Dealing with "the Middle Landscape": "Landurbanism", integration, and the revival of large open space projects in urbanised areas.

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Abstract

To argue that Flemish space is fragmented, is simply stating the obvious. The diffuse and fragmented condition of this space has been frequently and extensively described. It has also been explained how this condition came about as a result of the emergence of the welfare state and how it heralded the end of the old contrast between city and countryside, and gave the green light for the advent of various concepts aimed at describing a similar 'intermediate condition'. In this paper I therefore do not so much want to enter into discussing this new or, better, this different condition (not city, nor countryside, but ánd city ánd countryside), but rather ask how we do deal with this middle landscape today from an urban development perspective. I argue that this different context of fragmentation, diversification and advancing urbanisation (in Flanders and elsewhere) has logical consequences for the planning and (policy) management of these areas. We can formulate three complementary findings from the current way of dealing with the middle landscape in urbanism. In particular we notice first a project-based approach, secondly in which landscape increasingly comes to the fore and thirdly the 'integration' concept is introduced. In the framework of these findings, an important role seems to have been reserved for design, for instance as a possible medium of integration. The Fresh Kills case, a former landfill site surrounded by valuable marsh ecologies in suburban Staten Island, New York, is used to draw a picture of this changed role of design in the different condition of the middle landscape.

1. Dealing with "The Middle Landscape"

Although from a planning-urbanism perspective people often have the tendency only to consider the spatial dimension of 'sprawl' concepts such as 'Zwischenstadt' (Sieverts 2003), 'La città diffusa' (Indovina 1990) or 'Middle Landscape' (Rowe 1992), the interweaving of city and countryside is not only a spatial fact, but also a social-psychological one (Van Geel 2005). It is an established fact that both the spatial and the social context for planning and urban development in these middle landscapes - one of "open-endedness, indeterminacy and change" according to Waldheim (2002) - today differ substantially from the more 'traditional' urban or rural environments. We can classify the condition of this heterologous space on the one hand as one of uncertainty, characterised by rapid changes, inconstancy and open ends, and on the other hand as one of multiplicity, an and-and context in which diversity in all shapes and sizes is prominent. In this space a different form of spatial quality reigns and different rules are applicable. Moreover, this middle condition entails many 'side' effects. For example, the mixture between city, countryside and nature provides a different view of the relationship between man and nature, and the conceptions of this relationship are today liable to change. According to Busquets and Correa (2006), the recognition of new qualities in nature enables us to understand living environments more dynamically, as a component of a general ecological system. A consequence is that the view that nature is "external" to the urban settlement is due for revision. According to Busquets and Correa, the objective of planning today is to design and devise more coherent integrated ways of combining urbanisation and nature. Miller advances a similar argument and states that "nature, traditionally conceived as separate from cultural endeavour, can now be fully integrated into the man-made landscape. The result is a synthetic, integrative nature, simultaneously wild and cultivated, bewildering and cultivating. Nature is no longer the image we look at... but the field we inhabit..." A fact that in her opinion is clearly manifested in the reconversion project for the 'Fresh Kills' landfill site in NY– which will be discussed further on. (Miller 2002)

As Peter Hall indicates "the new landscape is not worse, it is different; it cannot be appreciated and should not be judged by the traditional rules, but by its own" (Peter Hall in Marshall 1997).
This heterologous context of fragmentation, diversification and advancing urbanisation (in Flanders and elsewhere) therefore has consequences for the planning and (policy) management of these areas and presents many challenges for the disciplines concerned. Sieverts (1997) argues that one of the most important tasks of spatial planning is to design open areas in urbanised environments, as they will be the stabilising frame of the '*Zwischenstadt*' in the future. He sees the creation of a new cultivated landscape in which production, recreation and leisure, and ecological recycling will be in balance with one another. According to Sieverts (2003) the design of the *Zwischenstadt* can consequently "no longer be achieved by traditional resources of town planning, urban design and architecture. New ways must be explored, which are yet unclear." However, we can formulate three

