

The Research Group

**Comopolis Centre for Urban Research**

has the honor to invite you to the public defense of the PhD thesis of

**Eva Van Eenoo**

to obtain the degree of Doctor of Sciences

Title of the PhD thesis:  
**Navigating a car-dependent society. The case of Flanders (Belgium).**

Promotors:

**Prof. dr. Kobe Boussauw (VUB)**

**Dr. Koos Fransen (VUB)**

The defense will take place on  
**Monday, February 5, 2024 at 15h in  
auditorium D.2.01.**

**Members of the jury**

Prof. dr. Nele Aernouts (VUB, chair)  
Prof. dr. Cathy Macharis (VUB, secretary)  
Prof. dr. Wojciech Keblowski (VUB)  
Prof. dr. Monika Maciejeweska (VUB)  
Prof. dr. Jonas De Vos (UCL)  
Dr. Anna Plyushteva (University of Oxford)  
Prof. ir. Dirk Lauwers (Ghent University /  
University of Antwerp)

**Curriculum vitae**

Eva Van Eenoo is trained as a historian (Ghent University, 2003) and urban planner (Ghent University, 2018). From 2018 to 2023, she worked as a researcher and teaching assistant at the Cosmopolis Centre for Urban Research at Vrije Universiteit Brussel, which provided her with the opportunity to carry out a PhD research project. She values the aspiration to produce knowledge and insights that assist in realizing a just and equitable mobility transition towards low-carbon modes.

**Abstract of the PhD research**

This research starts from the observed phenomenon of car travel being considered inevitable for many individuals, both for daily obligations and leisure activities. Its main objective is to contribute to ongoing academic discussions concerning the production and reproduction of the car-dependent society. The central research question guiding this dissertation is: How, where, and by whom is the car-dependent society produced and reproduced? Grounded in the land-use transport feedback cycle, the study introduces novel concepts and integrates insights from diverse disciplines to unravel its complex dynamics. Beyond investigating the reciprocal relationship between travel and land use, it addresses car-use disparities, explores perceived elements of car dependence, and engages with sociological frameworks.

Critically assessing existing literature on car dependence, the dissertation identifies gaps in methodology, empirical data, and theory. Employing four case studies in Flanders, it examines various aspects of car dependence across different geographical scales. The research finds that the car-dependent society is not confined to areas associated with high car dependence in terms of accessibility but also extends to places considered to have limited or low levels of car dependence from a land use perspective. The research shows that the spatial distribution of the car-dependent society is nearly ubiquitous, except within inner cities. In essence, this implies that the places where the foundation for a car-independent society is being laid today, or where it has already partially materialised, are predominantly limited to inner-city areas.

The car-dependent society is a collective construct, albeit a far from a neutral concept. High-income households disproportionately perpetuate it, making it inherently exclusive and exclusionary, benefiting some more than others. Consequently, not everyone can seamlessly navigate within this society. In that sense, the general classification of 'car drivers' is essentially problematic. The strong association of certain ordinary social practices underscores the deep-rooted presence of the car in daily life, resulting in a degree of messiness that is challenging to untangle.

Providing a definitive answer to the question of whether Flanders is car-dependent is not straightforward. The car-dependent society is inherently multi-dimensional, characterised by complexity, spatial and social disparities, unequal participation, prevailing meanings, and a reliance on capacities that are not evenly distributed throughout society. This situation calls for a layered understanding of the car-dependent society.