

Project: Rural development for employment

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Partner: ABF

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Research best practices of rural development in Belgium

Intro

In order to identify a collection of Belgian best practices in rural development, ABF carried out desk research structured as follows:

- research for excellent projects
- analysis of the projects
- identification and selection of good practices
- contact with the managers of the selected projects
- sending questionnaires
- request for interview

25 projects were identified and those recognized as inspiring initiatives that demonstrate the contribution of Rural Development Policy towards a more competitive, sustainable and inclusive rural Europe were selected:



- ⇒ **Tiges chavées – Sustainable management of private forests** - Promoting the sustainable management of small, privately owned forests. *This is the winning initiative of the 2019 Rural Inspiration Awards in the 'LEADER' category.*
- ⇒ **Nos Oignons - Supporting social farming in Wallonia** – 'Nos Oignons' is an association that supported the preparation and implementation of three RDP funded projects that promote social farming in Wallonia.

List of analyzed project:

'Abissage' - restoring traditional water management systems in the Ardennes - Restoration of a meadow irrigation ditch to revive a multi-centennial tradition that existed throughout Europe and over time has produced meadows of outstanding flora.

Nos Oignons - Supporting social farming in Wallonia – 'Nos Oignons' is an association that supported the preparation and implementation of three RDP funded projects that promote social farming in Wallonia.

Setting up a communal facility at Vaux sur Sûre - Construction of a new, versatile building consisting of a coworking space, a cultural hall and a tourist office, enhancing the services offered to the residents of a rural municipality.

Restoration of the Romedenne clay-pit nature reserve - An environmental NGO implemented a project to preserve and maintain an old clay pit that provides shelter to a number of rare and endangered species.

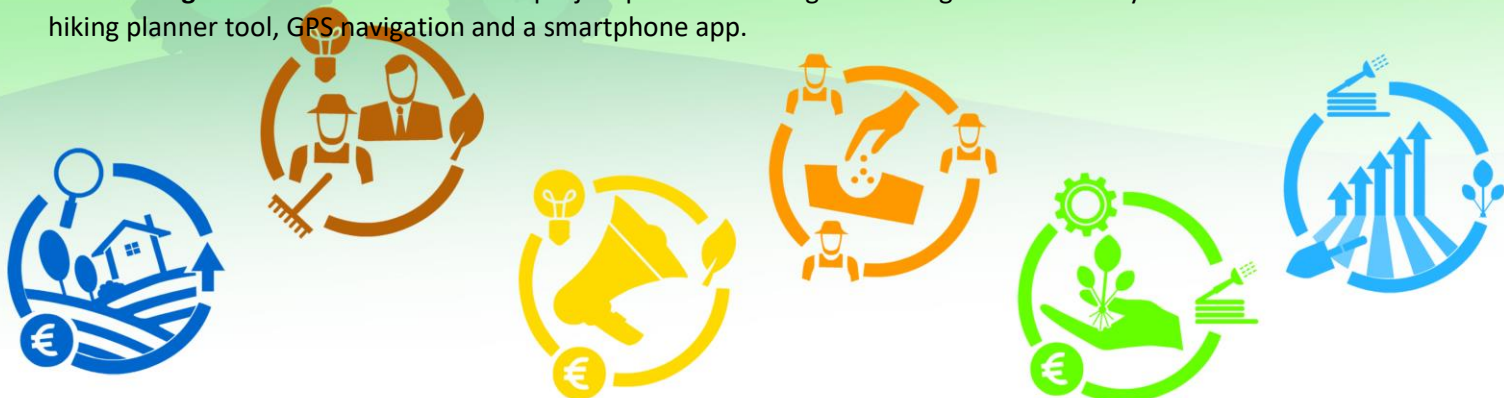
Bâti-Botte - Identification and promotion of local heritage to the wider public - The project considered built heritage as a development and to take care of it in the longer term.

The Innovation Route of the Walloon rural development network - An educational peer-to-peer programme for farmers that are engaged into innovative practices, facilitated through participative techniques and scientific expertise.

Chevetogne - combining a wetland ecosystem observation area with social tourism - Restoring a wetland ecosystem and creating an observation area, for ecological, hydrological, educational and touristic purposes.

The forest of the Land of Chimay - The project supported the area of Chimay to promote 'green tourism' and boost local development by fostering cooperation among local stakeholders.

GO Eastbelgium - An innovative LEADER project promotes hiking in the Belgian Eifel area by means of an online hiking planner tool, GPS navigation and a smartphone app.



