

An aerial photograph of a dense urban landscape, likely a city center, with a yellow overlay. The image shows a complex network of streets, buildings, and green spaces. The text is overlaid on the top left and bottom of the image.

**Manifesta 16**  
**Ruhr 2026**  
**Urban Vision**  
**Josep Bohigas**

**“This is not a church”**



# mind map anatomy of a research

/ what are the  
potentials and  
challenges of using  
**empty churches**  
as cultural spaces  
of social cohesion?  
/ what role do the  
**neighbourhoods** play  
in shaping the identity  
of the Ruhr Area?

/ what cultural  
structures and spaces  
currently facilitate  
**social cohesion**  
in the Ruhr Area?

The research process is presented linearly in this mind map, which outlines its main stages.

The investigation begins with an initial phase of reconnaissance, aimed at interpreting the core questions posed by the BID (Biennial in Development) and at mapping the territory to gain a situated understanding. The reading of the urban form—so distinctive in this region—is closely tied to the historical demands and spatial logic of labour, shaped by the growth of mining and industrial infrastructures throughout the valley. This has produced a territorial condition characterised more by neighbourhoods than by cities.

Each neighbourhood with its own church, and each church embedded within its neighbourhood—this indivisible relationship was further reinforced during the post-Second World War reconstruction, notably through the strategic implementation of the so-called Pantoffelkirchen, or “slipper churches”, a policy that deliberately fostered proximity and community cohesion at the micro-scale.

The second phase of research was structured around the “This is not a Church” workshops, which aimed to identify churches currently being closed or abandoned, and to map vulnerable neighbourhoods—thereby opening up the possibility of imagining new associations between these remarkable yet underutilised infrastructures and their contemporary communities.

Manifesta 16  
Ruhr 2026  
Urban Vision

Josep Bohigas  
First Creative Mediator

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## “This is not a church”

MANIFESTA  
16 Ruhr

MANIFESTA

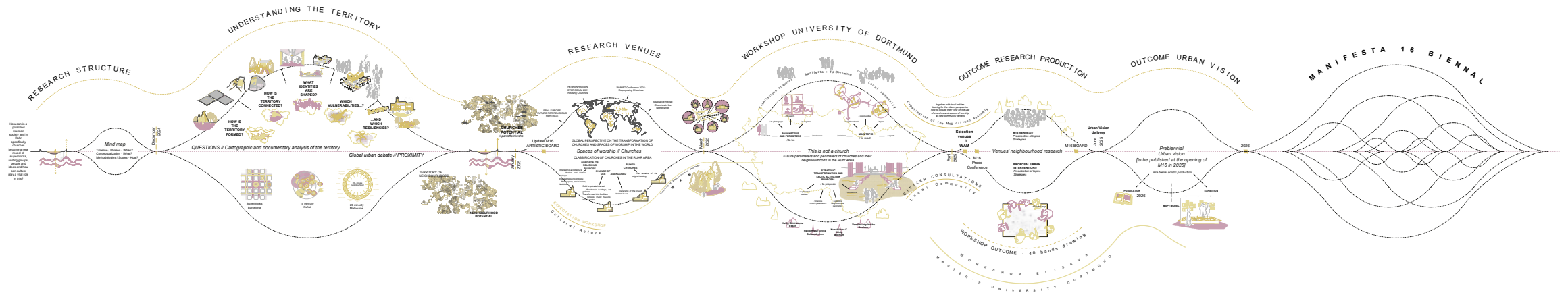
REGIONALVERBAND  
**RUHR**

Ministerium für  
Kultur und Wissenschaft  
des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen





## Mind map







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# intro

This document is the result of a year of work in 2024-2025 in the Ruhr area aimed at developing the Urban Vision for Manifesta 16 Ruhr.

The commission stems from the Biennial's self-imposed need to carry out preliminary research in each territory where the biennial, as a nomadic event is going to take place. To this end, Manifesta engages an external perspective by appointing a professional from the field of urbanism, planning or architecture to act as the first creative mediator, initiating an intense and deliberate dialogue with the host context.

In previous editions, this role was taken on by leading architects such as Rem Koolhaas in Manifesta 12 in Palermo, Winy Maas in Manifesta 13 in Marseille, Carlo Ratti in Manifesta 14 in Pristina, and Sergio Pardo in Manifesta 15 in Barcelona. Each played a fundamental role in identifying the urbanistic framework conceptualised and activated by Manifesta's Director and her team before, during, and after the Biennial, through conversations, preparatory workshops, and various interventions. This Pre-biennial urban research was initiated for the first time for the Palermo edition in 2016 due to the fact that Manifesta is by origin a nomadic moving structure and needs to identify the grounds she is working on every two years anew.

In the Ruhr, the theme we, Manifesta team and myself, have chosen and as a result came out of the expectations workshops and preliminary research, is that of abandoned, closed, or repurposed churches, using this as a conceptual framework for a broader reflection on neighbourhood-scale urban regeneration strategies, particularly in relation to the concept of *Proximity*.

At this stage of the Pre-Biennial research process, the complex role of religious spaces and their relationship to cultural, social, and welfare institutions has been analysed, establishing a dialogue with religious, secular, and cultural stakeholders. This methodology includes tailored local studies such as Expectation Workshops, Urban Vision Workshops in collaboration with the University of Dortmund, and Citizen Consultations.

**“This is not a Church”** is the title of the Urban Vision for Manifesta 16 Ruhr that seeks to deepen the debate on how these desacralized and transforming churches can become creative incubators for neighbourhood regeneration. The Urban Vision includes a proposal which have been gathered together with the Manifesta team to include a series of churches in four (4) main Cities in Ruhr, that will be selected as main venues for the Biennial, while also incorporating their extended perimeters—highlighting the social infrastructures and networks these spaces are capable of weaving within their surrounding communities.



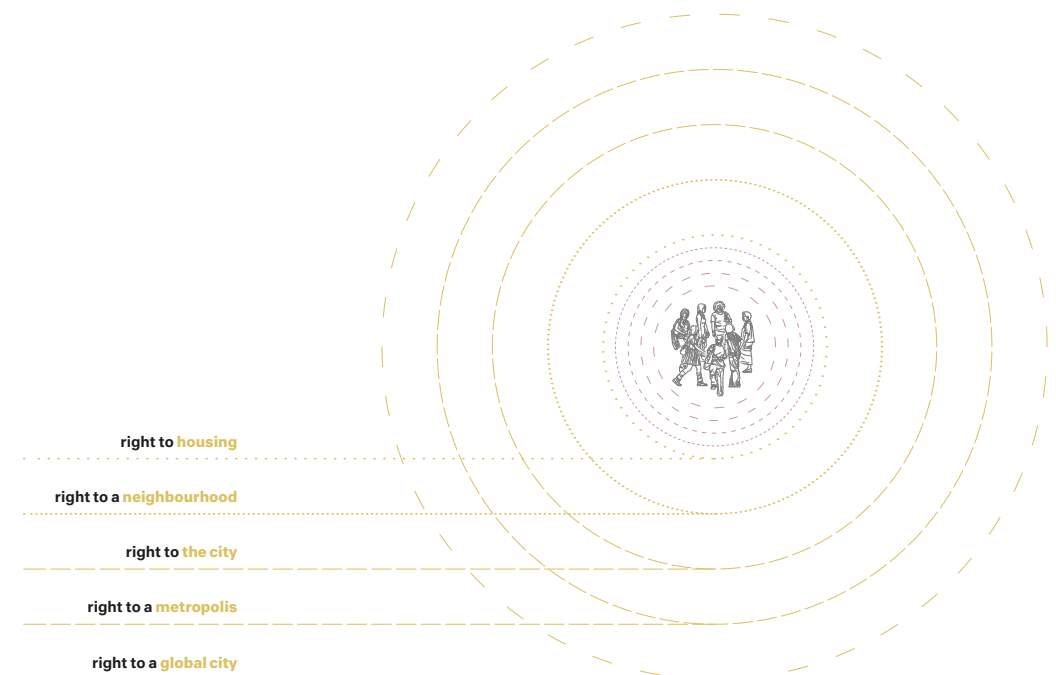
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# urban vision

## / an Urban Vision for Manifesta 16

The Territory is not shaped by “well-meaning” geographers, ecologists, landscape architects, urban planners, or architects—no matter how technically skilled or institutionally legitimised they may believe themselves to be. Urban sprawl, gentrification, speculation, socio-spatial injustice, segregation and other destructive territorial processes occur *despite*—or even *because of*—the interventions of these well-intentioned actors. Often, they arrive too late, self-prescribing urbanist placebos—endless diagnostics and clever yet unfeasible suturing projects—to inoculate their reputations, while the planet and its people remain terminally ill.

Let us be clear: politicians and developers shape the Territory and its cities, advancing projects driven and legitimised by economic viability or profitability. The former, because their funding capacity is limited to urbanisation; the latter, due to the inherent voracity of the market and the capitalist system, which competes ruthlessly, devouring resources without restraint. In this context, urban planning has become a discipline of repair, deploying technical expertise to stitch together the wounds of poor planning. The brutal day-to-day demands of political management reduce planners to reactive agents, leaving little room for the strategic planning that should be their core mission—a priority that, regrettably, many politicians have long abandoned.





“Urbanism is dead”, declare certain self-interested voices, precisely because they know that good urbanism threatens their agenda. And it is within this very tragedy that we must urgently reclaim the few remaining spaces of opportunity—spaces from which alternative urban models can emerge to halt the accelerating waste of land, the erosion of cohesion and the lack of resilience caused by fragmented urban development. We need technical, artistic and political spaces imbued with social responsibility and environmental foresight—spaces that offer pathways to reverse systemic collapse, reconnecting society, economy and ecology to foster structural criteria beyond short-term gains<sup>1</sup>.

Despite its understated nature, the European Nomadic Biennial, Manifesta stands as one of these rare spaces. Manifesta is not (*just*) a conventional art exhibitions, where a curator selects a theme, gathers local and international artists and displays their work in prepared venues. It is developed itself over the years as also an urban incubator for change collaborating with diverse actors to generate territorial research in which culture serves as a stimulants for urban rethinking.

To my knowledge, Manifesta is the first and only nomadic biennial on the European continent, as well as globally. Every two years, it “lands” in a new location, invited by a local Host City and based on a specific BID, deploying site-specific methodologies and forging deep, expansive relationships with local and international agents—all with the aim of acting as an incubator for social and geopolitical awareness of how our cities function as well as producing a site-specifically cultural event based on urban-focused issues, committed to leaving a long terms legacy that sparks future transformations both of the infrastructure, ecology of the green areas, and the culture institutions...

To achieve this, Manifesta engages with the territory years in advance, appointing an external First Creative Mediator—an expert in strategic planning—to provoke a less predictable, and undoubtedly more fraught, dialogue about the place. This deliberate “provocation” lies at the heart of Manifesta’s local-international exchange across all its facets.

<sup>1</sup> This recurring diagnosis— “urbanism is dead”—has been voiced by numerous authors as a way to denounce the discipline’s disintegration. In his polemical text *Whatever Happened to Urbanism?* Rem Koolhaas famously declares: “Having sabotaged the discipline of urbanism, we have ridiculed it to the point where ... we have dismantled a complete profession... What remains is a world without urbanism, only architecture.”

Vittorio Gregotti similarly laments the ideological decay of modern urban thought, stating: “Behind the principles of modern functionalism crept the most sinister forms of economism; behind the sacrosanct defence of cultural heritage stand some of the most reactionary forces; behind the critique of modernity and the reflections on history and tradition, a confused crowd of postmodern neo-conservatives has gathered.”

Echoing this sentiment, Oriol Bohigas, in his article “Muerte y resurrección del planeamiento urbano” (*El País*, 4 November 1986), explicitly refers to the “death of urbanism” not as a definitive end, but as a provocation—a metaphorical call to fundamentally rethink and reconstruct the discipline.

## / the Urban Vision as process

The First Creative Mediator is tasked with delivering an “Urban Vision”—a deliberately subjective, partial, focused and incisive perspective on a specific territory and thematic approach based on the BID made by the Host City and the conceptual framework by Manifesta. It is a gaze that opens new ways of seeing, serving cities as preliminary research for the biennial to test potential urban strategies, key nodes, communities and themes relevant to the Host Cities. The Urban Vision is related closely to the outcome of the Expectations Workshops done by Manifesta in the region and the Citizen Assemblies which creates alternative model of knowledge research combined with democratic models of conceptualisation of cultural events. This multifaceted approach ensures a nuanced understanding of the urban complexity, allowing for iterative learning and adjustments that may become catalysts for long-term transformation.

The Urban Vision is, by nature, a fragmentary and restless inquiry—one that resists the arrogance of final answers. It thrives instead on testing hunches, aiming to plant ideas that outgrow the biennial itself. This methodology has been applied in the last four Host Cities, with varying impact but a shared transformative ambition. In Barcelona, where I served on the Manifesta 15 Barcelona Metropolitana Board, I had the privilege of collaborating with the First Creative Mediator Sergio Pardo and the director of Manifesta and her team. Their shrewd proposal for radical decentralisation—applied across multiple dimensions, including territorial—led to the selection of venues that became crucial catalysts for debates on their fragile conditions and uncertain futures. The proposals never aimed to “solve” the issue but rather to deepen a critical discourse—one that remains vital today—on the metropolis’ structure and the ecological, social and economic futures of its key nodes.



## / landing in the Ruhr Area

Each place demands its own methodology, and each Manifesta edition requires a different profile for a Creative Mediator and each professional arrives with their own intellectual toolkit and set of preoccupations. It would be presumptuous to claim that an Urban Vision could ever deliver a comprehensive or objective diagnosis—especially in a territory as vast and intricate as the Ruhr Area.

The selection of Ruhr Area was guided by the invaluable Bidding papers in 2021, drafted by the Host Cities Initiating Circle. This document was decided not to use seen the crucial global changes in regard to the proposed topic of the influence of the New Silk Road in respect to the city of Duisburg as the end station and framed the New Silk Road as a narrative of multiple, complementary visions, portraying a complex region and proposing a territorial investigation into the interplay between local and global dimensions across all facets of life. It brings to light pressing questions about the region's urgent need to redefine its identity—questions that have become foundational to the Urban Vision's development.

Key Questions from the BID:

*/ Where are concrete shifts visible today—in the region's social and economic cycles, its political sphere or the lived environment of its inhabitants?*

*/ How does the global manifest in the regional and vice versa?*

*/ How does life in the region transform behind the façades of industrial culture?*

*/ What emerging identities can be traced across the territory?*

*/ How can a culture of practice and action gain ground against the dominance of built-space legacies?*

## / the Ruhr Area: a landscape of neighbourhoods

The Ruhr Area presents a singular territorial model. When examining a map depicting only its built structures, one observes a distinctive settlement pattern of small, clustered formations. These urban archipelagos, remarkably similar in size and configuration, are distributed throughout the territory, constituting one of Europe's most extensive agglomerations of neighbourhoods (fig. 1, fig. 5).

This structure stands in stark contrast to major European capitals like Madrid, London or Paris, or global megacities such as Mumbai or Shanghai. Unlike these monocentric models, the Ruhr Area lacks a dominant urban core. Instead, it comprises multiple interconnected units without hierarchical organisation. Even the denser urban centres fail to impose structural order on the broader territory (fig. 2).

The Ruhr Area's configuration differs significantly from other European polycentric regions like the Randstad in the Netherlands, Germany's Rhein-Main, Italy's

# understanding the territory

2



Veneto or Barcelona's Metropolitan Area. In these cases, while multiple centres exist, one primary city typically dominates, often resulting in peripheral dormitory neighbourhoods that absorb the negative externalities of centralisation.

The Ruhr Area presents an alternative paradigm. At a time when urban planners worldwide struggle to decentralise overloaded city cores, this region already possesses an organic decentralised structure that many contemporary urban theories advocate.

Historically, the Ruhr Area stood as one of Europe's foremost industrial centres, specialising in mining and steel production. While during the last decades it has transitioned toward technology and services, the physical imprint of its industrial past remains profoundly visible. The region's urban morphology essentially follows the logic of industrial infrastructure placement, with hundreds of working-class neighbourhoods developing around mines and factories (fig. 3). These communities, populated by migrants from diverse origins, shared a common identity rooted in labour rather than traditional urban forms.



The region's urban form was further shaped by post-war reconstruction strategies. Maps of wartime bomb damage reveal how the pattern of destruction reinforced the existing dispersed settlement model (fig. 4). Reconstruction efforts introduced new housing developments connected by highways, further weakening any potential urban hierarchy through strict functional zoning, extensive road infrastructure, widespread parking facilities and car-dependent commercial centres. This approach ultimately solidified the isolation of neighbourhoods despite their geographic proximity<sup>2</sup>. Within this dispersed logic, places of worship often served as focal points for local reorganisation, structuring the everyday life of their immediate surroundings (fig. 5, fig. 6).

The Ruhr Area's current landscape reflects this complex evolution. Some neighbourhoods represent exemplary urban models, having been designated as heritage sites and preserved as garden city prototypes<sup>3</sup>. However, most have undergone

<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey M. Diefendorf "In the wake of war: The Reconstruction of German Cities after World War II" New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press

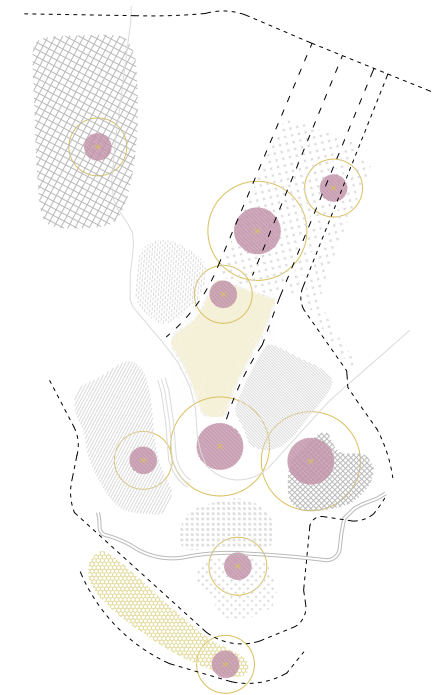
<sup>3</sup> The Margarethenhöhe housing estate (constructed between 1909 and 1938) holds a distinctive place in the history of Krupp company housing developments, or those sponsored by its philanthropic foundations. While not the earliest of such initiatives, it was among

significant transformation, losing their original cohesion as the region transitioned to new economic models and welcomed multicultural communities.

The territory reveals stark contrasts. While some areas have declined into segregation, losing vitality, social cohesion and resilience, others have emerged as new economic hubs through substantial public and private investment, transforming into modern tech centres, commercial districts or cultural parks with outstanding facilities<sup>4</sup>. The adaptive reuse of former factories and mines as museums, theatres and creative incubators has generated authentic cultural quarters, while universities have established cutting-edge technology parks.

These disparities are equally visible in the region's transport infrastructure, which both connects and divides the territory. Some areas benefit from excellent connectivity, while others remain isolated despite possessing robust rail infrastructure suffering from chronic underinvestment in maintenance and operations. The tram network's incomplete coverage fails to meet metropolitan needs, missing its potential to effectively link neighbourhoods. Although bus routes extensively cover the basin, the lack of bicycle infrastructure as complementary metropolitan transport remains problematic.

While the Ruhr Area boasts an impressive recreational cycling network connected to its green spaces, functional bike lanes for daily commuting are conspicuously absent, with most streets lacking proper cycling connections between public transport nodes and residential areas (fig. 7).



the first to apply the principles of the garden city movement in Germany with significant ambition. This planning approach was inspired by the ideas of British reformer Ebenezer Howard, who articulated his vision in the 1898 publication *To-Morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*. At its core, the garden city concept sought to combine the social and economic benefits of urban life with the environmental and spatial qualities of the countryside. Howard, Ebenezer. *To-Morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*. London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1898.

Pfeiffer, Bernhard. *Margarethenhöhe: Geschichte und Gegenwart einer Gartenstadt*. Essen: Klartext Verlag, 1996

<sup>4</sup> An example of a tech centre is **TZDO (Technology and startup Centre Dortmund)**. A hub for tech startups and spin-offs, closely tied to TU Dortmund and the broader TECH5plus network. It channels innovation and connects with SMEs across the Ruhr region. And an example of cultural park is **Zollverein Coal Mine Industrial Complex – Essen**. A UNESCO World Heritage site turned industrial cultural park, featuring the Ruhr Museum, repurposed conveyors and infrastructure integrated into public spaces—symbol of Ruhr's cultural transformation



The Ruhr Area already contains all the necessary elements for a multimodal transportation system, though strategic investment remains crucial to overcome car dependency. The path forward involves densifying neighbourhoods to reduce travel distances while simultaneously strengthening public transit networks and developing comprehensive active mobility infrastructure. When implemented as an interconnected system, these measures could elevate the Ruhr Area's distinctive urban framework into a pioneering model of sustainable regional development.

## / strategic planning of the region

Today, there is growing consensus on the profound interdependence between large cities and smaller communities. The daily lives of residents unfold across regionally interconnected spaces where traditional administrative boundaries have faded in relevance, giving way to broader urban dynamics. In Europe, polycentric regions have emerged as a key model for contemporary and future urban development.

Yet translating this concept into practice presents significant challenges:

*How can such a vast and diverse territory be structured, where some areas expand while others contract? What strategies and tools are needed for its planning and development? Is it possible to maintain a functional balance between different zones? In the Ruhr Area's case—with its 53 independent municipalities and competing local priorities—can this mosaic of cities evolve into a cohesive urban landscape rather than remaining a collection of isolated neighbourhoods?*

The Ruhr Area offers an unparalleled setting to reflect on these questions, which have already been explored through numerous attempts to craft an integrated urban vision for the territory. From Robert Schmidt's 1912 housing plan<sup>5</sup>, which sought to organise the coal- and steel-dominated landscape between Essen and Duisburg, to the ongoing efforts of the Regionalverband Ruhr (the Ruhr Regional Association, also referred to as RVR)—founded in 1920 and pioneering green space preservation and structural planning—the region has long grappled with territorial coordination<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Schmidt's 1912 proposal—formulated in his Denkschrift—is widely recognised as a foundational moment in regional planning for the Ruhr area. Originally submitted as a planning memorandum, this document outlines the principles for a general settlement plan for the Ruhr region. A facsimile edition was reissued in 2009 by the Regionalverband Ruhr in collaboration with Klartext Verlag (ISBN: 978-3-89861-901-1).

<sup>6</sup> The Regionalverband Ruhr (RVR) was one of the first regional institutions in Europe to systematically coordinate urban development and preserve green spaces across municipal boundaries. For institutional context and the evolution of regional planning mechanisms in Germany, see: Hans Heinrich Blotevogel and Bernd Schelhaas, *Raumordnung und Landesplanung in Deutschland: Institutionen, Aufgaben, Instrumente* (Hannover: Akademie für Raumforschung und Landesplanung, 2011).

These precedents reveal the protracted struggle to establish a sustainable urban model for the region. The question remains unresolved, lacking a convincing medium- or long-term strategy to harness the basin's rich diversity as an asset for development.

When the SVR lost its authority over regional development<sup>7</sup>, its capacity to guide the Ruhr Area's growth was severely diminished. Planning became fragmented across three zones, each following distinct territorial principles. Recent decades have seen repeated attempts to unify the Ruhr Area's cities under a cohesive "Ruhrstadt" (Ruhr City) concept. All failed, primarily because neither political actors nor economic powers demonstrated genuine interest in altering their urban or corporate strategies. Decisions continued to prioritize immediate needs over comprehensive urban redesign<sup>8</sup>.

Other initiatives to structure a vision for the Ruhr Area within the Rhine-Ruhr context also faltered. Projects like the 2002 The Region Maker: Rhein Ruhr City by Dutch architectural firm MVRDV, or the 2008 Konzept Ruhr by Metropoleruhr, left negligible impact. Even Speer Consult's 2010 preliminary study for a masterplan commissioned by North Rhine-Westphalia yielded no tangible outcomes<sup>9</sup>.

Undoubtedly, one of the most notable transformation efforts was the International Building Exhibition (IBA) Emscher Park (1989–1999), which pioneered new urban approaches and delivered concrete renewal examples. These ideas found continuity in 2010's RUHR.2010 as European Capital of Culture—yet progress since has been incremental at best.

<sup>7</sup> The Siedlungsverband Ruhrkohlenbezirk (SVR) underwent two key institutional transformations before becoming the Regionalverband Ruhr (RVR):

1920: SVR (Siedlungsverband Ruhrkohlenbezirk) is founded — the first legally mandated regional planning body in Germany, with powers over settlement and open space planning in the Ruhr. In 1979 SVR is renamed as KVR (Kommunalverband Ruhrgebiet) following the 1975 administrative reforms in North Rhine-Westphalia. While it continued to exist, its planning competencies were significantly reduced, and its role became more administrative and service oriented. In 2004 KVR is transformed into the RVR (Regionalverband Ruhr). This marks the formal establishment of the RVR as the current metropolitan institution representing the Ruhr area, with a renewed (though limited) mandate for regional coordination, including spatial planning, infrastructure, and landscape management.

<sup>8</sup> As noted in the introduction of *Schichten einer Region: Kartenstücke zur räumlichen Struktur des Ruhrgebiets*, edited by Christa Reicher, Klaus R. Kunzmann, Jan Polívka, Frank Roost, Yasemin Utku, and Michael Wegener (Berlin: Jovis Verlag, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> The 2002 Rhein-Ruhr City concept by MVRDV was unveiled in conjunction with the NRW-Forum Kultur in Düsseldorf as part of an exhibition showcasing regional-scale urban investigations, though the scheme never progressed beyond the conceptual phase <https://www.mvrdv.com/publications/927/the-region-maker-rhein-ruhr-city>

The 2008 Konzept Ruhr, commissioned by Metropole Ruhr, outlined a strategic vision for sustainable urban and regional development but saw limited implementation due to institutional inertia and funding constraints. The 2010 preliminary study by Speer Consult, commissioned by the State of North Rhine-Westphalia as a preparatory masterplan, remained unrealised—underscoring the gap between strategic visioning and actual project delivery as-p.com+1umweltbundesamt.de+1vr.ruhr+5staedtebau.rwth-aachen.de+5art-book.com+5



The Ruhr basin faces profound economic, social and environmental vulnerabilities that have deeply impacted its neighbourhoods. For decades, this region drove Germany's growth, yet the closure of mines and economic restructuring have left a legacy of unemployment, precariousness and social fragmentation that persists today. Data reveals staggering disparities: some Ruhr neighbourhoods suffer poverty rates that nearly double the national average, with a long-term unemployment reaching 42 % in areas like Duisburg's Marxloh district<sup>10</sup>. Gelsenkirchen, infamously branded Germany's poorest city, records the country's lowest average incomes. These alarming trends coincide with Germany's recent economic downturn and the escalating climate crisis, factors likely to exacerbate an already fragile situation.

This fragility is also spatial: mobility across the region remains deeply uneven. While the road network is expansive, it often reinforces territorial imbalances—favouring car-centric patterns and leaving vulnerable neighbourhoods further disconnected from opportunity (fig. 8).

The transition from heavy industry to a service and technology-based economy, has been profoundly uneven. Cities like Duisburg, Essen, Gelsenkirchen, and Bochum continue to report unemployment rates exceeding national averages (fig. 9, fig. 10). Job insecurity has fuelled rising poverty, particularly among generations of former mining families<sup>11</sup>. Despite state subsidies and retraining programmes, inequality remains entrenched, with wealth concentrated in the basin's southern neighbourhoods and deprivation pervasive in the north.

Social cohesion poses another critical challenge. Migrants from Eastern and Southern Europe, as well as from amongst others Northern Africa and Syria have enriched cultural diversity but also exposed systemic exclusion (fig. 11). Migrant communities face disproportionate barriers to well-paid employment, often relegated to neighbourhoods with crumbling infrastructure and inadequate services. Discrimination and limited opportunities fuel tensions, undermining integration and community stability<sup>12</sup>.

These vulnerabilities are mirrored in the region's demographic evolution. Population density and migration indicators, both in their current state and long-term

<sup>10</sup> According to the Soziale Stadt NRW programme (2019), which publishes district-level social profiles, the Marxloh district reports the following figures: an unemployment rate of 14%, long-term unemployment at 42%, 36% of residents receiving SGB II welfare benefits, and a child poverty rate of 71%.

<sup>11</sup> Lengyel, J., Roux, S., & Alvanides, S. (2022). Multivariate analysis of socioeconomic profiles in the Ruhr area, Germany. *Journal of Maps*, 18(3), 576–584. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17445647.2022.2098839>

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

trends, highlight the stark asymmetries between cities: while some urban areas have experienced moderate growth or continued inflows, others have stagnated or declined steadily over the past fifteen years (figs. 12-15).

The Ruhr Area's education system struggles to break cycles of disadvantage. In high-poverty areas, limited access to quality schooling perpetuates low social mobility. School dropout rates outpace other German regions<sup>13</sup>, leaving younger generations ill-equipped for the labour market (fig. 16).

The industrial legacy lingers environmentally. Though initiatives like Emscher Landschaftspark's greening project showcase ecological renewal, soil and water contamination persist. Water management reveals the region's vulnerability most starkly: over 600 pumping stations work perpetually to prevent flooding in densely populated areas (fig. 17). Ground subsidence<sup>14</sup>—exceeding 15 meters in places due to abandoned mine networks—has destabilised entire neighbourhoods, prompting planned demolitions in parts of Gelsenkirchen<sup>15</sup>.

The Ruhr Area's international reputation portrays a region that has managed to transform itself from a harsh, polluted mining landscape into an ecological model, best exemplified by the remarkable metamorphosis of the Emscher - a waterway that only decades ago functioned as an open sewer.

Yet this surface-level success masks a precarious reality. Beneath lies an enormous, ongoing effort to maintain an artificial balance under fundamentally fragile conditions. This delicate equilibrium could collapse at any moment, with particularly devastating consequences for the most vulnerable neighbourhoods. The combination of impending economic crises and the escalating climate emergency threatens to dramatically worsen living conditions for disadvantaged populations, who remain concentrated in areas with the poorest housing infrastructure.

Addressing these vulnerabilities demands a comprehensive, multi-pronged approach. Truly effective solutions must combine inclusive economic policies with robust social integration strategies and system-wide sustainable urban develop-

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* Christa Reicher, *Schichten einer Region: Kartenstücke zur räumlichen Struktur des Ruhrgebiets* (Berlin: Jovis Verlag, 2011)

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* Christa Reicher, *Schichten einer Region: Kartenstücke zur räumlichen Struktur des Ruhrgebiets* (Berlin: Jovis Verlag, 2011)

<sup>15</sup> These developments demonstrate how mining-induced ground subsidence and widespread urban degradation have compelled the municipality of Gelsenkirchen to implement a range of legal and administrative interventions—including emergency evacuations and court-mandated demolitions—with the stated aim of safeguarding public safety and promoting neighbourhood regeneration. However, this policy remains highly controversial and has been criticised by various civic groups and associations, such as LALARUHR, who argue that the underlying agenda may be one of gentrification. According to these critics, such measures risk revalorising the existing built environment, reducing the availability of social housing, and accelerating housing cost increases in affected districts.



ment. Such an approach needs to work simultaneously at multiple scales - from improving basic housing conditions at the neighbourhood level to implementing coordinated territorial planning across the entire region. This dual focus, balancing hyperlocal interventions with strategic regional coordination, could form the basis of what might be termed an “Integrated Neighbourhood Development Strategy”.

## / resilience

Yet not all is bleak news—the positive aspect is that the Ruhr Area is well-equipped to confront these challenges, drawing on its inherent strengths and remarkable resilience. Much of its capacity for reinvention has already been demonstrated through exemplary projects like the environmental restoration of the Emscher River or the conversion of industrial heritage into outstanding cultural facilities, such as the Zollverein UNESCO World Heritage Site. Hundreds of well-distributed urban regeneration initiatives have successfully reshaped the region’s image and purpose, attracting major international events including the IBA exhibition (1989-1999), the European Capital of Culture (2010), and upcoming showcases like Manifesta 16 Ruhr (2026) and the International Garden Exhibition (IGA Ruhr 2027).

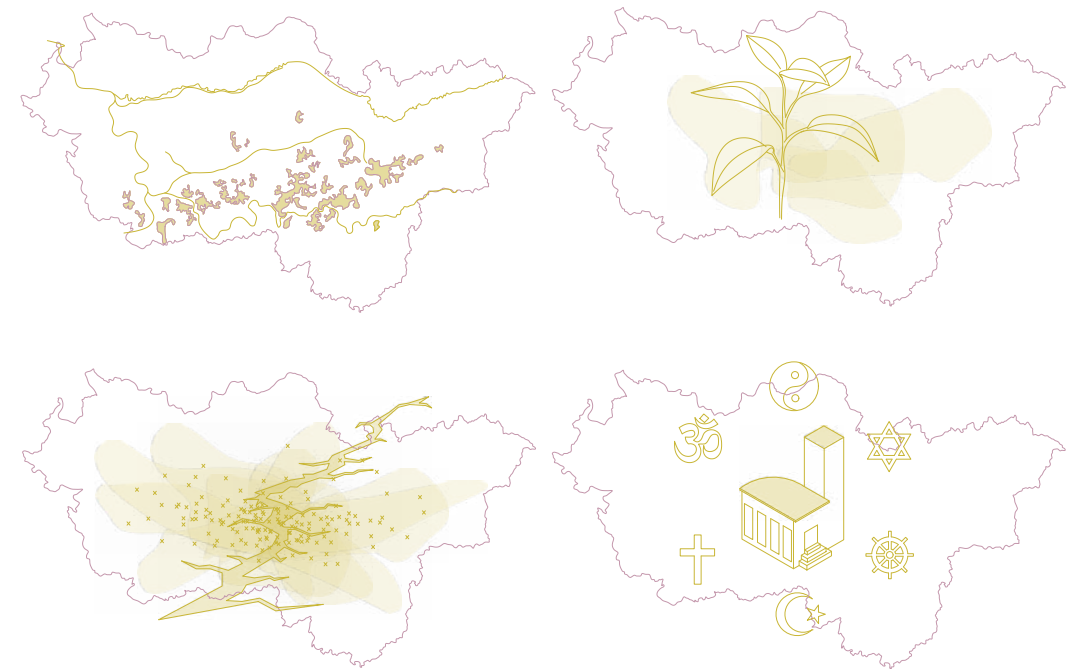
Beyond these bold institutional efforts, the territory is also enriched by a robust ecosystem of community associations and networks that have played pivotal roles in social integration, urban revitalisation and building resilience against economic and social crises (fig. 18, fig. 19).

Since the late 19th century, the Ruhr has been an epicentre of Germany’s labour movement, with strong trade unions and community organisations tied to mining and steel production. During industrialisation, these groups not only defended workers’ rights but also fostered community welfare through cooperatives, social housing and local services. Following the closure of mines and factories in the last half of the 20th century<sup>16</sup>, the region’s associational landscape transformed. While unions remained key players, new networks emerged focused on social integration, migrant support and cultural-urban renewal.

