



Exploring Place Matters in Planning Practice

CHANGING PLANNING DISCOURSES AND PRACTICES:

THE FLANDERS STRUCTURE PLAN

Kristian Olesen in conversation with Louis Albrechts

LOUIS ALBRECHTS

Department of Architecture
Urbanism and Planning
University of Leuven – KU Leuven

KRISTIAN OLESEN

Department of Planning
Aalborg University



AESOP Young Academics Booklet Series C

Exploring Place matters in Planning Practice

Booklet 1

Kristian Olesen and Louis Albrechts @ July 2017

ISBN. 9789082819106

Internal And Cover Design

Shaimaa Refaat, Piece Of Art

AESOP YA Booklet Series Editor-in-Chief

Mona Abdelwahab

Architecture Engineering and Environmental Design, AATMT, Cairo

School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape, Newcastle University

AESOP YA Booklet Series C Editors

Lauren Ugur

International School of Management, Frankfurt Germany

and

Giusy Pappalardo

Department of Civil Engineering and Architecture, Catania

Authors

Louis Albrechts

Department of Architecture, Urbanism and Planning

University of Leuven – KU Leuven

and

Kristian Olesen

Department of Planning

Aalborg University

AESOP YA Booklet Series

Published by Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP)



Introducing the YA booklet Series C Exploring Place Matters in Planning Practice

We are pleased to present the very first booklet of series C: ‘Exploring Place Matters in Planning Practice’ on the practice of Professor Emeritus Louis Albrechts, through ‘Changing Planning Discourses and Practices: Flanders Structure Plan’.

The series aims to discuss urban planning projects and case studies through conversations with researchers, planners and practitioners. In elaborating on their experiences, the focus is placed on the process of institutional design through which spatial interventions have taken place. It is interested in exploring the practicalities, as well as societal and physical impacts of the respective project(s). Furthermore, this focus assesses the actors involved, both governmental and non-governmental, and seeks to explore the impact of planning policy and local contextual specificities on the realization of interventions.

This series thus reflects on relevant issues for contemporary development and the role that planning fulfills in practice, covering a broad range of topics including the provision of housing, basic services and infrastructures, and engaging with empirical experiences of inclusive development, civic engagement, and the promotion of well-being and sustainability. Furthermore, this series reflects on the relationship between planning theory and practice; it questions the contribution of adopted theories as well as counter theoretical perspectives in the realization of urban developments. Consequently, this series provides an arena for Young Academics (YA) and Practical Planners (PP) to interact, discuss, and write about the development of planning practice. Theoretical reflections that have underpinned the particular project/case study’s development and realization form part of the work’s overall discussion. Essentially, this series establishes an interactive reading that reflects on the planning debate, through the work of PPs who have significantly influenced the practice of planning. The booklet series employs a set-up of reflexive reading, echoed and represented through the different concepts in the series: setting, main arguments, comments and reflection.

The setting of this series focuses on tangible planning projects through the introduction of the project(s) context and the involved actors. Reflections are progressively developed, based on the main themes of the planning practices. The dialogical structure between YA and PP highlights the development and progress of the project(s) and reflections. Finally, reflections are reframed in the light of the adopted/relevant theoretical positions that have been explored while the project(s) has been presented. The constructed storylines link theory and practice through direct experience and autobiographical notes. These storylines invite the readers to step into the planners’ shoes, enabling a deep understanding of the presented challenges and lessons learnt.

This is the first publication of Series C, with many more in the process of making. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all the senior scholars and planners of present and forthcoming booklets who have not only enthusiastically agreed to take part in the project, but have also relentlessly supported our YA authors in spite of their very busy schedule. With thanks and regards,

‘Conversations in Planning’ Booklet team



FOREWORD

This booklet explores the contributions of Professor Emeritus Louis Albrechts (KU Leuven) to planning practice, with special reference to the case study of the ‘Flanders Structure and Plan’. Albrechts has, through his long academic career, maintained a strong interest in planning practice. His academic work has in many ways been focused on developing more appropriate and responsible ways of doing planning and at the core of Albrechts’ academic thinking has been the question of how to improve the practice of planning. His scholarly work has always been deeply rooted in his own experiences and reflections from working closely with and in planning practice. Albrechts has a long and impressive CV, and there are a significant number of projects that I could have explored deeper in this publication. In the end, I decided to focus on Albrechts’ perhaps most well-known contribution to planning practice, his work on the first Structure Plan for Flanders in the early 1990s. This choice reflects partly my own interest in strategic spatial planning, but it appeals hopefully also to a broader audience interested in how new planning ideas emerge, gain momentum, and then partly loose legitimacy, as socio-economic and political conditions change.

A special thanks goes to Hans Leinfelder, Philippe van Wesenbeeck and Jef Van den Broeck for interesting discussions on the complicated and fascinating aspects of spatial planning in Flanders.

From a personal perspective, important lessons can be learned from the case of the first Structure Plan for Flanders. First of all, the case illustrates some of the challenges in terms of translating ideas from theory into planning practice. Second, the case effectively illustrates some of the difficulties in transforming institutionalised ways of practical planning and understanding the role of planning in society. Third, the case illustrates that to be successful in transforming planning practices and discourses you have to engage with the deeply political and conflict-laden context, which inevitably characterise planning projects that seek to challenge the status quo.

I hope that this publication will inspire future generations of planners and scholars to work on the interface between planning theory and practice in order to strengthen the planning profession and improve the urban areas in which we live.

Kristian Olesen



I always valued a combination of academic work and work in professional practice (see Albrechts, 2017). My experiences in practice combined with a theoretical literature made me aware that taking a clear stand is important. Inspired by Schon (1983) I feel the need to inquire into the epistemology of my practices. This allows me to evaluate and make sense of what I learn in practice relative to a wider theoretical context, and test the depth and comprehensiveness of these practices. Abstract conceptualisation and generalisation of the accumulated knowledge of learning-in-action helps me to see some of what can be learned from practice and to gear my theoretical reflections, my teaching and research to the actual realities of practice. In doing so I learned that there is a need for a minimum social basis to build upon, that skills (technical, social, empathetic) remain very important, and that planners need to be aware that they have a highly political role to play if they so choose. I also learned that broadening the scope of possibilities, the process of “discourse structuration” and its subsequent “institutionalisation” are perhaps more important than a plan.

I deplore the widening gap between universities and practitioners, research and practice, systematised thought and practical action. I experience that this gap is related to the relationship between the kinds of knowledge honoured in academia and the kinds of skills, competence, and attitudes valued in professional practice.

I very much appreciated the way -kindly, skilfully but also firmly and persistently- my younger colleague, Kristian, challenged me to reflect on my thinking and practice and to unpack underlying ideas, concepts and values.

I feel honoured by the opportunity, provided through this booklet, to enter a discussion with young academics. I am deeply grateful to the Young Academic Network for having made this possible.

Louis Albrechts

CONTRIBUTORS

Louis Albrechts



is professor emeritus of strategic spatial planning at the department of architecture, urbanism and planning at the University of Leuven, Belgium. He holds Masters degrees in urban and regional planning, social studies, and the study of developing countries and a PhD in urban and regional planning from the University of Leuven. He was full professor at the University of Leuven from 1987 until 2007 and was visiting professor at the Universities of Poznan, Pecs, Lille, Newcastle upon Tyne, and Alghero as well as visiting research fellow at the University of West Australia, Perth.

Louis Albrechts is corresponding member of the 'German Academy for Research and Planning', founder and editor of the journal *European Planning Studies*, member of the editorial board of several international journals and chair of the first and second World Planning Schools Congresses. He was president of the Association of European Schools of Planning from 1990-1992 and Chair of the Advisory Board of the global Research Network on Human Settlements (UN-Habitat HS-Net) from 2009-2011. Currently he is chair of the planning commission of his home town, Beringen.

Louis Albrechts was in charge of some 150 research projects financed by local, regional, national and international institutions. He was in charge of the strategic plan for Flanders (1992-1996) and was responsible for the scientific coordination for the transport plan Flanders (1999-2000). Louis Albrechts is author/editor of 16 books, some 90 chapters in international books and over 60 articles in leading international peer-reviewed journals. His work has been published in Dutch, English, German, French, Italian, Greek, Spanish, Turkish, Russian, Chinese, and Korean.

His current research focuses on the practice and nature of strategic spatial planning, diversity and creativity in planning, planning as a process of coproduction and bridging the gap between planning and implementation.

Kristian Olesen



is associate professor at the Department of Planning at Aalborg University in Denmark. He has researched changes in strategic spatial planning in Denmark in conjunction with its wider socio-spatial context. In 2011 he completed his PhD thesis entitled *Strategic Spatial Planning in Transition: A Case Study of Denmark*. In one of his recent publications, he discusses the complex relationship between neo-liberalisation and the widespread adoption of strategic spatial planning in Western Europe (Olesen, 2014).

CONTENTS



FOREWORD	4
CONTRIBUTORS	6
1. INTRODUCTION	8
2. SETTING THE CONTEXT	14
2.1 ON THE TIME AND CONTEXT	18
3. TOWARDS A NEW PLANNING APPROACH	23
3.1 ON THE THEORETICAL IDEAS AND INSPIRATION	27
4. THE FLEMISH DIAMOND	32
4.1 ON THE STRUCTURE PLAN AND ITS SPATIAL CONCEPTS	38
5. NAVIGATING THE POLITICS OF PLANNING PRACTICE	43
5.1 ON THE PROCESS AND MANAGING CONFLICTS	49
6. THE IMPACT OF THE STRUCTURE PLAN	56
6.1 ON THE IMPACT AND WHAT STRATEGIC PLANNING CAN DO?	60
7. REFLECTIONS	64
7.1 ON LOOKING BACK AND AHEAD	67
REFERENCES	72



In the period 1992-1996, Louis Albrechts had the unique opportunity to bring ideas from academia into planning practice. Together with Professor Charles Vermeersch (University of Ghent), Albrechts was commissioned to prepare the first structure plan for Flanders. The two professors saw this as an opportunity to prepare not only a long-lasting strategic spatial plan, but also to introduce a new and more pro-active approach to spatial planning and thus reinvigorate spatial planning as a profession in Flanders. The process of preparing the structure plan became very important for spatial planning in Flanders for several reasons. First, building a new regional identity for the Flemish territory became an integral part of the planning process. Second, a new, more pro-active and entrepreneurial planning approach was adopted, which became important for invigorating the planning profession in Flanders. Third, a number of spatial problems that had been accumulating for years were put at the centre of the planning process. It was advocated that the spatial problems Flanders was experiencing in terms of urban sprawl, increasing congestion and dissatisfaction with public transportation were a result of structural shortcomings in the overall planning framework. As a consequence, the process of preparing the first Structure Plan for Flanders developed into an exercise of transforming spatial planning in Flanders.

Albrechts' initial understanding of the need for a new approach to spatial planning is evident in his articles from the early 1990s. In a critique of the mainly managerial role adopted by planners in the 1980s, Albrechts (1991: 132) stressed that “planners must rededicate themselves to the substantive ideas and consequently become more heavily involved in the development process”. For Albrechts (1991) the combination of technical expertise with the planner's important political role is important for bringing about structural change. In his later writings, Albrechts (2004) presents his normative perspective on strategic planning (see Textbox 3). In a proposed macrostructure for a strategic spatial planning process, Albrechts outlines four tracks around which strategic spatial planning processes in his view ought to evolve. The central elements in the four-track planning approach focus on the selection of identified issues of greatest importance to the project at hand, combining short-term actions with long-term visions, and involving key actors as well as the broader public in major decisions. More recently, Albrechts (2010) has argued for a more radical approach to strategic spatial planning, which seeks to bring decision-makers, planners, institutions and citizens out of their comfort zone in order to find new solutions to contemporary planning problems. Albrechts (2010) argues that in order to achieve this you have to work backwards from commonly imagined future destinations. This implies that spatial planning is not an elitist practice. The involvement of key actors and the wider public is crucial in producing shared visions for the future. In his most recent writings, Albrechts (2013, 2017, 2018, Albrechts et al. 2017) elaborates on the importance of coproduction in spatial planning in order to build a more just and inclusive society.

¹ A list of Albrechts' publications can be found in the reference list at the end of this publication.

² The Besluitwet 25 August 1915 was passed to organize the reconstruction of Belgian cities after the First World War. According to the act municipalities were required to draw up general

Albrechts' work on the Structural Plan for Flanders is well documented in numerous journal articles and book chapters. However, rather than repeating what has already been written, the aim of this booklet has also been to dig a shovelful deeper and explore in conversation with Albrechts the importance of the Structure Plan for Flanders, the challenges of entering planning practice as an academic, as well as the lessons learned from engaging in a more strategic approach to planning and the core challenges of developing strategic spatial planning further. In addition, interviews have been carried out with practitioners and academics in Flanders with the aim of exploring the discursive and spatial impacts of the Structure Plan for Flanders across levels of governance. In unpacking the complexity of spatial planning and the case of Flanders, this booklet is structured around core themes portraying different elements of the Structure Plan developed. First, the context in which the structure plan emerged is set out. The context is important, as the beginning of the 1990s was a defining moment for spatial planning in Flanders. A moment of opportunity emerged for not only preparing the first structure plan, but also for changing the planning system and the planning culture in Flanders. Second, the core ideas and theoretical thinking behind the new planning approach advanced by Albrechts and Vermeersch are outlined. These ideas of structure planning have been developed over a considerable period of time, going back to three scholars' doctorates completed at KU Leuven in the 1970s. Third, the substance of the structure plan is presented. Here, the important spatial concepts of the plan are outlined and explored in depth. Fourth, the planning process and the challenges of navigating the politics of planning practice is discussed. The section highlights key events that became important for the successful adoption of the structure plan and particular events that threatened to end the process before successful adoption. Fifth, the impacts of the structure plan on Flemish spatial planning are analysed. It is argued that the most important impacts of the structure plan have been on the discursive level, whilst the spatial impacts of the structure plan remain scarce. In this way, the indirect outcomes of the Structure Plan for Flanders appear more significant than the direct outcomes. In the final section, the political changes in Flanders since the adoption of the structure plan are considered together with the future perspectives for structure planning in Flanders.

Each section is followed by a conversation between the two authors, in which the key issues in each section are discussed further. The conversation sections attempt to delve deeper into the issues touched upon in the main sections, as well as present broader and more nuanced perspectives on issues related to the Structure Plan for Flanders, which are not easily communicated in plain text. The aim of the conversations is to shed light on the important strategic planning work being done in preparing, mobilising support and getting approval for the structure plan. In this respect this publications attempts to provide lessons and insights into one of the most referenced cases of strategic spatial planning in Europe. The conversation sections are based on an initial exploratory interview, which was recorded and transcribed. During the writing and editing process the content and focus of the conversation sections have been refined and developed further in a continuous conversation between the authors. In this sense the conversation sections reflect the ongoing conversations among planning professionals and scholars working with strategic spatial planning.

“Rather than being a neutral eunuch, the planner him or herself is a strong partisan for certain outcomes as opposed to others, for the interests of some groups over others, for some styles of governance, for some conceptions of justice, some patterns of future development and so on.”
 (Albrechts, 1991: 133)

In a still ongoing process Belgium gradually developed from a tightly organised central state with three levels of political and administrative government (national, provincial and municipal) to a federal structure where the sovereignty is divided between the federation (national government), regions (Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels) and communities (Dutch, French and German language communities) with their own specific responsibilities and powers. In this constitutional reform, the three regions of Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels had gained considerable autonomy and powers in the sectors of spatial planning, housing, transport, the environment and regional aspects of economic and agricultural policy. Each region has its legislative body (parliament), a government and its own administration. Located in the northern part of Belgium, Flanders is a region with an area of 13,522 km² and a population in 2014 of nearly 6.4 million (see figure 1). Flanders is divided into five provinces. Although spatially located within Flanders, the Brussels Capital Region is formally not part of Flanders (see figure 2).

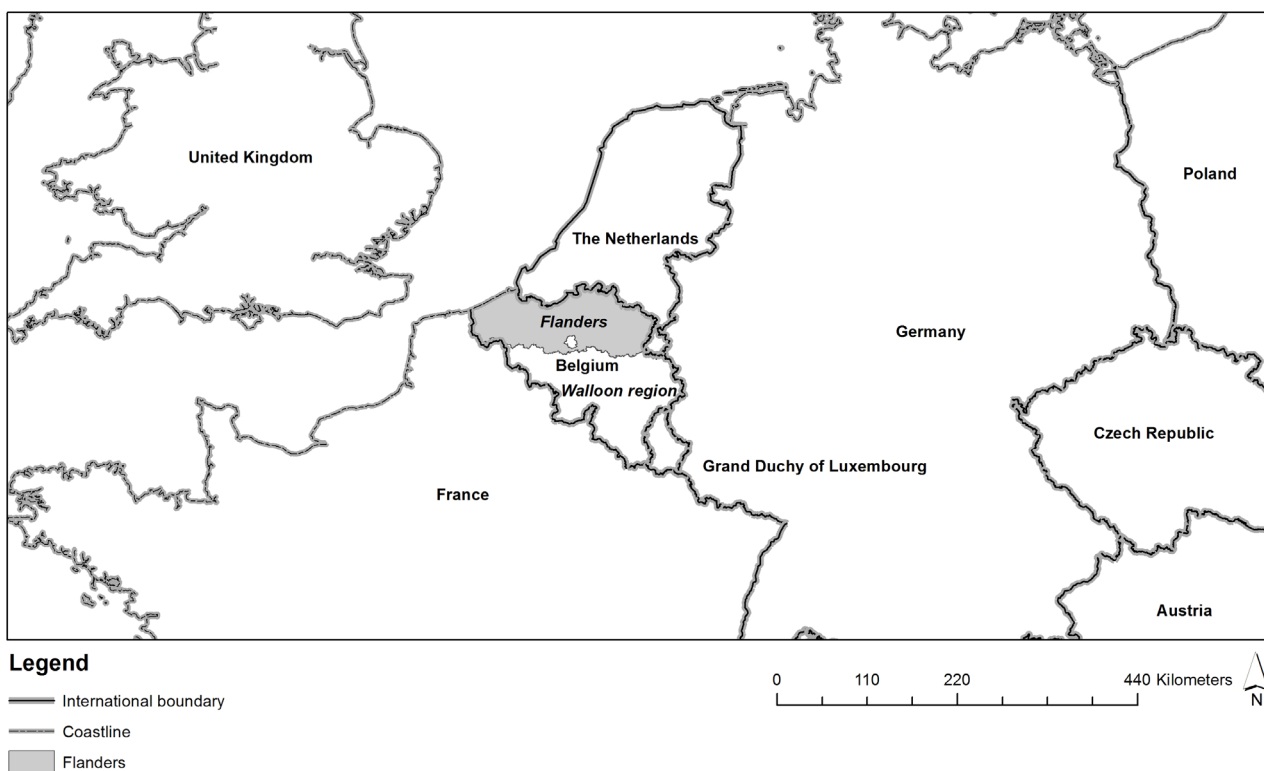


Figure 1: The location of Flanders in North-West Europe (Source: Mercatordatabank)

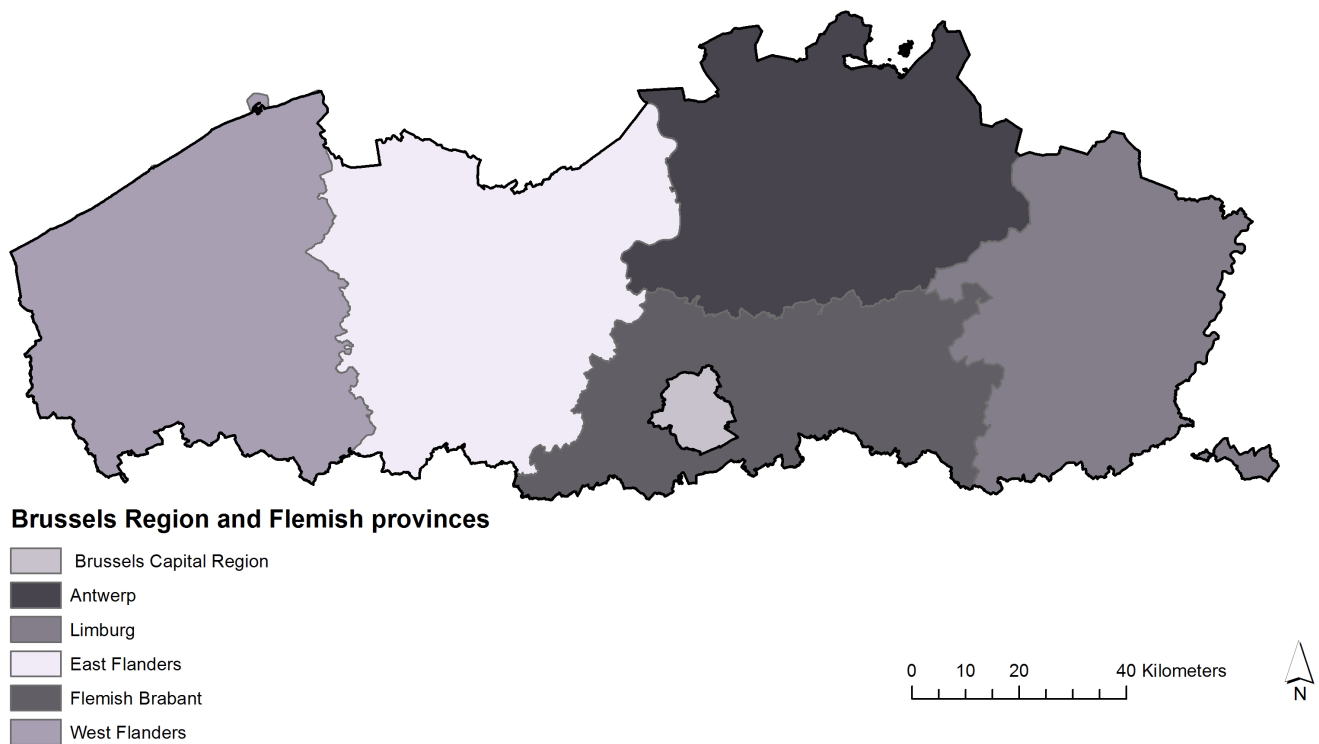


Figure 2: The Brussels Capitol Region and the Flemish provinces (source: EuroGlobalMap version 2.4, 2004)

In Flanders a three-tier planning system was adopted with structure plans and spatial implementation plans at each level (Flanders, Province, Municipality). The new planning system replaces a statutory multi-layered system of planning embracing binding land use plans at the sub-regional level and at the local level. The development of an overall spatial framework for Flanders as a whole was on the political agenda for 20 years, before the process really started in 1992. Preparing the first structure plan for Flanders and building a new planning system became an important element in the process of ‘nation building’ in Flanders. Envisioning the Flemish territory in a broader context also became important for developing a Flemish identity (what does Flanders stand for? what are its ambitions? how does it position itself in North-western Europe?).

