

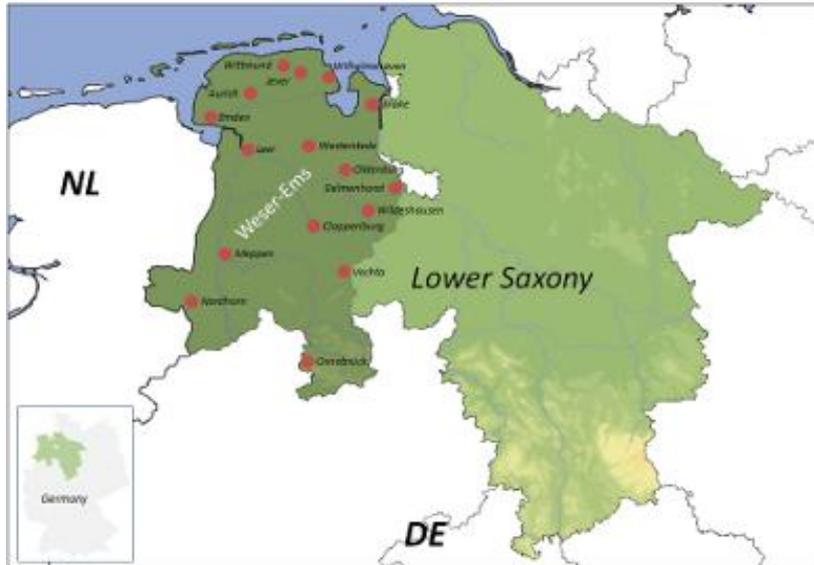
Weser-Ems (Germany)

Background Document - Territorial Innovation System and Experience

Region Description

The Weser-Ems region (NUTS II) is situated in the Northwest of Lower Saxony at the border of the Netherlands.

- area: about 15,000 km² (half the size of the Kingdom of Belgium)
- population: 2.4 million inhabitants
- GDP: 25.577 EUR per capita (2009)



The population density of Weser-Ems (162.7 inhabitants per km²) is relatively low in comparison to the national average (230.6) due to its rural character. However, Weser-Ems is a growing region and has developed quite well in the last years.

One indicator in this regard is the high dynamic of population growth within the region which is attributable to the birth surplus and migration. Moreover, the number of employed persons has grown at a rate above the German average. This positive overall trend on the job market is due to the fact that companies can draw on a well-established network of primary, secondary and tertiary educational facilities. Another important aspect in this context is the increase of business tax revenues. In spite of lower collection rates than in other regions, these revenues have grown by more than 20 percent since 1990 which points out the positive development of the region's economy.

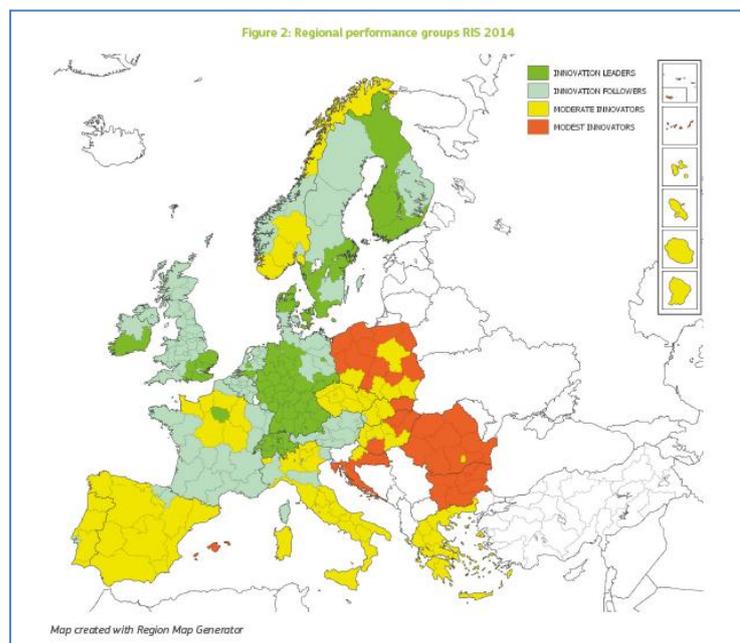
Variety is the keyword characterising the economic structure of the Weser-Ems region. Whereas the North is mainly focused on the maritime industry, an emphasis is put on logistical services in the South. Additionally, the amount of other branches that are of major importance for the entire region is manifold: it ranges from tourism, food industry, automobile manufacturing, plastics processing, the textile and electrical industry to mechanical engineering and metal industries. Another crucial point showing the change in Weser-Ems towards a sustainable economic structure is the number of employees working in the services sector today: nearly two out of three are employed in this growing sector.

