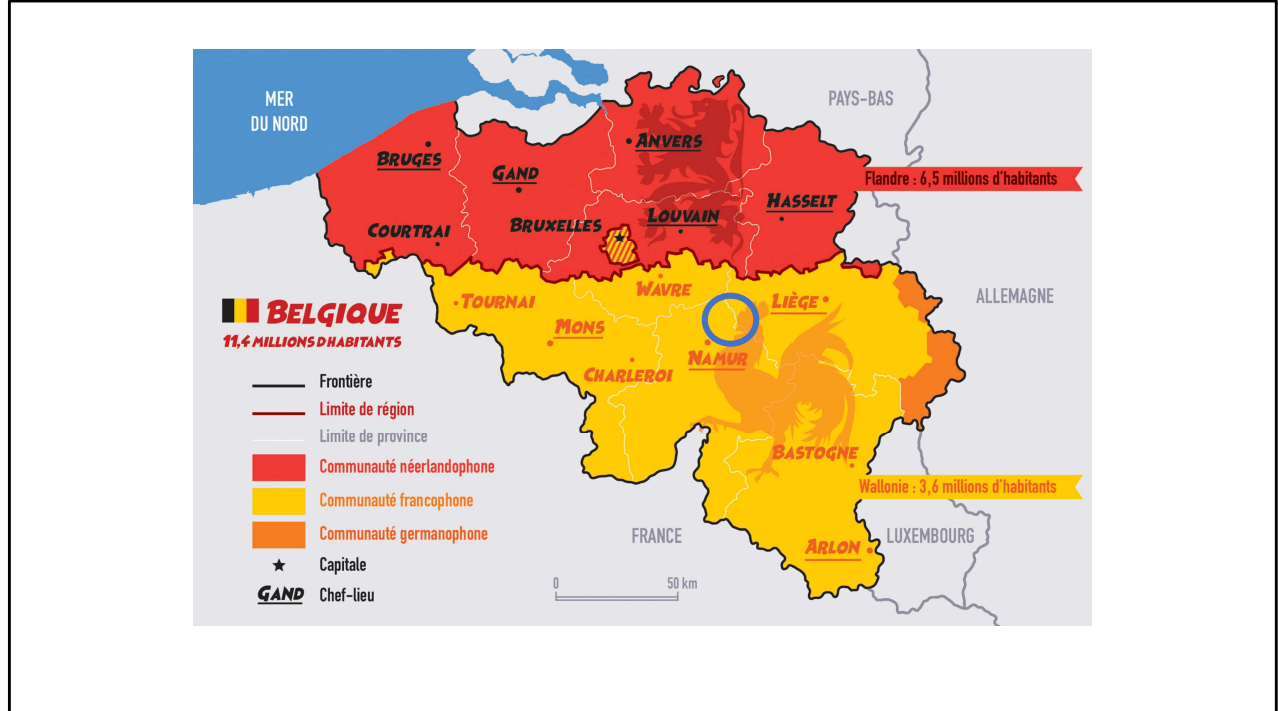




Gal  
Meuse @ Campagnes

Citizen empowerment through digital technology

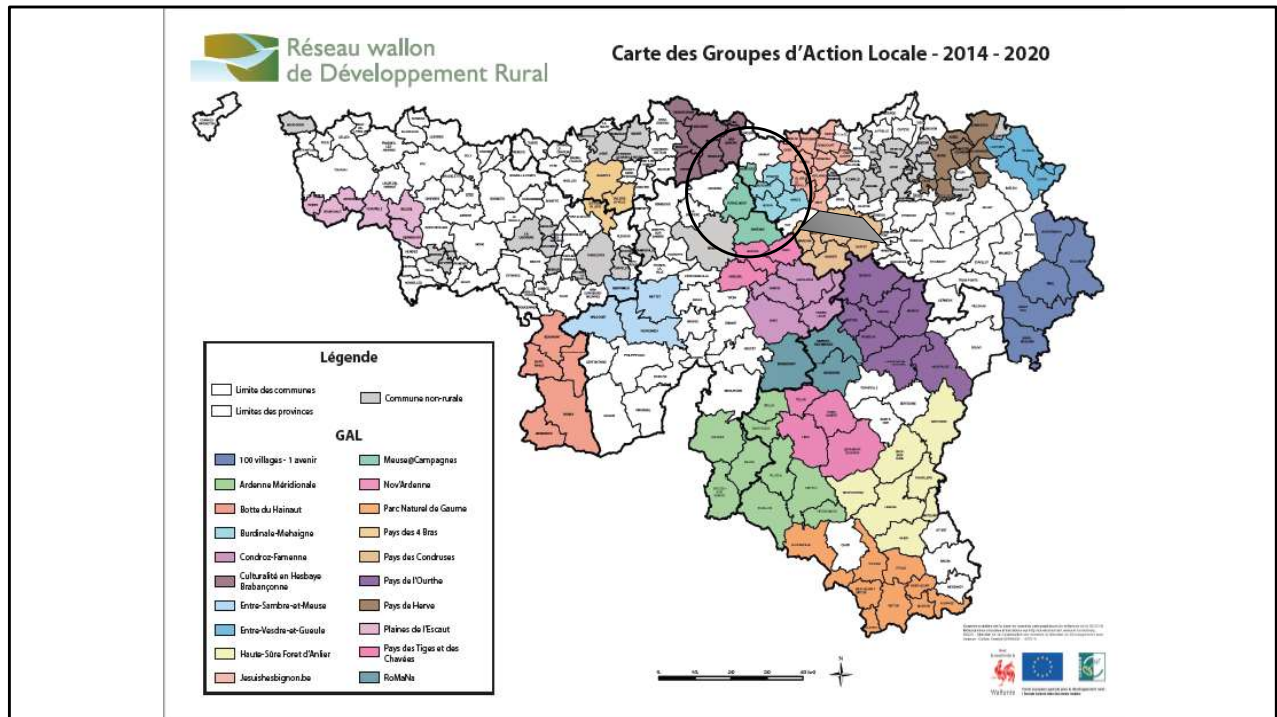
Involvement of variety of stakeholders engaged in  
a sustainable project to the benefit of nature



