

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE USE OF OPEN SPACE IN A DENSELY URBANIZED CONTEXT

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Abstract

The boundary between the Flemish urban and rural areas has faded in recent years and a fragmented spatial structure has emerged. The ‘open space’ is evolving from an agricultural production area to a semi-urbanized consumption area. On the one hand the public use of open space seems to be growing, particularly because of the success of recreational networks. On the other hand the open space also seems to be increasingly used in a private way, as a consequence of residential development, setting up gardens and hobby farming. An empirical case study showed that these evolutions are actual phenomena and that some determining conditions can be defined. Both evolutions tend to change the open space profoundly. Planning policy should be aiming to guide these evolutions in the best way possible, considering the limited carrying-capacity of open space. Maybe the control of accessibility of the countryside is part of the solution.

1. Introduction

The terms city and countryside can be considered as two ideal images that don’t exist no longer in Flanders. Elements of these two opposites exist scattered and fragmented across the Flemish landscape. Due to different urbanization movements a complex spatial structure has come into being, where the traditional boundaries between city centres and suburbs, between city and countryside and also between residential areas and rural areas have faded. What remains is a vague and chaotic spatial structure without any real notion of centrality, existing of fragments with different densities and functions.

In the pre-industrial era agriculture and nature were practically the only users of the Flemish open space. Now, the so-called ‘open space’ is evolving from an agricultural production area to a semi-urbanized consumption area where people reside, work and recreate. These signs of urbanization, that endanger the

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traditional agricultural function, seem to occur with different degrees to the farthest corners of the Flemish region.

In this paper two transformations will be examined that occur simultaneously in the Flemish ‘open space’ and appear contradictory at first sight. On the one hand the public use of open space seems to be growing, particularly because of the success of recreational networks and supporting infrastructure. This recreational joint use of the open space can be noticed on the ground in the form of cycling and walking networks, mountain bike trails, picnic grounds, information panels, etc. The open space is becoming a shared space that is consumed massively by the modern ‘urbanized’ Flemings.

On the other hand the open space also seems to be increasingly used in a private way, as a consequence of residential development, setting up gardens and using former pasture land to keep horses. The collective use of rural parcels – like agricultural space to produce for the society, woods that are accessible to everyone – is decreasing more and more. Parcels are increasingly enclosed and used in a way that has no connection with the original function and sometimes curbs the accessibility of open space.

The growing public and private use seems to be an actual evolution in Flemish open space. Nevertheless little research has been done so far to check whether or not these intuitive observations can be objectified. This is partly because of the lack of data – due to the juridical context – which makes it difficult to situate or quantify these phenomena. In addition, these profound changes in the use of our open space pose the policymakers for some important choices. It is clear that the carrying-capacity of the open space is limited and that an increase of public or private land use can pose problems.

This paper wants to focus on an empirical assessment of these two phenomena via terrain study as well as an evaluation of the policy related to it. Consequently, the research is built up around three important and intriguing research questions; Are public use and privatization important phenomena in Flemish open space? What can be seen as the determining conditions? What is the policy related to these phenomena?

The findings demonstrate that public use and privatization tend to have a profound impact on the open space. Not all Flemish regions are affected in the same way, some determining conditions can be defined. Planning policy should be aiming to guide these evolutions in the best way possible, considering the limited carrying-capacity of open space. Anyway, a better enforcement of the permission system can be helpful in the short term.

Because of Flanders’ specific and dense urbanization pattern, assessing these transformations in a Flemish context can probably open a relevant research for similar contexts in North-West Europe or other urbanized regions in the world.

The rest of the paper will be organized in the following way. First some literature will be discussed, divided into two parts: a social placing of the phenomena and an overview of existing research. The next part handles

about the methodology of the research, followed by a part in which the results are displayed. A discussion about the results will conclude the paper.

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2. Literature overview

2.1 Social placing

Privatization

The increase of private land use can be understood within the broader societal evolution of individualization, which implies the control over your own money, your own time, your own body and also your own private piece of land (Beck, 1992). This individualization trend started in the 18th century but has not become dominant until halfway the 20th century, together with the flourishing of capitalism (Sennett, 1977; Giddens, 1991). Individualization and the increasing independence of the individual are namely only possible in societies with a high degree of specialization as well as functional differentiation, with a corresponding high production of goods and a high level of amenities. These are all elements that exist in our contemporary modern societies. Furthermore gradually a ‘culture’ of individualism has come into being, which suggests that people have the right to pursuit individual happiness (Schnabel, 2004).

In the last decades an evolution towards hyper-individualism can be observed, related to a strong individualization of consumption (whilst individualization was initially linked with production). This logic of hyper-individualism is strengthened by our technological equipment and our ordinary spatial planning. This evolution can be spatially translated to the ideas of privatization and capsularization (De Caeter, 2005).

Privatization points to the moving of human activity from the ‘public’ space to the ‘private’ space, which leads to serious threats to the survival of the public sphere (Lofland, 1998). Capsularization stands for the idea that people want to live in capsules; inward directed, isolated spaces that have to represent security, privacy and hygiene and that radically ignore the environment which they are situated in (De Caeter, 2005).

This privatization and capsularization movements can be clearly noticed in the Flemish countryside. Many people prefer a peripheral location to buy or build a detached house, surround it with a private – often fenced off – outdoor area and if possible for the horse lover a private hobby pasture. Living on the countryside has evolved from a necessity to a choice.

Public use

Opposed to the increasing private appropriation of open space are standing different transformations that make the open space more accessible, introduce new meeting places and supply a multiple land use, mainly in the field of recreation.

Because of complex and often contradictory urban processes an unambiguous approach of public space is no longer sufficient. For a long time yet, public space isn't situated any longer only in the cities and one can say that the urban public space is declining (Lofland, 1998). A new (thinner) form of public life is emerging in the contemporary society, which demands a redefinition of public space. Public space doesn't disappear in the network city, but gets a new meaning and appears at new places (Nio, 2001).

The open space gradually becomes such a 'new' public space (Van der Wouden, 1999). This broadening of the term 'urban public space' is the consequence of a scaling-up of urbanization processes, changes in leisure spending, and fundamental transformations in the social-economic relations (Hemel and Van Uum, 1999). The open space is more and more consumed and experienced as a 'leisure space'. Hereby visitors often follow the tourist gaze, paying much attention to the visual aspect. They are searching authenticity, the so-called rural idyll (Urry, 1995; Hemel and Van Uum, 1999; Leinfelder, 2007).

In addition to this idea of open space as consumption space there are two other possible points of view that give an explanation for the evolution towards 'open space as public space', namely the open space as a new 'public space' for socio-cultural confrontation (Leinfelder, 2007) and open space as a reservoir for recreational activities (Boonen and Smits, 2002; Metz, 2002). Especially the last view can very explicitly be noticed in the Flemish open space, a large part of the visitors consider the open space only as a green scenery for experiences and entertainment.

Concerning the future of the public open space different opinions exist. Some authors warn for the increasing public 'claim' and emphasize the need for a new balance between the private sphere and the public sphere, because of the existing discrepancy between the way how the landscape is produced and how it is consumed (Mels, 2006). Others think that 'everything is permitted everywhere' (Hemel and Van Uum, 1999).

2.2 Related research

Privatization

When it comes to privatization of Flemish open space, some relevant research has already been carried out in the last years. Concerning residential housing, Pisman et al. (2008) showed that the number of people living in the open space has declined in the period 1998-2007, corresponding to the objectives in the Flemish Spatial Structure Plan of 1997, that concentrate on a reinforcement of residential cores. On the other hand the number of households, in the same 'open space', has increased in the period 1998-2007, mainly because of the evolution towards smaller households. An increase of households in the open space leads consequently to an increase of houses. This tendency is conflicting with the objectives in the Flemish Spatial Structure Plan.

Dewaelheyns et al. (2008) focused on the spatial characteristics of the garden complex in Flanders. They interpret this term as ‘the whole of individual private gardens, associated with a house’ and therefore gardens will also occur in relation with houses in the open space. Three aspects are examined: the relative spatial importance and the distribution, the spatial associations with other categories of land use and the morphology of the spatial structure. They calculate that 13 percent of the Flemish territory consists of gardens, what makes it an important land user. Gardens seem to be concentrated around city centres and villages and are more abundant in urbanized municipalities. One can conclude that gardens are ‘followers’ of urbanization. Dewaelheyns et al. tried also to get insight into the active process of ‘gardenization’ on previously open pieces of land, an important transformation in the open space. Based on their sample, 8,4% of the garden area in the period 2002-2005 is new compared to the garden area in the period 1988-1990 and most of these gardens occupy former agricultural land. This proves that ‘gardenization’ really is an actual process.

Concerning the increasing presence of hobby pastures in Flemish open space, recently an explorative analysis on the spatial importance of the horse sector has been carried out by Bomans et al. (2009). They estimate the total number of horses in Flanders at 150.000. Based on a random test they conclude that 40 percent of all pastures, or approximately 5 percent of the Flemish territory, is occupied by horse pastures. Furthermore they conclude that small parcels close to gardens and/or woods have a significantly higher chance to be used for horse keeping. On a municipal level they pose that a strong splitting up of the open space, an urbanized character, a high density of gardens and pastures and small parcels lead to a significantly higher concentration of horses.

Public use

Concerning public recreational use of Flemish open space, some general studies exist but profound spatial research is lacking. WES (2007) sheds light on trends on the demanding side in Flanders, which are the consequence of demographic and economic factors. The increasing leisure possibilities of people, together with the trend towards more fragmented leisure activities and short recreations, lead to a growing interest in outdoor activities in a green and rural environment. This leads to a demand for more well accessible and intricate networks, close to cities and village centres, with a high degree of supporting. At the same time some problems due to an increasing public use of Flemish open space are quoted by WES, like an exaggerated supply of recreational trails without uniform promotion, an exaggerated signposting on the terrain and conflicts between walkers, cyclists, riders and mountain bikers. De Spiegeleire et al. (2006) add to this list the problem of establishing a social basis and a certain tolerance among the local rural community. Finally, an interesting point of view comes from the British researchers Kay and Moxham (1996), who suggest that the idea of hordes of visitors threatening the countryside is a misconception. They examined the use of recreational walking trails on the English countryside. It is true that some clear and serious temporal and spatial concentrations of visitors exist, but it is just a small and loyal part of the population that is

responsible for the greater part of the activities. The occasional visitors are probably visiting the popular destinations on the popular days, which causes the false impression of an overcrowded countryside.

3. Methodology

For the majority of mentioned phenomena of public and private land use, reliable numbers and data on a Flemish scale often don't exist or are very difficult to obtain. Also Dewaelheyns et al. (2008) and Bomans et al. (2009) emphasize this lack of data in Flanders. This makes it impossible to carry out research on a generalized Flemish scale or map the evolution of public and private land use over the last decades. Therefore is chosen to detect the phenomena via an empirical in-depth examination of study areas, to shed light on the extent of public and private land use and to determine some influencing spatial factors.

The municipal scale was chosen for the definition of the study areas. The selected municipalities were spatially distributed over Flanders based on some spatial criteria. Within these municipalities smaller micro study areas were demarcated. These study areas were put through a detailed terrain study. The results of the case study make it possible to give a provisional answer to some research questions. Finally the phenomena will be considered from a policy scope, by a confrontation with the permission system and the municipal spatial structure plans.

Selection of case municipalities

To date, six case municipalities were examined. The choice for these municipalities was based on an existing research on mixed land use in Flanders (Leinfelder and Pisman, 2008). In this research different spatial typologies are distinguished, with specific open space and urbanization characteristics. Six municipalities were chosen out of these types. Figure 1 shows their location.

- Low-dynamic open space under commuting pressure: Nevele
- Dynamic open space under recreation pressure: Brakel and Kasterlee
- Dynamic open space in a suburban field: Keerbergen and Lebbeke
- High-dynamic open space in an urban network: Kontich

In the summer of 2008 the first two municipalities, Kasterlee and Nevele, were examined. In the spring of 2009 the focus was on a third municipality, Kontich. In the summer of 2009 the three other municipalities, Brakel, Keerbergen and Lebbeke, were examined.

