

A place-based spatial policy in Flanders – a quest for success and realizations, partners and instruments.

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1 KEYWORDS

Area development, Flanders, spatial planning, a place-based approach

2 Abstract

Spatial planning in Europe and in Flanders is tackling internal and external problems. The region is still recovering from a deep financial crisis and is struggling with social and climatological changes. Traditional spatial planning has not always been able to deal with these new challenges and actors that are coming forward. In the Europe 2020 strategy (2010-2020) Europe introduced the idea of a '*place-based approach*' as an alternative or addition to traditional spatial planning, referring to the context-dependent nature of efficiency and equity problems that the policy deals with, and to the fact that design of integrated interventions must be tailored to places, since it largely depends on the knowledge and preferences of people living in it. Nevertheless, little research has examined the use of the place-based approach in Flanders.

In this paper the place-based approach, also called area development, is referred to as a tool to deal with the complexity of spatial development, more specifically a proactive planning approach, characterized by an intensive coordination of initiators, plans and projects in one specific area, in order to implement the plans and projects on the field. A place-based environmental policy was already introduced in Flanders in the Flemish Mina-2 plan 1997-2001 and has been more recently developed within the context of spatial planning. At this moment, different actors are testing area-development in Flanders.

This paper reports results from different studies examining two cases in Flanders: area development in the Valley of the Lys by the Province of West-Flanders together with other regional actors, and the Flemish process for the demarcation of the urban growth boundary of Aalst. The paper unravels similarities and specific aspects of the two cases and describes the degree of implementations of plan intentions.

We found that authorities are experimenting with place-based planning in Flanders for several years, but that results, actors and instruments differ. These results can be used to develop future place-based planning, programs and projects in Flanders.

3 Introduction

Spatial planning in Europe and in Flanders is tackling internal and external problems. The region is still recovering from a deep financial crisis and is struggling with social and climatological changes. The traditional land use planning – being a more passive planning approach aimed at controlling land use through a zoning system and regulations - has not always been able to deal with these new items and with the new actors that come forward (Albrechts, 2006). Planning authorities are struggling with the growing importance of citizens, and more general with the broad range of actors involved in a planning process. There is a need for cross-fertilization between the model-based and top-down planning views, with the bottom-up experiences, to construct an integrated approach. In current policy settings, spatial planning tends to emphasise the achievement of policy intentions through realisation of actual spatial interventions and growing importance of citizens as spatial actors (Sager, 2011).

Meanwhile Europe introduced the so-called '*place-based approach*'. Nevertheless, little research has examined the use of the place-based approach in Flanders. In section 4 the context and use of place-based planning in Europe and Flanders is described.

The purpose of this paper is to show what happens in practice; that is how the regional government of Flanders, together with other actors, are experimenting with new planning instruments in order to get the plans implemented on the field. We will illustrate these experiments with two cases, the urban region of Aalst and the area development in the Valley of the Lys. We hypothesize, in part 5 of this paper, that place-based planning processes are very time-demanding, but at the end some of them are really contributing to the implementation of the spatial visions in these areas.

The paper ends with general and specific conclusions on place-based planning in Flanders and in the two cases, and recommendations for further research.

4 The context and use of place-based planning in Europe and Flanders

In the Europe 2020 strategy (2010-2020) Europe has introduced the idea of a place-based approach as an alternative or addition to traditional spatial planning, referring to the context-dependent nature of efficiency and equity problems that the policy deals with, and to the fact that design of integrated interventions must be tailored to places, since it largely depends on knowledge and preferences of people living in it (ESPON and Politecnico di Torino, 2014). Place-based development policy can be defined as '*a **long-term development strategy** whose objective is **to reduce persistent inefficiency and inequality in specific places, through the production of bundles of integrated, place-tailored public goods and services, designed and implemented by eliciting and aggregating local preferences and knowledge through participatory political institutions, and by establishing linkages with other places; and promoted from outside the place by a system of **multilevel governance** where grants subject to conditionalities on both objectives and institutions are transferred from higher to lower levels of government.***' (Barca, 2009, pag. 5). Place policy making is embedded in multiple institutional domains and arenas, which challenge the hierarchical setting of planning levels and the traditional administrative boundaries. All relevant actors (public and private) need to be involved in new planning processes, for different reasons: procedural competences, acceptance and legitimacy, substantive contributions, etc.

