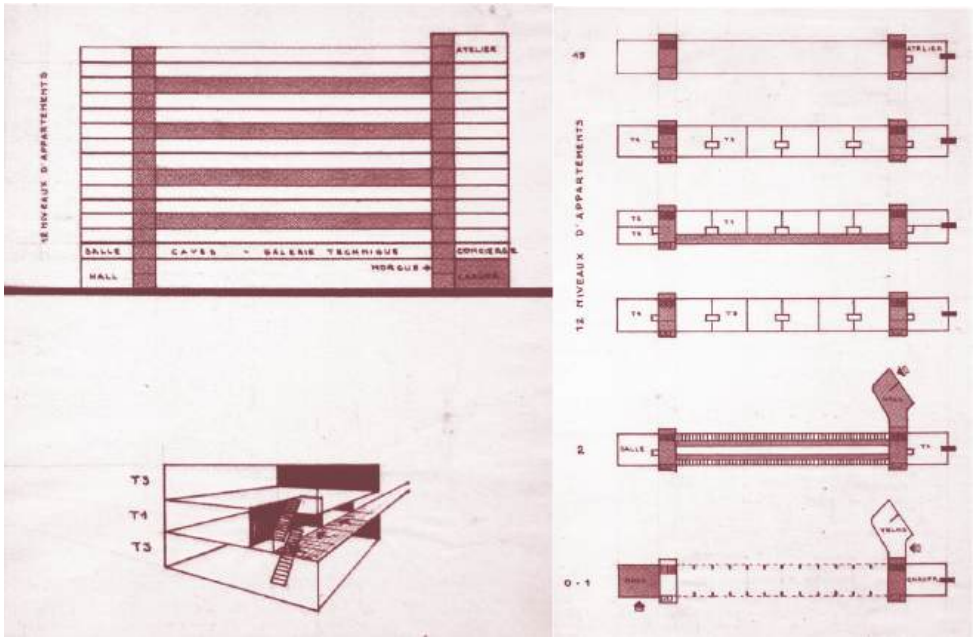


Image left: “Hoogbouw Ieder Zijn Huis, schematische opbouw en ‘triplex-principle’” by Willy Van Der Meeren Archives via De Kooning et al., 2012 modified by Alexandra Teubner
Image right: “Hoogbouw Ieder Zijn Huis, schematische plattegronden” by Willy Van Der Meeren Archives via De Kooning et al., 2012 modified by Alexandra Teubner

Van der Meeren had a few main elements in mind when designing this building. His priority was creating spaces where residents could meet in a relaxed manner. Therefore, the galleries function as streets within this building to create more opportunities to see and meet each other. The building was never closed off allowing walking around freely. Additionally, the doorbells were located at the apartments’ door to highlight the effect of a street. The way the streets are distributed in the building is shown in the image “schematische opbouw en ‘triplex-principle” (De Kooning et al., 2012).

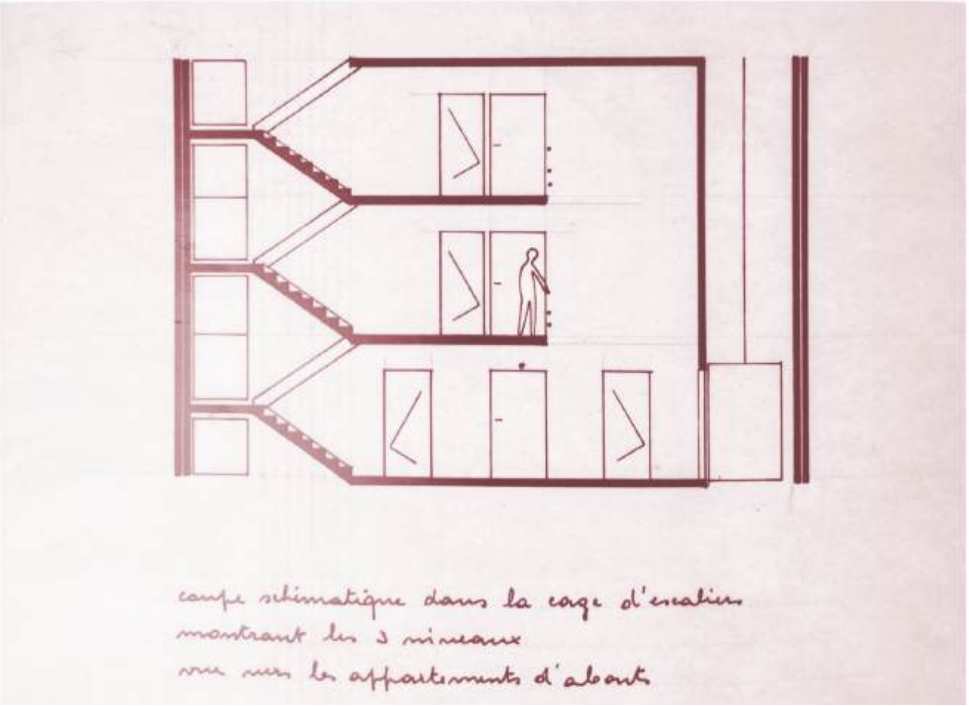


Image: “Hoogbouw Ieder Zijn Huis, schematische doorsnede van één ‘triplex’ in de trappentoren” by Willy Van Der Meeren Archives via De Kooning et al., 2012 modified by Alexandra Teubner

Other spaces Van Der Meeren imagined as meeting spaces are the rooms in front of the elevator. He thought of them as public squares and wanted to install vending machines and other items. The programming of these spaces was never realised (De Kooning et al., 2012).

Another leading principle was the idea of creating a social mix. The building consists largely of apartments, but he mixed in common areas such as a mourning room, a bicycle storage, a laundry room, offices and a meeting room for the housing associations. He also imagined residents installing shops in the apartments to further deepen the mix (De Kooning et al., 2012). Within the residents' structure, it was important to accommodate all stages of life, which is why the apartments have different sizes and there is a mourning room added (Richon, 2019).



Image: “Traphal, bestaande tiestand” by Georges de Kinder via De Kooning et al., 2012 modified by Alexandra Teubner

The Building Nowadays

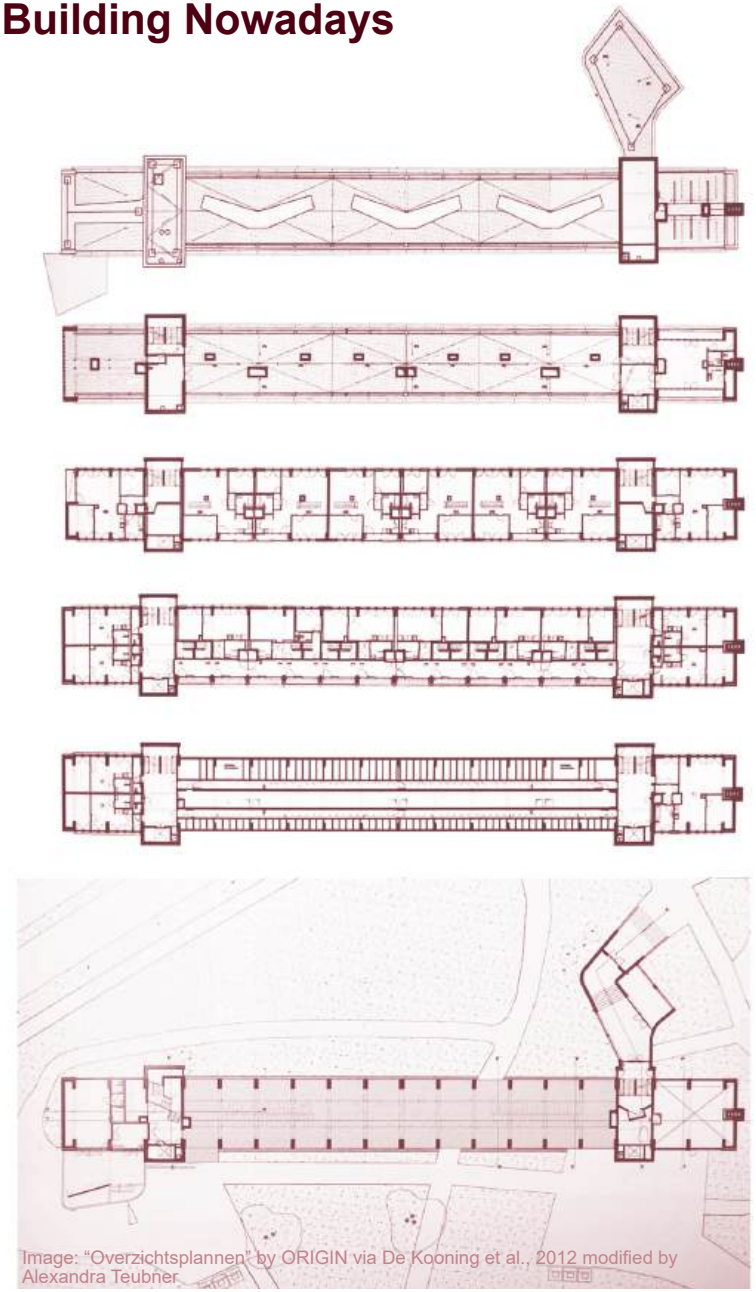


Image: “Overzichtsplannen” by ORIGIN via De Kooning et al., 2012 modified by Alexandra Teubner

