THE INTERFACE CHALLENGE
NEW PERSPECTIVES ON LANDSCAPE AND LAND USE

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Lost in the title page?

It probably took you some time to figure out the actual title of this book. Is it "Challenging the boxes. Interfaces in landscape and land use"? Or did you read it as "Challenging interfaces. The boxes in landscape and land use"? Or maybe you looked at it from an angular perspective: "Challenging interfaces in landscape and land use" or "Interfaces. Challenging the boxes in landscape and land use"? Don't feel lost. The editors of the book spent hours debating about a fitting title and subtitle of the book. At a certain moment, we just wrote down the core elements of the message of this essay. Suddenly – as a true Eureka experience – all the pieces fell into place. Both what (content) and how (structure) we had written on the board perfectly expressed our intentions. The result lies before you as a book cover that challenges the co-ordination between your eyes and your brain, between what you watch and what you think to see.

The book title illustrates that the same object can be looked at from different perspectives, and consequently can be understood in diverse ways. And, nearly every perspective makes sense too. Not only the familiar Western way of reading from right to left but also the Chinese one from top to bottom offers a valid interpretation. What seems most essential in understanding the title is the content represented by the words. How you organize the words to make sense out of them through a sentence is somehow subordinate and depends to a large extent on your background, interests and preferences.

Interfaces in landscape and land use

Just as the book title succeeds in showing the multiplicity in reading possibilities, the essay itself challenges you to look at the landscape and to land use in different and unfamiliar ways. We offer you at least a perspective for landscape analysis, design and planning, complementary to your disciplinary traditions. We invite you to start thinking out of the conformal boxes or categories familiar to landscape experts, planners and policy makers, and in which they try to fit almost every phenomenon that happens in the landscape. To essay introduces and develops the concept 'interfaces of landscape and land use' (further called just interfaces). An interface is broadly defined as a place or site in some intermediate location, in

some transition between two states in time, or influenced by interacting agents. The concept offers a way out of too much standardization or conformity in research, design and planning policy. The following three major reasons explain why such an escape route is rewarding.

First of all, the current approaches to land use analysis as well as landscape design and policy ignores a wealth of phenomena in the field. The insights from three PhD studies under the supervision of Hubert Gulinck triggered and inspired the questioning of these narrow, conformal and familiar perspectives. Bomans (2011) [1] in her PhD assessed the rise of transformations in suburbanized and rural areas, such as horse keeping or so-called 'horsification'. Dewaelheyns (2014) [3] stressed the strategic importance of the complex of private, semi-public and public gardens. Verhoeve (2015) [4] shed a light on the multitude of non-agricultural economic activities in former farm buildings. These in depth studied phenomena have in common that they remain 'under the radar' or underrated (Bomans et al., 2010) [1] in everyday landscape analysis, design and planning policy. They rarely appear on maps or in statistics; and they are not at all addressed in strategic planning visions or translated into categories of land use planning. It seems as if their existence is intentionally kept silent. The concept of interfaces breaks through this silence.

Second, disciplines of landscape analysis, design and policy each use their own terminology and categories to address the landscape. These standard vocabularies and their grammars are often quite remote to the daily experience of the landscape and the use of land by people. It is the very nature of categorizations to aim for purity and clarity instead of fuzziness. Categories are simplifications of reality, making abstraction of elements and conditions that are contradictory to this simplicity. So for instance, mixed land use is always a difficult issue to deal with when mapping, designing or planning. It is strange to hear policy makers talk about the differences in development perspectives between a residential land use category and an agricultural one while their own garden may be spread out over both categories. The concept of interfaces in landscape and land uses pleas for new vocabularies and grammars to be able to talk about landscapes and land uses that make a difference in the real world.

Finally, major contemporary and future societal challenges such as climate change, food provision, water management and the transition towards renewable energy are challenging our familiar way of designing and planning. Dealing with these issues demands both the stretching of existing and the exploration of new approaches. Solutions that seem strange in relation to the traditional allocation of land uses in planning policy – just think about the flood risk of land allocated for agricultural use in the case of extreme weather events – become evident. The qualitative development and the day-by-day management of the landscape becomes more important than the stiff allocation of land to conformal uses. The concept of interfaces in landscape and land uses offers new starting points to reflect about this different future.

Concept of the book

Just as the book cover, the essay itself can be read in multiple ways.

We recommend you to start with the launching document by Hubert Gulinck and Jan Schreurs that introduces the concept of interfaces in landscape and land uses. This starting text not only underpins the need for a concept as 'interfaces in landscape and land use', but also intuitively defines eleven interface categories, as an eye opener.

With this starting text, we invited authors to reflect on the concept or to project it on their working field.

A number of 'reflections' attempt to clarify the concept of interfaces. These contributions scrutinize one or more of the eleven interface categories to better understand them, probe methods to map or analyze interfaces, explore how interfaces can be embedded in research by design, or look for proper governance approaches to deal with interfaces.

In the 'projections', authors search for the applicability of the concept of interfaces in their own projects, be it a very concrete case on the field, a research project or a geographic work place. The range of scales is obvious: the authors pinpoint the categories of interfaces on projects at micro, macro and intermediate scale and some even across scales. This observation illustrates that the concept of interfaces in landscape and land uses is applicable at any scale.

The reflections and projections alternate, allowing you as reader to commute between theory and practice.

The conclusion of the book wraps up the major observations and invites researchers and professionals to pick up the added values of the interface categories in land use and landscape analysis, diagnosis, mapping, design, policy and managment.

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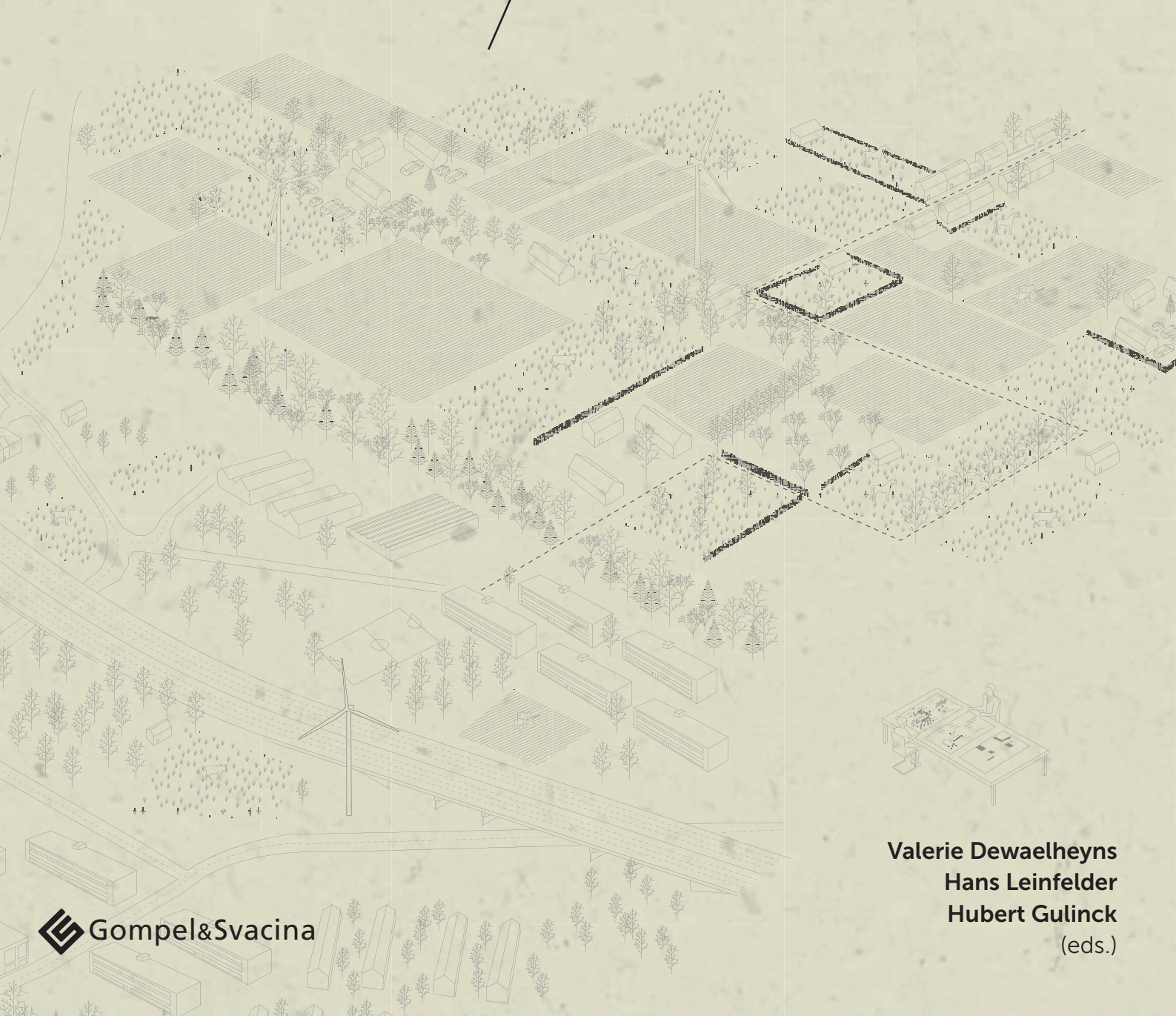
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