



# Nature Connectivity in Belgium

Interregional Working Group



# VAPEO

Vlaams Actie Programma Ecologische Ontsnippering  
(Flemish Action Program Ecological Defragmentation)

→ An introduction towards the rest of the day



# VAPEO 2019-2024 (roads)

Government agreement - Flemish Government 2019-2024:

Flemish transport infrastructure presents the biggest barriers for nature in Flanders

→ Flemish government is responsible and needs to act



Agency for roads & traffic



Department of environment and spatial planning



Agency for nature and forests



Institute for nature and forest research



- Structural collaboration within the Flemish government:
  - Environment and spatial planning
  - Mobility and public works
- 15 priority actions on roads
- Building a database of known bottlenecks to prioritize
- Acting on opportunities and acute bottlenecks

# VAPEO first list (roads)

Ecoduct Hallerbos



Gefinancierd door de Europese Unie  
NextGenerationEU



Ecovalley Zwartberg

Ecoduct Waaltjesbos



Wild detection system N76 Oudsbergen



Ecovalley Vossenberghighway bridge

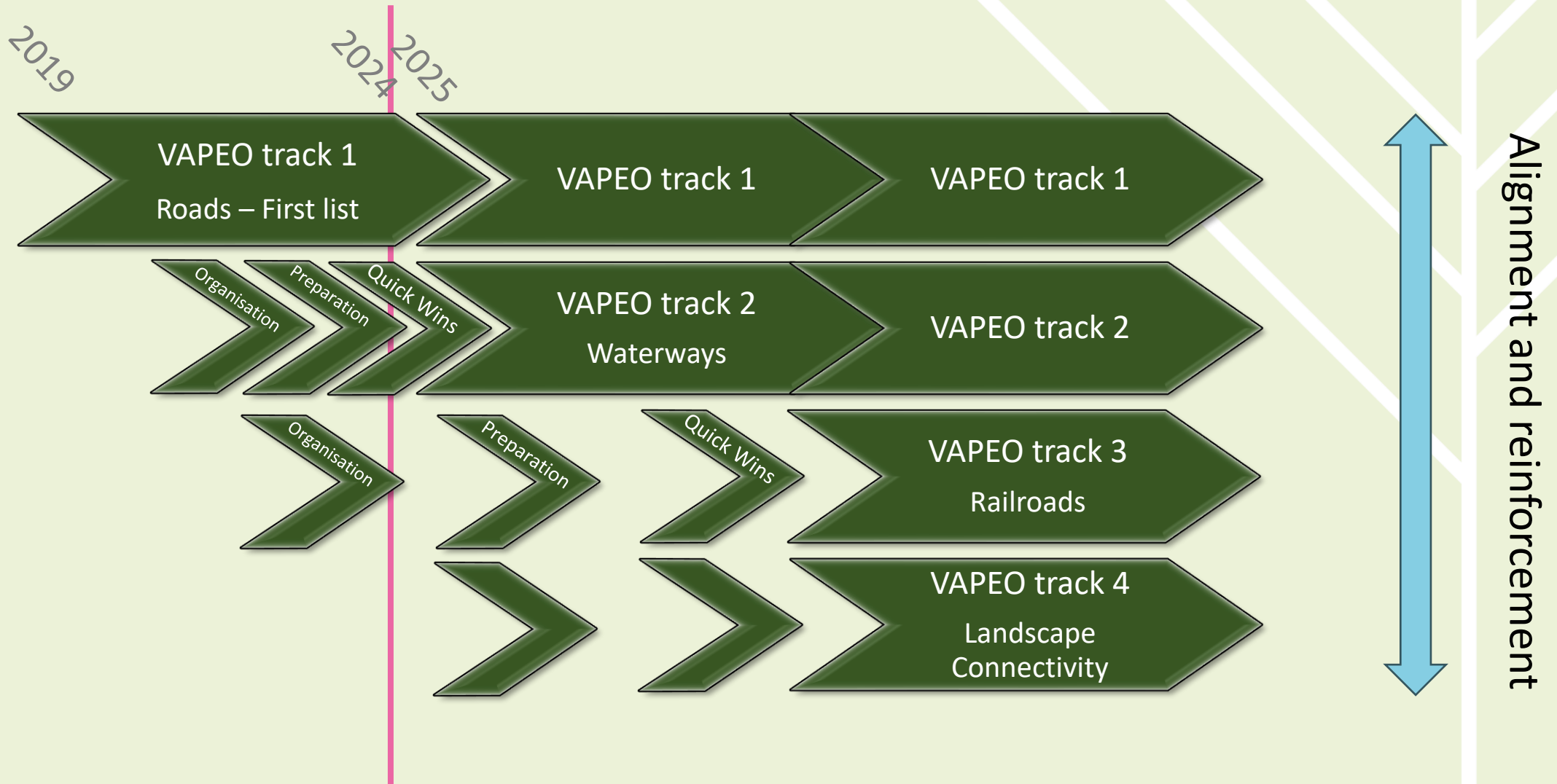


Roadside bridge Waasmunster

Ecotunnel Pipaenshoek



# VAPEO Vision: 1 program – 4 tracks



# Government agreement 2024-2029



*‘Met het Vlaams Actieprogramma Ecologische Ontsnippering (VAPEO, een meerjarig investeringsprogramma) verbinden we waar haalbaar onze natuurgebieden en maken we onze weg- en waterinfrastructuur veiliger voor mens en dier. Dit gebeurt in goede samenwerking tussen het Departement Omgeving, het Agentschap voor Natuur en Bos en het Agentschap Wegen en Verkeer. Daarbij focussen we eerst op de plekken met de meeste impact.’*