complementary findings resulting from the current way of dealing with middle landscapes in an urban development context:
First of all there has been a revival of the project method in urban development and planning over the last decade with a view to tackle various environments in a plan-based way. Over the last few years a shift has occurred within this project method: after the originally French '*projets urbains*' and their Flemish counterparts, the urban regeneration projects ('*stadsvernieuwingsprojecten*'), today we notice larger-scale landscape projects in which the focus is shifting from city centres and buildings to urban peripheries and open spaces in urbanised areas. Projects are increasingly being conducted in a context of fragmentation and diffusion. A similar phenomenon can also be observed outside Belgium's borders, for example, the large-scale transformations of former industrial areas and other brownfield areas on the outskirts of cities throughout Europe and the US, or the regional parks in Germany. We could state that the substantive focus of spatial development projects has shifted from buildings, public squares and city parks to landscapes and large-scale projects (Waldheim 2002). This leads us to a second finding, i.e. the renewed interest for the 'landscape', which is consequently increasingly put in the forefront in project development projects.

Marot (1999), for example, talks about a rediscovery and reinvention of the landscape project, and Schafer and Reeser (2002) about a revival of the interest in landscape (Schafer and Reeser 2002). Corner goes even a step further and argues that 'landscape is emerging as a model for urbanism' (in Waldheim 2002). Sieverts, too, attributes an important role to landscape and sees it as the glue that keeps all the fragments of the *Zwischenstadt* together. In the same context of a substantive shift in spatial development projects, such as the renewed attention for the landscape, the concept of the 'park' is increasingly cropping up as a programme element. However, the public (suburban) park of today is no longer the public (city) park of yesterday. The significance of the park has also been transformed along with the views of the man-nature relationship and the shift of attention to suburban areas and open spaces. The park today is a symbol of 'healing', a symbol of the repair of the 'damage' caused by the modern industrial era (Pollak 2002). What used to be a semi-natural element within the urban space - the park was, as it were, the 'natural' element brought into the urban fabric - today is an expression of the mixture of dissimilar elements in the middle landscape.

The park and the landscape are also increasingly being used as concepts of integration, or as media for achieving integration, which leads us to a third finding. As a result of the different "and-and" condition with a mix of urban, natural and rural elements in open spaces in urbanised areas, we see that a need and increased demand for 'integration' of all kinds seems to be cropping up (see Vanempten 2007). Brandt & Vejre (2004), for example, argue in favour of functional integration when planning various environments. They consider the segregation of land use, as is still the order of the day in many zoning schemes, as one of the causes of the current environmental problems. They argue that there is need for a strategy that brings about a shift in plan-based thinking from functional segregation to functional integration. Many of the open spaces are moreover not (or no longer) monofunctional, but use the space in diverse ways to provide room for more than one function. In this context, Perrier-Cornet (2002), for example, talks about '*la campagne ressource*', which is at the same time '*cadre de vie*' and '*nature*'. This diversity of uses, functions and also players which are present in such middle areas, is reflected in the projects for these areas. Integration crops up in all kinds of forms in the project definition and descriptions, the further development and the process. For example, they often endeavour to combine or 'integrate' nature and urbanity, or an ecological and sustainable programme in combination with a social, spatial, cultural programme, the creation of spatial and social relationships between the project site and its wider physical, social and institutional environment, etc. Marot (1999) draws the attention to yet another aspect of the integration concept, i.e. the need for institutional integration. He notes that landscape as a wider environment is rarely subject to the control of a single authority. This means that when developing a spatial development project, the various competent authorities (often several different administrations and on different levels) are 'confronted' with one another, and thus a certain form and extent of institutional 'integration' has become a necessity in many of these 'middle landscape' projects in order to be implemented in practice. Also the number of disciplines involved in spatial development projects has increased, which requires a more intense form of cooperation. As a result of the end of the old antagonism between city and countryside, the distinction between urban development, architecture and the landscape disciplines also has blurred. Smets notes that as a result, today they share a common reference framework (Smets 2002). It is therefore not surprising that in many of the current large-scale landscape projects multidisciplinary (design) teams are involved, consisting of an urban planner, an architect, an engineer, etc.