Case study 1: Tiges chavées – Sustainable management of private forests - Promoting the sustainable management of small, privately owned forests



Digital resources

<https://www.tiges-chavees.be/project/forets-filiere-bois/>

<https://www.facebook.com/GAL.PaysdesTigesetChavees/>

<http://www.oewb.be/la-cellule-d-appui-a-la-petite-foret-privee>

Aims and objectives

- The project “Tiges chavées” aims to support the sustainable management of the private forests of the territory, by offering training, tailored advice and awareness raising for forest owners and by promoting the collective management of small private forests. The project also aims to create a social enterprise for construction work using local wood. With this objective in mind, the Local Action Group is developing links with training enterprises that are active in the forestry sector.
- The first axis of the project aims to strengthen the local hardwood industry by anchoring it in a short circuit logic. Concretely, the project aims to increase local production and processing of hardwood lumber, while preserving the biodiversity characteristic of the territory's forests. To contribute to this objective, the project will intervene at different levels of the sector:
 - With forest owners in order to ensure sustainable management of forests allowing the mobilization of a greater quantity of hardwood while preserving biodiversity. The project will also allow the owners to organize themselves to facilitate work and the sale of wood.
 - With processing companies (loggers, sawmills, carpenters and cabinetmakers) in order to better meet their needs and consumer demand.
 - With public and private consumers, as well as with the construction sector to promote the use of hardwood from local forests.
- The second axis of the project aims to create a social enterprise carrying out wooden constructions on the basis of materials from local forestry work. In addition to mobilizing local hardwood for the sector, this axis will above all meet local demand for social inclusion in the wood sector.



Top highlights:

Economic benefits:

- This project mobilized 55 forest owners, 45 of which received a visit to assess the short-term needs on their plot. Twenty-seven service agreements were established between owners and forestry experts, to organize the marking of trees for harvest, a common sales catalogue for 2650 m3 of local woodland was also established. The project supported the sale of 25 lots of 2270 m3 of firewood, softwood and hardwood lumber (for a total of 76 000 EUR), and the afforestation of two plots (1.6 ha). Two municipalities agreed to use local wood in their building projects. The bench-making competition culminated in an exhibition event at a popular provincial recreation site. In autumn 2018, the project organized a collective sanitary action to help small and medium-sized properties to remove wood attacked by bark beetles (*Ips typographus*).
- Technicians visited affected sites and marked the trees that needed to be felled and sold. The action is ongoing and aims to reduce the impact of the bark beetle outbreak on coniferous forests.

Environmental benefits:

- Forest owners are making better use of their property in terms of environmental protection and improving the forest habitat. They are starting to adopt a more natural forest management approach (Pro Silva) which requires less intervention.

Social benefits:

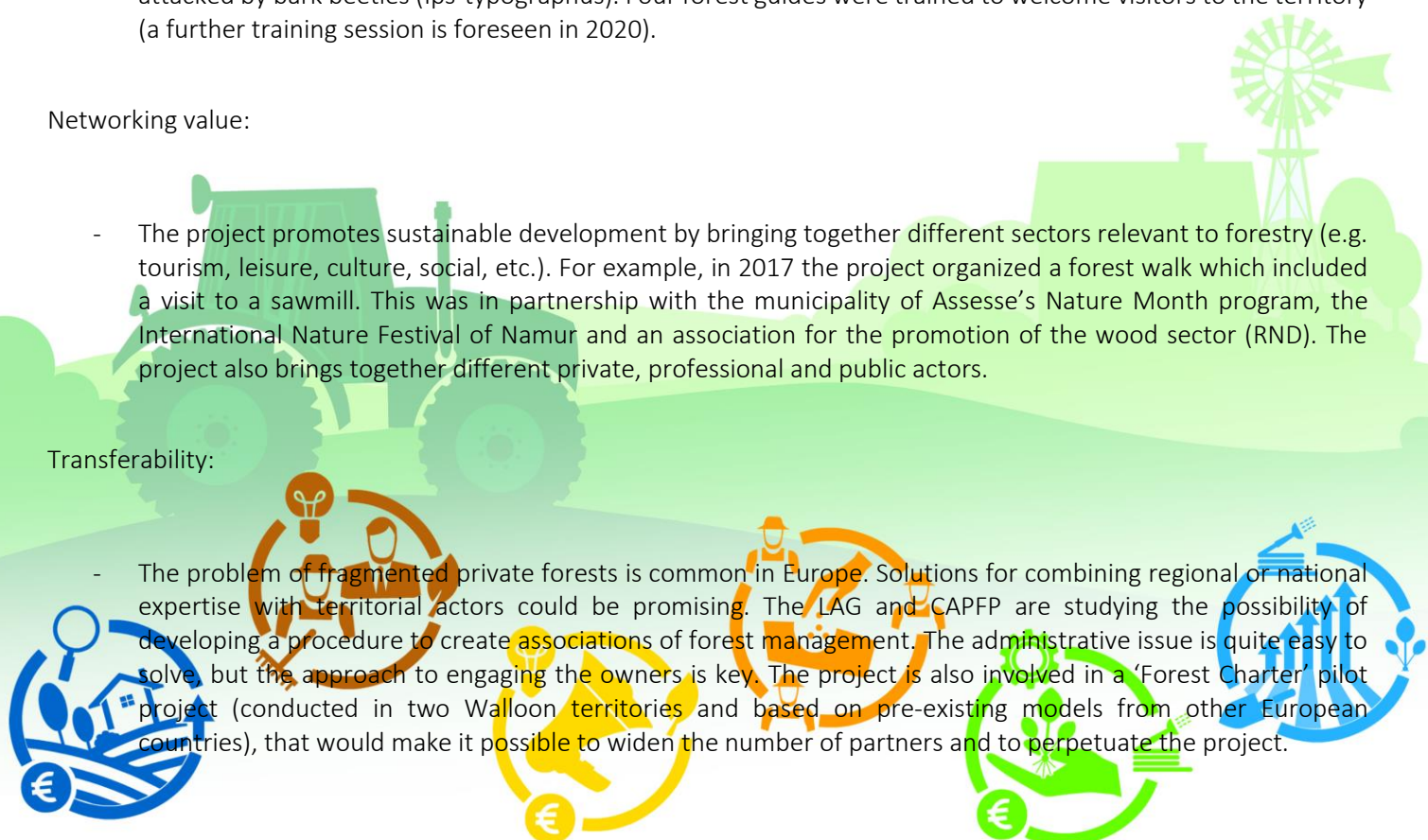
- In Autumn 2018, the project organized a collective sanitary action to help small properties to remove wood attacked by bark beetles (*Ips-typographus*). Four forest guides were trained to welcome visitors to the territory (a further training session is foreseen in 2020).

Networking value:

- The project promotes sustainable development by bringing together different sectors relevant to forestry (e.g. tourism, leisure, culture, social, etc.). For example, in 2017 the project organized a forest walk which included a visit to a sawmill. This was in partnership with the municipality of Assesse's Nature Month program, the International Nature Festival of Namur and an association for the promotion of the wood sector (RND). The project also brings together different private, professional and public actors.

Transferability:

- The problem of fragmented private forests is common in Europe. Solutions for combining regional or national expertise with territorial actors could be promising. The LAG and CAPFP are studying the possibility of developing a procedure to create associations of forest management. The administrative issue is quite easy to solve, but the approach to engaging the owners is key. The project is also involved in a 'Forest Charter' pilot project (conducted in two Walloon territories and based on pre-existing models from other European countries), that would make it possible to widen the number of partners and to perpetuate the project.



Description and benefits of the intervention:

Background

- Most of the private forests in the area covered by the Local Action Group (LAG) 'Tiges et Chavées', are very small and fragmented. They contribute very little to the local economy as it is difficult for owners to perform effective forest management on small plots. To address this constraint, the LAG aims to create links between small forest owners, advisors and professionals in the sector. Activities supported by this project include organising wood sales in groups, facilitating forestry work, organising training, developing local chains, creating partnerships and informing the public. In addition, the project promotes social carpentry to make it possible to carry out non-profit actions with a positive societal and environmental impact. The promoter of the project is the LAG 'Tiges et Chavées' in partnership with the Wallonian Support Office for the Private Small-scale Forest (Cellule d'Appui à la Petite Forêt Privée) and the Royal Belgian Society of Forestry (Société Royale Forestière de Belgique).

Actions

- Collective management of small private forests
- Small forests owner training and awareness
- Personal advice
- Creation of a network of forest coaches
- Support to the exploitation sector
- Raising awareness of municipalities and construction stakeholders
- Citizen awareness
- Training of forest guides
- Tourist circuit on the uses and trades of wood
- Creation of a social carpentry

How does it work

Activities implemented to support the economic development of the local wood industry

- Established a database of timber companies operating in the territory (2016).
- Provided information to 377 small owners (under five ha) on forest management and organised a demonstration session for them (2016).
- Forty-five forest owners received a diagnostic visit from a private expert. Part of a team set up by the 'Public agency for small private forests' (CAPFP) in collaboration with the 'Federation of forestry experts'. The visits aimed to identify the owner's aims for their forest as well as any works that needed to be carried out on the land. Three forest owners with more than five ha also applied to participate.
- A collective timber/lumber sale was organized with the support of CAPFP (2016).
- On-site advice was provided to forest owners of properties sized between five to 25 ha (2018).



