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Session 5.1: Special Session 2: Land policies in Europe 1

**Land Policy in Belgium: How to limit land take in a “landowners’ paradise”?**

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Two main characteristics are prerequisites to apprehend how land policy and spatial planning operate in Belgium. The first relates to a cultural and political context where the planning tradition is weak, in particular compared to the main neighbouring countries (The Netherlands, Germany and France). In Belgium, the balance between individual property rights and collectively desired land uses has historically been favourable to landowners (Halleux et al., 2012). This is why, as opposed to the Netherlands being qualified as a “planners’ paradise”, Belgium can be described as a “landowners’ paradise” (Shahab et al., 2021).

The second characteristic of the Belgian situation is that the country is now a federal state where spatial planning, including land policy, is the unique official responsibility of four federated entities: the Brussels–Capital Region, the Flemish Region, the Walloon Region and the German-speaking Community. In view of this, it can be considered that four distinct planning systems (co)exist in Belgium (Halleux & Lacoere, 2023). Even though, those four planning systems actually originate from a common matrix that was set up in the 1960s, by the then competent national government. It is in the 1980s that the planning systems of the federated entities started to diverge, with the evolution of the Belgian institutional system from a unitary state to a federal state.

In this contribution, we will focus on both, Dutch-speaking Flanders and French-speaking Wallonia. Our choice is not only justified by the fact that those two entities represent 97% of the national territories, but also by the fact that they are the most concerned with the issue of land take that we have chosen to focus on. More precisely, in this contribution, we will use two case studies in the Flemish city of Ghent to achieve two objectives. The first objective is to depict how the planning system in Flanders designs solutions to meet the objective of land take limitation. In parallel, the second objective is to compare the Flemish attempts with the different attempts that are envisaged in Wallonia to meet the same objective. The structure of our presentation will follow the general proposal: (1) Short description of the understanding(s) of the term “land policy” in your country.

(2) Description of the general situation, spatial context and the actual conflict/tension (what is the land use problem? How does it fit the context of the country’s spatial development?)

(3) Public and private actors relevant in your case (who owns this premises? which public authorities are involved? which other private actors play a role, like banks, neighbours, etc.)

(4) Public policies & Institutions (What are the regulations that influence how this plot is / can be used? Are there further regulations that influence the land value? Is there any influence on ownership / distribution of this plot of land?)

(5) Reflections (To what extent is this case representative for the land policy in your country? How does the case reflect the overall policy debate in your country? Think of the property rights and the public policy intervention).

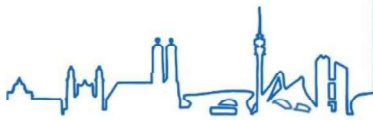
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