Marot arrives at similar findings. He describes the approach of this different condition of the middle landscapes as 'suburbanism', a new approach to urban development focused on suburban environments. "Suburbanism: from *suburbia* and *urbanism*" (Marot 1999:50) Some of the consequences of the different nature of these middle landscapes crop up in his definition of suburbanism (see further), including the need for cooperation between different types of disciplines and between various players.

Since design is a possible medium to assimilate diverse physical and socio-cultural issues, we could conclude from the foregoing that design can play an important part. Design generates substance for the spatial project and unites the interests at play within the project environment. Moreover, it is cross-discipline in the sense that design is used not only in (landscape) urbanism, but also in planning, engineering and architecture. Moreover, design is a means to bring about certain forms of integration (for example functional or organisational – Vanempten 2007) and testing them against a practical situation and environment. Yet, little attention is paid to the 'design'-aspect in dealing with the intermediate condition. According to Sieverts, aspects such as design quality, aesthetics and ecology are categorically ignored in planning practice (Sieverts 1997). Hence, in this paper I will pay more attention to these aspects. I will short describe the situation of the project method in Flanders, and then the matter of 'suburbanism', and the role of design. For a further description of the need for integration however, I refer to an earlier paper (see Vanempten 2007).

2. The renewed project method of large-scale open space projects in Flanders: points of interest

By now, in Flanders there are many examples of such open space projects in urbanised areas, some more successful than others. Examples include the '*Schelde landschapspark*' (River Scheldt landscape park), a joint project along the river Scheldt, involving 25 municipalities in the provinces of East Flanders and Antwerp, and 'Canal Link' or *Kanaalstad*, a project on the Roeselare-Leie (Roulers-River Lys) Canal intended to design and strengthen the open space, the industrial and residential fabric, and the green areas around this industrial axis. Also the *Parkbos* Ghent can be added to this list. This expansion of woodland in the open space between the centres of the municipalities of De Pinte, Zwijnaarde and Sint-Martens-Latem is regarded by some as a model project for such open space projects. The project is an attempt to combine possibly contradictory programmes, such as woodlands, agriculture, science park and recreation, and primarily benefits city dwellers.

In the current larger-scale landscape-oriented projects in Flanders, a lot of attention is devoted to programmatic, technical, legal and statutory procedures. As a result substantive issues tend to be relegated to the background, or are simply geared to accommodating the respective programmatic, technical, legal and statutory problems. This does not always benefit the substantive cohesion and quality, as is demonstrated by the 'Parkbos' case. The starting point for this project was a general idea, an abstract programme of an urban forest. It combined the aspirations of both the forestry sector for more woodlands in Flanders and the regional planning policy with a view to maintaining the population figures in the towns and cities. As a matter of fact, an urban forest expanded the woodland area and was meant to accommodate the recreational needs of city dwellers and form a beacon against urban exodus. This programme was imposed on a specific site, selected by means of a so-called 'Location Study' in which the advantages and disadvantages of various locations around the city of Ghent were weighed up against one another. The Parkbos site to the south of Ghent was finally chosen for institutional and physical-spatial reasons. The area was suitable for planting an easily accessible urban forest, but on account of various area-specific characteristics a tabula rasa project development did not turn out to be a good idea. In particular, the area boasts a number of valuable historical-cultural elements, such as castles and castle parks, a historical structure of alleys and lanes, and a characteristic bulk landscape. The presence of healthy, well-functioning agricultural and horticultural companies could also not be ignored. Therefore the programme had to be adapted to the characteristics of the area. Additionally, the farmers, who were not at all keen to see their agricultural land be taken over by trees, demanded legal assurances to guarantee the continued existence of their activities after the planting of the woods on certain plots of land. The resulting design, which involved a fairly qualitative compromise between the combined use of the space for woodland, agriculture, knowledge development and recreational activities, degenerated into a regional development plan ('RUP') that was confined to monofunctional strips of land. It is therefore not surprising that today the Parkbos project seems to experience a lot of problems to get off the ground. Abstract programmatic requirements were imposed on a site without taking sufficient account of the characteristics of the area. The reduction of the tabula rasa woodland volume to three core woodland areas where agriculture and nature existed alongside a science park could however be accepted as a qualitative

compromise. However, the legal imperatives again pushed the substantive aspects to the background and the content - and therefore also the project quality - was corrupted to satisfy the legal certainty and political ambitions.

One of the problems of this project has to do with maladjusted planning instruments that can not adequately respond to the design solution. Besides that, is another problem that too little attention is devoted to the design. The design solution is simply manipulated to obtain the desired legal certainty and is not given the chance to get out of the concept stage. A practical translation of the concepts used into a detailed design or a design investigation of the possibilities for each sub-area was never done for the Parkbos. The question is whether this will turn out to be a good solution in the long term.
A conclusion that can be drawn from the Parkbos case is that the subject of the site and its characteristics deserve at least as much attention, when organising a project development, as the definition of the programme to be realised, irrespective of the site. Another conclusion is that substantive issues often seem to be subordinate to process characteristics. Project management, legal certainty, and other process elements are - of course - important, but in many projects a balance seems to be lacking. It is frequently forgotten that “The means are important but only as to the end they lead to” (Hargreaves 2007).

3. “Suburbanism”: the search for a new substance for a hybrid area

Following from the above argument we can say that two aspects have to be considered on an equal footing in a spatial development project: on the one hand a technocratic aspect (management, process) and on the other hand a creative aspect (content, development). Although much attention is often paid to process elements in current projects, a number of authors argue in favour of restoring the balance. Sieverts indicates that design and substance play an important role in large-scale transformation projects, and thus in dealing with such large-scale open spaces in urbanised areas. “Large-scale transformation projects require differentiated plans and procedures within the framework of a designing – not only administrating and organising – kind of regional planning” (Sieverts 2002:44). Healey (2007) even indicates that the entire form of planning as it is used now is actually no longer suitable for the current (metropolitan) space, as this space has changed, and she argues in favour of a relational form of planning. Even as regards theory there appears to be a gap with regard to substance. With his “integrative theory” Sternberg searches for a substantive theory that can provide a complement to the often procedural planning theory. Within a context of urban development design, he searches for the integration principles that influence the human experience of environments, such as ‘good form’ or ‘legibility’, and which thus constitute a basis for the design of environments (Sternberg 2000).

Except for the search for a healthy balance between substance and process within a project, there are other points of interest that come to the fore when dealing with the middle landscape, including the subject of programme versus site. The emergence of the post-industrial period and the shift of the project method to large-scale suburban sites also cause a shift in modern thinking on project programmes, to the benefit of the site where the project is implemented, which is receiving increasing attention. Marot states that the site itself is “the matter and horizon” of design (instead of the programme, Marot 1999:51). Busquets and Correa also adopt a similar stance when they argue that the large-scale landscape projects very meticulously examine the potential and capabilities of a certain site and its natural and ecological systems, instead of working with predetermined abstract and general guidelines and models (Busquets & Correa 2006). Issues such as ecology, habitat, human usage, cultural significance, etc., that are embedded in landscapes cannot be understood - let alone qualitatively used in a project context - without considering the physical and socio-cultural characteristics of the site itself. These characteristics are, after all, the fundamental basis of every landscape (Hargreaves 2007), and thus need to be incorporated into a project development in order to obtain a quality result. According to Waldheim, designers can activate space and produce urban effects by carefully studying the conditions of the site (configuration, materiality, performance). This capability to “read” the space and, in so doing, to activate it, moreover uses landscape as a medium to raise the matter of the increasingly widespread urban condition of sprawl and de-densification (Waldheim 2002).
It is important not to forget that, in addition to a functional-morphological dimension spatial transformation also has a social and mental dimension. The motto that looking at the site and its characteristics constitutes an important approach for design and project development has to be considered from this perspective. It is not only a matter of the physical characteristics of the site, such as relief, geography, soil conditions, etc., but certainly also a matter of the social context, the links with the surrounding fabric (both physical and social), the identity of the site, etc.

