

# EXTRA INFORMATION VIRTUAL ROOMS



## Sensing the City

Antwerp, 14-16 July 2021

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## Spaces of Antwerp 01: Aula Rector Dhanis



The Aula Rector Dhanis, the largest auditorium at the University of Antwerp, was officially opened in 2002. It was named after Etienne Dhanis, S.J. (1905-1977), rector of UFSIA (*Universitaire Faculteiten Sint-Ignatius Antwerpen*) and one of the main forces behind the transformation of Antwerp into a university town during the second half of the twentieth century. The aula itself has a seating capacity of 700 persons and, apart from its function as a classroom, is often used for ceremonial purposes, such as graduations, university events, and conference lectures. If the RC21 conference would have been organised on-site in Antwerp, this is where the keynote lectures would have taken place.

## Spaces of Antwerp 02: Market Square



The Market Square lies at the heart of Antwerp's historical city centre, and harbours the city hall as well as the old guildhalls (pictured), representing the city's economic success as a mercantile hub during the so-called 'Golden Age' of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Its current form, as a large open space displaying the luxurious grandeur of the urban past, is mostly the result of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century policies of aesthetic restoration, leading to the destruction of many of the square's residential buildings. In the middle of the square you can find the Brabo Fountain, portraying the mythical figure of Brabo. According to local legend, Brabo was a Roman army captain who cut off the hand of the giant Druon Antigoon, throwing it into the river Scheldt. Thus, so goes the tale, arose the city's name ("hand throw", Dutch *hand werpen*, 'ant' 'werpen').



## Spaces of Antwerp 03: Braem Towers, Kiel



These iconic residential blocks were built during the 1940s and '50s, in an attempt at alleviating some of the increasing pressures felt by the Antwerp housing market. Designed to be affordable yet spacious at the same time, they embodied the vision of famous Belgian architect Renaat Braem (1910-2001), a modernist and a member of CIAM (*Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne*). In total, nine residential blocks were constructed, three blocks of twelve stories high encircling a large playground, while another six, shorter blocks (9 stories high) were built in zigzag-formation to increase exposure to daylight.

## Spaces of Antwerp 04: Port of Antwerp



The port of Antwerp is one of the largest in Europe (2<sup>nd</sup> to Rotterdam) and is at the centre of the city's economic life and political-cultural identity. As it turned into an industrial port in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, port activities and infrastructures moved away from the city centre to the north of the city, thus becoming physically separated from the urban tissue and expanding all the way up to the Dutch border. Known for its ideal location as an inland connection to the North Sea, the port is responsible for the processing of a considerable share of Europe's imports from across the globe. Furthermore, it is home to the largest integrated petrochemical cluster in Europe, with a clear aim of bringing transport, logistical processing and industry together.

## Spaces of Antwerp 05: Antwerp Central Station



The Antwerp Central railway station is known for its architectural beauty as well as its handy location, near the city centre. Built between 1895 and 1905, its entrance hall was designed by Louis Delacenserie (1838-1909) in an eclectic Neo-Renaissance style, while the iron and glass train hall (a whopping 44 metres high necessary for the dissipation of the steam locomotives' smoke) was designed by Clément Van Bogaert (1865-1937). Originally a terminal train station, significant reconstructions were made in 1998 in order to facilitate high-speed trains (e.g. Thalys) passing through from Rotterdam to Paris.



## Spaces of Antwerp 06: R1 Ring Road



The R1 is the ring road around the city of Antwerp. Known for its heavily congested traffic, the R1 serves an important economic purpose to the city, providing the Port of Antwerp with a multitude of transport opportunities. At the same time, the ring road, which still needs to be completed, has become a hot topic for discussion among several urban interest groups, with several organizations critiquing its nefarious environmental impact, its role in lowering the overall quality of living, and its excessive air and noise pollution.

## Spaces of Antwerp 07: De Coninckplein



Located in the so-called Station District ("Statiekwartier"), the *De Coninckplein* is a square which was built at the edges of the old Spanish city walls and received its current title in 1869. It was named after Pieter de Coninck (†1332 or 1333), a weaver from Bruges who became a symbol of Flemish resistance and cultural identity after his role in the Battle of the Golden Spurs (1302). The square itself is constructed in a triangular shape, thinly populated by tall plane trees, and surrounded by bourgeois houses.

