"How can the integration of cultural and educational spaces in urban redevelopment projects foster a sense of community and a strong local identity in neglected neighbourhoods, *while addressing the challenges of gentrification*?"

'"Origins" suggests instead a moral right to the city that enables people to put down roots. This is the right to inhabit a space, not just to consume it as an experience. Authenticity in this sense is not a stage set of historic buildings as in SoHo or a performance of bright lights as in Times Square; it's a continuous process of living and working, a gradual buildup of everyday experience, the expectation that neighbours and buildings that are here today, will be here tomorrow.'

- Zukin, Sharon. **Naked City**: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places

01. INTRODUCTION

Whilst waiting in line at the local *Frituur* around the corner from the Blikfabriek, we encountered a young boy, a local resident of Hoboken. What began as mystified stares from him and his friends, turned into a conversation between him and the other Dutch speakers in our group. When their conversation was later translated to me, one part stood out. *"Why are you here and not staying in Antwerp?"* – Although his curiosity wasn't entirely misplaced, given that most tourists only visit the city centre and not the suburbs or downtown areas of Antwerp, the boy's utter disbelief that we had chosen to stay in and explore his neighbourhood, left a lasting impression.

The syllabus brief reads '*We head for Antwerp, to the now rapidly developing New South area, into the patchwork of Hoboken, where medium-scaled industries, social and middle-class housing experiments and preserved polder landscapes make up an intricate testimony of a twentieth-century city-in-the-making*'. *Patchwork* perfectly summarizes the fragmentation that exists within the area of Hoboken we are focusing on. One the one hand, you have the Blikfabriek – a warehouse with a long history as a can factory, now an oasis and a community driven space dedicated to artists and alike to explore their talents in their own dedicated studio spaces. On the other hand, you have Hoboken's industrial background and the current local working-class residents, made up largely of second and third generation immigrant families. This landscape features residential streets and a lack of inviting and public open spaces, limiting spontaneous interactions between friends and neighbours, and creating a disconnect between the local inhabitants and the residents of the Blikfabriek.

The aim of this research is to discover how the introduction of cultural and educational spaces could be used as a catalyst for urban regeneration, breathing new life into the forgotten area of Hoboken, driving economic growth, whilst simultaneously fostering a sense of community and strengthening local identity in this '*downtown*' neighbourhood. Guided by a theoretical framework that examines how arts and culture can drive urban redevelopment while mitigating the challenges of gentrification, the research applies these concepts to the context of Antwerp's rich artistic culture and Hoboken's unique socio-economic landscape. Additionally, it examines how schools "*as a locus of positive activity, can serve as a catalyst for strengthening and revitalizing the entire community*". [1] In the final phase of my research, the focus will shift to the Blikfabriek itself, exploring how it can be restored and reimagined as a space for culture and education to come together, serving as a focal point of the neighbourhood.

02. LITERATURE & FRAMING ISSUES

The theoretical framework for this research is grounded in urban regeneration and community-driven development. This framework is informed by theories that view cultural and educational infrastructure

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[1] Sharon Haar, ed., *Schools for Cities: Urban Strategies* (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2002).

not merely as functional additions, but as transformative elements that can redefine how residents experience and identify with their surroundings. Richard Florida's '*The Rise of the Creative Class',* refers to the *Creative Class* as any *'scientist or engineer, an architect or designer, a writer, artist or musician'* and suggests that cities that attract this class are more likely to thrive as the factors needed to attract these workers, such as diversity, openness and a high quality of life, foster a creative environment and can lead to a more prosperous and dynamic urban landscape.[2] This theory can be applied to the context of Hoboken as it suggests that the integration of educational and cultural spaces will attract the *Creative Class,* thus positively impacting the social and economic fabric of the neighbourhood. Nevertheless, Florida's theories must be interpreted cautiously as not to marginalize the community further through introducing a new *Class,* thus displacing the existing one.[3] Therefore, the gentrification phenomenon and its challenges in contemporary urban redevelopment projects plays a large role throughout this research.

