



# **STRONGER TOGETHER**

**Recapture the Fortress Cities**  
– results and future perspective –

# MATCHING OPPORTUNITIES FOR FORTRESS CITIES

## FORTRESS CITIES

Flanders has a lot of forgotten military heritage. City walls, bastioned fortifications, city gates, belts of forts and city canals ... which are a sometimes hidden part of a city and its surroundings as unused remnants from the Middle Ages and Modern Times – sometimes hidden. Also more recently, fortress belts with fortresses, redoubts and anti-tank ditches were built further away from the cities as defensive lines.

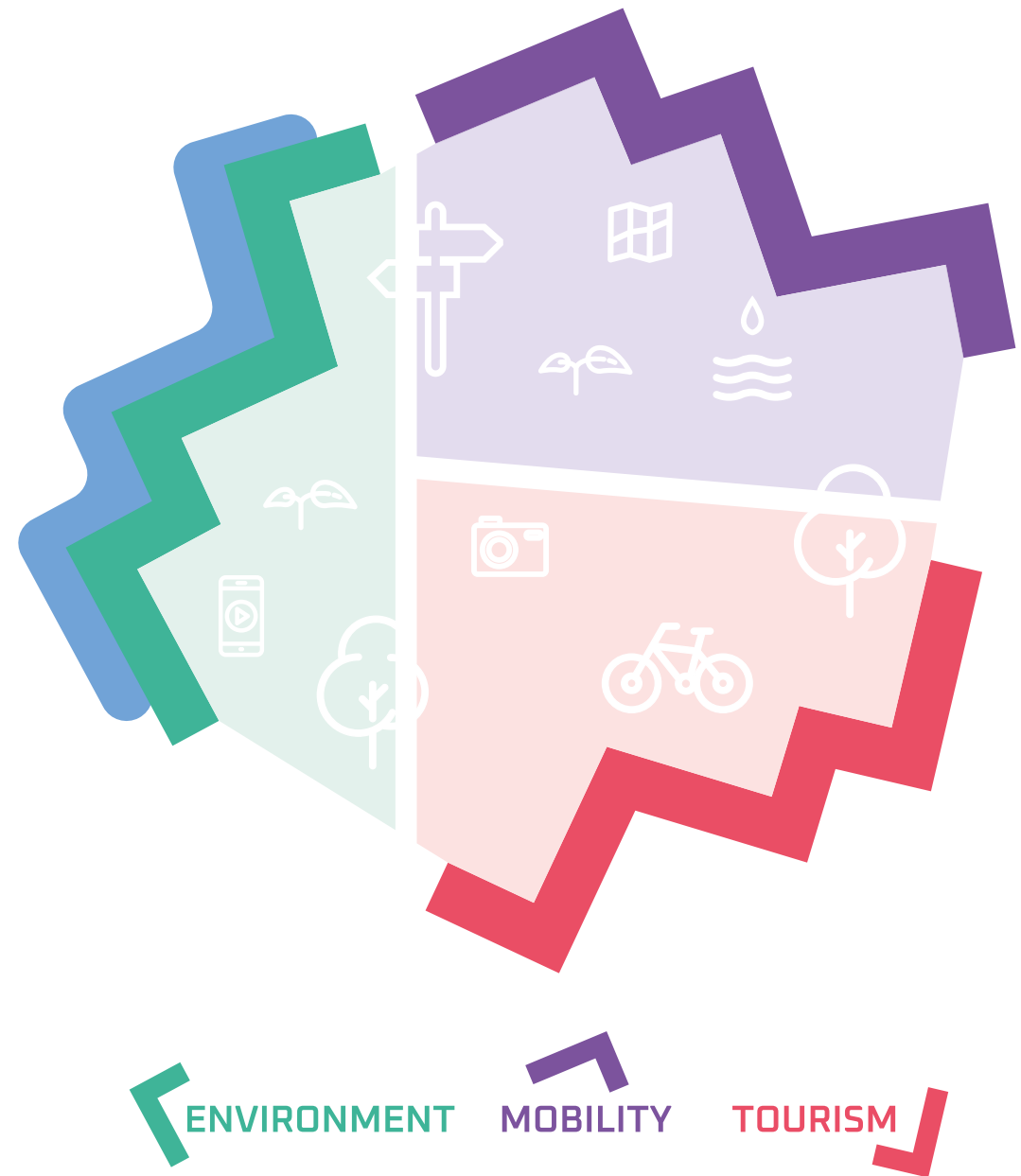
## FORTRESS CITIES BUILD FOR THE FUTURE

This heritage is finally getting the attention it deserves. The remnants often offer many opportunities to solve today's bottlenecks. For example, projects are being developed to combat climate issues, urbanization and traffic congestion. By opening up filled-in canals, greening forts and converting disused city walls into safe and nature-friendly walking and cycling connections, densely built-up city fringes are once again given breathing space. With the right interpretation and experiences to discover, these remnants also have many advantages for tourism.

We are building the future with fortress cities by focusing on mobility, the environment and tourism. In this way we sustainably strengthen the environment.

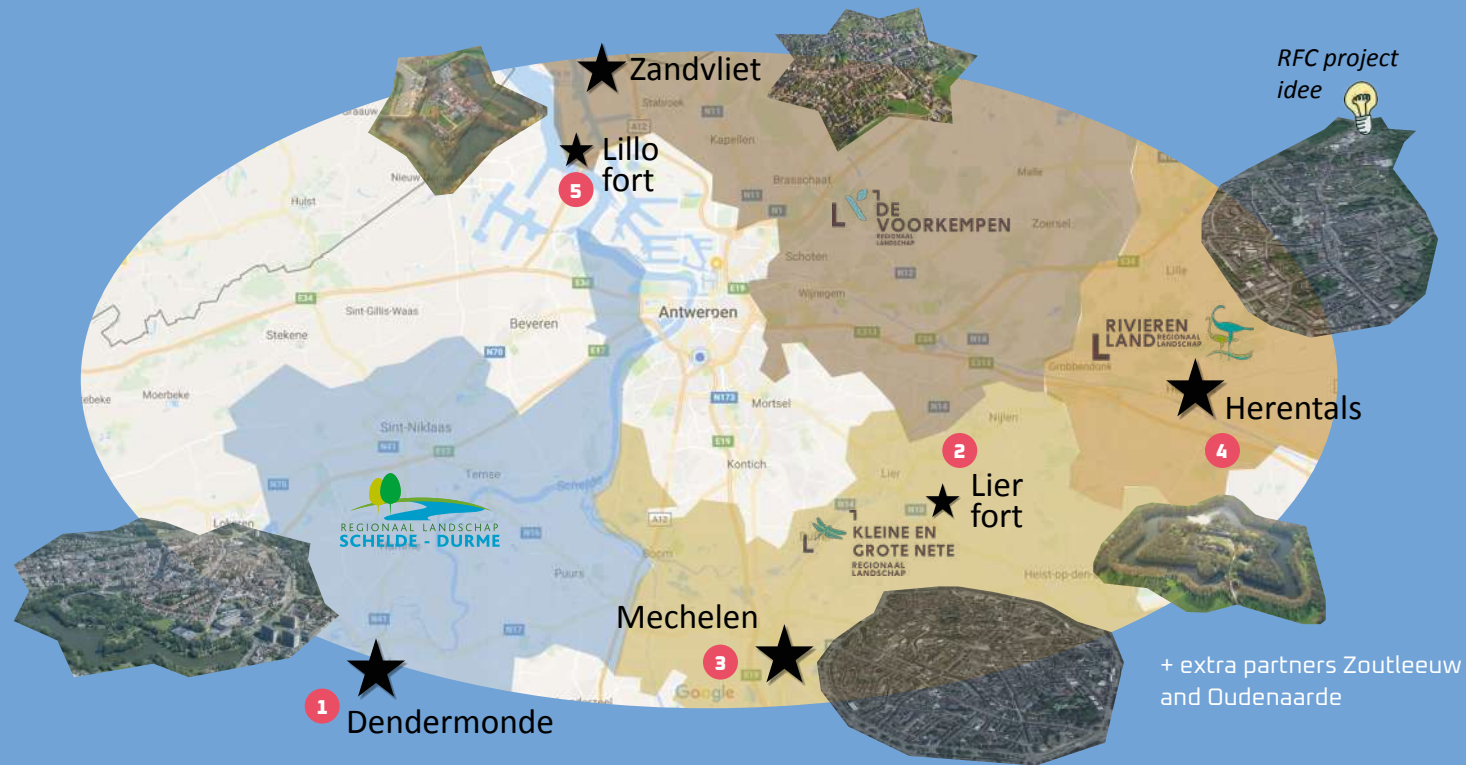
## WE BUILD THE FUTURE TOGETHER WITH FORTRESS CITIES

In recent years, a number of great projects have been set up in Flanders. Various partners sat hereby around the table on a regular basis. This collaboration led to accelerated and higher-quality results. Moreover, a new pool of knowledge was thus formed. The opportunities for a sustainable future for fortress cities are there for the taking. An enhanced momentum!



