Article

Remembering Ypres. Post- War Reconstruction, Land and the Legacies of Shock and Conflict

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Abstract: We consider the case of the Flemish city of Ypres and its reconstruction after World War I to analyze the legacies of war, as a violent shock to social- ecological systems for the meaning and organization of land. We argue that these legacies can only be understood when considering the multiple meanings of land, including its association with identity, and when distinguishing between the effects on the land itself, on the community inhabiting that land and the governance system in that community. We demonstrate that war, in its diversity of effects reinforces some path dependencies while erasing others and creates space for reinvention. If a city and its countryside are entirely devastated, as with Ypres, actors in governance come and go, old institutions lose their binding powers, some stories and forms of knowledge remain persuasive and locally rooted, while others whither. The necessity to decide on the future, in a landscape that requires rebuilding, triggers debate, discursive production and options for reinvention. We reflect on the lessons of Ypres for other communities forced to contemplate reconstruction.

Keywords: Ypres; war; reconstruction; shock; conflict; meanings of land; identity; social-ecological systems; environmental governance

1. Introduction

Wars are shocking for many reasons. Vivid images come to mind of the current tragedy unfolding in Ukraine, where the depth of destruction and the full implications for rebuilding cannot be grasped yet from this point in time, even for insiders. It is this depth of destruction by war that we want to probe cautiously in this paper, without pretending to grasp its full complexity. In war the land is an obvious victim. For people to rebuild their lives after the war the land must be restored, not to its former state but to a state where the social-ecological system can function again, with places to live and areas to produce food and infrastructures. War reshuffles and destroys more than is often assumed and this multi- dimensionality has effects on post- war reconstruction and on the roles of land in this process. The technical aspects of the management of urban and rural land play a major endeavour in the reconstruction and can never be decoupled from institutional (organizational) and discursive (interpretive) realms. War and its destruction and its potential destruction of identities, narratives, spaces and forms of governance thus serve to reveal connections also present, yet much less visible, in peace time.

To understand the present, we believe it is useful to look back at the dramatic story of Ypres, Belgium, during and after World War I. Understanding Ypres can perhaps help us to appreciate wars more easily as shocks in social- ecological systems. Social- ecological systems can be in shock when no coordinated response is immediately ready to deal with external events [1,2]. Conflicts can be such events and a war, as major conflict, can easily lead to shocks in the system. As a result of shocks like these, all elements and relations in the system can potentially be damaged or repositioned, reconstruction is thus essentially a

rebuilding of a system [3,4], not just of its elements. Moreover, reconstruction is a rebuilding of a system from within a system [5] and therefore an understanding of all aspects of the system is important when discerning a path for reconstruction [6,7].

The story of Ypres is instructive not just because of the scale of destruction wreaked upon the city and its surrounding landscapes [8] but also instructive for the impressive process of reconstruction afterwards [9] (Figures 1 and 2). In this paper we use the case of Ypres to illustrate the different roles land and its management can have in the process of rebuilding afterwards- after the shock of war. The governance of reconstruction after a period of intensive destruction must give a central role to the governance of the land. This is true for the reconstruction of cities and the countryside [10,11].

Figure 1. Aftermath of World War I in the city of Ypres and surrounding landscape.

Figure 2. City of Ypres nowadays.

We will argue that the war triggered both path dependencies and path creation, visible in the management of land post- war. Understanding the relation between shock and conflict and the connections between spatial identity, social identity, and historical narrative helps to see the different roles of land and the different meanings of particular spatial configurations and designs in the conflict and its aftermath. Furthermore, decisions taken after the war regarding the management of land create new path dependencies both for social and ecological systems. In our view it is therefore relevant to consider conflicts, such as wars, as social -ecological shocks hence the importance of managing these kinds of conflicts and their aftermath from a social ecological systems perspective.

This theoretical contribution to thinking on social–ecological systems and on planning and development in post- conflict areas draws itself on social- ecological systems litera-

ture [12,13], on evolutionary governance theory [14,15] and on the anthropology of war and conflict [16,17]. The paper is not a historical one since there has been excellent work devoted to Ypres, Flanders and World War I already (which will be referenced throughout). Our story of Ypres serves to illustrate and develop the theoretical line of thought introduced above and is supported by extensive literature and several site visits. Our analysis is enriched by borrowings from the inter-disciplinary field of memory studies [18,19]. The perspective on land and post-war reconstruction is thus not derived from the case but the case had to be analyzed in detail to illustrate the perspective which was, in essence, constructed by bringing two clusters of ideas and associated literatures in contact. First cluster is an established set of relations between place identity, social identity and historical narrative and secondly, an emerging literature on the relations between shock, memory and conflict in the governance of social- ecological systems. These ideas and their relations will be presented in due course and the framework which emerges is illustrated by the story of Ypres. In this way, we can consider in a new light the roles of land in post-war reconstruction.

In the next sections we first briefly introduce Ypres and World War I. Then, we dwell on the relation between shock and conflict and between spatial identity, social identity and image of history. We then discuss how war disrupts governance and how both shock and conflict affect the potential for and the form of reconstruction. Finally, we draw conclusions regarding the organization of land after major conflicts referencing the relations between shock, conflict, memory, and identity. While we refrain from formulating generic recommendations we offer an invitation to reflect on the connections between land and conflict, not only in physical and visible terms but also in terms of the social memory and identity of those people working, inhabiting, and imagining the land.

2. Ypres and World War I

Ypres, the name, was etched in the collective memory of many nations especially those who participated in the fierce fighting in and around the medieval city in World War I [20,21]. Ypres was on the front lines for almost the entire war (1914–1918) and therefore the war left an indelible mark in the region (Figure 1). What we see now is a post- war reconstruction, and one that was highly contested [22,23] (Figure 2). Several major battles took place around Ypres and the casualties were counted in the hundreds of thousands [24]. The city itself was mostly deserted during much of the war because of the grueling circumstances and the practicalities of living in an annihilated city.

The earliest history of Ypres is not very well documented precisely because of the destructions of the First World War but some archives were preserved elsewhere, while historical investigations have been carried out throughout the 19th century. In Post- Roman times the coastal landscapes changed considerably, with former Roman settlements being swallowed by the North Sea. The location of Ypres however remained dry, and the small but navigable river calledIperlee made for a useful connection with the sea. Already in the 10th century two small settlements existed in close proximity: one farming village with a noble manor and a collection of merchant and craftsmen housing near the river. These two would merge into the town of Ypres before the first preserved written appearance of the name 'Ieper' (1066) [25]. Count Baldwin V of Flanders (died 1067) is credited with shaping Ypres as a town; with giving it town privileges and a planned street pattern, a dedicated market, and religious areas. Parts of this urban pattern still exist, especially in the southern part of town. Count Phillip of Alsace further buttressed the privileges so a largely self- governing city emerged in the later 12th century [26]. The rise of Bruges and Lille (then part of Flanders), to which Ypres was connected by early roads, contributed to its growth [27]. Especially the new connection of Bruges to the sea (after the flood of 1134) helped the development of trade in the region (even though the pattern of competition and collaboration between Ypres and Bruges was complex) [28].

Ypres became famous internationally for the textile trade and production (wool and linen) but was economically on a path of slow decline since the 14th century [26]. Bypassed

by the Hanseatic trade, the development of finance and later the industrial revolution, its population in the early 20th century did not surpass its medieval size. Most of the city walls were intact and still defined the urban landscape since relatively more medieval buildings were left standing than in Bruges which, despite an extended period of decline, still managed to remain relatively relevant with the implication of more substantial re-building and transformation [9,29,30]. The decline of Bruges also started much later, in the late Renaissance.

The most famous building in Ypres, giving it a place in the national and international imagination was beyond doubt the cloth hall or textile market, a mostly 13th century building of enormous proportion, combining several civic and commercial functions [31]. The young nation state of Belgium (independent in 1830) prided itself on its 'historical art cities' (*historische kunststeden*) and Ypres figured prominently in its history books and tourism brochures [32]. The cloth hall itself was famous as an example of impressive civic architecture in the Gothic style and was well known to architectural students in the Anglo-Saxon world [33]. As the Neo- Gothic movement was English in its earliest form and as Flanders contributed to its emergence, and later became deeply influence by it, this does not need to surprise. In addition, English tourism in the Flemish Medieval cities was flourishing since the early 19th century and Bruges had a sizeable English expat community in that century [34].

The landscape around Ypres was a cultural landscape, dating back to the (early) Middle Ages. Polders from the 11th–12th centuries and canalisation works on the Ieperlee river soon after made for a thoroughly altered ecosystem [35]. The landscape was dotted with villages and towards the south- west a series of low sandstone hills interrupted the flat landscape of fields and meadows. Roads connected Ypres with France, the Schelde and Rhine valleys, and importantly, the coast and England [36,37]. For most of the flowering of Ypres, the wool for cloth came from England and could be found in markets far and away -including the towns of Kiev Rus [31]. Both these urban and rural landscapes were disfigured during the war. Endless shelling, digging trenches, cutting trees for firewood, flooding for strategic reasons, land abandonment in the most dangerous zones, and scattered unexploded ammunition everywhere made it extremely difficult to recognize the place when confrontation was taking place [23,38] (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Devastation of both cultural and urban landscapes in Ypres after World War I. Picture bottom Frank Hurley, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

The medieval fame did not protect Ypres and its landscape in any sense. Belgian botanist Jean Massart even proposed that evolution changed course in the years of devastation. This utter devastation, which cannot be detailed here (for more see Verpoest et al., 2020; Claeys, 2017, and the works by Dendoove, Liefooghe and others cited regularly in this paper), is closely associated with the so-called Ypres Salient, that is a bulge in the frontline, including Ypres and with the medieval canal as a boundary. A salient invites attack, as three sides are exposed. While both allied and German troops tried to reach the North Sea in 1914, Ypres remained unconquered although mostly empty of people and destroyed by

German artillery. In the first battle of Ypres, in fall 1914, over 200,000 people died while the second one (spring 1915) caused about 100,000 deaths. Those deaths were British, Canadian, French, German, Belgian, and of many other nationalities. The third battle of Ypres, or the notorious battle of Passchendaele (summer and fall 1917) was the worst with none of the parties close to giving up despite only minor movements on the terrain- all parties were willing to sacrifice more [24]. Thus, more than half a million people died in that battle alone. After the Americans joined the war in 1917 and the Russians withdrew the military balance did not change quickly or easily and the fourth battle of Ypres (battle of the Lys), in spring 1918, took another 200,000 lives. Very close to the armistice of 11 November 1918, the fifth battle of Ypres raged, with once again little change in the front lines. By November 1918 it was clear that none of the warring parties could clinch a military victory but Germany was closer to internal collapse than the allied powers [39].

When British troops liberated the city in 1918 virtually nothing was left standing [22,40] (Figures 1 and 2). Initially a British officer took over local government and the question soon came up of 'what to do?'. During the war, the expat government in France and sometimes in England started reconstruction discussions already in 1915. International networks of planners, architects and heritage specialists also had an opinion on what to do with Ypres and its ravaged landscapes. We return to Ypres and its reconstruction after deepening our theoretical perspective on shock and conflict and on the governance of land during and after war.

3. Shock, Conflict and Identity

As argued elsewhere [41], shock and conflict are not the same phenomena and the connection of conflict to processes of identity formation, and more broadly discursive formation, differs greatly from what can be observed with shocks. Shocks can affect ecological systems and social systems [42,43], while conflicts pertain to the terrain of the social. Shocks can cause conflicts and conflicts can cause shocks but it is the domain of conflict where one can find an intricate connection with identity formation [19,44] (Figure 4).
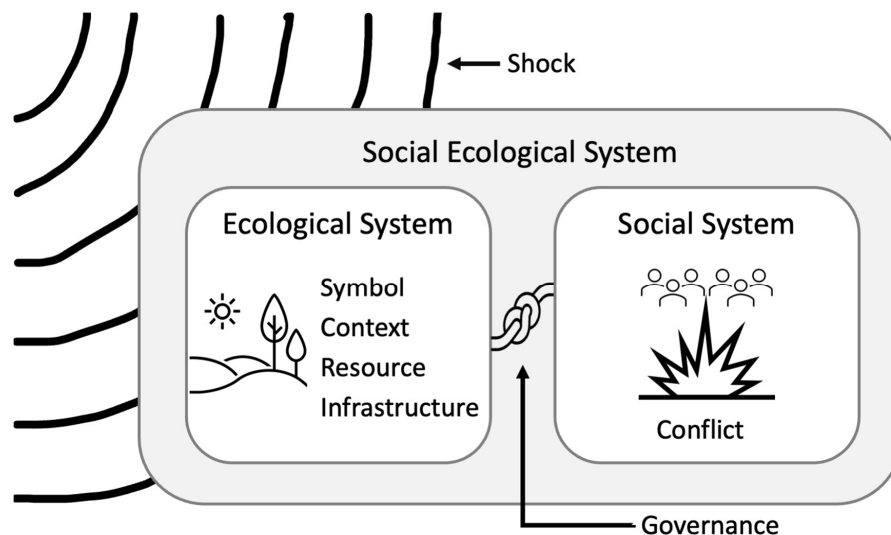

Figure 4. Shocks and conflict in social ecological systems. Shocks can affect ecological systems and social systems while conflicts pertain to the terrain of the social and therefore have a direct connection with social identity. Land can be understood as a symbol, a context, a resource and an infrastructure and shocks can alter some or all these different meanings. Reconstruction therefore should be understood in a physical, discursive, and material sense. Meaningful interactions between social and ecological systems can be establish through governance, non-coordinated interactions destabilize the social ecological system.

When speaking of identities we speak of *social identities* proper, community identities, narratives of group identity which can produce and be produced by groups [45]. When politics become identity politics, polarization and conflict become more likely [17]. Wars are often caused by nation states disagreeing over land and resources- nationalist discourse can both cause and be strategically mobilized in this process. The aftermath of war can be redrawing of maps, a loss of confidence in a state, in nationalist discourses or, rather the opposite: a cultivation of grudges tied to former losses, territories, changes, and a strict drawing of group boundaries [46–48].

We also speak of *spatial identities*, where images and discourses of space are often part of the self- definition of groups [49]. Groups define spaces and define themselves by means of spatial reference [21,50]. When areas are conquered, landscapes are scarred, landmarks vanish and this can naturally be traumatic for groups whose self- definition revolves around those places [6,51,52]. The military situation might not warrant reconquest, the economic situation might not allow immediate reconstruction but the symbolic value of the affected land will most likely trigger changes in identity discourse and later in governance [53,54].

Similarly, *historical narratives* underpin social identity construction. Larger groups with longer histories and more substantial territories are almost certain to produce their own version of history [18]. When conflicts become wars and the war has a clear winner, it is indeed in all likelihood the winners who write history [55]. When the state is dissolved or dismembered the production of history through the state machinery of schools, administration and research stops abruptly and the cultivation of the perspective of the vanished state becomes a matter of lingering memories and sometimes literature [44,56]. The perspective of a state can also be the perspective of a nation, so a disappearing or retreating state can entail a receding memory, a fading group identity. When a group moves out of a place, even a town, their perspective on spatial identity or their older contribution to the creation of spatial identity might disappear [57,58].

Stories might survive even while the people who created them are gone. Post- cosmopolitan places might be marked by spatial and historical narratives quite foreign to the ancestors of the people living there now, people who moved in and started to identify with the place through spatial and historical narratives [59]. They possibly enrolled in existing social identities in this manner, but this is not necessarily the case. Or, where cities were forced to grow quickly by ambitious regimes, this could lead to a 'ruralization' of older city cultures but also to an enrolling of the rural newcomers into old urban traditions and identities [60].

Thus, spatial identity images of history and social identity shape each other over time, are imbricated through mutual references [49,61]. This interplay can be so strong that place, people and events can change but the knot of stories survives *cf* [3]. Alternatively, it is also possible that changes in one element trigger change in the others: new people bring new stories, new interpretations of place, history, while their own social identity can change in the process, in contact with the older local spatial and historical identities [62,63].

Shock and conflict can affect each of these three identities as well as their interplay. Identities, their competition and polarization, their monopolization of politics, their replacement of other categories in the game of participation and representation in politics, cause and are caused by conflicts [64,65]. Identification can happen in reference to lost places, lost battles, as much as to cherished places and artistic treasures [66]. It can happen in contrast and felt superiority vis à vis others as much as in friendly distinction [52,67] (George et al., 1999). Groups can cultivate grudges, invent old humiliations and revisit 'old injuries and injustices' [68]. This, luckily, is not always the case but this conflict- prone aspect of the formation and functioning of social identities requires consideration when discussing wars and post- war reconstruction.

Wars have the potential to reshape social identities because they can change spatial identity by changing the landscape, by erasing traces of history, by making certain activities difficult [11,51,56]. If the identity of the people living in the area was central to the conflict, to the war, then the war itself, its suffering and its rapid processes of change are most

certainly rewritten afterwards [69]. The war and its aftermath constitute two moments of forced collective reflection on the identities which triggered the war, their value, their endurance and the relation with other identities [70]. Before a conflict, one might have been a local of a town, first and foremost, but the war, its devastation, maybe mandatory military service, imposed a national identification, an imposition which might have worked, or, which might have triggered alternative, maybe older identifications [71].

The changing landscape in a particularly violent and protracted landscape can make it hard to maintain spatial identities and to support historical narratives rooted in that landscape [8,46]. Physically elements structures and overall appearance can be disfigured to such an extent that reconstruction and historical readings of the landscape become impossible. Even when reconstruction is possible, the trauma of war can alter the interpretation in such a way that it cannot support older identifications anymore [6,69,72]. The memory of the war itself can make people move out of the place, can bring about negative reinterpretations of place. Social identities, even the ones triumphing, can be questioned, can be dismantled because of the war, just as much as they can be reinforced [73]. The war, its damage, its memories put a pressure on all forms of identification but the direction of the result cannot be anticipated. That direction is however in almost all cases influenced by the mutual shaping of social, spatial and historical identities *cf* [49,50].

War can thus reshape the meaning of land as much as the *shape* and the *use* of land. Besides being a resource in itself and a context or background for events and objects, land is a symbol [21,48,51]. War puts pressure on processes of identification, as the consequences of that identification become visible, as well as the price to pay for pursuing narratives and fantasies inspired by social identities, first of all the nation *cf* [74]. The pressure on that process of identification will have ramifications for social, spatial and historical identity.

In the following paragraphs we will discuss the different kinds of damage war can do to a community and a society, paying special attention to the implications for the use of land after the conflict.

4. War, Governance and Land

Each war has different effects. Cities and landscapes, infrastructures, people and other creatures perish. Stories perish or transform, while some symbols lose their value and others are created. Forms of organization, types of expertise, roles and rules in governance- whole governance configurations-disappear or are affected to such extent that they lose their cohesion and functionality. Scarcity of potentially anything can shrink the domains of governance, while the need for speedy decision making undermines checks and balances. Values, ideologies, identity narratives and expert narratives loose or gain interest, are transformed. If the damage is so extensive that no semblance of 'normal' can be re-established, the post- war community will necessarily be a reinvention, even if the intention is to return to the good old days. What has to be reconstructed is not a sum of elements but a system, meaning that a new set of relations in governance and in the community will have to be established between a partly new set of elements [3,12,75,76].

The rebuilding is not just a matter of reconstruction of the physical landscape but a rebuilding of the community, its governance system and the reconstruction of the social-ecological relationships [11,21]. A functioning governance helps to give direction to the rebuilding through the ongoing work of coordination and the articulation of longer- term strategies, including those that connect the community to the land [7,41]. If governance remains intact coordinative capacity remains intact and the capacity to rebuild is greatly enhanced along with the capacity to give the rebuilding effort a direction. Conversely, if governance capacity is reduced to almost nothing even in a landscape barely touched by enemy activity it will not be easy to see the same activities as before and transformation in a different direction can hardly be achieved. It is through governance that the social and ecological can establish a meaningful interaction. In contrast, non-coordinated interactions that bypass governance systems are problematic for the social-ecological system as a whole [2,42,77].

If governance embodies the capacity to do something with the land in a way that can benefit the community, the land itself can be affected in ways which shape the possibilities for rebuilding in a guided manner. If the economy before the war was much reliant on the land through agriculture or resource extraction, or through the presence/absence of water, and the landscape was altered beyond recognition, littered with explosives, omnipresent craters, damaged ditches, drains and canals, then a weak post- war economy will create troubles for rebuilding, for the stability of governance [77,78]. The support of allies or outsiders (nations, organizations, etc.) in the form of reparation payments, rebuilding efforts and loans represents an exception (an exception which applies to Ypres) which relied on agriculture and tourism but received much post-war support.

The way the land as symbol is affected by the war in our view has the greatest impact on the way forward after the war [46]. The different meanings of the land pre- war, the unique entanglements of spatial, historical and social identities (see above) plus the specific kind of damage done, will determine whether the attachments to the land are strong, whether locals are still identifying with the place, its landscape, its livelihoods, and with the city, region and nation. It will also, at least in democratic contexts, determine the way the future is envisioned for the towns and landscapes. Which new stories come in when envisioning the future and through which channels depnds on the form of multi-level governance still existing in the country and region and on the power relations in that configuration [15,78].

If some actors are gone, others loose power or if some stories loose persuasive capacity and some institutions loose coordinative capacity, then 'something needs to change'. If urban and rural landscapes are ravaged, 'something needs to happen'. Systems have to respond to these situations [3,5]. When economies elsewhere are already moving in a different direction, less dependent on the land or the previously recognized resources, this can provide a source of inspiration and a model of organization. Shifting power relations in the war also make it possible to introduce new institutions and change the system of political participation and representation [17]. For example, the movement for Flemish emancipation gained ground in the Great War [72].

5. War, Governance & the Ypres Reconstruction

Ypres, as we know, was entirely devastated and as soon as it was recaptured the discussion about its future became tense. Exhibitions in Paris and London in 1915 and 1916 [9,36] contributed to the public discourse, on the other hand artists such as Mondrian had strong opinions about Ypres and the English garden city promoters as well as the ideas of the English 'scientific' planners [79]. Ypres' local government had been effectively dissolved and most inhabitants had fled the town. An immediate need was to build temporary housing for the returning citizens while the English military government did not immediately encourage a return. The option preferred by the English was to leave the centre in ruin, as a stark reminder of the suffering of war [8]. Many Flemish nevertheless voted with their feet and came back, building shacks without much help or organization. Those Flemish were often not the same people who lived there before the War [80,81].

As local government did not function initially and as British perspectives differed greatly from the local ones, decision- making on reconstruction did not reflect local identities and values [23]. The more locals came back and the stronger the Belgian national government started to assert itself again, the less inclined the British were to push through the 'ruin plan' [10,22]. The monumental ruin area shrunk in the plans but eventually the whole idea was abandoned when British leadership decided they were now becoming dependent on the Belgians. For the monumental Menin Gate, an alternative to the 'ruin plan', the British still needed cooperation from the Belgians.

This still did not decide what to do and how. Several options were seriously discussed: weather rebuilding on a different site or on the same site, weather rebuilding in modernist style, in garden city style or in traditional style (which now took the guise of neo-gothic) [9,36,40]. Even modernist Mondrian found the modernist idea unfitting.

Rebuilding somewhere else was never an important option for the locals [79]. The garden city idea had followers, but still felt too close to English fashions and, more importantly, the overwhelming desire of locals and other Belgians was to refer back to the past more explicitly not to forget the war but to remember old glories [9,32]. Forgetting the war was not much of an option anyway, as the Menin Gate, its immediate surroundings and its approach in the city centre could not be overlooked, and as the surrounding agricultural areas took years to reclaim [10]. In addition, there were the numerous cemeteries slowly growing in different corners of the region.

How to refer to the past? The new council adopted the approach by chief architect Jules Coomans [6,8]. This entailed a historical reinterpretation of the Medieval past. That is, the emphasis in the new Ypres came to be medieval architecture even where it did not exist before. Other layers of time were neglected or sometimes erased and the Neo-Medieval style was inspired by local traditions as well as by Bruges' past and also by a more international Neo- Gothic [82]. The planning was detailed, one can speak of a comprehensive design approach, with attention to the cohesion of the overall urban pattern and with returning motifs, symmetries, viewsheds, axes, points of interest and landmarks, connectivity as well as to architectural details [79]. English inspiration could be found in the systematic survey activity and in the picturesque detailing of historicizing urban design.

The Belgian government stipulated already in 1915 that reconstruction in the 'ravaged regions' should proceed in orderly fashion, meaning according to plans. Each municipality was expected to produce a general plan and a subdivision plan (*rooilijnplan*). The general plan was supposed to give the opportunity to improve the pre-war situation, even rethink previously poorly planned settlements, while the subdivision plan was focused on establishing lot lines and especially the boundaries of public and private domains. After the war the subdivision plans became particularly contentious as changes to the public domain would entail costly expropriation. Local mayors, more sensitive to local sentiments of people returning hopefully to their homes, bitterly opposed the more ambitious plans drawn by architects working for the federal government- often from the capital [22]. The result of this dynamic was that the possibility of the general plan guiding development was soon out of the question, at the same time the subdivision plans were often contested and had to be redrawn and negotiated several times.

This process took time, the delay caused irritation with locals eager to return and with a wide variety of actors at all levels pushing for a speedy reconstruction. The pressure led to a gradual lowering of ambitions in the planning sphere and to an emphasis on the private domain. For this reason public projects tended to progress more slowly, with reconstruction sometimes finished several years after most residents had rebuilt. The speed of private reconstruction was also linked to the fact that most residents preferred to take the matter in their own hands (with some financial support from the government), rather than taking the route of government reconstruction, where they had to contend with more paperwork, slower procedures and an architect [83]. For the larger public projects, tenders and competitions were organized, where in the case of Ypres' chief architect Cookman did not always win–he did have critics, within circles of architects and within higher level administrations [10].

Ypres was thus one of only three towns where a general plan was drawn up, but, illustrating the difference between the imagined futures during and after the war, the 1916 plan (by Coomans) was lost when planning started again in 1919, a new one adopted in 1921. For individual buildings, original designs were often lost before the war, others during the war. Few middle-class residences were faithfully reconstructed, therefore; only the medieval street pattern was reconstructed and key buildings from the late Medieval and Renaissance periods (yet allowing for the use of concrete). The street pattern itself was slightly 'enhanced' to bring medieval city planning principles to the foreground [22], while a return to an idealized late medieval Ypres also made it possible to work faster, bring a unity to the city design (repeated motifs, façade designs, yellow colored brick), and highlight important places, buildings, views -by simplifying what happened around

them, by harmonizing surroundings with them, by accentuating them as focal points at the end of a street or preceded by an enlarged and cleaned up public space [9]. What helped to maintain the unity of street design was the rather strictly implemented rule to build temporary housing on the back of the lot, so the frontage of the streets would not be affected, and further that the 1919 building codes gave the power to Coomans and city administration to judge whether a proposed façade was fitting the street design [84]. The involvement of architects in private reconstruction was not legally imposed but their use became the norm after the war. Their networks, shared discourse, pragmatism and connections with architects and others members of city and national administration further enabled a new unity in urban design.

Conspicuously absent was modernist architecture, architecture from the French 17th century and car-oriented interventions in the street pattern. Additionally, conspicuously retro was the decision to rebuild the city walls -for which German restitution funds were flowing until the 1990′s, and the decision not to couple the ambitious reconstruction plans with some form of economic development strategy (necessitating rather drastic interventionist economic planning from the 1960′s on) [85]. Economic development, after the initial construction boom, was slow, labor migration remained common for a generation- helping to preserve the historicizing appearance of Ieper. What also contributed to this situation was the non- return of the local economic elite.

Thus, the highly planned new old Ypres was more medieval, more detailed, prettier and certainly more designed than what came before [9]. As in the earlier restoration- reinvention of Bruges, the search for a more optimal 'medieval' appearance often came at the expense of actual medieval features, elements and buildings, deemed less representative or interesting. In the 20th century, however, and after the wartime destruction of so much heritage, the approach was bound to be controversial, and indeed opposition arose. Eugene Dhuicque, an expert in architectural history and art history more broadly, working for the national government, became the declared nemesis of chief planner Coomans and his ally mayor Colaert [22,86]. For Dhuicque, the proposed post-war Ypres was neo- medieval, and the remembering embraced by council and chief architect was *de facto* a forgetting of both the war and the existing Ypres from before the war. What was preferable, for him was part preservation of ruins, part accurate reconstruction and part pragmatic reinvention.

A number of brochures and books appeared about the ravaged regions, often by governmental actors, but also by architects and civil society organizations with an inter- est in the process, either for ideological or financial reasons [79]. Architects hoping for commissions presented their ideas, also the farmers' association, and several national gov- ernmental organizations. Architecture magazines, farmers magazines, but also chambers of commerce and associations of municipalities, as well as heritage groups published and publicized their perspectives, as it was widely understood that the post- war environment was an arena where old positions were not necessarily kept, and where greater influence in governance and in the physical reconstruction was possible. Most players realized that the shakeup offered new possibilities, underpinned by government investment which was in part supported by German reparations and foreign assistance [8,10,36].

In the rural communities around Ypres, the situation was slightly different, and the path of reconstruction different. First of all, agricultural systems need land and need a restoration of the water system and -to a lesser degree- the green structures that used to be so common in the pre-war bocage landscape, dominated by small landscape elements such as hedgerows. Second, the smaller municipalities did not have the expertise, lobby power, and thus autonomy to decide on their fate. In 1919, the Belgian government adopted a law on the adoption of municipalities by the national government, and this meant that most decisions on reconstruction were taken by the Administration for Ravaged Regions (*Dienst der Verwoeste Gewesten*), active from 1919 to 1926, and in control over budget, and plans [81]. Purely agricultural subsidies, including for reclamation, came through the Ministry of Agriculture, and often went through intermediaries established by farmers or farmers unions, the most active being the *Fédération Agricole de la Flandre Dévastée* [87,88].

The adopted municipalities, not able to organize their own reconstruction, were obliged to present a general plan and detailed setbacks plan and the same the Administration for Ravaged Regions could help them with this. Architects could be hired by the Administration for both planning and design. This however often did not lead to modernist or personal stylistic or conceptual experiments; what dominated was a pragmatic combination of historicizing, or 'regionalizing' architecture, reproduction of old town and village plans, and slight modernization behind the facades, to accommodate modern comforts and modern techniques of agriculture [36,89]. A national commission for the beautification of rural life existed, an organization established before the war, and inspired by the exhibitions of Ghent and Antwerp, where old Flanders was glorified [8,88]. They also argued, like many other associations, for a practical historicism, but it seems that they were more indirectly influential, in shaping the discourse of other actors. All governmental actors were cautious with expropriation, budgets and timelines were limited, so only three villages were significantly altered in terms of planning and layout.

In the region, the damage to local landscapes and economies was as dramatic as to local governance. In about eight years the fields were de-mined, cleared of leftover ordinance, leveled, while rivers, ditches and canals were brought back to their old positions and most farms rebuilt. Architects did not play much of a role in the process although some farmers, the ones directly relying on the Administration for Ravaged Regions, followed architectural guidelines more strictly. The Prince Albert Fund (founded 1916) helped in the larger towns with temporary housing. Farmers union and others tried to educate homeowners and at the same time resuscitated local governments on how to rebuild well both in functional and in aesthetic sense. Publications appeared to demonstrate how to design modern farms and villages (e.g., Raison & Ronse, 1918). In Northern France a so-called 'red zone' was left where no landscape reconstruction took place but Flanders was too densely populated and governance too locally focused to make that option attractive. The French red zone moreover was not so much the result of an intention to memorialize the war through a landscape, more than a '*lieu de memoire*' it was simply a lack of resources in the much larger affected area [10].

In the Ypres area, which used to be known for its attractive landscape; dotted with farms and numerous estates and mansions, the intention was to restore the old landscape as much as possible. Most farmers took their own initiative in the rebuilding of the farms, sometimes with the assistance of the farmers union and other cooperatives. Although barbed wire did show up as a cheap replacement of some hedgerows many others were restored and large- scale land consolidation, water management projects or other forms of modernization did not appear until much later (the landscape *anno* 2022 is much more open). Forestry did not appear high on the agenda with the exception of a few villages where reconstruction included forestry plans [90,91].

6. A Theory of Ypres?

The war annihilated Ypres but not its memories, its imaginaries, and its aspirations. It also did not erase Belgium as there was always some form of federal government even if it had a nominal power at times. There was the social memory of the city, the region, the nation, and there were expert memories nationally and internationally. With foreign help, later financing, reconstruction became possible and a reconstruction of governance happened remarkably fast. Dendooven et al. (2006) and Hortensius (1989) both demonstrate that, despite the necessary 'adoption' of many municipalities in the Ypres salient, the national government was very active in the promotion of resilient local governance. Additionally, it created a web of specialized organizations which could sometimes compete with the bonus of a relative autonomy. These two tracks led to a quick rebound of local governance capacity, just as the landscape itself rebounded more quickly than experts and farmers expected [92]. Before the end of the war the organizational and administrative infrastructure for the post- war governance of Belgium was designed.

The landscape around Ypres was a cultural landscape, so a reconstruction as cultural landscape was not a shock. No nature was lost which would be harder to bring back. The web of trenches was almost entirely erased and the war cemeteries became new landmarks [51]. Foreign war tourism never faded and was revived in 2018 and the British War Graves Commission still has a presence in Ypres. Ypres itself, its importance as a landmark among landmarks, stood out even more because of the radical erasure of history from the surrounding landscape. The history that stood out around Ypres was the history of World War I, an episode many locals rather forgot, and relevant more to outside powers than to Belgians who focused on a return to normal and a celebration of a medieval past [22,23].

Social identity, spatial identity and image of history could find a new entwining after the war as new images had been formed, old ones reinterpreted, and as a discussion about the future of Ypres had been *forced* after the war because of the urgency to take decisions. Simultaneously, a reinvigorated council, with new resources and new powers over reconstruction, chose for a symbolic meaning of the land as tied to a medieval image of its history far back in time, far from the war. Such a polished medieval image fit the self-image the nation state wished to promote. The city as a space to write new histories, as a context to enable new activities and build new identities, was not considered. The grip of British historical imaginaries on local space was felt as a noose, despite the gratefulness for British support during the Great War.

The historicizing aspects of reconstruction should not blind us to the fact that reconstruction spurred reinvention of discourse and organization, that is, reinvention of the three interwoven narrative identities analyzed above and of the governance system. The need to rebuild governance, landscape and community at the same time, and the impossibility to rely exclusively on existing material, discursive and organizational elements, forced reinvention, reinvigorated political life and spurred the construction of long- term perspectives and strategies to achieve them *cf* [7,41]. The forced engagement by local communities with a complex system of expertise and multi-level governance might have caused irritation, but at the same time created familiarity with such operation in more complex governance environments, which enabled an increase in institutional capacity in the longer run.

The *shock of war* had shifted power relations, erased actors and brought in new ones, as well as unseen quantities of money and expertise, in this way new options, substantively, and new forms of steering emerged as possible *cf* [93,94]. Meanwhile, the *war as conflict* had hardened spatial identities and historical narratives into a polished version of the medieval past. For the locals Ypres as ruin was uninhabitable and represented a memory of war not of Ypres *cf* [22,61]. As local governance in democratic fashion was restored, so returned the local insistence on a combination of space as context, as resource and as symbol, rather than merely a symbol.

In the meantime, *anno* 2022, modernity is not the modernity of 1918 anymore and the reconstructed towns and landscapes became naturalized and in some cases heritage themselves. Smets (1987) came to an appreciation of the reconstruction townscapes after the dominance of modernism in architectural and planning theory waned, and a generation later Liefooghe (2018) and colleagues had to confront more urgently a situation where new decisions had to be taken regarding that new heritage: preservation, reconstruction, modernization? In the rural areas agriculture scaled up while other land uses (tourism, nature conservation, place-based development) demanded preservation of natural elements and small- scale landscape structures. In Ypres a layering of renovations made many buildings lose their design quality, and with that, the cohesion of the urban fabric as envisioned by the reconstruction architects and planners. Which brings us to the point that spaces, in their materiality and discursivity as well as in the governance systems coordinating their organizations, never stop evolving and that this does not prevent the same questions and the same dilemmas to reappear time and time again. It is just that after a devastating war, the pressures on space, discourse and organizations are of an entirely different character, as described above for the case of Ypres and its landscapes.

These pressures create new combinations of path dependence and path creation, they also create more options for innovation and more pressures to cling to a past and an identity. What the result of this pressure cooker situation is cannot be predicted and its contingency cannot be avoided.

7. Conclusions: The Organization of Land after Major Conflicts

Shocks disrupt the organization of social- ecological systems and wars most obviously cause serious shocks. If literally anything can be destroyed in war, the effects of the shock and the potential for and direction of rebuilding can vary widely [77,78]. This might appear a trivial observation but it becomes less trivial if we look at the way the governance system, in its institutional and discursive dimensions is affected and the way the physical landscape is affected *cf* [21]. It is through coordinated and binding decisions that the social and ecological systems interact and function as one system [75]. When the governance system enabling these decisions is undermined, weakened or shattered then interactions and the physical landscape itself are also affected *cf* [42] (Figure 4).

Land can be a symbol, a context, a resource and an infrastructure. This is relevant for the way it is affected during war, for the response of the attacked, and for the choices made for reconstruction. Attackers can try to undermine livelihoods, they can be interested in the land as resource but disinterested in its other meanings, they could try to wipe out or rewrite existing identities. The defenders can similarly be holding ground for a variety of reasons, and they can be attached to their system of governance for many reasons. When towns, villages and landscapes are deeply scarred and severely damaged during a war, this triggers a need for reconstruction in physical, discursive and material sense, as it triggers a need for but also opportunity for developing long- term perspectives in the community [16,43]. This will need to find a place in governance and it will need to find implementation through governance [7,41]. That governance system is likely to be among the victims of war itself, because its actors, institutions and power/knowledge relations can be erased, transformed, moved, re-related *cf* [95–97].

The choices made for reconstruction of settlements, for the restoration and organization of the land, thus hinge on:

1. The meanings and functions of the land before the war
2. The damage to the land and to the governance system during the war
3. The capabilities left or imported for reconstruction of land and governance after the war
4. The hierarchy of values after the war, and the choices for the future derived from this

The choices made are thus highly path dependent and they introduce new path dependencies since the land continues to be invested with a multiplicity of meanings and functions, it cannot be so easily changed and it can be connected to identities and forms of organization that cannot be so easily changed. At the same time, the damage done by the war can open new possibilities. The war can function as a reset and interdependencies can be weakened. Vanished actors and institutions, narratives which lost persuasiveness and fragmented infrastructures all introduce opportunities to change the system [3,15]. Empty space can inspire a rethinking and empty or impossible roles can do the same. New knowledge can be needed or created. Old values, forms of organization, of planning, can look suspicious, ridiculous or simply *passe*. A new generation can take over, a new ideal can emerge (Figure 5).
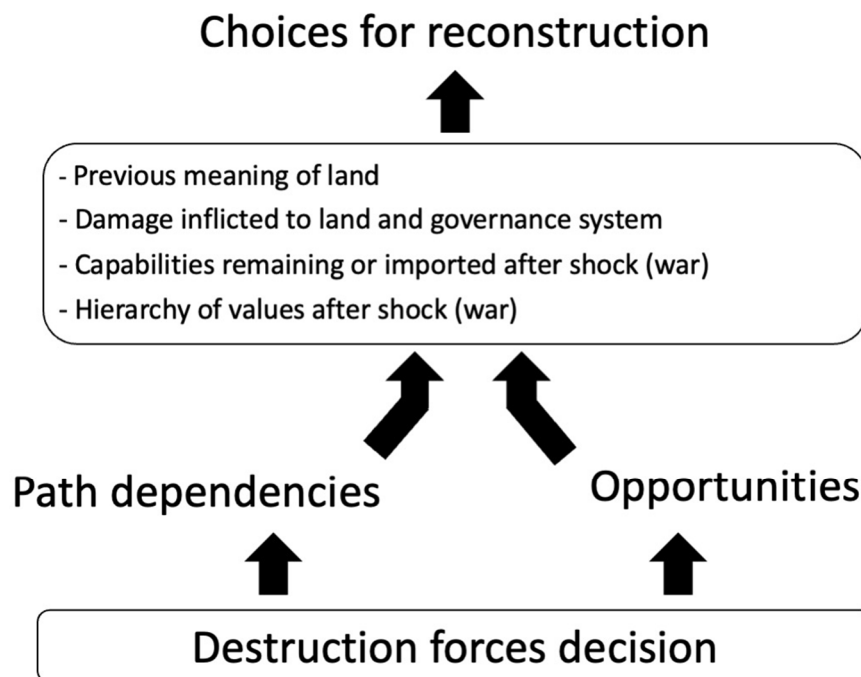
Choices for reconstruction

- Previous meaning of land
- Damage inflicted to land and governance system
- Capabilities remaining or imported after shock (war)
- Hierarchy of values after shock (war)

Path dependencies   Opportunities

Destruction forces decision

Figure 5. Decisions and choices after war. The choices for reconstruction are highly path dependent and they introduce new path dependencies, at the same time, damage done by the war can open new possibilities. The war can function as a reset by weakening interdependencies and introduce opportunities by opening space for new actors and institutions, replacing less persuasive narratives and replacing fragmented infrastructure in the system.

As Verpoest and colleagues (2020) noted and resonating with the contributions in Winter & Sivan (2000), there was always a multiplicity of relations between ways of remembering the Great War and ways of looking forward *cf* [57], as well as an inherent tension between attempts to institutionalize memory (and codify identity) and attempts at rewriting identity, reforming governance and reshaping landscapes in localized, even individualized and creative manners. Ypres ended up with a harmonious Neo-Medieval cityscape and a countryside marked by official memories of the Great War, by graves of foreign soldiers whose stories left no other trace (however powerful that may be, *cf* [98]. Its reconstruction was first praised and then maligned by experts. Right now, when new decisions are *forced* by materiality, its decay and its insufficient functionality *cf* [79], a new appreciation of the reconstruction landscapes presents us with a new pallet of options for the future. Both war and its reconstruction legacies (organizational, discursive, and material) force decisions and open new avenues in governance again and again. The relevance of those decisions will recede in the background when the war fades out of memory, and when the same happens to the fact of reconstruction itself. The more dramatic the war, the more ambitious and identifiable the reconstruction, the more likely that these choices will appear again and again, perpetuating the memory through material means and through the mediation of the governance system.

The story of Ypres is of great intrinsic importance. It was a vehicle to make the following points. It's complexity and dramatic character, both in war and reconstruction, helped to illustrate our perspective on war and post-war reconstruction. It helped illustrate the roles of land in it and the more general connections between land, identity and governance that are revealed when landscapes and its elements are under threat. The case of Ypres illustrates how the shock of war reconfigures social identities; values, ideologies and a set of relations with the land; spatial identities.

What we analyzed was not only the depth of destruction, but also the possibility, in fact, the need for reinvention. The rapid changes to landscapes, identities, and governance

systems during the war, through damage, escape, and response can make a return to the past at the same time more attractive and more impossible. The interplay of identities in the conflict, between discursive identities and scarred materialities, make it entirely impossible to turn the clock back. One might believe that landscapes and cities can be restored but such restoration will always have a cosmetic character as the people living there will not be the same, will not identify the same way, will not forget the war, and will not use and see the land in the same way. For nature, there might be new unused corners of resilience, and no social memories and identities that can be traumatized but the post-war relation with new social systems will bring new risks, as slow mutual adaptation is not likely.

War obviously affects much more than the built environment and the land; if people are gone, either passed away or moved, if people redefined themselves, if forms of organization and stories about place, history and self are transformed or gone, these changes interact and affect what happens after the conflict. In Ukraine, Syria, and other devastated grounds, reconstruction will be on the agenda and such reconstruction will need to carefully consider the role of imported stories, experts and expertise which might miss insight in the past, in the depth of devastation during the conflict and in the reshuffling of memories, identities and futures. Couplings of old and new, of local and imported that are established without understanding the web of relations of the old social-ecological system, and how war changed them, made some impossible to repair, turned others into obsessive dreams, and all this can create new fault lines, sites of future troubles. Conversely, cultivating the awareness of the systems relations, and their pressured evolution under duress, can clarify opportunities for reinvention, for new and resilient futures.

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