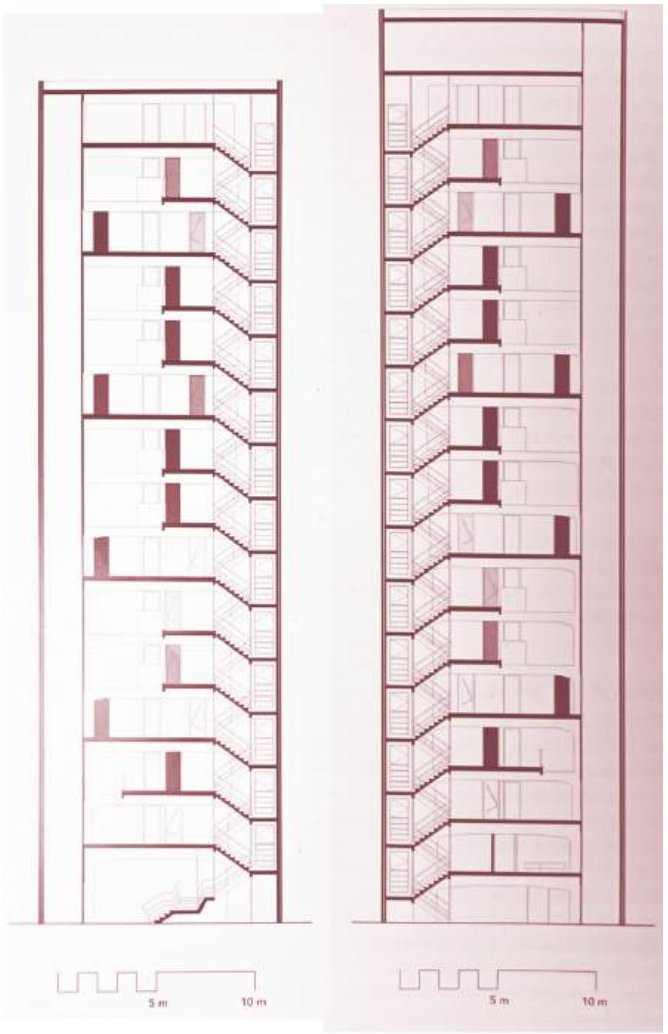
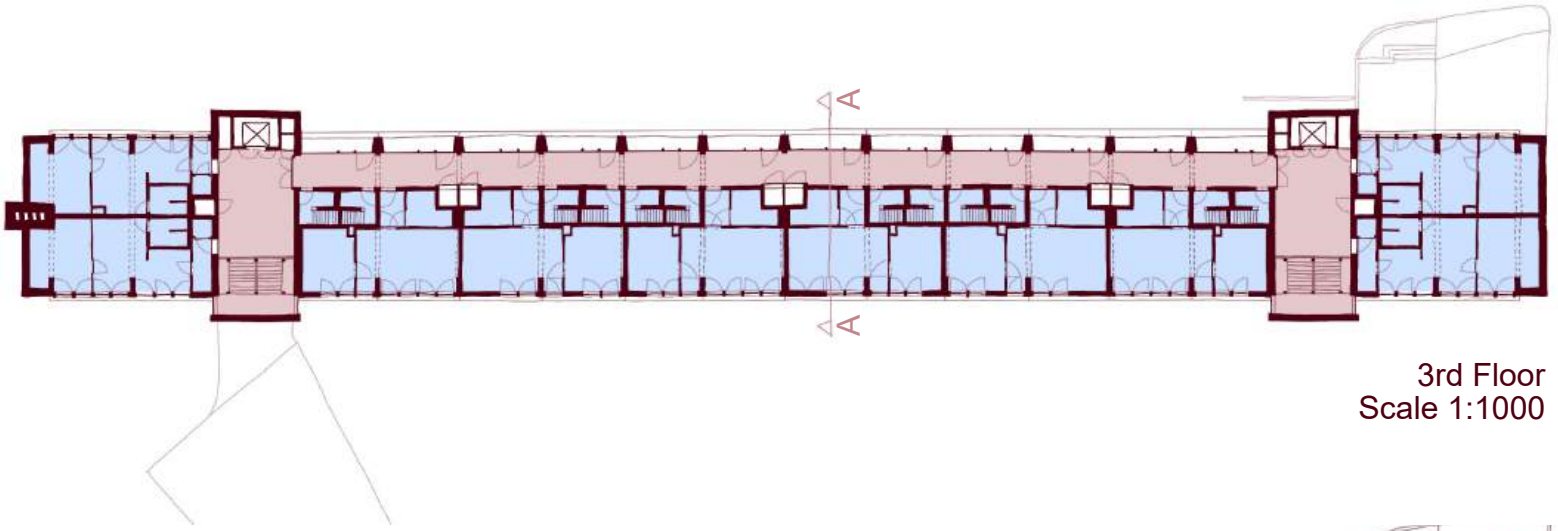


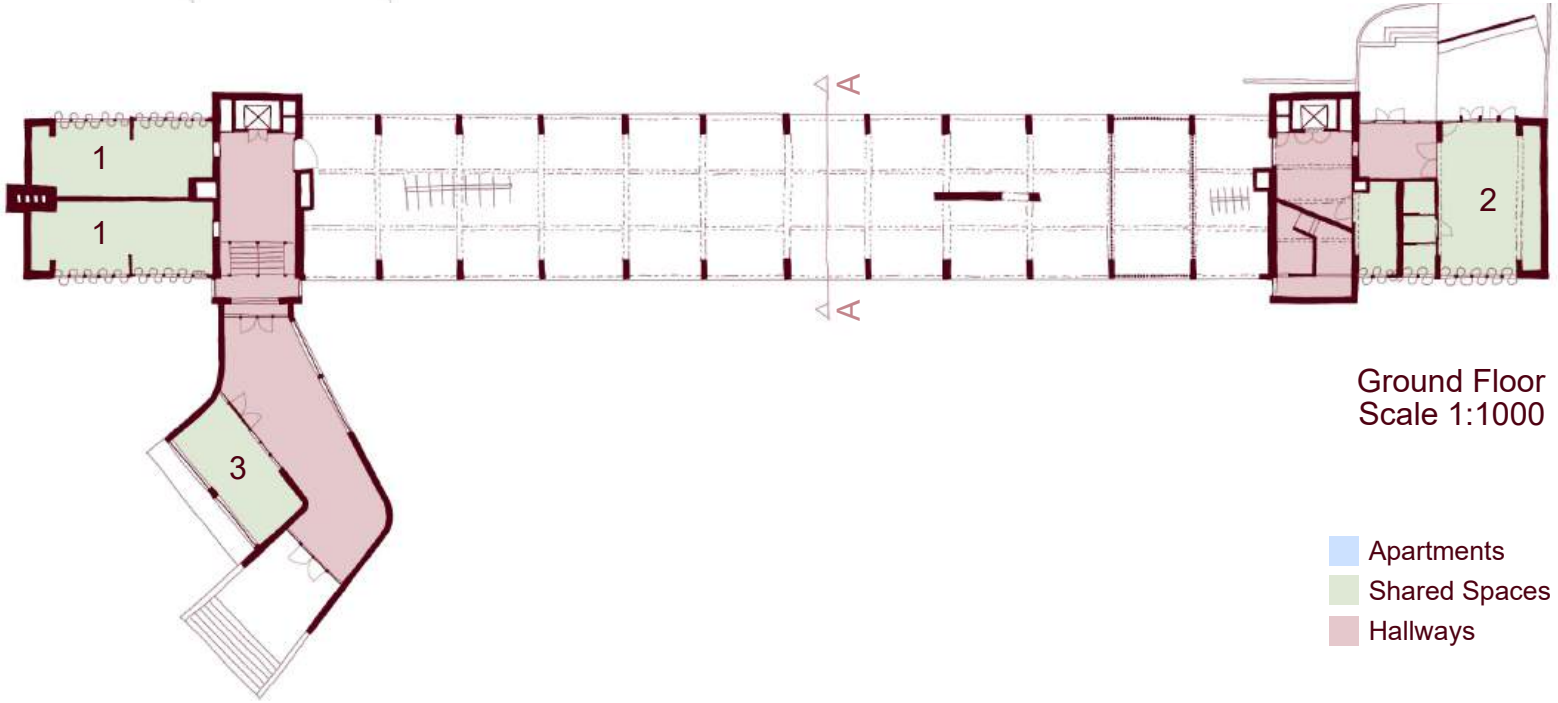
Image: “Toepassing van kleur” by Koen Verswijver via De Kooning et al., 2012 modified by Alexandra Teubner

These plans show the original design for the building. What remained is the large and open ground floor. The building stands on pillars which keep the ground floor open for public functions and enables people to walk around freely (De Kooning et al., 2012).

Floor Plans



3rd Floor
Scale 1:1000



Ground Floor
Scale 1:1000

Apartments
Shared Spaces
Hallways

 Image: Original Drawing by Alexandra Teubner

Section



Section A-A
Scale 1:1000

The *Ieder Zijn Huis* building generally consists of the described hallway system that runs through the building like streets (red), differently sized private apartments (blue) with balconies (dark green) and shared spaces (light green). The building has been renovated and the specific uses of mainly the shared spaces have been changed but the distribution of different uses is still in its original condition. The spaces are preserved except the entrance hall. But Van Der Meeren admits that there is little reason to meet for extended purposes as many of his desired shared spaces have not been realised (De Kooning et al., 2012).

It is visible today that some residents use the doors or space in front of their entrance to appropriate the space with plants or decorations, but the lack of social interactions and a real square character is not visible. From looking at the distribution of different uses, it can be concluded that the residents have a very limited access to private outdoor space and shared spaces.

Image: Original Drawing by Alexandra Teubner

Shared Spaces

The shared spaces have undergone the most transformation throughout the years. De Kooning et al. (2012) state that due to the modifications to the collective spaces, the spatial quality and shared potential were lost. The hall at the south got transformed into a temporary exhibition, the boiler room into a carpentry workshop, the laundry room into a community room, the mourning room into a building archive and the rooftop into a green roof (De Kooning et al., 2012).

Currently, the boiler room (number one on the image) is used as storage before the parent-child reading workshops can be restarted in September of 2026. The hall in the south (number two on the image) hosts the PCS De Lá Haut, which organises different community events and activities (which will be described in more detail in the *Social Analysis*). The space can be entered without going through the building, which makes it especially convenient.The roof is not open to the public anymore.

These shared spaces are organised by the PCS De Là Haut and used by residents as well. But looking at how they transformed over time, it can be concluded that there lies great potential in reactivating these spaces, programming the ground floor open space and making the access easier for residents in the building.



