

Conceptualising Diplomatic Representation on an Architectural Level: The Purpose-Built Embassy as Architectural Typology?

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In recent years purpose-built embassies have increasingly drawn attention from researchers. Conceived as the architectural flagship of the state abroad, purpose-built embassies have been studied to unravel the building policies and practices of different state actors. While this case study based research has enriched our knowledge of representational strategies, a conceptual discussion approaching purpose-built embassies on a typological level is less pronounced in architectural research. This paper aims to open up this discussion using the example of Belgian purpose-built embassies—a case which involves a wide variety of typological variations and is very much influenced by the use of cultural diplomacy deployed by this middle power state. Appearing on a larger scale in the streetscape of capitals since the twentieth century, purpose-built embassies are the result of a unique building assignment located on foreign soil. They often house a hybrid environment, shaped by bureaucratic, housing and representational requirements relatable to government offices, hôtels particuliers and national pavilions in world's fairs. So what exactly constitutes the purpose-built embassy and to what extent can we speak of an architectural typology? In order to address these questions, the paper consists of two parts. The first part aims to shed light on the evolutions within Western and in particular Belgian diplomatic patrimony. The second part touches upon the different components of Belgian purpose-built embassies and compares them with established typologies.

Keywords: Architecture; diplomacy; Belgium; national identity; middle power; international politics

On February 9, 1957 the new Belgian chancery in Washington, DC was officially inaugurated by Minister of Foreign Affairs Paul-Henri Spaak (1899-1972).¹ Being one of the first purpose-built embassies commissioned by Belgium, the opening of this diplomatic mission was part of a representational shift in the country's diplomatic patrimony. Whereas embassies were, and still are, predominantly located in purchased or leased buildings, "sending states" have also opted to construct embassies. Commissioning one of its first purpose-built embassies in the post-war period, Belgium followed the international trend of constructing embassies.

Appearing on a larger scale in the streetscape of capitals since 1945, purpose-built embassies form a challenging building assignment for sending states.² Apart from the challenge of building abroad, purpose-built embassies have to meet different requirements depending on the function of the building. In general parlance, an embassy comprises the dual function of a chancery accommodating the offices of the diplomatic staff and a residence meeting the housing and representational needs of the ambassador. In addition, embassy architecture has in some cases been used by sending states to form a materialized representation of the nation abroad combined with an interplay of art and interior design. As such, Jane Loeffler labels purpose-built embassies as "[...] symbolically charged

¹ This paper is part of the PhD project "Designing Embassies for Middle Powers: The Architecture of Belgian and Dutch Diplomacy in a Globalizing World" funded by the Department of Architecture of KU Leuven and supervised by Prof. dr. Fredie Floré and Prof. dr. Anne-Françoise Morel.

² Jane C. Loeffler, *The Architecture of Diplomacy. Building America's Embassies* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2011), 37-58.

Figure 1. Sketch of the Belgian chancery in Washington, DC (early 1950s), by Architects Hugo Van Kuyck and Voorhees & Walker, Smith & Smith. (Reprinted from "The Belgian Chancellery," presentation booklet, personal archives of Hugo Van Kuyck, file 9862. Antwerp: Felixarchief.)



buildings uniquely defined by domestic politics, foreign affairs, and a complex set of representational requirements.”³ In recent decades, however, embassy buildings have faced political and budgetary challenges. As political symbols on foreign soil, embassies have become prized targets for terrorist groups. As a result, security has become a major concern when designing and constructing embassies. In some cases, the threat of terrorism has led to the relocation of embassies away from the city centre to fortress-like compounds on a city’s outskirts. In addition, the financial burden of constructing embassies has led to profound changes. The pooling of embassy buildings by two or more states, called colocation and primarily used by smaller states, appeared in the 1990s for both budgetary and political reasons.⁴ Apart from colocation, purpose-built embassies have been sold as part of real estate operations to balance a government’s budget or purchase new accommodations, sometimes located in generic office buildings, such as the Belgian embassy in Bangkok and Tokyo.

