

2. Safety on intermodal hubs – The case of the Liège-Guillemins railway station

2.1. Introduction

The new Liège-Guillemins railway station was inaugurated in September 2009. With some 30,000 travellers/day, it is the 11th railway station of Belgium and the 3rd one in Wallonia. It is also, with Bruxelles-midi and Antwerpen, one of the three Belgian railway stations served by the high-speed train network (Thalys and ICE in destination to France and Germany).

The railway station itself, work of the Spanish architect-engineer Santiago Calatrava, is a wide umbrella structure including a commercial gallery and an underground parking. This building is designed to accommodate up to 50,000 travellers/day.

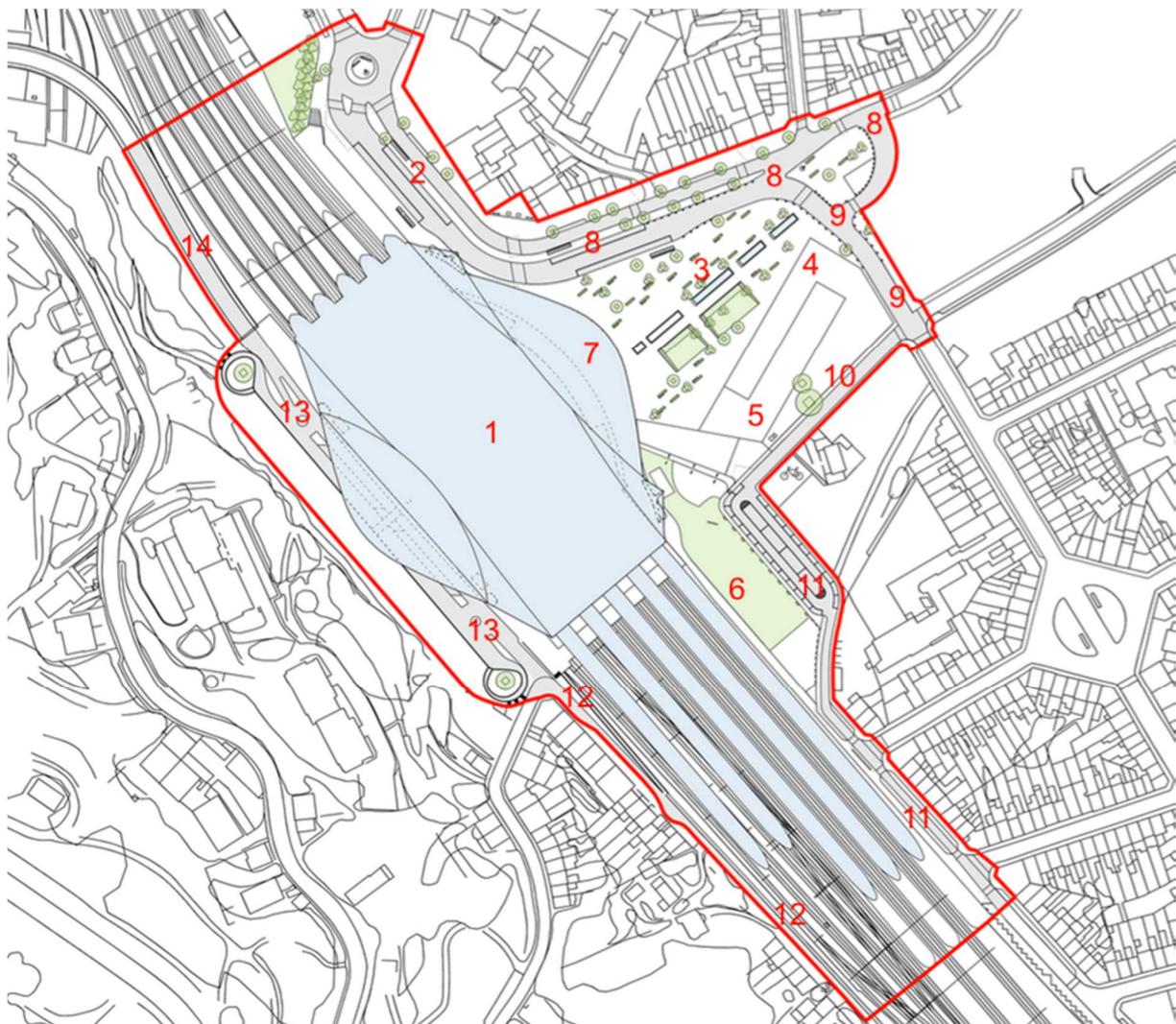


Fig 1 : Schematic map of Liège-Guillemins railway station and its surrounding public space, within the study area

