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14. The Grünmetropole

(Belgium – Dutch – German border region)

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1 Introduction

This observatory case analysis report presents the result of the analysis of the project 'Grünmetropole'. This project – implemented in the Belgian-Dutch-German border region in 2008 – aimed at rehabilitating the shared mining past of this region. The industrial mining past was of major influence in shaping the physical appearance and the social and cultural life in this region. Hence, the end of the mining industry in the second half of the 20th century created many challenges concerning the conversion of the region, which strongly resonate with heritage management issues. The Grünmetropole project aimed at addressing these issues. Its objectives were to renew the post-industrial landscape, to strengthen the common identity of the region, and to create a touristic impulse. This was done by implementing two touristic routes along relicts of the mining past, one for cars and one for bicycles, connecting 72 points of interest in the region.

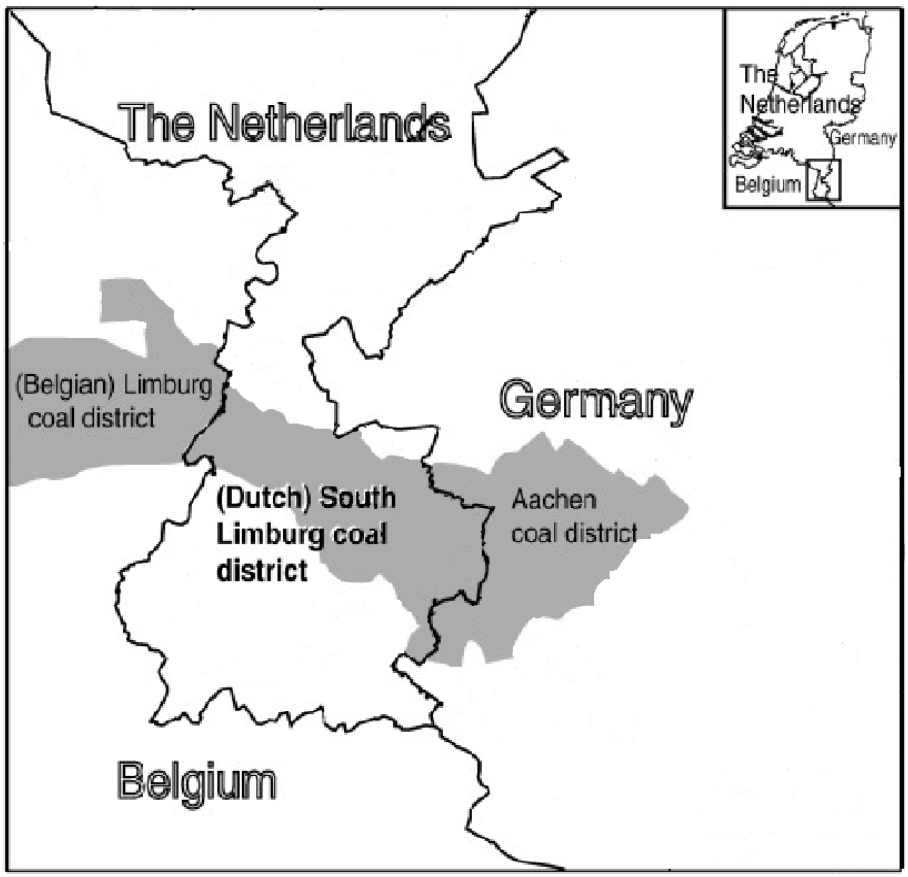
1.1 The area of the Grünmetropole

The area of the Grünmetropole stretches along a former coal basin, ranging from Beringen in Belgium, via Heerlen in the Netherlands, to Düren which is located in Germany (see Picture 2). It's an urban area consisting of about 2200 square kilometre and about 1.6 million inhabitants (Heinrichs et al., 2008), located in the centre of North-West Europe in between several other metropolitan areas: the Ruhr Metropolis in Germany, the Randstad region in the Netherlands and the Flemish cities (see Picture 1). It is a tri-national, cross-border area not corresponding to any legislative or governmental institution and without direct political power. Within the same region as the area of the Grünmetropole we also find the Meuse–Rhine Euroregion, and the Tri-Country Park. The Euroregion Meuse-Rhine is an Euroregion created in 1976, with judicial status achieved in 1991. This transnational co-operation structure between territories located in three different European countries is composed of the city-corridor of Aachen–Maastricht–Hasselt–Liège (see Picture 1) and aims to promote cross-border cooperation around common and shared interests. The Tri-Country Park is the name of nature park in the tri-national, cross-border area which forms a connection to various other natural area's such as the Eifel Park, the Ardennes, and the natural region Campine. The area of the Grünmetropole is however slightly different in terms of size and location as it for example only covers a small part of the Euroregion.

Although the area of the Grünmetropole is divided by three national borders, it has a strong common denominator in the industrial mining past. The presence of a major coal basin triggered a long history of mining activities (see Picture 3). Hence, the area of the Grünmetropole has a shared economic and cultural history based on winning coal as a natural resource. Yet there are differences between the three countries.

Picture 1: The location of the Euroregion Meuse-Rhine in Europe.

Picture 2: The area of the Grünmetropole.



Picture 3: Coal field locations (in grey) in the southern part of the Netherlands and adjacent mining districts in Belgian Limburg and near Aachen (Germany), after Van Bergen et al. (2007).

1.2 Conversion and restructuring

The decrease of coal exploitation, which started in the 1970s, meant de-industrialization, unemployment, and again changed the socio-demographic characteristics of the region. The mining regions faced a difficult physical and environmental legacy in the form of unused mining shafts and buildings, and polluted coal heaps. The mining regions in all three countries, once more faced enormous challenges to their economic, social and environmental future. A process of conversion and restructuring set in. Here again we can identify differences and similarities in the three countries with regard to the process of conversion and restructuring.

The Netherlands

In the Netherlands, the decision to close the mines was taken in 1965. The Dutch mining region in the southern part of the province of Limburg was characterized at that time by a pronounced monoculture in the form of the mining industry. The social consequences of the decision to close the mines upon those directly affected and upon the region can thus not be ignored (Toonen, 1972). Yet, since the mines were largely state owned, it was up to the Dutch government to decide about the mines, and they decided to adopt a policy aimed at closing all the mines as rapidly as possible. The reconversion policy, as outlined in Dutch government documents focused on several aspects (for an overview see also Toonen, 1972). Focusing on for instance economic measures related to retraining for miners, and measures for encouraging the establishment of substitute employment (Kasper et al., 2013). Economic conversion was done by transforming the Dutch state mines into a large chemical enterprise (DSM, net sales 8.6 billion euros in 2017) (Hassink et al., 1995). Despite this focus on economic conversion, the former mining region has had struggles in terms of unemployment until several decades after the closing of the mines (Kasper et al., 2013).

A second pillar of the conversion measures focused on branding the region in order to attract new employees and to keep workers and citizens in the region. For this goal a close cooperation between various governmental bodies, such as municipalities, and other organizations such as the Limburg Investment and Development Fund (LIOF), was set up. Also with regard to the physical environment and the relicts of the mining industry, the conversion policy has had a major impact. On the one hand new industrial landscapes (for example for the DSM enterprise) were laid out, and new infrastructure was constructed in the form of regional roads, and highways (Kasper et al., 2013; Toonen, 1972). On the other hand, the industrial landscapes that became obsolete after the closing of the mines were restructured and reallocated. This restructuring policy, often referred to as *'van zwart naar groen'* (black to green)- referring to the transition from dusty black mining relicts, to a green park-like setting, post-industrial landscape - resulted in the destruction of many landmarks referring to the mining past. In fact, this happened with striking speed, and nearly all references to the extraction of coal were removed from the landscape. As an example, the last coal mine, i.e. the *Oranje-Nassau I*, ceased production in 1974 and already in 1978 there was not a single place left where one could come across a coherent whole of slag heaps,

mine structures and miners' cottages (van Veldhoven, 2015). Dutch reconversion policy and practice thus aimed at removing the obsolete mining landscape and transforming it into a post-mining landscape. The strong focus on physical reconversion however meant that other aspect did not get full attention, in particular social aspects and the recognition of industrial heritage.

With regard to the social aspects, it should be noted that miners who lost their jobs also lost status in society. Their self-esteem deteriorated, and social isolation occurred—the mines were no longer guiding the social infrastructure of society (Kasper, 2012). Together with the upcoming secularization, the closing of the mines caused insecurity among the miners and unrest in families (Kasper, 2012). Moreover, the large-scale demolishment of mining relicts did also lead to the situation that former miners felt deceived; they saw and felt their world collapse around them (GM13: former miner, 2019; van Veldhoven, 2015). This frustration can still be noted at present day: "The Dutch government is not interested in Limburg's most southern region and this region itself is characterized by the perils of village politics, this doesn't help for taking care of heritage. This also differs from Belgium where they treat the past with respects and accordingly look after their heritage" (GM13: former miner, 2019). With regard to the heritage management policy were this interviewee refers to, it should however be noted that at the time of the closing of the mines, the public opinion about mining heritage was rather negative. Many of the former miners suffered from severe forms of silicosis, felt deceived, and their status had evaporated. At that time, due to the social trauma of the closures of the mines, there seemed to be first and foremost a 'need to forget' as van Veldhoven (2015) calls it. This is underlined by a guide from the Dutch mining museum:

> *"One wanted to demolish all objects that reminded of the mining period, this was called 'van zwart naar groen', only later on, one started to reject this since everything was gone"* (GM15: guide museum, 2019).

Only from the 1990s onwards, public opinion changed as people once again started to show interest in the mining past and related heritage. At that time, also heritage organizations started to recognize industrial heritage (van Veldhoven, 2015).

In Belgium, the mining industry had been the central, and until after the 1945, the only industrial sector of any significance in the Flemish Province of Limburg. Since this mining industry was dominated by Walloon capital - both in terms of investment capital flows and destination of coal production – there was almost no regional capitalist-entrepreneurial tradition in this region (Swyngedouw, 1996). Already during the 1950's the mining industry showed signs of stagnation and new industry – notably Ford and Philips- were attracted to generate new employment opportunities. Yet, by the time the closure was announced, 17000 miners were still employed in the sector, while the region was suffering from higher than average unemployment (Hassink et al., 1995). Therefore, together with the closure, the national state decided to initiate the most gigantic project of urban and regional development ever undertaken in Belgium (van den Panhuyzen, 1989). The state embarked 100b Belgian Francs (about 2.5b euros) for both redundancy payments and to support and co-finance investment in the socio-economic and spatial reconversion and restructuring of the region (Swyngedouw, 1996). The reconversion plans were outlined in a document called 'Future contract

for Limburg' (*Toekomstcontract voor Limburg)* aiming at the production of a new region, based on erasing the old physical landscape, the socio-cultural fabric and the mental image of the region and the construction of a new urban landscape (Swyngedouw, 1996; Vlaamse Overheid, 1987).

