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Dominique Vanneste

The preservation of nineteenth-century industrial buildings near historical city centres: the case of Ghent

Many nineteenth-century industrial buildings in Flanders in general and in Ghent in particular are still waiting for (permanent) users and functions. At the same time, renewed economic and residential interest represents a threat to the built-up heritage as well as to the structure of the traditional working-class social fabric of such areas. Additionally, little is known about the expectations of the residents of such neighbourhoods or the extent to which they identify with this industrial heritage. Ghent, with its strong industrial past, resulting in many nineteenth-century textile factory buildings and characteristic working-class housing (including *cités* and alleys), can thus offer interesting insights as a case study. However, field work about the relationship between the industrial heritage, identity and preservation as well as about the attitude of local authorities revealed that practice sometimes differs from theory.

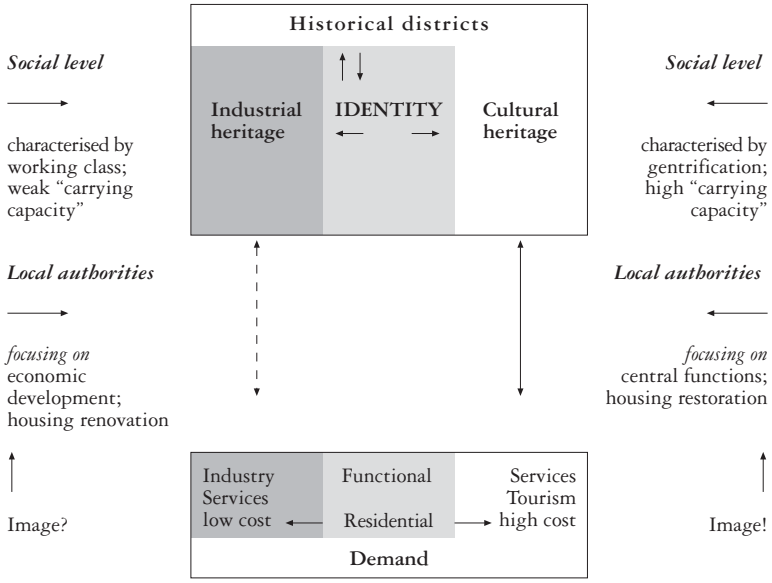
Conservatie van negentiende-eeuwse industriële gebouwen nabij stedelijke kernen: het geval van Gent

Heel wat negentiende-eeuwse industriële gebouwen in Vlaanderen (en in Gent in het bijzonder) wachten op duurzame gebruikers en functies. Er bestaat hiervoor een nieuwe belangstelling vanuit economische en residentiële hoek maar deze vormt tegelijk een bedreiging voor het bouwkundig erfgoed als dusdanig alsook voor de structuur van het sociale weefsel, gekenmerkt door de historische aanwezigheid van een arbeidersklasse. Bovendien is zeer weinig bekend over de verwachtingen van deze buurtbewoners en de manier waarop of mate waarin zij zich met het industrieel erfgoed identificeren. Daarom is Gent, met zijn belangrijk industrieel verleden dat resulteerde in talrijke negentiende-eeuwse textielfabrieken en arbeidershuisvesting (zoals cités en stegen), een casestudie die interessante inzichten kan opleveren. Veldwerk in het teken van de relatie tussen industrieel erfgoed, identiteit en conservatie alsook met betrekking tot de positie van de lokale beleidsinstanties, toont aan dat deze niet altijd de theorie volgen.

Prof D Vanneste, Institute for Social and Economic Geography, Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium; E-mail: Vanneste@geo.kuleuven.ac.be

The process of urban conservation, in relation to gentrification and neighbourhood revitalisation on the one hand and historic preservation on the other, is well documented for cities in developed countries and, increasingly, for those in developing countries too.[1] Nevertheless, old industrial neighbourhoods are more studied in terms of social problems than as (potential) heritage sites and prototypes of urban areas with programmes for preserving (industrial) heritage. This article attempts to contribute to this less developed aspect and will focus on the left half of the schema below (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The perspective (Vanneste 2000a)



The focus of this article is the old industrial neighbourhoods where revitalisation and gentrification have not (yet) occurred; these are situated in the so-called nineteenth-century belts (major problem areas in Belgian towns) and are characterised by a dominant lower-class social structure as well as an inferior quality of housing inter-

1 Cf Bondi 1998; Bourne 1993; Frank 2002; Jones & Varley 1999; Larkham 1996; Scarpaci 2000; Smith & Williams 1986.

spersed with nineteenth- and beginning of twentieth-century industrial buildings.

Since the local authorities are looking for a means of revitalising these neighbourhoods with their carrying capacity, questions arise about the potential of the old industrial buildings to "anchor" local development and community identification. Much has been written about identity,[2] about heritage,[3] and about their interaction within the "manufacture" of space[4] as well as — to a lesser extent — within preservation models (Nelissen *et al* 1999).

The theoretical framework comprises the following:

- A number of definitions about identity and heritage, in addition to some statements about their mutual relationship and links with the preservation of historical sites, and
- some of the models for the analysis and evaluation of projects for redevelopment and the re-use of historical industrial buildings.

After a short introduction on nineteenth-century industrialisation in Ghent — which clarifies why Ghent was chosen for this case study — the empirical analysis focuses on the relationship between heritage, identity and preservation in the nineteenth-century belt of Ghent in an attempt to discover the real meaning of industrial heritage in nineteenth-century working-class neighbourhoods close to or part of a historic city centre and to confront the viewpoints and attitudes of various role-players, namely the residents of the neighbourhood, local authorities, (potential) investors and entrepreneurs.

This research was stimulated by the fact that practice has more than once been found not to confirm to theory in such matters, while case studies are badly needed, since generalisation has proven dangerous. This was experienced by Frank (2001, 2002) when comparing urban historical preservation in selected cities in the USA and Germany.

Many provocative research questions could be derived from the literature as a basis for this fieldwork, such as the following:

2 Cf Black & Butlin 2001; Castells 1997; Vanneste 1996.
3 Cf Arnold 1998; Avrami 2000; Brett 1996; Herbert 1995; Mason 1999.
4 Cf Graham *et al* 2000; Tunbridge & Ashworth 1996.

- Is the industrial built-up environment in the nineteenth-century belt of Ghent an element of self-recognition, still associated by the residents and the local authorities with elements of civil society such as the working class?
- Is the industrial heritage fortifying the identity of the old working-class neighbourhoods? Is it an expression of locality?
- Is the industrial heritage an element of community building? In an active or passive way? On the part of the residents of the neighbourhood or the local authorities? Are they inducing specific movements at the local level?
- Is there a conflict between economic use (the functional component) and preservation (the material component)? Is "heritage requirement" playing a part in the choice of location of economic role-players in Ghent's nineteenth-century belt?
- Is the local community (with its historical and industrial identity) a victim of global (international economic) investors?
- Do industrial investors, like investors in housing and heritage tourism, induce a revitalisation process characterised by displacement and gentrification or do they at least induce changes in the neighbourhoods of Ghent's nineteenth-century belt?
- Are local authorities interested in the protection of the urban industrial scene and, if so, is there more at stake than the renovation of structural facades or the promotion of new investment opportunities? What are their instruments?

1. Heritage, identity and preservation: some (integrative) definitions and models

1.1 Heritage, identity and preservation

There is little doubt that (historical) industrial buildings can be considered as a "heritage" (Alfrey & Putnam 1992). Nevertheless, this begs the question: "What is heritage?", to which Graham *et al* (2000: 1-2) offer the following answer:

> The range of meanings attached to this formerly precise legal term — inheritance that an individual received in the will of a deceased

> ancestor — [...now] include almost any sort of intergenerational exchange or relationship, welcome or not, between societies as well as individuals [...but] [t]he adjective 'heritage' [...] is increasingly being used to convey a feeling of generalized quality, continuity or simply familiarity and well-being [...] The debate concerning the existence of the past as an objective reality is not a precondition for the creation of heritage [...] If concerns, however, focus upon the ways in which we use the past now, or upon the attempts of a present to project aspects of itself into an imagined future, then we are engaged with heritage [...] The present needs of people form the key defining element in our definition. If people in the present are not merely passive receivers or transmitters of it, then the present creates the heritage it requires.

From this definition, it is clear that historical industrial buildings can only be considered as a "heritage" if this past is used or useful in the present. In general this is the case, and Graham *et al* (2000: 2-3) explain why:

> Like language, [heritage] is one of the mechanisms by which meaning is produced and reproduced. But the synonymity is not precise because heritage also exists as an economic commodity, which may overlap, conflict with or even deny its cultural role.

They add:

> The two heritage domains (economic and cultural capital) are linked by their shared dependence on the conservation of past artefacts and the meanings with which these are endowed; it is the latter which generally constitutes the broad arena of contestation (Graham *et al* 2000: 22).

From this, one can conclude that certain role-players may be interested in (industrial) heritage only because of its economic value. Therefore, the use of a historical building is clearly a separate issue from identification with it. There is less chance of the industrial heritage contributing to the meaning of place by means of the building(s) being recognised as an attribute of the identity of the place when there is no interplay between the economic and the socio-cultural aspects. In such a case, role-players attribute a function to a (historical) industrial building without deriving any particular benefit from its historicity and therefore without attributing much importance to that historicity (Graham *et al* 2000: 159-60). In the words of Scarpaci (2001: 7):

> Geographers have examined the dichotomy of landscapes as both physical representations as well as the socially constructed interpretation of the same. There is an interplay of knowledge about heritage: its physical, economic, cultural, class, racial, and political axes provide myriad frameworks for interpreting how identities are constructed. Central to the debate about place identity is the question: Whose heritage is represented?

We can immediately add several more questions: "Who is taking responsibility for whose heritage?" and "How do processes such as identification with heritage versus indifference towards heritage interact?"

From such a perspective, the following quotations from Castells's *The Power of Identity* (1997: 61) seem particularly relevant, since they reveal the link between identity and heritage, although the notion of heritage is, surprisingly enough, not mentioned:

> Production of meaning is an essential component of cities, throughout history, as the built environment, and its meaning, is constructed through a conflictive process between the interests and values of opposing social actors [...] [and] left people with no other choice than either to surrender or to react on the basis of the most immediate source of self-recognition and autonomous organisation: their locality.

Castells (1997: 7) adds:

> The real issue is how, from what, by whom, and for what. The construction of identities uses building materials from history, from geography, from biology, from productive and reproductive institutions, from collective memory and from personal fantasies, from power apparatuses and religious revelations. But individuals, social groups, and societies process all these materials, and rearrange their meaning, according to social determinations and cultural projects that are rooted in their social structure, and in their space/time framework.

For example, research in the Flemish region where, during the last decades of the twentieth century, all coal mines were closed, revealed that miners and their families experienced a pride of place with the mine as a central symbol (De Rijck & Van Meulder 2000).

If (local) communities identify with their heritage, preservation may be facilitated. The conservation or preservation process of industrial heritage may rely explicitly on this meaning of place and community identity (Frank 2001, 2002). One can expect that, once members of a community identify with the industrial heritage, they may undertake action (protest against decay for instance) to obtain a (pu-

blic) intervention. The authorities, in turn, are offered justification for creating a policy window (see below) and for political involvement. Castells (1997: 62) expresses the link between identity and policy as follows:

> In many cases, urban movements, and their discourses, actors, and organizations, have been integrated in the structure and practice of local government, either directly or indirectly, through a diversified system of citizen participation, and community development. This trend [...] has considerably reinforced local government.

Nevertheless, identity and identification are not in themselves enough to ensure the preservation of historical industrial buildings, since disadvantaged areas such as old industrial areas are often treated as second-class regions by those in charge of implementing programmes of historic preservation (Frank 2001, 2002) and historical buildings (including industrial buildings) are sometimes "discovered" by international role-players who have no links with the local community (Scarpaci 2000, 2001).

This demonstrates that nineteenth-century industrial buildings may not be an uncontested form of heritage or that, at least, there is a "dissonance" in heritage, "involving a discordance or lack of agreement and consistency, or tensions caused by the simultaneous holding of mutually inconsistent attitudes (by the actors)" (Tunbridge & Ashworth 1996: 20).

1.2 The impact of heritage in re-use project models

Before commencing the applied part of this research, some models for the evaluation of re-use projects were analysed. Nelissen *et al* (1999) mention various models such as Kingdon's stream model and the so-called 6F-model.

The model of Kingdon consists of four "streams", namely problems, solutions, political events and decision-making opportunities. Sometimes, although not often, participants can bring a problem (such as the vacancy and deterioration of a building) into the spotlight (when the problem has got beyond a certain level of tolerance) and they will be supported by crucial role-players to find a solution when the "climate" is favourable. Such moments, when all elements

coincide, are rare and brief; they are called "policy windows" (Nelissen *et al* 1999: 109).

In this model no explicit mention is made of the heritage value of the industrial building that may be the subject of re-use. Nevertheless, when supported by the local population as a symbol for the neighbourhood and an element of identity, policy windows may be created at particular times, for example when local authorities need to demonstrate political action as part of an election campaign.

The 6F-model is characterised by six crucial elements, namely the "fool", functionality, philosophy, finances, flow, and phasing.

- A "fool", a person or organisation who is able to get redevelopment adopted instead of demolition, is needed at a very early stage. As long as the social basis is lacking, the public authorities often support the general indifference towards redevelopment, since it is often not at all clear how old buildings can be re-used in modern society at an acceptable cost. If industrial buildings are considered as a heritage and part of the identity of (their) place, the local community may act as the "fool".
- The aspect of functionality is often not in favour of the economic redevelopment of old buildings, since the first element to check is the quality of the building and its location. Therefore it is important to find architects and technicians who think of the industrial heritage and its location as a challenge rather than a limitation.
- The philosophy links the various parties; being convinced of the historical value and qualities of the building as a surplus value may be a common link and unifying factor.
- Finding financial resources is, of course, also important. One has to cope with the idea that redevelopment is more expensive than demolition and construction *ab initio*. The contrary has been proved to be the case, at least when the decay is not at a very advanced stage. Nevertheless, financial support from the public and the private sector is in many cases one of the most important issues.
- The flow, or co-operation between the parties, is more successful if it is supported by a common philosophy. Nevertheless, all parties want to exert an influence on the project, and whether they want to go beyond demands for returns and benefits is important.

