

**INNOvating policy instruments for historic  
CASTLEs, manors and estates**



**ACTION PLAN**

**FLANDERS**

**February 2021**

This document has been prepared by the INNOCASTLE consortium within the framework of the exchange of experiences activities. Therefore, it only reflects the authors' views and the programme authorities are not liable for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.

## Innocastle Action Plan

As developed by

De Roo Bert & Van Damme Sylvie

**GHENT UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES AND ARTS**

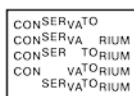
KASK and Conservatorium

are the School of Arts

of HOGENT and Howest

in agreement with

the Flanders Heritage Agency and the Province of West Flanders.



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1. GENERAL INFORMATION.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<i>INNOvating policy instruments for historic CASTLEs, manors and estates .....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Local Action Plans .....</i>	<i>4</i>
<b>3. REGIONAL CONTEXT .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>General Information .....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Rural estates in the region.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Policy instrument to be addressed by this LAP .....</i>	<i>11</i>
<b>4. OBJECTIVE OF THIS ACTION PLAN.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<i>OBJECTIVE 1: Create a better understanding of rural estates .....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>OBJECTIVE 2: Towards a transverse and participative approach .....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>OBJECTIVE 3: Stimulate a future-oriented view towards rural estates.....</i>	<i>17</i>
<b>5. STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>6. ACTIONS TO BE IMPLEMENTED .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<i>Introduction .....</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>ACTION 1: Development of an 'Immovable Heritage Masterplan for rural estates. ....</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>ACTION 2: Implementing a participative approach in relation to rural estates. ....</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>ACTION 3: Development of criteria for historical rural estates.....</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>ACTION 4: Formalizing cooperation on the topic through an intention agreement.....</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>ACTION 5: Policy supporting research .....</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>ACTION 6: Development of a future-oriented vision for rural estates.....</i>	<i>37</i>
<b>7. MONITORING OF THE ACTION PLAN.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<i>Monitoring Structure: .....</i>	<i>39</i>
<i>Monitoring process and assessment Plan .....</i>	<i>39</i>
<i>Performance Indicators per Activity/Action.....</i>	<i>39</i>
<b>8. CALENDAR FOR PLANNED ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES .....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>9. SUMMARY AND SIGNATURE .....</b>	<b>42</b>

# 1. GENERAL INFORMATION

**Project INNOCASTLE (PGI05215):** INNOvating policy instruments for historic CASTLEs, manors and estates

**Partner organization:** Ghent University of Applied sciences and arts –  
University College Ghent (**UCG-KASK**)

**Country:** Belgium

**NUTS2 region:** Prov. Oost Vlaanderen

**Contact person:** Sylvie Van Damme & Bert De Roo

e-mail: [Sylvie.vandamme@hogent.be](mailto:Sylvie.vandamme@hogent.be) & [Bert.deroo@hogent.be](mailto:Bert.deroo@hogent.be)

phone number: 0032 9 243 36 00

**The Action Plan aims to impact:**

- ☐ ~~Investment for Growth and Jobs programme~~
- ☐ ~~European Territorial Cooperation programme~~
- ☒ Other regional development policy instrument

**Name of the policy instrument addressed:**

Decree of Immovable Heritage (Onroerend Erfgoeddecreet)

## 2. INTRODUCTION

### INNOvating policy instruments for historic CASTLEs, manors and estates

Innocastle is an Interreg Europe funded project running from mid-2018 to the end of 2022. The central issue addressed is that in most European countries, current policies towards the preservation, transformation and exploitation of historic castles, manors and estates are outdated and do not reflect their real needs and opportunities. There is a need for better and more integrated governance, better understanding of the economic possibilities and better promotion and visibility for these historic sites.

Innocastle project partners:

- National Institute Heritage - Romania (Project Leader)
- University College Ghent - Belgium
- Diputación de Badajoz - Spain
- The National Trust for Places of Historic Interest and of Natural Beauty - United Kingdom
- Province of Gelderland - The Netherlands

### Local Action Plans

The Local Action Plan (LAP) is a document providing details on how the lessons learnt from the interregional cooperation will be developed in each European region, in order to improve the policy instrument addressed within that region. It specifies the nature of the activities to be implemented, their timeframe, the players involved, the costs and funding sources.

The Local Action Plan follows the learnings from the baseline survey, the identification of best practices and the exchange of experiences activities (through seminars, meetings and workshops during study visits and partner meetings) as well as the learnings from the participatory process with regional stakeholders (e.g., meetings, workshops, interviews, living labs, study visits.).

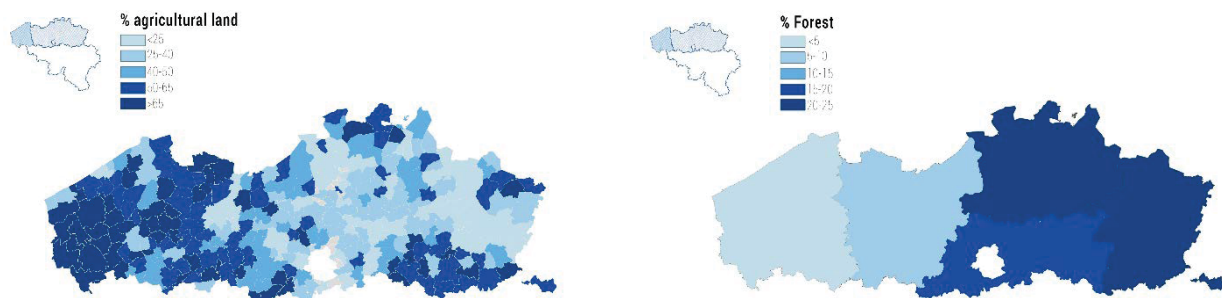
This Local Action Plan has been drafted by the University College Ghent (UCG-KASK) following a template and instructions provided by the Province of Badajoz.

### 3. REGIONAL CONTEXT

The regional context has been extensively described within the baseline survey. This chapter consists of parts of the baseline survey publication; we recommend consulting the original text within the publication. (see <https://www.interregeurope.eu/innocastle/news/news-article/9780/the-innocastle-baseline-survey/>)

#### General Information

West Flanders is the westernmost province of the Flemish Region in Belgium. It is the only coastal province in Belgium, facing the North Sea to the northwest. It has land borders with the Dutch province of Zeeland to the northeast, the Flemish province of East Flanders to the east, the Walloon province of Hainaut in the southeast and the French department of Nord-Pas-de-Calais to the west. Its capital is Bruges. Other important cities are Courtrai in the south, Ostend on the coast, Roeselare and Ypres.



Largely due to good soil conditions, West Flanders is the province with the highest percentage of agriculture in Belgium. In the province, agricultural land represents 63% of the total surface while the average in Belgium is 43%. However, the province has the lowest percentage of forests within Belgium, with only 3.4% of West Flanders covered by forest. This is only 1/4th of the average in Flanders and 1/7th of the Belgian average. Most of the forests within the province which still exist today are found on (former) rural estate grounds. The largest forest cluster in the province can be found south of Bruges where multiple rural estates transformed heathland into forests and arable land.

West Flanders is 3.197 km<sup>2</sup> in size and as such it covers roughly 10% of the nation's surface. It has approximately 1,2 million inhabitants and a population density of 380 inh/km<sup>2</sup>. The population is spread heterogeneously with the highest densities of more than 1000 inh/km<sup>2</sup> around the economic centers in the south-east (Kortrijk, Roeselare) or the center cities (Bruges and Ostend) and with densities dropping to 50 inh/km<sup>2</sup> in rural areas in the west of the province. West Flanders' population is growing at half the rate of the national average. However, some municipalities in the West of the province are faced with a slow decline in population.

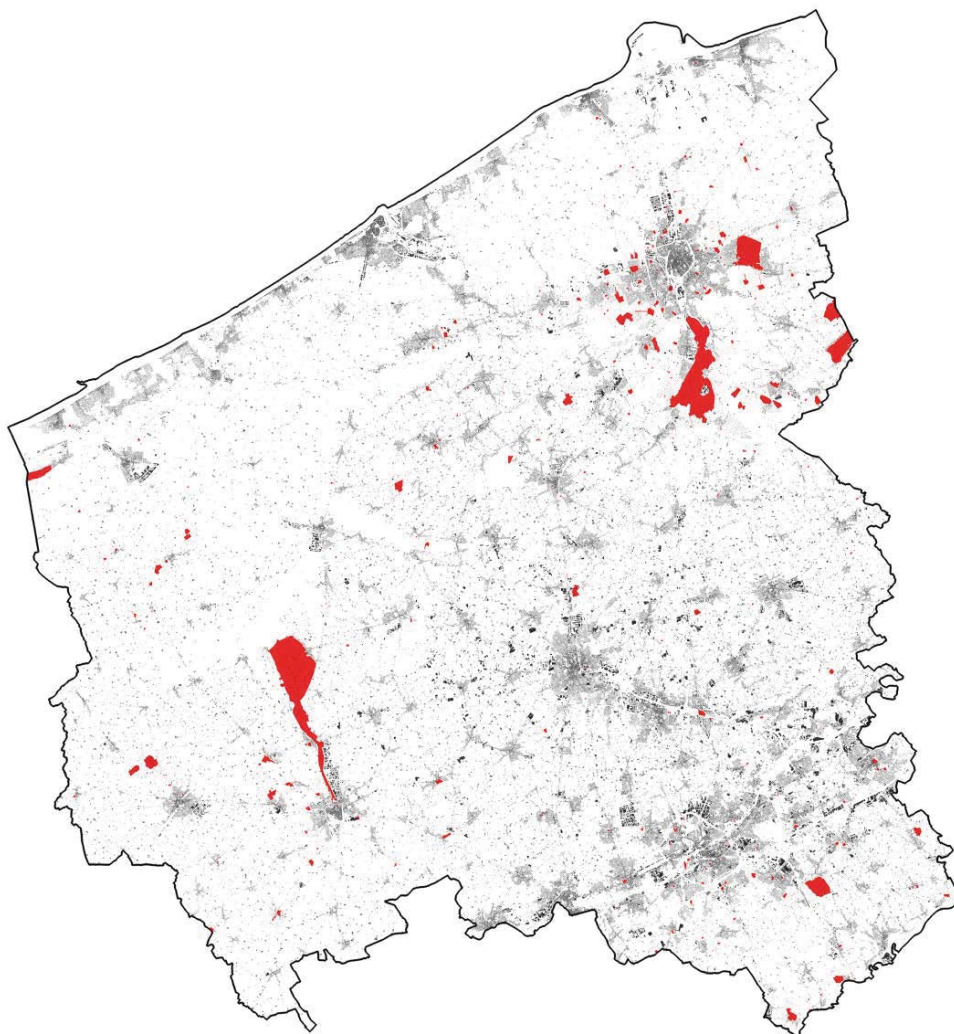
West Flanders receives one out of four tourist arrivals in Belgium due to its two unique features: the coastline and the city of Bruges. The 'Westhoek' near the French border is the most popular rural tourist destination and this is linked to the different World War heritage sites in the area. Attracting more tourists to the less visited parts of rural West Flanders is one of the current priorities for Westtoer, the tourism office of the province. Events such as the year of the 'castles and abbeys', organized in 2017 in the rural region around Bruges, fit within this priority.

The provincial government has its seat in Bruges and is the intermediate governmental level in between Flanders and the different municipalities. From this position they support the other governmental levels, are responsible for supra local matters and initiate regional cooperation and development. Although heritage policy is mainly a Flemish and municipal competence, the province develops its own heritage strategy through its heritage service and is for example responsible for 'monuments watch'.

## Rural estates in the region

### **Introduction**

West Flanders has a rich variety of rural estates. Some estates have a history of at least 1000 years and a current size of more than 300 ha, including the garden or park with buildings, ponds, tree lined alleys, farming grounds, forests and nature. Others are just a few hectares and were built in the middle of the 20th century. Larger domains with sizes between 100 and 600 hectares were once more common. However, increasing urbanization and sharing-out of the estates reduced their size tremendously and today an average site between 5 and 50 ha is more common. As rural estates functioned as multifunctional rural enterprises, these changes undermine their financial viability. Moreover and importantly, it blurs their ecological, spatial and cultural historical connections with the surrounding landscape.



Indication of the 235 rural estates which can be identified in West Flanders

### **Identification**

There is no simple method to estimate the number of rural estates in West Flanders. As a starting point we use the combined inventory of built heritage, archeological heritage, landscapes and boats of the Flanders Heritage Agency . This inventory identifies a diversity of heritage objects throughout Flanders. Rural estates are part of this inventory, but have no specific typology within it. 'Castle domain' (kasteeldomein) is the closest typology to what we understand as rural estate. According the inventory there are only 11 'castle domains' in West Flanders while a study from 2008 for example reveals roughly 100 domains around the City of Bruges. These domains can however be identified using other typologies related to castles such as 'castle farm' (kasteelhoeven) for example. Using the term 'kasteel' or 'landhuis' to search the typologies reveals 1580 items for Flanders of which 392 are found in West Flanders. For

Flanders 45% of these items is protected within the heritage inventory. Big differences exist between regions: while an average of 62% is protected in Limburg, within West Flanders this is less than 30%. One reason for these large differences between regions could be the 40 year timespan between start and finish of the first inventarisation process and consequent changed view towards protection. The largest part of West Flanders was addressed at the end of the process. Certain rural estates have their buildings protected, others have their garden or park protected, others are part of a protected landscape and others are consolidated, as a step prior to protection (explained more in detail below).

A closer look at the 392 identified items within West Flanders reveals several challenges. First, certain rural estates are identified multiple times because they have a separate protection for different elements of the rural estates, e.g. a separate protection for the gatehouse and the castle. These cannot be linked automatically. For West Flanders we have isolated these overlaps by comparing names and addresses. This enabled us to eliminate 40 items. A second problem lies in the correct use of the heritage typologies. The Learning Case 'Wildenburg' for example cannot be found using a typology referring to rural estates. We encountered five similar situations. Similarly, certain items which are indicated as 'kasteelwoning' are actually farmsteads or noble houses in city centers which do not fit the project's definition of rural estates. Looking into this issue decreased the number 352 to 300 items. A third challenge is the fact that certain items within the inventory refer to rural estates which disappeared a long time ago. Sometimes only the name refers to the historical origin of the site, sometimes only parts of the park or certain built structures remain. We isolated 65 of the 300 items containing the words 'former estate', 'the disappeared castle'. Our finding is that, 235 rural estates still exist in West Flanders today and at least 300 areas still have certain rural estate qualities.

### **Clusters**

Rural estates are spread heterogeneously in West Flanders, with large clusters around the bigger historical cities or rivers. We currently identified five large clusters but more detailed research will be necessary to explore this further. In the 90 km<sup>2</sup> region of the Bulskampveld Landscape Park, an estate density of roughly four times higher than the regional's average can be found. At least 35% of the region's landscape has been highly influenced by the rural estates resulting in a landscape appreciated for its recreational, historical, natural and aesthetical value. Numerous smaller clusters of 3 to 5 estates are located on the border of municipalities and along historical roads. Although they do not have the same regional impact as the larger clusters, their proximity and small scale holds specific potential.

### **Public and private**

In contrast to the tangible influence of rural estates on the rural landscape, there is the relative invisibility of their core element: the park and castle. These are most often enclosed by evergreen borders and function as hidden islands within the landscape. Most rural estates in West Flanders are privately owned and managed. In the cluster Bulskampveld Landscape Park for example 75% of the rural estates are used as private residence or office. Although almost all of these estates take up an informal social role, there is no tradition or legal incentive to make these privately owned rural estates publicly accessible on a

structural basis. In the past the provincial government acquired several rural estates. Today these estates make up half of the provincial domains in West Flanders. In these situations, the park is publically accessible and the buildings function either as a visitor centre, provincial offices or a privately managed restaurant. Less than 5% of all rural estates in West Flanders house a museum.

### **Condition**

The heritage monitor of the Flanders Heritage Agency presents data about heritage and heritage care in Flanders. It uses a fixed set of indicators organized according to four themes: heritage status, heritage financing, heritage management and heritage actors. The information collected within the monitor is directly linked to the different instruments within the decree (number of accepted funding applications, number of management plans, allocated overall funding,...). It does not collect general information on the heritage in Flanders such as the general condition, the use or type of owner. It furthermore only shows information on heritage in general without making a distinction between types of heritage. Because rural estates cannot be isolated this monitor is not suited to collect detailed information on rural estates.

Monuments Watch (Monumentenwacht) is a Flemish non-profit organization founded in 1991 and has the objective to stimulate the correct maintenance of valuable historic heritage. This member-based organization is supported by the government. As one of its core tasks the organization inspects heritage objects and collects information on their condition, regardless of the legal structure of the ownership or the protection status of the property. In 2019 7337, heritage objects were inscribed on the list of Monuments Watch out of which 4923 had a heritage protected status. This represents 40% of the protected heritage in Flanders. The typological division used by Monuments Watch does not coincide with the division by the Flanders Heritage Agency. The owner is for example responsible to indicate the type of heritage for which they start a membership and as such this can be different then the type used by the Flanders Heritage Agency. Within the list of Monuments Watch a bit more than 5% of these objects is directly linked to a rural estate while only 3,8% (277 objects) had a maintenance check since the system was updated in 2018 . As one estate can be inscribed within Monuments Watch with numerous objects (castle, stables,...), these 277 objects are only linked to 142 rural estates across Flanders. Fourteen are found in West Flanders. From these 277 objects 53% are in good to excellent condition.

## Identified Challenges

Through stakeholder meetings, as well as different visits to the learning cases and interviews with owners, managers and key professional stakeholders, we developed a better understanding of the challenges that can play a role in the development of the rural estates in Flanders. We divided the challenges into three different groups.

		WHAT
<b>General Challenges</b>		There is no clear understanding or definition of what a rural estate is.
		Succession laws make it difficult to keep the rural estate unified.
		The different stakeholders are often focused on their specific sector and not on the interaction of it with other sectors
		The spatial context of rural estates is changing fast due to urban pressure. This can damage the different values of the estate.
		There is a lack of a connection between the indirect benefits rural estates generate and the direct costs they have.
		The societal value / potential of rural estates is not always understood and the perception of these estates is strongly connected to the role they had in the past. This can hinder innovative and participative development.
		The potential of rural estates is rarely connected to larger developments or networks of estates.
		The green heritage connected to the rural estates is under pressure due to changing context, intensive farming, nature development efforts, climate changes, urban pressure and so forth.
<b>Challenges related to the Decree of Immovable Heritage.</b>	Structural	The split between immovable, movable and intangible heritage creates challenges.
		The premium system of the Flanders Heritage Agency focuses on the heritage related works and not on the quality of the whole project. As such rural estates are not always approached holistically.
		The premium rate is not connected to the objectives set by the owner or the capacities of the owner.
		The strong difference in the approach towards protected or 'consolidated' heritage and their context, hinders the holistic approach towards the landscape.
	Operational	The holistic potential of e.g. the ELC, heritage management plans and heritage landscapes can be activated more.
		Heritage laws underwent numerous changes. This caused confusion.
		The legislation is perceived as complex.
		The assigned heritage agent works closely together with the owner of a protected site. If this cooperation is not working well, the owner cannot ask for a second opinion or mediator.
		The heritage management plan is a good instrument but it does not always fit the management logic of rural estates.
		The special premium (restoration) has waiting lists of several years.
		Lack of publicly communicated assessment guidelines and assessment frameworks. As such not always clear how a proposal will be evaluated.

Each of the three groups of challenges need a different approach and bring different possible advantages and disadvantages.

Most of the challenges related to the 'operational level' of the decree are clearly delineated challenges and progress on these challenges will have a direct impact on rural estates. The development of a template or guide for heritage management plans specifically targeting rural estates could already have an influence for example. This impact will however be limited to the rural estates it reaches i.e., the protected sites in need of a management plan.

The challenges related to the structural level of the decree question the core of the decree and its approach to heritage. While there is no direct answer to these questions, they are important for long term policy development. Rural estates are interesting cases as they often make these questions explicit. Exploring for example how to value, manage and subsidize a tree-lined alley which starts on a protected estate but continues beyond its borders, can reveal new directions in our approach to protected and unprotected heritage.

The general challenges are complex, involve multiple sectors and instruments and have a certain societal nature. Solutions can only be found through cross-sectoral cooperation and joint experimentation. Because of their inherent multifunctionality, size and complexity, rural estates can be valuable experimentation grounds to explore solutions for these challenges. An example is the learning case Wildenburg which functioned as a living lab within the project. The living lab introduced an innovative food producing layer in the historical park of the estate and as such revealed amongst others the difference in approach between the different policy sectors involved.

## Policy instrument to be addressed by this LAP

### Introduction

This LAP addresses the Flemish Decree of Immovable Heritage which is upheld by the Flanders Heritage Agency. Heritage is a regional competence in Belgium and as such the decree is the highest policy instrument relating immovable heritage in the region. Lower bodies such as the provinces and municipalities are free to develop supplementary heritage policies. These must fit within the binding stipulations of the overarching policy instrument.

### Organization structure

The Flemish Decree of Immovable Heritage is the first decree dealing with all types of immovable heritage. As such it replaces the previous, typologically oriented heritage decrees in an attempt to harmonize the existing fragmented laws, fiscal measures and premium systems. From its outset and as the name suggests, the agency and its decree do not deal with movable or intangible heritage. This falls within the policy domain 'culture, youth, sport and media' (CJSM).

The Flanders Heritage Agency is part of the policy domain Environment and Spatial Development. It is an independent agency advising the minister on the development of the government's five-year policy program on immovable heritage. Moreover, it is responsible for the execution of the program and for the implementation of the Decree of Immovable Heritage. The agency itself is connected to several advisory bodies of which the SARO (Strategische Adviesraad Ruimtelijke Planning) and VCOE (Vlaamse Commissie Onroerend Erfgoed) are the most relevant in the Innocastle context. SARO is the strategic advisory board on spatial planning and heritage advising the minister on strategic matters on policy execution and development. The VCOE is the Flemish commission on immovable heritage, advising on matters such as the inventory and protection dossiers. The members of the two bodies are experts and civil society organizations.

### **Three Approaches to heritage**

The introductory chapters to the Flemish Decree of Immovable Heritage, the explanatory notes, the policy notes, the decree itself, the decrees resolution and several other publications reveal three approaches towards heritage.

#### **Holistic approach**

First a holistic approach to heritage is being promoted, with a focus on the context and the surrounding landscapes. Several elements within the decree initiate and stimulate this holistic approach, with a resurgent interest in the landscapes of Flanders as a consequence. The landscape policy of the Flanders Heritage Agency ranges from the identification of unique 'cultural historical landscapes' to the search how to identify the characteristics of different Flemish landscapes. While the first is a typical heritage-oriented approach, the latter is a qualitative oriented approach which includes contemporary or everyday landscapes. The instrument of 'heritage landscape', moreover positions heritage elements within an ever evolving spatial context. The responsibility of the Flanders Heritage Agency for the implementation of the 'European Landscape Convention' certainly gives a boost to this evolution.

#### **Cross-sectoral approach**

Understanding heritage holistically automatically results in the need for a cross-sectoral approach. The decree explicitly pleas for cross-sectoral connections between the heritage policy and other policy domains. For example, in order to increase development possibilities for protected heritage, they can be excluded from specific spatial planning rules if this is supported by the Flanders Heritage Agency. Spatial implementation plans (RUP) can impose specific stipulations to preserve heritage values within a specific area (for both protected and unprotected elements) or can indicate protected 'heritage landscapes'. Also, the Flanders Heritage Agency together with the Nature and Forest Agency developed the possibility for owners to create an integrated management plan. It aligns the goals and premiums set for a specific site in relation to heritage, nature and its forests. Although thorough interaction is still a work in progress, these transverse alignments are proving very important for rural estates. As these are characterized by their diversity and complexity, rural estates benefit from harmonizing different policy sectors.

### **Participative approach**

The participative approach is the third approach towards heritage in the decree. It is believed that a shared responsibility towards heritage within a community will increase the general engagement towards heritage. As such the Flanders Heritage Agency is actively stimulating a strong heritage community in which the Flanders Heritage Agency engage as a steadfast partner. Within the decree structural funding is, for example, made available for heritage organizations, municipalities can demand a heritage label giving them a certain autonomy, and the possibility for 'Intercommunal Immovable Heritage Offices' is created. Most significant is the shift of the responsibility for the development of an inventory from the Flemish to the local level giving the different local communities a certain autonomy about the identification of their heritage. It is obvious that these three approaches intertwine within the decree and that efforts to approach heritage holistically are not possible without creating cross-sectoral connections or understanding how all the stakeholders approach heritage. The 'Immovable Heritage Master Plan' is a newly introduced instrument within the decree and can be understood as the instrument that most internalizes the three different approaches towards heritage. It is a holistic and cross-sectoral debated plan on a specific region or heritage topic. Its goal is to create an agreed vision and action plan between all stakeholders in the approach towards a specific heritage challenge. The actions can be directly connected to the different instruments within the heritage policy as well as to other policy domains. As such it is intended to activate the instruments of the different policy domains participating in the plan to solve a certain heritage related challenge. It is a process-oriented instrument with a strong participatory element bringing together the different levels and organizations.

### **The decree's protection methodology**

The protection policy of the Flanders Heritage Agency dates back to the beginning of the 20th century. In the Flemish Decree of Immovable Heritage, the protection strategy is organized in three steps. In a first step heritage objects in Flanders are identified by mapping them in type-specific inventories (buildings, landscapes, gardens and parks, archeological sites, city and village sights). These are scientific inventories without legal consequences and are generally accessible.

As these inventories have recently become a competence of the municipalities, some of them started their re-evaluation. In a next step, specific inventoried heritage objects can be consolidated ('vastgesteld' in Dutch) by the minister. This must be understood as a first classification step with certain minor legal consequences which are primarily the responsibility of the municipalities. The Flanders Heritage Agency will not be consulted when changes are made to these consolidated heritage elements for example. In the third step certain of these consolidated elements can be declared protected heritage. For these items, the Flanders Heritage Agency has to be consulted for a binding advice on building plans, for controlling the good execution of construction works, for subsidizing restoration or maintenance works and so on.

## SWOT-analysis of the instrument

STRENGTH	WEAKNESS	OPPORTUNITY	THREAT
A holistic understanding of heritage with a specific sensitivity towards landscape and context.	The holistic potential of e.g. the ELC, Heritage direction plans and Heritage landscapes can be further activated.	Society and the government in general have a growing interest in a holistic and cross-sectoral approach	Budget restrictions in all departments cause a refocus towards the core tasks and this hampers cross sectoral cooperation.
A scientific inventory as solid base for the heritage policy.	The strong difference in the approach towards protected or 'consolidated' heritage can damage the holistic approach towards the landscape.	The Flemish government is working towards a cultural shift in all departments.	The trust between different stakeholders can still increase.
Connections to other policy domains are formally imbedded in the decree	The participative intentions and possibilities of the decree are not always / not yet activated.	A general understanding of the potential role of heritage in solving the large societal challenges of today is growing.	The dominance of the conservative view towards heritage can block inventiveness, experiment and development.
A diversified financing system	The premium system of the AOE focuses on the heritage related works and not the quality of the whole project.	The holistic approach of the ELC more and more invades in the approach of the AOE	Heritage is still mainly understood as limiting towards the possibilities within a landscape already under pressure.
Heritage responsibilities are distributed to different governmental levels and external ngo's	Heritage laws underwent numerous changes. This has caused confusion.	Rural estates are understood as important heritage and are specifically mentioned in the Flemish Coalition agreement.	The transition of certain competences from regional to local level may cause loss of expertise

## 4. OBJECTIVE OF THIS ACTION PLAN.

In order to make a success of this action plan it is important to set specific objectives. What do we exactly want to realise with this Local Action Plan?

During the project several challenges have been identified relating the preservation, transformation and exploitation possibilities of rural estates in general as well as in relation to the Decree of Immovable Heritage. They are described within the baseline survey (see BS chapter 1, 2, 6 and more specifically p. 51, p. 187 and 209). It is not possible to address all challenges identified and in order to avoid ad hoc choices we need to set specific objectives in order to make a success of this action plan.

Four criteria have been decisive to identify the challenges and related objectives for our Local Action Plan.

- To take into account the expertise and capacity of the different partners within the Innocastle partnership Flanders. The partnership between the UCG, the Flanders Heritage Agency and the regional development office of the province of West Flanders offers a unique mix of expertise which responds to certain challenges better than others.
- To focus on challenges which potentially have the largest negative impact. This regards the percentage of rural estates a challenge negatively impacts as well as the impact it has on each case. It can be relevant to disregard for example the challenges which are unique to heritage protected sites as these challenges only influence around 45% of the rural estates in Flanders.
- To focus on challenges that can be approached within the current structure and limitations of the Decree of Immovable Heritage and other legislations. The decree's implementation started in 2015 and already underwent several changes. Many stakeholders have indicated the need for a certain legislative stability. At the same time it is believed that the possibilities created by the decree have not yet been fully explored and tested. This is especially the case in relation to rural estates. Creating a match between the challenges we identified and the (untapped) possibilities offered by the decree will increase our chances for success.
- To focus on cause, not effect. By targeting root causes we ensure our efforts have a large and sustainable impact. It is for example more sustainable to improve the culture of cooperation through new positive experiences than to create fixed templates and procedures which formalise possible cooperations.

Taking into account these criteria we identified the challenges we want to address and set three overarching objectives for this Local Action Plan.

### **OBJECTIVE 1: Create a better understanding of rural estates**

Phase one of the project has made clear that the notion 'rural estate' remains fairly unknown or misunderstood. The well-known term 'castle', 'castle park' or 'castle site' focuses on the buildings and park. This interpretation ignores seeing these sites as historical, spatial and economical unities. Elements such as the agricultural land and forests, as well as their spatial impact on the wider region remain unnoticed. This lack of understanding is widespread both in the general public as well as in the different sectoral expertises engaged in the preservation, transformation and exploitation of rural estates. Moreover, within the inventory linked to the Decree of Immovable Heritage, rural estates are not specifically mentioned and often only a part of a rural estate is mentioned (e.g. a castle without the park or agricultural land). As such the Decree does not actively promote knowledge about this type of heritage.

Because of this we are often unable to understand the core characteristics of these sites. These characteristics, which we have described in chapter three of the baseline survey, reveal the potential of these sites for us today. It will thus be vital to increase understanding if we want to activate that potential through effective policy measures. Conversely, these policy measures can only target rural estates if we are able to correctly identify these sites as well.

The Flanders Heritage Agency can take on this challenge for example by exploring how to identify rural estates better within the heritage inventory or by stimulating a holistic and transverse approach to rural estates within redevelopment processes.

Possible actions:

- Create a prolonged focus on rural estates imbedded within the Decree of Immovable Heritage.
- Start a process in which rural estates are approached in a holistic and transversal way.
- Continue to explore the knowledge gained within phase one of Innocastle and this by broadening and deepening the knowledge gained through new research.
- Identify rural estates by drafting a definition for rural estates in Flanders.

### **OBJECTIVE 2: Towards a transverse and participative approach**

The Decree of Immovable Heritage commits to a transformation of the heritage sector in Flanders from an expert and sectoral approach towards a more holistic, cross-sectoral and participative approach. This is in line with a shifting international understanding of heritage and its position within society (e.g. 2000 European Landscape Convention, 2005 Faro Convention, 2018 Davos Declaration,...). This participative approach is vital. Rural estates and the cultural landscapes they interact with can only be valued, preserved, transformed and exploited if all sectors and stakeholders involved work together.

However, this transformation process takes time. The different actors involved value rural estates for different reasons. Landowners pass on a rural estate from generation to generation, together with their experiences and their particular view. The same is valid for the different governmental bodies whose

officers are trained and used to approach a project a certain way. Also local residents or entrepreneurs have their own point of view. This means that the expectation someone has towards the position and role of the different actors not necessarily coincides with the possibilities and intentions of others. This eventually complicates discussions, and possibly also the wanted transformation. Specifically, stakeholder meeting two and three have made this clear as well as multiple one-on-one conversations during phase one of the project. In stakeholder meeting two, a rural estate owner has for example described the current situation: *'We are stuck in an adversarial approach too much. This is not good. It is only a small shift towards a partnership approach.... The win-win is important for this. This means to look at what is best for the estate and its surroundings. A holistic approach.'*

To realise this shift exchanges in experiences are needed. The Flanders Heritage Agency has an important role in this as they are in the position to take the initiative. The current implementation of the Decree could be more focused on realising that shift. Initiating networks and open debates on certain heritage topics will for example help to promote a climate of trust and cooperation. In addition, experiments on larger scales with bottom up processes and transverse methods of working or with stimulating a shared ownership and responsibility towards private rural estates will clear the path for initiatives in which the Flanders Heritage Agency does not take the lead role.

Possible actions:

- Actively increase the knowledge on transverse and participative approaches towards rural estates in the different involved institutions such as the Flanders Heritage Agency and the regional development office of West Flanders, as well as with the involved individual owners and managers.
- Unite the different actors in a shared vision for rural estates in order to create understanding and stimulate interaction and cooperation.
- Continue the regional network focused on the rural estate south of Bruges.
- Continue the stakeholder meetings started in Innocastle phase one within the region.

### **OBJECTIVE 3: Stimulate a future-oriented view towards rural estates.**

Rural estates have always been centres of experimentation, of culture and economic development. Their role and function changed throughout history together with the changing of society. At the same time, the nature of their activities has resulted in stable and long term management principles. The investments of one generation often give a return during the following generations. This marriage between experiment, adaptability and long-term management defines one of the core qualities of rural estates.

Heritage and spatial legislation incorporate important flexibilities towards heritage sites, their functions and possible transformations (e.g. heritage sites are allowed to deviate from the function determined within spatial planning policy,...). However most owners still indicate that legislation is predominantly protective and limiting. This hinders the adaptability of the estate which negatively influences the

economic viability of the site. Debates in phase one uncovered several obstacles. First, the different legislative levels and sectors involved in a redevelopment process of a rural estate need to jointly agree while checking the proposed development to their individual regulations. Hence, finding a redevelopment plan which suits all of these specifications is often not possible. A rural estate owner described the problem as followed: *“If four parties need to agree, whatever plan you propose, there is always one party involved that does not agree.”* A second element often limiting the development possibilities is the mono-functional logic of zoning plans. This does not align with the multifunctional land-use which is so typical for rural estates. Moreover, an estate can be confronted with different zoning regulations for different parts of the rural estate resulting in difficulties to manage and develop it as a unity. Third, the focus of the immovable heritage policy is on the preservation of the material outcome of a certain culture rather than on the culture itself. This implies that the legal protection of a cultural landscape of a rural estate focuses on physical appearance of the landscape, rather than on immaterial heritage (e.g. the horticultural experimentation within the historical parks created important knowledge). The continuation of the historical narrative - often resulting in a change of the physical appearance of the landscape - is not actively stimulated or acknowledged within a normal protection dossier. Eventually, this can lead to the landscape freezing in time.

Current heritage policy acknowledges the necessity of development in order to preserve. Owners are for example stimulated to develop a vision when starting a redevelopment project. Creating a vision which develops, in a balanced way, the different values (economic, social, ecological, heritage) has however proven very challenging for rural estates. Moreover, it is important to understand the regional potential of a site in relation to the larger contemporary challenges. To realize this the knowledge of multiple actors (owner, local, regional) needs to be brought together. Making available the expertise of governments, entrepreneurs and other stakeholders will support this. In particular, it is important to share and align the several sector-oriented types of expertise. Phase one already showed that working with inspiring pilot studies and designing research is very rewarding in this regard.

#### Possible actions:

- Explore the redevelopment solutions in certain challenging cases through quick wins.
- Connect rural estates to contemporary challenges such as food and energy production.
- Continue the benchmarking started in Innocastle, connected specifically to the challenges within the region.
- Stimulate discussion on the value and need of a design atlas for the region south of Bruges. This atlas could include design proposals for rural estates on a regional scale to inspire and set in motion a discussion on future development possibilities.

## 5. STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED

The list below summarizes the most relevant stakeholders we engaged with in phase 1 of the project. We have already made steps to continue and expand this in phase 2 of the project. Local businesses, tenants and the direct communities surrounding rural estates are for example a group that could be involved more in parts of phase 2.

ENTITY	NATURE (SME, Authority, NGO, ...)	FIELD OF ACTIVITY/COMPETENCES	INVOLVEMENT
Rural estate owners and managers	Private & public owners	Managing rural estates.	Participation in stakeholder meetings and thematic seminars. Individual interviews and involvement in the Learning Cases.
Flanders Heritage Agency - research and protection	Regional authorities	Authority responsible for the execution of the heritage policy in Flanders. Responsible for the implementation of the 'Decree of Immovable Heritage'.	Participation in study visits, stakeholder meetings, steering group meetings, thematic seminars, joint organisation of one stakeholder meeting and the elaboration and validation of the LAP
Flanders Heritage Agency - management region West	Provincial office of a regional authority	Regional office of the Flanders Heritage Agency in direct contact with the owners and managers of heritage sites, giving advice for consolidated immovable heritage and control over protected immovable heritage.	Participation in stakeholder meetings, steering group meetings and thematic seminar.

Regional Development Office of the Province of West Flanders	Provincial authorities	Responsible for regional development in the region 'landscape park Bultskampveld' amongst others.	Participation in study visits, stakeholder meetings, thematic seminars, regular meetings, joint organisation of one stakeholder meeting, exploratory research on the Bultskampveld Landscape Park and the elaboration and validation of the LAP.
Heritage Office of the Province of West Flanders	Provincial authorities	Responsible for the heritage policy at the provincial level.	Participation in local study visits, stakeholder meetings and sporadic meetings
Westtoer	Provincial authorities	Responsible for the tourist policy on a provincial level.	Participation in local study visits and stakeholder meetings and informal meetings
Landelijk Vlaanderen	NGO	Represent the private landowners in Flanders, often of historical rural estates	Participation in stakeholder meetings, interviews and involvement in organisation of one stakeholder meeting.
Historische woonsteden en tuinen.	NGO	Represent the private owners of heritage sites in Belgium	Participation in stakeholder meetings, interviews and involvement in organisation of one stakeholder meeting.
Spatial planning Oostkamp	Local authorities	Responsible to develop and execute the spatial planning policy of the municipality.	Participation in stakeholder meetings and thematic seminars and local study visits
Culture Department Beernem	Local authorities, heritage municipalities	Responsible for the heritage policy of the municipality.	Participation in stakeholder meetings and thematic seminars and local study visits
IOED Raakvlak	Local authorities	Local organization responsible for certain heritage matters of some local municipalities in the Bultskampveld area	Participation in stakeholder meetings.