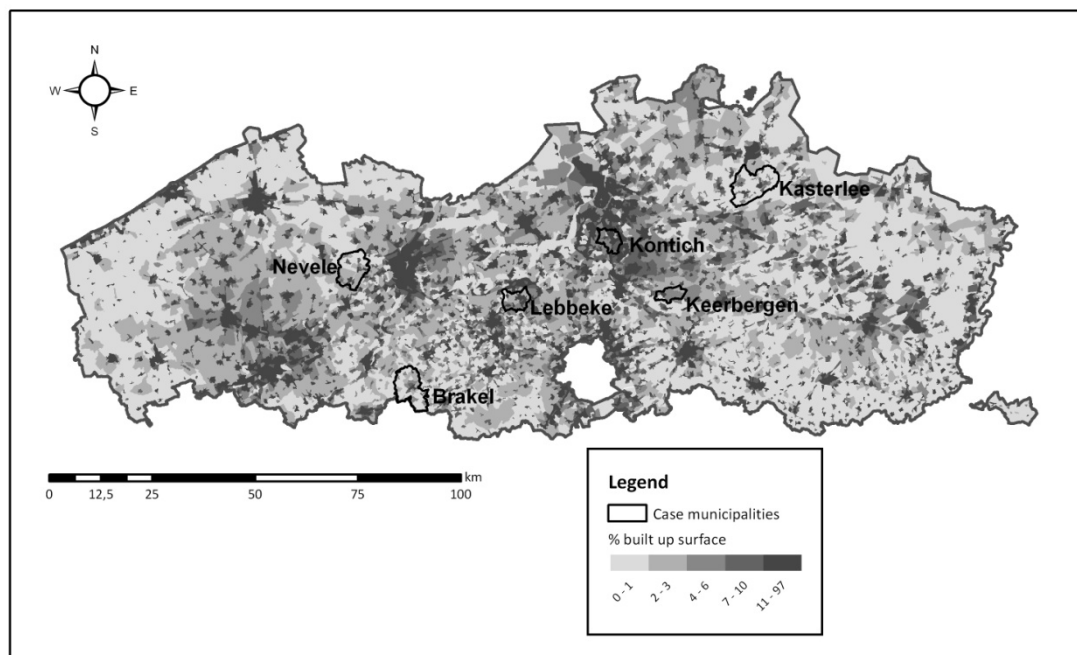


Figure 1 Location case municipalities on a building density map of Flanders

Selection of micro study areas

Because of practical reasons not the whole municipal territory could be studied. Three micro study areas were defined per municipality, as far as possible based on the information in the municipal spatial structure plans. It was attempted to select three strongly different areas, to make the diversity of phenomena as big as possible and to detect local differences:

- an area with a (possible) privatization pressure
- an area with a (possible) recreation pressure
- a reference area, with a dominant productive agriculture

The precise demarcation of the areas was made by infrastructure lines, mostly roads and railways, to make it possible to carry out a clear parcel wise registration of public and private phenomena. The assumed size of a micro study area was approximately 200 ha, so that on average 600 ha were studied in each municipality. In smaller, highly urbanized municipalities the micro study areas could be smaller.

Terrain registration method

The terrain study consisted in the onsite registration of public and private phenomena. Further processing took place in GIS (ArcGIS9.2 software), whereby attributes were linked to phenomena and further calculations were made possible, as well as a convenient cartographic representation. For the digitalization of the terrain registration, digital aerial views (OC-Gis Vlaanderen, 2003 and Google Maps (Teleatlas data, 2009)) and cadastral plans (Kadvec, 2005) were used. This made a detailed digitalization much easier and made it possible to uncover certain matters that were not visible on the terrain.

The broad phenomena of public use and privatization were operationalized by selecting specific phenomena that can be examined and registered on the terrain.

