

Medieval Bruges and its outports

An interdisciplinary approach to a multi-layered landscape

Research Context

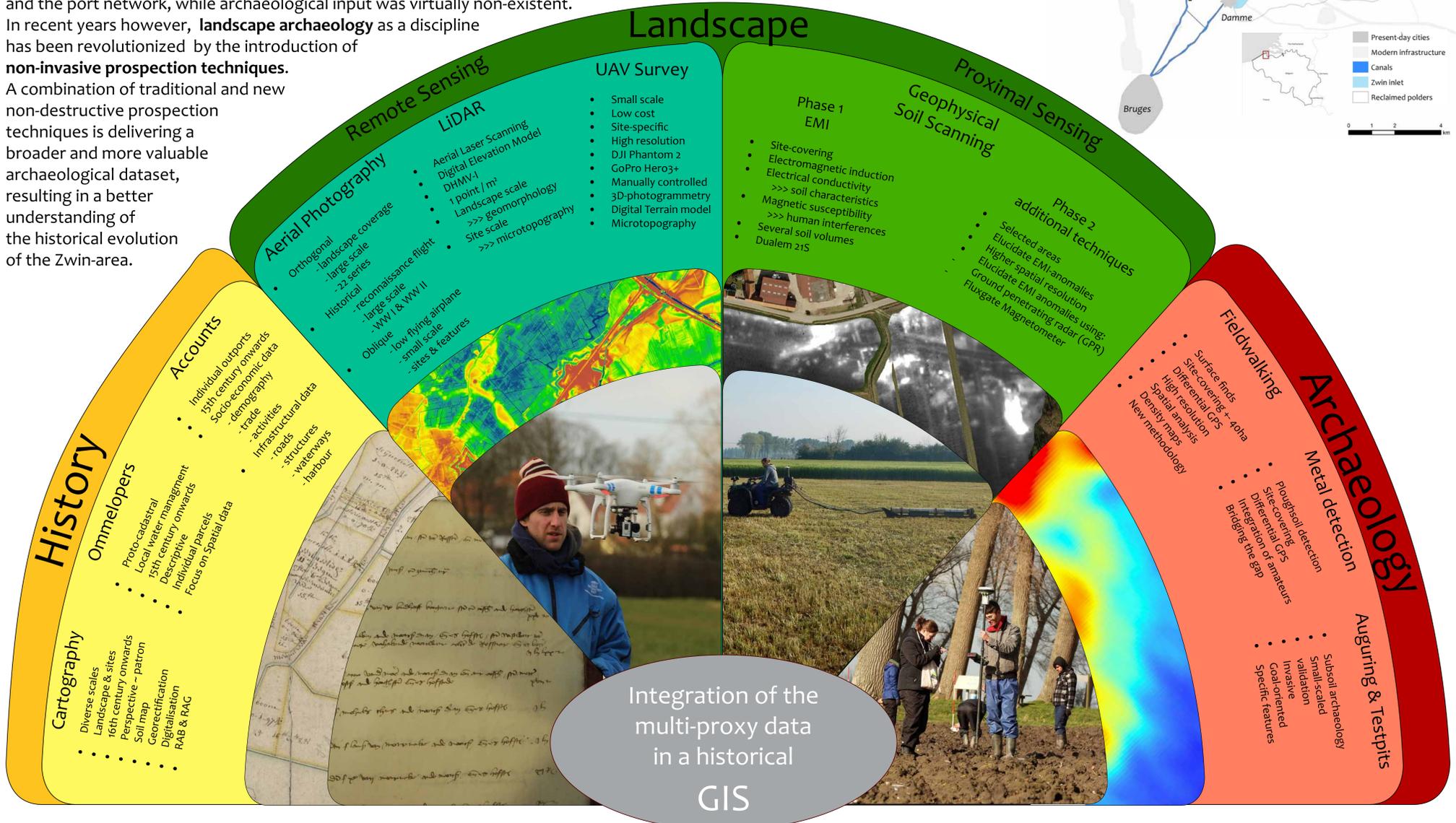
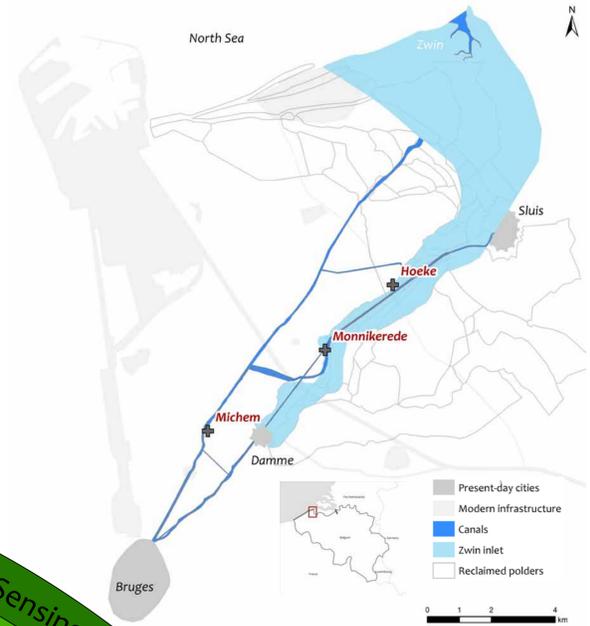
During the Middle Ages, Bruges became one of the most important urban centres north of the Alps. The specific position it held within transcontinental and maritime **trade networks** played a crucial role in this development. In order to attain and retain such connections, natural creeks were connected with man-made canals, dams and sluices, creating a **port system** named after its main waterway: the **Zwin**. Bordering the tidal inlet, a **network of outports** shaped the region into a **linear suburban extension** of Bruges.

