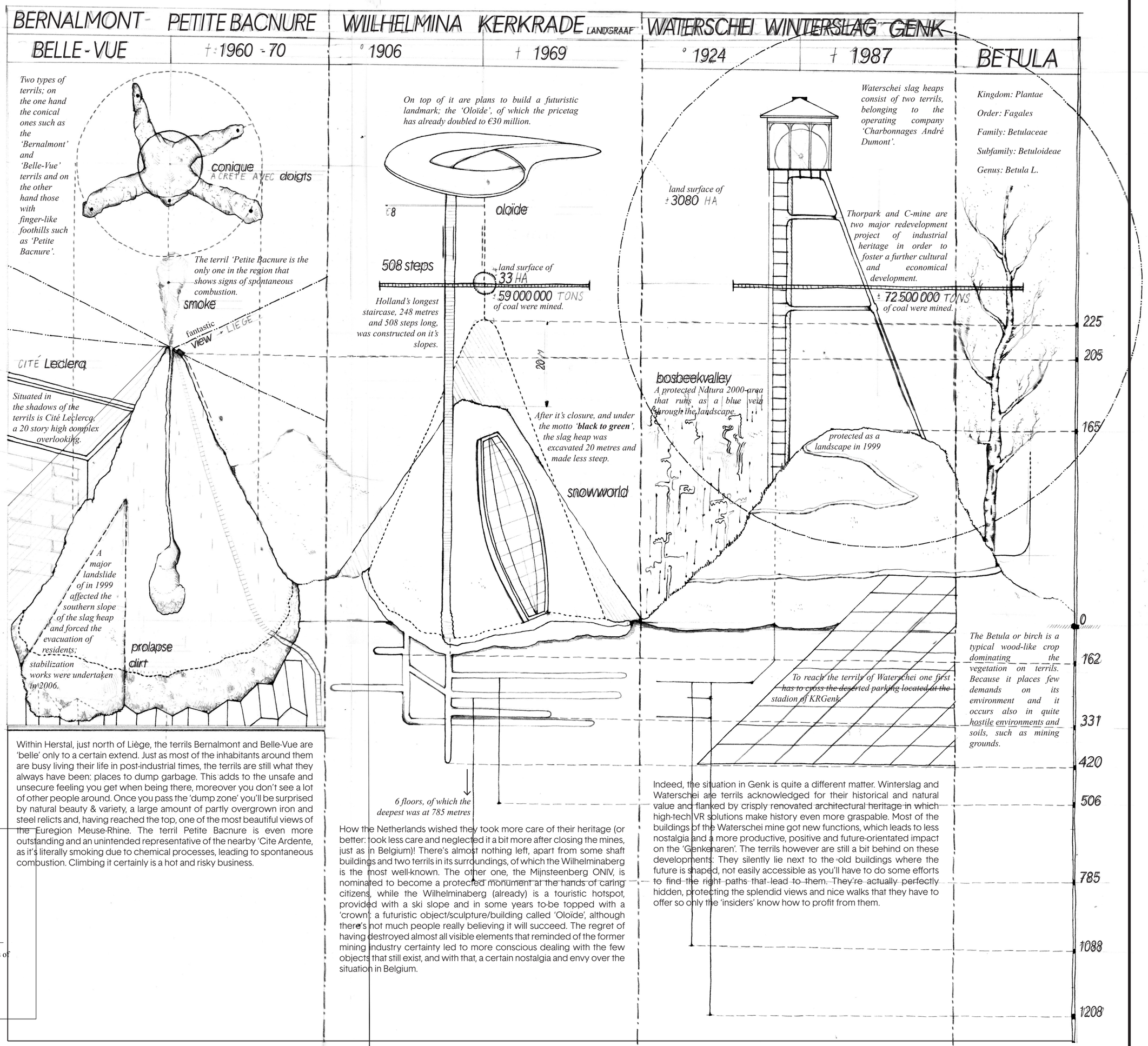
Hills with a history

Terrils (French for slag heaps) are microclimates in itself, not only regarding their natural aspects but also because they, at least within the Euregio Meuse-Rhine, seem to be representatives of the societal/social and economic situation they're in (or better: on top of). There's hardly any similarity between the terrils themselves and the way they are perceived, apart from the vegetation (white birch trees that stand in beautiful contrast with their surroundings and the black earth of the terrils themselves) and the fact that they stand out in the relatively flat landscape and thus offer nice views to the ones daring to climb them.

There's various forms and structures, depending on the way how they have been 'constructed' and deconstructed (which is the case with most terrils in the Netherlands). The way how they are perceived varies from garbage dump to monumental relicts, and the variety in current 'function' and use makes these post-industrial scenic outliers interesting to discover.



Within Herstal, just north of Liège, the terrils Bernalmont and Belle-Vue are 'belle' only to a certain extend. Just as most of the inhabitants around them are busy living their life in post-industrial times, the terrils are still what they always have been: places to dump garbage. This adds to the unsafe and unsecure feeling you get when being there, moreover you don't see a lot of other people around. Once you pass the 'dump zone' you'll be surprised by natural beauty & variety, a large amount of partly overgrown iron and steel relicts and, having reached the top, one of the most beautiful views of the Euregion Meuse-Rhine. The terril Petite Bacnure is even more outstanding and an unintended representative of the nearby 'Cite Ardente, as it's literally smoking due to chemical processes, leading to spontaneous combustion. Climbing it certainly is a hot and risky business.

How the Netherlands wished they took more care of their heritage (or better: took less care and neglected it a bit more after closing the mines, just as in Belgium)! There's almost nothing left, apart from some shaft buildings and two terrils in its surroundings, of which the Wilhelminaberg is the most well-known. The other one, the Mijnsteenberg ONIV, is nominated to become a protected monument at the hands of caring citizens, while the Wilhelminaberg (already) is a touristic hotspot, provided with a ski slope and in some years to-be topped with a 'crown': a futuristic object/sculpture/building called 'Oloïde', although there's not much people really believing it will succeed. The regret of having destroyed almost all visible elements that reminded of the former mining industry certainty led to more conscious dealing with the few objects that still exist, and with that, a certain nostalgia and envy over the situation in Belgium.

Indeed, the situation in Genk is quite a different matter. Winterslag and Waterschei are terrils acknowledged for their historical and natural value and flanked by crisply renovated architectural heritage in which high-tech VR solutions make history even more graspable. Most of the buildings of the Waterschei mine got new functions, which leads to less nostalgia and a more productive, positive and future-orientated impact on the 'Genkenaren'. The terrils however are still a bit behind on these developments: They silently lie next to the old buildings where the future is shaped, not easily accessible as you'll have to do some efforts to find the right paths that lead to them. They're actually perfectly hidden, protecting the splendid views and nice walks that they have to offer so only the 'insiders' know how to profit from them.

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This map is a part of the

Temporal itinerary to –
and
The accompanying complete incomplete atlas of –
Cross-border marvels or astonishments of
A(n) un/defined border region:
Euregio Meuse-Rhine

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