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# Water Ways as the Backbones for Country-Houses-and-Suburban-Villas Landscapes: Method to read Heritage Landscapes

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## Abstract

*This paper is on the understanding of the cultural (historic) coherence in the urban landscape systems in the Netherlands and the use of this knowledge for sustainable landscape transformations. When culture (use, meaning) is hermeneutically read in (historic) landscape features, we can fully understand how the historic landscape functioned as a system in the past. If we understand the historic landscape system, we can find future solutions to spatial problems nowadays maintaining its heritage value. This paper presents a hermeneutic approach to heritage preservation describing the coherence of our culturally formed landscapes or heritage landscapes in a threefold approach based on the parameters form, meaning and use on different scales and in various timeframes. The explanation of this approach is given by presenting an example from, the chosen a study of Dutch country houses and suburban villas erected as part of Dutch landscape in the seventeenth century. Nowadays, these individual green monuments are seen as country-houses-and-suburban-villas landscapes. These landscapes can be defined as large scale landscape structures or even systems. Research learned that water (rivers, brooks, canals et cetera) was the backbone of all Dutch country-houses-and-suburban-villas landscapes and by defining these water systems, we can create country-houses-and-suburban landscapes for spatial, ecological, climatological, cultural and organisational reasons; an example of this application is the story of the Baakse Beek.*

## Keywords

*Country houses, suburban villas, country houses and suburban villas landscapes, heritage landscapes, cultural landscape.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 HERITAGE LANDSCAPES WITH CONTEMPORARY VALUES

The urge to base the cultural understanding of landscapes on the reading of historic use and meaning is embedded in a changing perspective on heritage. Since the 1990s, the common approach in heritage changed from an expert-driven preservation of single objects into an area-driven preservation based on narratives and the description of landscape structures and its (physical) characteristics (Ministerie van OCW, 1999) and its values. So, both scale and scope changed recently in the approach of heritage. The historic landscape structure is now seen as an important aspect of spatial planning and the need to include it is growing (Janssen et al, 2017); this requires a proactive role in spatial planning of our built past (Denhez, 1997). The change in scale reflects the landscape-based approach in heritage theory that developed over the last decades. The origin of this approach is already found in several nineteenth-century publications (Veldpaus, Pereira Roders, Colenbrander, 2013). The change in scope is caused by the growing attention to include both tangible and intangible aspects necessary for a participative community-based approach (Vecco, 2010). The cultural shift of heritage changed at

the turn of the twenty-first century with the incorporation of intangible heritage aspects like stories and traditions; it increased the role of culture in the domain of heritage (Vecco, 2010). Participation by heritage-inclusive communities and their growing commitment will lead to use of historic systems in a new way that can ensure sustainable use of landscape systems. Landscape architecture focuses more on landscape characteristics nowadays than it did in the past. To understand the importance of these characteristics in landscape planning, we have to go beyond identifying the physical landscape characteristics by studying its historic use and meaning in close connection to the surroundings.

The main goal of this paper is to describe a holistic, hermeneutic approach based on defining and valuing the physical form, historic use and meaning of the landscape. This approach is applied to all known country houses and suburban villas built in the province Holland in the seventeenth century (Verschuure-Stuip, 2019). Next an example of the application of this theory in heritage management is given for a different area, the Baakse Beek. It shows how the description of historic use of a landscape by country houses can help to develop a better process of remodelling the landscape in sustainability questions.

