
3 Betuwse bloem

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Abstract

The transition programme Betuwse Bloem was carried out to enhance economic and sustainable development of the horticulture sector in the River Area in the province of Gelderland, the Netherlands. Horticulture in the River Area takes place in five highly specialised clusters, separated both spatially and organisationally. The premise at the start of the public-private initiative of Betuwse Bloem was that uniting the clusters will lead to synergy and a powerful competitive area. This should be rewarded with the Dutch Greenport Status. On an institutional level the question arises if and how juxtaposed living and working professionals commit themselves to the ambitions of overarching Betuwse Bloem.

3.1 River Area

'Betuwse Bloem' (Flower of Betuwe) is the name for a programme with the aim to stimulate horticulture in the River Area ('Rivierengebied') in Gelderland, the Netherlands (Figure 1).



Figure 1 Location of the River Area in the Province of Gelderland in the Netherlands

The River Area lies roughly between Gorinchem in the west and Nijmegen in the east. It is embedded between the Rhine and Waal rivers and the A12 and A15 motorways. Together with the Betuwe Lijn railway, these rivers and motorways form a cluster of important west-east connections for the supply of European markets, especially Germany. Horticulture is a relatively important economic sector. The Rhine, Waal and also Linge rivers shaped the landscape, and for very long time horticulture has been

practised on the fertile banks of these rivers. The rivers are also important transport routes. They also played an important role in history: as a frontline in wars (among others the Eighty Years' War, the French-Dutch War), a supplier of water - but also a risk factor for flooding - and a boundary marker in political and religious structures. The eastern part of the Bommelerwaard area, for instance, has been under influence of the Roman Catholic church for centuries, due to the proximity of the Diocese of Den Bosch. The western part of Bommelerwaard is strictly Protestant. Among others, this religious aspect affects the crops that are grown in the areas: Protestant growers do not work on Sundays and therefore do not grow crops like mushrooms, whereas Catholic growers have no problems with working on Sundays.

In the River Area a number of municipalities are located. Horticulture subsectors fruit, trees, mushrooms and greenhouse horticulture are concentrated in different municipalities in so-called clusters. In the River Area, five of these clusters are distinguished: a fruit cluster ('Betuwe'), mushrooms around Maasdriel, avenue tree nurseries around Opheusden, greenhouses with a focus on cutflower production in 'Bommelerwaard' in the western part, and greenhouses with a focus on potted plant production between Arnhem and Nijmegen in the east. Universities of Wageningen (Wageningen UR) and Nijmegen (RUN) are nearby (Figure 2).

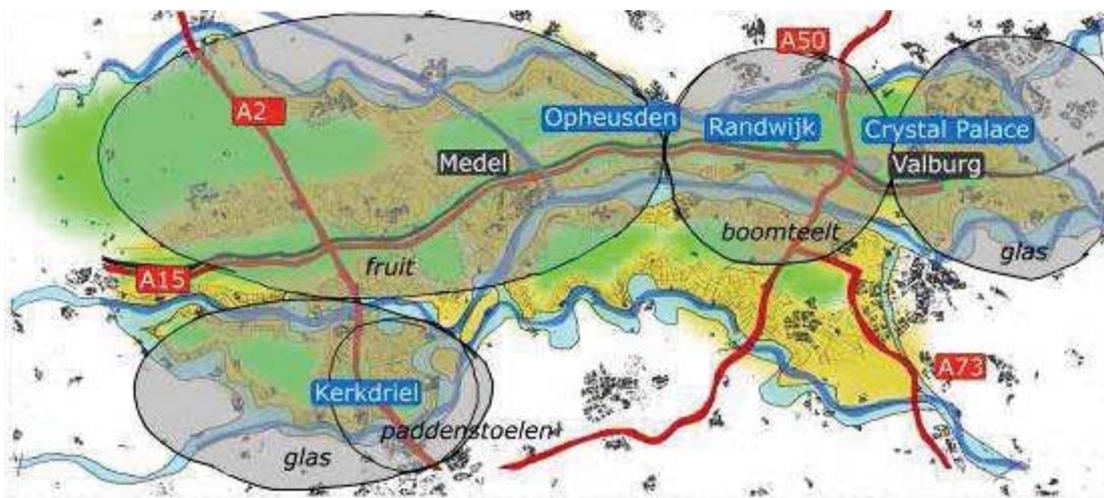


Figure 2 Location of the different horticultural clusters in the River Area

In the name Betuwse Bloem, 'bloem' (flower) refers to horticulture; also, the structure of the region can be represented as a flower, with the A15 motorway as the stem and the clusters as the flower petals.