After a first law in 1915 intended to regulate the rebuilding of Belgium after the First World War, the basic planning act from 1962 conceived a planning system mainly based on sub-regional and local land-use plans. The sub-regional plans are zoning plans prepared in the scale 1/10,000 and then published in the scale 1/25,000. This resulted in a very static, detailed and inflexible planning system with the unintended consequence of stimulating land speculation. At the same time, the planning system did very little to prevent urban sprawl and ribbon development. Albrechts (2001b) portrays the spatial organisation of Belgium as more or less the result of laissez faire processes dictated by powerful economic and/or social groups, such as real estate, chamber of commerce and industry, among others.

The complex political system relied heavily on clientelism. In this context, spatial planning was reduced to the activity of “smoothing the negative implication of a mainly uncontrolled economic development” (Albrechts, 2001b: 168). In the early 1990s, as a densely populated region with great pressures on the land, Flanders faced a number of spatial problems - urban sprawl, increasing congestion, dissatisfaction with public transportation, and irreconcilable spatial demands for housing, industry agriculture and nature - that had accumulated over the years. These problems were increasingly perceived to be a consequence of structural shortcomings in the overall planning framework (see Textbox 1).

It also affected the public attitude towards spatial planning. On the one hand, the prevailing planning process was perceived as too rigid, preventing economic development, and on the other hand, planning was regarded as not sufficiently effective in preventing urban sprawl and the deterioration of the environment. Figure 3 illustrates the building density in Flanders.

² The Besluitwet 25 August 1915 was passed to organize the reconstruction of Belgian cities after the First World War. According to the act municipalities were required to draw up general development plans.

³ The whole process of each sub-regional plan took many years and many actors (governmental and private) tried to (and had) an impact on the delineation of the most profitable land-uses ending up with a building area far beyond the needs.

⁴ Clientelism refers to a political model constituted by a direct relationship between politicians (patrons) and political supporters (clients). In this political model clients give their political support in exchange for various beneficial outputs from the political decision-making process, e.g. planning permission and building rights.

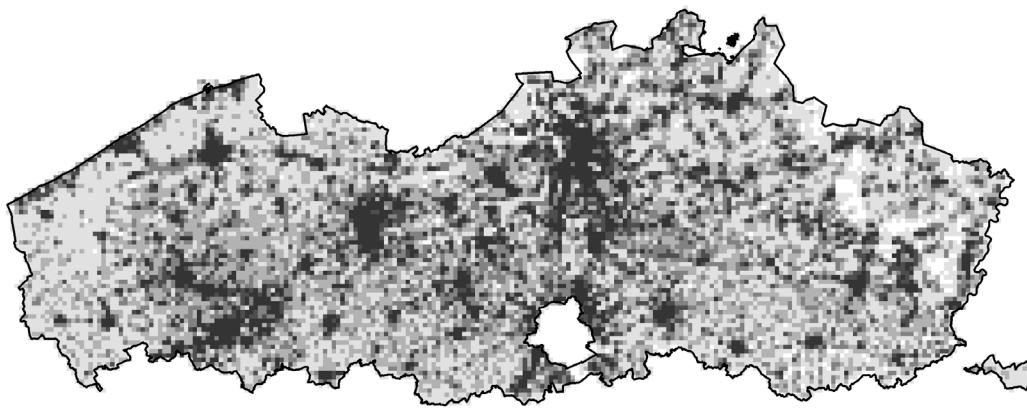
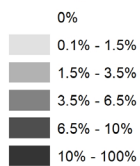

Building density


Figure 3:
The building density in
Flanders 2011. (source:
Ruimtemonitor. Steunpunt
Ruimte & Wonen 2007-2011)

0 10 20 40 Kilometers



Textbox 1: The inflexibility of the modern planning system in Belgium

The modern planning system in Belgium goes back to the Spatial Planning Act of 1962, which intended to implement a three-tier planning system (national, (sub)-regional, municipal). For various reasons, the national plan and regional plans never materialised (Albrechts, 1998). Instead sub-regional plans (gewestplannen) became the most important planning instrument in Belgium, despite not coinciding with any level of governance. In 1966, it was decided to draw up 48 sub-regional plans for the entire Belgian territory. The sub-regional plans were zoning plans, which through colour-coded maps in the scale of 1/10,000 and then published in the scale of 1/25,000 specified land use for every square meter of land. The sub-regional plans' level of detail and rigidity put large constraints on municipal plans, which either were not prepared or lost their importance. As sub-regional plans could only be adjusted by central government's approval of a new plan, the planning system became static and very inflexible. Furthermore, the introduction of parcelling permits did not as much prevent deterioration of the environment and urban sprawl, as it stimulated land speculation.

In addition, the economic restructurings of the 1970s and 1980s, and the increased focus on urban entrepreneurialism and inter-urban competition underlined the need to rethink spatial planning in the context of globalisation. With its central position in Western Europe, Flanders was experiencing the full effects of these transformations and was seeking to address these just as acutely as many other regions in Europe at the time. This awareness put even further pressure on the need to reform spatial planning in Flanders and incorporate a strategic dimension, positioning Flanders within Europe.

Gradually, the Flemish Government began to see the deficiencies of the planning system. In 1992 a political momentum emerged which brought spatial planning onto the political agenda in Flanders. Albrechts (2003a) highlights a number of driving forces behind this momentum. First, the Flemish Government had realised that many of the problems and challenges Flanders were facing were due to structural shortcomings in the overall planning framework. Second, the emerging international discourse on sustainable development helped to legitimise a different attitude for handling spatial problems. Third, important groups such as trade unions and environmental movements called for the introduction of long-term perspectives and a more coherent and integrated way of handling problems in spatial planning. Last and most importantly, Albrechts (2003a: 256) highlights that several ministers found that planners had “developed a new and more convincing appreciation of the nature and importance of the problems and challenges Flanders was facing” and not least “that potential directions for solutions were indicated”. This culture change was supported by the fact that a growing number of politicians had moved away from clientelism.

After 20 years of hesitation, the Flemish Government commissioned the task of preparing the first structure plan for the Flemish territory in 1992 to two university professors Louis Albrechts and Charles Vermeersch. They accepted this offer in two steps. First, they prepared a document to construct the problems and to illustrate their view on the process and the content. This document included a clear normative dimension indicating that they did not aim only to be instrumental, but that they were partisan towards certain outcomes as opposed to others, partisan towards certain patterns of future development (sustainable development), as well as representing the interest of weak groups and functions over others. The Minister accepted their document and turned it into his official policy document. Second, they negotiated the establishment of a substantial planning unit within the central administration and the repeal of two very contested legal regulations.⁵ This was considered to constitute a clear indication to the public at large that the Minister was completely serious about a new spatial policy.

⁵ The first regulations allowed that space between existing constructions outside the building area could be filled up under very strict conditions and as an exception. However, this became the rule rather than the exception with little attention being paid to the actual conditions (Albrechts 2003a). The second regulation that was repealed was the so-called ‘mini-decree’ (June 28th, 1984) which made it possible to deviate from binding sub-regional land-use plans (these plans covered the whole country) for building, rebuilding and use changes insofar proper planning was not harmed.



After a positive evaluation of the two steps, Albrechts and Vermeersch signed the contract for the structure plan in December 1992 and were given a wide-ranging authority in terms of adopting their view on the content of the plan and how to organise the planning process (Albrechts, 2003a). From the beginning of the planning process, a number of aims were formulated, which became the focal point for the planning process over its four-year duration (Albrechts, 1998, 1999). In general, the aims of the Structure Plan for Flanders were to stop the current deterioration of the environment by adopting a new attitude to planning (sustainable development), and to develop a new planning culture by adopting innovative planning concepts and planning strategies (deconcentrated clustering), responding to the challenges Flanders was facing.

The aims reflect a unique opportunity and commitment from the Minister of Planning to introduce a new planning system and planning culture in Flanders. At the same time, this represented a unique opportunity for Albrechts and Vermeersch to bring theoretical ideas from academia into planning practice to influence the future spatial planning in Flanders.

As highlighted above, Albrechts identifies a number of driving forces behind the momentum, which led to the preparation of the first Structure Plan for Flanders. In the following conversation with Albrechts, I want to explore the particular time and context within which this momentum emerged in detail. Understanding this context and the particular spatial problems at the time are important for beginning to understand what the Structure Plan for Flanders was trying to achieve. In the conversation below we explore what the spatial problems in Flanders were at the time, and how a new type of spatial planning was intended to manage these problems. We discuss the motivations for introducing structure planning in Flanders, and how structure planning provides an alternative to traditional land use planning. We end the conversation with a brief note on Albrechts' concerns about stepping into planning practice as an academic.

2.1

On The Time And Context



KO: I want to begin this conversation by discussing the time and context, in which the Structure Plan for Flanders was prepared. Can you elaborate on the spatial problems Flanders was experiencing at the time?

LA: Increasing ribbon development, unplanned industrialisation and a general fragmentation of both green zones and agricultural areas dominated the planning discourse in the 1960s. Therefore, the discourse surrounding the 'Structure Plan Flanders' focused on: the ad hoc adjustments of sub-regional (land use) plans to changing circumstances, the use and abuse of rural land, urban decay, the daily reporting of traffic jams, neglecting the local public transport network. Moreover, the government gradually realised that all these problems - urban decay, road congestion, the filling up of open space, irreconcilable demands for space for housing, nature and the economy - reveal structural shortcomings in the overall planning framework. What caused the discourse to turn was the realisation of the enormous planning challenges. Located at the nerve centre of Western Europe, Flanders feels the full force of the spectacular restructuring of economic, political, ideological and social relations.

KO: Against this context, what were the main motivations for embarking on structure planning?

LA: A first major motivation was the highly fragmented existing spatial structure. Post-industrial reorganisation, suburbanisation and the car have disrupted the traditional pattern, which consisted of urban networks in combination with a diversified but coherent rural space. This disruption has resulted in an active and flexible, but at the same time highly fragmented space. Elements of past cohesion survive against a background of emptying cities, diffused services, fragmentary networks, a damaged landscape and a general density of traffic. Second, it became very clear that the prevailing planning system was not suited for the problems and challenges Flanders was facing at that time. As Schon (1971), Christensen (1985) and Forester (1993) argue in a phase of deep and rapid change, traditional planning instruments seem to be ineffective because they are designed for situations of stability, certainty and a reasonable clarity on the problems to be addressed. All these traits were lacking in Flemish cities, urban regions and regions. In many places, public authorities looked for new interpretations, new descriptions, which could give a sense of what could be appropriate and necessary, to contrast the negative effects of change and to devise positive actions. Third, there was a momentum for change.

KO: What was the main goal of introducing a new style of planning in Flanders?

LA: A first main goal was to provide structuring principles in order to impose some order on the current chaos. Other main goals were to introduce a certain degree of selectivity and to provide an alternative to the shortcomings of land use planning. The main purpose of land use plans is to provide legal certainty.

This makes them very difficult to change and very difficult to use in a flexible way. As almost everything was changing fairly rapidly, and as these plans, at the time, took up to 4-5 years to change this became a big issue. Moreover, there were completely different issues at hand in the 1990s than in the 1970s, when the land use planning for the country as a whole was started. Just take the issue of sustainable development, which after the Brundtland report became extremely important. Also a growing concern for spatial quality was not easy to realise in traditional plans. It became clear that legal rules, numbers and figures are not sufficient in this respect. So I felt the need to develop an approach, a language that allows us to deal with sustainability and to talk about spatial quality. And not just the sustainability and spatial quality of the planner, of the governor, but also the sustainability and spatial quality of the different actors who are involved. Another main goal was that, as in many countries at that time, the involvement of the public at large came only at the very end of the process, mainly in the form of a public hearing. People could object to the plan – but it was just objecting and that is completely different from having a part in the plan. So I was convinced that involving more actors right from the beginning into the plan allow them to add their concerns, ideas and views. Becoming involved in the different phases of the process gives an opportunity to provide substance, ideas for the development of the process. That was very important in the type of planning I stood for.

KO: You highlight that one of the main goals was to provide an alternative to the shortcomings of land use planning. What were the main problems with the traditional planning approach as you see it?

LA: Land use regulation helps to steer developments in a certain direction. The statutory plans used for this purpose are static documents, which are used as a control tool for the actions of third parties, as a (legal) framework for spatial development and for the building rights of owners. The logic behind the use of government intervention in the use and development of land is to guide development to occur in a way that development proposals that do not accord with certain planning objectives or design standards can be refused under law. It claims legal equal rights for bureaucratic and political control and legal certainty for investors. An additional aim is also to avoid clientelism and corruption within the permit policy. Today the main rationale seems to be the pursuit of legal certainty as a basis for the permit policy. As a consequence, documents have to set out land uses and formal requirements very carefully and very accurately, while eliminating uncertainty as much as possible. Land use plans give land and property owners certainty of investment returns. In this way land use planning and economic growth are intrinsically connected. Progress is equated with order, with buildings and with economic development. Land use planning - even in a simplified zoning form - is considered a necessity: urban markets need it; there is no way of managing city growth without some form of grids and regulations. Moreover, most of the statutory plans were designed for situations of stability and predictability in which plans can serve as blueprints offering investors (including local residents) and developers the certainty they want. It is guided by what the planners normatively would like to see happen rather than form a fine-grained analysis of what actually takes place.

It is guided by what the planners normatively would like to see happen rather than form a fine-grained analysis of what actually takes place. The interpretation of land use plans in terms of form and content (comprehensive, detailed, covering every single square meter of land, etc.) is in effect a negation of change, dynamics, uncertainty, etc. meaning that they soon become outdated, are often utopian, are often not based upon sufficient and correct data, do not take into account resources or the time factor or even the possibilities for their implementation. In short, they focus on legal certainty, which makes the plans far more rigid and inflexible and less responsive to changing circumstances. In this way, they seem not suited for dealing with the dynamics of society, changing issues, changing circumstances and a changing context. Moreover, they force planners, politicians to make choices before the time is right to do this and the mainly comprehensive nature of land use plans is at odds with increasingly limited resources.

KO: Does this mean that you consider land use planning an outdated style of planning, which is no longer relevant today?

LA: No, not at all. Structure planning at that time and strategic planning now-a-days were never presented as the ultimate model which would be chosen, in idealised conditions, by every planner, every government, neither as a panacea for all challenges, all problems. They were and are not meant as a substitute, but as a complement for other planning tools (statutory planning). Traditional land use planning is still relevant to avoid unwanted developments. Moreover, from practice we learn that main actors desire certainty in relation to the built environment (the natural environment as well). Certainty is here associated with detailed land use zoning schemes and regulations, together with fixed targets for employment, housing, retail floor space provision and so on. Some (Balducci, 2008; Sartorio, 2005; Kunzmann, 2013) stress the voluntary character of many strategic planning experiences as a structural antidote against marked standardisation. They are strongly in favour not to define strategic planning as a legally defined instrument. Even where (see Wilkinson 2011) spatial strategies are grounded in principles of adaptability. The pressure to deliver implementation agendas (projects, actions) makes it difficult to shift the gaze of governments and planners sufficiently to deal with continuously emergent policy shifts and their implications. Moreover, structure planning and strategic spatial planning need a context and an intellectual tradition in which success factors are available or can be made available. The surrounding political regime enhances or inhibits institutional change needed for structure planning or strategic planning. These conditions clearly affect the ability of planning systems to implement the chosen strategies. This is linked to moments of opportunity, as I mentioned before for the Structure Plan Flanders, when strategic ambitions seem to engage with political structures. The structure element of political opportunity structure helps to focus on path-dependence in institutional development and to acknowledge that the past puts constraints on future development.

KO: I want to move on to a different topic now. I was wondering whether you as an academic stepping into planning practice had any concerns about accepting the job of preparing the structure plan.



LA: Yes, for sure! When the minister of planning invited my colleague and I to prepare the plan for Flanders, I was reluctant and sceptical for a couple of reasons. The issue of an overall plan for Flanders was already on the political agenda for many years, several previous attempts failed, and I didn't want to serve as window dressing for the government. But on the other hand, I was aware of the huge challenges and the inadequacy of the prevailing planning system. I sensed a momentum for change as different influential actors and society at large required a new planning policy and as new concepts (sustainable development) were introduced. Moreover, it provided a unique opportunity to bring my ideas from academia into planning practice. Before accepting and to avoid political pitfalls I wanted to make it clear what I stood for. Accordingly, with my colleague I first wrote a policy document that explained our view on the definition of the problem, our view on preparing such a plan, on the process we intended to follow, and on its likely content. In this way, we made it clear from the outset that we were partisans of certain outcomes over others such as for the interests of weak groups and neglected functions and for certain patterns of future socio-spatial development. The purpose of this document was to find out if we were in line with the minister's views. The minister accepted the document we produced and even turned it into his official policy document. Secondly, we urged the establishment of a substantial planning unit within the central administration and thirdly, we asked to repeal two greatly contested legal regulations. All this was considered necessary to make a point to the public at large that the minister was completely serious about a new spatial policy, which had been promised for many years.

Flanders was in the beginning of the 1990s experiencing a number of spatial challenges as a result of restructurings in the economy and an inefficient planning system. The task of preparing the first Structure Plan for Flanders was not only a task of preparing a new planning document, it was to a large extent also a matter of developing a new style of planning, which more acutely could address Flanders' spatial problems. What is worth dwelling on here is that the traditional planning instruments were experienced as being inadequate in a time characterised by rapid transformation. What was needed was a strong strategic framework with a considerable time horizon, which could bring some order to the otherwise fragmented Flemish urban development patterns. As Albrechts notes in the conversation, the structure plan was more envisaged to supplement and complement the traditional planning instruments rather than replacing them, adding a more strategic dimension to Flemish spatial planning. The opportunity to be involved in the preparations of the first Structure Plan for Flanders offered a unique opportunity for Albrechts and Vermeersch to bring theoretical ideas from academia into planning practice. In negotiating the contract with the Minister of Planning, Albrechts and Vermeersch made sure that they had the freedom and support to introduce a new planning approach in Flanders. In the next chapter, we explore the theoretical ideas behind this new approach to spatial planning more in depth. We explore the origins of these ideas and how they have developed over time. This allows us to develop a theoretical understanding of structure planning before we consider how the ideas have been implemented in practice.

