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# MP4 WP4.1

## Retroactive evaluation of on-the-ground benefits

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Evaluation report:  
Nieuwenhove-  
Gruuthuyse and  
Oostkamp,  
Bruges, Belgium

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**Dr Harry Smith**  
**Dr Filip Sosenko**  
**Dr Jenny Roe**  
Heriot-Watt University  
Edinburgh, UK

**Pieter Vercammen**  
**Sabine Gheysen**  
Vlaamse Landmaatschappij  
(VLM), Bruges, Belgium

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## Introduction to the pilot project

The semi-rural village of Oostkamp is located near the Flemish coast, between the cities of Bruges and Torhout. It has a population of 22760 inhabitants and an area of 7964 ha. Its geographic location is an asset for its residents. Oostkamp has a lot to offer in terms of employment. High-tech enterprises, distribution companies as well as many SMEs are located on its many industrial sites, the most important one being Tyco electronics. In addition, Oostkamp is the greenest village in the province of West-Flanders. Besides the castle domain Gruuthuse, there are about 20 other castles and castle-domains (landed estates) in the forested area of Oostkamp. In terms of its administration, Oostkamp is a city, which is governed by a city council that consists of a Mayor, six Aldermen, a Chairperson, a Secretary and 19 Councillors.

Oostkamp is separated from the countryside by three main barriers: a canal, the railway and the motorway. Although surrounded by large areas of open space, some of which are officially subject to international protection, these are under the ownership of a variety of different public and private owners. There is little coordination, occasional conflicts and low capacity for park management by individual landowners, resulting in low quality in the parks. In addition, the individual landowners have limited capacity to invest in improvement of parks and continuing maintenance of these once improved. Thus, the private management practices in internationally protected areas often do not meet the international expectations, and generally maintenance standards are not consistent/ guaranteed. This combination of physical barriers and diverse land ownership is seen to contribute to the fact that many open spaces in or around the neighbourhood of Nieuwenhove and around Oostkamp seem underused.

Within Oostkamp a number of opportunities arose to develop the public open space of the village and the green infrastructure of the surrounding region. A derelict industrial site, a former Coca-Cola factory, was proposed as the site for a new community advice centre. Vacant land adjacent to this new facility offered the scope for the creation of a new open space for the village. In addition, a network of forests in the surrounding countryside offered scope to develop plans for a series of connected green corridors to facilitate walking and biking.

MP4 provided an opportunity to address the above issues in an initiative to improve pedestrian/bicycle circulation and reduce the impact of physical barriers; improve public access to different parks, woods, private estates, farmland and other urban areas; negotiate public use of private parks, estates; increase the quality of open spaces and the value of the surrounding countryside; and develop an integrated place-keeping plan for the whole area.

MP4 funding was used specifically for the creation of the OostCampus, i.e. the new open space in the centre of Oostkamp resulting from the redevelopment of the old Coca-Cola factory. This was seen as a key project underpinning the rest of the initiative to improve public access to open space in the area. This evaluation report thus focuses mainly on the experience and lessons from the development and implementation of Oostcampus, but does so in the context of the wider initiative in the Oostkamp area.

## Context and the aim of the project

The overall project set out to address the public access issues through the creation of a land development plan for the area which included specific place-making initiatives geared mainly towards surmounting the physical barriers created by the canal, railway and motorway. In doing this a series of issues needed to be addressed including: how to define and engage the multiple stakeholders/ partners; how to deal with multiple land ownership, both public and private; the ability to purchase required land; the ability to negotiate public access to private land; and the potential high costs of access improvements.

During implementation of MP4, the overall project has been developed through three specific projects:

- preparation of a forest management plan for Kampveld and Nieuwenhove forests for the area developed by Agency for Nature and Forests (ANB) and the municipality of Oostkamp, linked to a strategic land development plan identifying broad aims and objectives for the region;
- re-design of a redeveloped neighbourhood square in the neighbourhood of Nieuwenhove, called Cardijn Square;
- and the creation of the OostCampus, i.e. a new open space in the centre of Oostkamp resulting from the redevelopment of the old Coca-Cola factory.

The Flemish Land Agency (Vlaamse Landmaatschappij – VLM) has been a key stakeholder in the development and implementation of the project. In OostCampus and in Cardijn Square, VLM has worked mainly alongside the municipality of Oostkamp, as well as engaging other stakeholders, as is explained in the relevant sections below. Work on improved public access in the wider area through preparation of the forest management plan has been led by the Agency for Nature and Forests, with VLM responding to the process, as have other stakeholders. For VLM in particular, key issues included: its lack of official responsibility for place-keeping and therefore of authority to enforce standards; and the co-ordination of multiple place-keepers with no consistent standard across them.

*Overall project aims and objectives:*

1. Obtain an integrated way of managing the open spaces, corresponding to the international protection of the area, to the satisfaction of individual landowners, and to the public, reducing in that way conflicts.
2. Make the private parks more accessible to the public.
3. Create a sense of 'ownership' among users of the open spaces.
4. Convert OostCampus into a nice place to spend some time. To integrate the site, purchased by the municipality in its surroundings and to improve the place-making and place-keeping aspects of the surroundings.
5. To create easy and safe connections for bicycles and pedestrians between different green areas.
6. To reduce the inconveniences produced by the E40 highway, the railway and the canal.

*Specific project aims and objectives for Oostcampus:*

1. Change the industrial destination of the Oostcampus site towards a public green destination.
2. Make the site accessible to the public.
3. Create a sense of 'ownership' among users of the open spaces.
4. Convert OostCampus into a nice place to spend some time. To integrate the site, purchased by the municipality in its surroundings and to improve the place making and place keeping aspects of the surroundings.
5. To create easy and safe connections for bicycles and pedestrians between different green areas.

