

# THE TERRITORY AS A DUAL MANDATE FOR URBANISM

## A case in South-West-Flanders

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**Abstract:** *By means of a research by design of a case in South-West-Flanders, the question is raised how one can understand 'site' in the hybrid field and put its meaning into play in a design process. Akin to cities that seldom can be understood as coherent wholes, hybrid territories are complex. Therefore tools of descriptive urbanism to deal with ongoing transformation processes as well as to substantiate criteria for spatial quality are explored. Moreover, it is postulated that a shifting gaze towards the dynamics manifest in open space instead of focusing on spread built substrates involves a possible manoeuvre to approach the structuring capacity of hybrid space – the potential of the site.*

### 1. Introduction

In this paper I will explore the epistemological value of descriptive urbanism to unfold the potential of 'site' in hybrid territories. Sébastien Marot (2003) proposes *sub-urbanism* to direct attention to the third territorial state that is neither urban nor rural. In the meantime, the idea of *sub-urbanism* entails a subversion of urbanism in redirecting emphasis from programme to site – site as the regulatory idea of the project. By means of a research by design of a case in South-West-Flanders, the question is raised how one can understand *site* in the hybrid field and put its meaning into play in a design process. Object of interest are the dynamics manifest in open space instead of focusing on spread built substrates. It is believed this shifting gaze from the built up space to the open space involves a possible manoeuvre to make descriptive urbanism operational in Marot's narrative and to approach in general the problem of giving structure to hybrid territories.

### 2. Revisiting descriptive urbanism

Descriptive urbanism is a recent (re)introduced discourse in urbanism that deals with the actual *production of space*<sup>1</sup> rather than *things in space*.<sup>2</sup> It finds its basis to a large extent in the reading of

the factual physical space and in the interpretation of the actual modes of transformation and mutation of the territory. In this reading, spatial patterns are considered the reflection on, but also the active carrier of, a variety of economic and social realities. To understand the complex stratification of these patterns of (self) organisation, descriptive urbanism brings forward a need to combine different ways of looking upon the urban territory. Not the fragmented and labyrinthine vision of space, neither the detached birds eye perspective, but a multiple reading of the territory – crossing different scales and fields of knowledge - can uncover its hidden logics.

Descriptive urbanism explores urbanising territories and particularly is challenged by *'the relations between town and territory which had been perceived as chaotic and without conceivable connections'* (Vigano, 2001, 15). Initial object of research was the general idea of the contemporary territory being a diffuse urban space, an urban nebula. Consequently, the problem of giving structure to hybrid territories has been primarily confronted by facing the fundamental question of the capacity of the dispersed built environment. While having proven to be a powerful approach to the matter, thereby referring to the atlas fascicles by Bruno De Meulder and Michiel Dehaene (2001) and to the concept of the 'eclectic atlas' by Stefano Boeri (2003), this particular vision is yet challenged. Another tale has emerged in projects like the Salento Park by Paola Vigano (2001) and Bernardo Secchi, and in some projects inscribed in the discourse of landscape urbanism (Shannon, 2004). They use landscape and ecology as a matter of urbanism and question the capacity of open space to not only be the scene of evolution, but to become the carrier of processes that move between society and space. This research inscribes itself in the search for the structuring capacity of open space.

Notwithstanding the shifting gaze towards the open territory, the framework of an eclectic multiple reading is considered adequate to deal with the *site* in the hybrid field. Design studies focus on South-West-Flanders, a region historically characterised by a settlement pattern that is dispersed and dense at the same time.<sup>3</sup> Being emblematic for contemporary Flanders, the image of this hybrid landscape is one of a heterogeneous space in continuous transformation. It is forged by urbanisation and agriculture, consumption and production. Consequently, the open space represents not a black hole that can freely be filled in, neither a 'negative space'<sup>4</sup>, but rather a territory where multiple logics of agriculture, recreation, dispersed living and working, operate simultaneously. It appears dynamic as spatial consequence of the rapid change of society: the sectors of agriculture, recreation and industry, are in a state of flux, constantly evolving and diversifying. As such, akin to cities that

seldom can be understood as coherent wholes, it reveals a stratification – a multiple and/or condition - that is not readable as a whole. Complexity has spread towards the countryside and insinuates the need for methodological tools of urbanism.

Descriptive urbanism underpins the act of designing as a research process of territorial transformation mechanisms – image and imagination as a laboratory to learn about the existing (De Meulder, Dehaene, 2004). The discourse is in this research translated into five phases that practically organise the investigation. First is the selection of the case study. Second, a close reading of the territory explores the complex stratification in a selective sample of layers. Third, the detected modes of mutation / transformation are extrapolated in scenarios. Fourth, a filter of qualitative criteria negotiates the legitimacy of existing and future dynamics. And finally, the descriptive exercise creates a spatial concept for a sustainable future that qualitatively accommodates the existing territorial dynamic and unlocks hidden potentials. In the three last mentioned parts, the elaboration of a vision is at stake. In this process, the designerly exploration of development strategies interacts with the construction of a vocabulary and grammatical language to deal with spatial quality.<sup>5</sup>

a. Selection of the case study

The purpose is to investigate an open productive landscape in transformation and under urbanisation pressure. To read the hidden *rules* behind the transformation dynamics the research zooms into a square of 1800 ha of the territory. Then, for the same area, the generative capacity of these rules to direct the further mutation of the hybrid territory is explored (De Meulder, Dehaene, 2004).

The selected territory is a traditional agricultural area in South-West-Flanders embedding the towns of Westrozebeke and Oostnieuwkerke (fig. 1). It is situated west of the city of Roeselare that has become an economic growth pole since the last decades. The city's centrality is especially formed by a network of economical and agriculture supporting entities. Besides the present port and the canal link with the river Leie, the presence of the vegetable auction, the deepfreeze and cattle cake industry, the slaughterhouse, research centres for agriculture, agriculture schools and headquarters of important agricultural associations, give impulse to the dynamics of the surrounding productive landscape. Mainly specialisation and intensification of agricultural practices seem to occur, while at the same time 'exogenous' forms of territorial consumption are forced by sectors of infrastructure, recreation, housing and industry.

b. Layered narratives<sup>6</sup>

The observations of existing territorial phenomena are structured in a selective sample of layers. Each layer encompasses the reading of behavioural patterns of a number of actors and the way in which they have either a structuring impact on the territory or not. The act of territorial reading – diachronic or synchronic - is also conceived as a way to gather data on key issues and to reflect on the critical points in the present territorial state. Hence a selection is made that is most significant for the territorial dynamic. In this case study it especially includes the interpretation of production patterns and agricultural transformation.

The historic settlement patterns that have been directive for shaping human society are revealed in the first group of layers '*Structures of nature; Micro territories of farms; Smooth villages; Small hamlets*'. An early and complete territorial utilisation by farms was conditioned by the geography of fertile lands, topography and water streams. Initial settlements smoothly inscribed in the landscape, underlined with windmills and chapels point by point the territorial order of repetition. The territorial mosaic revealed an order of a spread grid inscribed within the topography. It was determined by the structure of the parcels and landscape elements which are part of the logic of farm running. In a next instance dispersed clusters of houses emerged as consequence of new economic and infrastructural realities. The farm workers no longer pulled up a chair in the farmstead where they work and used to sleep, instead they commuted between farm and the house they lived in, between city and countryside, between Belgium and France. These small hamlets instigate the disconnection of the relation housing – landscape, leaving the productive landscape a life of its own.