These changes raise questions as to what exactly constitutes a purpose-built embassy. Despite considerable interest in embassies, a grounded conceptual discussion laying bare the typological characteristics of these diplomatic constructions is currently missing in architectural research. Instead, scholars have primarily focused on case study research to unravel building policies and representational practices of state actors.⁵ Scholarly attention broadened to include interior design focusing on the representational repercussions of art and furniture displayed in embassies.⁶ While this case study research has enriched our knowledge on sending states’ building policies and practices, a more conceptual discussion is lacking. Therefore, this paper sets out to question to what extent purpose-built embassies can be labelled as an architectural typology. For the concept of typology the paper relies on the description by Andrew Leach who labels the study of type as “[...] the correlation between the form, character and organization of a building and the purpose it serves [...]”⁷ Since this paper does not aspire to embark on a lengthy discussion of the concept of typology, Leach’s definition gives the advantage of being clear and comprehensible.⁸

To approach purpose-built embassies on a typological level, this paper consists of two parts. In the first part, a historical evolution of diplomatic patrimony will be discussed. By retracing the origins of and evolutions affecting purpose-built embassies, this part aims to improve our understanding

3 Loeffler, *The Architecture of Diplomacy*, 3.

4 G.R. Berridge, *Diplomacy: Theory and Practice* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 122.

5 Ron Robin, *Enclaves of America: The Rhetoric of American Political Architecture Abroad 1900-1965* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 63-88; Loeffler, *The Architecture of Diplomacy*; Mark Bertram, *Room for Diplomacy* (Reading: Spire Books, 2011); Denise Hagströmer, “In Search of a National Vision: Swedish Embassies from the Mid-20th Century to the Present” (PhD diss., Royal College of Art, 2011); Gladys Abankwa-Meier-Klodt, *Delhi’s Diplomatic Domains* (New Delhi: Full Circle, 2013).

6 Fatima Pombo and Hilde Heynen, “Jules Wabbes and the Modern Design of American Embassies,” *Interiors* 5, no. 3 (2014): 315-39; Philip Goad, “Designed Diplomacy: Australian Embassies,” in *The Politics of Furniture. Identity, Diplomacy and Persuasion in Post-War Interiors*, ed. Freddie Floré and Cammie McAttee (London: Routledge, 2017), 189.

7 Andrew Leach, *What is Architectural History?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), 61-62.

8 For the start of the complex history of typology see Nikolaus Pevsner, *A History of Building Types* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976); Rafael Moneo, “On Typology,” *Oppositions* 13 (Summer 1978): 23-45.

of the transformations shaping these diplomatic buildings. Building on this foundation, the second part will touch upon recurrent themes in both the chancery and residence and draw comparisons to relatable typologies. With this comparative approach, the second section aims to identify the different layers within purpose-built embassies. As such, this paper aspires to start off a more thorough discussion on how to qualify the purpose-built embassy as an architectural typology. Throughout this paper, emphasis will be placed on Western purpose-built embassies since 1945. Against the backdrop of the development of the Transatlantic Alliance and a growing political and economic interdependency, countries on both sides of the Atlantic have from time to time invested in embassy architecture as a representational instrument. Tasked with streamlining these intensifying bilateral contacts and identified by the UN Vienna Convention in 1961 as the highest-ranked diplomatic mission, embassies have become the cornerstone of the overseas patrimony of sending states such as Belgium.⁹ Discussing this nation's efforts at embassy-building forms an interesting case of point. Firstly, Belgium can be labelled as a middle power in international politics. Whereas the lion's share of literature on embassy architecture has focused on world powers, the building policies and practices of middle powers are less touched upon.¹⁰ Many countries—in particular middle powers—have been confronted with the increasingly complex assignment of national representation within a more globalized context after the Second World War.¹¹ The challenge of representing the nation-state in the post-war period coincides with the rising number of purpose-built embassies in the diplomatic patrimony of sending states, as illustrated by the Belgian embassy in Washington, DC. Secondly, Belgium has an extensive network of embassies. Numbering only ten embassies in 1939, the country nowadays operates 82 embassies with approximately thirty of these being purpose-built.¹²

Retracing the Origins and Evolution of Purpose-Built Embassies

Although today the word embassy as such evokes associations with a fixed environment where an ambassador works and lives, its etymological origin has a far more dynamic nature. Deriving from the Indo-European word *ambhi* meaning “going around,” the word “embassy” initially referred to envoys instead of buildings.¹³ Although the use of envoys remained a common diplomatic practice until late in the nineteenth century, the

9 United Nations, *Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations 1961*, 3.

10 Robin, *Enclaves of America*, 63-88; Loeffler, *The Architecture of Diplomacy*; Bertram, *Room for Diplomacy*.

11 Randall L. Schweller, “The Concept of Middle Power,” unpublished ms, 2013, 5-6, available on https://www.academia.edu/7493871/The_Concept_of_Middle_Power.

12 Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Annuaire Diplomatique et Consulaire* (Brussels: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1939-1971); website of the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, http://diplomatie.belgium.be/nl/Diensten/ambassades_en_consulaten/belgische_ambassades_en_consulaten_in_het_buitenland; Emily Ampe, “Bouwen in het buitenland. Inventaris van Belgische ambassadegebouwen” (MA diss., Ghent University, 2014).

13 Stuart E. Mann, *An Indo-European comparative dictionary* (Hamburg: Buske, 1984), 2.

fourteenth century Italian city-states of Milan and Venice started to send diplomats abroad to reside there for a longer period of time.¹⁴ It is imperative, however, not to interpret these first residences with our understanding of embassies. In contrast, these diplomatic buildings only served as living quarters. In addition, diplomats were tasked with the search for adequate housing themselves. With these proto-states being undercapitalized, diplomats were paid on an irregular basis. Therefore, many of these embassies closed down due to high costs, unqualified diplomats and lack of issues to discuss on a permanent basis.¹⁵ Although only serving as living quarters for the ambassador, Milan supported its resident embassies by a chancery, located in the home country, which processed their letters and sent new instructions.¹⁶ The use of a chancery, a medieval writing office, was copied from the Catholic Church. Originally, chanceries were the work environment of chancellors where charters and treaties were composed and sealed.¹⁷

With the rise of the nation-state in the nineteenth century, the sending of resident embassies turned into a more common practice. In addition, the meaning of the word embassy gradually shifted from the envoy to signify the diplomatic mission as an institute and subsequently broadened to also include the building units accommodating the mission. As part of the rising nation-state and its bureaucratization, the newly-formed foreign ministries professionalized diplomatic conduct by training and regular payment. States also focused on organising the accommodation of their diplomatic personnel abroad.¹⁸ Great Britain bought a Parisian *hôtel particulier* in 1814, which became its first state-owned embassy.¹⁹ These *hôtels particuliers*, originating in seventeenth-century France, were luxurious urban residences for noblemen. With emphasis on prestige and aristocrats acting as ambassadors, it comes as no surprise that *hôtels particuliers* were and still are used as ambassadorial residences.²⁰ The *corps diplomatique* of the young Belgian state, gaining its independence in 1830, relied heavily on the aristocracy until the first half of the twentieth century.²¹ Apart from their privileged position in society, these noblemen possessed the financial means to reside abroad. Whereas European states such as France and Prussia bought or rented residences from the 1860s onwards, one of the first Belgian acquisitions was the Parisian Hôtel de la Marck in 1935, which still serves as the ambassadorial residence today.²² With the growing administrative state apparatus, the tasks assigned to embassies differed one to the next. Whereas residences primarily centered on housing and representation in the form

14 Jeremy Black, *A History of Diplomacy* (London: Reaktion, 2011), 44.

15 Black, *A History of Diplomacy*, 47.

16 Black, *A History of Diplomacy*, 44.

17 E.J. Haslinghuis and H. Janse, *Bouwkundige termen: verklarend woordenboek van de westerse architectuur- en bouwhistorie* (Leiden: Primavera, 2005), 250.

18 Berridge, *Diplomacy*, 106.

19 Black, *A History of Diplomacy*, 175.

20 Alexandre Gady, *Les hôtels particuliers de Paris* (Paris: Parigramme, 2008), 272.

21 Michael Auwers, "The Island and the Storm: A Social-Cultural History of the Belgian Diplomatic Corps in Times of Democratization, 1885-1935" (PhD diss., University of Antwerp, 2014).

