



Vlaams Ruraal Netwerk

Best practices in rural development Flanders – Belgium

Nominated and winning projects
Competition Prima Plattelandsproject 2010



Communicating Rural Development
www.ruraalnetwerk.be



The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development:
Europe investing in rural areas



Preface

At the beginning of April 2010, the *Prima Plattelandsproject* competition was launched. In the frame of this competition the Flemish Rural Network went in search of the best rural projects and activities in Flanders, subsidized under the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 (RDP II).

No fewer than 35 farmers or organisations submitted their candidacy. A total of 32 candidates were finally retained by the Flemish Rural Network. These were distributed as follows in function of the competition themes:

- added value through cooperation:	15 candidates;
- smart use of energy in agriculture and rural areas:	0 candidates;
- care for nature and biodiversity:	8 candidates;
- communication and education as an instrument:	6 candidates;
- smart marketing strategies:	3 candidates.

The provincial juries decided which of the submitted files could continue to the next round (up to 3 projects per theme per province). Then an international jury selected the five best candidates for each theme for the whole of Flanders. After that, everyone had the opportunity to vote for their favourite(s) on the www.ruraalnetwerk.be website. No less than 7300 valid votes were registered!

The four winning projects were honoured on 14 January 2011 during an event at the Agriflanders agricultural fair.



Picture: The four winning projects.

Since all 18 projects can be considered “best practices”, this brochure gives an overview of the winning and the nominated projects by theme. The texts and photographs were provided by the applicants, unless otherwise indicated.

Enjoy your read!

Flemish Rural Network

Theme

“Added value through cooperation”

WINNING PROJECT: Library service bus Zwevegem

Project description:

The main facilities (including the municipal administrative centre and the library) are located outside of the city centre in the municipality of Zwevegem, in the extreme north of the town. Residents in the rural districts in the south (Heestert, Moen, Otegem and Sint-Denijs) and in the hamlet of Zwevegem-Knokke who wanted to use these amenities always had to drive from one end of the municipality to the other. As a result the disadvantaged and less mobile residents often encountered problems if they wanted to make use of the municipal services. In three of the four boroughs the library had already opened a branch but the opening hours were minimal.

Because the municipal council and the library were of the opinion that everybody should have the same opportunities, irrespective of their domicile or mobility they decided to set up a library bus: the bibus. The bibus visits all the villages and boroughs and the hamlet of Zwevegem-Knokke several times a week. All the schools and the residents of the retirement and nursing home Marialove in Heestert and of the Huize ten Dries counselling centre in Sint-Denijs were given the opportunity to visit the bibus every week.

The bibus offers books, magazines, tourist maps, DVDs and audio books. You can consult the Internet on the bibus, look up information in (library) databases and print off data. Next to this, a whole range of municipal and social public welfare services is also made available. Documents and forms (e.g., applications for the fuel allowance, travel passes, and so on) which cannot be always issued immediately can be sent to your home address. In any case, the bibus serves as a central office where you can obtain all possible information. You can also buy tickets here and pick up various brochures and leaflets; the bibus even sells the municipal garbage bags!

The bibus is a pilot project which is pioneering in almost every area. There are several library buses in Belgium but the bibus in Zwevegem is the first to combine a library service with other public services. Excellent cooperation between all the municipal services ensures that the services are always available.

The bibus also has been a valuable asset for the rural villages, where the level of amenities had deteriorated significantly in recent years. Shops, banks, post offices and so on had closed over the years. The bibus visits all the villages weekly and its multifunctional character attracts people from all layers of society. Thus the bibus also becomes a meeting place where you can meet your neighbours and fellow villagers and have a chat. As a result the bibus also serves as a barrier against isolation and loneliness!

Contact details:

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Photograph: The kindergarteners visit the bibus. (© Gemeenteschool Heestert)



Photograph: The festive inauguration on 24 April 2010. (© rxja Harelbeke)



Photograph: Choosing from the amazing selection... and enjoying your read... on the bibus! (© Bibliotheek Zwevegem)

Nominee: Woon-Zorg-Net-Werk (Residential-Care-Net-Work) region of Tielt

Project description:

A Residential-Care-Net-Work for the region of Tielt: innovative and challenging!

Studies question the social cohesion and solidarity within a rural context. In the West Flanders Leader Region Tielts Plateau four organisations (Regional Welfare Council Roeselare-Tielt, Samenlevingsopbouw West-Vlaanderen, CAW Midden-West-Vlaanderen and Familiehulp) have joined forces. With the unique Residential-Care-Net-Work project they want to restore and strengthen the declining social cohesion. Many initiatives that are designed to strengthen social cohesion and cohesion in general are realised in and inspired by urban contexts where resources, people and services are more readily available than in rural areas. Creating such an offer in rural areas therefore requires an innovative approach and constitutes the challenge of this project.

The innovation lies in the new, but very specific cooperation which focuses on disadvantaged groups and on specific themes (social isolation, guaranteed housing) in and around Tielt. The public social welfare centres and social housing agencies as well as the local councils of Tielt, Pittem, Wingene and Ruiselede have joined forces. The realisation of a strong tailor-made network across several departments and target groups is the main challenge of this project.

The project's four key words are also the areas in which the various partners operate. With its housing counselling the CAW supports and supervises vulnerable tenants. This contributes to a dignified life in their residential context to guarantee their housing. The npa Opbouwwerk makes service more accessible to vulnerable groups. To this end they establish Care networks with local volunteers, organisations, key figures, etc. Familiehulp helps keep the housing facilities clean. But because they receive priority cleaning assistance the residents in these target groups can continue to live at home. The Welfare Council is in charge of coordinating the project. It not only is the motor, which oversees the cooperation with all the parties involved but also encourages networking. Identifying, monitoring and reporting gaps, problems and opportunities to the competent authorities is an important task.

