

# Home Beyond Walls

Stories and Traces as echoes of Belonging



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## Thank you

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In cities around the world, our living spaces are changing. Everyday environments are constantly being restructured, relocated, or replaced and new developments often appear faster than communities can adapt. While these changes usually respond to economic, demographic or ecological pressures, they can also affect something that is harder to measure: our sense of belonging. The invisible threads that connect people to their surrounding such as memory, routine, and shared meaning, are at risk of being lost.<sup>1</sup>

This book is an invitation to slow down. To listen. To walk.

Together, we'll follow stories that are embedded into streets, parks, cafés, and quiet corners of Hoboken (Antwerp, Belgium). You'll meet Lisette, who knows Hoboken like no one else; Johan, who protects nature with care; Karin and Jean-Paul who take action to shape their place; Diether, who knows the gaps in the social fabric; and Joris and the artists, who reclaimed an industrial space and made it dance again. Through them, you'll start to see the city differently.

This book explores how architecture can be more than construction. It can serve as a form of care, a way to respond to personal stories, and a tool for envisioning more inclusive futures. It's built on a process of walking, listening, mapping, remembering, and designing, focusing on Hoboken as a case study.

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Relph (1976) describes this loss of meaning as 'placelessness' - a state in which places lose their distinct identity and emotional significance as they are increasingly shaped by external forces and homogenised patterns of development.



Hoboken, a post-industrial district on the southern edge of Antwerp, is a place defined as much by transition as by memory. Once shaped by its factories and workers' housing, it is now a fragmented landscape caught between the weight of its industrial past and the pressures of ongoing redevelopment. And yet, among the change, there are traces: of people, stories, rituals, and forms of belonging that have not entirely disappeared.

This project is about following those traces, learning from them, and imagining how they might inform future ways of living together. At its heart lies a question that shaped every step of the research:

**How can stories and uses of space inform the crafting of a sense of belonging (in redeveloped areas), through architecture and design?**

However, this approach is not limited to Hoboken. The tools and reflections provided are adaptable for use in your own neighborhood, block, or building. The questions we'll explore together – *What do you remember here? What changes would you want to see in your house, your neighborhood or your city and how would you do it? What makes you feel at home?* – are not bound to any single place.

As you read, you won't just follow stories, you'll become part of them. There will be moments where you'll be invited to pause and map your own memories, imagine your own living space, or design with empathy. This is a guide, a sketchbook, a shared journey.

So let's begin.

Put on your walking shoes.  
You are coming with me to  
**HOBOKEN.**







Picture by Lance Schroten





Picture by Barten Jip Verschoor





Picture by Barten Jip Verschoor





Picture by Author





Picture by Barten Jip Verschoor





Picture by Lance Schroten





Picture by Barten Jip Verschoor





Picture by Barten Jip Verschoor





Picture by Barten Jip Verschoor





Picture by Barten Jip Verschoor





Picture by Marianna Angelini





Picture by Marianna Angelini





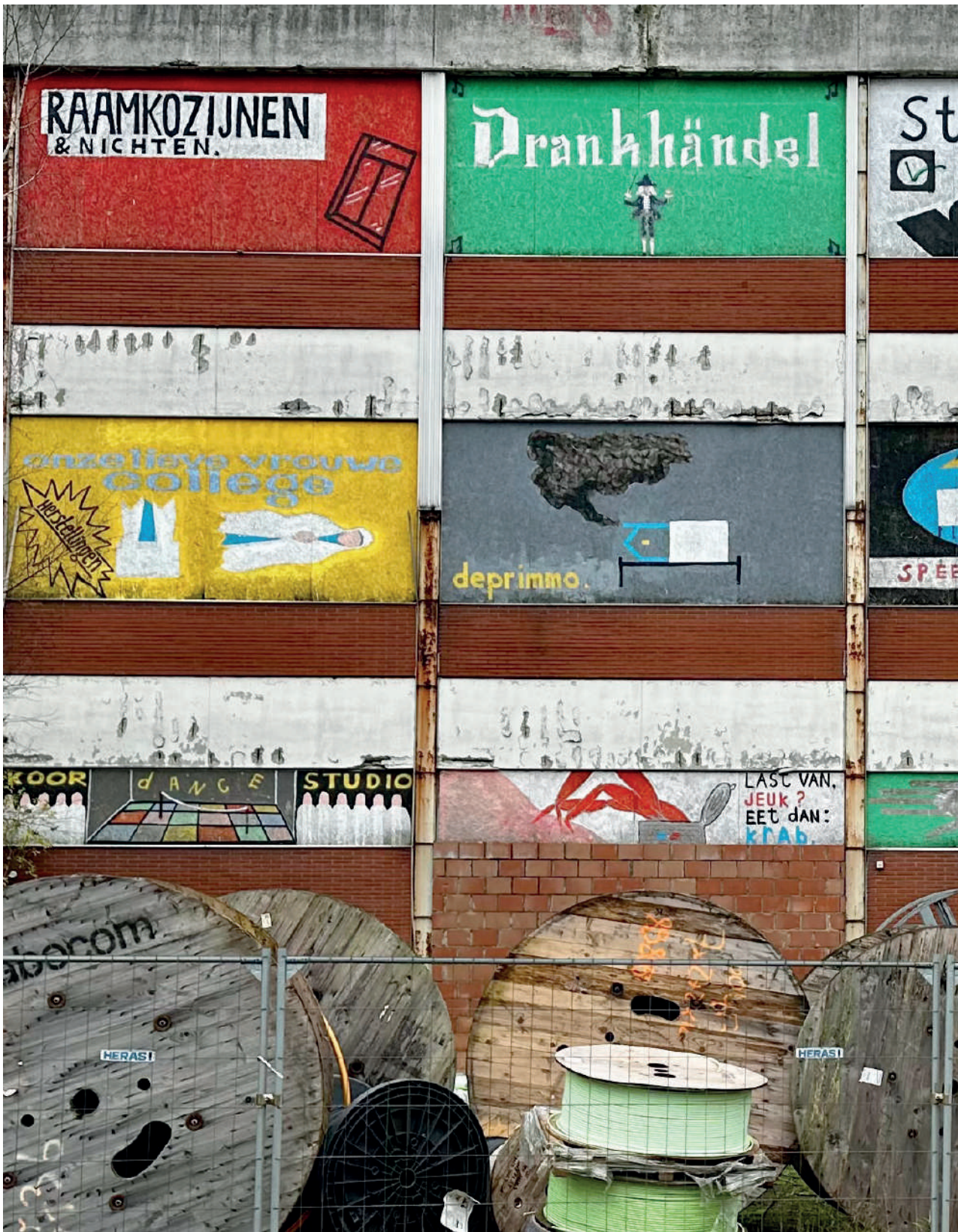
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Picture by Barten Jip Verschoor





Picture by Author

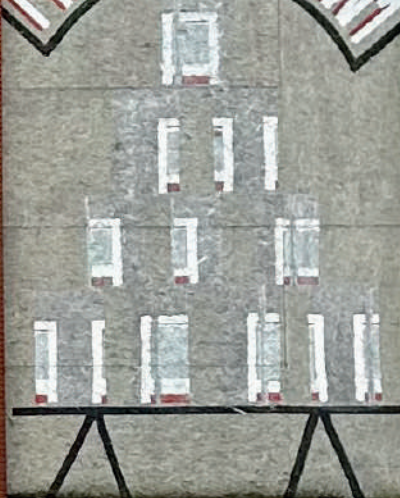
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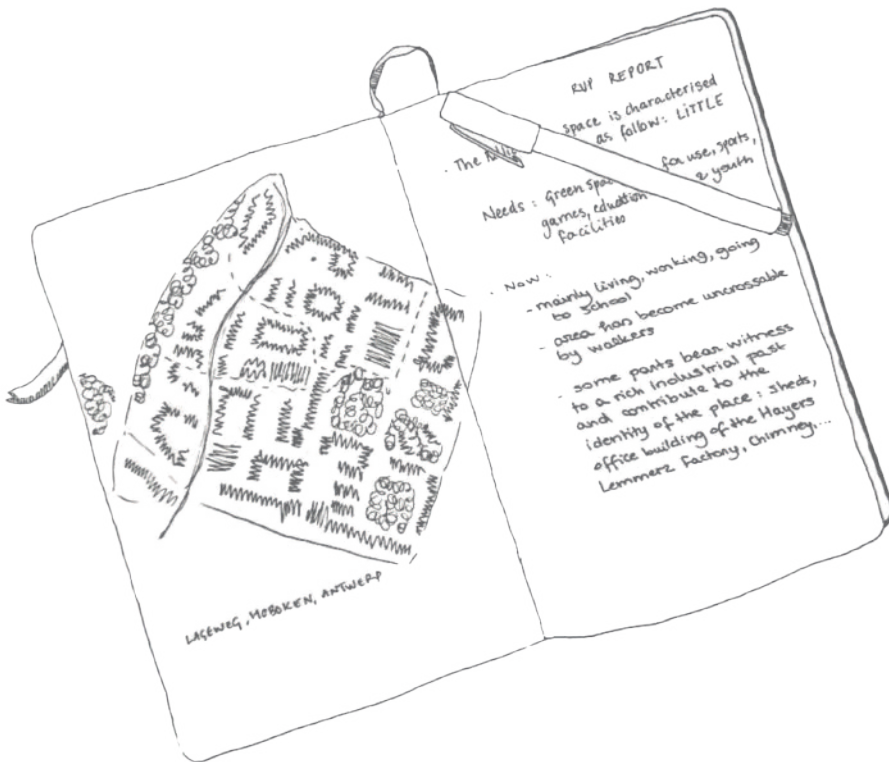
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# 01

A PLACE





I didn't grow up in Hoboken. I came here with questions, a sketchbook, and no clear idea of what I would find. It's not the kind of place that announces itself. There's no main square, no skyline, and no headline attraction. But if you spend time here and really pay attention, you begin to notice things: the way a street bends around a building or a tree; the way people pause to chat in front of the school gate or in the supermarket; the empty spaces that feel like they're waiting for something—or someone.

Hoboken resists quick definitions. It's a district, yes, but also a memory, a patchwork, a place in between. It's industrial, yet green. Overlooked, but full of life.

Let's start by asking simple questions:

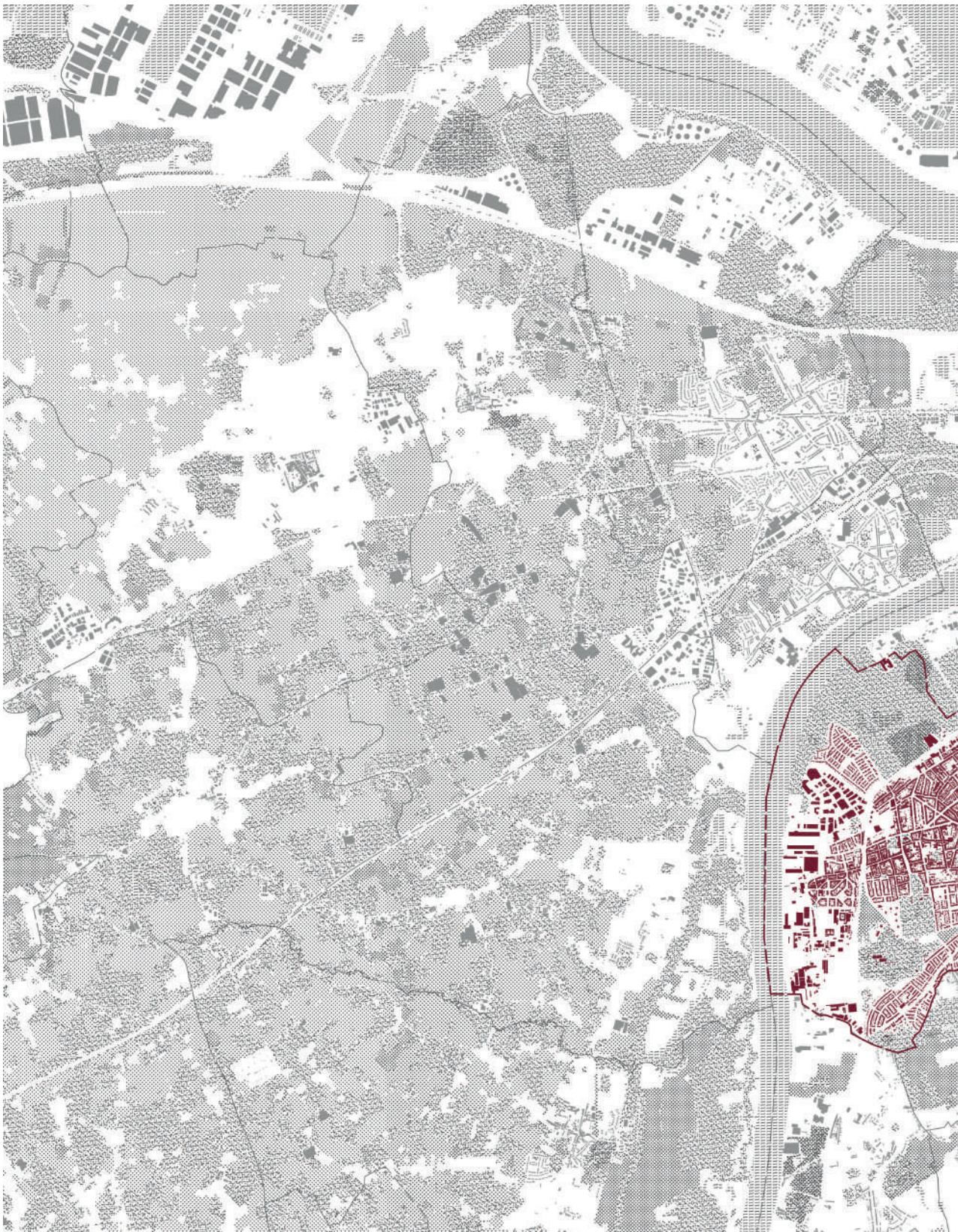
**Where is this place?**

**What is this place?**

**What was this place?**



**WHERE  
IS THIS  
PLACE?**



1:50 000 - Antwerp city map (Made by author)  
Highlight on Hoboken district located in the south of the city of Antwerp, along the Scheldt River.  
Once an independent municipality, it was incorporated into the city of Antwerp in 1983. (City of Antwerp, n.d.)





**WHAT  
IS THIS  
PLACE?**

## Hoboken's Identity Card

**Status:** District of Antwerp

**Area:** 10.23 km<sup>2</sup>

**Population:** 41,216

**Population density:** 4,029/km<sup>2</sup>

**Postal code:** 2660

**Median age:** 42.2 years

**Foreign origin:** 59.2%

- Foreign nationality: 23.6%
- Belgian nationality with foreign roots: 35.6%
- Top foreign nationalities:  
Moroccan, Dutch, Turkish, Romanian, Polish

### Household types:

- 43% single-person households
- 32% couples with children
- 16% couples without children
- 9% other

### Employment:

Unemployment rate: 8.7%

Share of low-income households: 18.5%

### Education:

- Percentage of pupils in disadvantaged schools: 55.3%
- Percentage with higher education diploma (25–64 y/o): 28.1%

### Notable features:

- Mix of residential, industrial, and green areas
- Presence of social housing and urban renewal projects
- Blikfabriek, Hollebeek Valley, and Polder nature reserve



1:25 000 - Hoboken map  
Made by author

# The Other Identity Card

## Hoboken in 55 Voices

**Quiet** but not far from the city. Dirty and marginal. **Green**, quiet A lot has changed. Dirty, not like before, unsafe. Quiet nice neighborhood where there is always something going on. Lots of greenery but dirty in some places. Relatively quiet yet close to town. A beautiful pleasant **village** where everyone knows each other. Used to be very social but become less safe year after year, especially after sunset. **Sad**. The greenest suburb of Antwerp. Quiet, green, pleasant and full of elderly people. Feeling **unsafe**. Quiet district next to the city. Lots of **heritage** to be found. Became more **multicultural**. Expropriation of 1 old neighborhood. Fragmentation. A district with a bad name but with a lot of potential. Hoboken is **dirty**, dilapidated, a lot of litter, a lot of dog poo and complete accommodation. Even the tram no longer runs here. Cafes are disappearing, one can really no longer speak of a shopping street here, park itself is sad. **Birthplace**. Evolved from a large village to a city district with many old and "new" Belgians. Little green, fairly boring neighborhood. Popular, many **boring** houses with far too few green facades. Densely populated, **working class district**, large. Has become a bit more impersonal compared to the past. Green, village feeling, litter, **friendly**, **diverse**. A district with many faces, sometimes positive, sometimes negative. A quiet and green municipality that we would like to preserve so much. A **pleasant neighborhood** to live in. **Unfriendly**. Was there because of my husband, but quickly knew a lot of people: family, neighbors, etc. There was a lot of contact with everyone. An **industrial** municipality with a striking amount of greenery (fort 8, polder and parks). District with **potential**, organization not an exemplary function. Industrial municipality with many **immigrants** and a surprising amount of greenery. Workers' village but always on the move. The front yard of a big city. By reducing or stopping all kinds of (heavy) **industry** and **ghettoization** by less fortunate population groups, an increase in the feeling of insecurity supported by a resurgence of drug-related violence. A municipality where a lot has **changed**. Multicultural green and friendly. **Artistic** and green district. **Green lung** of Antwerp. A district with a village feel if you want it. Pretty quiet so far... A natural, well-located municipality. Contradictory impressions± messy, sometimes closed (shutter houses, not very inviting), sometimes open (the landscape, the open spaces), lively (the **Blikfabriek**), varied (many different types of inhabitants), also feels quiet (compared to the city center). Village in the Randstad, **contrast**, industry. Built-up and liveliness disappeared. I always found a nice and cozy municipality until a few years ago. the moment Hoboken was merged with Antwerp. A green municipality with a beautiful and a less beautiful side. Delicate question, nicely said **no longer the same**. Very much changed and not in the positive sense... Everything is deteriorating, own local shops are **disappearing** and ethnic businesses are taking their place, native residents no longer **feel at home** here, you see more immigrant people than **native** people on the street, supermarket, playground ... women wear more and more headscarves ... the Abdijstraat on the Kiel was the shopping street, there you now imagine yourself in Morocco, Turkey ... Still good to live in and very **familiar** to me. The perfect suburb. Beautiful green, with initially nice residential areas but in recent years run-down streets and too busy **car traffic** center but essentially a nice municipality. A village that is becoming more and more **urbanized**, a district with very poor public transport. Quiet and friendly. Located at the bottom of the **Scheldt** bend to Antwerp, through traffic does not pass through the center. It is the greenest borough of Antwerp. **The Hoboken of my youth cannot be compared to Hoboken of today**. For example, I knew that there were 5 (five!) cinemas in Hoboken and that when KSK Hoboken played at home, the fanfare came through the street. The **merger with Antwerp** has also changed a lot and not always for the better. For example, the **polder** where we went to catch skippers has now become a polder city.

Take a moment to write down a definition, a few words, or even sketch something that captures how you feel about the place where you live or the place you're working on. You can also ask others around you: What words do they use? What memories come up? Collect and compare.

How would you describe  
your neighborhood?



**WHAT  
WAS THIS  
PLACE?**





Model elements - A Tidal River  
Made in collaboration with  
Barten Jip Verschoor, Merle Schmidt-Jürgensen, Lance Schroten



Now that we know where we are, and have gathered a sense of what Hoboken is through numbers, maps, and personal definitions, a first picture begins to form. But understanding the present means asking how it came to be. What shaped the landscape, the people, and the patterns of life we see today?

This section introduces *A Tidal River*, a short film that explores Hoboken's complex past. Instead of following a strict chronology, the story unfolds through the metaphor of tides: moments of arrival and departure, growth and decline, each leaving traces behind.

The film retraces key historical shifts: agricultural settlement, pilgrimage, industrial expansion, migration, pollution, and the slow return of nature. These moments have left marks in the soil, in the air, in the way people live. Together, they reveal how Hoboken has been shaped by both outside forces and the responses of those who call it home.

Looking at the past is about grounding future ideas in the reality of what has already been lived. This perspective is essential for any design that hopes to belong here.



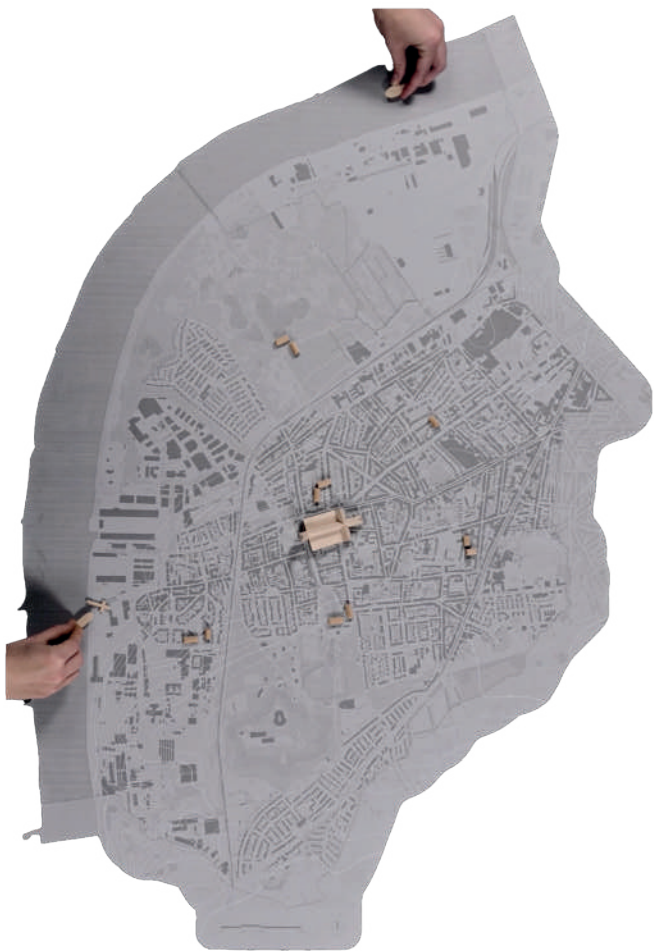


# A tidal River

*movie script*



*A movie by Barten Jip Verschoor, Merle Schmidt-Jürgensen,  
Lance Schroten and Bérénice Demiddeleer*



The fertile soil of the Scheldt floodplains and the natural inlet of the Kille, led to the settlement of Hoboken. The Kille provided a place for ships to dock, while the rise on which the historic village centre stands offered safety from floods.

*Small ships travelling up and down the Scheldt into the Kille*

As early as 1200, mention is made of the dyke and polder, which the Hobokenaren used to grow crops such as hay, flax, oats and vegetables.

*Place Farms on the Hobokense Polder*

On the higher grounds with poor sandy soils, sheep and pig farming gradually developed. The nickname of Hobokenaren 'Strontboeren' is derived from the fact that human faeces from Antwerp were transported by special barge to fertilise their fields and in return, vegetables were sold to the people of Antwerp.

*Small ship still travelling/other coloured sawdust spread of the polder as fertiliser*

The first archeological evidence of a human settlement in Hoboken is a letter to the bishop from our lady's church written in 1135.

*Place the Church on site in Hoboken*

Shortly after, the parish became a site for pilgrimage. Popular belief speaks of the famous Black God, a crucifix statue that washed ashore at the Kille. The statue was retrieved by the Parish and placed in a chapel. Remarkably, it disappeared at least twice, only to reappear in the same location miraculously.

