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Urbanisation and planning culture in Flanders

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Promotor: prof. dr. Stijn Oosterlynck

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Supervisor

Prof. dr. Stijn Oosterlynck, University of Antwerp

Doctoral committee

Prof. dr. Ilse Loots, University of Antwerp (chair)

Prof. dr. Hans Leinfelder, KU Leuven

Prof. dr. Jochem de Vries, University of Amsterdam

Jury members

Prof. dr. Wouter Van Dooren, University of Antwerp

Prof. dr. Ann Pisman, Ghent University & Departement of Environment Flanders

Prof. dr. Frank Othengrafen, TU Dortmund

Cover

Stylized version of street sign marking an urban area in Belgium.

Source: Verkeersborden in België – Serie F: Aanwijzingsborden, F1bh: Begin van een bebouwde kom

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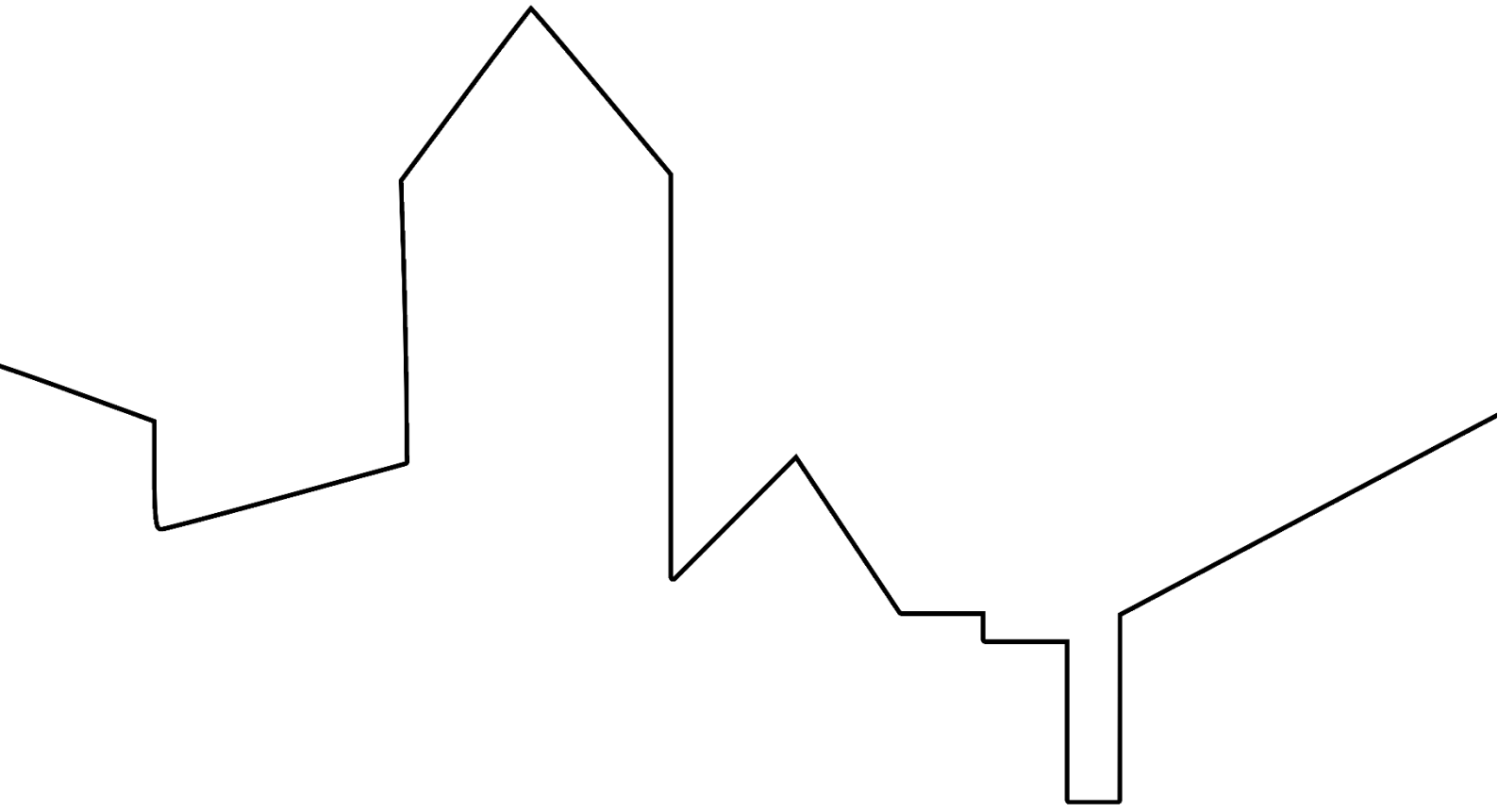

In a desolate dream I saw
a city that never ends

Through my window I watch it grow
and I know it'll never end

Endless streets through endless nights
this city needs a helping hand

City off the album *City Same City*
by Antwerp-based band Flying Horseman
2013

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Dankwoord

Sociale wetenschappers hebben vaak de neiging om de route van onderzoeksvraag tot publicatie te presenteren als een rechte weg van start naar finish. Zo schrijven we onze resultaten op en zo vertellen we het aan onze studenten. Waarom doen we dat? Is het aantrekkelijker om een eenvoudig verhaal te vertellen? Of forceert de dwangbuis van gestandaardiseerde onderzoeksartikelen van 8000 woorden ons tot die vorm? Want de werkelijkheid is heel anders.

Elke onderzoeker zal je op een informeel moment vertellen dat een onderzoek vaak meer op een kronkelweg lijkt dan op een rechte lijn. De route kent pieken en dalen en ligt vol onverwachte haarspeldbochten. Onderzoekers zullen vertellen dat onderzoeksvragen tijdens het proces soms nog veranderen en dat commentaren en revisierondes er niet zelden voor zorgen dat de uiteindelijke argumenten in een publicatie andere zijn dan je van tevoren had gedacht.

Op de kronkelweg van het onderzoek passeren er heel wat mensen die hun stempel op de reis drukken met ideeën, advies en soms eenvoudigweg door hun aanwezigheid. Dat zijn er zelfs zoveel dat je de vraag kunt stellen in hoeverre het eindresultaat alleen het product is van de onderzoeker. Daarom wil ik hier de mensen bedanken die mij en mijn onderzoeksproces hebben gevormd op de lange weg van eerste idee tot proefschrift.

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Ook de andere leden van de doctoraatscommissie ben ik dankbaar. Ilse Loots was een zorgzame en consciëntieuze voorzitter en collega aan de Universiteit Antwerpen. Hans Leinfelder beschikt over een encyclopedische kennis van ruimtelijke planning in Vlaanderen en is daarnaast een zeer zorgvuldige en constructieve lezer. Jochem de Vries ging mij voor in het beschrijven van de kloof tussen politieke en bureaucratische rationaliteit en bood daarmee een kader voor mijn observaties. Als doctoraatscommissie versterkten jullie elkaar en tijdens de bijeenkomsten brachten jullie mij telkens een stap verder dan waar ik op eigen kracht beland was.

Juryleden Ann Pisman, Frank Othengrafen en Wouter Van Dooren hebben allen in de loop van het onderzoeksproces waardevolle bijdragen geleverd. Ann vanwege haar kennis van de afbakeningen van stedelijke gebieden en de Vlaamse ruimtelijke planning, Frank als opsteller van het model dat een culturele analyse van ruimtelijke ordening mogelijk maakt en Wouter als bestuurskundige vraagbaak als ik weer eens buiten de grenzen van mijn vakgebied trad.

Ik ben alle respondenten grote dank verschuldigd voor de tijd die ze voor mij hebben gemaakt en de documenten die ze uit hun archieven opdiepten. Rikkie Speleman en Frederik Stevens hielpen de vijftig uur van interview-opnames beheersbaar te krijgen. Er waren vele fijne en interessante ontmoetingen met collega's van de onderzoeksgroepen OASeS – later CRESC – en van Cosmopolis aan de Vrije Universiteit Brussel waar ik regelmatig te gast was. Het secretariaat van de

Faculteit Sociale Wetenschappen was een goed geoliede ondersteunende machine van mijn eerste werkdag tot en met deze verdediging.

Buiten het werk kon ik altijd rekenen op de kritische steun van vrienden aan beide kanten van de grens: Esther, Floris, Marijn, Robbie, Josip, Joram, Iris, Laura, Sajda, Elias, Elisabet, Robin, Katrien, Valerie en Greg stonden me bij met raad en daad. Ellen en Ellen van Kornél in de Sint-Lambertusstraat zijn mijn steun en toeverlaat voor de broodnodige koffie en zoetigheid. Ook ben ik dankbaar voor de eigenzinnige inleiding op de Vlaamse (plannings)cultuur die ik in mijn eerste jaren kreeg van Michiel van Meeteren. De redactie van AGORA Magazine vormt een rijk netwerk van sociaal-ruimtelijke kennis en was de bron van vele gezellige vergaderingen.

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Ook de collega's die ik tegenkwam na mijn tijd op de Universiteit Antwerpen wil ik danken. Zij voegden weer nieuwe ervaringen toe die het proefschrift verrijkten. Wouter Bervoets en Bart Van Herck van IDEA Consult begeleidden me bij het vertalen van academische kennis naar praktische beleidsinstrumenten. Naast het delen van zijn kennis over het Vlaamse woonbeleid, toonde Michael Ryckewaert van de Vrije Universiteit Brussel zich ook ongelofelijk begripvol en flexibel in een voor mij zeer moeilijke periode. Heel recent werd ik hartelijk ontvangen door mijn nieuwe collega's van de Gezinsbond.

Niet alleen in mijn loopbaan maar ook op familiaal vlak is er veel gebeurd de afgelopen jaren. Adje en Cat gaven ons een warm welkom in hun familie. Het was een grote verrassing dat de vader die ik 36 jaar lang niet gekend heb socioloog en planoloog bleek te zijn. Als sociologen geloven we vaak sterk in *nurture*, maar de invloed van *nature* blijkt niet te onderschatten!

Als persoon ben ik echter het meest gevormd door mijn moeder. Haar niet aflatende honger naar kennis, haar politieke betrokkenheid en haar onverbeterlijke leraressenstijl maakten mij tot wie ik ben. Ze bood lange tijd een luisterend oor voor mijn onderzoekservaringen. Daarom is het heel droevig dat ze het afronden van dit proefschrift niet meer kan meemaken. Ze heeft wel eens schertsend gezegd dat ik niet wilde opgroeien toen ik maar bleef doorstuderen. Ik kan niet beloven dat ik nu klaar ben want ik leer nu eenmaal graag en dat heb ik van haar.

Ten slotte het gezin dat zich vormde tijdens mijn reis op deze weg. Véronique, ik dank je voor je liefde, voor je gezelschap, en voor je kritische en stimulerende sociologische inzichten. Voor je geduld met mijn dag-nacht en ritme dat vaak niet aansluit bij het jouwe en met mijn weekendwerk dat 'toch nog even moet gebeuren'. Voor je troost als ik het even niet meer zie zitten en ook voor de hele fijne vakanties. Ik kan mij geen betere partner wensen.

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Samenvatting

Vlaanderen wordt gekenmerkt door een steeds groter wordende ruimtelijke versnippering en ruimtebeslag. De negatieve maatschappelijke effecten hiervan hebben in de twintigste eeuw reeds geleid tot diverse pogingen om deze ongebreidelde verstedelijking te beteugelen, met teleurstellende resultaten. Om meer inzicht te krijgen in het onvermogen van het Vlaams gewest om verdere versnippering en ruimtebeslag in te dammen, analyseert dit proefschrift het Vlaamse verstedelijkingsbeleid in de periode 1996-2021.

Het onderzoek vertrekt vanuit een sociologisch-institutioneel analytisch standpunt, met de planningsculturen-benadering als belangrijkste uitwerking daarvan. Deze benadering ziet ruimtelijke planning als een cultuurgebonden vorm van handelen. Inzicht in de culturele dimensies die een rol spelen bij het vormgeven en uitvoeren van het Vlaamse verstedelijkingsbeleid, kan in de toekomst leiden tot de ontwikkeling van meer effectief beleid.

Het planningsculturen-raamwerk is abstract en behoeft verdere operationalisering. Daarom wordt het hier aangevuld met andere theorieën en methoden. De hoofdstukken in het proefschrift analyseren respectievelijk (1) de implementatiefase van de groeistrategie van afbakeningen van stedelijke gebieden met behulp van de beleidsarrangementen benadering; (2) de rol van de bestuurscultuur bij het opbouwen van institutionele capaciteit voor verstedelijkingsbeleid; (3) de rol van discours bij het uitvoeren van het Vlaamse verstedelijkingsbeleid, in het bijzonder de discursieve tweedeling stad-land; (4) de dominante en oppositionele *framings* van het recent voorgestelde instrument van de betonstop met behulp van een nieuws framing analyse.

Het afsluitende hoofdstuk presenteert zowel empirische conclusies als een reflectie op deze verschillende manieren van onderzoek naar planningsculturen. Het stelt vast dat het ambitieuze kader van ruimtelijke structuurplanning dat in de jaren negentig werd bedacht en in de jaren 2000 werd geïmplementeerd, onvoldoende in staat was om nieuwe planningspraktijken duurzaam te institutionaliseren in de mate dat verstedelijkingsbeleid kon worden geïmplementeerd zoals bedoeld. Een van de belangrijkste oorzaken voor deze constatering is de dominantie van een machtslogica in de Vlaamse planningscultuur. Deze domineert vaak een (bureaucratische) expertlogica en creëert een situatie waarin beslissingen soms worden gemaakt op basis van te verwachten politieke succes, in plaats van op basis van een afweging van inhoudelijke argumenten. Gecombineerd met kritische attitudes van de bevolking ten aanzien van maatregelen die de vrijheid van individuele woonkeuze en het wooncomfort inperken en met lokale overheden die sterk hechten aan autonomie, resulteert deze cultuur in wantrouwen van stakeholders ten opzichte van elkaar.

Hedendaagse pogingen om nieuwe maatregelen te ontwikkelen om ruimtelijke versnippering en ruimtebeslag tegen te gaan worden geconfronteerd met een tweedeling in de houding van het publiek. Enerzijds is er een vocaal dominante groep academici, planologen en progressieve politici die voorstander is van strengere maatregelen. Maar er is ook een groep

tegenstanders: zij met belangen als grondeigenaar, burgers die hun ongenoegen uiten op sociale media en conservatieve politici die daarop inspelen, die het beteugelen van verstedelijking associeert met een bedreiging van hun manier van leven. Deze verdeeldheid bemoeilijkt het nemen van ambitieuze maatregelen verdere ruimtelijke versnippering en ruimtebeslag tegen te gaan. Het proefschrift besluit met zes aanbevelingen voor het verstedelijkingsbeleid in Vlaanderen en twee suggesties voor verder onderzoek.

Summary

The Flemish region is characterised by ever increasing spatial fragmentation and land take. Its negative societal effects have led to attempts to curb this unbridled urbanisation for decades, with disappointing results. To increase understanding of this inability of the Flemish region to curb further fragmentation and land take, this dissertation analyses Flemish urbanisation policy in the period 1996-2021.

The research takes a sociological institutionalist analytical viewpoint, with the planning cultures approach as its main driver. This approach holds that planning is a culturally contingent form of practice. Understanding the cultural dimensions that play a role in shaping and implementing Flemish urbanisation policy may lead to more effective policy in the future.

As the planning cultures approach is abstract it requires further operationalisation. Here it has been supplemented with other theories and methodologies. The chapters in the dissertation analyse respectively (1) the implementation of the urban growth management framework of demarcating urban areas using the policy arrangement approach; (2) the role of governance culture in the building of institutional capacity for urbanisation policy; (3) the role of discourse in executing Flemish urbanisation policy, especially the continued discursive role of the urban-rural dichotomy; (4) the dominant and oppositional framing in the reception of the recently proposed instrument of the 'concrete stop' using a news framing analysis.

The concluding chapter presents empirical conclusions as well as a reflection on these various ways of doing planning cultures research. It observes that the ambitious spatial structure planning framework conceived in the 1990s and implemented through the 2000s was insufficiently able to institutionalise new planning practices to a degree that urban growth controls could be implemented as intended. One of the most important causes for this observation is the dominance of a power-based political logic in Flemish planning culture. This often dominates an (bureaucratic) expert-logic and creates a situation where decisions are sometimes made on the basis of the expected political success, rather than on a judgment of substantive arguments. Combined with a critical attitude of the population towards measures that curb the freedom of individual residential choice and comfort, and with local governments that are strongly attached to their autonomy, this culture results in a distrustful attitude of stakeholders towards each other.

Current attempts at developing new measures to counter spatial fragmentation and land take are confronted by a dichotomy in public attitudes. On the one hand there is a vocally dominant group of academics, planners, and progressive politicians in favour of stricter measures. But there is also a group of opponents: those with landed interests, citizens voicing discontent on social media, and conservative politicians capitalising on this, who associate urbanisation controls with a threat to its way of life. This division complicates taking ambitious action to counter further spatial fragmentation and land take. Finally the dissertation formulates six recommendations for urbanisation policy in Flanders and two suggestions for further research.

1. Introduction

1.1 The land of liberalised nonchalance

Travelling along one of the many main roads that connect towns and villages in Flanders, one can see the effects of two centuries of seemingly random urbanisation. The more densely built centres are linked by kilometres-long ribbons of varied buildings. Behind these ribbons – well visible from the train – structures are sprinkled like confetti over the landscape. Only on the fringes of the region, in the eastern province of Limburg and the western tip of West-Flanders larger open spaces can be found.

The structures in this spread-out urban nebula usually look out over green spaces at the back, but they are seldomly open to the street. Front yards are paved for parking. Windows are blocked by blinds. Commercial structures are interspersed with residential buildings and small-scale industries. Some businesses have been closed for decades but the deteriorating structures still remain. Houses are often detached and situated on generous plots. As far as architecture goes, a true mishmash of styles can be found. New-but-historicising farmhouses are placed next to Mediterranean-inspired villas, which in turn are flanked by the sleek horizontal lines of a modernist residence picked straight from a catalogue. In Flanders an owner really is 'king of their castle'. Infrastructure is extensive and not always in good shape. But these houses and gardens are spacious and there is ample room for parking. Indeed, there is a certain kind of comfort to be found in this "land of liberalised nonchalance" (De Meulder, Schreurs, Cock, & Notteboom, 1999, p. 79). Dehaene and Loopmans provide a striking description:

> **The Flemish landscape is constructed out of small grains: the combination of a finely distributed ownership structure, a strong local government and the emphasis on private initiative. The open landscape is also often a busy landscape, made up of a multitude of small landscape elements. The transformation of this landscape occurs almost innocently, elements are replaced and exchanged. The loss of the landscape is gradual. Rarely is the entire landscape at stake in an intervention. Gradually a loose and somewhat messy landscape emerges, the expression of a characteristic nonchalance. It is often a good place to live, but it doesn't always seem like it (Dehaene & Loopmans, 2003, p. 5; translation CdO).**

To an outsider[1] the Flemish spatial structure and architectural diversity can appear chaotic and alienating. It would be easy to judge that the residents of this region are apparently not capable of keeping their landscape tidy and structured. But easy judgements are unsatisfactory to a social scientist. There is more to be explained. How did a spatial pattern like this emerge? How it is maintained? What institutional structures, incentives and, not least, cultural values are expressed in

[1] I was born and raised in The Netherlands, famous for its planning doctrine of "rule and order" (Faludi & Van der Valk, 1994) and came to Flanders when I was 30 years old. Initially a comparison of Flemish and Dutch urbanisation policy was the intent of this thesis (see section 6.2.1).

the spatial pattern and its structures? Are these subject to change? Urban form affects human behaviour directly and differentially. It influences the societal allocation of resources with consequences that last for generations. It also shapes the perception and values of its residents and their location decisions. Furthermore, shaping urban form is not simply a result of individual decisions, it is subject to logics of collective action (Hack, 2012). This makes the genesis and management of the Flemish built environment a topic fit for sociological research. The 'logic of collective action' regarding urbanisation in Flanders, Belgium is the subject of this PhD dissertation. This study focuses specifically on how urbanisation is being guided by spatial planning as an institutionalised activity driven by public policy (cf. section 1.2).

In spatial planning, attempts to guide urbanisation often take the shape of urban growth management. In the course of the twentieth century growth management has evolved through three paradigms, with a possible fourth emerging in the last decade. These are: growth controls, comprehensive planning, smart growth, and sustainable growth (Chapin, 2012). These paradigms are approaches to controlling urban growth that have evolved from simple boundary lines in the post-war years, to comprehensive planning initiatives up to the year 2000, to incentive-based policy packages in line with a retreating government in the 2000s and 2010s, and finally a mixture of the last two shaped to combat the looming environmental and economic challenges of our time. While these growth management paradigms are often described in a United States context, they are perfectly applicable to Belgium as well, albeit with a delay of some fifteen years. Thus each growth management regime reflects the dominant socio-political and cultural attitudes of the era and is shaped by conditions specific to states or regions. There is always a balance that must be found between promoting growth in the 'right' places and limiting it or even pushing for degrowth in others (Grant, 2018).

Growth management strategies consist of sets of policy instruments that can be viewed as tools to control the social and ecological costs of spatial fragmentation. Examples of these tools are developer impact fees, farmland preservation ordnances, infrastructure development controls, and priority growth areas (Bae, 2007). One of the most widely known instruments of growth management however is the urban growth boundary. Combined with regulations on building types and densities growth boundaries attempt to contain spatial fragmentation directly by providing 'lines on the map'.

Urban growth boundaries have been one of the key instruments used in Flanders in the past twenty-five years. The process of formulation and implementation of this Flemish growth management strategy is extensively discussed in the chapters below. The goal is to acquire an in-depth understanding of Flemish urbanisation policy, including the translation of its goals into planning regulations and the professional and wider societal environments in which it was developed. This is important because "(…) the implementation form, as well as the geographical, economic, political and legal context in which an [urban growth boundary] is implemented, may determine to a large extent its impact." (Boussauw, Allaert, & Witlox, 2013, p. 1511).

1.2 Sociological institutionalism and the planning cultures approach

Spatial planning – through public policymaking on various scales – is an eminently institutionalised activity. The previous section has illustrated how Flanders lacks a growth management strategy that succeeds in curbing fragmented urban development. However, this is not due to a lack of attempts at policy development and implementation in this direction. At several moments in Belgian and Flemish post-war history (cf. section 1.4) there have been spatial planning policy initiatives regarding urban growth. Yet somehow these proposals have not become institutionalised to the degree that urban growth has actually been curtailed.

This dissertation therefore approaches spatial planning for urbanisation from an institutionalist perspective. Institutions are defined by Turner as formal and informal 'regular patterns of behaviour that are regulated by norms and sanctions into which individuals are socialized' (2006, p. 300). Institutions therefore "shape and constrain individuals' preferences and behaviour" (Lowndes & Wilson, 2001, pp. 631-632) Sociological institutionalism conceives of the forms and procedures used by modern organisations as culturally specific practices. These practices are:

> **(…) assimilated into organizations, not necessarily to enhance their formal means-ends efficiency, but as a result of the kind of processes associated with the transmission of cultural practices more generally. Thus (…) even the most seemingly bureaucratic of practices have to be explained in cultural terms' (Hall & Taylor, 1996, pp. 946-947).**

Sociological institutionalism can be identified according to three characteristics (Hall & Taylor, 1996, pp. 947-949). First, there is no clear distinction between structural and cultural variables, with the former supposed to be formalised and official and the latter belonging to a symbolic domain of human experience. Sociological institutionalism recognizes that culture is part of institutions and there is no clear divide between cultural and institutional explanations of human behaviour (Sorensen, 2018). Indeed, Janin Rivolin proposes an institutionalist approach as a way to:

> **(…) overcome the persisting (and misleading) conceptual separation between 'planning systems', as the configuration of formal and informal institutions (laws and rules) which guide spatial planning practice, and 'planning cultures', as referred to the concrete practices and mechanisms which determine the ways of planning (2012, p. 64).**

Second there is a focus on the interaction of actors and institutions. This follows the duality of agency and structure that has become commonplace in late twentieth-century sociology. Third, institutionalist analyses aim to account for the origins and transformation of institutions. This last element is far from obvious as 'attempts at institutional redesign inevitably involve conflicts over values, identities and interests' (Lowndes & Wilson, 2001, p. 643). Institutional transformation, as Healey puts it, does not just entail the re-configuration of formal structures, "[It] is about transforming the deeper frames of reference and cultural practices which structure how people make sense of their collective worlds and engage cognitively and bodily in their day-to-day routines" (Healey, 2007, p. 65).

Thus the approach in this dissertation tries to account for a wide variety of socio-cultural influences on spatial planning. This focus is not new, interest in the cultural aspects of planning already existed before the onset of the current millennium. It emerged particularly in comparative work on spatial planning that was done in the context of European unification. With the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, the EC Committee for Spatial Development was created. Due to the decrease of national mass production and the increase of international trade as well as the growing influence of European policy on member states, it became necessary to look beyond national borders and take into account the differences of spatial planning systems throughout the European Union (Healey & Williams, 1993). The EU Compendium of Spatial Planning Systems and Policies (1997) presented a first comprehensive comparison of planning systems. Many authors note however that the Compendium was mostly concerned with formal aspects of planning systems such as legislation, procedures, instruments and administrative structures. Existing work only briefly described the more contextual and cultural aspects of the planning process (Friedmann, 2012; Fürst, 2007; Knieling & Othengrafen, 2009; Nadin, 2012; Othengrafen & Reimer, 2013; Reimer, Getimis, & Blotevogel, 2014; Sanyal, 2005; Stead & Nadin, 2009). Ernste pointedly summarises the common critique of these studies as a "reductionist conceptualization of spatial planning" (2012, p. 88).

In the almost quarter century since the Compendium, a literature has emerged aiming at a more contextualised comparison of planning systems. Other European Union-funded projects such as CULTPLAN (During & Van Dam, 2007) and ESPON TANGO (Schmitt, Van Well, Lange, & Reardon, 2013) and ESPON COMPASS (Berisha, Cotella, Janin Rivolin, & Solly, 2020) have spent attention to contextual factors of spatial governance as well.

In this dissertation the *planning cultures* approach is taken as the main driver of a sociological-institutionalist analysis of urbanisation policy in Flanders. Planning cultures literature regards spatial planning as a "culturally contingent form of practice" (Friedmann, 2012). It defines planning culture as the "result of the accumulated attitudes, values, rules, standards and beliefs shared by the people involved or the 'built environment professionals'" (Othengrafen, 2012, p. 5). This includes "incorporated and unconscious routines, traditions, ideologies, practices and norms" that guide action (Othengrafen, 2012, p. 19). Not only the professionals immediately involved in shaping urban form play a role however. Values regarding the organisation of space also exist in wider society and affect private and public decision-making. These contain, for instance, the perception of urban and rural spaces. A simple street sign like the one marking town limits (cover) represents these kinds of ideas. That those ideas of what urban cores (should) look like are still relevant in Flanders is shown in chapter 4. A planning cultures view therefore may increase understanding of the formulation and implementation of planning policies and practices.

Othengrafen presents the Culturised Planning Model (CPM)[2] as a tool to analyse planning cultures (Knieling & Othengrafen, 2009; Othengrafen, 2012). Its point of departure is an anthropological understanding of culture, which consists of:

> **"shared meanings" as they are conceptualised in the basic philosophy of life and values among a group of people, and of the way in which these shared meanings are visualised or manifested in people's social interactions, as well as in the results of those interactions. (Othengrafen & Reimer, 2013, p. 1272)**

Thus the understanding of culture in the model is that of a comprehensive category which can be defined as: "the values, customs, beliefs and symbolic practices by which men and women live" (Eagleton, 2016, p. 1). Institutions are ultimately expressions of culture understood in this broad sense. De Vries underlines:

> **(…) culture and institutions are overlapping concepts that both refer to the durable and stable conditions shared by a community, which structures the behaviour of individuals and the actions of the collective actors within it (2015, p. 3).**

The CPM's understanding of culture includes: "(…) incorporated and unconscious routines, traditions, ideologies, practices and norms that guide the actions of members belonging to a specific culture" (Othengrafen, 2012, p. 19). The model aims to describe the activities of a broad range of built environment professionals. Next to planners and urbanists, this also includes actors such as politicians, journalists, and researchers because they too play a role in the context in which spatial development takes place.

[2] The Culturised Planning Model (CPM) was first developed in the project 'Planning Cultures in Europe: Coping with cultural differences in planning and cooperation' (CULTPLAN) which ran from 2005-2007. In the context of the project an interpretation of culture was developed based primarily on the cultural theory of Gullestrup (2009). Combined with theories from the organizational sciences, cross cultural studies, and sociology this work resulted in Othengrafen's version of the CPM.

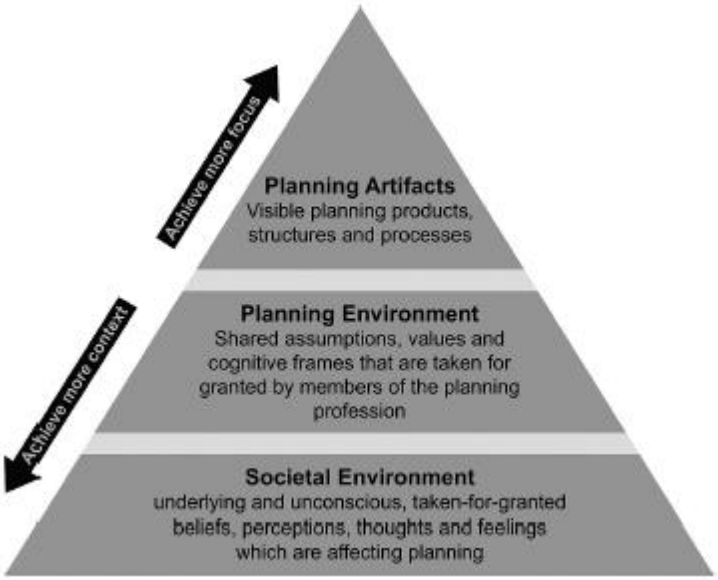

Figure 1.1: The Culturised Planning Model (source: Othengrafen, 2010)

Based on the social psychological model of Schein, the model categorizes the activities of these built environment professionals in three levels (Othengrafen, 2012, pp. 60-63). This results in a pyramid-shaped model (Error! Reference source not found.) with planning artifacts located at the top level a pex of the pyramid. These "visible planning products; structures and processes" include spatial plans, data, planning instruments and law, et cetera. The intermediate level is that of the planning environment which contains "shared assumptions; values and cognitive frames that are taken for granted by members of the planning profession." Examples are objectives and principles of a planning system such as a certain subsidiarity between government levels, or the way participation should be organised. At the base is the level of the societal environment that includes society-wide "underlying and unconscious; taken-for-granted beliefs; perceptions; thoughts and feelings which are affecting planning" (Othengrafen (2010, 2012); Othengrafen and Reimer (2013)). This includes convictions such as understandings of socio-spatial justice, the conception of what an ideal landscape should look like, or attitudes towards the relationship between nature and human activity.

The model is structured by 1) a loose form of causality between the levels, and 2) the distinction between manifest and non-manifest levels of culture. The principle of causality poses the levels as loosely linked: elements from the societal environment trickle upwards into that of the planning community which produces the artifacts. An example may be a stricter regulation of polluting activities once their risks become known publicly. Conversely, artifacts can trickle down to become part of the traditions of the planning environment and sometimes the societal environment. Examples here are planning concepts that become part of the everyday language and experience of members of a society, such as the Dutch Randstad. The causality between these levels is loose however because each of the levels may also show developments that do not immediately translate into the others.

The distinction between manifest and non-manifest levels of culture is the other main structuring principle of the CPM and it is reflected in its pyramid-shape (During & Van Dam, 2007).

The planning artifacts at the top are the most manifest expressions of planning culture. This 'tip of the iceberg' (this author's metaphor) provides an indication of the dominant elements of planning culture. The influences of societal culture, at the bottom, are more difficult to observe and research. They often only appear in more general descriptions, secondary or 'grey literature' or in attitudes and values research. In the middle lies the planning environment, which can be seen as the 'subculture of the planning community.' This is the level that most closely resembles the notions of organisational or institutional culture that was already part of planning research in the past.

Culture in the planning cultures approach then, is taken as a relatively stable unity of societally shared meanings that guide the perception and action of actors, both on a manifest and a non-manifest level. These meanings form a 'reservoir' of implicit knowledge that is applied in current policymaking, planning and reporting. Planning practices represent: "(...) a mental 'usable repertoire of unique cases', which guides planners' actions, particularly when confronted with a new situation" (Othengrafen, 2012, p. 3). The core tenet of the model then, is that development and implementation of planning systems can partly be explained by the cultural attitudes towards spatial planning. Perceptions, routines and values influence actions of planners consciously or unconsciously. These elements are part of planning culture (Othengrafen, 2012, pp. 4-5, 8).

The Culturised Planning Model is not a theory, rather it is positioned as an analytical tool to sensitise research to cultural elements of planning processes. (Othengrafen, 2012, pp. 185-186) Indeed Othengrafen tempers expectations of the model's explanatory capabilities stating that it "does not offer a blueprint for research on planning cultures" (2014, p. 13). This mean that there are multiple ways to operationalise the planning cultures approach into research designs. Some use (refined versions of) the CPM (e.g. Purkarthofer, Humer, & Mattila, 2021; Reimer & Rusche, 2019), others (e.g. Chilla & Schulz, 2014; Levin-Keitel, 2015; Li et al., 2020; Pallagst, Fleschurz, Nothof, & Uemura, 2019; Valler & Phelps, 2018) draw from methods from the social sciences to highlight how planning instruments and their effects are shaped by existing (but potentially also changing) social institutions and discourses. Whether this freedom of choice of analytical frameworks to use within planning cultures research is a strength or a weakness will be reflected upon in the conclusion to this dissertation (section 6.2).

1.3 Research approach

1.3.1 Research question

This dissertation investigates institutional dynamics and cultural attitudes regarding urbanisation in Flanders, Belgium. With these elements we arrive at the research question of this study:

What is the role of planning culture in shaping and implementing Flemish urbanisation policy from 1996-2021?

Box 1.1: Research question

1.3.2 Operationalisation

As the Culturised Planning Model only specifies a loose form of causality and relationship between its levels, it mostly remains a sensitising analytical tool. In order to improve understanding of the empirical material this dissertation chooses to operationalise the planning cultures approach through various meso-level theories and methodologies. These provide handholds to analyse the the development and operation of institutions and discourses that bear upon spatial (urbanisation) policy.

With these approaches three case studies on urbanisation in Flanders have been performed. In the first three chapters (2-4) the formulation and implementation of the policy instrument of demarcating the urban areas of Antwerpen and Mechelen is analysed. This instrument is rooted in the 1997 Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders from (Vlaamse Overheid, 1997/2011). In the fourth empirical chapter (5) we cast our gaze forward to Flemish urbanisation policy currently in development. This is the 'concrete stop' or 'building shift' based on the Spatial Policy Plan for Flanders (Departement Omgeving Vlaanderen, 2018). Thus the study covers a quarter century of formulating and implementing Flemish urbanisation policy. These case studies and approaches to spatial planning in Flanders are introduced more elaborately in subsection 1.4.

In order of appearance in the chapters the Policy Arrangement Approach, Institutional Capacity Building, theoretical perspectives on the urban-rural distinction, and News Framing Analysis are used. The policy arrangement approach used in chapter 2 is a flexible yet structured analysis with attention to the interrelation of the dimensions of actors, resources, rules, and discourses in policy processes. It was chosen because of its usefulness in studying the implementation of urban growth management in Flanders. The institutional capacity building approach (chapter 3) also provides the materials for a structured analysis of urbanisation policy, but in contrast to the PAA it departs from a theory of the characteristics of democratic and effective collaborative planning processes. With this foundation the question of how and to what degree the demarcation processes have contributed to building institutional capacity can be answered. Literatuer on the urban-rural distinction (chapter 4) provides a theoretical lens to research one of the key concepts that structured both the formulation and opposition to the urban area demarcation policy. This approach has more attention for the symbolic aspects of planning processes. The same applies to the news framing analysis used in analysing the attitudes regarding the concrete stop (chapter 5). This final chapter researches the ideological points of view associated with the main frames in the public discussion on this most recent proposal for an urbanisation policy. Thus the first two chapters can be considered to focus more on the rules, routines, and practices in urbanisation planning processes. The analysis in the final two empirical chapters finds its entry point in the attitudes and symbolic meanings regarding planning processes. So even though in the empirical chapters it disappears into the background, the planning cultures approach functions as an overarching socio-cultural orientation towards the analysis of planning processes. In other words, it is the thread that connects four windows onto the socio-cultural elements that affect urbanisation

policy in Flanders. Figure 1.2 shows the intersection of case studies and approaches in this dissertation.

CASE CHAPTER	DEMARCATION ANTWERPEN	DEMARCATION MECHELEN	CONCRETE STOP
CH. 2 – PAA	X		
CH. 3 – ICB	X	X	
CH. 4 – URBAN-RURAL	X	X	
CH. 5 – NFA			X

Figure 1.2: Overview of approaches and case studies

Section 1.4 contains a short history of Flemish urbanisation policy. This is followed by a description of the empirical chapters in section 1.5. The conclusion of this dissertation (chapter 6) discusses the research findings, reflects on the chosen approach and formulates a number of recommendations for the future of Flemish urbanisation policy.

1.3.3 Interviews and document analysis

The research reported in chapters 2-4 is based on interviews and document analysis regarding the demarcations of urban areas surrounding the cities of Antwerp and Mechelen. While each of these chapters contains an explanation of the data gathering process, it is relevant to provide some further information here.

Interview respondents were recruited from four groups: 1) Flemish planning experts with expertise on the planning instrument of demarcating urban areas, as well as 2) local politicians, 3) local planning officials, and 4) citizen-activists in the regions of Mechelen and Antwerp. Through including these three perspectives on local implementation of the demarcation processes a measure of triangulation was acquired where voices with varying interests and roles could be allowed to provide information on the process.

Documents provided by the private planning office involved in both processes as well as a review of press articles regarding the demarcations in the local newspaper Gazet van Antwerpen contained many names of relevant stakeholders. Respondents were also asked for names and contact information of additional persons that would be able to provide relevant information. For each demarcation process, interview subjects from the core cities were included as well as from municipalities where the process was contested. For instance, in the Antwerp demarcation there was little protest from the fringe municipality of Borsbeek, but quite a lot from the municipalities of Schoten, Beveren, and Kontich. This helped to identify and approach respondents. It should be noted that Flanders is a small region and the sector of spatial planning is also small. This meant that many respondents possessed knowledge of multiple demarcation processes. The approach of respondents continued until I felt that a degree of saturation was achieved or no more relevant respondents could be found or reached. In total 36 interviews were conducted amounting to

approximately 40 hours of interview material. This material was fully transcribed and analysed using the software tool f4analyse. A complete list of interviews for these cases can be found in appendix II of this dissertation.

Most respondents quickly agreed to share their experiences in an interview, though a handful refused or simply did not reply to my requests. This, unfortunately, included the minster of spatial planning from 2001-2009 who was responsible during much of the demarcations' implementation phase. Sadly, the alderman responsible for the demarcation in the city of Mechelen, as well as one of the main authors of the Spatial Structure plan for Flanders had already passed away at the time of research.

While mostly forthcoming, some respondents were wary of how their information could influence their current position. Therefore local planners still working in the same roles as they had during the demarcations, or incumbent politicians were sometimes careful in how they phrased their experiences. One respondent specifically asked for a non-disclosure agreement. Generally the citizen-activists were more outspoken, though often quite disappointed or even cynical in their recollection of the protest.

In addition to interviews policy documents were analysed. These were found through public channels, mostly the websites of the Flemish Department of Environment and the (former) Flemish Committee of Spatial Planning (VLACORO). The archives of the private planning office that conducted both demarcation processes provided a valuable resource, as these contained interim reports and correspondence among stakeholders. Some of the citizen activists kept impressive archives of their actions and were willing to share documents, photographs and other media on the subject. Finally information was provided through many informal contacts on study days and contacts with fellow academics in Flanders.

Chapter 5 of the dissertation reports on the analysis of 579 news articles and 1001 tweets to determine the frames used in the public debate regarding the concrete stop. Further explanation of these data can be found in section 5.3.3.

1.4 Three waves of urbanisation policy in Flanders

This dissertation studies urbanisation in Flanders – the northern Dutch-speaking region of Belgium. Flanders is known for its specific historically grown fragmented spatial pattern that can be associated to several problems of urban sprawl and that is hardly sustainable in light of reports linking urbanisation to climate change and ecological crisis (UN-Habitat, 2020). [3]

One result of historical planning practices in the region is a large amount of land take and fragmentation of space. In Flanders the percentage of land occupied for human activity (settlements,

[3] This is why the United Nations New Urban Agenda (2017) aims for cities that are "just, safe, healthy, accessible, affordable, resilient and sustainable" (§11). It stresses that to realise this vision urban planning and design instruments are required "that support sustainable management and use of natural resources and land, appropriate compactness and density, polycentrism and mixed uses, through infill or planned urban extension strategies (…)" (§51).

commercial, industrial, and recreational purposes, transport infrastructure, parks and gardens) was 33.3% in 2019. Additional land take reaches an average of 5.1 hectares per day since 2013 (Poelmans, Janssen, & Hambsch, 2021). Additionally Flanders is one of the most sprawled regions in Europe (Henning et al., 2016)[4] and Belgium as a whole is in second place of most fragmented landscapes of Europe with 83% of its landscape strongly fragmented.[5]

Land take and spatial fragmentation due to urbanisation are associated with a number of problems such as the need for extended traffic and utility infrastructures, waste production and pollution, increased imperviousness[6] which limits the possibility for water infiltration and creates flood risk, reduced possibilities for carbon storage and sequestration, energy inefficiency, and the loss of fertile land and biodiversity (European Environment Agency, 2019). There are also negative effects that become individualised such as noise and air pollution, extended travel times, and traffic injuries and fatalities (Grietens, 2009).

Because of these developments, several waves of planning initiatives have tried to influence the direction of spatial development in the region, with mixed results. Since World War 2, there have been three main waves of urbanisation policy in Belgium, and later Flanders. This section provides an overview of these policies. The goal of the overview is to familiarise the reader with the policy setting in which the analysis takes place that is the subject of the four academic papers (chapters 2-5). The first three of these papers are focused on urbanisation policy in the second wave described here: the demarcation of urban areas (1.3.2). To understand the particulars of these demarcations, it is necessary to have some background knowledge of the earlier land use planning system however (1.3.1). The final paper treats the main ambition to curb further urbanisation in the planning system that is currently in development.

1.4.1 1960s – 1990s: Sub-regional land use plans

The spatial layout of the Belgian region of Flanders is characterised by many small settlements that have gradually expanded over the course of centuries. The historic connections between settlements grew together in ribbon development leading to the pattern of urban sprawl that characterizes much of the region today. Indeed in post-Second World War Belgium not housing production, but the development of infrastructure was the guiding principle for the spatial development of the country (Allaert, 2009, p. 134; P. Van den Broeck, Moulaert, Kuhk, Lievois, & Schreurs, 2014, p. 176). Because this infrastructure development followed the existing spread-out pattern of urbanisation and housing development followed this infrastructure, De Block, de Kool, and De Meulder (2015) speak

[4] The data in this report are from 2009. The European Environment Agency has more recent data available but this has unfortunately not been reported on the regional level.
[5] https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/indicators/mobility-and-urbanisation-pressure-on-ecosystems-2/assessment (Consulted 23 June, 2021).
[6] With 6.04% of its surface sealed (2015) by settlements and infrastructure, Belgium comes in third place of amount of sealed surface relative to its total surface (after Malta and The Netherlands). https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/dashboards/imperviousness-in-europe (Consulted June 23, 2021).

of "implicit urbanism". Ryckewaert and Theunis (2006) argue that the post-war Belgian spatial policy was based on a rationalised modernist vision that linked infrastructure, housing and economic policies with the aim of developing prosperity evenly in all regions of the country. Yet in the 1950s and 1960s Belgian spatial planning had little influence on urbanisation. Although there was a legislative framework for planning since 1915, it played a small role in rebuilding the country from 1945 (Allaert, 2009, pp. 116-117; 122). The spatial development model was liberal with much freedom for local authorities and citizens which resulted in a lack of spatial selectivity in housing policy and spatial development more broadly. This predisposition towards local and individual development is still visible today (P. Van den Broeck & Verachtert, 2016).

