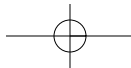
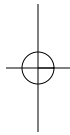
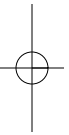


Between Exploring and Interpretation
Between Interpretation and Projecting
Between Projecting and Acting

76

Design as a Mediating Vehicle

BART DE ZWART



1. Eric Frijters, et al., *Tussenland*. Rotterdam-The Hague: NAi Publishers-Ruimtelijk Planbureau, 2004.
2. See for example Tom Avermaete, 'Rus in urbe', *Oase*, 60 (2002), pp. 1-7.
3. Bernardo Secchi, 'Diary of a planner. 06 Scenarios', *Planum*, online source <http://www.planum.net/topics/secchi-diary.html>.
4. Thomas Sieverts, 'Improving the Quality of Fragmented Urban Landscapes – A Global Challenge!', in: Hille von Seggern, Julia Werner, Lucia Grosse-Bächle (eds.), *Creating Knowledge*.

Innovation Strategies for Designing Urban Landscapes. Berlin: Jovis Verlag, 2008, pp. 252–265.

5. The notion of 'anaesthetic architecture' was introduced by Neil Leach in response to architecture's growing obsession with images and image-making. For Leach the term anaesthetic expresses the narcotic effect of a surfeit of sensory (esp. visual) stimulation. The stupefying aesthetics that is generated by this intoxication of the aesthetic prompts a decline in critical awareness and instigates a superficial play of

- seduction and mindless consumption. Sieverts uses the term 'anaesthetic' primarily to problematize the perception of the fragmented urban landscape. Neil Leach, *The Anaesthetics of Architecture*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999.
6. Thomas Sieverts, op. cit., 2007, p. 10.
7. André Corboz, 'De stedenbouw van de 20ste eeuw: een profiel', *Archis*, 5 (1992), pp. 49–52.
8. Edgar Morin cited by André Corboz, *ibid.*, 1992, p. 52.
9. André Corboz, *ibid.*, 1992, p. 52. Italics are the author's own.

Between Exploring and Interpretation
Between Interpretation and Projecting
Between Projecting and Acting

77

In recent years there have been many attempts at interpreting the landscapes that have formed in the border area between town and country. These hybrid territories, with a spatial logic conforming to neither the rural nor the urban or suburban, defy many of our traditional ideas about spatial planning given their seemingly indeterminate character. Not only is it problematic to read the structure of the so-called 'borderland' in terms of commonly used planning concepts – such as town/country or centre/periphery – but the processes by which the urban landscape transforms also often take place in the blind spot of the spatial planning apparatus.¹

The current state of the urban-regional landscape thus raises the question of what design and planning can achieve in a context in which planned and quasi-accidental developments exist side by side.² Without wanting to rekindle the aforementioned discussion, I believe that it may be helpful to mention a few issues that are symptomatic of the current uncertainty surrounding planning on the scale of the region. This uncertainty pertains to both the *object* and the *capacity* of planning and prompts a reconsideration of the role of regional design.

The elusive region

Although it is tempting to construe the diffuse character of the contemporary urban landscape as a consequence of a lack of knowledge about cause and effect, Bernardo Secchi points out that the apparent indeterminacy of the urban territory is more likely a function of its *over*-determined condition: an excess of causal relations, which renders the system as a whole complex and unpredictable.³ The abundance of phenomena influencing the spatial production mechanism means that each outcome has an infinite number of possible explanations but, conversely, also that a result can seldom be predicted in advance. The only level at which anything (sensible) can be said about the transformation of the territory is the level of the fragment. By investigating and describing this fragment, we can construct a body of knowledge about the constituent parts without laying claim to a universal knowledge of the whole.

Other analyses, meanwhile, suggest that besides our knowledge of the processes of change, our perception of spatial reality itself is fragmented. Thomas Sieverts, for example, concludes that contemporary discourse about regional urbanization has a lot in common with the parable of the group of blind men encountering an elephant. The fable tells how the blind men

have to touch the animal as a collective in order to make sense of the enormous creature in front of them.⁴ Sieverts regards the multiplicity of perceptions generated by this perilous undertaking as emblematic of the current 'anaesthetic' condition of the urban region.⁵

Because traditional spatial concepts have proven unequal to the task of getting to grips with its vast and dispersed character, the fragmented urban landscape finds itself largely outside the reach of our conceptual universe. The phenomenon of regional urbanization is seen but not actually *observed*.⁶ For Sieverts this poor perception has a major impact on our ability to develop an emotional bond with such landscapes.

Sieverts signals a fear of the unknown, which sometimes triggers a conservative, sometimes a conciliatory and sometimes a euphoric approach, but always creates a sense of unease. He himself proposes that we embrace the indeterminate character of the fragmented urban landscape as offering freedom for new ideas and experiments. His suggestion that we reject the notion of order as unfeasible and exchange it for the possibility of a tolerable and productive disorder is an implicit call for an extensive ethical and aesthetic survey of the distinctive character – rather than the coherence – of these landscapes.

