

Metropolitan Landscapes?

Grappling with the urban in landscape design

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Abstract

On January 2016, a joint consortium of the Flemish and Brussels Chief Architects published *Metropolitan Landscapes. Espaces ouverts, base de développement urbain/Open ruimte als basis voor stedelijke ontwikkeling*. Based on the assumption that open spaces have the potential to spur and structure future urban development and surpass administrative boundaries, Metropolitan Landscapes presents research by design, authored by four prominent design firms with the intention of jumpstarting conversations about a shared spatial vision for the fragmented territory of Brussels and its periphery.

In this article, we examine the methodology and definitions put forth by Bureau Bas Smets & List, explore the historical context that has rendered the landscape approach so promising in Brussels, and perform a thematic and critical reading of the four projects and their underlying rationale. These projects demonstrate the potential of landscape to engender novel territorial solutions. However, by choosing to ignore competing spatial claims and tending towards a techno-managerial rationale based on infrastructural and ecological systems, these designs raise questions as to the capacity of the landscape approach to deal with ever-present socio-political concerns in Brussels.

Keywords

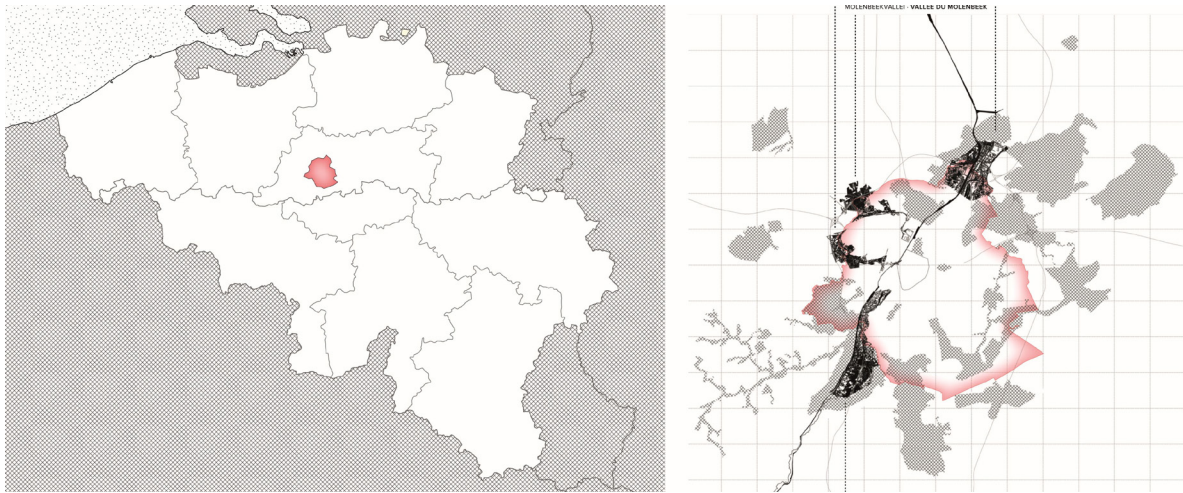
Metropolitan Landscapes; Bureau Bas Smets & List; Brussels; urban design; landscape design; design methodology

Introduction

On 28th January 2016, the publication *Metropolitan Landscapes. Espaces ouvert, base de développement urbain/Open ruimte als basis voor stedelijke ontwikkeling (open space as a base for development)* was presented to the public. Intended to jumpstart conversation about a shared spatial vision for Brussels, the publication encompasses research by design authored by prominent design firms exploring ‘the capacity of open space to take up an active and structuring role in the qualitative development of the urban space’ of Brussels and its environment (Mabilde & Vanempten, 2016, p. 11). The project areas are located at the peri-urban fringe of the Brussels Capital Region, intersecting with rigid administrative borders as well as hard infrastructural edges like highways and railways, and are further fragmented on a smaller scale by ribbon development, subdivisions, agricultural land, and undefined in-between open space. Commissioned by a consortium of the Flemish and Brussels Chief Architects and both ‘urban’ and ‘open space’ planning administrations, four design teams formulated proposals exploring the potential of a landscape lens within the context of the ‘horizontal metropolis’ of Brussels, defined by a common urbanity while being territorially and administratively splintered (Dejemeppe & Périlleux, 2012). Eric Corijn, André Loeckx and Freek Persyn elucidate in the final, critical chapter on the strategic choice of open space as crux of design: ‘Many open spaces around the city escape speculative overpressure: protected as green space, set aside as leftover space of real estate development, abandoned private property, ...’ Focusing on open landscape as a new paradigm for urbanisation, *Metropolitan Landscapes* aims at evading competing claims and real-estate pressures associated with high-density urban projects, thus unlocking the terrain for experiment and dialogue within the tense context of Brussels. What’s more, the open space entry surfs the wave of a renewed interest in an ecosystem approach as an antidote to the disruptive excesses of the industrial, capitalist society and political appropriation strategies (Corijn, Loeckx, & Persyn, 2016, p. 172).

Urban processes in Brussels – top-down, bottom-up and the landscape alternative

The landscape approach embodied in *Metropolitan Landscapes* did not come out of thin air, and owes its existence to the troubled history of Brussels’ urbanisation. It offers an alternative to a specific history of brutal, top-down interventions fragmenting the urban tissue in Brussels, as well as to the strong bottom-up movements and small, punctual projects resulting from this tradition. The binary opposition between top-down and bottom-up planning has marked the course of Brussels’ urbanisation, and until recently resulted in a perceived absence of a common urban project for the city. In order to understand this opposition, one must dive into the rather recent history of the Brussels metropolis. By the middle of the 20th century, the historic urban fabric of Brussels had already experienced large-scale demolition works, mostly due to the construction of a major railway line, central station, and grand boulevards. However, some consider the real shift in Brussels urbanism to have happened in the 1950s, when the government opened up the city to large scale vehicular traffic and undertook the simultaneous construction of multiple highways in view of the international world fair of 1958 (Leloutre, 2009, p. 174). One might add to this the placement of the European institutions in Brussels, the programmatic destruction and reconstruction of the quartier du Nord, the indiscriminating erasure of historic buildings and urban fabrics in and around the city centre, as well as many more traumatic urban interventions undertaken in a manner that was later to become known as ‘Brusselization’ (Brasseur, 1979; State, 2004; Swyngedouw & Baeten, 2001).



a



b

FIGURE 1 The hydrographical and topographical reading of Brussels by Bureau Bas Smets for Brussel 2040. The study restructures the city by connecting all the tributary rivers, offering a landscape reading of the city by basing. The Zenne, however, disappeared because it has been buried (Dejemeppe & Périlleux, 2012, p. 59).

Internationally, Brussels became the prime example of haphazard urban development, driven by a laissez-faire politics, “which featured a lack of detailed and enforced zoning regulations, the desire of municipal authorities to cater to national political interests at the expense of local residents” (State, 2004, p. 52). Although this history is often viewed as a moment in which there was no collective project for Brussels, Géry Leloutre emphasises that these large-scale projects had a common logic of converting the Belgian capital into an international hub, which would tackle the national mobility question and the shortage in housing (Leloutre, 2009, p. 177). With the subsequent rise of protest movements in the seventies and the eighties, an opposing planning culture arose in which participation of local inhabitants would become paramount. Thierry Demey saw the weakness of politicians during the seventies and the eighties, vis-à-vis these aggressive manifestations of private and public promotion, as the very reason for the strong reaction of the sidelined inhabitants (Demey, 1992a, p. 281). By the end of the 1960s, the creation of the *Atelier de Recherche et d’Action Urbaines* (ARAU) and the proliferation of citizen committees around the city initiated a veritable counterculture (Demey, 1992b; Doucet, 2015, p. 40). From 1979 onwards, as an outcome of this counterculture, citizen consultation became an official part of the planning process with the creation of the *Plan Secteur*, or regional plan, which legalised reactions to urban projects (Doucet, 2015, p. 141). However, only after the creation of the Brussels Region in 1989 did this counterculture gain a truly active voice in a new planning apparatus, with the instatement of a planning instrument called the neighbourhood contract, or *contrat de quartier* (see chapter 5 of Doucet, 2015), which was designed and funded by the region yet applied on a municipal level. Until recently, these *contrats* were the only real planning tools used by the regional government, thus building up a strong culture of participation, albeit at the expense of any large scale urban projects or a common vision for the Brussels urbanity (Borret, 2017).

According to Brussels Chief Architect Kristiaan Borret, this perceived deadlock was only recently broken down with a new, landscape infused reading of the city structure initiated in the *Brussels 2040* study commissioned by the regional government (Borret, 2017). Borret states that a landscape reading of Brussels urbanity was instrumental in the invention of a new, collective urban project that went beyond the small-scale neighbourhood contracts. In this publication, Bureau Bas Smets forwarded a topological and hydrographical reading of the city (Fig. 1) as a new, cultural way of envisioning the future of Brussels. The valley structure served as a coherent development structure, on which mobility and new housing could be connected (Dejemeppe & Périlleux, 2012, p. 58). This alternative reading of the city fabric runs counter to two centuries of urban practice in Brussels, where rivers were simply covered and the topography ignored. Inserting landscape into planning processes was therefore a novel way of sidestepping the previous oppositions that existed in the city’s history - landscape (urbanism) became a way out of the disciplinary crises of modern planning “through a synthesis of ecological function and design culture” (Waldheim, 2016, p. 50). Metropolitan Landscapes was therefore seen as the next logical step in the promotion of a landscape reading of the Brussels territory, putting forward open space as a new, structuring element in the large-scale planning of the metropolis (as opposed to the small-scale visions of the Neighbourhood Contract).

Metropolitan Landscapes – Defining the Metropolitan?

The research by design methodology for the open landscape is defined by Bureau Bas Smets & List, framing the proposals of (1) WIT Architecten, OSA research group, Annabelle Blin, and Philip Stessens; (2) Coloco, DEVspace, and Gilles Clément; (3) Agence Ter; (4) LOLA Landscape Architects, Floris Alkemade, and Grontmij (see Fig. 2).

