

2.1.



LANDSCAPE & CLIMATE

With its activities in the sphere of “Landscape and climate”, the EMR is at one with the fundamental global United Nations goals of sustainable development³, the European Green Deal and the EU Biodiversity Strategy. As will be seen, there are many connections with the other areas of the EMR2030 Strategy, especially culture, tourism and health (e.g. in the area of soft cross-border health tourism) and also the economy and innovation (e.g. as regards the sustainable bio-based circular economy).

2.1.1. DESCRIPTION OF THE SITUATION

The EMR is distinguished by the attractiveness of its cities and landscapes. Besides the various national parks and cross-border nature parks, the sweeping landscape of fields and hedgerows in the heart of the EMR offers a premium living, recreational and economic environment around the urban areas of MAHHL+ (Maastricht, Aachen, Hasselt, Heerlen, Liège, Genk and Sittard-Geleen). The is the project region of the landscape partnership 3LP (Three-Countries Park), a cross-border cooperation alliance between the authorities for land use planning, the environment and nature conservation in the Euregio.

For two decades, all those involved in the project have been committed to the preservation and sustainable development of this open space without borders: these beautiful landscapes that are characteristic of the EMR bring people together across borders.

With its EMR2020 Strategy, the EMR assumed the role of lead partner of the 3LP for the cross-sectoral issue of Sustainable Development and developed this further to become a Euregional platform for space, nature and landscape.

The Three-Countries Park

The Three-Countries Park is a cross-border partnership and platform for shared space, nature and landscape in the Meuse-Rhine Euregio. It is steered by a multi-level governance system (competent local and central authorities) within the Meuse-Rhine Euregio. Thirteen official partners from all partner regions of the Euregio Meuse-Rhine participate in the project. Representatives from different departments, such as Land Use and Landscape Planning, Environmental Protection and Nature Conservation or Cultural Heritage, collaborate and share ideas in the **project group**, which meets three times a year. The Three-Countries Park also collaborates with various **working groups**, in which other departments or organisations are involved at the operational level, such as AG GeoDaten (working group), which gathers geographical data in a Euregional GIS data set. Every activity is always about promoting cross-border cooperation for the shared landscape area and for sustainable development of the Euregio.

The strengths

Climate change and the European Green-Deal policy underline the need for cross-border cooperation between the areas of landscape, nature and land development. In keeping with the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030⁴ and the Council of Europe Landscape Convention⁵, the EMR will continue to support cross-border cooperation in the areas of space, nature and landscape, while the focus is increasingly on the adjustment to climate change.

The challenges

As a shared living and economic space, the landscape is constantly changing and subject to different trends. These include increasing urbanisation and fragmentation resulting from infrastructure measures and structural change in agriculture. But a major factor is also global climate change:

The flood disaster in July 2021 and the drought of the last few years have left appalling scars and huge damage in the Euregio far beyond the borders. Heavy rain and floods, heat waves and dying trees do not stop at the border. The isolation of habitats and atmospheric nitrogen deposition are also cross-border phenomena. It is often the case that solutions to be implemented locally can only be found through cross-border cooperation.

2.1.2. DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVES

The EMR has identified two guiding principles: joint engagement for the resilience of landscapes and establishment of an open space without borders.

Becoming jointly engaged for the resilience of landscapes in light of climate change

When it comes to landscape, the impact of climate change is visible and apparent to everyone. It is above all the excessive or inadequate amounts of water which, in conjunction with major fluctuations in

temperature, are threatening the health of people and the ecosystems. It is also contributing to a reduced productivity in agriculture, forestry and industries dependent on water. Like the COVID pandemic as well, it impacts personal stories and has huge material and financial consequences.

“Nature-based solutions” such as terraces, hedges, buffer zones, agroforestry and the greening of cities can for example ease or even avoid the impacts of climate change (e.g. by encouraging water and carbon capture and storage in the ground and vegetation).

So, how can a whole cross-border landscape with its inhabitants, ecosystems and economic sectors become more resistant to climate change – or climate-resilient? By working on various issues of cross-border relevance, including...

- Cooperation in cross-border river basins (e.g. Meuse, Göhl, Wurm, Jeker, etc.) with the aim of mitigating impacts of climate change through ecological solutions, such as the improvement of water retention and quality in the landscape and the protection of life in and on the water.

»»» Priority topic “Water”

- Cooperation along cross-border ecological corridors for the restoration of green connections between Natura 2000 areas, as well as in narrow urbanised strips, with the aim of enabling endangered species to migrate and spread more freely so as to adapt to the changed climatic conditions.

»»» Priority topic “Green corridors”

- Cross-border coordination of territorial strategies and regional development projects, so that the blue-green infrastructure has sufficient room to offer services for climate regulation and other ecosystem

services. (The related topic of the subterranean landscape and the mining legacy can serve as an example for reflection on and the origin of the change)

»» Priority topic "Countryside as resource"

- Creation of Euregional landscape experiences in collaboration with departments for culture, tourism and health with the aim of providing people with places for relaxation where they can maintain or restore their health and find enjoyment, tranquillity and a feeling of belonging in what is an increasingly uncertain world

»» Priority topic "Landscape bliss"

- Cooperation with agriculture and forestry and other sectors so that companies can continue to make use of the value added and productivity of nature and reinvest in their "landscape hub" (where a Euregional market for local sustainable products and a landscape-related offsetting of greenhouse gases can play a unifying role. The goal of reducing the nitrogen burden also falls under this category).

»» Priority topic "Eco-innovation"

An open space without borders

offers not only a shared landscape area, but also an open space for reflection and a place for encounters. It is a space for sharing perspectives, for mutual learning between partners and actors and for cross-border cooperation not only across national borders, but also between departments and administrative levels, sectors and disciplines.

This mission is a model for a cross-border landscape policy on several levels. It has aroused interest in other European regions and networks. The EGTC EMR, the Three-Countries Park network and the partner regions use a variety of means and formats to organise and

encourage cooperation, such as the organisation of Euregional meetings and working groups, the integration of cross-border data and studies, the support of cross-border initiatives through the inclusion of contacts and the provision of information, and the initiation and where necessary the execution of projects.

To make the best possible use of these resources, the initiatives that will be followed up, as part of the EMR 2030 strategy and according to the predefined priorities, are those that have a strong cross-border connection and show the greatest Euregional value added.

*With its motto
"Open space without borders
in the heart of the EMR"
the Three-Countries Park is a
pioneer in Europe for a cross-
border landscape partnership.
It is a place of encounter and
an open space for sharing ideas
and collaborating for
a sustainable development.*

2.1.3. OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

Building on the experiences and insights of the last few years and the networks that have been established, the successful collaboration of the Three-Countries Park consortium should be deepened and extended to include further actors, such as the many nature and landscape organisations that are active in the EMR. The aim is to preserve the open space and develop the Euregional landscape jointly in a way that is sustainable and climate-resilient.

Specific objectives

- Renewal of the Three-Countries Park partnership and improvement in the governance structure
- Strengthening of the Three-Countries Park as a cross-border umbrella organisation for interested local organisations (e.g. nature parks and national parks, landscape associations, local action groups, etc.) which are active, innovative and engaged in the Euregio for climate, environment and landscape, especially in the above-mentioned development priorities
- Promotion of cross-border cooperation in the area of landscape and climate with the main focus on climate adjustments and environmental solutions, in line with the EU's Green Deal
- Development of the Euregio as a hub of the Trans-European Nature Network (TEN-N) and of cross-border blue-green infrastructure with win-win effects for climate, health, tourism and the economy
- Promotion of greater public and political awareness of the shared landscape, the cross-border impacts of climate change, the unlimited value added of blue-green infrastructure and the successes of cross-border cooperation.

Planned activities

- Implementation of the Three-Countries Park cooperation agreement and renewal of the accord from 2024 onwards
- Expansion of the Euregional Geographic Information System (GIS) of the Three-Countries Park in order to integrate further data of relevance to a climate-resilient landscape as working basis
- Analysis of partners' climate adjustment strategies with regard to cross-border interfaces and cooperation options
- Support of local and regional actors in the cross-border coordination of territorial strategies and the development of projects with regard to the priority topic "Countryside as resource"
- Organisation of cross-border activities (workshops, events, studies, etc.) in conjunction with the above-mentioned development priorities

CONCLUSION



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The “landscape” is increasingly being used both internationally and also in the EMR and 3LP partner regions as a starting point for sustainable territorial development and as a framework for change. With the European Landscape Convention as a model, the landscape is the common denominator in the Three-Countries Park network. It brings together the different administrative levels and departments responsible for the environment, nature, land use planning, water and cultural legacy and serves as a link for many other actors (e.g. private organisations for the protection of nature and landscape and also in sectors such as agriculture, water management and urban planning etc.).