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# THE STARTUP ECOSYSTEM OF THE EMS-DOLLART-REGION

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

3	Introduction
4	The Structure of the Startup Ems-Dollart-region project
5	Methodology
7	Mapping the Ems-Dollart-region Startup Ecosystem
<b>Executive Summaries</b>	
9	Groningen Startup Ecosystem
11	Friesland Startup Ecosystem
13	Drenthe Startup Ecosystem
15	Ostfriesland Startup Ecosystem
17	Oldenburger Land Startup Ecosystem
19	Emsland Startup Ecosystem
21	Connecting the Dots – Bilateral Discussions between Consortium Partners
23	Conclusion
24	Bibliography

## INTRODUCTION

*In the Ems-Dollart-region in the North of the Netherlands and North-West Germany, startups are contributing to the region's economy. In principal, well-developed startup and entrepreneurship ecosystems are an important factor for prosperity. Such ecosystems consist of companies, regional policy institutions, universities and other private or public organisations.*

In a functioning entrepreneurship ecosystem, these players optimally interact with each other. In January 2019, the project "Startup Perspectives" (Bakker et al., 2019) explored the opportunities and possibilities that a cross-border startup scene would bring to the Ems-Dollart-region.

Based on this research, the **Startup Ems-Dollart-region** project emerged. Within the Interreg V A scheme, the project is funded by Interreg/EDR and runs from June 1<sup>st</sup> 2019-June 30<sup>th</sup> 2022. The aim of the Startup Ems-Dollart-region project is to facilitate a cross-border startup ecosystem between the three provinces of Drenthe, Friesland and Groningen on the Dutch side and the Weser-Ems region in Germany. This will entail the formation of a (digital) network for the startup scene, tailored mentoring programs for young entrepreneurs and the development of entrepreneurship education programs with a cross-border focus. Overall, a sustainable and long-lasting entrepreneurship ecosystem shall facilitate cross-border activities among young entrepreneurs and startups.

To gain an understanding of the current entrepreneurship environment in all the regions, a mapping of the relevant stakeholders took place at the beginning of the project. This report will summarize the key findings of this mapping exercise.



**STARTUP**  
EMS-DOLLART-REGION  
EEMS-DOLLARD-REGIO

**Zielsetzung**  
Die Förderung von grenzüberschreitender Zusammenarbeit von Startups und jungen Unternehmern in der Ems-Dollart-region

**Doelstellingen**  
Het bevorderen van grensoverschrijdende samenwerking tussen startups en jonge ondernemers in de Eems-Dollard-regio

**Projektzeitraum**  
1-6-2019 bis 30-6-2022

**Project periode**  
1-6-2019 tot 30-6-2022

Partners:  
Hanze University of Applied Sciences Groningen, zero, Ems-Dollart-Region, Inqubator Leeuwarden, universiteit OLDENBURG, it.emsland

Unterstützt durch / Mede mogelijk gemaakt door:  
INTERREG Deutschland Nederland, INTERREG Nederland, Europäische Union Europese Unie, EDR, groningen, provincie friesland provincie fryslân, provincie Drenthe

## THE STRUCTURE OF THE STARTUP EMS-DOLLART-REGION PROJECT

The project consists of six partners which are formed in a consortium. These partners are: Inqubator Leeuwarden, Hanze University of Applied Sciences, Zero to One, Emdr GründerInnenZentrum, Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg and IT.Emsland.

The project is divided into eight work packages. Work package 1 and 2 contain the project management and the marketing and communication of the project. Work package 3, which is the basis for this report, is the mapping (inventory) of the regional startup ecosystems. In work package 4, a cross-border entrepreneurship education program will be developed during the project phase. Work package 5 consists of a mentoring program that focuses on the internationalisation aspects of entrepreneurship with a concentration on Dutch-German (cross-border) aspects. Work package 6 is centered around the development of a digital platform that will represent the cross-border startup ecosystem and digitally facilitate collaborations among young entrepreneurs. Each region is hosting a regional support office that will act as a liaison and a contact point to the project and within the regions. Further, every region will once be responsible to run the Startup Ems-Dollart-region Council (German: Rat; Dutch: Raad).

Both activities, the regional support offices and the Startup Council are combined in work package 7. Finally, the importance of several focus and important industry for startups such areas such as energy, health, IT, agriculture, and others will be emphasized in the 8<sup>th</sup> work package. Research had shown that the regions on both sides of the border have similar focus areas and startup activities are common.

All above mentioned activities shall create a platform that will activate and support young entrepreneurship in the Ems-Dollart-region throughout the time of the project. Furthermore the developed systems shall facilitate sustainable cross-border startup business long-term.

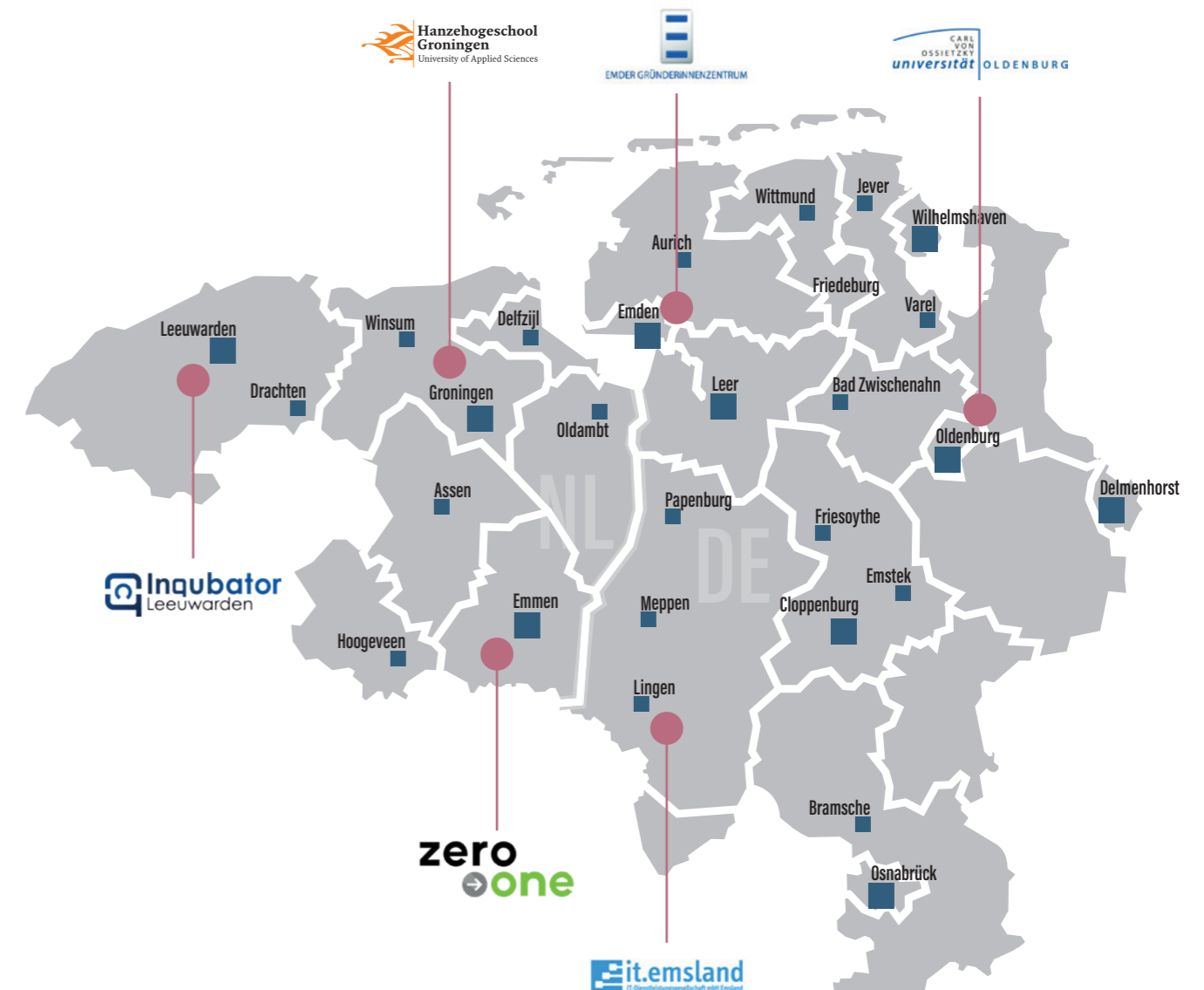
The next chapter will outline the methodology of work package 3 – the mapping of the startup ecosystem in the Ems-Dollart-region.

*It was important at the beginning of the project to first map all regions individually, and in a second step identify connections and overlaps between the regions and its stakeholders.*



## METHODOLOGY

To gain an understanding of every region's relevant startup stakeholders, the 6 consortium partners were tasked with a mapping of their own regional startup ecosystem. The partners in this project are all well-established participants in their regional startup community and work within well-established networks. However, these networks are mostly unknown to the other consortium partners. Besides, the entirety of the 6 regions forms the Ems-Dollart-region startup ecosystem. Hence, it was important at the beginning of the project to first map all regions individually, and in a second step identify connections and overlaps between the regions and its stakeholders.



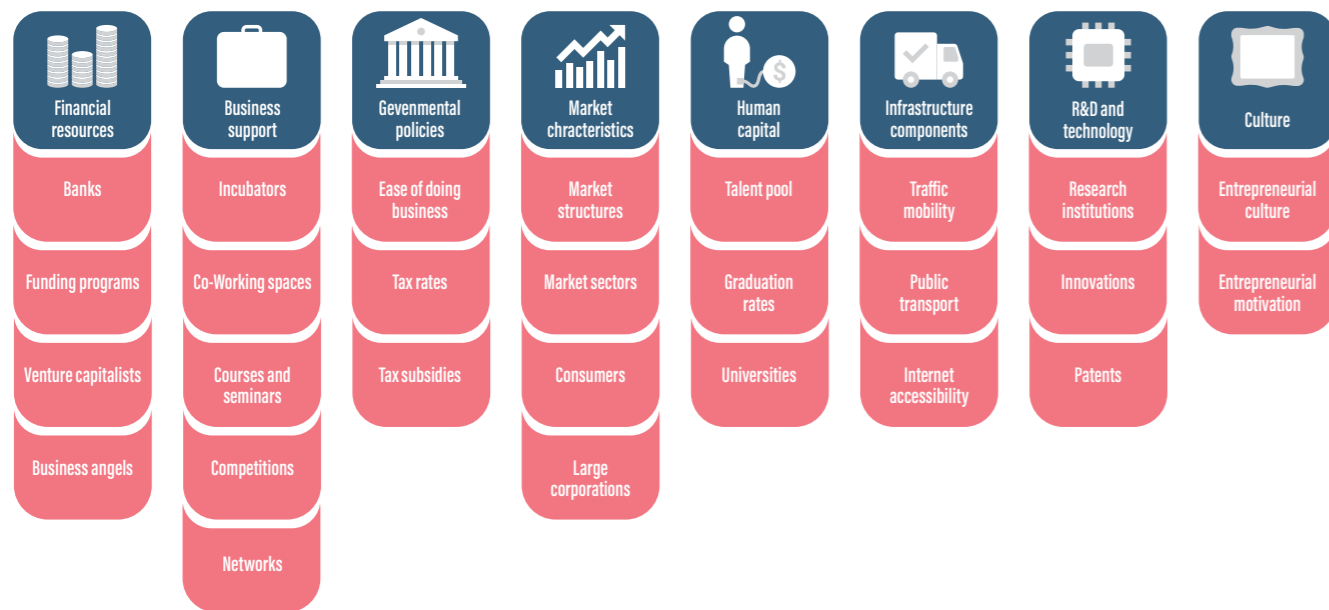


Figure 1: Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Diagnostic Toolkit (source: ANDE, 2013)

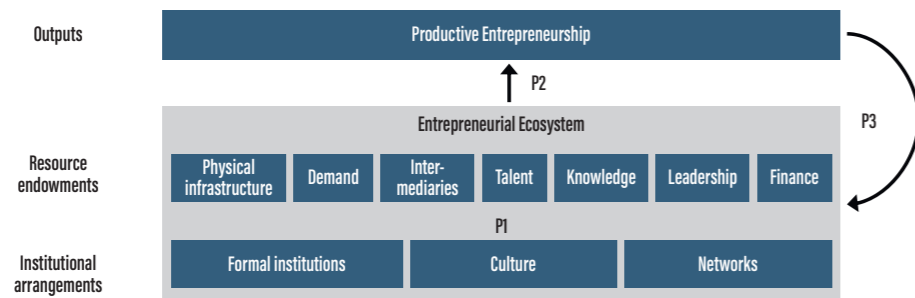


Figure 2: Stam, E. & van de Ven, A. (2019). Entrepreneurial ecosystem elements.

