



## Social developments

The countryside is in a process of movement. A shift is taking place from working towards to living and experiencing the countryside. Sheer production companies are decreasing in number while the number of companies that provide adventurous experiences are growing. The region is searching for a new balance where social development and enjoying go hand in hand, while taking nature protection and cultural history into account. The regional stakeholders have both personal and shared interest in new opportunities.



## Active cooperation

Awareness is growing with regard to the potential added value to be gained by joining forces between government agencies, advocacy organisations, entrepreneurs, education and research institutions.

A jointly formulated vision on development ensures that all parties contribute to regional development based on their own interests and role. The Vision on Development will be translated into concrete knowledge and research questions aimed at achieving the set goals, within the scope of a regional Knowledge Agenda.



**The Rural Academy is a playground for regional development through regional partners. A free actor, the Rural Academy created playing field to 'learn how to play' within the pilot project in order to provide tangible examples of regional cooperation as well as a tool for sustainable cooperation.**

## Partners in Regional development

- Local and regional authorities: regional policies
- Organisations (water boards, Dutch Agri/Horticulture organization and Nature conservation): regional management, regional organization and regional advocacy
- Entrepreneurs : entrepreneurship, regional development
- Research: region – related themes
- Education: the region as a learning environment



## Pilot projects

In various regions the parties involved in the pilot projects provide form and content to regional cooperation. The Rural Academy has contributed to providing links between stakeholders. Critical factors for achieving successful cooperation have been determined.



## The Free Actor

### Theory

The role of the free actor is usually taken up by the Regional Centres, Regional Innovation Centre (RIC) and the Streekhuis. The Rural Academy itself also acts as a free actor in the Kromme Rijn area (see page 3). The free actor plays an important role in the development of the region, facilitating co-operation between the involved stakeholders, which leads to a common vision on Development and an improved problem articulation.

### Practice

*Eveline Westeneng: 'In the Kromme Rijn area we saw the establishment of the Streekhuis. Together we provide a robust economy, vital natural areas, attractive landscapes and vigorous villages, development of knowledge and innovation, from, for and through rural entrepreneurs.'*

*Hans Hoek: "During the next few years several regional centres will be developed in the western part of the Netherlands."*

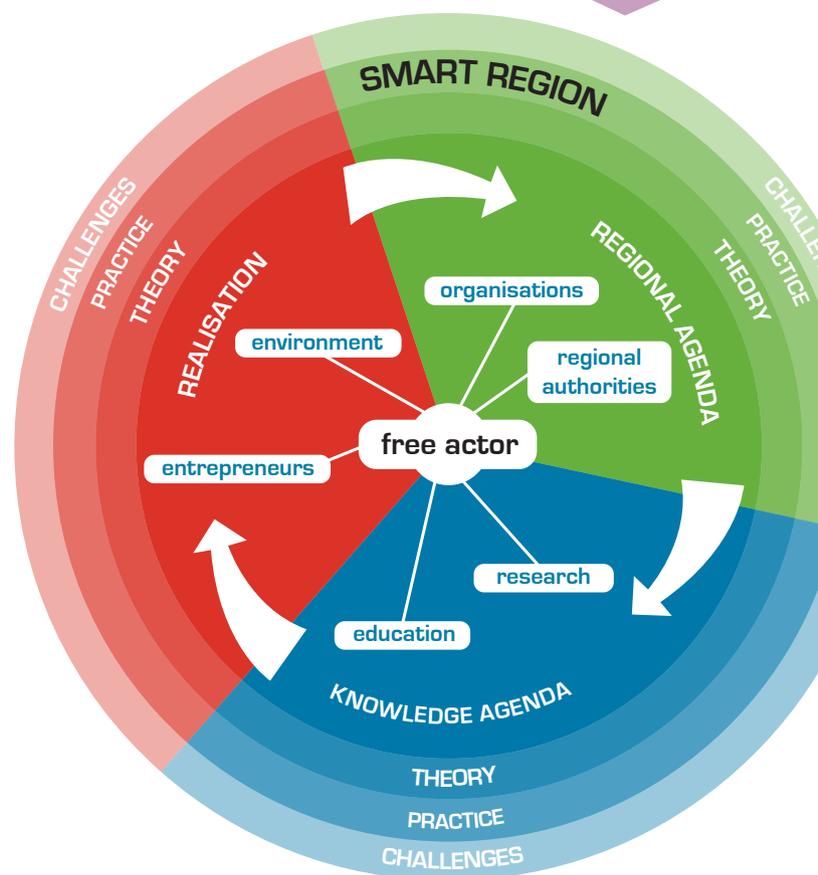
*Jan Huijgen: "It is the competence of the RIC to inspire, kindle enthusiasm, coach, facilitate and achieve results".*

Critical factors for achieving successful results in accurate and effective cooperation within a Smart Learning Region are:

- Sustainable management
- Joint generate interest between stakeholders
- Development of a joint vision
- The necessary drive can be found amongst the entrepreneurs: use it well and consolidate it!