Next to the focus on creating a new labour profile, there was thus also a strong tendency to get rid of the mining landscape. This strong focus on creating a new urban landscape is underlined by one of the interviewees: "In this region however, everything had to disappear, because one thought that these buildings were negative reminders of a negative past" (GM21: tour guide, 2019). The large-scale demolition works however also lead to protests from heritage organizations and from local citizens, herewith illustrating the love-hate relationship with the mining past. An example of the city of Eisden:

> *"Here in Eisden, there were 56 buildings from the mining period on one site. Almost nothing is left now. We made plans for the protection of this former mining site, we even protested, but without much success. Even former miners came to us, asking us what we were doing. They told us to get rid of all the buildings because it reminded them of a very negative, unhealthy past. But as soon as they started to demolish things, the same persons came to us, worried about the scale of the demolition works. This shows the love-hate relationship; the mining past is not a romantic story"* (GM21: tour guide, 2019)

Amongst other reasons (such as financial scandals) these protest led to the establishment of a new conversion agency for the Flemish Province of Limburg. This, so called LRM (*Limburgse Reconversiemaatschapij)* then became responsible for the remaining buildings and relicts from the mining period. Also citizens started to organize themselves as they established local associations for the protection of the mining buildings and relicts. It was at this time that people started to see the value of these buildings and even started to see it as potential heritage objects (Delarbre et al., 2009; van Veldhoven, 2015). Focus then shifted towards protection of the still remaining mining buildings. Redevelopment and re-use of these buildings by giving them a new function (e.g. for tourism or living) has been done more and more over the past decades. Although these redevelopment are (financially) supported by the conversion agency LRM, it are still very expensive, complicated processes (Delarbre et al., 2009). Mainly because there is a lack of support and of financial means:

> *"Dealing with mining heritage is not easy, no one is supporting you and there are no funds, this is not like taking care of castles. You never get support for this"* (GM21: tour guide, 2019).

In short, the story of the physical conversion of the mining landscape in Belgium is a dynamic one. At first a policy focusing on demolishment was initiated, but citizens and politicians then started to embrace their once denied mining past as they started to protect and redevelop former mining buildings.

Germany

Conversion of the mining landscapes in Germany took place more gradually, meaning that time was taken in order to think about a post-mining economy and landscape (Soete et al., 2000). Conversion in the former mining district in the region Aachen, aimed at creating industries related to technological expertise. Indeed, Aachen is building its conversion on the presence of one of the largest European technical universities which already led to the establishment of hundreds of small engineering and consultancy firms (Hassink et al., 1995). Besides, a strong focus was put on the establishment of research- and consultancy firm in the domain of energy and sustainability. In the German city of Jüllich for example, a technology park was founded with the support of the German government which funded this technology park for about 90% (Soete et al., 2000).

Next to the economic conversion, the physical conversion of the mining landscape was quite impactful in Germany. In fact, alike the Netherlands, in the former mining district in the region Aachenhardly any of the industrial buildings such as offices, cooling towers, coal bunkers, washing plants and so forth have been preserved (van Veldhoven, 2015). The city landscape of the town of Alsdorf (Germany) still shows the reminders of this conversion policy. For over decades, the cityscape of Alsdorf has been dominated by the mines which were located in the hearth of the town. Hence, the town depended on its mining industry. In 1992 however, it was announced that mines had to close in Alsdorf as well. At that time, a large conversion plan was set up which focused on the demolishment of the mining buildings. Accordingly, the large mining complex in the town's middle has been demolished and for the largest part transferred into an urban green park in the period 1992-1995 (GM14: guide museum, 2019; Heinrichs et al., 2008). Some buildings remained and serve as a landmark nowadays (e.g. the water tower, and the shaft tower), whereas some other buildings are re-used as new functions are added (e.g. a high school and a museum). Most parts have however been demolished leaving a wide open area. Some parts of this area then were transformed into for example a residential area or a shopping centre, but the largest part was transformed into an urban green park (Heinrichs et al., 2008). Also in Alsdorf, a link was made with the post-mining story related to technological expertise and energy. The museum focuses for example on 'experiencing energy', and throughout the park a so called 'W*eg der Energie'* can be followed, which leads you along various stops which inform you about energy and technology (GM14: guide museum, 2019).

In all three countries the removal of these industrial activities left marks in the three countries' history. Besides, for a long time, the heritage of the mining era was not recognized. In The Netherlands, most explicit mining relicts (such as the shafts) were demolished and are not visible anymore in today's landscape. In Germany, closed mining areas were partly demolished and partly kept as natural and historical monuments. In Belgium, the policies aimed at erasing most relicts of the mining past were only partly implemented, and many relicts remained intact though severely deteriorated. Thus, all three mining regions have followed a different conversion process. But despite these differences, many scars of the industrial past still characterize todays' cultural landscape of the region.

2 The Grünmetropole-project

The area of the Grünmetropole is thus characterized by a common denominator of the industrial past and the mining activities shaped the physical landscape in the region. Mining industry in this region however has a dynamic history of industrial production, decline, and reconversion. Indeed, the removal and reconversion of these industrial sites left marks in the three countries' history and moreover the scars of the industrial in many cases still characterize the present-day landscape. Only more recently mining heritage started to be recognized (as explained above). Public opinion changed as people once again started to show interest in the mining past and related heritage. One interviewee states:

> *"First people used to see the mining past as a negative history, but at the same time it is just part of our collective memory"* (GM21: tour guide, 2019).

This is further explained by a Dutch municipal policy officer who explains:

> *"There is now a generation who is not familiar with the region's mining past, but who is nevertheless looking for their roots in order to understand developments in their living environment"* (GM3: policy officer, 2019).

Also (local) heritage organization started to recognize industrial heritage, listed them as classified buildings, or made plans for redevelopment of these former mining buildings. These redevelopments were linked to other domains like tourism, leisure, living, nature development, or shopping (GM19: policy officer, 2019).

It is against this backdrop that the Grünmetropole project was conceived. Aiming at rehabilitating mining heritage by connecting local projects and mining relicts with touristic routes. The Grünmetropole as a project followed from a German regional initiative called "EuRegionale 2008". The Grünmetropole was a flagship design project within the EuRegionale 2008s' track "Conversion of former industrial landscapes".

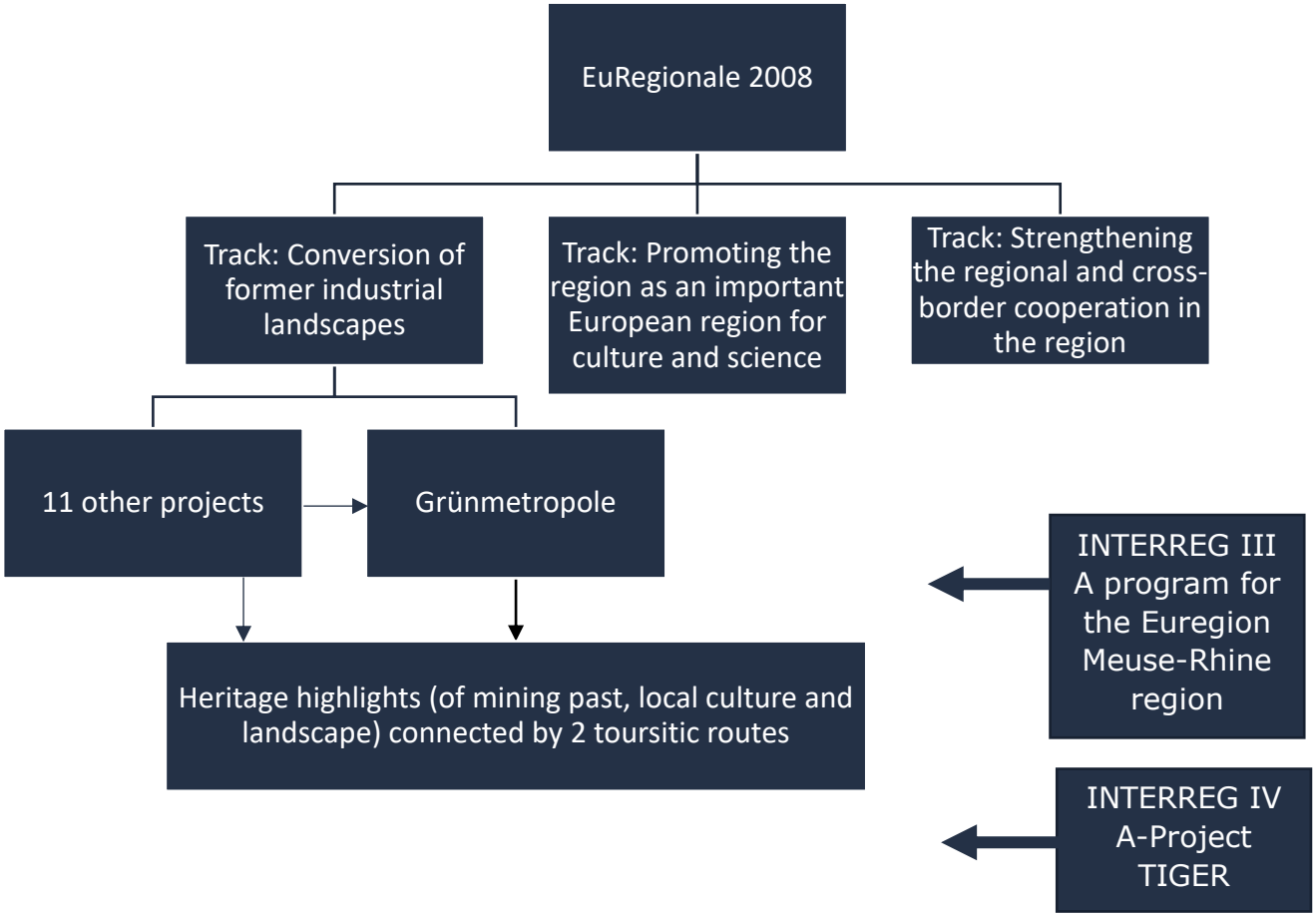
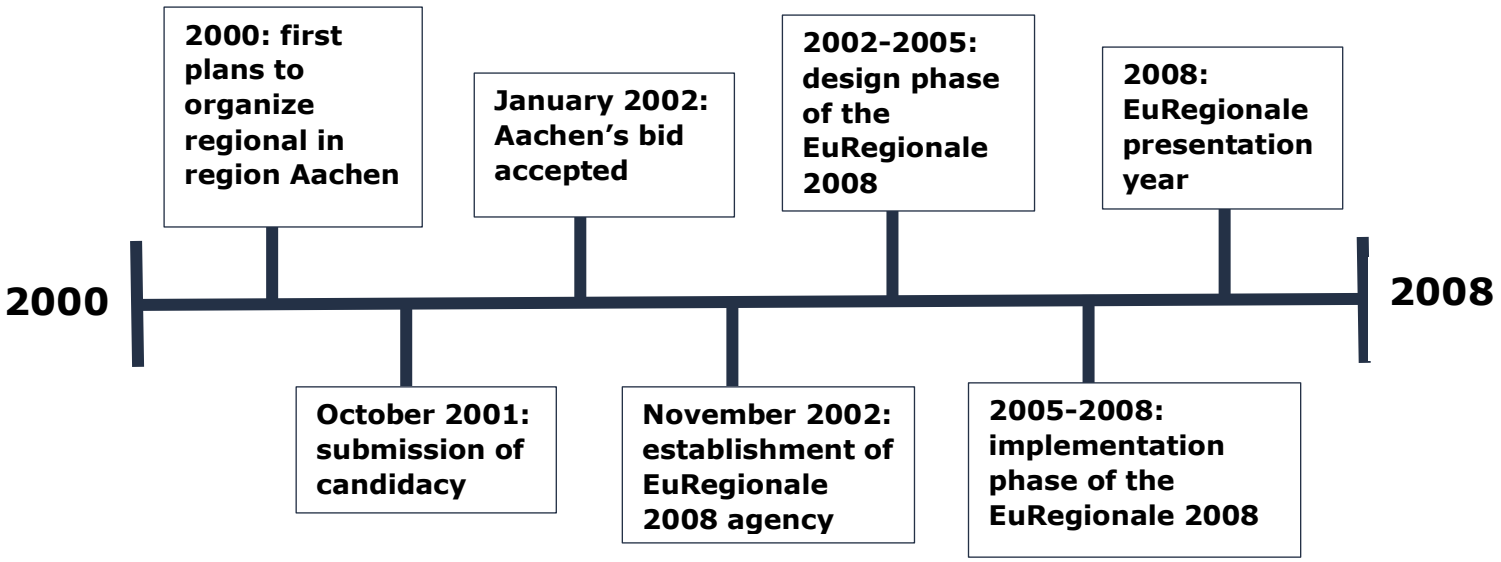


