

Lab Pay(S)Age : A Landscape Observatory for the Research Project

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Mutations of Nature paradigm in Wallonia founds a geomorphological approach learning from landscape and urban types of configurations, in order to understand the "reasons of landscape" and the "inhabitants' will" having transformed environments over time. Important change replaced the original Meuse valley, first into a thriving rural countryside and finally through voracious industrialization. This palimpsest reflects the contemporary distress of a society forced to find itself again. The LabVTP with VERDIR (Ulg research) focuses on crisis of post-industrial landscape. Readings and Action Research could make visible landscape's transformations, in order to: reveal relations, existing and forgotten, between Nature and Culture; intervene on key sites (acupuncture); redesign cultural and landscape texture; use the project as a tool for interaction between specialized and common knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

Nature is today more a concept than a matter. As such it needs to be cultivated again so as to redirect the advances of a civilisation which has changed its meaning by going from the wild stage via the harmony of the bucolic era to the ideal rebirth of more artificial nature.

In the 18th century, the shocks of a new "green revolution" (M.Mosser, G.Teyssot 1991) dismantled the fixed forms in order to identify mutations, movements and proper time in the living world by questioning the way in which relations between the human beings and nature were forged, until the moment where the excessive control of man over his environment resurfaces with the modern thought.

Despite cyclical resurgences of fear and hope, this ideology inevitably leads to the exhaustion of natural resources hereby causing the environmental crisis and the process which Mongin calls "deterritorialisation". The 21st century thus inherits previous disturbances, crises and doubts. Nonetheless, it benefits from the exuberant force of nature which, like a rhizome, travels time and follows its path underground. Like a latent force, during each moment of crisis, it resurges and calls into question the various balances of narcotized societies that have lost all cohesion as well as the capacity to look at themselves, to understand and to visualise each other. Nowadays, this is the role of the idea of nature: a green revolution that imposes itself each time the balances are disrupted, each time neglect sets in and distances man from his own environment.

"Cultivate" and "culture" possess a meaning that largely surpasses the sense of the word to plant and they elicit the idea of "taking care". Associating the words "culture and nature", we either feel the need to take care of the earth and the natural elements or to look for a deeper sense cultivated between these two to further nurture an already rich and targeted dialectic. The intention of "taking care, of nurturing, of growing, and of guaranteeing balanced relations and their continuity is a cyclical

movement" (I. McHarg 1967) and dependent on the "capacity to nurture the dialogue" (A. W. Spirn 1988), to take on an active role and not to forget the interdependence that exists between mankind and its environment. Cultivating nature or keeping alive different forms of nature is a question of the attention paid and the active and responsible relations the human beings manage to forge with the environments they modify.

The notion of pro-jet (A. Berque 2000) needs to be implemented as a medium to call into question, understand and act in order to nourish, keep alive, follow and influence the different stages of approximation and distancing which, alternatively, characterise man's interactions with nature. With double components, the permanence due to the "jet" inscription, leaving trace and its prolongation by an intention and a projection, the "pro-jet" surpasses the state of finished image. It takes on the new meaning of a system of retention and relaunch. It's a hypothesis to be put to the test, a balance to be established in time, relentlessly, again and again, for none of the obtained modifications of the relation man/nature represent a definitive accomplishment.

This allows us to reconsider the future potential inherent in the project. The cyclicity of natural phenomena, their need to be accomplished and then to reduce themselves, to mutate in order to reach a new balance have been closely studied. It has been found that the mutation and/or the action are the most subversive foundation of the system and that "the future being" (R. Assunto 2001) is the most promising state of the interactional project with nature. This thought, introduced by the thesis "The paradigm of gap" (R. Occhiuto 2005) finds field of prospect in the Meuse valley landscape, where river crosses Liège agglomeration, characterized by apparent fixedness of highly industrialized environments.

From the observation emerge methodological elements establishing a research project which takes up with the on-going phenomena, by reasoning with system of variable configurations, whose characteristics and arrangements themselves can vary too.

Project & research by design represent tools of regulation, accompaniment or inflexion that can change sites by permanently re-evaluating and rebalancing the man-made effects on the natural system and vice-versa: principles referring need of accompanying project (M. Corajoud 2000) or of "will to want" (J. Derrida 1967), outlined by this research trajectory.

CONTEXT, MATERIALS AND METHOD

The context of the research is the river landscape, formed by the Meuse and a confluence area with other rivers - Legia, Ourthe and Vesdre: a magnificent island landscape. As an archipelago, it offered itself to the occupation by strong urban nuclei, while exercising its rights on any ground and fluvial passages. The city covers every particle of land by a cut-up architecture marked with towers and steeples. Water is its element, its identity, the reason of its growing and its looking after the balances of a tormented geography. Two almost contemporary movements coincide: on the one hand, the frame already extends or punctuates the more distant country sides, and on the other hand, the river withdraws by a progressive drying up. It then adjusts itself by tracing less winding, more fluid and hence waterways trade-friendly flow paths. Like opportunistic resurgences, industrial nuclei exploit the bowels

of the Earth and take possession of large cereal surfaces of a rural world unmindful of this underground aggression. The Industry structures itself on and by the materials this same land uses on the surface to nourish and pace the rural life and world, while underground, the working population organises itself according to the model of human anthills whose visible results are a big heap of garbage: the waste tips. Similarly, the water arms cut the meanders with canals transforming them into islands, while railway and roads lines accompany mutations of the rural and pastoral environment into proto-industrial systems, massively occupying the valley afterwards by interposing the watersheds and the river. Split and breakdown are hallmarks of the urban by planted promenades and public parks serving as the embodiment of the fantasies of a purposeful bourgeois class that structures and beautifies the city as much as it exploits the land elsewhere - a testimony to the duality of a modern world that separates. Once reached the breaking point of fragile balances, the industry regresses and the sites occupied by their heavy machines switched off and eventually withdrawn. Research method is profoundly anchored on morphological transformations of places in time and starts with the crisis of this palimpsest (A. Corboz 2001).

