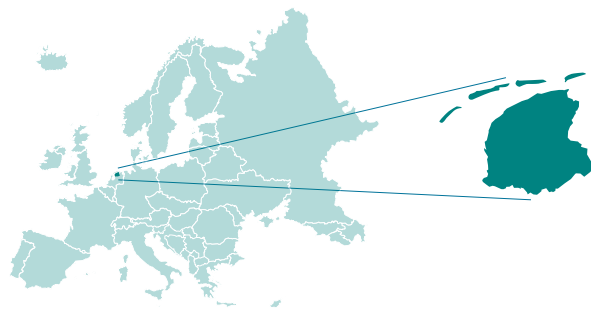


Province of Fryslân, Northern Netherlands

provinsje fryslân
provincie fryslân 

A rural front-runner with the ambition to become the most circular region in Europe by 2025



Province of Fryslân, Netherlands

 appr. 654,000 inhabitants (2022)

 5.750 km² area

 192 per km² population density

Characteristics of the region

- Rural area with smaller villages and divided power, but no predominant large city.
- 99% of the region's companies are SMEs.
- Together with the other two provinces Groningen and Drenthe, it forms the Region of the Northern Netherlands.
- Most relevant sectors of the regional (circular) economy: circular agriculture and soil (especially cattle, tulips and potatoes), circular plastics, water technologies, construction, tourism, mobility.

Baseline situation

Starting its circular economy planning and activities in 2014, the province had very favourable conditions to establish a circular economy. This was especially related to the innovative and motivated stakeholders with the right mindset and identification with the region, as well as already existing innovative economic ecosystems.

- Strong agricultural sector and connected mechanical engineering clusters in Drachten
- Cluster for green chemistry and plastics: the National Test Centre Circular Plastics and the innovative recycling factory Omrin in Heerenveen
- Water Campus Wetsus in Leeuwarden
- Horizontal economic structure: 99% of the companies in the province are SMEs. They are highly innovative, complement each other and are of equal importance in the region.
- High identification of citizens with the region and the interest of citizens in other factors than economic growth have influenced political decisions and shifted the goal towards broader prosperity.

Starting point and objectives

- A **regional visioning process** was initiated in 2015 based on the election of Leeuwarden to the European capital of culture for 2018. The knowledge for place-based policy making has partly existed before related to the development of a **smart specialisation strategy** (RIS3).
- In the same year, **waste collectors and like-minded companies** came together and saw opportunities in becoming circular. They are highly motivated for this change, willing to experiment and thus very innovative. Together with the Municipality of Leeuwarden and the province of Fryslân, they commissioned a **material flow analysis** (MFA) as a first step to closing loops in 2016.
- The **Circular Fryslân Association** (CFA) is the multi-stakeholder organization in the province for the transition towards a circular economy. Based on inspiration from the MFA, it was founded in 2016 by 25 companies and organisations and inspired more than hundred actors for the transition.
- Regional politicians from the **province of Fryslân** decided to support the movement. Together with the CFA, they organised round tables to think through sector transitions more thoroughly and fix strategic agreements in the so-called transition-do-agendas in 2018. With the CFA, they are mutually “critical friends” with short lines of communication and flat hierarchies. They support the transition “where the energy is” by displaying iconic projects and filling the gaps where necessary. It was helpful that the topic is located within the **Economic Ministry** and that the Deputy of Economics became inspired after a while.
- The objective is to become the **most circular region in Europe until 2025**.

Focus of the initiative

- **Circular agriculture and soil:** The strong dairy industry goes hand in hand with environmental emissions. As the Frisians are proud of their landscape, nature is of high value to them. Extensification of cattle is needed to solve this challenge and retain biodiversity in the region. Additionally, an increasing production of biobased materials provides both new earning models for the agricultural sector.
- **Circular plastics:** More and more policy focus are given on the growing cluster of plastics. E.g. the state of the art recycling factory Omrin is highly innovative and knowledge gets a boost with the National Test Centre for Circular Plastics (NTCP).
- **Water:** Since 2017, Circular Friesland has been working closely with the specialists at Water Campus Leeuwarden to flesh out this theme. In practical terms, the objectives are returning human excreta from sewage to agriculture, recovering raw materials from production processes and working on rainwater storage and water reuse in residential areas.
- **Circular construction:** In Friesland, many small- and four bigger, very innovative companies have started working on circularity even before the framework was set by public procurement. Also, social housing companies try to work together with regional construction companies. Iconic projects are e.g., the Swettehûs, constructed solely from re-used materials and energy-self-sufficient, the world’s first bike made from recycled toilet paper extracted from sewage, and the Netherlands’ first circular school building ROC Friese Poort.
- **Tourism (on the islands):** The high level of tourism creates a lot of pollution on the islands. Friesland cooperates with the other Dutch and German islands to find circular solutions.

