

# The War after the War

## The reconstruction of the Belgian countryside after World War I

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In academic literature on World War I, very little attention has been given to the post-war reconstruction process. How did various actors try to gain influence and power to reconstruct the countryside according to their ideals and ideologies? And did this bring about far-reaching landscape transformations? I try to answer these questions by using qualitative as well as quantitative sources and methodologies.

Firstly I analyse the discourses of various actors. Public and private actors took matters in their own hands as soon as the war was over. Especially the successive Belgian governments and the local farmers, who had lost their houses and agricultural lands, had opposing visions on how to restore the countryside. While ministers and national representatives stressed the importance of national solidarity and the need for a legal framework in first instance, local farmers favoured a quick and private restoration. Other pressure groups were involved as well. The Belgian Farmers' Union participated in the reconstruction for both humanitarian and expansionist purposes.

Secondly, I focus on the reconstruction of farmlands and farmsteads. While the post-war landscape heavily referred to the pre-war countryside, some changes occurred. For example, stables and homesteads were now physically separated and hygienic measures were taken to make life on the countryside more comfortable. Roads were adapted to motorized traffic. An in-depth study of three villages (Lievele, Merkem and Wijtschate) has to provide more information on the geographical transformations between 1914 and 1940.

Public and private actors were involved in the reconstruction of buildings, with private proprietors having a larger weight (1920-1924)



After 1918, the rural landscape in (West) Flanders did not change much at first sight. However, small adjustments were made and war relics preserved, even to this day.