

Course: Exploring the future of food and farming (FSE 21306)

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Group 12

A THINK-DO GAP ANALYSIS ON DIVERSIFYING LANDSCAPE: COMBINING NATURE, TINY HOUSES AND AGRICULTURE IN THE PEEL



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Figure 1: Jan Ottens and Floris Sikking discussing the project in Jan's home

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FOREWORD

This report was written during the course Exploring the Future of Farming and Food at the University of Wageningen. The course included a deep dive into a think-do-gap analysis. This is a concept used to analyse a project's vision while trying to bridge the gaps that come along the way. The example of Peel Natuurdorpen project gives a good overview of the different issues to be considered. In case description the context of the project is described, followed by the vision for 2030, the actors, the gaps, and the bridges. In the last chapter the group process can be found.

CASE DESCRIPTION

The disappearance of woodlands and subsequently a simplification of landscapes in the southeast of Netherlands has been the consequence of agricultural intensification (CBS Data 2021). The area in the Southeast of the Netherlands is characterised by intensive agriculture and farmland that is rented out yearly to high profit industries like lily and grass sod production. This results in a disconnection of farmers with their lands and soils, and unsustainable practices with a high biodiversity decline.

Nowadays, it is more profitable for farmers to discard biodiversity and nature than to manage it. Peel Natuurdorpen aims to change this and provide farmers an income based on managing nature on their land through an extensification of their practices. The concept of this project is to combine agriculture, nature and living on farmland. Farmers will implement nature (I.e., forests, ponds, herb rich grassland etc.) in which a few tiny houses are placed that they rent out. For this, farmers, nature conservation organisations and local governments must be considered to understand the different boundaries.

First, we look at the vision of the association active in the region (I.e., Peel Natuurdorpen). After, we define the actors that influence the vision, the current gaps and how these gaps can be bridged.

Location: Provinces of Noord Brabant and Limburg, The Netherlands

Time scale: Between now and 2030

System boundary: Farmers, government, and citizens

Research question: *Using a bottom-up approach, how can a landscape that combines nature, living and farming be created?*

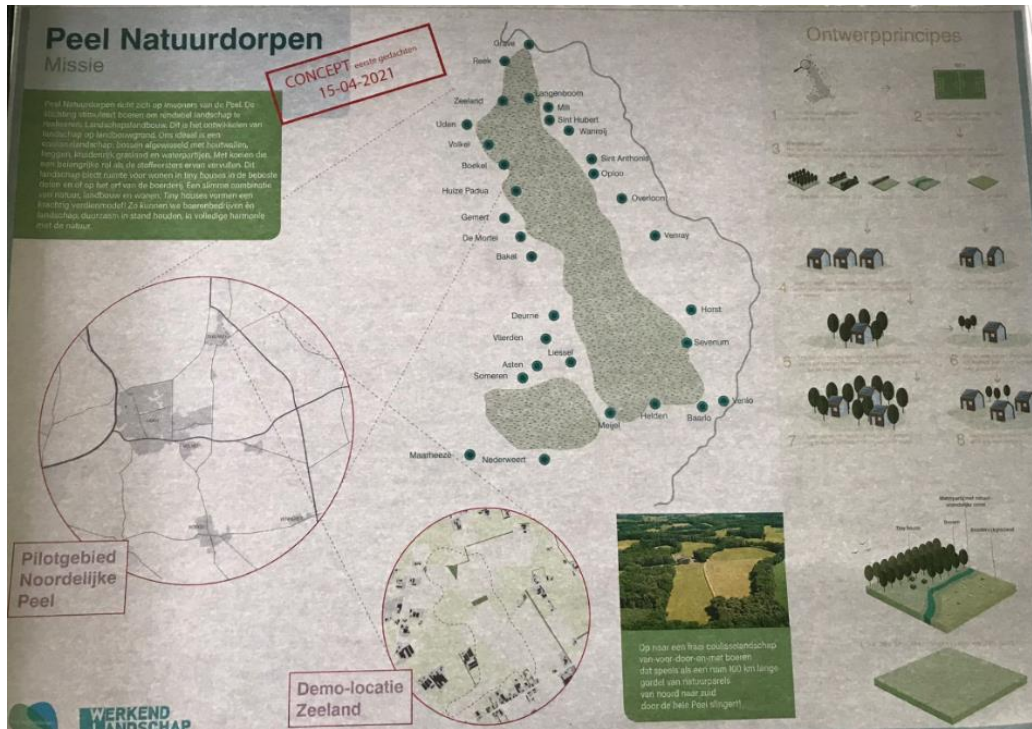


Figure 2: Experimental zone in the Peel

VISION

For 2030 we want to have a convincing experiment run in the Peel where farmers convert their agricultural land into new nature and profitably rent out tiny houses to people. Currently in the Netherlands biodiversity is in decline, there is a housing shortage, a nitrogen oversupply, farmers are facing financial and political challenges, and there are more and more people who want to live closer to nature.