The 1962 Law on Town Planning was the first Belgian initiative to combat spatial fragmentation. It envisioned plans on five levels. At the top there was a national plan with regional plans under it. These would emerge from a series of sub-regional plans and be supplemented by local and sub-local plans. For specific situations the law also defined allotment and building plans.[7] According to J. Van den Broeck (2005) the system's hierarchy and centralism was deliberately envisioned to provide a counterbalance to the strongly autonomous Belgian municipalities.

This system was never fully developed. The 25 regional plans did not move past the study phase, primarily due to political strife about regional demarcations. Only the 48 sub-regional plans were developed (Figure 1.). The original intent was to use them as a strategic tool by marking a desired spatial structure on these plans with a planning horizon of 1980 (later 1985). Yet under pressure of an increasing improper use of space, it was decided in 1972 to regard the sub-regional plans as binding land use plans at the plot level. "De facto, the subregional land use plans became part and parcel of the planning permit system, rather than guidelines for a collective development of the territory" (P. Van den Broeck & Verachtert, 2016, p. 6).

[7] In Dutch respectively: Nationaal plan, Streekplan, Gewestplan, Algemeen plan van aanleg, Bijzonder plan van aanleg, verkavelingsplannen en bouwplannen.

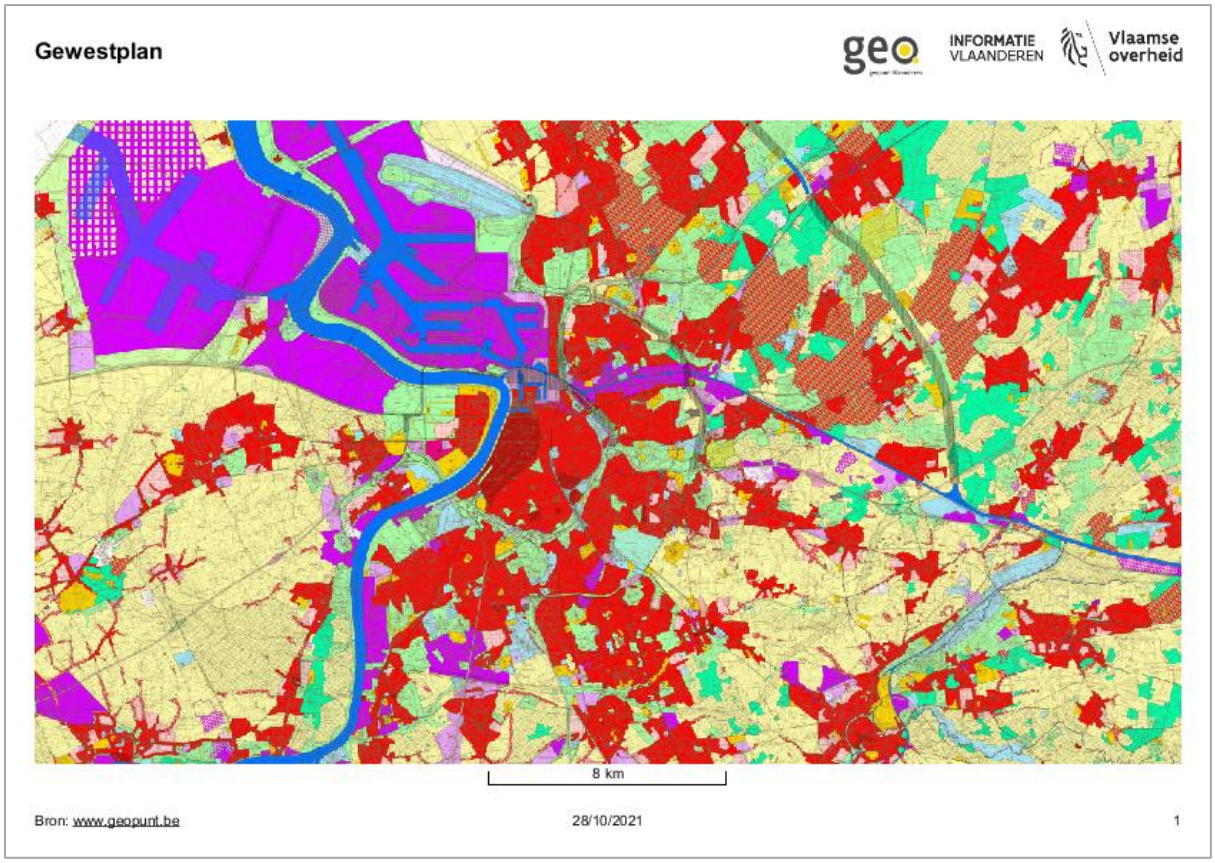

Figure 1.3: The City of Antwerp on the sub-regional plan. Source: GDI-Vlaanderen.

As a result, even where municipal plans were lacking, national policy could still influence the fragmentated development. This had the opposite effect however. Due to the land-use character, the value of a plot became linked directly to its zoning, while a specific land policy was lacking, despite having been proposed several times. This increased pressure on municipal authorities and private actors to change zoning in order to allow more economically valuable development and to obtain legal certainty about the use of the land. This happened sometimes at the last minute between draft and final plan and it was accompanied by frequent lobbying and clientelism.[8] Existing interests and power relations were thus cast into plans and the original strategic intentions of regional planning were undermined (Albrechts, 1999; Allaert, 2009, p. 123; De Vries & Van den Broeck, 1997; Renard, 1995; Saey, 2005, p. 42; J. Van den Broeck, 2005; P. Van den Broeck et al., 2014, p. 171).

While the creation of the sub-regional plans was established by law in 1962, the plans for Flanders were only completed in 1980, with amendments being made until the year 2000[9]. Planning authority was devolved from the federal level to the regions in 1980. Subsequent years of permissive development control (Allaert, 2009; P. Van den Broeck & Verachtert, 2016) allowed the Flemish landscape to become ever more fragmented. Though the sub-regional plans have been superseded

[8] Albrechts (1999) indicates that this clientelism not only played a role in spatial planning, but that it is a feature of the Belgian administrative system in which a large number of administrative government tasks are performed by (pillarized) political organizations: "In fact, on this substratum, clientelism and patronage came into full development" (Albrechts, 1999, p. 590).
[9] https://omgeving.vlaanderen.be/gewestplan (Consulted 27-10-2021).

by other types of plans (see next subsection), their zoning and its associated development rights shapes Flemish planning to this day. Since the plans contain large amounts of (reserve) housing area they kept land prices relatively low, but created a surplus of developable land that, if anything, promotes sprawl rather than curbs it. Since these lands have been designated developable land for decades now, a change of zoning requires damages to be paid. Estimates vary, but it is clear that the costs of correcting this situation to develop towards a modest amount of developable land and protect against further spatial fragmentation exceed the Flemish spatial planning budget many times over (Stec Groep met medewerking van De Zwarte Hond en Zjak Consult, 2018).[10]

1.4.2 1990s – 2010s: Structure planning and demarcating urban areas

Introducing structure planning

In the 1990s Flanders attempted to break with a long standing tradition of liberal spatial policy that was characterized by many exceptions and a high degree of civil and official disobedience to planning regulations. With various attempts and innovative proposals being made in the 1980s, finally in 1992 an assignment for drawing up a new regional spatial plan and accompanying legislation was given to professors Louis Albrechts and Charles Vermeersch. A widespread exasperation with the state of affairs in the planning community and among municipalities, as well as the political alignment of Social- and Christian Democrat parties, and civil society organisations paved the way for developing this new planning system (D'hondt & Quackelbeen, 1993; Lorent, 1993; Merckaert, 2008). One of its most striking features was a tightening of the rules for construction outside of appropriately zoned areas as a response to the "consumption-driven suburbanisation" that has long been characteristic in the region (P. Van den Broeck et al., 2014, p. 180).

The first structure plan for the Flemish region was approved in 1997 (Vlaamse Overheid, 1997/2011), henceforth: RSV. The introduction of this new direction in planning was accompanied by a communication strategy aimed at professionals and the general public to promote the transformation to a new way of dealing with spatial development. Part of the process was also to increase the capacity of the planning administration at the Flemish level.

The structure planning framework was to prepare Flanders for a new age of globalization, European unification, digitalisation, the rise of the service economy, and the increased importance of environmental protection. "Establishing a new planning culture" is also explicitly mentioned as one of its aims (Albrechts, 2001a, p. 176) as well as "open dialogue, accountability, collaboration, consensus building" (Albrechts, 2001b, p. 99). The aim of the RSV was to achieve "a shift from a form of planning focused on the regulation of private development (i.e. traditional sub-regional land use plans – providing 'physical' solutions to social problems) to a form of spatial development strategy,

[10] This is why in a recent opinion article I argue together with spatial planning professors Kobe Boussauw and Michael Ryckewaert that the generous zoning of the sub-regional plans created a reservoir of 'fictitious value' that needs to evaporate in order to regain public control of urbanisation in Flanders (De Olde, Boussauw, & Ryckewaert, 2020).

which seeks to work through the interests and strategies of selected stakeholders." It was to be "a turning point in planning practice shifting from a more technical regulation to a more strategic and negotiated form in governance." (Albrechts, 2001b, p. 89)

Thus the Spatial Structure Plan had to form the watershed for Flemish spatial planning. Its defining principle was 'sustainable development' with the plan fulfilling the role of "(…) framework at the Flemish level that weighs the spatial views and claims of various angles against each other and that starts from spatial quality" (Vlaamse Overheid, 1997/2011, pp. 11-12)[11]. It aimed to fulfil a pivotal function between policy levels and sectors that could orient themselves on the structure plan. This meant that the 'ad-hoc problem approach' that often predominated thus far was to be avoided.

The designers of the RSV had judged originally that firm legal anchoring was necessary to bolster the execution of the plan against the interference of the political level. Therefore an important element of the structure plan was its 'spatial balance'. This is a result of negotiations between policy sectors where for each important spatial function (housing, industry, agriculture, nature) surface area targets were reached, required to be translated into zoning. Insiders indicate that without this spatial balance the plan could never have been approved, particularly by the economic and agricultural sectors. The adverse effect was that for some sectors, the plan was therefore defined by the spatial balance (De Peuter et al., 2011). This shows the political rationality common to Flemish spatial planning (Albrechts, 2003; Coppens, Van Den Broeck, & Van Wymeersch, 2016, p. 60; De Vries & Van den Broeck, 1997). In chapter 2 we argue that the existence of this spatial balance undermined the strategic character of planning for urbanisation.

The shift to a new system of strategic structure planning was prepared by legislation in 1996 and made final in the Flemish Decree on Spatial Planning of 1999 (P. Van den Broeck et al., 2014). This Decree also replaces the previous instrument of regional and local plans by a system of 'spatial implementation plans' [Dutch: Ruimtelijke Uitvoeringsplannen, henceforth: RUP] that can be created on three levels: local, provincial, regional. Where these new plans are approved, they replace the previously active sub-regional land use plans. Otherwise, these remain in effect.

Demarcating urban areas

With "Flanders, open and urban" as its guiding metaphor, the RSV voices an ambition to stem further urbanisation in the region. The metaphor refers to the character of the Flemish landscape with a strong degree of urbanisation interwoven with small-scale open spaces. In acknowledgement of this fragmented spatial structure, the plan outlines the principle of "deconcentrated clustering" as a way to combat urban sprawl: "Deconcentrated clustering goes against unbridled suburbanisation and fragmentation and reduces the pressure on the countryside" (Vlaamse Overheid, 1997/2011, p. 189).

[11] Quotes from the RSV and several other sources in this subsection have been translated from Dutch by the author.

The proposed policy focuses on two tracks: specific measures for urban areas on the one hand and for rural areas on the other. For the urban areas, a demarcation instrument was designed. In Bae's (2007) typology of planning measures to contain sprawl, it can be categorised as an urban growth boundary with accompanying minimum density zoning, infill and residential unit ordinances, and a limitation on new residential development outside the growth boundary.

In practice the demarcations are a growth management policy based on zoning decisions to attract development to some areas and prevent it in others. By creating a supply of suitable developable land in urban areas combined with restrictions on development outside of them, the attractivity of urban development was to be increased. Guiding percentages of additional growth were 60% in the urban areas and 40% outside of them. Within the demarcated urban areas a minimum density of 25 residential units per hectare was to be realised, whereas a maximum of 15 units per hectare would be the norm for any areas not demarcated as urban. Also within the demarcated areas additional locations were to be zoned for housing, commerce and nature according to sectoral development targets agreed upon in the spatial balance (see section 1.3.1) and distributed over each province. Next to concentrating further urbanisation in the urban areas, the demarcations also aimed to revitalise existing urban living- and working conditions and improve the efficient use of urban services and infrastructure. In their evaluation of the RSV Voets et al. (2010) include a schematic overview of the goals of the demarcation processes (Figure 1.).

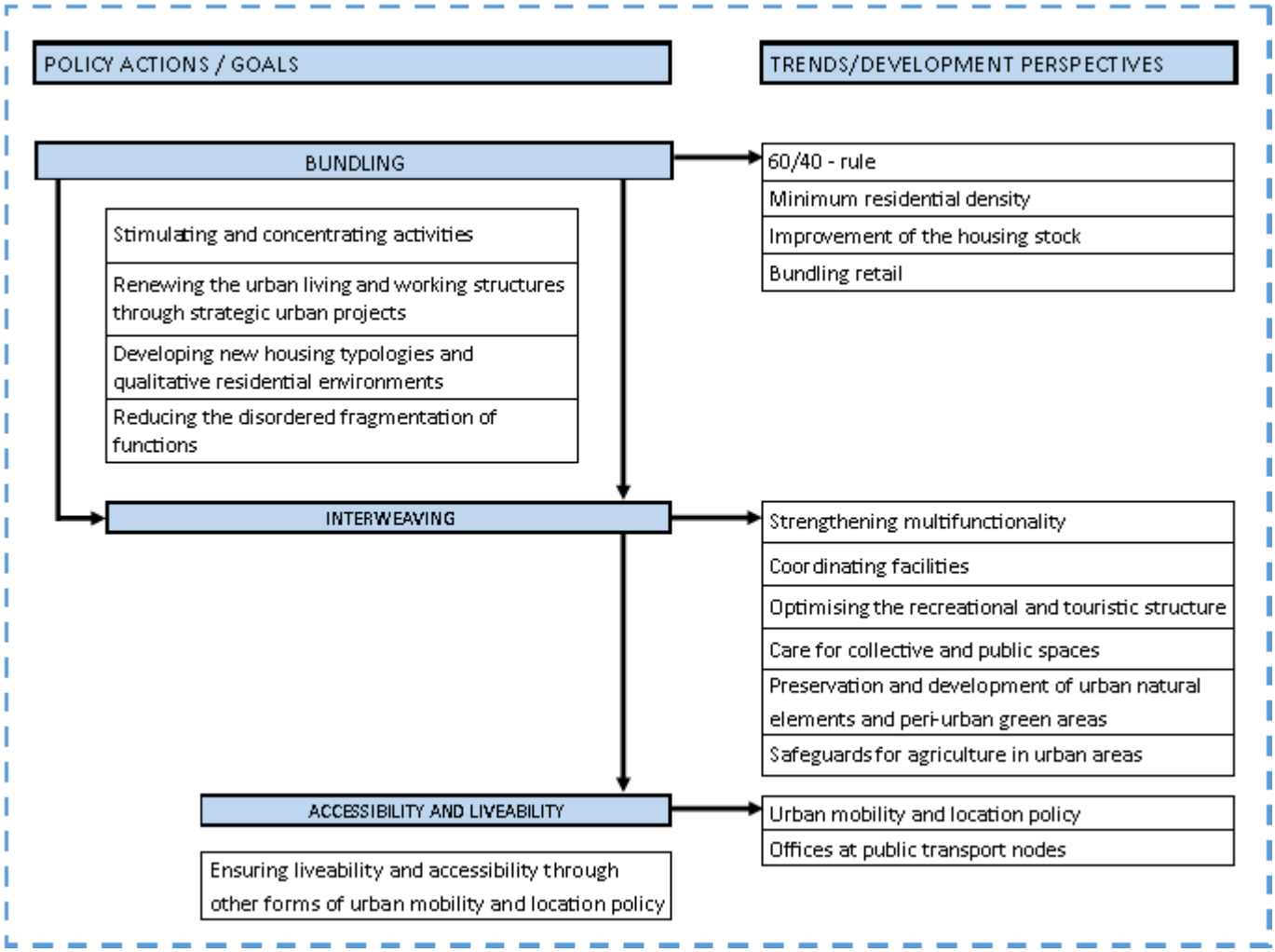

Figure 1.4: Policy goals for the demarcation of urban areas (Voets et al., 2010, p. 36). Redrawn and translated by author.

In addition to the 'strategic urban area surrounding Brussels' the RSV (indicatively) selects two metropolitan urban areas, ten regional urban areas, and 44 small urban areas for demarcation (Figure 1.5). These selections indicate the core municipalities and parts of the surrounding municipalities that "based on the existing spatial structure (…) contain areas that have an urban character in whole or in part due to suburbanisation" (Vlaamse Overheid, 1997/2011, p. 212). Chapter 4 of this dissertation describes how for the designers of the RSV this term 'urban area' was a conceptual term, yet it was received by local authorities and citizens alike as a descriptive term.

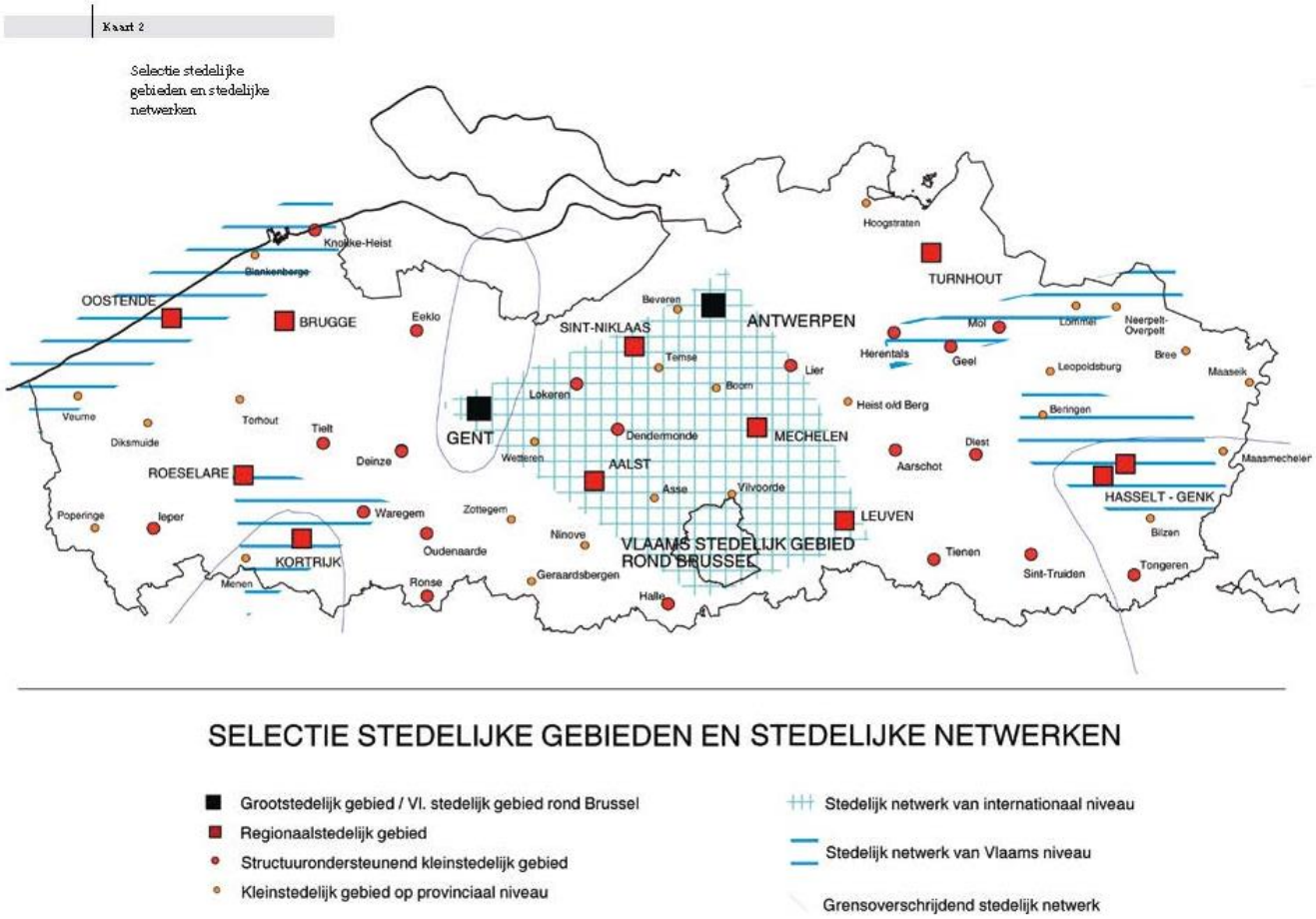

Figure 1.5: Selection of urban areas and urban networks from the RSV. Source: Vlaamse Overheid (1997/2011, p. 215)

Not only in terms of pre-selecting urban areas and attempting to create a diverse policy for them are the demarcations a comprehensive planning instrument (cf. section 1.1). The demarcation processes were also explicitly designed as a strategic planning tool as is shown in the schematic representation of the process flow (Figure 1.2). The collaborative character of the demarcations (Houthaeve, 2000) is reflected here. In fact, while the demarcation processes were strictly speaking initiated and coordinated by the Flemish Administration, the designers of the instrument explicitly state that it is not the role or the jurisdiction of the Flemish Region to draw up a detailed plan for the urban areas. Therefore the demarcation proposal was initially developed as a 'hypothesis', to be discussed with the municipalities, province and other policy sectors (Omgeving, 1996). This process flow was often subverted in practice however. This is described in chapter 3 on the role of governance culture in institutional capacity building for urbanisation.

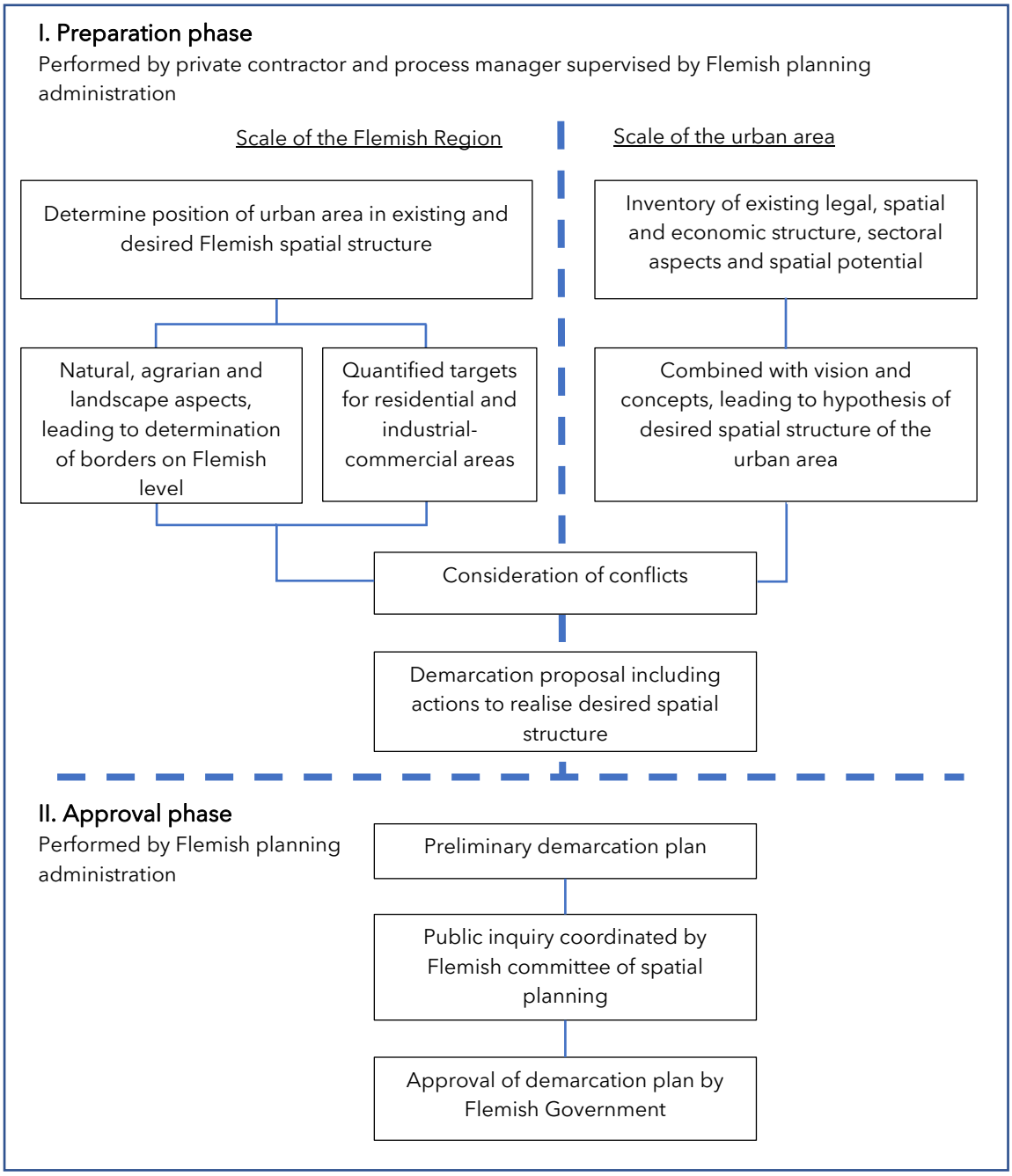

Figure 1.2: Process design for spatial demarcations, adapted and extended from Vlaamse Overheid (1997/2011, p. 214)

The demarcation of the metropolitan and regional urban areas was supervised by the Flemish authorities whereas the smaller demarcations were supervised by the provinces. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 of this dissertation analyse the demarcation of the urban areas of Antwerpen and Mechelen from various theoretical perspectives. In the research for this dissertation interviews were also conducted with experts knowledgeable on the demarcations surrounding Turnhout, Kortrijk, Gent, Aalst, and Sint-Niklaas. More or less extensive analysis of other demarcation processes were performed by (Boucké, 2015; Boussauw et al., 2013; Coppens et al., 2016; Daems, 2021; De Rynck, Schraepen, &

Voets, 2021). This literature sheds light on the reception and effects of the demarcation processes as an instrument to guide urbanisation.

1.4.3 2010s – now: Policy planning

Despite the aims of the RSV, urban sprawl in Flanders has continued to increase. Contemporary authors argue that the spatial fragmentation and the degree of imperviousness of the region causes a heavy individual as well as an environmental burden in the shape of traffic congestion, air pollution, carbon emissions, and loss of biodiversity. The spatial pattern also generates high costs for the maintenance of infrastructure and public services, and increases flood risk (Grietens, 2009; Meeus & De Decker, 2015; Vandekerckhove, Van Hulle, Vanhaeren, Foré, & Zwerts, 2021; Verheyen et al., 2020; Vermeiren et al., 2019). Alternative strategies for guiding urbanisation in Flanders are now being explored. After the evaluation of the Spatial Structure Plan (Voets et al., 2010), work on a successor plan was started. This is to become the Spatial Policy Plan for Flanders [Dutch: Beleidsplan Ruimte Vlaanderen, henceforth BRV].

In 2012 a Green Paper was released outlining the priorities for this new generation of Flemish planning (Vlaamse Overheid, 2012). Like its predecessor, it has a guiding metaphor that refers to the nature of Flemish spatial organisation: "Human scale in a metropolis". In its first lines the Green Paper mentions the "far-reaching imperviousness and fragmentation of Flemish space" (Vlaamse Overheid, 2012, p. 7). Like the RSV, the Green Paper for the BRV formulates a number of aims to move towards a more sustainable land use. Most significantly it outlines the ambition to halt and reduce further spatial fragmentation by 2050. The Green Paper was followed by a White Paper (Vlaamse Overheid, 2016), approved by the Flemish Government in November 2016. This is a more fleshed-out document containing specific spatial development principles. The White Paper is largely the basis of the BRV's Strategic Vision which was approved in July 2018 (Departement Omgeving Vlaanderen, 2018). The BRV is to have a modular structure: a strategic vision complemented by policy frameworks for specific spatial themes. The reasoning is that separate policy frameworks allow for more flexibility than one comprehensive plan (Stapper & De Olde, 2019). When new spatial issues arise, policy frameworks can be added or adjusted more quickly than an entire plan could be revised.

One of the prime strategic goals of the Strategic Vision concerns urbanisation. Like the Green Paper it aims to "reduce the additional spatial uptake" to zero. The horizon for this goal was advanced ten years to 2040 after public criticism that the original date was too far in the future. The goal is pursued by increasing "spatial efficiency" [Dutch: ruimtelijk rendement]. Through a series of 'smart' policy measures, the existing spatial structure should acquire more density around urban and village centres, so that vulnerable areas may be protected from additional development.[12] Location choice for densification is predicated on its "level of public transport accessibility and level of service provision" (Departement Omgeving Vlaanderen, 2018). Unlike the RSV, the Strategic Vision does not

[12] This is not so different from the concept of 'deconcentrated clustering' in the previous generation of Flemish planning.

use the terms urban and rural area anymore. Yet even its more procedural-sounding terms caused a storm of protest from (rural) politicians whose jurisdictions score lower on these indicators (Rommers, 2019). Furthermore the use of the term "hinterland" in the Strategic Vision led to protest from rural provinces (Lambrix, 2018).

While no concrete spatial policy frameworks have been approved yet[13], there *has* been an attempt to draft legislation to pursue the reduction of the additional spatial uptake. This "decree concerning the realisation-oriented instrumentarium", more commonly referred to as the "instruments decree" [NL: Instrumentendecreet] has been in the making for several years.[14] Most notably it contains higher compensatory sums to be paid to those who see the zoning of their land changed away from residential, making future development impossible. The reasoning is that higher compensations will increase public support for reducing the amount of developable land in the region. This intent has not been without controversy. A wide range of experts and civil society organisations argue that raising compensation for zoning changes will make ambitious action to reduce spatial fragmentation even more unaffordable than it already was under the old compensatory rules (De Becker, Dua, De Schamphelaere, Mattheeuws, & Verhetsel, 2021). The public support for this "building shift" or popularly "concrete stop" [NL: betonstop] is the topic of analysis in chapter 5 of this dissertation. The proposal for the instruments decree is still pending in the Flemish Parliament. Latest amendments have reduced the amount of instruments available in the decree. Following continued public criticism and a critical evaluation of the decree by the Flemish Council of State the Minister of Spatial Planning has set up a "taskforce building shift" which is to formulate "a strategy and roadmap with concrete measures towards a feasible and affordable building shift".[15]

Thus in the decade since most demarcation processes were finished, attempts were made to develop new policy instruments for managing urbanisation. So far these have not materialised into active policy and current attempts do not share the comprehensive character of the previous wave of planning for urbanisation.[16] Indeed with policy planning, urbanisation policy in Flanders

[13] This introduction was last updated in January 2022.
[14] The decree text in its several stages can be reviewed here: https://www.vlaamsparlement.be/nl/parlementaire-documenten/parlementaire-initiatieven/1362658 (Consulted 12-01-2022)
[15] The taskforce reported its findings early December 2021 (Bouckaert, Lacoere, Paelinck, & Tindemans, 2021). Due to the goal of submitting the first version of this dissertation in early January 2021 this report could unfortunately not be studied in depth.
[16] It must be remarked here that in the policy domains of mobility and domestic administration there is an increasing focus on regionalisation that has a number of goals in common with the city-regions of the RSV demarcation strategy. In Flanders 'transport regions' were instituted recently, which encounter many of the same problems as the demarcation of urban areas with the key difference that cities and municipalities have to cooperate in order to ensure optimal public transport accessibility for themselves. That means that contrary to the demarcation of urban areas, the price of non-cooperation is higher. Additionally in March 2021 the demarcation of 17 'reference regions' for increased intermunicipal cooperation were demarcated by the Flemish Government. While they are not part of Flemish spatial policy, these initiatives may lead to improved effectiveness in the spatial domain as well. And in 2017 the Flemish Departments of Spatial Planning and Living Environment, Nature and Energy merged into one Departement of Environment. Along with updates in legislation this led to changes at the local level where these sectors are now starting to merge. There are still

seems to have fully entered the 'smart growth' phase characterised by incentive-based policy packages (Chapin, 2012; Grant, 2018). These incentives are aimed at smaller interventions such as stimulating densification of urban cores and de-hardening the countryside. These initiatives are often project-based and delegated to local authorities or households. Yet the comprehensiveness that in previous episodes proved so difficult to implement, did hold the promise of results on a larger scale. With incentives aimed at individual municipalities, citizens and companies, progression towards spatial goals is harder to distinguish and it remains a topic open for debate who actually benefits. De Rynck et al. are explicit in their evaluation of the current trend:

> For initiatives that are comparable to the demarcation of urban areas and that have the ambition to arrive at area visions and extension plans at city-regional level, there seems to be less or no room left at the Flemish level, partly because the Flemish government does not succeed in formulating its own renewed targets, partly because the political pressure to give local governments more responsibility seems to be the dominant movement (De Rynck et al., 2021, p. 45).

barriers between planning and other spatially influential sectors though, in the first place regarding infrastructure and mobility.

1.5 Outline of the thesis

1.5.1 "Safeguarding the future": Taking implementation seriously in evaluating urban growth management strategies in the Antwerp city-region

The first paper (chapter 2) argues that contemporary evaluations of urban growth management (UGM) policies are aimed too much at quantitative measurements of land values and housing prices.

In those evaluations it is often implicitly assumed that policy was implemented as it was intended. This paper argues that it is key to understand the policy formulation and implementation phases of growth management strategies in order to evaluate their effectiveness. It is in these phases that the institutions and discourses are (trans)formed in which UGM strategies are embedded. This will enable us to better understand the conditions for growth management policies' success or failure.

This argument is illustrated empirically by the analysis of the formulation and implementation of the demarcation of the Antwerp Metropolitan Area. Using the Policy Arrangement Approach to analyse four phases in the policy process, the paper describes how the strategic vision collapsed during implementation, where the new structure planning framework was mostly recontextualized in terms of its still active land use predecessor. The orientation towards the protection of private property, characteristic of the Flemish spatial governance and planning system, is illustrated by the discursive presentation of land as a resource for new developments and a concomitant focus on the legal aspects of land use planning. The land supply policy emerged dominant through rezoning subprojects and measures to restrain development outside of the urban growth boundaries were never implemented. The give-and-take between policy actors and interest groups was profoundly disturbed by strategic behaviour intended to safeguard individual interests. This left a focus on the 'rules of the game' according to which the demarcation process ought to take place. Other stakeholders were mainly disinterested in the process. Weak community input and the fact that citizens' self-interest did not coincide with the strategic spatial vision led to objections and disillusion that was captured by local politics. The dissolution of the original vision is reflected in the discursive metamorphosis of the meaning of the phrase "safeguarding the future" from counteracting urban sprawl into safeguarding it by guaranteeing further development opportunities.

In conclusion, the paper argues that in the Antwerp case, the demarcation never solidified into a stable policy arrangement for creating a metropolitan area and combatting urban sprawl on a city–regional scale. These findings show that the results of UGM instruments should not only be evaluated from the perspective of their measurable effectiveness, but as part of a project of institutional, discursive, and therefore, sociocultural change.

The findings in the paper strongly suggest that future planning initiatives aimed at counteracting urban sprawl in Flanders need to take into account three elements. First, Flanders needs to free itself from the historical legacy of the Belgian land use planning system in order for new planning frameworks to have a chance at being successful. The legalistic focus on extensive

land use rights established in a growth-centred era hamper any ambitious sustainable spatial development perspective for the region. Secondly, the historical animosity between cities and suburban fringe municipalities will not disappear if planning processes are merely centred on achieving quantitative targets and rely too much on the voluntary participation of these parties. Withdrawing the means for consultation or co-creative processes is a sure way of undermining any local support for city regional cooperation that might exist at the outset of a new planning initiative. Therefore, a strong planning vision and policy implementation on the Flemish regional level is needed to give direction to new initiatives for city-regional planning cooperation. Spatial planning in urban areas like these revolves around the distribution of scarce spatial resources, which implies that not every actor can be satisfied. However, more constructive ways of handling objections and creating public support need to be found if new planning initiatives are to be successful.

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1.5.2 The role of governance culture in building institutional capacity for sustainable urbanization

The core question of the next paper (chapter 3) is how institutional capacity building can lead to effective policy for sustainable urbanisation. Contemporary contributions often discuss capacity building often in terms of social, intellectual, and political of capital, but this is not sufficient. The paper argues that an analysis that takes into account the underlying governance or planning culture is essential to understand the conditions for successful capacity building for sustainable urbanisation. The value of such an approach is illustrated with an in-depth investigation of a spatial planning instrument for guiding urbanisation: the demarcation of urban areas in Flanders.

The analysis is guided by the institutional capacity building framework developed by Healey (1998). Institutional capacity is built by formal arrangements and networks between actors, but also by promoting a governance culture to respond to particular spatial problems and needs. These cultures can be conceived of as systems of meaning that are historically and geographically situated and characterized by (in)formal 'synergetic encounters, contradictions, conflicts and active struggles' (González & Healey, 2005, p. 2056). In this approach a governance culture prepared to evaluate and improve its own quality and performance is considered as a condition for embedding 'new collaborative practices into mainstream governance processes' (Healey, 1997 [2006], p. 335). The legitimacy of a planning system is also rooted in these governance cultures for if systems are not experienced as legitimate in practice, other forces (e.g. money, ownership) will take over and guide spatial development. The approach is supplemented by an analytical dimension that accounts for strategic stakeholder behaviour.

The analysis shows how capacity building for the demarcation of urban areas did not succeed. Firstly this was due to a failing intersectoral and stakeholder collaboration. Despite involving a range of representatives, sectoral and political logics remained dominant in the decision-making processes. Because of the instrument of the spatial balance that assigned quantified area targets to each sector, the preceding system of land use planning remained dominant. Second, the process proved unable to include citizens' objections and their knowledge on the areas. Instead local knowledge was used by action groups as grounds to resist the rezoning decisions in court. Finally, failing subsidiarity led cities and municipalities to blame the Flemish Region of top-down policymaking. These inter-administrative tension limited the willingness to participate constructively in the process. In short: the process was not experienced as legitimate and led to citizen protests. Not confident that the demarcation process could fulfil their needs and wishes, stakeholders strategically acted to achieve their goals through (party political) formal and informal channels.

From this the paper distils five lessons for future capacity building for guiding urbanisation. 1) If the governance culture does not furnish trust but is characterised by strategic action from positions of distrust, no attempt at capacity building is going to work. 2) Quantified planning targets may be a tool to reach stakeholder consensus, but should be handled very carefully because they threaten to eclipse the building of stakeholders relationships. 3) Fears of threatened local autonomy

should be anticipated, as they may lead to distrust when implementing an urbanisation strategy that affects multiple administrative jurisdictions. 4) Subsidiarity in planning systems comes with responsibility. If it fails, the (perception of) top-down steering is detrimental to legitimacy of the planning process. 5) Citizen participation should have a role at the outset, not merely at the close of a planning process for it to inspire legitimacy.

These lessons show the importance of looking beyond forms of capital in analyses of institutional capacity building to the underlying governance, or planning culture at work. In conclusion in Flanders the existing elements of governance culture counteracted the building of relational, knowledge and mobilizing capital as intended by the designers of the Flemish planning system.

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1.5.3 The countryside starts here': How the urban-rural divide continues to matter in post-urban Flanders

The third paper (chapter 4) evaluates the role of the urban-rural distinction in the governance of urbanisation. This paper explores an apparent contradiction in contemporary urban studies literature. On the one hand the urban-rural distinction is declared obsolete by various authors. On the other, this conceptual pair still seems an indispensable category to understand the governance of urbanisation. This leads to the main question of the paper: how does a distinction which has been deemed inadequate in capturing the empirical reality of urbanisation in post-urban regions, still strongly inform the way a variety of actors think and act?

This question is explored through an in-depth qualitative study of spatial governance in the fragmented post-urban settlement structure of Flanders. Central to the study is the spatial governance instrument of demarcating 'urban areas'. The demarcation instrument was predicated on a distinction between urban and non-urban areas in an attempt to preserve the spatial quality of these environments. Through its implementation in the agglomerations of Antwerp and Mechelen the paper shows how the urban-rural distinction tends to activate and reproduce a morally charged symbolic urban-rural divide.

The demarcation approach underestimated the store of strong discursive meanings attached to 'the urban' and 'the rural' in Flemish society. These meanings shape the perception of the residential environment and the 'good life', collective identity and belonging. Especially in fringe municipalities the policy concept of an urban area was perceived as a harbinger of further urbanisation symbolised by high density development and threatening the suburban lifestyle. Suburban actors presented their residential environments as rural villages, tying into a historically widely present anti-urban sentiment in Flanders. Thus while many of the interviewed citizens and politicians acknowledged that they no longer live in a distinct countryside, an idyll of rurality was used as a resource for strategic action to oppose the instrument's goals and undermine its effectiveness. In the end the demarcations were judged by most respondents as a lot of effort leading to little result. This was especially the case among local politicians and planners. At the regional level experts and planners were frustrated that other stakeholders did not acknowledge the value of the process and refused to move beyond local interests.

Dymitrow and Brauer (2018) judge the urban-rural dichotomy to be "meaningful-yet-useless". Yet the results of the analysis lead to the conclusion that the stress on the pervasive influence of the urban by post- or planetary urbanists does not render the urban-rural dichotomy obsolete as a social construction. In line with insights in the impact of discourse and narratives in spatial planning we can conclude that certain power relations rooted in symbolic and physical resources (e.g. political influence, land value, a desirable residential environment) are at the heart of struggles involving the urban-rural dichotomy. Notions of urban and rural still strongly inform the way actors in urban governance processes think and act exactly *because* they are meaningful. The analysis confirms that as the morphological divide between urban and rural space becomes harder

to distinguish, the symbolic distinction may become all the more important for residents and local politicians to make sense of spatial development. Therefore spatial planning instruments predicated on the urban-rural dichotomy may even lead to further entrench it in the discourses and practices of local stakeholders, and hence will lose effectiveness for spatial governance in a post-urban context. While this case study is limited to Flanders, literature shows that the urban-rural conceptual pair is also relevant in many other countries and has similar meanings attached to it.

Thus this paper shows the importance of understanding the impact of broader societal meanings attached to concepts on which spatial planning instruments are predicated. An increased understanding may benefit the quality of implementation, reception and effectiveness of instruments based on new epistemologies of the urban, of which there is definite need in a post-urban world.

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1.5.4 Introducing a concrete stop: signs of a changing planning culture in Flanders?

The final paper of this thesis (chapter 5) fast-forwards a decade into the future to consider current policy initiatives to guide urbanisation in Flanders. It investigates the contemporary attitudes held towards urbanisation as laid bare by responses to the "concrete stop" that is part of the new Spatial Policy Plan. This successor to the 1997 Spatial Structure Plan was first announced in 2012 and has been in development ever since (see section 1.3.2). A reduction of the additional spatial uptake to zero by 2040 – popularly named the "concrete stop" – is part of these plans. This paper asks whether the proposed concrete stop can be viewed as a sign of a changing planning culture in Flanders that marks a readiness to take a new spatial development path. Up to this day, Flemish planning culture is shaped by the post-war socio-economic growth model with its state-promoted homeownership, sponsored commuting, and antiurban sentiment. An unintended negative consequence of this spatial development paradigm is a large amount of land take and fragmentation of space.

To answer this question we perform a news framing analysis on the public debate surrounding the concrete stop. Frames can be defined as 'organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time. They work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world' (Reese, 2001, p. 11 quoted in: Reese, 2007, p. 150). As such, frames can be considered "interpretative schema" that '(…) simplify complex issues by lending greater importance or weight to certain considerations and arguments over others" (Nisbet, 2010, p. 47) Hence, frames unite related ideas in a "net" that colours events in the social world in order to promote a certain effect. Frame analysis is concerned with the way this web of ideas is being formed (Reese, 2007).

