

Assessing Ghent's City Directories for Socioeconomic Historical Research (1770-1932)¹

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Abstract

City directories emerged as important sources of trade and residential information in late eighteenth-century Europe. This paper examines the *Wegwijzer der stad Gent* (1770-1932), the longest continuously published city directory of Ghent, so as to assess its reliability for socioeconomic historical research. Despite its apparent informational value, the directory remains understudied in terms of scope, content, and accuracy. Through an analysis of its publication history and compilation methods, combined with comparison against contemporary sources, this article evaluates both the strengths and limitations of the *Wegwijzer* as an urban historical source.

Introduction

City directories emerged in the late eighteenth century as widely used sources of residential and commercial information. Their popularity was caused by the expansion of market economies, advancements in affordable printing, and the implementation of house numbering systems.² By the late nineteenth century, directories had become

¹ The authors thank Bas Vercruyssen (data extraction), Frederic Lamsens (technical advice), and Sven Vrielinck and Guy Dupont (directory expertise). We are also grateful to Irini Verbeeck and Kirsten Defresne (archive inventory), Simon Legiest (digitisation), Piraye Hacıgüzeller (proofreading), and the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback and valuable comments that helped improve this work. This research was supported by the Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO) through grant 1000921N (CLARIAH-VL: Advancing the Open Humanities Service Infrastructure).

² Thilo N.H. Albers and Kalle Kappner, 'Perks and pitfalls of city directories as a micro-geographic

ubiquitous in urban centers across Asia, Europe, and North America. European city directories typically included three key lists: a residential name list, a residential street list, and a trade list.³ These annually updated lists provide household-level data that are particularly valuable for regions and periods lacking census records. Even when censuses are available, directories are still useful as they offer annual, address-level information that complements the periodic and aggregated nature of census data.

Since the 1930s, directories have been used as historical sources across disciplines like history, sociology, and economics.⁴ More recently, advances in computational methods have enabled their large-scale analysis, opening new possibilities for assessing both their reliability and research potential.⁵ In particular, several studies have developed semi-automated methods to transform directory entries into geocoded datasets for spatial analysis. Notable examples include the Addressing History project, which used geoparsing to map entries from Scottish post office directories (1773-1911), and the work of Berenbaum et al., which extracted and structured directory data for socio-environmental research.⁶ Di Lenardo et al. applied similar methods to Parisian directories (1839-1922) for demographic analysis, while Gravier and Barthelemy used French trade directories (1797-1914) to study urban growth patterns.⁷ Likewise, Kappner and Albers

data source', *Explorations in Economic History, Methodological Advances in the Extraction and Analysis of Historical Data* 87 (2023) <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eeh.2022.101476>.

3 Gareth Shaw, 'Directories as sources in urban history. A review of British and Canadian material', *Urban History Yearbook* 11 (1984) 36-44, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S096392680006908>. Gareth Shaw and Tim Coles, *A guide to European town directories. Volume One: Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Scandinavia* (Aldershot 1997).

4 Shaw, 'Directories as sources'. Gareth Shaw and Allison Tipper, *British directories. Second edition* (London 2010). Samuel Bell et al., 'Automated data extraction from historical city directories. The rise and fall of mid-century gas stations in Providence, RI', *PLoS ONE* 15:8 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0220219>.

5 Mathias Böhler, Davide Cantoni and Matthias Weigand, 'City directories as a source of historical microdata. Progress report', 2024. directories_20240311.pdf

6 David Berenbaum et al., 'Mining spatio-temporal data on industrialization from historical registries', *Journal of Environmental Informatics* 34 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.3808/jei.201700381>. Nicola Osborne, George Hamilton, and Stuart Macdonald, 'Historical post office directory parser (POD Parser) Software From the Addressing History Project', *Journal of Open Research Software* 2:1 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.5334/jors.aq>.

7 Isabella di Lenardo et al., 'Repopulating Paris. Massive extraction of 4 million addresses from city directories between 1839 and 1922.' *DataverseNL* (2019), <https://doi.org/10.34894/MNF5VQ>. Julie Gravier and Marc Barthelemy, 'A typology of activities over a century of urban growth', *Nat Cities* 1 (2024) 567-575, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s44284-024-00108-7>. Solenn Tual et al., 'A benchmark

developed a computational workflow to extract and verify household-level demographic data from Berlin city directories (1799-1970).⁸

However, despite recent advances in the large-scale processing of city directories, the *Wegwijzer der stad Gent* – the longest continuously published city directory for Ghent – remains comparatively understudied. This situation is notable given that it was the only city directory for Ghent published consistently throughout the long nineteenth century. Ghent itself represents a particularly valuable case for urban historical research due to its long-standing economic and demographic significance. As one of the largest cities north of the Alps in the medieval period and an early center of industrialization driven by inner-city textile manufacturing, it offers rich potential for long-term urban analysis. Key sources for reconstructing its development include population censuses, industrial censuses, and patent tax registers, which provide systematic but periodic snapshots of demographic and occupational change. However, patent tax registers are incomplete or inconsistently preserved for much of the nineteenth century, while censuses are typically available only in aggregated form. As a result, fine-grained, address-level reconstruction of short-lived socioeconomic patterns remain challenging when relying on these sources alone.

Building on this source landscape, the *Wegwijzer* is particularly useful. As a yearly published source, it helps overcome the temporal and spatial limitations of censuses and tax registers. In particular, it allows for the reconstruction of the evolving spatial distribution of shops and services across neighborhoods, the identification of persistent commercial and residential clusters, the examination of how transport infrastructure and accessibility shaped locational choices, the study of occupational segregation, and short-term neighborhood change between census years. Collectively, these examples point to a broader set of research possibilities over time.⁹

However, realizing this potential depends on a thorough understanding of the *Wegwijzer* as a historical source. This awareness includes its publication history, completeness, reliability, and

of named entity recognition approaches historical documents application to 19th century French directories', *Document Analysis Systems. DAS 2022* (May 2022, La Rochelle, France), <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2302.10204>.

8 Kappner and Albers, 'Perks and pitfalls', 2022.

9 For (potential) applications of the *Wegwijzer* for economic research, see: Nele Bracke, *Bronnen voor de industriële geschiedenis. Gids voor Oost-Vlaanderen (1750-1945)* (Ghent 2000) 343-345.

accessibility. At present, such a systematic overview is lacking, which has limited its use in urban historical research.¹⁰

This paper takes a first step toward developing a source guide focused on its reliability for socioeconomic research. Our objectives are twofold: first, to trace the development of the directory in terms of content, compilation methods, and structure; and second, to assess its accuracy both internally – across the trade, residential name, and residential street lists – and externally, through comparison with contemporary sources.

The paper is structured as follows. We begin with a contextual overview of European city directories, situating the *Wegwijzer* within this broader genre. The second section examines its publication history, including its compilers, information-gathering methods, and changes in content over time. The third section evaluates the directory's accuracy and representativeness through internal and external comparisons. The final section discusses the implications of our findings, outlining possible applications of directory data and proposing considerations for its future use.

City Directories

European city directories

The emergence of city directories in Europe reflects a gradual evolution. Originating in early modern almanacs and address calendars, directories initially served the informational needs of businessmen and social elites.¹¹ By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, two distinct strands – one focused on official and royal information, the other on local commercial data – had converged to form the typical European city directory. This hybrid format aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of a town's inhabitants, including both official and commercially prominent individuals and organizations, and reflected a broader access to information.

The rise of city directories as marketable products in the late eighteenth century coincided with wider technological and social

¹⁰ Since 2025, a comprehensive bibliography of all known editions has been made available via the Open Data Portaal Stad Gent (*Wegwijzers en Dubbele Wegwijzers Gent en Oost-Vlaanderen*), developed by Archief Gent in collaboration with the authors: [https://data.stad.gent/explore/dataset/wegwijzers-enkele-wegwijzers-gent-en-oost-vlaanderen/table/\[o6/11/2025\]](https://data.stad.gent/explore/dataset/wegwijzers-enkele-wegwijzers-gent-en-oost-vlaanderen/table/[o6/11/2025]).

¹¹ Shaw and Coles, *A guide to European town directories*, 13-37.

transformations. In addition to increasingly affordable printing, their growing popularity was driven by rapid urban expansion and the integration of inter-urban markets.¹² As Williams observes, 'In those countries [referring to Great Britain, Europe, United States and Canada], as a rule, all cities having a population of 25,000 and upward, and many of smaller size, have city directories.'¹³ The increasing complexity of urban environments, combined with the frequent relocation of tradespeople and businesses seeking visibility, created a sustained demand for reliable sources of urban information.

Shaw and Coles's geographical classification of European city directories distinguishes between three groups: an early core area (Britain, France, Germany, Sweden, Denmark); a semi-peripheral group (Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland), and a later peripheral group (Norway, Finland, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Russia).¹⁴ Although Belgium is placed within the semi-periphery, the relatively early appearance of the *Wegwijzer* invites a more critical reassessment of this categorization. Shaw and Coles envisaged a second volume that would extend their analysis to other European countries, including Belgium. However, this work never materialized, leaving their typology insufficiently substantiated in the Belgian case.¹⁵

Rather than treating the *Wegwijzer* as representative for Belgian city directories as a whole, it situates the publication within its specific context. At the same time, the case of the *Wegwijzer* points to a broader historiographical gap: despite the wide availability of city directories in Belgium, there are no studies systematically assessing their reliability. This limits our ability to generalize about their use in urban historical research. This limitation is particularly striking given the richness and diversity of the available material. Belgian directories were produced at various levels, ranging from national almanacs – such as the *Nieuw Belgischen Almanach*, *Indicateur Belge*, *Almanach royal et du commerce de Belgique*, and *Annuaire industriel et administratif de la Belgique* – to a wide array of city-level publications. Examples include Bruges' *Almanach voor het bisdom van Brugge* and *Nieuwen en*

12 Kappner and Albers (2022) note that strong industrialization and economic growth were not the only factors behind directory publication; they also appeared in smaller, less industrialized settlements.

13 A.V. Williams, *The development and growth of city directories* (Cincinnati 1913) 2.

14 Gareth Shaw and Tim Coles, 'European directories: a universal source for urban historians', *Urban History* 22:1 (1995) 85-102.

