‘SAMEN GRENZEN VER-LEGGEN’
(Pushing back frontiers together)
Flemish Strategy for Sustainable Development

VISION 2050
Introduction

Flanders has a political responsibility for sustainable development, towards its own citizens as well as towards the world. On the basis of a Flemish Parliament Act on Sustainable Development, it committed itself to pursuing a policy oriented towards sustainable development. The Flemish Parliament Act establishes that the Flemish sustainable development policy is an inclusive, coordinated and participatory policy in which each minister translates the policy lines agreed upon in his/her own way for his/her policy area. Each minister therefore has the explicit responsibility for the design and definition of a policy for sustainable development regarding his/her competences, within a general coordinating policy framework.

The Flemish Parliament Act on Sustainable Development stipulates that a Strategy for Sustainable Development (VSDO – Vlaamse Strategie voor Duurzame Ontwikkeling) must be drawn up after the entry into office of a new Government of Flanders. Rather than an action plan, the VSDO is a strategy paper focusing on the formulation of a vision and long-term objectives, that must then be made concrete and operational in the regular policy (planning and decision-making instruments). By means of the VSDO, Flanders wants to make a substantial contribution to the change in mentality, to a growing awareness of sustainable development and to a new vision to think and act with regard to the government, the industry and the consumer.

A long-term vision 2050 is directive in that respect. The emphasis is on the necessity of engrafting the policy onto fundamental long-term changes through processes of (system) innovation and societal transitions. The transitions in systems and dimensions that are fundamental to making the society more sustainable, are therefore an important pillar of the Strategy for Sustainable Development: the system of living and building, the materials system, the energy system, the mobility system, the food system, the health system, the knowledge system, the economic dimension, the socio-cultural dimension, the ecological dimension, the international dimension and the institutional dimension.

Aiming at a sustainable society in 2050 is a commitment which the Government of Flanders makes wholeheartedly. However, it cannot realise this by itself: it shares this responsibility with all other social actors. The long-term vision has therefore been drawn up in consultation with civil society and the strategic advisory councils, and everyone will have to contribute one’s mite in order to realise the transitions.
A Flemish long-term vision for sustainable development

Sustainable development is a long-term process which must be carried by a long-term vision - 2050 and beyond - that may serve as a framework to further flesh out the policy and take social action. A long-term vision is a compass indicating in which direction we must proceed to make our society more sustainable, and in which way we can move in that direction. It forms a basis for the strategic choices and activities of all social actors. It gets public strategies and strategy development between the government and other social actors moving in the right direction, and determines priorities for the processes that may be steered or supported by the government.

Sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The long-term objective of sustainable development is to guarantee the creation of prosperity and especially wellbeing that is divided in a balanced and fair manner, within the limits of the 'system earth'. It requires a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the use of investments, the orientation of technological development, and institutional and social changes are designed to meet both current and future needs.

This objective must be realised in a strong interaction between authorities, market actors and civil society, in a context of globalisation.

The need for a long-term vision

It is difficult to deny there is a need for a long-term vision and a policy for sustainable development that is based thereon: our current (global) society model is essentially unsustainable. The prosperity we create is not fairly divided - neither globally, nor in Flanders - and the model causes unbearable negative effects on the environment and on social and economic living circumstances. Moreover, the model possibly affects our personal quality of life.

The central issue of sustainable development therefore is: how can we combine a high quality of life with living within ecological boundaries, social justice and economic progress? This will be worldwide one of the major social challenges in the following decades.

The need for development towards sustainable development is further emphasised by the (potential) consequences of a lack of decisiveness. The continuation of economic and social inequality, the degradation of ecosystems, the depletion of natural resources, the climate change, the food problem, the instability of the economic system, etc. are irrefutably a threat to fundamental individual and collective needs such as safety, health, cultural development, development opportunities, etc., in short, to the right of wellbeing for the current and future generations.

The problems caused by our current social system have a global nature. Causes and effects are situated at different levels of scale, involving several actors, a high level of insecurity, etc. There are no simple short-term or technological solutions, as the problems are caused by the systems providing for our prosperity. The structures and practices linked to those systems are deeply embedded in our society and culture. We must attend to thorough change processes in order to reorient these systems towards sustainability.

Transitions as a prerequisite for sustainable development

In order to evolve to a sustainable society in the long term, we must rethink and rearrange a number of large systems on which our prosperity is built. Such a change process is also referred to as transition. It concerns a long-term social process, with concurrent changes at economic, cultural, ethical, technological, ecological, social and institutional levels.

Transitions are complex processes, involving numerous actors. The government, companies, knowledge institutions, socio-cultural organisations, environmental associations and individual citizens each play their role. The changes result from an interaction between all these different actors.

Innovation - at the level of society, system or product - is an important leverage. In an economic environment, characterised by increasing competitive pressure and the need for increasingly sustainable production, innovations are of paramount importance. We must not only aim at product and process innovations, but also at system innovations. The latter are oriented towards restructuring systems and making them more sustainable, by interfering with structures, practices, legislations, physical infrastructures, rules that are applied, cultural prerequisites and knowledge. Apart from technological innovation, socio-cultural and institutional innovation are also at issue.

Sustainable development must above all aim at the promotion and support of system innovation and transitions. Social justice, the creation of welfare and wellbeing and the recognition of ecological boundaries are the fundamental preconditions and objectives of transitions towards sustainable development.
Working actively on system innovation and transitions

Transition management starts from a system approach focusing on essential elements such as a long-term perspective, a multi-actor policy, integrated action from the government. ‘Experience is the best teacher’ and keeping options open.

New paradigms are necessary. Transitions relate to complex problems: neither the problem nor the solutions are laid down univocally, and they differ according to the perspective. Transition processes start during an interactive rethinking process in which values, intentions and assumptions are adjusted in mutual relation to one another. It boils down to looking beyond the existing paradigms and having the courage to change them: in other words, it is about system innovations. These take time. After all, it is about a number of innovations of existing processes, areas, attitudes, paradigms and structures. Hence a long-term vision is required.

A vision is a desire of people for something that is about to come into being, of which people think it must be realised. A common desire unites people. It creates involvement and team spirit. There is a joint commitment. The vision is considered to be an inspiring, joint and dynamic orientation towards the future. Each transition process and system starts from a long-term thinking process or a collective vision development. The vision is drawn up together with the stakeholders and plays an important guiding and leading role in the innovation process. It is necessary to keep constantly thinking about this future orientation and the underlying argumentation of the choices of the transition pathways.

Transition pathways are developed based on the vision for the future. These are the different possible pathways in order to realise the vision for the future. Experiments or groundbreaking projects are the first steps, which are formulated and organised in cooperation with the various actors. These experiments are mainly learnt from, learning by doing, in order to upscale, to re-orient or to set up new experiments.

It is essential to keep options open: different actors can jointly develop an option of their own within the framework of the vision. All stakeholders pass through the same steps, but each one of them may have his/her own path to realise the common future vision. A long-term vision and short-term action, as well as continuously switching between these levels, are indispensable. In this context, it is crucial one goes beyond a thinking exercise, and also focuses from the start on realisations in practice: a transition rarely if ever starts from scratch.

Transition processes are social learning processes. Transitions are regarded as very interactive and participatory searching and learning processes, in which a multitude of social actors play a role, and each actor co-shapes and realises the change process based on his/her own knowledge and know-how. From the beginning focus is on initiating and designing a social movement, a network, a transition arena which is prepared AND able to break through existing paradigms.

A transition process also creates new insights and ideas by sharing different types of knowledge, for instance knowledge by experience, thematic knowledge and scientific information. Various kinds of stakeholders are involved and essential: knowledge institutions, the industry and trade unions, the NGOs, socio-cultural organisations, individual companies, different levels of government and policy areas, ... which together form the network or transition arena.

This network perspective provides the opportunity to properly understand today’s society. Diversity and difference are considered to be characteristic of the network rather than a phenomenon to combat. Ownership, motivation, passion, coalition formation, confidence, openness and equivalence all apply to a successful network. Moreover, experience shows that dynamics and continuity are guaranteed by showing visible results at an early stage.

It is important to manage the expectations of the participants who are expected to provide input, from the beginning, and to have the participants actively take part in the thinking process about content and direction of the transition, and have them formulate questions. This integration of thinking, deciding and doing increases the ownership and co-entrepreneurship that are deemed necessary, and make the final results of the process strong and sustainable. The guidelines of a transition process must be clear to the participants from the start.
**Vision 2050**

Sustainable development is essentially a global concept; system innovation and transition management are challenges that surpass the Flemish level. This implies that a ‘sustainable Flanders’ does not exist as such. However, Flanders can contribute to global sustainability by playing an active pioneering role in the transition processes.

Transition management does not replace the regular policy, but transitions form the framework on which consecutive strategic choices (the Flemish Strategy for Sustainable Development, and other processes such as ‘Flanders in Action’) are based.

It is quite a challenge to set up a transition process in order to innovate the entire social system. That is why the long-term vision for 2050 focuses on a number of crucial systems: the energy system, the mobility system, the food system, the living and building system, the health care system and the materials system. Other systems are required in order to obtain a sustainable production and consumption (for instance tourism, culture and other leisure activities) that are not dealt with explicitly as a system. In the selection, account was taken of the fact that living, energy, health care and mobility are the major need systems in our society, that building, food and mobility are the systems with the most environmental impact, and that materials, energy and health are major priorities of the coalition agreement.

The selected systems are inextricably linked to each other and are part of the integral social system. Hence, feedback is wanted in order to prevent internal contradictions between the various transition pathways.

We must also take a horizontal dimension into account. The latter contains horizontal aspects that return in each system, but are aggregated in a reinforced manner at a higher level: the economic, the social and the ecological dimensions, the learning (knowledge) dimension, the institutional dimension and the international dimension. These horizontal dimensions are intertwined and feature in each system. In addition, other important aspects of the social system require a specific consideration of different social needs, such as spatial planning.

The crucial systems for system innovation and transition in Flanders in the long term (target 2050) are discussed below. Further concretisation and operationalisation in the form of ‘transition paths’ and harmonisation with policy and social processes have to be fleshed out in social consultation processes.

We must not forget that external factors can accelerate or slow down transition processes. We cannot predict which factors will be important from now up to 2050: certain technological developments are still unknown. Current trends can change in a period of forty years, and new, currently unknown trends and unexpected events can drastically change our future. Those possible developments are not mentioned here; the target visions for the selected systems and dimensions, that are described below, are independent of these trends. The vision intends mainly to inspire: it is the desired situation in 2050.
1. Living and building transition

A sustainable spatial development and a sustainable mobility system are fundamental supports for the living and building system. The spatial structure has a balanced filling-in for the cultural, social, ecological and economic functions. The spatial planning is in harmony with the built environment and the natural structure of the landscape. The space is managed economically and compact building has been generally adopted. Living is organised in a way that allows easy access to different social activities. Living and basic facilities are clustered. Districts and cities are lively and have a good cohesion. The district is sufficiently equipped to keep basic facilities within walking distance for everyone.

Living requires a place that can be filled in individually or collectively. Everyone has a surface area for private use, while the multipurpose joint space has been given a new destination. The balance between private, semi-public and public use is right.

The cultural heritage is being respected and taken into account. Congenial, functional and aesthetically high-quality concepts with a cultural image are used as a basis for designing houses, buildings and their surroundings.

In 2050, Flanders has a high-quality living and building system in terms of construction, maintenance and use, with high-level sustainability performances regarding health aspects, comfort, spatial use, safety, accessibility, flexibility, energy, architectural value, construction materials, etc. The system is adapted to the future needs of society, the changing surroundings and the environment (adaptation).

Everyone can find affordable and (physically) accessible living accommodation, with a diverse provision of residences, including ample provision of facilities for the socially underprivileged. Everyone has a right to appropriate housing. There is general access to sustainable living installations in terms of price, availability, performances, quality guarantees, reliability and understandability.

