

De kracht van tijdelijke open(bare) ruimte

This project is based on collaboration between partners from 'spatial', 'green' and 'historical' backgrounds. Cooperation in a trans-disciplinary way combines the specific skills of the diverse professional approaches, leading to the 1+1=3 principle.

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Approaching spatial development by temporary uses

Flanders and the Brussels metropolitan area are highly urbanized. Their territory is characterised by a mish-mash of open spaces, natural areas, urban fabric, infrastructures and industries. Policy and research mostly focus on the downsides of this fragmented condition. Smaller open spaces in an urban to peri-urban context are often undervalued by regional policies (Dewaelheyns et al., accepted). The observation that only 13% of the Flemish soil is effectively sealed-off, however highlights a hidden reality that offers opportunities (Dewaelheyns et al., 2013). Given the significant number and the diversity of the open spaces located near, on the side or between urban fragments, the future of the Flemish territory is strongly related to their development. New visions could be developed for this urban substance where green areas and urban fabric are potentially closely interlinked.

This research proposal focuses specifically on areas previously reserved for urban development, which have evolved today to semi-natural spaces* (e.g. former brickyards, sand mines, meadows or agricultural fields). Throughout the 19th and 20th century, wastelands within and at the fringe of the urban fabric (e.g. demilitarized ramparts and building plots) were already used as informal green spaces. They were crucial in the perception of the urban landscape and the quality of life in the city. Today, inhabitants and conservationists tend to recognize semi-natural sites as green spaces, although they are not being managed by any official body (Vanbutsele, 2014). In that sense, semi-natural sites can be qualified as 'Waiting Spaces'*. Studies have shown that both today and in the past, these spaces provide opportunities for a large number and variety of citizens to express themselves and to participate in urban life through all kinds of spontaneous, autonomous and alternative (temporary) activities. The transformation of such available land to vegetable gardens (Verbeek et al., 2011) and pasture for horse (Bomans et al., 2011) are two examples. But it also appears that these activities are able to contribute significantly to the future redevelopment of the sites (Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung, 2007; De Jong, 2012; PMB/Leershuis, 2012). For example by

influencing the private actors to improve the quality of the space and management of their activities (Foré et al., 2012). This seems to offer possibilities within the search for more contemporary - participatory, flexible and sustainable - approaches to spatial (re)development (De Smet, 2014).

Management of semi-natural spaces: Good Practice Guide

The objective of this research is to provide a Good Practice Guide, presenting strategies that recall upon 'temporary' uses for approaching semi-natural spaces and guiding their future management.

How can urban planners, designers and managers approach these 'waiting' open spaces in redeveloping the contemporary city? Should public authorities recognize and manage them as public green spaces or as building lots to fight urban sprawl? Or can they be considered as definitive semi-natural spaces; which raises the issue of how to manage this type of space, half way between a historic park and a nature reserve. Based on the context and the stakeholders related to the site, the issue of accessibility needs to be addressed.

The selected 'temporary' uses should help ensure an appropriate balance between the social (recreational), economic and ecologic needs, as well as contribute to safeguarding or restoring the coherence and identity of the landscape (Vanemptem, 2009).

Research approach and methods

The project involves a combination of theoretical and empirical research. By studying the (historical) evolution of a number of cases: the involved stakeholders, the morphological characteristics and the ecological aspects, we will demonstrate how 'temporary' initiatives have had a long-lasting effect on these places. We will combine our professional expertise with the lay-knowledge and experiences of 'local experts' (e.g. inhabitants and users) through participatory observations and interviews. Based on these observations we will propose strategies for approaching this 'waiting spaces'.

*Semi-natural spaces

'Areas resulting from the combination of natural processes and human activities. These areas are characterized by multi-functional use (for example, a space of recreation, a space of production — kitchen garden, pasture for livestock etc. — a space of regulation — visual and anti-noise screen — and a space of education). Their status is often precarious because these areas are subject to the pressures of property speculation and the fragmentation of land by infrastructures.' Definition adopted in 1989 by the Conseil Supérieur bruxellois de Conservation de la Nature (Ost et al., 1993). The semi natural spaces are located where the peripheral tissue meets the city fabric (Vanbutsele, 2012).

*Waiting Spaces

Urban locations awaiting official redevelopment that are in the meantime inviting everyday use and stimulating creativity and initiative (Faraone & Sarti, 2008; De Smet, 2014).

References

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Temporary uses :
Tree trekking, Neder-Over-Hembeek, 2013



Vegetable gardens, Neder-Over-Hembeek, 2013



Children playing on the Brialmont ramparts, Antwerpen ca. 1900