The following layers '*Agricultural invasion; Livestock breeding; Horticulture; and Wood relics*' discuss how the change in cultivation and the rationalisation of agriculture accelerated the rate of change in the landscape.<sup>7</sup> Agricultural practice gradually moved away from the closed self-sufficient system that typified a symbiosis between arable farming and cattle-breeding at the scale of each farm. This transition set in since 1870-1880 when arable farming lost its major role through the invasion of American cereals. Mixed farming did hold, but livestock breeding and horticulture got more attention. Initially fields and woods were converted to grazing lands. Separated by natural elements, they created more closed productive landscapes while increasing acreage for more extensive or less labour-intensive forms of cattle breeding. Since the 1950s, as consequence of technological innovations and national and European agricultural policy, the territory underwent a

large scale restructuring characterised by a strong splitting up and specialisation of agricultural activities. In the region of Westrozebeke-Oostnieuwkerke, besides local tradition and stimulating agrarian centralities, also the exhaustibility of land and the multiple actors contributed to a dominant switch to more intensive or profitable cultivations. Especially cultivations not depending on large surfaces of land such as pig farming, intensive cultivation of vegetables and greenhouse production have been organised in space. Landscape patterns are affected by these shifting factors and the increasing proportion of built versus open underlines the change in character of the productive landscape.

Finally, three layers '*Housing; Upgraded economy; and Disrupted agriculture*' emphasise the movement (of space) between the various sectors occupying the territory. Transformations of the agricultural sector as well as impositions from the outside cause the shrinking of agricultural land. Developing the affluent society, housing extensions were imposed to enable 'living in the countryside' for not farming residents. They were often new ribbon developments, allotments and house construction projects on wetter grounds. The impulse to live royally on the countryside has partly changed the landscape towards a 'lawn landscape' of consumption - from cultivated land to 'fermette', from farmstead to 'villa', from wood relict to residential wood.

While the farmers also contributed to the condensation of spread housing in creatively dealing with spatial policies, they most importantly played a role in the emergence of another productive landscape. After both the 1st and 2nd world war, the 'industrialisation' of agriculture in the municipality started with the rise and growth of companies which have especially focused on the processing and manufacturing of agricultural goods (Staden, 1998). Still a boundless industrial supply of machine manufacturing, freight transport, raw materials for agriculture, building material for sheds, hangars, greenhouses, heating installations, storage bins and containers, etc, supports locally the modernisation of agriculture. Driven by development dynamics at the scale of each parcel, it mostly involves an evolved conversion of former farmsteads that were scattered in the open landscape. As a result, besides some (new) industrial grains attached to large scale transport infrastructures that reveal the contemporary territorial hierarchy, the majority of the large grains are lost in the open landscape what scale and transport is concerned. Moreover, while one could expect that these dynamics would eliminate agriculture from unfavourable terrain, farms still exist randomly dispersed in the territory. At the same time, farmers are encouraged to intensify their activities because the surface for agricultural activities is limited and becomes even more limited

due to the emergence of many other actors in the rural field. Consequently, problematic issues of erosion come along with the overuse of less suited ground for agricultural purposes.

c. Scenarios

The contemporary territory of Westrozebeke-Oostnieuwkerke is exemplary for what De Meulder and Dehaene (2001) have described as an ad hoc landscape, a landscape of many words and little sentences. The region has always been characterised by an intense cohabitation / coexistence of productive space and landscape - it was always *and* landscape *and* productive space. The transformations in the landscape are, until today, particularly driven on the one hand by development dynamics at the scale of each parcel, on the other, but in a lesser extent, by large scale infrastructures (road system, agricultural centralities). These mainly incremental transformations have led to several problems that exceed the scale of the parcel. The problem is defined related to one, the dynamic of the territorial transformation and mutation and two, the nature and identity of the territory that are considered under *d. Qualitative filter*.

[1] The territory is a coherent surface whereby change in one place most often implicates consequences at another place. In Westrozebeke-Oostnieuwkerke, a problem of shared space and a problem of shared water attribute to this coherence as consequence of the dense coexistence of multiple actors that occupy the territory. It is a composition of different habitats - agricultural, recreational, residential, and industrial - which together totally consume the space, leaving no space in the margin. Thus, the elasticity of space (and the availability of water in the deep and undep ground levels) is very limited to answer their various social, economic or ecological needs, especially as these needs are evolving.

To investigate how existing and future dynamics can be accommodated in space, the notion of time, of modification, is in the descriptive exercise introduced via scenarios<sup>8</sup>. It is a tool used to deal with over-determination and uncertainty that are inherent to the actual territorial evolution. Partial and polarizing scenarios are formulated for the different claims and illustrate the open development process of the territory. What will happen if horticulture becomes the main agricultural activity? What will happen if pig farming is the dominant trend? What will happen if nature can grow and spread? What will happen if water is used as a structuring element for giving form to the territory? In these 'What if scenarios' the spatial reflection of future processes is imagined and tested to the actual spatial characteristics of the case study (present activities, soil constitution, topography,

opening up of areas). It is based on the extrapolation of the actual transformation mechanisms detected in the layers of self organisation as read in the first part. Some scenarios are inviting in a direction, for instance the evolution towards more nature. But in totality the scenarios are conflicting and illustrate a play of frictions. Hence the scenarios should not be considered alternatives, but a tool to inquire the superimposition in the territory, the fact of cohabitation.

d. Qualitative filter

[2] The contemporary landscape of Westrozebeke-Oostnieuwkerke is an amalgamation of different grids or logics. Yet possible plain contrasts in the landscape are blurred because all kind in-between types emerged. The pace new layers are added to the already intensively and multidimensional exploitation of the landscape - or in which old systems are rewritten - is high. In the continuous proliferation of difference, the actual dynamic leads paradoxically to an isotropic reality of disorder. In other words, the multiplication of difference is rendering the difference meaningless. Consequently, the landscape has eroded and lacks any structure, readability or minimal coherence (fig. 2).

From multiple reading to scenarios to spatial image, is not a simple deduction process.<sup>9</sup> It is a process of imagination; imagination not as a fantasy, but as a search for a renewed link with the reality. *'This exertion is an iterative and dialectic process in which allied operations alternate: imagination as reflection, the construction of a mirror, imagination as test, the construction of a hypothesis (...), imagination as a projection of what isn't yet, but could be.'*<sup>10</sup> As such it is not only about the accommodation of existing and future dynamics, but also about the restructuring of forms of production and consumption with a new and different idea of space. It means the existing ones are re-interpreted and used in new ways in the process of imagination. To approach this restructuring we use the addition of a qualitative filter that negotiates what is legitimate (fig. 3).

First, to answer the lack of spatial quality and in search of a possible direction of the play between the many actors, the qualitative filter includes the creation of an intermediate scale in the landscape - a scale that is able to mediate between the parcel and the landscape as a whole. The idea is to activate a structuring effect on the physical environment by dissolving the isotropy and give significance to the difference. Therefore various fields of tensions inherent to the hybrid territory but at the moment only latently present, are detected and unlocked. They include: grid / texture, scale / scope, enclosure / disclosure, repetition / contrast, resistance / sensitivity. Former reasoning

is, to a large extent, related to Eastern conceptions of spatial quality. Like Jusuck Koh (2005) describes, these conceptions seek the state of integration with internal differentiation by operating with bipolarities of rock / water, yin / yang, in which each can only be explained by reference to the other. Thus the hybrid landscape is configured by articulating its self, its ambiguity.

Second, the qualitative filter simultaneously seeks for a 'minimal rationalisation' and optimisation, a greatest win/win situation between the different activities. In this search the designing of the landscape, the creation of order and measure, is related to the functional use of the landscape (Sijmons, 2002).