- In 2018, a contest was organized to make benches from locally produced wood. Twenty-four contestants took part including professionals and amateurs from the sector, as well as regular citizens.
- Finally, a promotional event for the local wood industry was also organized in 2018. The day included visits to forest plots and local sawmills, with demonstrations by lumberjacks, pruners, mobile sawmills, carpenters, etc.

Training activities for forest owners

- A survey of training needs was conducted amongst small forest owners (less than five ha) (2016).
- A cycle of one-day training sessions (2017 and 2018) was launched in collaboration with the Belgian Royal Forest Society (SRFB):
 - Pruning of forest trees (11 participants);
 - Biodiversity management (12 participants);
 - Pro Silva management in private forests (14 participants);
 - Classification of hardwoods and mobile saw-mill demonstration (24 participants);
 - Thinning of hardwoods (21 participants);
 - Forest site diagnostics (25 participants);
 - Forest landscape interpretation (30 participants).

Activities to promote social integration

- Exchanges were organized with the Socio-Professional Integration Centre "Espaces" in Ciney, with a view to creating a structure to support social and professional integration in the wood industry (2016).
- An agreement was established regarding the launch of a social carpentry workshop in collaboration with 'Espaces' in 2018.

Preservation the environmental characteristics of local forests

- Public information panels on afforestation, thinning and clear cutting were placed in public and private forests.
- A forest owners conference was organised in 2017, to discuss the health and maintenance of the main tree species in the area (60 participants).
- A further conference took place in 2018 concerning the evolution of forest landscapes (38 participants).
- Four training sessions for forest guides were carried out in 2017 (with four participants), and a new session is planned for 2019.
- An educational forest trail concerning forest management and the uses of local species is currently under development.



- It aims to enhance and stimulate the local productive economy by allowing the development of an economic sector which is well present in the territory, but which is faced with an unfavourable global context. The project should make it possible to maintain or even increase jobs related to the hardwood sector in the territory.
- By ensuring biodiversity-friendly forest management, the project contributes to preserving territorial qualities or amenities. Indeed, it contributes to the protection of forests which constitute a major factor of economic, residential and tourist attractiveness of the territory.
- The project also contributes to promoting social equity within the territory by setting up a structure with a social purpose. It clearly fights against social dualization by allowing people who drop out of work to find a professional environment.

Impact on the territory

The project can be qualified as a sustainable project since it has an impact on the 3 pillars of sustainable development:

Economic impact

- The economic impact is one of the essential elements of the project since it aims to strengthen the sector of hardwood lumber in the territory with positive consequences in terms activities and jobs in the sector. Indeed, the production and processing of lumber represents a significant source of employment, far superior to the energy recovery of wood. The added value of the lumber industry is also much greater than the wood energy industry. The forest also represents a major tourist asset for the territory and a factor of residential attractiveness.