Image left: “Dernier cours de gym douce jusqu'à la rentrée” by Pcs De Là Haut via https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1485498494889739&set=pb.100069121016253.-2207520000&type=3 modified by Alexandra Teubner
Image right: Original Image by Alexandra Teubner



Image: “22. January 2022” by Pcs De Là Haut via https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=2377846505654929&set=pb.100069121016253.-2207520000&type=3 modified by Alexandra Teubner

Apartments

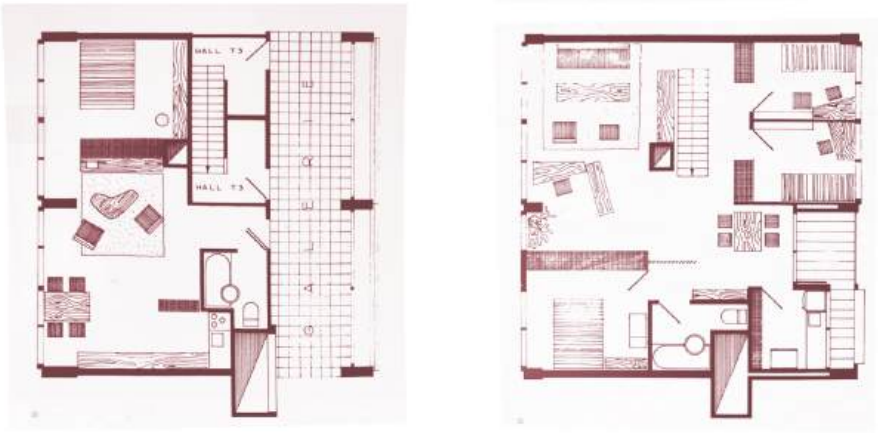


Image left: “Hoogbouw Ieder Zijn Huis, plattegrond studio op galerijniveau” by Willy Van Der Meeren Archive via De Kooning et al., 2012 modified by Alexandra Teubner
Image right: “Hoogbouw Ieder Zijn Huis, plattegrond appartement boven en onder galerij” by Willy Van Der Meeren Archive via De Kooning et al., 2012 modified by Alexandra Teubner

Van Der Meeren designed the apartments as an open space that is open and airy, which leaves the division of the apartments up to the residents. Each apartment includes a living room, kitchen and bathroom. He generally designed four different types of apartments depending on the location in the building and size (De Kooning et al., 2012).

Conclusion

The building analysis shows that the common rooms have experienced a lot of change throughout the years and currently hold a potential for more programming and even reactivation in some cases. Additionally, the building is mainly used for private apartments. Inhabitants have limited access to outdoor spaces or shared facilities. This need further reaffirms the importance of improving the quality of already existing spaces. It can be highlighted that this vision resembles Van Der Meeren’s original proposal for *Ieder Zijn Huis* as well. The original vision was there and the building already has everything that is spatially required for an active community. What is lacking between vision and reality to make the common rooms fulfill their potential will be further explored in the *Social Analysis*.

Sources

De Kooning, M., De Moffarts, J., & Ledent, G. (2012). Ieder zijn huis: Willy Van der Meeren: Verleden en toekomst van een unité d’habitation in Evere.

Richon, P. (2019, September). Ce qui se trame ici: Une expérience de l'architecture. Studio Platon; Centre culturel d’Evere L’Entrela’.

Conclusion

Urban Analysis

Building Analysis

Conclusion



Image: “Conclusions” by Nick Youngson via https://www.thebluediamondgallery.com/handwriting/c/conclusions.html modified by Alexandra Teubner

The spatial analysis has shown the important urban features of the neighbourhood and the elements that make up the *Ieder Zijn Huis* building. In the analysis, it is seen that historical plans and intentions differ from the existing situation today. The neighbourhood and the *Ieder Zijn Huis* building plans were made with the modernist approach that was predominant at the time. Their goal was to create a lot of housing and big open spaces with community spaces. It is seen that these spaces still exist; however, they are not as dominantly used by the community. There are existing children's parks, but also big non-utilised grassland in between the buildings. For the building, there were a few attempts to revitalize the shared spaces; the boiler room turned into a carpentry workshop at the time, but is now used as a storage room. Ground floors are not exactly utilised or connected with the urban fabric around; the community room still is active, but the common spaces in the building, including the rooftop and the hallways, hold a big potential to increase social cohesion. This lack of activity in the common spaces in the area is related to the historical patterns of the neighbourhood, where these spaces didn't evolve through time, and they didn't undergo any long-term change. It is similar to the initial plan of the area; however, it is realized that to meet the needs of residents for the future years, it requires some attention.

The neighbourhood is mostly pedestrian-friendly and weaved with walk paths that connect different housing typologies and green spaces. However, there is no diverse or additional function to connect in this monofunctional neighbourhood, with the exception of a retirement home and a few small-scale commercial units. The area works as an island in the urban fabric because it doesn't connect with surrounding buildings or the street network; however, it can't sustain itself without the urban fabric surrounding the area.

In conclusion, this neighbourhood still provides a good number of housing units with different typologies, and big green spaces to this day. The *Ieder Zijn Huis* building stands as a modernist icon of the 1950s social housing building, but is not used to its full potential. The original vision is still there, but it is not realized in full. Ground floors, common spaces, and the green areas in between the buildings need more care to create social cohesion and community participation.

Social Analysis



This chapter gives a Social Analysis by looking at the structure of Everecity and its surrounding context with a focus on the *Ieder Zijn Huis* building. The social analysis is held in order to understand the interaction of the different actors, projects, and inhabitants. It starts with an overview of the organisation of Everecity looking into its governance, structure and different departments shaping its functioning. Following this, the focus shifts towards the inhabitants to see how participation is organised and how residents are involved in the shaping of their own living environment. The stakeholders present on site, such as PCS De Là Haut, L'Entrela', social workers, and other local initiatives are then mapped. To conclude, this chapter reflects on lessons learned from the actors already working in Everecity. Through this, a series of underlying principles or "building blocks" are identified, which form the basis for thinking about future interventions.

Going through this chapter, social workers active in Everecity guided us through the foundation of this chapter. This means that even though more research on Everecity has been done, a part of the information does focus on the perspective of the social workers who aided us through this project. Please note that this information is guided through our own observations, opinions and that of those who helped us during this project.

Structure Everecity

Structure Everecity

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Image: “Logo Everecity” by Everecity via https://www.everecity.brussels/fr/ modified by Alexandra Teubner

Structure Everecity

The SISP (Sociétés Immobilières de Service Public) Everecity is created in 2015 after the merger of the two social housing companies Germinal and Ieder Zijn Huis and currently responsible for about 2000 social housing units. Everecity is a cooperative of tenants which means that at each level of management, there is a balance between official representatives in combination with tenants (Everecity, n.d.).

Everecity is one of the SISP organizations responsible for managing social housing in Evere, providing affordable rental homes and maintaining the social housing stock in that area. Everecity operates over three different bases, divided in Bas Evere, Centre-Evere and Haut-Evere. Our case study lies in Haut-Evere.

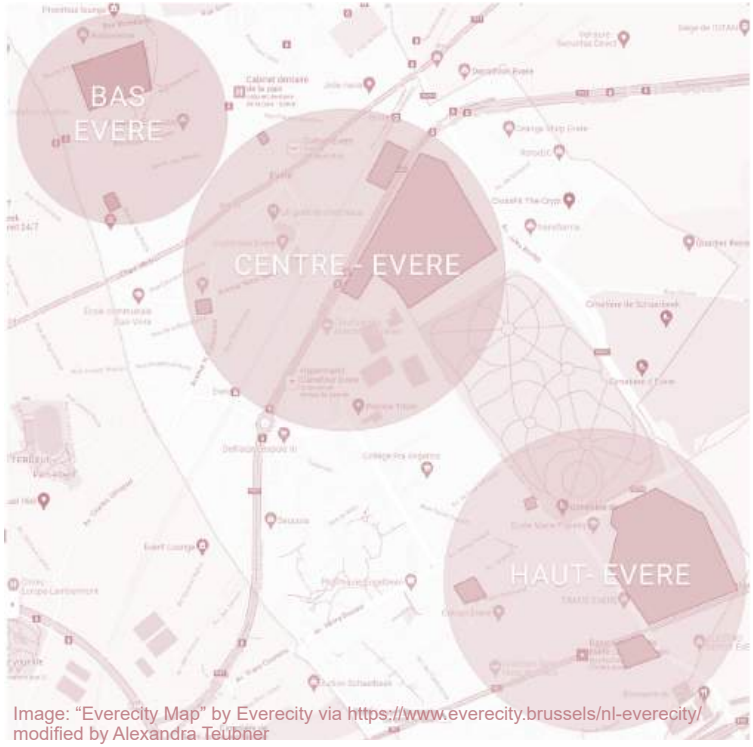


Image: “Everecity Map” by Everecity via https://www.everecity.brussels/nl-everecity/ modified by Alexandra Teubner

Mathieu Vervoort is the chair of the company. The day-to-day management and overall coordination of Everecity is delegated to the managing directors Pascale Roelants. Combined, they are the members of the Management Committee and attend the Board of Directors meetings (Everecity, n.d.).

The board of directors is composed of 15 members. One member, Mathieu Vervoort, is elected upon nomination by the Brussels-Capital Region. Seven members get elected through nomination by the municipality of Evere. Furthermore, seven members get elected among tenant-cooperative members. Lastly, two observers are elected upon nomination by the municipality of Evere. The board meets around ten times a year with the goal of two meetings per month, excluding the summer (Everecity, n.d.).

