

Screened urbanisation: urban planning and the imagination of the Flemish landscape in film productions.

The condition of 'Flemish urban landscape' has been a difficult subject to tackle for urban planners as well as policy makers for more than half a century now. In particular the landscape and the 'open space' has been discussed a lot in recent years. The reality of a highly fragmented settlement structure that covers almost the entire territory contrasts with the ideal of the compact city versus the countryside. As a model without or with only limited planning and regulation, the horizontal metropolis is conventionally designated as inferior compared with the compact and highly planned and regulated city model. Not only within the context of urban planning, also in a wider social debate current demographic, economic and ecological problems are assigned to our current spatial model that is wasting land and has resulted in social problems such as structural traffic jams, noise barriers, chronic flooding, and so on. However, the causality is not as rigid as described above and this problem-based approach doesn't seem to do justice to the unique qualities of the horizontal metropolis. Just like the fine-grained network of peri-urban areas the complexity of this fragmented landscape is very diffuse and nuanced.

Since film, as a powerful medium, can have an important influence on (change of) public opinion, one can assume that movies can influence the perception of the public on this specific urban landscape. Therefore this project wants to investigate the cinematographic space as a reflection of the real environment. In order to gather knowledge and insights in the intrinsic characteristics, experience and typical dynamics of the 'dispersed city' that Flanders has become nowadays, this project starts by examining visualisations in film.

The point of view of directors differs a lot from how urban planners and architects approach the landscape, using mainly cartographic material. Moreover, directors often succeed to capture exactly what has been undiscerned for policy makers. They use their cameras to make statements, for example on social issues, but also about the built or un-built environment. Especially the so-called 'intermediate areas' often appear in front of the lens. Because of their lack of planning or politically uninteresting, these 'blind spots' easily disappear from the radar, which often results in a trivial, informal, open, undefined use. Examples of those 'intersectional places' can be residual spaces between infrastructure, interior areas of building blocks, spaces between garage blocks, enclosed gardens, abandoned buildings, densed up paths (water lanes), Often these are places with a strong, imaginative atmosphere (poetry), with a strong expression.

Analyzing how the suburban sprawl is imagined in existing films, provides another reading of those places by exploring the three-dimensional, spatial facet of the landscape, as well as its character of use and meaning. An innovative, strategic and realistic study of the contemporary urbanized landscape will be important to change the perspective of not only policymakers but first of all the Flemish audience, who's support will be needed to implement new policy.