



Internationalisation Framework

# Innovative Connecting Across Borders

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provincie limburg





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The basic principles formulated for the Provincial Executive's current term in office (2019-2023) form the basis for effective political relationships and reflect the Provincial Council's political principles. All of the political parties endorse the principles that "we believe in an inclusive, open and participative society ... Differences between people should not affect participation in society, but they can have an added value" and "Limburg participates actively in the Euroregions and in the European Union". These principles demonstrate that the cross-border perspective informs and is embedded in the thoughts and actions of Limburg inhabitants. Cross-border relations remains an important theme for Limburg and is a common thread in the 2019-2023 Provincial Executive's "Innovative Connecting" programme.

# Limburgers – global citizens

*Limburg has a wealth of opportunities at its command, with its geographical location ensuring an environment in which people are used to thinking and acting across borders. It's hardly surprising that today's Europe was born in Maastricht. In Limburg, rural tranquillity and global dynamism co-exist in one region, with many opportunities to drive progress and innovation.*

*This singular region on the Dutch border and in the heart of Europe understands that there is no future without history, and that tradition, culture and a regional language foster the sense of community needed to go forward, to seek out inspired connections and to act pragmatically when breaking new ground. It is precisely what many in the Netherlands and Europe are looking for: connectedness, individuality and balance. In Limburg, these things are readily available, for everyone.*

These words are part of the proposition narrative for Limburg<sup>1</sup> and describe a province that has its own identity and whose inhabitants have always regarded thinking and acting across borders as self-evident. Whether it's exports to neighbouring countries, education, shopping or hospital treatment, cross-border activities are part of the daily life of Limburgers. They are aware of what is going on across the borders and take this into account in their actions. Limburgers are proud of being part of a region that minimises borders, but Limburg itself has much to offer in this respect. One need only consider the international character of our province. It is home to leading international and European policy institutes such as the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) think tank, the European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA) and the Institute for Transnational and Euroregional Cross-border Cooperation and Mobility (ITEM). Organisations such as EUROCONTROL and the research and training institute of United Nations University (UNU-MERIT) are also based in Maastricht.<sup>2</sup> Several honorary consuls with their own diplomatic status represent foreign authorities while living and working in Limburg. They deploy their network in both countries and complement the work of their embassies and their economic, cultural and academic attachés. Limburg's geographical situation between the seaports of Rotterdam and Antwerp and the German hinterland, the knowledge available here and its excellent multimodal transport infrastructure mean that it is the preferred business location for many large international logistics service providers. In addition, events in 2019 and 2020 celebrating Limburg's liberation 75 years ago and international cultural festivals such as the Schrittmacherfestival and Cultura Nova have attracted national attention and express the cross-border dimension of which the people of Limburg are so proud.

1 Provincial Council memorandum of 22 June 2018, portfolio holder's communication regarding the Limburg Branding Advisory Committee, 18 January 2019

2 The provincial authorities are involved in some of these institutes. See Chapter 4: Instruments and partners



Gouvernement aan de Maas  
Zetel van het  
Provinciaal Bestuur van Limburg  
Geopend door  
Koningin Beatrix  
op 22 april 1986



De Europese Raad  
vergaderde in het Gouvernement  
op 9 en 10 december 1991  
Het Verdrag van Maastricht  
werd hier getekend  
op 7 februari 1992



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*Liberation concert in Margraten*

# 1 Introduction

We are pleased to present the Internationalisation Framework – Innovative Connecting Across Borders. Limburg's international outlook and the way in which it deals with cross-border relations are vital - after all, it does not exist in a vacuum. Because of its location, Limburg is economically and socially inseparable from the region to which it belongs and that is situated in three different countries. In general, inhabitants of Limburg work and do business across the border, shop and spend their spare time across the border, cooperate with partners across the border and receive their education across the border. And our neighbours in Germany and Belgium do the same. This naturally open attitude towards other regions, found both in the Netherlands and on the other side of our national border, has grown historically. Cross-border cooperation will also be a common thread running through the Provincial Executive's programme during the term of this administration. Every area of provincial policy has a cross-border dimension, with Limburg having much to offer its partners in neighbouring regions, in Europe and around the world in this respect. Collaboration of this kind also makes Limburg stronger, as our efforts have already shown. So we are pressing ahead unabated.

The coronavirus crisis makes clear that global, European and border-specific developments and measures have an impact on Limburg inhabitants. Authorities take decisions and issue instructions in conjunction, but often independently as well, occasionally producing contradictory results. The challenge for our citizens is to be aware of and to accommodate the interconnectedness of national and international developments. The current calls for plain and unambiguous measures and communication may revive the debate about the EU's resources and competences and how united we really are. The authority of international organisations such as the WHO is also back on the agenda. Our close relationship with German federal state Nordrhein-Westfalen has delivered visible benefits during the coronavirus crisis in the form of borders that remained open and the admission of coronavirus patients from Limburg to German hospitals. Cooperation between the Dutch and German fire brigades in fighting the wildfire in De Meinweg National Park also springs to mind. Closer relations with our neighbours certainly merits our attention in the post-coronavirus phase.

In addition to the efforts made by the Provincial Executive, the King's Commissioner for the Province of Limburg plays a special role based on his responsibilities at national level. He is also Limburg's ambassador and represents our province on official occasions at home and abroad. In his role as coordinating portfolio holder for internationalisation, he ensures optimal synergy between the various international aspects of provincial policy and the internationalisation activities in which he is otherwise involved.

This framework encompasses the various cross-border aspects of the course that we have charted as a province. It serves as a guideline for our international efforts and provides an overview and coherence. For example, we indicate how we deal with international relations and cooperate with neighbouring countries and regions, with Europe, and in the global context, and to which framework principles this leads (Chapters 2 and 3). In addition, we outline the various facets of the Province of Limburg's internationalisation policy (Chapter 4), in which the policy frameworks drawn up on the basis of the Provincial Executive programme provide direction and focus. In Chapter 5 we outline the instruments that will be used. The relationship between our policy ambitions and the relevant instruments is

discussed in Chapter 6. For a brief summary of what the Province of Limburg's internationalisation policy has achieved in the recent period, we refer to Appendix 1.

For the sake of clarity, we differentiate in this document between **Limburg and neighbouring countries, Limburg and Europe, and Limburg and the world.**



*Cooperation between Dutch and German fire brigades during the wildfire in De Meinweg National Park.*

## 2 Strategy

Cross-border cooperation is second nature in Limburg. The province's geographical location and its own efforts have made it an increasingly prominent player on the international stage. We will continue these efforts unabated, narrowing our focus to the direction and objectives of the Innovative Connecting programme.

Our focus is mainly on neighbouring countries and regions. We can serve Limburg's interests best only if we look beyond and work across borders. After all: **the impact** of Limburg's policy on the economy, mobility, energy transition, security,\* fauna management, culture and innovation remains limited when activities stop at the border.

We are maintaining and building our European profile because the region has an interest in **coordinating** policies, **limiting border effects** and in **economic and scientific cooperation on a European scale**. From this special position, we are a partner in dialogue with central government and we see that our interests have a place on the national agenda. Our **knowledge and expertise in cross-border cooperation** not only strengthens our position at national level, but also makes us a **valuable partner in Europe and beyond**. We are also building knowledge and innovation alliances with international partners aimed at socially relevant solutions and broad prosperity. Participating in international clusters boosts our **position and strength**. We switch between the various levels of scale: starting with our own provincial agenda, we collaborate with our neighbouring regions, European partners, the EU or global relations, depending on the specific theme. These partnerships also create the mass required to put shared interests on the agenda. Such "organised" cross-border networks and contacts also make **rapid response** possible when opportunities arise or incidents occur. In addition to the political administrative network, **familiarity with the agendas** of our partners and the dynamics of **give and take** are essential requirements. Our Public Affairs efforts in The Hague, Brussels, Düsseldorf and Wallonia add value, while the focus in our own agenda offers direction, based on our policy clusters. This direction also determines which instrument or partnership has the greatest impact in the short or longer term.

\* Disaster relief and crisis management, public order and associated police, judicial and crime-fighting cooperation (both provincial and cross-border) fall within the tasks and responsibilities of the King's Commissioner as an extension of central government and therefore outside the scope of the Provincial Executive programme and related policy efforts.

## Limburg and the neighbouring countries

The different ways in which government tasks and competencies and financial flows are organised on the other side of the border, not to mention the linguistic and cultural differences, make knowledge and a good relationship crucial to removing border obstacles. There is a permanent need to invest in relationships and form alliances with Belgium and Germany, the aim being to boost competitiveness, optimise energy or other infrastructure and create a safe and healthy living environment for the inhabitants of Limburg. But Limburg also has much to offer neighbouring countries, e.g. in terms of research and knowledge, tourism and recreation, the labour market, and logistics, the latter owing to its favourable location along major national and international freight transport corridors. In fact, Limburg is one of the few logistics regions in the Netherlands with multimodal connections (by road, water, rail, air and pipeline) to its surrounding regions, to the main ports of Rotterdam and Antwerp, and to important regions in the German hinterland.

Illustrative of good relationships with neighbouring regions are the alliances forged between organisations and institutions across the border, for example between MUMC+ and Uniklinik RWTH Aachen, Brightlands Chemelot Campus, RWTH Aachen University and Fraunhofer IME in AMIBM, and Maastricht University and KU Leuven.

Such good relationships make it possible to respond quickly when opportunities arise or in times of crisis. Even during a recession or in an emergency, cross-border cooperation remains important for Limburg. At the same time, closer cooperation also compounds the differences, making it all the more urgent to resolve any issues. As cross-border urban areas grow increasingly connected, they are also linked to international infrastructure and transport networks: road, rail, water, air, energy, pipeline, cable and digital.

To develop and implement Brightlands' innovations in a way that will facilitate the transitions that the province is facing, Limburg needs an economically level playing field. This also means attracting and retaining sufficient talent. Information on cross-border working and cross-border job placement encourages people to work across borders and helps to retain foreign talent for the region. The accessibility of our province is another important factor, with robust logistics networks making an important contribution. Provincial objectives are the guiding principle for active participation in the Euroregions and bilateral agendas. The expected impact and effectiveness determine the choice of instrument.



