

# Urban Architecture

MSc 3/4 - Low Town Downtown



Antwerp. Photograph by Rosie van der Schans

## Tutors

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Code	AR3UA100
Credits	55 ECTS
Location	Antwerp (Belgium)
Excursion	Yes
Costs	t.b.d.

At the chair of Urban Architecture we study medium-size urban sites that are inaccessible for the regular tools of urbanism, and where expectations of urban design can only be fulfilled by an architectural project. Adding a building thus means (re)designing an environment, both socially and physically. As we realize that in contemporary cities opportunities for collective and personal fulfillment are unevenly spread, we choose to intervene in those urban areas where these opportunities need strengthening.

As no urban sites are ever blank, our studio investigates their resources: the traces of histories in buildings and soils, the various social patterns installed in the urban realm, the material stocks available for reuse, their other than human inhabitants and their ecological connections to larger landscapes. Our studio designs on-site research methods to capture and picture the depths of an everyday place.

For this, our studio heads for Antwerp, to the south of 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 twentieth-century city-in-the-making. A halfway-city, as scholars Michiel Dehaene and Annette Kuhk have labelled it: a place well on its way to shake off its suburban origins, holding in its disarray a promise of some new sort of urbanity

striking the delicate balance of inhabitation, productivity, community and ecological resilience the traditional centre has forfeited.

Lage Weg (Low Road) is an area of terraces, slabs, schools, parking lots, gardens, wasteland and industries, some in decay, others hoping for expansion. Blue Gate, a new industrial park, and the Hobokense Polder, an extensive nature reserve on the banks of river Scheldt are within its reach. Awaiting sanitation of its polluted soil, it has become in recent years a testing ground for new urban policies and more cautious ways of urban development, steered by dialogue between its various stakeholders.

As a result, it has become a place of high hopes, fueled by temporary occupations invited by municipal policies. Lage Weg became an insider tip for all Antwerp citizens, with its factory halls invested by cultural and counter-cultural events, circular manufacturers, leisure and entertainment. Its pioneering temporary users cast light on the possible futures this place can have, and prefigure the urban vocation of the halfway city. But for how long still? Pioneers are expected to soon give way to more definitive tenants. Will their spark of civic liveliness and outward centrality survive the subsequent waves of investments to come? This tension, typical for many future developments, is the central issue of this studio: how to make Low Town last as a downtown?