Capacity-Building Workshop in Europe

Safeguarding Living Heritage in Urban Contexts

12-13 October | Antwerp, Belgium

FIELD VISIT: URBAN SPORTS
Skating as living heritage - Park Spoor Noord

13 October 2026

Time: 9:00 am

Location:

Corner of **Lange Dijkstraat + Ellermanstraat** (Southern side of Park Spoor Noord), Antwerp

Contact persons: Sofie Schoeters (Heritage Lab) +32 485 89 85 82

Programme:

9.00-11.00 am: Visit Park Spoor Noord, Skate Park and sports Hall including introduction in the urban approach to the park.
Depending on the weather, we hope to see skaters but the park is more known for afternoon, evening and weekend skating. Never when it rains.
> Meet and greet: Steven De Meyer – City of Antwerp – Sports department about SPRK

11.00 am -1.00 pm: Workshop in a meeting hall in SPRK: Damplein 35.

1.00 pm - Lunch
some possibilities :

Bar Nest (in SPRK) – part of a project of creating job opportunities
Bar Nest – Rising You

Several options in surrounding MAS :
Wolf Sharing Food Market - Brussels & Antwerp
Roest Cosy Restaurant
Otomat | Antwerp Mas

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

URBAN SPORTS **Skating as living heritage - Park Spoor Noord**

This field visit is an introduction to urban sports, skating in particular, as living heritage in the city.

- What are urban sports?
- What do urban sports need in sense of urban space?
- What can an organised city do/not do when it comes to urban sports – characterised by its non – organised freedom, to facilitate the further existence of this outdoor sport heritage.

The field visit takes us across the new neighbourhoods of Eilandje and Park Spoor Noord to the skate bowl that was developed in 2006/2007 with participation of skaters in the city.

What distinguishes urban sport from other sports?

Urban sports are not merely sports that take place in a city; they represent a particular **culture, mindset, and way of practicing sport**.

> "*Urban sports are sports that originally were mainly practiced by young people, often take place in urban public spaces, are embedded in urban culture and therefore contain creative and/or artistic elements that are displayed in the street and/or through social media, possibly in the form of battles." (Van der Meijden et al, 2022)*

Urban sports emerged from youth cultures and often developed outside traditional sports clubs and formal sporting structures. Freedom, independence, and self-organization are central values. Examples include skateboarding, freerunning, street dance, and BMX freestyle.

The city is not just the location where these sports occur; it is an integral part of the activity itself. Urban elements such as stairs, railings, walls, squares, bridges, and parks become the sporting environment. In freerunning, for example, the architecture of the city shapes the movement possibilities. In skateboarding, urban obstacles become part of the performance.

This is perhaps the most important aspect of the definition. Muller Institute [1] describes urban sports as part of a broader urban culture that includes music, fashion, art, social networks, and a

DIY mentality. Many urban sports originated from countercultures that emphasized freedom, self-expression, and an alternative to traditional organized sports.

This is why some activities that also take place outdoors are not necessarily considered urban sports. They may use public space, but they lack the cultural connection to urban culture.

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[1] Van freerunning tot streetdance: verkenning brengt urban sports beter in beeld – Mulier Instituut
Urban sports in kaart

Urban sports often place as much value on style, originality, and self-expression as on performance or competition. Participants constantly develop their own techniques, tricks, and personal identity within the sport. Creativity is visible not only in movements but also in clothing, music, and other cultural expressions associated with the activity.

Urban sports have a strong culture of sharing and inspiration. Participants learn from one another in public spaces, at events, and increasingly through videos and social media. Online platforms function as an extension of the urban sports community, allowing athletes to showcase skills, exchange ideas, and inspire others.

A battle is not simply a competition to determine a winner. It is a performance-oriented confrontation in which participants demonstrate their creativity, skills, style, and ability to improvise. Battles are common in street dance, freestyle football, and other urban disciplines.

What distinguishes Park Spoor Noord from other city parks?

The city of Antwerp counts several classic parks and since 2008 a new park in the North of the city, including a new skate park since then. The 18 hectares that are now park, were part of large railway infrastructure. The area was filled with railways, buildings, train sets and the terrain was closed off from the rest of the neighbourhood by closed fences.

In the 1990s, Belgium's metropolitan policy focused on disadvantaged neighbourhoods in major cities. Funding for a range of projects was made available to help improve these areas. In Antwerp, the neighbourhoods surrounding the railway yard were among the most deprived areas according to the poverty atlas. It was precisely in these neighbourhoods that an opportunity arose through the redevelopment of the extensive railway site.

The circumstances were ideal for a major urban regeneration project. Both the federal government and the European Union launched calls for urban renewal initiatives. The NMBS was looking for a new purpose for the site and turned to the city for a solution.

A group of local residents offered to participate constructively in the planning process. The city investigated the needs and priorities of the neighbourhood and found a particularly strong demand for open and green public space. After an intensive public debate, all stakeholders agreed that the creation of a new city and neighbourhood park should be the top priority. Such a large park could only be realised on this scale if the northern section of the site could be developed commercially. Together with local residents, the city decided to transform the area into a green, open park that would be accessible to everyone and reconnect Antwerp North and the Dam district with the historic city centre.

Park Spoor Noord was designed and developed with a delicate, broad range of participation by neighbours, community organisations and city departments. It was designed as a broad, open space, not perceived as a park, compared to classic 19th century parks. It was designed by the international renowned architects: Secci and Vigano.
Its overall aim was to be a park for the city and attract visitors from all over the city but also a garden for the neighbourhood which is very densely populated.

The design of the park enables free use of space in general and urban practice of skating.

First opening of the skate park was in 2008. It had specific characteristics: different bowls and pipes compared to other skate parks in Antwerp. It also resulted from broad participation by the skate community, including the international renowned Team Pain. That basis still attributes to its international appeal.

The skate environment was linked to graffiti possibilities – integrated in the environment: Yearly skate- and graffiti events, empowered by city – and members of skate-and graffiti movement, often including street parties with local DJ's.

Later, this extended to the Sports hall, further down in the park: SPRK, a large hall with skate training possibilities.

The city continues to highlight the skate park as an urban environment with battles, urban festivals, etc.

Back ground information:

- Van freerunning tot streetdance: verkenning brengt urban sports beter in beeld – Mulier Instituut
- Urban sports in kaart
- Urban Sports vent 10, 11, 12 april 2026 - Bar Noord Antwerpen
- Skate parks throughout the city : Stadsplan | Antwerpen.be
- Vernieuwd skatepark Park Spoor Noord ingehuldigd met urban feest
- SPRK Antwerpen
- **Testimonies by skaters:** https://youtu.be/rLlGsfwLcpc?si=MZpMQWlfkSEwaBgb

Living heritage traditions – observations – reflections – questions:

- Location of the element (e.g. whether it occurs in the city as a whole, or in a particular part, etc.)
- Place and scale at which the element is practiced (e.g. monument, building, block/plaza/street, district/neighborhood, region, other)
- Description of the temporal aspects of the element (e.g., whether it is practiced daily or once a year for a given period of time, etc.)
- Description of associated elements and, if any, instruments, objects and related cultural spaces.
- Description of how the element is transmitted in the urban context.
- Description of how it is transmitted with/without support?
- Description of which communities, groups and individuals are related to the element
- Sketch of other living traditions which might interact with the tradition(s) you describe

Notes: