



COUNCIL OF EUROPE LANDSCAPE CONVENTION
LANDSCAPE AWARD OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

9th Session – 2025-2026

APPLICATION FORM

State Party: BELGIUM

Presentation

The Council of Europe Landscape Convention is the first international treaty to be exclusively concerned with all aspects of landscape: natural, rural, urban and peri-urban. It represents an important contribution to the implementation of the Council of Europe's objectives. By taking into account the value of landscapes, with their natural and human components, the Council of Europe acknowledges that the landscape is an important part of the quality of life for people everywhere: in degraded areas as well as in areas of high quality, in areas recognised as being of outstanding beauty as well as everyday areas.

The 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government, held in Reykjavik on 16 – 17 May 2023, recognised “the urgency of additional efforts to protect the environment, as well as to counter the impact of the triple planetary crisis of pollution, climate change and loss of biodiversity on human rights, democracy and the rule of law.” It committed the Council of Europe to strengthening work on the human rights aspects of the environment and initiate the Reykjavik process of focusing and strengthening the work of the Council of Europe in this field, as laid down in Appendix V of the Reykjavik Declaration on “The Council of Europe and the environment”.

Appendix V of the Reykjavik Declaration references the Landscape Convention to highlight that “landscape has an important public interest role in the cultural, ecological, environmental and social fields and is a key element of individual and social well-being, and that landscape protection, management and planning entail rights and responsibilities for everyone.”

Article 11 of the Convention establishes the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe. The Resolution CM/Res(2008)3 on the rules governing the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 20 February 2008 at the 1018th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies, draws attention to the fact that Article 11 of the Convention institutes the Award and that it is in keeping with the work carried out by the Council of Europe concerning human rights, democracy and sustainable development.

Opened to the Parties to the Convention, the Award is intended to raise civil society's awareness of the value of landscapes, of their role and of changes to them. Its objective is to reward exemplary practical initiatives aimed at successful landscape quality objectives on the territories of the Parties to the Convention. The Award is conferred every two years and the files presenting applications must reach the Secretariat General of the Council of Europe.

At its meeting held in Strasbourg on 28-29 April 2008, the Steering Committee for Cultural Heritage and Landscape (CDPATEP) decided that applications should be submitted to the Council of Europe Secretariat through the Permanent Representations of the Parties to the Convention.

Each State Party to the Convention is thus invited to send by post to the Secretariat General of the Council of Europe (Council of Europe Landscape Convention), no later than 31 December 2025, via its Permanent Representation to the Council of Europe, a completed application form in paper format, together with a digital copy on a USB key of the form and additional material.

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Please note that:

- participation to the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe is only open to local and regional authorities and their groupings and non-governmental organisations, as stated in the Resolution CM/Res (2008)3, Appendix, Article 2;*
- the application form must be completed in all its parts, in one of the two official languages of the Council of Europe (English or French);*

- *the materials submitted must be copyright-free, for use by the Council of Europe in communications aimed at promoting the Award or any other publications or activities relating to the Convention. The Council of Europe undertakes to cite the authors' names;*
- *files that are incomplete or fail to comply with the rules will not be taken into consideration.*

For further information please visit the Landscape Award section of the Council of Europe website:

[Convention du Conseil de l'Europe sur le paysage / Site web officiel \(coe.int\)](#)

[Council of Europe Landscape Convention / Official website \(coe.int\)](#)

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I. STATE CONCERNED AND APPLICANT

1. State

BELGIUM

Represented by

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2. Applicant

Regional Landscape *Kleine and Grote Nete*

*Name of the local,
regional authority(ies)
or NGO(s)*

- ☐ ~~Local / regional authority project~~
☒ NGO Project

**Website of the Applicant (if
exists)**

www.rlkgn.be
www.kempenseheugelrug.be

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II. PRESENTATION OF THE PROJET

3. Name of the Project

KEMPENSE HEUVELRUG (Campine ridge) between the valleys of Kleine Nete and Aa where a biography of the landscape brings together past, future and people

4. Location of the Project

Kempense Heuvelrug and valleys (Lille, Kasterlee, Herentals – Province of Antwerp, Belgium)

5. Summary of the Project (10-12 lines)

The *Kempense Heuvelrug* (Campine Ridge) area-based initiative is founded on an innovative methodology of landscape biography and vision. This methodology was introduced in Flanders in 2015 and, by 2021, was developed to cover the entire ridge (5,000 hectares). Over the past ten years the project enhanced landscape and heritage care and sustainable tourism. The project and partnership realised a high-quality and accessible visitor reception, immersive experiences, guide programs, hospitality ambassador schemes, landscape design, landscape restoration, and heritage care.

