

# Constructing a Natural Connection Across the Border of Belgium and the Netherlands, where Planners and Landscape Architects Meet

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## Part of a strategic planning process

The strategic, cross-border project ALBERTKNOOP (see [www.albertknoop.eu](http://www.albertknoop.eu)) was set up in the border region between the cities of Maastricht (NL) and Lanaken (B) in 2004 to establish a highly accessible (water, rail, road) regional business park. In fact it were the two provinces of Limburg (the Belgian and The Netherlands provinces have the same name!) who took the initiative to search for crossborder collaboration. The success of the project depended on its sustainable integration into surroundings, and could not be achieved without a careful and integrative planning process. Therefore, by starting the whole development with a new green and ecological corridor named "Zouwdal", the suburban residents of Maastricht could be from the beginning protected from the negative effects of an upcoming industrial and business park. The need for a synchronized planning approach and urban design, the presence of a political border, which all its administrative and political complexities, and finally the introduction of a public-private partnership structure as a mode of the project's realization, makes that this project is exceptional on the regional scale and the national scale both in Belgium and in The Netherlands.

## Part of a transborder framework

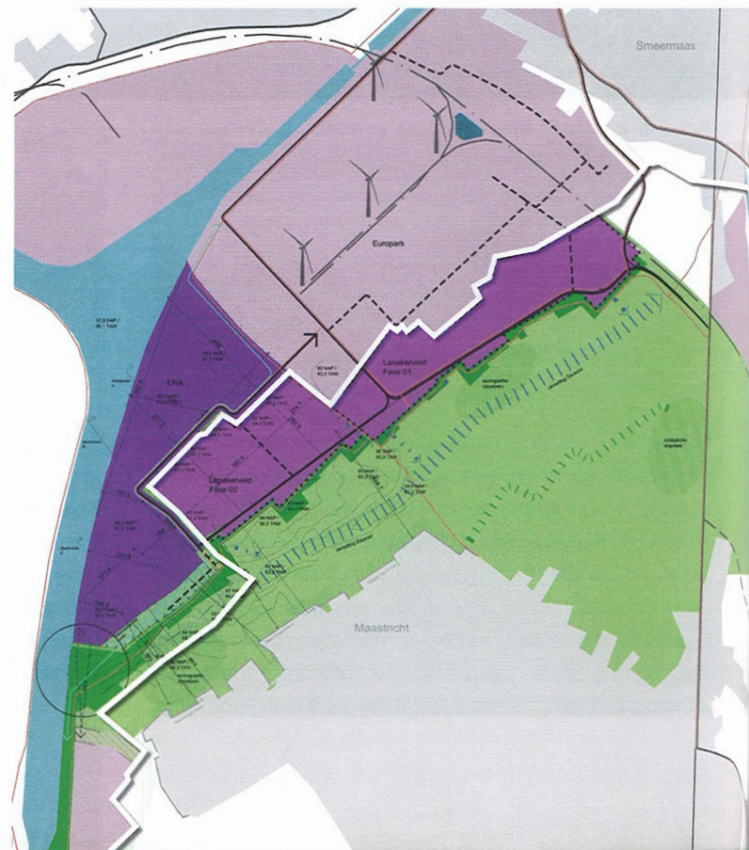
The methodological structuring of the ALBERTKNOOP, a suitable legal and spatial framework was created to allow trans- and crossborder collaboration. Since it will take approximately more than fifteen years to complete the project, it creates the time margin for nature to embrace the potential industrial site. The project structure of the strategic project ALBERTKNOOP has created a suitable framework to launch the first sub-project with the realization of the natural connection on site. A new landscape has in such over 10 years' time to develop before the industrial and business park will be constructed.

## Creating a new landscape connecting nature and cities

With the aid of scientific researchers and landscape architects a development plan was designed for the natural crossborder connection 'Zouwdal', with a width varying between 360m to about 500m and more and a length of more than 3 kilometers. The groundwork and new plantings were selected so that the present butterflies, bats, reptiles, amphibians and mammals will find their new habitat. Forest edges, thickets, hedgerows and grasslands are specially designed

1. A view on the cross-border region between the cities of Maastricht (NL) and Lanaken (B). The countryborder passes through the strategic project

2. The overall structure-plan shows the green ecological corridor between the future industrial and business park and the suburban residential areas of the city of Maastricht





3. A more detailed landscape plan of the green ecological corridor which will create a new landscape connecting zones with different destinations and recreational pads through the new green area



4. A photo of the space before and a visualisation of the future new and connected landscape



for these target species. Through the green corridor a cycling and hiking trail will connect the cities of Lanaken and Maastricht. The open space landscape which is accomplished between the residential areas of Maastricht, the future industrial park and the new green buffer will undoubtedly benefit the experience of the scenery and the joint recreational use. And as such the support base for the business park that will be developed after 2025 - 2030.

#### Under construction

The realization of this landscape project embedded in a whole region operation would not exist without the excellent cooperation between administrations across the borders and

with Wienerberger and Leembank cvba, the industrial partners who are landowner and are cooperating in realising the groundworks and the new plantings. Creating a massive ground-wall around the industrial site of Wienerberger will result in a new crossborder landscape. This engagement is part of the building and environmental permits. Next challenge is to organise a crossborder maintenance of the natural connection.

#### Participation

Plans for the natural corridor have been discussed with the neighbours several times. They created a neighbourhood Committee that continuously is in dialogue with the projectpartners.

5. A cross section that shows how the future building will disappear in the new created landscape