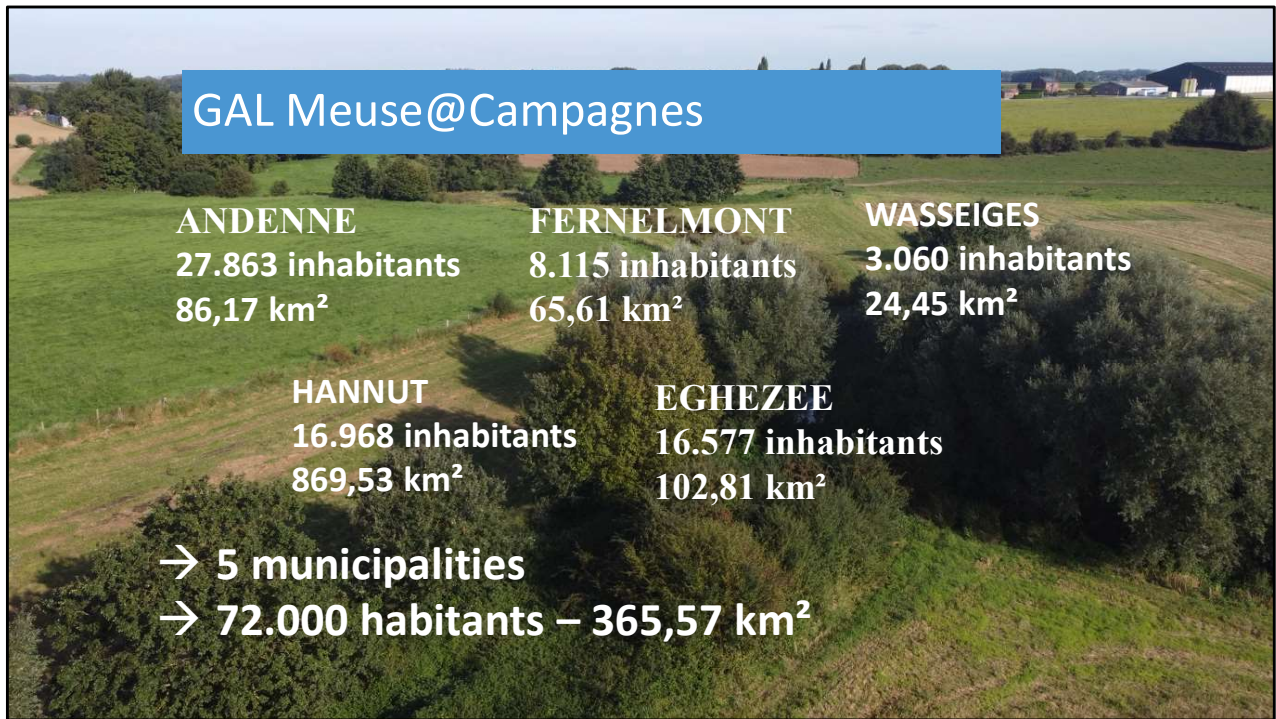
My name is Cécile Mestrez, I'm in charge of coordinating LAG Meuse@campagnes and I'm going to introduce you one of our projects managed by my colleague Jean-Pierre. This project, called BiomMap, associate citizen empowerment through digital technology, involvement of variety of stakeholders and engagement in a sustainable project to the benefit of nature

But first, let me introduce some information about general context. As you certainly know, Belgium is a small and complicated country with two bigs regions (and a third which is BXL). The way of it works, even for LAGS, is not the same in Flanders and Wallonia.

We are located rather in the middle of Belgium in the Wallonia part. One specificity of LAGS in wallonia is that there is a team to cocreate projets on each theme, as it's the case for JP on digital and citizen participation.



There is 20 LAGs in Wallonia. Listening to you, I thought that LAGs work is always done in a smart village spirit as there are many similarities with LEADER approach, and also most of the actions contribute to the green deal vision LAG Meuse@Campagnes is quite a new LAG as it has been established in December two thousand sixteen.



For now, our LAG is composed of the first three municipalities from bigger to smaller and the last two one should join us for the next program.  
It makes a territory located on a small area with many inhabitants.  
Belgium is such a very small country that no one is ever very far from a city, especially where we are. Which makes things special concerning rurality.  
The whole country around us is like a peri urban suburb.  
So the issue is rather how to preserve rural character of the place.  
For example as population is in constant evolution for several years, it can be a problem for social cohesion.



A second concern is that it makes a big pressure on the ground as population is usually living in big houses like this one



Nevertheless a large majority of the territory is dedicated to agriculture (seventy six percent). This region call Hesbaye is also the belgium's attic because it's essentially industrial cereal crops (cereals, beets, potatoes, ...). Farms are less and less and becoming bigger and bigger, so rather agribusiness farmer.



This makes a flat landscape without any, or very few, elements of ecological network, bad quality water, degraded and impoverished soil.



So, with the demographic pressure and agriculture pressure on the ground, biodiversity get a fundamental issue.