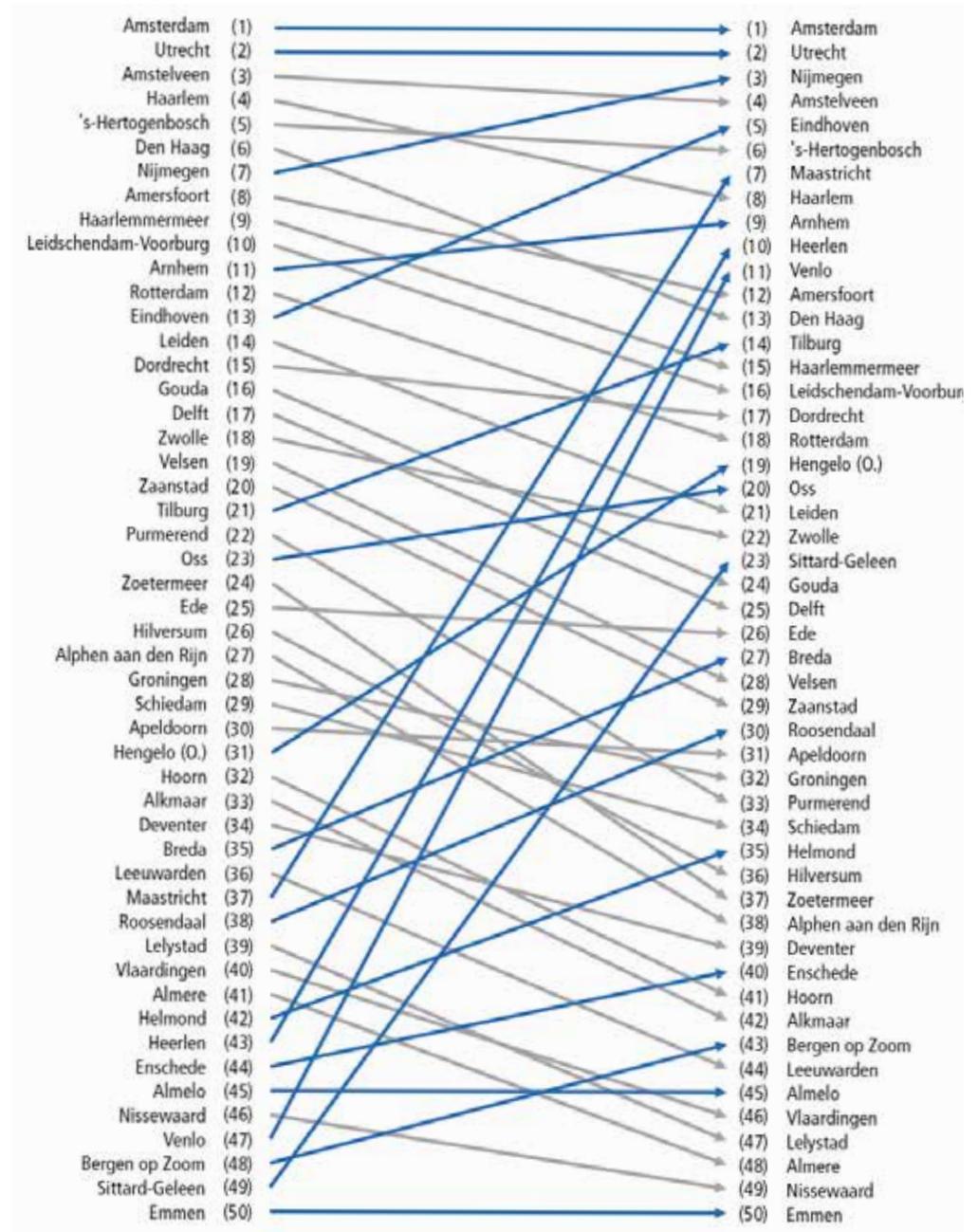
*Uniklinik RWTH Aachen*



*Brightlands Maastricht Health Campus*

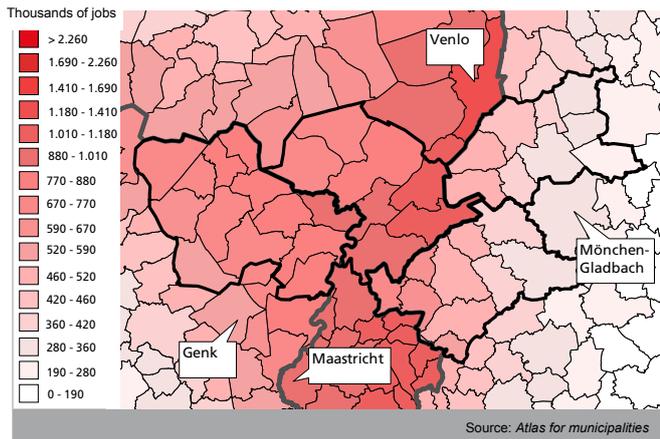
According to the Atlas for municipalities (May 2019), cities along the border benefit most from European cooperation. The attractiveness of large municipalities in Limburg increases when obstacles to working across the border are eliminated. When legal, linguistic and cultural differences are removed and information is available about opportunities on the other side of the border, people start to consider jobs abroad as a genuine option and “it’s like picking up cities along the border and relocating them to the Randstad urban conurbation in the west of the Netherlands,” according to the researchers. This conclusion stems from the idea that the recent growth in large cities can be attributed to the many highly educated and creative people living there who in turn attract like-minded individuals, increasing their chance of finding a suitable job and partner. In addition, the presence of a wide variety of cultural (theatre, pop venues) and other urban amenities (university, healthcare) plays a role. This influx results in an increase in employment opportunities, creating an upward spiral.

**The residential attractiveness index, with (left) and without (right) border obstacles; cross-border jobs and facilities are included**

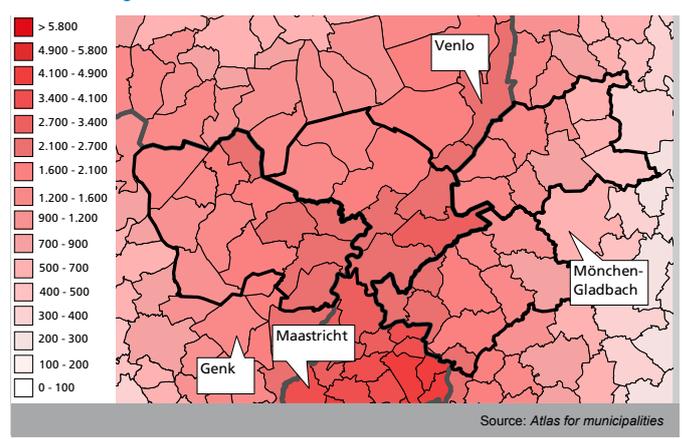


The Atlas of opportunities<sup>1</sup> shows how agglomeration benefits increase when border obstacles are dismantled or reduced, revealing the potential for cross-border cooperation. An increase in agglomeration benefits can lead to more career opportunities and more amenities, making regions more attractive for households that are relocating. The labour market also experiences growth on both the demand side (more jobs in the vicinity) and the supply side (more potential employees).

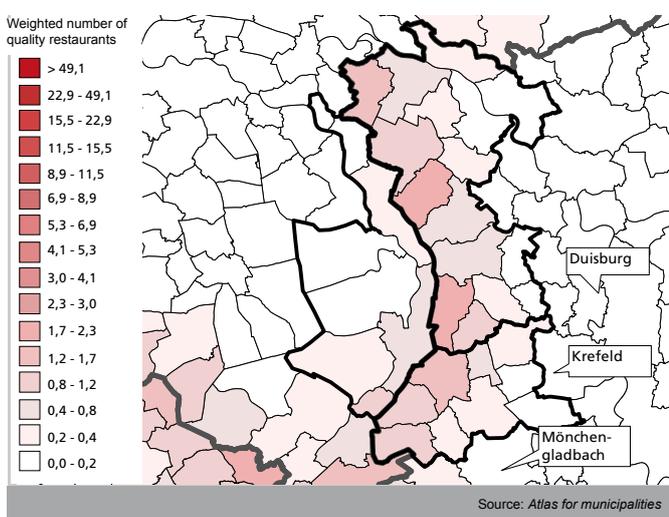
Increase in the number of jobs available after removing border obstacles in the labour market



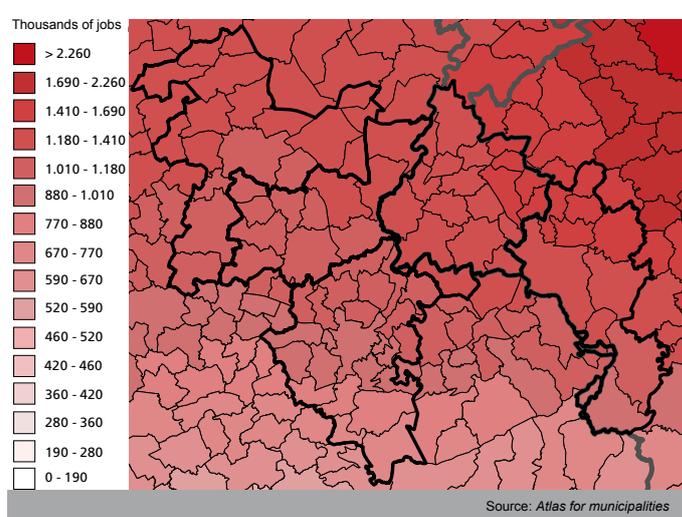
Increase in the number of hospital beds within acceptable travel time after removing border obstacles



Change in culinary choice within acceptable travel time after removing border obstacles



Number of jobs available within acceptable travel time in a labour market without border obstacles



More recent publications, i.e. Arbeidsmarkt zonder grenzen by the PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (2015) and De arbeidsmarkt aan de grens met en zonder grensbelemmeringen by the CPB Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis (2016), also show that Limburg benefits from a cross-border labour market; according to the latter report, if we assume that agglomeration effects have a range of 60 kilometres, then the Province of Limburg's gross regional product would increase by just over one billion euros per year if border obstacles were removed.

1 Atlas of opportunities for South Limburg, Tongeren, Liège and Aachen, Atlas of opportunities for North Limburg, Atlas of opportunities for Central Limburg, all by Roderik Ponds, Clemens van Woerkens, Gerard Marlet, 2013.

## Limburg and Europe

The southern part of the Netherlands, consisting of Limburg along with the provinces of Noord-Brabant and Zeeland, is one of the most innovative and competitive regions in Europe. The strength of the region lies in its innovative international High Tech Systems and Materials (HTSM), Agrifood and Chemicals clusters, in addition to four clusters with international potential (logistics, biobased, life sciences & health and maintenance)<sup>2</sup> and associated leading knowledge institutions. The fact that Limburg has long experience in thinking and acting across borders also contributes to its strong position in Europe. Like European and national government policy, regional innovation policy is dominated by the search for solutions to societal challenges. In “mission-driven innovation”, the strength of the above clusters is combined to respond to these challenges, which can only be addressed if sectors work together on multidisciplinary solutions. Limburg has identified two missions in its mission-driven economic policy: “Limburg energises!” and “Limburg boosts health”.<sup>3</sup>

The Brightlands campuses make an important contribution to the Limburg missions, but also to addressing societal challenges at national and European level. The international nature of the Limburg missions leads to market opportunities. By working with companies, knowledge institutions and organisations in other European regions, the Province can enter into innovative alliances and identify solutions to broad societal issues more quickly. The Einstein Telescope positions the region in an international ecosystem of innovation, research and talent development. A level playing field at European level is of direct importance for companies in the border region – an importance that is not always felt or appreciated at national level.

The new European Commission aims to position Europe more firmly in a world in which global competition is growing fiercer in certain areas. It wishes to take the lead in addressing climate change. At the same time, digital leadership should result in a degree of technological autonomy. Limburg wants to help to address the European challenges with knowledge and innovation developed on the Brightlands campuses. This will mean aligning as closely as possible with the European Commission’s plans and boosting economic competitiveness. Innovation (e.g. digitalisation, control towers, etc.) is also essential for the Goods Corridors<sup>4</sup> Programme, aimed at making Rotterdam-Duisburg corridor the smartest and most sustainable in the world. Limburg is an important part of this corridor.

Clear propositions that are in line with the European priorities match the Provincial Executive’s high level of ambition for using European Union resources to achieve provincial objectives. We will draw on the experience of an expert consultancy firm when drafting these propositions.<sup>5</sup>

The European Union is currently preparing its new programmes for the 2021-2027 period. We will again be focusing on the various structural funds and on the Common Agricultural Policy.

2 “Innoveren en realiseren met impact RIS3 Zuid-Nederland 2021-2027, Regionale Innovatie Strategie Slimme Specialisatie voor programma’s Europese fondsen”.

3 “Mission-driven Economic Policy Framework”, Provincial Council proposal, June 2020

4 Part of the Multi-Year Programme for Infrastructure, Spatial Planning and Transport of the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management.

5 In 2019, ERAC carried out research for the Province of Limburg into the efficiency and effectiveness of provincial policy for obtaining European subsidies. The 2015-2019 coalition agreement included a best efforts obligation of €100 million for this purpose.

The societal challenges that have been incorporated into the Limburg missions in the “Mission-driven economic policy framework” and in the “Policy framework for Limburg’s agriculture and agrifood sector: heading towards the future” are comparable to their European counterparts. Our propositions contribute in this way to national and European objectives. More than in the past, we wish to anticipate financial opportunities by pro-actively developing the right propositions and projects with our partners, while making optimal use of the synergy between the programmes. We will maintain the system of provincial co-funding for this reason, and intensify our cooperation with municipalities and regions. Limburg also promotes the use of other European funds, such as Horizon Europe, intended for knowledge, research, and innovation projects. We intend to monitor progress in terms of content, numbers and financial scope, as was the case in the previous Provincial Executive term. At the time of writing, it is not yet clear how the European Commission will tackle the EU’s recovery after the coronavirus crisis. With the United Kingdom exiting the Union, constraints on available resources had already been taken into account, but Europe’s economic recovery following the coronavirus crisis will also have an impact.

In addition to the economic and digital priorities and the Green Deal, the European Commission has identified a number of key areas that emphasise European values: “promoting a European way of life based on equality”, “a stronger Europe in the world” and “a new impetus for European democracy”. These priorities provide reference points for Limburg’s efforts to position itself internationally but also in the context of active participation in the Euroregion and Europe and active citizenship.<sup>6</sup> One of the opportunities to portray Limburg as a European region is the renown that it enjoys thanks to the Maastricht Treaty.<sup>7</sup> The award of the European Heritage Label in 2018 recognises the power of this treaty as a symbol for European ideals, values, history and integration and it therefore makes a major contribution to Limburg’s international image. Keeping Europe and the debate about Europe alive for its inhabitants, especially young people, is one of the Province’s responsibilities. The Maastricht Working on Europe programme, initiated in 2018 by the Province of Limburg, Maastricht University and the Municipality of Maastricht, is the central hub in this respect, together with the implementing organisation Studio Europa Maastricht (SEM). Participation in European innovation and other networks, alliances and institutes provides academic expertise and a more international composition of the population in the region. Here, too, our guiding principle is that the focus should be on aligning with the provincial policy objectives and that academic disciplines can make an independent contribution to solving the region’s problems. The Young Universities for the Future of Europe (YUFE) alliance, with Maastricht University as the driver and chosen by the European Commission as one of the best initiatives by a European university, can also serve as an international showcase for the region’s European-grade academic excellence, linked to other top young European universities and regions. This is Innovative Connecting at its best. Events and activities connect our efforts in this area to the inhabitants of Limburg and also promote our European character.

In this way, we continue to build on Limburg’s European profile and renown in Europe, with our international positioning helping us to attract employees from around the world and to promote tourism. Brexit is not going unnoticed in an export-oriented province like

<sup>6</sup> Page 7, Innovative Connecting, 2019-2023 Provincial Executive programme.

<sup>7</sup> Although we communicate it modestly, Limburg enjoys European fame because of the Treaty on European Union, known as the Maastricht Treaty, which transformed the European Community into the European Union in 1993. It also laid the foundations for the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), for the introduction of a single currency (the euro) and for a new European body: the Committee of the Regions.

Limburg. At the same time, 140 Brexit companies have chosen the Netherlands as their new location,<sup>8</sup> with several settling in Limburg. The province's favourable location, powerful innovative clusters and European image are qualities on which we can capitalise. As in The Hague and Düsseldorf, a strong presence in public affairs and public administration in Brussels is resulting in a network and advocacy of relevance to provincial dossiers.<sup>9</sup>

## Limburg and the world

A multipolar world order<sup>10</sup> is making geopolitics and diplomacy increasingly complex. The behaviour of world powers has become less predictable. Technology is no longer simple progress, it also raises questions about dependencies and security when friendly world powers act in unpredictable ways. While national agreements are no longer sufficient on certain issues, such as legislation in the digital world, there is also a need at national level to remain as independent as possible. This demand for "proximity" leads to an increased emphasis on regionalisation. As regions are well positioned when it comes to innovation ecosystems and contacts between industry, research centres and civil society, they play an important role in strategic value chains. Our own agenda, linked where possible to the national agenda, is leading in maintaining relationships with countries outside Europe and we opt for an approach in which market opportunities are central. We seek to collaborate with innovation clusters in countries that can boost the innovativeness and knowledge position of the Brightlands campuses, with cooperation perhaps also being necessary in logistics or manufacturing. In this way, we can contribute to Limburg's economic missions. When it comes to our alignment with international knowledge clusters, China, as innovation leader in many areas, is a case apart. Our relationship with our Chinese partner province of Sichuan has already borne fruit and, together with the Brightlands China Center of Brightlands Maastricht Health Campus, makes a valuable contribution to Limburg's economic missions. Follow-ups have been planned, for example the opening of the Brightlands showroom in Chengdu Medical City or the supply of respiration rooms to Shanghai hospital by Maastricht Instruments.

The knowledge and expertise of the Province of Limburg serve as tools of economic diplomacy in China and elsewhere, with foreign government networks being used for targeted project lobbying.<sup>11</sup> The New Silk Road is leading to market opportunities in logistics that are being further explored and developed in cooperation with Limburg Development Company LIOF and logistics market parties. Finally, we are also looking beyond Europe to connect our international network with the Limburg business community and civil society.

8 Netherlands Foreign Investment Agency, February 2020

9 Public Affairs agenda for central government, European Union and neighbouring regions", letter to Provincial Council 2 April 2020, 2020/12994

10 The multipolar world order has several influential countries or regions, as opposed to the bipolar world order before 1991, when the Cold War divided the world into two camps.

11 The importance and effectiveness of this approach became clear during the coronavirus crisis, when medical supplies were imported from China.

### **Regional vs. national policy**

National policy also influences our international relations. The Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, any line ministers and the respective embassies are in charge of foreign relations to ensure a consistent national foreign policy. The policy regarding our neighbours is handled by the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations. Local and provincial governments maintain contact with governments of other countries and flesh out the Netherlands' connections with other countries in order to forge opportunities for broad social and economic structural enhancement. The Province of Limburg is also part of this working method, with the ambitions with regard to autonomous policy areas being achieved mainly through cooperation in national, Euroregional and international alliances. In the letter to the Dutch House of Representatives of 12 July 2019, the Ministry of the Interior (also writing on behalf of the ministries of Education, Culture and Science, Economic Affairs and Climate Policy, and Social Affairs and Employment) emphasises the importance of continued cooperation across the border, partly because it offers opportunities to increase the attractiveness of border regions. Initiatives are being supported along four tracks:

1. Cross-border initiatives
2. Underlying conditions and border obstacles
3. Nordrhein-Westfalen-Netherlands governance
4. EU and Benelux.

The Parkstad Regional Deal and North Limburg Regional Deal are part of the first track, as are the national consultations with the border regions regarding the Einstein Telescope. The second track includes, in particular, central government's approach to border issues. This is relevant for Limburg because of problems experienced in education and the labour market, the importance of cross-border information points and the task of tackling subversion and drug crime in border areas. The Dutch government's dialogue with Nordrhein-Westfalen (NRW) is taking place within the framework of track 3 and concerns the potential opportunities for and problems surrounding cross-border cooperation between Nordrhein-Westfalen and the Netherlands. The dialogue has resulted in a border area agenda whose implementation has been embedded at regional and local level (see also the review of neighbouring countries). Finally, the fourth track comprises the INTERREG programmes financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

Limburg cooperates closely with central government within the above tracks and has short lines of communication with the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations. Venlo hosted the first border area conference between the Netherlands and Nordrhein-Westfalen on 9 May 2019.

The "Public Affairs agenda for central government, the European Union and neighbouring regions" outlines the long-term strategy, methods and substance of provincial lobbying activities in The Hague, Brussels, Düsseldorf, Flanders and Wallonia.

### 3 Framework principles

The strategy described in Chapter 2 is based on the 2019-2023 Provincial Executive programme, Innovative Connecting, and leads to a number of framework principles that serve as the guidelines for our cross-border activities.

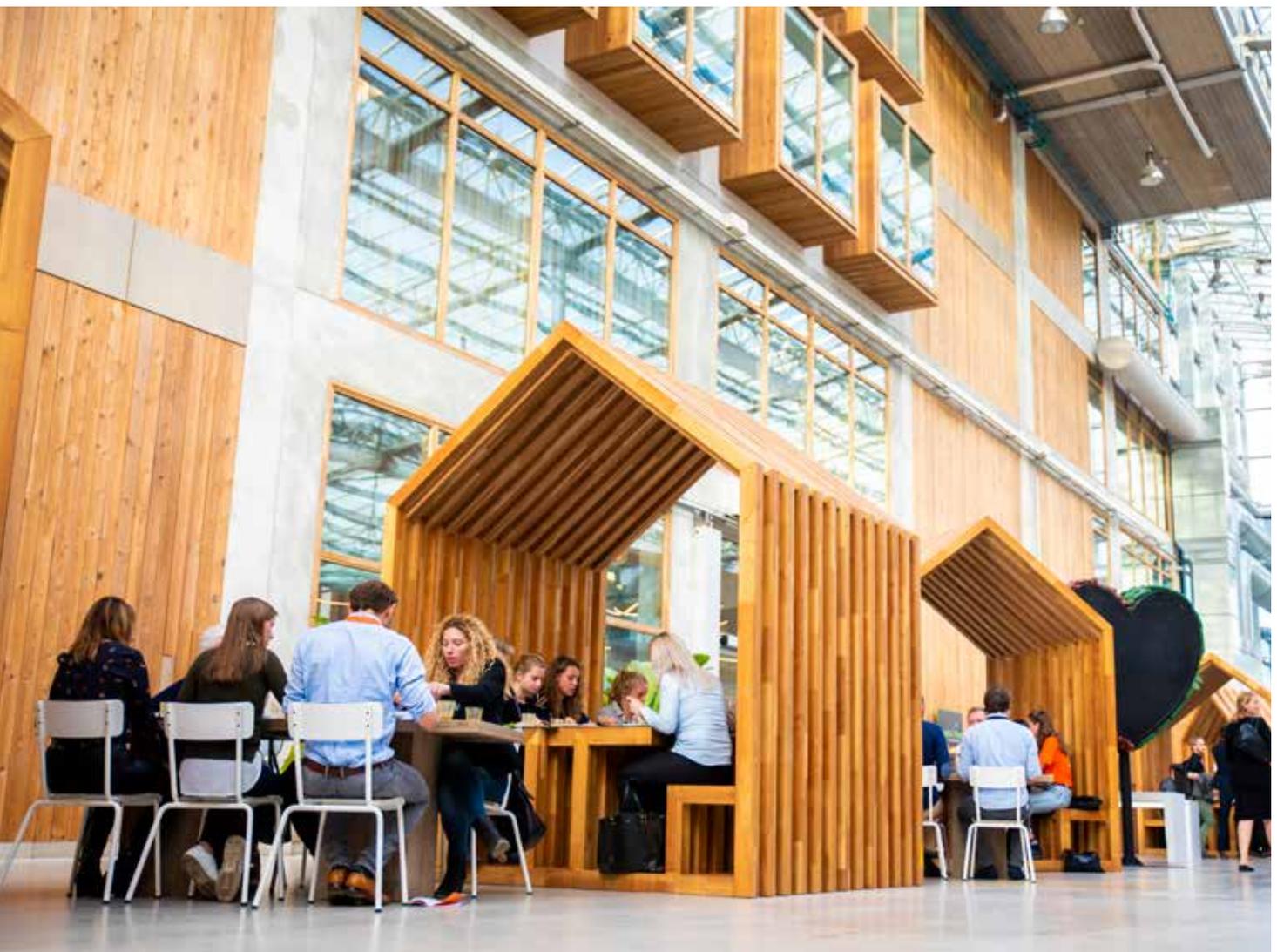
- The provincial agenda is leading for participation in cross-border projects within the context of the European programmes. Targeted efforts are being made to develop cross-border projects together with other public authorities, partners in society and the business community that contribute to the provincial policy ambitions. Examples include projects focusing on innovation and the economy, but also on social cohesion, logistics, nature, housing, culture, energy, security,<sup>12</sup> the labour market & education, tourism or the acquisition of international and Euroregional skills. In addition, we try as much as possible to translate our Provincial Executive programme into Euroregional programmes.
- The acquisition of European funding is a process that starts with efforts to influence the legislative framework for the instrument and then the programmes themselves. Tendering and selecting the Limburg proposals then requires lobbying for Limburg's interests while also identifying, connecting and empowering the actors in Limburg and the border region. The Province of Limburg is actively involved in all these facets.
- We anticipate the financial opportunities of the 2021-2027 European Programmes by pro-actively developing propositions and projects with our partners, while making optimal use of the synergy between the programmes.
- Co-funding is used to boost the acquisition of European funds. Calls and projects that contribute to the provincial objectives are eligible for provincial co-funding.<sup>13</sup>
- Initiatives in relation to the international positioning of Limburg are considered in conjunction. Networks and activities resulting from these initiatives are not separate but rather reinforce each other.
- Research conducted by Limburg's knowledge institutions in the context of cross-border cooperation or the removal of border obstacles is not carried out independently, but in mutual coordination. The results serve as the basis and justification for resolving issues in the region, for pursuing activities in cross-border alliances, and for developing agendas with our neighbouring countries.