This vast organisational system displays diverse approaches at different scales. Associations and networks like Plan B Ruhr, IFAK e.V. and Diakonie Ruhr facilitate migrant inclusion through education, employment and social cohesion programmes. Neighbourhood networks and citizen participation initiatives—such as “Ein anderes Duisburg” or “Nordstadt Together” in Dortmund—engage residents in improving public spaces and organising community. Cultural and creative associations, ranging from the institutional PACT Zollverein to grassroots organizations like kitev (Kultur im Turm e.V.) in Oberhausen and Pottporus e.V in Herne, collectively drive urban regeneration through the transformative power of regional cultu-

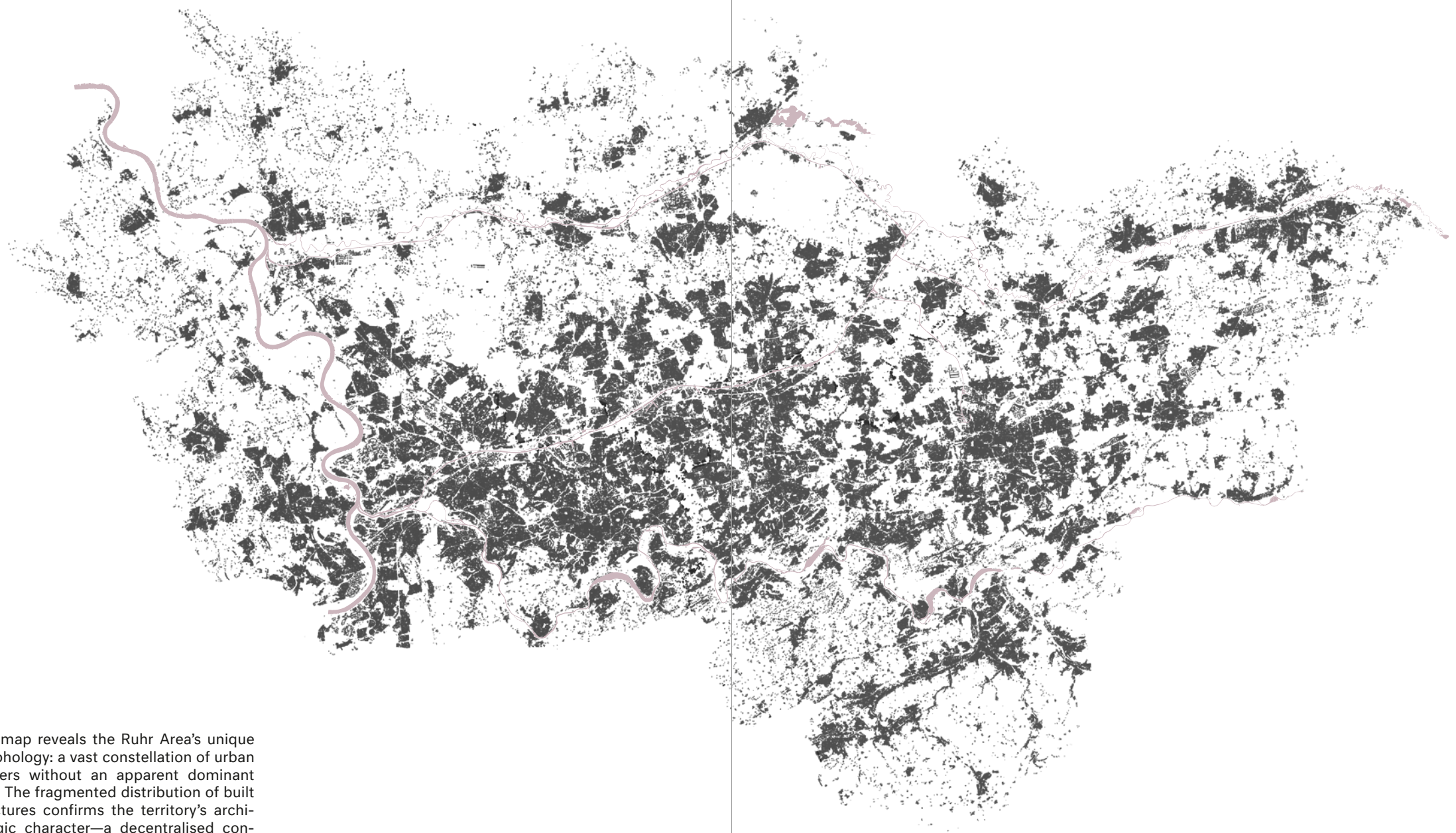
re. Religious institutions also play a central role in this social fabric—offering not only spiritual guidance but also material support, social infrastructure and spaces for cultural continuity. The spatial distribution of worship spaces reveals the layered presence of different faiths across the Ruhr, reflecting how plural identities have become embedded in the territory (fig. 20).

This multifaceted civil society fabric, combining historical depth with innovative approaches, forms the living backbone of the Ruhr Area’s ongoing transformation—proving that its communities remain the ultimate source of resilience against the challenges ahead.



<sup>16</sup> <https://www.cleanenergywire.org/news/germany-bids-farewell-domestic-hard-coal-mining#>





This map reveals the Ruhr Area's unique morphology: a vast constellation of urban clusters without an apparent dominant core. The fragmented distribution of built structures confirms the territory's archipelagic character—a decentralised configuration that challenges conventional metropolitan models and opens new possibilities for rethinking the contemporary city.

**fig. 1 / Map of the built-up network (2024)**  
Own production with data from OpenStreetMap  
1/300000



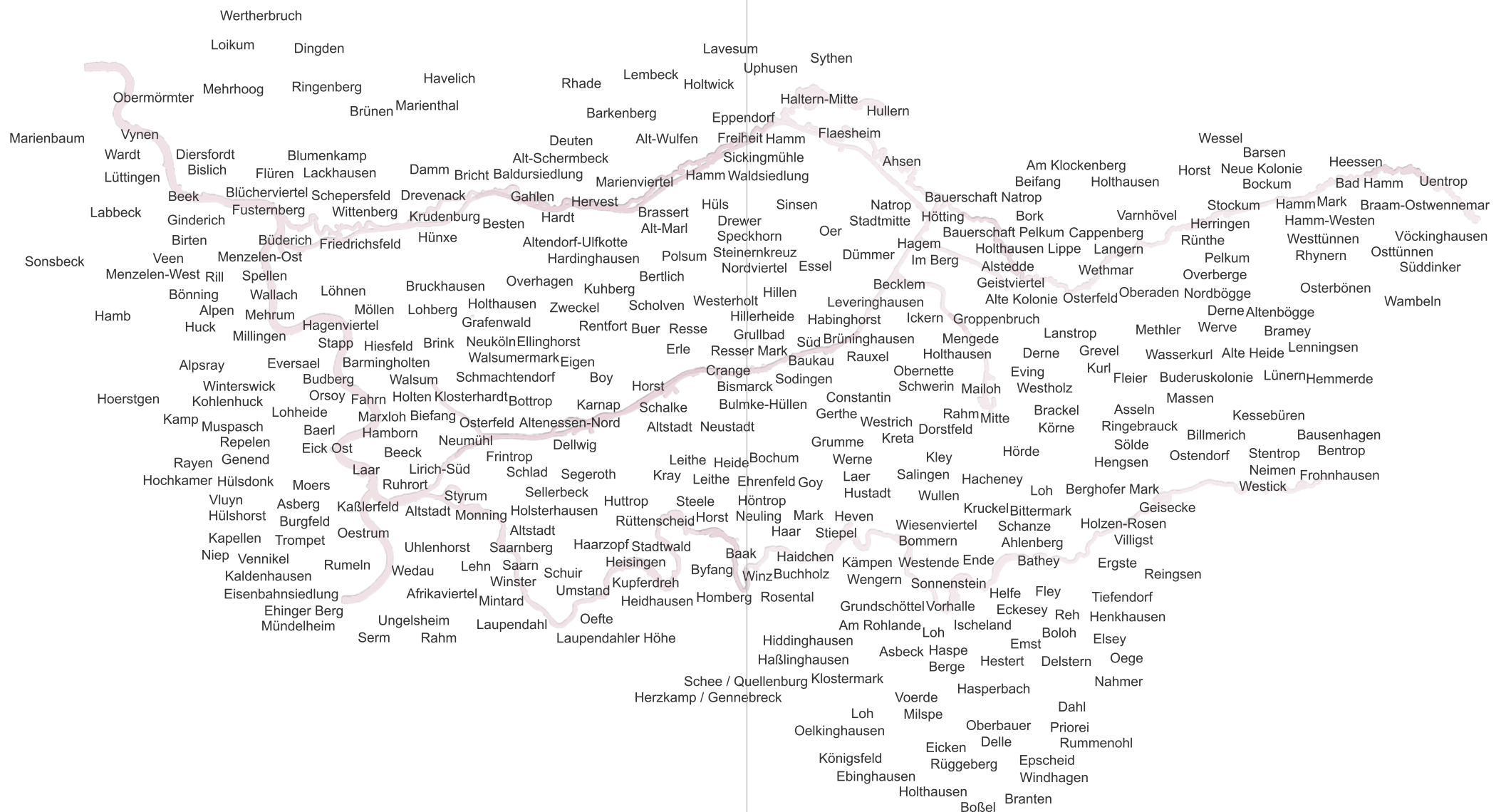
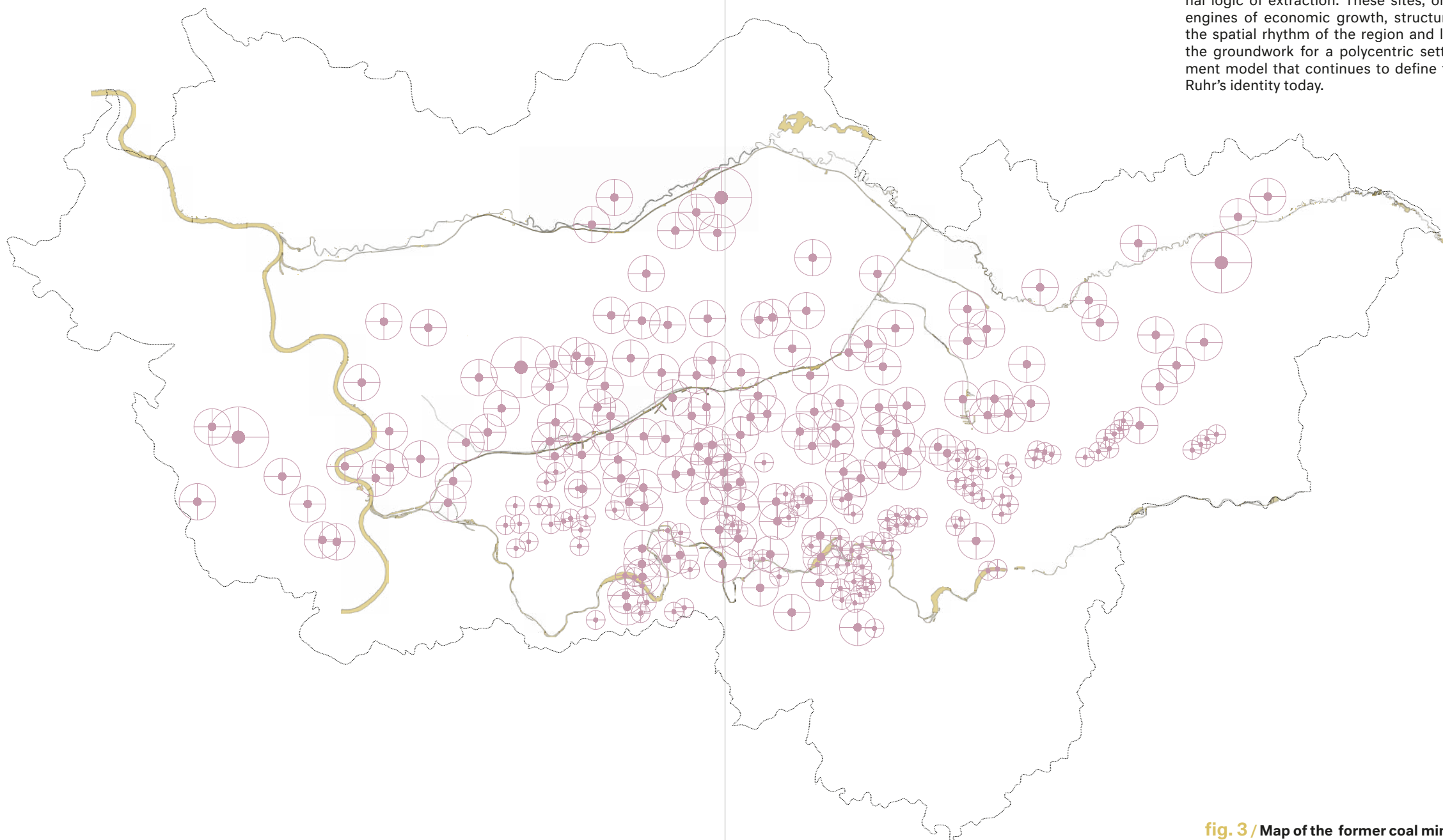


fig. 2 / The archipelago of neighbourhoods, by their names (2024)  
Own production with data from OpenStreetMap

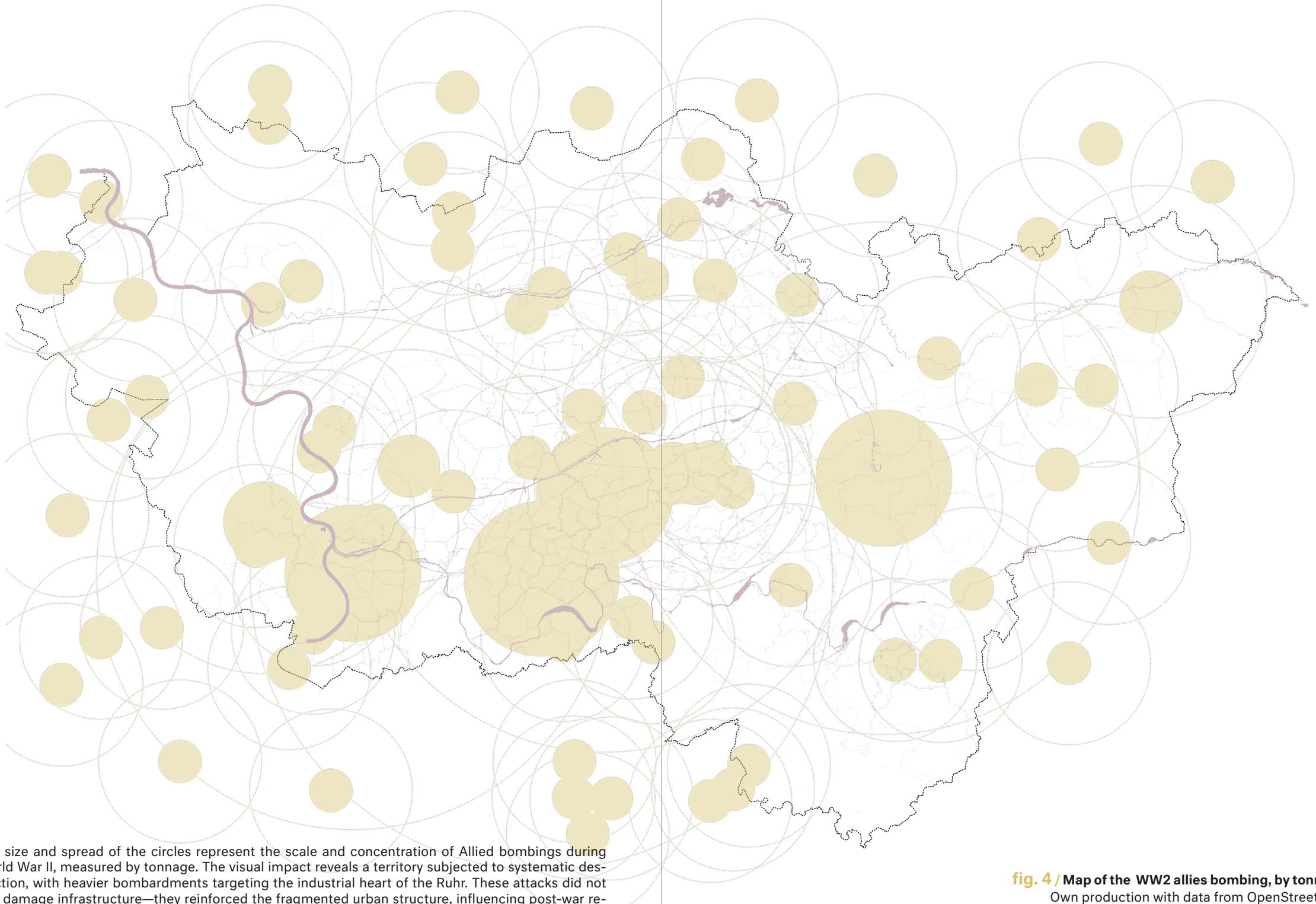


The dense network of former coal mines illustrates how the Ruhr Area's industrial past remains inscribed in its geography. Their even and far-reaching distribution gave rise to a dispersed urban fabric, where neighbourhoods emerged not from central planning but through the functional logic of extraction. These sites, once engines of economic growth, structured the spatial rhythm of the region and laid the groundwork for a polycentric settlement model that continues to define the Ruhr's identity today.



**fig. 3 / Map of the former coal mines**  
Own production with data from Reicher *et al* (2017)  
1/300000



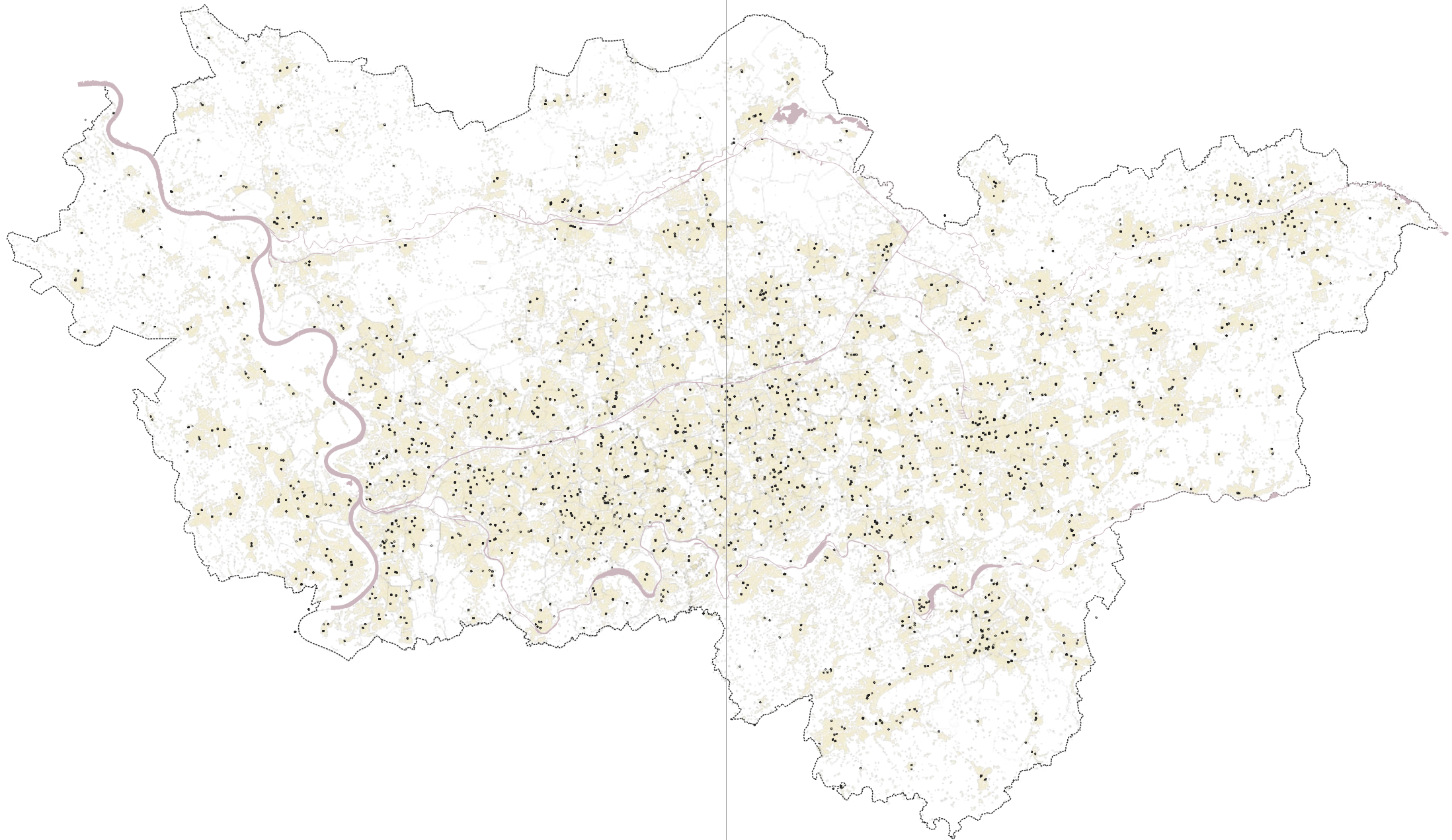


The size and spread of the circles represent the scale and concentration of Allied bombings during World War II, measured by tonnage. The visual impact reveals a territory subjected to systematic destruction, with heavier bombardments targeting the industrial heart of the Ruhr. These attacks did not just damage infrastructure—they reinforced the fragmented urban structure, influencing post-war reconstruction and further entrenching the region's decentralised morphology.

**fig. 4 / Map of the WW2 allies bombing, by tonnage**  
Own production with data from OpenStreetMap  
1/300000

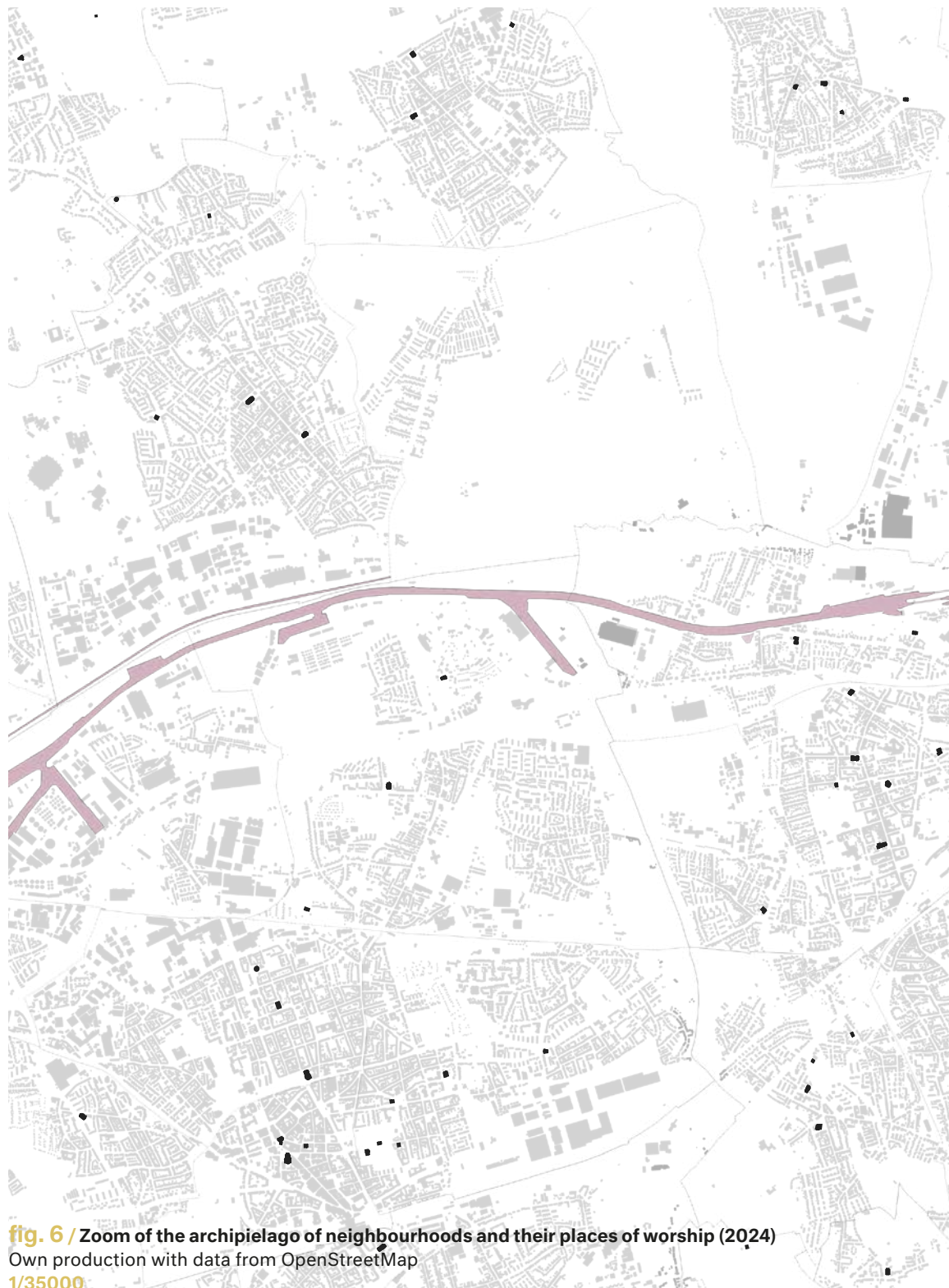


Densely distributed across the built environment, places of worship often played a key role in shaping the spatial identity of individual neighbourhoods. In the fragmented post-war landscape, churches emerged as local anchors around which housing, schools and public life were restructured. Rather than connecting the wider territory, they helped organise the immediate surroundings, reinforcing the self-contained nature of each urban fragment.



**fig. 5 / Map of the places of worship in the built-up network (2024)**  
Own production with data from OpenStreetMap  
1/300000



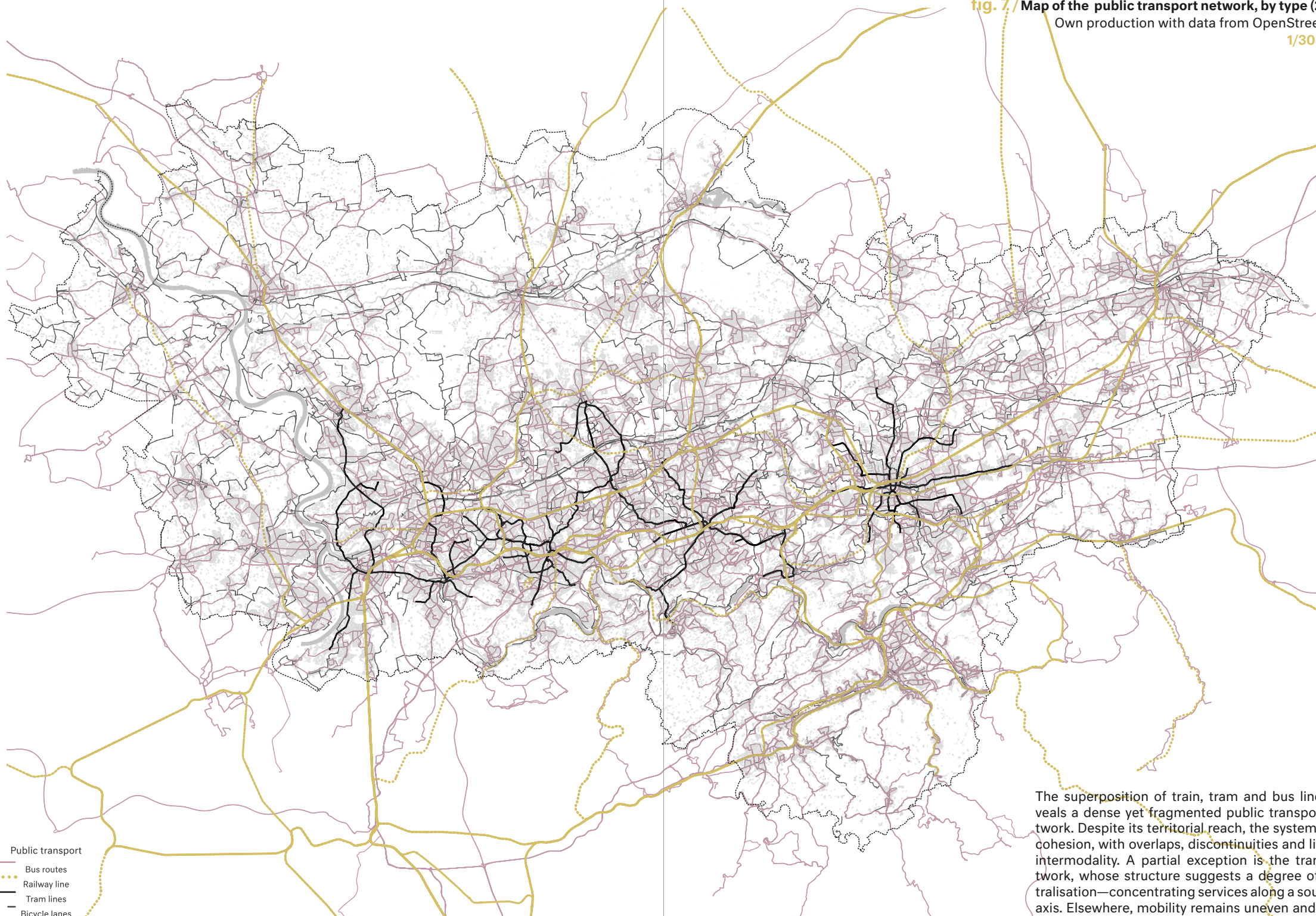


**fig. 6 /** Zoom of the archipelago of neighbourhoods and their places of worship (2024)  
Own production with data from OpenStreetMap  
1/35000





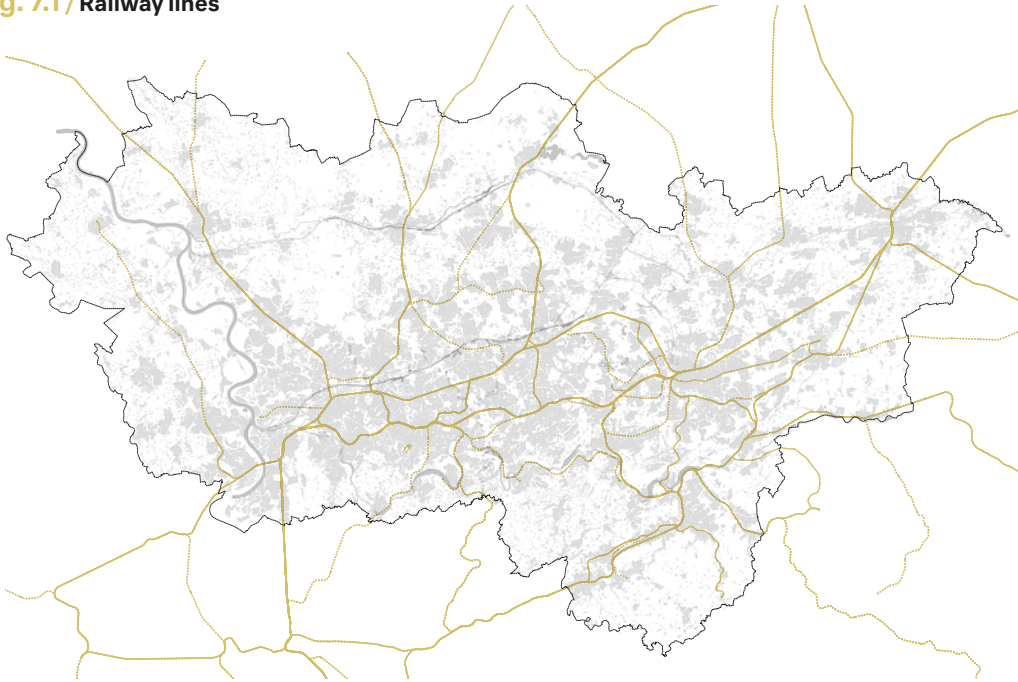
**fig. 7 / Map of the public transport network, by type (2024)**  
Own production with data from OpenStreetMap  
1/300000



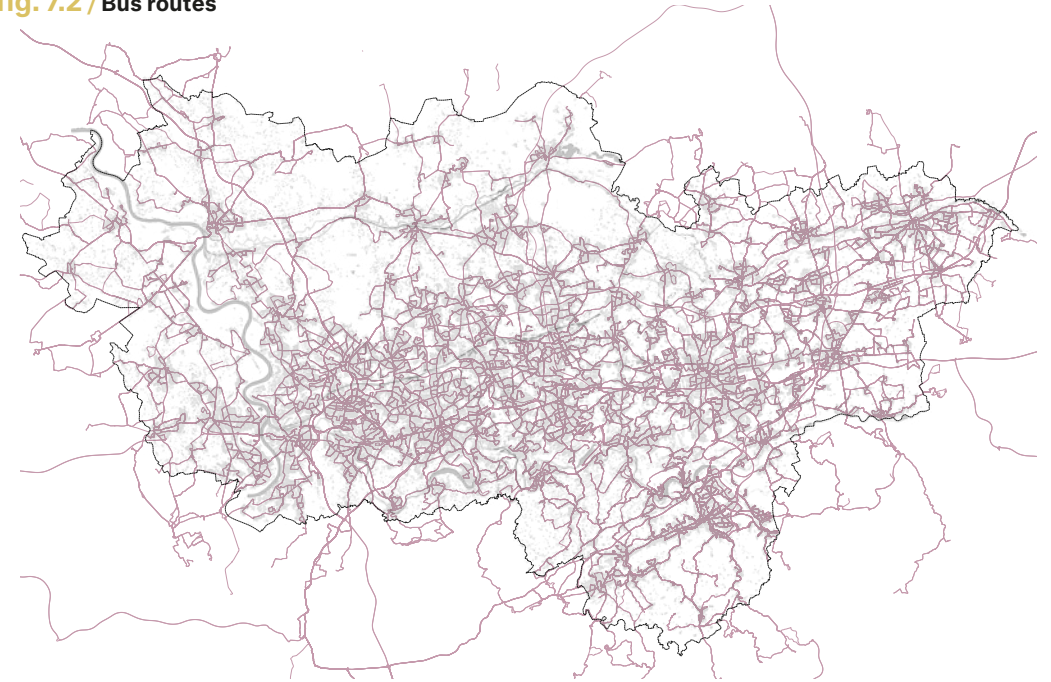
The superposition of train, tram and bus lines reveals a dense yet fragmented public transport network. Despite its territorial reach, the system lacks cohesion, with overlaps, discontinuities and limited intermodality. A partial exception is the tram network, whose structure suggests a degree of centralisation—concentrating services along a southern axis. Elsewhere, mobility remains uneven and often fails to bridge the divides between neighbourhoods.



**fig. 7.1 /** Railway lines



**fig. 7.2 /** Bus routes



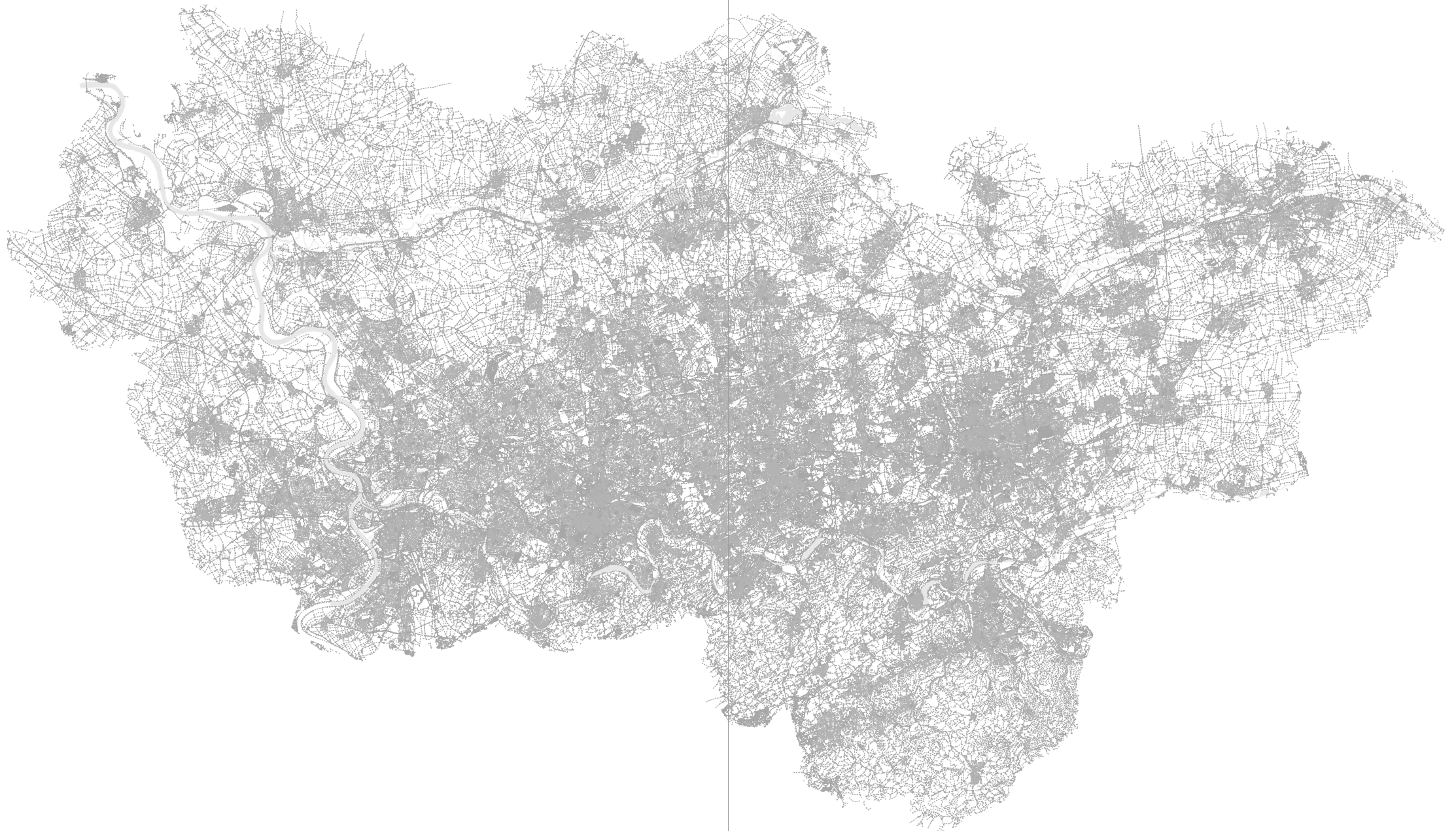
**fig. 7.3 /** Tram lines



**fig. 7.4 /** Bicycle lanes



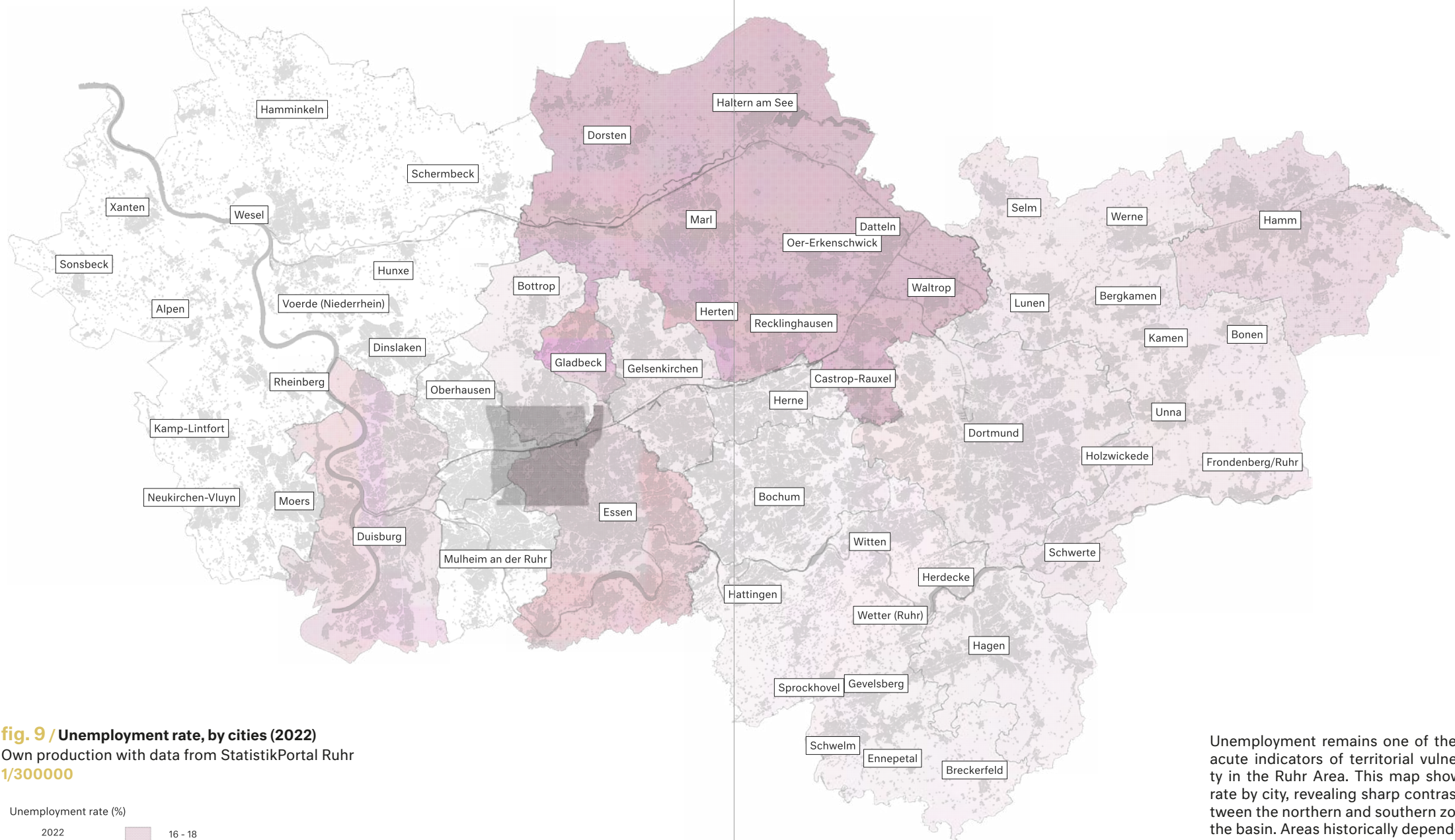




The density and continuity of the road network reveal a territory that is highly connected, yet unevenly articulated. While asphalt stitches together the basin, this infrastructural mesh reinforces fragmentation by privileging car-based mobility. Rather than resolving the region's dispersed structure, the road system often deepens local isolation—posing critical challenges for future models of metropolitan accessibility and integration.