*Place the cross next to the Kille*

In the 16th century the Flemish Renaissance brought wealth to the merchants of Antwerp, leading them to construct lavish countryside estates in Hoboken. At its peak, Hoboken had at least 17 of these estates, featuring ornamental gardens, while also maintaining operations from existing farms.

*Place the Pleasure Houses*

However, in 1874, the Cockerill company, a key figure in Belgium's industrial development, settled in Hoboken and significantly transformed the village. Originally from Manchester, they established a multitude of industries in Wallonia before moving to Antwerp to start a shipyard. As expansion opportunities were limited in Antwerp, they relocated to Hoboken, utilising the natural inlet of the previously mentioned Kille for their first dry dock, marking the start of a period in which more than 700 ships were produced for clients all over the world.

*Place Titan next to the Kille and start moving ships up and down the Schelde*

Their arrival sparked other industrialists, mainly from Germany, to establish businesses in Hoboken. Notably, 'De Wol' settled in 1885, followed by 'De Zilver' in 1887, both located south adjacent to the shipyard.

*Place Factories along the Schelde, and start constructing the Chimney.*

According to today's standards, the working conditions in these factories were awful, with child labour and numerous premature deaths occurring on-site. Labourers were housed in projects on former estate lands, with Ferdinand Moretus being the first to sell his property.

*Place worker houses at Moretusburg.*





The population grew quickly from 3,000 to 16,000 inhabitants from 1873 till 1910. Replacing all but three of the estates by housing for the factory workers.

*Remove estates*

The arrival of this new influx of people contributed to a vibrant community life after work hours. Fanfares, véloclubs and other associations started developing. Pubs named after famous ships, built by the shipyard, like Moanda and Vera Cruz, were an integral part in the lives of Hoboken's residents. These pubs were strategically located along Kapelstraat, connecting the industries to the centre of Hoboken.

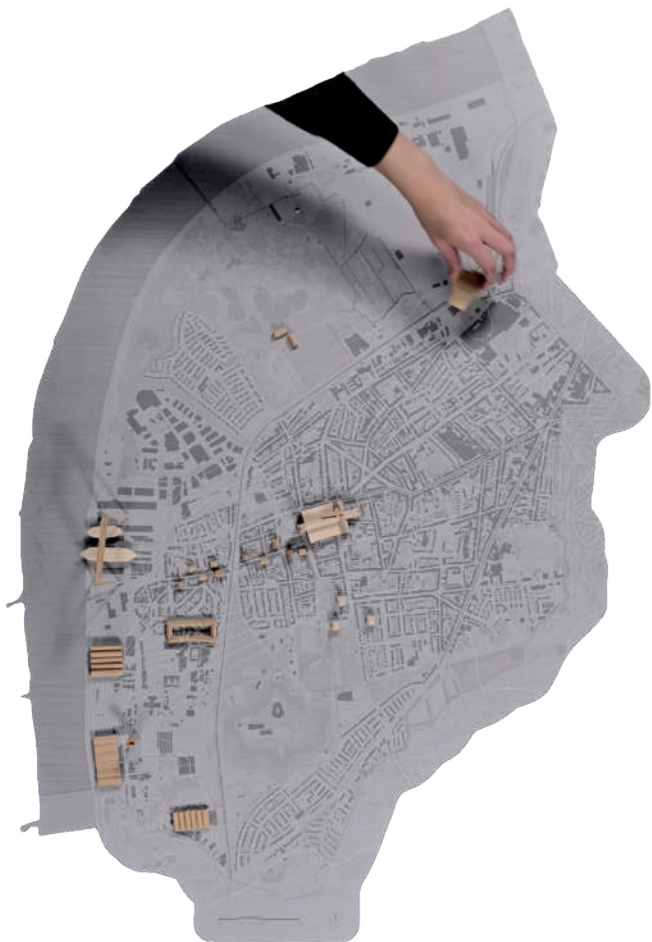
*Place Kapelstraat*

Industries took off and small businesses built factories all over the city, one of the sites being the now Blikfabriek, where a collection of companies such as Schuybroek settled.

*Place factories throughout Hoboken including at the Blikfabriek.*

One aforementioned industry that stood out, also in a literal sense, was 'De Zilver,' which constructed a 125-metre-tall chimney and engaged in various metallurgical activities. Their influence extended beyond Belgium, as they extracted valuable metals and radioactive substances from Congo. These intensive industrial activities came at a cost: pollution spread throughout Hoboken, and the Congolese workers faced incredibly hazardous and unhealthy working conditions, inextricably linking these developments to Belgium's problematic colonial history.

*Finish the Chimney, add last factories, and start moving ships from the site along the Schelde.*





Alongside these developments, another industry was setting up in the north of Hoboken. After the petroleum storage of Antwerp burned down in 1889, thereby killing 300 people, Antwerp, under royal decree, annexed a part of Hoboken and moved the industry outside the city to Petroleum Zuid. While the facility was just completed in 1904 a three-day fire broke out damaging the installations severely.

*Place the petroleum tanks and the concrete pier.*

Rebuilding began in 1906 and in 1909 a train yard was built to accommodate the export of oil by rail and truck throughout Belgium and Europe. The site quickly became the main petroleum port of Europe. In 1910, more than 200 million litres of oil were processed at the site. A portion of this oil originated from Eastern Europe, while half came from American sources, with the American Petroleum Company being the largest operator at the site.

*Export oil via rail and have ships docking at the pier.*

In the First World War Petroleum Zuid was set alight and again damaged by fire. After the war, Petroleum Zuid quickly recovered and incited the development of other related industries, including CROWN, which began manufacturing oil barrels. At its peak in 1929, there were 233 petroleum tanks on site.

*Add to the Blikfabriek*

Yet, in 1930, a devastating flood hit the site. Recovery from this disaster was challenging, additionally competition from other ports in Europe became increasingly fierce, leading to a period of stagnation.

*Remove some tanks*

The final blow came from a German bomb during WWII.

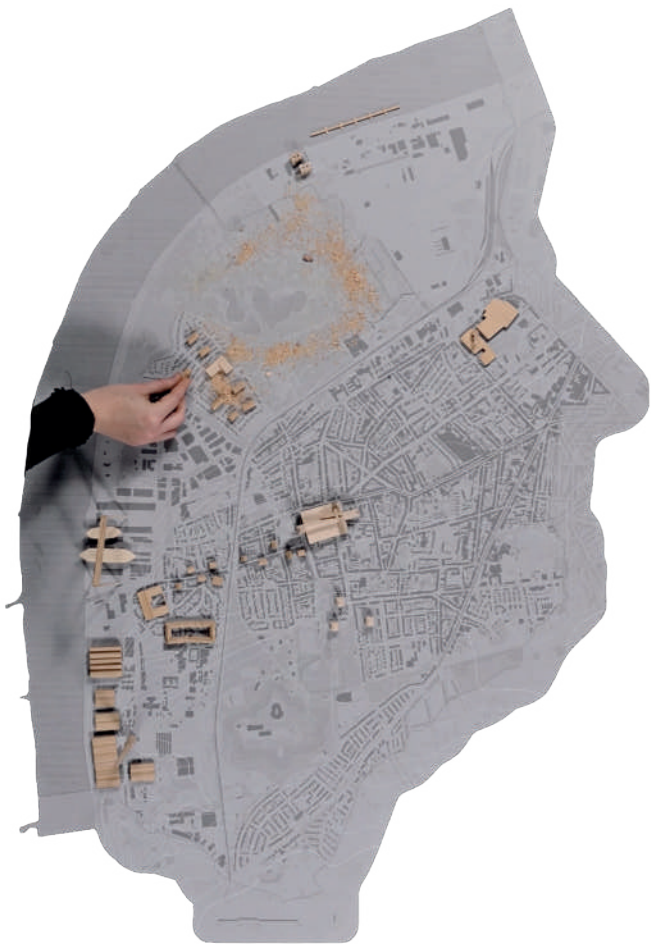
Unlike Petroleum Zuid, Metallurgie Hoboken continued its rapid growth. It still relied heavily on Congolese resources, which continued through post-colonial structures after Congolese independence. This was at a time when most other industries had declined in Hoboken.

*Expand Umicore and place the new structures.*

This growth in the metal industry sparked a second movement of immigration to Hoboken, mainly from Northern Africa. Over time, their culture began to take root in the area. The pastor of Moretusburg secured a building permit for a mosque, which became the first of its kind in Belgium, realised through the efforts of the community. Nowadays more than half of Hoboken's demographic has a family history tied to the immigration of this period.

*Place Mosque*





Meanwhile, the Polder, losing its importance in industrial Hoboken, had become dotted by dump places of household and industrial waste. Moreover, to allow new plans for city expansion, three million cubic metres of soil from excavation works of the ring road, household waste and debris were disposed of on the Polder. After Braem's modernist housing development plan was rejected, private investors and developers came with a new plan which also included housing units, amenities and sport facilities, known as Polderstad.

*Add different types of soil + Add the two phases*

Yet, only the first two phases of the plan were realised due to financial struggles caused by the oil crisis in 1973.

In the meantime, many industries that settled at the end of the 19th century began to shut their doors. The closure of Cockerill in 1982 was particularly devastating for the community. As a result, the vibrant town life gradually faded away; pubs shut down and local celebrations came to an end. The last major event was the Zwarte God procession, which took place in 1980. Ironically, just one year after Cockerill's closure, Hoboken became a district of Antwerp and lost its status as an independent municipality. As a physical reminder of the Cockerill shipyard, the enormous titan crane still stands, now in use by a different company.

*Remove industries, ships and all the pubs*

Returning to the Polder, the four remaining phases of the Polderstad plan were put on hold, allowing nature to take over instead. Diverse pioneering ecosystems emerged on the bare soil, and rare species of animals and plants settled in the Polder. The community embraced this spontaneous nature and fought for its preservation, arguing that it was the last piece of nature for the Hobokenaren. Their efforts paid off, and the Hobokense Polder became a nature reserve in 1990.

*Place duck and trees on the Polder*

This engagement resulted in the creation of an organisation managing the Polder to conserve and reintroduce diverse biotopes, later expanding to the Hollebeek in 2015 and the Tarzanbosjes and Blikvelden in 2018.

*Place the trees in that order.*





The Hollebeek, now constricted by dense urbanisation, used to flow through the Blikvelden. The site was bought by the Antwerp municipality after the last industrial activity at the Blikfabriek ended in 2013. Today, the factory site is managed as a creative hub and hosts a variety of activities.

This marks the increasing interest of Antwerp in its suburbs. Similar to the estates during the Renaissance, the city is expanding its influence beyond the ring road. Additionally, the currently vacant Petroleum Zuid is said to become a hub for sustainable technologies.

*Add buildings in Petroleum Zuid*

The metallurgical industry, now known as Umicore, is also making efforts to become sustainable. Among other initiatives, Umiore is creating a green buffer zone. In order to do so, it has bought out 200 homeowners adjacent to the industry and demolished their houses.

*Remove top part of the chimney, add Umicore's new headquarter and take out housing in Moretusburg*

Hoboken is currently facing the decline of its industry, which once served as the heart and soul of the community but also contributed significantly to air, water, and soil pollution. The story of Hoboken is a story of the coming of outside forces, ideas and people shaping the community, landscape and city and in return being shaped by Hoboken. However, as these influences depart, Hoboken's unique identity is slowly merging with that of Antwerp. These successional interrelated actions can be understood as tides moving in and out. In their wake, they have created a diverse and layered collection of spaces and communities known as Hoboken.

*Final image*





*A movie by Barten Jip Verschoor, Merle Schmidt-Jürgensen,  
Lance Schroten and Bérénice Demiddeleer*



This historical perspective helps us to understand Hoboken as a dynamic environment shaped by diverse forces that require our constant attention. Recognising this complexity encourages us to think more deeply about how we live, interpret and reshape the city today. Moving forward, our focus is drawn to the people who inhabit this place, shifting from historical patterns to the individuals who embody and challenge them. In the next chapter, we explore the stories that give Hoboken its voice, asking not only what this place has been, but also what it is becoming.

# 02

ITS PEOPLE





## **If the past shapes the stage, then who moves across it, and how?**

Let's turn our attention to the people of Hoboken. Together, we'll explore how daily routines, memories, and quiet rituals shape the way places are lived and remembered. Which streets feel like home? Which corners hold a story? And what about the parts that go unnoticed, yet carry deep meaning for those who move through them every day?

To begin, I reached out to residents from different backgrounds and generations. With the support of local networks like *Heemkundige Kring Hobuechen 1135*, I was able to connect with people whose voices help bring the district to life.

Some of these conversations became longer journeys. With Lisette, I drove through streets mapped by memory, where even the smallest landmark held significance. Johan spoke about growing up here, and how he now works to protect the nature that shaped him. Karin and Jean-Paul welcomed me into a home they've made their own, layering care over a place that didn't always feel like theirs to begin with.

This chapter isn't just about collecting stories. It's about listening closely to how «home» is created through encounters, routines, resistance, and care. Sometimes it's loud, other times quiet. It can take the shape of a walk through the polder, a shared meal, a protest, or a song.

As you read, think about your own places of meaning. What makes you feel rooted? What parts of your neighborhood are part of your story — even if they don't appear on any official map?

## Interview Guide: Understanding Everyday Life, Public Space, and Home

### 1. The District – Perceptions, Places, and Practices

Understanding how residents perceive and move through their neighborhood.

- How would you describe your neighborhood to someone who has never been here?
- What made you choose to live in this area?
- What's in front of and behind your home?
- Can you describe your street? What does it feel like? (Would you feel comfortable drawing it?)
- Who else lives in this street/building? Do you know your neighbors?
- What are your favorite places in the neighborhood, and why? (Can you show them on a map or sketch them?)
- Are there places you tend to avoid? Why? (Map/draw if helpful)
- What, for you, makes a public or shared space feel welcoming?
- Do you have any personal memories tied to public places here?
- Have you seen changes in public/shared spaces over time? What would you like to see improved?
- Do people interact much in public space here? Why or why not?

### 2. The Action Space – Everyday Movements and Social Routines

Exploring how space is used in daily life, both inside and outside the home.

- What kinds of activities do you usually do in your home?
- Can you walk me through a typical day – from your bedroom to other parts of the house or shared areas?
- What about the outdoor areas around your home – how do you use the front and the back?
- Is there a specific spot in your house or building where you feel most comfortable or spend the most time?
- Where do you usually do your shopping or errands?
- Where do you usually meet people – formally or informally?
- Do you tend to use the same paths or places when moving through the neighborhood?
- Are there spots, indoors or outdoors, that are important to your routine or social life? What do you do there? (Would you like to show them on a map or during a walk?)

### **3. The House – Spatial Layout and Domestic Life**

Looking at the living situation and the spatial configuration of the home.

- Can you describe your current living situation (house, apartment, etc.)?
- What kind of building do you live in? (e.g. detached, row house, apartment block...)
- How many rooms are there? (Bedrooms, living areas, bathrooms, etc.)
- Can you describe or sketch the layout of your home? Does the layout support your sense of comfort or belonging? Why or why not?

### **4. The Home Range – Personal History and Definitions of Home**

Diving into personal notions and emotional connections to home.

- Have you lived in other places before? Where?
- Have you ever had to leave a place you considered home? • How did that feel?
- What does “home” mean to you? Can you give examples?
- Where would you say your home is – is it a place, a feeling, a memory?
- What feelings or emotions do you associate with the word “home”?

### **5. Make It Your Own – Personalization and Adaptability**

Addressing how residents shape their space to reflect their identity and needs.

- What makes your space feel like your home?
- Are there things you’ve done to personalize your space – like decorations, furniture, or small rituals? Why those?
- Have you ever modified or adapted your living space to suit your needs or feel more at home?
  - If yes, what kind of changes did you make?
  - If no, is that something you’d like to do if you could?
- Would a house or apartment that allows for more flexibility or easy changes interest you?

What questions would you ask?

This guide offers a framework, a set of suggested questions designed to explore how people live, move, and make meaning in the spaces they call home. But it's just a starting point.

Every conversation is different, and so is every place. These questions can and should be adapted to fit the context, the person in front of you, and what you are seeking to understand. Sometimes a single answer opens up an entirely new line of inquiry. Other times, what's not said can be just as telling.

Use this guide as a companion, not a script. Let it help you listen more closely, stay open, and respond with care. Ultimately, the goal is to reflect with the person you're speaking to, and to begin seeing space through their eyes.

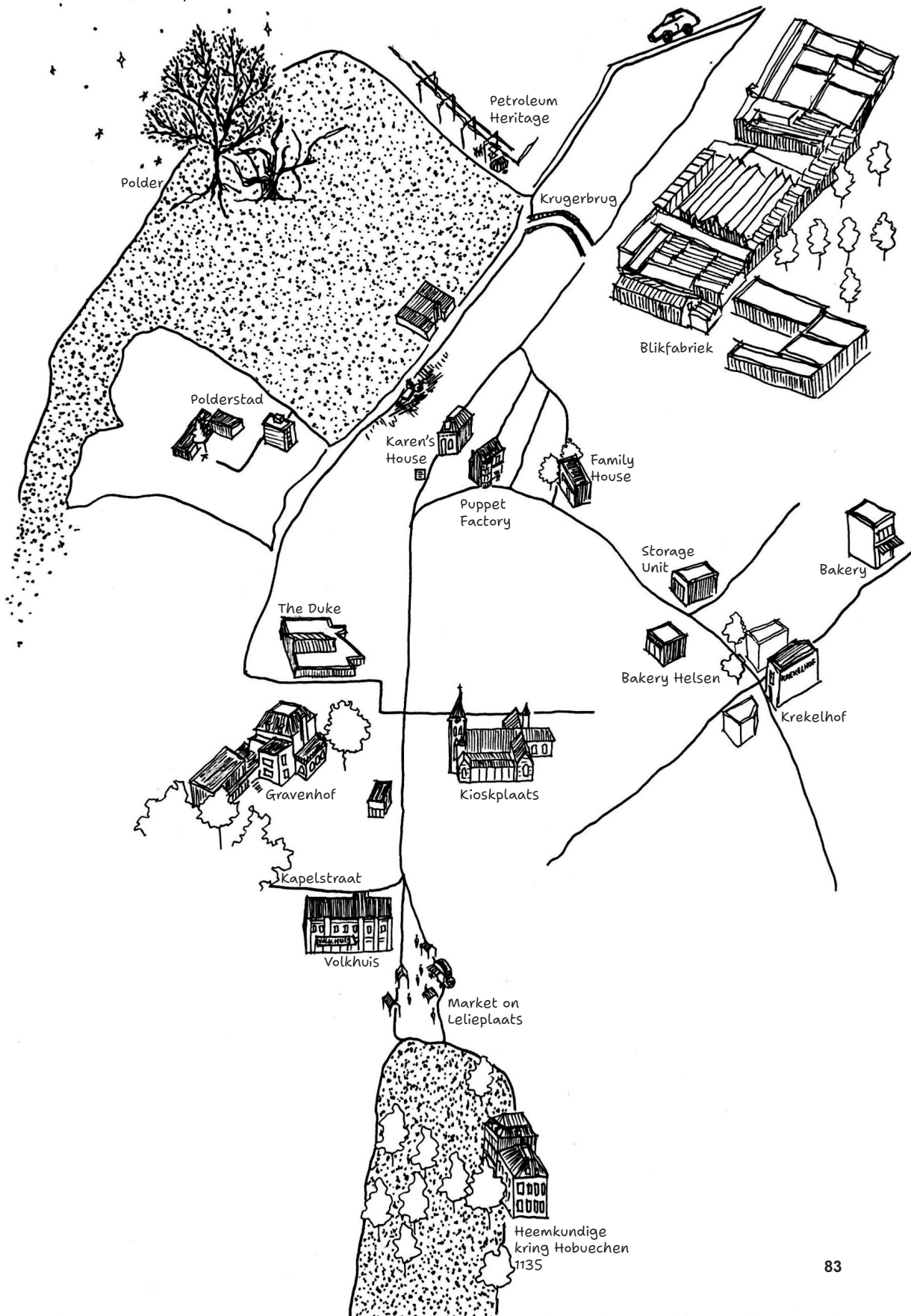


Using it as a starting point, I was led to three stories that unfolded into shared explorations. With each conversation, walk, or gesture, places gradually transformed as streets became storylines, and familiar corners turned into emotional landmarks.

What follows are maps drawn not just from space, but from memory and experience.

Each map is paired with a small booklet, a narrative woven from the voices of Lisette, Johan, Karin, and Jean-Paul. These materials don't aim to represent all of Hoboken, but offer glimpses into how a place is lived, remembered, and made home, one story at a time.





# Where Memory Lives

Hoboken Through Lisette's Eyes





Darts Club

De Kiekers

*It was just past eleven when I saw Lisette arriving in her little red car at the entrance of the Blikfabriek. She parked casually on the sidewalk, stepped out with a big, welcoming smile, and greeted me warmly. Together, we went inside, hoping to find Karen, an artist from Blikfabriek. Karen had agreed to join us to help me navigate the Dutch conversations, but she was also eager to learn more about Lisette's life stories. Interestingly, the two of them are connected, as Karen is renting Lisette's house.*

*Moments later, Karen arrived, locking her bike with a quick smile. We settled at a sunlit table on the terrace and I introduced my research project about memory, place, and belonging. Lisette, relaxed, began to share fragments of her life in Hoboken.*

*Lisette's roots run deep in Hoboken soil. Her mother once worked at the Blikfabriek, back when it was a bustling metal factory, infamously nicknamed the «finger thief» because so many workers lost their fingers to the machines. «That was before,» Lisette said, almost wistfully. Both of her parents were born here, and the family house, bought by her grandmother in 1887, had passed through generations before finding its way to Karen.*

*She had lived many lives in this place. In the 1980s, she managed a café after realizing that if she could run a café for someone else, she could certainly do it for herself. Balancing motherhood with work, she promised herself that she would never become the absent parent described in the song «t Sleutelkind.» When her son came home from school, she was always there for him.*

*As we flipped through old archival photos, Lisette's eyes lit up. She recognized streets, buildings, and markets, weaving*

together the past and present of Hoboken.

After a quick visit to Karen's atelier, we set off to rediscover Lisette's meaningful places. First stop: the Polder.

Lisette led us into the vast green expanse, sharing memories along the way. She showed us the Krugerbrug, which was once a car bridge and is now a cycle path. She pointed out that one bridge was no longer enough.

The Polder was, and still is, her sanctuary. She walked her dog there three times a day, sometimes to take her mind off an argument with her husband, sometimes just to breathe. Here she sang, wrote poems and cried under the stars. It was her place of peace, her place of dreams. Even today, she still takes occasional walks along the Scheldt.

This place has a deep meaning for her. Next to a pair of trees, one alive and the other dead, she scattered the ashes of her cousin and her mother. «That's my tree», she says in a low voice, slowing the car as we approach. The deep connection between memory and place was clear.

On the way back, we stopped to admire a few cows and spotted a lost South American bird perched on one of them. Even in this quiet place, nature has found a way to tell new stories.

Not everything was idyllic. Trash dumping near the tracks angered Lisette, contrasting sharply with her cherished memories. She blamed the complicated recycling system, which illustrated how policies, places, and people were out of sync.

We passed the United Cap Company, which was once part of the old Blikfabriek, known as Résibel at the time, a fragment of Hoboken's industrial past that has been relocated.

At 12:30, we reached Polderstad, where Lisette currently lives. Her apartment, located in one of the first buildings of Polderstad, overlooks the green polder she loves. Practical, modest, and cozy, her home was filled with her son's belongings, but she was happy. «I have everything I need,» she said simply.