The most important **public** phenomenon is the recreational use of open space through recreational networks, supported by infrastructure, as the main elements. A subdivision was made into four categories:

- Signposts: all forms of recreational signposting, generally linked to recreational networks
- Other public small-scale infrastructural elements: for example benches, information panels, dustbins
- Recreational tracks: line-shaped structures that are clearly set up for or adapted to the needs of recreational users, like mountain bike and horse riding trails
- Recreational attraction poles: all kinds of establishments that have a crowd pulling, recreational character, like restaurants, sport grounds and riding schools

Concerning the **privatization** of open space it was attempted to register all visual private phenomena in the open space. Roughly speaking a difference was made between three categories:

- Non-agrarian buildings: all buildings that have no link with productive agriculture and are thus 'new' users of the open space (mostly houses and small commercial or manufacturing companies)
- Hobby pastures: all pastures that are used for a private purpose, namely hobby farming (mostly horses)
- Other privately used land: all other phenomena of private land use, like private woods, private fishponds and scattered vegetable gardens

Evaluation of policy documents

Additional to the terrain registration an evaluation of policy documents was conducted. On the one hand the permission system was examined, with special regard to the practices for small scale public and private interventions in the open space. These tend to change the character of our open space but seem to slip through the net when it comes to the permission policy.

On the other hand the municipal spatial structure plans of three case municipalities (Kasterlee, Kontich and Lebbeke) were evaluated. It will be assessed what kind of policy vision they have on the open space and whether some statements about recreational use and privatization of open space can be found in the documents.

4. Results

4.1 Terrain study

Because of the lack of space, it is impossible to depict all the terrain registrations. Therefore the attention will be fixed on the resulting findings from this research. Some examples of the terrain registration can however be seen in the following figures (Figure 2 and Figure 3).

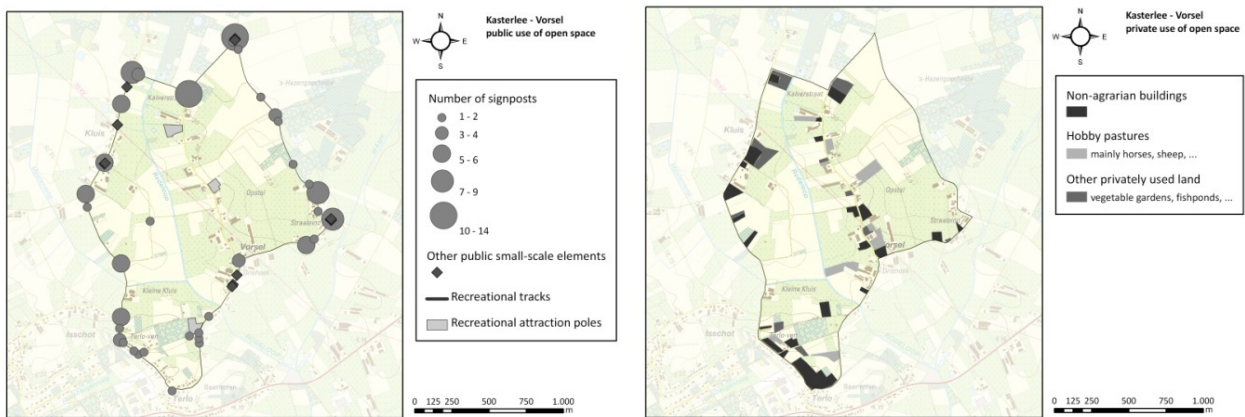


Figure 2 High public vs. average private use of open space in a micro study area in Kasterlee