## 1.2 COUNTRY HOUSES AND SUBURBAN VILLAS LANDSCAPES OF HOLLAND

A large number of country houses and suburban villas were built close to each other in the province of Holland in the 17<sup>th</sup> century what resulted in landscapes of green ensembles (Bijhouwer, 1946; Maas, 1967). Van der Wyck (1982) used the term country-house landscape (singular) for the first time in 1982. He focussed on the influence of one country house or suburban villa on its surrounding. Because of the unique Dutch situation that many houses and villas were built close to each other, the term *country-houses-and-suburban-villas landscapes* (multiple) was introduced (Verschuure-Stuip, Renes, 2015, 42-65) (map 1). The *country-houses-and-suburban-villas landscapes* were inseparably connected to the high dynamics of change in the landscape due to e.g. land reclamation, urbanisation and warfare at the time (Steenbergen, Reh, Aten, 2005; Stol 2002; Verschuure-Stuip, Renes, 2015). Reh, Steenbergen and Aten wrote that country houses and suburban villas functioned at different scales (2005). The scales are referred to as the micro scale, the meso scale and the macro scale.

Groups of estates and villas are be identified as *country-houses-and-suburban-villas landscapes* nowadays. This name reflects the landscape-based approach in heritage theory of the last several decades. This started to attracting attention since the 1990s, but has its origin in the nineteenth century (Veldpaus, Pereira Roders, Colenbrander, 2013). The first question is do these landscapes are foremost a physical structure based on the combination of houses, villas and their gardens? Renes defined these landscapes based on the presence of country houses and suburban villas and other physical landscape features (Renes, 2018). But what is missing is the balance between physical appearance and human interventions, like the European Landscape Convention declared in the first article 'an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors' (ELC 2002). Following that line of thought, the first question is: how can you read heritage landscapes as a combination of a mental and social landscape and a physical appearance And the second question is: how can you use this knowledge in reading and organising cooperation to preserve its historic and current values?



FIG. 1 Map of a country houses and suburban villas landscape along the river Vecht. Source: 'Nieuwe kaart van Loenen, uitgegeven door Covens en Mortier in Amsterdam' (1737) Archives of province Utrecht.

## 2 BODY OF THE PAPER: CULTURAL IDENTITY OF THE LANDSCAPE

### 2.1 AUTHORSHIP OF THE LANDSCAPE

Heritage landscapes (or in general cultural-driven landscapes) can be considered as dynamic landscape systems, altered since its creation and changed over times in different periods. One of the basic challenges in the field of landscape architecture is to manage the dynamic interrelationships between the environmental and cultural *systems* (Senge, 1990). The changes depends very much on the power, freedom, and prosperity of owners (and policy advisors) (Antrop, 2007). To understand the identity of these dynamic landscapes, three sets of parameters are crucial important: the relationship between form, meaning and use interpreted as the human authorship, the influence of time and the importance of scale; such an analysis was described in detail in the thesis "Well-situated"(Verschuure-Stuip, 2019).

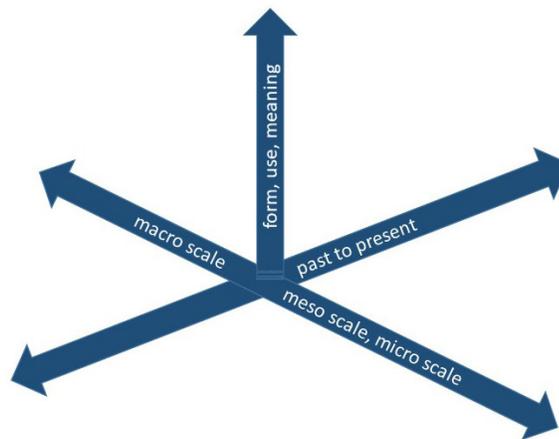


FIG. 2 Table to define the relation between the parameters of a heritage landscape. Source: author

An important aspect of the authorship is the reciprocity of men and landscape. In the last twenty years the approach of human influence on the landscape has changed from simple data collection to reading and understanding the (individually driven) influences of men; it is referred to as the *landscape biographical approach* (Hidding, Kolen, Spek, 2001; Kolen, 2005). Renes and Kolen expressed this with the words '...as an essential part of human life work, landscapes have the potential to absorb something of people's life, works and thoughts. Landscapes shape their own life stories in different time scales, imprinted by human existence, affecting personal lives and transcendent individual life cycles' (Kolen, Renes, 2015, 25-26). This underlines the reciprocity of men and landscape and the dynamic relationship this represents. This human influence is not only based what is seen and sensed, but what is experienced emotionally or imagined (Fairclough, 2006). Samuels and Kolen referred to this as the *authorship of these landscapes* (Samuels, 1979; Kolen 2005; Kolen, 2015). The authorship can be seen as the way to describe how human used the landscape, reflecting the values and priorities of the designer, client, user, community or even the larger environment. The author can vary from an individual person to larger societal groups; the relevant persons may differ in time. In this paper the authors are the landowners-designers and how they relate to their local communities and the location. The reading of these landscapes can contribute to understanding the ideas of the urban elite through time if studied in a well-defined group. The theoretical approach is clear, but it needs to be made more specific for practical applications.

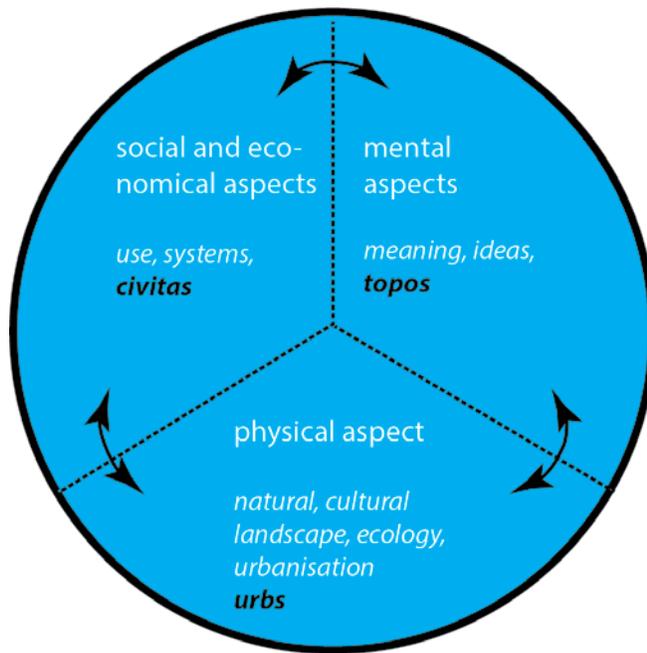


FIG. 3 Three parameters defining place in the threefold analysis. Source: author, 2019, 73.

The first parameter is the authorship. It can be studied by reading historic maps, drawings, pictures and literature, based on the triad of space (Relph, 1976), the physical features and appearances, the activities, and the meanings. Montgomery (1998) described these elements more explicitly for the urban realm. Fig. 3 explains how the three aspects form the triad of space. Lefebvre (1974) and Soja (1998) used words like the physical appearance, the social and the mental issues. The Dutch researchers Taverne et al used for the physical plan, the societal issues and the meaning the Latin words *urbs*, *civitas*, and *topos* (Taverne, Ramakers, Demski, 2012, 9-20). The second parameter is time. The landscapes changed over time, altering the appearance of places regularly due to natural, cultural or financial forces like fashion, new owners and so on. The third parameter is scale. Burns and Kahn distinguished the dynamical mutual relationship between objects and its surroundings on three 'scales', the area of control, the area of influence and the area of effect (2005). Use and meaning may be different on these scales which we describe as the macro scale, the meso scale or the micro scale.

Understanding form, use and meaning can be based on a spatial analysis like used in (urban) typomorphological studies, on space syntax and on mental mapping such as was done by Lynch (1960). Historic drawings can be used to explain use and meaning by analysing the apparent emphasis given to specific elements in these drawings. Sightlines can as an example help to understand the meaning of specific elements (Verschuure-Stuip, 2019). Every site should be analysed on the mentioned different scales (micro, meso, macro) and on three different aspects (spatial, social-economic and mental-meaning), separately for well-defined time frames. The scales vary and should be identified in the beginning of the research. To study the dynamics of the site or place, this table should be completely filled in and for a number of timeframes, because the meaning and use of a site may have changed because of new technics or different incentives.