Landscape, heritage, tourism, and local communities are now connected within an integrated partnership that has a lasting impact on area development. Through public participation, broad partnerships, and a (geo)tourism offer grounded in geological, scenic, and archaeological qualities and a deeper understanding of the place's (temporal) layering, the project contributes to landscape care and vibrant awareness. In doing so, it addresses various aspects of the European Landscape Convention at local and regional levels.

6. Photo representing the Project (high definition – JPEG 350 dpi) and name of the author of the photo please



Kempense Heuvelrug between the valleys of the Kleine Nete and Aa rivers.
Copyright: De Kijkhut for Regional Landscape Kleine and Grote Nete

7. Website of the Project (if exists)

www.kempenseheuvelrug.be

III. CONTENT OF THE PROJECT

8. Start of the Project

*The project must have been
completed at least three years previously*

September

month

2014

year

9. End of the Project

*The project must have been
completed at least three years previously*

September

month

2022

year

10. Partners

Tourism Province of Antwerp
IOED Land van Nete en Aa,
Province of Antwerp,
Provincial Domain Hoge Mouw,
Municipality of Kasterlee,
Municipality of Lille,
City of Herentals,
Flanders Heritage Agency,
Agency for Nature and Forest,
University of Leuven,
Bosgroep Kempen Noord,
Natuurpunt Kempen,
Erfgoed Noorderkempen,
De Brink jeugddomein Hopper
school GO! 3master Kasterlee.

11. Financing bodies

Regional Landscape Kleine en Grote Nete
Province of Antwerp
Flanders Heritage Agency,
Toerisme Provincie Antwerpen
Toerisme Vlaanderen,
LEADER Europees Plattelandsfonds,
Rural Development Programme (PDPO),
Municipalities Kasterlee, Herentals en Lille,
Koning Bouwdewijnstichting,
IOED Land van Nete en Aa,
school GO! 3master Kasterlee.

12. Central aims of the Project

What are the main objectives of the project regarding landscape?

How does the project contribute to the implementation of the Convention at the national level or transnational level?

The aim is to sustainably strengthen the **Campine landscape** through an area-based collaboration built on **landscape biography and vision**, bringing together past, future, and people.

This methodology is integrated, cross-sectoral, and driven by a long-term ambition to connect with local communities, personal narratives, and the deeper spirit of place and landscape.

With **experience and participation** as core principles, and by creating connections across different levels of governance, the overarching goal is translated into concrete and achievable sub-goals:

- Supporting local policies for **immovable heritage** and **landscape stewardship**.
- Deepening existing **forest, nature, and spatial planning policies**.
- Realising **sustainable (geo)tourism and landscape-based education**.
- Using **tourism and experience** as a catalyst for heritage and landscape care.

The project contributes to the implementation of the **European Landscape Convention** through awareness-raising, participation, heritage protection, sustainable tourism, and policy integration.

The area-based approach grounded in landscape biography and vision acts as a lever for **integrated landscape management**, in which geology, cultural history, **soil and geomorphological values**, and meaningful experience go hand in hand.

13. Type of the Project

Describe the nature/type of the project:

Does it focus on landscape protection and management, or does it involve landscape planning, or both?

Is the project related to specific measures or to a landscape public policy?

Is it implemented at a national level or a transnational level?

In the *Kempense Heuvelrug* region, a broad partnership of stakeholders uses, as a result of the project, the landscape as a strategic framework for **integrated, long-term territorial development**, bringing together landscape, heritage, geology, ecology, geotourism, and meaningful place-based experiences.

The landscape biographies and accompanying visions have led to a wide array of initiatives for **landscape protection, management, design, and spatial development**.

Although firmly rooted in local and regional contexts, the project holds strong potential for **transnational cooperation**—for example through geopark initiatives and the recent establishment of the *Bodemverbond Kempense Heuvelrug* (Soil Alliance, Campine Ridge), which explores further cross-border collaboration.

The project directly contributes to **Flemish landscape policy** by activating protected landscapes and inventoried heritage assets. The first landscape biography in Kasterlee was

developed in collaboration with the Flemish Heritage Agency for the protected landscape area of the *Kempense Heuvelrug* between Lichtaart and Kasterlee. This served as a pilot project to reinforce **integrated local heritage policy** and apply the landscape biography method in Flanders.

The partnership has invested significantly in **knowledge building and dissemination**, resulting in improved landscape care and management, with specific attention to **soil, geomorphological, and archaeological values**.

Thanks to the partners' own financial contributions, supplemented by European, Flemish, and provincial funding, the landscape vision was quickly translated into action. Numerous on-the-ground interventions were realised, including **over 10 hectares of ecological and landscape restoration, road depaving**, the conservation and care of veteran trees, restoration of historic landscape relics as a Bronze Age barrow and second World War remnants.

The *Sleeping Giant* ('Giant' refers to the ridge, 'sleeping' refers to the wooded drifting dunes) tourism development plan was implemented as part of the broader landscape vision. Its visibility and success have reinforced this integrated approach. Inspired by the project, an increasing number of local and regional policy frameworks now recognise the value of **landscape as a driver for visitor experience**.

Tourism acts as a **lever for landscape and heritage conservation**, with the tourism offer aligned with the ecological carrying capacity of the natural and cultural environment—ensuring that **experience and protection go hand in hand**. Highlights from the development plan include:

- Six welcome points were created through tailored **landscape design** inspired by geological, ecological and archaeological features.
- Tourist products focused on understanding the landscape
- Forest management plans refined and implemented within the framework of these landscape designs, with attention to heritage and experiential value
- Mobility interventions to promote soft, sustainable recreation—such as **road depaving** and reducing hard infrastructure

The project reveals that a landscape biography and vision are not mere destinations, but gateways—inviting dialogue, inspiring collaboration, nurturing sustainability, and fostering a profound bond with place and Earth itself.

14. Outcome

What are the effective and measurable results of the project on the landscape?

First Application of the landscape biography and vision methodology in Flanders:

- Publication of the landscape biography and vision for the Kempense Heuvelrug between Kasterlee and Lichtaart
- Publication of the landscape biography and vision for the Kempense Heuvelrug and Valleys, Herentals and surrounding area
- The landscape biography acts as a catalyst for attracting investment in the landscape, with over €1.5 million mobilised within the partnership

From local innovation and testing ground to Flemish model:

- Meanwhile 15 landscape biographies already created and 2 in start-up in Flanders.

Experience and participation as a foundation:

- Over 70 local landscape guides trained
- Over 1,500 books sold and distributed through local bookstores
- Both books are freely available in digital format for consultation and dissemination
- Stronger integration of heritage and landscape with tourism development, open space planning, and forest and nature management
- Implementation of the tourism project *Sleeping Giant* and realisation of the land art installation *A Giant Sculpture* by [Gijs Van Vaerenbergh](#), reinforcing local identity
- Training of hospitality staff in Kasterlee as landscape ambassadors

Connection at every level:

- Structural intermunicipal cooperation on landscape and tourism
- Towards interconnected landscapes for both people and wildlife
- Citizens, policymakers, nature managers, and artists brought together

Selection of actions within the framework of the landscape visions:

- Over 10 hectares of nature restoration and landscape rehabilitation
- Planting along roads, slow roads (trails), and at trailheads/start locations
- Tree management plan and care for notable trees and woody heritage
- Tailored forestry operations on a Celtic field complex
- Adaptive forest management on the slopes of vulnerable parabolic dunes
- Restoration of historic fens
- Clearing of trees on a Bronze Age burial mound using draft horses
- Management vision for WWI and WWII trench heritage within forestry operations
- Restoration of historic hedgerows and medieval ridge-and-furrow fields within the forest complex

Monitoring and engagement

The development of nature and the effects of implemented measures are monitored through field inspections and targeted monitoring, and are embedded in management plans that implement European nature policy. A new management plan will be drawn up in 2027, providing renewed impetus for active monitoring. For the Regional Landscape non-profit organisation, monitoring is essential but also challenging within the available staff capacity. Therefore, cooperation with volunteers, such as pond monitors, is pursued, allowing monitoring to be combined with education and public engagement.

Future objectives for landscape en nature development.

The Regional Landscape will continue to actively seek opportunities for nature restoration and landscape enhancement. In doing so, it will keep exploring investment opportunities to support private landowners and organisations with financial resources and the expertise built up through area-based operations.

Selection of implemented actions from the Tourism Development Plan *Sleeping Giant* and *Kempense Heuvelrug*:

- **Start and information points designed as part of a landscape concept**, including welcome markers, information panels, and seating infrastructure
- **Creation of play zones themed around the prehistoric landscape**, including an archaeological sandbox, Iron Age climbing farm, and an interactive quest for urns and pottery
- **Implementation of autism-friendly tourism infrastructure**, including a wheelchair-accessible sand play area and the inclusive *Reuze Rollerpad* ("Giant Roller Path")
- **Development of tourism products that invite visitors to read the landscape** (*Slapende Reus* discovery map), and revive ancient stories (*Trekjan* trail with audio stations)
- **Land art project [A Giant Sculpture](#) by Gijs Van Vaerenbergh**
- **Refinement of forest management plans** integrated into landscape design to enhance the visitor experience
- **Downgrading of the central Goorseweg in Kasterlee** through mobility interventions, including the installation of wildlife grids
- **Educational walk “Ed the Squirrel’s Adventure” on the [Eekhoortjespad in Kasterlee](#)**
- **[Slapende Reus hiking route](#)**, including a dedicated walking leaflet
- **[Slapende Reus children’s quest activity](#) in Kasterlee**
- **[“Welcome to the Wild Mountains of Baroes!” – Kempen](#)**
- **[Launch of the children’s walking route *Hegge – Geniet van Lille*](#)**

Communication and Awareness-Raising:

- **2 publications and 3 tourism brochures**
- **Website:** www.kempenseheuvelrug.be
- **Partner websites** through Tourism Province of Antwerp: [Discover the Sleeping Giant | Kempen](#)
- **Educational brochure:** "*Oude Belgen on the Kempense Heuvelrug*" (The Old Belgians on the Kempense Heuvelrug)
- **[Promotional film](#) on the Kempense Heuvelrug**
- **Educational documentary** on the Kempense Heuvelrug by Frans Verhoeven. The documentary was broadcast twice on national television
- **Lectures, articles, and presentations**, including the *Provincial Landscape Day 2021* and a training course on landscape biography by INVERDE in collaboration with the *Flemish Heritage Agency*

Future Objective for Landscape Experience and Geotourism

We aim to enhance knowledge exchange with existing geoparks, such as Geopark Scheldedelta and Geopark De Hondsrug, and to actively engage in European projects related

to landscape, geology, and soil management. A candidacy has already been submitted for the **Soilscape Project** under **HORIZON-Europe**, and we are collaborating within the network on an **Erasmus+ project** focused on geotourism.

IV. RESPECT OF THE CRITERIA OF THE ATTRIBUTION OF THE AWARD

15. Sustainable territorial development

Is the project part of a sustainable development policy?

Does it contribute to the enhancement of environmental, social, economic, cultural or aesthetic values of the landscape? How?

Has it successfully countered or posed a remedy to any pre-existing environmental damage or urban blight? How?

Does it respond to the triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss? How?¹

The two landscape biographies and visions for the *Kempense Heuvelrug* and valleys of the Kleine Nete and Aa in Kasterlee, Lille and Herentals from 2015 and 2021 have been realised and already initiated concrete interventions, but continue to serve as a guide for sustainable spatial planning. It enhances ecological connectivity through landscape care, restoration and heritage care, protects geological monuments and promotes sustainable mobility and tourism. The project also provides answers to climate challenges by making soil, water and cultural history a guide for spatial processes or subprojects as basic ambitions.

Some of the realised projects that underline this integrality and action orientation:

- Improving mobility and road safety
- Landscape and natural habitat restoration
- Landscaping and spatial planning focused on cultural-historical landscapes enhances the environmental and aesthetic quality of the living environment
- Strive for balanced accessibility for all recreationists and users, including those with limited mobility

Starting and stopping points are linked to locations whose residents and users need more cohesion and connection with greenery and nature: such as the starting point *Witte Bergen* in Lichtaart near the residential care centre and nursery school (Educational Package *Ed De Eekhoorn*), youth domain *De Brink* in Herentals, GO! 3master school for special education near *Kabouterberg* and *Sleeping Giant* (Giant Rollerpad).

16. Exemplary value

Can the project be considered of exemplary value? Why?

Which are the good practices that it implemented? Which of these practices are considered of exemplary value at the national or transnational level?

¹ Appendix V to the Reykjavík Declaration

The **methodology of landscape biography** was first applied in the *Kempense Heuvelrug* area and the valleys of the Kleine Nete and Aa rivers in the **Antwerp Campine region** between 2015 and 2021. **Since then, it has been adopted and implemented in Flemish calls for Landscape Parks and National Parks, with as a result 15 landscape biographies completed to date.**

With this, the Kempense Heuvelrug set a standard for area-based collaboration grounded in an integrated methodology that connects with the (temporal) layering of place, landscape, and heritage. This approach links local expertise, partners, and citizens with scientific research. The project serves as an inspiring example of integrated landscape policy and experience, characterized by broad cooperation and sustainable embedding. The emphasis on geotourism, soil, and geological values is also innovative, strengthening the connection between science and the public.

Furthermore, linking tourist starting points with care centres, schools, and youth domains—offering wheelchair-accessible and autism-friendly facilities—is groundbreaking and can serve as a best practice example.