Horticulture in the River Area can briefly be characterised by the following numbers (based on Jukema and Ruijs (2011):

- 1,200 companies with primary production
- 8,000 ha
- 19,600 employees
- € 670 million gross added value per year.

The five clusters are in close proximity to each other: some 75 km between Bommelerwaard in the west and East Betuwe in the east. The horticultural sector generates considerable added value and employment. It faces some important challenges: the average company size is relatively small (Jukema and Ruijs 2011) which leads to a relatively unfavourable performance; logistical arrangements are fragmented and new developments clash with traditional landscape features (Fontein *et al.* 2010). Probably with the exception of the fruit sector, the horticultural clusters are not very significant and influential in terms of political power compared to other horticultural clusters in the Netherlands.

3.2 National policy: Greenports and Top Sectors

In the Netherlands, national spatial policy is to concentrate horticulture in a few designated areas. The most important horticulture regions have a so-called Greenport status. The name 'Greenport' was launched in 2004 in the *Fourth Memorandum on Spatial Planning (Vierde nota Ruimtelijke Ordening)* by the Dutch ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment. Greenports are spatially bounded clusters of horticulture production and trade of significant (economical) size. The Greenport concept has a theoretical basis in Porter's cluster theory (Porter 1990). In this concept, the proximity of companies in the same sector creates competitive advantages due to economies of scale and network effects. A well-known example of a cluster is Silicon Valley. In 2004, the Dutch national government granted five regions the Greenport status: Westland-Oostland (greenhouse horticulture), Aalsmeer (floriculture), Boskoop (trees), Lisse (flower bulbs) and Venlo (mixed sectors, with special notice for logistics). In 2011 also Noord-Holland Noord (mixed sectors, with special notice for breeding: 'seed valley') received an official Greenport status. The Greenports joined forces, and created an influential lobby platform, called Greenport Holland (GreenportHolland 2011).

In 2004, the national 'Innovation Platform' started by former prime minister Balkenende, developed the 'sleutelgebieden' (Key Sector) policy. Horticulture was present in one of the six Key Sectors: Flowers and Food. The Key Sectors were seen as the jewels in the crown of the Dutch economy, and instrumental to meet the ambitions of the Lisbon agenda to make Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge economy worldwide. Key Sectors have a high level of technology and knowledge, there is a high degree of self-organisation, and they contribute significantly to the competitiveness of the Dutch economy (Scheepbouwer *et al.* 2009). In 2011, the minister of Economics, Agriculture & Innovation Verhagen introduced the Top Sector policy. 'Horticulture and Propagation materials' was designated as one of the nine 'top-sectors' (Verhagen *et al.* 2011). The Top Sector can be regarded as a follow-up of the Key Sector policy, both examples of 'Smart Specialisation' aiming at stimulating a limited number of 'winners'. Only Top Sectors receive public funds for innovation. This is done in public-private partnerships, and private enterprises are getting more influence in directing public innovation budgets. Greenport Holland is designated as the organisation that coordinates agenda setting and research programming by private industry, government and research institutes for the top-sector Horticulture.

Instruments in both spatial and sectorial policy were among others several innovation programmes. An example of a programme to stimulate designated sectors in regions was the public-private 'Pieken in de Delta' (peaks in the lowland) programme. An example of a programme to stimulate agriculture was the public-private 'Transforum' programme, which was financed by the Dutch government (from natural gas revenues). It started in 2005 and ended in 2010. The objective was the development of a sustainable agriculture in the Netherlands, combined with transformation of the national research infrastructure for better implementation of research outcome in practice (Transforum 2011).

Wrapping up the perceived benefits of a Greenport, it brings competitive advantages through economies of scale and network effects; due to the Greenport status, budgets for improvements in infrastructure and economic development will be received; it creates lobby power via the Greenport Holland network, and the national top-sector innovation agenda can be influenced; and it can be used in PR strategies as a proof of the importance of the region.