**fig. 8 / Map of the road infrastructure (2024)**  
Own production with data from OpenStreetMap  
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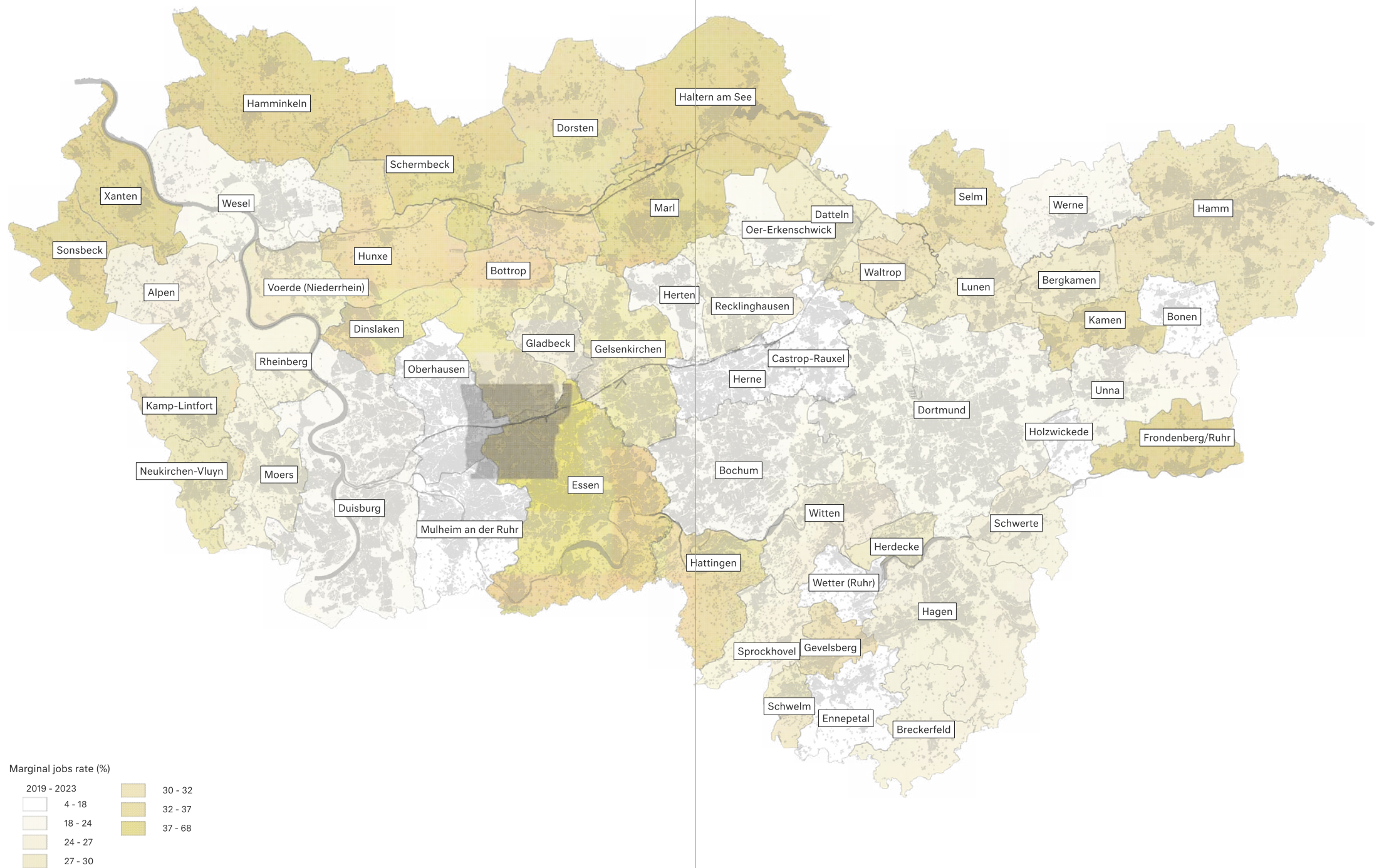
**fig. 9 / Unemployment rate, by cities (2022)**  
Own production with data from StatistikPortal Ruhr  
1/300000

Unemployment remains one of the most acute indicators of territorial vulnerability in the Ruhr Area. This map shows the rate by city, revealing sharp contrasts between the northern and southern zones of the basin. Areas historically dependent on heavy industry display persistent structural unemployment, while others show signs of relative recovery. These disparities expose long-standing socio-economic fault lines, cutting across the region's fragmented urban fabric.



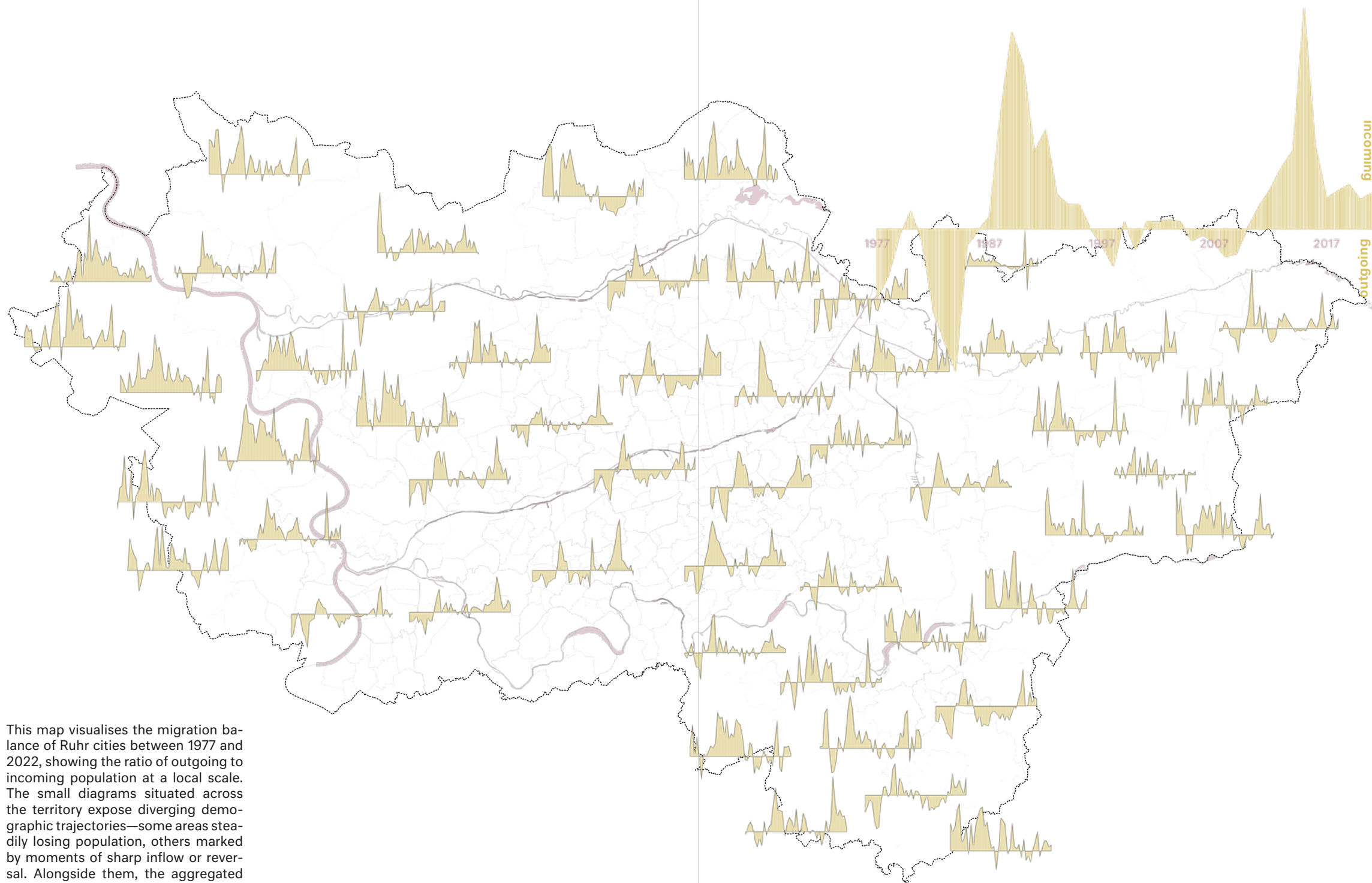
**fig. 10 / Marginal Jobs rate, by cities (2022)**  
Own production with data from StatistikPortal Ruhr  
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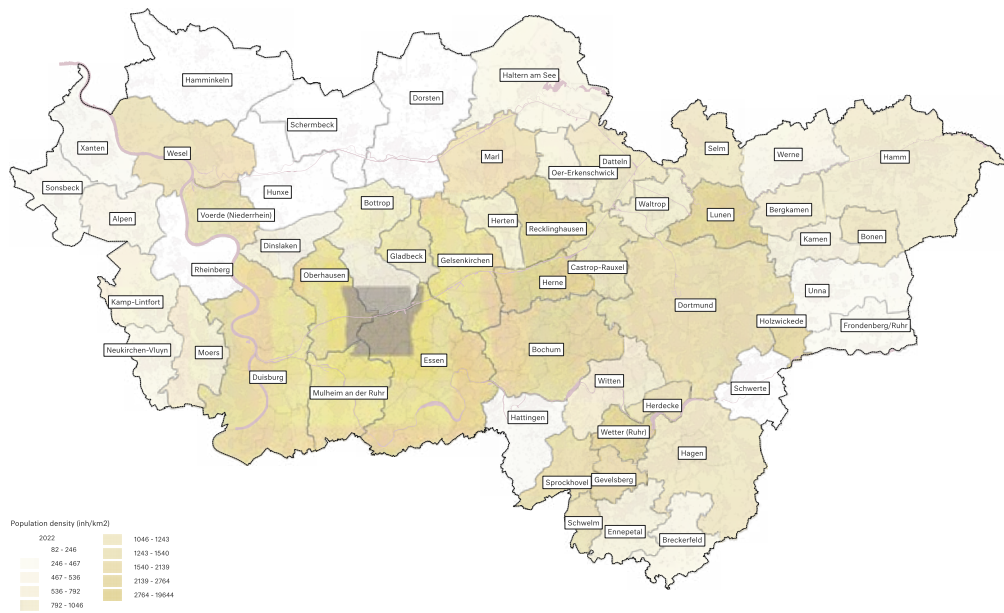
This map visualises the migration balance of Ruhr cities between 1977 and 2022, showing the ratio of outgoing to incoming population at a local scale. The small diagrams situated across the territory expose diverging demographic trajectories—some areas steadily losing population, others marked by moments of sharp inflow or reversal. Alongside them, the aggregated diagram for the Ruhr Area as a whole reveals a region in constant flux, where patterns of mobility have played a decisive role in shaping urban identity.

**fig. 11 / Situated migration balance (outgoing-to-incoming ratio), by cities and of the Ruhr Area (1977-2022)**

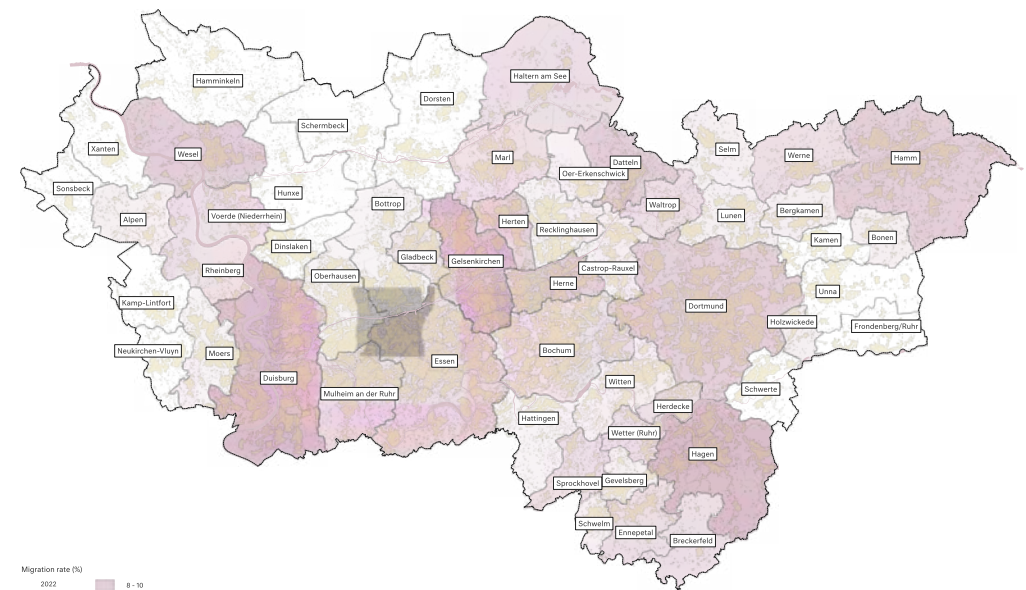
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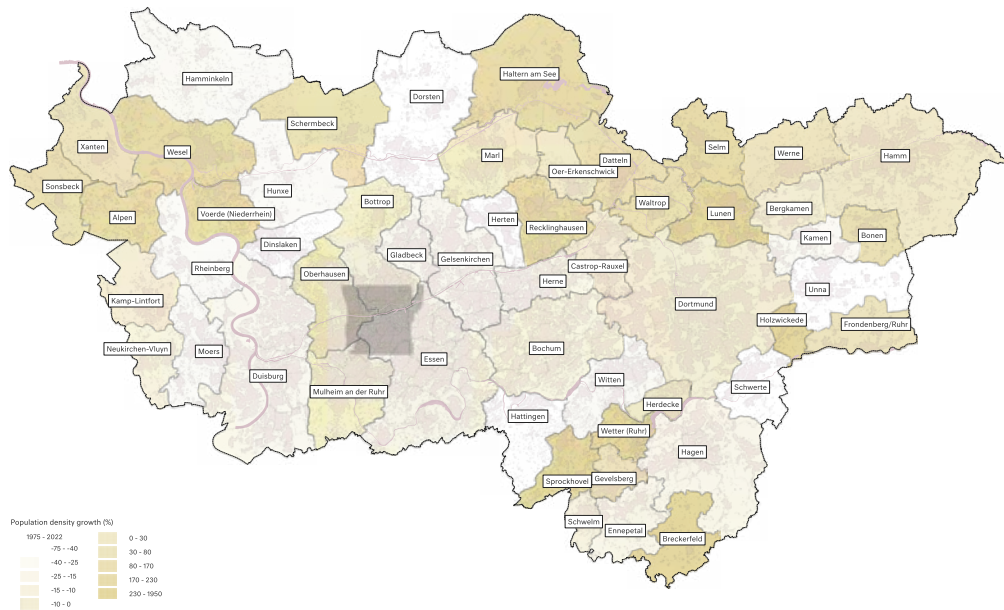




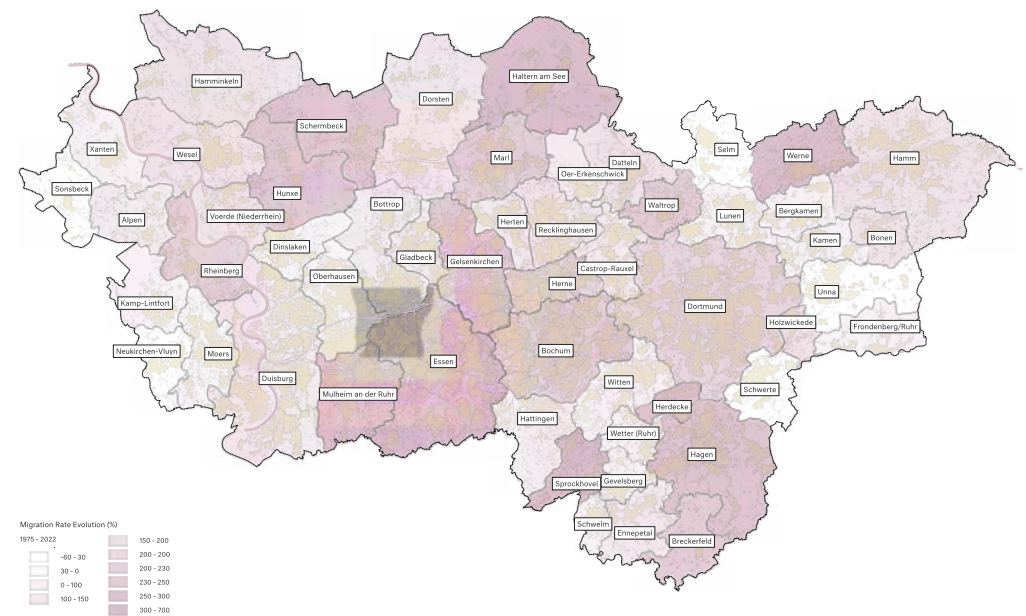
**fig. 12 / Population density, by cities (2022)**  
Own production with data from StatistikPortal Ruhr  
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**fig. 14 / Migration rate, by cities (2022)**  
Own production with data from StatistikPortal Ruhr  
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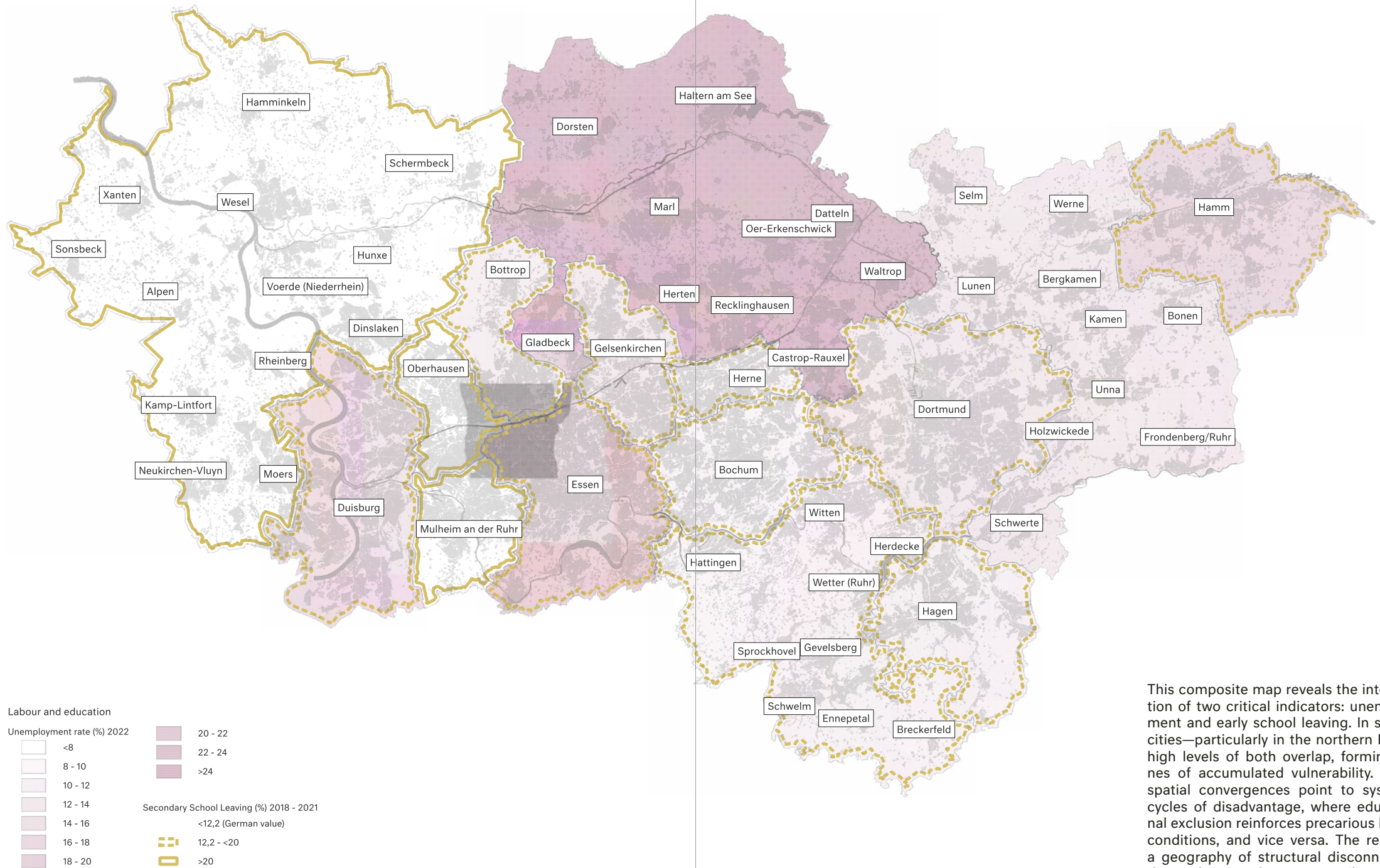
**fig. 13 / Population density growth, by cities (2008-2022)**  
Own production with data from StatistikPortal Ruhr  
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**fig. 15 / Migration rate growth, by cities (2008-2022)**  
Own production with data from StatistikPortal Ruhr  
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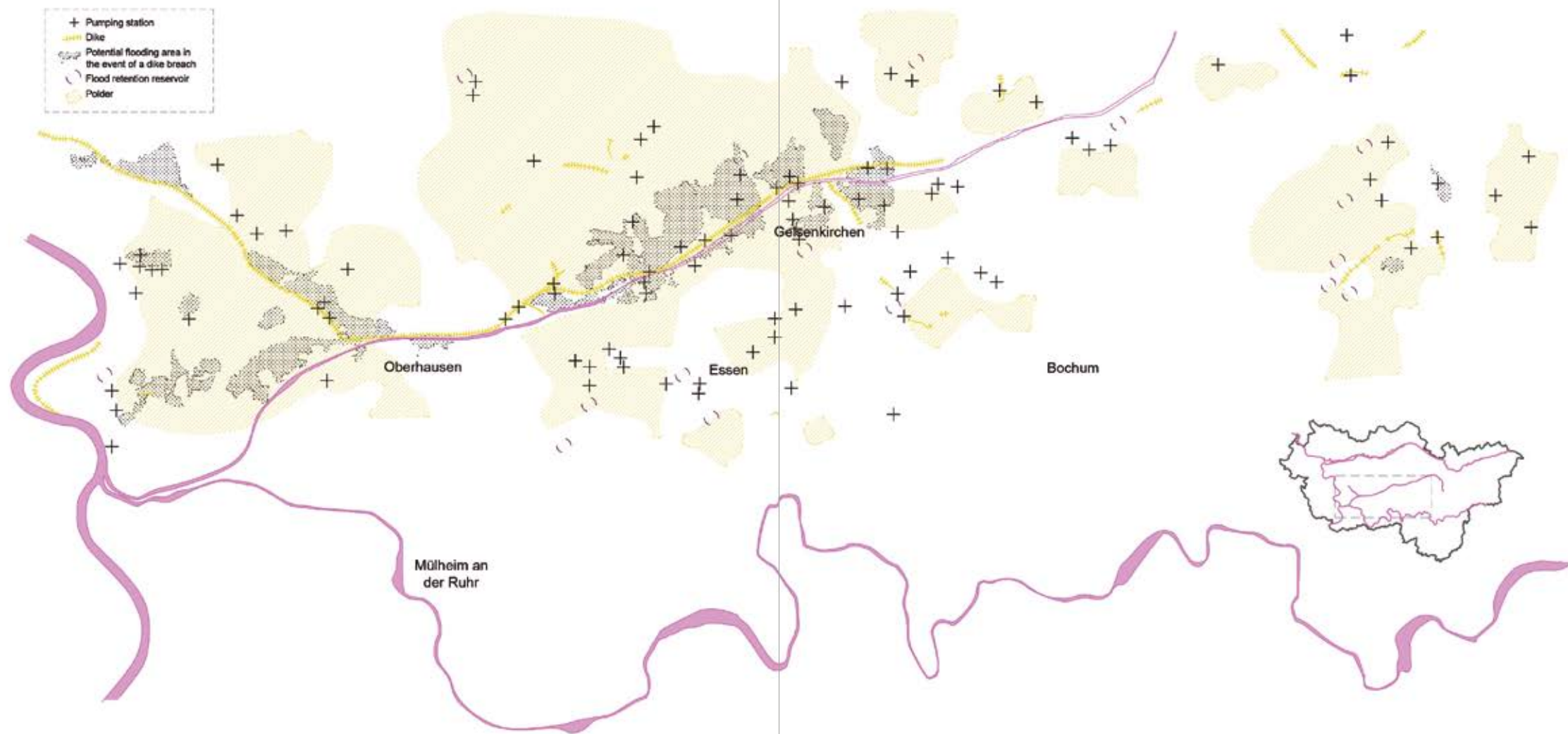


**fig. 16 / Unemployment rate and secondary school leaving, by cities (2022)**  
 Own production with data from StatistikPortal Ruhr  
 1/300000



This composite map reveals the intersection of two critical indicators: unemployment and early school leaving. In several cities—particularly in the northern Ruhr—high levels of both overlap, forming zones of accumulated vulnerability. These spatial convergences point to systemic cycles of disadvantage, where educational exclusion reinforces precarious labour conditions, and vice versa. The result is a geography of structural disconnection that undermines long-term resilience.



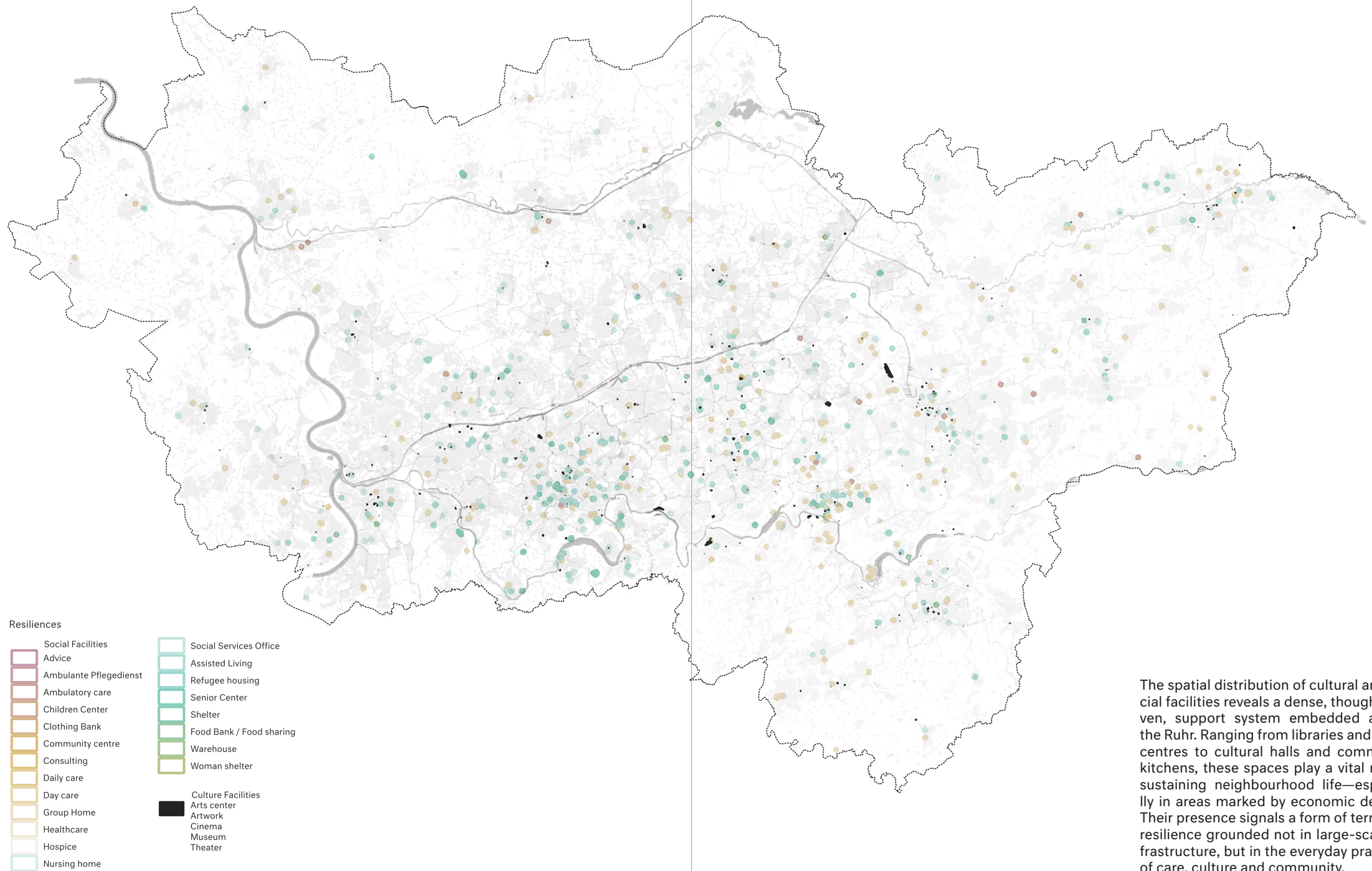


Beneath the Ruhr's urban fabric lies an invisible yet indispensable system of pumping stations and water infrastructure, working constantly to prevent flooding in areas destabilised by decades of mining. The map reveals the extent of this hidden network—an artificial equilibrium that sustains entire neighbourhoods above former coal seams. Far from resolved, this condition demands permanent intervention, exposing the environmental vulnerability at the foundation of the region's urban life.



**fig. 18 / Map of the social and culture facilities (2024)**  
Own production with data from OpenStreetMap  
1/300000

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The spatial distribution of cultural and social facilities reveals a dense, though uneven, support system embedded across the Ruhr. Ranging from libraries and youth centres to cultural halls and community kitchens, these spaces play a vital role in sustaining neighbourhood life—especially in areas marked by economic decline. Their presence signals a form of territorial resilience grounded not in large-scale infrastructure, but in the everyday practices of care, culture and community.



## cross-city institutions

/ Interkultur Ruhr  
/ Fonds Soziokultur NRW  
/ Arbeitsstelle Julturelle Bildung NRW  
/ Arbeitsstelle für politische Bildung  
/ Caritas Verband  
/ Die Tafel e.V.  
/ AWO Arbeiter Wohlfahrt  
/ Der Paritätische

## municipal institutions

/ KI - Communal Centre for Integration  
/ VHS Volkshochschule  
/ Music schools  
/ Public libraries

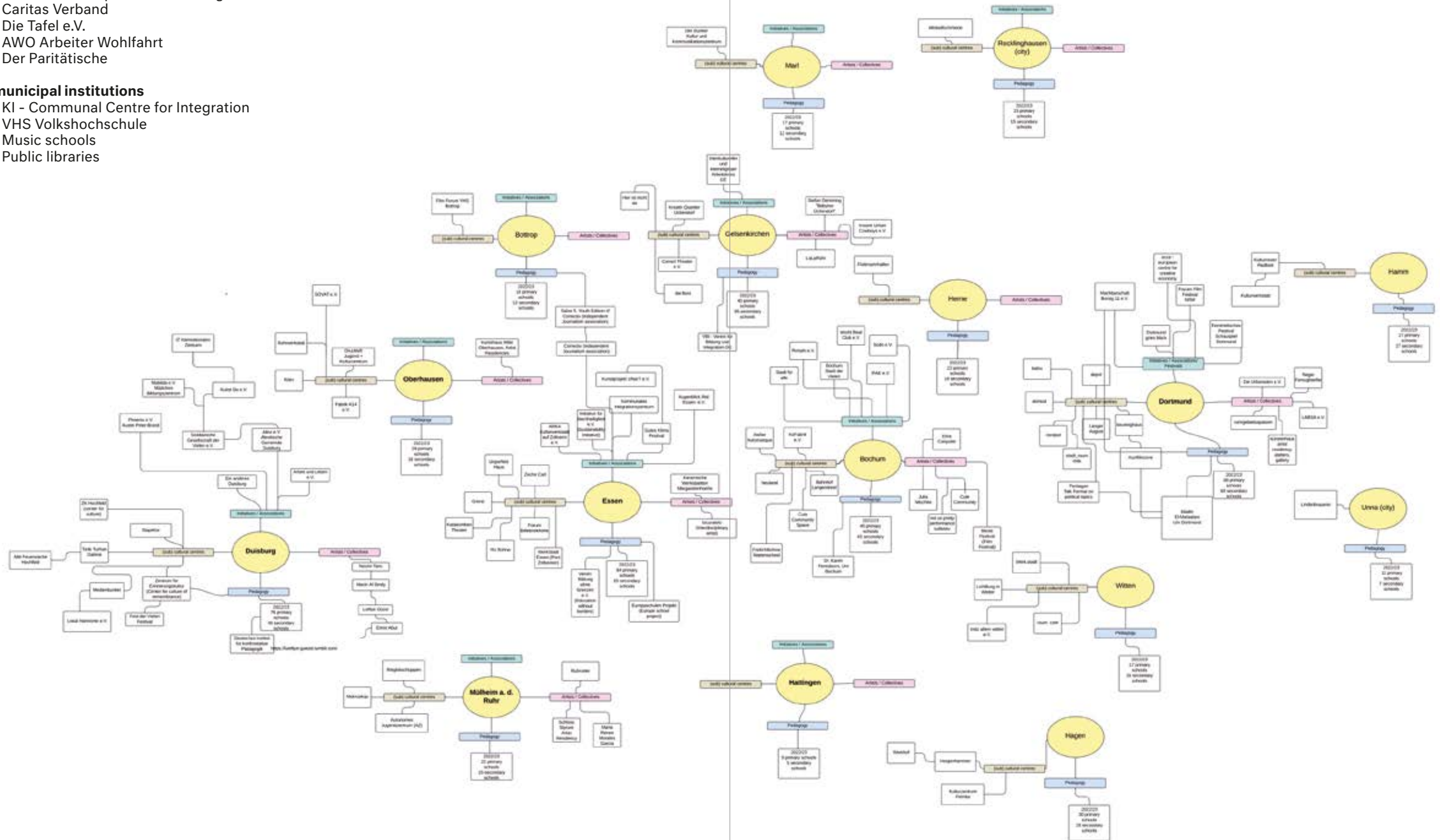
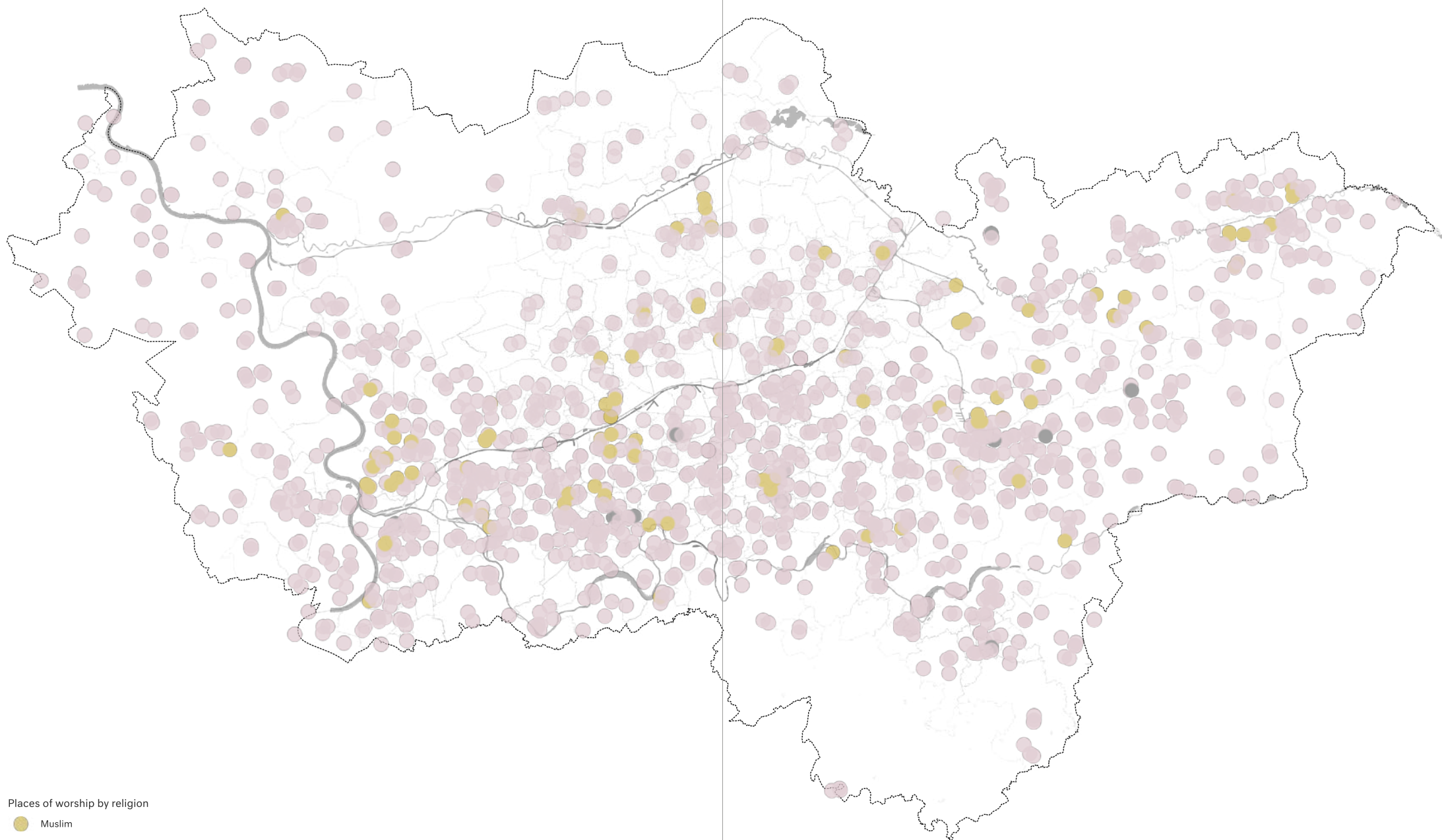


fig. 19 / Map of the social and culture agents

Own production





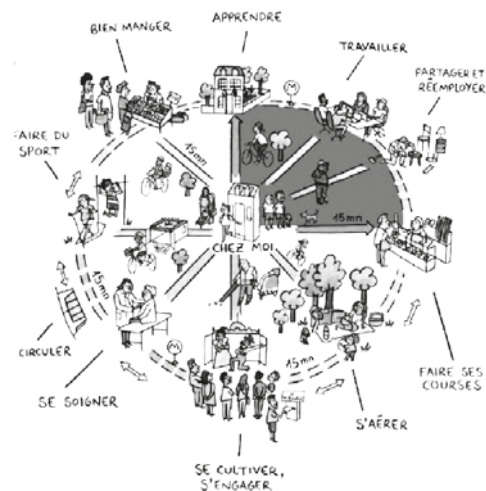
**fig. 20 / Spaces of worship by religion, the three most prevalent ones**  
Own production with data from OpenStreetMap  
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*“Distance is the pathology of the modern city.”*  
— Richard Sennett

The 20th century witnessed the consolidation of nation-states, while the 21st century has undeniably become the century of cities. Their growing influence parallels the exponential rise of megacorporations that have propelled capitalism into a new dimension—one that some predict may herald its own demise. Today, the planet’s future is being shaped in metropolitan areas and sprawling urban regions whose geographical boundaries grow increasingly blurred. These city-territories define a diffuse, globalised, anonymous and accelerated reality that has simultaneously provoked a countermovement: the resurgence of neighbourhood communities as fundamental urban units.

The neighbourhood represents the smallest urban structure of meaningful complexity—a space whose contours we still recognise, with a familiar local landscape accessible at human scale. It offers an irreplaceable sense of identity and belonging that complements the overwhelming anonymity of global cities. During the late 20th and early 21st centuries, cities engaged in fierce competition for global positioning, rebranding themselves as commodities in hopes of economic improvement that would trickle down to citizens’ quality of life. Yet this promise largely failed to materialise as intended. Capitalism’s voracity placed economic metrics at the core of public policy, exacerbating socio-spatial inequalities—a reality laid bare during the 2007 subprime crisis. The financialisation and speculation of housing, which disregarded fundamental rights to dignified, affordable homes in well-equipped neighbourhoods, sparked widespread social movements demanding more equitable management of shared resources through direct, localised governance.



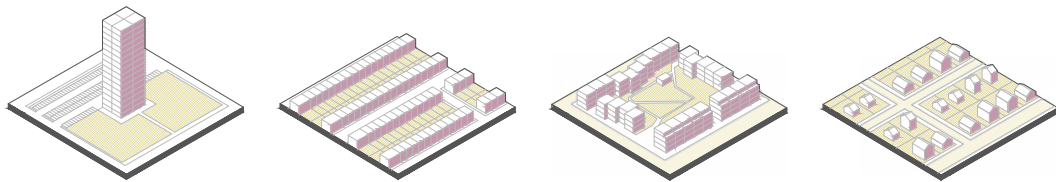
/ Ville de Paris (2021). La ville du quart d'heure en images

# 3

## the revolution of proximity



Progress has been uneven, and lessons from that crisis remain incompletely learned. Yet citizens today are more vigilant and organised through activist networks advocating political changes to create “lives worth living”—lives rooted in the neighbourhoods where daily existence unfolds. This spirit of reclamation has spawned initiatives worldwide asserting rights to the city, to neighbourhoods, and to housing—a demand for physical and political proximity to reverse glaring socio-spatial injustices. Many began as grassroots efforts in community organisations and urban labs operating outside formal institutions, gradually gaining partial municipal adoption after years of advocacy.



The COVID-19 pandemic marked a watershed in this neighbourhood-centric shift. Lockdowns forced cities to reconsider their basic functioning as mobility plummeted and residents relied on immediate surroundings for essentials.

To reduce contagion risks from crowded transit, cities rapidly implemented alternatives—within months, sidewalks expanded, bike networks multiplied, parking spaces became outdoor dining areas and sustainable neighbourhood initiatives proliferated. This agile, low-cost urban reconfiguration demonstrated the efficacy of flexible planning. The health crisis not only validated proximity principles but accelerated their adoption by highlighting the value of local access, non-motorised transport and community bonds.

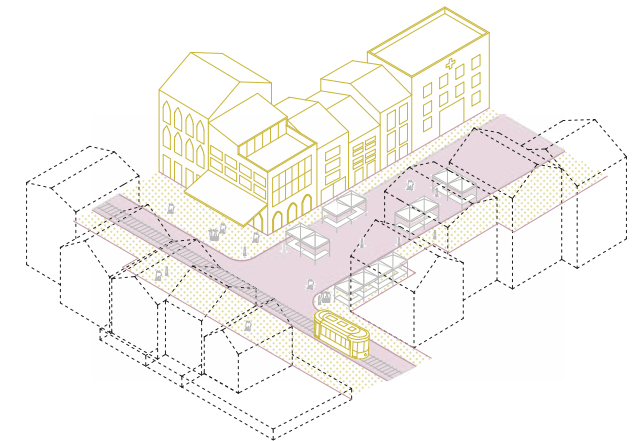
Today, most global cities are testing and refining similar approaches through mutual learning. The C40's *Global Observatory of Sustainable Proximities* facilitates this knowledge exchange toward new models—never literal copies given cultural, geographic, economic and climatic differences, but adaptable frameworks addressing shared challenges. This collaborative scaling represents one of our most potent strategies against environmental crises and worsening socio-spatial inequalities.

From Paris' 15-Minute City to Barcelona's *Superblocks*, Bogotá's *Vital Neighbourhoods*, Melbourne's *20-Minute City*, Shanghai's *15-Minute Community Life Circles*, Glasgow's *Liveable Neighbourhoods*, New York's *Caring and Cool Neighbourhoods*, and Portland's *Complete Neighbourhoods*, cities are pioneering contextualised interpretations of proximity while forging unprecedented global cooperation networks—choosing collaboration over competition.

## / “resurgent neighbourhoods”. proximity in the Ruhr Area

*“Neoliberal urban policy has created global conditions that dramatically impact cities and their residents. Resurgent neighbourhoods interconnect locals to break disciplinary boundaries, stimulate collaborations among professionals, and engage with people who live the local realities. It recognises a new form of city development that has at its centre the notion that civil society can use their knowledge, skills, and, ultimately, their potential to build better living conditions.” — David Harvey*

The Ruhr Area's official designation as “Metropole Ruhr” in 2010, when it served as European Capital of Culture, marked a political shift in scale that strengthened cooperation among its cities. This milestone ushered in new opportunities and challenges for the territory. As urban design requirements evolve, a critical question emerges: *Can polycentric territories like the Ruhr Area adopt a single, unified spatial and urban planning vision?*



The answer is decisively negative. Neither the Ruhr Area nor any complex territory should aspire to singular visions. What these regions require instead are complementary perspectives capable of building scalable alliances and networks. More fundamentally, they need methodologies that prioritise collective wellbeing—for both residents and the planet.

Our proposed complementary vision reimagines the territory through an inside-out approach. It begins by understanding neighbourhood realities and residents' lived experiences, then progressively expands to territorial-scale perspectives. This framework can be visualised through concentric circles placing people at the centre of fundamental rights (Fig. 10).

At the core lies housing rights—the essential foundation without which other rights cannot materialise. Neighbourhood and urban rights remain meaningless without guaranteed housing. Without a registered address, individuals lose formal citizenship status and struggle to exercise basic democratic rights. A home functions simultaneously as shelter, personal agency and collective voice—extending its influence on the community, neighbourhood and city scales.

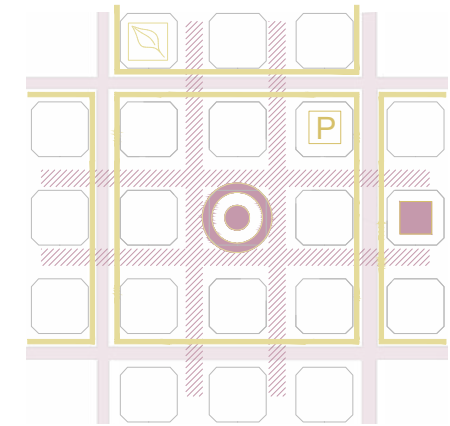




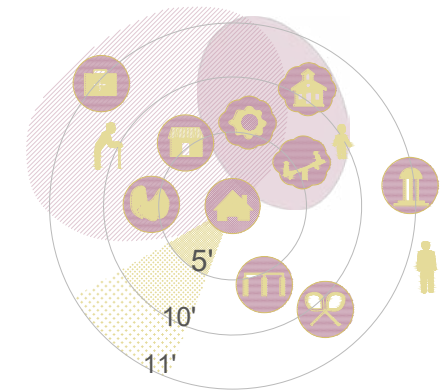




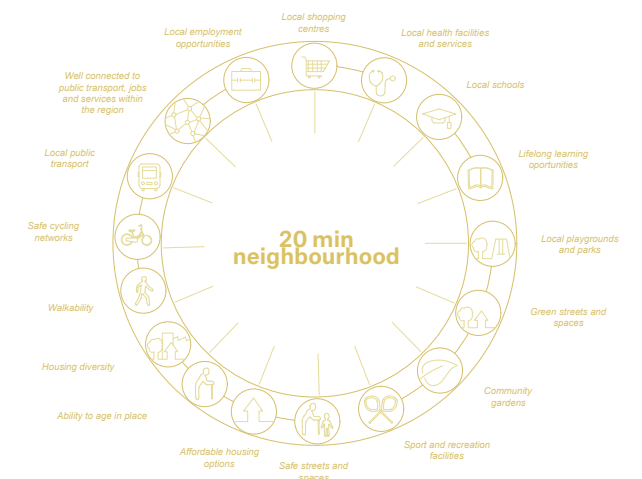
/ Barcelona Superblock (Scofet)



/ Barcelona Superblock



/ 15 min city Xuhui



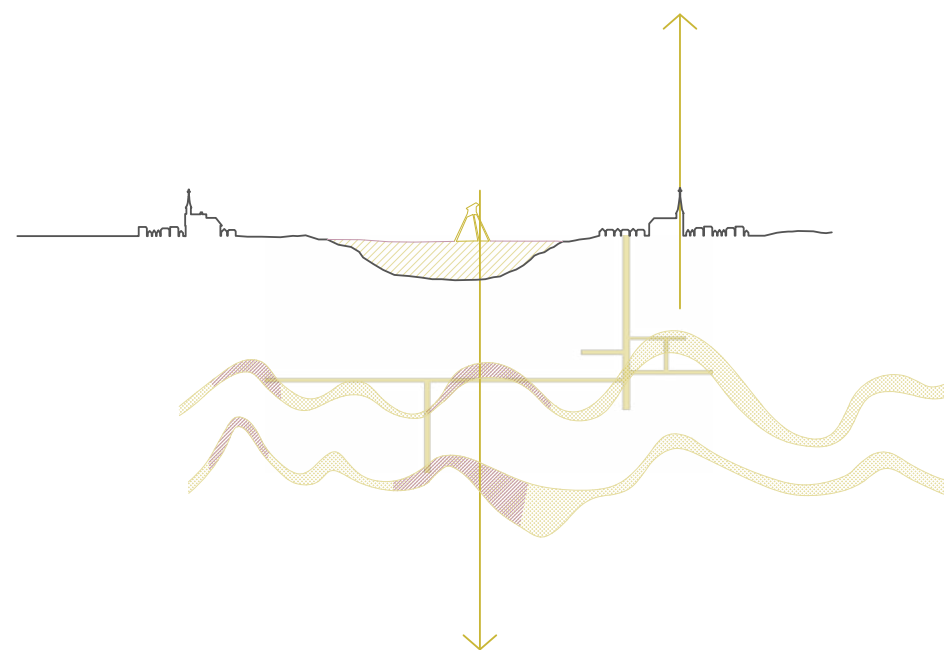
/ 120 min city Melbourne



# churches as an amazing urban infrastructure

## / the problem of churches

Christian churches in the Ruhr Area are undergoing a profound process of transformation. The reasons for this are multifaceted, although the most evident is the steady loss of parishioners, who are increasingly ageing due to a lack of generational renewal. Many sons and daughters of the original parish founders have been compelled to relocate to other regions in search of better employment opportunities. This phenomenon is not only occurring in the Ruhr Area but throughout Germany, one of the most secularised societies in the world. Only ten percent of Catholics and five percent of Protestants attend mass regularly, according to data from the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD) report from 2023. In the Ruhr Area specifically, the traditional working-class and mining identity historically linked to the Church and the community life it fostered has faded with the onset of industrial decline.



In 1950, eighty percent of West Germans were members of Christian churches; today, only fifty percent are, and many of these are merely nominal members, with minimal engagement in church liturgy. The clergy has also failed to undergo a generational shift. In 2022, the number of Catholic priests in the Ruhr Area was sixty percent lower than in 1990. In the absence of members of the clergy, many parishes have been forced to merge or to remain closed most of the time, opening only for an hour a week or on significant religious holidays.

Economic and urban changes have further rendered the model of maintaining a church in every neighbourhood unfeasible. The diminished parishes are unable to regularly activate these infrastructures, and neither the Church nor the state has prioritised their upkeep. These are remarkable communal spaces that remain un-



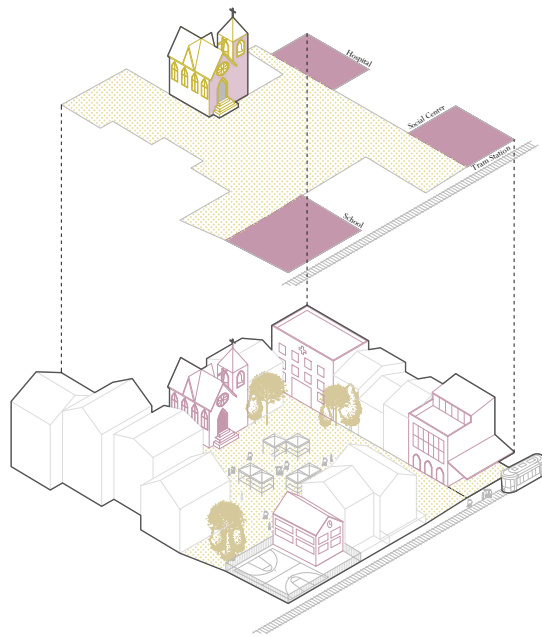
derutilised, including both their interiors and the associated outdoor areas, which typically provide public squares and gardens.

Perhaps the greatest issue, however, lies in the fact that in the Ruhr Area, churches have become victims of their own post-war success: far too many were built for a society that no longer exists.<sup>17</sup>

### / “Pantoffelkirche”

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the Ruhr region faced a profound socio-cultural rupture, marked by the dual burden of suppressed collective guilt and the yearning for renewal following the devastation of Nazism. Amid material hardship and infrastructural ruin, communities were compelled to reconstruct both their physical environment and social identity. Within this context of disorientation and recovery, local parishes emerged as vital spaces of cohesion, offering continuity, moral anchorage, and a renewed sense of belonging.

In the 1950s, the Catholic diocese of the Ruhr was established, and its first bishop, Franz Hengsbach, developed the concept of the Pantoffelkirche—the “slipper church.” This idea was deeply rooted in the finest urban planning traditions of “proximity,” aimed at building cohesive and walkable neighbourhoods in which every believer would have a church so nearby that they could attend mass without having to put on shoes but could walk to the church on their slippers. The ambitious reconstruction project was also a programme of evangelisation and a political strategy of protection. Its strategic deployment systematised the notion of a safeguarded and interconnected community, in which parishes were linked and their tall bell towers served as territorial sentinels.



<sup>17</sup> This situation has led to the emergence of various initiatives in Germany aimed at raising awareness of the alarming decline and abandonment of numerous church buildings in recent years. One of the most significant of these efforts has been the Kirchenmanifest (Church Manifesto) “Kirchen sind Gemeingüter!”. A manifest officially published in early May 2024 that calls for a collective societal responsibility—via foundations or foundation networks—to rescue and repurpose deconsecrated and threatened church buildings in Germany [reddit.com/15baukultur.nrw/15baunetz.de/15](https://www.reddit.com/r/15baukultur.nrw/15baunetz.de/15).

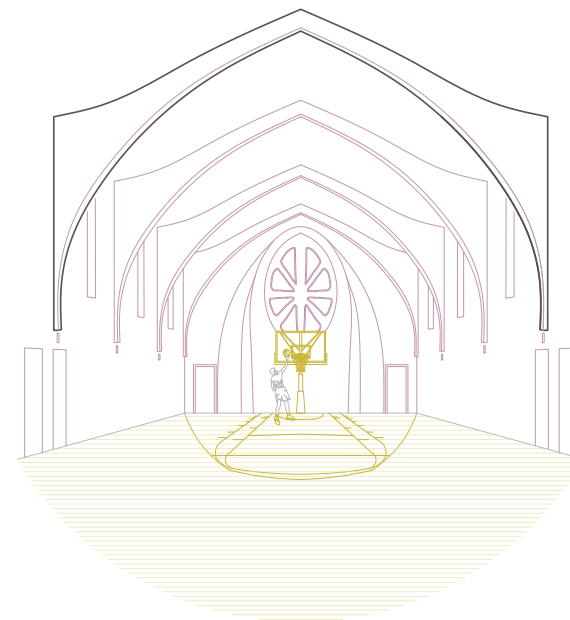
Another significant initiative was the exhibition in September 2025 “Kirchen als Vierte Orte” (Churches as fourth spaces) curated by Felix Hammers, in the Holly Spirit church in Kattemberg, Essen

This approach harmonised with the American model of dispersed residential developments, designed to offer greater safety in the event of renewed aerial bombardments by reducing urban density and favouring isolated housing clusters connected by road networks. This formula led to a wave of church construction during the 1950s and 1960s, coinciding with the rise of post-war modernist architecture. Architects such as Gottfried Böhm, Emil Steffann, Otto Bartning and Hans Scharoun designed religious buildings in the Rhine and Ruhr regions that are now considered iconic examples of that era.

### / the decline and transformation of churches in Europe

The issue of disused churches is not unique to the Ruhr Area. In recent decades, the European continent has experienced a progressive decline in the use of religious spaces, reflected in the closure, abandonment, sale or repurposing of many buildings<sup>18</sup>. This phenomenon, particularly pronounced in countries with high levels of secularisation and decreasing religious practice, is driven by demographic, socio-economic and cultural factors, and shows significant geographical variation in both its intensity and the responses it has elicited.

In the Netherlands, where studies predict the closure of approximately 1000 churches before 2030, many have been adapted for alternative purposes, some of them communal, such as concert halls, theatres or libraries.



A well-known example is the Dominicanen Bookstore in Maastricht, a former Gothic church converted into a cultural venue and bookshop. However, many other churches have been sold to the highest bidder for private, less community-oriented uses. A similar trend can be observed in the United Kingdom, where the Church of England has implemented a parish consolidation plan that involves the closure of around 20 buildings per year, many of which are transformed into housing, community centres or commercial premises.

<sup>18</sup> See Beaumont, J., & Baker, C. (2011). *Postsecular cities: Space, theory and practice*. Continuum; Ganiel, G., & Winkel, H. (2018). *Secularisation and the transformation of religion in Europe: Theoretical perspectives and empirical findings*. Nomos; and Council of Europe. (2021). *The future of religious heritage in Europe*.



In contrast to this growing trend, southern European countries such as Spain, Portugal and Italy present a less pronounced picture. In these nations, despite the decline in religious observance, the strong cultural and identity-based ties to Catholicism, along with higher population density in rural areas, have so far limited both the prevalence of such transformations and the public debate surrounding them. Nonetheless, in depopulated regions such as parts of Castile and León in Spain or the Portuguese interior, as well as in major cities like Madrid, Barcelona and Lisbon, instances of church transformation are beginning to emerge—particularly in buildings of significant heritage value—though not yet on the scale observed in northern Europe.

In any case, the tension between preservation, functional adaptation and disappearance of these spaces will remain a central challenge in the management of 21st century cultural heritage. Every church that closes marks a small rupture in the historical fabric of its community, yet at the same time, every transformation offers a significant opportunity to reimagine these structures. Though desacralised, they can continue to serve as powerful spaces for gathering and fostering social cohesion within neighbourhoods.

As part of the Urban Vision, our aim was to construct a comprehensive picture of the current condition of churches in the Ruhr Area, while also situating this regional reality within a broader European and global context. We sought to develop a sort of taxonomy—an analytical framework that could categorise churches according to their current use: active, closed, abandoned, or transformed. This quantitative dimension of the research was intended not only to map the extent of the phenomenon but also to provide a “big picture” overview that could inform more nuanced, locally grounded strategies. The ambition was to gather comparative data at multiple scales, capturing both the particularities of the Ruhr and the shared dynamics unfolding across national and international landscapes.

However, despite our efforts, we encountered significant difficulties in accessing consolidated and up-to-date information. The fragmentation of sources, the absence of unified databases, and the variability of terminology across regions made it challenging to obtain a precise and comprehensive set of figures.



Rather than seeing this limitation as a setback, we consider it an invitation—an open line of research that could be further developed and deepened over time. A transnational observatory or comparative mapping project could offer a powerful tool for understanding the fate of these religious buildings and reimagining their future across diverse socio-cultural contexts.

## / neighbourhoods/churches of opportunity for an Urban Vision

*What would be the most appropriate use for these urban monuments, preserving the deep-rooted social significance they have historically represented? (And how do they reflect the hyper-diverse neighbourhoods and contribute to communicating over cultural breaking grounds?)*

The Urban Vision for Manifesta 16 is grounded in the belief that the biennial can serve as a modest catalyst to complement the long-standing transition already underway in the Ruhr Area.

Through substantial investment and the strategic hosting of international events, the Ruhr Area has emerged as a global reference for the adaptive reuse of industrial heritage. Culture and environmental regeneration have been employed as principal drivers of transformation. The results—evident at multiple scales—have converted a once hostile and heavily polluted landscape into a greener, more liveable region, distinguished by exemplary cultural infrastructure.



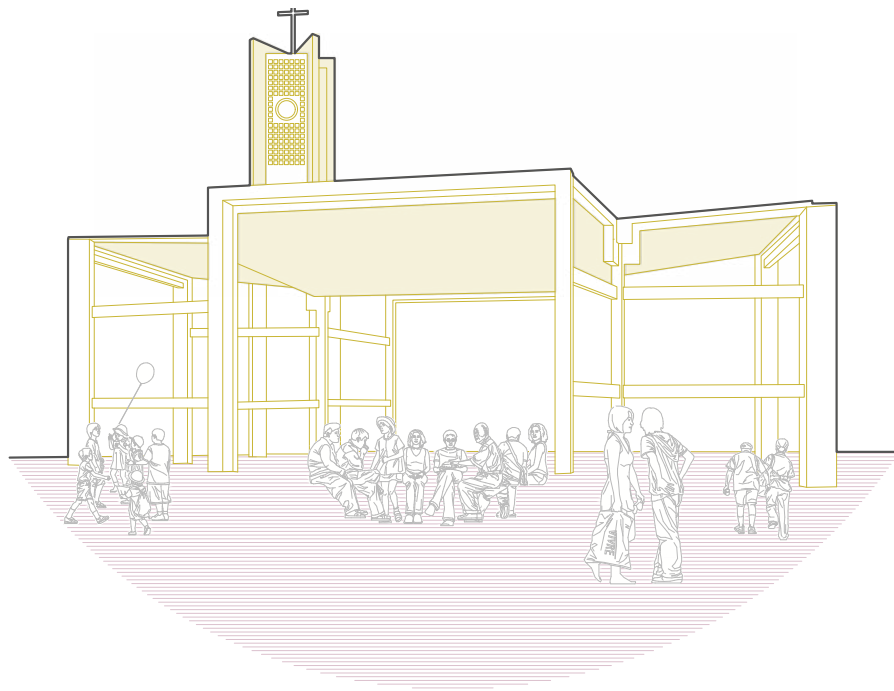


Nevertheless, the region continues to seek complementary strategies to address the concerning reality faced by a significant segment of its population—those who struggle to make ends meet and reside in segregated neighbourhoods that have lost much of their original cohesion.

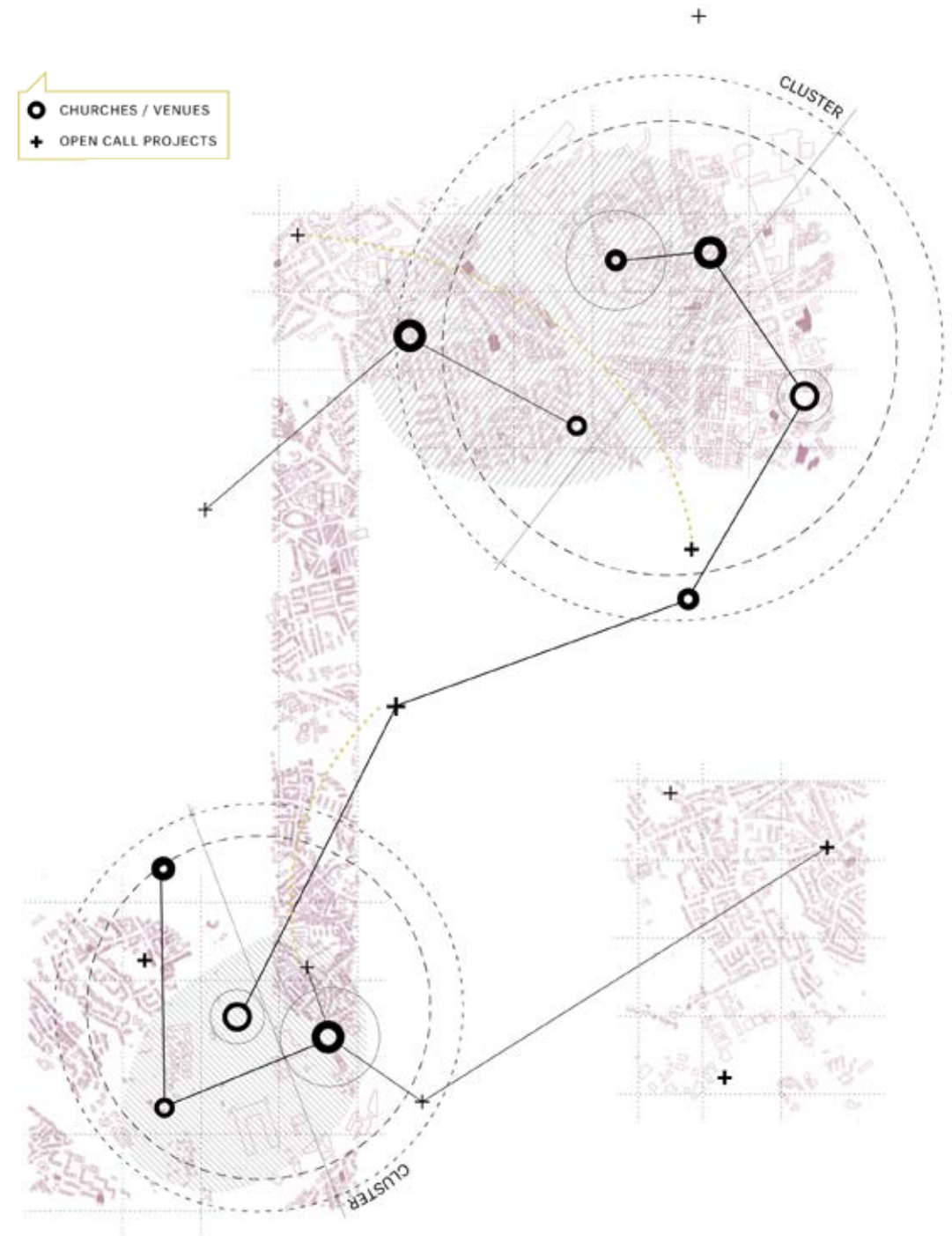
This Urban Vision proposes to focus precisely on the neighbourhood scale as a structuring axis for the pending regeneration.

By intersecting two lines of investigation—the vulnerability of neighbourhoods and the widespread closure of churches—a locally grounded proximity-based model may emerge, contributing uniquely to the “proximity revolution” currently being embraced by cities around the world.

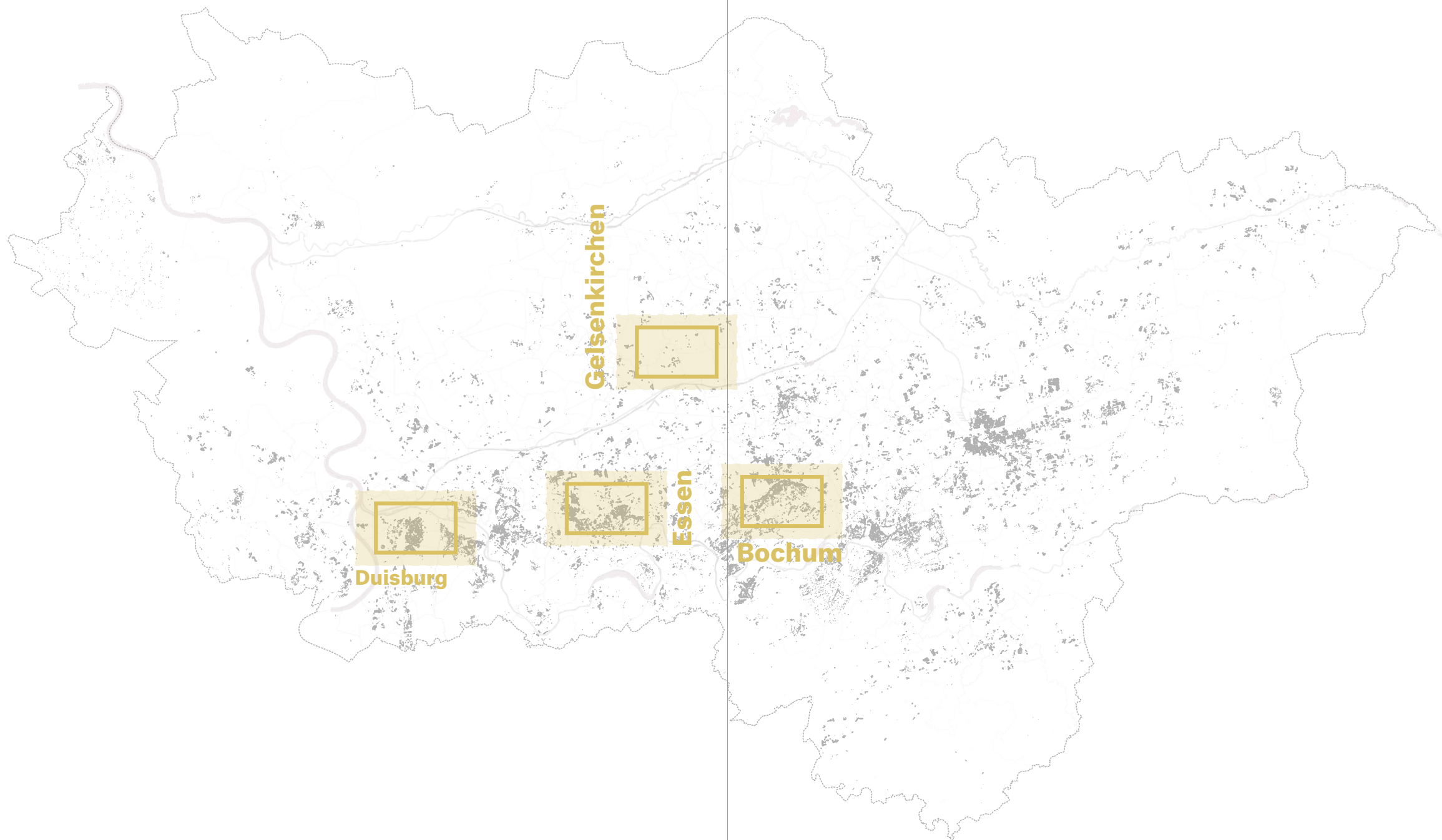
The cross-referencing of data on vulnerability, neighbourhood resilience and the condition of churches has enabled us to develop initial mappings and exploratory strategies for intervention.



Over the past months, we have visited more than 50 churches, organised workshops, and engaged with local experts about churches and neighbourhoods in the Ruhr Area. Notably, we have benefited from the invaluable collaboration of Professor Renée Tribble from the University of Dortmund, Sebastian Schlecht from the collective Lalaruhr, and Felix Hemmers, an architect specialising in churches in the Ruhr Area, along with numerous contacts with organizations on site, experts, members from various parishes, Bishop, Priests, and their technical teams. Their insights have helped us to understand the circumstances of vulnerable neighbourhoods and how these may be associated with the phenomenon of closed and abandoned churches, thereby contributing to the establishment of a regeneration process that can be both piloted and scaled.











