

HOW THE REDEVELOPMENT OF A NEIGHBORHOOD CAN LEAD TO GENTRIFICATION



FOCUSING ON THE CASE STUDY OF *HET EILANDJE* IN ANTWERP

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ABSTRACT

Can the process of gentrification be revealed in one of Antwerp's most trendy and expensive neighborhoods of this moment and to what extent did it impact the social and built environment? This paper offers insight in the events that possibly led to gentrification on *het Eilandje*, more precisely *de Oude Dokken*, and the impact this had on the area. It will systematically review the Dutch and English literature regarding gentrification combined with data provided by and of the city of Antwerp, the history of the researched area, and fieldwork. This will lead to the conclusion that during the dynamic history of *de Oude Dokken*, the process of gentrification indeed occurred. The paper turns to the negative and positive impacts this process had on the built and social environment. It will be argued that the most prominent negative impact the process had on *de Oude Dokken*, was the homogenization of the social composition of the neighborhood and more specifically the expelling of earlier residents by wealthier residents. Although it could be argued the negative consequences outweigh the positive, one benefit should be highlighted. Due to the gentrification of the area, which was partially caused by the involvement of the government, the previously abandoned harbor area regained its vibrancy. The area that previously felt disconnected from the city center, is now perceived as a trendy and lively extension of it.

Figure 1: (Front Cover) View of the MAS seen from the Bonapartedok

Stad Antwerpen. (2011). District Antwerpen. RUP EILANDJE (RUP_11002_241_10010_00001). TOELICHTINGSNOTA. Retrieved from https://www.antwerpen.be/docs/stad/stadsvernieuwing/bestemmingsplannen/rupt_11002_214_10010_00001/RUP_11002_214_10010_00001_00073VISIE_tn.html

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INTRODUCTION

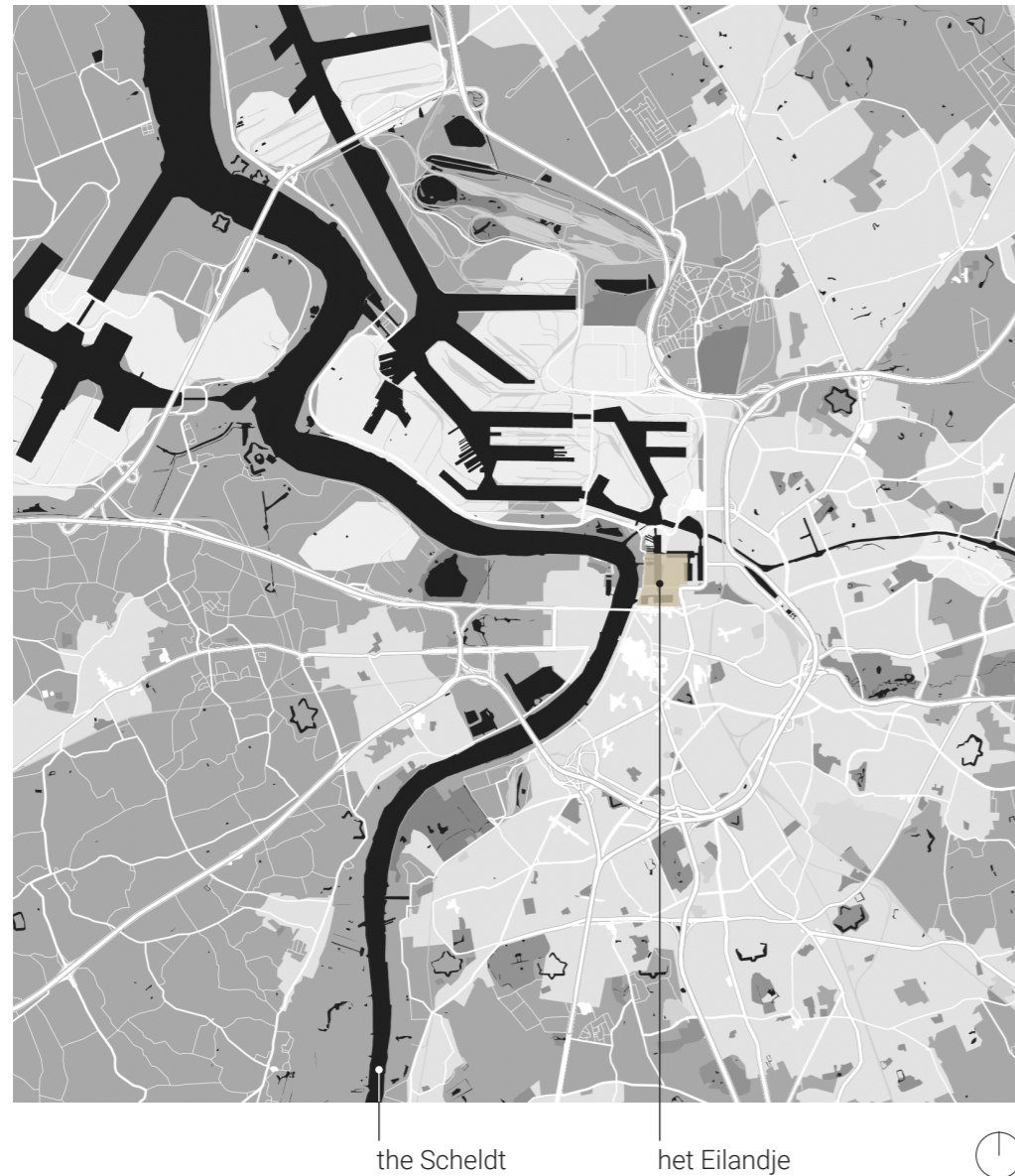


Figure 2: Map of Antwerp
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Cities can be seen as ever-moving organisms where neighborhoods change, new buildings and infrastructure are added, different inhabitants succeed each other, and areas are being rediscovered and redeveloped. The (re)development and implantation of neighborhoods in historic city centers has always been an important challenge that is often accompanied by the phenomenon of gentrification.

The term gentrification¹ as we understand it today was introduced by American sociologist and urban scientist Richard Florida in his book, *The New Urban Crisis*, first published in 2017. In his book, Florida defines what he understands as the new urban crisis and outlines new proposals for urban governance that strive for fairer, inclusive, and prospering cities (Florida, 2017). However, he was not the creator of this term. The term *gentrification* was first used by British sociologist Ruth Glass in 1964 in her attempt to describe the developments and changes in London's social and urban fabric (Glass, 1964). The term was derived from the word *gentry*, which means the upper classes or high society. In her book the term gentrification, applied to the city of London, is described by her as the phenomenon where:

One by one many of the working class quarters of London have been invaded by the middle classes-upper and lower. ... Once this process of gentrification starts in a district, it goes on rapidly until all or most of the original working class occupiers are displaced, and the whole social character of the district is changed. (Glass, 1964, p. 18)

To understand the phenomenon of gentrification, authors like Neil Smith and Richard Florida, identify different phases in the process. In the first phase, creative young people, artists, and alternative professionals make use of the neglected and vacant buildings in the area. This desolation of an area was in many of the researched cases due to the post-World War II decline (Freeman, 2016), and therefore can be seen in cities all around the world. The lower price of both the land and the building provides spaces that accommodate different uses. These new residents consist of single people, two-income households without children, or young couples who do not seem to fit in with the suburban life of the city. The presence of art gallery spaces for the artists and a university in proximity to the neglected area are key features that attract new pioneers.

Where this first phase was linked to young and artistic pioneers, the second phase of the process is often associated with the middle-class. Contrary to the early pioneers, the middle-class residents rent apartments in this area as their first step on the housing ladder. Apartments are now bought by developers at a larger scale and are renovated thoroughly. The new residents attract new facilities to the neighborhood and as result, the streetscape changes. During this phase, the original residents slowly become aware of to feel the rising rent and become vulnerable to exclusion.

During the final and third phase, new wealthy residents find their way to the area that previously had a mixed character of inhabitants. The new residents are

¹ The Cambridge Dictionary defines gentrification as 'the process by which a place, especially part of a city, changes from being a poor area to a richer one, where people from a higher social class live' (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022).

