



STAY`ING`ACTIVE

social symbiosis on the Belgian coast

Research || Sarah Stoffels & Renske Aben || 2013.12.22 ||

0 PROLOGUE

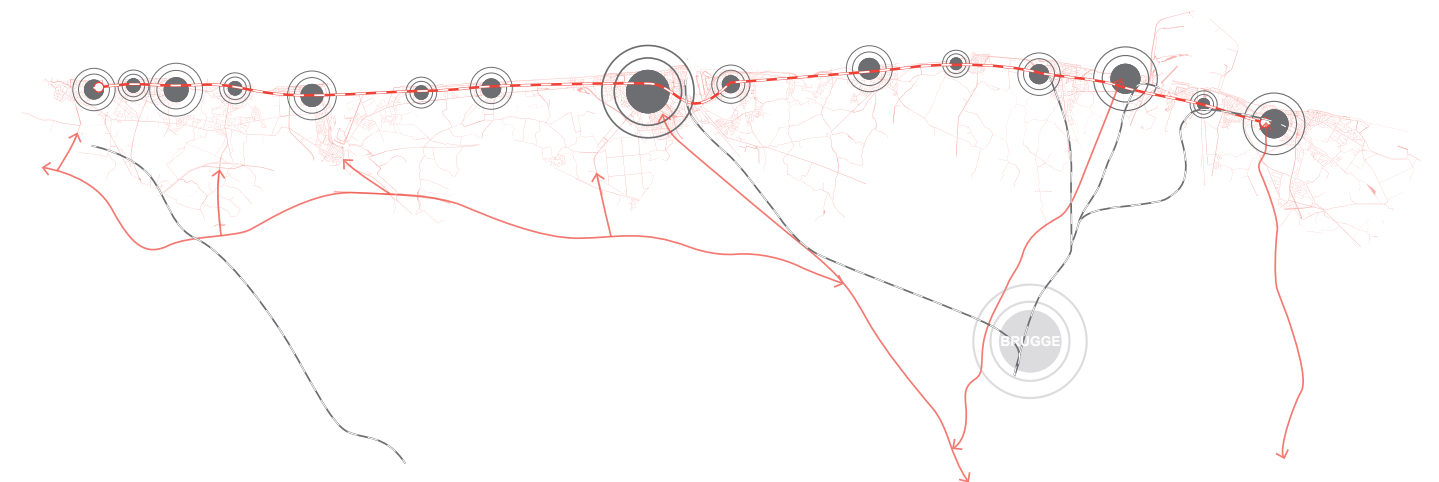


The Concrete Coastal Wall || Middelkerke

For our final year 2013-2014 and graduation project we began a collaboration to investigate our common fascination : The Concrete Coastal Wall. One of the finest examples of this wall, as a result of mass tourism, is on the Belgian coast. With over twenty coastal cities within only 67 kilometres, the Belgian coast is distinguished by the continuity of urban development and the narrow width of its tourist infrastructure. The spatial development of the 20th century formed the concrete coastal landscape and made it a strong economic carrier. Currently, the coast is holding convulsively to the past but it needs new opportunities to re-vitalized the coastal area. The urgency to invest new thoughtful ways of using space is big.

By completing research of the urban structure on different scales we are able to understand the problems and search for new opportunities on the coast.

The relationship of the original landscape with the current urban context is lost due to the growth of mass tourism. The original landscape and the network of transport and water are now irreversible. At the moment, the original relief can be found in small pieces of dunes which divide the seawall between each coastal city. These dunes are protected to prevent the unbridled growth. A new way of using land can be created to shape a new experience.



Network Belgian Coast

The coast is in a state of change. The demographic development such as aging, urban migrants and increasing longevity makes this an accelerated process. Due to the extreme aging population, this project can be a precedent for the rest of Belgium and the Netherlands. The high expectancy of life and political issues will change policies regarding healthcare. However, how will this change the coast and the coastal cities as a result of aging, and how does this currently affect the built and un-built environment? We named it "a health & welfare environment".

22 december 2013, Sarah Stoffels & Renske Aben

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. 2 HYPOTHESIS & VISION

.Hypothesis

The Belgian coast is in a state of change due to the colonization of retirement migrants. By creating a health & welfare environment, a new coastal preventorium will have a positive impact on the area. By interweaving features such as typologies of living, working and wellbeing become an integral part of the urban program. This zone connect the seawall with the hinterland. This transformation strategy becomes the foundation for the symbiosis between the present and future generations.

.Vision

We no longer believe in the individual and one target group only. We're looking for urban models that can be attractive for starters, young families and the aging population. The coast of tomorrow is an environment where healthy aging has a positive impact on development. It's an environment that stimulates the new professional opportunities for starters and young families by connecting the knowledge(the elderly) in the public domain.

The current neighbourhoods of young and older people do not grow in harmony. However, these two areas of life do need each other. A symbiosis is the coexistence of two different organisms in which the survival of one is dependent on the other. We motivate/ strengthen this necessity by creating manifestos on both a spatial and a social level. Through a symbiosis between life stages, a new healthy self-sufficient life form will arise. The regeneration continues.

High season vs Low season Summer city - Winter city

If one looks at the present and past and feel the directions towards the future, we can observe the major diversity in seasonal occupation (winter and summer), especially concerning stability and dynamics. The tuff transition between the two zones, hinterland and seawall, and the major differences between the spacious functions there is mentioning between coherence and mutual independence.

When one approaches the Belgian Coast regarding the value of seasonal occupation, we can see the tolerances between summer and winter as a whole. The tolerances are the high activity during summer times and vacancies during winter. The zone it is applying to needs to be redefined for the spacious intertwinement of winter and summer, so an additional value comes into existence. This new zone works bilaterally. As such, the hinterland will be connected with the seawall by means of these interventions. A dilatation gap comes into existence and becomes the corridor between the woven functions. Economic principles will be vertically connected to this. Now the Coast has a single functional value, where admittedly the economic values play a role, but where the dynamics between the present and future generations remains undefined.

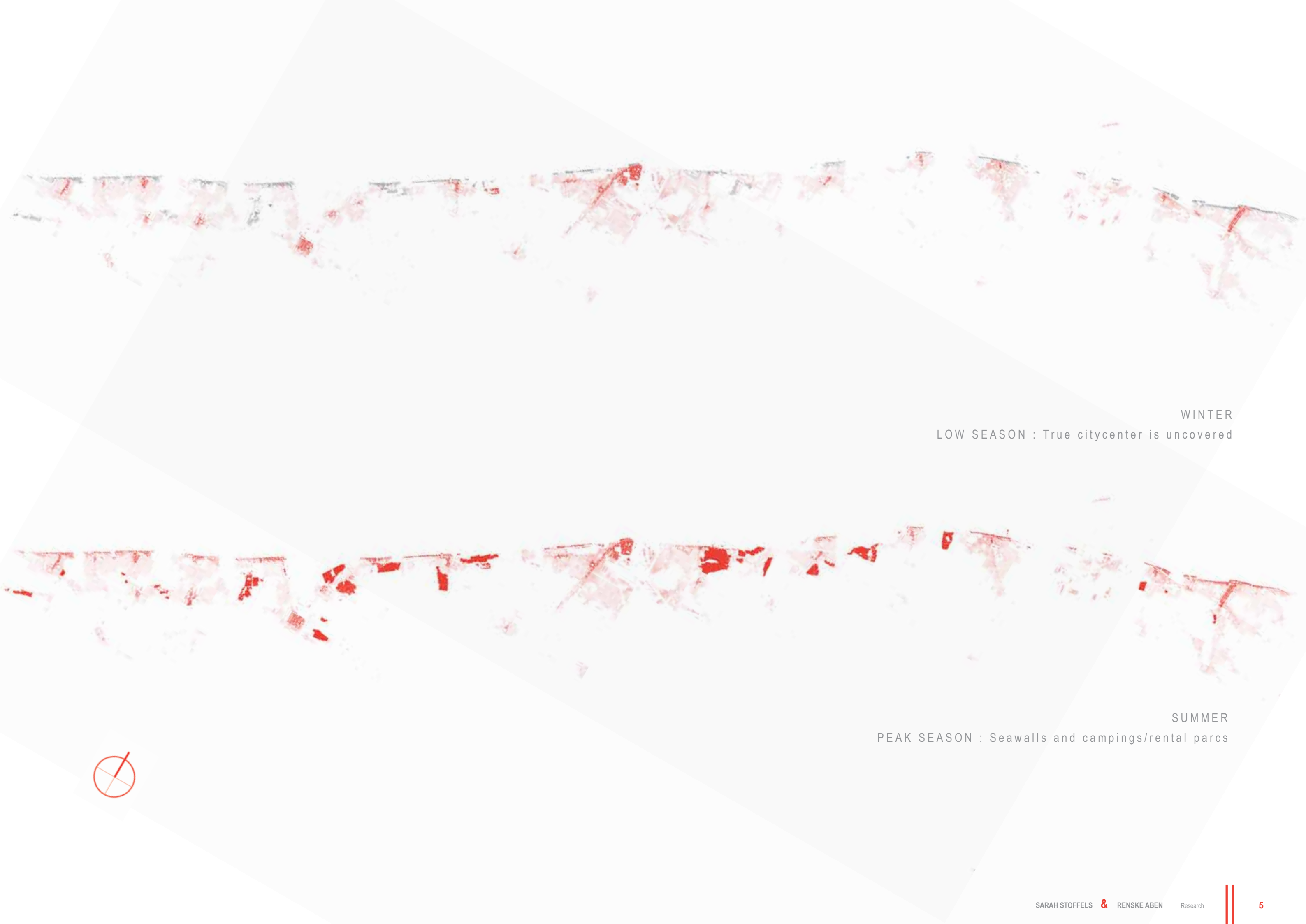
A specious agenda for shrink

When we reformulate the design job, one can draw the conclusion that the aging of the permanent residents and their accommodation promotes loss in quality. Blankenberge winter city and summer city. They are two separate worlds with their own assets and habitation. So one can conclude that the occupation of this territory is happening by two target groups who have joining conflicting interests. The social-economic factors and demographic shrink lead in the area, is for some time already in a diminishing population during winter and an explosive growth during summer times. The alternating composition has a less positive influence during building of age.

At the Coast the social-economic factors and seasonal shrink is already for some time leading to a decrease in the mixed population, a changing structure of households and a less favorable building of age. This zone will be the means to intervene.



