

Pearls of the Dutch Countryside



European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD): Europe invests in its rural areas



Foreword

Vitality in all its aspects

The Passion for the Countryside Prize (known in Dutch as the *Passie op het Plattelandprijs*, or *POP prize*) showcases successful projects financed by EU funds. These pilot projects are not only about good ideas, but also the people behind them. The nominees have all demonstrated a passion in their work for rural development.

I think it is great to see how people assume responsibility for improving the quality of life and development of the countryside. This is testimony to enterprise and individual initiative. The Rural Development Programme offers the opportunity to support such initiatives from society. European and regional contributions act as a catalyst to set these initiatives in motion, and have generated valuable and visible results.

Rural development has many faces, and this is well reflected in the diversity of the nominated projects. The projects illustrate cultural, recreational, landscape, societal and sustainable aspects of the countryside. Moreover, many projects are innovative and exemplify good cooperation between the parties involved. These elements are mutually strengthening and inextricably linked – they showcase the vitality of the countryside in all its aspects!

Hester Maij

Jury Chair, Passion for the Countryside Prize
(*Passie op het Plattelandprijs*)

Member of the Provincial Executive for rural areas and cultural infrastructure Province of Overijssel



19 pearls of the Dutch Rural Development Programme

This is an invitation to get acquainted with nineteen innovative, creative and fascinating people. Each of them have in the last seven years contributed towards the renewal of the countryside, through for example new types of tourism, stimulating local clubs or investing in a better environment. All 19 projects have been implemented with financial support from the second Rural Development Programme for the Netherlands (*Plattelandsontwikkelingsprogramma - POP2*). These are the pearls of the programme. The initiative takers were rewarded with a nomination for one of the 'Rural Passion' (*Passie op het Platteland*) prizes, awarded in 2010 and 2013 to the most successful and innovative projects. Allow yourself to be inspired by the magic of the countryside.

The focus of the subsidy program is on a vital, sustainable agricultural sector, the quality of nature and the environment, and the quality of life in the countryside. Between 2007 and 2013 the second Rural Development Programme has contributed to some five thousand projects. There has been a rich variety of initiatives, which have had a visible benefit on the quality of life in the countryside.

Examples include the construction of sustainable animal housing, advisory services for farmers, providing support to young farmers for business investment and land consolidation through increased competitiveness. Agricultural nature is supported by among other things hedgerow maintenance, meadow bird management and the construction of environmentally friendly river banks in agricultural areas. With the development of rural tourism and investment in cultural and rural heritage, the programme stimulates the countryside economy. Under the 'Leader Approach', which involves rural development from the bottom up, local action groups receive support in the preparation and implementation of a development strategy for their area. The Leader Approach promotes cooperation between members of the local action group and the project implementers, and between Leader areas in the Netherlands and abroad.

With contributions from...

European rural development policy is implemented in the Netherlands through the POP2 programme (see box). In the period 2007-2013 almost 2.7 billion euros were made available for projects. Of this amount, some 600 million euros were provided by the European Union. The remainder was provided by the Dutch government (approximately 1.4 billion euros) and private parties (businesses, foundations, cooperatives and individuals – amounting approximately 700 million euros). At the time of publication of this brochure (mid 2013) the implementation of the POP is already at an advanced stage.

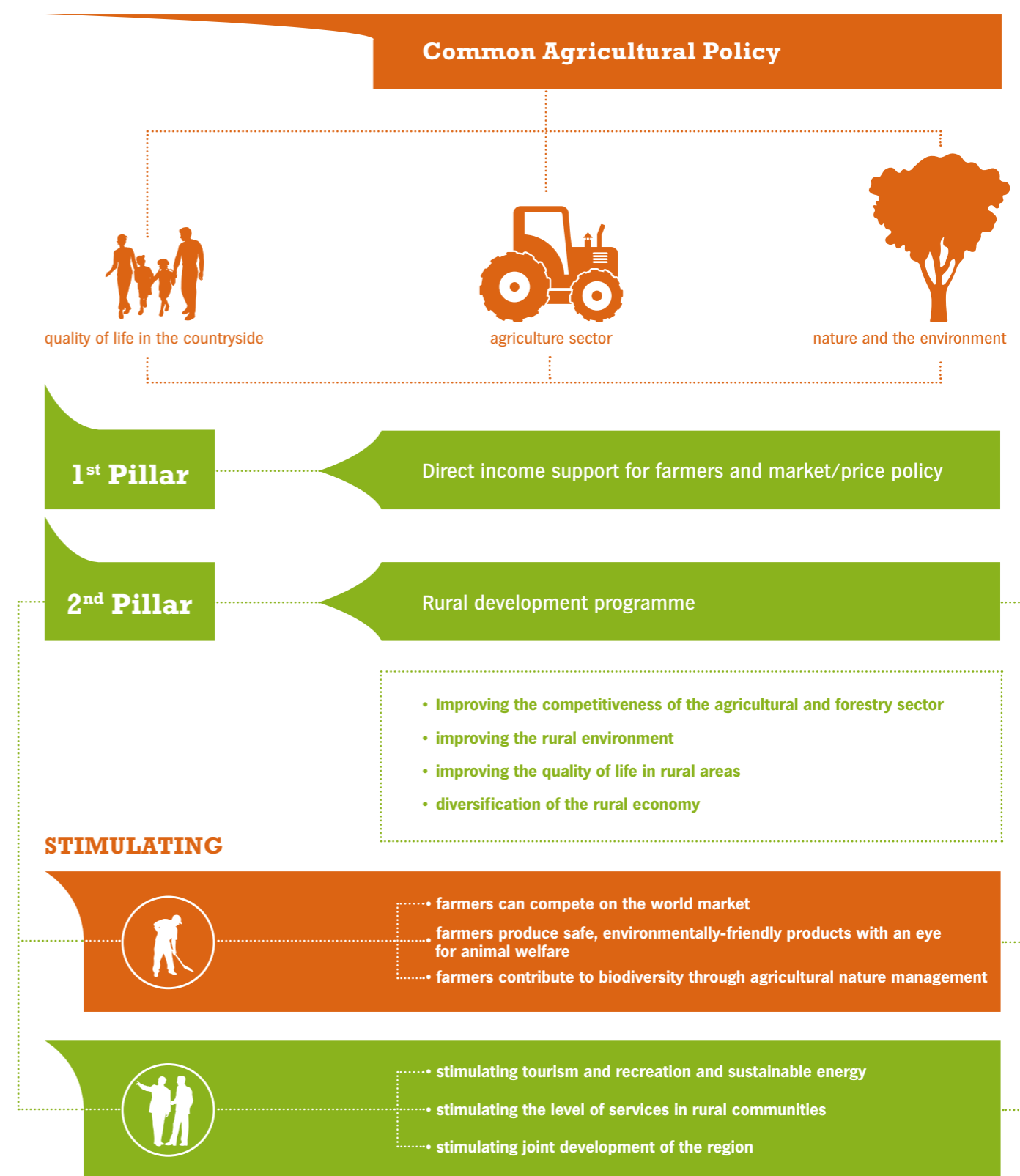
EUROPEAN RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY

European Rural Development Policy is defined in the regulations on the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). EAFRD is the second pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the European Union. This second pillar focuses on supporting the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector, improving the environment and the countryside and the quality of life in rural areas, and the diversification of the rural economy. The first pillar of the CAP comprises schemes that focus on direct payments and market measures.

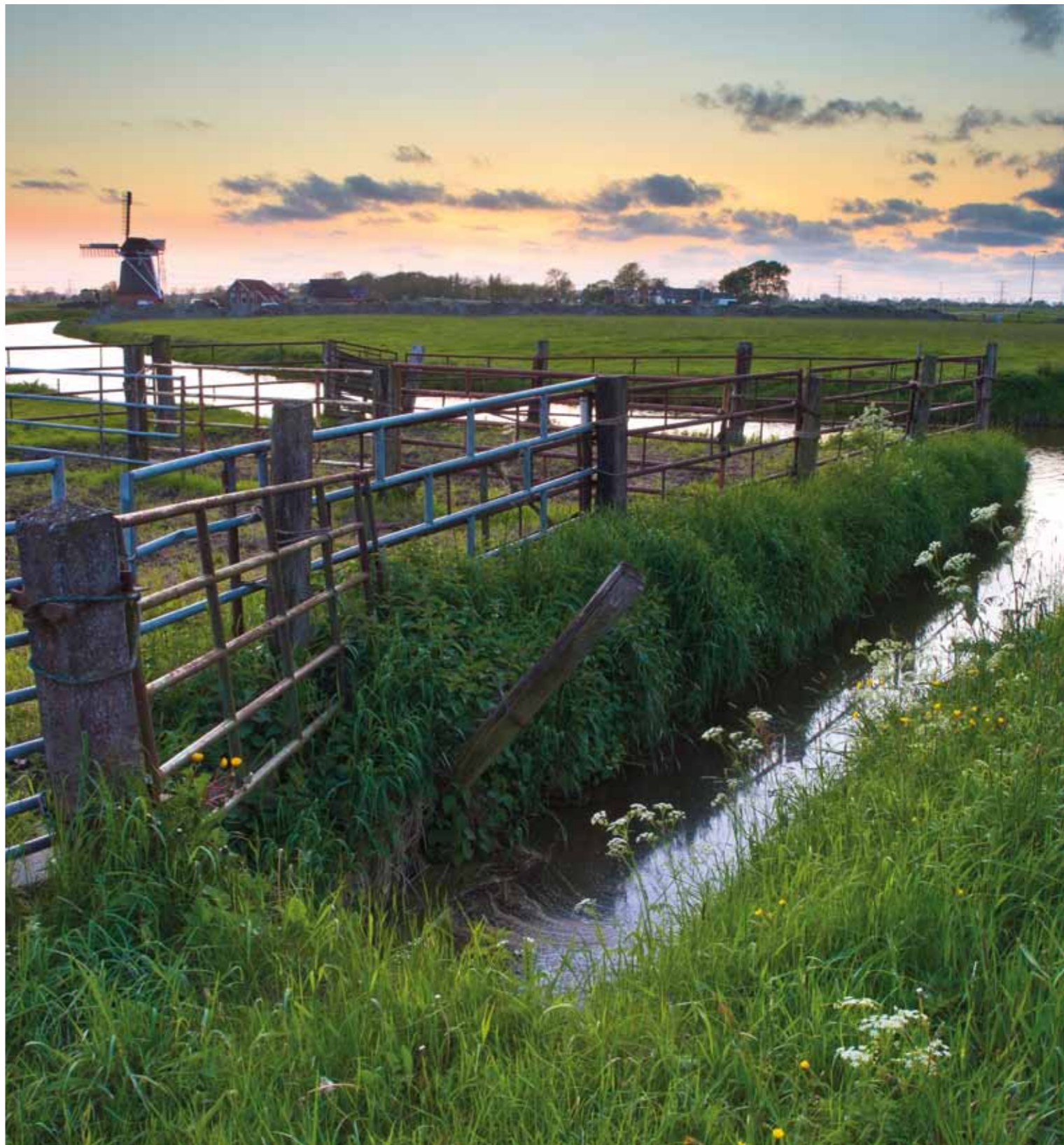
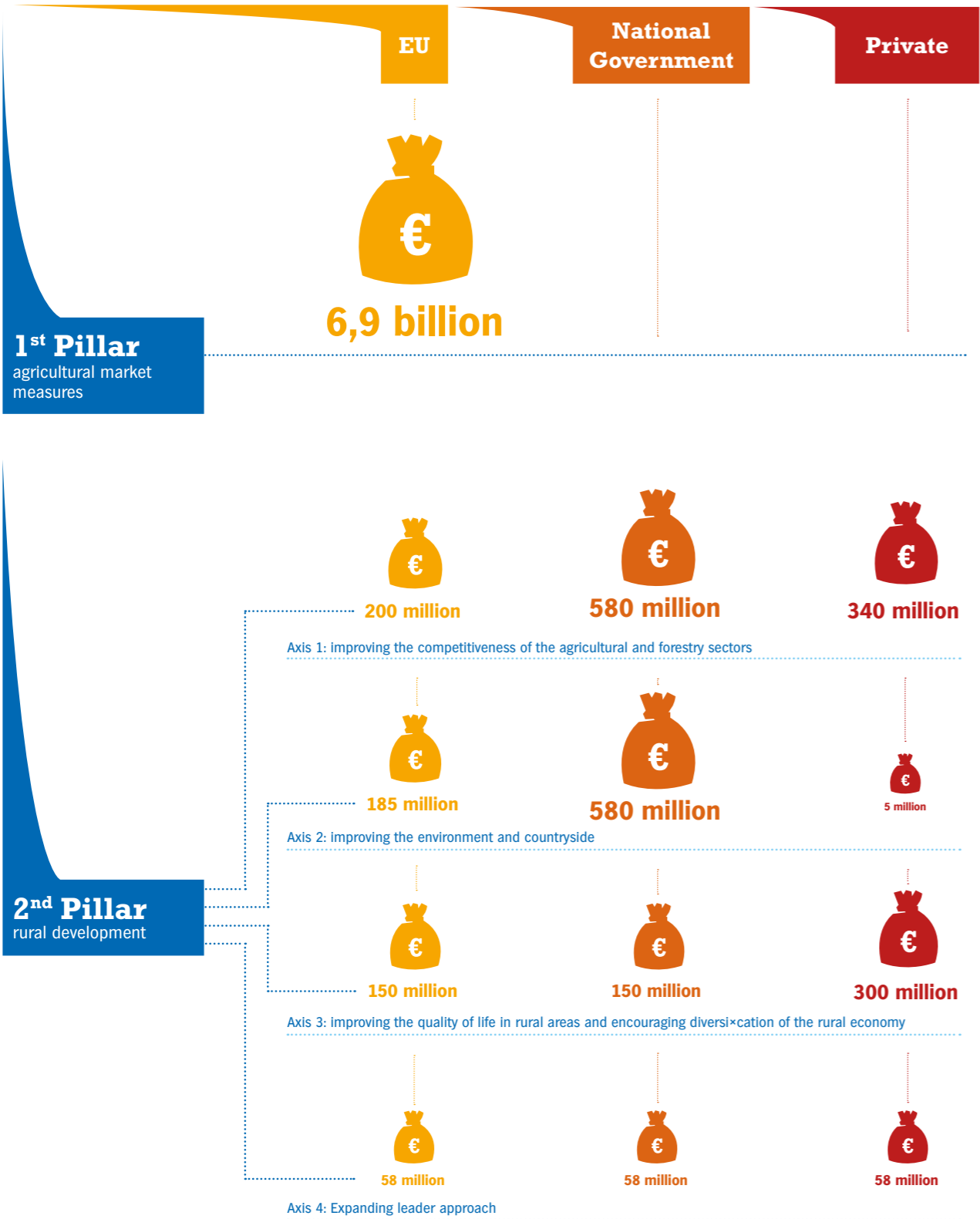
The European Union is home to over five hundred million consumers who require good, safe and affordable food. The EU already introduced a common agricultural policy in 1962 to safeguard food production and to maintain agricultural land and forests (90% of the EU's land area). The CAP serves several purposes: it helps farmers to not only produce food but also to protect the environment and the consumer, improve animal welfare and safeguard healthy rural communities.

In the period 2007-2013 a total of over 370 billion euros was made available for the entire CAP, and of this amount, 7.5 billion euros was allocated for the Netherlands. A considerable proportion of these funds, 6.9 billion euros, was earmarked for the first pillar, while 600 million euros was made available for the second pillar, rural development.

Common Agricultural Policy



Financial contribution for the Netherlands from Common Agricultural Policy



Content



Bonte Bentheimer Plg-book, Hoorn (Terschelling) - 2010



Integral Sustainable Loose Housing System Moerdijk (Noord-Brabant) - 2010



Market introduction energy Innovations Kapelle (Zeeland) - 2008



Feeding centre Leeuwarden (Friesland) - 2012



Heat/cold storage Bemmel (Gelderland) - 2008



Farm Spa Nutter (Overijssel) - 2008



ColumBus Library Service Middelburg (Zeeland) - 2011



Foxheerd Wonen en Zorg Foxhol (Groningen) - 2008



Nationaal Fruitpark Ochten (Gelderland) - 2009



Roman Bridge Walk Tungelroy (Limburg) - 2008



Sports centre Alkemade-West Rijpwetering/Oud Ade (Zuid-Holland) - 2008



Ferry Kingmatille Franekeradeel (Friesland) - 2011



Walking route network Land van de Hilver (Land of the Hilver) Goirle, Hilvarenbeek en Moergestel (Noord-Brabant)- 2008/2009



OutletGroningen (Groningen) - 2009



Dorpshuis Weesterheem Garrelsweer (Groningen) - 2009



KroKo Multipunt IJhorst (KroKo MultiPoint) (Overijssel) - 2010



Podium 10 Bladel (Noord-Brabant) - 2009



SWET Theatre Groningen (Groningen) - 2011



Tulip trip Slootdorp (Noord-Holland) - 2010

Bonte Bentheimer landrace pig gives small-scale farming a boost



The return of the Bonte Bentheimer gave our small-scale pig farm a boost. The characteristic black and white pig died out in the Netherlands in the nineteen seventies. Now there are about three hundred of them running around. Lighthouse keeper and pig farmer Remi Hoeve from Terschelling is the driving force behind the digital pedigree pig book.

When Hoeve, after years at sea, found a job on dry land, he remembered the pigs he used to see running around outside when he was a boy. 'I thought: this is an ideal spot to keep a few pigs. But much had changed in fifteen years. Small pig farms had practically died out. I thought that was a shame, as pigs are a big part of our culture. You come across them all the time - on your plate, in sayings, in books ... I wanted to bring the pig back to the people. I bought a few pink pigs from someone I knew. That went well and they grew quickly, but they weren't the pigs I knew. They were overbred, slightly aggressive, and they burned in the sun. Then I saw a programme on North German TV about the Bonte Bentheimer. It is an old pig breed that originally came from the region of Twente/Bad Bentheim, and had died out in the Netherlands in the seventies. A magnificent beast.'

Record keeping

Hoeve travelled to Germany and was given a warm welcome. 'Swine fever was a problem at the time. There were only 300 breeding animals in the whole of Germany, concentrated in two regions. If swine fever hit there, the Germans were afraid the breed would die out. Consequently they were pleased that I wanted to introduce the Bonte Bentheimer landrace pig to Terschelling. The Germans also asked me if I wanted to keep records to keep the breeding programme of the Dutch pigs on the right lines. I set up a website, which before long had plenty of visitors. Clearly I wasn't the only person thinking about starting up a small livestock holding. Initially I kept the pig records in an Excel spreadsheet, but they rapidly outgrew that. I met our project leader, Ineke Eijck, during a symposium of the Dutch Association of Hobby Farmers. She had a lot of experience with "practice networks". With support from the rural development programme subsidy scheme, among other things, I could hire in experts to help me to set up a professional interactive pig-book.'

"You can identify every pig using a digital photo"



Digital inspection

Pig keepers can log in to www.bontebentheimer.nl and consult the pedigree records. They can also inspect each other's pigs online. 'Other farm animals are physically inspected at shows, but pig shows couldn't be held because of the risk of infection. Breeders can look at each other's pigs on the website. They can even do a digital trial service: the software calculates the risk of inbreeding if sow x is crossed with boar y. That way we keep the breed pure and the animals healthy.' Hoeve adds that landrace pigs do not need tattoos, eartags or chips, because they are naturally easy to recognise. 'Bonte Bentheimers have a unique pattern of markings. You can identify every pig using a digital photo.'

Nature manager

In the meantime the number of Bonte Bentheimers has increased considerably. There are now around 300 in the Netherlands, and around 40 active breeders. Recently the first Bentheimer boar was set up at an AI-station. You can see landrace pigs on care farms, on country estates and at hobby and part-time farmers' holdings. But even some large commercial pig farmers see the advantages of keeping landrace pigs in addition to their conventional pigs. The Bonte Bentheimer is strong, less susceptible to disease, and has low piglet mortality. Furthermore, the Bonte Bentheimer can be kept outdoors all year. That makes it suitable for certain types of landscape management. And - another benefit - the meat is sold to high-quality butchers. 'To maintain a rare breed you have to breed with it. Only the best offspring can be used for breeding. The other pigs are fattened and slaughtered.'

Back in the community

Hoeve lives in a converted farmhouse in a village. The pigs are further off, on the polder. They attract a lot of attention. And it's not just tourists that think remark on them, the residents of Terschelling like them too. 'Farmers used to keep pigs in the summer, so they had fat and meat in the winter. At some point that practice stopped, but now the pig is back in the community again.'

Project: Bonte Bentheimer Pig-book
 Location: Hoorn (Terschelling)
 Completion: 2010
 Contact: Remi Hoeve
 Website: www.bontebentheimer.nl

Remi Hoeve



A barn where the cow feels at home

Dairy farmer Marc Havermans' cows are strong, they have a better immune system and they live longer. His secret: the animals are living in a so-called Integral Sustainable Loose Housing System (IDV-barn). A living space where every cow, big or small, feels good and exhibits natural behaviour. It is clear these 150 animals are very much at home in this 'greenhouse'. "The low costs of the medication tell me that they are much healthier," says the proud farmer.

When you approach De Klaverhof farm from a distance, you can already see the cows walking around. Not in a field, but in a mega greenhouse and on a soft layer of compost. The high ceiling and the open sides give the place a lot of natural daylight, but here and there you will also notice some shady spots. In the entrance hall that was built for the many guests from the Netherlands and abroad, you can see even better how much space the cows actually have. They have lots of options to either avoid each other or to group together, and they can walk to the milking robot or feeding station themselves.

The animals look healthy and they have dry legs. "That is because of the dry compost they walk around in," says Havermans, who has just returned from one of his many trips abroad. No wonder that there is a lot of interest in 'his barn'. "These days I feel more like a businessman than a farmer," he says in a matter-of-fact way. "I sell an interesting product: a barn that fits the trend in sociale, sustainable and responsible business management. I'd like to tell you more about this, because both the farmer and the cow benefit from this way of operating. Calves for example will stay with their mothers for up to three weeks."

From left to right: Ingrid Havermans, Peter Geerts and Marc Havermans



Project: Integraal Duurzame Vrijloopstal (IDV-stal – Integral Sustainable Loose Housing System)
Location: Moerdijk (Province of Noord-Brabant)
Completion: 2010
Contact: Marc Havermans
Website: www.idv-stal.nl

Animal-friendly

It all started about six years ago in Wageningen with fifteen farmers that were invited to create ideas for a more animal-friendly alternative for the cubicle stall. "Current cattle housing concepts date back from the last century and no longer apply to modern requirements for social, sustainable and responsible business practices. We wanted to give the cows more space with a soft floor made of compost, so the animals can exhibit much more natural behaviour. That idea came from America and Israel. But in Israel they work with dry manure. We didn't know how we could keep the soil dry enough in the wet Dutch climate. And a concrete floor is no good for cows as it can cause hoof problems."

His business partner Peter Geerts joins the conversation. Below, staff member Sofie is riding the tractor. "We started building three years ago. This is the fourth year we have this barn. In the beginning we had the wrong machines for applying the compost. The composition of the compost was also changed several times. Now we don't need to supply any dry compost up until November," Geerts says.

