'Integrated' strategic rurban projects[1]? An overview of the dimensions of integration

Integrated approaches, integrated visions, integrated actions, integrated financial flows, integrated development, etc. etc. Is 'integration' the new vogue word? Lately, the term (or the synonyms 'united', 'combined' and 'associated') appears in all kinds of projects, planning- and policy documents, where it is being used as a catch-all concept.
Especially the last years the need to 'integrate' seems to be ubiquitous within plan and project development. Also in the social sphere the demand and attention for integration has increased (Gulinck 2007, Demeester 2006). The large diversity and the complexity of the current issues; the complexity in space, and the connected processes and structures; the continuing social, economic and political changes that takes place in quick succession and that have some repercussion in space; the culmination of new appeared needs in the open space; the close interaction of economy, environment, ecology and society; etc. are only some of the reasons why integration today is placed high on the agenda of a lot of actors. The term integration, and especially the derivative term 'integrated', is omnipresent in the planning literature. After the appearance of concepts as 'sustainability' and '(spatial) quality', 'integration' seems to have become the next buzzword. All too often, however, one is silent on the actual meaning of integration.

For this reason, this research project attempts to clarify the contents of the term integration, which according to us is central to the planning discipline, We want to put the spotlights on the term's potential and the need to use it properly. My research project is part of the larger research program SP2SP "*from Spatial planning to Strategic projects"*, which analyses ways to bridge the gap between the planning and the physical implementation of strategic spatial projects. Hence integration is analysed in the context of strategic spatial planning. We see integration as one possible way to reach a consensus about future visions for a specific area, but also as a means to implement that vision with concerted action. Integration is however not applicable everywhere and for everything. Therefore, strategic projects require thorough analysis of the problem issues and a informed choices of the way to deal with them.

To reveal the actual contents of the term integration we will first unpack the term and then use its constituent elements to build up our own definition. Integration for us is **a synergetic process where several physical, social, economic, ecologic and cultural elements or components that appear in and are relevant for a particular spatial environment, are mutually linked or combined, according to a certain hierarchy or with equal priority, in order to reach certain goals such as the creation of societal and content-related surplus-value. This process, which asks for a certain period or time, can occur with different degrees of linkage. Also, in order to be able to speak of integration, the chosen scale level is very important.**

Obviously, this general definition does not yet tell us in detail what an integrated project is. Therefore we will now focus on the reasons for the (self-)description of certain (strategic spatial) projects as 'integrated'. Are these projects really integrated or do we have to be more careful with using this term? Our empirical focus is on strategic spatial projects in rural/rurban areas. This choice is informed by the specific spatial situation in Flanders[2], which is a strongly urbanised and densely populated, resulting in a conglomerate of different spaces, each with their own specific character (some of which still display strongly rural characteristics despite the pressure of urbanisation). Another reason for this choice is the complex decision-making and implementation of spatial projects in the open space. The latter is the case amongst other because of the need for interaction between a multitude of actors, each with their own authority, requests, agenda's and instruments. Strategic spatial projects hence are in great need for integration.

'Integrated' strategic projects?

Spatial projects carry the label 'integrated' for very different reasons. For instance, some projects call themselves integrated because of the involvement of both public and private partners, others because the issue dealt with cross various (policy) domains or themes, or because of the need to combine several functions within the same area, etc.
On the basis of these reasons, a number of dimensions of integration can be defined.

Organisational integration

The first, and one of the most recurrent, reason for integration emerges from the need to organise *cooperation or consultation of actors* with different profiles, backgrounds and interests.
For example, different public actors (governments) can cooperate. This can take place both horizontally and vertically. Horizontal cooperation refers to cooperation between multiple (policy) domains and vertical integration for different (administrative) levels. In this respect, we can also speak of cross-policy, intergovernmental and interdepartmental integration.
Spatial planning often operates at the intersection of both. In most cases horizontal as well as vertical integration are necessary to complete a strategic spatial project successfully.

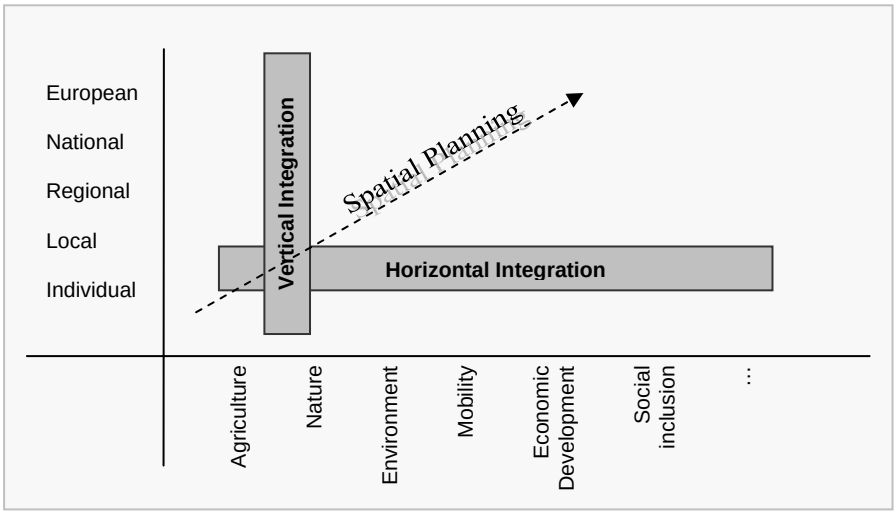

Fig. 1: Vertical and horizontal integration, and diagonal coordination of different actors and policy areas (Based on: Pegasus and Eurocities 2004, p4)