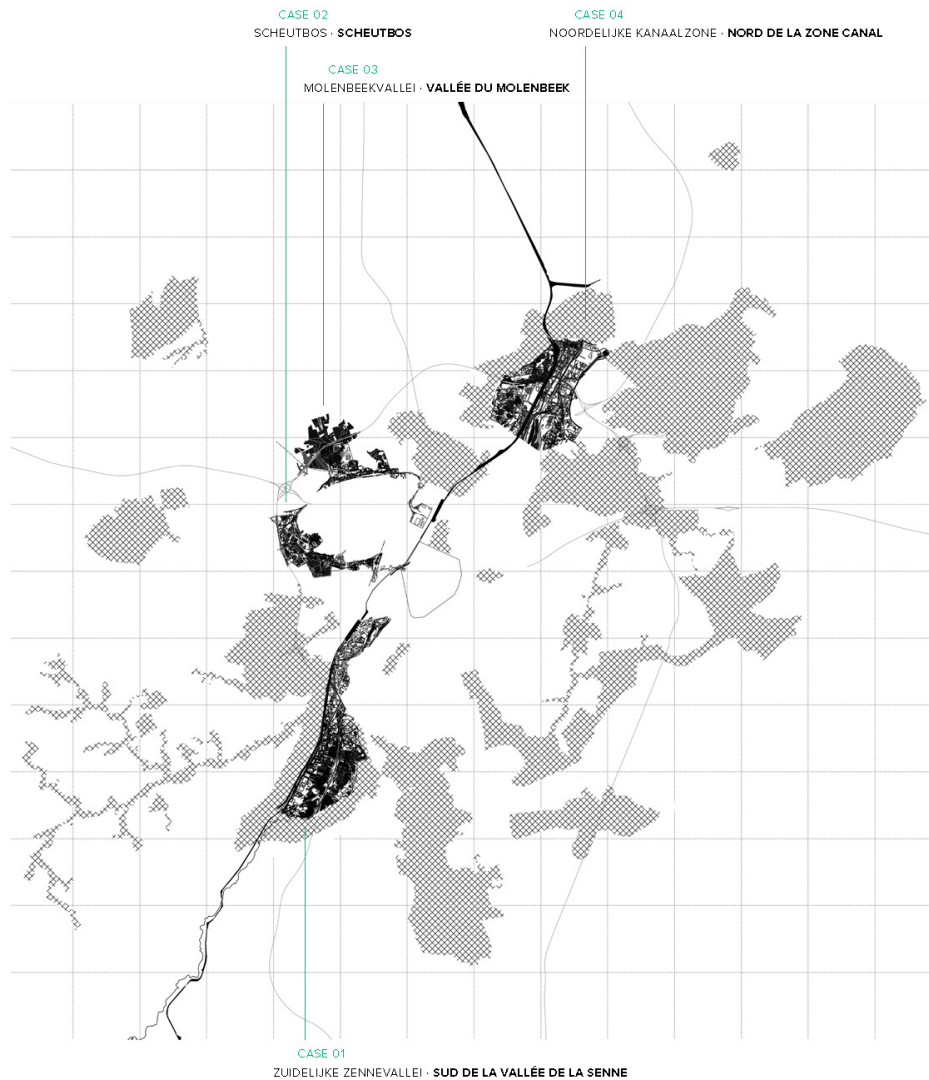


FIGURE 2 The four project areas of Metropolitan Landscapes. (Bureau Bas Smets & List, 2016, p. 57)

Introducing the different proposals, Smets & List clearly outline that the central hypothesis of Metropolitan Landscapes is twofold: First, they stipulate that research by design should explore the potential of open landscape to play a productive, reconciling role in formulating a comprehensive, shared spatial vision for Brussels, beyond administrative borders of municipalities as well as regions – that is the regional border between Brussels and Flanders; Secondly, the proposals should search for ways in which open landscape could prompt a new dynamic and serve as ‘magnetic poles’ around which urban development could be structured (Bureau Bas Smets & List, 2016, pp. 45–46). In contrast to prevailing defensive and passive open space policies geared towards conservation and zoning, the design proposals in Metropolitan Landscapes aim at reimagining open space in view of development and networking. Open space is reconceptualised as a dynamic networked structure, or as the spatial nuclei around which urbanisation and its actors assemble. Attempting to avoid losing sight of the ultimately urban goal and its associated socio-political drivers when focusing on open space, Smets & List define three criteria that should guarantee the metropolitan character of the landscape, namely, (1) accessibility, (2) adjacent programs, and (3) systemic value. These criteria are then used to identify four key study areas – large-scale landscapes considered to have the potential to incite administrative and spatial interconnection between the city and its periphery, while offering answers to decidedly urban problems.

In the following, we will reflect on these three criteria as they are manifested in the different designs, not as a way to evaluate these proposals or critique the Metropolitan Landscapes study as a whole, but as a means of raising questions and possibly setting an agenda for (open) landscape design, an approach whose attention is increasingly turning towards the city as its object of study. Thus, Metropolitan Landscapes serves as a proxy for such disciplines as Landscape Urbanism and Ecological Urbanism in which, quoting Charles Waldheim's seminal manifesto, 'landscape replaces architecture as the basic building block of contemporary urbanism ... landscape has become both the lens through which the contemporary city is represented and the medium through which it is constructed' (Waldheim, 2006, p. 11). The aim of this article is to question this trope through the designs of Metropolitan Landscapes, thus using the projects instrumentally. Instead of aligning ourselves with operative criticism, which offers solutions resulting from a selective account (McLeod, 1987), we choose to examine the projects in order to call into question certain trends in the broader field of design. More specifically, this article is rooted in a concern about the relation between recent design cultures and the socio-political context in which they seek to intervene, with the associated hypothesis that these designs risk being too disconnected from their socio-political context in order to 'hit the ground' and materialise. These questions incited us to contact the Brussels Chief Architect Kristiaan Borret, who was instrumental in the development of Metropolitan Landscapes. As a strong and influential practice and policy-oriented voice, Borret offered us insider knowledge of actual urban processes and visions in Brussels, thus giving more concrete context to the theoretical and more academically-oriented Metropolitan Landscapes.