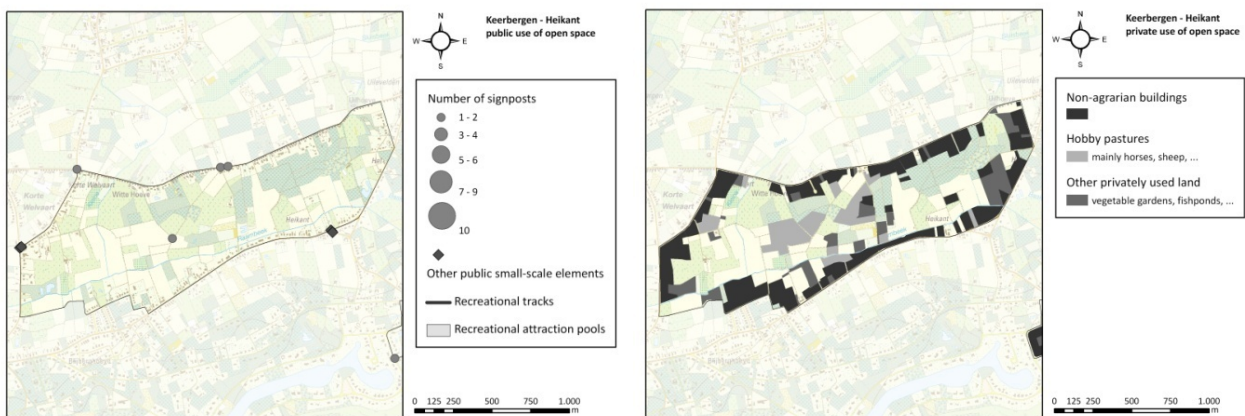


Figure 3 Low public vs. high private use of open space in a micro study area in Keerbergen

Based on the terrain study it is clear that privatization as well as an increasing public use are real phenomena in the Flemish open space. At the same time it turns out that relevant differences can be noticed between the different micro study areas. It is clear that not all open spaces are publicly or privately used to the same degree. There exist some differences between municipalities as well as within municipalities.

At a **micro scale**, some factors can be defined which seem to give a higher chance on public or private land use. These influencing factors return in various micro study areas, but because of the qualitative intention of the research, these factors remain hypothetical. Table 1 gives an overview.

Table 1 Influencing factors based on the terrain study

	PUBLIC USE	PRIVATE USE
Factors that give a higher chance on public/private land use		Small parcels
	Presence of water and woodland	
	General recreational attractiveness of the municipality	
	Municipal touristic-recreational policy	
	Proximity of villages and residential areas	Presence of buildings, on a large scale (e.g. on the outskirts of villages) as well as a small scale (around dots or ribbons of buildings)
	Good accessibility	Good accessibility
	Absence of large private domains	

When it comes to the **public use** of open space, the following factors can be distinguished, that however strongly interfere with each other.

- Areas with an attractive landscape, with the presence of water and woodlands, seem to be used more in a public way.
- The general recreational attractiveness (often due to the location in a touristic region) seems also an influencing factor. In Kasterlee and Brakel, two municipalities with a noticeable recreational pressure, also the less interesting areas are strongly publicly used.
- The municipal policy seems to play a role too. Municipalities that pay attention to recreational networks will also involve their less attractive areas.
- Also the accessibility appears to be influencing: a weak accessibility causes a significantly lower public use. This is strongly linked with the private character of vast open space areas, which works obviously counterproductive for a high public use.
- Finally, open spaces neighbouring residential areas seem to be used more in a public way than expected based on their weak intrinsic values.

Also the **privatization** of open space seems to be influenced by some spatial characteristics.

- The presence of buildings seems to be an important influencing factor. Private land use is more frequent adjacent to the build environment, on a small scale as well as a larger scale.
- The parcel size appears to be very important too. Large agricultural parcels are not privatized very quickly, whereas small parcels are very susceptible.

- Finally also the accessibility seems an influencing factor. The more accessible an area, the more parcels are privatized. Parcels that are difficult to reach will not be privatized in first instance.

At a **macro scale**, some differences can be noticed between the various spatial typologies of the municipalities. These are summarized in Table 2.

Concerning the public use of open space it speaks for itself that the ‘dynamic open space under recreation pressure’ has the strongest recreational use of open space, with often a supra-local impact. The concerned municipalities, Kasterlee and Brakel, lay far from the urban areas and are part of important ‘touristic regions’. On the other hand the ‘high-dynamic open space in an urban network’ is strongly urbanized and has a weak public use of open space, with only minor local impacts. In the other spatial typologies structures on a meso- or micro-level seem to be more influencing than the general spatial typology. The local presence of nature conservation areas, woodlands or canals can cause a high local recreational use of open space, whereas the absence of local attraction structures causes the opposite.

Private use also leads to a differentiation at a macro level. Two typologies have a strongly privatized open space, namely the ‘dynamic open space in a suburban field’ and the ‘high-dynamic open space in an urban network’. These municipalities are also the most urbanized. In the other types of open space privatization rather seems to be a local phenomenon. Local factors, like the presence of buildings, the parcel size and the accessibility are determining here.

