

# AMSTERDAM'S DIEMER TERRITORY: Mapping Co-productions

**Karl Beelen**

*Urban Design and Planning Unit,  
TU/e Eindhoven University of Technology, Netherlands*

## ABSTRACT

Europe's cities are changing. Though not as breathtaking and overwhelming as elsewhere in this world, the transformation of its urban areas clearly points to forces that are as fundamental and irrevocable, in Europe as elsewhere. Its extensive local tradition of state-induced planning has increasingly come under stress through liberal reforms compounding with the forces of capital and globalization – forces which it seeks to benefit of as well as compensate for. In urban design, the question of who produces the city and its environment, has therefore become more than just a marginal issue. As the production of the physical urban space increasingly takes shape through an interplay (a so-called co-production) of many actors and agents, urban design is increasingly having to face up to this challenge.

The paper focuses on issues of urban design within a larger urban territory, situated on a regional scale. It draws on research carried out in and around the city of Amsterdam (Holland), and focuses on the urban disciplines changing position within this particular European context. Starting from current practices covering Amsterdam's urban fringe, it will try to contextualize these efforts, putting them into perspective with the development of what essentially still is *peri*-urban space: a regional territory in between urban centers that defies clear representation and delineation. The question will be raised how and to what extent the urban disciplines (urban design and urbanism) can be seen to contribute to this elusive territory. Starting from a range of interpretative maps and schemes, this text will try to define an alternative approach. It redefines the territory as a feasible field for design interventions, thereby assessing

design's agency in terms of the shared interests and possibilities that it might allow to open up.

Peri-urban developments epitomize, to a certain extent, the current state of urban planning in Holland. Operating in the periphery of central city developments, its piecemeal and rather discontinuous development comes about in spite of the country's extensive tradition in planning and collective scheme-making. For many decades, city planners have been working hard to contain Amsterdam as a city within clear formal bounds. However, the plans that try to keep the city's wider regional territory to an order currently seem driven by failure of containment and control than by adaptation to development forces. This current paradox in planning lies at the heart of developments in the urban fringe. As the region becomes a growing arena of planning aspirations – market forces and institutional forces of all sorts and sizes – these developments also question the urbanist *métier* itself, casting doubt on its devices and their remaining agency. This paper, therefore, goes by the assumption, that as the 'overall plan' becomes more and more implicated, there will be a growing need for urban design to explicitly mediate and reclaim its position within a growing field of multiple actors. Rather than any defined or demarcated physical entity, this very field of enterprises (past and present) defines the current object of urban design. It is the material terrain for both urbanism and this paper.

## INTRODUCTION

The urban environment in Holland typically provides something of a paradox when explained to outsiders. While the country's population density ranks among the highest in the world<sup>1</sup>, its cities

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1 483 inhabitants per sq. km. (Van der Schuit, J. et al. (2006) "Ruimte in cijfers 2006 [Space in figures 2006]". Ruimtelijk Planbureau, Rotterdam (In Dutch).

are far less populated than the country's density would suggest. Over the last few decades, the country's historical network of towns and cities in the West of Holland, is seen to have merged into a single continuous conurbation: a horizontal city or a 'rim city', also known as *Randstad*<sup>2</sup>. Stretching over a hundred kilometers, this super-sized idea of a larger city, however, partly hides the fact that it is still made out of small-size autonomous cores and an increasing amount of low-density extensions.

This observation points to a situation that lies at the basis of this text. Even though large parts of this conurbation are part of a single 'daily urban system,' issues of cooperation and finding common strategies for development have become real points of contention in Dutch urban planning. Predictably, as formerly separate towns and cities increasingly spill over onto neighboring fields of authority, institutional tensions are likely to arise. Locally, the concept of 'co-production' is therefore being put forward to counterbalance this evolution. It

calls for strategic coalitions between public, private and community-based partners, which are seen as a vital necessity in helping to resolve some of the outstanding tasks and assignments that typically transcend the local planning scale.

This text looks into issues of urban design on such a larger planning scale. It uses Amsterdam, Holland's capital in the north of the Randstad, as a point of focus. While briefly retracing some current practices covering Amsterdam's urban fringe, it tries to contextualize these efforts locally within the development of the city's fringe as an urban territory resisting representation and delineation, but most of all as an arena of hesitant aspirations. The question will be raised how and to what extent the urban disciplines – urban design and urbanism – can be seen to contribute to this territory as an elusive field of design intervention. For this end, these practices will be put into perspective using a more tentative approach.



**Figure 1:** Location of Amsterdam and the Diemer case area in Holland.  
(Source: Own image)

2 This 'rim city', which is named after its doughnut-shaped contour, currently houses about seven million inhabitants. On the north end of this rim-shaped city lies the city of Amsterdam, itself presently containing about 750,000 people within its municipal boundaries.

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Focusing on a specific location within Amsterdam's urban fringe, urban design's current potential will be explored through a mapping approach. This exemplary location lying to the east of Amsterdam (referred to as the Diemer wedge), serves as a starting exercise investigating the practical implications of an urbanist approach that seeks to address the peri-urban fringe.

### PLANNING'S AFFLICTED AGENCY

Compared to other urban areas in Holland, Amsterdam consists of a largely compact urban environment. Although the official city rhetoric tends to pride itself on this retained compactness in shape as well as on the ease with which citizens can access the surrounding countryside, the larger urban territory<sup>3</sup> can be seen to consist of increasing amounts of construction. As far as public perception goes, continuing initiatives and intrusions such as housing developments, industrial estates, and road infrastructure are silting up the clarity of the city's surrounding open spaces.

Part of this has to do with changes that can be noticed in many urbanized areas – changes that are due to the decline of small land holdings in the city's 'rural' fringe. As the economic base of agriculture erodes, larger tracts of land are traded in for tourism, recreation and real-estate developments. Rising awareness of this situation has led to an increasing consensus that combined action is necessary to help shape and direct the future of these areas. In itself, this consensus is nothing new. Dutch planning doctrine has been known to try and shape the future of similar areas for many decades, be it starting from a decisively larger, mostly centralist, national scale (e.g. Holland's 'Green Heart' concept, which is tantamount to a large body of planning devices developed under the welfare state).