Accessibility: making things public?

The first criteria forwarded for a landscape to be metropolitan is accessibility, according to Smets & List, urging the designers to relate public space to public transport. By ensuring connection between the city and the project areas in the fringe, Metropolitan Landscapes assumes that the open landscape becomes a public space 'where different social groups mix, in the same manner as elsewhere in the metropolis' (Bureau Bas Smets & List, 2016, p. 49). The problem with this interpretation of public space is quite obvious, as it sidelines the fact that 'making things public' requires either democratic politics focusing on matters of concern (in the Latourian sense) or (in more radical terms of 'the right to the city') a space to interrupt in order to offer a stage for the struggle for equality, for shaping and claiming rights (Amin, 2014; Dikeç & Swyngedouw, 2017; Latour & Weibel, 2005). Keeping in mind that the exact aim of Metropolitan Landscapes is to shortcut these meanings of public space as it tries to distance itself from a history of democratic processes being restrained by administrative impasses, as well as a tradition of insurgency or 'counter-projects', let's engage – reluctantly – with the minimal definition of public space as proposed by Smets & List. We would not be alone in doing so, as prominent international designers and authors like Pierre Bélanger and Charles Waldheim have also aligned themselves with this post-political perspective on public space (Bélanger, 2013, 2016; Metzger, Allmendinger, & Oosterlynck, 2015; Waldheim, 2016).

Of the four design teams, only those of WIT Architecten and (to a certain extent) Agence Ter zoom out and explicitly bring the connection to the public transport network into focus, relating the green network with a mobility system at a larger scale. WIT's team even proposes to expand and transform the tram system in order to anchor the open space, and in extenso the peri-urban fringe, on the urban armature (WIT Architecten et al., 2016, pp. 60, 63, see Fig. 3). The other teams engage with the issue of accessibility solely within the contours of the project area, without positioning it in a larger urban or metropolitan context.

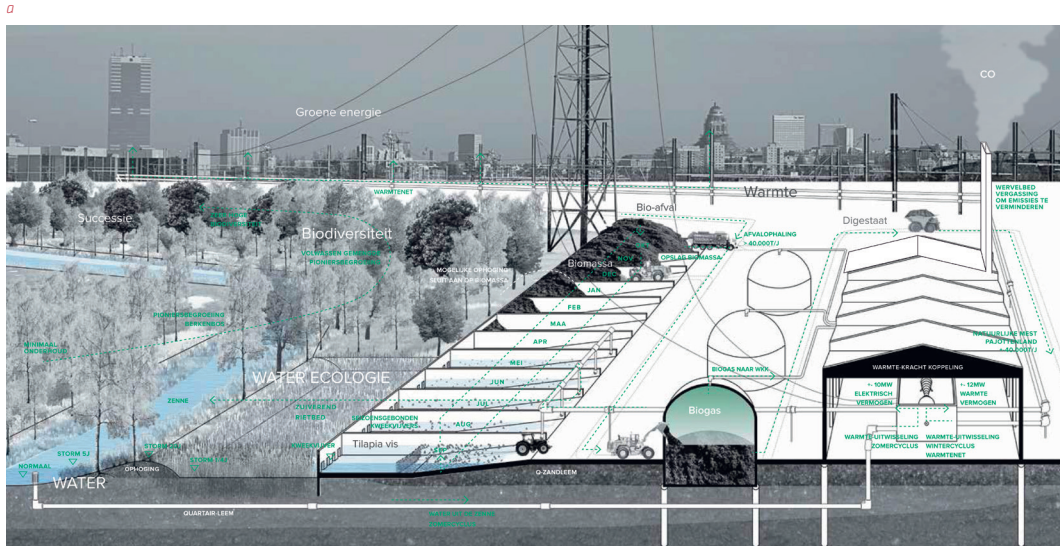
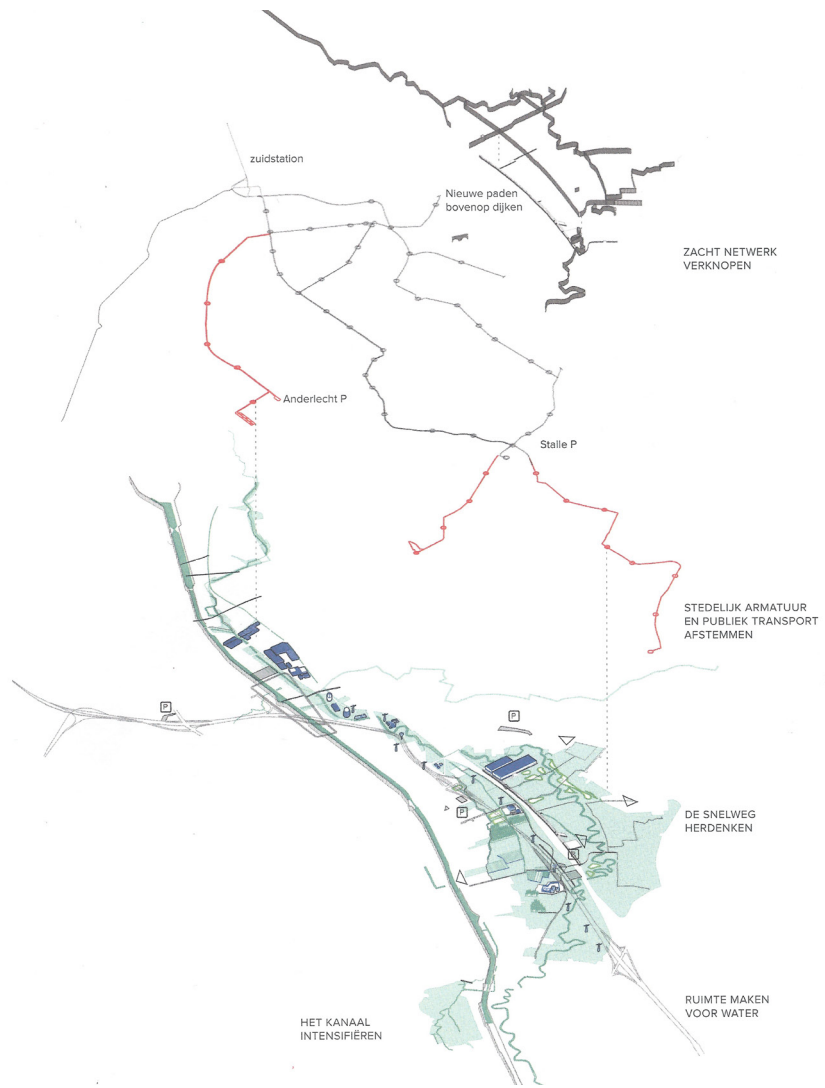


FIGURE 3 The metropolitan landscape of WIT Architecten et al. In this 'waterlandscape', the river is connected to public infrastructure such as the public transport and the highway (WIT Architecten, OSA Onderzoeksgroep, Annabelle Blin, & Philip Stessens, 2016, p. 63).

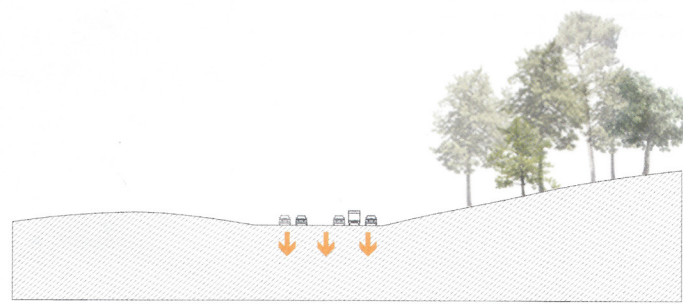
Moreover, the concept is generally interpreted quite traditionally, engineering-wise, as a matter of overcoming technical obstacles – i.e. the railway, highway and canal – by means of what could be described as equally technical fixes such as bridges, dikes and tunnels (be it with a green, or ‘public’, platform instead of concrete surface, see Fig. 4.). The core of engineering, as Antoine Picon explains, is to perfect nature and smooth out the accident-ridden territory by means of bridges and other connections levelling mountains and filling ravines, in order to facilitate exchange between people and abolish administrative compartmentalisation (Picon & Thom, 1992).

This definition is quite close to the interpretation of accessibility by Metropolitan Landscape, which aims at envisioning a continuous (infra)structure bringing both people and administration into a shared territory. Although these connections could potentially construct a territory that is mentally cohesive and connected, there is no such thing as equal access, nor a guarantee of social mixing by providing bridges or other kinds of infrastructural linkages. Living next to open space, and having to use public transport to travel from a high-density neighbourhood in the city centre to the outskirts, are two very different levels of accessibility. In addition, the public transport connection to these outskirts, crossing regional borders, is far from failsafe and could result in a large-scale park landscape used exclusively by suburbanites living adjacent to it. Moreover, we also would like to question the assumption that providing a continuous infrastructure to, and within, a park leads to a social mix. As Kristiaan Borret explains, the design principles promoted by Metropolitan Landscapes are not meant to be concretely instrumentalised, but instead retain a cultural productivity by instigating a change of mind and by showing how Brussels could be territorially connected (Borret, 2017). He also admits, however, that it is currently not possible to steer the informal appropriation mechanisms, let alone lead to a socially just urban project, without resorting to the ‘classical’ urban tools like social housing quotas, land ownership management, and zoning regulations determining form and function. Moreover, Borret elaborates, guaranteeing physical accessibility, even in its most modest form such as the removal of fences, would be almost impossible to regulate or control at the territorial scale of these projects (Borret, 2017).

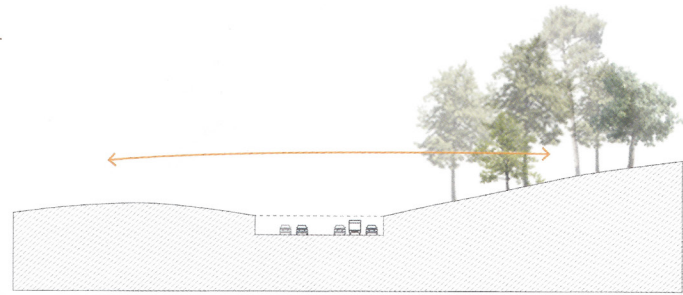
Adjacent program:

Revisiting the nature-culture divide?