Both of the analyses set out above bear some resemblance to the observations made by André Corboz in the early 1990s about the changing nature of twentieth-century urbanism.⁷ Corboz notes that at the turn of the century, the city can no longer be interpreted in terms of an 'aesthetic of harmony', but should instead be regarded as a 'place of the discontinuous, the heterogeneous, the fragment and the continuous transformation'. The gulf between spatial reality and the harmonic ideal compels us to find a new explanation for urban phenomena, with instrumental rationalism making way for an appreciation of the complex interplay of forces within which space is produced.

Whereas, according to Sieverts, the urban landscape needs to abandon strict (urban) order as its only frame of reference, Corboz points out that because of its disregard for the contingency of spatial processes urban planning is in danger of becoming alienated from its object. Urbanism can no longer rely on a 'wholly positivist view of means and ends', but should initiate a process that simultaneously 'tolerates, produces and combats' disorder.⁸ Urbanism, Corboz argues provocatively, 'falls under *game theory*', which is to say that the 'players decide without knowing all the data of the problem'.⁹

10. Key milestones in this development within the Dutch context include the publication of the report *Ruimtelijke ontwikkelingspolitiek* by the Scientific Council for Government Policy in 1998 and the enactment of the National Spatial Strategy in 2004, in which a development-orientated approach was put forward as an alternative to regulatory land-use planning.

11. Hans Mommaas and Joks Janssen, 'Sturen op kansen: nieuwe ontwikkelingscoalities in de ruimtelijke ordening', *De Architect*, 9 (2006), pp. 36–43.

12. Luuk Boelens, Tejo Spit and Bart Wissink (eds.), *Planning zonder overheid. Een toekomst voor planning*. Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2006.

13. Maarten Hajer, Dirk Sijmons and Fred Feddes, 'De politiek van het ontwerp', in: Maarten Hajer and Dirk Sijmons (eds.), *Een plan dat werkt. Ontwerp en politiek in de regionale planvorming*. Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 2006, pp. 4–25.

14. The debate about strengthening public administration at supra-local level has been going on for decades. In fact, the problem was defined as the 'regional lacuna' as early as the

1970s. Marten Oosting, 'Regionaal bestuur: lacune en oplossingen', *Tijdschrift voor openbaar bestuur*, 12 (1979), pp. 239–247.

15. Dirk Sijmons, 'De regio als belofte. Op zoek naar de juiste schaal voor ruimtelijke plannen', in: Maarten Hajer and Dirk Sijmons (eds.) op. cit., 2006, pp. 26–43.

16. Joost Schrijnen, *Stad en land. De creatie van een opgave*. Delft University of Technology, 2005.

17. Jannemarie de Jonge, *Landscape Architecture between Politics and Science*. Wageningen: Blauwdruk, 2008, p. 83.

A practice in the making

As the above analyses indicate, the consequences of the changing urban landscape extend well beyond mere theoretical discourse about the status of the 'borderland'. The daily practice of regional planning resounds with an almost existential debate on the mandate of planning, as well as on the issue on whose behalf planning speaks when there is no longer any consensus about the definition of its object and the effect of its instruments.

An important element in all this is that the discussion about the meaning of regional planning coincides with changing ideas about the role of government in spatial production processes. These changes gravitate towards the demise of regulatory blueprint planning in favour of a facilitating model with decentralized powers¹⁰ and have opened the door to a quest for new, opportunity-driven development coalitions in which the government is no longer the sole client.¹¹ In fact, some have even suggested dismissing the idea that spatial planning is primarily a matter of government and adopting a radically different way of thinking.¹²

One reason why such a notion of 'planning without government' is rather controversial may be that it could be interpreted as a normative statement. But in fact it is simply an empirical conclusion that spatial transformations are not the product – or at least not the exclusive product – of government-coordinated development policy, but of a complex interplay of forces from every quarter. In today's context, spatial production is first and foremost co-production, not in the sense of participation, but as the productive state of cooperation of a network of spatial actors.

What are the consequences of this conclusion for the practice of regional planning? Within the Dutch context we can identify two general trends. First of all, there is increased attention to the organization of the planning trajectory, resulting in the rise of process-oriented specializations within planning practice. Secondly, a renewed interest in the explorative and visionary capacity of the design instrument has prompted a return of the design disciplines to the heart of regional planning.¹³

Although this resurgence has led to a whole raft of inspiring examples since the mid-1980s, the position of regional design is by no means a foregone conclusion yet. This appears to be largely due to the region's indeterminacy in an institutional sense. While the absence of a strong governing body and self-evident problem owner – the 'regional gap'¹⁴ – may have allowed the region to develop into a laboratory for research by design, they

have also contributed to the continuation of a kind of 'Wild West' situation as far as the actual implementation of plans is concerned.¹⁵

In response it has been suggested that by exploring and projecting possible futures a design has the ability to create its own brief and client.¹⁶ Such a capacity would not necessarily provide the design with more autonomy, but could be the cue for its institutional embedding, ensuring a better fit between planning and implementation. Another development is the differentiation of the design's level of action. A distinction can be made here between an established 'operational' and an emergent 'strategic' approach, with the first variant based on *conformance* and a hierarchical scale definition, while the latter is based on *performance* and a nested conception of space.¹⁷

The attention paid to the operational and strategic instrumentation of the design suggests a reevaluation of the regional design within spatial development processes. This reassessment does not just occur in the academic circle, but also in everyday planning practice, where a rich palette of methods and planning models is being tested. Although regional design practice remains very much in flux, three aspects are emerging that appear to shape the relationship between planning and implementation, and the linkage of vision and action through design. We could tentatively describe them as different modalities of design, which neither exclude nor supersede one another, but that coexist and have different emphases depending on the circumstances or phase of the planning process.

The determining design

Both in and out of design circles there is a recurrent fascination with the design's apparent capacity to bring about actual change through its imaginative power. The difficulty of explaining this effect in theoretical terms does little to alter the fact that designs – even those without 'formal status' – are often capable of stirring seemingly inert situations.¹⁸

Central to this performative power is the fact that a design does not just speak of (the transformation of) the territory, but is also very clearly a cultural act. The design not only precedes the action, it is an action itself that creates (mental) images which, once produced, are not easily discarded.

Illustrative of this power are so-called planning concepts and their tendency to have an existence independently of the reality to which they refer.¹⁹ While it is tempting to relate the merit of these planning paradigms

18. Terry van Dijk, 'De betekenis van het niet-formele ontwerp. Het verleiden tot ketens van anticipatie', in: Geiske Bouma, et al. (eds.), *Tussen droom en werkelijkheid (conference proceedings Plandag 2009)*, Delft, 2009, pp. 91–99.

19. Wil Zonneveld and Femke Verwest, *Tussen droom en retoriek. De conceptualisering van ruimte in de Nederlandse planning*, Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2005.

20. I derive the notion of a 'policy-compliant design practice' from a remark made by Pieter van Wesemaal during a seminar on 7 November

2008 devoted to the theme 'The Role of Design in Regional Planning', organized by the Netherlands Architecture Fund and the Urban Design and Planning Group, Eindhoven University of Technology.

21. This is not to say that the production of such plans cannot yield new insights. The case of the New Map of the Netherlands (1997) exemplifies that even a seemingly innocent inventory of local plans can prompt major changes at national level in thinking about the collective impact of independently planned developments.

22. The *Gebiedsuitwerking Haarlemmermeer – Bollenstreek* plan was commissioned by the Minister of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment (VROM) and is a joint study by the provinces of Noord-Holland and Zuid-Holland in collaboration with Publicis Consultants Van Sluis and design studio MUST urbanism.

Between Exploring and Interpretation
Between Interpretation and Projecting
Between Projecting and Acting

79

to their ability to succinctly convey complex reality – that is to say, convey the abundance of spatial relationships in a condensed and coherent way – experience shows us that the concepts with the longest life span do almost the exact opposite. Instead of synthesizing different interpretations, these planning concepts appear to facilitate speaking about the territory in euphemisms. It is a style of representation that sublimates rather than resolves potential conflicts.

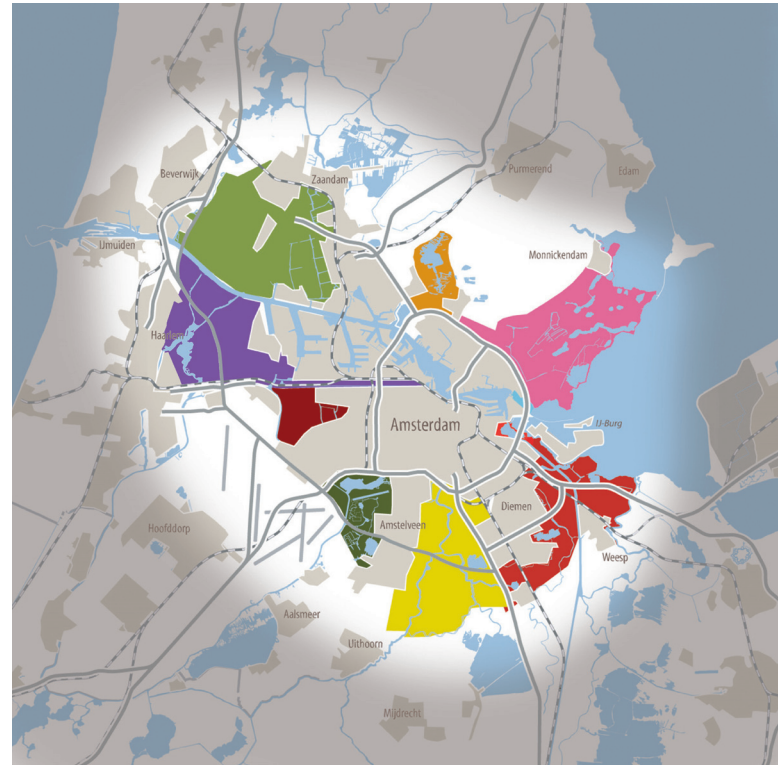
Not surprisingly, plans – especially those with a lot of graphic detail – are often greeted with the utmost caution in the public administrative arena. The thought that each visualization can trigger new policy debate, political tension or social unrest means that there are major reservations regarding the information offered via the design.

These reservations have led to a specific form of design, which we could refer to as the 'policy-compliant' genre.²⁰ It is aimed at the exploration and representation of space starting from the political and bureaucratic context.²¹ An example is the *Gebiedsuitwerking Haarlemmermeer-Bollenstreek* (2006; Area Action Plan Haarlemmermeer-Bollenstreek). This plan shows how a survey of the spatial policy claims for the area between Amsterdam and Leiden provides new information about the policy assumptions and limiting conditions within which a design for this region can be conceived.²²

The mapping and documenting of individual sectoral tasks, policy set at different administrative levels and the remaining scope for action yields building blocks for the formulation of various development perspectives. These perspectives can be set along two axes – *public initiative* versus *private initiative* and *conservative* versus *progressive* – and serve as scenarios that enable negotiation without stepping outside the lines of previous agreements.

Although policy-compliant plans appear to be well-equipped for exploring, articulating and establishing precisely that about which there is agreement at policy level – or at least latent consensus – the fact that such plans are so firmly embedded within public administrative reality sometimes pushes the spatial context (literally) into the background.

The latter can be seen in, for example, the *Opgaven-, Actie- en Koerskaarten* (2007; Assignment, Action and Course maps), which were drawn up during the seventh Noordvleugel (North Wing) conference. These maps – it is doubtful whether we can really speak of designs here – feature a typical planning legend and use of symbols that reflect policy formulated beyond the map. The potential weakness of this type of plan is that it does little



The Metropolitan Landscape in 2020: a Course map indicating the thrust of development for 'wedges' of greenery. The *Opgaven-, Actie- en Koerskaarten* were produced by the Government Service for Land and Water Management, as part of *Streefbeeld 2040* (Target 2040) and *Actieprogramma 2020* (Action Programme 2020), which were established during the seventh Noordvleugel (North Wing) conference on 14 December 2007

Between Exploring and Interpretation
 Between Interpretation and Projecting
 Between Projecting and Acting

80



Destination AMS: In the context of the 2007 edition of the International Architecture Biennale in Rotterdam the city of Amsterdam's Department of Physical Planning (DRO) and Land Development Agency (OBA) commissioned the creation of a presentation. A slide presentation by Zef Hemel, deputy director of the DRO, which presented a vision for the city region as a metropolis using a series of concrete project proposals, served as the basis for the installation. Various artists, poets, filmmakers and architects elaborated these projects into 21 thematic presentations under the supervision of Kossman.dejong exhibition architects. The presentations were positioned on an incline around a gigantic model of the region and together they function as one big installation

23. Quotation from initiator Zef Hemel, deputy director of the Department of Physical Planning, recorded in the minutes of the debate on 'De koers van de stad' (The course of the city) on Monday 15 October 2007 in Amsterdam, organized by architecture centre Arcam.

24. James Throgmorton has pointed out that storytelling about the future by planners has both a constitutive and a persuasive function. The storyteller, the way in which the story is told and its characters have a real impact on the context in which the storytelling takes place.

James Throgmorton, 'Planning as persuasive storytelling in a global-scale web of relationships', *Planning Theory*, 2 (2003), pp. 125–152.

25. Design studio *Z-Lab* is a collaborative venture between office Zandbelt & Van den Berg, the province of Zuid-Holland and Delft University of Technology.

26. The terms used in this passage derive from an interview with Rogier van den Berg, director of office Zandbelt & Van den Berg, Rotterdam, 18 January 2008.

more than reproduce policy assumptions about the area. Rather than linking various areas of policy in spatial terms, these plans have a tendency to revert to projecting existing policy onto the territory.

The City of Amsterdam's project *Destination AMS* (2007) is a creative attempt at overcoming the often paralyzing fear of crossing policy and administrative borders. In an attempt at surveying the potential spatial implications of the capital's metropolitan ambitions, the city's Department of Physical Planning used a process that is best described as a prospective form of *oral history*. By explicitly not aiming for a finished document in the shape of a plan, but by putting the envisioning process which culminates in a temporary exposition centre-stage, the department managed to carry out a design exercise with far greater openness than the public administrative context normally allows.

Taking its cue from the position of Amsterdam Airport as a crucial junction in international air traffic, the survey freely explores what projects might conceivably turn the capital into an attractive stopover for tourist and business transfer passengers. The outcome is an eclectic mix of ideas, ranging from rebuilding a medieval tower in the city centre and contemporary country estates on world heritage site De Beemster, to constructing a city park around the Amstel River and connecting the airport to the underground network.

The message of the travelling presentation is that we should debate not the individual projects, but the overall 'story' around which these projects have been formulated, namely 'to make the small Amsterdam region as interesting as possible through a varied range of programmes'.²³ Whether the reconstruction of the old 'Haringpakkers' tower will really mark the start of the 'rebuilding of Amsterdam into a metropolis', as the Department of Physical Planning would like us to believe, remains to be seen, but *Destination AMS* has clearly created an opening for an administrative exploration of the way in which the city's metropolitan ambitions can be shaped.

