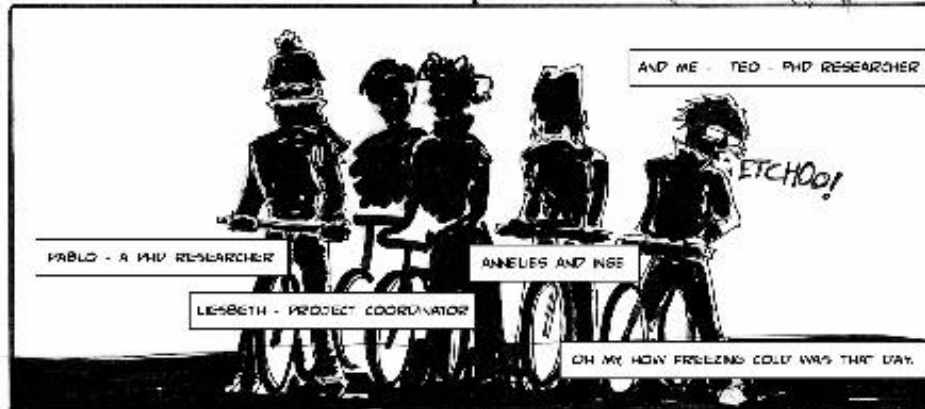


# FIVE ON TWO WHEELS

TWENTY FIRST JANUARY 2015.  
A COLD DAY IN GENK, LIMBURG. VERY COLD.

THE FIVE OF US DECIDED TO EXPLORE WINTERSLAG  
BY BIKE.



THE BIKING TOUR WAS SET UP WITH THE HELP OF TWO WIJK MANAGERS  
(NEIGHBORHOOD MANAGERS): ANNELES AND INGE.  
THERE IS THE RESPONSIBILITY TO KNOW WHAT IS GOING ON IN THE DISTRICT, TO  
KEEP IN TOUCH WITH RESIDENTS, TO INFORM THEM ABOUT ADMINISTRATIVE  
PLANNING OF MUNICIPALITY.  
ACTUALLY, IT WAS THE OTHER WAY ROUND TOO, THEY INFORM THE MUNICIPALITY  
ABOUT PEOPLE'S NEEDS, INTERESTS AND DESIRES, REGARDING THE ENVIRONMENT  
THEY LIVE, AS WELL AS ABOUT THEIR POINT OF VIEW RELATED TO THE  
DIFFERENT PROPOSALS.

WINTERSLAG - A FORMER MINE SITE THAT IS  
ONE OF THE CORE NEIGHBORHOODS OF THE  
CITY.  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF GENK HAS ALWAYS BEEN  
RELATED TO LABOR-INTENSIVE INDUSTRIAL  
ACTIVITIES. THE SPATIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE  
AREA IS DRIVEN BY OVERSIZED  
INFRASTRUCTURES THOUGHT TO ACCOMMODATE  
THE ONCE FLOURISHING INDUSTRIES. GENK  
BECAME INTERNATIONALLY AND NATIONALLY  
IMPORTANT IN 1917 WITH THE FIRST COAL  
EXTRACTION.

THE RECENT ECONOMIC CRISIS LED TO  
SIGNIFICANT JOB LOSSES. THE UNEMPLOYMENT  
RATE IN GENK IS CURRENTLY 12.34%. ONE OUT  
OF 4 UNEMPLOYED PEOPLE IS YOUNGER THAN  
25. BESIDES THE HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT RATE,  
GENK IS FACING CHALLENGES IN RELATION TO  
EDUCATION, SUSTAINABILITY, URBAN RESOURCES  
AND DEPRIVATION/POVERTY.  
THE CITY IS FACING AN ECONOMIC CRISIS,  
WHICH QUESTIONS THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE  
CURRENT ECONOMIC MODEL OF  
LABOR-INTENSIVE INDUSTRIAL ACTIVITIES.