15 To the best of the authors' knowledge, the second volume was never published. Attempts were made to contact the original authors to confirm whether such a volume exists, but no response was received.

nuttigen almanach der stad en arrondissement Brugge, the *Almanach du commerce de Bruxelles et des communes limitrophes* (1878-...), and Antwerp's *Guide commercial ou Livre d'adresses de la Ville d'Anvers* (1838-1890), followed by the *Adresboek van de stad en de provincie Antwerpen* (1892-1940).¹⁶ Taken together, this varied output highlights both the considerable analytical potential and the historiographical challenges of this still underexplored genre in the Belgian context.

Directory compilation

European city directories typically consisted of three types of listings: a residential name list (alphabetically sorted by last name), a residential street list (recording residents and organisations by address), and a trade list.¹⁷ The introduction of house numbering was crucial for organizing these lists. In the absence of official numbering systems, compilers often devised their own, highlighting the central role of spatial frameworks in managing urban information.¹⁸ Depending on the directory, publishers also included additional material, as, for instance, in revenue-generating advertisements and, in some cases, in city maps.

The compilation of directories – particularly in larger urban centers – generally relied on public/private collaboration. In Germany, for example, directories often acquired a quasi-official status: local authorities granted access to police registers and parish records or issued public tenders for their publication.¹⁹ In some cases, compilers maintained formal or informal ties with municipal administrations, which facilitated access to official records. Even so, directories showed systematic demographic biases. They primarily recorded household heads, thereby excluding large segments of the population, including women, children, servants, subtenants, and transient groups such as vagrants and day laborers.

The compilation process drew on a wide range of sources, including official records, census data, house lists, questionnaires, and oral reports. In larger cities, compilers relied predominantly on administrative records, such as parish and police domicile registers.

¹⁶ See <https://anet.be/record/opacehc/clvd:115493> for Antwerp directories, see also <https://consciencebibliotheek.be/nl/pagina/adresboeken-ratinckx-online>.

¹⁷ Shaw and Coles, *A guide to European town directories*, 13-37.

¹⁸ Tantner, 'Addressing the houses. The introduction of house numbering in Europe', *Histoire & Mesure* 24:2 (2009) 7-30.

¹⁹ Shaw and Coles, *A guide to European town directories*, 45-59.

Secondary methods, including door-to-door surveys or the use of local agents, were used to fill these gaps but proved difficult to implement effectively. Compilers often encountered public resistance, agents were sometimes suspected of acting as police informants or even threatened, while response rates to surveys remained low. The experience of Lehmann, Vienna's first directory compiler, illustrates these challenges: for the second edition of his directory, he received only 32 responses from 30,000 distributed questionnaires, highlighting the practical limitations of compiling directories without the use of administrative records.²⁰

Assessing directory reliability requires close attention to both their compilation process and content. Reliability may be evaluated in terms of coverage of demographic and socioeconomic groups, consistency across time and space, and internal accuracy. This article follows international approaches that distinguish between two complementary strategies.²¹ Internal analysis focuses on editorial practices, structural features, and inconsistencies within the directory itself, including coherence between different listings, entry duplication, and changes in scope over time. In many cases, one type of listing proves more comprehensive and therefore provides the most reliable basis. External analysis, by contrast, compares directory data with contemporary sources, such as censuses, population registers, or patent tax records, to assess completeness and representativeness.²² Together, these approaches help to identify both the limits of directory data and the factors shaping their reliability.

Existing literature demonstrates that the reliability of directories is shaped by their type, the motives of their publishers, their compilation methods, and the size of the city they cover. As Shaw and Coles argue, their development was driven not only by economic incentives but also by considerations of prestige and civic pride.²³ Advertisements were frequently introduced to offset rising production costs while allowing advertisers to reach a broad and expanding audience. In some cases, publication was further supported by state or municipal subsidies, reflecting the view that providing socioeconomic information constituted a public responsibility. As commercial products, directories had to balance broad coverage with production costs. As a result, they

²⁰ Ibid., 179.

²¹ Ibid., 81.

²² See Kappner and Albers, 'Perks and pitfalls', 2022.

²³ Shaw and Coles, *A guide to European town directories*, 49.

typically covered only 20 to 30 percent of urban populations and systematically underrepresented low-income households, laborers, women, children, and minority groups.²⁴

Even the entries that were included require careful scrutiny. Although information was often drawn from official records, a substantial share relied on self-reporting and therefore depended on the willingness and accuracy of respondents. Working-class residents, for example, might withhold information due to concerns about taxation or conscription, while business owners could exaggerate their services. To maintain customer relationships, compilers rarely verified such claims. At the same time, changing occupational terminology complicated classification and sometimes resulted in multiple entries for the same entity.

These limitations must be considered in relation to the biases inherent in alternative sources. Census records, for instance, also exhibit systematic underrepresentation and classification challenges, while patent tax records sometimes reflect administrative priorities that do not fully correspond to actual economic practices.²⁵ In this context, directories offer important complementary advantages. Their commercial orientation created strong incentives to record economically relevant actors, often resulting in more detailed and timely information on occupations and businesses – namely, at the address level. Their relatively flexible and less standardized recording practices also help preserve occupational distinctions often flattened in official sources, allowing directories to capture emerging occupations, industries, and informal activities.

Directories as historical sources

The compilation challenges associated with publishing directories underscore the need for careful source criticism. When properly contextualized, directories offer insights that complement longitudinal sources such as demographic and industry censuses and patent tax records. While censuses provides periodic snapshots, directories

24 Shaw, 'Directories as sources', 114. Peter R. Knights, 'City directories as aids to ante-bellum urban studies. A research note', *Historical Methods Newsletter* 2:4 (1969) 1-10, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00182494.1969.10593895>.

25 On the reliability of Belgian demographic and industrial censuses, see: Sven Vrielinck, 'De macht van het getal. Een statistische kritiek van de bevolkingsstatistieken in België (1801-1976)', *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis* 43:2-3 (2013); Nele Bracke, *Een monument voor het land. Overheidsstatistiek in België 1795-1870* (Brussels 2008).

capture annual changes in urban spatial and economic patterns.²⁶ Their annual publication makes it possible to trace short-term developments, and research has demonstrated that they can address questions that cannot be answered through census data alone. For example, Arnout used the *Almanacs de Bruxelles* to analyze quantitative and spatial transformations in urban retail landscapes, while Gravier et al. (2025) drew on Parisian directories to quantify urban sprawl and the de-densification of Central Paris over the long nineteenth century.²⁷ Such applications underscore their broader historiographical relevance.

The relevance of directories is not confined to Ghent, nor are they unique to this city. Comparable publications were produced for other urban centers in Belgium, although their development, compilation, and publication practices remain underexplored. Simultaneously, the *Wegwijzer* has rarely been analyzed as a source in its own right, despite its use in urban historical research. Studies of Ghent's early industrialization, for example, have made extensive use of directory data.²⁸ Coppejans-Desmedt analyzed the late eighteenth-century flax industry, while several master's theses have compiled inventories of textile companies across 1790-1914, 1919-1939, 1795-1923, and 1900-2000.²⁹ Claes examined the gin sector from 1820 to 1913.³⁰ Van Nieuwenhuyse used the directory to map potentially contaminated sites in relation to industrial development, particularly in the textile

26 Censuses provide a snapshot of population figures at a specific time, while population registers record inhabitants continuously. Registers are nominative and often include details such as age, occupation, and place of birth.

27 Anneleen Arnout, *Streets of splendor. Shopping culture and spaces in a European capital city* (Brussels, 1830-1914) (London 2019) 44; Julie Gravier et al., 'Evaluating and understanding the geocoding of city directories of Paris (1787-1914). Data-driven geography of urban sprawl and densification', *DHQ: Digital Humanities Quarterly* 19:4 (2025).

28 Bracke, *Bronnen voor de industriële geschiedenis*, 345-346.

29 H. Coppejans-Desmedt, 'De Gentse vlasindustrie vanaf het einde van de XVIIIe eeuw tot de oprichting van de grote mechanische bedrijven (1838)', *Handelingen der Maatschappij voor Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde te Gent* 22:1 (1968) 179-202, <https://doi.org/10.21825/hmgog.v22i1.118>; Lieve Vleurick, 'Gent, een stad van fabrieken. Een inventaris van de textielfabrieken in Gent tussen 1790-1914', (Unpublished master thesis, Ghent 1998) 121. Liesbet Van Nieuwenhuyse, 'Potentiële historische bodemverontreiniging als gevolg van industriële activiteiten in de 19^{de} en de 20^{ste} eeuwse stad. Een bronnenkritische studie over Gent, 1795-1926', (Unpublished doctoral thesis, Ghent 2008) 698. Evy Declerck, *De textielindustrie te Gent, haar voorsteden en Ronse tijdens het Interbellum*, (Unpublished master thesis, Ghent 2001); Robin Debo, 'Spinnen en weven in de stad: een chronologische en geografische reconstructie van de Gentse textielindustrie van 1900 tot 2000', (Unpublished master thesis, Ghent 2014).

30 Bruno Claes, 'Een klare kijk op de Gentse jenever. Een institutionele benadering van de Gentse jeneversector, 1820-1913', (Unpublished master thesis, Ghent 2004) 74-76.

sector.³¹ Subsequent research has further shown that a significant proportion of chemical and laundry businesses between 1861 and 1910 were operated by women.³²

Beyond economic history, the directory's value extends to a wide range of research domains. Ossieur, for instance, used it to study police personnel, while Kluyskens drew on the *Wegwijzer* to examine municipal governance in East Flanders.³³ Steels analyzed Ghent's nineteenth-century gate rights using gate opening hours preserved in the directory.³⁴ In housing research, the directory functions as a tool for tracing residents over time.³⁵ Despite its limitations, the *Wegwijzer*'s annual publication and detailed address-level data make it particularly well suited to reconstructing Ghent's social and economic landscape throughout the long nineteenth century. At the same time, its frequent – yet still insufficiently theorized – use reflects a broader, ongoing effort to develop a more rigorous methodological framework for working with city directories in Belgium.