Table 2 Differences according to spatial typology of open space

	PUBLIC USE	PRIVATE USE
Dynamic open space under recreation pressure	Strong public-recreational land use	Determined by local factors
Low-dynamic open space under commuting pressure	Determined by structures on meso- and micro-level	Determined by local factors
Dynamic open space in a suburban field	Determined by structures on meso- and micro-level	Strong privatization
High-dynamic open space in an urban network	Weak public-recreational land use	Strong privatization

These findings seem to correspond with the findings of Dewaelheyns et al. (2008) and Bomans et al. (2009), who see private phenomena like gardens and hobby pastures as ‘followers’ of urbanization. Furthermore they

concluded too that small parcels in an attractive landscape, in the vicinity of other gardens or woodland, are more susceptible for privatization.

4.2 Evaluation of policy documents

A brief analysis of the Flemish permission system (based on the decree of 18 May 1999) shows that many public and private interventions in the open space require a building permit. When it comes to public land use, the construction of cycle paths and footpaths and the placing of signposts, benches, information panels and dustbins requires in most cases a permission. Concerning private land use, of course the building of houses in rural areas needs a permission, as well as the change of the function of a rural building. But also horse stables, small horse pens and large fences require a permit in most cases. On the other hand, the extension of a garden to adjacent parcels and the privatization of pastures don't need a permission on paper. A verification of the building permit register to the situation on the ground, shows however that the obligation to obtain a building permit gives no guarantee on a real apply for a building permit. For many small interventions it is generally known that few people do the effort to request a building permit. As a consequence there is no reliable data about interventions in our open space and it is very difficult for local policymakers to have an effect on the new evolutions on the terrain. A better enforcement of the permission system seems necessary.

An evaluation of the municipal spatial structure plans shows that is not easy for the municipal authorities to respond politically to the evolutions of privatization and increasing public land use. Most municipalities pay some (passive) attention to the increasing recreational use of open space and sometimes develop specific programs within some spatial preconditions. Privatization, on the other hand, doesn't seem to be an issue for the municipalities at all. Only the municipality of Kasterlee pays some attention to privatization. The ambition to concentrate hobby farming in fragmented agrarian zones is, however, not very realistic. As mentioned before, the privatization of pastures doesn't need a permission which makes it impossible to control this evolution. An overview of the analysis can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3 Main conclusions policy evaluation

	PUBLIC USE	PRIVATE USE
Policy options in the municipal spatial structure plans		
Nevele (1997) (Groep Planning, 1997)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Objective to make the open space attractive for recreation - No area-specific objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No specific statements on privatization - The open space is divided into three different areas with other building possibilities - No area-specific objectives
Kasterlee (2006) (IOK Plangroep, 2006)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Search for a precise harmony between tourism/recreation and the qualities of open space and nature - Division into different zones: touristic-recreational attention zones, mixed land use zones, strategic sanctuary zones - Area-specific visions for the different open space areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Few specific statements - Concentration of hobby farming in the most split up agrarian zones - Agricultural space is divided into different zones: e.g. core areas of the agrarian structure, searching zones for building free zones, zones for multifunctional agriculture - Area-specific visions for the different open space areas
Kontich (2008) (Hevec/Stramien cvba, 2008)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recreational use is mentioned repeatedly but unsatisfactory worked out - Area-specific visions are very limited 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No specific statements concerning privatization - No area-specific visions

5. Discussion

Based on the results of the terrain study, it can be concluded that public land use as well as privatization are actual phenomena in the Flemish open space.

In all 18 micro study areas, in six totally different municipalities, signs of public use of open space could be found. Even in the recreational least attractive areas numerous signposts showed that a public use of space existed. Recreational joint land use of the countryside seems to be an irreversible fact that can't be thought away or neglected any longer.

When it comes to privatization, rural housing can be found almost everywhere across Flanders. With the exception of nature reserves and woodlands, vast areas of open space without habitation can be barely found in Flanders. The solitary living on the countryside, unconnected to the agricultural sector, has become a reality in Flanders for a long time yet. Related to these houses the open space is 'gardenizing' more and more, whereby adjacent parcels are connected to the built-on parcel to enlarge the private space. This doesn't seem to be a general phenomenon yet, most rural houses are limited to the built-up parcel. 'Horsification', and more in general the occurrence of hobby farming, is a very actual and visible phenomenon in Flemish open space, and moreover originated quite recently. This tendency is apparently linked to the rise of rural residents, but also to the difficulty of the agricultural sector to survive in an urbanized Flanders.