As mentioned before, in this project-based approach landscape increasingly occupies the foreground. We can consider this as a form of content that is brought to the fore, as a 'new type' of conceptual medium of post-modern urban development. Waldheim attributes this emerging role of the landscape to the 'layered, non-hierarchical, flexible and strategic' properties that respond to the characteristics of the "different condition". Marot argues that this rediscovery of the landscape arises from a critical reactivation of 'suburbanism':

"*Suburbanism: from suburbia and urbanism: (1) the body of management experiments and structures in landscape architecture, town planning, civil engineering and architecture that were developed for suburbia and through which suburban areas have shaped their own spaces and scenographies. (2) The discipline of design practice, first inspired by suburban situations (as contexts), where the hierarchy traditionally promoted in urbanism between program and site is reversed. Instead, the site itself becomes the matter and horizon of design. (3) The hypothesis (both theoretical and critical) that views the planning process as a movement from the outside (exterior) to the inside (interior), from the surrounding milieu to the city. This historiographic approach sees previous suburban experiments, including the landscape structures and particularly their gardens, as the true laboratories for urban design and regional planning. This perspective is not necessarily exclusive of its more traditionally accepted alternative.*" (Marot 1999: 55-56)

The 'sub' in suburbanism refers to the land outside the (traditional) city, to the site that precedes and lives on after the programme. Within suburbanism the site is no longer subordinated to the programme but forms an important line of approach to design practice. Besides, this suburbanism also points to a number of aspects that are a consequence of the different condition of the middle spaces: it indicates that cooperation is required between different disciplines and between different players, and points to the fact that suburban environments can serve as examples and laboratories for urban design and that urban principles do not necessarily need to be the model for the areas outside the traditional city.

4. The richness of the middle landscapes: a need for integration

We can consider the need for cooperation between players with different backgrounds and interests, as a consequence of the multiplicity and diversity of the middle space, as a form of integration (in particular organisational integration, see Vanempten 2007) which needs to be brought about when setting up a spatial development project. 'Integration' can be described as the 'combined action of distinct elements', as an important point of attention in the desire to integrate is the establishment of relationships, with the aim of achieving a result that is greater than the sum of the parts. However, the concept of integration is highly diverse and is employed in many various ways in spatial development projects. This demand for it in spatial development projects not only concerns the integration of players and institutions, but in many cases also the integration of functions, resources, instruments, etc. For more, please see Vanempten 2007.

5. Substantive issues and site to the foreground: the role of design as an integrator in open space projects in urbanised environments.

In summary we can say that today a number of aspects come to the fore in spatial project development as a consequence of the different hybrid condition of middle spaces. First of all there is the content (the what), which is no longer secondary to the process (the how); secondly, the sites are being regarded less and less as an unpainted canvas - site-related characteristics deserve adequate attention when determining the project programme - and thirdly there is the need for interdisciplinary cooperation and integration. Design plays an important role in all of these aspects. Design does indeed generate the substance. It examines which are the possibilities depending on the physical-spatial, social and economic characteristics, reveals options and tests them against the practical reality of the project area. Moreover, today design has become a multidisciplinary task; design can mediate and integrate between the various players concerned who often have divergent profiles and agendas. Mandanipour sees design itself as a multidisciplinary field of activity, a process that is a combination of three distinct and at the same time interwoven tracks: a technical, social and aesthetic-expressive process. Through this combination of the technical, social and expressive needs design is multidisciplinary almost by definition. "Urban design bridges the fields of architecture, planning, landscape architecture, civil engineering, urban development, and social science -- with a focus on physical form and the social use of space" (Larice & McDonald 2006). Moreover, it addresses all scales of the social-spatial continuum (Mandanipour 1997) so that it is suitable for use as a possible medium for integration. Integration in the context of urbanism is about creating relationships between distinct elements, which in project development are for instance the various existential dimensions (the social, cultural, economic, institutional, ecological and spatial dimensions - Vanempten 2008) that inevitably crop up in the development of a spatial development project. The construction, delineation and testing of these relationships can be done through design as a means. When Lynch considers design as "the imaginative creation of possible form intended to achieve some human purpose: social,

economic, aesthetic or technical", he indicates that through design a bridge can be built between the spatial dimension and other existential (human) dimensions. Jarvis (1980) also makes a link between the physical-spatial and the social-functional aspects. He argues that design can be approached in two ways: in a geometric way, as a visual form (the aesthetic, formal dimension of design), and in a socially inspired way, i.e. design in the sense of public use and perception of environments (in other words the functional, social dimension of design). A form, however, can not be separated from its context, and therefore both approaches are complementary. The motto of looking at the site and at the social, cultural and economic networks that are present there, thus remains an important approach to design. Ideally, a project is - according to Jarvis - both 'visual art' and 'social setting' (Jarvis 1980).

Another aspect of the different type of condition of the middle space concerns the rapid changes and the dynamic nature, which preferably result in an open end for a project, without, however, leaving everything to chance. This balance between sufficient structure and control on the one hand, and sufficient openness and flexibility to adapt to the changing context on the other, is an aspect that has important implications for the design approach. The current landscape projects, for example, often give the impression of being strongly constructed, but at the same time have an indefinite end point. Therefore a series of options are suggested in the designs, rather than a single definitive solution (Schafer & Reeser 2002, some examples are the Field Operations designs for Fresh Kills in New York, and OMA for Downsview Park in Toronto). This shift in technical representation methods in design points to the shaky position of master planning today. According to Sieverts "The old comprehensive proposal and maintenance plans are not suited for this task, nor are the old linear administrative procedures". (Sieverts 2002:44). We therefore see that in many of these designs, for example in the various competition designs for the Fresh Kills site (a project that will be discussed further on), open ends are built in and taken into account. These are designed frames, which aim at striking a balance between sufficient stability for a long-term development, on the one hand, and maintain sufficient openness and allow space for adaptations that present themselves a few years after the project and/or implementation of it has started, on the other.

6. Design in the middle landscape: the Fresh Kills case

To conclude, some the above points of interest (site vs program, role of design, position of landscape, substance vs process) will be illustrated and underpinned with a practical example. The case is the project for the 'Fresh Kills' landfill site in New York, which was closed down in 2002. This landfill site is situated on suburban Staten Island, in the middle of a marsh area, and surrounded by many brooks and streams. Parts of the Fresh Kills area that were not used as a dumping site are already protected as nature reserve. With its complex site, historically speaking as well as from a physical and social point of view, this project balances on the border between urban and natural usage, on a strange duality between sublime nature and the excrescences of humanity. A middle landscape in other words. The design for the site was the result of a design competition organised by the planning department of New York City, won by the American firm Field Operations and its manager James Corner. They created a 'lifescape', a regional development project (in all its aspects - physical, social and functional) whose purpose is to convert the landfill site step by step into a public park that also balances on the boundary between city and nature. The ambition of Lifescape is to convert suburban Staten Island from 'a backyard bypass in a larger and more vital metropolis' into 'a nature-lifestyle island, a big spread of lush vegetation, open space, birds, mammals and amphibians – an expansive network of greenways, recreational areas and restored habitat reserves' (James Corner cited in Merkel 2005). The realisation of this new extensive (890 hectares) park needs more than just a physical-spatial transformation. In addition to a structural change, this project also requires a change of (place) identity (from landfill site to public park), and significance (as a perceived useless site fit for no better purpose than the dumping of waste to a place perceived as valuable for public relaxation and recreation, and valuable for natural and ecosystems). Moreover, there is a shift in public use: originally a dump, it will become a public park, which not only has economic benefits, but also social, cultural and ecological benefits, in contrast to the landfill site.