Herita	NGO	The heritage organisation in Flanders which supports heritage sites, helps to develop the heritage sector and manages important heritage sites.	Participation in stakeholder meetings, study visits, thematic seminars and exploratory research at rural estate Beauvoorde.
Visit Flanders	Regional authorities	Authority responsible for the tourist policy in Flanders	Participation in stakeholder meetings, thematic seminars and meetings;
The Flemish Department of Environment & Spatial Development	Regional authorities	Authority responsible for the spatial planning policy in Flanders	Participation in stakeholder meetings, thematic seminars and local study visits
Nature and Forest Department	Regional authorities	Authority responsible for the Nature and Forest policy in Flanders	Participation in stakeholder meetings
VLM	Regional authorities	Flemish Land Agency - responsible for developments in rural Flanders. Active on (former) rural estate grounds	Participation in stakeholder meetings, study visits and thematic seminars.
(Landscape) architects (Omgeving, Bureau Bossaert, Erfgoed en visie,...)	Experts	Several offices involved in redevelopments of rural estates.	Participation in stakeholder meetings, thematic seminars and informal meetings;
Experts in heritage redevelopment (Kapittel, erfgoedstudio,...)	Experts	Experts in redevelopment of rural estates and heritage in general	Participation in stakeholder meetings, thematic seminars and informal meetings;

## 6. ACTIONS TO BE IMPLEMENTED

### Introduction

The Innocastle project has certainly put rural estates on the political agenda in Flanders. The policy note 2019-2024 of the Minister of Immovable Heritage, published in November 2019, explicitly mentions the importance of rural estates<sup>1</sup>. Besides churches this is the only heritage type mentioned within the policy note. “For churches and castles, important challenges await....Together with the owners of rural estates we are looking into tailor made solutions to ensure the continued management of this important heritage.” Parallel to the development of this policy note and continuing after its publication, the activities of Innocastle increased the interest and understanding towards rural estates within Flanders Heritage Agency. Examples are the study visits, the stakeholder meetings, the site visits and the living lab at Wildenburg in which policy makers of the Agency frequently participated. The same goes for the Regional Office of the Province of West Flanders, where the project activities also realized a heightened interest for the rural estates in the region. The growing interest on behalf of all of these parties led to the joint development of a proposal for an ‘Immovable Heritage Masterplan’ (Onroerenderfgoedrichtplan) for rural estates. Our contacts with ‘Landelijk Vlaanderen’ have been important in this respect as well. They are an important advocate for such a masterplan. Developing a shared understanding of the potential of this instrument has helped in creating a wider support for it. The proposal has been supported by the Flanders Heritage Agency and formally approved by the Minister during the summer of 2020. The actions proposed within this LAP are centered around this masterplan. With the Flanders Heritage Agency as initiator and as process manager, the close relation to heritage policy and the Decree of Immovable Heritage is guaranteed. But above all, the LAP activates the aims of the Decree: it is a step towards a more holistic, cross-sectoral and participative heritage policy.

An ‘Immovable Heritage Masterplan’ is an instrument introduced in 2013 that intends to tackle complex heritage challenges in a transverse and future-oriented manner. Only two pilot projects have been started since the instrument’s introduction in 2015. This masterplan is the third to be realized. It can best be described as a process-oriented instrument which approaches a certain heritage challenge by bringing stakeholders together to develop a vision as well as actions to realize that vision. As an activating instrument it creates the attention and needed support to jointly invest (knowledge, time and/or resources) in a specific heritage topic. And finally, it is an innovative instrument and must be understood as part of the integration of the European Landscape Convention (Florence Convention 2000) and the

---

<sup>1</sup> Flemish Government. (2019) *Beleidsnota Onroerend Erfgoed 2019-2024* [Flemish Government document number 139 – 2019-2020 - version 1]. Specifically paragraph 4,3,1,5, on page 24

Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro Convention 2005) within heritage policy in Flanders.

The 'Immovable Heritage Masterplan' will combine a thematic approach (rural estates) with a focus on the region south of Bruges, which was also subject of the Innocastle project, but aiming to be relevant for rural estates in other parts of Flanders as well. By explicitly focusing on this region Flanders Heritage Agency on the one hand will profit to the maximum from the work executed within Innocastle. On the other hand, it gives the opportunity to proceed with this work, and to translate it into more concrete actions on the field. Through this focus further in-depth knowledge and experience of the region can be developed which will lead to generalizable insights, methods and approaches valuable in other regions as well. Eventually this will have an impact on the policies influencing rural estates all over Flanders.

This masterplan will reflect in many ways the logic, structure and methods of Innocastle. It is a continuation of the holistic, cross sectoral and participative approach towards rural estates but now formalised within the legislative structure of the heritage policy in Flanders. As such the Innocastle project can be seen as the essential basis to prove the need for this plan. With Innocastle we have realized an acceleration in the process towards a culture change in the Flemish heritage policy, inscribed within the Decree and supporting policy documents. We furthermore succeeded in connecting that process to the topic of rural estates.

**In relation to this LAP the 'Immovable Heritage Masterplan' must be seen as the legislative structure which makes it possible to continue the work of Innocastle. It will enable to implement the participative, holistic, cross sectoral and future-oriented approach through heritage policy. It is the policy framework to embed the different actions on rural estates both in space, society and local community.** This LAP holds six actions which all relate to the masterplan. The first action is the realization of the plan and the five following actions are all made possible by and imbedded in this masterplan. The table on the following page summarizes the six actions. They are all connected to the objectives we have set for this LAP in chapter 4. In the table we mention the objective each action influences the most, we describe the main deliverable of the actions as well as the impact they will have on policy in Flanders relating to rural estates.

We have directly experienced the impact of Covid-19 on some of the planned activities in phase 1 and have organised three large digital events to partly replace the study visit to Flanders. We take in account the possibility of a prolonged influence by Covid-19 and will use the gained experience to adapt when needed. We currently have send a questionnaire to most of the stakeholders asking how they would like we continue the project in Covid-19 situations.

Action	Main objective	Main result	Main policy instrument for this action	Impact on the policy instrument
<b>1</b> Development of an 'Immovable Heritage Masterplan' for rural estates	Objective N°1-2-3: Create a better understanding of rural estates Towards a transverse and participative approach. Stimulate a future-oriented view towards rural estates.	Validated 'Immovable Heritage Masterplan' by the responsible minister.	Decree (other instruments will be involved as well, depending on the evolution of the project.)	This masterplan is specifically intended to create a policy change for rural estates. It will connect a future-oriented vision for rural estates to specific points of attention within the heritage policy and it will formulate management and development objectives for these sites in general. This masterplan is a legislative structure
<b>2</b> Execution of a participatory process in relation to rural estates.	Objective N°2: Towards a transverse and participative approach.	Participation plan Three stakeholder meetings & reports.	Decree	The Flanders Heritage Agency will use the knowledge gained within the stakeholder meetings to adapt their policy to rural estates. The Flanders Heritage Agency will increase their capacity in participatory approaches and will continue this participation by formalising certain partnerships.
<b>3</b> Development of criteria for historical rural estates	Objective N°1: Create a better understanding of rural estates	The criteria to determine whether a site is a rural estate and what heritage value it has.	Decree	To be able to take policy measures in relation to rural estates on a Flemish level, an agreed definition is needed to identify the sites which will be eligible.
<b>4</b> Formalizing cooperation on the topic through an intention agreement.	Objective N°2: Towards a transverse and participative approach.	An intention agreement will be signed which formalizes the cooperation on the topic between different stakeholders.	Decree	To be able to take policy measures in relation to rural estates on a Flemish level, an agreed definition is needed to identify the sites which will be eligible.
<b>5</b> Policy supporting research	Objective N°1: Create a better understanding of rural estates	Research plan Research report.	Decree	The applied research will increase specific knowledge on rural estates and inform the Flanders Heritage Agency how to implement certain instruments to better answer to the needs of the different stakeholders relating rural estates.
<b>6</b> Development of a future-oriented vision for rural estates.	Objective N°3: Stimulate a future-oriented view towards rural estates.	A jointly developed vision on the future of rural estates.	Decree	This vision will form the basis to identify the specific measures needed to realise that vision and will thus inform which instruments within the decree need to be activated for rural estates.

**Table connecting the actions to the three specific objectives and specific changes in the policy instrument**

## ACTION 1: Development of an 'Immovable Heritage Masterplan for rural estates.

- The background/ lessons learned from the interregional exchange process**

The 'Immovable Heritage Masterplan' is a process-oriented instrument intended to create policy change in relation to rural estates. It reflects in many ways the logic, structure and methods of Innocastle and will formalize them within the legislative structure of the Flemish heritage policy. As such, the lessons learned that informed the need for this action stem from Innocastle. In all four European regions which participate in Innocastle, the different stakeholders involved all increased their knowledge on rural estates. The baseline survey has identified certain challenges and knowledge gaps and proposed moreover possible solutions for these challenges. Most importantly, the process of the Innocastle project has increased the trust between the different involved stakeholders. Two policy recommendations in the baseline survey explain the value of process-oriented and cross sectoral funding mechanisms. The development of this masterplan for rural estates fits within these two recommendations as it is a participative process funded by the Flanders Heritage Agency aiming to create cross sectoral engagements.

Source of the lessons learned	Country	Lessons learned
Thematic seminar and group discussion during study visit in the UK	UK	The discussion during the thematic seminar led to an open debate about the different values of rural estates and the importance of co-creating an understanding of these values as well as a vision how to engage with those values.
Group discussion during study visit SP	SP	The role of the government in the preservation, transformation and exploitation of rural estates is not fixed and can change case by case. Each region has its traditions in respect to the relationships among the stakeholders. Adaptions to those relations is often the key to success. The 'Immovable Heritage Masterplan' could shift those relations.
First mentioned at the thematic seminar and group discussions during the study visit in Romania	NL	The 'Nature Beauty Law' in the Netherlands realised a context to talk about and discuss the definition of rural estates. Without this definition it is not possible to create a specific policy context for these sites. If rural estates need specific measurements it is important to have a shared understanding about what a rural estate is. The 'Immovable Heritage Masterplan' will try to develop that shared understanding.
Study visit UK	UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Discussions about the relations with local authorities</li> <li>- Partnership working and how to build effective collaborations.</li> <li>- Discussions about the relations with local authorities</li> </ul>
Study visit SP – presentation from Ms Georgina Holmes-Skelton	UK	The presentation given during the thematic seminar explained the process of policy development from a NGO perspective. How to create a constructive relationship with government officials and other stakeholders in order to develop policy.
Good practices: Building connectivity: A country house partnership	NL	The importance of a network of rural estates together with the need for trust within this network in between different stakeholders to share challenges and wishes. The 'Immovable Heritage Masterplan' will hopefully increase the trust among the stakeholders in Flanders.
Good practices: Gelders Arcadia: A spatial approach to regional cooperation amongst landed estates	NL	Understanding the historical impact of rural estates in a region eventually led to a discussion and understanding of their potential for today. This project shows how continued efforts and research eventually led to change in policy on the regional level. Focussing on a region reveals their potential as a cluster of estates. Although the 'Immovable Heritage Masterplan' is valid all over Flanders, it specifically focuses on a region to understand the local impact as well as the potential of the cluster of estates.

- **Action**

This action will realize the 'Immovable Heritage Masterplan'. As explained in the introduction to this chapter, this must be understood as a process-oriented action which installs the framework needed to execute actions two to six. It moreover makes it possible to connect binding stipulations to these different actions which eventually will be formalized by the responsible minister.

This action consists of four large steps.

- **Step one: Start**

This step is the preliminary phase within the masterplan and is intended to decide the necessity of the project. A business case and draft project proposal are developed. In this step the political decision to start the project is taken by the responsible minister and budget is made available within the budget plans of the Flanders Heritage Agency. Much of the work executed in Innocastle led to elements in the business case or informed the processes in this step. Innocastle helped to create the needed support to get the project approved. This step was largely executed in the second part of 2019.

- **Step two: Exploration**

This step has the goal to further explore the topic and approach after the first approval by the responsible minister. In this step the feasibility is estimated by exploring and analysing the involved stakeholders and factors of influence. A first stakeholder analysis is executed and exploratory meetings are organised, knowledge gaps are identified and a large start up meeting is organised. First exploratory steps are taken as well. In this step a working group will be set up by the Flanders Heritage Agency with key stakeholders which have decision-making power in milestones during the trajectory. A project group will be formed. This group is responsible for the process management and preparatory documents discussed in the working group. The project group is composed by representatives of the Flanders Heritage Agency, UCG and the province of West Flanders. They will organise the different meetings and activities and they are responsible for the planning and for the budget.

The stakeholder network of Innocastle is used to efficiently start the project. The last public event, in Flanders, in phase one of Innocastle (November 5<sup>th</sup> 2020) was a joint organization of UCG-KASK, Flanders Heritage Agency and the province of West Flanders. This event was in fact the kick-off meeting of the 'Immovable Heritage Masterplan'.

- **Step three: Execution**

This step brings together actions two to six of the action plan. A project note is developed attuning these different parts. These steps consist of a participative process, criteria development for rural estates, the development of an intention agreement, policy research and the development of a vision for the future of rural estates. The possibility exists to directly develop measures that need to be taken to execute the vision that is developed.

- **Step four: Validation and evaluation.**

In this step, actions two to five are brought together into the format of the masterplan as described within the Decree of Immovable Heritage. It is a draft proposal that eventually will result in a document validated by the responsible minister. This results in binding actions. An evaluation of the process is executed as well.

- **Players involved:**

The Flanders Heritage Agency is the main responsible together with all the organizations which will become part of the working group.

- **Timeframe:**

It is important to understand the process-oriented nature of this action. As such, the timeframe proposed is a tentative proposal to describe the sequence and estimated duration of the different steps.

- Step 1 was executed in the second part of 2019 and the first part of 2020.
- Step 2: mid 2020 to end 2020
- Step 3: end 2020 to mid 2022
- Step 4: 2022

- **Costs** (if relevant)

The costs are mainly related to staff which has already been assigned to the action and the costs which will result from the intended interventions described by the developed plan.

- **Funding sources** (if relevant):

The budget to coordinate the development of a masterplan for rural estates is made available by the Flanders Heritage Agency and is foreseen in their multi-year budget plan. The province of West-Flanders has made resources available to participate in and support the project. All partners who decide to participate are responsible to provide their own resources.

- **Indicators of success:**

- The business case proposing the project is approved by the minister and budget is made available.
- A stakeholder analysis is undertaken.
- A project group is formed within the Flanders Heritage Agency to develop the masterplan and all actions connected to it.
- A working group is formed which will advise the whole process of realising the masterplan and has four meetings.
- Actions two to six of this action plan are lined up (both in their agenda and the topics they address). This results in a project note explaining in detail the objective of the masterplan and the stakeholders involved. It as well evaluates the societal, financial and legal feasibility of the project.
- A draft proposal for the final masterplan combining the developed vision and attached policy implications which is validated by the working group.
- Validation of the proposal by the responsible minister of the Flanders Heritage Agency resulting in an 'Immovable Heritage Masterplan' on rural estates officially recognized by the Flemish government.

- **Expected outcome:** We hope that the participants involved in realising the 'Immovable Heritage Masterplan' will see it as a positive and important experience to be repeated for other topics as well.

## ACTION 2: Implementing a participative approach in relation to rural estates.

- **The background/ lessons learned from the interregional exchange process**

In all regions of the Innocastle project a multitude of stakeholders is connected to rural estates and puts a claim on certain elements or values of these sites. In order to create a mutual understanding of these sites and positive cooperation between the stakeholders, policy practices and policy development need to become participative in nature. The Innocastle project has proven the value of such processes as the trust and understanding between stakeholders has increased tremendously eventually leading to the LAP's in each region. Within the baseline survey the value of a 'shared ownership' is acknowledged and policy can stimulate people to get involved. Practices which succeed in creating a feeling of shared ownership (through participative processes for example) will strengthen the connections rural estates have with the communities and landscapes surrounding them.

Source of the lessons learned	Country	Lessons learned
Thematic seminar and group discussion during study visit in the UK	UK	The discussion during the thematic seminar led to an open debate about the different values of rural estates and the importance of co-creating an understanding of these values as well as a vision how to engage with those values.
Good practice: visiteering	UK	Connecting visitors or communities to a rural estate is challenging and visiteering is an informal and flexible way to do so. It creates an atmosphere of participation and involvement. It creates opportunities both for publicly accessible and inaccessible sites as well as the development of policy relating those sites.
Good practices: Building connectivity: A country house partnership	NL	This good practice shows that a network of owners of rural estates and government officials is beneficial for the development of the heritage sites eventually leading to high quality environments for all inhabitants and visitors. Having trust to speak openly is very important in this regard and is something the municipality of Bronckhorst succeeded in doing within this network.
Partner meeting Brussels	UK	The stakeholder workshop at the partner meeting in Brussels revealed how the NT engages with stakeholders. An insight in their stakeholder management led to the understanding on how to manage stakeholders in a participative process.
Good Practices: Cronicari digitali (Digital chroniclers)	RO	An interesting idea that aims to connect the X, Y and Z generation through knowledge transfer and engage young people in promoting the cultural identity through storytelling and social media. <a href="https://cronicaridigitali.ro/">https://cronicaridigitali.ro/</a>

- **Action** The Flanders Heritage Agency will start a participative process in relation to rural estates. This process is a key element in the development of the 'Immovable Heritage Masterplan' for rural estates (action 1). It has multiple functions
  - Creating an interest for the topic with the general public.
  - Dissemination of the knowledge gained and steps taken in relation to the topic following the communication plan developed in action 1.
  - Participation infuses the process and research with on-site knowledge and a better understanding of needs, expectations and goals

- By co-creating a shared vision for the future of rural estates with different stakeholders involved, that vision will have a broad support, eventually facilitating the execution of that vision.

A participation plan will be developed which describes the course of the participation process. It makes explicit how the different stakeholders will be involved (different methods of participation following the ladder of participation) and how the decision-making process is influenced. It describes the followed plan, what stakeholders will be involved for what part of the policy development and how the results and intermediate steps will be communicated and shared with all stakeholders. This will create realistic expectations for all involved stakeholders. During the process, the plan will evolve towards a logbook making transparent the followed steps.

A stakeholder analysis will be executed which uses the stakeholder map and knowledge from the Innocastle project. It will describe the possible influence the stakeholders can have on the development of the 'Immovable Heritage Masterplan' and what capacities the different stakeholders can possibly add to support the execution of the plan.

Different stakeholder meetings will be organised on key moments within the process.

- **Players involved:**

The Flanders Heritage Agency takes responsibility to start and guide the participative approach. The province of West Flanders will play a supporting role by facilitating the process and supporting the communication amongst others.

