

Başak Aycan Özkan and Peter R. Davids

# Conference Report

## *The 16th Annual Conference on Planning Law and Property Rights (PLPR), Ghent, Belgium, 4–8 July 2022*

From 4 July to 8 July, the KU Leuven, Ghent University and HoGent jointly hosted the 16th annual conference of the International Academic Association on Planning, Law and Property Rights (PLPR) in Ghent, Belgium. This conference was the first to be held on site (due to COVID-19), and follows an online conference in 2021 supported by the German Akademie für Raumentwicklung in der Leibniz-Gemeinschaft (ARL).

Dr Hans Leinfelder (*KU Leuven*), representative of the local organising committee, Prof. Geert van Hoorick, professor at the faculty of Law and Criminology (*Ghent University*) and Prof. Thomas Hartmann, president of PLPR (*TU Dortmund*), welcomed the 110 participants from sixty-nine universities and research institutes in thirty countries across the globe and challenged the participants to contribute to fruitful debates during the four days of conference. Never before have three universities been jointly responsible for the organisation. This partnership deserves recognition for the excellent organisation of the parallel sessions, keynote speeches and roundtable, hosted in multiple buildings of the three universities throughout the city centre of Ghent, as well as marvellous excursions and cheerful social events.

The theme of the conference, ‘With or without borders’, referred to the discussion on Flemish sprawl, its territory-wide strongly anchored land-use plans, and the ‘betonstop’ aiming to reduce this unbridled growth. However, according to Hans Leinfelder, the title also referred to the first face-to-face gathering of PLPR in Ghent since the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Full-day PhD workshop**

Since it was held for the first time in 2016, the PhD workshop has been one of the most valuable parts of the PLPR conference for young academics. As in the previous years, an interactive and fruitful PhD workshop constituted the first day of the conference

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programme in Ghent. The full-day PhD workshop took place on 4 July 2022 in Campus Wijnaert, with the participation of 17 PhD students attending the PLPR conference.

The PhD workshop included both plenary and group sessions. In the plenary introduction session of the workshop, students had a chance to listen to valuable presentations of ‘Research Audience, Goal, Question, and Design’ by Prof. Dr Richard Norton and ‘The ‘do’s and don’ts of PhD research’ by Prof. Dr Tejo Spit. After the introductory session, students with similar research topics formed groups that were led by one of five mentors – Prof. Dr Richard Norton (*University of Michigan*), Prof. Dr Tejo Spit (*Utrecht University*), Prof. Dr Janet Askew (*Ulster University*), Prof. Dr Heather Ritchie (*Ulster University*) and Prof. Dr Willem Korthals Altes (*TU Delft*). With the guidance of mentors and the coordination of Sofija Nikolić Popadić (*Institute of Social Sciences, Serbia and PLPR PhD coordinator*) and Andreas Hengstermann (*Ulster University*), PhD students found an opportunity to share their research topics and get recommendations to improve them. In brief, mutual learning on methods, problems and solutions, deepening the theoretical understanding, extending the empirical scope, learning mainstream research in the field, and networking were the main achievements of the workshop. All in all, the workshop was very fruitful according to the students, and they regretted that the workshop only lasted for one day.

## Parallel sessions

A total of 111 presentations were held during the conference, spread over 28 thematic sessions within the field of PLPR. Thematic sessions included instruments for value capturing, climate change, market-based tools for ecosystem services, struggles over rural space, informality, law and property, housing, urban sprawl and densification, policy analysis, obsolescence and vacancy, and green infrastructure. Interesting presentations on a wide variety of subjects contribute to the review and discussion of recent developments in cities and emerging challenges and solutions in the field. For example, Lander van Hove presented valuable insights from planning practice on the introduction of ecosystem services on private land. This presentation was highly praised by the audience, and an inspiring discussion followed future research questions. In a further example, Rupesh Shrestha focused on the flood vulnerability issue in urban areas and proposed a combination of grey, green and blue infrastructure as a promising solution to reduce flood vulnerability. To get these infrastructures implemented, Shrestha suggests wider integration of such hybrid approaches into building codes and planning byelaws as a strategy.

Special sessions of the conference focused on two main themes: the struggle over rural space, and market-based land-use tools for ecosystem services. In the special sessions on the struggle over rural space, participants had a chance to discuss recent

issues affecting rural space in many respects. Some of these issues are the protection–construction dichotomy on agricultural lands, using land taxation for regulating urbanisation, and missing links between land-use planning and food planning. Participants illustrated current land policies and policy measures used to solve the identified issues, and examined their social, economic and environmental impacts. On top of that, after measuring the efficiency of certain policy measures, researchers suggested alternative policy measures, regulations and implementation processes. In addition to policies, public authorities implementing policy processes have great importance in solving struggles on rural space. For this, some presentations concentrated more on the changing roles of public authorities in the planning and implementation processes.

In the special sessions on market-based land-use tools for ecosystem services, participants addressed urban challenges that are becoming more prominent with global warming. Some of these challenges are flood risk management, protecting urban agriculture, preserving natural areas in peri-urban land, and funding, enhancing and preserving ecosystem services. To link the planning system to future spatial challenges, and cope with them, researchers proposed the adoption of effective market-based tools. Those tools can be the ones already used, such as the transfer of development rights or relatively new ones such as experimental law. Researchers identified economic, legal, governance and social barriers and opportunities associated with these market-based tools. The experiences from different countries such as Canada, Persia, Portugal, Belgium and Poland enabled valuable discussion on the legal framework and role of land owners to increase the effectiveness.

