



Enabling sustainable entrepreneurship in the context of the Frisian entrepreneurial ecosystem

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Background

The current study investigated what barriers sustainable entrepreneurs face when setting up their business in the context of the province of Fryslân. Currently, several actors are aiming to promote new and innovative opportunities to foster development and entrepreneurial activity within the province. More specifically, they are aiming towards a more circular economy. Sustainable entrepreneurs are essential in this process, as they are concerned with financial, social and environmental goals. Enabling these entrepreneurs to conquer such barriers marks a step towards a stronger, more sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystem, or *sustainable valley*.

Objective

The goal is to obtain a better understanding of the opportunities and threats for entrepreneurs in the Frisian ecosystem and how existing institutions could address these opportunities and threats. Each entrepreneurial ecosystem has its own, unique characteristics, and studying those of Fryslân results in a better understanding of real-life situations and practices, thereby increasing empirical knowledge of entrepreneurial ecosystems and their respective barriers.

Introduction

Sustainable entrepreneurs aim to address not only financial goals, as most conventional ventures, but combine this with social and/or environmental goals, thereby addressing the collective goals of society. **As sustainable entrepreneurs pursue a multiplicity of goals, produces additional challenges for them**, especially when setting up their business. In particular, scholars argue they struggle with financial, administrative and informational barriers.

Methods

In order to obtain a full understanding of the barriers sustainable entrepreneurs perceive in Fryslân in order to develop a *sustainable valley*, a qualitative research method using semi-structured interviews was conducted. In total 4 entrepreneurs and 6 distinct ecosystem actors were interviewed to obtain a thorough understanding of the elements already present in the ecosystem and the elements that are missing or constraining. The interviews were colour coded and the sections regarding existing and missing elements were examined more in-depth using open coding. This resulted in a comprehensive understanding of the Frisian ecosystem and its barriers, which is essential in generating a way to overcome such barriers.



Results

What is already there? A visual was created of the current Frisian ecosystem based on the results. The ecosystem works with the Triple Helix Model, where the governmental bodies, entrepreneurs and knowledge institutions play a central role and collaborate together.

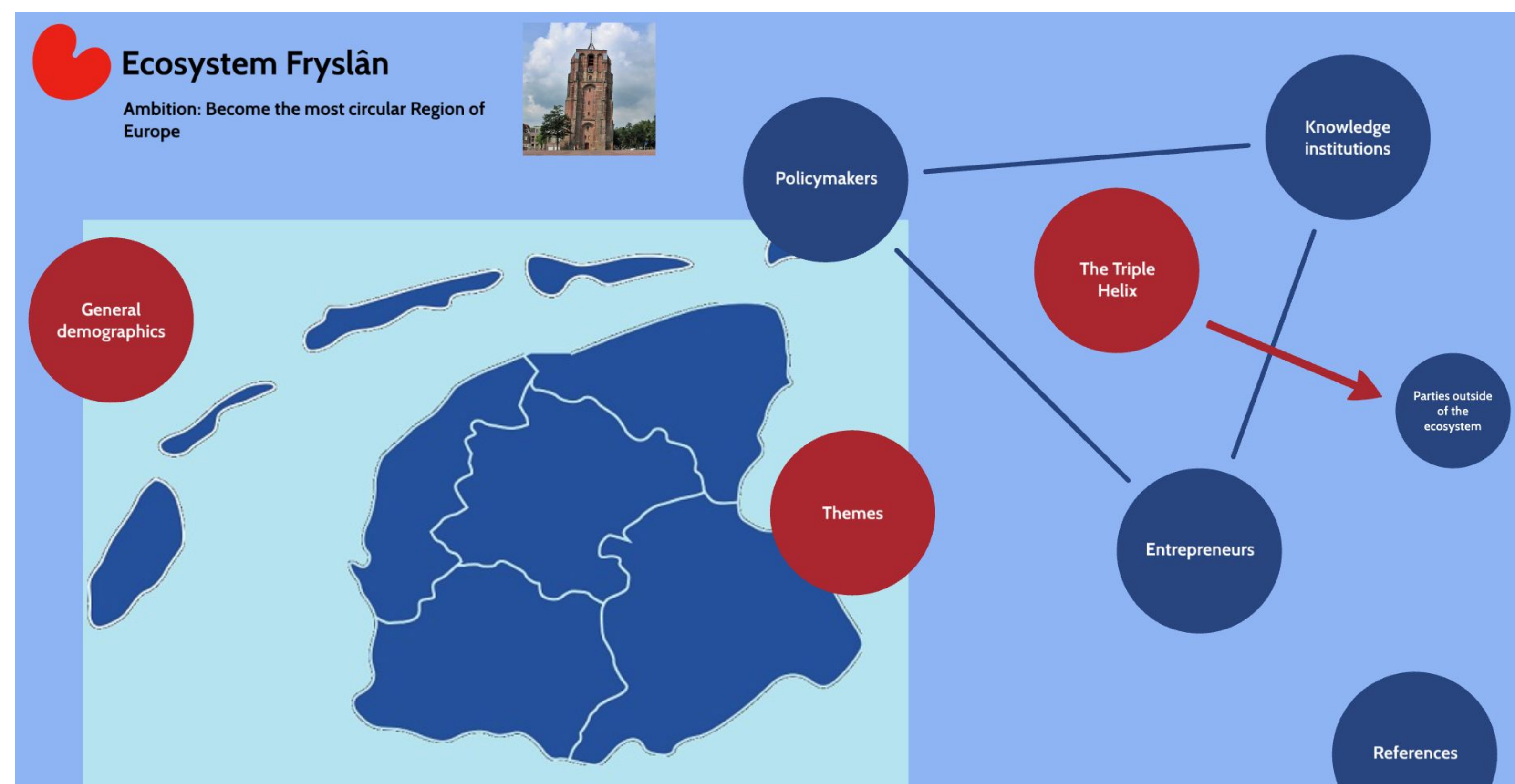


Figure 1. The Frisian entrepreneurial ecosystem

Results

- In general, there are several attempts to constitute a successful Frisian entrepreneurial ecosystem.
- However, the Frisian demographics, its no-nonsense culture and its rural nature might not be so supportive as they might seem at first sight.
- In order for the Frisian entrepreneurial ecosystem to become more successful and to evolve into a sustainable valley, these gaps need to be overcome.

Conclusions

Even though a lot of work has been done to boost the development of the Frisian entrepreneurial ecosystem, a number of barriers need to be overcome in order to facilitate a wealthy sustainable valley. Moreover, as this study demonstrated additional results than scholars identified previously, this implies that the research method and the scope of the research affect the thoroughness/exhaustiveness of the barriers identified. In other words, a more focused study results in more precise barriers. Furthermore, the Triple Helix Model as a basis for the ecosystem provides a fruitful tool to develop into a *sustainable valley*.