3.3 Betuwse Bloem

Representatives of regional government and interest groups of the horticultural industry wanted to put the River Area in Gelderland on the map as an important horticultural area of significant economic importance and with international pretensions. Therefore they started the Betuwse Bloem programme in 2005, with a study called 'Development of a vegetal agro corridor across motorway A15' (Boekema *et al.* 2006), which was conducted by representatives of farmer interest group LTO, east-Netherlands development company Oost NV, local-based consultant BoerEnAdvies, and knowledge institutes Wageningen UR and Radboud University Nijmegen. The conclusions were adopted by governor

Keereweer of the province of Gelderland, and he started public-private partnership 'Betuwse Bloem'. Initially, the province of Gelderland financed Betuwse Bloem for the period 2007-2009, and this first phase was extended until 2010. In 2010, an effective lobby led to political support at the province for facilitating a second phase for the period 2011-2014. In 2011 the scope and agenda were set for implementation in the period 2012-2015.

The main objective of the Betuwse Bloem programme was to profile the River Area as an import horticultural area: preferably with a Greenport status because of the implicit and explicit benefits of such a status. Activities of the Betuwse Bloem should enhance cooperation, education, development of sustainable clusters (energy and bio-based economy), innovation and logistics, and keep the landscape attractive for inhabitants and tourists. So a regional transition was needed.

Betuwse Bloem is organised as a network: a group of representatives of different companies and institutes, which has a minimum of formal structures and relies on teams (in Betuwse Bloem: 'platforms' and 'pacts') operating on a project basis. In the centre of the network, a platform of entrepreneurs and a governmental platform operates. Within Betuwse Bloem, each of the clusters is organised in a pact: mushroom pact, fruit pact, avenue tree pact, greenhouse horticulture pact 'Bommelerwaard' and greenhouse horticulture pact 'Arnhem-Nijmegen'. A project team coordinates activities of the platforms and pacts (Betuwse Bloem 2012). The financial capacity of Betuwse Bloem consisted of cash from the provincial government and additional funding from among others Transforum national transition programme, but also in-kind (hours) from the different stakeholders involved.

3.4 Dramaturgical analyse of Betuwse Bloem

To get a more or less formal description of chronological events in Betuwse Bloem, an analysis of articles in the Dutch press was conducted. The search term 'Betuwse Bloem' revealed 161 articles in LexisNexis.academic.nl (from 2006 until December 31 2011). The first article was published in September 2006. Most articles by far were published by De Gelderlander (138), followed by Brabants Dagblad (15). Both are regional newspapers, which emphasises the strong regional scope of Betuwse Bloem. It is remarkable that no articles were found in professional horticultural journals.

2006-2007: Start of Betuwse Bloem

In 2006 and the first months of 2007, articles refer to the start of the Betuwse Bloem programme. Representatives of interest groups and province stressed the importance of cooperation and knowledge dissemination, on topics such as logistics, entrepreneurship, economic development, product innovation and region branding. Municipalities saw the perspectives for economic development and employment. But in some municipalities opposition against Betuwse Bloem plans was reported: against the growth of the greenhouse sector because of the quality of the landscape, against a mushroom company for legal issues in the past, and because of the vagueness of plans in general.

The start of smaller programme teams within the Betuwse Bloem structure are mentioned, the so-called 'pacts'. The Fruit Pact is the first pact mentioned. In 2007 newspapers also mentioned the aim to connect with the Greenports organisation in the Netherlands. The greenhouse region between Arnhem and Nijmegen already called itself a 'greenport', but that status was not granted by national parties because this cluster is too small. In December 2007, January 2008, the Betuwse Bloem programme is mentioned as an argument for locating the new flower auction 'Plantion' in Tiel (part of the River Area) instead of Ede (outside the River Area), but shareholders decided otherwise.