The region's character is also shaped by many small and medium enterprises as well as crafts enterprises. Their innovative approaches make for a healthy mix of economic activities. In addition, Weser-Ems has asserted itself as a location for nationally and internationally operating companies. Leading wind power producers, high tech shipbuilders and a variety of the largest German food producers consider the region with its good potential for development and opportunities for cooperation their home.

The size and extension as well as the development of the region in the Northwest of Lower Saxony have made it necessary to provide a good transport infrastructure. Today Weser-Ems is connected to all European business hubs. Whether by car, train, ship or airplane, the region offers excellent opportunities for efficient and economic mobility. The federal motorways A1, A29 and A31 connect the region with the Ruhr area as well as with the important European ports of Bremen and Hamburg. Motorways A28 and A30 secure the region's connection to the Benelux states and new markets in the East. There is also good and reliable access by water, rail and air. The most important sea and river ports in Lower Saxony, together with a system of widely ramified inland water routes, a rail network for various types of rail systems and the close proximity to the international airports of Bremen and Münster/Osnabrück make sure that people and goods can move in all directions at low cost and by modern means of transport. Nevertheless, due to the rural character in some parts of the region the accessibility must still be enhanced. The completion of the Jade-Weser port (deep sea port with approx. 1 billion Euro investments) in Wilhelmshaven in 2012 is an outstanding example for the dynamic development of the region.

Regional Innovation Performance

European Innovation Scoreboard 2014 groups Europe's regions into different and distinct innovation performance groups based on their relative performance on the Regional Innovation Index compared to that of the EU. Due to its innovation performance Weser-Ems has been evaluated as "Regional Innovation Leader". Regional Innovation Leaders are those regions which perform 20% or more above the EU average. 34 NUTS II-regions in Europe were assessed as Regional Innovation Leaders (see map from Regional Innovation Scoreboard 2014, p. 16).



Regional development and innovation in Weser-Ems are majorly determined by a broad and multifaceted basis of SME and three dominant fields of competence: the agricultural sector, the energy economy and the maritime economy. In all three fields of competence, the region is characterized by a wide spectrum of enterprises, networks, educational facilities and research institutions while the latter work very application-oriented. Although the regional competences in all three thematic fields is non-controversial beyond regional boundaries and Weser-Ems displays a very dynamic development also in national and international comparison.

Regional Innovation System

Established in 1978, the region Weser-Ems was administratively dissolved at the end of 2004 due to an administrative reform in Lower Saxony. While the State Government of Lower Saxony has a small representation office in Weser-Ems, the region is currently without a formal regional authority. However, local authorities of the 17 Landkreise and kreisfreie Städte (districts and independent cities) of Weser-Ems established an assembly to voluntarily take over the task of further developing the region, ensure continuity and create common policies, for instance, in the field of innovation.

The region started to work on its first Regional Innovation Strategy in 1996 (within the framework of a project financed by EU Funds) and then permanently continued to develop and update it until 2010 (even despite the above mentioned reform and administrative dissolution in 2004).

This broad regional involvement – bottom up – is perceived as the basis for success by the responsible persons. All 17 districts (*Landkreise*) and independent cities (*kreisfreie Städte*) of the region (NUTS III) have adopted the RIS without having any formal responsibility as a voluntarily binding framework of action. The state government of Lower Saxony (*Landesregierung Niedersachsen*) has accepted and reinforced this “local” approach recurrently.