Wegwijzer der Stad Gent (1770-1932)

Publication

This section examines the *Wegwijzer*'s publishing history, compilation methods, and evolving content. Its origins date to 1770 with the first edition, *Nieuwen almanach, curieux en util voor 't jaer M. D. CC. LXX. ofte den getrouwen weg-wyser der stad Gent soo voor de vremdelingen als voor de inwoonders der selve stad*.³⁶ Conceived as a

31 Liesbet van Nieuwenhuijse, 'Een nieuw spoor voor milieuhistorici. Historisch onderzoek naar potentiële historische bodemverontreiniging door voormalige industriële activiteiten', in: Liesbet van Nieuwenhuijse and Dries Tys (eds), *De geschiedenis van industriële technologie en vervuiling* (Ghent 2005) 41-68.

32 Van Nieuwenhuijse, 'Potentiële historische bodemverontreiniging', 461.

33 Edgard Ossieur, 'Vondelinge Sophia Stove (1844-1870)', *Ghendtsche Tydinghen*. 24:5 (1995) 259-267, <https://doi.org/10.21825/gt.v24i5.6504>. Pierre Kluyskens, 'Josse Delehay', *Ghendtsche Tydinghen* 17:4 (1988) 190-196, <https://doi.org/10.21825/gt.v17i4.6929>.

34 Michel Steels, 'De Sint-Lievenspoort te Gent', *Ghendtsche Tydinghen* 6:1 (1977) 34-38, <https://doi.org/10.21825/gt.v6i1.7490>.

35 Leen Charles et al., *Erf, huis en mens. Huizenonderzoek in Gent* (Ghent 2001) 158-159. Roger Delbaere, 'Bronnen voor de sociale geschiedenis van Gent in de XIXde Eeuw (1794-1914)', *Handelingen der Maatschappij voor Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde te Gent* 16:1 (1962) 41-75, <https://doi.org/10.21825/hmgog.v16i1.80>.

36 The directory's title changed several times: in 1794 it was *Almanach curieux en util, ofte, et cetera*; by 1828, *Nuttigen almanach en wegwijzer der stad Gent*; in 1830, *Almanach-wegwijzer der stad Gent*; and from 1831 onward (except for a brief hiatus), *Wegwijzer der stad Gent*.

comprehensive guide to Ghent, this edition combined chronicles alongside practical information such as a calendar, lists of officials and organizations, market prices, postal regulations, and city gate hours. On 26 October 1769, the printer Philippe-Jean Gimblet secured an imperial privilege from Maria Theresa, duchess of Flanders, granting him nine years of exclusive publishing rights. Renewed in 1777 and 1778, this privilege reinforced Gimblet's monopoly and imposed financial penalties on unauthorized reproductions.³⁷

In 1788, Philippe-Jean Gimblet entered into partnership with his brothers, Pierre-Laurent and Jean-Joseph, to continue publication.³⁸ Following their deaths, Jean-François Vander Schueren briefly managed the directory until his death in 1804, after which his printing equipment was sold to François-Jacques Bogaert-De Clercq. Under Bogaert-De Clercq, the *Wegwijzer* underwent several notable changes, including a period of publication in French (1815-1826), reflecting the language's prominence among Ghent's elite.³⁹ Although he reportedly retired in 1825, François-Jacques continued to be listed as publisher until 1827.

A new phase began in 1828, when the Vanderhaeghen family took over.⁴⁰ Désiré-Jean Vanderhaeghen, a relative of Bogaert-De Clercq, expanded the directory's scope and oversaw its publication until his retirement in 1845; afterward, his wife Sophie Hulin continued the business.⁴¹ By 1851, the *Wegwijzer* had reached a print run of 4,500 copies, indicative of its growing popularity.⁴² Their son, Eugène Vanderhaeghen, assumed control in 1854 and introduced major changes, most notably the *Dubbele Wegwijzer* in 1863. This extended series broadened coverage to Ghent's sub-municipalities and eventually the entire province of East Flanders, growing the directory from 111

37 Philip Gimblet, *Nieuwen almanach, curieux en util voor 't jaer M. D. CC. LXX. ofte den getrouwen weg-wyzer der stad Gend soo voor de vremdelingen als voor de inwoonders der selve stad* (Ghent 1770) 9, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433066665294>, [05/11/2025].

38 Jean-Joseph reportedly left the association shortly thereafter, see: Ferdinand van der Haeghen, *Bibliographie gantoise. Recherches sur la vie et les travaux des imprimeurs de Gand (1483-1850) Tome IV* (Ghent 1862) 26.

39 Vanderhaeghen, *Bibliographie gantoise*, 206.

40 For more on the extensive history on the Vanderhaeghen family, see: P. Van de Velde, 'De drukkersfamilie Vander Haeghen en de "Gazette van Gent"', *Oostvlaamse Zanten* 77:2 (2002) <https://openjournals.ugent.be/oz/article/id/72615/>

41 Ferdinand Vanderhaeghen, *Bibliographie gantoise. Recherches sur la vie et les travaux des imprimeurs de Gand (1483-1850) Tome V* (Ghent 1865) 18. François-Jacques Bogaert-De Clercq, *Nuttigen almanach en wegwyzer der Stad Gend in het bezonder, en van de provincie Oost-Vlaenderen in het algemeyn, voor het jaer 1827* (Ghent 1827) 1, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433066667316>.

42 J.-M. Heberlé, *Bulletin du bibliophile Belge. Tome VIII* (Brussels 1851) 201.

pages in 1770 to 720 pages in 1863. From the fourteenth edition (1876) onward, paid advertisements were included. Initially these resembled the free entries but appeared in a larger, bold font. Over time, however, they were also published as separate supplementary pages. This revenue likely helped offset rising production costs while offering advertisers access to an increasingly expanding audience.

Following Eugène's death in 1880, his wife, Victorine De Keyser (1839-1923) managed the publication until their son Arnold Vanderhaeghen (1869-1942) took over in 1905-1906.⁴³ Arnold continued publication until 1916, when the disruptions of World War I brought it to a halt. The Vanderhaeghen family maintained the longest continuous association with the *Wegwijzer* and belonged to one of Ghent's most prominent printing dynasties. Their press produced major works such as the *Gazette van Gent* and the *Bibliographie gantoise*. As printers primarily engaged in newspaper and commercial print production, directory publishing formed part of a broader portfolio, suggesting that it may have been sustained, at least in part, through these other printing activities.

The *Wegwijzer* did not appear in 1918 and 1919 due to the German occupation.⁴⁴ During the interwar period, its quality and frequency declined, and its layout became increasingly condensed, resulting in reduced page counts, likely in an attempt to lower production costs. From 1920 to 1921, it was published by *J.M. Matton & Cie*, followed by *Vanderpoorten & Cie* for 1922-23, 1926-28, and 1932. Publication ceased entirely after 1932. Although the precise causes of its discontinuation remain unclear, this decline reflects a broader mid-twentieth-century trend: as cities grew, directories became more complex and costly to produce, and were gradually replaced by more standardized sources such as telephone directories. In Belgium, this shift was likely caused by competition from the publicly issued telephone directory of the *Regie voor Telegraaf en Telefoon (RTT)*, first published in 1929.⁴⁵

A competitor to the *Wegwijzer* also appeared in the early nineteenth century, when the Snoeck-Ducaju family began publishing a very similar directory.⁴⁶ Between 1818 and 1828, Joseph Snoeck-Ducaju

43 Even after Eugène's death, publications continued under *Snelpersdrukkerij Eug. Vanderhaeghen*, still bearing his signature.

44 The 1920 edition includes a note from the city archivist Victor Fris explaining that the 1918 and 1919 *Wegwijzer* editions were not published due to World War I.

45 See, for example: <https://anet.be/record/opacehc/c:lvd:1139143>

46 Heberlé, *Bulletin du bibliophile Belge. Tome VIII*, 202.

adopted the same title and numbering system as Bogaert-Declercq's *Wegwijzer*. In 1829, the publication was renamed *Algemeenen koop-handels-almanak of wegwyzer der stad Gend*. Joseph's son, Adolf Snoeck, took over in 1838 but discontinued the series in 1844. The relationship between the Snoeck-Ducaju directory and the *Wegwijzer* warrants further investigation, but falls beyond the scope of this study.

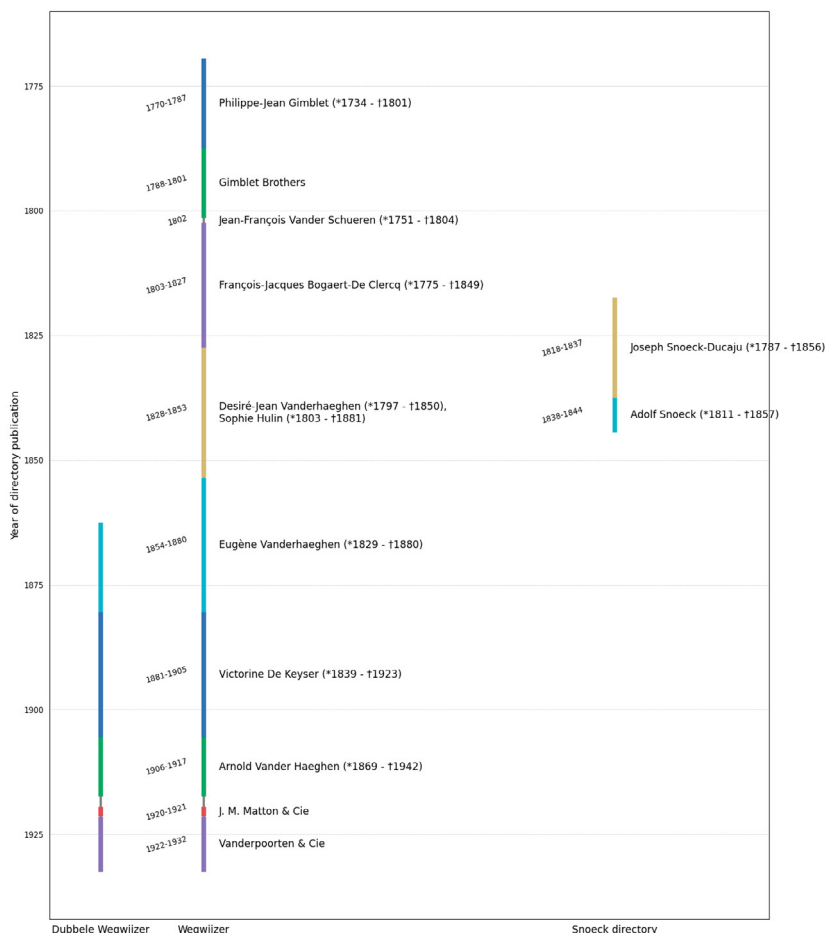


Figure 1 Publishing history of the *Wegwijzer* and its extended version, the *Dubbele Wegwijzer*. Colors indicate different publishers, with the Vanderhaeghen family's long-term involvement (1828-1917) highlighted. The timeline on the right shows the period of the competing Snoeck directory.