## 2.2 RESEARCH METHOD

The threefold analysis is embedded in a four step method. The first step is an inventory of data on the main topic, which was for this research country houses and suburban villas. Due to the spatial character of this analysis, data are presented in distribution maps with geo-information programmes (GIS). Next to this an inventory of the suspected most influential contextual aspects is made based on historic research of (historic) maps, drawings, descriptions (Verschuure-Stuip, 2016) and others. In this paper the main contextual topic is *water and landscape*. This information was made visual in the same software and analysed in the threefold approach (form, use, meaning). Within the second step the topic layer and the contextual layer were combined and analysed in three scales. The third step is to classifying all information and combining it in a coherent story (Verschuure-Stuip, 2019).

## 2.3 COUNTRY HOUSES AND SUBURBAN VILLAS LANDSCAPES

The method was used to describe the essence of the large scale *country-houses-and-suburban-villas landscapes*. The origin of outside living by the urban elite in the Netherlands. was in the beginning of the seventeenth century when the Republic of the Seven United Provinces was formed. From that moment on, hundreds of these houses were built in the most influential province of the young Republic (f.e. Stöver 2000, Bertram 2005). From that moment on, hundreds of these houses were built in the important provinces of the young Republic (f.e. Stöver 2000, Bertram 2005). The luxurious houses with their meticulous designed gardens and agricultural grounds were grouped close to each other, just like the wealthy civilians lived in the city in specific quarters (Verschuure-Stuip, 2019). This was seen from outside the republic as quite an extraordinary situation. It had to do with the socio-political situation in the Republic. The Republic was led by civilians and not by nobility in a highly dynamic landscape in one of the most urbanised areas in Europe at the time (Frijthoff, 2002). This situation was different from neighbouring countries and was only comparable to the Venice situation a century earlier where the hinterland Veneto was reclaimed and used for building a villa urbana or a villa rustica<sup>1</sup> (Cosgrove, 1988).

In this paper the combining of the topic map (country houses and suburban villas as dots) with the context map (barge canals, landscape) on the macroscale (Fig. 4) is explained by presenting a few drawings. The blue lines represent the barge-canal connections for public transportation between cities. Analysing and combining the topic data (houses and villas) and the contextual information (barge canals) on different scales, a number of conclusions could be drawn. A detailed analysis of the map shows that only in a few regions country houses and suburban villas were purposely built near the barge canals and this is only valid for the barge canals opened in two periods, the first period being between 1630 and 1647, the second period being between 1655 and 1702. Most country houses and suburban villas were built close to the barge canals opened for use in the first period when the barge connections were a novelty.

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In the Netherlands, a division is made between country houses and suburban villas. Country houses have a noble or an agriculture origin, being used the entire year and the suburban villas, which were made for pleasure during the summer and with a urban signature. Van der Wyck, 1974.