### Challenges

What would be the proper organizational structure for a regional centre? Who is responsible for its ownership? How is long-term funding arranged and what is the role of a knowledge institution in this setting?





## **The Regional Agenda**

When regional stakeholders have drawn up a Vision on Development, they define major development themes within the Regional Agenda. The Regional Agenda has been developed from a future-oriented vision and a comprehensive approach. A region is characterised by its own identity and value. It is of the utmost importance that economic vitality and social values are developed in balance with each other. By formulating the Regional Agenda the involved stakeholders commit themselves to realising these plans in accordance with the formulated vision.

## **The Knowledge Agenda**

### **Theory**

In order to realize the themes of the Regional Agenda, it is translated, in conjunction with Research and Education, into a Regional Knowledge Agenda containing knowledge and research-related themes. Key objective: good coordination with regard to the issues raised in the region and gearing the long-term vision with short-term objectives of achievement.

### **Practice**

- Stichting Vernieuwing Gelderse Vallei strives for continuity in intersectoral knowledge and research approaches, making use of a more programmatic approach.
- The 'Streekhuis' in the Kromme Rijn area aspires to discover the common factor in the issues raised in the field, making use of clear question formulation and taking into account regional entrepreneurs' culture and characteristics.

### **Challenges**

- How does the Regional Knowledge Agenda take shape?
- Who should be involved in drawing up the Knowledge Agenda?
- How do we gear long-term demand for knowledge by regional authorities to national demand for knowledge?

## **Realisation**

### **Theory**

The Knowledge Agenda will result in various tangible projects in which the involved stakeholders will strive for achieving tangible results, each and everyone with his own dynamics and interests, but also based on synergy of collaboration: shared returns.

### **Practice**

Jan Huijen predicts: "Within five years from now, questions raised in a certain area to Knowledge Institutions and Education, advice or research agencies will be linked. Schools are participate in this way through Slow Advice in Smart (Learning) Regions and regional long-term knowledge agendas".

### **Challenges**

- How do you secure the energy invested in the process ?
- How are entrepreneurs mobilized for formulating questions?
- Achieving results and celebrating successes!

**BE SMART  
USE  
SLOW ADVICE**



## INTERVIEW WITH EVELINE WESTENENG

The Kromme Rijn area is situated southeast of the city of Utrecht and is characterised by open and closed landscapes with various watercourses, numerous rural estates. Agriculture in the area focuses on animal husbandry and fruit growing. Het Streekhuis Kromme Rijn acts as the free actor within the region.

### **Eveline, what is actually the Streekhuis?**

The Streekhuis is a co-operative body of government bodies and social organisations. Together, they provide a robust economy, vital natural areas, attractive landscapes and vigorous villages.

### **What are the most important questions in the Kromme Rijn Area?**

It is vital to find a good balance for the whole area. How can aspirations and ideas gear with regional plans? And how can we intensify the relation between town and countryside, in a sustainable manner, and attract more tourists?

### **In which way can these goals be reached?**

A key role in all this is played by Het Streekhuis Kromme Rijn, which acts as promoter and coordinator. Within the scope of these projects knowledge institutions and schools can play a role in their realisation. Through the formulation of a regional knowledge agenda it becomes clear which problems are suitable for a "slow advice" approach.

### **Which was the most memorable pilot project of the Rural Academy from Kromme Rijn Area?**

Two fruit growers, Theo Vernooij and Eric Hees, had students working for them on a new product for their cherries and rose hips. After testing, several concepts have been conveyed to growers, who can now start working with them. Ans students have been able to experience the growers' approach in practice. The free actor, Rural Academy has achieved a good cooperation practice between regional entrepreneurs and education institutions.

### **What are the challenges of the future?**

Stimulating strength and facilitating rural entrepreneurs in The Kromme Rijn region, the economic vitality of both entrepreneurs and region are reinforced. The biggest challenge: to achieve the proper cooperation between the entrepreneurs and Het Streekhuis Kromme Rijn, in favour of the development of a Regional Innovation Centre where ideas turn into real projects and results.

## Reinforcing one another

Eveline Westeneng is a fruit grower in the Kromme Rijn area and a member of the board of the Justly Different Foundation (Stichting Terecht Anders), the club of



entrepreneurs that advocates a broader view on agriculture in the region. On behalf of this foundation she acts a member of the board of the regional committee of Streekhuis Kromme Rijn.

A freelancer, Eveline has been hired by Coöperatie Stadteland in order to participate in the Rural Academy project. This project clearly shows the existing opportunities for regional co-operation with knowledge institutions., so that knowledge can be enhanced and entrepreneurship in the Kromme Rijn area can be reinforced.