**The morphology of historic urban landscapes: research, practice and design.**

Re-scape colloquium

Leiden University

June 20, 2019

Historic urban landscapes are highly valued these days as places where people like to live, work or entertain themselves. Urban form, constituted by an unique arrangement of town plan, land-use and buildings, seems to be a major factor for the attractivity of historic towns. Scholars from several disciplines (historical geography, urban history, architecture, archaeology, heritage studies) contribute to the study of the origin, development and transformation of urban form. In doing so, they generate knowledge on what can be termed ‘the morphology of historic urban landscapes’. This knowledge helps to improve our understanding of the ways in which towns came about and took shape, how their appearance changed over time, and how our present townscapes are the stratified results of centuries of living, working and building by various groups of actors.

Ideally, the knowledge produced in academia finds its way to professionals and policymakers involved in contemporary urban planning and design or heritage management and preservation. They can use this knowledge, for instance, to make informed choices and decisions, or as inspiration for new designs, schemes or developments.

However, does it really work this way? What kind of knowledge are scholars actually producing regarding the morphology of towns? To what extent is their work being used by practitioners in the field of urban planning, heritage and design? What kind of knowledge would these practitioners like to receive from academic scholars? And can scholars comply to those wishes?

The interface between scholarly research on the morphology of historic urban landscapes and the practice of heritage management, planning and design in historic towns, is the theme of the *Re-scape colloquium*, organised at the Leiden University on June 20, 2019. Two experts are invited to share their experiences and opinions in a keynote lecture. Three PhD-students will then present a specific case from their own research, which will be discussed with the experts and the attendees.

*Program*

13:00 **Introduction** - Marcel IJsselstijn, MA (Leiden University), organiser; Dr. Reinout Rutte (Technische Universiteit Delft), chair and moderator

13.10-13.40 **Morphology, stratigraphy, verticality—evolving urban forms?** – Prof. dr. Keith Lilley (Queen’s University, Belfast)

The use of urban morphology—the study of built form—as a tool for historical enquiry and analysis has a long history in Europe. The development of analytical techniques invariably has involved using maps and plans both as sources to reveal past changes in urban form as well as to visualise evolving urban forms. Mapping, then, is a core characteristic in the morphological study of urban landscapes.

In this paper I explore how mapping relates not just to shape and form, but to the stratigraphy—the temporal and spatial layers—of historic built environments, enabling us to visualise the complex evolution of urban landscapes of European towns and cities across long time-periods. Methodological evolution is at work too. The application of digital methods and geo-spatial technologies offers new insights into the dynamics of processes of urban evolution. With these methods, the challenge now is to integrate the vertical and the horizontal planes of urban landscapes—a sequence of urban evolution on both axes—to explore the processes shaping our towns and cities, to make them into what they are today.

13.40-13.55 **Questions and discussion**

13.55-14.25 **Persistence, traces and palimpsests: a basis for design?** – Dr. Karl Kropf (Oxford Brookes University)

A key result of early research in urban morphology and its precursors in geography and architecture was to identify the phenomenon of persistence. Chronological plan sequencing shows, for example, that street patterns can persist for centuries. Research also shows, however, that persistence is not merely a matter of simple material inertia. Some patterns persist through transformation and reuse, for example building on previous foundations such as at the Piazza Navona in Rome. These traces of previous forms provide a sense of time depth that give places their identity and historical character: the character of the palimpsest.  
  
Given current ideas, attitudes and principles in archaeology and heritage protection, can the phenomena of persistence, traces and the palimpsest be taken as principles for new designs? Can we create time depth by transformation in new places to achieve the character we admire in the old?

14.25-14.40 **Questions and discussion**

**Break**

15.00-15.15 **Secularisation & urban form: past and future** - Reinout Klaarenbeek, MA (KU Leuven)

The secularization of urban space in the Enlightenment can be considered a crucial phase in urban development of cities in many catholic European countries. The suppression of monasteries and the consequent release of large plots of land and profaned buildings to governments and the private market, offered wide ranges of possibilities for re-use and redevelopment. Morphogenetic research of the cities Brussels, Antwerp and Bruges using GIS, reveals a permanence in parcel structures, scales and buildings, some of which can be extended to the current-day urban landscapes. What opportunities does this knowledge about urban transformation, presented in an atlas, offer for urban designers?