The objective is to get all the needed stakeholders involved such as different rural estate owners, experts and governmental institutions on a local and provincial level as well as the Flemish level.

- **Timeframe**

Mid 2020 – end 2022

- **Costs** (if relevant)

The costs relate to staff and a working budget for the interactive moments (material, food, location, communication,...).

- **Funding sources** (if relevant):

The Flanders Heritage Agency has foreseen to resources to guide the process within their multi-year budget plan. The province of West-Flanders will make their infrastructure available for these meetings and will actively participate.

- **Indicators of success:**

- A participation plan is developed by the Flanders Heritage Agency.
- A minimum of three participatory encounters will be organised by the end of 2022, all resulting in a separate report which will inform the process of action.

- **Expected outcome:** We hope we will realise a climate of participation and cooperation in relation to the development of rural estates. A climate which makes possible to realise actual change both in general policy as for the sites directly.

### ACTION 3: Development of criteria for historical rural estates

- **The background/ lessons learned from the interregional exchange process**

One of the important knowledge gaps identified during the development of the baseline survey is the difficulty of identifying rural estates. In most of the participating regions, there is no clearly defined idea on the criteria for rural estates. Without a generally accepted understanding, which is made explicit, it is difficult to create a shared understanding of the challenges or solutions. The Nature Beauty Law in the Netherlands created a situation in which strict identification of rural estates was needed. This led to a definition of rural estates which has helped to create a climate of understanding, preparation of specific regulations and discussions. As a consequence, rural estates are acknowledged and imbedded within different legal instruments. One of the policy recommendations drafted during Innocastle is the need to clearly identify rural estates.

Source of the lessons learned	Country	Lessons learned
Partner meeting Romania	/	The discussion among the different partners on the selection of the learning cases made clear that everybody has a different understanding of the subject and that it is necessary to agree on certain criteria in order to create a shared project. Following discussions in Flanders indicated this as well.
Baseline survey process	/	The difficulty in identifying the rural estates in the different regions (using available heritage databases) in the process of the baseline survey hindered further research during the project. It made clear the need for an agreed identification method in order to increase knowledge.
First mentioned at the thematic seminar and group discussions during the study visit in Romania	NL	The 'Nature Beauty Law' in the Netherlands realised a context to talk and discuss about the definition of rural estates. Without this definition it is not possible to create a specific policy context for these sites. If rural estates need specific measurements it is important to have a shared understanding about what a rural estate is.

- **Action**

The goal is to create a shared understanding of what a historical rural estate is, leading to a set of criteria to identify the sites and evaluate them in relation to their heritage value. This will indicate which site will be influenced by the stipulations connected to the 'Immovable Heritage Masterplan' and which sites are not. The 'criteria' which will be developed will make it possible to develop specific policy measures for rural estates in the future.

- **Players involved:**

The Flanders Heritage Agency will initiate and guide the process. All stakeholders interested in a formal partnership will be involved in this.

- **Timeframe**

April 2021 to July 2021.

- **Costs (if relevant)**

The costs relate to staff.

- **Funding sources (if relevant):**

The Flanders Heritage Agency has foreseen the needed budget in their multi-year budget.

- **Indicators of success:**
  - Agreement on the criteria for rural estates and their valuation.
- **Expected outcome:** We hope to create workable criteria which will be usable for the 'Immovable Heritage Masterplan' as well as for other policy development projects.
  -

#### ACTION 4: Formalizing cooperation on the topic through an intention agreement

- **The background/ lessons learned from the interregional exchange process**

The value, potential and challenges of rural estates extend beyond the sites themselves and even their wider setting. The baseline survey has shown that if we want to activate the potential of rural estates, it will be vital to link the challenges estates are faced with to the challenges on a regional scale. It is important to explore new ways of cooperation in which win-win situations can be created. This action explores how an intention agreement initiated by a regional government can promote cooperation between all stakeholders involved. The study visits in the Netherlands and the UK have made clear the value to formalize the partnerships as it makes explicit the engagement and intentions of the different partners in the cooperation.

Source of the lessons learned	Country	Lessons learned
Good practices: Building connectivity: A country house partnership	NL	This good practice makes explicit the importance of partnership. A rural estate partnership, bringing together owners as well as different governmental levels, SME's, experts and other stakeholders. Formalising such a cooperation makes explicit the engagement of the different actors and is an important step to build trust between the different actors.
Study visit Spain – discussion and visits of Paradores	SP	Following the visits and insights into the organization of the Paradores network a discussion was held on the importance of cooperation and the role of the government in these cooperations. What is the right balance between state influence and entrepreneurship?
Study visit Romania – Thematic seminar on public-private partnerships	/	Within the thematic seminar the different partners discussed the partnerships existing in the different regions. This revealed the variety to approach partnership working.
Good practices: Gelders Arcadia: A spatial approach to regional cooperation amongst landed estates	NL	Five municipalities work together to make explicit the value of the many rural estates for the wider region. Rural estate research, policy making, educational projects and art projects have all added to the focus on and the understanding of the rural estates for the region.
Study Visit UK – discussion and visits relating the NT sites.	UK	The National Trust is involved in a multitude of partnerships and cooperative agreements and they are often with the rural estate owners as a direct partner. During the visit to Powis and Croft we learned the value of these cooperations as well as the importance to formalise them in order to create the right expectations.

- **Action**

The goal is to realise a more structured and formal cooperation between multiple stakeholders relating rural estates. Shared objectives will be developed together with the different involved stakeholders which have agreed to support the development of the 'Immovable Heritage Masterplan'. These objectives will be elaborated in an intention agreement. This agreement sets the first parameters for the cooperation between the different stakeholders and creates engagement by the different parties.

- **Players involved:**

The Flanders Heritage Agency will initiate and guide the process. All stakeholders interested in a formal partnership will co-create the intention agreement together.

- **Timeframe**

End 2020 to mid 2021.

- **Costs** (if relevant)

Each partner participating in the agreement will need to foresee the staff resources needed to join the meetings leading to this agreement and the follow up of it.

- **Funding sources** (if relevant):

The Flanders Heritage Agency has foreseen the resources to guide the process within their multi-year budget plan.

- **Indicators of success:**

- Group of stakeholders identified which are interested in a formal partnership.
- Exploration of the objectives.
- Draft intention agreement.
- Final intention agreement signed by all the partners.

- **Expected outcome**

With the intention agreement we hope to create a long term engagement between stakeholders on the topic of rural estates.

## ACTION 5: Policy supporting research

- **The background/ lessons learned from the interregional exchange process**

As a research organisation we have a specific approach towards the topic of rural estates which is different than most other partners involved in Innocastle. Both in Innocastle as in the research project 'preservation through development'<sup>2</sup> we gained unique knowledge on rural estates which has been disseminated and used in Flanders to inform rural estate owners, local governments, NGO's, the regional office of the province of West-Flanders and the Flanders Heritage Agency amongst others. Innocastle showed us the value of applied research in participative policy making processes. Research helps to objectify a certain debated topic and creates the opportunity for the different stakeholders to interact with each other as equal partners. Research processes can be the neutral start in policy development and can create the needed trust among actors. Tentative design proposals such as the Powis castle, the Reuversweerd estate, De Wierse estate and the Bulskampveld region (which all have been discussed or developed within the Innocastle project) have furthermore made explicit the value of such design proposals in a search towards future development of these sites. During the Innocastle project knowledge gaps have been identified relating to rural estates; one of the policy recommendations explicitly states the need to increase knowledge on rural estates.

Source of the lessons learned	Country	Lessons learned
Good Practice: Arché Summer School	RO	The summer school is an inspiring example of how knowledge as well as needs of different stakeholders can be connected to create a joint venture beneficial for everybody.
Good practices: Gelders Arcadia: A spatial approach to regional cooperation amongst landed estates	NL	At the base of the Gelders Arcadia project lies the research executed which informs the different municipalities, owners, regional governments and other stakeholders about the value of the clustering of these sites.
First mentioned at the thematic seminar and group discussions during the study visit in Romania	NL	The analysis of the economic value of rural estates for the wider region, executed by three provinces in the Netherlands <sup>3</sup> , revealed the importance of detailed research into rural estates. The results, revealing the direct and indirect economic value of rural estates, are used to inform policy making processes amongst others. During the study visit as well, results of this research proved valuable to initiate debate.
Study visit Netherlands	NL	At Reuversweerd the design process is used as a research tool to inform the provincial government on the challenges faced. The different proposals reveal the possibilities on how to approach these challenges. This can be a strong tool to increase knowledge on rural estates.

- **Action**

<sup>2</sup> PWO-project 'Behoud door ontwikkeling: nieuwe perspectieven op historische landgoederen in Vlaanderen.'

[https://expertise.hogent.be/nl/projects/behoud-door-ontwikkeling-nieuwe-perspectieven-op-historische-landgoederen-in-vlaanderen\(6956f53f-ffdb-4a81-9e94-920c23984523\).html](https://expertise.hogent.be/nl/projects/behoud-door-ontwikkeling-nieuwe-perspectieven-op-historische-landgoederen-in-vlaanderen(6956f53f-ffdb-4a81-9e94-920c23984523).html)

<sup>3</sup> Witteveen+Bos (2012) Instandhouden loont! Economische betekenis van Historische buitenplaatsen en landgoederen in de provincies Utrecht, Overijssel en Gelderland [Rapport AH605-2/tutr/005]. Provinces of Utrecht, Overijssel and Gelderland.

Research helps to better understand the root causes and possible solutions to the challenges identified within Innocastle. Small-scale research will be executed to solve the knowledge gaps which are most relevant for further policy development. The research executed will in a first stage inform the process leading to the vision development (action six).

