



Interview: Wim Meulenkamp

Chairman of Green Metropolis Twente: Programme Powerful Twente

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1) The project RUMORE aims at strengthening innovation capacities by fostering rural-urban cooperation and partnerships. What is the significance of this topic for the Region Twente and for the work of Green Metropolis Twente?

Twente is a region in the Eastern Netherlands combining beautiful rural area and bustling cities. Half of the inhabitants live in the rural area, so it is no surprise that the Agro & Food sector is an important economic field for Twente. It delivers almost 10% of the economic production in the region and 15% of the local employment opportunities. Besides the economic value, a healthy Agro & Food sector is of high relevance for the quality of life and the (historical) landscape in Twente.

The programme Green Metropolis Twente brings together various local governments, educational, and nature organisations from the region. Together, they aim at creating a healthy and economically strong rural area. A good connection with the urban area is a necessity. It is for this reason that the uplifting of innovation capacities by fostering rural-urban cooperation and partnerships is of central importance for Green Metropolis Twente.

2) What advantages could result for the Region Twente from improved rural-urban partnerships in the field of innovation and what types of partnerships are especially needed in your region?

Nowadays, the Agro & Food sector is changing rapidly. On the one side, the margins between the agricultural and urbanised land are put under pressure while the consumers are more aware where their food comes from. As a

result, the demand for sustainable food is rising and locally grown food is becoming more and more popular. At the same time, the Agro & Food sector is a subject to strict environmental rules. For example, it must

make an important contribution to the climate goals agreed in Paris.

These changes and goals require cooperation to strengthen the regional food chain. Cooperation should focus on bringing together the supply and demand side in the region, but also on developing techniques and applying

innovations for sustainable production. Enhanced partnerships between the rural and urban areas in Twente will also give more economic impulses. These will not only improve the development in the region, but will also contribute to the generation of innovative ideas and projects.

3) How could the cooperation between stakeholders from urban and rural areas in your region be strengthened and what are the main obstacles that hamper current cooperation efforts?

Multiple organisations, farmers, educational institutions, and individuals are working on innovations in the Agro & Food sector in Twente. The cooperation between them can be strengthened by bringing the different parties together and sharing ideas and knowledge from existing projects. Bringing everyone on the table makes it possible to identify what is currently missing and where exactly further efforts should be invested. It creates opportunities for entrepreneurs and local organisations to fill that gap. Moreover, practical tests and living labs should be carried

out in order to facilitate the development of new ideas and to thus foster innovation in the sector.

Currently, the most important challenge in the Agro & Food sector in Twente is the development of the regional market. How can we ensure that regional products are actually consumed regionally so that farmers do not just produce for the world market? The solution lies in the cooperation of all the parties involved in the sector. With the project RUMORE we hope to contribute to solving this challenge for Twente.

4) Can you name some successful innovation delivery projects from your region that are good examples for the integration of rural areas in innovation chains and for the transfer of knowledge between different regional actors?

There are multiple projects in Twente that focus on innovation and sustainability. You can think of smaller projects such as the Biological Knowledge Center Viermarken in Enschede, which is currently working on an educational programme for biological foods, or bigger ones, such as the “Mineral Valley Twente”.

“Mineral Valley Twente” focusses on improvement of the soil health and carbon sequestration in order to reduce climate change. The strength of the project is the large range of organisations, such as

universities, big private companies, agricultural enterprises, municipalities, the water board and the province Overijssel, which have committed themselves to develop new innovative ideas with regard to the use of nutrients in the Agro & Food sector. Mineral Valley Twente aims to achieve this by organising regular meetings, sharing knowledge and experience, but also by carrying out pilots. These include both research as well as pilots focusing on the use of verge cuttings for soil health.

5) How are innovation delivery projects in Twente currently supported by the Green Metropolis Twente and what potentials for future improvement of the funding instrument with regard to the rural-urban thematic do you see?

In the framework of Green Metropolis Twente various organisations from different branches are working together to strengthen the rural-urban partnerships in the region. Green Knowledge Portal is one of them and plays an important role in the generation of knowledge needed to bring innovation processes forward.

Green Metropolis Twente focuses on altogether seven themes. In the last couple of years, many efforts have been invested in the

establishment of cooperation, in drawing up the agendas of the different themes and in creating a valuable and wide network. This is of great importance for bringing the parties together and can be further improved in the future. By extending existing networks, we can further extend and transfer the practical pilots and organise meetings to share and exchange the hitherto knowledge and experience. This could lead to better cooperation and eventually to changes in the current policies.

6) What are your expectations from the participation of Green Metropolis Twente in the European project RUMORE?

For a long time, there was a sharp separation between urban and rural areas in Twente. This has led to delays in regional cooperation and economic development. The beautiful rural areas in combination with the bustling cities are the strength of Twente! But our challenges are not unique in Europe. More regions are facing the same social issues and that is why projects as RUMORE are so important.

We expect two main things from our involvement and work in the project. On the

one hand, we think we could learn a lot from the other partner regions, which face similar challenges as Twente. The meetings in Hamburg and Almelo were good examples and we hope to learn more in the next years. On the other hand, we expect to implement new ideas in future living labs and other practical projects, so we could give an impulse to the cooperation within the Agro & Food sector.