<b>The specific place-keeping approach</b>
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VLM's standard practice for place-keeping is that it transfers ownership of infrastructures and facilities it funds to other organisations (communities, provinces, nature associations, Flemish government) whose responsibility it is to preserve the new infrastructure or areas. VLM has no responsibility for place-keeping after passing projects on, but place-keeping arrangements are made through specific agreements according to 3 different standard project types (land consolidation, land development and land development for nature).

The overall project focuses on development of an integrated place-keeping plan for the whole area, with potential place-keepers being involved at the place-making stage. Therefore, the approach has been to bring public and private owners together to create a joint place-keeping plan. In the long-term, place-keeping is to be undertaken by a partner – whether public, private or an NGO. This raises a series of issues: ensuring the long-term maintenance of initial investment; resourcing; dealing with multiple land ownership (public & private); and therefore dealing with multiple stakeholders/partners.

In relation to overall Objective 1, ANB has led on the production of a forest management plan for the forested area in the neighbourhood of Kampveld and Nieuwenhove forest. This plan intended to make a vision for the use, management and the public accessibility of the forests. Start of the production of the forest management plan was delayed for 1 year; VLM could only follow and respond to this activity, but could not take over the initiative. The problem VLM faced was that it is not an organisation that carries out place keeping activities itself. Over the last decades VLM's awareness of the need to take into account place-keeping when planning investments has grown, but other organisations do not always have this perception, and according to VLM don't realise that VLM can play a role in place-keeping through their place-making projects. Therefore VLM are not always invited at meetings concerning place-keeping. VLM believes it can raise partners or stakeholders' awareness of place-keeping without intruding on their responsibilities and tasks. However, since 2011 ANB has worked on the drafting of the forest management plan for Kampveld and Nieuwenhove and VLM has assisted in the steering group, taking into account preliminary conclusions and ideas from the plan in the making of the land development plan for the area, which VLM is responsible for. So far discussions among the stakeholders haven't included place-keeping, as in the first year the focus of the process is on inventory and visioning. However, directives

on place-keeping and guidelines for operational management will be the final outcome of the place-keeping plan. The visioning efforts are mostly focused on recreational issues. The visioning regarding future management of nature and recreational facilities is to be carried out in 2012.

The VLM project team, consisting of different experts (water, forest, recreation, ecology, agriculture, etc) has worked on preparing the preliminary land development plan, including consulting different experts and professionally experienced people. This plan will address overall objectives 2, 3, 5 and 6. As with all VLM land development plans, place-keeping is being taken into account and will be assigned to one of the stakeholders who are legally responsible for maintaining public open spaces. This plan will be implemented after the end of the MP4 project.

In relation to overall Objective 2, VLM has approached several owners of large ‘castle’ estates, including the largest estate in the area – which was not initially keen on opening the private park to the public except on special occasions, with a guide. VLM reached agreements with a couple of these large private landowners to open lanes for public access thus opening up land for recreation. In one particular case VLM was able to make use of a legal instrument (pre-emption right) to have priority in buying private estate land with high nature value (European habitat directive protection) that was being put on the market. This enabled VLM to negotiate with the private purchaser who was interested in buying the land and to exchange some land plots in leasehold, thus securing land to be passed on for afforestation by ANB (because VLM never retains property) and permanent connections for cyclists and pedestrians across the land to be owned by the private landowner (the latter secured via deeds, a requirement to release the funds from the Ministry). VLM is still negotiating with all the partners involved (ANB, municipality, private owner) to decide who will pay for the place-making of the connections, and who will be responsible for place-keeping. Generally, municipalities have most capacity and knowledge to maintain bicycle lanes, so VLM is trying to set up an arrangement whereby the municipality will have the responsibility even if the bicycle connection isn’t located on their land.

The Cardijn Square project is particularly relevant to Overall Objective 3. VLM led on an engagement process to get the neighbourhood involved in decision-making on the redesign of the square including a survey and public meetings (see section on Governance below), which was expected to improve the sense of ownership. This fed into the production of a plan for the square. The design has been worked on more closely by VLM, the municipality and the company that manages the bus connections between Bruges and the surrounding villages, which uses the square for a bus stop and as a resting place for drivers. The initial draft plan was based on the principle of shared spaces, but this design was too expensive for the municipality. Therefore the adopted proposal was a strongly reduced version of the first proposal. Demolition works started in 2011, including the removal of a disused basketball pitch that was in poor condition due to lack of use. The municipality planned the reconstruction works from 2012 on. It is expected that place-keeping will be the responsibility of the municipality.

Objective 4 is to be met through the development of the OostCampus. This has been led by VLM and the Municipality of Oostkamp, with involvement from the owners of the shopping strip next to OostCampus and the neighbouring primary school, and with some degree of wider public consultation (see sections on Partnerships and Governance below). The process suffered some delays due to: financial constraints; unclear agreements between VLM, the municipality and the private contractor engaged by the municipality to prepare the technical file (THV Wolkenbouwer), concerning the tasks of each stakeholder; and design considerations which were partly related to place-keeping. For example, the planting proposed by the external designer was altered following review by VLM and the parks department of the municipality of Oostkamp in order to ensure easier long-term management, and a non-standard feature that was proposed to be built using crates normally used for storing beverages (to reflect the history and the present use of the surroundings of the site) was replaced by a wall using the same materials, to avoid problems with vandalism. After considering the possible involvement of the children from the 9 schools in Oostkamp in painting the durable crate 'monuments', a decision was finally made by the municipality and VLM to involve three schools. The 5000 Euro cost of initial painting of the crates is being covered by the municipality of Oostkamp combined with MP4 budget, but it is unlikely that funds will be available for repainting after the closure of the MP4 project.