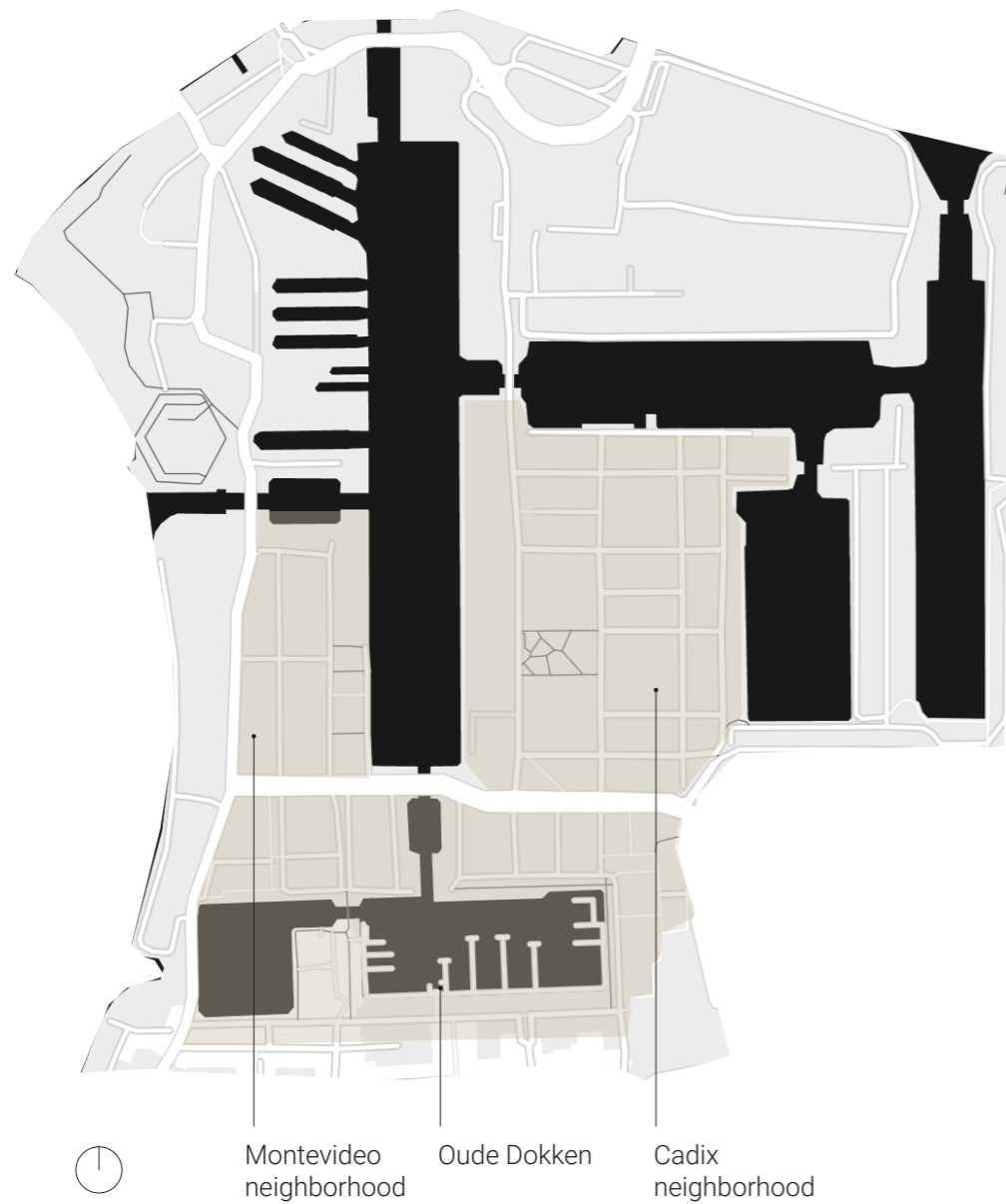


Figure 3: Map of *het Eilandje*. Showing the three different areas on *het Eilandje*: the Montevideo neighborhood, *de Oude Dokken* and the Cadix neighborhood.
Granata Rosalie

interested in the high status the neighborhood has now acquired. This group of new residents consists of wealthy occupiers that plan to live in the area for a longer period of time. The emergence of new facilities in the neighborhood, which started in the previous phase, now finds its peak. Bars, restaurants, art galleries, etc. now focus on this new wealthier group of users. Because of the interest of wealthier residents together with the new facilities, the apartment prices now become too expensive for the first pioneers and middle-class residents. The ever-changing housing market in this stage stabilizes and the previous residents are now forced to move to a new area of the city. (Metaal, 2007)

Where the above provides a general approach to the phenomenon of gentrification, its application will vary on a case-by-case basis. The research of gentrification of a specific urban area will, therefore, demand a detailed examination of specific events leading to its (re)development and the impact of such events on the existing urban fabric and its inhabitants.

Being previously the epicenter of the port of Antwerp (Part of Antwerp, 2019), also referred to as *de Oude Dokken*² (the Old Docks in English) and currently one of the new expensive residential areas in the city center of Antwerp (Luysterman & De Rouck, 2019), proven by having one of the highest land values in Antwerp (Damen et al., 2019), *het Eilandje*³ (translated in English as the little island) is an interesting case study to examine the possible application of the phenomenon of gentrification.

In this thesis, providing an overview of historical events taking place on *de Oude Dokken* (starting from the 1960s to the current day) and giving form to the development of *het Eilandje*, a conclusion will be drafted considering whether the process of gentrification is applicable to this area. As social changes in a neighborhood can have a vast influence on the urban fabric, it would be interesting to research whether the phenomenon of gentrification actually affected the history of the built environment of *de Oude Dokken*.

² As *de Oude Dokken* describe a specific area in the city of Antwerp in a very characterizing manner, the term will not be used in English in this paper.

³ Because of the same reason as the untranslated use of the name *De Oude Dokken*, *het Eilandje* will also be used in its original form. (see footnote 2)

I. HISTORY OF THE PORT OF ANTWERP, MORE SPECIFICALLY HET EILANDJE

A. A BRIEF HISTORY OF HET EILANDJE AS AN ACTIVE HARBOR

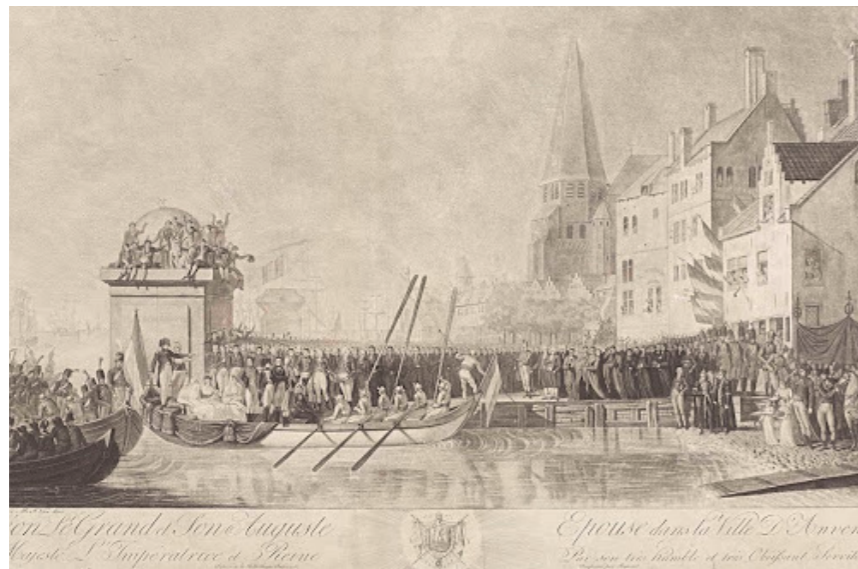


Figure 4: (top) Section of a map by Virgilius Bononiensis showing the *Nieuwstad* of the 16th century, designed by Gilbert Van Schoonbeke.

Stad Antwerpen. (s.d.). Wie was Gilbert Van Schoonbeke?. Retrieved from <https://www.antwerpen.be/info/5c6a8dbd3a2ed0ba7d20af93/wie-was-gilbert-van-schoonbeke>

Figure 5: (bottom) The arrival of Napoleon in Antwerp in 1803 by Ignatius Joseph van den Berghe (1803).

van den Berghe, I.J., (1803). *Aankomst van Napoleon en Josephine te Antwerpen 1803* [painting]. Retrieved from <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collectie/RP-P-1895-A-18733>

The old harbor area of Antwerp is located to the north of the city. Although it was originally located within the Spanish Walls⁴ around the old city center of Antwerp, it was never really a part of it. Even *de Oude Dokken*, to the south of *het Eilandje* were never connected to the city center (De Caigny, 2000). They were previously known as *de Nieuwstad* (the New town in English) and were designed by the founder of the urban development of Antwerp (stad Antwerpen, s.d.), Gilbert Van Schoonbeke in the 16th century. Starting from 1548, Van Schoonbeke launched an urbanization process to transform the *Nieuwstad* into a thriving economic center. He designed a new residential area and constructed three streams connecting the inland harbor to the Scheldt. In between the second and the third canal, an imposing building was designed by the German Hanze (Notteboom et al., 2004). The German Hanze was a union of different medieval cities that arose when merchants collectively defended themselves against assailants. The Hanze was a trade union between merchants and merchant cities from the late Middle Ages that was beneficial for trade (van Cruyningen, 2019). The Hanzenstedenplaats, where the Hanzenhuis was located, still constitutes an important place on *het Eilandje*. The 16th century symbolizes a period of economic growth and prosperity for the harbor of Antwerp.

