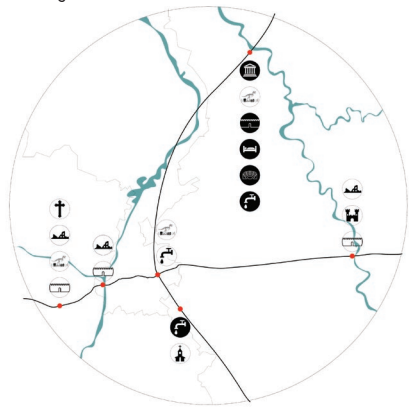


# (RE)DEFINING THE ROMAN QUARTER OF HEERLEN

Peter BONGAERTS scientific coordinator  
Nick CEULEMANS; Marijn VAN DE WEIJER  
teaching staff

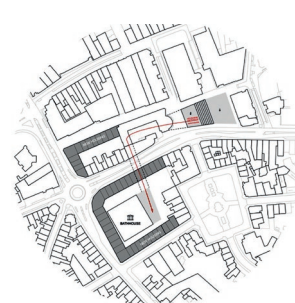
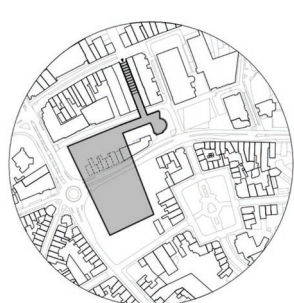
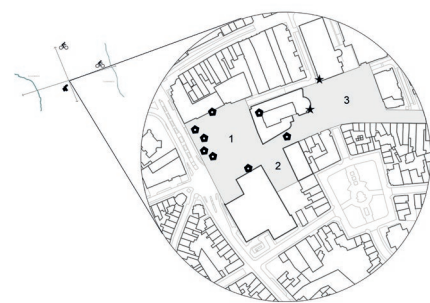
Floris AKKERMANS, Andi BELULAJ (Tu Delft), Nina CLAUS (Tu Eindhoven), Yves DUPONT, Ianthe LINDELAUF, Niels MATHOUL, John SILVERTAND, Steffi THIJS, Cente VAN HOUT participant students



The Via Belgica archeological context



Observations on the Roman Quarter in relation to its contemporary role in Heerlen



Activating the mental space / Re-Use

universiteit  
hasselt

ARCHITECTUUR EN KUNST

Within the larger academic context and framework of Hasselt University and the ARK faculty the research group focuses on architecture in its relation with fundamental/applied research and community services.

The interplays between practice and reflection, between métier and creativity, and between research and education are at the core of this ambition, an ambition that is driven by a process that is both contextualised and goal oriented.

Although design and artistic creation remain central, both in education and research, interdisciplinary connections with the humanities and engineering are actively sought out.

Main topics of the group, within the Ark, centre around four clusters, all of which involve a combination of the three factors of Process, Product and Performance: Adaptive reuse; Capacity building (collaborative design processes); Designing for More (user-space interaction); Sustainability (in design product and process). Consolidated relationships are engaged with US and European Academies.

Keywords: Collaborative design processes; Reuse; Community



Strategy one: reAction City;



Strategy 2: relginition City;



Strategy 3: reLiving City

**AMBITION.** The contribution to the International studio 'Revitalization by Reconciliation' from students at the Faculty of Architecture and Arts at Hasselt University investigates the spatial redefining of a 'Roman Quarter' in the heart of both the Parkstad urban district, and the wider Meuse-Rhine Euregion. This district-to-be-defined is a part of Heerlen's city core, centred around the archaeological site Roman Baths. Moving from Delft to Venice, the students' research process took shape as a trajectory which, primarily, made spatial opportunities and challenges explicit; and secondly, explored strategies for planning interventions addressing these spatial opportunities and challenges. While covering a broad range, all strategies discussed here, share the goal to transform Heerlen into an attractive city and combat the negative effects of a shrinking population. What is the main identity of

the Roman Quarter today? This was the main research question formulated in Delft. At this point, the students observed that in fact the Roman Quarter is built up from a number of diverse patterns, determined by relics of the formative epochs that have determined the urban development of Heerlen - the Roman, Medieval, Mining and Modern eras. **The opportunity is hence to stitch these patterns together in order to establish a more recognizable identity for the district-to-be-defined.** Perceived challenges are the lack of green spaces in the urban quarter, and the presence of road infrastructure, which might function as a barrier to pedestrians.

**PROJECT.** The response to these observations took the shape of a 'Strategy Matrix'. The strategies included 'Greening' - inserting green spots or ribbons in the city - 'Airing' - transforming enclosed space into open space by cutting through or removing

building blocks - and 'Stratifying' - joining together key urban artefacts by connector spaces either lifted up into the air or sunken under the surface level. Primary explorations of these concepts provided deeper insights into the opportunities and challenges of the Roman Quarter, which led to further exploration in follow-up of the workshop. In Venice, the research question was formulated even more ambitious by asking: What is Heerlen today? Their upscaling of the enquiry led students to take into account spatial conditions on the level of the region, as Heerlen lies at the location of an ancient Roman crossroads, joining the trajectories between Tongeren (Belgium) to Cologne (Germany) and between the German settlements of Aachen and Xanten. The problem definition was extended with analyses of the relatively affordable housing stock, the significant amount of vacant buildings, and the limited quality of public open space.

This led to the perspective that concrete architectural programmes, like a new protective structure over the archaeological site and the migration of the related roman museum and city archives to the vacated public library building, should attain a higher level of impact, by including a search for connectivity and useable public space. The strategies of the earlier matrix were translated into three conceptual stories which were imaginatively projected onto the urban tissue of the Roman Quarter. The first story, '(re)Action City', translates the ancient Roman DNA of the location into the layout of a Euroregional cycling route, conceptually coinciding with the Roman crossroads. The second story, '(re)Ignition City', equally proposes a new connection, but one which is condensed into a single building. This building, an accessible urban-scale roof structure, joins archaeological protection, pedestrian circulation and eventful urban

space into one architectural statement. Lastly, '(re)Living City' aims to diversify the urban housing stock with novel housing types, hence addressing both the residential quality and the problem of vacancy. The public sites of interest, like the Roman Baths, are enveloped with novel residential blocks. The public inner spaces of these blocks are made accessible with underground passages, which take shape as enriching public spaces, such as open-air theatres. Rather than achieving a final stage, these stories unlock a joint research programme for further exploration in the follow-up design studio, which is currently being organised at Hasselt University under supervision of Jo Coenen and Nick Ceulemans. The exploratory designs demonstrate the range of imaginative yet feasible approaches to enrich the planning & development process conducted in the overarching IBA Parkstad Project.