For our part, we especially choose to work on developing the interconnectivity of the ecological network and social cohesion at the same time, and create a collaborative environmental mapping of the territory

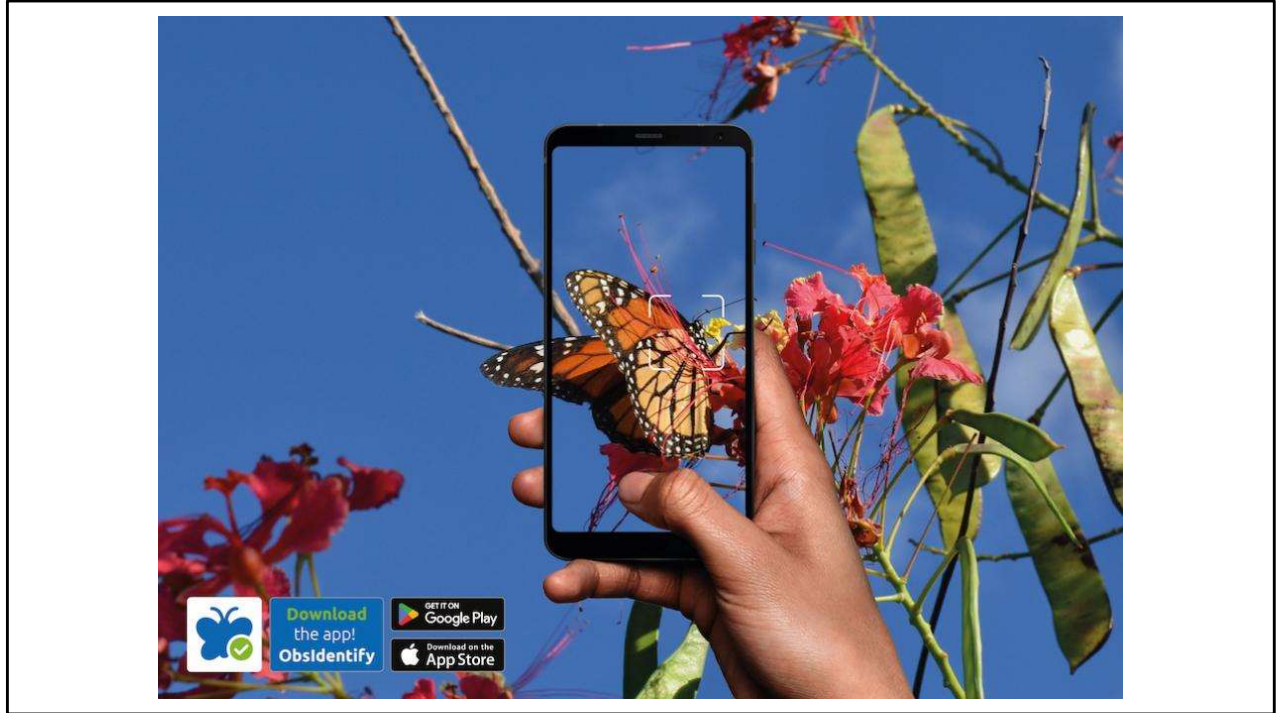




We first identified concerned actors and tools and data sources already available. We mapped good practice already implemented and ongoing needs.

A review of existing data showed that current data sources are numerous with diverse accessibility and potential usage. The data provided by scientists, although sometimes easily available on an open-data portal, remains little known and unusable for those without technical specialism.

The challenge is therefore to offer access to data in a user-friendly and exploitable form, and to easily cross-reference data sources and also in a way that allow to qualify the data with more precision



In Wallonia, we have big database concerning the presence of species thanks to this tool « Obsidentify ».

We also have a university working on a definition of the ecological network thanks to all the species data and which will give us soon main guidelines on areas to be devoted to nature or especially protected.