THIS TRIGGERED A PROCESS OF RECOVERING, RESTORING  
AND REINVENTING FORMER INDUSTRIAL SITES, SPECIALLY  
FORMER MINING SITES.  
TAKE C-MINE. ONCE A SIMPLE MINE, NOWADAYS HAS BEEN  
TURNED INTO A CULTURAL CENTER, COMPLETED IN 2010,  
WHICH GOAL WAS TO REPRESENT "AN ANSWER ON HOW TO  
DEAL WITH LARGE-SCALE ABANDONED INDUSTRIAL  
HERITAGE." - SO ITS DESIGNERS SAY.



SIMPLE AS A GARDEN COULD BE. EVERYTHING WAS SO SMALL, BUT NEVERTHELESS, SOME TIME AGO THE HOUSE NEXT TO IT WAS OWNED BY A COUPLE. THEY LIKED MIXING SPECIES OF GRAPES AND MAKING WINE, BUT WHEN THE TWO BECAME TOO OLD, DECIDED TO MOVE TO THE CENTRE, LEAVING THE SHOP FOR SALE.

PEOPLE FROM GENK FOUND IT SUCH A SHAME THAT NOTHING HAPPENS WITH SUCH A SPECIAL GARDEN, SO THE CITY BOUGHT THE SHOP

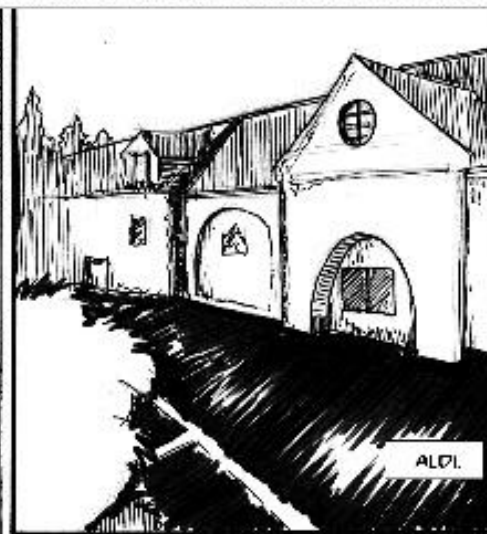


'NEXT THURSDAY - THE WIJK MANAGERS TOLD US - WE HAVE OUR FIRST ACTIVITY AND IT WILL BE A POETRY EVENING. WE ASK PEOPLE FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD TO BRING POEMS, GATHERED AROUND SOME FIRE AND SOME SOUP. WE HOPE THAT IN THE LONG-TERM THE GROUP OF INTERESTED PEOPLE WILL BECOME STRONG ENOUGH TO KEEP GOING BY THEMSELVES, WITHOUT OUR HELP.'

WHY NOT... THEY WOULD BE EVEN ABLE TO BECOME THEIR OWN ORGANIZATION.'



WE CONTINUED OUR TOUR, THEN SOME MILES WHICH BROUGHT US TO VISIT MANY PLACES ALL AROUND.



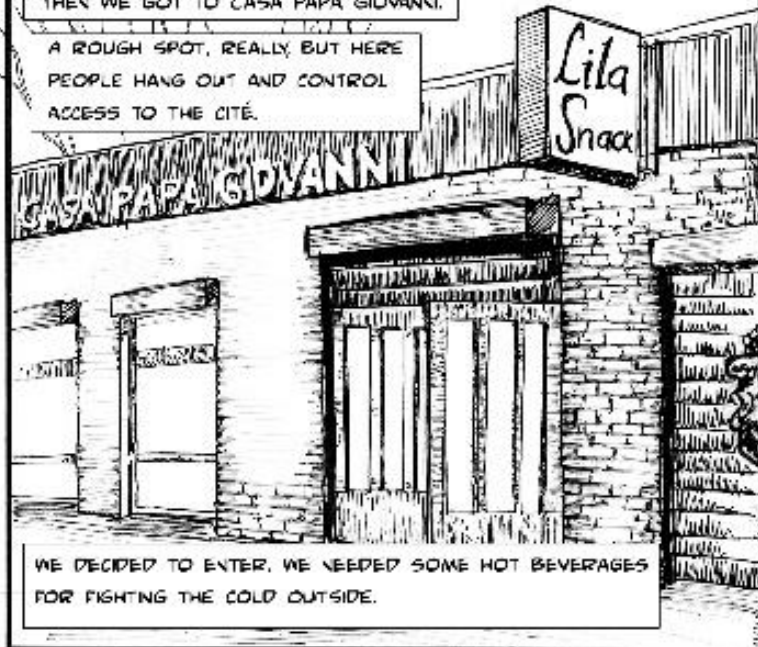
HOTEL DE SCHAET.

