

What's going on in...Wallonia?

Forest and multifunctionality: two words matching (again)!

If for many years, forest has just been assimilated to a source of benefits and to a proof of richness, we now have to observe that forest starts to be more than a source of timber and a playground for hunters: forest « becomes » multifunctional!

When we talk about « multifunctionality », we simply recognize that forest is providing a lot of different services such as water filtration, carbon storage, species habitat, soil conservation, etc. but also that forest implies a local identity, a typical landscape, a recreational use. In a way forest belongs to the society in the fact that forest represents for many citizens a common good. Forest is also most of the time considered as a heritage: a personal heritage, a local heritage, a historical heritage, etc. Then multifunctionality of forest refers to three main pillars: economical, environmental and social pillars.

In Wallonia (South part of Belgium), about 30% of the territory is covered by forest. It certainly represents a great potential in terms of environmental services and natural resources that management authorities, professional organizations, local stakeholders and especially private owners have to take in account. The following examples show how Walloon private owners are involved in forest management and how they think about multifunctionality of forest.

The *Bois de Lauzelle*: a multifunctional private forest in a peri-urban area

As a property belonging to the Catholic University of Louvain, the *Bois de Lauzelle* is a private forest combining several objectives: commercial forestry, scientific study, nature conservation, hosting visits from members of the public, and education. This area thus meets the University's key objectives: teaching, research, and service. The *Bois de Lauzelle* is also a true educational laboratory covering 198 hectares, close to the lecture-theatres and visited by large numbers of students, notably bio-engineers and biologists.

At the research level, the scientific interest of the forest appears undeniable. It is an area of continual activity in forestry, ecology, botany,

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zoology, pedology, and hydrology. A great number of research and doctoral theses have used it as a basis for experimental findings.

Covering a number of valleys with differing orientations, the *Bois de Lauzelle* presents a diversity of landscapes. Numerous associations of flora can be identified. This variety of groups, from alluvial ash to heather-covered moorland, has developed from a mosaic of springs, of streams, of abrupt slopes, either warm and dry or cold and humid, and varied soils. This exceptional site was listed as protected in 1994 and today forms part of the Natura network.

The site has several functions:

- “Discovery” forest: educational ramble and arboretum;
- Productive forest: timber and fuel production; permanent bank of forest resources;
- “Research” forest: experimental zone for UCL’s laboratories (notably the water and forest unit);
- “Educational” forest: place for practical teaching for students, would-be engineers and biologists; availability of a *marteloscope* (virtual tree marking);
- « Leisure » forest: freely-accessed walks;
- « Ecological » forest: Natura2000 site and nature conservation, habitat for flora and fauna, carbon storage.



Field visit in Bois de Lauzelle (Walloon Rural Network – 19/11/10) ©Tr@me scri

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***Forest Life* or a family history**

Even if the *Bois de Lauzelle* belongs to a private owner, its management can be easily described as a public management. At the opposite, *Forest Life* is a familial property of 20 hectares of arable land and 50 hectares of forest, which belongs to a sister and two brothers. Together they decided to think about a multifunctional management of the estate: they chose to form a company in order to avoid division of the property, to preserve family spirit and to develop a coherent management approach to this agro-forest area.

Forest Life follows up several objectives such as:

- To learn about and to develop forestry/agricultural management skills.
- To conceive and think through the management of the site along ecosystemic lines (by thinking on the scale of the entire property).
- To develop soft transitions between forest and agricultural zones.
- To increase the habitat capacity available for flora and fauna (ecotone areas).
- To monitor the development of biodiversity throughout the site.
- To conserve topsoils (strongly hydromorphic clay zones).
- To raise public awareness of the multifunctional role of forest, forest borders, and local hedgerows.
- To communicate messages in terms of ecological coherence and autonomy.

In order to reach those targets, *Forest Life* developed actions like plantation of mixed “multi-strata” local hedgerows in order to increase the number of “refuge points” on the site or like creation of a pond in the forest. The management of the forest is thought plot by plot: each plot is managed due to a main objective. For example, a plot is dedicated to timber production and is planting only with Douglas fir (thinning every three years)¹. This plot is certainly monospecific, but it brings enough incomes that permit to let another plot be only managed for its landscape and environmental value: this second plot is covered by mixing trees of different varieties and only offers marginal incomes. But it has a real added value because it increases biodiversity, it improves water quality, it preserves heritage and landscape...

¹ Douglas fir 40 years old: $15\text{m}^3/\text{ha}/\text{an}$ at $40\text{€}/\text{m}^3 = 600\text{€}/\text{an}/\text{ha}$.

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For consistency *Forest Life* has started a process of certification: the owners have chosen to be certified by PEFC as a guarantee of a sustainable forest management.

In order to share their experience, but also to give a social role to their actions, the owners organize guided tours, host youth organisations, training courses or conferences.



Field visit in Forest Life (Walloon Rural Network – 19/11/10) ©Tr@me scri

How to stimulate private owners towards multifunctional management?

If the previous examples clearly demonstrate that some owners are open to multifunctional management, there is still upstream a problem in Wallonia: many properties stay under managed for a lot of different reasons. The first reason is the small size of properties: Walloon private forest is really fragmented: in total 115.000 owners of which 80.000 own

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properties smaller than 1 ha². Most of the time owners are not foresters and know nothing about forest management. Sometimes they don't even live in the same area. All those reasons show us one evidence: private owners of small properties need a real support, to be more involved and to be stimulated. *Regiowood*³ has been a pilot project for 3 years. Between October 2008 and October 2011, this cross-border partnership (involving Wallonia, Luxembourg, France and Germany) allowed all the members of the forest and wood network to meet and share their visions of the small private forest.

The final purpose was a better knowledge of the territory to ensure a good match between wood resources, economical, social and ecological supplies, all of this in a sustainable management perspective. *Regiowood* has developed several actions in order to involve owners and valorise forest estates: timber sale in common, property exchange, training days, field visit for a diagnosis and a management plan, forest trail investment, etc.

In order to enhance management of forest, especially in a multifunctional way, the Walloon forestry sector started to look after innovative and relevant management tools and shared experience and best practices with other member states in particular through field visits organized by the Rural Networks. One study case has been positively demonstrating the potential of collaborative management: the Flemish *bosgroep*⁴, under the guidance of a coordinator, proposes a participatory approach to the development of views concerning forest management and accessibility...still following the three pillars of multifunctionality!

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² 1970 statistics from Walloon Authority, more recent data are not available.

³ *Regiowood*: project co-financed by European Union and Walloon Region due to the Interreg IVA-Grande Région programme. In this case this project involves two Walloon stakeholders: Vielsam and the Belgian Royal Society of Forest (SRBF).

⁴ *Bosgroep*: « forest group ».

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