A step by step process was developed to gather and analyse 1392 news articles in the public debate on the concrete stop and uncover the various attitudes at work. In the analysis three frames are found. A first stresses the need for action against spatial fragmentation and land take. Its sponsors are majority politicians, experts and activists. However, a subframe which is by far the most prominent in the dataset, voices a great amount of distrust in the ability of the Flemish institutions to effectively implement these measures. The second and least prominent frame discusses the concrete stop in terms of costs and benefits. Its sponsors are aligned with those of first in that they are convinced public action is required, but they are also aware of potential negative effects. Considering the implications of strict measures it is remarkable that this cost/benefit frame is not very prominent in the sample. Both the first and second frames take the position that the state needs to intervene in order to preserve quality of life, with or without compensating regions, landowners, and developers. Though calling for radical change, these pro-measures frames appear to have become the dominant theme. They are therefore at an ideological remove from the third frame. This one is sponsored by those who view the concrete stop in terms of a threat to the customary way of life. These sponsors cling to the twentieth century growth model that contains housing ideals and development interests deemed unsustainable by experts. Its discourse resonates with a fear of densification, reduced market freedom, and threatened freedom of residential location choice by

government intervention. This frame is also taken up by Flemish right-wing nationalist parties who use it to politicise and polarise.

Based on the analysis we conclude that Flemish planning culture is indeed (slowly) changing towards a more sustainable model. The analysis shows that a new attitude towards guiding urbanisation has indeed emerged that is able to dominate the public discussion. However there are powerful counter-framings that appeal to vestiges of the twentieth century socio-economic arrangement and tap into wider socio-cultural divides in Flemish society. More than the institutionalisation of a new paradigm, this may be a time of a 'populist moment' where several social movements are trying to influence public policy towards their vision of a just social arrangement.

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2. Taking Implementation Seriously in the Evaluation of Urban Growth Management Strategies: "Safeguarding the Future" of the Antwerp City-Region

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Abstract

Contemporary evaluations of urban growth management (UGM) strategies often take the shape of quantitative measurements of land values and housing prices. In this paper, we argue that it is of key importance that these evaluations also analyse the policy formulation and implementation phases of growth management strategies. It is in these phases that the institutions and discourses are (trans)formed in which UGM strategies are embedded. This will enable us to better understand the conditions for growth management policies' success or failure. We illustrate this point empirically with the case of demarcating urban areas in the region of Flanders, Belgium. Using the Policy Arrangement Approach, the institutional dynamics and discursive meanings in this growth instrument's formulation and implementation phase are unravelled. More specifically, we explain how the Flemish strategic spatial planning vision of restraining sprawl was transformed into one of accommodating growth in the demarcation of the Antwerp Metropolitan Area, epitomised by two different meanings of the phrase "safeguarding the future." In conclusion, we argue that, in Antwerp, the demarcation never solidified into a stable policy arrangement, rendering it largely ineffective. We end by formulating three recommendations to contribute to future attempts at managing urban growth in Flanders.

2.1 Introduction: Evaluating Growth Management

Compact settlements are beneficial in terms of the cost of mobility and providing public services as well as safeguarding valuable agricultural land and nature. Therefore, planning strategies have been developed throughout the twentieth century in order to guide growth and protect open space (Hack, 2012). Urban growth boundaries are arguably the most famous instrument used in these growth management strategies. Early examples are found as Greenbelts in the United Kingdom and, from the 1950s, as statutory lines around cities in the United States. In any form, growth boundaries support:

> **The key idea that imposing a defined boundary around a city beyond which development will be prohibited (at least up to some other jurisdiction) will simultaneously prevent sprawl outside the boundary and promote higher density inside it (Bae, 2007, pp. 1-2).**

From the second half of the twentieth century, urban growth management (UGM) instruments developed from 'simple' urban containment boundaries into comprehensive plans including a wider array of policy measures to restrain urban growth and promote selective development. Recently, smart growth policy packages have centred more on (dis)incentives than direct regulation. Thereby, the perception of urban growth has evolved from a problem to be contained, to an opportunity to fix past development errors and guide new developments to address current social issues (Bae, 2007; Chapin, 2012; Janssen-Jansen, 2007). As Calthorpe and Fulton state,

> **A multifaceted policy can reinforce a development tendency toward more compact communities, support efficient infrastructure investments, preserve open space, and encourage the revitalization of many declining areas (Calthorpe & Fulton, 2001, pp. 64-65).**

Despite the recognition that UGM instruments are multifaceted, Knaap and Nelson already noted three decades ago that, "Although UGBs are multi-objective instruments, most research on the effects of UGBs has focused on land values" (Knaap & Nelson, 1988, p. 38). This also holds true for the evaluative literature published in subsequent decades, which focuses primarily on analysing the effects of growth management strategies on land values and housing prices (Cunningham, 2007; Dawkins & Nelson, 2002; Jaeger, Plantinga, & Grout, 2012; Mathur, 2014; Pendall, 1999) . Additionally, there are many reviews of the effects of urban growth management on urban development patterns (Dempsey & Plantinga, 2013; Gennaio, Hersperger, & Bürgi, 2009; Jun, 2004, 2012; Wassmer, 2002) and mobility (Anas & Rhee, 2007; Brueckner, 2007).

We argue that a majority of these contributions evaluate growth management strategies by using quantitative indicators of surface areas, retail sales, land values, building lot sales transactions and traffic. Studies often identify growth management policies—without further elaboration—as independent variables tied to a particular geographical location, in order to evaluate their effects (Kline, Thiers, Ozawa, Alan Yeakley, & Gordon, 2014; Nelson & Moore, 1996). New contributions to the body of work generally suggest improvements in measurement methodology or add new case studies. These quantitative evaluations thus often implicitly assume that growth management policies are executed as they were intended, after which effects can be measured. This approach of evaluating UGM stresses the final stage of the policy cycle (Jann & Wegrich, 2007) and creates a blind spot regarding the events and decisions of earlier stages in which policy is conceived, formulated, and implemented. Furthermore, it is striking that there is hardly any work on the public support for growth boundaries.

Therefore, we argue that there is a need to look beyond the measurement of effects of urban growth management instruments and consider the institutional and discursive conditions in which they are formulated and implemented. This aim is supported by occasional contributions to the literature that do at least recognize the importance of cultural factors and institutional settings on the

formulation and implementation processes of urban growth measures. After their statistical analyses of growth boundary effectiveness, Jun (2004) and Gennaio et al. (2009) refer to the pertinence of political debates and circumstances on these policies, though they refrain from delving deeper into them. In other studies, the data on the broader context *is* there, but it is not given a prominent place in the analysis (e.g., Cunningham (2007)). Moreover, Bengston, Fletcher, and Nelson (2004) distil the key lesson that "implementation is critical" because it determines effectiveness.

Other authors also point out the importance of institutional and discursive factors for the success of urban growth management. Margerum produces criteria for the evaluation of collaborative planning processes applied to the implementation of growth management strategies in South East Queensland, Australia (2002) and Denver, Colorado (2005). The main conclusions of these studies are that growth management collaborations lead to an increased sensitivity to spatial problems on a regional scale, as well as to increased communication between governments. The studies also, however, find a weak political and community input into growth management projects, and stress the importance of these contributions. Knaap (1987) points at the importance of citizens' perceived self-interest in growth management for its public support and Knaap and Nelson (1988) also note the role of political tension in their evaluation of the Oregon land use program,

> **The construction and implementation of UGBs in other urban areas is a protracted political process. Turf battles often arose between city and county governments and, in the larger metropolitan areas, between city governments (Knaap & Nelson, 1988, p. 38).**

Finally, various authors call for more context-specific studies and nuanced analytic frameworks of the policy environments and governance structures in which UGM policies are situated (Bae, 2007; Chapin, 2012). In the words of (James et al.):

> **Efforts to manage urban growth tend to occur within the frameworks, conventions, and requirements of government structures—from the municipal to the national. However, this very much depends upon associated political and cultural systems (James et al., 2013, pp. 225–226).**

These contributions show that there is a broad awareness of the importance of the institutionalisation of growth management instruments for their success or failure. Yet, the analysis of the policy formulation and implementation phases is still rare in evaluations of growth management strategies. This paper aims to contribute to the body of work by focusing on the institutional and discursive context in which urban growth policies are formulated and implemented. To illustrate the importance of such a perspective, we analyse the growth management instrument of demarcating urban areas in the Belgian region of Flanders using the Policy Arrangement Approach (PAA). Section 2 outlines our research approach.

2.2 Analysing the Institutional and Discursive Dimensions of UGM

The PAA (Van Tatenhove, Arts, & Leroy, 2000) describes the structure and institutionalisation of policy arrangements. These are defined as "the temporary stabilisation of the content and

organisation of a particular policy domain at a certain policy level or over several policy levels" (Arts & Leroy, 2006, p. 13). Through daily interactions between policy actors, patterns emerge that are more or less stable and that may include the "substantive delineation of the problem at stake and of possible solutions, but also the processes of give-and-take between the actors and the formal and informal rules according to which these processes take place" (Liefferink, 2006, p. 47). The Flemish spatial demarcation instrument analysed in this study is one such policy arrangement intended to restrain urban sprawl.

By distinguishing four dimensions of policy arrangements, the PAA analyses institutional patterns of change and stability:

1. The first dimension of **actors and coalitions** include governments, departments, private citizens, firms, and NGOs with a stake in the policy process.
2. The second dimension is **rules of the game**, defined as mutually agreed formal procedures and informal routines of interaction within institutions. These rules select the shape in which social interactions take place. For instance, procedures to in- volve citizens in the planning process lead to a certain kind of participation which may or may not have the intended effect and may or may not be satisfactory for those participating.
3. Thirdly, **resources and power** can mean material resources such as land and finances, but also knowledge and expertise. Funding agencies, incumbents of political office, and experts all possess particular resources in spatial planning which lead to the possession of various types of power and influence to affect the outcome of a policy process.
4. Fourth, policy arrangements are analysed in terms of **discourses**. This is a substantive dimension, as opposed to the former three, which are organisational dimensions of a policy arrangement. Discourses include the views and narratives of the actors involved in a policy process. Discourses contain and reflect norms and values, problem definitions, and preferred solutions to problems. The PAA draws a distinction between macro-level governance discourses and those at the level of the concrete policy issues at hand. These discourses may overlap or be at odds. For instance, in spatial planning, the strategic aims of a plan at the regional level plan can be opposed to the interpretations of citizens whose property is affected by it.

As Figure 2.1 shows, the four dimensions of policy arrangements are linked and their analysis only makes sense when all four are taken into account in their interconnectedness. Changes in one dimension are likely to cause changes in the others as well. For instance, the redefinition of a policy problem (discourses) may cause regulations to be altered (rules), different stakeholders to become involved (actors), and other knowledge and funding channels to become relevant (resources). This makes the PAA a starting point for an encompassing and dynamic analysis of policy processes.

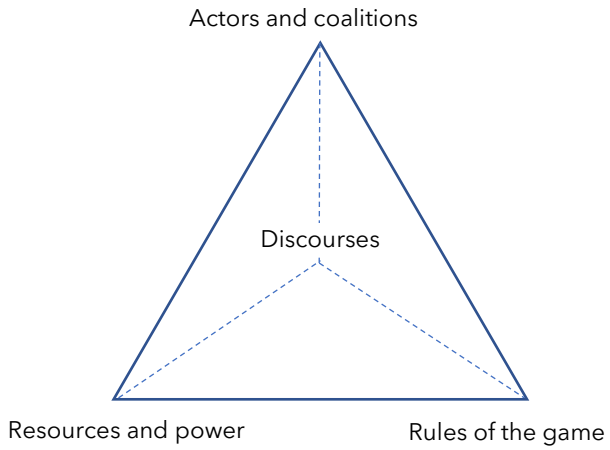


Figure 2.1: Schematic representation of a single policy arrangement. Adapted from Liefferink (2006).

In this paper, the policy arrangement approach is used to highlight the institutional dimensions of urban growth management strategies. By taking this perspective, we can shed light on the conditions under which the Flemish instrument of demarcating urban areas was formulated and implemented in the Antwerp Metropolitan Area.

2.3 Case Study: Demarcating Urban Areas in Flanders

2.3.1 The Belgian and Flemish Spatial Planning System

Modern spatial planning in Belgium can be traced back to the Belgian law on town planning of 1962. This introduced a system of land use planning that led to the development of 48 sub-regional land use plans covering the entire territory. Due to a liberal distribution of areas for housing and other functions in these plans, the landscape became increasingly fragmented. As a part of the federalisation of the Belgian state into semi-autonomous regions, authority over spatial planning in Flanders was devolved to the Flemish region in 1980. Under Flemish rule, further regulations stimulated fragmentation, but the land use planning system introduced in 1962 was kept intact (P. Van den Broeck, Moulaert, Kuhk, Lievois, & Schreurs, 2014).

Within the region, three levels of planning authority operate, each with their respective executive and administrative bodies. At the top, there is the regional level consisting of the Flemish government and the planning administration. The provincial deputation and planning office operate at the intermediate level. Locally, planning is handled by the municipal College of the Mayor and Aldermen and the municipal planning office. Between these levels, a relation of subsidiarity exists. The municipal level is concerned with local planning tasks, the provincial with matters that transcend municipal borders, and the regional with issues that concern the region as a whole. Appeals against planning (permit) decisions are possible from the local to the provincial, and ultimately, the Flemish level (Vandevyvere, 2010).

In part due to the adverse effects of the land use planning system on the region's spatial pattern, a new planning system was introduced in the Flemish region in the second half of the 1990s. Now, competent authorities on all three levels were tasked with developing a structure plan containing an overarching strategic planning vision, and spatial implementation plans[17] with decisions to implement this vision.

In the terminology of the most recent comparative study of European spatial planning systems—the ESPON COMPASS project—the Belgian[18] spatial governance and planning system (SGPS) is categorised as one in which market-led development is prevalent. This means that market actors regularly and informally influence spatial policy decision making to pursue their private goals. Additionally, building permits are oriented towards protecting private property, which makes the implementation of comprehensive spatial policy more difficult. Along with the SGPS of 12 Mediterranean and Eastern-European countries, and more so than most other Northern and Western European countries, Belgium leans towards a conformative planning model, where binding general plans determine land use and development rights to a large degree (Berisha, Cotella, Janin Rivolin, & Solly, 2020). The legacy of the sub-regional plans can clearly be seen here. However, gradual modifications are possible, which is illustrated by interventions made to the sub-regional plans by the Flemish spatial implementation plans at all three levels.

2.3.2 Restraining Sprawl in Flanders

As a result of its spatial planning history, Flanders is one of the most densely urbanized regions in Europe with a built-up area of 33% (Poelmans, Janssen, & Hambsch, 2019). The region is characterized by many of the problems accompanied by such a condition: the fragmentation of nature posing a threat to biodiversity, heavy congestion, a high traffic mortality rate, noise and air pollution, high public expenditures for building and maintaining extensive road and utility networks, insufficient water infiltration leading to flood risk, and finally, the unfavourable aesthetics of a fragmented landscape (Grietens, 2009; Meeus & De Decker, 2013; Vermeiren et al., 2019).

Because the growth of spatial fragmentation and its problems have long been recognised as an undesirable trend in Belgium (De Decker, 2011; Mustafa & Teller, 2020), in 1997, the Spatial Structure plan for Flanders (Dutch: Ruimtelijk Structuurplan Vlaanderen, henceforth: RSV[19]) was developed, accompanied by new planning legislation.[20] The RSV contains an explicit growth management strategy for Flanders[21]. Starting from a vision represented in the metaphor "Flanders

[17] In Dutch: ruimtelijke uitvoeringsplanning or RUPs.
[18] The COMPASS typology merges insights about the three independent planning systems in Belgium into one national type.
[19] This text adheres to the original Dutch acronyms of the planning documents to cater to those familiar with planning in Flanders.
[20] For more information on the RSV's design and implementation, see (Albrechts, 1999; P. Van den Broeck et al., 2014).
[21] In addition, there was a set of policy measures aimed at urban revitalization and making cities more attractive places to live; however, as this falls under the policy domain of Domestic Affairs rather than spatial planning, these are left outside the purview of this analysis.

Open and Urban", the RSV "(...) strives for a selective concentration of the growth of living, working and of the other social functions in the cities and the nuclei of the countryside" (Vlaamse Overheid, 1997/2011). Therefore, 60% of new housing in Flanders is projected to be realised in demarcated "urban areas" and a maximum of 40% outside them, thereby freezing the areal distribution of urbanization as it was in 1991 and halting the proliferation of urban sprawl. In order to achieve these goals, the RSV distributes quotas of land to be zoned for housing and other functions (industry, services, agriculture, nature) among the Flemish provinces and urban areas, which are to be realized by 2007.

As a part of this strategy, 13 larger and 44 smaller cities designated in the plan are subject to a spatial demarcation instrument that includes a statutory line drawn at plot level around them and parts of their fringe municipalities. Within these urban areas, a concentration and densification of residential and economic functions is envisioned. As a comprehensive growth management strategy, the demarcation process also aimed to promote cooperation between the political, administrative, and societal actors of the urban and suburban (fringe) municipalities to develop a shared vision of the development of the urban region. Within the demarcated area, a number of planning regulations are in effect, the most important being a minimum housing density of 25 units per hectare[22]. The line itself does not change any existing zoning or administrative borders as the new planning regulations only apply to new building permits[23].

Though there are some positive examples, the demarcation of the urban areas is generally regarded very critically in Flanders (Leinfelder, 2015; Voets et al., 2010). The structure planning framework in Flanders did not manage to reduce the large amount of residentially zoned areas in Flanders that has existed since the 1970s (Boussauw & Boelens, 2015; De Decker, 2011). By not meeting attempts at spatial concentration with a reduction of supply in the suburban and rural parts of the region, the demarcations proved largely inconsequential for the region's spatial pattern.

The intended city–regional cooperation was only achieved in the smaller and "less complex" urban regions and land use logic has emerged as dominant over a more open-ended structure planning approach (Boucké, 2015; Cabus et al., 2009). Reflecting a decade after the approval of the RSV, one of its main authors concludes that demarcation plans have become nothing more than "an inter-municipal local land use plan" which is "an improper use, more strongly, a misuse of the [demarcation] concept that leads to the undesired further juridification of spatial planning"

[22] The prescribed minimum density in the rural areas outside the urban growth boundary was 15 units per hectare.

[23] While the demarcations of urban areas in Flanders have some characteristics of smart-growth strategies, they completely lack the involvement of market actors as well as redistribution of development opportunities via transferable development rights (TDR). Furthermore, despite initial intentions, municipalities and provinces were not treated as equal partners in the process. The demarcations are, therefore, discussed here as a classic growth management strategy that in Bae's (2007) typology can be characterised as an example of an urban growth boundary with accompanying minimum density zoning, infill and residential unit ordinances and a limitation on new residential development outside the growth boundary.

(Vermeersch, 2008). This raises the question about the conditions of the demarcation instrument's formulation and implementation.

2.3.3 Demarcating the Antwerp Metropolitan Area

Our analysis focuses on the spatial demarcation process of Antwerp. Because it is the largest demarcation process in the Flemish region, it provides the richest selection of findings to analyse the implementation of the growth management policy[24]. The Antwerp urban growth boundary covers parts of 19 different municipalities, two of which lie outside the province of Antwerp in the neighbouring province of East-Flanders. The map in Figure 2.2 shows land coverage in the greater Antwerp area in 2015. Superimposed on the map is the demarcation line of the Antwerp Metropolitan Area. The map illustrates that Antwerp is a concentrated urban core with a fringe characterised by urban sprawl and ribbon development, both inside and outside the demarcated urban area. Next to the demarcation line, the plan includes 24 areas to be rezoned in order to achieve the quota set for the various spatial functions outlined in the RSV.

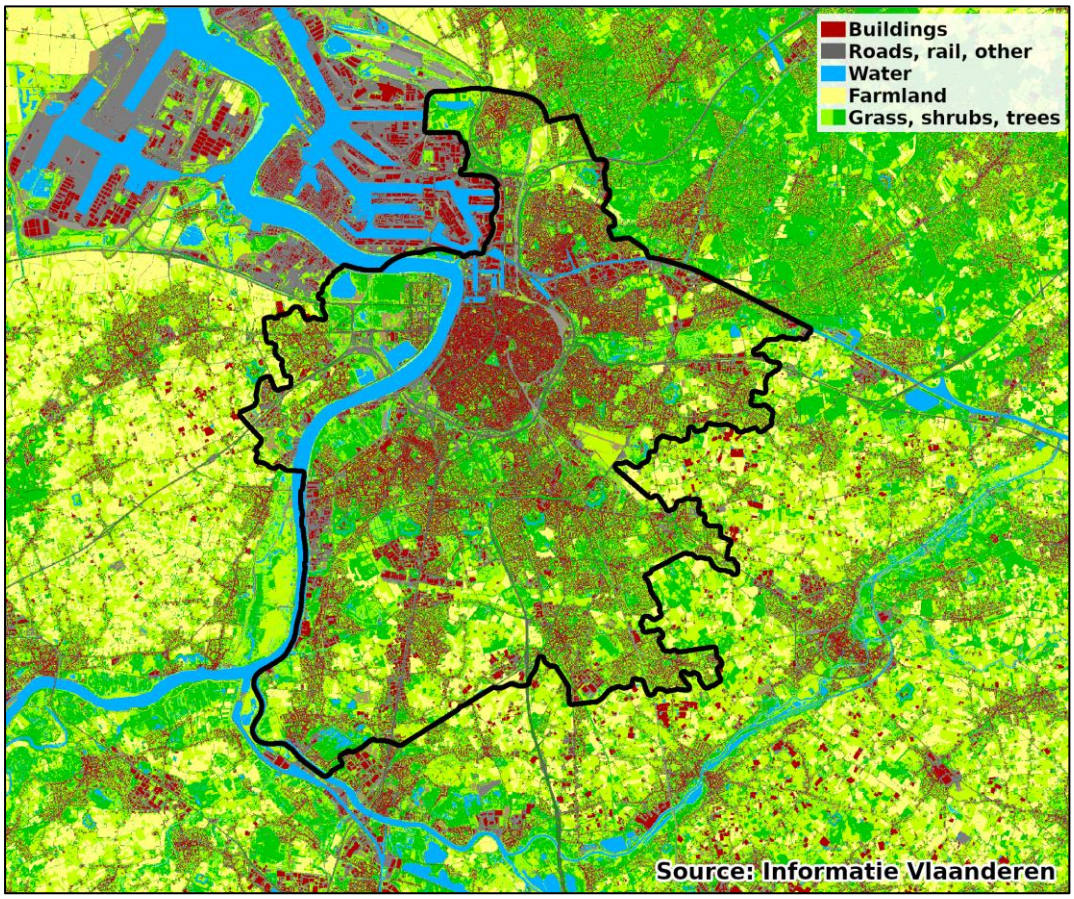


Figure 2.2: Land coverage in the greater Antwerp area 2015 including the Metropolitan Area demarcation (Informatie Vlaanderen, 2015; Vlaams Planbureau voor Omgeving, 2019).

[24] The demarcation process of the Flemish urban area surrounding Brussels is arguably even more complex and hence rich in empirical terms. However, as Brussels is a separate region within Belgium, its demarcation is strongly characterised by communitarian politics (Boussauw, Allaert, & Witlox, 2013) and is, therefore, not typical of the demarcation processes in Flanders in general.

Planning regulations for the urban area are recorded in a regional spatial implementation plan (Gewestelijk Ruimtelijk Uitvoeringsplan or GRUP) for the Antwerp Metropolitan Area (Vlaamse Overheid, 2009). It was designed by a private spatial planning firm, finalized by the regional planning administration and approved by the Flemish government. The timeline in Table 2.1 shows that this process spanned a period of six years (2003–2009), excluding the legal procedures that followed.

Period	Event
April 2003	Start of demarcation process, round of exploratory talks with municipalities conducted by planning firm led by a former provincial official.
June 2004 – April 2005	Three "steering group" meetings of Flemish officials, provinces and municipalities, leading to various iterations of a metropolitan vision.
15 April 2005	Final report concluding the vision process. Contains proposal of demarcation and areas to be rezoned. End of assignment for planning firm.
2007[25]	Process restarted by administration. August 23rd plenary meeting on the design of the regional spatial implementation plan (GRUP).
April – June 2008	Environmental and safety assessments completed.
1 July 2008	Minister of Spatial Planning presents the spatial demarcation to mayors of municipalities involved in plenary meeting.
5 September 2008	Preliminary approval of the Flemish Government of the demarcation Antwerp Metropolitan Area, press release.
October – December 2008	Public inquiry. Objections considered by the Flemish Committee of Spatial Planning (Vlacoro).
8 April 2009	Report of the Flemish Committee of Spatial Planning.
19 Jun 2009	Definitive approval of regional spatial development plan of the demarcation Antwerp metropolitan area.
2009–2012	Council of State hears several procedures against the demarcation GRUP.

Table 2.1: Demarcation of the Antwerp Metropolitan Area: Timeline

2.3.4 Data

The following empirical analysis is based on a study of the officially published plans and policy documents. From 2015 to 2018, in-depth interviews were conducted with 17 planning experts and officials at the regional level (designated E#), 3 local planners (A–S#), 5 politicians (A–P#), and 4 citizen-activists (A–A#).[26] These interviews were all transcribed and coded. The private planning firm granted access to its archives, while several key respondents provided documents from their personal archives. An analysis of 84 articles in the local newspaper mentioning the demarcation between 1997 and 2017 provided additional context. In the public inquiry on the Antwerp demarcation, the Flemish Committee of Spatial Planning (Vlacoro)—consisting of planning experts, government representatives, and civil society actors—summarized and advised on more than 6000 objections to the preliminary GRUP bundled in petitions, 2100 individual objections, and 12

[25] Politicians in Flanders are allowed to have concurrent seats in both local and regional bodies, creating close ties between local and regional politics. Therefore, the process was halted between 2005 and 2007 pending the outcome of local elections taking place 8 October 2006.

[26] There were more interviews conducted with local planners, politicians and citizens since the demarcation of the urban area surrounding the city of Mechelen was also researched. As this paper only reports on the Antwerp case, these are not included here.

recommendations by local and provincial governments. The responses in the resulting report (Vlacoro, 2009) were coded by the researchers to show the argumentations for accepting or rejecting the objections. Finally, policy evaluations of various other demarcation and city–regional cooperation processes were drawn upon (Boucké, 2015; Boussauw et al., 2013; Cabus et al., 2009; T. Coppens, Van Den Broeck, & Van Wymeersch, 2016; Voets et al., 2010; Voets et al., 2012).

2.4 Analysis: Safeguarding the Future

Table 2.2 provides a schematic summary of the analysis of four phases of policy formulation and implementation in the demarcation process. By distinguishing the four dimensions of the PAA in each phase, we show how the land use logic gradually overtook the vision of combating urban sprawl. Each phase is explained in the subsections below.

Between the original vision of the demarcation instrument and the way it is presented in the preliminary version of the spatial plan for the Antwerp Metropolitan Area, a major discursive shift occurred. On 5 September 2008, a press release titled "Antwerp's future safeguarded by the demarcation process of the metropolitan area" marked the Flemish Government's preliminary approval of the demarcation plan. The plan is promoted as creating new development opportunities, states that it "provides new space" and includes a list of amounts of land area (re)zoned for housing, nature and industry, which is translated in Antwerp's local newspaper as: "the GRUP enables the construction of 8249 houses" (Van Baelen, 2009). Additionally, the press release mentions decisions on a number of "metropolitan functions" such as regularising a golf course, finding a location for a soccer stadium and the expansion of the local airport. The minister of spatial planning is quoted,

> **Today we have arrived at a balanced proposal in which we safeguard the future of the Antwerp region and make the Antwerp metropolitan area even more attractive for working, residing and living[27] (Vlaamse Overheid, 2008).**

The discourse of a press release may be expected to present the ultimate legitimation for a spatial plan to the broader public. Here, it shows a dominant logic of land use planning with land and building opportunities represented as resources made available through zoning. This discourse is almost the opposite of the vision of the Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders under which the demarcation instrument was introduced. Its focus has changed from safeguarding rural areas from development, to safeguarding the future by making development possible. Why did the authors of the press release and their political superiors opt to present the plan in terms of the land use logic dominant in Flanders throughout the second half of the twentieth century, instead of in the terms introduced in the Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders ten years earlier?

[27] All quotes from interviewees, press and policy documents are translated from Dutch by the authors.

Phase PAA Dimension	1. Counteracting Fragmentation 1996–1997	2. Increasing Tension 2003–2005	3. Economic Engine for Flanders 2007–2008	4. "Coordinating Objections" 2008–2009
Actors and Coalitions	Designers Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders Private urban planning firm designing demarcation methodology.	Private urban planning firm (attempts to maintain original vision). City of Antwerp (disinterested). Fringe municipalities and Flemish Region (oppositional). "Lack of a figurehead".	Spatial Planning administration turns proposal into preliminary plan. Minister of Spatial Planning and his cabinet influence content of the preliminary plan. Fringe municipalities (opposition and political struggles).	Flemish Committee of Spatial Planning adjudicates objections. Citizens, organisations and municipalities (object in public inquiry). Flemish Government decides on final spatial plan, not bound to follow advice.
Rules of the Game	New structure planning framework with the ambition to move beyond legalistic land use planning tradition.	Strategic structure planning approach shackled by land use planning status quo. Fear of a demarcated "urban area" as prelude to municipal mergers. "Procedural process".	Goal: meeting quantified targets laid out in earlier plans. Rising stakes: demarcation starts to function as guideline for distribution of resources in other public sectors, leading to power plays.	Rules of the public inquiry procedure of central importance. Previous plans, regulations, legislation both objected to and used as basis for recommendations.
Resources and Power	Offer sectoral targets for growth to ensure political support for RSV.	Little fringe capacity to handle demarcation process, sufficient capacity in the city. Links between local and regional politics influencing the plan. Resources for consultation process withheld.	Designating land for development to ensure stakeholder support. Metropolitan functions. Administration and Minister possess power of summary viz. earlier steps in the process.	Objections over zoning decisions. Lack of legal, financial and temporal resources to file objections for most citizens.
Discourses	Deconcentrated clustering to safeguard rural areas from urban development.	Antwerp region as a checkerboard of fragmentation, reduce pressure on the countryside. Ambition for city–regional cooperation: "from Antwerp to the Antwerp region". Negative connotation of "urban area".	Space for expansion: Safeguarding the future by enabling development. The plan creates "new space" and the possibility to build new houses. Quantified targets versus threat to local liveability.	Making technical recommendations. Quantitative targets take precedence over spatial quality. "In what way are *our* [citizens] interests represented?"

Table 2.2: Policy arrangement analysis of the demarcation of the Antwerp Metropolitan Area.

2.4.1 Phase 1: Counteracting Fragmentation (1996–1997)

Despite a discourse that underlines the necessity to counteract urban sprawl, the tension between land use logic and strategic planning is already present in the two documents that lie at the root of the demarcation processes. These are a preparatory study to determine a methodology for demarcating urban areas, commissioned with a private urban planning firm (Omgeving, 1996)[28], and the Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders itself.

The preparatory study mentions the spatial fragmentation of the Flemish settlement structure explicitly as the main reason for developing an urban growth management instrument. It states that, in Flanders, there is currently no clear separation between "urban" and "open space" and it introduces the ambition to break with the trend of a primarily land use-oriented spatial policy. The study presents this intent as the:

> **(. . .) directed interweaving and bundling of functions and facilities, among which the economic functions, within the urban areas, above all absolute priority is to use and manage the existing urban structure as well as possible (. . .) the preservation and where possible strengthening and expansion of open space. (. . .) This breaking of the trend aims for the protection of open space, counteracting the fragmentation, and the separation of open space and urban areas (Omgeving, 1996, p. 1).**

In the RSV itself, this is translated into the central strategic spatial policy concept of deconcentrated clustering: striving for a greater bundling of activities within Flanders' decentralized urban structure. The principle is positioned explicitly as a means of combatting urban sprawl:

> **Deconcentrated clustering goes against unbridled suburbanisation and fragmentation and thus reduces the pressure on the countryside (Vlaamse Overheid, 1997/2011, p. 189).**

Combatting sprawl in order to reduce—or at least restrain—the growing negative effects on mobility, environment and cost of public services was, hence, originally one of the main goals of this first overarching spatial plan for the Flemish region. The demarcation of urban areas was to be the prime instrument to realise this:

> **The demarcation of the urban areas is considered an essential policy measure in order to stop the urban flight and ribbon development, to be able to realise a 'supply policy' regarding additional housing and space for economic activities and safeguard the rural areas from urban development (Albrechts, 1999, p. 212).**

This discourse is found in the vision section of both documents and, as such, outlines a number of 'grand goals' for the future without going too deeply into particulars. The documents also show that the original methodology to arrive at a demarcation proposal (delineating an urban area and

[28] In Flanders, these firms perform a mix of architectural, urban planning and research work with some of their staff moving freely in both academic and practitioners' circles. In fact, one of the firm's directors played an important role in developing the RSV itself. Furthermore, building private sector capacity through developing expertise regarding the new structure planning framework was a deliberate strategy of those designing the RSV to improve the quality of its implementation (Albrechts, 1999).

identifying certain areas for rezoning to create a supply of well-situated development areas) was a rich one that considers many socio-spatial indicators before proposing a desired spatial structure.

In terms of actors, the process was supervised by the Flemish regional authorities, though shaping a vision for the urban area itself was considered a task for the municipalities. Therefore, the intent was to give provinces and municipalities the opportunity to provide their input at various moments in the process.

However, this method stood in a tense relationship with the customary practice of land use planning. The newly introduced planning system had to operate against the background of the preceding generation of sub-regional land use plans that fix the permitted use of every plot of land in the Flemish region and that continue to shape the spatial-political reality up to this day. While the new planning system preferred a more open strategic 'structure planning' process over the existing 'passive' sub-regional plans, many actors were used to a rule-based practice oriented to the legal certainty of zoning. One of the designers of the RSV mentions the tension between these two paradigms:

> **We were not always very happy with that. Because what we wanted to do was partly at odds with the traditional sub-regional plans. Those are aimed primarily at legal certainty (. . .) while we would have preferred to depart from a vision and then see which technical, juridical conditions were necessary to transform those interventions in reality (E2).**

There was a keen awareness among the promotors of the RSV (actors) that the success of its strategic spatial planning vision depended on discursive and institutional support of other public and private actors. As part of that strategy, zoning logic did serve a purpose as a resource to ensure their cooperation when implementing the RSV's policy goals by promising them possibilities of future spatial expansion. Thus, the preparatory study already recognizes the importance of sectoral targets for housing, industry, et cetera, when it states that "the translation of these [targets] to an urban area is precondition to establish a demarcation." While concluding that vision is important to achieve the desired spatial structure, the study emphasizes that:

> **The spatial concepts for an urban area have to be aimed at possibilities for expansion. Especially the targets regarding housing and commercial areas have to be translated to the terrain (Omgeving, 1996, p. 20).**

Despite the presence of this tension, the vision of counteracting spatial fragmentation was carried forward into the Antwerp demarcation process by a key actor: the same urban planning firm that had produced the preparatory study was commissioned to produce the demarcation proposal for the Antwerp Metropolitan Area.

2.4.2 Phase 2: Increasing Tension (2003–2005)

While the private planning firm could be considered a champion for the new structure planning approach, when the time came to demarcate the Antwerp Metropolitan Area, it quickly ran into other actors: a disinterested City of Antwerp and opposition from both its fringe municipalities and the

Flemish Region. This would lead to a loss of resources for broad consultation and the development of city–regional coordination. Lack of formal political support seriously weakened the vision of safeguarding the future through combating urban sprawl and provided room for the land use paradigm to come to the fore.

As a first step towards a demarcation plan for the Antwerp Metropolitan Area, the private planning firm drew up a proposal in a consortium formed with subcontractors responsible for communication and citizen participation. Subsequently, an extensive formal consultation programme was planned. The proposal's discourse reflects the RSV's evaluation of space in Flanders, characterising the Antwerp Area as a "checkerboard of fragmentation", a network city, or a "polycentric whole of fragments, of poles, of dense and less dense places" (Studiegroep Omgeving & Buck Consultants International, 2005). To guide development, the proposal aims to realise a supply of development areas within the metropolitan area of Antwerp; it reads:

> **The pressure on the countryside can only be controlled by catering to the spatial needs for housing and commercial activities in the urban area (Studiegroep Omgeving & Buck Consultants International, 2005, p. 13)**.

In order to realise these aims, a demarcation line is drawn and proposals are made to activate some (residential, industrial and commercial) reserve areas, while eliminating others. The document also includes proposals for infrastructure renewal, investments in housing and culture, regional, transnational and global networking, and the creation of a metropolitan green structure as goals accompanying the demarcation exercise. Finally, by explicitly extending mentions of "Antwerp" to "the Antwerp region"[29], the demarcation proposal repeatedly underlines that this is an effort to be made not just by the city of Antwerp, but by all of the municipalities involved (discourse). It states that cooperation can be realised in a "strong and coherent metropolitan framework" which could be pursued by a potent planning administration on metropolitan level or "a platform that supports the metropolitan policy" (Studiegroep Omgeving & Buck Consultants International, 2005, pp. 35, 51, 149).

However, the ambitious vision of counteracting sprawl through the development of a spatially concentrated city-region laid out in the demarcation proposal was impeded by other actors: the Antwerp fringe municipalities and the Flemish Region itself. First, the complex and time-consuming policy context in the Antwerp region restrained working towards city–regional cooperation. The relationship between the city and the fringe municipalities is historically fraught with tensions as far as spatial planning is concerned (see Chapter 2 in J. Van Den Broeck, Vermeulen, Oosterlynck, & Albeda, 2014). As a part of these tensions, fringe municipalities often self-identify as rural, to stress their independent character as opposed to the (urbanised) City of Antwerp (De Olde & Oosterlynck, 2021). Therefore, the discursive concept of "urban area" quickly acquired a negative

[29] This sounds more subtle in Dutch: een verruiming van 'Antwerpen' naar 'het Antwerpse' (p. 37). A formulation with sufficient vagueness not to be politically threatening.

connotation, which, in turn, resulted in political and public resistance to the planning process. There was also fear in some fringe municipalities that the demarcation would be a prelude to future mergers, causing local politicians to start attending meetings originally intended for Flemish and local planning officials. The planning firm reported, nonetheless, that support for the metropolitan area was growing steadily at this time. Various respondents still recall a two-day workshop with stakeholders held in an abbey in one of the fringe municipalities, which acted as 'neutral ground' outside Antwerp city limits according to one respondent (A-P5).

The early involvement of local politics was initially welcomed by the Flemish administration as an opportunity to generate support for the project. At the same time, though, the regional level had a low estimation of municipal expertise—also found in other demarcation processes (Boucké, 2015). Building up municipal planning capacity as a resource was another aim of the RSV, but it had not advanced very far at the time of the Antwerp demarcation. When asked about the time available to occupy oneself with the demarcation process, one fringe municipality planner responds:

> **Yes, very limited you know? The main task is handling permits, planning is a task at the side. So, I didn't really treat it very substantially (A-S2).**

At the Flemish level, in 1999, a Liberal Party Minister had taken the place of Christian-Democrat and Socialist predecessors who had initiated the RSV and the new planning framework. From this moment, measures aimed at restraining growth outside the urban areas were weakened. In terms of rules, this resulted in a failure to meet the envisioned supply policy in the urban areas with a restrictive land development policy beyond them (P. Van den Broeck et al., 2014; P. Van den Broeck & Verachtert, 2016). The planning firm was also not granted permission by the Flemish administration to execute the public consultation part of the assignment and was not paid for work already performed. Consequentially, little resources were spent on promoting an agenda of city–regional cooperation. The private planning firm also noted the lack of a key public figure (actor) to support the strategic spatial planning vision behind the demarcation process. The then mayor of the city of Antwerp was approached to fulfil this pioneering role, but declined because he felt that involvement of his office would fuel distrust in the fringe municipalities.

In fact, the City itself took a back bench in the demarcation process. As one city planning official summarized the attitude: "We'll do it because Flanders is doing it. But we'll decide for ourselves what exactly we'll have to do" (A-S1). For any rezoning it wanted to initiate, it had ample planning resources to organise itself and it was, therefore, not interested in the Flemish rezoning exercise. Interviewees also report a direct link between city politicians and ministers of their party in the Flemish Government. This 'vertical connection' functioned as a resource to influence important decisions and resulted in the private planning firm and regional planning officials being taken out of the loop for all the important dossiers regarding the city.

Though discursively still representing the vision of the RSV, the tension between this vision and the land use logic is already visible in the 2005 final demarcation proposal. The erosion of the RSV's vision can be seen where the text explicitly states that it does not want to interfere with the

borders, plans and powers of the individual municipalities and does not aim to create new administrative authorities. Despite repeatedly stressing the need for city–regional cooperation, the text mentions the low levels of support and enthusiasm for the demarcation process. The approach, lacking resources for the consultation programme, is recontextualised as an approach through "predominantly informal contacts". The goal of working towards city–regional cooperation was henceforth abandoned in favour of what one interviewee calls a much more "procedural process" (A-S1). Another city official recalls:

> **Although the planning firm started from the ambition of the RSV, from a demarcation line to a programme for the Antwerp region, they were not allowed to work like that, they had to return to the old way of rezoning and -colouring. In effect this is almost a sub-regional land use plan (A-P5).**

2.4.3 Phase 3: Economic Engine for Flanders (2007–2009)

When the preliminary demarcation plan was published in 2008, its discourse had transformed into one of 'creating space' for expansion, omitting completely the RSV's aim of counteracting unbridled suburbanisation and fragmentation and reducing pressure on the countryside. The prime discursive legitimation presented in the preliminary plan is the continued development of the Antwerp area's position as metropolis and economical engine for Flanders. This, was argued, requires improvement of the quality of the locations for employment, housing, metropolitan services, natural and landscape structures, roads and public transport [50]. The preliminary plan only contains two cursory mentions of the spatial fragmentation of the Antwerp area before moving on to discuss quantified targets for housing and industrial development. The land use logic that already played a role in the earlier phases of policy formulation—both as the legal inheritance of the previous planning system and as *resource* to ensure stakeholder support—takes centre stage in this phase. Thus, the process reflects the exact political-institutional dynamics of land development leading to the spatial fragmentation that the initiators of the RSV sought to transform and contain. Reflecting critically on the process, one city official concludes that the demarcation was reduced to "a number of banal zoning changes" but not to a serious action plan, that, for instance, also included a mobility policy (A-S1).

The Flemish spatial planning administration processed the demarcation proposal into a regional spatial plan. This means that administration and the cabinet of the Minister were the actors that possessed the power to represent and foreground certain voices and arguments from the previous stage and filter out others. Possessing this 'power of summary' (Fairclough, 2003) without the obligation to offer legitimation, the regional administration could also make a different selection of areas for rezoning. Indeed, at this stage, several areas proposed for rezoning and development in the previous phase were left out. Others were added that were not included in the earlier demarcation proposal, either because they were deemed unfit for development by the private planning firm or because they were advised negatively by the City. Eliminating the already existing zoning of a number of areas is no longer mentioned. Finally, some areas for "metropolitan functions" are inserted into the plan. These provide zoning for a water purification installation, a soccer stadium,

regularization of a golf course and a commercial area attached to the local airport. Zoning interventions like these were not conceived as part of the demarcation instrument though it could be argued that finding locations for these kinds of supra-local functions is not contrary to the vision of developing a coherent metropolitan area. Yet various interviewees felt these metropolitan functions to be the result of political deals between the City and the Flemish Government and the lobbying of private market parties. In particular, the minister who was elected in the Antwerp constituency and hence had a local political stake in the demarcation process (E3, A-S1, A-P5). Overall, we can thus conclude that, in this phase, the growth management logic of drawing development to some zones in order to prevent it in others was dropped. Despite their caution, the municipalities had been fairly constructive partners during the production of the private planning firm's demarcation proposal. This changed when the classification of urban areas was adopted by other policy sectors as a criterion (rule) for the allocation of public resources such as healthcare facilities and cultural centres[30]. This raised the stakes of (not) falling within an urban area and led to 'power plays' between the stakeholders involved reminiscent of the turf battles described by Knaap and Nelson (1988). Similar to the strategy of the city, politicians from fringe municipalities attempted to safeguard their municipality's interests at the Flemish level by exerting influence through "vertical" party lines as well. Furthermore, the animosity between city and fringe came to a head. One interviewee in the Flemish Administration describes the process as:

> **How can I as a city gain power over the adjacent municipalities, and how can I as fringe municipality keep the power of the city out? That's what it came down to. And absolutely nothing more, no cooperation (E1)**.

In some municipalities the demarcation became the subject of local political struggles. Opposition parties politicized the demarcation dossier and attempted to co-opt citizens' protests (see also T. Coppens et al., 2016). One mayor viewed the opposition's stirring up of fears of being absorbed by the city as a strategy of keeping the majority on its toes (A-P3). However, majority politicians resisted the demarcation as well, in sometimes fateful *discourse*. A local alderwoman is quoted in the press:

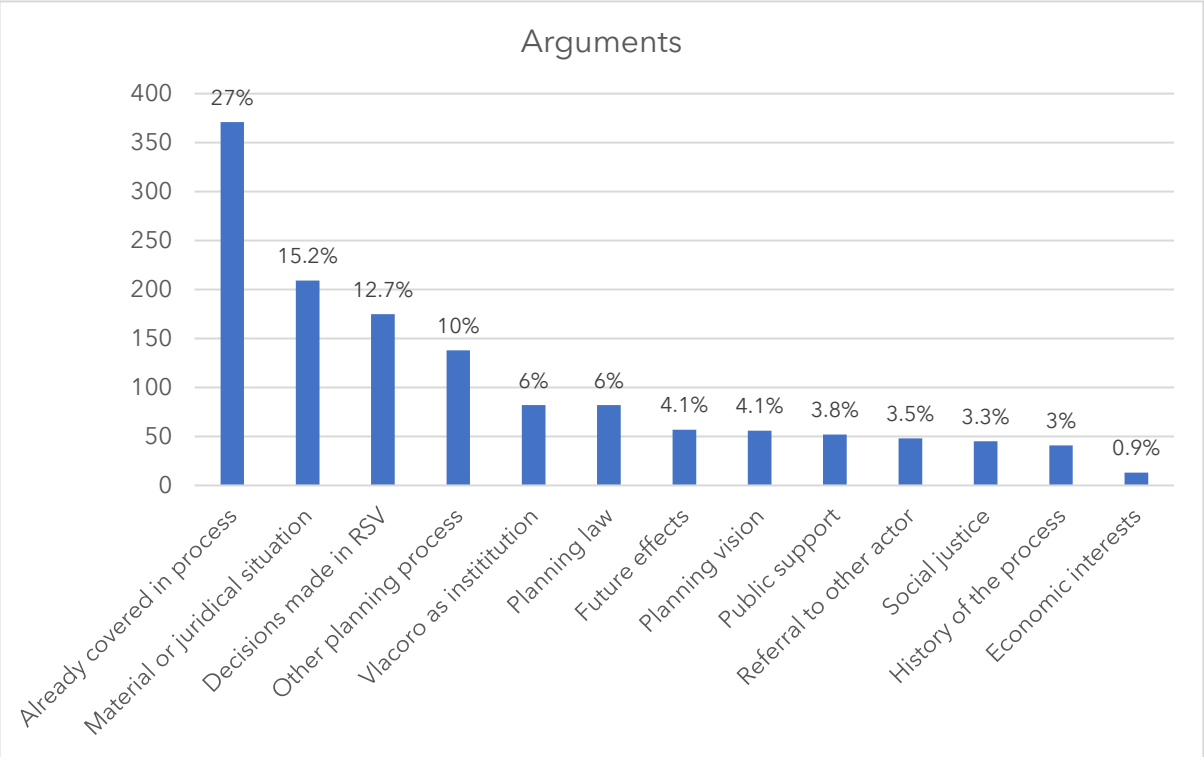
> **Because of the plans, some farms will be doomed to disappear since the area will have become unliveable (Redactie Gazet van Antwerpen, 2008)**.

2.4.4 Phase 4: "Coordinating Objections" (2008–2009)

Spatial plans in Flanders, like that of the demarcation, are subject to a public inquiry prior to approval by the government. In this last phase of the policy implementation process, it becomes clear that the ambition to realise the demarcation in line with the original strategic spatial planning vision has completely withered away and has been replaced by a predominant focus on distribution of

[30] A point interesting in its own right. The adoption of planning categorizations by other policy sectors could be regarded as a desirable intent of a strategic spatial planning instrument. In the Flemish case, however, this led to struggle and dissatisfaction which expressed itself in a lack of cooperation at the local level that then extended to the Flemish regional level.

resources and rules of the game. In this step in the process, the public inquiry instrument acts as a 'regulative device' (Fairclough, 2003) that takes up some voices and neutralises others. It marks a genre-shift in the planning process from formulating (beneficial) spatial policy to responding to objections. The responses formulated by the Flemish Committee of Spatial Planning to the objections made in the public inquiry were analysed by the researchers. Figure 2.3 shows the types



of the 1375 arguments used[31].

Figure 2.3: Arguments used in the responses to objections (including internal references).

Overall, the original strategic spatial vision of restraining sprawl in Flanders played no significant role in the objections to the plan. With only 4.1% of responses referring in one way or another to the spatial vision, it was not a major argument in the responses of the committee either (Figure 3). Nor did the chairman of the Committee consider adjudicating objections on the basis of the original planning vision its task. They rather took a rule-based view where the Committee is mostly focused on "coordinating technical objections" so the plan could ultimately be approved:

> **The objections had to be coordinated and then we expect from Vlacoro a technical recommendation. (…) Yes, it was a technical committee. So, in principle you have to depart from the RSV that was approved by parliament. Vlacoro did not judge that. It's more about: How shall we propose to solve these technical objections? (E4-1).**

[31] These numbers include 'internal references': responses to objections that refer to previous responses in the report.

The public inquiry rather triggered responses of citizens and other parties who felt their (landed) interests to be threatened by the urban policy within the demarcation line. This can be seen in the numerous objections that focus on land use type as a resource (re)distributed by the plan:

> The regulations for the natural area are unclear, can I build a stable for animals, does the area need to be fenced in, can the terrains be grazed, . . . (Vlacoro, 2009, p. 14).

> The 33 ha of the industrial zone is too little considering the high target number. One wonders whether the site doesn't have the potential to incorporate more (Vlacoro, 2009, p. 33).

> Why is the Fort of Kruibeke included in the demarcation and not that of Zwijndrecht? The fort of Kruibeke also needs to be excluded from the demarcation (Vlacoro, 2009, p. 33).

There are also many procedural challenges to previous plans, regulations, urban planning legislation, and the authority of the Flemish Government to make zoning decisions usually made by municipalities. Most of these, however, have a clear aim of stopping or promoting zoning decisions. The resource-oriented focus of the way urban growth management was implemented through this regional spatial plan was also noted by the committee in its general remarks:

> The plan is strongly based on the obligation to realize the quantitative targets, which means that there is sometimes less attention left for the spatial quality of some proposed urban developments (Vlacoro, 2009, p. 102).

Although the public inquiry instrument is designed to allow the voice of citizens and interest groups to be heard, it functions as a regulative device where the 'right kind' of discursively and institutionally framed objections (predominantly of a rule-oriented legal nature) are more likely to succeed. In fact, most objections are rejected, or – another example of the power of summary mentioned in Section 2.4.3 – recontextualised and referred to the committee's general remarks (Figure 2.4). One citizen-activist who led a local group that opposed the inclusion of his neighbourhood in the demarcation summarizes the difficulty of mobilizing the resources and knowledge to phrase objections:

> There is no capacity. It's almost impossible as a citizen nowadays to object properly against a complex plan. And then you have to know the procedures too. Planning law is tremendously complex. You can't know that as a citizen, you have to hire a very expensive specialised lawyer. There is no money for that. Who is going to gather that? Who will pay for that? And you have to do all of that within a month. That's practically impossible! (A-A1).

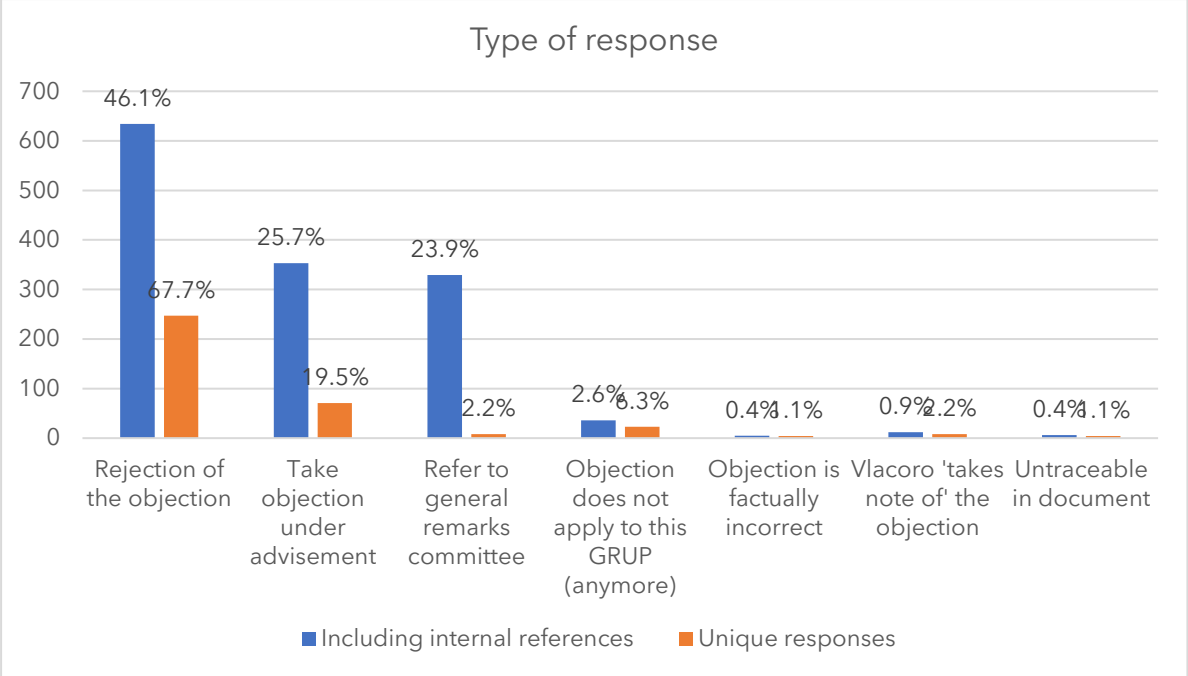


Figure 2.4: Responses considered in the public inquiry.

Ultimately, the public inquiry led to the elimination of three of the twenty-seven areas to be rezoned. A fourth area was retracted by the Flemish Government a year after the approval of the final demarcation plan in 2009. Four lawsuits were filed with the Council of State, but these only aimed to annul parts of the metropolitan area developments due to local concerns and did not pertain to a larger strategic spatial planning vision. As mentioned by the respondents, filing lawsuits requires resources that only specific actors are able to mobilize: time, knowledge and skills to construct a well-documented dossier and the financial means to hire specialized legal counsel. This left most citizen-activists disillusioned with the process and the value of filing objections:

> **And apart from the number of objections you filed, or the number of signatures you collected, that is of no import. The law is the only thing of import. [Politicians say] we belong in the urban area so we can't say no [to development]. –Yes, but what about *our* arguments? In what way do you represent *our* interest? The interest of the common citizen, of the current residents? And there is absolutely no answer to that (A-A2).**

Thus, the public inquiry instrument could not ensure the implementation of the original policy vision of restraining sprawl, but served instead as a regulative device to address public participation in a way that maintained the tried and true practice of zoning logic with its emphasis on rules and resources. The result is captured by one rather disillusioned planning official:

> **And what it became in the end is at its Belgian, right? Something very administrative, something legal-technical, zoning, securing, putting it into concrete. Was that the intent? I don't think so, but oh well. That's the only thing people know in Flanders right: securing, juridical (knocks on table). Which rights do I have, up to which plot? And that entire structure planning philosophy is translated in demarcations at the plot**

> **level, property titles yet again. What is allowed, what isn't? That uncertainty of "in time, what could this become??" A Fleming doesn't want that (laughs) (E3).**

2.5 Conclusions

Despite a broad recognition in the literature that 'implementation is critical' (Bengston et al., 2004), contemporary evaluations of growth management strategies still mostly take the shape of quantified measurements of effects such as land values and housing prices, where it is often implicitly assumed that policy was implemented as it was intended. In this paper, we argue that understanding the formulation and implementation phases of these spatial policy instruments is of key importance to gain insight into the conditions of success and failure of growth management strategies.

This argument is illustrated by the analysis of the formulation and implementation of an urban growth management strategy in Flanders, Belgium. Using the Policy Arrangement Approach, it was shown how the institutional dimensions of actors, rules, resources and discourses in the demarcation of the Antwerp Metropolitan Area interrelate to produce an outcome almost diametrically opposed to the original planning vision of reducing urban sprawl. This vision collapsed during implementation where the new structure planning framework was mostly recontextualized in terms of its still active land use predecessor. The orientation towards the protection of private property characteristic of the Belgian spatial governance and planning system, as noted in the ESPON COMPASS classification, can be seen here. This is illustrated by the discursive presentation of land as a resource for new developments and a concomitant focus on the legal aspects of land use planning. In the Antwerp Metropolitan Area, the intent to create a sensitivity to spatial problems on a city–regional scale was eclipsed by antagonistic relations between public actors, resulting in turf battles. Other stakeholders mainly showed disinterest in the process and measures to restrain development outside of the urban growth boundaries were never implemented. Weak community input and the fact that citizens' self-interest did not coincide with the strategic spatial vision led to objections and disillusion, captured by local politics. The dissolution of the original vision is reflected in the discursive metamorphosis of the meaning of the phrase "safeguarding the future" from counteracting urban sprawl into safeguarding it by guaranteeing further development opportunities.

In the Antwerp case, the demarcation of the urban area never solidified into a stable policy arrangement for creating a metropolitan area and combatting urban sprawl on a city–regional scale. Instead, the substantive delineation of the problem, as reflected in the discourse of the Minister, shifted throughout the process from combatting sprawl to creating future development opportunities and solving a number of problematic spatial dossiers. The give-and-take between policy actors and interest groups was profoundly disturbed by strategic behaviour intended to safeguard individual interests. This left a focus on the 'rules of the game' according to which the demarcation process ought to take place. The foregrounding of these rules can be seen from the second stage of the process onward with a "procedural process" taking the place of strategic cooperation, a focus on meeting the

quantitative targets for rezoning, the self-perception of the Committee of Spatial Planning as a "technical committee", and finally, in the lawsuits following the demarcation's approval. These findings show that the results of UGM instruments should not only be evaluated from the perspective of their measurable effectiveness, but as part of a project of institutional, discursive, and therefore, sociocultural change. Since a successor to the structure planning framework is currently in development [61], we can ask how a repetition of history may be prevented. The findings in this paper strongly suggest that future planning initiatives aimed at counteracting urban sprawl in Flanders need to take into account three elements. First, Flanders needs to free itself from the historical legacy of the Belgian land use planning system in order for new planning frameworks to have a chance at being successful. The legalistic focus on extensive land use rights established in a growth-centred era hamper any ambitious sustainable spatial development perspective for the region.[32] Secondly, the historical animosity between cities and suburban fringe municipalities will not disappear if planning processes are merely centred on achieving quantitative targets and rely too much on the voluntary participation of these parties. Withdrawing the means for consultation or co-creative processes is a sure way of undermining any local support for city regional cooperation that might exist at the outset of a new planning initiative. Therefore, a strong planning vision and policy implementation on the Flemish regional level is needed to give direction to new initiatives for city–regional planning cooperation. The new Flemish 'policy planning' framework is characterised by more elements of smart-growth strategies, including the active involvement of market parties and transferable development rights (TDR). Yet, it is our contention that these strategies will not work if the Flemish government does not adopt a directing role. In addition, political interlinkages between the local and the Flemish regional level need to be regarded with caution. They may aid to promote local support, but also carry the danger of too strong a representation of local interests on the regional level. Finally, public inquiry processes should not solely be treated as "technical coordination" of objections. Spatial planning in urban areas like these revolves around the distribution of scarce spatial resources, which implies that not every actor can be satisfied. However, more constructive ways of handling objections and creating public support need to be found if a new planning framework is to be successful.

[32] We are not alone in reaching this conclusion. Various Flemish planning experts argue for and propose ways of abolishing the sub-regional land use plans (Tom Coppens, Vloebergh, De Decker, & Leinfelder, 2020; De Olde, Boussauw, & Ryckewaert, 2020).

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3. The role of governance culture in building institutional capacity for sustainable urbanisation

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De Olde, C., & Oosterlynck, S. (2022). The role of governance culture in building institutional capacity for sustainable urbanization.

Abstract

This paper argues that taking into account the governance culture of a region is essential to understand the conditions for successful capacity building for sustainable urbanisation. We illustrate the value of such an approach with an in-depth investigation of a spatial planning instrument for guiding urbanisation: the demarcation of urban areas in the Belgian region of Flanders. The analysis is guided by the institutional capacity building framework developed by Healey (1998), supplemented by insights from other sources. In Flanders the existing elements of governance culture counteracted the building of relational, knowledge and mobilizing capital. While an urbanisation policy was formally institutionalised, it was not sufficiently able to transform existing institutional relations and stakeholder behaviour into a governance culture amenable to building the necessary institutional capacity for the policy to become effective in practice. From this we draw lessons for future attempts at capacity building for sustainable urbanisation to succeed.

3.1 Introduction: building capacity for sustainable urbanisation

In the face of a growing world population and increased pressure on the environment, sustainable urbanisation has become a priority for policymaking worldwide. For example, in its New Urban Agenda the United Nations envisions cities that are 'just, safe, healthy, accessible, affordable, resilient and sustainable' (2017, §11) and stresses that urban planning and design instruments are required 'that support sustainable management and use of natural resources and land, appropriate compactness and density, polycentrism and mixed uses, through infill or planned urban extension strategies (…)' (2017, §51) (see also the 2020 World Cities Report (UN-Habitat, 2020, pp. xix-xx). Spatial planning and governance are hence important tools for guiding urbanisation, but this requires capacity building. Indeed, in an evaluation of 185 best practices for sustainable urbanisation "vocational training and capacity building" was identified by Ochoa, Tan, Qian, Shen, and Moreno (2018) as adopted most widely.

This raises the question under which conditions capacity building for guiding urbanisation can be most effective. The literature on capacity building in urban and spatial planning is vast and in general aims to find out how actors can organise effectively, sustainably, equitably and enduringly

to respond to a particular need or challenge.[33] Yet, the literature discusses capacity building mostly in a loose fashion, without a consistent framework in which the concept is operationalised (e.g. Beauregard & Marpillero-Colomina, 2011; Knudson, 2011; Zhao, 2015). Among the contributions that do operationalise capacity building (e.g. Antolihao & Van Horen, 2005; Hillier, 2003; Knapp, 2017), only a handful of papers offer a framework with categories suitable for an analysis of urbanisation policy (e.g. Healey, 1998; Lafortune & Collin, 2011; Page, 2016). Additionally, most contributions that use capacity building in studies of urban growth refer to the three forms of capital from Healey's seminal (1998) text. These are applied to a variety of cases, such as the reconstruction and development of war-torn areas (van Horen, 2002); integrated rural development and governance (Shucksmith, 2010); the housing development sector (Foo, 2015); and the development of districts surrounding high-speed rail hubs (Dai & de Vries, 2018). Yet few authors look beyond these forms of capital to probe the underlying notion of "governance culture" (see section 2).

The main question in this paper is how institutional capacity building can lead to effective policy for sustainable urbanisation. We argue that an analysis that takes into account the underlying governance culture is essential to understand the conditions for successful capacity building for sustainable urbanisation. We illustrate the value of such an approach with an in-depth investigation of a spatial planning instrument for guiding urbanisation: the demarcation of urban areas in the Belgian region of Flanders. Our analysis is guided by the institutional capacity building framework developed by Healey (1998), but supplemented by insights from other sources. This framework will be introduced in the next section. Urbanisation policy in Flanders will be presented in section three. The fourth section contains the analysis and is followed by conclusions in the final section.

3.2 Institutional capacity building: capital and governance culture

In order to investigate how institutional capacity building can lead to effective urbanisation policy we use Healey's (1998) approach. While this framework was published over two decades ago it is

[33] An exploration of the literature on capacity building by searching the Web of Science database for publications with the search string "build* NEAR/3 capacity" on January 29, 2019 yielded 14,484 results. These were limited to publications in the categories "social sciences interdisciplinary, public administration, regional urban planning, sociology, political science, urban studies, and geography." Thus 1,774 unique results remained. To find the publications discussing urban or spatial planning topics within this set, a further topic search was performed with the string "urban* OR planning". This led to 469 results. These results were downloaded and analysed in Microsoft Excel. They contained 18,445 cited references excluding those by anonymous authors, institutional parties and newspaper articles. A frequency table was generated to identify the fifty most-often cited references. Along with the 469 original results these fifty references were studied to identify the most common themes in the literature on capacity building in urban studies and spatial planning. Finally 43 papers remained that explicitly discuss capacity building in spatial planning.

In this literature on capacity building in urban and spatial planning three dominant perspectives can be distinguished: community or civic capacity (Chaskin, 2001; Craig, 2007; Stone, Henig, Jones, & Pierannunzi, 2001), adaptive capacity (Adger, 2003; Gupta et al., 2010), and institutional or governance capacity building (Healey, 1998; Innes & Booher, 2003). In a review of fifty capacity building approaches, Wolfram concludes that despite the variation in subjects, purposes and components these perspectives remain 'highly complementary, if not synergetic' (2016, p. 129).

still one of the most comprehensive and relevant approaches to institutional capacity building. In Healey's collaborative approach planners shape the arenas in which stakeholders meet and (re)frame local collective issues regarding spatial development. The collaborative project builds institutional capacity by creating both 'hard and soft infrastructures of planning'. The hard infrastructure are the formal institutions of government that create the conditions for deliberative forms of collaboration that are experienced as trustworthy and legitimate by participants. The soft infrastructures of social collaboration are aimed at building social, intellectual and political capital in relationships of trust and understanding (Healey, 1997 [2006], 2012). These three forms of capital together constitute institutional capacity: relational resources, knowledge resources, and the capacity for mobilization (Healey, 1998). Collaborative planning processes can stimulate the development of these capitals so that conflicts of interest may be addressed in 'noncombative ways' in "(…) arenas which can act as learning environments through which stakeholders learn new ways of relating to each other." If this works, then "time, cost, and institutional damage of adversarial conflict-resolution' may be avoided" (Healey, 1998, pp. 1541-1542).

Yet capacity building does not occur in a cultural or institutional vacuum. Institutional contexts have values and criteria 'locked in' to them and these interact with the implementation of new spatial policy (Healey, 2012, p. 349). Therefore in Healey's collaborative framework the co-evolution of hard and soft infrastructures rests on 'governance cultures', defined as "[a]ccepted modes of governance, embedded values, and formal and informal structures for policing discourses and practices" (González & Healey, 2005, p. 2060). Governance cultures are systems of meaning that are historically and geographically situated and characterized by (in)formal "synergetic encounters, contradictions, conflicts and active struggles" (González & Healey, 2005, p. 2056). Institutional capacity then, is built through formal arrangements and networks between actors, but also by promoting a governance culture that responds to particular spatial problems and needs (González & Healey, 2005; Healey, 1997 [2006], 1998). Thus governance cultures shape the perceptions of formal rights and duties as well as the legitimacy of strategies in which to address new (spatial) challenges.

Healey's (1998) framework distinguishes five mutually reinforcing prescriptive concepts that are essential to promote governance cultures for building institutional capacity (table 3.1). These concepts are used in our analysis as dimensions to analyse the interplay of governance culture and capacity building for urbanisation. The collaborative planning paradigm was criticised however for not paying sufficient attention to "adequate accounts of power, the state, and political economy" (Goodspeed, 2016, p. 1; see also: Metzger, 2015; Sager, 2013). Thus capacity building "is often constrained by political and/or economic factors that limit the ability to incorporate new understandings into decision processes without repeating past tensions and adversarial conflicts" (Hillier, 2003, p. 266). Phelps and Tewdwr-Jones (2000) point out that more attention to stakeholders' motivations, agendas and expectations of 'winning' and 'losing' in collaborative planning processes is needed. Reflecting on these criticisms Healey (1997 [2006]) argues that the

opportunities for governance practices are shaped in interrelation with the institutional design of government (i.e. the co-evolution of hard and soft infrastructures of planning). Therefore we add a sixth dimension to the analytical model of governance culture to account for strategic stakeholder behaviour.

1. Degree of integration in placemaking How the degree of sectoral policy integration affects shared frames of reference regarding 'the qualities of places and the interrelationships between small places and a larger spatial organization' (Healey, 1998, p. 1536) and results in coordinated social, economic, and spatial stakeholder agendas.
2. Collaboration in policymaking How mutual understanding and a sense of ownership in the placemaking process affect collaboration. On a continuum with on one side a technocratic approach led by public-sector experts and a select number of private parties, and on the other a model of wide stakeholder participation aimed at strategy building rather than realising the singular project.
3. Stakeholder inclusion The effect of the chosen form of cooperation and participation on the knowledge, coordination, and consensus-building within the placemaking project. Translating into the perceived legitimacy of the decision-making process.
4. Mobilizing multiple forms of 'local knowledge' What and whose knowledge is (allowed) to play a role in the placemaking process including the various ways of appraising, explaining and presenting that knowledge. From narrow: formal technical expert-knowledge to broad: community, layperson, day-to-day knowledge with a sensitivity 'to cultural differences in ways of thinking and valuing and ways of communicating' (Healey, 1998, p. 1540).
5. Building 'relational resources' Building a social infrastructure in the placemaking process between governance, citizens and companies that affects 'relational resources' such as trust, the ability to have one's voice heard, the flow of knowledge, and mobilisation of resources to achieve policy goals.
6. Strategic behaviour Behaviour regarding 'power, the state, and political economy' that has an enabling or constraining effect for the ability to incorporate new understandings into decision processes. Also existing tensions, conflicts, stakeholders' motivations, agendas and expectations of 'winning' and 'losing' in the planning arena.

Table 3.1: Analytical dimensions of governance culture for building institutional capacity, based on Healey (1998) and extended with insights by Phelps and Tewdwr-Jones (2000), Hillier (2003) & Goodspeed (2016).

By adding this sixth dimension we introduce an increased sensitivity to the constraints and possibilities of stakeholders' strategic behaviour regarding the values and criteria 'locked in' to the institutional context of placemaking processes. Next, we will introduce the case of capacity building for strategic spatial planning and urban policy in late 1990s Flanders.

3.3 Guiding urbanisation in Flanders

To answer the main question how institutional capacity building can lead to effective urbanisation policy we study the institution of a new planning system in Flanders. At the start of the 1990s, spatial planning in Flanders had very little capacity and worked with an outdated and hollowed out land use planning system from the 1960s (Van den Broeck, Moulaert, Kuhk, Lievois, & Schreurs, 2014). Therefore a new planning system was designed that consisted of legislation approved in 1996 and 1999, along with a Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders (1997) [Dutch: Ruimtelijk Structuurplan Vlaanderen, henceforth: RSV]. The RSV outlined a macro-level spatial development perspective for the region in the next decade (Van den Broeck et al., 2014).

These events offer an excellent example of an attempt at institutional capacity building. Though not intended fully as a collaborative planning effort, the designers of the RSV explicitly refer to Healey's focus on institutional dynamics and a more "negotiative" form of planning (Albrechts, 1999, 2001a, 2001b, 2003; Albrechts, Healey, & Kunzmann, 2003; Vermeersch, 2008). The plan's introductory section states that Flanders is lacking "[A] framework that can balance spatial visions and claims from diverse angles and that departs from the quality of space" (Vlaamse Overheid, 1997/2011, pp. 11-12).

The new system established a 'hard infrastructure' to build capacity for spatial planning as a policy sector. It introduced stricter legislation and expanded planning expertise on all government levels (De Olde & Boussauw, 2019). It also introduced a subsidiarity principle, according to which each government level performs the planning activities most suitable to it while being bound by decisions made on the level(s) above it (Bauwens, 2000; Vlaamse Overheid, 1997/2011, pp. 173-174). This implies that each government level should be able to trust the others to mobilise the knowledge and resources to achieve the RSV's policy goals. The system also intended to create 'soft infrastructures' through an approach where "open dialogue, accountability, collaboration, consensus building – become key terms" (Albrechts, 2001b, p. 99). As one of its creators wrote:

> **In order to minimise the abuse of power one has to be able to count on an optimum of transparency and on a method supported by consultation with dialogue at its heart: procedural certitude. (…) Consultation from positions of power seldomly leads to quality and to optimal solutions. If one wants to strive for quality, then consultation has to happen on the basis of equality and trust. (…) In this consultation, proposals of joint imagination have to be sought that are supported by actors of diverse groups of users of space (Vermeersch, 2008, pp. 65; 74-75)**

Guiding urbanisation in the region was one of the new planning framework's key goals. Therefore the RSV introduced the instrument of spatially 'demarcating urban areas' [NL: afbakeningen stedelijke gebieden]. This instrument formulated a procedure to draw urban growth boundaries around thirteen of the largest urban cores and their fringe municipalities[34] with specific planning

[34] 44 additional smaller urban areas were to be demarcated by the Flemish provinces.

regulations stimulating densification within and restricting development outside of them. Thus the designers intended to preserve open space in the Flemish landscape that is characterised by a chaotic and costly pattern of urban sprawl (Mustafa & Teller, 2020; Vermeiren et al., 2021). The policy also aimed to strengthen the cities that had known a period of decline. A less prominent goal was to create a fertile ground for strategic policymaking at the city-regional level (Omgeving, 1996).

The demarcation processes were organised in two stages. In the first, a consortium of a private planning office, a process supervisor and a communication firm made an inventory of stakeholder wishes in an urban area. The methodology was to include spatial needs from various policy sectors in one spatial plan by (re)zoning areas for housing, commerce, services and green space. Therefore it explicitly states that "the [demarcation] hypothesis will be developed in a partnership of those involved" (Omgeving, 1996, p. 5). In fact, the processes are called "inconceivable" without the equal involvement and input of a wide range of stakeholders in the urban area (Vlaamse Overheid, 1997/2011, p. 217). This stage of the process was supervised by a steering group and a civil servant working group both consisting of members representing policy sectors involved. While there were informational meetings for the general public, the inclusion of citizen knowledge is not mentioned at this stage. Combined with an analysis of the area's spatial structure, this process resulted in a 'demarcation proposal', a land use plan with a hypothesis for the growth boundary and the rezoning of areas within it.

In the second stage the Flemish Spatial Planning Administration produced the final demarcation plan. Next a public inquiry instrument enabled citizens, government actors and other interested parties to formulate remarks and objections. These were adjudicated by the Flemish Committee of Spatial Planning [Vlaamse Commissie voor Ruimtelijke Ordening, VLACORO]. The committee included members from various government departments, academic experts, and representatives from sectoral organisations (e.g. Flemish Social and Economic Council, Department of Environment), interest groups (e.g. association of spatial planners; farmer's union) and civil society (e.g. labour unions). The process resulted in a nonbinding advice to the Flemish Government, which ultimately approves regional spatial plans.

Despite the careful process design the demarcation of urban areas was not judged positively in ex-post policy evaluations. Smaller fringe municipalities mostly have less personnel and expertise for spatial planning and city-regional cooperation to strengthen institutional capacity did not emerge (Cabus et al., 2009; Voets & De Rynck, 2008). More importantly, the demarcations' outcome eventually reverted to the inflexible pre-existing sub-regional land use plans from the 1970s (Cabus et al., 2009; Voets et al., 2010; Voets et al., 2012). Despite the international evolution from simple growth controls to smart growth packages (Chapin, 2012), the attractiveness of straightforward land use plans remains strong due to their associated development rights. This results in the discursive representation of land as a resource for new developments and a focus on the legal aspects of land use planning (De Olde & Oosterlynck, 2021). These critical evaluations make the demarcations an

interesting context to explore the enabling and constraining circumstances for institutional capacity building for guiding urbanisation.

In the analysis we aim to gain insight into how the five-plus-one dimensions of governance culture enable or constrain building institutional capacity for urbanisation policy. The two case studies are the demarcation processes of the urban areas surrounding the cities of Antwerp and Mechelen. These areas were chosen since they represent a large and complex process (Antwerp + 13 fringe municipalities) and a smaller and less complex one (Mechelen + 2 fringe municipalities). The cases are similar in that the first phase of the process was performed by the same private planning office that was contracted to design the demarcation instrument (Omgeving, 1996). A difference is that the Mechelen demarcation started earlier (1998-2008) than the Antwerp one (2003-2009) which enables a view of potential evolutions in the capacity building process. The results of the analysis may help to clarify the conditions for building institutional capacity in future planning efforts to guide urbanisation. For this analysis 36 in-depth interviews were conducted[35]. At the local level triangulation was attempted by interviewing planners, politicians, and citizen-activists in each municipality under investigation. These (fringe) municipalities were selected by their level of resistance to the demarcation process, as reported in the press and as indicated by the number of objections in the public inquiry. Among the interviewees were also planning experts who were active in drafting and implementing the new planning system, as well as experts who worked on demarcating other areas than Antwerp and Mechelen (i.e. Aalst, Ghent, Kortrijk, Sint-Niklaas, Turnhout). These interviews served to provide additional context on the experience with the demarcation instrument as a whole. All interviews followed the same structure based on a topic list querying the respondents' experience with the demarcation process. Additionally the relevant policy documents, material from the private planning office's archives and 303 articles in the local press were analysed.

3.4 Building institutional capacity for urbanisation

In this section we use the dimensions of governance culture as analytical lens to analyse the process of capacity building in the demarcation processes of Antwerp and Mechelen. The first subsection discusses the collaboration between public stakeholders. It describes how a continued focus on zoning, the perception of top down decision-making, and a fear of threatened local autonomy seriously limited the development of shared frames of reference, much less cooperation on a communal strategic vision. The collaborative process between governments and citizens is the subject of the next subsection. It shows how through the instrument of public inquiry the process of knowledge- and consensus-building, and decision-making was kept in the hands of traditional stakeholders. Citizens did not experience the process as transparent and inclusive. Their knowledge

[35] Respondents are labelled according to location (A = Antwerp; M = Mechelen), role (A = citizen-activist; S = local spatial planner; P = politician) and numbered in order of being interviewed. The letter E designates expert-interviewees.

sometimes became a resource for strategic action to oppose the policy implementation process. The third subsection shows how the lack of trust between all stakeholders inspired strategic opposition that seriously impeded the process as intended. These strategies are very much informed by the traditional governance culture, and they are legitimised by the principle of subsidiarity. The opposition undermined attempts to build the 'relational resources' necessary for institutional capacity building.

3.4.1 Intersectoral public stakeholder collaboration

As described above the demarcation processes were intended to establish wide intersectoral stakeholder collaboration. This section shows how this was frustrated by two issues. First, because of the weak position of spatial planning versus other Flemish policy sectors, strategic (political) calculations took precedence over substantial cooperation and the unintended reinforcement of the preceding land use planning system. Second, public stakeholders' relationships were adversarial rather than cooperative. The position of the Flemish Region as process supervisor led to a perception of top-down policymaking and created tension with local governments. This impeded a true synergy between sectoral agendas and the creation of shared frames of reference.

To gain insight into why the demarcation processes could not achieve these shared frames of reference firstly requires a glance back at the approval of the RSV itself. At the Flemish level, the institution of a new planning system that positioned itself as the frame of reference for the spatial uptake of other societal activities, along with a significant expansion of the planning administration, was viewed by some as a grab for power and influence (Merckaert, 2008). Other policy sectors feared they would become bound to demarcations, targets and regulations defined by spatial planning, for instance by assigning a maximum number of demarcated areas for additional economic growth. To get the RSV approved, the planning administration made a 'strategic retreat' to its 'own' narrow domain of the 'spatial'. According to a former head of the spatial planning administration:

> **We always said, in order to get it approved policy-wise: with our selection and our demarcation we only use spatial criteria. That's what we always said in the entire discussion around the institution of the RSV: we only think spatially. Because at that moment a number of partners already understood that it could be more than just that (E1).**[36]

The RSV's approval was only possible by reaching consensus over a quantified 'spatial balance' that allocated surface area targets to policy sectors. This (re)introduced land use as a prime planning instrument despite the intent to focus more on a strategic planning process *preceding* zoning decisions (De Olde & Oosterlynck, 2021). Since the Flemish government approved the regional demarcation processes, ownership issues and spatial development perspectives quickly became the subject of party political coordination in what was intended to be a more cooperative planning

[36] All quotes from the empirical material were translated from Dutch by the authors.

process. At the local level the supervisory role of the Flemish region led to the perception of top down decision-making.

The effect of this dominance of a political and zoning logic on the governance culture dimensions of integration in placemaking, collaboration in policymaking, and stakeholder inclusion is clearly reflected in the cases. The first phases of both demarcation processes still reflected an intersectoral, collaborative, and inclusive effort – at least of public and civil society actors. The working group supervising the Mechelen demarcation included representatives from a range of policy sectors (planning, infrastructure and mobility, water, environment, tourism, etc.) at various government levels. However, the planners report that these sectoral representatives remained oriented to (defensively) meeting their own sectoral goals (Wuillaume & Van den Broeck, 2000).

In the Antwerp case a series of thematic meetings included sectoral actors such as the Flemish public transport provider and the Flemish authority for the environment, as well as academics. Thus the consortium contracted for the demarcation process attempted to develop a vision for the urban region that went beyond simply finding areas to rezone. An employee of the planning office recalls:

> **We're going to set up a separate track that leads to the demarcation and all that rezoning (…), parallel to that we're going to propose something much more flexible, a kind of open thinking exercise together with all municipalities involved, of which we don't know exactly what it will lead to. (…) So in fact we're going to work on broad support for the concept of metropolitan area' (E8).**

This resulted in a two-day vision workshop with a wider set of civil society actors, but this was to be a single occurrence due to the tense (political) relationship between city and fringe. For the cities the supervisory role of the Flemish Region was not much of a problem since there was not much developable land left to rezone within their jurisdictions. They could also wield a greater planning capacity and political influence to control the process. Some fringe municipalities however feared that the city-regional project was a harbinger of a round of municipal mergers. For them the demarcations were identified with the threat of 'the city approaching' and they devised strategies to try and prevent the realisation of the 'urban area' (see 3.4.3).

Thus the spatial visioning process in Antwerp was cancelled and the Spatial Planning Administration re-directed to the focus of the consortium on drawing a demarcation line and identifying areas for rezoning (De Olde & Oosterlynck, 2021). While in the first phase there was room for some coalition building and strategic vision making, in the second phase the process became legal-technical, focused on zoning. A planner from an Antwerp fringe municipality is asked if there were many meetings between the Flemish and the local level:

> **Yes, very often, in the first place with the private planning firm and the communication office that was involved in the demarcation. We had many preparatory meetings that went in the right direction. (…) And then after that the process was taken over by the Flemish administration, that had a different view of the demarcation. Within the municipality we felt that that wasn't entirely the translation of the preparatory phase (A-S2).**

Since the demarcation process was guided by quantified targets for various purposes assigned in the spatial balance of the RSV (see 4.1), distrust quickly emerged on the back of the perception that the Flemish Region needed to "find hectares". The consortium's process supervisor explains:

> **So the initial idea was indeed, for example, Mechelen and three other municipalities will look together at what they can achieve on their territory. But, the quantified targets were given from the beginning, right? (…) So sometimes that was mentioned: "yes, but you are here with a hidden agenda because a hundred hectares have to be found here." I think that was the tricky double role of Flanders, right? (E23).**

So while the new planning framework initially intended to build capacity by promoting integrative placemaking and collaborative policymaking through stakeholder inclusion, in practice the coordination of stakeholder agendas on a local or regional level remained limited. The continued dominance of a zoning logic meant that strategic political logics prevailed over an integrative project. Thus a shared vocabulary on the quality of places and the interrelationships between small places and larger-scale spatial organisation was not adopted by politicians and local communities. Consequently shared understandings of the interrelations of economic and social life in the urban areas, a sense of ownership and process legitimacy did not spread beyond a small group of planning professionals.

3.4.2 Neo-corporatist coordination over citizen inclusion and knowledge

In this section we show how neo-corporatist coordination dominated the demarcation process at the cost of citizen inclusion. This undermined the legitimacy of the demarcation process among the general public and discouraged the use of citizen knowledge.

A neo-corporatist coordination model has been dominant in Belgium since World War II (Van Damme, Jacquet, Schiffino, & Reuchamps, 2017). This is clearly visible in the organisation of the demarcation processes. While the minister of spatial planning and Flemish government made the final decisions, neo-corporatist coordination featured twice in the demarcation process. First through the involvement of supervisory steering groups populated with sectoral representatives in the first phase of the demarcation process. The second time through the public inquiry at the end of the process.

Neo-corporatism resolves social conflict by including the most influential stakeholders in a process to 'create outcomes of balanced, or "general", interests' (Luyten, 2006, p. 303). Yet it also possesses 'a dual character by representing sectoral interests and simultaneously acting as an instrument for socio-political control in the hands of the authorities' (Prak, 2014, p. 282). In other words: neo-corporatist coordination creates social integration by representing the interests of some, while at the same time excluding those of others.

Though the RSV referred to broad stakeholder involvement, the demarcation instrument was not designed to involve citizens. It remained squarely expert-led and supervised by professional politicians. There were informational meetings for the general public in both urban areas but their impact is put into perspective by the process manager:

> **And we also took some initiatives towards the wider public and so on. But actually we have to say that that mainly took the shape of (…) relatively large-scale informational meetings. And the remarks that were discussed were taken into account, you can't say they were ignored. But in what manner, right? (E23)**

The prime instrument for formulating remarks to the demarcation plan was the public inquiry. In this process an advisory board consisting of sectoral representatives adjudicated the objections and remarks made by local governments and citizens. The Committee's chairman explains how the procedure of the public inquiry process aimed for a balanced outcome:

> **We have to treat all objections, but we do not have to respond to all objections individually. And that is also the case in other advisory committees in other sectors. So it's important that we bundle and coordinate everything. And if I'm not mistaken we – if I look at the case law of the Council of State – we were not criticized for having left some people out in the cold. Of course for some it was difficult, not being a lawyer, to always say: yes, where is the actual answer to my objection. And for some that might have been a bit too limited, that is possible. Anyway, yes, we did what we could with the means we had and we think we produced a fair recommendation (E4).**

Through this process citizen remarks often disappeared into the background in the recommendations made by the board. One reason for this is that the public inquiry occurred at the close of the demarcation process. Many spatial bottlenecks had already been solved in coordination among the stakeholders and there was little room left for fundamental critiques or including citizen knowledge in the process. The public inquiry *did* provide procedural certitude (cf. section 3) and, as an instrument of participation, served to officially legitimate the outcome of the demarcation process. But through this instrument the process of knowledge and consensus-building, and decision-making was kept in the hands of traditional sectoral stakeholders. Hence it was not experienced as transparent and inclusionary among citizens and some public stakeholders. In turn this created dissatisfaction and undermined the legitimacy of the demarcation processes.[37] This is illustrated in an interview with a citizen-activist in an Antwerp fringe municipality. They respond to a newspaper article in which the Flemish Administration of spatial planning is quoted, saying that the final demarcation plan cannot be adjusted because otherwise "the timing of the minister cannot be met" (Timmerman, 14-07-2008):

> **The timing must be met. Well, I think that's below par, right? That is like saying: we'll just do what we want, right? Then why do you request a public inquiry? If all those objections come and you don't even respond to them? (A-A1)**

While citizen knowledge was barely employed as a tool for capacity building for guiding urbanisation, it did sometimes serve to call a halt to rezoning processes. Especially knowledge

[37] This shows the tension of the neo-corporatist model of public consultation with the altered reality of a more activist, self-organizing, and proto-professional citizenry. A development that has only increased in Flanders: see Van Damme et al. (2017); Wolf (2018) chapter 4.

regarding drainage and propensity to flooding was particularly relevant to some citizens. In one example in an Antwerp fringe municipality activists built up significant technical knowledge in the course of their resistance which went hand in hand with gathering evidence first-hand. The private office planners, public officials, and landowners did not possess such detailed knowledge which meant it could be used strategically by this action group. Ultimately the rezoning of this particular area was annulled in court (A-A3). In another example an action group in the Mechelen demarcation started litigation in various courts based on water issues in the area to be rezoned (M-A1). This too led to the annulment of the demarcation plan for this area, after which the regional planning administration was tasked with 'repairing' it.[38]

3.4.3 Subsidiarity and building 'relational resources'

This section describes how distrust between Flemish region, local administrations, and citizens informed strategic opposition to the demarcation process. The subsidiarity designed in the planning system was used by each actor as a discursive device to legitimate why they pursued their own goals. This distrust counteracted the fostering of 'relational resources' such as a free flow of knowledge and resource mobilisation to reach the RSV's goals.

