

# Labo S/02 The Hop Region

Opdrachtgever: Provincie West-Vlaanderen  
2005  
Collaborators: P. Uyttenhove, B. Notteboom, K. Boonen, D. Peleman

## Context

The past 25 years, the hop region was characterised by a strong decline in population size, the withdrawal of economic activity and an increased vacancy of building stock.

However, a recent evolution seems to reverse this trend. The promotion of the region as an attractive recreational area by both the government and province, has drawn a considerable number of new inhabitants and tourists. Moreover, the region is regarded highly when considering nature conservation and the maintenance of old-time agricultural activities.

On one hand, this tendency grants the hop region a renewed significance. On the other hand, however, new stakeholders are attracted to the area, placing often incompatible claims on the landscape.

The design of ancient building typologies and landscape elements such as oast houses, breweries, lanes... were directly derived from the usage of the territory at that time. Nowadays, however, agricultural activities have evolved drastically in scale and methods, living conveniences have changed and recreation and tourism play a more significant role, rendering the landscape as well as a substantial part of the building patrimony obsolete for the current standards of living and working.

As a result, a number of buildings becomes dilapidated or get demolished, whereas others get renovated to accommodate an alternative programme such as living, recreation or tourism.

Apart from retro-fitting the existing building stock, new volumes are added that suit the contemporary living and working demands. The villa, the large-scale agricultural hangar and other new forms of agrarian architecture are some of the new typologies emerging in the hop region.

The Labo S research aims to bring together



building stock vacancy



new typologies



retro-fitting of the build patrimony



expansion of agriculture

^ The Hop Region, with an indication of the most common transformations

Historical evolution of farming in the hop region.xx



the concerns of various (new) stakeholders and to formulate a strategy to rethink the profile of the hop region – and the Flemish countryside in general- with an emphasis on the role of the built patrimony.

#### Approach

The research consists of four subsequent steps.

Firstly, the question of regional identity and the ambition of the authorities to enhance this identity, is examined. Depending on the scale on which one looks at the built patrimony – detailing, construction, position on site, footprint... – regional identity can be defined differently. Moreover, the outline of the studied area is an arbitrary choice, passing by the architectural and cultural evolutions happening the last decades in a much broader region. For example, certain building types in the hop region can be found from the North of France to Zeeland, which indicates the relativity and ambiguity of the term 'regional identity'.

Therefore the study focuses on built heritage in a broader spatial context, including aspects such as morphology, landscape and urban processes.

Regional identity is a dynamic concept, evolving through time. Contemporary developments such as the renovation of houses or expansion of farms, seem to shape the identity of a region. Hence, in a second part, the area is scanned in order to map certain processes and transformations in the landscape and building stock. Considering this information, the regional identity of the hop region is confirmed to be a contemporary phenomenon.

Next, a design-based research focuses on eight case studies: residences, farms and small areas that are expected to be subject to some profound changes in the next few years. For each case, several qualitative developments are proposed, with the methodology that frames certain contemplations prevailing on the actual proposal. Most importantly, the proposed developments should take into consideration a set of predetermined parameters. These parameters should be defined by local governments, depending on their own ambition and vision and can range from economical or spatial quality to the preservation of heritage.

Hence, the question of regional identity cannot be reduced to a matter of 'yes' or 'no', but should be related to their own ambition.

To conclude the study, several recommendations for the authorities are made, defined as structural, operational and emancipatory building bricks.

Structural building bricks set the outline on how to – directly as well as indirectly- enhance and consolidate the regional



Typische landschappen in het Hoppeland.