It represents a prime intermodal hub. Actually, it is served by :

1. **The highway/road network.** The motorized users have at disposal indeed, on the back of the station, a long-term parking building counting 750 places as well as a short-term parking zone (Kiss and Drive) connected to the E25-A602, giving direct access to the railway platforms and enabling the management of approx. 3,000 daily movements.
2. **The Liege area public transport network.** At the front of the railway station, at a distance of 100m to 200m of platforms, a city bus station receives approx. 1,600 bus/day generating over 15,000 daily users movements. Furthermore, the station is a major hub for the local taxi companies.
3. **The bikes and the pedestrians.** The building is designed to allow connections as easy as possible between the 2 banks of the railway tracks network as well as with the boarding platforms. These connections are achieved firstly through a « commercial gallery » under the tracks, managed as a private space (closing between the arrival of the last night train (1:30 AM) and the departure of the first morning train (5:30 AM), and secondly through 2 « bridges » up the tracks managed as public spaces (unrestricted access and uninterrupted opening day or night). Moreover, cyclists can find inside the station dedicated sheltered parking places and various amenities (rental, repair shop).

The commercial gallery counts twenty local shops mainly from the HORECA sector – restaurants, snacks, coffeeshops, ... -, completed by gift and newspaper shops, a drugstore and the transport and tourist oriented business – ticketing, information, ... -.

The railway building is « secured » by regular patrols of the railway police and by private security companies mandated by the shopkeepers. Additionally, the Federal Police has in the building a permanent office and places are under constant video surveillance (a hundred cameras cover either the platforms and the commercial gallery, the parking and the cyclo-pedestrian connections).

The station opens on a public square in constant transformation since 2009. The amenities of this square are intended to ensure a quality environment, coherent with the prestige of the station, but also convivial enough and safe for multiple users who use this space daily (including users who pass from the bus to the train and vice versa but also tourists since the square is the link between the station and numerous events – museum, park, banks of the Meuse, ...). Security on this space is the responsibility of the Liege Local Police who conducts both repressive actions (verbalization) and dissuasive/persuasive ones (awareness actions, preventive interventions in collaboration with other communal services – e.g. cleaning,... - and/or in response to citizens' requests).

2.2. Research Method

The study method

The present study of insecurity problems posed by this extremely important intermodal hub at the scale of the city of Liege is based on a double analysis :

- firstly on a statement of objective insecurity identified in the station and its surroundings by the police between 2007 and 2015 ¹ ;

¹ Police fédérale de Liège – DCA – Service d'Analyse Stratégique – Laurence Kersten, « Analyse de la criminalité dans et aux alentours des gares et points d'arrêt de la Ville de Liège – De 2007 à 2010 », Déc. 2010 ;

- secondly on a survey on the feeling of insecurity (subjective insecurity) conducted in 2015 by the operator of the station (SNCB – Belgian National Railway Company) ².

THE STATISTICS ON CRIME (OBJECTIVE INSECURITY)

As already noted, the railway station of Liège-Guillemins is an intermodal « hub » extremely important at the scale of the City of Liege. As such, the station and its immediate surroundings are among the busiest areas of the city, with a remarkable presence of users spreading over time. Actually, unlike the commercial streets of the urban center, the station and its surroundings attract the public both day and night, very early in the morning or very late at night, either during school periods and holidays... This « functional » attractiveness is further enhanced by the existence of the « commercial gallery » and its many shops, and because of the almost continuous program of events in the station or near it : since the inauguration of the building, one parking level from three is de facto dedicated to host cultural events attracting a large public) ; in addition, the esplanade in front of the station regularly hosts original events (ice rink, ice sculpture, circus, ...) which maintains quasi-permanent vibrant activities on the site.

« The opportunity making the thief », no surprise therefore to identify an important « small » criminality (pickpocketing, altercations, drug traffic, ...) directly related to the high level of « co-presence » despite the significant control means implemented (video surveillance, frequency of police patrols, security services, ...).

One can assume that drug traffic is also probably related to the proximity of the Netherlands which, in this matter, is experiencing a more permissive legislation than in Belgium.

Furthermore, the specificity of travel by train also induces a strong demand for parking, partially unsupervised, which in turn generates a specific type of crime (theft in and of vehicles).

Finally, as any international transit area, Liège-Guillemins train station is the drop point of a possibly illegal immigration.