Table 1: overview of the relation between various aspects of the set-up of the Grünmetropole project

2.1 *Die EuRegionale 2008 – Grenzen Überschreiten*

In order to explain the origin of the project the Grünmetropole, the concept of the '*Regionale'* and more specifically the 2008 EuRegionale project needs to be explained first. The Regionale is a design instrument used by the German federal state North-Rhine-Westphalia. North-Rhine-Westphalia is a state in western Germany covering an area of 34,084 square kilometres. This state – the most densely populated state of Germany – is divided into 31 districts (*Kreise)* and 23 urban districts (*kreisfreie Städte*). The Regionale is a tool for regional development initiated by the state. The Regionale can be seen as a design instrument that aims at co-operation between various stakeholders, such as districts and municipalities (Dembski, 2006), hereby focusing on one or several (urban) district. Although the Regionale is (financially) supported by the state government, it is up to the region (i.e. district(s)) and the regional governments to co-operate in order to implement the Regionale (Dembski, 2006). Moreover, the design instrument is used to strengthen the identity of a certain region (i.e. one or several (urban) district) and to promote the region to the outside world (Dembski, 2006; Kuss et al., 2010). The outcome of the Regionale was the development of various projects focusing on topics such as landscape, heritage, tourism, and culture. The first Regionale was organized in 2000 and from then on organized bi-annually.



Picture 4: timeline of the set-up of the 2008 EuRegionale, after (Vos & Gottschalk, 2009).

2.2 Track: Conversion of former industrial landscapes

One of the three tracks within the EuRegionale 2008 was 'conversion of former industrial landscapes'. A track aiming at using the German-Dutch-Belgian border

region's industrial past as a driver for future development, mainly by linking industrial heritage to tourism. It is within this EuRegionale-track that the project Grünmetropole was developed and implemented.

The design process of the EuRegionale projects took from 2002 to 2005, already during this design process a strong focus was put on historical links in the cross-border region. In 2002 for example, a Aachen-based' foundation called *Kathy Beys* for instance already proposed to link elements of the industrial past in order to use them as a resource for the future (Vos & Gottschalk, 2009). The *Kathy Beys* foundation has supported the EuRegionale and the development of the Grünmetropole throughout the years that followed (till 2008). Within the track conversion of former industrial landscapes, a call for projects, called *Industrielle Folgelandschaft,* was launched in January 2004. The design teams taking part in this competition were encouraged to take into account various aspect related to cross-border cooperation in order to enhance the profile of the German-Dutch-Belgian border region. Eight international teams of architects and designers took part in the design competition.

An international team under the direction of the French landscape architect Henri Bava (in corporation with other designers: Alex Wall, Stephen Craig and Erik Behrens) also took part in this design competition and proposed a design masterplan title "Grünmetropole" (Heinrichs et al., 2008). At the end of 2004, the design plans were reviewed by the EuRegionale agency and the concept of a "Grünmetropole" was selected as winner of this design competition. This was followed by the presentation of the design masterplan in spring 2005 (Vos & Gottschalk, 2009).

In this same period of time (2005-2008), supporting organizations and finance had to be found in order to implement the Grünmetropole design. With regard to the latter, half of the needed resources (3.8 million euros) came from the participating stakeholders[1], such as municipalities, and from the EuRegionale 2008 agency itself which in turn was funded by the German federal state North-Rhine-Westphalia. Besides, funding came available by linking the Grünmetropole project to an existing INTERREG-program. This INTERREG-program, called 'INTERREG III A program for the Euregion Meuse-Rhine region', focused on the development of cross-border cooperation between Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands. Application for this INTERREG-program, which run in the period 2000-2006, was done by the 'Stichting Euregio Maas-Rijn', a foundation based in Maastricht. Within this INTERREG-program, the European Commission co-financed projects with a structural funds assistance of a total budget of 211 million euros[2]. One subproject within this INTERREG-program was called *Industrielle Folgelandschaft* (conversion of former industrial landscapes). It is within this subproject that the Grünmetropole-project, as well as one other project called *Pays des Terrils* (a project in the former mining region in the Belgian Walloon region, focusing on ecological research, and conversion of the coal mines' spoil heaps by transforming

[1] A participating small municipality, like the municipality of As, for example had to contribute about 12.000 euros for placing of signs and one information panel at the train station in the city of As (Het Nieuwsblad/Limburg, 2008).

[2] https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/atlas/programmes/2000-2006/european/interreg-iii-a-euregio-meuse-rhine

them into a nature area), was funded. In total 3.8 million euros INTERREG-funding was made available for the Grünmetropole-project (Eibler et al., 2014; Vos & Gottschalk, 2009).

2.3 The project Grünmetropole

The concept of the Grünmetropole thus was the centerpiece of the track conversion of former industrial landscapes. Indeed the Grünmetropole concept fitted well into the overall concept of the EuRegionale 2008 to unify the region and create a new identity. This becomes apparent as we review and analyze the 2005' Grünmetropole masterplan (Bava et al., 2005). The Grünmetropole was intended to reframe the area as a sub-region with the Western-European network of metropolis (like Berlin and Paris). This sub-region would then be characterized by a combination of urban centers and nature and culture as connecting elements in-between urban areas. It was argued that such a framing as sub-region functioning as one entity would give the region a strong economic impulse, and would encourage closer cooperation among stakeholders (Bava et al., 2005). To underline the connectivity within the area of the Grünmetropole, the Master Plan identified three main goals (Bava et al., 2005):

- renewal of the landscape in order to give the region a socio-economic impulse;
- strengthen the common storyline and identity of the former mining area;
- creation of impulses for a touristic future by creating new touristic routes.

Although named differently, these goals are also mentioned by a Dutch policy officer:

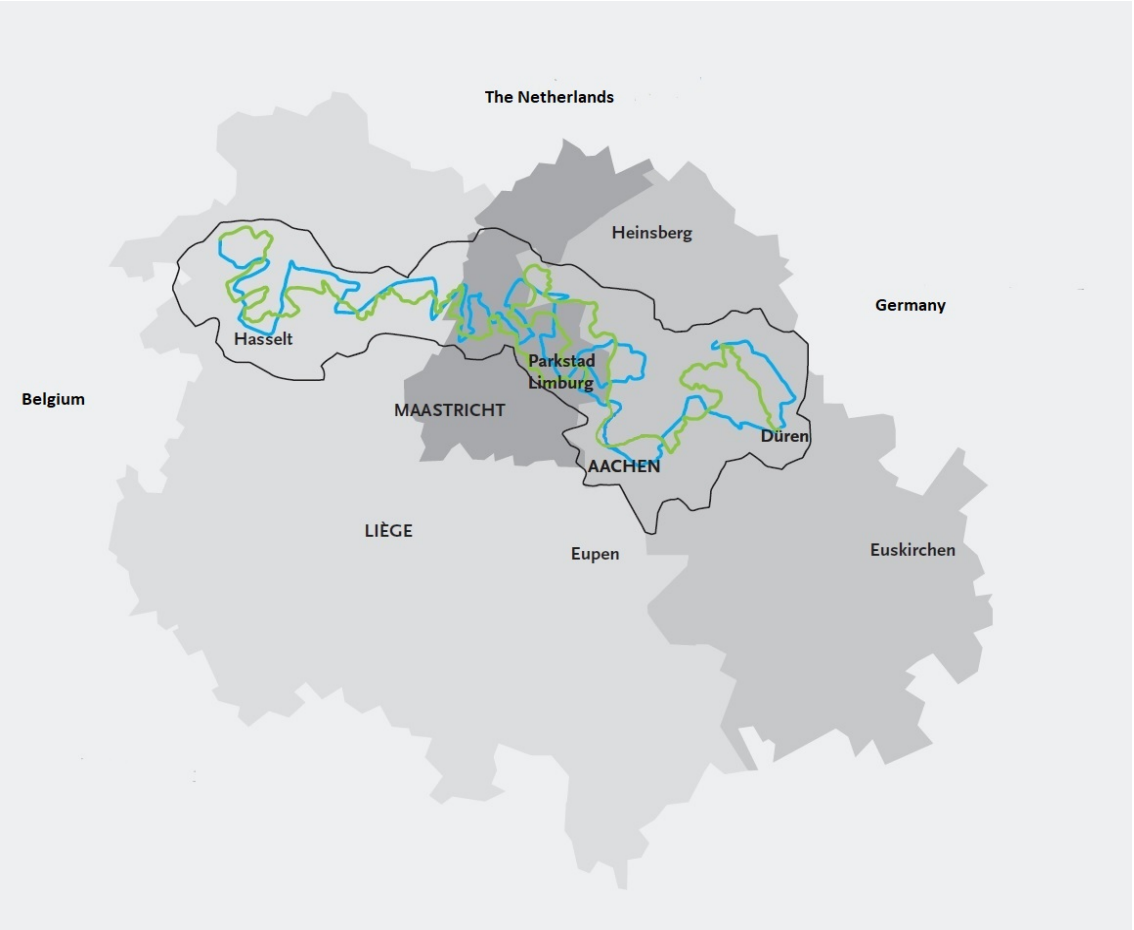
> *"The three main objectives of the Grünmetropole were: connecting people and places, to enhance a regional identity, and to stimulate tourism"* (GM2: policy officer, 2019).

He clarifies that this latter point was especially important. Moreover, the overall goals of the EuRegionale (cross-border cooperation), and of the track (conversion of former mining areas) were taken into account (Heinrichs et al., 2008). This is also underlined by one of the interviewees:

> *"The initial aim of this project was to present the mining history of the region, and to stimulate cross-border cooperation"* (GM1: tourist officer, 2019).

In order to reach these goals, two cross-border tourist routes through the landscape, and along the relicts of the mining past in the landscape were designed. These routes were designed to link the post-industrial landscapes in the German, Dutch and Belgian border region, and to encourage residents and tourists to explore the region (Bava et al., 2005). The two routes are: the 'Green Route' for cyclists and the 'Metropolisroute' for motorists (see map Picture 6). The Green Route takes cyclist through some of the natural areas of the region. The Metropolisroute focuses on the industrial heritage of the more urban areas. This route is set up for discovering the region by car. Both routes have a length of about 250 kilometres, and connect about 70 touristic highlights related to the mining

past, but also local culture and nature (Bava et al., 2005; Heinrichs et al., 2008; van der Heyden, 2008).



Picture 5: The two routes of the Grünmetropole: the 'Green Route' for cyclists (in Green) and the 'Metropolisroute' for motorists (in blue) in the area of the Grünmetropole (after Vos and Gottschalk (2009)).

Both routes were designed as part of a umbrella structure called 'Urban DNA' which was designed to form a green equivalent of metropolis in Europe. A clear defined and promoted 'Urban DNA', it was argued, would also help to strengthen the identity of the region (Bava et al., 2005; Heinrichs et al., 2008) making the region 'more readable'. The Master Plan defined six main elements of this 'Urban DNA': 1) the cities, 2) natural and rural areas, 3) the former spoils heaps of the coal mines, 4) the neighborhoods were the miners used to live, 5) the former mining shafts and other industrial buildings, and 6) other landscape features which are linked to the mining past (Bava et al., 2005). For all these six elements of the 'Urban DNA' specific development goals were identified in line with the overall objectives of the Grünmetropole plan.

Part of the design was to connect about 70 touristic highlights related to the mining past, but also local culture and nature, to the two designed routes (for an overview of all projects which were connected to the routes see **Error! Reference source**

not found. in **Error! Reference source not found.**, and see van der Heyden (2008)). These highlights include some of the other projects within the track conversion of former industrial landscapes such as the aforementioned project Wormdal, which is about nature and tourism. Besides, also former mining sites, cities, nature areas, former miner's neighbourhoods and so on and so forth were mentioned as a stop on the routes. Selection of these stops was initially done by the designers (see the masterplan: Bava et al., 2005), but these stops have been adjusted during the implementation phase of the Grünmetropole (2005-2008). One interviewee explains:

> *"Initially, the points of interest were chosen in such a way that they represented the mining history. Later on they added also different locations, but initially it was focused on the mining history. However, because some entrepreneurs along the route complained that only some locations were selected, they changed their mind, and some other locations were added"* (GM1: tourist officer, 2019).

In order to implement the Grünmetropole, chosen as the winner of the design competition in 2005, an organizational structure was set up. A working group led by the EuRegionale 2008 Agency, and in the case of the Grünmetropole more precisely Kreis Aachen, Parkstad Limburg/NL en Toerisme Limburg/B, held regular meeting with the 25 organizations involved in the Grünmetropole project (among other district governments, municipalities, and tourist organizations) to ensure concrete implementation. This working group for instance assisted in the search for locations for information panels and routing signage, application for permits, distribution of information leaflets etc. (Eibler et al., 2014; Vos & Gottschalk, 2009). It is also noted in the Master Plan that all interested stakeholders in the region could have their say in order to make the Grünmetropole effective in terms of cooperation and development in the region (Bava et al., 2005). The roles of the various stakeholders however varied, ranging from designing and implementing the routes, to an advisory role to reflect on the designed routes. One interviewee who works at a Dutch touristic organization explains:

> *"Selecting stops along a route was done in cooperation with municipalities and other organizations. They asked us to think about potential locations, so called 'points of interest', but not for designing the routes. Besides, we could made proposals, like did you consider this, or this, or this? I think we just had an advisory role as organization at that time"* (GM1: tourist officer, 2019).

Also local (heritage) organizations had a supporting role in the design process:

> *"Local non-professional history clubs were asked to get involved in the Grünmetropole project. Those who did participate could then propose historic objects, landscapes, or sites that could be interesting to make them part of the Grünmetropole' touristic routes"* (GM2: policy officer, 2019).

This person however notes that these local history clubs only had a supporting role, they had no decisive say in the design phase of the project (GM2: policy officer, 2019). In short, although the local (heritage) organizations, entrepreneurs, and communities had only an advisory role, they were able to influence the

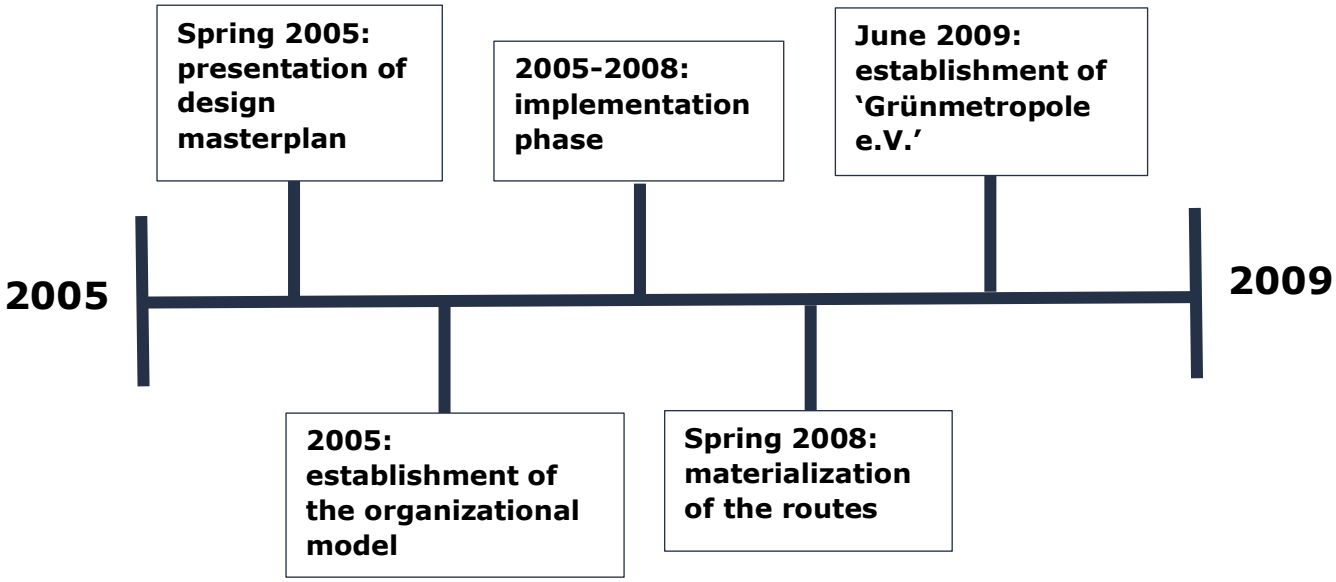
selection of points of interest, and there with the route design of the Grünmetropole (GM1: tourist officer, 2019; GM2: policy officer, 2019).

The resulting 70 touristic highlights were thus both selected by the designers of the Grünmetropole (see the masterplan: Bava et al., 2005), as well as by entrepreneurs, local (heritage) groups and citizens who were consulted on potential stops as well. Hence, there were some small differences between the initial design and the implemented project. The list of about 70 touristic stops along the Grünmetropole route is thus very divers, including sites related to former mining activities, nature areas, cities, but also shopping malls and even recreational sites like a theme park. 29 sites are located in the Netherlands, 23 sites in Germany and 20 sites in Belgium. We found 16 sites that are nature areas located on former industrial (and thus converted) landscapes, and 7 other nature areas that did not link to the mining history. We found 16 museums along the route, of which only 3 were directly related to the mining history. We found 7 heritage sites that did not link at all to the mining history, but were either a watermill, castle or abbey. We found 10 recreational sites with a commercial use (event center, wellness, sports facilities etc.), some of them located on former mining sites (such as a slope of a former spoil heap hosting a ski centre). We found 3 information points, of which 2 were linked to mining. We found 6 sites that were restaurant/pub/hotel, often located at a (non-mining related) heritage site. We found 4 social/cultural centers, and 3 city/shopping centers are listed. Of all these sites, we could only link 27 directly or indirectly to the mining history of the region (see for a full overview Appendix 3).

The link between these stops, the two routes, and the overall Grünmetropole project is thus often equivocal. Some projects, like the aforementioned project 'Wormdal' were part of the EuRegionale 2008 and for that reason linked to the Grünmetropole project by making it a stop on the routes. The development of these projects was directly linked to the Grünmetropole plan (Vos & Gottschalk, 2009). Other stops on the route were selected since local entrepreneurs for example proposed their location (e.g. a pub or recreational area) to become part of the Grünmetropole route. These stops were then listed as a stop and got a sign to put on their façade to indicate that this was a stop on the Grünmetropole route. Besides that, these stops (or projects/buildings) had no organizational, financial or thematic link with the Grünmetropole. This also accounts to some of the stops on former mining sites, who perhaps relate to the overall thematic focus of the Grünmetropole, but had no organizational or financial link to the project. Moreover, the conversion and redevelopment of many projects and places along the Grünmetropole route took place fully independently from the Grünmetropole project. The supervision by the EuRegionala 2008 Agency only related to the implementation of the route signage and information panels, and all, 25 cooperation organizations were each individually responsible for the final implementation(Bava et al., 2005).