- Redevelopment is often a more complex process than demolition, followed by new construction. It is not always clear who is responsible for what, resulting in an obscure and risky construction that may take too much time to execute the project. Phasing the process in logical steps can save the project from failure.

In the following paragraphs, the hypotheses on the relationship between industrial heritage, identity and meaning of place, as well as the interaction between this relationship and active participation in the preservation process of industrial heritage, will be tested.

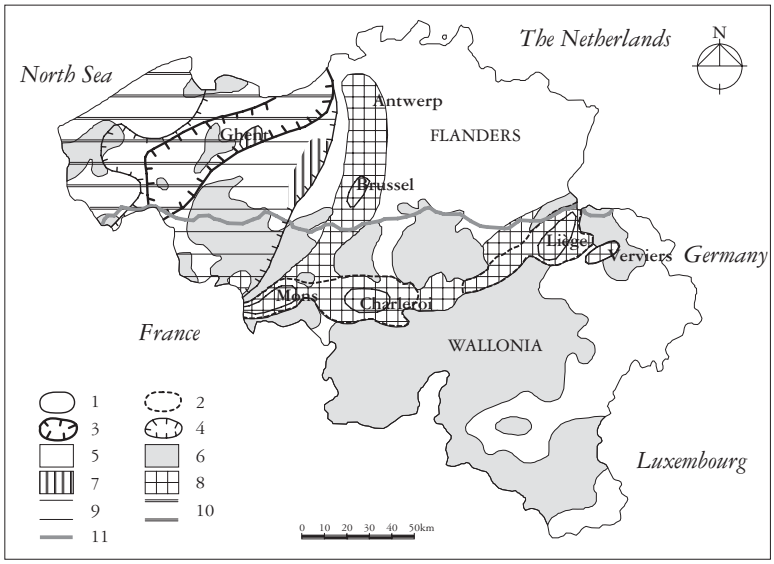
2. The industrial heritage of Ghent: an anchor for identity and preservation?

2.1 A short history of industrialisation in Ghent and its present-day outcomes

Belgium was one of the first countries after Britain to experience the industrial revolution, but the process did not touch the country as a whole (see Figure 2). The southern part, and more especially the east-west axis with its coal resources, was characterised by impressive economic development and growth, as was the north-south axis linking with it the major towns of Brussels and Antwerp. Some regions declined, particularly the densely populated countryside of the north-west, which was characterised by a crisis in agriculture, combined with a pressure on the domestic textile crafts from the mechanical textile industries (Vanneste 1997). In the middle of this countryside in crisis, the city of Ghent — Gent in Dutch — developed into what was called "the Manchester of the continent" (Bisschop *et al* 1984: 29).

Ghent was always an important town for Flanders and even for Western Europe, with the textile industry as a major pillar of its economy, even when it was re-orientated from wool to linen in the eighteenth century and to cotton in the nineteenth. Nevertheless, this does not explain why Ghent became a major international centre of the mechanical textile industry. Three major innovations were responsible for this, namely the introduction of the mechanical spinning frame by 1800, the introduction of the steam engine by 1805, and the introduction of the power loom by 1820 (Vlied 1981: 94-5).

Figure 2: The industrial structure of Belgium in the nineteenth century (1846-1896)



Industrial dynamics 1846-1896

1. Main industrial centres in 1864
2. Predominance of extractive industry and heavy metal industry
3. Core area of deconcentrated textile industry with a predominance of domestic craft
4. Idem, extended area
5. No particular industrial development
6. Areas with large scale rural out-migration
7. Moderate growth of industrial employment
8. Strong growth of industrial employment
9. Increase of employment in workshops compensating for decline in domestic industries
10. Stagnation or decline of employment in workshops and heavy decline in domestic industries
11. (Linguistic) border between Flanders and Wallonia

Alongside the dominant textile sector, attempts were made to introduce other industries, such as the metal industry, while the economic importance of Ghent was also stimulated by large-scale infrastructural development. For example, a sea canal and port were developed during the 1820s; a railway in the 1840s; a rail connection between the railway station and the harbour in the 1850s; and a freight station in the 1870s (Wezenbeek 1986).

As mentioned above, the impact of the textile industry was enormous. In 1846, there were 267 textile and clothing firms in Ghent employing more than 11 000 workers; by 1910, a total of 2 486 firms employed just under 24 000 workers. However, there was a considerable difference between the textile and the clothing industries. The former consisted of large factories with enormous employment (in 1910, 195 textile factories employed 21 485 workers), while the latter could be considered as SMEs located in small workshops (Dumont 1951: 322). The largest textile factories each mployed over 1 000 workers (for example, the Lousberghs firm employed 750 in 1851; 1 600 in 1860; 1 750 in 1872, and 1 450 in 1890, while the Parmentier-Van Hoegaarden firm employed 810 in 1860; 1 600 in 1872, and 1 800 in 1890 (Scholliers & Avonds 1981: 9, 16, 21, 22, 25, 28, 35).