While the square had long been a lively place of urban engagement and social interaction, it suffered from the gradual transition of local businesses away from the city centre. During the 1980s, the square reached perhaps its peak of unpopularity among the general public, with the many victims of the simultaneous crises in drug abuse and homelessness in Antwerp finding their own small refuge at the *De Coninckplein* (called 'the square residents'). Since that time, the city council has invested greatly in trying to make the square a more attractive option for the broader populace, making it the home for the new city library (2005) while stimulating the return of more up-market businesses as well. Its interventions are often criticised as attempts to gentrify the square and its surroundings.



## Spaces of Antwerp 08: Cathedral of Our Lady



A church that is considered a unique highlight of Brabantine Gothic, the Antwerp cathedral was built between the years 1352 and 1521. Originally designed to have two symmetrical towers with a height of 124 meters, only one of the towers ended up being completed. The church harbours some of the most famous works of art by Flemish painter Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), including *The Elevation of the Cross* (1610), and is included on the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites. It was because of its reputation as a symbol of Catholic iconography that the church was targeted, alongside many others in the Low Countries, by Protestant iconoclasts during the sixteenth century, resulting in an especially drastic bout of cultural destruction for the church during the so-called Iconoclastic Fury (*Beeldenstorm*) of 1566.

## Spaces of Antwerp 09: Auditorium Patrice and Pauline Lumumba, Campus Middelheim



The Auditorium Patrice and Pauline Lumumba is located at the university's Campus Middelheim. It is named after Congo's first democratically elected prime minister, Patrice Lumumba (1925-1961), as well as his third wife, Pauline, and was given to the auditorium in 2020 in remembrance of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Democratic Republic of Congo's independence.

Both the location as well as the choice for the Lumumba's are highly symbolic: the campus where the auditorium is located used to serve as the Colonial University of Belgium (1920-1962), which was meant to train and educate the future administrators of Belgium's colonies in Congo. Furthermore, Patrice Lumumba was assassinated in 1961, with later investigations clearly showing the involvement of the Belgian government. In 2002, the government of Belgium admitted its partial responsibility, after extensive research done by a parliamentary commission, but refused to take full accountability.

## Spaces of Antwerp 10: Mosque El Fath En Nassr



The Mosque El Fath en Nassr in Antwerp is the largest of its kind, with regular attendances of up to a 1000 mosque-goers during Friday Prayers. Independently owned and run since 1998, the Muslim community of El Fath en Nassr aims to provide a communal space and social services to both Muslims as well as the broader neighbourhood. Beyond its function as a place of worship, the Mosque houses both an educational centre (*Jisr Al Amaanah*) and a non-profit organisation, *Arrahma*, which engages in local forms of social assistance and provides Islamic burial and funeral services.



## Spaces of Antwerp 11: Park Spoor Noord



Park Spoor Noord is a public park in the north of Antwerp. A very wide and open space, the park was constructed on a former railway yard and was officially opened in 2008. Unlike most parks, Park Spoor Noord has very few trees, a decision which was meant to maximize the uses of the park. It has a large, green meadow, a skate park, basketball fields, and many playgrounds, all of which are intensively used by the local inhabitants. As such, it is often hailed as a primary example of the potential benefits of modern urban development.

## Spaces of Antwerp 12: Diamond District



The Diamond district is an area in Antwerp, neighbouring the Central Station, which is known for its many diamond shops. More than just its outer facades, however, this area represents a crucial cog in the global diamond industry, with the majority of all diamonds, either in their rough or polished form, passing through the district at some stage.

## Spaces of Antwerp 13: International Arts Centre deSingel



deSingel is an arts centre located on the Desguinlei in Antwerp. It is a popular venue for all sorts of cultural acts, be it musical concerts, dance performances or theatre shows. In 2005 the arts centre was recognized as one of the seven official art institutions of the Flemish Community.



## Spaces of Antwerp 14: Square Dageraadplaats



The *Dageraadplaats* is a square in Zurenborg, a residential area in the southeast of Antwerp. Known for its sociable and leisurely atmosphere, the *Dageraadplaats* is symptomatic of its further surroundings, as it belongs to an area, developed during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, which was designated for housing the middle classes. The many townhouses, constructed in Art Nouveau-style, reflect the economic boom experienced by the city during the *fin-de-siècle*.

