

VLM Pilots Vloethemsveld and Scheld heroes

Concerned citizens in the natural heritage site 'Vloethemsveld' (Zedelgem, Belgium)

Introduction

The 400 ha Vloethemsveld is a former military domain, located in a Natura 2000 area and a protected landscape. Part of the area is a nature reserve. The field includes former ammunition depots, which was used after World War II as a prisoner of war camp, as well as guardhouses and artwork who are protected as heritage. ANB, VLM and the municipalities of Zedelgem and Jabbeke drew up a plan to maintain the heritage and nature as much as possible and develop part of the area as a nature and heritage site open to the public. The framework for this nature and heritage site Vloethemsveld is the the land use project Moubek - Vloethemsveld, phase 1 and the layout of a management plan is developed and welcome.

Pilot Case

Together with the existing local citizens and associations, including guides, nature associations, wildlife photographers, historic societies and the Regional Landscape Houtland ANB, VLM and the municipalities want to encourage voluntary work on the reception and maintenance of the heritage and nature site 'Vloethemsveld'. When the government acquires such area, they need not necessarily stand for the daily reception of the visitor.

Instead, people with an interest in nature and heritage who live in the vicinity and already know for years the area and its history, have a special bond with the area and can be encouraged to be part of a new form of cooperation between the government as owner and citizens as a communicator and guardian of the area.

Together with the citizens and associations VLM wants to come to a well-functioning model of citizen participation for the natural and cultural heritage site 'Vloethemsveld'.

Pilots SELF – Scheldehelden in Klein-Brabant

1. Challenge – problem

Land development projects in Flanders are high ambitious projects aiming at developing open space in a large region in a coherent and integrated way. Open space, ranging from pure rural areas to public spaces in the cities and the peri-urban fringes, includes a variety of themes: landscape, heritage, agriculture, welfare, silence and tranquility, sustainable energy, recreation and tourism, local entrepreneurship, nature and biodiversity... Working with all these aspects in one area and translating this into well designed development plans requires a deep involvement of all stakeholders and partners available. This challenge, together with the context of a changing, leaner, more facilitating governmental role, brings an urgency for new models of cooperation and of a transfer of tasks and roles from government to communities and citizens.

2. Solution: activities

In the Land Development project Schelde & Rupel one model is foreseen to be tested during the coming years: the 'Call for projects Schelde Heroes' (Scheldehelden in Dutch). This call for projects invites local residents of the project area to come with their own ideas and initiatives to support the land development plans and strengthen local identity and the quality of the open space. The local projects are complementary and geographically connected to the land development investment projects in public areas financed by the national, regional and local governments. Essential aspects of this working model are: strong involvement of citizens, good dialogue (and use of social media and other supporting techniques), diversity of viewpoints shared to come to a common ground for action, readiness of communities to take action themselves and take responsibility. Criteria for actions are: sustainability, participation, innovation.

3. Stakeholders involved, local partners

Vlaamse Landmaatschappij, Flemish government agency. Local authorities. All private partners and citizens who are interested.

4. Activities, local outputs and outcomes planned

Call for projects from citizens 'Scheldehelden' in Klein-Brabant, part of the land development project Schelde&Rupel (more specific: communities of Sint-Amands, Bornem and Puurs). The applying citizens are organised, in local groups, organisations or associations, different from government partners. Support and process management. Approval and realisation of initiatives.

5. Innovative and transnational aspects

Other models and experiences are welcome to take the Scheldehelden call for projects to a next level. Up till now, initiatives are very small scale. How can citizens take more ambitious actions? How to create more synergy with government projects going on? How to define real needs and opportunities? How to spread more the existing knowledge and co-create for new approaches. How to use the foreseen financial resources for more results in the field?

6. Barriers

7. (transferable) models and tools applied

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