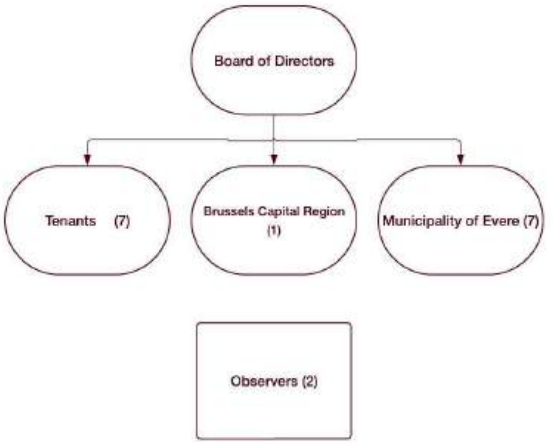


Image: Original diagram by Amber Luypaert

Everecity currently employs more than ninety people, including office staff, maintenance workers and caretakers. Through this, the company is structured within six departments: leasing and social services, communication, maintenance, HR and support, finance and strategy. This structure allows Everecity to approach the company’s management from five different perspectives (Everecity, n.d.).

The leasing and social services department is focused on customers. This means that all the activities are directly related to the tenants and their experiences through their tenancy. The communications department acts between the company and clients' requests. It is also responsible for external communication with the partners. The maintenance department focuses mainly on the tenants, intervening and generally ensuring the upkeep of the property portfolio. The finance department is focused on balancing the accounts and is directly related to all the expenses and income. The HR and support department is focused on the internal organisation, directly related to administrative and human resources management activities of all departments. Lastly, the strategy department is focused on the property portfolio directly related to construction and investments, such as new buildings (Everecity, n.d.).

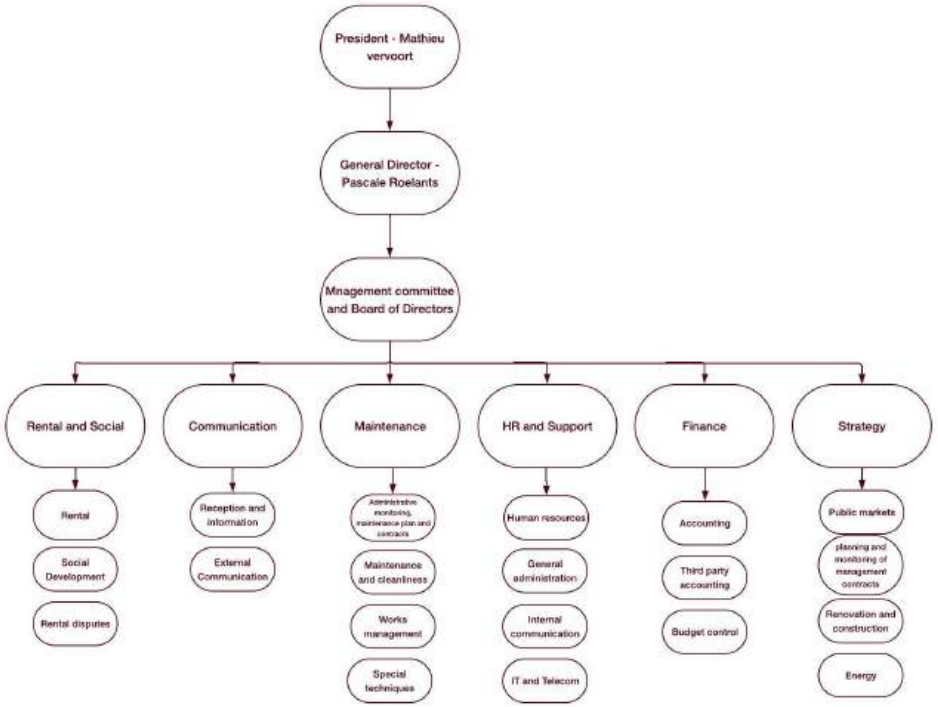


Image: Original diagram by Amber Luypaert

Active Inhabitants

Everecity actively strives for a collective community organised around the needs of the residents. These needs are then developed by the community in collaboration with Everecity. In order to actively organise this, Everecity hosts a social worker who acts as the direct link between the residents and Everecity. This is overseen by the *Rental and Social* department, specifically the *Social Development* unit. Residents are put in the centre of the spotlight to see what they need and how they can work together for their needs to be met. This way, the residents actively work together with Everecity in order to care for and maintain their properties (Everecity, n.d.).

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“Dernier cours de gym douce jusqu'à la rentrée” by Pcs De Là Haut via https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1485498494889739&set=pb.100069121016253.-2207520000&type=3 modified by Alexandra Teubner

PCS De Là Haut

Projet cohesion social (PCS) de la Haut is a publicly funded social cohesion programme in Brussels working on Everecity in Evere-Haut specifically. The office is located in the *Ieder Zijn Huis* building, acting as a meeting spot for residents to discuss, destress and organise action together. Its objective is to improve life within the social housing complexes in Everecity, to create connections with residents and to enable residents to develop civic projects *L'Entrela'*. (n.d.). Recent calculations show that more or less 750-800 inhabitants of Everecity participate in the projects in the neighbourhood managed by PC .

The project supports various citizen initiatives in the neighbourhood with the main goal of empowering everyone to take action on their environment and living space. The PCS acts as a mediator and provides residents with tools to make their neighbourhood a place for exchange where people reflect together on the world and develop the capacity to act for the common good. It helps realize the residents' desires for change and needs such as the need for security, the need to meet their neighbours, the need to learn and share, to repair their bicycles, or to have more welcoming green spaces (L'Entrela', n.d.).

The PCS is run by two full-time workers who are community workers focused on the process with the inhabitants instead of a result-based strategy.

The funding of the PCS comes from the NGO l'Entrela, which is the cultural center of Evere that presents itself as being at the crossroads between various community organisations and citizens. Within their bigger social projects in Evere, they fund the two community workers within the project for social cohesion in Everecity *L'Entrela'*. (n.d.). Inside L'Entrela, 17 people are employed working in different fields such as graphic designers and IT specialists. As L'Entrela is an NGO it is publicly funded for the most part with some extra income from tickets, workshops, and project grants.

Even though the two community workers of PCS de la Haut get funded through L'Entrela, the projects of the PCS find funding through small grants, self-generated income and participatory budgets. As the projects are created by the inhabitants themselves, PCS acts as the facilitator for these projects. They facilitate the budgets for the projects but don't provide the budget themselves (PCS de la Haut, personal communication, 16 April 2026).

Social Workers Everecity

Besides PCS de la Haut, Everecity also has social workers working on the grounds working in *Ieder Zijn Huis* building and the surrounding neighbourhood. There are two social workers who are employed by Everecity, carrying out more institutional projects for the social housing company in the whole of Everecity. They work closely together with the PCS and with the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, with the projects focusing specifically on the elderly population in the area of Evere-Haut. Through their projects, they reflect on what is best for the elderly and what is needed in a neighbourhood to make the population feel good about themselves PCS de la Haut, personal communication, 16 April 2026).

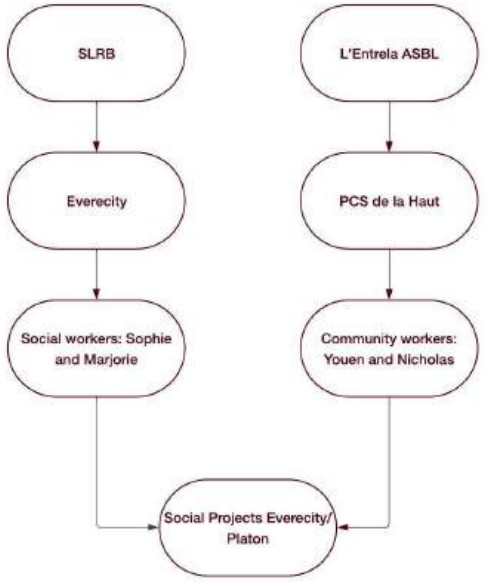


Image: Original diagram by Amber Luypaert

Physical Projects in Place

Evere-Haut is home to many different projects such as a woodworking participation house, a vintage store led by the elderly, a communal bike repair shed, lavender gardening and a sandwich shop. These are all spaces put in place by the residents of Everecity through communal gatherings, often with the facilitation of the PCS (PCS de la Haut, personal communication, 16 April 2026).

Plant Pots

One of the projects aiming to improve the physical space in the *Ieder Zijn Huis* building specifically is the plant pot project facilitated by the PCS. With the objective to make the public space within the building prettier, inhabitants created plant pots and installed them in the hallways of the building (PCS de la Haut, personal communication, 16 April 2026).



Image: “Facebook Youen de la Haut” By @Youen de la Haut https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100069121016253modified by Alexandra Teubner

Wood Work and Bike Shed

At Av. Platon 11, right beside the *Ieder Zijn Huis* building, a communal wood work and bicycle repair shed is installed at one of the houses. This shop is run by the inhabitants and is facilitated by the PCS. It allows for inhabitants to repair their own bikes and create/ repair their wooden furniture. Moreover it allows for residents to participate in workshops enhancing knowledge on their skills. In the end this encourages inhabitants to be more autonomous in their knowledge production and skills (PCS de la Haut, personal communication, 16 April 2026).

Clothing Store

Set up with the help of 3 Zen Age, a clothing store run by the elderly has been set up besides the wood work and bicycle repair shed. Focused on elderly women selling their clothes, this program helps with the self dependency of the elderly. One of the main goals of the project was for it to look like an actual store instead of a social project. Women in the project are aged up to 93 years old, working on the sales and repair of the clothes. As this store is led by the NGO 3 Zen Age, accompanied by the social workers of Everecity and community workers of Evere-Haut, no profit is being made from the project. The money that goes into the sale of the clothes gets used up for a yearly festival in the area (PCS de la Haut, personal communication, 16 April 2026).

Lavender Gardening

Besides in buildings, social projects surrounding the physical space are also put into action. For example, residents noted the need for more communal gardening. With the facilitation of the PCS, a lavender garden was installed by the *Ieder Zijn Huis* building. Residents helped apply for the grants needed for the project and installed the lavender. Now, a yearly process of taking the lavender and producing it has come into place. The lavender gets taken by the inhabitants, dried and produced into all sorts of products such as lavender oil and bags of lavender to put into closets. These lavender products go to the residents but a part is taken to the 3 Zen Age clothing shop and sold in order to get money for their yearly event (PCS de la Haut, personal communication, 16 April 2026).