22 Elisabeth Martin de Clausonne, *Ambassades à Paris* (Lavaur: Nicolas Chaudun, 2009), 150.

of ceremonies and meetings, the embassy had, in the second half of the nineteenth century, become a political institution. The chancery, initially offering administrative support from the homeland, was incorporated into the embassy, turning the latter into a bureaucratic environment as well as living quarters. Jeremy Black describes this merge as “[...] a more general differentiation of function, emphasis on continuity, and [the] need to house larger staffs, that characterized government buildings as a whole.”²³

23 Black, *A History of Diplomacy*, 175-76.

Apart from widening the activities taking place in embassy buildings, the representational strategies of sending states profoundly changed throughout the twentieth century. In addition to buying or renting buildings to accommodate embassies, sending states have opted to construct diplomatic buildings themselves. With the exception of a limited number of consulates and embassies constructed by (former) world powers before the Second World War, the process of designing and building diplomatic missions turned from a marginal into a common practice for sending states from 1945 onwards.²⁴ Coinciding with a growing international interdependency on political, military and economic matters, sending states started to accommodate an increasing number of embassy staff members, constructing embassies to enhance the state’s visibility abroad and in some cases to act as a carrier of national and ideological aspirations. For instance, the Belgian diplomatic patrimony gradually expanded by constructing purpose-built embassies in Washington, DC (1957), Canberra (1960), Tokyo (1960), Warsaw (1962) and New Delhi (1983). In some cases, Belgium has consciously used the medium of architecture as an instrument of cultural diplomacy. Opting for different building types and architectural features across time and place—ranging from accentuating national identity to a fitting-in strategy—Belgium has used its diplomatic patrimony from time to time as a means to shape its image abroad.²⁵

24 Robin, *Enclaves of America*, 63-88; Mark Bertram, *Room for Diplomacy*.

25 Cynthia P. Schneider, “Culture Communicates.” In *The New Public Diplomacy*, ed. Jan Melissen (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 147.

In the context of the early stages of the Cold War, the design of the Belgian chancery in Washington, DC of the 1950s was envisioned to accentuate both Belgian identity and the alliance with the United States. The Belgian architect Hugo Van Kuyck (1902-1975), a lecturer at Yale in the 1930s who served in the US Army during the war, was hired to design the chancery in collaboration with the American office Voorhees, Walker, Smith & Smith. Apart from being shaped by Van Kuyck’s knowledge of the American approach to building, the chancery accentuated clear national references such as the sculpted coat of arms above the entrance and use of materials originating from Belgium

and the Belgian Congo.²⁶ By contrast, in the 1960s the Belgian government collaborated with the Polish architect Mieczysław Kuźma (1907-83) in rebuilding a war-torn *hôtel particulier* in Warsaw to accommodate its embassy. Coinciding with a larger communist urban policy of reconstructing the damaged historical city centre of Warsaw, the Belgian initiative was propagated as a gesture towards the Varsovians.²⁷ A more conspicuously Belgian, purpose-built embassy can be found in New Delhi. Hiring the Indian artist Satish Gujral (b. 1925) in the 1980s to design its new diplomatic mission, the Belgian embassy is shaped by such traditional elements of Indian architecture as exposed red bricks and bulb-shaped lingams worshipping Shiva. Apart from serving as an important component of representation to guests and passers-by, the Belgian state has made or cooperated in publications on its diplomatic patrimony as part of its local outreach activities.²⁸ This genre of literature is mainly characterised by a promotional, almost hagiographical approach envisioned to promote the presence of Belgian diplomatic representation abroad and simultaneously accentuate the importance of these constructions.

In more recent decades, however, this highly expressive/representative character of purpose-built embassies has in several cases shifted to more anonymous architectural projects. Against the backdrop of discussions on the relevance of embassies in a more interconnected world and shrinking budgets for diplomatic patrimony, sending states have opted for different approaches to deal with these challenges. For instance, Belgium closed down several embassies since the 1970s because of successive budget cuts.²⁹ In addition, purpose-built embassies

26 Fredie Floré, "Serving a Double Diplomatic Mission: Strategic Alliances between Belgian and American Furniture Companies in the Post-war Era," *Design and Culture* 9, no. 2 (2017): 167-85, 178.

