

Participation of private landowners to the ecological restoration of the Pond area Midden-Limburg through a close participation of private and public landowners and a triple E-approach in the 3watEr project.



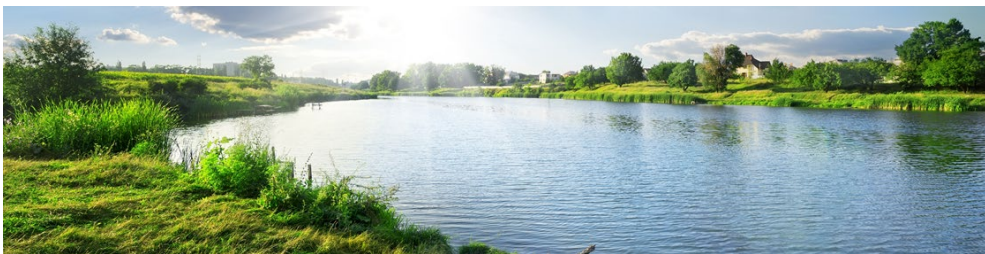
10 private landowners set up a specific association OVML vzw (Ontwikkeling Vijvergebied Midden-Limburg vzw) for participating together to a Life+ project (3watEr project) and ensuring collective implementation on the basis of voluntary agreements by private parties and an integrated management plan.

Summary

When confirmed as a participant and member to the OVML vzw association and the project, each private landowner has signed up to an agreement stipulating the following: that he agrees to the actions performed on his parcels, that he will do the necessary preparations so that works can effectively be performed (including studies, permissions, consultations, and tenders). In this regard, the landowner in question is always able to call on unlimited technical and administrative support from OVML vzw. Further, the landowners also contracted that they will respect the budget of the project, and that they will conserve and maintain the actions in the field for the coming 20 years.

Objectives

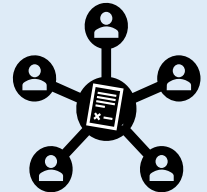
The Triple E Pond area M-L project aimed to conserve or restore the following species and habitats of Community importance in the Natura 2000 network site 'Vijvergebied Midden-Limburg' ('Pond area M-L'): bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*); tree frog (*Hyla arborea*); 'Oligotrophic waters...' (3120), 'Oligotrophic to mesotrophic standing waters...' (3130), 'Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix*' (4010) and European dry heaths (4030). The project aimed to secure the ongoing participation of private landowners and other stakeholders in habitat management, to establish a sustainable basis for the conservation of species and habitats by enhancing synergies between Ecology, Education and the local Economy ("triple E-approach"), to enhance public awareness of Natura 2000 and to demonstrate best practices for involving private landowners as partners in the management of Natura 2000 sites. Private contracts for implementation of the LIFE project; integrated nature management plan for the implementation of the nature management goals.



Problem description

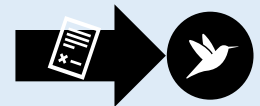
Private landowners were not structured to realize nature management projects, as this until 2014 was rather a monopoly of nature NGO's in Flanders. As in the Midden-Limburg area, private landownership was crucial to realizing specific nature management objectives, 10 local landowners took the initiative to start a Life+ project with other stakeholders. For doing so they created a private association (OVML vzw) assuming a common partnership in the Life+ project as associated beneficiary of the project. Private contracts were signed between OVML vzw and each of the 10 landowners for the further implementation of the LIFE project, also through an integrated nature management plan.

COLLECTIVE



OVML vzw structure and individual agreements plus integrated management plan for collective implementation.

RESULT-ORIENTED



Result-based monitoring of implementation of every action of the 3watEr project.

PUBLIC GOODS



Landscape and scenery



Recreational access / improvements to physical and mental health



(Farmland) biodiversity



Resilience to natural hazards



Rural viability and vitality



Cultural heritage

Data and Facts - Contract

Participation:

- Number of farms: 10 participant landowners
- Area of implementation: Vijvergebied Midden-Limburg

Involved parties: The contracting partners are the 10 landowners as being members of the private association OVML vzw for participating to the Life+ 3watEr project (2009 to 2013), as signatories to separate agreements for the financing and implementation of the project and partners to the integrated management plan for further follow-up after the realization of the Life+ 3watEr project.

