

TU Delft Faculty of Architecture

Department of Urbanism - Chair of Landscape Architecture

MSc Graduation Thesis

Graduation Studio

Flowscapes

Author _ Antonis Athanasiou

First mentor _ Denise Piccinini

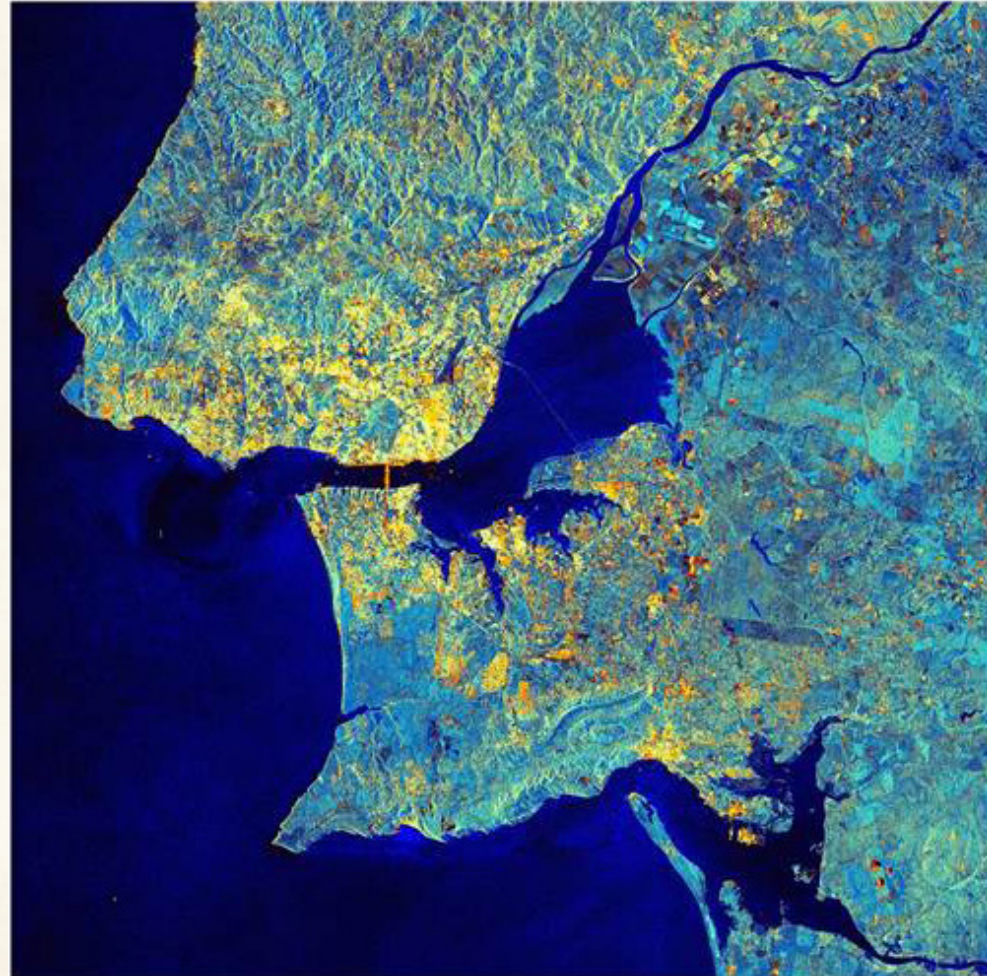
Second mentor _ Maria Luisa Calabrese

Delegate board of examiners _ ir. Alexander de Rider

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Reflection

Lessons Learned

The Landscape in the Gradient project is an attempt to examine a multidisciplinary approach learning from both Landscape Ecological and Urbanism theories as well as the complexity of social implications that characterizes the context.

The learning process from the early stage started with an inner urge to understand the relationships between the urban and rural realm and conceive the in-between as a place of interactions between the two, a hybridization. Sensitized by the theories of Patric Geddes and Mumford, a hybrid approach, can deal with the current urban conditions where distinctions between urban and rural have blurred, could lead to an interconnection of city-landscape rather than viewing cities as the corruption of nature. Prioritizing landscape as the foundation for a sound urbanism, and doing so through a synthetic, interdisciplinary practice and not only as a top-down planning process. An attempt to understand and rethink the complexity of social-ecological and morphological interrelations as one network. Further more, a personal concern was to address these multidisciplinary perspectives into a certain context and identify the main driving forces and actors that would contribute to the design process.

From the beginning my research had to come across several notions that would describe these landscapes as peri-urban areas and delve into theories and strategies in order to give my own definition. The Lisbon Metropolis was a challenge to my motivation as a great representative of the dense urbanization problem, as well as an unknown world that may be characterised by cultural differences, but mostly an inner urge to deal with an urban structure similar to my country both affected by the Crisis Era, both still in need of finding relations. As the Lisbon Metropolis disperses, it loses its complexity and charge and it is there where there is a need to recapture the vitality in the new expansive urban form.

The strong and weak sides of the chosen methodology

From the beginning of the research process it was important to understand the complexity of the system in the context and conduct a multiscale analysis to identify the relationships that contribute or not in the creation of the network. Starting from the regional scale and ending on the local scale the research process followed a cohesive exploration of the occurring networks on the context. The starting point was a difficult task as the collection of data and information was limited for the context. The early desk study provided the main axis of my research approach however a missing link between historical events that had shaped these in-between landscapes was visible. After the site visiting a new world of insights was open. The contribution of local authorities and universities further enlightened the clues and appeared to be fundamental in the ongoing process. The landscape biography tool was the main driving force to understand the historical events that shaped the interrelations between society and nature. The present approach takes after the idea depicted by Marwyn Samuels that argues that landscapes are much more than the by-products of anonymous social, economical and demographic developments (Samuels, 1979). In a sense they are Biographical accounts of numerous individuals who have occupied, worked, shaped and dreamed them over time.

From the layer analysis, on the other hand, the identification of the main driving forces and actors contributed to the clarification and selection of the potentials that could redefine the ecological -morphological and social relationships as a new complex network receiving and giving information to one - another acting as one organism. At the same time it was critical for me to combine both theoretical and referential strategies from landscape ecological theories such as the Landscape Ecological Principles of Forman and Godron to identify the ecological elements that were struggling by the suburbanization processes. The interaction between the several perspectives of the analysis contributed to the extraction of insights that were latter implemented on the design process by the application of the derived design principles.

The outcome defined the main strategies of design going back and forth from the larger scale to the local one where the main actors were altered in order to cultivate the new landscape. The experience to envision the future landscape was a complex design exercise as i had to have a critical overview of the interactions between the theories and the grounded design project. A landscape of interactions, where the implications derived from the actual conditions, always in relation to the theories and utopian views of both landscape and urbanism fields. Being a designer involved being both an author as well as a character experiencing the proposed cultivated landscape. Throughout the project research and design where always in interaction: the theoretical framework informs the context and the other way around, so that the strategic actions settle on site following its principles, but adapt to specific situations.

Ethical issues and dilemmas

Given the specific theme of the research, ethical and moral issues where also faced. The importance of the land and its productive character had to be taken into account. Many parts of the agricultural mosaic have nowadays been abandoned living space for further urbanization processes. A contradiction of relationships can be highlighted ; the agricultural mosaic that once served as a tool of ecological fragmentation by means of productivity, is now disappearing / contributing to the urban dynamics. The graduation project had to overcome the land uses problems and redefine the contribution of these abandoned areas in the new Cultivated Landscape.

The re evaluation of the landscape patterns was crucial not only for the design process in itself but also for the contribution of the new uses in the societal interaction as well as the economical benefits of the people implied in the action. Giving them the opportunity to re envision the land was a difficult task to accomplish as the main agricultural mosaic had to shift from the actual abandoned condition to a new cultivation theme as well as to serve as a the main driving force for the ecological continuum.

Relevance

The phenomenon of urbanization has been increasing for several decades leading to the creation of hybrid areas between the rural and urban setting, detaching society from ecological processes. The thesis tries to re-envision a developed framework inspired by ecological theories, methods and tools that will contribute to the creation of a complex network that will affect the reattachment of society and nature.

The course of the research is mainly focused on the questionable relation of these in-between landscapes with the urban and rural realm and their future perception. An attempt to explore design methods to integrate social-ecological and morphological relationships of the peri-urban areas into one network by using existing altered systems on site. The graduation thesis becomes a chance to further explore the theoretical approaches in Landscape Architecture and develop/build my own theories that can contribute to the design project in relevance to the context (Lisbon Metropolitan Area); an initiative to bring both theories and practise into one. The vision of contributing to the perception of these in-between landscapes as a continuum from urban to rural, rather than a distinctive appreciation of the two scopes. Giving shape and meaning to neglected, abandoned spaces.

To finalize however, the importance of the graduation project is not only to provide the design tools and principles needed to curate the problem, but also to understand the importance of the site specificity and its characteristics, that in the end are the ones that define the design project. Going from research to design, the design principles may consist a useful tool to evaluate and intervene in the system, however the alteration process will always be confronted with the site itself and the decisions taken should be a blend of both. Finally the research and design proposal is not serving as the curator of the problem but can be seen as a further step in the problem field of peri-urbanization and the relationships between rural and urban realm.