Inter-organisational cooperation between private and/or semi-public and public actors is another possibility. (De Rynck 2003) Furthermore, (representatives of) the population or the local inhabitants can be involved in such a collaboration.
If in a spatial project public and private actors cooperate in order to reach a better solution than a single actor on its own could do, we speak of organisational integration.

The 'Regional Landscapes', i.e. regions with their own identity and important natural and landscape values, are an example of organisational integration where non-profit organisations cooperate. Municipalities, provinces, the Flemish regional government and local volunteer groups are represented next to each other to perform a number of tasks for the Flemish environmental policy. For instance, they are responsible for the promotion of the regional characteristics, the nature recreation, environmental education, the joint use for recreational and other purposes of the area, the conservation and management of small landscape elements. Regional Landscapes projects (strictly spoken no strategic projects) are aimed both at horizontal and vertical integration, but focus on the environmental dimension. They are therefore not fully (horizontal or vertical) integrated projects.

The Regional Landscapes were initiated in 1990 by the nature development plan of Flanders, following the example of the German Naturparken and the French Parcs Naturels Régionaux. The concept 'Regional Landscape' received a legal base in the 1997 decree concerning the protection of Nature and the Natural Environment. The objective behind these cooperations was to link initiatives with regard to the environment and landscape protection and the development of joint use for recreational and other purposes, in order to reach effective implementation of necessary measures, more attention for the region and a broader public support. (Ministerie Vlaamse Gemeenschap 1997, Art.54; Regionale Landschappen 2006)

The Regional Landscape 'Hoge Kempen' (now Regional Landscape Kempen & Maasland vzw) was the first in its kind and originated on July 1, 1990 from cooperation between 'Natuurreservaten' (now Natuurpunt) and the former coal mines 'Kempense Steenkoolmijnen NV'. The provincial government of Limburg supported the initiative from the very beginning. Not much later, 12 municipalities and 9 nature associations joined the regional landscape, and support from the Environment Department of the Flemish Government followed. The goal was to convince people that "nature conservation and development are no handicaps, but on the contrary create added value for the region". (RLKM 2007)

Procedural integration

Yet another reason to identify a project as integrated is the *presence of multiple phases in the project process* that are not followed through in a linear way but in a parallel, intertwined way. When the phases of initiation ,starting, plan-making and implementation all take place within the same project, there is procedural integration. A necessary precondition for a project to be integrated with regard to the process, both the visioning and the implementation strategy or necessary measures need to be developed within the same process. For example, when both vision and implementation? measures are negotiated simultaneously in a project developed within the scope of the integrated area-development policy. (Albrechts et al 1999a) In some cases, the development of and principles for the future management of the area are also specified.

The presence of parallel phases in a strategic process can be illustrated by the three-track approach developed by Van den Broeck (1983). (See fig 2) The three 'tracks' are (non linear) sub-processes, the rationale for the division of which lies in the different objectives and nature of the planning activities as well as in the different and complementary skills that need to be used in the process (Van den Broeck & Albrechts 2004; Van den Broeck 2004). The end result of such a process will certainly not be a blueprint master plan or a land-use plan but rather an action plan (Van den Broeck 2004).

A first working track must lead to a long-term framework with a vision of the intended development of an area; the second manages amongst others everyday life and resolves conflicts, and works on a short-term time horizon. The third track engages different actors in the co-production, planning and decision-making. Later on, a fourth track was added to achieve a more permanent process involving the 'missing' groups of actors in order to build mutual trust and understanding.