Very concretely, between 2007 and 2010, the police registered on the site of Liège-Guillemins (railway station and surroundings) about 1,250 crimes per year which were distributed in the following categories :

Type of fact	Number of facts by year in mean	Repartition in % of the total of facts
Thefts	420	34%
Attacks on the person	180	15%
Drugs	140	11%
Illegal immigration	100	8%
Vandalism	80	6%
Other	330	26%
TOTAL	1.250	100%

ISLP versus BNG - Observatoire de la criminalité de la Police de Liège – Carmelo Troisi, « Statistiques de la criminalité aux alentours de la gare de Liège-Guillemins et de la Place Saint-Lambert », Mai 2016 ;

SNCB – Mégan Zangerlé, « Nombre d'appels passés au SOC (Security Operation Center) pour les faits d'insécurité entre 2011 et 2015 en gares de Liège-Guillemins et Liège-Palais », Juin 2016.

² SNCB – Mégan Zangerlé, « Résultats de l'enquête sur le sentiment de sécurité en gare de Liège-Guillemins », Avril 2016.

Thefts coming well ahead of the listed offenses, are divided into

- thefts in buildings	~ 100 facts/year	23%
- pickpocketing	~ 85 facts/year	20%
- thefts in vehicules	~ 85 facts/year	20%
- robberies with violence	~ 45 facts/year	11%
- thefts of vehicules	~ 35 facts/year	9%
- armed robberies	~ 10 facts/year	3%
- other thefts	~ 60 facts/year	14%
TOTAL	420 facts/year	100%

Unsurprisingly, pickpocketing occur overwhelmingly in the station or on the esplanade directly in front (~65% of the facts registered in the whole area mapped on Fig. 1) and during the day between 9:00 AM and 4:00 PM, when the density of movements is at peak. The rest occurs in the directly adjacent streets.

Thefts in or of vehicules concern evenly all the streets around the station, especially for unsupervised parking places. These facts are also held mostly during the day when the parked vehicule density is at peak.

Other facts of thefts do not show characteristics that could be correlated with the existence of the station, except the development of an expanded commercial device that attracts a specific crime, possibly violent (armed / violent robberies).

The second category of offenses concerns attacks on the person. There are :

- Violations of moral integrity (threats, harassment)	~ 90 facts/year	50%
- Violations of physical integrity (assault and battery)	~ 80 facts/year	44%
- Violations of sexual integrity (rape, exhibitionist)	~ 10 facts/year	6%
TOTAL	180 facts/year	100%

Unsurprisingly again, the station and its immediate surroundings concentrate a clear majority (80% !) of recorded facts in the whole area. Those facts occur mostly during the day (in 75% of cases), probably due to the density of the potential interactions between the many users of this space and at such times. However, the significant impact of a very particular crime occurring in a street traditionally dedicated to prostitution (rue Varin), close to the station, will be noted. In this street, the litigious facts of the category « attacks on the person » are recorded mainly at night (between 10:00 PM and 6:00 AM).

Facts related to drug trafficking and illegal immigration have always (100%) for setting the station, the esplanade and the street dedicated to the aforementioned prostitution. The interloping nature of specifically nocturnal activities around the station (bar, prostitution) and the presence of authorities in charge of illegal immigration explain this concentration.

However, vandalism (criminal damage to private property, mostly vehicules) and incivility appear to concern only a bit the station and its esplanade (barely about ten facts listed by year in mean, representing about 10% of similar facts recorded in the neighborhood (perimeter mapped on Fig. 1) and less than 1% of all

crimes recorded by the police on the site). The special supervision to which these places are subjects (patrols, cameras) seems quite effectively deter those « minor » formes of delinquency.

Crime statistics for the period 2007-2010 can hardly be compared to the police data for 2011-2015, the modalities of the survey being hardly compatible. The distribution between the various categories of reprehensible facts remains somewhat stable as can be judged on the basis of the elements in our possession.

SURVEYS ON THE FEELING OF INSECURITY (SUBJECTIVE INSECURITY)

In 2015, the SNCB has launched a survey on the feeling of insecurity felt by users of the railway in Liège-Guillemins station. 1,000 questionnaires were distributed. The response rate was about 16%.

First, the station appears as a generally safe place (80% of respondents feel safe). If the building itself seems to offer a very satisfying feeling of security, this is not entirely the case of its surroundings (esplanade and adjacent streets) judged rather insecure by 45% of respondents.

Then, the night and the evening (between 8:00 PM and 6:00 AM) are the moments judged the most frightening by 93% of respondents.