IN RECENT YEARS WE HAVE BUILD A BEAUTIFUL **NETWORK.**  
WE MEET ON A REGULAR BASIS AROUND SPECIFIC THEMES.

**2021-2022**



**Wim Debaene, coordinator  
project Recapture the Fortress  
Cities (RFC)  
Regional Landscapes**

"The RFC project appears to be an enormous stimulus, not only within the Antwerp Regional Landscapes, but also further on at Flemish level. In the future we would like to continue working together on this story of fortified towns and fortifications, by using targeted expertise we can move on to great actions and implementations in the field."

The Regional Landscapes are active all over Flanders in terms of preserving and strengthening nature, heritage & regional identity, climate, support and experience. We bring residents and partners together around a compelling landscape story that inspires and creates connection.

[www.regionalelandschappen.be](http://www.regionalelandschappen.be)

- 1 Fortress cities and fortresses in green and blue
- 2 Forts, vision and financing
- 3 Fortresses - recreation, tourism and experience
- 4 Fortress cities - spatial planning and landscape architecture
- 5 Building bridges, setting up networks

[CLICK HERE FOR MORE INFO ↓](#)



# WHAT CAN YOU DO? HOW TO ILLUSTRATE BETTER THAN WITH CONCRETE RESULTS AND TESTIMONIALS

## FORT LILLO

Fort Lillo is being restored according to a master plan to the original pentagonal bastion of the 19th century plan. The balance between structure and quality of life is monitored. In Lillo, a virtual reality project 'VirtuaFort' has been developed by the RFC project. This living digital visualization can make information understandable by visualizing historical maps, paintings and documentation and making it experienceable as future design plans. This pilot project is a collaboration between Regional Landscape De Voorkempen, the City of Antwerp, the University of Antwerp and Visual Dimension.

## 400 YEARS ZANDVLIET

The Spatial Implementation Plan 'Village Reinforcement', which is being developed, focuses on preserving valuable open space in the village, including the remains of the fortified city. The brochure and walking map take you to the past of the fortified city with seven strongholds, which is identical to the better preserved fortress model of Damme. Pupils from the Noordland school in the fortified city themselves give guided tours to peers. This helps create knowledge and involvement among the residents.

## DENDERMONDE

The last major military infrastructures date from the 19th century, many remains of which are still visible today. The fortresses are not perceived as a whole by the city's own citizens and visitors. The city has the ambition to arrive at a cohesive integrated spatial planning vision by drawing up a master plan – in participation with the intended actors.

# WHAT CAN YOU DO? HOW TO ILLUSTRATE BETTER THAN WITH CONCRETE RESULTS AND TESTIMONIALS

## FORT LIER

The condition Fort Lier is in today, necessitates urgent intervention. The fort also has a unique heritage value. The summer activities in 2021 and 2022 show the importance of the fort for the inhabitants of Lieren today. The master plan provides for an open fort, where there is room for flexible use in addition to the associations, with a third zone where nature and bats are left undisturbed. The original and barren military fort landscape has evolved into a wooded and overgrown fort with high natural value. These qualities are retained, here and there the original landscape is made readable and experienceable again.

## HERENTALS

As in many Flemish fortified towns, the city fortifications in Herentals are not recognizable as a whole. The RFC 'Vests Test' and the urban vision for the future will provide more cohesion, with the Blue Deal project 'Kroonwerk' as a pilot project and the step towards a climate-proof, contemporary and innovative repurposing of the ramparts.

## MECHELEN

The reconstruction of the renovated fortress ring around the city center offers a unique tourist experience for the city: the wide car corridor will disappear, from which new tourist opportunities will arise. The blue-green and archaeological wealth in and around the city will be further opened up, with thematic walking and cycling routes, for example the new route 'Cycling along the Vesten'.



# VIRTUAFORT LILLO

SUSTAINABLE PRESERVATION AND ACCESSIBILITY OF MILITARY SITES

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

## "EXPERTISE AND INSPIRATION"

RFC's  
pilot project



**Frederick Bruneel, Projectcoordinator  
Public Space City of Antwerp**

"The VR application proves to be of great added value as a visual tool in the design translation of the Lillo master plan into concrete implementation plans. In addition, it has also increased the support for the project among residents, as 2D design plans are not always that readable. If you can literally walk through the design plan, the planned interventions become much clearer. VirtuaFort will also greatly enhance the experience of Lillo. VR is a great tool to use for tourism, as a museum element and as an information tool in the reception to familiarize groups with the fort and to keep it up to date on the ongoing infrastructure works. Discovering the fort in an interactive way in 1640 has great touristic, historical and educational value and we would like to give that a permanent character in the fort. The church of Lillo seems to us an ideal place, linked to commercial and other types of activities within a broader reception function."





