

What the Dijle still means today.

The following will show that the Dyle is alive and is still an important part of our daily lives.

Mechelen region

TODAY

Nature association Natuurpunt has installed a solar-powered pump in the Dijle to transfer water from the river into the Mechels Broek (Mechelen wetlands) nature reserve. In this way, the organisation and its partners aim to humidify the area and make it more resistant to global warming.

There is a pipeline in the Dijle and water is pumped over the dyke. Solar panels provide the electricity needed to accomplish this.

Previously, water from the river flowed over naturally into the nature reserve. That happened during rainfall. Since the 1970s, that permanent connection is no longer there. Every year again, we see the area running dry. In addition, the area has become highly acidic in recent years because it only had (acidic) rainwater available. That is why they are partly restoring that connection. Now sweeter river water will be added. This is a pilot project that can be expanded in time.

Feeding the nature reserve will lead to a more balanced and sustainable water system. In the wet winter months, the nature reserve captures water from the Dijle like a sponge, retaining the water longer while also feeding the groundwater. This reduces the risk of flooding elsewhere. In the dry summer months, the sponge releases the buffered water, reducing the risk of the natural area drying out.

The pilot project is partly financed by private partners. Flanders Waterway is also part of the project. It is part of the European LIFE project Wetlands4Cities and therefore also receives European support. In time, it will be studied whether the area can remain sufficiently wet throughout the year.

Many rare animals and plants find their home in this extensive area. To name a few: the crested newt, garganey, bluethroat, snipe, bittern, great creeper, marsh marigold, snake root and great burnet, along with thousands of ducks, an awful lot of bird species, and masses of wetland and grassland plants.

The beaver also descended to the area where many rivers converge. And he has already become a real landscape builder there.

Nor is it surprising that the first observations of the otter, after decades of absence in Flanders, happened just here.

The river dykes themselves are very flowery and host characteristic, heat-loving dyke vegetation on the south-facing banks. As a result, they form veritable botanical ribbons throughout the valley and are gems for plant lovers, who find, among other things, cow parsley, cuckoo flower and grassbell. Even house snails find a suitable habitat here.

In 2018, the Dijle terraces on Zandpoortvest were opened. The former car park became a meeting place and reconnected the people of Mechelen with the Dijle. Thanks to Europe, these realisations can now be made reality in other places on the inner Dijle.

Recreation

In Mechelen, it is possible to book a boat trip on the Dijle, Mechelen's lifeline. As you sail, you will learn more about the sights on the banks, alternating with facts and anecdotes about Mechelen's history.

FUTURE

The aim is to let as many inhabitants of Mechelen as possible enjoy the city's water. This should be a place where all people can discover nature up close, where they can cool off and swim in the water, a place where biodiversity can flourish and be a lifeline for fauna and flora in and around our city.

The ultimate goal is to redesign the public space along the entire Inner Dijle by creating extra river terraces and lowered banks, by tackling the fragmented walking and cycling zone along the water and adding missing links, by constructing additional meeting places and parks along the water and by enabling a permanent zone for outdoor swimming.

For a few winters in a row, a family in the heart of Mechelen has been heating its home with water from the Dijle river. The private **aquathermy** project was a scoop for the city and also one of the first in Flanders.

The Dijle is already proving to be an excellent source of heat to heat buildings in Mechelen. Several associations are considering different options, from individual possibilities like a heat pump to collective projects like a cooperative heat network. The source can also vary: from heat from water, ground and air, to residual heat from industry. It will take a combination of all these to keep every home warm in the future.