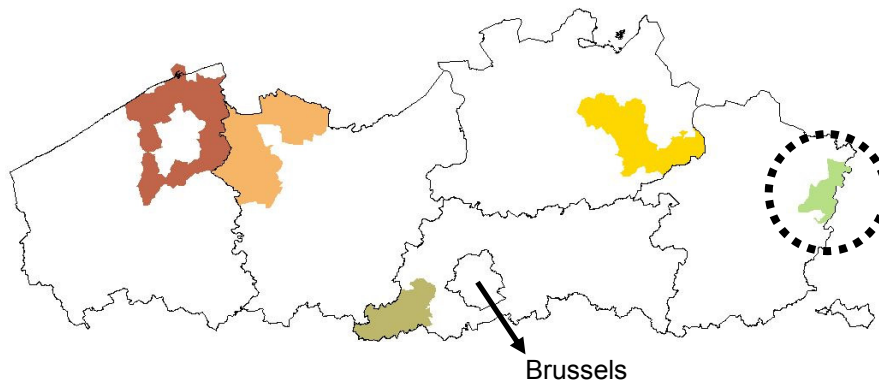


MIDDEN-MAASLAND (MIDDLE MEUSE COUNTRY)

[Valorisation of natural and cultural resources]

Coordinator: Davy Maesen
Visitors Centre De Wissen
Maaspark z.n.
B-3650 Dilsen-Stokkem
Tel: #32 89 81 99 64
Fax: #32 89 75 21 72
davy.maesen@leaderplus.be
www.leaderplus.be



▪ The Whispering Pearls of 'Maasland'

The project 'The Whispering Pearls of 'Maasland' was funded as part of the Leader+ Midden-Maasland programme. Through Leader+ the LAG Midden-Maasland wants to use the natural local resources such as water (the river Meuse), loam (brickyards), gravel (exploitation) and willow (cultivation) in identity- and image-strengthening innovative processes. These natural and cultural resources are the subject of the gps-navigated cycling route with 'Story Whisperer'. With this revolutionary gadget, the pro-cycling province of Limburg adds a completely new and trendy experience to cycling tourism. This appliance is a novelty on the cycling tourism market worldwide and it combines navigation, storytelling and video recordings, all in one apparatus. At a number of starting points, (cycling) tourists can lend a speaking navigation appliance which guides them throughout the entire route. This navigator tells stories on striking locations, shows additional visual material, provides practical information and offers options for alternative routes or experiences. By means of a wireless headset, users can fully enjoy this wealth of information in a safe way and turn their cycling trip into a varied and adventurous exploratory tour. It's certainly worth a try!

Contact: Willy Orlandini
Toerisme Limburg
Willekensmolenstraat 140
B-3500 Hasselt
Tel: #32 11 23 74 50
worlandini@limburg.be



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▪ Restyling of Visitors Centre 'De Wissen'

The visitors centre 'De Wissen' exists for more than 10 years and offers its visitors compelling stories about the river Meuse and the braiding industry as determining elements of the regional identity. Its function as a regional welcoming and information point for visitors of 'Maasland' will be further developed. However, the concept of presentation is bound for renewal and expansion. Key factors are increased use of multimedia and interaction and a modernized concept of presentation. With the support of Leader+ Midden-Maasland, a contemporary concept and design could be developed.

Contact: Jos Steyvers
Maaspark Negenoord vzw
Maaspark z.n.
B-3650 Dilsen-Stokkem
Tel: #32 89 75 21 71
jos.steyvers@dewissen.be

▪ Restructuring the Village Centre of Aldeneik

The plans for a contemporary and tourism-oriented restructuring of the village centre of Aldeneik have been drawn up for quite a while but have not been carried out as yet. The city council of Maaseik is taking care of a renewed lay-out for the old church's surroundings in Aldeneik, a unique and important place for the whole of Maasland.

Contact: Martin Goossens
Stad Maaseik
Lekkerstraat 10
B-3680 Maaseik
Tel: #32 89 56 05 12
martin.goossens@maaseik.be

▪ Visitors Centre for Wine Education and Promotion in Aldeneik

Karel Henckens, a fruit farmer and qualified wine-grower, has his own experimental garden with numerous grape varieties and a medium-sized vineyard on the siliceous soil along the banks of the river Meuse in Aldeneik. Thanks to Leader+ Midden-Maasland, he has been able to convert an old barn on his farm into a beautiful visitors centre. Here, visitors can get information on the vinification process, on wine and how to handle it, as well as an answer to the question why Maasland has potential to become a successful wine-growing region. Certainly worth a visit!

Contact: Karel Henckens
Hamontweg 81
B-3680 Aldeneik
Tel: #32 89 56 41 02
info@wijdomein-aldeneyck.be





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▪ **Beautification of the Village of Stokkem**

Like Aldeneik and Leut, Stokkem and its historical village centre with a preserved unique character, is a tourist asset for Maasland. Thanks to Leader+ Midden-Maasland, the local art society has been able to intensify the beautification of the village centre. A small statue has been put up and the large facade of the municipal primary school has been upgraded by murals. This large facade has been turned into a lively townscape of the former cattle market, which was held at this very spot. The historical facades and typical villagers emphasize the former life in Stokkem and Maasland in general.

Contact: Gerard Mostert
Kunstkring Arnold Sauwen vzw
Kapelstraat 41
B-3650 Dilsen-Stokkem

▪ **'Maasland voor l'Anker' (Maasland Anchored)**

'Maasland voor l'Anker' is a new biennial maritime event. During this event, the 'Zuid-Willemsvaart' (a canal) temporarily becomes a real inner harbour, displaying some 50 ships of various makes. During the first edition round trips, demonstrations, various attractions and an adapted cultural programme were the starting signal for the further structural and touristic development of this area into a new draw for Maasland. The first edition, held during the summer of 2004, was made possible thanks to the cooperation of Leader+ Midden-Maasland.

Contact: Hubert Ramakers
VVV Dilsen-Stokkem
Europalaan 2
B-3650 Dilsen-Stokkem
Tel: #32 89 79 08 00
hubert.ramakers@dilsen-stokkem.be

▪ **'Leut, 'n kei van een kans!' (Typical Maasland Paving in Leut)**

With this project, Regionaal Landschap Kempen & Maasland aimed at the revaluation and touristic-recreational opening up of the castle grounds of Leut and its scenery. The main action items of the Leader+ project were resurfacing (part of) the small lane in typical 'Maasland' paving and stimulating further actions by developing a network of footpaths, upgrading small-scale scenic elements and promoting a bed and breakfast formula.

Contact: Lambert Schoenmakers
Regionaal Landschap Kempen & Maasland
Winterslagstraat 87
B-3600 Genk
Tel: #32 89 32 28 10
info@rlkm.be





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▪ **Experiencing the Countryside of Midden-Maasland**

The first phase of this project included the organization and support of several initiatives regarding countryside experience and their promotion in Midden-Maasland. The aim was to introduce the typical regional identity to a broad public. As part of this project and with the support of Leader+ Midden-Maasland, the 'Landelijke Gilden' (rural guilds) and 'vzw Plattelandsklassen' (foundation of countryside classes) realized a do-and-learn path on countryside experience in the Meuse area between the villages of Aldeneik and Dilsen in 2004.

Right now, the second phase of the project is being carried out. This phase entails the following elements:

- an exploratory tour dealing with agriculture, local heritage and landscape in and around Heppeneert;
- an educational art-Meuse-tour for children, dealing with the river Meuse and its surroundings with an educational/creative approach using elements like loam, pebbles from the Maas, willow twigs, ...
- the organization of an extra training on agriculture for the region's local guides.

Contact: Johan Paredis
Landelijke Gilden Limburg
Tel.: #32 11 27 83 03
joan_paredis@landelijkegilden.be

▪ **Rapids**

Vzw D.Bros. has made a film about the 'Maasland' identity and the part elements woman and water play in this. The project was based on amateur films made in 'Maasland' from the 1950's onwards. What was filmed in the family circle and otherwise at that time? What do the images from those days and the reactions of the makers and/or the persons filmed say about the 'Maasland' and its inhabitants half a century later? This film, which lasts 73 minutes, has an important educational function towards young people, as schools frequently put in requests to show it.

Contact: Jan Dalemans
Stationsstraat 109
B-3650 Dilsen-Stokkem
Tel: #32 89 56 28 80
found.dbros@yucom.be

▪ **Tourist Vistas**

The local authorities of Dilsen-Stokkem, Maaseik and Maasmechelen were subsidized to make a feasibility study regarding the development of a series of tourist vistas in Midden-Maasland.

These vistas act as strategic junctions on the numerous cycling-, hiking- and experience-oriented routes that exist in the area or that are to be developed in the coming years. They should offer tourists and holiday-makers the opportunity to make a stop, enjoy the special





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view and get information on the continuation of their trip. A very original, imaginative presentation should make these vistas recognizable and inviting.

Contact: Hubert Ramakers
Stadsbestuur Dilsen-Stokkem
Europalaan 25
B-3650 Dilsen-Stokkem
Tel: #32 89 79 08 00
hubert.ramakers@dilsen-stokkem.be

▪ Sit-in

Jan Winkels, a visual artist and potter from Maaseik, developed a series of prototypes for artistic seating units in ceramics. The design was inspired by building ornaments from various styles, originating from important buildings in the Maasland region. In consultation with the local authorities, these prototypes will be used as public benches along the hiking and cycling routes network.

Contact: Jan Winkels
Diestersteenweg 211
B-3680 Maaseik-Neeroeteren
Tel: #32 89 86 79 85
jan.winkels@tiscali.be

▪ 'Smugglers' market' in Stokkem

Vzw Promo examined the possibility of organizing a so-called 'Smugglers' market' in Stokkem during the tourist season. The intention was to organize a weekly evening market with mainly regional quality products. The exploration and development of this idea resulted in a positive businessplan and launched the new tradition of the 'Smugglers' market' in the summer of 2004.

Contact: Albert Didden
Kapelstraat 33
B-3650 Dilsen-Stokkem
Tel: #32 89 75 60 80

▪ Elementa 2

In 2003, the association 'Elementum' organized an impressive art route in Aldeneik, set up as a homage to Jan Peeters. For the preparation of Elementa 2, a project on a larger scale, the association received Leader+ support. The central theme of Elementa 2 is water, as one of the four natural elements. In 2004 artists and scientists from various disciplines were invited to share their observations, points of view, experiences and findings with regard to water in all its aspects in a joint art project. This collaboration between artists and scientists was a unique event.





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Contact: Wim Corstjens
Bleumerstraat 49
B-3680 Maaseik
Tel: #32 89 56 58 95
wim-corstjens@skynet.be

▪ **Sculptures in the Country**

This sculpture event, which took place in the summer of 2005 in an old abandoned typical courtyard farm in Heppeneert, was a big success. For two weeks six artists sculpted statues from blocks of natural stone measuring 2 m³.

On the same spot, a sculpting workshop was held to introduce the practice of sculpting to young people. A lot of peripheral activities were organized as well. In total, 8 magnificent sculptures were made. Recently, these sculptures have been placed on 'strategic' locations along the cycling route network: six of them in Aldeneik, Wurfeld and Heppeneert (hamlets of Maaseik), one was offered to the city of Dilsen-Stokkem and one to the municipality of Maasmechelen. This way, tourists and locals can get to know and enjoy this monumental art during a relaxing hiking or cycling trip.

Contact: Peter Houben
O.B.M vzw
Lekkerstraat 10
B-3680 Maaseik
Tel: #32 89 56 05 59
peter.houben@maaseik.be