Moreover, the main victimization facts concern (in decreasing order of importance) :

- Facts in relation to drugs and alcohol, whose 70% of respondents say they have been victims or witnesses ;
- Violations of physical or moral integrity (fights or insults) which concerned 50% of respondents ;
- Thefts whose over 40% of respondents have been victims or witnesses ;

Finally, the feeling of insecurity results for its part mainly (in decreasing order of importance) :

- From the confrontation with the facts in relation to drugs and alcohol cited by more than 60% of respondents ;
- From fear of violations of physical integrity (fights) for approx. 50% of respondents ;
- From risk of thefts cited by just under 50% of respondents ;
- From risk of terrorist acts cited by 45% of respondents ;
- From the exposure to vandalism facts also cited by 45% of respondents ;

2.3. Learning from the Liège-Guillemins case study : Strategies and proposals to improve safety on intermodal hubs.

What lessons can we draw from this survey and from confrontation with crime statistics resumed in the first part of this study ?

1. Regarding the exposure (real or perceived) at any risk, the facts in relation to drugs and alcohol appear significantly overvalued compared with actual interventions of the police services (11% of verbalized facts, in annual mean). This could mean that the fears of users probably fall more from discomfort associated with certain behaviors perceived as « antisocial » than from an actual victimization. The facts in relation to drugs and alcohol seem characteristic of these places of transit and intense mixing that

constitute the transport nodes. These spaces shared very temporarily by a group of individuals, foreign to each other, are by definition hardly appropriated by a structured community, invested by some form of responsibility for the place. The marginal or « deviant » behaviors (compared to an assumed standard) may therefore be more frequent there especially if the environment is perceived as favoring the standard erasure (in this case : the presence of bars, prostitution, proximity to the Netherlands recognized as easy source of drugs supply, ...). It is interesting to note that the new Liège station, prestigious building if it is, contributes to a radical transformation of the neighborhood that tends to « gentrify » it or, at least, to align it with the standards imposed by major real estate investors. In this perspective, the demand to curb behaviors considered as « asocial » or « atypical » will no doubt be strong.

2. Regarding the « attacks on moral and physical integrity », the fear of being exposed or the feeling of having been confronted to such facts are again significantly higher than the actual verbalization (15% of the whole verbalization, in annual mean, are effectively concerning such facts while the fear of being victim of such facts – victimization - concerns approximatively 50% of the respondents). In this case, however, verbal or physical aggression may represent more than discomfort and lead to real victimization without the alleged offense does lead to a complaint registered in proper form, due to fear of reprisals, lack of evidence, by weariness or cowardice, ... It seems again that the transitory nature of social relationships that can be established in such places of passage, combined with the density and the diversity of potential contacts between users, can lead to a blurring of the standard usually regulating social life. In this respect, the quality of amenities, the profusion of available spaces that can accommodate a large variety of activities in good conditions regarding the promiscuity or the density of use, the constant reminder of the standard by the services invested with a persuasive or repressive authority, are helping to limit interpersonal clashes. It is demonstrated by a comparison between the stations of Liège-Guillemins and Liège-Bressoux which have two diametrically opposed faces in spatial quality, range of activities and effectiveness of surveillance. In Liège-Guillemins where the overall quality of the environment is deemed highly satisfactory by more than 60% of the surveyed population, attacks on the person concern 14% of verbalized facts while they represent 23% in Bressoux where conditions are much less favorable for the 3 mentioned criteria.
3. Regarding the thefts, the feeling of insecurity is in line with the statistics of the police action. One has to remain that this category of crime is highly correlated with the density of use of space and the resulting proliferation of potential targets. For example, if the focus is on pickpocketing, it represents 20% of all thefts in Liège-Guillemins against 7% in Bressoux which is an uncrowded station. Additionally, the pickpocketing occurs overwhelmingly in the day, when the crowd is at peak. The architecture of the space can also play a role in providing for example less latitudes to the offender who would want to escape after committing his crime, at the risk however of a deterioration of architectural or plastic quality of spaces. Prevention as well as recognized and effective proximity control seem by evidence reassuring users, at least partly. Indeed, a question of the survey on insecurity was about the presence of the security forces. If the respondent population showed generally very confident in the presence of security forces (confidence level approaching 90%), it was however much more critical about the effectiveness of their interventions (confidence level falling below 40%).

4. Fear of exposure to terrorist acts is purely conjunctural and symptomatic of the times, even the expression of extreme media outreach (Paris was just coming off the attack against the weekly « Charlie-Hebdo » and a terrorist cell had been dismantled ew days before the survey, in Verviers, a town near Liege). Nevertheless, an important field of research certainly opens up in this domain to provide satisfactory rather simplistic answers to ensure protection against terrorist madness in places such exposed as the intermodal « hubs ».

Appendix 1

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Appendix 2

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