

# Culture, cities & boundary drawing

Who can be found in the scene(s) of Brussels' neighborhoods Matonge and Molenbeek?

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Masters' thesis submitted to obtain the degree of

MASTER OF SOCIOLOGY

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Academic year: 2020-2021

Word count: 27 387



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## List of abbreviations

CCTV	Closed-circuit television
Region	Brussels capital region
Yuppies	Young urban professionals

## Acknowledgements

Before anything else, I want to express my sincere gratitude to those who made this master's thesis possible.

I would like to start off by recognizing the invaluable assistance of my supervisor, Giseline Kuipers. Her advice and feedback has pushed me to sharpen my thinking and lifted this thesis to a higher level. Professor Kuipers, thank you for the guidance, trust and encouragement.

It only makes sense to thank the thirteen people who not only made the effort to guide me through their neighborhood but also made collecting data an unforgettable experience. Because of your kindness, enthusiasm and warmth, I looked forward to going to Brussels each and every time. Thank you for the insightful and interesting conversations about Matonge and Molenbeek, but also for all of the inspiring and fun talks we had after the interviews, for offering me tea to warm up when it was freezing and for showing me around your workplaces. I am truly blessed to have met you all and hope that our paths will cross again somewhere in the future.

Last but not least, I am very grateful to my friends and family for their encouragement. In particular Freeke, Ans, Tinne and my mom, thank you for your unconditional support and for always believing in me.

## Summary

This masters' thesis explores the importance of culture in the superdiverse yet segregated city of Brussels by examining how cultural and aesthetic elements of the neighborhoods of Matonge and Molenbeek can attract different groups of people such as ethnic minorities or people with a middle class background.

Based on twelve walkabouts with thirteen informants that were supplemented with visual material, I distinguish two different geographical areas in each neighborhood. In addition, nine cultural repertoires that different groups of people use to give meaning to their neighborhoods are found.

Combining these geographic and cultural factors, I identify at least two different scenes in each neighborhood. In Matonge, there is a Sub-Saharan African and Flemish middle class scene while Molenbeek has a North-African and Flemish middle class scene. The neighborhoods show very similar patterns in terms of the constellations of the scenes, yet it is important to keep in mind that all scenes are unique and cannot be equated.

Much of the literature on scenes has focused on the attraction of people with a middle class background and has identified only one scene per city or neighborhood. However, these findings illustrate that the presence of ethnic minorities and middle class groups in (relatively) disadvantaged neighborhoods can be partly explained by the cultural characteristics of that place. It also sheds a new light on discussions around urban mixing. The scenes seem to peacefully coexist and even depend upon each other. However, there is only limited interaction between the scenes. The boundaries that are being drawn can best be seen as soft and do not lead to an 'us' versus 'them' perspective. These findings have practical implications for local authorities, urban planners, social workers and others who work in the context of diverse cities and are concerned with topics such as social mixing, segregation, revitalization and gentrification as it offers an alternative perspective on urban mixing.

### Keywords

Scenes, Cultural Repertoires, Walkabouts, Neighborhoods, Cities, Segregation, Boundary drawing, Brussels, Matonge, Molenbeek



## Introduction

While cities today are increasingly characterized by diversity, there does not seem to be a perfect social mix of different people all living together. Rather, individuals often sort themselves into different 'scenes' of likeminded people (Mansvelt, 2008; Whitson, 2006; Klekotko, 2019; Savage et al., 2018; Silver & Clark, 2015). Cultural elements of cities and specific neighborhoods affect how they are perceived, which in turns influences who chooses to live or spend time there and what this place means to them (Mansvelt, 2008; Whitson, 2006; Klekotko, 2019; Savage et al., 2018; Silver & Clark, 2015). While recent research has sought to explain the worldwide increasing urbanization by looking at how cultural factors make cities and specific neighborhoods attractive for young and middle class people, little work has been done around the influence of culture on the sorting of other groups of people, such as ethnic minorities, or to how different scenes within the same place relate.

*"Brussels: a melting pot of language and culture that just won't melt. We are on the subway together but as soon as the gates close behind us and the escalator brings us safely back to the first floor, the "Expat" hurries to an afterwork in the European district, the "Flemish" gathers on the terrace of a community center and the "Migrant" gathers in the favorite tea house."* (Toestand vzw, 2018, p.20).

Brussels is a diverse city with a strong segregation between its neighborhoods (Corijn & van de Ven, 2013; Van Hamme, Grippa & Van Crieelingen, 2016; Vandecandelaere, 2012; Vertovec, 2019). Since the 1980s, a rise in inequality within Brussels has led to a fracture between rich and poor communities (Van Hamme, 2010). Socioeconomic factors have often been given as an explanation for this trend. For example, the growing importance of the knowledge economy has increased the gap between high-skilled and educated migrants and the migrants with less capital. These groups settled in different parts of Brussels (Moderbacher, 2020; Van Hamme, 2010). In the West and North-West part of the city, there is a poor area in the shape of a half-moon, while a rich area can be found in the South-East part (Vandecandelaere, 2012). According to Van Hamme, Grippa and Van Crieelingen (2016), this has to do with the economic necessity of certain migrant groups to stay in the poor area, simply because they cannot afford housing anywhere else in the city.

However, next to socioeconomic factors, cultural factors also play a role in the differences between Brussels' neighborhoods. The aesthetics, the culture and the atmosphere of a city are playing an increasingly important role in its attractiveness (Klekotko, 2019; Savage et al., 2018). According to Silver and Clark (2016), this creates a specific combination of place, amenities, people and pursued values, or in other words, a scene. Because of these shared values, certain schemas of evaluation are more accessible to a particular scene. Hence, a scene draws upon certain cultural repertoires to give meaning to their neighborhood (Lamont, 1992).

To better understand how people sort themselves into different places based on cultural factors and how they give meaning to this place, it is interesting to look at the neighborhoods of Matonge and Molenbeek.

Matonge is a district in the municipality of Ixelles, which is located in the richer part of Brussels. It was created in the 1970s when more and more people from the former Belgian colony of Congo settled there (Demart, 2008). Because of its location, rent prices are relatively high and not many African migrants actually live there (Vandecandelaere, 2012; Demart, 2013). Yet the history of the neighborhood has made it a hotspot for African diaspora, not only from Belgium but from all over Europe. Matonge used to have a negative reputation, but this seems to be changing (Arnout, 2019). As Beddington (2013) emphasizes in her article for the Guardian, anyone walking around Matonge will find many people without African roots eating an African peanut curry or enjoy a drink on one of the terraces of the many African bars. The neighborhood is hip and also attracts many other visitors who want to get a sense of the 'African atmosphere'.

This is in contrast to Molenbeek, which has a persisting negative reputation. Although the only physical border between the historical center of Brussels and Molenbeek is a canal, the municipality is situated in the poor area of Brussels. It is being portrayed in the international press as the breeding ground for terrorism, a North-African ghetto and a no-go zone (Cohen, 2016; Drozdiak, Barnes & Steinhauser, 2016; Jones, 2015; Sykes, 2015; Traynor, 2015). However, some areas of Molenbeek are also gentrifying, which attracts new groups of people (studio020Paolaviganò & Walloth Urban Advisors, n.d.).

The aim of this thesis is to dig deeper into the question why certain people live or spend their time in particular neighborhoods. More specifically, this thesis will consider Molenbeek and Matonge through the lens of scenes. This is more of a logical choice for Matonge than it is for Molenbeek because, at least at first glance, it seems as if Matonge is a neighborhood certain people nowadays consciously choose to live in or to visit, while it seems as if the people in Molenbeek are mainly living there because they have no choice due to economic reasons. However, Silver and Clark (2016) point out that some neighborhoods labeled as disadvantaged also have high concentrations of specific facilities. On top of that, the changing reputation of Matonge and the process of gentrification in Molenbeek also attract new groups of people, which raises questions about how the different groups that live together within the neighborhood interact and draw boundaries between each other.

This study provides new insights regarding the influence of culture on the attractiveness of cities and neighborhoods. Focusing on Matonge and Molenbeek allows for an in-depth investigation of the effect of cultural factors on the presence of different groups of people in neighborhoods that can be seen as (relatively) deprived, yet where various different groups of people live. This is especially relevant because little research has looked into whether other groups of people than those who have a middle class background sort themselves into scenes. However, previous research explaining the presence of groups of ethnic minorities in disadvantaged neighborhoods as well as on gentrification does show that culture may be an important factor in these processes.

The importance and originality of this study are that it combines a scenes approach with the theoretical framework of cultural repertoires. First, this allows for a consideration of not only geographic factors of amenities, people and place, but also the cultural aspect of shared values that create a scene. Thus, looking into the cultural repertoires helps understand the cultural aspect of scenes as it provides insights into how people give meaning to their

neighborhood and draw boundaries between different scenes. Secondly, this is also the first study that uses the scenes perspective and framework of cultural repertoires to look into how different scenes relate to each other. This way, it aims to provide insight into about how different groups of people live with, alongside and mixed with each in diverse urban settings.

A better understanding of the effect of culture on where people choose to live or spend time and of how different scenes relate to each other is especially relevant because of increasing urbanization and (super)diversification and can also be beneficial for policy makers, urban planners, social workers and others who are concerned with topics such as segregation and social mixing.

Concretely, using thirteen walkabouts, this paper will examine the different scenes that can be found in Matonge and Molenbeek and compare these scenes. First, this paper will look into whether there are different scenes to be found in the neighborhoods. Secondly, it investigates how the different scenes within a neighborhood relate to each other, whether people acknowledge multiple scenes and how they look upon these other scenes. Thirdly, it is interesting to make a comparison between both neighborhoods in regard to how scenes come along and create meaning.

The central argument of this thesis is that culture plays an important role in diverse cities. Not only does the culture of a city or neighborhood attract people with a middle class background, other groups of people, such as ethnic minorities, also sort themselves into different scenes. This has implications for thinking about the social mix in cities because different scenes make use of the same geographical location yet give different meanings to this place and draw boundaries between their own scenes and others. As the results of this thesis will show, these are not necessarily hard boundaries and it is possible to have a peaceful coexistence between different scenes where there is only limited interaction between scenes without this leading to a 'us' versus 'them' perspective.

# Literature study

## 1. Attractiveness of cities and their neighborhoods

### 1.1. Identity and cultural consumption in cities

Within a postmodern society, 'What to do?', 'How to act?', and 'Who to be?' are central questions. Individuals face the task of creating their own identity by maintaining a set of biographical narratives, social roles and lifestyles (Giddens, 1991). This can be seen in the rising importance of consumption regarding identity formation (Miles, 1996). The practice of identity formation has become a life-project and draws upon features such as styles, places, aesthetics and ideas. In order to be seen as an authentic member of an identity category, one has to have 'enough' of its features (Blommaert & Varis, 2011). Thus, what people consume says something about who they are.

Cities and their neighborhoods play a significant role in this as they are becoming places of cultural consumption. Zukin (1995) argues that "as cultural consumers, we are drawn into the interrelated production of symbols and space" (p. 10). Since the 1990s, more and more people are moving back to the city after a period of de-urbanization, which is largely due to the attractiveness of urban culture (Deboosere, 2012). While up until the nineteenth century, industrialization and the promise of jobs used to be the main attractive power of cities, it is now the 'state-of-mind' of a city, the number and quality of amenities and the culture of place that determine the growth and success of a city or neighborhood (Glaeser, Kolko & Saiz, 2001; Silver & Clark, 2015). In order to be attractive, cities and neighborhoods need to reflect how diverse, creative, cosmopolitan and authentic they are (Geldof, 2016; Savage et al., 2018)

In this regard, Zukin (1995) talks about a *symbolic economy*. The aesthetics, the culture and the atmosphere of a city are important to its economy as they can be used to draw in capital such as through investors, shoppers and tourists. Differences in these cultural elements also attract different (groups of) people (Mansvelt, 2008; Whitson, 2006; Klekotko, 2019; Savage et al., 2018) as they prefer to spend time in a place that matches with their own personality, allowing them to identify with the symbolic meaning of the place and to develop their identity (Klekotko, 2019; Silver & Clark, 2016).

### 1.2. Scenes

Given that culture and identity play an increasingly important role in cities, it is relevant to study cities from a cultural sociological point of view. The concept of scenes provides a useful theoretical framework to do so and can complement the more traditional 'hard' variables used to study the city such as density or crime rates (Silver & Clark, 2016).

Scene is an ambiguous term that is used in daily life as well as academia and does not have a single, clear meaning within either domain. It can be argued that its ambiguity is exactly the power of the concept, as it provides the flexibility and adaptability needed to be useful in a broad range of domains (Straw, 2015). Within academia, the concept of scenes is mostly used to analyze the relationship between respectively music or youth culture and

consumption, subcultures and lifestyle (Bennett & Rogers, 2016; Driver & Bennet, 2015; Miha & Dragan, 2013; Woo, Rennie & Poyntz, 2015). However, it is not limited to these fields as it applies to various different contexts, including the city. In fact, the concept of scenes was first introduced by John Irwin in 1997 to study subcultures in urban life. He used the notion in a double way, to refer to events in a given time and place as well as to a more general lifestyle (Miha & Dragan, 2013). Woo, Rennie and Poyntz (2015) expand on this and note that “scenes are a basic part of the social imaginary of urban life. They are typically understood as loosely bounded social worlds oriented to forms of cultural expression” (p. 288).

In this thesis, the concept of scenes will be used as described in the work of Silver and Clark (2015), who define the concept as a framework to analyze “how and why amenities such as operas, art galleries, restaurants and the like influence community and urban development” (Silver & Clark, 2015, p. 425). The specific combination of a place such as a neighborhood, the amenities that are present in that place, the people who make use of the place and the values that those people pursue are what make a scene (Silver, Clark & Rothfield, n.d.). It is thus an interaction between geographical (amenities, people and place) and cultural (shared values and beliefs) factors.

Scenes both enable and constrain. They should not be perceived as specific ways of life but rather as looser lifestyles (Silver & Clark, 2016). Hence, a scene is not deterministic and leaves room for agency, or as Klekotko (2019) formulates, “on the one hand, practices provide territory with cultural meanings, and on the other hand, territory makes practices meaningful. (...). Thus, different types of scenes provide opportunities for different interactions and practices and lead to the emergence of different communities.” (p.124). The more sharply defined scenes are, the more they influence everyday life. For example, cities can formally define a scene and promote it (Silver & Clark, 2016). This does not only make the scene more visible and demarcated but also strengthens the attraction to specific types of amenities and people.

### 1.3. Cultural repertoires

Silver and Clark (2016) distinguish three categories, each containing five elements, which together make up a scene. The first of the three categories regards the authenticity of a scene, which creates a meaningful sense of rootedness and identity. Secondly, there is theatricality, which means that scenes create the opportunity of seeing and being seen. Finally, legitimacy is about moral judgements and which types of cultural consumption or ways of life are perceived as ‘good’, and, even more importantly, why these moral judgements are made. Most research on scenes uses these categories and elements to determine which scene is present in which city or neighborhood. For example, Silver & Clark (2016) identify scenes for every zip code in the United States of America, based on the amenities that are present in the specific geographical area of the zip code. This assumes that a zip code or neighborhood contains only one scene.

However, this thesis will look more in-depth at two neighborhoods because this allows to also measure the cultural aspects of scenes as well as look into whether multiple scenes can be found in the same geographical areas. To measure the cultural aspect of scenes,

this thesis will look into the cultural repertoires that people use to give meaning to their neighborhood rather than working with the categories and elements that are provided by Silver and Clark (2016). Lamont and Thévenot (2000) developed the concept of national cultural repertoires to be able to analyze cultural differences. These repertoires can be best seen as schemas of evaluation, of which the availability varies across different groups (Lamont & Thévenot, 2000; Lamont et al., 2017). According to Lamont (1992), “Values are rarely created anew: the boundaries that we draw often have a rule-like status, being mediated by the cultural repertoires that our environment puts at our disposal” (p. 130).

However, the concept of cultural repertoires also challenges ideas about cultural homogeneity. Like the concept of scenes, repertoires offer an alternative to deterministic perspectives of place. Different groups of people have different schemas at their disposal and are thus enabled or constrained to see and understand the world in certain ways. However, although cultural repertoires are shared with others, individuals can actively choose the cultural repertoires they use, which allows for differentiation within a group and within a single actor (Lamont, 1992; Lamont, Beljean & Clair, 2014; Lamont & Small, 2008).

## **2. Differentiation and boundary drawing**

Scenes create differentiation as people move into the neighborhoods that fit their own needs, interests and values. Cities are thus becoming arenas for displaying and consuming certain lifestyles (Zukin, 2010). Symbolic boundaries, or the criteria that individuals use to categorize themselves, create inclusion or exclusion (Lamont, 1992). Hence, Savage et al. (2018) find in their research on the formation of cultural capital in the cities of London and Brussels that the process of boundary drawing is more and more linked to (urban) place(s) as where one lives or spends time says something about the social and personal identity of that person.

In determining what is a ‘good’, ‘hip’ or ‘attractive’ neighborhood, the idea of authenticity plays an important role (Michael, 2015; Prieur & Savage, 2013; Friedman & Reeves, 2020; Zukin, 2010). Zukin (2010), who focused on the transformation of neighborhoods in New York city states that “a city is authentic if it can create the experience of origins” (p.3). Authenticity is not inherent in a place, but has to be attributed to it (Michael, 2015). It has become a tool to both look at and consume urban places, such as neighborhoods. Whether or not a place is seen as authentic depends upon its distinctiveness and history (Michael, 2015; Zukin, 2010).

In addition to authenticity, the cosmopolitanism of a place is becoming increasingly important. Cosmopolitanism can be seen as an openness to and desire for diversity (Prieur & Savage, 2013; Rössel & Schroedter, 2015; Young, Diep & Drabble, 2006). Cities or neighborhoods nowadays profile themselves as cosmopolitan in order to be attractive. Cosmopolitan cities are sometimes even seen as ideal cities where encounters with differences and foreign practices are taking place, the cultural consumption of goods and services from different cultures is possible and togetherness in difference is created (Rössel & Schroedter, 2015; Young, Diep & Drabble, 2006). However, even in cosmopolitan places ‘others’ are still excluded and boundaries are drawn between acceptable and unacceptable differences (Young, Diep & Drabble, 2006).

The process of boundary drawing happens mainly unconsciously and is often in contrast with moral evaluations. Most people hold both egalitarian views<sup>1</sup> and hierarchical views<sup>2</sup>. This causes tension within one's own beliefs, especially for well educated people who in general hold strong beliefs of egalitarianism yet distinguish themselves from others by judging their social position and worth on the basis of aesthetic taste judgments (van den Haak & Wilterdink, 2019). Besides, distinction in taste goes hand in hand with morality. For example, what is seen as beautiful, is often also perceived as good (Kuipers, Franssen & Holla, 2019; van den Haak & Wilterdink, 2019).

