

BELGIUM

Quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy

Location

Chimay, Wallonia

Programming period

2007 - 2013

Axis / Priority

Axis 3

Measure

313 - Encouragement of
tourism activities

Funding

Total budget 484 750 EUR
EAFRD 193 900 EUR
National/region. 193 900 EUR
Private 96 950 EUR

Project duration

2012– 2015

Project promoter

La forêt du pays de Chimay au
Parc naturel Viroin-Hermeton

Contact

Corentin Levacq
corentin.levacq@pnvh.be
tel.

Website

<http://www.foretdupaysdechimy.be/en>

Green tourism in a forested area of Wallonia, Belgium, was developed thanks to EAFRD funding. The project enabled the area of Chimay to utilise the natural value of the area thus boosting local development while fostering cooperation among a wide range of stakeholders.

Summary

The forest covering Chimay county in Wallonia, Belgium, has a great potential for tourism development although the area remained widely unknown as a tourist destination. Since 2008 preparatory work was carried out to see how this situation could be reversed. This included a multidisciplinary study, formulating a development strategy, as well as an analysis of the area's accessibility and resources.



The forest of the land of Chimay

Unspoilt nature and authenticity

Building upon this work, the project funded the development of a range of new tools and services that would make the area more attractive and recognisable. These included the development of mobile Apps that allow users to download more than a hundred walks searchable by certain criteria and detailing information on the landscape and heritage landmarks; an events programme featuring weekend nature activities, an introduction to geocaching, theme discovery hiking, a park festival in Viroin-Hermeton, nature workshops for children and adults, competitions and a photo exhibition; promotional tools, etc.

The project also helped promote existing activities such as for example 'The Great Adventure' comprising 178 km of marked trails and nine bivouac areas (primitive camp sites to spend the night in the wilderness), through its promotional activities. A key element in this process was that potential tourist client groups were identified and differentiated in order to match with the different products. Families were at the heart of the project, and also hikers and sportsmen.

Results

The project developed a wide range of tools and services that significantly upgraded the image of the area as a tourist destination.

Thanks to this initiative a wide range of different local actors including the tourism bureaux of Chimay and Vallée des eaux vives, the Nature Park of Viroin-Hermeton, municipalities, local clubs, hosting providers and restaurateurs, etc. joint efforts under a common vision that will boost the local economy and further facilitate the development of new visitor offerings.

Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ The biggest difficulty confronted was related to the large number of partners involved. It appeared that bringing together stakeholders around a common project requires a lot of paperwork, contacts and compromises.
- ❑ The project is innovative for the area as it is built around the concept that the stay in the forest (similarly to a trip to the mountains or the sea) should be accompanied by a certain type of lodging, specific dishes, etc.