What is distinctly special about the current rising awareness, however, is its prominence on a local planning level. This is reflected in the rising popularity of the regional landscape and in a current urge for action. In Amsterdam, as much as elsewhere in Holland, issues concerning these regional landscape and their protection have recently come to underscore urban planning considerations. Amsterdam's municipal planning department (DRO) is poised to protect the city's surrounding open spaces and has produced a considerable number of documents to support this intention. Distinctly remarkable about these initiatives is their shift beyond the local planning level as a necessary point of departure. Nonetheless, lacking the welfare state's highly centralized planning environment, these planning initiatives face their own difficulties in trying to working across a larger scale or territory, as will become clear later on.

In aspiring to work on a larger scale, however, local planning instruments are not the only ones facing problems. Also larger-scale plans, such as the ones tried historically, or even more recent planning devices are currently complicated and rendered less effective<sup>4</sup>. This happens for a number of reasons, one of which is clearly institutionally bound. In comparison with other European countries, the extent to which the Dutch environment is shaped by public intervention is still astonishing<sup>5</sup>. Although it should be noted that government influence is diminishing, physical developments are inevitably and fundamentally conditioned by the powers of government to intervene. This is ultimately the case in the city's urban 'fringe': an indefinable entity that is nonetheless conditioned by many superimposed policies and regulations concerning its use and exploitation. Plans focusing on this emerging 'peri-urban' field (i.e. interstitial open spaces on the edge of urban developments), are compelled to

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- 3 The notions of region, territory, landscape, and arena all tend to be very flexible. In this text I will hold on to the use of territory, mainly because it carries a sense of being organized by a multitude of forces without having or displaying obvious formal unity (Kwinter, 2001: 6). In this sense, it exceeds landscape (ibid.) and region both in expanse and depth. Arena will be used to indicate the varying arrangement of actors and forces, private, public or semi-public, that determine developments and thus the physical environment per se. Region, finally, will be used only sparsely to infer on areas and developments that extend beyond the local planning perimeter.
  - 4 I'm referring to typical Dutch planning devices such as the provincial authorities' *Streekplan* (regional plan) or the city-region's *Structuurvisie* (structural plan).
  - 5 Faludi, A and A. Van der Valk (2007) *Part 1: Background*, in: M. Wegener, K. Button and P. Nijkamp (eds.), "Planning History and Methodology", Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, Cheltenham, pp. 174-189.

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do so over a substantial number of institutional frames. Disconcertingly, this number is unlikely to drop in the near future. The returning political quest in Dutch politics, of re-adjusting planning levels to reflect the appropriate scale and extent of spatial developments, has hardly led to a decrease in institutional stratification, but, arguably so, rather to the inverse. In a bid to reform planning institutions, national planning authorities have devoluted considerable control to lower provincial and city-region levels in order to deal with regional planning demands<sup>6</sup>. This move came with simultaneous reforms handing extensive responsibilities to local communities<sup>7</sup>. In these recent policy guidelines, the local planning level is deemed more relevant and in touch with local developments, and thus considered more capable in responding accurately to spatial change. Rather matter-of-factly, broader overall plans focusing on larger developments thus inevitably and increasingly cut through any number of institutional frames and borders. Ultimately however, the environment is not shaped by public intervention alone. Being part of a market democracy, Holland's physical environment remains the result of co-production between public and private actors. On top of the previously mentioned local scales and borders have come a rising number of parties – social advocacy groups as well as environmental ones – not forgetting the influence of private and corporate development capital.

Apart from this shifting field of operation, other reasons for this decline in efficiency on the larger scale might be seen as more fundamental. Feeding into the predicament of contemporary urban planning and design is not just a shifting field of operation but also a changing urban condition. This shifting urban condition has been the subject of a number of critics feeding into a debate on the

re-interpretation of current European urban territory. Many of these writings however - ville franchisee<sup>8</sup>, métapolis<sup>9</sup>, Zwischenstadt<sup>10</sup> - are understood to offer appreciations ex post facto<sup>11</sup>, rather than offering approaches ex ante. While it is too optimistic to believe that such theory would find direct access into theory-in-use, these notions are still not seen to have delivered satisfactory remedial solutions to the current state of urbanism<sup>12</sup>, leaving largely undefined what actions are to be taken.

### **METROPOLITAN AMBITIONS - THE GREEN METROPOLIS**

One of the schemes recently put forward by the Amsterdam Planning Department, is the Green Metropolis scheme. Like many of these recent documents, it has no legal status and thus merely serves as an internal planning exploration of the larger urban territory. Still, the scheme is significant for two practical reasons. Firstly, it merits attention because it bears witness of a series of attempts crossing from a routine level of local planning into the lesser charted terrain, i.e. the region and its urban fringe. Secondly, because it provides a helpful context to the case study that will be addressed towards the end of this text.

Recent years have seen an upswing in schemes exploring the city's external landscape as a means to address its regional arena. While their approach and focus may differ, ranging from an entrepreneurial focus to one that is more akin to comprehensive planning, these schemes have started to explore less established tools and planning devices. Regardless of these differences in approach, they all seem prone, however, on carrying out the concept of Amsterdam's so-called metropolitan landscapes. The concept is remarkable

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6 Gieling, S. (2006) "[Amsterdam's urban form]." PlanAmsterdam 1. Dienst Ruimtelijke Ordening Gemeente Amsterdam, Amsterdam (In Dutch).

7 Van der Schuit, J. et al. (2006) "Ruimte in cijfers 2006 [Space in figures 2006]". Ruimtelijk Planbureau, Rotterdam (In Dutch).