Compilation

Early nineteenth-century European city directories can broadly be divided into two models based on spatial scope. In northern Europe (Germany, Austria, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Norway), directories typically focused on a single city and were issued by the same publisher over long periods.⁴⁷ By contrast, the “French model”, more common in southern Europe (Spain and Portugal), covered multiple smaller settlements simultaneously. The *Wegwijzer* initially followed the German model, focusing on Ghent, before expanding to provincial coverage with the introduction of the *Dubbele Wegwijzer* in 1863. This development parallels Swiss trends, where urban and regional coverage increasingly coexisted within the same directories.

Understanding the *Wegwijzer*'s compilation methods is crucial for assessing its reliability. The long stewardship of the Vanderhaeghen family (1828-1917) played a decisive role in shaping both its content and compilation practices.⁴⁸ However, documentation of these processes remains limited. Although Pierre-Bernard de Grootte served as main editor under Désiré-Jean Vanderhaeghen until 1850, little is known about other contributors.⁴⁹ Given the directory's scope and annual publication cycle, publishers likely maintained a network of information gatherers and editors.

From its inception, the *Wegwijzer* relied partly on self-reporting. The 1770 edition, for example, included a tear-out *Verbeteringen* form through which residents could submit corrections and updates.⁵⁰ This system, which required submissions by October for inclusion in the following year's edition, demonstrates both a systematic approach to data collection and its inherent limitations.⁵¹ The six- to seven-month interval between data collection and publication introduced a time gap,

47 Shaw and Coles, *A guide to European town directories*, 34.

48 The 88-year publication period is even longer when considering Vanderhaeghen is a relative of Bogaert.

49 Vanderhaeghen, *Bibliographie gantoise*. Tome V, 56; ‘*Les années 1839 à 1841 ont été rédigées par l’instituteur P. Jonglas*’.

50 At the end of the volume is a tear-out form titled *Verbeteringen*, inviting readers to submit corrections or updates to their address or profession by October 1 to the publisher. The form included fields for additions, corrections, omissions, changes of residence, and the submitter's name, address, and signature: ‘*De personen welke in den Wegwijzer mislagen zouden vinden of veranderingen wenschen te zien brengen aan hun adres of hun beroep worden vriendelijk verzocht deze bladzijde in te vullen en voor 1 October aanstaande aan den uitgever van den Wegwijzer, Drukkerij A. Vander Haeghen, Veldstraat 60, te Gent, in te zenden.*’

51 The exact month varied depending on particular editions

increasing the likelihood that some information was already outdated at the moment of printing.⁵²

The reliability of self-reported data was further shaped by social and political factors. Compilers themselves noted low response rates, which may reflect public indifference or the deliberate withholding of information.⁵³ During French rule, patent taxes on liberal professions and the self-employed likely discouraged accurate reporting.⁵⁴ At the same time, businesses seeking new customers had strong incentives to provide complete information about their activities. The limitations of voluntary reporting eventually prompted the adoption of more systematic methods, including the use of agents to conduct annual street surveys.⁵⁵

The extent to which the *Wegwijzer* drew on official records remains unclear, though there are indications their use increased over time. The 1920 edition, for instance, refers to the destruction of administrative records during World War I as an obstacle to data collection,⁵⁶ while the 1927 edition acknowledges assistance from provincial administrative staff.⁵⁷ However, the specific sources used are not mentioned by name in these announcements. The Vanderhaeghen family's connection to

52 *Wegwijzer*, 1927: 'La révision de notre Indicateur est faite avec le plus grand soin. Mais l'impression d'un ouvrage de cette importance dure de 6 à 7 mois et très souvent, des renseignements exacts au moment où ils sont pris, ne le sont plus, au moment où le livre paraît.'

53 *Wegwijzer*, 1927: 'Nous n'avons, hélas, pas la même collaboration du public, qui est cependant le plus intéressé à ce que nos renseignements soient exacts. Bien rares sont les cas où on nous renseigne une adresse ou une profession erronée: on préfère ne rien nous faire savoir, pour critiquer plus facilement après.'

54 A comparison between the *Wegwijzer* and Ghent's patent registers is impossible, as the latter have not survived except for Gentbrugge, whose patent tax records are preserved in the State Archives in Ghent, see: Bracke, *Bronnen voor de sociale geschiedenis*, 38-41 and 222-225.

55 'De dubbele wegwijzer der stad Gent en der Provincie Oost-Vlaanderen is algemeen gekend als het volledigst en best ingelicht der adresboeken. Ieder jaar doen wij door eenen bijzonderen beambte al de straten der stad Gent en voorgeborchten doorloopen om de namen, beroepen en adressen der inwoners op te nemen.' (see Vanderhaeghen, *Dubbele Wegwijzer*, 1901, 4).

56 'De nog betrekkelijke ontreddering van zekere besturen, die noodlottig een groote vertraging veroorzaakt heeft in de aankomst der inlichtingen, gevoegd bij het overgroot werk vereischt voor de hersamenstelling der teksten door de Duitschers vernield, hebben ons belet onzen « Wegwijzer » op den gewonen datum te doen verschijnen. Ten einde die vertraging niet erger nog te maken, zijn wij zelfs verplicht geweest zekere leemten te laten bestaan.' (J.M. Matton & co, *Dubbele Wegwijzer* 1920, 4, https://libcatalog.ugent.be/permalink/32RUG_INST/ton608/alma990001670070409161).

57 'Un Indicateur de toute une province, comportant plus de 150.000 adresses, est un travail de géant, qui ne sait être mené à bonne fin qu'avec la collaboration active et soutenue des administrations et du public. Pour les administrations sans distinctions, nous n'avons qu'à nous louer de la promptitude et de la régularité avec lesquelles elles nous fournissent les indications nécessaires. Et nous rendons hommage ici aux secrétaires communaux de toutes les villes et communes de la province qui ont bien voulu se charger de la révision des adresses concernant leurs communes.' (Vanderpoorten, *Wegwijzer* 1927).

the municipal archives, particularly Victor Vanderhaeghen’s tenure as city archivist (1882-1916), suggests that they may have benefited from privileged access to archival materials.⁵⁸ Although pre-1796 parish registers were unavailable until 1926, access to civil status registers (held at the town hall from 1811 onward) may have allowed for the verification of directory data.⁵⁹

Content

A typical city directory consists of an administrative list of authorities and organizations (secular, religious, governmental), followed by trade and residential lists. In the preface to the 1770 edition, Gimblet outlined his ambition to gradually expand the directory’s scope. Over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, successive publishers realized this vision by gradually introducing new sections and expanding existing ones (table 1).

Table 1 Evolution of socioeconomic data in the *Wegwijzer* (1770-1932)

Year	Main sections and changes
1770	Administrative headings Organisational headings Occupational headings
1854-1932	Consolidation of occupational headings into trade list: ‘ <i>Algemeene adressen voor handel en nyverheid</i> ’
1854-1917	Trade data for East-Flemish municipalities
1863	Extended series (<i>Dubbele Wegwijzer</i>)
1863-1932	Residential name list: ‘ <i>Alphabetische lijst der inwoners</i> ’
From 1864 onward	Residential data for Ledeberg, Gentbrugge, Sint-Amandsberg
1865	List of streets and bridges ⁶⁰
1876	Paid advertisements
1892-1932	Residential street list: ‘ <i>Lijst der inwoners der stad Gent per straat en per nummer</i> ’
From 1900 onwards	Residential data for Ledeberg, Gentbrugge, Sint-Amandsberg
1921	Trade data (limited to traders and entrepreneurs) for East-Flemish municipalities ⁶¹

58 Timo Van Havere, *De droom van een archivaris. De uitbouw van het Gentse stadsarchief en zijn collectie (1800-1930)* (Ghent 2015).

59 Van Havere, *De droom van een archivaris*, 25.

60 First published in 1855, the list appeared only once before resuming in 1865.

61 Like the consolidated trade list, but arranged by municipality first, then by occupation.

DUBBELE WEGWIJZER

voor 1901

TARIEF DER AANKONDIGINGEN :

Aankondigingen onder den naam in de Alpha- betische Lijst, Stielen, of Straten, per regel	1 fr.
De geheele bladzijde.	28 »
De naam en het adres in vette letter	1 »
Onderkant van eene bladzijde (bas de page), per regel hoogte van den gewonen tekst. .	2 »
Aankondigingen op gekleurd papier { 1 bladz.	20 »
te midden van den WEGWIJZER { 1/2 »	12 »
geplaatst { 1/4 »	6 »
Aankondigingen op de buitenzijde van den om- slag (couverture), Dubbele en enkele Wegwij- zer, de bladzijde	100 »
Aankondigingen op de binnenzijde van den om- slag, Dubbele en enkele Wegwijzer, de bladz.	50 »
Aankondigingen op de snede (tranche) per kant	128 »

Aankondigingen onder de rubriek AANBEVOLEN HUIZEN :

De prijs van ieder vak is vastgesteld op **5 fr.** met
verhoogen van 50 % voor diegenen welke aan het
HOOFD eener rubriek willen geplaatst zijn.

Buitengewone aankondigingen, prijs overeen te komen.

**De aankondigingen worden ontvangen
tot 1^{en} November.** Men gelieve ze te sturen ter
Drukkerij Eug. Vander Haeghen, Veldstr., 60.

