

# revive



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## Interview

Ignace Schops: "Nature is  
the best bank in the world"

## Minerve in Edegem

Model project in  
sustainability



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# foreword



- > Revive is more than a real estate developer and always will be. The bricks are merely the means to achieve the goal—building a liveable, high-quality, and positive society for tomorrow. For you, for us, for all of us. And certainly, for those who come after us.

For this purpose, we at Revive are happy to do more. More because we think ahead; because we have a long-term vision. But also more than what legislation or policy asks of us. We strive to (re)connect policy with practice by being the trailblazer, the leader of the pack. We want to share our knowledge, know-how, and inspiration with you through this new magazine every quarter. We want to show you what we're working on, where we're making a difference. Like our Minerve project in Edegem, for example (see p. 18).

Connection is central to us, not only between policy and practice but also between nature and economy, nature and humanity, and among people. That's why we consciously opt for socio-emographics—yes, you read it right: “emo” without the “d”—to truly enable like-minded people to coexist in domestic and international settings. Poland and Portugal are already on our project list, and other European countries will follow suit. Biodiversity is also under pressure there, although the issues differ. But as Ignace Schops, conservationist and a global authority in sustainable and economically viable nature management, says on p. 4 of this first edition: “Nature is actually the best bank in the world. When you invest one euro, society gets ten euros in return.”

So, we willingly take on our responsibility, even if we face challenges—technological or otherwise, because, just like “connecting”, it's in our DNA.

**Nicolas Bearelle**

Founder & Executive Chairman of Revive





“Nature is  
the best bank  
in the world”



# Ignace Schops

CONSERVATIONIST AND WORLD AUTHORITY ON  
SUSTAINABLE AND ECONOMIC NATURE POLICY

Ignace Schops has been playing on the world stage for 40 years regarding sustainable and economic nature policy. We have no room in this introduction for his entire palmares, but you may know the 59-year-old Limburger as director of the Regionaal Landschap Kempen en Maasland, founder of the Nationaal Park Hoge Kempen, and as ambassador/colleague/friend of former U.S. Vice President Al Gore. A conversation about (re)connecting nature and society.

"Our team determined that the connection with nature is missing", Ignace Schops begins his story in his Genk office. "While nature should be the link, everything has its function in nature. Nowadays, the link is sadly disrupted, so much so that over the years, we have locked up nature in reserves, outside of which we felt free to do whatever we wanted. But when you realise how important the function of nature is—not only for nature itself but also for our health, healthy air, clean water and good agriculture—you know that it is important to reconnect the local community with nature. For this purpose, we developed the (Re)connection Model, which is used internationally."

## *Your (Re)connection Model has four major themes. Explain ...*

"Connecting nature with nature, connecting people with nature, connecting businesses with nature and lastly, connecting policy with practice. We try to do that to make the links between them clear again. Many people react surprised when they see the connections again because they had forgotten how ubiquitous nature is, or perhaps they didn't fully realise it anymore. By employing this model, you'll come to many other insights. For example, the socioeconomic benefits of nature are huge. Every euro you invest in nature yields ten euros locally. And this is true worldwide. An added bonus is that with this

information, CEOs, decision-makers, and policy people do want to listen because suddenly we are speaking their language."

## *So translating nature into profitability is the trick to getting policy attention?*

"Nature is the best bank in the world. No other bank can offer anything close to the returns and the benefits you get from it. I have been lobbying for nature for 40 years, and I used to go to politicians with the story of tree frogs, snakes, orchids and butterflies. Retired ministers tell to this day that they were great stories, but they didn't resonate. They weren't convincing in government. Pretty soon, some 30 years ago



## Interview

already, I adapted my language to convince decision-makers. Not as the ultimate proof, but as an additional proof, an additional evidence of the intrinsic value of nature that we must protect."

### *How exactly do you do that, turn nature into business?*

"Nature is business. Every survival plan of any species—be it a plant, an ant or an elephant—is economics. Because if you don't get it right, you become extinct. We know economics as a financial transaction, but it is more than that. Economics is trading. An elephant must estimate how many trees it has available to eat leaves from and not eat them all at once, because it will have nothing left. Since we started using money to trade, we forgot to include nature. As if nature was always there and always will be. After all, nature goes without saying! Now, however, we have found that this is not the case. We need to free nature, so to speak. The work that enslaved people used to do was not counted because it was 'free'. At some point, that changed, and labour costs were suddenly, thankfully, included in the price. It's the same story with nature. What is the cost of clean water in

the manufacturing process of jeans? When you work through those cost prices, you end up in a very interesting position. Especially if you consider that you have to give something back to the one who provides it—nature."

### *Can you give a concrete example here?*

"The question is 'how can you monetise nature?' How can you monetise the socioeconomic benefits of, say, the Hoge Kempen National Park? There are several methodologies for this. We followed that of TEEB [The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity], an internationally accepted methodology that measures the values of nature. For the National Park alone, we arrive at 191 million euros a year and 5,000 jobs. So investing in nature is also investing in a better socioeconomic situation."