8 Mangin, D. (2004) "La Ville Franchisée: Formes et structures de la ville contemporaine [The franchised city: forms and structures of the contemporary city]". Editions de la Vilette, Paris (In French).

9 Ascher, F. (1995) "Métapolis, ou, L'avenir des villes [Metapolis, or, the future of cities]". Editions O. Jacob, Paris (In French).

10 Sieverts, T. (1999) "Zwischenstadt, Zwischen Ort und Welt, Raum und Zeit, Stadt und Land [Cities Without Cities: Between Place and World, Space and Time, Town and Country]". Birkhäuser Verlag, Basel (In German).

11 Girot, Ch. (2006) *Vision in Motion: Representing Landscape in Time*, in: C. Waldheim (ed.) "Landscape Urbanism". Princeton Architectural Press, New York, p. 93.

12 Ibid, p. 94.



**Figure 2:** 'Hand-shaped' city projected on the current map of the Amsterdam region. (Source: Own image and Amsterdam Planning Department (DRO) 2007)

for being more than a deliberate oxymoron. Most of all, the concept reveals some of the significance that is being accredited to regional planning issues. Strictly speaking, Amsterdam *has* no landscapes within its city limits, so the ones it is referring to lie outside its perimeter. In doing so, the scheme's implied field of action surpasses that of its jurisdiction, the local planning level.

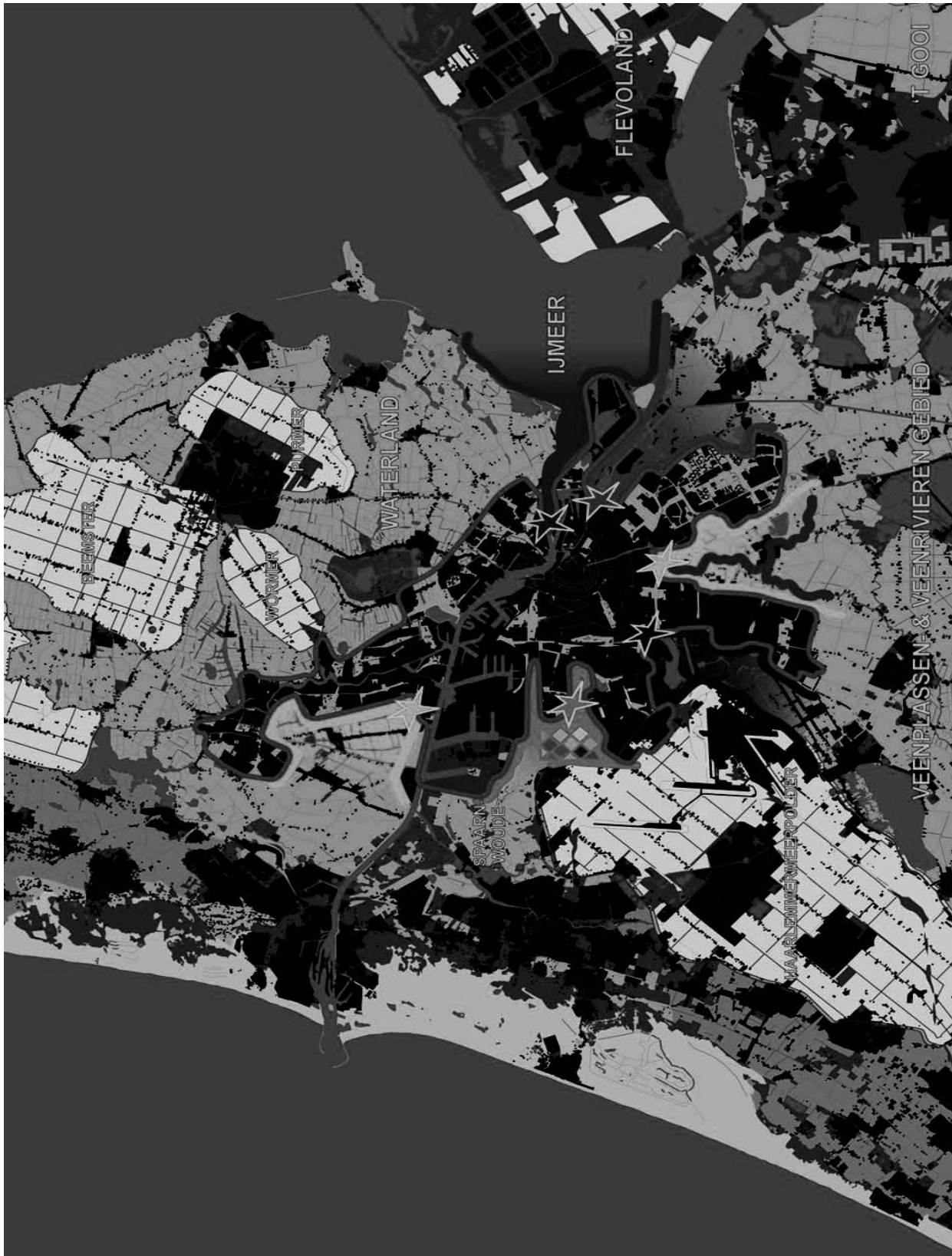
In essence, the Green Metropolis scheme is based on the figure of Amsterdam's alleged finger-city form, a hand-shaped figure of interlocking fingers (construction) and wedges (open spaces)<sup>13</sup>. Tracing a clear contour between both, the scheme's legibility obviously draws on an interplay of figure and ground through which it tries to seek leverage over today's increasingly blurred city-country divide. In this sense, the scheme mimics earlier land-use planning traditions dating back to the well-known overall extension plan (AUP) of 1935, which is credited to lie at its basis. Rather than trying to implement an updated version of the

finger-city, however, the main goal of the Green Metropolis lies elsewhere. It concentrates on the imaginative qualities of the adjoining landscapes by putting these on the map as verifiable entities and seeks to redefine the regional peri-urban landscape as basically an issue of conserving an array of green 'wedges,' coincidentally lying right next to a major city bent on calling itself a metropolis.

One can pose the question, however, as to whether the Green Metropolis provides an accurate reading of the region's present dynamics. Within planning, literature authors have pointed out the risks of such simplified representations in trying to 'somehow un-problematically capture the multiple space-time subjectivities of a city.'<sup>14</sup> On the whole, the regional landscape is approached as an abstract container, whereby it fails to engage the material aspects of its various sites. To state the obvious: the outward appearance of fingers and wedges does not necessarily relate to on-going

13 Although the terms of 'finger' and 'wedge' would surface only later, the General Extension Plan or 'AUP' by Cornelis van Eesteren strongly opposed concentric expansion of the city and advocated expanding the city through lobe-shaped extensions interlocking with large open spaces.

14 Graham and Marvin 2001.



**Figure 3:** The Green Metropolis.  
(Source: Amsterdam Planning Department (DRO) 2007)

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developments nor correspond coherently to the actual forces structuring those developments. Lacking to provide any clearer understanding of the territory, the scheme thus most likely also passes up opportunities related to these sites. More crucially, considering the 'landscape' to be a backdrop out of which the city might somehow be carved, passes by on much of this landscape's potentials in design. As Pollak argued, '[f]or landscape to be an agent, implies that it is not only present but also active and exerting power, rather than functioning as a passive backdrop.'<sup>15</sup>

The Green Metropolis merely appropriates the landscape, which is dug up as a narrative and, arguably so, chiefly serves as a detour into the regional *arena*, rather than a terrain as such. It allows the local planning level to propel its own concerns beyond its proper circle of authority. This distant view on realities on the ground itself fits in an approach that is mainly process-oriented, top-down, and focused on addressing the regional arena by carrying policy measures through a framework of structural planning to a level of project definition. Clearly, the scheme does not reveal, nor intend to reveal any specific spatial knowledge of the areas in question.

Consequently, the position of design itself remains muddled, or even fully out of focus. In the following section, this current position of design is taken up more closely. To this end, the idea of 'reclaiming' provides a convenient point of entry. It serves as a working expression to help come to a clearer understanding of what design in these areas might consist of. In the context of a territory and an arena that are intrinsically in flux, the Diemer case will work from a hypothesis on how design might assist in a better understanding and handling of these areas.

## THE DIEMER CASE

"Reclaiming landscapes requires one to abandon the idea of designing landscapes as finalized objects

or images and instead adopt a design approach engaged with open-ended ecological processes."<sup>16</sup>

Reclaiming, i.e. making land suitable for building, goes back quite a bit further than the phenomena described in Alan Berger's seminal text "Reclaiming the American West"<sup>17</sup>. Investigating strip mining and large-scale dereliction in the American Midwest, Berger explored the concept rather evocatively, re-appropriating it in the context of landscape and the current American (r)urban territory. Historically, reclaiming has played an equally important role in the Amsterdam context. Land reclamation schemes like Lake IJssel and the Delta Works feature prominently in Dutch planning history, which has always engaged strongly in strategic projects<sup>18</sup>. This way, reclamation projects have taken a large stake in the development of the city's wider physical environment. Historically however, reclaiming land was never a one-off action, but involved many cycles in which land was given up and re-claimed by water, thereby changing the topography and the extent of urbanization repetitively over history. This prominence of land reclaiming in historic spatial developments, on the other hand, is not reflected in current interpretations of the resulting areas. The undertow of change and instability that was implicitly present in the continuing process of reclaiming land, has since largely moved out of focus, especially in planning representations of today's territories. Sustaining only the final and most stable part of that evolution, the Green Metropolis scheme, as discussed earlier, serves as just one example of such regional representations. The alleged 'metropolitan landscapes' that it pictures so prominently, are disclosed primarily through the legend on the map. This should not come as too much of a surprise. Using the map as a kind of graphic shorthand, the scheme does not disclose any specific spatial knowledge as such - nor does it intend to do so. It merely reclaims the surrounding landscape for policy intervention. For this end its image is frozen to a distant point in the future, namely 2030.

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15 Pollak, L. (2006a) *The landscape for Urban Reclamation. Infrastructure for the everyday space that includes nature*, in: "Lotus International", No. 128, pp. 32-40. Milan.

16 Berger, A. (2002) *Reclaiming the American West*, in: "Praxis". No. 4, pp. 82-93. Cambridge MA.

17 Ibid.

18 Faludi, A and A. Van der Valk (2007) *Part 1: Background*, in: M. Wegener, K. Button and P. Nijkamp (eds.), "Planning History and Methodology", Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, Cheltenham, pp. 174-189.



**Figure 4:** Location of the case area within the Amsterdam region.  
(Source: Own image)



**Figure 5:** The Diemer Wedge case area.  
(Source: Own image)



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This limited spatial grasp of planning schemes on a regional level points to the difficulties of implementing design within environments where co-production and co-operation (or the absence of it) become decisive issues. As Pollak pointed out: "The idea that a designer is explicitly moving without absolute power relates to a shift in design towards operational approaches that emphasize performance rather than, or in addition to, a formal language."<sup>19</sup>

Approaching design from this performative rather than formalist point of view, the maps and drawings of the Diemer case that I will refer to below, investigate this area's current potential within the Amsterdam urban fringe. As a case-study, they serve to illustrate to what extent this area can be reclaimed for design and turned into a container of additional interpretations. It is a design approach that, at least to some extent, can be observed also in Berger's reclaiming approach. According to Berger, design is essentially an act of 'revealing the invisible'<sup>20</sup> and from there on to 'plot a trajectory for the future of these mining sites.'<sup>21</sup> The recovering of these sites thus amounts to more than simply putting forward a final shape or 'design' for a certain area. Instead, it is crucially about plotting out a trajectory: of constructing a resilient course into a new future of these sites. Both ends of the equation - the revealing of the sites and their future trajectories - thus operate on a kind of knowledge or understanding of the territory that can be put to work. The basic premise underlying this text, then, is a double one. By trying to read patterns in the territory, it is assumed that a certain constitutive knowledge or certain conceptions (figures, patterns, etc.) can be deduced from that reading. Secondly, it assumes that this knowledge might also be used to induce: to extend certain patterns or to produce new ones on the grounds itself. Taken as one, these hypotheses essentially amount to an approach that seeks to 'reclaim, rather than to conquer.'<sup>22</sup>

So how does the above translate into the topographies of Amsterdam's urban fringe? No doubt, this topography could not be more dissimilar to the conflicted sites of the American mined-out West. Typically for this location in the west of Holland, a large part of this peri-urban topography consists of formerly reclaimed sites. This does not exempt them from further changes, however. Their position within many spheres of influence currently puts these areas under a considerable amount of stress. As a rule, there will be many contradictory claims and tasks competing over these sites - housing areas, storage facilities, industrial plants, dairy farms, sites for water storage, highways, natural areas, etc. These are part and parcel of the complexities of Amsterdam's regional arena, and more often than not, these claims cross over many borders into different lands and properties.

Urban design has to find a way to perform in this contemporary arena. Within Amsterdam's peri-urban arena, the Diemer Wedge area takes up a highly emblematic position. It easily serves as a prototypical case allowing to reflect on the potentials of urban design within such settings. A much-debated area on the city skirts of Amsterdam, the area derived its name from being wedged in between two finger-shaped extensions of Amsterdam's finger-city plan. Partly still fixed between lake *IJ* and the southeastern city-district of the *Bijlmer*, the Diemer 'green wedge' presently lies in the middle of the region's main band of economic growth. As this band of development, stretching from Haarlemmermeer through Amsterdam to Almere in northeast, accumulates many of the region's developments, it also puts high amounts of pressure on the Diemer Wedge. Due to the area's ecological qualities, its position linking Amsterdam to Almere, and the extent of housing developments nearby, this on the whole, an open area has become a main focus of ecological, infrastructural and housing concerns. The Diemer wedge's location within the region's primary band

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19 Pollak, L. (2006a) *The landscape for Urban Reclamation. Infrastructure for the everyday space that includes nature*, in: "Lotus International", No. 128, Milan, pp. 32-40.

20 Berger, A. (2007) *Entropic indicators and waste strategies*, lecture held at the Technical University of Eindhoven, Urban Wastelands Conference, November 5th 2007.

21 Ibid.

22 Marot, S. (1999) *The Reclaiming of Sites*. In: J. Corner (ed.) "Recovering Landscape: Essays in Contemporary Landscape Architecture", Princeton Architectural Press, New York, pp. 44-57.

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of development is therefore reflected in its splintered appearance: cut up by highways and split up by division-lines demarcating development, nature preservation, former rural centers and still wide-open agricultural lands.

Conversely, the area presently lacks any clear conception on a regional level: what is it structured by, what does its future consist of and where do its boundaries lie? If attention is being devoted to them at all, these questions remain consistently unresolved in most planning documents up to this day. The area therefore epitomizes the current stalemates between both private and government interests as well as various public authorities internally.

The maps and cartographies presented below work from the twofold hypothesis highlighted above. The assumption is that these mappings and representations can bring in a kind of seminal extra knowledge. For this end, they read, re-read and engage into the wedge's 'overlooked, subordinated, unrepresented, unseen, unimagined, or unpredicted assets.'<sup>23</sup> Such constant moving back-and-forth between reading, seeing, re-reading, and representing, allows for a different way of investigation, that is more 'intertextual' and based on critical assessment<sup>24</sup>. Differentiated readings of the urban territory, may indeed, as Girot pointed out: "reveal some inherited qualities from the past but may also be capable of repairing and clarifying opacities of the present. It is therefore important to plead for an open, differentiated, and non-dogmatic reading of landscape, where both past traces and potential futures can be grasped synchronously."<sup>25</sup>

In more or less overtly speculative ways, the following maps and drawings thus try to reveal the territory at hand by drawing out figures and patterns in the territory. They present two separate strings of cartographies, exposing two different

topics inscribed within the topography of the Diemer case area. That said, the aim is to extract largely hidden figures through the agency of mapping - figures that have managed to persist through time, often in spite of conflicting planning intentions.

Ultimately, however, the following maps are just a first step into this direction. They are part of an ongoing investigation into a design-based approach for these kinds of areas. The next paragraphs describe a part of the mapping work that has been done so far. By investigating the logic behind some rigid and unruly patterns in the production of the city's urban fringe, I hope this logic can be incorporated more systematically within urban planning processes. Conceiving ways of design that work 'along the grain' of such rigid patterns, allows one to plot a clearer trajectory for these areas. In the end, this mapping analysis could also assist in constructing a dialogue between actors throughout the wedge's arena; clearly, without such clear trajectories, no one is compelled to move into action.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, it should be mentioned that the two strings of maps which were worked on, do not intend to explicitly oppose any of the official schemes produced so far on the area. They could help contradict or even support some of these schemes. As most of the official schemes still stem from one predominant actor, the following maps would like to challenge this one-sidedness, and put forward mechanisms that might bridge this one-sidedness. It is presumed that such mechanics will allow design ideas to be shared more collectively.

## **MAPPING ANALYSES OF THE DIEMER WEDGE**

On a very elementary level, the following two strings of cartographies present features of the area in which the Diemer case is located. At this level, the area is presented through basic geo-

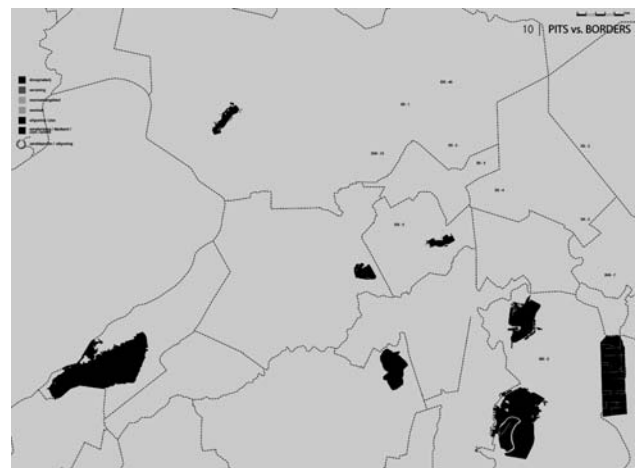
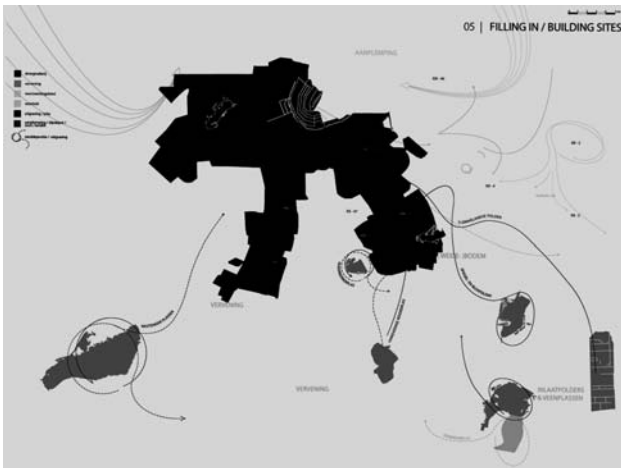
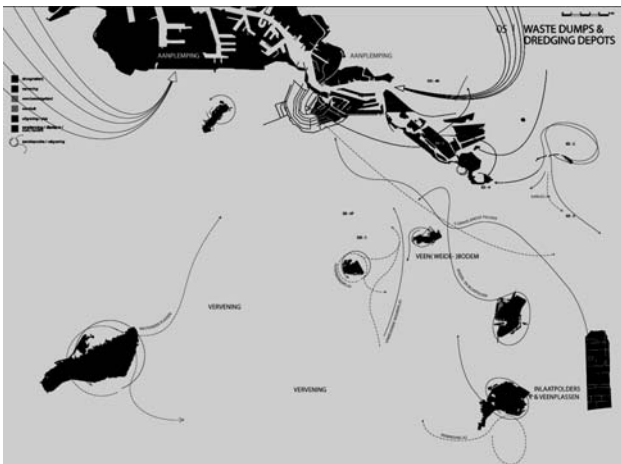
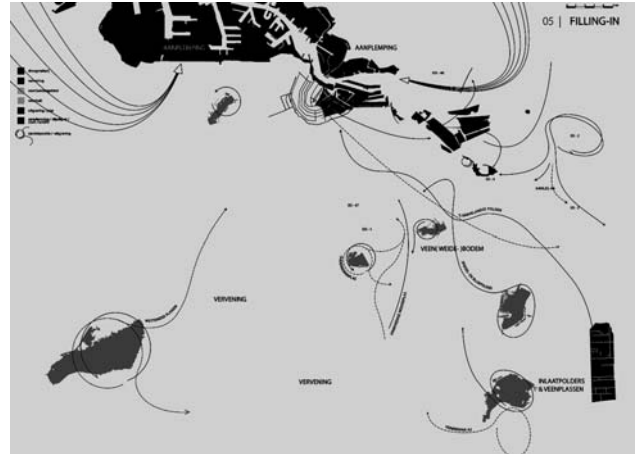
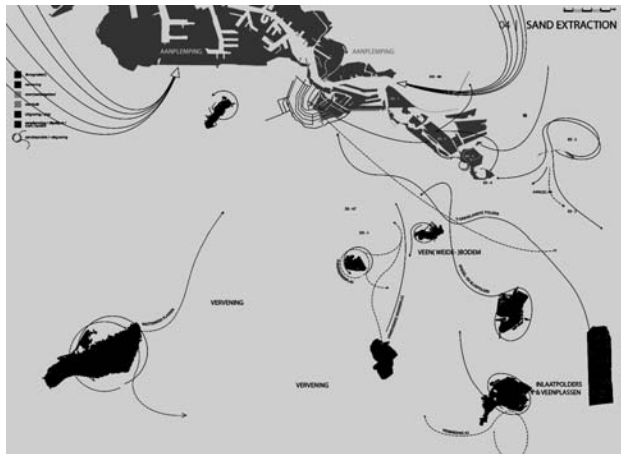
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23 Berger, A. (2002) *Reclaiming the American West*, in: "Praxis". No. 4, Cambridge MA, pp. 82-93.

24 Shannon, S.K. (2004) "Rhetorics and Realities. Addressing Landscape Urbanism. Three Cities in Vietnam". Unpublished doctoral thesis, Leuven University, Leuven.

25 Van der Schuit, J. et al. (2006) "Ruimte in cijfers 2006 [Space in figures 2006]". Ruimtelijk Planbureau, Rotterdam (In Dutch).

26 Berger, A. (2007) *Entropic indicators and waste strategies*, lecture held at the Technical University of Eindhoven, Urban Wastelands Conference, November 5th 2007.



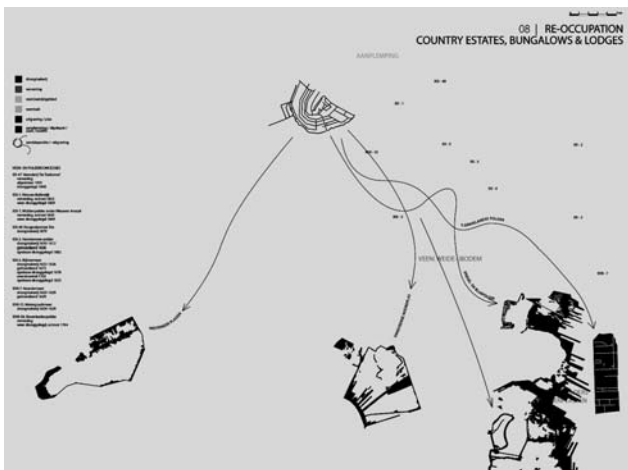
**Figure 6-11:** The First sequence of maps.  
(Source: Own image)



morphological conditions: its geographic location, its topography and the location of various composing sites. Gradually and successively, these maps are pushed further in small consecutive steps. Starting from a basic logic of how things work, the maps recombine into more intricate forms of organization. As they build into a sequence, this mapping approach recombines basic elements of observation into a territorial reading of the area. To present these forms of organization, maps are laid out and presented in two distinct series: one on sand and peat extraction and the other on water and road infrastructures. Both try to read and reveal the area in separate but related ways.

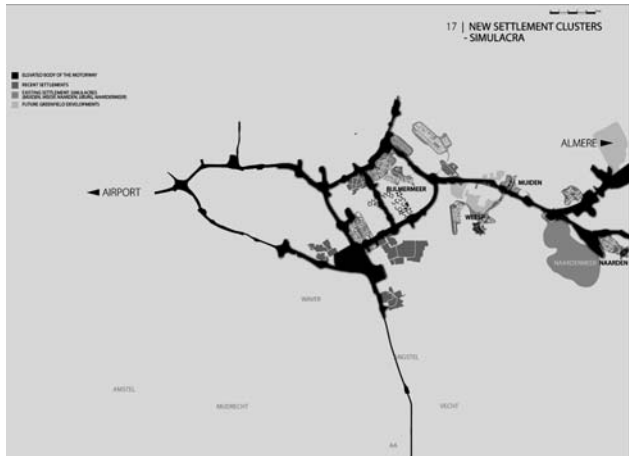


The first series presents the area itself. It tries to show that the Diemer wedge area is revealed less by the supposed edges of its wedge-shaped figure than by a collection of features on the terrain. This approach focuses on the exploitation of the land through the extraction of ground materials - sand, peat, soil, waste, sludge, dredgings and water. This sequence of mappings shows the consecutive stages of extraction and re-use over history. As these actions leave their marks on the territory, they reveal a cycle of use and re-use that determines the present state of the area. The result is a kind of figure – an arrangement of consecutive movements and additions – that presents a slightly different angle to more rooted-in conceptions on the area. It presents a counterpoint image to the *fixity* of physical arrangements as they are put on the map today.



**Figure 12-14:** The First sequence of maps. (Source: Own image)

At the outset, the production of the larger Diemer area starts when sand is extracted, site after site and century upon century. This sand-economy has a double side to it. To begin with, new topographies arise where the sand is being transported. Building sites come into being as entire building sites are being raised, as waste dumps are being covered over, roadsides are being raised meters on top of the landscape, and lakes and sea-side areas are being reclaimed. While the IJ-estuary fills up with mounds of dredged up sand, its resulting form gradually takes shape from the shipping routes carved out on the water. Simultaneous to sand-related production, there is also re-production. It occurs as pits become lakes, lakes become settlements, and docksides are turned into housing



neighborhoods. Surprisingly, as each local community had to provide for its own supply of sand, the fragmented institutional make-up of the territory is reflected in the amount of pits currently to be found. The sheer amount and ubiquity of those open excavation pits spatializes the presence of institutional borders, normally only ephemerally present on the land.



In a similar process of extraction, peat was extracted from vast surfaces in the area as well. It was available in large quantities and served as an extensive supply of fuel and a source of heating in the city. Peat extraction occurs below ground water level, and creates large shallow ponds that gradually turn into veritable lakes. In turn, these large shallow waters were later reclaimed together with some more 'natural' lakes in their vicinity. Once again, these former sites of peat production acted as a strong basis for settlement. Clusters of country-estates, cottages, lodges and bungalows arose along the edges of those former extraction pits.