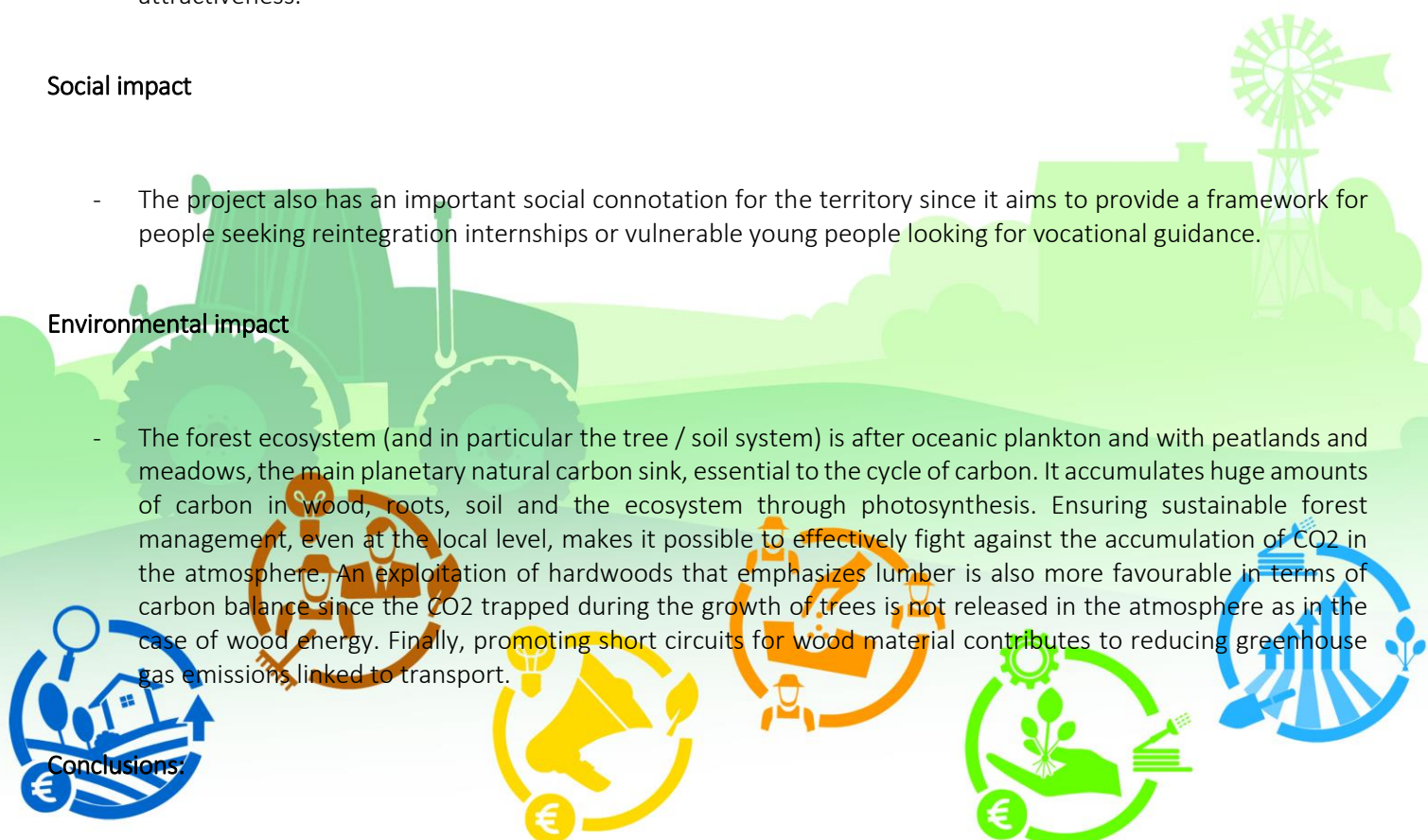
Social impact

- The project also has an important social connotation for the territory since it aims to provide a framework for people seeking reintegration internships or vulnerable young people looking for vocational guidance.

Environmental impact

- The forest ecosystem (and in particular the tree / soil system) is after oceanic plankton and with peatlands and meadows, the main planetary natural carbon sink, essential to the cycle of carbon. It accumulates huge amounts of carbon in wood, roots, soil and the ecosystem through photosynthesis. Ensuring sustainable forest management, even at the local level, makes it possible to effectively fight against the accumulation of CO₂ in the atmosphere. An exploitation of hardwoods that emphasizes lumber is also more favourable in terms of carbon balance since the CO₂ trapped during the growth of trees is not released in the atmosphere as in the case of wood energy. Finally, promoting short circuits for wood material contributes to reducing greenhouse gas emissions linked to transport.

Conclusions:



It is important to provide a territorial approach and to integrate different sectors: bringing together forest management, primary processing, secondary processing, environment, forest recreation. The Local Action Group has to play a role of facilitator. The project must allow opportunistic developments: e.g. the support given to forest owners to intervene against the current invasion of bark beetles is a real value-added.

- Mobilized 55 forest owners, of which 45 received a visit to assess the short-term needs on their plot
- Supported the establishment of 27 service agreements between owners and forestry experts to organize the marking of trees for harvest. Established a common sales catalogue for 2 650 m3 of local woodland
- Supported the sale of 25 lots of 2 270 m3 of firewood, softwood and hardwood lumber for a total of 76 000 EUR
- In autumn 2018, the project organized a collective sanitary action to help small properties to remove wood attacked by bark beetles (*Ips typographus*)
- Trained four forest guides to welcome visitors to the territory (a further training session is foreseen in 2020)
- lever for a rural area and relied upon the younger generation to raise awareness about it



Case study 2: Nos Oignons – Supporting social farm in Wallonia



Digital resources

- www.cspo.be/content/entre-mots
- www.ssmsafrans.com
- <https://vachesetbourrache.be>
- www.nosoignons.org
- https://www.tvlux.be/video/autre/agriculture/au-chant-du-coq-les-fermes-sociales_27361.html
- <https://youtu.be/6ElwVxxVLpA>
- <https://youtu.be/Lh8m81cTH3c>

Aims and objectives

The three projects concerned aimed to:

- Adapt and offer relevant administrative and support tools to stakeholders in the field (farmers, beneficiaries, other social institutions from the territory)
- Promote social farming by:
 - building a network of institutions to reach a significant number of beneficiaries;
 - creating communication and facilitation tools;
 - contributing to project coordination and documentation;
 - creating synergies with other projects and supporting the creation of an operational framework for Wallonia.

Top highlights:

Economic benefits:

- Reduced care cost for patients. Participants in social farming tend to have fewer relapses and hospitalizations. In Wallonia, a day care center costs around €190 /day/patient and for hospitalization around €430/day/patient. Social farming is estimated to cost €80/day/patient in this exploratory stage. Valorization of existing infrastructures and small complementary defrayment/income for farmers (max. €40 /day).

Environmental benefits:

Social farming encourages environment-friendly agricultural practices. It has been noted that those who already engage in environment-friendly farming practices are more likely to be open to the idea of getting



involved in social farming. On the other hand, several owners of highly-industrialized and non-organic farms have asserted that our initiatives could be a means of helping them to rebuild links with their neighbourhoods and consumers.

Social benefits:

- Beneficiaries feel empowered, create new relationships, and gain self-confidence. The farmers share their know-how, benefit from social exchanges and create new links with beneficiaries and social institutions. They and their working environment benefit from recognition and the development of different skills e.g. relational. All-in-all there is an enhancement of their sense of social worth despite a gloomy overall context. Results achieved by mid-2018: 18 farmers took part, 48 individual participants, 432 'farm days' for individuals, 44 participants in 346 days of collective workshops.

Networking value:

- The ongoing development of a Walloon framework for social farming brings together a diverse range of actors: 'Nos Oignons', the Walloon Rural Network, the 'Accueil Champêtre en Wallonie', 'Steunpunt Groene Zorg' in Flanders.

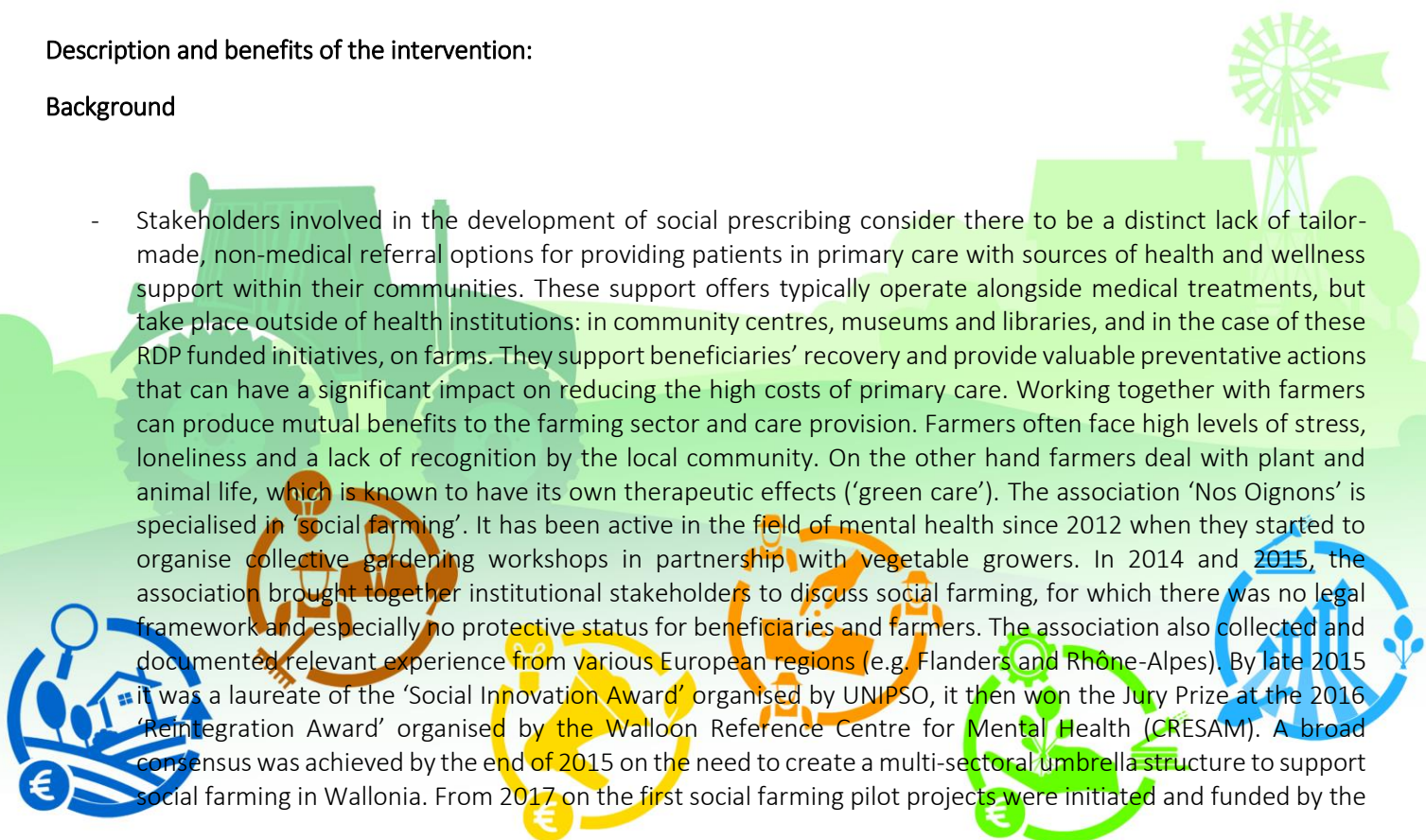
Transferability:

- The current work on a regional framework will benefit all farms and social institutions' beneficiaries in Wallonia. Many rural areas in other European regions are also experiencing similar realities and could be inspired.

Description and benefits of the intervention:

Background

- Stakeholders involved in the development of social prescribing consider there to be a distinct lack of tailor-made, non-medical referral options for providing patients in primary care with sources of health and wellness support within their communities. These support offers typically operate alongside medical treatments, but take place outside of health institutions: in community centres, museums and libraries, and in the case of these RDP funded initiatives, on farms. They support beneficiaries' recovery and provide valuable preventative actions that can have a significant impact on reducing the high costs of primary care. Working together with farmers can produce mutual benefits to the farming sector and care provision. Farmers often face high levels of stress, loneliness and a lack of recognition by the local community. On the other hand farmers deal with plant and animal life, which is known to have its own therapeutic effects ('green care'). The association 'Nos Oignons' is specialised in 'social farming'. It has been active in the field of mental health since 2012 when they started to organise collective gardening workshops in partnership with vegetable growers. In 2014 and 2015, the association brought together institutional stakeholders to discuss social farming, for which there was no legal framework and especially no protective status for beneficiaries and farmers. The association also collected and documented relevant experience from various European regions (e.g. Flanders and Rhône-Alpes). By late 2015 it was a laureate of the 'Social Innovation Award' organised by UNIPSO, it then won the Jury Prize at the 2016 'Reintegration Award' organised by the Walloon Reference Centre for Mental Health (CRÉSAM). A broad consensus was achieved by the end of 2015 on the need to create a multi-sectoral umbrella structure to support social farming in Wallonia. From 2017 on the first social farming pilot projects were initiated and funded by the



Walloon RDP, these predate the umbrella structure. These projects cover fields such as disability, mental health, addiction and social inclusion. Thanks to this support and 'license to experiment', a community of practice is gradually emerging. 'Nos Oignons' co-produced three of the current 15 projects in partnership with project holders: Ottignies' Mental Health Service; 'Safrans' Mental Health Service of Braine l'Alleud and the Public Center for Social Action of Tubize. The projects are focused on psychiatry / mental health and social inclusion and aim to support cooperation between the three participating organisations and local farmers. The area covered by the projects is the province of Walloon Brabant, to the south of Brussels. It has an area of 1 000 km² and population of 400 000 inhabitants, there are more than 1 000 agricultural holdings and has 64 000 hectares of agricultural land.

Actions

Collective market gardening workshops in Haut-Ittre, Bousval and Grez-Doiceau

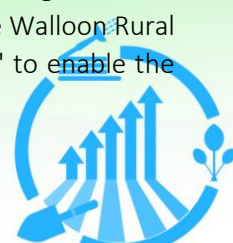
- The workshops take place one day a week, in the form of an exchange of services between participants on the one hand, and farmers on the other. The farmers open their farm, share their daily life and provide know-how, and a plot reserved for a collective vegetable garden which is co-managed with all the participants throughout the season. Together we take part in the establishment of the garden and crops, until the sharing of crops. In exchange for this plot, part of the time is devoted to helping farmers. This mutual assistance is also an opportunity to familiarize themselves with their profession, to learn basic techniques or even to deepen knowledge. Creation of a social carpentry