In the project kick-off meeting on 23. January 2020, representatives of the six consortium partners met to determine the process of gaining the information relevant for the mapping. It was important for all to apply the same way of collecting the data. For this, several entrepreneurship ecosystem models were examined. For instance, the Entrepreneurship Diagnostic Toolkit (figure 1) divides entrepreneurial systems into eight categories.

Stam and Van der Veen (2019) include similar elements in their ecosystem approach but base them on three categories namely institutions, culture, and networks (figure 2).

The Dutch consulting company Halbe and Koenraads bases its startup ecosystem mapping on the following five elements: Support, Education, Networks, Expertise, and Capital. As it can be seen, these elements can be found in similar ways in both Aspens's and Stam van der Veen's systems. Based on the five elements Halbe and

Koenraads have also created a Startup Infrastructure diagram in an effort to visualize startup ecosystems. The Startup Ems-Dollart-region project team decided to map their region also in the five categories as mentioned above and later, once data was collected visualize this in a diagram. For data collection, the six teams used an Excel sheet with the five categories and descriptions on how to categorize entries for each category.

To define existing connections and overlaps within the ecosystems and regions and to identify opportunities for future collaborations relevant for the project, bilateral meetings between all regions took place after the ecosystem data collection phase. The consortium partners from the six regions (Drenthe, Friesland, Groningen, Emsland, Ostfriesland, Oldenburger Land) all met with each other to discuss the outcomes. This led to 30 bilateral discussions in total.

The results of these discussions and the mapping exercise will be presented in the next sections.

## MAPPING THE EMS-DOLLART-REGION STARTUP ECOSYSTEM

The individual mapping of the all six regions led to different results. As table 1 shows, the number of entries differs per region and category.

In total the first mapping lead to 309 entries in the five surveyed categories for the entire region. Network (129) is by far the most frequent category followed by Support (61) and Education (51). Capital with 33 entries is lowest. This comes as no surprise as the financing support for startups has been considered comparatively low in the region and leaving room for improvement.

In a country comparison, all five categories lead to higher numbers on the Dutch side. Overall, 66% of the documented ecosystem participants were registered in the Netherlands. In the category of Expertise, the results are nearly at equilibrium. All other categories range from 62% up to 72% in favor of the Dutch regional ecosystems. Reasons for this disparity are difficult to determine. First of all, it has to be mentioned that the inventory does not claim full coverage of all ecosystem stakeholders. The applied methodology only allows for a subjective assessment per region. The consortium partners were tasked with the inventory and applied it to their best knowledge. The outcomes are also partially based on the amount of relationships of each consortium partner within their own ecosystems. These relational aspects may differ and the effects to the data collection outcomes will have to be corrected throughout the period of the project. Besides, the database will be continuously updated throughout the entire duration of the project.

Problems that may have occurred during data collection were addressed during a half-way meeting with all consortium partners on 27. February, 2020. It became clear that regional and country specific differences do exist. For instance, German research institutes that are connected to universities, so called "An-Institute", are independent legal entities. In such cases the right category, for instance Education vs. Expertise, had to be determined individually. An unexpected result was that the Oldenburger Land ecosystem had comparatively low numbers. The city of Oldenburg is the second largest municipality in this project and hosts, similar to the city of Groningen, two institutions of higher education where entrepreneurship is a key theme. Despite the significance of other regional ecosystems, it was expected that Oldenburg's "numbers" would compare to the ones registered in Groningen. As table 1 shows, the Oldenburger Land only ranks 4<sup>th</sup> in the Ems-Dollart-region in terms of inventoried ecosystem stakeholders. Also worth mentioning is the fact that the Province of Drenthe appears to be the most proliferated ecosystem in the EDR. The "snapshot" character of the ecosystem mapping at hand further becomes apparent by looking at the relatively low numbers that derive from the ecosystems in the Emsland and Ostfriesland regions. Although expected to be lower than the average, the submitted data has shown a further need for substantiation throughout the project. For this purpose, each consortium partner is responsible to regularly update the regional data base so that missed entries can be added and obsolete ones deleted. It is expected that the ecosystems will further converge but size differences are likely to stay in proportion – at least partially.

Region	Network	Support	Expertise	Capital	Education	Total
Drenthe	28	8	11	10	18	75
Friesland	27	9	5	7	10	58
Groningen	34	21	3	7	8	73
Emsland	4	9	2	2	3	20
Ostfriesland	8	8	9	4	4	33
Oldenburger Land	28	6	5	3	8	50
	<b>129</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>309</b>

Table 1: The Ems-Dollart-region ecosystem in numbers (source: own)

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY GRONINGEN STARTUP ECOSYSTEM

The Groningen Ecosystem is dominated by the institutions and activities from the city of Groningen. Approximately 2000 startups and young companies account for roughly 10.000 jobs. Two institutions of higher education, i.e. Groningen University (RUG) and Hanze Hogeschool University of Applied Sciences (Hanze UAS), both have entrepreneurship in their strategic portfolio.