We again find three important principles in this project that are strongly site-related, and which constitute both the strength and weakness of the project, i.e. its historic usage as a landfill site, the urban location of the site, and the presence of 'wetland ecologies'. Moreover, this site has a very negative connotation for New Yorkers, a fact that presented an additional challenge to its redevelopment. These site-related elements formed the basis for the design that Field Operations produced, and are primarily used as opportunities that now have to be exploited. "Many projects from past centuries began with sites that had special, sometimes complex characteristics, which gave them their iconic qualities." (Hargreaves 2007:165). In other words, the character of the site - according to

Hargreaves also determined by notions of location, multiplicity of form, spatial volume and surface character - takes up an important proportion of the design solutions, although of course it is left to the creativity of the designers as to how they are developed.
The design solution of Field Operations consists of three interwoven spatial systems: habitat (new landscapes), programme (event areas and facilities), and circulation (roads and paths) that together form the layers of the 'lifescape matrix' and structure other programme elements. In the course of time this matrix will restructure the entire Fresh Kills site into an extensive, coherent landscape. The initial frame of habitat, programme and circulation thus evolves into a self-sustaining matrix of possibilities, continually moving according to the changing needs, but at the same time preserving a robust characteristic identity so as not to jeopardise the development. In this way Field Operations has been able to respond to rapidly changing needs in the different type of condition and has left it open ended, without letting go of the whole. In addition to an ecological restoration of the site through restored and new marsh areas, grasslands and woodlands, a diversity of cultural, aesthetic and educational programmes are suggested. Cultural elements have been brought in for example by using 'land forms' as a design element. These earthwork figures form a monument to remember the events of 11 September and the dumping of the rubble from the Twin Towers on Fresh Kills (Leatherbarrow 1999).

Miller (2002) indicates that the site is an opportunity to develop a new form of public-ecological landscape, and "an alternative paradigm of human creativity, biologically informed, guided more by time and process than by space and form". She points out that not only is the physical aspect important in this design, but also factors such as time have been included. Indeed, the design for Fresh Kills runs over a period of a good 30 years, a period in which the piles of waste will be further encapsulated, in which land will be cultivated through various planting strategies, in which the heaps will change shape through the release of gases from the decomposition process, and in which the planted grasses will grow into bushes, and later into trees and woodland. Not one single aspect is forgotten. The Lifescape project looks for ways of reinterpreting the topography in order to bring about a selective process that gradually transforms the area into a park, and does not forget either the logic of the origin of this place (i.e. marshland that grew into high piles of waste with negative connotations, but also with some remaining valuable places incorporating woodlands and other habitats) (Busquets & Correa 2006). Czerniak argues that the Lifescape project sees landscape as a catalyst to transform the whole of Staten Island and to reconcile the various dissimilar parts (suburban fabric, green and open spaces and natural areas, and former brownfield of the landfill site) (Czerniak 2007). The schematic presentation of the Lifescape matrix in particular brings about an accumulation and orchestration of highly diverse and potentially incompatible substantive elements. Particularly attractive, moreover, is the complex interweaving of natural ecology with social, cultural and infrastructural layers which are specific to the modern city (Waldheim 2002).
With Lifescape, Field Operations developed the type of thinking that "the site, its perceptions and concealed facts – as well as regional, cultural and natural processes – come to the fore to drive design decisions and acts, and to create meaning for communities and local identity." (Kamvasinou 2006)
In this project, landscape has become an active component, a verb or process, "an agent" and no longer just a passive background or product. (see Selman & Knight 2004; Corner 1999)

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