Gelsenkirchen



Duisburg



Bochum



Essen



Liebfrauenkirche

Marxloh

Synagoge

Kolumbarium

Altstadt

Duissern

Dellviertel

Kulturkirche  
Liebfrauenkirche

Duisburg







## / Synagoge

**/ year of construction**  
1999

**/ architect**  
Zvi Hecker

**/ address**  
Springwall 16, 47051 Duisburg

**/ status of use**  
Active synagogue and Jewish community centre

**/ ownership**  
Jüdische Gemeinde Duisburg-Mülheim/Ruhr-Oberhausen K.d.ö.R.

**/ contact**  
<https://jgduisburg.de>

### **/ significant features and history**

Designed as a sculptural “open book” or star-shaped structure, its five exposed concrete fins symbolise the Pentateuch or the historic five Jewish community sites in Duisburg since medieval times, and echo the five fingers of an open hand. The building combines a synagogue to the east, a large multipurpose hall, library, classrooms, offices, apartments, and youth/senior centre. Green roof sections relate visually to Dani Karavan’s adjacent “Garden of Remembrance”. It replaced earlier synagogues destroyed in the November Pogroms of 1938.

### **/ surroundings**

The synagogue is located near the Yitzhak-Rabin-Platz and Duisburg’s inner harbour, an area that blends civic institutions, memorial sites, cultural spaces and office buildings. Public transport connections are strong, and the building faces a small park and plaza. The surrounding district includes residential streets and several community initiatives, making it a visible and engaged anchor within the urban setting.



## / Kulturkirche Liebfrauen

**/ year of construction**  
1961

**/ architect**  
Toni Hermanns

**/ address**  
König-Heinrich-Platz 3, 47051 Duisburg

**/ status of use**  
Deconsecrated in 2009, repurposed as cultural venue in 2013

**/ ownership**  
Stiftung Brennender Dornbusch

**/ contact**  
<https://liebfrauen-kulturkirche.de>

### **/ significant features and history**

Liebfrauenkirche was built after the destruction of its Gothic predecessor during World War II. The new design, by architect Toni Hermanns, features modernist lines and exposed concrete elements. A notable relief sculpture depicting the burning bush, by Karl-Heinz Türk, is mounted on the facade. Inside, the two-level space is dominated by a large Breil organ and flexible seating. The church was deconsecrated due to restructuring and declining attendance, then reopened as a cultural venue after a careful renovation. Today it hosts concerts, exhibitions, lectures, and civic events, preserving its architectural integrity while reactivating its public role.

### **/ surroundings**

Located directly at König-Heinrich-Platz, the church is surrounded by civic landmarks including the municipal theatre, district court and public event halls. The main station is nearby, and the area has high pedestrian traffic. The church’s central location makes it highly visible, and its reuse contributes to the cultural life of Duisburg’s inner city. Small restaurants, shops, and residential blocks are interspersed in the area.



## / Kolumbarium

**/ year of construction**  
1971

**/ architect**  
Lothar Kallmeyer

**/ address**  
Wintgensstraße 72, 47058 Duisburg (Duissern)

**/ status of use**  
Repurposed as a columbarium since 2012

**/ ownership**  
Kolumbarium Duisburg oHG

**/ contact**  
<https://kolumbarium-duisburg.de>

### **/ significant features and history**

Originally built as a parish church for a growing Protestant community in Duissern, the building reflects post-war ecclesiastical architecture with geometric concrete forms and a sculptural tower. Designed by Lothar Kallmeyer, the structure included a worship space and community rooms. Due to declining attendance, it was decommissioned and stood vacant until 2011, when it was sensitively converted into a columbarium. The transformation preserved the sacred spatial quality, and today the building holds around 900 urn niches and allows for commemorative ceremonies in a calm, light-filled setting.

### **/ surroundings**

The building stands on a quiet residential street in Duissern, an inner-city neighborhood between the main rail lines and the inner harbour. Though relatively low in density, the area is well connected by tram and bus. The former church is set between modernist housing blocks, a small park, and a school, offering a discreet and tranquil urban presence.



## / Liebfrauenkirche

**/ year of construction**  
1915

**/ architect**  
Alois Böll

**/ address**  
Schulstraße 29a, 47166 Duisburg

**/ status of use**  
closed, temporary social usage

**/ ownership**  
Abtei Duisburg Hamborn

**/ contact**  
<https://abtei-hamborn.de>

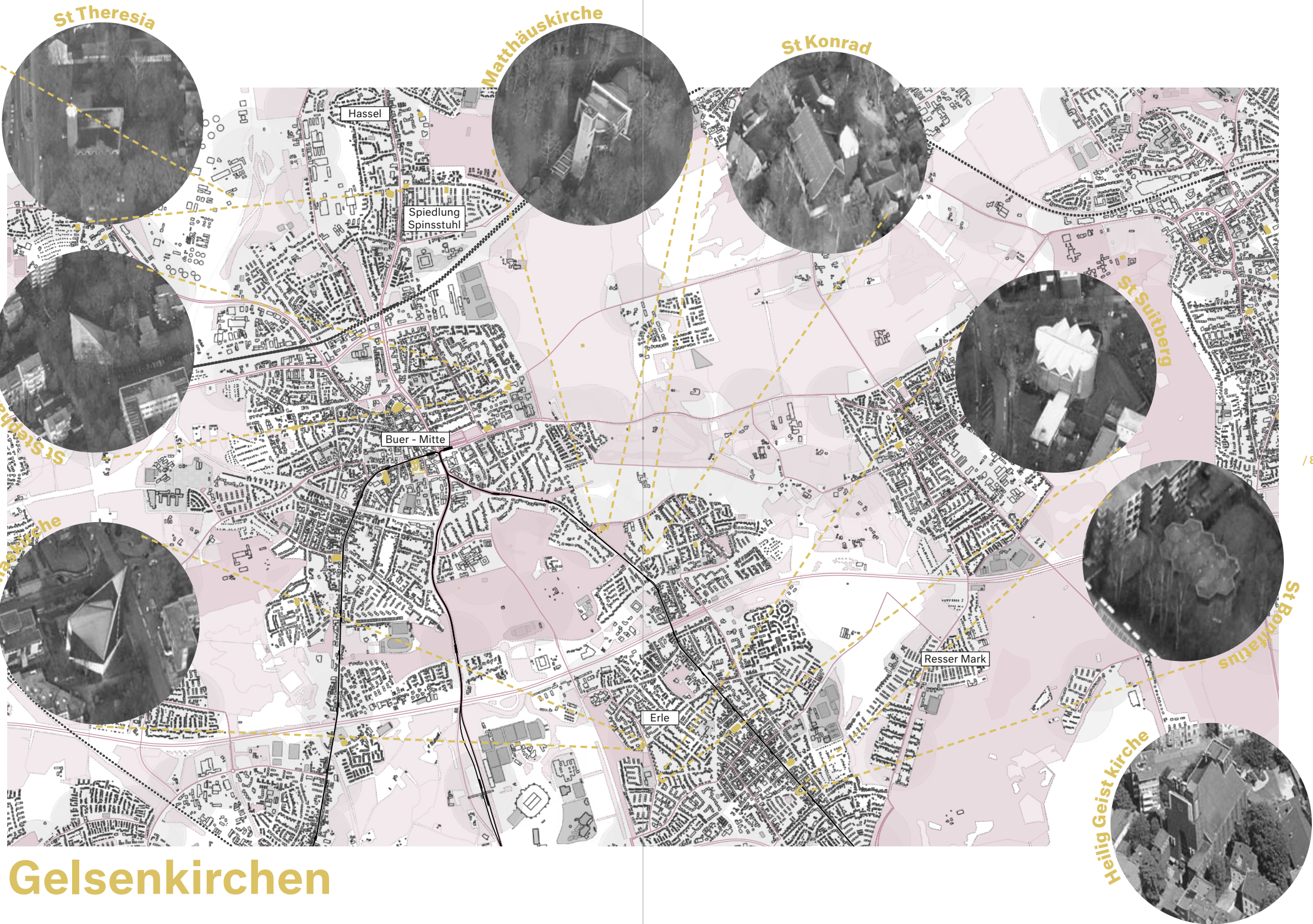
### **/ significant features and history**

The Liebfrauenkirche in Duisburg- Bruckhausen was completed in 1915 after two years of construction during the First World War. It offered space for up to 2000 worshippers. At that time, many new workers and their families moved to Bruckhausen to find work in the Thyssen factory there. The church building was badly damaged during the Second World War and was rebuilt by 1951, albeit with a somewhat reduced interior. In the 1970s, the population declined rapidly due to structural change. In the 1980s, the roof of the nave was demolished, leaving only the outer walls standing. Renovating the roof would have been too expensive and the space had become too large for the congregation. The Russian Orthodox congregation celebrated its services in the former altar area until 2019, since when the church stands empty.

### **/ surroundings**

Duisburg-Bruckhausen is located in the north of the city and borders on Duisburg- Marxloh. The district is characterized by large (former) industrial areas. There is also a power station there. Between the industrial areas is the town center, a small residential area. The Liebfrauenkirche church is also located here. Nearby there is an Islamic cultural center, the Thyssenkrupp education center and a school. The front area of the church is regularly used to serve food for people in need.





# Gelsenkirchen





### / St Theresia

**/ year of construction**  
1960

**/ architect**  
Karl Band

**/ address**  
Polsumer Str. 104, 45896 Gelsenkirchen

**/ status of use**  
closed

**/ ownership**  
Gemeinde St Urbanus

**/ contact**  
<https://www.urbanus-buer.de>

#### **/ significant features and history**

The church of St. Theresia in Gelsenkirchen Hassel was built between 1958 and 1960 according to plans by Cologne architect Karl Band, who was known for his post-war church buildings. At the time, the population was growing due to the new coking plant in Hassel and so a Catholic church building was needed. The church building has been a listed building since 1999. The building stands on a trapezoidal ground plan, with a jagged concrete frieze running under the edge of the roof. The rest of the façade is made of red brick. The church was closed in 2007. From 2015 to 2016, it served as temporary refugee accommodation. There is currently a construction fence around the building. There are plans to convert the church into a kindergarten and to build a grocery store next to it.

#### **/ surroundings**

The Hassel district is strongly characterized by its industrial past. A park was built on the site of the now closed coking plant. The church building is located in the center of the former working-class district, with a bus stop directly in front of it. There are several schools in the surrounding area. The "Siedlung Spinnstuhl", a former workers' housing estate with social housing, begins to the south of the sacred building.



### / St Stephanus

**/ year of construction**  
1970

**/ architect**  
Peter Grund

**/ address**  
Westerholter Str. 92-94, 45894 Gelsenkirchen

**/ status of use**  
Declared redundant in 2022; now integrated into a senior living complex, with limited liturgical/events use

**/ ownership**  
Sold to Belia Seniorenresidenzen GmbH in 2015; listed building

**/ contact**  
Evangelische Gemeinde Nord – <https://www.evangelisch-ge-nord.de>

#### **/ significant features and history**

One of Peter Grund's late masterpieces, the church has a striking triangular floor plan derived from sacred geometry and clad in sip-view concrete. The steep copper-folded roof rises toward the altar, which, along with baptismal font and pulpit, echoes triangular symbolism. Notable features include stained glass panels by Inge Vahle, an organ by Rudolf von Beckerath (1975), and a bronze altar relief by Josef Baron (1991). After sale due to declining congregation and structural maintenance costs, the adjacent parish house was demolished to build a senior residence. The church shell remains intact and hosts occasional services and community gatherings.

#### **/ surroundings**

Located in northern Buer on Westerholter Strasse, the church sits beside a new senior living facility, with green strip landscaping. The neighborhood consists of mid-century residential zones and mature trees. Bus routes and proximity to Westerholter Wald provide pleasant access, while the juxtaposition of religious and care institutions creates a landmark setting within a quiet suburban context.



### / Matthäuskirche

**/ year of construction**  
1960

**/ architect**  
Roland Berner (renovation), original details unknown

**/ address**  
Cranger Straße 81, 45891 Gelsenkirchen

**/ status of use**  
Closed; preserved as listed building

**/ ownership**  
Evangelische Christus-Kirchengemeinde Buer

**/ contact**  
<https://www.kirchegelsenkirchen.de>

#### **/ significant features and history**

The church features a centralised, almost square layout (22 x 22 meters), with an octagonal floor plan that reflects modern Protestant liturgical principles of spatial unity. A separate freestanding bell tower is positioned slightly apart from the main structure. The exterior façade is composed of red brick and minimal ornamentation, aligning with the functional clarity of the period. The interior is bright and sober, with white walls and a restrained altar design. A major renovation was carried out in 2009 under architect Roland Berner, preserving the form while upgrading facilities and the tower. The church was decommissioned shortly after and has since remained unused, although protected as a monument.

#### **/ surroundings**

Matthäuskirche is located in a residential area of Gelsenkirchen-Ost, directly on Cranger Straße, a main thoroughfare with public transport access. The immediate area consists of 1950s and 1960s housing blocks, small commercial premises and schools. The church is situated near several green spaces and pedestrian zones. Although no longer in use, its visible bell tower continues to mark the area's silhouette and stands as a local urban reference point.



### / Thomaskirche

**/ year of construction**  
1965

**/ architect**  
Fred Janowski & Albrecht Egon Wittig

**/ address**  
Surkampstraße 33, 45891 Gelsenkirchen

**/ status of use**  
Active; listed as protected monument

**/ ownership**  
Evangelische Christus-Kirchengemeinde Buer

**/ contact**  
<https://www.kirchegelsenkirchen.de>

#### **/ significant features and history**

The building consists of a striking polygonal structure with a dynamic roofscape. The floor plan, based on a rotated square, creates an expressive tent-like form. The roof is clad in copper and slopes steeply upwards, giving the church a monumental yet compact presence. The interior is bright and spacious, with smooth white walls, a suspended ceiling, and a simple altar. The church was awarded heritage status due to its architectural clarity and integrity. Together with nearby St. Suitbert, it represents a significant ensemble of post-war ecclesiastical modernism in the area.

#### **/ surroundings**

Thomaskirche is located in the heart of the Berger Feld estate, a housing development planned in the 1950s as part of Gelsenkirchen's expansion. The area is made up of terraced houses and social housing blocks, with schools, playgrounds, and green corridors. The church stands next to a bus route and is easily accessible by foot. Despite its compact urban context, the distinctive architecture allows it to act as a local landmark and visual anchor.





### / St Konrad

**/ year of construction**

1939

**/ architect**

Josef Franke

**/ address**

Gartmannshof 9, 45891 Gelsenkirchen

**/ status of use**

Closed since June 2020; future use under discussion

**/ ownership**

Formerly Catholic parish; no current private or municipal owner

**/ contact**

N/A

**/ significant features and history**

St. Konrad was constructed in the late 1930s to serve a newly developing residential quarter in Gelsenkirchen-Erle. The church was designed by Josef Franke, a local architect known for his work in Brick Expressionism. It features a tall tower, a gabled roof, and a simple brick façade. The interior was sober and functional, with a wood-paneled ceiling and expressive stained-glass windows added in the post-war period. Renovations in the 1970s included modernisation of the heating system and sacristy. Following a steady decline in congregation size, the church was closed in 2020 and its future remains uncertain. A local initiative seeks to preserve the building for community and cultural use.

**/ surroundings**

The church is located in a quiet residential area, characterised by single-family homes, gardens, and small apartment blocks. It is positioned near other ecclesiastical buildings, including the Thomaskirche. The surrounding neighbourhood includes schools, bus stops, and low-traffic streets. Although no longer in use, the tower remains visible above the rooftops and the building retains a strong spatial presence in the local environment.

### / St Bonifatius

**/ year of construction**

1964

**/ architect**

Ernst von Rudloff

**/ address**

Cranger Straße 338, 45891 Gelsenkirchen Erle

**/ status of use**

closed, used by Urbane Künste Ruhr

**/ ownership**

Urbane Künste Ruhr, Christian Zipper

**/ contact**

<https://www.urbanekuensteruhr.de/>

**/ significant features and history**

The church of St. Bonifatius in Gelsenkirchen Erle was built between 1963 and 1964 according to plans by the architect Ernst von Rudloff. The building follows a strictly geometric structure, the floor plan is made up of many small hexagons, which together create a longitudinal space. The brick façade is set off from the flat roof by a continuous horizontal band of windows. The roof consists of 78 triangular surfaces. The last service in the church was celebrated in 2007. It was profaned in 2014 and the building was sold to a neighboring bakery in 2016. Since 2018, it has been used as a "Healing Complex" by artist Irena Haiduk as part of Urbane Künste Ruhr. The experimental art project is intended to result in a permanent usage concept for the sacred building.

**/ surroundings**

Erle is a northern district of Gelsenkirchen, located directly north of the Rhine-Herne Canal. There are several schools and a hospital in Erle. The St. Bonifatius church is located directly on Cranger Straße, the district's main street. There are several street-car stops as well as stores, restaurants and cafés in the immediate vicinity. An area predominantly used for residential purposes begins to the south.



### / St Suitberg

**/ year of construction**

1966

**/ architect**

Dr. Paul Günther

**/ address**

Surkampstraße 28, 45891 Gelsenkirchen Berger Feld

**/ status of use**

closed

**/ ownership**

Pfarrei St. Urbanus Buer

**/ contact**

<https://www.urbanus-buer.de>

**/ significant features and history**

The church of St. Suitbert stands on a rectangular floor plan with semi-circular conches on both ends. The main entrance is located in the western conch and the altar area in the eastern conch. The building was designed by local architect Dr. Paul Günther and consecrated in 1966. The building has a solid brick façade and a copper-clad roof with several regular ridges on top. Windows on the gables let light into the interior. The building was decommissioned and deconsecrated in 2020. A year later, the entire furnishings, including the altar, baptismal font and pews, were handed over to a congregation in Romania.

**/ surroundings**

The Berger Feld housing area was built in the 1950s and is part of the Gelsenkirchen-Erle district. St. Suitbert is located in the center of this housing estate. A municipal comprehensive school is located directly opposite. The church complex also includes a parish hall and a day-care center. The structure of the surrounding area is characterized by terraced development. The area is only accessible by bus.

### / Heilig Kreuz

**/ year of construction**

1929

**/ architect**

Josef Franke

**/ address**

Bochumer Straße 115, 45886 Gelsenkirchen

**/ status of use**

Deconsecrated in 2007; cultural and event space since 2019

**/ ownership**

City of Gelsenkirchen

**/ contact**

via Stadtbüro Bochumer Straße – emschertainment.de

**/ significant features and history**

Designed by Josef Franke, the church is considered one of the most important examples of Brick Expressionism in the Ruhr area. Its monumental tower, tripartite façade and parabolic arched windows define its exterior. Inside, the hyperbolic vault rises to 19 metres, giving the space a dramatic and vertical rhythm. After being deconsecrated in 2007, the building stood vacant for several years until the city purchased it in 2017. It was then carefully restored and adapted for public use. Today, the former church serves as a venue for concerts, exhibitions and social events.

**/ surroundings**

Located on Bochumer Straße in the district of Ückendorf, the building anchors one of the city's key urban redevelopment areas. It is surrounded by residential blocks, cultural institutions and public parks. The revitalisation of the street has included cafés, art spaces and creative businesses. Heilig Kreuz now functions as both a cultural landmark and an open community space, drawing people from the immediate neighbourhood and beyond.





# Essen





### / St Ignatius

**/ year of construction**  
1961 (reconstructed post-war)

**/ architect**

Emil Jung

**/ address**

An St. Ignatius, 45128 Essen

**/ status of use**

Closed; tower removed in 2013; site planned for residential and daycare redevelopment

**/ ownership**

Former Jesuit parish; currently vacant/private planning stage

**/ contact**

N/A

**/ significant features and history**

St. Ignatius was rebuilt in 1961 by Emil Jung after its wartime predecessor was destroyed. The red-brick block structure reflects Brutalist influences, with a prominent cubic main body and large, simple forms. The church housed stained-glass windows by Wilhelm Buschulte, installed in the early 1960s. Its freestanding tower, part of the original design, was dismantled in 2013 following Jesuit withdrawal. The interior emphasized functional design, once accommodating 800 congregants. Its closure in 2025 followed a relocation of parish activities and began conversion plans for mixed-use redevelopment.

**/ surroundings**

Located in the Südviertel, a dense urban district south of the central station, the church stands among 1960s housing blocks and small commercial units. A bus corridor runs directly in front. Proximity to multi-ethnic residential zones and social services generated debate around reusing the site for a local daycare centre and apartments to serve shifting demographics.

### / ChorForum Essen

**/ year of construction**  
1926

**/ architect**

Otto Bartning (sanctuary); original church from 19th century

**/ address**

Fischerstraße 2–4, 45128 Essen

**/ status of use**

Active rehearsal, concert, and seminar venue

**/ ownership**

ChorForum Essen gGmbH (organized by local cultural associations)

**/ contact**

<https://www.chorforum-essen.de>

**/ significant features and history**

The core rehearsal hall—formerly St. Engelbert—was designed by notable modernist Otto Bartning, forming a vaulted space over a former auditorium. The restoration (2011–2013) maintained its vaulted ceiling (18 m high) and a historic organ, with careful acoustic treatment for choral use. The main hall (1,000 m², up to 450 seats) and additional rooms (e.g., chapel with Rohrstraße chapel fresco and glazed dome) now support a broad programme of music, readings, mentoring, and exhibitions.

**/ surroundings**

Situated in Essen's Südviertel, the building anchors a mixed-use district of mid-rise offices, residential buildings, and cultural venues. Close to Stadtgarten and Gruga Park, it is well served by bus and tram. The venue actively collaborates with choirs, universities, and community groups, sustaining daytime and evening programming in a formerly church-oriented urban quarter.



### / Jüdische Kultusgemeinde

**/ year of construction**  
1959

**/ architect**

Dieter Knoblauch / Heinz Heise

**/ address**

Sedanstraße 46, 45138 Essen Südostviertel

**/ status of use**

in use

**/ ownership**

Jüdische Kultusgemeinde Essen

**/ contact**

<https://www.jg-essen.de>

**/ significant features and history**

The old synagogue was badly destroyed during the November programs in 1938. After the end of the Second World War, the Jewish community in Essen therefore decided to have a new synagogue built elsewhere. The building, modeled on the Park Synagogue in Cleveland and designed by architects Dieter Knoblauch and Heinz Heise, was finally opened in 1959. The place of worship is located under a hemispherical dome with a concrete roof clad with sheet metal on the outside. The church rooms are connected to the dome via glass corridors.

This creates a spacious inner courtyard in the center of the building. The building is still used by the local Jewish community today.

**/ surroundings**

The new synagogue is located in the southeastern district of the city of Essen and is within walking distance of Essen's main train station. There are several outstanding post-war church buildings in the immediate vicinity, such as the Church of the Resurrection and St. Engelbert. The synagogue is located on a wedge-shaped plot on a busy road. Off the main road are residential areas with apartment buildings.

### / Auferstehungskirche

**/ year of construction**  
1929–1930; damaged in WWII; rebuilt from 1948

**/ architect**

Otto Bartning

**/ address**

Manteuffelstraße 26 / Steubenstraße corner, 45138 Essen

**/ status of use**

Active Protestant church and music venue

**/ ownership**

Evangelische Kirchengemeinde Essen-Altstadt

**/ contact**

<https://www.auferstehungskirche-essen.de>

**/ significant features and history**

A round church heralded as a “star church,” Auferstehungskirche exemplifies Bartning's expressionist vision: a circular plan focusing on central baptismal font and altar. Its concrete structure and radial symmetry earned it the nickname “Tortenkirche” (“cake church”). Glass bands by Johan Thorn-Prikker encircle the building, later reconstructed after wartime damage. With seating for approximately 700, and a Karl Schuke organ installed in 1987, the church is a pivotal model of European modernist ecclesiastical architecture. A comprehensive restoration between 2013–2016 preserved its heritage features. The attached community centre hosts music concerts, choirs, classes, and social programs.

**/ surroundings**

Situated in the Südostviertel, the church occupies a prominent position at the corner of Manteuffel- and Steubenstraße. It is surrounded by mixed-use buildings—residential, commercial, cultural—and adjacent to Stadtgarten park. Well-served by tram and bus, the site functions as a vibrant urban node with cultural and educational functions.





### / St Antonius

**/ year of construction**

1959

**/ architect**

Rudolf Schwarz

**/ address**

Kölner Straße 35–37, 45145 Essen

**/ status of use**

Active parish church; listed building since 1985

**/ ownership**

Katholische Pfarrei St. Antonius (Diocese of Essen)

**/ contact**

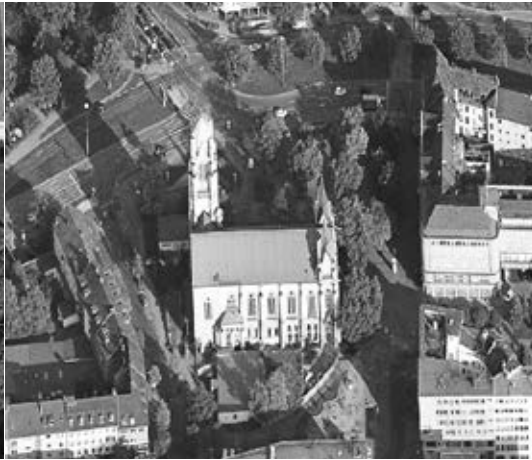
<https://www.st-antonius-frohnhausen.de>

**/ significant features and history**

Designed competitively by Rudolf Schwarz, St. Antonius is a post-war landmark in modern sacred architecture. Featuring a T-shaped basilica plan in concrete frame filled with brick and glass, it offers a luminous central nave with clerestory lighting. The symmetrical and austere space contrasts with traditional Catholic modelling. The church structure incorporates a gently pitched roof that softly rises over the altar area. Its heritage protection since 1985 ensures conservation of original architectural elements and liturgical fittings.

**/ surroundings**

Nestled in Frohnhausen's central district, the church occupies a corner plot on Kölner Straße. It is surrounded by tightly packed residential buildings and pedestrian zones. Nearby are shops, small cafés, and community facilities, reflecting a dense, local-scale urban fabric.



### / St Gertrud

**/ year of construction**

1872–1877 (reconstructed 1955–1956 after WWII)

**/ architect**

Originally designed by August Rincklake; rebuilt by Emil Jung in the 1950s

**/ address**

Rottstraße 36, 45127 Essen

**/ status of use**

Deconsecrated in 2025; sold for redevelopment as an arts-culture-education centre

**/ ownership**

Former Catholic parish St. Gertrud; currently transferred to private/municipal hands for cultural repurposing

**/ contact**

<https://www.st-gertrud-essen.de>

**/ significant features and history**

St. Gertrud was built in the 1870s to serve the expanding Catholic community in Essen's northern city centre, using early-Gothic hall church principles. Severely damaged in WWII, it was reconstructed in 1955–56 under Emil Jung, with a new 59 m bell tower replacing the original 75 m one. The interior boasts stained-glass windows, a Klais 20-register organ from 1955, and a historic monstrance dating to 1521. As a parish church, it played a central role in urban religious life until its deconsecration in 2025. The parish has now sold the site to convert it into an arts and education hub—preserving significant liturgical furnishings and architectural substance.

**/ surroundings**

St. Gertrud is located at the Rottstraße traffic circle in Essen's inner city, surrounded by perimeter-block apartment buildings, cafés, offices, and social infrastructure. It faces Weberplatz (a community meeting point) and stands close to other significant post-war and modernist churches. Strong public transport connections emphasize its urban visibility. The building's adaptive re-use aligns with ongoing efforts to densify, upgrade, and culturally activate Essen's downtown core.



### / St Michael

**/ year of construction**

1954

**/ architect**

Heinrich Böll

**/ address**

Steubenstraße 45, 45138 Essen Südostviertel

**/ status of use**

closed, plans for demolition

**/ ownership**

Pfarrei St. Gertrud Essen

**/ contact**

<https://www.st-gertrud-essen.de>

**/ significant features and history**

St. Michael's Church was built in the early 1960s after the previous church was completely destroyed in the Second World War. However, the new church was planned on a different location. Construction based on plans by architect Heinrich Böll began in 1951 and the church was opened in 1954. The rectangular floor plan is based on the classic basilica. The central nave was designed as a high, hall-like space, while the side aisles are very low. Both the nave and the free-standing church tower have a red brick façade. The building is also known for its many works of art and furnishings.

Due to restructuring in the parish, the building was deconsecrated in 2019. The parish plans to demolish the building.

**/ surroundings**

St. Michael is located in the southeast district of Essen. Essen's main train station and the A40 highway are in the immediate vicinity. The area is characterized by perimeter block development, in which there are mainly apartments. Other prominent buildings from Essen's city history, such as the Church of the Resurrection, the new Essen Synagogue and the water tower, are located in the vicinity of the building.

### / Heilig Geist

**/ year of construction**

1957

**/ architect**

Gottfried Böhm

**/ address**

Meybuschhof 9, 45327 Essen-Katernberg

**/ status of use**

Deconsecrated; cultural centre and exhibition venue since 2000s

**/ ownership**

City of Essen / Kunstraum Heilig Geist

**/ contact**

<https://www.hl-geist.net>

**/ significant features and history**

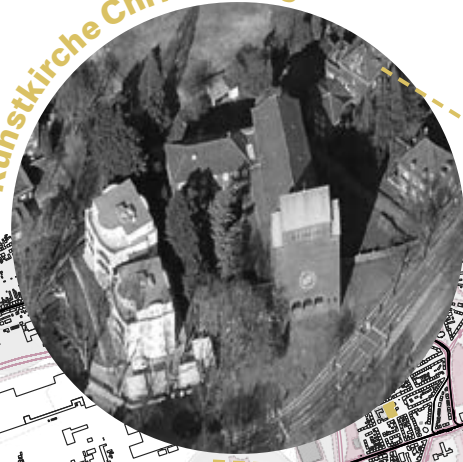
Designed by Pritzker-laureate Gottfried Böhm, Heilig Geist is a prominent example of post-war Brutalist church architecture. The angled concrete forms and brick infill create robust sculptural volumes, topped by a striking roof structure. Originally built on the site of a former oil factory and then rebuilt due to mining subsidence and war damage, the church became independent parish headquarters in 1951. Following deconsecration and years of vacancy, the site was taken over by the city and converted into a cultural venue with artist studios and exhibition space in 2000s–2010s, maintaining its architectural integrity while activating the interior for community and arts programming.

**/ surroundings**

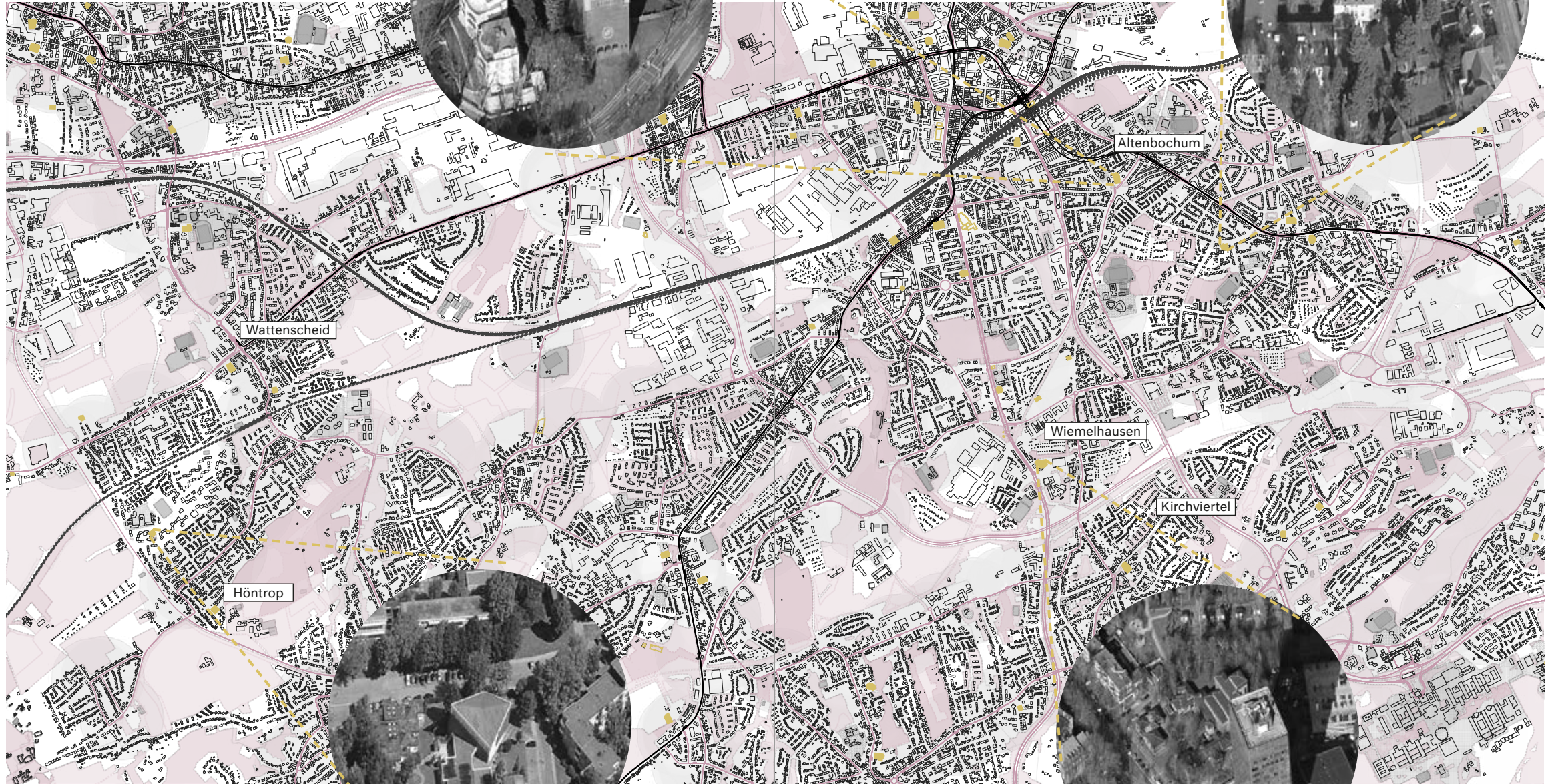
Located adjacent to the UNESCO World Heritage Zollverein site, Heilig Geist now sits within a cultural-industrial corridor that blends heritage industry, creative spaces, and green paths. It anchors local revitalisation efforts and hosts exhibitions, open studios, and community events, contributing to the district's evolving identity.



Kunstkirche Christ König



Johanneskirche



Versöhnungskirche



St. Albertus Magnus



Bochum





### / St Albertus Magnus

**/ year of construction**

1964

**/ architect**

Gottfried Böhm

**/ address**

Königsallee 171, 44799 Bochum

**/ status of use**

Deconsecrated in 2008; converted in 2014 into a performance venue (TheaterTotal)

**/ ownership**

Formerly Catholic parish; now TheaterTotal gGmbH

**/ contact**

<https://www.theatertotal.de>

**/ significant features and history**

Designed by Pritzker laureate Gottfried Böhm, this church ensemble integrates layered brick-clad cubes forming a sculptural complex comprising the church, a chapel, and a kindergarten. A planned tower and parish hall were never constructed. Interior elements include stained-glass windows by Böhm (1964) and later works like the Sinai representation and "burning bush". The concrete-and-brick structure was deconsecrated in 2008 amid diocesan restructuring, then transformed into a stage and community hub, preserving the architectural form and monument protection status.

**/ surroundings**

Situated on a green plot along Königsallee, the building forms part of a mid-20th-century residential district flanked by family homes and local businesses. Adjacent parkland and the church's transformation into a cultural space bolster its potential as a neighbourhood arts centre.

### / Kunstkirche Christ König

**/ year of construction**

1932; rebuilt 1957

**/ architect**

Original: Franz Schneider; rebuilt with Rudolf Dustmann

**/ address**

Steinring 11, 44787 Bochum

**/ status of use**

Closed to regular services; venue for exhibitions & art projects

**/ ownership**

Diocese of Essen; operated as "Kunstkirche KICK"

**/ contact**

<https://www.kick-kunstkirche.de>

**/ significant features and history**

Built as a Franciscan church, Christ König was devastated in WWII and rebuilt in the 1950s. In 2010, it was repurposed as "Kunstkirche KICK" under the Ruhr cultural program. It features a wide nave, rose window, barrel-vaulted ceiling, and acoustics suited to installation art concerts. The final installation was held in 2015, and since then the space hosts temporary exhibitions and experimental art events.

**/ surroundings**

Located on a main urban street lined with shops and offices, the church stands near the city's southern cultural corridor. It's close to public transit, theatres, and civic squares, and its reuse as an art space adds cultural vitality to the area.



### / Johanneskirche

**/ year of construction**

1967

**/ architect**

Hans Scharoun

**/ address**

Glockengarten 70, 44803 Bochum Altenbochum

**/ status of use**

in use

**/ ownership**

Christengemeinschaft Gemeinde Bochum

**/ contact**

<https://christengemeinschaft.de/gemeinden/bochum>

**/ significant features and history**

St. John's Church is one of the few church buildings designed by the famous architect Hans Scharoun. It is a polygonal, almost organic building with an irregular floor plan. The brick walls are topped by a tent-like roof, which is clad with sheet metal on the outside. Inside, the dark bricks also dominate the atmosphere. They form a strong contrast to the light-colored roof surfaces. Targeted, selective daylight directs the visitor's gaze and creates a lively space.