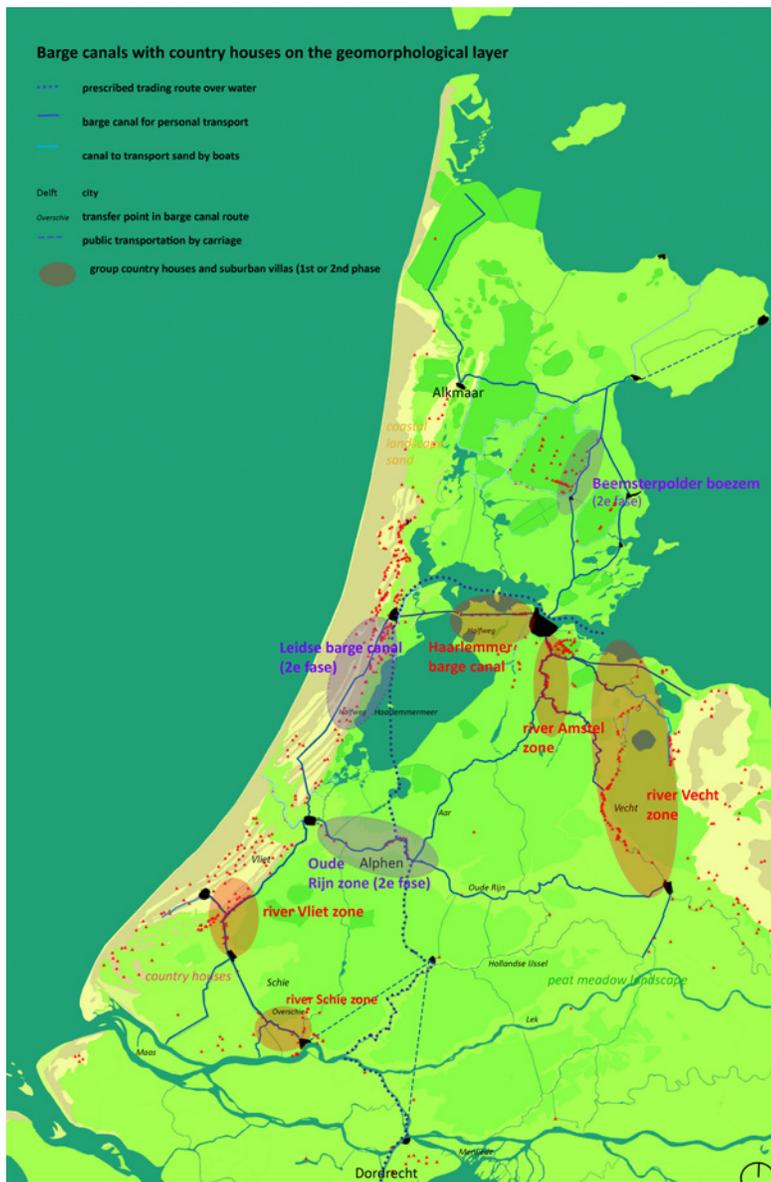


FIG. 4 Distribution map of country houses and the location of barge canals in the seventeenth century. Source: author 2019, 193.

The relationship between country house or suburban villa and the barge canals system, the analysis was further analysed one on the micro scale, in this example for the country house *Vegtvliet* (Fig. 5). The rich merchant of Amsterdam Willem van den Broeck (1617-1681) and his wife Anne Masuer (1613-1668) built their villa along the river Vecht in 1665 (Plomp, 1983). The couple was one of the many rich civilians who built themselves these recreational houses *avant la lettre*. The house itself was orientated towards the river, which was both a trading route as well as a barge canal, public transportation over water (Verschuure-Stuip, 2019). We explore whether the orientation was chosen for visual reasons (seen and be seen) or for transportation reasons and the former seemed to be the case. In a later period the orientation of the house was reversed to the paved 'highway' on the other side of the house.



FIG. 5 The house of Van den Broeck and Masuer called Vegtvliet near Breukelen. Source: D. Stoopendaal 1719, provincial archives of Utrecht.

The use of different scales and of different time periods can give more validity to the conclusions reached in the research. A more profound understanding of the relationship between house, garden and context requires the addition to the analysis of the tangible and intangible relationships between these groups of country houses and suburban villas. It needs a similar analysis of a number of contextual topic layers, like land roads or other water ways, rivers, drainage-canal systems and brook systems, before it builds up to a systematic landscape approach.