17. **Public participation**

Does the project actively encourage the public's participation in the decision-making process? How?

Which stakeholders were involved, and how and when were they engaged? When did the active public consultation and dialogue take place, and in what form?

Is the project in line with the wider policies implemented by national, regional or local authorities?

The landscape biography forms the foundation for dialogue, approaching the landscape as a unifying theme. By exploring the layering of a place, a shared narrative emerges in which people recognize themselves and engage in conversation with one another. **Participation processes** (community meeting, 10 guided information walks for residents en policymakers) preceded the development of the landscape biographies and visions. **Field surveys and interviews** were conducted with local experts and associations. **Working groups on 'tourism & heritage' and 'landscape & nature'** provided input and reflection on the biography and vision over multiple sessions. The project was presented and discussed at a **residents' meeting**, ensuring active involvement of local inhabitants with the surrounding landscape.

The tourism reception plan focuses on opening up access to the landscape and heritage and now includes various educational products for children, guides, residents, and visitors. **Various courses, training modules, lectures, and articles contribute to participation:** tourism products and activities were developed together with residents and partners (landscape vision, Sleeping Giant (*Slapende Reus*) festival, guided walks), making the landscape a shared narrative that resonates with a broad audience. Participation is not only content related or educational but is also institutionally embedded in the project's policy framework.

The governance of the landscape biographies and visions is built on **open collaboration and stakeholder involvement**. During the development of the biographies and visions, steering committees were established, comprising representatives from local authorities,

the Flemish and Provincial governments, land managers, associations, and local experts. These steering committees act as **advisory groups and co-creators of policy**.

18. Awareness-raising

Is the project effectively increasing public awareness of the importance of landscape in terms of human development, consolidation of European identity, or individual and collective well-being? How?

The landscape biographies seek out the soul of a place, giving meaning to historical relics and land use. Published in book form and accompanied by a landscape vision, they serve both as timeless tools and dynamic methodologies. By deepening the understanding of natural landscapes, historical land use, and site-specific characteristics, they support work on climate adaptation, landscape stewardship, soil quality, heritage preservation, and meaningful tourism.

Through storytelling, walking routes, guide training, artworks, and publications, the project raises awareness among visitors, entrepreneurs, and residents of the importance of soil, topography, heritage, and landscape in their living and working environments. The project demonstrates how landscape contributes to identity, well-being, and a sense of connection with place and nature.

Concrete awareness-raising actions (implemented between 2015 and 2022):

- Realisation of a reception and interpretation plan: development of start and resting points with general information about the area and its geology, and site-specific interpretation of landscape and heritage values (2018–2022)
- Creation and distribution of an *Ambassadors' Guide* for the *Sleeping Giant* (2017)
- Three landscape guide training programmes for the Kempense Heuvelrug (75 participants in total – 2017, 2020, 2021)
- Educational package “*The Ancient Belgians on the Kempense Heuvelrug*” (2021)
- Creation of three new thematic walking routes (2018–2022)
- Public contest and call for historic landscape photographs (2021)
- Landscape festival and launch event “*Sleeping Giant festival*” (2021)
- Ongoing media coverage and interpretation in local press
- Production of [a promotional film](#) on the *Kempense Heuvelrug* (2021)
- Production of an educational film on the *Kempense Heuvelrug* by filmmaker Frans Verhoeven (2019), **broadcast twice on national television** (VRT Canvas)
- Knowledge sharing and development of a knowledge network on landscape, involving partners, policymakers, researchers, and educational institutions
[example: About giants, gnomes, bastards and will-o'-the-wisps” | vlaanderen.be](#)

In addition to the tangible products resulting from this area-based project, the landscape biographies will continue to inspire new forms of awareness-raising for years to come. Both biographies are freely accessible and can be used by a broad and diverse group of educators and communicators. The partnership actively supports new ideas and projects and remains committed to ensuring continuity and long-term integration within future landscape initiatives."

V. ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

Together with the printed version of the Application form, additional material in digital format should be included in one USB key, and returned by post to:

Secretariat General of the Council of Europe

Directorate General Human Rights and Rule of Law (DG I)

Directorate of Social Rights, Health and Environment

Department for the Reykjavík Process and Environment

Council of Europe Landscape Convention

9th Session of the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe

F-67075 STRASBOURG, Cedex

- Text (20 pages max.): *PDF format*
- Photos (10 max.): *JPEG 350 dpi high definition*
- Posters (2 max.): *PDF format high definition or JPEG 350 dpi high definition*
- Video (5 min max.): *mpeg 2 format - It is recommended to present a video (even of amateur quality).*

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