VLM helped the municipality to decide on technical aspects and to review and reduce the cost of the project, and the choices made in the technical file aimed for durable place-keeping. A key feature of this project is a permanent passage between the shops and the Oostcampus site which is expected to increase the permeability and accessibility of the site, giving shop workers and customers better access to the square and paths and people working in the service centre (located on site) better access to the shopping strip.<sup>1</sup> An agreement was made between the municipality and VLM, which was necessary to start the works because the development of the OostCampus site isn't incorporated in the land development plan. VLM asked the municipality to draw up an agreement with the owners of the shopping strip for the co-financing of the works on their property and to ensure that the investments will be maintained in a durable way and will remain accessible, even if ownership of the shopping strip changes. This easement will be ensured by means of a deed. The shop owners agreed to invest 12 500 Euro on their property.<sup>2</sup> The investment includes capital works (and repairs for three years, to be executed by the contractor). The maintenance will be the responsibility of the municipality, which is the legal owner of the site (except for repairs in the first three years).

Overall Objective 5 has been addressed mainly through the negotiations in preparation for the forest management and land development plan, as well as through the implementation of the OostCampus project. Progress has been made with several large landowners in the area North of the E40 highway, including via purchase of land, in securing access and connections for cyclists and pedestrians, which opens up opportunities for recreational use (see Objective 2 above and in following sections). To further reach this aim, meetings have

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<sup>1</sup> Without consulting with VLM, the shop owners changed this permanent passage into one that will only open during daytime. This change was also noted in the agreement between the municipality of Oostkamp and the shop owners. It is unlikely this change will have any impact on site, because there isn't an obstruction foreseen to prevent people from using the passage overnight.

<sup>2</sup> 8000 Euros to build a new fence for safety reasons and ca. 4000 Euros to improve the green infrastructure on the parking lot and near the passage to the OostCampus site.

taken place between VLM and the municipality, ANB, Westtoer (an expert organisation on recreation and tourism in the province of West-Flanders), Province of West-Flanders, and stakeholders including Aquafin (responsible for sewerage), AWV (motorway and transport), VMM (waterways and rivers), and Onroerend Erfgoed (cultural heritage). No specific place-keeping agreements or documents have been produced yet as it is still too early in the process. The implementation of the OostCampus project (see objective 4 above) has also contributed to the future increase in safe pedestrian and bicycle connections, with negotiations on access with the shopping strip owners.

Meeting Objective 6 is part and parcel of meeting objectives 2 and 5 above, and the approach described for these objectives is relevant here. In addition, in the preparation of the land development plan, reducing the inconveniences produced by the E40 highway, the railway and the canal, are a high priority.

In summary:

- an integrated place-keeping plan is being drafted for the forests that are mainly owned by public partners;
- place-keeping on the OostCampus site will be carried out mainly by the municipality, with shop owners looking after their part of the re-developed space. It is possible that schoolchildren will take on a small place-keeping role in the future;
- place-keeping on the Cardijn Square is going to be undertaken by the municipality and the bus company.

**Place-keeping: looked at from five dimensions****1. Partnerships**

*The Partners:* across the three projects that VLM has engaged with a range of partners including a public and private forest owners group; farmers and their organizations; the Agency for Nature and Forests (ANB); the municipality of Oostcampus; roads and railways agencies; a bus company; owners of a shopping strip and a local primary school. The composition of the partnership specific to each project is explained below.

VLM has a long tradition of working with partners in the implementation of land development projects that it funds. Prospective owners/managers of project infrastructures are involved with VLM from the early stages of planning, as they will be responsible for place-keeping. VLM never acts as place-keeper in the long term. Rather, place-keeping is handed over to a public, private or NGO partner, and the funding for place-making is made conditional to such place-keeping responsibilities being met. On a new project, the contractor is required to carry out necessary repairs for the first 2 years, after which responsibility passes to the land owner.

In the pilot projects attempts were made to trial a new type of partnership (in Flanders) based on a bottom-up approach. Partners in the pilot projects range from public to private, and from large to small, with the main partners also being involved in the design of the projects and giving approval to the final projects. The pilot projects intended to produce an integrated place-keeping plan through partnership of all landowners and land managers within the area.

Preparation of an overall forest management plan for the land surrounding Oostkamp (Overall Objective 1) was led by ANB, which in late 2010/early 2011 formed a steering group for the plan. With ANB as Chair of the steering group, other members were a private consultant, the different landowners (united in an organisation named Forest group Houtland), Natuurpunt vzw, INBO, the municipality of Oostkamp and VLM. During 2011 ANB tendered the preparation of the forest management plan to an external private agency. VLM, together with ANB, informally agreed<sup>3</sup> with the private agency a division of tasks in the making of the forest management plan whereby VLM would make a draft plan for its pilot project area and the private agency would do so for the ANB properties. The most important agreement was that both parties would coordinate both plans on a regular basis.

A partnership approach also underpinned VLM's drive to open up private parks to public access (Overall Objective 2). By September 2010 two oral agreements had been reached for the recreational and functional use of park lanes within private property. Between September 2010 and September 2011 no new partnerships had been formed, but there was hope of forming one with the castle domain Cellen, which was subject to one of the agreements reached in the previous period. The castle domain was then sold and between September 2011 and March 2012 VLM used a legally binding instrument – known as pre-emption right – to buy land from the new owner of the castle domain Cellen. This purchase gave VLM the opportunity to negotiate with the owner of the castle domain Cellen and arrange to exchange some parcels in leasehold. In doing so, the owner could obtain the control over the property

<sup>3</sup> I.e. there wasn't a written agreement.



he originally wanted to buy and VLM could obtain new property to be afforested. The pre-emption right gave VLM a strong basis for negotiation and it could set its own conditions. One of these conditions was that the castle owner would allow a connection for bicycles and pedestrians on or near his property. These negotiations have all take place north of the highway. South of the highway, during mid 2012 negotiations to buy the necessary land to make safe connections for bicycles and pedestrians were at a well advanced stage between VLM and a private person – who happens to be the same owner of castle domain Cellen.

The redesign of Cardijn Square (related to Overall Objective 3) involved a limited partnership only with the municipality and de Lijn, the public bus carrier, which in late 2010 / early 2011 agreed to cooperate in the redesign project, and to review their organisation and the location of the bus stop. The bus company's anticipated involvement in place-keeping is through maintaining their own bus stop and bus resting place in good condition.