She showed us her basement storage, which resembled a mini-supermarket of supplies. «I could survive a war,» she joked proudly. Practicality, survival, and a connection to place are deeply intertwined in her life.

When I shared old urban models of Polderstad's development, Lisette and Karen laughed, relieved that some of Braam's boldest proposals never materialised. They teased me, saying that I knew so much about Hoboken that I should consider moving there.

When I asked if she loves living in Hoboken, Lisette answered quietly, «I don't know anything else. I am used to Hoboken.»

We explored further, visiting the only tavern in Polderstad, which is busy in the summer; the new playgrounds; and old butcher shop and bakery that have now been closed for a while and replaced by houses. Gravenhof, once a police station, is now a cultural center where Lisette enjoys shows.

At Kioskplaats, Lisette proudly pointed out the bakery known for the best apple pancakes. Nearby on Kapelstraat, which was once a bustling shopping street, many shops now stand half-empty. The neighborhood had evolved, with new businesses, often run by Moroccan and Turkish families, bringing a different energy to the area. «It's changing,» she said, mixing acceptance with nostalgia.

*At Leliesplaats, the Monday market comes to an end, adding another layer to the daily life of Hoboken.*

*The stories deepened as we visited Karen's home, the house once owned by Lisette's cousin. She was proud of how Karen and her partner had transformed the derelict place into a cozy home. «I fulfilled my cousin's wish,» she said, smiling. Lisette was born in that house, and stories of hidden wartime weapons in the garden added another layer of mystery. A summer project, we joked, metal detectors ready!*

*Nearby, a memorial project had placed remembrance tiles honoring resistance fighters, including Lisette's family. Standing there, Lisette pointed out her father's childhood house and recounted the tragic story of her uncle, shot by the Germans in his own garden after being betrayed by a neighbor. Hoboken's streets are filled with her personal history.*

*Later, over coffee in the Kregelhof café where Lisette once worked, her memories flowed freely. She painted vivid pictures of spontaneous street parties, rice fights, dancing until dawn, jukebox songs, and a community where people laughed together and helped one another.*

*«This was when Hoboken was Hoboken,» she said, her eyes distant. The fusion with Antwerp in 1983, she believed, had drained the neighborhood's soul along with local amenities like the police who knew everyone by name.*

*Recently, she learned that Kregelhof would close its doors forever. It was an emotional moment, making the loss of another piece of her history. Still, Lisette's connection to the place remains deeply alive.*

*«If I could go back in time, it would be to when I worked here. Every day was a party,» she said, her voice thick with emotion.*

*We ended our day at a restaurant on Kioskplaats, savoring lunch as Lisette ordered her usual dish (even if it wasn't on the menu anymore). Habits, memories, small rituals are all part of feeling at home.*

*Wandering familiar streets, Lisette's Hoboken revealed itself not just as a place, but as a living, layered memory: markets and polder walks, lost shops and new faces, laughter under fireworks by the Scheldt, poetry whispered in the night. In every corner of Hoboken, Lisette has a story, and in every story, a deep and lasting sense of belonging.*

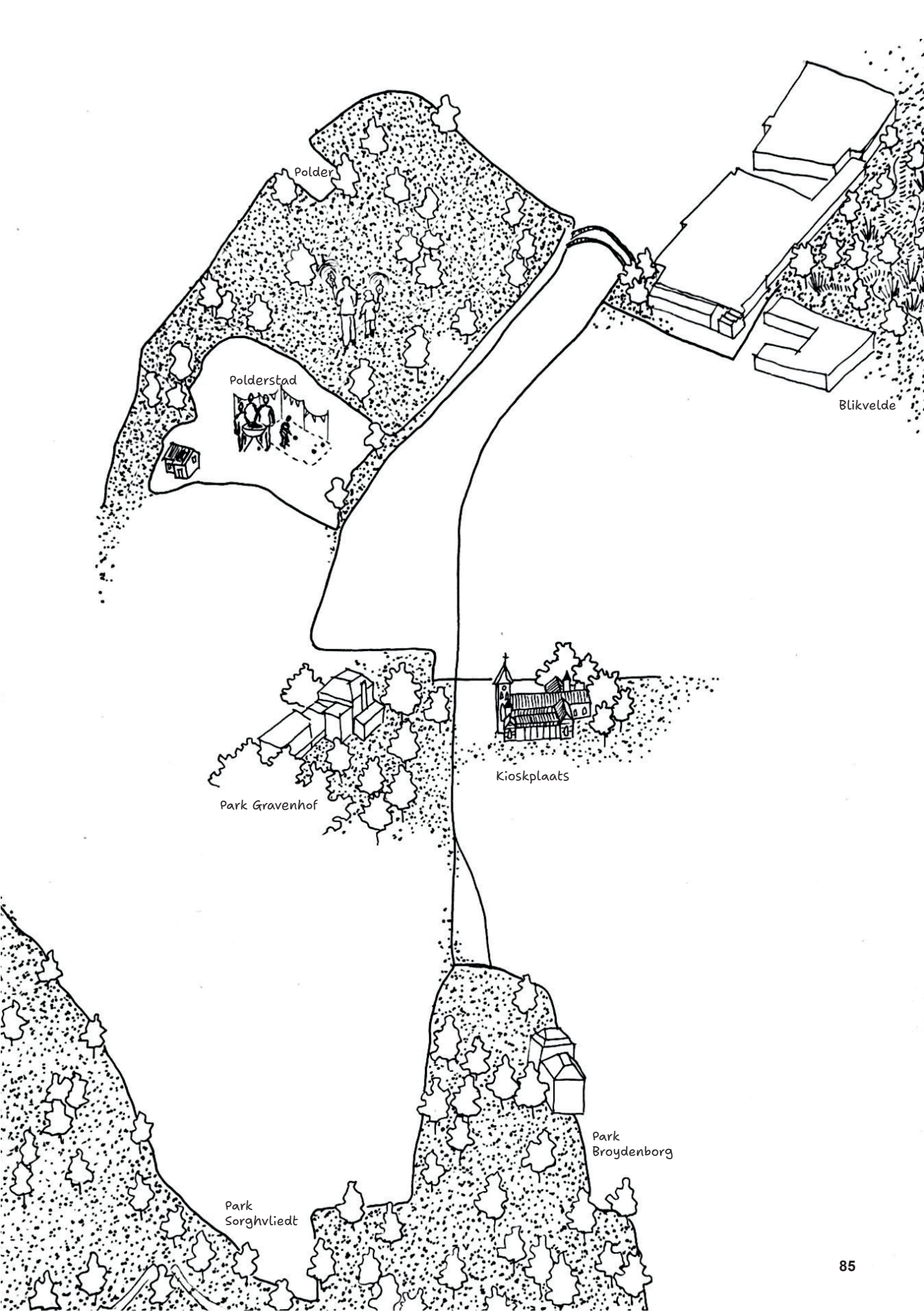
*For Lisette, home is about buildings and people, memories, routines and emotional ties. She may not feel comfortable with all the changes around her, but her life remains deeply rooted in the fabric of Hoboken.*

*As she dropped me off at the station, promising me pancakes for next time, I realised that this was not just a visit through the neighbourhood, but a journey into living memory. Through Lisette's eyes, Hoboken was not just a place, it was a life.*









Polder

Polderstad

Blikvelde

Park Gravenhof

Kioskplaats

Park Broydenborg

Park Sorghvliedt

# Growing Up and Growing Roots

Johan's Hoboken





«If we were walking through the Polder today,» Johan said, «I'd show you where it all started for me.» Johan's life is deeply intertwined with Hoboken, particularly with the quiet neighborhood of Polderstad. His parents bought a house there when he was a child, and his most vivid memories are rooted in its streets and green spaces. Although he briefly left as a young adult, he always knew he would return. Once he could afford it, he bought a home there, allowing his children to grow up in the same neighborhood where he had once played. In Polderstad, Johan feels safe, at ease, at home.

The urban layout of Polderstad plays a significant role in how life unfolds there. It's a dead-end neighborhood with only one way in and out, resulting in little traffic and allowing kids to play safely in the streets and creating natural opportunities for connection and trust. But the urban fabric alone is not enough. «The social life is possible thanks to both the layout and the people living here,» Johan explained. Community thrives: every summer, neighborhood volunteers organize pétanque games, social gatherings, and walks into the Polder nature reserve. This year is special as they celebrate 60 years of Polderstad's existence. Relationships among neighbors run deep. «Everyone knows each other, or at least knows someone who knows someone. If you do something good, or bad, the whole neighborhood knows within 48 hours,» Johan laughed. He believes that good neighborly relations create a sense of security and belonging: «If I go away for work, I know people are watching out for my house.»

For Johan, the Polder holds some of his most powerful memories. It was wilder in the past, less accessible and less neatly managed. He recalled an adventure from his childhood: «When I was about ten, we had family visiting. We went for a walk in the Polder at night, carrying torches. But the torches went out. No flashlights or cell phones back then. We

got completely lost.» Wandering in the dark, they eventually stumbled across the old railway line that still runs through the nature reserve, following it home, laughing and relieved. That wild, untouched landscape became part of his mythology of Hoboken: a space of adventure, freedom, and connection.

When asked if he feels he belongs to Hoboken, Johan's answer is nuanced. «On a global level, I'm Belgian. In Belgium, I say I'm from Antwerp. But once I am in Antwerp? I'm absolutely from Hoboken.» His attachment is local and personal, a bond to the streets, parks, and people he knows intimately.

Johan noted that Polderstad itself has remained relatively stable over the decades. New families are moving in, revitalizing the area as original residents age. He is not alone in this sentiment; many who grew up here eventually return when they can. In the broader Hoboken area, changes are more noticeable. Johan appreciates improvements like better biking infrastructure and gradual investments in green spaces such as Green Zuid. He observes the decline (and slow renewal) of the once-vibrant Kapelstraat shopping street. Demographically, he feels that despite perceptions of significant shifts, things have remained relatively stable. «Maybe it looks different, but the Moroccan community, for example, was already there 30 years ago,» he remarked. On the subject of safety, he expressed a personal sense of unease, particularly at night, and wondered whether this feeling was due to changes in the world or simply to growing old.

Not too far from Polderstad lies Blikfabriek. However, Johan's relationship with it is somewhat distant. He is aware it hosts workshops, a bike and adventure park for kids, and various initiatives, but he has rarely set foot inside. His connection to Blikfabriek mainly comes through his volunteer work with Natuurpunt, where he maintains the Blikvelde. «The

permanent activities are mainly for kids and when there's something for adults, I just don't hear about it,» he stated. «Unless it's in collaboration with Gravenhof, I don't even know where to find the information.» His memories of Blikfabriek go back to its industrial days: factories producing cans and tires, structures that were impossible to miss when crossing the now bike-only bridge. After the factories closed, the site stood empty for years, a silent giant waiting for a new narrative to unfold. He is pleased that something is happening there and hopes that redevelopment will put nature first, reconnecting the polder to the rest of Hoboken.

For Johan, place and people are inseparable. «It's a little bit of both,» he said. «A good place helps build a good community. A strong community can make a not-so-great place livable. But ideally, you need both.» Polderstad, with its familiar faces, safe streets, and surrounding green spaces, seems to have achieved that delicate balance. It's a place of memories, daily rituals, neighbourly encounters, shared adventures and countless stories like Johan's. A place where, even as time passes, the sense of belonging remains authentic.







Primary School  
Kiel

Primary  
Schools

Blikfabriek

Polder

Primary  
School

Bar  
Madam

House and Garden

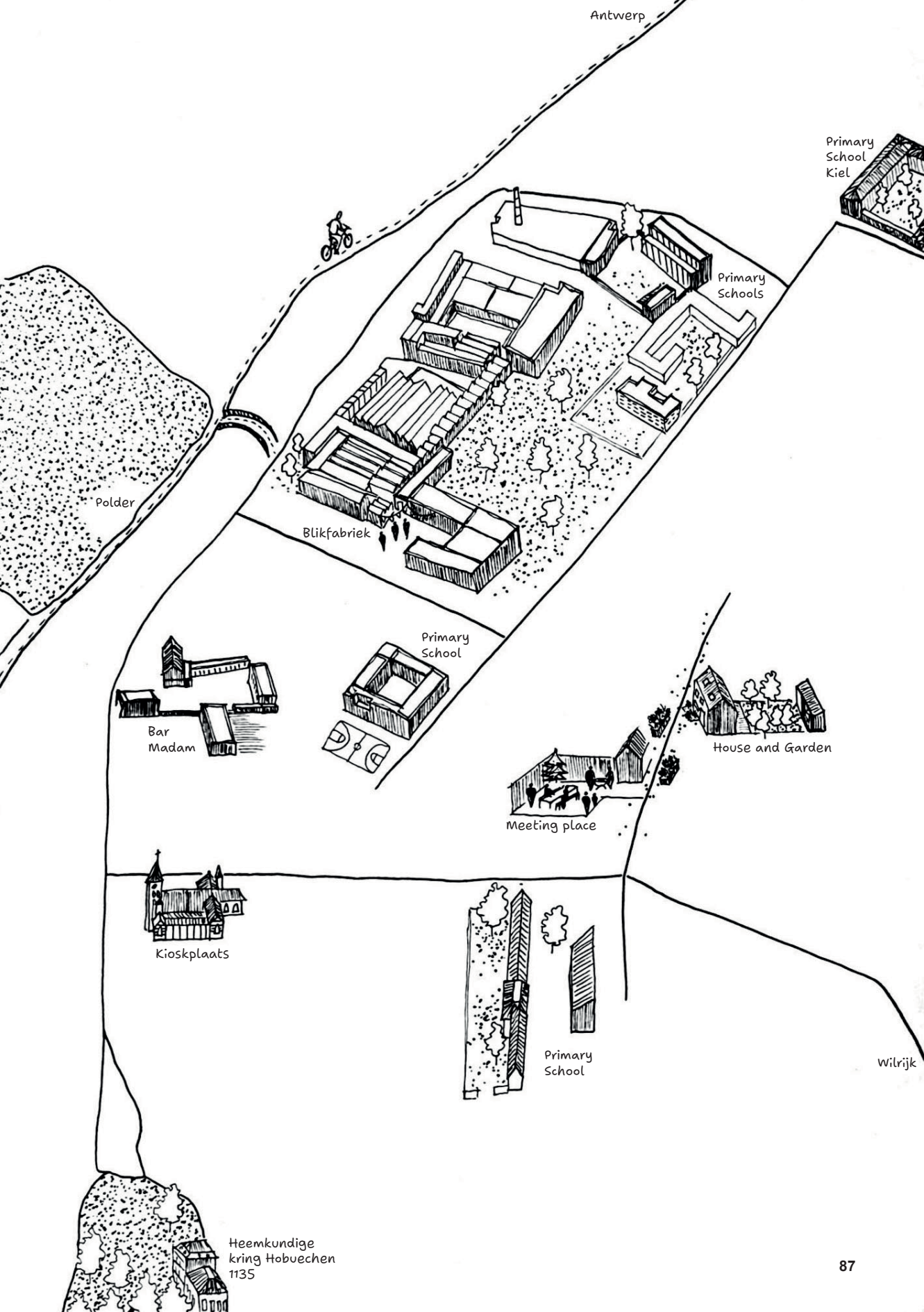
Meeting place

Kioskplaats

Primary  
School

Wilrijk

Heemkundige  
kring Hobuechen  
1135



# **Building Home and Navigating Change**

Karin & Jean-Paul's Hoboken





Karin arrived in Hoboken twenty years ago, drawn by the affordable houses compared to nearby neighborhoods. Born in Wilrijk, not far away, moving to Hoboken felt practical rather than emotional. Even after two decades, she admits she does not fully feel like she belongs. Old habits are hard to break: when she needs to shop, she still returns to Wilrijk. Yet Hoboken's location close to Antwerp and the surroundings by bike and car, remains ideal.

Jean-Paul, her partner, has lived in Hoboken for just three years. His connection to the neighborhood is even less strong. He moved simply because Karin lived here. They had tried to find a new beginning together in Wilrijk, a place without Karin's memories, but couldn't find a house with a garden like the one they had. So they chose to stay and instead reinvented the house together, renovating it until it felt like their shared home. «We did it all together, what we wanted,» Jean-Paul said, «and now it is our house. But honestly, we could put the house elsewhere, it wouldn't change anything for me.» Having lived happily for twenty years in Borgerhout, he believed home was something you built with care and presence, not something the address alone could provide.

«You must make it yourself,» Karin explained. «The neighborhood matters too, of course, but if you only focus on what you don't like, you'll never feel at home anywhere.» For them, home is created through small gestures: filling the street with plants, choosing to see the positive sides of where they live. «The street is nice, the neighbors too,» she added with a smile. Jean-Paul, ever sociable, stressed the importance of neighbors. He still remembers fondly how, when he lived in Borgerhout, people would welcome each other on the street with food and laughter. Hoboken had some of that spirit too: a few years ago, a wedding was held on their street, and food was shared with the whole neighborhood.

Yet time has changed the rhythm of their street. Many neighbors come and go, some houses changing hands every two years. With this constant flux, the neighborhood projects that once flourished have faded away. In earlier years, a strong group of about ten families organized flower pot projects, barbecues, flea markets, and even set up a massive Christmas tree together. Karin fondly recalled how their garden hosted the first neighborhood barbecue, which later grew into lively street events with long communal tables and shared meals. But as original families moved away and newcomers showed less interest in joining, the events diminished. «We used to be 30 people,» she said. «But when only 10 or fewer came, it didn't feel right anymore.»

It wasn't only personal initiative that kept connections alive. City initiatives like street-cleaning projects, where participants received flowers in exchange for their efforts, provided joyful excuses to gather and chat. «We're a little village within our street,» Jean-Paul said. «Jacques, who lives a few houses down, is 75 and knows everything and everyone. He keeps an eye on things, making sure the street stays tidy. Just this morning, he told a woman off for leaving a broken vacuum cleaner outside.»

Both Karin and Jean-Paul agreed that good neighbor relations were essential to feeling truly safe and comfortable. Even Karin, who considers herself more introverted, admitted it feels better when you know the people around you, when you can ask for help if needed. Jean-Paul insisted, «It's important to talk with neighbors and to talk through problems too, not just ignore them.»

Unlike others, they didn't feel the need for more public spaces to connect. Their social life took place at home, inviting

neighbors and friends into their house and garden. «For me, it's okay like this,» Karin said. «I don't need to go out looking for conversations. I'm still working. I don't have the time. I have my house, my garden.» Jean-Paul added simply, «I have enough social contacts.»

Still, they acknowledged that Hoboken once had more local meeting places. Thirty years ago, their street alone had cafés, bakeries, butcher shops, a library, and three friteries, only one remains. Without those everyday meeting points, spontaneous encounters became rarer. Today, if they want a drink, they cycle to Kioskplaats or Blikfabriek. «There aren't many places left in Hoboken,» Jean-Paul said.

When asked why they described Hoboken as boring, they answered without hesitation. It needs more green parks, better upkeep of houses, and greater cleanliness. «Some people just don't care,» Karin shrugged. Yet they also acknowledged the city's efforts to improve public spaces. Jean-Paul mused that life here could use more cultural festivities, more local animation. «If we want to do something now, we take the bike to Antwerp,» he said. «We have our habits. But if there were more things happening here, we would go.»

They both held a soft spot for Blikfabriek. They had attended concerts, dance performances, and markets there, often stopping by in summer to have a drink. Jean-Paul even celebrated his retirement party at Blikfabriek, catered by Barmadam, a beloved local initiative. «It's a beautiful space,» they said. «It's a shame it will soon be destroyed to make room for housing.»

Karin had discovered Blikfabriek «by accident». For years, she thought it was still an abandoned industrial site until one day she stumbled upon its revival. Jean-Paul knew it through his

work: as a school principal, he had taken students there to use the adventure courses built for children. Through their experiences, Blikfabriek became a rare place where culture, creativity, and social life merged in Hoboken.

Their reflections on education echoed their feelings about neighborhood life. Karin remembered how her children attended a local primary school, once a beautiful mix of nationalities. Over time, as class sizes grew and the composition changed, more Flemish families moved their children to other schools. «It's sad,» Karin said. «We're losing the multicultural mix. It's so important for kids to grow up together, to see that differences don't matter.» Jean-Paul, having worked as a school director in both Kiel and Hoboken, had seen similar patterns. «Integration», he said, «only happens when people meet and talk. Otherwise, communities drift apart behind walls of misunderstanding.»

In their conversation, the history of Hoboken emerged too. Jean-Paul recalled that before the fusion with Antwerp, Hoboken was fiercely independent, its schools staffed by locals, its culture tight-knit but sometimes closed. For many older generations, Hoboken carried the stigma of being a «workers' town,» shaped by the metal industries. Karin remembered telling her mother she had bought a house here and how her mother had been shocked, still holding onto the old prejudices. «But in the end,» she smiled, «it's the people who matter.»

Jean-Paul couldn't agree more. «You can have the nicest house,» he said, «but if you're not integrated into the local culture, you will never feel truly at home.» Hoboken, for all its imperfections, had people who feel real, grounded, open.

*«If I had to choose,» Karin added quietly, «I would choose Hoboken, for its people.»*





Take a moment to draw, map, and/or write down the places that shape your daily life or hold special meaning for you.

Could you map your places  
of belonging and memories?