As with any '*city-in-the-making'*, the danger of planning a large-scale redevelopment project is the inadvertent displacement of the existing *authentic* urban fabric. The term *authentic* is used lightly as it is almost impossible to determine the authentic identity of a place. In her book '*Naked City*', Sharon Zukin expresses how it would be '*absurd'* to call any city authentic as cities are shaped by layers of historical migrations, ever-changing residents, and a constantly evolving urban fabric.[4] However, in this context, the *authentic* fabric refers to the layered mix of industrial heritage, working-class history and the immigrant community roots. According to Zukin*,* in cities such as Paris, London and New York, creatives and *'gentrifiers'* move into old immigrant areas, *'praising the working-class bars and take-out joints but overwhelming them with new cafes and boutiques, which are soon to be followed by brand-name chain stores'*. Taking this into account, studies of gentrification provide a critical lens for understanding how cultural projects can be the cause of displacement and the loss of *authenticity,* reinforcing the importance of prioritizing community needs.

There are many research projects exploring how schools and other educational buildings can act as catalysts for community regeneration. '*Schools for Cities: Urban Strategies*' is a collection of essays on such case studies, some of which look specifically at the repurposing of historic buildings into schools. This provides an architectural perspective and illustrates how schools can act as social anchors that support broader urban goals such as economic development, housing and local employment opportunities. This approach complements Florida's broader socio-economic theories by demonstrating how physical spaces dedicated to the arts and education can practically anchor a community's identity.

03. CONTEXTUALISING THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Antwerp's deep-rooted history as a centre of art and cultural exchange provides a unique foundation for exploring how art and cultural spaces can be used as a catalyst for urban revitalisation. During the Renaissance period, Antwerp became a vibrant artistic centre, attracting artists from across northern Europe.[5] This openness provided the artistic freedom to experiment and innovate, embedding art into Antwerp's identity.[6] Today, this history positions Antwerp as a natural setting to explore how the integration of art can shape and sustain communities.

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[2] Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

[3] Vladimir Kostić, Aleksandar Kostić, and Milena Dinić Branković, 'Gentrification, Creative Class and Problems of Conflict of Interest in Contemporary Urban Development', *FACTA UNIVERSITATIS*, Architecture and Civil Engineering, Vol. 16, no. No. 03 (2018): 401–13, https://doi.org/10.2298/FUACE180524017K.

[4] Sharon Zukin, *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[5] 'Antwerp in the Early 1500s', accessed 31 October 2024, https://www.nga.gov/features/slideshows/antwerp-in-the-early-1500s.html.

[6] 'Antwerp in the 17th Century: Rubens, Van Dyck, and Jordaens', Het Noordbrabants Museum, accessed 31 October 2024, https://www.hetnoordbrabantsmuseum.nl/en/explore/magazine/antwerp-in-the-17th-century/.