This place-based planning approach is related to a more general approach of strategic planning. In the nineties, in many countries a different type of planning was needed, moving away from regulatory policy and instruments to a more development-led approach that aims to intervene more directly, more coherently and more selectively in social reality and development (Albrechts, 2006).

A place-based environmental policy was already introduced in Flanders in the Flemish Mina-2 plan 1997-2001 and has been more recently developed within the context of spatial

planning. Albrechts et al.(1999). It can be considered as a specific form of strategic planning, with special attention for the organization of planning processes, and dynamic networks of various actors from different policy domains interacting in arenas and fora (Van den Broeck, 2001). Since that moment, different experiments with this planning methodology have started, but the regional authorities have decided not to formalize this planning method in the legacy system. Recently, several Flemish authors have described actual trends in the planning system, using keywords related to the place-based planning such as strategic planning, project-planning, transitions, governance and coproduction (Van den Broeck, 2008, Boussauw and Boelens, 2013, Coppens et al., 2014).

Within this paper the place-based approach, also called area development, is referred to as a tool to deal with the complexity of spatial development, more specifically a proactive planning approach, characterized by an intensive coordination of initiators, plans and projects in one specific area, in order to implement the plans and projects on the field.

Within Flanders, different planning initiatives and partners can be found, linked with area development on a regional scale. Over the past few years, due to the Flemish decree concerning the inter-municipal or intercommunal cooperation of July the 6th 2001, (Vlaamse Regering, 2001) a large number of regional initiatives were established (Pisman et al., 2013).

First of all, planning processes for the demarcation of urban growth areas can be distinguished. In 1997, Flanders adopted the Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders, a spatial policy plan (Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap, 2011). One of the leading ideas of the Structure Plan has been to (re)develop and enforce the urban areas, characterized by intense spatial, cultural and socio-economic interactions and by higher building densities. The authorities want to create extra houses and industrial zones within the urban areas, and to stimulate more sustainable mobility. Shortly after the adoption of the plan, Flemish authorities started planning processes in each of the urban areas, to discuss about future development with key actors in the region, in order to agree on a program and on different zoning plans mainly for extra housing and economic activities. In fact these planning processes have a lot of characteristics of place-based planning.

Next, the subsidizing of strategic projects by the Flemish authorities, is been given attention in this paper. *“A strategic project is a project with an integral and spatial character which contributes to the spatial quality of an area. The project is place-based and is related with different policy domains and different policy levels. It must be able to realize the strategic project within a short or medium time period.”* (Departement Ruimte Vlaanderen, 2012, pag. 7). The Flemish authorities started subsidizing project managers for strategic projects since 2004.

Finally the specific programs for area development by the provinces, are noteworthy. In practice, the provinces have been taken many initiatives for area development on a regional level. Often, those initiatives are financed by European funds and situated within the place-based approach. Due to the closer contact with both the local and the Flemish level, the provinces are in the ideal position to deal with conflicting or competing objectives at different planning levels.

5 Hypothesis and methodology

This paper wants to contribute to the growing awareness that producing plans may not be considered as the main purpose of planning. Planning without implementation on the field is futile. Accordingly Europe has introduced the idea of a place-based approach. The present study seeks to elaborate the implementation of two place-based planning processes in Flanders. The hypothesis is that place based planning processes are very time-demanding, but at the end they are really contributing to the implementation of the spatial visions in these areas.

In order to test this hypothesis two planning processes are analyzed. At first a general description of the different steps in the planning processes is given, focusing on the actors involved and the main visions developed. This analysis is based on literature study of policy documents and selective bilateral contacts with key-actors. At second, focusing on the realizations anno 2015, the data of the building and allocation permits are explored, more specifically the number of permits is taken into account. The registers of building and allocation permits are developed by the local communities, and can be considered as indicators for the dynamics within a specific area. In Flanders an allocation permit is obligatory to divide a plot in multiple, smaller plots in order to sell at least one of those plots as building land. A building permit is necessary to build, rebuild, demolish a built structure, fell a tree, etc. Further research is however necessary since for example not all activities need a building or allocation permit, not everything is registered correctly, the impact of permits is differently, a permit doesn't necessarily lead to a realization on the field.

6 Case demarcation of urban growth boundaries – case urban region Aalst

The first case is situated within the central part of Flanders, between Brussels and Ghent. The center of the area is the urban region of Aalst, but also parts of local communities of Denderleeuw, Liedekerke, Haaltert, Erpe-Mere and Affligem are included. The urban region has approximately 80.000 inhabitants. The analysis refers to the time period 2003-2015.

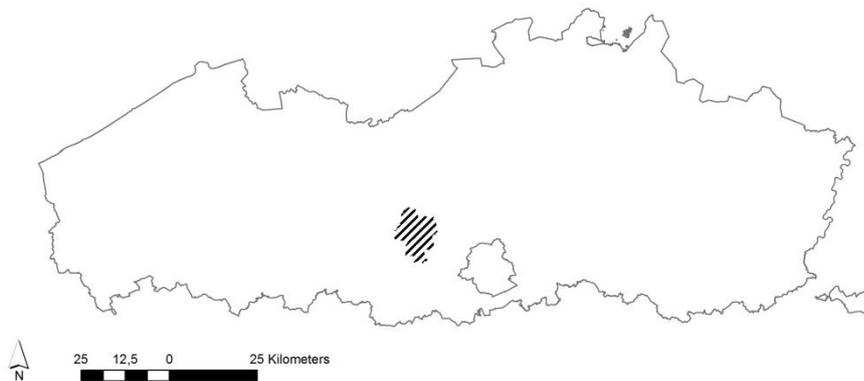


Figure 1 case 1

6.1 Demarcation of the urban growth boundary of Aalst by the Flemish Authorities (2003)

In Aalst the planning process for the demarcation of the urban growth boundary was organized between 1998 and 2000. The process was supervised by communication experts (CIBE) and by spatial planning experts (studiebureau Omgeving). Local authorities, as well as representatives of the provincial and regional level (different domains) and local inhabitants, were invited to participate. The result was a shared vision on the urban area, and a limited set of actions.

Unfortunately, it took three years for the Flemish authorities to develop and approve the regional zoning plan for the urban area of Aalst. The main reason for this delay is the experimental phase of urban planning in this stage. The planning process in Aalst was the first experiment with this type of planning together with local key-holders. The zoning plan itself, was also one of the first experiments with the new planning codex. Finally the Flemish government approved the regional zoning plan in 2003 (Vlaamse regering, 2003). In the table and map below, changes in zoning are displayed. The zoning plan creates many new opportunities for housing and economic activities. At the same time natural areas within the urban tissue are safeguarded and neighborhoods close to railway stations received

opportunities to redevelop these areas with higher building densities and with a mixture of activities.

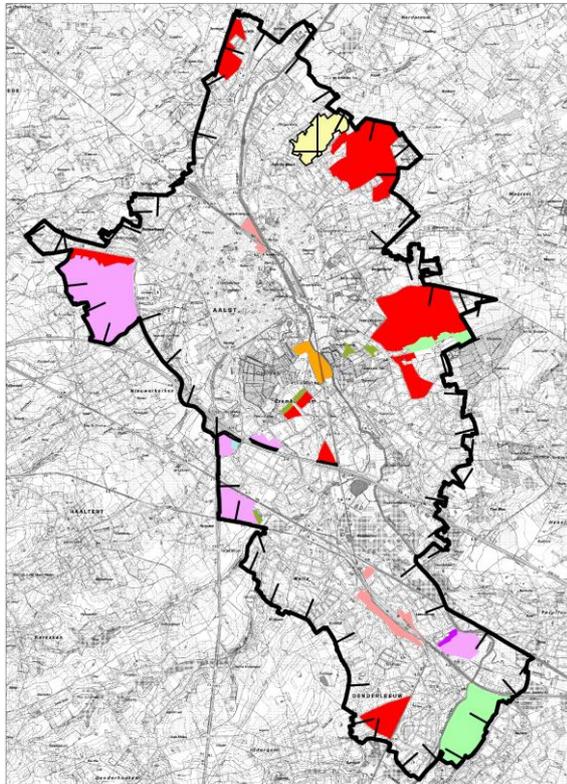


Figure 2 Map regional zoning plan, case 1

Categories zoning plan	Area
Residential areas	-12 ha
Industry / offices	124 ha
Agricultural areas	-180 ha
Recreational areas	11 ha
Nature	7 ha
Other green	56 ha
Railway areas / mixed use	21 ha

Table 1: Areas included in the regional zoning plan, case 1

6.2 Strategic project Siezegemkouter (2007-2011)

In 2006, the strategic project Siezegemkouter was initialized by a provincial development organization (development of industrial areas), and funded by the Flemish authorities as a strategic project. Initially, the aim was to coordinate the realization of a qualitative, sustainable industrial zone at the western border of the urban area. The strategic project was not related to the general residential program included within the zoning plan, but only referred to one of the industrial zones included in the general plan.

After a short period, political questions arose about the zoning plan, and new research, a masterplan and finally a new zoning plan, were necessary in order to find a consensus about the development of the area (Vlaamse Regering, 2013). The funding of the strategic project was used to re-do the planning process of the specific area, and for the moment the area is not yet realized.

6.3 General observations of the planning process and analysis of the building permits within case area 1

The planning process for the urban region of Aalst, finished 15 years ago, was one of the pioneer projects of Flemish spatial planning and place-based planning. The consensus and dynamic at that moment, did not result in many urban projects or long lasting planning initiatives. The ideas to create a project group for the acquisition and development of regional industrial zones and a consultation platform to discuss cross-border and common problems and opportunities were not realized. The action plan mentioned two other strategic projects:

Waterfront Dender and Station Denderleeuw, but no local actors were found to initiate and coordinate these projects.

Based on the data in the registers with building and allocation permits in the period 2004-2015 (table 2) and on bilateral contacts with local actors, it was found that in all areas of the zoning plan, initiatives were taken. In the residential areas allocation permits were given to divide the land. At the moment, the residential areas are partly realized, mostly by private actors. Furthermore the urban agricultural area, the peri-urban green and natural areas are preserved. For the two neighborhoods around the railway stations masterplans were developed and the areas are currently under construction. Because of the complexity, the implementation is spread over several years. The realization of the industrial areas seems to be the most difficult part. Siezegemkouter is not yet realized. Further research is necessary to give a correct overview.

On the map below (figure 3) the different areas of the zoning plan are situated on a heatmap, giving information about the building and allocation permits for the complete urban area and the local communities (partly) situated within the urban area (Aalst, Denderleeuw, Liedekerke, Haaltert, Erpe-Mere and Affligem). The darker zones on the map are referring to neighborhoods with a higher concentration of permits. The map indicates that the central zones of the urban area (Aalst, Denderleeuw) have the highest number of permits, but also some of the residential areas, rezoned within the zoning plan for demarcation of the urban growth boundary of Aalst are lighted on the map.

Referring to the concept of place-based planning within the case of Aalst we noticed, during the planning process of the demarcation of the urban growth area of Aalst, an intention to start a regional coordination of plans and projects. This intention however, did not result into other coordinating initiatives or actors within the region. Finally, most of the initial zoning plans are realized by private actors. To realize industrial zones within this complex planning context without a regional coordination seems to be more difficult.