The proposing design

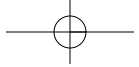
The *storytelling* exercise by the capital's planning authorities demonstrates that the design's process-driven capacity can have a constitutive as well as a prospective function in planning on a supra-local scale.²⁴ Although the proposed interventions in *Destination AMS* regularly teeter on the edge of the fantastic, the scale and concreteness of the projects are such that they



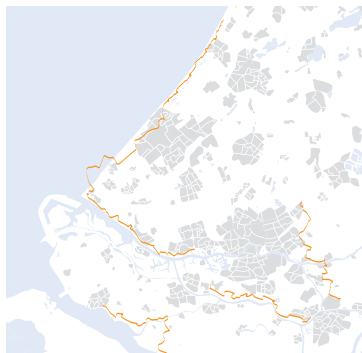
Z-Lab: designing at the sub-regional scale: 'sublime living' as a design opportunity in the coastal zone

seem to speculate on potential feasibility. The way in which the projects are positioned suggests that even the wildest ideas are within reach, provided that some visionary administrators are prepared to pick up the gauntlet.

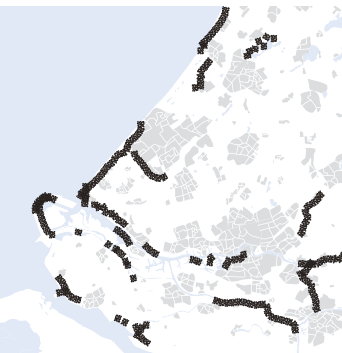
A somewhat comparable example of such a proposal-oriented approach is the work of *Z-Lab* (2007).²⁵ This studio, which served as a design laboratory in the wake of a more large-scale and government-embedded initiative called Atelier Zuidvleugel, has done research by design into the spatial circumstances of the southern Randstad conurbation. What distinguishes the laboratory from Atelier Zuidvleugel, and what explains its position as a 'shadow studio', is the fact that *Z-Lab* did not start with a predetermined client but from the so-called 'power of the design'.²⁶ Independent design inventions on a sub-regional scale – defined as the intermediate level between local and regional – exposed recurrent challenges, which were then grouped as 'legend units' to construct regional planning perspectives. The design is here used as a recruiting vehicle in order to