27 Marek Kwiatkowski, *The Mniszech Palace in Warsaw* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut, 2009), 45.

28 Dirk Achten, *The Belgian Embassy, Washington* (Brussels: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010); Olivier Stevens, *Belgium's Most Beautiful Embassies from Around the World* (Tournai: Renaissance du Livre, 2003); Philippe Falisse, *Inspirations: The Architectural Marvel of Satish Gujral and Memories of Seven Ambassadors* (New Delhi: Bosco Society, 2004).

29 Vincent Delcorps, *Dans les coulisses de la diplomatie* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Presses universitaires de Louvain, 2015), 483-511.

Figure 2. Façade of the Belgian chancery in New Delhi, (2018). (Private Collection.)



have been sold to purchase new accommodations in an effort to balance the budget. Nowadays, the Belgian purpose-built chancery in Washington, DC is up for sale to finance the move to anonymous office buildings. Furthermore, shrinking budgets have instigated sending states to implement new strategies such as colocation (introduced above). Initiated by the Scandinavian countries in the 1990s with the construction of the Pan Nordic Building in Berlin, Belgium and the Netherlands have copied this diplomatic equivalent of co-housing with the construction of a shared embassy in Congo in 2017.³⁰

30 Berridge, *Diplomacy*, 122.

Besides budgetary concerns, policymakers are confronted with a growing terrorist threat since the turn of the century. As political symbols on foreign soil, embassies have been prized targets for terrorists as illustrated by the devastating Al-Qaeda attacks on American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in August 1998. As a result, American policymakers implemented the Standard Embassy Design, shaped by a one-hundred-foot setback and the accommodation for US Marines.³¹ Although less conspicuous than their American counterparts, security has gained importance with smaller state actors, including Belgium. In the case of the Belgian embassy in New Delhi, the architecture is profoundly affected by the presence of security measures. Flanked by fences, CCTV and manned checkpoints, the embassy buildings reflect a tension between their public purpose and fortress-like surroundings. Besides surveillance

31 Loeffler, *The Architecture of Diplomacy*, 260-64.

Figure 3. A2M Architects, Belgian-Dutch Embassy, Kinshasa. Opening ceremony of the embassy in Kinshasa, November, 27, 2017. (Photograph courtesy of A2M.)



techniques visible from the street, the design is affected by these necessities. For obvious reasons, however, this is a difficult topic to discuss. Although being confronted in recent decades with budgetary and security issues, embassy buildings still remain one of the cornerstones of bilateral diplomacy. It remains to be seen, however, what the growing impact of e-diplomacy, the use of the Internet in diplomatic conduct, will be on the future of sending states' diplomatic patrimony.

The Purpose-Built Embassy as Hybrid Environment

As discussed previously, the embassy serves different purposes including providing a suitable work environment and living quarters for diplomats. On an architectural level, embassies are adapted to these diplomatic needs consisting of a chancery and ambassadorial residence which can be located in the same building, in a compound or in separate buildings. This second section sets out to discuss the nature of both the chancery and residence by drawing comparisons to relatable architectural typologies.

Tasked with collecting, processing and reporting on developments taking place in the receiving state, the chancery forms the bureaucratic heart accommodating offices and meeting rooms. Loeffler has already compared chanceries to office buildings.³² In more general terms, chanceries can be related to the functioning of ministry buildings. Acting as an outpost of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, chanceries are also shaped by a bureaucratic and hierarchic administrative system with government officials making up the workforce.³³ Furthermore, both are tasked with offering public services to citizens.³⁴ As pointed out previously, however, this public character of the chancery has diminished at the turn of the century. Due to the growing importance of e-diplomacy and the outsourcing of visa applications to (online) visa centers, the number of people actually visiting the chancery is declining. With this decline vis-à-vis relations between the diplomatic staff and the general public, the chancery is losing visibility in favour of the ambassadorial residence.