For example the RUG operates the Venture Lab North which is run by Prof. Aard Groen. Venture Lab North is a significant accelerator for startups and companies in the North of the Netherlands<sup>1</sup>. It would be an interesting opportunity for the higher education institutions in Lingen, Emden, Oldenburg, and Wilhelmshaven on the German side to participate in this project

if it is taken across the border. At the Hanze, the key driver of entrepreneurship can be found at the Marian van Os Centre of Expertise Entrepreneurship. Approx. 15 professors are behind the Centre's efforts in connecting education and applied research in this field<sup>2</sup>. In 2019, the Hanze ranked 5<sup>th</sup> in the world in the category "graduate companies" in the U-Multirank<sup>3</sup>.

- 1 <http://venturelabinternational.com/north/>
- 2 <https://www.hanze.nl/eng/research/overviews/professors>
- 3 <https://www.gic.nl/economie/hanzehogeschool-in-wereldwijde-top-5-ondernemerschap>



Figure 3: The Startup Ems-Dollart-region ecosystem.

Figure 3 shows a graphical representation of the startup ecosystem in the Ems-Dollart-region based on the five surveyed categories. The graph illustrates the significance well of the category "network" which represents over 40% of the composed ecosystem. This goes in line with prior findings in ecosystem research both at practical and academic level where network related parts play a dominant role. The overall number of displayed logos in the entire graph surpasses the total number of ecosystem participants as calculated in table 1. This is due to double entries of some stakeholders in this ecosystem. It is natural that some institutions take on more than

one role in an entrepreneurship ecosystem. For example the consortium partner Zero 2 One from Drenthe hosts startup events (Network) and also supports international startups in "landing" in the province of Drenthe (Support). Similar effects can be observed with chambers of commerce and educational institutions.

Every region composed a summary document of the mapping highlighting the most important aspects of the inventory and describing the regional ecosystem in brief. The six summaries are subject of the next section.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY FRIESLAND STARTUP ECOSYSTEM

*Based on the [startupthermometer.frl](http://startupthermometer.frl) site, we have gathered the information for the Startup Ecosystem in Friesland. Much of these addresses were already available on this site. We have enriched the database behind it and transferred the database to the EDR format. To summarise the startup Ecosystem in Friesland we will describe the various sectors of the database: network, capital, expertise, education and support.*

### Network

The network in Friesland has received a big impulse after the kick-off of STERK! A network organization to stimulate the start-up ecosystem. STERK has created the platform to offer all kinds of mechanisms in the range of inspiration, education, incubation and growth to many organizations in Friesland. Sterk does not offer financial support

but brings network and events to all parts of Friesland. The network entails a program for mentoring (Entrepreneurship Mentoring, EMS), a competitive Launch Game, an Acceleration program, Fuck-up Nights and Business Lunch Talks at the University.

The network consists of some players dealing with start-ups.

Inqubator Leeuwarden is over 10 years active in the region of Friesland, dealing with start-ups and having coached over 300 start-ups over the years. BeStart acceleration program brings start-ups in clean tech and water related fields further and pushes them to a next level.

At the Zernike Campus in Groningen both the Hanze and the RUG run Startup City, the joint central place for startups and scale ups<sup>4</sup>. There is also a yearly competition for entrepreneurial students called “Day for the Entrepreneurial Student”, initiated by Hanze but from 2020 also available for entrepreneurial students of RUG. In the future hopefully also students from NHL Stenden and Van Hall Larenstein in the province of Friesland will join.

Other ‘Living Labs’ (aka Innovation Work Places) by the universities host entrepreneurial activity in special interest domains such as digital: Digital Society Hub, health: Health Hub Roden and Aletta Jacobs School of Public Health, biobased economy: Zernike Advance Processing facility and energy: EnTranCe, New Energy Coalition and Energy Academy Europe<sup>5</sup>. Many events and awards connected to educational programmes can serve the Startup Ems-Dollart-region project as ways to promote the project and connect with the Ems-Dollart-region. Overall, the Groningen Ecosystem profits from the activities of the universities and the dynamic situation that derives from the educational activities and the many young graduates that enter the entrepreneurial scene (combined both institutions host approximately 60.000 students).

<sup>4</sup> <https://campus.groningen.nl/en/campus-groningen/campus-in-transition/building-projects/start-up-city>

<sup>5</sup> Similar focus areas such as energy, health and IT can also be found in Oldenburg but also find representation in regional policy, i.e. Strategie Noord/Strategie Nord by the EDR ([https://edr.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/DE\\_Entwurf-Strategie-Noord-2020.pdf](https://edr.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/DE_Entwurf-Strategie-Noord-2020.pdf))

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.foundedingroningen.com/>

Prominent startups that derived from former Groningen students are *HackerOne* and more recently *MrChadd*.

The Groningen ecosystem is well supported by the public sector. The municipality and province of Groningen understand entrepreneurship as a key theme. One key activity funded by both the municipality and the province is *Foundedingroningen.com* (Founded). It is an initiative “Promoting, supporting and connecting entrepreneurs and initiatives from Groningen”. *Founded* is run by entrepreneurs and finds its central place in a website facilitating this<sup>6</sup>. This website can be seen by the Startup Ems-Dollart-region project as a conceptual benchmark. Many interview partners have mentioned *Founded* as an important part of the Groningen ecosystem. It is seen as the key digital and “physical” place for young entrepreneurs.

In the city of Groningen, many facilities for startups can be found. These are mainly workspaces, support organisations (both from public and private sector) and networks. A few mentionables are “Launch Café, Het Kwadraat, BusinessMatchGroningen, and Fablab Groningen.

Financing startups in both the startup and scaleup phase is an area that requires attention in Groningen. Most interview partners have mentioned “financing” as a key concern.

The startup environment outside the city of Groningen is less dynamic and pronounced. Regional startup and entrepreneurship activity in cities such as Veendam, Winschoten, and Delfzijl are much less prominent. Overall it can be stated that an aim of the Startup Ems-Dollart-region project is to facilitate “spill-over effects” of startup activity. This should happen within regions – e.g. the city of Groningen to other areas in the Province – and to other regions and municipalities – e.g. Leeuwarden to Drenthe, Oldenburg to Ostfriesland, Emsland to Groningen, etcetera.



De Noorderlingen deals with student entrepreneurs so is the Student excellent program. At VET level, an incubator-like organisation, managed by the schools has started recently. Organizations like NOM Finance, Doe Fonds (FOM) and other financial institutions like F-linc deal with finance questions. So do Bureau Zelfstandigen (private companies finance) and Qredits (smaller loans up to 200k). These are the major players in the Frisian network. Many other organizations connect to these.

In the network there are 3 competitions for start-ups which are interesting. Young Business Award is a start-up competition which attracts national players but is organized in the north of the Netherlands (in the three northern Provinces). Price is 25.000 Euro cash. Enterprise is a competition for student start-ups with a semi-final with 8 contestants and a final with 4 contestants. Price is half a year coaching by Inqubator and 2.500 euro cash. Start-up of the year is a co-production with entrepreneur of the year award in Friesland. Price is pitching your company at an exclusive network of 250-300 people and creating very good publicity with the regional media (NDC).

#### Capital

As mentioned under network, there are several players. NOM, F-linc, FOM are initiatives from public sector to finance start-ups or scale-ups. Mostly with higher interest percentages or even share participation. There are other investors active in the region. Not on the list are informal investors. Usually to be found via networks like incubator and accelerators but acting basically underground. The banks are also not mentioned in the database but are present in the network. Rabobank, ING and

ABNAMRO bank are the banks which perform on the market for start-ups or scale-ups. Qredits is an institution which provides smaller loans up to 200K for start-ups or smaller companies. Current interest rates vary between 8 and 9,5 %.

#### Expertise

Water technology is one of the key characteristics of Friesland. Wetsus Insitute for water technology and the water campus can be found in Leeuwarden. The Water Alliance is the network organisation around and they connect 100 players in the water network. Amongst them start-up companies. There are 10-15 start-up companies listed as specifically water related start-up. Although most of them do not have a proven sustainability and are merely research focused. There is a biobased hub in Balk (south part of the province). Paques company puts energy in this hub and offers sustainable start-ups with ideas in the water and wastewater technology spectrum a good base to start. The research department and the client base of Paques is used to offer opportunities. In Leeuwarden there is also the dairy campus with expertise from Wageningen University and Van Hall University on dairy and dairy technology development. Several companies in Agri and Food are connected to the Dairy Campus. There is not a specific focus on start-ups. The energy campus is the newest campus in Leeuwarden. Initiated by Royal Oosterhof Holman together with Ekwadmaat company. The North part of Friesland specialises in potato and potato crops. A company called HZPC is one of the largest distribution partners for potatoes and potato growth models. The south part of Friesland has a focus on recreational sailing industry. Interesting companies

like Royal Huisman, Feaship and Hutting Yachts are innovators and front runners globally in the production of yachts.

#### Education

There are three universities active in Friesland. University of Groningen has set up a sustainable entrepreneurship department as Groningen campus Fryslan. Approximately 200 students (international) follow education to reach a master of university level. Approximately 20.000 students can be found at NHL-Stenden University with bachelor level education and some growth to master. Also 20.000 students can be found on VET level in Leeuwarden at Friesland College and Friese Poort. Next to that we have some agri education on bachelor level at Van Hall Larensteijn with 2.000 students and on VET level at Nordwin College with also 2.000 students. The VET schools can be found in Leeuwaden, Sneek, Drachten and Heerenveen and some other remote locations. The majority can be found in Leeuwarden.

#### Support

Support to start-ups is offered by BeStart in an acceleration program. Inqubator Leeuwarden in an incubation program. One location offers flex-desks and a coaching program for start-ups in teams. Another location offers assistance for student start-ups. A new acceleration program starts in 2020: Finc. A Frisian acceleration program focused to growth of sales. There is place for 4-6 candidates in a program running 4 months. The program is executed twice per year. Another support can be found at EMS, Entrepreneurship Mentoring Support. About 30 start-up companies with at least 500K turnover can find strategic support to grow their business with the assistance of (local) mentors.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY DRENTHÉ STARTUP ECOSYSTEM

*There are events in Drenthe, although they are mainly organized by existing communities/ networks, and often for members only (or heavily discounted for members and/ or not heavily marketed).*

#### Network

There are also competitions in Drenthe. A relatively big competition that started out in Drenthe is the Young Business Awards. First rounds are often held in the northern part of the Netherlands, and finals are often held in Drenthe. Other competitions are mainly held for companies with a CoC registration in Drenthe only.

Collaborations are there, but mostly on a project basis (and

often with a sectoral focus).

Collaborations take place at the Emmtec Industriepark for instance (e.g. between Morssinkhof Plastics and Wageningen University and Research). Government collaboration can be seen on a very structural basis between Assen and Groningen where focus lies mostly on healthcare.

Coworking spaces are mostly present in Emmen and Assen. The coworking space Growing



Emmen also collaborates with NHL Stenden, collaborates with and houses Zero to One and houses Ondernemersfabriek Emmen. (Smaller) events are also held here, some of which are open to the public, such as Growing Global, which is organized together with Zero to One, IWCN and others for internationals in Drenthe.

There is no specific news media about startups in Drenthe. Some news is shared (in English) by The Northern Times, and by e.g. IkbenDrentsOndernemer (Drenthepreneurs magazine). However, the former mostly shares news about international entrepreneurs, and the latter covers Drentse entrepreneurs in general (also ZZPers, rather than startups only).

#### Capital

With regard to capital, there is seed funding, but hardly clear pre seed funding. In this stage, startups often rely on bootstrapping (savings and sweat equity, later also internal funds), subsidies, FFF funding, and/ or another source of personal income.

Preseed is hard to acquire for startups here, but also expensive in general (especially if they need multiple rounds of funding), so it is not always advisable.

There are business angel networks, but they are often nationwide (occasionally with a local contact person). There are also business angels that are not visibly part of a network, but can be contacted as a person. These people are left out of the mapping because of privacy reasons.

Both municipalities and the Province of Drenthe have instruments (such as subsidies, vouchers) available to fund business activities (e.g. growth and export), and IkbenDrentsOndernemer and Ondernemersfabriek Drenthe are also government initiatives (via tenders). These facilities are mostly available for companies with a CoC registration in Drenthe.

Apart from that, the northern provinces also collectively help with subsidies (SNN) to businesses. And there are early stage loans, e.g. in combination with future investment by a co-financier. Corporate venture capital is not really present, and private equity and VC funding is often covered by nationwide companies.

Banks can provide funding (often debt financing), but they hardly finance high risk, early stage startups. Some banks do facilitate networks of investors.

#### Expertise

Organizations and initiatives mostly accommodate and facilitate industries such as (green) chemistry, HTSM, circular economy, and IT.

In the Northern part of Drenthe, there is more focus on health (Assen collaborates a lot with Groningen on innovation with regard to health), rather than (green) chemistry, HTSM and circular economy focus which is focused on more in the south (e.g. Emmen). IT initiatives are both present in the south and north. Facilities include help with research related to these sectors, collaboration which leads to valorization, and facilities such as (help with) pilots, plants, laboratories, logistics, permits, etc.

#### Education

Drenthe doesn't have a university, but does have MBO level schools and a university of applied sciences, where students are educated. Schools mostly focus on the region-relevant industries, rather than entrepreneurship, although there is a minor entrepreneurship at NHL Stenden. NHL Stenden is also present in other countries (e.g. Bali, Indonesia), and e.g. in Leeuwarden, Friesland.

#### Support

Drenthe has incubators, accelerators, and offers facilitation to international entrepreneurs from outside of Europe as well. Support is also provided by governmental bodies, although often not specifically for startups (rather, entrepreneurs in general).

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OSTFRIESLAND STARTUP ECOSYSTEM

*The region of East Frisia (Ostfriesland) consists of the districts of Aurich, Leer and Wittmund as well as the district-free city of Emden. East Frisia is located on the coast of the North Sea and includes not only the mainland but also the East Frisian Islands. Hochschule Emden-Leer University of Applied Sciences is based in Emden with a second, smaller location in Leer, where the Maritime School/Department of Maritime Transport is located.*

Nearly 4700 students are enrolled at the two East Frisian university locations, of which just over 400 are in Leer. A vocational academy for the East Frisian region is also located in Leer. There is no research university in East Frisia, the nearest one is the university in Oldenburg.

Each district and the city of Emden manages economic development in different legal formats, usually connected with offers for start-ups or technology-oriented founders, but less for start-ups according to the classical definition. It offers business start-up and financing advice, events and network offers as well as investment programmes for small and medium-sized enterprises,

## OST- FRIESLAND





targeting founding companies as well. Gründerpreis Nordwest is a private initiative and has been awarded since 2014.

The city of Emden stands out in the region with its offers compared to the surrounding counties. This can be explained by the existence of the Hochschule Emden-Leer University of Applied Sciences and by the offer of the Emden Founders' Centre (EGZ), which opened in 1999. The EGZ is currently the only provider of seminars around the topic of business start-ups in the region.

Due to its proximity to the University of Applied Sciences, Emden has been increasingly involved in topics regarding founding businesses, technology-oriented founders and start-ups for many years. In addition to the classic offers, there have been a number of other offers in recent years: events within the framework of the project weeks, teaching assignments in different disciplines, event formats such as an annual Start-up weekend, workshops Exist, support and mentoring of exist teams, a start-up network, redox, with regional and supra-regional partners. The EGZ is currently implementing a start-up centre with the support of the state of Lower Saxony.

Overall, there is a growing interest in startup topics throughout the region – commitment from individuals such as Jan Pleis (GOOE, Meetups offer) or entrepreneurs who provide venture capital or create co-working places. Political decision-makers also have a much higher interest.

Since 2017, Prof. Annika Wolf has been professor for entrepreneurship at Hochschule Emden-Leer. The professorship also resulted in the project "Meer.Community", a program supported by the Exist program (starting 06/2020) to raise the potential for start-ups at universities. In addition to this commitment, other teachers (Prof. Lars Jänchen, Prof. Manfred Hoogestraat and others) contribute to the start-up activities, so some start-up teams have emerged. Among them, two teams were awarded the Exist funding "Founder Scholarship" in 2020. Moreover, an open FabLab operates at the university.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OLDENBURGER LAND STARTUP ECOSYSTEM

*While we are looking at different aspects of the startup ecosystem Oldenburger Land we will also refer to findings of the initial study „Startup Perspectives: Startup Ecosystems in the Ems-Dollart Region“ (Bakker et al., 2019).*

As mentioned in the study the Start-up ecosystem in Oldenburger Land is dominated by the university city of Oldenburg. In addition to the support in startup consultancy offered by the city, the district, Chamber of Industry and Commerce and Chamber of Crafts as a strong foundation, the establishment of professorship and teaching in entrepreneurship at the University of Oldenburg has provided important impulses for the development of a start-up

ecosystem in Oldenburg and beyond. The resulting startup culture at the university has been anchored through the establishment of the Gründungs- und Innovationszentrum (GIZ).

Central Highlights of the startup ecosystem in the Oldenburger Land are:

- Three professorships for entrepreneurship at the University of Oldenburg and one professorship at the University

## OLDEN- BURGER LAND



of Vechta continue to provide important impulses for a start-up culture at universities. This has a lasting positive influence on the development of the start-up ecosystem in the entire Oldenburger Land.