Telefoon N^r 710

Figure 2 Publisher's notice in the Dubbele Wegwijzer (1901) encouraging manufacturers, traders, and artisans to advertise. Standard inclusion in the lists remained free.
(Source: Ghent University Library, Ghent)

The organization of information in the *Wegwijzer* parallels developments in house numbering. In 1770, house numbering was gradually introduced across the Habsburg Netherlands, including Ghent, primarily to facilitate military recruitment.⁶² By 1775, cadastral records confirm the formal codification of addresses in Ghent through the '*Directoir om te numeroteren alle de huijsen gelegen binnen Gend*'.⁶³ This ordinance, issued alongside the renewal of the '*registers van het huisgeld*' (a tax on immovable property), required the display of both street name and house number signage. By mid-1778, all houses had been numbered by district, using a district-specific letter followed by a sequential number.

The relationship between these addressing systems and the organization of the directory is interesting. Although Gimblet was aware of the new numbering scheme, he was initially hesitant to incorporate it – an unusual stance given the rapid adoption of such systems in contemporary directory publishing.⁶⁴ This reluctance likely reflected local resistance, as evidenced by repeated instances of vandalism targeting street signage. Municipal decrees issued on 1 December 1768, 7 November 1792, and 9 November 1793 imposed penalties for such damage, indicating sustained resistance, likely due to the association of house numbering with military billeting and taxation.⁶⁵ This connection might have discouraged *Wegwijzer* compilers from systematically adopting house numbering. As a result, address information remained inconsistent in the directory: some editions (1800, 1801) included house numbers for selected entries, while others listed only street names. The introduction of the French off-and-even numbering systems in 1812 marked a turning point, paving the way for more consistent integration of address data by the mid-nineteenth century.

62 Tanttner, 'Addressing the houses'.

63 Leen Charles, 'De Gentse registers van het huisgeld als kadastrale bron: mogelijkheden en beperkingen (17de-18de eeuw)', *Handelingen der Maatschappij voor Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde te Gent* 46:1 (1992) 176, <https://doi.org/10.21825/hmgog.v46i1.288>.

64 'L'an 1786 and 1787, le magistrat de la ville de Gand a fait peindre les noms de chaque rue & ruelle, qui sont clouées sur les coins de chaque en particulier; de même toutes les hôtels, maisons, &c sont numérotés dans la ville, laquelle est éclairé par des reverbères dans les places & rues principales, & par environ 4000 lanternes, depuis le 1 Octobre jusqu'au 31 mars inclus.' (Philippe Gimblet, *La quintessence du guide fidele de Gand ou Almanach nouveau, pour l'année 1791* (1791), 22.

65 Charles, 'De Gentse registers van het huisgeld als kadastrale bron'.

ALGEMEENE ADRESSEN

VOOR HANDEL EN NIJVERHEID DER STAD GENT.

Fabrikanten, Koopmans, Magazijniers en Winkeliers.

Aannemers van Bouwwerken

(Entrepreneurs).

Bauwens L. stoppelstraat 46	Dauwe H., kastanjestraat 43
Beert R., kortrijkschestr. 16	Dauwe P., hundelg.st.weg 59
Beert J., kl. bellevuestr. 106	Debeucker G., molenstraat 9
Bertin E., vanlokerenstraat 66	s. Amandsberg
Bevernage A., denderm.steenweg 62, s. amandsberg	De Bisschop P., hundelgem.steenweg 19, Gentbrugge
Blanchaert L., pekelharing 27	Debrackeleire V., kl. meerhem6
Blyau N., zwijn. steen-weg 206	De Bruycker E., s. pieters-vrouwstraat 124
Boterdaele J., catalognestraat 21	De Clercq gebr., godshuizen-boulevard 9
Bouquet J., eendrachtstr. 25	De Cock E., schoolkaai 12
Bovy A., begijnhofboulev. 32	De Cock E., slijpstraat 49
Bovyn A., boul.frère-orban 48	Decock C., bruss.steenweg 132
Bracke J., ouden brusselschen aardeweg 62, Gentbrugge	Decuyper E., tweebruggenst. 9
Bracke J., achterstraat 38	De Goix A., l. boomgaardst. 43
Braet T. nieuwe kerkstraat, brugschepoort	Dehoon N., meerschstraat 67
Brandes H., s. p. nieuwstr. 4	Dejans A., zwijn.steenw. 215
Broeckhans A., visscherij 65	De Landsheere J., lange violettenstraat 116
Bruggeman B., toekomststr. 129	Delandtsheer K., godshuizen-boulevard 283
Brunau F., dendermondw. 105	De Leu J., ketelplein 4
Brunau M., wollestraat 65	Demeyer C. en F. zwijn.stw. 138
Buyck I., s. pietersvrouwst. 38	De Moerloose G., posthoornstr. 66, Gentbrugge
Buyck G. koornmarkt 38	De Molie J., kalvermarkt 22
Caluwaerts F., wondelgemst. 20	De Paep T., nassastraat 9
Claeys F., koningstraat 50	Depaep H., godshuishamm. 23
s. amandsberg	Depoerck B., meerschstr. 43, s. Amandsberg
Colman D., langestraat 26	Depoorter C., rooigemstr. 69
Coppieters E., visscherij 130	De Pue N., abeelstraat 37
Couez A., normaalschoolstr. 16	De Pue F., sasschekaai 3
Craeynest E., akkergemb. 133	De Pue E., kuiperstraat 6
Craeynest F. akkergemboul. 51	Depue J., korte steenstr. 10
Criel D., kerkstr. 136, gentbr.	Deraeve J. en Welvaert A., visscherij 30
Dauwe E., abricoostraat 37	

13*

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Figure 3 Trade list from the 1892 Dubbele Wegwijzer.
(Source: Ghent University Library, Ghent)

Listing by trade (1854-1932)

Before 1854, occupational information was organized under two broad, non-alphabetized categories: (1) institutional information covering political, ecclesiastical, judicial, social, and economic organizations, including guild members [*'neringen'*],⁶⁶ and (2) commercial activities of traders and artisans. By the late eighteenth century, company names had begun to appear within the commercial category. During the early nineteenth century, these headings gradually evolved into a more standardized format incorporating abbreviated first names and addresses. The consolidation of this material into a single trade list in 1854, *Algemeene adressen voor handel en nyverheid der stad Gent en der provincie Oost-Vlaenderen* (figure 3), marked a decisive shift toward a more modern directory structure.

The consolidated trade list focused primarily on goods and services, while political, ecclesiastical, and judicial professions continued to be listed separately. It included categories such as landowners, shopkeepers, and clerks, but largely excluded lower-status occupations, including factory workers and seasonal laborers. Unlike other directories – where trade listings were typically derived from residential lists – the *Wegwijzer's* trade list preceded its residential list by nine years, suggesting it relied on other sources.⁶⁷ These likely included guild records (prior to their dissolution), periodic police censuses (1796-1846), population registers (1846-1980), and national censuses (1846-1991).⁶⁸ The dissolution of guilds during the Napoleonic period appears to have affected coverage, as certain trades were subsequently omitted, indicating earlier dependence on guild-based information.⁶⁹

66 Unlike the *registers der neringen*, the *Wegwijzer* also lists ordinary guild members (*supposten*), and for some guilds, such as the *menageriebrouwers*, it provides the only surviving membership records, see: Delbaere, *Bronnen voor de sociale geschiedenis van Gent*, 66.

67 Shaw and Coles, *A guide to European town directories*, 7.

68 The law of October 2, 1795 (10 Vendémiaire Year IV) required municipalities to maintain population registers systematically, see: Sven Vrielinck, *De territoriale indeling van België (1795-1963): bestuursgeografisch en statistisch repertorium van de gemeenten en de supracommunale eenheden (administratief en gerechtelijk). Met de officiële uitslagen van de volkstellingen, Volume III* (Leuven 2000) 2038.

69 With the abolition of the *neringen*, several professions disappeared from the directory: butchers (1800-1854), bakers (1800-1882), and vinegar makers (1795-1828). Van Nieuwenhuyze (2008, 421) explains that although the Austrian manufacturing regulations of 1753 were formally abolished under French rule, local administrations often prioritized commercial interests over revolutionary theory, so many crafts and former regulations persisted. This situation illustrates that guilds were abolished in theory, but not fully in practice.

The trade list is subject to several limitations. Certain occupations are underrepresented, and occupational terminology can be ambiguous (e.g., *fabrycke* does not indicate modern industrial factory work).⁷⁰ In addition, individuals engaged in multiple activities could be listed more than once, leading to potential overrepresentation. This issue is less pronounced for guild artisans as regulations generally restricted members to a single trade.

Residential name list (1863-1932)

The 1863 *Dubbele Wegwijzer* introduced the *Alphabetische lijst der inwooners der stad Gent, bevattende de namen der fabriekanten, kooplieden, winkeliers, bedienden, byzonderen en grondeigenaers*, which listed residents alphabetically by last name with abbreviated first names, occupations, and addresses (figure 4).⁷¹ This list did not cover the entire population but was restricted to socially and economically prominent groups, including landowners, manufacturers, merchants, clerks, shopkeepers, and *bijzonderen* (i.e., wealthy individuals without a specified occupation).

Certain entries were marked with an asterisk, indicating individuals included in the official electoral registers (*kiezerslijsten*) for the Chamber of Representatives and Senate during the period of the *cijnskiessetel* (1831-1893), when suffrage was limited to tax-paying men over the age twenty-five. From the 1894 edition onwards, these asterisks were discontinued following the introduction of universal (plural) male suffrage in 1893. Aside from this change, the format remained largely stable, with the main structural expansion occurring in 1864, when coverage was extended to Ghent's urban periphery (Gentbrugge, Ledeborg, and Sint-Amandsberg).

Gender representation within the list evolved over time. Early indications appeared in the 1863 edition through occupational labels (e.g., seamstress). By 1932, women were systematically classified as unmarried ('*juff.*'), married ('*huisv.*' or '*huisvrouw*'), or widowed ('*wed.*'), with additional abbreviations used for entries containing multiple individuals (e.g., '*vr.*' for women, '*zuster*' for sisters, and '*gebroed.*' for brothers). Occupational attribution for women varied according to marital status: married and widowed women were often listed under

70 Van Nieuwenhuyse, 'Potentiële historische bodemverontreiniging', 242. Bracke, *Bronnen voor de industriële geschiedenis*, 343-345.