### 3 SUSTAINABILITY GOALS AND THE THREEFOLD APPROACH

#### 3.1 CLIMATE CHANGE AND COUNTRY HOUSES

The use of country houses and suburban villas as *large scale landscape systems* can give insight in various landscape values which are important in the STG's (Sustainability Goals). To do so we need to fully understand a given heritage landscape. The landscapes have a cultural meaning and a unique narrative binding people to a certain place and to each other (place attachment). Large scale landscape structures also have natural, ecological and climatological values; there are sometimes unique species of plants and animals present and they may play a role in reducing the negative human impact (CO<sub>2</sub>, fine dust, warm cities) on climate. Especially when we consider country houses as a large group covering an extensive area, they can be profitable for climate control and ecology (STG 11). Research has shown the importance of trees and a green environment for our health, for liveability and for the physical experience of landscapes (STG11). Country-houses-and-suburban-villas landscapes can help to achieve sustainability goals by the creation of meaningful, inclusive and healthy living conditions through the preservation of the natural values of their historic systems. In the next section it is explained by example how this landscape approach can work if we create groups of country houses and suburban villas and organise them spatially and organisationally as a base for new planning strategies.

## 3.2 CLIMATE CHANGE AND COUNTRY HOUSES

In 2018 and 2019 the Stichting Kastelen, Buitenplaatsen, Landgoederen (SKBL), a national organisation for castles, historic country houses and suburban villas, presented a programme raising the public awareness of the effects of the severe drought on historic gardens (NOS, 2018). In the eastern part of the Netherlands climate change is affecting the distribution of rainfall. About a century ago water management systems were developed to drain water from the higher grounds and historic retention systems were shut off. Nowadays rainfall is diminishing in certain periods of the year creating a shortage of water to fill the moats, water streams, the ponds, fountains and even to supply the woods used for rabat forestry, a form of industrial forestry on country houses. In turn it results in a change in landscape experience and a loss or change in biodiversity. The lack of water causes specific species to be replaced by others, thus creating 'new' landscapes. The question is which landscapes should be considered? Which phase is leading in this transformation? (Malinath, 2017).

An analysis as described in chapter 2 of this paper is needed of the relationship between the country-houses-and-suburban-villas landscapes, the present waterways and the historic retention system. A design atelier Heritage landscapes, Delft University of Technology (DUT) was organised in 2018 to make plans to control the drought problem and to include the preservation of the historic situation in this solution. The water systems inside and outside the gardens needed to be made more robust to preserve the unique species of plants and animals in the gardens and so preserve the experience of the gardens. As a first step, the students made an inventory of the topic layer, the country houses and suburban villas, and combined the layer with a contextual layer consisting of the brook system and the most relevant landscape features. The Baakse Beek is a prominent brook in the eastern part of the province of Gelderland and it used to supply water to country and castles like De Wiersse, t' Medler, Brandenburg, Hackfort and others. The brook system is the base of this country-houses-and-suburban-villas landscape. After this large-scale analysis, the analysis was also done on the meso- and micro scale with De Wiersse and 't Medler as typical examples of country houses and gardens in this area (Fig. 6).