Blankenberge Vision



WINTER
LOW SEASON : True citycenter is uncovered

SUMMER
PEAK SEASON : Seawalls and campings/rental parcs



Belgian coast

Blankenberge

Zeedijk

J. de Troozlaan

Graafjansdijk

Rogier van
Monsstraat

.3 Overarching the Belgian Coast



.12



.10



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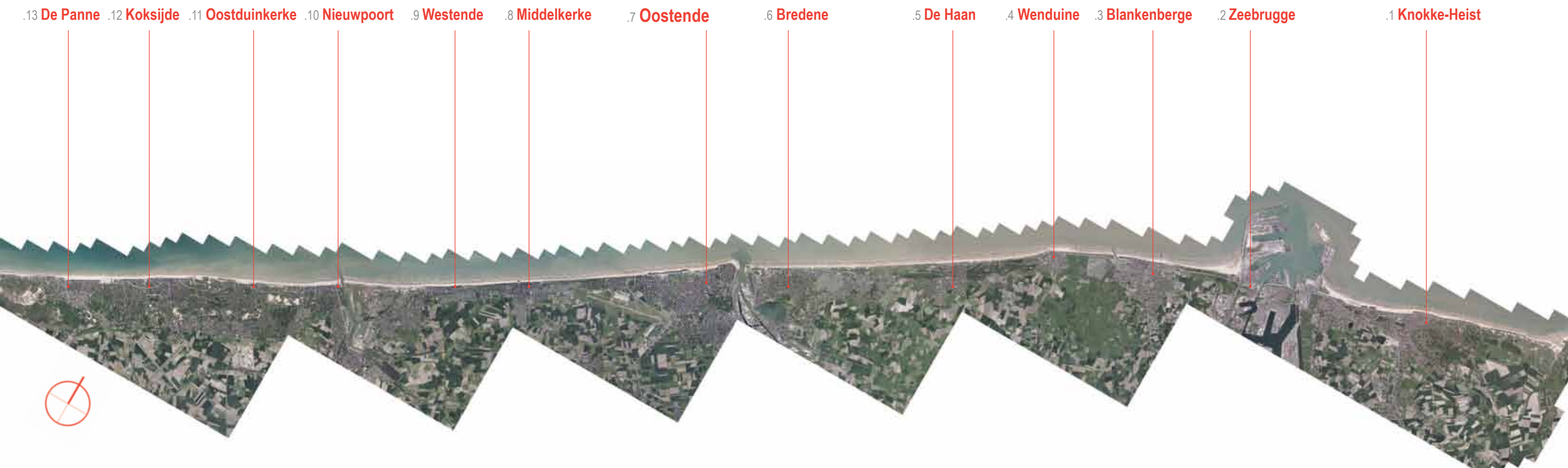
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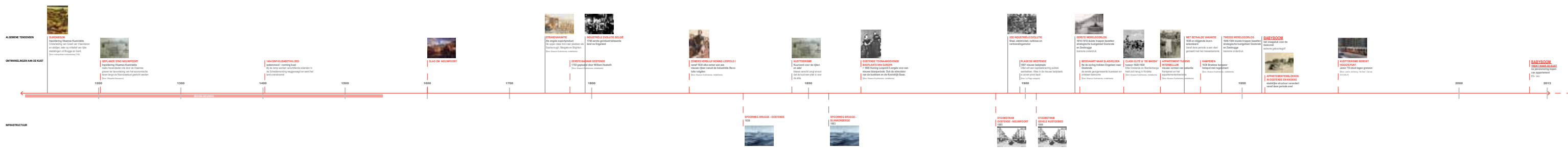
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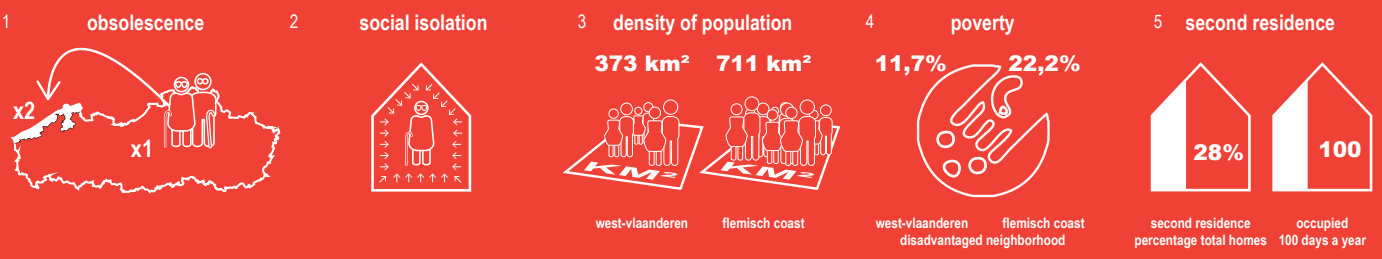


■ Evolution Belgian coast





↑ BUILD AREA belgian coast
INFRASTRUCTURE belgian coast



Facts coast

3 Overarching the Belgian Coast || MACRO

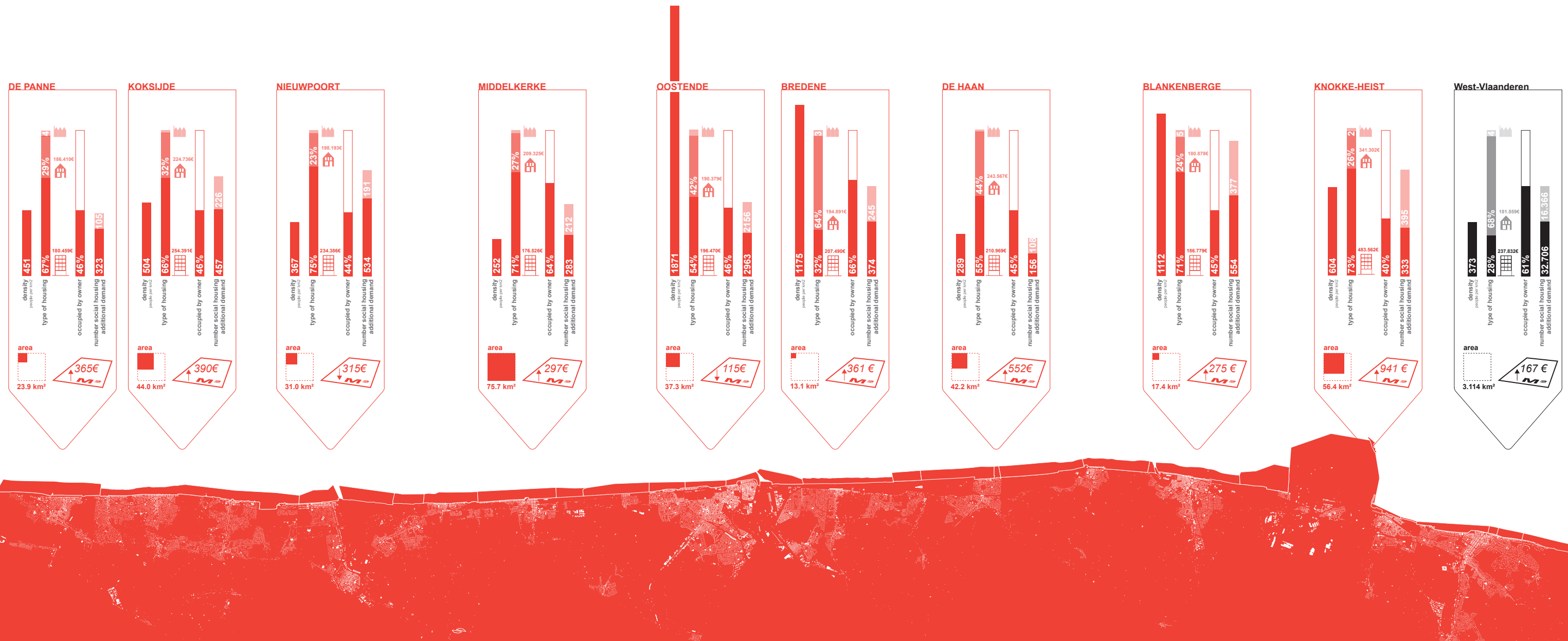
The spatial development of the 20th century formed the concrete coastal landscape and made it a strong economic carrier. But time is changing, there is no touristic growth and the line is outdated. Tourism decreases which results in vacancy in apartments and commercial spaces. The younger generations leave the coast for a dynamic life in the larger cities and the average age of the population increases, not only by the aging population, but also by a large percentage of retirement migrants. Between 2002 and 2012 the number of over-65s on the coast increased to 34.5%. If this trend continues, it would be 51% in 2040. The transformation from vital to dependency will require more time. We consider the coast as an environment where health is the top priority. Every seaside town has its own spatial and social characteristics. By further deepening these characteristics and to extend them through the health concept, every seaside town gets its own identity. Meanwhile, this fact produces a global entity on a bigger scale.

1. The aging moves twice as fast compared to other parts in Belgium. Hence the living circumstances are further more coming under pressure and new models in way of living conditions and leisure are necessary to fulfill the necessary needs in the future.
2. With the migration of the elderly to the coast, one facet has been overlooked. The loneliness in this vast group. Often they leave behind their family and social contacts inland. By getting older, these contacts remain far more difficult to uphold due to the distance.
3. The high density at the coastline can be concluded from the development at the seawall. At one small line, the housing is literally stomped out of the ground. But to the jump in scale in the development, the connection with the hinterland is barely made. An additional problem is that this axe is filled with secondary homes and remains empty for most of the year.
4. Another urban problem is the poverty amongst people. This is contradictory to the high prices per square meter.
5. The current quality of living circumstances is base on an individual residence. In many coastal municipalities, the amount of secondary residences is exceeding the number of residential homes. In the course of a year, these residences are occupied 100 days. This contains that the tissue of a seaside resort cannot meet in the needs to anticipate on a temporary shrink or growth. A flexible city.

² J. Vangelder, Het grootste rusthuis van de wereld, Trends.be, 2013



The concrete wall - Middelkerke - Oostduinkerke



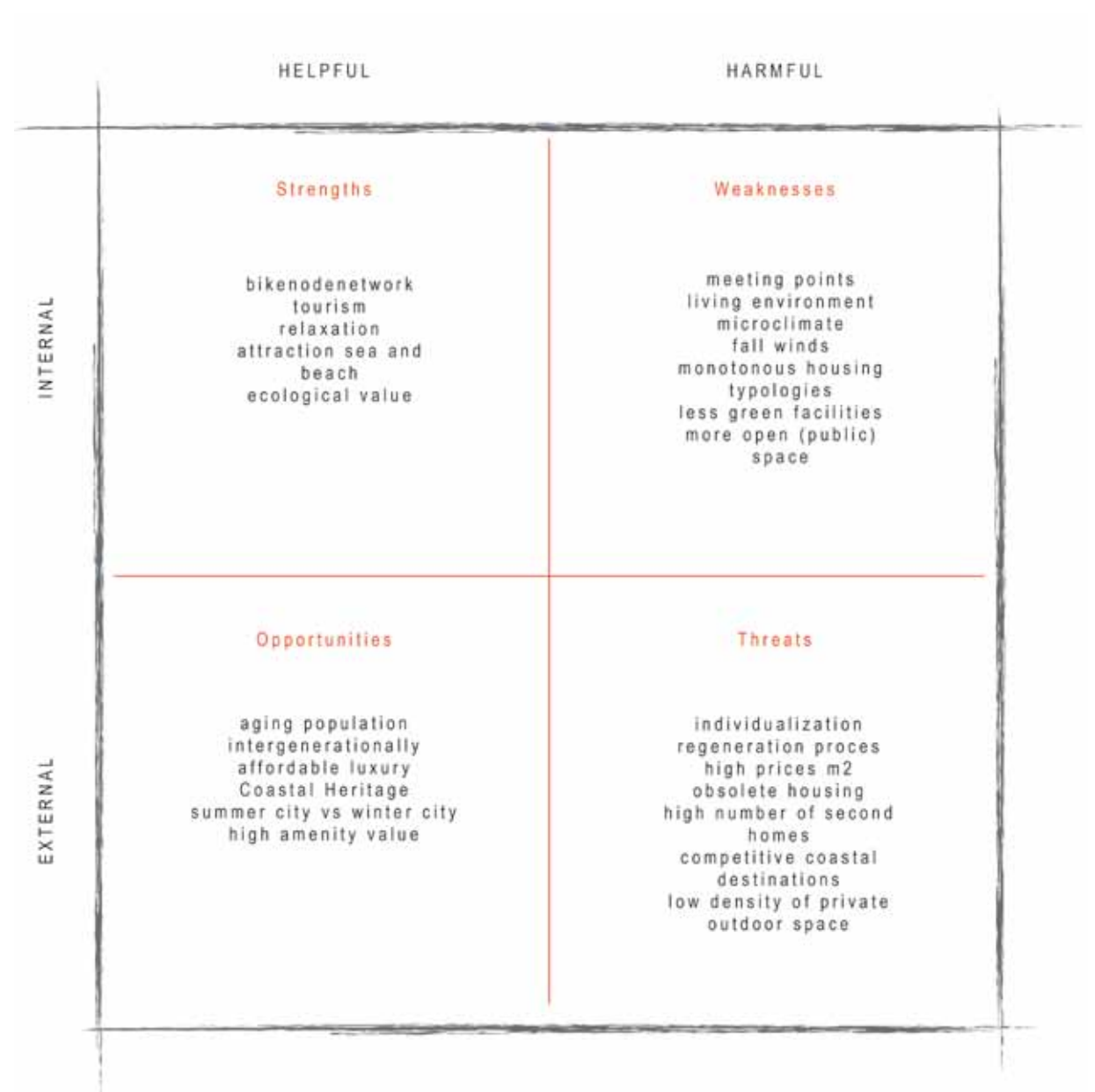
3.1 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats



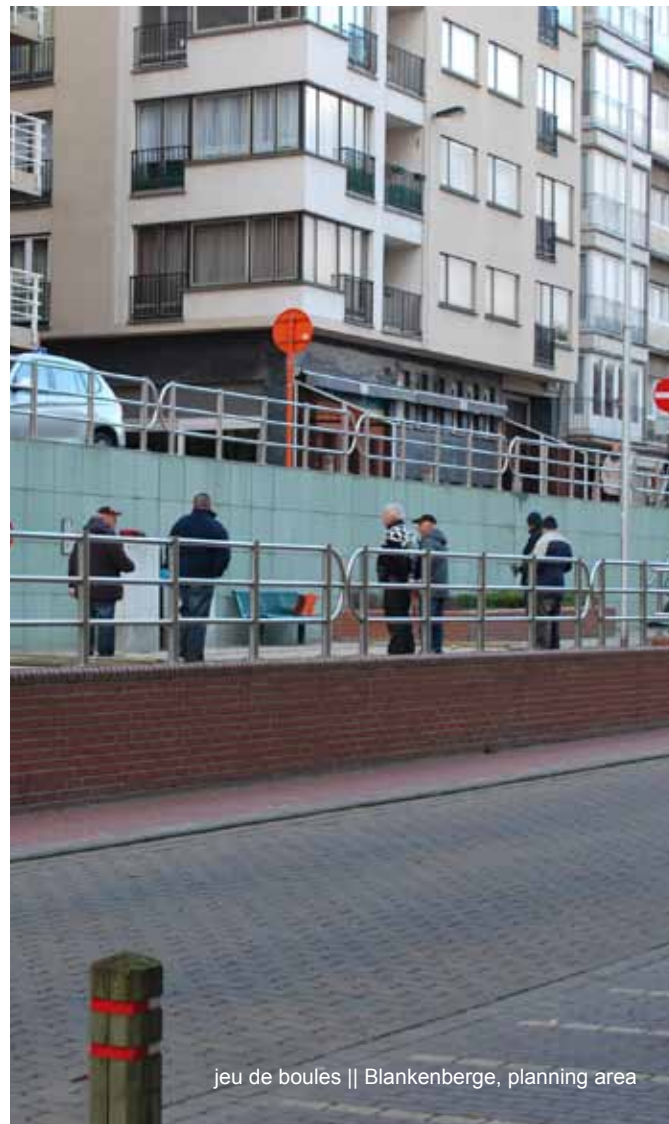
Because every coastal city operates by itself in view of its town-planning, its developments at macro scale wherein the area operates as a whole, is far from obvious. Nonetheless the mayors of the coastal communities want to show their commitment by organizing meetings amongst each other.³ Paramount in the meetings is the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, which are manifesting in the area.

By investigating the different vision in policies and notes of the coastal city, it becomes evident that a joint vision is missing with regard to the coastal towns. In these visions it becomes clear their needs for the common use of recreational facilities, sports, care and education. On the contrary when decisions are to be made outside community borders, competition breaks loose. As such these meetings amongst mayors lost their good intentions.

By making the SWOT analysis, one can see the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. There prevails an atmosphere emitting from the people and companionship promoting a good living standard and working climate.



³Sarah Stoffels & Renske Aben, interview Guy Devos afdelingshoofd STROM, Blankenberge, 08/12/2013



3.3 Society shapes

For the first time in history of human kind, four, even five generations have started a new millennium.

The intergenerational approach. The idea has to be highlighted that solidarity between generations has to be strengthened. What emerges to often is the gap between young and old. At the moment an encouraging vision for future faces in life is missing. These days where can generations meet, have social contacts and create ties of solidarity outside of the family spheres? Usually this takes place in the working and living environment, the social, cultural and sports facilities, within the different spaces of social living⁶.

By looking at the different referential projects we try to get a better insight in the working of the care of the elder facilities. What strongly emerges from this is that no intergenerational approach is generated. Elderly residing in the “Residential in Seniors-town Benidorm”, “Retirement community Summerland hall Florida” and “Care farm De Hulst in Oterleek” are only focused on care, leisure and the elderly. Nevertheless the care for the elderly is approached from different perspectives.

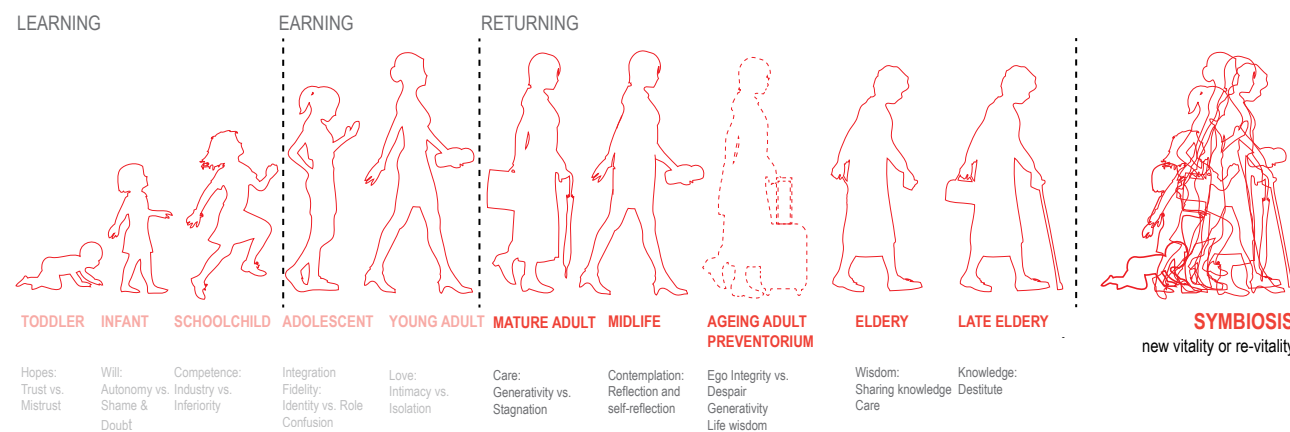
Aging and lifestyle. Vital mediores have different preferences than the needy seniors. Many lonely elderly (baby boomers who have relatively not many children and divorced). Many isolated women (men dye sooner).

Aging and economy. The Silver Economy. The following aspects play a role: elderly (paid off mortgages) have more to spend, new products come into existence and services for the elderly, the elderly who do no longer participate in the labor process.

Aging and politics. Political development in relation to the rising costs for care. More and more the costs are to be covered by the people themselves.

It is well known that elderly and young people who live next to each other find it tough. But by the aging population, a new phase of life will be created. The feeling to have a vivid standing in the society is big after retirement. The lack of social and cultural community facilities for all target groups. Now one obtains services to young people with no understanding for all audiences. The professional service providers are not trained to. Handle all audiences Therefore, it is a challenge to catch. Relations between the generations to avoid isolation, to build a strong social fabric of knowledge transfer, reintegration, work and live as intergenerational process to consider. This generates new opportunities for new forms of society.

The young professional is not at ease at the coast. But bearing in mind that the coast possesses a future, mediores, is big and with valuable properties to show them the way in the playing fields.



⁶ M. Malki, Intergenerationele relaties: een uitdaging Colloquium georganiseerd door de Koning Boudewijnstichting 2008

. BENIDORM BASTERDS

community

residents

type of housing

reason of staying

facilities

impression

philosophy

issue

BENIDORM || SPAIN

Residential in Seniors-town Benidorm ||

100.280 (2007)
29,3%
residents other nationalities



individual apartment



300 days of sunshine



social (isolated from social life)

POOL, HOBBY CLUBS, ENTERTAINMENT, BEACH AND THE REGULAR URBAN FACILITIES



Mainly westherd inter-income elderly who came to the Spanisch resort for social considerations. In the Netherlands they often feel isolated from social life.

source : De trek naar sociale contacten, Olga Ekelenkamp



"CARE"

FLORIDA || USA

Retirement community Summerland hall Florida ||

7200



apartment in gated community



LEISURE

they longed to retire to a life of leisure



"Self-preservation is number one, always."
woman in documentary Kings Point

to stay young

GOLF, TENNIS, EXERCISE, SWIMMING, BILLIARDS AND PING PONG, COMPUTER CLASSES/CLUBS, ARTS AND CRAFTS, CARDS, CLUBS, GOLF, BOWLING



Many people saw this as an opportunity to buy a little piece of the American dream. We all struggle with the desire for community and independence and try to strike a balance between those two things.

source : Next Avenue's Caregiving and Health & Well-Being channels, Gary Drevitch