15.15-15.25 **Questions and discussion**

15.25-15.40 **Planned vs. unplanned urban form: the case of the Oudegracht, Utrecht’s medieval harbour** - Marcel IJsselstijn, MA (Leiden University)

Town plans usually reveal a striking persistence over time. In many contemporary historic towns in the Netherlands, you can still find directions using a mid-16th-century town plan made by Jacob van Deventer. The ways in which these town plans came about and took shape, however, is not particularly well understood. In the 19th century, a rather straightforward dichotomy has been developed that is still widely adhered to. This model considers towns with a predominantly irregular plan to have evolved because of ‘organic, unplanned development’, also denoted as ‘piecemeal or incremental growth’. On the other hand, towns with a more regular plan are considered the result of ‘conscious planning’ or ‘deliberate foundation’.

In its simplicity, the basic idea of this dichotomy is very powerful and a recurrent theme in debates on contemporary urbanism and planning between proponents of incremental, bottom-up growth (emergent urbanism) versus advocates of top-down coordinated, large-scale planning. In this paper, I will try to reconstruct some aspects of medieval town plan development, using the case of Utrecht’s medieval harbour: the Oudegracht, one of the most valued parts of the historic town today. By demonstrating how the harbour was formed and transformed over time, we might gain a better understanding of how ‘planning’ or ‘development’ worked in the past which may also help to reflect on current practices of urban planning and design.

15.40-15.50 **Questions and discussion**

15.50-16.05 **From the tanners square to the fullers street: the geography of tanning in sixteenth-century Bruges -** Ward Leloup, MA (Free University Brussels/Ghent University)

Historians and geographers alike often assume that occupations in late medieval towns were spatially clustered up until the sixteenth century. Toponyms such as “Butchers Street” or “Fullers Quay” are held to be witnesses of these medieval occupational clusters. Yet when it comes to empirical evidence of the urban socio-professional topography, the pre-modern period is generally given little attention. In this paper I explore this issue through the case of the tanners in sixteenth-century Bruges. Did these artisans flock together around the Tanners Square? Why so, or why not? Departing from taxation lists, court cases, guild’s accounts, but also archaeological data, I will investigate geographical patterns in the residence and work places of the tanners and explore evolutions therein. Thus, this study sheds light on current issues about the functional division of space and the coping with a polluting industry in a past urban environment. Furthermore, it offers information on the social dynamics of urban neighbourhoods from a historical perspective.

16.05-16.15 **Questions and discussion**

16.15 **Conclusions** – Dr. Jaap Evert Abrahamse (Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands)

16.30 **Drinks**

*About the speakers*

**Prof. dr. Keith Lilley** is Professor of Historical Geography at Queen’s University in Belfast, with particular interests in the history of cartography, urban morphology, and landscape history. He uses maps and mappings to explore past landscapes and geographies as well as how the past connects with the present. For more than 15 years he has directed funded spatial humanities research projects, all using digital 'geospatial technologies' (eg GIS). He is currently developing this work further in 4 funded research projects:

1. An AHRC-funded public engagement centre, "Living Legacies 1914-18: From Past Conflict to Shared Future", which connects academic and community researchers through WW1 heritage projects - including 'citizen history' and community mapping projects - for more information see: <http://www.livinglegacies1914-18.ac.uk/>

2. A British Academy funded project called "Surveying Empires: Archaeologies of Colonial Cartography in West Bengal, India", in collaboration with colleagues in the Department of Archaeology at the University of Calcutta (India), a project which is following in the footsteps of George Everest and the surveyors of the Great Trigonometrical Survey (GTS) of India by digitally recording the surviving remains of the trigonometrical towers constructed for survey work in West Bengal in the 1820s-1860s. See <http://surveyingempires.org/> for information on the project.