The new barn system was already adopted by thirty dairy farmers. Havermans is also sharing his knowledge through IDV-Advies (IDV-advice), which he founded with funding from the rural development program, with students, scientists and dairy farmers

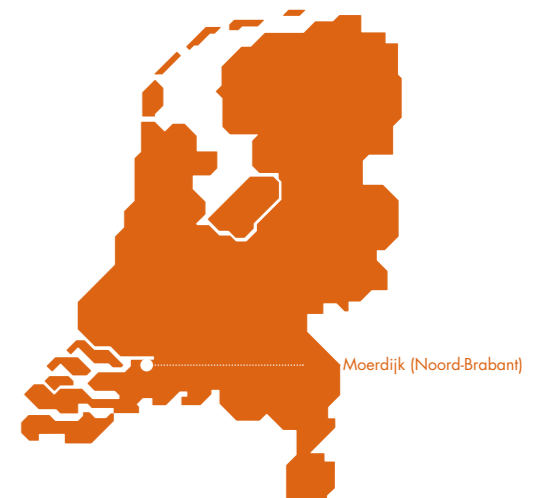
“Because the animals are never sick, the farmer hardly needs to look after them”

"In the end I started to experiment myself. I commissioned a compost business to do a study for me to come up with the best possible compost features for the floor, and it has further developed these. For the upper part of the housing I got in touch with a greenhouse construction company. The ventilation in a traditional greenhouse is not good. Now the high ceiling is covered with transparent plastic foil, a cheaper construction than glass. The rays of the sun kill possible mould and germs. Besides, we also hung up some pieces of cloth to create shade, so that a cow – just like in nature – can go and lie in the shade once the temperature tops 25 degrees. The cloth on the sides makes sure that wind can't reach the barns, because cows really don't like a hard wind. Now the cows are so satisfied that even in summer they prefer to stay in the barn."

Less labour intensive

Because of the soft flooring, it is very hard for the cows to slip. "Because the cows are never sick, the farmer hardly needs looking after them. The housing is also very interesting with regard to the costs: construction costs are lower than with traditional barn systems. And there is also a solution for the manure; as it is dried out because of the sun and the wind, it is easier to transport and process," Havermans says.

from the Netherlands and abroad. "We do have the barn, but we still need to do a lot of research. For instance, we still don't know if milk and manure from this barn will generate more money. And what about the ammonia emissions? And we are still experimenting with the right format of feeding troughs, which make our cows spill less. So you can see that we still have a long way to go."



Innovative wood pellet stove installation strengthens competitiveness



Rose growers are having a hard time. In the Netherlands and surrounding countries, Jos Otte notices how many of his colleagues are forced to quit the business. But rose nursery Otte is doing very well thanks to a dedicated choice for innovation, creativity and sustainability. Its biomass installation thus not only enhances the competitiveness of its own business, but also that of other businesses in the region.

Every year, Otte burns 600,000 kilos of wood in the installation, which keeps the roses in the greenhouses warm. That is the equivalent of about 300,000 cubic metres of gas. "Heat is essential for the growth and quality of the roses. But it isn't cheap. About a third of my total business expenses went on energy costs."

Looking for alternatives

That, and the continuing rise in the price of natural gas, were the reasons why Otte starting looking for alternatives. "Heat generation was not an option as such installations generate both heat and electricity. If we look at the costs, it is better to purchase power from the energy company. Our business is too small for geothermal energy, another alternative. And heat exchangers weren't an option either, as we would need too many pumps. A biomass installation was therefore our final choice, with wood as our fuel."

Multifunctional installation

The wood pellet stove installation, a well-tried technique in the horticultural sector, was applied for the first time in rose growing at Otte's in 2008. The grower made invested about 200,000 euros in a multifunctional installation. "Multifunctional means that the installation can process several types and sizes of wood and other biomass, which makes it flexible and quite productive, comparatively speaking. We get the wood from the region, from a pallet factory and an onion grower (crates). When the district water board and the Department of Waterways and Public Works prune the trees in autumn, a contracting agency delivers the wood to our premises. My suppliers are happy with this solution, as it saves them a lot of transport and removal costs. Previously, the wood would be transported many miles outside of the region to a processing company or another client."

"We're more in tune with nature"



Proven technique

The installation itself also functions very well, Otte says. "In the beginning we had to try out different types of wood to see which one would work the best, but by now this is all running very smoothly. The installation is doing what it has to do. During the day, the temperature in the greenhouses is twenty degrees, at night it is one degree lower."

In tune with nature

The bio-installation fits in with Otte's sustainable and innovative management style. "We are different from other growers. For example; we cultivate our roses in the ground and not on substrate, like 95% of growers do. This gives us the option not to heat the place or use lights in winter, giving the plants a longer life. Besides, we also use ecological pesticides, like manure to strengthen the leaves of the plants. In other words; we're more in tune with nature."

Otte is also making a difference with his types of roses. Where his colleagues opt for the standard white or red types, Otte's horticultural expert is creating new roses. The grower comes up with the names himself. 'Precious Moments', a rose with a warm, aubergine-purple colour, is the last addition in line. "To create a demand at the flower auction, I first paid a visit to ten top florists from the Netherlands. I offered them a floral arrangement, with our roses as one of its main elements."

POP-prize

The sustainable, innovative and cost-reducing installation won Otte the 2010 POP-prize in the Environment category. "A great recognition for my work. But the prize has also enhanced the

image of our business, and particularly the regional press has played an important role here. Half our sales come from the sales in our own shop. So you can see that the region is very important for us."

Project: Market introduction
energy innovations
Location: Kapelle (Zeeland)
Completion: 2008
Contact: Jos Otte
Website: www.rozenkwekerijotte.nl



Jos Otte

Feeding centre: “Ensilage and feeding together in Friesland”

Inspired by a successful Israeli initiative, Klaas Struiksma calculated together with some business partners that taking care of ensilage and food supply at the same time should also be a realistic goal in the province of Friesland as well. And successfully. With their Feeding centre they currently serve around thirty dairy farmers and in 2013 they will open a second branch in Dokkum.

The Feeding centre removes some concerns for the dairy farmers. It takes care of ensilage of grass and supplying food in winter. Seven days a week. His suppliers are also his customers. The centre makes business deals with them about the quantity and the quality.

Efficiency and enrichment

Struiksma: “Our joint approach has great advantages. The ensilage procedure is labour-intensive and it takes a long time. The Feeding centre provides an important efficiency advantage by arranging the

ensiling procedure centrally. That is unique in the Netherlands. We mix the silage with other products, like sugar beet pulp (a by-product in sugar production) and wheat yeast concentrate (a by-product in ethanol production).”

Measuring and knowing

“As our relationship with the dairy farmers is purely business-based, we take a very close look at the quality and the quantity of the silage when we receive a supply and when food goes out again. That way our clients are much more aware of what their cows are

processing. And it also stimulates them to supply as much silage as possible, and of the highest possible quality. Because the food is the same for all our clients, we can measure the ration efficiency for each business: the number of litres of milk per cow per kilo of food. And that showed that per business there could be a difference of ten litres per cow! On a yearly basis, that would amount to around € 50,000 euros. That insight initiated a heated discussion: where does one business differ from another? After all it can't be the food.”

Rural development subsidy

“In 2009 we have applied for a government subsidy,” Struiksma continues. “It is now three years later and we have invested about six or seven times that initial amount. The subsidy was a great step to get us motivated. Without that financial support, I doubt if we would ever have started this project. We noticed that the subsidy created a bit of an administrative burden. We made a wrong assessment regarding the time it would take us. Being the initiator, our first role was after all dealing with the initiative itself. Fortunately our subsidy application was processed very efficiently.”

are also much closer to the dairy farmers (a few hundred metres as opposed to twelve kilometres). This last point was an important insight from the first phase: to be able to run a successful business, it is important to be as close as possible to the dairy farmers. After all: the fewer kilometres we have to drive, the lower our costs will be.”

Project: Feeding centre
 Location: Leeuwarden
 (Province of Friesland)
 Completion: 2012
 Contact: Klaas Struiksma
 Website: www.voercentrum.nl

Klaas Struiksma



“Our customers are now much more aware of what their cows are processing”

Fast growth

Struiksma thinks that in hindsight the Feeding centre has grown too fast. “In 2010 we had 6 customers. In 2011 that had already grown to 28. That's 2,800 cows! As the supply of larger material for transport had been delayed, we had to improvise a lot to get everything at the right place in time. The alternative material also broke down continuously. That was a stressful period and not something we would like to go through again.”

Franchise concept

“In 2013 we want to roll out the Feeding centre as a franchise. That way we intend to recoup our own investment. We ourselves will start with a second branch in Dokkum, which will be radically different from the one in Leeuwarden. For starters the floor space in Dokkum is much larger (2 compared to 0.7 hectares) and we



Energy saving thanks to interaction of heat and cold

Michel van Gellecum has a glasshouse business in Bommel, Gelderland, growing amaryllis. A distinctive feature of his business is the innovative heat and cold storage system that he has been using since September 2008. The system delivers a 50% energy saving and also reduces his CO₂ emissions. Van Gellecum also captures CO₂ from other businesses for use in his own business: plants grow on faster, thanks to photosynthesis.

The heat and cold storage installation is based on a complex system. Van Gellecum: 'Basically it comes down to a big refrigerator. It produces 50% cold, but also 50% heat. In winter we put the cooling machine on to cool groundwater. This inevitably produces heat, which is used straight away to heat the glasshouse, while we store the cold deep in the ground in the form of water. In the summer months we pump the cold water up to cool the glasshouse. At the same time, some of the water is reheated by solar panels, and we store that in the ground too, for use in the winter. The third aquifer, where the water is stored, works as a sort of thermos flask.'

Closed-system glasshouse

The hot and cold "thermos flasks" are sited as far apart as possible. 'this keeps the hot and cold stores separate', explains Van Gellecum. 'It is important that the temperatures do not influence each other.'

According to the amaryllis grower, the system is nothing new in itself. 'But you have to create the right conditions for your own situation. Heat pumps are already used a lot in office blocks, for example, but they are only gradually being introduced into horticulture. Of course you have to adapt the entire glasshouse. Still, the system is a good step on the way to the closed glasshouse system that is supposed to become the standard in a few years' time. Then glasshouses will be kept completely closed, winter and summer, and the cooling and heating system will be an internal process, like the one we already operate.'

"If a small business like mine can manage a 50% energy saving, there must be endless other possibilities."



CO₂ on tap

Before Van Gellecum had introduced the heat pump into his glasshouse, he used a big heating boiler in the winter. The heating process released a lot of CO₂, that helps plants grow through photosynthesis. 'Actually CO₂ is a type of artificial fertiliser. Now that we no longer use the boiler we capture carbon dioxide from other businesses and bring it here.'

Subsidy

Van Gellecum's business is very small compared with other horticultural holdings. 'So the question is whether we should be using a system like this here, as it's really a bit over the top, but it saves us a lot of fuel. If you're looking purely at growing amaryllis, there are plenty of other ways to do it.'

He continues: 'but since the crisis the banks have lost confidence in lending seed capital. Without the subsidy from the ministry it would have been a lot harder to start up a project like this in any case, I have to be honest with you. It was a push in the right direction.'

Sustainability

Although Van Gellecum's innovative system is sustainable, that wasn't the main motivation. 'What set me off on this project was being fed up with the old cooling system and the huge rise in fuel prices. I don't think sustainability should be an end in itself, it should just be taken as read - by everyone. Some resources are finite, we all know that. But if a small business like mine can manage a 50% energy saving, there must be endless other possibilities.'

Project: Heat/cold storage
 Location: Bommel (Gelderland)
 Completion: 2008
 Contact: Michel van Gellecum

Michel van Gellecum



Relaxing in the countryside



Lying between trees and pastureland to the north-west of Ootmarsum in the Dutch province of Overijssel is an old farm dating back to 1645. A casual passer-by would probably be surprised to learn that this old farm houses a health spa. This was exactly what Frans and Marinka Steggink were aiming for when they had the idea for a farm spa. "We wanted to create a health spa that was completely integrated with its rural surroundings."

Visitors to the spa can make use of various facilities, depending on the spa package they choose. The farm also has a bread oven, two hay saunas, a herbal sauna and a room with a clay oven for mud treatments. Each space provides a different experience. For instance, the floor of the herbal sauna is covered with pine branches to stimulate foot reflex points. The gentle mist produced by the burner fills the air with the soothing aroma of pine needles and herbs. "It reminds people of Christmas", says Frans Steggink with a laugh.

Family business

He and his wife Marinka developed the concept for a farm spa in Nutter together with Jeroen Drabbe. As well as the farm spa the couple also runs an ice cream dairy, cattle herd and farm-stay accommodation. All the activities form part of the family business. "Our three hardworking daughters work alongside us to keep the business running smoothly."

Frans and Marinka Steggink with two coworkers



Project: Farm Spa
 Location: Nutter (Overijssel)
 Completion in: 2008
 Contact: Frans Steggink
 Website: www.boerderijspa.nl

Countryside and outdoor life

The farm spa in Nutter is a special kind of health spa. Frans Steggink: "All our spa packages involve some element of the countryside and outdoor life. Like the pine needles on the floor of the herbal sauna. And the room with the bread oven where we bake our spelt-flour bread typical of the Province of Twente. The warm air from the oven is blown back into the room to heat it and when it's breathed in this air also has beneficial effects on the airways."

than simply being replaced by a new building. That would have been the easy way. But with an old farmhouse you can do so many more nice things."

The fact that this costs more time, energy and money, Drabbe believes is more than worth it. "The rural development programme subsidy gave us great encouragement. Without the subsidy we wouldn't have been able to build exactly what we had in mind. But now it's standing here. And every brick tells its own story."

"It reminds people of Christmas"

We purposely chose this natural approach. We didn't want the usual type of sauna that you can find everywhere these days. We've always been a farming family, with our cattle farm, so the link to agricultural products has remained. We mainly use local products in the spa. The pine needles come from the neighbourhood, as does the spelt flour for the bread. We have designed our treatments to fit in with the surroundings."

Development and quality of life

Frans Steggink: "The purpose of this farm spa was to set up a new sort of business with my family with surprising treatments that appeal to people. So they can relax and feel the benefits. Using country products, and so the old farmhouse can be preserved in the form of a health spa. I think we have succeeded pretty well."

Steggink also believes that the farm contributes to rural development and the quality of life of the surrounding countryside. The spa won the *Passie op het Plattelandprijs*, rural development programme prize in the quality of life category. "Preserving a characteristic farmhouse to improve the quality of life in this area was an important aim for me. If we had left this farmhouse standing as it was for another 25 years, it would have fallen into ruin. That would have been a terrible shame: I think it is wonderful that this old farmhouse has now been given a new function, rather



ColumBus supports education in villages in Zeeland



Primary school teachers and students in the province of Zeeland's countryside enjoy a visit by the ColumBus. This educational services bus is equipped with all sorts of features to support primary education. Staff members with training in pedagogy read stories to the children and help them with their projects or presentations. ColumBus also organises thematic lessons about social topics like managing finances, water management, sustainable energy, bullying and other current topics.

The ColumBus is an initiative of the Library of the Province of Zeeland in Middelburg, in cooperation with thirty partners that have financed the bus and/or come up with ideas about the products on offer. Each week, the bus visits 25 to 30 primary schools. In the bus children can find more than just books: there are also special work stations with computers available. At the 'Microsoft-surface', students can start working with educational software. Large screens show films and presentations. And there are glass displays

with interesting objects, like the butterfly collections from one of the nature societies. The availability of jigsaw puzzles, cuddly toys and other child-friendly objects gives ColumBus a great atmosphere, so children enjoy visiting the bus. During the day, the bus visits schools and in the evening it provides a service bus for adults. At the Middelburg library, the children's books make place for books for adults. But the bus also serves as a sales point for stamps and as a service point for the public transport pass.

Quality

Together with the teachers, we have listened to the comments from a feedback group, so that the material is in tune with the educational goals. The cooperation with an educational agency ensures we meet high educational standards. That quality is enhanced by the fact that teachers can spend more time with other pupils when other children are getting assistance in the bus. "We stay two to three hours at each school. We can start by reading a story to a group of toddlers, then we continue with a lesson on traffic rules with children who are a little bit older and we finish with a workshop on water management for the oldest kids."

In the two years that the Educational bus has been in service, the facility has gained a good reputation all over Zeeland. Not only with schools, but also with other civil society organisations. "They often come up with new ideas. One welfare organisation in the town of Veere for example, told us that several of the younger kids would be happy to use the bus to explain some basics of the internet to senior citizens."

"Schools indicate the topics of the lesson, and we contact one of our partners to organise this"

Cooperation Partners

The ColumBus responds to an important need in the countryside of Zeeland, as Antoinette van Zanten, general services manager of the Library of Zeeland explains: "Before we started this service, we did some studies at schools. Many teachers indicated that they enjoyed giving special lessons, but that they had to go to town to find special material or when they needed to do some research for things like a visit to a museum or a lesson about art. That used to take up a lot of the teachers' time. We have a large network of cooperation partners that provide money and people for these thematic lessons. The schools indicate the topic of the lesson, and we contact one of our partners to organise this. We have for example organised lessons with welfare organisations about bullying and how to handle fireworks, and with housing corporations we have organised a lesson about living in a village. Apart from social organisations, we are also working together with the corporate world. We have set up the topic "Managing your finances" with the Rabobank, and we have put together a lesson about nuclear and sustainable energy with an energy provider."



Project: ColumBus Library Service
 Location: Middelburg (Zeeland)
 Completion: 2011
 Contact: Antoinette van Zanten
 Website: www.decolumbus.nl

Antoinette van Zanten



Independent living in the community

From the outside it is not obvious what makes the Foxheerd housing complex in Foxhol, Groning so special. The complex houses twelve young adults with disability. The all rent their own individual apartments but can also make use of the communal rooms and professional assistance.

The initiative for this housing complex came from the parents of the residents, who had formed a parents association. The Lefier housing corporation carried out the project. Meindert Molter of Lefier: "The remarkable thing about Foxheerd is that the demand for this complex came from the market and that we as corporation listened to what they wanted." His colleague Frank Jongsma adds: "Often a corporation decides itself to build a specific building and then chooses the care provider. This was the other way around. This is not a care provider, but a group of parents who want their children to lead a normal life."

Community living

Everything in Foxheerd is under cover, including the corridors between the apartments. Only the central courtyard is open. The housing complex is energy-efficient and built with the environment in mind. The construction included apprentice builders. Jongsma: "We wanted to create openness in the complex. The young people now live here independently in their own homes of about 50-55m². They have all the facilities they need and pay rent for the apartment."

Meindert Molter



Project: Foxheerd Wonen en Zorg
 Location: Foxhol (Groningen)
 Completion: 2008
 Contacts: Meindert Molter and Frank Jongsma

Although they have their own apartments, they use the communal rooms a lot, whether it's the kitchen, living room or courtyard. Resident Kees says that people often eat together. "There are menu lists in the kitchen and you can sign up if you want to eat with the group. Most residents use this option every day. And we play games together too."

Professional assistance

A professional assistant is available in Foxheerd in the morning (7.00-10.00 uur) and the evening (16.00-22.00 uur). There is also an assistant present at night. During the day the young people take part in training to prepare them for work. Jongsma: "The professional assistance is bought in by the parents association. At the moment this is run by the Van Boeijen organisation."

A nice place to live

One of the most important aims of Foxheerd is participation. "There are a lot of things that the residents are quite capable of doing," says Molter, "like watching football matches or riding a scooter. But there are also things that they can't do, like managing their own money. That's what the care assistant is for."

Jongsma: "We have managed to create a nice place to live for these people. That's what it's all about. A corporation is intended to create homes for people, not just to give them a roof over their heads, but also to give them a place where they can say: "this is a really nice place to live, we enjoy living here. That's what's important." Molter: "Enough said."

"The villagers here always go that extra mile"

Participation in the community

What is exceptional about the Foxheerd project is that the parents association and Lefier created support in Foxhol, the village where the complex is built, long before it was started. Jongsma: "the villagers were extremely positive about the project. You often see that people with disability are accepted more easily than for instance those with a drug dependency, but here the village council invited the locals to really get involved."

And they still are. Molter: "Opposite Foxheerd a new village hall has been built, which also houses a school and sports accommodation. The Foxheerd residents were invited to come and see the building for themselves. It all happens quite naturally." Jongsma adds: "The villagers here always go that extra mile. That says a lot about the community. In Foxhol there is a real village culture. It is a close community set in the heart of the countryside."



The Betuwe in miniature

'The Betuwe region in miniature' is located in the village of Ochten, in the province of Gelderland. That is, if Floor Peters, initiator and owner of the National Fruit Park gets his way. In 2008 he started extending his fruit garden to add an amusement park with a children's farm, a modern education centre and the 'experience-it-yourself fruit garden'. A year later, the National Fruit Park Ochten was officially opened.

"We have always had a fruit garden", says Peters. "Our customers were large businesses and the consumer market, but we wanted more than that. It was also a bit of a hobby: we wanted to show families and young people a different lifestyle by introducing them to a new kind of park. People like to find out about things."

Different lifestyle

Then he devised the idea of the National Fruit Park, where the fruit garden would play a key role. Peters: "Our tree nursery was about 25 ha in size. We didn't change this during the fruit park project, but we have added a park of about 4 ha. We have built a children's farm, set up playground equipment and put up signs with information about the different fruit trees we have. You can see

that people are taking our ideas about nature on board when they are here. For example: we didn't place any bins on purpose but we're still keeping the place clean. Of course we hope that people will copy this lifestyle."

Breakfast and floral arrangements

The children's farm, the playground equipment and the miniature golf course – constructed in 2012 – give the idea that the Fruit Park's target audience are mainly children. "We are indeed focused on families and younger visitors", says Peters, "but entrepreneurs from the region are also very welcome. One of our main objectives is to bring people together. That includes for example the free breakfast sessions we are organising for entrepreneurs. During

"We didn't place any bins but we're still keeping the place clean"



these sessions, people are discovering ways to work together. The other day for example, a plum grower discovered that he could sell his residue plum stones to an oil manufacturer from the region."

Peters organises workshops for people from the region. "The courses we offer range from wine production and cooking to floral arrangement. This means a great night out for people in this area. Businesses are also offering training courses at our premises, because of the location. For us the workshops are especially welcome in winter, when the Fruit Park outside has fewer visitors."

Regional interest

The guiding principle of the whole Fruit Park – the park itself, the workshops and the other seminars – is the regional product. "We ourselves are also working a lot with local businesses. The food we serve at the breakfast sessions is 80% organic and is produced locally. And all the profit we make goes back to community

projects in the region, like social work experience projects for young people who assist the elderly on day trips. We also do some work with schools."

Maintenance

Managing an orchard involves a lot of pruning. That's why Peters organised a pruning project: eleven volunteers from the landscape management advisory group *landschapbeheer Nederland*, of which Peters himself is also a member, have 'adopted' their own small orchard from the Fruit Park and are responsible for pruning their own section.

Peters and others are also conducting ecological research in the Fruit Park's waterways. "The district water board has made it compulsory for everyone to dredge their own drainage ditches

every year, but that has a negative impact on the quality of the water. We wanted to improve that quality and that's why we're investing in ditch maintenance. This has the main advantage that we don't really need any insecticides for all the insects in the trees anymore, as the banks of the ditch houses many of their natural enemies."