TOWARDS A NEW PLANNING APPROACH

“As such, planning is in politics, and cannot escape politics, but it is not politics. At best the planner does not retreat to the precision of technical competence at the cost of social relevance. But he or she faces technical and political problems which require ideological guidance.”
(Albrechts, 1991: 133)

The task of preparing the first Structure Plan for Flanders offered Louis Albrechts and Charles Vermeersch a unique opportunity to bring their ideas and theoretical thinking into planning practice in an attempt to transform spatial planning in Flanders. The process of preparing the first Structure Plan for Flanders provided a moment of opportunity for developing a new strategic approach to spatial planning, and to foster a culture change among planning professionals in Flanders. The aim was first and foremost to break away from the traditional technocratic and managerial planning approach rooted in land use regulation, which over the preceding decades had revealed a number of shortcomings in handling urban development pressures in Flanders.

Under the heading of structure planning, Albrechts and Vermeersch wanted to introduce a new planning approach, which had roots in their doctorates. This planning approach was strongly influenced by thinkers, such as Hasan Ozbekhan (1969), who challenged the traditional rational planning paradigm relying on forecasting techniques, and advocated for a planning approach that would take a point of departure in a desired future state. Later these ideas were adjusted to incorporate critiques from a range of prominent critical geographers and planning theorists, emphasising issues such as structural change, diversity, equity and inclusivity (see Textbox 2).

The idea of structure planning was in many ways ahead of its time. Throughout the 1990s, other urban regions in Europe were preparing visionary spatial strategies in an attempt to position themselves more favourably in the increasingly competitive European landscape. However, this revival of strategic spatial planning was still in its early days, when the decision to prepare the structure plan was made. The Structure Plan for Flanders was thus not only an important document for spatial planning in Flanders, it became also (mainly through Albrechts' writing) a well-documented and well-known example of a new generation of strategic spatial planning, which took a more policy-oriented planning approach focusing on the preparation of visionary spatial strategies (see Albrechts, 2001a, 2004; Albrechts et al., 2003; Healey, 2007; Healey et al., 1997; Salet & Faludi, 2000).

Textbox 2: Theoretical Roots

In his PhD thesis *Strategic Factors in Urban Planning as Applied to Parking* from 1974, Louis Albrechts developed the first steps towards a voluntaristic planning model. Together with two other PhD students at the Institute for Urban and Spatial Planning at KU Leuven, van Havre (1973) and Vermeersch (1976), the basis for the planning model was prepared. The model was influenced by the work of Berger (1964), de Jouvenel (1964), Masse (1962, 1966), Ozbekhan (1967, 1969) Jantsch (1967, 1970) Ladriere (1960), Perin (1970). Especially the contribution by Hasan Ozbekhan in the proceedings of the OECD Bellagio conference *Perspectives of Planning* (Jantsch, 1969) became influential for Albrechts' thinking about planning. Ozbekhan (1969) advocated a planning approach that would begin with a vision of a desired future and/or what sort of existing problems you wanted to remedy or avoid. This planning approach was substantially different from the traditional planning paradigm relying on control and forecasting techniques. To avoid pure idealistic thinking, the voluntaristic planning model was over the years adjusted to integrate the work of social critics such as Harvey (1973, 1989), Friedmann (1987), Forester (1989), Krumholz (1982), Castells (1972), Beauregard (1989), Fainstein and Fainstein (1979) in the approach. Gradually, Albrechts' thinking about planning evolved into a more radical type of strategic spatial planning with a clear focus on structural issues, and a concern for bringing about systemic change through transformative practices (see Albrechts, 1999, 2010, 2013, 2017, 2018, Albrechts et al., 2017).

First and foremost, the new planning approach set out to challenge the traditional land use oriented planning approach and the negative attitude towards planning in Flanders at the time, resulting from a rigid planning system. The new planning approach was rooted in a belief/conviction that spatial planning had to be more pro-active and entrepreneurial in order to deal with the problems and challenges Flanders was facing. This involved also a strong commitment to engage a wider range of actors in the planning process, most importantly actors vital for the implementation of the plan. In his later writings, Albrechts (2004, 2006; Albrechts & Van den Broeck 2004) has outlined a four-track model of strategic spatial planning, reflecting his normative perspectives on spatial planning (see Textbox 3). The model is based on literature reviews of planning theory and strategic management literature together with Albrechts' experiences from preparing the structure plan for Flanders. One of the key elements in this planning approach is the understanding of the planner as a potential catalyst and initiator of change (Albrechts, 1999), rather than a neutral process manager. Politics plays an active role in the power relations within the 'plan-making' process.

Rather than being a neutral eunuch, the planner him or herself is a strong partisan for certain outcomes as opposed to others, for the interests of some groups over others, for some styles of governance, for some concepts of justice, some patterns of future development over others and so on. For Albrechts (2004) this also means that some issues are more important than others, and it is the selection of critical issues to focus on that constitutes the essence of strategic planning. Another important aspect is the focus on action. “Things must get done!” (Albrechts, 2004: 752). Relating short-term actions with long-term strategic visions represents also a helpful approach to maintaining the interest of important actors in spatial planning.

As Flemish planning tradition was rooted in land use planning, building support for a new planning approach and facilitating a culture change in the Flemish planning community was a huge challenge. When the process of preparing the structure plan started, the central planning administration consisted of only four planners. Albrechts and Vermeersch were fortunate to be able to select for their planning team planners out of their brightest former students, and had the freedom and the budget to hire consultants to carry out background analyses. Strategically, they decided to locate the planning team in the same building as the Flemish planning administration. The physical proximity was important for spreading the ideas embedded in the new planning approach and facilitating a new planning culture among planners in the Flemish planning administration. By gradually merging the ad-hoc planning team with the planning department a substantial permanent cell, who shared a stock of knowledge, information, sensitivity, mutual understanding and who were fully persuaded of the new ideas of the Structure Plan, was installed in the planning department. In doing so the basis for structural change in the department was provided both in numbers as well as in dedication to the new approach. The planning department could draw upon this intellectual capital when using its control function to re-frame ways of thinking, ways of doing things, attitudes and practices of provincial and local governments, sector departments and consultants.

In this way, the Flanders case exemplifies that spatial planning practice is not just a contingent response to wider forces, but it is also an active force in enabling change. It forms knowledge, produces discourse, constitutes a productive network and builds institutions that act as a catalyst for change.

Albrechts has over the years developed and refined his own normative perspective on strategic spatial planning. In the conversation that follows, we explore where the inspiration behind Albrechts’ theoretical thinking on spatial planning comes from, and how these ideas have developed throughout his career. This allows us to develop a better understanding of the ideas that have influenced Albrechts’ theoretical perspectives on strategic planning.

Textbox 3: The Four-Track Model

Albrechts' four-track model of strategic spatial planning is based on four interrelating types of rationality: value rationality (the design of alternative futures); communicative rationality (involving a growing number of actors - private and public - in the process); instrumental rationality (looking for the best way to solve problems and achieve desired futures); and strategic rationality (a clear and explicit strategy for dealing with power relationships). The model consists of four tracks, which should not be understood in a purely linear way, but rather reflects important elements of strategic planning. In track 1 a long-term vision is formulated. In track 2 the focus is on building trust by solving problems through short-term actions that do not contradict the long-term vision. In track 3 important actors for the implementation of the vision are involved. In track 4 the broader public is involved in major decisions. For further reading see Albrechts (2004) and Albrechts & Van den Broeck (2004).

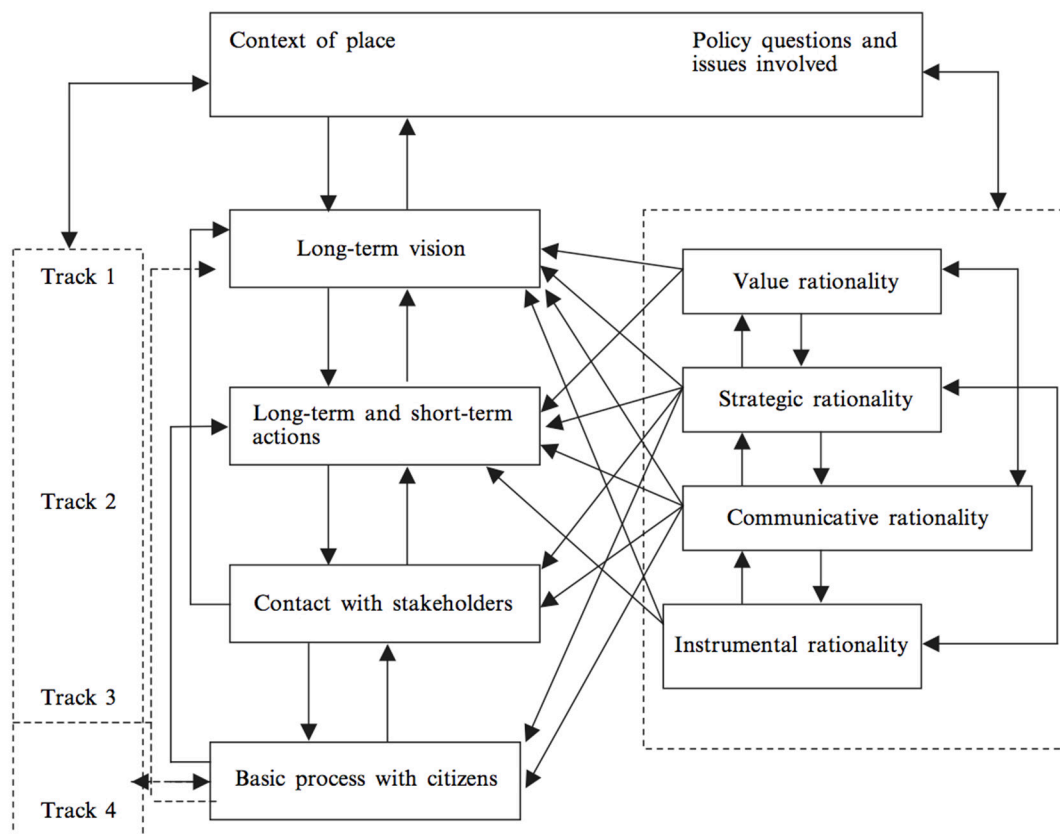


Figure 4: The four-track approach and its relationship with different concepts of rationality (Albrechts, 2004: 753)

3.1



On The Theoretical Ideas And Inspiration

KO: I think it is quite important to discuss your theoretical ideas of spatial planning, where these ideas come from, and how they have developed through your career. I want to start this discussion by asking you how you became interested in planning in the first place.

LA: This question needs a little bit of personal background. I graduated in three different subjects: social sciences (1965), study of developing countries (1966) and planning (1971). Social sciences provided me with tools for analysing and understanding structural issues in society. But it felt short in providing answers. My study in developing countries pushed me to go beyond western realities and practices. Planning turned the focus of analysing for the sake of analysis towards analysing for the sake of providing answers. When working on my social science masters' thesis I became inspired by fascinating experiments in the former Yugoslavia where extensive group interactions in self-managed firms promoted greater communication and worker commitment. It made me focus on the way in which people are excluded or included and the way the relationship between people are organised. I fully realised that this needed a focus on the structural problems in society. This urged me to construct a type of planning that provides a critical interpretation of the structural challenges and problems and thinks creatively about possible answers and how to get there. I became influenced by the work of Berger (1964), de Jouvenel (1964), Masse (1962, 1966), Ozbekhan (1967, 1969) Jantsch (1967, 1970) Ladriere (1960), Perin (1970). To avoid pure idealistic thinking, however, over the years the views of social critics such as David Harvey, John Friedmann, and Susan Fainstein became very important for me.

KO: I suppose that this way of thinking about planning was quite new and innovative at the time. What were the limitations of the planning paradigm at the time, as you see it?

LA: Again some background to set the scene. As a planning student, I became strongly indoctrinated with Patrick Geddes' famous aphorism: 'survey before plan', coined in the early 20th century. In the planning classes, survey-analysis-plan was propagated as the planner's grand rule of good practice. So in much of teaching and practice work, the most persistent emphasis was on the survey method. The prevailing planning model in my country at that time produced static documents, which were used as a control tool for the actions of third parties and as (legal) frameworks for spatial development and the construction rights of land owners. The logic behind the use of government intervention in the use and development of land was to guide developments to occur so that proposals that did not accord with certain planning objectives or design standards could be refused under the law. Conceptions of the future in these plans were based on linear derivations from the past and present and tended to create the impression that there was something logically and factually inevitable in both the sequence and the final configuration of predicted events. I soon realised that this approach resulted in plans that are closed systems constructed to solve specific classes of problems in the light of given goals which had been conceived outside the plan's own system. The whole rhetoric of planning as consisting of 'administrative' work undertaken to regulate the implementation of given policies was not very appealing to me.

I became intrigued by the complex and surreal narrative of writers and their ability to shift back and forth between tales of parallel worlds. In my contact with utopias, I valued the dimension of the 'radically new', the transformative, and the dimension of bringing something new into being. In utopia the prevailing culture is confronted with a mirror of itself. Utopian thinking, although I am well aware of its dangers, for me is a source of self-criticism and socio-cultural innovation. In this respect Harvey (2000) provides a good example of contemporary utopia. All this pushed me to provide room for imagination and undoubtedly laid the foundation for my later interest in envisioning, creativity, innovation and in a contemporary utopian tradition.

KO: How did you come in contact with new ways of thinking about planning? And how did this inspire you to develop your own thinking about planning?

LA: A couple of stays abroad, such as an extended stay at the Athens Centre of Ekistics (Constantinos Doxiadis, Jaqueline Tyrwhitt), a four weeks program at the Salzburg Seminar in American Studies (Mel Webber, Arthur Naftalin, Jack Dyckman, Robert B. Mitchell), brought me in contact with a whole new literature and made me aware of the usefulness of theory. McLoughlin's book *Urban and Regional Planning* (1969) and Chadwick's *A systems View of Planning* (1971) provided a first (although mechanistic) alternative for Geddes' scheme and an introduction into systems thinking. Systems, as sets of components together with the relations between the components and between their attributes, made an opening towards a relational approach obvious. The book *Perspectives of Planning* (1969) - the proceedings of the OECD Bellagio conference - edited by Erich Jantsch and more specifically the contribution by Hasan Ozbekhan *Towards a General Theory of Planning* became an eye-opener for me. Planning, as conceived by Ozbekhan, begins with a vision of what sort of future a community wants, and/or what sort of existing problems they want to remedy or avoid. Planning is then done not only to see what sort of actions would be suitable but also, and indeed primarily, to see what systemic and policy changes might be suitable or necessary. The new literature taught me that the future cannot be logically deduced from the past by forecasting techniques and that a community has (within limits) a responsibility for its own future. The model I conceived for my PhD is based on a concept of rationality (extended rationality) and a concept of time (psychological notion of time). In this model, the future transcends mere feasibility and results from judgments and choices formed with references, first to the idea of what is desirable then to that of betterment. Such futures might (and perhaps must) be imagined as differing radically from present reality; they must represent situations which are not mere temporal extensions of the here and now; they must be free of the weight of what we are able simply to predict. A particular future state becomes in this way an act of choice that involves valuations, judgments and decisions and, when these decisions are carried out, would lead to the gradual shift in a desirable direction. The governing characteristic of this model is that it defines and, therefore, contains within itself the direction towards which it is guided. It is a process in which the outcome is invented or created as something new, rather than as a solution arrived at as a result of the manipulation of givens.

I can draw a link here with Bergson's (1992) concepts of duration (*duree*) and virtuality. For Bergson, duration is the unified flow of time or becoming, so *duree* is becoming, and virtuality provides us with a way of seeing the future as bound up with the continual elaboration of the new, the openness of things (see Grosz, 1999: 28). As Grosz (1999) writes, becoming is a movement of differentiation, divergence, and self-surpassing or actualisation of virtualities in the light of the contingencies that befall them. In line with Chia (1995, 1999) this way of thinking provoked for me a shift in planning from an ontology of 'being', which privileges outcome and end-state, towards an ontology of 'becoming', in which actions, movement, relationships, conflicts, process and emergence are emphasised. It became for me an argument to think in terms of the heterogeneous becoming of institutional transformation, the otherness of institutional outcomes and the immanent continuity of institutional traces.

KO: You highlight that your thinking about planning also has been influenced by critical geographers and planning theorists. In what ways have planning theory inspired your thinking about planning and approach to planning in practice?

LA: A vast critical literature and my experience in practice made me aware that planning faces major ontological and epistemological challenges. These may imply the scope of planning, approaches, use of skills, its context, resources, knowledge base, and involvement of a wider range of actors. A major concern became the awareness of an emerging democratic deficit as a central element of the neoliberal policies. Young (1990) made me aware that class, gender, race and religion do matter in terms of whether citizens are included or excluded in the process. In my first edited book in English *Regional Policy at the Crossroads* (1989), I drew on David Harvey, Ed Soja, Alain Lipietz, Louis Althusser, Doreen Massey and argued that neoliberal policies have allowed capital to restructure in ways that are socially and spatially uneven. Over the years a vast literature (Friedmann, 1992; Peck & Tickell, 2002; Jessop, 2000; Allmendinger & Houghton, 2009; Purcell, 2009; Mouffe, 2005; Swyngedouw et al., 2002; and also your own Olesen & Richardson, 2012) backed up these ideas. According to neoliberal dogma, distributive injustice was seen as a temporal problem that will eventually be ironed out as economic growth proceeds. But many practices demonstrate that the roll out of neoliberal policy privileges urban and regional competitiveness, mainly through the subordination of social policy to economic policy and new, more elitist forms of partnerships and networks. A growing literature, but also my experience in practice, illustrates that city and regional governments are lured to adopt a more entrepreneurial style of planning aimed at identifying market opportunities and assisting private investors to take advantage of them in order to enhance city and regional competitiveness. As neoliberalism assumes that socio-spatial problems have a market solution, its aim was and continues to depoliticise the economy and subordinate everything to the economic realm and the sovereignty of the market. Indeed, I witnessed neoliberal attempts to create competitive cities and regions by generating investments in major cities and urban regions.

Such investment projects became a key component of the neoliberal shift from distributive policies, welfare considerations and direct service provision towards more market-oriented and market-dependent approaches aimed at pursuing economic promotion and competitive restructuring. In many cities, urban revitalisation is presented as an opportunity to change economic hierarchies and functions within the urban region by creating new jobs and strengthening the city's position in the urban division of labour. Within (and constrained by) the framework of the market society, places and communities face the challenge to construct (or reject) and implement the discourses of cultural diversity, sustainability, equity and place quality and, subsequently, to creatively transform their own functioning and practice. In recent articles (Albrechts, 2013, 2017, 2018, Albrechts et al., 2017), I point to a need for creative transformation that refers to changes in governance relating to current and historical relations of dominance and oppression. My experiences in practice taught me that questions have to be raised about whether spatial planning practices are able to resist the hegemonic discourses of neoliberalism.

Clearly evident from the conversation above, the sources of inspiration for Albrechts' thinking about spatial planning are many. The new style of spatial planning that Albrechts initially developed in his PhD thesis was a reaction towards the predominant planning paradigm at the time, rooted in a survey-analysis-plan dictate. The main inspiration for the new style of spatial planning came from Hasan Ozbekhan's argument that one must begin with a vision of what sort of future a community wants, rather than logically deduce the future from the past by forecasting techniques. Supplemented by a strong interest in utopias, critical planning theory and involvement in planning practice, Albrechts' theoretical thinking about spatial planning has evolved continuously over the years. In the next chapters, we return to the Structure Plan for Flanders and explore how Albrechts' theoretical ideas were translated into planning practice in the case of the Flanders Structure Plan. The next chapter explores the content of the structure plan in depth, while chapter 5 discusses the process of preparing the plan.

THE FLEMISH DIAMOND

“After approximately twenty years of planning desert without any new visioning activities or substantial legal reforms, the Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders enthused the planners’ and decision-makers’ world with a new, relevant and attractive storyline on how Flanders should develop in the next fifteen years. The increasing societal disturbance about the failing foundations for changes in the existing land use plans, dating from the 1970s, and the growing number of new societal challenges such as traffic congestion, fragmentation of the open space, decline of the attractiveness of cities to live and work, ... created a clear sense of urgency for this new storyline in the 1990s.”

(Hans Leinfelder, assistant professor at KU Leuven,
former planner in the Flemish Planning Department)

The Flemish Government approved the Structure Plan for Flanders (Ruimtelijk Structuurplan Vlaanderen) on 23 September 1997. The aim of the structure plan was first and foremost to provide structuring principles that could impose some order on future urban development and reduce the fragmentation of space (Albrechts, 1998). The structure plan was based on the storyline of the need for a new approach to spatial planning. This storyline was supported by the idea of an urban network, the baseline of “Flanders, open and urban”, four core spatial concepts, and the principle of subsidiarity, which secured that structure planning would take place at the local level as well.

The idea of developing an urban network was an important idea in the structure plan. The example of neural networks provides helpful insights for the formulation of a general description of urban networks. A network consists of different entities or nodes (1), pursuing some goal (2). The nodes can obtain this goal more easily through collaboration, than if they would act individually. That is why the nodes within a network maintain relationships with each other. This requires the presence of links or connections (3) enabling exchanges. By maintaining and improving these indispensable relationships, a large connected system appears. This system can be pointed out as a network. Consequently, an urban network could be considered as a collection of different ‘urban actors’, pursuing some goal they can obtain in a more functional and efficient way through co-operation than if they were to act individually. Therefore, these cities or urban areas enter into links or connections with one another. This implies a need for a certain common policy and cooperation (see Albrechts & Lievois, 2004).

One of the important insights in the structure plan is that the city can no longer be based upon an image of one compact and coherent area. Unambiguous urban patterns are losing their validity and the clear distinction between town and country is becoming blurred (Albrechts, 1998). The city has evolved towards a fragmented pattern of dispersed functions and actors. Traditional geographical analytical terms referring to the banlieue, the city-core, and agglomerations etc. do not anymore seem sufficient to describe an urban area. The actual spatial structure shows a pattern of loose parts (built up areas, infrastructures, but also natural entities and open spaces) functionally linked to each other. Within this fragmented entity, different stakeholders and actors representing different (spatial and organisational) layers come together. Spatial systems and logics on global, European, regional and local levels increasingly interact and defend their own interests. In this view, the Flanders Central Area can be considered as one large fragmented and multi-layered entity with international, national, regional and local functions; large, regional and small urban areas, villages, natural elements, line-infrastructures, areas for economic activities, traffic flows, etc.

The international discourse on urban space was (and still is) conceptualised in a vocabulary of economic competition, with references to the underlying 'growth rationale' but, at the same time, was articulated with the aspiration of combining growth with concern for the environment. The concept of the Flemish Diamond, conceived in the Structure Plan for Flanders, articulated a spatial narrative based on a discursive process of 're-imagining' territory and urban space within Flanders. In this discursive process of social spatialisation, the driving rationale was one of competitiveness as the precondition for a possible wider acceptance of the concept.

The urban network formed by the Flemish Diamond takes the form of a set of physically separate urban areas. The three largest cities – Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent – and the regional city of Leuven together form the anchors of the diamond-shaped urban constellation. Brussels, due to its role as the base for the European Union, contains a wide range of activities and economic decision-making power, reflected in a large number of headquarters within the service and financial sectors. Antwerp is due to its port an important node for sea transport, whilst Ghent and Leuven are home to the two largest Flemish universities.

The urban network is constituted by the main infrastructures in Flanders, including the national airport, high-speed train connections, the main road, rail and water infrastructures. All the main Flemish universities and research centres are located within the network. In total the area is inhabited by almost four million people, making it one of the larger urban regions in Western Europe. Like the internationally better known networks of the Randstad and the Rhine-Ruhr Area, but quite unlike the primate cities of London and Paris, the Flemish Diamond is an example of a polynucleated urban system. Its quality is said not to be merely physical but also functional, in that the cities within the complex perform complementary functions. Government (European, federal, regional) is concentrated in Brussels, while for instance port activities and industry are concentrated in Antwerp. Figure 5 illustrates the spatial outline of the Flemish Diamond.

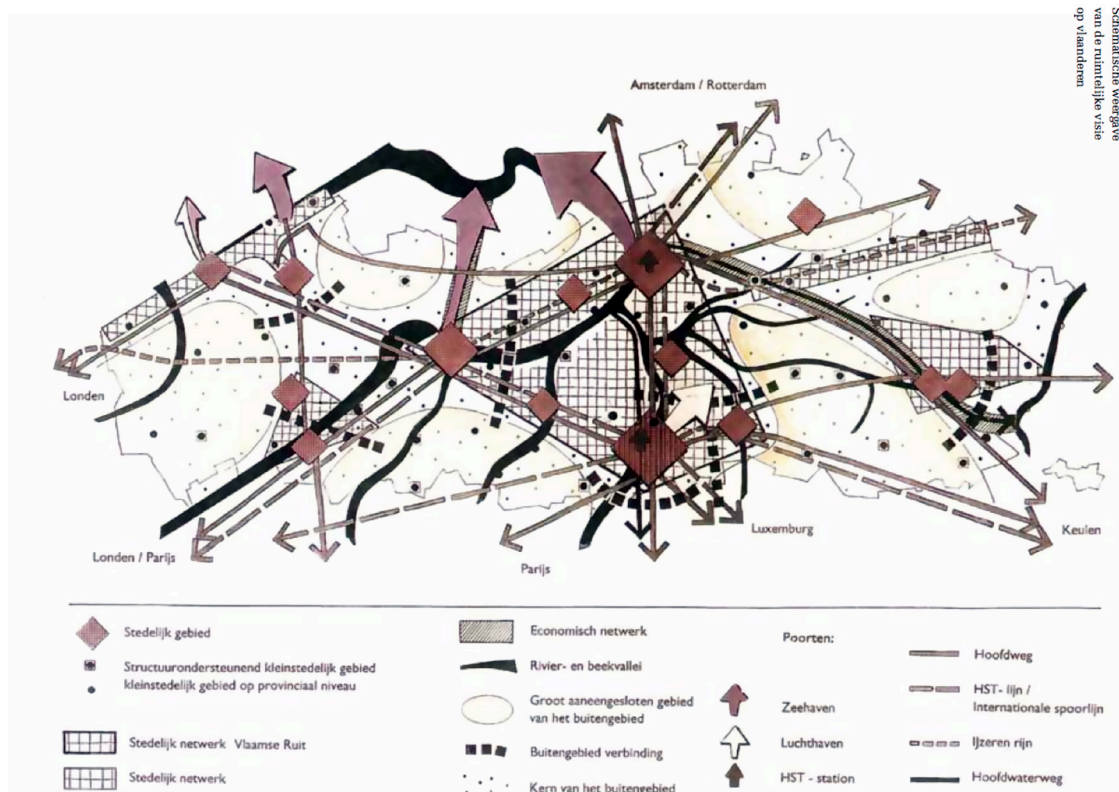


Figure 5: The spatial outline of the Flemish Diamond (Vlaamse Overheid, 2011: 194)

To increase the chances that the spatial concept of the Flemish Diamond would gain support, the discourse adopted was initially directed at specific users. The new concept aimed to make politicians and especially the business community perceive challenges and solutions in a particular way. In this way, the concept impinged upon the frame of reference of the 'model users'. The actual users (lower planning levels) may have a frame of reference far different from that imputed to the 'model users'. In the Structure Plan of Flanders, it was argued that only the Flemish Diamond was able to compete with networks such as the Randstad, the Rhine-Ruhr Area, or Lille-Roubaix-Tourcoing (see figure 6). An intentional effort was made to antagonise other international networks. By underlining the initiatives taken in the Rhine-Ruhr Area, and particularly in the Randstad, attention was drawn to the possible competitive advantage that could come out of such initiatives in the fierce international competition to attract investments. In addition, identifying common rivals was seen as an excellent opportunity to strengthen ties with Brussels and help the parties to join forces and close the ranks.

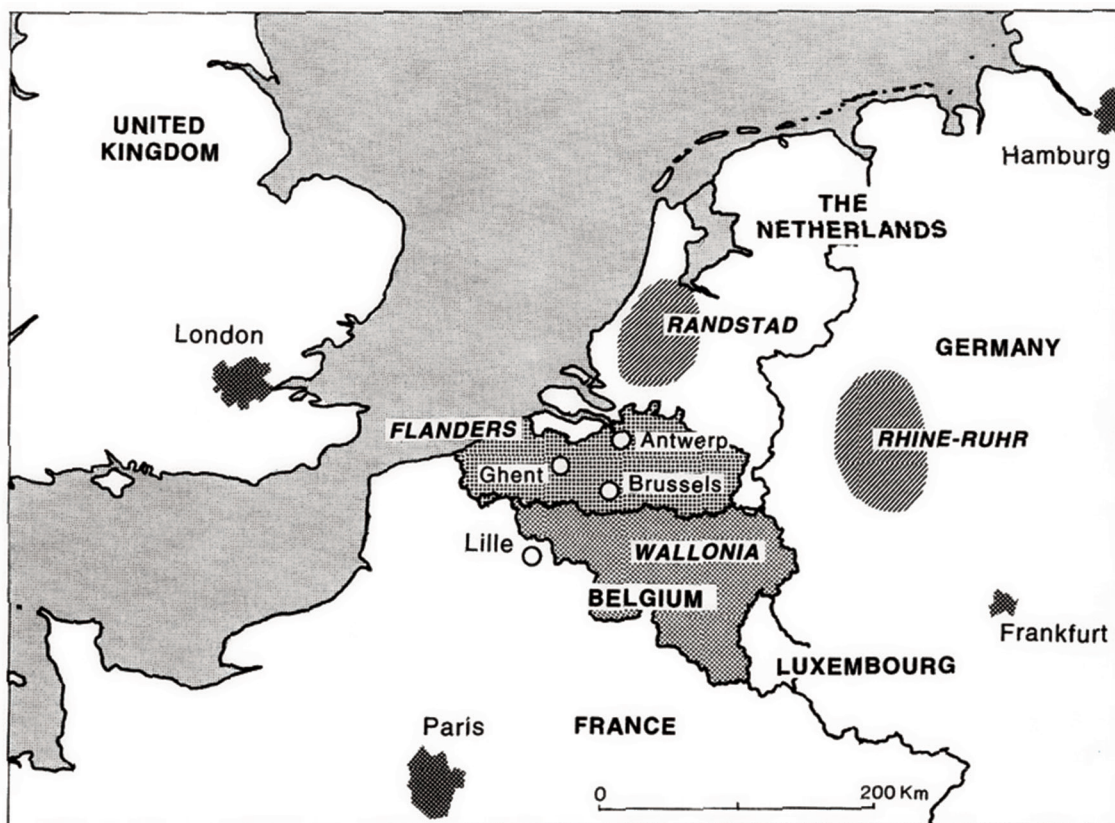


Figure 6: The location of the main cities in Flanders in relation to the Randstad and the Rhine-Ruhr Area.

As discussed in chapter 3, urban regions were increasingly recognised as an important scale of economic development and strategic spatial planning at the time. Below Philippe van Wesenbeeck highlighted how the structure plan built on this new era for urban regions by strengthening the role of cities as nodes in an urban network.

“The most important idea is the strengthening of the urban regions in the Flanders Region. The Flanders Region has a lot of historically small cities, like Ghent is a relatively small city, 250,000 inhabitants. And it was declining in the 1980s and 1990s like all the Flemish cities. With the idea and the concept of concentration in urban regions, not in the city, but in the urban region, in urban networks, there was a new era for the urban region at that time. So concentration is important. At this moment, we are growing again. Antwerp and the other big cities are growing again. This was part of the idea and the concept of the Structure Plan for Flanders.”

(Philippe van Wesenbeeck, planning director in Ghent, former planner in the Flemish Planning Department)

The structure plan was based on the simple distinction between urban areas and the rural zone, captured in the baseline “Flanders, open and urban”. The main aim was to locate future urban and economic development within the urban areas, whilst preserving the rural zones for agriculture, woodland and nature. As Hans Leinfelder highlighted, this very simple principle played an important role in mobilising important actors early in the planning process.

⁶ The population of the entire Flemish Diamond (including Brussels) is 5 million people. However, the Flemish Region does not have any authority in the Brussels Capital Region.

“The simple baseline ‘Flanders, open and urban’ was able to gather all actors and to keep them gathered when defining the more detailed development perspectives. The baseline had a positive analytical dimension – Flanders still had open space left despite its very urbanised character – as well as a promising political dimension – to safeguard these open space fragments, it was really necessary to concentrate new residential and economic developments in the urban areas. The spatial planning perspectives for urban areas and open spaces were complementary parts of a same storyline!”

(Hans Leinfelder, assistant professor at KU Leuven,
former planner in the Flemish Planning Department)

The first and most important spatial concept in the structure plan is ‘deconcentrated clustering’. Although Albrechts and Vermeersch were knowledgeable about Dutch planning, the concept of deconcentrated clustering’ was not derived from ‘bundled deconcentration’ (this is opposite to the argument by de Jong & de Vries, 2002). The concept of deconcentrated clustering came from the existing situation in Flanders (urban sprawl) and the aim to concentrate (cluster) new developments. The concept emphasised the importance of concentrating urban and economic development in nodes or clusters in order to counteract urban sprawl. This quite simple philosophy permeated the structure plan.

The structure plan highlighted the importance of finding a balance between dispersion and concentration of urban and economic development, which preserved the landscape and at the same time allowed for some development in smaller clusters (nuclei) in the rural zone. The aim was to turn the major cities and networks such as the Albert Canal from Antwerpen to Liege into hubs of urban and economic development. The structure plan worked with a time horizon until 2007 and distributed future urban development according to specified ratios.

For example in the case of housing, the structure plan specified a 60/40 percent ratio in favour of locating new residential facilities in municipalities fully or partially belonging to the urban area.

Urban sprawl was counteracted through stressing that urban development incompatible with the principle of deconcentrated clustering, such as retail ribbon developments, must be stopped. Figure 7 illustrates the spatial concept of deconcentrated clustering.

“It was paralleled by an equally simple concept, albeit in a quite difficult and technical wording: ‘deconcentrated clustering’. And it has to be said that every detailed development perspective in the rest of the more than 250 pages of the policy plan fitted this concept perfectly: it was all about clustering new developments in the already existing deconcentrated urbanisation pattern of Flanders. This difficult wording made sense of course, as the Dutch, some years earlier, already defined their planning concept as ‘clustered deconcentration’ as they started off from a totally different urbanisation pattern.”

(Hans Leinfelder, assistant professor at KU Leuven,
former planner in the Flemish Planning Department)

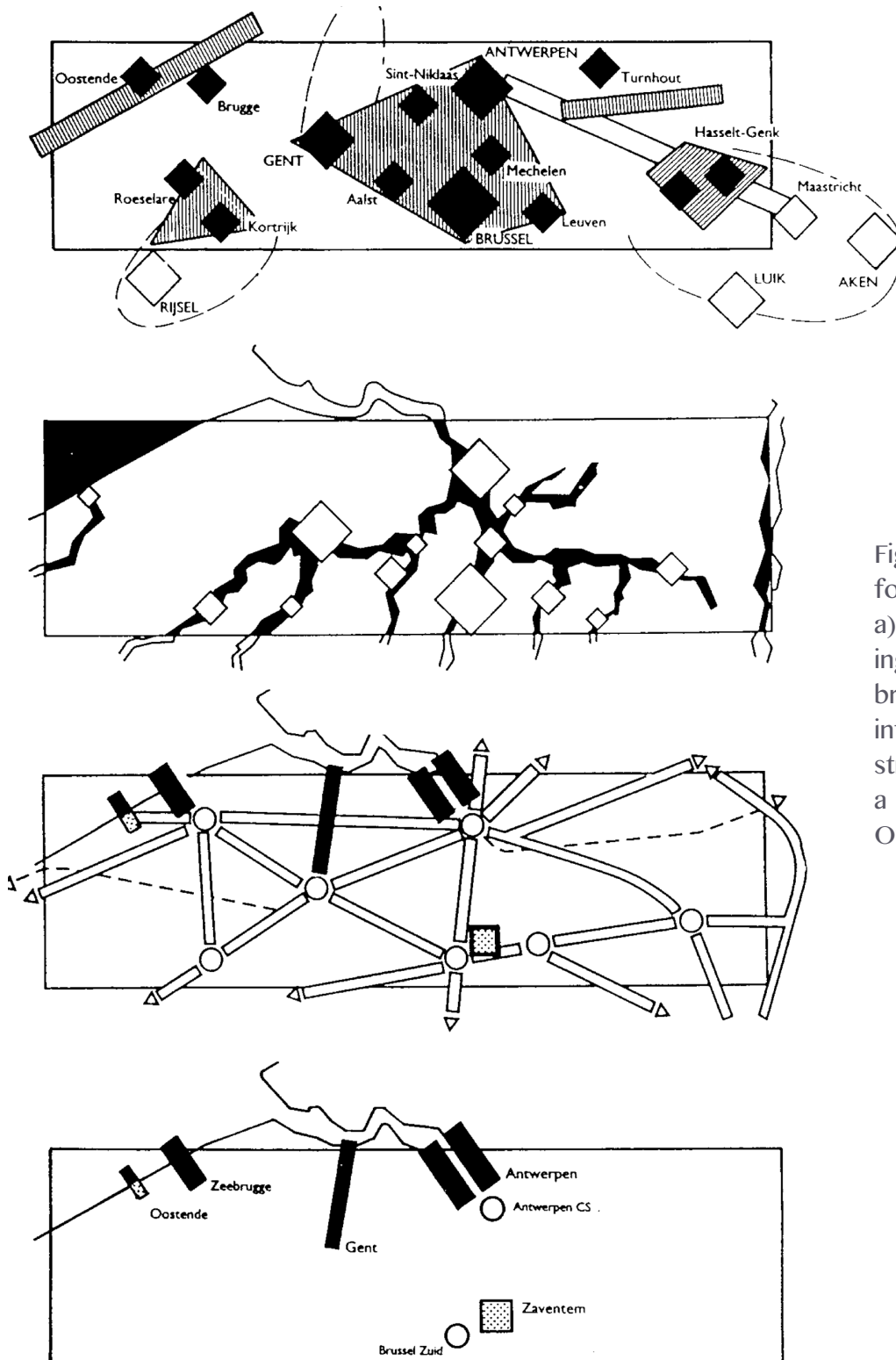


Figure 7: Illustrations of the four main spatial concepts a) deconcentrated clustering, b) network of river and brook valleys, c) transport infrastructure as a spatial structure, and d) ports as a growth engine (Vlaamse Overheid, 2011: 189-192).

The second spatial concept was ‘the rural zone’. Here the main aim was again to reduce urban sprawl, preserving space for agriculture, leisure, woodland and nature. Nature was perceived as an ordering system made up of river and brook valleys, larger nature and woodland complexes, and other areas where natural structures can be found, e.g. agriculture. In the structure plan, emphasis was put on nature’s spatially ordering/structuring qualities, instead of just seeing nature as a subject of ecological concern or as a reserve. This had implications for the urban and economic development potentials in the rural zone. As highlighted above, urban and economic development could take place locally in nuclei of the rural zone (e.g. main village), but for example not in areas with strong agricultural structures. Figure 7 illustrates how river and brook valleys were envisioned to constitute an ordering structure in Flanders.

The third spatial concept of ‘linear infrastructures’ was used to highlight main infrastructures such as roads, railways and waterways as ordering spatial structures (see figure 7). In contrast with traditional transport planning, the structure plan categorised roads and railways according to their function (instead of demand). Main roads for example linked Flemish metropolitan and regional urban areas, whilst the function of local roads was to provide accessibility. Philippe van Wesenbeeck highlighted how the structure plan adopted the ‘form follows function’ principle, where each road was categorised and designed according to its function.

“Another important concept for me is the categorisation of the infrastructure. The main infrastructures like roads, railroads and waterways, they were built with the idea of the dimensions, the form. We had the concept of the opposite, the form follows the function. We have to give function to the infrastructure, each road, each street, and you have to adopt the form, the dimensions of that road or that railroad according to the function. [...] All investments in infrastructure by the Flemish Government or by the province or the local authorities are based on the categories.”

