Chapter 40

Integrating the Concept of Ecosystem Services in the Province of Antwerp: The Inland Dunes Project

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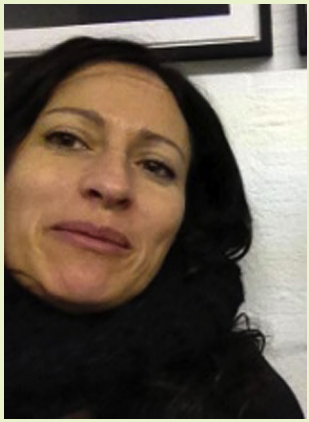

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INTRODUCTION

Until recently, the Province of Antwerp did not explicitly apply the concept of ecosystem services (ES) in its practice. With an ecosystem services-based process on landscape planning in the area of the inland dunes, this will be tried for a first time. We will first introduce the main sources of inspiration for applying an ES-based approach. Next we will introduce the project and the context in which it came about. Finally, we will briefly focus on the expected added

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value of the concept for the Province of Antwerp and the Belgium Ecosystem Services community.

THE INLAND DUNES PROJECT AND ITS INSPIRATION

Three projects can be mentioned as inspiration to the ES-based process on landscape planning in the area of the inland dunes. (1) The Interreg IVB project Green Infrastructure for Tomorrow-Together! (2) The Wijers project of the Flemish Land Agency. (3) The Belgium Ecosystem Services (BEES) project that formed the basis of this book and of the BEES community. For more information on the Wijers project, see Chapter 34. For more information on the BEES-community, we refer the reader to the introductory chapter of this book. Here we will focus on the Interreg IVB project Green Infrastructure for Tomorrow-Together! which was an important source of inspiration for the Province of Antwerp.

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE FOR TOMORROW-TOGETHER!

The Green Infrastructure for Tomorrow-Together! project is a three-year GIFT-T! project (www.gift-t.eu) involving seven partners from three countries: Great Britain, The Netherlands, and Belgium. In five case study areas, a prototype method for planning green infrastructure based on the ecosystem services approach is developed. The inland dunes project is a case study within this project.

The project aims to implement the concept of ecosystem services into everyday policy making (bringing it from the study shelf to the planning table). Key features of the methodology developed in this project are:

1. Goal finding and long-term ambition: collecting stakeholders' demands for ecosystem services—building up a shared vision and a partnership of "shareholders"
2. Diagnosis and design of spatial alternatives: green infrastructure and ecosystem services analysis and mapping—cost-benefit analysis
3. GI business plans and business cases—search for (new) funding

THE INLAND DUNES AND ITS CHALLENGES

The inland dunes project is situated on the territory of the municipalities of Balen, Mol, Meerhout, and Geel. The identity of the area is closely linked with the inland dunes and the watercourses of Molse Nete and Grote Nete (special protected areas of European importance) embedded in a dense landscape with lots of small-scape landscape elements such as tree rows, and hedges and cultural heritage elements such as windmills, watermills, chapels, and homesteads.

Currently, the inland dunes are mostly covered with 50- to 70-year-old pine trees. Choices are to be made for the future land use and management of the inland dunes. Eighty % of the woods are in private ownership. The forest owner's organization, Bosgroep Zuiderkempen, requested a policy framework on forest management.

FIGURE 40-1

This bottom-up demand anticipated the Province of Antwerp's policy on landscape and green infrastructure, inspired by the European Landscape Convention. The Province of Antwerp's targets are the enhancement of the environmental quality and the community-based development of integrated visions on a multifunctional use of green infrastructure on a regional scale.

Project Partners

The project was initiated and conducted by a partnership within the government of the Province of Antwerp; Department Environment, Bosgroep Zuiderkempen vzw (Forestry Group), Kempens Landschap vzw (Landscape conservation organization), Regionaal Landschap Kleine en Grote Nete vzw (Regional Landscape), Rurant vzw (Countryside organization), and Toerisme Provincie Antwerpen vzw (Tourism Organisation).[1]

This partnership will be supported by policy makers, companies, stakeholder organizations, and citizens. In a process of co-creation, they will be developing a shared vision on the inland dunes' ecosystem services, responding to the needs of all involved in the process. Simultaneously, a strong partnership will be built up.

The project will be developed in collaboration with and supported by experts in ecosystem services, ecology, participatory processes, business planning, and economics.

The Project Approach

The challenge for the inland dunes area is the development and implementation of a future scenario for the inland dunes and surroundings. A scenario for the preservation and quality enhancement of the inland dunes and sustainable

1. "Province of Antwerp" further in the document refers to this partnership.

multifunctional use of the inland dunes. A scenario optimizing the ecosystem services needed and creating value out of the ecosystems delivered by the inland dunes.

The scenario building will be based on an analytical, deliberative process: a combination of top-down expert assessment and bottom-up stakeholder deliberation. All relevant stakeholders will be involved. In this process the Province of Antwerp will be supported by the Research Institute for Nature and Forest (INBO) and the University of Antwerp.

Spatial alternatives will be designed, based on an analysis of the landscape (ecology, connectivity for species, archeology), and on the input coming from the stakeholder deliberation. The design of spatial alternatives will be underpinned by analysis and mapping on the optimization of provided ecosystem services. Inspired by the GIFT-T! project (see above), the process will include the search for funding and investment in green infrastructure. New opportunities will be searched for in new alliances between green infrastructure and local economy, cultural heritage, tourism and recreation, and win-win situations between green infrastructure and businesses. The valuation of ecosystem services will underpin these assessments.

EXPECTATIONS REGARDING AN ECOSYSTEM SERVICES-BASED APPROACH AND THE BELGIUM ECOSYSTEM SERVICES (BEES) COMMUNITY

It is still too early to present a concrete experience-based evaluation of the relevance and use of ecosystem services. Belief in the usefulness of ecosystem services for landscape planning is based largely on the inspiration from and the experiences within the GIFT-T! project; partly on contacts in this project with experts from the Flemish Land Agency involved in the Wijers project; and partly on acquaintance with several experts of the BEES community. The ES concept is believed to be useful in indicating cross-cutting themes and stimulating responsibility from all sectors. It is also believed to help disclose connections possibly leading to funding and investment in green infrastructure. Within the BEES community the Province of Antwerp hopes to further share experiences and assessment of the usefulness of the ecosystem services concept in landscape planning.