

### **SmartSports4GoodLife: let's meet Cluster Sports & Technology**

Cluster Sports & Technology is an open innovation cluster for sports and vitality, located in the Brainport region in South Netherlands. In the cluster more than 100 companies, SportFieldLabs, public authorities, universities and knowledge institutions move together for innovation for sports and vitality. The innovation turnover of the cluster is more than 5 M€ per year. *“An excellent starting point, but certainly not the end point”* according to Rene Wijlens, Cluster manager. *“Our cluster partners have expressed the ambition to further develop and professionalise the cluster. The goal is to create a globally appealing ecosystem for innovation, start-ups and business development in the domain of sport and vitality, building upon the ambitions and technological excellences of South Netherlands”*.

To reach this goal the transfer from market needs to innovation and product validation leading to business creation and new business is key. *“To further improve the transfer, we need to strengthen the link and support to SME's to achieve a quicker and better uptake of the innovation and business opportunities that emerge. Besides, generic trends as digitalisation, sustainability and more recently also Covid-19 consequences have to be met.”*

In Europe various sports clusters exist that are facing similar challenges to strengthen the link with their SME-members. These clusters are already familiar with each other and operate in various European innovation networks, such as EPSI and the smart specialisation platform ClusSport. Five of these clusters have joined forces to learn from each other and share good experiences and working methods to engage on the challenges with the cluster members. Marc van der Zande, project manager for Cluster Sports & Technology, explains: *“The cluster collaboration in the SmartSports4GoodLife Project will provide and create new business opportunities and transfer knowledge to SME's. The project will improve cross-sectoral cooperation, especially with technology, energy, tourism and health sectors. With this we can address the main challenges the sector is facing in Europa and advance in the digitalisation process and the provision of low carbon products and services. We want to learn from other sports cluster, but we also have something to offer”*.

The project SmartSports4GoodLife has a strong focus on the involvement of SMEs. The clusters will facilitate and stimulate the exchange of companies' offers and needs between the clusters as to learn/create new innovations and collaborations. For this they will organise company visits to other sport SMEs and stakeholders, B2B matchmaking and networking events at regional and European levels for this exchange.

A specific task of the Cluster Sports & Technology in the project is to help the other clusters to sharpen their strategy. Cluster Sports & Technology has experience with formulation of cluster strategies from other projects such as Inno4Sports. Marc van der Zande explains: *“First we ask the clusters to formulate their regional state of affairs. It is an overview of goals, facts and figures and trends of their own region specially linked to SMEs and digitalisation, sustainability and the provision of low carbon solutions. These overviews will be used to analyse complementarities among clusters and to identify and analyse the main and real needs of SMEs regarding services and product offered by clusters. Furthermore, these overviews will be used to identify common synergies and share resources to develop activities at European level to enforce the Cluster collaboration. In this way the collaboration and cooperation of cross-sectoral clusters will be strengthened. Also key complementarities among the clusters will be identified to strengthen their*

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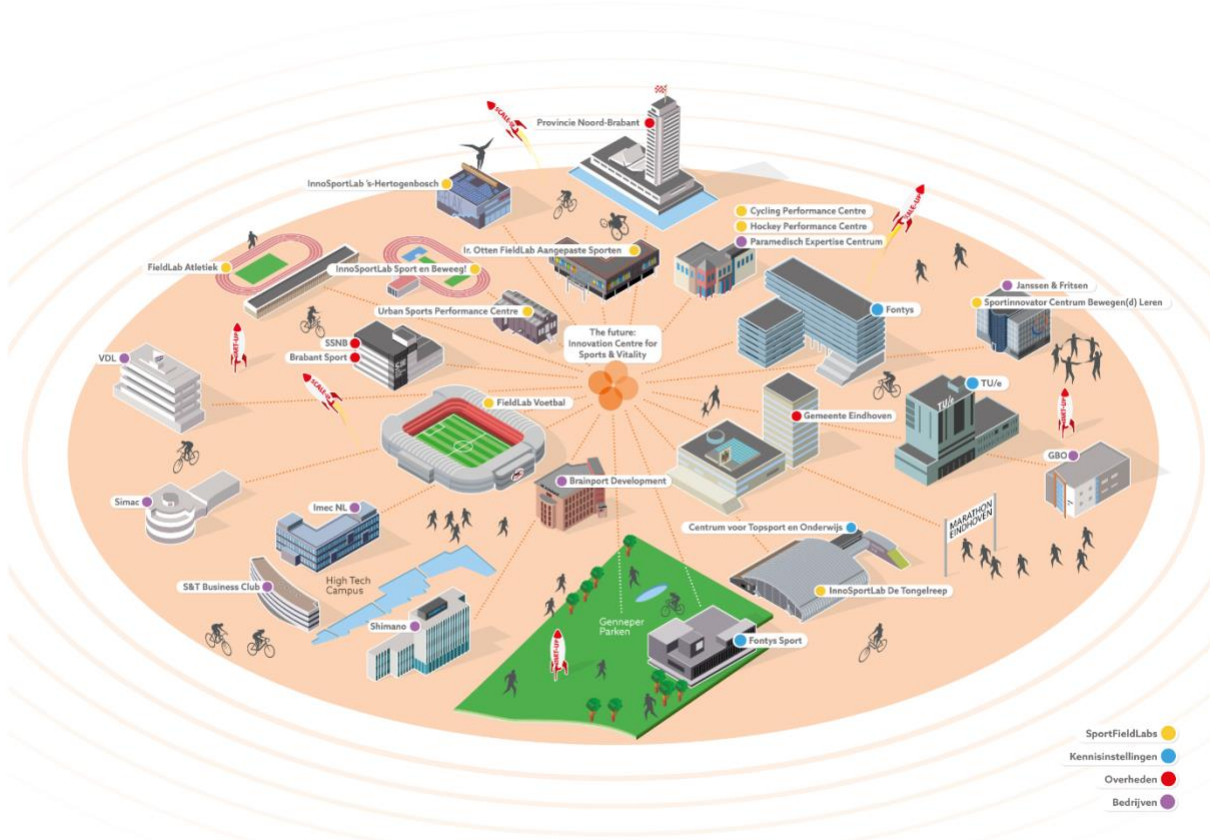
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collaboration and cooperation by defining and offering common programme of services to their members. All this information will be used to update a comprehensive (individual) cluster strategy and to define and implement a five years cluster partnership strategy to support the individual cluster strategies."

Cluster Sports & Technology has already started gathering the regional state of affairs to exchange between the cluster partners. Rene Wijlens and Marc van der Zande are enthusiastic about the project and the consortium "We see a lot of opportunities to learn from each other and work together. It is a great way to sharpen our regional cluster excellence".



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