<sup>12</sup> Disaster relief and crisis management, public order and the associated police, judicial and crime-fighting cooperation (both provincial and cross-border) fall within the tasks and responsibilities of the King Commissioner as an extension of central government and therefore outside the scope of the Provincial Executive programme. Efforts are naturally made to align with the provincial agenda as a means of reinforcement.

<sup>13</sup> The Provincial Executive programme is based in part on the principle that 70% of the requested co-funding comes from the policy budget and 30% from available policy intensification budget for "process resources/unforeseen/co-financing Europe". In the coming months (2020), an assessment framework will be detailed for the use of provincial co-funding resources in the form of a "co-funding ladder".

- With our Brightlands concept, we position ourselves as an internationally leading knowledge region, giving us an international radius of action in which we cooperate with knowledge institutions and the business community across the border.
- Unmistakeable brand familiarity and effective service provision are paramount for organisations engaged in cross-border labour mobility when informing citizens about working, living, studying and doing business across borders.
- The Limburg economic missions are leading for the targeted acquisition of companies abroad and for participation in innovative international alliances.

Brightlands Campus Greenport Venlo



*Brightlands Campus Greenport Venlo*

## 4 Cross-border ambitions in provincial policy frameworks

Internationalisation is a focal point for the Province that has transcended terms in office and can count on broad political support. It has positively influenced and strengthened Limburg's position as a cooperation partner. There is continuity in our cooperation with neighbouring countries and regions and with international partners and we have forged enduring relationships with them. Without claiming to be exhaustive, this chapter summarises the cross-border priorities within various provincial policy areas during this Provincial Executive term. They are listed here to provide an overview. Decisions on these priorities and their implementation will take place within the relevant frameworks and under the responsibility of the Provincial Executive (or the King's Commissioner). For more information, please refer to the frameworks. The next chapter deals with the instruments available to capitalise on opportunities and to achieve objectives.

### Safe Limburg action plan

- Safe outlying area: the North Limburg Regional Deal looks specifically at the risk of subversion among international workers, such as human trafficking and labour exploitation.
- An awareness of and a cross-border approach to subversion is very important for the security partners from the Netherlands, Belgium and Nordrhein-Westfalen, which are cooperating within EURIEC on a single cross-border administrative approach. Cross-border partners are challenged and encouraged to cooperate more intensively and innovatively in this area where opportunities arise. The King's Commissioner (acting on the basis of his central governmental duties) and responsible security partners ensure that the cross-border administrative approach is placed on the cross-border agenda. The King's Commissioner works closely with the Provincial Executive in this context.

### Culture policy programme 2020-2021

Provincial cross-border cultural policy focuses in particular on:

- The geographical area of the Meuse-Rhine Euroregion, including Liège, the Rhine-Meuse-North Euroregion, Flanders and Nordrhein-Westfalen.
- Boosting cross-border cultural cooperation originating from and supported by the arts and culture sector itself, creating cultural offerings for audiences on both sides of the border.
- Distinguishing Limburg's cultural sector and raising its profile through cross-border cultural cooperation.
- Serving as an "ambassador" for the Limburg cultural sector during administrative and official consultations with Belgian and German government partners.

## Policy framework for Limburg's agriculture and agrifood sector: heading towards the future

- Innovation in agrifood and crossovers with high-tech, manufacturing, logistics and IT are essential for agriculture: in addition to partnerships with regional and national knowledge institutions, cooperation is sought with knowledge clusters across the border, including Hasselt, Aachen and Leuven and with the CERN knowledge institute in Switzerland.
- Connecting with agendas, partners and projects, especially in neighbouring countries, broadening and strengthening a strong cross-border ecosystem and accessing European resources: to this end, promoting cross-border innovation, joining cross-border excursion programmes and trade missions, and supporting entrepreneurs in cross-border business.
- Powerful lobbying to remove problems in legislation and to create a level playing field, as expressed in the statutory framework for the Common Agricultural Policy, European Trade Policy, Competition Policy and Food Safety Policy.

## Policy framework for sport 2020-2023

- Limburg is internationally positioned as a leading region for elite sport and talent development: prominent athletes make the presence of an elite sport infrastructure and facilities visible in the Euroregion and beyond. The elite-class sports innovations developed at the Brightlands campuses also contribute to this international positioning.
- Active recruitment abroad is extending the reach of sporting events. The region's profile is also being highlighted in other countries: cross-border sports & leisure infrastructure contribute to its tourism profile, as do the cycling and equestrian events that are a form of branding.

## Branding

Limburg's branding programme is meant to improve the business climate and attract and retain the right subgroups within the Residents, Visitors, Businesses and Brains target groups. The focus is therefore on positioning Limburg as an attractive, distinctive region in which to live, work, study, do business, innovate and spend leisure time.

- The story of Limburg is based on seven building blocks. The cross-border dimension is one of them: its border location makes it stronger. Limburg lies in the heart of an international region. That makes Limburg, and therefore the Netherlands, stronger.
- Branding is largely about brand development. It is crucial to make smart use of existing brand power: when promoting Limburg among international target groups, the flag-bearers are the Limburg brands with the greatest international brand familiarity.

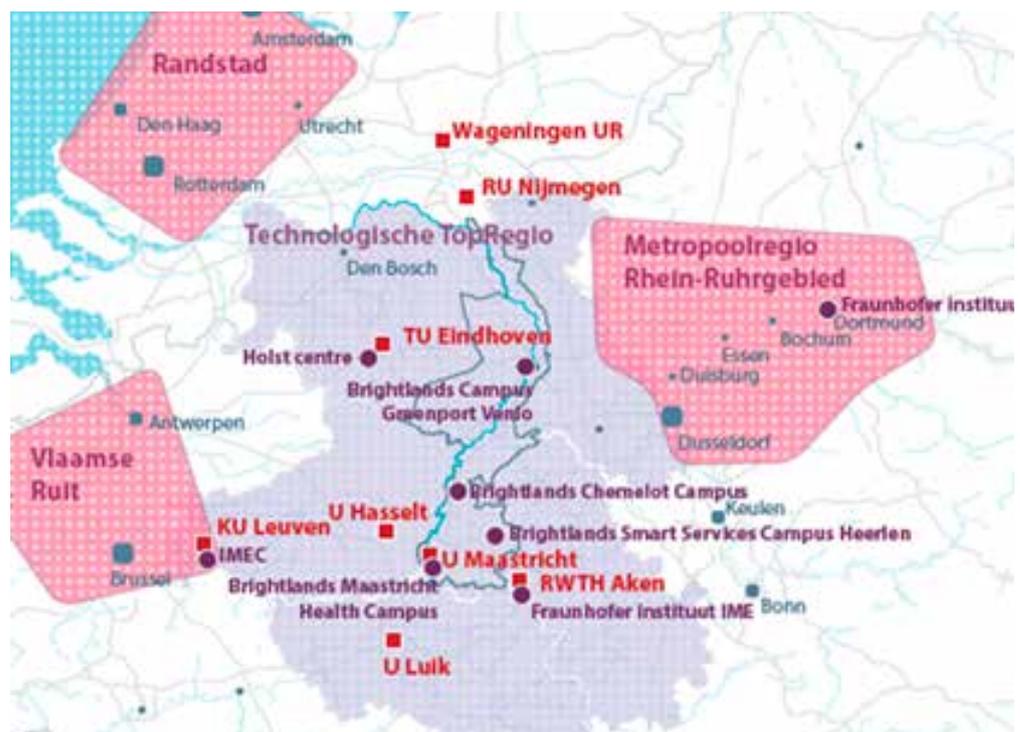
## Energy policy

- The challenge of making industry, buildings, mobility, agriculture and electricity generation more sustainable is not unique to Limburg. Industry in both neighbouring regions is facing challenges similar to those in Limburg: cooperation on the energy transition and nitrogen reduction is on the cross-border cooperation agenda for public authorities and the business community.
- Optimisation and cost-efficiency of electricity grids: we must look beyond the national and provincial perspective and also take the Euroregional perspective into account.

- New “molecules” for pipelines are needed to make the large industrial clusters in the Euroregion more sustainable: cross-border cooperation is essential for cost-efficient construction, spatial planning and public funding and to clarify the revenue model for an international energy highway running from the Ruhr area to Chemelot and on to the ports of Rotterdam/Antwerp.
- The cross-border aspects of a sustainable energy infrastructure are being examined in a system study carried out in cooperation with grid operators, major industrial energy consumers and producers of renewable energy.
- The choices made in the Provincial Energy Strategy will define our efforts concerning Limburg’s energy supply.

### Mission-driven economic policy

- There is sufficient talent is available and we make optimal and long-term use of it: cross-border information points and expat centres inform newcomers about options and opportunities. There are cross-border exchanges and cooperation in international alliances and between educational institutions. Limburg is being positioned as an attractive European region.
- Taking advantage of opportunities offered by the border region to boost vitality and quality of life: commitment to multilingualism, Euroregional knowledge in education and for SMEs.
- Supporting cross-border entrepreneurship: the trade days and export support for Limburg’s economic missions by LIOF; participation in trade shows and national and international trade fairs; support for acquisition and trade promotion, including economic diplomacy and taking advantage of opportunities offered by incoming tourism.



- Adding value to the innovative ecosystem (Brightlands campuses) for the Limburg missions: coordination and cooperation between ecosystems on both sides of the border; setting up joint innovation strategies with Nordrhein-Westfalen, Flanders and Wallonia; knowledge exchange through participation in Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) Platforms<sup>14</sup> and international high-tech clusters.
- The attractiveness of the region for international workers: the European, international image of Limburg makes the region more attractive for international workers.
- Using European funds to leverage regional resources.
- Being open to groundbreaking opportunities such as the Einstein Telescope.
- A new impetus for learning the languages of neighbouring countries (for example integrating languages into other subjects) and promoting knowledge about cultures on both sides of national borders to take Euroregional education to the next level: exchange programmes with educational institutions across borders. In vocational education, this includes exploring Euroregional career opportunities, apprenticeships with Belgian and German entrepreneurs and available training programmes.
- Tourism and recreation contribute to the health and vitality of Limburgers, who relax in their own environment: cross-border recreational facilities, such as the cross-border nature parks and the iconic Meuse cycle route, are an important part of the recreational opportunities available in the surrounding area.
- Tourism and recreation are important for Limburg's economy, the living environment and the business climate: German and Belgian tourists and holidaymakers remain an essential target group for the Limburg tourism sector.
- In addition to landscape, hospitality and cultural heritage, we make the most of Limburg's Euroregional location, where possible by pursuing a supra-regional approach to initiatives, marketing and financing.

## Mobility without borders

The Limburg Mobility Plan "The Smart Route to Tomorrow", adopted in 2018, is leading. We are working towards an accessible, liveable, attractive and borderless Limburg, based on our ambitions and strategic goals, one of which is to improve our cross-border mobility. The recent Mobility Challenges Review has pinpointed mobility-related challenges and ambitions for the next few years, including an explicit focus on internationalisation and cross-border mobility.

- Cross-border aspects are always taken into account in current and new area studies. Examples are the Westelijke Mijnstreek area study, the Weert area study and the South Limburg Mobility Vision.
- In the Future Vision of Public Transport and within ongoing projects and initiatives, we are committed to improving cross-border connections and the associated solutions in ticketing and pricing. Examples include the development of the Three-country train and the Limburg MaaS pilot, which specifically focuses on achieving sustainable mobility by offering multimodal, cross-border door-to-door transport solutions.
- In the area of Smart Mobility, we are working with central government on the "Smart Mobility Combination of Forces". Digitisation of public mobility data is an important development in this respect. Limburg is taking a pioneering role by including cross-border data.

<sup>14</sup> Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) is an innovative strategy aimed at boosting growth and jobs in Europe by enabling each region to develop its own competitive advantage. The EC facilitates S3 platforms for knowledge sharing, data collection, analysis, and networking opportunities for some 170 EU regions and 18 national public authorities.

- We are working hard to make instruments in other national projects, such as the ongoing development of the national market and capacity analysis (NMCA), suitable for cross-border use.
- In the new provincial policy framework Cycling 2019-2023, we are focusing on climate policy and, more than in the past, on Euroregional urban connections and the accessibility of the universities located in those regions.
- Logistics is pre-eminently an international issue. Our policy is aimed at maintaining and further strengthening Limburg's strong position in this area. We will be looking closely at how to develop logistics corridors and hubs and intensify the Modal Shift. We are also working on creating sufficient and secure truck parking spaces.
- These challenges and ambitions can be fulfilled only in cooperation with a wide range of partners. We are therefore also working on an appropriate governance structure, with the involvement of international partners as one of the focal points.

### Nature and fauna management and provincial water plan 2016-2021

A solid cross-border nature and water network of good quality can mitigate the effects of climate change on flora and fauna. To this end, cross-border cooperation exists at various levels.

- Lifting border obstacles for people, water, flora and fauna and more efficient use of instruments and resources available on both sides of the border for nature, water and landscape management: implementation of cross-border cooperation projects, where possible with European co-funding.



- Cooperation and coordination with Noord-Brabant, Germany and Belgium are essential when it comes to developing and restoring cross-border brooks and wet and other nature areas and in terms of water management: participation in the regular border water consultations with Germany, Flanders and Wallonia; formulation and implementation of cross-border projects and agreements on the sustainable management of cross-border green and blue connections.
- The cross-border (landscape) parks Maas-Swalm-Nette, Kempen-Broek, RivierPark Maasvallei, the Drielandenpark and Brunssumerheide/Tevenerheide help to shape cross-border biodiversity and landscape as an essential part of the European Green Infrastructure connecting the larger European natural areas: further creation of international networks of natural areas (Green Infrastructure); green area development in the larger landscape units in the border parks.

### Spatial planning and environment policy

- In spatial planning and environment strategies at national, provincial and municipal level, the cross-border dimension is given ample attention where relevant. This applies to the full spectrum in the physical domain, i.e. urban agglomerations, housing, facilities, spatial economy, infrastructure and transport systems, energy, water, nature, landscape, subsoil, etc. In this context, one positive development is that stronger cross-border relationships has been identified for the first time as a national interest in the draft National Strategy on Spatial Planning and the Environment (NOVI).
- We carry out underlying analyses and explorations from a cross-border perspective, which makes them much more realistic. We work on resolving missing or non-compatible data and assess the effects of legislation on cross-border cooperation, demonstrating that everyday urban systems do not stop at the border.
- In cross-border cooperation, we focus on actions that show rapid results, but we also work with neighbouring countries on cross-border scenarios in which we explore opportunities for a joint approach to strategic issues.
- We deliver input to national, provincial and municipal programmes to develop spatial planning and environment strategies that highlight the cross-border dimensions. Examples include the National Main Energy Structure Programme (cross-border energy networks) and the National Nature Programme (biodiversity from an international perspective). The “Spatial Planning and Environment Agenda”<sup>15</sup> focuses on the challenges and identifies the parties that should be involved in addressing each challenge, if necessary across the national border. By participating, we are responding to an invitation by the Belgian Province of Limburg (in response to the draft NOVI) to become involved in the agenda’s development.
- We inform each other in good time about spatial developments near the border with possible consequences for nature, the environment and/or local residents on the other side.

<sup>15</sup> In this new instrument, the challenges identified in the spatial planning and environment strategy are placed alongside the ongoing implementation programmes of central and regional governments and any required additional actions are determined jointly.



Meuse Valley Border Park

## Urban development & living

### ***Expo Real Munich***

- For several years, the Province has participated in Expo Real Munich, the largest B2B real estate fair in Europe. This is where Limburg positions itself with international builders, developers and potential investors.

### ***Quality impetus for Limburg city centres***

- We are opting for an opportunity-based approach to crossovers within cross-border projects and related (European) funding, for example promoting the “Euroregional profile” of city centres.

### ***Purchase flow survey***

- In 2019, the Province launched the purchase flow survey, which provides information on consumers’ purchasing behaviour and motives for visiting. Purchasing behaviour does not stop at the national and provincial borders. That is why a deliberate choice was made to question respondents relatively far from the border in Belgium and Germany and in the rest of the Netherlands.
- The research results are used by policymakers, market parties and our foreign partners to optimise retail zones, where relevant in cooperation with one another.

### ***Housing monitor***

The INTERREG EMR Housing Monitor project reveals cross-border housing issues in the Meuse-Rhine Euroregion:

- The Housing Monitor combines demographic trends, developments in the housing market and other aspects closely related to the theme of housing in one integrated statistical database.
- Cross-border transparency of data is increasing, blurring the dividing line between the various housing markets in the border area.

## Social Agenda implementation programme

We are opting for an opportunity-based approach to crossovers within cross-border projects and related (European) funding.



*Brightlands Maastricht Health Campus*

## 5 Instruments and partners

We are opting to retain and further develop knowledge about cross-border instruments in our organisation, but also to use the competence and experience of our partners in cross-border cooperation. This chapter describes what are currently the most relevant instruments and partner organisations. It is a sample and not an exhaustive overview. New opportunities or challenges may require the use of other instruments and collaborative relationships.

### Limburg and the neighbouring countries

#### Organisations promoting cross-border cooperation between Limburg and other partners in the region

The **EGTC Meuse-Rhine Euroregion (EMR)** is a partnership involving the Aachen region, the Province of Liège, the Belgian Province of Limburg, the Dutch Province of Limburg and the German-speaking Community of Belgium. Since 1 April 2019, the EMR has been a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), a legal entity under European law set up to facilitate cross-border transnational or interregional cooperation within the European Union. The EGTC Meuse-Rhine Euroregion promotes and coordinates cross-border cooperation between the five partner regions and has its own programme with the focal areas Economy & Innovation; Labour Market, Education & Training; Culture & Tourism; and Healthcare & Safety. Each partner region has seven voting members and two advisory members. Limburg has allocated the seats as follows: two to the Provincial Executive (King's Commissioner + a Provincial Executive member), three to the Provincial Council, two to municipal representatives, one advisory member on behalf of employers and one advisory member on behalf of employees.

Within the Meuse-Rhine Euroregion, the EMRIC agency is responsible for cooperation between the above partner regions in crisis management and disaster relief. Limburg is represented by the South Limburg Municipal Health Service (GGD) and the South Limburg Security Region.

The EU-Prevent Foundation is responsible for cooperation in healthcare, promotion and prevention. More than 30 partners within the Meuse-Rhine Euroregion are affiliated.

The **Rhine-Meuse-North Euroregion** has 31 members: 13 Central and North Limburg municipalities, SME association MKB Limburg and their German counterparts. The Rhine-Meuse-North Euroregion is a public body under German law. The main objective is to reduce border obstacles for living, working, doing business and studying in the Euroregion and to build its identity as a coherent region. To this end, five focal areas have been identified up to and including 2020: 1) agribusiness, 2) logistics, 3) industry, 4) tourism & recreation, nature & landscape, culture & sport and 5) labour market, education & language. These themes are elaborated on in projects. The Province of Limburg is an advisory member.

Approximately 55 municipalities and regional authorities are affiliated to the **Rhine-Waal Euroregion**. On the Dutch side, the Rhine-Waal Euroregion encompasses a large part of the Province of Gelderland with the territories of Arnhem-Nijmegen, West-Veluwe, South-West Gelderland, parts of North-East Brabant and the northern part of the Province of Limburg. On the German side, it includes the districts of Kleve and Wesel district and the cities of Duisburg and Düsseldorf. The main objective of the Rhine-Waal Euroregion is to

improve and intensify cross-border economic and social cooperation. Partners are brought together to launch joint initiatives. The Province of Limburg is involved through the general meeting of members and the committees.

### **Cross-border agendas**

#### ***Cooperation with Germany***

The latest coalition agreements of Nordrhein-Westfalen and the Netherlands have given a new impetus to bilateral cross-border cooperation between the two countries (GROS agenda). At the request of both prime ministers Mark Rutte and Armin Laschet, a study was carried out into possible improvements in the organisation (governance) of cross-border cooperation under the leadership of King's Commissioner Theo Bovens and Europe Minister for Nordrhein-Westfalen Stephan Holthoff-Pförtner. The new governance structure was adopted during the first government consultation between the Netherlands and Nordrhein-Westfalen on 19 November 2018. The King's Commissioner for Limburg coordinates on behalf of the border provinces in question. An administrative and official coordination structure was set up encompassing all levels of government on both sides of the border. Its main instruments are an annual Border Area Conference and a Border Area Agenda. The Border Area Agenda is a dynamic agenda in which specific activities are currently being developed addressing the three themes of labour market, education and mobility. After coordination within the above administrative coordination structure, new themes will be added to the Border Area Agenda. The theme of security (crisis management, cross-border police and judicial cooperation, cross-border crime fighting) has been added to the agenda for the forthcoming Border Area Conference. The responsible partners are preparing this subject in close cooperation with the King's Commissioner.

#### ***Cooperation with Flanders***

A new governance structure for cross-border cooperation with Flanders has also been developed. The King's Commissioner for the Province of Zeeland coordinates on behalf of the southern Dutch provinces. Chaired by Cathy Berx, Governor of the Province of Antwerp, and Piet Hein Donner, former vice-president of the Council of State, an administrative working group identifies solutions to border obstacles caused by differences in Dutch and Belgian legislation. This process resulted from an earlier exploration by ITEM into opportunities and risks with respect to the cross-border North Sea Port (Ghent-Vlissingen) port area. The resulting knowledge and expertise will be used to reach broader agreements on cross-border cooperation and to tackle border obstacles at supranational level. The aim is to ratify these agreements during the Flemish-Dutch summit in November 2020. If the cooperation extends into matters that affect the competences of the federal government or of Wallonia, Flanders will take this up with the relevant authorities.

### **Organisations promoting cross-border labour mobility**

#### ***Cross-border information points (GIP), Expat Centre, Cross-border job placement service points (SGA)***

Given Limburg's geographical location, it is important to have regular and long-term services for Euroregional labour mobility. The Maastricht, Aachen-Eurode, Rhine-Meuse-North Euroregion (Mönchengladbach) and Rhine-Waal Euroregion (Kleve) cross-border information points are there to answer border workers' questions about work, job applications, wages, taxes, healthcare costs, childcare, pensions and social security in both the German and Belgian border regions. The cross-border information points receive long-term funding from the provincial budget based on an agreement with central

government. The Cross-border job placement service points (SGA) in Kerkrade-Herzogenrath and Maastricht act as intermediaries in matching jobs and candidates across the border. Since 2020, there has been a new Cross-border job placement service point for Venlo-Mönchengladbach. The Expat Centre Maastricht Region assists internationals taking up employment and living in the South Limburg region and their employers. Its work supports the recruitment and retention of qualified international personnel, who are often in short supply. The presence of internationals (and border workers) has proven to be important for South Limburg companies, the Brightlands campuses and service providers.

## **Other**

### ***LIOF/NRW.Bank and LRM***

Together with its counterparts in our neighbouring regions (NRW.Bank in Nordrhein-Westfalen and LRM in Belgian Limburg), LIOF is investigating whether instruments for cross-border entrepreneurship can be developed that are easily accessible to SMEs in the Euroregions. LIOF also plays a specific role in Euroregional cooperation and export promotion based on the economic policy formulated by the Province.

The Parkstad Limburg Regional Deal and the North Limburg Regional Deal will make the region even stronger in cooperation with central government. Cross-border cooperation is an important component in both deals. In Parkstad, agreements have been made with the Aachen region about closer cooperation on the cross-border labour market, mobility and digital and other services. Within the framework of the regional deal, the education sector and the business community in North Limburg are working on a field lab for cross-border entrepreneurship. In addition, cooperation with the Lower Rhine region and the cross-border knowledge infrastructure are of particular interest.

## **Limburg and Europe**

### **Advocacy & Public Affairs**

**Advocacy** is practised throughout the organisation to persuade politicians, administrators, fellow civil servants and all other relevant actors to support specific interests or policies. Building good relationships and networks takes time but is crucial in cross-border cooperation. The "Public Affairs agenda for central government, the European Union and neighbouring regions"<sup>16</sup> outlines the long-term strategy, methods and deployment of provincial lobbying activities in The Hague, Brussels, Düsseldorf, Flanders and Wallonia. The Public Affairs outposts of the Province of Limburg are located in The Hague, Brussels and Düsseldorf.

### **Organisations & programmes that connect Limburg with Europe: European institutions**

#### ***Benelux Union***

The Benelux Union<sup>17</sup> is an intergovernmental partnership in which Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg cooperate closely in the areas Economic Union & Internal Market (including sustainable development) and Security & Society (justice and internal affairs). Cooperation between the three countries is generally given specific form in official (high-level) working groups. The Benelux also has its own legal instruments, enabling

<sup>16</sup> "Public Affairs agenda for central government, European Union and neighbouring regions", letter to Provincial Council 2 April 2020, 2020/12994

<sup>17</sup> [www.benelux.nl](http://www.benelux.nl)

Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg to tackle cross-border issues of local authorities or executive bodies in a legally unambiguous manner. On 1 January 2020, the Netherlands assumed the presidency of the Benelux for one year and is focusing on three overarching themes: sustainable economic development, ensuring cross-border security, and cooperation with other countries and regions.

The **Committee of the Regions** is an advisory body in which local and regional authorities make their voice heard in the European Union's decision-making process. The European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council consult the Committee of the Regions on new proposals in areas impacting local and regional policy. A member of the Provincial Executive is active in the Committee of the Regions.

**ITEM** (Institute for Transnational and Euroregional Cross-border Cooperation and Mobility) started in 2015 as a knowledge axis project; as a knowledge institute, it plays an important role in reducing border obstacles. It makes a socially relevant contribution to the cross-border economic development of the region not only by offering astute legal analyses but also by providing practical solutions to identified border problems. In this sense, the institute is also a facilitator for other "instruments" such as the cross-border information points. Evaluation shows that the institute is firmly embedded in existing Euroregional, national and European networks. In November 2019, a second tranche was awarded to ITEM to support its further development into an independent research institute with added value for society.<sup>18</sup>

**Maastricht Working on Europe** (MWOE) aspires to position the Limburg capital Maastricht as a meeting place for debate and dialogue and as centre of excellence for research on European themes. Initiatives taken within the framework of the European Heritage Label awarded to the Maastricht Treaty on 26 March 2018 are an important part of the MWOE programme (see also Europe review). After the successful completion of phase 1, the multi-annual programme objectives will continue to be implemented in phase 2: "Maastricht as a Centre of Excellence for research on Europe and European integration", "Maastricht as a meeting place for citizen dialogue and debate" and "propagating and cherishing the European Heritage linked to the Maastricht Treaty". Studio Europa, the implementing organisation for the programme, aims to act as a hub that connects existing and new "Europe initiatives" and parties involved in creating and reinforcing projects and events by deploying expertise and a broad network at local, national and international level. A further wish is to set up an administrative "Europe Consultation Body" to coordinate the various Europe initiatives.

Studio Europa will be entrusted with coordinating the agenda, capitalising on its role as a hub and building on the successful governance structure that is already operational. This decision is in line with administrative intentions and previous agreements. Boosting the international profile of the Limburg capital Maastricht, the region and Maastricht University will help to embed and position the province's interests in relevant European networks and meet its strategic challenges. Limburg has a wealth of organisations and programmes that transcend borders, and that is precisely why it will, in the longer term, become increasingly competitive in the international arena, offering international and national knowledge institutions, knowledge workers, social start-ups, businesses and networks an attractive business and working climate and attracting future students with its inviting living and academic environment.

<sup>18</sup> Proposal to Provincial Council regarding evaluation and application for second tranche of grant for knowledge axis project ITEM

Continued support for this initiative has already been endorsed by the Provincial Executive “Innovative Connecting” programme.

**Model European Parliament (MEP)**

The MEP provides European pupils in the upper classes of secondary school with the opportunity to experience what it is like to develop solutions to cross-border problems within the European Union by participating in a simulation of the European Parliament. It allows young people from Limburg and elsewhere to explore the complex process of European decision-making and to understand into the importance of cooperation within the European Union.

**Young European Talent (YET)**

Fifty top talents from five European countries (Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg, France and the Netherlands) are selected by relevant consuls, embassies, ministries and other government agencies to attend a three-day programme in Limburg. YET is an outstanding international network for young and future policymakers and decision-makers in Europe that helps to position our province internationally as a strong and versatile region.



Source: Studio Europa Maastricht

**YUFE** (Young Universities for the Future of Europe) is a collaboration between Maastricht University and the universities of Carlos III Madrid, Eastern Finland, Antwerp, Bremen, Essex, Rome, Cyprus (and Rijeka and Nicolaus Copernicus Torún as associate partners) within the framework of the European Commission's "European Universities" initiative. The aim of this initiative is to bring together a new generation of creative Europeans who can cooperate in different languages across borders and disciplines to address societal challenges and skills shortages in Europe. The Commission has allocated YUFE virtually the maximum number of points available in this pilot phase. Not only does YUFE respond to themes relevant to Limburg, such as social equality and connection with society and citizens, but cooperation with innovative clusters in the YUFE regions also offers opportunities for economic structural enhancement and for attracting international talent. There is no doubt that YUFE can become a showcase for Limburg as a European region.

## **Structural funds & thematic funds**

### **General**

The current European programming period runs from 2014 to 2020. The European Union is on the eve of a new seven-year policy period (2021-2027). The European financial framework will be provided by the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the task of the new European Commission. At the time of writing, the MFF has not yet been announced, so we do not know which European funds will become available for Limburg for the 2021-2027 period. The coronavirus crisis is affecting the MFF decision-making process and is also expected to have a major impact on the resources available for the various programmes and their allocation. European programmes cover a wide range of European policy themes such as cohesion/socio-economic structural enhancement, cross-border cooperation, agriculture and rural development, infrastructure, research and environment/sustainability.

In terms of governance and programming, there is a distinction between structural funds and thematic funds. The structural funds are implemented through national or regional programmes. Particularly relevant for Limburg are the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). The ERDF funds the various INTERREG programmes that are very important for Limburg.

Many of the thematic funds are programmed centrally in Brussels by the European Commission itself. Funds important for Limburg include EASI, Horizon, TEN, LIFE, Erasmus+ and ECF. For a diagram of the structural funds and thematic funds, we refer to Appendix 2.

Because of its geographical location, Limburg is active in a number of European programmes and strives to make optimum use of them. These programmes can make a positive contribution to achieving our provincial policy ambitions. A proactive attitude on the part of the Province is essential to attracting European resources to Limburg. This could include concentrating EU expertise and a commitment to project development in order to support those in the field. At the time of writing, the uncertainty about available budgets and allocations stemming from the coronavirus pandemic makes it impossible to identify a target amount for European funding.

### ***European coronavirus emergency package***

The European Union is currently (spring 2020) negotiating a European response to the coronavirus crisis, consisting of a package of financial measures to help countries combat

the virus and to assist in the recovery of economies impacted by the crisis. There appears to be consensus on a European Stabilisation Mechanism (ESM), an EIB European guarantee fund for businesses, and SURE, an unemployment compensation fund. The total package comes to approximately € 540 billion.

A Corona Response Investment Initiative (CRII) is also being prepared (€ 37 billion), which the European Commission is proposing to finance from the remaining budgets of current structural funds programmes.

We will follow these developments and, in consultation with the European Commission and central government, examine whether and, if so, how we can respond to them in Limburg.

The three southern Dutch provinces have developed an integrated Regional Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialisation (RIS3). It provides the basis for the operational programmes to be developed for the ERDF (OP South), INTERREG, our contribution to the National Strategic Plan for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and national programmes in the 2021-2027 period. The RIS3 explicitly reflects the main societal issues of climate, energy, agriculture, circular economy and health.<sup>19</sup>

There are numerous other European subsidy and investment opportunities that are interesting for funding projects and developments in Limburg. The following instruments are the most relevant in that respect:

## **European structural funds**

### ***ERDF***

European Regional Development Fund, which is mainly intended to reduce economic disparities between European regions.

### ***ESF***

European Social Fund, which is mainly intended to enhance economic and social cohesion in Europe.

### ***INTERREG A***

INTERREG is a European Commission programme meant to promote territorial cooperation between border regions. The INTERREG A programmes have a broader objective than innovation alone. They are intended to create connections in border regions on such themes as cross-border education, labour market, public transport, and healthcare. In the three INTERREG programmes mentioned below, Limburg would prefer 65% of the future budget to be spent on innovation in the 2021-2027 period (this is related directly to the RIS3 objectives) and 35% on a connected border region. This means that we are particularly committed to the following European policy objectives: 1. A SMARTER EUROPE by promoting an innovative and smart economic transformation, 2. A GREEN LOW-CARBON EUROPE by promoting a clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investments, the circular economy, adaptation to climate change, risk prevention and risk management, and 3. GOVERNANCE through better management of cross-border cooperation. For Limburg, the three INTERREG programmes described below are relevant.

<sup>19</sup> "Innoveren en realiseren met impact RIS3 Zuid-Nederland 2021-2027, Regionale Innovatie Strategie Slimme Specialisatie voor programma's Europese fondsen".

**INTERREG Meuse-Rhine** Euroregion consists of 13 programme partners, including the Province of Limburg. In addition, all regions adjacent to Limburg, as well as the Leuven region, the Brabant region, the Rheinland-Pfalz region, the EGTC Meuse-Rhine Euroregion and a number of ministries participate in the programme, both nationally and internationally. The programme has a larger number of cooperation partners than the EGTC Meuse-Rhine Euroregion. In the 2014-2020 programme period, resources have been divided between four investment priorities and one management priority: 1) Innovation, 2) Economy, 3) Social inclusion and training, 4) Territorial cooperation and Technical assistance. The programme reimburses a maximum of 50% of the eligible costs of a project. The remaining 50% must be covered by the partners' own resources or national or regional co-funding. Every partner in the programme has a right of veto. The Netherlands is the Member State responsible for this programme and the Province of Limburg is the managing authority.

The **INTERREG Flanders-Netherlands** programme is implemented in all or parts of the territory of the five Flemish provinces and the three southern Dutch provinces. The 2014-2020 programme focuses on 1) Strengthening research, technological development and innovation, 2) Supporting the transition to a low-carbon economy in all sectors, 3) Protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency, and 4) Promoting employment and supporting labour mobility. The objectives for the new period are still under discussion but entrepreneurs, knowledge institutions, organisations and public authorities will be involved in addressing such themes as innovation and economic transformation; energy transition, biodiversity and circular economy; a more social Europe with wide access to cross-border education and labour market, focusing on professions where there are shortages; and facilitating cross-border cooperation. The Dutch language is spoken throughout the programme area, which eases cross-border communication.

Nordrhein-Westfalen is the responsible partner for **INTERREG Netherlands-Germany**. Other partners are the federal state of Niedersachsen, the Netherlands, the provinces of Groningen, Friesland, Drenthe, Overijssel, Flevoland, Gelderland, Noord-Brabant and Limburg, the Eems Dollard Region, the Gronau-Enschede Euroregion, the Rhein-Waal Euroregion and the Rhein-Meuse-North Euroregion. The INTERREG partners share joint responsibility for programme implementation. The main objectives of the programme are 1) to increase the innovative capacity of the border region, and 2) to reduce the barrier effect of the border. The programme has five strategic initiatives aimed at increasing innovative capacity: high-tech systems & materials, agribusiness & food, health & life sciences, energy & low-carbon economy, and logistics. The FOOD2020 project, in which small and medium-sized businesses and knowledge institutions work together on innovative developments to strengthen the competitiveness of the region's food sector, is an example of a successful project within this programme. FOOD2020 project themes include biobased packaging solutions, insect-based nutrition and the controlled cultivation of plants in urban areas. The Healthy Building Network project, which unlocks and connects knowledge and facilities on both sides of the border around the theme of health and the effects of buildings on people, is also illustrative of the success of this programme.

#### **INTERREG B North-West Europe, INTERREG B North Sea (Transnational), INTERREG C (Europe) and Component 5**

The INTERREG B programmes cover a larger area around the Netherlands and include Belgium, Luxembourg and parts of western Germany, northern France and Ireland. Limburg can now participate in INTERREG B North Sea for the first time. The INTERREG B programmes focus largely on the same priorities as the A programmes and specifically

target innovation and niche projects. INTERREG C Europe focuses on policy cooperation between regions across Europe and uses the RIS3 as a basis. The Province of Limburg is itself a project partner in the INTERREG Europe projects S3Chem, Medtech4Europe, Regions4Food and Wildlife Europe. A Component 5 arrangement has also been included in the new ETC scheme that has clusters working together on innovation projects; this will allow the Brightlands campuses and their European counterparts, for example, to tackle European challenges together.

### ***CAP – National Strategic Plan***

The aim of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is to ensure that enough food is grown using sustainable methods, that consumers can buy agricultural products at a reasonable price, that farmers have a decent income, that biodiversity and landscape are protected, and that businesses and rural areas can innovate. This legislation also includes an extensive instrumental framework for funding both direct payments/hectare-based payments and rural development expenditure. Since the inception of the Rural Policy component in 2000, provinces have demanded a say in funding allocation decisions and now take part in the CAP management and implementing organisation and also co-fund part of the rural policy budget. Actual results are made manifest in sector-specific, area-based and regional projects and investments. The RDP (Rural Development Programme) concept will cease to exist with effect from the 2021-2027 period and will be replaced by the broader NSP (National Strategic Plan).

### **European thematic funds**

#### ***EaSI***

The European Programme for Employment and Social Innovation is mainly intended to promote innovative policies in these areas. This programme is particularly relevant for the Euroregions and the employment agencies in the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium.

#### ***Erasmus+***

Erasmus+ is the European Union's funding programme for education, training, youth and sport. It is committed to contributing to economic growth, employment, equal opportunities and inclusion in Europe.



### **Horizon Europe**

Horizon Europe is the European Union's research and innovation programme, intended to create scientific, technological and societal impact. In addition, the programme will contribute to strengthening the scientific and technological bases of the European Union and to the competitiveness of all EU Member States. The Commission wants to introduce a mission-driven approach to research and innovation. The missions should focus on EU objectives and appeal to the imagination of citizens. They must also establish links between disciplines and sectors. The proposal under the new programme is to make between €85 and €100 billion available to knowledge consortia in support of knowledge infrastructure, research and innovation. We use our positions and expertise to enable parties in Limburg to obtain some of this funding.

### **LIFE**

LIFE is the EU's programme for the protection of nature and biodiversity. It also provides financial support for projects to combat climate change. From 2021 onwards, energy efficiency and renewable energy projects will also be eligible for LIFE support.

### **TEN-T**

This programme is intended to strengthen transport networks in the EU. Trans-European infrastructure and, more specifically, transport and telecommunications networks and energy grids receive EU funding if they contribute to the proper functioning of the internal market and strengthen economic and social cohesion.

### **Other**

#### **European Investment Bank (EIB)**

The EIB provides loans and participates in funds. The Province of Limburg has received a direct loan from the EIB for the Limburg Energy Fund (LEF) and the Sustainable Home ("Duurzaam Thuis") scheme. An additional provision of € 30 million was added to raise LEF's original fund capital of € 60 million to € 90 million to finance sustainability investments by companies in Limburg. The EIB also provided €75 million for the Sustainable Home scheme, to which individuals can apply for a loan to make their homes more sustainable. We will continue to work with the EIB in the future.

## **Limburg and the world**

### **Acquisition, innovative alliances and trade promotion**

Acquisition is instrumental to boosting new innovation-oriented business activity aimed at Limburg's economic missions. Participation in European and cross-border innovative alliances also contributes to knowledge exchange and innovation under the Brightlands themes. Examples are the Smart Specialisation Platforms "Med Tech", "Precision Medicine", "Chemicals" and "Agrifood" and the Vanguard initiative. For acquisition and trade promotion, the Province works closely with LIOF in accordance with the principles set out in the Mission-driven Economic Framework.

### **Friendship Relationship with Sichuan**

Since June 2014, the Province has had an official friendship relationship with the south-west Chinese province of Sichuan based on complementary top economic sector policies. Specific cooperation initiatives were launched in previous years in the life science & health and in education. Currently, economic diplomacy is used for targeted project lobbying.

## 6 Relationship between policy ambitions and instruments

Countless instruments can be used to achieve the cross-border objectives of the Provincial Executive programme. We are opting for an approach in which the Limburg agenda is leading and in which we switch between different levels of scale. This means that, depending on the theme, we may use several instruments at the same time. The expected impact determines our approach.

	Economy Incl. circular	Mobility	Space	Nature	Culture	Social	Agriculture	Energy	Security*	Housing
Neighbouring country	GROS agenda	GROS agenda	GROS agenda	GROS agenda	GROS agenda	GROS agenda	GROS agenda	GROS agenda	GROS agenda	GROS agenda
	Cross-border information points					Cross-border information points				
	neighbouring languages					neighbouring languages				
	PA	PA	PA	PA	PA	PA	PA	PA	PA	PA
	Regional deal					Regional deal	Regional deal		Regional deal	
	Innovative alliances/ acquisition/ trade promotion					Innovative alliances/ acquisition/ trade promotion	Innovative alliances/ acquisition/ trade promotion	Innovative alliances/ acquisition/ trade promotion		
Europe	European programmes					European programmes	European programmes	European programmes	European programmes	European programmes
	European institutions					European institutions	European institutions	European institutions	European institutions	European institutions
	PA	PA	PA	PA	PA	PA	PA	PA	PA	PA
	Innovative alliances/ acquisition/ trade promotion					Innovative alliances/ acquisition/ trade promotion	Innovative alliances/ acquisition/ trade promotion	Innovative alliances/ acquisition/ trade promotion		
General	Economic diplomacy (incl. China)									
	Innovative alliances/ acquisition/ trade promotion						Innovative alliances/ acquisition/ trade promotion	Innovative alliances/ acquisition/ trade promotion		

\* Disaster relief and crisis management, public order and the associated police, judicial and crime-fighting cooperation (both provincial and cross-border) fall within the tasks and responsibilities of the King Commissioner as an extension of central government and are therefore outside the scope of the Provincial Executive programme.



# Appendix 1: Review

Just as cross-border cooperation is part of the Limburger's DNA, internationalisation policy is part of provincial policy. Since 2012, internationalisation policy has been regarded as a Provincial Executive task to which all the portfolios contribute. This makes internationalisation instrumental to achieving the various Limburg policy objectives. The most important of these is for Limburg to continue its success as a business climate and to remain an attractive province in which to live, work, study and spend leisure time.

## Limburg and the neighbouring countries: review

The core of the Province's internationalisation policy has always been broad cooperation with its immediate neighbours, Germany and Belgium. According to the economic literature, linguistic and cultural differences are the most common border obstacles.<sup>20</sup> Differences in language and culture, but also in legislation and in political-administrative and financial organisation often prevent smooth cooperation with our neighbouring countries.

### Governance

Finding the right contact, at the right level, requires knowledge and a good network. The King's Commissioner for Limburg took up the role of investigator in 2018, leading to new agreements on the governance of cross-border cooperation for the entire border area between the Netherlands (i.e. the provinces of Overijssel, Gelderland and Limburg) and Germany (i.e. the federal state of Nordrhein-Westfalen).<sup>21</sup> The agreements were established during the first government consultation between the Netherlands and Nordrhein-Westfalen on 19 November 2018. An annual Border Area Conference takes place under these agreements, and the governance structure has the provinces of Gelderland, Overijssel and Limburg working together at the Netherlands consulate general in Düsseldorf.

A looser governance structure has been agreed with Flanders, in which Zeeland is taking the lead, with Noord-Brabant and Limburg participating. As yet, no governance structure has been agreed with Wallonia.

In 2018, following a motion in the Provincial Council, the Institute for Transnational and Euroregional Cross-border Cooperation and Mobility (ITEM) carried out an investigation into a "Limburg Statute",<sup>22</sup> meant to resolve certain legal border issues independently of government policy. The focus of the discussion is a proposal from the European Commission concerning a cross-border mechanism. This proposed EU instrument is one of the dossiers that the European Parliament will continue to work on within the current timeframe (2019-2024).

20 The labour market at the border, with and without border obstacles, CPB memorandum 23 November 2016.

21 GROS governance study NRW-NL, Report of Dr Stephan Holthoff-Pförtner, Minister für Bundes- und Europaangelegenheiten sowie Internationales des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, central government representative/investigator King's Commissioner Theo Bovens NL, 10 October 2018, by order of the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations.

22 <https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/nl/nieuws/effectiever-aanpakken-van-juridische-grensobstakels>

ITEM has also looked into extending the Benelux legal instruments or bilateral treaties (such as the Aachen Friendship Treaty between France and Germany, concluded in January 2019). The governance structure described above, between the Netherlands and with Nordrhein-Westfalen, is another possibility.

### **Education**

The evaluation of the Provincial Education Policy<sup>23</sup> shows that it has supported educational institutions in their efforts to promote neighbouring languages and Euroregional education. At the same time, the large number and variety of initiatives appear to be detrimental to focus and coherence. It is a familiar dilemma: primary and secondary schools see the added value of participating in projects but cannot free up enough time on top of their regular curriculum. Secondary vocational education has taken a more proactive approach with the Euroregional toolkit and other initiatives. But the lack of a continuous learning pathway that focuses on learning neighbouring languages and Euroregional competences at an early age is proving to be an obstacle that the Province, in its role, can only tackle to a very limited extent. The Euroregional Education Expert Group and Steering Group<sup>24</sup> have drawn up a position paper with starting points for new policy. The research of the Service Science Factory<sup>25</sup> also offers a frame of reference for future policy.

### **Labour market**

Cross-border information points and expat centres provide information on opportunities for working across borders, helping to attract cross-border and global talent.

### **Brightlands & innovation**

The cross-border Aachen Maastricht Institute for Biobased Materials (AMIBM) brings together knowledge and expertise at Maastricht University, RWTH Aachen University and Fraunhofer Institute to develop innovative biobased materials.

### **Tourism & recreation**

Dutch and Belgian Limburg together have much to offer in terms of tourism and they cooperate on several levels. Examples include a joint promotional campaign in the German market, the development of the cross-border RivierPark Maasvallei and the “Via Belgica” project. There is cooperation with Germany in various INTERREG projects. The Meuse Cycle Route is part of the cross-border tourism and recreational infrastructure.

### **Border parks**

Limburg’s largest nature reserves and loveliest landscapes are located on and across the border. In addition to the three National Parks, these are the cross-border landscape parks Maas-Swalm-Nette, Kempen-Broek, RivierPark Maasvallei and the Drielandenpark. These green spaces and corridors – they are part of the National Nature Network – are an essential part of the European Green Infrastructure that connects the larger European natural areas. In the recent past, cross-border measures and INTERREG and other projects in the parks have made it possible to achieve various biodiversity objectives and to resolve water problems. An INTERREG project on “Fighting wildfires” is under way in the nature

<sup>23</sup> Communication of portfolio holder on evaluation of provincial education policy 2016-2019, March 2019.

<sup>24</sup> The Expert Group consists of lecturers, members of primary and secondary school boards, the Employee Insurance Agency (UWV), secondary vocational education and municipal officials in charge of education (municipality of Venlo and Maastricht).

<sup>25</sup> “Tweetalig onderwijs –Nederlands-Duits, VMBO onderwijs” Service Science Factory.

reserves in North and Central Limburg bordering Nordrhein-Westfalen. Over the course of the three-year project, the integrated area development initiated by the Province of Limburg will be rolled out to the entire Rhine-Meuse-North Euroregion. The King's Commissioner has supported this project financially on the basis of his responsibilities at national level and involvement in the security region. The project will be completed in mid-2020. An assessment will then be carried out to see whether its results can be extended in the long term, making the impetus for cross-border cooperation structural in nature.

### **Water**

Basic cooperation and coordination with regard to cross-border brooks and wetlands and cooperation in cross-border water management are fleshed out in cross-border consultations with Germany, Flanders and Wallonia. The international project LIVES (litter-free rivers and streams) started in 2018 and runs until 2021. In 2019, officials representing the Meuse-Rhine Euroregion attended the international LIVES launch conference. In the Meuse region, the Neighbouring Countries working group was set up to coordinate mutual input and identify shared ambitions.

### **Einstein Telescope**

The unique composition of the soil and overall tranquillity have made the border region of South Limburg a viable candidate for the siting of the Einstein Telescope, which would position the region in an international ecosystem of innovation, research and talent development. Euroregional partner institutes and development companies, including LIOF, are already collaborating in R&D projects commissioned jointly by the partner authorities associated with the EMR INTERREG programme. These projects challenge Euroregional businesses to contribute to developing key technologies for the instrumentation of the Einstein Telescope.

The European consortium of scientists associated with the Einstein Telescope has delivered a draft application for the upcoming European roadmap for major scientific infrastructures, i.e. the ESFRI roadmap 2021. The ESFRI application and the proposed site selection procedure both list the border region of South Limburg as one of two possible sites for the Einstein Telescope. The final decision will be taken in 2023.

## **Limburg and Europe: review**

In the previous Provincial government coalition period, efforts were undertaken to make better and broader use of EU funding for projects in Limburg. A monitoring system set up by an expert consultancy firm in collaboration with the Province of Limburg reveals that Limburg projects make good use of EU funds. From 2015 to December 2019, more than € 348 million in EU funding was allocated to Limburg projects (excluding EIB financing), with knowledge institutions and companies based in the south of Limburg making the most use of such funds. In addition to the subsidies that flow to the Southern Netherlands from the programmes surveyed, loans are also awarded by the European Investment Bank (EIB). The Province of Limburg has received a direct loan from the EIB for the Limburg Energy Fund (LEF) and the Sustainable Home ("Duurzaam Thuis") scheme. An additional provision of €30 million topped up LEF's original fund capital of € 60 million to € 90 million to finance sustainability investments by companies in Limburg. The EIB also provided €75 million for the Sustainable Home scheme, to which individuals can apply for a loan to make their homes more sustainable.

In May 2018, the European Commission published the draft cohesion policy regulations. These include a separate INTERREG regulation and a separate border mechanism regulation (see also above under neighbouring countries). The INTERREG regulation devotes more attention than was previously the case to removing border obstacles.

In December 2018, the Charcoal Sketch “Deployment of European Funds 2021-2027” was adopted by the Provincial Executives of Zeeland, Noord-Brabant and Limburg. The priorities set out in this Sketch (which emphasises societal transitions and structural enhancement) are also indicative for the approach to the three new INTERREG programmes (Flanders-Netherlands, Germany-Netherlands and EMR). Details of the Sketch are described in a new “Regional Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialisation” (RIS3).

In 2018, the Maastricht Treaty received the European Heritage Label, confirming Maastricht’s key role in the creation of the European Union. A number of initiatives and organisations support the propagation of Limburg’s international character, reaffirming its image as an expert in cross-border issues. Since 2014, Maastricht University’s academic institute ITEM has been proposing solutions for problems that occur in the border region. One of the ways in which it does so is by drawing up an annual border effect report. Maastricht Working on Europe is a follow-up to Europe Calling (the successful commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the Maastricht Treaty) in which the Province of Limburg, the Municipality of Maastricht and Maastricht University work together to make Maastricht a centre of excellence and a meeting place for citizen dialogue about European integration. Multidisciplinary and socially impactful research on Europe and citizens’ initiatives and events, including those undertaken in the context of the European Heritage Label for the Maastricht Treaty, contribute to the European image of the region. The evaluation of MWOE shows that Studio Europa, as the organisation implementing the Maastricht Working on Europe programme, has recently developed into more of a workplace and hub, thereby building a bridge between society and research on Europe. Examples include the Maastricht Debate in April 2019, where the outcomes of a survey of young people informed the issues addressed during a debate between the lead candidates for President of the European Commission, and events such as Workplace Europe, where Euroregional stakeholders came together to get to connect and share best practices.

Maastricht University is also the driving force behind the Young Universities for the Future of Europe (YUFE) initiative, in which it collaborates with the universities of Carlos III Madrid, Eastern Finland, Antwerp, Bremen, Essex, Tor Vergata University of Rome and Cyprus as part of the European Commission’s “European Universities” initiative. The aim of “European Universities” is to bring together a new generation of creative Europeans who can cooperate in different languages across borders and disciplines to address societal challenges and skills shortages in Europe.

At European level, Limburg is also working to strengthen its economy by taking part in various knowledge and innovation networks, including the European Chemical Regions Network (ECRN) and partnerships in the field of smart specialisations under the Brightlands themes of Chemistry, Medtech, Agrifood and Precision Medicine.

## Limburg and the world: review

Limburg has taken note of China's emergence as a leading global player in virtually every economic and scientific field. Since June 2014, the Province has had an official friendship relationship with the south-west Chinese province of Sichuan based on complementary top economic sector policies. Specific cooperation initiatives were launched in previous years in the life sciences & health and in education. Where possible, the Limburg trade missions (to China) were combined with national trade missions and/or relevant trade fair entries based on the strategic travel agendas of the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) and Foreign Affairs and other relevant ministries. Most of the Brightlands campuses and Limburg's top economic sectors (particularly logistics) have strategic partnerships with Chinese partners. A number of specific projects (Zuyd care for the elderly training programme, MHC investment fund) can be traced back directly to contacts that originated from the provincial friendship relationship with Sichuan. From the combined perspectives of proactive market research and demand-driven project support, the Province's China policy provides clear added value.

In the 2012-2019 period, the Province supported the development of a trade relationship with Azerbaijan, a commitment that has resulted in several major business cases in Azerbaijan and surrounding areas. After the conclusion of an airfreight agreement with the companies Silkway and Skygates, five to ten cargo flights a week were operated to and from Baku from Maastricht Aachen Airport. Another key result concerns the establishment of the Sister Port Development Greenport Venlo-Port of Baku. Logistics specialists Cabooter and Smart Logistics Venlo have worked with the Port of Baku to develop a logistics concept for goods flows to China (Southern Silk Road) from Europe. In addition, Cabooter is a partner in the development of rail terminals and cool ports at the new Port of Baku site, where Dutch fresh food logistics flows can be prepared for further export in the Caucasian region. On 26 and 27 November 2019, an important step was taken towards establishing an intermodal logistics connection between the Venlo-Baku-Xi'an logistics hubs on the Silk Road: in the run-up to the European Silk Road Summit event in Venlo, the Austrian rail freight carrier Rail Cargo Group, the port authority of Baku and the Dutch shipper Cabooter Group signed a letter of intent for the joint development of the Middle Corridor linking Europe and China via Turkey and Azerbaijan. The Maastricht School of Management has also developed a package of curricula for ADA University (Baku).

Now that the Limburg business community has forged a number of stable relationships with Azerbaijan, we will phase out our role in the upcoming period and place matters primarily in the hands of the businesses involved.





Colofon  
Uitgave Provincie Limburg  
Limburglaan 10 Maastricht  
Postbus 5700, 6202 MA Maastricht  
+31 (0)43 389 99 99  
postbus@prvlimburg.nl  
www.limburg.nl

2009 834 | Grafisch Centrum Provincie Limburg