Besides chanceries, embassies consist of residences serving as living quarters of the ambassador and his/her relatives. As discussed previously, the first state-owned residences of Great Britain and Prussia were located in Parisian *hôtels particuliers*. Originally constructed by aristocrats in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, these highly representative *hôtels* are shaped by a spatial layout separating the circulations of residents, guests

32 Loeffler, *The Architecture of Diplomacy*, 3.

33 Haslinghuis and Janse, *Bouwkundige termen*, 327.

34 Hilde Heynen, Jan Schreurs and Liesbet Silverans, *Overheidsopdrachten architectuur* (Brussels: Politeia, 2001), 31.

and servants into different apartments, known as the *distribution à la française*. Whereas the *appartement de parade* was used for hosting events, the *appartement de commodité* served as living quarters.³⁵ With *hôtels particuliers* being one of the first building types in the diplomatic patrimony of sending states, the spatial layout of the *hôtel particulier* may have (implicitly or not) served as a reference for the division between private, semi-private and servant spheres within modern purpose-built residences. Upon visiting the Belgian purpose-built residence in New Delhi in November 2018, the ambassador's wife showed two different dining rooms. As depicted in figure 4, the private dining room and VIP dining room are separated into a private (blue) and semi-private (green) wing evoking associations to the *appartement de commodité* and *appartement de parade*. In addition, service area (orange) such as the kitchen and laundry are located out of sight of both residents and visitors. As such, it would be too one-sided to simply label the residence as a house. Apart from being only temporary housing linked to the office of ambassador, the residence forms a hybrid environment where both private and professional life of the ambassador are intertwined. Besides accommodating the ambassador's living quarters, the residence has a highly representative character as it is often used as a venue for a wide variety of activities such as banquets, informal meetings and cultural events.

Besides meeting bureaucratic, housing and representational needs, purpose-built embassies have been utilised in some cases as a prestige project by the sending state to evoke a national image abroad. Apart from the typical display of the national flag and coat of arms, the architecture and interior design of the purpose-built embassy can be used to act as a carrier of national representation. With the embassy being used as a tool of cultural diplomacy, showcasing a way of living to a foreign audience, the purpose-built embassy evokes associations with national pavilions in world's fairs. Both constructions, commissioned by state actors, are found in a highly politicized and competitive environment surrounded by architectural representations of other countries. In the twentieth century the United States and the Soviet Union exploited both embassies and national pavilions as architectural weapons in the Cold War's cultural arms race to promote themselves as progressive and democratic countries.³⁶ Sending states have also, on occasion, sought to create a national image through an interplay of art and furniture in their embassies, as is the case for national pavilions.³⁷

For instance, the Belgian chancery in Washington, DC was decorated with a tapestry depicting a Flemish missionary who

35 Gady, *Les hôtels particuliers de Paris*, 75.

36 Loeffler, *The Architecture of Diplomacy*, 40; Rika Devos, "Architecture at Expo 58 in Resonance of War," in *Architecture of Great Expositions 1937-1959*, ed. Rika Devos, Alexander Ortenberg and Vladimir Paperny (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 150.

