



Prosperous

A foundation created by five municipalities boosts tourism in Groningen, the Netherlands



SUMMARY

Concerned about the growing depopulation and lack of employment in the province of Groningen, the least densely populated in the Netherlands and mostly rural, five municipalities have created the foundation ZO Groningen to promote the region. In barely a year and a half, the foundation has created a network of more than 400 local entrepreneurs who, with the support and communication campaigns of the foundation and the municipalities have seen demand for their services increase.



CONTEXT

The north-eastern part of the province of Groningen in the Netherlands consists of three sub-areas: Westerwolde, Oldambt and Veenkoloniën. All three are predominantly rural, with an economy based on agriculture that, due to soil deterioration, the extensive mechanisation of the agricultural sector, and the lack of employment alternatives, has suffered a continuous process of depopulation.

The initiative seeks to improve the region's economic prospects by creating and disseminating new economic opportunities to attract businesses and people from other regions. This started by **changing the perception that the area is empty and showing that it has a lot to offer** in terms of landscape, cultural heritage and outdoor activities (canoeing, sailing, cycling, etc.).



OBJECTIVES

The objective of the foundation ZO Groningen is to promote the region as an attractive destination for recreation and tourism and in this way to contribute to the economic development and the quality of life of the region.

Theme: Tourism and heritage. **Rural revitalisation**

Country: Netherlands

Organisation: ZO Groningen, foundation created by five Dutch municipalities

Start & end date: 12/21- 12/29

Budget: 500 000 EUR annually

Funding sources: Financed by the National Program Groningen (NPG), five local municipalities (Oldambt, Pekela, Stadskanaal, Veendam and Westerwolde) and by local entrepreneurs' fees

Website: <https://www.zogroningen.nl/>

Contact: Edwin van der Woude, Director, edwin@zogroningen.nl





ACTIVITIES, KEY ACTORS, AND TIMELINE

Since its creation at the end of 2021, the foundation has carried out two main activities: engaging and supporting local entrepreneurs and disseminating up-to-date information about the services and activities in the region.

To promote the region, the foundation has developed three communication campaigns, one per area, through which it provides information about the complete overview of events, activities, destinations, accommodation or routes that people can enjoy. Each campaign includes a website, social media and promotion in different magazines and newsletters as well as physical events and tourism fairs. While the initiative is mainly funded from the national and local public authorities' budgets, entrepreneurs contribute with an annual fee of 125 EUR (excl. VAT).

This covers being promoted in all the communication and dissemination activities, receiving marketing advice and support with a toolbox developed for the entrepreneurs, and being an integral part of the network. Three times a year the foundation organises tourism cafés (twice in each area plus an annual event for the three areas together), physical events bringing together over a hundred participants from different public and private sectors where local entrepreneurs can meet each other or learn about a specific subject they choose.



RESULTS

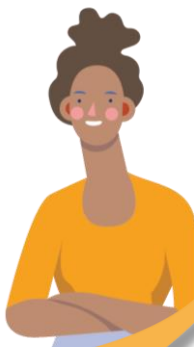
The foundation has created a **network with over 400 local entrepreneurs** that are actively engaged in the online and physical activities. The platform has visibility thanks to different communication campaigns, achieving over 15,000 followers on Facebook and 2,000 on Instagram in the first year. The positive results have been celebrated by the municipalities which have committed to keep supporting the foundation until at least 2029. The toolbox provides advice tailored to the businesses of the three areas so that entrepreneurs can easily access high-quality material to advertise their services.



SUCCESS FACTORS/LESSONS LEARNT

The promotion of the region is connected to a larger marketing programme to promote the entire province of Groningen and therefore has a team of communication and marketing professionals to ensure high quality. The long-term financial commitment of the public administrations of the province has been key to ensure the engagement of professionals working in the tourism sector that otherwise would have gone to work in other regions with more labour market opportunities.

The **close collaboration and mutual support between the five municipalities** is another key aspect to consolidate the initiative. This political will includes the fact that the municipalities which are in a more advantageous economic situation at the moment are willing to contribute more than those with fewer resources, without expecting to get more out of it, but rather for the common prosperity of the region.



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info@rural-pact.eu



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