From the late 15th century onwards, political, economic, and environmental factors triggered a **crisis** in the Zwin area. Bruges lost its vital connection to the sea and the subsequent decline of port activities proved that outports like Monnikerede and Hoeke were not viable without the network in which they sprout. Following this economic crisis, successive periods of military turmoil sealed the fate of the port network and made the **deserted** outports gradually fade away in the landscape.

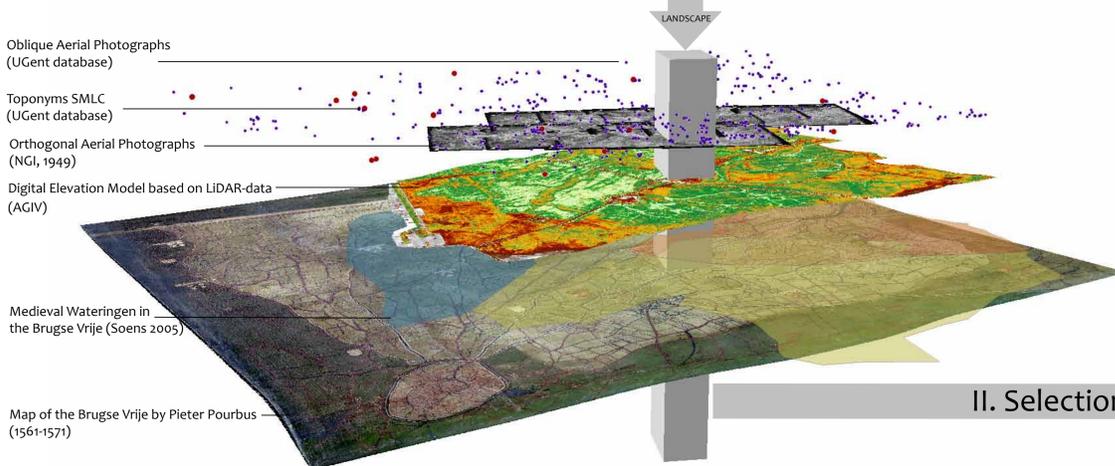
For more than a century historians and pedologists debated Bruges' connection to the sea and the port network, while archaeological input was virtually non-existent.

In recent years however, **landscape archaeology** as a discipline has been revolutionized by the introduction of **non-invasive prospection techniques**.

A combination of traditional and new non-destructive prospection techniques is delivering a broader and more valuable archaeological dataset, resulting in a better understanding of the historical evolution of the Zwin-area.



I. Acquisition & processing of existing data layers for the entire Zwin area



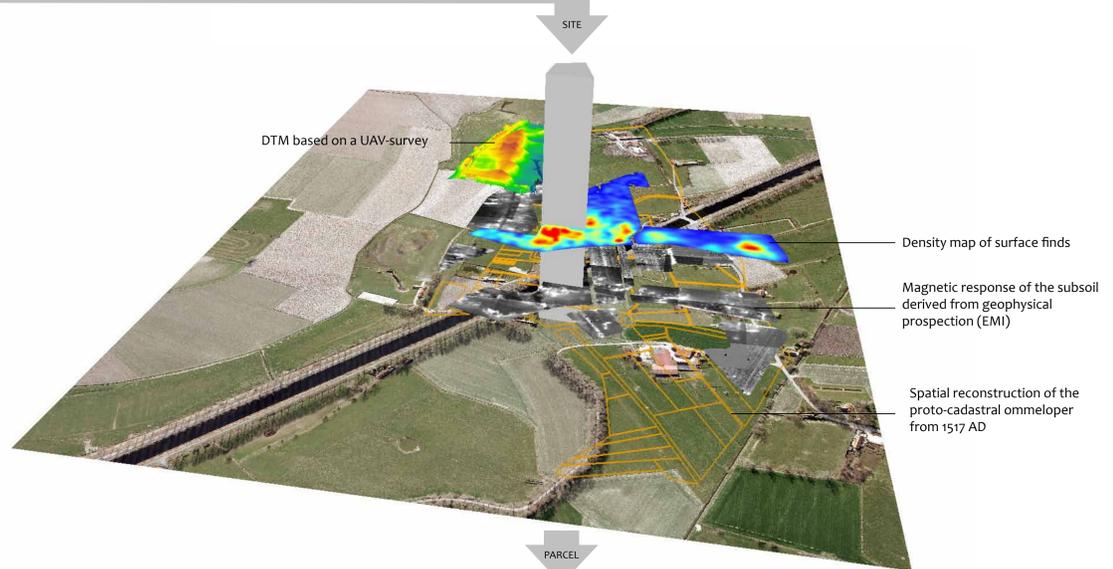
Objectives

- Interdisciplinary study of the historical and landscape evolution of the area between Bruges and the Zwin-mouth.
- Detect the exact location, morphology and state of preservation of the lost Zwinports.
- Develop and evaluate an integrated methodology for assessing such complex landscapes and sites.

First results

- The spatial integration of data coming from ommelopers, fieldwalking and geophysical prospection are highly complementary, even on the level of individual historical parcels.
- The combination of traditional and innovative prospection techniques is promising and needs to be further developed.
- The developed methodology empowers us to bridge the gap between urban and rural, micro-scale and macro-scale, landscapes and seascapes.

II. Selection of the sites



III. High-resolution scan and development of new data layers on the selected sites