In 1795 the French troupes occupied the Netherlands⁵ and overthrew the old regime of Willem V (Leysen, 2003), who was up until then the Stadtholder of the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands (de Carvalho-Roos, 2003). At the beginning of the 19th century, during the French regime, Napoleon Bonaparte was convinced of the strategic location of the port of Antwerp. Under his rule, the commencement of the second development phase of *het Eilandje* took place. In 1811 and 1812 the Little Dock (now known as the Bonapartedok) and the Large Dock (now known as the Willemdok) were inaugurated for military purposes (De Caigny, 2002). To make room for these two new docks, around one thousand and three hundred residential houses on the Boerenkwartier, an area in the *Nieuwstad* (Leysen, 2003), needed to be demolished (Tijts, 2007). Only the Hanzenhuis that served as lodging and warehouse was spared. On the East side of the Large Dock, two ninety-three meters long drydocks were constructed that would serve as construction and repair sites for large warships (Debroyer, 2015). Under the regime of Napoleon, this area in the harbor of Antwerp obtained its characteristic look, which is still visible up until today (De Caigny, 2000).

After the deposition of Napoleon in 1814, when the Dutch ruled over Antwerp again, the harbor acquired its commercial harbor function and character back (Notteboom et al., 2004). By order of Willem I additional docks were added more to the north of the city, which would compensate for the ever-growing harbor activities.

⁴ The Spanish walls were fortified walls built by order of Emperor Karel in 1542 – 1553 when Antwerp was the biggest city of the Netherlands. The walls and canals embraced the whole city center and were meant to withstand raids from other northern provinces. (Leysen, 2012)

⁵ The Republic of the Netherlands of the 18th century consisted of the northern and southern Netherlands. The Austrian Netherlands, the prince-bishopric of Liege and later also the Unified Departments (the French departments of the Austrian Netherlands and the prince-bishopric of Liege), were considered the South. The South consisted of the modern countries now known as Belgium, Luxemburg, a small part of the Netherlands and Germany. The Republic of the Seven United Netherlands covered the North (Blok, 1981).



Figure 6: (top) Plan of the city of Antwerp from 1866. Showing the Little Dock (*Petit Bassin*) and the Large Dock (*Grand Bassin*) north on the map.

Van de Kerckhove, J. (1866). *Plan de la ville d'Anvers et de son agrandissement général dressé et gravé d'après l'exécution des derniers plans modifiés de l'Etat* [map]. Retrieved from Tijss, R. (2007). *Antwerpen : atlas van een stad in ontwikkeling*. Lannoo.

Figure 7: (bottom) Willemdok with sailboats and a view on the *Koninklijke Stapelhuizen*.

s.n. (s.d.) *Willemdok met zeilschepen en zicht op het Koninklijk stapelhuis* [photograph]. Retrieved from https://felixarchief.antwerpen.be/detailpagina?invnr=934_23155&dtnr=1224_62&dtnr=8409&page=1&pageSize=10&type=copy

Around the docks in the *Nieuwstad*, a mix of functions now evolved, building blocks that house harbor activities were interspersed with housing facilities (De Caigny, 2000) (Leysen, 2012). In 1830 Willem I gave the order to build big-scale warehouses alongside the docks that received the fitting name of *Koninklijke Stapelhuizen* (Royal Warehouses) (Bekaert & Putteneers, 1990). These different building types together with the surrounding water made this area look and feel like a small island, therefore now named *het Eilandje* (the Small Island in English). After the independence of Belgium in 1830, the separation of the Southern Netherlands (Belgium) from the Northern Netherlands (Holland), the urbanization process of *het Eilandje* comprised three different phases. During the first phase from 1834 until 1867, urbanization progressed at a slow pace and only a few new buildings were realized. The next phase is characterized by the demolition of the Spanish Walls and another economic boom that continued until 1885. Towards the end of the 19th century, during the third phase, this positive trend came to an end. Up until the First World War, building activities grew once again (De Caigny, 2002).

Due to a low degree of damage caused by World War I, the city of Antwerp became overpopulated during the 1920s which led to an anti-urban mentality. Growing mobility in the suburbs of Antwerp made this area more attractive to the now overpopulated city center. During the period in between wars, the project on Linkeroever, the area across the harbor on the other bank of the Scheldt also commenced. Both of these events led to a flow of people out of the city center to the urban fringe. After the Second World War, the repair of the city appeared to be more expensive than it was after the First World War. As demolition of the destroyed buildings was cheaper than repairing them, more places became vacant all around the city center. These vacant places received the function of parking spaces to house the cars of commuters that, as mentioned above, moved to the urban fringe of Antwerp but still worked in the city center. (Notteboom et al., 2004)

B. HET EILANDJE FROM 1960 TO 1980

In the wake of a period of economic growth, the harbor activities of the port of Antwerp had outgrown the area of *het Eilandje*. Around 1960, the core of the harbor activities was relocated to an area more north of Antwerp, closer to the Netherlands. After being an important and vibrant part of the harbor of Antwerp for almost four centuries, *het Eilandje* had to relinquish its economic important position. Due to this relocation *de Oude Dokken*, together with other parts of *het Eilandje*, lost their economic value (De Caigny, 2002). This loss of value was accompanied by a reduction of working opportunities for the people that previously worked in the harbor. Not only did the relocation mean a loss of employment for the dockworkers that up to now lived on *het Eilandje*, it also meant a decrease of users for other facilities that had found their way to the active harbor area. Since the period before the demolishing of the Spanish Walls, the hotel and catering industry on *het Eilandje* bloomed. The population register, for instance, registered a total of eighty-five innkeepers in the period before the demolishing of the Spanish Walls. Up until the early 1970s, the presence of hostels, coffeehouses, and bars was almost as defining for the atmosphere of the



Figure 8: (top) Godefriduskaai, with the Felixpakhuis on the left and a view of the Hanzehuis in 1880.
 s.n. (s.d.) Godefriduskaai, het Sint-Felixpakhuis links en het Oostershuis achter de masten van de zeilboten in het Willemdok [photograph]. Retrieved from https://felixarchief.antwerpen.be/detailpagina?invnr=FOTO-OF_216&dnr=1224_40&dtrecordid=25650&page=1&pageSize=10&type=copy

Figure 9: (bottom) Sketch of the Koninklijke Stapelhuizen on het Eilandje.
 Retrieved from Bekaert, G., & Kooning, M. D. (1990). *Hommage koninklijke stapelhuizen antwerpen* (Ser. Vlees en beton, 14-15). Gehavende Stad.

area as the harbor activity itself (De Caigny, 2002). All these factors resulted in the moving out of the residents of *het Eilandje* to another area of the city with more job opportunities. By the early 1970s, *het Eilandje* became an abandoned and desolated area with little prospect of a future.

A symbol of this loss of value of the area were the *Koninklijke Stapelhuizen* around the Willemdok. The buildings were a remnant of the heydays of the harbor activities and were now, same as many other buildings on *het Eilandje*, vacant. In 1968 the city announced its ideas for a new large-scale project for which the *Koninklijke Stapelhuizen* had to make way. The warehouses didn't have a function or value for Antwerp anymore, so had to be demolished (Bekaert & Putteneers, 1990). On the site of the *Koninklijke Stapelhuizen* project developer E.P.M.C (the European Property Management Corporation) would build large office towers that would be occupied by the city of Antwerp, the ministry of finances and private companies (Van Gerrewey, 2009).

Only during the 1970s, did the housing market take the first steps in urban renewal and shifted its gaze to the vacant harbor area. With the *Structuurschets Antwerpen: de binnenstad* (Structure Sketch: downtown) from 1973, living in the city received more attention and the suburbanization was not being tolerated anymore. The plan called for a halt in the demolition wave that went throughout the whole city. Urban monuments were preserved and areas for redevelopment and revaluation were determined. The structure plan resulted in a more positive attitude towards living in the city (Notteboom et al., 2004).

C. HET EILANDJE FROM 1980 TO 2000

In response to the demolishing of a building with an important historical value together with the threat of the demolishing of the *Koninklijke Stapelhuizen*, painter Jan Vanriet (Braeken, 2013) and architecture historian Geert Bekaert, created the non-profit organization *De Gehavende Stad* (Bekaert & Putteneers, 1990). This organization was a collection of different urbanists and architects that had the same vision for the city. Their goal was to bring the city of Antwerp back to the Scheldt, by reconnecting Antwerp with the water, without the harbor activities being present there anymore. During this period another non-profit organization that would have a considerable influence on the takeoff of the redevelopment of *het Eilandje*, was created. This second organization, called *Stad aan de Stroom* (City by the Stream), symbolized a series of projects to reconnect the inner city to the harbor area (Van Gerrewey, 2009).

However, opposed to these organizations that strove to preserve the historic appearance of the city of Antwerp as a harbor city, not all the significant buildings were being saved. In spite of protests from *De Gehavende Stad* as well as the inhabitants of Antwerp, the demolishment of the *Koninklijke Stapelhuizen* next to the Willemdok got a green light in 1990 (Bekaert & Putteneers, 1990). These protests with the aim of preserving the historic significance of the warehouses to

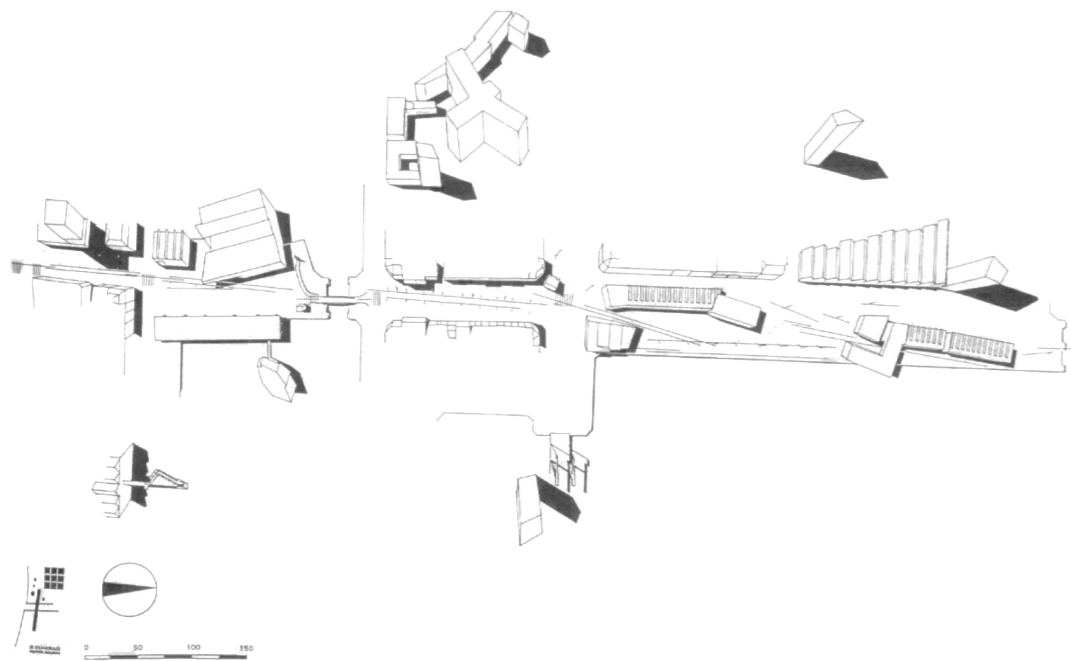
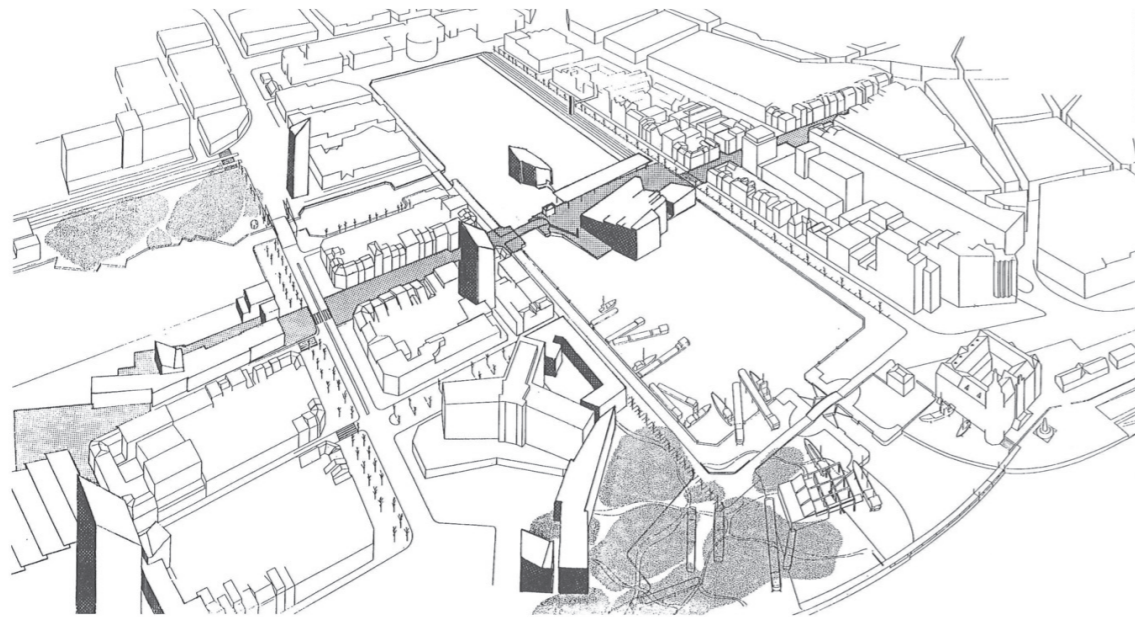


Figure 10: (top) Plan of Manuel de Solà-Morales for *het Eilandje*.

Antwerpen morgen. (s.d.). *Structuurplan vandaag*. Retrieved from <https://www.antwerpenmorgen.be/nl/projecten/structuurplan-vandaag/tijdlijn>

Figure 11: (bottom) Sketch made by Manuel de Solà-Morales showing the north-south axis envisioned to connect *het Eilandje* with the rest of the city of Antwerp.

de Solà-Morales, M. (1993). *As Falcon-Nassau-Montevideo perspectief* [drawing]. Retrieved from De Solà Morales, M. (1993). Antwerpen 'stad aan de stroom' plantoelichting. (K. Borret, Trans.). OASE, 35, 32 – 42.

Antwerp came as a shock to the former mayor Bob Cools⁶. To counteract these objections, Cools invited American architect Richard Meier to Antwerp to share his view on these buildings. Meier, who was in Cools' eyes the best architect in the world, dismissed the buildings as worthless. Although the minister of spatial planning and housing John Mangelschots suggested inviting other influential designers like Italian architect Aldo Rossi or Belgian architect Charles Vandenhove to share their view on the subject, this was dismissed as undesired by Cools. When in 1989 Louis Waltniel, who did not have any affinity with the preservation and protection of monuments, became minister of spatial planning and housing, the matter of the demolishing of the *Koninklijke Stapelhuizen* was as good as settled (Van Gerrewey, 2009).

On June 27th 1990, *Stad aan de Stroom* announced the winners of the international design idea competition for the previous harbor area including *het Eilandje* (Van Gerrewey, 2009). Two important designers that came out of this competition were Japanese architect Toyo Ito for the area in Antwerp that carries the name *het Zuid* (the South) and Spanish architect and urbanist Manuel de Solà-Morales for *het Eilandje* and the quays next to the Scheldt (Leysen, 2003). De Solà-Morales's idea for the region was to create an urban area that would not feel isolated or marginalized anymore but, in its appearance and activities, still stayed closely connected to the water (Solà-Morales, 1993). In 1991 a series of events, under the name *Stroomversnelling* (Rapids in English) (Van Gerrewey, 2009), were organized by three different musea (the Hessenhuis, the Volkskundemuseum and the Scheepvaartmuseum (Peeters, 2002)) in and around the harbor of Antwerp for the inhabitants of Antwerp. The aim was to attract attention back to this area and provide information on the new plans.

In 1993, the city of Antwerp was appointed the title of Cultural Capital of Europe. This nomination was not received positively in every sector. Where all the events and projects undertaken by *Stad aan de Stroom* could be seen as a dress rehearsal for Antwerp 93, not everyone in the sector agreed to this title. Indignant reactions sounded about the fact that a city that dealt with its cultural heritage in such a loosely manner (for example the *Koninklijke Stapelhuizen*), could earn the title of Cultural Capital (Bekaert & Putteneers, 1990). Not only was this disagreement a consequence of the nomination, most of the funding from the city of Antwerp that previously went to *Stad aan de Stroom*, was now redirected to Antwerp 93. *Stad aan de Stroom* lost its main funding and therefore budget for the redevelopment of *het Eilandje* by de Solà-Morales together with all the other areas that were being redesigned. In 1994 the dream of the organization came to an end when Antwerp decided to withdraw all its remaining funding (Van Gerrewey, 2009).

The 1990s symbolized a first attempt in the redevelopment of and relaunch of activities on the desolated harbor area with the aim of preserving its important historical value to the city.

D. HET EILANDJE FROM 2000 UNTIL 2020

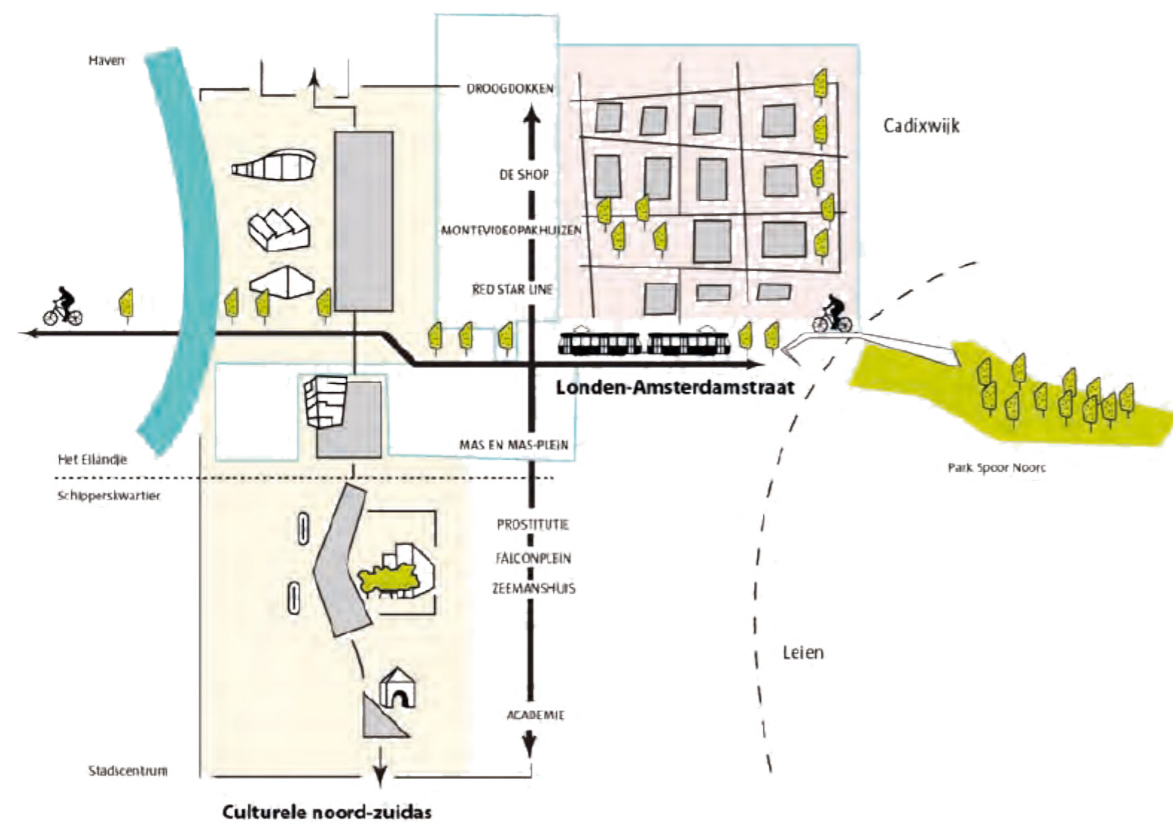


Figure 12: Sketch for the north-south axis in the masterplan of 2002 based on the vision of Manuel de Solà-Morales. s.n. (s.d.). Schematische voorstelling van de twee verbindende assen van het Eilandje [sketch]. Retrieved from https://www.antwerpen.be/docs/stad/stadsvernieuwing/bestemmingsplannen/rup_11002_214_10010_00001/RUP_11002_214_10010_00001_00073VISIE_tn.html

In 1999, given his experience with urban regeneration projects in Maastricht and Rotterdam (Leysen, 2003), Dutch architect and artist René Daniels got appointed city architect (*stadtbouwmeester* in Dutch) of Antwerp. The job of city architect was not a new function in Antwerp, however, the description and function behind the title had changed. The last architect of the 20th century that carried this title was Emiel Van Averbeké from 1876 until 1946, afterwards the job was reduced to chief architect-director of City Building Department. In the 20th century, the job of city architect was mainly of advisory nature whereas, in the 21st century the city architect was in charge of the quality assurance of different design disciplines including architecture, urbanism, and monument preservation (Antwerpen morgen, s.d.).

For most part of the history of the harbor, the land was owned by the port authorities. This, together with finding a consensus between different the actors, was one of the reasons behind the difficult redevelopment of the area. Around the same period as the appointment of René Daniels as the city architect, the port authorities formed a committee that appointed Daniels as the project leader of the project office of the redesign for *het Eilandje*. In 2002 Daniels produced, together with his architecture firm Buro 5 Maastricht, a master plan for the area. Around the year 2007, the city of Antwerp appoints *AG Stadsplanning Antwerpen*⁷ and *AG Vespa*⁸ to coordinate the redevelopment of *het Eilandje*. *AG Stadsplanning* would overlook the overall planning, quality protection and public domain, whereas *AG Vespa* would manage the transactions of the plots and real estate development. Furthermore, *AG Vespa* also holds the function of the principal constructor for different projects on *de Oude Dokken*, like the Felixpakhuis and the MAS. In this stage, *AG Stadsplanning* appointed a new manager from their team that would take over the job that was previously belonged to Daniels (Kenniscentrum Vlaamse steden, 2018).

In the new masterplan of *het Eilandje*, Bura 5 Maastricht tried to build upon the initial ideas of Manuel de Solà-Morales. Derived from his masterplan, a cultural north-south axis was created on *het Eilandje*. The goal of this axis was to reconnect the historic city center with the water with the use of steppingstones on this line (The academy of Fine Arts, Felixpakhuis, etc.) (Kenniscentrum Vlaamse steden, 2018). As an addition to this vision, the renovations of the Sint Felixpakhuis, one of the warehouses on *de Oude Dokken*, is finished in 2006. The former warehouse, now houses all kinds of different functions such as a restaurant and the city archive of Antwerp (Felixarchief) (Felixarchief Antwerpen, s.d.). The focus on the dual vision between preservation and renewal has also been included in the new vision for the area. The preservation of the historic character of old harbor areas is not evident for each city. For instance, in the redevelopment of the desolated harbor area in the city

⁷ AG Stadsplanning Antwerpen (Urban planning Antwerp) is an autonomous company founded by the city of Antwerp to guarantee guidance and quality for different city development projects (Lorquet, 2012).

⁸ AG Vespa is an autonomous municipal company for real estate and urban projects in Antwerp (AG Vespa, s.d.).



Figure 13: the MAS on the Hanzenstedenplaats

Stad Antwerpen. (2011). *District Antwerpen. RUP EILANDJE (RUP_11002_241_10010_00001). TOELICHTINGSNOTA*. Retrieved from https://www.antwerpen.be/docs/stad/stadsvernieuwing/bestemmingsplannen/rup_11002_241_10010_00001/RUP_11002_241_10010_00001_00073VISIE_tn.html

of London, the LDDC (London Docklands Development Corporation) mainly focused on people, purpose and change of the area. Their main aim for the Docklands was to preserve its distinguishing feature of the waterscape together with creating opportunities for large-scale developments that could be built unobstructed by other buildings (Ward, 1986).

The balance between history and modernity that can be found in the masterplan as well as in the present view of *het Eilandje* creates its unique and distinguished character. On the one hand, the plan includes precise restoration, renovation and repurposing of the existing historic urban fabric. On the other hand, space is being made for new iconic towers and waterfronts (Autonom Gemeentebedrijf Stadsplanning Antwerpen, 2012). One of these buildings that would become an icon on *de Oude Dokken*, is the Museum aan de Stroom (MAS - Museum by the Stream), designed by the Dutch architecture firm, Neutelings Riedijk Architects in 2006 and build in 2011 (Kenniscentrum Vlaamse steden, 2018). The museum was designed in the image of the historic warehouses and therefore connects the old with the new in an innovative manner (Leysen, 2003). This new iconic building was located at the site where a formerly monumental building was located, the Hanzehuis on the Hanzestedenplaats. Not only did the MAS attract the attention of tourists, and therefore placed the area of *de Oude Dokken* back on the map, it is also regularly visited by the inhabitants of Antwerp who regard it as a landmark in their city.