Regeneration of the OostCampus site in Oostkamp (Overall Objective 4) has been based on a partnership approach. Between September 2010 and March 2011 an informal agreement was reached between VLM, the municipality and a private contractor, concerning the design of OostCampus. This was followed during 2011 by the preparation of a formal agreement between VLM and the municipality about the tasks for the execution of the works in the park and, on demand from VLM, between the municipality and the owners of the neighbouring shopping strip about the place-keeping and accessibility in the long term – both agreements being in place by September 2011. According to these agreements, the city is responsible for the tendering of the works, delivering official documents to VLM for approval, securing building permit, safety regulations, ground works, follow up of the works on site, delivering invoices on time to VLM, and financing the part that is not financed by VLM. VLM is responsible for financing a part of the works and making sure that the European cofinancing is requested in time. Communication has to be agreed upon by both parties. The shopping strip owners agreed to allow the works on their property, according to a plan attached to the agreement and produced by a contractor. The public easement will be arranged in a deed, drawn up by the Purchase Committee in Bruges. The shopping strip owners will invest a minimum of 12,500 Euro in the capital works.

In summary, VLM and the municipality of Oostkamp achieved a very good level of cooperation during the planning and implementation of the OostCampus site, reaching the agreements that were necessary to take the project forward. This was the first time that VLM had cooperated with this municipality, and as in all new cooperations this needed some time to go smoothly. VLM staff felt that the municipality of Oostkamp got to know what VLM represents, to appreciate its expertise and to see it as a partner that also can bring along some investment potential in the city. The shopping strip owners and neighbouring school were actively engaged in the project and perceptions of the benefits of the project substantially improved over time.

Overall Objectives 5 and 6 have been addressed mainly through the preparation of an overall land development plan for the land surrounding Oostkamp (Overall Objective 1). No partnerships have been formed specifically for these objectives beyond those established for the preparation of the forest management plan. Partnerships have been continuously explored during the plan preparation process and are expected to be arranged in the land development plan.

## Lessons learnt

- *Involvement of private partners can help achieve objectives that would otherwise be unachievable, and can be beneficial for the private partners:* Through an access agreement with the owners of the shopping strip next to the new Oostcampus park, the people of Oostkamp who need to access the city service centre on Oostcampus will use the shopping strip car park. Both users and employees of the city service centre will have easy access to the shopping strip. Overall footfall in the shopping strip is therefore expected to increase.
- *Though involvement of private partners in place-making and place-keeping can be beneficial and even necessary to achieve certain objectives, it can also be difficult:* VLM recognise that private partners can have a big (particularly economic) interest in the development of a neighbouring public space, and therefore consider that it is reasonable to ask such partners to participate by improving their own private (but publicly accessible) space. VLM's experience is that the result is best recorded in a written agreement in order to ensure long term durability of both the private and public space. In the case of Oostcampus such an agreement was made between the city council and the shopping strip owners. VLM found it difficult to achieve the agreement. According to VLM the private owners felt that if certain measures are for a public cause, then the public authorities should pay for them. The fact that those measures raise the value of the private partners' own property was less decisive in persuading them to invest in the project.



## **2. Governance and Engagement**

VLM's standard practice for place-making is that it prepares a plan for a land development project (usually based on requests from local municipalities or provinces), seeks approval from the Ministry, and constitutes a 'planning council group'<sup>4</sup>, which then identifies and prioritizes projects within the broader plan.

In the early stages (2009) of the preparation of an overall land development plan for the land surrounding Oostkamp (Overall Objective 1) VLM consulted the majority of the existing boards in the community of Oostkamp<sup>5</sup> and passed on the findings from those meetings to the private agency who has been assigned to prepare the forest management plan. Since this initial consultation, involvement in the making of the forest management plan has been limited to the steering group, and to bilateral meetings that have been held between VLM, ANB, and the private contractor who is preparing the plan.

Future intentions include a public survey and several public consultations when the draft development plan is ready (which will also be relevant to Overall Objective 2). Once the draft is ready, the plan will undergo a public survey for a month, during which the draft plan will be available at the town hall and at the VLM office, and residents will have an opportunity to make objections. After the public survey and a round of consultations (run by VLM's partners) is finished, a final plan will be prepared taking into account all the objections as far as possible. VLM answers every objection with a letter. The public consultation will be advertised by means of a flyer which will be posted to all mailboxes. The final consultation process will be held after the local elections in October 2012, with a finalised land development plan envisaged for 2013.

Broadening a sense of ownership (Overall Objective 3) is particularly relevant to the theme of achieving wider governance, and the initiative where this has been taken furthest is the redesign of Cardijn Square. As part of the process of redesigning Cardijn Square, in 2009 VLM sent out a survey to 1477 households in the neighbourhood of Nieuwenhove and received 313 completed questionnaires (21% return).<sup>6</sup> Written feedback on the questionnaire was subsequently distributed in the neighbourhood. This was followed up by a workshop held in September 2010, to which the 17 people who had expressed an interest in being involved in a village committee in their response to the questionnaire were invited. Five residents participated, identifying Cardijn square as the first priority for action, and key design elements to include. Following this workshop, VLM drew up a draft plan for the renewal of this square, together with the municipality of Oostkamp and "de lijn", the company that manages the bus connections between Bruges and the surrounding villages, as one of the issues to be addressed was the location of the bus stop and the resting place for the bus drivers. During 2010/2011 VLM worked together with the municipality to produce a draft design to present to the community. An initial design proposal based on the principle of

<sup>4</sup> A *planning council group* is an advisory committee. The council group consists of representatives from the municipalities involved, the province, farmer representatives and representatives from different departments of the Flemish Government.

<sup>5</sup> With the exception only of the local council of childcare and the council of development aid.

