

Partnership and landscape fund for landscape development in industrialised areas

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In recent years the port of Ghent, in Belgium, has undergone considerable development along the canal, which is putting pressure on the quality of life in the nearby villages. Subsequently the authorities are investing in the Ghent Canal Zone, aiming to make it an area that is pleasant to live in, where there is a good business climate for companies and where farmers can continue to earn a living. The connecting areas of the economic zones and the port villages at the edge are all included in the development, as they act as transitional zones and buffers.

Buffer zones provide space for both agriculture and nature and are referred to as 'yellow' and 'green' zones respectively, with the green zones, such as woodland, parks and nature areas, being set up by governmental authorities. The Vlaamse-Landmaatschappij (Flemish Land Agency) set up the EFRO funded ECO² project with the aim of achieving cooperation between farmers, residents and the business community in trying to incorporate more 'green' in the agricultural areas.

1. Description

There are three distinct groups within the Ghent port area: residents, farmers and the business community. To foster cooperation between these and throughout the buffer zones, the groups identified their requirements and wish-lists. The residents wanted a pleasant environment to live in without too much industrial activity surrounding and in their villages. The farmers wanted to continue managing their land without further expropriations and to receive a fair income. The industrial companies were interested in developing sustainably and within a good business environment.

The project ECO² is based on three fundamental elements of the market system: demand, offer and financial resources.

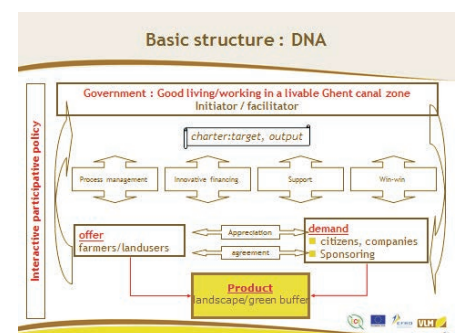
The key elements developed in the ECO² project are: process management (for bringing together different stakeholders with opposite opinions); innovative financing (for bringing together long term private and government financing); support for the different stakeholders and local governments; plus creating a win-win situation for each stakeholder. This project stands or falls by the cooperation, enthusiasm and voluntary commitment of these different stakeholders. The public sector is tasked to provide support and innovative solutions.

2. Activities

The first move was made by the farmers. The Flemish Land Agency used discussions with a number of key players and information sessions with all the farmers to get an idea of the requirements, interests and wish-lists of the farmers in the port area. The most active farmers also led a number of working sessions and signed the landscape development plan with the Flemish Land Agency.

This landscape development plan was then presented to, and discussed by, the residents and the industrial companies.

The Flemish Land Agency started a campaign called 'Buffer boom(t)' with some of the residents aiming to generate enthusiasm among action groups, residents' associations and the industrial companies. The campaign also sought financial support to compensate the farmers for the landscape development proposals presented in the landscape development plan.



The Landschapsfonds Gentse Kanaalzone (Ghent Canal Zone Landscape Fund) was subsequently set up to collect and properly manage the private money that is used for financing for the landscape buffers planted by the farmers. The Fund is being handled by the Koning Boudewijntichting (KBS, an independent foundation for social projects) and has been set up for 20 years with the option of it being extended if needed. Gifts to the fund are tax deductible.

The Fund steering committee decides annually how the budget will be allocated to achieve the objectives and the advisory group makes recommendations to the steering committee. The steering committee monitors and evaluates the cooperation between the various partners and the objectives of the fund. Both committees have representatives from the farmers, companies and residents. An expert from the Flemish Land Agency is facilitating the process but has no right to vote.

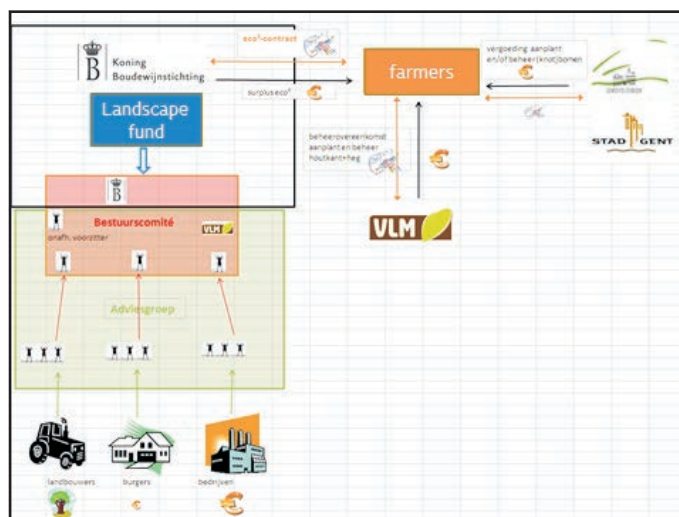
3. Results

17 farmers planted trees and hedgerows on their land this autumn (2011) and in total, they will be providing 7 kilometres of green buffer in an agricultural area and they will undertake the physical maintenance for the next 20 years. This is financially supported by twenty companies who put a total of 85,000 Euros into the landscape fund, as part of their social commitment to the quality of life in the Ghent port area.

With the financing being arranged for the first twenty years it is hoped others will follow. The new buffers will hopefully encourage other farmers to extend the port area landscape further.

This kind of approach is a new one for the Flanders region and it is an approach that works. Farmers, residents and the business community all acknowledge the need to look after the landscape and provide a good environment to live in, and they are doing something about it: the farmers choose to combine their agricultural activities with planting trees; the business community is providing the financial support; the canal village residents have a greener environment.

The project provides a unique and sustainable cooperative venture between farmers, residents and businesses in the Ghent Canal Zone.



4. Additional information

www.ecokwadraat.be/gentsekanaalzone (Dutch)

ECO² magazine (English)

ECO²krant (Dutch)

ECO²: Een markgericht, gebiedsgerichte en participatieve aanpak voor landschapsbouw (publication 57p. in Dutch)

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