This new and rethought master plan resulted in the revival of *het Eilandje*, especially *de Oude Dokken*. Thanks to the MAS and other interventions, the area became an attraction for tourists and a new trendy neighborhood for inhabitants of Antwerp (Autonom Gemeentebedrijf Stadsplanning Antwerpen, 2012). The connection with this new trendy area is only being reinforced by the installation of a new tram stop right on *de Oude Dokken*.

II. GENTRIFICATION OF DE OUDE DOKKEN

A. THE PROCESS OF GENTRIFICATION OF DE OUDE DOKKEN



Figure 14: Aerial view of *het Eilandje* in 1987.

s.n. (s.d.). *Luchtopnamen havengebied in 1987* [photograph]. Retrieved from https://felixarchief.antwerpen.be/detailpagina?invnr=FOTO-HB_3298&dtnr=1224_40&dtrecordid=86466&page=1&pageSize=10&type=copy

Figure 15: Aerial view of *het Eilandje* today.

AG Vespa, (s.d.). *MAS - Museum Aan de Stroom*. Retrieved from <https://www.agvespa.be/projecten/mas-museum-aan-de-stroom#>

As described in the introduction, the process of gentrification consists of different phases. The area of *het Eilandje* indeed went through a considerable number of changes throughout the years that could cause a change in inhabitants. The first substantial change in the inhabitants and its number was characterized by moving the harbor activities to an area more to the north of Antwerp during the 1960s. Due to a decrease in job opportunities, both for dockworkers as well as for the inhabitants that serviced the restaurant and hostel business, residents moved out of this previously thriving area. In 1961, right before the move, the population of *het Eilandje* amounted to 8728 people (De Caigny, 2002), compared to 4572 residents today (Stad in cijfers Antwerpen, rapport demografie). Even up until now, the population of the revalued area does not reach the number of residents during the heydays of the urban area.

This urban flight and deflation of the area came to its peak in the late 1970s. The area around the docks was left deserted and abandoned, stripped from all its facilities and liveliness. However, *het Eilandje* was not left without opportunities or a future. This now newly desolated area with a strong history and harbor character attracted the interest and attention of new people. The vacant warehouses and other big buildings on *de Oude Dokken*, which were previously used for harbor activities, became suitable as inexpensive studio spaces and residential units. Artists together with other creative and open-minded citizens found their way to these buildings around the water (Notteboom et al., 2004). Not all warehouses were being reused immediately, an example of this is the Felixpakhuis (Felix warehouse). The warehouse, which is located next to the Willemdok, also became vacant in 1975 but was declared a protected monument one year later (Felixpakhuis, s.d.). Due to these different factors, the area regained attention and vibrancy from a completely different group of people than before but still managed to preserve its harbor nature and image with the addition of galleries and studios.

Due to these new residents' partial revival of the area, the area acquired even more new possibilities. It was only until the early 1980s that the city of Antwerp itself became interested in *het Eilandje* again. During this period, initiatives were being created regarding the redevelopment and revaluation of the area. However, it was not up until the end of the 1980s actual plans of action were being undertaken (Notteboom et al., 2004). As previously explained, due to different factors, this redevelopment only took off in the years 2000. At that time, the total population of *het Eilandje* amounted to 1198 residents in the year 2000 (Stad in cijfers, Antwerpen), which is only 14% of the initial population during the heydays of the area.

During these early years of redevelopment and restoration of the area, some well-known and influential artist moved their studio spaces to *de Oude Dokken* as well, one of these artists being Belgian fashion designer and member of the Antwerp Six⁹, Dries Van Noten (VisitFlanders, s.d.). On behalf of Van Noten, Pakhuis Godfried, another protected warehouse around *de Oude Dokken*, was renovated so it could be used as his studio space (DMT architecten, s.d.). This already indicated a shift regarding the nature of the residents. Where before beginning and self-renounced

⁹ The Antwerp Six is a title used for a group of renowned Belgian fashion designers who all graduated from the Fashion Department of the Antwerp's Royal Academy of Fine Arts in the academic year 1980 – 1981. The group includes Dries Van Noten, Ann Demeulemeester, Dirk Van Saene, Walter Van Beirendonck, Dirk Bikkembergs and Marina Yee (VisitFlanders, s.d.).

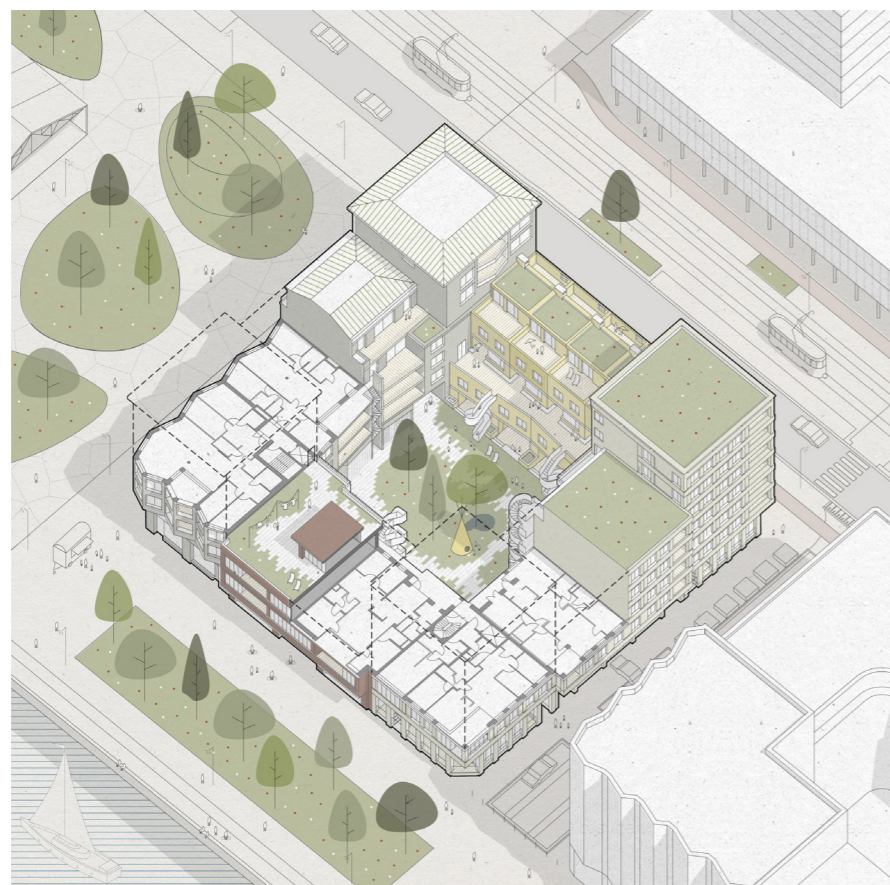
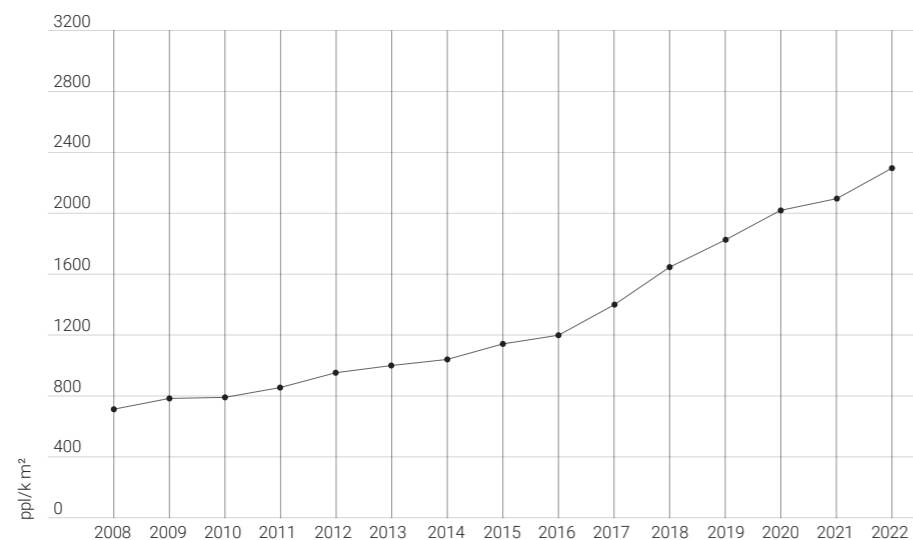


Figure 16: (top) Table showing the increase in population density on *het Eilandje*.
 Stad in cijfers: Databank (s.d.). *Rapport Demografie: Wijk Eilandje*. Retrieved from https://stadincijfers.antwerpen.be/databank/Report?id=demografie_parents&input_geo=ggw7_11002ant05

Figure 17: Design for a family friendly building next to the water in the Cadix neighborhood by BULK architecten with the aim of attracting families and children to *het Eilandje*.
 BULK. (s.d.). *Cadix A4*. Retrieved from <https://bulkarchitecten.be/nl/catalogus/huisvesting/cadix-a4>

artists started using the warehouses as ateliers, renowned artists, who would attract other users to the area, also made use of this urban area now.