Meanwhile, Hoboken presents a contrasting urban identity. Despite its proximity to the centre of Antwerp, it remains somewhat overlooked and economically marginalised. Like its American namesake, Hoboken, New Jersey, which has transitioned from an industrial centre to a trendy, gentrified neighbourhood, Hoboken faces similar potential pressures as urban redevelopment gains momentum.[7] I cautiously draw parallels between Hoboken/ Antwerp and Brooklyn/ New York. Both Hoboken and Brooklyn are, or were, industrial areas with a growing interest in art and culture as a potential revitalization tool. However, Brooklyn could serve as a cautionary example as what initially benefited the community, later led to high rents, displacement and a loss of the *authentic* identity. Therefore, the situation in Brooklyn will be analysed as a case study, helping to identify what dangers Hoboken could avoid, and be used to explore how *thoughtful* development could avoid the negative outcomes associated with gentrification.
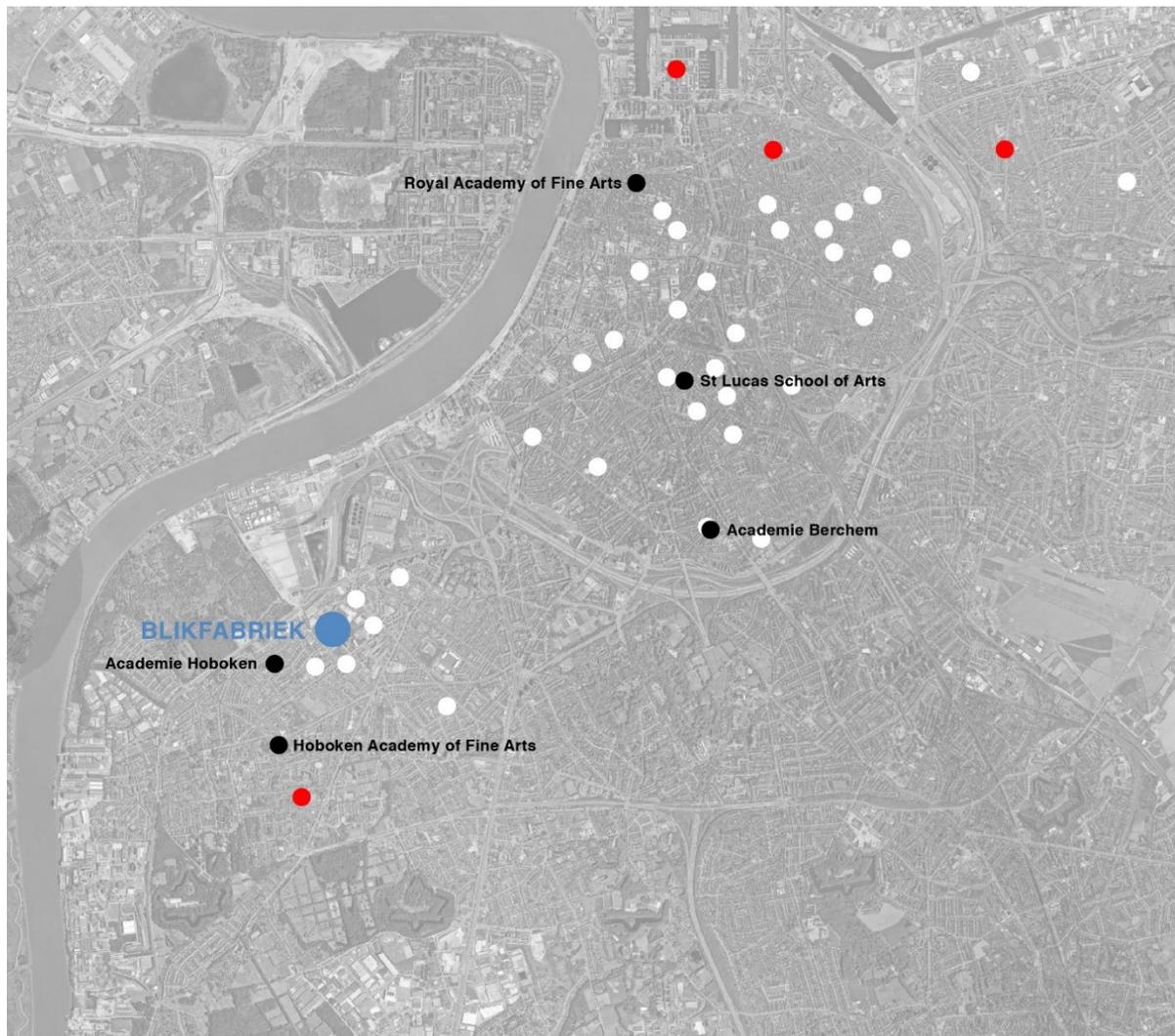
04. RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