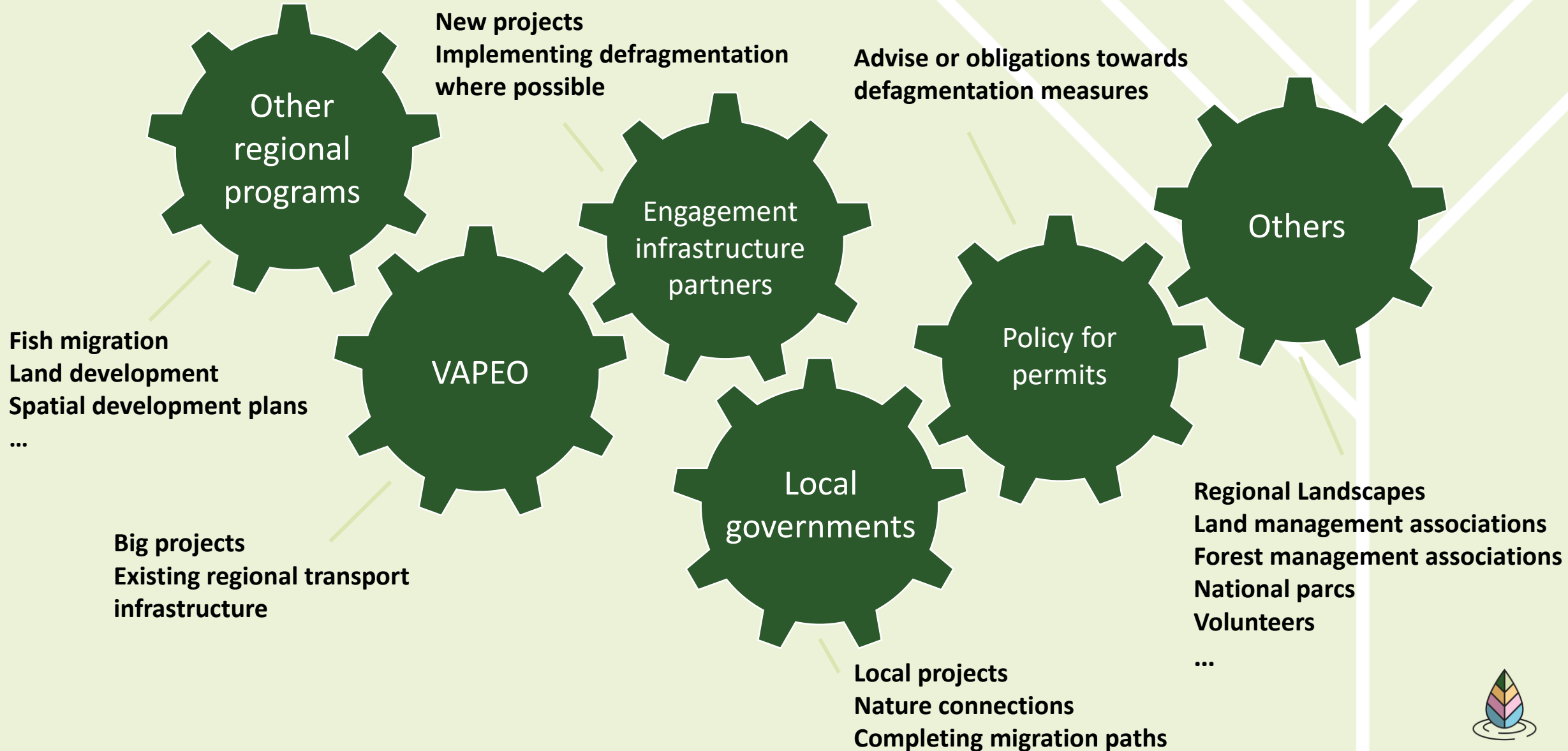
# VAPEO 2024-2029

- ❑ Preparing and building 14 projects on regional roads and highways
- ❑ Current bottlenecks and opportunities
- ❑ Developing an approach for railroads and landscape-connections
- ❑ Supporting actions: communication, GIS, monitoring, ...
- ❑ Preparing and building 11 projects along waterways
- ❑ Developing a spatial Vision for nature connections in Flanders

NEW!

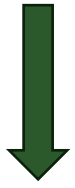
NEW!

# Defragmentation motor in Flanders

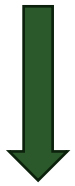




Ideas,  
Questions,  
challenges,  
opportunities



Contacts with  
other partners



**COMMON** Ideas,  
Questions,  
challenges,  
opportunities





## REDUCING IMPACT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PRESSURES

Reducing impact of environmental pressures



## EU PROJECT OFFICE & FINANCING BIODIVERSITY

EU Project Office & Financing biodiversity



## RESTORING BIODIVERSITY

Nature restoration



## NATURA 2000 BRANDING

Natura 2000: promoting and branding the European ecological network



## TRANS EUROPEAN NATURE NETWORK

Protected areas



## MONITORING & EVALUATION

Monitoring and evaluation



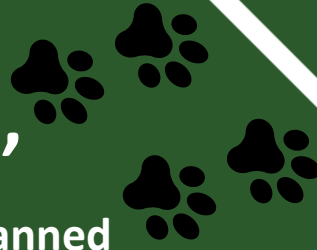
## CAPACITY BUILDING & KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

Developing and sharing knowledge and skills



# Survey 'Connectivity in Belgium'

Map stakeholders, knowledge, what is ongoing and planned



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Map stakeholders, knowledge, what is ongoing and planned

Interregional working group Life

B4B+:

- Results of the survey
- Inspirational presentations

Detected through the survey – 'Kill your darlings' dilemma for the organisation

- Working sessions



# Survey 'Connectivity in Belgium'

Map stakeholders, knowledge, what is ongoing and planned

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**Detect following steps together**

**→ towards more collaboration**

**→ and maximizing impact**



# Survey 'Connectivity in Belgium'

Map stakeholders, knowledge, what is ongoing and planned

Interregional working group Life

B4B+:

- Results of the survey
- Inspirations
- Detecting opportunities for the organisation
- Work

**Sounds like a plan!  
Let's do this!**

Detect following together

→ towards more collaboration

→ and maximizing impact





# Nature connectivity in Belgium

Results survey



# 59 survey entrees!



Vlaamse  
overheid



Le Brabant wallon



LAGE  
KEMPEN  
REGIONAAL  
LANDSCHAP



leuven



GruunRant  
Behouden - versterken - verbinden



natuurpunt



natuurpunt

STUDIE



Wallonie  
service public  
SPW



Kempens  
Landschap



MEETJESLAND  
& LEIEVALLEI  
REGIONAAL  
LANDSCHAP



MECHELEN



natuurpark  
RIVIERENLAND



DURME



bruxelles  
environnement  
leefmilieu  
brussel  
.brussels



provincie  
Oost-Vlaanderen



VLAAMSE  
ARDENNEN  
REGIONAAL  
LANDSCHAP



STRATEGISCH PROJECT WALDEN



VLAAMS-  
BRABANT



PROVINCIAAL  
NATUUR-  
CENTRUM



DE  
VOORKEMPEN  
REGIONAAL  
LANDSCHAP



ORIOM  
OPEN RUIMTE IN EN OM MECHELEN



ECO  
STRADES  
natuur verbindt



WWF



LEI(E)NDE NACHT T.  
ZORG VOOR DE NACHT.



Provincie  
Antwerpen



Limburgs  
Landschap vzw



Leie en Schelde  
REGIONAAL  
LANDSCHAP



natagora



BOEREN  
NATUUR  
VLAANDEREN



ZONIËNWOUDE  
FORÊT DE SOIGNES



DE BOSGROEPEN



ZUID-  
HAGELAND  
REGIONAAL  
LANDSCHAP



REGIONAAL LANDSCHAP  
SCHELDE - DURME



vereniging voor  
openbaar groen



BOEREN  
NATUUR  
VLAANDEREN



INFRABEL



NATUUR- EN BIODIVERSITEITSPAD  
LEUVEN



Natuurpunt  
Vleermuizenwerkgroep



Vogelbescherming  
VLAANDEREN  
Stem van wilde dieren



West-  
Vlaamse  
Hart  
REGIONAAL  
LANDSCHAP

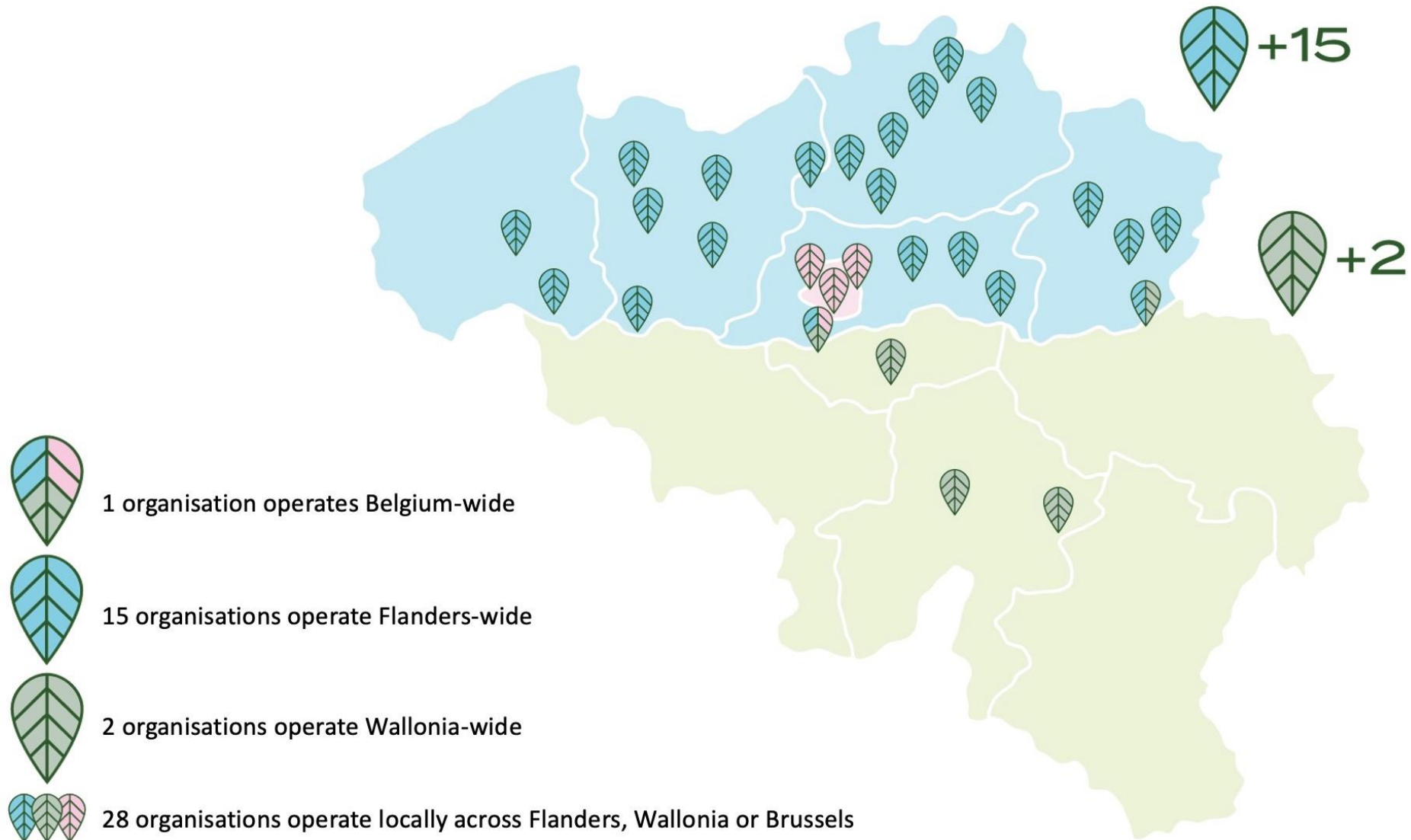


KEMPEN &  
MAASLAND  
REGIONAAL  
LANDSCHAP



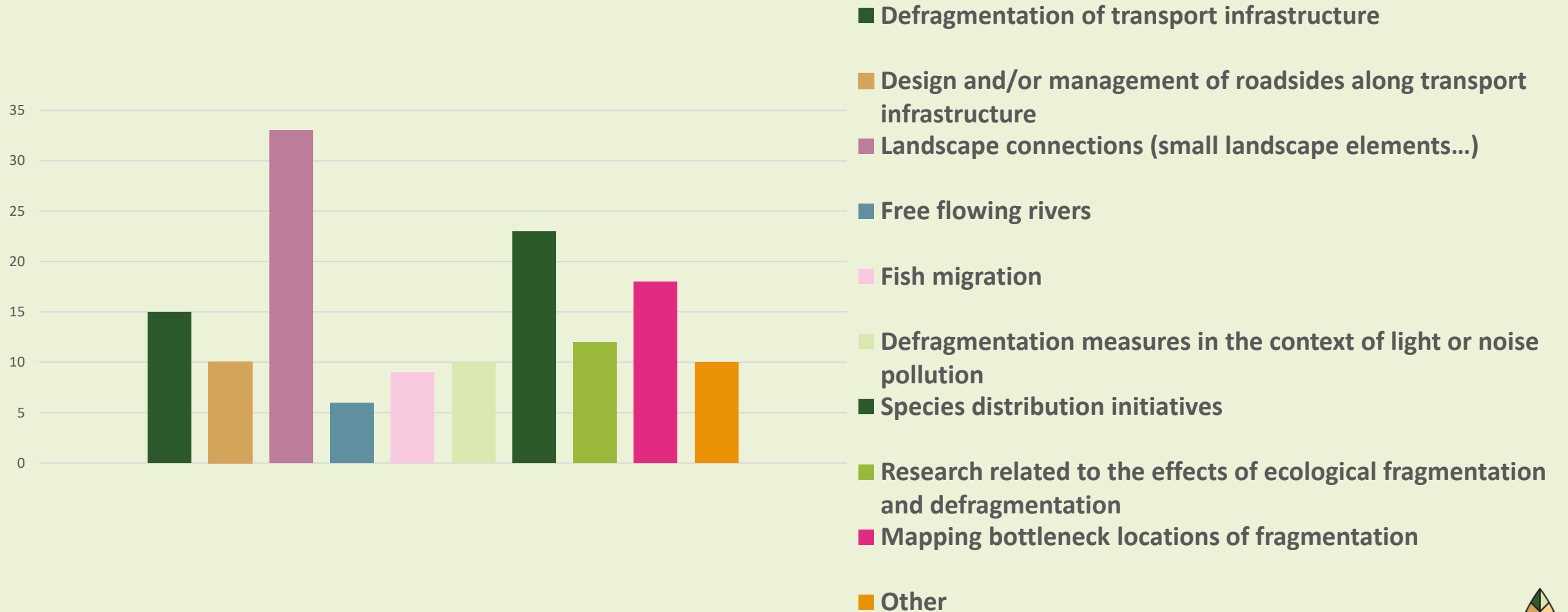


# What region are you active in?

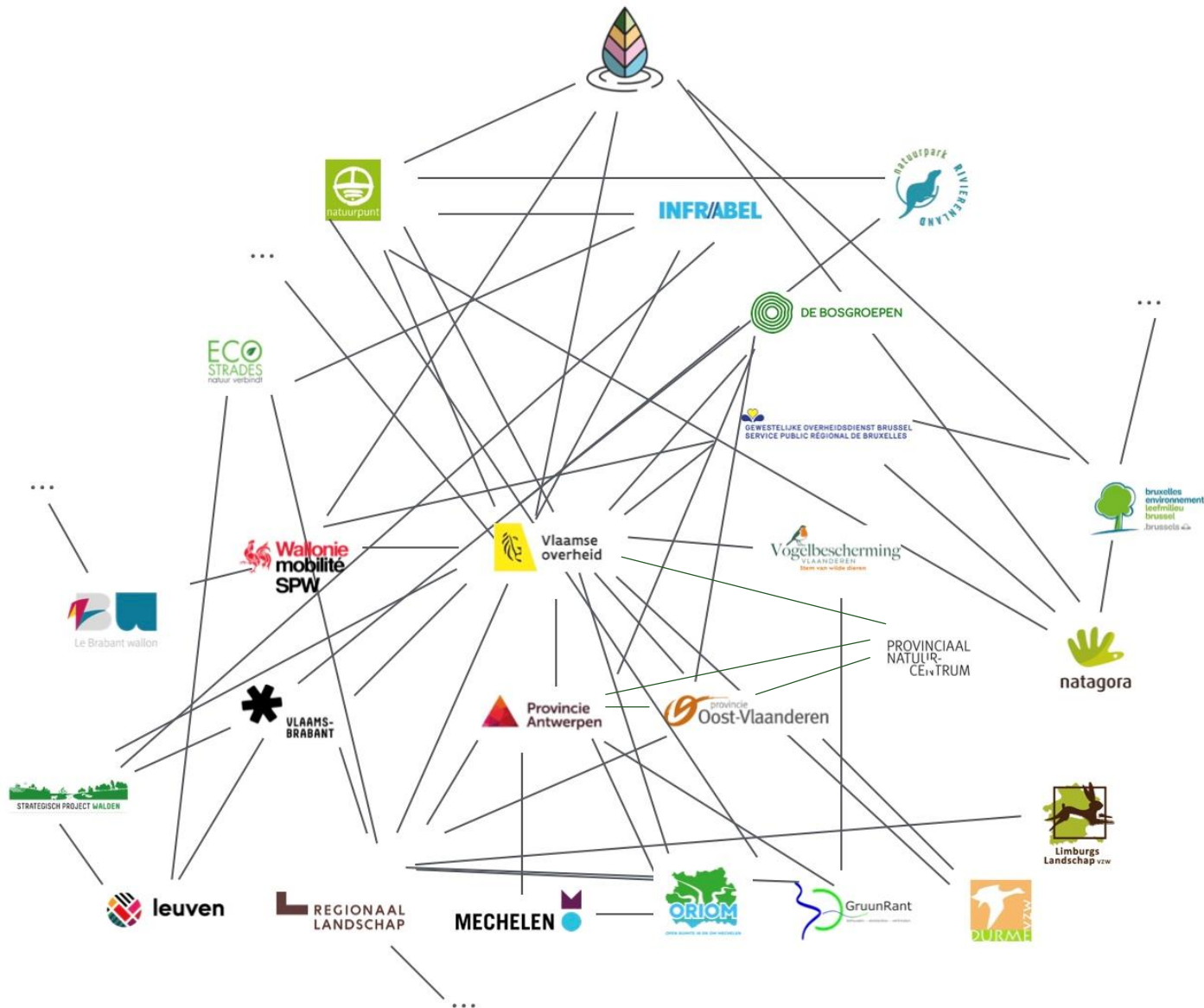


# What is the focus of your organisation towards nature connectivity?

Focus of organisation