With guidance from AG Vespa, the plots on *de Oude Dokken*, which were initially owned by the harbor itself, were being sold to the private housing market. The city trusted them to renovate and create all kinds of projects within the old warehouses. The opening of the new museum het MAS, which received a prominent place in between the Bonapartedok and the Willemdok, in 2011 characterized a new activation of and attraction to the area (Antwerpen, 2011). However, this did not automatically result in an attraction of new wealthier inhabitants to the area. Only after a while, when trendy coffee bars, restaurants, and bars opened around *de Oude Dokken*, to facilitate these new visitors and tourists, did the area become attractive for wealthier residents. The prices of the now privately owned lofts and apartments became too expensive for the previous pioneers (Stad in cijfers, Antwerpen). This led to the moving away of the creative pioneers of *het Eilandje* to another urban area that would suit their lifestyle. As a result, more housing opportunities became available for residents with a higher income.

This phenomenon of housing opportunities for wealthier residents characterizes the area of *de Oude Dokken* in particular. In the master plan of Bura 5 Maastricht and AG Vespa, this area of *het Eilandje* was reserved for private investors that would turn the old warehouses into high-class housing units. However, in contradiction to this, in one of the other neighborhoods on *het Eilandje*, the Cadix neighborhood, lands were sold from the port of Antwerp to the city of Antwerp itself as prescribed by the *Ruimtelijke Uitvoeringsplan Eilandje* (Spatial Executionplan Eilandje – RUP). In that way, the city of Antwerp could coordinate and control the sustainable housing projects that would house a social mix of inhabitants (Antwerpen, 2011).

B. THE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF GENTRIFICATION OF *DE OUDE DOKKEN*

The process of gentrification generally receives divided opinions from urbanists, researchers, and policymakers. Where some share the opinion that gentrification is beneficial for the public sphere and the built environment, others see a great disadvantage and downfall in the social coherence of the city, referring to the involuntary move of poorer citizens out of a certain area. Furthermore, the positive and negative impacts due to gentrification will always be based on the viewpoint of the commentator. What an investor or owner sees as a positive result, perhaps is not seen as positive for certain households or according to sociologists. This discussion about the consequences of gentrification is an interesting and difficult one as it involves the relationship between the political view of observers and the recognized qualities of the process itself (Atkinson, 2004). The gentrification process of *het Eilandje*, more precisely *de Oude Dokken*, is in that regard no different to other gentrified cities or neighborhoods. The next part of the thesis will go over the perceived negative and positive impacts of gentrification on the area.

The main negative consequence of gentrification is the loss of affordable housing in one whole area that resulted in a homogenization of the social environment

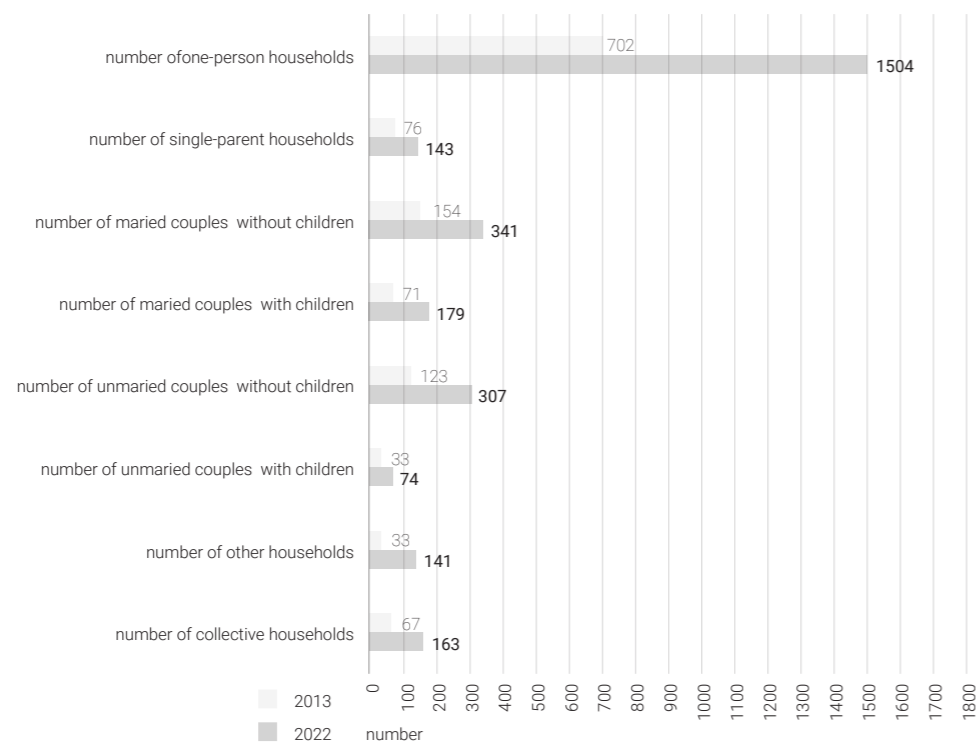
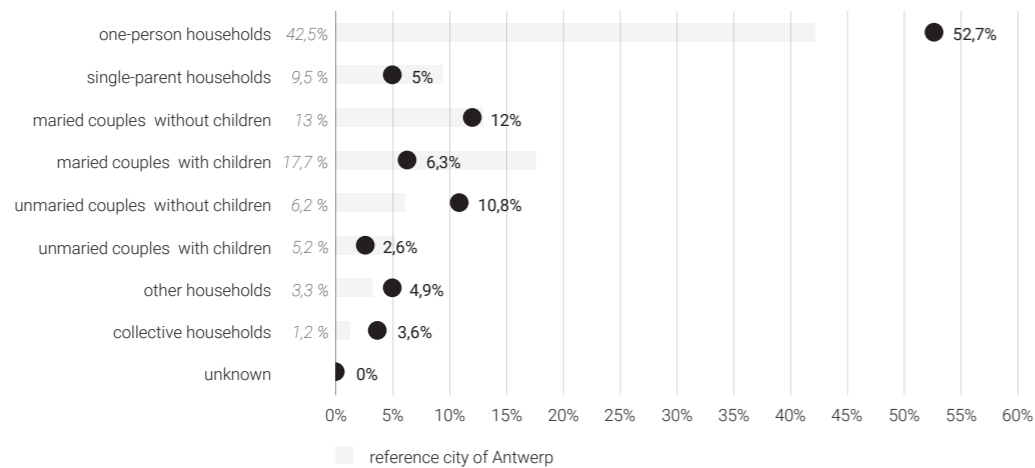


Figure 18: (top) Table showing the share of households by type on *het Eilandje* compared to the whole city of Antwerp.

Stad in cijfers: Databank (s.d.). *Rapport Demografie: Wijk Eilandje*. Retrieved from https://stadincijfers.antwerpen.be/databank/Report?id=demografie_parents&input_geo=ggw7_11002ant05

Figure 19: (bottom) Table showing the evolution of the numbers of households according to type from 2013 to 2022.

Stad in cijfers: Databank (s.d.). *Rapport Demografie: Wijk Eilandje*. Retrieved from https://stadincijfers.antwerpen.be/databank/Report?id=demografie_parents&input_geo=ggw7_11002ant05

(Atkinson, 2004). As previously mentioned, this increase in rent prices led to a flight of early pioneers with a standard income to an area that would better suit their needs. On *de Oude Dokken*, this was no different. The real estate prices on *de Oude Dokken* increased dramatically in the last fifteen years. Where the area was previously only occupied by dockworkers or people offering related services and goods, afterward used by the early pioneers, it is now one of the most expensive neighborhoods in the whole city of Antwerp. The average price per square meter for the year 2022 amounts to €3251,23 for a house and €4000 for an apartment, while the average price per square meter for the whole of Antwerp is €2361 for a house and €2729 for an apartment (realeo, s.d.). This comparison proves the neighborhood to be one only available for people with a higher income.

The affordability of the houses is not the only manner by which the social cohesions of the area can be distinguished. After analyzing the statistics of the neighborhood provided by the city of Antwerp¹⁰, the household compositions show a clear majority of one type, namely the single-person household. In the data of 2022, it appears that more than half (52,7%) of the households living on *het Eilandje* are single-person households. The second and third place of the most occurring household are married couples who do not have children (12%) and unmarried couples who do not have children (10,8%). Where the number of single-person households is considerably higher than the average in the whole of Antwerp (42,5%), the most outspoken difference can be found in the number of unwed couples without children (average Antwerp: 6,2) (Stad in cijfers Antwerpen, rapport demografie). This change is also visible in the table showing the change in households for 2013 to 2022. The table shows that in these nine years each category grew, however, the unwed households without children more than doubled. Naturally, this growth of childless couples is also accompanied by an increase of residents who are of older age (65 or older). The composition of the households also relates to the budget people set aside for rent as they don't need to provide for any children (yet/anymore). Next to having a higher budget for rent, their spending habits lean towards high-end facilities, which leads to a move from these facilities to the area. This attraction of new higher-end facilities results in a more exclusive character of the area in regards to its residents. Another factor that shows the increased homogenization of the area, is the amount of native-born Belgian people living there. More than two-thirds of the residents are people that are *first born* Belgians¹¹.

Although available research did not tend to focus on the positive effects of gentrification, two aspects should be highlighted, (i) the renewal of an urban area and (ii) the increase of property values and local services (Atkinson, 2004). (i) The most prominent aspect of gentrification on *het Eilandje*, which can be considered as a positive consequence is the redevelopment of the previously decaying and

10 Stad in cijfers: Dashboard. (s.d.). Retrieved from <https://stadincijfers.antwerpen.be/dashboard/hoofd-dashboard/demografie>

11 The city of Antwerp defines the nationality of a person by first looking at the nationality of the father. When the nationality of the father is not known, the nationality is defined by the first nationality of the mother. Only when both are not known, is the first nationality of the individual defining for the determination. People who were born in Belgium, but have parents whom both have a foreign nationality, are categorized as foreigners (Stad in cijfers Antwerpen, rapport demografie).



Figure 20: (top) Present view of historic buildings like Godefridus Pakhuis and the Felix Pakhuis on the Godefriduskaai.
 s.n. (s.d.). *Het Eilandje*. Retrieved from <https://www.allesoverantwerpen.nl/wijken/eilandje.htm>

Figure 21: (bottom) The preserved original interior of the Felixpakhuis.
 Daem, K. (s.d.). *Felix Pakhuis* [photograph]. Retrieved from <https://www.librarybuildings.eu/library/st-felix-warehouse/>

abandoned area resulting in the preservation of the historic architecture and structures as a cultural asset and as such reestablishing the identity of its inhabitants of Antwerp related to their historical harbor site. The former harbor regained attention and prestige back thanks to funding from the government as well as the investment from private actors (Autonoom Gemeentebedrijf Stadsplanning Antwerpen, 2012). Furthermore, this revaluation of the area does not only impact the built environment but as a wider impact, after creating an architecturally more appealing area, the attraction by the public also led to an increase in activities and local services in the area. Before, when the area still had a primarily harbor function, the local services mainly consisted of hostels and bars aimed at the dockworkers and merchants. With the desolation of the area, these functions also disappeared (De Caigny, 2002). When the attention of tourists and inhabitants of Antwerp was turned to the area of *het Eilandje*, mainly *de Oude Dokken* thanks to the MAS, these local services reappeared. Where before they mainly consisted of hostels and bars the majority of the services now located in the area are trendy coffee bars, restaurants, and bars, that would also suit the lifestyle of the new high-class residents. Not only did the process of gentrification have a big impact on the residents and the built environment, this also resulted in the revaluation and rehabilitation of the neighborhood in the eyes of the citizens of Antwerp (Autonoom Gemeentebedrijf Stadsplanning Antwerpen, 2012). The harbor area that before was not really connected to the historic city center of the city now feels like a full-fledged extension to a lively city center that is being used both by residents of the area itself, citizens of Antwerp together with tourists.

(ii) As explained before, the increase of the property value has some vital negative consequences, but from an economical viewpoint can be seen as a positive outcome. This viewpoint of course being the one of the owners of the properties. Some also say the increase in households living in this area also results in a boost of the city tax revenues. However, the statement of gentrification being beneficial for city taxes is not supported by researchers of gentrification as the new wealthy residents in many cases just moved from another part of the same city (Atkinson, 2000).

III. CONCLUSION



Figure 22: Aerial view from *het Eilandje* along the Scheldt to the city center of Antwerp.
s.n. (s.d.). WEEKENDJE WEG IN ANTWERPEN. Vlaanderen Vakantieland. Retrieved from <https://www.vlaanderenvakantieland.be/artikel/weekendje-weg-antwerpen>

This paper presents evidence that the process of gentrification was indeed present in the area of *het Eilandje* in Antwerp and impacted both the built and social environment of the area during the researched period of time. Research done by a systematic review of Dutch and English literature covering the history of the harbor area of Antwerp shows that the events leading up to gentrification can be perceived in the post-World War II urban fabric of the area (Leysen, 2003). By analyzing the data provided by the city of Antwerp itself of the current residents together with fieldwork it can be concluded a considerable change in residents and its behavior took place as well (Stad in cijfers Antwerpen, rapport demografie).

The history of the area shows to be one of many ups and downs, prosperity and hardship, which resulted in a dynamic flow of residents, interest, and disinterest throughout the years. Due to the increase of the harbor activities, *het Eilandje* had to give up its important function as the center of the harbor activities shifted to a larger and logistically better-situated area north of the city. As was the case in many other post-World War II cities, this now desolated and abandoned area became occupied by new pioneers in a natural manner (Notteboom et al., 2004). As explained in the introduction, this is one of the first steps towards the phenomenon of gentrification (Metaal, 2007). In the case of *het Eilandje* and mainly *de Oude Dokken*, the harbor character of the area and the proximity to the city center were important aspects for the revival of the area. Prominent buildings were being listed as monuments and others preserved their authenticity as a consequence of these artistic pioneers. When the city of Antwerp itself regained interest in the area inevitably linked to the water, this being the docks and the river the Scheldt, it initiated plans regarding the restoration of the reputation and liveliness of the area. These plans for the redevelopment could be seen as successful. The area of *het Eilandje*, more specifically *de Oude Dokken*, gained a unique and vibrant character by preserving the harbor distinguished architecture while at the same time elevating the area by the addition of modern architecture. However, it can be argued that one of the consequences of this revaluation was gentrification initiated by the government (Notteboom et al., 2004).

After analyzing the data regarding the residents of *het Eilandje*, the social homogenization of the area can be perceived. The residents of the area consist for the majority of single-person households and couples without children (Stad in cijfers Antwerpen, rapport demografie). The negative impact of gentrification was most felt in the area of *het Eilandje* called *de Oude Dokken*. As the real estate on this part of the former harbor area was sold to private investors under the supervision of AG Vespa, which was created by the city of Antwerp, the buildings were turned into high-class housing units and ceased to be affordable for the previous pioneers (Kenniscentrum Vlaamse steden, 2018). However, a positive change in the urban fabric can also be seen. In consequence of the redevelopment plans and ideas of the city about *het Eilandje*, the area that previously felt disconnected and excluded from the city center of Antwerp is now perceived and being used as a complete extension of it. *De Oude Dokken* currently possess the elements that attract visits from people not living in Antwerp themselves as well as residents of Antwerp, which makes the area a vibrant and lively place for all types of visitors (Notteboom et al., 2004). However, it is an exclusive and socially homogeneous neighborhood that doesn't translate the same atmosphere of an urban mixture the urban area itself radiates.



Whether or not the negative consequences of gentrification outweigh the positive impact it can have on the urban fabric, is a discussion that falls outside the scope of this research paper. This paper attempted to present the events leading up to the gentrification of *de Oude Dokken* and displayed the effects both negative and positive it had on the urban space. It summed up the events that caused the several rediscoverings and redevelopment of an area with a rich and dynamic harbor character, to give insight into the manner in which it is now used and perceived by the various users of the space.



Figure 23: View from the Sint-Aldegondiskaai to the MAS and the Napoleonkaai across the Willemdok.
Luxevastgoed. (2022). *Exclusief nieuwbouwproject Eiland*. Retrieved from <https://www.luxevastgoed.be/nl/blog/1258/exclusief-nieuwbouwproject-eiland>

Figure 24: View of the atmosphere on the Napoleonkaai overlooking the Willemdok with the Godefriduskaai across the water.
Ontdek Antwerpen. (s.d.). *Wijk in de kijker: Het Eilandje*. Retrieved from <https://ontdek.antwerpen.be/thema/in-de-kijker/het-eilandje>

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