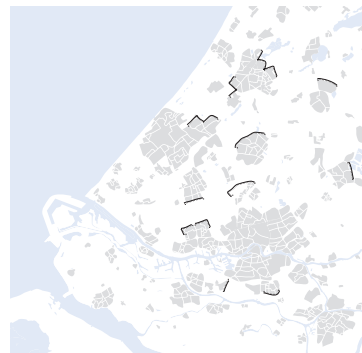
Landscape glue



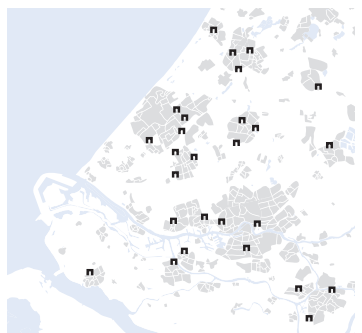
Touring roads



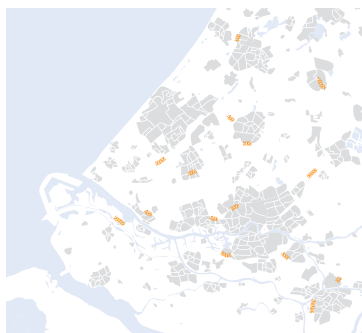
Sublime dwelling



Sharp edges



City gates



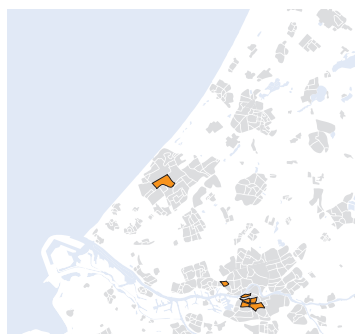
Dutch stripmall



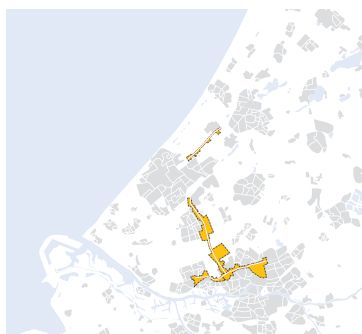
Building biotopes



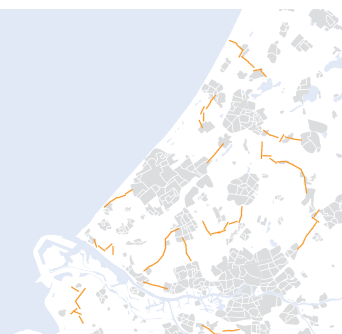
Regional Landmark Plan



Positive gettos



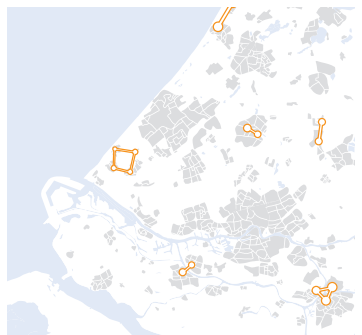
City boulevards



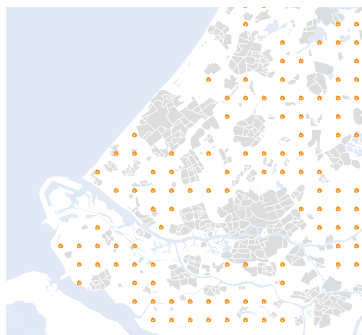
Landscape avenues



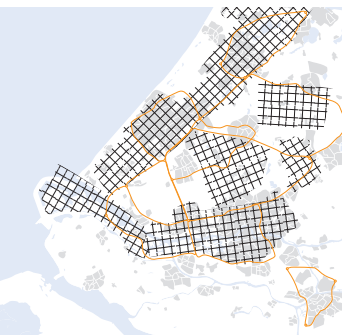
New landscapes



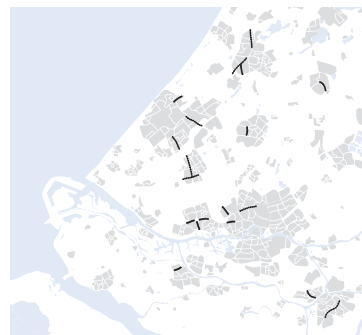
Twins



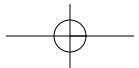
New hamlets



Circuits and grids



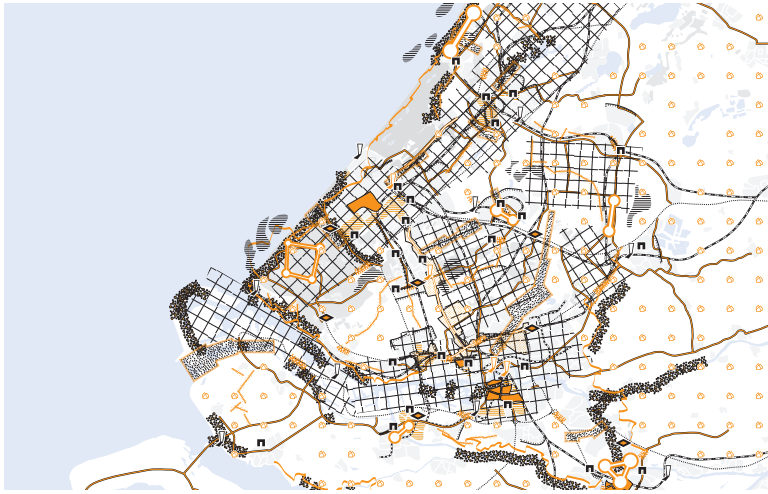
Urban stitches



27. The survey *Bouwen voor Waterland 2020* was commissioned by the province of Noord-Holland and conducted by office La4Sale, as part of the provincial plan *Waterlands Wonen* (2006).

Between Exploring and Interpretation
Between Interpretation and Projecting
Between Projecting and Acting

83



Z-Lab: comparable recurring tasks that were brought to light by the sub-regional design cases were aggregated into legend entities at the regional level

formulate a project for the regional level via the representation of local interventions.

Although the dramaturgy pertaining to the actors that are actually involved in the realization of these projects remains underexposed, there are quite a few examples of designs that explicitly anticipate a certain administrative or political condition. It could be argued that through their design interventions such plans say something about space as well as about a possible institutional constellation in which these interventions could take place.

An example of this is the design study *Bouwen voor Waterland* (2004; Building for Waterland) in which, in response to a commission from the provincial authorities, potential developments are mapped for housing in the rural Waterland region, north of Amsterdam.²⁷ The design is based on a detailed inventory of landscape and housing types by which it inscribes itself in the regional context. The analysis is used to explore if and where the region has a latent 'absorption capacity' and how this might be utilized without compromising the area's distinctive character. The resulting argument pleads for the atomization of the housing programme through an

extensive series of fine-grained interventions that supposedly disappear into the landscape.

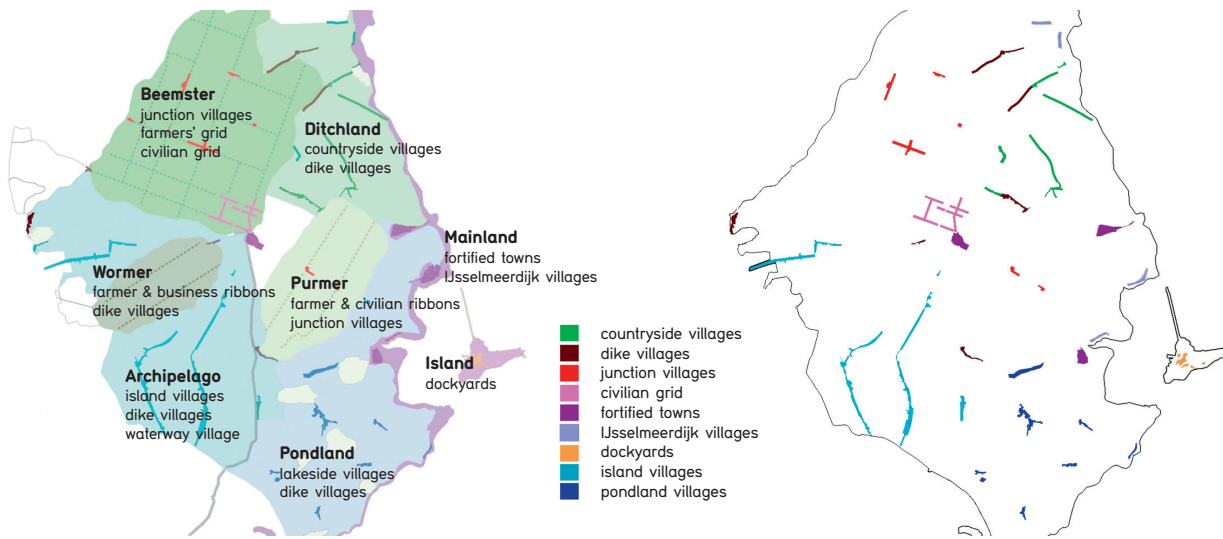
In this respect the proposed spatial strategy clearly distinguishes itself from the development method most commonly used in the Netherlands so far. Whereas the conventional model targets large-scale housing developments by institutional parties such as housing corporations and project developers, the Waterland design opts for a free market system and underpins small-scale private developments and decentralized (quality) management.