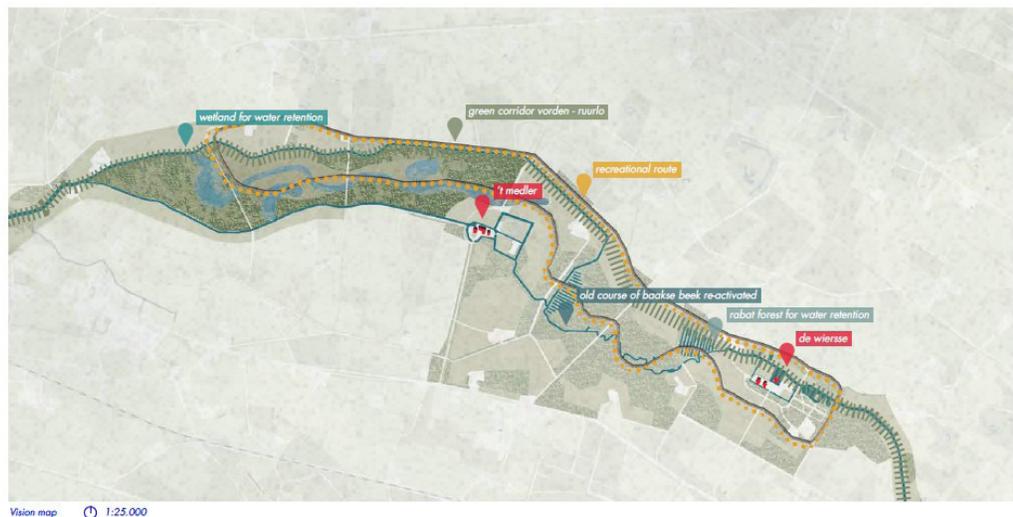


FIG. 6 Student plans for the integration of the improved and remodelled retention system in the drainage system in the Baakse Beek area, De Wiersse and 't Medler.

Source: new plans M. Zinsmeister for elective Heritage landscapes.

The current water system is primarily designed to drain the water from the higher grounds, because of the surplus of water in the past and still in some periods of the year. Students showed how the new system including water retention systems present in the *country-houses-and-suburban-villas landscape* could prevent droughts from occurring in the future. The choice of such a combined drainage and retention system could be important for the transition process and for the required cooperation as well. Issues of water management cannot be solved by individual stakeholders or owners alone. By the inclusion of the concepts from the *country-houses-and-suburban-villas landscapes* in the drainage system the most important stakeholders can work together and discuss the maintenance of these landscapes with governmental bodies.

The design atelier showed that using the described analysis method, the inclusion of the historic retention system in the drainage system may help solve the drought problem. The transition to such a landscape is only possible with cooperation between owners and governmental bodies like the Water board.

## 4 CONCLUSION

In order to create solutions for the future of heritage landscapes we need to use a method to read the dynamic culture-driven landscapes with specific attention given to its historic use. We need to understand historic elements in the context of former use and meaning on different scales and in different time periods to maintain the identity of landscapes in new solutions. In preservation we tend to focus on the landscape itself but a focus on use and meaning is even more important because it is closer to the hearts of people living in the area. Based on a threefold method of analysing the triad of space, the spatial form of a landscape biographical description showed the possibility of creating sustainable spatial solutions that were in line with how people lived in these areas for long periods of time. The approach is not needed for identity reasons alone, but more importantly for finding solutions to modern problems close to local people's hearts so that it can become an inclusive approach for both people and 'nature' (STG 11 and 15). Therefore, it can be used for cooperation in (preservation) management. These integrated approaches have been worked in detail out for cities, but in landscape architecture there is a need for further development. In layer analysis this should result in adding various narrative (or cultural) layers next to the green-blue and grey layers we tend to describe. Even in zoning plans various narrative maps, explaining historic use and meaning) should be added.

For the preservation of country houses or suburban villas, we have to take the surrounding landscapes of green monuments formally into account. Although we generally recognize that country houses and suburban villas are part of large-scale landscape structures or even systems, we tend to focus in descriptions of the preservation of green monuments on regarding them as ensembles of house and garden. This paper shows that an additional description of these green monuments on a larger scale is as important as the preservation of the ensemble of house and garden itself. In times of climate change we should preserve green monuments by restoring or adapting them taking its surroundings into account; this was explored and shown in the example of the Baakse Beek.

## Acknowledgment

The method in this article is developed in the PhD thesis "Well-situated" (Verschuure-Stuip, 2019). It was applied in graduation projects for the History and Heritage Vector in the master track Urbanism (f.e. Ruan, 2017; Dijkstra, 2017; Alewijn 2018; Bluemink 2019). The case of the Baakse Beek was described by Malinath (2017) and students of the atelier Heritage Landscapes 2018 for the project KADER, a project on sustainable Heritage between DUT and province of Gelderland.

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### Additional

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- [2] nn. Schade door droogte aan tuinen bij kastelen en landgoederen, 13-08-2018, <https://nos.nl/artikel/2245986-schade-door-droogte-aan-tuinen-bij-kastelen-en-landgoederen.html> (20-01-2020)
- [3] European Landscape Convention no 176. Florence 2000.