Currently, the valley fades away. Yet, despite the pleas for the impossible resumption of a bygone mode of production, it's from the condition of this abandon and through a fine observation method that appear signs of shut-downs as well as signs of resurgence.

"Engagement" (A. Foxley 2010), supplemented by special expertise gathered throughout studies of historical and geomorphologic distancing allows us to identify the components and relations causing and regulating the on-going dynamics. Thanks to these reflective observations, we can understand and embark upon a process. The experience of the Mosan landscape shows how important it is to construe movements to be used as new potential existing beyond the phenomenon of the urban and industrial "shrinking". The loss of activity instead of appearing as a breaking point, establishes an opportunity to go back to the resilience of sites to read again by wiping out industrial traces, showing previous layers.

The rurality reappearing opens to new thoughts about cultivation and urban practices (S. Sereni 1984) to allow the experimentation. Citizens could reorganize themselves to dedicate the free lots for: gardening, vegetable gardens, cooperation, new or traditional cultures, exploitation of forgotten gaps offered to the urban agriculture, craftsmanship, parsimonious water management.

The research, starting by knowledge of the in situ materials as well as the on-going dynamics, proceeds by hypothesis-project, or actions of landscape acupuncture, acting in experimental sites, used as places to observe all over time. So these sites stand out as "places-laboratories in situ" allowing to show dynamics and transformations which change, influence and disrupt local conditions. Hypotheses nurture the creation of new ideas whose "short, medium and long-term" implementation makes them adaptable to the reality and practical for the inhabitants. Their particularity belongs to flexible and participatory logic inherent to the iterative development of the approach and the ability to follow up on every single modification occurring in situ. By referring to principles of the "reflective practice", based on experience, and to process of distancing this method leads other

logical ways of constructing innovative hypotheses which are adapted to the real resources and techniques. Thus landscape project can play the role of a medium to compile and federate the explicitly or implicitly expressed expectations according to a "bottom up process". However, the landscape project is not an accumulation of opinions but their readapted critical elaboration, going through intermediary preparatory stages for the hypotheses-project, used as means for debate, as documents to grasp and discover otherwise invisible characteristics. Every input or phase of project plays its specific role, without any possible confusion. Interactive platforms are suited for an active organization and rethinking of knowledge.

Citizens' participation can help discover places and their immaterial values such as the memories, but project remains a competence of designers doing weighted synthesis. Several abandoned places are used as study-case to rethink new cycles of life, by revealing the implicit site's project (G.De Matteis1985) to be spread on the long term so as to complete the approach. It aims at the creation of places to continually examine the state of progress of the modifications.

By the implementation of a lab-tool called "LaboPay(S) age" and constituted by a network of "places of continuous auscultation" of modifications undergone by the urban and landscaped materials all over time, the research aims to establish some monitoring places. Such as the Observatories for Landscape, they constitute a sites system of landscape acupuncture (R. Occhiuto 2013) taking shape and meaning of living "in situ" laboratory, allowing the continuous study of the transformations on the ground. It is at the same time the reflection of the «country», the territory which the inhabitants try to shape and always different in terms of characteristics. Nevertheless, it is also the image of the « wise » who possesses knowledge in every wrinkle of his face, and who is, like the earth, carrying in itself the signs of lived experience (S. Shama1999).

This research assumes "traces or incisions" continuous made by man on the ground as writings carrying intentions and postures to be reinterpreted all over the time and focuses on reasons adduced for the study which, by overtaking the shape of a research report, goes on by a new dynamic tool, a permanent "laboratory in situ". Its objective is to interact and follow the movements of the territory in order to direct and re-orientate any action making it mutate. Repetitions of more deepened readings produce innovative postures to face transformations, in order to "design with nature" (I.McHarg1967) or to refer to the "slow development", also the impact of the time factor, to better understand in its relations in the daily transformation of the places of life.

CONCLUSIONS

The experience illustrated above is a plea to the project businesses so that they can re-acquire this know-how by enriching them with innovating qualities that only the elaboration of highly complex conceptual logics under very intricate territorial conditions can restore.

The multiplication of processes, enquiries and sectorial analyses, all while aiming at precise diagnostics, are part of a dissection process. Simple reassembling all the collected data contains in itself not the potential of a project.

The CEP has stated that the landscape is linked to

"interactions between natural and human actions". Currently, we are working, on the one hand, with practices based on protocols quantifying our actions. Without being able to compare them, we could not trace the next steps for the project. On the other hand, we have observed that the project has progressively lost its legitimacy because of an approach that still lacks a conception of adequate scenarios. Different elements need to be taken into consideration: existing places which can already offer implicit components to the project.

This method of research concerns the spatial and temporal continuity of the landscape and requires places of experiment to submit to observation and monitoring extended in time, a condition which is at present lacking to any practice of landscape project.

The possibility of establishing places in accompaniment of the "project of the landscape" would answer completely the principles of the European convention of the Landscape.

The notion of Observatory could grow rich of a dynamic dimension and the raising awareness, assured through practices of "highlighting, culture or care" of the nature, could lead to the recognition that the future of a landscape is less the addition of divided up looks than a posture of perception still knowing how to "project" itself towards prospective visions of its own environment: the collective landscape of tomorrow, among which "laboratories in situ" can register continuously, as seismographs, every sign to be reviewed as the potential "future of past".

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