71 Eugène Vanderhaeghen, *Dubbele Wegwijzer* 1863, 473.

ALPHABETISCHE LIJST
DER INWOONERS DER STAD GENT,
EN DER VOORGEBORCHTEN,
 BEVATTENDE DE NAMEN DER
FABRIKANTEN, KOOPLIEDEN, WINKELIERS, BEDIENDEN,
BIJZONDEREN EN GRONDEIGENAARS.

Indien men verlangt onderaan zijnen naam de bijzondere aandacht te roepen op zijn bedrijf, kan dit in uitstekende letteren worden bijgedrukt. Voor de voorwaarden zich te vervoegen bij den uitgever van den Wegwijzer, Veldstraat 60.

A.

- *Abbeloos V., kolen en cokes, vlaanderenstraat 59
- *Abbeloos G., dechetkoopman, hofstr. 20, bureel leeuwstr. 20
- *Abel K., koopman-commissionaris, s. machariusstraat 4
- Abel G., student, s. machariusstraat 4
- Abel E., kandidaat-bouwkundige, s. machariusstraat 4
- Absolon A., sigaren-magaz. antwerps. steenw. 258 s. amandsb.
- Acart wed., en zoon, peperkoekbakkers, brabantdam 26
- Acart wed., bijzondere, korte violettenstraat 37
- Acart C., peperkoekbakker, brabantdam 26
- *Achtergael J., onder-luiten. der pompiers, s. margrietestr. 6
- *Acke L., kruidenier, burgstraat 45
- *Acke K., herbergier, hoogezonnestraat 14
- Acke L., winkelier, meulesteedsche steenweg 505
- Acke wed. I., kruidenierster, sluizeken 50
- Acke F., timmerman, verbindingstraat 36, s. amandsberg
- Acke H., stadsbrugdraaier, voormuide 139
- Acke B., kruidenier, voormuide 58
- Acke J., verkensslachter, posthoornstraat 6, ledeberg
- Acke L., winkelier, groendreef 249
- Acke C., schoenmaker, bennesteeg 16
- Acke D., postbediende, stoppelstraat 15

Nota. Het teeken * duidt aan de personen ingeschreven op de kiezerslijst van de stad voor de kamer van volksvertegenwoordigers en voor het senaat.

Figure 4 Residential name list from the 1892 Dubbele Wegwijzer.
 (Source: Ghent University Library, Ghent)

— 1 —

LIJST DER INWONERS DER STAD GENT

PER STRAAT EN PER NUMMER

Om te weten waar eene straat begint en waar zij eindigt, aan welken policiewijk of aan welk kanton van vredegerecht zij behoort, raadplege men de lijst der straten, openbare plaatsen en bruggen op het einde van den WEGWIJZER geplaatst.

Abdijstr. — r. de l'Abbaye

- 7 Massart (w^e) A. herb.
- 9 Defyn J. slachter
- 13 Pauwels (w^e) D. herb.
- 15 Vanheddeghem P. herb.
- 17 Verhoeve J. herb.
- 19 Roels C. herb.
- 21 Dhondt E. herb.
- 23 Geldolf F. vigilantvoerder
- 25-27 Devos (w^e) D. herb.
- 29 Pauwels (w^e) A. likeuren
- 31-33 Vereecken I. herb.
- 35-37 Vandevelde (w^e) D. herb.
- 39 Goossens P. broodbakker
- 43 Vernimmen J. herb.

Abeelstr. — rue du Tremble

- 11 Vanopbroeck E. mekaniekm.
- 19 Decostere F. ijzervlechter
- 21 Vanderbruggen L. slotmak.
- 23 Declercq (juiff.) I. naaister
- 29 Devos L. huurhouder
- 31 De Valck S. en Baele E. kleermaaksters
- 33 Duquesne J. muzikleeraar
- 35 Stoppelaere L. muziekleer.
- 37 Depue N. ondernemer
- 41 Heyman Th. verzek.-agent
- 63 Vandermeersch A. plaat-singbureel
- 65 Moerman K. herb.

- 73 Matthys G. winkelier
- 87 Vanloo C. winkelier
- 105 Decan M. winkelier
- 107 Hoste A. kruidenier
- 109 Coppens L. voerman
- 2 Cornelis G. bijzondere
- 4 Vanschayk A. timmerman
- 6 Vandeputte P. winkelier
- 8 Riessauw (w^e) modemaakst.
- 12 Nuytens F. kolenkoopman
- » Vancurck K. kleermaker
- 16 Gemeente meisjesschool
- 18 Engelbeen (hv.) bijzondere
- » Debrauwere E. vlaskoopm.
- 20 Merlé F. pijpenbakker
- 22 Riessauw A. zinkwerker
- 26 Verwest A. porcelainwink.
- 28 Bottelberg V. winkelier
- 30 Noël F. winkelier
- 34 Dejonge F. aardappelkoop.
- 36 Doublet J. herb.

Abraham(str.-rue d')

- 1 Coepieters A. herb.
- 3 Mortier T. herb.
- 5 Vercruysse F. likorist
- 9 Allewaert A. apotheker
- 11 Deheem C. hoofdtingenieur
- 13 Berg van bermhertigheid
- » Govaere D. bestuurder
- 2 Willaert H. schoenmaker
- » Willaert C. schilder

De uitgelatene nummers zijn die der beluiken, onbewoonde huizen, achterpoorten, enz.

Figure 5 Residential street list from the 1892 Dubbele Wegwijzer.
(Source: Ghent University Library, Ghent)

their husband's name, while unmarried women in professional roles were more likely to appear under their own names.

By 1932, the residential list had also expanded to include socioeconomic entities such as schools, hospitals, and businesses. Specific abbreviations were introduced to denote corporate entities, including 'N.M.' for limited companies and 'Firma' for commercial firms.

Residential street list (1892-1932)

The subsequently added street list, *Lijst der inwoners der stad Gent per straat en per nummer*, organized residents and businesses alphabetically by street name and ascending house number. From 1900 onwards, its coverage expanded to include Gentbrugge, Ledeberg, and Sint-Amandsberg.⁷²

Neither the residential name nor the street list provides full population coverage. As explicitly noted in the directory: *'De uitgelatene nummers zijn die der beluiken, onbewoonde huizen, achterpoorten, et cetera'* (The omitted entries concern courtyard dwellings, uninhabited houses, back entrances, etc.). This systematic exclusion of *beluiken* (laborer housing) introduces a clear social bias by omitting working-class residents.⁷³ Gender categorization in the street lists followed the same conventions as the residential name list.

Reliability

Evaluating the *Wegwijzer* as a historical source requires assessing its accuracy and biases. Like most directories, it captures only a subset of the population, raising questions about representativeness. Although inclusion in the three main lists was free and therefore likely encouraged broad participation, coverage remained uneven across social groups and economic sectors. Van Nieuwenhuyse argues that the *Wegwijzer* includes a wide range of historical trades and professions, while Velle cautions against its uncritical use. Through comparison with patent registers and the national business directory *Almanach du Commerce et de l'Industrie de Belgique*, he shows that lower-status occupations were often underrepresented.⁷⁴ Recent research on Brussels trade directories

⁷² Eugène Vanderhaeghen, *Dubbele Wegwijzer* 1900, 721.

⁷³ Eugène Vanderhaeghen, *Dubbele Wegwijzer* 1893, 827.

⁷⁴ Van Nieuwenhuyse, *Potentiële historische bodemverontreiniging*, 358. Karel Velle, 'De betekenis van de Annuaire du Commerce et de l'Industrie de Belgique', *De Roede van Tiel* 13:2 (1982) 42-70.

further refines this critique by demonstrating that even within occupations, inclusion was socially selective, with wealthier individuals more likely to be recorded.⁷⁵ This case is particularly evident in the retail sector, where inclusion may have depended on greater capital resources (i.e., the ability to pay for advertisements) or stronger incentives to attract customers. While a systematic reconstruction of these dynamics lies beyond the scope of this article, such patterns should not be seen solely as a limitation, for they also provide insight into underlying occupational hierarchies.

In Ghent, the availability of alternative sources also shapes the evaluation of directories as a historical source. Population registers are not systematically accessible in digitised form, and patent tax records are less well preserved than in other contexts, limiting their usefulness for long-term comparison. The population census therefore provides the most relevant benchmark. Accordingly, the following section combines internal consistency checks with systematic comparisons to census data. It starts by examining the internal development of the *Wegwijzer*, focusing on changes in size and layout as indicators of its consistency over time.

Internal consistency

The *Wegwijzer*'s lists expanded significantly over time:

- Trade list: 57 (1854) → 194 (1913)
- Residential name list: 165 (1863) → 465 (1913)
- Residential street list: 143 (1892) → 308 (1913).

While these figures capture overall growth, page counts are not directly comparable across editions due to differences in layout and typography. Variations in column formatting, for instance, affect how many entries fit on a page: in 1892, the trade and street lists were printed in double columns, while the residential name list used a single-column layout, accommodating roughly half the number of entries per page (figures 3-5). Consequently, the residential name list spans 382 pages, compared to 158 for the trade list and 143 for the street list. Although imperfect, page counts provide a useful proxy for the expanding volume of information and the increasing compilation effort required. The

⁷⁵ Arnout, *Streets of splendor*, 2019. For butchers in particular, see Dennis De Vriese, *Selling new ways of selling: Legitimising regulation and deregulation in the Brussels meat market (1770-1860)* (PhD dissertation, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, 2025) 241.

