



RELOS3

From Regional to Local:

Successful deployment of the Smart Specialisation Strategies

Action Plan by

Partner organisation	Gemeente Emmen
Country	The Netherlands
NUTS2 region	NL132 - Zuidoost Drenthe
Contact person	Roel Folkersma
E-mail address	r.folkersma@emmen.nl
Phone number	+31 591 685 555

The action plan aims to impact: the Investment for Growth and Jobs programme, more specifically OP Noord / Operationeel Programma EFRO NoordNederland (2014NL16RFOP001), subpart Objective 1 : Focus on Innovation, managed by SNN - Samenwerkingsverband Noord-Nederland - see <https://www.snn.nl/en/>



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1 General policy context

Emmen is a local authority in the north of the Netherlands, peripheral to the economically most prosperous part of the country: the Randstad area. It is bordering Germany. Although the first mention of Emmen is in a document from 1139, it experienced its biggest growth after WW II, when the area was designated a growth area for chemical industry and related applications such as (industrial) fibres. Modern Emmen is therefore an example of a planned city.

Previously, the area was known for peat delving. When this fossile fuel stopped being used in the 1930s, there was a great unemployment in the area. After 1945, funds from the Marshall Plans were used for structural investment, from the 1950s the first factories for industrial yarns started (AKU - merged into Akzo, later Akzo Nobel). Also in the 1950s plastics factories were established, producing classic plastics such as PET, nylon and polyester.

In 1986 Tejin came to Emmen with the very strong fibre Twaron. At the highest level, 5000 people were directly employed by the chemical industry around Emmen. In the 1990s, this turned around because of outsourcing and reduction because of high wage-levels. From 2010s, a new resurgence of the chemical industry emerged. This is the green chemistry that is closely connected to SMEs in niches rather than big conglomerates.

Therefore, Emmen established itself as a small chemical cluster emerged, cooperating closely with bulk chemistry clusters in Delfzijl and Rotterdam. Emmen has always specialised on smaller scale production, and has made a transition to greener forms of chemistry, concentrating mainly on bio-based composites and polymers.

This spawned a lot of innovation and Emmen has become an economic driving force for the region. Nowadays there is an ecosystem in which all partners (companies, education and government) collaborate, a new innovation campus is in development (with links to outside the region such as the Univerisities of Groningen and Wageningen).

Unfortunately, this situation does not exist in all industries. RELOS3 made us re-think the economic landscape in the area, and look for areas where innovation would have a big impact, i.e. sectors which currently do not innovate on a structural basis and just subsist and/or decline, rather than grow and prosper.

Our goal is to learn from our own best practice of fostering innovation in green chemistry and bio-based economy and to use this knowledge and approach in the tourism and leisure sector. Furthermore, we want to learn from our RELOS3 project partners, this was also our reason for participating in the Interreg Europe programme, particularly in the RELOS3 project.

In the RELOS3 project, we set out to influence the OP Noord programme that is managed by Samenwerkingsverband Noord-Nederland, the joint Management Authority of the three northern provinces in the Netherlands.

By implementing the actions described in this Action Plan, 'OP Noord' will be impacted through a higher quality of applications from tourism and leisure companies based in and around Emmen.

What is RELOS3?

RELOS3 focuses on implementing regional Smart Specialisation Strategies (RIS3) in a local context by actively involving local authorities, innovation actors and companies. The local level is often overlooked, however it is crucial to involve this level in innovation strategies.

Partnership

The project has six partners from six countries:

- Tartu City Government (Estonia)
- Metropolitan City of Bologna (Italy)
- Malta Enterprise Corporation (Malta)
- Local authority of Emmen (the Netherlands)
- Wielkopolska Region (Poland)
- Economic Development Agency of Sabadell (Sabadell, Spain, Lead Partner)

Most partners have a local ecosystem connected to industrial systems, advanced manufacturing, applied industrial design and ICT. However, other industry-related specialisations are not excluded.

Main activities

RELOS3 is a unique opportunity to develop and contrast local RIS3 strategies. The findings will contribute to improve the Operational Programmes of the European Regional Development Funds, specifically to promote delivery of innovation at the lowest (local) level. The partners will achieve this objective by:

Our scanning process, spurred by one of the first international meetings of the project, showed that tourism and leisure industry probably has much unused innovation potential. In a process that took most of the first phase of the project, we have settled on focusing to increase the quality of proposals to the RIS3 programme that is managed in our area by Samenwerkingsverband Noord-Nederland as the Management Authority.

This action plan describes the lessons learnt from our transnational exchanges and the actions we plan to undertake to reach the goal defined. Of course, this would not be complete without knowing which players to involve, how to fund the activities and the time frame planned. This forms the basis for the cooperation within the RELOS3 partnership for the coming years.

2 Lessons learnt from the project

Emmen took part in most of the transnational exchange sessions that were organised, along with stakeholders.

Smart specialisation in a local context

Initially, we were struggling to see the smart specialisation in the local context, as it appeared that there are many forces pulling on OP Noord, and that the influence of Emmen seemed relatively small. From casual observation and exchange a situation that more partners struggled with.

However, already after the first initial kick-off meeting, new insights began to emerge, and within the partnership a meaningful exchange took place, helping us to shape our thoughts and to approach and involve stakeholders, most notably SNN (our Management Authority) in the process.

It was clear that each partner has its own approach. The diversity of each approach was also enriching, making us realise that size and the resulting character of smart specialisation issues is diverse, one size fits all does not apply here. This insight facilitated knowledge transfer to a great extent, because no situation was similar to our own, and therefore we needed to question our own status quo and make comparisons. An interesting process that laid down the groundwork for our further learning activities in the project. We discovered that many factors influence effective implementation of smart specialisation in a local context.

Context of SNN in the Northern Netherlands

In the Dutch governance context, SNN is considered to be an open organisation, willing to listen to all stakeholders which can contribute to the overall Smart Specialisation Strategy of the Northern Netherlands. SNN is in fact a joint operation of three northern provinces. The four big cities in the north of the Netherlands (Assen, Emmen, Groningen and Leeuwarden) have a permanent seat on the board, too.

The policy instrument (OP Noord) that has been set up for execution of the RIS3 in the Netherlands is widely considered to be effective, although at this stage it may not reflect all the latest societal changes. It is safe to say that the large amount of Interreg Europe projects in this region have contributed to all stakeholders continually perfecting their skills and discussing the RIS3 in this programming period as well as for the future.

Some concern was raised on the accessibility of the funding to all. The Open Innovation Call and the Matrix model that have been set up by SNN alleviates this concerns to a large extent. It is now up to local actors to capitalise on these opportunities.

As we have identified possible areas for improvement in local actors in and around Emmen, this provides a great opportunity to influence OP Noord's effectiveness by having a bigger impact at the local level. This Action Plan describes those changes that can be made, based upon the learning achieved through transnational exchange.

Building the learning process through the project

The structure of the project was well chosen for us, with Thematic Events and Long-Term Visits

- Thematic Events: short impression, with a deep-dive per event, zooming in on one topic
- Long-Term Visit: a deep study of the entire innovation ecosystem of an area

There have been inspirations throughout the good practices discussed in the Thematic Events and Long-Term Visits. Because in the situation that we find in the Netherlands it is not possible to copy an existing good practice one-on-one, we look for different elements. This list is not exhaustive, because the discovery process varies even from person to person. Nevertheless, we present the good practices that particularly inspired us.

We started with the Thematic Events, in which we systematically discussed and focussed on specific topics, each letting us learn specific things that were beneficial for further opinion-forming. From all events and visits, we learnt many lessons. In the end, they provided important insights which we could use. Some of the things that we learnt:

- The regions Sabadell, Bologna and Wielkopolska cooperate with vocational education and universities. This cooperation between stakeholders presents additional value in the smart specialisation process. For Emmen, these have been inspiring examples, we are actively seeking more collaboration with universities further afield, and at the local level we strengthened our cooperation with vocation education and even jointly established the Rijnland Institute for cross-border cooperation. We are particularly hopeful about impact on innovation in the tourism sector.
- We have also noted the strategic (planning) approach for the Metropolitan Region of Bologna, for us a good example to see how upscaling can be done from the project to the strategic level in a strategic manner.
- Entrepreneurship is very much part of the national curriculum in Estonia and offers many possibilities for development. This engrained entrepreneurship seems to be beneficial for development of the Quadruple Helix as a whole, as there seems to be a bigger risk appetite, i.e. failure does not come with a stigma. Also in Bologna with the innovation hubs entrepreneurship is present. A higher quality of entrepreneurship is something we aim for in this action plan.
- In the field of ICT, especially in the sustainable innovation and knowledge economy, countries like Estonia are developed the furthest. A guest speaker from Helsinki also provided useful insights, also as a Smart City approach. A lesson for us has been to critically look at all local government processes and to include inhabitants with all kinds of innovation. Innovation should make life not easier, not complicate it.
- If you take the Tourism Perspective within the Tourism and Leisure specialisation there are clearly similarities with the Sabadell / Barcelona and Malta. We learnt about upscaling the quality of the tourism offer in order to attract more profitable organisations that are less dependent on one type of income.