Individualized farm receptions

- Inspired by the models implemented in neighbouring regions, where social reception on the farm has been redeployed for several years already (especially in Flanders or in France), in 2015-2016 we offered some individual experiences in collaboration with partner farmers. Our intervention is done through the shaping of a partnership between the person interested in an experience in agricultural business, the institution

that accompanies it, and the farmer concerned. A separate agreement is then signed by the different parties. The purpose is the well-being of the people welcomed, in an exchange that aims to be balanced with the farmers who welcome them. This dynamic has taken off since 2017 as part of the Walloon Rural Development Program, jointly funded by the Walloon Region and the European Union (FEADER fund). The association Nos Oignons is / was co-author within this framework of three projects carried respectively by the Mental Health Service "Safrans" of Braine l'Alleud ("Nos Oignons de Safrans" - closed on 30/06/2019), the Mental Health Service "Entre Mots" of Ottignies ("Nos Oignons d'Entre Mots"), and the CPAS of Tubize (project "Cows and borage"). These projects include a community work dimension (collective workshops and hosting of small groups) coupled with the establishment of individual shelters with partner farmers in the regions concerned. "Nos Oignons" also collaborates closely with other promoters of Walloon pilot projects within the framework of the Walloon Rural Development Network, and with the non-profit organization "Accueil Champêtre en Wallonie" to enable the future dissemination of social agriculture in Wallonia.

How does it work



2017 implemented activities

- Launch and coordination of the "Nos Oignons de Safrans" (Braine l'Alleud - 2017-2020) and "Vaches et bourrache" (Tubize - 2017-2021) projects. Hired respectively 1 and 1.25
- FTEs for the field work, 'Nos Oignons' hired a project manager at 0.2 FTE per project for methodological support, cross-communication and facilitation of the partners network.
- Organization of first collective workshops and individual receptions at the farms and the creation of administrative and scheduling tools to assist stakeholders (farmers, beneficiaries, colleagues within institutions).
- Organization of information sessions to recruit participants, institutions and farmers.
- Work with the Walloon Rural Network and other operators to share tools and prepare a Memorandum on social farming which includes practical guidelines, experiences from the field and takes stock of policy suggestions.

2018 implemented activities

- Launch of the project "Nos Oignons d'Entre Mots" (Ottignies - 2018-2021). 1 FTE was hired by the project and 0.2 FTE by 'Nos Oignons' for its support provision.
- Growing level of activity in a growing number of farms.
- Work in progress on the Memorandum for social farming in Wallonia - first release in July 2018.
- Inclusion, together with the Agriculture Minister's office, of social farming in the Walloon Legal Code for Agriculture.
- From January 2018 creation of a 'social farming' manager position within the non-profit association 'Accueil Champêtre in Wallonia'. Initiative funded for two years by the private cooperative CERA. It specified the concrete proposal to create an umbrella structure as jointly proposed by "Nos Oignons" and "Accueil Champêtre in Wallonia" since 2016.

Activities planned for 2019 to 2021

- Canvassing a growing number of partner farmers and social institutions (beneficiaries).
- Continue the deployment of adapted communication tools for the general public and the various project stakeholders (dissemination of information, feedback and continuous adaptation of the framework).

Local, regional, national, and international impact

Reclaiming food and its production, jointly share the experience while supporting the agricultural initiatives sustainable development. To allow a large public, and more particularly people who frequent or have attended mental health care institutions, access to and participation in food production processes in line with organic farming.



Conclusions:

Results

- Two thousand 'farm days' for individuals and 900 days of collective workshops will be delivered by the end of the three projects.
- Reduction of costs of day care for public finances combined to innovative source of support and income for farmers (a defrayment is paid to them).

A structural policy is being set up for social agriculture beyond current RDP funding:

- An edition of a practical political guidelines book ('Memorandum') to be distributed
- Modification of the Rural Law Code of Wallonia achieved to integrate the concept of 'Rural Social Welcoming', giving Social Farming its first legal basis.

Lessons & Recommendations

"The first results in the field are stunning, for beneficiaries and for farmers. We shall continue to consolidate the framework and spread it in Wallonia (and elsewhere!)." Pursuit of the networking process with other public and private partners (in Wallonia and other European regions) is key to achieving this goal and producing a useful and sustainable framework. Our priorities are:

- Clarifying and securing the farmer and beneficiary statuses regarding social farming (notably regarding labor and volunteering laws);
- Convincing health care funds, national medical authorities and labor unions to collaborate as facilitators and acknowledge social farming as a care or a transitory alternative to unemployment;
- Sustaining the new regional 'umbrella' structure for social farming to give stakeholders appropriate support beyond the 15 current RDP funded pilot projects.