### *Notable: all visitor infrastructure is located off-site at the Hoge Kempen National Park.*

"Suppose we had put everything in the park, we might get the accusation that all visitors are flattening nature and thus causing depreciation. Our (Re)connection Model is structured to avoid that. Our visitor centres, the







National Park gateways, are all outside the park. Sometimes even kilometres away. They are located where a large number of people can arrive and where they already feel like they are in the National Park, even if they aren't. Why exactly did we do this? Because the carrying capacity of nature is always a priority. Moreover, by bringing the gates up to the village churches, we are expanding nature because mayors also want the road to the actual park to be green. It's a win-win."

*And again, it has a lot of economic benefits.*

"The bakers, the butchers, the B&Bs in the small villages make money because of this. They flourish because of the extra visitors and attention to local culture and products. As a result, they become motivated ambassadors of the National Park, without us having to do anything for it."

*When you first addressed the European Parliament in 2011 as president of the Europarc Federation, an organisation representing national parks' interests worldwide, there was little enthusiasm.*

"Nature was much more on the fringes back then.

As I began talking, everyone pulled out their newspapers. It was very frustrating because I know that if we don't save nature, we can't save humanity. Fortunately, thanks to the (Re)connection Model, people are now listening more. But it remains a challenge. By the way, it is not that we cannot find solutions to nature and climate problems; we are creative and innovative enough. The biggest challenge is time. We are losing time daily, and the science is clear: if we don't get our homework right in the next decade, there will be irreversible tipping points and turning times. Saying that the next generation will fix it is no longer an option. We are the last generation with the power to make things right."

*Do you think we will meet the climate goals by 2030?*

"We have to remain optimistic; there have been times in history when systemic change happened in ten years. At the same time, this summer has been another good opportunity to face the consequences of procrastination again. The persistent heat forced our children to stay indoors during the day in southern Europe and other places worldwide.

*“Nature is business. Every survival plan of any species—be it a plant, an ant or an elephant—is economics. Because if you don’t get it right, you become extinct”*



We are literally and figuratively “blessed”. But what is happening is actually very dramatic, make no mistake. Will we meet the climate goals? Probably not. Hence, many lawsuits are being organised worldwide, including the Climate Case I co-founded in 2014.”

### ***Why does politics remain so difficult?***

“I often hear that Belgium is such a small country and therefore cannot make the difference anyway. They look to India, China and America: because, according to them, those big countries are responsible for fixing it. What we do doesn’t accomplish anything, they say. But, of course, that’s not true. The Paris Climate Agreement was developed and approved

in such a way that each country has a proportional share. Belgium is a small country and thus has to do comparatively little. Proportionally, we should not do more than another country, but certainly not less. Less means you are asking another country to do more because you can’t manage to achieve your own goals. Looking at this more broadly, why ask China or Poland to close their coal mines if we don’t drastically reduce our emissions ourselves? Why should they have to do anything if we fail at it? We must take responsibility, and we can. For example, we are the global leaders in offshore wind turbines.”

### ***Can we, as individuals, also do something?***

“Yes, but it is the govern-

ment that plays a crucial role. What they determine applies to everyone. Think of traffic lights: everyone has to stop at a red light. Everyone has to pay taxes. And we all do it, even if we don’t like it. Many individuals together can be a driving force to get politicians and business leaders thinking because the impact of politicians and businesses is much greater. Fortunately, over the last seven years, I have noticed that the economic world is also beginning to realise that not having enough nature and a bad climate is even worse for the economic climate. This is a relatively new development. If we do not manage to balance the climate and biodiversity, there will also be economic consequences.”





*Yet climate activists and conservationists are still often pigeonholed into a leftist box.*

"Nature or climate has never even been a left-wing topic. People have only politicised those themes. I am an ambassador to Al Gore [former vice president of the U.S.]. The last time I was in Berlin with him, he told me that he may have unwittingly politicised the issue with his 2006 film 'An Inconvenient Truth'. He is a Democrat, so the Republicans automatically had to be against it. This is a great pity because climate and nature belong to and for everyone. Moreover, we need to stop individualising the problem. 'Oh, you're still flying, And you don't have LED lights yet? Then you are part of the

problem.' A government should ensure that there are only sustainable ways to travel or buy products."

*In all honesty, do you ever get fed up of the political games?*

"Yes, sometimes it can be frustrating, but giving up is also boring. There are different degrees of hell, and it is worth fighting for every 10th degree. Moreover, renewable energy is not only in wind turbines but also in people. We must pass that positive, renewable energy to the next generation. And, of course, that can bring about negativity, but then I go somewhere to recharge myself—in nature. I have several places I go when things get really difficult. Just like you push a plug into a socket, I recharge in nature."

*So despite your busy schedule, do you still find time to get out into nature alone?*

"Yes, although I must note that the more I am involved with nature, the less I get into it. You get swept up in all these decisions, and I'm playing on the world stage. But when I'm struggling, it's still nature that pulls me through. Of course, it is also person-dependent. I think I can handle contradictions or setbacks reasonably well. More than that: sometimes it gives me more energy."

*Finally, what are your goals yet?*

"I hope the energy, the renewable energy that I have, will be there for a long time to come. That I stay healthy, of course.

That I can keep helping to move that stone in the river. I believe very much in the South African Ubuntu philosophy. 'Ubuntu Ngumuntu Ngebantu' is Zulu and means: 'A person is a person because there are other people'. In other words: 'I am because we are'. It is sort of a translation of solidarity because we are part of a greater whole and must build together. "I think because we are," by the way, is not just about people. 'We' refers to everything living, all organisms, and nature. Once you realise that clean water, clean air, our health ... are all nature, then you can go far. Let me conclude: we need to move more from 'ego' to 'eco'. When you become aware of that, it comes full circle."

ALEXANDRE HUYGHE (CEO) AND SOFIE VERSTRAETE (HEAD OF DEVELOPMENT)  
DISCUSS THEIR REVIVE VILLAGES

## “Instead of hundreds of apartment blocks with as many cars, we develop neighbourhoods where people and nature are connected”

Following our interview with Ignace Schops (p. 4), we sit down with Revive’s Alexandre Huyghe and Sofie Verstraete, CEO and Head of Development, respectively. What links can be made between Schops’ philosophy and Revive? One thing is sure: both parties are progressive, to say the least. “Our Revive Villages, where nature and people go hand in hand, make us unique in Belgium,” says Huyghe.

*Let’s start with Ignace Schops’ statement, “Nature is the best bank in the world”. Is he right?*

**Alexandre:** “Absolutely. We recognise our projects in that. Project development used to boil down to parceling out land. The result was that everyone needed a car to get anywhere, and there was little in the way of nature. The infrastructure no longer allowed it. Cities were not yet as hip and cool as they are today. There was a lot of pollution; cars were everywhere. Thanks to mobility plans, cities have become more attractive places to live again. Nature also played a large part in that, of course, because that is what connects people. That is why we develop neighbourhoods instead of hundreds of apartment blocks with as many cars.”

*Your starting point is the unbuilt space. Can you elaborate on that?*

**Alexandre:** “We look at how to turn undeveloped space into an inspiring place, and nature just plays

a key role in that. People meet in nature; you feel good there. It also brings silence to the city, as nature creates silence. The investment in nature is the crown jewel of our project—the project stands or falls with nature.”

**Sofie:** *(enthusiastically)* “Before the summer holiday, we spotted a beaver on our site at Interescout in Schelle! There are also all kinds of extraordinary species of butterflies and deer there, which is fascinating. We want to do everything we can to preserve and respect that natural development.”

*Interescout, a former Electrabel site of 70 hectares, is your largest project in terms of surface area and the first Revive project located outside the city.*

**Sofie:** “In earlier projects, we used inner-city projects as a starting point, such as paved industrial sites where we try to include as much green space as possible. Now we are looking more at





*“Our Revive Villages,  
where nature and people  
go hand in hand, make  
us unique in Belgium”*



well-connected brownfields in the Randstad. We still start our master plan from the unbuilt space here, but nature carries the project. The entities plant themselves in the landscape, not the other way around.”

**Alexandre:** “This project covers an area ten times larger than our first project, Den Draad, but we will build far fewer homes on it in proportion. The density is completely different.”

**Sofie:** “We also don’t want to take up unnecessary space. We are looking at concepts that better fit this type of development or the type of residents we are looking for. We want to really delineate nature to let it be ‘nature’. It is the first time we are taking on such a large nature development project, because Interescout is really a residential and nature development project. Nature and living go side by side, but also definitely together. Nature is valuable for living—for literally staying alive—but also for approaching our projects and adding value to our homes.”

**Alexandre:** “In the cities, we are re-adding nature and biodiversity, which was really lacking. Interescout already has a lot of greenery, and we want to preserve and expand it. The target audience for this project is also different than usual. We are not looking for urban residents who want a green environment in the city.”

#### *Are urban brownfields running out?*

**Alexandre:** “Yes. Many developers are starting to build on the outskirts of the city, but often along chaussées and lacking in quality. We want to offer a sustainable, fun and nature-loving alternative for people who do not want to live in the city but on the outside. Instead of buying up an old house, renovating it and moving in somewhere on their own, they might want to become part of a great community—in the midst of nature.”

#### *Who is the target audience for Interescout?*

**Sofie:** “We call them the believers. People who

are in the phase of their lives where they want to become more grounded in nature again, or who are looking for peace and fewer stimuli, while retaining comfort. We try to combine the best of both worlds. The foundation is still being well-connected, but living amid greenery, and feeling it. Our communities will play an important role in this."

### Communities?

**Sofie:** "In the city, we have community managers who get communities started around an existing network. At Interescout, we have to start the communities from scratch. We see it as our first Revive Village. Space forms the backdrop of how you live; our job is to work with the architects to find the design. How can you bring people together and what are those relationships like? We even brought in an anthropologist for this. She started by looking at how the project would fit within the village and how all those living groups could work together. From a number of scientific studies, we know that around 20 to 30 families can form some kind of group. But we have gone even further to figure out how different groups click with nature without disturbing nature much."

### *That all sounds very futuristic.*

**Sofie:** "It is all still fairly conceptual, as we are still in the master plan phase. We plan to move to the next step soon: architecture. We are also looking at nature that can provide food supplies, such as food forests and permaculture. Again, we don't want to compete with what's already there. It is important that it is complementary and creates awareness among residents. *(thinking)* We introduced an urban forest for the first time as part of a project in Oudenaarde. That is a forest the size of a tennis court. Before building it, we conducted a thorough soil analysis. We considered which tree species would best take root



*"We don't want to follow today's standard; we are always looking five years ahead"*



there—not throughout Oudenaarde, really within a two kilometre perimeter. The social intent was to have all the trees planted by new and existing residents. Together with the mayor, they planted 3,000 trees in a single day. The idea behind it is especially beautiful, because helping to plant such a forest means you are involved, which leads to increased respect.”

#### **How unique are your Revive Villages?**

**Alexandre:** “This is a first for Belgium.”

**Sofie:** “We were inspired by the ReGen Villages, a concept from the States that never materialised. We strive for the same self-sufficiency in energy, water and food. The biggest difference is that they start from greenfields, while we work in brownfield development. We are still developing the model, and in doing so, we are already looking at applying it to other sites in the future.”

#### **When will the proverbial first stone be laid?**

**Alexandre:** “Rezoning takes the longest. We want to turn an industrial area into a whole neighbourhood—so a residential area. This is an administrative procedure that takes at least 2.5 years. We are in the early stages now, but once the rezoning is complete, you can get the first permits, and then you’re off.”

#### **Let’s go back to Ignace Schops and his (Re)connection Model.**

**Alexandre:** “We are implementing his model, but subconsciously. We see a certain evolution in that, by the way. On our first project, our gut instinct was to keep the only three remaining trees on the site because more greenery would make for a better project. In subsequent projects, we were already looking more innovatively for solutions to add even more biodiversity to what was already there. The urban forest is a great example, as are the bat nesting boxes in our Minerva project (see

p. 18). Today, we also effectively engage experts to measure biodiversity before buying a particular site, and look at how we can increase it.”

#### **Ignace Schops’ main task is to challenge policy. Do you do the same?**

**Alexandre:** “It is related to our model. We do very complex projects, and we believe that if you do the right things, you will have the wind in your sails and will get a better result faster. In our first project, for example, we were already building passive houses when the standard was much less stringent. Did customers pay the right price for it? Probably not, but our sales went smoothly because you only need a few believers willing to pay that little extra anyway.”

#### **Are there more and more believers today?**

**Alexandre:** “Buyer expectations are much higher today, and standards are evolving. We also always want to be ahead of the market.”

**Sofie:** “Interescout is a supply-driven project, not a demand-driven one. It is a brand-new product, and we don’t know how the market will react. But that suits who we are: we don’t want to follow today’s standard; we are always looking five years ahead.”

**Alexandre:** “A concrete example: before and during the COVID pandemic, it was not yet mandatory to have an outdoor space per housing unit; now the regulations say each apartment must have a terrace. COVID broke out and suddenly everyone wanted an outdoor space. This had already been the norm for our projects for a long time; the competition had to catch up.”

#### **I previously used the word ‘futuristic’, but you guys are really just futureproof.**

**Sofie:** “At Interescout’s neighbourhood event, guests struggled with the concept that we would effectively provide fewer parking spaces per

home. "You guys are developers; will you be able to sell these homes?" was their response. Look: if the policy doesn't do it, someone else has to. As a private company, we are not afraid to challenge policy and bet on innovative means that offer the same comfort but approach it differently. We look at usage rights rather than property rights."

*So how many parking spaces per dwelling are we talking about at Interescaut?*

**Alexandre:** "Two-thirds of a space per dwelling. That may seem limited, but it is based on a trend. We are following the European market; we are in an international network, in working groups such as ULI, and we also notice it in our buyers. In projects we licensed ten years ago that have since sold out, there are still twenty empty parking spaces. You can also look at the Scandinavian countries or the Netherlands—hardly anyone has a car there anymore."

**Sofie:** "Our parking spaces are now shared systems. We still sell parking spaces, but as a right instead of as property. This means that buyers are not always guaranteed to be in the same spot at all times, but a software system ensures that you will always have a place. With 20% less parking, you can still handle the same parking demand. This means a saving in materials and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in construction and a saving for the end user's wallet without sacrificing comfort. In the future, we will try to provide as few parking spaces as possible, instead moving to innovative shared systems and circular parking buildings."

*Lastly, Ignace Schops' Hoge Kempen National Park has provided numerous economic benefits in the park's vicinity. Will Interescaut also provide an economic boost in the region?*

**Alexandre:** "Den Draad is a great example of that. When we bought the site, the neighbourhood was very rundown. Because we started working on it, a new park was added. The homes in the neighbourhood were also done up and renovated, and local neighbourhood projects provided even more green space in the street. In that sense, our projects really have an accelerator effect. The scale is obviously different from that of the Hoge Kempen National Park, but we do feel the effect, and that's what we do it for."



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## Figure it out

"In 14 years, we have restored around 100 hectares of nature in our portfolio of approximately 260 hectares of residential redevelopment," says Revive founder Nicolas Bearelle. "That amounts to about 40 per cent nature restoration—more than the original ambitions of the Nature Restoration Act. For example, to fulfil the Green Deal, Europe wants to restore 30% of degraded ecosystems by 2030 and cover 10% of cities with trees. I am proud that Revive has been voluntarily doing better since 2009 than what Europe is politically imposing on others by 2030.

I am even making a serious underestimation

here, as by redeveloping 260 hectares, we are also leaving 260 hectares of nature untouched. In other words, for 260 hectares of business activity, we restore 100 hectares of nature and 'prevent' the use of 260 hectares of nature. That adds up to a whopping 138% nature-positive ecological return.

**138%**  
nature-positive  
ecological efficiency

At Revive, it's all about people and nature: social and environmental gains are as important to us as financial success. We look ahead and adjust course when necessary,

and we believe that a better and healthier planet is only possible if we also think long-term. That is why we deliberately choose a mix of reuse, repurposing, restoration and connection."

### More figures please

<b>Paving removed from 40% of our redeveloped sites</b>	<b>16 brownfield covenants</b>	<b>Two in-house soil experts</b>
"That amounts to 100 hectares. It may be a drop in a bucket compared to the approximate 5 hectares of pavement added in Flanders per day, but it makes a world of difference to us, our residents and the neighbourhoods in which we operate."	"None of our requested covenants—essentially agreements made between the Flemish Government and developers—have been rejected."	"We regularly work with third parties for this, but we also have the necessary expertise in-house."

EVERYTHING STARTS WITH SETTING THE RIGHT EXAMPLE

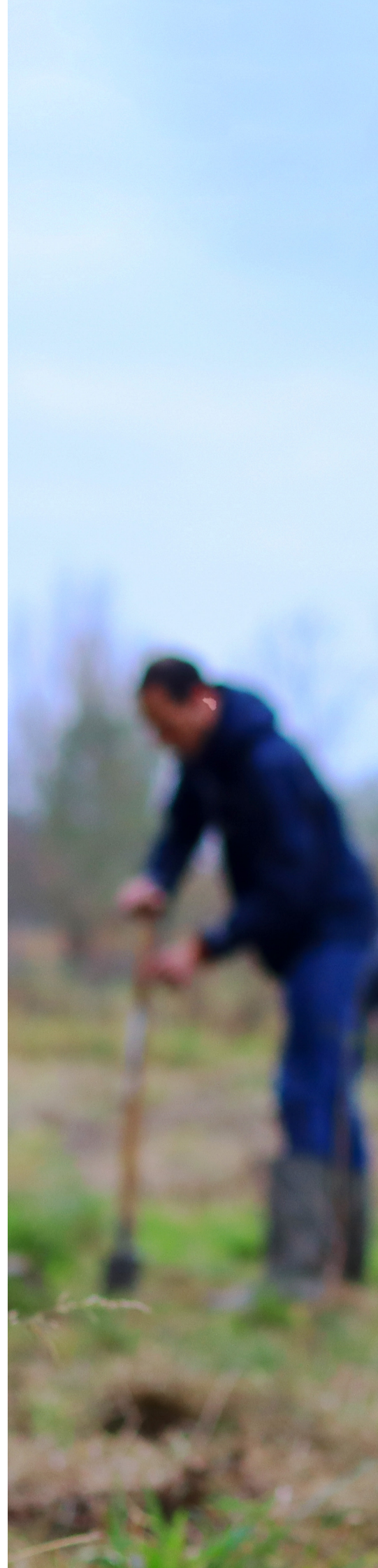
## “Our Revive Forest is more than a forest; it offers connection”

As one of the first companies in our country, Revive, under the guidance of afforestation company Forest Fwd, planted its own corporate forest in Ghent, just a few kilometers from our offices. The Revive team broke out the spades to plant 800 native trees in 2021, boosting local biodiversity.

Today, the corporate forest forms an important link between two large existing nature reserves: the Vlinderhoutse Bossen and Vallei van de Oude Kale, where herds of deer can often be spotted. The Vinderhout Bossen is a beautiful forest and nature reserve that spans around 640 hectares, part of which is owned by Natuurpunt and protected as part of the European Natura 2000 habitat directive area.

Revive not only increases nature, it also keeps involvement high. The best example is their ‘fin de saison’—the starting shot of the holiday for the construction industry, you could say—which we organise in their forest every year. The tent is pitched, tables are set, snacks are prepared, and bottles are raised. It is always ‘nature friendly’, but an experience in every sense of the word.

“Without a doubt, we are proud of our Revive forest. Not only because it has a rather unique function as a connection between two nature reserves, but it also connects people. It doesn’t get better than this,” says Nicolas Bearelle, founder of Revive and an early believer in the function of corporate forests.







Natuurpunt beheert dit natuurgebied


Dit bos werd aangeplant met de steun van

**revive**

we build society.

Welkom in het Revive bos! We hebben als bedrijf dit bos aangeplant omdat we actief willen meewerken aan de klimaatdoelstellingen, maar ook aan een betere biodiversiteit en gezondere leefomgeving. Revive ontwikkelt duurzame wijken in de stad en tracht haar positieve impact op het milieu en maatschappij te maximaliseren. Het is onze plicht zorg te dragen voor de toekomst en met dit bos kunnen we extra helpen. Geniet ervan en draag er zorg voor. Groene groeten, het Revive team!

**CONTACT** Natuurpunt Gent • Bart Vangansbeke • [www.natuurpuntgent.be](http://www.natuurpuntgent.be)  
**CONTACT** Forest Forward • [www.forestfwd.be](http://www.forestfwd.be)

 **Forest Fwd**  
Creëer impact. Met je eigen bedrijf.





Project Developer  
**ISABELLE VERHAERT**

**MODEL PROJECT IN SUSTAINABILITY: MINERVE IN EDEGEM**  
CURRENTLY IN PHASE 2 (FINALISING SHELL) AND PHASE 3 (STARTING DESIGN)

## “Everything has been thought of: from a community garden, over water storage basins to nesting boxes for bats and swifts”

From built-in bat nesting boxes to community gardens; it is safe to say the Minerve project in Edegem—a stone’s throw from the city of Antwerp—is a model project. Our Project Developer Isabelle Verhaert takes you through the story of one of the most biodiverse sites in our country.

- Purchase of site 2016
- Estimated completion 2026
- Area 62,307 m<sup>2</sup> (of which 33,813 m<sup>2</sup> is public domain)
- Paved: 47%, unpaved: 53%
- Total of 330 units: houses and apartments of various sizes, 65 social rental homes, 6 duplex apartments, 15 co-housing homes, 4 adaptable homes, and 17 terraced houses.

### **Wadis and WASCOs**

“Historically, the neighbourhood around Minerve had a water issue upstream,” says Isabelle Verhaert, Project Developer at Revive. “So right from the start, we knew water would be a sensitive issue.

To resolve that, a large, mandated sewage buffer measuring 5 by 1.5 meters was placed under the entire length of the site. That buffer cross-links the sewage system and provides buffer capacity during floods. The site

itself is not connected to the buffer. For the site itself: rainwater that falls onto rooftops is used for flushing toilets, while rainwater that lands on the roadside i.e. on any paved surface is drained into plant borders and then into wadis. These are buffer basins that are usually empty but become a kind of pond during heavy rainfall. Firstly, wadis allow infiltration; if that is not possible or there is too much water, the basin delays discharge into the sewer system. Wadis also attract insects and butterflies, which

adds to biodiversity.” The Minerve site has three wadis. “These are all connected, with only two overflows. The idea is that all stormwater is infiltrated or reused on the site. The whole system is designed to prevent rainwater from entering the surrounding sewer system.”

In addition to water infiltration, Revive also integrated a WASCO at the Minerve site. “A WASCO recovers rainwater that falls on our neighbours’ rooftops. This means drinking water will never have to





be used for toilet flushing. We also redistribute stormwater back to our industrial neighbours; there will be a tapping point that municipalities can use. The WASCO will also supply our green building Ata Kando and the communal gardens," says Verhaert. "Putting trees and plants on buildings is a big hype nowadays, but it's not exactly sustainable if you water them with drinking water. They also need much more water because they are not in the open ground. Anyway, we have a buffer of a whopping 1.6 million litres of

rainwater. We currently estimate that we can retain 18 million litres of water per year, of which 12 million litres are reused annually by the WASCO at the current usage."

#### **Bats, swifts and sparrows**

When Revive began designing the first phase of Minerve, nature-inclusive construction was not yet established, especially in Belgium. "The bat nesting boxes only coincidentally ended up in our plans," says Verhaert. "Because we had to lower the neighbours' walls, the nesting boxes they had

received from Natuurpunt (local nature conservation organization) —as the region is known for bats— also had to go. As the nesting boxes were being used, we investigated how we could incorporate them into the facades of the apartments.

Natuurpunt helped us determine the right height and orientation." That is how the apartment buildings got the first-ever built-in bat nesting boxes: little slots in the facades you can hardly see. "It's not enough to offer nesting opportunities; you must also ensure the bats





*“We are working with the municipality and residents to see if we can get residents to manage the public realm and communal gardens themselves”*



have food. That's why our landscape designer chose plants that attract enough insects, butterflies and moths that they like to eat. Did you know that a bat nesting box should not be cleaned? It requires very little maintenance."

Phase 2 of the project, which is currently underway, also includes nesting boxes for other animals: swifts and sparrows. "The site only has one north-facing facade. All the other facades are rotated a little, but one facade is suitable for swift nesting boxes.

We collaborated with our architects because swift nesting boxes, for example, should not be located above but between windows," says Verhaert. "We recovered a bridge from the industrial past on the site, which offered good nesting opportunities for sparrows. The idea is to grow climbing plants slightly off the wall, which is a perfect nesting ground

for sparrows, who like to be in groups."

Revive goes beyond providing a 'home' for these animals. "A bike path runs through the site where we use amber lighting so it can serve as a passage for bats. The other light fixtures on the public property have been significantly reduced in consultation with the municipality. We always choose directional downward light in the houses and apartments, with no light shining upward. This reduces light pollution."

#### **Communal gardens managed by residents**

"The Minerve site has several community gardens, including one large one in the first phase of the project," says Verhaert. "We initially landscaped it with various plants and a flower meadow. The public grounds are also landscaped with various plants, shrubs and trees.



We are working with the municipality and residents to see if we can get residents to manage the public realm and communal gardens themselves. There is already a core group of 16 residents currently working on it. Extra interesting: that group includes people who also deal with green landscape design or communications professionally. During a study visit to Lanxmeer, a project in the Netherlands, we learned about the advantages and disadvantages of in-house management. We are still in the early stages, and it is already noticeable that the grown space's sustainability and level of ambition can be increased by letting the people decide on maintenance and pruning management. You get more done."



#### Everyone on the heat grid

Homes on the Minerve site are very well insulated, with an E-level of 30 or less. All houses and apartments will be equipped with underfloor heating. The buildings are also equipped with empty conduits for installing solar panels on the collective parts of the apartments. The coolest part is that all the homes are heated by the Warmte Verzijlverd heat grid. "This heat grid uses residual heat from the Agfa-Gevaert plant in Mortsel and provides heat for heating and hot water in the homes," says Verhaert. "This reduces both CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and energy bills. As it is a cooperative heat grid, residents and other citizens also have the opportunity to co-finance the heat grid and get a return from it."



## *Tiny Triumph*

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGER **JAN VAN SCHAEAREN** ON HIS 'TINY TRIUMPH'.

# “Remaining three trees on four acres of steel mill saved”

For environmental manager Jan Van Schaeren's Tiny Triumph, we go back to 12 years ago. In 2011, Revive's first remediation project was scheduled: a 4-hectare site in Gentbrugge that had been severely contaminated by the Den Draad steel mill operations, which had been operating there for more than 50 years. "The entire plot had only three large trees," Van Schaeren begins his story. "We had to pump up groundwater to carry out the remediation work, and we feared the trees could weaken or even die. So, we regularly took the time to 'water' the trees to prevent this. At the time, this was a manual task in which the Revivers used thick pipes to bring a few cubic metres of the pumped groundwater to the trees. Without really realising it, we were already circular with drainage water."

This small accomplishment had big consequences, as today, the three trees still stand tall, and plenty of fauna and flora have been added. The new neighbourhood, which bears the same name, Den Draad, was completed in 2017 and boasts a collective kitchen garden (with

a project on gardening for people with disabilities), a giant park and a botanical garden. "This project is magnificent in terms of biodiversity, but also in terms of history," Van Schaeren says. "Plant expert Louis van Houte [died in 1876] had an experimental garden at the same location where he worked on biodiversity. Marvellous, right?"



### **Value assessment for nature**

Anno 2023, Revive determines what is of value to nature in every project. "Likewise for one of our new projects, the rundown ACV industrial site in the centre of Ruisbroek," Van Schaeren

Each quarter in our Tiny Triumph column, we give you the back story of a 'tiny triumph'—an accomplishment that may seem minuscule at first glance but has quite grand and, most importantly, positive implications for biodiversity. We debut with the story of one of our environmental managers, Jan Van Schaeren. "In our first remediation, one of four acres, one of our goals was to save the only three remaining large trees on the plot."

says. "How exactly does it work? During the survey phase, a surveyor measures every tree, and a tree expert provides a comprehensive inventory. This results in a current and a potential valuation, supplemented by opinions and possible actions to be taken. In this project, for example, we had to watch out for Japanese knotweed, a plant that grows very fast and has the potential to overgrow everything. We obviously took this information into account in our master plan."

That master plan will determine which trees or green structures will be planted so that the most valuable fauna and flora can come together to score as well as possible regarding biodiversity. "Even at our Cavallia project in Poznan, Poland, steps are being taken to protect biological heritage by combining old with new," according to Van Schaeren. "Several chestnut trees, each several decades old, will be preserved and complemented by, among other things, a green wall on the wall of the neighbouring building. That way, the future residents will have a beautiful natural view from their windows."

### **Technology and biodiversity**

Revive collaborates with Walloon E-BIOM, among others, for various types of scans. Walloon E-BIOM combines a testing laboratory with a scientific expertise office and is dedicated to biodiversity conservation, ecology and environmental protection. "They conduct biodiversity scans for us, among other things," Van Schaeren says. "They use a lot of innovative technology that allows them to go very far. Like surveying a body of water by analysing the DNA in the water."

[www.e-biom.com](http://www.e-biom.com)



## "Every euro you invest in nature pays off"



**DAJO HERMANS & FRANK MISSOUL / FOREST FWD**

Because you can't do business on a dead planet. That is why it is necessary for all of us to keep working for more nature and biodiversity. We need to start close to home, where it is as tangible as possible. Think global, act local.

Analyses show that biodiversity in Belgium is doing a little better, but that is still far

from "good". To clarify, barely 10% of Flanders is forested. This makes us one of the least forested regions in Europe. We score slightly better when you look at all of Belgium, but the final result is still very lousy.

Nevertheless, investing in sustainability and ecology pays off in the long

run. Every euro you pump into nature earns back ten for society. Just think of additional tourism or employment. Equally remarkable, green retail environments attract more customers, who consume over 12% more. This is strategically interesting for store owners and investors.

Those who combine ecology and economy are working on the society of tomorrow. This is why at Forest Fwd, we help businesses in our country create corporate nature, close to cities and accessible. For example, Revive planted its own corporate forest just a few kilometres from its Ghent office. It's wonderfully healthy and perfect for winning the "war of talent". Working for a sustainable—read: caring—company is a decisive argument for more and more people to choose an employer or stay with one.

**For more information, visit:**  
[forestfwd.be](https://forestfwd.be)

## "No ocean, no life. No ocean, no us"

**SARAH PARENT / GO OCEAN**

Our seas and oceans—which cover 70 per cent of our earth's surface and are home to 80 per cent of life on earth—have been through a lot. Climate change and air pollution heat and acidify water, intensive industrial fishing depletes fish populations, and coastal economic development endangers coastal ecosystems.

Conservation, while important, cannot restore the complex balance that marine ecosystems depend on to thrive. Conservation alone is not enough to restore the health and resilience of our oceans.

With Go Ocean, we focus on restoring and expanding marine ecosystems such as coral reefs, seagrass meadows, mangroves and seaweed forests. The benefits of these ecosystems include coastal protection,

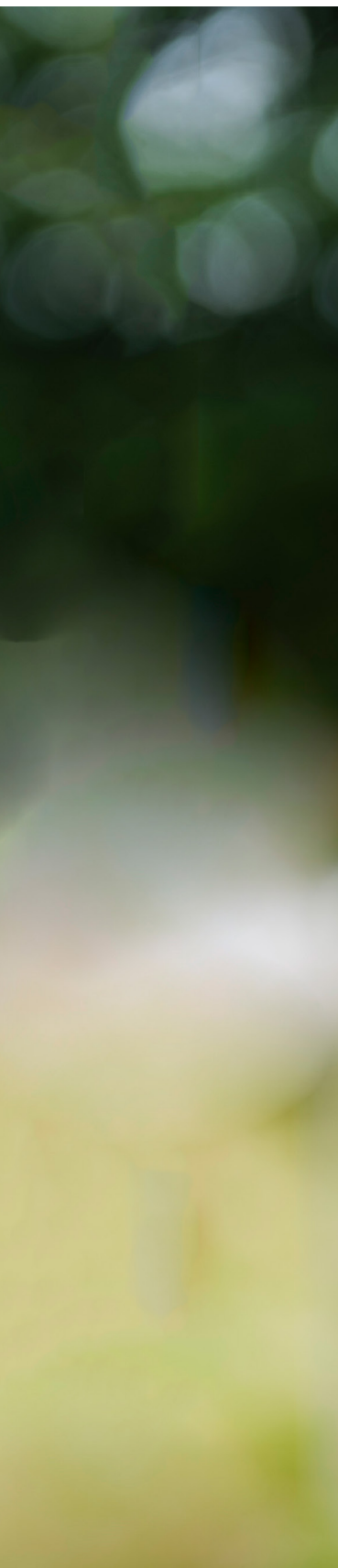


CO2 uptake, food and habitat supply and water purification. Important links in our food chain also depend on it.

In short, healthy marine ecosystems are more resilient to climate change and other challenges, but if we don't act, numerous ecosystems may reach their tipping point and lose their capacity to support life.

As marine biologist Dr Sylvia Earle words it clearly: No ocean, no life. No ocean, no us.

**For more information, visit:**  
[goocean.be](https://goocean.be)



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