

# Conference Growing Connections

4 November 2014



Leen Verbeek, King's Commissioner of the province of Flevoland, welcomes all participants with an inspiring speech!



## Nature meets economy

The **Growing Connections** conference on 4 November in Almere, Netherlands, brought together partners from two exciting European-funded projects: the Smart Europe project, which addressed issues of innovation and entrepreneurship in cities and Regions, and the Green InfraNet project, which shared knowledge and experience of the development of Green Infrastructure as a part of regional development.

The conference was sub-titled '*Where nature meets economy*', and set out to explore the important connections between the environmental quality and sustainability of a region and its potential for economic growth.

The setting of Almere in Flevoland was significant: in addition to acting as the lead partner for these two projects, the Province of Flevoland has also embraced the possibilities of green growth, as the Province's King's Commissioner, Leen Verbeek, reminded us in his introductory remarks. The newest province in the Netherlands is not afraid to explore new ways of doing things.

National Park in Belgium, and Dinand Ekkel from Vilentum Hogeschool – focused on the need for environment and economy to find a common ground on which to engage and develop.

These presentations emphasised the importance of speaking a common language, where the economic value of environment could be assessed and evaluated, but also where the need for economic growth did not compromise the health and biodiversity benefits of green space.

These themes were taken up later in the day, when a panel of political representatives from the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK discussed the political questions which affect the development of a truly green economy.



Ilan Hill



Akos Szabo



Dinand Ekkel  
Johan van den Bosch



### Workshops and presentations

- Monitoring of nature values through GIS schemes – the Natterjack Toad
- Tools for the economic value of nature
- A peer review experience
- Demola, an innovation hub from Finland



Political debate with Thomas Hagg, Angeliki Stogia, Jan Nico Appelman and Anne-Marie Spierings.

## Nature meets economy

The topics discussed included:

1. Should cities and regions have more control over their innovation policy? It is clear that many of the partner regions in these projects have a strong drive for innovation and enterprise which makes best use of their environmental assets, but this is not always supported by national policies.
2. Does environmental protection require us to expect lower levels of economic growth? It was not accepted that environmental challenges are a barrier to economic growth, but rather that they offer new economic opportunities which regions can explore, through the development of new companies, new technologies, financial savings and improvements to health and well-being.

3. How do we empower citizens to make changes in their own neighbourhoods and cities? It was recognised that information and awareness are essential tools in helping citizens to get truly involved in the decisions that affect their lives. Local and Regional Authorities have a responsibility to engage citizens in the environmental debate, and can bring about significant environmental change in this way.

### Websites

GreenInfraNet:  
<http://www.greeninfranet.org/>

SMART Europe:  
<http://www.smart-europe.eu/>



### Thank you

The Province of Flevoland would like to thank all participants for attending the conference.

**Text: Ian Hill**

**Design: Daniek van de Ven**



## Future cooperation

And where next for these projects? Akos Szabo from the Interreg IVc programme's secretariat office in Lille gave us an update on the new Interreg Europe programme, which will offer exciting new opportunities for the regions in the project to continue their cooperation and collaboration. The partners at the conference showed a real willingness to extend the discussion, and to develop new projects together which explore the important link between nature and economy.



European Union  
 European Regional Development Fund



# Links

## Presentations

<http://www.greeninfranet.org/new.php?id=57>

## Photos

Final conference:

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.710268209070170.1073741832.242663525830643&type=1>

Working visit 5 November:

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.713962182034106.1073741833.242663525830643&type=3>

## Videos

GreenInfraNet: <http://www.greeninfranet.org/index.php?page=project-videos>

SMART Europe: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKPPmWXrvPA>