

# Good Practice Summary of the International Groningen Program

## **The problem and proposed solutions**

Groningen is becoming an increasingly international city. This is driven both by opportunity in the knowledge economy, and by demographic need. Groningen is a small, but highly ranked university city, similarly to others in Europe. Therefore Groningen increasingly needs to operate in an integrated global context in order to remain competitive in the knowledge economy. Also, 'secondary' cities such as Groningen are vulnerable to demographic decline, as the surrounding regions age and shrink, and primary metropolitan areas ('first' cities) become increasingly dominant in the region. Attracting and retaining new residents from further afield thus offers an important means to keep a healthy demographic, to ensure the academic continuity and to boost the local economy.

Our good practice represents an integrated approach to internationalisation processes, to ensure a sustainable demographic, economic and cultural future for the city.

We seek to manage the complex processes of internationalisation in an integrated and participative programme. We do so by working together with the main actors (i.e. universities, student organizations, expats and local inhabitants) addressing four key aspects of life in the city: housing, work, city living and communication, together, in an innovative and coordinated set of projects. Our aim is for Groningen to successfully attract, retain and integrate new residents, while maintaining the high level of social cohesion and liveability which make it such a valued home for locals as well as internationals.

## **Timeframe, dates, important milestones**

- Autumn 2016: launch of International Groningen programme with research report and project outlines, duration 2016-2020
- Spring 2017: start of individual projects such as Housing Platform, My Local Friend, Experience Groningen 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, International Cultural Agenda platform, International Student Club House, City Welcome Site, International Friendly City Signing and Public Transport.
- Autumn 2017: Housing Platform, My Local Friend and Cultural Platform are launched, International Student Club House will be opened, Make it in the North labour program is funded.
- Spring 2018: first version new City Site launched, City Signing is adjusted, interim monitoring via International Student Barometer and regional Internationalisation report, Experience Groningen 4<sup>th</sup> edition.

## **The link to the specific strategy (with key themes, subthemes, actions)**

The International Groningen programme fits within the long-term strategic goal of the 'Akkoord of Groningen' - the high level local coalition of the two local universities, the academic hospital, the municipality and the province - to further develop and profile Groningen as an international hub in the knowledge economy.

## **The main outputs for achieving objective, innovative elements**

Our good practice addresses two important city objectives:

- 1) Remaining competitive in a globalised knowledge economy by boosting the reputation of Groningen as an international friendly city, and by doing so boosting the local economy and universities as well.
- 2) Maintaining the high social cohesion and liveability which makes Groningen such an attractive small city.

The main outputs are realised in an integrated set of projects addressing internationalisation challenges within: housing, work, city living and communication.

International students, expats and policy workers from both universities and the local government have formed several project teams to execute the various projects. The steering committee of the Akkoord van Groningen consisting of the mayor, the chairmen of the universities and academic hospital and the Kings Commissioner are funding the projects as well as overseeing their cohesion and progress.

Many others cities have touched one or two of the aforementioned themes, but Groningen is the first city to have developed a fundamentally integrated approach, which we hope will boost both the reputation of Groningen as an international friendly city, as well as the local economy and liveability.

## **Results achieved, monitoring**

The International Groningen program only started at the end of 2016, which makes it difficult to show major results. Despite this fact we already see a local increase along several key lines:

- The topic has risen on the local and regional political agenda, thanks to the Akkoord van Groningen
- Internationals are becoming more engaged as we ask them to join project teams and focus groups
- Cultural stakeholders and companies are seeing ‘the international’ more and more as a potential interesting target group they have to facilitate in new ways
- The municipality starts to embrace internationals in other policy fields as well, such as public transport, health care etc.

As a means for monitoring we will use the regional Internationalisation report on stay rate and participation, and the biannual International Student Barometer which measures satisfaction for housing, social inclusion and career prospects. Both have been published in 2016, and on an ongoing biannual basis, so these will be used for baseline and comparative monitoring.

## **Potential for re-use and improvement**

Re-use by other cities either of the fully integrated approach, or of individual sub-projects, is certainly very feasible, provided that the local and national governance context allow for this. We have highly detailed project plans which we are happy to share with other cities. Also, some of the digital platforms will specifically be designed under the Creative Commons

licence precisely for this reason. We encourage other (university) cities to join our cause and make Europe the most international friendly continent, at least when it comes to education.

The majority of projects are set-up as long-term or structural solutions to the challenges of internationalisation for Groningen. Independent interim assessment means that they can be improved while in development.