

# Spatial plans for quality beaches and dykes – BE

## 1. Policy Objective & Theme

- ADAPTATION TO RISK: Integrating coherent strategies covering the risk-dimension (prevention to response) into planning and investment
- SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH: Balancing economic, social, cultural development whilst enhancing environment

## 2. Key Approaches

- Integration
- Participation
- Ecosystems based approach

## 3. Experiences that can be exchanged

The development of spatial planning documents specific to beaches and dykes, in order to prevent conflicts in the use of the limited space and to maintain the attractiveness of the beach and dyke .

## 4. Overview of the case

For each of the ten seaside towns, a provincial Spatial Plan (Ruimtelijke Uitvoerings Plannen = RUP) was made for that part of the beach and dyke (or seafront) at each seaside resort, proceeding, in each case, from a shared vision. The main overall objectives include guaranteeing the public character, accessibility and qualitative development of the beaches and dykes, without losing sight of the specific character of each seaside resort.

## 5. Context and Objectives

### a) Context

The coast is one of the main tourist attractions in Flanders. The irresistible pull of the coast is mainly down to its specific natural ecosystem (the sea, beach and dunes). Measures to intensify the tourist-recreation use of these areas are still ongoing, resulting in growing demand for groynes, dykes, banks and levees. Certain stretches of beach are currently designated as nature- and scenic areas on the regional zoning plan. This means that, in principle, no structures may be erected there. In fact, most of the beach areas fall outside the demarcation of the regional zoning plans, so it is classified as an 'undesigned' area. This state of affairs has, for a long time now, caused confusion as regards the legal and spatial planning frame conditions for structures for the benefit of tourism and/or recreation.

### b) Objectives

The purpose of the provincial execution plans for spatial planning is to sort and classify the tourist-recreation functions within each planning area and, more specifically, all structures, both of a temporary and permanent nature, and the activities relating thereto. The main overall objectives include guaranteeing the public character, accessibility and qualitative development of the beaches and dykes, without losing sight of the specific character of each seaside resort. Also stressed, in the execution plans, is the distinction between summer and winter seasons.

## 6. Implementation of the ICZM Approach (i.e. management, tools, resources)

### a) Management

The spatial planning department of the province of West-Flanders was responsible for the official procedure. The Coordination Centre on Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) was responsible for organizing the stakeholder consultation. The consultation meetings were held at different locations along the coast and were directed specifically at the key sectors involved.

### b) ICZM tools

The Spatial Plans are a typical planning tool. The Provincial West-Flemish Regional Plan for Environmental Development (or PRS-WV for short, was approved and adopted on 6 March 2002) contains a policy framework, which, in itself, already sets out the core themes for the further re-designation of beaches and dykes. The 10 provincial execution plans of spatial planning for beaches and dykes are, therefore, a direct implementation of the PRS-WV. For each plan (one for every seaside town), a separate procedure was followed. The preparations of the plans and the consultation were a combined effort.

#### GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR THE 10 EXECUTION PLANS

In all zones of each RUP, sea defence applies as the main function. All initiatives necessary for achieving that main function are permissible. A distinction is made between a summer and winter season, which run from 15 March - 15 October and from 16 October - 14 March respectively. During the winter season, the beach should be kept completely protected from any temporary (removable) structures. Along the entire high-water mark, provision should be made for a sufficiently wide, continuous and unobstructed passage for holidaymakers. Three types of area are distinguished: a central area, a transitional space and a nature (or scenic) area.

Each seaside resort is allotted a 'central area for recreation' at the dyke (or seafront), which can be laid out and equipped to suit as broad a target group as possible. It is in this area where tourist facilities are concentrated, as much as possible. Underground car parks can be built on the dykes in the central area and the outdoor cafés can stay open all year round, provided a sufficiently wide, unobstructed passage is guaranteed for passers-by. Marked out, at the ends of the 'central area', are 'transitional spaces', where nature and recreation become interwoven. In these areas, suitable sites are designated for a beach- and water sports club. This usually relates to the existing beach cabins but, in some cases, a re-siting is proposed for a hitherto badly sited structure. In addition, it is also possible to include a structure for public services (a sanitary block or a rescue post) and a limited number of temporary beach cabins or beach huts. The 'transitional spaces' are, quite literally, the stepping stone to the 'nature- and scenic areas'. The latter are, by the Flemish policy-making level, designed and laid out via separate spatial plans. In some places, which have a line of buildings behind the dunes, a limited number of temporary structures on the beach is allowed, provided they are clustered.

Not all issues relating to activities and structures on beaches and dykes are dealt with in the provincial RUPs. Besides these spatial zoning plans, other tools are also available for dealing with several matters e.g. the annually renewable beach concessions, the municipal police regulations and tender documents. However, the execution plans for spatial planning do, as always, form the framework for compliance checks for the aforesaid rules and regulations.

When attaching weight to conflicting factors, the sea defence function and the ecological values of beaches and dunes were taken into consideration. Based on the principle of subsidiarity, the nature- and scenic areas which form part of the Flemish Ecological Network (VEN), as well as the nature conservancy acquisition areas which form part of the Integral Conservancy Acquisition and Supportive Network (IVON), were delineated by the Flemish Region. Areas, whose boundaries have been fixed already, are excluded from the provincial RUPs. If overlaps exist, nonetheless, between the RUP and the nature- and scenic areas at the Flemish level, then the main function 'nature' remains unchanged. Provisions are incorporated, however, for subordinate functions which are reconcilable with the main function 'nature'.

## 7. Cost and resources

The provincial RUP gives clear instructions to municipalities and private operators as to the legally permissible activities and structures on beaches and dykes. Instead of one overall plan for the coast, it paid dividends to work with 10 separate Spatial Plans (one per coastal municipality) as then there was less risk of delays in getting the plans approved. The objectives have been achieved in most of the coastal municipalities. However, the most sensitive building dossiers of illegal structures remains

a moot point among the coastal municipalities, even though the provincial RUPs have been approved.

## **8. Effectiveness (i.e. were the foreseen goals/objectives of the work reached?)**

Staff costs: Two years full Full Time Equivalent (spatial planner) + two months FTE for consultation.

## **9. Success and Fail factors**

Political will (and courage) is needed to start the process. A need for consultation procedures, involving all stakeholders. In this case, an informal consultation procedure was chosen, before starting the official procedure. It is not proven that this informal option will result in better or quicker agreement, compared to consultation during the formal procedures.

Failure factors: sensitivity as regards illegal structures, for which planning permission was granted in the past.

## **10. Unforeseen outcomes**

None so far.

## **11. Prepared by**

Kathy Belpaeme, Coordination Centre on ICZM, Belgium

## **12. Verified by**

Joachim D'eigens, Province of West-Flanders – spatial planning department, Belgium

## **13. Sources**

<http://www.West-Flanders.be/NL/Leefomgeving/rup/Pages/default.aspx>