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY EMSLAND STARTUP ECOSYSTEM

*To summarize the Startup Ecosystem in the Region of Emsland we will describe the different sectors of the Database: Network, Capital, Expertise, Education and Support. Please take note, that we weren't able to write down every single supportive institution/organisation.*

### Network

Currently the region of Emsland does not have a specialised Entrepreneurial Network with all kinds of inspiration or networking events. But we do have the "Unternehmensnetzwerk" of the Emsland GmbH, which is a network of companies which, as a communication platform, offers the possibility of networking as entrepreneurs or founders of new businesses from a wide

range of sectors and to exchange information on specific topics. And we also have the Startup- and Entrepreneurforum from the Cornexion GmbH, which aims to give new impulses to the Emsland region and mediate networks between local entrepreneurs and regional and supra-regional networks from the start-up scene, industry experts and investors in order to mediate between these two groups and create new food for thought and

- An important success for all universities in the Oldenburg region is the (renewed) funding by the Federal Ministry of Economics and Energy within the framework of "EXIST-Potentiale". Both the University of Oldenburg, as well as the Jade University and the University of Vechta can expand their capacities and join forces for startup support and a strong "Start-up Region Northwest".
- Furthermore, the transfer of knowledge and technologies in the economy and society is supported by inter-university projects in the Oldenburg region and beyond such as *Technologiescouting Innovativ* and *Innovative Hochschule Jade Oldenburg (IHJO)*.
- The support of founders through startup consultancy services provided by universities, cities and chambers is traditionally complemented by the infrastructure of technology centres and co-working spaces. Currently, the accelerator GO! Startup-Zentrum and the incubator ZUKUNFT. Unternehmen are being set up as additional sources for infrastructure, training, consultancy and networking.
- Startup scene and local industry cooperate closely with each other. This shows, for example, in the mentoring programme run by GIZ gGmbH, in which experienced entrepreneurs from the regional economy support start-ups with their expertise and network.
- In addition, three successful companies from the Oldenburger Land (EWE, Cewe and Büfa) invest venture capital in startups via the High-Tech Gründerfonds (HTGF)

- Major events within the start-up ecosystem in the Oldenburg Land involve the various players from universities, economy and the public sector and are carried out in cooperation

The results of the inventory mapping confirm the three industrial sectors identified in the initial study: Agrifood (Vechta and Cloppenburg), Energy (Oldenburg) and Maritime (Wilhelmshaven and Nordenham). In addition, the sectors digitisation and digitisation in the construction industry (Oldenburg) should be mentioned. The following associations and An-Institute represent the various sectors:

- Maritimes Cluster Norddeutschland e.V.
- Oldenburger Energiecluster e.V. (OLEC)
- OFFIS Oldenburg
- Zukunftslabore Digitalisierung (ZDIN)
- BIM Baumeister Akademie
- Verbund Transformationswissenschaft agrar Niedersachsen

Barriers and missing links in the Startup ecosystem in Oldenburger Land:

- The results of the mapping confirm continuing gaps in financial support for startups. In the category capital, the fewest players are represented.
- Although three regional companies - EWE, Cewe and Büfa - invest in the HTGF, no regional company has so far been able to receive support from the fund

Starting points for cooperation within the project EDR:

- The joint project Technologiescouting Innovativ already activated cooperation between the University of Oldenburg, Jade University of Applied Sciences and Emden/Leer University of Applied Sciences.
- Within the framework of EXIST-Potentiale, there will be more intensive exchange and cooperation between the University of Oldenburg, the Jade University of Applied Sciences and the University of Applied Sciences Emden/Leer in the field of start-up consultancy and the building of a strong „Start-up Region Northwest“
- There is potential for a more intense and supported cross-border cooperation between startup scene and industry with in the EDR. This could, for example, expressed through the extension of the mentoring programme.

Further potential lies in the cross-border matching of startup teams



networks. We do have many other networks (Wirtschaftsjunioren and other typical industry networks etc.) with the potential to build up future Startup business collaborations.

### Capital

From a financial point of view, founders and startups in Emsland do not yet have as many opportunities for startup financing as, for example, in other startup regions with more venture capitalists and venture capital firms, in addition to the classic capital procurement via the house banks and credit institutions. However, with Cornexion GmbH, there is an actor who wants to change this situation and is pursuing this relevant component of the startup ecosystem with great energy. One of the main contacts or institutions is currently the NBank as a public funding institution, which offers favourable and attractive startup loans and startup grants for founders and startups.

### Expertise

Most of the “expertise” institutions focus on the fields of mechanical engineering, logistics, agriculture, energy and IT. However, it is the case that all these areas do not really have a focus or a certain proximity to start-ups or start-up activities. Thus it can be said that although the Emsland region has a high level of professional knowledge through the various institutions, expertise networks and companies, this knowledge is not yet or only very rudimentarily accessible to startups. Only the Chamber of Industry and Commerce provides targeted support for founders and startups with consultation days on legal advice, tax law and patent and trademark law. In this respect, the Mittelstand 4.0 Kompetenzzentrum can also be regarded as an expert institution, as it can offer targeted support especially in the areas

of maritime trade, crafts and agriculture. In general, however, it can be said that, from a technical and professional point of view, some points of contact between startups and industrial or expertise institutions are still to improve.

### Education

The Emsland region does not have a research university, but with the Osnabrück University of Applied Sciences in Lingen (Ems) it has an excellent and above all practice-oriented science location. The Osnabrück University of Applied Sciences in Lingen (Ems) offers a wide range of interdisciplinary teaching and research opportunities for its 2,300 students with 22 degree programmes and four institutes for “Management and Technology”, “Communication Management”, “Theatre Education” and “Dual Study Programmes”. The institutes for “Dual Study Programmes” and “Management and Technology” cooperate with a total of over 300 partner companies and teach with a strong practical orientation. In addition to the services offered by traditional teaching (start-up seminars, business planning, etc.), there are also events such as the Campus Convention, as an advanced event for company spin-offs or business management games, etc.).

### Support

With the Emsland GmbH, the Emsland region has an institution which supports founders of all kinds, but preferably founders in the classical sense and with an organic growth potential. Furthermore, there is the Mittelstand 4.0 Kompetenzzentrum Lingen and it.emsland, which offer comprehensive support (workshops, seminars etc.) to founders, especially in the area of digital or data-driven business models. The three regional business development agencies in Lingen, Meppen and Papenburg also provide public/regional support for start-ups in the classic sense, but not yet a comprehensive support for start-ups. From an infrastructural point of view, with the Part of Port, the Co-Working in the IT-Zentrum and some other Co-Working facilities in the Emsland, there is a solid basis of offers in terms of infrastructure, but this should be further expanded. In addition, an incubator with a focus on digital business models and start-up projects is being planned as a further support measure in the IT-Zentrum in Lingen (Ems).