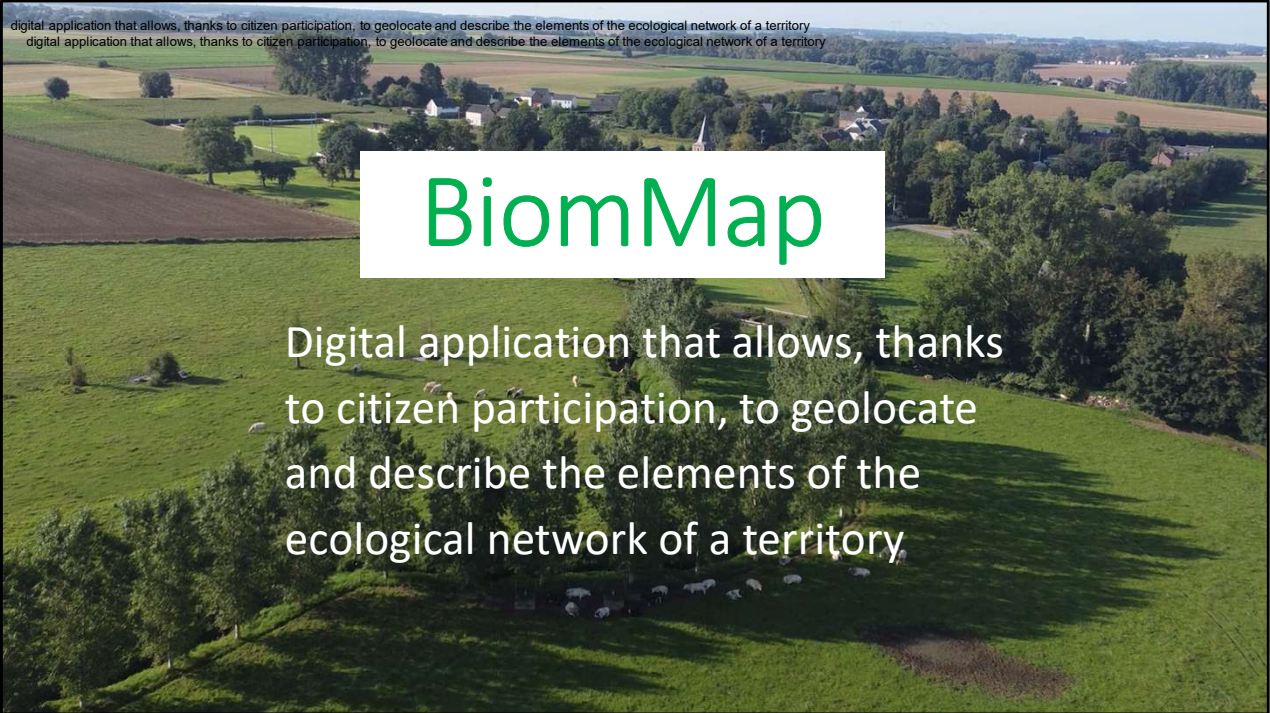
But no tool exists to identify and manage the ecological network, especially concerning small elements like hedges or isolated trees, on a local scale.



There is yet some initiatives for planting with citizens. But the work of these local actors is not valued, not visible.

The same observation can be made for local authorities, farmers or hunters working for more biodiversity. No one knows about their efforts.

And there is no cooperation in the territory to bring relevant actors together.