Third, the qualitative filter aims to make the idea of time visible in the territory and to create many levels of significance in the time-depth. The structuring capacity, '*a capacity to embody, in built form, the prehistory of the place, its archaeological past and its subsequent cultivation and transformation across time*' is part of '*the critical capacity of the landscape to resist the notion of placelessness and physical homogenization of the territory*' as Frampton has described it (quoted in Shannon, 2004, 114). Therefore an explicit inner territorial logic makes it easier for the landscape to absorb change and leave room for human coincidence. When permanence and change have struck a balance - change within constancy and constancy within change, it is at the same time a strategy to generate a balance between (recreated) coherence and variation.

e. Spatial image (fig. 4)

Secchi (2004) put the considerations of concept and image in quite an articulated manner: '*The concept attempts to express the fundamental aspects of an interpretation of reality as well as its design projection.*' Image is proposed as a tool to deal with collective imagination; a possible way to contain a consensus of the territory or of moving collective imaginary in one direction.

Central in this case study is the approach of space that can transcend as well as mediate between contradictions. The concept for reorganising the territory has been conceived as a play wherein various actors are orchestrated to find sustainable ways of cohabitation - from hybrid territory towards landscape of cohabitation. In this process agriculture is questioned as a structuring anchor of the dispersed territory.

It is proposed to restructure the open landscape of Westrozebeke-Oostnieuwkerke in a landscape that is composed of multiple micro-landscapes. Each micro-landscape aims at a characteristic system or coherence by selectively bringing together specific dynamics that transform the territory. Thus, for each micro-landscape it is specified what types and degrees of change are likely to be allowed, encouraged or discouraged. In this conceptual shift from a play of frictions of parallel divergent landscapes towards the cohabitation in complex micro-habitats - ecologies of unlike species, we want to investigate the possible valorisation of the hybrid condition in space. Hence, the concept is offering space for the and/and condition and not endeavouring or/or conditions. It is not consumption or production, greenhouse activity or open air cultivation, not living or working, not landscape or agriculture. The combined production of landscape and agriculture can take on different shapes. A compact closed productive landscape where greenhouses and housing determine narrow views or an open 'traditional' landscape with stamps of concentrated activity (housing, farms) are just two extremes.

One strategy to structure the micro-landscapes is the use of 'growth lines'<sup>11</sup>. These lines are conceived as linear elements that tie up the micro-landscapes by functioning as border or as linking element. They act as line of confrontation between two micro-landscapes (longitudinal growth lines) or they shape the interaction between the micro-landscapes by crossing them (transversal growth lines). It possibly involves existing structures in the landscape on which future developments can be grafted (natural elements, roads) or new structures (water networks and basins, recreation paths). Besides areas / surface, and growth lines that give texture to the image, the aesthetic dimension is underpinned by the qualitative filter that brings contrast and logic in the landscape. *One can imagine feeling an ease, a pleasure, from understanding the relationship between activities as one moves through the distinct, expressive environments evolving on the different growth lines.*

This image is not to be understood as a comprehensive plan, it is part of a vision. Strategies underpin the actual organisation of the production of space, the implementation of the vision. Therefore, in a next step, strategic spaces and projects should be identified, which allow for punctual interventions to design / give form to the hybrid territory. At the same time a language of commitments needs to be written that inspires correlated policies.<sup>12</sup>

### 3. Dual mandate?

The interpretation of *site as the regulatory idea of the project* implicates an understanding beyond the natural characteristics of the area. As Marot (2003) explains, it points at the *substrate* of our practices of territorial development that embodies the history of the place and social practices of today. In projecting following quote of Freud (Ornstein, 1992, 181) about the functioning of memory to the physic environment, one can understand how the territory is staging evolution and time. *‘Our psychic mechanism has come into being by a process of stratification; the material present in the form of memory traces being subjected from time to time to a rearrangement ... - to a retranscription ... memory is present not once but several times over.’* The landscape (and the site) is characterised and enriched by centuries of change and modification. Its stratification is not a static coexistence of multiple independent layers, but could be considered a *palimpsest*: traces of former writing interact with new words.<sup>13</sup>