## CONNECTING THE DOTS – BILATERAL DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN CONSORTIUM PARTNERS

*From the end of March 2020 onwards, each region held bilateral discussions with the other five regions of the consortium within a period of six weeks. The goal of these bilateral discussions was to find common ground for interregional collaboration and identify overlaps both from a content point of view and between members of the ecosystems.*

It was also part of these discussions to establish relevancy for the Ems-Dollart-regio itself which represents the cross-border aspect of the project (question 3). The discussions were also meant to get a better understanding of the regional ecosystems and its special features. The following four questions were used as discussion guidelines and the outcomes of the regional talks were summarized into a special form-template and made accessible to the consortium in a dedicated online database of the project.

### Form used to guide bilateral discussions:

Interreg V A project  
Startup Ems-Dollart-Region  
Startup Eems-Dollart-Regio



Bilateral between the following two regions (please tick two boxes):

Emsland  
 Oldenburger Land  
 Ostfriesland  
 Drenthe  
 Friesland  
 Groningen

*The main goal of the bilateral is to share common ground on which we can build on as a project. If we can determine all the possibilities between different regions, we can also see what we can work on/with for the rest of the project period. The bilateral scope is just a start. The entire ecosystem and its well networking functioning is the goal of the project.*

<b>Date:</b>
1. What possibilities do you see to collaborate together, in the areas of: - Sectors (for example both regions are strong in the field of Energy or Health, so they can work together on those areas) - Support systems (for example organizing events that are interesting for both regions, or learning from each other – between regions sharing best practices on certain topics)
Answer:
2. What missing links or overlap do you see within both regions? Where can the two regions help each other?
Answer:
3. Where do you see between the two regions a relevance or links to the EDR region as a whole?
Answer:
4. Are there other results worth mentioning which came up during the conversation?
Answer:

### Questions for the bilateral discussions:

1. What possibilities do you see to collaborate together, in the areas of:
  - Sectors (for example both regions are strong in the field of Energy or Health, so they can work together on those areas)
  - Support systems (for example organizing events that are interesting for both regions, or learning from each other – between regions sharing best practices on certain topics)
2. What missing links or overlap do you see within both regions? Where can the two regions help each other?
3. Where do you see between the two regions a relevance or links to the EDR region as a whole?
4. Are there other results worth mentioning which came up during the conversation?

The basis for each discussion was the summary of the ecosystem mapping that every region had written beforehand (see previous section). It was then possible to prepare for the meeting and find access points for a meaningful conversation. Outcomes of the discussions were manifold. For instance, in the bilateral between Groningen and Friesland, the discussion lead to a program of “Sterk Fries Ondernemerschap” that organises lunch meetings in conjunction with the regional university NHL Stenden. These meetings are attended by up to 200 students and many other participants from the Frisian entrepreneurship ecosystem. These events are also used as a platform to present new business ideas, startup success stories and other related topics. During the bilateral discussion it was then decided to make the Startup Ems-Dollart-region project part of one of the next lunch meetings and also include a Dutch-German theme into the discussions. During that same bilateral meeting between the consortium partners Inqubator Leeuwarden and Hanzehogeschool it was discovered, that the regional universities of applied sciences on the Dutch side, namely NHL Stenden, Van Hall Larenstein, Windesheim and Hanzehogeschool all jointly participate in the “De Noorderlingen” entrepreneurship study program. In the meeting it was concluded that a Dutch-German internationalisation subject would be a meaningful addition to the program. In a follow-up the Noorderlingen program manager and the Startup Ems-Dollart-region project team met and discussed how to best approach this in the curriculum.

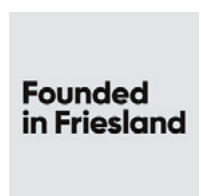
The bilateral discussion often resulted in a better understanding between each partner. Especially the Dutch-German bilaterals proved to serve this purpose. It became apparent, that relatively little is known between Dutch Provinces and the German regions in this context. For example, the educational landscape of Drenthe was unknown to the project team of Oldenburger Land. The project teams of both regions also had to streamline their understanding of focus points and strong industry sectors typical for their regions. During the meetings, relevant sectors were matched where appropriate and the discussions and made plans were set to lead to further collaborations.

The bilateral discussions also gave each consortium partner an opportunity to discuss their own work package and the needs deriving from it. For example Zero 2 One, which is in charge of work package 5-cross border mentoring program, solicited mentors from each partner during the talks. This became very useful especially towards the German side, where Zero 2 One is less connected to the local ecosystems like it is the case with its neighbouring Dutch provinces Groningen and Friesland.

IT-Emsland furthermore was able to use the bilateral talks with their partners to bounce-off ideas regarding the digital platform it is developing (work package 6). This was useful because the digital platform will have the purpose to digitally connect the regions and represent the virtual part of the Ems-Dollart-region startup ecosystem.

In summary, the bilateral meetings between the regions were an essential part of the mapping process. The inventory-like assessment at the beginning of the mapping was therefore qualitatively supplemented by the discussions. These discussions were therefore the first step towards the forming of the cross-border startup ecosystem in the Ems-Dollart-region.

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Word cloud composed out of the 30 bilateral discussion summaries:



## CONCLUSION

The mapping of the Ems-Dollart-region ecosystem has been a very important step for the entire project. First of all, the inventory offered the necessary starting base for the actual task of the project and the attached goals. Only an identified system where its stakeholders and established networks are known can be instrumentalised accordingly.

Furthermore it showed that the consortium is functioning as a

team. Consortium partners got to know each other well and learned how to work with each other. The mapping process also led to a number of newly identified cross-overs and new ideas to meet the overall Startup Ems-Dollart-region project goals. These new ventures are now in development and will serve for additional push-effects for the development of the entrepreneurship ecosystem in the Ems-Dollart-region.

It is now the challenge to implement the projects that derive from the work packages into the specific needs and characteristics that the identified ecosystem with its stakeholders and connections among them requires.

[www.startup-edr.eu](http://www.startup-edr.eu)