The church is used by the local Christian Community congregation for services, but also for cultural events.

**/ surroundings**

The so-called Scharounkirche is located south-east of Bochum's city center in the Altenbochum district. There are several public transport stops in the immediate vicinity. The church building is located in a residential area. Right next to it are various social associations that do art and youth work, e.g. 'Gruppe 11' or the association for social work and youth welfare. There is also a retirement home and an elementary school (Vels-Heide-Schule) not far away.

### / Versöhnungskirche

**/ year of construction**

1967

**/ architect**

unknown

**/ address**

Preins Feld 8, 44869 Bochum, Wattenscheid-Höntrop

**/ status of use**

in use

**/ ownership**

Ev. Kirchengemeinde Wattenscheid

**/ contact**

<https://www.e-ki-wa.de/versoehnungskirche>

**/ significant features and history**

The Church of Reconciliation was built in 1967 as a parish church for the local Protestant community. Adjacent to it is the community center, both parts of the building are accessed via the same entrance. The church building does not have a steeple. The façade is a defragmented interplay of closed, dark brick surfaces and open, bright glazed areas. The window surfaces are painted with abstract patterns. The irregular square floor plan, in combination with the steep roof surfaces, creates a pyramid-like interior. The altar area is located at the intersection of the outer walls, from which the pews fan out in a semi-circle. The church is currently still used by the local community for services.

**/ surroundings**

The sacred building is located in the southern part of Bochum Wattenscheid, a very diverse district of Bochum that is characterized by immigration. Wattenscheid was long a town in its own right and is located between Bochum and Essen. There are several block-like apartment buildings in the vicinity of the Versöhnungskirche. There is also a school and sports center right next to the building, as well as a Protestant youth center. The nearest bus stop is a few minutes' walk away.



## / the potential venues of Manifesta 16 Ruhr

(NOT A) CHURCH	YEAR	ARCHITECT	STATUS OF USE	NEIGHBOURHOOD	CITY	TYPE OF VENUE [temporary]	WORKSHOP [yes/no]
Synagoge	1999	Zvi Hecker	In use	Innenstadt	Duisburg	Main	N
Kulturkirche Liebfrauen	1961	Toni Hermanns	Transformed	Innenstadt	Duisburg	Main	N
Kolumbarium	1971	Lothar Kallmeyer	Transformed	Duissern	Duisburg	Not interested	N
Liebfrauenkirche	1915	Alois Böll	Closed	Hamborn	Duisburg	Open Call	N
Friedenskirche	1959	Denis Boniver	In use	Beckhausen	Gelsenkirchen	Main	Y
St Theresia	1960	Karl Band	Closed	Hassel	Gelsenkirchen	Not interested	N
St Stephanus	1970	Peter Grund	Transformed	Buer-Nord	Gelsenkirchen	Not interested	Y
Matthäuskirche	1960	Roland Berner	Closed	Buer-Erle	Gelsenkirchen	Not interested	N
Thomaskirche	1965	F.Janowski & A. E. Wittig	In use	Buer-Erle	Gelsenkirchen	Main	N
St Konrad	1939	Josef Franke	Closed	Gelsenkirchen-Erle	Gelsenkirchen	Not interested	N
St Bonifatius	1964	Ernst von Rudloff	Closed	Erle	Gelsenkirchen	Main	Y
St Suitberg	1966	Paul Günther	Closed	Berger Feld	Gelsenkirchen	Main	N
Heilig Kreuz	1929	Josef Franke	Transformed	Ückendorf	Gelsenkirchen	Not usable	Y
St Ignatius	1961	Emil Jung	Closed	Südviertel	Essen	Main	N
ChorForum Essen	1926	Otto Bartning	Transformed	Südviertel	Essen	Not interested	N
Jüdische Kultusgemeinde	1959	D. Knoblauch / H. Heise	In use	Südostviertel	Essen	Parallel	N
Auferstehungskirche	1930	Otto Bartning	In use	Südostviertel	Essen	Main	N
St Antonius	1959	Rudolf Schwarz	In use	Frohnhausen	Essen	Main	Y
St Gertrud	1877	A. Rincklake / E. Jung	Transformed	Stadtkern	Essen	Main	N
St Michael	1954	Heinrich Böll	Closed	Südostviertel	Essen	Not usable	N
Heilig Geist	1957	Gottfried Böhm	Transformed	Katernberg	Essen	Parallel	Y
St Albert Magnus	1964	Gottfried Böhm	Transformed	Wiemelhausen	Bochum	Main	N
Kunstkirche Christ König	1957	F. Schneider / R. Dustmann	Transformed	Mitte	Bochum	Main	Y
Johanneskirche	1967	Hans Scharoun	In use	Altenbochum	Bochum	Main	Y
Versöhnungskirche	1967	unknown	In use	Höntrop	Bochum	Not interested	Y



One of the key actions undertaken during this research has been the organisation of a series of workshops involving expert stakeholders, academics and students. The first, held on the 5th of February 2025, was a short “expectation workshop” with professionals from the cultural sector of the Ruhr Area. This session introduced and critically discussed the potential of engaging with the region’s closed or abandoned churches.

The second workshop, organised in March 2025 by Manifesta in collaboration with the department for Spatial Planning at the Technical University of Dortmund, was the result of an international open call and brought together students of Planning, Architecture, Urbanism and Design for an intensive five-day programme.

The third workshop, also organised in partnership with the Technical University of Dortmund, began on the 8th of April 2025 and will continue throughout the semester until June 2025.

The research collaboration between Manifesta 16 and Professor Renée Tribble and her team at the university has been instrumental in deepening the understanding of each neighbourhood and its churches, as the proposed methodology requires a nuanced grasp of local dynamics and sustained engagement with the communities involved.

In each neighbourhood, the research unfolds through an iterative process of mapping, questioning and reinterpreting existing urban and social dynamics. This approach enables a deeper immersion into the stratified histories of the region, acknowledging the complex interplay between its industrial past, fragmented urban fabric, and contemporary challenges.

Through fieldwork, participatory workshops and interdisciplinary collaborations, the research seeks to construct a framework that not only analyses but also activates potential pilot interventions. This evolving body of knowledge is shaped through direct dialogue with local communities, institutions and key stakeholders, fostering a shared understanding of how urban transformation might emerge from within.

Rather than imposing pre-defined solutions, the project aims to reveal latent possibilities embedded within existing urban structures—particularly underutilised churches—which once played a vital role in the social fabric of their respective neighbourhoods. By critically examining these spaces and their contexts, the project explores how they might be reimagined as catalysts for new civic interactions and cultural production.

At its core, this research seeks to lay the foundations for Manifesta 16’s pre-biennial Urban Vision, setting the stage for future artistic and civic interventions that will activate these spaces in meaningful ways. The insights gained and actions implemented will not only inform the biennial’s programme but also contribute to the broader global discourse on proximity, social cohesion and adaptive reuse within contemporary urban strategies.



## / “this is not a church” student workshop

Dates: 4th to the 8th of March 2025

Venue: ChorForum Essen (International Baptist Church)

Participants: Luisa Gehnen, Ana Rrushi, Martin Sonnek, Irina Pischalnikov, Mahdyar Mafakherian, Paola Dominguez, Sameena Corrado, Selen Seferogullari, Anni Brünner, Jannik Wetzstein, Erim Besak, Antonin Vitoušek

Directors: Josep Bohigas (Manifesta), Renée Tribble (Dortmund University)

Lecturers: Lisa Marie Zander, María Martínez-Artero, Roy Huschenbeth, Kim Lempelius, Greta Wienen, Jan Dröge-Rothaar, Sebastian Schlecht

Churches/Neighbourhoods:

/ *Heilig Geist Kirche*; Katernberg (Essen)

/ *Heilig Kreuz Kirche*; Ückendorf (Gelsenkirchen)

/ *KunstKirche ChristKönig*; (Bochum)

/ *Versöhnungskirche*; Wattenscheid (Bochum)

The workshop aimed to conduct an in-depth analysis of four selected churches and their surrounding contexts. An expanded notion of “context” was adopted, one that sought to examine not only the emphatic architectural form of the buildings, but also their prominent positioning within their respective neighbourhoods, as well as the diverse communities that use or live in close proximity to them.

The primary objective was to map the **parameters and perimeters** of these churches in order to analyse the causes of their decline and explore ways to reclaim—through their new desacralized condition—their original social hierarchy and function.

Each student group assessed the current condition of a specific church and investigated the needs of its surrounding neighbourhood, formulating tailored urban strategies to reintegrate these structures into the everyday lives of residents.

The outcome is an interpretative documentation of the realities and potentialities of the buildings and their urban settings, comprising plans, diagrams, sketches, photographs, interviews and models, that supported a critical reflection on the state and future of each church.

Taken together, the four research projects and proposals developed during the workshop aim to act as catalysts for local change, while simultaneously establishing a network of synergies that lays the groundwork for desirable scalability.

The modest scope of each proposal seeks to co-design strategies that offer a renewed opportunity for the church, before it is sold or abandoned. Yet we should be capable of imagining that these small-scale actions could become the spark for something greater—multiplying and activating hundreds of churches in similar conditions across the region. It is within this ambitious vision that the joint proposal may be conceived as a modest yet profoundly transformative “revolution of proximity.”

## / the potential venues of Manifesta 16 Ruhr

In any case – and keeping our feet firmly on the ground – the immediate objective of this research is to consolidate all these initial efforts to strengthen the Urban Vision of the biennial. This vision must ultimately culminate in the strategic selection of venues and serve as a foundational resource for the artists and collectives participating in subsequent interventions.

The process remains open, and it is still too early to determine precisely which churches Manifesta will be working with. The preliminary research has enabled the identification of over 50 churches and neighbourhoods across the territory. Each site and each church, beyond their theoretical suitability, is also subject to other considerations.

A key consideration is the feasibility of establishing cooperation. Not all churches have a clear interlocutor, and it is often difficult to contact the owner or their representative (be it the Church itself, the local community or a private purchaser) to persuade them to become partners in their regeneration. Many of these churches are closed or abandoned, and currently in the process of being sold or demolished, which makes negotiation complex, slow and highly sensitive.

Another fundamental aspect in the final selection of venues for the biennial is the connectivity between groups of them, forming clusters of multiple sites to facilitate visits and to better exemplify the concept of connected archipelagos. These connections should also provide a valuable opportunity to address some of the region’s infrastructural deficits, such as the limited network of bicycle lanes. As previously noted, there are some excellent recreational infrastructures along parks and rivers, but the urban cycling network remains far from adequate, with streets still overwhelmingly dominated by car traffic.

Finally, the architectural and urbanistic quality of the churches is also a crucial factor. All churches possess intrinsic value due to their hierarchical position and their striking forms and dimensions. However, some are particularly unique and should be protected and urgently reoriented towards new functions before they are sold, demolished or undergo dramatic transformations.

## / seminar Current Issues in Urban Design

Churches/Neighbourhoods:

/ *Friedenskirche*; Gelsenkirchen-Beckhausen (Gelsenkirchen)

/ *Johanneskirche*; Altenbochum (Bochum)

/ *St Antonius*; Frohnhausen (Essen)

/ *St Bonifacius*; Erle (Gelsenkirchen)

/ *St Stephanus*; Buer-Mitte (Gelsenkirchen)

One of the two courses is the seminar Current Issues in Urban Design, which is currently taking place at the Department of StädteBauProzesse at TU Dortmund



University. In this seminar, ten students, working in five teams of two, each examine one church site. Most church locations are situated in a cluster of three churches in Gelsenkirchen, with two additional sites located in Essen and Bochum. The workflow of the seminar follows a three-phase process, gradually aiming at the development of concrete, site-specific strategies for the churches and their surrounding neighbourhoods.

#### Phase 1 – Kick-off: Research and Analysis

At the beginning of the seminar, students engage in an in-depth examination of the respective site and its surroundings – seeking a comprehensive understanding of the neighbourhoods. The first step involves conducting a situation analysis. The objective is to identify, as impartially as possible, the practices and uses that shape the location, to make the city as-is visible and to take its current state seriously. The focus is on understanding the here and now: Which actors, residents, tradespeople and visitors are active in the respective neighbourhoods? What ordinary and everyday routines, noises and relationships or even unexpected realities can be observed?

Starting from the church location, each neighbourhood is divided into nine analysis tiles of 100 x 100 metres each. These tiles are each given a consecutive index and prepared on A4 sheets as blank black maps and aerial photographs. The sheets are printed out and the neighbourhoods – selected at random – are visited independently by the students at different times of the day and week. The impressions on site are documented by written observations, photographs and cartographic entries. Back in the seminar, the tiles are brought together to form overall pictures and presented to and discussed by the students. The result is a collective, multi-layered initial picture of the neighbourhoods, which forms the basis for the further phases of the seminar.

In addition to the situation analysis, students also carry out a data- and actor-centered analysis of the areas. They go into the field and conduct interviews with stakeholders, local associations, and initiatives to gather facts and establish initial contacts. To further differentiate the research, specific vulnerabilities within the neighbourhoods are identified and analysed. Using a GIS-based research tool, datasets from the State of North Rhine-Westphalia and the municipalities are overlaid with the respective neighbourhoods, covering social, ecological, and economic parameters. On this basis, the students create a total of nine maps per working group at a scale of 1:500, which reveal the specific weaknesses and challenges of the study areas and further supplement the collective knowledge. If necessary, a zoom-out to the larger scale level is also carried out in order to be able to categorise overarching dynamics.

Identified vulnerabilities in the neighbourhoods may include the lack of public space for staying and appropriation, energy supply issues, insufficient resident responsibility for the neighbourhood, or economic trading-down processes. Analysing such vulnerabilities helps student groups to reveal hidden dynamics, identify potentials for the re-coding of neighbourhoods and define priorities for the planning process. Moreover, contradictions between analysis methods may be uncovered – for example, a dataset may indicate a large number of young residents,

which might not be reflected in the field analysis. Such tensions provoke critical reflection on data sources or personal perception and offer insights for future urban design decisions.

#### Phase 2 – Concept Development: Working in the Urban and Neighbourhood Context – Finding a suitable theme

The goal of the second phase is to develop desirable futures and new realities for the church sites and their surrounding neighbourhoods based on the previously analysed parameters and perimeters.

The approach is intentionally reversed from a classic, linear case study model: the visionary process begins small – at the church itself – zooms outward to the neighbourhood, and then back to the church site.

To go beyond the obvious and explore innovative approaches to the church sites, students first create a Vision Board. This includes national and international reference projects on church conversions to offer inspiration and potential strategies. Additionally, various future realities are developed and critically discussed in the seminar, helping to form an initial stance toward the sites under study.

In the further course of the seminar, the working groups – building on the previous analysis of vulnerabilities, the situation analysis and the discussion on the vision boards – develop a concrete vision for their respective church location and its neighbourhood: the aim is to formulate a sustainable theme that takes into account both the identified vulnerabilities and the potential derived from them as well as the spatial context and serves as a basis for further conceptual development.

In order to do justice to the complex urban transformation processes of churches and the development of their neighbourhoods, the developed guiding principle will be concretised in three development phases. In phase 1, the focus is on measures that can be implemented in the urban space at short notice and with a low threshold. This involves so-called ‘instant measures’ such as tactical traffic calming, pop-up uses or community activities that have a direct impact on the urban space and its users and provide initial impetus for the transformation of neighbourhoods. In phase 2, the working groups involve relevant stakeholders in their deliberations, who must be activated for the long-term establishment of the visions. To this end, the students return to the field and identify possible additional cooperation partners, civil society initiatives or stakeholders, such as the local administration, who can be helpful in forming networks. In phase 3, the vision of the future is finally considered further in terms of long-term spatial changes and possible urban development funding: What measures would be necessary at the church locations? How could the immediate surroundings of the church be further developed in terms of urban planning?

#### Phase 3 – Implementation and Strategy Phase

To build on the collective knowledge of earlier steps, the refined visions are visualized using the same planning tiles as in the analysis phase. The analysis dimensions of vulnerability – social, ecological, and economic – are revisited and color-coded (red, green, yellow). To communicate these visions clearly and tangibly to residents, each group creates six isometric visualizations in a unified style. Three of



these illustrations represent the development of the church site at a scale of 1:100, and three show the development of the neighbourhood at 1:500 - each across the three development phases. A central ambition is to translate the visionary ideas into specific spatial designs even in the early phases, to make future relationships between urban elements visible and provide a solid basis for discussion.

Winter school: This is not a church!

The second of the two courses - the winter school This is not a church! - took place in March 2025 at the ChorForum in Essen. It followed a similar structure and methodology to the seminar but was condensed into an intensive, multi-day workshop. The goal was to attract students from various disciplines and international backgrounds to work on the church sites and their neighbourhoods. A total of twelve students from architecture, spatial planning, and design participated. Working in interdisciplinary teams of three, they focused on four selected church locations in Bochum, Gelsenkirchen and Essen.

As in the seminar, the starting point for the Winter School was an intensive examination of the spatial and social conditions on site. During the first two days, the students also carried out a detailed situation analysis and mapped the parameters and perimeters of the churches and the respective neighbourhoods in order to identify potential for their future transformation.

Alongside this, the students made contact with representatives of the parishes and local stakeholders in the neighbourhoods in order to generate knowledge about existing initiatives, needs and perspectives. Joint work phases in the afternoons and evenings were used for intensive group work, methodological exchange and the further development of the respective approaches. Due to the compact format, the focus - in contrast to the longer seminar - was increasingly on directly realisable forms of communication and work. In the intensive work and discussion phases of days three and four of the workshop, the teams developed strategic concepts and ideas for tactical interventions. These were recorded with the help of CAD and hand drawings, visualisations, urban models made of modelling clay and photographic and film documentation.

Documentation and Presentation of Results

The final goal of both courses is the creation of a comprehensive dossier. This will map the current state of the churches and their neighbourhoods, as well as their specific challenges within the Ruhr region. At the same time, it will outline spaces and possibilities for future transformation and propose concrete suggestions for tactical urban interventions. The student-produced documentation is part of the Urban Vision Research within the framework of Manifesta 16 and serves both as a basis for selecting potential venues for the biennial and as inspiration for the thematic direction of Manifesta 2026. The results will be recorded in writing and presented publicly to the Manifesta team and other experts in church transformation at the conclusion of each course.

The This is not a church! workshop was supervised by Prof. Dr. Renée Tribble (Head of the Department StädteBauProzesse), Josepe Bohigas (Architect and Manifesta 16 Ruhr First Creative Mediator), Lisa Marie Zander (Lecturer, Architect at Projekt-

büro Hamburg), Sebastian Schlecht (Lecturer, Architect and Urbanist at lala.ruhr), Jan Dröge-Rothaar (Research Associate at the Department StädteBauProzesse), and Greta Wienen (Student Assistant at the Department StädteBauProzesse). feel free to complete

The seminar Current Issues in Urban Design is supervised by Prof. Dr. Renée Tribble (Head of the Department StädteBauProzesse) and M.Sc. Jan Dröge-Rothaar (Research Associate at the Department Städte-BauProzesse).

Authors of the framework text: Prof. Dr Renée Tribble (Head of the Department StädteBauProzesse) and M.Sc. Jan Dröge-Rothaar (Research Associate at the Department StädteBauProzesse)



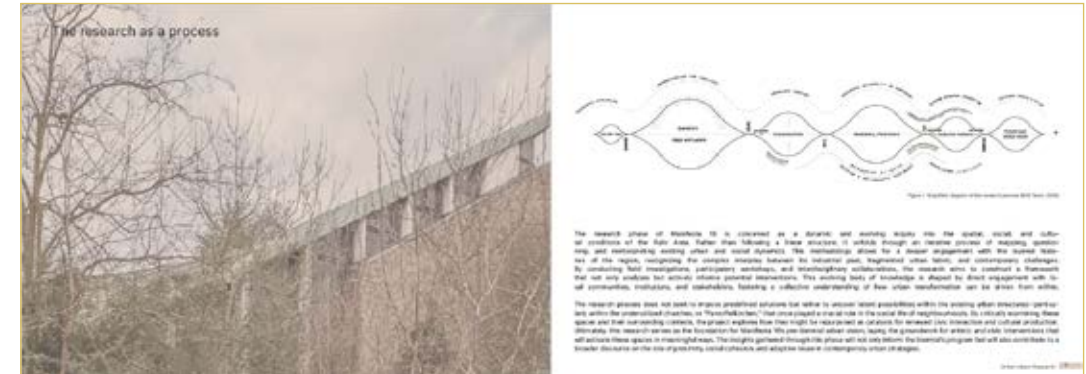
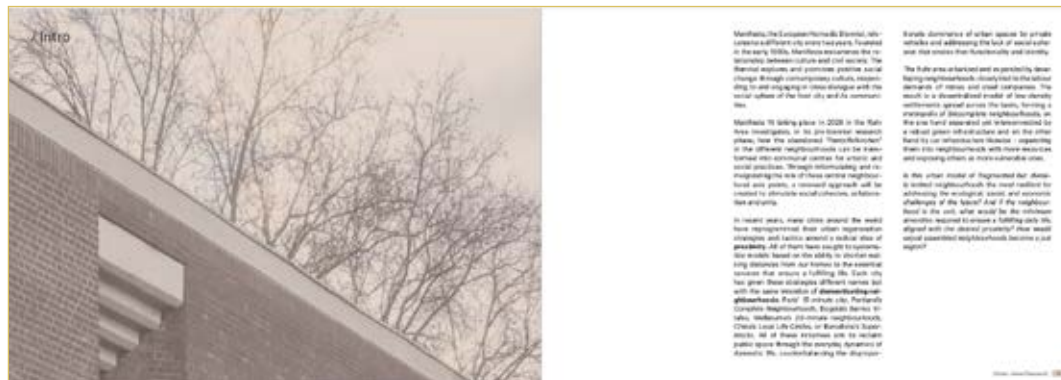
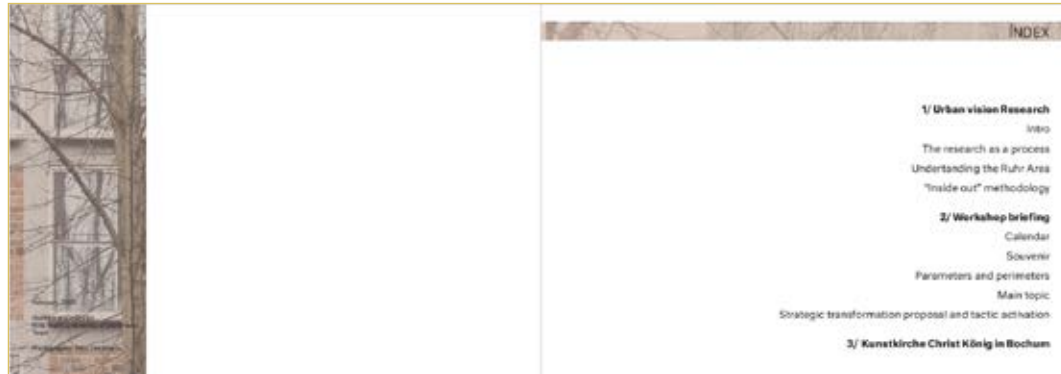
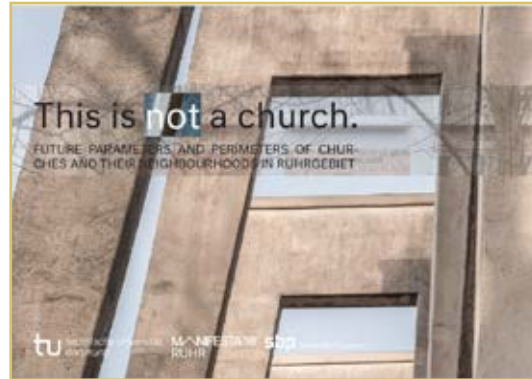


/ "this is not a church" Workshop at ChorForum Essen (march 2025)  
Charlotte Ernst





/ Example of statement and work dossier for students  
Own production





		2/ Workshop briefing	
		Calendar	
		Souverir	
		Parameters and perimeters	
		Main topic	
		Strategic transformation proposal and tactic activation	

/ Calendar March 4th - 8th, 2025 Ruhr Area			
February 28th	Registration deadline	00:00	00:00
	Event start	09:00	18:00
March 1st	Event start	09:00	18:00
	Event end	18:00	18:00
March 2nd	Event start	09:00	18:00
	Event end	18:00	18:00
March 3rd	Event start	09:00	18:00
	Event end	18:00	18:00
March 4th	Event start	09:00	18:00
	Event end	18:00	18:00
March 5th	Event start	09:00	18:00
	Event end	18:00	18:00
March 6th	Event start	09:00	18:00
	Event end	18:00	18:00
March 7th	Event start	09:00	18:00
	Event end	18:00	18:00
March 8th	Event start	09:00	18:00
	Event end	18:00	18:00

/ Souvenir		/ Parameters and perimeters	
<p>The first two days of the workshop will be dedicated to precisely defining the parameters and perimeters of the church – as a living force for transformation within the neighborhood.</p> <p>By parameters, we refer to the physical and functional characteristics of the church building as form, interior architecture, uses, events, rituals, history, structural attributes and their immediate presence and meaning within the neighborhood. To facilitate the description of these parameters, we have prepared a set of questions on each church and arranged for someone to guide you around. They will be used to define the parameters and perimeters of the church building.</p> <p>By perimeters, we refer to the church's extension into its immediate surroundings and the broader neighborhood. This includes mapping the visible and invisible boundaries of the church's influence in the neighborhood.</p> <p>After all, both the definition of parameters and perimeters depend on a large extent on their application in practice. We will be working with the church and the neighborhood to define the parameters and perimeters of the church building.</p>		<p>The church building is a complex structure with many different parts. It is not about describing a single part, but rather working on the project of the church as a whole. The church is a living entity, and its parameters and perimeters are constantly changing. The church is a living entity, and its parameters and perimeters are constantly changing. The church is a living entity, and its parameters and perimeters are constantly changing.</p> <p>After all, both the definition of parameters and perimeters depend on a large extent on their application in practice. We will be working with the church and the neighborhood to define the parameters and perimeters of the church building.</p>	

/ Main topic		/ Strategic transformation proposal and tactic activation	
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		3/ Kunstkirche Christ König in Bochum	

/ Kunstkirche Christ König in Bochum			
<p>The church building is a complex structure with many different parts. It is not about describing a single part, but rather working on the project of the church as a whole. The church is a living entity, and its parameters and perimeters are constantly changing. The church is a living entity, and its parameters and perimeters are constantly changing. The church is a living entity, and its parameters and perimeters are constantly changing.</p> <p>After all, both the definition of parameters and perimeters depend on a large extent on their application in practice. We will be working with the church and the neighborhood to define the parameters and perimeters of the church building.</p>		<p>The church building is a complex structure with many different parts. It is not about describing a single part, but rather working on the project of the church as a whole. The church is a living entity, and its parameters and perimeters are constantly changing. The church is a living entity, and its parameters and perimeters are constantly changing. The church is a living entity, and its parameters and perimeters are constantly changing.</p> <p>After all, both the definition of parameters and perimeters depend on a large extent on their application in practice. We will be working with the church and the neighborhood to define the parameters and perimeters of the church building.</p>	

/ Parameters			
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/ Strategic transformation proposal and tactic activation			
<p>The first two days of the workshop will be dedicated to precisely defining the parameters and perimeters of the church – as a living force for transformation within the neighborhood.</p> <p>By parameters, we refer to the physical and functional characteristics of the church building as form, interior architecture, uses, events, rituals, history, structural attributes and their immediate presence and meaning within the neighborhood. To facilitate the description of these parameters, we have prepared a set of questions on each church and arranged for someone to guide you around. They will be used to define the parameters and perimeters of the church building.</p> <p>By perimeters, we refer to the church's extension into its immediate surroundings and the broader neighborhood. This includes mapping the visible and invisible boundaries of the church's influence in the neighborhood.</p> <p>After all, both the definition of parameters and perimeters depend on a large extent on their application in practice. We will be working with the church and the neighborhood to define the parameters and perimeters of the church building.</p>		<p>The church building is a complex structure with many different parts. It is not about describing a single part, but rather working on the project of the church as a whole. The church is a living entity, and its parameters and perimeters are constantly changing. The church is a living entity, and its parameters and perimeters are constantly changing. The church is a living entity, and its parameters and perimeters are constantly changing.</p> <p>After all, both the definition of parameters and perimeters depend on a large extent on their application in practice. We will be working with the church and the neighborhood to define the parameters and perimeters of the church building.</p>	





## /year of construction

1957

## /architect

Dominikus Böhm, Gottfried Böhm

## /address

Katernberger Markt  
45327 Katernberg Essen

## /status of use

profaned

## /ownership

private

## /contact

Felix Hemmers  
hemmers@studiohemmers.de

available on the 4th of March from 14:00 h.

## /significant features and history

The Heilig-Geist-Kirche in the district of Katernberg in the district of Katernberg is a former Roman Catholic branch church in the parish of St. Nicholas. It was consecrated in 1957 and has been a listed building since February 2019. According to plans by the architect Gottfried Böhm, the church building with around 400 seats was built from 1955 to 1957, the rectory in 1958, the youth home and kindergarten in 1965, and the house of the sexton in 1967. In 2017, the church council and parish council decided to bring the church to a new use. When building the church building, Böhm realized the idea of a large tent, which he placed in the industrial environment in glass and concrete. The architecture of the tent of hanging over "difs" follows the word of the writing (Heb. 13, 14): "We do not have a city here that remains, but we are looking for the future." The Holy Spirit Church with its church buildings has been steady since the 7th century. February 2019 listed.

The church building itself consists of an elongated main room, which is complemented both in the south and in the north by two side aisles stored on two additionally attached. In the north, the sacristy with a low bell tower concludes, so that a staggering of different buildings determines the view of the church. Gottfried Böhm



/ to chat

Ambulanten Hegepflege  
Myelastik  
Many Cars  
Car Parking  
Zuversicht  
Meyfusschul  
Schmidt  
Börger - v. Handen  
Train/Bus  
Grass  
Flowers  
Persönliche  
Persönliche  
Bestattung  
Adressierung  
La Vida Pizzeria  
Enghy Shops  
Leads Diamond  
Versicherungsgesellschaft  
Abzweig Katzenloft  
Wohnung  
Taxis  
Tipshop  
Baby Art Teller  
Die Aquas Cresta  
Häufigkeit  
Wohnung am Abzug  
People waiting for  
Lidl Werbung  
Kids sitting out of school  
is doesn't look walkable

A LOT OF TRAFFIC  
AMPELSATION  
Is difficult for pedestrians  
Old building mixed with modern  
blau  
these models of wood

Times 13:00  
Weather: Sunny/Windy

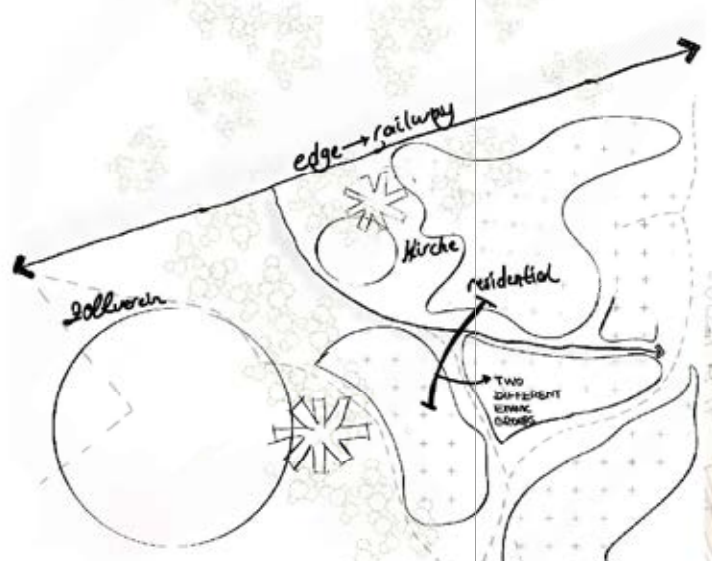
/ to register



/ to observe



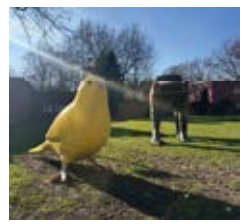
/ to be



/ to sketch



/ to photograph



# Heilig Geist kirche /Essen

/ selection of material produced by the students during the fieldwork phase  
"this is not a church", march 2025  
Own production





/ to reach

/neighbourhood

- Who: Seniors & Kids / neighborhood
- Why: • missing gathering place  
• missing public space for kids
- Where: • Inside & Outside the church
- What: • mobile coffe shop &  
• playground  
• sports offer



/relations



/opportunities



/agents

/main topic



Heilig Geist kirche /Essen

/ selection  
of material produced by the  
students in the analytical phase  
"this is not a church", march 2025  
Own production

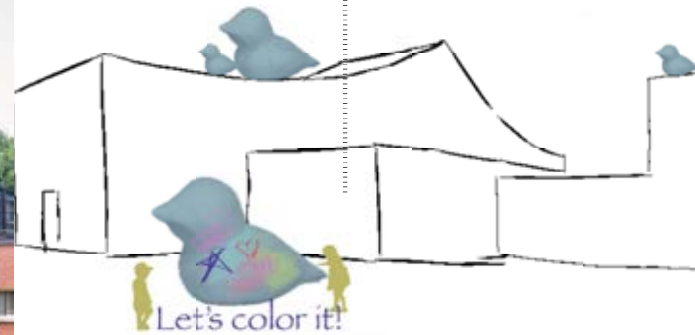


## /exteriors | urban perimeter

public space  
activation



reclaim the memory  
of the neighbourhood



/connectors



/interiors | church parameter



strengthen existing  
community practices

# / to propose

/augmented realities

Heilig Geist kirche /Essen

/ selection of material produced by the students in the proposal phase  
"this is not a church", march 2025  
Own production



# Heilig Kreuz kirche /Gelsenkirchen



## /year of construction

1927 - 1929

## /architect

Josef Franke, pbs architects

## /address

Bochumer Straße 115  
45886 Gelsenkirchen Ückendorf

## /status of use

Cultural center of the district of Gelsenkirchen, since 2019 - 2021

## /ownership

Emschertainment

## /contact

Prof. Dr. Helmut Hasenkox  
Helmut.Hasenkox@emschertainment.de  
0209 954-1102

appointment on March 4th from 13:00 till 15:30 h.

## /significant features and history

After World War I, St. Josef Parish, with over 17,000 Catholics, planned a branch church for 2,000 attendees. Land was acquired in 1920, and architect Franke, previously involved with the parish in 1912, was commissioned in 1922. Due to inflation, construction began only in late 1926. The foundation stone was laid on 13 November 1927, incorporating modern Catholic church design and reinforced concrete to protect against mining damage.

Post-war repairs addressed vault and window damage, and the church became an independent parish in 1948. Additional buildings, including a rectory, were completed in the 1950s. Mining damage led to restorations in 1966, introducing a lighter interior by Gerhard Kadow, featuring bright tones, blue-green windows framed in white glass, and a new altar concept aligned with the Second Vatican Council. A new organ was installed in 1972.

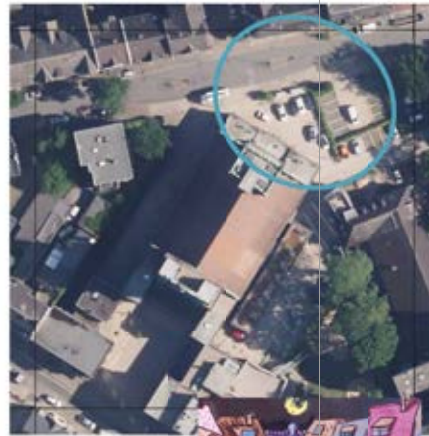
Interior renovations in 1990/93 balanced original 1929 and 1966 designs, adding three wheel lights. The church ceased services in 2007 and was integrated into the neighboring science center. Plans aim to preserve its architectural heritage.



/ to photograph



- ① Parking visible on
- ② Who is
- ③ Connect in the st
- ④ Open sp Change



/ to sketch



/ to register



/ to observe

/ to be



References

- \* Stretches
- \* How many strategies
- \* Make it obvious that church isn't visible
- ① Non visibility (front)
- ② The back (parking)
- ③ Non connectivity (the functions together) Maybe pics of closed shops/gallery



Heilig Kreuz kirche /Gelsenkirchen

/ selection of material produced by the students during the fieldwork phase  
"this is not a church", march 2025  
Own production



/relations



/neighbourhood



Main issue  
Church and community  
are not connected



/opportunities

/main topic

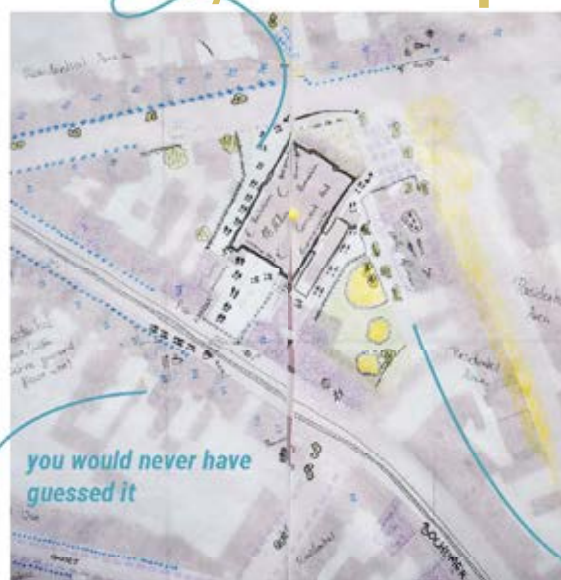
/to reach

/agents

Kindergarten  
Back of the church is soul-less.