Tourism

Education, research, cooperation and recreation are thus the main focus of the National Fruit Park. Peters: "The park is also important for tourism. People come to visit us from all over the country. They are interested to see this new attraction focusing on the region. That was necessary, as this region was really underdeveloped for tourism. You can see this in other parts of the Netherlands and Europe as well. We have made the countryside interesting for outsiders and put the region on the map."

Project: National Fruit Park Ochten
 Location: Ochten (Gelderland)
 Completed: 2009
 Contact: Floor Peters
 Website: www.fruitpark.nl

Floor Peters



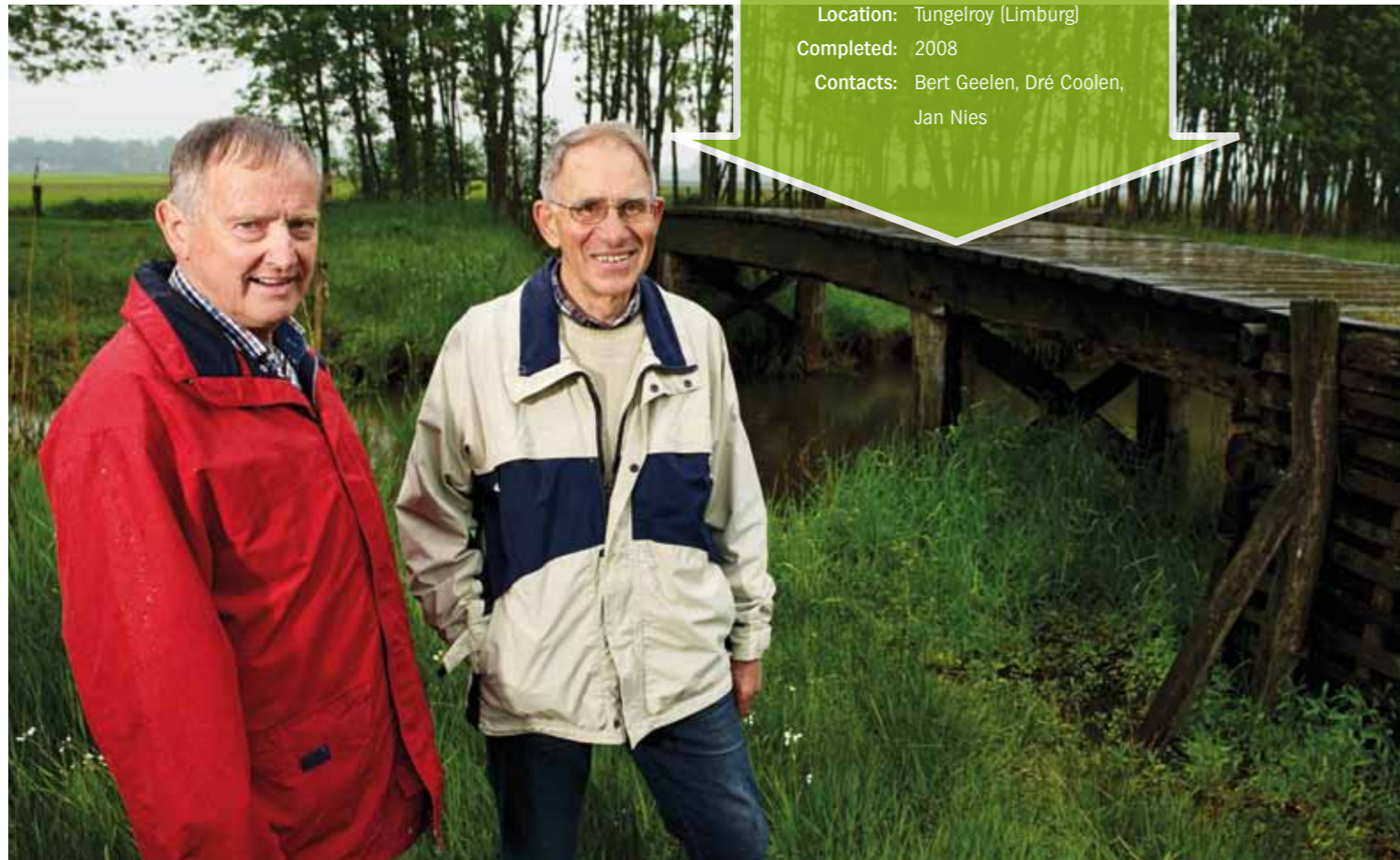
Connection thanks to a Roman Bridge

The village square in Tungalroy in the province of Limburg is the starting point for two walks of three and four kilometres. Both paths on the Roman Bridge Walk lead to a reconstructed bridge dating from Roman times. The bridge has connected the two banks of the Tungalroy Brook since 2008. Three years before, the remains of an original wooden bridge dating from around 27 AD had been found during meander restoration works.

Dré Coolen, member of the team that reconstructed the Roman Bridge, says: "Finding the remains of a Roman Bridge was unique in the Netherlands. Of course it's fantastic when this type of discovery is made in your village. It would have been a shame if it hadn't been followed up." That is why a group of six Tungalroy men, including Dré Coolen, Bert Geelen and Jan Nies, decided to reconstruct the bridge on a voluntary basis, about eighty metres from the site of the find.

Geelen: "Actually, the reason the project got started was the competition organised in 2007 by the Stichting Instandhouding Kleine Landschapselementen in Limburg (IKL - *Organisation for the Preservation of Small Landscape Aspects in Limburg*). The theme was "create your own little walk", with a first prize of no less than €10,000! We thought: we have to enter this competition, because that amount will give us enough funds to really get our plan going. And it worked. Of course the POP-allowance also played a role. In the end this allowance took on half of the total costs."

Dré Coolen (left) and Jan Nies



Project: Roman Bridge Walk
 Location: Tungalroy (Limburg)
 Completed: 2008
 Contacts: Bert Geelen, Dré Coolen,
 Jan Nies

Volunteers

With their new capital, the members of the team started enthusiastically on the reconstruction of the Roman bridge. It's very special that only volunteers were involved in the little walk project. "We haven't worked with a single contractor," Geelen explains, "because that would have been incredibly labour-intensive and expensive. The advantage a team of volunteers gives you, is also that you can do everything exactly the way you want it. We have made a most realistic copy of the bridge with sustainable material. The advice from Jan Roymans from Archeologisch Adviesbureau RAAP (*Archeological Advice Agency RAAP*) has also been most helpful."

But within the team there was no lack of knowledge. Coolen: "We had people that had worked in construction, good text writers, technical men, all of them! All the knowledge required was put together in a group of six."

Geelen: "This way we try to keep the local cultural heritage alive. I think we have made a 100% contribution to the tourism sector. We are see people coming from near and far to see the bridge in Tungalroy. And of course the trail is also perfect for people from the village who want to walk their dogs or simply enjoy a little stroll."

Apart from being a tourist attraction, the bridge is also a meeting point. Coolen: "We have had a meeting here with the carnival clubs from Tungalroy and the village of Stramproy, located nearby. And mass was also celebrated on the bridge." His team member Jan Nies adds: "The bridge connects things, not only people from Tungalroy and Stramproy, but also nature, holiday-makers and farmers from the lands next to the project area. And of course the bridge is a symbolic link between the present and the past. It really deserves its reputation."

"All the knowledge required was put together in a group of six"

Education

"We wanted to give history a new meaning", says Geelen. "The bridge is a visible piece of history." This makes the location most suitable for a history lesson at primary school. "The bridge brings history to life for the children." But the Roman Bridge is not only an interesting environment for lessons from the past. Geelen: "We are also regularly seeing groups of high school kids coming along for a biology lesson. Sometimes they are conducted under the guidance of IKL maintenance. Schools specifically select this location because it is so beautiful and surrounded by nature."

Tourism at a meeting point

The fact that the bridge is also part of two walks set up by the team, contributes to tourism in the region. Both trails also lead past other sites in the area, like an old tram stop and a stone cross where a merchant was murdered in 1765.



Impulse for the community

Together, Rijpwetering and Oud Ade have 2,500 inhabitants. Both villages are located in the so-called 'Green Heart' in the province of Zuid-Holland. There are a few bars and restaurants, one primary school and one local store that is run as a side business and is only open when the flag is out. These facilities aren't enough to keep the villages liveable. A multifunctional sports centre changed all of this.

Sports activities and education are bind Oud Ade and Rijpwetering together. Both villages share one primary school and one sports centre. The sports centre was built in 2008 to address the lack of a sports hall in De Kinderbrug primary school.

Managing director Rob van der Hoorn: "The children went to the community halls to do sports, but at a certain moment that was prohibited by law. One important factor was that the community halls did not satisfy the new safety requirements. Long trips in an expensive bus to Roelofarendsveen were not an option. The municipality of Kaag and Braassem, responsible for education accomodation, was prepared to spend 750,000 euros for a new sports centre. These days the primary school is located close to

the sports fields and the football club house. And the football club liked the idea of a new sports hall, just like the handball club did. With a new sports hall, we could kill two birds with one stone: the primary school students could do sports and the sports clubs could make use of a great shared accommodation."

Feasibility study

Van der Hoorn continues: "We conducted a feasibility study with a number of the locals, focused on three questions: What are the costs? Where do we get the funding? And can we make the sports hall exploitable? The first question wasn't too hard to answer. That was a matter of making the right calculations. The second question wasn't too hard either. The council was prepared to spend the

revenue. They have specific rules-of-thumb to achieve this and we have applied these to running the place. Currently we are breaking even, and a lot of thanks goes out to our volunteers who are running the sports centre. That means we have no staff costs."

Social functions

Those volunteers came from the club house. "They were cleaning the changing rooms and the canteen. When the sports centre opened its doors, their "working area" was extended. It is a social activity. In the morning the volunteers – practically all of them senior citizens – have a cup of coffee. Then they start cleaning, weeding, and so on. People can also play billiards and do other activities. So in that sense, the sports hall also has another social function. And next to that we are organising several events, like recently a consultation about the High Speed Line.

Van der Hoorn says that the sports hall has provided Rijpwetering and Oud Ade with a social life and a new impulse. "Of course you can hop on the bike and go to a sports hall in Roelofarendsveen or Leiden. When you are living in the city, you may even have to travel farther at times. But these villages are isolated. There are a few bars and restaurants, there is a mobile grocer and we have a local store who only opens at irregular hours. That's it. For the liveability and identity of the villages, this is not enough. This sports centre – a real basic facility – binds people together. And it is just nice to have something you can't compare with other facilities in the region."

“This sports centre is a basic facility:
it binds people together”



money that had been budgeted for the sports hall in the primary school on the sports centre. Via a so-called "revolving fund", the municipality could borrow an additional amount under favourable lending conditions. The Rabobank donated an amount from their social funds. And we borrowed an additional amount from this bank."

"The remaining amount came from subsidies. One of the members of the working group knew about the existence of the European POP-subsides. Our sports hall is a very good contribution to the programme's objectives: "basic facilities for the economy and rural residents". We received half a million euros. All these funds were enough to be able to pay for the construction of the sports centre. We have had the NOC*NSF advise us regarding the exploitation. They told us that the presence of a club house of an existing accommodation, together with a new sports centre, would increase

Rob van der Hoorn



Project: Sports centre Alkemade-West
Location: Rijpwetering/Oud Ade (Zuid-Holland)
Completed: 2008
Contact: Rob van der Hoorn

Solar-powered sailing through the Frisian countryside



After 1963, Frisians that wanted to cross the Van Harinxma Channel near Franeker had a serious problem. They had to travel an extra eight kilometres ferry service at that time was cancelled due to high costs. In 2011, almost forty years later, the ferry service has been restored, with one very special feature: it runs on solar power.

"The locals came up with the idea to restore the old ferry service," says Corien Betten, project secretary of the foundation 'Keimpetille, it pontsje werom' (*Keimpetille, the ferry restored*), that was founded in 2006 to implement the service. Five years later the ferry is making its first crossing. Betten: "The project was an immediate success. In 2012 we had an impressive total of 7,500 crossings."

Quiet and sustainable

That happens silently, because the ferry runs on solar energy. It was built by local businesses. "Right from the start, running on fossil fuels has not been an option," Betten explains. "Keimpetille, the hamlet between Franeker and Dronrijp where the ferry is

located, is a special place. You are surrounded by pastures; the silence and peacefulness are overwhelming, something people can only experience when the ferry crossing are silent."

Skipper training

The ferry is run by volunteer skippers. Betten: "In 2006 we started with about 20 applications and now, seven years later, we have 34 volunteers, so we don't really have to look for skippers. They come from all layers of society: working people or pensioners, from doctors to farm hands. For them, running the ferry is a useful way to spend their spare time."

Project: Ferry Kingmatille (Keimpetille)
 Location: Franekeradeel
 (Province of Friesland)
 Completion: 2011
 Contact: Corien Betten
 Website: www.fletspontkeimpetille.nl

Corien Betten among two volunteer skippers



Not all volunteers had experience in operating a ferry. That's why the foundation Keimpetille decided to start a course together with the Maritime Academy in Harlingen. The course had a theoretic component including shipping regulations, first aid and practice. "Not only does this course make the sailing safer, it has also created very strong ties within the group."

Local products

The ferry and the skipper training weren't the only components of the Keimpetille project. Building a shelter for the skippers was also part of the plan. The shelter is covered with grass and dug into the dike. Betten: "This way it is fully integrated into nature. Skippers can take a rest if they have a quiet moment."

"Initially, the lives of the locals from both sides of the Van Harinxma Channel were interwoven, but when the ferry was cancelled in 1963 it made it very hard for them to meet up. Now all of that has changed. When we opened the service, many people saw each other again for the first time in ages."

Cooperation

Three municipalities, the province and the district water board of Friesland have worked together to build the ferry service. That also means that there are extra ferry services when one of the bridges is temporarily closed due to repair works. Betten: "This is our way of giving something back to the community. After all, government subsidies were a huge benefit in setting up the ferry."

"The opening party was like a large reunion of locals"

Next to the shelter is a jetty with a little terrace where visitors can enjoy some local produce. "It's a place where we serve coffee," says Betten, "and in summer we sell things like ice cream made with milk from a farm in the nearby town of Harlingen."

Quality of life

For tourists, the ferry and the small café offer a nice break in bicycle excursions that pass through this location. Local entrepreneurs also profit from the Keimpetille project. Betten: "It brings in more visitors, also among the locals. The open house route we organised when we opened the service in 2011 has definitely been a great help. On that day, many local entrepreneurs opened their doors. For some millers, farmers and artists it was the first time they showed their business to a wider public! That has made people more aware of all the things they can find in their area."

For the locals, the ferry adds to the quality of life of their region. "It makes it easier for people to meet each other," Betten explains.

According to Betten, the Rural Development Programme subsidy was the largest contribution. "The Keimpetille project was expensive. The first subsidy we received was from the Rural Development program, and it has been a great help to us. It also made others more willing to provide assistance and these days we have around a hundred donors and sponsors. We also cover costs by charging for our services and through the sale of our products. Rural Development program works as a catalyst."



Walking along historical sandy paths

What can you do when historical sandy paths in the outer regions of your municipality are running the risk of making way for industry, housing and landscaping? Then you take action and show the historical value and scenic beauty of this area. That is exactly what a group of walkers and nature lovers from the Hilvarenbeek area have done. They united in the *Werkgroep Behoud Zandpaden De Hilver en Leije (Working Group to Keep Sandy Paths De Hilver and Leije)*, drew up a plan for the sandy paths in consultation with the landscaping commission, and with professional help they also realised a walking route network.

Paths totalling 300 kilometres

In the Netherlands, walking often means following the coloured signs along paths where many have walked before you; walking along a fixed route. The Walking Route Network Land van de Hilver is different, something you clearly notice when visiting the area. Here a number of junctions will help walkers make up their own route according to their preferences. Regardless of whether that is a short walk on a Sunday afternoon or a longer walk with an overnight stay in one of the many hotels or B&Bs along the route.

Catholic history and character, like a little chapel. There are also moors with birds of prey and beautiful national reserves like Annanina's Rust. You will also find many historical places, like the 'De Rook' building, which marked the official border between Belgium and the Netherlands in 1839. When the road connecting Goirle to Poppel was constructed in 1855, this border crossing lost its relevance. A watermill was located left of the bridge for centuries, but it was demolished in the nineteenth century, with a small part of the wheel of the mill being the only reminder.

“Future generations can also enjoy the walking network”

The walking route network has six recommended starting points. The area around Land van de Leije for example offers a lot of cultural history and takes the walker through heathland and along green marshes. Overall, the paths totalling 300 kilometres have a lot to offer and the green outskirts of Hilvarenbeek, Goirle and Moergestel (Oisterwijk municipality) are perfect for a pleasant walk. You can take a rest at one of the special buildings that mark the area's Roman

A plan for the sandy paths

These beautiful walks along and on historical sandy paths almost failed to materialise. When a plan was made for landscaping the Estate De Hilver, scant attention was paid to this aspect. Many paths ran the risk of making way for industry, housing and agriculture.

That's why the members of the Working Group to Keep the Sandy Paths De Hilver and Leije drew up a plan and they submitted this to the landscaping commission. "The plan was to give as many sandy paths as possible in the De Hilver area a special function. In creating the plan for the sandy paths, we have achieved this goal," says initiator and working group member Dré Rennen. "The municipalities themselves were also enthusiastic and supported the plan, which was integrated into the landscaping plan. The working group also managed to get landowners and nature conservation organisations interested in keeping the paths. Thus a network of paths with an important historical, ecological and recreational value was created. "We have used a so called junction system, which made it possible to make a connection with neighbouring areas in the provinces of Noord-Brabant and Antwerp. It is great that future generations will be able to enjoy this as well."



Promotion and signposting

The working group looked for professional help in applying for the required permits, setting up the signposting, promotional material and maps and guides at the Brabant Tourism Office.

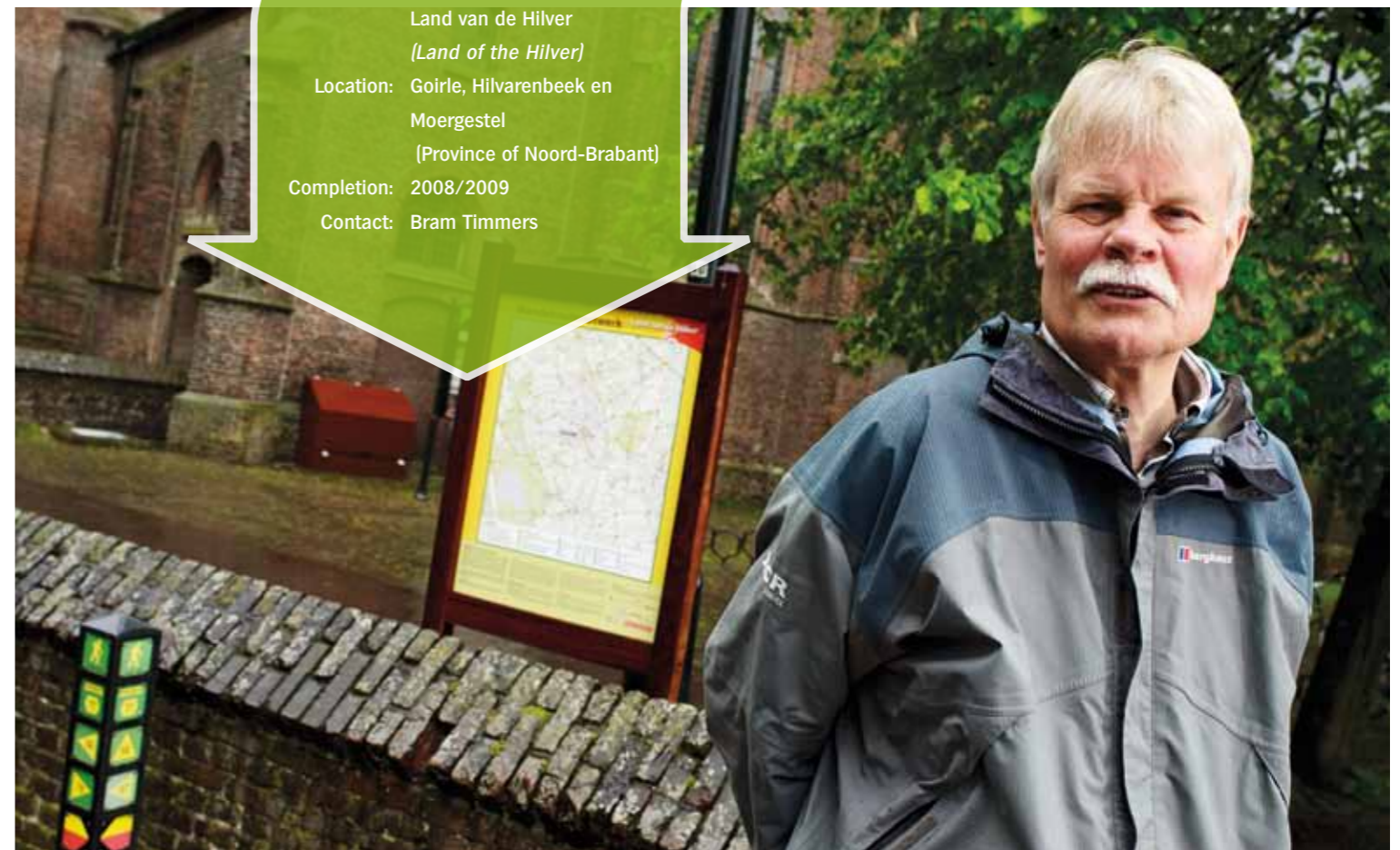
Bram Timmers: "We have contacted councils, the province, district water boards, nature conservationists and landowners to apply for permits and be able to map the right walking track. We have arranged to make the areas accessible to the larger public and connect them via small bridges. The working group also plays an important role in maintaining the network. Twice a year, volunteers will walk the whole route to see if everything is still fine. Route Agency Brabant co-ordinates the maintenance and management."

Hotels, bars and restaurants

Timmers thinks that the walking network is a clear example of co-creation, as several parties have worked together very closely. "At the same time it is a real citizen's initiative and that's why I really think that this project deserves a prize! We could also see this during the official opening, which was attended by many locals. And of course this walking route network is also a great boost for the local economy. The map includes for example several hotels, bars and restaurants where walkers can have something to eat or drink, or where they can stay overnight. Local businesses, Route Agency Brabant and the local tourist agency are promoting the new walking route network. You can also buy the two walking and theme guides. The walking route network is also promoted on www.routesinbrabant.nl."

Project: Walking route network
Land van de Hilver
(Land of the Hilver)
Location: Goirle, Hilvarenbeek en
Moergestel
(Province of Noord-Brabant)
Completion: 2008/2009
Contact: Bram Timmers

Dré Rennen



Outlet provides voice for youth

Having young people participate in their environment by making them think about current problems and possible solutions. That was the principle for the TV programme 'Outlet' directed by Thom Verheul, broadcast in 2008 and 2009 by channel RTV Noord. Students, from vocational to pre-university level, played the main part in the programme. Together they discussed current theories and often entered into discussion with regional or provincial authorities.

