

Building the university at the end of the 19th century: the Trasenster Institutes of Lambert-Henri Noppius in Liege (1880-1889)

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research project: Building Belgian universities in urban areas at the end of the 19th century. The case of the construction of the Trasenster Institutes in Liege by Lambert-Henri Noppius, between 1880 and 1889. (Working Title)

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This research project delves into the construction of universities in urban settings during the last quarter of the 19th century, with a specific focus on the Trasenster Institutes of the architect Lambert-Henri Noppius in Liege. Built between 1880 and 1889, these six scientific institutes were named after their founder, Louis Trasenster, the rector of the University of Liege. From the perspective of construction and architectural history, the study aims to comprehensively understand the genesis of these buildings which are part of our cultural heritage and remain important landmarks in today's city centre. This architectural ensemble also holds significant value within the realm of science history: by analysing their functional design, we can observe the major shifts in research and teaching methods that occurred towards the end of the 19th century, instigated by German universities.

Studying the institutes themselves, along with their intricate creation and construction processes, will enhance our understanding of the technologies and techniques from the period being discussed, as well as the experimentation that might have taken place at the different building sites. The production methods will especially be identified, examining whether they adhered to established construction traditions or adopted innovative approaches. Given the advanced architectural program, tailored to accommodate new equipment to be installed in the laboratories and classrooms,

it will be particularly interesting to determine the extent to which the construction systems were experimental. Additionally, the research will explore the level of interconnection between the building sites, questioning the presence of networked design and planning, as well as economies of scale. Throughout the decade under review, it will also observe the evolution of decision-making and choices within the history of the six constructions, which generally followed a sequential order but occasionally overlapped.

Furthermore, the study will shed light on different actors of the construction field, witnessing at that point a significant professionalization and a shift between craftsmanship and manufacturing. The involvement of other stakeholders beyond the building sector will also be highlighted, such as the national and local authorities, who were notably responsible for funding the project. The crucial role of university staff will also be examined, particularly the one the professors played in shaping the architectural program and influencing various practical choices before and during the construction phase of the institute they would eventually teach at. Finally, studying these monumental construction sites and their interactions will provide a new outlook on the evolving landscape of the university town, then itself 'under construction'. Indeed, understanding the establishment of these six sites located in the city centre will offer insights into their impact on the urban environment and on the

infrastructure development at that time.

To achieve this, three key phases of the Trasenster Institutes' history will be investigated in all their complexity: their conception, their construction, and their reception. Specifically, the analysis of the latter phase will focus on the problems that might have arisen right after the building phase, as well as the feedback provided at that point from different stakeholders. This will enhance the critical assessment of how effectively these buildings met the demands and requirements of the university, city, and state.

Despite the apparent disappearance of the architect's original plans, the research already conducted on the Pharmaceutical Institute as part of my Master's thesis, which I am currently expanding upon, has revealed the wealth of available documentation. Have not only been uncovered an extensive collection of archives, but also a richness of architectural and technical details that can be observed on-site.

Facade ornamentation of the former Zoological Institute of the University of Liege (now "Aquarium-Museum of Liege"). Personal photograph, February 11, 2023.