<sup>6</sup> In addition to the survey, VLM also contacted boards and councils of the city to gather the wishes of the different social groups, including those of the youth board.

shared spaces was considerably modified in order to make it less expensive – in VLM's view this was not the thorough facelift that would have given a new life to the place, but was acceptable for the municipality of Oostkamp (who was financially responsible). The modified plan was discussed in a second workshop, organized by VLM in March 2011, in which 12 local people participated. This workshop led to further revisions to the plan, and a final consultation on the revised plan was envisaged through an exhibition, which is still to be held. The finalisation of the revised plan and the exhibition have been delayed because the municipality of Oostkamp needed time to investigate the different possibilities for the location of the bus stop. In the meantime, between March and September 2011 the city council of Oostkamp started the demolition works on Cardijn Square, and the basketball field, which was in poor condition due to lack of use, was replaced with a grass field. The municipality has planned the reconstruction works from 2012 onwards. Future representation of residents in the place-keeping of the redesigned square depends on what works will be executed on the site. VLM asked in their public survey whether people might be interested in joining a stakeholder group in the future, but VLM will probably not be actively involved in promoting or supporting this.

In the Oostcampus pilot project VLM has led the process (by decree), with the main partners (identified in the previous section) being involved in the design of the project. Small-scale consultation was carried out, focused on local shop owners and the local school; two public meetings were also held. Plans for both the building and the open space were prepared exclusively by the Council and made available to residents and other interested parties to view in the local library and on the council's website but there was no formal mechanism for processing objections. In the Council's view, the project did not require to be participatory or community-led as the site used to be a 'dead', and therefore not contentious, space.

However, in order to widen and strengthen the sense of ownership (Overall Objective 3) in the creation of OostCampus (Overall Objective 4), the range of participants in the project was widened from the initial partners (VLM and Municipality of Oostkamp) to the shopping strip owners and the primary school adjacent to the area being regenerated. Since the area had not previously been a public space, very few people knew or had expectations about it, despite the newspaper coverage and a public meeting held in December 2009. VLM and the municipality therefore proceeded to consult with those parties that had expressed an interest. By September 2010 VLM's perception was that everybody concerned agreed that the OostCampus project could result in a big improvement in the living environment of the people living in Oostkamp. Nevertheless, VLM still found very few people who were prepared to collaborate in thinking with VLM about how their environment could be improved other than the shopping strip and the school nearby. Other parties didn't respond to VLM's invitations. However, cooperation between VLM and the municipality of Oostkamp concerning the OostCampus site was rated as excellent by VLM, and the shopping strip and the school's engagement continued throughout the place-making process, after their participation had been requested by VLM as part of the MP4 project. VLM therefore saw the MP4 project as having played an important role in achieving this. By September 2011 no further changes had been made to the governance of the project. The municipality of Oostkamp kept their inhabitants informed by regular press releases about the progress of the implementation of the works on site. Future expected involvement in place-keeping by the shopping strip owners is limited to maintenance of their own investments through their own funding. No

agreements have been made yet with the school regarding further participation in place-keeping. The focus now lies on operationalizing the graffiti crates monument. VLM consider that formal participation of the school is probably not necessary for the actual place-keeping (ie maintenance) of the site. The school was mainly approached as a future user of the site.

Governance arrangements to achieve Overall Objectives 5 and 6 are those made for Overall Objectives 1 and 2 (ie related to the preparation of the forest management plan) described above.

#### Lessons learnt / implemented

- *The format of engagement with the public is important:* Early on in the process VLM learnt that during public consultation processes it is better to engage local people in a public meeting by splitting them up into smaller discussion groups instead of presenting the plan and asking for input in one large group.
- *Simple techniques can help communication with other stakeholders:* VLM learnt from other MP4 partners about techniques such as Gender Cards, images that you can show to people to make clearer what you want to do in a project, though these were not implemented in the VLM projects.
- *Careful phasing of engagement in plan preparation can contribute to a successful process:* For example, based on lessons learnt from other MP4, partners, VLM are engaging with a limited group of residents on a draft plan, and facilitating consultation with other residents through this group.
- *Long plan preparation processes present problems in public engagement and information gathering:* In 2009 VLM consulted different boards and councils who are active in Oostkamp. In 2011, VLM had doubts about whether the findings from these consultations which had taken place two years earlier could still be considered as valid, or whether they would be dated.



### **3. Finance**

VLM's standard practice when planning a project is to prepare a complete breakdown of what investments are necessary and who is going to pay for these. This includes cost-estimating for place-keeping although the responsibility for implementation does not lie with VLM.

For place-making across the three projects funding comes from different sources: Municipality of Oostkamp, Province of West Flanders, ANB, subsidies for land development projects, private persons/organisations/agencies, and European funding. For place-keeping, the contractor is obliged to carry out arising repairs in newly developed open space for 2 years after which it passes to the responsibility of the land owner. In terms of capital investment, the latter is limited to the creation of Oostcampus.

For place-keeping, full project costs are not yet available. Place-keeping costs will be considered during place-making and VLM considers that they must be durable, sustainable and cost-effective.

In the case of the land development plan (Overall Objective 1), funding will be preliminarily arranged in the draft plan. It is expected that 70% will come from land development funding (from VLM) and 30% from stakeholders for place-making only. Arrangements made in land development plans do not have a certain time limit. Implementation of the works of the different measures taken may take up to ten years.

For Cardijn Square (related to Overall Objective 3), lack of funds was a limiting factor, which led to a strongly reduced design for the remodelling of the square. Place-making funding for this project is provided by the municipality only. VLM has not allocated any place-making or place-keeping funds for this, with its contributions being limited to those required for the public consultations and staff time and resources for the preparation of the plans. VLM are not aware of any place-keeping funding having been secured specifically for this square, and the presumption is that future place-keeping will need to be funded from the municipality's maintenance budget for public properties they are responsible for.

The design of the Oostcampus project (related to Overall Objectives 3 & 4) during 2010 suffered some initial delays because of financial concerns at the municipality of Oostkamp. During 2011 the preparation of the final technical files for tendering produced the first accurate calculations of costs, which were higher than the Euro 1,000,000 that the town council had allocated for developing the open space and therefore cast doubts over the project's viability. However, the tendering price achieved was within the town council's limit, thus allowing the place-making project to proceed with no cuts. Through negotiations with the private shop owners, these agreed to pay a one-off fee of Euro 12,500, which has been used mostly to provide a low-maintenance fence and safe passage for bicycles. The shop-owners will be expected to pay for the long-term place-keeping of their properties, which involves the maintenance of a few trees and hedges – i.e. limited costs. Funds for place-keeping of the main space post-contract don't appear to have been considered; this will need to be reviewed by the municipality after the election.



- It is important to plan and cost for place-keeping at the very beginning of a project;
- Place-keeping ought to be made an integral part of the permission to develop.
- Cost allowances for evaluation of place-keeping post-development should be built in to a project from the beginning.



#### **4. Policy**

VLM's standard practice at the plan-making stage is to study all policy plans of local, provincial or national entities in order to ensure that the plans to be prepared comply with the policies of all entities. For place-making, the procedure to prepare Land Development projects, specific rules on land development and modification, and the approval of specific land development plan programmes are all subject to Flemish Government legislation. For place-keeping, VLM has different place-keeping standards embedded in their official procedures for 3 standard project types: land consolidation; land development; and land development for nature.

The 'VLM Place-keeping Initiative' has an approach based on two components: (a) an internal manual focusing on place-keeping; and (b) an official internal instruction requiring consideration of place-keeping while place-making is being planned, and participation of prospective owner/managers in planning. This internal instruction (policy) includes embedding as much of the VLM field measures into external place-keeping plans (ie prepared by partners, whether these plans are existing or new ones), to ensure place-keeping in the future.

In relation to Overall Objectives 1 and 2, in 2009 VLM agreed with the municipality and the ANB to make a forest management plan for the Kampveld and Nieuwenhove forest. Every owner of a forest is obliged to make such a plan. ANB is responsible for the plan for Kampveld and Nieuwenhove. After initial delays for reasons that VLM is not aware of, in late 2010/early 2011 ANB started the production of the forest management plan (see previous sections). The policy that informed this plan was: a durable management of public forests, in combination with the use of these forests for soft recreation.

In Cardijn Square (related to Overall Objective 3) VLM intended to implement a design based on the shared spaces principle, but were not able to convince the municipality due to lack of funding.

There was no strong policy framework for the OostCampus project. The political consensus was that the new civic centre is an important high profile project for the municipality, with the design being selected by international competition. The policy for the site (related to Overall Objectives 3 and 4) originally comes from the masterplan for the site. The co-financing of the MP4 project has helped the municipality to stick to this plan.

In relation to Overall Objectives 5 and 6, easy and safe connections and reducing inconveniences produced by highway, canal and railway were mentioned as objectives in the plan programme of the Transport axis Ghent-Bruges-Zeebrugge. A plan programme is made a stage earlier than any land development plan and it groups policies from different Flemish departments and administrations on the subject of countryside development. A plan programme is implemented on the field throughout different land development plans. Nieuwenhove – Gruuthuyse is one of such land development plans.



### Lessons learnt / implemented

- *A written contract with partners/stakeholders is a good principle for place-keeping. This works particularly well with private partners; place-keeping of public space is more problematic than private because municipalities change.*
- *Time is required for other principles and guidelines to emerge.*
- *VLM recognise that despite the fact that the organisation follows the place-keeping principles 'naturally', it would be good to have a written policy on place-keeping.*



## 5. *Evaluation*

Though a set of objectives, actions, indicators and measures were identified for the overall project in the early stages of MP4 (as was done for all pilot projects across MP4), there was no formal evaluation strategy for any of the 3 projects in and around Oostkamp. This results partly from the fact that there has been no legal obligation to carry out an evaluation, but more importantly it results from the fact that this process is new to VLM. (VLM do not typically get involved in urban projects such as Oostcampus. VLM projects tend to be set in rural or semi-rural areas and thus do not require evaluation of the kind that might have been useful in Oostkamp). There was no cost budget to allow for it. No baseline information was gathered for any of the projects, nor was there any establishment of indicators, and there is no intention to carry out any evaluation of the projects in the future.

However, feedback collected on an informal basis shows that the new Oostcampus space is very positively perceived by shop keepers and the school principal; this has evolved over time and has not always been as positive. The involvement of local school children in the creation of two crate monuments (north and adjacent to the shopping strip) is perceived to be a very positive outcome of the project.

In addition, figures for some of the indicators identified in the early stages of MP4 were collected by VLM and reported on in the regular critical reports, such as the number of people reached by a survey, number of public meetings held, etc. But data for such indicators were not consistently collected across all 3 pilot projects and there was no baseline or benchmark.

### Lessons learnt / implemented

Lessons learnt from MP4 include the potential use of sociotop mapping and rec mapping as evaluation tools. VLM also employs traffic surveyors who could be deployed to evaluate traffic on the Oostcampus site. Additionally, VLM staff consider probing residents' satisfaction with the new site as well as keeping the record of the number of events organised in the new space. The VLM project manager expressed a preference for collecting qualitative evidence as quantitative measurement could only be limited.

## Critical appraisal of the pilot project

There are two elements in this critical appraisal:

Firstly, actions that were planned in the initial stages of the project are compared with the actions that were actually completed throughout the life of the project. This gives an indication of the extent to which the project has been successfully implemented.

Secondly, the project's aims and objectives are examined against information collected via the critical reports and the evaluation visit/workshop.