Stakeholders distrusted and blamed each other for only serving their own self-interest in the demarcation process. Fringe municipalities feared further urbanisation and municipal mergers and blamed the cities for having expansionary motives. An example of this is voiced by a former mayor of an Antwerp fringe municipality:

> **It would be a mistake to merge those rural municipalities of the fringe in the Antwerp city-region because there is only one goal: that is enlarging the financial spread of Antwerp. They want to link their impoverished city centre or their impoverished neighbourhoods to richer neighbourhoods in order to have more income, and then transfer the money from here to there so that is purely an economic, personal-economic thing (A-P4).**

Municipalities blamed the Flemish region of top-down policymaking and pursuing political goals, with the minister "having to find his hectares". Citizens in turn blamed municipal and regional politicians for the anticipated changes to their living environments due to the demarcations. Finally, the Flemish administration distrusted the local level to implement the structure planning framework as intended. A regional planner reflects on the differences in expertise between the city of Mechelen and its fringe municipalities:

> **[Person] was working in Mechelen and there you can already feel a difference in level. So they were in a team that was doing planning and they could follow us. They thought [the demarcation] was fantastic, because they could add a number of things into it. (…) But there was no know-how in those fringe**

[38] This process is still ongoing, which means that parts of the Mechelen demarcation plan remain inactive 13 years after its initial approval and 23 years after the planning process started.

> **municipalities. Not in Bonheiden and not in Katelijne-Waver. (…) I think, if I look back on that now, perhaps we went a bit too fast for Katelijne-Waver (E5).**

The RSV's principle of subsidiarity implied that every level decides over matters in its purview. It required trust that the other levels would not impinge on this prerogative. Stakeholders in the Mechelen and Antwerp demarcation processes called on the subsidiarity principle to support their claim that the Flemish regional government should not interfere in local matters. One municipal planner expresses criticism regarding the use of subsidiarity by the Flemish level:

> **Especially if there are damages involved, for local business parks or whatever. Then all of a sudden the principle of subsidiarity became paramount. 'Yes, that's not our jurisdiction, you have to take care of that yourselves.' And that is one of the issues, I think, in the demarcation process. They [the Flemish level] drew that [demarcation] line and changed a number of things, but they did not at the same time take the responsibility of resolving things here and there for the municipality. Those points of contention regarding things like removing or rezoning residential area to business park. Then they passed on the hot potato (E22-2).**

Instead of collaborating on the regional plan and attuning local policy to it, practically all stakeholders acted strategically to influence the policy process in other ways. These attempts are illustrated in figure 3.1 and table 3.2.

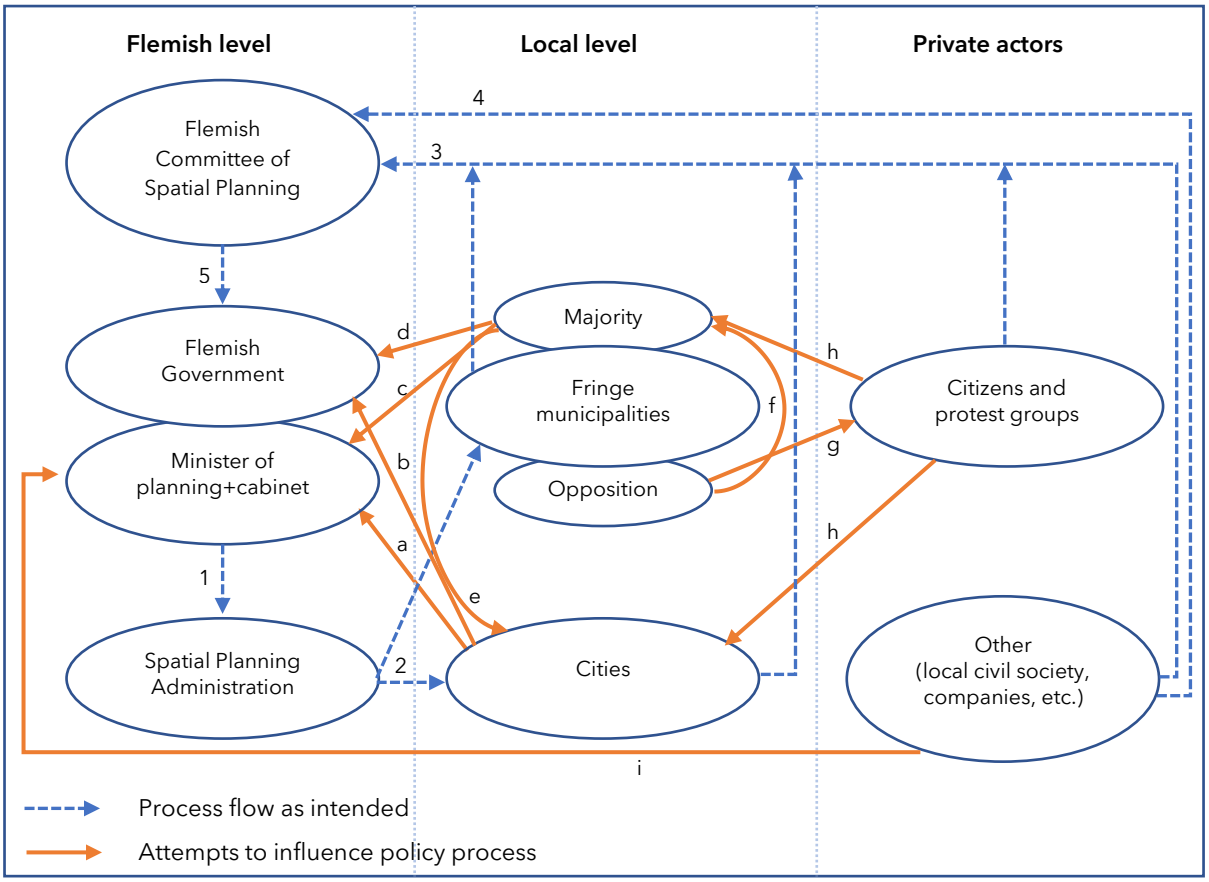

Figure 3.1: Relations of influence in the demarcation process[39]

Process management as intended

1. Minister and his cabinet supervise Spatial Planning Administration
2. Administration supervises the demarcation of urban areas with cities and fringe municipalities
3. Municipalities and province, citizens and private parties formulate remarks and objections to Flemish Committee of Spatial Planning
4. Local civil society feeds representatives in the Commitee
5. Committee advises Flemish Government, which decides on the demarcation

Attempts to influence the policy process

a. Ties between Liberals in office in the City of Mechelen and Liberal minister
b. Ties between Socialists in office in City of Antwerp and Socialists in Flemish Government
c. Local governments attempt to influence process by appealing to the minister
d. Ties between Christian-Democrat mayors of fringe municipalities and Christian-Democrats in the Flemish Government
e. Local governments of fringe municipalities visit to verify city governments' intentions
f. Opposition in fringe municipalities use demarcation to exert pressure on the majority
g. Opposition in fringe municipalities coopts citizens and action groups in resistance against the demarcation
h. Action groups resist demarcations with the city or fringe municipal governments
i. Private parties weighed on the demarcation through the minister and his cabinet

Table 3.2: Explanation of relationships in figure 1

[39] Provinces are omitted here since the demarcation process was handled directly between region and municipalities. The majority/opposition distinction in the cities is also omitted because there the demarcation was not found to be an object of political strife.

The figure shows the tension between hard and soft infrastructures of planning. On one side the formal institutions of the new planning system with its strategy for guiding urbanisation in a collaborative and legitimate fashion, and on the other the soft infrastructures that did not evolve as quickly. Instead of coordination and a flow of knowledge, stakeholders' practices reverted to strategic opposition of the demarcation instrument's intent. Often this opposition went along political party lines, a tried-and-tested method of the Belgian 'particracy' in which political party elites rather than public servants or individual politicians control a great deal of the public decision making process (Dewachter, 2014; Happaerts, 2015).

The account of an alderperson of a Mechelen fringe municipality (M-P2) illustrates this. They relate how they voiced their concerns about the demarcation at the cabinet of the Flemish prime minister instead of going to the spatial planning administration, which was the authority tasked with the demarcations. The reason was that the prime minister at the time was of the same (Christian democrat) political denomination as the municipality's mayor. It was felt that maximum political pressure might be exerted in this way because the mayor of neighbouring city of Mechelen and the minister of spatial planning were both Liberals.

Strategic action always plays a role in planning processes and its nature is determined by the institutional playing field. Yet various authors point out that since the subsidiarity principle is open to interpretation, it enables stakeholders to legitimate the strategic pursuit of their own interests (De Rynck, 2000). That means 'the subsidiarity discussion is part of a game of positioning within the political power stratification' (Cabus & Saey, 2000, p. 32). Healey too, remarks that in settings where trust is lacking 'contributions to debate, however well-intentioned, will tend to be perceived as the promotion of self-interest or constructed in adversarial terms' (1998, p. 1541). Subsidiarity in the RSV was introduced in a pre-existing environment of tense relations between public stakeholders. Distrust informed the demarcation of urban areas and led to strategic action that counteracted the fostering of 'relational resources' such as a free flow of knowledge and mobilisation of resources to reach the RSV's goals.

3.5 Conclusion

This paper asks how institutional capacity building can lead to effective urbanisation policy to benefit the increasing demand for sustainable urbanisation. We argue that an analysis that takes into account the underlying governance culture is essential to understand the conditions for successful capacity building for sustainable urbanisation.

The analysis in this paper provides an account of the interplay of planning practice and the institutional playing field using the framework of Healey (1998) supplemented by a focus on strategic stakeholder behaviour. As Healey states, there are values and criteria 'locked in' to institutional contexts that interact with the implementation of new spatial policy, or put more succinctly: 'The power of the past lives on in the institutional relations of the present' (1998, p. 1543). This certainly holds true in Flanders, where the existing elements of governance culture counteracted the building

of relational, knowledge and mobilizing capital as intended by the designers of the planning system. The RSV and its demarcation processes formally institutionalised an urbanisation policy on a city-regional scale. Yet it was insufficiently able to transform the governance culture of existing institutional relations and stakeholder behaviour into one amenable to building the necessary institutional capacity for the policy to become effective in practice. Thus the processes accumulated time, costs, and institutional damage for conflict resolution to the degree that two decades later no new urbanisation policy frameworks have been developed.

From the analysis of the demarcation of urban areas in Flanders we can draw a number of lessons. First, trust is paramount for capacity building to succeed. No reform of the hard infrastructures of planning can compensate for the lack of trust nurtured through the governance culture characterised by strategic action from positions of distrust. Second, working with quantitative zoning area targets from the outset is problematic because they threaten to eclipse the building of relationships between stakeholders and they enable opponents to frame the planning process as being solely about achieving targets. Quantifying planning targets may function as a tool to reach stakeholder consensus, but these should be handled very carefully. In Flanders that these targets were required to get even the planning framework approved is a sign of a distrustful governance culture. Third, the fear of a perceived threat to local autonomy when implementing an urbanisation strategy that affects multiple administrative jurisdictions is an important impediment to institutional capacity building. These fears should be contradicted as soon as they arise to secure trust between stakeholders. Fourth, subsidiarity as far as it is desirable in a small region like Flanders to begin with, comes with responsibility. Again, trust is necessary for it to work properly and if it fails the (perception of) top-down steering is detrimental to legitimacy of the planning process. Finally, organising citizen participation at the close of a planning process is inadvisable. Even though they can be considered democratic modes of representation, neo-corporatist and ultimately top-level political decision-making are not vehicles of true citizen participation. In the demarcation processes it was too little, too late and citizen participation did not go beyond tokenism (Arnstein, 1969). As a result the process lost any legitimacy for the citizens affected.

These lessons show the importance of looking beyond forms of capital in analyses of institutional capacity building to the underlying governance, or planning culture at work. This is important as the problems of continuing urbanisation are becoming ever clearer, in Flanders as much as elsewhere in the world. Elements of governance culture both legitimise and challenge systems and practices. Herein lies the potential for policy failure, but also for success. Thus knowledge on the governance culture informing capacity building is of paramount importance to create legitimate research-informed policies to effectively, sustainably, and equitably guide urban growth.

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4. 'The countryside starts here': How the urban-rural divide continues to matter in post-urban Flanders

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Abstract

Contemporary scholarship has critically interrogated categorical distinctions of urban and rural settlement types, shifting attention to processes of urbanisation instead. Yet, in some cases, the urban-rural dichotomy still proves an indispensable category to understand the governance of urbanisation. In this article, we explore this apparent contradiction: why is it that a distinction which is clearly inadequate in capturing the actual reality of urbanisation in post-urban regions still strongly informs the way a variety of actors involved in spatial planning think and act? This question is explored through an in-depth qualitative study of spatial governance in the fragmented post-urban settlement structure of Flanders, Belgium. Central to the study is the spatial governance instrument of demarcating 'urban areas', which is based on a strict urban-rural dichotomy in an attempt to counter sprawl. Through its implementation in the agglomerations of Antwerp and Mechelen, we show how this distinction tends to activate and reproduce a morally charged symbolic urban-rural divide. Combined with anti-urban identities and interests the distinction is instrumentalised in strategic actions of politicians and residents to undermine the instrument's effectiveness. We conclude that arguments about the need for 'new epistemologies of the urban' should take the symbolic power of the urban-rural dichotomy seriously, as declaring these categories obsolete does not in itself lead to their disappearance.

4.1 Introduction: the urban-rural dichotomy

This article explores an apparent contradiction in contemporary urban studies literature. On one hand, the urban-rural distinction is declared obsolete by various authors. On the other hand, this conceptual pair still seems an indispensable category to understand the governance of urbanisation. This leads to the main question of the article: how does a distinction, which has been deemed inadequate in capturing the empirical reality of urbanisation in post-urban regions, still strongly inform the way a variety of actors think and act? Thus, the article aims to develop a better understanding of the impact of a still socially relevant urban-rural distinction by focusing on what exactly makes it 'stick' in discourse and practice.

4.1.1 An obsolete dichotomy

In their work on 'Planetary Urbanisation', Brenner and Schmid (2011, 2014, 2015) argue that it makes no sense to sustain the urban versus rural dichotomy as an epistemological category. Because urbanisation has now become a worldwide condition, a conceptual pair that describes phenomena in terms of inside/outside ceases to be a relevant category of analysis. The scope of this observation is not limited to scientific research: 'the urban-rural opposition that has long underpinned the epistemology of urban concepts has been profoundly destabilized, at once in social science, planning practice, and in everyday life' (Brenner & Schmid, 2014, p. 751). Westlund (2018) comes to a similar conclusion. He identifies a 'post-urban world' of peri-urban regions that consist of metropolitan cores and their surrounding areas in which 'the inhabitants have urban occupations, values, norms and culture, consumption patterns and lifestyles' (p. 77). These recent arguments build on a long history of academic critique of the urban-rural dichotomy. Dymitrow (2017) describes how for at least a century scholars have argued that the urban-rural dichotomy fails to capture the ambiguities of the multi-layered socio-spatial reality of urbanisation. Today, the dichotomy is judged to hold little analytical value in urban studies and considered spatially deterministic because it implies that urban or rural locations determine ways of life. Therefore, many scholars argue that urban versus rural should be replaced by more nuanced understandings of the interrelation of space and society (Champion & Hugo, 2004; Cloke, 2006; Dymitrow & Stenseke, 2016; Halfacree, 2009b; Stevenson, 2003; Woods, 2011). From a more (urban) cultural studies perspective, the urban-rural dichotomy is viewed as a social construction that has a little purchase on the actual reality of human settlements. Both urban and rural have become 'floating signifiers' that are attributed a variety of meanings depending on the context, occasionally even making them interchangeable (Cloke, 2006; Nilsson & Lundgren, 2018; Woods, 2011). Regarding rurality, Cloke (2006) argues that 'symbolic notions of the rural have become detached from their referential moorings, meaning that socially constructed rural space has become ever more detached from geographically functional rural space' (p. 22). This leads Dymitrow (2017) to evaluate the urban-rural dichotomy as an 'unnecessary conceptual filter' (p. 155) or 'meaningful-yet-useless' (Dymitrow & Brauer, 2018).

4.1.2 Continued relevance

Despite the apparent destabilisation of the urban-rural opposition in empirical reality, the (socially constructed) distinction between urban and rural space, with different assessments of their quality of life, is still part of people's lived reality. It continues to exist both colloquially and in specialist discourse (Dymitrow & Stenseke, 2016; Halfacree, 2009a; Stevenson, 2003). Dymitrow (2017) argues that its non-reflexive everyday use, as well as the use in strategic professional settings, facilitates and legitimises the dichotomy and helps to keep it alive. Cloke (2006) adds that 'the concept of rurality lives on in the popular imagination and everyday practices of the contemporary world' (p. 18). Indeed, examples of urban versus rural thinking are seen throughout the world in locations as diverse

as the United States, Sweden, Estonia, China and Ecuador (Hidalgo-Bastidas & Boelens, 2019; Nilsson & Lundgren, 2018; Nugin, 2018; Wachsmuth, 2014; Yu et al., 2015).

The loosening of the referential moorings between social and geographical space may also explain how it is possible that suburbs are often identified in terms of rurality in the urban-rural dichotomy. Stevenson (2003) notes that the contrast between city and suburb 'roughly follows the anti-urban/pro-urban divide and, intriguingly, draws on many of the same discourses' (pp. 123–124). These include the myth of a quasi-rural green, safe and spacious lifestyle, versus 'the metropolitan "other"'. Wachsmuth (2014) too, observes that in contemporary American public discourse 'small towns and suburbs have readily occupied the position of the "country" in moral inflections of the city-country opposition' (p. 81).

These lay discourses containing myths or symbols of the (imagined) differences of city versus country are widespread and have real-life consequences. Hence, the everyday distinction between urban and rural space still conjures up well-known images that play a role in the behaviour of many residents, planners and politicians and the institutional arrangements they create (Halfacree, 2009b; Harding & Blokland, 2014; Leinfelder & Allaert, 2010; Woods, 2011).

Since the early 1990s, there is an increased attention to the role of language in the construction of social institutions. Most important in the context of this article is the insight that discourses '[carry] social meaning and power relations of a social order' (Healey, 1997 [2006], p. 36). That is, words and stories are not simply descriptions of the empirical world. They have the power to construct social and (and in the context of spatial planning) physical worlds. Dühr, Colomb, and Nadin (2010) underline the importance of power relations in discourse: 'Who is involved in the preparation of [a] spatial concept, and which spatial information is selected to represent it, will thus significantly affect the message' (p. 56). The analysis of discourse and narratives also serves to understand how the institutional embeddedness of actors leads to varying interpretations of, and attitudes towards the same phenomenon. Within social groups, '[t]he discussion develops in such a way as to reinforce the identity of the community and to protect its interests' (Hidding, Needham, & Wisserhof, 2000, p. 127). Contemporary approaches such as planning cultures (Levin-Keitel & Sondermann, 2015) and spatial imaginaries (Davoudi et al., 2018) also assign much value to the role of discourses in how environments are shaped.

Thus, if urban and rural remain social categories of lived experience, this means that the dichotomy holds moral and political power. Dymitrow (2017) observes that the urban-rural dichotomy is 'used for (...) identity building by stabilizing points of reference (we/them; I/you)' (p. 33). This identificatory function shows that the urban-rural dichotomy can be both the object of, and subject to political struggles. Nilsson and Lundgren (2018) describe how framings of the rural can serve as vehicles for constructing a political (party) ideology to present oneself as having solutions to perceived problems and at the same time distinguish oneself from one's political opponents.[40]

[40] This applies equally to political framings of the urban and urban policy.

In this article, we explore the impact of the continued relevance of the urban-rural distinction on spatial planning processes through the analysis of a government-led strategy to contain urbanisation in the Belgian region of Flanders. We are particularly interested in how and why various stakeholders in this process use the dichotomy. More specifically, we focus on the discourses and practices surrounding a planning instrument with the urban-rural distinction at its heart: the spatial demarcation of urban areas, as implemented in the city-regions of Antwerp and Mechelen.

We elaborate first on the specific history of the urban-rural dichotomy in Flanders and present the Flemish region as a textbook case of post-urbanity (section "Exploring the urban-rural dichotomy in the Flemish 'nebular city'"). Section "The spatial demarcation of urban areas surrounding the cities of Antwerp and Mechelen" introduces the research design developed to analyse to what extent, how and why spatial planners, local politicians and residents in urban demarcation processes use the urban-rural dichotomy. The analysis in section "The countryside begins here" considers first the demarcation instrument's reproduction of the urban-rural dichotomy that ultimately undermined its effectiveness (subsection "Reproducing the dichotomy"). Next, various ways in which stakeholders perceive the urban are discussed in terms of densities and residential types, the moral connotation of the urban, and the view of suburban green space (subsection "Threat to a suburban lifestyle"). The following subsection (section "A loss of identity") delves into how place-based identities relate to planning decisions. Finally, we discuss (subsection "Urban versus rural as discursive resource for action") how images of urban and rural space are used as a strategic resource for opposing the demarcation processes. The concluding section (section "Conclusion") summarises the dynamics surrounding the urban-rural dichotomy in Flanders as analysed through the entry point of the spatial demarcation processes. It pleads for more research into the subjective experience of the urban-rural conceptual pair and its impact on spatial governance processes.

4.2 Exploring the urban-rural dichotomy in the Flemish 'nebular city'

Belgium's northern region of Flanders provides an excellent illustration of 'post-urbanity' where inhabitants mostly live in (sub)urban areas dependent on urban cores for work and leisure (Haas & Westlund, 2018). Flanders is characterised by an extremely spread-out and chaotic settlement pattern (Figure 1) consisting predominantly of individually owned single-family dwellings. This has earned the region the label 'nebular city' (Bruggeman & Dehaene, 2017). In the province of Antwerp where both case study areas are located, it is hard to distinguish between urban, suburban and rural space as one sees an almost completely, albeit unevenly urbanised space (European Commission, 2011).

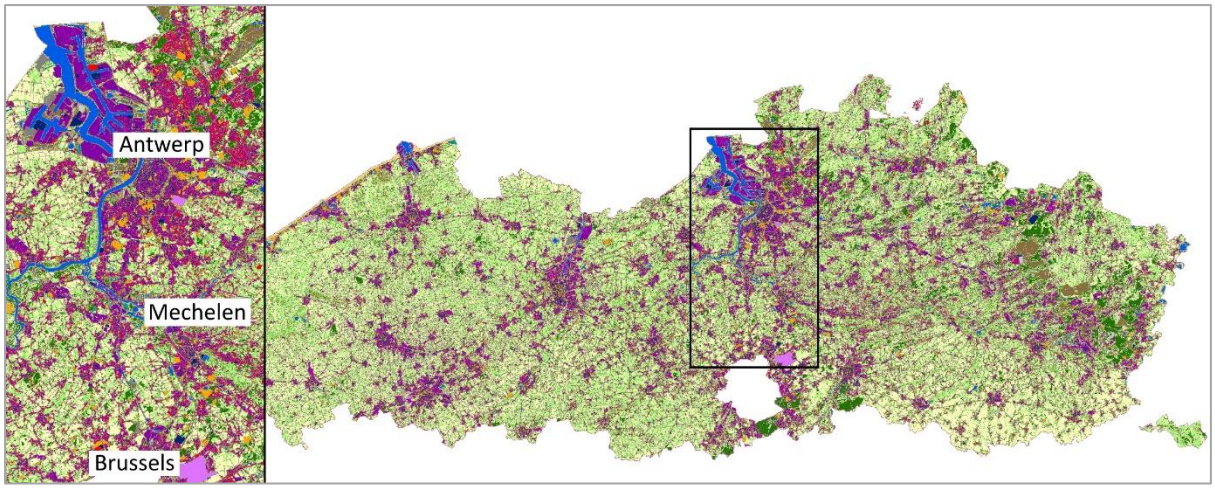

Figure 4.1: Sprawl in Flanders as indicated by land use in 2016. Inset: the Antwerp-Brussels corridor. (Data are property of Vlaamse Overheid–Departement Omgeving–Afdeling Vlaams Planbureau voor Omgeving. Use allowed under Flanders Free Open Data license v1.0).

Despite the easily observable and well-documented hybridity of the Flemish settlement structure, the urban-rural/ suburban dichotomy is very much alive in lay and policymakers' discourses and practices. The 'urban' is historically rather contentious in Flanders. In 19th-century Belgium, Catholic and Liberal elites worked to prevent the formation of an 'unsanitary' and potentially revolutionary urban working class. Measures were taken to keep workers in the villages by improving accessibility and creating low cost public transportation for commuting to the cities. Both ideological pillars' doctrines supported the ideology of private homeownership and legislation was passed that stimulated the financing and building of a private home of one's own, rather than constructing large scale urban (working class) neighbourhoods. Post Second World War urban flight led to the impoverishment and overall decline of cities due to a lack of spatial selectivity. New developments were largely situated outside the cities and were often constructed according to a rural aesthetic characterised by single-family dwellings inspired by the traditional farmhouse. This strengthened an already existing anti-urban attitude among large sections of the population (Boussauw, Allaert, & Witlox, 2013; De Decker, 2011; De Vos, 2012; Kesteloot & De Maesschalck, 2001).

Like other European cities, Flemish cities are now experiencing a (selective) return of middle-class residents and commercial and real estate investments. Despite this trend, owning a suburban home with its concomitant lifestyle remains the dominant cultural ideal of the majority of Flemings. Especially young, dual earning families with children tend to favour the suburbs because of the (perceived) financial wisdom of investing in a single-family dwelling, the presence of a culturally homogeneous middle-class population, green space and safety for children to grow up (De Olde et al., 2018; Meeus & De Decker, 2015; Schuermans, Meeus, & De Decker, 2015). Urban cores still function as hubs for jobs, schools and recreation however, making them 'cities of users' for the suburban population. In addition, Schuermans et al. (2015) describe how the historic anti-urban attitude has become imbued with notions of race, class and criminality, leading the suburban population in particular to avoid (certain areas of) cities. This combination of a post-urban settlement

pattern and the presence of a strong urban versus non-urban divide in lay and policy discourse and practice makes the Flemish region an excellent site to explore the impact of this distinction.

4.3 The spatial demarcation of urban areas surrounding the cities of Antwerp and Mechelen

4.3.1 The demarcation instrument

The impact of the continued salience of the urban-rural dichotomy is analysed through an empirical analysis of the spatial demarcations of the urban areas surrounding Antwerp and Mechelen. In an attempt to break with a historically weak spatial planning policy, the Flemish Government took action in 1997 to curb a further increase of sprawl in its Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders (Dutch: Ruimtelijk Structuurplan Vlaanderen; henceforth, RSV). One of the plan's instruments is the demarcation of 'urban areas' that consist of the urban cores and parts of their urbanised fringe municipalities. Within their growth boundaries,[41] a supply of housing, commercial and industrial zones is created. Together with limiting the land supply for building outside of the urban demarcation line, the instrument is intended 'to prevent further expansion, ribbon development and proliferation of all kinds of activities in the outer areas' (Vlaamse Overheid, 1997/2011, p. 200). This concentration of growth in urban cores in combination with slowing down development in the outer areas was termed 'deconcentrated bundling' (Vlaamse Overheid, 1997/2011, p. 189).

The result of each demarcation process is a policy document that contains a spatial demarcation line within which 'urban' zoning regulations apply. These are (among others) a minimum building density of 25 units per hectare (compared to 15 units outside of it) and specific areas zoned for housing, industry, green space, and so on (Vlaamse Overheid, 2008, 2009). The Flemish government made the final decision on the demarcation plans of 13 regional cities[42] and thus – ultimately – controlled the process. Cities and municipalities were involved as stakeholders in the design phase. Along with other stakeholders such as citizens, companies and civil society, they were able to formulate recommendations in the public inquiry at the close of the process.

4.3.2 Case studies

The spatial demarcations surrounding the cities of Antwerp and Mechelen (525.000 and 86.000 inhabitants, respectively; Rijksregister, 2018), are interesting cases to research the continued salience of the urban-rural dichotomy in planning processes. The selection of these two cases was based first of all on the fact that they had been completed for a time during the period of data gathering (2015–2018), allowing the process to sediment and legal procedures to finish completely. Other criteria – based on coverage in the press and exploratory interviews with experts – were, there had been an amount of friction in the process leading to a rich store of stakeholder experiences;

[41] Demarcation plans may be more familiar to the US and UK readers as boundary plans. In using the term demarcations, we follow other international publications on these processes in Flanders.
[42] Demarcation processes of smaller cities were supervised by the Flemish provinces.

there was a significant variation in size as measured by the amount of stakeholders involved; cases had not already been extensively documented before; cases were not too a-typical of the demarcation strategy as a whole (e.g. the region surrounding Brussels; Boussauw et al., 2013); and finally they were in reasonable proximity to the researchers. On the basis of these criteria some constant and variable characteristics of these cases can be identified.

The first constant is that both cities are part of the heavily (post)urbanised corridor between Antwerp and Brussels (Figure). They are situated in the Flemish 'urban core area' which was considered by the RSV as a continuous urbanised area. The policy vision for this area foresaw the development of an internationally competitive urban network, the 'Flemish Diamond' (Albrechts, 1998, pp. 218-220; Vlaamse Overheid, 1997/2011).[43]

A second constant is that both demarcation areas consist of larger cities surrounded by smaller fringe municipalities. Some of these fringe municipalities have long agricultural histories, but were increasingly suburbanised after the Second World War. A third constant between the two cases is that the initial studies for both demarcations were carried out by the same private urban planning office that also produced a preliminary study for the demarcation instrument itself (Omgeving, 1996). Hence, the demarcation processes were organised in a similar way, informed by the instrument's original intention.

Variation is found in the timing of the two demarcation processes and their size. The regional urban area around the city of Mechelen was one of the first to be demarcated (1998–2008) with two fringe municipalities involved in the process. The Antwerp Metropolitan Area, with 20 municipalities surrounding the core city, was demarcated at a later stage (2003–2009). In both cases, the lengthy duration of the demarcation process indicates the difficulty of reaching an agreement between all stakeholders.

4.3.3 Data and analysis

The empirical analysis is based on 36 semi-structured interviews conducted by the first author. Each respondent is labelled according to location (A=Antwerp; M= Mechelen), their role (A= citizen-activist, S= local planner, P= politician) and numbered in order of being interviewed. For example, M-S1 is a local planner involved in the Mechelen demarcation process who was interviewed first. The sample consists of eight citizen-activists who actively opposed the spatial demarcation plans, five local planners, seven politicians and 17 experts[44] (labelled E#) involved either at the regional level, through the private planning office, or in other demarcation processes.[45] All but two interviews were

[43] This designation was not meant as an incentive to develop the entire area as one urban field. In line with the concept of deconcentrated bundling, the Ruimtelijk Structuurplan Vlaanderen (RSV) specifies that within the Flemish Diamond 'the rural area policy should be strengthened rather than weakened' (Vlaamse Overheid, 2011 [1997]: 220).

[44] Adding up to 37 individuals. Including double interviews the total number of interviewees was 40, but not every one of these persons received a code since their contribution remained limited.

[45] Surrounding the cities of Aalst, Turnhout, Sint Niklaas, Ghent and Kortrijk. These interviews as well as policy evaluations of various other Flemish demarcation and city–regional cooperation processes (Boucké, 2015;

recorded. Fifteen interviews were transcribed by the first author. The remaining ones by external transcribers.

The interview topic list aimed to find out how the demarcation process and specifically the urban-rural dichotomy was discussed and perceived by each of these groups. First, the respondents were invited to explain their involvement in the demarcations of urban areas. Next, they were asked to indicate which events were important in the decision-making process and how they would characterise the attitudes of other stakeholders. The role of the demarcation line was specifically discussed as well as the potential apprehension of the term 'urban area'. Finally, respondents' views of the demarcations' implementation and effects were prompted by reading two critical quotes from the 2010 evaluation of the RSV.

The interview data were supplemented by the relevant policy documents, spatial plans, public inquiry reports and 303 local newspaper[46] articles on the demarcation processes. It was possible to consult the private planning office's archives and several respondents provided materials of their protests against the spatial demarcation process (i.e. powerpoint presentations, posters, petitions, informational leaflets). The interview transcripts as well as the newspaper articles were coded in two phases (open and axial coding) using the software tool f4analyse.

4.4 The countryside begins here

4.4.1 Reproducing the dichotomy

We begin by looking at the conceptualisation of the spatial demarcation instrument to analyse why, how and to what extent it reproduced the urban-rural dichotomy. The Flemish spatial structure plan aimed to make 'Flanders open and urban'. It shows how planners in the late 1990s were aware of the problematic urban-rural divide and it presents this post-urban condition of the Flemish region as undesirable:

> **The existing spatial structure shows that Flanders does not resemble the image of 'Flanders, open and urban'; at least not if 'open and urban' are interpreted as two clearly separated spaces. The open and urban spaces are not clearly separated in Flanders, they are tightly interwoven (Vlaamse Overheid, 1997/2011, p. 183).**

The plan describes how the Flemish settlement structure developed from a landscape with discrete urban areas surrounded by countryside to one of larger urbanised regions, and finally, to an 'urban conglomerate' characterised by extensive spatial fragmentation and sprawl of housing and other functions. The RSV departs from the concept of sustainable urban development. It therefore aims to curb the growth of urban sprawl so as not to exceed the 'capacity of space to absorb human activities,

Boussauw et al., 2013; Cabus et al., 2009; Coppens et al., 2016; Voets et al., 2010; Voets et al., 2012) were used to gain a wider perspective on the practice of demarcating urban areas.

[46] Gazet van Antwerpen; henceforth, GvA.

now and in the future, without crossing the boundaries of spatial functioning' (Vlaamse Overheid, 1997/2011, p. 182). This is translated into policy as follows:

> **We opt to implement an 'urban area policy' containing specific urban-area measures in those parts with an urban character and a countryside policy in those parts with a countryside-character (Vlaamse Overheid, 1997/2011, pp. 183-184).**

The term 'urban area' was intended as a strategic concept to stimulate municipalities at the fringe of cities to adopt a policy that fit their urban reality, as well as to safeguard the countryside from additional sprawl. Underlying its strategic character, in the larger demarcation processes a planning office contracted by the Flemish Government was tasked to: propose a demarcation line based on the existing built environment, a spatial development vision for the urban area and its accessibility, and to indicate potential zones for additional development to pursue provincial growth targets (Vlaamse Overheid, 1997/2011, p. 201).

However, once the spatial demarcation instrument was in its implementation phase, planners observed that what was intended as a strategic policy distinction tapped into a reservoir of meanings and vivid representations concerning urbanity and rurality. The urban-rural dichotomy at the root of the instrument activated entrenched and antagonistic political identities and associated interests, notably of politicians and residents from fringe municipalities. These unintended consequences eventually undermined the goal of slowing down urban sprawl. An employee of the private planning office subcontracted for the first phase of the demarcation process shares their impression:

> **And in Mechelen, perhaps one of the issues that was very much at the forefront there, that's the urban-rural discussion: 'we are from the fringe, we reject the city' (E8).**

A municipal planning officer involved in the process says,

> **Yes but I experience it, well Katelijne is a fringe municipality of the city of Mechelen and that is traditionally like, the countryside against the city (M-S1).**

A similar dynamic was observed in the relationship between city and fringe municipalities surrounding Antwerp. A few months before the Flemish Government approved the Antwerp demarcation, the local newspaper reports on events in a fringe municipality included in the urban area:

> **Alderman of spatial planning [name] proposed the municipal structure plan to the council. The majority approved the plan. The opposition views the plan as a harbinger of the transition to urban area. With a long plea [opposition leader] showed that the inhabitants want to preserve the rural character: 'The future of our village is at stake' (GvA, 26 February 2008).**

The demarcation instrument's phrasing and its use of a literal 'border line' activated the urban-rural dichotomy through which many stakeholders constructed their political identity and interests. In effect, the juridical demarcation boundary institutionalised 'the planning discourse of city and

countryside as separate entities' (Leinfelder & Allaert, 2010, p. 1789). Reflecting on the processes, a spatial planner working for the Flemish Government stresses that the instrument of demarcation was not adequate to reach the goal:

> In the demarcations it was not about the division city versus countryside, it was about the physical quality of the countryside and of the city. Making both stronger based on the characteristics of one or the other, which are different characteristics, *that* was the starting point. And all the rest was . . . it was added. Perhaps we should have foreseen that, but it was so difficult to foresee that we didn't and they also charged it [with other meanings, *authors*] (E1).

Thus, the demarcation instrument activated socio-political forces that undermined its goal to address the negative social, ecological and financial consequences of the post-urban settlement structure in the Flemish region. These forces superseded any concerns regarding the development of an urban core area.[47] Co-creator of the Flemish structure plan, Vermeersch (2008) even calls the juridical demarcation boundary 'a grave planning error because it creates the impression that there would be a tight final separation between urban area and countryside' (p. 69). One municipal planner reflects:

> So perhaps in that view the story of that polarisation that said this is an urban area and that's a rural area perhaps had the opposite effect. (…) Maybe we should have introduced 'activity concentrations'. It's something conceptual anyway, so it might as well sound very conceptual too (E20).

The following subsections describe in more detail the manner in which this reception of the spatial demarcation instrument in terms of the urban-rural dichotomy became salient for various stakeholders.

4.4.2 Threat to a suburban lifestyle

Building type and density

Respondents of all interviewed groups, that is, planners, politicians and residents, report that the demarcated area was perceived as a threat to the suburban lifestyle in the fringe municipalities, which is strongly associated with images of the rural. The fear of urbanisation is expressed as fear of higher housing density, increased traffic, loss of open and green space, and pollution. These concerns are voiced by local politicians. One is quoted in the press in the early stages of the Antwerp spatial demarcation process:

> [Local politician] has no faith in the Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders. He agrees with the principles, but cringes when he sees that his municipality is described as Metropolitan Area. 'I fear that the building density will rise from nine units per hectare to twenty' (GvA, 15 January 1997).

[47] The Mechelen demarcation plan mentions the Flemish diamond only once in passing. The Antwerp plan does reference the development of the metropolitan area as a 'polycentric part of the broader network city Flemish diamond' (Vlaamse Overheid, 2009: 24). But from the interviews, this does not emerge as a concern of the local stakeholders.

Schelfaut (2007) showed that in Flanders not only density but also building type is associated with urbanity. Residents of single-family or semi-detached houses, especially those with a garden, perceive their environments as less urban than those living in a terraced house or apartment. Apartment buildings are viewed as symbolising urbanity. A neighbourhood protest group argued,

> **According to the preliminary spatial plan those neighbourhoods would be added to the Antwerp Metropolitan Area. Because of that, for instance apartment blocks of fifteen stories will be allowed, which we opposed successfully in the past (GvA, 3 December 2008).**

In the next objection, quoted in the Antwerp public inquiry at the close of the demarcation process, the existing building type is used as representative for the rural character of an area and as an argument to oppose densification:

> **Kontich is a buffer to further expansion of urbanisation. Kontich will become urban area though; this is against the guidelines of the Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders. The housing density, type of housing, public transport network and type of shops indicate that Kontich is countryside. The density in the residential areas can certainly not be increased to 25 units per hectare (Vlacoro, 2009, p. 13).**

This level of concern was not shared in the cities of Mechelen and Antwerp. Although there was some protest against the zoning of a large hospital site in Mechelen, and some petitioners opposed developments in less central districts of Antwerp, these were not large organised protests. A municipal planner in Antwerp voices how in to the city's vision on the demarcation urbanity was experienced as the normal condition:

> **The intrinsic qualities of a city, you've already got those. And a demarcation line or a structure plan for Flanders is not going to make much of a change to that. So those intrinsic qualities of the large attraction of a city, an influx of inhabitants, the close proximity of services, the nodes, the diversity, the multimodality. (…) I think the border line was much more important to remind the fringe municipalities of their urban policy (A-S1).**

From these quotes, it is clear that definitions of urban density are arbitrary and fraught with measurement complications as proponents of the post-urban thesis argue (Brenner & Schmid, 2014; Champion & Hugo, 2004). At the same time, the material shows that the urban-rural dichotomy does not lose its socio-political salience as citizens and local politicians imbue the concept with great symbolic value ('good versus bad living environments'). Thus, technical spatial planning instruments predicated on the dichotomy may contribute to entrench oppositions that are in many ways obsolete and by doing so also undermine their own effectiveness.

Landscape

Next to the fear of increased densities, the loss of green space is often mentioned as a threat posed by opponents of the demarcation process. While acknowledging the need for additional housing in the urban area, one respondent notes of the greenfield slated for development bordering his

backyard: 'We'd better preserve that little piece of green, right?' (M-A4). However, this contrast of urbanity versus green spaces is not experienced alike by all residents. Several respondents (A-P1, A-S2, A-A4, M-A1) point to the divergent attitudes towards the demarcation held by established versus newer fringe inhabitants. Many established residents have a link to the municipalities' agricultural past, while the newer inhabitants moved there in recent decades to find larger detached housing in a more quiet and green environment within easy reach of the city's facilities. A municipal planner explains,

> **I: First the fear of continuing urbanisation among the population. Did people think: the city is coming?**
>
> **(…) That was mainly the case among the new residents. The unauthentic inhabitants of Kontich, the newcomers that already lived in the new subdevelopments, who came to Kontich because of its location along the E19, a good connection. On the other hand [they came] also because of the quiet, the landscape, and those inhabitants did fear that the landscape would be affected further. And that was then translated in politics trying to stop the demarcation of the municipality (A-S2).**

Cloke's (2006) observation of the increasing disconnect between geographically functional and symbolic understanding of the rural provides insight here. While the established inhabitants saw their rural village gradually develop into a (sub)urban community, for these newer suburban inhabitants, the possibility that their place of residence might be included in the spatial demarcation of the urban area is a threat against the idyll of rurality that they have come there to consume. While people once moved away from the cities in search of a more open and green environment, they fear that urbanisation is now catching up with them. This leads, as Leinfelder and Allaert (2010) suggest, to the paradoxical situation that

> **(…) at a moment where the actual differences between city and countryside seem to fade, the societal and political need to protect and to strengthen the identity of the countryside grows: or, in other words, the more the city and countryside intermingle, the greater the desire to distinguish them politically (p. 1798).**

'Urban' social groups

The urban-rural dichotomy extends beyond material characteristics such as density and green space to specific social groups associated with the city. Some fear these groups might come to the fringe as a result of it being demarcated as an urban area. A functionary at the Antwerp city administration explains,

> **The fringe always viewed the city as the pit of decay. And if the topic for instance was a tramline extension then- no. A tram shouldn't come here because along with the tram the filth of the city will come in, you know, that kind of discourse (A-P5).**

Another respondent associates the need for extra housing and infrastructure (in the demarcated urban area) with the influx of migrants:

> They [politicians] have to come to the decision that here in Flanders nothing more can be built. Flanders is overpopulated. (…) And the problem is with politics, that they let those strangers in. Asylum seekers, economic refugees, war refugees and what have you (M-A1).