Image: “Facebook PCS de la Haut” By @Youen de la Haut https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100016022973172id=100069121016253 modified by Alexandra Teubner

Vegetable Garden

Lastly, the PCS also helps with the facilitation of a vegetable garden in the area. Community workers, social workers and the inhabitants work on the garden together. They reap the vegetables and sell them on for small profits. Again, this project enhances green knowledge and the self-sufficiency of the inhabitants (PCS de la Haut, personal communication, 16 April 2026).

Small Commercial Activity

Besides activities run by NGOs, there are also spaces for commercial activity by the residents. At the Avenue Platon, houses are available for small commercial activity. At the moment shops such as a sandwich shop and a dog grooming facility take place. These places are fully run by the residents and are focused on profit. However, they do still contribute to the social fabric in the area of Evere-haut (PCS de la Haut, personal communication, 16 April 2026).

Sorocité

Communa is an NGO based in Brussels focusing on legally and temporarily occupying vacant buildings to create housing for vulnerable individuals. Together with Everecity, 17 vacant apartments were made available for temporary occupation. Whilst these apartments are awaiting renovation, they temporarily house 16 homeless women. The objectives of this initiative are multifaceted: to support the homeless individuals in their reintegration process by providing tailored psycho-medical-social care, with the goal of facilitating their transition to permanent housing. Community-based support is also provided by building bridges with existing initiatives in the neighborhood, such as the Là Haut Social Cohesion Project, the cultural center, and the Everecity social development unit (Sorocité, 2025).

Quartier Durable

What

Everecity participated in a Quartier Durable Citoyen (Sustainable Citizen Neighborhood) initiative primarily through the City Zen project. While Everecity as an entity manages many social housing sites, the specific Quartier Durable status and active period for this community-led project began around 2017–2018. From 2018 until 2021 the Quartier Durable was funded by Brussels Environment (Bruxelles Environnement, n.d.). However, the project did not stop. It transitioned into a permanent “Citizen Initiative” supported by the municipality (Commune d’Evere, n.d.).

Origins

This project was born out of discussions between neighbours: ‘working together for sustainable and collective change’! In 2017, the operators of the Everecity vegetable gardens in Platon approached the PCS ‘De Là Haut’ in L’Entrela’: their complaints focused on the lack of cleanliness, safety and collective regulations. Rather than a closed chapter, City Zen functioned as a laboratory where residents and institutions first practiced collective management. This initial impulse created a ripple effect, creating a lasting foundation of trust that newer initiatives continue to build upon today (PCS de la Haut, personal communication, 16 April 2026).

Goal

Developing more socially responsible lifestyles quickly became a necessity. So a group of residents decided to cultivate three plots of land that had been lying fallow for several years. One thing led to another, a charter was drawn up, and the ‘City Zen’ sustainable neighbourhood project was born (Everecity, 2022).

Three Plots Location

The City Zen project is centered in the Platon/Haut-Evere district. Originally, these were wastelands (*friches*) left unmaintained for years (Everecity, 2022).

- Parcel 1 (Main hub): Located at 21 Avenue du Platon (near the PCS De Là Haut office). This is the primary meeting point.
- Parcel 2 (The vegetable garden): Located within the Clos des Lauriers Roses. This is the core gardening area where collective vegetable plots are managed.
- Parcel 3 (The orchard/honey site): Located near Clos des Diablotins and Avenue Auguste Vermeylen. This area hosts the fruit trees and the neighborhood beehives (ruchers) (Everecity, 2022).

Maintenance and Management

Maintenance is governed by a participatory management model:

- Residents are responsible for the daily maintenance (weeding, watering, harvesting).
- The PCS De Là Haut (L'Entrela'): provides a coordinator who facilitates the group, manages the tools, and organizes the collective “Garden Days” (Commune d’Evere, n.d.).
- Everecity: As the landowner, they handle heavy maintenance, such as structural repairs, safety checks, and providing water access.

What Happened

The transformation focused on turning underused or neglected spaces into community assets. Key developments included:

- Community Gardening (the heart of the project): Residents reclaimed three parcels of wasteland that had been abandoned for years. They established vegetable gardens, fruit trees (raspberries, currants, quinces), and a shared composting area.
- The “61” Community Hub: A local space (at number 61, Clos des Lauriers Roses) became the headquarters for the neighborhood’s activities. It hosts:
- 3 Zen Age: A project specifically for seniors to reduce isolation.
- Workshops: Residents organize “Confipote” (jam-making from garden harvests) and “Doigts en Soie” (sewing and textile workshops) Everecity, 2024).
- Social & Ecological Events: Solidarity Soup & Light Festivals: regular gatherings where neighbors share food grown in the gardens.
- Sustainability Workshops: Training on waste reduction, biodiversity, and collective management of green spaces (Bruxelles Environnement, n.d.).
- Formalization: The residents drafted a Neighborhood Charter, outlining their commitment to collective management, mutual respect, and environmental protection.

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Image: [Title] by [Author] via [Source] modified by Alexandra Teubner

Lessons and Baselines from the Ieder Zijn Huis Building

As students, we initially sought to “install” a mixed agency structure in the *Ieder Zijn Huis* building. After listening to those on the ground, we realized that an alliance or mixed agency cannot be installed but must be cultivated with what is already in place.We have moved from being architects of a system to being providers of the baselines, the essential conditions for any project to exist. To find these, we turned to the people already closely active within the *Ieder Zijn Huis* building, the collective social worker of Everecity and the coordinator of PCS De Là-Haut. They do not speak for the SLRB nor in the name of the residents; we only listen to them sharing their thoughts and reflections of their own experiences. We identified the following six building blocks that already exist and must be protected and cultivated for any future activation of the ground floor.

I. From Proposing to Listening

For a project to truly take root, we must shift our stance from experts with a plan to listeners with a purpose. For any intervention to work, it cannot be an idea dropped onto the residents but it must be brought to life through active listening so that inhabitants can truly re-appropriate the space.

A beautiful example of this is the “Streets in the Sky” concept (Richon, 2019). By placing street names at the elevators and on different floors, a functional transit point is transformed into a recognized neighborhood identity. It is thereby in line with Van Der Meerens’ vision of the galleries functioning as streets within the building, as pointed out in the Building Analysis. This symbolic re-appropriation reminds us that to make a common space work, it must first be named and recognized by the inhabitants. As the social workers noted: “appropriating the project, the land, or the public space is showing that one exists” (Coordinator PCS De Là-Haut, personal communication, 3 March 2026).

II. Moving Away from the End Product: The Value of the Unfinished

In an era and constrained budgetary context where every euro must be spent “productively”, there is too much focus on the end result of projects, while actually the social value within the process might be much more important. We must move away from rigid objectives that “imprison” a project before it has even begun. If we define the end goal too strictly, we leave no room for the inhabitants to breathe life into it.

The “success” of a common space happens when we make a blank space available and prioritize the links between people over the final physical realization. As explained by the Coordinator of PCS De Là-Haut, if you tell yourself the objective is “to have this”, you will never have it, it can only work if it is the inhabitants who develop it. The time spent sharing during the process of a project is more valuable than the final physical objective (personal communication, 3 March 2026).

III. Beyond the Meeting Room: Finding a New Language

To reach people who are tired of being “diagnosed” by experts, we must use mediums beyond formal coffee hours and post-it note workshops. Rigid structures remind residents of the world of work or institutional frameworks that favor a language they may not master.

By using creative tools like photography, play, or gardening, we allow budding artists and technical talents among the residents to reveal themselves. This approach allows a group to “dream collectively”, projecting themselves into a space that doesn’t exist yet until that dream becomes a reality. We must replace diagnostics with these shared dreams to ensure residents don’t leave meetings feeling “useless” or “not smart enough” because of technical jargon, but instead feel nourished by their own expertise (Collective Social Worker, Everecity; Coordinator, PCS De Là-Haut, personal communication, 3 April 2026).

IV. Social Support: Balancing Roles

A successful alliance requires a delicate balance between workers who share values but hold different stakes. The building benefits from a unique collaboration between two distinct roles:

- The Institutional Worker (Everecity): focuses on building management, technical safety, and the quality of life for the owner.
- The Community Worker (PCS/Lifelong Learning): focuses on the "gut feeling", the collective dream, and community ethics.

Recognizing the specific posture of each actor is a baseline. You cannot have community projects without a worker who has the distance from the institutions and so that the residents thrust them, but you also need the support of the housing society to make things legal and safe. The collaboration between these different postures are what makes many projects work in Everecity.

To make these types of relations transferable, we need a dedicated budget for human presence and a revaluation of community social work.

V. Functional Ecology as a Bridge

The interviews revealed that residents don't care about green projects for the sake of aesthetics or for a project just to happen. They care about things that solve daily problems so projects should aim at this functional side. The following examples show how projects in Everecity became relevant and fostered community building because of a functional ecology as bridge:

- Trees and ice cream: In buildings with chemical insulation that trap heat, trees were planted by young residents to provide shade so elderly residents wouldn't overheat. They knew about the overheating because the social workers go to the elderly's home with ice cream during the summer to chat with the residents.
- Nectar and jam: Planting melliferous (nectar-producing) plants led to beehives with which honey could be made. The planting of the plants led to the community jam-making.
- Lavender: as mentioned above, the Lavender project is also a very relevant example that shows the ecology as a bridge.

Projects shouldn't be greenwashing, they should be functional as well. As the social workers stated, If the youth want strawberries, plant strawberries. Because they decided they wanted them, they will be the ones to protect the plantation. Trust is built when the project solves a craving or a discomfort. So when we look at communal spaces and think about its management, something needs to be of function here so that there is something to manage. We should as well acknowledge that the spaces in PCS De Là Haute are a very lively and used community space. These projects also go on to exist in other ways as the honey and the lavender showed, the lack of a blueprint and the room to experiment leads to community projects that create an own life (Collective Social Worker, Everecity; Coordinator, PCS De Là-Haut, personal communication, 3 April 2026).

For a "mixed agency" to work on the ground floors, it must revolve around a concrete project that has a clear function. People will only participate in maintenance if the space serves a purpose they have collectively dreamed of and realized.