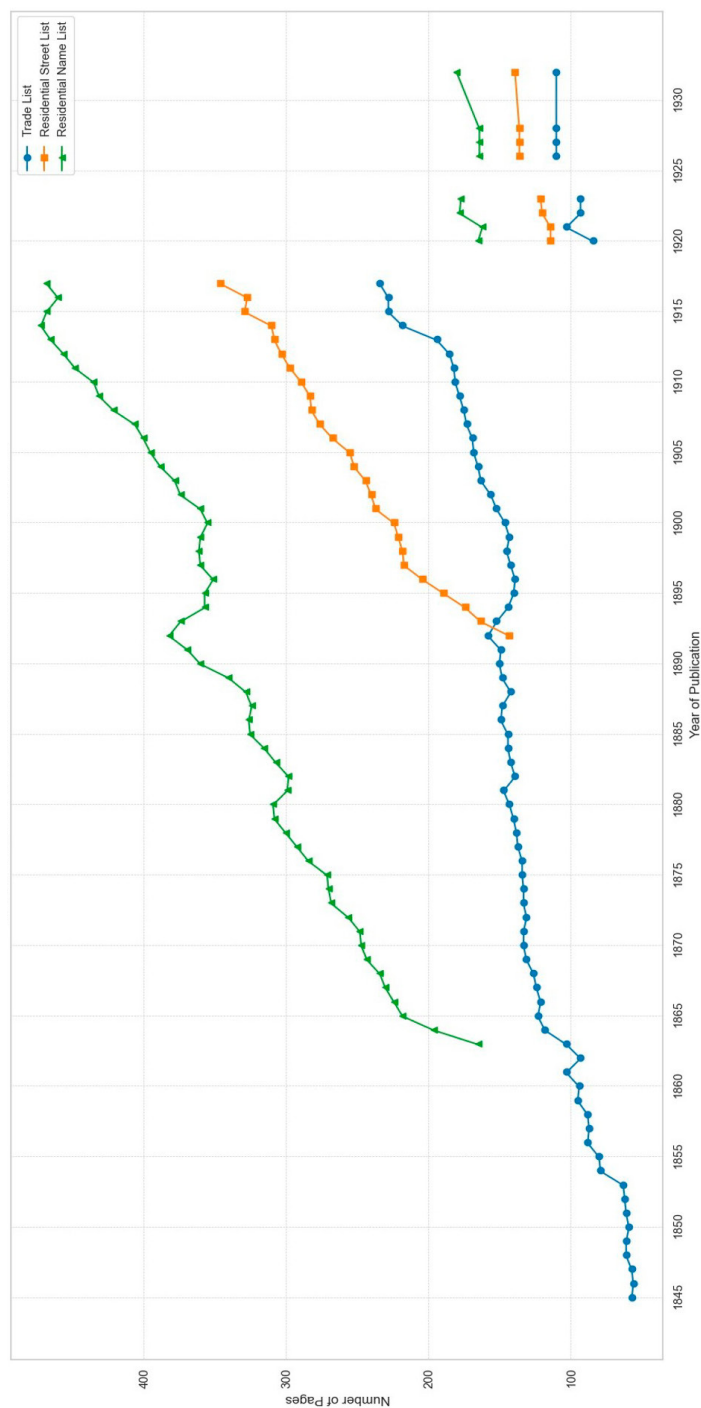


Figure 6 Number of pages in the trade, residential name, and street lists (1845-1932). Page counts reflect the growing size of the directory over time. The post-World War I decline corresponds to the adoption of a more compact four-column layout, likely driven by economic shortages, which reduced page numbers without necessarily reducing the number of entries.

continued publication of such large volumes also suggests that demand was sufficient to justify the costs of producing increasingly extensive directories.

An analysis of selected sample years reveals clear differences in coverage across the three lists. In 1920, the street list is the most comprehensive (29,640 entries) compared to the residential name list (18,840 entries). This difference likely reflects its closer alignment with street-based data collection methods (e.g., street surveys, household circulars) and sources (e.g., censuses, police registers).⁷⁶ The trade list contains even fewer entries, as it excludes categories included in the residential list, such as *'bijzondere'* (affluent individuals without a declared occupation). Their inclusion in the residential list, but exclusion from the trade list suggests that the different lists serve complementary rather than equivalent functions.

At the same time, all three lists share common limitations, most notably entry duplication. This issue is particularly visible in the trade list, where individuals and businesses frequently appear under multiple occupational categories, reflecting both increasing economic specialization and the difficulty of consistently classifying emerging professions. Table 2 illustrates this issue using the example of the business of D. Duwallers, which appears across multiple categories. While such duplication complicates quantitative analysis, it also points to a key strength of the directory: compared to more rigid sources such as the census, it captures economic activity in a more flexible and granular way, revealing forms of occupational diversification that are often obscured in official records.

Beyond duplicate entries, other inconsistencies appear across the lists. The residential street list was likely prioritized during compilation because of its street-based structure, while the trade and residential name lists were probably derived from it, although it cannot be stated with certainty. This sequence created opportunities for error, including omissions, outdated house numbers following renumbering schemes, and inconsistent recording of changes in business ownership. For example, a butcher recorded in the residential name list as *'De Backer W., beenhouwer, Biestraat, 19'* appears in the street list as *'Biestraat 19 De Backer (We M.), vleeschhouwster'*, illustrating how ownership changes, such as those following a proprietor's death, were not always updated consistently across lists.

⁷⁶ Similar to compilation methods of other directories; Shaw & Coles, *A guide to European town directories*, 91.

Table 2 Example of entry duplication in the 1892 *Dubbele Wegwijzer*, showing how a single business ('D. Duvilers', 'D. Duvilers Zoon'). appears under multiple occupational headings, reflecting classification challenges and the diversification of economic activity.

Original category (NL)	Translated (EN)
Trade list	
Aannemers van Bouwwerken	Building contractors
Bouwkundigen	Engineers
Brandspuitmakers	Fire pump manufacturers
Bronzen Gastoestellen en bronzen voorwerpen magazijnen	Gas fixtures (bronze)
Gas-toestellen (plaatsing van)	Gas appliance installation
Gas-toestellen tot verwarming	Gas heating appliances
Ijzeren-Geldkoffers	Iron safes
Kerkornementen	Church ornaments
Landbouw- en Nijverheidgereedschappen	Agricultural and industrial tools
Serren en Wintertuinen	Greenhouses and winter gardens
Verwarming-toestellen voor Serren	Greenhouse heating
Ijzerwerk en Quincaillerie-Magazijnen	Ironware and hardware
Residential name list	
Fabrikant van geldkoffers	Safe manufacturer
Residential street list	
geldkoffersfab.	Safe manufacturer (abbrev.)

Table 3 Internal consistency in the 1892 *Dubbele Wegwijzer*: 100 randomly selected entries from the residential street list are matched with their entry in the residential name list.

Residential street list	Residential name list
100 entries	91 entries

External comparison

Demographic data

Comparison with census data shows that the residential list covered between 8.5 and 9.2 percent of Ghent's population from 1866 to 1890

(table 4). This relative stability, despite rapid population growth, suggests a consistent underlying compilation process. Coverage increased following the introduction of the residential street list, reaching 20,160 entries (10.16 percent) in 1900 and 29,640 entries (14.74 percent) in 1920. These figures exceed those of the residential name list for the same years (16,100 and 18,480 entries, respectively). If the residential street list is assumed to primarily record household heads, its coverage corresponds to approximately 38.29 to 43.40 percent of households. This contrast with its lower total population coverage highlights the underrepresentation of domestic workers, seasonal laborers, and other marginalized groups.

Table 4 Comparison of residential entries in the *Dubbele Wegwijzer* with census data (selected years). An asterisk indicates population figure affected by boundary changes since the previous census. Page counts decline after World War I due to changes in layout and material constraints, not reduced coverage, as total entries remain broadly stable.

Year ⁷⁷	Directory entries ⁷⁸	Pages	Census population ⁷⁹	percent of population	Census households	percent of households
1866	10,481	223	123,176 ⁸⁰	8.51 percent	26,508	39.54 percent
1876	13,018	283	146,402 ⁸¹	8.89 percent	N/A	N/A
1880	14,122	307	153,273 ⁸²	9.21 percent	35,374	39.92 percent
1890	16,468	358	180,189 ⁸³	9.14 percent	43,012	38.29 percent
1900	Name list: 16,100 Street list: 20,160	350	*198,446 ⁸⁴	10.16 percent	51,071	39.47 percent
1920	Name list: 18,480 Street list: 29,640	175 ⁸⁵	*201,035 ⁸⁶	14.74 percent	68,294	43.40 percent

77 No digital directory data is available for comparison with the 1910 and 1930 censuses.

78 Estimated entries for Ghent and its boroughs: Gentbrugge, Ledeborg, Sint-Amandsberg.

79 Population for Ghent and its boroughs, excluding Sint-Amandsberg in 1866 (established 1872).

80 Le ministre de l'intérieur, Statistique de la Belgique. Population. Recensement général du 31 décembre 1866, (Brussel, 1870), 152.

81 Le ministre de l'intérieur, Recensement Général de la Population (31 Dec 1876): A basic population count conducted ahead of the 1880 triple census, without household data.

82 Le ministre de l'intérieur, Statistique de la Belgique. Population. Recensement général du 31 décembre 1880, (Brussel 1884), 63.

83 Le ministre de l'intérieur, Statistique de la Belgique Population. Recensement général au 31 décembre 1890. Tome I, (Brussel, 1893), 253.

84 Le ministre de l'intérieur, Statistique de la Belgique: Population. Recensement général au 31 décembre 1900, Tome I (Brussel 1903).