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Photograph: Project staff.



Photograph: Residential counsellor Maaïke during a home visit.



Photograph: Madeleine, a volunteer visits an elderly resident with a small birthday gift.

Nominee: Duurzaam behoud Haspengouws landschap (Sustainable preservation of the Haspengouw landscape)

Project description:

“Samen sterk voor NATUUR EN LANDSCHAP” or ‘Working together for Nature and Landscape’, this has been the motto of the Regional Landscape Haspengouw and Voeren for the last ten years. Thanks to LEADER we can step up our efforts and give an added impetus to the landscape and to nature. Three years ago we concluded a unique partnership with the province of Limburg, 15 Haspengouw municipalities, Agro | Aanneming cbva and the Natuur en Boomgaarden Social Employment vzw. The funds are invested in the future of the cultural landscape of Haspengouw and Voeren. But what does it all mean in practice?

In the first part of this project our aim was to preserve and restore the small landscape elements that are so characteristic of the cultural landscape in Haspengouw and Voeren. These authentic scenic gems underwent considerable maintenance in the frame of this project. We draw up tailored preservation, restoration or redevelopment plans and encourage private individuals, farmers and municipalities to care for these small landscape elements. Sheltered workshops or farmers carry out the work. For farmers who love the landscape the nature and landscape work is a welcome alternative source of income. And the deployment of teams of social workshops provides for a social benefit. The workers, who come from disadvantaged social groups, benefit from expert assistance which provide real growth opportunities and new possibilities within the regular job market. The result is a pleasant environment where the living is good.

In the second part, we offer a lasting solution for the pruning of rural hedgerows. Agro|aanneming, a partner in this project, bought a brand-new flexible hedgerow thresher. Three farmers in the region are in charge of the new thresher and when the machine cannot reach the hedgerow the social economy takes care of the job. Thanks to this simple and efficient system we want to encourage owners of rural hedgerows to leave their hedges in place and even plant new ones. So we can continue to enjoy the beautiful lively and green hedgerows of Haspengouw and Voeren.

Finally, the third part of this project provides a solution for the kilos of fruit that are rotting in the many orchards because what is an owner to do with all this fruit which can only be stored for a short period of time? As a result of this many owners would prefer to do away with their orchard altogether. The sheltered workshop of the Nationale Boomgaardenstichting (National Orchard Foundation) purchased a mobile juicer to ensure the survival of these beautiful, strong landscape elements. During the harvest this mobile juicer visits many of the municipalities in Haspengouw and Voeren. The lucky owners of tall trees can have their fruit pressed into a delicious juice. You need to have at least four crates of apples (100kg) to be eligible. During the harvest we organize a juicer tour so you can have your apples pressed.

The future of our little landscape miracles is looking good!

Contact details:

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Photograph: Hedgerow thresher - rural hedges of at least 50 metres long are eligible for the pruning of hedges.



Photograph: Mobile juicer - apples are pressed into a vitamin-rich juice.



Photograph: Necessary maintenance in hollows in Sint-Truiden.

Nominee: Sentse cultuur in beweging (lively culture in Sint-Jan-in-Eremo)

Project description:

The project 'Sentse cultuur in beweging' is part of the development of a cultural site in an old school building in Sint-Jan-in-Eremo, a district of Saint-Laureins. The former school house, which already serves as a music school, will now be reused as a cultural venue. On the one hand project concerns the renovation of the school building into a multipurpose space devoted to culture. On the other hand the project is the visible expression of a cultural movement in the town of Sint-Laureins. The building is the hardware in this project.

The aim of the project is to set up a partnership in which local cultural and social-cultural associations, the people of our community who are interested in culture, local residents, the cultural advisory body and other target groups join forces to create a vision for the multidisciplinary refurbishment of the building, for the identity and inauguration of the building. Besides the participation process, a comprehensive communication project was set up with the associations, the residents of the building and more broadly with the population of Sint-Laureins. The external supervision of both processes was in hands of the Plattelandscentrum (rural centre) Meetjesland vzw.

The plans grew thanks to the participation of and in consultation with the cultural and socio-cultural associations which are all members of the cultural advisory body. Furthermore, two working groups focusing on 'technicity' and 'cultural site' reflected on the building's design and on how to create the building's identity. Communication among others entailed the development of a blog, which was constantly updated, so everybody could follow the progress of the works and the dissemination of two newsletters to keep residents informed.

The project 'Sentse cultuur in beweging' is a positive practical example of a good and well conducted participatory process involving several parties: associations of the cultural advisory body, local residents around the cultural site De Meet and the people of Sint-Laureins. The merit of the project, however, is that:

- involvement was encouraged and obtained among the associations;
- the available specific knowledge and experience among the members of the technicity working group were used: e.g., sound and lighting equipment and TSAT, designing the kitchen and KVLV;
- the associations were more 'involved' in the cultural advisory body thanks to the working groups;
- communication about the project generated wider support among the local residents who live around the site;
- new, fresh ideas emerged.

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Photograph: Opening weekend.



Photograph: Opening weekend.



Photograph: Presentation of the newsletter.

Nominee: Van hartje stad tot ver daarbuiten een regenboog van kansen (A rainbow of opportunities in the city centre and far beyond)

Project description:

In 2010 the Groebegracht Valley in Halle is a beautiful area offering several opportunities and challenges. The project 'A rainbow of opportunities in the city centre and far beyond' wishes to tackle the key challenges by optimally exploiting the area's possibilities.

The open landscape of the Groebegracht is under considerable pressure due to various factors. The Groebegracht itself in recent years caused flooding in the area but also in the city centre. Ensuring adequate water storage by creating a flood plain can prevent damage to homes and agriculture and also offers opportunities for nature development. Stimulating water purification at the source also creates better opportunities for biodiversity and an attractive living environment.

In the wide area in and around the valley every day rat-run traffic makes its way between the Pajottenland and the industrial estates of Halle. The big companies in the vicinity are perfectly aware of this and are jointly looking for safe and pleasant bicycle connections in the area. Encouraging bicycle use for commuting of course also requires a change of mindset among employees, but ultimately it can also contribute to a better health. Reducing traffic in the vicinity can make an important contribution to reducing CO² emissions, fine dust particles and engine noise.

In the frame of a two-year project, the Regional Landscape and all its partners (the city of Halle, the city of Pepingen, Colruyt, Natuurpunt, the Flemish Land Agency, the Farmers' Union and the Province of Flemish Brabant) a vision for Groebegracht develop the living environment more pleasant and liveable. After a careful inventory of the area the partners are now preparing a regional vision.

But there is more to this project than just plans. Our aim is also to implement a number of smaller but tangible projects in the field within the term of this project. At present 27 standard fruit trees and 350 linear metres of hedges have already been planted and a pool created on the land of private individuals. Currently there are also other proposals on the table.

We are also organising five activities with numerous local partners (music and art academy, library, cultural centre, ...) under the title 'Op de Sofa van de Groebegracht' in order to involve the general public in the project. You can find out more about a typical aspect of this area during each of the activities. In this way, the project is not only realised through a collaboration with all the partners involved but residents and visitors also are given the chance to join forces and support the project.

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Photograph: Site building - planting of mixed hedges and a standard fruit orchard in the V. Demesmaeckerstraat.



Photograph: Traffic pressure in the Groebegracht Valley - Beertsestraat - dangerous cycling conditions.



Photograph: Pressure of urbanisation in the Groebegracht Valley – encroaching building (including the hospital) in the landscape.

Theme

”Care for nature and biodiversity”

WINNING PROJECT: Steenuilen in de Vlaamse Ardennen (Little owls in the Flemish Ardennes)

Project description:

Thanks to the small-scale landscape in the Flemish Ardennes (small grazing fields and farmland, hedges, orchards and willow trees) the little owl is still able to maintain itself. The Little Owl has thus become the mascot for Regional Landscape Flemish Ardennes (RLVA) to tend to this small-scale landscape.

The Little Owl (*Athene noctua*) is the smallest owl in Flanders. It breeds in tree holes (of old fruit trees and willow trees) or in old barns and feeds on (shrew) mice, large insects, snails and/or earthworms which it finds in fields and meadows. At night it can often be spotted sitting on posts while looking for a tasty prey.

This owl is still thriving in the Low Countries. This is largely due to the mild climate and the small-scale landscape with small grazing pastures, small fields, hedges, hedgerows and standard orchards. The Flemish Ardennes is one of the regions with the highest numbers. In Flanders alone there are 6,000 to 10,000 breeding pairs of the Little Owl. At European level, Flanders plays a very important role in the survival of this small owl species. And yet the Little Owl is under threat:

- Because of the use of herbicides and insecticides it finds fewer insects to feed itself;
- Grazing land is being increasingly converted into farmland, whereas pastures are a good hunting area;
- The lack of nesting facilities: because of economies of scale several small fields are turned into one big field, meaning many hedges, trees and pollarded trees disappear. Also, old standard orchards are becoming less available. And old barns are demolished or renovated hermetically;
- In addition, the maturing young tend to remain close to the parental nest meaning that those areas in which the Little Owl does no (longer) breed are only gradually colonised;
- And many young Little Owls are killed under the wheels of cars because they tend to seek out the heat and insects on the asphalt.

In the frame of the Little Owl project 400 nesting boxes will be hung up throughout the Flemish Ardennes, which will also be monitored. The nesting boxes are manufactured by BUSO Zottegem-Velzeke (A school for special secondary education) and the npa Breek De Stilte, which has been working with autistic people for more than ten years. Anyone who volunteers to hang up a nesting box will receive a unique house number of baked clay depicting a Little Owl. People are also encouraged to plant willows and fruit trees through the annual RLVA tree planting campaign. Since March 2010 there is also a mobile exhibition and an educational fact sheet available for primary schools.

As part of the Little Owl Project, RLVA commissioned Brewery De Ryck to brew a traditional beer, the 'STEENUILKE'.

The house number and the beer have been created to put Little Owls in the minds and the hearts of people.

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Photograph: Little Owl.



Photograph: Little Owl gadget.



Photograph: Little Owl nesting boxes.

***Nominee: Beekrandenbeheer in het stroomgebied van de Dommel en de Warmbeek
(managing embankments of brooks in the Dommel and Warmbeek river basin)***

Project description:

The northern Limburg municipalities, the Province of Limburg, Europe, farmers and De Dommelvallei water management agency are joining forces to improve quality of surface water. By creating grass berms along watercourses farmers create a buffer counteracts the run-off of fertilizers and pesticides to these watercourses. The creation of these buffer strips therefore has a beneficial effect on water quality.