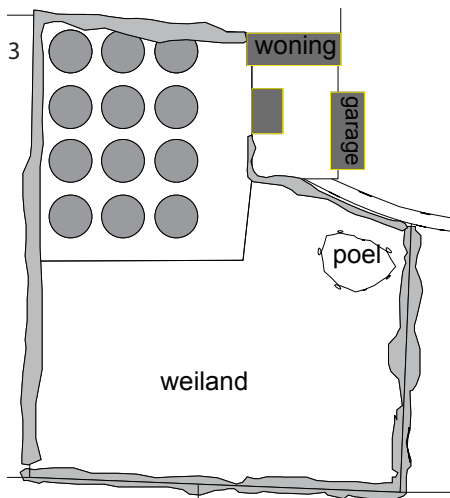
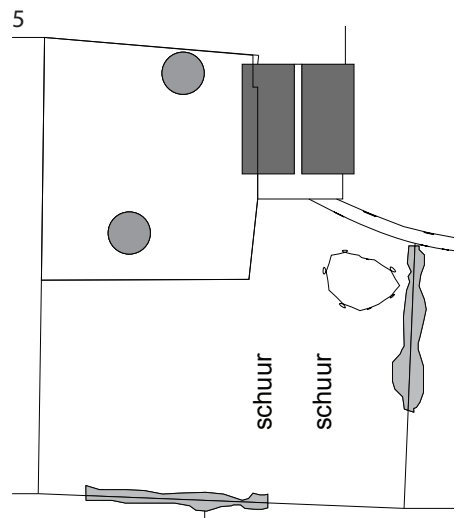
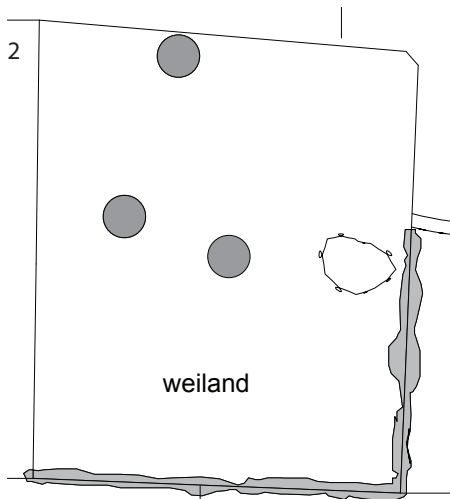
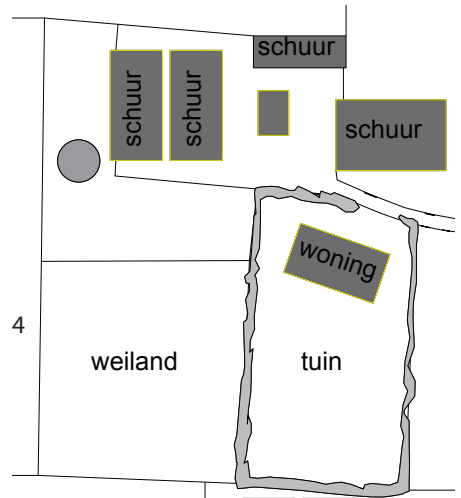
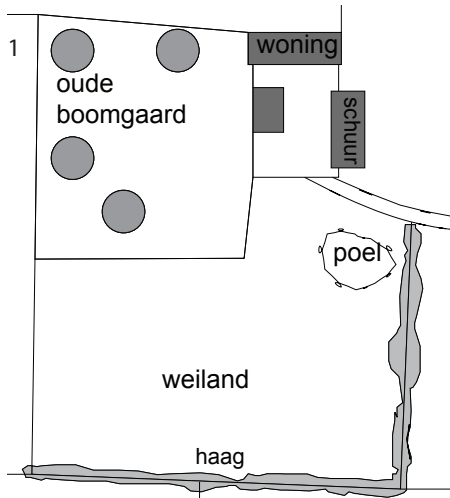


Typisch landbouwbedrijf in het Hoppeland.

