



Bron: Universiteit Gent, België

Lost cultural landscapes in the border area of Flanders and the Netherlands (Zeeuwsch-Vlaanderen)

Introduction

The project “Lost cultural landscapes in the border area of Flanders and the Netherlands” aims at an interdisciplinary study of lost and strongly changed landscapes in the area to the north of the sand deposit ridge Bruges/Antwerp, or better defined as the covered up clay landscapes of western Sealand Flanders (Zeeuwsch-Vlaanderen) and the neighbouring areas of West and East Flanders.

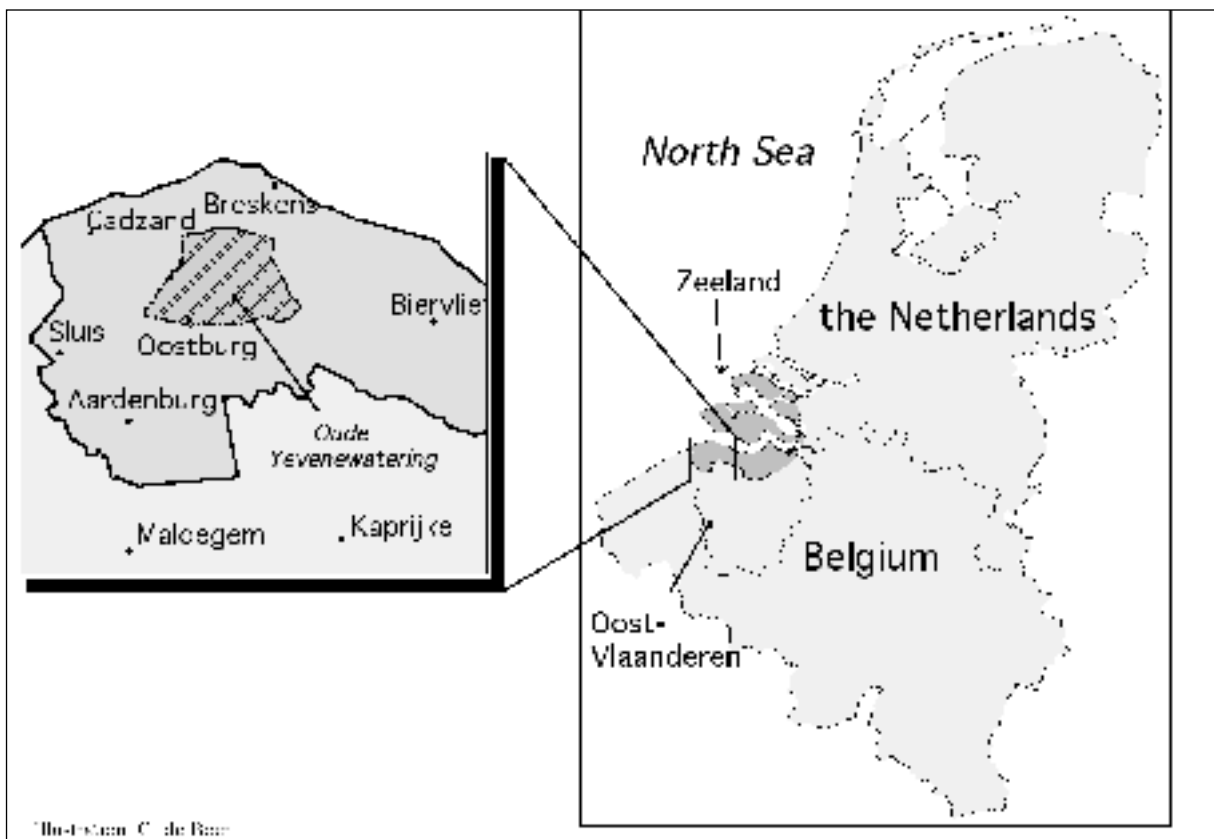


Figure 1 The Dutch-Belgian border area (right) within the localization of the test area: the former water board district *Oude Yevenewatering* (left).

The objective is twofold. The archaeological, historical and physical-geographical research has to lead to a better insight in the natural and anthropogenic processes, which were modifying those changes in the landscape. In second stage, the study enables it to bring up material for the construction of a predictive model that is currently being used in Archaeological Heritage Management in the Netherlands. This model (Indicative Map of Archaeological Values or IKAW) has several restrictions for a functional application, certainly in Sealand Flanders.

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Scrutinizing the area

The former coastal wetlands of Sealand Flanders belong geographically to a late Holocene landscape that consists mainly of alternations of clay, peat beds and sand deposits. At the end of the 16th century, the old medieval landscape was heavily ravaged by flooding carried out for military reasons. For almost the whole area, re-embankments were needed afterwards. An overview of the current well preserved post-medieval landscape suggests it was impossible to restore the preceding infrastructure.

The actual landscape encloses four major landscape types:

- (1) the dune belt and the beach,
- (2) the polder- or sea clay landscapes,
- (3) a transitional zone (amongst which the so-called *krekengebied* on the boundary of Belgium and the Netherlands) consisting of a thinner layer of clay depositions on Pleistocene sand, and
- (4) finally the Pleistocene sand deposit landscapes of Bruges - Maldegem – Eeklo - Kaprijke.

A test area (fig. 1), used to be the *Oude Yvene* water board district, is chosen because of many interesting aspects promising a reconstruction and explanation of lost and transformed medieval landscapes.

Physical-geographical research

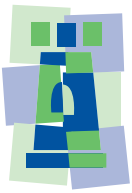
This part focuses on the palaeo-environmental changes of the area. Natural processes control the formation, transformation and erosion of (cultural) landscape. Starting point is formed by recent theories on geological evolution of the coastal plain of the southern North Sea area. On the other hand, human activity during Roman and Medieval period has triggered new geological processes.

The main objective is to obtain detailed insight in geological evolution at a local level and to look which processes and factors dominated. More concretely, the field survey applies fundamental data for the reconstruction of natural landscape (e.g. hydrology and tidal influence, peat area, ridges of silted-up channels, palaeo-vegetation ...) and its transformation at a local level.

Archaeological research

A mainly post-medieval landscape (embankments, waterways, field structures and roads of the 17th-18th century) and a lack of archaeological knowledge in the area, suggest in this respects a completely lost medieval cultural landscape. Anyway, ortho-photographs, aerial archaeology and digital elevation models indicates that in some areas a well preserved former cultural landscape is still detectable. Most of these old traces are invisible on ground level. By combining field walking, geo-archaeology (augering) and not at all historical cartography, it is possible to have more insight in the meaning and dating issue of these quiet invisible relicts.

In this intension, archaeological research in Sealand Flanders can still answer many fundamental questions concerning the origin and development of medieval occupation and infrastructure. As a consequence, it broaches more methodological skill as well as a multidisciplinary approach.



Historical research

The historical part aims at the description and explanation of the geographical transformations based on written and cartographical historical sources. By combining this information a suitable method can be developed to create insight in the medieval and post-medieval landscape and influential political-institutional events.

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