Relevant actors will be consulted through for example interviews or participative moment in order to increase the knowledge on specific detailed topics.

These research activities are as well intended to explore the legislative possibilities of existing instruments in support of the vision that will be formulated. It is for example possible that the Flanders Heritage Agency will evaluate their protection strategy in relation to rural estates (proposing new protections, etc.). Instruments of other agencies will as well be evaluated in relation to the topic.

The research process is an iterative one, producing new insights that lead to new research questions. This continuously informs the 'Immovable Heritage Masterplan' and eventually will result in a research report. This report will be communicated following the communication plan from action 1 and is intended to inform the process towards an 'Immovable Heritage Masterplan'. Research that will be executed in a parallel project by the UCG-KASK will inform this process as well. This research will explore the value of rural estates in relation to different communities (human as well as non-human communities) and how the relationship between these communities and the estate can be positively influenced through a participative design process. As such new insights will be gained on the societal value and future potential of rural estates in Flanders. Through the working group meetings within the structure of this LAP and informal contacts, this research will further inform the Flanders Heritage Agency.

- **Players involved:**

The Flanders Heritage Agency will execute the research and will be responsible to identify the research questions through the participative process of action one amongst others. Stakeholders will be involved as described in the participation plan.

UCG-KASK is responsible for the research executed within their organization.

- **Timeframe**

Mid 2021 to mid 2022

- **Costs** (if relevant)

Staff costs + working budget.

UCG-KASK has foreseen 1,7FTE for 2 years + working budget.

- **Funding sources** (if relevant):

The Flanders Heritage Agency has foreseen resources for this action within their multi-year budget plan..

UCG-KASK is responsible for the funding of the research executed within their organization. The budgetary needs are identified, the budget is reserved and all the contracts are arranged.

- **Indicators of success:**

- The topics in extra need of research are identified.

- A research strategy is developed.
  - Research is carried out.
  - Feedback on research through stakeholder consultations.
  - If needed after stakeholder consultations the above steps are repeated until the needed knowledge is developed.
  - A research report is drafted which will be communicated to all the involved stakeholders.
- **Expected outcome:** We aim to work away certain knowledge gaps with a direct influence for the development of rural estates. The research project UCG-KASK executes aims to increase practical knowledge on the meaning of rural estates towards the different communities and how a design process can increase that meaning.

## ACTION 6: Development of a future-oriented vision for rural estates.

- **The background/ lessons learned from the interregional exchange process**

Within the different regions of Innocastle it is clear that the challenges rural estates face can only be successfully overcome if the preservation, transformation and exploitation of the sites is executed within a larger vision. In Romania certain municipalities stimulate the rural estates to work together and set shared goals. In the Netherlands rural estates are approached for the potential they have for the general societal challenges and solutions for the estate can only be found when taking into account the larger region around it and vice versa. In Spain rural estates need to be understood in relation to regional development in order to create viable touristic or other exploitations. In Flanders we have explored the relationship between the many rural estates and their region and tested future development proposals which connect the development of the sites to the development of the region. In all these cases it is understood that a shared vision is needed in order to activate the potential of rural estates.

Source of the lessons learned	Country	Lessons learned
Thematic seminar and group discussion during study visit in the UK	UK	The discussion during the thematic seminar led to an open debate about the different values of rural estates and the importance of co-creating an understanding of these values as well as a vision how to engage with those values.
Good practices: Gelders Arcadia: A spatial approach to regional cooperation amongst landed estates	NL	Understanding the historical impact of rural estates in a region eventually led to a discussion and understanding of their potential for today. This project shows how continued efforts and research eventually led to a development of a vision.
Study visit UK – Thematic seminar on Diversifying Business at rural estates	/	The economic side of rural estates was explored during the thematic seminar from different perspectives (governmental, private owners, National Trust, NGOs). Understanding the diversity in challenges and approaches increased the understanding of the need for a vision for rural estates. Private owners need more development possibilities and the government wants to safeguard societal values. How to balance these two?
Study visit Netherlands	NL	At Reuversweerd the design process is used as a research tool to inform the provincial government about the challenges faced. The different proposals reveal the possibilities and are the starting point of a debate about the future development possibilities of the site.

- **Action**

This action has the objective to develop a future-oriented vision for rural estates together with all the stakeholders involved. This vision will eventually result in actual measures taken by the stakeholders in order to realize that vision.

The process will follow specific steps. Following participatory encounters the objectives and opinions of all involved actors will result in a first synthesis. Multiple consultation rounds with the involved actors will lead to draft formulations for the vision. The possible needed actions to realise the vision will inform how realistic these drafts are in their execution. Revisions are made until an agreed proposal is drafted and within the timeline set in the project note. The working group of the masterplan will validate the proposal. This process will result in a concise statement that will form the base for all future actions taken by the involved stakeholders in relation to rural estates.

- **Players involved:**

The Flanders Heritage Agency will guide the process. All the stakeholders, which formally agreed to participate in the intention agreement, will be equal partners in the development of the future vision for rural estates.

- **Timeframe**

End 2020 to end 2022. With main focus on 2022.

- **Costs** (if relevant)

Costs relate to staff and small working budget.

- **Funding sources** (if relevant):

The Flanders Heritage Agency has foreseen resources to guide the process within their multi-year budget. The province of West-Flanders has foreseen staff resources as well. All other partners who wish to participate are responsible to provide their own staff resources.

- **Indicators of success :**

- First participative moments and consultation round results in a first draft of a vision.
- Evaluation of intermediate versions.
- A final draft that will be used in the proposal to the minister is developed.
- A publicly communicated vision for the future development of rural estates in Flanders.

- **Expected outcome:** We hope this action will make a strong statement on the future potential of rural estates and how this can be realised.

## 7. MONITORING OF THE ACTION PLAN

### Monitoring Structure:

A working group will be set up at the beginning of the implementation phase of the action plans to follow the process. This is the same working group as specified for action one. There is no direct formal process in selecting the members. The Flanders Heritage Agency is responsible and is using the stakeholder mapping and experience of Innocastle to get a better insight.

At least three people from the Flanders Heritage Agency will be part of the working group as well as one person from UCG-KASK. Other stakeholders will be part of the working group and currently the participation of the province of West Flanders is explored as well as specific expert groups. It is important that this group is representative and at the same time manageable in size.

### Monitoring process and assessment Plan

The working group will follow the process both towards its content as towards the progress.

At least four meetings will be planned in the two year period (2021-2022). Each meeting will result in a meeting report that will form the basis for the reporting towards Interreg Europe. A first meeting will be held in March 2021.

The representative from UCG-KASK will be responsible for the administrative feedback towards Interreg Europe.

The partner meetings in phase two of Innocastle will serve as feedback moments towards the progress of the Local Action Plan. The different partners will share progress, challenges and solutions in the execution of the action.

At the end of the project an evaluation report will be drafted. In this report an evaluation will be developed in relation to the jointly set goals in the intention agreement and the process will be evaluated. This evaluation is executed by the Flanders Heritage Agency.

### Performance Indicators per Activity/Action

The working group must validate all the different results of the actions.

- ACTION ONE: Business case
- ACTION ONE: Forming of a project group
- ACTION ONE: Forming of a working group
- ACTION ONE: Stakeholder analysis
- ACTION ONE: Project note
- ACTION ONE: Draft proposal for 'Immovable Heritage Masterplan'
- ACTION ONE: Validated 'Immovable Heritage Masterplan'
- ACTION TWO: Participation plan
- ACTION TWO: > 3 participative moments
- ACTION THREE: Criteria needed to identify rural estates.
- ACTION FOUR: Intention agreement.

- ACTION FIVE: Research report
- ACTION SIX: Formulated vision for rural estates.
- MONITORING: Monitoring report.

## 8. CALENDAR FOR PLANNED ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

[illegible]

## 9. SUMMARY AND SIGNATURE

This document contains the Local Action Plan (LAP) for Flanders which is the result of phase one of the Interreg Europe project named Innocastle. This LAP proposes actions to positively influence the relationship between the many historical rural estates in Flanders and the Decree of Immovable Heritage. This LAP focuses on the landscape park Bulskampveld and wider region to develop lessons and methods of working valid all over Flanders.

Chapter 1 and 2 contain administrative information and an introduction to this LAP. In chapter 3, extracts from the baseline survey are combined to give the necessary context which led to the three objectives of this LAP as described in chapter 4 (create a better understanding of rural estates; work towards a transversal and participative approach; stimulate a future oriented view towards rural estates). Chapter 5 summarizes the most important stakeholders involved in phase one of Innocastle. Chapter 6 describes the actual actions that will be executed to realise the objectives set. An Immovable Heritage Masterplan for 'rural estates' will be realised in the coming years. This masterplan must be seen as the legislative structure to embed the different actions of this plan within the Flemish heritage policy. It enables to implement a participative, holistic, cross sectoral and future-oriented approach in relation to rural estates. Chapter 7 describes the monitoring process and chapter 8 the planning.

By signing this document we agree to the content of this document and commit to the implementation of the described actions.

Signature:

Onroerend Erfgoed

(Flanders Heritage)

Signature:

HOGENT - KASK

Signature:

Provincie West-Vlaanderen

Getekend door: Sonja Vanblaere (Signatur

Getekend op: 2021-02-19 07:41:54 +01:00

Reden: Ik keur dit document goed



Sylvie  
Van Damme

Digitally signed  
by Sylvie Van  
Damme  
Date:  
2021.03.02  
08:57:11 +01'00'

See next page

## Handtekening(en)



Elektronisch ondertekend op 26/02/2021 door  
Stijn Lombaert, Bestuursdirecteur



Elektronisch ondertekend op 1/03/2021 door  
Jean de Bethune de Bethune, Gedeputeerde -  
de Bethune