Because of this alternative approach the plan is by no means uncontroversial. A major point of controversy is the fact that the plan rests on an open-ended strategy and thus appears to leave the door open to unbridled house building in the area. The question then presents itself whether local authorities are equal to the task of guaranteeing the desired quality and whether the institutional capacity that the design supposes is actually there. Whatever the case may be, the Waterland plan shows that designs, apart from projecting a view on future developments, are also capable of representing a spatial-political and spatial-economic context in which this view might be realized.

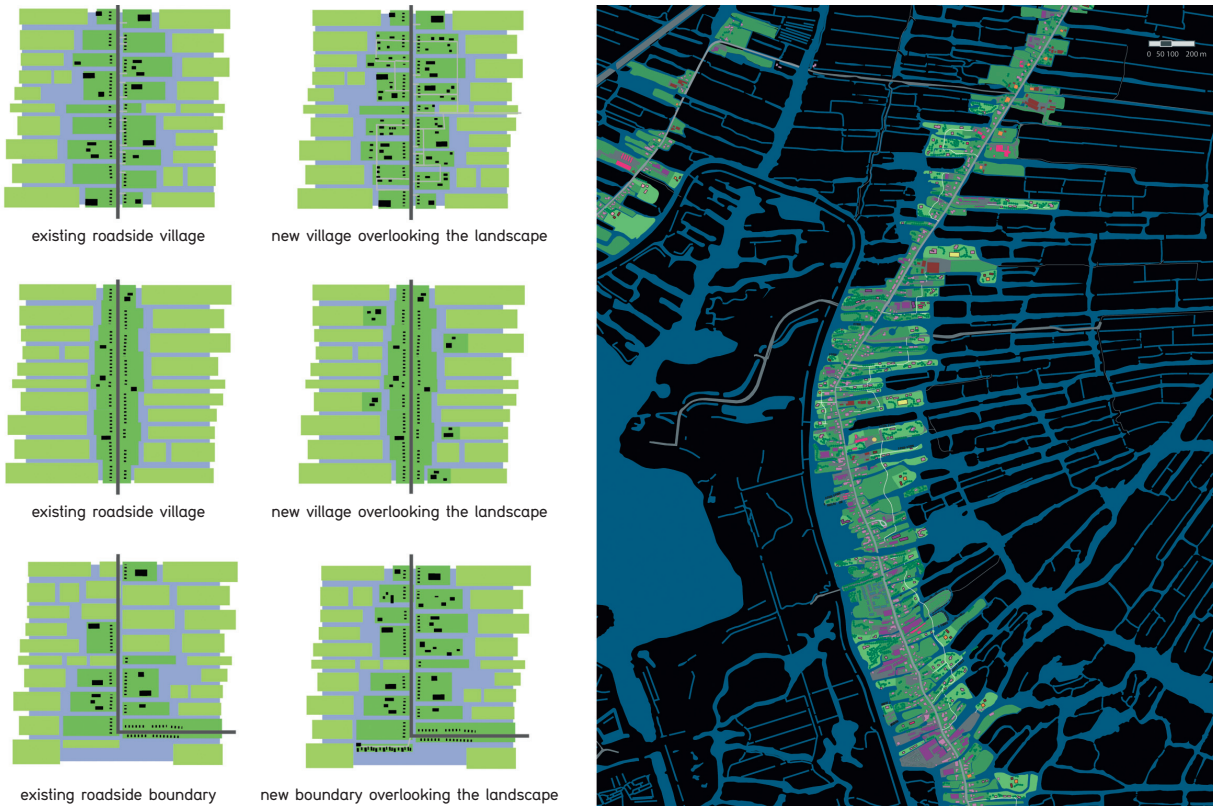
The acting design

Although the discussion of the determining and proposing dimensions of (regional) design has definitely no fundamental antithesis between the two in mind, the examples appear to suggest that each of the capacities is rooted in a separate design practice. In this respect the determining genre appears to be a primary component of a consensus-driven – largely administrative – planning tradition, whereas proposal-oriented planning evokes the critical-visionary deployment of design from an autonomous position. In this, the proposing design submits its 'own' reality vis-à-vis the definitions of reality of each of the actors involved, whereas the determining design is primarily a representation of an agreement that can be reached amid a series of given (administrative, political) realities.

