



Reviving the network of fortress belts

A Policy Learning Platform peer review

16 – 17 November 2021

Final Report

16/12/21

1. Brief presentation of the beneficiary and its motivation to host a peer review

Antwerp is a city in the Flemish region of Belgium. It is the capital of the Province of Antwerp and the district of the same name. The city is at the centre of and the reason for the fortification heritage that surrounds it, dating between the 9th - 20th century. The stronghold of Antwerp is one of the largest military structures in Europe, including more than 30 sites spread out over three provinces: a medieval castle near the river, walls, quays, fortresses, sconces, inundation fields, ramps, bunkers, ditches and dikes.

Policy-wise, the province of Antwerp took the lead on a regional level in 2009-2019 with an Area Oriented Strategic Project called the 'Fortress Belts' of Antwerp. In this period, a policy instrument addressed as the 'Framework Plan of the Fortress Belts of Antwerp' (2015) was developed in collaboration with local, regional and (inter)national stakeholders and partners. Projects and actions on different levels were embedded in this framework and when relevant, subject of European and Flemish funding programs (Interreg projects 'Forts and Lines', 'At Fort', 'Great War', 'Murailles et Jardins' and several Natura 2000 and LIFE projects). The purpose of the framework consisted of an analysis of the existing situation, developing a global vision on different scales, listing possible actions and introducing a consultation structure to create broad support.

The province of Antwerp ended its coordination of the Fortress Belts in 2019 but various partners wish to continue the network and brand. This 'Fortress Community' of stakeholders (fortress owners, municipalities and organisations), has taken the initiative to support the former cooperation of the network, its website and annual event. The City of Antwerp, which is at the historic centre of the Fortress Belts stronghold since the 9th century, has over the last 20 years increasingly focused on improving the policy on military heritage. As such, the City is an important partner in shaping this transition together with all stakeholders. The city of Antwerp has hosted this peer review to help reinvigorate the new Fortress Belt organisation and to gain helpful insights from experts in the field of military heritage and tourism in identifying potential opportunities and pitfalls.

2. Specification of the policy challenge encountered

Fortengordels (Fortress Belts) was an effective operational structure during the period 2010-2019, under the leadership and coordination of the Province of Antwerp and with support of the Flemish government and European funding. During the period Fortengordels was active, it booked good results concerning –among other things- strong common branding, an informative website, an annual event,... However, in 2019 the province of Antwerp discontinued its support for the organisation, thus creating the need for a new regional policy framework. The period of 2019-2020 was a transition period which saw the Fortress Community itself take the initiative to restart the cooperation between the many fortresses. This led to the founding of the new Fortengordels (NPO Non-Profit Organisation).

For a smooth relaunch of the Fortengordels, the Fortengordels community wants to learn from the experience of experts and of other defence lines in Europe, mainly concerning the following topics :

- How to set up a sustainable restart of the Fortress Belts on a local scale?
- Which challenges and points of attention do we have to take into account when organizing a cross-border cooperation
- Up until now, the Fortengordels has mainly focused on the outer belts of 20th century fortresses. The older defence structures on the territory of the city of Antwerp have mostly remained out of its scope of operations. The Fortengordels wishes to fully include the military heritage of the city of Antwerp in its new policies and make a connection to the eldest remains of the city's defences (mainly archaeological remains).
- What kind of organisational form / entity has been used by other regions/cities to manage similar networks?
- How are similar networks financed in other regions/cities?
- How to include cooperation of the network on a greater regional (intra municipal) scale?
- Can Fortress Belts be used as an example and/or steppingstone for a good and wider fortification / fortress city network around Antwerp (Lier, Mechelen, Dendermonde, Herentals ...)
- In what way can Fortengordels become an example for Flemish, Belgian and European cooperation?
- How can we create a strong and easily recognizable brand that can be used by the entire fortress belt community? (Name, logo, shared communication structure,...)
- What kind of branding / communication strategies have been devised in other cities/regions?
- What governance structure are other regions/cities using?
- How to include non-public partners: communities, local organisations, sponsors, other stakeholders?
- How to gain policy support of the municipalities, provinces, organisations and private owners?
- How will Fortress Belts include the heart and point of origin of the Stronghold Antwerp (Stronghold area, Spanish walls and Brialmont walls) into a new Fortress Belt era?

3. Participants

Members of the beneficiary organisation

- *Koen Kennis*, Vice-Mayor and Alderman for Tourism, City of Antwerp
- *Dirk Vermeiren*, Spokesman Cabinet of Tourism, City of Antwerp
- *Johan Veeckman*, Adjunct-coordinator heritage, City of Antwerp
- *Karen Minsaer*, Head of the Archaeology Department, City of Antwerp
- *Veerle Caelen*, Technical Expert, Draughtswoman, Department of Archaeology, City of Antwerp
- *Veerle Hendriks*, Archaeologist, Department of Archaeology, City of Antwerp
- *Femke Martens*, Archaeologist, Department of Archaeology, City of Antwerp
- *Frederick Bruneel*, Project-coördinator Public Space, Urban Development, Public Space, City of Antwerp
- *Katrien Moortgat*, Purpose Development, Entrepreneurship and city-marketing, City of Antwerp
- *Piet Van Laecke*, Coördinator 'Antwerpen Morgen', Communication and Participation, City of Antwerp
- *Wim Van Acker*, Sitemanagement, events, film, markets and fairs, City management, City of Antwerp
- *Luc Verheyen*, Coördinator Talent-development and Leisure experience, Museum and Heritage, ErfgoedLab Antwerpen, City of Antwerp

Local stakeholders involved

- *Rafaël Deroo*, Secretary General EFFORTS and Fortengordels
- *Karen Geysen*, Fortress Belts 2009 - 2014 project
- *Wim Debaene*, Recapture the Fortress Cities, Regional Landscapes Voorkepen
- *Natalie Buys*, Project employee Nature, Edegem local council
- *Tom Callens*, Stafort, Fort Stabroek
- *Mathieu De Meyer*, Director-Conservator Atlantikwall Raversyde, Province of West-Flanders
- *Dirk Hautekiet*, Natuurpunt Antwerpen Noord en Kempen VZW
- *Willy Ibens*, Chairman Natuurpunt Antwerpen Noord en Kempen VZW, Honorary director Natuurpunt
- *Willy Jacobs*, Chairman Workgroup guides Fort 2, Wommelgem
- *Iason Jongepier*, Tenure track docent, University of Antwerp
- *Piet Lombaerde*, Visiting assistant professor University of Antwerp
- *Stanislas Marichal*
- *Philippe Michiels*, Manager and Co-owner BLWRK, Fort 5
- *Luc Olyslager*, Simon Stevin V.V.C. and Fortengordels VZW
- *Rik Rousseau*, Head of Department Spatial planning and urban development, City of Dendermonde
- *Carolien Van Hecke*, Director City Museums Dendermonde
- *Dorien Witteman*, Expert Environment and Nature, Edegem local council
- *David Wouters*, Fort 7

Peers

- *Patrick Rang*, Estonian War Museum, General Laidoner Museum, Estonia
- *Renata Tomljenovic*, Institute for Tourism, Zagreb, Croatia
- *Josephine Kroneberg*, City of Magdeburg, Germany
- *Fabrizio Panozzo*, Ca'Foscari University, Veneto, Italy
- *Jiří Hofman*, Project Terezin, Czech Republic

Interreg Europe team

- *Erwin Siweris*, Programme Director, Interreg Europe secretariat
- *Astrid Severin*, Thematic Expert – Environment and resource efficiency & Low-carbon economy, Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform
- *Katharina Krell*, Thematic Expert – Environment and resource efficiency & Low-carbon economy, Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform
- *Eugénie Suplisson*, Events Expert, Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform
- *Magda Michalikova*, Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform

4. Policy Recommendations

Short term – phase 1: task force continuity, mapping & funding preparation

The work of the 16 & 17/11/2021 Peer Review was, via a platform offered by a fledgling Fortengordels Association, the consequence of the termination of the provincial project of Fortengordels in 2018.

The City of Antwerp initiated the Peer Review and worked with all partners to bring this to a good conclusion and is willing to participate in the next stages of a project in this field.

Peer Review partner Regional Landscapes will ensure continuity and be leader for the Peer Review follow-up until 31st July 2022. As part of the EU Interreg Recapture the Fortress Cities project, this follow-up is an important action, as the RFC still aims for policy improvement on the Provincial Framework Plan (Kaderplan) of the Antwerp region Fortengordels.

The Peer Review is now organised in the context of the RFC project after its description as Good Practice: on 07/12/2021 the GP has been approved and published by the Interreg Europe administration. Next step is that the Good Practice will be evaluated further to be included into the Policy Learning Platform Good Practice Database <https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/good-practices/item/5561/fortengordels-cooperation-of-fortresses-around-antwerp-one-of-the-largest-fortress-belts-in-europe/>.