This fear of 'urban' social groups informed the local response to the demarcation of urban areas. This shows again how, as Schuermans et al. (2015) claim, the urban-rural dichotomy gets racialised and classed in particular ways. A Flemish regional spatial planner explains,

> And that's a large difference we felt from the beginning. In [the fringe municipalities'] perception that [demarcation] line was a kind of export of negative urban problems, and they were partly negative. Why? Those were lower incomes that moved there. So in other words, you export your problems to, what they called, posh neighbourhoods, the better neighbourhoods (E5).

Finally, there were also political motives to oppose the demarcation processes. Politicians in fringe municipalities feared that the administrative concept of a 'demarcated urban area' would be a prelude to municipal mergers or the creation of an autonomous urban region that would threaten their jurisdictions (De Olde & Oosterlynck, 2021).

4.4.3 A loss of identity

The meanings associated with the urban-rural dichotomy extend to issues of place identity and spatial belonging. This is especially relevant to residents living in newly demarcated urban areas. The urban-rural dichotomy, as noted by Dymitrow (2017), provides stabilising points of reference for identity building. This can be observed in the discourses stakeholders employ to reject inclusion of their municipalities in the spatial demarcation of the urban area. They describe their surroundings as rural, green municipalities and self-identify as villagers who aim to retain the village character. Ultimately, it speaks to their personal identities that they feel threatened by urbanisation. Examples are found throughout the source material. An objection in the Mechelen public inquiry reads,

> Petitioner 378 argues that the authenticity and individuality of the area known on a municipal level as a zone for responsible greenhouse horticulture that reinforces the rural character, the radiance and attraction of the municipality, cannot be blemished (Vlacoro, 2008, p. 51).

A respondent who actively opposed the demarcation identifies his municipality as a village:

> [A]ctually the people who always lived in Kontich and real Kontich families they really think: 'yes, Kontich is a village' (A-A4).

Local politicians responded to these concerns of citizens by opposing the demarcation:

> Zemst rejects the expansion [of the urban area] and vetoes it on the basis of the approved structure plan. The steering group and the local council want to prevent that the open spaces between city and village become silted up and thus mess up the rural character of Zemst completely (GvA, 20 May 1999).

For some interviewees, the impending change threatened their collective identity as a resident of a (rural) place. An alderperson of a fringe municipality said,

> **Plus then the fear of, and with time we won't be Katlijnenaar anymore, then we'll be Mechelaar. You hear that too (M-P1).**

The discursive power of these kinds of collective identifications is illustrated by a pamphlet distributed in order to oppose the inclusion of a fringe municipality neighbourhood in the demarcated urban area of Antwerp. Titled 'Will we become urbanites???' the text uses rhetorical discourse such as 'to suffer a dense concentration of building', 'to feel like second-rate citizens' and closes with the call to sign the petition if you 'also want to keep our neighbourhood out of the City?' The final line stresses the purpose typographically, 'We DO NOT want to become URBANITES. Therefore a RADICAL NO to these plans' (Deuzeld Leeft!, 2008).

For some residents, the perceived threat posed to their identity by urbanisation resonates on a very personal level:

> **M-A2: I mean, not everyone was born to be in a city you know.**
>
> **I: No, no, I'm sure (laughs).**
>
> **M-A2: (laughs) I'm an outdoor child. He's an outdoor child [indicates husband]. You really can't put me – we lived for a long time in a – well, long time – we lived for a year and a half, two years in a row house in the Stationsstraat. Out of misery I tended the neighbour's garden.**

The setting of this last interview was the respondents' living room with a view of the busy ring road around Mechelen, adjacent to a newly rezoned industrial area. Yet, in her discourse, the respondent identifies herself as an outdoor child to show the importance of countryside life for her. Other protest groups used slogans such as 'the countryside starts here', found in many forms in the empirical material, to reassert that they (still) live in the kind of environment they aspire to live in.

Yet again, a clear difference appears between how (many) citizens and local politicians use the urban-rural dichotomy and how planning experts use it. Spatial planners, as well as some local politicians with planning expertise, consider the fringe municipalities an integral part of the urban area and point to residents' lack of understanding of planning. The alderperson of an Antwerp fringe municipality explains,

> **[In this municipality] there were quite a few people of the administration that felt: we are the village, and they had quite a romantic notion about that. We want to stay village and we don't want apartments (…) I'm a lawyer specialized in spatial planning myself and because of that I had a bit of a different view than other politicians or residents, but people had the feeling: we'll become part of the urban area, they'll let go of the neighbourhood and, well this is putting it too strongly but: they'll let it deteriorate along with the city. (…) There were even people who thought that the municipal borders were going to change, so there was little understanding of what it meant (A-P2).**

A municipal planner involved in another demarcation process also connects the resistance to spatial demarcation plans to place identities:

> **E20: Look, here in Flanders, what is a village and what is the city is a pretty ambiguous matter. What is it, that book about urban republics et cetera says 96% of Flanders is city and that's right. Everything surrounding this place is people who live in a city, they just don't want to realize it themselves.**
>
> **I: Is that a matter of identity then?**
>
> **E20: Yes, but in itself that's simply a denial of reality, and it's important that they are gradually rid of that.**

Some stakeholders in the demarcation processes, however, do acknowledge that the countryside in the urbanised heart of Flanders is of a particular character. They try to come to terms with the increasing detachment of socially constructed and geographically functional rural space. Like this alderperson of a Mechelen fringe municipality:

> **In the end Katelijne-Waver is a rural municipality. But when I say rural municipality you cannot compare that to a rural municipality in the Westhoek[48] right? That's something completely different. This is a rural municipality in the province of Antwerp and there is already a lot of urban activity within those rural municipalities (M-P1).**

The assertion of the urban fringe as green and rural serves as building block of social and personal identities. It then becomes part of a discourse that uses the urban-rural dichotomy to oppose a spatial planning process that was predicated on the same distinction despite some actors' acute awareness that the actual spatial reality is very hybrid. The next section shows how the dichotomy is used as a strategic resource.

4.4.4 Urban versus rural as discursive resource for action

The use of the urban-rural dichotomy by residents and politicians in their resistance against the spatial demarcation processes can be understood as the wielding of discursive power in a policy domain where regulatory and relational power is rather strong. Liefferink (2006) develops these three aspects of power in policy arrangements: **Relational power** refers to the power relations between actors, rooted in their ability to control resources; **regulatory power** describes which resources can be activated by using the formal and informal 'rules of the game'; and **discursive power** is exerted through dominant narratives.

In Flanders' strongly juridified planning system, the customary way to oppose spatial plans is through official procedures and eventually in court, that is, regulatory power (Van den Broeck & Verachtert, 2016). This is shown by the example of one action group. Backed by expert legal advice, it was able to have rezoning annulled in court on the basis of an imperfect flood risk assessment. Their words illustrate that a strategic assessment was made which (legal) arguments to use to halt development of a residential zone as part of the urban area demarcation:

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[48] The 'Westhoek' area in the province of West-Flanders is qualified by Eurostat as one of the few rural areas in Flanders.

> We never went to the Council of State because of the urban character (…) but because of the flooding in *part* of that area. (…) What we did not get involved in – that was in other municipalities – is the fear of having to belong to the city. (…) We had sufficient trump cards, not to have to put that one in play. (…) I'm telling you: we played it like that with the water, that was an opportunity to, between parenthesis, keep the village outlook intact (A-A3).

Another way to weigh on planning decisions is the use of political connections (i.e. relational power). In one Antwerp fringe municipality, the proposed zoning of a transport hub as part of the urban area was significantly downsized through the local mayor's contacts in the Flemish Government:

> And at a certain moment the cabinet of the then Prime Minister came with a proposal: do you happen to have room for horticultural zones? And then we kind of used the one dossier against the other. To say: we don't approve of that commercial or transport zone and so, yes, that area would be an excellent location to develop [horticulture]. (…) And then that entire urban area of Antwerp was seriously shrunk (A-P3).

However, if regulatory and relational power can be deployed to avoid being included in the urban area, then why do opposing citizens and local politicians so often turn to discourse constructing an urban-rural dichotomy? One answer found in this analysis is that by influencing public opinion with strongly rooted images, the discursive power of the urban-rural dichotomy can help weaken the regulatory and relational power wielded by experts and governments. The previous quotes show that this becomes more valuable when those other two aspects are not at the opposing parties' disposal. It also comes to light in the words of a planning expert who explains the use of discursive power on the part of (fringe) municipal administrations:

> If you're less professional and you want to make sure you're standing your ground then you'll say: 'but I don't want to be annexed by those guys', so then you'll use that as an argument. If you're strong yourself then what's the problem? If your population sees you, then you don't need to use that argument (E5).

The discursive power of the urban-rural dichotomy is often mobilised by groups that have less regulatory and relational power on hand to exert pressure on the local political majority (for a similar dynamic, see Nilsson and Lundgren, 2018). Thus, local opposition parties present themselves as champions to combat the threat of impending urbanisation by framing their municipality as a village. A member of a local opposition party explains,

> But bottom-up there was no public support whatsoever. Nobody in Kontich understood [the demarcation], wanted it, so yes, among the population there was only resistance. Well it wasn't illogical that they ended up with opposition members such as myself then. If you can voice a little bit what people feel or think you immediately get a lot of animation around it (A-P1).

In response, local councils sometimes gave in to the call of opposition parties and action groups and gave negative recommendations in the public inquiry process. This shows the effect of the discursive power that can be wielded through the urban-rural dichotomy, even though it may not reflect the actual morphological reality of the area.

4.5. Conclusion

In light of its proclaimed inadequacy to understand the empirical reality of post-urbanity, this article aims to understand the impact of the urban-rural dichotomy in the governance of urbanisation. This goal is pursued through an analysis of the demarcation of urban areas in post-urban Flanders. The demarcation instrument was predicated on a distinction between urban and non-urban areas in an attempt to preserve the spatial quality of these environments. Yet, this approach underestimated the store of strong discursive meanings attached to 'the urban' and 'the rural' in Flemish society. These meanings shape the perception of the residential environment and the 'good life', collective identity and belonging. Especially, in fringe municipalities, the policy concept of an urban area was perceived as a harbinger of further urbanisation symbolised by high density development and as a threat to the suburban lifestyle. Suburban actors presented their residential environments as rural villages, tying into a historically widely present anti-urban sentiment in Flanders. Thus, while many of the interviewed citizens and politicians acknowledged that they no longer live in a distinct countryside, an idyll of rurality was used as a resource for strategic action to oppose the instrument's goals and undermine its effectiveness. In the end, the demarcations were judged by most respondents as a lot of effort leading to little result. This was especially the case among local politicians and planners. At the regional level, experts and planners were frustrated that other stakeholders did not acknowledge the value of the process and refused to move beyond local interests. While this case study is limited to Flanders, literature shows that the urban-rural conceptual pair is also used in many other countries with similar meanings attached to it.

In line with insights in the impact of discourse and narratives, in spatial planning, we can conclude that certain power relations rooted in symbolic and physical resources (e.g. political influence, land value, a desirable residential environment) are at the heart of struggles involving the urban-rural dichotomy. In addition, the planning concept of urban areas, as drawn up by experts, was received as a threat by other social actors such as fringe municipality politicians and residents. These groups turned the discourse inside-out to defend their interests and reinforce group identity.

Dymitrow and Brauer (2018) judge the urban-rural dichotomy to be 'meaningful-yet-useless'. Yet, the results in our analysis lead us to conclude that the stress on the pervasive influence of the urban by post- or planetary urbanists does not render the urban-rural dichotomy obsolete as a social construction. Instead, we argue that notions of urban and rural still strongly inform the way actors in urban governance processes think and act exactly *because* they are meaningful. In fact, the findings confirm that the notions of urban and rural act as floating signifiers to which meanings are attributed that serve specific actors' agendas. The analysis also confirms that as the morphological divide between urban and rural space becomes harder to distinguish, the symbolic distinction may become all the more important for residents and local politicians to make sense of spatial development. Therefore, spatial planning instruments predicated on the urban-rural dichotomy may even lead to further entrench it in the discourses and practices of local stakeholders, and hence, will lose effectives for spatial governance in a post-urban context.

In Flanders, urban sprawl has continued to grow since the 1990s. Contemporary authors argue that the spatial fragmentation of the region causes a heavy environmental burden, traffic congestion, air pollution, carbon emissions, generates high costs for the maintenance of infrastructure and public services, and increases flood risk (Grietens, 2009; Meeus & De Decker, 2015; Vermeiren et al., 2019). Alternative strategies for guiding urbanisation in Flanders are now being explored. One ambition of the Flemish Government is to increase 'spatial efficiency' through policy instruments predicated on locations' 'level of public transport accessibility and level of service provision' (Departement Omgeving Vlaanderen, 2018). These plans have already caused a storm of protest from 'rural' politicians whose jurisdictions score lower on these indicators (Rommers, 2019).

The analysis in this article shows the importance of understanding the impact of broader societal meanings attached to concepts on which spatial planning instruments are predicated. An increased understanding may benefit the quality of implementation, reception and effectiveness of instruments based on new epistemologies of the urban, of which there is definite need in a post-urban world.

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5. Introducing a concrete stop: signs of a changing planning culture in Flanders?

Abstract

Spatial planning in Flanders, Belgium has often been criticized for a lack of effectiveness. Despite the implementation of a planning system aimed at sustainable development in the late 1990s, the planning culture shaped by the post-war socio-economic growth model, with its state-promoted homeownership, sponsored commuting, and antiurban sentiment remained dominant. This has led to a fragmented spatial pattern and continuing land take. To counter this development the Flemish Government proposed a new spatial policy plan in 2016. One of its most striking measures, named the "concrete stop" in popular discourse, aims to reduce the uptake of open space for human activities to zero by 2040. This paper asks whether the proposed concrete stop can be viewed as a sign of a changing planning culture in Flanders that marks a readiness to take a new spatial development path away from the conditions that caused additional spatial fragmentation and land take. To answer this question we perform a news framing analysis on the lively public debate surrounding the concrete stop by the analysing 1392 newspaper articles and tweets. Based on the results of this analysis we argue that there are clear signs of changing positions of key actors in Flemish society. Yet, strong vestiges of the old socio-economic growth model and its associated planning culture remain. The discussion on the concrete stop moves along the lines of wider socio-political divisions in Flemish society. We also identify a great amount of distrust in the ability of the government to effectively implement anti-sprawl measures.

5.1 Introduction: spatial fragmentation in Flanders

As in many other Western-European countries, the Belgian post World War II war socio-economic strategy was focused on rebuilding and generating economic growth. Part of this was a housing model that created favourable conditions for individual homeownership through generous loans and cheap commuting. This in turn led to spatial planning that provided ample zoning for housing, few urban growth controls, and generally allowed for a significant influence of individual property interests on the spatial organisation of the country (De Decker, 2011; Ryckewaert, 2011).

An unintended consequence of this liberal housing model and planning practice is a large amount of land take and fragmentation of space. In this paper we focus on the Dutch-speaking region of Flanders in the north of Belgium, which acquired spatial planning competences in 1980. In Flanders the percentage of land occupied for human activity (settlements, commercial, industrial, and recreational purposes, transport infrastructure, parks and gardens) was 33.3% in 2019. Additional land take reaches an average of 5.1 hectares per day since 2013 (Poelmans, Janssen, & Hambsch, 2021). Additionally Flanders is one of the most sprawled regions in Europe (Henning et

al., 2016)[49] and with 83% of its landscape strongly fragmented Belgium ranks as second most fragmented European country.[50] This situation is aptly described by Dehaene and Loopmans: "The Flemish landscape is constructed out of small grains: the combination of a finely distributed ownership structure, a strong local government and the emphasis on private initiative" (2003, p. 5).

Land take and spatial fragmentation due to urbanisation are associated with a number of problems such as the need for large-scale infrastructures, waste production and pollution, increased surface imperviousness which limits the possibility for water infiltration and creates flood risk, reduced possibilities for carbon storage and sequestration, and the loss of fertile land and biodiversity (European Environment Agency, 2019). This is why the Flemish government and administration have been working since 2010 on a Spatial Policy Plan for Flanders [NL: Beleidsplan Ruimte Vlaanderen BRV]. One of the primary goals of this plan is to slow down, and ultimately halt further land take for human activity in the region (Departement Omgeving Vlaanderen, 2018). At its first announcement in 2016 this goal was dubbed the "concrete stop" [betonstop] in Flemish media. This term fuelled controversy in public debate[51] and quickly became shorthand for the entire policy plan with media references to the concrete stop far outnumbering those to the policy plan itself (De Olde, 2018).

This paper asks whether the proposed concrete stop can be viewed as a sign of a changing planning culture in Flanders that marks a readiness to take a new spatial development path, away from the liberal housing and planning models that caused the growth of spatial fragmentation. To answer this question we perform a news framing analysis on the public debate surrounding the concrete stop.

The next section elaborates on the causes of Flemish housing sprawl as a socio-economic growth model that created a particular growth-centred planning culture. We illustrate how the new policy initiatives could indicate a transformation of this planning culture. Section 3 introduces the research approach and news framing analysis methodology. The results in section 4 identify the dominant news frames regarding the concrete stop Flemish media and public debate by analysing a sample of 1392 newspaper and magazine articles as well tweets. In the discussion (section 5) we reflect on how the debate on a transforming planning culture seems to reflect broader divisions in contemporary Flemish society.

[49] The data in this report are from 2009. The European Environment Agency has more recent data available but this has unfortunately not been reported on the regional level.
[50] https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/indicators/mobility-and-urbanisation-pressure-on-ecosystems-2/assessment (Consulted 23 June, 2021).
[51] Concrete stop became runner-up in the contest for 'word of the year 2016'. Leading up to the May 2019 Flemish elections the leader of Flanders' largest political party 'joked' in a press conference that the journalist who coined the term "deserved to be hung" (Hendrikx, 2019).

5.2 A growth-centred planning culture

5.2.1 Planning culture

As a technical-administrative activity, spatial planning is always affected by the socio-economic and cultural contexts in which it takes place. Thus the planning cultures approach is "aimed at identifying the place-specific practices that emerge in different cultural settings" (Reimer & Rusche, 2019, p. 1543). Planning is culturally contingent, characterized by often unconscious and taken-for-granted elements such as values, perceptions, attitudes, routines, thoughts, feelings, and beliefs (Othengrafen, 2012).

Planning cultures research often focuses on instruments, documents, and practices relevant to "built environment professionals" such as planners, architects, and researchers. But here we are specifically interested in the aspects of planning culture located at a distance from its technical core of professionals, procedures and policy documents. These are shared cultural elements relevant to the built environment widely present in a society or cultural group. Among others, these are people's acceptance of and abidance to plans, planning's significance, aspects of social justice, efficiency or moral responsibility, opinions on the relation between nature and human activity, and evaluations of socio-political or economic models (Othengrafen, 2010, pp. 92-93). In this sense the public upheaval over the concrete stop in Flanders offers a rare opportunity to lay bare such conceptions and study planning culture regarding urbanisation among a wide audience of experts and laypeople. In order to determine change in Flemish planning culture, we first need to understand its characteristic elements.

5.2.2 Suburban homeownership as a socio-economic growth model

Flemish planning culture is growth-centred and promotes individual homeownership and the fulfilment of individual housing desires. Dwellings and land are viewed as secure investments, and therefore it is important that sufficient development possibilities remain available. De Decker argues that "[b]oth homeownership and sprawl are deeply embedded in the Flemish institutions and the minds of the households" (2011, p. 1636). This model dates back to the 19th century but became dominant with the creation of the Belgian welfare state in the period following World War 2, when the acquisition of a single-family home with a garden was widely promoted and subsidized. The (anti-urban) ideal of a quiet life, surrounded by 'pristine' nature but with all modern comforts and private parking space became the housing ideal (E. De Vos, 2012). Today this suburban housing stock is increasingly mismatched with the needs of an aging population and stands in stark contrast to a practice – reinforced by policy – of ageing in place, shrinking household size, a reappreciation of living close to services, and rising environmental concerns (Bervoets & Heynen, 2013; Volckaert, Schillebeeckx, & De Decker, 2020). Nonetheless the dominant imaginary of housing in Flanders is still the detached countryside villa and the asset based welfare (AWB) model, where outright (fully amortised) homeownership functions as insurance to secure a rent-free retirement, is still firmly

reproduced today as an ideal in the discourse of key policy actors (De Saegher, 2020; Fikse & Aalbers, 2020).

Thus the suburban lifestyle remains an ideal to many, with cities still fulfilling the role of anti-model and urban flight of young families continues, albeit at a slower pace (De Olde et al., 2018; Meeus & De Decker, 2015; Schuermans, Meeus, & De Decker, 2015).

This housing model and locational preferences are enabled by a mobility policy at odds with a compact city model (J. De Vos, 2015). Favourable fiscal schemes make the company car very popular in Belgium, contributing to increasing congestion (Poppelmonde, 2021). Car travel is dominant everywhere except for big cities. Increased traffic results in environmental and health problems (Vandenbulcke, Steenberghen, & Thomas, 2009).

The elements described above operate in a planning environment that incentivises and stimulates urban sprawl with large reserves of residentially zoned land, and in absence of instruments that channel growth towards urban cores (Buitelaar & Leinfelder, 2020). Ambitious spatial policy introduced in the late 1990s (Vlaamse Overheid, 1997/2011) emphasized sustainable development through collective action rather than private interest. While this slowed down the rate of additional sprawling development, it did not halt additional land take and fragmentation (Mustafa & Teller, 2020). In the 2000s policy was again "reoriented towards the protection of private property" (Van den Broeck, Moulaert, Kuhk, Lievois, & Schreurs, 2014, p. 185). Today the Flemish permit system is still strongly adapted to the individual applicant with many exceptions to- and relaxations of rules that do not adhere to the original intent of zoned areas (Pisman, Vanacker, Willems, Engelen, & Poelmans, 2018).

For three decades now experts in Flanders have noted that the combination of these elements creates a housing and planning model that is socially and ecologically untenable. Nevertheless values in the broader societal environment, and spatial policy with it, remained in line with this planning culture. Yet now there is a new spatial policy plan that explicitly formulates the goal of halting further land take, creating pressure on the familiar socio-economic growth model. Does this indicate a change in Flemish planning culture towards a more sustainable model? We study this by analysing the public discussion of the concrete stop. Therefore we have opted to use a news framing analysis, which is described in the next section.

5.3 Methodology

5.3.1 News framing analysis

We propose to operationalise the planning cultures approach through frame analysis. Frame analysis provides a methodology to discover the networks of values and ideas that function as organising principles for the use and planning of space in a specific power context. To capture the framing of the concrete stop in Flemish society we analyse mentions in newspapers and magazines as well as tweets (news framing analysis).

Frames can be defined as "organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time. They work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world" (Reese, 2001, p. 11 quoted in: Reese, 2007, p. 150). As such, frames are considered as 'interpretative schema' that "(…) simplify complex issues by lending greater importance or weight to certain considerations and arguments over others" (Nisbet, 2010, p. 47). Hence, frames unite related ideas in a 'net' that colours events in the social world in order to promote a certain effect. Frame analysis is concerned with the way this web of ideas is being formed (Reese, 2007).

We follow Van Gorp (2007) and Reese (2010) in their view of frames as part of a 'web of culture'. Frames are not free-floating concepts, but find traction in the store of already present cultural meanings that are historically rooted, yet also subject to gradual change. Frames 'connect the dots' of what is already present, using key phrases or metaphors (framing devices) and logics (reasoning devices) to create a recognizable picture of reality that invites the media consumer to read the story in a particular way.

Frame analysis investigates the definitions of events and situations, with this study focusing primarily on media content through a news framing analysis. We aim to analyse the multiple framings (viewpoints) used in the reporting about the concrete stop to uncover the underlying organising principles that lend it its particular meaning in Flemish planning culture. Additionally we consider news frames not just as categories of news events, but as a way to:

> **[I]nvestigate, and reveal how media content works ideologically to reinforce dominant ideas, beliefs, and interests by legitimizing and naturalizing them through their media representations as natural and unavoidable (or "common sense") (Maeseele, 2010, p. 281).**

This attention to the ideological charge of frames is incorporated in our analysis by including the dimensions of interests, frame sponsors, and problem definition in the frame matrix. This allows the creation of a 'storyline' for frames which can be understood in the context of the social and political power in a society.

5.3.2 Research approach

Box 5.1 lists a step by step methodology for the framing analysis that was developed by drawing on Gamson and Lasch (1983); Gamson and Modigliani (1987); Kitzinger (2007); Linström and Marais (2012); Van Gorp (2010).

News framing analysis of the concrete stop

1) Gather material: newspaper articles via platform GoPress; tweets via Coosto.
2) Determine a sample of five months in the research period in which concrete stop was discussed most.
3) Clean up material: removing irrelevant and duplicate newspaper articles.
4) Analyse a random sample of articles (10% of articles and tweets divided over the time periods) to construct news frames through open, axial and selective coding (inductive frame development).
5) Draw up a framing matrix including:
    a. Framing devices and reasoning devices for each frame
    b. The relation of frames to one another (dominant versus secondary frames)
6) Systematically analyse the total sample of articles with the developed frames in previous step (deductive frame analysis):
    a. Determine the (dis)appearance of frames over time by following the chronology of mentions in the data analysis
    b. Determine the prominence of each frame in relation to the complete sample and the sample for each period chosen

Box 5.1:Step by step methodology for news framing analysis

5.3.3 Data

This research aims to lay bare the elements of Flemish planning culture made visible through the framings of the concrete stop. By using the keyword 'concrete stop' we obtain the widest selection of relevant articles and tweets. Other combinations of keywords prove less productive. Search results that include the Spatial Policy Plan are far fewer in number, indicating that the reach of the term concrete stop has extended beyond that of the policy document it was based on (De Olde, 2018). And while a new Flemish Government in October 2019 adopted the more neutral sounding "building shift" [NL: bouwshift] in a bid to avoid further controversy, this keyword still yielded fewer results than concrete stop at the time of analysis.

The tool GoPress academic was used to access the archives of 13 Flemish newspapers and 7 magazines that have mentioned the concrete stop[52]. Additionally all Twitter posts, comments, retweets, and comments-to-comments with the term concrete stop were gathered via the tool Coosto. Figure 5.1 visualises the total number of press articles and tweets between 1 May 2016 and June 30, 2020.

[52] De Morgen; De Standaard; De Streekkrant; De Tijd; De Zondag; Gazet van Antwerpen; Het Belang van Limburg; Het Laatste Nieuws; Het Nieuwsblad; Krant van West-Vlaanderen; Metro NL; Deze Week; Bruzz; HUMO; Knack; Trends; 't Pallieterke; Mo; Dag Allemaal; Ik ga bouwen.

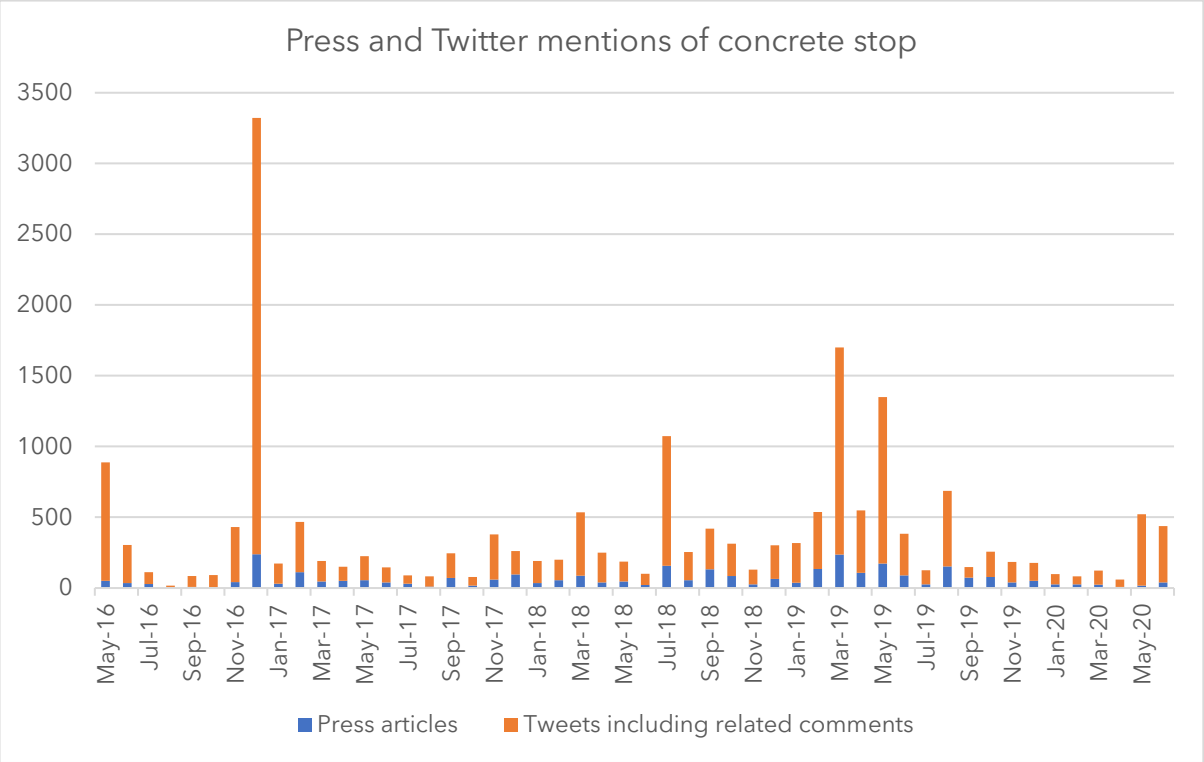

Figure 5.1: Total number of press articles and tweets on the concrete stop

Next, the five peak-months in the public discussion on the topic were selected as sample for the data analysis. Analysing the public debate in these months enables the researchers to investigate the framing concerning measures to combat land take and spatial fragmentation. Thus an answer can be formulated to the question whether planning culture in Flanders is changing.

While taking a large sample of the public discussion on the concrete stop was the most important criterium, these peak months do not occur randomly. As Gamson and Modigliani (1987) note, a surge in news coverage can often be associated with stimulus events on the issue. These provide opportunities for players in the discursive arena to reassert their preferred interpretation of events and provide 'pegs' for journalists writing broader coverage. Table 5.1 lists the five periods chosen, their associated stimulus event and the number of press articles and tweets, replies and retweets on the concrete stop.

Time Period	Stimulus event	# Press	# Tweets
May 2016	First announcement of concrete stop. The minister provides an exclusive scoop of the policy plans to newspaper De Morgen	32	658
December 2016	Flemish Government approves the Spatial Policy Plan White Paper which includes the proposed reduction of spatial uptake to zero by 2040.	170	2,277
July 2018	'Summer agreement' of the Flemish Government in which the strategic vision of the Spatial Policy Plan for Flanders is approved. This includes the proposed reduction of spatial uptake to zero by 2040.	101	553
March 2019	After a negative evaluation by the Council of State of proposed legislation, the Flemish government decides to leave the decision on the concrete stop to its successor. High school students strike and march weekly in Brussels time to demand climate action in the run-up to Flemish elections.	153	1,027
May 2019	Flemish regional elections take place on May 26, 2019. When conservative nationalist parties win, the public discussion focuses on how their voters reject the measures.	123	808
Total		**579**	**5323**

Table 5.1: Data overview

All press articles and tweets were coded using NVivo. Since the total amount of tweets proved too large to analyse, the top-200 tweets for each period were selected by 'influence score'. This score is calculated by Coosto to signify the amount of conversation a Twitter user is able to generate by counting the number of responses, retweets, and responses-to-responses. By using the influence score, rather than simply the amount of followers a user has, we aim to analyse those voices on Twitter with the greatest effect on the public debate. This amounts to a total of 1001 tweets since the final tweet was a two-part message.

Following the technique used in Maeseele (2011), variables were created for each article or tweet that correspond to the frames. This variable was assigned a 0 if the frame was not present; 1 if present; and 2 if it was dominant. The mean scores for these values provide a relative indicator of frame prominence across the entire sample, for each of the five periods, and per medium chosen. Next to frame prominence the co-occurrence of frames was measured.

5.4 Results

5.4.1 Frames on reducing land take and spatial fragmentation

On the basis of the inductive frame development (see Box 1, step 4 above) three main frames and two sub-frames were identified (Appendix 1). With this frame matrix all 1580 cases in the sample were coded. In 157 cases no explicit framing was present and in 31 cases potential framing had become untraceable. This left 1392 cases that contained framing of measures to reduce land take or spatial fragmentation.

Frame 1a: A need for action to safeguard our quality of life

The issue in this frame is that the increasing land take and spatial fragmentation in Flanders is problematic. Urban sprawl mixed with ecological threats (deforestation, land degradation) as well as demographic developments (an ageing, increasingly single-household population, increased residential mobility) threatens the broad quality of life in the region. The position taken in this frame is therefore that these developments must be countered with ambitious policy instruments – like a concrete stop – to safeguard the quality of life in Flanders and beyond. This is in everybody's interest as it will create room for nature, improve wellbeing, and decrease public expenditure. Contributions in this frame underline the benefits in terms of water supply and management, biodiversity, CO2 and particulate matter reduction, public health, energy savings, utilities cost and upkeep, public transport, car dependency, and traffic safety. Some voices state that a sustainable transition will provide the basis for renewed, equitable social ties and create opportunities to build a new economy. This frame is used by all proponents of anti-sprawl measures, from Flemish majority politicians commenting on the concrete stop to green and progressive opposition members. Local politicians defending policy initiatives use this frame to show they are 'doing their part'. Some sponsors of this frame invoke the climate emergency and point out that the excessive human ecological footprint leads to global warming and destruction of ecosystems. This happened especially in the context of a series of high school student climate strikes leading up to the Spring 2019 elections. Experts, scientists, and (climate) activists also strongly campaign using the quality of life-frame. For instance, the Flemish master architect polemically suggested that "building detached houses in these times is a criminal act"[53].

Frame 1b: A need for action but with concerns

This subframe has a goal identical to 1a. There is a clear discursive difference however, that merits identifying a subframe. Contributions here stress that public decision making in Flanders is often hasty, shoddy, and fickle. The subframe is used widely by progressive opposition members, scientists, civil society representatives and citizens who are disappointed in the government's actions. These frame sponsors point out that extensive lobbying, the pursuit of short-term political gains, and opposition between government levels lead to ineffective compromises on anti-sprawl measures. One widely shared tweet by a geology professor voices dissatisfaction about the initial date for a concrete stop, 2050:

> **"Thunderstorms … hence flooding. How about that [#concrete stop]? Oh yes … 2050. #Titanic" (https://twitter.com/ManuelSintubin/status/736290742000361473)**

[53] https://www.knack.be/nieuws/belgie/vlaams-bouwmeester-leo-van-broeck-nu-nog-vrijstaand-bouwen-is-crimineel/article-longread-935033.html (Consulted January 12, 2022); all quotes in this section have been translated from Dutch by the authors.

Many articles and tweets in this subframe underline that by announcing a concrete stop years before actual legislation is passed, developers and landowners are incentivised to start building in case it will become harder to obtain permits in the future. Thus it is in the interest of the general public to improve the quality of public decision making to implement effective anti-sprawl measures timely. To improve policy culture, policymakers should 'take their job more seriously', cooperate, be resourceful, clever and careful. Loopholes in existing legislation that promote sprawl need to be closed. This frame also incorporates various discussions on government scale that are common in Belgium. Some voices argue that local authorities receive insufficient guidance and support from the Flemish Region in safeguarding open space and combatting sprawl. Others argue that public policies are ineffective due to insufficient Flemish autonomy in the Belgian federal system.

Frame 2: Social distribution of effects

The issue in this frame is the social distribution of effects of measures against land take and spatial fragmentation. While sponsors of this frame do not disagree that these measures need to be taken (and in effect are in favour of a concrete stop), they voice concerns of a material or symbolic negative impact for certain regions, groups, or persons.

Most often concerns are discussed in material terms, like rural properties losing their value or disappearing development opportunities in some regions. Frame sponsors argue for mitigating measures to make sure that no one is victimised. Politicians who defend these measures (frame 1), often switch to this frame to address fears and prevent unrest regarding economic consequences. In an interview the Flemish Prime Minister and Minister of Spatial Planning are quoted saying "People with properties should not suffer from this financially." In a different interview the latter says: "We're not going to tear down villages" and an MP for the Liberal party reassures that "developable land stays developable land".[54] Critical journalists and commentators often use this distribution of effects-frame in question-answer type articles that explain the new measures, e.g. "how much is this going to cost us" or "should you start building as quickly as possible?".

Sometimes the distribution of effects can be interpreted symbolically, when people living outside the cities feel demonized by the advocates of anti-sprawl measures although they are not in disagreement with them:

> **Suddenly I am viewed as an egoist, as someone who causes much environmental misery. It's because of people like me that the environment is messed up, that there are more traffic jams and the taxes are so high. They want to increase the cadastral income of my house and the associated taxes and I may not get a thing for my house and land. But I love living here and wouldn't trade it for anything.**[55]

[54] Respectively:
"Niemand mag verliezen", Het Laatste Nieuws 02-12-2016, p.4;
"We gaan geen dorpen afbreken", De Tijd 03-12-2016, p.7;
"Lydia Peeters wil Zomerakkoord al aanpassen", Het Belang van Limburg, 27-07-2018, p.1.
[55] Iedereen naar de stad? Nee bedankt. De Morgen - 03 Dec. 2016, p.8.

In this frame there are also mentions of financial benefits of the concrete stop. Especially when in 2018 it was proposed to start compensating landowners 100% of the contemporary value of their buildable land upon zoning changes.

Sometimes frames 1 and 2 are pit right against each other. Such as when an environmental NGO representative replied to a newspaper headline that read: "Up to 1,5 billion in damages because of concrete stop" (frame 2) with a tweet: "Conversely: 3,6 billion euros in taxpayers money necessary for sewage in ribbon development and countryside developments."[56] (frame 1).

Frame 3: Threat to our way of life

This frame focuses on the negative consequences of anti-sprawl measures. The themes of threat and loss often appear here. Current problems associated with land take and fragmentation are not regarded as pressing. Attention is drawn to how green Flanders looks on aerial photographs, which is taken to mean that there is still plenty of space to build. Measures are presented as a mask to pursue additional taxation, forced land redistribution, or mass resettlement of the rural population to cities:

> **[Concrete stop] = forced to be tucked away in cities full of tiny chicken coops. The seeds for a gigantic social conflict have been sown.**
> (https://twitter.com/vuurdistel/status/804228877123985408)

Voices in this frame argue for action to protect the interests of landowners and hardworking suburban-rural populations. This may be achieved by deregulating the housing and development market. To the degree that climate change is recognised, faith is placed in technological innovation to solve its problems. This frame is sponsored by some representatives of the building lobby, but mostly by politicians and citizens with a conservative orientation. For instance, disappointment is voiced by voters of Flemish nationalist-conservative party N-VA that it supports the concrete stop:

> **When I voted for the #NVA, I had hoped for lower taxes and less government interference. Now that there even is a [#concrete stop], a ban on plastic bags, #container-deposit and a closure of the nuclear power plants in the pipeline, I have given up all hope for change. (https://twitter.com/factsCruncher/status/1019990276654452736)**

There are also frame sponsors with a far right agenda. These voices often reinterpret the concrete stop in terms of migration. The reasoning device used here is that if migration ceases, there will be enough space for everyone and the customary way of life can be preserved.

Another strategy of these sponsors is to cast policy in terms of the hypocrisy of "extreme left" policymakers. Government intervention in the shape of anti-sprawl measures is positioned as essentially taking things away from people and this is associated with socialism. The green party in particular is flouted as the culprit of anti-sprawl and pro-climate measures:

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[56] https://twitter.com/Erik_BBL/status/804619618820231168

> **"Bizarre how the same figures who are in favour of the extreme left [#concrete stop] to "preserve open space", so to speak, want to fill the same 'open space' full of subsidized #windmills."**
> (https://twitter.com/AsterBerghe/status/1020223047054372864)

5.4.2 Frame prominence and use

Prominence per peak month

Absolute coding counts are less relevant as some articles and tweets contain several frames. A more fruitful way to chart the weight of frames in the public discussion is by calculating their average prominence for each month in the dataset (Figure 5.2). Separate prominence scores for press articles and tweets were also calculated. Scores range between 0 (not present at all) and 2 (dominant in all articles and tweets).

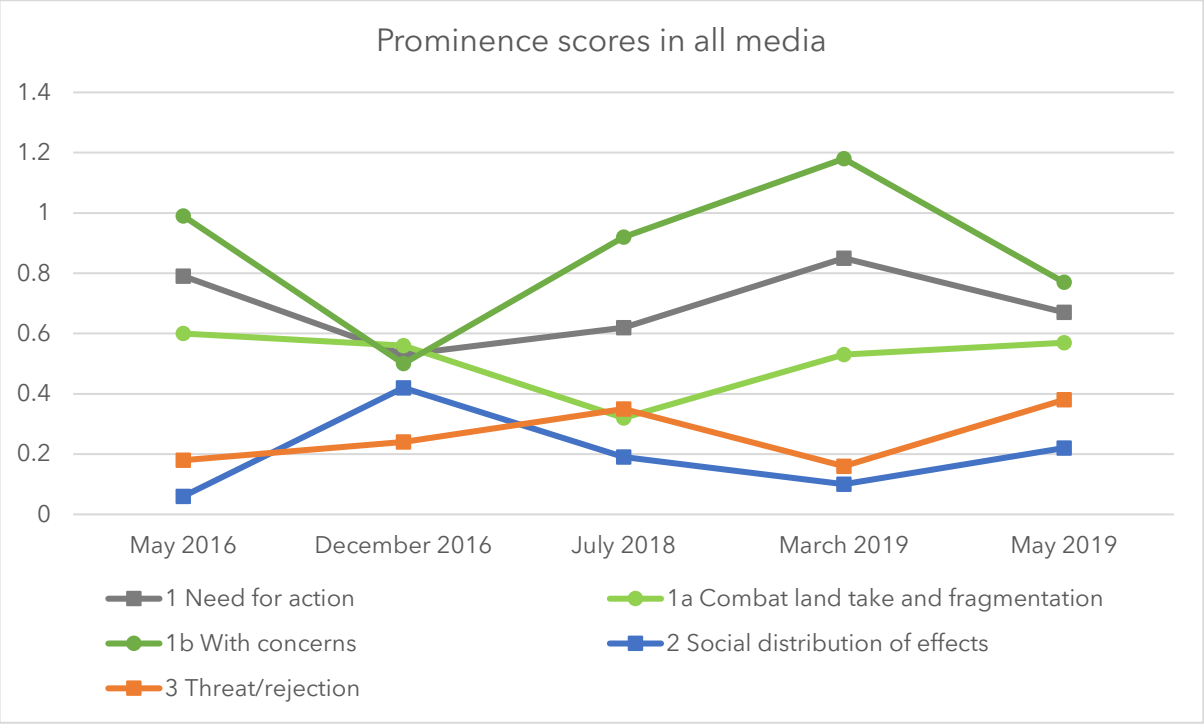

Figure 5.2: Average prominence scores for each frame per peak month

The 'need for action' frame is most prominent overall and particularly in May 2016 and March 2019. These months correspond respectively to the first announcement and to the public debate leading up to the Flemish elections. When split out, it is remarkable that those proponents with concerns regarding the ability implement anti-sprawl measures (1b) overshadow the outright proponents (1a). We suggest this indicates a scepticism towards the Flemish political system and policy practice. The distribution of effects frame (2) is least prominent throughout the dataset, except in December 2016. Combined with lower scores for the other frames this suggests that when the Flemish Government approved the first version of the concrete stop, the discussion was at its most 'open'. The prominence of the threat/rejection frame (3) is on the rise between the first announcement of the concrete stop in May 2016 and its approval in the strategic vision in July 2018. It drops in the run-up to the elections (March 2019) but peaks around election time in May 2019. Yet the prominence of this frame remains low compared to the proponents' frame (1). We will reflect on this in the discussion.

March 2019 shows the most divergent scores in our sample. Proponents of measures are quite vocal in communicating their message, especially in subframe 1b. We suggest this may be an effect of the election period. At this time weekly high school climate strikes, accompanied by large demonstrations in Brussels, further incited contributions that demanded change from business as usual. In election time one might expect that opponents would match the strength of their response to that of the proponents. If they did, it does not show in our sample. The threat/rejection frame is at its lowest here. Discussions of social distribution of effects are also almost non-existent.