(Phillippe van Wesenbeeck, planning director in Ghent,
former planner in the Flemish Planning Department)

The fourth spatial concept of ‘gateways’ is used as a collective term for important economic structures such as seaports, internationally-oriented multimodal logistics parks, Zaventem International Airport and the HST Station Antwerp-Central (see figure 7). Together with the main infrastructures, the gateways and the main urban nodes constitute the main urban area of the Flemish Diamond.

Finally, it is important to highlight the principle of ‘subsidiarity’, which was added in the revision of the planning act. The Planning Act from 1996 stressed that structure planning must be conducted on the regional, the provincial and municipal level. The principle of subsidiarity divided the tasks between levels of governance from the principle that matters should be dealt with at the lowest possible level. In the structure plan the principle of subsidiarity was defined as:

“The principle of subsidiarity implies that each authority which is competent for spatial planning occupies itself with those matters that are best dealt with at the level concerned. Decisions must be taken at the most appropriate level. A decision at a higher level is justifiable when its significance and/or scope clearly exceed(s) the lower level. A higher level only takes action insofar as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the lower level.”

(Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap, 1997: 10)

Several of the people interviewed for this publication highlighted that the principle of subsidiarity was important for a widespread implementation of structure planning in Flanders. This understanding is exemplified in the quotation below from Philippe van Wesenbeeck.

“The principle of subsidiarity means that the local level gets more power on strategic planning. They get their own instruments like a structure plan, where you can put in your strategic vision and what we call spatial implementation plans. The same instruments for the local, provincial and regional level. That was a new idea in the 1990s, and it is very well implemented in our city and other cities. In my opinion, it was a very modern and contemporary planning system at the time - less hierarchical and more power to the local level.”
(Phillippe van Wesenbeeck, planning director in Ghent, former planner in the Flemish Planning Department)

The Structure Plan for Flanders was built around the idea of Flanders as an urban network, which was underlined by the spatial metaphor of the Flemish Diamond. On the one hand, the idea of the urban network was intended to signal collaboration and interdependency between cities and actors. On the other hand, the Flemish Diamond metaphor was important for inscribing Flanders in a larger narrative of industrial restructuring, economic development and regional competition. In this sense, the structure plan operated with different rationalities for different target groups. On the more practical level, the structure plan was developed around the baseline ‘Flanders, open and urban’ and a few spatial concepts, which were intended to provide the structuring principles for future urban development.

In this sense, the structure plan represented a significant break away from the previous comprehensive planning paradigm, which had characterised Belgian planning in the previous decades. In the following conversation with Albrechts, I explore the inspiration behind these concepts further, as well as the question of how these spatial concepts were intended to structure future urban development in Flanders.

4.1



On The Structure Plan And Its Spatial Concepts

KO: I want to start this discussion about the content of the Structure Plan for Flanders by focusing on the idea of Flanders as an urban network. Where did this idea come from? And how important was this idea in terms of mobilising actors in support of spatial planning?

LA: Manuel Castells (see his seminal book *The Rise of the Network Society*, 1996) was extremely important in this respect. For him a network is a set of channels through which flow matter, information, and energy. The channels connect nodes in which flows are stored and processed. It comprises physical as well as social relations. Castells argued that the way relations between individuals, firms, and other actors emerge today differs fundamentally from past ways. For Castells the fundamental difference is that the means of communication among actors in networks have increased spectacularly due to new technologies. As an outcome, networks supporting the concentration of activities in space have grown in size, speed, and global reach. So for me it became impossible to imagine a society - Flanders in my case - which is not dependent on networks; which is not a “network society”. We used the concept of the Flemish Diamond to convince political and economic actors that only through a network with international appeal would Flanders be able to compete with the Randstad, the Rhine Ruhr area and Lille-Roubaix-Tourcoing.

KO: In what ways did Castells’ ideas of a network society inspire you to adopt the spatial concept of the Flemish Diamond?

LA: I learned from him that the flows of persons, goods and information had increased substantially in recent decades. Europe-wide communication axes and corridors linking the national networks facilitate these flows. Although people do still live in places, function and power in Flanders are organized in the space of flows, and the structural domination of its logic changes the meaning and dynamic of places like Brussels, Ghent, Antwerp. These cities are the main nodal points in the organisation, management and structuring of the Flemish Diamond. They are interconnected via a dense physical and virtual network of international infrastructures. For Castells the nodal points linked by these corridors face the dialectical opposition between the space of flows and the space of places. People live in places (cities, villages) and they perceive their space as place based. Castells (1996) makes it clear that people, organisations are based in places and that the organisational logic is placeless. The space of flows is based on a network that links up specific places with well-defined social, cultural, physical and functional characteristics. From this we realised, as mentioned before, that the quality of the network of the Flemish Diamond is not mere physical but also functional in that different cities within the network perform broadly different functions. Unfortunately due to a lack of response, a lack of understanding (or even knowingly misunderstanding) by cities and leading actors, the Flemish Diamond must still be considered as a territorial community not yet defined by cultural association with place or by boundaries of political jurisdictions. Till now the concept remains for many steadfastly opaque and apparently academic to the outside observer. Opponents read the concept as simply another means of fuelling the growth of the already prosperous core region.

KO: You highlight that the structure plan was supported by the baseline ‘Flanders, open and urban’. What exactly is the meaning of this baseline? And how was this baseline integrated into the structure plan?

LA: We used the metaphor ‘Flanders, open and urban’ to illustrate the issues and tasks that were at stake. For me metaphors decode what is susceptible to figuration in bringing forth from this image not what is actually there, but what may be said about it in terms of potentials. The metaphor provided the discursive key which turned the discussion from urban decay, suburbanisation, loss of productive land and loss of open space, towards strengthening urban areas, renewal of residential and economic structure, new types of urban mobility, safeguarding the development opportunities for the structural functions and activities of open space.

KO: The Structure Plan for Flanders is based on a few core spatial concepts. In what ways were these spatial concepts intended to structure the future urban (and economic) development in Flanders?

LA: Let me first stress that the concepts used in the Structure Plan Flanders became influential. As Hajer (1989) points out, concepts provide the discursive key which turns the discussion from one conception to another. The plan seeks to find a new balance through a first planning concept namely ‘deconcentrated clustering’. For me this (see Albrechts, 1995) concept suggests a tension between dispersion and concentration. The recognition of nature, not as a subject of ecological concern or as a reserve but as an ordering system is the second spatial concept. River valleys, rather than any conceivable regulations, currently maintain some articulation in the chaos in the periphery. The plan aims to make one coherent, structuring framework from the river valleys together with linked open areas and corridors of open space. A third concept is the role of linear infrastructures as structuring framework. Categorisation of the road network makes it possible to set priorities: main roads with an emphasis on fast connections and a smooth traffic flow; local roads with an emphasis on local access, safe, slow traffic and reduction of traffic noise. A fourth concept focused on gateways (seaports of Antwerp, Ghent, Zeebruges and Ostend the high-speed-train station in Antwerp (and in Brussels) and the Brussel’s international airport) as engine for development. In this way, the concepts act as frames that embody a sensitivity to the complexity, plurality and uncertainty of the spatial development dynamics as they emerge in Flanders. The concepts are used to generate the energy needed to inspire and direct transformative actions within those dynamics with the aim of shaping, framing and reframing what Flanders is and what it might become (see Healey 2008).

KO: In the structure plan, you are trying to integrate a range of different sectors. You focus both on the cities and the rural areas, and you have included considerations about infrastructure and so on. Was this a deliberate strategy?

LA: Yes! And out of necessity I would argue. The plan identifies two main categories in Flanders: urban areas and rural areas with an appropriate policy for each category. Most actors were convinced that the policies for these categories need to be complementary. It also became increasingly clear that a number of the prevailing planning concepts could not be achieved solely through physical hard planning. Indeed most land use plans have a predominant focus on physical aspects providing physical solutions to social or economic problems. Moreover, the approach to planning via a single policy field met fierce opposition from other and usually more powerful policy fields. Although land use plans had formal status and served as official guidelines for implementation, when it came down to the actual implementation, other policy fields which, due to their budgetary and technical resources, were needed for the implementation were easily able to sabotage the spatial plans if they wanted. To avoid this and to stimulate integration we constructed the cooperative model (see chapter 5). A main purpose of this model was to create a store of mutual understanding and to build up the social and intellectual capital needed for cooperation.

Albrechts highlights how Manuel Castell's seminal work on the Network Society was an important source of inspiration for envisioning Flanders as an urban network. The spatial metaphor of the Flemish Diamond was in a way Albrechts' way of translating Castell's thesis into a Flemish context, as a point of departure for exploring the challenges of spatial planning in a new context. The content of the Structure Plan for Flanders, its spatial concepts, the baseline 'Flanders, open and urban', and the idea of the urban network must be understood with a point of departure in the specific context in which the plan was prepared (chapter 2), and the core theoretical ideas inspiring this planning approach (chapter 3). However, as noted above, the planning process, and in particular the politics surrounding the preparation of the structure plan, has also had an important impact on the plan and its later implementation. This is where we turn our attention now.

In the next chapter, we explore how the planning process has had an influence on the Structure Plan for Flanders and at several instances threatened the legitimacy of the plan.

“Since planning in this view is primordially aimed at inducing structural changes, the planner's political role comprises a contribution not only to the substantiation of these changes but also to the mobilisation of the social forces necessary to realise proposed policies.”
(Albrechts, 1991: 133)

NAVIGATING THE POLITICS OF PLANNING PRACTICE

While most traditional spatial planning focuses on providing space for objects and functions, strategic spatial planning focuses on process too. Traditionally, there has been little or no vertical and horizontal integration between the different levels and departments of government, which has often resulted in fragmented approaches, costly duplication of efforts, and in only rarely achieving the potential synergies. Reality is usually compartmentalisation in different departments and agencies that compete for power rather than cooperate to tackle issues. Horizontal integration stresses collaboration, coordination and the building of working relationships that span departmental and agency boundaries and policy areas. Vertical integration offers the potential to tease out causal linkages between global, national, regional, metropolitan and local change, while also taking account of the highly diverse outcomes of such interactions.

To involve the traditional sector departments (agriculture, housing, public works, education, transportation and economy) and some official advisory bodies in the process of the Structure Plan for Flanders, a cooperative model was designed (see figure 8). This model consisted of three groups of actors: the government (with the sector departments), the planners, and the organised and non-organised population. These groups are internally very much differentiated as far as their nature, their goals and their balance of power are concerned. The sector departments were invited to participate actively in the process right from the beginning. They were asked to:

- Give a full picture of their sector (actual situation, main problems, existing trends and policies);
- Identify the main processes at work in their sector;
- Formulate their spatial demands;
- Give an overview of how they assess the evolution of their sector towards the plan horizon.

This information was used as input in the planning process. At the same time, representatives from all sectors became members of a steering group, so they could control how the information was used in the process. However, the cross-sector dialogue did not work out as intended, as it proved to be very difficult to get the representatives to overcome the sector logics. The representatives often took the role as 'observers', who had little mandate to discuss and take a stand during meetings. As a consequence, the link to other sectors remained fairly weak throughout the process.

Some years after the preparation of the Structure Plan for Flanders, Albrechts initiated a research project in order to better understand the power relations influencing the planning process of the structure plan (Albrechts, 2003a, 2003b). As Albrechts highlights in his semi-autobiographic writings on the planning process, transforming the planning culture in Flanders proved to be a highly challenging process of conflicts and power plays.

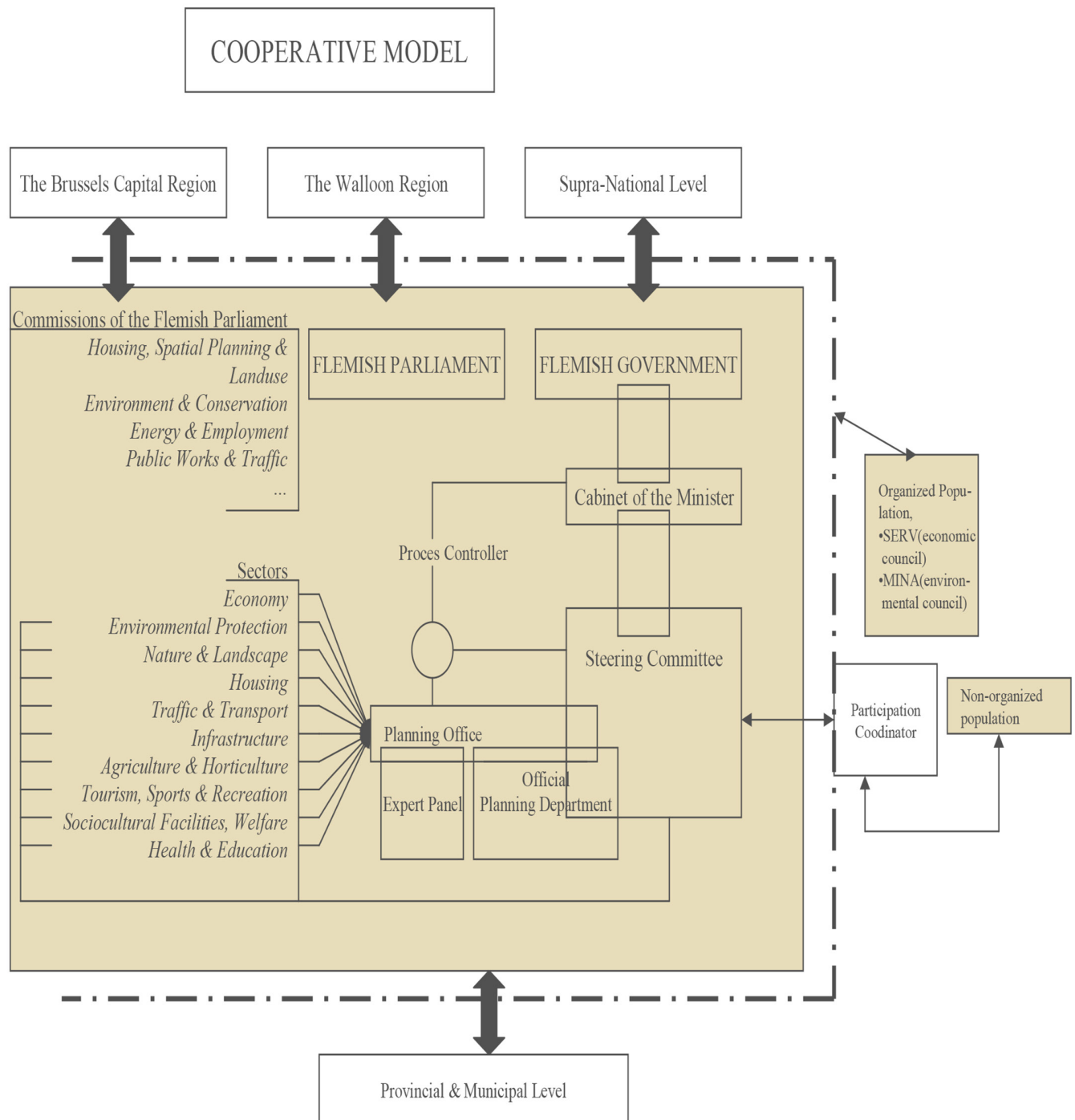


Figure 8: Illustration of the cooperative model applied in the planning process of the Structure Plan for Flanders (Albrechts, 2003c: 13)

Although Albrechts and Vermeersch were mainly hired to provide the scientific foundation for the structure plan, they soon realised that they had to engage in power plays, if they were to gain any influence. Developing an understanding of how to navigate the politics of planning practice thus proved to be crucial in this respect.

First of all, the Minister of Planning made the planning team fully responsible for the content of the plan. As a consequence, any failure of the plan would be the responsibility of the team. The planning team was asked to defend the plan in front of the Council of Ministers, the Parliament and in the media. It was a deliberate strategy from the Minister of Planning to use the (supposed) authority and objectivity of the two university professors to provide the structure plan with a sense of objectivity and a scientific character, whilst he at the same time was able to protect himself against potential criticism. Albrechts (2003a, 2003b) highlights how this arrangement in the end proved to be beneficial for both parts, as it provided the planning team with a direct link to key political actors, and allowed the team to inform ministers directly with the possibility to refute any untrue rumours about the structure plan.

“The planning team had a strange power relationship with the minister. As far as he was concerned, the planning team was fully in charge of the plan, fully responsible for its content and it had to face all possible criticism. It was ‘their’ plan and of course they were to blame if something went wrong. Since the minister remained distant from the plan it was the planning team who had to explain and defend the plan before the council of ministers, the parliament, and the media. These direct contacts proved very beneficial. The minister used our authority as university professors and we were aware of that; we used the flexibility we obtained to enlarge other people’s vision of what is possible and what is at stake.”

(Albrechts, 2003b: 915)



The early dialogues with the Confederation of Flemish Industry are illustrative of the barriers the planning team experienced in advancing a new planning discourse. The Confederation of Flemish Industry initially adopted a hostile attitude towards the plan, advocating that it would be counterproductive for economic development. The confederation insisted, for example, on a fixed number of hectares for future development based on extrapolations from the past. This was in clear conflict with the aim of an economical and qualitative use of space, with the attitude of sustainability and the changing profile of the industry. However, through a study of the spatial needs of the Flemish economy, the planning team was, through using scientific arguments, able to argue for densification due to restructurings of the Flemish industry. This knowledge contributed to balancing the power relations between the confederation and the planning team, and improved the dialogue between the two parties.

This example is also important, as it illustrates how the Confederation of Flemish Industry was pushed to communicate with the planning team and thus participate in the planning process, rather than airing their concerns to the politicians alone (see Albrechts, 2003b).

“Within the Structure Plan Flanders a bilateral dialogue began with the Confederation of Flemish Industry. The planning team served as an engine to start this dialogue and to keep it going. This dialogue was initially one-sided, where the planning team was dominated by one very powerful actor and somehow stigmatised because the economic actor advanced the thesis that the plan was counterproductive for economic development. Since this actor had its own newspaper and broadcasting time, it could easily manipulate the broader public. Moreover, it had easy access to leading politicians. It was no surprise that, initially, the Confederation behaved in an old-fashioned, arrogant way. It simply claimed a fixed number of hectares, based on an extrapolation of the sales of industrial zones in the past. Pursuing scientific arguments, the planning team commissioned a study of the spatial needs of the Flemish economy. In this way, it began to challenge the power of the dominant discourse through the power of sound and well-documented arguments (rational persuasion). With the results of this study, the tone of the conversation, although still spirited, changed and gradually became less polemic and more dialogic (more or less on equal terms). For instance, the Confederation became open to counterarguments on shifts in the Flemish economy, different types of industrial estates, the need for higher densities, and the need for spatial quality. The planning team realised that it was impossible to calculate a precise figure for the spatial needs of the small and very open Flemish economy and became sensitive to the need to change actual activity patterns. The agreement combined an awareness of uncertainty with the need for higher densities, changes in activity patterns, and a concern for spatial quality.”

(Albrechts, 2006b3: 912-913)

In the process of preparing the structure plan, three main conflicts arose and threatened to end the process. The first conflict arose around the nomination of a new director-general for the planning administration. The nominated candidate, an engineer who had served for 20 years in the planning administration, was not sympathetic to the new planning approach. The planning team feared that the planning process would be abandoned as soon as the candidate was appointed. Through careful lobbying the planning team succeeded in preventing the candidate from being appointed, thereby guarantying the continuation of the planning process (see Albrecht, 2003b).

“During the process, a conflict arose about the nomination of a new director-general for the planning administration. This was considered a very critical decision for the process and for planning in Flanders. One of the candidates, Mr B, was seen as a clear exponent of the past and of political clientelism. He was the preferred candidate of the Conservative Liberal Party, very outspoken against the new approach, an engineer who had served for some twenty years in the planning administration. The committee of secretaries-general drew up a shortlist of candidates. This rather conservative committee recommended Mr B. Moreover, Mr B was the only candidate they selected. The planning team was fully convinced - and there was a lot of evidence to support this - that once this candidate received the formal nomination, the whole planning process would collapse and everything would be back as it was before. So, the planning team started its delicate lobbying work: talking to members of parliament, several ministers, leading civil servants and trade union leaders, etc. The outcome was that Mr B did not get the nomination and the whole procedure started from scratch. A new candidate was added and she finally received the nomination. Mr B initiated a lawsuit with the Council of State and in 2002 he won the case. In his new position, Mr B starts to fight the implementation of the plan using all possible means (inaction, building sectoral resistance) and he initiates new alternative discourses.”