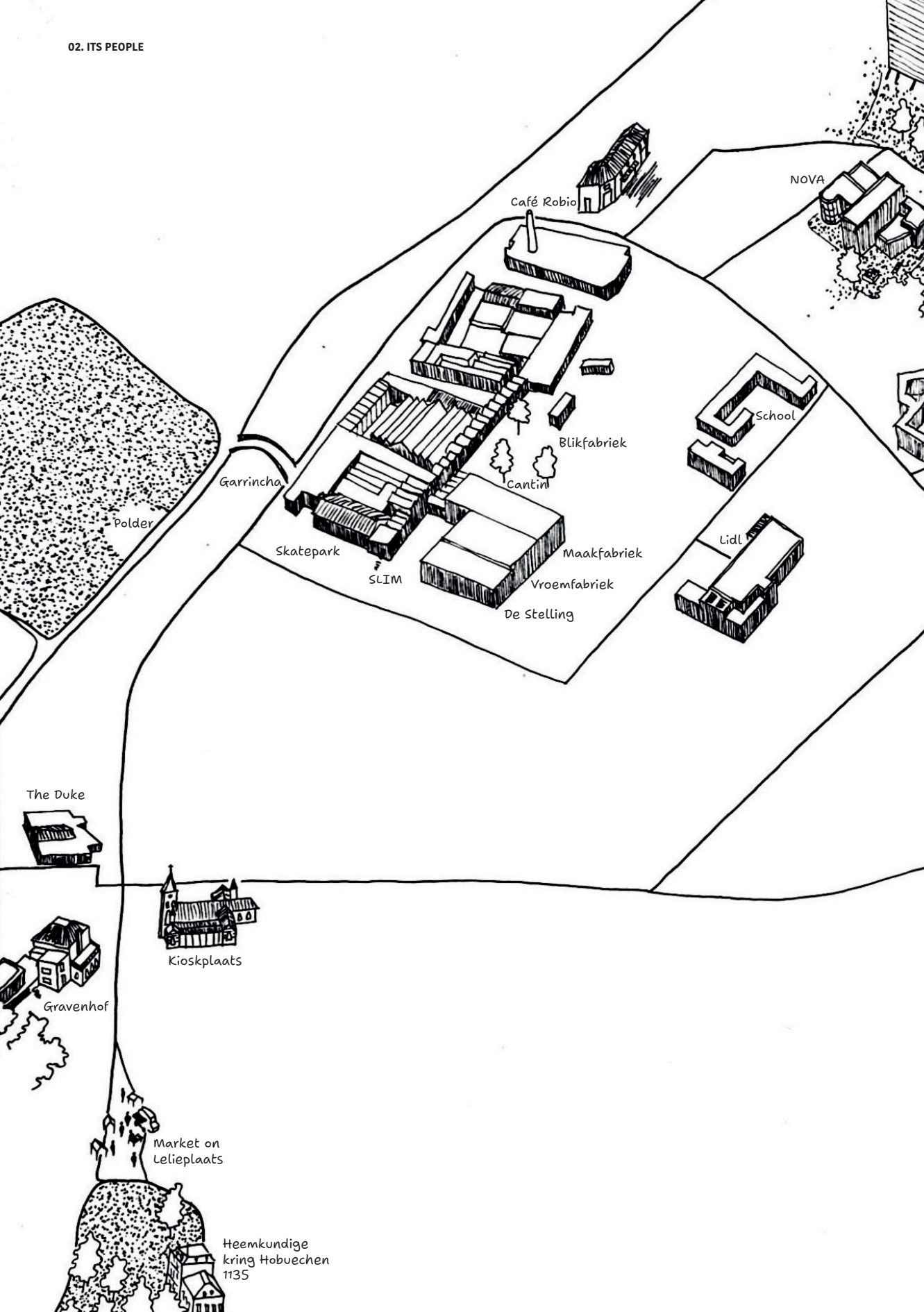
## **Mapping Everyday Anchors of Belonging**

A walk with Diether through Kiel and Hoboken

The interviews and online questionnaire revealed a wide range of significant places and daily routines: cafés, markets, parks and streets where informal encounters take place. However, I also wanted to explore how community ties are actively created and what kinds of spaces or projects facilitate this process. While the questionnaire enabled me to reach many older Flemish residents (mostly between the ages of 50 and 85), it proved more difficult to make contact with other groups, such as newcomers or younger people. This prompted me to embark on an exploration with Diether, a social worker from SAAMO, whose long-term involvement in Kiel has helped me to discover projects and places that might otherwise remain overlooked.

Together, we mapped the spaces where people come together and co-create. We looked at the places where people meet, and at how and why these meetings happen, or don't happen. We explored cultural venues, markets, social organisations, schools and green spaces. Above all, the walk helped me to recognise the contrasts between the two districts. For example, Kiel has many community gardens, often supported by SAAMO's efforts to establish a relationship of trust with the residents, whereas Hoboken has none (Stad Antwerpen, n.d.). This is not simply a technical difference; it reflects deeper dynamics of participation, accessibility and social inclusion.

What follows are sketches and annotations of each place we visited, a visual and spatial representation of how connections are currently practised and where there is greater potential.



Garrincha

Polder

Café Robio

NOVA

School

Blikfabriek

Cantin

Lidl

Skatepark

Maakfabriek

SLIM

Vroemfabriek

De Stelling

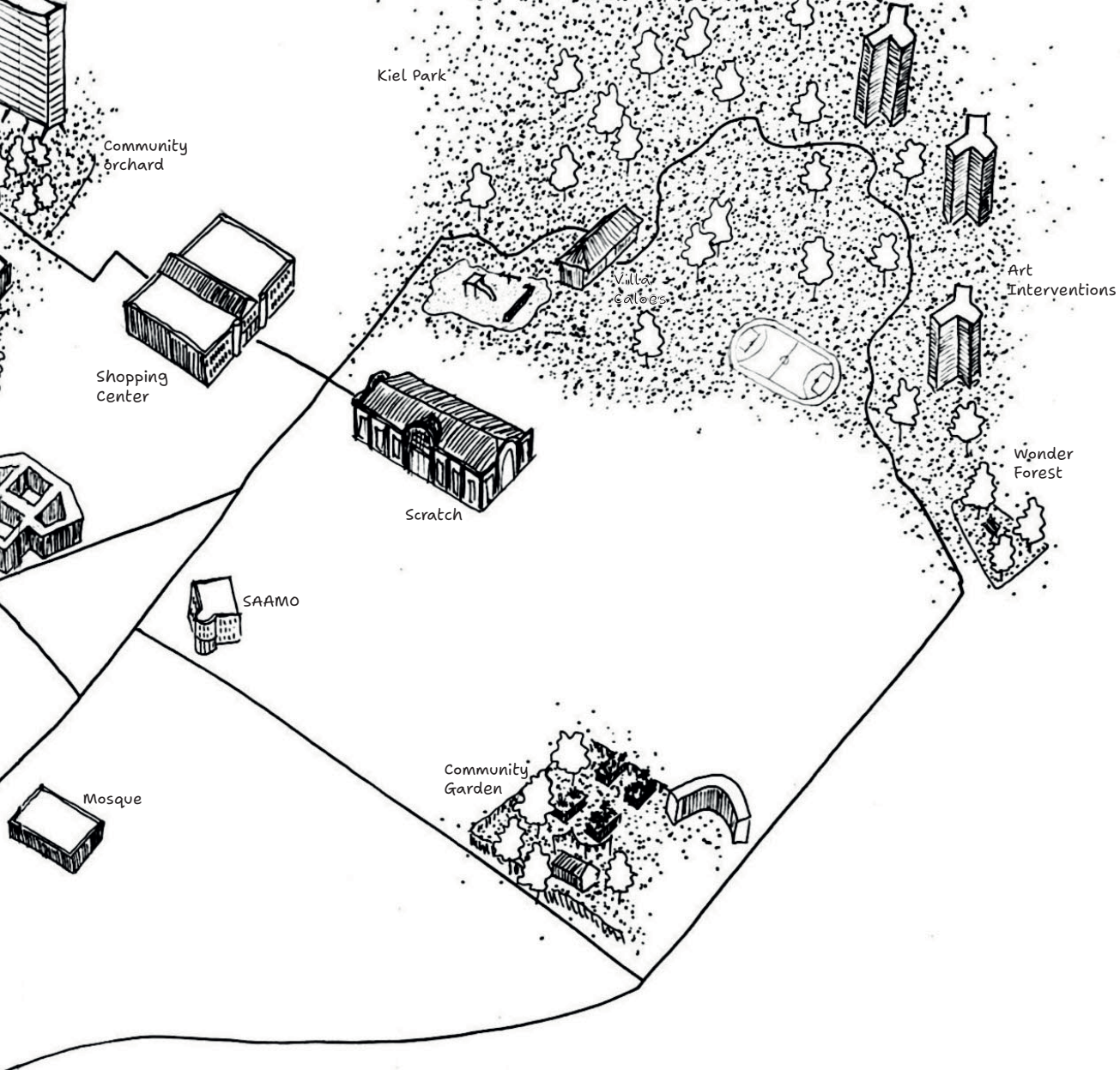
The Duke

Kioskplaats

Gravenhof

Market on  
Lelieplaats

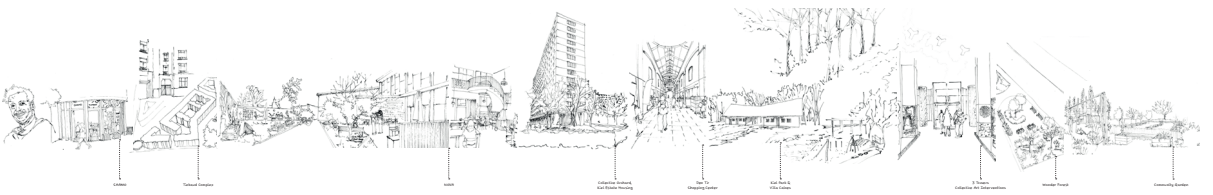
Heemkundige  
kring Hobuechen  
1135



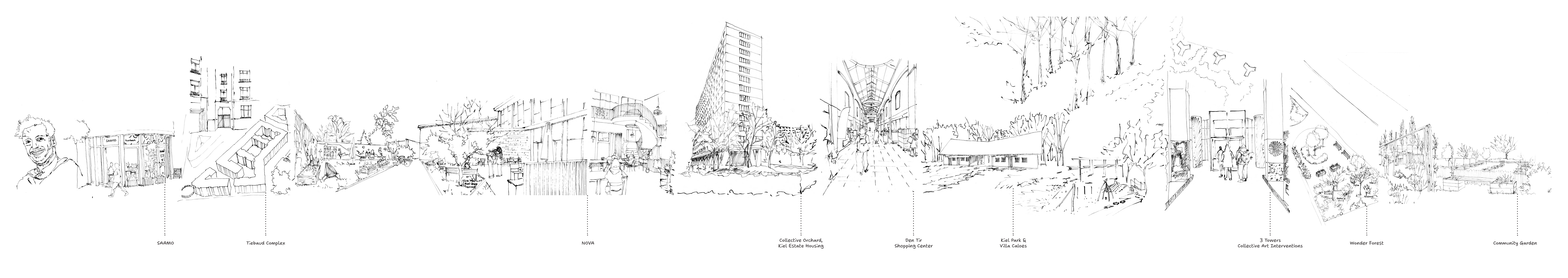
## Mapping Everyday Anchors of Belonging

A walk with Diether through Kiel and Hoboken

Made by Author







SAAMO

Tiebaud Complex

NOVA

Collective Orchard,  
Kiel Estate Housing

Den Tir  
Shopping Center

Kiel Park &  
Villa Caloes

3 Towers  
Collective Art Interventions

Wonder Forest

Community Garden



Heemkundige kring  
Hobuechen 1135

Gravenhof

Blikfabriek

Vroemfabriek

Maakfabriek & de Stelling

Cantin

SLIM - homework school

Skate Depot

Garrincha

Café Robio

School

Supermarket (Lidl)



## The Acts of Walking & Mapping

The walk and resulting mapping revealed both the existing social infrastructure and the gaps still waiting to be bridged. While places like Blikfabriek and Gravenhof function as cultural anchors, they often remain inaccessible or unfamiliar to many. As Karen described, even a dynamic space like Blikfabriek can feel confusing or closed to outsiders, despite its openness in theory. Yet initiatives such as SLIM, responding directly to local needs like school support, show how small, precise actions can begin to reconnect people to place.

What became increasingly clear was that belonging is not merely a matter of physical proximity or well-designed spaces. It relies on continuity, trust, and the ability of people to shape the environments they live in. In Kiel, the presence of community gardens and long-standing social programs supports these everyday connections. In Hoboken, this sense of rootedness feels more fragile, fragmented — a patchwork of personal memories without a shared ground.

Through the simple act of walking, however, that ground begins to appear. Walking allowed me to inhabit the city slowly, attentively, and from below. It echoed what Michel de Certeau called a “tactic”, a way to navigate and resist the imposed structures of urban order, to reclaim space through lived experience (de Certeau, 1984). Like the *dérive* of the Situationists, my route through Hoboken became a drift through stories, routines, and subtle thresholds of belonging (Debord, 1956). These movements formed an alternative shaped by people’s memories, frictions, and desires.



In this way, mapping was not only a technical tool but a relational practice. It allowed the city to emerge as a dynamic narrative, woven through daily encounters.

It was this awareness of space as lived and evolving that brought me to the threshold of design. The question was no longer just where to intervene, but how to carry these traces forward into architecture. What follows is an attempt to do just that: to give form to the stories, gaps, and encounters revealed through walking, and to invite others into the act of shaping what comes next.

# 03

ITS POSSIBLE  
FUTURE





## From Stories to Space

If walking helps uncover stories, and mapping gives them form, then design asks: how can these stories evolve into places where people can truly inhabit?

Blikfabriek, a former industrial complex in Hoboken, provides both a physical anchor and a symbolic stage for this exploration. Once a production site, it is now a canvas for the collective imagination, temporarily activated by civic initiatives while on the brink of redevelopment (Antwerpen Morgen, n.d.). It is precisely in this moment of in-betweenness that the project's urgency emerges.

Drawing on insights gathered through interviews, mapping, and walking, this chapter proposes a possible future for the site, not as a blank slate, but as a continuity. It envisions a place where the traces of the past can meet the needs of today, and where architecture becomes a framework for new forms of home, care, and community.

The project does not aim to impose a fixed vision. Instead, it asks:

What if housing could grow with its residents?

What if architecture could remain open—flexible enough to adapt to changing needs and solid enough to foster a sense of belonging?



Aerial View (2016)  
(FelixArchief)