You can't see the church  
from the street.



you would never have  
guessed it

Art is actually happening  
around the church.  
#ClosedShops  
#EmptyStreet



Heilig Kreuz kirche /Gelsenkirchen

/ selection of material produced by the students in the analytical phase  
"this is not a church", march 2025  
Own production



/interiors | church parameter



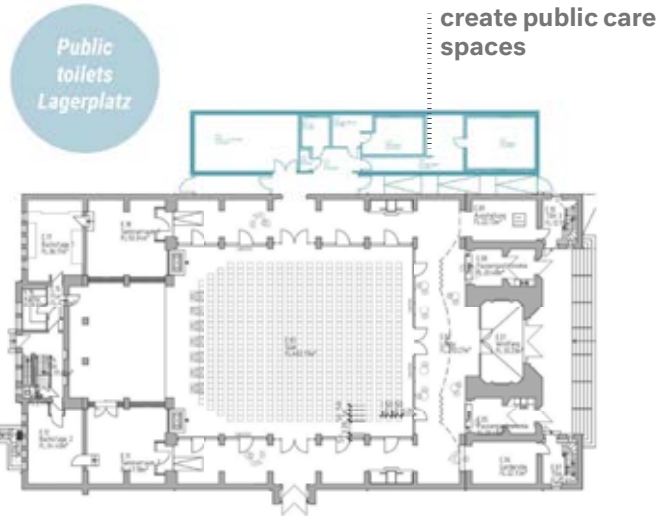
boost the local market



/connectors



strengthen existing community practices



THIS SUNDAY  
9th MARCH  
FLOHMARKT  
@HEILIG KREUZ KIRCHE

/to propose

/augmented realities



public space activation

de-prioritize the car



/exteriors | urban perimeter

green regeneration

Heilig Kreuz kirche /Gelsenkirchen

/ selection of material produced by the students in the proposal phase  
"this is not a church", march 2025  
Own production





## /year of construction

1932

## /architect

Gundolf Bockemühl, Hans Scharoun

## /address

Steinring 34  
44789 Bochum

## /status of use

Cultural venue

## /ownership

Catholic Parish of St. Peter and Paul Bochum

## /contact

Michael Ludwig  
+49171 7207989  
info@michael-ludwig.net

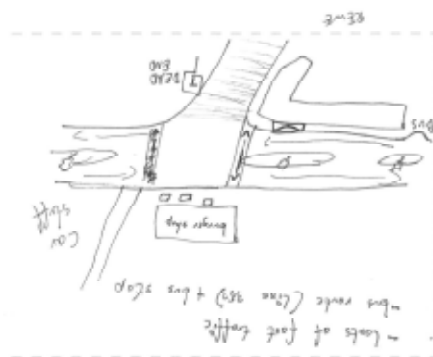
timeframe for March 4th to be confirmed.

## /significant features and history

The Christ-König-Kirche is a Roman Catholic church located in the southern part of Bochum's city centre. Constructed between 1931 and 1932 on Steinring, it was designed by the Düsseldorf architect Franz Schneider as part of a Franciscan monastery established by the Saxonian Franciscan Province. The church was consecrated under the patronage of Christ the King, following the establishment of the Christ the King feast by Pope Pius XI in 1925. It was the last church built in Bochum before World War II.

During World War II, the church was completely destroyed by an air mine on November 4, 1944. Reconstruction began in 1946, with the tower being increased by 4 meters. The church was reopened in its current form in 1957. The under-glass painted Stations of the Cross, illuminated from behind, were created by artist Claus Kilian. In 1958, the church became part of the newly established Diocese of Essen. In 1998, the parish was closed due to a lack of religious vocations, and the monastery was converted into a rectory with parish office and rental apartments. The church was repurposed as an art church (Kunstkirche) in 2010, hosting various exhibitions





/to sketch

Place 1:  
Exterior has not accessible for public, only after  
• wide car lanes, heavy traffic  
• different styles of transportation  
to cars to pedestrians  
to motorcycles to cyclists  
to trucks to scooters  
to buses (SS) to trains (underground)  
- 2-3 big parking lots  
- underground bypass through subway station  
- look - car park - lot  
- not much green, there is no  
- no outdoor, just a small area

/to be

- shop for animal food  
- commercial (car salesmen / car park shop)  
- REWE (to 4 of them: spray shop / food shop)  
- crossing (to 4 of them: spray shop / food shop)  
- all of them: only outdoor  
- a food truck

/to register



/to observe

2010 Kulturhauptstadt  
b) Kunstkirche  
bis 2021  
chance to change the church  
6-10 masses / year (2010-21)  
COVID Corona-Pandemie  
sometimes Gottesdienst C.A.  
w) bspw. Folklore-Tanz  
gestellt

/to chat



/to photograph

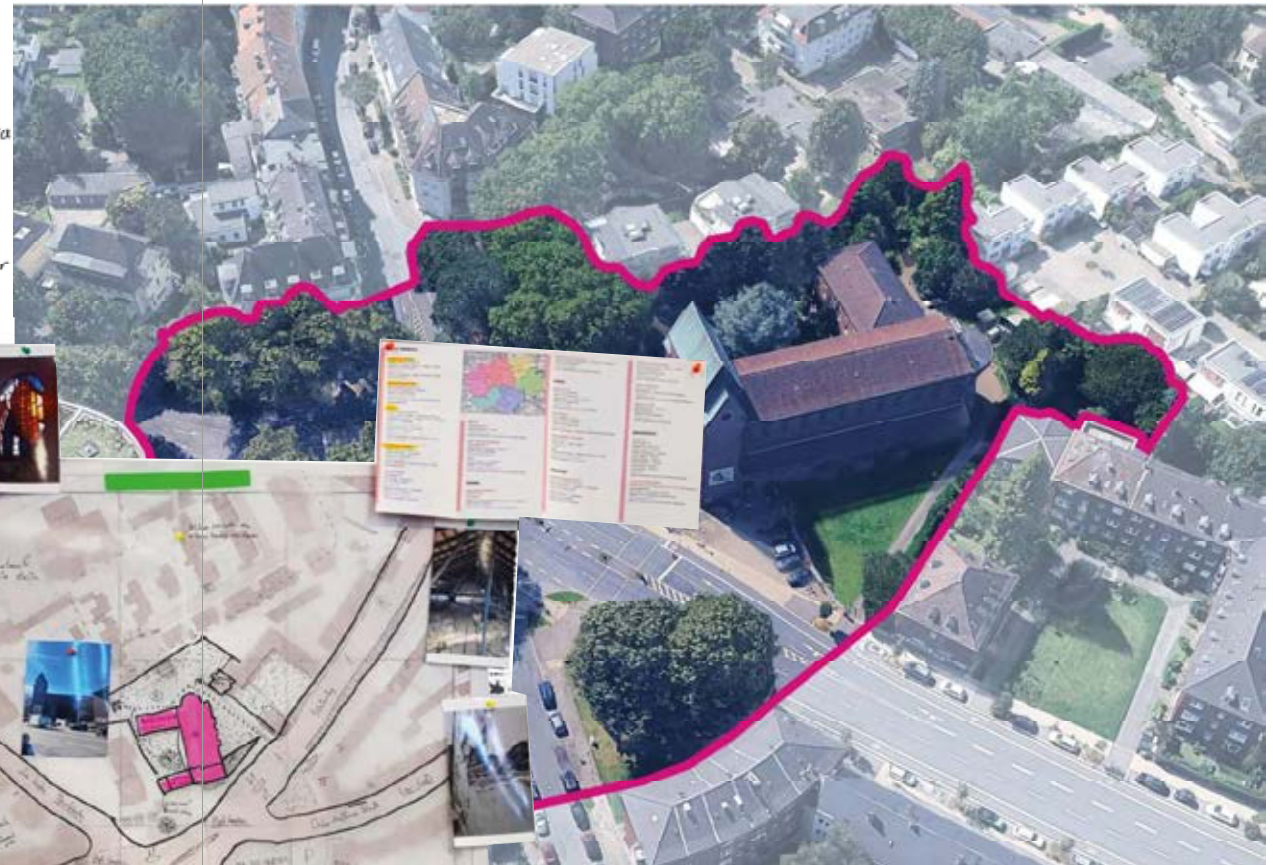
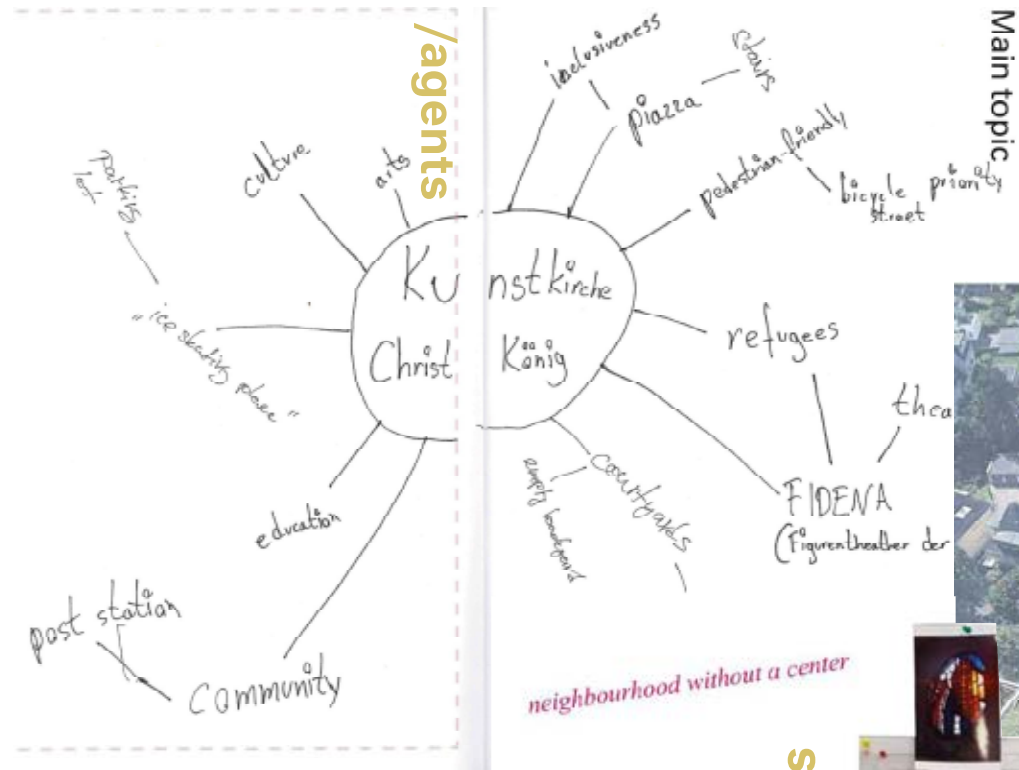


# Kunstkirche Christ König /Bochum

/ selection of material produced by the students during the fieldwork phase  
"this is not a church", march 2025  
Own production



/ to reach



/main topic

/relations



nonsense traffic

/opportunities

no place for community

Kunstkirche Christ König /Bochum

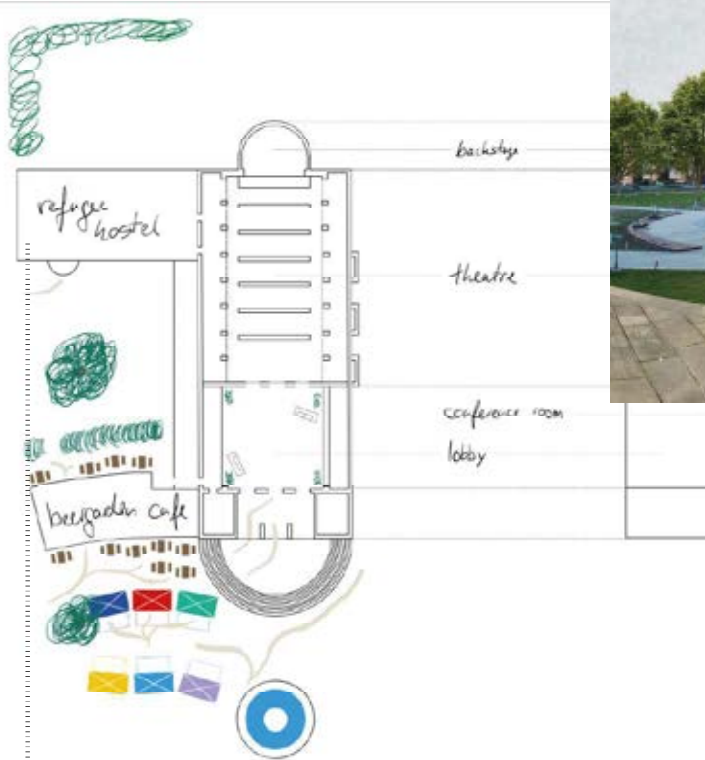
/ selection of material produced by the students in the analytical phase  
"this is not a church", march 2025  
Own production

/neighbourhood



# / to propose

/interiors | church parameter



de-prioritize the car

strengthen existing community practices

/augmented realities



/connectors

bring the green back to the pavement



new use for parking lot

enhance sustainable infrastructure



/exteriors | urban perimeter

**Kunstkirche Christ König /Bochum**

/ selection of material produced by the students in the proposal phase  
"this is not a church", march 2025  
Own production





## /year of construction

1967

## /architect

unknown

## /address

Preins Feld 8  
44869 Bochum, Wattenscheid-Höntrop

## /status of use

In use

## /ownership

Ev. Kirchengemeinde Wattenscheid

## /contact

Kirsten Sowa  
+49 2327 9941524  
Kirsten.Sowa@ekvw.de

available on March 4th between 12:30 and 18:00 h.

## /significant features and history

The Church of Reconciliation was built in 1967 as a parish church for the local Protestant community. Adjacent to it is the community center, both parts of the building are accessed via the same entrance. The church building does not have a steeple. The façade is a defragmented interplay of closed, dark brick surfaces and open, bright glazed areas. The window surfaces are painted with abstract patterns. The irregular square floor plan, in combination with the steep roof surfaces, creates a pyramid-like interior. The altar area is located at the intersection of the outer walls, from which the pews fan out in a semi-circle.

The church is currently still used by the local community for services.



/ to sketch

**/ to register**



**/ to be**

**/ to chat**

① Sportplatz

- Vogel kinds <sup>flirping</sup>  
 - motorbonds of cars & motorcycles  
 - "heavy" <sup>work</sup> coming out of a house nearby  
 - children playing with parents  
 - 3 elderly people playing by "ich hab sehr heute  
 am halb 2 gehen lassen", das sag ich auch"  
 "ja ist 460 muss ich ganz ehrlich sagen"  
 "sie muss die lehrzeit nicht schreien"  
 "ne he hümm!" Ja sehr schwer ist sie von  
 "ist nicht" nach da steht doch die lehrzeit!"  
 "ja ist das aufgelegt" was so wachen muss?  
 "he. Nein, Nein, Nein, das ist tageliches."  
 "für [für doch jetzt auf! Gooo! Yippel!]  
 "ho paan!" ~~he~~ H. Yippie! Yippie  
 "heute das hümm! Ich sag machen sie das,  
 doch lauter o  
 heute leben  
 • hutter mit 12  
 2 jungs anfan  
 • 2 jugends mit  
 ich hoffe auch  
 "ich hoffe"  
 • kind mit bluthei  
 ... sager kinds d  
 "ich muss die  
 alles klonen  
 Sports also geht
- 
- Beschreibung  
 Gebäude  
 Straße



/ to observe



## Versöhnungskirche /Bochum

selection of material produced by the students during the fieldwork phase

“this is not a church”, march 2025  
Own production

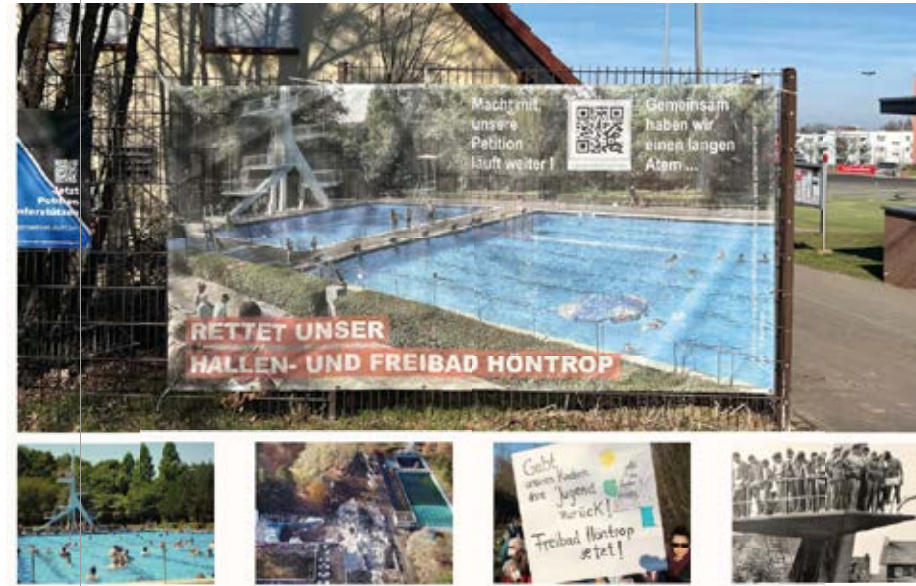
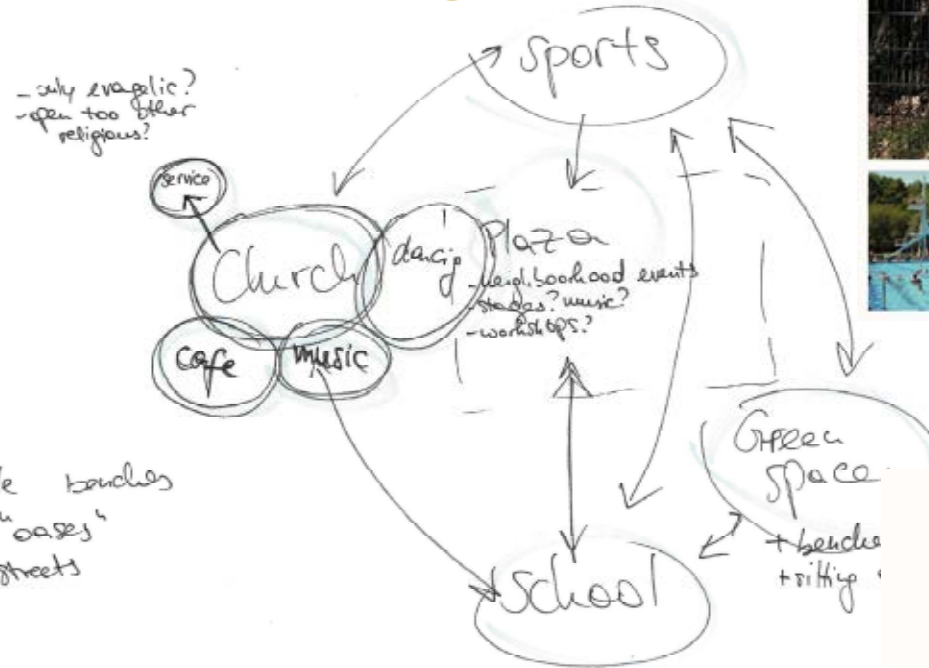
**/ to photograph**



/main topic

/neighbourhood

/relations



/agents

/ to reach



/opportunities

Versöhnungskirche /Bochum

/ selection of material produced by the students in the analytical phase  
"this is not a church", march 2025  
Own production



/interiors | church parameter



/exteriors | urban perimeter



support neighbourhood claims

save the swimming pool

create public care spaces

water as a symbol of community

abstracting water & the pool into a place of gathering and relaxation

create a climate shelter

/ to propose

public space activation

/connectors



create public care spaces

de-priorize the car

enhancing the existing hotspot water as a connecting element



/augmented realities

strengthen existing community practices

Versöhnungskirche /Bochum

/ selection of material produced by the students in the proposal phase  
"this is not a church", march 2025  
Own production



# Friedenskirche /Gelsenkirchen



## /year of construction

1957 - 1959

## /architect

Denis Boniver

## /address

Königsberger Str. 120, 45881 Gelsenkirchen

## /status of use

Church

## /ownership

Evangelische Emmaus-Kirchengemeinschaft Gelsenkirchen

## /contact

Robert-Koch-Straße 3a, 45879 Gelsenkirchen,

Tel: 0209 / 25 89 0

Email: [gewat-kg.emmausekvw.de](mailto:gewat-kg.emmausekvw.de)

## /significant features and history

In Germany, the industrialization of the 19th century led to the rapid development of cities. As a result, the rural community in the Schalke district transformed into a densely populated working-class neighborhood. In 1882, the first Protestant church was built at Schalker Markt.

However, the urban structures in Schalke were severely damaged during World War II. This was followed by a period of reconstruction, during which the Schalker Markt lost its original urban significance. The new construction of the Friedenskirche (Peace Church) took place in the 1950s. The Friedenskirche is a two-story, oval-shaped central building made of reinforced concrete and brick.







/neighbourhood

/to reach

/agents

/relations

/opportunities



CMNCTZNG



Sportanlage



INHALTUNGSÜBERBLICK



Multifunktionaler Raum



Legend:

- Friedenskiche
- Bildungseinrichtungen
- Grünflächen
- Fußgänger- & Radfahrer-Infrastruktur
- Schulen
- Fußgänger- & Radfahrer-Infrastruktur

Arbeiten & Lernen im Quartier



Einzelne Person bildet das Quartier



Begegnung & Gemeinschaft im Quartier



Multifunktionaler Raum für das Quartier

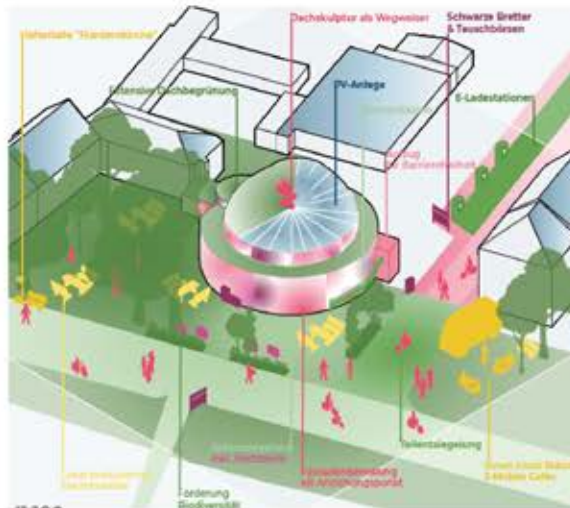
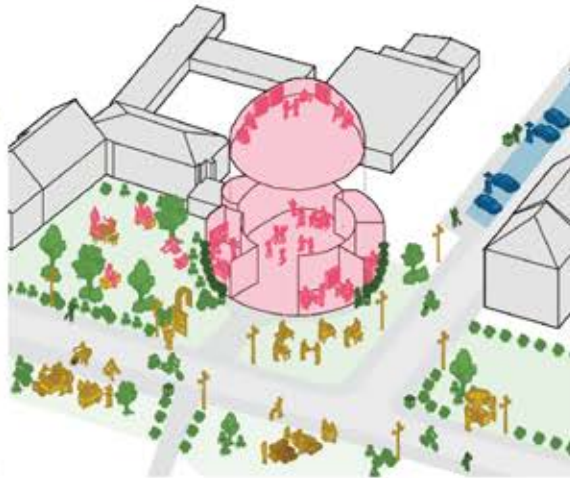
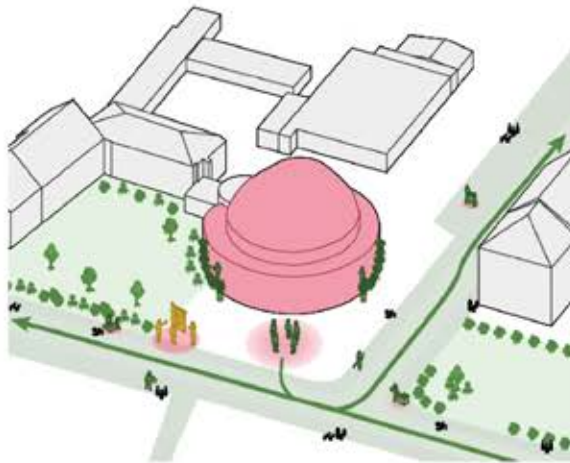


Friedenskirche /Gelsenkirchen

selection of material produced by the students in the analytical phase  
seminar Current Issues in Urban Design, april - june 2025  
Own production



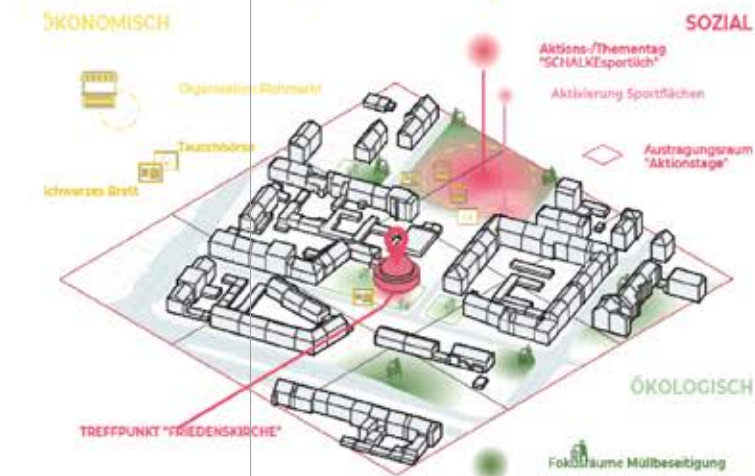
/interiors | church parameter



/ to propose

/connectors

/exteriors | urban perimeter



Friedenskirche /Gelsenkirchen

/ selection of material produced by the students in the proposal phase  
seminar Current Issues in Urban Design, april - june 2025  
Own production



**/year of construction**

1965-1966

**/architect**

Gundolf Bockemühl, Hans Scharoun

**/address**

Glockengarten 70, 44803 Bochum

**/status of use**

Church

**/ownership**

Christengemeinschaft Bochum

**/contact**

[bochum@christengemeinschaft.org](mailto:bochum@christengemeinschaft.org)

[info@scharoun-kirche.de](mailto:info@scharoun-kirche.de)

**/significant features and history**

- architecture by Hans Scharoun
- renunciation of symmetry
- walls made of specially manufactured bricks
- appears restrained from the street
- guided path from the foyer into the worship space
- flooded with light due to glazed south side
- roof shape is designed to resemble a tent



/ to photograph

/ to observe



/ to be

BESCHREIBUNG

- Die Straße „Glockengarten“ ist im Bearbeitungsraum nicht stark befahren.
- Sie ist mit Wohngebäuden bebaut, die überwiegend Wohn- und Satteldächer aufweisen.
- Nach Ende des Gottesdienstes steigen einige Kirchenbesucher in ihre Autos, die im Straßenraum geparkt wurden. Andere laufen.

SKIZZE



/ to sketch

BESCHREIBUNG

- Die Straße „Am Birkenbruch“ ist eine schnelle Wohnstraße, die in der Bearbeitungszeit von niemandem genutzt wurde.
- Vom Fußballplatz hinter der südlichen Gebäudereihe hat man ein Fußballspiel.

SKIZZE



/ to chat

/ to register



**Johanneskirche /Bochum**

/ selection of material produced by the students during the fieldwork phase  
seminar Current Issues in Urban Design, april - june 2025  
Own production



/neighbourhood



Umgebungsfärmkategorisierung  
2022 in dB(A)  
Straße, 24h-Pegel



Durchschnitt  
Bevölkerung in J.

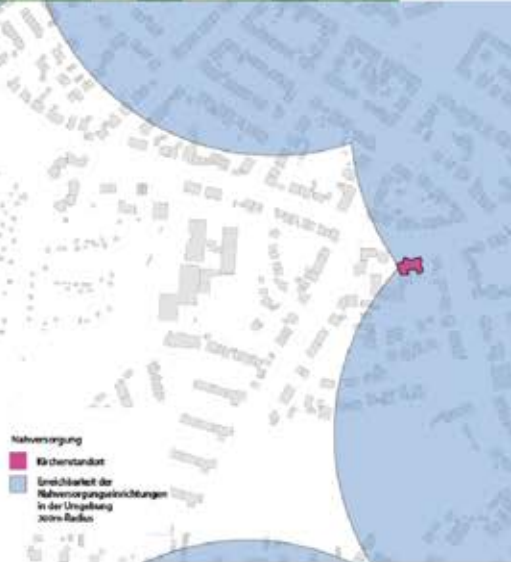


/ to reach

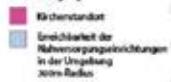


/relations

/agents



Nahversorgung



/opportunities

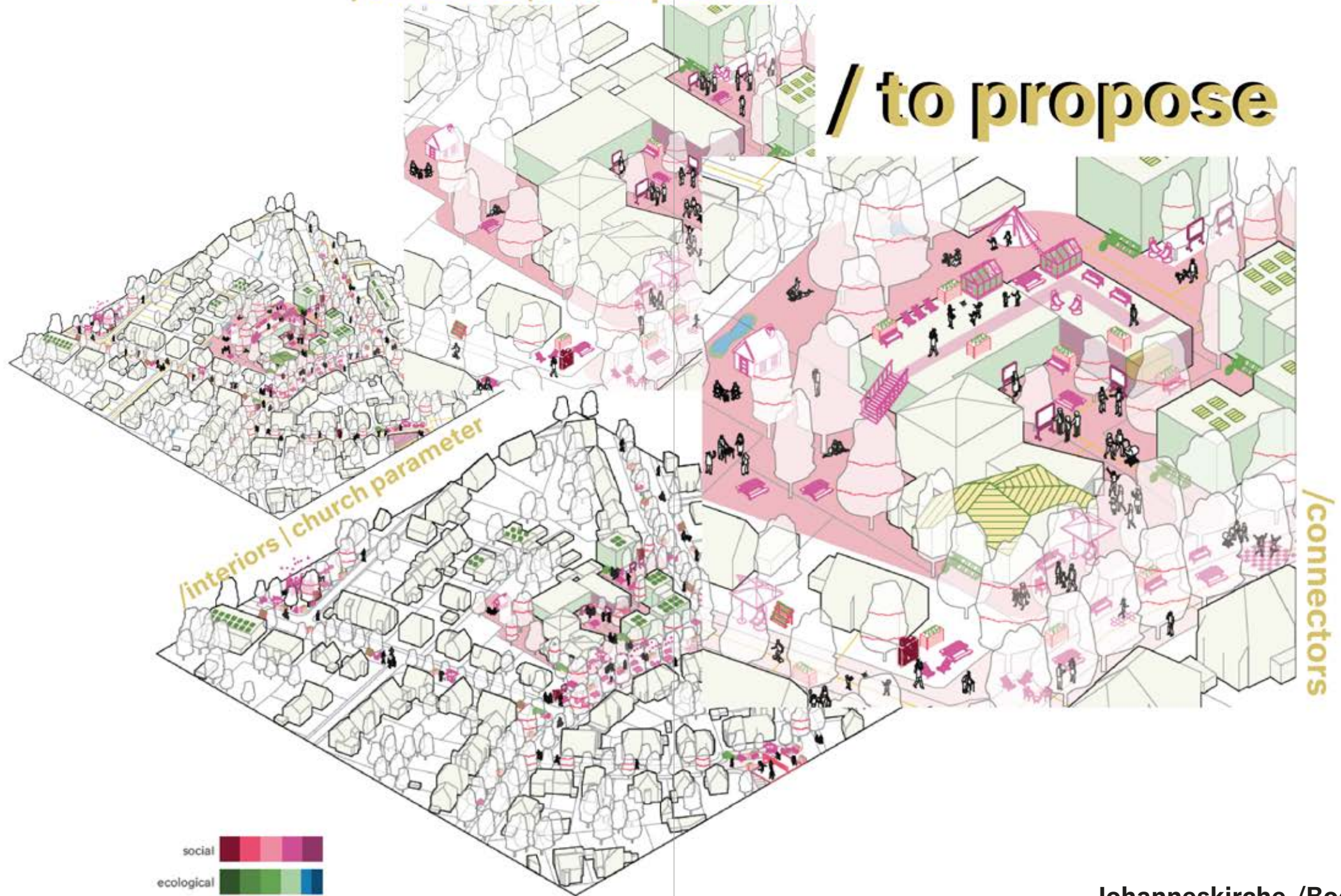
Johanneskirche /Bochum

/ selection of material produced by the students in the analytical phase  
seminar Current Issues in Urban Design, april - june 2025  
Own production



/exteriors | urban perimeter

/ to propose



**Johanneskirche /Bochum**

/ selection of material produced by the students in the proposal phase  
seminar Current Issues in Urban Design, april - june 2025  
Own production



**/year of construction**

1956 - 1959

**/architect**

Rudolf Schwarz

**/address**

Kölner Str. 37, 45145 Essen

**/status of use**

Parish church

**/ownership**

Parish St. Antonius

**/contact**

(0201) 125 273 - 0

[pfarrbuero@st-antonius-essen.de](mailto:pfarrbuero@st-antonius-essen.de)

**/significant features and history**

St. Antonius Church in Essen-Frohnhausen was built on the site of a neo-Gothic brick church that was destroyed during World War II. The former church was built between 1879 and 1881 and was almost completely destroyed in 1944. The church tower, which had not been destroyed, was demolished in 1972 due to dilapidation. The new St. Antonius Church was designed by architect Rudolf Schwarz and built between 1956 and 1959. It consists of a reinforced concrete frame with some brick infill and glass in the upper part of the walls. Schwarz described the new church as a "walk-in crystal." From the outside, it appears compact, but inside it opens up into a T-shaped, higher interior.



Auf der Baustelle der Fähre ein Hochleistungs-  
verboi, der sehr laut Musik laufen hat. Es  
schleift einen Teiler ab, diesen Motoranlage regel-  
mäßig einlegen. Gehtes sind die Straßen von  
die Küche herum reicht viel belästigen.  
Es gehen auch Gesch. viele Menschen vorbei,  
die werden auch haben die ein bestimmtes Ziel.  
Die aus Kinder und Jugendliche waren hier sind  
die Einzelgruppen kommen. Obwohl die Geschwindig-  
keit auf 30 km/h begrenzt ist, ist viel Verkehrsmittel  
zu haben. Auch die Baureihe hat eine auch regel-  
mäßig Vogel zuhören.

Die Straßenverkehrsregeln sind für alle Regeln.  
Da die Geschwindigkeit geschult sind und das  
Arbeitsprotokoll auch eher gering ist, ist davon  
auszugehen, dass es sich um Anwesenheit handelt.  
Es führt ein Ort vorbei.

Ein Hochleistungs Motor gibt mehrere Minuten auf das  
Schiffen von dem Vorkörper und wird etwas.  
Die Türen zum Vorraum der Küche sind geöffnet von  
8.00 bis 18.00 Uhr.

[illegible]

Ich gehe den Ordnung einseitig der Währungsabteilung eine Jange im Grundschulhaus kommt mir entgegen und trägt einen Pilsener (Ich schenke dich) Was die Schwere. Es fragt mich, was ich hier mache und ich erkläre ihm, dass ich die Vergeltung der St. Annen's Kirche anbauen und Herzen für die Un-Geheuer. Es erzählt mir, dass er hier mehrere Kirchen gibt, aber diese zählt er nicht zu den Kirchen. Er redet auch von der bei seiner Freundin (Apollonkirche) und eines anderen mit Namen T-Ann und einem "Lovers", das immer zu diesem Ort führt. Er fragt mich, ob ich das fertig sei und sagt, dass er jetzt weiter müsse. An der Vorwand geht er hier richtig über die Straße. Eine Person von oben trägt einen etwas größeren Kasten. Sie gehen zusammen in die Buchstaben und kommen mit einem Kasten wieder um den Grundschulhaus und laufen über die Straße in einen Metall-Struktur.

## A hand-drawn sketch of a building facade. The building has a symmetrical design with a central entrance and two side wings. The central entrance features a small porch with a pediment supported by columns. Above the entrance is a sign that reads "The Old Mill". The wings have large windows with multiple panes. The sketch is done in a simple, illustrative style.

