Carmen Van Praet

7 The Opposite of Dante's Hell? The Transfer of Ideas for Social Housing at International Congresses in the 1850s–1860s*

In 1855 two Belgian civil servants – Edouard Ducpétiaux (1804–1868) and Auguste Visschers (1804–1874) – published an influential report in which they registered information about ‘social housing’. Assigned by the Belgian *Commission Permanente des Sociétés de Secours Mutuels* (‘Permanent Commission of Benefit Societies’), they examined and compared several housing schemes in different European cities. They concluded that the act of building “healthy, convenient and economic houses” was one of the most powerful ways to solve the social question and to aid the working classes.¹ The issue of housing and hygiene problems of workmen in European cities in the 19th century was closely linked to expertise in health policy. With the advent of industrialisation, the question of developing adequate housing for the emergent working classes became more pressing than before. Moreover, the problem of unhygienic houses in industrial cities did not stop at the borders of a particular nation-state, sometimes literally, as pandemic diseases spread out transnationally. Historiography about social policy in general and social housing in particular, has often focused on individual cases because of the different pace of industrial and urban development, and is thus dominated by national perspectives.² However, transnational influences

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1 Edouard Ducpétiaux and Auguste Visschers, *Rapport de la commission permanente des sociétés de secours mutuels sur les combinaisons ayant pour but de faciliter aux ouvriers l’acquisition d’habitations convenables* (Brussels: Lesigne, 1855), 43.

2 See: John Burnett, *A Social History of Housing, 1815–1970* (London: Methuen, 1980); Myriam Cassiers, *Bruxelles, 150 ans de logements ouvriers et sociaux* (Brussels: Dire, 1989); Fabienne Chevallier, *Le Paris moderne: histoire des politiques d’hygiène, 1855–1898* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2010); Jean-Pierre Flamand, *Loger le peuple: essai sur l’histoire du logement social en France* (Paris: La Découverte, 1989); Roger-Henri, *Les origines du logement social en France* (Paris: Les éditions ouvrières, 1967); Geneviève Heller, *‘Propre en ordre’: habitation et vie domestique 1850–1930: l’exemple vaudois* (Lausanne: Editions d’en-bas, 1979); Colette Huberty, Marijke Hoflack and Philippe Moureaux, *100 ans de logement social à Molenbeek: bilan et perspectives d’avenir* (Brussels: Le logement molenbeekois, 2000); Luc Joos, Guido Deseyn, Jo

also played a vital role in the development of social policy.³ Moreover, Aiqun Hu and Patrick Manning contend that international forces conveyed basic ideas while national forces determined the timing and the specifics of the adoption of international models.⁴ Was this also the case for early housing models in the mid 19th century?

Desmedt and Marie-Louise Bisschops, *Volkshuisvesting in Gent. Tentoonstelling naar aanleiding van 80 jaar Gentse maatschappij voor huisvesting* (Ghent: Stad Gent, 1984); Joseph Melling, ed., *Housing, Social Policy and the State* (London: Croom Helm, 1980); Richard Plunz, *A History of Housing in New York City: Dwelling Type and Social Change in the American Metropolis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); Richard Rodger, *Housing in Urban Britain, 1780–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Marcel Smets, *De ontwikkeling van de tuinvijkgedachte in België: een overzicht van de Belgische volkswoningbouw in de periode van 1830 tot 1930* (Brussels: Mardaga, 1977); Christianne Smit, “Symbols and Images of the Amsterdam Housing Issue,” in Ilja Van den Broek, Christianne Smit, Dirk Jan Wolffram, eds., *Imagination and Commitment. Representations of the Social Question* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 145–162; Jean-Marc Stébé, *Le logement social en France (1789 à nos jours)* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998); John Nelson Tarn, *Working-class Housing in 19th-century Britain* (London: Lund Humphries for Architectural Association, 1971); Annelies Tollet and Piet Janssens, *Vilvoorde City, meer bepaald in de Far-West: sociale huisvesting* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009); Auke van der Woud, *Koninkrijk vol sloppen: achterbuurten en vuil in de negentiende eeuw* (Amsterdam: Bakker, 2010); Anthony S. Wohl, *The Eternal Slum: Housing and Social policy in Victorian London* (London: Arnold, 1977); Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983).

3 See: Christopher Alain Bayly, Sven Beckert, Matthew Connely, Isabek Hofmeyr, Wendy Kozol and Patricia Seed, “AHR Conversation; On Transnational history,” *American Historical Review* 111, no. 5 (2006): 1440–1464; Patricia Clavin, “Time, Manner, Place: Writing Modern European History in Global, Transnational and International Contexts,” *European History Quarterly*, eds. Laurence Cole, Philipp Ther and Lucy Riall, 40, no. 4 (2010): 624–640; Christoph Conrad, “Social Policy History after the Transnational Turn,” in *Beyond Welfare State Models: Transnational Historical Perspectives on Social Policy*, eds. Pauli Kettunen and Klaus Petersen (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2011), 218–240; Klaus Kiran Patel, “Transnational History,” in European History Online, last modified 3 December, 2010, <http://ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/theories-and-methods/transnational-history/klaus-kiran-patel-transnational-history>; Hugh Heclo, *Modern Social Politics in Britain and Sweden: From Relief to Income Maintenance* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1974); Akira Iriye, “The Transnational Turn,” *Diplomatic History* 31, no. 3 (2007): 373–376; Wolfram Kaiser, “Transnational Mobilization and Cultural Representation: Political Transfer in an Age of Proto-Globalization, Democratization and Nationalism (1848–1914),” *European Review of History* 12, no. 2 (2005): 403–424; Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Pierre-Yves Saunier, “Les regimes circulatoires du domaine social 1800–1940: projets et ingénierie de la convergence et de la différence,” *Genèses* 71, no. 2 (2008): 4–25; Ian Tyrell, “Reflections on the Transnational Turn in United States History: Theory and Practice,” *Journal of Global History* 4, no. 3 (2009): 453–474.

4 Aiqun Hu and Patrick Manning, “The Global Social Insurance Movement since the 1880s,” *Journal of Global History* 5, no. 1 (2010): 125–148.

Historiography generally considers two European capitals – London and Berlin – as trendsetters in the housing question since the 1860s.⁵ These German and English attempts to resolve deficiencies in the housing of the poorer classes – e.g. the philanthropic housing enterprises of Sir Sydney Waterlow (1822–1906), George Peabody (1795–1869), Octavia Hill (1838–1912) or Princess Alice of Hesse-Darmstadt (1843–1878) – are considered as the 19th-century ‘philanthropic blueprints’ for social housing.⁶ This chapter, however, will focus on a small French city: Mulhouse in Alsace, where as early as 1853 a house-building association was founded which constructed a “*cité ouvrière*” (i.e. ‘working class neighbourhood’). I will argue that this concrete example of Mulhouse spread transnationally as the best model to solve the housing problem on social international congresses in Europe during the second part of the 19th century. How did this model fit into the political and moral agenda of a group called ‘hygienists’, and how did it contribute to the conceptualisation and crystallisation of social policy? Can we argue that the circulation of ideas on housing schemes lay at the very basis of the development of social housing as a policy?⁷ Some scholars have stated that “ideational processes” help construct the social problems most social policies are designed to address.⁸ Moreover, these authors showed how ideas helped actors to define their interest and how they also shaped the understandings that underpin political action.

I will focus on the transnational circulation of the Mulhouse-model across borders by examining several archival sources: international newspapers, brochures, bulletins, reports of international congresses, administrative documents and the correspondence of the housing association. Firstly, I will outline the proliferation of social international congresses. In the second part of this chapter, I will examine the sources of inspiration of the Mulhousian entrepreneurs, especially the first Great Exhibition in London (1851) as a platform for the exchange of ideas. After that, I will look at the particularities of the Mulhouse model put

5 Van der Woud, *Koninkrijk vol sloppen*, 26.

6 Thomas Adam, “Philanthropy and the Shaping of Social Distinctions in Nineteenth-Century U.S., Canadian, and German Cities,” in *Philanthropy, Patronage and Civil Society: Experiences from Germany, Great Britain and North America*, ed. Thomas Adam (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 18.

7 See: Adrienne Chambon, Marjorie Johnstone and Stefan Köngeter, “The Circulation of Knowledge and Practices across National borders in the Early Twentieth Century: A Focus on Social Reform Organisations,” *European Journal of Social Work* 18, no. 4 (2015): 495–510.

8 Jal Mehta, “From ‘Whether’ to ‘How’. The Varied Roles of Ideas in Politics,” in *Ideas and Politics in Social Science Research*, eds. Daniel Béland and Robert Henry Cox (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 23–46; Daniel Béland and Mitchell A. Orenstein, “International Organizations as Policy Actors: An Ideational Approach,” *Global Social Policy* 13, no. 2 (2013): 125–143.

forward by an international network of experts or ‘hygienists’. In the final part of this chapter, I will focus on the transfer and local adaptation of the Mulhouse *cité ouvrière* by several Belgian cities. Convergences and divergences will be taken into account and I will consider the different factors that influenced the local transformations, ranging from personal choice to political situation and socio-economic circumstances.

Proliferation of social international congresses

With the advent of industrialisation, the question of developing adequate housing for the emergent working classes was a topical subject. In the 1840s, a series of reports of doctors from different countries revealed the dismal living conditions of the working class (e.g. Louis Villermé (1782–1863) for France, J. Heyman and Daniel Mareska (1803–1858) for Belgium, and Edwin Chadwick (1800–1890) for England). The abominable hygiene, the “moral degeneration” and health consequences prevalent in the slums were very much alike in every industrialising metropolis. It is not coincidental that the number of international congresses on hygiene and social topics expanded substantially in the course of the 19th century.⁹ The topic of social housing was also tackled on an international scale by a group of young progressive doctors, labeled as ‘hygienists’. They developed ‘social medicines’ to combat the new, imperceptible threats to society caused by industrialisation and urbanisation, e.g. industrial fumes, food adulteration, waterborne diseases and soil contamination.¹⁰ In their opinion, the changing conditions made medical expertise vital.¹¹ This group of doctors called for reforms, first in medical science, then in society as a whole. They turned their attention to the natural environment and its possible connection with individual pathological problems.¹² Moreover, they feared that the poor environmental conditions could lead to the “degeneration” of mankind.¹³ The hygienists advocated

9 Nico Randeraad and Chris Leonards, “Transnational Experts in Social Reform, 1840–1880,” *International Review of Social History* 55 (2010): 215–239.

10 Karel Velle, “Medikalisering in België in Historisch Perspectief: een inleiding,” *Revue Belge de Philologie et d’Histoire* 64, no. 2 (1986): 266; Christophe Verbruggen, *Stank bederft onze eetwaren. De reacties op industriële milieuhinder in het 19de-eeuwse Gent* (Ghent: Academia Press, 2002), 6.

11 Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, “Beck Back in the 19th Century. Towards a Genealogy of Risk Society,” *History and Technology* 23, no. 4 (2007): 342.

12 John K. Walton, *Histories of Tourism. Representation, Identity and Conflict* (Frankfurt: Channel View Publications, 2005), 91.

13 See Jo Tollebeek, Liesbet Nys and Henk de Smaele, eds., *De Zieke natie: over de medicalisering van de samenleving 1860–1914* (Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij, 2002).

better public health and recommended “well-ventilated, bright houses, healthy sewer systems and waterworks”.¹⁴ During the second half of the 19th century, hygiene was a leading force that was ready to take charge of everything, and the question of adequate housing was a vital part of it.¹⁵ However, public health and social housing were not yet institutionalised in this period.¹⁶ Moreover, the two concepts crystallised during discussions on the local, the national and even on the international level. It was not a coincidence that when ‘the social question’ was abundantly discussed at the local and national levels (in medical associations and public health boards), the number of international congresses on these topics expanded substantially as well. These international congresses increasingly offered the opportunity to stage, debate and interchange ideas about social challenges more efficiently.¹⁷

The earliest international congresses almost exclusively considered peaceful settlements of international conflicts. Gradually, from the 1850s onwards, international “Welfare”, “Sanitary” and “Social Sciences” congresses, together with international congresses on other themes (e.g. prison reform, prostitution, education, alcoholism, slavery, political economy and statistics) outshined peace conferences. Although these conferences treated a broad array of themes, there were entanglements between them, as they were all linked to the social question.¹⁸ The multiplication of international congresses must be placed within the trend of ‘scientification’ of the society during the second half of the 19th century. International gatherings were a manifestation of the construction of several fields of expert knowledge.¹⁹ Whereas the international congresses in the 1850–1860s discussed a multitude of topics, the congresses in the 1870s–1880s became more specialised. The congresses organised by the *Association Internationale pour le Progrès des Sciences Sociales* from 1862 to 1865 can be quoted as an example of the first type of comprehensive congresses. These international

14 Van der Woud, *Koninkrijk vol sloppen*, 71.

15 Bruno Latour, *The Pasteurization of France* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 23.

16 Eddy S. Houwaart, *De hygiënisten: artsen, staat & volksgezondheid in Nederland 1840–1890* (Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij, 1991).

17 Stijn Van de Perre, “These Mutual Lessons of Nation to Nation. The International Philanthropic Congresses of 1856, 1857 and 1862,” *Conference paper Voluntary Action History Society Liverpool*, 2008, 1, https://www.canonsociaalwerk.eu/1849_Ducpetiaux/philantropische_congressen.pdf.

18 Jasmien van Daele & Christian Müller, “Peaks of Internationalism in Social Engineering: A Transnational History of International Social Reform Associations and Belgian agency, 1860–1925,” *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 90, no. 4 (2012): 1300.

19 Peter M. Haas, “Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination,” *International Organization* 46, no. 1 (1992): 1.

congresses promoted an encyclopedic approach to a holistic social reform project.²⁰ Also, since 1856 International Welfare Congresses were organised that dealt with a variety of topics – e.g. alcohol restrictions, charitable and philanthropic institutions, saving banks, sanitary ameliorations, public assistance, workman's associations, cooperative associations and house building associations. The adherents of the comprehensive congresses were doctors, lawyers, architects, manufacturers, engineers, academics, politicians, economists and owners or, in sum, a large group of people worried about, occupied by, and/or engaged with the improvement of the 'fate' of the workingman. From the late 1860s more specialised international congresses were organised, such as the International Medical Congresses. During these gatherings, different medical branches – ranging from surgery, anatomy and physiology to gynecology, obstetrics, ophthalmic sciences, dermatology, psychiatry and even homeopathy – were discussed and formed. Every part of the human body became an object of study. Not surprisingly, the list of members of the International Medical Congresses was almost exclusively composed of medical academics and doctors.

Moreover, society as a whole became itself became an object of study during the second part of the 19th century.²¹ Besides the purely scientific International Medical Congresses, other social congresses were organised, in which the medical knowledge and discourse offered a 'solution to the social question'. Between 1876 and 1884, a conference aiming specifically at hygiene questions took place every two years. These sanitary and welfare congresses formed a transnational platform and a laboratory for hygienists. Unlike the exclusively scientific International Medical Congresses, the International Hygienic Congresses in the 1870s-1880s also hosted other actors. Hygienists, sanitary reformers and physicians gathered with lawyers, architects, civil engineers, economists and industrials to deal with the unhygienic conditions in the growing European cities. Their weapon of choice was not a microscope; it was statistics. They wanted to 'count' the world, in order to 'cure' it.²² Statistics uncovered the causal relation

20 Carmen Van Praet and Christophe Verbruggen, "'Soldiers for a joint cause': A Relational Perspective on Local and International Educational Leagues and Associations in the 1860s," *BMGN, Low Countries Historical Review* 130, no. 1 (2015): 12. For the importance of these conferences, see also: chapters 1, 3, 6 and 7 of this volume.

21 Tollebeek, Nys and de Smaele, *De Zieke natie*.

22 Nico Randeraad, *Het onberekenbare Europa. Macht en getal in de negentiende eeuw* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 2006); Velle, "Medikalisering in België," 265; Dirk Jan Wolffram, "Deftige hervormers. Internationale congressen van statistici en hygiënisten in de 19e eeuw," in *Identiteitspolitiek. Media en de constructie van gemeenschapsgevoel*, eds. Marcel Broersma, Joop W. Koopmans (Hilversum: Velden, 2010), 113. For the growing role of statistics in the care for children, see: chapter 2 of this volume.

between cholera and unhealthy living conditions. Moreover, the predictable pattern of systemic observations contributed to the hygienists' belief that human society could be controlled and managed.²³ During these international gatherings, participants formulated what they saw as "universal knowledge about the social question" and distributed it by means of congress reports, brochures, essays and journals.²⁴ The conferees were influenced by other initiatives as they looked across their national borders for inspiration. The interchange of ideas and practices and the successful foreign examples were used as a lever to put pressure on policymakers at home. The international social congresses in the second half of the 19th century thus formed laboratories for social ideas.²⁵ But they were also hubs in a diffuse and unstructured network of hygienists and social reformers, or part of what Pierre Yves Saunier has called the "first circulatory regime" in the field of social policy, characterised by "the interchange of words and experiences, in order to resist, devise, support or change the response to problems stemming from the industrial and urban revolution".²⁶

Philanthropic tourism: The fieldwork of social reformers visiting housing projects

The two Belgian commissioners Ducpétiaux and Visschers attended several international congresses, but besides that, they also visited several housing projects in different European industrial cities, such as Paris, Berlin, London and Mulhouse.²⁷ They thus took part in what was called "philanthropic tourism".²⁸ After their 'fieldwork' and after inspecting and examining different projects, they made recommendations about social housing. Ducpétiaux and Visschers noted that the Benefit Building Societies in Great Britain, which collected financial means for the constructions of houses, were a great example and they also referred to the *Gemeinnützige Baugesellschaft* ('Non-Profit Building Association'),

23 Nico Randerad, "The International Statistical Congress (1853–1876): Knowledge Transfers and their Limits," *European History Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2011): 54–55.

24 Wolfram, "Deftige hervormers," 112.

25 Anne Rasmussen, "Jalons pour une histoire des congrès internationaux au XIX^e siècle: régulation scientifique et propagande intellectuelle," *Rérelations internationales* 62 (1990): 120.

26 Saunier, "Les regimes circulatoires du domaine social," 17.

27 Ducpétiaux and Visschers, *Rapport de la commission permanente des sociétés de secours*, 4.

28 Marie-Sylvie Dupont-Bouchat, "Du tourisme pénitentiaire à l'Internationale des philanthropes". La création d'un réseau pour la protection de l'enfance à travers les congrès internationaux (1840–1914)," *Paedagogica Historica* 38, no. 2–3 (2002): 533–563.

a building company in Berlin. But the most significant enterprise of all, Ducpétiaux and Visschers thought, was a housing project in Mulhouse. This French *cité ouvrière* was, in their opinion, “the most comprehensive example” they had visited. How did this rather small industrial city obtain the status of an international example for these Belgian housing reformers?

During the first half of the 19th century, Mulhouse had developed a diversified economic base, characterised by textile and metallurgical enterprises. The city not only underwent important economic changes, but also ‘suffered’ – as the hygienists in the nineteenth century formulated it – from a demographic explosion: a tripling of the population from about 10,000 to 30,000 inhabitants in less than 50 years. Natural increase was not the only cause; the decisive factor was immigration.²⁹ Mulhouse expanded into one of the most advanced centres and was called “France’s Manchester”.³⁰ Hygienists and entrepreneurs stated that, as a result of this important demographic explosion, the living conditions of the working classes were “atrocious”. The overcrowded quarters were havens for pandemic diseases such as typhoid fever, tuberculosis and cholera.³¹ Louis Villermé – a leading French hygienist – visited Mulhouse in 1835 and 1836 and was appalled by the “squalor of the workers living in the town”.³² Doctor Villermé was not the only one concerned with the living conditions of the labourers. A group of large manufacturers of Mulhouse, gathered in the *Société Industrielle de Mulhouse* (SIM), was ‘disturbed’ by the situation as well. This association endorsed the dictum that ‘a boss owes more than wages to his workers’ and they sponsored charitable and philanthropic works, ranging from homes for the elderly to public baths and associations to prevent industrial accidents. The SIM also aspired to offer cheap, affordable and decent houses for the working classes. The factory-owners realised that the rents generally exceeded workers’ wages and they wanted to dispense with the need for their employees to move to nearby villages. The industrialist André Koechlin (1789–1875) was the first to build low cost worker tenements in 1835.³³ Just like in other industrialising regions, these piecemeal philanthropic measures were adequate instruments of

29 Arthur Borghese, “Industrialist Paternalism and Lower-class Agitation. The Case of Mulhouse, 1848–1851,” *Histoire Sociale* 13, no. 25 (1980): 57–58.

30 *Northern Star*, July 3, 1847, 8.

31 Van der Woud, *Koninkrijk vol sloppen*, 87.

32 Robert Fox, “Science, Industry, and the Social Order in Mulhouse, 1798–1871,” *The British Journal for the History of Science* 17, no. 2 (1984): 147–148.

33 Borghese, “Industrialist Paternalism and Lower-class Agitation,” 81–82.

control.³⁴ Moreover, this philanthropic work was determined by a latent desire of the new industrials to integrate themselves into the leading circles of urban society.³⁵ Furthermore, the Mulhouse captains of industry also believed that they had to look for solutions to solve the social question in order to avoid direct state intervention, thus preserving their freedom and their interests.³⁶

In search of good practices, the members of the SIM looked abroad at better housing solutions for their labourers. A deputation of the SIM visited the *Great Exhibition of Industry of all Nations* in London in 1851. During this trip to London, the deputies of Mulhouse were introduced to the cottage projects executed by the British architect Henry Roberts (1803–1876). Roberts was the honorary architect for the *Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes of London* (SICLC), a powerful association that made attempts to reform urban housing. In 1850, Henry Roberts wrote an essay called ‘The Dwellings of the Labouring Classes’, in which he described the advantages and the inconveniences of several building systems.³⁷ He observed that living together too closely in the large, cheap buildings that were intended to hold dozens of houses (e.g. tenement houses, barracks or union-houses) resulted in protests, disputes and irregularities. He argued that the aggregation of a large number of people on the same spot and in close proximity led to unfavourable results.³⁸ Roberts advocated for “separate, spacious and salutary” family houses with more privacy, in blocks of four, six or eight houses. For the Great Exhibition in 1851, Henry Roberts designed such a model-block for the SICLC in Hyde Park.³⁹

After their visit to the Crystal Palace the Mulhousian entrepreneurs launched a competition for the building of affordable and decent housing for workers near the industrial site, which was won by the French architect and civil engineer Emile Muller (1823–1889).⁴⁰ The construction of Muller’s design started in 1853, under the aegis of a brand-new association, the *Société Mulhousienne*

34 Neil Thompson, “Social Movements, Social Justice and Social Work,” *British Journal of Social Work* 32, no. 6 (2002): 711; Sandrine Kott, “La Haute-Alsace: Une région modèle en matière d’habitat ouvrier (1853–1914),” *La Revue de l’Économie Sociale*, no. 1 (1988): 35.

35 Adam, “Philanthropy and the Shaping of Social Distinctions,” 17.

36 Sandrine Kott, “Enjeux et significations d’une politique sociale: la Société industrielle de Mulhouse (1827–1870),” *Revue d’Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine* 34, no. 4 (1987): 655; Sandrine Kott, “Des philanthropies aux politiques sociales. Solutions françaises et allemandes à la question sociale en Haute-Alsace (1850–1914)” (Master’s thesis, Sorbonne Paris, 1991), 153.

37 Sharon Marcus, *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 234–235.

38 *Norfolk News*, October 20, 1866, 5.

39 Ann-Louise Shapiro, *Housing the Poor of Paris, 1850–1902* (Wisconsin: Madison, 1985), 163.

40 *Bulletin de la Société Industrielle de Mulhouse* 24, no. 116 (1851): 135.

des Cités Ouvrières (SOMCO).⁴¹ There were 12 founder-shareholders in this house building association, and the mayor of Mulhouse – Jean Dollfus (1800–1887) – was the president. Even though Muller received much credit for this housing-model, his design of the industrial town certainly was inspired by and derived from Henry Roberts’ conception.⁴² In this housing model, attention was paid to the importance of a sewage system, to space and light, and to the circulation of fresh air.⁴³ (see Figure 7.1) Thus, the Great Exhibition in London constituted a site for international exchange. The transfer of Roberts’ ideas was also facilitated by the fact that the president of France – Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte (1808–1873) – requested to translate the essay of Roberts into French. The library of the SIM possessed a copy Roberts’ book on housing models and we can assume that Emile Muller consulted this work when he set up his own housing model. In fact, the French architect Muller even recommended Roberts’ ‘The Dwellings of the Labouring Classes’ during international meetings as a “guiding manual” for everyone who wanted to improve the housing of the labourers.⁴⁴ The admiration was mutual: in a widespread publication in 1855 Roberts stated that the new project in Mulhouse blossomed to become an international model of a working class neighbourhood.⁴⁵

The project in Mulhouse received international attention and the expectations were high, but the *cité ouvrière* project was certainly not the only housing project that circulated internationally in the 19th century as an example or model. During the social international congresses, it was common to put forward local and national reform ideas, initiatives, discursive experiences and practical examples as international solutions to the social question.⁴⁶ In September 1856, an International Welfare Congress was held in Brussels, and the founding fathers of Mulhouse – Jean Dollfus and doctor Achille Penot (1801–1886) – were on the guest list. In a discussion about housing the poor, the international conferees collected and exchanged information about six housing projects. First in line was a French housing project of Jules Emile Scrive (1837–1898) in Lille. Secondly,

⁴¹ Janet Polasky, *Reforming Urban Labor. Routes to the City, Roots in the Country* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 48.

⁴² Fox, “Science, Industry, and the Social Order in Mulhouse,” 153.

⁴³ Brochure of model houses for four families at the Great Exhibition, erected at the cavalry barracks in Hyde Park, p. 2–3, 02 B 31, Fonds Société Industrielle de Mulhouse, Municipal Archives of Mulhouse, Mulhouse, France.

⁴⁴ *Congrès international de Bienfaisance de Bruxelles. Session de 1856. Compte rendu des séances* (Brussels: Aug. Decq, 1857), 100, 457.

⁴⁵ Graham Towers, *Building Democracy. Community Architecture in the Inner Cities* (Bristol, UCL Press, 1995), 10.

⁴⁶ Van Daele & Müller, “Peaks of Internationalism in Social Engineering”.

two housing projects from Belgium were discussed: the project of the *Grand Hornu* erected by coal industrials in Hainaut and the project of *La Vielle-Montagne* set up by zinc industrials in Liège. Subsequently, a philanthropic and religious housing project in Groningen (Holland) and a model working class neighbourhood in Copenhagen (Denmark) were presented. The final project was that of Jean Dollfus and Achille Penot. They discussed the technical and practical aspects of the *cit ouvrire* in Mulhouse. Despite a lot of similarities between these six projects, the *cit ouvrire* in Mulhouse was the most eye-catching. It was particularly interesting because it combined two specific characteristics: first of all, the project had not been carried out by a single manager, but by a group of Mulhousian patrons gathered in a house building association (SOMCO). Secondly, the workers could eventually become owners of their rented houses after 15 years of mortgage payments (i.e. in practice by means of a monthly payment of 15 to 20 francs as installments or annuities). The method behind the plan was straightforward: the SOMCO bought land and built houses, taking advantage of buying wholesale and of building on a large scale.⁴⁷ After the International Welfare Congress in 1856, a British newspaper gave the following account:

The system now most approved of by philanthropists and labourers is that of small dwellings, designed for the least possible number of households, in which privacy, as a rule, will predominate over a life in common. This is the system applied in the *cits ouvrires* of Mulhouse, in France, which has been adopted by the building societies in England, and has served as a basis for institutions of alike nature in the different capitals of Europe. What most recommends this system to the favour of the working classes is the idea it holds out the possibility of each person becoming an owner.⁴⁸

The opposite of Dante's hell? Mulhouse, a utopian working class neighbourhood in France

The model in Mulhouse was in favour because it was congruent with hygienists' discourse: everything that could "cause the outspread of pandemic diseases" was cast aside. Doctor Penot strengthened this 'hygienic' discourse on the International Welfare Congress by showing that only a small amount of cholera cases were diagnosed in the *cit ouvrire* when a pandemic made a lot of victims in Mulhouse in 1854. However, the question of dwelling houses was treated as more than a purely sanitary one. The initiators in Mulhouse had economic mo-

⁴⁷ *London Daily News*, October 20, 1866, 5.

⁴⁸ *Morning Post*, November 1, 1856.

tives as well, and one of the key motives of the industrial manufacturers was to increase productivity.⁴⁹ Thus, social housing was from its beginnings more than just a philanthropic act. Besides personal benefits for the factory-owners, better housing and urban planning were also means to control the working class and prevent social disorder. More specifically, from 1847 until 1851 Mulhouse experienced several uprisings.⁵⁰ The first riot broke out in June 1847 and was prompted by the high prices of food, which in their turn were caused by a potato blight in 1845 and poor weather conditions. The situation deteriorated after the fall of the July Monarchy of France in February 1848. The popular agitation became increasingly organised, indicating the pervasiveness of socialist republican propaganda among the lower classes.⁵¹ This volatile situation was the catalyst for the industrialists in Mulhouse. Furthermore, during the international congresses, the importance of the 1848 revolution was presented as a warning of what could happen if the workers' needs were not met.⁵² The paternalistic captains of industry in Mulhouse feared a social revolution, which would threaten and undermine their hegemony.⁵³ This urged them to take measures to improve the living conditions of their labourers. Moreover, in 1852 the national government of France issued two decrees in which 10 million francs were granted for the improvement of the working-class houses in the large industrial cities. Private persons and associations could receive subsidies and the Mulhousian house building association received in total 300,000 francs from the national government to execute Muller's designs.⁵⁴ More specifically, this subsidy of the central government had to be used to build roads, sidewalks and fountains, as well as to plant trees.⁵⁵ For the Mulhousian entrepreneurs the lines between personal benefits, philanthropy and social welfare, between discipline and humanitarianism, and between paternalism and emancipation, were thin and permeable.

During the international conferences the first social reformers and hygienists examined the best models to obtain an ideal bourgeois society according to an

49 *Annales de l'Association internationale pour le progrès des sciences sociales: Congrès de Gand* (Brussels: A. Lacroix, 1864), 541.

50 Fox, "Science, Industry, and the Social Order in Mulhouse," 151.

51 Borghese, "Industrialist Paternalism and Lower-class Agitation," 63.

52 *Annales de l'Association internationale pour le progrès des sciences sociales: Congrès de Gand*, 558.

53 Borghese, "Industrialist Paternalism and Lower-class Agitation," 70, 75.

54 Ducpétiaux and Visschers, *Rapport de la commission permanente des sociétés de secours mutuels*, 15.

55 Achille Penot, *Les cités ouvrières de Mulhouse et du département du Haut-Rhin. Nouvelle édition augmentée de la description des bains et des lavoirs établis à Mulhouse* (Mulhouse: Bader, 1867), 12.

elitist blueprint, e.g. a *cité ouvrière*, housing 'model' workers in 'model' dwellings. Like the entrepreneurs of Mulhouse, these international experts clung to upper class values and considered themselves as new moral authorities. In their opinion, the *cité ouvrière* of Mulhouse led to moral advantages, because the labourers were encouraged to maintain "the garden of their new house instead of going to the pub" and, because they could become owners, they would be less revolutionary.⁵⁶ The tension between social work as a force for social regulation and as a force for social development or emancipation was thus a constant presence.⁵⁷ The *cité ouvrière* in Mulhouse was a total concept, containing everything required for health, comfort *and* for social order. The industrial city contained blocks of four houses, each with an enclosed, small garden. The SOMCO also recognised the importance of clean water and installed a water distribution system. More 'social' buildings were constructed as well, such as a kindergarten, homes for the elderly, a hospital for disabled workers, public baths, places for laundry, a swimming pool, a popular library, a communal kitchen, a cooperative bakery and a grocery shop. There were also factory-schools, where young children were educated during their paid hours of work and also mutual aid funds were set up. When ill, the workers who engaged in the fund received 50 per cent of their wage, in addition to medication and a free doctor consultation. Some Mulhousian industrials also handed out retirement payments to their old, sick or invalid workers. In sum, the *cité ouvrière* in Mulhouse encouraged the three 'pillars' of progressive liberalism in order to solve the social question. Instruction was promoted by the factory-schools and the public library, while precaution and saving were stimulated by the mutual aid funds and by the possibility of attaining property. By extending these extra-legal benefits, self-help was stimulated. It was a liberal conception of helping the poor: by enlarging and encouraging the civil society, the social question could be 'solved' without direct state intervention. The initiatives in Mulhouse in the 1850s differed from the early century philanthropic initiatives set out to appease the workers. "Once a man becomes a owner," stated Mulhousian architect Muller, "he will blush to eat the bread of charity".⁵⁸ But even though the *cité ouvrière* of Mulhouse contained social emancipation elements, it still remained to some extent a paternalistic initiative.

Mulhousian doctor Achille Penot was not the only one attending international congresses to promote and to legitimise the *cité ouvrière* model. Other dele-

⁵⁶ *Congrès international de Bienfaisance de Bruxelles*, 95–99.

⁵⁷ Thompson, "Social Movements, Social Justice and Social Work," 711. For more on this tension with regard to participatory initiatives, see: chapter 3.

⁵⁸ *Morning Post*, November 1, 1856, 3.

Figure 7.1: View on a part of the *cités ouvrières* of Mulhouse. (© Municipal Archives of Mulhouse)

gates of SIM and SOMCO were present at several international congresses as well. Jean Dollfus and Emile Muller attended the International Welfare Congresses in Brussels (1856), Frankfurt (1857) and London (1862), actively participating in the discussions on the housing question during these gatherings. Muller offered practical tips about the *cités ouvrières* at the International Welfare Congress in 1856. Again, Muller did not take all the credit for his project, emphasising that Henry Roberts was his source of inspiration. During his contribution, Muller also referred to several other house-building initiatives in Belgium (e.g. *Grand Hornu*, *Société John Cockerill*, *Société de la Vieille-Montagne*), and to measures taken in several industrialised cities (Berlin, Bremen, Amsterdam, The Hague, Geneva, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Turin, Rome, New York).⁵⁹

Jean Dollfus made his international appearance during the debates of the International Welfare Congress in London (1862). He presented a long and exhaustive report (similar to that of doctor Penot in 1856), in which he enumerated all initiatives made by industrialists in Mulhouse (e.g. municipals schools, public baths, refuges for old and disabled workers, kindergartens, mutual aid funds, public library, cooperative grocery shops). Moreover, Jean Dollfus – dubbed by the press as “the humane employer” – also introduced a new regulation giving

⁵⁹ *Congrès international de Bienfaisance de Bruxelles*, 457–470.

women time off for childbirth and the subsequent six weeks without suspending their wages, in order to diminish the heavy rate of mortality among the infant children.⁶⁰ In 1862, the delegates of Mulhouse were pleased to state that the *cités ouvrières* had already found a lot of imitators.⁶¹ The project in Mulhouse received a lot of international appreciation. After attending the International Welfare Congress in London in 1862, the Belgian liberal Gustave Rolin-Jaequemyns (1835–1902) stated that Mulhouse was the “opposite of Dante’s hell”: “Hope, redemption by work is the device that could be inscribed at the entrance of this good place. It is as beautiful as Utopia, as eloquent as a fact”.⁶² That same year, during the international congress of the *Association Internationale pour les Progrès des Sciences Sociales*, Ducpétiaux argued that the model of Mulhouse was very successful. By 1864, more than four fifths of the houses were owned by labourers. During the World Exhibition in 1867 in Paris, the SOMCO built a scale model of the model houses at ‘Champ-de-Mars’. Many visitors from other European countries viewed the project from Mulhouse, and more than 15,000 booklets about the project were handed out to the visitors. During this World Exhibition, the SOMCO received a gold medal and architect Muller received a silver one.⁶³ For the captains of industry of Mulhouse, such international attention also had personal benefits and an economic motive: by spreading their model, other, foreign textile entrepreneurs could follow their example and in this way the international competition would be fairer.⁶⁴ The housing project in Mulhouse also implied a potential investment opportunity for entrepreneurs who wanted to diversify their deposits. By 1882, the SOMCO had built 1016 houses, of which 706 were redeemed by the labourers. Even in the literature, Mulhouse received the status of a utopian working class neighbourhood. For example, Vornsky, a major character in Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* (1877), visited Mulhouse in his search for a better society.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ *Manchester Courier*, 20 December 1864, 3.

⁶¹ *Congrès international de bienfaisance de Londres. Session de 1862. Compte rendu des débats* (London: Trübner, 1863), 342–348.

⁶² Letter from London written by Rolin-Jaequemyns, 10 July 1862, 0043 D, Correspondance de Londres. Congrès international de bienfaisance, Private Archives of the Rolin-Jaequemyns family.

⁶³ Société Mulhousienne des cités ouvrières, assemblée générale des actionnaires. 14e exercice: 30 juin 1866 au 30 juin 1867, Etats des constructions des cités et extraits des rapport Jean Dollfus (1854–1875, 1869–1881), A 1421, Fonds SOMCO, Municipal Archives of Mulhouse.

⁶⁴ Kott, “Des philanthropies aux politiques sociales,” 56.

⁶⁵ Christianne Smit, “International Reform Literature: Indictment, Guidance and Inspiration,” in *In Control of the City. Local Elites and the Dynamics of Urban Politics, 1800–1960*, eds. Stefan Couperus, Christianne Smit and Dirk Jan Wolffram (Leuven: Peeters 2007), 98.

Small-scale housing projects in Belgium influenced by Mulhouse

In contrast to France, the revolutionary breeze of 1848 did not break through in Belgium. This lack of social pressure could explain why social housing was not high on the political agenda in the second half of the 19th century. However, we can detect some minor measures. In 1849, the liberal Minister of the Interior, Charles Rogier (1800–1885), provided credits for ‘slum clearances’ and obliged the municipalities to found local “*Comités de salubrité*” (‘health committees’) in charge of examining the local situation and making proposals for improvements.⁶⁶ Rogier was also the driving force of the National Congress on Public Hygiene in Brussels in 1851, which commissioned Ducpétiaux and Visschers to write the abovementioned report on the housing question. Moreover, local governments especially felt responsible for the housing question, in particular for the *Bureaux de Bienfaisance* (i.e. Social Welfare Councils). In this part, we will examine how the transnational circulation of the Mulhouse-model had an impact on the development of social housing policy in Belgium. Convergences and divergences, the different factors influencing the local transformations and the effectiveness of the measures will also be taken into account.

29 April 1859. During a council meeting, the *Bureau de Bienfaisance* of Nivelles decides to invest financial reserves into building 12 “healthy” houses for workers. Inspirer of this idea was doctor François Lebon (1807–1900), who attended the International Welfare Congress in Brussels in 1856, where he became inspired by the reports of Penot, Dollfus and Muller from Mulhouse.⁶⁷ The architect of this first Belgian housing project was Raymond Carlier (1805–1883), who followed hygienic prescriptions conscientiously, e.g. the houses in Nivelles had an ingenious ventilation system. The project of Carlier in Nivelles showed a lot of architectural similarities with the houses in Mulhouse, but there was one important difference, determined by the local socio-economic context. When a labourer of Mulhouse registered for a house built by SOMCO, he had to have a starting capital. Consequently, the houses built by the SOMCO were mostly set up for a middle class of labourers, artisans and craftsmen. In Nivelles by contrast, the members of the *Bureau de Bienfaisance* stipulated that everyone, even a labourer without savings, could participate in the project, as helping the poor was one of

⁶⁶ Bernard Van Causenbroeck, *Rode Daken. De Goede Werkmanswoning 75 Jaar* (Ghent: Amsab, 1998), 11.

⁶⁷ “Bureau de bienfaisance de Nivelles: projet de logements destinés aux ouvriers, 1859”, University Library Ghent.

the main tasks of this local institution. Like Mulhouse, the housing of the poor by the *Bureau de Bienfaisance* of Nivelles had an important moral aspect: doctor Lebon stated that the selection of the 12 families was based on “their good behaviour, good morals and dedication to work”.⁶⁸ The project in Nivelles was small-scale, but nevertheless innovative because of its accessibility. On 26 October 1884, 12 families were invited to the city hall of Nivelles for a solemn ceremony to celebrate their ownership of the houses after 23 years of “hard work and savings”.⁶⁹ The housing experts of Mulhouse, Emile Cacheux (1844–1923) and Emile Muller, who published an international overview of housing schemes in the late 19th century, also acknowledged the importance of the system in Nivelles: “it was the first time that the principle of acquisition of property was introduced in Belgium”.⁷⁰ Lebon was thus a pioneer in Belgium, and others soon followed his example. In 1860, the *Bureau de Bienfaisance* of Wavres built 12 houses for the working class, imitating Carlier’s architectural and the financial principles.⁷¹ Other local municipalities in Belgium followed: Hoei (1867), Melle (1867), Jodoigne (1868), Sleidinge (1870), Zomergem (1870), Morlanwelz (1873) and Blankenberge (1873).⁷² These small-scale projects had some characteristics in common: the labourer could become owner of his rented accommodation by means of a repayment plan and the *Bureau de Bienfaisance* appointed inspectors to guarantee social order and hygiene. Furthermore, the workers who bought the houses were prohibited from selling liquor or opening a pub in the house and they were also required to maintain the garden.

24 June 1851. In the city counsel of Ghent, a pamphlet of city counselor Adolphe Burggraeve (1806–1902) – also professor medical sciences of the university of Ghent and head of the Civil Hospital – is discussed.⁷³ Like Mulhouse, Ghent was a dynamic textile-city that grew spectacularly in a short period.⁷⁴ Conse-

68 François Lebon, *Des habitations ouvrières à Nivelles. Moyen pratique de faciliter aux classes laborieuses l'accès du capital et de la propriété* (Nivelles: Guignardé, 1878), 5, 11.

69 Hippolyte de Royer de Dour, *Essaie d'étude d'économie sociale. Les habitations ouvrières en Belgique* (Brussels: Société belge de librairie, 1890), 228.

70 Emile Cacheux and Emile Muller, *Les habitations ouvrières en tous pays* (Paris: Baudry, 1889), 209.

71 De Royer de Dour, *Essaie d'étude d'économie sociale*, 229–231.

72 “Rapporten van de Hoge Gezondheidsraad, 1867–1873”/volume 4 (Brussels: s.n., 1873), p. 65, 215–216, 254, 519–520, 561, Archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Belgium, Brussels, Belgium.

73 Adolphe Burggraeve, *Projet de cités d'ouvriers pour la ville de Gand* (Ghent: De Busscher, 1851), 4.

74 For the situation in Ghent, see chapter 1/introduction to his volume.

quently, as early as the 1840s, two doctors – J. Heyman and Daniel Mareska – already noted that Ghent was “polluted, overcrowded, insanitary, and disease-infested”. Just as Villermé did for France, they noticed that the “housing of the labourers was at its worst”⁷⁵. Ten years later, Aldophe Burggraeve started visiting the slums in Ghent repeatedly and was time and again “appalled by the deprivation of the workers living there”. In 1851, Burggraeve initiated the foundation of a house building association in Ghent, the *Société Anonyme pour l’Amélioration des Demeures de la Classe Ouvrière*. Proceeding from this association, Burggraeve wrote the above-mentioned pamphlet to the city council, in which he clearly endorsed the hygienists’ discourse. Burggraeve looked for disturbing and unhealthy elements in the natural environment of the laborers and connected them with the pathological problems of this group. He listed all unhealthy quarters of the city of Ghent, marked by “overcrowding, pollution, infections, and the total absence of light and air”. As a remedy, Burggraeve advocated improving or even demolishing the unhealthy quarters and building new and healthy *cités ouvrières modèles*. In his view, a perfect workers’ district had public baths and lavatories, sanitary installations and water pumps and each house should also have its own little garden, because “it was a manner of moralisation and a useful distraction to keep the workers away from pubs and other immoral places”. A kindergarten and a school were part of his plans as well, because “instruction would moralise the labourers from childhood on”.⁷⁶

In this project, Burggraeve vaguely referred to initiatives in France and England, yet he did not explicitly name the two influential architects Henri Roberts or Emile Muller. However, we can state that Burggraeve was influenced by the international trend for building private houses for the labourers. Just like Roberts and Muller, doctor Burggraeve opposed tenement houses – or what he called “*bataillons-carrés*” (‘blocks of flats’) – and he promoted separate, spacious and hygienic houses. Despite Burggraeve’s efforts, his plans to build model working-class neighbourhoods were never realised.⁷⁷ Whereas Dollfus and the other shareholders in Mulhouse had enough political and socio-economic power to establish their house building association, Burggraeve had less influence. Firstly he was unable to find enough financial sponsors for his project and he did not receive any national state subsidies. Secondly, Jean Dollfus exer-

⁷⁵ See: Daniel Joseph Benoit Mareska and J. Heyman, *Enquête sur le travail et la condition physique et morale des ouvriers employés dans les manufactures de coton, à Gand* (Ghent: Gyselynck, 1845).

⁷⁶ Burggraeve, *Projet de cités d’ouvriers pour la ville de Gand*, 7.

⁷⁷ Andreas Stynen, “Proeftuinen van burgerlijkheid. Stadsnatuur in negentiende-eeuws België” (PhD diss., Ghent University, 2010), 348.

cised the role of mayor in Mulhouse, whereas Burggraeve played only a minor role in Ghent politics as city counselor and commissioner in local commissions on public health.

But Burggraeve continued his inquiries into social housing and attended several international congresses in the 1850s, among which the International Welfare Congress in Brussels in 1856, where the Mulhousian doctor Penot extensively described and glorified the Mulhouse project. During the congresses of the *Association Internationale pour le Progrès des Sciences Sociales* in Brussels and Ghent (1862/1863), Burggraeve complied with the Mulhouse model. Moreover, he strived to re-establish a housing association in Ghent, this time inspired by the SOMCO. This shows how Burggraeve used the transnational circulation of ideas as a vehicle to influence local social policy development. However, just like Carlier in Nivelles, Burggraeve also did not adopt the Mulhouse Model indiscriminately. Burggraeve was not convinced by the idea of making every labourer owner of his house. In his view, this measure could lead to inconveniences, such as dependency to a factory-owner. The workers could also be inclined to take a loan on the house and becoming indebted to speculators, or the labourer might not have enough resources to finance the high maintenance costs.⁷⁸ In sum, Burggraeve stated that the Mulhouse model was too expensive and too luxurious, certainly for a city as Ghent, where the major parts of the labourers were poor factory workers.⁷⁹ In the adapted Ghent model, Burggraeve made a distinction between two categories of workers: “owner-labourers” and “share-holder labourers”. The craftsmen who could become owners of their houses constituted the first category of labourers, while the factory workers were part of the category of shareholders: they did not have enough means to become owners, but they were members of the association and could therefore rent houses from the housing association and also receive an interest of 4 per cent and a dividend of 1 per cent from the association.⁸⁰ In 1864, Burggraeve published this idea in a collected work titled *Améliorations de la vie domestique de la classe ouvrière*.⁸¹

This time the association had an even broader outlook. It was not solely concerned with improving workers' dwellings, but would also make large acquisi-

⁷⁸ Adolphe Burggraeve, *Amélioration de la vie domestique de la classe ouvrière* (Ghent: De Busscher, 1864), 51.

⁷⁹ *Annales de l'association internationale pour le progrès des sciences sociales: congrès de Bruxelles* (Brussels: A. Lacroix, 1863), 509–511; Adolphe Burggraeve, *Études sociales* (Brussels: Lacroix, 1862), 262–265; A. Burggraeve, *Concours Guinard pour l'amélioration de la position matérielle et intellectuelle de la classe ouvrière en general et sans distinction* (Ghent: s.n., 1887), 38.

⁸⁰ *Journal de Gand*, January 23, 1864.

⁸¹ Adolphe Burggraeve, *Amélioration de la vie domestique de la classe ouvrière*.

tions of food in order to resell it to the associated labourers at a reduced price, following the principle of a consumers' cooperation society. This project, called the *Société Gantoise*, would also create public baths and lavatories, a health centre, kindergartens, evening schools and mutual aid and precaution funds. Not just the association, but the local government as well, had an important role to provide all the resources that contributed to salubrity and public health. In 1866, Burggraeve published *Projet d'assainissement et d'embellissement de la ville de Gand*, in which he stated that the local government was responsible for clearing out the small streets and laying out large and spacious boulevards. The local government also had to provide good street lighting and clean water, and prevent air pollution.⁸² But just like ten years earlier, Burggraeve's ideas and proposals were not put into practice and he remained unable to implement new legislation in his hometown.

Beside the housing projects in Nivelles and Ghent, the question of unhealthy slums was also discussed in Verviers in the 1860s, and again the model of Mulhouse influenced the social reformers in this Belgian town. In 1861, the *Société Verviétoise pour la Construction des Maisons d'Ouvriers* was founded. Moreover, the national government approved this association and it thus received the juridical status of a public limited company. Just like Heyman, Mareska, and Villermé, the project in Verviers materialised after a doctor, in this case André-Joseph Lepas (1826–?), stated that the living conditions of the labourers were at their worst and had a “deteriorating effect on the morals of these people”.⁸³ Some industrials in Verviers felt responsible for this housing problem and directly contacted the captains of industry of Mulhouse. On 4 March 1861, the Chamber of Commerce of Verviers sent a letter to the SIM with a question for more practical information and advice about the SOMCO.⁸⁴ In July of the same year, the association built nine houses for workers. There were a lot of architectural and institutional similarities with the project in Mulhouse: the project in Verviers consisted of individual family homes with a little garden, attention was paid to fresh air and the labourers could become owners of their homes after a certain number of years. But in contrast to Mulhouse, this project in Verviers was not at all successful. One of the members of the board of the *Société Verviétoise*, Emile Bède, made a report about the problems of this organisation to inform other social re-

⁸² Adolphe Burggraeve, *Projet d'assainissement et d'embellissement de la ville de Gand* (Ghent: Annoot-Braeckman, 1866).

⁸³ André-Joseph Lepas, *Coup d'oeil sur la situation de la classe ouvrière de Verviers* (Brussels: De Mortier, 1844),

⁸⁴ Letter, 4 March 1861, Correspondance, registres de copies de lettres (1857–1861), 94 B 188, Fonds Société Industrielle de Mulhouse, Municipal archives of Mulhouse.

Figure 7.2: Portrait of Adolphe Burggraeve (1806–1902), Florimond Van Loo and Jozef Pauwels (1857), (Ghent University Library). Catalogue number: BIB.GRA.003541. This image is licensed under a Creative Commons license: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>

formers.⁸⁵ First of all, the labourers in Verviers were not enthusiastic about this housing project, perceiving the houses to be too much like charity. Moreover, the cost for building the houses was too high. In 1867, the shareholders of Verviers visited the World Exhibition in Paris and appraised the model houses built by the SIM on the 'Champ-de-Mars'. In the summer of 1868, the *Société Verviétoise* again built four new houses, this time almost exactly modelled after the project in Mulhouse. Even though small changes were made to adapt the model to the social and cultural environment of Verviers, the problems were not solved, as we can read in Bède's report one year later. Bède inserted a model to make the investment in the labourer houses financially interesting for the entrepreneurs in Verviers. Contrary to the SOMCO, the *Société Verviétoise* could make profit. Just like the initiative in Nivelles, this housing association in Verviers became a model for other Belgian cities. In June 1867, the Belgian government passed a law by which building companies could receive the juridical status of a public limited company ("*naamloze vennootschap*").⁸⁶ On 21 September 1867, the *Société Liégeoise des Habitations* was created after the model of the *Société Verviétoise*.⁸⁷ That same year, housing companies were established in Brussels and Antwerp.⁸⁸

In the late 19th-century, there were thus several housing projects in Belgium, but contrary to the successful international model of Mulhouse, these small-scale local projects were mere drops in the ocean. Several Belgian specialists and reformers became frustrated and wanted greater structural reforms. During a meeting of the Liberal Association in Brussels in 1864, the liberal Ernest Defuisseaux (1829–1886) advocated a proactive policy that would replace the emergency measures that were taken when a cholera epidemic broke out.⁸⁹ Although a number of housing models circulated and the project of Mulhouse was well known in Belgium, the housing theory was not put into practice until the late 1880s, when a new national law on workers' houses was enacted. In contrast to Mulhouse, there was for a long time no social pressure in Belgium to make structural changes or to formulate national housing laws. Whereas the interna-

⁸⁵ Emile Bède, *Note sur les travaux de la société verviétoise pour la construction de maisons d'ouvriers* (Verviers: Vinche, 1869).

⁸⁶ Louis Bertrand, *Le logement de l'ouvrier et du pauvre en Belgique* (Brussels: C. De Paepe, 1888), 135–148.

⁸⁷ J.K.W. Quarles van Ufford, "Iets over arbeiderswoningen. Société anonyme liégeoise des maisons ouvrières fondée à Liège le 21 Septembre 1867 – Notice sur les travaux de la Société," *De Economist*, 22, no. 2 (1873): 876–877.

⁸⁸ Léon d'Andrimont, *Des institutions et des associations ouvrières de la Belgique* (Brussels: Lebègue, 1871), 81.

⁸⁹ Ernest Defuisseaux, *Conférence du 4 mai 1864 sur les habitations ouvrières* (Brussels: Decq, 1864).

tional congresses had no direct impact on Belgian national law in the 1850s and 1860s, they were nevertheless influential. When a violent strike broke out in March 1886, the national Belgian government organised a large national survey to obtain information about social and housing questions.⁹⁰ A workers' commission ("*Commission du Travail*") was initiated to investigate the working conditions of labourers and workmen's houses were closely inspected.⁹¹ One of the research questions of this commission was to detect whether the Mulhouse Model was imitated in Belgium.⁹²

As a result of these surveys, the national government promulgated a law on the housing of the labourers in 1889. The central goal of this housing law was to make the workers the owners of their houses, an idea that had already been transnationally spread in the 1850–1860s and that resembled the Mulhouse Model. In the housing law of 1889 it also stated that the legislator did not want direct government involvement in the building of houses for the working class. Just like in Mulhouse, public limited companies – or more generally the civil society – had to contribute to building housing for the poor.⁹³ Yet, the law also contained new elements, e.g. regional Patronage committees were founded, and a national savings bank, the *Algemene Spaar- en Lijfrente Kas* ('General Savings and Annuity Fund'), was involved in financing the enterprise. This savings bank would not lend money to private persons but to public corporations. The housing question was soon enclosed within the national context of pillarisation in Belgium.⁹⁴ Several house building associations emerged within every 'ideological pillar'. A lot of social, Catholic and liberal public corporations for housing arose in Belgian cities in the 1890s, and housing the poor became a type of policy-making. In 1894, the Catholic minister of Public Works and member of the Catholic Party of Belgium, Léon De Bruyn (1838–1908), detected the existence of 64 housing corporations in Belgium.⁹⁵

90 Willy Steensels, "De tussenkomst van de overheid in de arbeidershuisvesting: Gent, 1850–1904," *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis* 8, no. 3–4 (1977): 477.

91 L. Denys, "Trends in de sociaal-ekonomische toestand van de Belgische arbeiders rond 1886," *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis* 5, no. 3–4 (1974): 401.

92 "Enquête sur les habitations ouvrières. Séance du 27 avril 1886. Proposition de M. Beco, Rapports van de Hoge Gezondheidsraad"/volume 7 (Brussels: s.n., 1887), p. 109–110, Archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Belgium.

93 "Rapporten van de Hoge Gezondheidsraad"/volume 7 (Brussels: s.n., 1887), p. 128, Archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Belgium.

94 For the phenomenon of pillarisation in Belgium, see chapter 1/introduction to this volume.

95 Léon Meerens, *Études pratique sur les habitations ouvrières en Belgique et le fonctionnement des sociétés d'habitations ouvrières dans leurs rapports avec la caisse générale d'épargne et de*

Conclusion

At social international congresses, it was common to put forward local and national reform ideas, initiatives, discursive experiences and practical examples as international solutions to the social question. International hygienists and other social reformers picked up the idea of Mulhouse, as they believed that “improved houses make improved men, women and children”. The Mulhouse Model was in favour because it was consonant with hygienists’ belief that human society could be controlled and managed. It was a total concept encompassing everything required for health, comfort and social order.

The paternalistic captains of industry in Mulhouse had several motives to set up these *cités ouvrières*. The factory owners realised that the rents generally exceeded workers’ wages and wanted to prevent their employees from moving to nearby villages. There was also a latent desire of the new industrials to integrate themselves into the leading circles of urban society. They had economic motives as well, such as increased labour productivity. But probably the most important reason was the fear of a social revolution, which would threaten and undermine their hegemony. Better housing and urban planning were means to control the working class and prevent social disorder. In sum, by building ‘decent and hygienic’ houses for their own labourers, the social question could be ‘solved’ without direct state intervention, thereby preserving the factory owners’ freedom and interests. In order to gain legitimacy, the entrepreneurs of Mulhouse promoted their model at international congresses and world exhibitions, published booklets with practical information and gave personal advice to sympathisers by means of letter correspondence. The international attention also had economic benefits: by popularising their model, other, foreign textile entrepreneurs could follow their example and international competition would be fairer.

The project in Mulhouse was particularly interesting because it combined two specific characteristics. First of all, it was not carried out by a single owner, but by a group of Mulhousian patrons gathered in a house building association. Secondly, the workers could become owners of their rented houses. The model also led to moral advantages, since it encouraged instruction, precaution and saving. We can conclude that the project of Mulhouse was internationally propagated as a model in the late 19th century. The interchange of ideas and practices and the successful foreign examples were used as a lever to put pressure on policymakers at home. But as the case of the Belgian cities proved, local

retraite suivie de la loi du 9 août 1889 coordonnée et des arrêts et circulaires utiles à son interprétation (Brussels: Emile Bruylant, 1896), 44–48.

forces determined the timing and the specifics of the adoption of this international model. In contrast to Mulhouse, there was no social pressure to make structural changes or to formulate national housing laws in Belgium for a long time. Although actors in several Belgian cities used the transnational circulation of the Mulhouse Model as a vehicle to influence local social policy development, it was not a guarantee for success, as the case of Adolphe Burggraeve in Ghent showed. However, the circulation of ideas on housing schemes lay at the very basis of the development of social housing. The national housing law of 1889 clearly contained elements and ideas that had already been transnationally spread in the 1850s–1860s and that resembled the Mulhouse Model. At the end of the 19th century however, a remarkable shift took place. In the 1850s and 1860s, top-down solutions *for* the laborers were put forward. In the 1880s, however, the labourers themselves played a more active role, though the argumentation was simple and the focus on self-help remained: “Only the workman himself knows the best the needs of the proletariat, by showing him his character you make self-help possible”.⁹⁶

96 De Royer de Dour, *Les habitations ouvrières en Belgique*, 131.