2008-2009: Betuwse Bloem in progress

The Fruit Pact reports progress. It is the most frequently mentioned pact in the LexisNexis articles analysed, with the most projects, and the most clear results. In 2008, also other Pacts (mushrooms, greenhouse horticulture) started activities. Governor Keereweer was satisfied with the progress of Betuwse Bloem, and several other stakeholders explained again the benefits of cooperation and combining forces to improve the position of the regional horticulture in a national and international context. This continued in 2009, when Betuwse Bloem was also mentioned as a programme that would

benefit from infrastructural works such as connecting highways and solving traffic problems on bridges across the Rhine river. In November 2009, the province of Gelderland together with six entrepreneurs installed Regional Innovation Centre (RTC), also a project under the Betuwse Bloem umbrella. RTC should support individual entrepreneurs in the River Area who want to innovate, among others by linking and brokering. Another Betuwse Bloem project was launched in the same period: the Transformum financed project Blooming Cluster. Because Wageningen UR was participant in this project, Betuwse Bloem stakeholders concluded that their programme was finally taken seriously by the scientific community as well.

The objective of the Blooming Clusters project was to enhance cooperation between companies in Blooming Clusters and within the horticulture supply chain, to strengthen their economic position. The Blooming Clusters project consisted of a number of activities: (1) Vision and agenda setting for the themes logistics, energy and landscape for the horticultural locations in the River Area; also preparing an overarching vision. (2) Strategy formulation and building business cases Mushroom Cluster Velddriel, Agribusiness Center Opheusden (trees), Greenhouse theme park Crystal Palace and Fruit Knowledge Center Randwijk. (3) Linking with related networks including Greenport Venlo and Biopark Terneuzen. Also a lot of attention was paid to communication, including the use of new social media like movies on YouTube channel 'Betuwe flips'.

Due to all initiatives, the self-confidence of the Betuwse Bloem partners was rising. Betuwse Bloem received credits as a significant horticultural cluster by the national Greenports organisation, during a meeting organised by Betuwse Bloem at the Fruitmaster auction in the River Area, in November 2009.

2010: Finish of the first phase of Betuwse Bloem

In 2010, results of the Blooming Cluster logistics project, sustainable energy & biobased economy project and development of 'icon' Crystal Palace were presented in so-called business cafes. Fruit Pact, Mushroom Pact, Greenhouse Pact Arnhem-Nijmegen as well as the Betuwse Bloem umbrella programme reported progress. The start of Greenhouse Pact Bommelerwaard was announced in November.

In the last months of 2010, governor Keereweer declared that the province wants to stop subsidising Betuwse Bloem. Ferry Hollinger, chairman of the business platform Betuwse Bloem, supported by other stakeholders (including the Chamber of Commerce) started a lobby for extending the funding of Betuwse Bloem by the province of Gelderland. They stressed the successes obtained: added value was created, new connections were established, dynamics and commitment were enhanced, and Betuwse Bloem claimed its position on the national Greenport agenda. They also emphasised that some initiatives take a long time, especially infrastructural projects, and need extended support from the government.

On February 3 2011, the first phase of the Betuwse Bloem programme was ended officially in a meeting in Zetten in the River Area. Stakeholders like provincial governor Keereweer, Transformum spokesman Bordewijk and participants in the Blooming Cluster project BoerEnAdvies and Wageningen UR, evaluated four years of Betuwse Bloem.

2011: Betuwse Bloem continues

The lobby for extension of the Betuwse Bloem programme was successful. In February 2011 provincial subsidy for Betuwse Bloem was extended for another year. The province stated the explicit condition that individual entrepreneurs be more involved in the different initiatives. This involvement of business parties is mentioned several times in the analysed articles as an aspect that needs improvement: in October 2010 by province official and project manager Kees Pieterse, in November 2010 by alderman De Ronde of municipality Buren (participant in the Fruit Pact) and by governor Keereweer in February 2011 at an evaluation moment of four years of Betuwse Bloem.

In 2011, soon after the evaluation of Betuwse Bloem, Keereweer withdrew as governor. His successor was Jan Jacob van Dijk, who continues the policy of Keereweer regarding Betuwse Bloem. In 2011 Buck Consultants International presented their research, commissioned by the province of Gelderland, on the economic value of Betuwse Bloem (Michon and Koekebakker 2011). They concluded that

Betuwse Bloem is the second largest horticultural cluster in the Netherlands, after Westland-Oostland but before the Greenports in Venlo, Aalsmeer, Boskoop and Lisse. According to *Gelderlander* journalist Walter Post, Van Dijk seemed a bit jealous of Greenport Venlo. Van Dijk presumed that Venlo earned their Greenport status with the organisation of the Floriade Horticulture World Exhibition in 2012. In a meeting in May, Van Dijk mentioned that a Greenport status is important for Betuwse Bloem because of representation of River Area interests and common profiling in Greenport Holland. He asked for plans which would bring Betuwse Bloem the same status as Greenport Venlo. He wanted stronger connections with Food Valley (in Gelderland, near Wageningen) and Health Valley (also in Gelderland, near Nijmegen). Coincidence or not, in December 2011, the River Area announced its candidacy to host the Floriade in 2022. (Unfortunately for Betuwse Bloem, the Floriade organisation decided in 2012 that Almere would be the new host.)