ALDI.



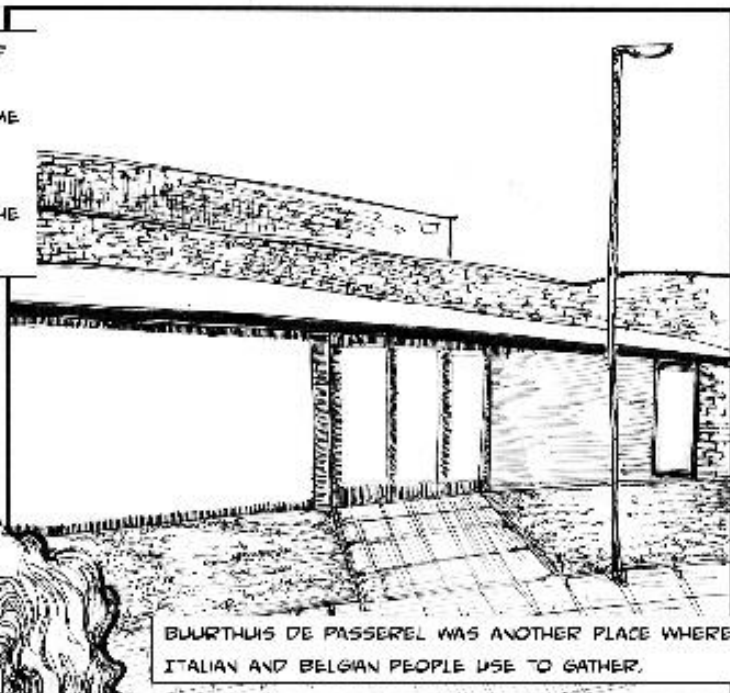
THEN WE GOT TO CASA PAPA GIOVANNI.

A ROUGH SPOT, REALLY, BUT HERE PEOPLE HANG OUT AND CONTROL ACCESS TO THE CITÉ.



WE DECIDED TO ENTER. WE NEEDED SOME HOT BEVERAGES FOR FIGHTING THE COLD OUTSIDE.

INSIDE THE BAR THERE WERE A LOT OF ITALIAN ORIGIN MEN, FIRST AND SECOND GENERATION OF THE MIGRANTS THAT CAME TO WORK IN THE MINES. THEY WERE SOMETHING BETWEEN 40 AND 65. THEY WERE GATHERED IN GROUPS AROUND THE TABLES PLAYING CARDS.



BUURTHUIS DE PASSEREL WAS ANOTHER PLACE WHERE ITALIAN AND BELGIAN PEOPLE USE TO GATHER.