VI. Anchoring and Reliability

In a city like Brussels, where populations change rapidly, common spaces serve as vital anchors for neighborhood identity. We build trust not through grand promises, but through small, reliable actions. Trust is formed when the community sees that the workers are reliable: "We don't just dream; we put it in place". These projects create "neighborhood stories" that secure people in an otherwise insecure society, moving them from a state of nostalgia for the past to a living, active present (Collective Social Worker, Everecity; Coordinator, PCS De Là-Haut, personal communication, 3 April 2026).

Conclusion

Structure Everecity

Social Actors and Projects

Building on Existing Foundations

Conclusion



Image: “Conclusions” by Nick Youngson via https://www.thebluediamondgallery.com/handwriting/c/conclusions.html modified by Alexandra Teubner

The social landscape of Evere-Haut reveals that social housing is not merely a collection of units, but a complex ecosystem of living heritage. Through the cooperative structure of Everecity and the grounded mediation of the social workers and PCS De Là-Haut, we see that a successful living environment depends on a delicate balance between institutional management and community-led dreams. The projects identified, from the City Zen vegetable gardens to the 3 Zen Age clothing store demonstrate that when residents are treated as co-managers rather than just tenants, maintenance becomes a natural act of community building. Ultimately, this analysis shows that the Great Repair is already happening on the ground through the dedicated work of social workers and neighbors. These existing foundations teach us that any future activation of the ground floor should not be installed from the outside, but cultivated from within. By prioritizing human presence, active listening, and functional projects that solve real daily needs, we move from a logic of “productivity” to a logic of collective care and reliability.

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Lessons and Conditions



In this section, we look towards others in Brussels who are already actively working on resident participation in the regeneration of communal areas in social housing. By researching these initiatives and listening to the people directly involved, we identified the specific lessons and conditions that are crucial in reactivating the social and spatial potential of shared housing environments. The projects selected for this study were chosen specifically because they work around the participation of residents and the regeneration of common areas. Each initiative is rooted in social housing context and focuses on the regeneration of common areas, providing us with realistic lessons for how neglected spaces can be transformed into community assets. It is important to note that we are not presenting these findings as formal statements on behalf of the projects or the people we interviewed. Instead, we have approached these conversations as a learning exercise. We are looking at their experiences to identify the underlying conditions that are most relevant and interesting for our own context. We seek to learn from these projects to better understand how to support a lasting alliance here.

YouYou

YouYou

Le Bouquet

La Dalle

Peterbos

Conclusion



Image: "YouYou" by Communa via https://communa.be/les-lieux/youyou/ modified by Alexandra Teubner

The YouYou project by Communa ASBL was initiated because the Molenbeek public housing company wanted to renovate the social housing complex in the Avenue Jean Dubrucq. For this purpose, Communa is temporarily occupying this building and working on building a community with the inhabitants. 16 apartments were brought up to standard, and the ground-floor included a community space for socialising and support for the residents. The goal of the project is to facilitate housing for families in need and to get residents to take ownership of public spaces. Different activities are organised, such as children's activities every Wednesday to give parents a break and foster connections or monthly meetings with the inhabitants (Youyou, n.d.).

Challenges

Multiple challenges arose in the creation and maintenance of these common spaces, especially around the inclusion of residents. In regards to the monthly meeting, the inhabitants didn't join those meetings for the first two years, so it was a challenge to activate the residents in the first place. Additionally, people did not gather in the common rooms or help each other. It took a long time to get people to trust the YouYou-Team and participate in any activities. Lessons were learned and they found different strategies to include the residents and form trust. (YouYou Team Member, personal communication, 1 April 2026).

Another ongoing challenge is to create effective relations with different neighbourhood associations. They all seem to struggle with budget and don't have time to meet, which makes cooperating difficult. (YouYou Team Member, personal communication, 1 April 2026).

Lessons Learned

Three lessons were learned over time that can inform the implementation of new projects in other contexts. These are revolving around different ways of getting the residents to participate in activities and gain trust in the community.

One recommendation is to "start from a need" (YouYou Team Member, personal communication, 1 April 2026). Including facilities that inhabitants need into the shared spaces will make people gather automatically. This can increase their connection to each other and let it take shape naturally.

Another recommendation is to consistently show presence as a team for the inhabitants to get used to you and gain trust. In the context of this project, three people are working in the common spaces full-time, and two people help irregularly. It was stated that you need to be available and show the residents that their feedback is taken seriously and has an impact. (YouYou Team Member, personal communication, 1 April 2026)

The last recommendation is incorporating children's activities into the programming of the site. This gives parents the opportunity to have some time away from their children while connecting children to one another at the same time. In the context of the YouYou project, this has proven to be a good way to increase the families' trust in the team as well because "Once the kids love you, the family follows." (YouYou Team Member, personal communication, 1 April 2026)

Conclusion

The realisation that just the provision of common spaces is only part of the solution in creating trust and a community is a valuable insight. The takeaway therefore is, that the focus should be on creating a team that is available for inhabitants to talk to and help to organise the communities' needs and get people to use the shared facilities in the first place.

It also should be mentioned that the context in Molenbeek is somewhat different to Haut Evere. In this specific projects people were included that are in precarious positions in their life and partially have lived on the streets. Social work is a crucial part at YouYou and for *Ieder Zijn Huis* as well. The already existing group of people working on the *Ieder Zijn Huis* could get more resources or a bigger team to accommodate even more of the needs.

It was also mentioned that it is extremely important to take the specific needs of inhabitants seriously. For the Ieder Zijn Huis building, this can be translated into a guided process with the residents, in which it can be determined what needs they have and how these can be incorporated into the common spaces. To draw a specific conclusion, more engagement of the residents has to be the first step.

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Le Bouquet

YouYou

Le Bouquet

La Dalle

Peterbos

Conclusion



Image: "C'est le Bouquet" by Haricots via https://www.haricots.org/spip.php?page=projet&id_rubrique=44] modified by Alexandra Teubner

C’est le Bouquet is a project created by the NGO *Le Debut des Haricots* located in Consience, Evere. The project is based on collective gardening through the contrat de quartier durable of the Consience area. The garden is a place for citizen participation, which has been designed with and for residents. Besides collective gardening, the project runs workshops, raising awareness about biodiversity and mobilizing specific socio- economic groups. It aims to create a place to strengthen the social bonds of the area while at the same time offering a place for discovery. The project is run by two social workers who are both employed part-time by Le Debut des Haricots. Due to its location in Evere and its focus on lower socio-economic groups, this project can give insights on how to create an active participatory project, what to watch out for and gives an outlook on the future.

Challenges

Through an interview with one of the social workers, we got to know more about the current challenges and opportunities that the project faces. Overall, the project seems successful in mobilising residents to actively contribute to the green space. This is due to the many activities that get planned by the social workers, the availability of budget, and the relatively long time to participate in the project. Important to note is that active participation did not happen overnight. The project started off slowly, gaining the trust of the inhabitants before active participation. When asked about the participation and participants’ reasons behind their participation, a social worker mentions that there are many reasons people take part in this project, the most important ones being: social connection, love of plants, learning, childcare relief and combating social isolation.

However, this active participation is only possible as long as the social workers are invested into the project. Without active funding and two people working part time, the project wouldn't be able to take place. Resident participation is only possible through active engagement and projects without personal ownership. As the project is part of the Contrat de Quartier Durable and only runs until 2028, the project faces the risk of remaining short- term. In order for the project to work in the long run, residents need to take ownership of the project to keep the area alive. Again, the reality of this is questioned by one of the social workers as the residents contributing to the garden don’t have the socio-economic abilities to actively budget and take time out of their days to take ownership of the project. In order for the project to work in the long run, ongoing professional support and trust is needed to sustain it.

Lessons Learned

Through the challenges of the short-term of the project, the involvement of the residents and the budgetary needs of the maintenance of the garden, a longer-term governance structure should be installed.

1. Funding is needed in order to keep the project on its legs in the long run. Activation of residents has been found increasingly difficult without social workers activating them and the tools ready to be used. As inhabitants of social housing often do not have the financial ability/ willingness to participate in a project that is not their property, funding is needed for the project to work.

2. Resident participation through active engagement and time is necessary in order to make the project work. Residents of the area need to be actively engaged in the project in order to obtain a sense of agency. Whenever participants feel that they are doing something and making a difference, they will actively engage in the project. This doesn’t come from one or two participations but from an ongoing project that takes time to win over participants. To ensure this, the project needs to actively try to engage residents to come over and participate.

3. Knowledge and the process are more important than the final result. The participants have noted that they are happy with the process of learning, whether that is by coming once or multiple times. Without focusing too much on having to deliver a result of the project besides knowledge enhancement, the project

focuses on the participants and not the result. Moreover, this helps gain knowledge on the residents and their wants and needs. By knowing what the residents need, the project is able to play in on them. This allows for the creation of trust and ensures that people in an insecure position won't get a useless project imposed on them.

Conclusion

To conclude, a project like Le Bouquet! Actively engages resident participation, strengthening the bonds of inhabitants with lower socio-economic status. It focuses on the creation of knowledge and less on the result. Local inhabitants with a lack of green space can engage in the maintenance of green areas through it. This project could be duplicated in a social housing context, like in Evere, maintaining the green areas surrounding the buildings. Projects like this need to work in the long run, with the help of professional engagement in order to gain the trust of the inhabitants.

La Dalle

YouYou

Le Bouquet

La Dalle

Peterbos

Conclusion



Image: “La Dalle op La Dalle! La Dalle sur La Dalle !” by La Dalle via https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1882106348527897&set=pb.100069909520222.-2207520000&type=3 modified by Alexandra Teubner

La Dalle is an atelier and a community project made by Toestand in the Jonction district of Marolles. It's focused on the area around Brigitinnen Tower. Atelier La Dalle was created in one of the empty apartments on the ground floor in 2018. Its initial goal is to create social cohesion, collaborative initiatives, and reactivation of the public spaces and ground floors. It starts with 3 people initiating the project from the Brussels Capital Region planning office, with the initiation from Toestand. So far, they have established a number of public renovation events collaborating with residents in the surrounding social housing units. There is a ground-floor renovation as well, including the atelier La Dalle being situated in the building. It was designed to activate public/ common spaces for social housing (Atelier de la Dalle: Brussels, n.d.).