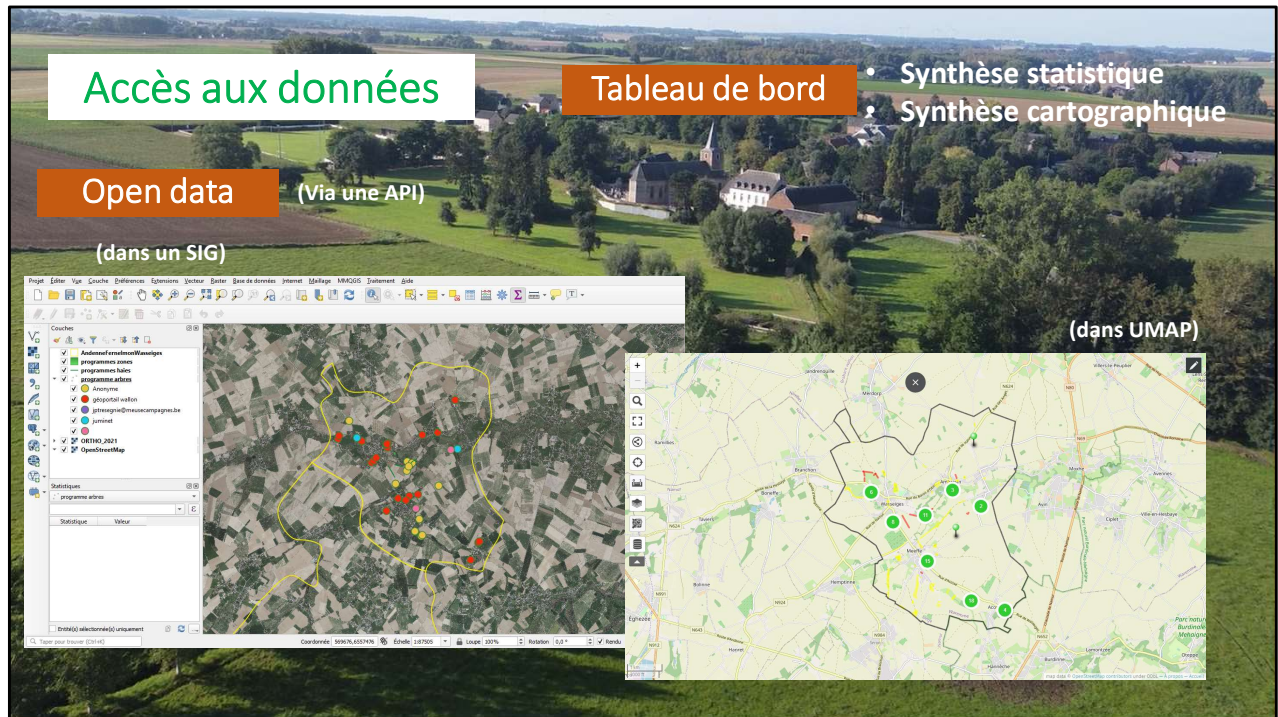
To share information about all these initiatives would be a good point for at least two reasons:

It allows to build a more complete and qualitative database of the local ecological network  
And it encourages the others to get involved in actions for more biodiversity

So we create it

Our tool has this double aim:

- To provide a simple and user-friendly way to make known its actions to improve the local ecological network
- To contribute to a finer picture (cartographic and statistical) of the local ecological network situation



The tool is open source (which grants all the rights to use, study, change, and share the software). The codes are available on a software forge (for example a collaborative maintenance management system, accessible via the web).

Any local authority is able to access and use it and develop the adaptations specific to its needs. As the problem of biodiversity loss is present in the entire European territory, the approach and tool developed will be able to meet the needs in other regions or countries.

All the information collected on a territory is accessible in open data via an API. It is thus possible to recover the data in a GIS for more advanced cartographic analyses, in data visualization tools to build statistical summaries.



All stakeholders in the rural area (local authorities, farmers, hunters, naturalists, inhabitants, and so on) play a central role in building this ecological network and ultimately in improving the biodiversity of the territory.



All these stakeholders have specific needs

1, The municipal planting and maintenance services can sometimes carry out contradictory work: one plants, the other removes...

The tool should allow better monitoring and better communication of what is achieved and between the services

2, Local political authorities need a guidance tool to help them in their decision making and actions related to biodiversity. They can also communicate on concrete facts.

3, The tool provides all actors in the rural world with a simple means, not requiring advanced technical knowledge, to inventory, monitor and facilitate decision-making in favour of ecological networking.

4, The coexistence between inhabitants and farmers, and hunters, is sometimes difficult. However, they carry out concrete actions in favour of biodiversity. BiomMap can make these actions visible.

5, BiomMap is a simple tool, easy to learn, open to all, collaborative. Each inhabitant, citizen, can participate in the knowledge and improvement of the network in his place of life.

