



**Belgeo**  
Revue belge de géographie

**1-2 | 2011**  
**Urban studies in Belgium**

---

## Editorial

**Stijn Oosterlynck and Ben Derudder**

---



### Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/belgeo/6327>  
ISSN: 2294-9135

### Publisher:

National Committee of Geography of Belgium, Société Royale Belge de Géographie

### Printed version

Date of publication: 30 June 2011  
ISSN: 1377-2368

### Electronic reference

Stijn Oosterlynck and Ben Derudder, « Editorial », *Belgeo* [Online], 1-2 | 2011, Online since 15 December 2012, connection on 06 May 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/belgeo/6327>

---

This text was automatically generated on 6 May 2019.



*Belgeo* est mis à disposition selon les termes de la licence Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International.

---

# Editorial

Stijn Oosterlynck and Ben Derudder

---

- 1 About a decade ago, this journal published a review article by De Lannoy and De Corte (2000). In this review, the authors scrutinized the (then recent) urban studies carried out by researchers explicitly adopting a geographical perspective. The purpose of this special issue is to update De Lannoy and De Corte's (2000) assessment by bringing together a range of papers that collectively provide an overview of the research foci and methodologies presently adopted by Belgian geographers in their study of Belgian cities and city-systems. We want to emphasize that the terms "geography" and "geographer" are hereby used in a loose, non-sectarian way: many contributors are not strictly working in geography departments and/or are not geographers by education. However, all of the papers published in this special issue on "urban studies in Belgium" deal with topics that are commonly studied by those who call themselves geographers. In our reading, the different papers can thus be conceived as urban-geographical contributions.
- 2 Although most of the research featured in this special issue is quite topical, established frameworks are still featuring in the background. Grulois revisits the debate on the very nature of urbanism to investigate its potential remit today. This is deemed sensible as the century-old debate on the nature of urbanism in Belgium was organized around a similar set of points of attention, with environmental problems at the core. Hanssens and Derudder, in turn, confront recent research on polycentricity and world cities with Christaller's classic work on central-place systems. Both papers make clear that, in spite of the emergence of new theoretical frameworks and research methodologies, there is actually quite some continuity in the field of urban studies in/on Belgium.
- 3 This combined discontinuity/continuity in urban-geographical research can also be observed in the papers by Doucet and Sacco. That is, while these papers clearly build on the critical turn urban studies have taken since the 1970s, they also cover new ground. Doucet, for instance, explores how a discourse analysis, firmly rooted in post-structural thinking, can inform our understanding of the Brussels' conundrum. Meanwhile Sacco draws on recent debates on state spatial restructuring to examine the opportunities and

constraints of political participation of migrant associations in new urban policies, using a case study of two neighbourhoods in Brussels.

- 4 The remit of the critical turn in urban studies is also visible in the papers of Block and Steyvers, Van Criekingen and Van den Broeck, albeit that their research frameworks are grounded in institutionalist approaches. Van den Broeck contrasts market-oriented new urban policies with socially innovative forms of local development. He illustrates these two trends in urban development strategies by assessing the socio-spatial innovation capacity of urban strategic projects in Leuven (railway station area) and Antwerp (Schipperskwartier) respectively. Block and Steyvers, in turn, unravel the (often implicit and fuzzy) decision power of elites, bureaucrats, politicians, etc. in the urban planning process in Kortrijk with the purpose of understanding how urban planning comes into being. Van Criekingen reviews the (extensive) literature on gentrification, and uses this to call for research that acknowledges the role of state actors in gentrification processes.
- 5 A final tradition that is followed-up in this special issue is that of the quantitative modeling of urban systems. The papers by Pisman *et al.* and Van Acker *et al.* are not only comparable in terms of their methodological framework, but also in terms of their empirical setting (Gent) and tangible research purpose, i.e. relating the urban geographies of residential preferences to both the lifestyle concept and mobility preferences.
- 6 Although a special issue of an academic journal can obviously not do justice to the broad spectrum of contemporary urban geography in terms of its theoretical frameworks, analytical tools, and research topics, we believe that – taken together – the papers give a fair impression of recent urban-geographical research on Belgium. In our view, perhaps the single most remarkable feature of this special issue is the immense diversity in meta-theoretical frameworks (see Kesteloot & Saey, 2003). These frameworks include inter alia post-structural readings of the city (e.g. Doucet), positivist (e.g. Pisman *et al.*) and institutionalist approaches (e.g. Block & Steyvers), and Marxian political economy (e.g. Van Criekingen). Closely related to this, one can observe an enormous breadth in terms of empirical strategies, which include discourse analysis, quantitative modeling, and a host of qualitative methods. Coupled with the very different nature of the research topics and the associated unevenness in terms of cross-fertilization with other disciplines such as transportation studies and political science, this results in an eclectic mixture of urban studies. Although it is customary to applaud such diversity, it also raises concerns on the possibilities of a fruitful debate between urban geographers: it would seem that few researchers speak the same “language” in terms of topics, theories, and methods. Put differently: (urban) geography’s lack of a paradigm in a Kuhnian sense may well be beneficial because it facilitates heterodox thinking, but we may also simply be witnessing the failure to put Humpty Dumpty together again.

---

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

DE LANNOY W., DE CORTE S. (2000), "Urban Studies of Belgian Geographers at the turn of the millennium". *Belgeo*, 1, pp. 189-200.

KESTELOOT C. , SAEY P. (2003), "The nature of changes in human geography since the 1980s: variation or progress?", *Belgeo*, 4, pp. 131-143.

## AUTHORS

### **STIJN OOSTERLYNCK**

University of Antwerp, [Stijn.Oosterlynck@ua.ac.be](mailto:Stijn.Oosterlynck@ua.ac.be)

### **BEN DERUDDER**

University of Ghent, [Ben.Derudder@ugent.be](mailto:Ben.Derudder@ugent.be)