Later in 2011, Betuwse Bloem organised a meeting to put the development of Biobased Economy in the River Area on the agenda. Several Pacts reported progress, among them Greenhouse Pact Arnhem-Nijmegen about the reconstruction of the local greenhouse sector. Results in the tree nursery pact around Opheusden were not very promising: plans to build an Agro Business Centre were not adopted by growers. In December, the province mentioned their investment in a - revolving - innovation fund for horticulture entrepreneurs, which they hoped would help to stimulate innovation in Gelderland. The name of the fund: 'Betuwse Bloem Innovates'.

3.5 Projects & Pacts

The programme of Betuwse Bloem is an 'umbrella' of projects, some initiated by the Betuwse Bloem project team, or the parent organisations of the project team, especially the Province of Gelderland. But most projects were initiated by the different Pacts. Until 2011, more than 70 projects were already conducted, with different scopes: from entrepreneurship courses, energy scans of cold storages, to feasibility studies for multi-modal logistic hubs, lobby projects for improving highway infrastructure and design studies for 'iconic' experience centres like Crystal Palace. (Engelbart and Schuur 2011).

In general, projects initiated by pacts are more tailored to the specific circumstances of companies than those initiated on the level of Betuwse Bloem. Pact-initiated projects are in general more specific for one horticultural subsector, or more specific for the exact location. Subjects of the projects directed by Betuwse Bloem are more inclusive. This is illustrated in Table 2. In this table, projects from the overview by Engelbart and Schuur (2011) were assigned to classes for specific and more general sector (innovation, sustainability etc.) and location (infrastructure, spatial planning, etc.) subjects. Greenhouse pact Bommelerwaard is missing in the overview; projects in this pact were started in 2012, after the overview was made (in 2011).

Table 2
Types of projects in pacts and Betuwse Bloem programme

| | Subsector specific | Location specific | Horticulture general | Region general |
|--|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Greenhouse pact Arnhem Nijmegen (n=14) | 29% | 50% | 14% | 7% |
| Avenue tree pact (n=19) | 63% | 21% | 11% | 5% |
| Fruit Pact (n=16) | 56% | 31% | 6% | 6% |
| Mushroom Pact (n=14) | 64% | 7% | 29% | 0% |
| Betuwse Bloem programme (n=10) | 0% | 0% | 40% | 60% |

Tables 3 and 4 offer some examples of the different projects.

Table 3

Examples of projects initiated by pacts

| | Horticulture subsector specific | Location specific |
|---------------------------------|--|---|
| Greenhouse Pact Arnhem-Nijmegen | Vision on sustainable energy for greenhouses | Reconstruction greenhouse area Huissen-Angerden |
| Avenue Tree Pact | Sustainable harvest and storage of trees | Improvement infrastructure for avenue tree centre Opheusden |
| Fruit Pact | Innovative crop protection spray technique for orchards | Fruit street Ingen |
| Mushroom Pact | Alternative processing of 'champost' (mushroom propagation material) | Feasibility study for a river harbour at Hedel |

Table 4

Examples of projects initiated on Betuwse Bloem programme level

| | Horticulture in general | Regional |
|---------------|--|---|
| Betuwse Bloem | Opportunities of biomass Horticulture education | Blooming Clusters: vision & strategy development on landscape, logistics and energy grids |

Most of the subsector-specific projects are about innovations in cultivation or processing techniques. Although implementation of the results in other clusters is not necessarily impossible, implementation in the clusters concerned is more likely because of adaption to local circumstances and a closer involvement of entrepreneurs who are more likely to be trusted because of their proximity.