As main recommendations we see in this context the following tasks:

- **‘Task force Fortengordels’: the set-up of a stakeholder platform** has been ongoing since the take-over of the Fortengordels project from the Province of Antwerp by a private conglomerate consisting of EFFORTS, Simon Stevin VVC and BLWRK, with the support of Regional Landscapes. These organisations continue to work on a voluntary basis to do the minimum that is required, keep this platform going and with it also the interest in joint communication, for example on summer events. Currently this task force is at its lowest level of activity. However, with the Peer Review results in hand, Regional Landscapes and EFFORTS are working project-wise together for the strengthening of the Fortengordels and their community
- **Mapping of the stakeholders:** on the basis of an existing mapping exercise by the Fortengordels Association, a new mapping effort will be done in the spring or start of the summer 2022 from within the organisation of Regional Landscapes in its Recapture the Fortress Cities regional stakeholders meeting with and in the City of Antwerp. This will be well prepared and organised as a co-creation session as starting point for a new project and common dream. [This final Regional Stakeholders Meeting of the RFC project](#) hosted by the city of Antwerp will be a stimulus for reviving the network.
- **Funding structure - preparation:** Regional Landscapes, together with EFFORTS and other stakeholders continue searching good funding opportunities for the reviving of the network. Currently there are two funding opportunities where a project idea is under construction. Most important is to have funding to cover costs for a stable team as a starting point for the full project cooperation:

- Interreg Europe new program – 85% funding. Project idea Reviving the Fortress Regions was pitched on IE Lets Cooperate on 25/11 as follow-up of the Peer Review. <https://www.interregeurope.eu/europecooperates2021/project-ideas/book-a-table/510/> There is substantial interest in the project idea and the search for possible partnerships continues. A primary condition for participation is to have fortress networks. Also working on improvement of the project idea and description on green, smart and social themes towards new European program expectations. This project idea connects with EFFORTS' fortress belt cities, and it merges with it. Work has started on the set-up of the project.
- Flemish funding for culture – 100% funding. This is a supra-local subsidy for a multi-municipal culture event. This project (comprising the Fortengordel Event) is being set up for 2022 (project 2022-2025), based on a interregional cooperation of heritage organisations (www.erfgoedcellen.be).

Mid term – phase 2: start up governance & funding roll out (until end of 2023)

To reach this phase, the previous phase 1's tasks of mapping, task force continuation and funding preparation have to be fulfilled. The best way to have continuation after phase 1 is to prepare the phase 2 start-up as soon as possible.

What is apparent is the complex government structure related to any supra-local shared heritage coordination of the Antwerp regional fortresses.

Therefore, after the Peer Review, it became clear that new and innovative paths to federate interests need to be taken. One of the options is an ad hoc *Urban Community*. This is an ad hoc open cooperation between geographically close municipalities in the same region, so as to share the burden of common challenges. This organism can create a goal-oriented ownership and it can carry the tasks enumerated in the Peer Review conclusions of phase 2. The name of this new organism can be 'Vesting Antwerpen'.

Tasks:

- **Set up a 'start-up governance'**: one of the outcomes of the stakeholder session is to start up a first governance structure with key stakeholders that can make the difference. Important is the backing and involvement by policy makers and administration – the start-up governance structure is responsible to perform the project. The creation of a coalition of the willing, of an open *Urban Community* (in a first phase with very limited tasks) can federate the key stakeholders and ensure administrative and financial stability (time horizon: 2023)
- **Roll out of the stakeholder mapping**: attribution of the different roles for the stakeholders.
- **Funding structure - operational**: stakeholders act on the funding opportunity given and initiated in phase 1 – the most important part of funding will be used to organise a strong team with professionals.
- **Organisation types and staff - start**
 - Coordinator, manager: 1FTE
 - Administration: 0,5 FTE
 - Expertise
 - Communication and events: 0,5 FTE
 - Fort expert and vision: 0,5 FTE
 - Find new funding opportunities: 0,5 FTE
- **Steering and working groups – exploration & preparation**: a coordinator and manager in the field organises meetings with key stakeholders in order to form steering and working groups
 - **Steering group is**
 - Led by the owners with common dream/ambition (urban community) Start meeting organised
 - (*Lead city of Antwerp not applicable at the moment*)
 - **Working groups - start**

- **Communication – start:** Common dream and story – press release and presentation on symbolic place and/or moment (i.e. the start of a new series of Fortengordel or other cultural event) for the start of the project.

Long term – phase 3: fully operational project

Organisation types and staff – operational:

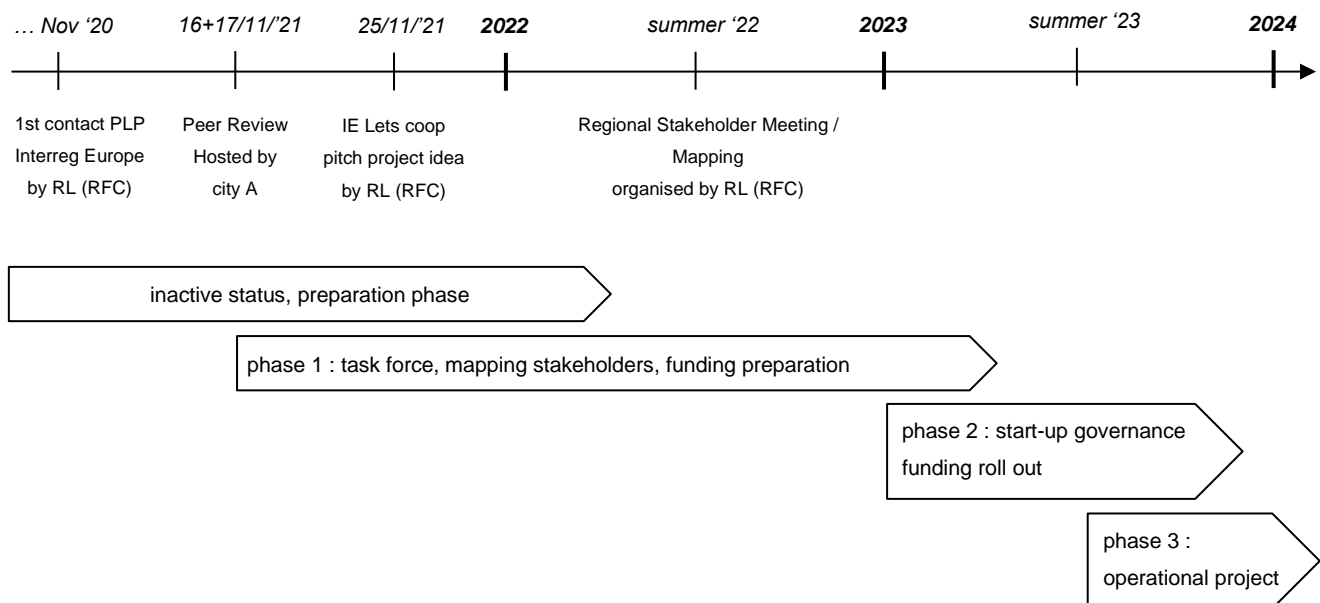
- **Volunteers, exploration:** when the project is up and running staff is active: volunteers will be contacted and have one on one meetings – hearing their interest, dreams, ambitions, and possible involvement.
- **Steering groups – operational:** 2nd meeting organised

Expanding with external partners: involving other cities around Antwerp: Mechelen, Dendermonde, Zuiderwaterlinie (NL) ... In the 21st century these regions and cities in Flanders are part of new solutions we seek in the historical Antwerp fortress belt region.

- **Working group – operational:** 2nd meeting organised
 - Thematic
 - Sub-regions: Brialmont, 2nd Belt
- **Volunteers – operational:**
- **Communication:** project up and running

5. Possible calendar of implementation

See Excel in annex for detailed description and general timeline below:



6. Conclusions

- In light of a complex structure, there is need for a regional coordination. Peer Review partner Regionale Landschappen agrees to take up this role temporarily.
- Mapping of stakeholders is the start of a well-based bottom-up structure.
- There is a great potential for a new ad hoc urban community in the field of fortification heritage.
- The Peer Review gives a good perspective for European projects. The results of the Peer Review have had immediate resonance in concrete proposals, meetings and the EFFORTS congress.
- The concept of the Peer Review helped to clear the thinking process on the concept of a regional development of the Antwerp fortress region. The partners hope that the announced follow-up live visit can be organised in 2022.

Antwerp, 23 December 2021

City of Antwerp, Urban Development/ Heritage Department, Karen Minsaer
Regional Landscape de Voorkempen vzw, Wim Debaene
Fortengordels vzw, Raf Deroo
Simon Stevin Vlaams Vestingbouwkundig Centrum, Luc Olyslager
Supported by EFFORTS (European Federation of Fortified Sites)