

## THE STORY OF THE PLACE

DIFFERENT TYPES OF STORIES OF A PLACE, THE NETHERLANDS

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### *introduction*

Appointing the pedestrian crossing on Abbey Road (London, UK) as a listed monument is exemplary for the changing ideas on the preservation of monuments and historic sites in the last decades. This pedestrian crossing was not listed as a monument for its beauty, authenticity or its unique role in architectural history, which are normally criteria for a monumental status. It was listed because it was the décor of the Beatles last album cover and iconic for British pop music. The story of this spot, its cultural or human aspect which touched the physical world, is gaining importance in preservation in research as well as policy. In the Netherlands, this changing perspective started with the Nota Belvedere (Feddes, 1999) influencing transformation and preservations of sites, monuments and landscapes in the last decades. Identification and adaptation of the *story of the place* will contribute to define the meaning, identity and historic continuity of a place. But every place may have a great variety of stories to tell. Which story can be told in what way? This contribution will explore influence of culture on the landscape and therefor in the story of the place. Second, it explores a way of grouping of what kind of stories can be told in what way. Three various-small sized- Dutch transformation projects are described to explain this classification.

### **1.Introduction, research question**

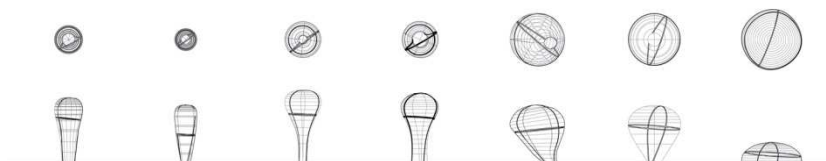
In the Netherlands, in every place we find remains of what happened in the past. These remains have a story to tell: why they were made there, why it was changed, broken, transformed or put on a pedestal to keep it as it is and how we experienced them. Sometimes these stories are more connected to the everyday life; it's about normal life, which we want to preserve for our family identity. In other cases, these stories are important because they are part of our collective, national memory. The stories are gradually determining if it is just an ordinary place or a heritage place or even monumental place. This new focus on the narrative aspects and its tangible and intangible aspects is now leading to a diverse spectrum. It's helpful to understand the meaning and function of these stories in transformation processes. But, we haven't classified these stories of the place yet. How can we categorize the stories which are present on the site (and therefore used in transformation plans)? By doing so, this could help designers and owners of these objects to identify the story they want to tell. Therefore, what is the story of a specific place and how can these contribute to the future experience of the place? Which story can be explained best in connection to the physical object?

## 2. Changing stories (literature)

Pierce J. Lewis argued that all human landscape has cultural meaning and that this meaning might be understood, like reading the landscape as if it was a book. He stated that our human landscape is our unwitting autobiography, reflecting our tastes, our values, our aspirations and even our fears, in tangible visible form (Lewis, 1979, p12) . To him, reading the landscape was mostly determined by the *physical* expression of it. Lewis adapted the ideas of the 'Berkley school' of cultural geography, which were based on the work of Carl Orwin Sauer (1889-1975). Sauer defined the cultural landscape as '*an area made up of a distinct association of forms, both physical and cultural*' (Sauer, 1925). His method for reading the landscape focussed on the traces in geomorphology and topographic change for understanding the cultural landscape. In the 1980s and 1990s these ideas on the cultural aspects of the landscapes were challenged and more value was added, by for example David Lowenthal and Denis Cosgrove (Riesenweber, 2008). The landscape was not only a physical form anymore, but also a way of seeing and experiencing it. In the Netherlands, this morphological approach led to a differentiated field of specialised studies in landscape architecture, historical geography, geology, urbanism and others. Next to Lewis, Marwyn Samuels described a new research method '*the biography of the landscape*'. (Samuels, 1979). The landscape absorbs elements of the history of numerous people living in them which are of great importance for spatial orientation, identity and wellbeing of communities (authored landscapes). All landscapes are an interaction of *landscape of impression* (imaginary or utopian landscapes) and *landscape of expression* (physical landscape). In 1986 Arjun Appadurai and Igor Kopytoff used a biographical approach to understand the history of history of goods, estates and monuments and was later one used by others (Kolen, e.a., 2012). Reading the people's stories, connected to a place as part of the collective memory, became a research method at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the Netherlands. The accelerator was the Nota Belvedere, the establishment of the project bureau and a funding system. This led to the introduction of these new ideas on landscape and heritage for a wider group of people, which led to a great amount of projects varying in size, outcome and historic participation from both experts as well as ordinary people. The biographical method was introduced in Dutch heritage research in 2001 and was adapted in research and design (Roymans, e.a.2009,Vervloet e.a., ... ..) The method emphasised that a place has many stories of importance to tell.