In the period 1810-1812, Ghent was the most important "cotton town" of the continent, but political events caused major fluctuations in industrial production and employment. (Belgium passed from French rule to Dutch hands in 1815 and gained independence in 1830). Nevertheless, by the end of the nineteenth century, Ghent possessed 59% of all spinning and weaving factories in the country (Dumont 1951: 346).

Ghent grew from approximately 50 000 inhabitants in 1793 to approximately 100 000 in 1842 and approximately 150 000 in 1888. By the end of the century, the town had more than 160 000 inhabitants (Dumont 1951: 120-1).

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the surface area of the built-up part of the town had hardly changed, which meant that the density was increasing dramatically, with alleys within housing blocks, scarcely visible from the street. By the 1860s, about 700 alleys offered shelter to almost one-fifth of the population. Such high

density, together with the fact that housing for the poor was constructed from inferior materials and lacked sufficient (public) sanitation, encouraged sanitation problems and epidemics of diseases such as cholera. Several such epidemics (in 1832, 1849, and 1866) were so devastating as to cause a decline in the normal growth curve of the urban population. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, most industrial activities were located in large buildings such as abbeys and cloisters that had lost their function when the French rulers abolished the religious orders at the end of the eighteenth century.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, and particularly after the town walls had lost their function as toll barriers, a number of entrepreneurs built new factories, together with new workers' housing, near and beyond the old walls. These *cités* were the result of a kind of paternalistic reflex coupled with the objective of control. This gave rise to an urban landscape with a mix of industrial buildings and monotonous workers' *cités* which still exist today and are very typical of the "nineteenth-century belt". During this period a series of textile factories, called "cathedrals of/for work", were built. Those that have survived constitute an important industrial heritage, especially if situated in neighbourhoods that have retained the typical mix of industrial buildings and nineteenth century working-class housing, including *cités* and alleys (Van der Haegen *et al* 1992: 447).

Some of these neighbourhoods were selected for fieldwork. They belong to or are adjacent to Type 2 neighbourhoods (see Table 1). The typology is based on a cluster analysis, comparing the neighbourhood scores on 23 characteristics with the average for the entire town. The results can be interpreted in terms of overrepresentation ("+") or underrepresentation ("-"), compared to the average for Ghent.

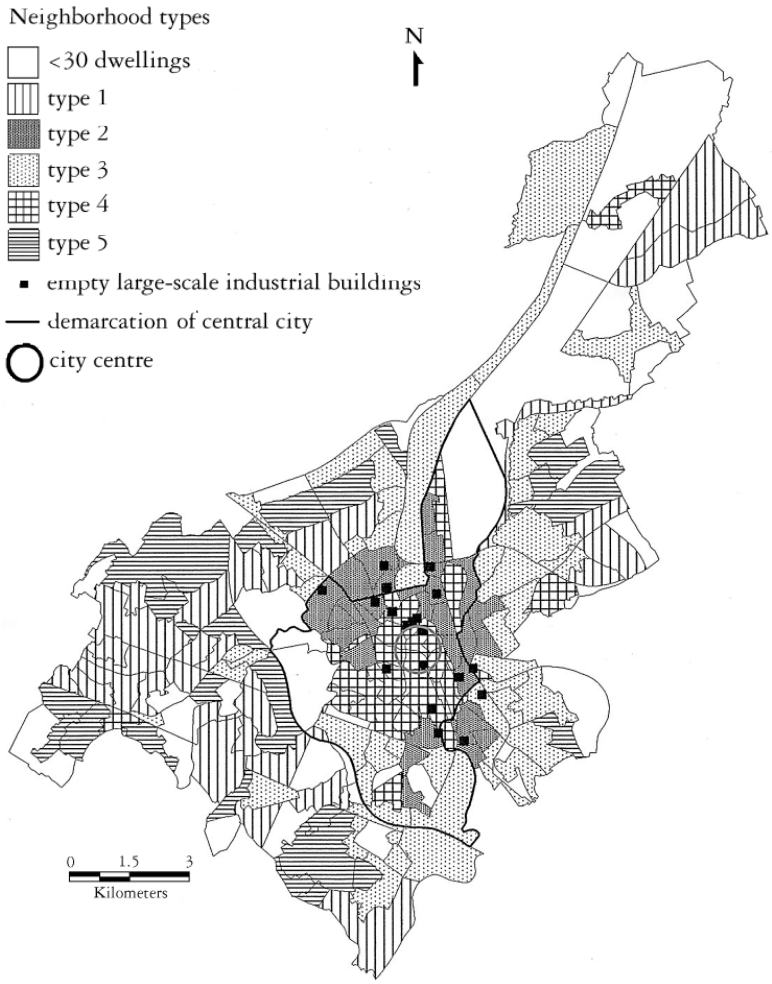
Table 1: Present-day profile of neighbourhoods in Ghent