Advantages of participation: Specific private sector oriented and motivating approach towards the participating landowners through the working and support of private association OVML vzw. administrative simplification. Benefit of being able to participate to a Life+ nature project, adapted to the private landowner sector philosophy and needs.

Management requirements : The landowners are held to the method and objectives of the Life+ 3watEr project, as approved in the project contractual documents.

Controls/monitoring: During the lifetime of the project, the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the concrete conservation actions on the selected habitats and species was subcontracted to an independent body by means of public tender. This was done in two stages: from the first monitoring it was expected to get a clear overview of the conservation status of the habitats and species targeted at the start of the project. For the second monitoring the objective was to get a clear picture of the achieved results after the execution of the actions. The second monitoring referred to the expected results and contained the list of indicators, their values and the conservation status of habitats and species before and after the execution of project actions.

After the lifetime of the project, it was very important that all improvements made within the framework of the project would last for a longer term. A clear After-LIFE Conservation Plan consolidated all intentions and initiatives which must guarantee this. That included (1) a shared long term vision for the project area, signed by all associated beneficiaries, (2) a realistic action plan for fundraising, to support the recurring management actions, (3) signed contracts with the majority of the (larger) landowners to conserve the restorations for the long term, (4) to have proposals for additional projects and improvements and (5) to have a long term plan on communication and education inside (and outside) the area involving the different beneficiaries. The monitoring is effected once or twice a year, as indicated by the steering committee of the After-LIFE process, by way of expert visits on the grounds, for assessing the project realizations according to individual planning schemes for implementation.

Conditions of participation: No limitation on number of participants. Original number of participants are the landowners participating to the realization of the Life+ 3watEr project. One of the objectives of this project was the further association of additional landowners for achieving the overall goals of the project at their own cost. Requirements and standards are defined precisely and comprehensibly, as specified in the project description of Life+ 3watEr. Consequence of non-compliance: contractual responsibility under the Life+ nature project contractual framework.

Risk/uncertainties of participants: Implementation risk of the project objectives. If objectives are not reached or maintained, project monies can be reclaimed through OVML vzw.

Links to other contractual relationships: Links to the contractual framework of the Life+ 3watEr project.

Funding/payments: Money came from the approved Life+ project. OVML vzw acted as “associated beneficiary”, therefore received the funds and further dispatched these to the participant landowners according to the terms of the agreements signed.

Contract partnership: The formal contractual elements are Private-Private: signatories are private parties.

The object of the contract could be qualified as Public-Private-Civil society, as it concerns the realization and implementation of a Life+ nature project, which involves public funds used by private parties for the benefit of civil society aspects.

INDIRECT EFFECTS

- Climate regulation - carbon storage,
- Water quality
- Water quantity (e.g. water retention)

CONTRACT

Contract conclusion:
Written agreement



Payment mechanism:
Project payment mechanism



Financing party:
Government (with EU-funding and own funding)



Length of participation in scheme:
24 years

Start of the program:
2009

End: 2023 (Renewal possible)

Information / contact: www.3water.eu/site/

LOCATION

BELGIUM



BE221 Limburg –
Arrondissement of
Hasselt



Context features

Landscape and climate: The Vijvergebied Midden-Limburg area is located in the North-East of Belgium, in the province of Limburg, and is especially important and most known for its unique number and variety of pond ecosystems, bird species and wet to dry heath gradients. For 6 of 9 Directive species the project area is essential for their maintenance in Flanders. For the remaining 3 species this project area is very important. These 9 species are indicators of habitats in which a greater number of threatened species in Belgium live. Especially ponds with a natural indigenous fish density, a good water quality and accompanying reed lands or marches are the most important habitats for these species. Other important habitats are wet and dry heaths, hygrophilous tall herb fringe communities and hayfields. Main land uses and ownership status of the area:

- Fish farming: 13% or 330 ha fish ponds, 75% in use of fish farmers, 25% nature reserve. - Forestry: 40 % or 1.033 ha;
- Farming: 20% or 515 ha;
- Other (urbanization, tourism, etc.): 27% or 692 ha.

Farm structure: Landowners' profile is traditional multifunctional countryside management, including forestry and local fish farming.

SUCCESS OR FAILURE?



The structure of participation of private landowners to the 3watEr project presents a successful contract solution, as it was very effective in these aspects:

1. The establishment of strong relations with and participation of a group of committed private landowners in the project area, who would participate as full partners in the project and perform works and management on their own grounds.
2. Generating strong and open relationships with the other partners could be sought effectively, leading to obtaining a Natura 2000 award.
3. To demonstrate to an (inter)national audience a best practice method on how to target, reach, and convince local private landowners to become full and reliable partners in the further development of Natura 2000 goals.
4. To further the sustainable conservation of target species and habitats, as well as the general wellbeing of the target area, through the development and implementation of the Triple-E approach that balances Economy, Ecology, and Education. The enhancement of awareness of Natura 2000 and local biodiversity at local, regional, national, and international levels.

Reasons for success:

1. OVML vzw structure is a private association, tailor made to the needs of private landowners;
2. Private contracts are with OVML vzw, a structure private landowners trust, which is important for long-term implementation of objectives;
3. Contracts provide for the maintaining of the project objectives, which implies a common approach towards monitoring and reporting.

SWOT analysis



Main external factors influencing success



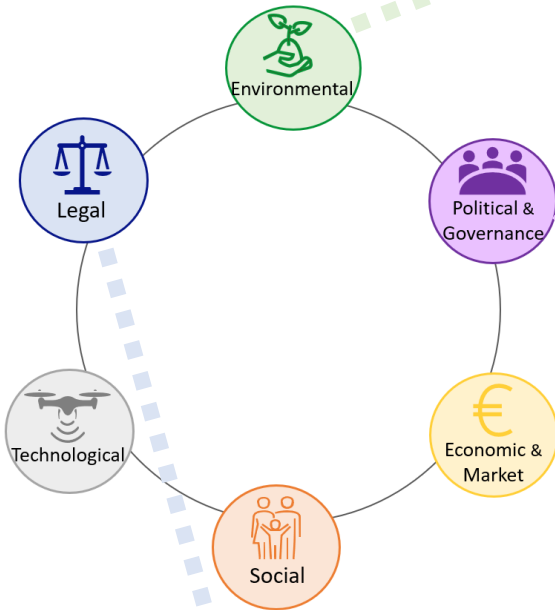
Political/governance, economic/market, social, technological, legal and environmental factors can all have a strong impact on the success of contract solutions. In this case study an in-depth analysis found that the following, selected factors were of specific importance.

Environmental deterioration as a principal motive to become active:

The main reasons for the ten landowners to develop the LIFE+ project were based on the following:

- ➔ deterioration and disappearance of the unique pond and heath landscape, and
- ➔ reduction of critical habitats for especially the Bittern (*Botaurus Stellaris*),

The abandonment of fish farming partly caused solid urbanisation processes due to the regression of economic perspectives for this activity.



Policy moving to integrated management:

Flemish nature and forestry policy have evolved from the concept of single aspect management (nature only) to integrated management (environment, economic and social aspects always are integrated). The new Flemish nature management plans (covering nature and forestry) are conceived and implemented accordingly.

The Life+3watEr project anticipated as a pioneer project on this evolution with its key **3 E's concept** (Ecology, Economy, Education).

Give priority to reality in nature management:

The implementation area of the Life+3watEr project lies within the *Flemish Ecological Network* and the *Natura 2000 territorial designations* as conservation zones.

The legal frameworks set for management in these areas, with many intended management regulative constraints, may have compromised a series of traditional rural economic activities in the project area.

Here, the Life+3watEr project integrated the wishes of private landowners from the start causing an instructive reflection on the content and interpretation of regulative constraints.

The sole application of legal definitions and concepts often does not serve the purpose they were intended to, as reality in nature, management usually takes precedence.