## TOURISM



**HERITAGE** – reconstruction of the fortress according to the pentagonal bastion of the 19th century  
> financing: 3.5 million euros city of Antwerp, 15 million euros De Vlaamse Waterweg (DVW).



**SOCIO-ECONOMIC** – finding the right balance in this picturesque village between tourist development and the quality of life for its residents.

**INNOVATION** – the VR project “VirtuaFort as a new experience connecting past-present-future”.  
This pilot project is a collaboration between Regional Landscape de Voorkempen the city of Antwerp, UA and Visual Dimension. > financing RFC’s pilot project: 11,000 euros for the city of Antwerp and 64,000 euros for Interreg Europe.

**CHANCES** – further development of VirtuaFort into an online and virtual game, opportunities for collaborations with twin fortress Liefkenshoek on the left bank (Beveren).

## ENVIRONMENT



**SEA LEVEL RISE** – dyke elevation of 3 m. as part of the Sigma works along the Scheldt with a marina outside the dike



## MOBILITY



**SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY** – the Waterbus stop in Fort Lillo saw a strong increase in tourism



**HERITAGE** – a new bridge over the ring moat connects the access road with the fort. This bridge is built according to the historical model and increases the experience of the fort.



# MASTERPLAN FORT LIER

PRESERVATION THROUGH DEVELOPMENT

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

PARTICIPATION



Droom  
het FORT



**Stéphanie D'Hulst, expert Property Heritage City of Lier**

"Fort Lier is a fortress of the Antwerp fortress belt that is unknown and unloved by the general public. However, there are not many fortresses with a green character located so close to a bustling city center. This situation is unique and creates enormous possibilities. The RFC project has given us the opportunity to join an exciting European project with supervision and research of the master plan for Fort Lier. Moreover, the regional and European cooperation has provided a lot of inspiration, for example, we organized the workshop on the theme of financing and vision from the city of Lier."



PAST



PRESENT



## TOURISM



**HERITAGE** – the Fort is still intact as a whole but urgent action is needed. The Real Estate Agency Heritage designates the fort as worthy of protection, depending on the vision of the city of Lier.



**MEMORIAL** – in 1914, some parts of the fort were destroyed and there were also some casualties.

**SOCIO-ECONOMIC** – reconcile the functioning of the associations with an open fortress and new uses, as tested during the activities of past summers. 'Dream the fortress' gave more than 600 great ideas, such as open-air theatre.

## ENVIRONMENT



**BATS** – Fort Lier is an important and European protected bat habitat – a hundred bats, among others, hibernate in saillant I. The master plan provides for a separate nature zone.



**LANDSCAPE** – the original barren military fort landscape has evolved into a forested and overgrown fort with high natural values. These qualities are retained, here and there the original landscape will be made visible again.

**WATER** – a number of fish and bird species live on the fort moat, this is also the hunting ground of the water bats.



## MOBILITY



**HERITAGE** – the master plan aims to restore the bridge, the embankment and the original entrance gate the Fort regains a face and increases its accessibility and appearance.



**CYCLING** – the Fortstreet will be redeveloped while retaining the characteristic cobblestones and new concrete tracks for cyclists.

**WALKING** – the new 'Dikke Bertha' path connects the Aarschotsesteenweg with the Berlaarsesteenweg, with Fort Lier as an important centre.



# 400 YEARS FORTRESS CITY ZANDVLIET

IN THE SPOTLIGHT



**Pieter Linders, programmer culture, heritage & projects district  
Berendrecht-Zandvliet-Lillo**

“With a lecture, a guided tour, an exhibition with reproductions of old maps, information panels on the street and a new brochure with a walking map are reviving the history of the fortified city. There will also be digital additions to the brochure and the walking map. The RFC project helped inspire the realization of these initiatives. With the support of specialists such as Professor Piet Lombaerde, we have learned much more about the fascinating and instructive history of Zandvliet, for example, the unique spy map from 1627 has emerged as a special asset.”





## TOURISM



**GUIDE** – the brochure and hiking map take you to the past of the fortified town of seven strongholds. Zandvliet used to look just like Damme, also built by the same general Ambrogio Spinola during the Eighty Years' War.