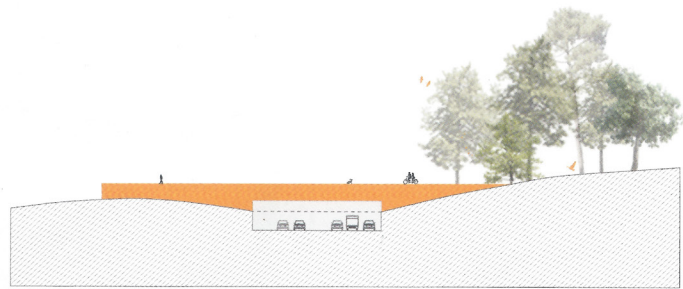
Since landscape cannot be metropolitan without a program reflecting diversity and multiplicity, Smets & List forward the criterion of shared programs that should encircle the open space. “The ‘green’ cannot be metropolitan without the ‘grey’”, they assert in the methodological chapter (Bureau Bas Smets & List, 2016, pp. 49–50). In a study that aims to transcend the nature-culture divide, this is a surprising statement. One would suspect an engagement with the idea of urbanised nature, instead of literally pushing the urban program to the margins of the drawing and setting up an explicit spatial divide between the green and grey. Smets & List do allude to land-sharing and co-productive constellations, but these notions are never actually elaborated upon. This vagueness, coupled with the internal contradiction of the criterion, has resulted in very different interpretations of ‘adjacent program’ by the different teams.



Idée de base



Possibilité de connecter



Construction d'un tunnel + terrasse publique

a



b

FIGURE 4 The construction of a public terrace on top of the ring road by Agence Ter. The road is a technical obstacle, overcome by the 'technofix' of the terrace (Agence Ter, 2016, p. 105).

The schemes of WIT's team do not even include adjacent urbanisation, instead defining large productive programs such as a biogas factory and logistical terrains, of a scale too large and unwieldy for a city centre. Agence Ter and Coloco only give an indication of the edges to be urbanised, selected either by topography or by what Coloco refers to as 'metropolitan living rooms'. The design team of LOLA Landscape Architects, in their plan to upgrade the post-industrial and deteriorated Northern Canal Zone, is the only one that does suggest an urban program in its drawings, explicitly calling for the creation of regulatory plans for these urban zones along the open spaces to ensure 'an attractive mix of living, working and recreation' (LOLA Landscape Architects, Floris Alkemade, & Grontmij, 2016, p. 120). However, whereas Borret clarifies that these zones are in need of some degree of gentrification, where should it end? In the designs of the other firms, regulation of the urban program is not even posited – without it, what stops these projects from resembling countless other landscape designs that have proposed green corridors weaving together an undefined urban program, and which are ultimately left to the market to develop (Czechowski, Hauck, & Hausladen, 2014)? Although the choice to move the urban to the margin is strategic in a context that is fundamentally stuck, one could raise the question of what is left to program in the open space, and whether the strategy of leaving the urban edges to free-market development is defensible in a metropolitan context like Brussels, which is dealing with high poverty rates and social unrest? If you avoid competing claims, struggle, and pressure, is there anything left in which to spatially intervene that could have an impact on a socially just urbanisation? Aren't these design rationales far more prone to being co-opted by neoliberal market logics, with an increased risk of segregation in city which is already torn, where the wealthy live in the 'adjacent program' and the less fortunate are connected via the 'accessibility' of public transport? By not defining the adjacent program or public program within the park, the projects risk becoming gentrification and segregation machines.

Systemic value: systems as (re-)productive program?

The third criterion forwarded by Bureau Bas Smets & List in defining the metropolitan character of a landscape is its *systemic value*. Their elucidation of this principle opens with the following statement: "Systemic thinking approaches phenomena and their interconnections in an interdisciplinary manner, focusing mainly on the relations and exchanges between different components of the studied system rather than on the internal functioning of each individual component" (Bureau Bas Smets & List, 2016, p. 50). While this opening could call for a further exploration of these notions and a discussion about the complexities of intertwined systems, the reader is instead confronted with a rather vague and tautological expansion of the subject – the 'metropolitan' quality is defined by 'participation in the general functioning of metropolitan systems', and 'systemic value' is defined as the importance of an element in the functioning of systems in the metropolitan scale. By this, it is later explained, the writers allude mostly to an area's importance within metropolitan *environmental* systems – ecological networks, ecosystem services, etc. However, they also include 'human activities' as being part of the metropolitan ecosystem, and the example they provide clarifies their intention of defining areas of high systemic values as those in which high infrastructural, logistical and environmental stakes are spatially superimposed. Following this definition, they claim, unsurprisingly, that areas that display this high systemic value are also prone to functional and programmatic conflict. Once again, having focused exclusively on infrastructural, logistical and environmental parameters, and by calling for the creation of interconnections, synergies and cooperation between 'grey' (urban), 'blue' (humid), 'green' (natural) and 'yellow' (agricultural) systems, Bureau Bas

Smets & List reduce the complex realities of these landscapes to open spaces in need of techno-managerial fixes. By circumventing any socio-political discussion, they therefore open the door for the four design teams to create socially 'all-is-well' scenarios, in which novel techno-natures further realise the functional potential of the metropolitan landscape, while social questions such as inclusion/exclusion and justice are conveniently pushed aside. As with the two previous criteria nonetheless, the vague definition of systemic value has offered the different design teams the possibility of interpreting this value in multiple ways: WIT Architecten, OSA Onderzoeksgroep, Annabelle Blin & Philip Stessens see the systemic value of their study area (the southern Senne Valley) as pertaining mostly to aquatic systems and their interplay with important infrastructural elements; Agence TER, working on the Molenbeek Valley which links dense urban neighbourhoods with natural reserves, large transport arteries and agricultural land, identifies the systemic value of their study zone as being ecosystemic, infrastructural and productive; LOLA Landscape Architects, Floris Alkemade and Grontmij highlight the tension between economic, infrastructural and environmental systems in their zone (the north of the Senne Valley); Coloco, DEVspace and Gilles Clément, as opposed to the other design teams, do not stress the systemic value of their study zone when introducing their project as a convergence point of multiple systems, but still illustrate the potential of their zone (stretching from the ring highway to the West station of Brussels) to participate in Brussels' food-production system due to its high soil fertility.