## Spaces of Antwerp 15: The Port Authority House



The Port Authority House is a government building which serves as the headquarters for the Antwerp Port Authority. Designed by the famous architect Zaha Hadid, it was posthumously completed in 2016. Both the building's shape as well as its usage of triangular glass facets echo the city's trademarks, combining the two into the image of a sailing ship covered in diamonds. In March of 2018, the building was awarded the prize of "best refurbished building" by the *Marché International des Professionnels de l'Immobilier* at Cannes.

## Spaces of Antwerp 16: MAS Museum



The *Museum Aan de Stroom* (Museum By The River), or MAS as it is popularly known, is a museum located in the north of Antwerp, in the district called *Het Eilandje* ('the little Island'). The relatively new museum – it was officially opened back in 2011 – has as its mission to tell the story of Antwerp's many connections to the world, both in its capacity as a centre for maritime trade as well as its prominent role as a cultivator of the arts and fashion. It has eight exhibition spaces and around 500.000 objects, making it the largest museum in Antwerp.



## Spaces of Antwerp 17: Bourse of Antwerp



The bourse of Antwerp was the first of its kind in the world, as a commodity exchange erected in order to accommodate the international traders which were increasingly grouping together in the city during the first half of the sixteenth century. The building itself came into use in 1531, a rectangular square enclosed by galleries in a decorative Gothic style. It would serve as the model for its London equivalent, the Royal Exchange. After a tumultuous history throughout the centuries – going from gradual disuse to its eventual restoration as the Antwerp stock exchange – the building now serves as an events venue, going by the name of Antwerp Trade Fair.

## Spaces of Antwerp 18: Entrance Road Turnhoutsebaan



The Turnhoutsebaan is a famous road in Borgerhout, the smallest district in Antwerp. The boulevard, which has connected Antwerp to Turnhout since the Middle Ages, represents the cultural and commercial heart of the district, with its many shops, restaurants and cultural venues (cf. 19) drawing a great deal of attraction.



## Spaces of Antwerp 19: De Roma



*De Roma* is an arts centre located in Borgerhout, Antwerp. It originally started out as a movie theatre and got its name from its building commissioner, an Italian stonecutter named Jean-Baptiste Romeo. It gradually transformed, however, into a concert venue, which saw famous musicians such as Lou Reed, Paul McCartney, and Iggy Pop perform there. After being shut down for a number of years during the 1980s and 90s, it was eventually certified as a cultural monument and underwent a revival, mostly through the work and financial support of local volunteers.



## Spaces of Antwerp 20: De Peperfabriek



*De Peperfabriek* ('The Pepper Factory') is a non-profit organisation which acts as a cultural and educational community centre, and which is committed to stimulating progressive initiatives and social action, on diverse matters such as climate change, migration policy, societal inequality, and many more. It originally started out as a folk high school called *Elcker-Ik*, which, in the full spirit of Paris '68 and Christian liberation theology, had three main goals: to inform, to take action and to educate. With its recent rebranding to 'The Pepper Factory', the organisation aims to, once again, put more emphasis on the social-activistic nature of its activities and lecture series.

## Spaces of Antwerp 21: Farmers' Tower



An iconic tall building dominating the skyline of Antwerp (alongside the cathedral and the Antwerp Tower), the *Boerentoren* ('Farmer's Tower') is located at the end of Antwerp's most famous shopping street, *de Meir*. Built in art deco-style and completed in 1931, its 87.5 meters height made it, at the time of its completion, one of the tallest buildings in Europe. Its peculiar name, a soubriquet of sorts, came from the association commissioning its construction, the General Bank Union (*Algemeene Bankvereniging*), which was then still under the control of the Belgian Farmers' League (*Boerenbond*).



## Spaces of Antwerp 22: Square Theaterplein



*Het Theaterplein* ('Theatre Square') is a square in the city centre. Its name comes from the several theatres close to it, such as the City Theatre and the Arenberg Theatre. The square is perhaps best known for the several markets which it hosts throughout the week, with a so-called 'exotic market' on Saturday and the bird market on Sunday, which draws both locals as well as plenty of tourists.