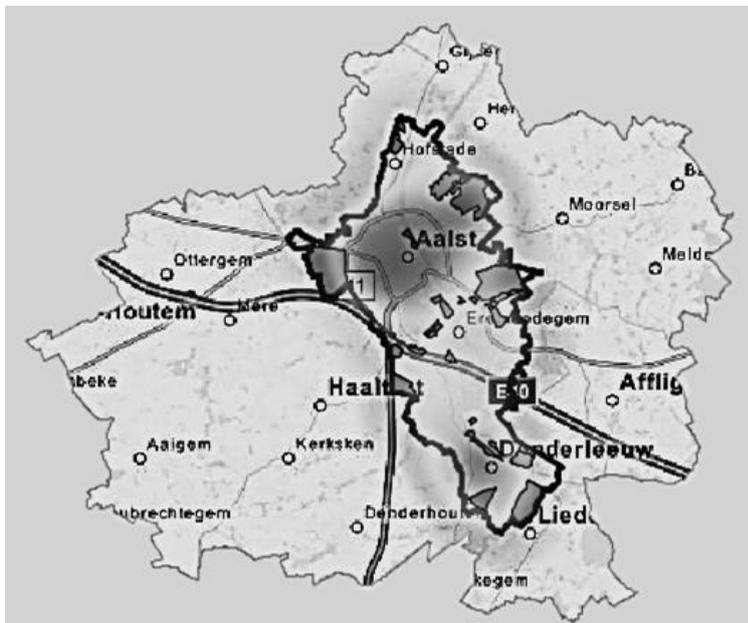


Figure 3: Heat map building permits, case 1

Area zoning plan	Building permits	Allocation permits
Residential areas	271	40
Industry / offices	59	4
Agricultural areas	13	4
Recreational areas	7	0
Nature and other green	20	3
Railway stations	25	0
complete map	12.808	1.210

Table 2: Number of building / allocation permits per area, case 1

7 Case 2 area development by different regional actors– The Valley of the Lys between Wervik and Kortrijk in West-Flanders

The second case is situated within the Western part of Flanders, along the valley of the Lys, which is currently part of an important ecological corridor and open area within the urban tissue of the region Kortrijk-Roeselare-Lille. The valley is surrounded by historical villages, cities and industrial areas. The historical presence of industrial activities, mainly textile industries, determines the actual view. The originally meandering River Lys is replaced by a wide channel with a water regime adapted to shipping. Only fragments of the original landscape, like some relicts of old Lys arms, are remaining.

The second case is much more complicated than the first one, since more actors and more planning instruments are involved. The analysis refers to the situation in the time period 2006-2015. We distinguished four successive planning instruments or processes.

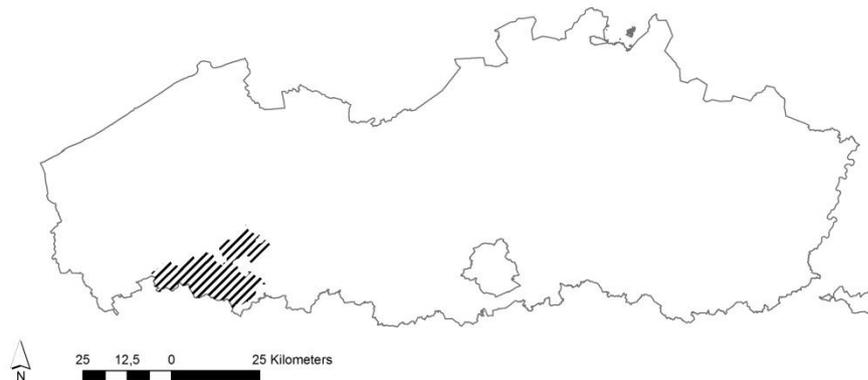


Figure 4: case 2

7.1 Demarcation of the urban growth boundary of Kortrijk by Flemish Authorities (2006)

In 2006, the Flemish government approved the regional zoning plan for the demarcation of the urban area of Kortrijk (Vlaamse Regering, 2006). Thus, the first step of the planning process seems very similar to the first case for the urban area of Aalst. The planning process (2001-2004) was an intensive exercise in strategic planning together with the most important local and regional actors. Finally, Flemish authorities decided not to include the rezoning of the Lys valley in the zoning plan, notwithstanding the shared planning concept that the valley could function as a central green area within the urban region. They argued that it was too early to rezone the area, since the vision needed to be completed with shared actions.

7.2 Area development within the valley of the Lys by Province of West-Flanders

Medio 2003 the province of West-Flanders, intercommunal partner Leiedal and four local authorities (Wervik, Menen, Wevelgem and Kortrijk) decided to develop a shared vision for the Valley of the Lys. This resulted in a report (Provincie West-Vlaanderen and Intercommunale Leiedal, 2005) with a general vision describing the area within a time period of 15 years, and a list of 107 actions with an indication of actors involved and a distinction between short-term, mid-term or long-term actions. Yearly, the action program is followed up by a steering group (Pisman et al., 2011a, Pisman et al., 2011b).

7.3 Regional zoning plan for the valley of the Lys (2008)

The regional zoning plan for the Lys Valley and Open Areas in the region of Kortrijk was adopted by the Flemish Government in 2008, two years after the adoption of the demarcation of the urban area (Vlaamse Regering, 2008). The vision of the Province, Leiedal and four local communities was inspiring for the zoning plan. The plan aims to keep the valley as open and natural as possible in the future. In the table and map below, changes in zoning

are displayed. The zoning plan changes originally residential, industrial and agricultural areas into natural zones.

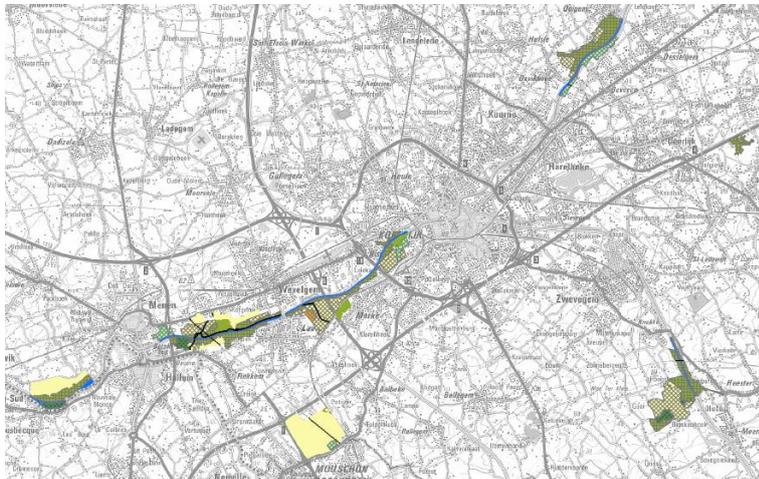


Figure 5: Map regional zoning plan, case 2

Categories zoning plan	Area
Residential areas	-9 ha
Woodland	-30 ha
Agricultural areas	-171 ha
Industry	-2 ha
Recreation	+8 ha
Nature	+202 ha
Other green	+31 ha

Table 3: Areas included in the regional zoning plan, case 2

7.4 Strategic project ‘Green Trails’(2010-2013, 2014-2017)

In 2010 Flemish authorities started to subsidize strategic project ‘Green Trails’ (‘Groene Sporen’). This project includes a wider area than Valley of the Lys, since also three other green trails: valley of the Scheldt, Heulebeek and channel between Bossuit and Kortrijk are analyzed. The strategic project aims to use green infrastructure to develop the regional identity and landscape quality.

A charter was adopted between two main partners: province of West-Flanders and intercommunal actor Leiedal. For every trail a steering group has been installed and a list of actions has been described (Departement Ruimte Vlaanderen, 2012).

Recently the project has started up for a second period (2014-2017). The global aim of the strategic project is unchanged, but more partners are included since the province of East-Flanders has become an official partner. Secondly the strategic project is now more explicitly situated in an international or interregional context of Euro-metropolis of Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai. Finally the project will pay more attention to creating a local agenda together with local authorities.

7.5 General observations of the planning process and analysis of the building permits within case area 2

Generally, the region around Kortrijk is known as an area with a very active planning scene on a regional scale. The analysis shows that over the past 10 years, many planning processes have been organized successfully. The central and driving actors are province of West-Flanders and intercommunal organization Leiedal. Flemish authorities for spatial development and for other policy domains are often involved, as well as local authorities. Recently, planning processes become more international or interregional orientated, introducing new actors as the province of East-Flanders, Wallonia or France.

In 2010, five years after the consensus on the general vision and according actions, the area-development in the Valley of the Lys was evaluated by University of Ghent. They confirmed the intensive planning processes and planning activities in the area, but were more critical about the results of those planning processes in the field. Many actions were not

yet realized because of the continuing planning phase and the complexity of planning actors and planning responsibilities.

For this paper we decided to analyze the register of building and allocation permits in the area (2006-2015), in order to have an overview of actions that led to an actual change in the field.

The heatmap (figure 6) shows that the areas included in the zoning plan for valley of the Lys are not the areas within the urban area (Harelbeke, Kortrijk, Menen, Waregem, Wervik, Zwevegem, Wevelgem, Wielsbeke) that have many applications for building or allocation permits. The darker zones on the map, showing the areas with the most applications, are situated in the built-up-zones of the urban area, and not in the open core of the valley.

Table 4 gives a more detailed overview of the number of building permits or allocation permits (dividing of a larger plot into smaller building plots). The number of building and allocation permits is rather limited in all areas. This is a first indication that the actual changes on the field are restricted. Further research, however, is necessary since the main option of the zoning plan was to keep the areas open in the future. The preservation of the open areas, such as the transformation of an agricultural zone into a more natural use, does not always demand building or allocation permits.



Figure 6: Heat map building permits, case 2

Area zoning plan	Building permits	Allocation permits
1 Laag Vlaanderen	15	1
2 Diefhondbos-Posthoornhoek	28	2
3 Biezenveld-Patersmote	12	0
4 Plaatsbeek-Ooigembos	9	1
complete map	25.759	928

Table 4: Number of building / allocation permits per area, case 2

8 Conclusion and discussion

In general, this paper addresses that place-based environmental policy has recently been developed within the context of spatial planning in Flanders. The place-based approach, also called area development, is referred to as a tool to deal with the complexity of spatial development, more specifically a proactive planning approach, characterized by an intensive coordination of initiators, plans and projects in one specific area, in order to implement the plans and projects on the field. Flemish, as well as provincial and intercommunal initiators for this planning approach were identified.

In case studies it was found that the planning processes for the demarcation of urban growth areas can be founders for place-based planning. Furthermore, in the case of Kortrijk, the subsidizing of strategic projects by the Flemish authorities was useful because a process manager was financed. However, referring to the case of Aalst, if there is no initiator in the region to submit a strategic project, this opportunity is missed.

In the second case of Kortrijk, multiple place-based planning initiatives have been detected, leading to diverse and intensive planning processes and activities. The initiators for these planning activities range from Flemish authorities, intercommunal actors, to the province of West-Flanders. This has not lead to discussions about the global vision on the future of the area. This paper does not focus on multi-level governance or cooperation, but both cases deliver interesting insights. Regional and multi-level cooperation is becoming more and more an essential part of Flemish planning activities (Saris et al., 2011, Boucké, 2015, Instituut van de overheid- KU Leuven et al., 2012).

Focusing on the implementation of the planning projects, in the first case of Aalst, 15 years after the adoption of the zoning plan for the demarcation of the urban growth area, most of the initial plans are realized by private actors. To realize industrial zones within this complex planning context without a regional coordination seems to be more difficult. The most important industrial zone, Siezegemkouter, is not yet realized. For the second case of Kortrijk, more research is necessary to evaluate the results of the numerous planning processes in the field.

To conclude, we found that authorities are experimenting with place-based planning in Flanders for several years, but that results, actors and instruments differ. These results can be used to develop future place-based planning programs and projects in Flanders.

In this paper only two cases are analyzed. It can be interesting to elaborate this research with more cases in the future. The selection of the cases can be discussed. The cases are selected because of the involvement of the author in parts of the planning processes in the past and because of previous research within these areas. In addition, the zoning plan for the demarcation of the urban growth boundary for Aalst was the first zoning plan adopted, which makes it an interesting case because of the longer time period. Furthermore, the region around Kortrijk is well-known for its regional planning activities (Pisman et al., 2013), and the combination of two zoning plans within a recent time frame together with a sequence of strategic projects, justify the selection of Kortrijk as case.

The quantitative analysis of building and allocation permits is useful because it gives a general view of the dynamics on the field in the areas. However the quantitative analysis can be discussed and further research is recommended for different reasons, such as: not all activities need a building or allocation permit, not everything is registered correctly, the impact of permits is differently, a permit doesn't necessarily lead to a realization on the field. More interviews with local actors and an analysis of recent evolutions and changes on maps or on the field can be added in the future.

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