Challenges

The creation of Atelier La Dalle increased the community engagement and interaction for a period of time. During this time, residents lived out their initial enthusiasm in this social housing unit. The everyday public space was actively used by the residents and community members, that are triggered by the initial workers from Atelier La Dalle. A La Dalle team member was one of these workers at the site to renovate the public spaces and the ground floors. As he quotes from one of the residents who lived in the building for more than 15 years: *''It's the first time I'm proud of where I live!"* This shows that residents enjoyed the time they had with La Dalle, where they'd like to participate more. Therefore, this causes the biggest challenge in the area, as this project is a short-term project. One of the main challenges is that after the project ends (4 years duration), there were no participative renovation or community events that bring the community together. The main trigger of this social cohesion was gone by night (La Dalle team member, personal communication, 21 April 2026).

The challenge here is maintaining this ground-floor community space that brings everyone to participate in renovation or community workshops. No solution was found for the atelier to cover or maintain itself after the project was done by Toestand. There were a few community collective areas also opened in other units on the ground floor, turning into more and more active at the time, but they were closed after that (La Dalle team member, personal communication, 21 April 2026).

For this active participation in the public realms and ground floors, there is always a need for a push or an initial worker factor that creates the initial trigger to pull communities together. This project also has a high budget, and this makes it less applicable for different projects as well. In public realm renovations, where the children's park was created, the budget was covered by the city government (La Dalle team member, personal communication, 21 April 2026).

Lessons Learned

Considering the current situation of the site, and the short-term project that was successful in pulling people into the social renovation, a type of long-term self-governance model, a maintenance tool, or a branch that takes care of the public realms, and acknowledging the importance of resident participation for common space renovation were the key lessons learned from the site.

A type of governance model that maintains the activity of Atelier La Dalle on the site and keeps the atelier alive in the long-term. This is the key implication to get from this project that it was really successful in activating open common spaces and ground floors, but it would have required a tool to maintain it in the long-term. The residents already proved that if any trigger or 'activity-maker' stays on site, engagement will be high in common spaces.

Open public spaces are renovated to a nice standard that makes them sustainable in the long term, making them slower in decay because of the material they used and the design of the elements on the site. A public presence or a government branch that maintains the area physically is also a quite important lesson learned to keep the public realms properly used.

The last lesson is also one of the key positive lessons that this project achieves; it's the residents' participation in the public realm renovation. La Dalle team member (21 April 2026) mentioned that with the other two colleagues, they started doing some cleaning and renovation themselves in front of the residents, where the residents engaged themselves naturally after they saw and trusted them with their set of actions. This created a chain reaction to cause community engagement and enhance social cohesion, which later led to their participation in painting the balconies.

''The project was finite and finished in four years; however, it has brought dynamic social knowledge and experience to both sides (the residents and the city government) that is too precious to be achieved by any other physical renovation." -(La Dalle team member, personal communication, 21 April 2026)

Conclusion

In conclusion, this project is an important and successful example of activating the open public spaces and the ground floors of a social housing unit. It has a few challenges, as it is limited to short-term, and the project did not last after the atelier was closed. However, with its pieces and the application to the open areas and ground floors, the community engagement holds a great potential example for the renovation of other social housing projects like Evere. A long-term, maintained version of this project can be applied in the Evere neighbourhood where the ground floor and the open public spaces are quite similar in the context of the space and the people.

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Peterbos

YouYou

Le Bouquet

La Dalle

Peterbos

Conclusion



Image: "302913170_601775404768108_8705547768870697571_n" by SAAMO via https://www.saamo.be/fr/bruxelles/project/stek-peterbos/ modified by Alexandra Teubner

SAAMO runs a community centre in the Peterbos social housing estate, that gives inhabitants a space to connect, voice their issues and participate in events. The Peterbos social housing area consists of 18 blocks with 4000 inhabitants. Their local team consists of eight people that work in different areas, and it includes multiple social workers (SAAMO Team Member, personal communication, 18 April 2026).

The community centre is always open and facilitates different events. It offers food on Wednesdays and Fridays, creates spaces for the youngsters and holds workshops for example about dealing with humidity in one's apartment. The SAAMO team also works with the inhabitants to help them take ownership over their space and represents their needs to the SISPs and other actors (SAAMO Team Member, personal communication, 18 April 2026).

Challenges

During this work some challenges have appeared. Firstly, a difficulty to connect with inhabitants. Not many of the 4000 inhabitants can regularly be reached. Some seem to simply not have the capacity to join events or participate generally, due to them fighting to keep their basic needs met. It should also not be underestimated that there can be shame surrounding asking for help or accepting help, which makes it difficult to create a connection (SAAMO Team Member, personal communication, 18 April 2026).

Secondly, organising events such as a humidity workshop for inhabitants exist on a fine line between empowering people to change their situation and blaming responsibility on them. As important as helping the residents is, one must keep in mind that they don't carry the responsibility to adapt to circumstances that should be fixed. To find a balance between representing inhabitants and campaigning for change whilst making the most of a situation and being a help in urgent matters, seems to be difficult to find at times (SAAMO Team Member, personal communication, 18 April 2026).

Thirdly, a very direct and specific challenge can be a language barrier. If a community space mostly works in French and Dutch, it can be difficult to reach inhabitants with other language needs (SAAMO Team Member, personal communication, 18 April 2026).

Lessons Learned

In adapting to the occurring challenges, some lessons were learned. The first one being that starting from a need is an ideal way to reach the inhabitants. In the case of this project, they are organising shared meals two times a week that make it easier to facilitate a space of connection and understanding. This is also a good setting to promote further events and workshops (SAAMO Team Member, personal communication, 18 April 2026).

This leads to the second learning, which is that mouth to mouth advertisement is what works best. When trying to make residents gain trust in a project, participate and communicate their needs, it is the easiest to form a bond with them to further motivate them to join (SAAMO Team Member, personal communication, 18 April 2026).

Another thing that has been essential is a big and diverse team that works in the community centre. To facilitate different needs and languages many different people are needed from social workers to technicians. Importance should be put on having an open ear and using any opportunity to listen to people's needs. Listening and taking the residents seriously is the easiest bridge to gain trust in both directions (SAAMO Team Member, personal communication, 18 April 2026).

Conclusion

The community centre in Peterbos reaffirms our understanding of resident’s participation in the social housing context. It highlights the importance of listening to the inhabitants' needs and patiently forming relationships and trust. It is understandably difficult to create a setting for participation in a context, where individuals have different priorities. This can probably be assumed in the context of the social housing in Haut Evere as well. Getting groups that live in social housing to engage goes further than creating events. These learnings could inspire our context as well. Creating shared meals, opening the space to inhabitants and adapting the size of the team and languages to the specific context are practical matters that could be implemented.

Conclusion

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Image: “Conclusions” by Nick Youngson via https://www.thebluediamondgallery.com/handwriting/c/conclusions.html modified by Alexandra Teubner

This chapter has highlighted key lessons and conditions for participatory interventions in social housing contexts. The most important factor to take into consideration is the demonstration that providing a shared physical space is simply insufficient in order to create a space with active residents and participation. Spaces such as common rooms and green areas provide opportunities for resident interaction but they do not guarantee it. The success of these spaces is dependent on social processes that accompany these spaces. The creation of trust and a sense of ownership of projects are achieved through long term social engagement and not purely design interventions.

Secondly, sustained professional support is necessary. Whether it be dedicated facilitators or social workers, they are found to be essential in the creation of dialogue and supporting residents to make use of the shared social spaces. Participation requires patience and continuity which is especially important in social housing contexts where residents often do not have the social and economic capacity to actively participate. Short term investments may create momentum, however long term engagement is necessary to create a sustainable impact.

The adaptation of the interventions to the realities and needs of the residents is essential in order for a project to be successful. Meaningful participation requires actively listening to residents and involving them early on in the processes of planning. In a vulnerable context such as one like social housing, residents are not eager to reply to installations that seem useless to them. This requires flexibility, trust and open communication allowing residents to openly express their feelings, thoughts and needs. This can be achieved by taking communication barriers away, by organizing informal events and activities such as shared meals for example.

Lastly, the use of these lessons and conditions should allow for successful resident engagement in a social housing context. However, residents of social housing remain in precarious conditions and may simply never have the social capacity to engage in any sort of project. Social housing residents simply do not have another residential option or the capacity of residential freedom. Their social needs may be too high and restricted for any projects to be met. This should be treated with utmost care and respect remembering the vulnerability of the residents.

Conclusion

Brochure II of *The Great Repair* has focused on ground-floor activation as a broad and essential process that links the technical side of social housing renovation with the human realities of governance and maintenance.

Relevance

After taking this first step in exploring what a Great Repair looks like in Brussels, we believe in this vision even more than before. We aspire for a social housing sector that is truly cared for. This care is already visible in the *Ieder Zijn Huis* building, it is lived by the residents who work in the gardens, and it is upheld by the ninety employees, both blue-collar and white-collar, working within the Everecity cooperative. It is nourished by social workers who prioritize trust and relationships, centering the residents in everything they do. This care also extends to the work of the SLRB and the BMA, who took a first step with initiating The Great Repair studio by envisioning other ways of rethinking the renovation of social housing.

However, in a precarious political and social climate that often stigmatizes social housing residents, and amidst budgetary constraints that demand every euro be spent "productively", we must reclaim the value of human presence. We claim the need for more individuals as collective social workers to be active and supported with resources and funds, since it is them who are active on the ground, engaging with residents by building trust and making a difference. We envision a Great Repair as renovation as much as investing in the people who keep these buildings alive. By recognizing the ground floor as a shared resource, we can begin to build a social housing sector that houses people and cares for them.

