

## Some experiences on monument preservation on the provincial level in Flanders

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### 1. Regionalisation of national policy.

The Belgian policy concerning preservation of monuments and sites was originally settled on a national level, according to the law of 1931 on preservation of monuments and sites. A national Royal Commission on Monuments and Sites advised the responsible ministers in the execution of the policy, as well in matters concerning the protection of monuments and sites of national importance, as in necessary repairing- and conservation works. A supporting national institution, especially in charge of these tasks did not exist.

In 1968 an essential renovation took place, this meant the regionalisation of the policy, the legislation and organisation. So all matters concerning monuments, conservation-areas in towns and villages, mobile cultural heritage are conducted to a final regionalisation. We are still waiting for an own Flemish decree for landscapes. The Capital Brussels is kept apart in this reorganisation of the Belgian Nation.

A Royal Commission on Monuments and Sites is now functioning on the centralised level of the Flemish Community with a central commission and 5 provincial sections, together with a direction for Monuments and Sites with 5 deconcentrated provincial directions.

### 2. Concentration of regional policy.

However, it must be clear that also other public institutions and private organisations have a task to accomplish in taking care of cultural heritage. I want to draw your attention to the operation on a level between national government and local committees, in particularly the participation of the

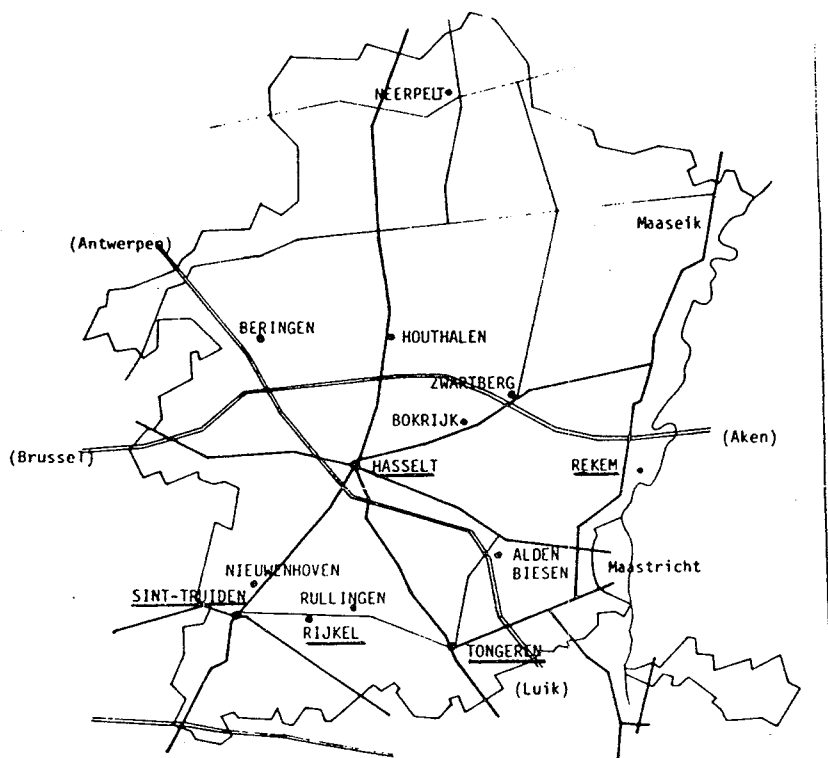
provincial governments. I do not want to give an extensive historical survey, but it is worth mentioning that from the middle of the 19th century, there has been an effort on provincial level to draw lists of valuable cultural heritage and to make an inventory of it. But true realisations in the provinces of West-and East-Flanders and Antwerp only took place after the second world-war. Today the activities on provincial level, apart from the accomplishment of administrative guardianship-duties, still mainly exist of publications of inventories and monografics. In general it strikes us that the provinces are not directly active in policy, legislation and financing. Everything happens on the centralised level of the Flemish Community ; the provinces are partly concerned in the execution of the policy, for example : co-financing of which the percentage is fixed by a decree.

### 3. Province and cultural identity.

Since 1969 the provincial government of Limburg is trying to put some different accents and to advance an activity between central government and local administration without interfering with the competence of the authorities. This (otherwise) different policy has an historical explanation. From the Middle-Ages up to the French Revolution the province of Limburg enclosed grosso-modo the Earldom of Loon, which was from 1366 as such a part from the princiocese of Liège, itself incorporated as a west-frontier-state in the Holy Romain Empire of the German Nation. From culture-historical point of view Limburg knew also a different development from the other Flemish provinces. Besides, it had always remained a country-like province with a strong feudal character. You do not find here any large municipal centres as Gent or Antwerp. The many vestiges from the past are scattered all over the country-side in rural villages and little towns, in convents, abbeys and castles. Only starting from the period between the two world-wars, we find a sudden industrialisation of the centre part of the province. The industrialised region from Tessengerlo up to Maasmechelen with mainly the cole-mines of the Kempen-area dividing now the fertile Southern part, Haspengouw, from the sandy Kempen.

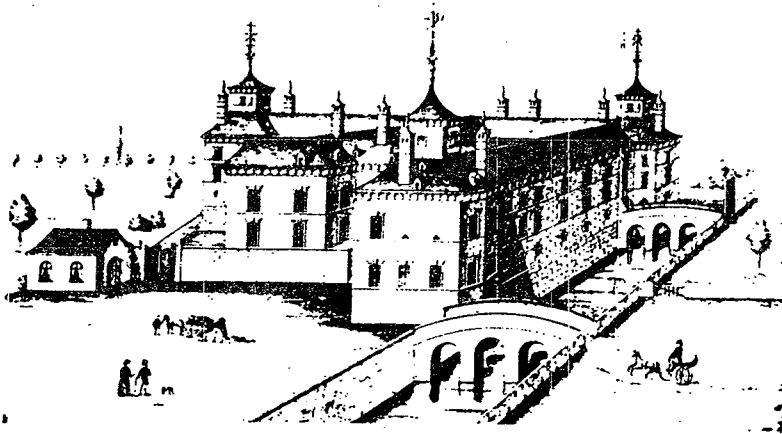
4. The actuality of preservation on a provincial and intermediary level : not an institution but a service.

Specific technical and logistic aspects for active preservation of the cultural heritage, not at least the sensibilisation of official authorities and public, overrule the possibilities of local level. The provincial government has accepted the task of opening the care of cultural heritage to all who are concerned, reckoning with the legal framework. The main means to accomplish this aim will be provided by a sector of preservation of culture. I want to give you a few details about this initiative.



4.1. the preservation sector as a whole of specialized services to draw up inventories, realise studies and offer some scientific-technological support :

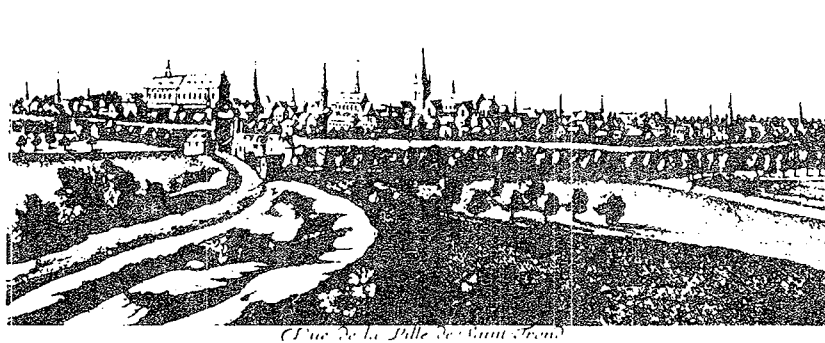
A Nature Centre has been lodged in an abandoned renaissance castle in Rekem which is situated in the Eastern part of this province within the characteristic landscape of the valley of the Meuse. The rehabilitation of this castle provides the opportunity to revalue Old-Rekem. The main mission of the Nature Centre is to promote the values of nature and landscape in an educational way. Our attention is drawn to an educational project around three provincial domains : Nieuwenhoven, Rullingen and Alden Biesen situated in the cultural landscape of Haspengouw, the southern part of our province. A profound study has been made on the heather, a menaced but an important example of landscape in Limburg.



The Gallo-Roman-Museum in Tongres, the oldest town of Belgium, lodges the service for Archeology. The archeological outside-service is very important. Its task consists in archeological excavations (for example Roman villas and tumuli), emergency-excavations like the one of the Benedictine Church of the eleventh century in Rutten, support of archeological research like the one of the roman town "Atuatuca Tungrorum" in Tongres, archeological research in service of monuments care like the abbey-church Sint-Truiden and the castle d'Aspremont-Lynden in Rekem. This initiative functions also a central depot of "archeology". The museum presents mainly the Gallo-Roman Culture, a period during which Tongres (Atuatuca Tungrorum) was the Capital of the Roman Civitas Tungrorum.

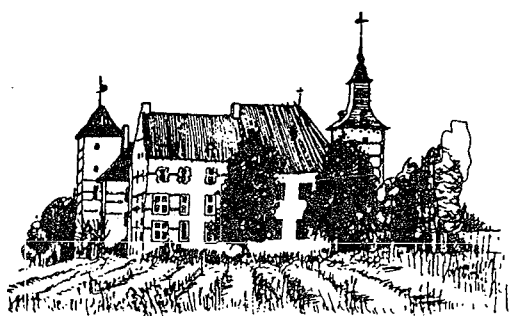


Sint-Truiden, in the South-Western part of the Province lodges the Service for Mobile Cultural Heritage. In the former Benedictine Abbey a workshop for conservation of pictures, sculptures and historic interiors is instored. Here, a central depot-activity takes place, mainly in behalf of the church councils. The museum for religious art has its space in the Beguinage church. For the time being, the Service and the Museum of Industrial Heritage is also situated in Sint-Truiden.



*Clair de la Ville de Saint-Truiden*

Monuments, historic towns and villages, are brought to the attention in the castle of Rijkel where the Service of Cultural Heritage has its offices. From here the support and development of renovation of historic towns and villages, the care of monuments and cultural tourism takes place. Special attention is accorded to programming, destination-questions and methodical procedure. As examples we can mention: the rehabilitation of the abbey-site in Sint-Truiden, of the landcommandery of Alden Biesen near Bilzen, of the abbey Herkenrode in Kuringen near Hasselt, of the castle d'Aspremont-Lynden in Rekem near Maastricht. Concerning the renovation of historic towns and villages in Limburg a global study of the problems has been undertaken. The monument-guards operate from the castle of Rijkel to promote the maintenance of historic buildings. Most of the attention is accorded to marginal monuments such as small country-chapels, ruins, tumuli, archeological sites and so on. The castle of Rijkel will soon be at the disposal of actuality in care of monuments and sites as a colloquium- and symposium centre.



4.2. an integrated tackling in favour of promotion, cultural tourism, formation and education, publication and documentation :

Important is also the promotion of cultural tourism on the provincial or intermediary level. It permits not only the invention of more substantial themes and exploration of cultural heritage on a more personal and existential manner, but also a tackling on a frontier crossing way :

international tourist roads like the Roman way from Cologne to Boulogne ;  
cultural-historical weeks or weekends on Baroque and Classicism in the Rhin-Meuse region ;

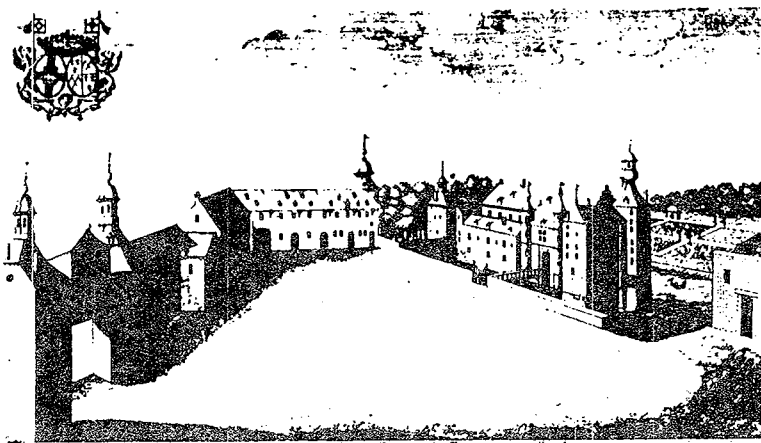
international studies on common subjects like architects in the 18th century ;  
international conferences on historical themes such as Servatius, the first Bisschop of Tongeren-Maastricht, or preservation problems as the maintenance of conservation handicraft and frontier crossing meetingdays for conservators and so on. In this sense the Service of Cultural Heritage works close together with the Basilica Concerts of the Festival of Flanders. Most of the animation and concerts are organised in relationship to historical monuments and sites.

The opening happening of the Festival, the so-called Spring-Celebration, is an all over-program with landscape-walks, cycling-tours, concerts, spring-market...

The provincial level works on formationprograms for local authorities and administrators, for cultural guides. Fit in the working Youth and Heritage the Service of Cultural Heritage organizes each summer for young students an international introductioncourse on preservation of cultural heritage.

To promote and support our work on preservation many of the services compose portable expositions for schools, local museums, cultural centres so for example maintenance of conservation handicraft, wallpainting-conservation, conservation of interiors, archeology, mediaeval and renaissance tomb-monuments, roman tumuli, mediaeval castles, coalmines, letter-heads ... Usually this expositions are accompanied by educational publications and experience-roads.

It is of great importance that each item spread in Limburg provides an information-, publication- and documentation activity, as well for the interested people as for the specialists. In Hasselt (in the beguinage), in Sint-Truiden (in the abbey), in Tongres (in the Gallo-Roman museum) and in Rekem (in the castle) you will find a documentation-centre specialised upon a specified subject (history of art, archeology, museology, care of monuments, conservation areas, nature preservation and so on). Besides I can inform you on a Centre for Regional Exploration in the castle of Hoepertingen.



*(Vue du Chateau de Hoepertingen)*

This mission started in 1978. In spite of all former efforts, there is still a lot of work to be done.

### Summary.

In Belgium the policy concerning preservation of monuments and sites has recently undergone considerable changes. Cultural affairs, including care of heritage, are autonomous competences of the cultural communities, what resulted in separate legislation and administration. On a level between regional government and local authorities are situated the initiatives of the provincial governments. The Province of Limburg is trying to put some different accent : the organisation of a sector for preservation of cultural heritage. The sector is composing by specialised services : nature, landscape, archeology, history of art and architecture, care of monuments and sites, museums, etc. The services set oneself the task to elaborate inventories, to establish scientific-technical ateliers and to put at the disposal of documentation centres. Promotion, cultural tourism, formation, education, publication and documentation is understood as a integrated tackling in favour of cultural heritage.

### Résumé.

La préservation des monuments et sites est changée considérablement en Belgique il y a quelques années. La politique de sauvegarde, conservation et restauration, -comme toutes les affaires culturelles- est la compétence des régions. Il en résulte une législation et une administration séparée. Sur un niveau intermédiaire entre gouvernement régional et autorités locales sont situées les initiatives provinciales. La Province du Limbourg au nord-est du pays fait l'essai d'élaborer un secteur pour la préservation des monuments et sites. Le secteur se compose de différents services où on trouve les spécialismes en matière de patrimoine culturel : nature, paysage, archéologie, histoire de l'art, monuments, secteurs sauvegardés, muséologie, etc. Tous les services se donnent pour tâche de rédiger d'inventaires ; l'organisation de dépôts, ateliers et centres de documentation. Les initiatives pour la promotion des monuments et sites comme le tourisme culturel, les expositions itinéraires, les publications et la formation font l'objet d'une stratégie intégrée.