The methodologies used to drive this research will be multifaceted. I plan to conduct interviews with a variety of different actors, such as the inhabitants of Hoboken, local stakeholders, artists and business owners, aswell as architects and developers who have worked on similar projects in the wider Antwerp area. Two people I hope to interview in the light of this research are *Rosie van der Schans*, a tutor in my studio who is currently working on a demolished art school in Antwerp, and *Mechthild Stuhlmacher* of Korteknie Stuhlmacher Architecten. Based in Rotterdam, Mechthild's practice focuses largely on designing schools with a domestic atmosphere, and they have already completed four projects in Antwerp and Hoboken, where they have transformed pre-existing historic structures into schools. Their studio approaches each restoration with great care, reinterpreting the existing function and structure, taking into account Antwerp's complex urban fabric, and transforming the building into a school that meets and exceeds the demands of the 21st century. These contacts would help me gain insight into the realities of planning and designing educational and cultural spaces, as well as provide contextual understanding of the challenges and opportunities related to urban redevelopment in Antwerp.

Analysing case studies of successful and unsuccessful urban redevelopment projects will also inform this research. By reviewing literature, such as Zukin's *'Naked City',* which often refers to Brooklyn as an example for gentrification, and conducting research on similar neighbourhoods, such as Shoreditch and Kreuzberg, I can examine how these case studies approached urban regeneration and dealt with issues such as gentrification and cultural preservation, whilst extracting specific design strategies and community integration practices that could be adapted to Hoboken.

Carrying out a site analysis and mapping will also play a vital role throughout the process of this research. To understand Hoboken's physical and social landscape, I plan to map open spaces, accessibility and circulation, and other points of interest on a map. I also plan to situate the current educational and cultural buildings in Antwerp and Hoboken, in hopes of comprehending the existing network of schools and art schools and identifying gaps where such buildings could be used to strength the sense of community. An initial draft of such a map is illustrated below.

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[7] 'Hoboken, New Jersey', in *Wikipedia*, 22 September 2024,
https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Hoboken,_New_Jersey&oldid=1247066235.

Royal Academy of Fine Arts ●

St Lucas School of Arts ●

● Academie Berchem

BLIKFABRIEK ●

Academie Hoboken ●

● Hoboken Academy of Fine Arts

○ Schools
● Art Schools
● Korteknie Stuhlmacher Architecten Projects

05. ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Florida, R. (2002) *The rise of the creative class*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

> In his book, Florida defines the Creative Class as people in *'science and engineering, architecture and design, education, arts, music and entertainment'*. Although the term 'creative' is used in a broader sense, his theories are still relevant to my research as he explores the critical role of the Creative Class in driving economic growth and fostering vibrant communities. Florida's insights into how creative individuals contribute to cultural diversity and innovation can inform the understanding of how integrating arts and educational initiatives can revitalize neglected neighbourhoods like Hoboken.

Haar, S. and Robbins, M. (2002) *Schools for cities: Urban strategies*. Washington, D.C: National Endowment for the Arts.

> The book is a collection of essays examining how schools can act as catalysts for community revitalization. Certain essays, such as Roy Strickland's '*City of learning*' and Constance Beaumont's '*Why Jonny cant walk to school'*, are particularly relevant to my research as one explores the repurposing of disused buildings into schools, creating new '*downtown'* magnets in the process, and the latter provides strategies for preserving schools as *'neighbourhood anchors'*, investigates public policies related to schools and the suggests a *'prototype'* of the perfect school.

Mattern, S.C. (2007) *The new Downtown Library: Designing with communities*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

> In this book, Mattern explores how libraries are being reimagined as central cultural hubs that serve diverse urban communities and function as multi-purpose spaces that foster learning, creativity and social interaction. This is valuable for understanding how an educational and cultural building, such as a library, can address issues of urban fragmentation, promote social cohesion and help create a sense of place.

Zukin, S. (2010) Naked City: The death and life of authentic urban places. New York: Oxford University Press.

> *Naked City* is written as an update of Jane Jacobs' 1961 book 'T*he death and life of great American cities'*, and in it Zukin explores the dangers of gentrification and what it means to be *authentic*. She argues that today's goals for neighbourhoods to be distinct and unique, has become a tool for interested parties to increase property values and hence remove the neighbourhood '*characters'* that Jacobs praised.