All five pacts are initiated by 'founding fathers'. For instance, for Greenhouse pact Bommelerwaard: Province of Gelderland, Rabobank Bommelerwaard, and two local associations for enhancing horticulture: 'Vereniging tot Verbetering van de Tuinbouw in de Bommelerwaard' (VVTB) and 'Stichting Stimulering Tuinbouw Bommelerwaard' (SSTB). Every pact has a manager; for Bommelerwaard the pact manager is an employee of LTO Noord Projecten. Pacts formulate ambitions and a strategy to achieve these via projects. Greenhouse Pact Bommelerwaard organised a first meeting for the growers in the region. Some 70 growers attended this meeting (BetuwseBloem 2012). The pact management made a pre-selection of seven relevant themes, and invited experts for introducing them. The seven themes were entrepreneurship, image, employment strategies, water use, energy use, markets and logistics. Together with the experts, the growers generated a number of project ideas and set priorities. Greenhouse pact Bommelerwaard intends to conduct 20 projects from this list in four years. The pact management organises financial support, mobilises the network, is in charge of communication on pact level, and participates in the Betuwse Bloem programme team.

The boundaries of the pacts coincide with the boundaries of the clusters, geographically - rivers - but presumably not only geographically. Clusters seem to work quite separately from each other. For instance, unions that protect interests, like farmer organisation LTO, still have a strong local basis, and the greenhouse part of LTO ('LTO Noord Glaskracht') has two different sections in the province of Gelderland: Gelderland Oost - where greenhouse pact Arnhem-Nijmegen is located - and Gelderland West - where greenhouse pact Bommelerwaard is located. The administrators of these interest groups are entrepreneurs with their companies located in the area of concern, so they are personally involved in what's happening in the specific region in the specific subsector. Like almost every horticulture or horticulture production company in the Netherlands, most of those in the River Area are family businesses. There are strong family ties within subsectors. Furthermore, Dutch horticulture has a rich history of region-based cooperative organisations for, among others, selling products at auctions, purchasing inputs and banking.

3.6 Linking clusters to Betuwse Bloem

The described specificity makes it more attractive for entrepreneurs to commit themselves to pacts, as the example of Bommelerwaard indicates. But on the other hand it raises the question what the added value is of joining clusters for among others knowledge development and innovation, important mechanisms in the construction of a competitive region.

The regional transition was the ambition of members of the government and boards of governors and directors. Their ambition was to receive a Greenport status, activities were formulating visions and strategies, and organising public and private funding. The paradigm behind links to general strategies about Greenports, logistic (and knowledge) infrastructure. Representatives of provincial and municipal government presumed that a joint ambition to improve competitiveness by improving infrastructure, creates new bonds between stakeholders in the area by itself.

Although on the Betuwse Bloem programme level the importance of cooperation, tuning and commitment were recognised, it is not clear how entrepreneurs and their existing networks can find a place in the Betuwse Bloem regional strategy. On a regional level, Betuwse Bloem linked to the clusters on local level via the pacts, but the internal links in clusters seems to be much more robust and cohesive. The cooperation in the clusters appeared to have a professional background, being engaged in similar horticultural sectors, and that is something else than a regional programme. It seems relevant to get more insight into the way entrepreneurs and related stakeholders have cooperated in their professional specialisation for years. A comparison can be made, among others, with guilds - institutions with their own paradigms and rules - on accession, doing business, handling problems and dealing with uncertainties and risks.

For managers, practitioners and researchers in a regional programme like Betuwse Bloem it is necessary to know and acknowledge the practices of existing professional associations. It provides the opportunities to connect the overarching regional programme to the capacities and ambitions of the highly-specialised professionals in the area. Betuwse Bloem has recognised this challenge, and established a business platform. In the business platform, growers and entrepreneurs from the different clusters were members. The chair of the platform was former auction director Hollinger. Hollinger was quite active in the lobby for Betuwse Bloem, as the dramaturgical analysis showed. The question is, however, to what extent the entrepreneurs in the different pacts were really represented by members of the business platform, or whether the business platform was a part in the organisation that had to be installed from a programme management point of view. The observation is that the influence of the entrepreneurs via the business platform was increasing through the years. Wageningen UR, with a region-based knowledge institute in Randwijk, located very close to the tree nursery cluster in Opheusden and the Betuwe fruit cluster, also responded to the challenge of getting close connections to the business networks in the clusters, by establishing a regional knowledge centre, aiming at short communication and knowledge dissemination lines with the clusters.

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