

Belgium's ordinary landscapes seen by Belgians

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Ordinary landscapes are the surroundings of more and more people living in the Belgian urban sprawl context. They are worth to be better understood not only because the European Landscape convention (Florence, 2000) suggest it, but also for they are also places where new challenges for the 21st century - such as renewable energy – are developing.

The Lacsawep project (Landscape Capacity and Social Attitudes towards Wind Energy Parks in Belgium) was presented during a previous session of the Belgian geographical days in Brussels. The results of the Lacsawep's photo questionnaire survey (n=1543) on landscape attractiveness have been more deeply examined since.

We have analyzed the cross-cultural and sub-cultural differences. We found variation in preferences towards some types of landscape while others seem to reach a consensus. To understand this, we analyzed the content of landscapes. Recurrent features in the non-consensual landscapes have raised hypotheses on their influence on perceived landscape attractiveness.

Flemings seemed to feel more attracted by typically Flemish landscapes than Walloons. With "typically Flemish landscapes" we mean rural landscapes with smaller agrarian plots due to the higher urbanisation rate in Flanders, compared to Wallonia. Flemings also showed a more positive attitude towards rural landscapes in general. Less educated people were more positive towards manmade landscapes: modern agricultural landscapes, canalized waterways, etc. Country people felt better towards large dark forest dominating backgrounds than city dwellers. Age seemed also to have an influence. Older people seemed to prefer landscapes where buildings could be seen, while younger respondents preferred wilder landscapes. Finally, gender seemed to have an effect, as it could be seen that women tend to prefer worked fields.

Thanks to these hypotheses, we elaborated a new research design mixing quantitative and qualitative approaches. We developed a new photo-questionnaire with 30 photographs, selected to maximize the presence of hypothetic influencing features. Respondents were chosen according to their profile in three different regions (Ardennes, the region between Sambre and Meuse rivers and the surroundings of Tournai. Young students (18-25 years) from teaching schools and one of their parents were interviewed in two phases. The first stage consisted, as in the previous survey, to mark landscapes on a Likert scale according to their attractiveness. The second stage consisted of semi-directed interviews starting from the explanation of their choices.

But is it really respondent's characteristics (gender, age, education, domicile) that have an influence or does the personal background get the upper hand? The first results tend to prove that both have an influence. Most landscapes are analyzed only from an esthetical viewpoint, as scenery (colours, weather, brightness, landuse patterns, shapes). But there is an exception to this rule. When landscape contains meaningful elements, they are analysed as a place. People project themselves doing something there (walking, fishing, building a house...). Sometimes, these meaningful elements are related to personal affection (good or bad memories, nostalgia) in which case people can appropriate the landscape as a personal landscape.

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