

VLM as a Flemish public institution

In the federal state of Belgium, responsibility for the living environment lies with the federal regions. The policy in the case of Flanders is determined by the Flemish government and implemented by the competent departments of the Ministry of the Flemish Community and by a number of Flemish public companies, including the Flemish Land Agency.

The Flemish Land Agency is a Flemish public institution employing some 750 staff. As a Flemish public company, the Flemish Land Agency seeks to stay as close as possible to its projects. To achieve this, it has decentralised organisation; in addition to a central directorate in Brussels, there are five provincial divisions carrying out VLM assignments in the different Flemish provinces.

Providing open space

Open space is so scarce in Flanders that we have to treat it very sparingly. This is the task of the Flemish Land Agency (VLM). VLM has a host of projects running, from the west coast of the eastern borders of the Flemish Region, helping to make possible the sustainable, viable development of man in harmony with his environment.

Assignments

Landinrichting - Land-use planning

It is not enough to designate an area as an open space in regional planning memorandum; the area must also be developed and strengthened as an open space in practice. To this end, land-use projects have been carried out since the early 1990s. The aim of these projects is to bring together the various claims on open space in a coordinated way. Structural land-use plans offer integrated and sustainable development opportunities to all functions within a given area (farming, environment, nature, landscape, recreation, cultural history, etc.)

The experience gained in the first projects carried out (Northeast Limburg, Westhoek, the Grote Nete river area, the rivers Leie and Scheldt) will enable a new legal framework to be developed for land-use planning as a specific instrument for the integral development of open spaces.

Ruilverkaveling - Land consolidation

Land consolidation has been going on in Flanders since the 1950s. Its primary aim is to streamline agricultural economics; areas which are used mainly for farming are divided up in such a way that farmers are able to work more efficiently : plots are exchanged in order to create regular, accessible land areas which are as close as possible to the farm headquarters; roads are laid, drainage modified, etc.

Land consolidation is a continually developing instrument whose objectives today are much broader than in the past, developing measures on issues such as the environment, nature conservation, care for the landscape and forms of passive recreation in order to create maximum opportunities for the sustainable development of an area in all its facets.

Natuurinrichting - Nature

This assignment was recently attributed to the VLM by the Flemish Government. It is still in full development.

The main goals are :

- the protection, development, control and repair of nature and the natural environment;
- the preservation or the repair of the environmental quality necessary to achieve this;
- the creation of a social basis as broad as possible.

Mestbank - Manure Bank

In order to combat over-fertilisation of farmlands, the "Manure Bank" was set up within VLM in 1991. Among others things the Manure Bank stimulates demand for animal manure, mediates in the trade in manure and provides a safety net for manure surpluses which cannot be sold immediately.

The Manure Bank also collects levies, pays out compensation and provides information in relation to the manure problem. On the one hand the Manure Bank provides information regarding the policy on the development of manure surpluses and the manure problem in general, while on the other hand taking measures to reduce the surplus further and to achieve a situation in 2002 in which there is a balance between the amount of manure applied and the carrying capacity of the environment.

GIS-Vlaanderen - GIS-Flanders

Various bodies and organisations collect digital geographical information on Flanders. In order to make these computer data more accessible and easier to exchange between all concerned, a coordinating system was set up in 1995, the Geographical Information System Flanders, or GIS-Flanders.

In order to organise this system effectively, The Support Centre GIS-Flanders has been set up within the VLM. The Centre plays an organisational and coordinating role, preparing policy and providing a service and acting as a leader and catalyst within GIS-Flanders.