

Minutes Wildlife Economy stakeholder meeting

Wednesday 29 January 2020

De Wissen

Katrien Schaerlaekens gives a short presentation on the Meuse Valley River Park: location, 'RiverPark' quality mark, origin, mission, partners and key figures are briefly explained.

After that, Raymond Tilmans gives a short presentation about the INTERREG project 'Wildlife Economy', of which the province of NL Limburg is the lead partner. The project should result in an action plan for each region to link entrepreneurs and nature more and to achieve benefits for both the entrepreneur and nature.

In the morning the focus of the meeting is on 'tourism and recreation' . Speaker Aukje Van Gerven, manager of European Wildlife Safari, was excused due to illness. Katrien briefly explains their activities. This is a niche product, but one that fits in well with the objectives that the partners behind the Meuse Valley RiverPark have jointly set: focus on special nature experiences and on quality.

In the afternoon the focus of the meeting is on the 'health' sector. Liesbeth Van Gyseghem, employee nature and health at the Regional Landscape Kempen and Maasland, explains a number of interesting projects in which local communities become healthier through nature experiences, local entrepreneurs are also involved.

The attendees will then address these questions, among others:

1. Nature is often seen as a 'cost' or a 'threat' to economic development. How do we ensure that entrepreneurs in the Meuse valley also see it as a 'revenue'?

- o What is important for those entrepreneurs? What should we pay attention to?

- o How can we influence policy together?

2. Which actions, which meet the basic principles of WLE, would you like to see realised in the RPMV? Which entrepreneurs do you see participating? Who is best placed to develop this?

3. What would you like and be able to develop from your own practice in/with nature in the RPMV?

4. Below are some examples of mechanisms to reinvest capital from natural resources in the management of nature. Which are feasible or desirable in the RPMV? What initiatives could you set up yourself? Are there any other/better ideas?

- o Gravel companies can exploit gravel for flood protection, but have to set up the landscape after excavation.

- o A car park visitors will have to pay for, the proceeds will go to maintenance of the hiking area.

- o A restaurant serves burgers including a 'nature burger'. A part of the revenue goes to nature conservation or to the protection of a particular species.

- o Young people take part in a nature camp, and carry out nature work under supervision

- o An entrepreneur 'rents' an equipped location for a ceremony in nature, and informs the client where the rental income goes to.

- o A nature park sets up a 'Friends of...', where people pay a support/membership fee and receive some benefits.

- o ...

General feedback:

- In order to make a difference, large companies and large target groups are particularly interesting to focus on. However, mainly the small-scale enterprises have responded to the call and are mostly involved in and concerned with their environment. Nevertheless, the large companies have the highest margins. Both catering and health care are vulnerable sectors in which you can work out all kinds of small actions, but there are much stronger shoulders than these to be able to bear greater burdens.

- Apart from revenue models and business cases, it would have a lot of impact to be able to achieve a good division of tasks between government and nature

organisations. If, for example, effective arrangements could be made about maintenance and waste collection, this would be a much greater gain for nature than an entrepreneur who contributes now and then.

- As a general 'tactic' for the River Park, it is stated that the first step is to create local support for nature. Organisations and governments have to do this, and it requires continuous investment. A second step is to embrace good examples (see below). In other words: continue to invest in the basics (make nature more resilient and easier to experience), raise awareness among a large group of people, and companies focus on people.

Questions:

1. Nature is often seen as a cost:

o So what is important for these entrepreneurs?

It involves a certain mindset. Changing that mindset is a huge task and it might be impossible to convince entrepreneurs from the area, not even through coaching. It is a better tactic to involve the entrepreneurs who do have the right mindset, and who are already convinced of the importance and added value of nature. It is a good idea to give them visibility and to empower them in the work they do in a positive way. First of all, we need to attract drivers, then we need to reach the broad population (stimulate demand), then the rest will follow, one day... There is in any case a great distance between the classic economy and the new economy.

o What should we pay attention to?

In society as a whole, and therefore also in the Meuse valley, points of view are increasingly totally opposed or groups seem to be drifted apart by the media and politics. In our communication, we must pay attention to presenting 'economy' and 'nature' not as opposites, but as two fields that can reinforce each other.

If there are objective figures, e.g. because of a doctor (not someone who is already in a camp, for or against nature), the credibility of a project is greatly improved.

Have entrepreneurs, municipalities and nature managers network. Now everyone meets around their own table, but not yet around the same table. This way, prejudices or problems are quicker to get rid of. Afternoon: the example of Brainport Eindhoven is hopeful, because when all those employees of all those companies were asked what they wanted in order to stay motivated (e.g. during the afternoon), the answer was: more nature. That also influences the policy!

More area promotion is needed. Many companies (and residents) have their do not (yet) see the potential of the Meuse, perhaps because some work is still in progress.

o How can we influence policy?

Drawing attention to the small-scale and sustainable in relation to the large-scale. However, regulations and subsidy policy are not currently organised in this way.

A lot of entrepreneurs, especially those starting out, are affected by the strict regulations and almost need a 'guide' or 'coach' to help them through all kinds of procedures. A government should pay attention to this as well. An area director will also continue to be necessary: linking people with ideas to the right organisations.

In case of new intended use after gravel extraction, the management plan concerning landscape has to be most important. The region does not need yet another fishpond.

The participants come up with a lot of action which are interesting for the RPMV.