Picture 7: Overview of the routes and some of the 'points of interest'' (Heinrichs et al., 2008).

The Grünmetropole project was implemented in spring 2008 by the placement of the route signage, information panels, and traffic signs (for a complete chronological overview see Picture). The "Metropolisroute' was opened in May 2008; the 'Green route' in June 2008 (Vos & Gottschalk, 2009)(see map Picture 6 and map **Error! Reference source not found.**). The routes only use existing roads, since this made it easier to design the route and it was more about creating a connection rather than designing roads (GM1: tourist officer, 2019; GM19: policy officer, 2019). Supporting information about the routes including maps were disturbed through existing touristic infrastructure like tourist offices in the region. Information leaflets and route maps were made available in different languages.



Picture 8: timeline of the set-up of the Grünmetropole project (two routes) after Vos and Gottschalk (2009)

After implementation yet another organizational model and funding scheme were set-up in order to keep information about the Grünmetropole routes available, and to further strengthen and promote the touristic services within the tri-national cross-border region, especially with regard to regional culture, industrial heritage and nature. The new organization, called 'Grünmetropole e.V.' was founded in June 2009 (Vos & Gottschalk, 2009). This organization aimed at maintenance and further development of the touristic routes in the region Aachen, including the Grünmetropole routes. 14 German organizations are part of 'Grünmetropole e.V.', mainly governments of cities in the region Aachen, as well as governments of the districts[3]. Funding for these activities was available because of yet another INTERREG-programme. This INTERREG-programme, called INTERREG IV A-Project TIGER (Touristic Valorisation of the cross-border European Region), aimed at enhancing the touristic profile of the German-Dutch-Belgian border region (Eibler et al., 2014). From 2008 till 2013 funding was available through this INTERREG-programme. For this INTERREG-programme, the organization 'Grünmetropole e.V.' cooperated with several other organizations namely: tourist office Zuid-Limburg (Netherlands), *Toerisme Limburg* (Belgium), Parkstad Limburg (i.e. a regional cooperative between 8 Dutch municipalities), and the *Féderation du Tourisme de la Province de Liège* (i.e. Belgian tourist office). Although these organizations were thus also involved in maintaining the Grünmetropole routes, it were mainly the German organizations (e.g. 'Grünmetropole e.V.') which put most effort in keeping the Grünmetropole routes up to date. One interviewee who works at the tourist office Zuid-Limburg, explains:

[3] https://www.gruenmetropole.eu/ueber_uns.html

> *"In Germany a better marketing strategy resulted in the situation that the Grünmetropole is still up to date there. In the Netherlands, we decided to only maintain the routes without further marketing. Belgium is comparable to the Netherlands, they do maintain the route, although they do not really know what this route is about"* (GM1: tourist officer, 2019).

It appears that the 'Grünmetropole e.V.' is not well known:

> *"It would be good if there would be an organization responsible for the Grünmetropole nowadays, but I have no idea who that could be"* (GM16: heritage officer, 2019).

A policy officer working at a Dutch municipality adds to this that maintenance of the Grünmetropole routes was dependent on funding:

> *"When funding stops, the project also stops, since no one is responsible any longer"* (GM3: policy officer, 2019)

and

> *"Maintenance is an issue. There is funding for just three of four years, and afterwards no money is available anymore"* (GM1: tourist officer, 2019).

Another person highlights the importance of political support:

> *"They made nice maps, and information leaflets, but there was no political support, thus not the projects' soul is absent"* (GM13: former miner, 2019).

Thus, although a special organization was set up in order to maintain the route, a lack of responsibility, funding, and political support resulted in degradation of the Grünmetropole routes. At present day both touristic routes are badly maintained and consequently barely used (GM1: tourist officer, 2019; GM11: tour guide, 2019; GM19: policy officer, 2019; GM21: tour guide, 2019).

> *"You can see that it is just barely used by cyclists, they choose either the existing cycling network (Knooppuntenroute), or a route that is better marketed. This route is marketed 10 years ago, so people just don't know about it: they see the signs but wonder what it is about"* (GM1: tourist officer, 2019).

Another person adds to this:

> *"I was surprised when I read that you are interested in the Grünmetropole, I didn't expect that anyone would still be interested in the Grünmetropole"* (GM21: tour guide, 2019).

OPEN HERITAGE

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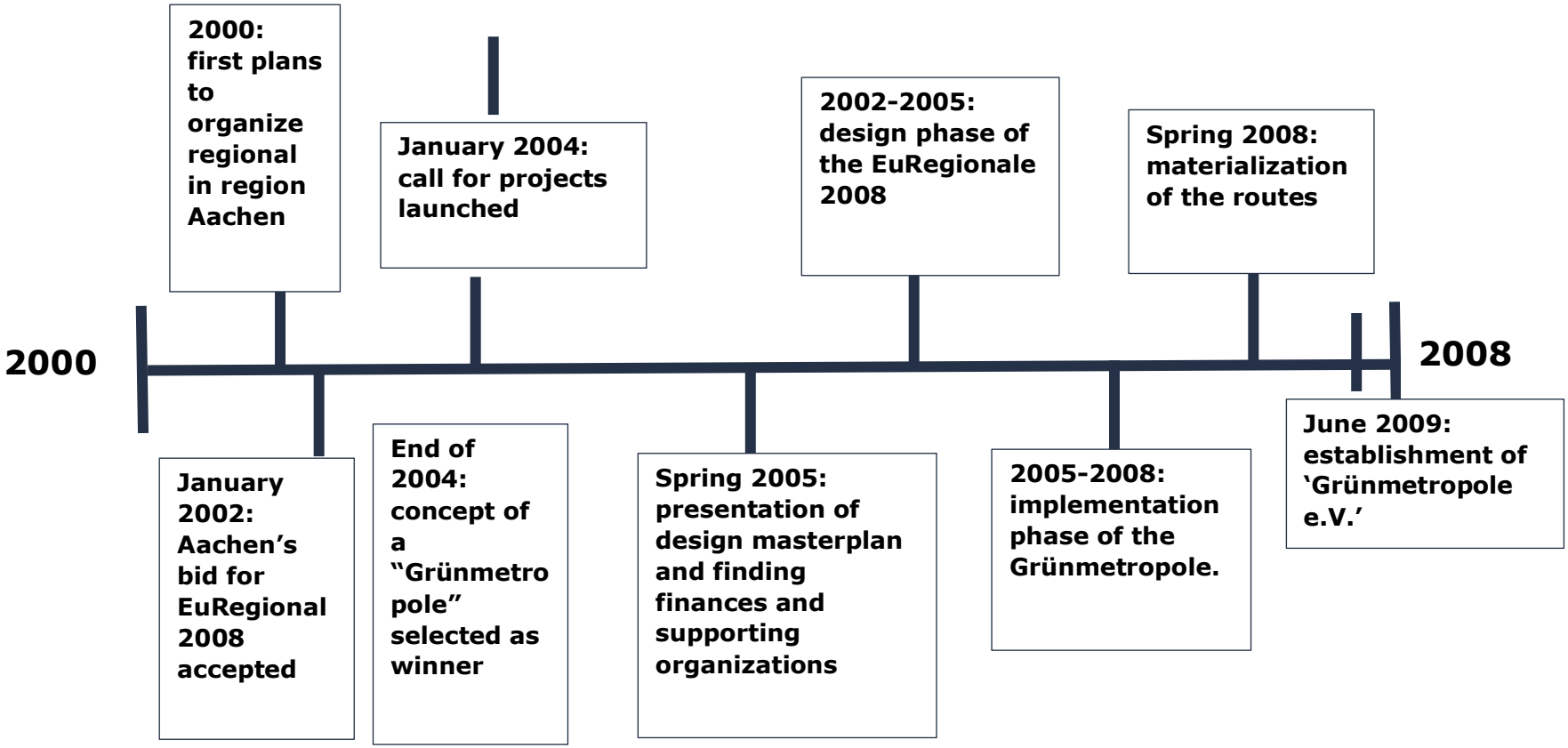

2.4 Example: Beringen

Part of the Grünmetropole design was the idea to connect about 70 touristic highlights related to the mining past to the two designed routes. These highlights were designed as a stop along the route, were tourists could stop to visit a site and to get more information. Selection of these stops was initially done by the designers (see the masterplan: Bava et al., 2005), but these stops have been adjusted during the implementation phase of the Grünmetropole as also entrepreneurs, local (heritage) groups and citizens shared their ideas for potential stops along the route. This resulted in a varied collection of touristic highlights. The list of about 70 touristic stops along the Grünmetropole route is thus very divers, these stops include sites related to former mining activities, nature areas, cities, but also shopping malls and even recreational sites like a theme park. The link between these stops, the two routes, and the overall Grünmetropole project is however equivocal. Many projects and places, including former mining sites, had no organizational or financial link with the Grünmetropole project besides that they were listed as a stop. The developments and heritage re-use processes on those projects and places thus took place independently from the Grünmetropole project. To explain especially this later group of stops, a closer look into the example of the city of Beringen (Belgium) is useful.

Picture 6: overview of the site in Beringen. The diving centre in the former sewage treatment plant can be seen in the front (picture made by author).

As a city, Beringen is inextricably linked to its mining past. In Beringen the mining past is still very present as the relicts of the former mining settlement have been preserved comprehensively. This means that next to the mining site itself (with the shafts, sewage plants, offices and so on) also the coal heap can be found, the former residential areas (i.e. a garden city), the former recreational buildings, churches, and other community buildings, and the properties of the different migrant worker communities such as a mosque, a clubhouse of the Polish community, and a Greek orthodox church, can still be seen in present day landscape (GM11: tour guide, 2019). Various of these sites are included as stop on the Grünmetropole route, this includes: the coal heap, the Flemish museum of mining which is housed in a former mining office building, and the former residential areas (i.e. a garden city) (van der Heyden, 2008). Since many of the mining relicts have been preserved, Beringen almost feels like an 'open-air museum' (Heinrichs et al., 2008). Indeed in Beringen, different from other Belgian cities, Beringen chose to focus on experiencing the mining past:

> *"At the time of the closing of the mines, people were stuck with these buildings, they were wondering what to do with them, in some cases, such as 'Zwartberg' (city of Genk, Belgium), they demolisshed everything. In some other cases they did 'beatiful things' with these buildings, for example in Eisden, where they opened a shopping mall on the former mining grounds. In other cases, they made different choises with regard to the re-use of these buildings, such as here in Beringen where we focus on 'mijnbeleving' (i.e. the mining experience)"* (GM11: tour guide, 2019).

This descision to protect the minin site of Beringen was made by the national government:

> *"It was a conscious decision by the Flemish government to protect at least one former mining site, as complete as possible. The decision was made in favor for Beringen, that is why you can read the story so clear here. Only a few years after the closure of the mines, the minister decided to protect as much as possible here in Beringen, this was in the year 1994"* (GM20: policy officer, 2019).

Although many mining relicts have been preserved, and Beringen feels like a museum, many developments took place, especially with regard to the mining site itself.

The mining site has been, and still is, being redeveloped, hereby partly re-using former mining buildings. The coal heap has for example been transformed into a, so called 'adventure park', which means that there is a playground, mountain bike trail, hiking trail, and viewing platform developed. The sewage treatment plant is for instance transformed in an aquarium with diving activities taking place (see Picture 6). One of the former offices has been transformed into the Flemish mining museum, and the former power plant has been transformed into an indoor climbing centre. Some other buildings, like the shaft towers, has been renovated and are preserved as a listed monument. Next, there are some new buildings added to the site, a couple of houses, a swimming pool, and a shopping mall are built on the site. Finally, there are also some buildings which have neither been renovated, nor been developed into a new function. Hence it is still unclear what will happen to

the coal washery complex on the site (GM10: heritage officer, 2019). Alike, there are plans for new developments, like building a mining experience centre, and a hotel (GM17: tourist officer, 2019; GM18: tourist officer, 2019).

The developments on the former mining site in Beringen are clustered under the name 'Be-Mine'. This developments on Be-Mine were however a

> *"difficult, complicated, and long lasting process"* (GM20: policy officer, 2019)

since the start. "When we started, there was even a kind of aversion against protection; one did not understand why the minister decided to protect so much here in Beringen. So people ignored it, and just weren't interested. This sentiment was there from the start, people thought, it is rather useless to protect all this, whose gone pay for this. So the lack of vision, the lack of interest, has always been there" (GM20: policy officer, 2019). First it was only the government who was responsible for the developments in Beringen. However, some other projects initiated by the government failed and consequently the government was hesitant to join. For a short period of time, the government relied on a private investor, but this also appeared to be unsuccessful.

> *"Then this lead to some new insights for the government; they couldn't just not care, but had to take a central role and had to take the responsibility. For a small scale municipality like Beringen, however, we didn't have the power, money, or ideas to develop this site or lead the redevelopment process. At a certain moment, the province, the municipality and the Flemish government came together and took their responsibilities to develop this site. A cooperation agreement was signed in 2009 and the Beringen project was recognized as a Flemish key development project. Then consistently more and more funding was available. Yet, the government realized that they needed private and commercial investors, so they had to allow functions like living, leisure and tourism. So they opted for a public-private-partnership, so that governmental funding's were doubled by private partners within this public-private-partnership. Then we had to find a private investor, to set up the 'Be-Mine-agency'. A consortium with the LRM (Investment company Limburg) and 2 private developers was founded and they developed a masterplan, and started to develop. The easiest parts were developed as first, than some opportunistic developments took place"* (GM20: policy officer, 2019).

Developments focused on various function as commercial developments were allowed on this site.

> *"When the minister started to protect this site in 1994, we decided to not transform this site into a museum, but we chose for a more mixed, urban, development including a museum. Yet, this was not the main function, it had to be more than just leisure and tourism. Therefore we decided to include also commercial functions, like shops, and room for living"* (GM20: policy officer, 2019).

However, this led to additional difficulties. The idea was that developing houses and commercial buildings would generate financial resources which in turn could

be invested in heritage re-use projects. This economic model however failed, since the houses appeared to be difficult to sell. So

> *"all in all it was a very difficult process, because people ignored it, governments who did first not cooperate, and because we were always searching for funds for a huge project like this"* (GM20: policy officer, 2019).

Moreover, it was a difficult process since an overall vision for the site lacked and the developer converted the site in a rather opportunistic way and developments depended on coincidence (GM19: policy officer, 2019):

> *"The development of the diving center is a good heritage re-use example. But this was by chance, two entrepreneurs came to the development company and told them that they wanted to develop such a diving center, they were looking for a location. Here was the perfect location for that. So this is very dependent on coincidence and some local entrepreneurs who want to develop something. The same goes for the climbing center, which was initiated by an enthusiastic hobby climber who looked for a suitable location, which appeared to be the former electricity factory. These are nice developments, which came here coincidently, but however fit well to the overall story"* (GM20: policy officer, 2019).

That's according to two policy officers of the municipality of Beringen also the main strength of the development process: that they didn't choose to focus on one function, but that various functions were allowed that fitted next to each other (GM19: policy officer, 2019; GM20: policy officer, 2019). Overall, it was a rather dynamic and adaptive process of development:

> *"The swimming pool was an important first development, it started to attract people again to this site. Then the shopping mall came here, the diving center, the climbing center; all pieces of this puzzle. It is a very dynamic growing process"* (GM20: policy officer, 2019).

The development process in Beringen is a good example of re-use

> *"since the existing infrastructure of buildings and objects is integrated in the re-use plans, and former mining buildings get a second live as new functions are added"* (GM11: tour guide, 2019).

At the same time, this interviewee however notes that there is still some potential with regard to this project as there are still some buildings left that need restauration works, or that need to get a new function. The interviewee explains that:

> *"There are still some buildings which need renovation. These restauration works however will need a serious investment. Thus the investment company needs to make a decision about the amount of money he can invest, versus the amount of cost of the restauration works. In some cases, demolishing an old building, and built something new will be more efficient, economically speaking. The investment company however needs to think about the heritage value of a certain object, and about the impact of a new building on a historical site"* (GM11: tour guide, 2019).

The developments on Be-Mine are not yet integrated in the broader urban context, so this is a challenge for the future (GM19: policy officer, 2019).

This section provided an overview of the development process in Beringen. As described in this section, the developments and heritage re-use processes in Beringen took place independently from the Grünmetropole project. This is also mentioned during the interviews:

> *"The Grünmetropole project didn't play a role at all in this process"*

and

> *"I don't think that the Grünmetropole project was a stimulator for further development in this region"* (GM20: policy officer, 2019).

3 Case evaluations

The mining past influenced the identity and physical landscape of the area of the Grünmetropole. The end of the mining industry brought challenges with regard to conversion policy and the relicts of the mining past. The Grünmetropole project aimed to contribute to a rehabilitation of this mining past by focusing on tourism and recreation. As part of the interviews and field work, we could construct an evaluation of the project Grünmetropole from the perspective of the stakeholders. The results of these evaluations are clustered around the themes "overall concept", "cross border cooperation", "activities" and "impact".

3.1 Grünmetropole concept

The concept of the Grünmetropole was to improve organizational connectivity within the region, and rehabilitate the mining past. A threefold goal was set up: renewal of the landscape, strengthening identity, and stimulating tourism and recreation (Bava et al., 2005). The selected goals as such seem to be valued by (at least several of the interviewed) stakeholders involved in the implementation of the project. One interviewee especially likes the idea to overcome cultural differences in the cross-border region:

> *"I appreciate the overall intentions of this project: to connect the region. In that regard it's a pity that the project failed"* (GM2: policy officer, 2019).

Other interviewees (e.g. GM1: tourist officer, 2019; GM3: policy officer, 2019) value about the project that it focused on one central topic, namely the region's mining past:

> *"The Grünmetropole was one of the first projects which really put attention to a part of history which we tented to ignore until then. Until then we never payed attention to this part of our history, the Grünmetropole project tried to shift focus to this period in history"* (GM3: policy officer, 2019).

Another interviewee however questions whether the mining history is framed in a 'good way':

> *"I can't hear people say what a 'cool history' because this history wasn't cool at all: people died because of 'miner's lungs', this story is unknown to the wider public"* (GM13: former miner, 2019).

The broad focus and the regional, cross-border scale however appeared to be one of the pitfalls of the project. This is stated in no uncertain terms by one of the interviewees:

> *"The project was too big, too complex. Historically speaking there is no connection, cooperation was contrived, and it was too comprehensive"* (GM21: tour guide, 2019).

Also with regard to the routes itself, this interviewee thinks that this route was too complicated:

> *"The route was just not well designed; I think it was too comprehensive and not well considered"* (GM21: tour guide, 2019).

Another person underlines this:

> *"This project is not well-thought-out: it is designed as a masterplan without having an overview of the project as a whole. As a result, not many people use the Grünmetropole route and this route does not help with explaining the region's mining past"* (GM12: tour guide, 2019).

In this regard, also the approach of the project didn't help as it was foremost a nice plan which lacked links with other aspect like local communities, or existing spatial issues. Although one interview (GM1: tourist officer, 2019) states that

> *"it would have been logical to address spatial issues as well"*

it turned out that this was not the case:

> *"The Grünmetropole was too much on 'high-level', hence it wasn't able to really have impact on the local scale. It was an abstract masterplan which was okay, but didn't lead to something, there was too much distance between this masterplan and reality"* (GM19: policy officer, 2019).

He adds to this:

> *"I remember about the study reports, which were in itself quite interesting, but it didn't lead to a concrete, perceptible project, where we could work on at a local scale".*

The Grünmetropole had no, or only weak links, with other projects or developments (GM2: policy officer, 2019):

> *"The mining history is the most important factor to stimulate a endogenous potential including aspects like spatial planning, landscape, architecture, technique, and socio-cultural aspects. I don't think these aspects were part of the Grünmetropole project"* (GM16: heritage officer, 2019).

Thus the potential of the project was recognized by various stakeholders at that time. But implementation became a disappointment, because it was a promising project, but it remained to be only a well-designed promising plan (GM1: tourist officer, 2019). A quote from (GM20: policy officer) is included to summarize this discrepancy between the plan and the implementation:

> *"The Grünmetropole had some potential, there were some nice studies done at that time. Besides, it was an interesting approach, but it remained a theoretical story. When it was implemented, it was a rather pathetic implementation. It were only some signs, and some information signs, but these were located in weird locations. The Grünmetropole and the signs were like a weird ufo which landed here. Hence, the Grünmetropole is overlooked nowadays, I now only remember the name of the project"*

3.2 Cross-border cooperation

Strengthening the region's identity and stimulating cooperation in the region was one of the three goals of the Grünmetropole project. The data from the fieldwork once more show a nuanced reflection on this cooperation. Cooperation in the border region is in general seen as good thing, but the cross-border aspect is mentioned as a complicating factor, and also the link with tourism is questionable as we will see in this paragraph.

Several interviewees state that cross-border cooperation is one of the main strengths of the Grünmetropole project (e.g. GM3: policy officer, 2019; GM19: policy officer, 2019).

> *"The initial aim of this project was to present the mining history of the region, and to stimulate cross-border cooperation. These are interesting things to focus on, and at that time, we saw some initiatives that indeed focused on cooperation. Of course, there is a language barrier, but still it is good to cooperate at a regional scale. This project helped start building these connections"* (GM1: tourist officer, 2019).

The Grünmetropole project is seen as a

> *"valuable learning experience"* (GM3: policy officer, 2019)

and in fact led to cooperation:

> *"Cooperation is nowadays quite good in this region. We work on several international projects"* (GM1: tourist officer, 2019).

Although cooperation led to some concrete results, the cooperation within the project Grünmetropole was not always fruitful:

> *"International cooperation as such is a good goal to set and closer cooperation in this border region is really needed. Unfortunately however, this project is not a good example of international cooperation. Maybe this region is just too big to really create cross-border cooperation, or maybe too many stakeholders were involved"* (GM12: tour guide, 2019).

Other reasons that cross-border cooperation never really came off the ground are mentioned by a former Dutch miner:

> *"This region is characterized by the perils of village politics, each city has his own initiatives and the provincial government does not make guiding decisions, so nothing happens. Besides, regional and cross-border cooperation needs to be organized by the government. Yet, they don't pay attention to this topic because it is not interesting enough, electorally speaking"* (GM13: former miner, 2019)

Next, the cross-border aspect is mentioned as a complicating factor:

> *"Historically speaking, there has never been a link between the Belgian, Dutch and German mining regions, these are different periods, and different approaches used there. The Grünmetropole tried to make a link that's not there. If people want to make a link between the three countries they use Facebook to communicate with their German and Dutch friends, but not a route like this"* (GM21: tour guide, 2019).

And also the touristic aspect is a complicating factor, as is explained by both a German and Dutch tourist officer:

> *"Cross-border cooperation with regard to toursim doesn't work, there is always competition, different interests, and cross-border cooperation is simply very difficult to realize"* (GM6: tourist officer, 2019)

and

> *"Although there are some cross-border routes, we see that most routes end when they reach the border. Our policy is too much focused on individual regions and countries instead of connecting these routes by cross-border cooperation"* (GM14: guide museum, 2019).

3.3 Governance and community

The discrepancy between the Grünmetropole plan and implementation was in a way disappointing. One reason for this could have been the governance approach used, which only had little room for incorporating stakeholders and communities' ideas. Various interviewees state that the Grünmetropole was a top-down organized project. One person explains that there was no room for participation hereby referring to politicians and designers:

> *"They remained deaf to what local citizen were saying"*

and

> *"If you don't have academic titles, like professor or doctor, in front of your name, than they think you don't have any knowledge at all; they won't listen to you. But these people do in fact have the most valuable, local knowledge, way more important knowledge than people with academic titles like professor or doctor can ever acquire"* (GM12: tour guide, 2019).

Other interviewees underline this lack of community involvement, but do mention some other ways of participation:

> *"I don't think there was community involvement, there were some discussion groups with local entrepreneurs who discussed the plans and decided to make a link with this project. And besides organizations such as the 'VVV Zuid Limburg' made proposals: did you consider this, or this, or this? But citizens did not make any proposals, no"* (GM1: tourist officer, 2019).

Also local non-professional heritage clubs were asked to propose objects or locations. But this was only a supporting role, without a decisive say about the design of the project. The lack of community involvement is seen as a major pitfall as this could have had an impact on the future development of the Grünmetropole.

> *"There was a possibility to engage with citizens, if you don't do that at that moment you will never do that. Eventually however such a project has to be supported by citizens, because they are the potential users"* (GM1: tourist officer, 2019).

Hence, this led to a situation that the Grünmetropole does not live in the minds of the people (GM13: former miner, 2019) (GM20: policy officer, 2019).

At the same time, it should however be noted that the Grünmetropole project has been developed and implemented in a period when community-involvement was not a common practice. This is also recognized by the interviewees as the for instance state that:

> *"Nowadays I think there is anyways more awareness of community-involvement, especially in comparison to 20 or 10 years ago"* (GM1: tourist officer, 2019).

Indeed, nowadays there is more interest in local stories and bottom-up developments. One person who works at a Dutch municipality in the area of the Grünmetropole, for example explains that with regard to the mining history, they now initiate various projects to collect local stories and ideas:

> *"Top-down projects, organized by a bigwig, don't work. Projects only work if local stories are incorporated, you actively need to look for these stories and incorporate them in your projects"* (GM4: policy officer, 2019).

He for instance mentions the project '*Jaar van de Mijnen'* ('Year of the Mines': a year to commemorate the closing of the Dutch mines, 2015) which, according to him was very successful because

> *"this was not a top-down organized project, this project was particularly interested in local stories. That was one of the strengths of this project".*

Also with regard to designing a route, like the Grünmetropole routes, these local stories and ideas should be taken into account. At least this is what a Belgian policy officer explains:

> *"It may sound logical to start from a regional story and then select individual projects, but it works the other way round: you have to start with small entities, and only then look for a connection within a certain area, or region, for example the former mining region"* (GM20: policy officer, 2019).

3.4 Activities: tourism

Within the Grünmetropole project, the goals of revitalizing mining heritage, and stimulating tourism were intertwined. A touristic route was implemented to inform the public about the mining past in the region: a dedicated route for bicicles and one for cars. The routes connect 70 individual heritage or touristic/recreation sites – predominantly but not exclusively related to the industrial mining history of the region.

The value of such an approach is recognized by the interviewees who state that it is important to inform the tourist about the heritage they encounter along the route:

> *"Information leaflets and signs are needed to tell about the history and heritage of a particular region: it brings the objects 'alive' again"* (GM2: policy officer, 2019).

This is underlined by another interviewee, who however questions whether tourists actually read the information that is provided:

> *"People want to know about the history, or about what they see. Providing information along the route is important",*

And at the same time

> *"I don't think citizens know a lot about the routes in the landscape. I think you will be surprised"* (GM1: tourist officer, 2019).

Moreover, tourists are also misinformed or even fooled by touristic routes as a Dutch policy officer elaborates:

> *"The mining past cannot be linked to touristic activities since there are almost no visible relicts of the mining past. Stories are now made up at places were mining activities used to be, but this is not 'readable' for a tourist who comes here. Designing a new route about the mining past is a sign of a lack of creativity: if you run out of creativity, you come up with a route"* (GM3: policy officer, 2019).

He furthermore states:

> *"I think we're putting too much attention to this mining past. If there is no link, you cannot make a link with the past".*

Although some interviewees questions whether the mining past can be linked to tourism, storytelling and region-branding are seen as important aspects with regard to tourism:

> *"We can think of new storylines to add to the touristic product of our region, we must think about locations which are not yet part of our tourist offer and include these places into tourist offer by presenting a new story at that location"* (GM8: policy officer, 2019)

and

> *"We are constantly looking for new storylines to tell, to make and keep this region attractive for tourists"* (GM7: tourist officer, 2019).

That there are not much relicts from the mining past left doesn't seem to be a problem:

> *"A location can be opened-up to the broader audience by telling the stories of that place, objects are usefull for that, but not necessary"* (GM7: tourist officer, 2019).

Hence tourism is a very important economic sector in the area of the Grunmetorpole, and branding touristic routes is an important aspect. This however also leads to competition, as a Dutch tourism officer explains:

> *"Routes are really an issue in this region, we always promote that. But now there are so many projects, so many routes, we need to choose for certain storylines. The Grünmetropole is also a storyline, and if we can, we will try to promote this route as well. In the region South-Limburg however, there is more supply than just the Grünmetropole-route: we can make various storylines about for example the Mergelandroute, the hills, the wine, the Burgundian lifestyle, our pie's: there are about 15 powerful storylines that we can brand and promote. The mining history is also a powerful storyline, absolutely, but we can't just focus on one storyline, as they did in the Aachen region, that we won't do, because our touristic supply is too important"* (GM1: tourist officer, 2019).

3.5 Impact

When asked about the impact of the Grünmetropole routes itself, interviewees are either modest or critical.

> *"The Grünmetropole is history. I was surprised when I read that you are interested in the Grünmetropole. I didn't expect that anyone would still be interested in the Grünmetropole"* (GM21: tour guide, 2019).

This is underlined by two other interviewees. One of them states:

> *"The Grünmetropole is now heritage itself"* (GM24: heritage officer, 2019).

Another interviewee underlines this:

> *"That's already a couple of years ago, about 10 years ago, so I don't know exactly. I know about because I remember some of the documents made. But I don't remember concrete results at this moment, except the information signs which can be found at all the mining sites in Limburg, but they work alienating I think. I just remember the name of the project. Besides, the signs are still there, actually this morning I spotted a sign indicating the car route of the Grünmetropole project"* (GM20: policy officer, 2019).

The alienating effects of the route signs and the mistakes in the design of the route itself are mentioned several times as reason for the lack of impact of the Grünmetropole routes.

> *"This project never functioned the way it was designed. Also the signs are very useless, they are not well designed and besides, they located here in Eisden on a location where no tourist or cyclist will notice it. People maybe look on internet or websites about information about the mining past, but the cyclist who pass by here are either just looks for a place to have a drink or for some information, only some of them indeed stop and read the information. That's also due to practical aspects because this info sign is placed in the wrong direction, no cyclist will notice it"* (GM21: tour guide, 2019).

Another interviewee notices that:

> *"It is just stupid that this route goes from A to B, that does not work. It would have been interesting to make a round tour, especially because they want to promote cross-border tourism"* (GM1: tourist officer, 2019).

Besides, practical issues, such as money for maintenance works are mentioned as reason for the lack of impact of the Grünmetropole routes.

> *"Even before the project was well implemented, in turned out that there was no money available and that maintenance works could not be done anymore. This was really a disappointment, especially for local entrepreneurs"* (GM1: tourist officer, 2019).

All in all this led to a situation that:

> *"there are now nice maps, pictures and information leaflets, but they are not very practical, so where did that bring us?"* (GM12: tour guide, 2019).

Various interviewees (e.g. GM1: tourist officer, 2019; GM11: tour guide, 2019; GM19: policy officer, 2019) indeed state that the information leaflets are not distributed any longer, and that the routes are barely used.

4 Reflection

This section firstly provides a reflection on the OC Grünmetropole by considering the data from the case observation from the three thematic lines of OpenHeritage: resource integration, community and stakeholder integration, and regional/territorial integration. Outcomes of interviews, field observation and literature study are complemented in this section with newspaper articles from different periods. Finally, we shortly compare the Grünmetropole project to other projects related to mining history and touristic routes within the same region. We question whether lessons from the Grünmetropole can be of help there.

Overall, the case observations show a somewhat nuanced evaluation of the Grünmetropole project. Although the overall perception is rather negative, it should be noted that some interviewees however also note some positive results of the Grünmetropole project. The overall intention of the project as well as the intention to closer cooperation in the region are for example valued as positive aspects. The overall perception is however rather negative. We can cluster this negative perception along the three thematic lines of OpenHeritage.

1. **Resource integration**
   The first reason why stakeholders overall perceive the Grünmetropole as negative, can be linked to the theme of resource integration. Overall, the project lacked many practical aspects and agreements. As seen in the previous section, interviewees mention that even at the time of the implementation there were questions about some practical aspects, like the placing of information signs and the design of the route itself as it is not designed as a round tour. But moreover, interviewees mention the lack of practical agreements about for example funding, a plan for the Grünmetropole after implementation, and the lack of agreements about maintenance. These aspects indeed have had a negative impact on the success of the Grünmetropole. Nowadays, for example, some information signs as well as signs indicating the route, can still be found in the landscape whereas others are gone due to vandalism, renovation works, or changes in the spatial context (e.g. new infrastructure). Thus tourists who come to the region nowadays can't possibly cycle the entire route as signs are missing, but may wonder what this route and the signs are about. Maps or other information can however not be found anymore since the website is not maintained and information leaflets were never reprinted after they were sold out. All in all this resulted in a situation that nowadays the sings and the routes work 'alienating' as one of the interviewees called it. In fact, as is mentioned by several interviewees, the routes are hardly used nowadays, and the Grünmetropole is relatively unknown to both locals and tourists.

2. **Community and stakeholder integration**
   A second reason explaining the negative perception of the Grünmetropole project can be linked to community and stakeholder integration. When looking at the governance model applied, the interviewees frame the Grünmetropole as a top-down organized project. Although there were some forms of participation included, decision making was done by the designers

of the project. Moreover, local citizens were not included in the design and decision making process at all. It is questionable whether the lack of community involvement should be regarded as a negative aspect, especially when realizing that community involvement was not a common practice at the time of designing this project. Yet at the same time it is mentioned that the lack of local knowledge has had negative impact because local stories and bottom-up developments were not included in the plans. This was yet another reason leading to a situation that the project didn't land at the local or individual level. Nowadays, community involvement is more and more common practice in spatial developments. Some of the interviewees name examples of other, more recent projects (e.g. *Jaar van de Mijnen* project), that did incorporate local stories hereby showing that these projects are better known among local citizens, but also catalyzed new, bottom-up developments (Leunissen, 2019). The lack of community engagement with the Grünmetropole project can thus be partly explained by looking at the applied governance model. Linking the project to local bottom-up initiatives, and incorporating communities' stories would have led to a more interesting route, and to more engagement at present day.

3. **Regional/territorial integration**

A third reason explaining the negative perception of the Grünmetropole project is the approach used within this project. It was namely not only a top-down plan in terms of governance model applied, but also in terms how it was brought to this region. It was a high-level, abstract, visionary masterplan which had almost no links with the existing spatial issues, or socio-cultural patterns in the region. The consequences of this were practical in terms that it didn't lead to concrete, perceptible projects at the local scale, as one interviewee tells us. This plan was implemented in a way that it was just placed in the landscape without having a concrete impact. In this regard, it should be noted that also the method used (i.e. designing two touristic routes) didn't really address the issues the region was dealing with. This resulted in a situation that the signs and routes work alienating nowadays (as explained above). Moreover however, due to this approach, and the methods used, the Grünmetropole never became a catalyzer for stimulating developments in the region. In fact, because there were no concrete projects linked to the project, and because the project was not linked to other ongoing projects, the Grünmetropole never achieved the goal of renewing the landscape. Next, using this approach once more contributed to the mismatch between plan and local perception as it didn't help the region. Hence, as a result not many citizens know about this project or have a personal link with it. Also with regard to the goal of cross-border cooperation and connecting the mining regions in the three countries, it is questionable whether this plan really contribute to these goals. The overall impression from the interviews is namely that the project has more or less been forced upon the region. Creating a common identity, and organizing cross-border cooperation are however difficult processes in itself which develop over time, instead of bringing it to a region by implementing a plan like the Grünmetropole.

The three abovementioned reasons summarizing the negative perceptions of the Grünmetropole project are based on the case observations (i.e. data from the interviews, and field observation). The case observations thus represent value judgements made at present day, more than 10 years after the project was designed and implemented. However, an interview with three main stakeholders involved in the EuRegionale 2008 project, during and directly after the implementation of the project, can be found in a document reflecting on the EuRegionale 2008 project (see Vos & Gottschalk, 2009, p. 40). Not surprisingly, these stakeholders see the Grünmetropole project as a successful project. Especially with regard to the cross-border cooperation, and the touristic routes. The fact that a cross-border route is developed and implemented is valued, and the high number of maps distributed is seen as an indicator for the success of the routes. At that time (2009) none of the stakeholders seems to worry about the future of the route and maintenance activities. They see the cross-border cooperation as a lasting activity that will ensure the future of the Grünmetropole project, and specifically of the routes (Vos & Gottschalk, 2009). Likewise, also in the booklet that discusses the ideas of the Grünmetropole (see Heinrichs et al., 2008), the project is regarded as very successful. It is stated that the Grünmetropole contributed to a feeling of communality in the region, and that it stimulated cross-border exploration in the sense that both citizens and tourists started to get interested in the common history of the region (Heinrichs et al., 2008).

In newspaper articles of that time some more sceptical remarks can be found. In an article of De Standaard (2006), concerns are shared that the Grünmetropole will be just a gushy, city-branding story, without concrete ideas or projects that will stimulate developments in the region. Besides, they condemn the lack of a well-thought-out concept underpinning this project as it is mainly framed as a nice region-branding story. Finally, they notice that the Grünmetropole plans degenerates local citizens into users/tourists instead of seeing them as a potential source of input of local knowledge (De Standaard, 2006). In a local Belgian newspaper *Het Belang van Limburg,* we read that critics focus on the idea that the Grünmetropole project is too much backwards looking instead of a driver for future developments (van den Reyt, 2006). At the same time reporters in various newspapers note that stakeholders, and especially those involved in the project, nevertheless expect a lot from the project (see for example Swinnen, 2006; Swinnen, 2007; Van den Reyt, 2007). In 2011, a reporter of the online blog *ZuiderLucht* reflects on the Grünmetropole project by interviewing several stakeholders who were involved in the set-up of the project (see van der Steen, 2011). Although the interviewees in this article name some positive aspects, the overall perception in 2011 (only four years after implementation) is rather negative. The concept of the project is criticized, the cross-border cooperation is mentioned as a failed attempt, and it is stated that the project doesn't live in the minds of the people (van der Steen, 2011).

To sum up, although the project is initially evaluated rather positive, opinions changed over time into a more negative perception. Hence, both the reflections in the 2006/2007 as the one in 2011 show striking similarities with the remarks of the interviewees of today.

Lessons from the Grünmetropole

Considering these critical reflections on the Grünmetropole, one could conclude that valuable lessons can be learned from the case, especially for other projects dealing with mining heritage, and other spatial developments with regard to tourism. This however appears to be hardly the case. Even at the time of the Grünmetropole project, other projects dealing with the mining heritage were implemented. In the Belgian mining area for example, a project called '*Masterplan Mijnstreek'* (Masterplan Mining area) dealt with the exact same spatial issues, such as bringing the relicts of the mining past alive again. This masterplan was also produced in 2008, yet there are no links made with the Grünmetropole project (Mols, 2008). But it is even more striking to see that even at present day projects are designed and implemented that address almost the same goals as the Grünmetropole project, and propose more or less similar measures with regard to spatial planning and tourism. A Dutch policy officer for example elaborates on a project called 'Leisure Lane'. This project is about creating a touristic route that connects various attractions and informative stops. So there is a similarity with the Grünmetropole project in the sense that it a route and stops are designed. But moreover the interviewee explains that there are similarities in terms of governance model applied:

> *"This is once more a top-down organized project, which is forced upon us. Maybe we should dust off the Grünmetropole project again, instead of making new projects"* (GM2: policy officer, 2019).

Another interviewee adds to this the example of a project called '*Mijnspoor*' (Mine trail). This project is about transforming a former mining railway into a cycling path which leads tourist along relicts of the mining past in the region. The interviewee states:

> *"I'm wondering for who these projects are intended, I think we're putting too much attention to the mining past. Designing a new route about the mining past is a sign of a lack of creativity: if you run out of creativity, you come up with a route"* (GM3: policy officer, 2019).

He is very skeptical about this route since the route –similar to the Grünmetropole routes- tries to make links that aren't there:

> *"Tourists will wonder how this route links to the mining past because they can't see any relicts of the mining history. Tourists will say: where is this mine you're talking about?"* (GM3: policy officer, 2019).

Also in the Belgian part of the mining region, new routes around the topic mining heritage are designed. A project called '*Kolenspoor'* (cCoal trail) aims at more or less the same goals (with the exception of cross-border cooperation) as the Grünmetropole project. These similarities in goals are not concealed by the interviewees as one of them says that

> *"This route has the same aim as the former Grünmetropole project, since they both try to connect various mining regions and promote it as one entity: we try to link various mining sites by using a former mine trail"* (GM18: tourist officer, 2019).

Another interviewee adds to this:

> *"Kolenspoor is again a quest to find each other and to cooperate, and it is once more a quest to link the former mining sites"* (GM19: policy officer, 2019).

Many other examples of (cross-border) touristic routes, in all three countries, could be named here. These routes not only try to achieve more or less similar goals, but also use more or less similar principles like designing a route, making links between mining areas, and attracting tourists to mining heritage sites.

Based on the lessons derived from the Grünmetropole, critical remarks can be made here. Implementing top-down designed touristic routes might result in a mismatch with local perceptions. Routes on a map do not necessarily land in practice and easily remain nice plans only. Moreover, focusing on tourism can be a goal as such, but this goal can't easily be linked to other goals like renewal of the landscape, community-involvement or specific spatial heritage issues. The Grünmetropole does not incorporate communities' and individuals' ideas of heritage in order to land in the existing physical, but also socio-cultural or 'mental' landscape of the region. this bottom-up perspective on heritage and regional socio-cultural aspects. The idea of heritage that formed the basis of the two touristic routes was an object-focused one. Therewith the Grünmetropole-project left no room to incorporate other immaterial, or more personal, ideas of heritage. This is also one of the main lessons with regard to governance models applied in heritage re-use practices.

The question thus remains whether successful examples of routes as an instrument for adaptive re-use of heritage through community-involvement can be found, and if so, what specific approach and/or conditions made them successful?

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