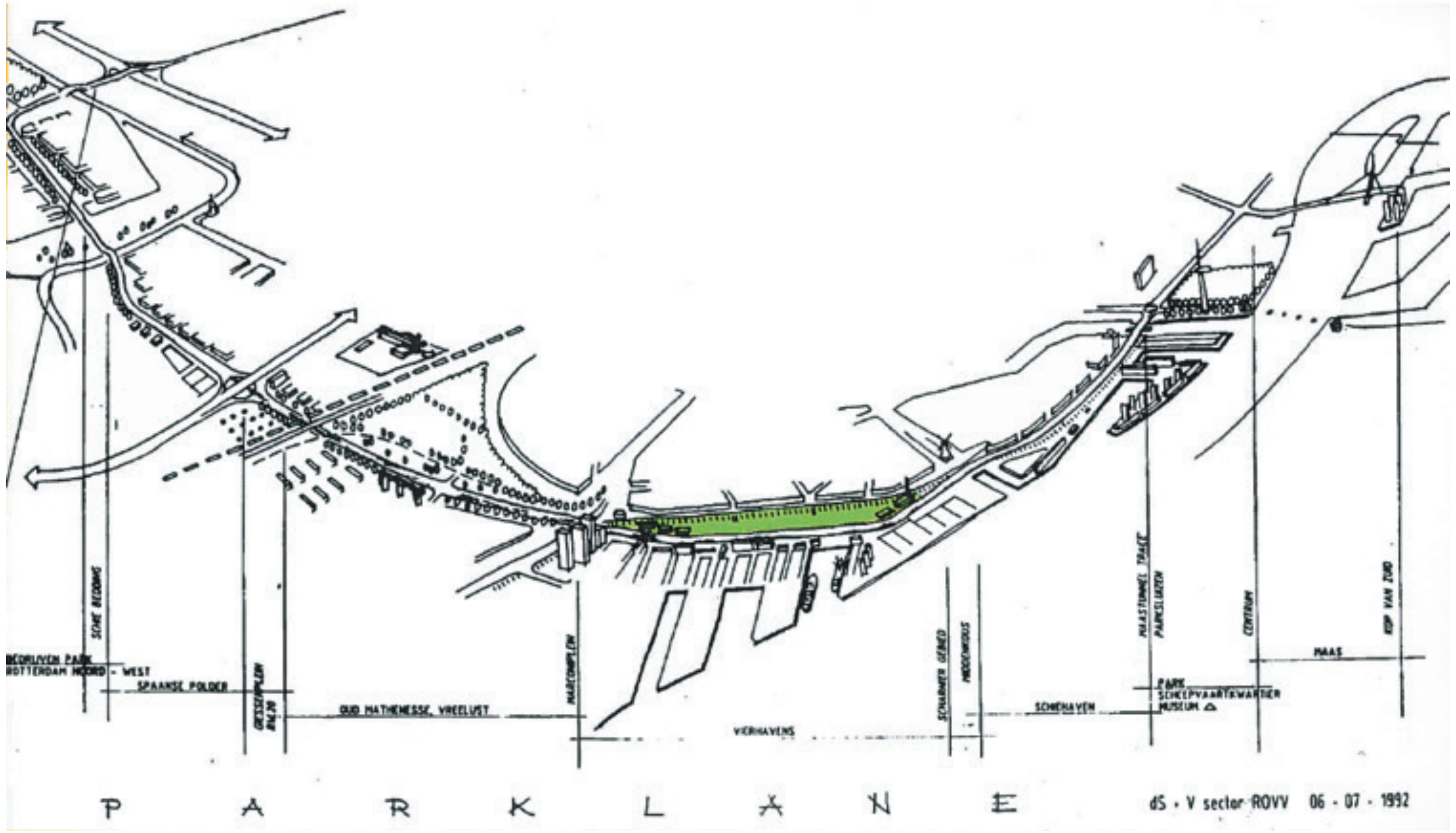
Figure 1 (right). Constructing a joint visual language by building a scale model (Source: Masterplan "het Darkpark", Ontwikkelingsbedrijf Rotterdam, 2003)

Figure 2 (below). Bird's eye view sketch of the 'parklane' concept (Source: Masterplan'Het Darkpark', Ontwikkelingsbedrijf Rotterdam, 2003)



Kevin Raaphorst

'DECONSTRUCTING' THE ROTTERDAM ROOF PARK

MULTIPLICITY OF DESIGN REPRESENTATIONS

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Visual representations of landscape designs tell a lot about a project, the design process, and about the politics involved. The visual content of these representations reflects a myriad of choices, not only in what they show or do not show, but also what visual techniques and styles are used. A visual analytic framework enables the researcher to 'read' design representations by relating the images to their makers, the interests of those makers, as well as to the socio-political context within which those images were created. This can be illustrated using the case of the Rotterdam Roof Park.

The visual rhetoric of the Roof Park
A city planner from the municipality of Rotterdam allegedly drew a sketch on a paper napkin. This sketch presented an elevated park situated above an industrial train yard located beside a river dike. This idea sparked interest among inhabitants of the neighborhood and, thanks to a participatory design process, gained public support for what became the multifunctional flood defense *Rotterdam Dakpark* ('Rotterdam Roof Park').

Originally conceived as a gentrification project, the park area was intended to improve social cohesion in the adjacent neighborhood. The concept of an elevated park was born out of necessity due to the need to preserve the industrial railroad tracks, while at the same time offering space for harbor-related activities at the ground level. However, the railway stakeholders withdrew halfway through the design process. Consequently, the railroad tracks no longer needed to be preserved, and thus the rationale for an elevated park evaporated: a simple ground-level park could now suffice. However, the most powerful stakeholders involved continued to push the idea of an elevated park through the remainder of the design process: the municipality, who desired an iconic design; and the project developer, who saw the potential value of ground-level commercial real estate. The desirability of high-profile competition for local shops in the neighborhood was questioned severely, but the pivotal role of the project developer and their resources proved decisive.

A design workshop was organized at the beginning of the project to gain insight into the concrete ideas and desires of the local community. Stock photos and on-the-fly photo montages created a preliminary composition of the park's architecture and a 'top 10 list' of desired functions. Additionally, this group of inhabitants developed a visual language together with a landscape architect and community organizer by constructing a scale model (Figure 1). One could say this approach was successful: the local community could express their wishes and concerns, and arrived at a design concept they were satisfied with.

Parallel to the participatory design process, the municipality was pursuing a more iconic design: they presented the Roof Park as part of the 'Parklane', a park interwoven with the city's infrastructure, through a bird's eye drawing (Figure 2). They were looking at the project from a larger perspective, focused on connectivity, embedding the project in a structure of iconic city projects.

The visuals used by the municipality and designers up to this point reflect these interests. The drawings and maps are from the perspective of the neighborhood (northeast ñ southwest), emphasizing the connectivity with the local community and the neighborhood role of the Roof Park. The 'Parklane' is clearly present in the perspective drawing, but not emphasized in the cartographic material. The combination of spatial functions is visualized using a layering of small iconic drawings (Figures 3, 4, 5 page 176).

In a later stage, the project developer pressed for additional commercial exploitation: a combination of 3D bird's eye visualizations and realistic 3D artist impressions at ground level presented their vision of the 'Bigshops Parkboulevard'. The perspective of all cartographical material, as well as the bird's eye views, was now oriented towards the park and the neighborhood (southwest - northeast). This perspective put the emphasis on the infrastructure of the park lane, as well as the commercial real estate beneath the park, which was previously invisible. The layering of functions is still shown by using small iconic drawings to maintain visual consistency, be it with different functions.

Figure 3.
Layering of iconic drawings shows the multifunctionality of the Roof Park plan (Source: Gemeente Rotterdam).

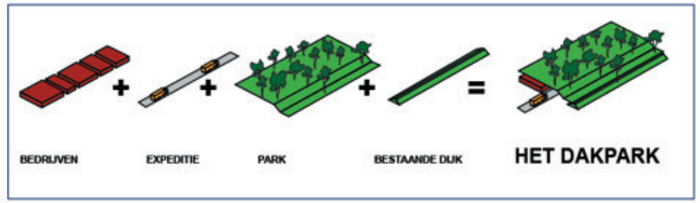

Figure 4.
Top view map of final Roof Park plan (southwest–north-east) (Source: Gemeente Rotterdam)

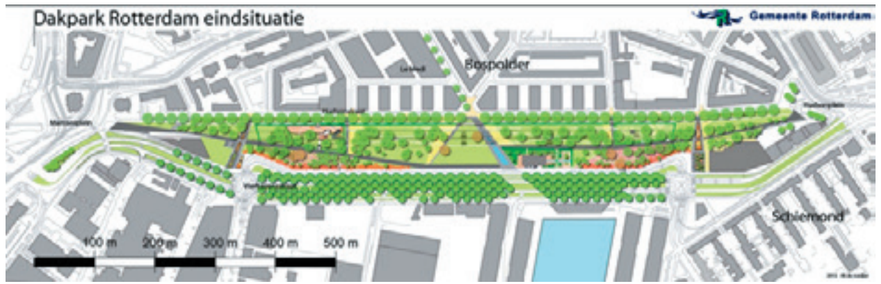

Figure 5.
3D artist impression at ground level of Bigshops Boulevard (Source: Buro Sant en Co).

There was a logical succession from analogue towards digital techniques as the project developed: as the design ideas became more concrete, they were also represented more precisely. But these images also reflect the interests of the people behind them: the project developer presented an attractive shopping boulevard, and the municipality used a 3D aerial perspective to emphasize the 'Parklane' (Figure 6). The focal point of the images was no longer just the park and its connection to the neighborhood; it had become the development of the shopping boulevard and its connection to the 'Parklane' concept.

Conclusion

Every aspect of a design representation, whether it be scale, perspective, technique, lighting, or color scheme, is an implicit or explicit choice. Design representations are thus political instruments, and should be treated and studied as such. The case of the Rotterdam Roof Park shows the increasing interest in design-based participatory and interdisciplinary workshops, in which the design process is used as a means to achieve a common future vision; it also shows the convincing power of sophisticated visual representations and how stakeholders use this to emphasize their interests.

Different stakeholders have different interests and communicate these interests in different ways. This analysis shows that a project like the Rotterdam Roof Park is not reducible to a single image: a 3D bird's eye view does not show all the design ideas that make up the project, and neither does a handmade scale model. The emphasis on the Bigshops Boulevard in some visualizations does not exclude the social functions of the park for the community, and vice versa. By looking at all of these images, and identifying the ideas and interests that are embedded within them, we can get the most complete representation of a design project. The pictures that end up on a website or billboard only represent a small part of a design, even though these are often these images that become the focus of public discussion.

Figure 6. 3D bird's eye visualization of the Roof Park (southwest – north-east) (Source: Buro Sant en Co)