Although all micro study areas show signs of privatization and public land use, some determining conditions can be defined. The attractiveness of the landscape, the presence of forests and bodies of water, the recreational policy of the municipality, the accessibility and the distance to residential areas seem to give a higher chance on public use of open space. On the other hand, the proximity of the built environment and the parcel size are determining conditions for the privatization of open space.

A big limitation of the study is the restriction to a static analysis of the present situation on the ground. Because of the lack of data about the examined phenomena, the research was restricted to a static case study. More evidence is needed to talk of a real evolutionary transformation. Interviews with locals or a new terrain registration within a few years can repair these shortcomings.

It is not yet clear whether or not conflicts are generated when the two transformations take place in the same area. It is clear that some areas are attractive for public as well as private use and that public and private users come into contact with each other. It is also obvious that a strong privatization damages the public character of open space. In the examined micro study areas no real conflicts could be noted. Further research, among others through the interview of users, is necessary to give an adequate answer.

Whether an increasing **public** land use or a privatization tendency is problematic or not, cannot be defined univocally and the opinions will differ. Anyway these evolutions seem to be unstoppable. The point is to guide these evolutions in the best way possible and fit them in the open space in a judicious way.

When it comes to public recreational land use, municipalities and provinces have to realize that there is an upper limit to the recreational carrying capacity of their open space and have to weigh every proposal versus its context. A limited and canalized public use can contribute positively to the liveability and the preservation of open space as well as the understanding between visitors and locals and between visitors themselves. On the other hand, excessive recreation could harm the landscape and the scarce open space in Flanders.

Based on the policy analysis, it appears that some municipalities are working on this topic and try to guide these evolutions in a good direction, by formulating area-specific visions with respect for the carrying capacity of the landscape and the natural structure. Other municipalities restrict themselves to the formulating of the vogue word ‘countryside recreation’ without being aware of the possible consequences.

Whether the **private** use of open space is interfering or not, depends on the phenomenon. Rural housing is often interfering, but has been made legally possible by decree. Policymakers must try to prevent a further development of houses in the open space and to integrate existing houses in the landscape in the best way possible. The incorporation of parcels with the built-on parcel in order to use them as a garden should be regulated better. The society has to wonder whether it is desirable that wealthy people occupy parts of the open space and fence them off to create an own private ‘living space’. The growth of hobby pastures too seems to be unstoppable, but this evolution can possibly contribute to an attractive open space if the pastures are well placed in their context. In many fragmented regions, hobby farming has a larger chance on survival than the productive agriculture. Hobby pastures might become the new guardians of open space if attention is paid to the influence of pens and fences on the landscape.

A more stringent permission policy alone wouldn’t repair the situation, because of the low willingness to apply for a building permit. A better enforcement on the terrain is part of the solution, together with a broad sensitization of the citizens. For both tasks primarily the municipality will be responsible. Today, municipalities aren’t really conscious of the phenomenon. In the spatial structure plans barely a word can be found about the surge in private land use. A change in the actual policy is thus needed.

Maybe part of the solution lies in the theme of accessibility which is an important influencing factor for both private and public land use (see Table 1). The accessibility of open space could be a guide to lead these phenomena in a good direction. By making some open space areas more or less accessible, a municipality can actually have an impact on the use of open space. If no public use or privatization is wanted, the area could be closed for everyone. If only recreational public of open space is wanted, motorized vehicles can be locked out from the area, so that walkers, cyclists and horse riders have free play. One of the difficulties in this theory is the accessibility for agricultural vehicles and locals who live already in the area. Because a

guiding policy alone is not enough to keep out unwanted visitors, a more stringent entrance policy is needed, but this impedes the traditional users of open space. More research and try-outs are definitely needed.

It is clear that the use of our open space is an interesting research topic which gets a lot of attention in recent years. Much of the research is however still in its infancy. Further research is necessary, because how we have to use our scarce open space is a fundamental question.

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