### A. Have actions planned at the beginning of the project been carried out?

In the early stages of the MP4 project VLM identified a series of actions in order to achieve the aims and objectives set out earlier in this report. These actions were undertaken to varying degrees, as follows:

1. *Make an inquiry among the people of Nieuwenhove and Oostkamp about the wishes they have for improvements in the public and private open spaces.* A survey was undertaken for the redesign of Cardijn Square, as well as two public meetings (with 70 attendees in total) for this particular project. 101 improvements were suggested in response to the survey. In Oostkamp, local shopkeepers and the neighbouring school were consulted on parts of the project but no public consultation as such has taken place. The public have been informed by the Council via an exhibition in a local library and via the Council's website.
2. *Discuss with these people about how they want to improve these spaces, thus creating ownership of the improvements.* As described in detail on page earlier, VLM has been successful in installing a sense of ownership among the citizens living in proximity of Cardijn Square. As for the Oostcampus site, project leaders anticipate that the sense of ownership among the citizens will grow gradually once they start using the open space.
3. *Make a land development plan, incorporating the different investments and partnerships.* This was initiated during the MP4 project period, but is still at a draft stage.
4. *Make an integrated forest management plan for different private and public areas which incorporates the wishes of the owners, the international protection and the wishes of possible users.* This was initiated during the MP4 project period, but is still at a draft stage.
5. *Public participation in the maintenance of private spaces, according to the integrated forest management plan.* This has not yet happened as the forest management plan has not been finalised. VLM staff expressed their concerns with regards to how

realistic it is to achieve this objective. The key issue is that the dominant attitude to the maintenance of public spaces is such that it is the municipality's role to maintain such areas.

6. *Discuss with the companies within OostCampus in order to make them improve the place making and place keeping aspects of their own space neighbouring the new administrative centre.* This was fully achieved for place-making, with private shop owners contributing financially to the capital works. They will remain responsible for place-keeping of the spaces under their ownership.

## **B. To what extent has the project been successful in achieving its aims and objectives?**

Each of the 3 projects was reviewed by HWU with representatives from VLM, considering the 6 project aims and objectives:

### **B1. LAND DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

1. *Obtain an integrated way of managing the open spaces, corresponding to the international protection of the area, to the satisfaction of individual landowners, and to the public, reducing in that way conflicts.* Around Oostkamp there are some private castle owners (old nobility) who have large properties. If the local authority wants to realise bicycle and other connections through the project area, those private lands need to be crossed. VLM's experience is that private castle owners do not allow any crossing over their properties, even if this were to take place at the borders of their property. They do not want to sell small parts of their property either. 43% of the forest in the land development plan is in private ownership. Owners of 5% agreed to cooperate with VLM but owners of 38% have so far refused to cooperate. This objective was therefore only partially achieved.
2. *Make the private parks more accessible to the public.* Partially achieved only owing to difficulties of negotiating public access through private land.
3. *Create a sense of "ownership" among users of the open spaces.* Not yet achieved.
4. *To create easy and safe connections for bicycles and pedestrians between different green areas.* At the time of writing sections of these connections had been identified, but the exact location of complete routes was yet to be established. There were many problems in finding good connections not crossing private land.
5. *To reduce the inconveniences produced by the E40 highway, the railway and the canal.* This was partially realised. There is a proposed connection to the railway station planned. The costs of creating links proved to be prohibitive – e.g. tunneling. Connections might be improved in future owing to a proposed plan to renew part of a main road section offering an opportunity to integrate foot bridges and provide safe road crossings etc.

## B2. CARDIJN SQUARE

1. *Make the private parks more accessible to the public.* Public access improved owing to removal of ball games area and relocation of bus stop.
2. *Create a sense of “ownership” among users of the open spaces.* Sense of ownership should arise as a result of the public consultation.

## B3. OOSTCAMPUS

1. *Change the industrial destination of the Oostcampus site towards a public green destination.* This will positively change owing to the highly innovative design for the Civic Centre with new access routes to the centre of Oostkamp. A major change over time is a positive shift in perceptions of the shop keepers and the school principal about the benefits of the project. The project will substantially improve the appearance of the derelict industrial site.
2. *Make the site accessible to the public.*

An area of private industrial land, the area was not previously publicly accessible. Public access to the new civic centre is provided by a network of new cycle routes (to and through building) and pathways linking the centre to the local school and neighbouring facilities. The site will be accessible most of the time although a gate to the shopping strip (locked only at night) will restrict 24/day cycle-pedestrian access.

3. *Create a sense of “ownership” among users of the open spaces.*

The Council-led approach to place-making meant that the sense of ownership could not be engendered at the design stage. It is anticipated ownership will increase, particularly amongst those local school children (and their families) participating in the crate sculptures for the square, and from local shop owners owing to their financial investment towards planting and fencing of the site. It is hoped this involvement will directly impact on place-keeping – e.g. it is hoped the space will encourage shop owners to keep their car park area more tidy. Over time, both the local school and shop owners have become more engaged with the project.

As for the residents of Oostkamp, it is anticipated that future events held in the new open space will drive the sense of ownership. Footfall to the new Civic Centre will increase over time, in turn increasing use and ownership of the public open space. It is not anticipated that citizens will become involved in the place-keeping of the new open space. This is due to two factors: (a) the dominant attitude among Belgians is that since they pay taxes already, the municipality should look after public spaces; (b) in Oostkamp most residents have large gardens which means that there is no personal incentive for them (in terms of health or well-being) to become involved in place-keeping of the new space.

4. *Convert OostCampus into a nice place to spend some time. To integrate the site, purchased by the municipality in its surroundings and to improve the place making and place keeping aspects of the surroundings.*

The public space will offer an attractive place to pass through and provides a series of attractive links to the new civic centre from nearby shops/businesses/schools. On completion, it will substantially improve the appearance of the once derelict factory and environs. At least initially, it is not envisaged as a space where people will sit or spend time, but the VLM Project Manager believes that citizens will gradually start using the space for recreation.

The school envisage using the space for outdoor activities. The provision of a new outdoor sports facility is anticipated to be a popular feature for young people in the neighbourhood. It is anticipated that the flexible nature of the design will allow the use activities to evolve over time.

The site was described by neighbouring shop owners as 'symbiotic' bringing together disparate elements together in the community. It is hoped the project will act as a catalyst for place-keeping in the nearby environs – i.e. that shop owners and local industry will improve current maintenance of adjacent open spaces .

5. *To create easy and safe connections for bicycles and pedestrians between different green areas.* Cycle and pedestrian access will be considerably improved to and from the new civic centre. This is perceived to be a substantial benefit of the project.

In summary, the pilot project in Flanders encompassed three pilot projects within it, only one of which was the direct recipient of MP4 material investment – Oostcampus, which was identified in the MP4 bid as the 'key challenge' of integrating an industrial estate into a green landscape and into community life. Given the focus of the material investment on Oostcampus, and the dependence of the other two pilot projects on other stakeholders' initiative and funding, VLM's efforts have been concentrated on Oostcampus, which is where its stated objectives have been most fully met. More comprehensive fulfilment of objectives in Oostcampus in terms of place-keeping will now require time after completion of the works. Achievement of objectives in relation to the Land Development Plan and Cardijn Square is lower due to the already mentioned external factors, though according to VLM progress is being made at a slower pace to achieve these objectives in the longer run as well.

## Recommendations and Outlook

From the evaluation of the experience of the pilot project(s) that VLM has engaged in, and from lessons drawn from elsewhere in MP4, several recommendations and potential ways forward can be identified, which can be grouped under the five cross-cutting themes of MP4.

### 1. Partnerships

1.1 Achieving involvement of landowners and other stakeholders in forming partnerships has proven difficult in preparation of the land development plan (and perhaps to a much lesser extent in Cardijn Square), and it was not a straightforward process in Oostcampus. However, in the latter the involvement of private partners has helped achieve objectives that would otherwise have been unachievable. The latter could be used by VLM as an example of what a partnership approach can achieve, stressing the economic benefits to the partner (e.g. the shopping strip owners at OostCampus should benefit from increased footfall and trade owing to improved access) when engaging with prospective partners in the land development plan and in other projects.

1.2 VLM's experience suggests that, in the context it operates in, formal written agreements between all partners are essential to ensure long term durability of private and public space (e.g. as in the agreement established at Oostcampus for the shopkeepers to maintain the new areas of planting in the car park).

### 2. Governance and engagement

2.1 VLM would benefit from varying the format of engagement with the public (e.g. smaller discussion groups versus large groups), as well as widening the scope for such engagement, as statutory requirements for this appear to be limited in Flanders if compared internationally, and thus opportunities for creation of wider 'buy-in' and ownership may otherwise be missed.

2.2 VLM should consider using simple communication techniques with stakeholders – e.g. use of image cards to illustrate the main principles of a proposal.

2.3 Careful phasing of engagement with public/stakeholders in plan preparation can contribute to a successful process.

### 3. Finance

3.1 Place-keeping should be made an integral part of the feasibility for a project, with cost-planning carried out at the early stages.

### 4. Policy

4.1 VLM should consider developing a written policy on place-keeping which would help communicate its stance externally as well as provide guidance internally.

4.2 Written contracts with partners/stakeholders is a good principle for place-keeping in the context in which VLM operates.

## 5. Evaluation

5.1 Budgets and time should be allocated to place-keeping evaluation at the project feasibility stage, with establishment of baseline indicators and measurement pre- and post-implementation.

5.2 A sound (quantitative and qualitative) evaluation of use and place-keeping of Oostcampus some time after the completion of works could help VLM evidence its case for future projects when dealing with funders and prospective partners.



## Glossary

**Agency of Nature and Forests (ANB):** government body that is in charge of the administration of nature and forests in Flanders.

**Engagement:** is a cross-cutting issue which describes successful models of working with communities and encouraging appropriate use. Engagement is an aspect of governance particularly relevant in forms of participatory governance and is intrinsic to the concept of 'governance' as defined below.

**Finance:** describes financial models for efficient long-term management.

**Governance:** relates to the relationship between and within government and non-governmental forces. The term implies wider participation in decision-making than representative democracy or other forms of government, recognising a wider range of actors other than the state, and allowing for varying governance contexts and processes.

**INBO:** government research institution for nature and forests in Flanders.

**Natuurpunt vzw:** an NGO which groups all the local nature associations throughout Flanders and is funded by its members and donations. It defends nature in all kinds of boards and political levels. It purchases land and carries out nature conservation activities. Converts those areas into more nature minded areas.

**Partnership:** is defined as agreed shared responsibility between public, private and community sectors. It is a relationship which, in this context, is normally formed between governmental and non-governmental sectors – i.e. it is a manifestation of governance relationships.

**'Place-keeping':** relates to maintaining the qualities and benefits – social, environmental and economic – of places through long-term management. The management required to maintain these qualities and benefits, the approach adopted and the timescale will depend on the 'place-making' aims, the available resources and the life span of the 'place'.

**'Place-making':** creating high quality places that people want to visit, experience and enjoy. It implies a people-centred approach which emphasises designing spaces that promote health, wellbeing and happiness. Such spaces engender a sense of belonging and connection for those who use them.

**Policy:** is discussed within the context of embedding best practice into spatial planning and other policy.

**Valuation:** describes the economic impacts of improvements to open spaces, but also relates to wider socio-economic and environmental benefits.

**Vlaamse Landmaatschappij (VLM):** Flemish Land Agency.

## Notes on this report

This report forms part of the output from MP4 Making Place Profitable – Public and Private Open Spaces, a project funded by the EU through its Interreg IVB North Sea Region programme 2007-2013. This report is based on qualitative methods including: documentary evidence (six-monthly critical reports, model agreement assessments), meetings with project staff (pre- and post-evaluation meetings on 16 and 17 May 2012), and site visit and workshop on 17 May 2012 with project staff from VLM – the site visit included the municipality of Oostkamp, the shop owners and the school, and the workshop included the municipality of Oostkamp, with observers from the MP4 partner in Emmen participating in both.

## Websites of the OostCampusproject:

<http://www.mp4-interreg.eu/page/23/Bruges-Torhout+Green+Infrastructure+project+.html>

<http://www.oostkamp.be/Nieuws - actueel - info/OostCampus#2009 ->

[Concept van architect Carlos Arroyo](#)