

## BELGIUM

# Local development

### Location

Kasterlee and Olen

### Programming period

2014 – 2020

### Priority

P6 – Social inclusion & local development

### Measure

M19 – LEADER/CLLD

### Funding (EUR)

Total budget 80 602.33  
RDP contr. 52 391.51  
Private 12 090.35  
Local communities 16120.47

### Project duration

2016 – 2018

### Project promoter

Regionaal Landschap Kleine en Grote Nete

### Contact

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### Website

[www.rlkgn.be/projecten/landschap-en-erfgoed/houtkanten/leader-houtkanten/6086](http://www.rlkgn.be/projecten/landschap-en-erfgoed/houtkanten/leader-houtkanten/6086)

Developing an area-specific vision on hedgerows and coaching farmers to manage and integrate hedgerows into their farming activities.

## Summary

Hedgerows are in decline or disappearing all over Europe, even though well-managed hedgerows are structural networks that provide shelter and a possible food source for insects, birds and small mammals.



Up until the 1960's, hedgerows were used as fences and plot boundaries and were an important source of firewood. The main reason for their decline is that nowadays farmers do not see the possibilities, or the value hedgerows can add to their businesses.

The project supported bilateral meetings between local and regional governments and ecologists for the development of an area-specific vision on hedgerows for the local communities of Kasterlee and Olen in the Campine area of Belgium. It also provided coaching to farmers on how to manage the hedgerows on their farms and integrate them in their economic activity.

## Results

25 farmers were coached on the management and/or the planting of new hedgerows, considering their specific business model.

The project improved the economic situation of the farmers by creating new business opportunities, namely, using the wood from hedgerow management to produce bioenergy in local (communal) projects, e.g. heating a local school, or heating water in a dairy farm.

Preserving hedgerows is an important cultural-historic element in the rural landscape; and it helps improve the local CO<sub>2</sub> balance.

## Lessons & Recommendations

- ☐ From the beginning, the project was set up as a participative exercise to achieve a well-funded and supported vision of their future landscape. Therefore, it brings together stakeholders who use and appreciate the landscape in different ways and learn to understand the arguments and views of other stakeholders.

## Context

Through regular coppicing, well-managed hedgerows are structural networks which provide shelter and a possible food source for insects, birds, and small mammals. Up until the 1960's, hedgerows were not only a plant and animal habitat. They were used as fences and plot boundaries. They were also an important source of firewood.

As habitats are changing and get devalued, hedgerows in the Campine area, Belgium and all across Europe, have been disappearing from the rural landscape. The remaining hedgerows have not been managed over the last decades and have grown into rows of trees. These tree rows provide much less shelter compared to the historical, well-managed hedgerows.

Instead of being protected and (re)managed, remaining hedgerows/tree rows are still disappearing as farmers do not see the possibilities, or the value which hedgerows can add to modern agricultural businesses.

In this project a participative approach was applied to include farmers, as well as local and higher governments, ecologists, historians, etc. to develop an area-specific, widely supported vision and a plan for the conservation and management of hedgerows in the future. Farmers are supported individually to integrate this vision in their economic model.

## Objectives

The aim of this project is to establish scientifically-based, well-supported visions about hedgerows management for the two agricultural communities of Kasterlee and Olen, taking into account both practical issues from the farmer's point of view, e.g. litter, shading, as well as other, often neglected ecosystem values that hedgerows bring in the landscape.

## Activities

During the project, bilateral meetings between local and higher governments and ecologists, were organised on a regular basis to exchange information on the development of an area-specific vision on hedgerows for the two local communities. Local farmers were coached and supported to (re-) manage the hedgerows on their farms.

The process of co-learning, the developing of the vision and coaching the farmers, brought forward the ecological benefits of hedgerows and responded to the practical issues from the farmers point of view, in a participative way.

The knowledge gathered about hedgerows and hedgerow management is being shared through presentations and courses for farmers and the local government of other communities across the Campine area

## Main results

25 farmers received coaching on the management and/or the planting of new hedgerows, considering their specific business model.

The project resulted in better economic conditions for the farmers. The wood from hedgerow management is sold to produce bioenergy in local (communal) projects, e.g. heating for a local school, heating water in a dairy farm.

Preserving hedgerows is an important cultural-historic element in the rural landscape. In addition, planting new hedgerows and (re-completing) old hedgerow networks helps improve the local CO<sub>2</sub> balance.

The efforts of farmers to protect hedgerows has improved their image among their local communities.

The project is disseminated through presenting the methods and results to other communities and farmers' organisations.

The project is continued through new projects such as the 'Campine Energy Wood project' which is funded by the RDP under M16 – cooperation, and the 'iLandscape project' which is not RDP funded. Both projects aim at further developing hedgerow management as an efficient resource for bioeconomy and a valuable ecosystem.

## Key lessons

From the beginning, the project was set up as a participative exercise between local farmers, the participating local communities and ecologists to achieve a well-funded and supported vision of their future landscape. Therefore, it brings together stakeholders who use and appreciate the landscape in different ways, and therefore learn to understand the arguments and views of other stakeholders.

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### Additional sources of information

n/a