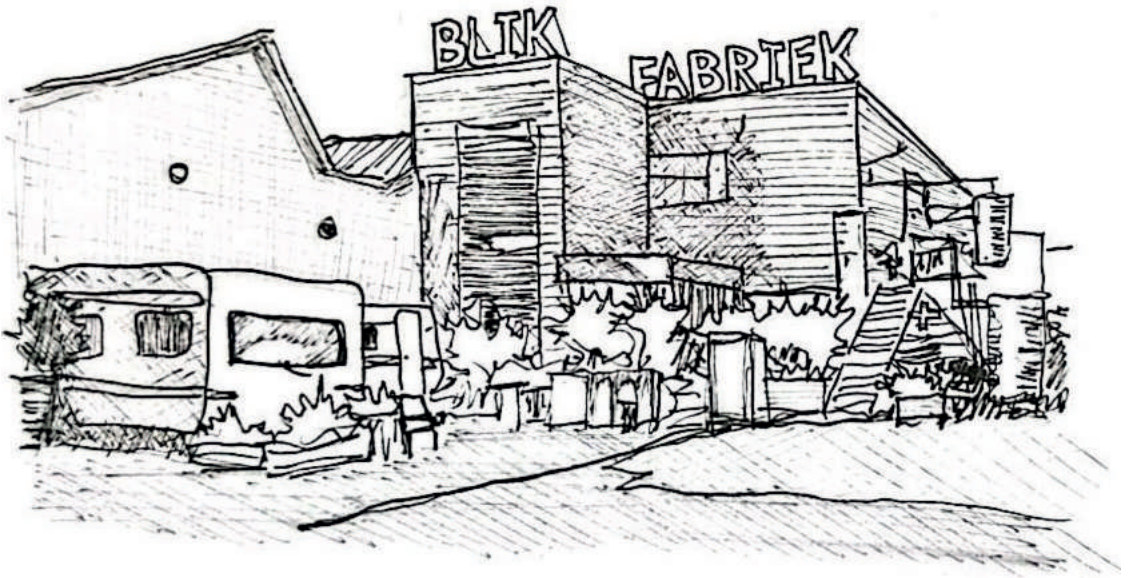
**WHAT  
CAN IT  
BECOME?**





1:25 000 - Hoboken map  
Focus on the Intervention Site  
Made by author

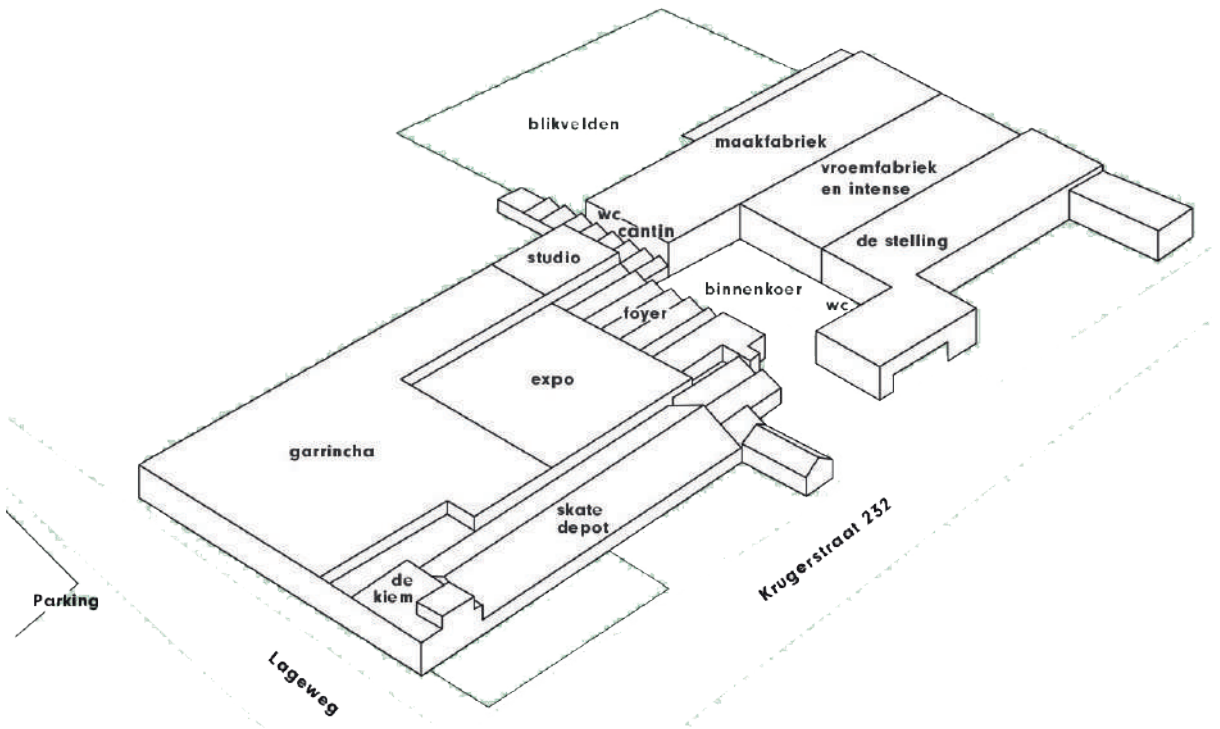


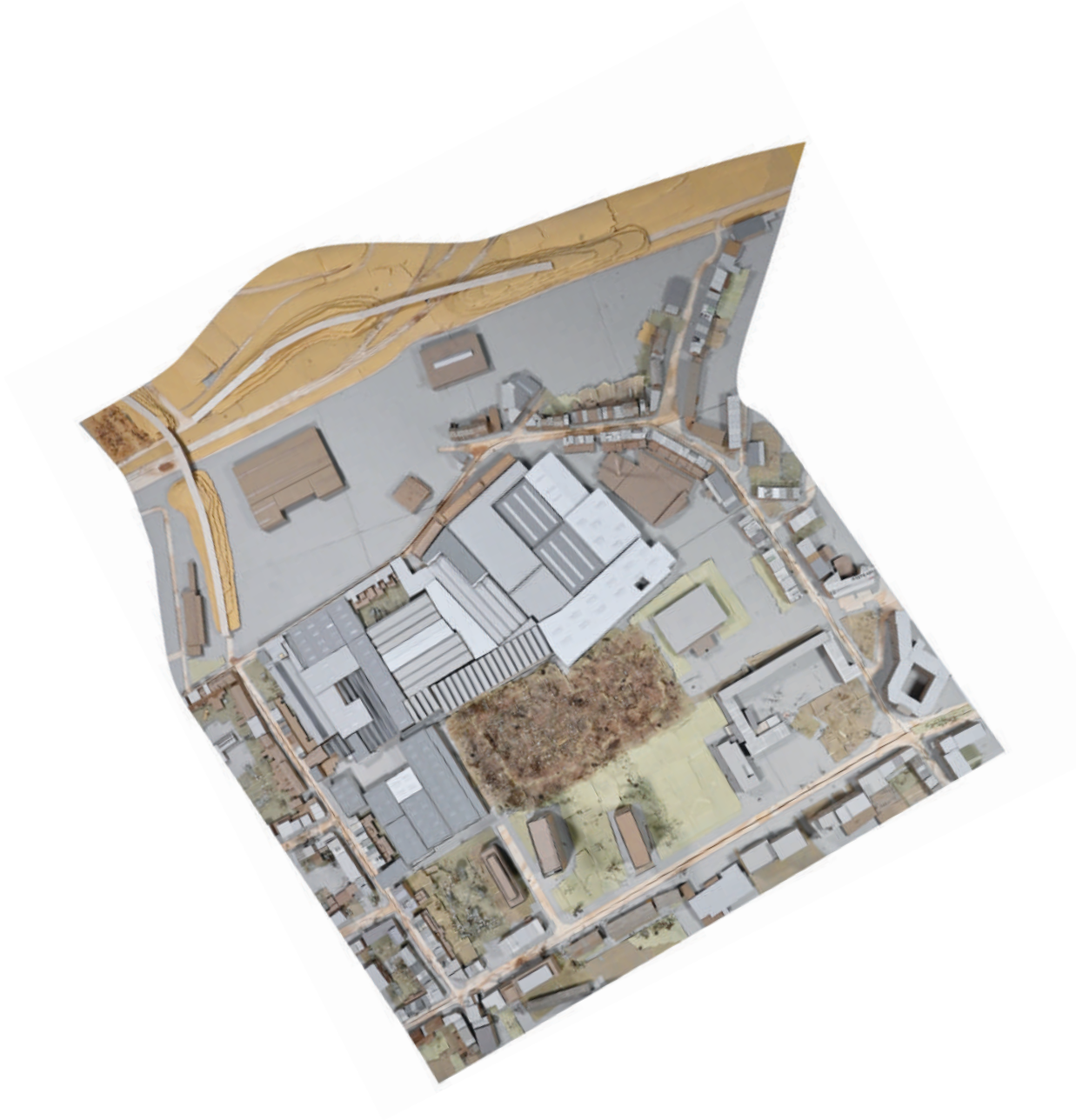


*“No urban site is ever blank”*

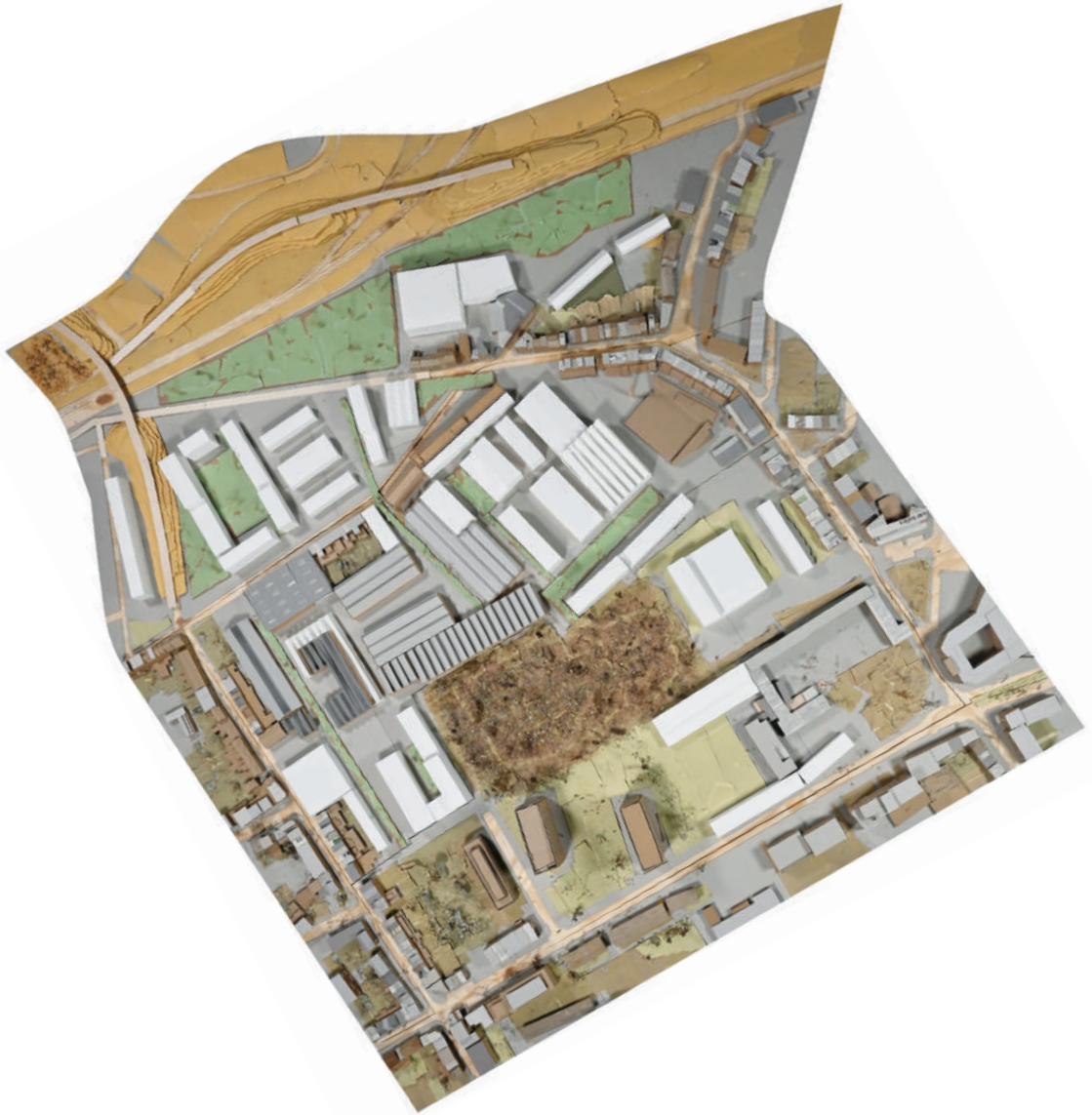
## Blikfabriek List of Activities

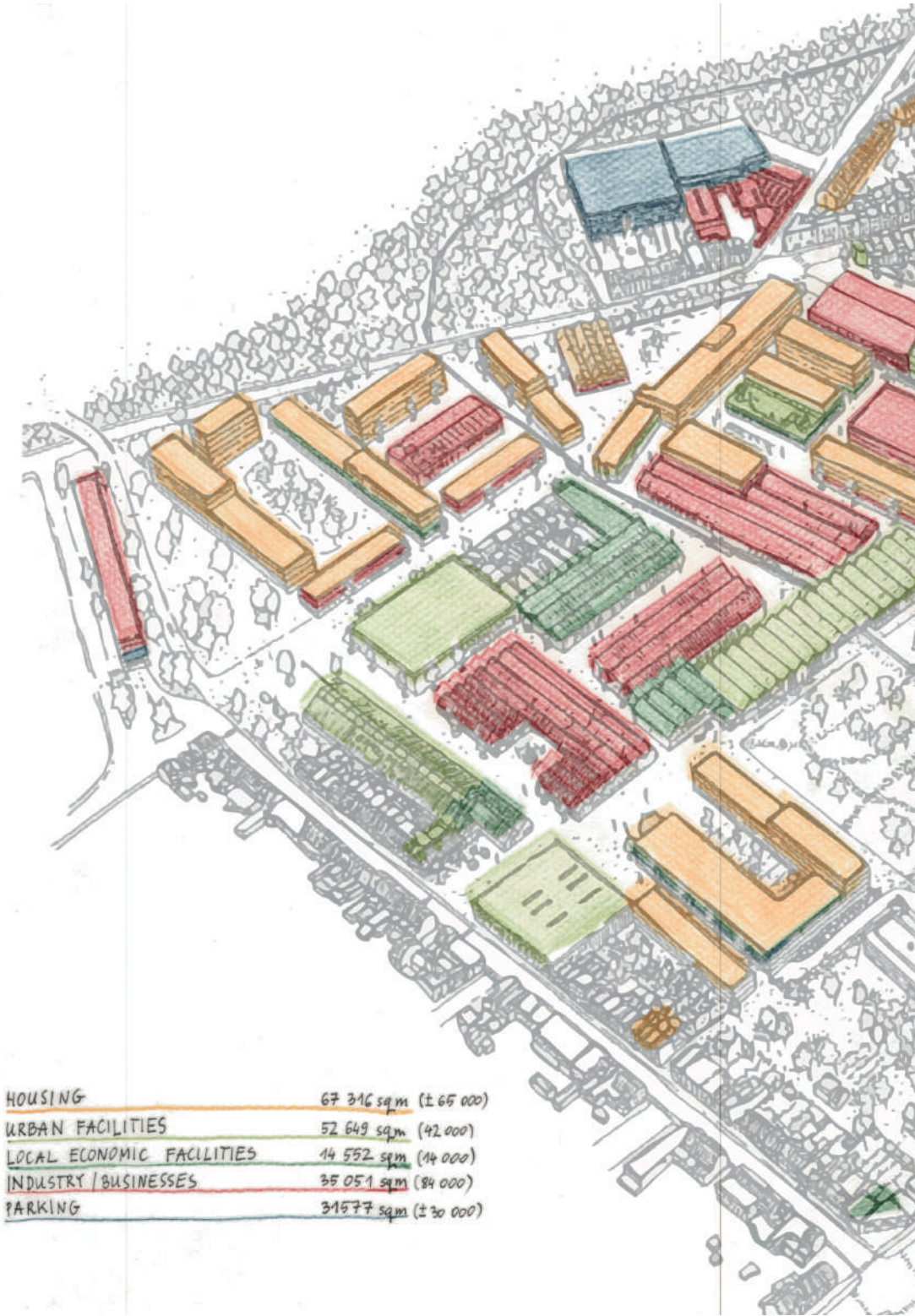
Cantin  
De Stelling  
Wildgroei  
Maakfabriek  
Garrincha  
Skate Depot  
Hoogteparcours & Vroemfabriek  
Pirre Kookt  
Wellnergy  
Mobilant  
Andy  
Slim Homework School  
Natuurpunt  
...



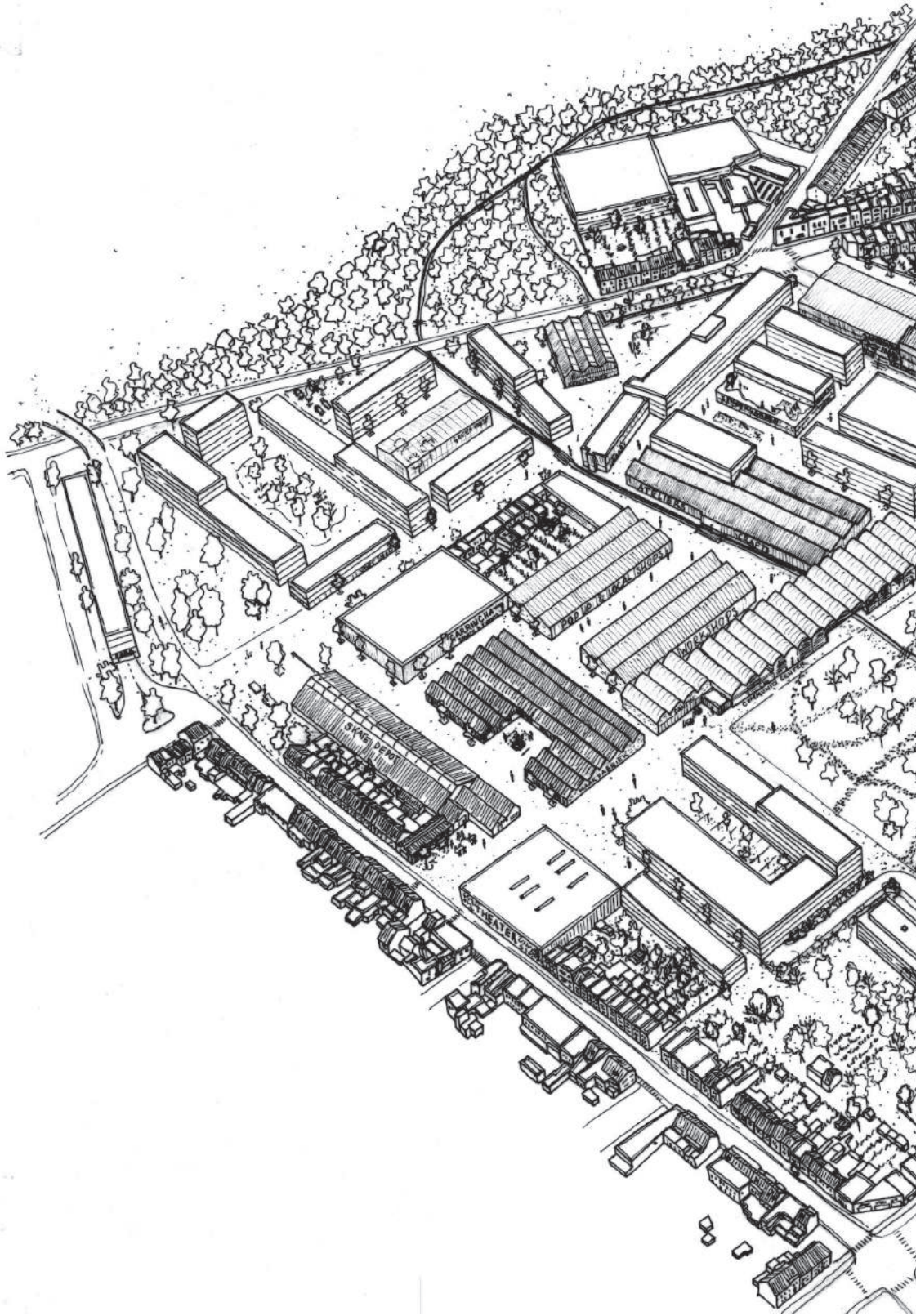


🕒  
1:333 - Site Model  
Existing situation  
Group Studio Model

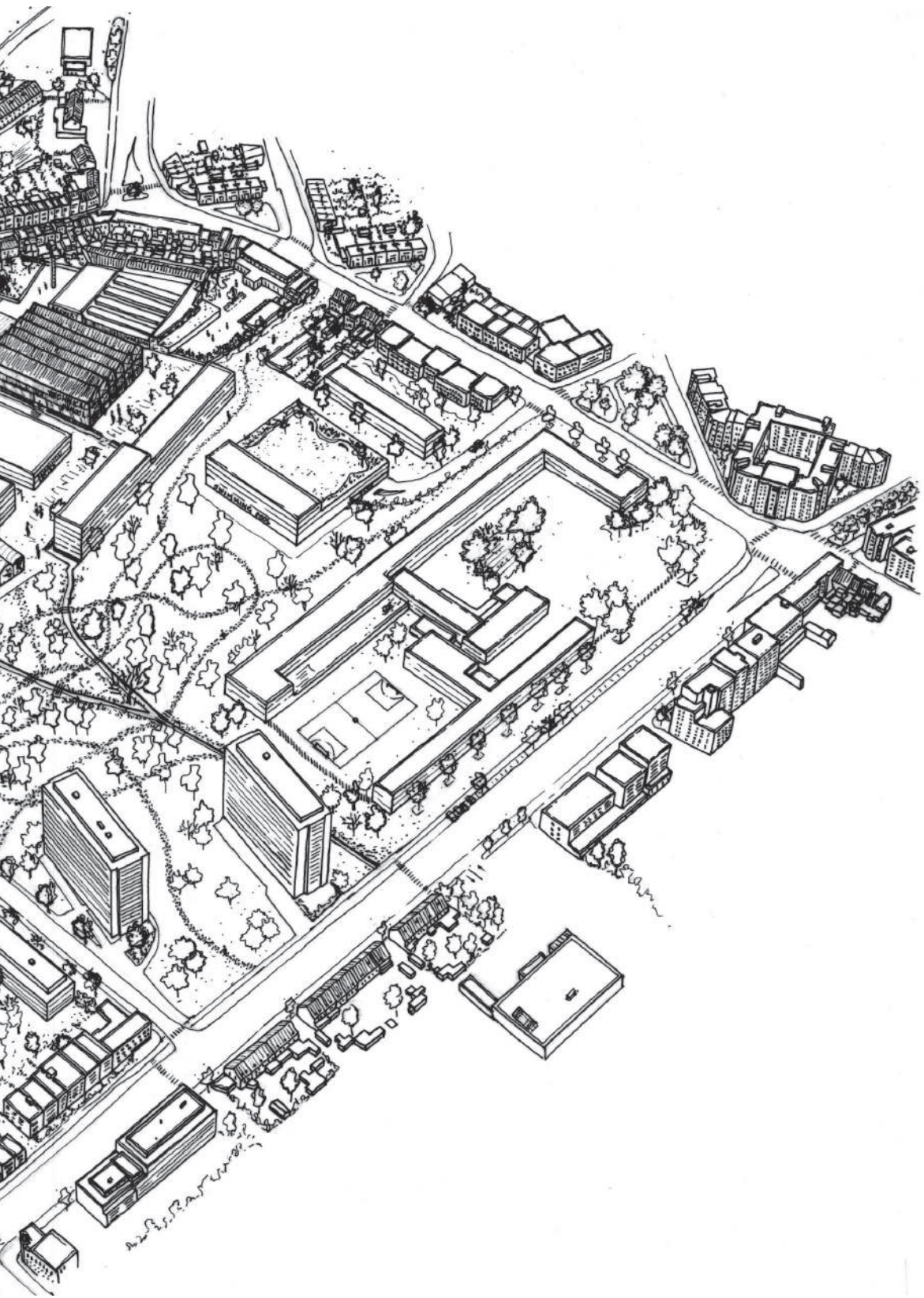






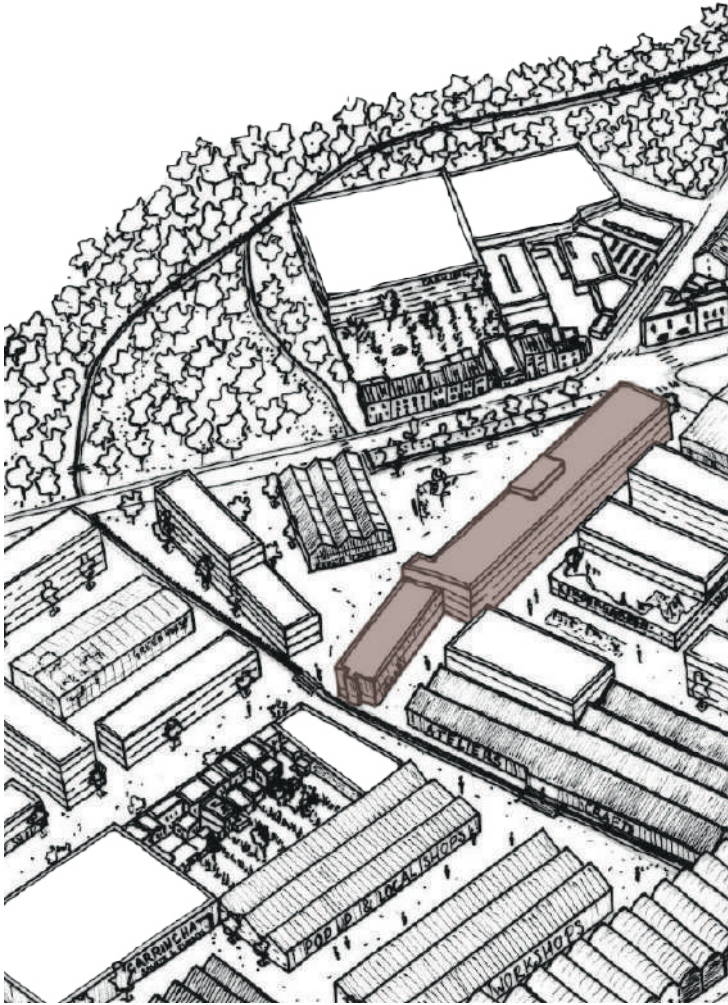


Masterplan Vision  
(made in collaboration with Julia Kudła and Max Obbink)  
Made by Author



The selected site project focuses on two existing buildings: the first office and concierge wing of the factory, built in 1924 and later extended, and the so-called “Social Building” (FelixArchief, n.d.) from 1960, which once housed the canteen, changing rooms, and administrative spaces for the workers. These two buildings mark the beginning and end of Blikfabriek’s industrial era and now serve as a departure point for reimagining its next phase.

Blikfabriek emerged as a recurring presence throughout the previous chapters, whether in historical records or in the personal stories shared by local residents. It appears as a place of labor and memory, a space of current social activity, and a site of nature and care. This layered significance makes it a shared reference point across generations. Today, the city of Antwerp recognizes Blikfabriek as a “community work organization,” (Stad Antwerpen, n.d.) stepping in where no formal alternatives, such as SAAMO, exist in districts like Hoboken. It is this continuity between past, present, and future that grounds the selection of this site for transformation.



*Where it all started...*



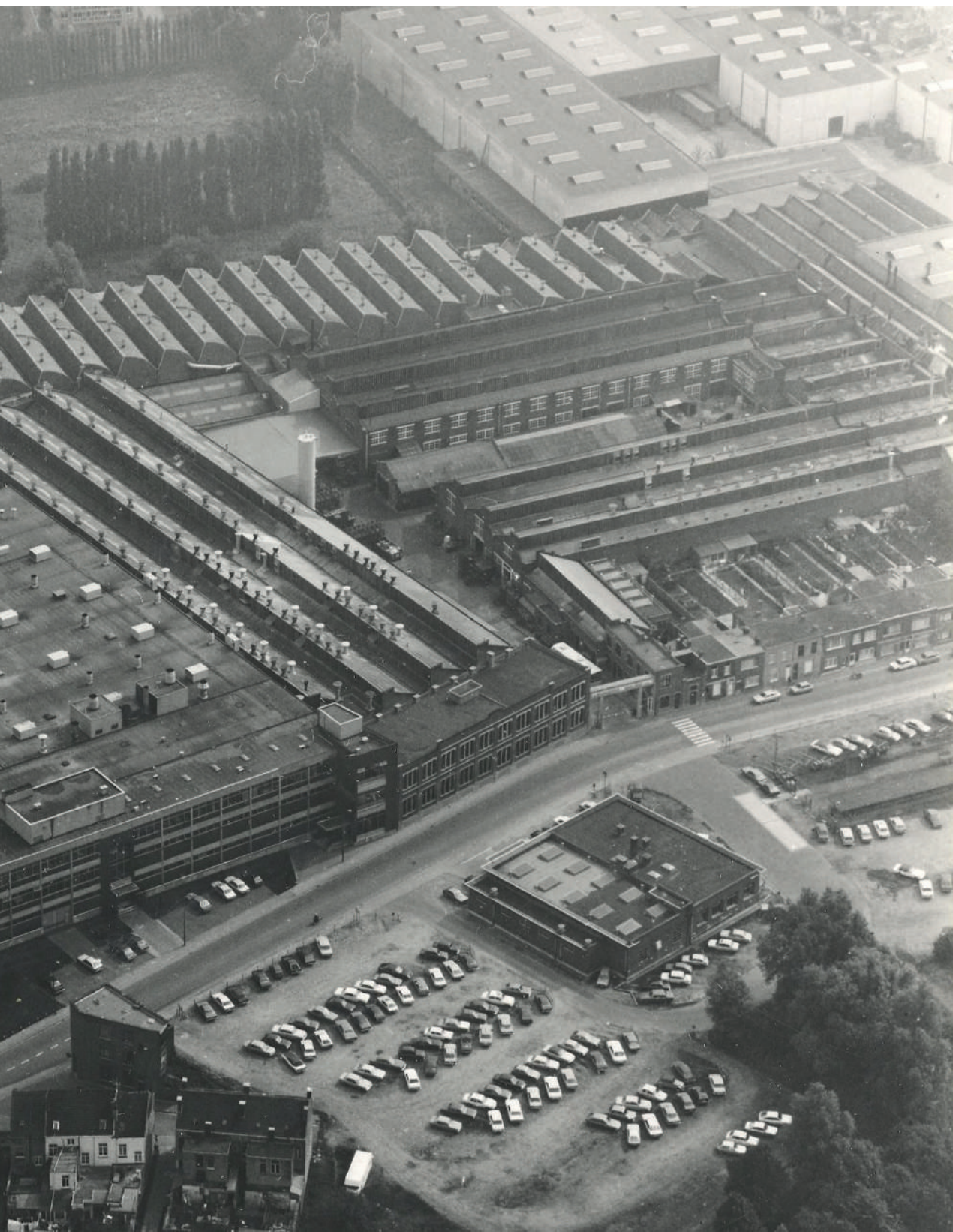
'Atelier et Fonderie Schippers & Podevyn', Lageweg  
Aerial Picture from 1962  
(FelixArchief)

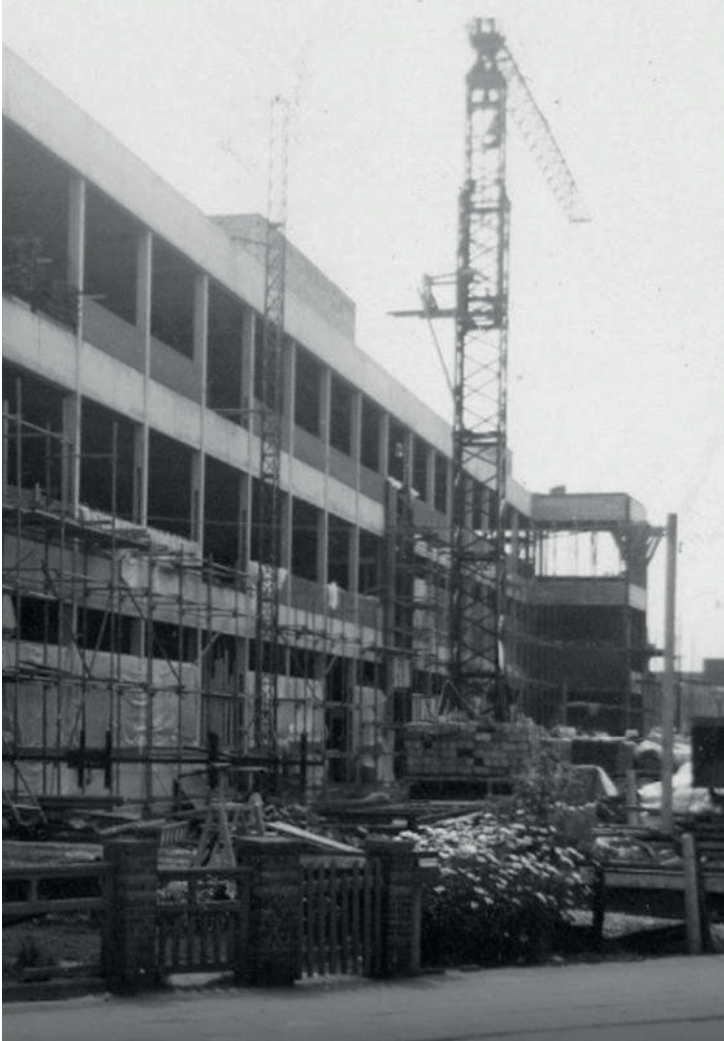


'Atelier et Fonderie Schippers & Podevyn', Lageweg  
Foundry - worker at work (n.d.)  
(FelixArchief)



Lemmerz Factory, Lageweg  
Aerial Picture from 1980  
(FelixArchief)





Lemmerz Factory, Lageweg  
Construction site, 1965  
(FelixArchief)