Furthermore, no city or neighborhood is an island and their scenes only become meaningful in comparison to others (Silver & Clark, 2016). Boundaries are being drawn between different neighborhoods or scenes and the process of meaning making differs between groups of people. What is defined as a 'good' or 'bad' neighborhood is not the same to everyone. It depends on characteristics of the group, such as class or ethnic background, and the characteristics of a place, like its level of neighborliness<sup>3</sup> or transgressions<sup>4</sup> (Fiore & Plate, 2021; Silver & Clark, 2016).

Additionally, the definition of the neighborhood is entangled with power structures. What is seen as beautiful, authentic and hip by groups of people who are part of the dominant culture, is often indeed perceived as a 'good' neighborhood by official and government authorities (Fiore & Plate, 2021).

### **3. Disadvantaged neighborhoods**

To better understand how boundary drawing differs across various groups of people, it is relevant to look at (relatively) disadvantaged neighborhoods. These types of neighborhoods are interesting because they are usually characterized by high numbers of ethnic minority groups, they often attract middle class people and they are prone to processes of gentrification. This indicates that they are places where different groups of people live together, and where it is likely to find different distinctive scenes.

#### **3.1. The middle class and disadvantaged neighborhoods**

The renewed growth of cities is partly due to the attraction of young and highly educated people who move to urban centers because of the more general transformation towards a knowledge economy, the expansion of higher education and the rising importance and attractiveness of urban culture (Deboosere, 2012; Silver & Clark, 2015). In respectively the context of London as well as Brussels and Montréal, Butler (1997) and Van Criekingén and Decroly (2003) speak of a new urban elite or new middle class, consisting of young urban professionals (yuppies), who are highly educated and are usually middle class, that want to live in cosmopolitan environments to distinguish themselves from the middle class living in the suburbs.

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<sup>1</sup> The belief that everyone should be equal in value

<sup>2</sup> The belief that one's own group's values and norms are superior

<sup>3</sup> How well you know your neighbors and the sense of community spirit

<sup>4</sup> Not following the dominant values and norms

People with a middle class background usually have the means and opportunities to choose where they want to live and whether or not to attach themselves to that place. More and more, they are drawn to (relatively) disadvantaged neighborhoods (Frank & Weck, 2018; Klekotko, 2020; Weck & Hanhörster, 2015; Zukin, 2011). To explain this, Pinkster (2014) looks at neighborhoods in Amsterdam and the Hague and puts forward three theories. Firstly, middle class residents may not see their neighborhood as deprived and stress the ordinariness of the place or the attractive price-quality ratio of housing. Secondly, stigmas and disadvantages of the neighborhood are being recognized but the middle class residents believe that these do not outweigh the benefits of living in the neighborhood. Besides, although the negative reputation may have some effect on the social status of the middle class people, this impact is rather limited because their already high social status buffers the stigmatizing effect of the neighborhood. Thirdly, symbolic boundaries are not only drawn between but also within neighborhoods. Indeed, in their research on mixed neighborhoods in German cities, Weck and Hanhörster (2015) point out that having a social mix does not necessarily lead to social mixing. Some middle class households living in ethnically diverse neighborhoods take part in mixed networks, while most others don't. Although most people describe the diversity of their neighborhood as an asset, they differ on the diversity of their social contacts and the perception of the neighborhood. Together, these studies indicate that middle class residents seem to neither identify with the existing neighborhood nor do they wish to change it to their own needs and preferences, as is the case with gentrification (Pinkster, 2014; Weck & Hanhörster, 2015).

This creates two groups, urbanity seekers who move to disadvantaged neighborhoods because of their urban qualities, such as being close to work, public transport to city center or number of amenities, and diversity seekers who value their neighborhood for its diversity and have a socially heterogeneous network (Weck & Hanhörster, 2015). In her research, Klekotko (2019) identifies Neukölln, Berlin as an 'egalitarian' scene, hence a scene that is characterized by strong egalitarian views. She points out that 'the privileged', people with a middle class background who choose to live in an egalitarian scene, take over some of the aesthetics of the 'unprivileged'. Besides, interests are shared between the different groups, which leads to community action. This egalitarian scene is not only found in mixed neighborhoods but also corresponds with the presence of middle class residents who hold strong egalitarian and cosmopolitan beliefs.

The question arises what makes these neighborhoods attractive to middle class residents. First, their ethnic diversity can be a catalyst for vibrant urban centers (Audretsch, Lehmann, & Seitz, 2019; Zukin, 1995). As discussed before, people with a middle class background often hold egalitarian and cosmopolitan beliefs. However, they are usually more attracted to neighborhoods with moderate levels of diversity rather than the areas with almost exclusively migrant populations (Foster, Grondach & Murdoch, 2016; Young, Diep, & Drabble, 2006). The presence of a large group of people with a shared minority background can create a sense of group threat for the majority population because of the power position the minority group is in at a local level (Alanya et al., 2017; Boschman, 2018). The admiration for diversity is also linked to the idea of authenticity because diversity is seen as a unique and historical aspect of a neighborhood (Zukin, 2011).



Secondly, Kourit and Nijkamp (2018) find that the atmosphere of Dutch cities, which they refer to as ambience, matters. The authors categorize what they call the creative class in three groups, namely the creative professionals (e.g. corporate managers, nurses, legal professionals and social workers), the creative core (e.g. teaching professionals, social scientists, public service administrative professionals and engineers) and bohemians (e.g. writers, artists, photographers and models)<sup>5</sup>. They find that people belonging to the creative core as well as bohemians are nowadays overrepresented in cities because of the atmosphere of the inner city neighborhoods. Especially authentic urban atmospheres are positively evaluated (Savage et al., 2018; Zukin, 2011). For example, areas with warehouses and former working class houses within larger cities are highly valued because the elements of deprivation are seen as authentic (Zukin, 2011).

Thirdly, a vibrant life, often due to the implementation of certain amenities, cultural projects or festivities can also influence the neighborhood (Mouate, 2019; Savage et al., 2018; Silver & Clark, 2016; Toestand vzw, 2018; 2016; Zukin, 1995). They can be used by cities to put themselves and their neighborhoods on the map. For example, events such as music festivals can be used to enhance or create the liveliness of a neighborhood and to promote a specific image of this place (Wynn & Yetis-Bayraktar, 2016).

### 3.2. Ethnic enclaves vs. ethnic scenes

(Super)diversity is an important and prominent characteristic in today's cities. Although it can be a source of attraction, Birdsall, Halauniova & van de Kamp (2021) note that diversity is also often believed to have problematic consequences because it implies that groups of people with various backgrounds have to live tighter despite their differing, or even clashing, cultures. This is especially the case when this diversity is simplified to ethnic or religious backgrounds. Neighborhoods with high levels of residents with a migration background are generally seen as ethnic enclaves and disadvantaged neighborhoods since immigrants are often underprivileged and they frequently arrive in transit neighborhoods which they will leave once they have the opportunity (Kataure & Walton-Roberts, 2012; Van Hamme, Grippa & Van Criekingen, 2016). Segregation is usually seen as involuntary and the result of economic disadvantage and discrimination (Hatziprokopiou, Frangopoulos & Montagne, 2016). However, this is not always the case. Residential segregation sometimes remains, even for second generation migrants who climbed the social ladder to a higher social class and have high levels of education (Kataure & Walton-Roberts, 2012).

Little research has been done about whether people from minority groups, who are living in those neighborhoods consciously choose to stay there. Yet, Silver and Clark (2016) point out that some neighborhoods labeled as disadvantaged also have high concentrations of specific amenities. Segregation does not have to be involuntary (Hatziprokopiou, Frangopoulos & Montagne, 2016), and can thus be the result of a deliberate choice. Some studies point out that the presence of a large population of a minority group increases the

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<sup>5</sup> This classification is based on 'the standard European classification of creative classes' (see van Aalst, I., Atzema, O., Boschma, R. & van Oort, F. (2006). "Creatieve Klasse en Economische Groei in Stedelijk Nederland." In *Creatief Vermogen*, edited by B. Hofstede and S. Raes, 123–55. Den Haag, the Netherlands: Elsevier Overheid)

level of residential satisfaction for members of the same minority group (Alanya et al., 2017; Boschman, 2018; Hatziprokopiou, Frangopoulos & Montagne, 2016). However, paradoxically, minorities in ethnic neighborhoods report more discrimination (Alanya et al., 2017). This may be a consequence of stigmatization and the negative media correspondence that is often associated with certain communities and neighborhoods that are perceived as ethnic enclaves (Vandecandelaere, 2012; Alanya et al., 2017).

Besides, scenes do not necessarily arise from a concentration of shared cultural meanings. These shared cultural meanings can also be the consequence of the presence of amenities and a certain community in an area due to factors such as historical processes or economic reasons (Silver & Clark, 2016). As Hatziprokopiou, Frangopoulos and Montagne (2016) illustrate, people with a migration background take part in ethnic entrepreneurship. This can lead to an interactive system where ethnicity is commodified and part of the goods and services offered. However, what has been given less attention is that these businesses may also be places to meet, see and be seen for ethnic minorities. Hence, these businesses can play a significant role in the transnational networks of people with a migration background (Hatziprokopiou, Frangopoulos & Montagne, 2016). Ethnic entrepreneurship affects the space in which these businesses are located and brings forward certain ways of living (Hatziprokopiou, Frangopoulos & Montagne, 2016). According to the urban competition approach, which rejects the idea of dominant culture, every social group can exploit cultural capital, yet is simply not as latent in communities of working class or ethnic minorities. Still, even the cultures and traditions of these classes can be commodified in order to make the neighborhood more attractive to various groups of people (Bridge, 2006).

Additionally, the image of an ethnic enclave consisting of one homogenous ethnic group is often too simplistic to describe the neighborhoods of today's cities. As a consequence of globalization, there is a diversification of diversity, which results in European cities that are characterized with superdiversity (Vertovec, 2007). While minorities are indeed often overrepresented in deprived neighborhoods, the presence of people with a migration background also helps shape the city (Geldof, 2016). Likewise, it is no longer tenable to speak of clearly defined ethnic or migrant groups and segregation is not only influenced by ethnicity and migration background but also by factors such as class and power structures (Hatziprokopiou, Frangopoulos & Montagne, 2016)

### 3.3. Gentrification

Within disadvantaged neighborhoods, there is often a process of gentrification happening. Gentrification has many definitions, often with a focus on the economic aspect, that is the rising rent prices which force people to move out of their neighborhoods. However, in addition to this financial aspect, culture also plays an important role (Birdsall, Halauniova & van de Kamp, 2021). Exclusion and inclusion in gentrified areas are partly based on cultural barriers such as exclusive taste (Zukin, 2008). Besides, whether the changes that are taking place in these areas that are seen as 'good' or 'positive' depends upon who you ask (Mouate, 2019; Savage et al., 2018).

Power structures and the unequal distribution of capital plays a part in the process of gentrification. Usually, a neighborhood is transformed in favor of the taste of a specific,

usually new middle class, group (Bridge, 2006). Besides, there is a reinforcing relationship between different forms of capital in the process of gentrification. Cultural capital does not only allows the higher middle class and creative class to transform deprived or unpopular neighborhoods to spaces that correspond to their lifestyles, changing its 'look and feel', it also leads to an increasing popularity of the neighborhood, with rising house prices and the attraction of even more inhabitants who share certain cultural and aesthetic preferences and which can enlarge the economic and social capital of the new residents (Bridge, 2006; Savage et al., 2018; Zukin, 2016).

Gentrification usually leads to, among other things, new housing, office buildings and leisure infrastructures that match the lifestyles of the new residents and visitors (Bridge, 2006; Lees, Slater & Wyly, 2008; Valli, 2021; Van Criekingen & Decroly, 2003). Thus, in most cases, gentrification is about the creation of a new middle class scene that often drives away other inhabitants, replaces amenities and becomes attractive to others who share the lifestyles of these new urban middle class residents.

However, Van Criekingen and Decroly (2003) stress that there are alternatives to this specific type of gentrification which involve the influx of different groups of people than the new middle class and yuppies, for example families with children or people with a lower socioeconomic background. Besides, gentrification often starts with individuals and households who oppose the mainstream culture and are looking for spaces for alternative lifestyles, such as artists or members of the LGBTQ+ community (Audretsch, Lehmann & Seitz, 2019; Van Criekingen & Decroly, 2003). According to Zukin (2011), these are groups of people who want to go against the mainstream norms by performing alternative consumption. When they are in the capacity to move to a place of choice, they often settle in deprived neighborhoods and create new spaces of consumption there. This attracts attention and eventually leads to an inflow of other groups of people, such as yuppies, and thus to gentrification. Paradoxically, the groups who initiated the process of gentrification are often among the displaced groups themselves and are critical towards gentrification (Valli, 2021). Next to this group of early gentrifiers, it are often mainly migrant or ethnic minorities who are being displaced (Hatziprokopiou, Frangopoulos & Montagne, 2016). There is thus a delicate balance between having a negative reputation at the stakes of stigmatization and being seen as hip which can lead to gentrification that affects both the migrant or ethnic minorities and the more privileged alternative lifestyle communities (Klekotko, 2019).

Besides, the initiation and implementation of new projects and businesses, be it by state actors, local residents or others, and the revitalization of neighborhoods does not necessarily lead to gentrification in the sense of transforming a disadvantaged or decayed neighborhood into a wealthier one with an improved built environment, social status growth and population change (Van Criekingen & Decroly, 2003). Changes that take the needs and preference of the original residents and others who make use of the neighborhood into account are also possible (Garboden & Jang-Trettien, 2020; Silver & Clark, 2016).

Besides, local communities can also influence their neighborhood themselves. For example, migrant entrepreneurship can also lead to the revitalization of a neighborhood, especially by using the commodification of ethnicity and diversity to attract new residents, consumers and

tourists (Hatziprokopiou, Frangopoulos & Montagne, 2016). Furthermore, children of the 'old or original residents' often differ in lifestyle and cultural preference and can be part of 'the new residents' themselves (Silver & Clark, 2016). On top of that, strong neighborhood associations can keep newcomers out or integrate them into their scene (Silver & Clark, 2016).

#### **4. Breaking boundaries and building bridges**

Disadvantaged neighborhoods are thus capable of attracting middle class people as well as ethnic minorities and are places that are prone to processes of gentrification that attract new groups of people who might change the neighborhood to their own needs and preferences. However, research on disadvantaged neighborhoods using a scenes perspective remains limited and narrow in focus. Although previous research about the presence of ethnic minorities as well as gentrification indicate that culture plays an important role, not much is known about whether this leads to the creation of different scenes and how these different scenes relate. Overall, this highlights the need for a better understanding of how scenes can break boundaries and build bridges.

Scenes provide opportunities for bonding and bridging. On the one hand, a scene brings forward specific types of interactions and practices, which leads to the emergence of different communities. This facilitates and increases bonding, a form of social capital within homogenous social networks (Putnam, 2000). However, a scene can also build bridges, or in other words, social capital between socially heterogeneous groups. For example, a scene can put differences between race or class to the background by choosing an equal kind of lifestyle that fits a certain scene (Kleotko, 2019; Putnam, 2000; Silver, Clark & Yanez, 2010).

Besides, if there would indeed be more than one scene present in a specific location, overlapping cultural repertoires may facilitate contact and influence to what extent different groups of individuals who live in mixed neighborhoods participate in bridging and social mixing (Silver & Clark, 2016; Weck & Hanhörster, 2015). According to Allport's (1954) contact theory, more positive contact with diverse neighbors increases positive attitudes. However, according to the earlier mentioned threat theory, negative contact would increase negative attitudes (Alanya et al., 2017; Boschman, 2018). When having similar cultural repertoire, groups share values and give similar meanings to their neighborhood, which may increase the positive contact between them. The contrary is also true, disparate and different cultural repertoires that clash might lead to negative encounters.

#### **5. Case studies: two of Brussels' neighborhoods**

Brussels is a superdiverse and multicultural city, not only regarding national and ethnic backgrounds but also lifestyles, consumption patterns and subcultures (Vandecandelaere, 2012; Vertovec, 2019). Although Vertovec's (2007) findings regarding superdiversity were about London, it is also true for Brussels that the still somewhat orderly and manageable migration of the guest workers up until the early 1990s has been replaced by flows of migration from almost all countries in the world. But superdiversity goes further than that,

including amongst others gender, languages, religion and migration channels and statuses differ significantly amongst migrants (Vandecandelaere, 2012).

Brussels is a relatively small city with a strong fragmentation and segregation between its neighborhoods. Yet, different types of neighborhoods, including disadvantaged ones, are well connected and close to each other (Corijn & van de Ven, 2013; Van Hamme, Grippa & Van Criekingen, 2016). A clear example of this is the canal that runs through Brussels and forms a physical as well as socioeconomic border between the poorest and most deprived communities and the rest of Brussels (Corijn & van de Ven, 2013; Van Hamme, 2010).

Socioeconomic factors have been the main focus when analyzing Brussels' deprived neighborhoods. Much research has been done on the influence of educational level, ethnicity and economic capacity on residential segregation (Moderbacher, 2020; Van Hamme, 2010; Van Hamme, Grippa & Van Criekingen, 2016).

What is less clear is to what extent culture plays a role in Brussels' fragmentation and segregation. However, the (super)diversity in Brussels in regard to ethnic background, lifestyles, consumption patterns and subcultures indicates a need to better understand this cultural aspect. Therefore, it is interesting to look at Brussels from a scenes perspective and to examine how different scenes relate to each other.

Within this segregated, diverse and cosmopolitan city, the neighborhoods of Matonge and Molenbeek can be found. They provide good case studies as both neighborhoods are known for their high levels of respectively people with a Sub-Saharan African and people with a North African background. Over the years, they have often been seen as ethnic enclaves. However, other groups of people can be found in the neighborhoods as well because Matonge is nowadays improving its reputation while there is gentrification happening in Molenbeek (Arnout, 2019; Demart, 2008; Steffens, 2007; European Institute of Peace, 2017).

## 5.1. Matonge

*“And Matonge has more to offer than wigs, nails and dried fish: it's a fascinating place to soak up a mix of African culture, bobo (the much-derided bourgeois-bohème) hangouts and historic Brussels.”* (Beddington, the guardian, 2013)

Matonge is a meeting place where people from Brussels, Belgium and Europe with Sub-Saharan African roots come together. The name Matonge refers to a district in Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo because of the many similarities between the Belgian and Congolese neighborhood during the 1970s. After Congo's independence in 1960, a flow of migration of Congolese students, diplomats, tourists and traders took place (Demart, 2008). This is in contrast to the more general migration pattern during the 1960s since most of the other migrants arriving in Belgium and Brussels were unschooled guest workers who were actively recruited to work in the Belgian mines and other industrial sectors to compensate for a shortage of labor force within Belgium itself (Vandecandelaere, 2012). Many of the Congolese migrants settled near three major emerging hotspots in Ixelles, namely the Africa House, the nightclub 'Le Mambo' and the prestigious Ixelles trade gallery,

which at the time was gradually being abandoned by Belgian traders causing empty spaces that Congolese traders could take over (Demart, 2008, Arnout, 2019).

