Revealing the Beauty of Biesbosch

—— Experiencing the Ecological Aesthetics of Dynamic Landscape through Recreation

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Reflection

Relationship between the theme of graduation studio and graduation project

The graduation studio of landscape architecture has established the concept of Flowscapes. 'Flowscapes explores infrastructure as a type of landscape and landscape as a type of infrastructure (cf. Strang, 1996) “The hybridisation of the two concepts seeks to redefine infrastructure beyond its strictly utilitarian definition, while allowing spatial design to gain operative force in territorial transformation processes” (Nijhuis, 2015). With movement and flows at the core, landscape infrastructure facilitate aesthetic, functional, social and ecological relationships between natural and human systems.

In this specific graduation project this concept of Flowscapes is adopted since the landscape (terraces) as part of infrastructure (water management). The terraces are transformed according to the prediction of the water levels in the scenario. In one way, it deals with fast dynamics: tide and flood. In the other, it deals with slow dynamics: sea level rise. And it is not only on the level of ecology, but also on aesthetic level. With the flows at the core, the opened polder facilitates aesthetic and ecological relations between human and nature.

Relationship between the project and the wilder social context

From a historical point of view, landscape was based on aesthetic in the past. However, with the near time movement for nature protection, ecological function has been the priority in design. There’s very little concern for aesthetic in the scheme.

In the context of Netherlands, the Oostvaardersplassen offered a new perspective that provided the social need for nature. Following it, Plan Ooievaar is developed, having a positive view on ‘nature-development’. Nature became more open to people. However, the negative influence that human can have on nature was still a big concern. Nature that was developed was only focusing on an ecological benefit and man was the viewer. (Feddes et al., 1998) Until recent years, national project Room for River has been carried out from a starting point as to give more room to nature.

The graduation project is located in one of the project of Room for River. Actually, it is based on the technical left over of the depolder for Room for River that the project is developed. Therefore it can be seen as a refinement based on the Room for River project, refining the ecological function as to be more suitable for dynamic changes in the foreseen and adding an aesthetical layer to enlarge its existance to a park. Therefore, it is not only a part of water management, but also a connection with the urban.

Method, possible application and ethical dilemmas

It can be argued that the methodology could be considered to have both strong and weak sides. The research on natural succession and aesthetic appeal in the area provided design tools and
principles for the design. With this regard, the research and the design were highly interrelated. The design was based on the conclusions and logical arguments that were from the research. The methodology provided necessary supplies to be able to link the research and design. However, while working with aesthetics, difficulties occurred. Since aesthetic is quite subjective, it requires not only researching, but also expression in an artistic way. And whether other people consider it as ‘beautiful’ remains to be verified. And when the research conclusions are drew, there’s the gap between design and research. In what way should be aesthetic be expressed in the landscape really got me stuck. It is only after the research of the relations between human and nature from the city Dordrecht and village Werkendam from an urban perspective that it became settled that this should be a garden-park to link people in city with nature. And the aesthetic really involves with art and people perception. With this regard, more could be done to the aesthetic research and application.

The graduation project is located in an estuary that not only the natural dynamics are formative force, but also human interventions play an important part in. The tides in the estuary is controlled by the block to a huge extent. Even though in the scenario the block will be open to some extent, it is still controlled by human. And it is this tamed dynamic that the whole project is based upon. It is in the not total nature environment that an eco-park is built on. Therefore, an eco-park here in the Netherlands may not fit every estuary dynamic landscape. However, with different kinds of water management or other natural forces and processes management, the idea of the balance of ecology and aesthetic can always be achieved.

*Ethical dilemmas*

There are two main ethical dilemmas that the project is facing. One is about opening the Haringvliet block. The project applied one scenario that has been predicted to be half open to allow more dynamics in. However, it is a lot more than more dynamics that will follow. There’s still other aspects that are needed to be taken care of. Like the water will turn from fresh to brackish water, which can influence the agriculture and water supply in the South West delta. Therefore, how the block will control the dynamics in the future needs discussion and research on ecology, agriculture, etc. a lot of aspects.

The other is about the balance between nature protection and development. Any human intervention can do harm to the ecosystem. Therefore, it is the basic rule that human intervention must be kept within the resiliency of ecosystem. The project hold it as a principle that as little construction as possible and give recreation and nature separate zones. However, all the ecosystems are connected in multiple ways like the though the water, the food chain, etc. So, whether the construction in the project site effect the whole ecosystem of Biesboch area requires research on a larger scale.