3. A Leverhulme Trust funded project called "Mapping Lineages: Quantifying the Evolution of Maps of the British Isles", in collaboration with The British Library, and using GIS and spatial analysis techniques to trace the 'genealogy' of national mapping of Great Britain from the 14th to 17th centuries.

4. An AHRC funded project with the University of Exeter and National Library of Wales to digitise and analyse the maps of Humphrey Llwyd, a 16th century polymath--dubbed "inventor of Britain"--who created the first detailed map of Wales which appeared in 1573 in the 'Additamentum' to the 1570 publication of 'Theatrum Orbis Terrarum' by Abraham Ortelius.

Together, these funded research projects seek to advance our knowledge and understanding of the 'spatial practices' of past cartographers and surveyors, as well as explore the potential modern-day spatial technologies have for connecting mapping past, present and future.

**Dr. Karl Kropf** is a Senior Lecturer in Urban Design and Historic Conservation at Oxford Brookes University and Director of Built Form Resource, an urban design, landscape and heritage consultancy.  He has combined academic research in urban morphology, teaching and practice in urban design for many years with the aim of ensuring one benefits that other.  Karl completed a BA in Landscape Architecture at the University of California at Berkeley an MA in Urban Design at Oxford Polytechnic and a PhD in Urban Morphology at the University of Birmingham.  In practice he has worked in the UK, USA and France, including a time in the urban design team at Skidmore Owings and Merrill in San Francisco and as Conservation and Design Officer at Stratford-on-Avon District Council.  His practice work includes urban extensions and regeneration down to small urban infill.  Research projects include translating the results of morphological analysis into design codes, developing computational tools for masterplanning and establishing a repository of urban tissue.  More recently, he has been involved in collaborative research on street networks and route structure analysis.  Karl is Associate Editor of the journal Urban Morphology and his Handbook of Urban Morphology was published in autumn 2017 by John Wiley.

**Reinout Klaarenbeek, MA** is a PhD-candidate at the KU Leuven (architecture department, engineering faculty), working on (urban) landscapes in transformation using historical GIS. Former occupations: researcher at Centre of Urban History Antwerp University, independent author and researcher and historical geographer at an archaeological agency. He holds a bachelor in geography and a master in heritage studies.

**Marcel IJsselstijn, MA** is a PhD-candidate at Leiden University, Faculty of Archaeology. He studied Human Geography at Utrecht University and Heritage Studies at the Free University of Amsterdam. After his graduation, he worked as an independent researcher for five years. He was involved in the *Atlas of the Dutch Urban Landscape*, the first comparative overview of the long-term spatial development of towns in the Netherlands. His current PhD-research examines medieval town plan development in the Low Countries from an interdisciplinary perspective, using documentary, archaeological and cartographic evidence. Marcel is an editor of the Dutch journal of Historical Geography, het *Tijdschrift voor Historische Geografie*.

**Ward Leloup, MA** studied History at the KU Leuven where he obtained his Master’s degree in 2013 with a study on the origins and morphological development of the late medieval port town of Sluis. Thereafter, he was employed as a researcher at Ghent University, where he investigated the socio-economic history of Bruges and the Zwin ports in the context of an interdisciplinary research project (www.zwinproject.ugent.be). Since 2015, he is teaching assistant at the department of History at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. He is currently preparing a PhD-dissertation on the socio-professional topography of late medieval Bruges and Mechelen (VUB-UGent).

*Re-scape colloquium*

Research on spatial heritage is scattered over many academic disciplines, such as architecture, architectural history, archaeology, urban history, landscape studies and heritage studies. These topics are taught throughout the Randstad at a range of different universities with foci in the Humanities, Social Sciences and Technology. The *Re-scape colloquia* aim to bring together senior and junior scholars to establish common languages, theories, methodologies and practices and to create the foundation for novel research approaches.

The *Centre for Global Heritage and Development* (Leiden University, Delft Technical University Delft and Erasmus University Rotterdam) and the VU Amsterdam research institute CLUE+ organize the Re-Scape colloquia for young researchers and graduate students, to be inspired by experienced academics and professionals, learn from each other by sharing knowledge and progress on their own research and work. The colloquia are also open to anyone who is interested in heritage in its spatial setting.