Characteristics	Type 4	Type 2	Type 3	Type 1	Type 5
Single people	++	+		-	--
Apartments for rent	++			-	-
Unemployed people	+	++		-	-
Housing with surface area less than 55m^2	+	+		-	--
Population density	+	++		-	-
Age: 60 to 74	+				--
Age: 75 or older	++				--
Family without a car	+	++		-	--
House built before 1945		+			--
House without lavatory		++			-
Terraced house		++	+	--	--
Turks and Moroccans		++			
Age: 25 to 39					
Mean income per person		-		+	++
House with garden	--	-		+	++
Housing with surface area larger than 125 m^2	-	-		+	++
Detached house	-	-		++	++
Family with two or more cars	-	-		++	++
House built after 1981					++
Age: 0 to 14	--				++
Age: 15 to 24	-				++
Age: 40 to 59	-			+	+
Family ≥ 4 members	--			+	++

(+)+: (highly) overrepresented, compared with the average for Ghent
(-)-: (highly) underrepresented, compared with the average for Ghent
Blank: neither particularly over- nor underrepresented
Note: neighbourhoods with fewer than 30 dwellings were excluded from the analysis.
(Vanneste 1997 & 2001)

What is quite striking in mapping this typology (see Figure 3) is that Type 2, characterised by a number of elements that point towards a lower-social structure-class such as the overrepresentation of dwellings without lavatories; terraced and/or older houses; the presence of Turkish and Moroccan immigrants; low(er) income; high(er) unemployment, etc, resembles the nineteenth-century industrial belt almost exactly.

Figure 3: The neighbourhood social structure of Ghent



As has been pointed out, not only the social structure but also the built environment gives lively witness to the nineteenth-century industrial past in the presence of (textile) factories, as well as *cités* and alleys. Both factories and alleys can be considered as industrial heritages, and both tell a story of success and failure in preservation.

3. The importance of identity for the preservation of nineteenth-century industrial buildings and the role of various role-players: results of fieldwork

3.1 The attitude of the neighbourhood toward the industrial heritage: a story of alienation

As has been pointed out, a local community may play the part of the "fool" in the preservation process of industrial buildings if it considers these as (their) heritage and/or part of the identity of (their) place. In the following paragraphs, hypotheses about the relationship between the industrial heritage, identity and the meaning of place are tested by means of fieldwork in the nineteenth-century belt of Ghent.

The neighbourhood adjacent to the former UCO-De Hemptinne textile factories serves as an example. During fieldwork, it was learnt that the residents (both Belgians and immigrants) were not interested in the factories. Two were (partially or completely) demolished and replaced by social housing. The residents showed no regret and welcomed the additional housing (although they themselves did not live in it), green space and parking possibilities. The third and most interesting factory, an impressive, manchesterian *Filature à l'Etage*, was saved from destruction by the public authorities' taking steps to put it on the national register of protected monuments. It stands empty, but has recently been the subject of skeletal renovation by a private design and development agency. The fact that there were plans to build a new Court House in the vicinity was a decisive factor.

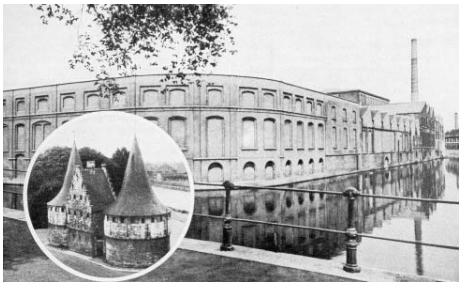
Figure 4: Site of the UCO-De Hemptinne textile factories
(Court House Project)

A: The Manchester Building, a skeletal renovation (for offices?), 2001

B: One of the buildings transformed into social housing, 2001

C: What is left of the weaving mill, 2001

D: The weaving mill in 1949



The renovation of the third factory was not the result of any action taken by the local community. On the contrary, some of those interviewed would have preferred the building to disappear, like the others, and to be replaced by a green space. None of those interviewed showed any interest in the future of the building. They knew that a developer had bought it for further (office?) development when the market demand became favourable. No-one showed any regret about the absence of plans for (small) manufacturing or craft activities. No-one seemed to worry about the possibility of offices bringing higher income groups into the neighbourhood, with possible side-effects such as rising rents or the impact on the local social structure. The only concern voiced was about new activities attracting traffic; respondents implicitly wished the building to remain vacant or expressed a preference for a "quiet" function such as housing.

This case clearly shows an absence of community involvement and a complete alienation of the industrial heritage. Individuals were not concerned and the buildings did not represent any meaning of place. All preservation action was taken by outsiders.

This attitude of alienation and the major concern — if not disapproval — about traffic as a result of new activities in the factory could also be observed in other neighbourhoods, even when the building concerned had been redeveloped for mass product shops (not at all exclusive) and for craft workshops (for example, the UCO-Rooigem factory with its attractive Art Nouveau facade).

Figure 5: Site of the UCO-Rooigem factory

A: The building re-used for (non-exclusive) shops (ground level) and workshops (higher levels), 2001

B: Reverse view of the former textile complex and the adjacent neighborhood, 2001

This attitude is only explicable if we take general as well as location-specific elements and processes into account.

First, it is not because the social class of the nineteenth-century belt neighbourhoods remained stable over time that the residents identified with the nineteenth-century industrial buildings as was the case with the disused mine buildings in other parts of the country, for example. Since these buildings are situated in the core and not at the fringe of cities, their former activities formed part of the sub- and

ex-urbanisation process which many industrial workers followed. In these neighbourhoods, few people (and none of those interviewed) had ever worked in the factories that were the subject of this study. In other words, mobility and delocation had created a "broken link".

Secondly, the textile industry in Ghent (and elsewere) was characterised by fatal competition from low-wage countries as early as the 1960s. In an attempt to deal with this competition, fusion into larger groups (for example, UCO or Union Cottonière) rather than diversification occurred. Finally, many factories closed their doors and many of the (low-skilled) textile workers lost their perspective on the future. During that time, there was not much organised support other than the unemployment relief, and this made the former employers and their symbols unpopular.

Finally, intellectuals may have a different perspective from working-class people as far as the "value" of a factory is concerned. They tend to take into account a building's historical importance, its functional representativeness and/or uniqueness and its architectural value. For many workers, factories, especially old ones have negative connotations, associated with dirt, exploitation and brutal money-lust (expert interview, van Doorne 2001).

Only in one neighbourhood did the local community react against plans for new office developments, but this can hardly be seen as a preservation action, since the enormous *La Lys* factory had already been demolished (in 1961). Therefore the residents were not defending the industrial heritage, but the seven hectares of open space that had been left behind.

In one case, those interviewed were convinced of the value of the building and that it ought to be preserved. (The building was not a textile factory, but a former steam engine factory). They expressed support for the plan to develop the factory buildings into a complex integrating shops and cultural functions, since they were situated some distance from the city centre. The most important consideration from the residents' point of view was the conviction that their properties would appreciate in value if the plan became a reality. Nevertheless, members of the local community (at least those interviewed) reacted only as spectators and were sceptical about the realisation of the project: "In 20 years [...], (too) many plans for the complex

were put forward but they were never executed". The major new element of this project was that authorities took the initiative, not only in terms of the factory buildings, but as part of a large-scale urban renewal project including a new traffic plan and waterfront development (the North Dock Project). It is remarkable that the authorities did not make use of the "classification as a monument" procedure to consolidate the preservation of (some of) the buildings in the complex. Nevertheless, this example is more of an exception than a rule.

Figure 6: Site of the former Carels Steam Engine Factory
(North Dock Project)

A: The northern buildings of the complex, 2001

B: The eastern buildings of the complex, 2001

3.2 The view of economic role-players and the impact of the authorities

The interviews with entrepreneurs in the nineteenth-century belt of Ghent dealt with the questions of whether economic role-players deliberately chose a heritage site or were indifferent to the historical character of the site/building, and whether economic role-players had a degree of heritage awareness. Attention was also paid to the impact of the process of internationalisation. Only a limited number of interviews (six) could be conducted, since the factories concerned had to be in use. Most of them had an industrial or distribution function (a paint factory, a chocolate factory, a plant for bottling and tasting wines, another for the production and distribution of ceramics, a distributor of inexpensive furniture, non-exclusive shops, and workshops).

In spite of the limited number of interviews, we tend to accept that the economic role-players interviewed had no economic "need" of heritage, except in the case of the bottling factory, since the entrepreneur had specifically sought out an old industrial building with a positive image due to its wine-tasting activity. Not surprisingly, a former textile factory was chosen, of which several production units had already been destroyed but which included a former owner's home of excellent architectural quality.

In another case, heritage awareness could be recognised as a *post factum* reflex. A producer of Belgian chocolates (*pralines*) decided to re-use a former textile factory because of the old building's excellent thermic isolation and the fact that redeveloping the existing building appeared possible at a lower cost than commissioning a new building. The satisfaction and pride came into effect after the factory had been completely restored, since the owner received an award for it.

In cases where heritage awareness underlies redevelopment, the initiators are mostly design groups and project developers (see Figures 4 and 5). Being on the national register of protected monuments seems to be considered a nuisance, expensive and a cause of delay rather than an advantage. In one case, a factory owner actually chose not to apply for the subsidies, to which he was entitled.

Figure 7: Re-used textile factories: a heritage requirement?