Nonetheless, all teams share similar techno-managerial rationales in their proposals for improving the systemic value (and performance) of their study zones, following the ideas put forth by Bureau Bas Smets & List in their definition of the metropolitan question – WIT Architecten's team propose 4 pilot projects which attempt to create new synergies between their identified systems, mostly concentrating on problem-solving through newly designed infrastructure or managerial tools. Their sole pilot project which could be construed as aiming towards social inclusion (creating communal gardens on flood-prone land) addresses this goal through a managerial scheme (WIT Architecten et al., 2016, p. 53, see Fig. 3), renouncing reflection on the correlation between spatial configurations and societal systems (See, for instance, Tonkiss, 2013). LOLA Architecten's team explicitly raise the issue of social inclusion and the heterogeneity of actors in their introduction (LOLA Landscape Architects et al., 2016, p. 114), even going as far as to bring up two acts of urban planning in the northern periphery of Brussels which evoke clear social systemic issues – the 'megaprison' of Haren (physical marginalisation of the 'unwanted') and the Uplace commercial centre (neo-liberal privatisation of open space). However, their actual proposal relies almost solely on an infrastructure system to generate development of the environment, housing and leisure-oriented landscapes. No mention is made of the social needs of local or adjacent communities, neither is there a clear reaction to their above-cited examples of socially significant urban planning. Instead, their images seem to evoke mainly gentrification and a healthy, environmentally conscious lifestyle. Agence TER's proposal addresses the systemic values of their sites through means of ecosystem services and land productivity, but does not ask who will ultimately benefit from these services or products. Finally, the Coloco team does actually address the social, by emphasising the role of citizen participation in the process of constituting, inhabiting, and using the landscape. However, the tools proposed in order to achieve these social goals are once again managerial rather than spatial, and the study remains vague as to the specificities of the local or regional populations it is intended to serve.

Perhaps it is not surprising that all teams had chosen technical or managerial strategies to address questions of systemic value, since this path was clearly paved by Bureau Bas Smets & List's emphasis on infrastructural and environmental systems. Nonetheless, even though their thought process was constrained at its onset by an overarching methodology, this methodology seems flexible and vague enough to have allowed for a deeper dive into the less obvious aspects of infrastructural and environmental systems. While all design teams concentrated on the importance of these systems and on their potential to induce territorial and urban change, how is it that they have all turned a blind eye to the fact that these systems are inherently socio-political in nature (Amin, 2014), and as such could have also been used as a tool in favour of social justice and equality?

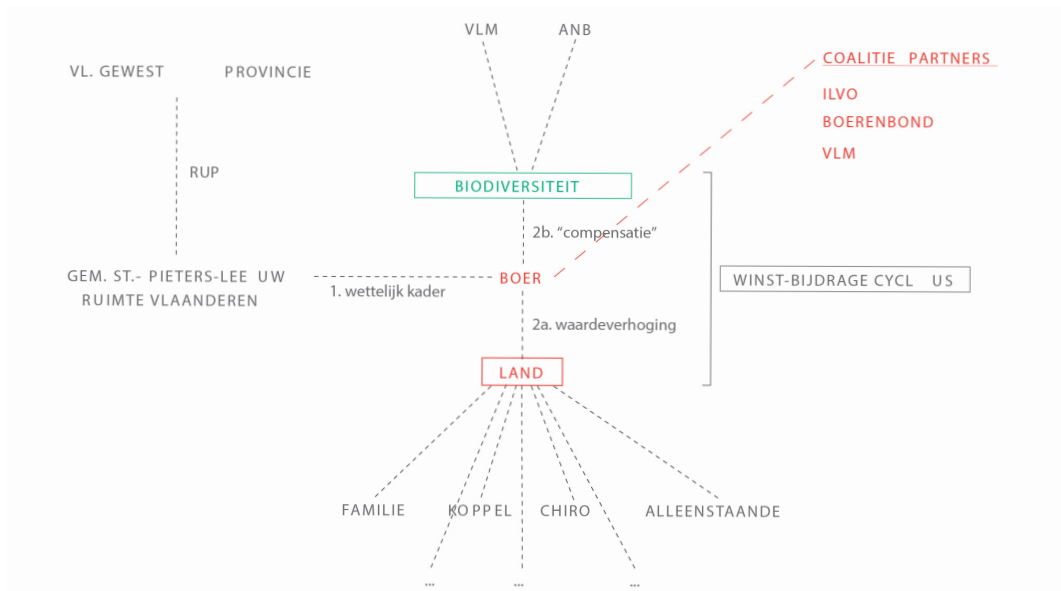


FIGURE 5 The third pilot project proposed by WIT Architecten et al. In their most socially engaged intervention, the team of WIT Architecten propose a communal garden, yet do not commit to a spatial design. Instead, they handle the subject through a purely managerial scheme. (WIT Architecten et al., 2016, p. 73)