★ Spotlights

- **Education for circularity:** The three pillars of an integral approach to education in Friesland incorporate the Sustainable Development Goals, the seven pillars of a circular economy and a whole school approach where students perceive a circular economy as a constantly recurring theme in their education and school environment.
- **Circular design and entrepreneurship:** Central to circular design and circular business models is value retention. In addition, the extent to which the product is detachable is important. For example, upcycling furniture from waste and surpluses (Louise Cohen), street furniture designed and produced in a circular manner and assembled by people with disabilities (vanAfval) and product-as-a-service models, where customers pay for the use of furniture (OPnieuw).
- **Circular procurement:** The local governments in Friesland have signed a Circular Economy ambition statement, including the intention to buy only circularly produced street furniture, the aim to replace the vehicle fleet (where necessary) in a completely fossil-free manner and the goal that by 2020, at least 10% of all physical products will be purchased circularly. Examples are the circular catalogue ROEN to buy sustainable innovations and the cycling bridge in the village of Ritsumasyl made from bio composite of plant fibres.



In Friesland, education the circular economy is present in everyday school life © Circular Friesland Association

🏢 Stakeholders involved

- **Circular Friesland association** – over 100 different actors involved: 40 to 50 % SMEs, 25% municipalities, knowledge institutes (including schools), NGOs and interest groups.
- The **province of Friesland** supports the CFA and is an additional facilitator for the process.
- Strong cooperation with **other provinces** in the region of the Northern Netherlands to close the loops and interest in knowledge transfer on EU level.

👛 Financing

The region and the **province** invested a lot in the planning and strategic visioning process.

Other funding has come from the **European level**. ERDF funding is for example linked to the RIS3 strategy and Fryslân is taking part in EU-projects like REPLACE, Circ-NSR, PLASTIX and Frontsh1p to develop and implement new solutions and technologies. The province tries to drive the transition with circular procurement regulations, but its thorough implementation depends heavily on institutional cooperation.

Key learnings and replicability

Rural areas should **make use of their advantages**:

- Rural areas have a good source of bio-based material from agriculture.
- Even though rural areas often lack the large scale for innovative solutions, and universities and start-ups are more often in cities, a horizontal economic structure and closeness can help to build a strategy together and to create regional value chains and industrial symbioses.

The **mindset** can be supportive:

- Circular economy practices are closer to common sense and are often already in place.
- A strong DIY attitude and going with what you have (especially on the islands) means doing more than just talking about it.

- In addition, people are closer to nature and biodiversity is valued.
- Smaller villages might also have the advantage of a lot of volunteers and cultural identity.

The example of Friesland shows that a rural region can be among the **frontrunner** regions in Europe. Motivated stakeholders and a **vivid bottom-up energy** are most important for the transition, but the mindset in rural areas provides helpful preconditions.

Other regions can use the approach to support “where the energy” is and benefit from the proximity of actors to create a **common vision**, momentum and a regional community around the issue.

Challenges and outlook

Changing mindsets: A more difficult, but necessary next step is to motivate the companies that are not yet involved. They have a CE team, but still have a siloed ambition in the organisation even though they took steps to broaden it. The capacity of these actors also depends on financial means. Increasing circular education and interest of consumers also remains an area for investment.

The province has also realised that they will not achieve their goal of circularity, if they do not influence product and waste legislation on national and European level, as this often creates barriers to implementation.

The CFA has grown a lot, which raises questions about **the right governance model** to steer the transition in the region and the optimal balance in membership.

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