"GATED" COMMUNITY

THE NETHERLANDS

Care farm De Hulst in Oterleek ||

16
850,6 m2



room in residential group



omforting and calming effect of animals

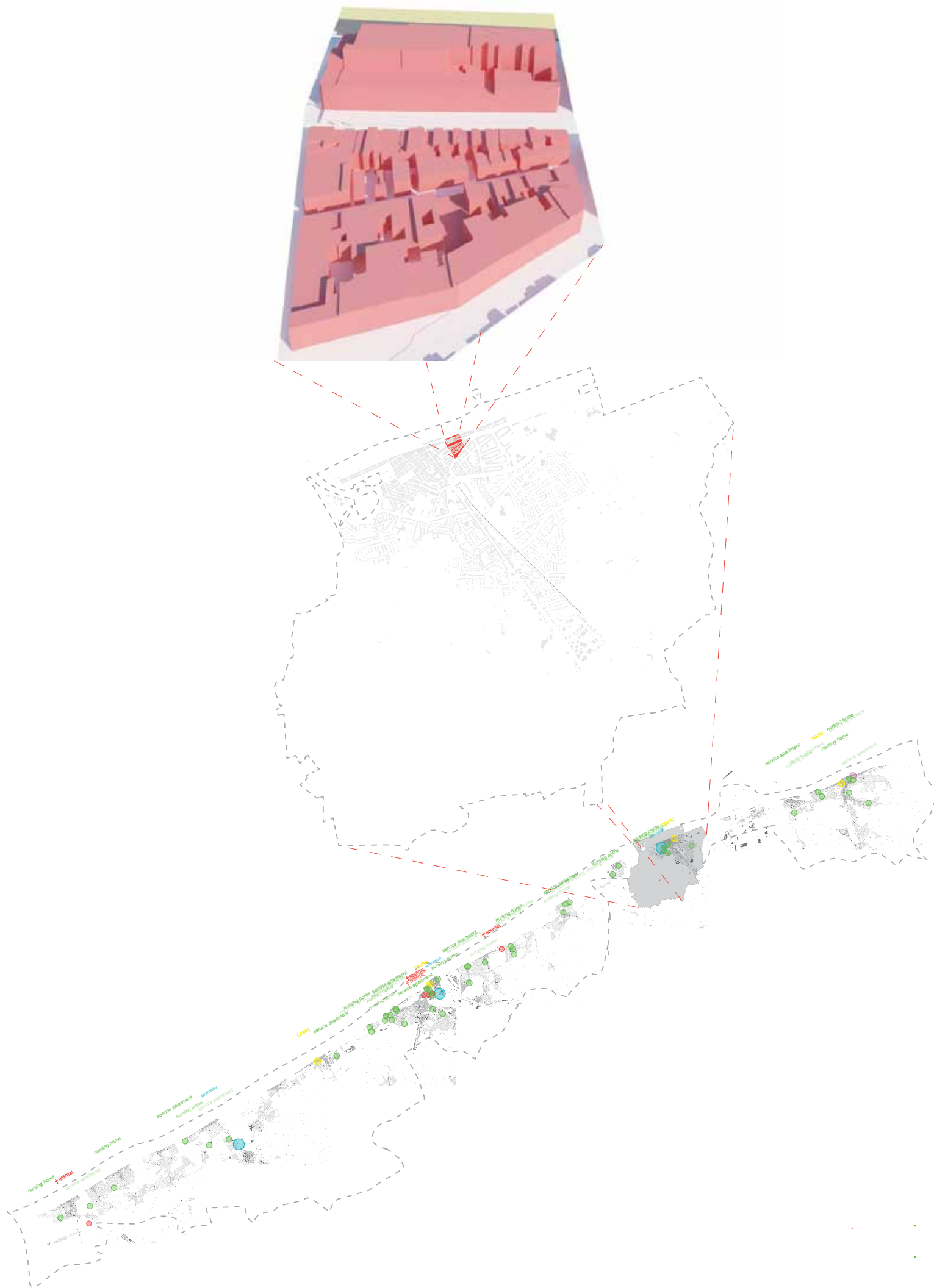
CARE

VEGETABLE GARDEN, AVIARY, HENHOUSE, BARNS FOR SMALL ANIMALS: RABBITS, CALVES AND SHEEP, ACTIVITY ROOM AND COMMUNAL LIVING ROOMS



The philosophy of "Farmology" is based on the original values that underpin everything we do in daily life. It is a feeling of living in the countryside, relax and do things substantially.

source : Website De Hulst



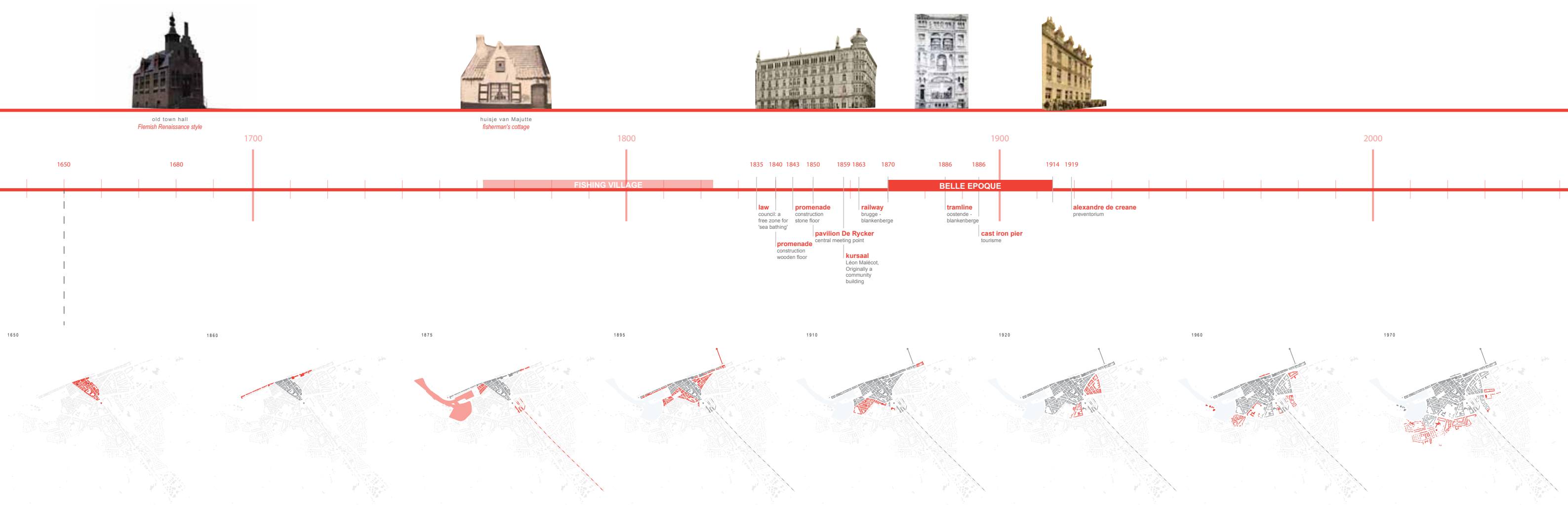
4 Embedding Blankenberge in the urban web || MESO

The chosen location for our intervention is Blankenberge. This seaside town grew in the period of coastal tourism together with Ostend and therefore developed in the century afterwards, obvious traces are left behind here due to the decline of mass tourism. The seafront or Atlantic Waal quickly became the focal element for almost all seaside towns, the place to see and to be seen and in the meanwhile a lever and supervisor of urban development. Due to the development of the railway network to the coastal area, an anisotropic urban development began. The arrival of the (coastal) tram and roads between cities creates an isotropic urbanization.⁷ These urbanizational zones grow towards each other, resulting in a continuous strip of buildings.



⁶ Metropolaan Kustlandschap 2100, verkennende en methodologisch analyse van de Belgische Kust i.o.v. Team Vlaams Bouwmeester, Departement R.V. & M.O.W.

■ Evolution - population growth Blankenberge



PAST : cultural meeting places || central: the ‘renewal’, the physical and psychological recovery.

Detached house



Semi detached



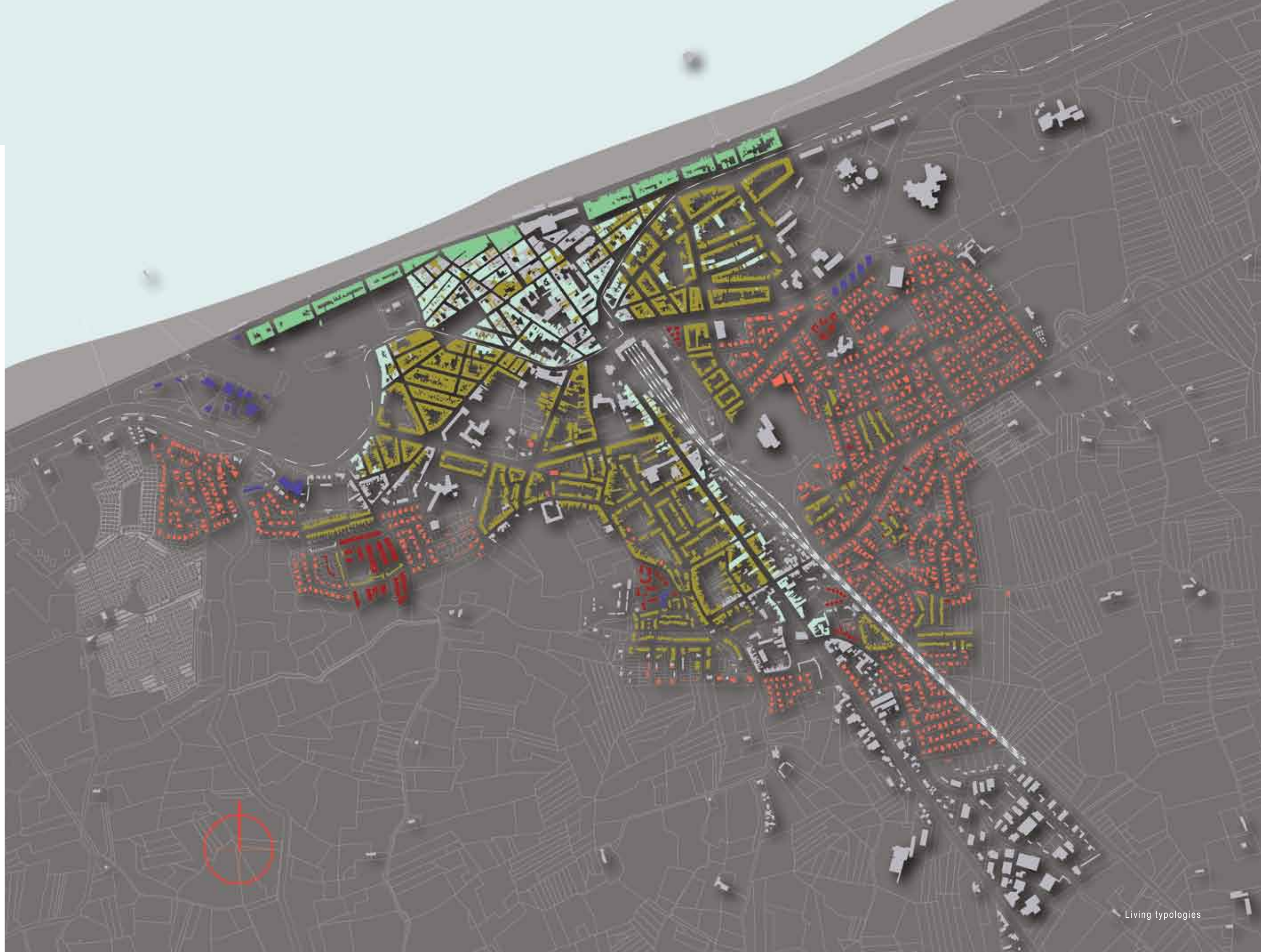
Row House



Enclosed apartment



Exposed apartment



Living typologies

KNOWLEDGE



RECREATION



SPORTS



4.1 The consequences of the mass tourism

There is huge vacancy among galleries, apartments and Belle Epoque seaside villas. This also caused that functions do not anymore satisfy the current supply and quality proportions in relation to the price for one square meter.

