

## CONCLUSION

With 213 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>, Wallonia is one of the most densely populated regions in Europe. On the basis of data from the land registry<sup>1</sup>, nearly 15% of its surface area is artificialised: residential land, public facilities, sites for economic activities, transport infrastructures, etc.

The Walloon territory has a relatively mixed profile, composed largely of agricultural and wooded areas. The way in which these different uses are distributed depends in particular on the geographical area. The physical environment and type of climate are favourable to agriculture north of the Sambre-et-Meuse line, while the south is more conducive to pasture and forestry activities. In terms of land take, Wallonia presents a veritable rupture in the Haine-Sambre-Meuse line. Land take is therefore relatively low to the south of the line, very pronounced along the length of the line, particularly with the four largest urban regions<sup>2</sup> in Wallonia (Liège, Namur, Charleroi and Mons), and is rather developed in many municipalities to the north of the line.

Wallonia is a territory which is particularly fragmented by artificialised areas. The development of transport networks has made it possible to connect towns and villages and has facilitated the gradual artificialisation of rural areas, mainly at the expense of agricultural areas. The municipalities close to agglomerations have been subjected to this pressure, but artificialisation also affects municipalities that are much more rural and relatively far from any urban area. Although a reduction in this pressure seems to have begun in recent years, land take continues to progress throughout almost the entire territory. The trajectory of Wallonia over the last three decades has therefore deviated from the principle of sparing land use<sup>3</sup>, as advocated by the 1999 Regional Spatial Development Plan (*Schéma de développement de l'espace régional - SDER*) and the recently repealed Walloon Code on Land Use Planning, Urbanism and Patrimony (*Code wallon de l'aménagement du territoire, de l'urbanisme et du patrimoine - CWATUP*). This observation can be made at the Walloon level, but also at the European level. Between 2006 and 2012, land take increased by about 1,212 km<sup>2</sup> per year in the EU-28, or 332 ha per day<sup>4</sup>. The impacts of artificialisation on the environment are numerous and negative.

It is important to persevere with the implementation of a territorial development policy that is sustainable in the long term. In effect, a territory is not an unlimited stock of space and, once artificialised, a territory rarely returns to a non-artificialised state. In its Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe (COM (2011) 571), the European Commission invited Member States to achieve "no net land take" by 2050, in other words eliminate any net increase in artificialised land by 2050. With the 2<sup>nd</sup> Walloon Strategy for Sustainable Development (*2<sup>e</sup> Stratégie wallonne de développement durable*), adopted in July 2016, Wallonia committed itself to achieving this objective beyond 2050. To achieve this, it will be necessary to pursue various options which allow sparing land use, such as urban renewal, reconstruction of the city within the city, a densification of living spaces, the fight against urban sprawl, placing vacant houses back on the market, the remediation and redevelopment of urban, industrial, military, tourist and commercial wastelands, etc. Adopted on 20/07/2016, the Territorial Development Code (*Code du développement territorial - CoDT*) replaced the CWATUP on 01/06/2017. This recent reform of the legislation on territorial and urban planning aims to combat urban sprawl, support the economic development of Wallonia, respond to the demographic challenge and simplify and speed up procedures for the benefit of Walloon citizens and businesses. It will be necessary to analyse the environmental impacts of this reform in the coming years and assess to what extent it meets the objectives of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Walloon Strategy for Sustainable Development.

Moreover, in order to achieve no net land take by 2050, Wallonia needs to adopt binding numerical targets relating to artificialisation, at the risk of seeing the sustainable use of the territory relegated to secondary importance compared to other concerns. In this context, the ongoing revision of the SDER from 1999 represents an opportunity for Wallonia to lay the foundations for a sustainable territorial development policy.

<sup>[1]</sup> Since the data from the land registry have a fiscal purpose, they do not accurately reflect actual land uses. | <sup>[2]</sup> An urban region consists of an agglomeration and its suburbs; more information at <https://www.iweeps.be> | <sup>[3]</sup> → HOUSE 1: decoupling between changes in residential land surface area and changes in the number of private households | <sup>[4]</sup> Based on CORINE Land Cover