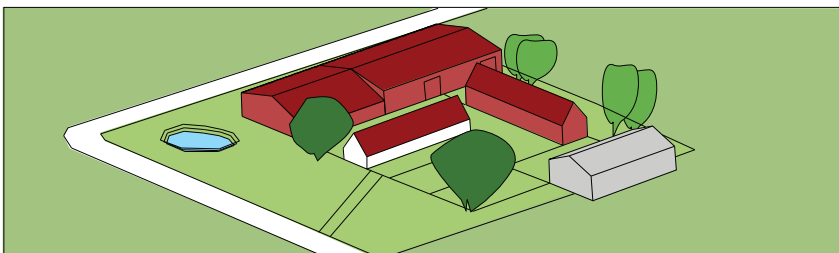
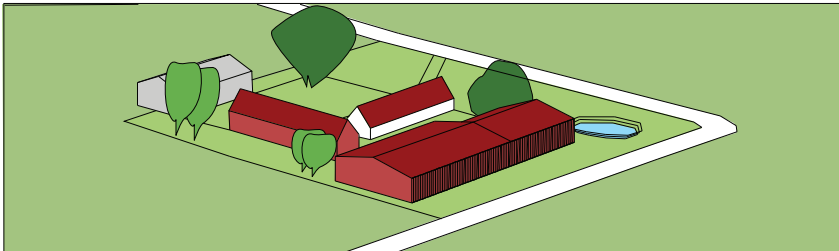
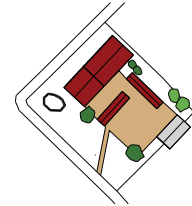
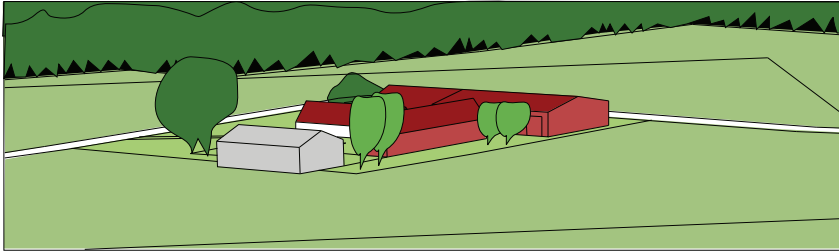
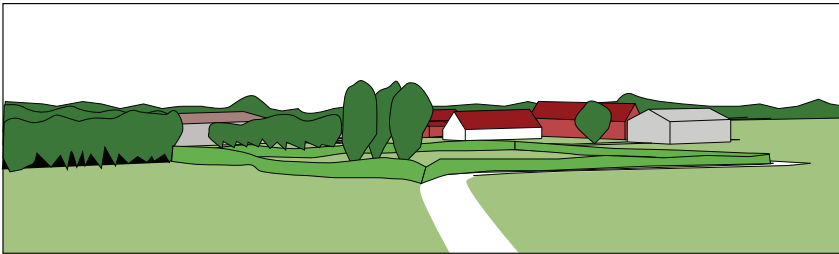
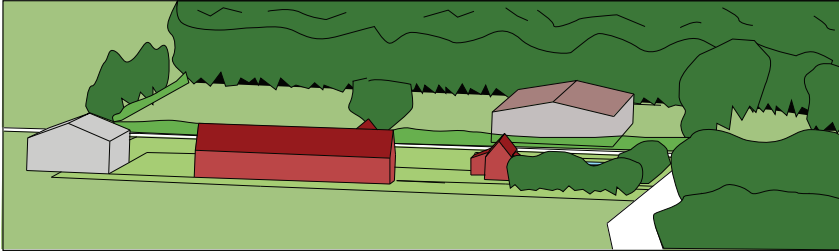
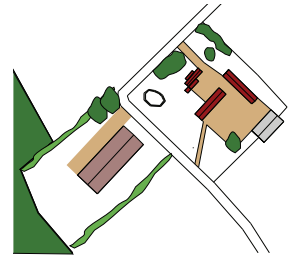
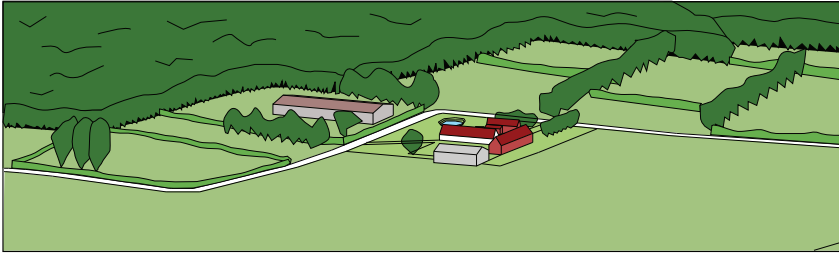
identity. A clear vision on the landscape, a research of the transformation of agricultural clusters, launching a design competition... can be regarded as structural bricks. Operational building bricks are aimed for implementations. Existing documents concerning certain aspects of regional identity, such as building alignment plans, urban regulations and other planning documents can serve as operational bricks, but also new instruments can be composed such as a manual with specific guidelines and sketches.

Finally, emancipatory building bricks can be deployed to mobilise a broader public in order to reach the aspired goals. Specific groups can be sensibilized, for example farmers or people planning to renovate their house. A knowledge platform could be the kathalysator of such a programme.

v



common transformations of farms:  
 (1) historical situation  
 (2) stopping of agricultural activities and demolishing of buildings  
 (3) transformation to residences and restoring of ancient plantation  
 (4) scaling-up of agricultural activities and dilapidation  
 (5) take-over by farmer and disappearance of residential functions



Scenario's to attune the expansion of farms to the development of the landscape

- Scenario 1: the hangar as a prefab construction, unadapted to the context of the farm. The new structure is situated, regardless of the farmyard, as a new footprint in the landscape. The ambition to consolidate nature development is used to fit these large-scale hangars in the area.
- Scenario 2: An architect is commissioned to design the hangar, considering the existing patrimony. The farm relates to the current spatial structure of the Hop Region and the historical typology of the clustered farm.