

Military landscape: Different policies of military cemeteries and the surrounding landscape in Flanders Fields through the last century

Van den Berghe, Hanne, Stichelbaut, B., Saey, T., Note, N., Gheyle, W., Van Meirvenne, M., Bourgeois, J., M., Van Eetvelde, V.

Ghent University, Department of Geography

Keywords: landscape and space, heritage management, military cemeteries, aerial photography, Landscape Change Trajectory Analysis (LCTA), policy

During the First World War, the typical Flemish landscape changed in a very high tempo into a military landscape. This military environment existed out of craterland, bunkers and trenches and many other landscape elements, but also out of military cemeteries. Many of these cemeteries are British property and are positioned on the former frontline or in the hinterland. These grounds were donated to the British people and popped up in a rapid tempo during and after the war. As a result, the soldiers were and are still commemorated by the policy of the Commonwealth War Grave Commission (CWGC).

The research areas in this project are located in the area around Newport, Ypres and Kemmel Hill, and are marked by three different landscape types. In those areas we analysed the abrupt landscape changes during the war into a military landscape and also the impressive restoration afterwards. This was accomplished by a landscape change trajectory analysis (LCTA) in a Geographic Information System (GIS). Land use (e.g. pasture, woodland, cemetery,...) and linear features (roads, green structures,...) are mapped through the last century starting with 1915, by use of historical and contemporary aerial photography. In this way, it is possible to see the evolution of the landscape until today in order to point out different locations of possible military relics or heritage today.

Afterwards, we try to understand why some parcels in the landscape have still WWI-relics today and why some don't have any. Our hypothesis is that these changes of the landscape are managed by different policies through history which results in different point of views on WWI-remains. Each policy causes a positive or negative wave of political interests in our WWI-history. The underlying reasons can be linked with culture, tourism and economic benefits. In summary, we try to understand the landscape changes through the last century with a focus on the policy of the Commonwealth and the Flemish municipalities of WWI-relics through the last century.