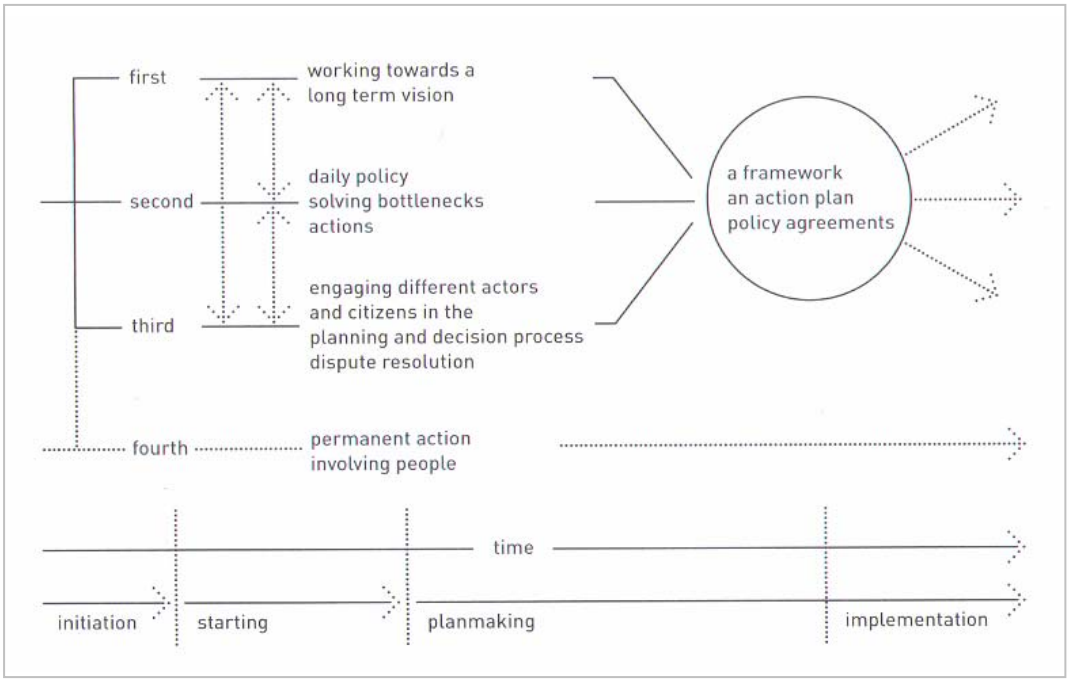

Fig. 2: The four tracks and their process components (Source: Van den Broeck, 2004, p181)

Besides the existence of several intertwined process phases, some projects carry the label integrated because of the fact that they *incorporate from the very beginning diverse factors, actors and study's* (such as a plan-MER, feasibility study and so on) in the process, in order to maximise implementation chances.

An example of the immediate incorporation of different elements in the process, are the strategic tourist projects conducted by the 'Limburgse Strategische Ontwikkelingsmaatschappij' (LISOM). Amongst others the 'Land van Ooit' at Tongeren and the former mine site in Beringen (both situated in Flanders) were developed by means of a simultaneous economic and planning process. The methodology followed by LISOM starts with a feasibility study and a test of the financing principles. If a project is considered feasible, a PPP construction according to the principle that the invested resources by LISOM are compensated with an equal amount by other public and/or private partners.

The story of the Parkbos Gent is another example that is 'mainly chronologic, but also shows that a project grows organic where must be worked simultaneously at different tracks and where some of the tracks come to an end.' (David, Vanhaeren & Vloebergh, 2005, p7). The project encompasses the organisation of a multifunctional green pole with a predominant open and green character, in and surrounded by strongly urbanised fabric (Allaert & Leinfelder 2005). The project included both a content-related visioning track, as well as a planning and decision-making process, as a participation strategy to involve farmers and other actors. These different tracks went parallel in time, but were not separated from each other. Also a number of implementation measures was taken, such as the linkage of a land compulsory plan with the 'RUP' (spatial implementation plan), and the establishment of a right of pre-emption on the castle parks.

Financial integration

If the financing of a project is made by different agencies or instances (e.g. intermunicipal company's), authorities (several sectoral subsidizing mechanisms), or programme's (such as interreg or LEADER), a financial integration can be the case.

Besides combining different financial resources, a project can also make use of cross-sector financial flows (in the majority of cases, theses flows exist of a combination of already existing support). On the Flemish level, there are very few of those initiatives.However, within the think tank for the rural area ("Denkcel Platteland") a request for a rural fund by analogy with the already existing city fund, as a lever for the integrated rural policy, was launched. (Denkcel Platteland 2004) Nevertheless, this fund has not been realised yet, despite the fact that the call for integrated financial flows such as the proposed rural fund, resounds clearer and clearer (Albrechts et al. 1999b, VLM 2006, VLM 2007a). At this moment, each sector has its own rules, objectives and credits for subsidy. On top of that, there exists a lack of attention for European funds and programmes, as a result of which not all financial possibilities are exploited. By constructing a cross-sector, and perhaps even a cross-level, credit the need to simplify and facilitate the implementation of complex projects, which can't be divided into different sectoral parts, can be met.

In the Netherlands, they did succeed in realising such a financial integration of budgets from different policy sectors. In the Investment budget for the rural area (Investeringsbudget Landelijk Gebied – ILG), which is directed by the provinces, there is money for nature, agriculture, recreation, landscape, soil, water, socio-economic vitality and reconstruction of sandy areas (with environment as integral part of every topic). The implementation of 'combined' projects by means of the traditional fragmented subsidy flows turned out to be virtually impossible (ILG 2007). This new, integrated financing source has to make this a lot easier. Before the arrival of the ILG, there was already a partial integration of financing flows for area-specific development in the 'subsidy regulation area-specific policy' (Subsidieregeling Gebiedsgericht Beleid – SGB). Contrary to the SGB, the ILG exists of an entire decentralised implementation. Funds for the rural area from the ministries of LNV, VROM, V&W and OCW are collected in the ILG. In addition it is supplemented with loans for private environmental management, European funds and exploitation benefits from land ownership. By making use of the ILG, on can avoid addressing each of the four ministries, with their sixteen subsidy schemes and a lot of rules and conditions in order to gain the necessary means to implement a project. A considerable simplification, a faster result and the end of the compartmentalization and fragmentation should be the consequences.

The project Midden-Delfland was set-up to maintain an open meadow area in the 'Randstad' of the Netherlands, which at the moment has to deal with a fast decreasing open space caused by town extensions, a lack of recreation possibilities, a stagnating development of agriculture because of a bad division in lots, and a poor water management. At the focus of attention are both spatial and non-spatial measures such as the development of a Green-blue ribbon, the establishment of a vitality fund, the funding of a soil instrument, the stimulation of 'Green Entrepreneurship' and the discourage of excess traffic (Ministerie LNV 2006, Gemeente Midden-Delfland 2007).
In the marge of this project also a 'Greenfund Midden-Delfland' was established. This fund contains a financial compensation for the implementation of green and blue services by farmers, by means of a point system. The fund is provided with financial means by the municipality Midden-Delfland itself, but also by the surrounding municipalities, an agrarian nature association and LTO department 'Delflands Groen' from the objective to maintain the agrarian cultural landscape, and to stimulate and support the strengthening of the relationship between rural and urban. (GGB 2007)

Functional/Thematic integration
Where planning in the past (postwar period, 20th century) was mainly based on the segregation of landscape functions as a result of the specialisation and the intensification of the production, today landscape multifunctionality and a well-considered assessment of segregation or integration is once again a point to focus on. (Selman & Knight, 2005) The *complex combination of multiple functions* such as agriculture, forestry, nature, recreational provisions and suchlike within a spatial project lately appears more frequently and can be a

reason to label a project 'integrated'. In some projects the functions are conflicting (functions that hinder each other in their development) but this doesn't always have to be the case. Within a project a certain function can be highlighted, but in order to be able to speak of functional integration, sufficient attention for the remaining functions, and especially for the relationships and correlations between the functions, has to exist. The mere presence of different functions is therefore not sufficient to speak of integration.
It is also possible that is worked with a *combination of different themes* in stead of functions, such as renewal of the town centre, liveability, spatial reorganisation, erosion control, rural water purification, etc. In these cases, we rather speak of thematic integration.

In the suburbs of the French Lyon a combination of high-tech activities, green spaces, a forest, housing and a shopping mall make up the basis for the 'Porte des Alpes' project. This site is not in the densely populated part of the urban community, its ambition is to increase the value of the "East Part" of Lyon in improving the economic development and the landscaping. Despite the unusual mixture of functions, this project is considered to be very successful. It is named after as 'best practice' in the 'Petus-practical evaluation tools for urban sustainability', (Petus 2007) both for the holistic approach as for the water management infrastructure. The combination of different functions has lead to an added value for the whole project. Economic as well as social and ecologic improvements were gained by the development of this project. It also integrates the different actors from the design stages on, it involved landscape architects already in a very early stadium, and it developed a management cell to coordinate and to follow up the responsibilities of the different partners.

Substantive integration
When the goal to handle *both the physical as the non-physical problems* is postulated, possibly a substantive integration is aimed at. The objectives to achieve, the conceptions or wishes are all combined in a common vision. Moreover, the different aspects of a certain issue are not examined separately but collective. Physical renewal is in such projects combined with social, economic, cultural and ecologic regeneration. Both spatial interventions, such as the improvement of the spatial structure of a certain area or the embellishment of a town square; and non-spatial actions such as the creation of employment, the development of the tourist sector, protection of the variety of species and suchlike, are included in the same project.

Substantive integration implies that the different visions of the actors, of the different policy domains and the involved local inhabitants or other people, need to be combined with each other. Also the results of possible studies can contribute to the construction of a common vision. From the aspiration to generate an added value on all levels, we don't aim at constructing a compromise between parties or the simple avoidance of contradictions, but at a consensus. I.e. actual substantive integration implies that on "strives for solutions where the different functions benefit from each others development" (Albrechts et al. 1999a, p71). In addition to that it is also important that the generated solution is not only accepted by all parties, it also must be a 'qualitative' solution.

In the valley of the Laakbeek-Hollebeemdenbeek in Gierle (Belgium) a project to establish a linkage of different nature areas was worked out. In this project, one puts forward that the sectoral design vision (a landscape-ecologic vision for the linkage of nature areas) needs to be reviewed to the wishes of the other sectors such as agriculture, water, forestry, hunt and landscape. This must lead to a 'integrated' vision on the area. (VVP 2004) According to us, this is not substantive integration, neither an integrated vision because of the mere 'review' of other sectoral 'wishes'. There is no guarantee that this review generates an added value for the other (policy) sectors. Moreover, the solution apparently doesn't have to be accepted by the other sectors, the review only seems to be enough.

In the level-3 project around the valley of the Leie between Wervik and Kortrijk also an 'integrated area-specific' vision was designed. (Provincie West-Vlaanderen 2005) This vision however was not just 'reviewed' against the 'wishes' of the other sectors, but was constructed on the basis of five sectoral visions. Point of attention is the fact that the mere attendance of different sectoral visions is not enough, there has to be an clear correlation or surplus value. In the project of the valley of the Leie, certain common goals were generated upfront. These goals were taken into account when constructing the integrated vision in order to gain a qualitative and common vision. Consequently, we can speak of substantive integration in this case.

What is an 'integrated / united vision'?

Several projects speak of an 'integrated vision', but not always with the same meaning in the back of their minds. For instance, it can point at combining of spatial visions of different actors into a common vision, or embedding one vision into another (broader) vision. But often one refers to the appearance (and constructive combination) of multiple (conflicting or not) functions or themes within the same spatial vision.
In order to be able to speak of an integrated vision, there must be a good balance between a shared, common vision and a qualitative vision at all times. A common vision opens up the possibility for a qualitative agreement. If stakeholders realise that different measures fit in the desired-for frame, they can also accept measures that appear less beneficial at first sight (Albrechts et al. 1999a).
Therefore, it is important to examine how the so called integrated vision was constructed. The mere combination of visions and goals of the actors, does not necessary lead to a vision where "the conceptions of the problem definition, the goals and the measures from different policy sectors and groups are coherent, or even influence each other in a positive way." (Albrechts et al. 1999b, p37)

An example of such an integrated vision can be found in the land-use procedure. In these types of projects, a vision on the desired development of the different functions is designed, in dialogue with the involved public and private actors. This vision is however limited to functions of the rural area and has to fit furthermore the requirements of the existing (legal) frames determined by the department of spatial planning ('Ruimtelijke Ordening'). A change of the original statutory use of space for instance cannot be established by the land-use instrument. Obviously, this has certain consequences for the constructed vision.

In the ROM^3-project Ghent Canal Zone three visions are collided into one integrated vision on the canal zone, in which "the coherent choices in reference to the spatial organisation, projects for economic development and measures with regard to environmental aspects are incorporated" (Albrechts et al. 1999b, p39). In other words, in this project three different visions (an economic one, a spatial one and an ecologic) are combined, and also several themes (housing and harbour, environmental qualities, necessary adaptations to the infrastructure, economic development) are integrated in the vision.
As also appears from the other examples, there exists a narrow connection between the functional and substantive integration. These links will be studied more in dept further on.

Instrumental integration
When *several instrument (for instance from different policy domains) are combined* in order to implement a vision or strategy, an instrumental integration can be the case. Besides mere combining or complementary use of different (existing) instruments ('integrated' instruments), one can also make use of 'integrating' instruments. Where *integrated* instruments are already existing instruments originating from diverse domains, from which for a specific project the useful parts are distilled and eventually assembled into a 'new' integrated instrument; *integrating* instruments are instruments that are used to obtain (a certain dimension of)

integration. An integrating instrument doesn't have to be a new instrument, it can also be an existing instrument (or instruments) from a certain policy domain that offers support for the harmonisation or realisation of objectives from other fields or of integrating objectives (Albrechts et al 1999a).

All three spatial management instruments of the Flemish Land Agency (VLM) – land consolidation, land-use planning ('landinrichting') and nature ('natuurinrichting') – claim an integrated approach. When we examine these instruments more closely, some nuance has to be made. In the 80's, the period when the land-use instrument was developed, the creation of an 'integrated approach' for the organization of the rural area was top priority from the very beginning. Moreover, the immediate cause to design such an instrument was the growing need for explicit combination of sectors when conducting a land reorganisation (Soetewey & Walpot 2005) and the need for reinforcement of all open space functions on an equal base (Demeester 2006). However, some restraints are placed on the functioning of the land-use instrument. It always has to work within the boundaries of the legal provisions such as the determined land use by the spatial planning department. Conducting a change of land use is therefore not possible when utilizing the land-use instrument. Another restrain on the 'integration' is the fact that the vision might be perceived in dialogue with other sectors or private actors, but the implementation remains very sectoral, and usually happens by means of the credits of the agriculture sector with the VLM as supervisor.
These instruments are an example of 'integrating' instruments, although mainly the land-use instrument can be labelled as integrating. Land consolidation and nature are clearly sector instruments[4], though they can anticipate on the multifunctionality of a plan area and realise as such goals from other domains. Generally speaking, integration in the context of these two instruments is only partial because the starting point for their goal remains per definition sectoral. (Soetewey & Walpot 2005)

The request for a complementary or a more integrated and flexible set of instruments for all sectors of the rural area is still very much alive. (Soetewey & Walpot 2005, VLM 2006) The existing instruments at the moment lack flexibility and are too complex in order to be anticipate to the growing complexity of projects. In addition, too little consultation is conducted with other sectors, and every sector has its own instruments, rules and subsidy schemes. The increased complexity concerning the dealt with issues, in combination with the amount of instruments, keeps the need for a flexible, integrated set of tools alive.

The fact that the current complexity of (sectoral) instruments obstructs the implementation of strategic projects, can be illustrated by means of obtaining the necessary permits. An 'integrated' permit that crosses different policy sectors does not exist in Flanders. Because of this, it is possible that a certain project receives a building permit from the spatial planning department, but in the case of deforestation according to the forest decree also an exemption from the Minister of Environment is necessary. Also the environment decree can be an obstacle for the implementation of the project and is able to declare the building permit invalid on the basis of the 'stand still' principle. In 2006 the environmental permit was linked to the building permit, as a result of which the building permit (in case that an environmental permit is necessary) is only executable when all procedures (advises, recommendations, 'Raad van State', etc) have passed. Also contradictory legislation of the different sectors can be a serious obstacle. The spatial planning department therefore can approve projects and deliver permits, but the other public and private actors need to be taken along in the process. Mainly legal certainty plays an important role in this respect.

Spatial integration

Some projects call themselves integrated because a physical spatial integration appears. For instance, projects of which the area is situated in a peripheral region, where some degree of mixture between rural and urban exists. If these specific conditions, this diversity and this

mixture are taken into account in the elaborated vision, we can speak of spatial integration. Also when from the objective of a reciprocal strengthening, several spatial qualities and characteristics are combined in the vision, spatial integration can be the case. This dimension can also be interpreted very literally and referring to the spatial embedding of certain elements, structures or functions.
Within a vision also different places and spaces can be linked, for example the linkage of a rural area with the city centre or other urban environments; the embedding of a certain area into a broader area by establishing functional links; etc. One must however keep in mind that an integrated approach covering an area as a whole is virtually impossible (Albrechts et al 1999a).

An important condition to reach spatial integration is however the continuation of the integrated vision into the physical implementation in the space. Obviously plans only do not create reality. Often the approach is 'integrated' and/or a common, qualitative vision is developed, but during the implementation the integrated aspect is lost and therefore not conducted in the space. In those cases, there is substantive and organisational integration, but no spatial integration. In order to reach a continuation of the substantive integration in the space, it is not necessary that the implementation is done jointly. However, if certain actions cannot be designated unambiguous to one (semi-public or private) actor or government, it can be helpful to consider an organisational integrated implementation.
Spatial integration is therefore very closely connected with all other dimensions of integration, not only with organisational or substantive integration as was the case in the above illustrated example.

The pilot project of the integrated rural policy in Flanders is the forest area 'de Merode'. This former private property belonged to the Princes de Merode and is situated in the 'Zuiderkempen' on the borders of the provinces Limburg, Antwerp and Flemish Brabant. The site covers approximately 1500 ha of land and encompasses mainly forest areas and agriculture areas. In 2004 the Flemish government took the incentive to buy the unique site – through the agency of the VLM – to prevent the fragmentation of the domain. The territory was resold to local actors, but only after these had committed to a charter that postulated a common management. In total this project consists of 7 projects, among which some are co-financed by Europe by means of the LIFE programme. Objectives are among others integrated area-specific rural development, reducing further fragmentation of the neighbouring areas; stimulating the social, ecologic and economic development of the region through spatial, historico-cultural, commercial and recreational developments; and all of this in constructive dialogue with the population. (VLM 2006b) Particularly the conservation and the strengthening of the spatial integration by the sale construction and the further spatial development of the area are the strong points of this project.

The aim of the Regionalpark RheinMain is to protect the open spaces between the towns and cities in the Region Rhein-Main. The park is a network of routes and places, located in the areas that were envisioned as 'protected open space' in the first regional plan of 1972. In 1991 the Regionale Grünzüge ("GreenBelt") was planned, which directly inspired the elaboration of the Regionalpark. Quality landscape and landscape identity are the keys that anchor the value of these areas in the awareness of the region's inhabitants. The park responds to a strong need for local recreation. Together with a biodiversity network the park will be a guideline for ecological compensation according to nature protection legislation. Regional park trails differ from other rural paths through their unique design and their attractions. Wherever possible, existing structures are used (paths and attractions, eg: historic gardens, monuments, industrial heritage, abandoned airport, orchards, nature reserves, wayside inns…), sometimes new elements are added (e.g. Works of art, playgrounds, pocket-parks, wells, lookout towers …). (Rhein-Main 2006)

Meta-integration

In some cases several *projects are combined and united within one common project* to reach for instance more intense cooperative bonds between the actors, to draw up a coordinating vision in an area, and to streamline initiatives. Also the opposite is possible; a certain project can be constituted of several projects, for example because of feasibility, that are not separated from each other in order to exhaust the mutual synergies.

The 'Klavertje 4' project in the Dutch Venlo illustrates this dimension of integration. In this project four separate projects were examined in a coherent way, from one spatial vision. The detached project proposals became graded up to the level of area development. From the concern to balance economic and ecologic development, the province looked for public support and brought the different public and private parties together. The actors now share the basic principles, work together to develop one regional development framework, head towards a common implementation, and reflect on possibilities to cooperate with respect to the financing of the projects (e.g. by means of a ground bank for the whole area). In the meantime, the project has also been presented as on of the 'sample projects' of area-specific development by the ministry of the VROM. As a learning point the following is quoted "The cooperation and the mutual attunement of the plans has led to a better plan for everyone. The integrated approach led to a result where the total is more than the sum of the parts." (Ministry VROM 2007a)

In the project 'coast West Zeeuwsch-Vlaanderen', another sample project of the ministry of the VROM, several governments and civil society organisations want to connect a number of projects in the area, which can -according to them- reinforce each other. Characteristic for this project is the combination of large and small tasks. Strengthening of the coastal defence and a lot of smaller projects such as land consolidation, landscape improvement and housing are combined. Lesson from this project according to the VROM (2007b) is the fact that "faith and urgency brought about an acceleration and harmonisation of the constituent projects. Among others, the fact that some financial flows became available because of the cooperation speeded up the whole project".

Summarised: dimensions of integration

In the table below an overview of the defined dimensions of integration is given. These dimensions have been arranged according to their dependence on process characteristics or substantive characteristics.

Dimensions of integration

- *meta* integration; the combination of several projects in one coordinating project

Process characteristics

- *organisational* integration of actors with different profiles, …
- *procedural* integration of parallel, intertwined phases, both vision and implementation in the same process,…
- *financial* integration of available (sectoral or private and public) resources
- *instrumental* integration of several types instruments (integrated or integrating), at diverse moments in the process

Substantive characteristics

- *substantive* integration of visions, objectives and wishes; different types of measures (spatial and non-spatial) within one vision
- *spatial* integration of places, present functions or activities in space; embedding of spatial characteristics, structures, etc.
- *functional-thematic* integration of functions and topic or themes that can be, but don't have to be, conflicting.

Finally, we also want to define a 'complex' integration. Most of the projects will not just consist of one dimension of integration, but will *combine several dimensions.* A strategic project mostly tackles complex problems, which ask for combined action of several governments, actors and organisations; which combine several functions or themes, and which require both visioning, concrete measures and the implementation of them.
Moreover, some dimensions cannot be separate in practice. For instance, obtaining substantive and/or instrumental integration requires a minimum of organisational integration (Albrechts et al. 1999a). From this respect, we will speak of a complex integration if a project is not limited to a single dimension of integration.

The aim of the project 'Mijnerfgoedsite Beringen' is the development of the former mining area in relation to the mining heritage. This development had to happen in an integrated, area-specific way, which also had to be durable. 'Integrated' was explained as "the combination of several functionalities such as housing, offices, tourism, recreation and culture" (LISOM 2006). Moreover they aimed to do this with attention to the relationship between the town Beringen and the other former mining municipalities. The project had to be durable in the sense that the social fabric of the immediate environment, as well as the economic liveability of the constituent projects and the ecological carrying capacity of the area are taken into account. In this project both the functional and substantive dimension of integration appear, therefore we can speak of complex integration.

We can now also pose the question what are these mutual relations between the different dimensions on the one hand, and on the other when is a project really integrated, i.e. this is a question towards the degree of integration. These questions will be discussed briefly in the following.

Genuine integrated strategic projects?

Now we know the dimensions of integration, let us return to our basic question what is an integrated project. It is definitely not the case that all projects that call themselves integrated inevitably also are. Also the opposite is valid, some projects are good integrated projects but don't label themselves as such.
Not all projects are always entirely integrated (meaning possessing all dimensions of integration), often the integration is only partial, containing one or several dimensions.

Whether a project really deserves the label 'integrated', therefore dependents on the degree of integration. This degree of integration is linked to the formulated dimensions. But also these dimensions can appear in a certain 'degree'. Therefore a number of assessments have to be made, which will determine whether a project can be labelled 'integrated' to a certain degree or not.
Among others we can look at the degree of openness with reference to the integration of actors, or the degree of integration with regard to the creation of a common vision, e.g. comparing the conceptions before and after the project. Are there already shared visions on beforehand or were the conceptions conflicting, is there a shared vision supported by all actors afterwards, etc. Also the degree of continuation of the (integrated) visioning in the implementation (to what extent the physical implementation is still integrated); the degree of instrumental integration (which instruments were used and in what way); the degree of substantive integration (can be tested by examining for example if coherent documents were made up and approved by the actors); etc. are all factors in order to determine the degree of integration of a project.

Also, often one speaks of 'integral' projects or an 'integral' approach, whereas in fact integrated is meant. A detailed concept definition is therefore necessary. In the project

Midden-Delfland for example one claims such an 'integral' approach because nature, agriculture and recreation are tackled together. In the first place it seems difficult to handle an area of 6600 ha in an integral way, and on top of that such an area also includes other functions such as mobility and transport, care and services, and housing that are not embedded in the development vision. Therefore, one cannot talk about an integral approach; but one can speak of an integrated one. The functions that do appear, reinforce each other by being incorporated in one vision; there exists cooperation between both public and private actors who wouldn't obtain an equivalent result when acting on their own, etc. Terminology therefore turns out to be equally important when examining 'integration'. Moreover we must always take into account that labelling or identifying something as 'integrated' or not, is strongly linked with the person who defines it, and also with to the context or frame of reference in which it takes place.

Conclusions

In order to create a thriving project a number of crucial factors can be listed that decide whether a project was successful or not. Examples are for instance a strong project leader, involving all important parties, a good analysis of the area and its problems and needs, a good time balance, a good internal and external communication, sufficient political feasibility, creativity, etc. etc. (See Soetewey & Walpot 2005, Albrechts et al. 1999a & 1999b, Landelijke Gilden, VLM & Kenniscentrum PPS 2006)
In order to create a successful *integrated* project however, a number of additional factors are necessary, among which elements such as avoiding exclusive sector-specific objectives, a sufficient interest of other actors and a willingness to allow others on their domain, and above all the choice of the most suitable method to the handle the issues. After all, it is important that one does not opt to conduct an 'integrated' project, just because this is now fashionable, since it is not always the most appropriate strategy. Moreover integration usually implies a complex process with high requirements to the design and the construction of the common, qualitative vision. The design must reflect and incorporate the diversity of interests and challenges, and has to ensure a certain coordination and timing. On the other hand conducting such a process offers the possibility to attract extra financial resources but also knowledge, it draws attention to the own problems, it reduces the risk that a certain party or actor (e.g. a dissatisfied landlord) was not involved but nevertheless feels involved can slow the project down, etc. Also the observation that the generic legislation for a certain situation is not wished for or is not feasible, can be a reason to proceed to integration. (Albrechts et al. 1999a) Therefore, the starting point and the analysis of the problem issues are very important when preparing an actual project.

This exploration of the dimensions of integration is only the first step towards an exploration of the possibilities and the meaning of integration. Further research questions build further on the exploration of the dimension spatial integration, and the coherence and interaction with constructing an integrated vision. Among others we think of questions such as: How can we express integration in the form of concepts and attractive images that work contagiously and are understandable for every actor? How can we come to a continuation of an integrated vision when implementing it in space? How can a better integration of the different policy sectors and legislations led to a more certain and smoother implementation, and how can we achieve this? How can the different instruments, plans, decrees, etc. be adjusted? Do we still need new integrated plans, permits, etc.?

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[1] A strategic project is an urban development project, directed by the government in close cooperation with civil society actors and the private sector. These projects have an impact on a broader area and pursuit economic, as well as ecologic and socio-cultural objectives. According to Albrechts (2006, p. 1492) *"Strategic projects aim to integrate the visions, goals and objectives from different policy sectors, as well as the ambitions and goals of the private sector. It also aims to integrate the inhabitants and users of the area. In this way these projects are transformative and integrative."*
We speak of strategic 'rurban' projects, because of the focus of the research on the 'open space' issues in Flanders. See endnote 2.

[2] During the last century, the rural area in Flanders changed significantly (De Roo et al, 1999). Evolutions such as a growing population, suburbanisation and an increasing complexity caused a shift from production into production and consumption space. Today new functions, such as nature, recreation, landscape conservation, water management, housing and new types of economic activities appear. This development arose in a more or less unplanned manner, parallel with the suburbanization of economic activities and households. Urban functions slowly invaded rural areas (referred to as 'rurbanization'). They had a strong spatial dimension, resulting in a scattered and fragmented landscape, which can be considered neither urban, nor rural. Therefore, we speak of 'rurban' areas, to indicate that these areas can contain intensive or extensive agriculture as well as suburb housing, as nature areas, recreational areas, industrial zones, etc.

[3] The ROM - approach was introduced in 1988 by the Ministry of the VROM in the Netherlands. This experiment had to tackle complex problems within the fields of spatial planning and environment. It was revolutionary for the integration of different parties and the linkage between several policy sectors. (ROM Rijnmond 2007) These informal processes must lead to an integrated vision and an action plan. The name 'ROM' reflects the integration of three different lenses: 'RO' stands for spatial planning (*Ruimtelijke Ordening*), and the 'M' for environment (*Milieu*). (Albrechts & Van den Broeck, 2004)

[4] The land consolidation instrument was developed in the fifties to meet the need to reorganise the agrarian structure in order to obtain a more efficient production landscape. A fairly unilateral economic approach laid on the basis. During time however the attention for other functions and values of the rural area increased. In the seventies nature protection suddenly placed high on the agenda and the land consolidation instrument was adapted for a first time. Today land consolidation 'new style' are being carried out, where the area is developed 'integral and durable' in all its facets (VLM 2007b). New aspects such as the care for landscape, nature, forest, heritage, etc. are now taken into account. However, this instrument is predominantly used in areas with a mainly agricultural land use. The underlying economic - agrarian objective therefore remains present.

The instrument 'nature' for the conservation, restoration and development of nature, was only established in the nineties. In principle a common land consolidation – nature instrument was necessary at that moment, but previous dispute and a still existing tension between the agriculture and nature sector prevented this. (Peeters 2006)