(Albrechts, 2003b: 914)

A second conflict emerged around negotiations of new contracts for the planning team. In December 1995 the planning team's final contract was to be negotiated. The Flemish Council rejected the team's request to hire additional permanent staff and decided instead to cut its financial resources. As a result, the planning team refused to sign a new contract.

As the contract had to be signed by 24th December for budgetary reasons, tensions were high as telephone calls and faxes were sent back and forth. On the 23rd December at 6 pm, Albrechts and Vermeersch were called to a final meeting with the Council of Ministers. After explaining their case and insisting that they would not give in, the two professors were able to reach a compromise with the council, which guaranteed sufficient staff to complete the structure plan (see Albrechts, 2003a, 2003b).

“ A second conflict concerned hiring additional permanent staff members for the planning team. In negotiating the terms of the planning team’s last contract with the council of ministers in December 1995, the Council did not accept the proposal formulated by the planning team and decided to cut its financial resources. Those of us (myself and one other) legally in charge of the planning team refused to sign the contract and since, for budgetary reasons, the contract had to be signed before 24 December 1995, this created considerable tensions. Faxes and telephone calls were sent back and forth. As much pressure as possible was put on the planning team. Without the planning team, the process would have come to an end, which would cause major discontent among some important actors in society. The matter was discussed very openly within the planning team and, although it ran the risk of being out of work by 1 January 1996, it decided unanimously not to give in. On 23 December at 6 in the evening, the two of us in charge were called to attend the very last meeting of the council of ministers. As part of the power game, they kept us waiting for more than one hour and then confronted us with a small committee of three ministers: the minister of finance, the minister of planning, and the minister responsible for the civil service. We explained our case and our concern for the quality of the process; we also made clear that we would not give in. A compromise was reached there and then. This compromise gave the planning team fewer direct financial resources but allowed it to hire additional permanent staff members, under the budget for the civil service. Moreover, selection of the additional staff became the sole responsibility of the two university professors legally in charge. The contract was signed the next day and the terms of the agreement were confirmed in writing to the three ministers.”

(Albrechts, 2006b3: 914)

A final conflict arose around the approval of the structure plan. As the 20-year-old sub-regional plans were far from up-to-date, the demands for development were piling up. The Minister of Planning knew that giving in on a single case could undermine the structure plan process. Despite considerable pressure on the minister, he maintained a policy of inaction for almost 18 months, until the Structure Plan for Flanders was approved (see Albrechts, 2003a).

“ Obviously by his tactics of inaction ‘the Minister of Planning made the opponents of the structure plan the demanding party without taking any action himself’. This power game increased the political tension between the coalition partners, in and outside the government. In the Flemish Government the dissatisfaction of mainly the Christian Democrats was aired through a party member of the Minister of Planning, the socialist vice prime minister. The pressure on the Minister of Planning, as well as from party members, coalition partners and the opposition increased, but the minister remained very calm and as a man of principle he refused to give in. He understood very well that giving in for one simple case meant that there would be no stopping the political opponents. Pressure was exerted on him to dismiss his ‘chef de cabinet’ and his main adviser for spatial planning. He refused to do so. If his opponents pushed too hard they ran the risk of a cabinet crisis. Apparently that was a bridge too far. The minister carried on with his ‘inaction’ policy for almost 18 months. ‘After bilateral talks, among others with the Prime Minister and a threat from the coalition partner not to vote the budget for his mobility covenants, an agreement was reached about the approval of the Structure Plan Flanders.’ ”
(Albrechts, 2003a: 262)

The Minister of Planning (1995-1999) did not only focus on issuing planning rules, but also on their enforcement. In a particular case this led to the demolition of illegal houses. The media’s coverage of this story changed the (until then) positive discourse of the structure plan in the media. As a consequence, the structure plan was already experiencing resistance before it had a chance to have an impact on the spatial structure in Flanders.

“ A commercial Flemish TV station brought images of a huge crane destroying a house mixed with images from the Palestinian territory accompanied by music of Bob Marley. This image was so strong that it became disconnected from the, till then, positive discourse in the written press. As a result the socialist party refused to take the portfolio of planning in the next coalition. The outcome was that the actual Minister of Planning and the Prime Minister (both liberal conservatives) challenged some of the achievements in the field of planning of the previous government. ”
(Albrechts, 2003a: 261)

Navigating the politics surrounding the preparation of the Structure Plan for Flanders proved to be a highly challenging task. As highlighted above several instances threatened to end the planning process before the adoption of the structure plan. In the following conversation, we further explore the design and intentions behind the planning process, and discuss how the conflicts that arose were managed. We end with a brief note on some of the lessons learned about the political dimension of spatial planning.

5.1



On The Process And Managing Conflicts

KO: Let's begin this discussion about the planning process and the conflicts that emerged during it by talking about the dialogue (or lack hereof) between the different sectors. You intended to base the planning process on a cooperative model involving a range of sector representatives. What were the lessons learned from these dialogues?

LA: This dialogue did not work out as it was intended. As it was the first time that this kind of dialogue took place, there was no store of mutual understanding, the kind of social and intellectual capital, Innes (1996) talks about. Representatives of the sector departments acted merely as observers. This became clear by the position of these 'observers' in the hierarchy of their department. There was no clear mandate for the observer; they in fact only had to report back what happened in the meeting. Moreover some 'observers' belonged to official advisory bodies and they did not want to thwart the official procedure by taking a stand during the meetings. It proved to be extremely difficult for the representatives of the traditional departments to overcome sector logics. Most sectors clearly still had more faith in the traditional (more hidden) way of influencing decisions.

KO: What were the main conflicts and clashing of interests in the process?

LA: A main clash of interest emerged in the department between the old and the new, the traditional and the new approach. It became a tough fight and it culminated in a number of conflicts as illustrated earlier. In the meantime, a procedure was started to hire a substantial amount of new staff members for the planning department. Initially the conservative forces within the planning department tried to keep us out of the selection committee. Again, we had to lobby, this time with the minister responsible for the civil service. He appointed us to the selection committee and almost all members of our planning team were selected. In this way, we managed to install a substantial permanent cell fully persuaded of the ideas of the Structure Plan in the planning department, and in doing so we provided the basis for structural change in the department. The most difficult discussions we had were with the economic pressure group and with the agricultural pressure group. Both of them deliberately misused the arguments of employment. In a region with a considerable amount of unemployment this is of course a very strong and very easy argument to get the sympathy of the broader public. They both had easy access to the media (both having their own journal or newspaper, and broadcasting time). So they were very powerful opponents. We used several meetings to explain our point of view, to explain the arguments we used, the kind of data we relied on. The use of these meetings was that we mutually learned about concerns we had, about aims and strategies. The result was that the points of view came closer together, but no final agreement was reached. This was left to the political arena. To strengthen our position on these issues in the political arena, we looked for (and got) support from the trade unions, the green movement, and most importantly, the knowledge we built and accumulated during the years proved to be extremely useful and valuable for us. It was no surprise that initially the Confederation of Industries behaved in an old-fashioned, arrogant way.

It simply claimed a fixed number of hectares, based on an extrapolation of the sales of industrial zones in the past. Pursuing scientific arguments, we commissioned a study of the spatial needs of the Flemish economy. In this way, we managed to challenge the power of the dominant discourse through the power of sound and well-documented arguments (rational persuasion). With the results of this study, the tone of the conversation, although still spirited, changed and gradually became less polemic and more dialogic (more or less on equal terms). For instance, the confederation became open to counter-arguments on shifts in the Flemish economy, different types of industrial estates, the need for higher densities and the need for spatial quality. The planning team realised that it was impossible to calculate a precise figure for the spatial needs of the small and very open Flemish economy and became sensitive to the need to change actual activity patterns. The agreement combined an awareness of uncertainty with the need for higher densities, changes in activity patterns and a concern for spatial quality.

KO: When you look back, in what ways did your study of the future spatial needs of the Flemish economy allow you to have a dialogue on more equal terms?

LA: Reflecting on this conflict, our purpose of launching a study of the spatial needs of the Flemish industry was clearly to achieve power through knowledge, and thus to bring about a more 'equal' relationship between the confederation and the planning team (see Foucault, 1984). We revealed alternative figures and corrected false information used to further private interests. It is remarkable to see how the process obtained 'power' – in the sense that it became worthwhile for an influential actor such as the confederation to communicate with us – as soon as it became more likely that the plan would be adopted. It illustrates a move from having more faith in direct access to politicians to an emerging belief in the benefit of actively participating in the planning process. In line with Dyrberg (1997) the case makes it clear that the knowledge acquired had a considerable impact on the power relations between the planning team and the confederation. As Rouse (1987) and Benveniste (1989) would argue, knowledge was strategically used in order to achieve power and made it possible to move in the direction of the dialogical ideal of Jurgen Habermas.

KO: I think that it is also important to dwell on the role of the media in mobilising or destabilising support of spatial planning. In the process of preparing the structure plan, it seems that you experienced both. What are your reflections on the role that the media played in supporting or undermining your planning initiative?

LA: As Huyse (1994) argues power shifts to sectors - such as the media - that, in theory, belong to the world of 'non-politics'. The media became an important political actor during the whole process. "An issue raised in the media became almost automatically an item on the agenda of the party executive, the ministerial staff meeting and the Council of Ministers" (Albrechts, 2003a: 261). In the planning team, we had a clear strategy for how to communicate with the media. Many journalists were fair and even supportive in their reports of the structure plan. Some newspapers even devoted special editions to the structure plan. In this way, the media helped to disseminate important information and played an important role in influencing the public opinion. One strange anecdote is worth telling. The editor-in-chief of a leading popular newspaper wrote a series of very biased articles treating us as communists and comparing us with Ceausescu. Apparently, there have been complaints from many sides about these articles and the editor-in-chief was dismissed. As mentioned earlier, a major turning point was the policy of the socialist Minister of Planning (1995-1999). It proves, according to one minister I interviewed, that the media "do not just make analyses but also propose projects that influence in a fundamental way the course of events in our societies" (Albrechts, 2003a: 261).

KO: You stressed in chapter 2 the importance of involving the broader public in planning processes. In what ways were the broader public involved in the planning process for the structure plan?

LA: The broader public was (and still is) undoubtedly the most difficult actor to work with at that time. The almost complete lack of a communicative tradition and culture posed serious problems and was for sure a weak part in the process. We went out as much as possible to listen, to speak and to debate at very different places and for very different groups. Most people got their information from hearsay and undoubtedly some pressure groups were distributing deliberately false information (as indicated earlier, some articles accused us for being communist and aiming to destroy villages and deport people to the cities as Ceausescu did in Romania). By meeting the public, correct information was given on the impact the plan had for their city or municipality. Sensitivity and respect for the value of difference and cultural diversity proved to be important. In doing so we found out that many citizens - even at this level - were really interested in the issues raised and open to arguments, to changes and they provided very important ideas, views, comments and criticism on the plan and on the process. I learned how important it is to make a link from the plan at a very central level and their concerns at a very local level, sometimes this could be a neighbourhood, sometimes this could be a municipality. If you can do that and make that link, then people start to believe that something is possible, and they start to understand what you are aiming for and what you are fighting for, and this builds some trust. I think this kind of trust that you are not planning for a specific political party; that you are not planning just for the economy; that you are not planning, on the opposite, only for the green. Just an anecdote, at a certain point we got a critique that our plan was too green and too much in favour of this. We thought it was mainly a matter of wording, of phrasing, so we hired somebody to say the same in other words, so that some people did not fight the plan because of the jargon of the plan. Because that is a fight that does not make sense.



The discussion should be about the content. I experienced a big difference between talking to an organisation and its members. We had difficulties in talking to the union of agriculture, because they are very much linked with European subsidies. But the contacts with farmers were direct and open. Their major concern was legal certainty for the huge investments they needed to stay competitive. If the plan was able to provide that kind of legal certainty, they were very supportive and willing to go quite a long way in line with the strategies we developed.

KO: To sum up, what did you learn about the political dimension of planning from your involvement in the Structure Plan for Flanders?

LA: As mentioned in chapter 3, as a student I became inspired by experiments in the former Yugoslavia where extensive group interactions in self-managed firms promoted greater communication and worker commitment. This urged me to construct a type of planning that provides a critical interpretation of the structural challenges and problems and thinks creatively about possible answers and how to get there. This needs a clear focus on structural issues such as: future (uncertainty, creativity, envisioning); diversity (race, class, age, religion,); equity (unequal development); inclusivity (inclusion, exclusion); and action (implementation, selectivity). I learned to understand that some decisions and actions are considered more important than others and that much of the process, which is inherently political in nature, lies in making the tough decisions about what is most important for the purpose of producing fair, structural responses to problems, challenges, and aspirations. It is therefore necessary for me to take structural relations of power into account that both include some and exclude others from involvement in decision processes. Schmitt (1988) and my experience, taught me that one of the most important manifestations of legal and spiritual life is the fact that whoever has true power is able to determine the meaning of concepts and words. With regard to crucial political (and by extension planning) concepts, meaning therefore depends on who interprets, defines and uses them. Who concretely defines what spatial quality, what equity, what accountability, what sustainability, what legitimacy is in a specific process? My conclusion is that planners must become more knowledgeable about existing relations of power, and become aware that ideals are not blocking the view of reality of those - directly or indirectly - affected by the process. I regret that formal decision-making and implementation often seem like black boxes to planners. This is why I initiated a research project to unravel the power relations in the Structure Plan Flanders process and in Perth (Albrechts, 2003a, 2003b, 2006). I interviewed political key actors - the leading ministers and influential members of their cabinet in office during the period that the Structure Plan Flanders was prepared - to reconstruct what actually took place in the course of decision-making and implementation, in the transition from plan to formal adoption of the plan, and in its actual implementation, as opposed to what planners normatively would like to see happen.

While on sabbatical in Australia, I did the same for Western Australia (Albrechts, 2006) and concluded in more or less the same way as Healey (1999) that power relations must be built into the conceptual framework of planning and looked at in a given context, place, time and scale, regarding specific issues and particular combinations of actors. This research project helped me to discover the ‘whys and wherefores’ of how political actors handle plans, projects and planning processes. The Flemish case illustrates that power is not an abstract analytical concept, but a concrete set of relations, which are inextricably part of existing social, cultural, economic and political reality. In the line of Foucault, (1984) and Healey (1997), the Flanders and Perth cases illustrate that spatial planning practice is not just a contingent response to wider forces, but that it is also an active force in enabling changes. As a planner, I tried to act as counterweight, mobiliser, builder of alliances and presenter of real political opportunities. I learned from action not only what works, but also what matters. This brought me to the concept of transformative practice (Albrechts, 2010) needed to provide answers to the structural problems. Conditions and structural constraints on ‘what is’ and ‘what is not’ possible are put in place by the past. These conditions (such as the neoliberal context) that, remaining unchanged, predetermine outcomes, have to be questioned and challenged in the process. In order to imagine conditions and constraints differently, we need to deal with history and try to overcome history. This defines the boundaries of a fairly large space between openness and fixity.

Strategic spatial planning focuses on the substance as well as the procedural side of planning. The politics surrounding spatial planning remain often a black box for planners. In this chapter, the importance of developing an understanding of and actively engaging in the politics surrounding planning processes has been highlighted. What is made most clear, is that without an understanding of and an ability to navigate the politics of planning, the Structure Plan for Flanders might never have been published and adopted by the Flemish Government. One prominent example of this is the role that the media might play in mobilising support or resistance towards new planning ideas. Furthermore, the adoption of a more strategic approach to spatial planning should not only be understood as a response to the changing socio-political context in Flanders. The case of Flanders illustrates how strategic spatial planning in itself is a transformative process, seeking to transform the spatial structures of Flanders, as well as the existing planning culture.

As discussed in the conversation above, the latter was met by fierce resistance from the “traditional” planning community, which sought to maintain the traditional ways of understanding and practicing planning. In the next chapter, we explore this issue further and assess the impact of the structure plan on the Flemish planning culture as well as the spatial and material structures in Flanders. In particular we are interested in developing an understanding of what kinds of impacts a structure plan might have and how this can be analysed.

THE IMPACT OF THE STRUCTURE PLAN

“The Structure Plan for Flanders influences the official planning discourse through its spatial concepts, vision, images, policies and actions. In this way it has an impact on plans and planning at a provincial and municipal level and on sector policies.”
(Albrechts, 2001c: 304)

“In the Flanders case the process of ‘discourse structuration’ and its subsequent ‘institutionalization’ became more important, perhaps, than the plan as such.”
(Albrechts, 2006: 1164)

The Structure Plan for Flanders and, perhaps more importantly, the process behind the plan have influenced Flemish spatial planning in a number of ways. When discussing the impact of the structure plan, it is important to distinguish between direct and indirect impacts. As it will become clear in this section, the structure plan’s impact on the spatial and material structures in Flanders is perhaps less apparent than one might expect. In fact, the most important impacts of the structure plan can be found on the discursive level and in the changes in the legal framework. As such, it can be argued that it is the planning process rather than the structure plan itself, which has had the greatest impact on Flemish spatial planning.

The most important impact of the structure plan is perhaps its contribution to the change in planning discourse and culture in Flanders. As mentioned in chapter 3, the planning team gradually merged with the planning department in Flanders. In this way, a permanent cell was created centrally, which shared the same understandings of and approaches to spatial planning. This cell became very important in spreading new planning discourses, norms, attitudes and practices to provincial governments, local governments, sectors departments and consultants (Albrechts, 2006). Hans Leinfelder notes, how the spreading of a new planning discourse generally was quite successful, except in the case of the countryside where “the playing field of interest groups and governmental administrations involved was already too crowded and institutionalised”. The planning department’s role in spreading new planning discourses was important, as the process of the structure plan was largely top-down with little involvement of local governments and the wider public.

“It has to be said that the planning department has never succeeded in reaching a comparable legitimisation for its planning assignments in the countryside. The playing field of interest groups and governmental administrations involved was already too crowded and institutionalised.”

(Hans Leinfelder, assistant professor at KU Leuven,
former planner in the Flemish Planning Department)

The initial reactions to the structure plan were therefore also mixed (Albrechts, 1998). The concept of the Flemish Diamond was well received in the international planning community. In Flanders there was no formal reaction from political arenas, although some regions outside the urban area of the Flemish Diamond expressed fears that the Flemish Diamond would attract economic and urban development at the expense of their region. At the local level, many municipalities felt they simply had to suffer the plan. Many municipalities blamed the central planning administration for not listening to their problems and imposing a plan of universal solutions on them. In one case, the Minister of Planning came under attack from members of parliament, as he refused a request from the city mayor of his home province to upgrade his city to the status of ‘gateway city’. As a result, many municipalities started the process of preparing municipal structure plans because they had to, rather than out of conviction (Albrechts, 2001b).

However, as Hans Leinfelder highlights below, the Flemish planning department was aware of this issue and invested a lot of time and energy in assisting the provinces and municipalities in the preparation of their structure plans.

“Secondly, in the first five years after the approval of the Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders, the department also invested a lot of time and energy in assisting the provinces and the municipalities in their translation of the new spatial concepts and ideas. Sometimes the Flemish planning department was perceived as a mother in law, more often the meetings on local plans were moments where mutual experiences and know how were dealt.”

(Hans Leinfelder, assistant professor at KU Leuven,
former planner in the Flemish Planning Department)

Provincial and municipal structure plans tended to deal with the concept of the Flemish Diamond in a rather fragmented and not always meaningful way (Albrechts & Lievois, 2004). In general there was no broad socio-political basis for the concept of the Flemish Diamond, most probably because of unfamiliarity with the concept and because the Brussels Capital Region and areas outside the Flemish Diamond became very sensitive towards this concept (Albrechts & Lievois, 2004). The lack of a clear discourse resulted in some confusion regarding the spatial concept and (too) high expectations, which to some extent have undermined the concept. Whilst cities at the local level did recognise and assume their importance in the urban network, smaller municipalities largely perceived the urban network as a threat to their unique characteristics fearing a future as suburbs to main cities. As such the Flemish Diamond remains a hypothetical spatial concept.

In terms of institutional change, the structure plan prompted new planning laws (in 1996 and 1999), which besides providing the legal base for the structure plan also introduced structure plans at provincial and municipal levels (Albrechts, 2001a). Based on the principle of subsidiarity, planning responsibilities were delegated to the municipal level on the condition that they followed the overall framework set out in the Structure Plan for Flanders and employed a professional planner. The latter resulted in a growing professionalisation of civil servants and a considerable intake of students in planning schools. In the period from 1992 to 2000 the central planning administration alone grew from 4 to 42 planners (Albrechts, 2001a). Today, there is a planner responsible for planning and building permits in towns of more than 5,000 inhabitants.

“As a consequence of this legislative translation, the five Flemish provinces and the 308 Flemish municipalities were legally bound to develop a new long-term vision. Especially for the municipalities – that were used to serve the individual needs of citizens in a very direct and often benefiting way – this new legislative framework obliged all of them to think and discuss about how to spatially solve societal challenges. Since the Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders defined which municipalities were urban and which were countryside municipalities, the baseline ‘Flanders, open and urban’ and the concept of ‘deconcentrated clustering’ worked through until the very local planning level.”

(Hans Leinfelder, assistant professor at KU Leuven,
former planner in the Flemish Planning Department)

“The start of the process was also a reason to rethink the existing planning law, which has of course also much influence in practice. Possibly more than the Structure plan itself. Provinces and all municipalities are forced to make a structure plan, a vision for their future. Possibly this is the most important result.”
(Jef Van den Broeck, honorary prof. at KU Leuven)

However, the legal anchoring of the structure plan in the planning act also had unintended consequences. Many of the new planners in the Flemish planning department were young and inexperienced. They perceived the structure plan as the ‘bible’ rather than a set of guidelines. As a consequence, the structure plan became “a legal text with a juridical exegesis”, as expressed by Hans Leinfelder. In the day-to-day administration of the plan, the overall storyline and theoretical ideas behind the plan was pushed into the background. Albrechts (2006) notes how the implementation of structure planning in Flanders was often understood as merely a matter of preparing a new generation of land use plans.

“A negative consequence of this legislative translation is the legal character it gave to the Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders itself. What was conceived as a storyline, a more philosophical line of thought, became, through this legislation and through jurisdiction, a legal text with a juridical exegesis. In later years, Louis Albrechts and Charles Vermeersch, the godfathers of the Spatial Structure Plan often expressed their concern on this misuse of the long-term vision by lawyers, public servants and politicians.”

(Hans Leinfelder, assistant professor at KU Leuven,
former planner in the Flemish Planning Department)

Attempts were made to build public support for the structure plan (Albrechts, 1999, 2001a). The trade unions were important supportive actors, who organised special forums discussing the structure plan. As a consequence, union members became aware that they had a stake in the Structure Plan for Flanders. The planning team also joined forces with a refresher course for teachers in geography. On five Saturdays almost all geography teachers in Flanders were introduced to the ideas behind the structure plan in depth and were provided with the material needed to prepare classes on the plan. As a result, the Structure Plan for Flanders became part of the geography curriculum in all secondary schools.

There are only a few examples of the structure plan having any impact on the built environment, such as in the case of the railway station in Leuven (Albrechts, 2001a). The city of Ghent, one of the four core cities in the Flemish Diamond, represents an illustrative example of how ideas from the Structure Plan for Flanders are translated into the city's own structure planning. The city has a long history of experimenting with structure planning based on the ideas of Charles Vermeersch, who is a professor at the University of Ghent (see Textbox 4). In this way, many of the spatial concepts in the Structure Plan for Flanders were already to some extent implemented in the structure planning in Ghent. In general, the Structure Plan for Flanders sets the overall framework for structure planning in Ghent. However, according to the principle of subsidiarity, the city has considerable autonomy in terms of prioritising issues and needs, for example different types of housing.

The direct impacts of the Structure Plan for Flanders are therefore difficult to identify. However, as Albrechts (2001c, 2006) argues, the structure plan's indirect impacts in terms of influencing the planning discourse and facilitating a culture change within spatial planning are considerable and perhaps the most important. In the following conversation with Albrechts, I discuss the direct and indirect impacts of the Structure Plan for Flanders further. In particular we discuss to what extent there was a real dialogue between the central and local level, and what significance this lack of dialogue might have had for the implementation of structure planning in Flanders. We end the conversation with a more general note on which kinds of impacts we can expect from strategic spatial plans.

⁷ The planning team was well aware of the limited resources of the government. Hence the necessity to select projects very carefully, which yielded added value and symbolized the new policy of the government (focus on public transport, need for higher densities, and integration of different functions).

Textbox 4: Structure planning in the city of Ghent

Ghent was one of the first cities in Belgium to build their own planning department in the beginning of the 1980s. Based on the ideas of Charles Vermeersch, the city experimented with preparation of a structure plan in 1982, which was a mix between a land use plan and a strategic plan. This long tradition of structure planning meant that the city could fairly easy adopt the new policies and discourses of the Structure Plan for Flanders in their planning. Many of the spatial concepts of the Structure Plan for Flanders were in fact already implemented in the second generation structure plan for Ghent in 1993. The Structure Plan for Flanders sets the overall framework for planning in Ghent. Building permits are administrated after the guidelines in the structure plan. However within this framework each city can adopt its own planning strategy. Ghent has for example focused more on family houses than apartments in its planning of residential areas. In this way, the Structure Plan for Flanders' impact on city planning in Ghent is on a fairly overall level. However, this is also the intention according to the principle of subsidiarity.

6.1



On the impact and what strategic planning can do?

KO: Let's begin this discussion about the impact of the Structure Plan for Flanders by considering the communication and collaboration between the central and local level. You highlighted in chapter 4 how the concept of the Flemish Diamond was not necessarily aimed at the actual users, that is, lower planning levels. To what extent was there a real dialogue between the central and local level in the planning process?

LA: The Structure Plan Flanders influences the official planning discourse through its spatial concepts, vision, images, policies, actions. In this way, it has an impact on plans and planning at a provincial and municipal level and on sector policies. The plan served as frame for the Transport Plan Flanders (2001). As chair of the planning commission of my hometown, I notice that for every important plan reference is made to the Structure Plan Flanders. But I have to admit that there was no real formal dialogue between the central level and the provincial and local levels. The provincial (a completely new planning level with no experience) and the local level (apart from the main cities) had to absorb, at the same time, a new planning system, a different approach and they had to professionalise. So I fully understand that many local governments had the feeling that they had to suffer the plan, that they blame the central planning department to impose the plan on them, not to listen to their problems and not having an attitude of looking for a common answer to the problems they were facing. In addition, local governments were (and still are) confronted with increasing demands of other sectors (environment, transport etc.). They therefore feel overcharged. Some municipalities started the process for the municipal structure plan because they had to and not out of conviction. So the initial openness for a new kind of process and their willingness to change was rather limited in a number of cases. Many sector departments have been overwhelmed by the Structure Plan Flanders process and just now start to see the consequences of the plan, and struggle with the fact that the plan was conceived from a spatial planning viewpoint not always taking into account all their concerns and ideas.

KO: Several of the people I have interviewed highlight the principle of subsidiarity as one of the most important outcomes of the changes in the planning act. How important is this principle if the municipalities are not able to rise to the challenge of structure planning and implement the core ideas of the Structure Plan for Flanders?

LA: Subsidiarity became (at least in theory) an important principle in the structure plan. But in reality, notwithstanding all efforts made, the structure plan remains, due to many reasons (lack of qualified staff at the provincial and local levels - apart from the bigger cities -, lack of mutual trust, lack of communicative tradition, time pressure etc.) a mere top-down process that continuously struggles with subsidiarity. As the plan is approved by the Council of Ministers for the indicative part and by the parliament for the binding part, most strategic issues dealt with in the plan are covered by Flemish competencies.

KO: Was the Structure Plan for Flanders intended to have a more direct impact on the structure planning at the local level? Or was it the intention from the beginning to merely use the structure plan as a vehicle for transforming the planning discourse and planning culture in Flanders?

LA: For me, structure planning as well as strategic planning point to implementation. I see this as the pattern of visions, policy statements, plans/strategies, programs, actions (short, medium, and long term), decisions, and resource allocation that defines what a policy would be in practice, what it would accomplish (and for whom), and why it would do so from the points of view of various affected publics. Through implementation plans the Flemish level can have a direct local impact. Flemish plans provide a frame for the provincial and local plans. Now that all levels have structure plans it would be interesting to critically reflect on (also in view of subsidiarity) which issues can be best dealt with at which level.

The ideas behind the new approach at the Flemish level were equally important for the provincial and municipal level: eradicating purely speculative and technocratic town planning; to change the existing (very negative) attitude towards planning; to shift from passive planning towards a more action oriented form of planning; to introduce a new basic attitude (sustainable development); to introduce a completely new planning structure and planning approach; to establish a new planning culture; to conceive and introduce innovative planning concepts and planning strategies responding to the challenges provinces and municipalities were facing; to provide these levels with more adequate (spatial) instruments and structures to tackle their problems and challenges, to give an acceptable answer to the space demands of the main sectors (housing, economy and nature); and last but not least to integrate the key actors in the planning process.

KO: What would you say are the limitations of structure planning/strategic spatial planning in terms of shaping spatial structures in society?

LA: I conceive structure planning and strategic planning as an approach that is oriented to issues that really matter, adaptive to changing circumstances and that evolves with new information, new knowledge (scientific and local) and changing contextual conditions. As practices clearly demonstrate, strategic spatial planning is not a monolithic block of axioms set in stone. It is not a single concept, procedure or tool. In fact, it is a set of concepts, procedures and tools that must be carefully tailored to the situation at hand if desirable outcomes are to be achieved. The context forms the setting of the planning process but also takes form and undergoes changes in the process. For me it is a method for creating and steering a (range of) better future(s) for a place. Its focus on 'becoming' produces quite a different picture than traditional planning. In an article with Balducci (2013), we argued that a lot of traditional planning (for me this includes also routinely structure planning and strategic planning) is about maintaining the existing social order rather than challenging and transforming it, and it fails to capture the dynamics and tensions of relations coexisting in particular places.

I agree with Haughton et al. (2013) that a danger for strategic planning is that it becomes less focused on the visionary and imagining the ‘impossible’ and more concerned with pragmatic negotiations around the ‘immediate’ in a context of the seeming inevitability of market-based forms of political rationality, and as Watson (2007) writes, its rhetorical commitment to inclusivity limits perceptions of diversity and causes deliberate exclusions.

The impact of the Structure Plan for Flanders can be found in structure plans at provincial and municipal level, which explicitly refer to the structure plan as the overall framework for urban development in Flanders. On a broader scale, the process of preparing the structure plan, developing new spatial concepts, planning attitudes and practices contributed to the institutionalisation of a new approach to spatial planning in Flanders. In this sense, the Structure Plan for Flanders has had a greater impact on the legal framework and contributed to the institutionalisation of new planning discourses in Flanders. As Albrechts highlights in the conversation above, it is important that strategic spatial planning does not become static, but continuous to challenge the status quo.

This is, as highlighted above, a huge challenge as local planning levels struggle to live up to what is expected of them. In addition, Flanders has since the adoption of the structure plan experienced a change in the socio-political climate towards an increasingly more (ne-o)-liberal political environment. This change poses significant challenges for the future of structure planning in Flanders. It is this challenge that we direct our attention to in the final chapter of this publication.



“What is fascinating about the Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders is how it illustrates perfectly the theory of policy discourse formation, as it is described by Hajer (1995) and van Tatenhove et al. (2000). The storyline of the Spatial Structure Plan, more than 15 years since its approval, still survives and is being supported within the Flemish planning community and some important interest groups despite the changes towards a general political and societal more neoliberal policy discourse. The ideas and concepts are still daily used in discussions between planners of different policy levels and between planners and other policy authorities. The storyline is still supported by a resistant discourse coalition.”

(Hans Leinfelder, assistant professor at KU Leuven,
former planner in the Flemish Planning Department)

In the beginning of the 1990s, the idea of preparing a structure plan for Flanders gained momentum. A policy window opened, which allowed Flemish planners to transform spatial planning through the preparation of the Structure Plan for Flanders and a new planning act (de Jong & de Vries, 2002). The driving forces behind the momentum for structure planning must be understood with a point of departure in the particular context in which it emerged (see chapter 2). De Jong and de Vries (2002) argue that the adoption of a similar package would be very unlikely today, due to changes in the political climate in Flanders.

Since the preparation of the Structure Planning for Flanders, politics in Flanders have taken a more (neo)-liberal orientation (Van den Broeck, 2008). The Structure Plan for Flanders remains the overall strategic spatial framework for Flanders, despite the fact that its time horizon was only until 2007. The key spatial concepts in the structure plan have maintained their significance, although the interviewees for this publication highlight a growing discrepancy between what is said in policy documents and what happens in practice. At the Flemish level, there has been a change in planning approach from relying on structure planning to the administration of building permits. This change has been supported by a new discourse favouring very profitable real estate development projects (such as new shopping centres and football stadiums with retail activities) at the expense of overall planning considerations.

This change has been further accelerated by a liberalisation of the building permit legislation (see Textbox 5). Rooted in a more (neo)-liberal political climate, a counter discourse coalition has emerged, which questions some of the basic ideas and concepts of the Structure Plan for Flanders.

Textbox 5: Liberalisation of the building permit legislation

“This neoliberal change in discourse does not only facilitate major project developers, but also every individual citizen wanting to realise his or her residential dream. Incremental but cumulatively far reaching changes in the building permit legislation in the first 15 years of the 21st century allow almost every construction, in almost every land use zone, to be changed, extended or rebuilt into an exclusive dwelling in a rural setting. This legal possibility was first conceived as an exceptional facility, but has now become a basic right. Knowing that every such dwelling is accompanied by an extensive garden and often by a meadow for the hobby horse, this legal possibility results in a further aggressive invasion of residences in the already fragmented Flemish open space. The change in the building permit legislation promotes a development that is contradictory to the safeguarding of the remaining open space, one of the main ideas and concepts of the Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders. Moreover, the change in legislation creates an enormous number of potential residential plots in the rural area that competes qualitatively and quantitatively with the urban areas.”

(Hans Leinfelder, assistant professor at KU Leuven,
former planner in the Flemish Planning Department)

Attempts have been made to prepare a new structure plan, however, such efforts have been complicated by the liberal orientation of Flanders politics. The commentators interviewed for this publication do not have high hopes for the quality of a new structure plan, should it be prepared.

As such, planning activities have decreased at the regional level, and leaving the city level as the single most important planning tier in Flanders. It remains to be seen which of the two competing planning discourses in Flanders will survive and which consequences the surviving discourse will have on spatial planning in Flanders in the future. This reflection is summed up by Hans Leinfelder below.

“The changes in building permit legislation and the very facilitating implementation plans on the other hand show successful attempts of an alternative storyline, with its own powerful discourse coalition, to question the storyline of the Spatial Structure Plan through the institutionalisation of its ideas and concepts in legislation and planning practice. It will become clear in the coming years which of the two planning discourses will survive.”

(Hans Leinfelder, assistant professor at KU Leuven,
former planner in the Flemish Planning Department)

In our closing conversation, we reflect on the need to revise the Structure Plan for Flanders, and discuss the future challenges for structure planning in Flanders. We reflect on to what extent there is a need to adjust structure planning to more contemporary planning ideals, and discuss what such a change might mean for the role of the planner.

On looking back and ahead...

KO: Several of the interviewees highlight that structure planning above city level is facing significant challenges at the moment, due to an increasing (neo)-liberal political environment. In your perspective, does this mean that the Structure Plan for Flanders is out-dated?

LA: Not only above city level but also at the city level as I argued in chapter 3. The Structure Plan Flanders had a time horizon of 2007. Until now the governments, with from 1999 till 2014 conservative ministers for planning, didn't manage to develop a new plan. As the situation in 1992, when the basic ideas of the plan were conceived, was different from 2015, it is clear that changes are needed. In the different attempts to conceive a new plan, basic concepts of the Flemish structure plan are still endorsed as being timely. We have to realise that the meaning, which has been attributed to the term strategic in structure plans and strategic plans, has often been unclear and sometimes even contradictory. As strategic planning is influenced by the available and effective policy levers and by past patterns of spatial and institutional development, it is unlikely that it means the same thing when it has been translated into a different cultural setting (tradition of land use plans), political system (central, provincial and local), policy context (different political coalitions) and planning tradition (focus on legal certainty). In this sense, I agree with you, as you write (Olesen & Richardson, 2012) that there is ample evidence that in many strategic plans the often more abstract discourse is turned into something more tangible and is redefined into a more familiar vocabulary of statutory planning. That is what happened with some structure plans at the local level. Moreover, as Friedmann (2011) writes, the policy levers and development patterns create both capacities and preferences among relevant actors. We also have to accept, as Ganapati and Verma (2010) illustrate, that research in the field of policy reveals that the theoretical basis underlying a policy concept (what makes plans really strategic and what are the core characteristics of such an approach) in such diffusion (from Flanders to the provinces and the municipalities) is often inadequately conceptualised.

KO: What are your hopes for structure planning in Flanders in the future?

LA: From 1999 till 2014 planning became the responsibility of conservative ministers. Moreover, besides planning these ministers had a responsibility for other policy fields (budget, employment etc.) which they considered more important. This had a negative impact on the status of planning not only in political decision-making, but also in society at large. At the Flemish level, this provoked tensions between the political level and the planning administration. The centre of gravity shifted from Flanders to leading municipalities (Antwerp, Ghent, and some of the regional cities). But also there, the 2002 municipal elections and an austerity policy provoked a conservative turn. The new (2014) minister of planning is also responsible for the environment and is eager to reactivate planning. Her focus is on integration of spatial planning and environmental planning. She proposes policy plans to replace the structure plans and aims to focus on a more concrete area based planning. Questions remain on the real meaning of a policy plan, how to shift from the old to the new system, and how the integration of a more soft spatial planning with a more technical environmental planning will work out.

My hope is that against this background planning may take place beyond the boundaries of the (traditional) planning profession and planning laws and regulations. In this way, I hope that this planning aims to check government and corporate power to guarantee the use of local knowledge, to ensure that planning processes are responsive and democratic (see Friedmann, 1992), and that it aims at securing political influence. In this way, it is certainly confrontational and conflicting, it must be directed at change by means of specific outputs (strategies, plans, policies, projects) framed through spaces of deliberative opportunities. In line with Allmendinger and Haughton (2010), I hope that the Flemish planning community will be able and willing to take part in a debate on existing planning approaches and the search for new ideas. A basic purpose of this debate should be to position cities, regions as both the text and context of new debates about fundamental socio-spatial relations, about thinking without frontiers, providing new kinds of practices and narratives about belonging to and being involved in the construction of a place and in society at large. Therefore, planning theory and practice must involve a creative effort to imagine futures that are structurally different, and to bring this creative imagination to bear on political decisions and the implementation of these decisions. These outcomes must be well informed, just, and fair.

KO: What themes and issues do you believe that we need to focus on in the future to improve the practice of structure planning and strategic spatial planning?

LA: I have argued several times that if dominant modes of knowledge (causal, statistical) are incapable of envisioning the impossible (as the absolutely new in the terms of Grosz, 1999), they have to be questioned and complemented with other modes of knowing and other forms of thinking. In my shift towards a more radical strategic planning, I argue that planners have to open up for other modes of knowing, and to avoid shaping an urban future that is just in line with the aspirations of the most powerful segment among the actors. In this way, planning may become instrumental in building strong, resilient and mutually supportive communities that could assure its members that their needs would be met. Underlying this is that the conscious or unconscious maintenance of citizens as passive recipients is not just a waste of their skills and time; it is also the reason why systemic change doesn't happen. Structure planning and strategic planning must produce quite a different picture than traditional planning in terms of strategies (strategies versus master plans or land use plans), type of planning (providing a framework versus technical/legal regulation), and type of governance (a more pivotal role for civil society). In this way, radical strategic planning aims to enable a transformative shift, where necessary, to develop openness to new ideas, and to understand and accept the need and opportunity for change. In line with Purcell (2009), Lambert-Pennington et al. (2011), and Saija (2011), I argue that planning needs to mobilise the power of citizens to engage in counter-hegemonic struggles to establish other policies and to play a central role in decision-making insisting that other policies are possible or in Monno's (2010) terms working the impossible as emancipatory imagination.

It must help to counter hegemonic politics by challenging neo-liberalization where some groups are systematically advantaged by decision-making practices. In this way, the results of structure planning and strategic spatial planning processes cannot be judged solely by the implementation of a plan or strategy. Broadening the scope of possible futures and giving voice to certain groups must be considered as important and valuable outcomes of a strategic planning process. Structure planning and strategic planning get their legitimacy through a combination of their performance as a creative and innovative force, its potential to deliver positive outcomes and a formal acceptance by the relevant government level.