The district changed during the 1980s. There was still a high level of migration from Zaire<sup>6</sup> but these were mainly migrants leaving their country because of the socioeconomic crisis. The decline in purchasing power of Congolese migrants in Brussels led to the gradual closure of the gallery's trade premises (Demart, 2008). Conflicts in Rwanda and Burundi also led to an increase in less educated and wealthy migrants from other Sub-Saharan African countries (Christelle & Debeuckelaere, 2019).

The abandoned gallery was increasingly used for drug trafficking and the media started to describe Matonge in a negative light, linking the black population to crime (Demart, 2008). Especially in the 2000s, there were several confrontations with the police and the state (Arnout, 2019). This also reflects itself in the number of closed-circuit television (CCTV) that is present in Matonge that is due to the socioeconomic context and its perception as a dangerous place (De Keersmaecker & Debailleul, 2016).

Although at first glance it seems as if the glory days of Matonge lie in the past, its history makes the neighborhood a unique place. Often it is linked to ideas of post-independence and postcolonialism, a place where people of Sub-Saharan African origin still come to see and be seen (Demart, 2008).

Matonge can be described as a superdiverse neighborhood. Despite the fact that the neighborhood has strong ties with Africa, and Congo in particular, it is far from being an African enclave. Matonge has never been a residential place for African migrants and besides African visitors and facilities, you can also find many people with different backgrounds in this neighborhood. You do not only find African cuisine but can go for a quick meal in a fast food restaurant or a bowl of noodles at one of the local Asian restaurants (Demart, 2013). Besides, more and more people with Pakistani or other Asian backgrounds work their way into a trade that is aimed at an African audience (Vandecandelaere, 2012). Nowadays the neighborhood's cosmopolitan and colorful character is often highlighted and marketed (Arnout, 2019). These characteristics make Matonge an attractive place, especially for the new urban middle class.

Because of its location between the city center, the rich neighborhood Flagey and the European quarter there has been a large influx of European migrants working for the European Union. This has caused a process of gentrification, mainly of certain streets directly surrounding Matonge (Demart, 2008). Thus, there is not so much a question of gentrification of the neighborhood itself, but it is rather surrounded by gentrified areas. Besides, given that there are not many people with an African background living in the neighborhood, there is no case of gentrification in the sense of displacement of residents as rising rent prices for residential living space would not directly impact this specific group. Still, being enclosed by the rising surrounding scene may be experienced as a threat (Demart, 2008).

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<sup>6</sup> The name of the Democratic Republic of Congo at that time

## 5.2. Molenbeek

*“This is an outrage. Splintered Belgium had lost control of Molenbeek. A heavily Muslim district of Brussels had in effect seceded.”* (Roger Cohen, The New York Times, 2016)

Molenbeek has a negative reputation. Ever since the terror attacks in Paris in 2015, the municipality has been in the international media due to the fact that there are links between terrorism and Molenbeek. Like Matonge, this negative perception can be seen in the number of CCTV that is present in Molenbeek (De Keersmaecker & Debailleul, 2016).

However, efforts are also being made to challenge this reputation. If you look beyond the headlines printed on the front pages of international newspapers, you can find testimonies from people living in Molenbeek who disagree with this image as a dangerous place and ethnic enclave (Laumonier, 2016; Thompson, 2015).

This paper will focus on ‘Lower Molenbeek’. Although it is not officially recognized by the municipality or Brussels-capital region (region) as such, it is a neighborhood in the south part of Molenbeek that is being separated from Brussels by the canal. The reason to focus on this specific part of Molenbeek is because this is the place that is mainly referred to in the media. Elements linked to the municipality's negative reputation, such as a high number of inhabitants with North-African roots and high unemployment rates, are here the most prominent (Steffens, 2007; European Institute of Peace, 2017). There is debate about whether the canal zone is part of Lower Molenbeek, while other times it is not because gentrification is very present in this zone. This creates a large contrast between this zone and the rest of Lower Molenbeek, with little interaction (studio020Paolaviganò & Walloth Urban Advisors, n.d.). For this research the choice was made to include the canal zone.

There undoubtedly is a large Moroccan community in Lower Molenbeek. The neighborhood first served as a place of arrival for Flemish and Walloon workers who were later replaced by migrant workers, mainly from Moroccan descent (Corijn & van de Ven, 2013; European Institute of Peace, 2017). Therefore, it is sometimes referred to as *Klein Marokko* (little Morocco) or *Petit Marrakech* (little Marrakech) (Steffens, 2007). In 2013, about 71% of the inhabitants of Molenbeek had a migration background, of which up to 40% had Moroccan origins. These numbers are estimated to be higher in Lower Molenbeek (European Institute of Peace, 2017). For the sake of simplicity, from here on ‘Molenbeek’ will be used to refer to ‘Lower Molenbeek’, unless mentioned explicitly.

Molenbeek is often seen as a transit neighborhood where migrants arrive and either are stuck or leave as soon as they have the economic capital to do so (Van Hamme, Grippa & Van Criekingen, 2016). However, there are some indications that Molenbeek also has cultural qualities that attract certain people. The trendy, hip and mainly Flemish neighborhood Dansaert that is characterized by wine or cocktail bars, boutiques, flower shops and coffee bars stops abruptly at the canal and is replaced by Chaussée de Gand, where you find oriental food, furniture, modest fashion and halal meat (Corijn & van de Ven, 2013). However, it is important to take into account that, despite the fact that there is a large population of Moroccans and an even more strongly presence of a Moroccan atmosphere,

Molenbeek can be seen as superdiverse and is influenced by many more groups of people lifestyles (Corijn & van de Ven, 2013; European Institute of Peace, 2017; Vandecandelaere, 2012). As Corijn & van de Ven (2013, p. 174) state “the culturally diverse and migrant atmosphere in Historical Molenbeek is largely the result of the various ethnic roots and the many different lifestyles of its inhabitants.”.

Molenbeek provides a classic example of gentrification. It is a rather disadvantaged neighborhood that is located in the poor halfmoon of Brussels (Corijn & van de Ven, 2013; European Institute of Peace, 2017; Van Hamme, Grippa & Van Criecken, 2016; Vandecandelaere, 2012). Molenbeek has a low net income per inhabitant (European Institute of Peace, 2017) and real estate prices are low for Brussels standards, which is partly due to the municipality's negative reputation but also its history as an industrial area and popular neighborhood (Corijn & van de Ven, 2013; European Institute of Peace, 2017). Besides, the number of empty and vacant spaces in the canal zone, often large buildings and factories, make the area interesting for real estate developers (Corijn & van de Ven, 2013; Toestand vzw, 2018). In addition to increasing interest of commercial developers, the city of Brussels and Molenbeek itself are investing in the municipality through the implementation of sustainable neighborhood contracts, also with a strong focus on the canal area (Lambert, 2016; Fadil & Kolly, 2019; France24, 2018). This process of gentrification does not only imply the reorganization of infrastructure and amenities in Molenbeek, it also means that new, different groups of people come to the area. Coexistence between these new groups and the current inhabitants of Molenbeek is necessary (Fadil & Kolly, 2019).

Not only are there clear boundaries between different neighborhoods in Brussels, processes of differentiation and boundary drawing are also taking place within neighborhoods. Both Matonge and Molenbeek can be considered disadvantaged neighborhoods, although Matonge's changing reputation may indicate that this is starting to shift somewhat for this neighborhood today. Therefore, the Brussels' neighborhoods offer the opportunity to look into whether there are indeed middle class residents who are attracted to the neighborhoods and create their own scenes, whether there can also be spoken of ethnic scenes and whether processes of gentrification create new scenes.



# Methods

## 1. Qualitative approach: walkabouts and visual material

The data for this thesis is collected in a qualitative way. A criticism on the work of Silver and Clark's is that they try to quantify scenes in their own empirical research (Borer, 2017; Donahue, 2019). They choose to analyze which sorts of amenities are present in a certain place, with the latter being defined as the area that falls under one zip code. This makes it possible to cover the entire territory of the United States and determine the scene of each of these places (Silver & Clark, 2016). Yet Silver himself, this time in collaboration with Miller, states that scenes cannot be reduced to the amenities that are present in a given area (Miller & Silver, 2015). By using a qualitative in-depth approach and focusing particularly on Matonge and Molenbeek, it becomes possible to not only take amenities into account but also look at the unique connections between place, people, amenities and shared cultural repertoires and examine whether there are more than one scene present in each neighborhood.

More specifically, this research collected data using walkabouts. With this research method, interviews are conducted during a walk (Kinney, 2017). Walkabouts are mainly suitable for looking at the relationship between people and place as it allows for a multi-sensory experience. In addition to descriptions given by the respondent, the researcher also experiences the place in a sensory way. For example, say a respondent would talk about a place as energetic and busy, the researcher can experience this because she or he can actually hear the noise, see the gathering of people and feel the energy (Emmel & Clark, 2007; Evans & Jones, 2011; Strang, 2010). To be sure to capture these impressions, notes were made after each interview to supplement the transcripts of the interviews. Another important advantage is that conducting interviews while walking promotes spontaneity and makes having a conversation easier. For example, silences and breaks feel more natural, whereas in a traditional interview longer silences often mean the end of the conversation. Walking during interviews creates more time to think for the respondent (Evans & Jones, 2011; Kinney, 2017). Last but not least, walkabouts are a safe way to collect data in times of COVID-19, since the interviews are conducted outside and sufficient distance can be kept.

Like any research method, the use of walkabouts also has drawbacks. It is possible that the weather has an impact on the length but also on the content of the interview, especially when it rains heavily during the walk (Carpiano, 2009; Evans & Jones, 2011; Kinney, 2017). Because heavy rain was forecast, one of the interviews was postponed to another day but apart from that, it seems like the weather did not affect the length of any of the interviews. It is also important to take into account that parts of the interview may not be audible on the audio recording (Carpiano, 2009). This was the case a few times, but only with respect to one or two sentences within a fragment and did not cause serious problems in understanding what the respondent was talking about. In addition, it is best to keep track of the route taken during the interview and the specific places discussed while collecting the data because it may be difficult to know which specific place is being talked about on the audio recording when analyzing the data (Carpiano, 2009). In this study, the locations which were discussed were regularly mentioned out loud during the interviews. In addition, the routes were

recorded via the mobile app “STRAVA”. This sports app was designed for run and cycling tracking and indicates on a map which route has been followed. It also has options such as adding a title, photos and a description to each recorded walk. This made it a suitable way to track the route of each walkabout in a clear and structured way without being a distraction during the interviews.

The interviews that were conducted during the walks were participatory and semi-structured. This means that the routes were chosen by the respondents but that it did not necessarily have to be a route that they often follow themselves. Respondents were given the freedom to choose which locations in their neighborhood they wanted to show and talk about (Kinney, 2017). In this way, the choice of the routes also provides an insight into which places are perceived as important. The walkabouts were conducted in February, March and April 2021.

Walkabouts are often supplemented with visual material (Carpiano, 2009; Evans & Jones, 2011; Strang, 2010). The choice was made not to film the interviews because this can be disruptive and can reduce the spontaneity of the conversation. Instead, pictures were taken of the places the respondents indicated as important. Pictures can add an extra dimension when analyzing the data because it allows the data from the audio recordings of the interviews to be linked more accurately to a specific geographical context and thus facilitates the interpretation of the data (Emmel & Clark, 2007; Evans & Jones, 2011). Also, the inclusion of images can enhance the representation of the research findings, especially because it is a good way to illustrate the sensory impressions of places (Clark, 2017). During the walk, some pictures were taken using a cell phone. However, since this often disrupted the flow of the interview, most pictures were taken after all the interviews were conducted. One additional walk in Molenbeek, and one in Matonge were made in April 2021 with a camera by hand to document the most prominent and important places, based on notes that were written down in a notebook after each interview.

## **2. Population and sampling**

The aim was to conduct between six and eight interviews for each neighborhood. Respondents are selected through a stratified sample with two dimensions. First, an equal distribution was sought between respondents of Belgian origin and respondents with a migration background. In Matonge this would be people with a Sub-Saharan African background and for Molenbeek the focus is on people with North-African roots because of the fact that both groups play an important role in the composition of their neighborhoods. Secondly, generational differences were taken into consideration by working with a younger generation of people below the age of thirty-five and people who have at least reached the age of thirty-five. Since the Sub-Saharan African community is important in Matonge, yet rarely live there (Vandecandelaere, 2012; Demart, 2013) respondents did not have to be living in the neighborhood. It was sufficient if they indicated to be acquainted with the neighborhood, for example by working in Matonge or by spending a significant amount of time there.

Respondents were searched in two different ways. First of all, local organizations were contacted with the question if they could help identify possible respondents. However, it turned out to be difficult to find respondents this way. There was a rather large non-response

with only about half of the contacted organizations who replied. Of these organizations, some indicated that they could not help either because of too much workload or because they did not have the right contacts at that moment, often because of COVID-19 as events or gatherings were not possible. Secondly, five open calls were posted on social media. Most respondents were obtained via these open calls on Facebook and in Facebook groups (two groups mainly consisted of members who live in Brussels and have a North-African background and one for people with a Flemish background in Brussels), and two open calls on Instagram stories. Eventually, thirteen respondents were interviewed during twelve interviews. In the first interview in Matonge, both respondent 1 and respondent 2 participated. Attachment 1 gives an overview of the respondents.

There were only two interviews in Matonge with people with a Sub-Saharan African background, of which one interview only took up twenty minutes. Not only a lack of time but also difficulties in finding respondents lay at the bottom of this. People with Sub-Saharan African background are a rather hard-to-reach group. Due to the small size of Matonge, there is only a limited number of organizations who are active in the neighborhood and would be able to link a researcher with these people. Most of the contacted organizations either did not respond or were unable to help because they had not had any contact with the neighborhood for the last year due to COVID-19. Also, because of the pandemic and corresponding regulations and lockdowns, many frequent visitors did not go to the neighborhood and were therefore unable to do a walkabout. To remediate this, Matonge was visited one extra time. People who were walking on the streets were approached with the question whether they wanted to participate in the research. This did not provide any extra respondents. However, when people indicated that they did not have the time to walk around the neighborhood, they were asked to answer a few questions instead. Four people agreed to this, which resulted in conversations of about five to ten minutes. No new or surprising elements came to light as the answers were in line with the two interviews, so there seems to be saturation.

### **3. Data collection**

Before every interview, the informed content (see attachment 2) was discussed. This informed consent was in English, Dutch or French, depending on the language in which communication with the respondent took place. When using walkabout, there is a chance that the respondents run into acquaintances (Clark & Emmel, 2010; Kinney, 2017), which indeed occurred a few times. This was communicated with the respondent beforehand and they were informed that they were free to react to these situations in the way they prefer. The interviews and routes that were taken were recorded with the consent of the respondents, using the voice recorder of a cell phone and the app STRAVA.

The topic guide that was used to conduct the interviews can be found as attachment 3. First of all, there were some introductory questions that probed for the background of the respondent and their connection to their neighborhood. Secondly, questions were asked to identify which different scenes are present. These questions were inspired by the three categories discussed earlier and their different elements that make up unique scenes as described by Silver and Clark (2015). Secondly, the interview involved questions to look at

whether respondents identify with a certain group. Thirdly, questions were asked to see whether respondents are themselves aware of different scenes in their neighborhood and if so, how they give meaning to these different scenes. Finally, a question about the reputation of the neighborhood was asked to be able to compare how this is experienced in both neighborhoods. However, the topic guide should be seen as a guideline and the order of questions was not fixed. In most cases, the respondents often spontaneously started talking about the neighborhood and answered most questions without having to ask them, especially regarding the identification of the different scenes.

The duration of the interviews varied between one and three hours, with the exception of the fifth interview which only took up twenty minutes. The interviews in Molenbeek were on average longer than those in Matonge and covered more distance. This is no surprise given the significant differences in size of the neighborhoods. The interviews were conducted in Dutch, English or French.

#### **4. Data-analysis**

First of all, the recordings of the interviews were transcribed according to edited transcription. Thus, everything that was said during the interviews, was written down with small adjustments such as leaving out stop words, stuttering and hesitations to improve the readability of the transcript. Next, the interviews were coded in Nvivo according to the cyclical process and inductive reasoning as described by grounded theory (Mortelmans, 2009). First of all, open codes were attributed to the transcripts, which resulted in 103 different codes. For example, 'Asian and Pakistani shop owners', 'spontaneous and social', and 'vivid'. Next, the fragments with the same code were viewed again. Similarities were axially coded, leading to categories such as 'diversity of people' and 'description of atmosphere'. Last, a selective coding led to the identification of nine different repertoires (see attachment 4).

## Results

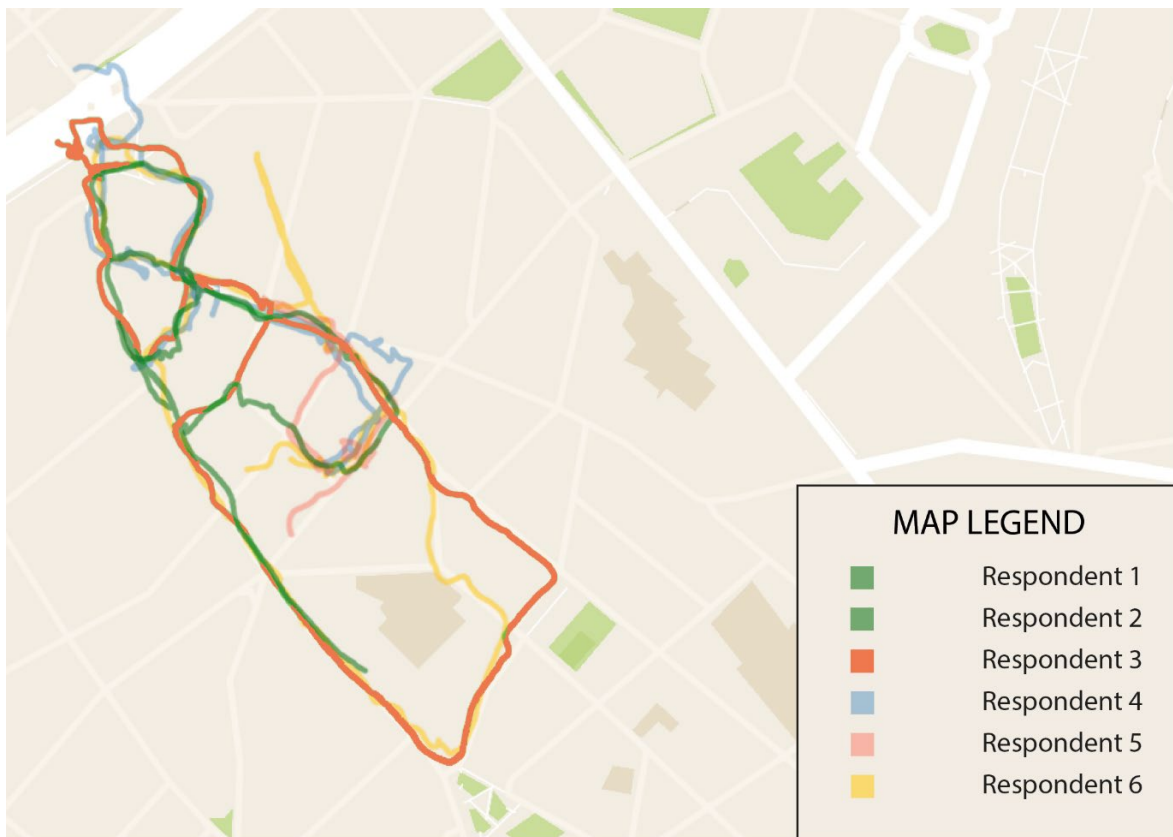
On the one hand, a scene has a geographical component where place, in this case the neighborhoods of Matonge and Molenbeek, amenities that are located in this place and the people who use the place come together. Therefore, the section 'the neighborhoods' will give a descriptive overview of the different amenities and people that can be found in Matonge and Molenbeek, locate them and indicate what the typical audience is that they attract. On the other hand, a scene is about shared values, about the consumption of cultural preferences and aesthetic ideas. The cultural repertoires that are used to describe and give meaning to the neighborhoods will be discussed in the second section.