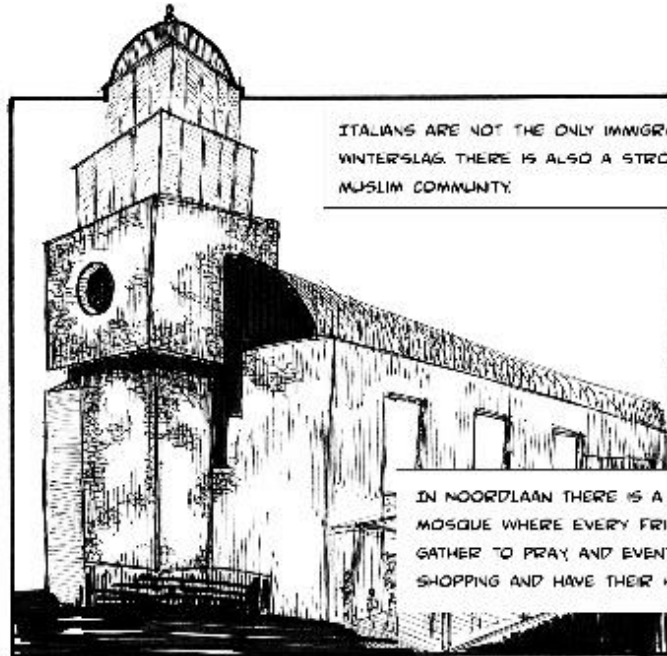
JUST MEN. WE WERE THE ONES WHO BROUGHT IN THE ONLY WOMEN, APPARENTLY.

APPARENTLY THERE IS A QUITE STRONG PRESENCE OF ITALIAN 'STRICT' SOCIAL WORKERS (AT LEAST, ACCORDING TO OTHER SOCIAL WORKERS SAY).

THERE THE ATMOSPHERE WAS NICE, PEOPLE, FOOD AND MANY GATHERINGS. WHEN WE ENTERED THE HALL THERE WAS A SORT OF PARTY. THIS TIME NO MEN, BUT ONLY WOMEN AND CHILDREN. FIRST ONES TALKING TO EACH OTHER (PERHAPS ABOUT THEIR HUSBANDS IN CASA PAPA GIOVANNI) WHILE THE SECOND ONES PLAYING ON THE GROUND.

FOOD WAS ARRANGED IN A BUFFET, AND PEOPLE WERE VERY FRIENDLY, ASKING US TO TALK ABOUT OUR PROJECT.





ITALIANS ARE NOT THE ONLY IMMIGRANTS IN WINTERSLAG. THERE IS ALSO A STRONG MUSLIM COMMUNITY.

IN NOORDLAAN THERE IS A MOROCCAN MOSQUE WHERE EVERY FRIDAY PEOPLE GATHER TO PRAY AND EVENTUALLY DO SHOPPING AND HAVE THEIR HAIR DONE.



THE TURKISH MOSQUE IS IN KROKUSSTRAAT. IN THESE PLACES IS NORMAL TO SEE ALL KINDS OF STALL SELLERS ON THE STREET (CUTLERY, CROCKERY, TOWELS, POTATOES, FRUIT AND VEGETABLES...) JUST IN FRONT OF THE BUILDING ITSELF.

IF SORCERY IS NOT IN YOUR FUTURE... YOU CAN ALSO LEARN HOW TO MAKE AND WORK WITH COMPOST.



ALONG OUR TRIP INTO THE MUSLIM SIDE OF WINTERSLAG WE GOT IN THE VROUWENCENTRUM.



IT LOOKS LIKE JUST A NORMAL HOUSE, BUT HERE WOMEN CAN COME AND GIVE KNITTING LESSONS AND COOKING LESSONS TO ONE ANOTHER.

IN STAATSTUNWIJK WE ACTUALLY DISCOVERED ALSO ANOTHER SMALL COMMUNITY IN WINTERSLAG.

HERE... WELL... YOU CAN STUDY TO BECOME A REAL WITCH.



FOR REAL.

PITY THAT IT WAS CLOSED WHEN WE GOT THERE.



I ALWAYS WANTED TO BECOME A WITCH.

IN THE END, GENK IS A REALITY THAT IS TRYING TO CHANGE ITS SKIN.

ALTHOUGH OUR EXPLORATION IS DONE, THIS WOULD BE RATHER A STARTING POINT THAN AN END. SEEING AND DISCOVERING NEW URBAN SPACES HAS TO BE A TRIGGER FOR TAKING PART IN THE CHANGES THAT GENK IS FACING NOWADAYS.

TWO WHEELS BROUGHT FIVE PEOPLE SOMEWHERE, BUT... WHAT'S NEXT? IN THE END... EVERY DESTINATION IS JUST ANOTHER START, ISN'T IT?