That we are not dealing here with two hermetically isolated design practices, but, as indicated earlier, with different design modalities becomes clear when we conclude that there is a third dimension that is relevant to design's focus on realization in regional development processes. Besides having a constitutive and persuasive capacity, design also has the potential to help



Building for Waterland 2040: Identity units with their building structures and Families of villages



Building for Waterland 2040: Pillion Strategy for Island Villages. The villages are given a 'second rank' behind the islands which have already been developed, parallel to the main ribbon of development. This second rank forms the 'first rank' facing the landscape

28. The case of the Eo Wijers Competition is described in more detail elsewhere in this publication.

29. Within the context of urban renewal projects in Flanders, André Loeckx et al. identify seven design tasks having a strong affinity with the three regional design aspects identified in this article. In brief these tasks are: 1) research by design; 2) negotiation by design; 3) envisioning; 4) the design as pact; 5) the design as board game; 6) the design as frame of reference; and 7) the design as implementation plan. André

Loeckx, Bruno De Meulder, et al., 'Ten considerations regarding urban projects and concept grants', in: André Loeckx (ed.), *Framing urban renewal in Flanders*. Amsterdam: SUN, 2009, pp. 255–266.

30. The term 'visionary pragmatism' has been taken from an essay by Marc Glaudemans. Marc Glaudemans, 'Visionair pragmatisme', in: Jan Houwen and Karel Farber (eds.), *Drie over dertig. Ontwerpen aan Venlo, Roermond en Parkstad Limburg 2030*. Maastricht: the Province of Limburg, 2000, pp. 104–123.

31. A similar linkage can be seen in the deployment of the urban project. See for example Filip De Rynck, et al., *The century of the city. City republics and grid cities. White paper*. Brussels: Ministry of the Flemish Community, pp. 163–164.

Between Exploring and Interpretation
Between Interpretation and Projecting
Between Projecting and Acting

85

shed light on the trajectory needed to arrive at a desired state from a given situation.

We could speak here of an *acting* design, or the design viewed from its pragmatic dimension. This dimension pertains to, among other things, the provision of information about the sequence of actions and the way in which the necessary means can be obtained. The design process also prompts the development of a set of instruments for dealing with uncertainty and change. The design thus lays claim to a tactical intelligence that touches on the institutional domain as well as the economic reality.

An example of this is the implementation-oriented approach as propagated in the most recent two editions of the Eo Wijers Competition, which looked at the formation of consortiums, management concepts and earning capacity.²⁸ Although in the first instance such an approach, because of its technocratic character, appears to plead mainly for a more far-reaching division of labour, design's role as an integrating framework in this process should not be underestimated. Instead of isolating the development of a vision from political decision-making and project management, design could be used as a substantial intermediate to conduct the process on the basis of content.²⁹

Although this capacity has not yet been fully explored in current practice it has great potential once developed. Not because productivity should be taken as dominant *vis-à-vis* legitimacy or quality, but because such a form of 'visionary pragmatism' introduces a specific type of knowledge to the design:³⁰ the knowledge needed to go from a confused, unruly and unpredictable reality to the formulation of a feasible project.

From integrated to inclusive

For years, planning has been plagued by the panacea of the integrated approach. It reduces the matter of the slow and difficult implementation of regional plans to a purely operational problem. The standard answer of the integrated approach is a scaling-up of the method: broader briefs, more expertise, more participation, more disciplines, more exchange and more agreements. However, given the impenetrability of the territory and the contingency of spatial processes, the question is whether such a method does not run up against its own constraints – constraints which, if not determined by cognitive limitations, are at the very least the result of practical restraints such as time, money and practicability.

It is precisely on this point that the regional design-based approach appears to offer a solution, given that it is a practicable alternative to the dominance of the comprehensive plan. Two characteristics are particularly important here:

1. Multiple levels of scale

Designs can function on several scales at once. This means that a design contains information at various levels of scale, which are not necessarily hierarchically ordered. A detail says potentially as much about the whole as the sum about the parts.

2. Inclusiveness

The design's spatial determinacy allows it to establish a connection with matters beyond the reach of the actual intervention. With the design serving as *pars pro toto*, it is possible to establish functional and spatial links between a range of phenomena through a single design intervention.³¹

These two elementary characteristics and the three aforementioned planning genres give rise to a powerful set of instruments for the regional design. The central point here is always the link between the content- and process-oriented aspects of the planning process, with attention not just to the strategic and operational dimensions, but also to the sometimes neglected tactical perspective for action.

We are not dealing with a fundamentally new method here, but with the rehabilitation of a sensibility that is typical of the field of design: a connection with reality based on practical commitment, whereby the formulation of ideas and the course of action go hand in hand. Instead of serving as a neutral container for ideas or as noncommittal position-taking, the design establishes a substantial connection between the spatial, political and economic aspects of the planning and implementation process.