When we look at the history of Blankenberge, the community is rich due to the fact that tourism had its flourishing period starting from end of 18th century. Due to this one can find remnants of the rich and upper class period. With the arrival of mass tourism, some parcels at the seawalls have started their fourth generation. The developers consider it a sport to sell the maximum square meters on most narrow parcels. When we look at the architectural image, all pretty elements, which give a building recognition, have disappeared. The architectural image is based on the sea view.

The vacancy at the seawall has a connection with the remaining vision concerning “the boulevard”. Shopping in one of the not to distinguished shops has long passed. Particularly the young are looking for new ways of meeting and experience. This could be an opportunity to again attract the masses at the seawall.

With the arrival of mass tourism the original economic bearer has moved to the background, the fishery. For Blankenberge, the connection that can be sought is the yacht port. That is one of the reasons why Blankenberge remains interesting as a coastal resort, due to the modest competition existing amongst the Northerly situated resorts.

Blankenberge main motivation is to increase quality and affordability of housing and living conditions. Because Blankenberge still has a positive population growth new residential typologies and new concepts for functions will reinforce this. Lifelong keep fit by encouraging a healthy, active lifestyle, personal development and maintain, is also a target.



1st generation

belle epoque villa :

1870 - 1914

European bourgeoisie known
as a remarkable prosperity

2nd generation

enhance existing
buildings :

+/- 1950-1960

After world wars

3th generation

apartment buildings :

1960 -

Property development, everyone
wants a "home" on the sea

4th generation

apartment buildings

2.0 :

Apartments rebuilt due to lack
of quality

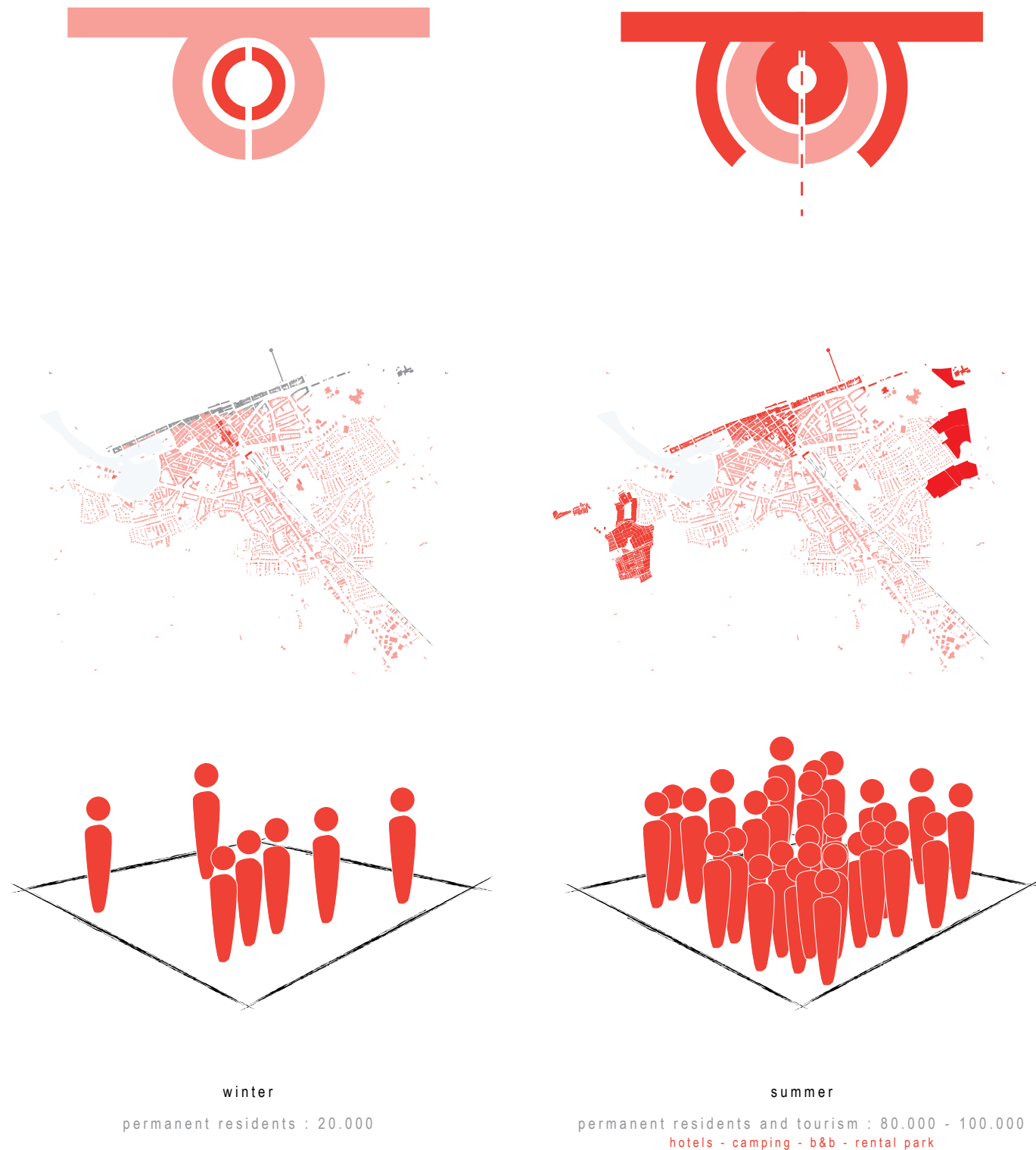


4.2 Small city, big urban issues

Due to the fact that the city only counts 20.000 permanent residents, the number of habitants is modestly low. On the contrary the area fights with enormous fluctuations in numbers of visitors. In high season the flow of visitors goes as high as 80.000 to 100.000 per day. This factor is of course problematic for the local residents. The living standards decreases dramatically.

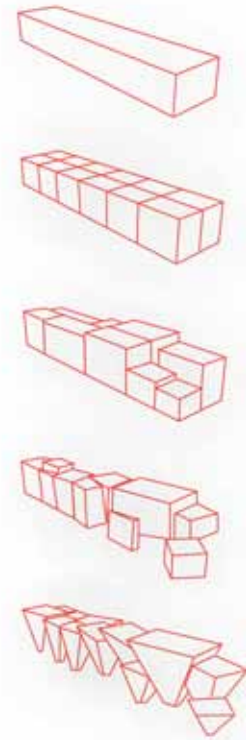
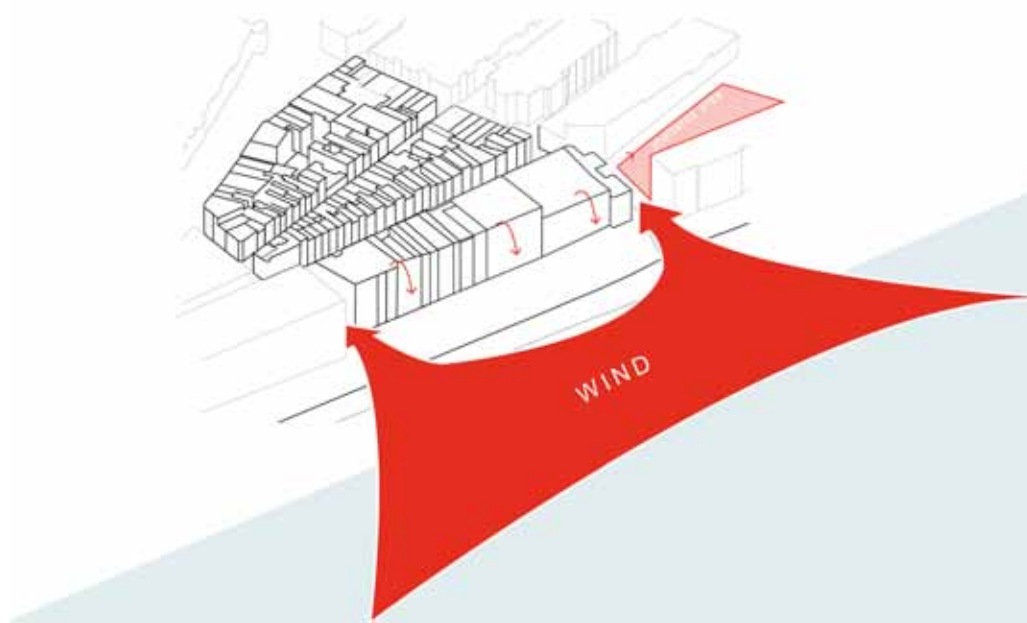
The problem arising is due to the history of the regional planning by Blankerberge. Because this is mainly centralized, it resulted in high building. Little open space remains available. As a result the younger families have moved to the outskirts.

The center of Blankerberge is in need of green facilities and open public space. The wall to the sea has been erected and other means for creating open space have to be administered.



5 Individualized building block || MICRO

The location is situated in the inner city where the occupational rate is highest. This has resulted in high-rise buildings, in big contrast with the old monumental premises, which are still existing. This high-rise buildings creates a deviation from climatological circumstances at the seawall, compared to the inner city. Therefore the living standards are less attractive for the local residents. Due to the high buildings, downbursts are created. The streets situated vertically to the seawall are suffering from mechanical turbulence. Also here the individualization is sensible which is being caused by the society: the “having” of their own peace of sea, in the form of an apartment.



Shadow



december - february
WINTER



march - may
SPRING



june - august
SUMMER



september - november
FALL

Wind speed

m/s
9+
8-9
6-8
5-6
4-5
3-4
1-3
0-1



5.1 Relations Seawall – Hinterland

Surrounding relationship with casino, church, square seawall

The situation of the chosen building blocks are a perfect example of the confrontation/interaction with the hinterland. The different functions are surrounding the locations, which are of importance for the urban tissue. Such as the casino, library, church and the seawall. Whereby the integration of the project can be implemented in the current urban tissue and in addition takes care of the intertwining of the different functions.

At present there are different varieties in functions. The functions can be divided into four themes: The brain, the body, the senses and the skin. A healthy mind in a healthy body. As such the bigger sport facilities are situated at the outskirts of the city and the little existing initiatives concerning hobby's of the elderly are hidden and not visible for society.

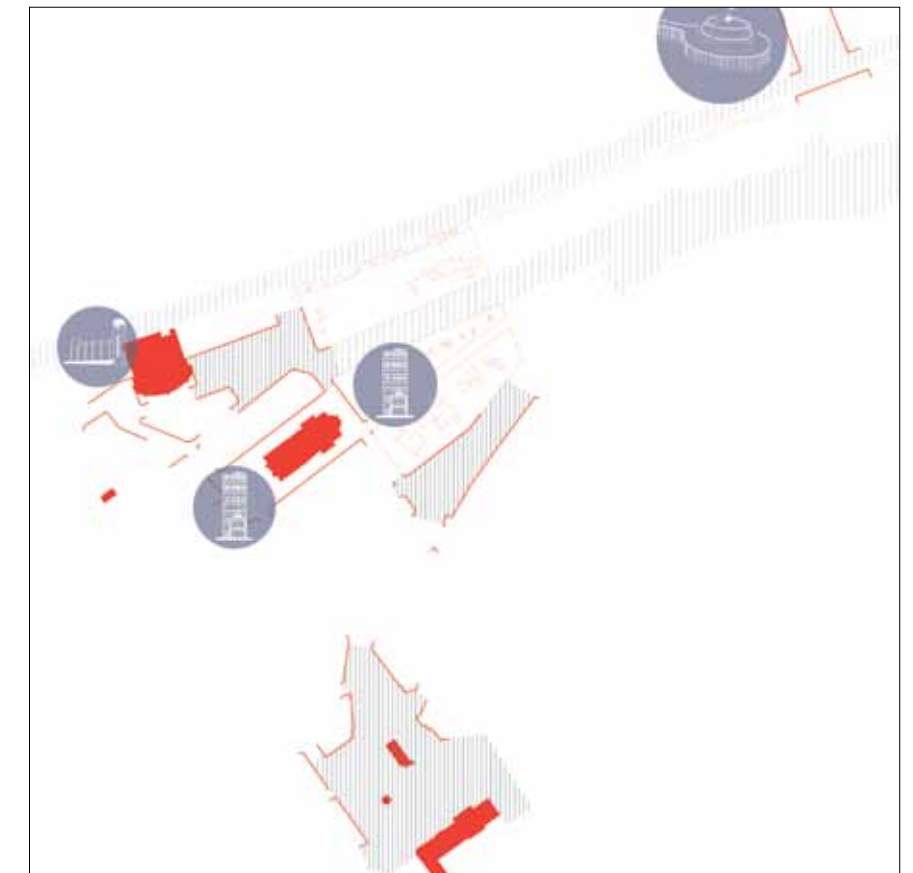
Little cohesion between the different functions, fortunately the town of Blankenberge is aware of the issue and wants to stimulate the mingling of functions. Therefore new forms of building and open space will come into existence.



building blocks



public space



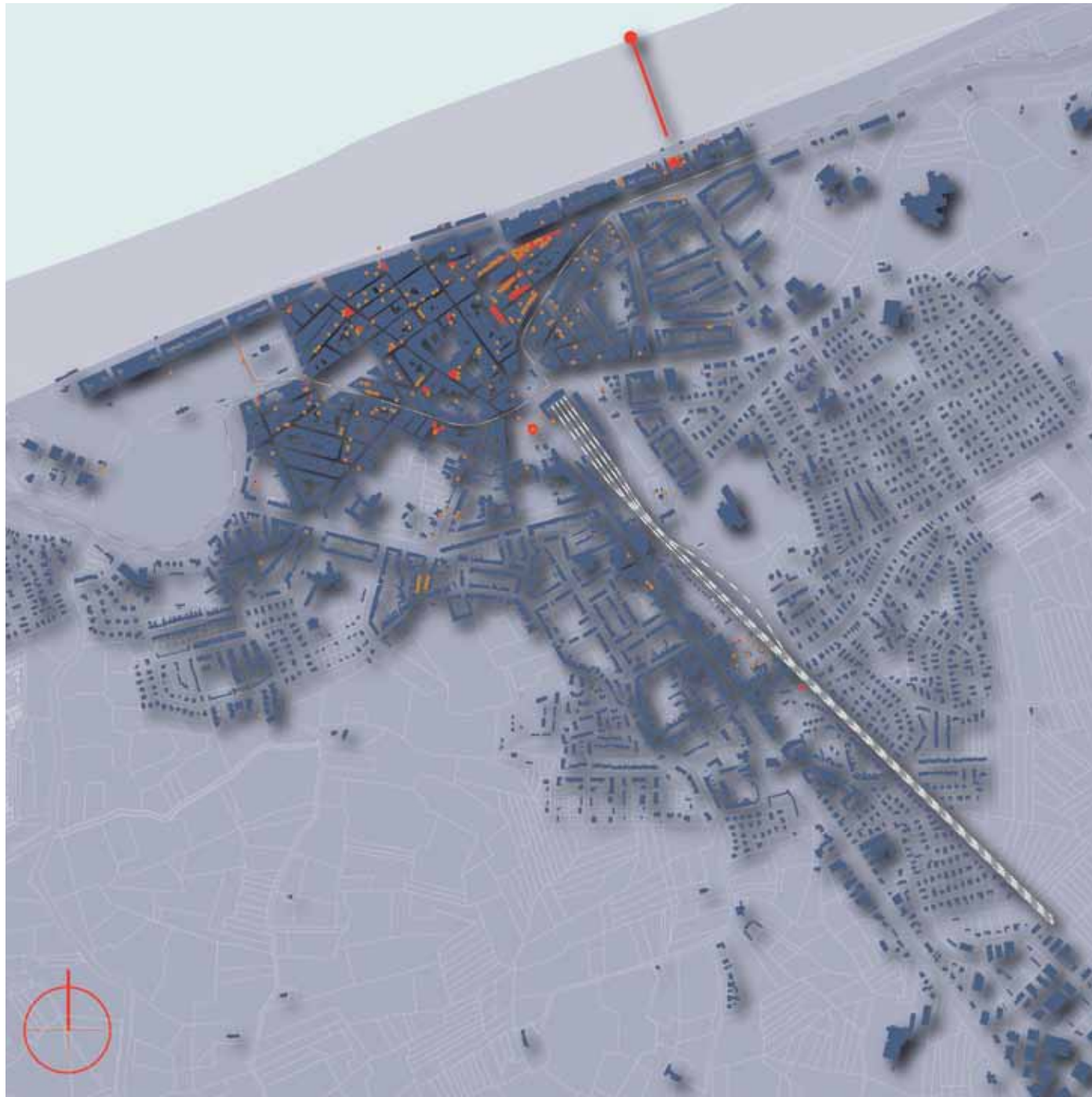
squares

5.2 Coastal Heritage

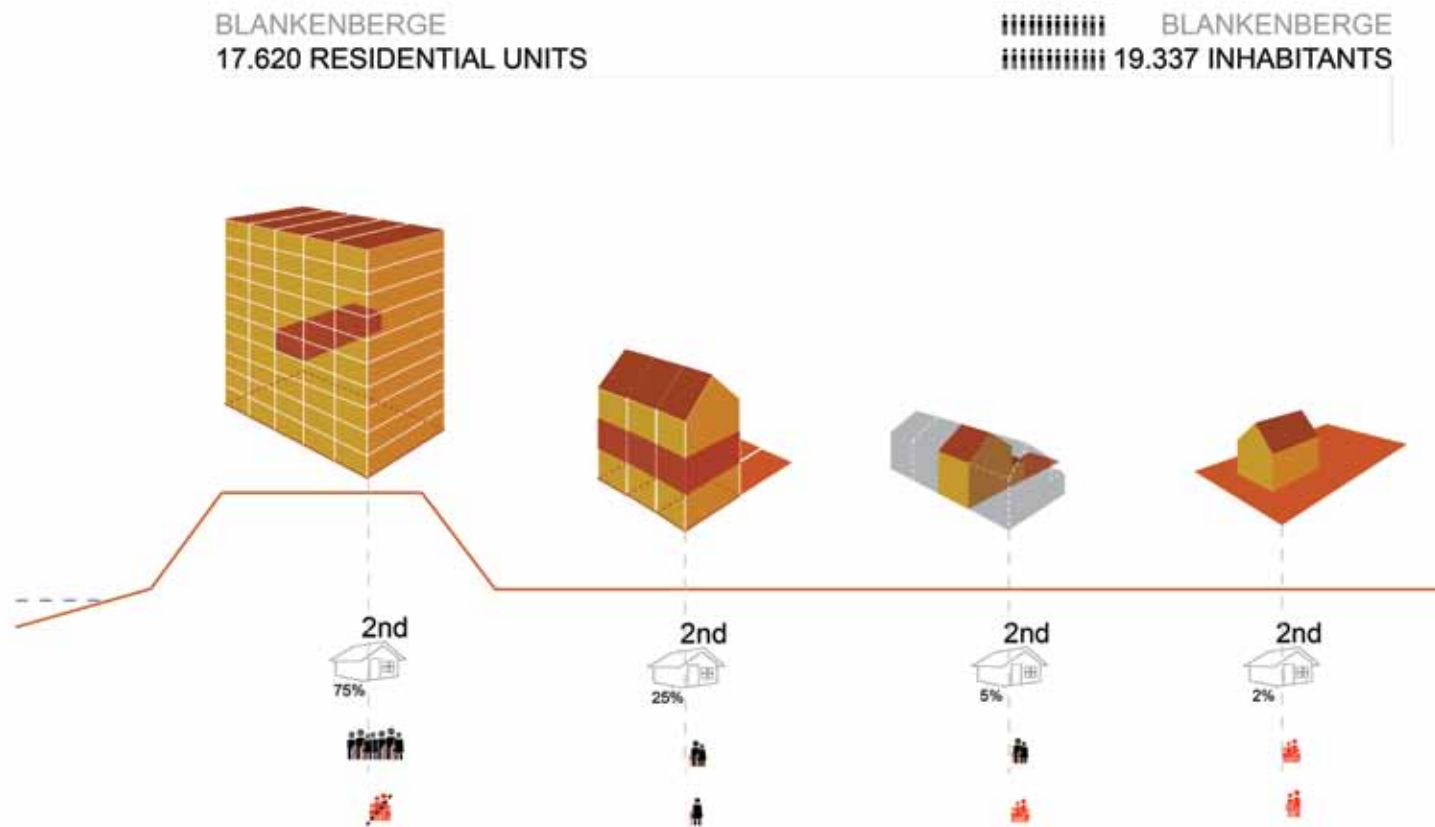
The protected architectural heritage is often pauperized and has lost its function in the past decades. The projects are likely halted by the experienced project developers. The buildings are not a good investment due to the legal terms resting on the properties. Constantly there is a search for other relocations, whereby demolition of existing properties is the main issue.

The houses, which are still very determining images for the heritage of Blankenberge, are situated around the Sint-Rochuschurch. These secondary homes were erected as per the existing concept of “bel-etage civilian house” or coastal villa. These houses offered a solution to the specific demands and problems in those days. The indented terras or veranda created an extra trump for curing in the health sea breeze, without excessive exposure to the sunlight. These veranda are currently closed off by a window, but originally they could be closed by a rolling shutter. From the street these verandas are accessible by an open stairs and was commonly decorated with glazed tiles. The material is subject to erosion, caused by sand and salt layers. Glazed tiles are splendid material being subject to this

We have to deal with the redevelopment of existing buildings. The Belle époque seaside villas are the heritage of the rich past. Nowadays the vacancy and neglect is high. These villas are located behind the high dense “wall” and have issues with a quantitative living space and high square meter price. The buildings are protected, but this should not detract from a new function. The historical and cultural value of the seawall residential buildings is nill. This in contrast with the high value of the concrete (and steel) construction for reuse.



6 Living environment



In Blankenberge, the pressure on environment is big due to the increase of secondary homes having appartementisation as a consequence for availability. Because one does not take into consideration that the need for secondary homes shall come to a halt, a heightened pressure is coming on the hinterland and the existing social fabric. Due to high prices in building land, mostly targeted at secondary homes and apartment buildings, is an immediate threat to the preservation of valuable heritage. The change in the urban fabric is going hand in hand with dense populated living areas. Facilities and services should be tailored to a strong changing velocity in occupancy.⁸ The perpetual increasing numbers of secondary homes at the coast have an immediate effect on the decreasing cost and availability of the houses of the permanent residents. Especially the young families emigrate to the communities in the hinterland. The secondary homes indirectly contribute to the settlement of elderly residents at the coast. From the time of retirement age, a secondary home often becomes a permanent residence. Together with the degreening, the aging promotes the change in the demographic and socio-economical profile of a coastal habitant.

With an average age of 47,75, Blankenberge is ranked 6th on the list of Belgian communities with oldest residents.⁹ The maintenance and care taking of a home is often not feasible / overpriced. In Belgium 21,6% of the aged people have an income lower than the poverty threshold.

The specific profile of owners holding secondary homes, older, highly educated and no children determines increasingly the average profile of visitors at the Coast. By the disappearing of the hotels in favor of the apartment buildings, today the Coast owns a less variable residence structure.

Blankenberge has realized that the secondary homes are the drive for the local economy. On one hand these secondary homes are providing for additional stay overs and creates extra labor force. On the other hand these secondary homes diminishes the living standard, by rising property costs and seasonal vacancies. Nevertheless Blankenberge is convinced that these secondary homes have to be integrated into the urban development and not in separate communities.

⁸IDEA Consult W. de Laat tweede verblijven aan de Kust: onderzoek naar het profiel, de effecten en een toolkit voor het beleid DEEL 4: TOOLBOX VOOR HET BELEID

⁹Memorandum Goed wonen van levensbelang! Woonbeleid en ouderen in Blankenberge, stedelijke seniorenraad Blankenberge & Vlaamse ouderenraad, februari 2012

6.1 Residential stock

We differentiate the following housing typologies as per location:

The seawall

1. Apartment buildings small plot
2. Apartment buildings broad plot

Hinterland (central area)

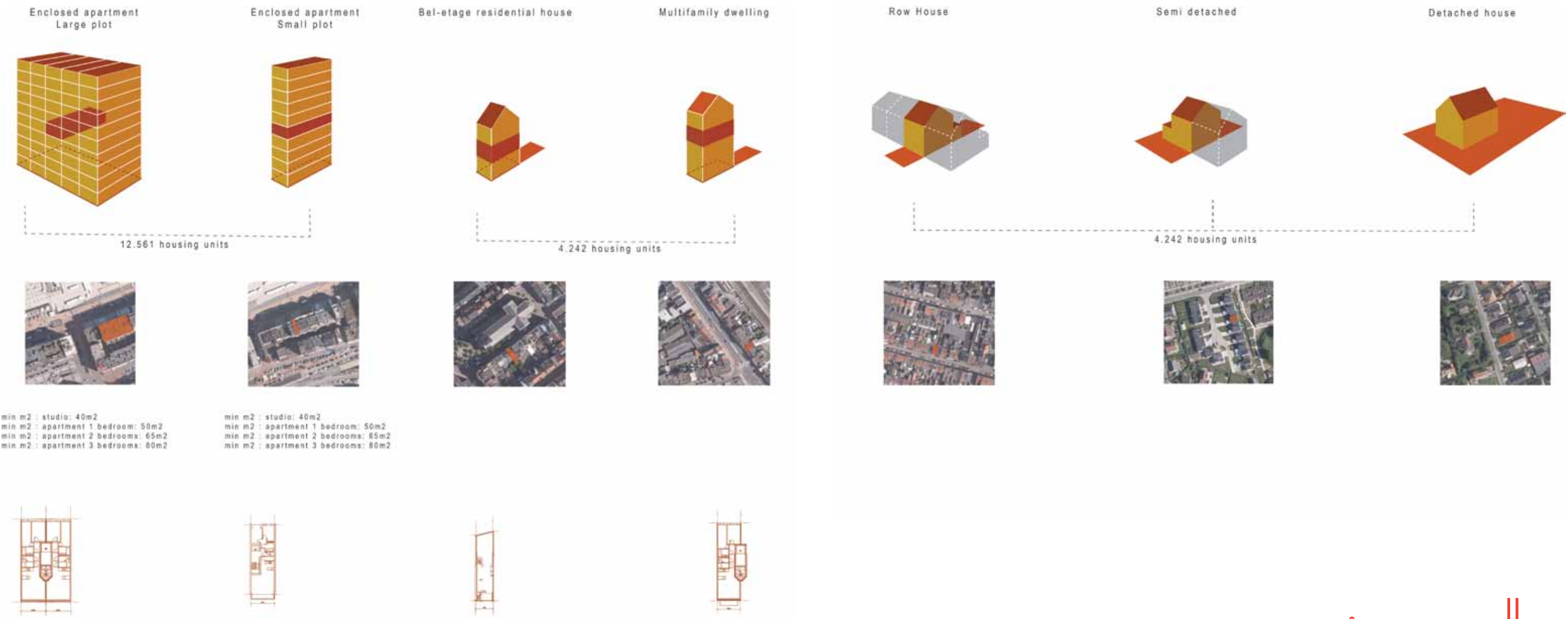
3. Family homes
4. Bel-etage civilian homes Belle Epoque
5. Row-houses / linked houses
6. Semi detached singly-family houses
7. Detached single-family houses

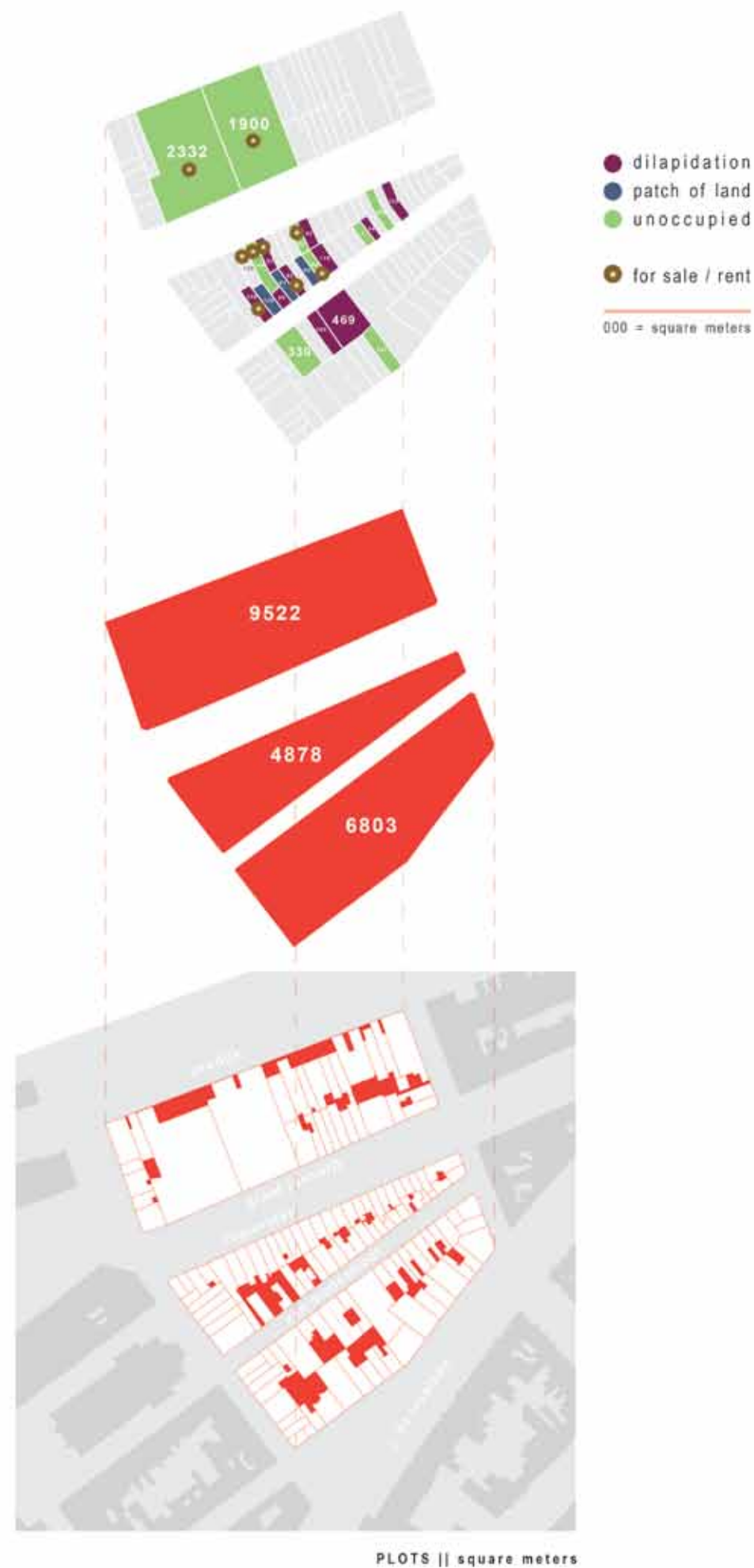
Blankenberge in 2010 possesses over 17.260 residences. Of about 9.654 occupied homes, 6.719 are over 25 years of age. This means that strong aging of the housing is present and which have not adapted to the current customer demands. The living standards are often below average and it can also not be ignored that the visual attraction of the Coast is influenced in a negative manner. On the current housing market, 45% of the habitants are also the owners and 54% do not own properties.

By means of housing typology investigation for the small urban area of Blankenberge the current net surface of the most occurring housing facilities became known. Blankenberge possesses a variety on housing typologies with the accompanying living spheres. This gives Blankenberge the characteristics of a city.

Elderly owners are not capable in maintaining their properties in a decent fashion. Because one has to differentiate between owners/ letters and actual owners.

In the past Blankenberge was suffering with housing of below average quality. But now the housing have to meet certain criteria. The most important criteria is the net-livable surface.





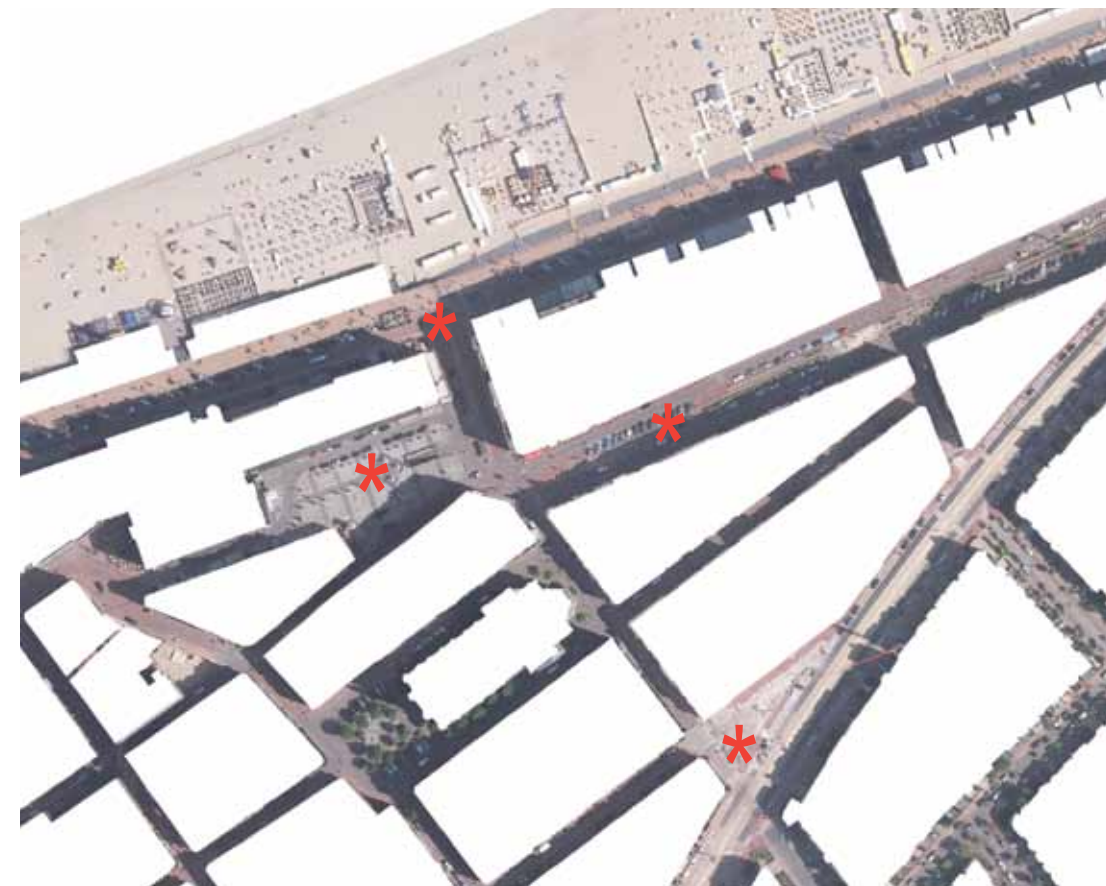
7 Public domain

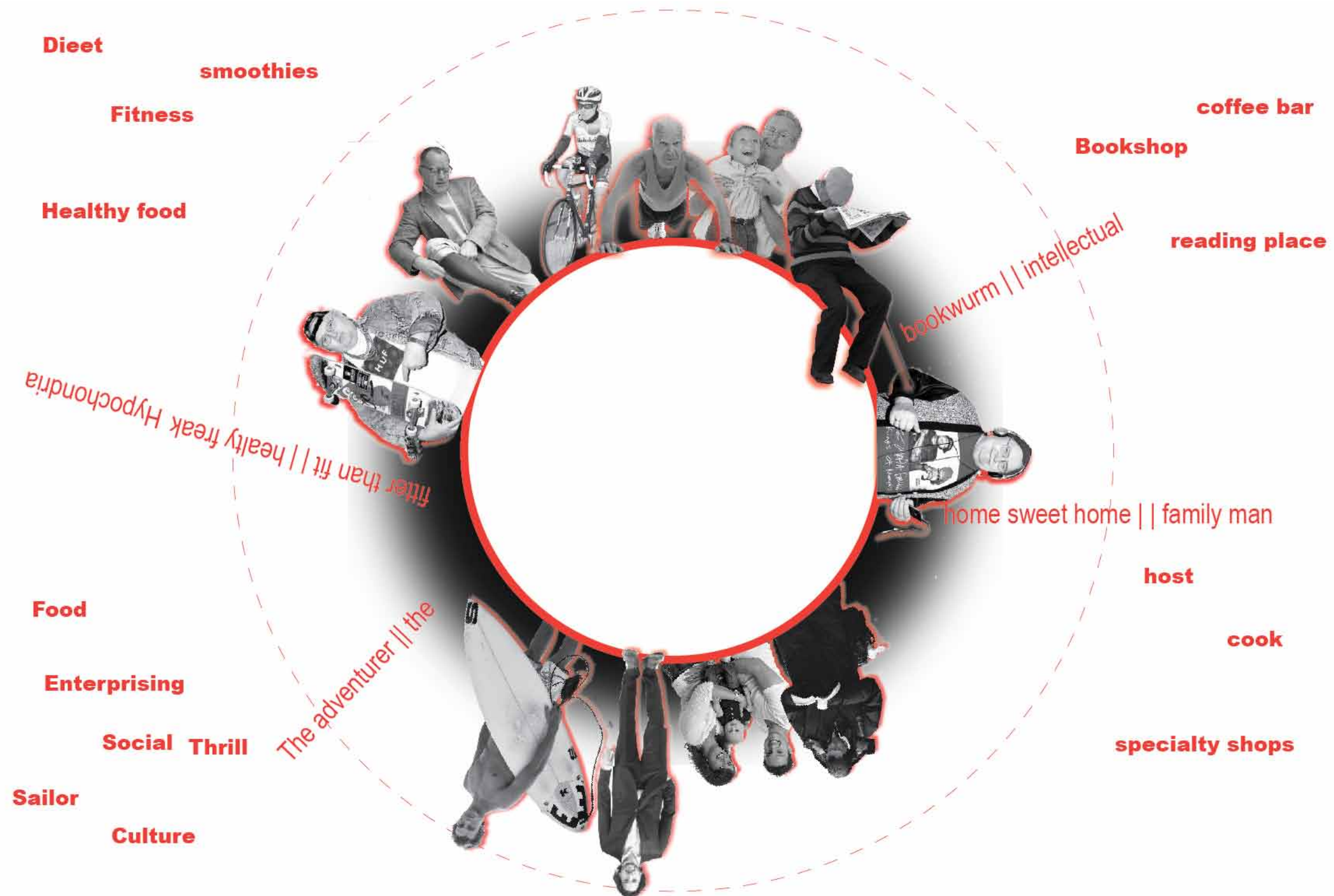
The public domain is a place where meeting is encouraged. This is the public space with the related health and welfare functions. Socio-cultural and sport associations such as, Radio Amateurs, Cineclub, Drama Club, Local history club, etcetera are placed mainly in the “attic”. By connecting these functions to the public domain, cooperation and interaction are stimulated and contributes a population of variety ages who can learn from each other.

Blankenberge attempted to qualify various forms of cultural expression for a reasonable price. The clubs constitutes a coherent network. Studies show that people who are actively involved in a club, have a bigger and more intense social network. They are less susceptible and serves as a safety net against social isolation.

In the research of WES, they suggests a brain drain during the labor life, and the will return after retirement. The coast should be made attractive for young people to remain live (defensive) or moved (offensive). However, only through several measures this can may be achieved.

The exchange between the generations generates space for hobbies and leisure. The younger generation benefits from new employment and the new diversity of the environment that the symbioses brings.





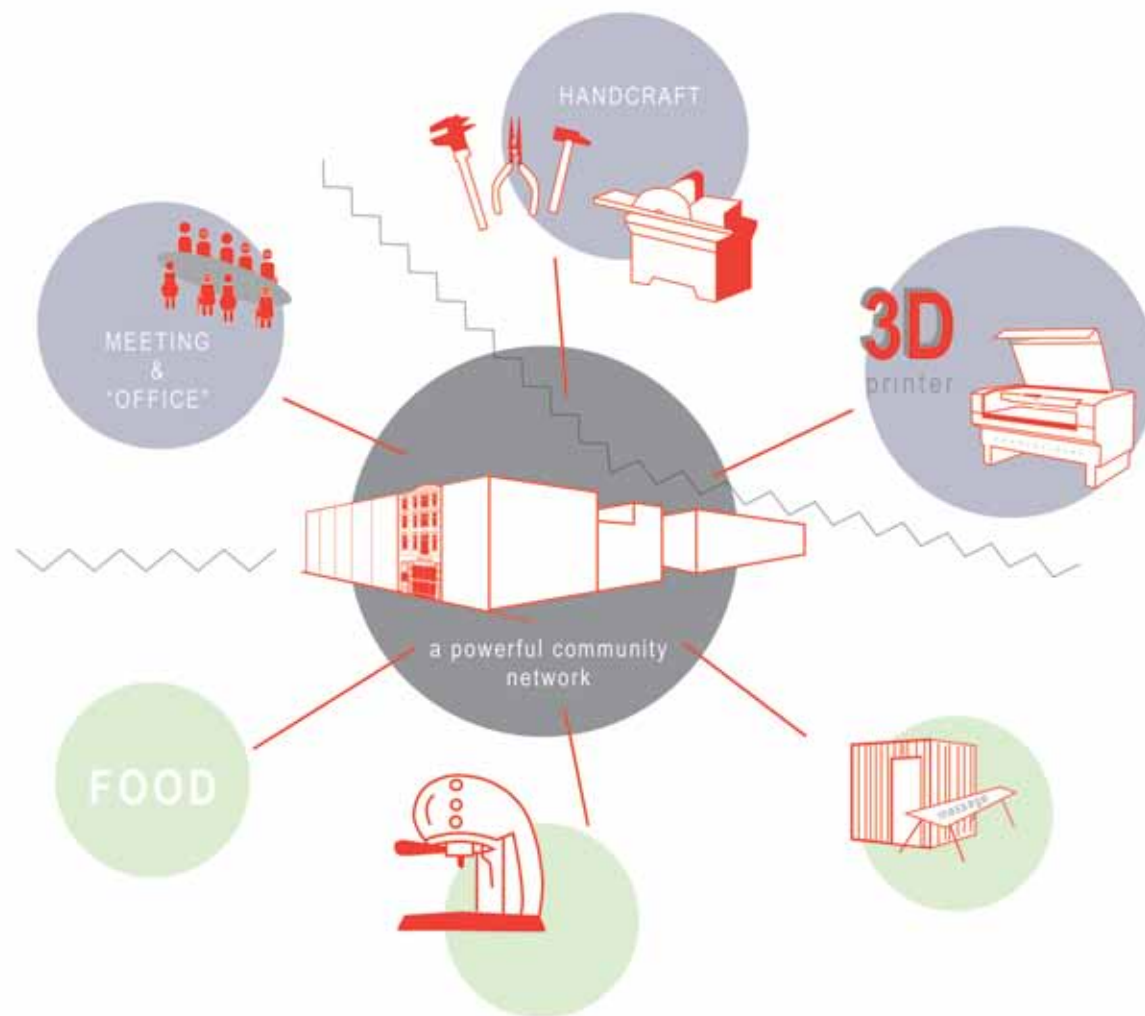
knowledge is widespread along the coast, but it has to come together for sharing and exchanging. through meeting places and meeting facilities, elderly can present themselves to the outside world and continue to contribute in the society

improving and reinforce the image of the West Flemish higher education and student cities, encouraging a climate for innovation in business, a sufficiently attractive leisure and cultural offer and a well-developed public transport network

7.1 Life coasting . lab

At the point where industry and digital technology meet, as well as entrepreneurship and participatory commitment, Fab Labs are expanding across the globe. With aims and resources that are sometimes radically different, they nevertheless form a powerful community network.¹⁰

Fab lab is a workshop operating as a network and is open to the public. The aim is to produce anything with new techniques or old handcraft. It can be used by a do-it-yourselfer, students, new entrepreneurs or the hobbyist. It's one big garage, that room that's missing in the stock of housing on the coast. By sharing machines it's reducing the cost and stimulates interaction between young and old.



REFERENCE FAB LAB



CREATIVE COFFEE HOUSE
incubator for young creatives and entrepreneurs



WELL-BEING
sauna - massage - yoga



ROOM FOR OFFICE SPACE AND MEETINGS
clubhouse // office for starters



¹⁰ Camille Bosqué, FAB LABS, 'A'A', june 2013)