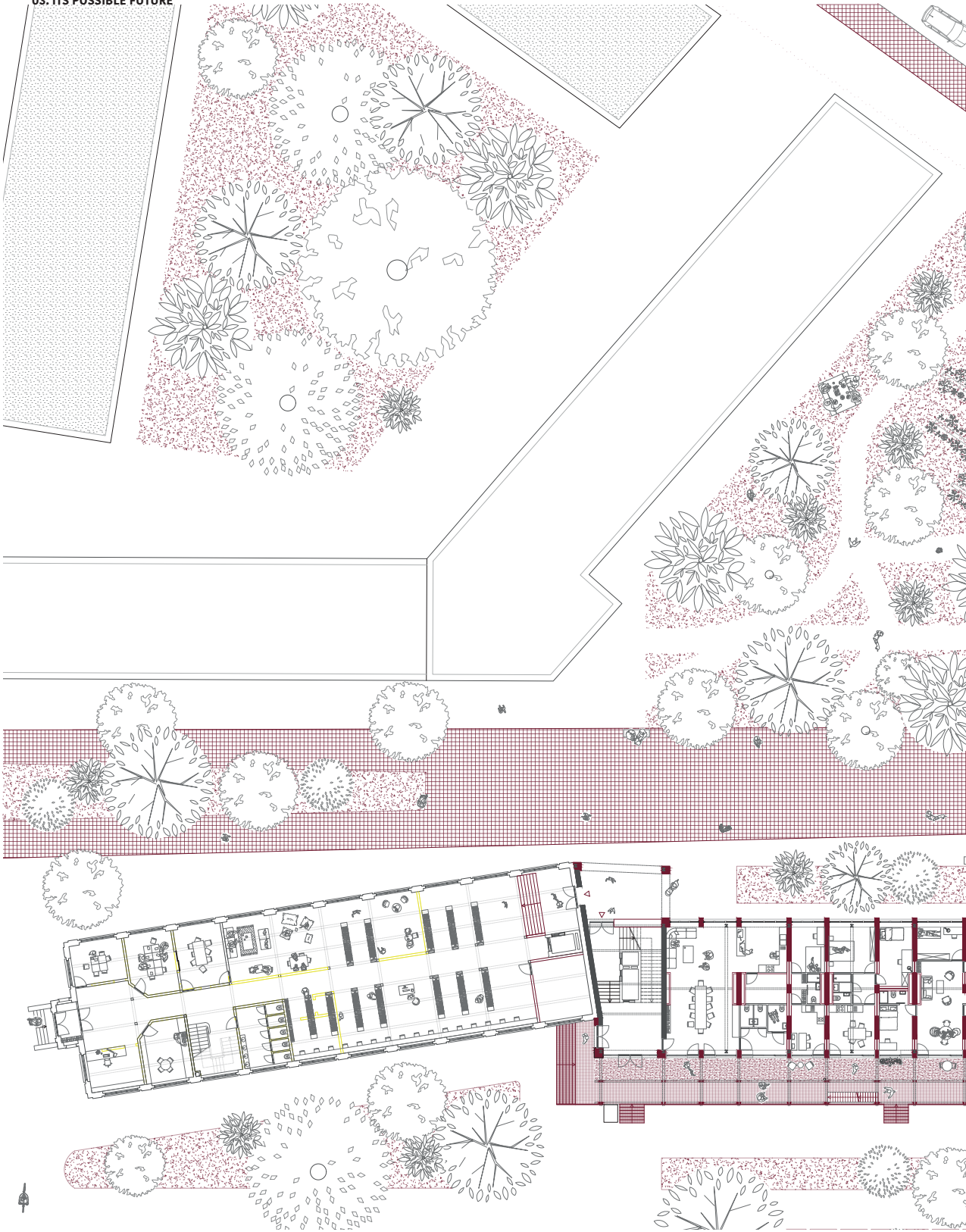
*Where it ended...*

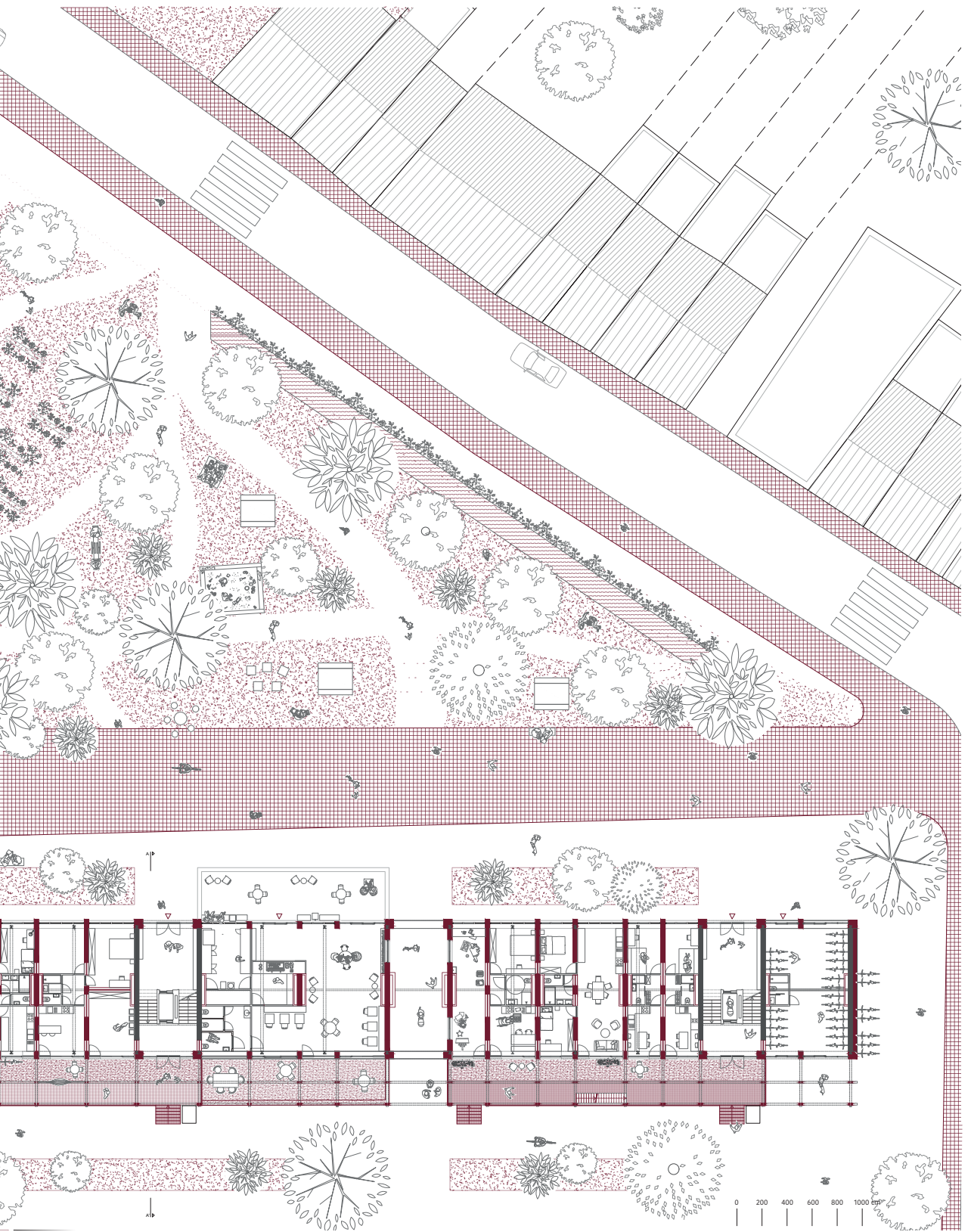
Last worker leaving the factory, 2008  
(Picture by Klaas De Scheerder in HLN)



Lageweg today  
Aerial Picture  
(Google Earth)







Site plan  
Made by Author

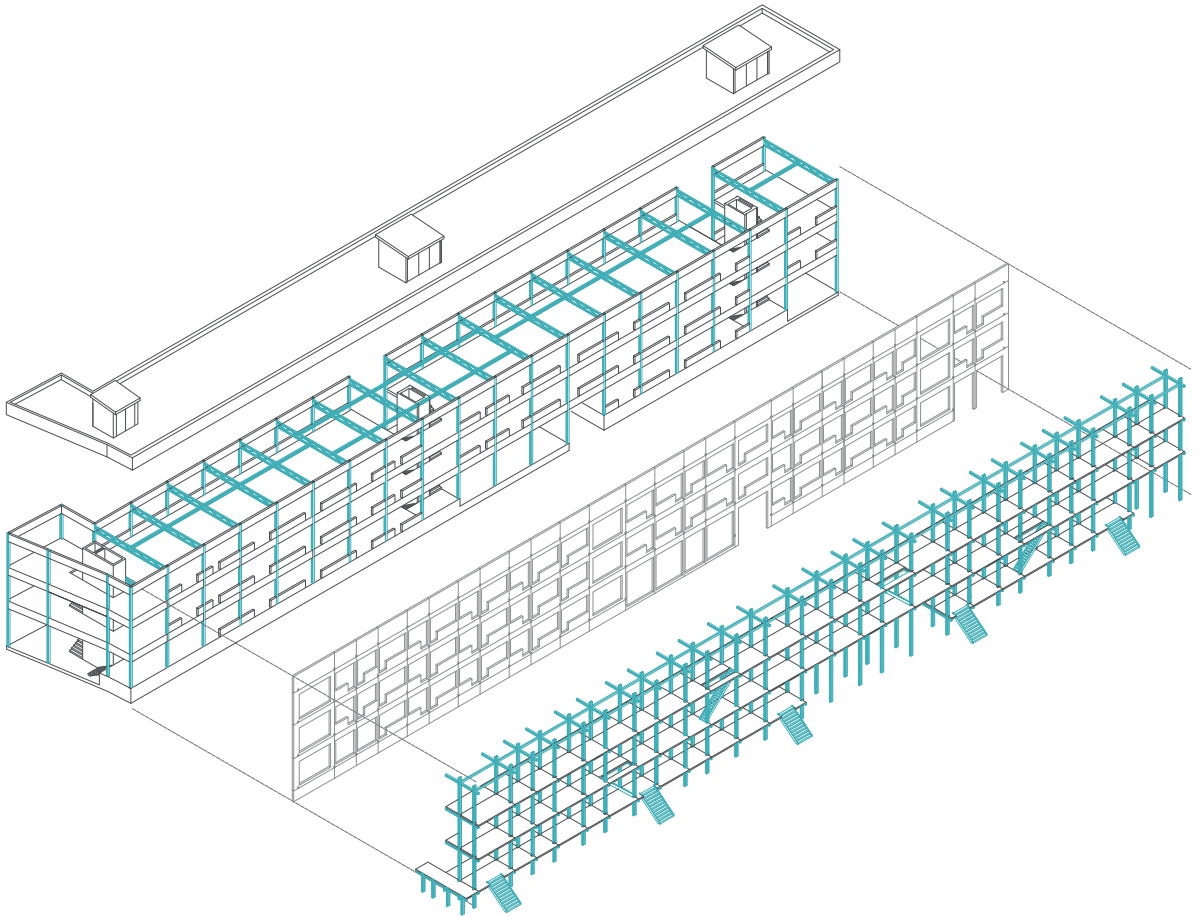


« We spend 87% of our lives inside buildings. How they are designed really affects how we feel, how we behave. Design is not just a visual thing. It is a thought process. It is a skill. Ultimately, design is a tool to enhance our humanity. It is a frame for life. »

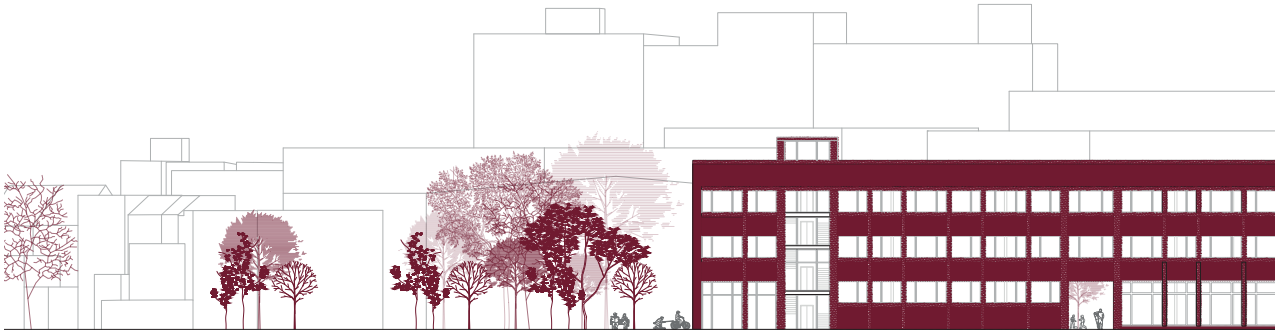
- Ilse Crawford-

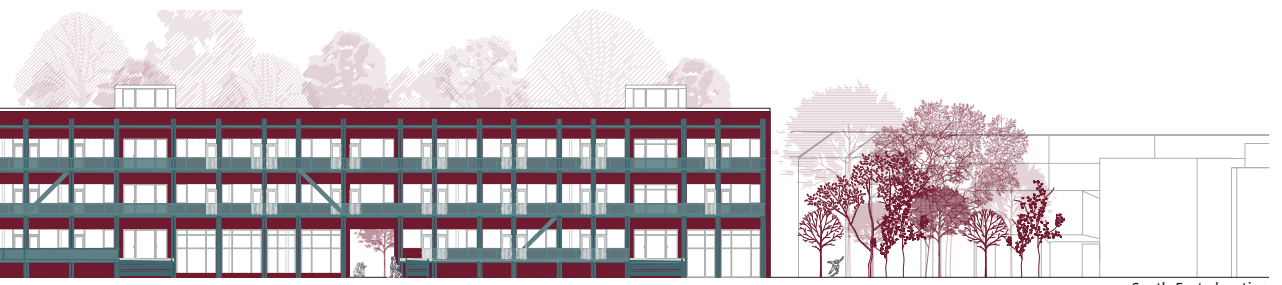
The «Social Building» is being transformed into cooperative housing. To achieve this, the existing structural elements—steel beams and columns, concrete beams and floors—are preserved, along with portions of the original brickwork. A new façade provides insulation, while the addition of an outdoor gallery fosters connections between apartments and creates spaces for social interaction.

Housing, as a program, connects across scales—from the shared public square and lively café, to intimate domestic interiors, and the collective spaces that lie in between. It offers room for everyday life to unfold, to be shared, and to be appropriated.



Exiting & additions  
new facades and new gallery on the south-west facade  
Made by Author





South-East elevation



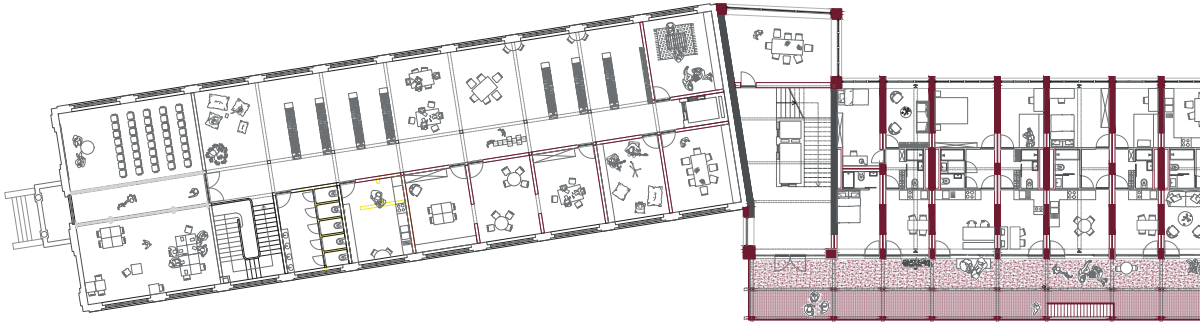
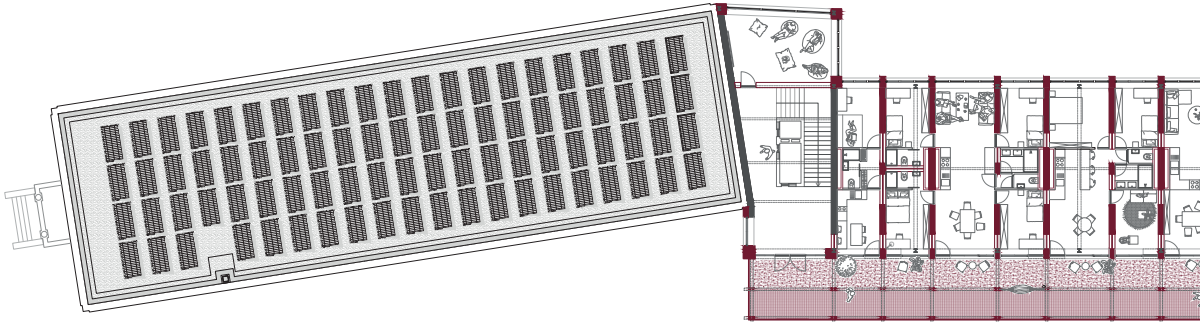
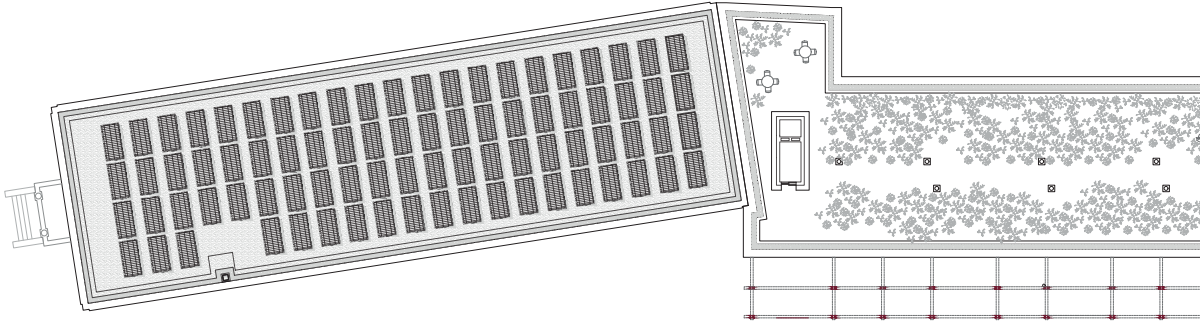
North-West elevation

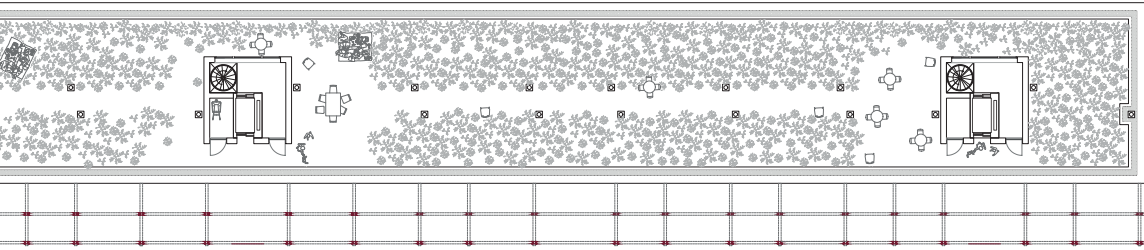


0 200 400 600 800 1000 cm

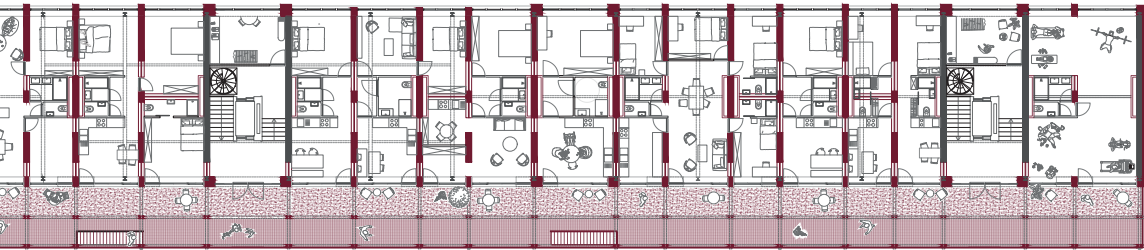
Section AA'

Elevations & Sections  
Made by Author

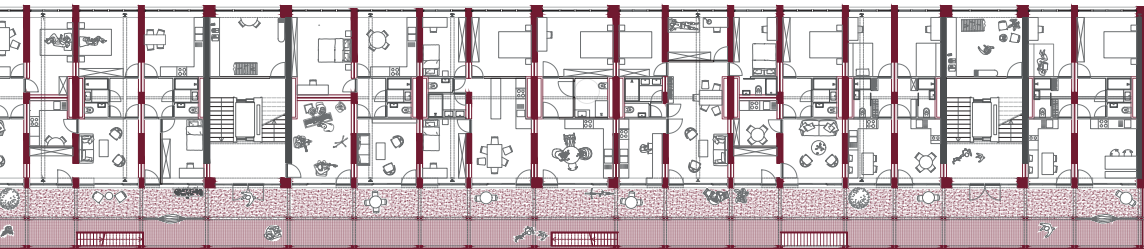




Roof



Second Floor

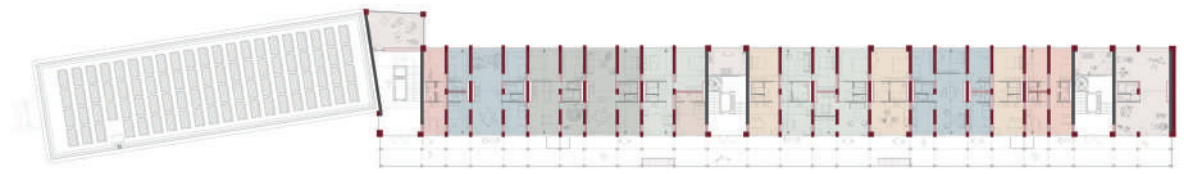


First Floor

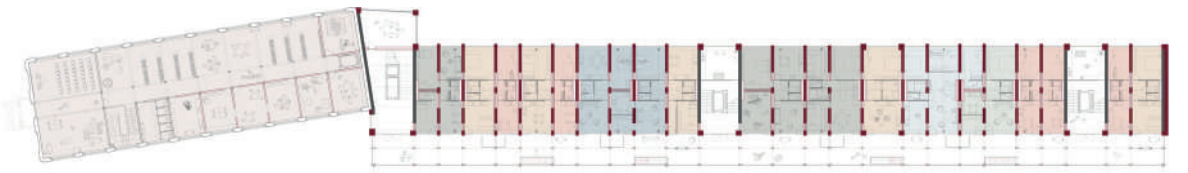
⊙  
Floor plans  
Made by Author

- 30 m<sup>2</sup> - student apartment/studio
- 40 m<sup>2</sup> - starter apartment
- 55 m<sup>2</sup> - elderly friendly and small family
- 70 m<sup>2</sup> - young family
- 85 m<sup>2</sup> - shared living or larger family
- 100 m<sup>2</sup> - shared living or larger family

- 30 m<sup>2</sup> - 12 apartments
  - 40 m<sup>2</sup> - 9 apartments
  - 55 m<sup>2</sup> - 5 apartments
  - 70 m<sup>2</sup> - 6 apartments
  - 85 m<sup>2</sup> - 4 apartments
  - 100 m<sup>2</sup> - 2 apartments
- TOTAL NUMBER OF APARTMENTS: 38



Second Floor



First Floor



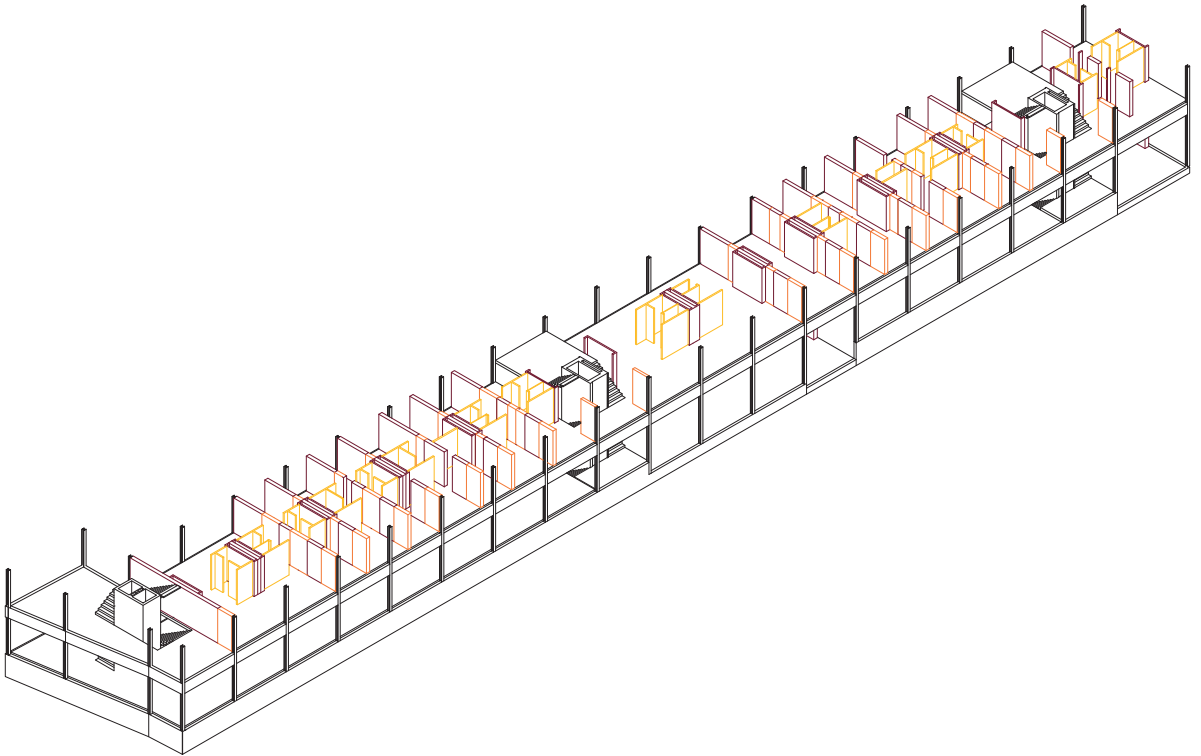
Ground Floor

At the heart of this housing proposal lies a construction system that embraces change. The wall system is designed with two layers of permanence: long-term walls in timber frame that provide structural clarity and identity, and short-term ecopartition walls that offer flexibility over time. Together, they form an adaptable framework that supports the lives unfolding within.