With the start of discussions in Brussels about RIS3, Weser-Ems has looked into respective objectives and potentials with great depth and commenced a corresponding process of development. The active participation in the project Know-Hub has brought important inputs and the Regional Strategy for Smart Specialization “Cross-Linking Knowledge in Weser-Ems 2020” (*“Wissensvernetzung in Weser-Ems 2020”*) could be handed to the state government of Lower Saxony already in March 2013. It has been taken into account for the draft of the RIS3 of Lower Saxony as well as for the draft of the Operational Programme ERDF/ESF.

The second half of 2013 was used by the region for the development of an implementation plan for the four central objectives that have been defined in the strategy:

- Cross-Linking Knowledge comprehensively in all fields of competence
- Cross-Linking Knowledge in Vocational training
- Cross-Linking Knowledge in Advanced Vocational Training
- Cross-Linking Knowledge in Innovation promotion

Aligned to the three regional fields of competence bio-economy, energy and maritime economy these measures are each supposed to be implemented under the auspices of a strategy council. These think tanks are groups of regional experts (10-15) with the „best regional minds” set up in the three fields of competence bio-economy, energy and maritime economy. In the three Strategy Councils (and subsequent working groups), the following measures are supposed to be implemented:

- Development and processing of strategic questions regarding the three fields of competence
- Chairing of the Strategy Councils by an professionally experienced coordinator acquainted with the regional conditions who also externally represents the Strategy Council
- Implementation of targeted subsequent expertise inquiries and project developments to operationalise the results of the Strategy Councils and further develop scenarios
- Recommendations by the Strategy Councils regarding the development, equipment and profile of the regional knowledge infrastructure in the form of “Master Plans 2020”

This process is complemented through the support of so-called knowledge hubs that bring together the most important actors in the respective fields of competence.

The implementation plan which the strategy councils aim to put into practice in 2014 comprises a total of 10 work packages and particularly the setup of so-called Master Plans for the three fields of competence. They are intended as a framework of orientation and action for regional actors and notably SME. Further measures include for example the compilation of an Inventory of Knowledge, a concept for the Marketing of Regional Competencies, the European Knowledge-Cooperation and the conception of Regional Foresight-Systems.

