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# Open space in urbanized regions

## A comparative study on spatial transformations in Flanders

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### Keywords

urbanization, peri-urban, open space, underlying dynamics, transformations, spatial effects, Flanders

### Abstract

Flanders, the northern part of Belgium, is one of the most densely built and inhabited regions in Europe. Due to urbanization the predominance of agriculture in its rural areas is decreasing. The open space is no longer a monofunctional agricultural production area, but rather a complex structure of fragments with different densities and functions such as housing, work and recreation. Although some key transformations have been studied before in independent, sector-oriented research, a spatially integrated approach is missing. Therefore, this research aims to gain insight into the current state and structure of open space in Flanders through a spatially coherent analysis based on a system approach. This article focuses on four relevant transformations: (a) the increasing residential use, (b) the economic diversification, altering the formerly agricultural rural economy, (c) the increasing private land use (e.g. for private gardens and hobby farming), and (d) the increasing use for public recreational purposes. The paper places these transformations in a larger socio-economic and cultural context and assesses their relations and combined spatial effects qualitatively and quantitatively through a case study in nine municipalities.

The study shows that the non-agricultural land uses resulting from these transformations affect about a quarter of the study area. They not only change the appearance and morphology of open space fundamentally (e.g. by fragmenting it), but also its structure and functioning. On a more fundamental level they even change the way we think about open space. Additionally, these changes become driving forces for further urbanization themselves. Generally, we can conclude that they have a significant impact on the remaining open space. However, since these transformations are unacknowledged and largely underrated, a legal framework is missing. The insights presented in this article could contribute to a policy that is better adapted to current dynamics in Flanders' open space.

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