The project 'Beekrandenbeheer in het stroomgebied van de Dommel en de Warmbeek' is a joint initiative of De Dommelvallei water management agency, the municipalities of Bocholt, Hamont-Achel, Hechtel-Eksel, Lommel, Neerpelt, Overpelt and Peer and the province of Limburg. With this project, these councils want to raise awareness among farmers to create six-metre wide grass berms along watercourses and to offer a solution for a host of practical problems. Participating farmers moreover will receive an annual payment from the Flemish Land Agency.

By creating buffer strips between the watercourse and the fields or arable land several problems are simultaneously addressed. The water quality improves due to the reduced run-off of fertilizers and pesticides. In these buffer strips plants can easily develop and thrive and animals find the necessary shelter here. Watercourses with embankments moreover also constitute lovely green ribbons in the landscape. This project also takes into account practical issues such as the maintenance of the brooks and the accessibility of the plots.

In 2007 a pilot project was already implemented along the Bollisenbeek in Peer. Over a distance of nearly five kilometres, eight farmers actively worked to create a buffer strip along this watercourse. This unique cooperation is the cornerstone for the expansion of river bank management to the entire Dommel and Warmbeek valley.

In April 2010 the counter was at about 21 km of embankment. The "river bank management project" is thus a fantastic example of how farmers and water managers can join forces to improve the quality of surface water.

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Photograph: A flowery embankment.



Photograph: Embankment along the cycling path.



Photograph: Embankment in the morning.

Nominee: Een toekomst voor autochtone bomen en struiken (A future for indigenous trees and shrubs)

Project description:

In the run-up to 2010, the year of biodiversity, everyone was concerned, and with reason, about the decline of our fauna and flora. What most people do not know, however, is that our native oak trees, hazels, hornbeams and so on are threatened with extinction. Only 5% of our greenery consists of real Belgian trees and shrubs.

These INDIGENOUS PLANTS are the trees and bushes that are descendants of the plants which settled in our region after the last ice age. The cause of the disappearance of these INDIGENOUS PLANTS is the cheap imports. For example, the common oak has been growing in our region since time immemorial. But the common which you can buy from a plant nursery or from a garden centre is almost certainly an import. That in itself is not so bad, one would think. More variety is more fun. But the newcomers have an entirely different biorhythm. As a result they are not suited to our climate, our trees and our wildlife. The blackthorns that are imported from Italy for example blossom for the Brown Hairstreak butterflies. Belgian blackthorns by contrast are however adapted to the lifecycle of this insect. Our plant and animal world thus requires INDIGENOUS PLANTS!

By planting an INDIGENOUS PLANT you not only contribute to biodiversity. These plants are also better adapted to our environmental conditions and consequently have a better chance of survival. Moreover, they promote the regional identity. Only benefits in other words!

The three Limburg regional landscapes have joined forces to help INDIGENOUS PLANTS. To achieve this we protect the places where INDIGENOUS PLANTS still grow and thrive. We also harvest seeds at these sites and grow them. In this way we can always use INDIGENOUS plants for our own landscaping activities. But our main objective is to market these precious seedlings so that everyone can buy and plant INDIGENOUS PLANTS. Because at the moment there is still a major shortage. In cooperation with various authorities and organisations we also went in search of sustainable solutions to deal with the gap in the supply. The INDIGENOUS PLANT quality label has helped us arrive at a solution. We are not quite there yet but all the partners are happy.

This project is a success thanks to intensive cooperation between Regional Landscape Haspengouw and Voeren, Regional Landscape Lage Kempen, Regional Landscape Kempen and Maasland, the Nature and Forest Agency, the Institute for Nature and Forest Research, the Agency for Agriculture and Fisheries, the Limburg environmental associations, the Limburg social economy workshops and the Flemish Land Agency.

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Photograph: Quality of an indigenous plant. (© RLH)



Photograph: Harvest of indigenous seeds. (© RLH)



Photograph: Indigenous hawthorn seeds. (© RLH)

Nominee: Ecologisch? Dat is toch logisch! (Ecological is logical)

Project description:

In the countryside many private individuals tend to have ornamental gardens and also often grow their own fruit and vegetables. As a result of problems with many diseases, pests and weeds, the use of pesticides among these individuals is significant and is not always thought through. The disadvantages of pesticides are well known and private individuals contribute significantly to undesirable environmental problems and health aspects which follow from the use of these products. This problem is often underestimated. Many private individuals are not aware of the negative impact of these pesticides on the environment and on their own health.

The theme of biological and ecological gardening these days is very much a hot topic. However, information as well as practical tips for individuals for private individuals are still very limited. For the average citizen, who often has limited knowledge about ecological gardening, the threshold to a more ecological approach to gardening is often still high. Sometimes this is inspired by a fear of additional costs or labour, and often out of ignorance or fear of excessive weeds, pests and diseases. That is why it is necessary to find examples of gardens where one can show that ecological gardening is possible and that it offers many opportunities.

There has to be an alternative in order to reduce the use of pesticides in people's gardens. That is why KHKempen and IMD-IOK want to show private individuals that ecological gardening is possible. We will be creating two demonstration gardens on the sites of KHKempen. Garden one is a classical garden in which we use pesticides and where the plant choice is largely inspired by ornamental reasons and ecological value is not taken into account. Garden two is an ecological garden without pesticides, which pays attention to plant selection, the situation of the plants and low maintenance, water-permeable pavements. We will show private gardeners with these demonstration gardens how they should proceed without chemical pesticides for better weed and pest control.

The gardens will be equipped with informative signs and during guided tours visitors will be taught about the principles of ecological gardening. The amateur gardener can ask questions to the network of advisers that is available to answer them. The project's website will be full of practical tips and explanations to give gardeners more background information after their visit of the gardens.

For amateur gardeners who want to find out more about the theory and practice of eco-gardening we will be organising ecological gardening courses for cottage gardens and ornamental gardens in the spring of 2011 courses. Composting masters are often focal points for gardening tips and tricks. We will give the composting masters of the Midden-Kempen Leader Region the opportunity to retrain themselves on ecological principles. Even the smallest backyard gardeners are initiated into the world of biodiversity through classes on pesticides and biodiversity, and with tours through the gardens.

This project is coordinated by the KHKempen and IOK. They will work closely with the associations, Velt and Volkstuin. Milieuzorg Op School (MOS) will raise awareness about the project in the MOScholen. All six municipalities in the Midden-Kempen LEADER region are partners in the project: Lille, Geel, Vorselaar, Retie, Meerhout and Kasterlee.

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Photograph: Adult ladybug between an aphid colony.



Photograph: Blossoming hawthorn in hornbeam.



Photograph: Bumblebees collect nectar and pollen from flowers.

Nominee: Groetjes uit het landschap (Greetings from the landscape)

Project description:

The 'Groetjes uit het Pajottenland' project wants to encourage owners of valuable sites to redevelop their sites in an ecological way as landscapes. The approach of the project is twofold. In first instance the Centre for Agricultural History (Centrum Agrarische Geschiedenis or CAG) tries to raise awareness among residents by collecting historical footage about the landscape and about its agricultural architecture. CAG's aim is to call on the general public, together with cultural regional institutions, to collect old visual data: old photographs, postcards, paintings, calendars, cards and films of the Pajottenland. By raising residents' awareness about the value of the landscape and nature in the olden times, we encourage them to take action themselves again to underpin the scenic and ecological values today.

The second part of the project focuses the redevelopment of privately held land in an ecological and scenic manner, with the support and supervision of the Regional Landscape Zenne, Zuun & Zoniën nva. As a result of the current fragmentation of our natural heritage corridors and stepping stones are an important refuge for many species. The cooperation with all kinds of stakeholders (including private individuals) is therefore of great importance when it comes to realising these stepping stones and corridors. The Regional landscape association thus consults with private owners how best to redevelop their land. A design is created, which only incorporates indigenous plant material in order to benefit biodiversity.

By linking this to historical footage (cultural heritage), we also want to reach an audience that is not yet interested in nature and landscape. By focussing on the former landscape, we present a current story of nature and of the landscape and we try to inspire owners to take action themselves.

A bike trail which incorporates the landscape projects will be developed in order to ensure that the investments are permanent. Historical and contemporary information will be incorporated in the tour. In addition, a publication of the historical and contemporary images will be printed, with simulations of the landscape restoration projects in the future.

Thanks to the innovative cultural angle of the project - the collection of images about the region - a totally new audience will become interested in nature and landscape preservation and restoration. Owners are encouraged to take action on their own land in order to benefit biodiversity and nature. This approach offers great added value in many ways: as a result of the combination of culture and nature, the region's identity is highly valued and nature and the landscape become an asset in one's experience of the region. The realization of a cycling tour among the various landscape projects means that nature and the landscape now even provide leverage for gentle tourism development.

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Photograph: Hedge (Bever).



Photograph: Shelterbelt (Bever).



Photograph: Pool (Pepingen).

Theme

“Communication and education as an instrument”

WINNING PROJECT: Boerderijontmoetingen in 4 seizoenen ***(farm meetings across four seasons)***

Project description:

If children and young people are the adults of tomorrow, our task is to ensure that they are sufficiently resilient, to raise their awareness and ensure that they take a critical approach to such topics as sustainability and global education. In a rapidly evolving society, they constitute an important link for future generations.

Education from September 2010 will capitalise on this development through cross-curricular development terms, such as sustainable development, which will be incorporated in the curriculum. Schools will therefore often rely on the activities of socio-cultural organizations, and that is where we will come in.

Papaver npa is currently developing a quality program for students in primary and secondary education. This offer takes them to De Kollebloem, an organic farm which subsequently gave rise to Papaver npa. On this farm, they will find out more about such topics as healthy food, nature experience and education, crafts, fair trade and North-South education in a playful, creative way and experiential way.

We will regularly take a class with us so they can familiarize themselves with these themes. The students learn to work together in the fields, enjoy a homemade meal, learn the art of forgotten crafts, experience nature and take care of animals ... They also learn to reflect on these experiences, so that there is much more to these farm classes than just a fun experience. However, we also want students to really get in touch with certain values and incorporate them in a story in which the "ecological footprint" is more than just a concept.

Adults also experience this need for better contact and getting more in touch with nature and the seasons. The offer in this area is already quite diverse, which is why we have chosen to focus on a disadvantaged target audience. Our aim is to strengthen social cohesion by creating an offer for an often forgotten population group.

We believe that healthy food is one of the cornerstones of a healthy life. The offer aimed at underprivileged groups and which focuses on these themes is rather limited, and such activities are quite expensive. We want to prevent these groups from being excluded merely for financial reasons.

That is why offer a number of seasonal pampering days at an interesting price. During these days our aim is to pamper a group and to let them enjoy the rhythm of each season. Our main objective is to give disadvantaged target groups the opportunity to participate in a social and cultural network. This will be done in collaboration with the local social public welfare centres.

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Photograph: Farm class.



Photograph: (Strange) vegetables.



Photograph: Youth camp: active work outside is often a meaningful and fulfilling pastime for young people.

Nominee: Het landschap vertelt (the landscape as a narrator)

Project description:

Haspengouw and Voeren pride themselves on their heritage. The numerous castles, historic parks and gardens, historic farms, small village churches, etc ... with the landscape as their backdrop are tangible evidence of this. There are also many intangible witnesses that are typical of the region's unique character. Behind each witness lies a fascinating story about life at the time, the social fabric, fruit heritage, ...

Anyone who lives or likes to go to Haspengouw for recreational purposes is undoubtedly aware of the fact that this landscape is the result of centuries of history and use, but understanding the landscape itself often is still a matter for a geologist, historian, biologist, archaeologist For example have you ever realized that the typical hollow road is the result of centuries of agricultural use, with horse and cart drawing tracks into the landscape, from the farm in the valley to the field on the plateau. The run-off of rainwater continues the process and continued to hollow the roads. The hedges and hedgerows also had a practical function. Hedges first and foremost served as a natural fence and kept the cattle in the fields, away from the crops but they also supplied wood. And this wood was then used for tools or incorporated in farm houses. It is no coincidence that there are still a lot of typical half-timbered farmhouses in this region. The clay, which is a feature of the soil here, was used to make a paste which was applied between the lattice truss. The current landscape no longer reflects these customs. But the story behind all the cultural and historical witnesses of the past is more than worthwhile. It helps us to better understand the landscape and have more respect for it.

Thanks to the LEADER project "Het landschap vertelt..." the many landscape stories that are present here and there ... or are locked up in people's minds ... are recorded and made available. The Centre for Agrarian History will interview 40 farmers and experts in the area, will examine historical maps, analyse agricultural censuses, ... This information provides a string of fascinating landscape stories. This collection of landscape stories can be consulted from 2011 on the recreational walking and cycling networks. A useful publication will also be published which will help various actors develop alternative experiential and access strategies. To raise awareness in the region among residents we will a number of storytelling evenings as the final phase of the project. We will also organize symposiums that serve as motivation to reflect together on the project results. This, in turn, may generate some new initiatives.

The project was launched in conjunction with the Province of Limburg, the Provincial Centre for Cultural Heritage, Tourism Limburg, ZOLAD (inter-municipal cooperation South-East Limburg) and five Haspengouw municipalities (Riemst, Bilzen, Tongeren, Borgloon and Sint-Truiden) but it is expected to have an impact on the entire region. The aim is to create a sustainable platform that will continue to exist even after the implementation of this project.

Contact details:

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Photograph: The village of Borgloon is strategically located. Grazing sheep in the foreground. In the past grazing herds of sheep would err through the pastures with a shepherd. (© Provinciaal Centrum voor Cultureel Erfgoed)



Photograph: Haymaking at Mariahof in 's Graven-voeren with the Jacobs family. (© Private collection Theo Broers)



Photograph: The panoramic views from the Haspengouw plateaus are spectacular. (© Centrum Agrarische Geschiedenis - Nathalie Ceunen)

Nominee: 't pure WEI-gevoel (that pure farmland feeling)

Project description:

Sint-Jozefhoeve is an active dairy farm which, in the past, has worked hard to expand the business. Thus, the farm is also an educational dairy farm which welcomes young people in the frame of school excursions and youth camps. Recent renovations in the frame of previous Leader project have created facilities for meetings, parties and team building activities. All this is situated in the agricultural area, "De Malou" where a footpath has been laid out among the meadows and the fields for a 'nature in agriculture' experience.

Sint-Jozefhoeve provides quality as an active farm, as an educational business and as a pioneer in the diversification of agricultural potential. The excellent dairy (milk) production figures, the large numbers of youth and school groups who visit the farm as part of an educational program and the number of groups (company staff or family groups) that use the meeting facilities and recreational facilities bear testimony to this.

Based on that 'pure farm feeling', Sint-Jozefhoeve wishes to create a number of original "farm games". The games (chickens in the coop, a carrot course, cow popping, pear picking, falling apples, the mole's loop and sheep trials) which were designed in this frame are completely new and original and are conceptually related to the agricultural sector; the materials and maintenance are entirely sustainable and the games are team games which are played in the field. A 'dairy farm quiz' is also linked to the games. In this way, the project capitalised perfectly on the following criteria: innovative, sustainable, activating and agriculture-oriented.

The target audience for these packages are companies, associations and families (up to 120 pax). The activities are seen as team-building or group activities with a quiz, combined with walks, a party or a meeting with a one-day or half-day program.

The approach is 100% original and innovative and offers potential for expansion and replication. This contributes to the appeal and the image of the agricultural sector and of the farm in particular. The project is based on active rural recreation and exclusively uses sustainable materials. None of the games require 'fuel', the material implantation is small and only has a minor impact on the landscape. The project enables a multitude of local stakeholders, organisations and associations to work with one another in this frame and thus provides a socially responsible economic contribution. This applies to both the construction and the daily operation and maintenance. As a result the project is environmentally friendly, ecological, socially and economically sustainable.

The project gathers an innovative group of partners: a farm, product developers, catering companies, events companies, tourist services, promotion services from different sectors ...who all actively contribute. The continuity is based on the cooperation of these stakeholders and generates an accessible but comprehensive (social) economic potential.

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Photograph: Chicken game.



Photograph: Sheep trials.



Photograph: BBQ in the barn.

Nominee: Plattelandseducatief Netwerk Kempen & Maasland (Rural education network Kempen & Maasland)

Project description:

From 2009 until 2011 twelve partners will be developing an agricultural educational network in the frame of LEADER. Plattelandsklassen vzw, Breugelhoeve vzw, Landelijke Gilden, the Farmer's Union and the cities and municipalities of Peer, Bocholt, Bree, Hamont-Achel, Hechtel-Eksel, Kinrooi, Maaseik, Meeuwen-Gruitrode and Neerpelt all have the same objective in mind: reducing the gap between the farmer and the rural user or consumer. Through the Leader Programme, the project has received the full endorsement of the province of Limburg, of Flanders and of Europe.

In the frame of the 'proximity learning' aspect we are mainly focusing on the link between the farmer and his immediate surroundings. Plattelandsklassen npa - the largest centre for agricultural education in Flanders - is the main promoter of this Leader Project and is responsible for the planning, coordination and implementation of most activities. The network currently has 26 farms that were trained to enter an active sponsorship agreement with local schools. In a joint agricultural newspaper local farmers introduce themselves to all the families in the region.

The 'learning experience' aspect extends this experience: the aim is to offer captivating experiences to anyone who is open to this. A number of farmers and horticultural entrepreneurs receive guidance to market an educational product. This is done through the "Kijkboerderijen" network of the Rural Guilds.

A rural route based on GPS technology is another activity in the frame of 'experience education'. The aim is to open up all agricultural and educational initiatives and facilitate active regional exploration for schools and recreational clubs".

And finally there is also an Agricultural Centre. Besides its support function for the entire network and for anyone who wishes to contribute to this objective, the centre also has a reception function. To this end, the Dairy Centre in Peer will be converted into the Agricultural Centre K & M, with a beautiful exhibition space and educational infrastructure. This active exhibition opened its doors in September 2010.

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Photo: Visit to the local farm.



Photograph: Exhibition.



Photograph: GPS technology.

Nominee: DigiRoute 42

Project description:

A DIGITAL WALK THROUGH THE FLEMISH ARDENNES
A VISUAL PILOT WALK BY ANTON COGEN

Many like to take walks to get away from their television, computer and other technical gadgets, except maybe from their cell phone: you never know ... Will the walker be overtaken by so-called progress too? The latest generation of mobile phones at any rate have all the potential of being useful guides for the recreational hiker. The integrated GPS will show you where you are on the map. So you no longer need to search for missing signs. And your walk is augmented en route with sound, images and video. The tourist information is now available on location. Finally, you can also interact through your smartphone. You can take part in a short quiz or find out where the nearest terrace is for a nice drink. A host of pocket-sized opportunities!

With the European 'DigiRoute42' project the combined libraries of Route 42 have launched a highly innovative product. A total of six animated walks in the Flemish Ardennes have been developed. During the summer of 2010 the pilot walk 'Jan De Lichte, weighed and found wanting' was launched. The project comprises a short film in seven scenes based on a screenplay by Anton Cogen: 'Jan De Lichte, weighed and found wanting'. This film about the eighteenth-century legend of Jan De Lichte was filmed last summer in the region around Velzeke.

You can use a free phone made available to you by the tourist information office for this walk. Or use your own if you prefer. Five other digital trails are proposed until 2011: a mysterious disappearance story in Sint-Maria-Lierde by award-winning crime writer, Bavo D'Hooge, a historical tour in Sint-Lievens-Esse, an interactive 'green activity walk' in Zonnegem, an 'Experience the silence' walk in Waarbeke and a heritage tour along the Molenbeek in Moortsele after a screenplay by Bob Van Laerhoven.

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Photograph: A picture of the Jan De Lichte walk on a smartphone.



Photos: Filming of the Jan De Lichte walk with Anton Cogen and Mout Uyttersprot.

Theme

“Smart marketing strategies”

WINNING PROJECT: Délimel, vers van bij de boer (Délimel, farm-fresh milk)

Project description:

Since 26 May 2010 every consumer in Belgium can enjoy the delicious taste of fresh milk from new Belgian dairy brand Délimel. Two supermarket chains have started selling the tasty fresh semi-skimmed milk by Délimel in all their stores in Belgium since this date, in a total of 367 outlets. Délimel, an initiative of two young dairy farmers, which now is a cooperative of eighteen Belgian dairy farmers wants to conquer the Belgian dairy market with its fresh dairy products.

Délimel's fresh dairy products are guaranteed to be exclusively from Belgian origin and are fully traceable from farmer to consumer. Moreover Délimel has retained full control of the collection and artisan processing of the milk. According to co-founder Christof De Keukeleire Délimel is a unique initiative in Belgium: "We can only provide guarantees to the consumer about our milk's authenticity, taste and quality by controlling the entire chain ourselves. Such a large-scale initiative, whereby fresh milk is made widely available to consumers, has not been launched in recent years. "

Because Délimel controls the collection and processing of the milk, this also has a positive impact on the price per litre of fresh semi-skimmed milk. There are no intermediaries between the affiliated dairy farmers and the stores that sell the fresh skimmed milk. As a result the milk is very attractive for consumers because of its price, while farmers are also guaranteed a fair price.