A: A wine bottling and tasting company: *a priori* heritage awareness, 2001

B: A chocolate factory: *a posteriori* heritage awareness, 2001

Fieldwork related to empty nineteenth-century buildings revealed that some owners of protected industrial buildings deliberately encouraged decay, for example by removing parts of the roof or the gutters, because they hoped that demolition would be allowed if the building became precarious. They even put pressure on the authorities to do their part (by changing the land use planning) because the economic value of a "monument" would drop instead of rising, due to declining economic potential. If the authorities decided to prevent the loss of an industrial building by instituting the legal protection procedure, the owner could demand "plan damage", since s/he could argue that the planned economic activities were no longer possible.

In such cases, there is no heritage awareness of any kind and decisions may be taken by middlemen or representatives of large financial groups with international links (for example, in the case of the empty *Filature Nouvelle Orléans* which was in the hands of a company located in Brussels).

Thus the authorities have become reluctant to use the legal protection procedure as a tool of preservation, since it has negative financial and planning consequences for the community (expert interview, van Doorne 2001).

Figure 8: International indifference and deliberate neglect

Of course, one has to take economic realities into account and therefore one cannot always expect to find/attract suitable economic activities that are in harmony with the social structure of the surrounding neighbourhood. Typical multistorey manchesterian facto-

ries, built for production on several levels, do not answer the need for fast loading and unloading of trucks. Redevelopment for housing may be too expensive (in the case of public housing) or too risky because the neighbourhood may lack a positive image (in the case of expensive lofts for higher income groups).

Nevertheless, examples show that some disused factories simply represent a capital investment on the part of anonymous groups. They do not have a project — economic or residential — but merely await opportunities, to be asked for or created by others. In such cases the impact of the authorities is small and any larger town renewal project or systematic planning becomes difficult. On the other hand, small ownership is widespread in Belgium. This is not conducive to dynamic, well-planned redevelopment taking historicity and social structures into consideration. Therefore a project such as the multi-faceted, large-scale redevelopment mentioned above (see Figure 6) remains an exception (Vanneste 2001b).

4. Conclusion: some lessons to be drawn from the case of Ghent

On the one hand Graham *et al* (2000: 17) promote heritage as being

> ... that part of the past which we select in the present for contemporary purposes [while] the worth attributed to these artefacts rests less in their intrinsic merit than in a complex array of contemporary values, demands and even moralities.

On the other hand, this study has shown that these values are seldom shared by the entrepreneurs or owners of nineteenth-century industrial buildings or by the residents of nineteenth-century neighbourhoods (at least not in Ghent). On the contrary, members of both groups show almost complete indifference towards the historical pattern.

This means that the local community does not play the part of the "fool" in the preservation process and that economic role-players seldom support a philosophy that would take the heritage value of the nineteenth-century industrial building (as in the 6F-model) into consideration. Only project developers — and three different agencies were involved during our fieldwork — tend to focus on the historicity of a building or a site. In most cases they have no other choice,

since the authorities are partners in the project (as in the Dock North Project) or the factory is legally protected by the National Register of Monuments (as in the case of the Court House Project).

For the local community, the factory is not a symbol of identity. In most cases, industrial buildings seem to be seen as a burden, preventing the creation of open spaces. In a few cases there is a kind of symbolic value involved, but the connotation is rather negative. This reminds us of the fact that general expectations about support for urban renewal and heritage preservation depend on the local population. Location-specific circumstances and history — in this instance, the history of the Ghent textile industry as totally different from, for example, the mining industry in other parts of Flanders and Belgium — have been taken into account to explain the attitude of the local community along with a lack of class consciousness or an inability to articulate their concerns.

Finally, the authorities are not commended by the local communities or by investors when they use the protection procedure to put an industrial building on the National Register of Monuments in an attempt to secure its preservation. On the contrary, the negative consequences for the community become very obvious, so there is a tendency to use this ultimate instrument less than before.

The most effective solution seems to lie in the hands of the local authorities, not in terms of legal protection, but via planning. This protection may not be limited to buildings, but considers a larger spatial entity in which representatives of the neighbourhood, private redevelopment agencies, and economic role-players (those using or interested in using the factories) as well as various public departments such as the Services of Economic Development, of Urban Planning and of Monument Care are involved. Besides the cost of such projects, obstacles in the case of Ghent (Flanders) may include the indifference of international players or small owners, both immobilising the planning process.

It is interesting to test these insights in relation to cities and communities where the whole historic city centre is experiencing problems of dramatic change hand-in-hand with decay. The first concerns the "fool": do not count on those who may identify with the heritage for preservation actions; in some (many?) cases, identification is masked

or disrupted by socio-economic and spatial processes. The second relates to the legal protection of heritage: planning seems a better tool for preservation than legal protection, since the latter is mostly non-preventative and is therefore seldom integrated into larger programmes which would take into account the socio-economic tissue of the whole neighbourhood and the concerns of all the role-players.

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