This system invites residents to shape their homes according to their evolving needs. Apartments can grow or shrink not just at the moment of entry, but across years, even decades. This echoes the concept of the “breathing house” as described by Summacumfemmer, where boundaries between units are not fixed but porous, allowing for transformation without rupture. Here, conventional apartment limits are softened, and the dwelling becomes a living structure that grows with its inhabitants.

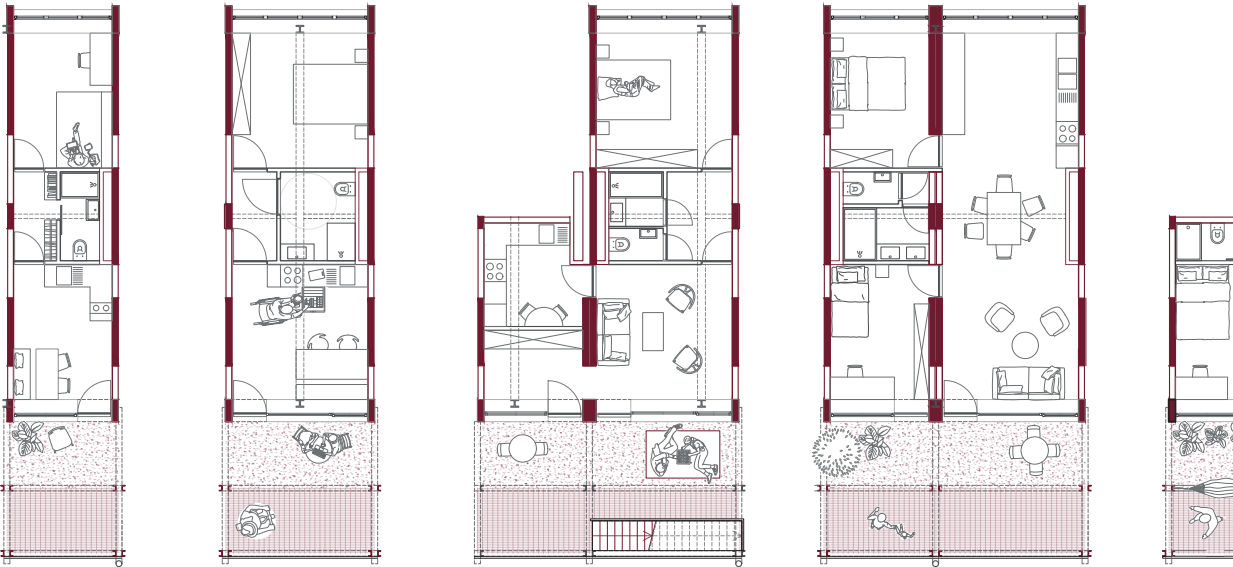
In fast-paced urban life, the act of shaping one’s environment is often rare (Pintos, 2024). Yet appropriation is essential to belonging. By creating spaces that are malleable, this project gives room for residents to inscribe their lives into the architecture – to expand, adapt, and leave a trace.

These walls become invitations to engage, to personalize, to dwell fully. And in doing so, they echo a deeper ambition of placemaking (Kent & Jackson, 2016): to create not only shelter, but a place to return to, transform, and call home.



- 'LONG TERM' MODULAR WALLS\_ timber frame structure
- 'SHORT TERM' MODULAR ECO PARTITION WALLS\_ VP70 fay
- 'SHORT TERM' INSIDE APARTMENT PARTITION WALLS\_ VP70 fay

Flexible Wall System  
Made by Author



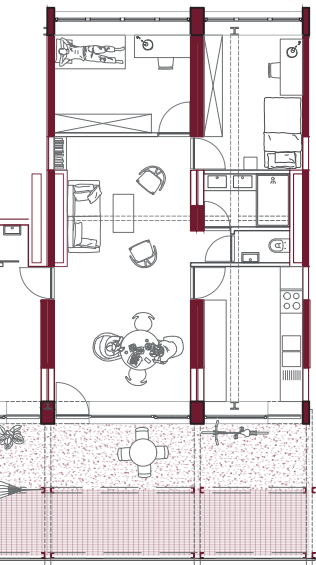
STUDENT/  
STUDIO

STARTER

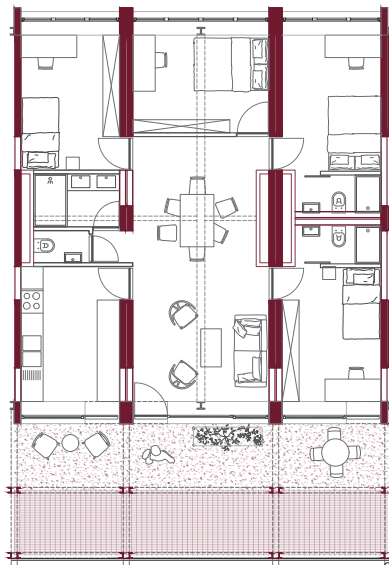
COUPLE

YOUNG FAMILY

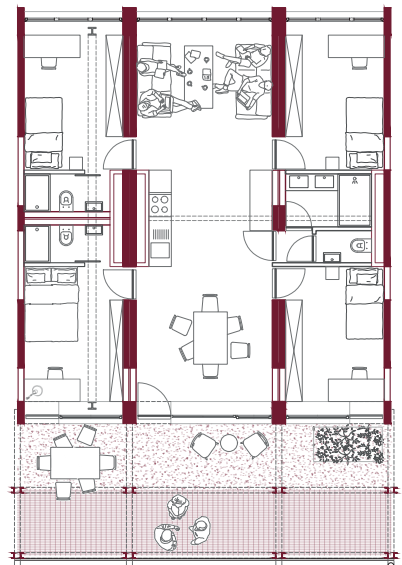
FAM



FAMILY/SHARED LIVING

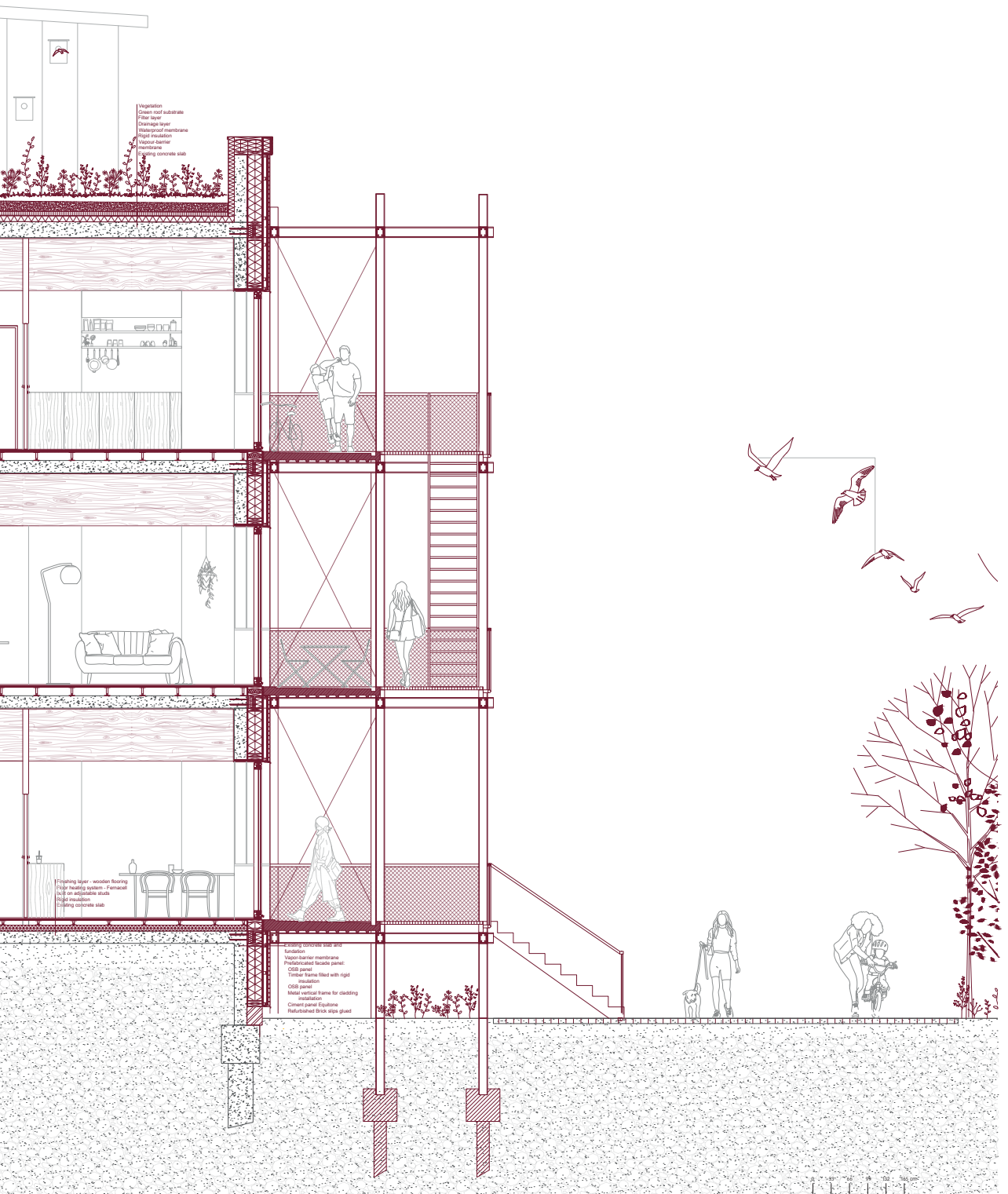


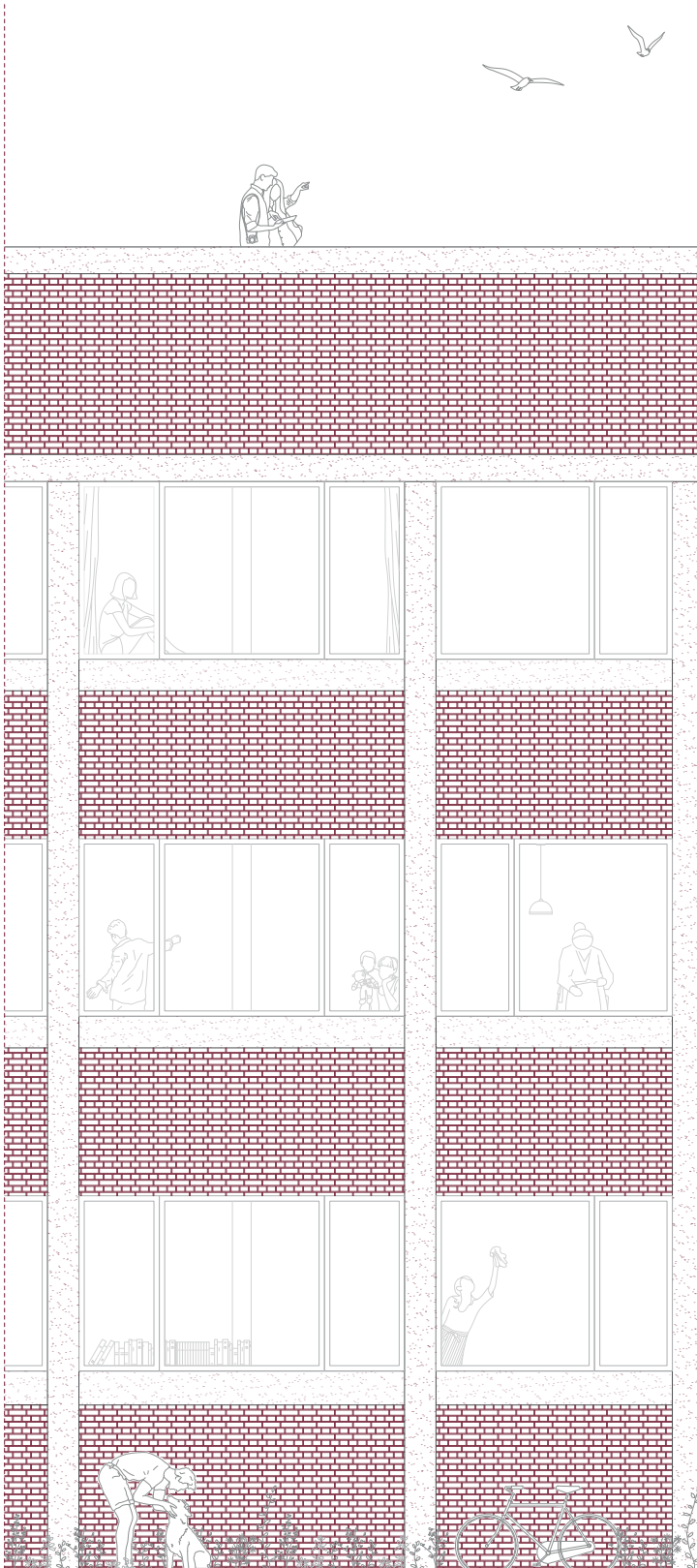
FAMILY/SHARED LIVING



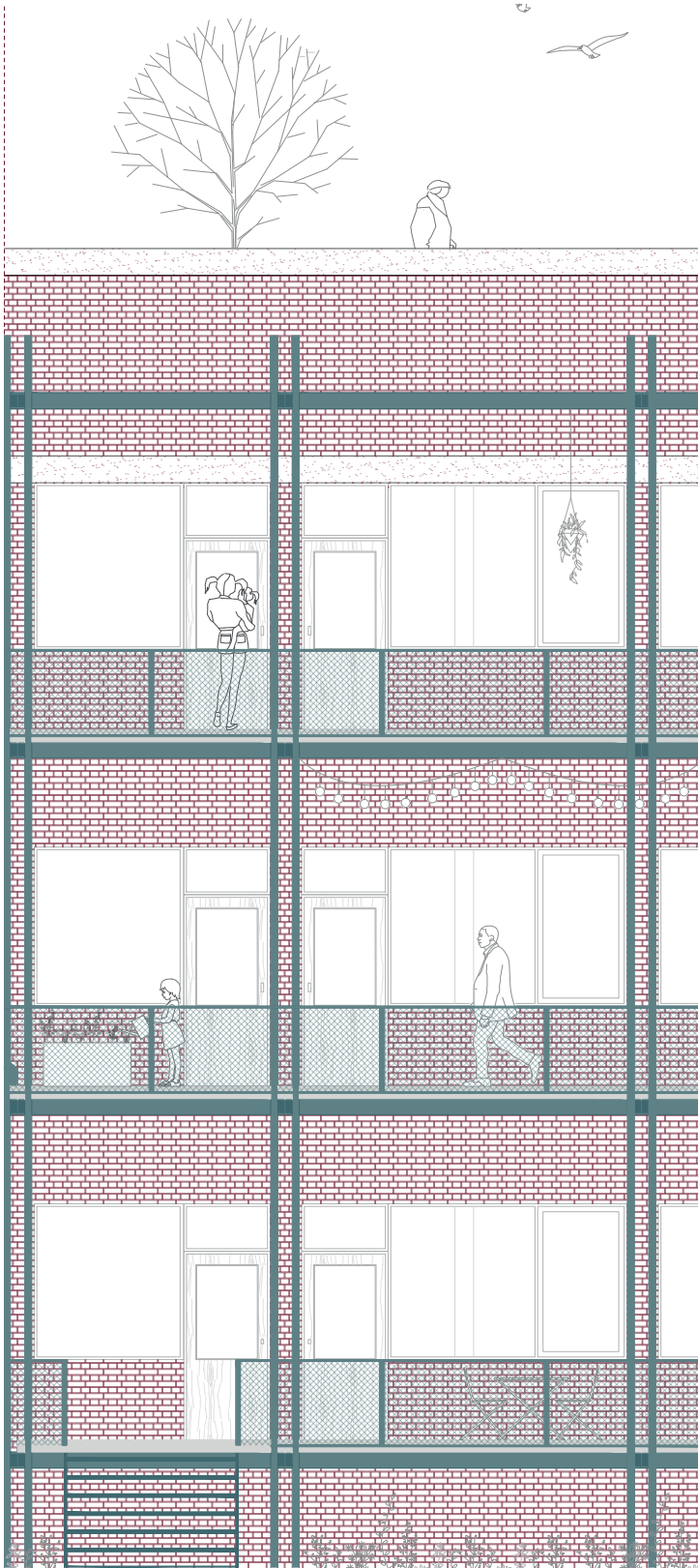
FAMILY/SHARED LIVING



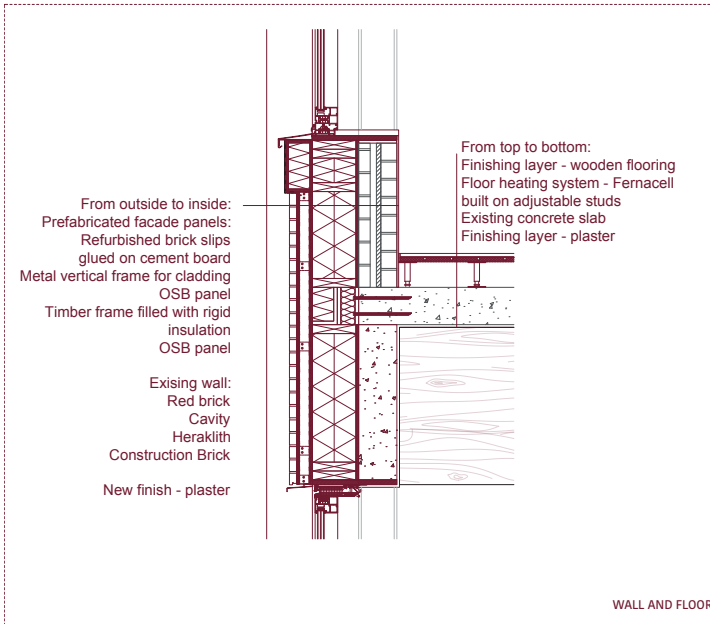
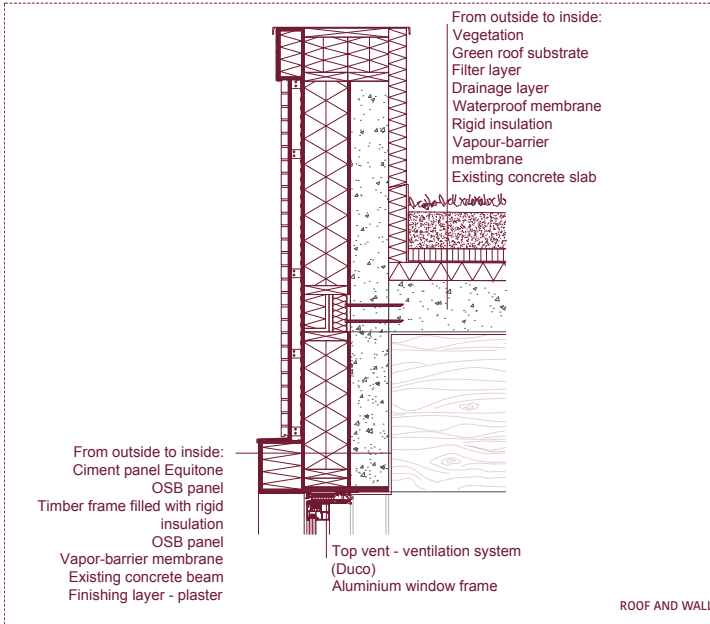


