

SMART USE OF SPACE

How to deal with the growing pressure of urbanization in Flanders

Els Terryn, Ann Pisman, Thomas Verbeek, Georges Allaert¹

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Abstract

Due to urbanization, Flanders, the northern part of Belgium, is one of the most densely built and inhabited regions in Europe. The growing pressure of urbanization is expressed by an increasing built-up surface. Projections indicate that 30 to 50 per cent of the area of Flanders will be built-up in 2050 (Poelmans, Van Rompaey & Batelaan, 2010). To slow down this urbanization trend, a more sustainable spatial development with less use of undeveloped land has to be considered. In the framework of the Spatial Policy Plan Flanders 2020-2050 this principle is translated into the concepts of 'smart' and 'careful' use of space, related to the 'Three R principle' of waste management: reduce, reuse and recycle. Translated to spatial planning objectives, the growing pressure on greenfield areas should be reduced and existing structures should be reused and recycled by constantly reusing them.

This article presents the results of a research for the Flemish Spatial Planning Department and focuses on the localization of reusable space, the stimulating and obstructing factors, its potentials and the integrated implementation in spatial policy. Currently, there is no 'tool' to locate reusable space and the majority of new developments still focus on greenfields. Firstly, the study introduces the idea of 'reuse of space' in Flemish spatial planning. Contrary to the restricted definition of the concept in the field of brownfield development, in this research reuse of space is defined broader than merely the development of contaminated sites. The concept has more resemblance with the term previously developed land (PDL): "land or premises which have been previously used or developed and are available for use with or without intervention" (Ganser & Williams, 2007, p.603). Secondly, the potentials of reusing space are analyzed through different case studies and the amount of reusable space in Flanders is quantified in a GIS-analysis. Finally, in order to implement reuse of space in spatial policy, the resulting data are used to construct different spatial typologies in Flanders, based on the potential reusable space.

The research shows that focusing on previously developed land can be a method to reduce the growing pressure on greenfield sites, resulting in less use of space.

¹ Ghent University (Belgium) - Centre for Mobility and Spatial Planning - els.terryn@ugent.be, ann.pisman@ugent.be, thomas.verbeek@ugent.be, georges.allaert@ugent.be