KO: What would the role of the planner be in this type of planning?

LA: Planners need to develop the ability to sense and grasp moments of opportunity when strategic ambitions seem to engage with political structures. Newmann (2008) argues that the structure element of political opportunity structure helps us to focus on path-dependence in institutional development and to acknowledge that the past puts constraints on future development. In line with O'Neill, (2002) and Healey (2010), I am in favour of a culture of public service where professionals and public servants must in the end be free to serve the public rather than their paymasters. I fully realise that this requires a change to the status quo and that the world of planning and planners inevitably becomes more complicated and messy. However, I agree with Campbell (2002) that it is in making planning issues and approaches messy that transformative practices can take place.

KO: Is there a need to revive and re-adjust the idea of structure planning to more contemporary ideals?

LA: Yes for sure! While sustainability, subsidiarity, networks, spatial quality, projects, integration of key-actors in the planning process dominated the discourse in the 1990's, nowadays the economy, flexibility, legal certainty, technical components of climate change start to dominate the discourse. The debate in the media on planning issues, which was lively in the 1990's, has disappeared completely. This shift is a main reason that I turned to a more radical strategic planning (Albrechts, 2013, 2017, 2018, Albrechts et al., 2017). Content and process are given by certain ideals and principles, which articulate certain values (justice, equity, accountability). These values may be different from the perspective of (even different levels) the state, the region, the city, the community, and NGO's. Therefore, planning needs to raise awareness for conflicts. As Mouffe (2005) argues, it requires a need to recognise the deeply pluralistic character of our neighbourhoods, cities, city-regions, regions and the irreducible conflicts of values and interests, with all the conflicts that pluralism entails. Conflicts for which no rational solution could ever exist. I agree with you (Olesen & Richardson, 2012) that this points to the necessity to open up structure planning and strategic spatial planning - as fields of contested planning rationalities and spatial logics - for a plurality of understandings. With Mouffe (2005), Hillier (2002) and Brand & Gaffikin (2007), I argue that what is at stake is the recognition of social division and the legitimization of conflict.

It brings to the fore the existence in a democratic society of a plurality of interests and demands which, although they conflict and can never be finally reconciled, should nevertheless be considered as legitimate.

I perfectly know that it is not in the power of structure planning and strategic spatial planning (and it even cannot be the purpose) to eliminate conflicts, but it is in its power to create the practices, discourses and institutions that would allow those conflicts to take an agonistic form. It therefore needs a fundamental shift in the balance of power not only between governments and citizens, but also between different private actors. Planners must raise awareness that strategic spatial planning is a field shaped by power relations where a hegemonic struggle takes place and that it risks of becoming an instrument in the imposition of a neo-liberal policy and a western intellectual (political) hegemony. Hence the necessity of making room for pluralising strategic spatial planning. In line with Mazza (2011, 2013) and Mantysalo (2013), I argue that as these processes may have a deep impact, concerns have to be expressed for the legitimacy of mainly informal strategic planning processes and consequently for the role of planners in these processes.

From the conversation above, it is apparent that strategic spatial planning in Flanders is in a deadlock at the moment. The political support and legitimacy for structure planning has vanished. However, this standstill might also provide a moment of opportunity for rethinking and changing spatial planning practices in Flanders once more, as it was done in the early 1990s. The increasing disappointment with the use (and misuse) of strategic spatial planning in practice has led academics to rethink strategic spatial planning in more radical ways. It is argued that strategic spatial planning instead of preserving the status quo must be concerned with imagining the 'impossible' and to a larger extent adopt an ontology of 'becoming'. For Albrechts (2013, 2017, 2018; Albrechts et al., 2017) this means that strategic spatial planning must be understood as a process of coproduction.

However, with the new theorisations of strategic spatial planning there is also a risk that they, instead of inspiring planning practice, will contribute to an increasing gap between planning theory and planning practice. In this light, Albrechts and Vermeersch achievements in the preparation of the first Structure Plan for Flanders are remarkable. Bringing theoretical ideas from academia into planning practice - and thereby bridging the gap between planning theory and practice planning - adopting a new planning style, preparing a new planning document, and facilitating a culture change in Flemish spatial planning is truly a remarkable achievement. The core ideas and spatial concepts developed in the structure plan are still important features in everyday planning language in Flanders. In this sense, these ideas and concepts might very well outlive the structure plan itself. The Structure Plan for Flanders might have lost political legitimacy, but the ideas behind the plan will continue to live on in Flemish spatial planning in the years to come.



REFERENCES

- Albrechts, L. (1974)** Strategische factoren in de ruimtelijke stedelijke planning, Ph.D. thesis, Institute for Urban and Regional Planning, University of Leuven.
- Albrechts, L. (1991)** Changing roles and positions of planners. *Urban Studies* 28(1): 123-137.
- Albrechts, L. (1995)** Batir le visage d'une region, *DiSP*, 122, July: 29-34.
- Albrechts, L. (1998)** The Flemish diamond: precious gem and virgin area. *European Planning Studies* 6(4): 411-424.
- Albrechts, L. (1999)** Planners as catalysts and initiators of change. The new structure plan for Flanders. *European Planning Studies* 7(5): 587-603.
- Albrechts, L. (2001a)** From traditional land use planning to strategic spatial planning: the case of Flanders. In: Albrechts, L., Alden, J. & Da Rosa Pires, A. (eds.) *The Changing Institutional Landscape of Planning*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 83-108.
- Albrechts, L. (2001b)** Devolution, regional governance and planning system in Belgium. *International Planning Studies* 6(2): 167-182.
- Albrechts, L. (2001c)** In Pursuit of new Approaches to Strategic Spatial Planning. *International Planning Studies* 6(3): 293-310.
- Albrechts, L. (2003a)** Reconstructing decision making: planning versus politics. *Planning Theory* 2(3): 249-268.
- Albrechts, L. (2003b)** Planning and power: towards an emancipatory planning approach. *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy* 21(6): 905-924.
- Albrechts, L. (2003c)** Shifts in Planning: from traditional land use planning towards 'new' strategic (spatial) planning. Symposium: Liveable communities throughout the world: Problems and Promise. University of Texas, Arlington December 11, 2003.
- Albrechts, L. (2004)** Strategic (spatial) planning reexamined. *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design* 31(5): 743-758.
- Albrechts, L. (2006)** Shifts in strategic spatial planning? Some evidence from Europe and Australia. *Environment and Planning A* 38(6): 1149-1170.
- Albrechts, L. (2010)** More of the same is not enough! How could strategic spatial planning be instrumental in dealing with the challenges ahead? *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design* 37(6): 1115-1127.
- Albrechts, L. (2013)** Reframing strategic spatial planning by using a coproduction perspective. *Planning Theory* 12(1): 46-63.
- Albrechts, L. (2015)** Ingredients for a more Radical Strategic Spatial Planning. *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design* 42(3): 510-525.

- Albrechts, L. (2017)** Strategic planning as a catalyst for transformative practices. In: Ha-selsberger, B. (ed.) *Encounters with Planning Thought. 16 Autobiographical Essays from Key Thinkers in Planning*. Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 184-201
- Albrechts, L. (2018)** Strategic planning: ontological and epistemological challenges in: Gun-der, M., Madanipour, A. & Watson, V. (eds.) *Routledge Handbook of Planning Theory*. Abing- don/New York: Routledge, 28-40.
- Albrechts, L., Healey, P. & Kunzmann, K. (2003)** Strategic Spatial Planning and Regional Governance. *American Planning Association* 69(2): 113-129.
- Albrechts, L. & Lievois, G. (2004)** The Flemish Diamond: urban network in the making. *Eu- ropean Planning Studies* 12(3): 351-370.
- Albrechts, L. & Van den Broeck, J. (2004)** From discourse to facts. The case of the ROM project in Ghent, Belgium, *Town Planning Review* 75 (2): 127-150
- Albrechts, L. & Balducci, A. (2013)** Practicing strategic planning: in search of critical fea- tures to explain the strategic character of plans. *disP - The Planning Review* 49 (3): 16-27.
- Albrechts, L. Balducci, A. Hillier, J. (eds) (2017)** *Situated Practices of Strategic Planning. An international perspective*. Abingdon/New York: Routledge.
- Allmendinger P. & Haughton G (2009)** Soft spaces, fuzzy boundaries, and metagovern- ance: the new spatial planning in the Thames Gateway. *Environment and Planning A* 41(3): 617-633.
- Allmendinger, P. & Haughton, G. (2010)** Spatial planning, devolution, and new planning spaces. *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy* 28(5): 803-818.
- Balducci, A. (2008)** Constructing (spatial) strategies in complex environments. In: Van den Broeck, J., Moulaert, F. & Oosterlynck, S. (eds.) *Empowering the Planning Fields: Ethics, Cre- ativity and Action*. Leuven: Acco, 79-99
- Beauregard, R.A. (1989)** Between modernity and postmodernity: the ambiguous position of U.S. planning. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 7(4): 381-395.
- Benveniste, G. (1989)** *Mastering the Politics of Planning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Berger, G. (1964)** *Phenomenologie du Temps et Prospective*. Paris: P.U.
- Bergson, H. (1992)** *The Creative Mind. An introduction to Metaphysics*. Secaucus, NJ: Carol Publishing Group.
- Brand, R. & Gaffikin, F. (2007)** Collaborative planning in an uncollaborative world. *Planning Theory* 6 (3): 282-313.
- Campbell, H. (2002)** Thinking about discourses: theory is practical? *Planning Theory & Prac- tice* 3(3): 351-352.
- Castells, M. (1972)** *La Question Urbaine*. Paris: Francois Maspero.



- Castells, M. (1996)** *The Rise of the Network Society. The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Chadwick, G. (1971)** *A Systems View of Planning: Towards a Theory of the Urban and Regional Planning Process*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Chia, R. (1995)** From Modern to Postmodern Organizational Analysis. *Organization Studies* 16(4): 579-604.
- Chia, R. (1999)** A 'rhizomic' model of organizational change and transformation: perspective from a metaphysics of change. *British Journal of Management* 10(3): 209-227.
- Christensen, K. (1985)** Coping with uncertainty in planning. *Journal of the American Planning Association* 51(1): 63-73.
- de Jong, M. & de Vries, J. (2002)** The merits of keeping cool while hearing the siren calls. In: de Jong, M., Latenis, K. & Mamadouh, V. (eds.) *The Theory and Practice of Institutional Transplantation*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 231-246.
- de Jouvenel, B. (1964)** *L'art de la Conjecture*. Monaco: Du Rocher.
- Dyrberg, T.B. (1997)** *The Circular Structure of Power*. London: Verso.
- Fainstein, M. & Fainstein, S. (1979)** New debates in urban planning: the impact of marxist theory within the United States. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 3(3): 381-401.
- Forester, J. (1989)** *Planning in the Face of Power*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Forester, J. (1993)** *Critical Theory, Public Policy, and Planning Practice*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Foucault M. (1984)** Space, knowledge and power. In: Rabinow, P. (ed.) *The Foucault Reader*. New York: Pantheon Books, 239-256.
- Friedmann, J. (1987)** *Planning in the Public Domain*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Friedmann, J. (1992)** *Empowerment. The Politics of Alternative Development*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Friedmann, J. (2011)** *Insurgencies: Essays in Planning Theory*. London: Routledge.
- Ganapati, S. & Verma, N. (2010) Institutional biases in the international diffusion of planning concepts. In Healey, P. Upton, R. (Eds) *Crossing borders: International exchange and planning practices*. Abingdon, Routledge
- Grosz, E. (1999)** Thinking the new: of futures yet unthought. In: Grosz, E. (ed.) *Becomings: Explorations in Time, Memory, and Futures*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 15-28.
- Hajer, M. (1989)** *City Politics: Hegemonic Projects and Discourse*. Aldershot: Gower Publishing Company Ltd.
- Hajer, M. (1995)** *The Politics of Environmental Discourse, Ecological Modernisation and the Policy Process*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

- Harvey, D. (1973)** *Social Justice and the City*. London: E. Arnold.
- Harvey, D. (1989)** From managerialism to entrepreneurialism: the formation of urban governance in late capitalism. *Geografisker Annaler. Series B, Human Geography*. 71(1): 3-17.
- Harvey, D. (2000)** *Spaces of Hope*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Haughton, G., Allmendinger, P., & Oosterlynck, S., (2013) Spaces of neoliberal experimentation: soft spaces, postpolitics, and neoliberal governmentality. *Environment and Planning A* 45(1): 217-234.
- Healey, P. (1997)** An Institutional Approach to Spatial Planning. In Healey, P., Khakee, A., Motte, A. & Needham, B. (eds.) *Making Strategic Spatial Plans*. London: UCL Press, 21-36.
- Healey, P. (1999)** Institutional analysis, communicative planning, and shaping places. *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 19(2): 111-121.
- Healey, P. (2007)** *Urban Complexity and Spatial Strategies*. London: Routledge.
- Healey, P. (2008)** Making choices that matter. *The Practical Art of Situated Strategic Judgment in Spatial Strategy-making*; in Van den Broeck, J. Moulaert, F. Oosterlynck, S. (eds) *Empowering the planning fields. Ethics, Creativity and Action*. Acco, Leuven: 23-41
- Healey, P. (2010)** *Making Better Places: The Planning Project for the Twenty-first Century*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Healey, P., Khakee, A., Motte, A. & Needham, B. (eds.) (1997) *Making Strategic Spatial Plans*. London: UCL Press.
- Hillier, J. (2002)** *Shadows of Power*. London: Routledge.
- Huyse, L. (1994)** *De Politiek Voorbij [After Politics]*. Leuven: Kritak.
- Innes, J.E. (1996)** Planning through consensus building: a new view of the comprehensive planning ideal. *Journal of the American Planning Association* 62(4): 460-72.
- Jantsch, E. (1967)** *Technological Forecasting in Perspective*. Paris: OECD.
- Jantsch, E. (ed.) (1969)** *Perspectives of Planning*. Paris: OECD.
- Jantsch, E. (1970)** From forecasting and planning to policy sciences. *Policy Sciences* 1(1): 31-47.
- Jessop, B. (2000)** The crisis of national spatio-temporal fix and the ecological dominance of globalizing. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 24(2): 323-360.
- Krumholz, M. (1982)** A retrospective view of equity planning, Cleveland, 1969-1979. *Journal of American Planners Association* 48(4): 163-174.
- Kunzmann, K. (2013)** Strategic planning: a chance for spatial innovation and creativity. *disP – The Planning Review* 49(3): 28-31.
- Ladriere, J. (1960)** Determinisme et responsabilite. Le langage de faction. *Questions Scientifiques* 140(1): 9-30.



- Lambert-Pennington, K., Westendorff, D., & Reardon, K. (2011)** Planning under the lion's paw: a Bluff City tale. Paper presented at ACSP Congress, Salt Lake City, 13-16 October.
- Mantysalo, R. (2013)** Coping with the paradox of strategic spatial planning. *disP - The Planning Review* 49(3): 51-52.
- Masse, P. (1962)** L'esprit prospectif et l'application. *Revue Prospective* 10: 17-38.
- Masse, P. (1966)** Les attitudes envers l'avenir et leur influence sur le present. In: Darcet, J. (ed.) *Etapes de la Prospective*. Paris: Presse Universitaires de France, 335-344.
- Mazza, L. (2011)** Personal Communication by e-mail August 24th.
- Mazza, L. (2013)** If strategic 'planning is everything maybe it's nothing'. *disP - The Planning Review* 49(3): 40-42.
- McLoughlin, J.B. (1969)** *Urban and regional Planning: A Systems Approach*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap (1997)** *Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders*. English summary.
- Monno, V. (2010)** When strategy meets democracy: exploring the limits of the 'possible' and the value of the 'impossible'. In: Cerreta, M., Concilio, G. & Monno, V. (eds.) *Making Strategies in Spatial Planning: Knowledge and Values*. Dordrecht: Springer, 161-183.
- Mouffe, C. (2005) *On the Political*. London: Routledge.
- Newman, P. (2008) Strategic spatial planning: collective action and moments of opportunity. *European Planning Studies* 16(10): 1371-1383.
- Olesen, K. (2014)** The neoliberalisation of strategic spatial planning. *Planning Theory* 13(3): 288-303.
- Olesen, K. & Richardson, T. (2012)** Strategic spatial planning in transition: contested rationalities and spatial logics in 21st century Danish spatial planning. *European Planning Studies* 20(10): 1689-1706.
- O'Neill, O. (2002)** *A Question of Trust*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ozbekhan, H. (1967)** *The Triumph of Technology: 'Can' Implies 'Ought'*. Santa Monica, CA: System Development Corp.
- Ozbekhan, H. (1969)** Towards a general theory of planning. In: Jantsch, E. (ed.): *Perspectives of Planning*. Paris: OECD, 45-155.
- Peck, J. & Tickell, A. (2002)** Neoliberalizing space. *Antipode* 34(3): 380-404.
- Perin, C. (1970)** *With Man in Mind. An Interdisciplinary Prospectus for Environmental Design*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

- Purcell, M. (2009)** Resisting neoliberalization: communicative planning or counter-hegemonic movements? *Planning Theory* 8(2): 140-165.
- Rouse, J. (1987)** *Knowledge and Power: Towards a Political Philosophy of Science*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Saija, L. (2011)** The US empowerment planning approach meets Sicilian community planning. The community mapping initiative in the Simeto Valley (Sicily, Italy). Paper presented at ACSP Congress, Salt Lake City 13-16 October.
- Salet, W. & Faludi, A. (eds.) (2000)** *The Revival of Strategic Spatial Planning*. Amsterdam: Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen.
- Sartorio, F. (2005)** Strategic spatial planning: a historical review of approaches, its recent revival, and an overview of the state of the art in Italy. *disP* 162(3): 26-40.
- Schmitt, C. (1988)** Volkerrechtliche formen des modernen imperialismus. In: Schmitt, C. (ed.) *Positionen und Begriffe im Kampf mit Weimar-Genf-Versailles*. Berlin: Duncker & Humboldt, 184-203.
- Schon, D.A. (1971)** *Beyond the Stable State*. New York, London: Norton & Co.
- Schon, D.A. (1983)** *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. New York: Basic Books.
- Swyngedouw, E., Moulaert, F. & Rodriguez, A. (2002)** Neoliberal urbanization in Europe: large-scale urban development projects and the new urban policy. *Antipode* 34(3): 542-577.
- Van den Broeck, P. (2008)** The changing position of strategic spatial planning in Flanders. A socio-political and instrument-based perspective. *International Planning Studies* 13(3): 261-283.
- van Havre, D. (1973)** *De waardering van de woonomgeving*, Ph.D. thesis, Institute for Urban and Regional Planning, University of Leuven.
- van Tatenhove, J., Arts, B. & Leroy, P. (eds.) (2000)** *Political Modernization and the Environment, the Renewal of Environmental Policy Arrangements*. Dordrecht: Academic Publishers.
- Vermeersch, Ch. (1976)** *Het niveau van de structuurplanning als integrale benadering in een dynamisch planproces*, Ph.D. thesis, Institute for Urban and Regional Planning, University of Leuven.
- Vlaamse Overheid (2011)** *Ruimtelijk Structuurplan Vlaanderen*. Updated February 2011. Brussel: Vlaamse Overheid, Department Ruimtelijke Ordening, Woonbeleid en Onroerend Erfgoed.
- Watson, V. (2007)** *Revisiting the role of urban planning*. Concept Paper for the 2009 Global Report on Human Settlements, Cape Town.
- Wilkinson, C. (2011)** Strategic Navigation: in search of an adaptable mode of strategic spatial planning practice. *Town Planning Review* 82(5): 595-613.
- Young, I. (1990)** *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Exploring Place Matters in Planning Practice

CHANGING PLANNING DISCOURSES AND PRACTICES: THE FLANDERS STRUCTURE PLAN

LOUIS ALBRECHTS

Department of Architecture, Urbanism and Planning
University of Leuven – KU Leuven

KRISTIAN OLESEN

Department of Planning
Aalborg University

■ Editorial Board

Mona Abdelwahab (editor-in-chief)
Verena Peer (series A)
Mohamed El-Azzazy (series A)
Chandrima Mukhopadhyay (series B)
Chiara Belingardi (series B)
Giusy Pappalardo (series C)
Nicholas Kasang (series C)

YA-Cordinator
Mohamed Saleh

Graphic Desgin (cover and layout)
Shaimaa Refaat