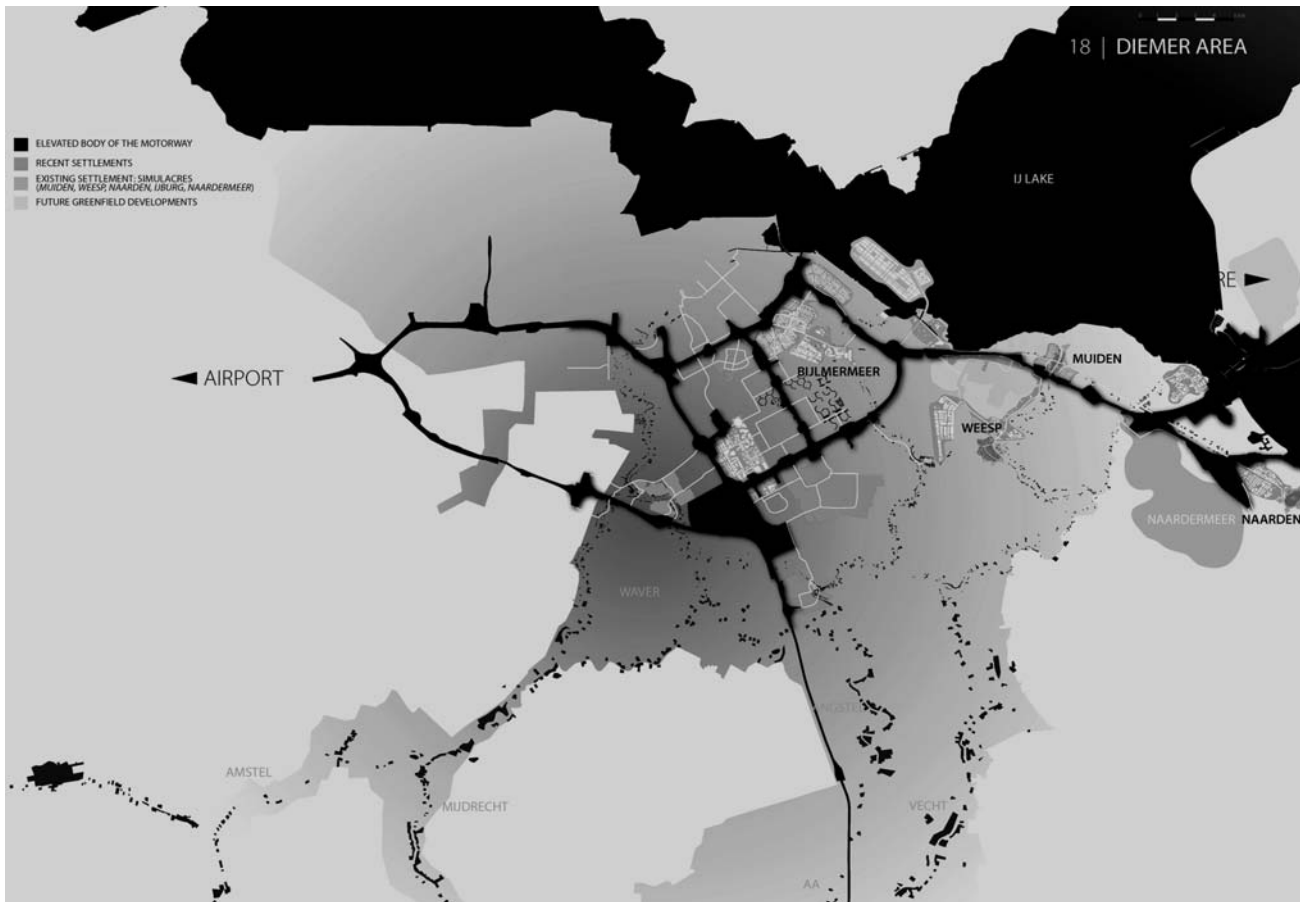


The final figure in this sequence of maps reveals some overarching logic that is determined by these continuing cycles of production and re-production. While the total image may seem forcibly chaotic, it does try to show that the continuous *shoveling* of peat and sand has a clear stake in shaping the wider territory. It also demonstrates the presence of certain logics that connect town and country, thereby challenging rooted conceptions.

### SUPERIMPOSED NETWORKS

The second string of cartographies takes a similar approach. It focuses on the morphology of the water and road infrastructure, and shows that the area is essentially in between different modes of production. The sequence starts with the river basin that straddles the area and originates in the peat marshes to its south. This fluvial system is determined by two sandy ridges to its west and east. The whole of this river basin has been subject to manipulation, changing the logic of the rivers, their courses and tributaries and adding canals and shortcuts in between its streams and rivulets. Its prehistory of flexible adjustments and its commodification is a well-known feature of Holland's landscape; but it is revealing in combination with

**Figure 15-17:** The Second sequence of maps. (Source: Own image)



**Figure 18:** Combined mapping of networks and settlement clusters.  
(Source: Own image)

other features, like road and settlement patterns. The first three maps show the river network and its alterations over time. In origin, this fluvial network defined a close relation between the water courses and the settlements on their banks. Like the canals in downtown Amsterdam, there is no dissociation between water network, street network and the buildings that are attached to it. The second map indicates how the adding of a large canal led to drastic changes in the water network. Correspondingly, the townships of Muiden and Weesp changed from being harbor towns on the open sea, to mere riparian suburbs on a lakeside cut off from the open sea.

The next three images reveal the motorway network superimposed on the river network. This motorway network defines strings of fragments that are essentially car-driven: the shopping mall, the greenfield development, the postcard townlet, the

football stadium, and the financial business center. In doing so, it distorts and redefines the settlement patterns found underneath and turns the little neo-villages of Muiden and Weesp into suburban hamlets. They become virtual simulacra from times past, now located just off the motorway exit.

These clusters and settlements, conditioned by the motorway network's omnipresence, include the eponymous 1960's housing settlement of the Bijlmer, which takes on a kind of paradigmatic position. Starting out as a modernist large-scale urban extension scheme, it combines the logic of park-like environment with a spatially separated highway network. While new additions of terrace housing currently reclaim it as a part of the city-center, it retains much of its earlier logic. Today, it has become a virtual switchboard between city and non-city.

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The final cartography of this second sequence is a combination of the previous ones. It reveals a 'mechanical' grid distorting and redefining the 'organic' settlement patterns found underneath. This superposition gives shape to a settlement fabric that is now clearly dissociated from the water network, unlike the city centre. The superimposed networks, water and roads, seem to recombine into a territory that has a landscape mode as well as a highway mode. This last cartography therefore reads the territory as lying in between neo-townships and a non-city, and in-between a river landscape and a highway logic. The clusters and stamps that follow out of these different modes of urbanization are not assembled coherently however. Yet they share a common denominator, a kind of 'landscape' subtext that is present underneath.

## CONCLUSION

The conclusion leads to a few final questions concerning the Diemer Wedge and its future trajectory. Following the previous two mapping

series, there is more than one reason to assume that the Diemer Wedge Area is not just a wedge of 'remaining open spaces' in Amsterdam's hand-shaped plan. Through an assessment based on different mappings, it was shown that the area is essentially in between different modes of production. However, should this position also be used to shape its future? Should one consider repairing along the lines of a covert landscape subtext? Can one define a course to start shaping this kind of future step by step? Quintessentially, these questions remain part of ongoing designerly investigation. The mapping analyses above try to recognize certain unruly patterns and figures in the territory and gradually distill a method out of this process. The assumption is that these figures allow for a more systematic way of handling planning tasks and assignments. Instead of working unknowingly against the grain of these figures, one might imagine working *along* the grain of them could yield considerable benefits. It could bring about new conceptions of co-production to help rescale and reformulate Amsterdam's peri-urban assignment.

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