**SOCIAL** – create knowledge and involvement among residents, the pupils of the 6th grade from school Noordland in Zandvliet give themselves guided tours to three other schools in the area.

## ENVIRONMENT



**HERITAGE** – the height difference at the Bergske Af alley indicates where the moat used to be.



**SPATIAL PLANNING** – the plan on Village reinforcement is committed to preserving valuable open space in the village, including the remains of the fortress city.

## MOBILITY



**HERITAGE** – the shape of the fortified city is still clearly recognizable in the star-shaped street pattern of the Conterssharp, the largest remnant of the fortifications.





# FORTRESS BELT DENDERMONDE

IN THE SPOTLIGHT



**Rik Rousseau, head of spatial planning and urban development**

"The added value of the RFC project is that it initiated the sharing of expertise between Flemish cities, in order to arrive at concrete local projects. This cooperation must be continued in the future, a kind of Flemish cooperation of fortress cities."





TOURISM

- EXPERIENCE – making a coherent tourism policy vision.
- PUBLIC SPACE – making the fortress relics and green spaces around them accessible.
- SUSTAINABLE – reuse of the main fortress buildings.



ENVIRONMENT

- THOUGHTFUL MANAGEMENT – connecting the green and blue spaces in and around the city



MOBILITY

- SPATIAL – the last major military infrastructures date from the 19th century, many of which remain today, are still visible. The fortresses are not perceived as a whole by their own citizens and visitors.
- MASTERPLAN – the city draws up a master plan – in participation with the intended actors – to arrive at a cohesive integrated spatial planning vision. A consideration will be given to various sectoral plans, visions and social wishes. A multidisciplinary long-term vision is being developed, as well as a number of ‘milestone’ actions in the short term. RFC provided opportunities for support in drawing up the Master Plan, and brought the city into contact with inspiring examples from abroad (e.g. Magdeburg).





# VISIT MECHELEN

IN THE SPOTLIGHT



**Els Van Zele, Visit Mechelen**

"Participation in this European project on fortress heritage created a leverage for local policy. The principles were: let new opportunities be experienced at an early stage and adjust if there are new developments."

[visit.mechelen.be](https://visit.mechelen.be)



CYCLING MAP





Visit Mechelen made a strategy with powerful objectives to grow and transform into a thriving tourist destination. The initiatives and results initiated from RFC contribute to the transformative development objectives of Visit Mechelen.

## TOURISM

**UNIQUE** – the reconstruction of the Nieuwe Vesten offers a unique tourist attraction for the city: the wide car corridor (as is) will disappear, from which new tourism opportunities will arise, such as at the Brussels Gate.



**VISIT MECHELEN** – thematic walking and cycling routes are being developed, e.g. the new route 'Cycling along the Walls'.

**STORY TELLING** – ook de vesten zelf bieden schatten van (verborgen) verhalen, die ontsloten zullen kunnen worden.

## ENVIRONMENT

**RINGROAD AWAY** – Doing away the ring road with less space for cars

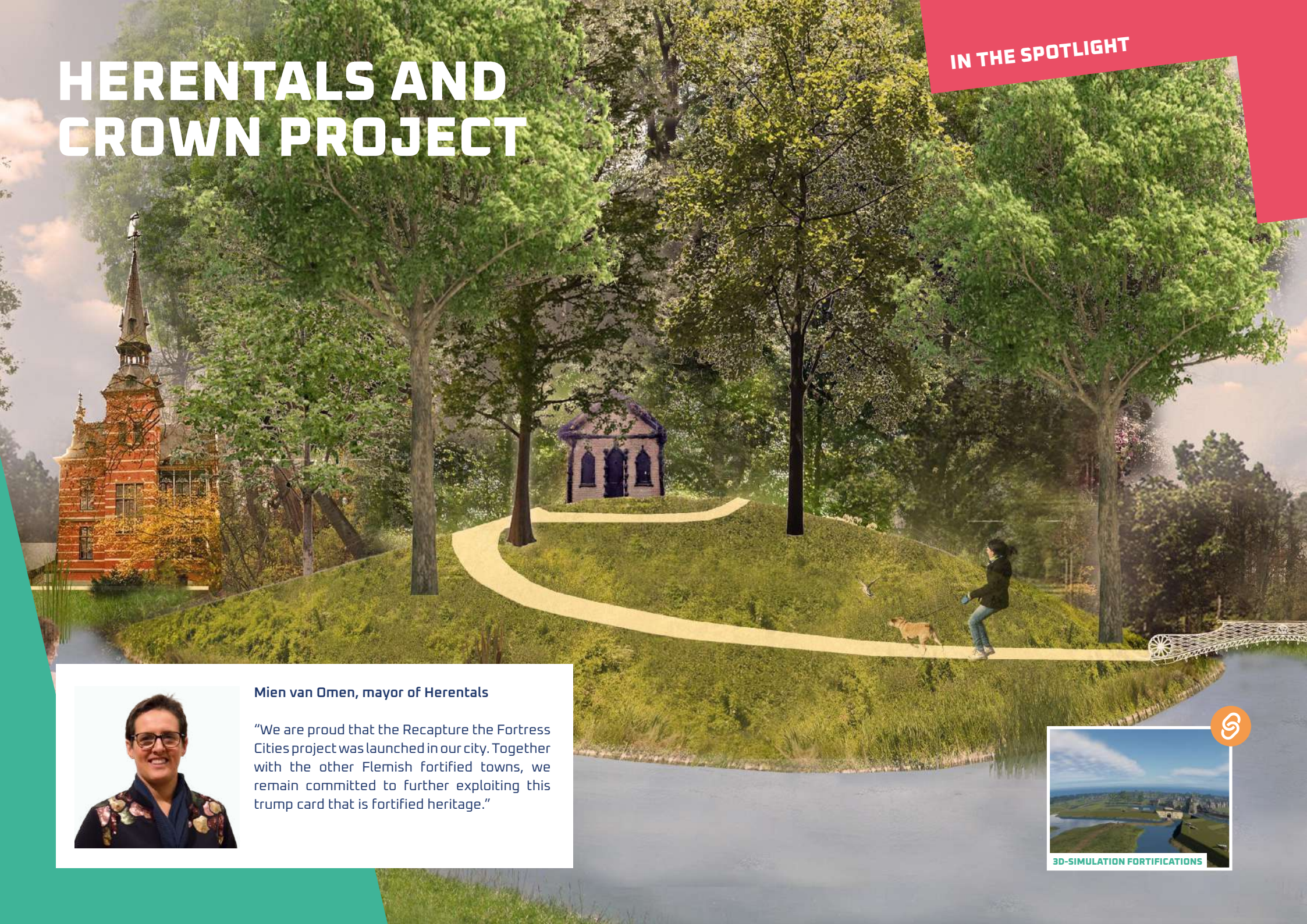


**GREENING** – the blue-green and archaeological wealth in and around the city will be further opened up.



# HERENTALS AND CROWN PROJECT

IN THE SPOTLIGHT



**Mien van Omen, mayor of Herentals**

"We are proud that the Recapture the Fortress Cities project was launched in our city. Together with the other Flemish fortified towns, we remain committed to further exploiting this trump card that is fortified heritage."





During the RFC project, additional research was carried out by, among others, the University of Antwerp into the history of the vests in Herentals. With origins from the medieval banana-shaped ramparts over the Kleine Nete to the reduced city ramparts of Andriessens and later improvements by Le Poivre. These construction phases are further detailed and mapped according to geographic data (GIS).

## TOURISM

**CITY STRUCTURE** – RFC has delivered a fortress check with design rules and guide lines for projects in or around the city fortresses.



**MASTERPLAN** – the LAMA design office draws up a vision and concept for the fortifications as a whole, so that they become more visible and regain as a city structure.

## ENVIRONMENT

**INNOVATION** – the city council strives for a climate-proof, contemporary and innovative destination for the ramparts.

**BLUE DEAL** – RFC initiated additional subsidies to the old vests as design and connect wet nature with the Kleine Nete under the new term 'northern crown work'.



[www.herentals.be/vesten](http://www.herentals.be/vesten)

GIS RESEARCH: UNIVERSITY OF ANTWERP

FORTRESS CHECK: REGIONAL LANDSCAPE + IOED

VISION FORTIFICATIONS HERENTALS: LAMA







# FORTRESS ANTWERP

IN THE SPOTLIGHT



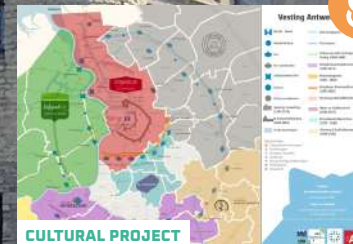
**Karen Minsaer,**  
head of the Property  
Heritage and Archeology  
department of the city of  
Antwerp

"At the city of Antwerp, we are really passionate about Fortress Antwerp and the fortress belts. We are very impressed with the experts who carefully studied our questions. Thanks to the Peer review, we now see everything a lot clearer regarding the functional structure, financing issue and communication. We now have to think about what role the city can take, but we have a lot of food for thought, with very concrete input and suggestions on the next steps to take."

[www.fortengordels.be](http://www.fortengordels.be)



# RFC RESULTS IN THE ANTWERP REGION AND WITH EUROPEAN CONNECTIONS



## PEER REVIEW WITH CITY OF ANTWERP: EUROPEAN EXPERTS ABOUT THE FORTRESS BELT

The 2021 EU Interreg Peer Review of the fortress region around Antwerp concluded that the Fortification Belts governance idea, as developed at the initiative of EFFORTS with partners such as Regional Landscapes, is unique in Europe. This initiative has been elaborated on the basis of the provincial event of the same name.

The conclusions of the Peer Review:

- Ensuring involvement of policymakers and administrations first (under way in 2021)
- Use of the stakeholder mapping implemented by EFFORTS for Fortress Belts (2020)
- Setting up an innovative and governance structure: for administrative-financial stability and structural cooperation

## INTER\_LINIE: FLEMISH SUPRA-LOCAL CULTURAL PROJECT

This Flemish supra-local cultural project (2023-2025) is a collaboration between seven heritage cells. Starting from the original Fortifications Belts idea and the 2020 start-up of the stakeholder mapping in the Antwerp region, art and culture makers will be inspired to work with local heritage 'supra-locally'. How can a fort and the stories associated with it inspire art and culture makers across municipal boundaries? How can local heritage in turn be strengthened regionally through cultural interpretation? The Antwerp forts heritage locations will be connected with each other via a cultural route.



# SAMEN BRUGGEN BOUWEN

29  
JUNI  
2022



VISUALS BY JOUCE VAN KERCKHOVE FOR @VISUALITYEV

## STRONGER TOGETHER

The RFC project showed the added value of sharing expertise and discussing the different, but quite similar challenges for the participating cities. Even before the end of the project, other Flemish cities joined in to think about this in a series of stakeholder meetings. This made it clear that the Flemish fortified cities, just as is happening in the Netherlands, could find added value in cooperation. This in the field of capacity increase, learning from best practices, knowledge exchange, common representation of interests towards common Flemish partners and Flemish public authorities, financing and public-private partnerships, governance, policy enrichment and setting up joint projects, also at European level. The cities want to see how the experiences from RFC can be transformed into more structural cooperation. With the support of Regional Landscapes and EFFORTS, a start will be made in 2023 on the discussion platform of Flemish cities.. The Flemish administrations and organizations are also involved in this.

## EFFORTS

The European Federation of Fortified Cities, with its 200 members in 21 countries (including, for example, Regional Landscapes and the cities of Antwerp, Oudenaarde, Zoutleeuw and Menen), has been bringing together the interests of European forts, fortified cities and fortified lines since 2018.

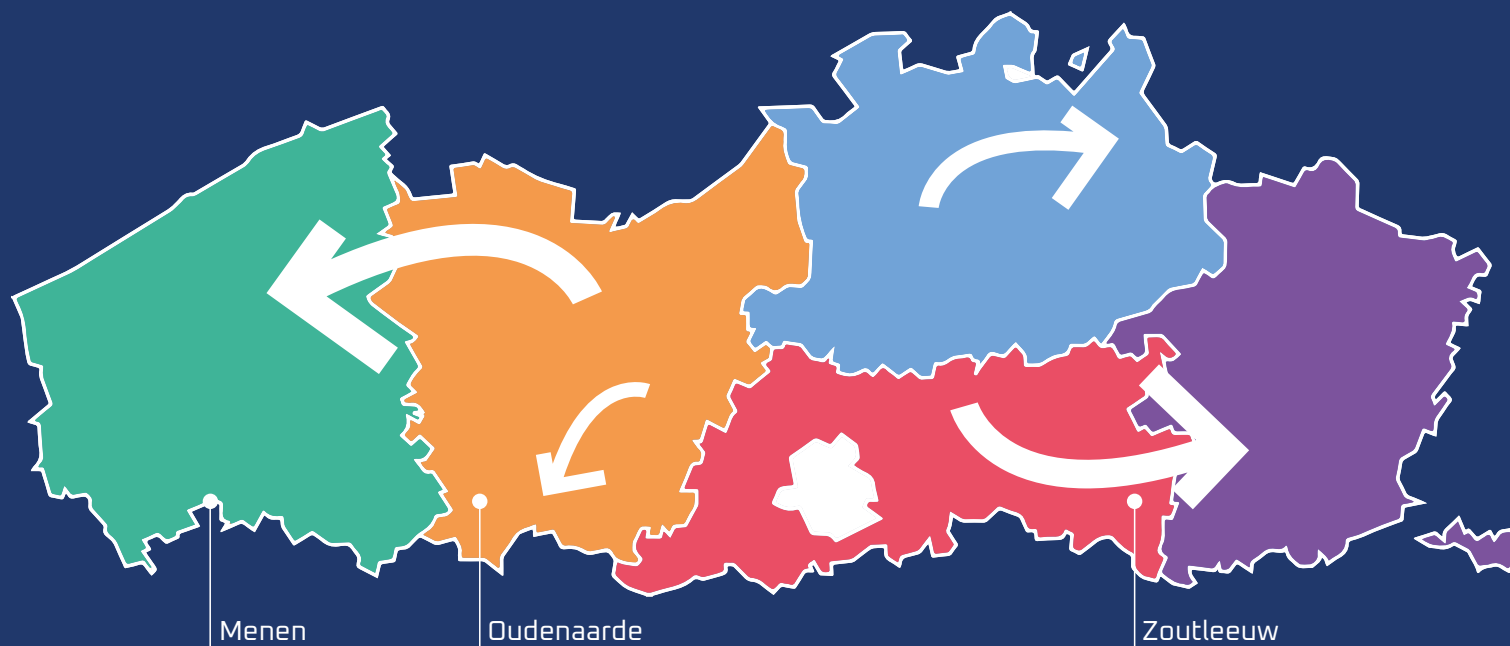
- EFFORTS helps its members set up European network and investment grants.
- By creating a pool of experts throughout Europe, EFFORTS can offer its members experience experts and knowledge transfer for improving local and regional policy on fortress heritage.
- In this capacity, EFFORTS also supported Regional Landscapes in setting up the RFC stakeholder meetings and also guides the RFC cities and other Flemish cities in looking at how to work on a Flemish fortified cities collaboration.



WE WANT TO CONTINUE THE **COOPERATION** IN THE COMING YEARS  
AND ALSO STRENGTHEN AND EXPAND WITH NEW CITY PARTNERS

**2023-...**

GOVERNANCE - FINANCING - INNOVATION - PLANNING - PARTNERS - GOOD PRACTICES - EXPERTISE



**Rafaël Deroo, Secretary-General  
of the European Federation of  
Fortified Cities**

"With the idea of turning the Fortress Belts project into an innovative instrument of regional development, EFFORTS wants to work with local and regional partners to make the Antwerp fortress region an example of how European fortress heritage can offer green and innovative solutions to urban challenges. That is why EFFORTS and Regional Landscapes are participating in a Flemish collaboration of fortress cities."

[www.efforts-europe.eu](http://www.efforts-europe.eu)



# FACTS & FIGURES

RFC has a three to four year term leverage created with local results and a regional cooperation.

In a total project of € 1.35 million with 6 countries, the Belgian share is € 230,000. With this starting capital, the four Regional Landscapes this budget around the stakes of fortification heritage in the region up and within a few years the investment quadrupled (approximately €970,000).

With resources from subsidies and financing of the municipalities are a lot of actions initiated around additional studies, master plans, cultural events and first realizations terrain (including wet nature Blue Deal Kroonwerk



RFC  
Interreg Europe  
**€ 1.350.000**



**€ 230.000**



x4



**€ 970.000**

TO ACTIONS

- through funding (EU, VL ...)
- financing municipalities



**3 future plans  
(approx. €280,000)**

- visionFortifications Herentals: € 35,000
- master plan, management plan and positioning report Fort Lier: € 25,000
- masterplan Fortress Belt Dendermonde (Open Call): € 220,00



**public opening  
Fort Lier  
€ 30.000**

+ 2,000 visitors during  
Summer in Fort Lier in 2022



**[inter] LINIE  
€ 285.000**

supralocal cultural project  
Fortifications Antwerp i.c.w. seven  
heritage cells 2023-2025



**VIRTUAFORT  
€ 75.000**

RFC pilot action  
VR in Fort Lillo



**Blue Deal 'Kroonwerk'  
€ 300.000**

= creation of wet nature Fortifications Herentals





# Stronger together for a better future!

FORTRESS CITIES - FORTRESS BELTS - FORTIFICATIONS - BASTIONS