37 Erik Mattie, *World's Fairs* (Blaricum: V+K, 1998), 8.

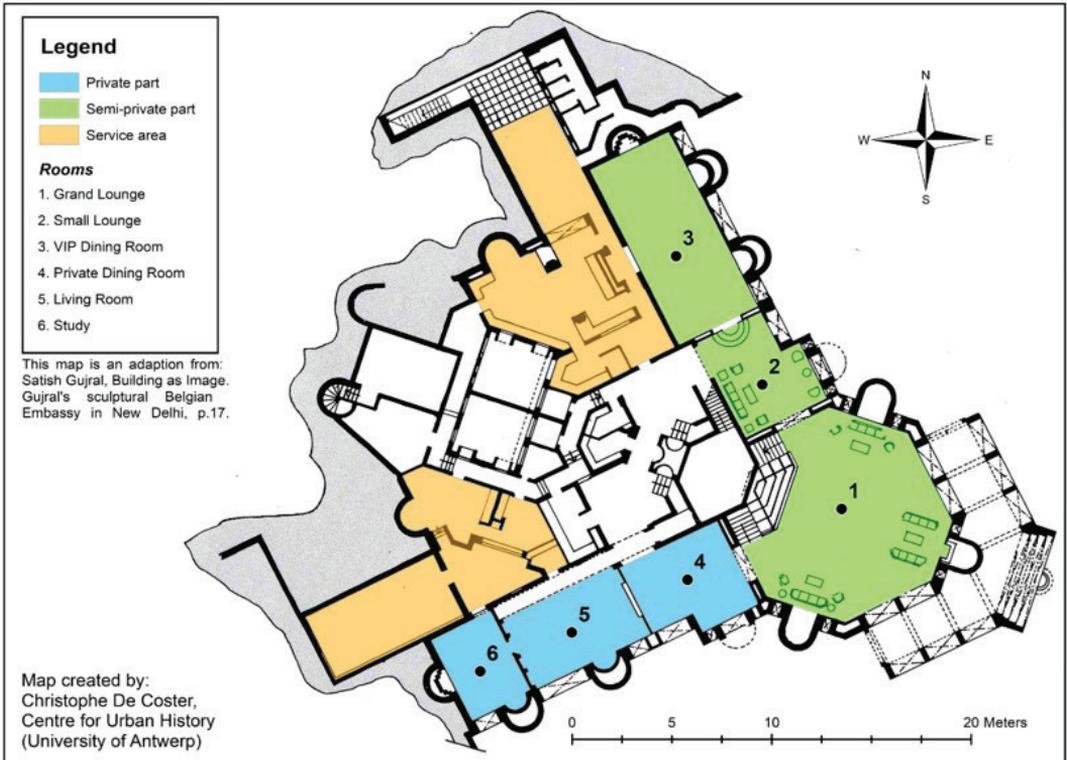


Figure 4. Spatial layout of the Belgian purpose-built residence in 2018. (Map by Christophe De Coster, Centre for Urban History, University of Antwerp.)

38 A.P., "La nouvelle ambassade de Belgique à Washington," *Le Soir*, February 10, 1957.

explored the Mississippi in the seventeenth century. This tapestry was previously displayed in the Belgian pavilion during the New York world's fair of 1939.³⁸ There are, however, profound differences between the purpose-built embassy and national pavilions. In comparison to embassies, most pavilions are temporarily constructions intended to be dismantled once the world fair closes its gates. In addition, pavilions aim to draw a different kind of visitor. They are meant to attract and entertain as many fairgoers as possible while accessibility of embassy buildings is limited and to a large extent linked with official visits and bureaucratic procedures.

The limited accessibility of embassies brings us to the last typological comparison. With the rise of global terrorism, security measures have profoundly reshaped embassy buildings. Apart from effecting the design, security measures can shape the relation between passers-by and the purpose-built embassy. In several cases, embassies are located in a compound marking a clear demarcation line between the public streetscape and the premises of the embassy. Flanked by fences, walls, checkpoints, roadblocks and CCTV, the premises of the embassy are shielded off from the streetscape. This exposes a certain tension between the public nature of an embassy and its fortress-like appearance

as a compound. Setha Low popularises the concept of gated communities to illustrate how residential neighbourhoods in America are fenced off from the outside world by extensive security measures. Low describes how these gated communities “[...] cordon themselves off as a class by building fences, cutting off relationships with neighbours, and moving out in response to problems and conflicts.”³⁹ As such, the image of the gated community can be applied to embassy compounds where staff members work and live in a shielded off environment.

39 Setha Low, *Behind the Gates: Life, Security, and the Pursuit of Happiness in Fortress America* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 18.

Conclusion

This paper examined the extent to which it is possible to approach purpose-built embassies from a typological perspective based on the three elements—character, form and organisation—of Leach’s definition. As illustrated throughout this paper, all three elements have witnessed profound changes in the course of the twentieth century. For example, the character of embassy buildings has shifted between public and highly expressive/representative urban building projects and more fenced off or anonymous architectural environments. They include a wide variety of building types and styles (form), and their spatial layout and functional programme also changed over time, not in the least when colocation was applied (organisation). As such, it is difficult to speak of a fixed typology. This illustrates, however, exactly why discussing embassy buildings from a typological perspective can be most revealing as it helps to pinpoint the constantly changing relation of architecture and interior design with the dynamic nature of diplomatic conduct. As such, these buildings still express the etymological origin of the word “embassy” by going around to overcome changing political, cultural and economic challenges. With the rise of e-diplomacy, it remains to be seen what the future has in store for purpose-built embassies.