Capacity-Building Workshop in Europe

Safeguarding Living Heritage in Urban Contexts

12-13 October | Antwerp, Belgium

FIELD VISIT: Bicycle Culture

13 October 2026

Time: 9:00 am

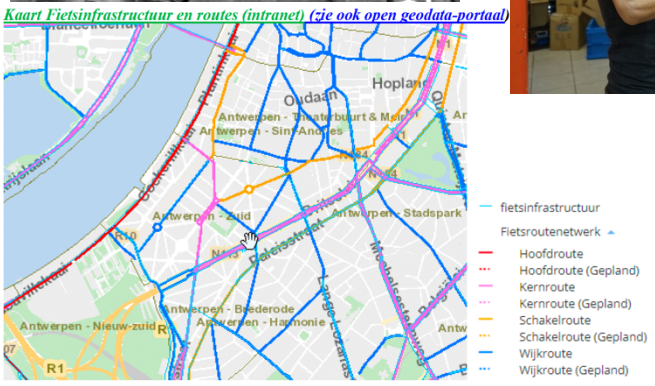
Location: Meeting in front of **Lange Koepoortstraat 2** (corner of the street at the crossroad, 2060 Antwerp
> group walk > 2nd location by 9.45 am: Wielredders - Paardenmarkt 24, Antwerp
> 3rd location by 10.25 am: University of Antwerp I Room S0.001- Paardenmarkt 94, Antwerp

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The purpose of the visit is to learn about this element, the urban dynamics associated with it, and some of the challenges and opportunities posed by its incorporation into urban planning. This visit also aims to help participants envision measures that could be implemented to help its safeguarding, from an urban planning perspective.











1) Description of the element and its location

Bicycle Culture

1.1 Urban context: cycling in Flanders and Antwerp

Cycling is deeply embedded in everyday life in Flanders. It is used for commuting to work and school, shopping, leisure, care-related journeys and social activities. Children commonly learn to cycle at a young age, while electric bicycles have widened the practice across age groups and distances. Cargo bikes, e-bikes, speed pedelecs, shared bicycles and other bicycle types continue to diversify how cycling is practised.

The practice can be approached as living heritage, not because everyday cycling is generally labelled as heritage by its practitioners, but because it involves routines, embodied knowledge, technical skills, social practices, shared meanings and particular ways of experiencing and using urban space. This everyday dimension sits alongside more explicitly heritage-framed cycling traditions in Belgium, such as road racing, local races and the cultural imagery of the “Flandrien”.

Scale and recent trends. In Flanders, 18.5% of all journeys are made by (e-)bike; for commuting the share is 22.1%. The bicycle is increasingly electric and intermodal, while secure parking and theft remain important concerns.[1]

Antwerp offers a particularly strong urban setting for this practice. The city is growing and highly diverse, and cycling intersects with neighbourhood life, commuting, education, leisure, public space, social inclusion and local economies. In 2024, 40.3% of Antwerp residents cycled to work, 45.1% to school and 42.8% to a leisure activity. Bicycle counters registered 33% more cyclists in 2024 than in 2019. The city reports 581 km of cycle paths and cycle routes and 22 km of bicycle streets.[2]

Urban planning is therefore not merely a backdrop. Streets, bridges, intersections, bicycle parking, stations, schools, workplaces, workshops and public spaces actively shape how, where and by whom bicycle culture can be practised. At the same time, everyday cycling changes the use, rhythm and social experience of those spaces.

1.2 Description of Bicycle Culture

Location of the element: Bicycle culture is practised across the whole city rather than at one fixed site. Its spatiality combines specific places with movement: routes, flows and connections through the urban fabric.

Place and scale: Relevant cultural spaces include streets and bicycle streets, bridges and intersections, squares and parks, schools and workplaces, railway stations and bicycle parking, repair workshops and shops, meeting points for cycling groups, sports facilities and the wider regional

[1] Flemish Government, Department of Mobility and Public Works, Onderzoek Verplaatsingsgedrag Vlaanderen 7 (OVG 7, 2023–2024), published 22 May 2025. 23,907 respondents; 18.5% of all journeys and 22.1% of commuting journeys by bicycle/e-bike/speed pedelec. https://www.vlaanderen.be/mobiliteitsprofessionals/mobiliteitsbeleid/onderzoek-verplaatsingsgedrag-vlaanderen-ovg/onderzoek-verplaatsingsgedrag-vlaanderen-7-2023-2024/22-mei-2025-onderzoek-verplaatsingsgedrag-7-fietsgebruik-in-vlaanderen-op-hoogste-peil-ooit

[2] City of Antwerp, Mobiliteitstrends 2024, published 1 July 2025: modal choice by trip purpose, bicycle-counter trends and cycling infrastructure. https://pers.antwerpen.be/stad-antwerpen-publiceert-mobiliteitscijfers-van-voorbije-15-jaar

cycling network. The relevant scale therefore ranges from a single workshop or street to neighbourhood, city and region.

Temporal aspects: The practice is daily and year-round: commuting, school journeys, shopping, care, leisure, deliveries, repair and maintenance. Other rhythms include weekend recreation, group rides, training, cycling events and races, and seasonal changes in use.

Associated elements, objects and knowledge: The bicycle is central but materially diverse: city bikes, racing bikes, children's bikes, cargo bikes, folding bikes, e-bikes, speed pedelecs and newer forms such as fatbikes. Related objects include tools, bags, child seats, trailers, helmets, locks and parking infrastructure. Knowledge ranges from balance, traffic navigation and route knowledge to maintenance, repair, wheel building, frame building and adaptation.

Transmission in the urban context: Cycling is learned and transmitted through families, schools, peers, everyday participation in traffic, cycling groups, instructors, repairers, vocational training and workshops. Newcomers and adults may learn through dedicated cycling schools or community initiatives. Specialist repair and making skills are transmitted through demonstration, repeated practice, coaching and apprenticeship-like learning.

Communities, groups and individuals: There is no single 'bicycle community'. The practice involves overlapping groups: children and families, commuters and students, recreational and sports cyclists, newcomers learning to cycle, couriers and other workers, activists and associations, mechanics and craftspeople, social-economy organisations, shops, planners and mobility professionals. Access and experience differ according to age, gender, ability, income, cultural background and neighbourhood.

1.3. Focal stop: De Wielredders

De Wielredders makes visible how bicycle culture connects technical knowledge, affordability, circularity and social inclusion. The Antwerp workshop refurbishes bicycles and repairs bikes for the public. It also gives abandoned or unused bicycles a second life and reuses parts where possible. As a project of social-economy organisation Werkmmaat vzw, it combines bicycle repair with training and coaching for people who experience barriers to the regular labour market. The workshop is therefore both a place of transmission and a node in the city's everyday mobility system.[3]

A craft perspective The visit also opens a lens on specialist bicycle craftsmanship. Traditional bicycle making and repair can involve hand-built steel frames, wheel building, material knowledge, geometry, spoke tension and sensory judgement developed through practice. Such knowledge is continually negotiated with new bicycle technologies, materials and expectations around affordability and circularity.[4]

1.4. A useful comparative lens: Bogotá

Bogotá's safeguarding plan for bicycle culture offers a useful comparative perspective, without implying that Antwerp follows the same heritage process. The Bogotá dossier describes bicycle culture as a complex cultural system linking mobility with local knowledge, popular economies, cultural practices and community and productive structures. It also stresses that its territoriality is multiple and diffuse: meaningful places coexist with mobile routes and flows through the city.[5]

[3] De Wielredders / Werkmmaat vzw, "Wie zijn De Wielredders en wat doen we?" https://www.dewielredders.be/blog-post/wie-zijn-de-wielredders-en-wat-doen-we

[4] "Wielen vlechten en het ambacht van fietsenmaker" and "Fietsen maken en bouwen op de authentieke wijze (ertsifyen)" (Tom Hermans / Erts). https://www.immaterieelerfgoed.be/nl/immaterieel-erfgoed/wielen-vlechten-en-het-ambacht-van-fietsenmaker/

[5] Instituto Distrital de Patrimonio Cultural, Plan Especial de Salvaguardia – La cultura bogotana de los usos y disfrutes de la bicicleta, Bogotá D.C., November 2023.

2) Suggested topics to discuss during the visit

During the visit, through dialogue with stakeholders, it is important to explore the urban dynamics that positively or negatively affect the element, as to identify its relationship with urban planning structures and possible safeguarding measures.

Below are some questions that may help guide the discussion:

- Who are the communities involved with the element and what is the kind of involvement? Who participates in bicycle culture in Antwerp, in which ways, and who may encounter barriers to cycling related to affordability, skills, safety, age, gender, ability or access to space?

- Does the element have an inventory? Was it done by/with the community? Everyday bicycle culture in Antwerp is not presented here as a formally inventoried ICH element. Does this affect how we identify its communities, transmission, threats and safeguarding needs? What might be gained - or changed - by approaching it through a living heritage lens?

- How is the element transmitted? Where and how are cycling skills, repair knowledge and specialist craft knowledge learned and transmitted - within families, through everyday practice, schools and cycling initiatives, or in workshops such as De Wielredders?

- What are the threats* that may affect the element in relation to urban factors and especially urban planning and management interventions, policies, decision making, etc. Are there urban development pressures? Which urban changes or pressures make cycling and related practices easier or more difficult? Consider traffic and mobility policies, redevelopment, affordability of workshop space, bicycle parking and theft, changing neighbourhoods, access to public space.

- Have any urban planning measures been taken that affect it (positively or negatively)? Which planning or mobility measures in Antwerp already support or affect bicycle culture, positively or negatively? Do they affect different groups of cyclists differently?

- Are there places/built heritage related to the element? Which places, routes and infrastructures are important for the practice -streets, bicycle routes, crossings, parking facilities, workshops, schools, stations or public spaces? What happens when we understand the route itself as part of the cultural space?

- Safeguarding possibilities: What might safeguarding bicycle culture mean from an urban-planning perspective: protecting a particular place or route, ensuring affordable workspace, enabling access and inclusion, supporting knowledge transmission, or maintaining conditions in which the practice can continue to evolve?

* The **threats** to intangible cultural heritage in urban contexts, when urban planning does not consider it, include rapid urbanization altering ways of living, destruction or changes to spaces associated with cultural practices, unemployment or low incomes, lack of public spaces, globalization (homogenization), migration (outward and inward), climate change and associated natural disasters, consumerism, armed conflicts, industrialization, and infrastructure strain.

Notes: