

DESCRIPTION Studio Architecture & Territory MARG34GENT

2021-2022

Architectural interventions in the landscape, In search for a common ground in All City/All Land, case the urbanized territory of the Vogelzangbeek Valley (ADO Landscape, Ecology and Design)

Steven Geeraert en Bart Van Gassen

"... I like the idea of discrete, tactical operations over the clumsy "totality" of the master plan. I believe that the largest of territories can be irreducible restructured through small, laconic interventions as opposed to the unbearable excess of everything - object, forms, materials." Georges Descombes in Shifting Sites: The Swiss Way, Geneva

This studio focuses on the relation between architecture & territory. And more in particular on the importance of the open space in developing and transforming a territory. The studio deals with punctual and precise architectural interventions that transform the public space and the landscape. The urgency of this matter is highlighted even more in current time due to the corona pandemic.

More specific we will explore a possible transformation of the horizontal urbanization that characterizes (large parts of) Flanders. A rich varied, seemingly chaotic, environment that is characterized by tensions, contradictions, juxtapositions, ... but also offers opportunities, possibilities and robustness/resilience for those who tend to look further. Within this very diverse urbanized territory – as well spatially as socially – we will search for the common ground that can connect the diversity of inhabitants and users, the human and the non-human, by means of architectural interventions. This will create common goals, a common understanding of a shared situation. Shared between citizens living differently in this urbanized territory. Shared between the human and the non-human.

In our search for solutions we will investigate and mobilize spatial, social and ecological forces that can support a sustainable transformation of this specific territory. Forces that can function as a driver to develop key architectural interventions. Each architectural intervention will thus tackle urban challenges – climate change, ecological decline, social polarisation ... – and address existing and new collectives – human and non-human – in the urbanized territory. This to transform the physical condition of the city, to boost its cultural and social imagination and to strengthen our link with the given world (the soil, water, animals, plants...). Through this making a contribution to a more democratic and a more "terrestrial" territory and stimulating a more "terrestrial" way of life.

More specifically, we will work on the urbanized territory of the Vogelzangbeek valley.

This design research needs to be framed as a spatial as well as a political project. In a context where the opposition between city and countryside is reinstalled by politicians and political programs (cfr. elections of May 2019 in Flanders!). In the light of climate change and sustainability some (political) agents want us to believe that the only place where we can work on a solution is the city. We are convinced that the power to transform is not concentrated in the city but is – in the condition of Flanders – spread over a wider horizontally urbanized territory. At the same time we witnessed the last half century an opposition between the social and the ecological in politics. Also this became again a hot topic in the last elections where some of the main actors capitalized on the fact that choosing for climate is choosing against people. And again here we are convinced that the solution lies in connecting the ecological and the social instead of treating them as two separate worlds. The studio will give us insights in the way this spatial and political project can be imagined.

THE DESIGN STUDIO

The design studio is a laboratory where possible architectures are tested and discussed. Experimentation always starts from an understanding of a concrete site, of a material, of a structure, of a system (social, cultural, ecological...) ... Through this understanding experimentation is embedded in what is already there, in existing forces and dynamics. At the same time experimentation is also speculative. A design also deals with the unknown: unknown users, the unknown future... Through the design a possible real future is imagined.

The design studio links theory to practice. The relation between theory and practice is crucial in architecture. Good architecture can only be realized through a continuous interaction between theory and practice. By reading and discussing texts in the design studio a complex and multifarious relation between theory and practice is accomplished in the studio context.

The design studio function as a collaborative team. The ambition is to combine individual and collective efforts. Students will collaborate to develop joint analyses, fieldwork ... At the same time there is room for individual expression in the making of design proposals. The projects of all the students are brought together in one collective drawing to express a joint effort of punctual architectural interventions to transform a territory.

THE SITE

We will work on **the urbanized territory of the Vogelzangbeek valley**. This valley is situated in the western fringe of Brussels, linking the village of Vlezenbeek in the Pajottenland to Anderlecht, a commune in the heart of Brussels. The Vogelzangbeek stream flows precisely on the border between the Flemish and the Brussels-Capital Region, over a distance of almost 6 km. **The Vogelzangbeek valley can be considered to be a representative sample of Flanders as horizontal metropolis. Consisting of a**

gradient of alternating patches with different scales, densities, uses, biotopes and governance structures, in which a rich diversity of urban and ecological conditions are present.

This fringe landscape is a highly dynamic environment. In Anderlecht, large-scale national infrastructure developments (such as the construction of the canal Brussels-Charleroi and the railroad in the beginning of the 19th century, as well as the construction of the Ring in the 1970s), as well as communal modernist urban design visions (in which residential development was coupled to the development of green infrastructures such as parks and greenways in the second part of the 20th century) have largely impacted the former Boerkozen landscape (with farmers growing a high diversity of vegetables on small plots) in the past 200 years.

Villages such as Sint-Gertrudis-Pede and Sint-Anna-Pede have partly kept their rural qualities, however, also in this context, economical activities and land use have changed drastically. Agriculture has reoriented their produce to international markets, and no longer exclusively serves the city of Brussels. Other economic activities such as small-scale industries, recreation and tourism, but also housing, are competing with farming activities in the Pajottenland. Even though the landscape morphologically still consists out of smaller clusters of housing (half former village, half sub urban developments) and agricultural fields, rural-urban dichotomies are blurred.

THE ASSIGNMENT

In the studio we aim to develop more detailed site specific punctual architectural interventions for different sites covering the complete territory of the Valley of the Vogelzangbeek. Spatial configurations addressing human and non-human actors and forces present on site. Relating to the use of the area, to the water system, to specific species (flora and fauna) ... These interventions go far beyond “architecture as object”. With these interventions we would like to introduce new perspectives to improve spatial structures – water and ecological systems, public space, green infrastructure, neighbourhoods ... – and social/cultural practices in the city. We want to develop true “landscapes for living”.

In this studio we explore why “less is more” and how even the “simplest” architectural intervention demands precision in its position, materiality, textures and forms, in the way different elements are joint and so fort. It can be the transformation of the ground to create a platform that can function as a scene in a wetland. It can be about positioning a rock to create a passage through a creek and become an element of play. It can be about the construction of a shelter.

In this specific studio of Architecture&Territory we want to put more emphasis on the detailed design of the architectural interventions. We would like the student to work on two similar or related interventions on two different sites: two platforms, two observatories.... At the same time the two interventions can vary in character: being more permanent or more temporary, more structural or more fragile, a quick win or a more long term intervention. The interventions need to engage with the triangle of people, ecology and design... Or put even more broader the relation between nature and culture, the relation between the human and the non-human.

An inspiration for these architectural interventions can be found in the renewed interest in outdoor activities we witness in this time of pandemic crises. People are more and more involved with the public spaces in their neighbourhood. Schools and other organisations are – through necessity – looking for possibilities to teach, work, sport ... in the outdoor. To develop specific solutions it is important to be embedded in the site, to experience the site first hand. The proposal is to teach and work together in the area of the Vogelzangbeek in different situations, different weather conditions, different atmospheres.

The studio will be composed of three phases: exploration, experimentation and elaboration. We will do this through walking and observing, reading and writing, thinking and drawing.

1. Exploring the territory on site (week 1 to week 3)

We will be spending the first three weeks on site exploring the territory intensely. By walking, taking pictures, doing interviews, sketching, making short movies ...

2. Design experiments on two selected sites (week 4 to week 8)

From the fourth week we will start to make detailed design proposals. Developing detailed drawings, models, on site experiments ... In the studio we want each student to develop a manifold of possible variations of each of the two interventions. We want a detailed exploration and detailed experimentation in terms of dimensions, materiality, position ...

3. Detailed design of two punctual interventions (week 8 to week 14)

Building further on the design experiments we can focus in the final stage of the studio on a further elaboration of a very sensitive and very precise architecture of the two interventions.

The studio will focus on three types of drawings.

1. Drawings that express the architecture of the developed interventions. Expressing the dimensions, materiality, the texture, the structure, the joints ...
2. Drawings that link the architecture to the territory and the other way around
3. Drawings that highlight the relation between ecology, people and design (cfr. ADO Landscape, Ecology and Design).

Drawings can at the same time be used for two or more of the above explained content. For instance a perspectival section (cfr. drawings of Bow-Wow) can show at the same time the architecture of an intervention, the use and the link to ecology. Each studio session we expect the student to present his or her work using those three perspectives.

Every student – or group of students – will work on a different piece of the site. The juxtaposition of all the interventions will result in a “complete” drawing, a possible reimagination of the Valley of the Vogelzangbeek. By this stressing the importance of a transformation made of separate punctual interventions.

METHODOLOGICAL ELEMENTS OF THE DESIGN STUDIO

Methodological elements of the design studio: Comparative research on case studies | Discussions linked to texts of the Reader Architecture & Territory | Walks on site (individual/in group) | Talks with inhabitants and local actors | Focus on the making of key drawings to express the design (the architecture, the relation architecture & territory, triangle ecology/people/design) | Site visit Groen Lint Ostend | Design sessions: individual and in group | In between reviews with invited critics | a sequence of formal and informal meetings allowing students to explore and experiment

Good architecture is built on a broad set of interests, needs, perspectives, lines of thought ... In this studio we want to strengthen ways of seeing and thinking that are often overlooked, often left out due to a lack of time, a lack of focus or – the opposite – a lack of distraction. We try to synthesise what we mean in three approaches that can help you to develop a good project, good architecture. We leave it open to you to find the right balance between the different lines but we hope that you take the time to explore them all. And we hope by doing this your architecture – and your daily life! – can become richer and more interesting since you will shift from drawing, to walking, to reading and thinking and so on ... One day you walk, one day you read, and one day you draw ... You can test proportions and variations in the organisation of your time and do what feels best.

The three approaches are:

Walk and observe

This starts from what is already there on a site. Taking time to walk and taking time to become sensitive to what you experience and what you see by walking, by being in a place, by using a site... Taking pictures. Taking measurements. Talk to people. Listen to animals.

Read and Write

There is a quote of Gilles Deleuze that states “no practice without theory, and no theory without practice”. This means that an architect also needs to develop an understanding of theory if he wants to build. We invite you to read and reflect on what you read. Select quotes. And then start to write to reflect on what you have read. And in doing this relate it to your design.

Think and Draw

This is probably what we all know best. Sometimes we just draw and it works. Sometimes we need the thinking to help us to break free from what we draw. But it can also be the other way around. When the thinking blocks you you need to start to draw, redraw and draw again. And then by trial and error you might come – unexpectedly – to a solution. Because of that: thinking and drawing!

To create room – space and time – for these different approaches we will integrate in the design studio one or two informal sessions. For the formal sessions the demanded output is clearly defined and it is obligatory to develop this and bring it to the studio. For the informal sessions it is open to the student to bring whatever he likes to the studio to discuss linked to walk&observe, read&write or think&draw.

FRAME OF THE STUDIOS ARCHITECTURE & TERRITORY

The studio is framed in the studios Architecture & Territory run by Steven Geeraert and Bart Van Gassen. It is embedded in the ADO Landscape, Ecology and Design (with Bruno Notteboom) and the research program All City/All Land. Studio Architecture & Territory focuses on the engagement of the architect with the territory. A sensitivity partly lost during the last century – although an undercurrent was always present! – and now becoming step by step again key to any relevant design practice. In designing sensitive buildings. And in this studio even one step further, by engaging as an architect in a field of design broader than the design of buildings. In focusing on landscapes, public spaces and infrastructure of different kinds and nature. More concrete: the design of platforms, shelters, passages, bridges, streets, squares, water systems, energy networks, river banks, promenades ... We believe that an experience in this broader field of design is key in any architectural educative trajectory nowadays.

CROSS SCALAR AND CROSS SECTORAL | Studio Architecture & Territory stands for crossing scales and crossing dimensions. From the territorial scale to the material detail. From an interest in space, construction and materials to an interest in the social, cultural, ecological...

“... the land and public space as an expression of ancient culture, or as a palimpsest that evidences all of the activities that contributed to the shaping of that particular landscape and no other. Upon the tracks overlaid by the march of time, site interpretation detects potentialities to be nurtured and passed on. The reading is thus that of an inheritance and the eventual project a bequest.” Sébastien Marot in *The reclaiming of sites*

SITE AS DRIVER | In the studio we will consider the (constructed) site – and not the program! – as the driver of the design. Every intervention starts from what is already there – the so-called '*As Found*' (A. en P SMITHSON, 1990) – on the site and in the larger territory: real and imaginary, material and immaterial, physical and social... From a close reading of the site civic architectural interventions will be developed aiming to tackle major challenges urbanized territories are facing today. Like there are climate change, social polarization, water management...

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PUNCTUAL INTERVENTIONS | We will design punctual and precise architectural interventions that can transform a given urbanized territory and help it to evolve in a more sustainable direction. The focus is thus not on the development of an over-all masterplan but on elementary interventions that form the translation of the most essential options. These interventions can vary from very fragile (light, temporal...) to very robust (hard, permanent...). Since we work on punctual interventions – and are not aiming for an overall transformation of a site – the overall quality of the project is developed through the confrontation, the collision between what is given and what is added. In the studio an architectural intervention is developed in a precise relation with what is already there and is given a precise character, atmosphere, materiality, detail.

“Animals, vegetals and minerals have to come into the world of art. The artist is attracted by their physical, chemical, biological possibilities (...) Among the living things the artist discovers himself, his body, his memory, his gestures, everything which directly lives, and doing so he restarts to experience a sense of life and nature, a sense which implies (according to Dewey) many contents: the sensorial, the sensational, the sensitive, the sensible, the sentimental, the sensual. The artist chooses the directly lived, not anymore the represented.” Germano Celant, *Arte povera*, 1969

LANDSCAPES FOR LIVING | These interventions go far beyond architecture as object. With these interventions we would like to introduce new perspectives to improve spatial structures – water and ecological systems, public space, green infrastructure, neighbourhoods ... – and social/cultural practices in the city. We want to develop true “landscapes for living”.

The studio Architecture & Territory is taught in the masters of Architecture in different formats. As well masterstudios as the master dissertation. In the year 2020-2021 following studios are taught. Studio 24GENT –Restructuring AC/AL through punctual interventions, case to be defined. Studio 34 GENT – the urbanized territory of the Vogelzangbeek.

Bio Studio Teachers

Bart Van Gassen is an engineer-architect and urbanist who graduated from the University of Ghent and the KULeuven. In his work and teaching he is exploring the relation between architecture, landscape and urbanism. Bart Van Gassen is leading the spatial design team of the engineering and consultancy firm of Tractebel (instagram Spatialdesigntractebel). He realised over a period of 20 years now studies and projects related to spatial design of a very different scale and nature. His main focus today lies on the design of public space, landscape design, master planning and territorial studies. He worked on the

design and execution of several parks, squares and promenades in different cities in Belgium: Muntplein in Brussels, Maria Hendrikapark in Ostend, Gentbrugse Meersenpark in Ghent, Zeeheldenplein in Ostend, Kortrijk Weide, ... At this moment he is leading the refurbishment of the Gedempte Zuiderdokken – Dok Zuid – in Antwerp, the Materialenkaai in Brussels, the Vaartkom in Leuven, Ringpark Zuid in Antwerp... He also made several master plans for contexts where city and landscape are intertwined. Among others the master plan IGLO for a high rise quarter in Antwerp, the master plan Groenlint which is exploring the Greenbelt of Ostend, the master plan for the Stiemervallei in Genk... Further he recently participated in territorial projects like the reactivation of the Kolenspoor in Limburg, a research project to rethink the relation between space and mobility in the city region Ghent in the framework of Labo Ruimte, research on landscape and ecology in relation to the realisation of the missing link Rond Ronse... Since 2008 Bart Van Gassen is part-time lecturer at KULeuven. He started with teaching the Theoretical Component in different studios. Today he is leading different studios in the Masters of Architecture. And from 2021 he will also teach a course in landscape architecture together with Bruno Notteboom. Bart Van Gassen participated in the KULeuven in the ADO All Cities All Land and is now leading together with Bruno Notteboom the ADO Landscape, Ecology and Design.

Steven Geeraert is an engineer-architect and an urban designer. He graduated in architecture (KULeuven, 2000) and urbanism (KULeuven, 2004).. Steven has a broad experience ranging from architecture to urbanism. He worked with BGK consulting (Leipzig/DE, 1995/1996), ABETEC (Dendermonde/BE, 1997), architect Kris Vos (Edegem/BE, 2000-2003), Studio Associato Secchi-Viganò (Milan/IT, 2004-2010) and AG Stadsplanning Antwerpen (Antwerp/BE, 2010-2012). In 2008 he founded MAARCH with Andrea Carlesso and Stefano Peluso. MAARCH is a laboratory for architecture, urban design and landscape. MAARCH is based in Milan/IT and Antwerp/BE. Stevens personal focus and interest mainly lies on public space, landscape and urbanism/urban design. He was, and still is, involved in (inter)national competitions and projects. With Secchi-Viganò he worked amongst others on the renovation of the Grote Markt, Veemarkt and Sint-Romboutskerkhof in the centre of Mechelen, the redesign of the Theatre square and surroundings in Antwerp, the Lamot site incl. the Vanbeethovebridge in Mechelen, the Spoor Noord Park and the Regatta Park in Antwerp, the masterplan for the Hoge Rielen near Kasterlee, a former military site that today is used as a reception area for youth internships and summer camps, and the masterplan for Siesegemkouter in Aalst, where the landscape is guiding the layout of an industrial area. He was also involved in the project for Hostel Wadi at the Hoge Rielen, a project that was nominated for the Mies van der Rohe Award 2015. With MAARCH Steven recently finished a neighbourhood development in Lendeledede, where MAARCH maximally tries to intertwine the village and the surrounding landscape. He is working, amongst others, on the design of a landscape parking in the protected area of the Hof Ter Linden park in Edegem and the refurbishment of the church area in the centre of Ekeren. For the city of Sint-Niklaas he is designing the 'street of the future' in the framework of a study MAARCH conducted, investigating the implementability of the Tjallingii's green lobe theory on the Baensland neighbourhood. In 2017 the team Studio Paola Viganò – Grafton Architects – MAARCH was selected as one of the five teams to study the capping of the Antwerp Ringroad. Today the team is working on the design and execution of 2 of the 5 ringparks: Ringpark Noordkasteel and Ringpark Lobroekdok. Since 2013 Steven is teaching at the Faculty of Architecture of KULeuven. He is involved in different studios in the Masters of Architecture. He

participated in the KULeuven in the ADO All Cities All Land and is now part of the ADO Landscape, Ecology and Design..

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Bart Van Gassen, Steven Geeraert en Bruno Notteboom

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Alvaro Siza – Malleguira, Evora, Portugal

Georges Descombes – Voie Suisse, Switzerland

Georges Descombes – Parc Lancy, Geneve, Switzerland

Georges Descombes/ADR architectes – Renaturalisation of the river Aire, Switzerland

Gion A. Caminada – in Vrin, Switzerland

Atelier Bow Wow – Canal Swimmers Club, Bruges (BE)

Aalto Alvar – Experimental House, Muurtasalo (BE)

Janssens Ann Veronica – HD400, Ghent (BE)

Niemeyer Oscar – Ibirapuera Park, Sao Paulo (BR)

Robbrecht&Daem – Stadshal, Ghent (BE)

Studio Secchi-Viganò – Cemetery of Hoog-Kortrijk, Kortrijk (BE) / Park Spoor Noord, Antwerp (BE) / Theaterplein, Antwerp (BE)

Van Eyck Aldo – Playgrounds, Amsterdam (NL)

Zumthor Peter – Bruder Klaus Field Chapel, Mechernich (DE)