To discuss this in more detail, we note that Bologna's good practices in the field of clusters and incubation (as studied during the TE in September 2017) pointed towards the need for smart specialisation, building on knowledge already existing in the area. This phenomenon is perhaps best described by Ron Boschma's research that we heard about during the LTV to Emmen.

However, as we learned about Spark Demo's good practice in Tartu, the idea of physical meeting spaces, but also common branding for an area came to the forefront. This entire process made us realise that building of expertise is necessary, and through more refining discussions at the TE in Seville, it became clear that there would be a lot added value in a unified approach, which was filled locally by the Rijnland Instituut. Both Rijnland Instituut and our Management Authority have been

frequent participants to our TE and LTVs, and indeed the discussions taking place during these trips have sparked our final ideas for the RAP that we are presenting.

The Skills Academy in Pila proved to be a good example to Rijnland Instituut because it highlighted the need for formal and informal education at the vocational level and it also made us think about the way we could influence the actual OP Noord. Our stakeholder SNN did some analysis too and it was clear that the intake of projects in tourism and leisure was below par, even though there was a lot of potential in for example the Open Innovation calls. This focus was further sharpened by the LTV to Sabadell in December 2018, where we discussed the TurisTIC good practice. This caused further focus for us, with a clear example about how you could approach this within the RIS3 of an existing Operational Programme for a region.

After learning all this, we looked for a common denominator in all activities that we saw. Looking back at our Dutch context, we concluded that a prerequisite for success is good communication within the Quadruple Helix. Fortunately, good communication can be stimulated.

From all this, we conclude that the orientation of Emmen towards Smart Specialisation in Bio-Based Economy, Tourism and Leisure is a logical extension that builds on regional economy of Drenthe and the intrinsic qualities of the area. The form on how to approach this has already been found, namely in a newly formed Community of Practice. In the coming months this process will develop more focus on the task at hand: improving the quality of proposals presented to OP Noord.

3 Increasing collaboration, coordination and alignment with stakeholders

As we concluded that our Action Plan is aiming to increase the quality of applications to OP Noord by organisations from tourism and leisure, we drafted actions to be implemented. This section of the Action Plan will discuss them, after that we will discuss the time frame, costs and funding sources.

The overarching ideas which we follow are :

- the choice we make must make sense, and enough content must be present
- the process must be carried by enough stakeholders

The first point helps to overcome the issue of not providing enough content, and the other is to make certain that enough stakeholders are in place to actually carry the project.

We do all this within the context of the Northern Netherlands, that is to say a region which enjoys a good cooperation between different innovation stakeholders.

Moreover, we note that Drenthe, and particularly the area around Emmen, has a lot to offer touristically. However, this potential is not completely realised.

1. there are many small companies without clear innovation policies
2. the business cases are often not strong enough
3. they do not form business networks

Therefore much of the innovation potential in the recreational industry is lost, resulting in many 'lifestyle' companies and SMEs that find it difficult to offer hospitality to guests at the level desired by tourists.

Some of the issues noted are:

- There is a lack of coordination in information and communication
- It is for the visitors on Tourism and Leisure not clear what the proposition / supply of attractions and activities is for the region region of Emmen (i.e, there is no overview)
- There is no fostering to innovate in this sector, although the companies needs support in there innovations plans and ideas (innovation of SMEs), i.e. failing entrepreneurship
- It is necessary to define opportunities for innovation that can be achieved through multidisciplinary collaboration
- The general service level for the tourist needs to come at a higher level of services, and packaged offerings

This has become the basis on which we learnt all the lessons from the Thematic Events and the Long-Term Visits of the RELOS3 project.

Inspiring good practices: Bologna and Tartu

From the lessons learnt from other projects, we were particularly inspired by two good practices also included in the good practice database. They each follow bringing together all stakeholders, but in a different manner.

Tartu: Mobile Monday

In Tartu, the Mobile Monday events bring together actors in the mobile industry and adjacent industries. Each meeting attracts about 70 to 100 key stakeholders, and over time many interesting forms of cooperation have developed. This inspired us for our own tourism and leisure sector, where cooperation is probably more useful than regarding other companies as straight competitors. The idea of an innovation broker also came from this good practice (even though this function as-such does not exist as such in Tartu).

Bologna: Metropolitan Covenant for Employment and economic and social development

For Bologna, the covenant unites all stakeholders in a strategic pact that can be executed over the period of a few years, rather than following each latest development in policy. This long-time commitment of all partners makes it easier for both government and companies to actually achieve the goals set out. This is modus operandi that appeals to Emmen very much, as it exceeds the current time horizons typically used in Dutch policy making for tourism and leisure. It also binds the different stakeholders.

Communities of Practice in Tourism and Leisure

As the title for our action, ‘Communities of Practice in Tourism’ is most appropriate. This title came about when we were thinking back about all the actions that we saw by RELOS3 partners and discussed in their good practices (and a few more), we looked for a working method to encapsulate all ideas and thoughts, and to be able to apply them practically in our context. For this, we need a community.

We work together in a concept that is called Communities of Practice, with all stakeholders working together on one theme, tourism and leisure. The formula for cooperation contains the following aspects: multidisciplinary and multilevel teams that are formed around regional clusters of socio-economic topics, in this case tourism and leisure.

It is crucial that knowledge is developed shared, used and stored so the Community of Practice can advance itself. Moreover, all parties work in co-maker ship at all organisational levels with partners they know personally and trust. The goal is to learn from each other, learning by doing in a real life situation. Starting small with people that like to experiment is a key principle, in order to first build a network of (involved) stakeholders and create plans and programs.

In order to work systematically, we defined these steps:

1. setting up Community of Practice
2. appoint Innovation Broker
3. developing projects
4. identifying funding opportunities (from OP Noord)
5. application process
6. evaluation and next steps

Step 1: Setting up Community of Practice

For setting up the Community of Practice (hereafter: also CoP) we would like to use existing regular round tables that already exist in the tourism industry. However, they are of a different nature (not so much innovation and funding focused), and some facilitation is probably needed at the beginning to introduce the new idea. Some first initial discussions already took place and current feedback is quite good.

We wish to kick-start the process of the start-up of the CoP and the Innovation Broker by:

- bringing people together physically
- developing timelines, for example through time boxes
- set success criteria, so we know what the commonly defined goal for success is
- create content and create artefacts (for example through a wiki) that people can learn from

Because it may not be easy to actually get this off the ground, we aim to promote this through a variety of channels, possibly with a expert speaker that can motivate people to actually come to the meeting, or an activity that is universally of benefit (for example, a cooking workshop for restaurants).

Also, we are aware that in such meetups, a natural progression exists. New members will probably first observe, then they consume and only then they will contribute. Earlier initiatives did not really take this into account, so they had no time to come to flourish. In order to increase this buy-in, we will also ask for commitment from opinion leaders and politicians.

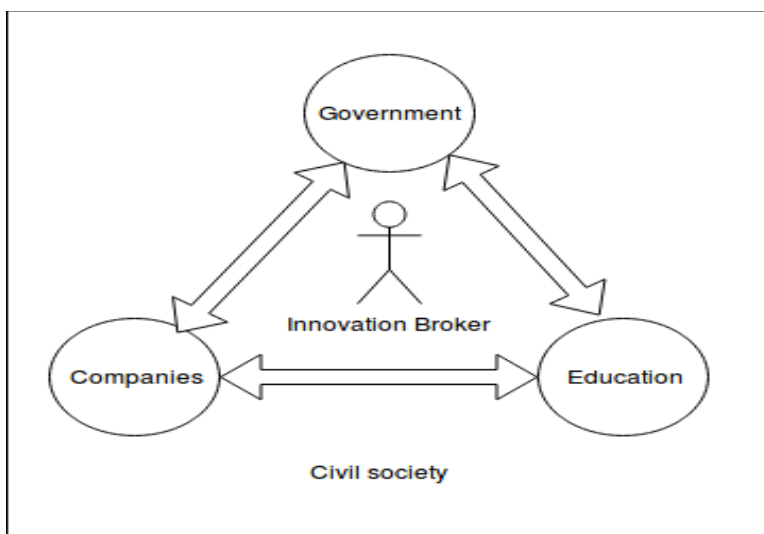
Step 2: Champions in the Community of Practice: an innovation broker

A new action and instrument we want to apply is an “Innovation Broker”. This instrument was noted at the Mobile Monday good practice in Tartu. Elements like this are also used in the Green Chemistry and bio-based industry in Emmen. It is therefore a realistic proposition that can be launched with large amount of certainty.

This would be a person who can unite all partners from the Quadruple Helix, to make connections between parties that currently do not collaborate, and who can also help to increase innovation, for example by alerting organisations about the availability of funding, or to signal a need for another organisation to partner with another. In this manner, extra additional value can be created by having new ideas and a new types of arrangements.

The funding for this person (probably not a full-time job) will be provided by the local authority of Emmen, as part of the budget discussed in a subsequent chapter.

We expect that the actual outcome will be something like the diagram below:



It's effectively a new ecosystem to work from, with all parties more united.

Step 3: developing projects

As the outcome of the interaction between the CoP and the assistance by the Innovation Broker (be it to individual companies, or to groups), new ideas will emerge about projects that are going to help the local tourism and leisure sector to increase the quality of its offerings.

It is up to the group, together with other specialists (funding specialists, but also expert staff from academia or independent consultants) to develop these projects.

Step 4: identifying funding opportunities (from OP Noord)

OP Noord will continue to launch funding opportunities. Of course, the Open Innovation Call exists and may be a suitable options, but other opportunities arise from time to time. The dialogue that we have established with the Management Authority SNN will help us in predicting what is to come. It helps that Emmen is one of the four local authorities with a regular seat on the board.

Step 5: application process

The application process depends very much on the development of the previous steps. However, for many stakeholders this will be their first exposure to external funding opportunities. Therefore, the infrastructure for the application process needs to be in place. In the past, it was often found that particularly smaller companies have issues meeting all the demands put by European programmes. It will be best to tackle these issues as much as possible before the application process actually starts.

Step 6: evaluation and next steps

Once the first project(s) are awarded, the CoP will be used to learn about the developments, and to consider what would be realistic and logical steps for a next opportunity.

Expected outcomes from the Communities of Practice in Tourism and Leisure

For us, the Communities of Practice will be of benefit to our region (i.e. a 'success') if it succeeds in the following objectives:

- **generation of 3 EU-funded projects by the end of 2021 with stakeholders as discussed in the next chapter**
- **€ 500.000 in additional EU-funds with stakeholders as discussed in the next chapter**

4 Players involved

This section lists the players involved for the successful application of this action plan.

Type of Actor	Names
Local government	Emmen, but also adjacent Borger-Odoorn and Coevorden (already working together for many policy topics). At a later stage perhaps Haren and Emlichheim from Germany.
Regional government	Province of Drenthe
Regional collaborations	Recreatieschap Drenthe, Marketing Drenthe
Management Authority	Samenwerkingsverband Noord-Nederland
Vocational training	Drenthe College, Alfa-college
Cross-border	Rijnland Instituut, EDR
Universities	NHL Stenden, Univeristy of Groningen, Wageningen University
Companies / attractions	Themepark/zoo Wildlands, Hunebed Centrum, Geopark De Hondsrug, CenterParcs Sandur, Hotel Ten Cate and any other
Civil society	ANWB, nature protection

5 Timeframe

The timeframe for these activities **is until the end of 2021, which is also when the bulk of the projects awarded in the current programming period will end.** This will make it possible to do good monitoring of the interventions of the Interreg Europe project RELOS3 within its project period.

Of course, at some point we will make the transition to the new RIS3 strategy for the north of the Netherlands, which may offer additional possibilities.

6 Costs and funding sources

For the moment, the capital outlay is foreseen to be **€ 75.000 for the year 2020, and a similar amount for 2021.**

The money is provided from variety of sources, all local:

Organisation	Amount
Local authority	€ 50,000
Rijnland Institute	€ 10.000
Local companies	€ 15.000
Total	<u>€ 75.000</u>


OP Noord itself is not a direct source of funding for the implementation of the Action Plan. This is because the funding of OP Noord is to be used for the projects awarded by SNN. SNN does not provide seed money for the development of applications.

Of course, successful projects that are developed as a result of this Action Plan will receive money from OP Noord and this amount may be considerable. This may increase enthusiasm among all stakeholders and increase the total budget available. However, because it introduces an extra level of dependency for this Action Plan, we have chosen not to make it a part of the budget. Instead, we opt for a budget that we know is fully funded.

7 Endorsement from Management Authority

The Northern Netherlands Alliance (known in Dutch als Samenwerkingverband Noord-Nederland, or SNN) agrees to support and promote the implementation of the actions discussed in this Action Plan.

I confirm that I have the required authority of my organisation to do so and that the required authorisation process of the my organisation has been duly carried out.

Date:	March 26, 2020
Name + job title:	Ir. H.E. Emmens, manager subsidies
Signature:	
Stamp:	Samenwerkingsverband Noord-Nederland Leonard Springerlaan 15, Groningen 