## 3. Design research; *Park Landing, Bunker 599 and Project Farmers Wisdom*

Three different, small scaled transformation project in the Netherlands will underline the differences in stories , which were expressed after transformation. These are: Park Landing in Arnhem, transformation of Bunker 599 near Culemborg and wooden fences in Vecht area.



*Park Landing:* During the building preparations of the VINEX area Schuytgraaf (Arnhem), traces of a pre-historical settlement (stone age) were found and other remains until traces of the parachute landings in Battle for Arnhem (1944). In the protected area a park, three story layers were added; first, railings with texts about the archaeological finds on the ground, second four pavilions placed were you can understand the place; third, large objects like parachutes, shaped freely on different stages of a jump from a plane, referring to the Polish parachutes (1944). The new park, was transformed into a place in which different historical layers were explained and made visible.



*Bunker 599:* Since 1999, the New Dutch Waterline, a historic defence line- was appointed as a large scale project in which heritage and transformation were supposed to connect. The goal was not only to restore historic continuity and to tell the story of water as a means of defence, but also to use this line for other spatial needs, for example water storage. The base of this defence line was an ingenious system of waterworks, flooding fields and so on to flood a strip of land of 6 to 8 kilometres of land with 50 centimetres of water. On non-defendable spots, military objects like fortresses and bunkers were built. To explain the defence system, one of these bunkers was transformed by two high impact interventions. It was cut in half, showing the interior and a simple walking bridge was made. The height of the poles marked the water inundation level. The bunker is now telling the story of this defence line at this spot.

*Farmers Wisdom:* To protect the uniqueness of small scaled elements in the peat meadow landscape the character and stories of the planks and wooden country fences in the Vecht area were collected, before they were replaced with iron ones. The stories of these planks were written down and the planks were re-used. This example is not a specific historical event, but the story of the everyday life was emphasised in this project.

#### **4. Three different types of stories**

How can we categorize these stories of the place? When we compare these site- oriented 'biographical' projects, we see the visualisation of three different kind of stories and their physical appearance. By using methods for classification *monuments* , we can start

understanding the differences of these stories. Because by appointing a listed monument, you are not only underlining the need for protection of a physical object, but you are also preserving a story of its importance. In line with the classification of monuments by Régis Debray, we can group three sorts of stories: a *message-story*, a *form-story*, a *trace-story*. A *message-story* describes a real or mythical past event. The story is telling the message of its past, which could also reflect ideological ideas. A *form-story* is marked out by its intrinsic aesthetic or decorative qualities, whilst the *trace-story* has not a direct connection to ethical or esthetical reason but primarily utilitarian ones, part of the everyday world.

Park Landing can be defined as a *message-story*, describing the historical experiences of the past by adding an extra layer to the place itself, enriching the place with an artworks and reflecting on the experience of the site. The story of bunker 599 and the New Dutch Waterline is the *form-story* explaining how the waterline functioned, emphasising the physical traces. Authenticity of the place is (somewhat) changed by the incision, which will lead to public discussion about authenticity and integrity of the historic object. Telling the stories of the wooden country fences, is bringing back the story of former life of personal and collective(local) memory physical as a *trace-story*. Bringing back these stories, they become parts of remembrance for people who lived there, referring to more personal or sometimes more collective memory, like Abbey Road.

## 5. Conclusions

By defining differences types of stories and their connection to the historic place, it can help designers to be more specific in discussions with clients, policy advisor and public. Grouping the stories will further develop the biographical methods. Further research is required to determine how to use this stories.

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