85 Fewer pages due to smaller font and double-column layout.

86 Ministère De L'Interieur Et De L'Hygiene, Population. Recensement général du 31 décembre 1920, (Brussel 1926).

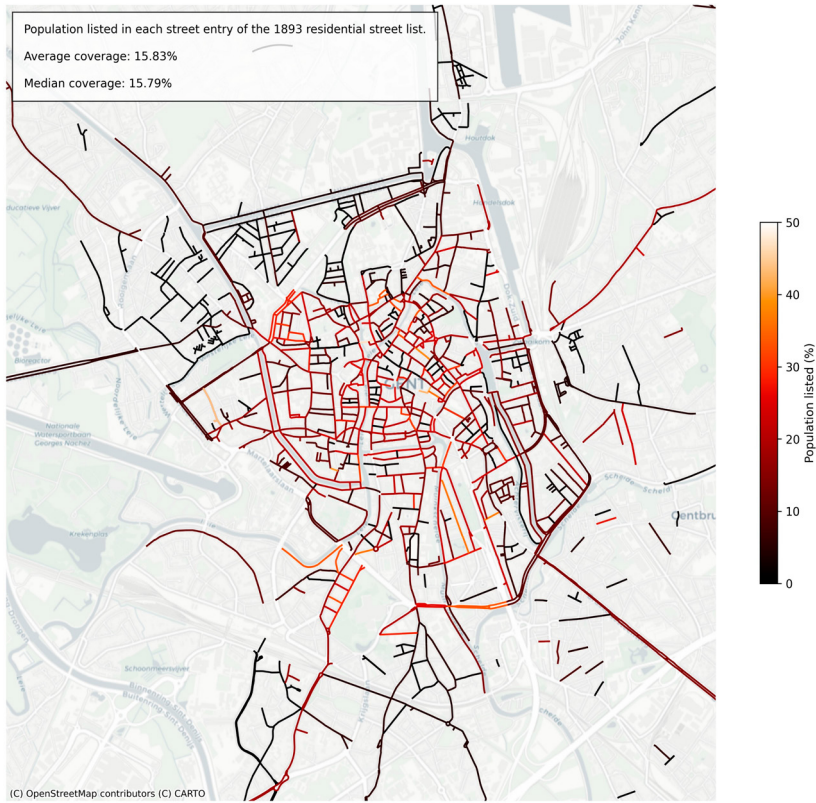


Figure 7 Population coverage of the 1893 residential street list mapped onto contemporary street geometries. Percentages compare directory entries per street to population figures from the 1893 Rapport sterfte- en geboortecijfer per straat. (Source: Ghent Archives)

A further comparison between the 1893 residential street list and a demographic survey reveals clear spatial bias.⁸⁷ The survey covers 679 streets in Ghent, while the directory includes 496. On average, the directory covers 15.83 percent (median 15.79 percent) of residents per street compared to the survey. Coverage declines with distance from the city center (e.g., 'Gasmeterboulevard', 2.90 percent [$n = 14/482$]; Achtermuide, 0.58 percent [$n = 5/850$]). Streets characterized by dense laborer housing also exhibit lower coverage, even when centrally located (figure 7). This pattern likely reflects practical and commercial priorities: focusing on central districts reduced productions costs and time needed for revisions.

⁸⁷ Archief Gent, *Rapport sur l'administration et la situation des affaires de la ville de Gand pendant l'année 1893* (Ghent 1894).

To further assess socioeconomic bias – particularly how exhaustively affluent individuals are included – a comparison could be made between residents marked with an asterisk (i.e., eligible voters) and entries in national voters' lists. This analysis would help evaluate the extent to which the *Wegwijzer* captures higher-status segments of the population. However, such an analysis lies beyond the scope of this article.

Commercial and industrial data

The *Wegwijzer*'s commercial and industrial data have previously been compared with Belgium's industrial censuses (1846, 1880, 1896, 1910, 1937, 1947, 1961, 1970), which are generally regarded as key sources for studying Belgian industry and industrial employment (De Brabander, 1984; Van der Hallen en Buyst, 2009).⁸⁸ However, these censuses have shortcomings that the directories can help to address. Industrial censuses were affected by shifting classification systems, complicating longitudinal comparison. As Vanderstraeten notes for population censuses, occupational classifications changed over time and between census types, introducing systematic inconsistencies.⁸⁹ Ancillary economic activities were inconsistently recorded, and the lack of standardized terminology further reduced accuracy within and across census editions.

Censuses also miscounted key labor groups. They tended to overestimate industrial employment by including unemployed individuals reporting previous occupations, while underestimating women's and children's labor. Bracke shows that female employment was often particularly undercounted, especially when male household heads provided responses to predominantly male enumerators.⁹⁰ The 1846 census excluded large segments of domestic industry, thereby omitting substantial female labor.⁹¹ The 1866 census was considered

88 Guido De Brabander, *De regionaal-sectoriële verdeling van de economische activiteit in België 1846-1979. Een kritische studie van het bronnenmateriaal* (Leuven 1984); Peter Van der Hallen and Erik Buyst, 'Measuring employment in the food industry: comparing the Belgian censuses, 1910-1930', *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis – Revue Belge d'Histoire Contemporaine* 39:3-4 (2009) 473-505.

89 Raf Vanderstraeten, 'Statistische constructies. De beroepsstatistiek in België en Groot-Brittannië', *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis* 35 (2005) 201-241.

90 Nele Bracke 'De vrouwenarbeid in de industrie in België omstreeks 1900. Een 'vrouwelijke' analyse van de industrietelling van 1896 en de industrie- en handelstelling van 1910.' *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis* 26:1-2 (1996) 165-207.

91 Eric Vanhaute, 'De meest moordende van alle industrieën'. De huisnijverheid in België omstreeks 1900', *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis* 20:4 (1994) 461-483.

too unreliable for publication, and the 1880 census covered less than half of all industrial sectors.

Cross-referencing census data with directory listings highlights the *Wegwijzer's* added value in capturing economic activity omitted from official classifications. Directories recorded auxiliary activities and unregistered enterprises, offering insights into the informal urban economy. Van Nieuwenhuyse, for instance, identifies 32 dyeing companies in the 1846 *Wegwijzer* compared to 17 in the industrial census.⁹² Verbruggen similarly finds chemical firms listed in directories but absent from both 1846 and 1896 censuses, suggesting that censuses were likely incomplete for some sectors.⁹³ Claes hypothesizes that directories may have included clandestine or unregistered businesses excluded from census categories. His study of gin distillers reveals substantially higher numbers in the *Wegwijzer* than in census data, implying an overly restrictive census definition of 'distiller'.⁹⁴ He also shows that half of these firms closed within a decade, short-lived activities that decennial censuses inevitably fail to capture.

Unlike periodic censuses, the annual publication of the *Wegwijzer* offers a more dynamic perspective on change in the urban economy making it possible to track short-lived enterprises and rapidly evolving sectors. However, this temporal granularity also introduces inconsistencies. Dumont notes that newly established firms often appeared only several years after their founding, while defunct businesses remained listed.⁹⁵ Van Nieuwenhuyse further observes that secondary business premises were occasionally omitted from the directory, despite being recorded in municipal industrial establishment files, although it remains unclear whether these sites were ever operational or excluded from the directory.

Despite these limitations, the *Wegwijzer* remains a valuable source for tracing the spatial trajectories of businesses over time.⁹⁶ It allows for the identification of firms operating across multiple locations and the documentation of business relocations between addresses. Its fine-grained, address-level structure therefore enables forms of micro-spatial analysis of urban economic patterns that are not

92 Nieuwenhuyse, *Een nieuw spoor voor milieuhistorici*, 50.

93 Christophe Verbruggen, *De stank bederft onze eetwaren. De reacties op industriële milieuhinder in het 19de-eeuwse Gent* (Ghent 2002) 87-88.

94 Claes, *Een klare kijk op de Gentse jenever*, 46-47.

95 Van Nieuwenhuyse, 'Potentiële historische bodemverontreiniging', 342-343.

96 *Ibid.*, 465

possible using aggregated census data. In addition, its advertisements document emerging products and commercial niches that fall outside formal occupational categories. As Debrulle notes, these texts reveal sector-specific innovations that cannot be captured through standard classification systems.⁹⁷

Conclusion

The systematic examination of the *Wegwijzer der stad Gent* (1770-1932) shows that city directories are valuable but methodologically complex sources for urban socioeconomic research. Analysis of its publication history, compilation methods, content evolution, and comparison with contemporary sources reveals both the directory's potential and its limitations

The *Wegwijzer's* main strength lies in its temporal and spatial granularity. Its annual publication enables detailed analysis of economic and demographic changes that decennial censuses cannot capture. This approach is particularly valuable for studying nineteenth-century Ghent, where population registers are not yet digitized. Its address-level structure further allows for granular spatial analysis of residential and urban economic patterns. In addition, the inclusion of informal activities, unregistered enterprises, and auxiliary business locations provides insights into forms of economic activity that are absent from official statistics. Comparisons with industrial censuses confirm that the directory often records a wider range of firms within specific sectors and captures short-lived enterprises.

However, the directory has systematic biases. Its compilation process meant that new businesses could appear years after establishment, while defunct enterprises sometimes remained listed. Geographic coverage is also uneven, with peripheral and working-class areas underrepresented. The focus on household heads reduces the visibility of women's work and non-traditional households. Selective inclusion further privileges economically significant occupations. Additional issues include duplicate entries, self-reported inaccuracies, and inconsistent updating across lists, as well as errors between the different types of listings. Nevertheless, when these limitations are

97 Rein Debrulle, "Den weg naar een deftig vermaak"? Een historisch-geografische en sociaal-ruimtelijke studie van de evoluerende spreiding van openbare vermakelijkheden in Gent (1880-1939) (unpublished master thesis, Ghent University 2022).

explicitly addressed, the *Wegwijzer* remains a valuable, complementary source for analyzing urban socioeconomic structures and demographic change.

Despite its research potential, the directory has historically been underused, largely due to limited accessibility. Recent digitization efforts by Ghent Archives in collaboration with Ghent University Library and the authors are significantly improving access.⁹⁸ Ongoing work aims to publish selected directory lists as open data, generating address-level socioeconomic data on persons and businesses. At the same time, this address- and street-level information will contribute to the development of an urban gazetteer, facilitating integration with other historical sources.

As digitization and computational methods continue to advance, city directories will increasingly support longitudinal, spatially detailed analysis of urban socioeconomic developments. Rich, address-level data on residents, businesses, and organizations can shed light on neighborhood change, social segregation, economic clustering, intergenerational mobility, and broader patterns of urban economic organization. Future research should continue to critically evaluate the reliability of these sources while developing methods to leverage their distinct strengths. Comparing the *Wegwijzer* with official voters' lists, for example, could clarify whether the directory completely covers this more affluent group. Importantly, studies on directory reliability should not be limited to the *Wegwijzer* alone, but extended to other city directories, including those for Brussels, Antwerp, and Bruges. Such comparative research would enable a more systematic understanding of how directory publication and content varied across Belgium.

98 *Wegwijzers en Dubbele Wegwijzers Gent en Oost-Vlaanderen*, [https://data.stad.gent/explore/dataset/wegwijzers-enkele-wegwijzers-gent-en-oost-vlaanderen/table/\[06/11/2025\]](https://data.stad.gent/explore/dataset/wegwijzers-enkele-wegwijzers-gent-en-oost-vlaanderen/table/[06/11/2025]).

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