But the consumer mainly is interested in the product's taste. And the taste is good, according to co-founder Koen Van de Walle: "Délimel's delicious taste, due to the low pasteurization process of our fresh semi-skimmed milk, cannot be compared with the UHT milk that is sold in supermarkets. The Belgian market is ready for fresh milk with a full flavour, and now we also have a wide network of outlets. "

Délimel picks up the fresh milk from Belgian dairy farms every day with its own trailer. The milk is then uniformly heated to a temperature of 84 degrees centigrade for a very short time. This ensures that the unique flavour, the valuable nutrients and vitamins are significantly better preserved. After pasteurisation, the milk is packaged into cartons and prepared for refrigerated transport. As a result Délimel's fresh semi-skimmed milk finds its way very quickly to the refrigerated shelves of supermarkets.

The milk is sold in one litre cartons. Délimel's fresh semi-skimmed should be stored in your fridge and is best before the expiry date indicated on the package (up to ten days). Following the introduction of fresh semi-skimmed milk, Délimel is now also planning to market other fresh and tasty dairy products.

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Photograph: Cows grazing.



Photograph: Milk in a cooling tank.



Photograph: Délimel packaging.

Nominee: Tandem

Project description:

De Vlaspit is a social employment project in Scherpenheuvel. The project was devised and developed under the umbrella of the local pilgrimage basilica and has now become an employer of 65 people who for various reasons can no longer handle job in the regular job market.

Three years ago, De Vlaspit decided to further develop its employment project by creating and operating quality and sustainable social-tourism facilities in the centre of Scherpenheuvel. The aim was to anchor social, sustainable economy in local tradition and folklore. To this end De Vlaspit purchased a historically valuable building which was renovated and refurbished thanks to PDPO II funding.

In both of its locations De Vlaspit organises activities aimed at all visitors to Scherpenheuvel. These activities are an interesting addition to the existing visitor attractions and the folklore in this place of pilgrimage and thus contribute to expanding the tourism offer, which, in turn, will benefit visitor figures in Scherpenheuvel.

The offer is structured around the following key activities:

- A visit to the traditional candle workshop and an introduction to social economy as an employer for disadvantaged groups: next to luxury candles for domestic use the workshop also manufactures the church candles for the basilica. The mass production of garden candles, made from recycled wax derived from recycling centres throughout Flanders, can also be visited here. The tour ends with a tasting of a delicious and locally sourced dish.
- Introduction to local and regional produce and dishes of Flemish Brabant: Scherpenheuvel is located in the Hageland region, where numerous local products are manufactured. Visitors to De Vlaspit can find out more about a wide variety of local produce including a tasting of delicious local wines.
- Possibility to rent bicycles and a (guided) visit to the region (Zichem, Averbode, Demerodebossen): the Zichem of Flemish author Ernest Claes and his *Witte*, and Averbode with its abbey as a starting point for visiting the Demerodebossen are only a short distance from Scherpenheuvel and can be reached through various well-marked and maintained bike trails.

In addition to the purchase of commercial property in the centre of Scherpenheuvel De Vlaspit also had to carry out some major infrastructure works in its existing facility where the candle workshop is located in order to be able to accommodate these activities. Leader funding made this possible and now larger groups can also experience a guided visit to De Vlaspit.

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Photograph: De Vlaspit.



Photograph: Building after renovation.



Photograph: Part of the offer in terms of local produce.

***Nominee: NEBUS Midwest – Netwerk Buurtwinkels met Streekeigen regioproducten
(Network of local stores with local regionally produced products)***

Project description:

More and more people enjoy our countryside. Authentic regional food products such as farm and regional produce play an important role in this. That is why the npa De Lochting, RESOC Central West-Flanders, UNIZO Central West Flanders and npa Pival have joined forces to distribute regional products.

In every municipality in the Leader Region Tielts Plateau (Tielt, Pittem, Wingene, Ruiselede, Ardoorie, Dentergem, Beernem and Oostkamp) we are building a network of producers of farm products as well as local products. The result is a comprehensive range of products which we can market to consumers.

But we are also working on a network on the other side of the chain. A network of local shops that offer local products ties in with our strategy to give local shops a new lease of life. By supporting local shops that offer a range of regional products, they will in turn be able to increase their revenue. In the long term strong local shops also contribute added value to the village fabric.

But the challenge of the project lies in the development of a distribution platform for all these products. The timely delivery of various farm-fresh products from local shops is a logistical feat. Through an online store retailers can place their weekly order. Npa De Lochting combines all the orders and passes them on to the producers. After collecting the products these have to be sorted and rearranged first according to the orders before they are delivered.

By using npa De Lochting as a logistics hub the network not only uses logistical expertise but also pays attention to the employment of disadvantaged groups. The region has a large group of unemployed jobseekers who do not qualify for social economy. The Lochting's aim is thus to go in search of innovative niches like these.

The latter certainly contributes to the project's sustainability. When combined with people purchasing products from their own region from the store on the corner of the street, it is clear that sustainability in all its facets is the keyword in this project.

By offering and promoting regional products people's regional identity and local pride is strengthened. This is supported by a solid communication strategy. Ultimately this will result in an increase in the tourism and recreational potential of the Tielt Plateau. Together with a number of other Leader projects in the region the Tielt Plateau will thus really become a region where the living is good.

In the long term we hope to implement this method on a larger scale. We are also working diligently towards creating other distribution channels such as local authorities, schools, restaurant owners/chef who can offer real regional gastronomy, and so on.

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Photograph: Tieltpancakes.



Photograph: Basket with local products.



Photograph: Cheese from the Tieltpateau.

The Flemish Rural Network thanks all the contestants of the 2010 Prima Plattelandsproject and the provincial and international members of the jury.

Colophon

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