"We often see young people functioning in statistics and studies, but they don't come across as motivated, true to life people who can make a positive contribution to solutions," Verheul explained about his project at the initial stage. In Outlet, young people were offered a chance to make themselves heard on current topics. "We wanted to teach the youth how to react to regional problems, think about present day issues and come up with solutions," Verheul explains. "But nowhere in the project did you get the idea you were dealing with education. It was rather an adventure, but one with a large educational interface."

Outlet was mainly focused on vocational students. Verheul: "That is a group that is hard to reach with the youth policies in the provinces." Each program was dedicated to one specific topic, like social poverty, violence at schools or regional youth policies. The young people had provided statements beforehand which could be discussed during the program. Actress Victoria Koblenko hosted the program.

Quantifiable and non-quantifiable effects

Verheul: "Often the programmes had a quantifiable effect. We had for example an on-location programme about the future of the village of Warffum. Young people provided statements like "you wouldn't want to be found dead in Warffum" and "you're a fool if you stay in this village". The reason behind it all was that youth policy hadn't changed in two years. The member of the Provincial Executive who discussed this issue with the students during the programme, was given a very hard time. In the end he made sure that the Municipal Executive saw the video. The next year the budget for youth policy was raised by 600,000 euros."

As such, Outlet was a wake up call for the authorities. "And I haven't even mentioned the non-quantifiable effects," Verheul adds. "You have no idea about what was set in motion in the heads of the young and the parents who were also watching. The programmes had a bigger audience than shows like the regional news. Of course, that was fantastic!"

that we motivated the young to participate in their environment and make them think about their role in society has been a major contribution here. It is important to talk about things that are usually left out or in which the voice of the young isn't heard."

An example of a taboo subject that was breached thanks to Outlet, is social poverty. "During the programme in Stadskanaal, it became clear that many more students came across this topic than the school management assumed," Verheul explains. "The students it concerned and their parents were not aware of certain support measures, so the local authorities decided to start a consultation hour at school several times a month, to inform students about possible support measures."

Verheul emphasizes the difficulty of fully eradicating social deprivation. "But our program at least made people look at the problems and talk about them. Students no longer felt alone and taboos were addressed. It is great to see that."

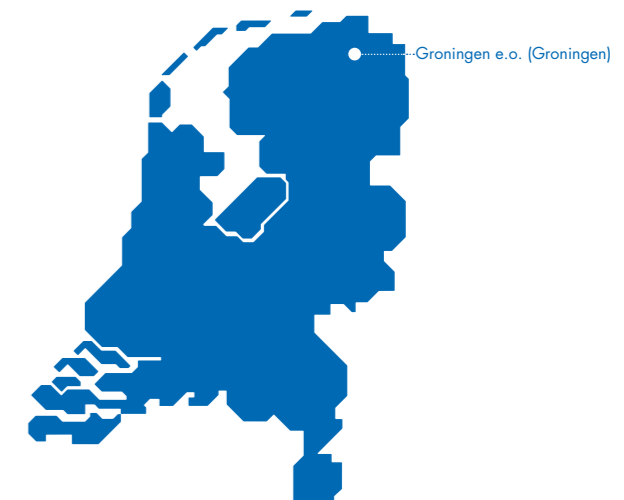
"The budget for youth policy was raised by 600,000 euros"

Allowance

After 2009, no new episodes of Outlet have been recorded. Verheul: "RTV Noord came across some problems due to changes in the management and budget cuts. They also focused more on the elderly than on the young. I thought that was a real shame, because Outlet was an incredibly successful project. I have tried to attract enthusiasm for the programme from other channels. Many of them showed interest, but in the end it wasn't possible to implement the idea due to budget costs. At the time, the POP-allowance has been very important for us. Without that amount, it wouldn't have been possible to make the TV programme anyway. Thanks to the allowance, we were able to take people seriously, and you could see this in the programme's quality standards. We have worked hard to achieve this."

Breach of taboos

Within the European POP-allowance programme, Outlet has received an allowance from axis 3: liveability on the countryside and the diversification of the regional economy. "Especially the fact



Project: Outlet
 Location: Groningen and region
 Completion: 2009
 Contact: Thom Verheul

Thom Verheul



A meeting place built for and by villagers



“Building village halls in Groningen was popular in the 1980s” says Eric Raad, ex-chairman of the foundation Stichting Dorpshuis Garrelsweer. One had been built in Garrelsweer in 1983, but was outdated and unsuited for present-day use. That was why villagers got together in 2008 to completely renovate the village hall. Less than one year later and the hall had a fresh, modern look and could be used for different purposes.

Eric Raad was chair of the foundation Stichting Dorpshuis from 2001 to 2011. “At the time people began to lose interest in the village hall. Membership of clubs using the hall was falling and fewer parties and meetings were organised there. People thought the hall was no longer attractive, especially the interior.”

A new opportunity

The council and the rest of the board decided that the village hall needed a radical modernisation. They drew up a plan of approach and, together with an architect, made a sketch of how the hall should look after restoration. Unfortunately the council was not able to provide a subsidy. “I have never been more disappointed in my life.”

Some time later, at a council committee meeting in the old village hall in Garrelsweer, Raad seized his chance and made a speech on behalf of the whole village. “After my speech the council wondered why such a great initiative had been written off so easily and agreed to come onboard. Someone from the provincial government told us about the POP subsidy, which was a fantastic help. That’s when we got going!”

Involvement

What is remarkable about Raad’s village hall project is that everyone in the village contributed to the renovation. “We did have an architect, a contractor, a plumber and an electrician, but they were assisted by volunteers”, said Raad.

Close community

The new village hall was opened on 14 Februari 2009 by the mayor and the Queen’s Commissioner in Groningen. Raad: “There must have been three to four hundred people there – it was great! In my word of thanks I said that I was actually pleased that in spite of the subsidies we received we still had to raise our own funds for the project. This meant working together as a village and it has turned us into a very close community. It really is our village hall now!” After the reopening new clubs were formed which all make use of the village hall.

“Also new is the Happie van Appie (Bites from Bert): villager Albert enjoys cooking and prepares a meal for the villagers every month. This helps to keep the community spirit going.”

Enthusiasm

This community spirit is an important spin-off from the village hall project. Raad: “For a project like this you need people who think outside the box. The enthusiasm is contagious: other people join in. I am convinced the same could be done in every community, in the rest of Europe too. There are so many rural communities like Garrelsweer. We’ve already had visits from people from outside the country to talk about our project. Not every village is the same, but I know you can learn from each other. You’re stronger together.”

“A project like this could be set up in any community”



“Even those people who didn’t have the manual skills were able to help. They collected scrap metal for example or helped the children to collect used bottles to claim the deposit.”

Raad continues: “One fun, lucrative way of making money was our “odd job” auction. It was based on the idea that everyone in the village had a special talent. There were people offering to prune fruit trees, a hairdresser offered to give a haircut, people knitted socks or gave computer lessons. It was a great success!”

“Not only the villagers got involved in the project: the contractor and the architect also supported it. “The contractor even built a bar for us in his own time”, said Raad happily, “and the architect presented us with a huge canvas bird’s eye view photo of Garrelsweer. Finally we even won the POP prize awarded by the public, fantastic!”

Eric Raad



Project: Dorpshuis Weesterheem
 Location: Garrelsweer, Province of Groningen
 Completion: 2009
 Contact: Eric Raad

KroKo MultiPunt: many facilities under one roof

Fresh fruit and vegetables, meat and bread. Regional books and arts. Tourist information, conference room and dry cleaners. These are just a few of the products KroKo MultiPoint in IJhorst has on offer. Greetje Kroonenburg came up with the concept when all shopping facilities disappeared from the village in the province of Overijssel.

Five years ago, Kroonenburg (freelance accountant) and her husband (IT technician) were looking for a new workplace. They ended up in a former bicycle/home appliances shop that had been vacant since 2000. "With the workplace and the store room that was part of the former show room, we had a lot of extra space left. Many tourists from the local holiday parks and camping sites had a quick look when they saw the posters on the front door, mentioning all the activities in the area. That gave me the idea that there was an excellent opportunity here."

Dairy ice cream

Kroonenburg started selling dairy ice cream from the neighbouring province of Drente. "My friends advised me to stick to a familiar ice cream brand like Ola, as that would generate a higher profit. But I didn't want that, as my focus was to attract people who are interested in local products. That proved to be a good choice, as regional products are selling very well. They are a serious alternative for the standard assortment from the regular supermarket." The cow ice cream laid the foundation for more regional products in MultiPoint. An ecological grower from nearby provided Kroonenburg

Greetje Kroonenburg



Project: KroKo MultiPunt
(KroKo MultiPoint)
Location: IJhorst
(Province of Overijssel)
Completion: 2010
Contact: Greetje Kroonenburg
Website: www.KroKoMultiPunt.nl

with the vegetables and the cellar proved useful as the store room. "I started with eight customers, but soon this had grown to 25. Going down to the cellar all the time started to become a bit of a burden, so we got ourselves a large refrigerator. Soon the number of products and services started to grow, always keeping the locals' and tourists' demand in mind. The tourist information section came about as holiday makers asked me for interesting things to do in the area. These days we even have the status of official tourist information agency."

Social function

Through de webshop everyone can order fresh fruit and vegetables, meat and bread. "I send a mail to the grower, the baker and the butcher to tell them what we need and the next day we pick up everything in one go." That saves the IJhorst locals a trip to nearby De Wijk or Staphorst. And they can do all their grocery shopping in one single shop, which is very practical for the largely older local population. Apart from being a grocery store and a bookstore for publications in the regional dialect, MultiPoint is an important meeting place. Locals visit us for a cup of coffee or a little chat, but the nature society also holds its meetings here. Besides, Kroonenburg also offers people the opportunity to hold exhibitions. Painters, straw-plaiters, sculptors and more regional artists can show their work here.

The mayor, who is also a member of the Leader Group advising on Rural Development Programme subsidies for projects, was very enthusiastic. He put me into contact with the Leader Group's co-ordinator, who helped me with the application. With the subsidy and the support of a number of regional businesses, like a painting, a plumbing and a construction business, I started MultiPoint. These businesses are all very region-focused and a job close to home fits both their as well as our own "sustainable" way of operating. In my shop you can find all their business cards and the site also mentions them."

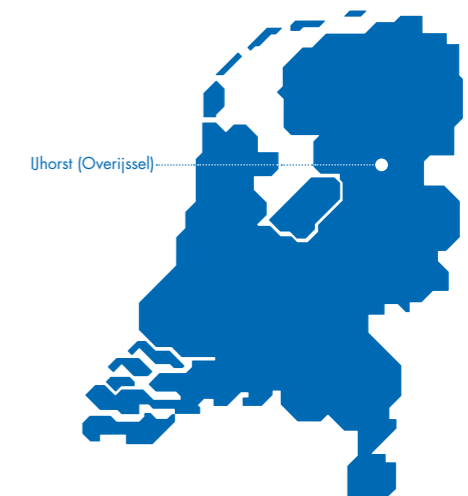
Lectures

MultiPoint's concept has also been picked up by other villages. Kroonenburg has already held several lectures during meetings of the national and regional sections of the Foundation for Small Communities and several small villages have already paid a visit. "I enjoy telling about it, because it is a concept that you can use everywhere. It is a unique opportunity to give sleepy villages a new lease of life."

"Regional products are a serious alternative for the standard supermarket range"

Plan of action

The way in which Kroonenburg came into contact with the rural development programme was a nice coincidence. "In 2000, there were only a library, a bar and a school left in the village, which was not a positive development. I wrote a plan and submitted this to our village council, who passed it on to the Mayor and Municipal Executive of the municipality of Staphorst, to which IJhorst belongs.



Music centre for all ages

Musician Gerard van Gompel had a dream: a music centre, where young and old from all over the region could share their passion for music. That dream became reality thanks to the help of a large group of volunteers, donations and government assistance. Now it is almost impossible to imagine a time when Podium 10 was not part of Bladel and the surrounding area in the province of Brabant. “We have become a regional label,” says the enthusiastic board member about this citizen initiative.



Anyone visiting Podium 10 will discover huge spaces in a very open, beautifully renovated building. Every day, young and old come together here to make or study music, or just to enjoy listening to it. From following music lessons on guitar, drums or piano to playing together or listening to a musical performance.

Moments of enjoyment

“We organise moments of learning for musicians and moments of enjoyment from each other,” says chairperson Anne van Herpt (26) about the success of Podium 10 when we visit the music centre. Van Herpt and her fellow board members Gerard van Gompel and Wil Moeskops are happy to dedicate some time to tell us passionately how the music centre came about. Then we receive a brief tour of the building. We see the different rooms where

music lessons are organised and in the middle the large podium for the musical performances. The toilet door bears a brief description of what Podium 10 is all about: these are the first four lines from the opening song: “Out of all life’s passions, there is one that tops them all. Because music lifts me up again and makes me conquer all. If you feel what I mean, then the moment is now. To know the musician you are, only you can show me how.”

In the meantime, the first children and their parents have arrived, in time for their music lessons. At the other end of the room we can see a guy who is testing the light and the sound for ‘band talent’, an event that will be held at Podium 10 this evening and, as always, the organisers are expecting a large crowd. “We will open the sliding doors and add this room to the hall,” explains Wil. He is responsible for Podium 10’s public relations. At the time, his wife

“Even people from Belgium know

where they can find us”



designed the new house style and interior of the building, which is incidentally located in the middle of a residential area. The board members assure us that noise pollution is not an issue, as the building is soundproof. “We have also had a neighbourhood party before the building opened its doors, so people could see for themselves what our plans were,” Wil says. “That has created a lot of goodwill.”

Impressive atmosphere

“Some time ago Open Youth Centre Pazzop was located here, but that had been closed for quite some time,” Van Herpt says. “Thanks to subsidies, we have been able to renovate the building, but we wanted to be more than just a music school and we have been able to achieve that. Our centre offers opportunities for music teachers, bands, theatre, comedians, audiovisual recording techniques, light and sound, small choirs, brass band music and even courses in DJ’ing. We also regularly organise an open stage for new talent. A few bands that have played here in recent years have performed gigs at festivals like Lowlands later that same year. And we also organise concerts for locally famous bands from the Bladel area. Bands playing here are always very impressed by the great atmosphere and we attract a public from the whole region. Even people from Belgium know where to find us.”

Unique concept

With forty volunteers, sixteen music teachers and almost two hundred students, Podium 10 can definitely be labelled a success, says Van Herpt. “What we have created here is unique in the Netherlands. We have shown that you can also run a music centre without local government subsidies. We can stand on our own two feet. Music teachers are not on the payroll, but rent a room here. For the municipality it is sufficient to subsidise the music classes for the children. And this is at a time of austerity,” she adds with a proud look on her face.

Anne van Herpt



Project: Podium 10
Location: Bladel (Noord-Brabant)
Completion: 2009
Contact: Gerard van Gompel
Website: www.podium10.nl

Musical goodbye

Many things are prone to change, including landscapes and village centres. But Gert Sennema and Willem Wessels noticed that people do not always realise that things are disappearing around them. This motivated Sennema to devise a special musical theatre project, called SWET, that eventually gained him the POP prize in the Leader category. Sennema and Wessels produced seven different shows in seven communities in the province of Groningen, with each show set against the background of a building or object that was going to disappear.



From resistance to acceptance and farewells

Sennema: "I came up with SWET from a very personal angle. A few years ago my sculpture studio burned down. When a few years later I returned to the place where my studio had been, it looked as though there had never been anything there at all. I thought to myself: this is no isolated case. We should be more aware of what disappears from our world and give it a sort of last breath, as a final goodbye. When my own place burned down, it was the community that pulled me through, giving me so much love and

helping me in whatever way they could. That made me think: I must do something to bring people together, so we can enjoy each other's strength and energy!"

To achieve this aim Sennema devised a project based on the concept of a requiem. "A requiem is a Roman Catholic mass for the dead that takes you through resistance and sadness to acceptance and submission. We have used this idea as a guiding principle in all our shows."

Willem Wessels (left) and Gert Sennema



Project: SWET Theater
 Location: Groningen (province)
 Completion: 2011
 Contacts: Gert Sennema and Willem Wessels

Variety

Sennema asked Willem Wessels, who he knew from an earlier art project, to assist him in setting up this project. Together they looked for characteristic scenes in the village that were about to disappear, selecting seven in total. Then they took a specific look at each location, to decide how the show could be staged there. Sennema: "Of course the spatial concept of a place was the first determining factor for the specific form the show would take. But we also looked at the space from an artistic point of view. Some locations were perfect for taking a little stroll, while others had a much more intimate feel to them."

In Grijpskerk the two theatre makers organised a show to say goodbye to a community centre. And in the village of Nuis they paid tribute to a former camp for refugees from the Moluccan Islands in the former colony of East India (present day Indonesia) with a large dinner. "Each show was very different", says Sennema, and Wessels adds: "SWET in Nuis was very impressive. Beforehand it seemed the camp was all but forgotten, but during SWET people started telling their stories, which were often very moving and emotional."

Both theatre makers think that the shows have really contributed to the quality of life in all its aspects in the Groningen countryside. Sennema: "We have made a connection between things that seemed worlds apart before, not just between villages but also between two bands in a village that wouldn't usually play together." Wessels adds: "We have also shown that if you really want something, you can also do it, even it means taking the hard road. We wanted to show that people can be proud of themselves and that you're allowed to use the grand gesture to express this."

Sennema: "Of course this is also a European story. Cooperation is great, but it is also important to discover and keep your own identity. We have focused on regional dialects, on local music, on culture. If people know what's theirs and this is recognised, it will be easier to work together and become part of a larger entity. If you know one another's differences, you can accept each other and enjoy one another's company."

"People can be proud of themselves. And they are allowed to use some emotion to show it"

Unity in diversity

The stories were the guiding principle for most of the shows. Wessels: "We wanted to pay justice to things happening in the region as far as we could. We also chose to use local talent in our shows, like people that were already involved in music, dance and theatre at an amateur level. We wanted to be able to, and dare to, speak the language of the locals and give them a clear idea of their own world and its history."



Excursion through 1,000,000 tulips

The Netherlands is synonymous with flowers and the ultimate Dutch symbol: the tulip. For Sandra Munster this was the immediate reason to realise her own dream in her husband Siem's business: organising a tulip excursion in a tulip greenhouse. In doing so, she put the tip of the province of North Holland on the world map.

Siem and Sandra Munster's tulip nursery is at the tip of North Holland, close to the A7 motorway. Today's host Sandra is expecting a group of American and English tourists from Amsterdam and she is preparing her presentation. "We never used to see international tourists here. They went to the Keukenhof or they went straight to the Afsluitdijk monument. Our tulip excursion has changed that. By working together with other tourist attractions, several travel organisations and tour operators, more and more people know where to find our business and this region. That means we have created a whole new market segment. Good for the economic development of the Wieringermeer polder and employment in our village and the immediate surroundings."

Dutch hospitality

In the meantime, two students are laying the tables in the welcoming foyer, decorated in typically Dutch style, where later today the guests will receive a warm welcome with coffee, tea and small cream cakes from the local bakery. In a corner we notice some souvenirs: from coffee mugs to a children's book about a cow breeding a tulip bulb, a story one of Sandra's friends wrote especially for English speaking tourists.

"This year we have redecorated this room to make it a second foyer, so we can receive two busloads of visitors at the same time," Sandra says. "At the back we used to have the stable for Jaap

There are over 1,000,000 tulips in different growth stages, types and colours. Yellow, red, pink, white, black and flamed, each week we have new types. This is something we want to show everyone, and that is why we are the first tulip greenhouse in our country that opens its doors between Christmas and mid-May for day trippers or tourists visiting our country."

"These days we receive 4,000 to 5,000 international visitors. Our challenge is to keep them in the region a little bit longer. To help them, we have made a brochure with 35 ideas for a group arrangement in the municipality of Hollands Kroon. This gives national and foreign tour operators the option to put together a complete day program or even a program for several days. We can really see how people appreciate this. Tourists can find everything here that is typically Dutch: dikes, windmills, clogs and tulips. And we are only forty minutes from Amsterdam!"

Black tulip

It is time to welcome the guests. Sandra and her staff are braving the cold and going outside to welcome the American and English visitors. Only minutes later the group, which is mainly made up of older people starts arriving, talking about tulips and why these particular flowers are so beautiful. The only English guest at our table is specially here for the black tulip.

After they've had coffee and tea, the guests are ready for the PowerPoint presentation. Sandra tells about her children and grandfather's stable. It works; the crowd is laughing and they are clearly having a good time. Then we get to the climax: an excursion through the business. It is clear: here is another group that will be very happy to continue their trip along other areas and tourist attractions at the tip of North Holland.

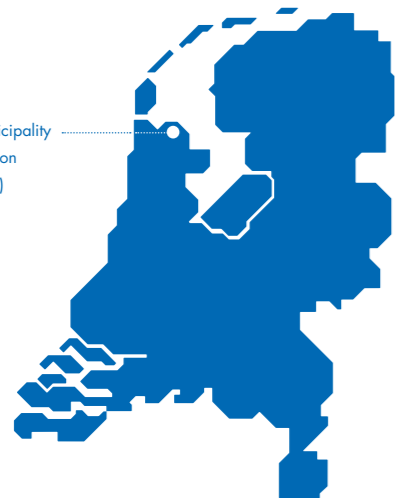
"Tourists always used to go to the Keukenhof or Afsluitdijk. These days they also visit us"

Munster's workhorse. Jaap is my husband's grandfather and when I tell our guests that they are actually sitting in grandfather's stable, it always makes them laugh. The first photo of my four daughters amid the tulips is also a big hit. I always tell them that we had to be quick to take this picture as we had to do it before topping the tulips. Stories like these ones illustrate to my guests that they are visiting a Dutch family business, and they like this idea. They don't get a prefab tourist attraction here, they can enjoy the personal ambience in a real tulip nursery."

Dream comes true

"My husband was born and bred here and he doesn't mind working seventy hours a week. I am from the city and two of the studies I've done were hotel management and tourism. When our third daughter was born, I wanted to pick up my own profession again. In setting up the tulip excursion, I have been able to combine my own as well as my husband's dream. You can already see tulips in our greenhouses when there isn't a single flower yet in the fields.

Slootdorp, municipality of Hollands Kroon (Noord-Holland)



Sandra Munster



Project: Tulip trip
 Location: Slootdorp, municipality of Hollands Kroon (North Holland)
 Completion: 2010
 Contact: Sandra Munster
 Website: www.tulpenexcursie.nl

'Pearls of the Dutch Countryside' is a publication of the regiebureau POP.

Year of publication

June 2013

Regiebureau POP

Postbus 2755

3500 GT UTRECHT

The Netherlands

T: 030 - 275 6909

E: regiebureau@rb.agro.nl

W: www.regiebureau-pop.eu

Compilation

Alfred IJlst (Regiebureau POP) and Frank van der Vorst

(EMMA Communicatie)

Interviews and text

Erika de Joode, Carolien Hovenier, Marguerite de Ruijter

and Arnout Ponsioen (EMMA Communicatie)

Photography

Sjoerd van der Hucht and Dick Pots (photo: Thom Verheul)

Design

Lawine visuele communicatie

Production

This brochure was printed by Drukkerij Knoops

according to the cradle-to-cradle principle

Translation

DB Vertaalbureau

Links

Dutch Rural Development Programme: www.regiebureau-pop.eu

European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD): http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/index_en.htm

Dutch National Rural Network: www.netwerkplatteland.nl/english-version-netherlands-rural-network