Specific to the hybrid territory is the materialisation through time of a dynamic imbalance between dichotomies of consumption / production, urbanisation / agriculture. Territorial hybrid reality can for instance be traced as a coexistence of two layers (urban-rural), with each its transformation dynamics. The hypothesis however is that reality does not associate with the contrast between these two layers, but rather with their interaction.<sup>14</sup> Hence the dual mandate for urbanism is to be found in the manner of dealing with this active relationship to achieve a significant integration of the two layers. One should therefore understand, besides spatial patterns related to consumption, patterns of organisation processes of production.

The opportunity to valorise the state of ‘in-between’ of the hybrid territory is thus not be found in a *tabula rasa* or a nostalgic search for what was before. Retaking Freud’s idea of memory, it is rather related to adding a strategic, well chosen, layer(s) that brings in motion a *retranscription* of the place. As such, the dual task relies on a critical recognition of the existing – the accommodation of existing but legitimate dynamics - while envisioning the new. It encompasses a love-hate relationship with the actual territory. While the reading of its dynamic is reliant on empathy, its reconfiguration through a new connotation, in a manner of revealing (latent) territorial quality, mostly implies a radical disruption. Moreover, the envisioned ‘new state’ is considered (not more then) one phase in a process, one line in the ‘biography of the landscape’.<sup>15</sup> In the *retranscription*, urbanism should therefore create a hybrid territory receptive for future transformations of production as well as consumption, while activating a qualitative coexistence. In other words, its

task is to create space for a *polythesis*: thesis and antithesis that find a synthesis, over and over again.

The objective is a reconfiguration of the hybrid place towards a more qualitative whole – a qualitative synthesis. The conclusion of the research by design is that descriptive urbanism is a versatile tool to obtain this objective. It is a method that has as its aim a more complex understanding of change in order to create future landscapes. This notion underpins the capacity of design to deal with ambivalence and even conflict. Moreover, the descriptive discourse allows for a shifting focus towards the open space. In this shift, it moves towards the four attitudes that Marot (2003) relates to his alternative approach: '*an active regard for the memory of the site; a vision of site and design as processes rather than products; an in-depth rather than planar reading of open spaces; and a conception of site and design as fields of relations rather than as arrangements of objects*'. This broadening of descriptive urbanism might be termed descriptive sub-urbanism. However, both terms need to be put in perspective: on the one hand it is a qualitative and interpretative approach rather than a quantitative and descriptive<sup>16</sup>, on the other sub-urbanism refers to sites that have been subsumed, in one way or another, by the suburban condition rather than to the more narrow interpretation of the suburbs, outer edge of the city. Essential is the emphasis on the suburban or peripheral condition: a state that is neither urban nor rural; or being simultaneously both, a singular third state characterised by rural-urban interaction.

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<sup>1</sup> The French sociologist Henri Lefebvre (1991) began writing about the 'production of space' more than two decades ago. He links the physical to the social, thereby suggesting that space is a medium through which social life is produced and reproduced.

<sup>2</sup> One could refer for example to: Dehaene, De Meulder (2003); De Meulder, Dehaene (2001); Koolhaas, Boeri (2000); Secchi (1992); Sijmons (2002); and Vigano (2001).

<sup>3</sup> A good overview of research that explored spatial identity and dynamics in South-West-Flanders can be found in: De Meulder, Dehaene (2001) and De Meulder, Vandenbroucke (2004).

<sup>4</sup> This was claimed by Xaveer De geyter (2002).

<sup>5</sup> Besides to urbanism, the developed research methodology owes its inspiration to approaches from complementary disciplines that relate more directly to the open landscape. For instance, the Historic Landscape Characterisation programme (HCL) has been most important in the way it is concerned with questions of how to protect and manage dynamic rural landscapes. In the consideration of the landscape as a whole, they place inevitable future change in the context of long-term historic meaning. See, for example: Clark, Darlington, Fairclough (2004); and Fairclough (2004).

<sup>6</sup> 'Layered narratives' is an expression borrowed from Kelly Shannon's doctoral thesis (2004). In this research it covers the interpretation of both historic traces and existing spatial structures in relation to contemporary society.

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<sup>7</sup> Knowledge of the history and evolution of agriculture in Belgium is mainly gathered on the basis of Segers, Van Molle (2004).

<sup>8</sup> The term ‘scenario’ is widely taken under consideration by Bernardo Secchi (2004) in *‘Diary of a planner’, 06 Scenarios; 08 Three words; and 10 Projects, visions, scenarios*. He develops the idea of ‘scenarios’ as a tool to answer the problems of uncertainty and over-determination of territorial transformations: *‘Scenario is a term referring to a future – whether good or evil – foreseen as possible. (...) True scenarios are attempts at inquiring into “what would happen if...”. (...) If, in an overly-determined field of phenomena, such as territorial transformations, some aspects are isolated and we ask what would happen if these phenomena reached their extreme or probable consequences, we obtain images from the future – scenarios – that are partially incompatible. And it is just their partial antagonism that makes them interesting.’*

<sup>9</sup> Secchi elaborated this notion in his lecture ‘Re-creative city: a vision for the city of Antwerp’ (Leuven, 26<sup>th</sup> April 2005) by comparing the process of design research with the act of climbing. The climber chooses a certain path without the possibility of knowing everything. Therefore he imagines the path with least difficulties, the path one follows without doing illogical passes. Once the climber arrives at the top, he feels secure although without knowing if the path was the most appropriate one.

<sup>10</sup> *‘Deze arbeid is een iteratief en dialectisch proces, waarin verwante operaties elkaar afwisselen: verbeelding als reflectie, de constructie van een spiegel, verbeelding als toetsing, de constructie van een hypothese (...), de verbeelding als projectie of speculatie over wat nog niet is, maar zou kunnen zijn.’* (De Meulder, Dehaene, 2004, 59)

<sup>11</sup> ‘Growth lines’ is an expression borrowed from Stevens, McNulty (1970) in which it is associated with the nerves of a leaf.

<sup>12</sup> The subsequent steps are inspired by the document structure of the Strategic Structure Plan of Antwerp as it was presented by Bernardo Secchi (Leuven, 26<sup>th</sup> April 2005): 1. Vision (scenarios / images); 2. Spatial Policies (Strategic Spaces / Strategic themes and projects); 3. Commitments.

<sup>13</sup> *‘A palimpsest was parchment used as writing material one or more times after earlier material had been erased. The word derives from the Greek palimpsestos, meaning “to scrape again”. The scraping does not obviously do away with all the traces of former writing since some of the words that were there may survive sporadically.’* (Suberchicot, 2005, 46)

The notion has also been explored at length in Corboz, Marot (2001).

<sup>14</sup> The same hypothesis is researched upon in the project of the Salento Park (Vigano, 2001).

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<sup>15</sup> This consideration is shared by many authors in many fields. For instance Koh (2005) in the field of landscape ecology: *'What we are designing in this ecological view, I believe, are not 'form', 'space' or 'function' as Modernists had led us to believe, but 'system', 'process', and our 'embodied experiences' thereof.'* See also: Fairclough (2004) and Latz (2003).

<sup>16</sup> In general, 'description' is interpreted in the context of positivist science as an act of observation in which the subject observes in a passive manner the object. However, amongst others, André Corboz has reflected on the significance of the active dimension of the descriptive act in his essay *'La description: entre lecture et écriture'* (Corboz, Marot, 2001, 249-257). Most often an (implicit) intention of the subject is preceding the descriptive operation, while the description changes the nature of the object. In other words, in the act of reading, the subject is transforming the object.