[illegible]

## St Antonius /Essen

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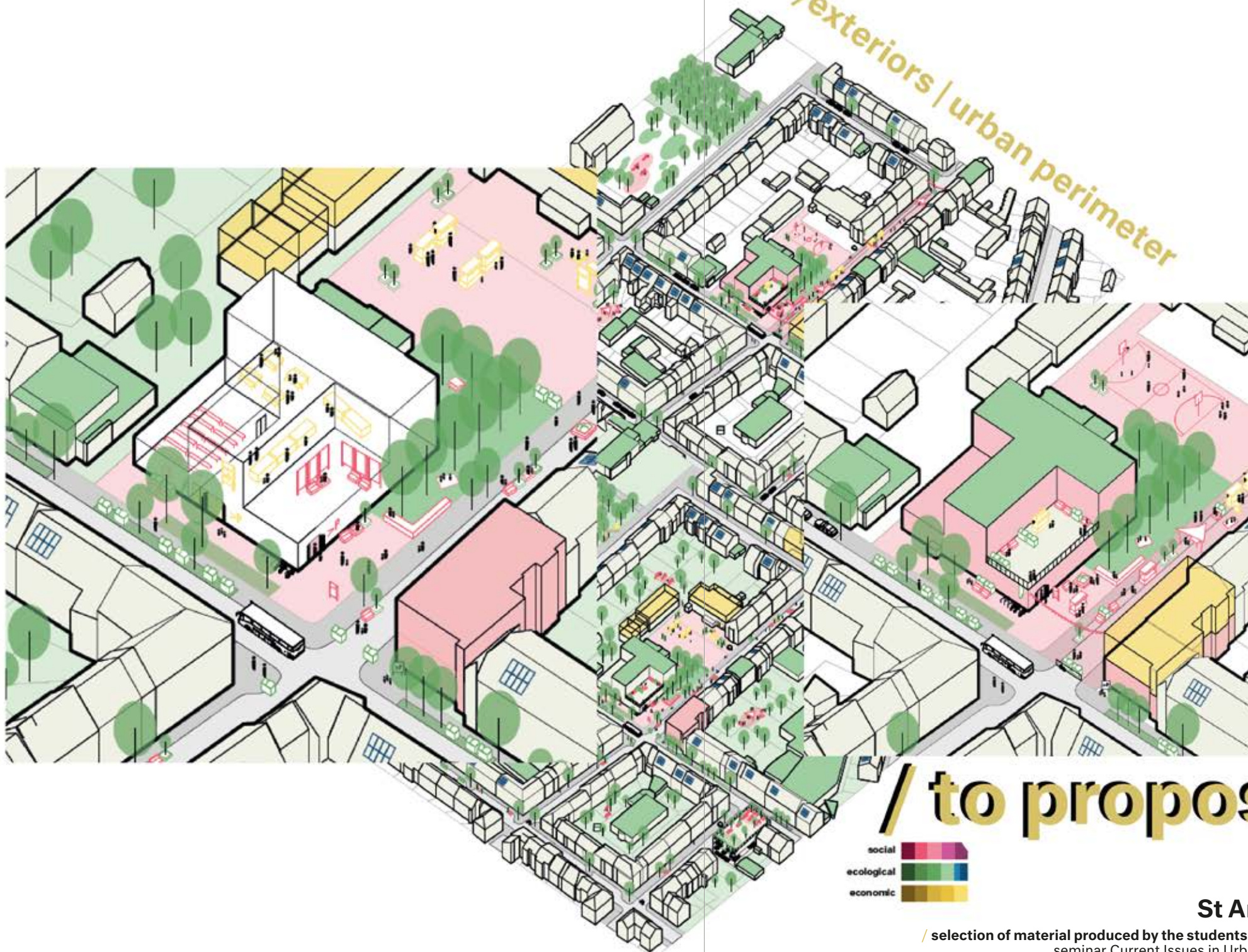


## /agents



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Own production





/ to propose



**St Antonius /Essen**

/ selection of material produced by the students during the proposal phase  
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Own production



# St Stephanus /Gelsenkirchen



/year of construction  
1968-1970

/architect  
Prof. Peter Grund

/address  
Westerholterstraße 92,  
45894 Gelsenkirchen-Buer

/status of use  
In use: used once a month by the retirement home

/ownership  
Belia Seniorenresidenzen GmbH

/contact  
Belia Seniorenresidenzen GmbH

/significant features and history  
One of Peter Grund's late masterpieces, the church has a striking triangular floor plan derived from sacred geometry and clad in sip-view concrete. The steep copper-folded roof rises toward the altar, which, along with baptismal font and pulpit, echoes triangular symbolism. Notable features include stained glass panels by Inge Vahle, an organ by Rudolf von Beckera-th (1975), and a bronze altar relief by Josef Baron (1991). After sale due to declining congrega-tion and structural maintenance costs, the adjacent parish house was demolished to build a senior residence. The church shell remains intact and hosts occasional services and commu-nity gatherings.





- geplante, kontrollierte sexuelle Interaktion - teilweise sehr modern, kommt zu Wärmegewinnen und auch Hygiene in den Wohnungen
  - ↳ Kastration/Teilnahme zwischen Tieren - können kaum & primäres Sexualverhalten unter Tieren durch 1. Testosteron sein
  - ↳ Vergleich mit Sexualbeziehung / Fortschritt
- Zoo zeigt (wie) Verhalten von Tieren zusammen mit ihren intelligentesten Geist mit dem Spüren und plötzl. dem Verhalten / Jagdverhalten, Verhalten fährliche & kindlich - unvorsichtige, Sexualverhalten unter von Anwesenheit der Gefährten?
  - Tieren können „Antitellungen“ der gefährlichen Tieren bewahrt werden - nicht werden
- häufig ist, mehrere Paarung des Tierpaares: Tiere sind in der Paarung mit, die die Paarung vom Paarpartner nicht ist, vom Paarpartner jedoch erfolgt
  - Das Verhalten, zeigt sich auf der Seite, auf der sie am besten paaren können mit einem Weibchen 1-1 oder 1:1000000

7)  $\bar{y}$  = Anteil Schütte (Pfeinnehmer)

A hand-drawn diagram of a water cycle. At the top, a horizontal line represents the sky, with a sun and clouds. Below this, a wavy line represents the ground surface. On the left, a vertical line represents a body of water. Arrows indicate the flow of water: from the water body up to the sky (evaporation), from the sky down to the ground (precipitation), and from the ground down to a lower level (runoff). The diagram is labeled with 'Evaporation', 'Condensation', 'Precipitation', and 'Runoff'.

83144

1. *Abstract* (100 words): A brief summary of the paper's content, including the research question, methodology, results, and conclusions.

2. *Introduction* (100 words): An overview of the research topic, its significance, and the objectives of the study.

3. *Methodology* (100 words): A description of the research design, data collection methods, and statistical analysis techniques used.

4. *Results* (100 words): A presentation of the findings, including any statistical data, tables, or figures.

5. *Discussion* (100 words): An interpretation of the results, their implications, and a comparison with existing literature.

6. *Conclusion* (100 words): A summary of the main findings and a statement of the study's contribution to the field.

7. *References* (100 words): A list of the sources cited in the paper, formatted according to the journal's guidelines.

8. *Appendices* (100 words): Additional information that supports the main text, such as raw data, supplementary figures, or detailed calculations.

9. *Tables* (100 words): A table or tables containing numerical data, organized in a clear and concise manner.

10. *Figures* (100 words): A figure or figures illustrating the results, such as a line graph, bar chart, or scatter plot.

11. *Supplementary Materials* (100 words): Additional resources related to the study, such as questionnaires, interview transcripts, or code snippets.

12. *Keywords* (100 words): A set of terms used to describe the paper's content, facilitating search and indexing.

13. *Author Biographies* (100 words): Short biographies of the authors, highlighting their qualifications and research interests.

14. *Conflict of Interest* (100 words): A statement regarding any potential conflicts of interest that may have influenced the research.

15. *Acknowledgments* (100 words): A section where the authors express their gratitude to individuals or organizations that supported the research.

16. *Disclaimer* (100 words): A statement clarifying the scope and limitations of the study, as well as the authors' responsibility for the findings.

17. *Correspondence* (100 words): Contact information for the author(s) to whom inquiries should be directed.

18. *Open Access* (100 words): A statement indicating whether the paper is available for free access and under what license.

19. *Peer Review* (100 words): A statement confirming that the paper has been reviewed by experts in the field.

20. *Final Version* (100 words): A statement indicating that this is the final version of the paper, ready for publication.

[illegible]

## St Stephanus /Gelsenkirchen

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/relations

/neighbourhood  
Ökologische Vulnerabilität

Soziale Vulnerabilität  
urbane Problemräume

Soziale Vulnerabilität  
Soziale Einrichtungen

soziale Einrichtung  
Kirchen

In der Nachbarschaft bestehen nur begrenzte Möglichkeiten für Begegnung und Austausch.  
• Gelände der Schule bietet nur wenige Aufenthaltsmöglichkeiten

IDENTITÄTSSTIFTENDER  
RAUM



KUNSTRAUM STATT  
ANSTRAUM



LEERSTAND + UMSTAND?



TYPISCH  
VELSEN-  
KIRCHEN  
BUEER



KOFABRIK



/ to reach

/opportunities

St Stephanus /Gelsenkirchen

/ selection of material produced by the students during the analytical phase  
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Own production

/agents

uhig.

KINDERSTUFE  
TUNCH-ALTER

GEMEINSCHAFT AUS ALT UND JUNG

HOCHWERTIGER  
URBANRAUM  
AM URS  
KIRCHE

BUERS ROTES KUNSTBAND

HOCHWERTIGE BAUSUBSTANZ  
MIT DENKMALSCHUTZ

2 GYMNASIEN

ST. STEPHANUS

LEERSTAND  
RUHR CITY

BELLA ALTENWOHNEN

KUNST UND IDENTITÄT  
BILDET GEMEINSCHAFT

KUNST BLÜHT IM  
LEERSTAND AUF

ZUSAMMENARBEIT MIT REGIONALEN  
KUND\*IN\*EN

KUNSTMUSEUM  
GELSENKIRCHEN

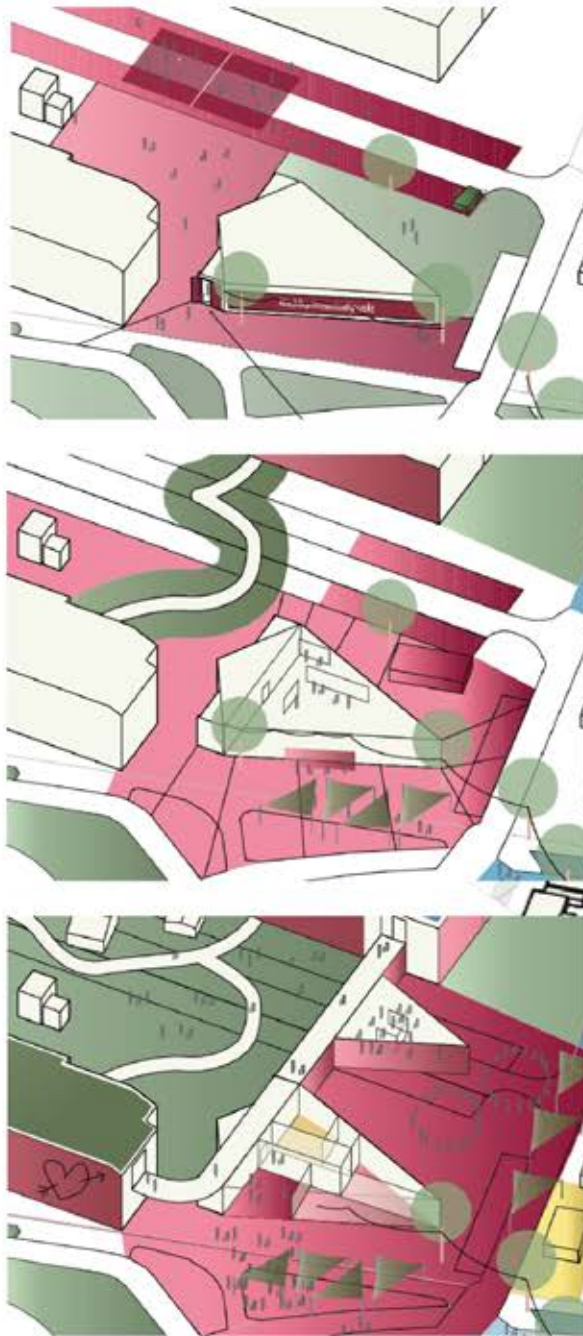
BENI  
BILDER

KUNSTRAUM STATT  
ANSTRAUM

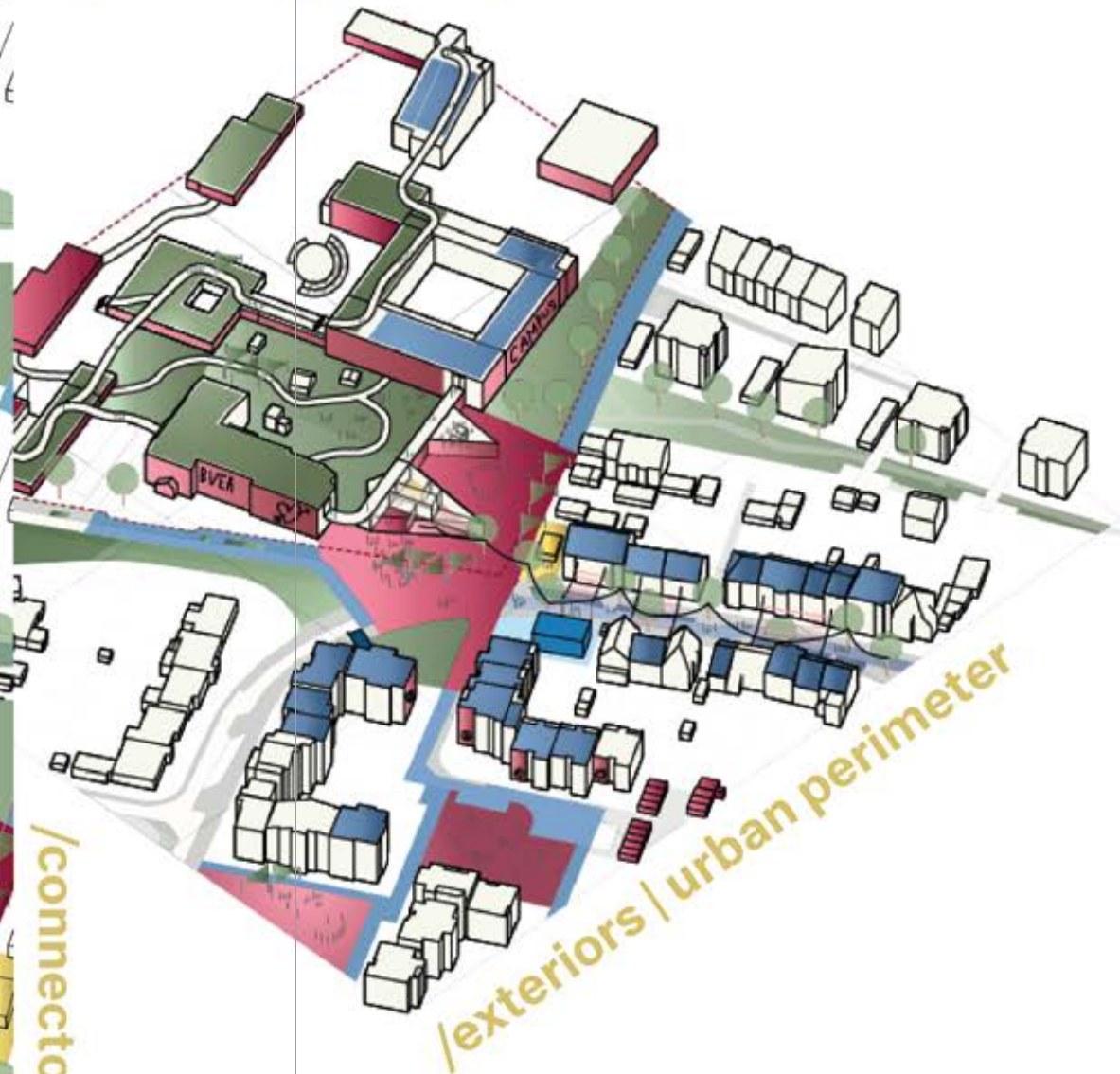
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/interiors | church parameter



/ to propose



/connectors

/exteriors | urban perimeter

**St Stephanus /Gelsenkirchen**

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The workshop concluded with a set of small-scale interventions imagined for each church and its neighbourhood. These tactical proposals—rooted in real needs and site-specific observations—seek to reclaim the social relevance of the buildings through everyday, low-threshold actions. Together, they explore how minor spatial gestures can become vehicles for collective empowerment, neighbourhood activation and urban regeneration.

## from tactical proposals...

/support neighbourhood claims

/ create public care spaces

/ boost the local market

/ reclaim the memory of the neighbourhood

/ create a climate shelter

/interiors | church parameter

/exteriors | urban perimeter

/ strengthen existing community practices

/ enhance sustainable mobility infrastructure

/ de-prioritize the car

/ green regeneration

/ public space activation



✚ hosting the food bank



✚ opening the toilets to the general public



✚ re-installing the removed public pool



✚ turning the icon of the neighbourhood memory into an urban playground



✚ hosting the weekly flea market



✚ replanting the church tree



✚ pedestrianising the piazza



✚ enlarging the refugee shelter



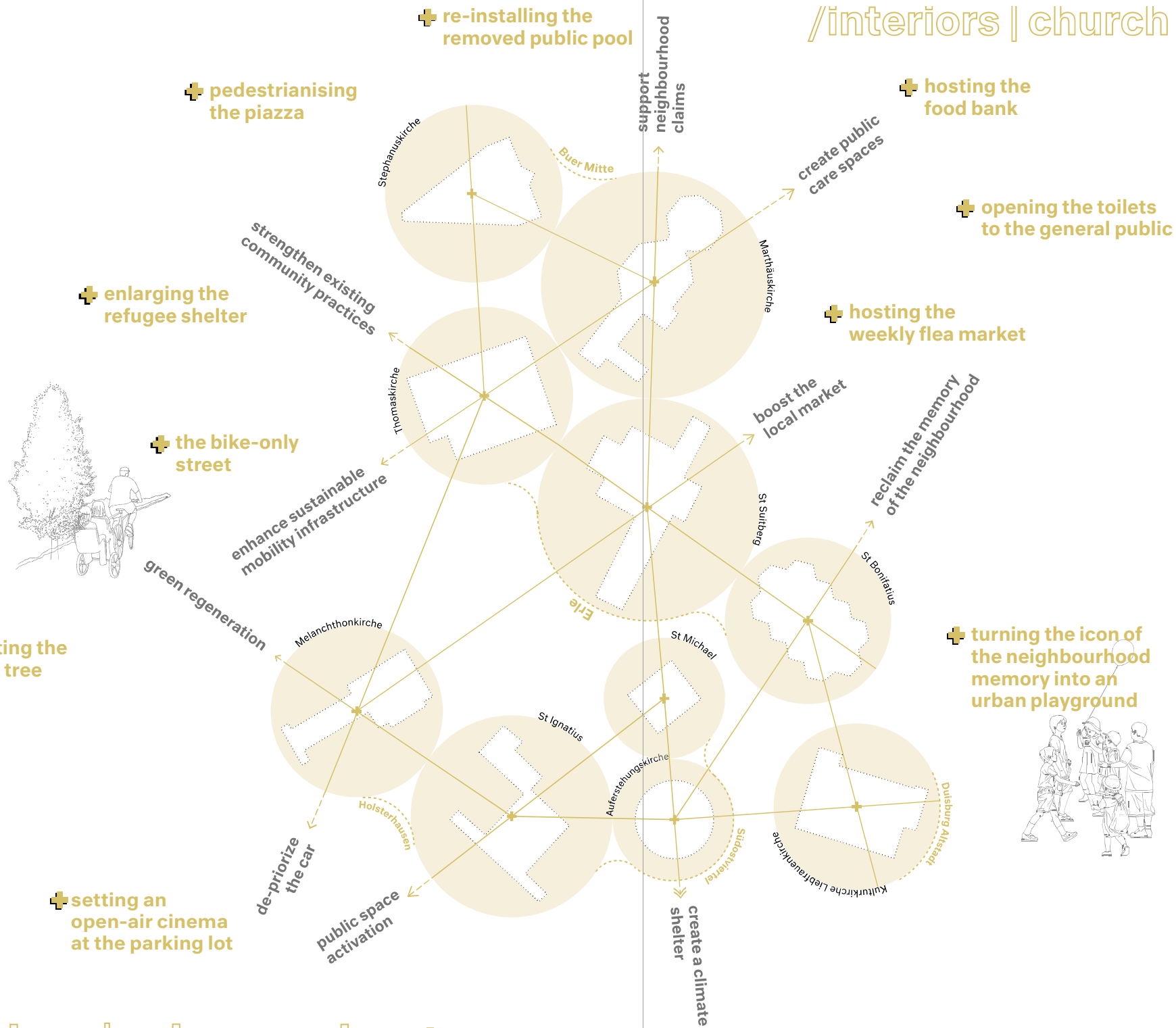
✚ the bike-only street



✚ setting an open-air cinema in the parking lot

...to specific actions





# tactical proposals + specific actions



# tentative outline of urban actions

## / intervention strategies

In recent editions of the Biennial, the role of the First Creative Mediator has extended beyond territorial research and the identification of relevant themes and potential venues. It has also been central to the collaborative development of a series of proposals for urban interventions.

The final selection of venues—in this case, churches—is determined through a range of considerations, not only in terms of alignment with the urban vision but also based on practical criteria: the feasibility of access, the possibility of leasing, adapting and activating the spaces, as well as their connectivity and proximity to other Biennial sites.



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It is therefore essential to understand that the objective is not merely to intervene within the churches themselves, but also to develop urban-scale projects that establish connections and make visible a physical and symbolic commitment to the territory.

As tentative proposals, this document presents a series of actions that take place *outside* the churches. These are intended to provoke reflection beyond the architectural splendour and heritage value of these spaces—towards a broader understanding of their urban and social context.



## / open doors

Churches constitute far more than religious structures; they are key civic infrastructures that historically articulated and gave meaning to their immediate urban environments. However, our field research—encompassing over 50 churches—has revealed a stark shift: most are now permanently closed, or open only briefly on specific religious dates. These once-vital spaces have become architecturally imposing yet socially inert, detached from the communities they once served.

This context calls for a symbolic and functional reactivation of the threshold—the door—as a site of renewed social engagement. We propose a series of artistic and architectural interventions focused on church entrances, developed in collaboration with artists, local collectives, and residents. These interventions aim to reimagine the interface between interior and exterior spaces, fostering new forms of dialogue, inclusion, and community use. By re-signifying these thresholds, we can test how churches might once again become relevant as inclusive civic and cultural infrastructures.



## / open church (within Open House)

Open House is a global initiative that grants public access to significant buildings—ranging from historic landmarks to contemporary architectural works—promoting public appreciation of the built environment and stimulating discourse on urban sustainability and heritage. Since its inception in London in 1992, the festival has expanded to over 50 cities worldwide.

In the Ruhr Area, Open House remains relatively recent, with strong potential for growth. Since 2015, it has focused primarily on the region's post-industrial transformation, offering public access to repurposed mines, industrial heritage sites, and innovative housing developments. The cities of Essen, Dortmund, and Duisburg have become active participants, demonstrating a clear appetite for cultural engagement with architecture and urban change.

We propose an institutional partnership between Open House Ruhr and Manifesta, introducing a dedicated focus on churches as sites of artistic exploration and urban reflection. In particular, the inclusion of Pantoffelkirche—modest churches built during the post-war reconstruction—could offer a meaningful counterpoint to the monumental scale of industrial heritage sites.

A coordinated initiative to open a network of churches over one or two days would not only reveal their architectural significance—with works by figures such as Hans Scharoun, Gottfried Böhm, Emil Steffann, and Otto Bartning—but also serve as a catalyst for discussions on their future uses, preservation, and integration into the social fabric of contemporary cities.

## / floating church

Emscherkunstweg is an open-air contemporary art exhibition held across the Emscher river basin. Initiated in 2010 as part of the European Capital of Culture celebrations, it has since become a triennial event that aims to revitalise this former industrial region through art and culture. The works, created by international artists, are situated within post-industrial landscapes—abandoned factories, waterways, and rewilded natural areas—fostering a dialogue between the region's industrial past and its sustainable future.

Today, the exhibition includes 21 permanent artworks, with further expansion planned for 2026. The sculptural trail spans over 100 kilometres along the Emscher River, from its source in Holzwickede to its confluence with the Rhine in Dinslaken and is supported by a dense network of cycling paths.

The alliance between Manifesta 16 and Emscherkunstweg for 2026 offers a unique opportunity to generate synergies and enhance the cultural impact of both initiatives.

Among the proposed actions is the creation of a Floating church—a symbolic and mobile space that would navigate the Rhein-Herne Canal, a 45-kilometre waterway connecting the eastern and western Ruhr Area. This itinerant venue would host



artistic, spiritual and community-based activities, making programmed stops in Duisburg, Oberhausen, Essen, Gelsenkirchen, and Herne, and eventually approaching Dortmund, where it could temporarily connect with selected fixed-site churches.

The Floating church could also function as one of the Blue Classrooms (Blaue Klassenzimmer)—a series of open-air learning spaces promoted by the Emschergenossenschaft along riverbanks. Reimagined as a small nomadic amphitheatre, the church would support educational, reflective and celebratory gatherings in a constantly shifting environment.

### / entreacto

Manifesta 16 proposes the temporary use of churches, with the intention of catalysing their transformation. As previously mentioned, many of these churches are undergoing a delicate phase of transition. Once spiritual and social hubs of mining communities, they now face abandonment and await either an urgent sale to enable a new purpose—or a slow and silent disappearance.

Destruction is typically a violent act that tends to erase memory without regard. The Interlude proposal seeks to identify all churches currently in this transitional state (between one “act” and the next—whether disappearance or transformation), and to make use of this fragile moment to provoke reflection through ephemeral actions that honour their heritage and memory.

A compelling example of this strategy can be found in the work “Ende einer Pantoffelkirche” by the photographer Karena Lütge. The artist documented the entire process of dismantling the church of Saint Thérèse in Stadtwald (Essen), transforming its disappearance into a sensitive tribute. (fig)

### / beachurch: where is the beach?

The BEACHURCH project emerges from a dual observation: on the one hand, the increasing number of churches in the Ruhr Area that are closed, underused, or facing demolition; on the other, the urgent need to rethink public space as a vehicle for rebuilding community ties in territories marked by deindustrialisation, social mobility, and urban fragmentation.

Rather than interpreting these churches merely as remnants of a fading religiosity, the project proposes their symbolic and functional reconversion through an urban metaphor: the church as a beach.

Here, the beach is not understood solely as a physical location, but as a radically open social construct—where diverse bodies converge, temporalities slow down, and informal modes of coexistence emerge. As a paradigmatic liminal space—between land and water, nature and culture—the beach embodies a form of non-hierarchical public space, free from formal prescriptions, accommodating both solitude and collectivity, ritual and play.

BEACHURCH thus invites us to imagine and activate a network of disused churches reconfigured as new civic infrastructures, open to hybrid uses and collectively reimagined alongside artists, architects, residents and cultural practitioners. This is not simply about assigning a new function to these spaces, but about re-signifying their urban presence as sites of encounter, hospitality and shared meaning-making.

The question “Where is the beach?” functions both as a provocation and a working hypothesis. If beaches do not perhaps we can create their symbolic equivalents in the heart of our neighbourhoods: spaces where time expands, hierarchies dissolve and common life becomes possible once again.

In this sense, BEACHURCH offers a contemporary reading of the sacred—not through the lens of institutional faith, but through the political and affective need to reconstitute the commons. In every church, a potential beach. In every neighbourhood, an invitation to relearn how to be together.

### / proposal for an International Conference: “New Uses for Churches in Transition”

In the context of the profound social, demographic and cultural shifts taking place across Europe, the future of disused religious buildings—particularly churches—has become a pressing and complex issue. Countries such as the United Kingdom and the Netherlands are several years ahead in addressing these challenges, while others, including Spain and Italy, are only beginning to confront the scale of the problem. Yet across all nations, churches are becoming increasingly empty, and the cost of their upkeep is often too great to maintain them in a proper state.

This international conference proposes to bring together researchers, architects, artists, institutional representatives and community stakeholders to discuss the challenges and opportunities related to the transformation and adaptive reuse of ecclesiastical heritage. The sharing of experiences—both positive and negative—across different countries can help avoid repeating past mistakes and foster innovative solutions, ensuring that this vast and widely distributed heritage is not irretrievably lost.

The Ruhr Area, with its dense industrial and social history, provides a paradigmatic case. Dozens of churches that once served as vital community centres for mining neighbourhoods now stand closed, abandoned, or threatened with demolition. Yet due to the opacity of many dioceses, no comprehensive public inventory of their current condition or future prospects exists.

One of the key objectives of the conference will be to promote the establishment of a “Ruhr Area Churches Observatory” and the development of a full catalogue that compiles architectural and historical data, as well as assessments of future potential—whether as sites of memory or as spaces for collective reinvention.



**tentative images of  
urban actions**



*This is not a church.*





*Sous l'église, la plage!*







*Where is the beach?*





*From altar to shelter*





*The floating post-church*

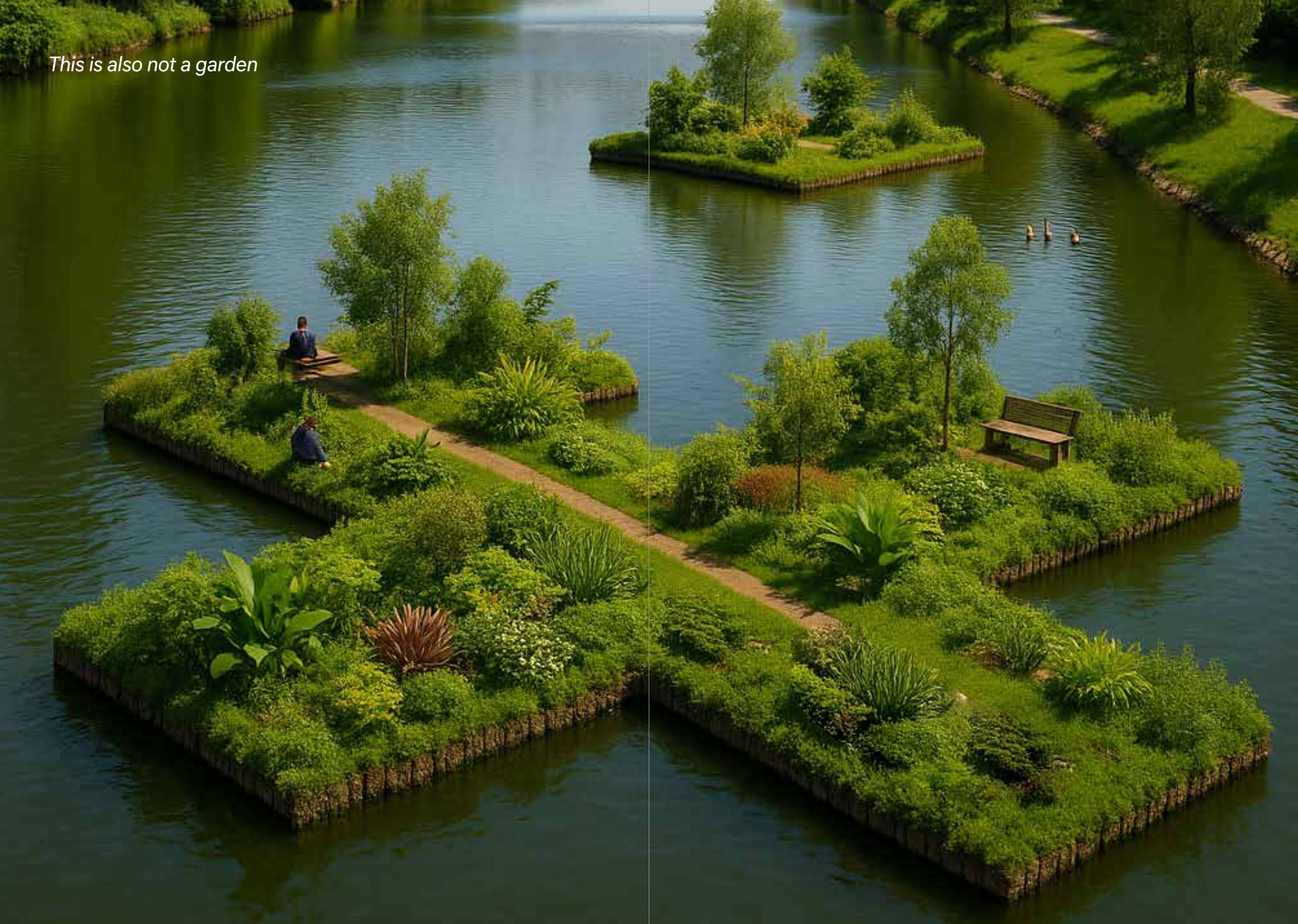








*This is also not a garden*









*Bicicletada*



*Re-source re-cycling center*









*Batism revisited*





Holly market







Climate shelter



Liebfrauenkirche, Duisburg  
second hand market



Heilige Familie, Oberhausen  
food bank





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Maria Martínez-Artero, Architect

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Tatiana Tarragó, Head of Production and Programming  
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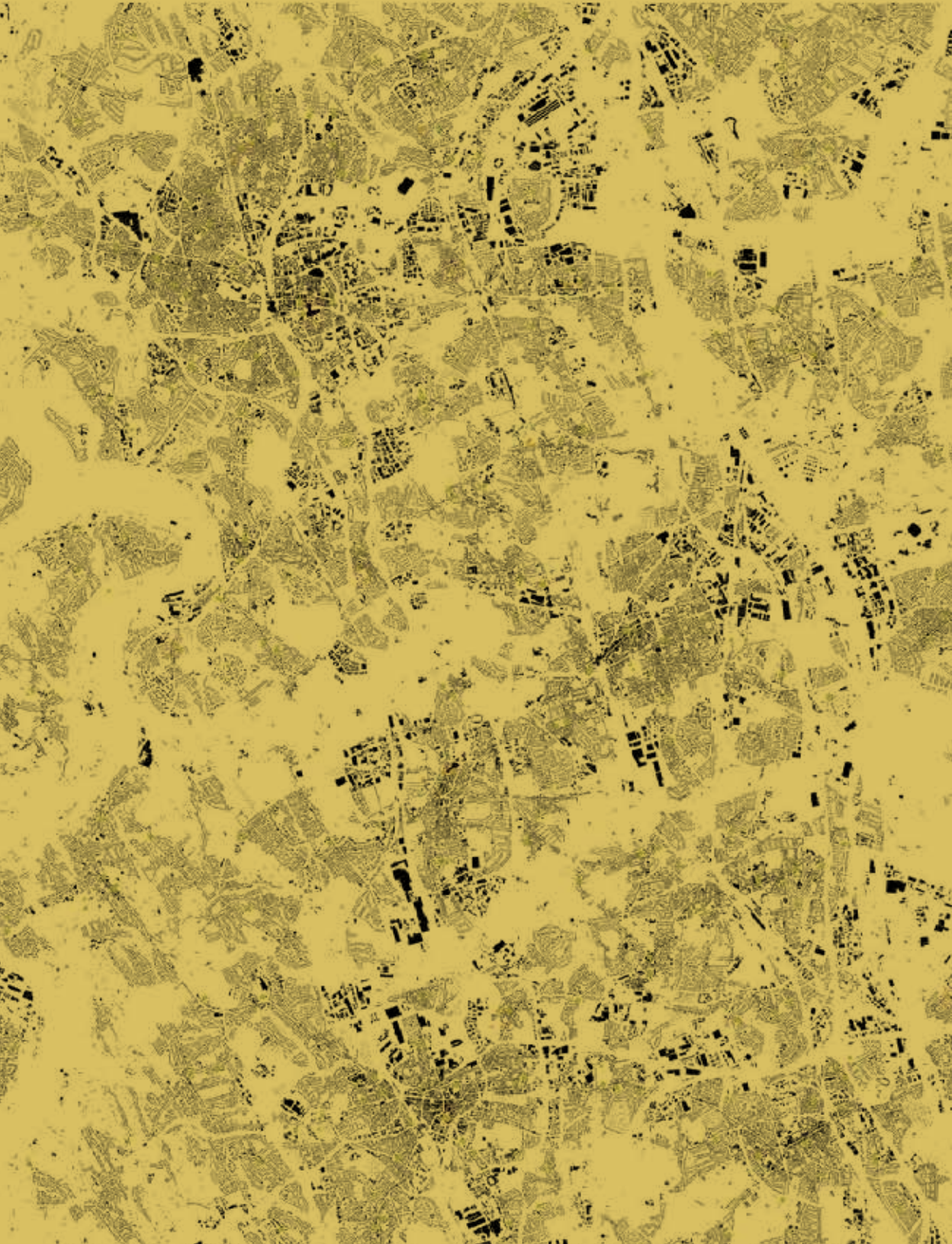
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Christa Reicher, Architect and Urban designer  
Stephan Hilterhaus, Artistic Director of PACT Zollverein





MANIFESTA

REGIONALVERBAND  
**RUHR**

Ministerium für  
Kultur und Wissenschaft  
des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen