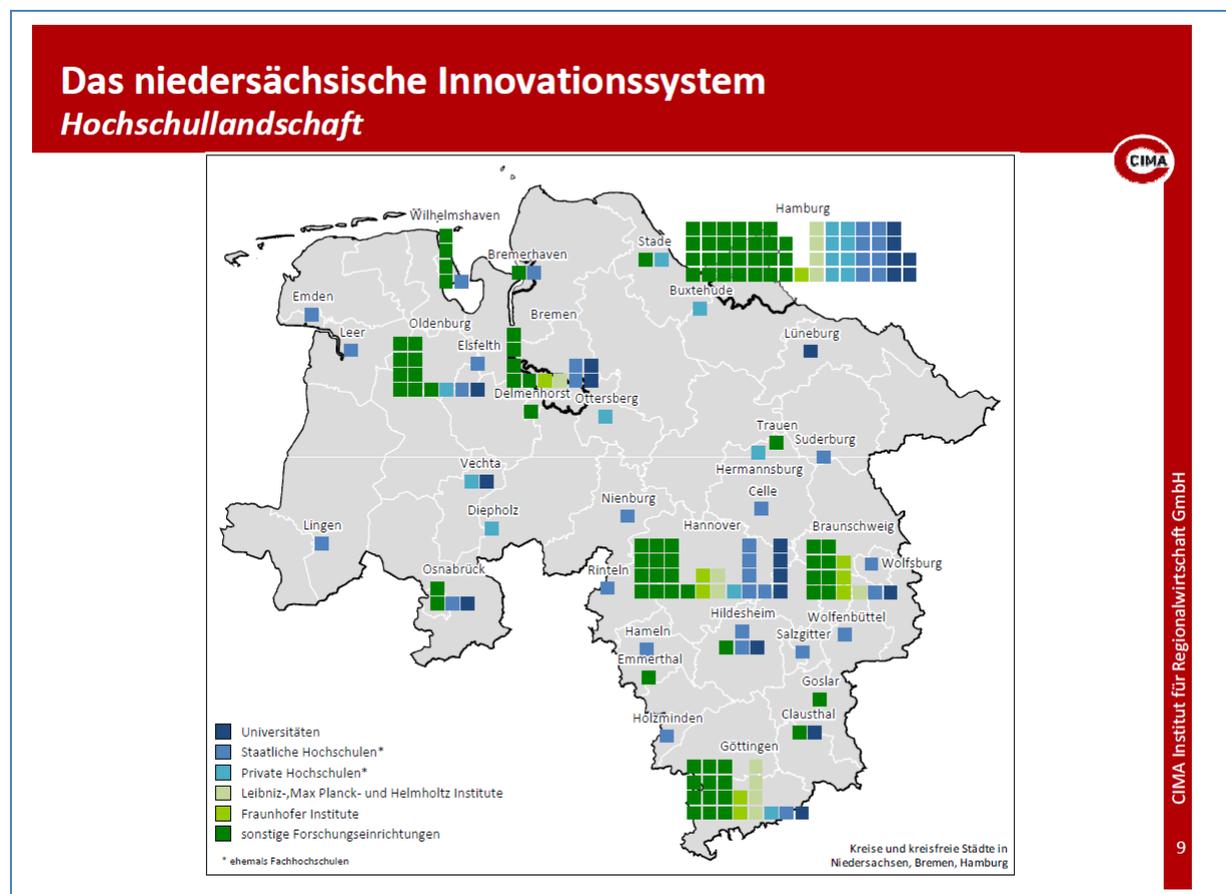
Thereby, the region feels optimally prepared to immediately start with the practical implementation of projects after the submission and approval of the programme planning documents for the ESI funds in Lower Saxony.

The statement by the *Landesregierung* at the end of 2013 to support Weser-Ems financially with the realization of the implementation plan has been valued by the CEO of the District of Ammerland (*Landrat Landkreis Ammerland*) Bensberg, spokesperson of the assembly of districts and independent cities in Weser-Ems. According to him it shows the outstanding acknowledgement for the work hitherto accomplished in the region. He regards the strategy councils as well as the knowledge hubs as highly motivated to continue their dedication for a further successful development.

Experience in Regional Innovation

As one of the first regions in Europe Weser-Ems implemented a Regional Innovation Strategy in 1996-99. In the follow up Weser-Ems region participated in several EU funded projects concerning Innovation issues, e.g. PARTNER; CRESCENDO, IASMINE, YOUTH FOR INNOVATION. These projects were funded under ERDF Innovating Actions, FP 6 and INTERREG A/B/C. The districts of Weser-Ems have in depth experiences as partner and lead partner in cooperation projects.

Innovation Infrastructure in Weser-Ems



Source: Presentation CIMA / Dr. Arndt, Die regionale Innovationsstrategie für Niedersachsen, 20.11.2013

SWOT-Analysis of Innovation System in Weser-Ems

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - good structure of economy – strong SMEs sector - special, identified fields of competences: food sector, maritime sector, energy - competences of R&D on the applied level - education system with practical component - long RIS experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - no governmental structure on regional level - no formal competences for definition of policy mix and action plans related to innovation - limited influence on policy making in Lower-Saxony - coordination with Lower Saxony government according main sectors and competences in Weser Ems
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - know-how of food production - whole Weser-Ems to be covered by INTERREG IVA programme - Increasing the regional cooperation, - development of public-private partnership - structural funds money for RIS3 implementation (depends on negotiation with Lower Saxony) - cross boarder collaboration with Dutch partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - demographic change – aging citizens, decreasing population - risks for environment because of intensive food production (meat, poultry) - neighbouring regions which compete in competence fields (for example Mecklenburg in tourism, Rotterdam in maritime) - dependence on Structural funds money as source for RIS implementation