



## **Regional Action Plan for Border Park Kempen~Broek and River Park Meuse Valley**

**January 2022 - Final Version**



## Part I – General information

Project: Wildlife Economy (WLE)

Partner organisation: Regionaal Landschap Kempen en Maasland (BE); Province Limburg (NL)

Country: Belgium / Netherlands

NUTS2 region: Province Limburg (BE) / Province Limburg (NL)

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## Part II – Policy context

The Action Plan aims to impact:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Investment for Growth and Jobs programme
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	European Territorial Cooperation programme
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other regional development policy instrument

Name of the policy instrument addressed:

Interreg Flanders - Netherlands 2021-2027.

Explanation on policy instrument addressed:

This is a change from the original application which refers to Interreg Flanders - Netherlands 2014-2020 programme. The reason for the change is that the Interreg Flanders - Netherlands 2014-2020 programme has now been closed. The new Interreg Flanders - Netherlands 2021-2027 programme, on the other hand, is currently being launched.

**The Interreg Flanders - Netherlands 2021-2027 programme is implemented by Interreg Flanders-Netherlands and covers the 5 Flemish provinces and the 3 southern Dutch provinces. For this programme period, it focuses on the following 4 policy objectives, each of which is further refined into specific objectives:**

1. A smarter Europe. Innovation and skills for smart transformation;
2. A greener Europe. Climate, environment and nature;
3. A more social Europe. Inclusive labour market, education and sustainable leisure;
4. A Europe without borders. Working together to overcome border obstacles.

With our new project proposal, we focus on policy objective 3. *Inclusive labour market, education and sustainable leisure*, and more specifically to the specific objective C3 *Strengthening the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation*. The specific objective is further explained under point 2. Activities of part III.

## Part III – The action plan

### 1. The background

This Regional Action Plan, based on the lessons learned during the Wildlife Economy project, describes the action we are going to carry out in 2 parks on the border of the Belgian and Dutch provinces of Limburg. The Border Park Kempen~Broek and the River Park Maasvallei are 2 cross-border areas of respectively 25.000 ha and 13.000 ha that extend across the borders of 2 countries (Belgium and the Netherlands), 3 provinces and 15 municipalities.

In recent years over 40 partners in Kempen~Broek and 30 partners in the Maasvallei have developed a structural cross-border cooperation. Not only literally, across administrative borders, but also figuratively, across the borders of different sectors and mindsets.

This cooperation is set up not only between administrations and organisations, but is especially a cross-border cooperation between people! Participation is highly valued by the cooperating partners and there is a constant focus on involving local people, supporting local initiatives and involving and valuing volunteers (guides, monitoring, ...).

This cooperation has led to a large number of realisations in the field of nature development, landscape care, climate adaptation, heritage, archaeology, tourism and recreation. These realisations were possible thanks to municipal, provincial, national and European subsidies. But also through the own investments of the various partners in the area.

Wherever possible, projects always look for synergy between different actors and/or users of the open space and for an economic spin-off for the local economy.

#### The demand for more

For the cooperating partners, cross-border cooperation became a basic attitude and will be continued and expanded in the coming years. The list of ideas to be realised is still long. Moreover, in Kempen~Broek the cooperating partners want to lift the park to a higher (inter)national level, based on the area's own qualities. That is why the Regionaal Landschap Kempen en Maasland - which organises and facilitates the cross-border cooperation - started the procedure to have Kempen~Broek recognised by UNESCO as a Transboundary Biosphere Area, at the request of the provinces and municipalities. For UNESCO Biosphere Areas are model regions in the field of sustainable development and have 3 objectives:

1. Preservation of the landscape, cultural and natural diversity and the ecosystem services they provide;
2. Information exchange, education and the promotion of scientific research
3. Sustainable economic and social development.

In the Valley of the Meuse River Park, strategic projects such as 'land development' or integral river restoration help to realise the ambition to become a reference area in the low countries for a climate resilient river landscape with opportunities for residents and visitors. The coalition of partners also marked 3 objectives:

1. To invest in a higher landscape quality, respecting nature and heritage values;
2. To invite inhabitants and visitors to become ambassadors of the River Park;

3. To cooperate cross border for an international appearance.

#### Wildlife Economy input and learnings

By participating in the Wildlife Economy (WLE) project, we wanted to give an impulse to the 3rd objective of Biosphere Areas. WLE is based on the belief that natural resources or ecosystem services are an economic asset. In some cases, especially in remote areas of Europe, they can be one of the most important building blocks of a sustainable economic and social development strategy.

However, this belief is still not sufficiently recognised. Natural resources or ecosystem services are still too rarely considered as an economic asset. Measures to protect landscape, nature, water, soil, etc. are often seen as an expense or a threat to economic development, which leads to a lack of support. As a result, the implementation of many policies is often inefficient and sometimes even counterproductive.

Moreover, regional economic development policies hardly make use of the opportunities arising from the development and conservation of natural resources. In addition, mechanisms to reinvest revenues from this natural capital in their management are lacking.

Lessons learnt from the project that constitute the basis for the development of this Regional Action Plan:

- The webinar 'The future of nature and business', organised by Rewilding Europe on 3 November 2020, showed us several business cases (e.g. Drafting a Landscape Business Plan for the Greater Côa Valley (Portugal), Bunloit estate (Schotland)) that were built on a wildlife economy and that were inspiring for the development of this RAP and the new Interreg project proposal.
- During our discussions with many local stakeholders, the study visits to Hainich National Park (D) and Crawinkel (D) (26-28 September 2021) and the partner meeting in the Oderdelta (29-30 September 2021) it became clear that local entrepreneurs are interested to incorporate nature and landscape in their business model and that small initiatives are already being taken (e.g. European Safari Company). It became however also clear that entrepreneurs are often in search of knowledge or simply do not find the time to get started with innovative ideas. This confirms our intention that with the methodology developed by Breda University of Applied Sciences during phase 1 of the WLE-project we have a useful tool that meets a concrete demand. We will incorporate this tool in the Interreg project proposal and put it in practice once our Interreg project is approved.
- The workshops on 19 November, 2 and 10 December 2021 with local stakeholders to develop the methodology for sustainable business models led by Breda University of Applied Sciences gave insights (e.g. what kind of help are entrepreneurs looking for) that are important for the development of the methodology, but also provided ideas (e.g. provide an account manager who assists entrepreneurs in drafting their business plan) for the Interreg application that we will develop during phase 2.

## **2. Activities**

To put the WLE principles into practice and to influence the policy instrument Interreg Flanders - Netherlands 2021-2027 we will prepare and submit an Interreg application based on the lessons learned (see below) from the WLE-project (influence Type 1: implementation of new project(s)).

We will submit the project under Objective C3 (Strengthening the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation) of the Interreg programme Flanders-Netherlands 2021-2027.

Objective C3 does not (only) aim at ecotourism and ecologically responsible tourism, but at a more conscious tourism where the initiatives aimed at strengthening the tourist-recreational offer and experience take into account 'people', 'planet' and 'profit'. The programme therefore wants to focus on projects with an added value on an economic, ecological and social level. The 'countryside', as an alternative to the busy historical cities and the coast, has the potential to provide added value with its open landscape, heritage, nature, the experience of tranquillity, etc. Therefore, the programme prioritises the development of projects that provide added value and the 'countryside'.

This means that the Interreg programme recognises the added value of cooperation between 'nature and economy' - i.e. wildlife economy and wants to focus on rural regions such as the Maasvallei River Park and the Kempen~Broek Border Park.

This also ties in with the focus of the activities in the Kempen~Broek Border Park and the Maasvallei River Park where we want to strengthen the local and regional economy in these rural areas in a sustainable manner with sustainable tourism, making use of nature, landscape, heritage, etc. that these areas have to offer.

During phase 2 of the WLE-project, RLKM together with the province of Limburg will prepare and submit a project proposal after the launch of the first call in February 2022. If our project proposal is accepted, we will use the rest of phase 2 to prepare and submit the detailed project application according to the deadlines set out by the Interreg Flanders - Netherlands 2021-2027 programme.

Potential ideas that will be included in the project proposal are investments in improving the tourist-recreational infrastructure, increasing the ability to experience the landscape, cooperation with entrepreneurs (e.g. via the methodology for sustainable business models that was developed in phase 1), setting up an ambassador programme with entrepreneurs, expanding the monitoring of visitor flows and making the data available online, investing in an increase of the basic landscape quality outside the protected natural areas in order to spread the recreational pressure over a broader region and to be able to better connect to the businesses of entrepreneurs,...

The final selection will be made in March together with the involved stakeholders.

### Activities (and planning)

Activities	Description	Timeframe / Planning
1	Collecting ideas and drawing up a longlist of potential partners > Belgian partners by RLKM > Dutch partners by province of Limburg.	February 2022
2	Organising a kick-off meeting at which the outline for the project proposal is explained and discussed with stakeholders > practical organisation by RLKM > link with provincial policy by province of Limburg in relation to the Interreg proposal.	End of February - Beginning of March 2022
3	Decision on final project set-up and stakeholders to be involved > by RLKM and province of Limburg together.	March 2022
4	Writing of project proposal > by RLKM (chief editor) in close cooperation with province of Limburg.	March 2022
5	Feedback of project proposal with stakeholders and preparation of budget > by RLKM	March 2022
6	Finalising the project proposal and budget > by RLKM and province of Limburg together.	March 2022
7	Submission of the project proposal > by RLKM.	March 2022
8	Decision on proposal by the Interreg Flanders - The Netherlands secretariat.	Q3-Q4 2022 (estimate)
9	If approved, drafting of the extended and final project application by RLKM (chief editor) in close cooperation with province of Limburg.	Q3-Q4 2022 (estimate)

### 3. Players involved

The potential stakeholders will be identified in action 1 (February 2022) but will likely include local municipalities, tourism organisations, conservation organisations, (agricultural) entrepreneurs, ...

### 4. Timeframe

See table Activities and planning.

