

Brainport is good at, its 'spearhead' sectors: high-tech systems & materials, automotive, food, design and lifetech. It is not just technological, but across-the-board support – or in the Brainport Foundation's words: People, Technology, Business & Basics. 'If the government invests in a research centre, that's great. But it's even better to allow foreign knowledge workers to work here without all the red tape, to ensure that the research centre is easily accessible and that the region has something to offer in terms of quality of life, culture, etc. These cannot be disassociated.'

Cross-fertilisation

The 'triple helix' formula works. At the High Tech Campus Eindhoven alone, previously a Philips site, over sixty large and small non-Philips companies have already put down roots. For example, IBM will soon be opening a branch on campus. And they are not moving there because land is cheap – on the contrary – but because they believe that in the prevailing atmosphere of cross-fertilisation (i.e. open innovation) they will earn back their investment in accommodation in no time. In the spearhead areas, the number of companies and the number of jobs has increased more than in other parts of the Netherlands. Start-ups are given every opportunity. 'The Incubator 3+ programme that was started in 2003 has already produced 215 initiatives for techno start-ups. One hundred have been successful and eighteen have enough capital to continue. The survival rate for start-ups is fifty percent, compared to a twenty percent average in the rest of the country,' enumerates Lemkes. A similar support and coaching programme was set up for the design community eighteen months ago. The Design Academy, which was founded sixty years ago, is Eindhoven's claim to the title of design city of the Netherlands. 'Our support/coaching and pre-seed invest-

Food and High Tech Systems combine innovative forces

A robot for boning pork, a mushroom picking device or an LED lighting system for organic farming. According to Peter Swinkels, former top executive at the Bavaria brewery and Brainport Foundation board member, the Netherlands has everything needed to develop and successfully market these types of innovative products. In mid-February, he presented the Technology & Food Systems Network (TeFon), a programme intended to bring together players in the Food & Nutrition and High Tech Systems & Materials sectors. In the Netherlands, Food & Nutrition (food production, processing and distribution) represents ten percent of the GNP (42 billion euros in sales a year, a fifth of which is for export) and approximately 460,000 jobs. High Tech Systems & Materials accounts for over twenty billion euros in sales (ninety percent export) and 600,000 jobs. Swinkels, project leader for the TeFon initiative comments, 'In short, the Netherlands is world class in both sectors. If we are able to effectively combine these two crown jewels, it will be possible to strengthen and expand our position.' He believes that the broad Brainport Eindhoven - Greenport Venlo - Food Valley Wageningen triangle has all the skills and willpower to collaborate on innovative projects that will provide new high-tech systems and materials for the



Brainport programme director Elies Lemkes and board member Peter Swinkels at the introduction of the Technology & Food Systems Network.

Food & Nutrition sector. The TeFon network is off to a flying start: thirty concrete projects have been started, which are funded by the collaborating parties themselves. The government has been asked to contribute an estimated annual 20 million euros.

ment formula has given many start-ups a real chance. Within eighteen months, sixty new companies popped up.' To promote Eindhoven as a design city internationally, 'Made in Brainport' presentations were given in Milan, India and China.

Success story

The 'Metaalhuis' ('Metal House') is another success story. A group of 35 small metal entrepreneurs get together every six weeks to share their problems and successes. Lemkes: 'At first, they mainly discussed personnel exchanges, marketing and acquisition. But gradually, the topic of innovation gained more ground. Now, they have concluded applied research contracts with Fontys University of Applied Sciences and TNO Science and Industry. The 'Metaalhuis' has resulted in ten concrete partnerships and two new product-market combinations – and this formula is being copied elsewhere.' Automotive is one of Brainport's fastest growth areas. Companies, knowledge institutes and government bodies collaborate closely in this sector. Lemkes talks about a 'combined approach': 'TNO Automotive is moving to Helmond, near Eindhoven, and, at the same time, the Eindhoven University of Technology, Fontys and the ROC Eindhoven for vocational training will be providing joint automotive programmes at Master, higher professional and senior secondary vocational educational levels.'

Weak spots

described in the 'Brainport en Route' book that was presented at the aforementioned Brainport meeting. The projects described in it prove that the 'triple helix' formula applied at Brainport works very well, which is confirmed by the 'Innovation Scoreboard', a European index that reflects the climate of innovation based on 25 indicators. 'Most indicators show that we are doing very well as a region; we do not yet perform well enough on three of them,' says Elies Lemkes. The three weak spots are: lifelong learning (encouraging people to sustain their personal development, so that the region will have sufficient well-educated labour in the long term), knowledge workers (remove obstacles to bringing in highly educated employees from abroad, and offer them an attractive living and working environment) and public R&D investment.

Leverage

'In the area of private investment in R&D, the south-eastern part of the Netherlands is doing very well, even compared to the rest of Europe. But the level of government investment is much lower here than in other high-technology regions. This will have to increase if we want to improve our competitive edge. Public investment gives leverage: if increased, more private investment will follow,' claims Lemkes. Brainport believes it should be able to claim 700 million euros in public R&D investment a year; this is now only 200 million euros. ●