# Who do you already collaborate with?



# What resources, specifically for defragmentation, does your organisation have?

## Budget

Budgets are often insufficient and not strictly reserved for nature connections.



There are often trade-offs to be made when budgets are under pressure. For example: Infrastructure partners have to choose to allocate budgets to nature connections, bicycle mobility and traffic safety.

## People

Staff often have multiple tasks and responsibilities.



The precise number of FTE of our partners is difficult to determine.

## Type of organisation



Volunteers



Professionals



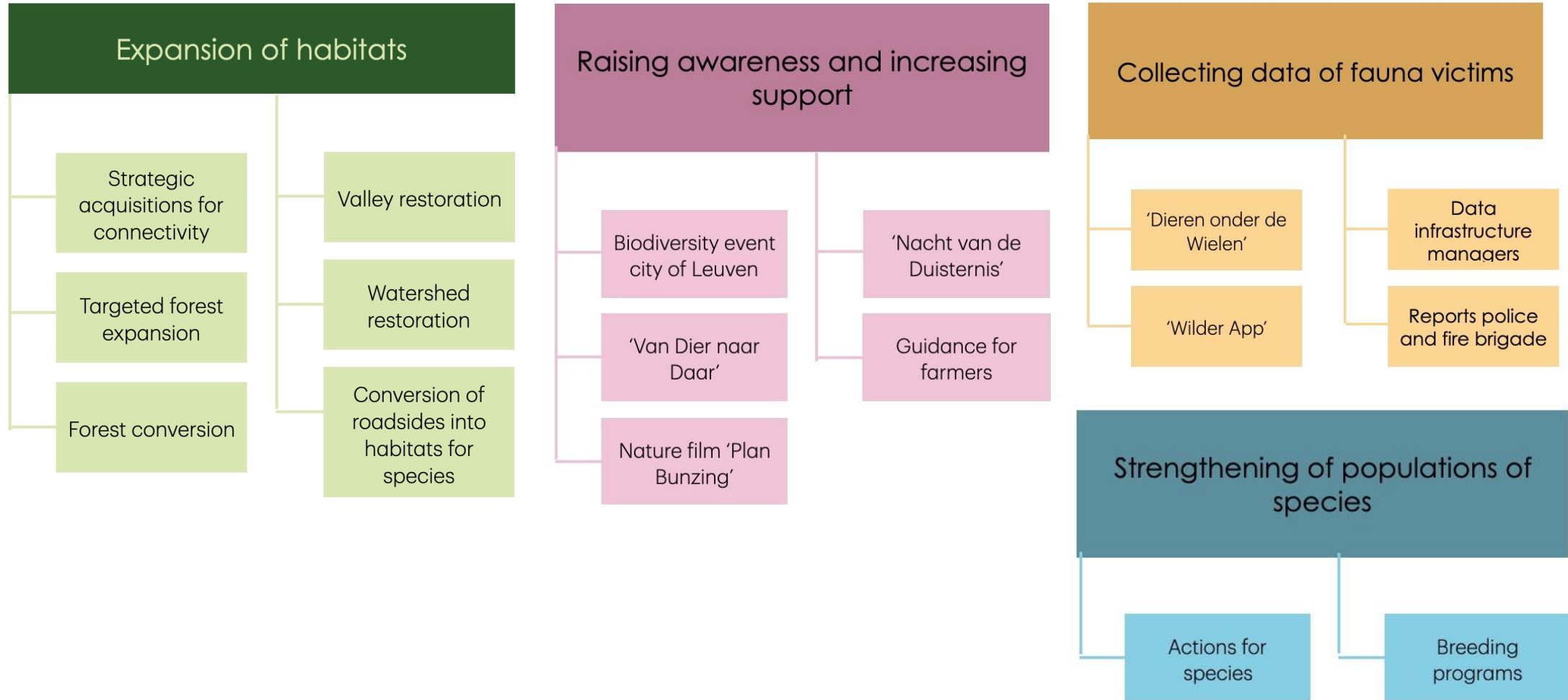
Professionals + volunteers

Different types of organisations are working on nature connections: governments, nature associations, non-profit organisations,...

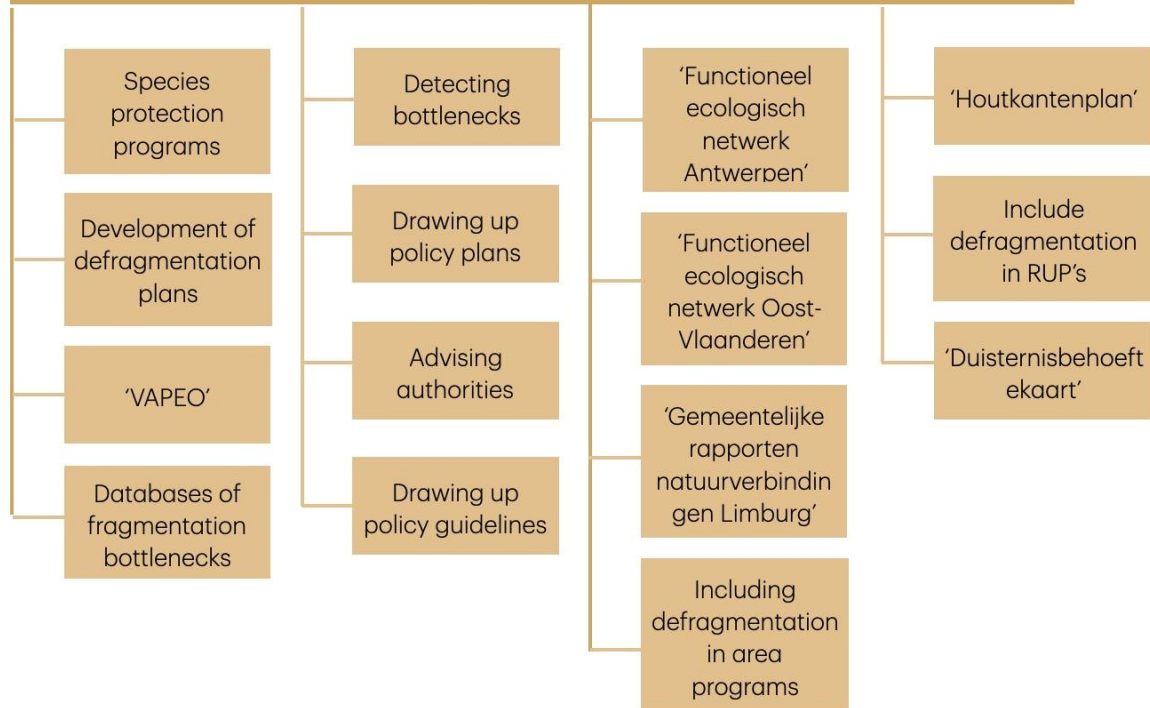
Efforts vary from only volunteers to one professional supported by volunteers, to governments that only work with professionals.



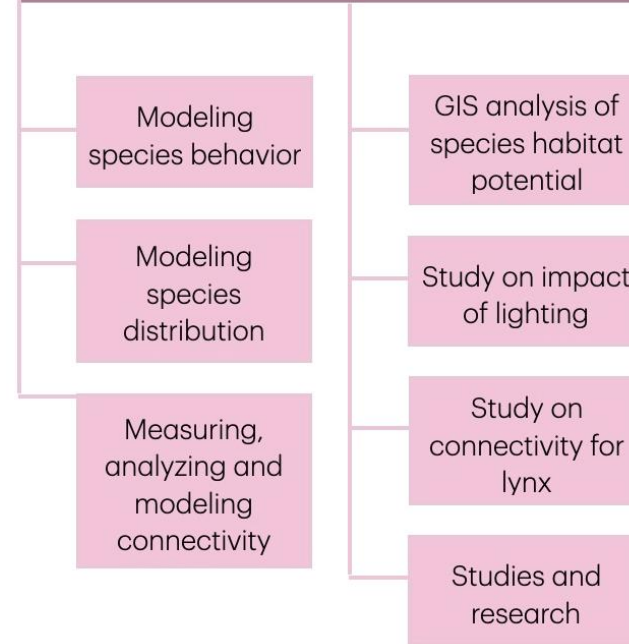
# What concrete results has your organisation accomplished?



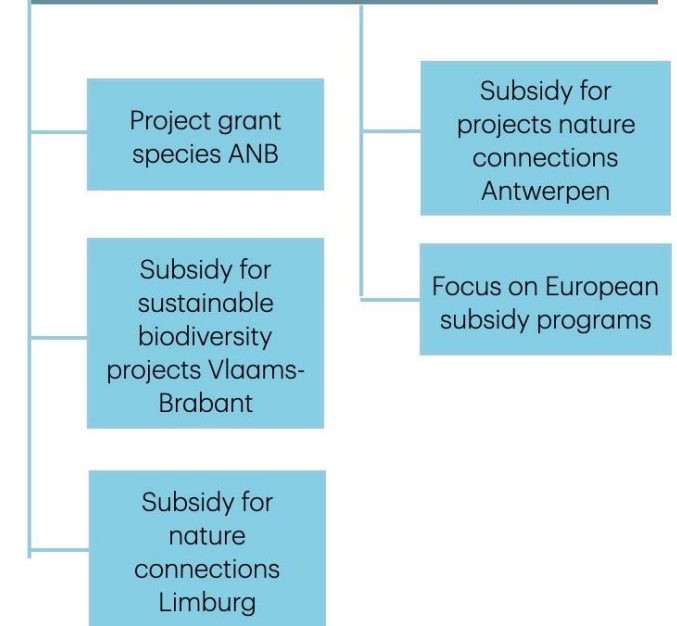
## Policy, strategy and planning



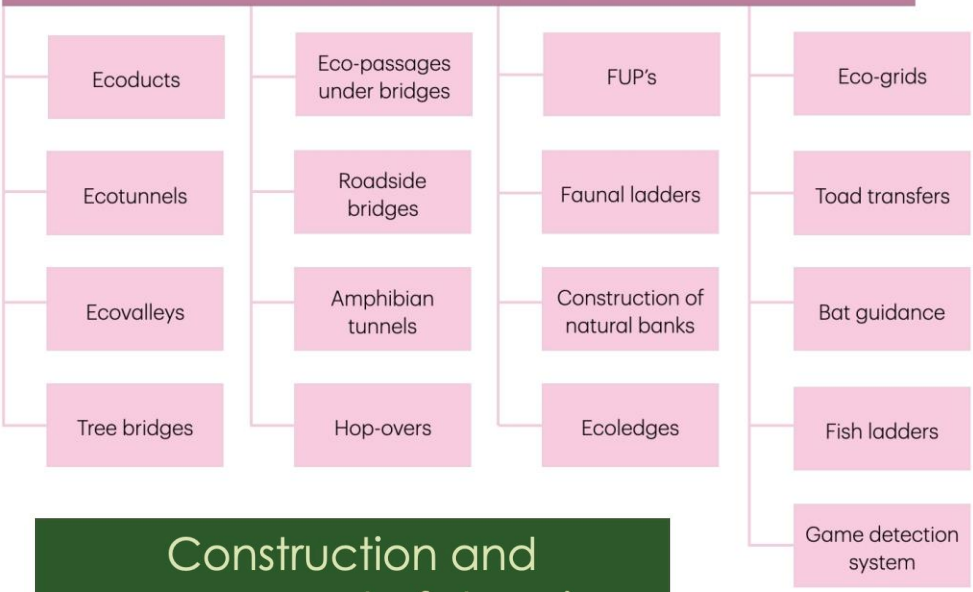
## Knowledge building



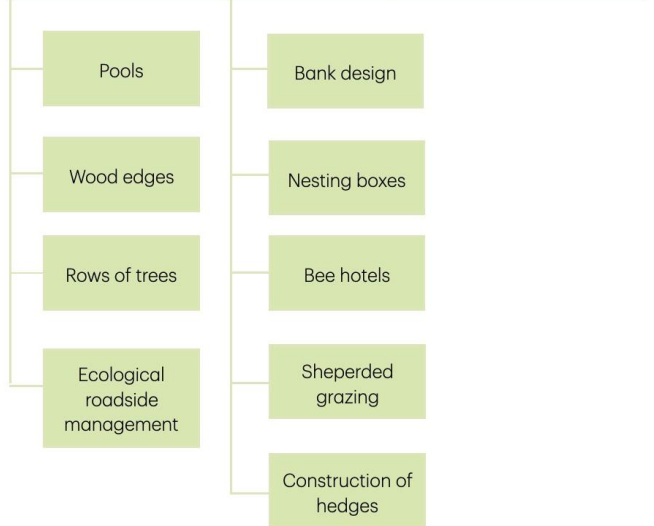
## Mobilization of resources



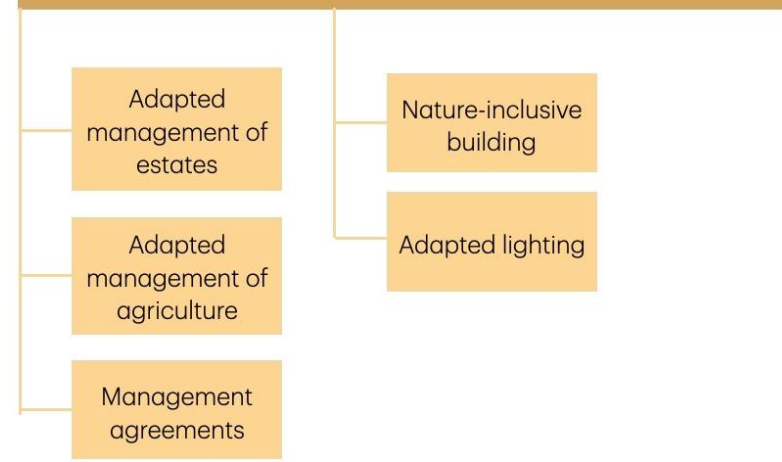
# Defragmentation transport infrastructure



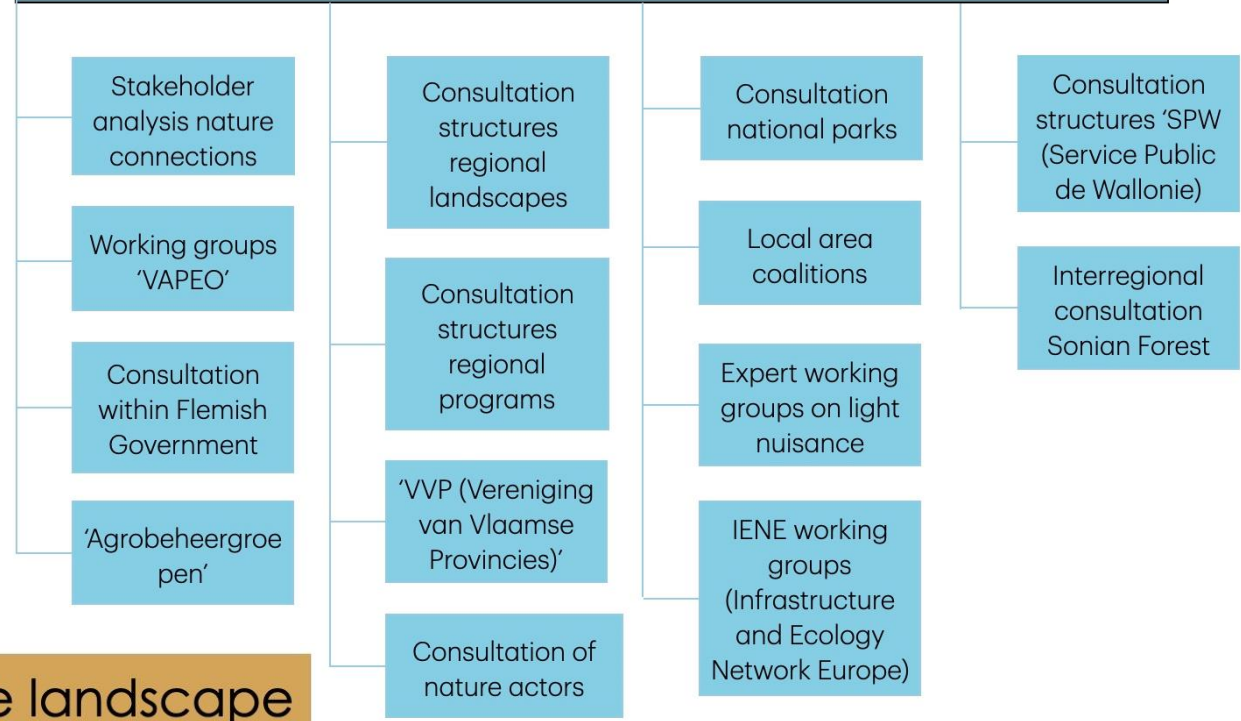
# Construction and management of stepping stones and corridors in the landscape



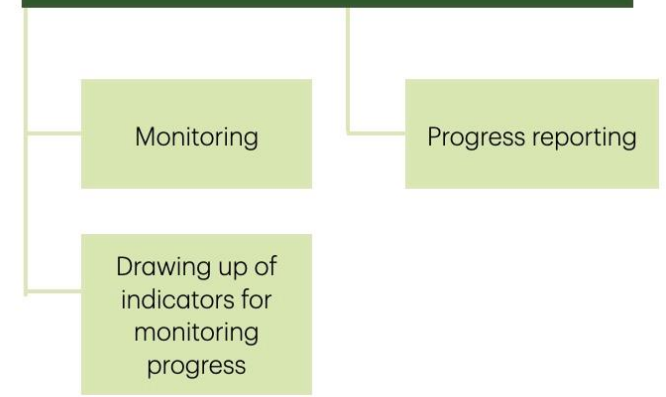
# Accessibility of the landscape between nature reserves

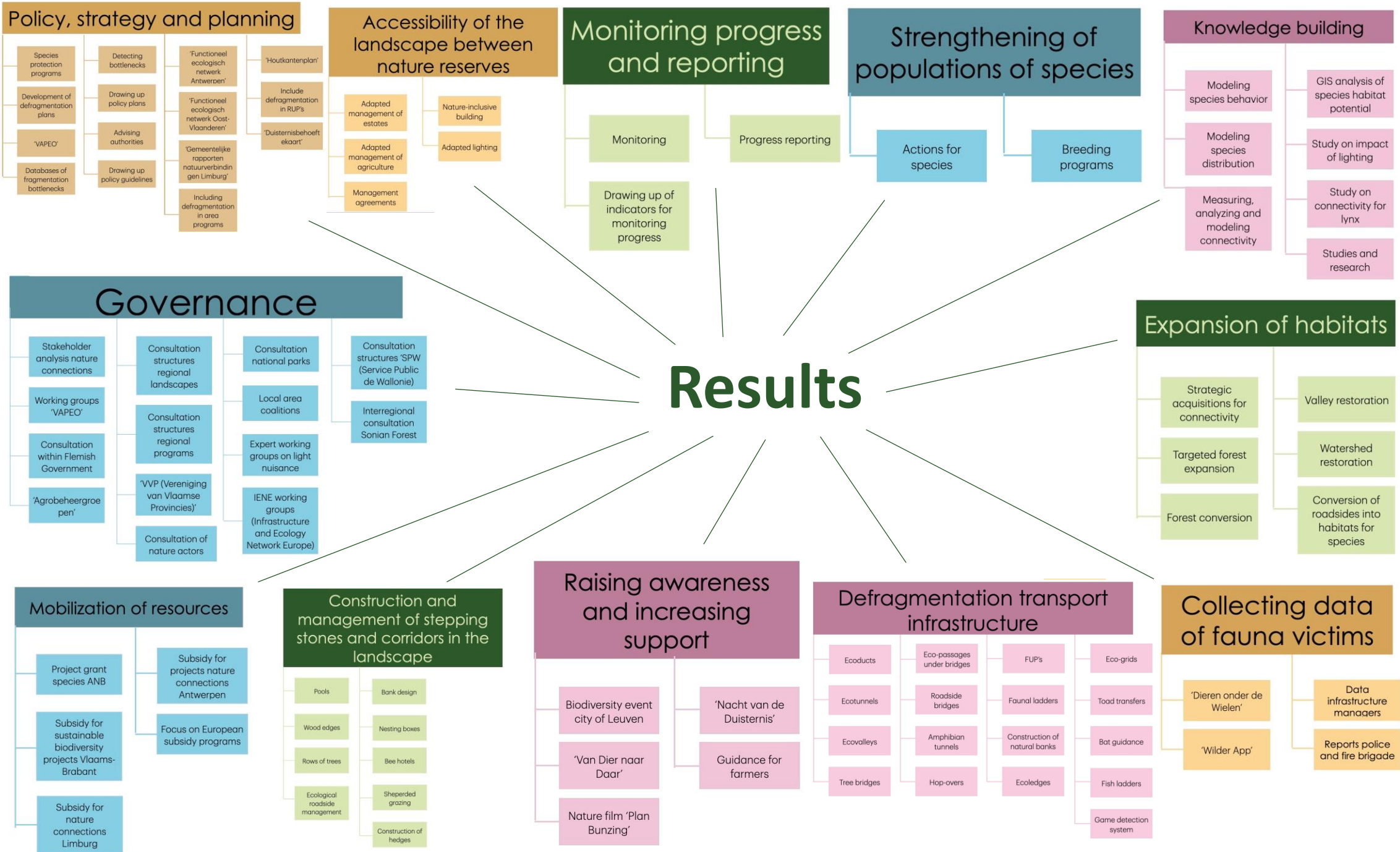


# Governance



# Monitoring progress and reporting

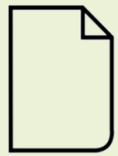








# What are the biggest bottlenecks in your operation? Where are the biggest gaps?



## Policies and regulations



Lack of spatial instruments and lack of long-term policy framework



(Local) political interests prevail: overregulation and bureaucracy in permits and subsidies



No clear legal framework and insufficient enforcement



Higher level required for funding decisions



Dependence on private property (voluntary)



## Knowledge and expertise



Lack of ecological knowledge among project partners & administrations (permits)



Limited availability of maps (bottlenecks, roads, waterways, light pollution)



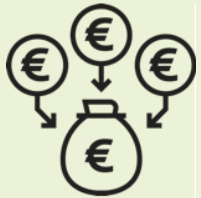
Limited knowledge on biodiversity and light pollution



Scientific insights do not translate to field implementations



# What are the biggest bottlenecks in your operation? Where are the biggest gaps?



## Finances and resources



Limited operating resources, budgets, time and personnel  
• also for realisations in the field



High cost of land acquisition and management/monitoring



Competition for budgets (core tasks vs defragmentation)



Dependant on volunteers



Lack of structural funding: lack of budget for strategic acquisitions, pilot projects, area coalitions and bottlenecks



Implementing small terrain measures is time-consuming, managing them is a challenge



Limited project funding, depending on external resources



Projects have long lead times



## Cooperation



Fragmented competences: insufficient coordination between government departments



Lack of long-term planning



Lack of overview and coordination between partners  
- Ecological connections often not included in project on time  
- Nature links not sufficiently integrated into planning processes  
- Co-responsibility among partners lacking



Difficulties cooperating between nature organisations and agriculture



Ignorance of issues among policymakers



# What are the biggest bottlenecks in your operation? Where are the biggest gaps?



## Communication and raising awareness



Low support from citizens and farmers  
- Put more effort into awareness and communication regarding need for nature connectivity



Low priority for nature links in public and political spheres



Disinformation by agriculture lobbies and politics



Negative effect of human urbanisation, ribbon development...



## Land ownership and land availability



Dependance on willingness of landowners to realise projects  
- private land  
- good will of private individuals



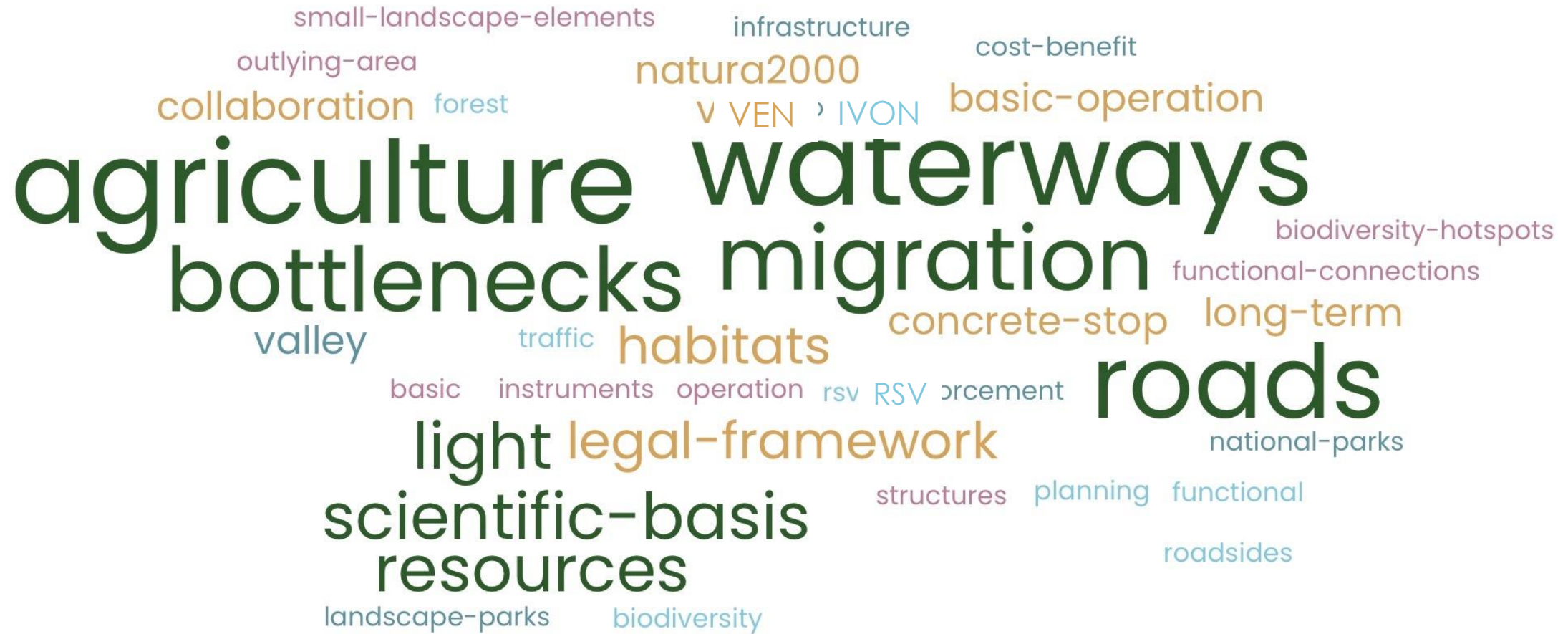
Public opinion (e.g. deforestation)



Resistance to land acquisition



# Where are the biggest opportunities regarding nature connections?



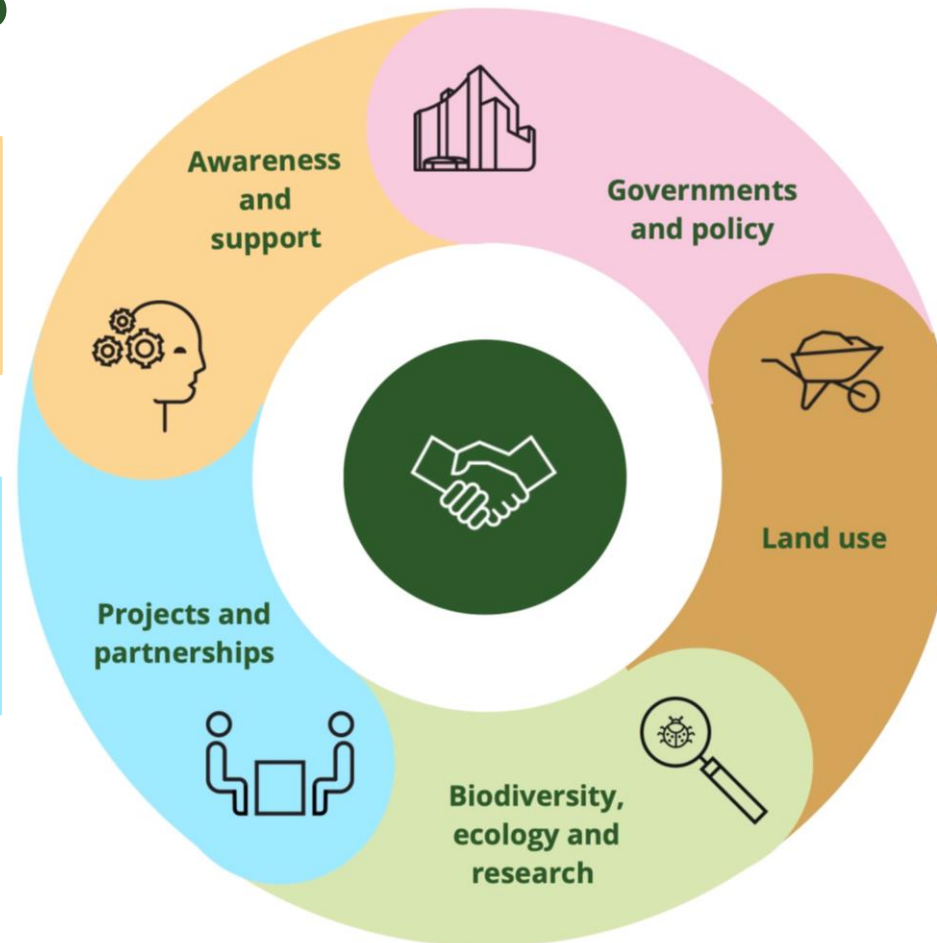
# Where do you see opportunities for more collaboration?

## • Awareness and support

- Education, awareness and communication local/regional politicians
- Emphasis on importance of darkness
- Resources
- Link with concrete terrain measures

## • Projects and partnerships

- LIFE
- Interreg
- Green Deal
- Transition management with universities
- Partnerships



## • Governments and policy

- Municipalities, provinces, intermunicipalities and authorities
- Coordination of spatial planning and defragmentation
  - Following example master plan nature network Netherlands and other countries
- National and platforms for knowledge exchange (e.g. VAPeinterregionalO, IENE)
- European legislation
- Administrative simplification for ecological projects

## • Land use

- Farmers
- Large landowners (e.g. horse owners, large landowners, private landowners, construction sector)
- Outlying area sectors (e.g. non-profit organisations)
- Infrastructure partners (AWV, Infrabel, NMBS, utilities)

## • Biodiversity, ecology and research

- Ecological impact
- Migration bottlenecks
  - Population-genetic research
- Monitoring
- Mapping of biodiversity
- Research and scientific collaboration/substantiation (VAPEO, INBO)
- Use of ecosystem services in stakeholder dialogue
- Blue-green networks
- Scientific delineation of nature reserves





Belgium for  
Biodiversity

# Inspirational sessions





# Nature Connectivity in Belgium

Interregional Working Group





# Some last questions