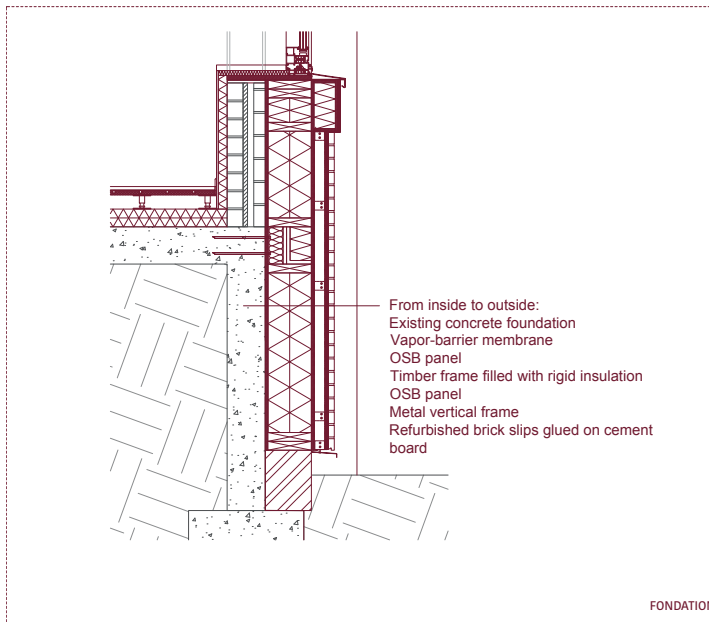
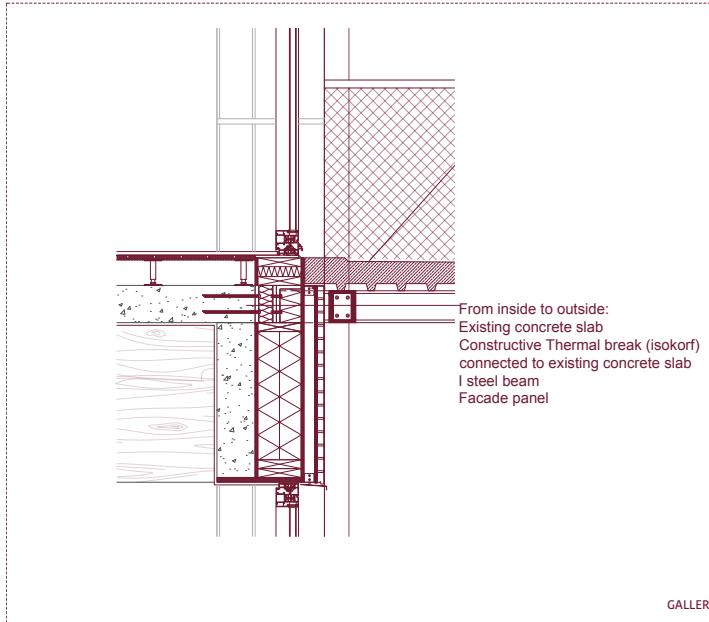


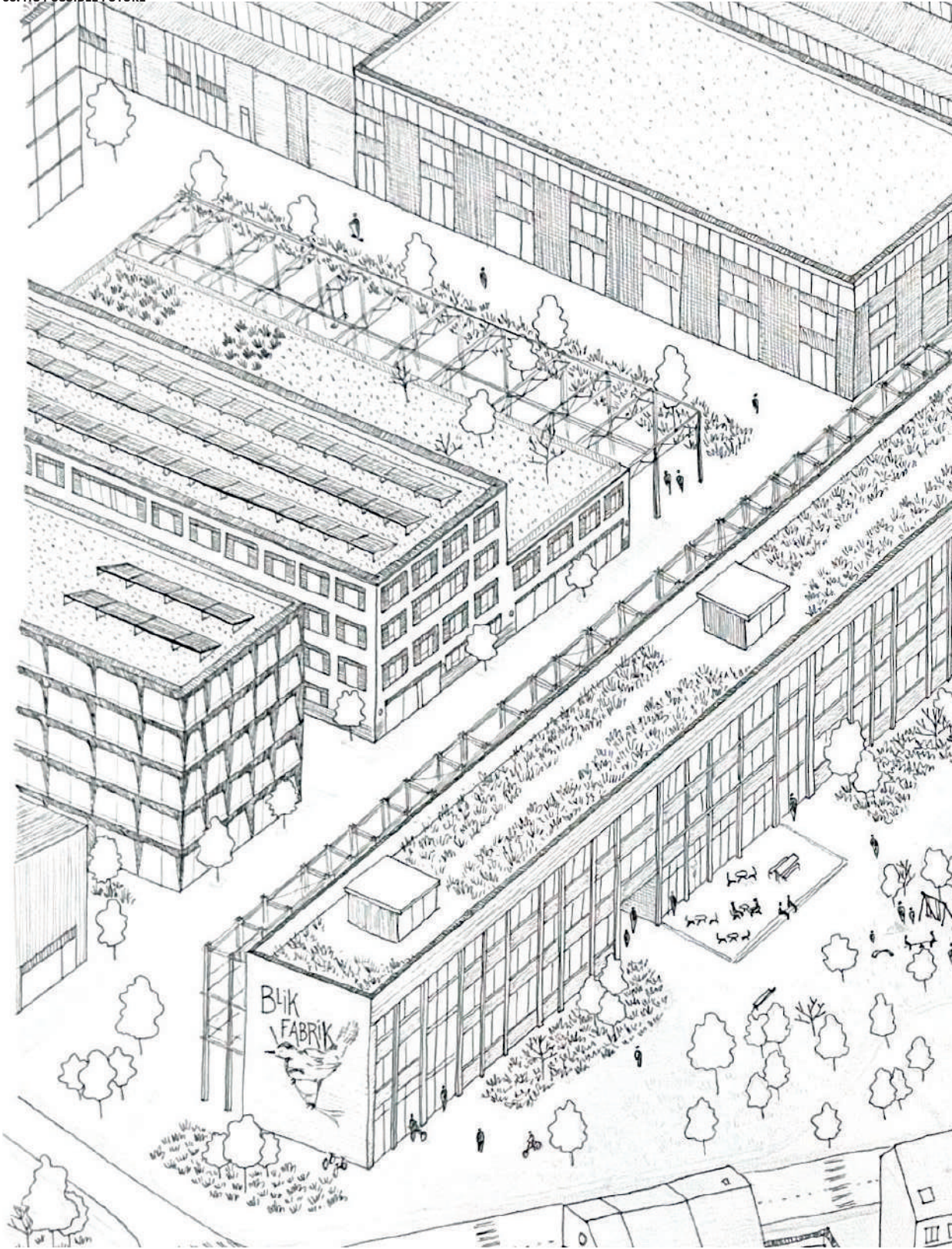
North-West Facade Fragmentation  
Made by Author



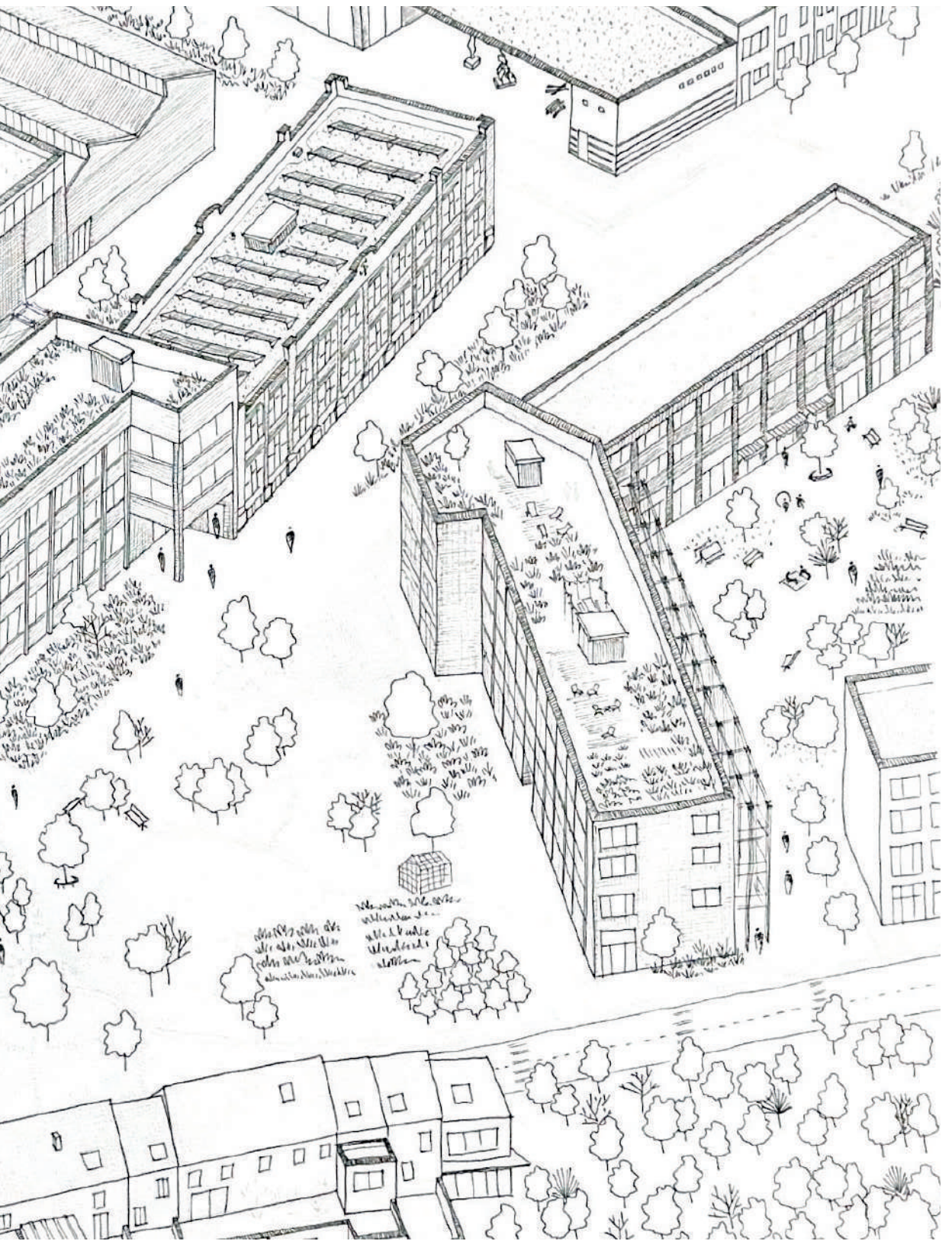
South-East Facade Fragment  
Made by Author







Vision for the future of the site  
Axonometry  
Made by Author

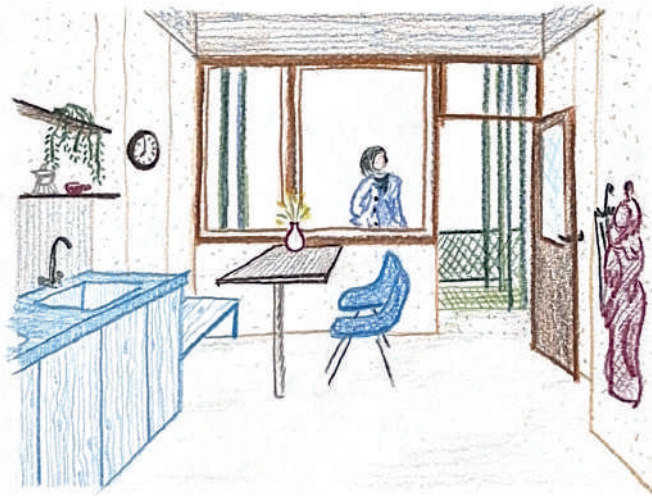
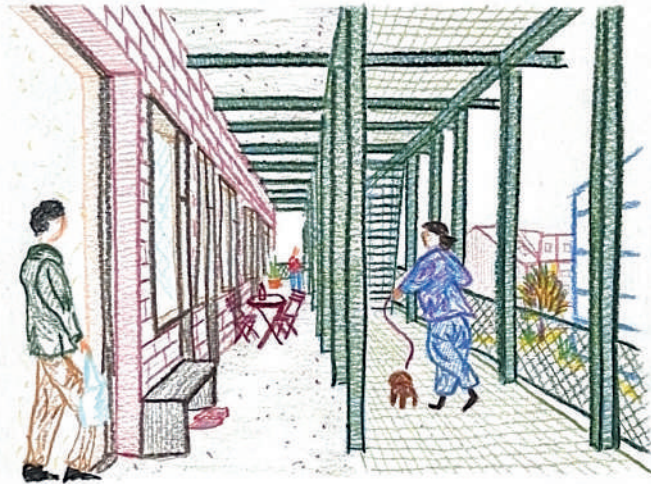


Handwritten notes in German:

Wichtig ist die  
Anzahl der  
Bäume, die  
auf dem Dach  
gepflanzt werden  
sollen.

Wichtig ist die  
Anzahl der  
Bäume, die  
auf dem Dach  
gepflanzt werden  
sollen.





# 04

## CONCLUSION



« First life, then spaces, then buildings.  
The other way around never works. »

- Jan Gehl -

This book has traced the invisible yet powerful threads that bind people to place, through memory, care, resistance, and imagination. By walking through Hoboken, listening to its residents, and exploring its layered past, we begin to see the city not as a static background, but as a living and changing terrain shaped by everyday gestures and long histories.

At a time when urban transformation often feels like erasure, this work proposes an alternative rooted in continuity, adaptation, and participation. It shows that architecture can be more than a response to change; it can also be an act of anticipation, an invitation, and a form of support. Through flexible housing, shared public space, and attentive design, we can create frameworks that grow with people and not only for them.

The stories shared by Lisette, Johan, Karin, Jean-Paul, and others reveal that belonging is never guaranteed. It is created over time, through presence, ritual, and agency. Places like the Blikfabriek remind us that even locations marked by abandonment can become stages for new forms of life when reimaged with empathy and care.

In the end, this book is not just about Hoboken. It speaks to how we might live better, together, wherever we are. It offers tools and perspectives that can be applied in other neighborhoods, cities, and everyday lives.

At the heart of belonging is not only the place itself, but the ability to shape and transform it.

# 05

## REFLECTION



Reflection Paper  
Home Beyond Walls  
Stories and Traces as echoes of Belonging

B er n ce Demiddeleer – 5866103  
Studio Name: Urban Architecture – Low Town Downtown  
Graduation Year: 2024-2025

Mentors: Rosie van der Schans / Architecture  
Leeke Reinders / Research  
Lex van Deudekom / Building Technologies

## Introduction

This reflection accompanies “Home Beyond Walls,” a project shaped by walking, listening, and learning about how places carry stories. Located in Hoboken, a neighborhood undergoing rapid change, the work developed as an ongoing dialogue between research and design, as well as between traces of the past and prospects for the future. What began as questions of architecture and belonging evolved into a deeper exploration of how individuals respond to change, care for what remains, and imagine what might be. In this reflection, I revisit the process that united memory, structure, and community, and explain how each step influenced the next, shaping a spatial response that extends beyond the walls and into a common space.

Question 1 | What is the relation between your graduation project topic, your master track (Ar, Ur, BT, LA, MBE), and your master programme (MSc AUBS)?

My project focuses on the fragmented urban fabric of Lage Weg in Hoboken, exploring how architecture, by listening to the stories of the place and people, can create a sense of belonging to spaces, bridging personal and communal needs. This approach aligns with the studio’s goal of revitalizing medium-sized urban areas through socially and historically informed design. Therefore, drawing from the studio’s site-specific, research-driven approach, I endorse the role of the architect seen as a mediator navigating social, historical, political, and cultural concerns in places undergoing transition. My project aims to reveal and activate the potential of an area shaped by industrial legacies, housing experiments, infrastructure voids and informal uses, an area

caught between past conditions and future aspirations.

By engaging with the everyday urban conditions and inherited structures, my work aligns with the Architecture Master Track, which encourages us to design beyond isolated buildings and to understand architecture as part of larger spatial and societal systems. The focus on contextual sensitivity, adaptive reuse, and the integration of temporary and informal dynamics demonstrates the track's goal of approaching architecture as a catalyst for meaningful urban transformation.

On a broader scale, the project aligns with the objectives of the MSc in Architecture, Urbanism, and the Built Environment (AUBS) program, which promotes multidisciplinary, community-oriented, and ecologically aware design practices.

Question 2 | How did your research influence your design/recommendations and how did the design/recommendations influence your research?

The project emerged from a strong research foundation that delved into Hoboken's socio-industrial history, current urban fragmentation, and the roles of craft and storytelling in shaping a sense of place. This investigation began with collective work from P1, where we created a film tracing the various "tides", historical, social, and spatial, that have influenced Hoboken over time. The research began as a process of exploration, intentionally getting lost to uncover and unravel the traces of time and human presence embedded in the urban fabric.

Building upon this historical perspective, I then focused on understanding how Hoboken's residents live today: their connection to their environment, their sense of attachment or belonging, and, most importantly, their stories. Listening to these narratives deepened my understanding of the place and allowed me to ground any future design in lived experience.

Therefore, this research significantly influenced the design in several ways:

- Historical narratives and local testimonies guided

the development of the master plan, highlighting and preserving places of significance for the community. These considerations also guided the choice of the site, located on the site of the factory's former main entrance, including the former offices, changing rooms, and canteen. This site served as a boundary between work and daily life, holding strong symbolic and practical significance for the workers. It has become a key anchor for exploring how contemporary architecture can reconnect with layers of collective memory.

- Interviews, participatory meetings, and walks through the neighborhood revealed the importance of enabling people to actively participate in shaping their environment. In response, the housing typologies I developed are intentionally flexible, allowing residents to adapt their living spaces. This approach supports the idea of co-authorship and reinforces their sense of ownership and belonging.

- The inclusion of collective programs, such as a library that gathers and shares local stories and a community center that encourages everyday interactions and co-creation, was directly inspired by research into informal gathering spaces. These interventions address the identified need for neutral, accessible spaces that different social groups can relate to and share.

In turn, the design process challenged the research to be more precise and spatially grounded. It pushed me to translate abstract themes like interaction, flexibility, and belonging into architectural language and physical strategies.

Overall, it was a reciprocal process in which research and design continually informed and refined each other, creating a multi-layered and responsive approach rooted in both place and people.

Question 3 | How do you assess the value of your way of working (your approach, your used methods, used methodology)?

My approach, combining on site narratives, ethnographic walks, and narrative mapping, allowed me to anchor the project in the lived reality of Hoboken. These methods enabled a rich and multidimensional understanding of the place, going beyond conventional spatial analysis and programming, giving voice to past and present communities.

Initially, I focused heavily on historical aspects, often immersing myself in archival documents and imagery. While this at times made me feel lost in the past, it ultimately sparked a real fascination and a deeper connection with the site. Exploring Hoboken became a way to integrate traces of the past into the current landscape I know, revealing how memory and spatial transformation are interwoven.

I encountered a similar challenge while working on interviews and narratives. At first, I struggled to clearly define what I was looking for, which made it difficult to extract meaning from the mass of stories collected. Transcribing words into drawings gradually helped me transform abstract experiences into physical forms, allowing the research to establish itself within the emotional and physical landscape of the site.

The iterative process, alternating between research, sketching, and physical modelling, was essential for maintaining a strong link between analysis and design. It kept the work grounded and ensured that the design was not a separate layer, but a direct continuation of the research findings.

In terms of my architectural approach, I began with physical volume models to test massing and relationships at the master plan scale. From there, I transitioned into in-depth architectural research on the existing buildings, studying structural logic, former layouts, and their current conditions. This part was particularly challenging, as the buildings are now abandoned, partially squatted, and physically difficult to access. Entering the completely dark, silent, and decaying buildings alone, was initially intimidating. However, this hands-on documentation became a turning point in the project: by drawing and cataloging the buildings in detail, I was able to develop proposals grounded in a precise understanding of the place.

As the year progressed and I gained a deeper understanding of the site, the master plan itself evolved. Lessons learned from research and feedback led me to revisit and adjust the surrounding new urban fabric, allowing the design to respond more precisely to the spatial, social, and ecological conditions discovered along the way.

Overall, my method was demanding, sometimes messy, and fraught with uncertainty, but it allowed me to work with care and depth. It reaffirmed that architecture, particularly in complex post-industrial contexts, requires careful listening, spatial empathy, and continuous iteration.

Question 4 | How do you assess the academic and societal value, scope, and implication of your graduation project, including ethical aspects?

This graduation project aims to create architecture that fosters adaptability, spatial agency, and inclusive engagement in urban environments influenced by social, historical, and ecological change. By transforming an abandoned industrial site in Hoboken into a new residential and public infrastructure, the project examines how architecture can respond to evolving needs while reinforcing existing cultural and spatial narratives.

From an academic perspective, this work contributes to discussions on adaptive reuse, flexible housing, and participatory urban transformation. It illustrates how narrative research, based on site visits, interviews, and mapping, can inform design in contextually specific and structurally open ways. By integrating social inquiry into iterative design processes, the project offers a methodology suited to equally complex or transient urban conditions.

In terms of societal value, the project addresses both physical vacancy and social fragmentation by introducing new layers of living, learning, and gathering spaces. The central park acts as a connective landscape and offers opportunities for community gardens, informal activities, and ecological continuity. The integration of public programs, such as a community center and library, further anchors the site in daily life and encourages long-term engagement with diverse user groups. These spaces actively contribute to social infrastructure by providing support, fostering encounters, and ensuring cultural continuity.

Ethically, this project is guided by the principles of spatial agency, adaptability, and long-term relevance, values that address both architectural responsibility and social transformation.

- Socially, the project values the role of architecture as a support for everyday participation and informal engagement. By integrating a library and community center into the living environment, it establishes programmatic anchors for education, support, and cultural exchange. These accessible spaces are actively shaped by and for the community, fostering a sense of belonging.
- From an ecological perspective, the reuse of the existing structure demonstrates a conscious desire to work with what already exists, avoiding demolition and adopting a circular approach to materials. Techniques such as reclaimed brick slips, and prefabricated timber facades minimize the environmental impact while strengthening the continuity between the site's past and future uses.
- Architecturally, the project is designed to evolve. Thanks to demountable lightweight walls, modular layouts, and expandable housing, residents are free to reshape their environment over time. This promotes flexibility, resilience, and user autonomy, allowing the architecture to adapt to changing needs.

The ethical strength of the project lies in its openness and responsiveness. Rather than imposing a rigid structure, it offers a framework for continuous reinvention, inviting residents to co-create their living environment and integrate the architecture with the rhythms and needs of daily life.

Question 5 | How do you assess the value of the transferability of your project results?

This project presents an approach to architecture and urban planning that addresses essential yet intangible aspects of the built environment, such as belonging, identity, and memory. By integrating historical traces, personal narratives, and collective aspirations, the project positions public, semi-public, and private spaces as active contributors to social cohesion and territorial attachment. This framework is relevant well beyond the specific Hoboken site.

Although the proposal is deeply rooted in the context of the Blikfabriek and its surrounding neighborhood, its fundamental design methods and strategies are highly transferable to other urban environments, particularly in post-industrial or transitional contexts where spatial fragmentation and social disconnection are prevalent. Key

transferable aspects include:

- A participatory design approach based on narrative and spatial storytelling, using walks, interviews, and mapping to reveal hidden structures of meaning and use.
- The development of flexible housing typologies capable of adapting to changing family structures, social configurations, and future needs.
- The integration of community programs into residential settings as accessible elements of everyday life.

The methodological toolkit employed, rooted in ethnographic observation, visual mapping, and iterative design, is simple enough to adapt yet robust enough to generate in-depth spatial analyses. It encourages designers, planners, and communities to begin by asking themselves what stories a place holds and how these stories can inform future interventions. This process nurtures a place-specific, yet universally relevant, design approach that respects local identity while addressing global challenges such as housing insecurity, ecological responsibility, and the erosion of shared public spaces.

Fundamentally, the project asserts that architecture and urban planning can and must serve as vectors of memory, belonging, and shared identity. In a world increasingly marked by transience and fragmentation, this type of architecture can create anchors: spaces that carry meaning over time and offer residents the opportunity to co-create their environment.

The project does not propose a one-size-fits-all solution. Rather, it offers a replicable approach that emphasizes context, formal flexibility, and the inclusiveness of the process. These principles can be applied in diverse urban contexts where communities seek to reclaim, reimagine, or reconnect with the spaces they inhabit.



# 06

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