### 1. The neighborhoods

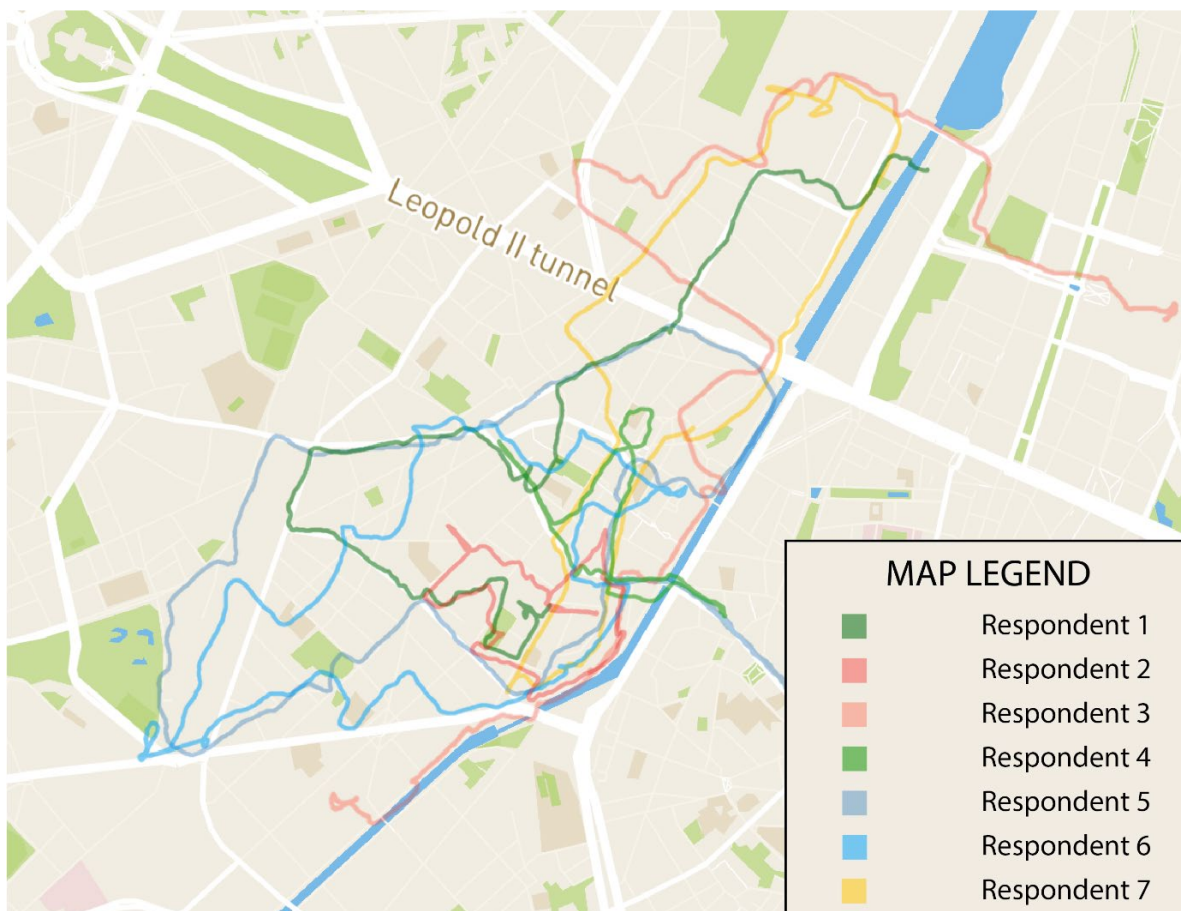
Matonge is a small neighborhood that can easily be covered in less than an hour. It is therefore no surprise that all respondents showed me more or less every street and every corner of Matonge, even the ones they normally do not go to themselves (see image 2). Molenbeek, on the other hand, can be further divided into several smaller neighborhoods or communities that are rather unknown to those who are not from the area. Although the specific community that you are part of plays a role in where in Molenbeek you hang out, who you know or where you do your shopping, the boundaries between these neighborhoods seem to be of less influence than the canal that separates Molenbeek from the center of Brussels or the *Gare de l'Ouest* railroad that forms a border between Lower-Molenbeek and Higher-Molenbeek. Covering the entire surface of Molenbeek would be an impossible task for a walk-about interview as it would take at least an entire day, if not more. Central places, such as *Chaussée de Gand* and the surrounding streets, came up in every walk. Other places, for example the canal zone, were extensively discussed by some and barely mentioned by others (see image 3). This paragraph will give a comprehensive geographical description of Matonge and -Molenbeek and look at which (groups of) people show which parts of the neighborhoods.



Map 1. The Brussels-Capital Region



Map 2. Routes walkabouts Matonge



Map 3. Routes walkabouts Molenbeek



## 1.1. Matonge

### Entering Matonge

When you step off the train at Brussels' central station, a ten minute walk will take you to Matonge (see image 1). Once you pass the *Place Royal*, i.e. the square that leads to the royal palace and where some of the most important and prestigious museums of Brussels are located, you will leave behind the crowd of tourists that are usually – in non-covid times – visiting Brussels. Take the *Rue de Namur*, a short shopping street that offers take-away coffee, an artisan florist, a small bookstore and multiple clothing boutiques. In less than five minutes, you reach the *Porte de Namur* on the R20. This three lane ring road is the only indication that you leave the center of Brussels behind and enter the municipality of Ixelles. Although less touristy, the municipality is dense and has a large number of amenities that are highly frequented. When you enter Ixelles via the *Porte de Namur*, you also enter Matonge.



Image 1. Porte de Namur

### The commercial shopping area

When you cross at the R20 and enter Matonge through the *Porte de Namur*, you first arrive in *Chaussée d'Ixelles*, which seems to be your typical shopping street. The range of stores differs from the Rue de Namur. Here, big clothing companies such as H&M or Zara dominate the street instead of little boutiques. However, some hip coffee bars and plant shops have recently found their way to *Chaussée d'Ixelles* as well. In 'färm' you can buy organic food and 'the barn' even sells its bio products plastic free. Although always briefly touched upon, this street was in itself never extensively discussed during the interviews. Only the two respondents with Flemish background who were younger than 35 mentioned the bio shops, hip coffee bars and plant shops.





Image 2. Chaussée d'Ixelles



Image 3. Organic food store 'färm'

Those who are attentive may notice some other changes besides the absence of boutiques in favor of big brands. Matonge's historical background and function as an African neighborhood starts to be visible as there are subtle but unmistakable signs of African influence and a colonial past showing in the *Port de Namur* and *Chaussée d'Ixelles*. Right next to the R20, there is the *Place Lumumba*, a small square which is dedicated to the first Prime Minister of the independent Democratic Republic of the Congo. People from the Congolese diaspora have been advocating for a statue of Lumumba but, instead, had to settle with a square and a memorial plaque. This plaque is rather small and not visible unless you go to the square, which is quite unlikely as it is between the metro entrance and the busy ring road, leading to nothing and therefore rarely used.



Image 4. Place Lumumba

A few meters further on the *Chaussée d'Ixelle* and a bit more in view, there is a large canvas with a work by the Congolese painter Chéri Samba titled *Porte de Namur, Porte de l'amour*. The painting represents the *Porte de Namur* as the entrance of Matonge and captures the busy, loud, convivial yet laid-back atmosphere of Matonge. In the painting, you can see a bustling scene of people having a drink on a terrace, women holding shopping bags filled with plantain, cassava leaves, wigs and wax, other women are braiding hair, people are kissing and others are preparing packages to send to Africa. Stereotypes about the African community are exaggerated, for example a white man asks a black man who is reading a book "since when do Africans read?". The black man puts his brain on the table to show that he does have them and responds that "Africans have always been great readers, especially 'de la parole et les B.D.'" (the bible and comic books). This painting is the first clear indication that you have entered the Sub-Saharan African neighborhood of Brussels.

### The African heart

Just a little further down the *Chaussée d'Ixelles*, on your right, you can find the *Galerie Matonge*. Again, if you don't know what you are looking for, you might pass it by without even noticing. Stepping into this gallery is like stepping into a different world. The audience, the range of stores and food, the atmosphere. To most, this is the heart of Matonge, the place where it almost feels as if you are in an African country. In the gallery, music is usually playing loud and if you visit in the afternoon, especially on weekends and when the sun is shining, lots of people are hanging around on the covered street. Usually, people are talking to acquaintances or strangers. If you hang around in Matonge, it is very likely that someone will start a conversation. At the entrance of the gallery, there are usually young African men waiting for potential clients to sell cannabis to. As long as this does not cause any significant issues, the police tolerates this. Looks and beauty play an important role in Matonge, the gallery is the place to be if you are looking for African wax or jewelry, both are very colorful. You can find a lot of salons where African women are braiding other women's hair or giving men a trim. Almost all customers have a Sub-Saharan African background apart from the occasional White man who goes in for a cheap haircut. Most of the time, these hair salons share their already cramped shop with Asian people who are doing nails. They also often use the space to sell things like CD's or arrange for packages to be sent to Africa. The street

that crosses the gallery is already small and, despite the fact that it is less busy due to Covid, many shops put things outside and people sell stuff on little tables on the street. There is also a take-away African food bar. There is no sign indicating the name or cuisine of the place. Neither is there a menu, the food is not labeled and there is no mention of the price of the food nor of the opening hours of the bar. When you order, you can just point out what you want. A little bit of everything, rice with a whole salted fish, a huge portion of beans. At the bar they will fill a single-use plastic tray until it is completely full with whatever you want. All for the same price – 5 euros. No attention is paid to the presentation of the food. If you want your food warm, you will have to ask and they put the tray in one of the microwaves for you.

A second gallery, *Galerie d'Ixelles*, has a similar set of amenities and stores as *Galerie Matonge*. This second gallery also has a Western Union for making money transfers and a travel agency that is advertising all African capital cities. Besides its African audience, this gallery is also used by a more diverse set of people as a shortcut towards the metro. However, they usually just rush by and don't shop in the stores or go to the hairdressers – even though it is a habit of the hairdressers to ask the people walking by if they want a haircut when it is calm in their salon.

It is important to note that most inhabitants of Matonge do not have Sub-Saharan African roots. None of the respondents with Sub-Saharan African roots lived in Matonge. Although the respondents who do live in the neighborhood showed me the African amenities, they do not use all of these facilities themselves. *"Now I'm going to do something I've never done myself, which is to go through the gallery of Matonge itself. There is very often very loud music there. That must be from inside. Yes, we'll see."* Although the galleries were shown by all six respondents in Matonge, two out of four respondents without Sub-Saharan African background pointed out that they had never been inside the *Galerie Matonge*. They had passed through the *Galerie d'Ixelles* before, but only to go to the subway faster. The main motive of one of the other four people from Flanders to visit the galleries was because he was involved in local politics and wanted to have a closer connection to the neighborhood. All the other respondents, thus the remaining respondent with a Flemish background as well as all respondents with Sub-Saharan African roots, used the galleries' amenities.

Neither of the galleries are in great shape. There are efforts from the people who are using the space to make it look nicer, e.g. paintings from a local artist can be found throughout the entire neighborhood on walls or as name signs from hairdressers and shops. Especially in the *Galerie Matonge* these colorful paintings catch your eye. However, this does not conceal the fact that the galleries need renovation. At one place, the wallpaper started to come loose from the ceiling and parts are laying on the floor. Another issue in the galleries, and the rest of Matonge for that matter, is clandestine dumping. Most shops simply take out their trash and put it on the street in front of the gallery. The fact that there are often problems with waste collection only enlarges this issue.





Image 5. Entrance of galerie Matonge

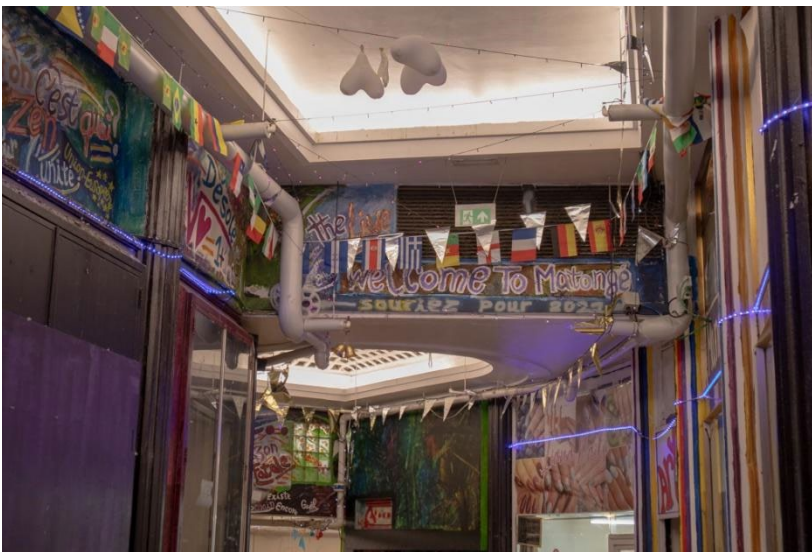


Image 6. Paintings in galerie Matonge



Image 7. Shops and street vendors inside galerie Matonge

The streets between *Chaussée d'Ixelles* and *Chaussée du Wavre* offer a wide variety of African restaurants, shops and bon marches (small, cheap shops with vegetables and other food). The audience that these amenities attract differs from place to place.

Some bars and restaurants are a meeting place for people with Sub-Saharan African roots or for people who identify with a specific nationality or ethnic group. Others host a more diverse and mixed audience. Thus, even though it is not by far a Sub-Saharan African enclave and it is important to keep in mind that 'Sub-Saharan African roots' is an umbrella term that encompasses many differences as well, it can be said that most the amenities in this area offer a predominant African range of products to a primary African audience. An exception to this is *Rue Longue Vie*, a small street with a few African restaurants that differ from the other restaurants in the area. First of all, they attract a different audience, such as Belgian tourists or Eurocrats. Secondly, these restaurants look more colorful, it is stressed that they are African and they have a terrace, which is not the case for most other restaurants. Besides, more attention is paid to the presentation of the food.

The shops that are located in this part of Matonge offer a broad range of diverse products, especially when it comes to beauty and hair products. Wigs in different sizes, colors and shapes are displayed in most shop windows. The bon marches are usually operated by Pakistani businessmen but they too sell African products such as sweet potatoes, okra, manioc plantain, cassava, smoked meat and salted fish.

In short, almost all of the amenities that can be found in the galleries and on the few streets between *Chaussée d'Ixelles* and *Chaussée du Wavre* offer African products or services. This area is busy and loud, yet also à l'aise and laid back. It is a place where people with a Sub-Saharan African background meet and hang out. They do not only come from different parts of Brussels, but from all over Belgium and the neighboring countries (mainly France, Germany and the Netherlands), to do their shopping, but also to see and be seen.



Image 8. Bon Marché





Image 9. Rue Longue Vie



Image 10. Wigs and beauty products in a shop window

### St. Boniface

Not everything in Matonge is African. Besides the shops on *Chaussée d'Ixelle*, there is also *Place St. Boniface*. This little square in front of the St. Boniface church is normally one big terrace. Every building on the square hosts a restaurant. With the closing of the catering industry due to Covid-19, the square seems rather dead. However, in contrast to the rest of Matonge, you don't find a lot of African restaurants here. The food that is offered is diverse and includes Belgian, Italian, Japanese, Mauritanian-Belgian, French, Korean and many more. It is generally more expensive to eat here than in the African restaurants across Matonge. Another big difference is the customers, who are generally White middle class or eurocrats. *St. Boniface* is not always seen as a part of Matonge and is sometimes seen as a neighborhood on its own. One respondent states "ah no no those are totally different neighborhoods they have nothing to do with each other". *St. Boniface* is located between Matonge, the European quarter and the richer eastern part of Ixelles. It can therefore also be seen as a sort of transition area. As respondent 6 noted "That's the crazy thing, if you come out of my room and turn right, you're in rich Brussels. You take five steps to the left

and you're in Africa, so to speak. And I find that mega charming and cool. Well, where we live, St. Boniface is actually quite a transition, I'll tell you that."

Around and behind *Place de St. Boniface*, you find coffee bars, take-away restaurants and local pubs. At the *Place de Fernand Coque*, where the administration of Ixelles is located, there is Renard Bakery. Usually, people are waiting in line in front of this bakery as it has an outstanding reputation and is very popular within Brussels. However, it is unlikely that in this line, you will find the people who are doing their shopping in the galleries. Three out of four respondents with Flemish background mentioned Renard bakery, compared to none of the respondents with Sub-Saharan African background.



Image 11. Place St. Boniface

### Different geographical scenes?

Despite the fact that all interviews covered more or less the same geographical area, there are important differences in how these spaces are used by different groups of people. All of the respondents with Sub-Saharan African background do their own shopping in the galleries and the streets between *Chaussée d'Ixelles* and *Chaussée du Wavre* from time to time. They know a lot of the people hanging around on the streets and working in the shops or restaurants. The geographical concentration of amenities that are specifically focused on a Sub-Saharan African audience can be seen as a scene. Surprisingly, this also applies to one of the respondents with a Flemish background as he too knows many of the people with Sub-Saharan African background in the neighborhood and visits the area to make use of the specific African amenities. The other respondents with Flemish background under the age of 35 both stated to never really use the galleries, apart from walking through the *Galerie d'Ixelles* to go to the subway. They were also the only ones who frequently visited the amenities on and around *St. Boniface*.

