

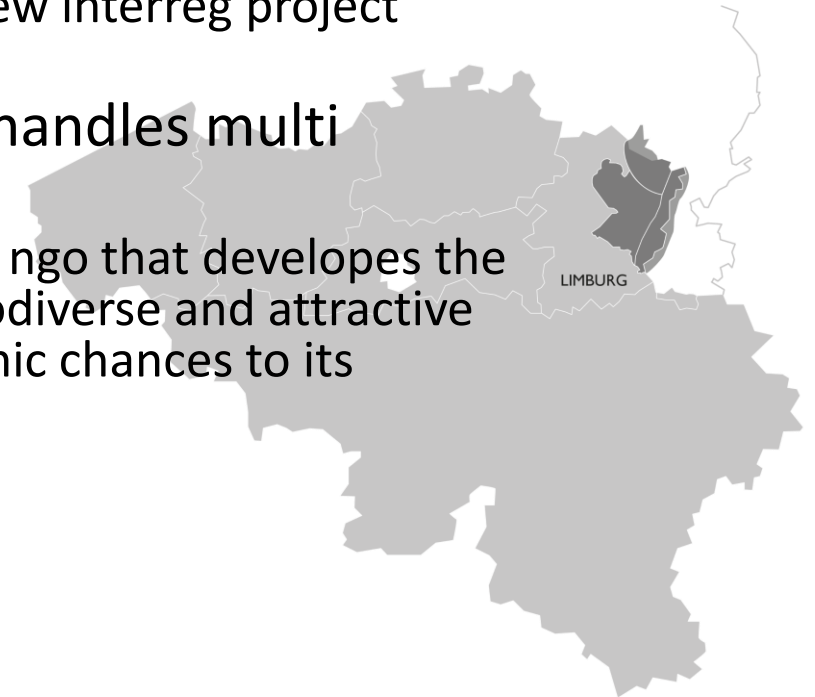
The 'River Park Meuse Valley'

Webinar 28/6

Katrien Schaerlaekens

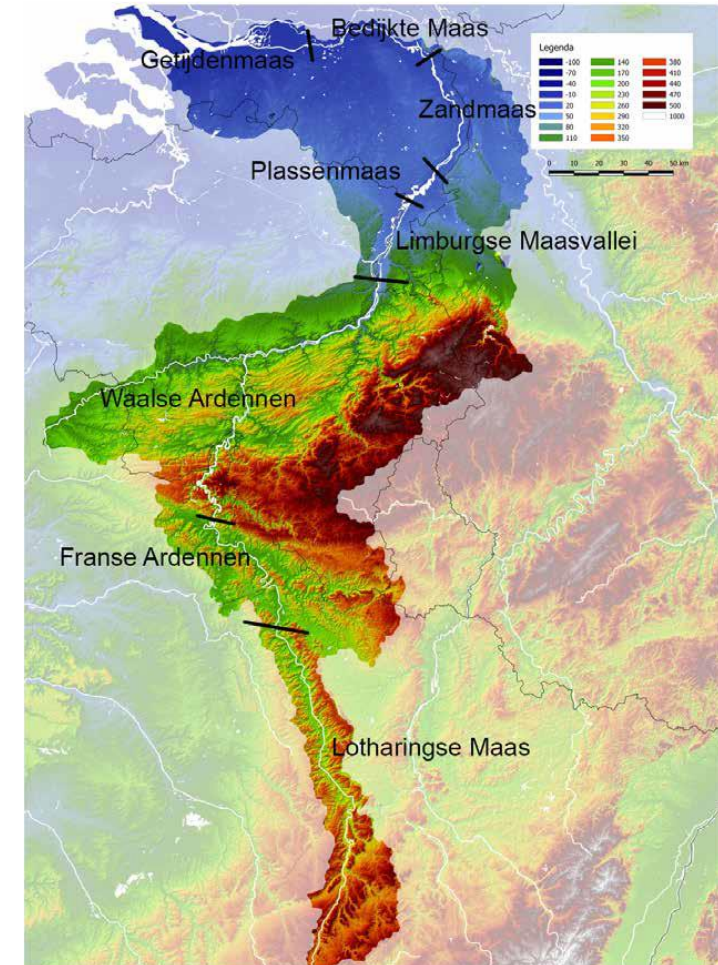
Coördinator River Park Meuse Valley at RLKM