When looking at the co-occurrence of frames counted on the basis of the prominence variable we find that subframes 1a and 1b appear together most often. There are also some articles that point out the need for action (frame 1) and discuss the social distribution of its effects (frame 2). Most remarkable is that there is barely any co-occurrence of the third frame with the others. This suggests that frame 3 has a more remote position in the discussion.

Press versus Twitter

Next we look at the differences between press sources and tweets (Figures 5.3 - 5.7 below). Frames 1, 1a, and 2 consistently appear more prominently in the press than on Twitter. This may be explained due to the fact that these frames are 'reasonable' (some form of action is proposed and its effects are discussed) and sponsored by established actors such as majority politicians. Yet in subframe 1b Twitter takes the upper hand in three out of five sample months. Frame 3 is even almost non-existent in the press but more present on Twitter throughout the sample months. This may be explained by the content of these frames. Scepticism and outright rejection are often more quickly and easily expressed in short messages than in extensive texts. It might also signify that concerns about the implementation of these measures resonated more among the most influential Twitter users at the time, whereas outright rejection did not. In any event these scores indicate again a that those who view measures against sprawl and land take as a threat are at a remove from the sanctioned opinion in the public discussion.

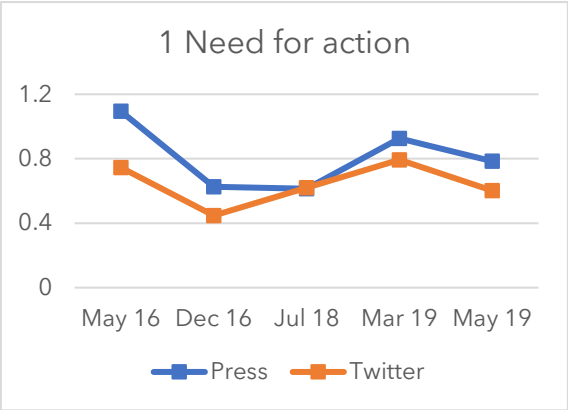

Figure 5.3: Prominence by medium, frame 1

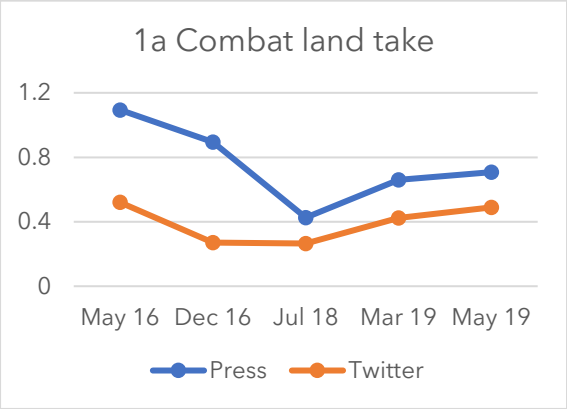

Figure 5.4: Prominence by medium, frame 1a

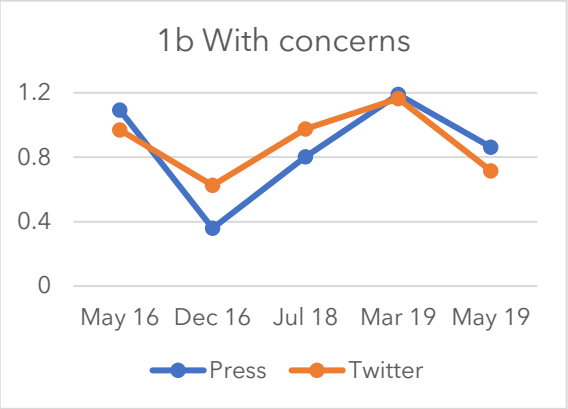

Figure 5.5: Prominence by medium, frame 1b

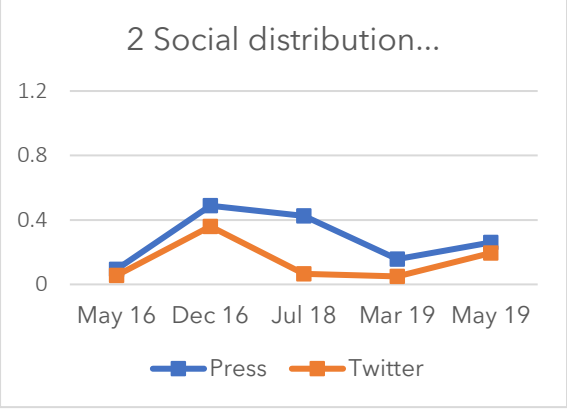

Figure 5.6: Prominence by medium, frame 2

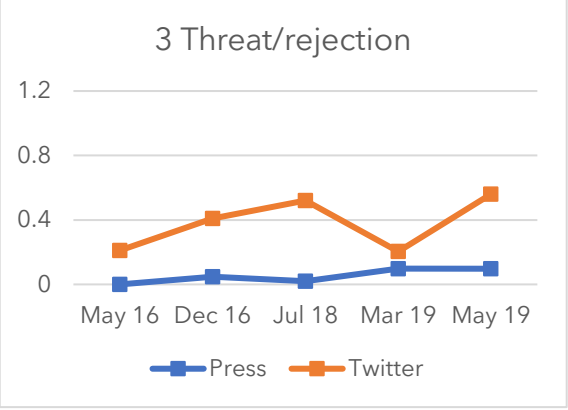

Figure 5.7: Prominence by medium, frame 3

Prominence per press medium

We can also explore to what degree the frames appear in various press outlets. To that end the frames' mean prominence score for each press medium with more than 10 articles in the dataset was calculated (Figure 5.8).

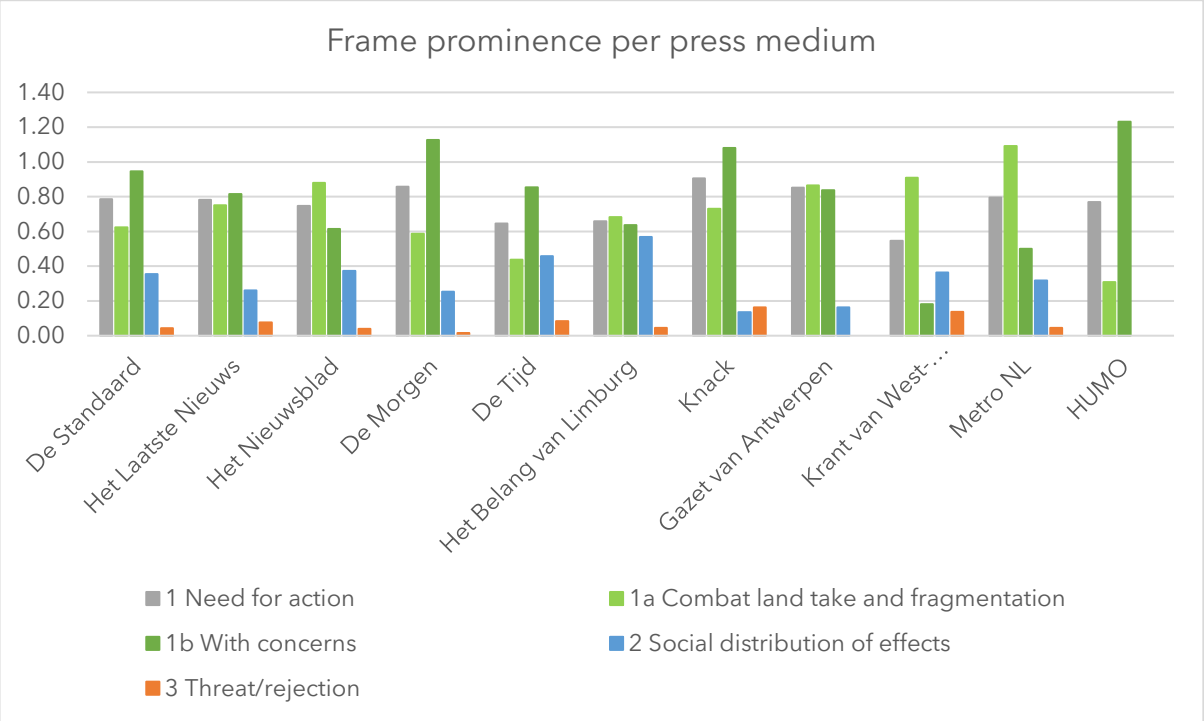

Figure 5.8: Frame prominence per press medium

The need for action frame (1) is strong in intellectual and progressive outlets like the newspapers De Morgen, De Standaard and Knack magazine (0.86|0.62|0.91). More remarkable is that this frame is also prominent in popular outlets like Gazet van Antwerpen, Metro NL, and Het Laatste Nieuws (0.85|0.80|0.75). This shows that the need for measures against land take and fragmentation is widely reported throughout the media landscape.

The social distribution of effects frame (2) is most prominent in Het Belang van Limburg and De Tijd (0.57|0.46). These are plausible findings since the first is an outlet focused on the peripheral province of Limburg where new policies are often discussed in light of how they affect the region. The second is a 'business newspaper' with investors and real-estate developers among its audience.

The threat-frame (3) appears most prominently in Knack and Krant van West-Vlaanderen (0.16|0.14). In both cases this is due to reports of right-wing politicians' resistance of a concrete stop. Generally though, the scores confirm what was found above: this frame is rarely present in the press, but more so on Twitter.

5.5 Discussion

This paper asks whether the announcement of a concrete stop signifies a change in the growth-centred planning culture in Flanders. Essential to this planning culture are a focus on the financial wisdom of individual homeownership, fulfilment of private residential desires, and the safeguarding

of future development opportunities. In order to answer the main question we performed a news framing analysis in the public debate on the concrete stop.

In general we observe that there is not one exclusive voice associated with a frame. The same frames are used by different parties in different contexts. For instance, framing action against urban sprawl as a way to improve the quality of life (subframe 1a) is used both by regional politicians defending policy measures, as well as by action groups that invoke these measures in protesting against local developments. Sometimes framing is recontextualised when it is repeated by someone with a different ideological position. For example, a remark by a conservative politician[57] that many policy measures announced in the past have not been executed years later, was taken up by both proponents and opponents of anti-sprawl measures to prove the point that *either* not enough was being done to combat sprawl *or* that nothing would come of it anyway. The ease of recontextualising framing is partly an effect of the media used. Expert-written policy plans are greatly abbreviated in newspaper reports, with certain elements receiving more attention than others. This happens even more forcefully in the mention of those plans in short tweets. Often the focus shifts from actual policy measures to other, more 'juicy' topics. This happened when the influential social-democrat mayor of Ghent tweeted upon approval of the concrete stop: "Our children and grandchildren won't be able to build anymore. Thank you Flemish Government." After being corrected by his party's MPs, who supported the measure, the gaffe became the subject of a media discussion regarding whether the party 'knows what it wants.'

Beyond the specific elements of Flemish planning culture, all aspects listed by Othengrafen (2010) as part of a planning culture's societal environment appear in the frames found in the empirical material. There is much discussion on the respect for plans and the significance of planning in Flanders. The social justice, efficiency and moral responsibility of taking action against fragmentation and land take are recurring topics. More broadly, the relation between nature and human activity (the climate emergency) and evaluations of socio-political and economic models are discussed.

Hence it is possible to visualise the frames' ideological positions on a continuum of overarching cultural themes that illustrate dominant and opposing ideas in a society (Gamson & Lasch, 1983); Figure 5.9. A resonance with these (counter)themes can give frames an extra charge that increases their reach. As main axis we employ what Maeseele calls the 'power dimension': the relation between society and economy which: "represents the struggle between a non-regulatory approach driven by values of market liberalism and profitability and a public accountability approach in which the precautionary principle, social responsibility and equity warrant political action" (Maeseele, 2011, p. 88). We will discuss each frame's position below and delve deeper into which actors use these frames in what context.

[57] https://twitter.com/HendrikVuye/status/1020579910128218114

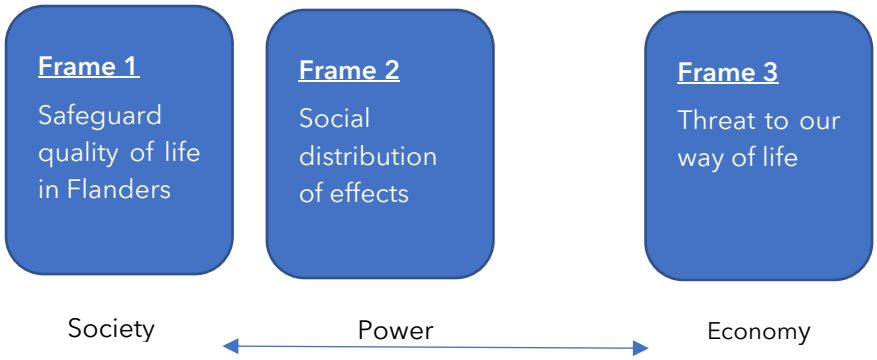

Figure 5.9: Frames projected on the power dimension

The first two frames identified in this analysis are situated on the end of public accountability: in light of the problems caused by spatial fragmentation and land take the state needs to intervene in order to preserve quality of life, with or without compensatory measures. In the analysis these pro-measures frames have become the dominant theme. A broad spectrum of actors, from opposition progressives to majority liberals and Christian democrats support a concrete stop or building shift. Their contributions feature more often in the traditional (quality) press.

At first glance this could indicate that planning culture in Flanders is definitely transforming towards a more sustainable model. Yet it is interesting to zoom in on the differences between these (sub)frames. While the ideological positions of sponsors in frames 1 and 2 are close together, the distinction becomes salient when looking at their motives. The Flemish majority is made up of parties that traditionally have not been in favour of strict spatial planning. Yet they have been informed by experts for decades now of the importance of taking measures to reduce spatial fragmentation and land take and appear to take slow steps towards realising these measures. In the meantime it is strategically more attractive for these parties to stress how measures will make citizens' lives better (subframe 1a) than to focus on the costs and limitations of these policies (frame 2). Local politicians too, stress quality of life arguments to show voters that they are doing their part. Experts, scientists and climate activists stress the positive aspects of improving quality of life to garner public support for measures they deem necessary.

Yet good intentions do not make a policy. In fact the conversion of the – ambitious and highly metaphorical – strategic goals of the BRV in actual policy seems characterised by inertia. Four years after the approval of its strategic vision, the professional community and legal experts have extensively criticised the goals and legislation proposed to make the BRV concrete. In other words, majority politicians' discourse does not match their actions, making it seem like the old planning culture facilitating fragmented growth remains strong. There are two reasons for this. First, compensating landowners for the loss of building rights is estimated to require a huge amount of public funds that simply is not available (Bouckaert, Lacoere, Paelinck, & Tindemans, 2021). This discussion belongs in the social distribution of effects frame but appears seldomly. Second, any actions that seriously reduce building opportunities – with or without compensation – would cost these political parties public support and votes in the next elections. Threatened in the polls by the far right, and supplying the current minister of spatial planning, the position of the nationalist-

conservative party is especially delicate. They have to walk a fine line between taking action against fragmentation and land take, and not alienating their voters. Furthermore in Flanders, powerful cabinets surround chosen politicians, and parties and lobbyists have a significant influence on policymaking. This provides room for decision logics separate from those discussed in the public domain.

The sponsors of subframe 1b do not have this 'problem'. Opposition politicians are free to criticise the majority for their ineffective policy. In the case of green and social democrat parties this criticism is in line with their ideology and their opposition might well strengthen voter support. The difference in prominence between frames 1a and 1b is remarkable. Numerous experts, scientists and citizens using subframe 1b raise their voice to express their frustration with the seeming inability of incumbent policymakers to take action.

The second frame represents the pressures on the traditional socio-economic growth model. A statement like "no one should suffer financially" refers to the perception of owning one's personal property as wise investment. It also serves as a brake to the positive quality of life-framing of frame 1a, reconfirming why no haste is made to implement strong policy measures against fragmentation and land take. Building sector representatives initially support this position by stressing the potential increased costs of living due to rising land prices. When later it became clear that there was a strong political majority in favour of the measures, this argument appear less prominently.

Considering the implications of strict measures it is remarkable that the social distribution of effects frame is not very prominent in our sample. To a large degree the debate seems to be divided between (dominant) proponents and opponents. Yet since contributions in the second frame do not deny the necessity of action to reduce land take and spatial fragmentation, a more optimistic view may be that while questions remain about the equity of proposed plans, Flemish planning culture is indeed reluctantly transforming towards a more sustainable position.

The greatest ideological rift in the analysis appears between the first and second frames on one side and the third on the other. Sponsors of frame 3 cling to vestiges of the twentieth century growth model with housing ideals and development interests that are deemed unsustainable by experts and climate activists. Its discourse resonates with a fear of densification, reduced market freedom, and threatened freedom of residential location choice. It thereby challenges the consensus that action is needed to combat land take and spatial fragmentation, and can be viewed as the countertheme. Far right Flemish nationalists sponsor this frame and charge it by referring to communism and migration. Thus the frame is used as part of a political strategy based on activating underlying social discontent. The fact that attacks are made on progressive left-wing parties using this frame – while it was in fact a centre-right coalition that approved the concrete stop – illustrates how it is used to amplify divisions between groups in Flemish society.

In fact, these results might be interpreted as indicating what Mouffe (2018) calls a 'populist moment'. In Flanders the hegemony of the existing socio-economic growth model is increasingly challenged by negative effects of spatial fragmentation and land take. An argumentation that gains

traction in light of the imminent climate crisis. The existing institutions seem unable to formulate a strategy supported by a wide section of the population. They are torn between the loud progressive call for change, and the conservative (and sometimes reactionary) demand for protection and continuity. This creates opportunities for populist discourses calling for more just policies that can be seen on both sides of the debate (e.g. high-school climate strikers versus (extreme) right-wing parties). The remarkable absence of a discussion on the social distribution of effects strengthens the impression that there is hardly a paradigm shared between these positions in which such a discussion can be had. In this way the news framing analysis in this paper shows the tension between discursive developments and policy action, and thereby the underlying currents of change present in Flemish planning culture.

Opponents' voices feature most prominently on Twitter but they are far less prominent in the complete sample than the voices of proponents. This may indicate that the threat/rejection-frame seldomly passes the 'gatekeeping' filter of journalists, as its argumentation does not adhere to the standards of (quality) reporting. The relative absence of opposition found in the analysis may however also be a result of the sampling method. By selecting the 'most influential' tweets, users with many followers like experts, politicians, and civil society representatives are potentially overrepresented. The opinions of those *not* participating in the public debate through these media cannot be polled this way. It is possible that measures are opposed in other ways (e.g. lobbying or direct contact between politicians and citizens). Therefore the public support for measures regarding sprawl and land take is a matter for further research.

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Appendix 1: Frame matrix

	Core frame	Core position	Problem definition	Interests	Action	Voices
1. A need for action to safeguard our quality of life	**1a** The issue is that the increasing land take and fragmentation of space in Flanders is problematic.	The continuing fragmentation and disappearance of open space must be countered with ambitious policy instruments. Systemic and/or administrative change is needed.	Space in Flanders is too fragmented and too built up and this trend continues. Combined with demographic and geographic developments this poses a threat to the quality of life, economic development, and contributes to the climate emergency.	Action against sprawl is in everyone's interest. It will create room for nature, improve wellbeing, and decrease public expenditure. The transition will provide the basis for renewed, equitable social ties and create opportunities to build a sustainable economy. Ultimately, averting further climate change is key to ensure humanity's future.	The Flemish government should move forward and implement a wide range of ambitious policies towards a more careful use of space.	Flemish Government Local politicians Experts, scientists, and (climate) activists
	Signature elements Time 'lost' in traffic before being able to do sports or enjoy green spaces, "The spatial pattern in Flanders is sick and makes people sick", Concentrating on the costs of a concrete stop is false reasoning when it delivers so many benefits, The 'old way' of simply building in open space is 'the easy way'. Can we find creative solutions that do not take up additional space?					
	1b Same as 1a but with concerns	…but it is very hard to implement consistent and satisfactory policy in Flanders.	…also Flanders has a culture of hasty, shoddy, fickle, short-term decision-making. Insufficient use of facts, outdated legislation, opposing levels of government, ineffective compromises, exceptions and lobbying threaten current plans to combat sprawl. This policy culture actually hastens land take instead of curtailing it.	Same as **1a**	… so policymakers should 'take their job more seriously.' They should activate popular support to cleverly, carefully, and resourcefully make policy. Opposition between policy levels should be resolved and turn into mutual support. Existing legislation needs to be cleaned up to effectively combat urban sprawl.	Opposition politicians Planning experts, scientists, and climate activists Citizens

	Signature elements "Good spatial policy will not get you re-elected", "Give it six months and the concrete stop will be dead and buried", "Five years lost", "Government decides not to decide", "Forget about your villa"					
	Core frame	**Core position**	**Problem definition**	**Interests**	**Action**	**Voices**
2. Social distribution of effects	**2** The issue is that action against sprawl will have a negative impact on certain regions, groups or persons	Certain regions, groups, and persons are likely to suffer more than others from measures to counteract urban sprawl. Usually materially, but sometimes also symbolically. This needs to be remediated.	Limiting the amount of developable land will increase prices. This will have effects on certain regions, land- and business owners. Symbolically: anti-sprawl proponents put rural dwellers in a negative light and overrule their right to self-determination.	The material interests or reputation of certain regions, groups, land- or business owners, and by proxy the interests of future generations.	Action needs to be taken to distribute the costs equally or protect the interests of certain regions, groups, or persons. Measures to reduce sprawl should not be taken too hastily or brusquely.	Flemish Government Opposition politicians Economic experts Citizens The building lobby
	Signature elements Stop building large shopping centres and support local businesses, jobs in the construction sector will be lost, "The right of ownership is essential. Landowners should at least be able to keep their accumulated capital." "Our children and grandchildren won't be able to build anymore. Thank you Flemish Government."					
3. Threat t to our way of life	**3** The issue is that anti-sprawl measures are a threat to our population's way of life	There is plenty of space to keep on building. If there are problems they are not as pressing as they seem or not related to spatial fragmentation. In fact anti-sprawl measures simply serve to take things away from people. They should be stopped immediately.	Current policy plans like concrete stop are poorly conceived and only serve as a power grab by proponents of anti-sprawl measures who want to tax or expropriate landowners and put the hardworking suburban and rural population in a bad daylight.	It is in the interest of the people to keep the region as it is. To hold on to our prosperity and the freedom to shape the region like we want, we should protect the interests of developers, landowners, and the suburban and rural population. Secondary interest: politicise the concrete stop and oppose those parties in favour of it.	Rather than a concrete stop the housing and development market should be deregulated. Innovation should be stimulated to come up with solutions for climate change. Finally, immigration should be curtailed.	Building lobby Conservative and extreme-right politicians Citizens
	Signature elements "Expropriation is theft", Deportation of the rural population to the cities, Ordinary citizens will have to pay for this, You won't be allowed to build on your own land anymore, Concrete stop is socialist policy per definition, Green, left, socialists want to take everything away from you, Other pro-climate and anti-sprawl measures are 'green nonsense'.					

Appendix 2: Notes on methodology

1) Some press groups print near-identical articles in various (regional) editions of newspapers, as well as publish them online. While table 5.1 lists the total number search results, these identical articles were analysed a single time, since the framing in them occurs just once, regardless of the edition or platform through which the articles are disseminated. In some cases very similar articles also appear in multiple outlets owned by the same press group. These framings were counted separately as they are aimed at varying reader publics.
2) Articles and tweets that mention the keyword without any additional framing (such as an announcement of a television program on the concrete stop, or tweeted links to a written article) are disregarded in the analysis.
3) The twitter data consists of both original posts and comments. This means that in some cases an influential poster may comment on another post with the sole aim of sharing it and voicing their assent or dissent. The text of these kinds of tweets may simply read: "agreed". In these cases we accessed and coded the original tweet that was the source for the comment.
4) Our goal was to report on the dominant frames in the public discussion on the concrete stop. Therefore we counted identical tweets, retweets, and comments by different users individually to draw conclusions about the most prominent frames in the public debate. If increased variance of opinions had been the goal, it would have been more representative to draw a random sample of tweets for each time period and to have disregarded identical tweets within the sample.
5) In measuring the co-occurrence of frames through the prominence variable, we can determine the presence of multiple frames in an article or tweet but not the exact volume of text that was coded.

6. Conclusion: building a planning culture for tomorrow's urbanisation

Approaches to shaping urban form are rooted in cultural values, customs, beliefs and symbolic practices by which people live (Eagleton, 2016; Hack, 2012). While these elements of culture change over time, urbanisation policies have existed for at least two centuries. In each era these policy instruments serve a different primary purpose: from measures to keep the spread of industrialisation at bay, through developing regions by efficiently concentrating people and economic activities, to promoting sustainability and combating climate change. Urbanisation policies can be found worldwide in many countries and regions. Yet not every planning culture is equally conducive to their implementation.

This dissertation investigates the role of planning culture in shaping and implementing Flemish urbanisation policy from 1996-2021. The topic was explored through an in-depth analysis of two demarcation processes of urban areas that belonged to the era of Flemish spatial structure planning. Chapters 2, 3, 4 report the results of these analyses. Chapter 2 argues that an evaluation of effects through indicators such as real estate prices or traffic volumes is insufficient to identify the reasons for success or failure of urban growth management instruments. One must also understand the process of these instruments' formulation and implementation. Chapter 3 stresses that an understanding of the conditions for successful capacity building for sustainable urbanisation must take into account an analysis of a region's underlying governance or planning culture. Chapter 4 argues that that despite claims of its empirical obsolescence, the urban-rural distinction still strongly informs the way actors in urban governance processes think and act because this distinction is strongly charged with meanings. The final empirical chapter 5 looks to the future by analysing the attitudes towards the prime instrument for guiding urbanisation proposed in the current generation of spatial policy planning: the concrete stop or building shift.

The first subsection of this conclusion combines the individual chapters' findings into an overarching conclusion on the role of planning culture in Flemish urbanisation policy in light of the literature evaluating the structure planning approach and the demarcations of urban areas. The second subsection reflects briefly on the research approach. The third formulates a number of policy conclusions. This conclusion is completed in the final subsection by a suggestion for further research.

6.1 Research Findings

6.1.1 Evaluation of the structure planning framework

With the institution of official planning, housing and mobility paradigms over the course of the twentieth century, Flanders developed a planning culture characterised by a large amount of individual freedom regarding (residential) location choice and strong place attachment; where a large amount of the population can own their (self-built) home; where land and real estate are stable investments and regarded as sensible pension savings; and where plenty of developable land is

available to safeguard future development opportunities. This planning culture is also characterised by a large autonomy for local authorities to spatially shape their jurisdictions as they see fit. Wary of supra-local interference, the relation between public and private actors, as well as among public authorities is characterised by strategic behaviour to safeguard autonomy. Despite signs of further spatial fragmentation and increasing commuting times in the final quarter of the century, public policy kept this socio-spatial development model intact. As a result, a first wave of urbanisation controls in the shape of a land use planning system to keep spatial fragmentation at bay (see section 1.3.1) could not be implemented.

The structure planning system implemented in the late 1990s was designed to confront this deeply entrenched planning culture. The structure planning approach was strategic, oriented at the long-term, aimed to curb private development, and required trust between stakeholders to enable collaboration instead of falling back on legal arrangements. Yet both the research findings and literature show that several characteristics of Flemish planning culture inhibited the implementation of this ambitious planning approach and urbanisation policy.

Initially this new planning framework set many things in motion: "The very negative attitude toward planning somehow started to change and a new planning culture start to emerge" (Albrechts, 2001b, p. 102). However, a true breakthrough was not reached. Some local governments felt overpowered and subjected to extensive top-down steering. They put off making new plans out of a lack of capacity or interest, or they used the new jargon to pursue the same 'archaic viewpoints' as before (Albrechts, 1999, p. 593; 2001a; Allaert, 2009; Voets et al., 2010). A lack of sufficient means, experience, skilled people, time and "a fundamental lack of confidence in politics" stood in the way of building trust and understanding between public and the government (Albrechts, 2001b, p. 94). The same author also remarks that the fact that the structure plan was only binding to governments was a limiting fact on the power of its implementation.

Not long after the introduction of the structure planning framework, development control was made more permissive again. This process was continued by subsequent Flemish governments (Van den Broeck & Verachtert, 2016) and various other policy domains developed their own policy frameworks with significant spatial impacts. Thus efforts of policy domains that were temporarily aligned in creating the structure planning framework fragmented again in subsequent years (Van den Broeck, Moulaert, Kuhk, Lievois, & Schreurs, 2014). The continued emphasis on legal certainty, which stems from distrust between levels of government and lobbying to safeguard (sectoral and/or landed) interests, did not contribute to implementing the RSV according to its spirit. Finally, the continued absence of a land policy supporting the strategic spatial planning framework also meant that it could not be realised to its full potential.

The RSV intended to break the strong trend of expanding urban sprawl specifically through the demarcation of urban areas. With "clustered deconcentration" as a guiding principle, urbanisation policy was aimed at combating the "unbridled suburbanisation and fragmentation and reduc[ing] the pressure on the countryside" (Vlaamse Overheid, 1997/2011, p. 189). This led to a

comprehensive scheme of demarcating metropolitan, regional, and small urban areas. With its characteristic mix of a collaborative strategic approach, hard zoning targets, and predication on an urban-rural distinction the demarcation instrument was received in Flemish planning culture in a specific way.

6.1.2 A planning culture rooted in a political logic

A key observation that emerges from the analysis of the demarcations of urban areas in this dissertation is the distrustful attitude towards each other of all parties involved in guiding urbanisation in Flanders. This is a feature of a planning culture where a power-based political logic often dominates an expert-based bureaucratic logic (cf. De Jong & De Vries, 2003; De Vries & Van den Broeck, 1997).

Local authorities responded to the demarcation processes in Antwerp and Mechelen by strategic behaviour to safeguard their autonomy and interests.[58] Especially when local autonomy is perceived to be threatened by the top-down installation of (city-)regional cooperation, strategic action is employed to manoeuvre oneself into the most favourable position. On the level of the Flemish authorities this led to frustration that well-intended policy could not be implemented efficiently.

Some powerful or well-connected local authorities could afford to be disinterested in the demarcation process since they had other ways of influencing decisions on the Flemish level. The less powerful local authorities lacked this kind of capacity to weigh on the results of the demarcation process in their jurisdictions. There politicians got involved in the planning process almost immediately even though the first phase was intended as an exploration among experts and sectoral stakeholders. The subsidiarity principle was used in this game of positioning to legitimate the pursuit of local interests, rather than promote cooperation between government levels. Since the urban-rural distinction was coded in the demarcation instrument from the outset, some players used it to appeal to discursive meanings of city versus village to generate support in the wider population. The discourse of 'small versus big', i.e. local governments versus the powerful coercive Flemish government, was also used, albeit less frequently. These discursive meanings partly shape policy reality. The responses of both the powerful and less powerful actors can be viewed as expressions of the political rationality referenced above.

[58] This was not the case in all demarcation processes, but certainly in the more contested ones. Interviews with respondents involved in demarcations other than the ones around Antwerpen and Mechelen show that the size of the selected municipalities relative to each other is a an important determinant of how the process went. The city of Turnhout and its surrounding municipalities, for instance, were of roughly the same size and realised early on in the process that it would be in their best interest to work together in order to present a common front to the Flemish Region (Maes, 2000). From this, a regional cooperation evolved that exists to this day and has extended its activities from spatial planning to housing, trade, mobility and healthcare initiatives. Of the thirteen large-scale demarcation processes, this is the only one mentioned by many respondents as an unequivocal success. In other locations, like Sint-Niklaas, the demarcation only included a small part of a neighbouring municipality and therefore the urban-rural dynamic did not emerge as strongly.

These responses went against the give-and-take required by a collaborative-strategic undertaking like the shaping of city-regional cooperation. Such an approach requires leaving some things open, but Flemish planning culture tolerates little uncertainty and open dialogue. This feature is underlined by the desire for legal certainty, also coded into the instrument from the beginning through its foundation in quantitative zoning targets. These targets served as an important cornerstone for the rest of the demarcation processes. But emphasis on zoning gradually eclipsed the goal of restraining further fragmentation and building of city-regional cooperation.

In the Flemish fragmented landscape with strong individual housing ideals, place attachment is also strong. When the (perceived) residential character is threatened, strong sentiments are triggered. For citizens[59] the demarcation processes sparked fears of a changing morphology and residential character. Increasing building density, the development of open spaces left in the fragmented spatial structure, and the 'threat' of municipal mergers made people worried that they would no longer live in the place of their choosing. Thus in the fringe municipalities the characteristic freedom of residential location choice and the suburban housing ideal was felt to be under pressure.

Protesters quickly got the impression that there was no room for their voice and for local knowledge in the process. This impression was reinforced by the neo-corporatist and procedural character of public consultation. Process supervision and 'treatment' of objections by advisory boards with members of sectoral organisations (e.g. farmers, entrepreneurs, et cetera) meant that participation favoured those already aligned with one of these organisations. The fact that negative recommendations of these boards could easily be disregarded by local and Flemish governments sparked further disappointment. This often led to disillusion and distrust in the Flemish government for not hearing local concerns, and sometimes in local authorities for not 'standing up' for their own citizens. In these protests appeals to an urban versus rural discourse were also frequent and legal action was often viewed as the most certain way to prevent undesired spatial developments.

In terms of the Culturised Planning Model it can be stated that the planning artifacts changed, but the planning environment could not follow suit quickly enough. Finally, the societal environment hardly changed. From a vision-inspired start, the extremely difficult and target-oriented implementation of some demarcations has led to a negative stance towards demarcated urban areas in Flanders. In the course of the implementation of the structure planning framework resources were taken away, weakening the building of capacity to create planning strategies supportive of the RSV's vision. Ultimately the demarcation instrument has done little to counter spatial fragmentation as well as the image of spatial planning in the region.

[59] The analyses in this dissertation centre around public authorities and citizens with the private sector almost absent. One reason for this is that the demarcation processes were binding to governments only. Furthermore the demarcations did not curtail ongoing business processes and annulled almost no previous zoning for development. So while some interviewees mentioned lobbying from private actors with various governments to obtain beneficial zoning decisions in the demarcations, this did not emerge as a strong dynamic in these planning processes.

These findings confirm the picture that emerges from the wider literature. In the early years of demarcating urban areas, the process was found to be too burdensome to be efficient in achieving its targets (Beersmans & Liekens, 2000; Wuillaume & Van den Broeck, 2002). A reorientation towards a "short, more execution-oriented process" was felt to be necessary (Van Wesenbeeck, 2002, p. 1). Twenty years after their introduction, the demarcations are considered negatively by many Flemish planning experts. From the evaluations of spatial policy in Flanders the causes can be enumerated as: 1) the length and complexity of the processes and an underestimation of the time required; 2) the all-too-simple division of urban and rural area which does not cover the complex spatial reality; 3) the lack of an active land policy to support (sometimes costly) zoning changes; 4) the non-realisation of the projected development programmes, reducing the level of public support for demarcating urban areas; 5) the fact that the demarcations were coordinated between politicians on the local versus civil servants on the Flemish level. Finally, all these factors contributed to 6) a juridification of the instrument with the 'the line on the map' becoming the prime goal of the demarcation, rather than the spatial processes happening within it. The promotion of legal certainty as well as gaining control over additional targets amounts of land zoned for housing, industry, et cetera became the main concern of the stakeholders overruling local and expert concerns. Thus the demarcations deteriorated into "the negotiated sum of spatial bottlenecks to be settled" (Leinfelder, 2015, p. 138). The result strongly resembles the previous Flemish sub-regional plans (De Peuter et al., 2011; Vermeersch, 2008; Voets et al., 2010; Voets et al., 2012).

In the new paradigm of policy planning intentions to curb further urbanisation take the shape of a concrete stop (now: building shift). The analysis in this dissertation shows that the currently proposed instrument also consists of several elements at odds with Flemish planning culture. As the freedom of residential location choice becomes more limited by removing the stock of developable land, prices are likely to rise. This undercuts the Flemish asset-based welfare model in two ways. First, building in suitable locations will become more expensive and therefore parts of the population will no longer be able to enter this model of accumulating assets by building their own (or buying an existing) home. This goes hand in hand with increased requirements on insulation and ecological ways of building and dwelling that come with added costs. Secondly, some of the existing stock in unfavourable locations will lose part of its value, which is translated in reduced pensions and inheritances.

Furthermore in some cases spatial concentration will mean that place character actually physically changes, or that merging jurisdictions will lead to a symbolic change of residential location from 'village' to 'city'. The image of living in (peripheral) locations in the fragmented spatial structure, positive during most of the last 75 years, comes under pressure as concentrated development is now increasingly promoted as the best way to live. For local authorities the expected regulation from higher authorities will render some locations unavailable and result in reduced control of local real estate development. This could possibly engender further antagonism between government levels.

Despite these points of contention, chapter 5 shows that taking firm action against urban sprawl is the dominant theme in the public discussion today. Especially in the traditional press. Various groups stress different aspects of the positive effects of these measures, and the drawbacks receive less attention. These findings may indicate that attitudes in the Flemish societal environment are transforming towards support of a more sustainable socio-spatial development model. Yet the analysis of press reporting and most influential tweets also shows much doubt – if not outright cynicism – on the capability of Flemish politics and public administration to implement such policy. It must also be noted that there is a current of opposition indicating that all-too drastic measures will lead to public discontent. Opposition against anti-fragmentation planning measures is already captured by certain political movements and used as conduit to channel other feelings of discontent. This is presumably why it is so difficult to find a political majority for ambitious anti-fragmentation measures. This division may also explain why the public discussion remarkably seldomly focuses on the social distribution of effects, as this remains a sensitive topic.

Interpreted according to the Culturised Planning Model one may state that the planning environment has experienced great changes since the institution of structure planning. There is now much more planning expertise and awareness at both the local and Flemish levels than thirty years ago. Among planning professionals there is widespread support for measures to contain urban sprawl. However, it remains difficult to translate this support into planning artifacts on the Flemish level because of the conditions present in the societal environment. While part of this environment is in favour of stricter measures, there remains also a vocal group of opponents.

Public support and advocacy for the regulation of urban growth is immensely important (Hack, 2012), but this kind of public support is sorely lacking in Flanders. Though there are some recent signs in the shape of large scale climate demonstrations, it remains to be seen whether local activism will translate into region-wide support for these latest measures.

In comparing the two regimes of urbanisation policy strategies (structure planning versus policy planning) it is important to note that the concrete stop or building shift is still in the policy formulation stage. So far it has been little more than announcements and designs of legislation. Once these intents are translated into concrete policy, technical, administrative and legal issues will emerge. This process is still ongoing. In fact the Flemish government reached an agreement on February 23, 2022 to institute a "building shift fund" of €100 million a year to aid local authorities in compensating value loss upon the rezoning of developable land. Criticisms quickly followed that the sum is not large enough to make the shift as quickly as needed; that compensating landowners for 100% of the actual value is unprecedented and will make the shift unnecessarily expensive; that local authorities still have to pay part of the bill is still an obstacle; and that only a certain type of developable land is eligible for compensation whereas there other types remain beyond the decision's purview. Once the building shift becomes an actual instrument ready for use, the focus on legal certainty in Flemish planning culture and mutual stakeholder trust will again undoubtedly play an important role in its implementation.

6.2 Reflections on research focus and approach

This dissertation project started out with an exploration of approaches and case studies that led to a diverse inventory of eight potential research topics ranging from urban and rural policy, to water management, and frameworks for spatial quality. The original intent was to compare Flemish and Dutch cases. After reflection and consultation with the supervisory committee, the choice was made to focus on urbanisation and to compare Flemish cases, rather than make an international comparison. In a later stage it was decided to supplement this analysis of the – increasingly historical – demarcations of urban areas with a look to the future by analysing attitudes towards the currently proposed urbanisation instrument of the concrete stop. In this section I reflect on these choices, as well as on the choice for the planning cultures approach as a main thread throughout this dissertation.

6.2.1 Choice of research topic and case studies

Urbanisation evokes strong feelings in Flanders as the chapters in this dissertation have shown. The structure planning paradigm intended a transformation of Flemish planning culture. This was to be accomplished partly through ambitious large scale planning processes such as the demarcations of urban areas. In the recent policy planning paradigm the announced concrete stop or building shift again led to a lively public discussion and even featured as a regional election theme. The empirical material provided a reservoir of social dynamics and meanings to study planning cultural characteristics and dynamics. It was therefore an interesting and productive entrance into studying planning culture in Flanders. Other themes might have done so as well, but urbanisation remains closer to urban sociology as a (sub)discipline than a theme like water management. Discourses and attitudes towards spatial quality frameworks would have made interesting material for sociological analyses, but are difficult to study in Flanders as the region lacks a central spatial quality instrument such as a building code.

As part of the empirical research the two cases of demarcation of urban areas were studied extensively through interviews, press coverage analysis, and multiple site visits. Knowledge of other demarcation processes was gathered through literature review and expert-interviews. The case on the concrete stop is based on an analysis of a sample of 579 press articles and 1001 tweets.

It could be argued that with a more reductionist case study approach – i.e. fewer interviews, less variation in respondents, smaller sets of documents analysed – a larger amount of cases could have been included. A simpler and less varied data gathering strategy would also have made it feasible to study events in two countries. There are significant differences between The Netherlands and Flanders regarding urbanisation. Studying these differences can be enriching and informative, as various authors have illustrated (Buitelaar & Leinfelder, 2020; De Block, de Kool, & De Meulder, 2015; De Jong & De Vries, 2003; Tennekes, Harbers, & Buitelaar, 2015). On the other hand, finding cases fit for comparison would have been a challenge as in recent decades The Netherlands has abandoned the type of comprehensive urban demarcation that was performed in Flanders in the

2000s. Because the empirical results could be viewed in light of background knowledge provided by expert interviews, publications like the ones mentioned above, and archival material provided by stakeholders this research has not suffered from focusing on a single region and a clear perspective on Flemish planning culture could be obtained. Important sources that were not included in earlier work are: archival material of the private planning office involved, interviews with citizen-activists who opposed the demarcation processes, and public inquiry reports. These allow not only an evaluation of whether the demarcations met their predefined policy targets but also how these targets were translated in the first steps of the process, and how they were received by the citizens that were directly affected by the plans. Furthermore the three interviewed groups of planners, politicians, and citizen-activists enables a triangulation of viewpoints to observe the formulation and implementation of spatial policy. In this way the dissertation attempts to contribute to the literature by adding in-depth analyses of demarcation processes that add nuance and refinement to earlier evaluations of the structure planning framework (Voets et al., 2010). While there has been some literature that touched on aspects of demarcation processes in the decade since this evaluation, none of these reports have been real in-depth evaluations.[60]

Research trajectories with numerous case studies are often also characterised by a single theoretical and methodological perspective. In this dissertation part of the work is not just the empirical research, there is also theoretical work by employing insights from academic literature and methodological tools to operationalise the planning cultures approach. I reflect more on this in the next subsection.

There is one way in which the Dutch-Flemish comparison has influenced this research however. In performing research in Flanders as a Dutch national I have benefitted from occupying an "in between" space as an insider and an outsider at the same time (Hellawell, 2006; Kerstetter, 2012). This has influenced the way I was able to communicate with research subjects and reflect on the subject matter. The fact that Dutch is spoken in both countries (albeit with different accents) made for relatively easy access to policy documents and respondents. On the other hand the institutional histories and cultures of Belgium and The Netherlands are quite different. This means that conducting interviews and analysing written texts required a greater work of interpretation. This position allowed for more analytical distance than I would have had in a research performed in my country of origin. Since my 'northern-Dutch' accent marked me as an outsider to my interviewees, some of them took it upon themselves to explain to me 'how things are done here in Flanders'. Studying cultural codes can sometimes be slightly disappointing because one studies those codes and shared meanings that are widely known, yet not often made explicit. When you stumble upon a source that does make them explicit it can feel as though your research was focused on something completely self-evident. Part of the sociological work then, is to study the reason why these things

[60] With the exception of Daems (2021), who extensively analysed the – less contested – demarcation process of Oostende

have achieved this seemingly self-evident nature. Thus this type of cultural distance in my interviews proved very informative for analysis. While the position of relative outsider sometimes felt alienating, I believe it has benefitted the research in general.

One of the most remarkable realisations for me as a researcher was how intertwined Flemish politics on the various levels of government actually are. There were many references to this throughout the interview material but they were often presented in such a self-evident manner that I did not really pick up on them at first. Only through repetition did this characteristic of the Flemish political-administrative system start to stand out to me.

One account of a local fringe-municipality alderperson in particular opened my eyes to this dynamic (chapter 2). This **social democrat** politician recounted how they went to discuss the Mechelen demarcation proposal at the cabinet of the **christian democrat** Flemish prime minister. The alderperson's mayor was a christian democrat, so this was judged as the most influential way to be heard by the Flemish government. All the more so because the influential mayor of Mechelen was a **liberal**. This meant that appealing directly to the cabinet of the liberal minister of spatial planning, responsible for the demarcation, was felt to be less likely to guarantee success.

So it happened that there was a meeting to discuss a preliminary spatial plan, not between expert-civil servants, but between political representatives of three different parties at the offices of the prime minister. This kind of intricacy is not something I was familiar with before starting my research. Once I understood the common nature of practices like these however, it helped me see new connections and reasons for the way the demarcation plans were implemented.

Finally, the decision to extend the research scope by adding an analysis of the attitudes towards the concrete stop provides an added value to the research. This analysis makes it possible to draw comparisons between the way urbanisation policy was implemented in Flanders around the turn of the millennium versus how it is regarded now. While measures to contain spatial fragmentation and land take are regarded more positively in the media now than twenty-five years ago, some of the dynamics impeding implementation are much the same. The comparison brings to light very well how formulating well-considered policies is only part of the challenge when political and planning practices are not geared to implementing them optimally.

6.2.2 The planning cultures approach and its operationalisation

The first wave of planning studies that took culture into account was criticised for paying insufficient attention to the interplay of actors and structures, to the intermingling of several scales of policymaking, and for the need to focus on transformation rather than static comparisons (Nadin, 2012; Sanyal, 2005). These criticisms are exactly those that new institutionalist approaches aim to address. In this dissertation the planning cultures approach is taken as the main driver of a sociological-institutionalist analysis of urbanisation policy in Flanders. Here I will briefly reflect on the strengths and limitations of this approach as encountered in my research.

A first observation focuses on the trade-off between breadth and depth of analysis. The Culturised Planning Model suggests a broad range of cultural elements as potential research topics

such as 'attitudes, values, rules, standards, beliefs, routines, traditions, ideologies, practices, and norms' (Othengrafen, 2012, p. 5 & 19). By employing such a broad perspective the analytical capability of the model suffers. Studies that focus exclusively on one of these concepts may yield more precise results but obviously within a more narrow theoretical scope.

The explanatory power of the CPM is limited further by the loose form of causality it specifies between the three levels. There is indeed reason to suppose that planning artifacts influence the planning community and societal environment, and vice versa. But beyond that there is little theorising of how these causal relationships play out in practice. It is also unclear where to place some manifestations of culture, as they are part of more than one level. For instance planning regulations belong to the level of material artifacts in their written form, as well as to the planning environment in their practical application by professionals. Indeed the CPM's developers recognise these limitations in stating that the model is not a theory or a blueprint for research, but an analytical tool for sensitising research to cultural elements of planning processes.

That is why most authors that employ a planning cultures orientation supplement their research with other theories and methodological tools, as I have done in the empirical chapters of this dissertation. In fact, the variety of approaches I have applied to the topic of urbanisation policy in Flanders could be considered a limitation to the dissertation's explanatory power. Yet while analyses of planning policy that depart from detailed frameworks that (pre)define culture in various categories of institutional analysis may provide more analytical power (e.g. Janin Rivolin, 2012; Servillo & Van Den Broeck, 2012), I have aimed to uncover a broad spectrum of socio-cultural dynamics in Flemish urbanisation policy. This diversity would have been more difficult to achieve in a research that used a single theoretical or methodological framework applied to several cases.

This freedom of choice provided by the CPM to use analytical frameworks within a research on planning cultures can be viewed both as a strength and a weakness. As a strength it allows a researcher to pick those analytical tools that fit their central question best. Opposed to that lies the weakness of 'cherry picking' a method that one likes or that one is already familiar with. This diversity of approaches also explains why the planning cultures approach has not become a theoretical foundation for an *epistemic community*, defined as "...a network of professionals with recognised expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area" (Haas, 1992, p. 3).[61]

Reflecting on the Culturised Planning Model from the experience gained I believe it shows a basic tension between the analytical value of the term culture in concrete empirical research and its value as a comprehensive category (Bennett, Grossberg, & Meaghan, 2005, pp. 63-69). The CPM

[61] This observation is based on experience with the planning cultures approach, gathered in the course of an extended research period. Becoming acquainted with the approach in 2015, I have studied literature, written and presented papers, attended conferences, organised sessions on the topic, and met other researchers employing the planning cultures approach. Many of these provided very interesting perspectives on cultural aspects of spatial planning but in my view planning cultures research has remained more a collection of perspectives than a fully grown academic tradition.

departs from a broad anthropological understanding of culture as shared meanings. A cultural perspective like this may shed light on all kinds of formal and informal human activity but if not handled carefully, loses all explanatory power (Reed & Alexander, 2006; Smith & Riley, 2008). The CPM would therefore benefit from a stricter demarcation of the variables it researches. When a more specific choice is made here (between values, attitudes, routines, customs, beliefs, et cetera, or a selection of these) the specificity of conclusions will increase.

A further point of attention is to reconsider and develop an account of the interplay of the three analytical levels in the model. The analysis in this PhD showed that 'travel' is possible where planning artifacts become cultural icons that stand for something more than their expert-content. An conceptual account of how this can happen (e.g. planning-artifacts-as-spatial-imaginaries (Davoudi et al., 2018)) would help to explain these processes.

Next, the boundaries of the planning environment as 'shared assumptions taken for granted among members of the planning profession' are increasingly blurred in a world with (proto-)specialised academics, politicians, activists, journalists and other interested parties. A more up-to-date definition of this level would increase the explanatory power of the model as well.

Finally, the model would benefit from adding a theory or approach that introduces a form of causality between the CPM's cultural variables. This does not have to be a model that attempts to explain everything, like some institutionalist approaches do, but a number of central theses (such as in Healey's model of institutional capacity building) can help to understand empirical descriptions with the Culturised Planning Model.

6.3 Policy recommendations

Despite its comprehensive and collaborative approach, the 1997 structure planning framework was insufficiently able to institutionalise new planning practices to a degree that urban growth controls could be implemented as intended. While structure planning had a revolutionary character compared to the previous generation of sub-regional plans, recent literature sketches it more as a hopeful episode rather than a true watershed in spatial policy (Albrechts, 1999; Boussauw & Boelens, 2015; De Block et al., 2015; De Peuter et al., 2011; Van den Broeck et al., 2014).

The somewhat sobering evaluation in this dissertation and the broader literature notwithstanding, the RSV and its accompanying legislation can be credited for leading to a significant increase in planning activity on all government levels in Flanders (De Peuter et al., 2011). De Rynck, Schraepen, and Voets (2021) point out that with the demarcation of urban areas specifically, valuable experience was gained for the Flemish administration by positioning itself directly in city-regional relations. And whatever the mismatch between their original intent and the final result, the demarcation plans still have an effect on current zoning decisions and discourse.

Much depends now on the further development of Spatial Policy Plan for Flanders, its accompanying legislation, and instruments. Just as in the generations before, a policy window is needed to enable fundamental decisions regarding the spatial organisation of Flanders. In the past

generations of planning this meant that several sectors aligned to promote and campaign for a new planning framework. In the 1970s these were agriculture, infrastructure, local authorities, the housing sector, conservationists and planning professionals (Van den Broeck & Verachtert, 2016). In the 1990s the Spatial Structure Plan as first comprehensive plan for Flanders was made possible by frustration about the limitations of the sub-regional plans, planning scandals, urban and infrastructural decline, and urban sprawl. Again there was an alignment of stakeholders, notably local authorities, the environmental movement, as well as two successive governments consisting of Social- and Christian Democrats (Albrechts, 1998, 1999; Allaert, 2009; De Jong & De Vries, 2003; Van den Broeck et al., 2014).

The current political landscape is much different with a significant rise of nationalist-conservative voices and parties in positions of power. These parties adhere a strong value to protecting the value of private property and the individual freedom of choice regarding residential location and building type. These are inhibitory factors in changing the existing spatial fragmentation. Yet the results of chapter 5 on the concrete stop do seem to indicate great support for stricter measures and innovative solutions to reduce spatial fragmentation and land take, especially among experts, activists, and progressive political parties but also gradually recognized and defended by conservative majority parties. Additionally the effects of climate change become ever more prominent.[62] Thus the increasing importance of ambitious climate policy may provide such a policy window. So far it has not led to an alignment across the political spectrum however and the danger exists that climate policy is further politicised as a vehicle of division, rather than unification. Therefore it is very important that (planning) measures to fight climate change are also just measures.

It takes a long time to change a culture, perhaps a generation, and taking the long view is important but not self-evident in Flemish planning culture. The current spatial development model is still 'locked-in' to property relations and legislation developed over the course of decades. In terms of the policy arrangement approach: expert discourse can change fairly quickly, but the associated dimensions of rules, resources, and actors might not change as easily. Change in these dimensions means drawing up and reaching consensus about new legislation. Means have to be found for new kinds of spatial development, as well as solutions for the potential loss of vested (material) interests. Finally new networks of stakeholders have to be built. Farmers for instance, will likely have to adopt a very different role in low carbon agriculture than they have in the past and contractors cannot keep on building the way they have for the past fifty years.

[62] In the summer of 2021 a large amount of precipitation in a short time caused flooding and casualties in Wallonia. This sparked a debate on how well, or badly, Flanders would have fared had the weather front passed just tens of kilometres to the north. A panel of experts has now been tasked with formulating a strategy to protect Flanders should this happen.
https://www.vlaamsparlement.be/nl/actueel/nieuws-uit-het-vlaams-parlement/waterbom

Also, and quite significantly, once the CPM-layers of planning artifacts and planning environment change, this does not mean an automatic alignment of the societal environment. The analysis of the concrete stop shows how planning artifacts are proposed by a forward-thinking group of experts. But concrete measures collide with the reality of public opinion towards curbing the freedom of residential choice and the threat to the asset-based welfare model. These transitions take time.

The question then becomes how current developments can best be captured and processed into an ambitious planning and urbanisation policy. How to avoid that the implementation of a new planning framework again results in a new generation of disillusioned planners and citizens, or worse, in increased polarisation between groups? Therefore in this final section I formulate a number of policy recommendations for an improved development and implementation of urbanisation policy and planning in Flanders. The six recommendations can be viewed in three sets of two. The first two propose a new Flemish urbanisation policy. The second set deals with the way the planning system functions: expert-logics versus political decision-making and participation. The third set of recommendations has to do with land policy.

6.3.1 Recommendation 1 – A new Flemish urbanisation policy

This dissertation showed how a comprehensive and collaborative instrument like demarcating urban areas required conditions for trust and open-ended cooperation that did not come easy to Flemish planning culture in the 2000s. From these findings we can look ahead to the new generation of spatial policy now in development.

The difficulties of the structure planning approach have led to the development of a 'policy planning' paradigm that is characterised by elements of smart-growth strategies such as incentives, exemplary projects and coalitions of opportunity. More than structure plans, policy plans are focused on stakeholder cooperation. They are no longer binding and there is no approval necessary from higher levels. These types of initiatives seem to fit Flemish planning culture better than comprehensive ones, not least because they are based on voluntaristic participation that keeps the tradition of strong local authority intact. Indeed more 'procedural' instruments, such as subsidies rewarding local cooperation and city-deals to achieve commonly established targets can be of value because they do not threaten local authority or force cooperation between stakeholders.

However, while this kind of smart-growth strategy is a realistic one in the Flemish political and planning landscape it runs the risk of being less ambitious and coordinated than earlier efforts.[63] The drawback of a smart-growth paradigm is that it leaves more room for uneven (policy)

[63] A more pragmatic approach towards regional cooperation can also be viewed in an initiative in recent years where voluntary municipal mergers are financially stimulated by the Flemish government. In some cases this actually leads to mergers, but there is no overarching vision on the potential beneficial scale effects of specific sets of merging municipalities. In fact, some municipalities at the fringe of cities merge so as to present a united front to the 'threat' of being merged with the city against their will at a later moment in time. This voluntaristic merging instrument thus seems rooted in realism rather than vision while it leads to uneven and unwanted development from a city-regional perspective.

development. Arbitrariness and uneven development are the flipside of solutions in the shape of planning artifacts tailored to specific stakeholders. In other words, the difficulty to achieve (city-regional) cooperation for urbanisation strategies should not lead to a lack of coordination on the Flemish level. The issues resulting from spatial fragmentation have become so serious that the causes cannot be left untreated.

Successful urban growth strategies require regional policies that provide legitimacy, incentives, and also sanctions (De Rynck et al., 2021; Margerum, 2005). A strong planning vision and policy framework is needed to give direction to new initiatives for controlling the further spread of urbanisation and promoting city–regional (planning) cooperation.

In Flanders a foundation has been laid recent by approving a strategic policy planning vision (2018). A new division of the Department of Spatial Planning, the 'Flemish Environmental Assessment Agency' has started consistent monitoring studies about the spatial condition of the region, and initiatives were taken by the Flemish planning administration to identify locations where building is no longer desirable, where reducing imperviousness would be most beneficial and where spatial efficiency may be improved.[64] Furthermore much government and non-government commissioned research has generated policy proposals to improve the effectiveness of Flemish spatial planning. With this, the materials and knowledge exists to build a new coordinated Flemish urbanisation strategy.

A Flemish regional urbanisation strategy can contain elements from both the comprehensive and smart-growth paradigms. It can be comprehensive in formulating urbanisation goals for the entire region with clear designations of where further development is desired and where opportunities will be phased out. It should also bolster existing regulations to make unwanted development more difficult (e.g. definitively barring development in flood-prone areas or lobby at the federal level to abandon the 6% VAT tariff on new construction on demolished sites anywhere in the territory). On the other hand it can include the 'smart' instruments it already proposes that aim for locally specific solutions. One way to do so would be to start from the 17 established reference regions and develop urbanisation strategies for each of them. Inspiration can be found here in the recently developed regional urbanisation strategies in The Netherlands.[65] The result is not as comprehensive as the demarcations of urban areas from the structure planning paradigm, yet not as voluntaristic as the current approach. It should however be though through for all three levels of the Culturised Planning Model: robust and realistically implementable artifacts, stakeholder support in

[64] See: https://omgeving.vlaanderen.be/onthardingswinst-afwegingskader-en-kansenkaart
https://archief.onderzoek.omgeving.vlaanderen.be/Onderzoek-2462590
https://omgeving.vlaanderen.be/woongebieden-in-vlaanderen
https://omgeving.vlaanderen.be/woonreservegebieden-in-vlaanderen (All consulted January 12, 2022)

[65] https://www.denationaleomgevingsvisie.nl/samenwerking+en+uitvoering/verstedelijkingsstrategieen/default.aspx (Consulted January 12, 2022)

the greater planning environment, and a an attractive and well thought out relationship to the values and beliefs in the societal environment.

The challenges are great, so this urbanisation policy should be matched by efforts at institutional capacity building with regard to Flemish governance culture. The analysis in chapter 3 has shown that this is essential for any urbanisation strategy to succeed. First and foremost the regional means and expertise to support local planners in executing complex dossiers in their jurisdictions should be reinstated. Through its area management (NL: gebiedswerking) process, 'Flanders' should not only be a partner in select areas of strategic value, but also in concrete urbanisation processes. The first goal of the Flemish level here is working to build stakeholder trust.[66]

By providing a number of clear decisions, an immutable policy framework, and fewer opportunities to influence the process politically, the demand for legal certainty should become less central. Pursuing quantitative targets from the outset is also not recommended, as those have shown to quickly eclipse substantive planning considerations and lead to stakeholder political manoeuvring, often along already existing political-geographic divides.

A final element regards urbanisation policy discourse. Spatial planning is not a very popular sector in Flemish society. It is associated with interdictions, top-down intervention, and generally at odds with the cultural tenet of doing what one wants with one's property. The findings in this dissertation have shown that 'discourse matters'. The terms in which planning instruments are phrased and the discourse surrounding the concepts on which they are based has an effect on their implementation. Since urbanisation is such a sensitive issue in Flanders it is important to consider terminology when designing new planning instruments to control it. This was shown by the urban-rural distinction becoming a key instrument of opposition to the demarcations of urban areas by both action groups and local politicians (chapter 4).

More than in the era of structure planning, society has now been mediatised and it has become much easier for the discourse surrounding planning concepts to spin out of the source's control. The somewhat activist term 'concrete stop' is an illustration of how this this likely did more harm than good (chapter 5). The use of the urban-rural distinction as a discursive resource to oppose the demarcations of urban areas (chapter 4) are another. Thus attention to discourse on the various levels of the Culturised Planning Model is a key element of a positive and ambitious urbanisation policy. This does not mean that every policy initiative should be phrased in the most bland and neutral terms, but that a careful evaluation must be made of what kind of effect the chosen discourse may have when shared with the 'outside world'.

[66] Similar recommendations were also made by the task force building shift (Bouckaert, Lacoere, Paelinck, & Tindemans, 2021). Its final report was released in the same week as this conclusion was written and therefore could not be studied in detail (December 10, 2021).

6.3.2 Recommendation 2 – Make urbanisation attractive

A widely supported urbanisation policy should not only come with obligations, but also with benefits. In the demarcation of urban areas action programmes were intended to enhance the attractiveness of urban areas, but those were never realised.[67] In the case of the concrete stop some voices in the public discussion stress the benefits of denser settlements. But since these messages are often paired with criticism of those living in the fragmented spatial structure, they often inspire more opposition than imitation. In other words: while the CPM-level of planning environment is now mostly convinced that ambitious action has to be taken to achieve more concentrated urbanisation and proposals for new regulations (artifacts) are being made, the benefits of such actions have to penetrate the societal environment more completely in order to create public support for these kinds of measures.

Any new initiatives for urbanisation policy should therefore seriously consider how citizens and local authorities can be encouraged to move towards more sustainable spatial organisation and forms of housing. In planning and housing policy this can be pursued through subsidies, fiscal benefits, or simplified planning permit processes for (the right kind of) densification. Recommendations to further attune Flemish housing, urban, and planning policy were recently formulated in De Olde and Ryckewaert (2021) and Van Herck et al. (2019).

On a more symbolic level Flemish authorities could make an effort to frame life in a denser settlement structure in a more positive light to counter the anti-urban sentiments still present within the population. These initiatives should mostly be aimed at the level of the societal environment regarding spatial organisation. Indeed, institutional transformation has to aim for "transforming deeper frames of reference and cultural practices" (Healey, 2007, p. 65). To counter the popular image of spatial defragmentation as a 'loss', more could be done to present it as a gain without making a negative caricature of fragmented forms of dwelling. As was illustrated in chapter 4, an all too simple urban-rural distinction is to be avoided here because it is not productive in creating contemporary forms of urbanisation.

In recent years Flanders has seen some initiatives in this vein. The Flemish environmental NGO BBL published a booklet with 'recipes' for increasing density in urban cores and there is the annual prize awarded by the Flemish planners association.[68] In the past, Flemish urban policy (part of the Domestic Affairs policy domain) awarded a prize for exemplary projects and initiatives. This prize could be reinstated and its criteria brought in line with the strategic goals of the Spatial Policy Plan for Flanders to ensure the coordination of policy between these domains. Other avenues may also be explored, like cooperation with real estate or travel television programs, or even popular soap operas. Finally the Department could try to have contemporary spatial concepts included into

[67] 'Action plans' are also mentioned as part of the policy frameworks of policy plans, but so far these frameworks have not materialised.
[68] Respectively https://www.bondbeterleefmilieu.be/projecten/recepten-voor-kernversterking and https://www.vrp.be/nieuws/2021/11/19/vlaamse-planningsprijs-2021/ (Both consulted January 12, 2022)

the geography and social studies curriculum taught in schools. This was done before in the era of structure planning, but the policy planning paradigm should receive equal attention.

These recommendations are mostly aimed at symbolic practices that can be grouped under the dimension of Discourses in the Policy Arrangement Approach. It should be noted that along with changing discourses, there also has to be attention to changing (networks of) actors, rules, and resources. Yet changing the discourses on urbanisation and urban living can form an impulse to transformation on these other domains easier as well.

6.3.3 Recommendation 3 – Reduce the political rationality central to Flemish planning

Notwithstanding huge advances in professionalisation of Flemish spatial planning compared to the 1980s and early 1990s, a power-based political rationality still often takes precedent in planning decisions. This was illustrated in this research by the reports of political deliberations on 'planning-technical' matters in the demarcation processes, both on the local and Flemish levels. It is also shown in the proposals for a new generation of spatial policy planning by the fact that implementing a concrete stop is repeatedly postponed because of its sensitivity in the Flemish political context.

That the final decision on spatial plans is made by politicians thus promotes the politicisation of the entire planning process. This is not a unique feature of the Flemish planning system however and the fact that in a democracy spatial organisation is determined by elected representatives is a defensible position (even if it is not always to the satisfaction of planning experts).

But as the analyses in this dissertation have shown, there are many diverse and fragmented interests that seek (and capture) the attention of decisionmakers, often to the detriment of decisively implementing good spatial policy. In fact, in Flanders knowledge production on spatial policy and political decision-making are largely separate fields with their own separate and specific logics. Expert-based knowledge is often 'kept at a distance' from the heart of political decision-making. Thus the operation of political decision-making is often a black box to researchers and civil servants alike. This is pointedly illustrated by the fact that political cabinets have the final say on publishing publicly-commissioned studies. It is also remarkable that in the many policy forums and presentations aimed at planning professionals I have attended over the past nine years, political representatives remain mostly absent[69]. In the meantime, spatial policymaking suffers from a distrust between elected politicians, functionaries, and governments endemic to Flemish governance culture (cf. chapter 3). This results in situations where institutional capacity is not properly built or where sentiments in the societal environments are allowed to penetrate the planning environment and artifacts to a great degree. For instance, in Flanders permit regulations have not been brought in line with the Flemish Government's spatial vision for the region (Vanoutrive et al., 2017). Furthermore complex planning processes that take years, as well as the continued absence of policy frameworks four years after an approved spatial vision do not enhance trust among strategic stakeholders and citizens.

The Flemish political system and its associated planning culture need a certain amount of room behind-the-curtains to operate. Ironically, in this system when swift decision-making is the aim substantive discussions seem best not be had in public. This tension between expert-informed policy and political decision-making is phrased aptly by spatial planning professors Coppens and Vloebergh: "a good spatial policy won't get you re-elected" (Coppens & Vloebergh, 2016)

[69] In these kinds of policy forums the politician responsible often gives a speech to 'start off the day'. This way the meeting (and spending the required budget) is officially sanctioned. But they then often disappear due to 'a full agenda', leaving the experts to their conference and thereby reconfirming the distance between the political and expert fields.

In order to enhance trust between stakeholders, improve the image of planning as a public activity, and increase the institutional capacity for implementing a spatial planning framework this recommendation proposes to reduce the distance between the fields of politics and experts, and of political rationality in Flemish spatial planning in general. A number of suggestions are formulated here:[70]

First, and most drastic, is to 'de-institutionalise distrust' by abolishing the cabinets of political employees that surround ministers and influential politicians. These cabinets insulate appointed officials from the daily reality of their departments. They also take away decision-making from the expert-level and create the parallel party-political decision-making landscape guided by a political rationality. This creates a focus on spinning political decisions and (short-term) strategy that is not conducive to substantive policymaking. That ministers and their cabinets are located at different locations than the departments they direct, also contributes to the distance between (expert) civil servants making substantive policy and politicians making decisions. Situating them together physically could improve the ease of exchanging knowledge and viewpoints between these actors, provided that it is not translated into greater party-political control of a department.

Second, non-expert and newly appointed elected officials could be required to build up expertise in an intensive back-and-forth with their departments. For instance by designing an introductory and tailored programme in the subjects of their position in the first 100 days of their tenure.

Third, abolishing the system of multiple mandates would potentially create more room between the levels of government, and thereby more room for expert-informed decisions. Currently local politicians in Flanders are allowed to have concurrent seats in regional bodies as well as in the boards of directors of intermunicipal associations that often own land and develop new projects. This is a recipe for a complex intermingling of local, inter-local, and regional interests and for political manoeuvring on multiple levels at once. Especially in the Mechelen demarcation this led to some questionable situations where local politicians deciding on rezoning certain areas for development were also (direct colleagues of) board members of the inter-municipal organisation that owned these lands.

If this situation is simplified by abolishing the principle of multiple seats and perhaps by removing political representation on the intermunicipal level altogether, it would allow 'higher' governments to make decisions that are unpopular on the local level – but necessary for a good urbanisation strategy and spatial planning in general – without this leading to consequences to politicians' local position. If political rationality becomes less important in the planning process, strategic manoeuvring and the intertwined interests of the local and regional level may be reduced.

[70] While the problems leading to these suggestions were identified in the results of the dissertation, I am aware that the suggestions themselves result from them less directly than do the other recommendations. They are however based on nine years of intense engagement with the Flemish landscape of spatial planning through the PhD and other research.

This should improve the quality and speed of planning processes[71] and ultimately promote stakeholder trust. The objection that the presence of local representatives in the regional parliament is a way to build trust between government levels is a logical fallacy. These politicians' powerbase is ultimately local and Flemish political culture favours local autonomy over regional influence. This means that in most cases local interests will prevail over the benefits for the region as a whole.

Fourth and final, by reinstating the sustained partnership between policymaking and academic research housing and spatial topics (NL: Steunpunt Ruimte en Wonen) studies on fundamental topics could be commissioned that are further removed from the day to day political reality than directly (politically controlled) commissioned research. This would also be a way of building institutional capacity through an investment in academic studies on spatial planning topics, that is not primarily dependent on short-term contract research or the academic grant system.

[71] For instance, the lull in making important planning decisions surrounding election periods can be a thing of the past.

6.3.4 Recommendation 4 – Reform the planning participation process

The analysis of the demarcation processes showed the problematic nature of the public inquiry process as a tool for organising participation. By treating the public inquiry process as a "technical coordination" of objections at the close of the planning process, much legitimacy and goodwill were lost. Because the plans were already mostly done in this final stage and a political compromise was reached in principle, there was little room for the input of local inhabitants to make changes to the plans. This made it hard to change matters or include new ideas.[72] In terms of the CPM, the public inquiry as an artifact conceived and implemented by the planning environment did not meet the expectations of participation in the societal environment. Additionally, withdrawing the means for broader consultation or co-creative processes, as happened in the course of implementing the demarcations of urban areas, is a sure way of undermining any work towards a city-regional forms of cooperation.

Since the demarcations of urban areas researched in this dissertation, the public inquiry process has been reformed. The Flemish Committee of Spatial Planning (VLACORO) has been reformed to a Strategic Advisory Board for Spatial Planning and Heritage (SARO) in 2007. Unlike its predecessor the current board no longer adjudicates objections but only gives strategic advice. Adjudicating the objections in a public inquiry is a task now relegated to the Spatial Planning Administration, which makes the (regional) plans itself. While the current approach may be more time and cost efficient, it is not a proper way of organising democratic participation. Furthermore strategic council members also self-report that their advice comes too late in the policy process and that it has little impact (Fobé, Brans, Vancoppenolle, & Van Damme, 2013). More fundamentally, under influence of an increasingly higher educated and more vocal population – not least made possible through the rise of social media – the weight of institutionally anchored stakeholder groups such as labour unions and farmers associations seems to diminish despite their representation in these advisory boards. Therefore the weight given to these actors in the public inquiry process might have to be reconsidered in time.

In order to increase citizen involvement in concrete urbanisation processes, the public should be able to have a say and contribute their local knowledge and insights at a moment where these still can make a difference. Therefore this recommendation proposes to reform the way citizen remarks are included in planning processes. Current planning legislation specifies that after the preparation of a 'starting document' (NL: startnota) there is a term of sixty days in which the population can formulate their remarks, and that governments are obliged to organise "at least one participation moment and prepare a report" (VCRO art 2.2.7 §2 | 2.2.12 §2 | 2.2.18 §2). This is a good

[72] On the other side of the spectrum the analysis of the concrete stop illustrated how announcing a radical policy shift without having sufficiently thought about concrete implementation measures led to an unproductive and divisive public debate. In this case it would have been better to wait with announcing the aims to the general public until concrete and legally sound options for implementation were on the table provided there was still room to change them when substantive arguments emerged.

practice in principle, but the formulation leaves much room for different modes of execution and there is no specification of how serious the resulting report should be.

Another way to organise this[73] would be to institute an independent and impartial 'planning participation team'. In other planning contexts, proposals have been made for 'quality evaluation teams' made up of impartial experts who are paid for their work (De Olde & Ryckewaert, 2021). On the Flemish level the Master Architect and their team fulfils this role for public building projects. A team for guiding participation of planning processes could be set up in this organisation.

This team of experts organises participation and gathers the remarks in both the starting and final phases of a regional planning process. It prepares a report of these remarks but *also* monitors the way the remarks are included throughout the planning process. This replaces the public inquiry process as it is organised currently. The advice by strategic advisory board can also be submitted to the participation team and be considered the same as other parties' remarks.

It should be made clear from the outset that it will not be possible to satisfy each contributors' wishes. Spatial planning revolves around the distribution of scarce spatial resources, which implies that not every actor can get what they want. Nonetheless it is important to include this citizen input in the process and there should be clear feedback to the contributors what has been done with their remarks. In terms of the institutional capacity building approach: when stakeholders are included in a more transparent manner, local knowledge could be included to work *for* instead of as a strategic resource *against* a project. As a result relational resources can be built, most importantly trust, which should lead to more performative and legitimate public spatial policy.

[73] I would like to stress that this is only one proposal to improve the quality of planning processes inspired by the findings in this dissertation. There is an extensive literature on participation in policy processes with proposals going much more detailed than this one. Whether it would be better to 'repair' the current system or reform it more fundamentally is a topic that I have not researched in depth. For interesting insights about this question I would like to refer to the contributions in Boonstra, Davids, and Staessen (2020).

6.3.5 Recommendation 5 – Mitigate the influence of the sub-regional plans, or abolish them

The now half a century old sub-regional plans still remain the cornerstone of Flemish spatial organisation. Due to the generous and fragmented zoning in these plans and their local additions, and the fact that they have zoned the entire territory, it is very hard for public actors to engage in any kind of guided urbanisation process. The concomitant legalistic focus on extensive land use rights, established in a growth-centred era, hamper any ambitious sustainable spatial development perspective for the region. In other words, the sub-regional plans are an example of (land use) rules, that making mobilising resources (land) and actors (landowners) for a new and more sustainable urban development model extremely difficult. One could argue that the era of sub-regional planning still resonates on all level of the culturised planning model, first and foremost in the artifacts (the plans themselves), in procedures and limitations presented to in the planning environment, and an orientation to a socio-economic growth model widely present in the societal environment. Both the analysis of the implementation of the demarcation of urban areas, as the responses to the proposed concrete stop have illustrated this complicated entanglement.

Yet guiding urbanisation not only implies making new areas available for development but also removing already zoned and built areas to make the spatial structure more compact. Recent proposals to mollify landowners by increasing planning damages in rezoning processes are financially unfeasible on a large scale (Bouckaert et al., 2021). Spatial planning in Flanders is a domain of relatively few financial resources and there are little strategic land reserves. Increased financial compensations will also not prevent the 'negative publicity' caused by obligatory rezoning or demolition.

The situation created by the sub-regional plans must be mitigated before any kind of larger scale urbanisation and defragmentation policy can take effect. Throughout the years some innovative proposals for this have been made. From introducing a system of transferrable development rights (TDR), to a combination of reparcelling and zoning exchange (NL: herverkaveling met planologische ruil), to abolishing the sub-regional plans altogether (Coppens, Vloebergh, De Decker, & Leinfelder, 2020). Especially noteworthy is the idea of an open-space transition fund proposed by the 2021 laureate of the graduation prize of the Flemish Association for Space and Planning (VRP). This fund allows the spreading of the costs of compensating owners for the value loss after a zoning change by paying out part of the land value over an extended period of time (Stroo, 2021). These proposals, while not a recipe for short term political success, should be considered very seriously. Here it is important that proposals are relatively straightforward (i.e. land exchange processes are very complex and time-consuming in the complex socio-political Flemish context), and lead to as little public division as possible.

There are also various possibilities to stop development without having to pay damages. For instance the condition that new developments can only be realised within a certain distance of a road equipped with utility infrastructure (electricity, sewerage, gas, etc.). These kinds of initiatives

can be widely explored and actively promoted by the Flemish level among the municipalities. Most important here would be to start on a small scale as measures to 'solve' the legacy of the sub-regional plans are costly, complex and as the analysis of the concrete stop (chapter 5) has shown, extremely sensitive to public opinion. A grand solution is therefore not likely to be implemented soon.

In this light another, more drastic initiative is to start with a 'clean-slate' concerning zoning in locations where the Flemish administration deems further development absolutely unwanted (see recommendation 1. This would entail abolishing the existing sub-regional land use plans, for instance with owners receiving the right to use their property for the rest of its 'natural life' or for a specific period of time – say 50 years. 'Hard' zoning outside of the urban areas could also be declared void if there has not been an approved permit application within this term. These measures can be coupled with a 'buy-back-or-expropriation' program of all the lands and properties for the current non-increased compensatory prices. This will be expensive to be sure, but by indicating a specific amount of locations annually, the Flemish administration will be able to control these costs.

6.3.6 Recommendation 6 – A land bank for densification and defragmentation

Controlling urbanisation means directly or indirectly controlling land. Yet land use problems are 'wicked' in that they are complex in their causes, manifestations, and open to disagreement about definitions and solutions, especially when relationships between stakeholders are contentious to begin with (Page, 2016). As the analysis in this dissertation has pointed out, the current Flemish fragmented spatial structure presents a problem to implement ambitious anti-sprawl measures because of the many fragmented stakeholders and their interests.

In the demarcations of urban areas this was shown in the fact that it proved extremely difficult to re-zone some of the designated areas due to the various fragmented interests at work. Regarding the concrete stop, existing ownership of land zoned for development is the prime obstacle to an ambitious policy to curb further urbanisation.

This illustrates that regulating through zoning is one way to exert influence on land use, the possession of a strategic land reserve is another. Therefore increased public control of urbanisation in Flanders by building up a strategic stock of land is to be recommended. In terms of the Policy Arrangement Approach: a greater control of resources (land) through regulations (land use policy), can mean a greater control of the actors involved (developers, contractors, future inhabitants) and discourses (architectural and urban philosophies and designs). Or put succinctly: greater land control means greater influence on realising a sustainable urban vision.

Flemish policy already has the instrument of 'land banks' where land is bought for specific spatial projects. Yet some of these land banks have a scope for the entire region. There is a land bank for reforestation for instance. Additionally, Flanders has quite a few vacant buildings, especially commercial ones in the urban cores (Pisman et al., 2021, p. 293). Flemish housing policy used to contain an instrument where local authorities had to keep registers of unused and underused lots and buildings. A number of possible policy actions was connected to the items in these registers, such as the provision of extra stimuli for activating or renovating unused buildings. These registers were not used often and they were partly abolished in 2017 (De Olde & Ryckewaert, 2021).

This recommendation proposes to create an instrument that combines the spirit of the ones mentioned above and create a fund on the Flemish level (a land bank or otherwise) that is tasked with buying up strategically placed lots and buildings to promote spatial densification and defragmentation.[74] Local authorities, who know their jurisdictions best, can for instance propose an abandoned or unused building/lot to the team managing this fund, who then attempt to buy it for the general compensatory price, possibly combined with a right of pre-emption. This way the Flemish and local levels can work together to create a strategic land reserve to incite

[74] Something similar already happens through the instrument of 'strategic projects'. However the difference in this proposal is that it makes strategic land acquisition for sustainable urbanization a more structural regional activity.
https://omgeving.vlaanderen.be/vlaams-minister-van-omgeving-investeert-18-miljoen-euro-in-verschillende-strategische-projecten-die (Consulted January 12, 2022)

redevelopments in desired areas and also work towards removing the worst excesses of spatial fragmentation.

In terms of the Culturised Planning Model, such a land bank can be considered an artifact (policy instrument, planning process) designed to achieve shared goals of the planning environment (insights from studies, operationalised in a democratic process of policy formulation) to ultimately affect conditions in the societal environment (the taken for granted feelings that on the one hand there should be a freedom of residential location choice, but on the other the environment has to be protected from continuing sprawl).

6.4 Suggestions for further research

6.4.1 Improving international data on societal attitudes towards spatial organisation

Most planning cultures research, including that performed in this dissertation, is based on case studies of specific planning projects. While this approach brings planning cultural elements in specific settings into focus, there is a lack of data on attitudes regarding spatial organisation in general. This means that the level of planning culture's societal environment often has to be interpreted with the help of historical research and journalistic publications.

Another source of information about these cultural attitudes is international value research. This kind of research is referenced by De Peuter et al. (2011) who point at general cultural characteristics in the Belgian population that may explain the reception and implementation of the structure planning framework. They draw on intercultural value research by Hofstede to illustrate relatively high values on the dimensions of uncertainty avoidance, short-term thinking, individualism and power distance.

While these results are in line with the findings in this dissertation, they need to be treated with caution. The data and particulars used in constructing these indicators of intercultural organisational research are employed by a consultancy spin-off and not publicly available. Furthermore these data were originally collected in a business setting, not in surveys specifically aimed at spatial organisation or at exploring the relation between private initiative and public regulations.

One avenue explored in this PhD research was to evaluate the usefulness of international value and attitude survey research to understand societal attitudes towards spatial organisation. In this light the EU-SILC, the European Value Survey (EVS) and the European Social Survey (ESS) were considered for understanding planning culture. Of these three the ESS contained the most relevant

variables for spatial organisation. A number of questions from this dataset were analysed further and compared to the data gathered from this dissertation's interviews. [75]

While these surveys include variables that may apply to planning situations, like institutional trust, civil (dis)obedience, individualism versus collectivism, and the attitude towards science and environmental policy, none of these are specifically polled in the context of planning processes. A further issue is that the applicability of questions (e.g. on institutional trust) is sometimes unclear. For instance, is the subject a national or a regional government? In a unitary versus a federal state? As a result, it is hard to determine from these sources whether results really apply to spatial organisation. This makes the information from this kind of survey research at best indicative and conclusions about planning cultures based on these data remain tentative.

Therefore I want to call for further systematic and consistent cultural research on the values and attitudes held towards spatial organisation and planning processes in countries and regions worldwide. This can then be related to knowledge about the institutionalised spatial planning practices and routines in these countries or regions. Existing research like the ESPON projects TANGO and COMPASS already go a long way in gathering these kinds of data on institutional practices, but they do not relate them to the level of the societal environment (Berisha, Cotella, Janin Rivolin, & Solly, 2020; Schmitt, Van Well, Lange, & Reardon, 2013). Therefore knowledge on the values and attitdes held in societies worldwide could provide a more solid base underpinning further case-based planning cultures research.

6.4.2 Expanding knowledge about political decision-making in spatial policy

There are already many studies on how the Flemish spatial planning system can be made more efficient, equitable and sustainable. Yet one dimension of Flemish planning culture that is left relatively underexposed however is that of the interplay of politics, public opinion, and planning decisions. As was discussed in sections 6.2.1 and 6.3.8 the logic of the Flemish socio-political system is often discussed as self-evident where from a sociological researcher's perspective it is anything but.

Particularly in the Flemish socio-political context it would therefore be interesting to conduct further research and uncover the intersecting dynamics of spatial planning, political decision-making and the public opinion. How do substantive considerations feature in decisionmakers' practices and how can the two be brought closer together? More knowledge about these logics could improve the quality of spatial planning decisions in the future.

[75] The results of this exploration were presented at the AESOP Theme Group Meeting Transboundary Spaces, Policy Diffusion and Planning Cultures: New Challenges - Ways Forward, 19-20 October 2016 at the University of Kaiserslautern, Germany.

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Appendix I – Author contributions

Chapters 2-5

Clemens de Olde

Conception of the project, methodology design, data collection, analysis, drafting the manuscript, critical revision, preparation for journal submission.

Stijn Oosterlynck

Conception of the project, supervising methodology design and analysis, reviewing and discussing manuscript drafts, critical revision of the manuscript (Chapters 2-4 second author; Chapter 5 third author).

Chapter 5

Pieter Maeseele

Conception of the project, discussing methodology, analysis and manuscript drafts, critical revision of the manuscript (second author).

Appendix II – List of interviews

Code	Respondent role at time of demarcation	Date
Antwerp		
A-A1	Citizen-activist Schoten	09-05-17
A-A2	Citizen-activist Kontich	15-06-17
A-A3	Citizen-activist Aartselaar	15-06-17
A-A4	Citizen-activist Kontich	24-07-17
A-P1	Alderperson Kontich	05-04-17
A-P2	Alderperson Schoten	19-04-17
A-P3	Mayor Beveren	27-06-17
A-P4	Mayor Aartselaar	03-08-17
A-P5	Staff member of Mayor and Alderperson of the City of Antwerp	02-10-17
A-S1	Planning official for province of Antwerp	11-01-17
A-S2	Local planning official Kontich	19-04-17
A-S3	Local planning official Schelle	05-03-17
Mechelen		
M-A1	Citizen-activist Mechelen	01-02-18
M-A2	Citizen-activist Sint-Katelijne-Waver	07-02-18
M-A3	Citizen-activist Spreeuwenhoek Mechelen	14-02-18
M-A4	Citizen-activist Mechelen	14-02-18
M-P1	Alderperson Sint-Katelijne-Waver	12-01-18
M-P2 & MS1	Alderperson & Local planning official Sint-Katelijne-Waver	16-01-18
M-S2	Local planning official Mechelen	31-01-18
Experts		
E1	Department lead Flemish Administration of Spatial Planning (AROHM)	28-10-16
E2	Member planning group Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders	18-09-17
E3	AROHM planning official involved in Antwerp demarcation	19-09-17
E4	Chair & Secretary VLACORO	17-10-17
E5-1	AROHM planning official involved in Mechelen demarcation	13-05-15
E5-2	Follow-up interview	15-01-18
E6	Member planning group Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders	20-04-15
E7	Staff member for Antwerp Mayor, author	22-04-15
E8	Staff member private planning office	09-09-16
E9	AROHM planning official involved in Aalst demarcation	23-07-15
E18	Staff member Bond Beter Leefmilieu, author	14-10-16
E19	Local planning official Turnhout	07-09-16
E20	Local planning official Aalst	04-11-16
E21	Local planning official Sint-Niklaas	09-11-16
E22	Local planning official Kortrijk	30-11-16
E23	Demarcation process manager for Aalst, Kortrijk & Mechelen	09-07-18
E24 & E25	Planning officials currently involved in Mechelen demarcation	19-03-18

Appendix III – List of terms

Acronym	Dutch	English
AROHM	Administratie ruimtelijke ordening, huisvesting, monumenten en landschappen	(former) Flemish Administration of spatial planning, housing, monuments and landscapes
AWB	Welvaart op basis van bezittingen	Asset based welfare
BRV	Beleidsplan Ruimte Vlaanderen (2018 -)	Spatial Policy Plan for Flanders (2018 -)
CPM	Culturised planning model	Culturised planning model
ESS	Europees Sociaal Survey	European Social Survey
GRUP	Gewestelijk ruimtelijk uitvoeringsplan	Regional spatial implementation plan
ICB	Institutionele capaciteitsopbouw	Institutional capacity building
PAA	Beleidsarrangementen benadering	Policy arrangement approach
RSV	Ruimtelijk structuurplan Vlaanderen (1997)	Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders (1997)
RUP	Ruimtelijk uitvoeringsplan	Spatial implementation plan
SARO	Strategische adviesraad ruimtelijke ordening	Strategic advisory council for spatial planning
TDR	Verhandelbare ontwikkelingsrechten	Transferable development rights
UGM	Stedelijke groeistrategie	Urban growth management
VLACORO	Vlaamse commissie voor ruimtelijke ordening	Flemish committee of spatial planning
VRP	Vlaamse vereniging voor ruimte en planning	Flemish professional association for space and planning