## Round table session

During the roundtable session of the conference Geet van Hoorick (*Ghent University*) and Peter Lacoere (*HoGent*) reflected on the Flemish horizontal metropolis of urban sprawl and the planning policies dealing with it. Moderated by Thomas Hartman (*TU Dortmund*), the international experts of PLPR discussed possible strategies to reduce future sprawl in the Flemish region. Inspirations from beyond the Flemish region provided new insights on this on-going struggle. Participating experts included Peter Cabus (*secretary general of the Department of Environment of Flanders*), Prof. Tom Coppens (*University of Antwerp*), Prof. Jean-Marie Halleux (*Université de Liège*), Prof. Edwin Buitelaar (*Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency*), Prof. Janet Askew (*University of Ulster*) and Dr Eliška Vejchodská (*Jan Evangelista Purkyně University, Czechia*).

## Excursions

PLPR organised excursions and social events for approximately 100 participants of the congress. Participants enjoyed the beautiful walking and cycling tours that were organised to showcase recent urban development areas in the neighbourhoods of Ghent. The excursion at Gentbrugse Meersen illustrated how the development of a green-blue network goes hand in hand with the development of safe biking routes into the city. The urban renewal project ‘Ledeborg Alive’ showed how the quality of living in dense nineteenth-century developments can be improved by implementing carefully chosen minuscule green developments on street corners and neighbourhood squares. The site visit to the urban transformation project ‘Oude dokken’ illustrated how conceptual master planning of public space and private housing development has led to a new popular neighbourhood in the old harbour of the city. The fourth excursion illustrated how the former gazometer area Tondelier is transformed into a sustainable residential neighbourhood with a public park. Next to these excursions, HoGent organised a live jazz concert by young local talent. Especially for the occasion of the PLPR conference in Ghent, a special beer called ‘t Bijloke’ was brewed by HoGent and served during the social event.

## Keynote speeches

The first keynote, Phillipe van Wesenbeeck (*Chief officer Urban Planning and Spatial Service*) introduced the story of city planning in Ghent to the international audience. He explained how the historical industrial expansions nowadays provide challenges and opportunities for green renovations in the urban fabric of Ghent. By providing collective living spaces and green areas on building block level and developing sustainable infrastructure and reduce individual car use across in the whole city, the city government aims to ‘grow wisely’. The keynote kickstarted a lively discussion on growth, densification, social conflicts and justice.

The second keynote was provided by the executive director of the European Environment Agency, Hans Bruyninckx. He provided the audience with a keynote speech titled ‘Land: the missing link for Europe’s climate and biodiversity ambitions?’ and addressed the rapid and irreversible impacts of climate change on world systems and indicated unsustainable consumption as an important factor of climate change. Efficient use of resources in different systems such as mobility, energy and the food industry, requires a systematic change in policies and policy implementation. The European Environment Agency works on the transition at the policy level to solve the problems and achieve biodiversity and climate goals. At this point, Bruyninckx emphasises the significance of the land dimension of policies for a systematic change with its social and economic dimensions.

Prof. Patricia Popelier (*Constitutional Law and Legislative Studies, University of Antwerp*) gave a keynote on the dynamics of legal certainty in a system of sustainable governance. Popelier inspired participants by investigating whether legal certainty is possible in times of urgency. The research had three main conclusions. The first of these is that legal certainty is a dynamic concept which is highly associated with the terms accessibility and foreseeability. The second conclusion is that legal certainty is not an obstacle to but an essential part of sustainable governance. Sustainability in governance requires stability, simplicity and adaptiveness of laws. Popelier explained the final conclusion of the research as legal certainty requires sustained efforts of all parties.

In the fourth keynote entitled 'Urban planning in the age of financialization' by Prof. Manuel Aalbers (*Human geographer at KU Leuven, Belgium*) enthusiastically discussed how that monetary policy is affecting housing, planning and land values; this financial rationale is used by actors and becomes part of urban planning. Based on examples from the Netherlands, Belgium and Brazil, he illustrated how entrepreneurial urban governance transforms towards financial urban governance. This results in public land being used to ensure inventors' profitability and in rising prices of private land. The session ended with a rich set of questions on the role of planning and the role of private money on investments on societal goals.

All keynote lectures are still available at the event website at the KU Leuven (<https://arch.kuleuven.be/plpr-2022>).

## General assembly and next PLPR

During the general assembly, two new members for the PLPR executive committee were nominated. Dr Nir Mualam (*Techonion, Israel*) will replace Dr Andreas Hengstermann as secretary general, and Josje Bouwmeester (*University of Bern, Switzerland*) will support Dr Sofija Nikolić Popalic (*University of Belgrade, Serbia*) as PhD coordinators. The new members of the executive committee were unanimously elected during the voting. The other positions remain unchanged: Prof. Thomas Hartmann (*TU Dortmund, Germany*) as president, and Prof. Eran Kaplinsky (*University of Alberta, Canada*) and Dr Rebecca Leshinsky (*RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia*) as vice-presidents. Moreover, Prof. Rachel Altermann announced that in June 2022 she was elected as one of the 143 members of the Israelian Academy of Science. In her speech Altermann emphasised that her election also means a strong recognition for spatial planning to be a multi-disciplinary science. The PLPR community congratulated her with strong applause.

The next PLPR conference will take place in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA, from 2–5 May 2023. During the flag ceremony Dr Leinfelder passed the PLPR flag on to Prof. Richard K. Norton (*University of Michigan*). He and his team will organise the next PLPR conference. More details will follow on the PLPR website (see [www.plpr-association.org](http://www.plpr-association.org)).