Potential of Common Areas

The idea of building upon already existing social structures that can be extended can be applied to the common rooms of the building as well as the ground floor. Van Der Mereen's original idea of creating a building with a social mix in mind, where the hallways function as streets in the air and common rooms are created for connection between the residents, is relevant to this day. Although the architects defended these ideas of additional facilities, such as vending machines in the elevator hallways to create public squares in the building or commercial uses such as a kiosk, they were not fully realised. Van Der Meeren himself concluded that there was little reason to meet for extended periods . Additionally to some of the ideas not being realised, due to modifications over the years the spatial quality and shared potentials were lost in other spaces (De Kooning et al., 2012).

This leaves us with only partially used common rooms with mixed quality nowadays. As mentioned before, the rooftop is not in use as much, some of the rooms are used more as storage and the group of people with access is limited. Connecting this knowledge to the conclusions from the spatial analysis, such as limited access for the inhabitants to good quality outdoor spaces or playgrounds for the children and small private outdoor spaces, the potential in the common rooms is huge. The residents' needs could be looked at for future adaptations and programming of the rooms and ground floor space.

Connecting the need for common spaces with the empty rooms and Van Der Mereen's original concept offers a great opportunity to improve the rooms and living quality. Creating the social mix and common qualities might have not been fully realised initially and partially lost on the way but could be returned to in the future.

Building Blocks from Brochure I

The benchmarks from the *Brochure I* revealed a *toolbox* where resident empowerment and community building are the primary drivers for longer term maintenance.

On the backdrop of the international benchmarks and the building blocks we gained from them, we zoomed in on the *Ieder Zijn Huis* as a case study. To understand the specific situation at *Ieder Zijn Huis*, we must first zoom out and reconnect with the global building blocks established in *Brochure I*. Our international benchmark study revealed a toolbox where resident empowerment and community building act as the primary drivers for long-term maintenance. We identified three essential building blocks that have guided our local analysis.

1. Social Mediation and Meaningful Involvement

The benchmarks showed that residents should not just be consulted but should be the co-managers of their environment. This means shifting the power balance so that inhabitants have a real seat at the table when deciding the future of their building.

2. Reactivating the Ground Floor as a Social Driver

The ground floor is the most critical interface between the private home and the common estate. It is where maintenance is most visible and where community trust is fostered. Brochure I demonstrated how flexible, low-barrier programming can turn underused spaces into active hubs that breathe life into the entire tower.

3. Maintenance as Co-Construction

Physical repair is a powerful tool for social cohesion. When residents are part of the process, fixing a space becomes an act of building a community. This building block focuses on using the act of building and fixing to foster a culture of collective ownership.

On the backdrop of these international lessons, we zoomed in on *Ieder Zijn Huis* as our pilot case study. We wanted to see how these global tools could work in a context of budgetary constraints and institutional complexity. This allowed us to move from the theoretical toolbox of *Brochure I* to the practical lessons and conditions of *Brochure II*, testing if these global ambitions can survive on the Brussels ground.

Conditions and Lessons

By combining the international benchmarks of *Brochure I* with the grounded experiences of social workers and neighbor projects in Brussels, we have identified a set of Essential Conditions. These are needed conditions and lessons for any ground-floor activation to grow into a lasting alliance.

1. Start from a Need to Build Community

A project must always start from a need. Whether that is a shared laundry room, a place for children to play, or simply a bowl of soup. We move from proposing to listening, shifting our role from experts with a plan to listeners with a purpose. As we learned from the *Streets in the Sky concept*, a space only becomes a neighborhood when the residents name it and recognize themselves in it. We replace technical diagnostics with shared ideas, ensuring inhabitants feel enriched by their own expertise instead of silenced by difficult jargon.

2. The Value of the Unfinished

In a political climate obsessed with “productivity”, we claim the value of the unfinished. We must move away from rigid objectives that “imprison” a project before it begins. The social value is found in the process and in the time spent together rather than the final physical result. By providing “blank spaces” and avoiding strict blueprints, we allow projects to take on a life of their own, evolving from a simple garden into a functional ecology that solves real problems, like planting trees for shade or strawberries for a snack.

3. Human Presence and Trust

Trust is not built through grand promises but through anchoring and reliability. This requires a team that is present as much as possible, building real relationships through patience and small, reliable actions. We need a balance of roles like the institutional worker (Everecity) to ensure safety and legality. But as well as the community worker (PCS) to protect the “gut feeling” and the collective dream. To make this work, we must claim for long-term budgets that prioritize human presence over one-time technical fixes. We need more people on the ground who have the time to listen, to spend time with the residents, and to prove that the institution is actually there to stay.

4. Maintenance as Community Building

Finally, we understand that people will only participate in maintenance if the space serves a purpose they have collectively realized. When a project is functional and resident-led, maintenance becomes an act of community building rather than a chore. These projects create “neighborhood stories” that secure people in an otherwise insecure society, transforming a state of nostalgia for the past into a living and cared-for present.

Future Vision

This brochure and the research within it are not intended to be a final report, but rather a foundation for the next step. By mapping the playing field of the *Ieder Zijn Huis* building and the broader Everecity site, we have documented the existing social energy and spatial constraints that often remain invisible to outside experts. Our work serves as a starting point for future students, researchers, or city-makers. We have gathered the raw material, like resident’s living conditions in the spatial morphology, the relationships, the lessons from social workers, and the technical baselines needed to finally build the mixed agency structure we initially envisioned. The next phase of this project can now move beyond finding out what is there and start building what could be, using our research as a guide to avoid common pitfalls.

In the end, the relevance of our project lies in the shift from installation to cultivation. We have proven that the ground floor is already a site of care, but that care is currently resting on the shoulders of a few dedicated individuals and a specific cooperative social housing site with a long tradition of resident involvement which is not the case for all social housing estates in Brussels.

We claim that:

→ The success of the current garden and social projects shouldn’t just be “nice to have” but should be the baseline for every social housing estate in Brussels.

→ Investment in human presence. We need to move from a logic of temporary projects to a logic of long-term presence. This means more budget and more resources for people who nourish trust daily.

→ Expanding the alliance, our research shows that a mixed agency is possible. However, it requires the SISP, the municipality, and the residents to have a formal, funded structure to meet in.

We aspire for a future where the Great Repair is more than a student studio. By laying the foundation stone for this site, we call for a permanent practice of care that can now be built upon.

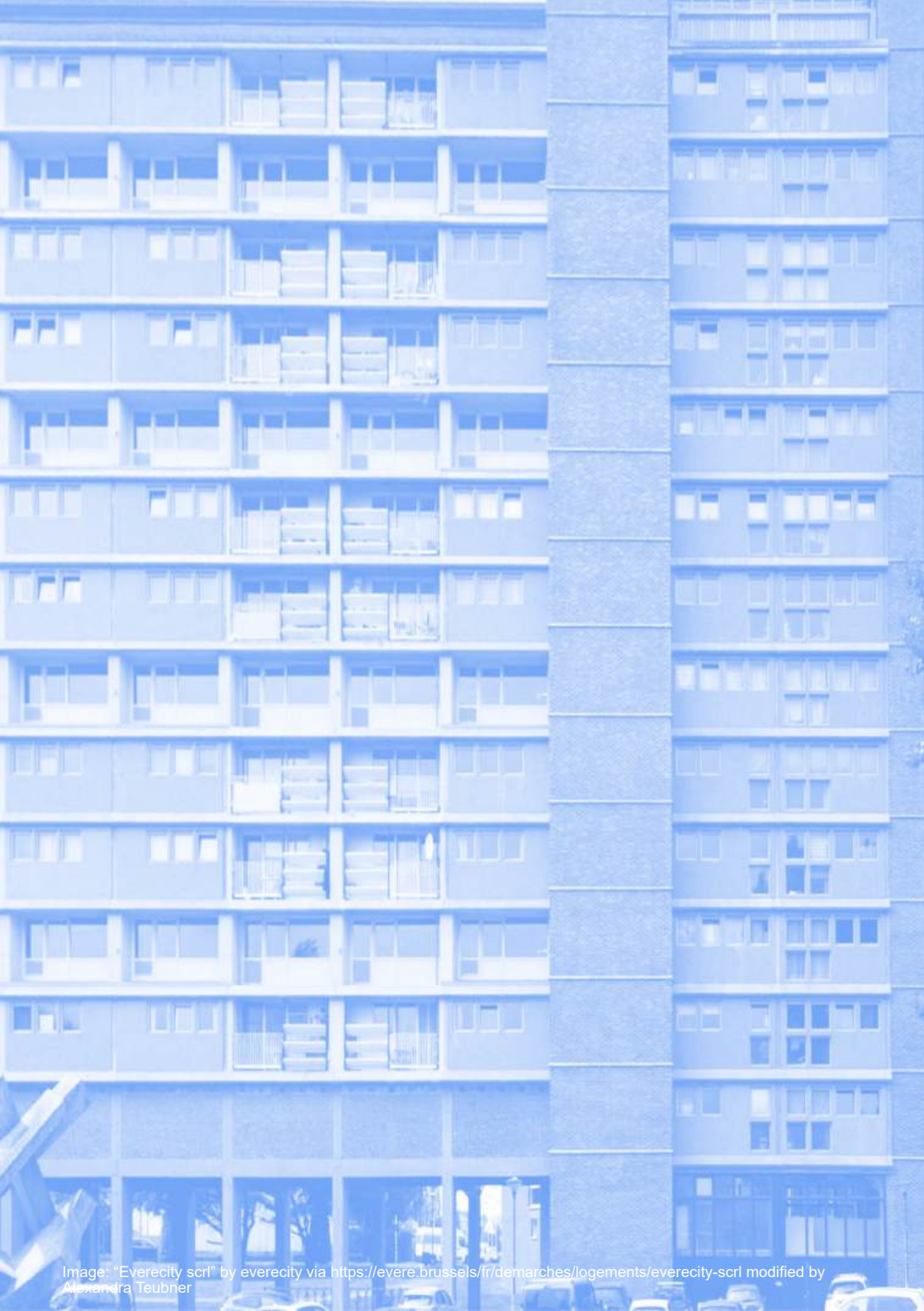


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