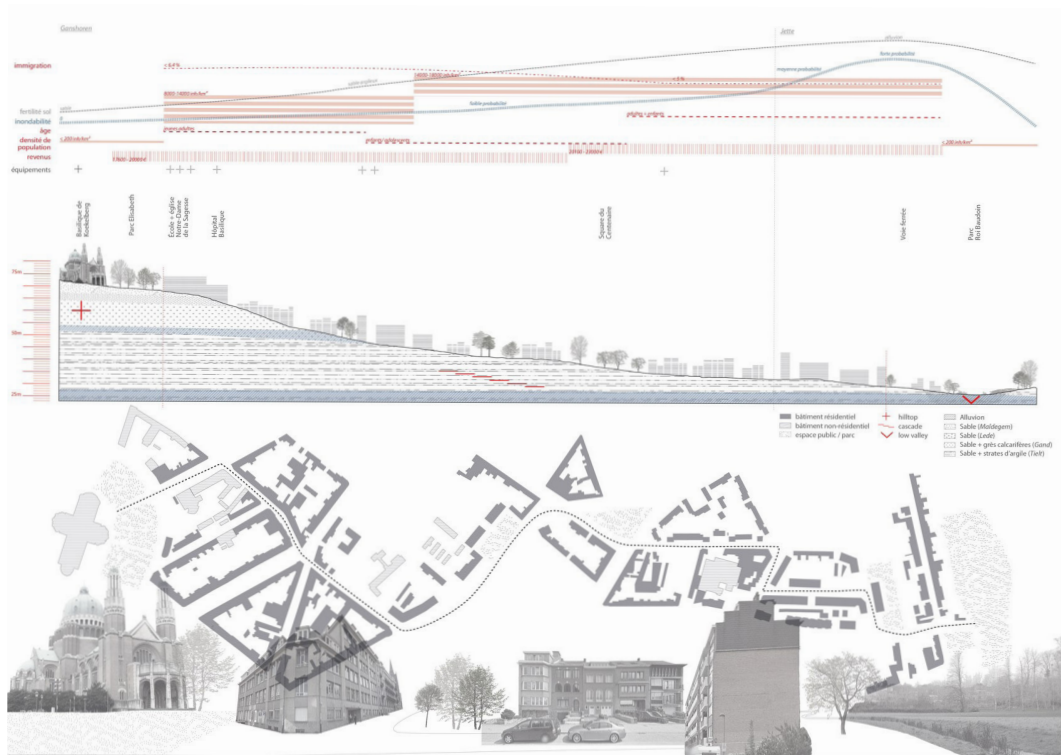


FIGURE 6 The Molenbeek valley envisioned as Geddes' valley section. The topographical structure of the valley is determining the activities, as well as the age groups that are present in different parts of the valley (Agence Ter, 2016, pp. 102-103).

Conclusion

What becomes apparent from the analyses of the underlying rationale behind Metropolitan Landscapes is that the landscape lens is seen as a potential instigator of a new urban project for the city of Brussels, based on a shared agenda formulated by Bas Smets in his topographical and hydrological reading of the territory. However, using this approach to bypass previous binaries between top-down and bottom-up urbanisation, so constitutive of the city's urban history, should not ignore the reason for which the bottom-up movements developed in the first place.

As we have seen, previous planning practice – where neighbourhood contracts entailed a high participation level of local stakeholders – are problematic, since large-scale concerns are not addressed. Accordingly, approaching the territory through the lens of landscape seems indeed very promising, as it transcends the small-scale communal reflection and seeks a larger context for action. However, the democratic nature of communal projects in Brussels might be very difficult to maintain as we widen our scope of action, because action groups tend to focus on the local but not on the regional scale, as Kristiaan Borret mentioned (Borret, 2017). Is this the end of the discussion, or are we just missing the theoretical framework and applicable tools in order for this tentative revisiting of large-scale visions in Brussels not to lose its democratic legitimacy?

Christopher Marcinkoski stated in his article on speculative urbanisation that in the past, urbanisation was viewed as a *response* to the social demands of economic growth (Marcinkoski, 2014, p. 48). In Metropolitan Landscapes, as we often see in ecological urbanism, the logic seems to have been flipped, and urbanisation has become a *means* to growth. This brings us to our second question, which is tightly bound to our reflections on scale – the question of control: How much – or how little – should we design and control the open spaces of the peri-urban fringes in contrast to the market pressures? If we are to accept Borret's statement that the classical urban regulation tools are only proven to work at a smaller scale, which regulation could, or should, we apply to lead these designs towards a socially just urban project?

The last question to come from our analysis is that of the ecological: In Metropolitan Landscapes, as in landscape urbanism and ecological urbanism, the ecological structure constitutes the fundamental anchor of the urban project and design. As the “underlying structures of topography and hydrology” become the major structuring elements of urban form, the designs of Metropolitan Landscapes attach the social structure to the ecological infrastructure, by alluding to the valley section of Geddes (Fig. 4) for example, thus ultimately subjugating everything to a scientific reading of the territory. In this logic, starting from a systemic reading of the territory, everything becomes naturalised, and the socially just city is a logical outcome of ecologically sound planning. Landscape design should look beyond this rationale. Quoting Georg Hausladen, we therefore argue that “ecosystem theory can serve as a basis for the production of so-called instrumental knowledge, however, for landscape architecture, such knowledge is useful but utterly not sufficient because architecture must go beyond science and technology” (Hausladen, 2014, p. 127). Designing the metropolitan landscapes of Brussels must go beyond a mere rhetorical use of the social in its projects, so that landscapes can become the groundwork for an urbanism that dares to question its socio-economical context, and not only its ecological potential (Swyngedouw & Kaika, 2014a, 2014b).

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