The physical flows (among others of water, energy and materials) of living and the construction process are closed. Only ethically, socially, economically and ecologically justifiable materials and products are used throughout the entire life cycle.

The building sector is economically sound, pays much attention to and provides a wide variety of sustainable spatial concepts, construction materials, building concepts, living installations and housing services. As a result of sound competition and an increase in demand, the latter can be provided at democratic prices. The building sector itself acts in a socially justified and responsible way and is based on solid training and education. There is room for innovation and creativity.

2. Materials transition

In 2050 there is an absolute reduction of raw materials being exploited and used, and new materials are sustainable products with the greatest added value for the local communities. We produce and consume in another, more thought-out way. The economy is a recycling economy with integral materials management as central focus, and we succeed in closing numerous cycles of materials in a qualitative way. There is a correct price-making and the production runs in ecologically and socially correct circumstances throughout the entire cyclic process. We excel in materials (cycle) knowledge and are the leading developers of new materials and of products with a view to re-use and recycling. As materials have become 'common property', usable for and by everyone, they must meet quality requirements at every moment of their existence in order to allow frequent re-use. The risks of materials for the environment have been restricted to a minimum by introducing strict ecological criteria. The use of materials in buildings, landscape and public space takes into account the spatial quality and heritage values. The knowledge of old techniques and materials is preserved, among other things with a view to the conservation of immoveable heritage. The precautionary principle is applied. The success of a sustainable materials management is also due to the cooperation between watchful consumers and producers. Both monitor the integrity of the materials chain and the traceability of materials.
3. **Energy transition**

Rational energy use is the standard. Flanders lives within its energetic capacity, uses only the energy it requires to meet its needs and uses all energy sources in an efficient way. Energy consumption in Flanders is based on avoiding social and ecological burden shift and on achieving social justice (preventing energy poverty). The energy consumption uses a mix of sources, taking into account the CO₂ emissions and the efficiency, and using as many renewable sources as possible. The energy supply and demand are aligned with one another on the right scale, in a mix of central and decentralised production. Other guiding principles for this transition are the design of a smart energy and electricity system and important improvements in energy efficiency and energy security. The transition pathway takes into account efficient spatial use and spatial quality. This transition results in a sharp decrease in the energy demand, a reduction of our dependence on foreign energy and an increased security of supply. Flanders and the rest of the world have evolved towards a low-carbon society.

4. **Mobility transition**

Flanders has evolved towards a sustainable mobility model. The mobility model guarantees the access to mobility as a basic need of individuals and society. It is affordable and socially just, it works efficiently, is safe and supports a lively economy and increased wellbeing. The travel inequalities have been eliminated to a maximum extent. The mobility model respects the ecosystem limits of our planet and has a minimum environmental impact and health consequences. The mobility system provides a range of mobility choices according to the STOP principle (consider walking first, then cycling, public transport and finally private car use), in which the demand for energy is reduced and the use of non-renewable energy sources is reduced to an absolute minimum. Easy access is guaranteed by a well-considered choice between public, private and collective transport and an efficient harmonisation of goods and passenger transport. Spatial use is restricted to a minimum. Good spatial planning can adapt the demand and supply in the field of mobility. This results in a better intertwinement and harmonisation of living, working, producing and leisure activities. At world level, well-considered choices are made as well. All external costs are internalised. The demand for global travelling by aircraft is managed and has a minimum environmental impact.

5. **Food transition**

The food system (food production, processing, distribution and consumption) guarantees the right to food, as well as sufficient, safe, balanced, healthy and affordable food for all world citizens, respects the principle of food sovereignty, is in balance with the limited space for environmental use (water, soil, air, space, energy), reinforces regional development and spatial quality, and respects the cultural identity of food. Food demand and supply (production, processing, marketing) are balanced. The aim is to obtain regional food systems (per partial continent) in a closed cycle as basic system. Food production may take place in the country, in peri-urban regions and in town. Dignified work conditions, honest prices and a worthy income are guaranteed to all actors of the food chain. The end price of a product not only internalises all production costs but also all social and environmental costs.

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1 In line with the long-term objective of the EU and the international objective, CO₂ emissions are decreased by 80 to 95% in Flanders by 2050.
6. Health care transition

In 2050, everyone has maximum opportunities to live a healthy life. In the first instance, the health care system (including mental health care) is aimed at prevention (among other things through the promotion of a healthy lifestyle with sufficient exercise and the pursuit of a healthy living environment). It provides for high-quality, affordable, accessible care. It uses scientific and technological knowledge and respects the individual choices of patients. The health policy also pays specific attention to the health of vulnerable groups in society. A healthy living environment is guaranteed by a good spatial development, without passing over the principles of intertwined activities and efficient spatial use. At world level, Flanders contributes to the universalisation of a high-quality system of health prevention and care for all world citizens. The health situation of the world citizens has strongly improved by providing access for all to high-quality health care and preventative measures, such as access for all to clean drinking water, sufficient, balanced and healthy food, basic education, and affordable and healthy housing.

7. Holistic knowledge & learning system

A holistic knowledge and learning system forms the basis of our society. High-tech knowledge is combined with great low-tech and basic knowledge (including cultural competencies), in order for people to have the knowledge and skills to take up their own lives and to provide for their basic needs. Education contributes to the realisation thereof. Knowledge is the development of the entire human being. People have the capacity to live together, work together, start relations, deal with losses, difficulties and give meaning. They develop the required competencies (knowledge acquisition and data exchange, insight, skills and attitudes) in order to act sustainably in a complex society. Special attention is paid in that respect to system thinking and action competence. Education assumes great responsibility in the sustainability story. Not only are young people educated to become critical contributors to society. In order to respond to the challenges of 2050, an increasing number of persons are also educated in the domains of science, technology and innovation. An efficient interaction between primary education, secondary education and high-quality, research-based higher education contributes to this.

Knowledge is regarded as a societal fact to which authorities, knowledge institutions, educational establishments, companies, socio-cultural organisations, environmental associations and individual citizens make a creative and innovative contribution.

Knowledge development is mainly steered by the general interest and social needs, and sufficient space is provided for revelatory fundamental research. Sustainable innovation and technological innovation are based on new knowledge. It is indeed impossible to predict from which angle innovations will originate in the distant future. A solid support for fundamental research is essential in that respect.

Maximum use is made of the possibilities to contribute, through state-of-the-art technology, to an increased sustainability (for instance, ICT and ‘virtual society’ in the field of mobility, health care, culture, education, etc.). Flanders invests in its own knowledge system but also keeps up with the most performing transnational knowledge networks, and ensures knowledge exchange and transfer with regions who need it for their development.
8. Economic development

In the economic field, Flanders and the world evolve towards a low-carbon\(^2\) and low-raw-materials, eco-efficient, knowledge-driven, social, ecologically and economically competitive\(^3\) and just economy, with low unemployment rates, high employment rates and workability, and fully-fledged jobs that guarantee high-level welfare and wellbeing for the future generations. Currently, our economy is already in transition. This will continue in the future. There is a correct balance between efficiency and resilience or flexibility. This development takes place within the boundaries of the social and ecological framework and with a global and European governance system. The economy creates values, quality, worthy work and a just transition at the global level. Every person has an opportunity and a place to contribute to that. In 2050 the economic actors (government, consumers, companies, banks) make their decisions and choices on the basis of sustainability criteria to which every economic actor can subscribe. Every economic actor thus assumes its own part of responsibility.

9. Socio-cultural development

The social development of and the care for people is a priority (objective of a ‘caring society’). Cultural development is inextricably linked to this. In that respect, opportunities are offered, irrespective of gender, sexual orientation, disability or state of health, origin or ethnic or national origin, race, skin colour, faith or philosophy, age, etc. Everyone has a right to a worthy existence and must be able to participate in the social and cultural life. All transitions pay attention to social justice and inclusion. They do so, among other things, by reducing poverty and the gap between poor and rich, in the absence of direct or indirect discrimination\(^4\). and in a much smaller social vulnerability at global level. Respect for and solidarity among people is maintained and reinforced. Welfare is redistributed in order to increase wellbeing. Social aspects of employment (worthy work, broadening of competencies) are guaranteed. The monitoring of the necessary balance between individual freedom and collective responsibility is a task for all social actors. In order to guarantee such a system of opportunities, the maximum development of everyone’s talents and their embedding in strong and supportive social networks are a prerequisite. Attention is paid to vulnerable groups, by means of education, empowerment, policy participation etc., but also by means of social awareness-raising and image creation.

10. Ecological capacity

The earth has a limited ecological capacity. In case it is exceeded, the economy and the human wellbeing will also deteriorate drastically. The quality of the living environment in Flanders has evolved to such an extent that the risks for nature, the climate and human health have been reduced to a minimum, and production and consumption do not exceed the earth’s capacity. Account is taken of the most vulnerable groups in society, with a view to maintaining the integrity of the ecosystems. This concerns more than clean water, clean air and a clean soil, a high-quality nature or the reduction of noise and odour nuisance. It concerns the importance that is attached to the environment for use and experience with a view to the future. In 2050, biodiversity is appreciated, protected, restored and used in a sensible way, in order to maintain the ecosystem services and keep the planet healthy. The state of endangered species and groups of species has improved. The size and coherence of habitats have increased for all indigenous species. The ecosystems have made progress. Everyone has a basic living quality and a basic environmental quality in his/her direct surroundings. In 2050 all decisions about food, energy, living and building, materials and economy are made in keeping with the climate and environmental impact and socio-cultural aspects. There is no systematic shift of negative environmental impact towards other countries or regions.

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\(^2\) In line with the long-term objective of the EU and the international objective, this means a decrease in CO\(_2\) emissions of 80 to 95% by 2050.

\(^3\) Competitive implies that an organisation/institution/company aims at constantly improving itself in relation with the other. This requires intensive cooperation in which each party has its own specialisation.

\(^4\) This refers to discrimination on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, disability or state of health, so-called race, skin colour, origin or ethnic or national origin, faith or philosophy, age, civil status, birth, capital, political opinion, language, physical or genetic features and social position.
11. The international dimension

Given the strong international dimension of sustainable development, the entire Flemish policy is based on the principle of a fair world. Development cooperation is no longer needed: cooperation is based on equality and exchange (no donor-recipient relation). The Flemish international policy is based on a dialogue with the partner countries. There is fair trade. The food and agricultural policy is attuned to the needs at the local and international levels. We have realised a redistribution of material welfare within the earth's capacity. There are strong, supported international institutions that lay the foundations for a fair world, and draw up strong international standards that are respected and enforced. Flanders implements these standards and actively cooperates towards their establishment. Poverty and hunger are eradicated. Everyone has access to basic education, worthy work, high-quality health care and clean drinking water, to renewable and environment-friendly energy sources, sustainable mobility, sufficiently balanced and healthy food, and everyone has the opportunity to have affordable and accessible housing accommodation at his/her disposal.

12. The institutional dimension

In 2050, the international level is characterised by strong, supported international institutions that lay the foundations for a fair world, and draw up strong international standards. The political system is transparent and based on dialogue and cooperation. The Government of Flanders itself is a vigorous and learning organisation with sufficient capacity to profile itself in terms of content and process, and to play a pioneering role. The Flemish policy is based on the principles of sustainable development. The decision-making process is transparent and is based on the available knowledge. Transparency is related to an open government structure. The government gives trust and receives trust. The shared responsibility of public civil market actors is common practice. All social actors assume their responsibility. They cooperate with regard to the main difficulties, and coproduction and cocreation are the standard to solve problems. There is room for horizontal methods and social learning processes. The efforts, the creativity and the innovative power of companies, socio-cultural organisations, environmental associations, citizens and knowledge institutions are appreciated and encouraged to a maximum extent. This shared responsibility is based on harmonisation, honesty, trust, openness and accessibility.