## 1.2. Molenbeek

### Entering Molenbeek

Getting from the central station of Brussels to the canal that forms the geographical and symbolic border with Molenbeek takes about 20 minutes. That is in case you choose to walk, public transport will half that time and by bike you are even faster. Molenbeek is well connected and given the fact that Molenbeek is located right next to the city center, it is easy to reach this center as well as other municipalities in the Brussels-Capital Region (Region). There is an extensive bus and subway service and the canal has a newly constructed bike path. To go to Molenbeek, you will pass the *Grand Place* and the *Bourse*, then you walk through the *Dansaert* quartier that is known for its hip, young and Flemish population and a school example of gentrification. At the very end of the *Dansaert street*, on the Brussels side of the canal, you will find the café 'de Walvis'. This famous and successful bar is often used as the icon of the *Dansaert* neighborhood and gentrification in Brussels. The next thing you see is another important symbol, the little, colorful mills (Molen in Dutch) welcome you in Molenbeek Saint-Jean. The different colors represent the diversity of the municipality. The bridge leads straight to *Chaussée de Gand*.

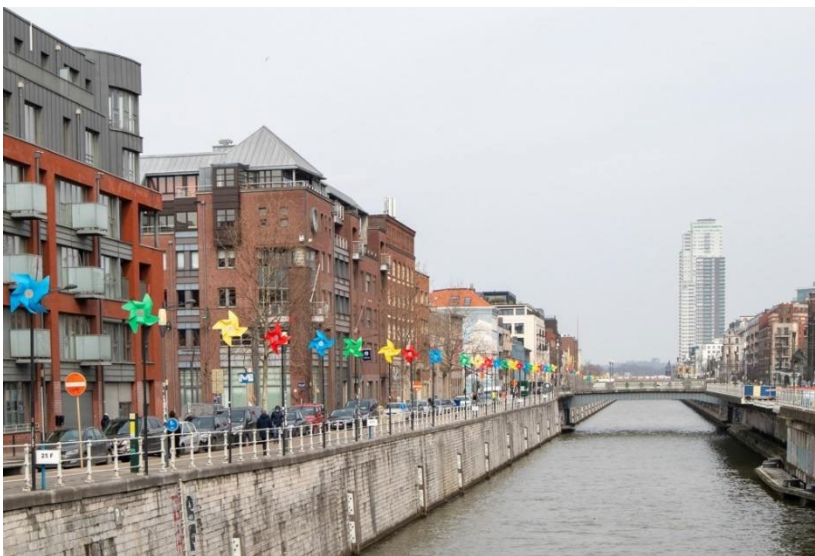


Image 12. The canal

### Chaussée de Gand area: the Moroccan/Arabic heart

*Chaussée de Gand* is a large shopping street with nicknames such as *Little Marrakech* or *Little Maroc*. Clothing stores sell modest fashion, furniture stores offering various Moroccan interiors. Bakeries sell Moroccan pancakes, biscuits and bread and supermarkets such as Tanger offer a wide range of products, which are all guaranteed to be halal. One product that you will not find in the shops and bars on this street is alcohol. There is a lot of movement as people are walking in and out of stores, people are strolling the streets and are talking to acquaintances and cars rush by, often honking at other drivers who cut them off. Most stores stall their products out on the street. A lot of the signboards of stores are in Arabic alphabet. *Chaussée de Gand* is centrally located in Lower-Molenbeek and connects most of the different parts of the neighborhood, both geographically and socially as the street is used by



almost everyone living in Molenbeek. Besides locals, this shopping street also has an international audience. Just like is the case in Matonge, people from all over Belgium and its neighboring countries come here.



Image 13. Clothing store at Chaussée de Gand



Image 14. Chaussée de Gand

*Chaussée de Gand* is a long street, but its commercial activities more or less end around the metro station *Étangs Noir*. The area between the canal and *Étangs Noir* that surrounds *Chaussée de Gand* can be seen as the center of Molenbeek. A side street takes you to the *Place Communal* where the town hall is located. On the square, there are a few clothing shops selling modest fashion and some restaurants. Although it is supposed to be car free, there usually are cars parked on the square, except for Thursday, when the weekly market is held. Car is king in Molenbeek. The town hall is often mistaken to be a mosque. The same goes for the *Église Saint-Jean-Baptiste* which is only a few minutes away from the town hall. Especially for the church, this misconception is somewhat strange given the fact that the facade consists of a large cross, yet the reputation and connotation of Molenbeek being a Moroccan or Islamic enclave combined with architecture that has some (be it small) resemblances to a typical Mosque creates this misconception. Molenbeek does have a lot

of mosques but they are often located in regular houses and are less visible than the town hall or the church.



Image 15. City hall



Image 16. Église Saint-Jean-Baptiste

### Different residential communities

Molenbeek can be further divided into smaller neighborhoods or communities which are often named after the metro stop that is located in that specific place, i.e. Maritiem, Ribaucourt, Comte de Flandre or Étangs Noir. These places are mostly residential with a sense of community. Once you know some people, you will know everyone. Young people often hang around on the same street and parents take their children to the same small park. Molenbeek also has many community centers and neighborhood associations. Some organizations, such as La Rue vzw, even buy regular houses in the residential areas to be closer to the neighborhood(s). The built environment shows Molenbeek's history as a working class, popular district. There are lots of old factory buildings and hangars, especially

close to the canal. Most houses are old workers' dwellers. Housing quality can vary significantly in Molenbeek and while some apartments look new or recently renovated, most are worn out or even close to dilapidation. In most apartments and houses, there are more people living together than can be accommodated by the building. Despite this shortage of space, many other buildings are vacant. Another problem that is very clear when you walk through the neighborhood, like in Matonge, is litter and the dumping of trash on the streets.

However, the inhabitants of Molenbeek, especially the ones with a North-African background, are trying to make their neighborhood more visitor friendly. Whereas the first generation of migrants initially thought of Molenbeek as a temporary location rather than the place they would settle down, more and more people growing up in the neighborhood now have the choice whether they want to leave or to stay. The latter, but to some extent also those who left as they often keep identifying as being Molenbeekois, are concerned with the bad image of Molenbeek. Especially after the terror attacks in Paris and Brussels and the following arrests that took place in Molenbeek, they are trying to remediate this reputation. For example, all four respondents with North-African background left Molenbeek, yet all of them emphasized that they loved growing up in the neighborhood and believe that despite some problems such as the high level of density and street litter, it is a safe, sociable and vibrant place.

Given that it is a residential area, there are also a lot of facilities such as supermarkets and smaller shops. Those who stay, sometimes start their own businesses, leading to a large increase in amenities in the past decade. Moroccan bakeries, butchers and bon marchés are scattered throughout Molenbeek. Besides, there is less transit as people tend to live longer in the same location than, for example, is the case in the city center of Brussels. This makes it easier to build a relationship with neighbors and create a sense of community. This community spirit is especially visible on (Islamic religious) holidays, as they are not only celebrated with family and friends but also outside on the streets. Another time this becomes clear is when there are unusual events happening, such as back in 2016 when people gathered to protest against the announcement of the French extreme right *Génération Identitaire* that they would be visiting Molenbeek. This protest was held without any formal organization and the mobilization of people largely happened via word of mouth and text messages. Besides, while there are usually a lot of cars parked next to the streets where the protest took place, it was now empty because word got around.

Although revitalization and gentrification are most concentrated and visible in the canal zone, there is also revitalization in the residential areas. An increasing number of young, educated Flemish people are moving to Molenbeek and every here and there, new apartment buildings are appearing and houses are being renovated.

One respondent with Flemish background and one with Moroccan background focused mainly on the area where they live(d) themselves. Two of the respondents with Moroccan background tried to show every community.





Image 17. Bon Marché



Image 18. Residential street



Image 19. Community center



Image 20. Clandestine dumping of garbage in park

### The canal zone

Along the canal there used to be factories. Once the canal lost its function as a transportation route, factories began to move away, leaving behind empty hangars and leaving the area vacant. Nowadays, things are changing. The large hangars are increasingly getting new destinations and are being renovated or demolished and replaced by new buildings. On the *Quai de Hainaut*, between *Chausée de Gand* and *Chaussée de Ninove*, you find new and fancy residential towers and the former Belvue factory now hosts various amenities on its partly renovated and partly demolished and rebuilt site. Many tourists who visit Brussels stay in the Belvue hotel or the Meininger hostel. A boutique-bar and Belgian electric bike startup are located on the small Kaai as well. Although the canal is seen as an island within Molenbeek by some, there are also initiatives that try to bridge this gap. The MIMA museum for visual arts opened its doors back in 2016 and portrays itself as a place with accessible art such as street art and wants to bring a new audience to the museum. Social economy initiatives from Atelier Groot Eiland such as restaurant 'Belmundo', joinery 'Klimop' and a bio shop 'the food hub' form a bridge between the canal zone and the rest of Molenbeek, they attract a different audience than the neighborhood's center but most of their employees live in Molenbeek. Belmundo also grows its own vegetables in a collaborative community garden that is located behind the Meininger hostel. Some respondents showed me the canal zone, while others (all three having a Moroccan background) noted that they don't ever go there.

Even further south, there is the *Quai de Mariemont*. This is located in the *Heyvaert district*, a neighborhood that still has an industrial character and where you can find a lot of car dealerships. This place is usually perceived as different from Lower-Molenbeek and there is no consensus as to whether this belongs to Low-Molenbeek or should be seen as a separate neighborhood. Only one of the respondents showed me around in this area. Much more buildings are still vacant and the audience that is attracted by the more central part of the canal zone has not yet found its way here. However, there are various initiatives that are supposed to boost the local economy and attract new residents. One example is Recyclart, an organization that combines an art center, vegan restaurant and social economy in the form of a wood- and iron workshop and they are best known for their nightlife activities,

which has not often been able to take place given the pandemic and the fact that Recyclart only moved to its new location in the *Heyvaert district* at the end of 2019. Recyclart is located in a former factory that has been bought by the Brussels capital region and which they were initially allowed to use on a temporary basis in the context of a neighborhood contract but now got permission to remain located there. Besides the area next to the canal, nor other parts of the *Heyvaert district* then the canal area of the district was discussed by any of the respondents.

The part of the canal north of *Chaussée de Gand* hosts a random looking assembly of amenities such as a café, a paper ware store, a textile store, a police station and a bakery. Although there is also vacancy and many buildings have not been as thoroughly renovated as the *Belvue site*, this neighborhood is also showing signs of being revitalized. When you keep on walking North, you end up at the *Tour & Taxis* site, which is technically seen located on the territory of the center of Brussels. However, in public opinion, it is usually believed to be Molenbeek because it is on the West side of the canal and because it used to belong to Molenbeek in the past. This former industrial site is now transformed into a city within a city. The large freight station has been converted to a covered hall with office locations and food courts. There is a large green park and some more hangars that can be used as event spaces and there is also housing available on the site. There has been some uproar because people complained about feeling unsafe when they had to pass through Molenbeek or the area toward the Brussels-North station. As a solution, there are now busses that ride very frequently and go straight to the Brussels-North station. This transportation plan combined with the large number of amenities allow *Tour & Taxis* to be an island within its neighborhood as people living or working on the site do not need to leave. *Tour & Taxis* is often linked to gentrification and there is concern about the effect it will have on the surrounding area in the near future. There are already signs of revitalization, increasing rent prices and the disappearance of local amenities in favor of other types of bars, shops and the like. However, many of the offices are still empty and much of the plans for the food courts still need to be brought to reality, which is all being delayed due to Covid. It is thus still early to say if and what the effect of *Tour & Taxis* will be on the neighborhood. Right across *Tour & Taxis*, you find *Allée Du Kaai*. Using a vacant site that the Brussels Capital region made available for temporary use to *Toestand vzw*, the organization behind the *Allée Du Kaai* project, organizations from the neighborhood and the rest of Brussels can use the location to organize events, host meetings or conduct their operations. This part of the canal was shown by three respondents, two with Flemish roots and one with a Moroccan background.





Image 21. Residential tower in the canal zone



Image 22. Former Belvue site



Image 23. Street with graffiti

### Different geographical scenes?

Despite its negative reputation, it seems that the clustering of amenities such as restaurants and snack bars only offering halal food, the clothing stores selling modest fashion, butcheries and bakeries that are all situated around the area of *Chaussée de Gand* make Molenbeek an attractive place to visit to some groups of people, mainly with Moroccan, and more broadly North-African and Arabic background. People who grew up in the neighborhood usually have the choice to leave, or on the contrary, to stay. All of the respondents who grew up in Molenbeek have a Moroccan background are now living somewhere else yet, except for one, still feel strongly connected to the neighborhood. They often mentioned the places they frequently used when they were young. Respondents 10 and 11 noted that they did not visit the canal zone and feel like it is a weird place that has nothing to offer for them. Although it is still the case that many leave, there is also a group of inhabitants that consciously decides to stay. Not taking the older generation who came to Molenbeek to work in the factories into account, the presence of Flemish people is rather recent and limited to middle class, progressive, young people. Although they do make use of the amenities in Molenbeek, they also all go to the city center to run errands or go for a drink. However, going outside of the neighborhood for leisure activities was mentioned by two of the respondents with Moroccan roots as well, yet to a lesser extent. For one of the Flemish respondents, Molenbeek was a conscious choice while for the others it was a coincidence of circumstances at first, yet an intentional choice to swap their rented apartments for a purchased one. All three respondents do not live near the canal but in the center of Molenbeek.

## **2. Cultural and aesthetic repertoires**

On the basis of the thematic analysis described in the methods section, it is possible to distinguish nine cultural and aesthetic repertoires, or in other words ways in which people give meaning to their neighborhood. Some repertoires are unique for one specific place or are only used by certain groups of respondents. Other repertoires are used in both neighborhoods and across all the respondents, although sometimes in different ways. The repertoires are sorted based on their prevalence.

### **2.1. Ethnic neighborhood**

First and foremost, both Matonge and Molenbeek are seen as ethnic, respectively Sub-Saharan African and North-African, neighborhoods by all respondents. However, this has different meanings for different groups of people.

*“From abroad I think there is not so much interest, except from the Africans. Africans from France, the Netherlands, the West of Germany, they come here, now with corona a little less but they come once a month to do their shopping here so they buy all those plantains, palm oil, manioc. You also have all the wax and such here, of course. It is primarily a neighborhood where people meet. Especially on Friday afternoon and then especially on Saturday afternoon. You'll see that there are a lot of cafes and restaurants because it's really a meeting neighborhood. So it's much more*



*of a commercial center with lots of stores and a meeting neighborhood in cafes and restaurants, very few cultural centers.” (respondent 4)*

In Matonge, the ‘Africanness’ of amenities and the variety of products and services they offer are seen as the core of the neighborhood. According to most, this is what attracts people with a Sub-Saharan African background from all over Western Europe and even beyond to the neighborhood. Indeed, minority or ethnic entrepreneurship creates places to see and be seen for the minority or ethnic groups. Although it was not specifically asked during the interviews, one of the respondents also stated that not every person with Sub-Saharan African roots would come to Matonge. For example, respondent 4 pointed out that (...) *upon today white people are the beauty standard. (...) and luckily you have more activist youth, students, but you’ll find those at universities or libraries or certain cultural centers (...) but you will find them less here in Matonge.*

*“Here in Chaussée de Wavre, that is really the African heart. You have those shops here and you also find those restaurants, you have to imagine, it is really authentic. Various kinds of fish and chicken for eight euros (...). And everything is very much taking it easy but I think that that population, I mean really African people who live here and come to a bar or restaurants here, they come here for that reason’ (respondent 3)*

*“Now I am going to do something I have never done before, go through the Gallery Matonge. There is often very loud music there. I guess that comes from inside. We will see. (...) I don’t get why, I think you only come there when you need something. It is no shortcut or anything. It is not a conscious choice either, not that I thought ‘oops I should not go through there’, it is just that I never thought, let’s go through there. It is not very inviting either right? It does not look so pretty.” (respondent 6)*

Respondents with a Flemish background stress that the ‘Africanness’ is central to describing Matonge. However, they rarely make use of those amenities themselves and often feel a sense of unease<sup>7</sup>. For example, walking through the galleries creates the feeling of not belonging and trespassing. Thus, the presence of these amenities and people is not what attracts them to the neighborhood, yet is seen as the core of Matonge. However, there are also amenities that commodify this ‘Africanness’, for example the restaurants on Rue Longue Vie are perceived as African restaurants by the respondents with a Flemish background but not by those with a Sub-Saharan African background who stress that the restaurants on this street are being managed by Asian or Eastern-European people and that Africans don’t go there to eat themselves but that it is more targeted towards white people and tourists.

*“From Ghent, the Netherlands they come here. Yes, mainly people with a Muslim background because it is known for its beautiful clothing, what is it called again? Ah yes modest! Modest fashion. And yes you can say ‘we don’t want that here’ but why not? What does it matter if they sell Flemish fashion here – or well Flemish, I mean the other shopping streets are also packed with H&M and Zara and that is not Belgian either. People just look down because it is Moroccan” (respondent 8)*

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<sup>7</sup> With an exception of respondent 4, who does use this repertoire in the same way as the respondents with a Sub-Saharan African background

The respondents with a Flemish background refer to the importance of the North-African influence in Molenbeek, especially in the center and the *Chaussée de Gand* area. Although they occasionally make use of them, neither the amenities nor the presence of the North-African population are in itself essential elements that attract them to Molenbeek. Although, in general, there is no sense of unease, it was pointed out that it would be weird to go into some specific amenities such as a teahouse as a Flemish person and that most amenities did not have anything to offer for them. Also, there does not seem to be a commodification of Moroccan or other minority or ethnic amenities. In other words, respondents did not indicate that they made use of specific amenities because they wanted an authentic North-African experience.

*“For example, you have more clothes here that fit women or girls who wear a headscarf, longer things. You're less likely to find that in regular stores. Also in terms of food, there are more snacks here with halal meat and not McDonalds or something. I think that's the main thing. And I also think that if you come from a migrant background you also want to be somewhere where you meet migrant people, you also want to be somewhere where you meet other people with a migrant background. When I came to Hasselt, I was like 'I'm the only Moroccan here' and I didn't speak Dutch yet so I was like 'oh la la where have you ended up'. So sometimes you like to be among people who are a bit like you.”* (respondent 10)

Although all respondents point out the various amenities in their neighborhood that offer goods or services aimed at an audience with North-African roots, especially those who have a North-African background value the neighborhood for this range of amenities in itself. Minority or ethnic entrepreneurship creates a meeting place. It seems like a significant presence of other people who belong to the same group, in the case of respondent 10 others with a Moroccan background, increases residential satisfaction amongst minority groups.

## 2.2. Diversity

A second repertoire that people use to evaluate their neighborhood is by its diversity, both in terms of people and amenities. In this repertoire, diversity is seen almost exclusively as something positive.

