

RE-FOUNDING LANDSCAPE PROJECT ON SENSITIVE PERCEPTION

Rita Occhiuto¹

Themes :

(1.) Perception studies and (2.) landscape identification

The recovered dimension of "interactions between natural and human factors" and the reference to "perception of people" are the European Landscape Convention elements which have most contributed to the establishment of a reversal process of landscape perspectives currently taking place in Belgium and particularly in Wallonia. The Convention suggests to think about another way to position themselves in relation to the landscape in order to review the fundamentals of landscape methods. The issues of perception and interaction no longer refer to the expression of a single actor (the designer or the legislator), but they evoke the need for a paradigm shift: leave the project vision imposed on the territory and promote a pluralistic and open project? integrating the perceptions and wishes of people who use and know the locations.

This emerging dynamic is still encountering resistance from the practices of functional and fragmentary planning, which promote the persistence of a landscape heavily imbued with the values of languishing modernity. The stimulus ways opened, five years after the adoption of the Convention in the Walloon region, show the limits of a functionalist and regulatory thinking strongly rooted. Territory is still treated as an object to be analyzed in all its components in order to identify and arrange them according to a new order. Certainty and security obtained through - landscape objectification - has produced a culture and a professional practice that have difficulties in challenging the traditional methodologies. Although analytical, these methods are still very distant from the real materials and conditions.

They are deprived of time and body dimension. People build territories to live. Bodies, located in physical spaces (built or not), maintain interrelationships, governed by diversified times. Landscape is inextricably linked to cyclical and variable relations intertwined between time and body. Relations that are continuous questioning the territory of today in order to understand how the destruction or reduction of body and time factors influence and affect vision, interpretation and, ultimately, landscape culture of people.

Without a critical review of ordinary cultures, attempts to integrate people's perceptions in the landscape project process could be inconclusive.

If one considers that the practices of objectification, promoted and codified by the Walloon Region, are in operation since long enough to forge a fragmented territory, bequeathed to the people, mostly fuelled by a progressive culture and consumerism, we can reasonably question the direct questioning methods involving non-sensitized individuals.

Indeed, the call for contributions from people, more and more distant from their territory, may be a harmful primary process. Today, the so-called participatory procedures are increasingly being adopted or recommended, and landscape observatories complete the picture of the innovations that the region is trying to promote. The issue is also transposed to the question of multidisciplinary studies, which seem to become an incontrovertible evidence.

However, the territory is changing constantly with no tangible results indicating a real paradigm shift. Cultures, both popular and professional, and management tools (project and control), although in phase of

¹ Architect and landscape designer
Professor - Faculté d'Architecture - Université de Liège
Institut Supérieur d'Architecture Lambert Lombard
ISALL - IESA Bruxelles, Liège, Mons
1, rue Courtois - 4000 Liège - Belgium
e-mail : rita.occhiuto@scarlet.be

critical questioning, yet fail to integrate methodological and philosophical changes that would re-establish the deep meaning of landscape in society.

Against practices that include and level everything, even under the label of sustainability, we propose a research that investigates on Walloon people's landscape meaning. Our reflection comes from the finding of a conflicting duality inherent in the demand from the public or grassroots groups. We are witnessing on one side the will- to defend the quality of the landscape and on the other side, the refusal to modify the dynamics such as habitat dispersal, increased mobility and resource exploitation. Moreover, this refusal is accompanied by the rejection of the landscape image generated, which is the direct consequence of actions realized in the territory.

Corboz², in order to describe the process of landscape consumption that generates fear and denial, talk about "anthroposage", a continuous action of the man who stores and provides various materials on surfaces or in containers designed as stocking places -. In this dynamic the landscape is the real absent. His absence is largely due to the lack of popular awareness.

We therefore support the thesis that the surpassing of this culture of the territory, widely shared but not acknowledged by people, lies in the establishment of working methods in the dynamics of non-disjunctive and conjunctive dialectic: one and the other, past and present, minerals and vegetable.

Based on the ongoing disjunctive observation, our thinking is oriented towards questioning of reading and project methods. Adopting the premise that the landscape materials are a resource to decipher, cut, re-assemble and dispose of them as characters of a group writing, the paired dual track-gap enables us to formulate a method of reading-project combining reality to dynamics of projection in order to continuous renewal. The will to lie closer to the existing landscape leads us to the part of the Convention related to education and awareness. To meet this need the research aims to study and restore the broken links between modes of perception by the people and ways of producing real, concrete, tangible and changing landscape. The significant points of methodological reversal concern the relationships between reading and project. The case study has helped redefine it conjunctively and dynamically. The refinement of every landscape readings, becomes essential to understand and recognize the physical and sensitive characteristics that give values to locations.

