

Connecting Brabant's aeolian sand regions through landscape history

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At the moment, the communities in Brabant each have their approach in attracting tourists. We propose a common landscape-historical approach for a European Geopark "*Brabant's aeolian sand landscapes*" (*provisional title*), to connect and promote their territories. Each community focuses on a specific part of Brabant's landscape history that stretches from the Weichselian polar desert up to the modern bio-engineered landscapes.

We divided Brabant's landscapes into geo-natural and geo-cultural landscapes. Many of these landscapes are unique in Europe and some have a geology that remains virtually untouched. Examples of geo-natural phenomena of interest are: (1). *the different types of sand dunes* from huge linear dune systems, large parabolic dunes up to modern small-scale shadow dunes; (2). *loam forests* developed on loams deposited in periglacial lakes; (3). "*donken*" *embedded in river clay*: the summits of large parabolic dunes, that were buried due to the fact that Brabant is situated on the border of a geological basin; (4). "*wijst*", the geological phenomenon which causes higher grounds to be wetter than adjacent lower ones, due to aeolian sands blown against re-activated faults of Caledonian origin; and (5). *huge active driftsands*, Weichselian dune areas that were reactivated during medieval droughts.

Part of Brabant's geo-cultural landscapes maintained their original geological structure and show the way humans used the geo during the ages. Examples are i.e.: (1). prehistoric mounds on the fringe of sand plateaus; (2). the small-scale cover sand topography, earth banks and ancient woodlands preserved in "Het Groene Woud"; (3). "*bolle akkers*", agricultural fields with characteristic "*plaggen*" soils; (4). the sand landscapes with remnants of the extensive moorlands, reclaimed for fuel as early as the 1300s; (5). the cliff with dunes and drowned villages, invaded by the sea through burning of peat for salt; and (6). the 19th century landscape painting colonies of Heeze and Kalmthout with dune heathlands and active drift sands as important painting themes.

Presented in Theme 4