By enabling farmers to rent out tiny houses on their farmland whilst creating and managing a bocage landscape, mixing woodland and herbaceous meadows, the farmers can provide themselves with financial security whilst providing space for biodiversity, ecosystem services and a place for people to live closer to nature. To bring this vision closer to reality there is an opportunity to run an experiment in the Peel and showcase such system. In the north of the Peel there are already farmers, potential inhabitants and five municipalities who are willing to participate. There also exists a financial framework for the farmers and there is a legal structure in the making for a new zoning plan.

ACTORS

The actors and stakeholders have been found for this case. These actors are the **province of Noord-Brabant** and **five municipalities** in the Peel (Boekel, Landerd, Sint Anthonis, Uden, Mill Sint Hubert), **Peel Natuurdorpen**, **information outlets** for farmers and **schools of communication**.

The municipalities and the province define the “zoning plan” of an area. This plan gives permission to certain usages of an area. Within the municipalities the aldermen and the mayor prepare the new zoning plan. The council must approve this to finalize it and can accept experimental exemptions.

The organization of Peel Natuurdorpen is the main actor of the project as they are the initiators. Communication schools such as Sint Lucas can provide help in the delivery of the project to all the stakeholders. The information outlets for farmers, like ‘Nieuwe Oogst’ and LTO can introduce ideas to farmers and make farmers enthusiastic about the project.

Furthermore, there are the stakeholders. These are **citizens** and **farmers**. The citizens of the involved municipalities vote for the members of the board. The farmers own the land on which the project can be implemented. They will be responsible for the management of nature and the renting out of tiny houses.

For a visual representation see Appendix 1.

GAPS

OUTREACH GAP

Peel Natuurdorpen uses a website as a first source to communicate their plans to interested parties. Currently, the information is rather scattered over multiple pages and lacking a clear structure. Pages have their own format with pdf's, links, bullet points or plain text. With a first glance, it is hard to understand de concept of Peel Natuurdorpen. This requires people to invest more time to understand the project or even mislead people into not taking the initiative seriously.

POLITICAL GAP

In cooperation with five municipalities and province a workgroup is currently reframing the legal details for a new zone to be tested in the experimental area of the Peel bringing the vision into reality. There are two years remaining for the details to be planned out and the members of the boards and mayors to agree on. However, as the members of the boards and mayors have responsibility towards their constituency, some of them express doubts and fears regarding the experiment which can severely halt the realization. Therefore, they need trust from their voters.

CULTURAL GAP

The income of a farmer is determined by how well they manage their farm. Because of this they are often hesitant to try new practices. When they have seen the innovation successfully implemented, they will be more inclined to also try it. However, this is a slow process, and it will take a long time for the innovation to be practiced on a large scale.

BRIDGES

OUTREACH BRIDGE - ATTRACTING THE GENERAL PUBLIC

An appealing, easy to navigate website with clear information is an extremely useful tool in communicating about the Peel Natuurdorpen. Although if a website is unclear to the user, it can also create misunderstanding about what it tries to convey. This was experienced with the website of Peel Natuurdorpen. Something which could misinform people about the project and might lead them to be unsupportive for it. To have a website where every stakeholder can easily understand what Peel Natuurdorpen is about, wants to do and how they can be involved is a major step in convincing them about the necessity of Peel Natuurdorpen.

Since the organization of Peel Natuurdorpen is currently run on a voluntary basis, there is presumably little budget to hire a professional. We propose to find an enthusiast intern who also wants to contribute to the project on a voluntary basis and who wants to take the communication on their responsibility (see Appendix 2). This intern can then focus on creating an appealing, easy to navigate website with clear information. To get an intern from an MBO school Peel Natuurdorpen needs to become a certified learning company at SBB. This is a clear process that starts on their website [Bedrijfsleven | SBB \(s-bb.nl\)](https://www.bedrijfsleven.nl/sbb/s-bb.nl).

POLITICAL BRIDGE

The political gap concerns the trust the members of the board have from their constituency. They do not want to make a decision which the constituency will not be in support of. And since it is a new and innovative idea, there are many unknown outcomes. However, once the constituency shows support for the Peel Natuurdorpen, the members of the board will have the trust from their constituency that they will be supported in bringing this idea into reality. The first step to reach out to the constituency would be to have a center point of information to refer to. This will be a website like described in the precious bridge. The outreach bridge is also the first step towards gaining trust from the constituency in the project of Peel Natuurdorpen.

CULTURAL BRIDGE – FARMER TRUST

To create enthusiasm amongst the farmers for this project, we first want to get them knowledgeable about the opportunity. We see this best done through sources they trust. Of which we believe are news outlets on agriculture and agricultural associations, like ‘Nieuwe Oogst’ and

‘LTO’. We want to publish positive articles regarding Peel Natuurdorpen and “Landschapslandbouw” to introduce and stimulate the ideas to the farmers.

Moreover, collaboration should be encouraged between neighboring farms as that can create financial synergies. Depending on the location of farms (i.e., some are near roads, others near forests), farmers can decide on whose ground there will be more woodland and on whose more grass. Additionally, because there is a limited amount of tiny houses that can be added per hectare of land, through combination the farmers could have the possibility to share an extra tiny house, subsequently delivering an extra source of income.

GROUP PROCESS

Our group process can be described as a walk with no trail but the enthusiasm and constant engagement of each of the group members brought reassurance and full confidence that we were walking in the right direction. Each week we found ourselves exposed to yet another layer of complexity which led to many brainstorming sessions sometimes ending up in a complete change of topic.

In the beginning our main vision was to draw farmers from a certain sector (potato farming or flower culture) to sustainable farming practices. Nonetheless, such a topic was too broad, and we did not have concrete sustainability related obstacles for those farms. We felt stuck in our process. We thus took a step back, resulting in a revision of our vision. We decided to set a location, namely Noord-Brabant and relate this region to the issue of decreasing biodiversity on farmland. With the help of our supervisor, we were redirected to “Boerennatuur” group who represents all farmer collectives within the Netherlands including the collective of Noord-Brabant: "Agrarisch natuur- en landschapsbeheer in Brabant" (ANB). We asked this collective about their vision and one of their employees redirected us to Peel Natuurdorpen.

We immersed ourselves in this specific case, by writing emails to the board members, arranging meetings with Jan Ottens, the treasurer of the organization, as well as organizing a trip to the demo tiny house itself. These meetings brought us the necessary input to understand their context and get a clear view of the gaps.



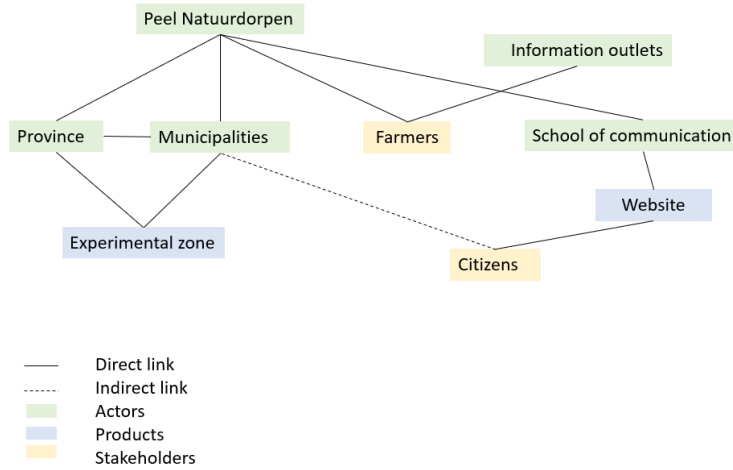
Figure 3: Visiting the board of Peel Natuurdorpen in their demo tiny house

One of these gaps was a political gap, for which we needed expert advice. We contacted Lara Sibbing who helped us get a better grasp on this political gap. Additionally, having weekly feedback sessions with Mariana helped us take a more critical look at our project from different angles that we might have missed along the way. Her keen interest in the topic and small push towards certain actors encouraged us to keep digging and puzzling pieces together to make a full comprehensive case.

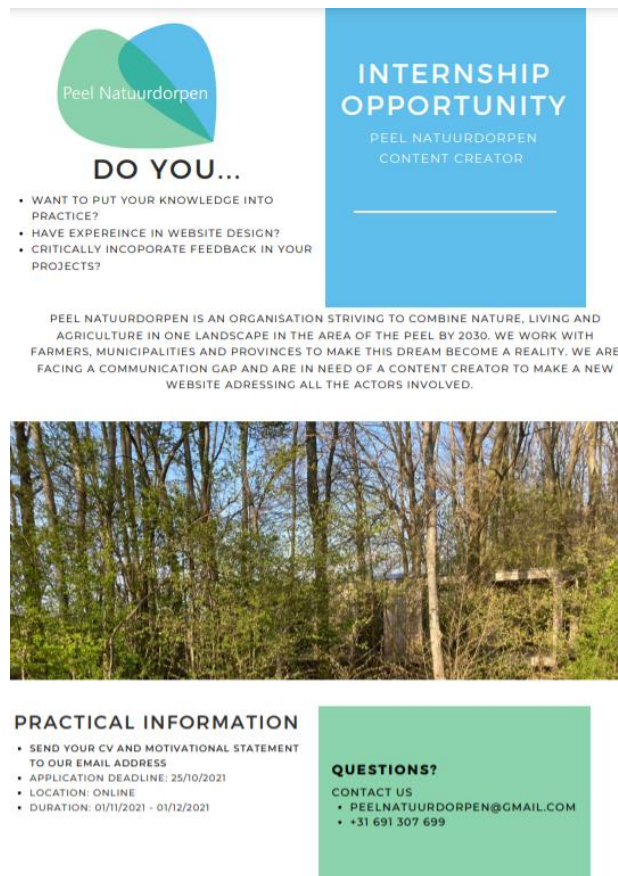
With all the input received we managed to go through a whole think-do-gap analysis, find an engaging case, understand the actors, develop a vision, find the gaps and come to appropriate bridges. We are satisfied with our process and grateful for all the support we got along the way.

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Appendix 1: Linkages between the different actors and stakeholders



Appendix 2: Prototype poster for the recruitment of an intern to bridge the outreach gap