The careful study of the topography and its human appropriation, climate variations and lights, shades (texture, colour, odour) and the intensities of each landscape component, give way to an approach founded on systemic reading-project, where man and territory are bound by the same dynamics.

Our study focused specifically on landscapes of northern Europe, where the weak character, exacerbated by increased climatic variations, gives a reading in terms of existing assets and not a nuisance. Thus landscapes always already there, often invisible and insignificant in the eyes of their people can finally re-emerge. Close reading can reveal these broken relationship between inhabitants and their environment. It also allows on one hand to bring out the landscape elements from which to rebuild links with the area "already there"³ and on the other hand it provides the basis on which to rebuild practices in order to create new landscape imaginaries.

The research tools are on one hand, practices of geomorphologic and artistic observation like painting (eg. Turner and Flemish school) and writing (travel of exploration by W. Goethe, lounging by W. Benjamin) and on the other hand, the tactile sense using the body as a sensor to re-activate in order to raise awareness.

Readings are oriented so as to bring out the different forms of separation (cracks, in-between, parks and green spaces, vast territories) and to read the landscape as a composition in which natural materials re-surface to acquire the same status as the built areas. Landscape finally arises as complex artefacts where hierarchies can be inverted to consider: the nature as "artialisée", cities like stone gardens locations as the provisions of variable porosity materials examined through the body. The reference to the body help to re-evaluate the perception by completing it with the tactile sense. We rediscover pacing,, exploration or strolling through the walk. The "spazierengang" (or go into space) of R. Walser evokes the primary value of walking as a way to question the premises. These values have been processed by Serra and Smithson in ar-

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² Corboz A, 2001. Le territoire comme palimpseste et autres essais. Les Editions de l'Imprimeur [The territory as palimpseste]

³ Derrida J, 1967. L'écriture et la différence. Editions du seuil [Writing and difference]

tistic research whose aim was to challenge the body. These research tools applied to the reading of contemporary landscapes will not only help to find the meaning of spatial patterns of the past, but also to identify the reasons of current failures and distinguish the ideological sequences that have carved the premises and conditioned the inhabitants.

From active exploration tools, combined with interpretative readings of constitution materials of spaces we have implemented a working method that allows to:

- find the intentions of the existing
- reactivate the listening and the awareness of the inhabitant,
- transform the project in a tool for awareness,
- establish a process of iterative design that makes the project an "open work", to own and extend in time.

The landscape project becomes more a tool to awaken awareness and stimulate the creation of new imaginary collective, rather than formal frozen formulation

Studies combining geomorphologic reading, tactile exploration and project, are being tested in the Lower Meuse (hinterland of Liege, Belgium) and in the valley of the Weser (Chaufontaine)

The case of Ville de Visé

The study was developed from the request to renovate the square in the city centre of Visé, located on the banks of the Meuse, at the Dutch border, a few kilometres from Maastricht. The geomorphologic and urban characteristics are taken into account to form the basis of a comprehensive reflection bringing to reconsider the public spaces system, form the front on the Meuse degraded, shoreline and waterways.

The study of landforms and settlement and growth patterns of the built area show the intelligence and the consistency of location choices of the ancient city. The Old Visé occupied the last position extending from the banks to the hillside before the current border, watching the open plain towards the land in the Netherlands. Fluctuations of the bed of the Meuse are at the origin of islands and lowlands in harmony with the rhythm of the water. The opening of the valley and its sunshine also justify the position of Visé on the right bank and its development clinging to slopes.

The fortified urban margin set itself up along the river Meuse and was the more porous side of the walls: several entrances were located on the banks of the Meuse. Only two high doors ensured connections with the hinterland. The study of the geographical layout of access suggests a composition of internal paths perpendicular to the landforms.

Urban areas on the lower side were driving towards steep streets and staircases allowing a scenic climbing approach: an example is still visible at the foot of the Collegiate. This path, witness of the past, still offers the opportunity to feel the physical action that the material of the built area, combined with the configuration of the urban layout, exercises on the moving body.

The urban hollows prepared to feel major elements such as the Hotel de Ville or the Collegiale. The particularity of this spatial organization certainly induced a different perception of the site, giving clearly, the path a potential of discovery of sequential spaces and landmarks, now lost.

The railway and the highway cut the city from the river, forming an artificial geographical fault that changed the perception of the old centre and encouraged, the urban development towards the north and the plateau. The urban Experience went from tactile and slow perception to the rapid and sectorial use of the city. The ideology of the new Visé, promoting mobility and trade, is based on two major elements: the bridge from the highway, above the old fabric and the bridge over the river Meuse, linked to the Place Reine Astrid. No access from the Meuse exists.

The new channels have characterised the urban body-with routes which profoundly alter the temporal and perceptive approach to urban materials. The topography and the sequences of urban spaces (streets, squares, stairs) lose their composition logic to give way to fragmented bodies to access to, cross or quickly use spaces marked by a profound change in travel times and life mode. The entrance, located at the top of the old Visé disgracefully touches the back of the Collegiale. It is transformed from a powerful landmark,

to discover progressively, in its physicality, into a floating object, intangible, lost in the middle of a , fluid or smooth road space. Indeed, this space misconfigured - Market Square - was never designed to be a square. The route of entry into the city follows the path of the ancient walls and quickly reaches the central square, which is more than a directional and parking node .

The city knows only one reading mode :its path that run parallel to the contours, marginalizing the paths leading to the town hall and the banks of the Meuse. The bridge on the Meuse, climbing over the low rail and river banks, leads directly to the Place Reine Astrid – center of the modern city – cuts it goes through the rest of the city to reach the plateau, without never exploiting the potential of the Boulevard XIX ème , on the basis of which Street bridge may have been thought.

The design of a classical "Great Square" induced the slipping of the new center – translation from City Hall to the NE – who founded the modern city, but was never able to impose its status. The site includes an architectural hybrid set and the Post, and cafes and restaurants are the signs of a unfinished project or given up ideas . The XIX intentions are put away by the ideology of a wired city through space- networks to serve the commercial role, seen as unique hypothesis of identity that the community manager to give itself up to now.

The return to the landscape shows that administrative boundaries, drawing a territory lying on the Meuse (between the Netherlands and Liège) and extended to the left bank, still preserve the possibility of an intense dialogue between urbanization and the river.

The route of the valley, towards the Netherlands, makes us aware of the tension between the river and the steep slope, sometimes abrupt, as opposed to the peace of the plain extending along the left bank. In the period between now flowing in an apparent calm, the waters of the channelled Meuse .

The extension of the study to the vast landscape allows to situate Visé in the valley system. Even if the infrastructure has disfigured the city, the existing land, suspended between sky and water, are still a great asset. The planning forecasts intend to allocate it to the industry, away from the urban center activities. The existing landscape opens assumptions which completely overthrew the known values of the site to highlight the qualities of the reflecting pool, combined with the expanse of heaven and its sunshine, consider a new Waterfront; design a landscape artefact linking town and water.

The right bank, associated with artificial landscape, became the testing ground for scenarios involving time, landscape materials , walking and leisure to reverse the logic of the industrial sector plan. These sketches are shifting urban practices towards the reappropriation of river landscape and provide opportunities for profit through "soft" educational, citizens and non-consumer space projects. Moreover, the questioning of the banks also offer the opportunity to link local projects to overall objectives of environmental interest, such as questioning the controlled state of a river still called "supercritical nature" or the potential effects of climate change in the Meuse valley. The formulation of hypotheses-projects, subject to decision makers and people, becomes a tool for reflection.

The landscape study has re-read the legacies etched in the ground to bring out the changes, deviations or losses of new practices and of imaginaries . It promotes critical review of urban forecasts , opening new development prospects to address the specific functional fragmentation of the ideology of planning by zoning.

The planning department of the city has accompanied us as an observer and a co-player of the first exhibition on public spaces. The wide participation of the population has opened up a useful debate for the future of the city. The most interesting impact of this initiative lies in the awakening of urban consciences and the revitalization of the imaginary in the minds of citizens who have been exposed to creative projects and the depth of the concepts advocated.

The project has thus become as a powerful stimulus of urban dynamics and landscape based on the attempt to coordinate ways of life and desires to become of different local users. This shows that people are now stunned by land surveys often poor, greedy and dispossessed of their imaginary potential.

If landscape is the mirror of our culture, it's time to give people the opportunity to act and to imagine new scenarios. But popular imagination cannot evolve if people are not given the means to understand.

Landscape, perceptive readings and the translation into systems-projects are the tools for building a real and sustainable community project . This does not correspond to an image, but it offers itself as a complex system to realize and redefine over time.

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