

Borderline Ecologies: Landscape between zoning and networks in Flanders and Brussels (1970-today)

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In recent years, advances in environmental sciences, namely the understanding of ecosystems as complex and dynamic networks, have trickled into the theory and discourse of urban planning and landscape design. Nonetheless, **these advances have remained mostly theoretical**, and have rarely been grounded in empiric case study research showing the full complexity of applying a network rationale to contemporary planning systems, which are predominantly based on land-use zoning principles. Moreover, this **spatial zoning** is paired **with disciplinary and administrative zoning**: in Flanders as well as in the Brussels Capital Region, nature policy (based on the network rationale) on the one hand, and (heritage) landscape policy and urban planning (based on zoning principles), are treated within distinct departments, each with its own agendas, tools, experts, practices and responsibilities.

This PhD research will mobilize 3 ecological projects in Belgium as testbeds for alternative solutions to **two contemporary rifts**: Between **theory and practice**, and between **planning/design and environmental science expertise**. By exploring multiple permutations of zoning/network juxtapositions, thus tackling the problem from multiple angles within a common geographical frame, this research will attempt to find innovative general strategies which allow the mediation of competing spatial claims, thus contributing to international theory and practice in which these two core rifts are in need of urgent deliberation.

Existing theoretical frameworks in the field of landscape ecology, political ecology and urban planning/landscape design will be combined and revised in the light of three case studies in the Brussels Capital Region, representative for the balancing act of ecology at the borderline between (1) zoning and networking, (2) expertise and disciplines, and (3) administrative and political bodies. Throughout the PhD, these case studies will unravel juxtapositions of networks/zoning together with different complexities of social, political, administrative and cultural contexts within a common geographical frame. Network and discourse analyses, based on interviews and archival research, will be complemented with a spatial/design analysis and critical cartography, functioning as a mapping instrument that spatializes, renders explicit and confronts spatial, non-spatial, historical and current-day data obtained during the case-study analysis.