*“Here at the shopping street, you have all the normal shops, except maybe a Pull & Bear and, yeah, also a lot of bio stores such as the Barn and Färm. I don't have to live in the center of Brussels. (...) and if you go down there, you have a big Colruyt, Lidl, Delhaize, Aldi, everything within a fifteen minute walk.”* (respondent 3)

*“So yeah I thought, I'll do my master's in Brussels for the multicultural aspect. So if you are eating something at Boniface, you hear Italian on your left, Spanish on your right, English, Dutch, everything and everything and I think that is wonderful”* (respondent 6)

Although people with Sub-Saharan African background are the most prominent group in Matonge, the neighborhood cannot be simplified to being solely an African neighborhood. From pointing out bon machés that sell African food products but are run by people with an Asian background to the diverse audience at *St. Boniface* or the differences in ethnicity and nationality within the Sub-Saharan African group of people, diversity is present on many levels. Indeed, Matonge can be seen as superdiverse. This diversity is addressed by everyone, however, mainly the respondents with a Flemish background use this diversity as

a repertoire to value their neighborhood and they perceive it as “one of the things [they] love most about Matonge” (respondent 6).

A diversity in amenities in Matonge is positively valued as well by respondents with a Flemish background, who feel like it is an advantage to live in a neighborhood where you have everything you need, ranging from the ‘normal’ to more ‘exotic’ or ‘special’. This ties in with the first repertoire: not the amenities offering typical Sub-Saharan African products and services in themselves are appreciated, but the diversity that they represent.

*“I think that's nice, that's really a reason for us to live here as well, the fact that diversity is super present here.”* (respondent 7)

*“You have so much diversity here, cultural, social, economic architectural, ...”* (respondent 9)

Molenbeek is also valued for its diversity. Next to the North-African community, there is a strong presence of people with a Syrian, Albanese, Roma and Flemish background. They are often concentrated in certain communities in Molenbeek. Respondents frequently address that the idea of Molenbeek as one ethnic enclave is too simplistic. In fact, this diversity is mainly used to illustrate that Molenbeek is not an ethnic enclave, but it is also appreciated and brought up as a reason to live in Molenbeek by Flemish respondents.

In Molenbeek, a diversity of, mainly practical, amenities such as supermarkets, various organization such as Zwanger in Brussel (organization of Flemish midwives) or Atelier Groot Eiland (social economy organization) and remnants of the neighborhoods such as Italian or Greek bars and restaurants from the area when it were these groups of people who entered Molenbeek as migrant workers. Again, respondents with a Flemish background value this diversity. However, on top of the Flemish respondents, two respondents with Moroccan roots, respondent 12 and 13, talked about appreciating this diversity too.

### 2.3. Authentic and unique atmosphere

Another mostly positive repertoire that people draw upon when judging whether Matonge or Molenbeek is a ‘good’, or on the contrary, a ‘bad’ neighbourhood, is its atmosphere.

*“In the end, in the center (...) everything is close by but there, everything is a bit more commercial and here, I find it a bit more ‘authentic Brussels’ compared to the center of Brussels, where among others Matonge has a uniqueness and I hope it will not go away fast.”* (respondent 6)

Matonge is believed to be an authentic representation of Brussels and of urban life. The perception of minority and disadvantaged neighborhoods as authentic and urban indeed attracts middle class residents and visitors but is also valued by the respondents with a Sub-Saharan African background.

The unique atmosphere of Matonge is often described as lively, vibrant and colorful, which is not only a source of attraction for the Flemish middle class residents but is also valued by respondents with a Sub-Saharan African background. For example, respondent 3 said “Normally there is such a fun and lively atmosphere here. Yes I personally find that very nice”. However, it is also seen as laid back and nonchalant. People are usually walking slow,

there is often no staff present in the shops in the galleries, but they are hanging out somewhere close by. If you want to buy something, you have to hang around until they return to check the shop or ask around. The interior of the stores is often cobbled together. It is also appreciated for its warm, welcoming appearance.

*“Because I like it here, really, it is very vivid.”* (respondent 12)

Molenbeek is also described as a busy, vivid and chaotic neighborhood with a lot of people and always something going on. Especially in the late afternoon, on the weekend, and on sunny days, people are out and about. The neighborhood is also seen as flexible and negotiating is an important skill. If you don't want to pay the full price, you will probably be able to come to an agreement. If you want to buy something, but you want it in another color, or it is not in stock, then the shop owner will probably ask for your phone number, give you a call when it is delivered and put it in the back of the shop until you can pick it up.

*“Spontaneously neighbors came to help [while moving to Molenbeek] and they said ‘bienvenue dans notre rue’ ”* (respondent 8)

In both neighborhoods, the Flemish informants say that local people with a migration background are seen as helpful and social, which contributes to the uniqueness and authenticity of the neighborhoods. It is believed that the authenticity of the neighborhoods can continue to exist because there is no tourism in either of the neighborhoods. The visitors from the neighboring countries with Sub-Saharan African or North-African roots are hereby not perceived as ‘real’ tourists by the Flemish informants.

## 2.4. Aesthetic

Another thing that is touched upon by some respondents, mainly in Molenbeek, is the aesthetics of the built environment and the presence of art in the streets.

*“That's him. That's all his [points to all the paintings on the walls] and for example also, those people don't have money to make a signboard like that ‘Coiffure’, so he makes that then”* (respondent 4)

Architecture or street art are not mentioned in Matonge. The work of one local artist that is spread across Matonge is addressed by many respondents. It can be found in the galleries but also on the walls of vacant buildings or as name signs for local businesses. However, these artworks are not discussed in the sense that they would make the neighborhood more attractive but are perceived as an inherent part of the African scene. The aesthetic repertoire was thus not used in Matonge.

*“If we cross the road here, this was a sugar refinery. A beauty of a building”* (respondent 9)

*“Look at this street, if this were London, this would have been a real hype!”* (respondent 13)

In Molenbeek, street art is brought up as *“one of the fun things that are typical for Brussels”* (respondent 8). Throughout Molenbeek, but especially around the canal zone, you can find numerous murals and graffiti works. Architecture is perceived as impressive, in particular the industrial heritage of Molenbeek is being appreciated. Old working class houses, some

renovated but most in bad conditions, are being pointed out. Near the canal zone, former factories and hangars are, at least partly, preserved when the buildings received their new destinations and have undergone the necessary renovations. *Tour & Taxis* is also mentioned, but the informants have mixed feelings about the site. Although the aesthetical aspects of the *Tour & Taxis* site is valued and the informants find it a beautiful and impressive place, they also feel like it is too fancy, too clean and most of all, disconnected from the neighborhood and rather a threat than something positive for Molenbeek.

## 2.5. Problems but not dangerous

A fifth schema of evaluation that people use is describing their neighborhood as a good and safe place, despite some problems. Both within Matonge and Molenbeek, there is the idea that the neighborhood has a negative reputation. However, informants see this as unnecessary and untrue.

*“Aggressiveness, violence, prostitution, no it is not that at the Porte de Namur. Yes that is here also, but that is everywhere. There is conviviality here.”* (respondent 2)

*“When I told my friends I was going to Matonge, they would say ‘what?’. And once they had been here, it was not so bad, you know.”* (respondent 6)

The residents and frequent visitors of Matonge believe that it to be a disadvantaged neighborhood that is negatively perceived by the media and public opinion. When the news articles that portray Matonge as a hip and vibrant place were brought up, most respondents were surprised. One of the respondents believes that those articles are actually about *St. Boniface*, which he perceives as a different neighborhood.

*“ ‘Yes you will be scolded as a Fleming’. Never experienced that before, never in those six years. ‘And as a woman, are you not often harassed?’ Yes, I am indeed bothered once in a while as a woman, but actually much more often in Dansaert than here.”* (respondent 8)

*“Before, there were a lot of riots. It was really very tense. (...) There were really gangs, the police against the youth. That was in the 1990s. So yes, it's become really nice. There is still tension, but not like before.”* (respondent 12)

In Molenbeek, the negative reputation only got worse after the immense increase in media coverage due to the terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels. However, it is also addressed that they do have real consequences. For example, the negative reputation of the neighborhood is believed to cause a further decline of chances at the job market for people with a North-African background, who already face discrimination, simply because they are from Molenbeek. While this negative reputation is seen as real, there is also a shared belief that those media reports do not show the real Molenbeek.

Overall, this repertoire is used in the same way for Matonge and Molenbeek. Besides the bad reputation, other problems and negative points are brought up in both neighborhoods. Some of these problems, such as garbage on the streets, can be found in both neighborhoods while others are unique to one neighborhood, for example the fact that there are cars parked everywhere in Molenbeek. Nevertheless, in both cases, addressing these

problems goes hand in hand with the remark that it does not outweigh the positive sides of Matonge and Molenbeek. It is repeatedly stressed that the neighborhoods are safe and good places. The bad reputation of the neighborhoods is seen as illegitimate and is more likely to be assigned to the influence of media on image formation, rather than on the problems that occur in the neighborhoods.

On top of that, both Matonge and Molenbeek are compared to the Bronx. In both cases it is emphasized that despite the existence of small gangs selling drugs, mostly cannabis, the respondents never experience any problems with these gangs. The comparison to the Bronx is not meant to illustrate that they are dangerous neighborhoods, but rather to indicate that they are impoverished and neglected by the government. All of the respondents emphasize that they did not feel unsafe in their neighborhood. In this regard, respondent 8 points out, “if you would feel unsafe, you would not choose to live here”. There is a sense that politics are not doing enough about these problems. This is illustrated by respondent 1: “Now the green party is renovating the Avenue Louise here, they are going to renovate the Porte de Namur too, they are talking about everything except Matonge and that is just next door. So they really don't want anything to do with it”.

## 2.6. Sense of community

Molenbeek is also described as a place with a strong sense of community. This repertoire was only present in Molenbeek and was not used by any of the respondents in Matonge. This community spirit, which is already touched upon in the geographical description of Molenbeek, is something that was frequently mentioned by several respondents.

*“They try to make it more visitor friendly (...) The youth, the population themselves. Policy makers, they don't have a lot of impact in Molenbeek. How politics is made in Molenbeek, there is one party, mostly PS, who try to connect the dots with the actors of the community, who are known, who do a lot. (...). And there is really a pride of ‘yeah I am from Molenbeek’. So yeah it is really the community who regulates what is happening, what is not happening in the neighborhood.” (respondent 11)*

Those with a Moroccan background emphasize how this community spirit undermines authority in the neighborhood. Social control is not the result of interventions from government agencies. Rather, the local people all keep an eye on things together and it is up to them to address the problems at play in Molenbeek.

*“As a Fleming you are not so quick to help others, we live much more on our own little island and you notice that here too. If there is a party here, it is really celebrated by the community. (...). That's just a different way of seeing life, they really see the street much more as an extension of their home, much more that ‘it takes a village that raises a child’. I have an interesting book about this, and yes, this is something that we have forgotten.” (respondent 8)*

The respondents with a Flemish background appreciate this sense of community. It is seen as something that is linked to the residential character of the neighborhood, which means that people are more settled and move less frequently than for example in the center of Brussels. On top of that, this community sense is seen as an integral part of the North-African scene. As the quote from respondent 8 shows, ‘the community’ is contrasted with

'Flemmings', which are seen as having a different way of life that are not as social and community driven. In this case, the way of life that is community driven is seen as better than the individualism that is believed to be typical for people with a Flemish background.

However, the respondents with a Flemish background do not only appreciate this sense of community, they also want to be part of the community and invest in it. It is believed that this sense of community offers opportunities to contribute to the neighborhood and make positive changes happen. For example, respondent 7 stated that: "for me, here, you can really make a difference. I have this feeling that you can actually participate as a citizen in the city, that yes you can really still do something there". This can be done in numerous ways, such as by simply talking to your neighbors on the street or by being involved in local organizations.

## 2.7. Central location

One thing that is rather unique to Brussels is the fact that it is a relatively small city and that the popular districts such as Molenbeek are close to, and well connected with, the city center and other neighborhoods rather than being located in the outskirts of the city. Respondents from Molenbeek as well as Matonge have pointed out that the location and the extensive offer of public transport are important aspects of why they choose to live in Matonge or Molenbeek.

*"You also have very good connections here. You have the metro here at the Porte de Namur and then at Flagey but also here several buses and that is important to me."*  
(respondent 3)

Within Matonge, the respondents with a Flemish background who are younger than 35 say that they visit the city center or other neighborhoods for leisure activities such as going out or going shopping. However, they both emphasize that they could, and often do, stay in their own neighborhood as it has everything they need on offer. Still, they value the location and offer of public transport in Matonge. This was not addressed by any of the other respondents in Matonge.

*"That difference in reality between here and the Dansaert zone while there's just a canal in between, that's madness. So you have the Walvis there, you have a very good wine bar right over there. The fact that I say these things perhaps says something about my behavior and consumption patterns. You have a nice little café on the left opposite the whale. Here you have much less, not to say none. There you might have menus, organic wines, tapas."* (respondent 9)

Two out of three respondents with a Flemish background in Molenbeek say that they usually go to the city center or neighborhoods in other municipalities to do their shopping, meet up with friends and go for a drink. Therefore, the central location and available public transport of Molenbeek are essential to them. Their regular bars are based in the *Dansaert* district or at the *Bourse*, which are both located in the city center and within walking distance.

Also, two out of four respondents with Moroccan roots mentioned going to the city center to go for a drink. For one of these respondents, the city center is the main place for going out. The other respondent said to like to go for a drink in the Walvis, a famous bar in the *Dansaert* district, right next to the canal. To him, it is still linked to Molenbeek because it is so close

by. Thus, in Matonge, the central location and easy mobility is only addressed by young Flemish respondents, while within Molenbeek there is more diversity regarding the use of the repertoire.

## 2.8. Revitalization

In Molenbeek, respondents also address that things are changing for the better. Or as respondent 12 put it “Even Molenbeek is changing fast. But that's good. I think it's great.”. The neighborhood has a problem of vacancy. Because of its industrial past, there are many hangars and factories that are no longer used for their initial purposes. As discussed earlier, these are increasingly getting new uses, especially around the *quai de Hainaut* and the *Tour & Taxis* site but also to a lesser extent around *quai de Mariemont* and the center of Molenbeek. The Region carries out many projects for urban development such as providing vacant buildings to social and non-profit organizations or by constructing new housing. This can be done taking the needs of the neighborhood into account and with special attention for gentrification, as respondent 9 indicates:

*“It's just the reality of BXL and for me, you see, we might pass some of the places, if you're talking about urban development, Molenbeek has been on the radar for a long time, also because of its image. Yes, then there's always the question of 'how are we actually going to ensure that something improves for everyone without you actually losing the soul of a city or excluding certain groups. I am convinced, and I don't have a political mandate and I don't aspire to have one, but I am absolutely convinced that in the region, at a political level, at an administrative level, there are people who are really working on this, but it's not easy. A historical example is Dansaert street, but you can also see this in Ixelles, and in certain parts of Ixelles and Saint-Gilles.”* (respondent 9)

Besides, more people with a North-African background stay in Molenbeek and make investments in their neighborhood, such as opening a local business. Despite being a minority group and having a lower average socio-economic status and lower class background, which makes the neighborhood more vibrant. There is much more going on, people feel safer because there is more life on the streets and thus also more social control. These changes are first and foremost beneficial to the neighborhood itself, but they also make Molenbeek more visitor friendly. This is seen as important because it can challenge the negative reputation of the neighborhood.

With the exception of one remark about the renewed square in front of the town hall in Ixelles, respondents in Matonge did not make use of a revitalization repertoire to describe and give meaning to their neighborhood. However, people from Matonge did address in the ‘problems but not dangerous’ repertoire that the neighborhood, especially the galleries, are in bad shape and things are in need of renovations.

The changes that are discussed within this repertoire are always in cooperation with the neighborhood in one way or another. For example, projects along the canal usually have an outreaching function. This is illustrated by respondent 9 who states that Podiumbouw, an organization that is located in one of the formerly vacant buildings next to *Quai de Mariemont*, “has an outreach function to the neighbourhood, they accommodate young



people who hang around or deal in the courtyards here very informally and they bring them in, again not patronizing or anything like that but more like guests”.

## 2.9. Gentrification

The last repertoire that can be distinguished is that of gentrification. It differs from the previous one in the sense that gentrification is usually seen as something negative, where new rich people move into the neighborhood and try to change it according to their standards without caring about the neighborhood or its residents. This repertoire is only used in Molenbeek. Both respondents with a Flemish and a Moroccan background in Molenbeek addressed gentrification and perceived it as something negative.

*“After les attentats, the attacks, they made a plan, a political plan. It is called plan canal. And the first objective was to mark in every house who is living here and some sort of weird dystopian project. And after that, they wanted to clean the neighborhood, they wanted to gentrify. So I heard a lot of stories from small businesses where inspectors came in and they invented, made up fraud and stuff like, like hygiene fraud to empty the thing without paying.” (respondent 11)*

*“That’s interesting because they are building housing there [Tour & Taxis site]. A lot of middle class, there are a lot of companies working there. This here and the neighborhood, they live like different countries.” (respondent 13)*

Some political plans, such as the ‘plan Canal’, which was launched after the terrorist attacks in Brussels and included more police in Molenbeek, and the expansion of the metro lines are believed to be disadvantageous for the neighborhood are seen as negative because they want to change the neighborhood. The same goes for public developers who are renovating or building new apartment blocks are working on larger projects such as the *Tour & Taxis* site. Rather, these changes serve the interest of others, such as Eurocrats who can now settle more easily over the Brussels Region, including Molenbeek or middle class people who work, live or spend their free time at *Tour & Taxis*. Whether or not something is seen as revitalization of the neighborhood, and thus as a positive change or rather as gentrification, and thus negative, depends mainly on whether or not the needs and preferences of the neighborhood are taken into account.

Although rising rent prices are also addressed, most respondents are more concerned with the fact that “they are trying to make it less Molenbeek” (respondent 11). It is believed that ‘they’, those who implement the projects that lead to gentrification, see Molenbeek as an area that has to be ‘cleaned’. By redefining places and giving them new purposes, the unique atmosphere and character of Molenbeek will be lost.

Gentrification is believed to be an attempt to create a social mix, overcome segregation and to reduce the economic and other disadvantages of the neighborhood. However, these attempts are seen as failures. “If they want to bring a mix here, the government, middle class, they should do something about the ‘badman’ houses because people come with their car directly into the garage and into their gardens but don’t come into the neighborhood”. (respondent 13).

This repertoire was not used in Matonge. Gentrification was not mentioned except for a few remarks that if it would take place, the atmosphere and uniqueness of Matonge would be destroyed. Due to the fact that Matonge is surrounded by hip and rich neighborhoods, there is a fear that those spaces might expand and swallow up Matonge.

Taken together, these results show that the informants mainly draw upon cultural repertoires that positively evaluate their neighborhood. Especially the 'ethnic neighborhood', 'diversity' and 'authentic and unique atmosphere' repertoires are most prominent and important. However, the results also show that how frequently and in which way these repertoires are used differs between the respondents. In general, respondents who use the same cultural repertoires have a similar ethnic background.

### 3. The different scenes

When combining the geographical characteristics of each neighborhood with the differences in the use of repertoires between different groups of people, two scenes can be distinguished in each neighborhood.

#### 3.1. Matonge

Because of the small size of Matonge, the different walks covered more or less the same space (see map 2). Nevertheless, Matonge can be geographically divided into two parts namely the 'African heart' between *Chaussée d'Ixelles* and *Chaussée du Wavre*, and the area around *St. Boniface*.

The differences regarding the cultural and aesthetic repertoires that are used imply the existence of two different scenes. In Matonge, repertoires 1, 2, 3 and 5 are used in similar ways by three respondents, namely the two respondents with a Sub-Saharan African background and one with a Flemish background (respondent 2, 4 and 5). This group of respondents is also linked to the geographical African heart. Therefore, we can speak of a Sub-Saharan African scene. In a nutshell, Matonge is seen as the African neighborhood where you can buy African products, get specific services such as getting your hair done and meet other people who are similar and likeminded. However, these respondents stress that the neighborhood is very diverse, especially to emphasize that it is not an African ethnic enclave. Matonge is believed to have a unique atmosphere which resembles the atmosphere in Sub-Saharan African cities. In particular *Galerie Matonge* is perceived as an authentic African place. Problems that the neighborhood faces such as the clandestine dumping of garbage on the streets or the presence of drug dealers outside the gallery are acknowledged but perceived as insignificant and wrongly damaging the reputation of Matonge. However, a lack of political attention for the neighborhood and the fact that they, the residents and frequent visitors, are never listened to is seen as an important issue.

Repertoires 1, 2, 3, 5 and 7 were used by the other respondents, who all have a Flemish middle class background. This second group of respondents make more use of everything on offer on and around the *St. Boniface* square. Therefore, they will be referred to as the Flemish middle class scene. This scene also describes Matonge as an African

neighborhood. They appreciate the Africanness, but rarely make use of the same amenities that are attracting those who are part of the Sub-Saharan African scene nor do they come to the neighborhood to meet up with those people. Like in the Sub-Saharan African scene, diversity is addressed. However, in this case it is not only to contradict the perception of Matonge as an ethnic enclave, but it is also perceived as an asset and even as one of the main reasons why Matonge is a good neighborhood to spend time in. The authentic and unique atmosphere is linked to both the Africanness and diversity. For example, the diversity and the fact that it is a meeting place creates a vibrant and lively feeling. But at the same time Matonge is also seen as very laid back, which is also believed to be something typical for African people. More or less the same problems are addressed by this scene and they too feel like these problems are rather insignificant and don't measure up against all the positive sides of the neighborhood. One additional repertoire that people from this scene use is the central location, which is appreciated. Despite the fact that everything needed is available in the area, the fact that you are close to the city center and other neighborhoods in Brussels and the extensive offer of public transport played a positive role in the evaluation of the neighborhood.

### 3.2. Molenbeek

In Molenbeek, there is a clearer geographically division into two different areas, namely the canal zone, which is characterized by revitalization and gentrification, and the rest, thus the central and residential parts of Molenbeek. However, none of the respondents are living in the canal zone. Still, the map of the walks (see map 3) shows some differences in regard to the routes that were taken. Respondents with a Flemish middle class background more often showed the canal zone. On top of that, there are some differences in the use of space and amenities compared to the respondents with a Moroccan background and it was stressed that they made use of amenities in the city center or other neighborhoods of Brussels because they could not find alternatives in Molenbeek. Besides, there are two different groups in regard to schemas of meaning making. Therefore, we can again speak of two different scenes.

All repertoires are used similarly by the respondents with a Flemish background (7, 8 and 9). Molenbeek is not per se seen as a North-African or Moroccan neighborhood, but it is still addressed that there is a significant Moroccan influence. The respondents of this scene do make some use of the typical North-African amenities but not to the same extent as the people in Molenbeek with a North-African background. For some purposes, they feel like it is necessary to go outside of Molenbeek, for example to go for a drink. This is not seen as a problem because of public transport and the central location of Molenbeek. The diversity and multiculturalism of the neighborhoods are appreciated and given as one of the main reasons for living in Molenbeek. Next to that, there is also the belief that the neighborhood has a unique and authentic atmosphere which should be preserved as it is appreciated by the Flemish middle class respondents as well. Molenbeek is also valued for its architecture, industrial buildings and street art, especially around the canal zone. Problems in the neighborhood are addressed and at the same time diminished by pointing out other positive sides of Molenbeek. It is also believed that these negative sides are disproportionately

represented in the media and the public debate, which creates a negative image. The bad reputation of the neighborhood is also seen as a source of problems in itself, for example by amplifying racism and discrimination. One of the main issues in the neighborhood is the contrast between lack of space due to a high density, both in terms of population and buildings, and the number of vacant buildings and spaces. However, there is a sense that things are changing as many projects of revitalization are being implemented. This is seen as a good thing, as long as it is at the service of the neighborhood. When this is not the case, people from the Flemish scene speak of gentrification. Although some acknowledge that their presence may enhance the gentrification of Molenbeek, they perceive it as something negative and fear that this will change Molenbeek in such a way that it would become a totally different neighborhood.

Repertoire 1, 2, 3, 5, 8 and 9 are drawn upon in more or less the same ways by the respondents with a Moroccan background (10, 11, 12 and 13). Although none of them lived in Molenbeek at the time of the interview, they all grew up there and still work or frequently visit the neighborhood.<sup>8</sup> Thus, there is also a North-African scene in Molenbeek. Things like the offer of specific amenities such as restaurants, supermarkets and butcheries that offer Moroccan or halal food and clothing stores that sell specific clothing styles such as modest fashion are attracting people from this scene to Molenbeek. But also the presence of people who are similar to them is a reason to like the neighborhood. Molenbeek is seen as diverse, which goes further than the presence of people with a Moroccan background. This diversity is used to draw boundaries between Lower-Molenbeek and the more white Higher-Molenbeek or other white neighborhoods and communities in Brussels. Whether or not the diversity is also brought up as a reason to spend time in Molenbeek varies in this scene. Molenbeek is seen as a warm, spontaneous and popular<sup>9</sup> neighborhood but is most of all appreciated for its strong community sense. The same respondents who cherished the diversity, also speak about positive changes in the neighborhood and use the revitalization repertoire. All respondents within this scene address gentrification and believe it to make Molenbeek less Molenbeek. Besides, respondents 12 and 13 also indicated that the aesthetics, the central location and the revitalization of the neighborhood draw them to Molenbeek.

Respondents 12 and 13 seem to be in between both scenes. The repertoires about appreciating diversity, aesthetics, central location and revitalization were used by respondents 12 and 13 in similar ways as in the Flemish middle class scene. In contrast, they do differ from this regarding the other repertoires. For example, they use the first repertoire in the same way as the other respondents with a Moroccan background and make more use of the North-African amenities than those who are part of the Flemish middle class scene. This may be explained by the fact that these respondents have a middle class background and are working in a creative profession.

Still, this also holds true for the other two respondents with a Moroccan background. Besides, given that scenes are not deterministic, not all repertoires have to be used in the same way by all. The presence of the repertoires enables members of a scene to give

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<sup>8</sup> With the exception of respondent 10, who has not frequently been visiting Molenbeek for the past few years and is not (anymore) a part of any of the scenes

<sup>9</sup> In the sense of working-class, folk, community

meaning to their neighborhood and surroundings in such a manner, but it is not the case that being part of a scene means fully copying meaning making processes.

Despite these differences, there can still be spoken of a North-African scene because there is a shared use of space and shared values. From this perspective, repertoire 1, 2, 3, 5, 8 and 9 can be seen as the core values in the meaning making processes of what makes Molenbeek an attractive neighborhood.

In sum, combining the geographical elements with the findings on how different groups of people use different cultural repertoires makes it possible to distinguish Flemish middle class scenes as well as ethnic scenes within both Matonge and Molenbeek. The case of Molenbeek shows that even when there are no distinct geographic areas visible within a neighborhood, it is still possible to find two scenes. These findings raise questions about how the scenes relate to each other.

#### **4. Relationship within the neighborhoods**

Given that there are at least two scenes within each neighborhood, the different scenes also come into contact with each other. However, this does not necessarily seem to lead to a lot of interaction between the scenes. As respondent 3 pointed out: “All the African people who live here and go to cafes and restaurants here, but people who live here and are open to it also go here, but you notice that it’s a minority.”

Although the social mix in both neighborhoods does not at all lead to a perfect social mixing where all residents and visitors interact with everyone in the neighborhood, many repertoires are shared and therefore bring opportunities for positive contact and bridging.

In Matonge, the African scene is perceived as the core of the neighborhood by both scenes. Thus, when describing their neighborhood, the Flemish middle class scene primarily acknowledges the existence of the Sub-Saharan African scene and believes that they are the ones who have the right to the space in Matonge. Although they do not make much use of the African amenities or have a lot of contact with people with a Sub-Saharan African background, they do believe this Africanness is essential for the other characteristics of Matonge that they value and are the reason why they like to spend time in the neighborhood. It is also for a large part this Africanness that gives Matonge its unique and authentic vibe. This atmosphere is more or less similarly described by both scenes. Within the Sub-Saharan African scene, diversity is addressed to illustrate that Matonge is no ethnic enclave, something they feel is often mistakenly thought. This diversity is also acknowledged by the other scene, hence they do not believe Matonge to be an ethnic enclave either. Although the central location was not addressed by respondents from the Sub-Saharan African scene, there are no colliding values around this matter. The only repertoire in which contradictions can be found is that of ‘problems, but not dangerous’. For example, the respondents from the Flemish middle class scene stated that the crowdedness and loudness of the neighborhood, something that is seen as characteristics of the Sub-Saharan African scene, can be annoying. Still, in general the same problems are addressed and the repertoire is used in similar ways, namely addressing problems but also encompassing that they do not outweigh the positive sides of the neighborhood.

Thus, the presence of both scenes does not necessarily lead to social mixing in Matonge, but due to almost no colliding repertoires and values, there seem to be little problems for the coexistence of the scenes. Moreover, some of the reasons why Flemish middle class informants who like to spend time in Matonge are linked to the presence of the Sub-Saharan African scene, such as the authentic and unique atmosphere that is partly due the Africanness of the neighborhood. Thus, the Flemish respondents in fact dependent on the other scene to give meaning to their neighborhood. Although there is little interaction between the scenes, their codependency combined with the many shared repertoires indicate a peaceful coexistence of the scenes.

Besides, bridging can also take place within each scene. Take for example respondent 4, who is actually part of the Sub-Saharan African scene in Matonge despite his Flemish background. His use of amenities and the way he gives meaning to the neighborhood make him part of the Sub-Saharan African scene, making the difference in ethnic background insignificant. In fact, he has a great deal of contact with other people with a Sub-Saharan African background.

Within Molenbeek, informants also recognize that there is a strong North-African, and more specifically Moroccan, influence. This is seen as one of the aspects that 'makes Molenbeek Molenbeek', but is less essential than in Matonge with the Sub-Saharan African scene. Some repertoires are shared, such as the atmosphere and the perception of Molenbeek as a diverse neighborhood. However, the appreciation of diversity can also be seen as something negative. For example, respondent 10 pointed out that she does not like it when people say they move to Molenbeek for its diversity because she feels like the migration backgrounds of people are then seen exotic and special instead of just seeing them as people.<sup>10</sup> Again, in the 'problems but not dangerous' repertoire, respondents from the Flemish middle class scene addressed some issues they have with customs and values of the North-African scene, such as the way they behave in traffic, but diminished these frustrations as insignificant in comparison to the benefits of living in Molenbeek. The aesthetics of the neighborhood, the processes of revitalization and the gentrification were discussed by the Flemish scene and half of the respondents from the North-African scene in similar ways. Also, informants from both scenes expressed concern and dissatisfaction about the processes of gentrification. However, whereas within Flemish middle class informants do often perceive the new projects as beautiful, for example *Tour & Taxis*, there is less consensus within the North-African scene. Some respondents share this sentiment, while others indicate that they feel like these projects offer nothing to them. Another repertoire that is used in both scenes is the 'sense of community'. Within the North-African scene, Molenbeek is appreciated for the fact that everything is very community driven and does not depend upon other authorities. Once you are part of the community, you will know everyone and everyone will know you. There are many community centers and organizations and local popular figures are seen as more important than people from the local government and authorities. In the Flemish middle class scene, this community sense is also recognized and is rather attributed to the North-African scene. However, people from the Flemish middle class scene indicate that they want to play an active role in this

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<sup>10</sup> This was discussed after the interview had ended, and thus when the recording was already stopped but it was noted down after the interview

community. This offers opportunities for bridging, as one scene actively tries to make connections with the other. This can be through interpersonal contact with neighbors or by joining an organization that can either deny access and draw boundaries or rather integrate the people from the Flemish middle class scene.

Thus, in general, the Flemish middle class scene depends upon the North-Africa scene to give meaning to their neighborhood, yet the interaction between the two scenes in Molenbeek is limited. However, the 'sense of community' repertoire does offer opportunities for social mixing and bridging. Like in Matonge, there are almost no colliding repertoires and the Flemish middle class scene and there seems to be a peaceful coexistence.

## **5. Relationship between the neighborhoods**

There are many similarities between Matonge and Molenbeek. About half of the repertoires are used in both neighborhoods, often with similar patterns in terms of how and by whom they are employed. This is no surprise if you look at the different scenes in the neighborhoods. Both neighborhoods have a middle class Flemish scene and a Sub-Saharan African or North-African scene, thus the constellation of the scenes are much alike.

However, there are also differences. Repertoire 4, 6, 8 and 9 only occur in Molenbeek. Thus, there are less repertoires used to give meaning to Matonge. Besides, geographically seen, the two scenes in Matonge are somewhat separated while in Molenbeek, both scenes share the same geographical location. However, respondents from the Flemish middle class scene often make use of the amenities in the city center, especially for leisure due to a lack of bars and restaurants that fit their preferences. People from the Flemish middle class scene in Matonge also go to the city center, but they emphasize that it is not necessary to go outside of their neighborhood because everything they need is present in Matonge.

The repertoire on gentrification indicates the possible existence of yet another scene in Molenbeek, or at least the presence of a significant group of middle class people with the economic capital to rent or buy an apartment in the newly renovated buildings. This does not come forward in Matonge.

It is important to note that, although both scenes were labeled as a Flemish middle class scene, the scenes in Matonge and Molenbeek are not identical. On average the same patterns occur, yet every scene is unique.

## Discussion and conclusion

Taken together, this master's thesis provides a better understanding of the importance of culture in the superdiverse yet relatively segregated city of Brussels by exploring how different groups of people sort themselves into different scenes and give different meanings to the (relatively) disadvantaged neighborhoods of Matonge and Molenbeek.

Previous studies have shown that cultural elements attract groups of middle class people to cities and specific neighborhoods (Glaeser, Kolko & Saiz, 2001; Silver & Clark, 2015; Zukin, 1995). Those people are often able to choose where they want to live or spend time and favor places that match with their own personality and worldview (Mansvelt, 2008; Savage et al., 2018; Whitson, 2006; Klekotko, 2019; Zukin, 2016). This can lead to the creation of scenes in which cultural repertoires are shared (Silver & Clark, 2015; Lamont & Thévenot, 2000). However, very little has been found in the literature about the effect of the culture of a place on attracting people with different backgrounds, such as ethnic minorities.

By using walkabouts as a research method, it was not only possible to get an in-depth insight into which repertoires are used to give meaning to someone's own environment and neighborhood, but it also allowed to see and experience those places. Sensory observations of the geographical space provided a better sense of what the respondents were describing and gave the necessary context to interpret the interviews. The non-verbal observations were either described in words or illustrated using maps and photographs.

The first aim of this research is to get a better understanding of which scenes are present in diverse and segregated cities such as Brussels, and more specifically in neighborhoods with a strong presence of minority groups such as Matonge and Molenbeek. To do so, the results section started by giving a descriptive overview of the different amenities and people in each neighborhood. Next, nine cultural repertoires that people use to give meaning to their neighborhood were identified.

When combining the geographical elements with the cultural repertoires, there seems to be a Flemish middle class scene present in Matonge. This is in line with expectations given that the neighborhood has gained a positive reputation over the years, which is in part due to the marketing of its cosmopolitan and colorful character (Arnout, 2018). Indeed, the results show that some of the amenities in Matonge commodify the Africanness of the neighborhood in order to attract middle class consumers and tourists, such as for example the restaurants on *Rue Longue Vie*. However, contrary to expectations, the 'problems but not dangerous' repertoire shows that within this scene there is a shared belief that Matonge still has a negative reputation. This repertoire also shows that the scenes make use of the second theory that was identified by Pinkster (2014), namely acknowledging problems but at the same stressing that these do not outweigh the positive sides of the neighborhood. This is also interesting in terms of politics of taste as it shows how taste and meaning making are entangled with power structures. It is because the informants from the Flemish middle class scene are largely unaffected by the stigmatizing effects of their neighborhood that they have the opportunity to appreciate Matonge, even though they recognize its problems and are aware of its negative reputation.



More surprisingly, there is a Flemish middle class scene in the center and residential area of Molenbeek as well. This scene is not the result of gentrification as it is not located in the canal zone. Moreover, the 'gentrification' repertoire shows that this scene is in fact highly critical about processes of gentrification. Given the negative reputation of Molenbeek and the fact that the neighborhood is often perceived as an ethnic enclave (Steffens, 2007; Van Hamme, Grippa & Van Criecken, 2016), it is a less likely candidate for middle class residents as they prefer moderate levels of diversity (Alanya et al., 2017; Boschman, 2018; Foster, Grondach & Murdoch, 2016). However, the 'problems but not dangerous' repertoire shows that this negative reputation is seen as illegitimate and Molenbeek is not perceived as an ethnic enclave by the Flemish middle class scene. This also corresponds with the second theory that was identified by Pinkster (2014).

In general, the presence of a middle class scene in both neighborhoods is in line with previous research in other Western-European and North-American cities. The 'ethnic neighborhood', 'diversity' and 'authentic and unique atmosphere' repertoires show that both neighborhoods have several of the characteristics that have been identified as elements of attraction for this new urban middle class and the repertoires that this scene uses are in accord with recent studies in the US and Western-Europe, indicating that aspects such as authenticity, diversity, a vibrant life and a unique atmosphere are appreciated by this middle class (Frank & Weck, 2018; Kleokotko, 2020; Zukin, 2011). The fact that these repertoires were discussed most extensively and that they are all related to ethnic diversity suggests that the Flemish middle class scenes are primarily about diversity seeking. However, the 'central location' repertoire shows that this scene is also, although to a lesser extent, about urbanity seeking (Weck & Hanhörster, 2015).

Next to a Flemish middle class scene, there is also respectively a Sub-Saharan African and North-African scene in Matonge and Molenbeek. Although the literature shows that the presence of specific ethnic minorities and amenities are the result of economic, historical, and discriminatory processes (Arnout, 2018; Corijn & van de Ven, 2013; Demart, 2008), the combination of geographical aspects and cultural repertoires, especially the 'ethnic neighborhood' repertoire, illustrates that a group of people, usually with Sub-Saharan African or North-African background, are nowadays consciously choosing to live in or visit Matonge or Molenbeek. This is consistent with the idea that scenes can also be created from a pre-existing set of amenities and people in a neighborhood that has emerged as a result of economic and historical processes (Silver & Clark, 2016). Within the 'revitalization' repertoire, some positive changes in Molenbeek are also discussed, including that people with a Moroccan background increasingly decide to stay in the neighborhood, for example to open a local business. This illustrates how ethnic entrepreneurship can create a meeting place for ethnic groups (Hatziprokopiou, Frangopoulos & Montagne, 2016).

It is thus possible to define two scenes in each neighborhood. Important to point out is that not every respondent made use of all the repertoires that are available in their scene. In Molenbeek, as discussed in the findings, some respondents from the North-African scene even used the 'diversity', 'aesthetic' and 'revitalization' repertoires in a similar way as the Flemish middle class scene. However, this variation in how the respondents give meaning to their environment does not mean that there is no consistent scene. Both the concepts of scenes and cultural repertoires show that place is not deterministic but rather enables and

constrains (Silver & Clark, 2015; Lamont & Thévenot, 2000), and thus allows for variation and even contradictions in how people interact with and perceive their environment. Given that the most prominent and important cultural repertoires were shared and could be combined with specific groups of people, amenities and place, it is still possible to speak of scenes.

The second objective of this research is to look into how the different groups of people within one neighborhood relate to each other. The fact that there are at least two scenes present within the same neighborhood has implications for the concept of scenes. Although Silver and Clark (2016) do address that different scenes can influence each other, no research has been done around the interaction and interplay between different scenes within neighborhoods with a strong presence of people with a minority background.

Sharing cultural repertoires indicates a like-mindedness, which may decrease the probability of conflict. This would indicate that, according to the contact theory (Alport, 1954), the presence of two scenes with many shared repertoires leads to more positive attitudes towards the members of the other scene. However, the inverse could also be true. Contesting cultural repertoires can lead to negative contact, which in turn can enhance negative stereotypes (Alanya et al., 2017; Boschman, 2018).

Nevertheless, the results offer an alternative approach to thinking about urban diversity as they show a peaceful co-existence between the different scenes, which does not have to be a positive or negative. The interaction between the different scenes is rather limited. That does not necessarily mean that the people have absolutely no contact with people outside of their own scene, nor that they do not want more interaction. In fact, they even partly depend upon each other. This is especially the case for the Flemish middle class scenes for whom the presence of the ethnic scene in their neighborhood is used in several cultural repertoires and is thus entangled with how they give meaning to their neighborhood. Besides, there is no indication of a process of boundary drawing that leads to an 'us' and 'them' perspective. Rather, the boundaries that are drawn can thus better be seen as soft and they there is the idea that both are simply present in the same geographical location without the perception that the other scene does not belong or has no right to be in the same space.

In addition, scenes themselves can also create opportunities for bridging. Although the ethnic or migration background of people played an important role within the ethnic scenes, the results of this thesis also show that scenes can make such differences irrelevant. This is illustrated by the case of respondent 4, who has a Flemish background but is a part of the Sub-Saharan African scene. Indeed, previous research has indicated that scenes do not only lead to bonding but also to bridging (Klekotko, 2019; Putnam, 2000; Silver, Clark & Yanez., 2010).

The last research question is to compare Matonge and Molenbeek. Both neighborhoods show very similar patterns, yet have their own unique scenes. One significant difference is that in Molenbeek processes of revitalization and gentrification are taking place. It is important to note that none of the respondents were living or making extensive use of the amenities in the gentrified areas. In fact, all respondents, including those with a Flemish middle class background are skeptical about gentrification. Still, the Flemish middle class

scene in Molenbeek could be seen as early gentrifiers, who are threatened to be amongst the displaced population as well (Audretsch, Lehmann & Seitz, 2019; Van Criekingen & Decroly, 2003). While some of the changes in Molenbeek are seen as positive (see the 'revitalization' repertoire), gentrification is believed to be a consequence "of people who do not care about the neighborhood and are moving there and changing the place to their needs and preferences". Thus, gentrification is about the creation of a new scene that has the cultural and economic capital to become dominant.

Something unique about Brussels is the fact that it is a relatively small city. There is a strong segregation between its neighborhoods, yet they are relatively close to the city center and each other. This affects the results of this research, for example regarding the 'central location' repertoire. However, although the results of this masters' thesis have to be interpreted in the specific context of Brussels, the general implications regarding the importance of culture in how different groups of people sort themselves and relate to other groups in (super)diverse cities are relevant for other cities as well.

The results show that it is useful to combine a scenes approach with the theoretical framework of cultural repertoires for two different reasons. First of all, the case of Molenbeek illustrates that by looking at cultural repertoires, scenes can be identified even when it initially appears that there are no clear differences in geographical terms. Secondly, looking into how different scenes give meaning to their own neighborhood allow a better understanding of how they draw boundaries between themselves and how different scenes relate to each other.

The literature on boundary drawing and the presence of the urban middle class in disadvantaged neighborhoods provided a useful framework for understanding the Flemish middle class scenes in Matonge and Molenbeek. However, literature on the effect of culture in regard to where ethnic minorities live or spend time is rather scarce. The results also illustrate that culture plays an important role in the process of gentrification, something that is often overlooked in previous research. The fact that there is both a 'revitalization' and 'gentrification' repertoire shows that not all changes are seen as negative. What is seen as revitalization and what is believed to be gentrification seems to mainly depend on whether the other group of people want to change the neighborhood to their own needs and preferences, and thus on cultural factors. Ideas around the bonding and bridging effect of scenes are useful to understand how different groups of people live together in diverse cities and bringing in cultural repertoires also offers an opportunity to look into whether contact between different groups has positive or negative effects because the different values and cultural repertoires that are shared by different scenes can be similar or, on the contrary, clash.

The results of this thesis are particularly relevant in the current context of urbanization where cities are becoming increasingly (super)diverse and where choosing specific cities are neighborhoods that fit your own identity are becoming important.

This thesis shows that this is not only true for people with a middle class background, but also for ethnic minorities and provides an alternative perspective on urban diversity and social mixing. Next to its scientific value is this information also useful for local authorities, urban planners, social workers and others who work in these diverse cities, especially when

they are concerned with topics such as segregation and social mixing or revitalization and gentrification.

In short, this study concludes that there are different scenes within each neighborhood, namely a Sub-Saharan African and a Flemish middle class scene in Matonge and a North-African and a Flemish middle class scene in Molenbeek. The variation in the use of repertoire shows that these scenes have no hard boundaries and are not deterministic. In both neighborhoods, there is a peaceful co-existence between two different scenes. They are aware of each other and to some extent even dependent on each other. Especially the presence of the ethnic scenes play an important role in the repertoires that the Flemish middle class scenes use. However, the amount of interaction between the scenes is rather limited. The neighborhoods show a great number of similarities regarding their scenes and many of the repertoires are used. Still, all four scenes are unique and cannot be reduced to one another as they are the result of the particular combination of place, amenities, people and values.

## Limitations and recommendations for further research

There may be some possible limitations in this study and some aspects remain under-investigation. First, due to practical reasons such as a limited amount of time, only thirteen interviews were conducted. Therefore, the choice was made to work with a stratified sample and to only include respondents with a Sub-Saharan African or Belgian background in Matonge and a North-African or Belgian background in Molenbeek in order to have enough respondents who were likely to belong to the same scene. However, the drawback of this is that it was not possible to look into whether there are more scenes present in the neighborhoods. In fact, the results of this research suggest that there may be a third scene in the gentrified canal zone of Molenbeek. Further quantitative or qualitative research that includes more respondents with diverse and different backgrounds in terms of ethnicity, class or other characteristics might explore which other scenes are present, what the size of the different scenes is and how they relate to each other. Although this masters' thesis touched upon it briefly, more research is needed to get a better understanding of how culture and scenes influence social mixing, bridging social capital and relate to the contact theory and the threat theory.

As mentioned in the method section, the number of interviews with people from a Sub-Saharan African background was low, with only two interviews of which one took no more than twenty minutes and was thus less extensive than the others. In the case of Molenbeek and the Flemish respondents in Matonge, there is not necessarily a problem because the last interviews in each category did not give many new insights, indicating that there is saturation.

In line with this, another shortcoming is a possible selection bias. Most respondents were contacted through an open call on Facebook. Given my own Flemish background, it may be the case that the open calls on Facebook reached mainly people in Brussels with a Flemish background. Besides, it is unlikely that all people with a Flemish, Sub-Saharan African or North-African background are part of a scene and consciously choose to live or spend time in their neighborhood. Thus, the fact that all but one respondent were part of a scene may be due to a selection bias. However, this is not necessarily problematic since the aim of this research is not to generalize results.

A fourth limitation was the language barrier. The interviews were conducted in the language of choice of the respondent. As Brussels is mainly a French speaking city, some of the interviews were conducted in French, which may have had an impact on the interviews. However, apart from one interview, there is no indication that there are significant differences between the interviews that were conducted in French and those conducted in Dutch or English as they do not seem to differ in length or content.

Another limitation is the possibility of a researcher bias. The unconscious use of guiding words in the question can influence the responses (Roose & Meuleman, 2014). Using walkabouts means that interviews are often more spontaneous. While this is generally speaking an advantage, it also means that there is more deviation from the topic guide. Consequently, the questions that were asked during the interview were often less thought through than in standard interviews. On the other hand, in many cases respondents

spontaneously brought up subjects without having to ask specifically about them. Other possible shortcomings and remedies of using walkabouts were discussed in the methods section.

Last, the coding and analysis of the data was done by only one researcher and was not tested for inter coding reliability (Boeije, 2014). To limit this effect, the coding was done iteratively and consistently. The interviews were coded multiple times with a critical evaluation of the codes.

Because of these limitations and the explorative character of this thesis, some questions remain unanswered, which offers opportunities for further research. First of all, more research is needed to gain a better understand of why certain cultural repertoires are used by other groups than middle class people such as ethnic minorities. Secondly, a larger and more diverse sample can provide more insight into how culture creates different kinds of scenes and how these relate to each other. The 'revitalization' and 'gentrification' repertoire indicates that there may be an additional scene in Molenbeek in the gentrified canal zone. Using a scenes perspective and including informants living in gentrified areas could thus enhance the understanding of the cultural aspect of gentrification. Thirdly, the 'gentrification' repertoire brings up the question when and under which conditions people speak of gentrification and how this differs between various groups of people. Last, more information on how different types of scenes relate to each other would help establish a better understanding of the role of culture in social mixing, differentiation and segregation in cities.

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## Attachments

### Attachment 1. Overview of respondents

Respondent	Neighborhood	Background	Age category	Contacted
1	Matonge	Flemish	35+	Open call FB (general)
2	Matonge	Sub-Saharan African	35+	Through respondent 1
3	Matonge	Flemish	- 35	Open call FB (Flemish group)
4	Matonge	Flemish	35 +	Open call FB (general)
5	Matonge	Sub-Saharan African	35+	Open call FB (general)
6	Matonge	Flemish	- 35	Open call FB (Flemish group)
7	Molenbeek	Flemish	35+	Open call FB (Flemish group)
8	Molenbeek	Flemish	- 35	Open call FB (general)
9	Molenbeek	Flemish	35 +	Open call FB (general)
10	Molenbeek	Moroccan	- 35	Open call IG
11	Molenbeek	Moroccan	- 35	Open call FB (general)
12	Molenbeek	Moroccan	+ 35	Open call FB (North-African group)
13	Molenbeek	Moroccan	+ 35	Through organization

## Attachment 2. Informed consent



FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEAN'S OFFICE

PARKSTRAAT 45 BOX 3600

3000 LEUVEN, BELGIUM



### Informed consent for master's thesis research

Title of the master's thesis:

The scene(s) of Molenbeek and Matonge: who hangs out in the neighborhoods?

Name + contact details of supervisor and student researcher

Supervisor: Giseline Kuipers; giseline.kuipers@kuleuven.be

Student researcher: Hannah Weytjens; hannah.weytjens@student.kuleuven.be

Aim and methodology of the master's thesis research:

Walk-about (interviews during walk through neighborhood)

Period/duration of the study:

Academic year 2020-2021

- I have received sufficient information about the purpose of the research.
- I understand what is expected of me in the study.
- I consent to the interview being audio recorded.
- I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary. I am aware that I can discontinue my participation at any time. I will not have to provide a reason for this and I will not suffer any disadvantages.
- The findings may be used for research purposes and may be published. My name will not be published; anonymity and confidentiality is guaranteed at every stage of the research project. The complete dataset can be made available to the research community in the anonymised manner described.
- I understand that I will receive no payment for participating in the research.
- I understand that I can contact .....  
*Hannah Weytjens (see above for contact details)*  
*Giseline Kuipers (see above for contact details)*

for any questions or to exercise my rights (access to or correction of data,...) after participating in the study.

- For any complaints or other concerns about ethical issues relating to this study, I can contact KULeuven's Social and Societal Ethics Committee: [smec@kuleuven.be](mailto:smec@kuleuven.be).

**I have read and understand the information above and have received answers to all my questions regarding this study. I agree to participate in the study.**

Date:

Name and signature of the respondent/participant

Name and signature of the student  
researcher



## Attachment 3. Topic guide

Variables	Questions
<b>Introduction questions</b> (before starting to walk)	<p>Can you briefly introduce yourself?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Who are you?</li> <li>- How old are you?</li> <li>- What kind of work do you do?</li> <li>- Do you have a migration background?</li> <li>- How long have you been living in Molenbeek/Matonge?</li> </ul> <p>Do you already know which places you definitely want to show me? Why?</p>
<b>Identifying the different scenes</b>	<p>How would you describe your neighborhood?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What is typical for this place? What makes it unique?</li> <li>- If you would have to describe the atmosphere in this neighborhood in three words, which words would you choose?</li> <li>- Do you know a lot about the history of Matonge/Molenbeek? Is this history important (to you)?</li> <li>- Are there any important people from around here? People that are local legends and mean a lot to this place?</li> <li>- Do you feel like this is a place where things need to be done efficiently and money matters a lot or is this rather a place where other things are more important?</li> <li>- Do you feel like it is important for the people around here to be able to express themselves, would you describe it as a creative place?</li> </ul> <p>What kind of people live here?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Are there a lot of families?</li> <li>- How do people usually dress? Are we more likely to see people all dressed up or are they more often wearing a jogging? Or rather in a suit?</li> <li>- Do people follow fashion trends or maybe rather try to oppose beauty standards?</li> </ul> <p>What kind of shops/restaurants/other amenities can I find here?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Until what time are these shops/restaurants open?</li> <li>- How expensive is it to shop/dine out around here?</li> <li>- What are the occasions do you come here?</li> <li>- What are the topic you discuss in a bar or with neighbors, what kind of things are the events about that you visit in your neighborhood? E.g. equality, work, university, art, ...</li> </ul>

If I had to hang around here all day, from morning till late in the night; what are the things that I should do? When would I have the most fun?

Are there any events or annual feasts that you like to go to in Molenbeek/Matonge? Or any specific tradition that are really important around here?

What are the kind of things you do within your neighborhood and what are the things that you need to go somewhere else for?

**Group  
identification**

Why do you live here/ why did you move here?

Do you feel like you are part of a specific group that is tied to this neighborhood?

Do you enjoy living here? What are the pros and cons?

**Relationships  
between scenes  
in the same  
neighborhood**

Do you feel like there are different groups of people living here?

- Do you feel like it has always been this way or is this a more recent trend?
- How do you feel about them living here?

If you had to categorizing the inhabitants of Molenbeek/Matonge in different group, how would you do this?

**Relationship  
between the  
neighborhoods**

I have read an article about Matonge by the guardian that said that, do you agree? / Molenbeek is often portrayed in a negative light in the media, how do you feel about this?

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**General remark:** this is a topic guide, all question will be adapted to the specific context of a specific interview. Therefor the order of the questions is not fixed. All questions may be asked several times to gasp differences within the neighborhood that can either be location specific or specific to certain amenities.

## Attachment 4. Overview of codes

Selective coding	Axial Coding	Open Coding
Aesthetic	1. Art 2. T&T 3. Aesthetic and moral judgment 4. Architecture 5. View/environment	(Street) art Tour & Taxies (aesthetic) Not beautiful or welcoming Ugly but charming Lost glory Architecture Appreciating industrial past View over Brussels
Diversity	6. Diversity of people 7. Diversity of amenities 8. Appreciating diversity 9. Social mix 10. Geographical differences	Other people Asian and Pakistani shop owners Sharing property with Asian people Other amenities Other restaurants and bars Other shops Market Bakery Appreciating diversity Ethnic or national background Exploring new things No mix Mix Differences within neighborhood Differences within Brussel
Unique, authentic atmosphere	11. Description of atmosphere	Helpful 'Sense unique', authentic 'à l'aise', 'à l'improvisoir' Busy Flexible, negotiating Non-judgmental Vivid Intense Spontaneous, social Friendly

		Warm atmosphere
	12. When	Late sunny afternoons
	13. Reasons	No tourism Popular and residential
(North)African neighborhood	14. Amenities	Stores Amenities Restaurants Religious centers
	15. Location	Chaussée de Gant Meeting neighborhood Moroccan/African heart There lives/lived...
	16. People	African people International African artist
	17. Values	Habits Almost Africa, feeling of home Looks and beauty (Colonial) history Moroccan/African holidays
	18. During childhood	During childhood
	19. Tourism	Belgian tourism Never been myself
Problems but not dangerous	20. Negative reputation	Negative reputation Terrorist attacks
	21. Problems	Racism Bad state Garbage Noise Traffic Drugs Lack of green space Density
	22. But...	Only move here if you feel safe If you have the change you leave
	23. Police	Police is tolerant Police not from here Politics not doing enough

Location and mobility	24. Accessibility	Location (close to everything) Good public transport
	25. Use of other neighborhoods	Shopping, going out, ... in other neighborhood
Community sense	26. Community driven	Community driven
	27. Meeting places	Community/neighbourhood center Square, street, ... where people meet
	28. Social cohesion	Social cohesion
	29. Participation	Participation, making a difference
Revitalization	30. Vacant, underutilized space	Vacant, underutilized space
	31. Canal	Canal
	32. Politics	Region Plan Canal Neighborhood contract NL schools
	33. Different atmosphere	More fancy More visitor friendly More vivid Safer feeling
	34. New infrastructure	New infrastructure
	35. Moroccans stays	Moroccans stay
Gentrification	36. T&T	T&T
	37. Gentrification	Gentrification
	38. Economic	Rental prices
	39. Different atmosphere	Hip(ster) Less Molenbeek Not taking into account
	40. Politics	Politics trying to change neighborhood Clean the neighborhood

41. Mix

Social mix

Islands

42. New residents

Eurocrats

(Not) legitimate inhabitants

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