Give a compass for the future Allows tracking

*« We only protect what we know well »*

## Challenges

- Increase involvement
- Preserve what already exist
- Give a compass for the future
- Help to follow up

In summary,

To Increase knowledge

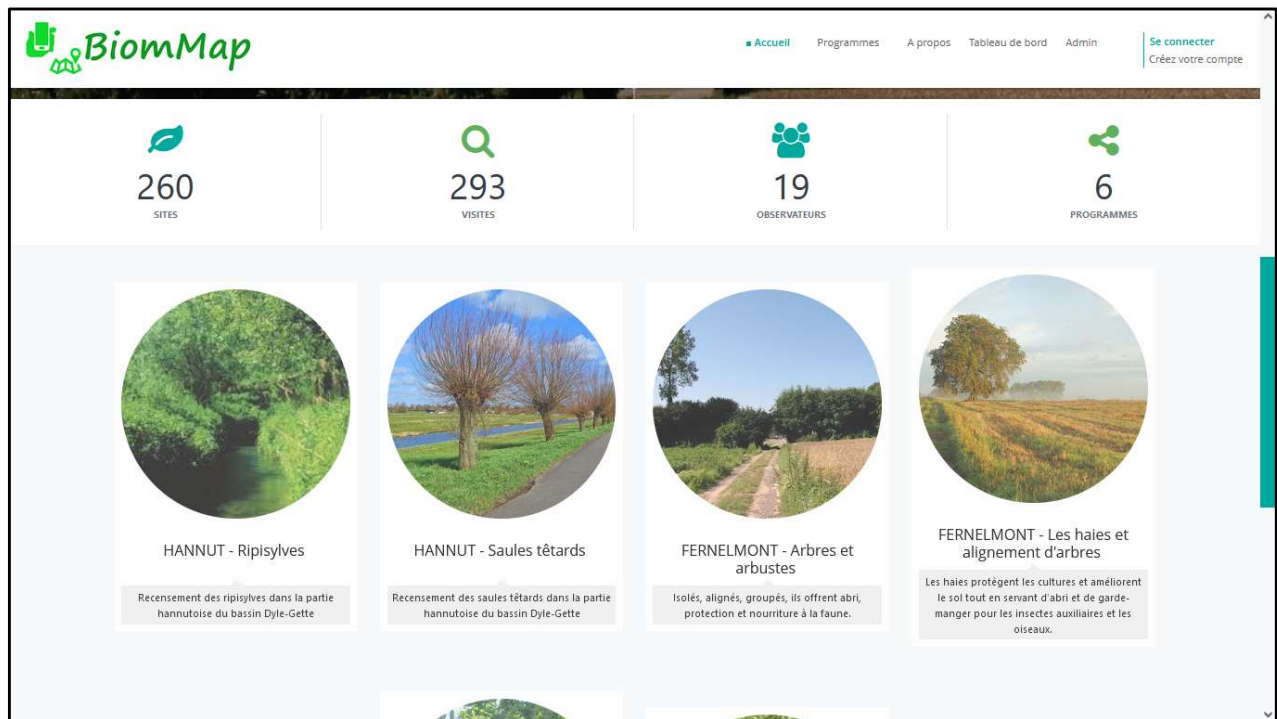
To make visible and promote actions

To quantify the local ecological network

Allow to :

How many times do we have been told that the will to plant was real but they didn't know where to plant? Or that young plantations have been torn off by other stakeholders because they didn't know. The objective of the project is to create a positive territorial dynamic for biodiversity, with the stakeholders joining together for collective action.





The final goal is a global vision leading to actions to improve the quality of the ecological network across five percent of the territory, a minimum threshold from which it can be estimated that biodiversity is protected.

Nevertheless it's with the initiation of concrete actions that data collection begins.

For now, we are still at the beginning. Six data collections are in progress. More than two hundred fifty Plus de 250 sites have been identified. Nearly 300 visits made. About twenty volunteers involved (belonging to nature-oriented working groups)

At the end, we hope to have a local community, representing different types of stakeholders, all mobilised around biodiversity and using the BiomMap tool and actions leading to a full understanding of the ecological needs and potential of the territory.



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