- WLE = wildlife economy in Kempen~Broek and Meuse Valley
 - Both border regions
 - Both water landscapes with different functions and secondary goals
 - WLE focussed on economic value, this lead to a new interreg project 'grenzeloos landschapstoerisme'
 - Today: focus on the water system, but RLKM handles multi perspectives
 - RLKM: 'regional landscape Kempen en Maasland', ngo that developes the Kempen en Maasland area towards a resilient, biodiverse and attractive landscape that gives ecosystem and socio-economic chances to its inhabitants.



- Today: focus on the Meuse Valley

- 40 km meandering Meuse between Maastricht and Thorn
- Rain river = enormous amounts of water without space in large cities upstream; downstream = space, no shipping
- Densely populated area with a soil full of gravel
- After floodings in the '90s, 4 challenges clicked:
 - Flood protection
 - Nature development
 - Gravel mining
 - Recreational added value



- Key Figures

- 1 a free-flowing river, no weirs in this part along the Dutch-Belgian border over 47 km
- string of ca. 20 typical Maas-villages
- 20 different nature reserves, together 1,800 ha, managed by B + NL nature organizations + their grazers
- more than 3 300 species of flora and fauna
- approx. 1,000,000 cyclists per year
- approx. 300 000 hikers per year
- 600 km of well-maintained recreational routes
- Over 50.000 direct inhabitants in the Meusevalley RivierPark, protected against high water
- +30 partners crossing-border including municipalities, provinces, river- and natureconservation organizations, tourist organizations, entrepreneurs



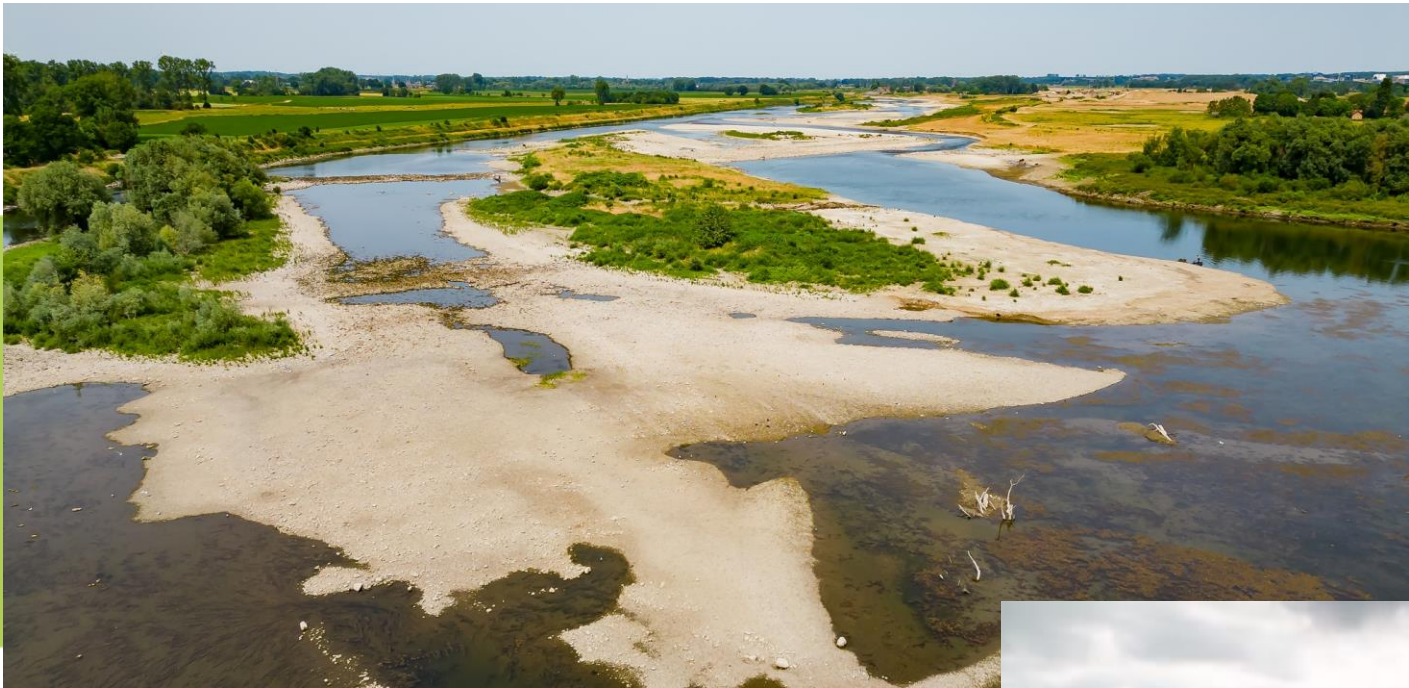


- 30 years of river restoration: six keys to ecological success
 - 1. FLOW AND FLOOD DYNAMICS
 - The lowering of the riverbanks caused a strong change in the flood dynamics, which resulted in a desired effect on the characteristic species
 - 2. CONNECTIVITY
 - On land between the different reserves and in water (stream mouths, connection to the North Sea)
 - 3. SHIFTING LANDSCAPE MOSAICS
 - Natural habitats along rivers occur as a shifting landscape mosaic, also benefits high biodiversity
 - 4. REWILDING & NATURAL GRAZING
 - the restoration of self-regulating ecosystems through restoring ecosystem processes, while reducing human control and by adding more semi wild cattle
 - 5. SCALE
 - the actual 1,800 ha of natural area offers a viable habitat for different (re-establishing) species that are gradually increasing
 - 6. TIME OF DEVELOPMENT
 - shows that the richness in characteristic species after the start of nature restoration has doubled in the first 5 years, and then tripled after 20 years

- BUT.....:

- Allowing erosion and bank retreat as basis for the ecosystem **vs...** focus on safety and engineering (Meuse was 'fixed')
- Feeding the river with the necessary gravel sediment and woody debris **vs...** aims gravel business
- Restoring the natural water flow regime, solving the fluctuations and unnatural low flows and peak velocities due to upstream dams and weirs **vs...** industry
- And at the same time working on the hydrology at water catchment level, to leverage the extended low flows **vs...** catchment full of borders / focus on flood risk

https://www.rivierparkmaasvallei.eu/sites/default/files/2101005_maasinbeeld.pdf



Beelden: Dekijkhut

- Seventh key: **people** are crucial to restoration success
 - Reason why the River Park was established!
 - Engage local communities and stakeholders – consider how people and restoration efforts interact – identify ways to avoid or overcome unwanted outcomes
 - Invest in restoring cultural heritage and old villages, provide facilities for people to enjoy and promote the region – but with a message of care.
 - People had turned away from the river, this relationship has also restored over the last decades
 - Resident survey: 90% appraisal of the nature restoration – equally high: being able to go walking and biking in natural areas
 - Which aspects make the River Park Meuse Valley most attractive: Hiking biking infrastructure / Peace and quiet / Nature / Presence of wildlife
 - Very fond: 92 % agree that the natural areas should be enhanced; 91% want to continue enjoying it by walking or cycling, 69% think that extra protection is needed during breeding season.
 - And concerned: 57% want to do their bit, f.e by collecting litter



- Shift toward rewilding creates new business opportunities (kayak, ecotourism, local distribution...)
 - Economic research: ca. 25 mio on a yearly basis is the economic return of the river restoration
 - <https://www.rivierparkmaasvallei.eu/nl/studie-herinrichtingswerken-maasvallei>
 - Not overestimate local effect
- Positive effects on quality of life and mental health, pride

Thank you!

www.rivierparkmaasvallei.eu/en