

VMO

THE

VITAL LINK

CONNECTING THE

EAST NETHERLANDS'

MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

FUTURE-PROOF THROUGH COLLABORATION

The Verenigde Maakindustrie Oost (VMO) fulfil their promises: they unite and support the manufacturing industry in the east of the Netherlands in all areas related to manufacturing entrepreneurship. We spoke with Lucien Perizonius and Petra Deterink about the role and future of the VMO.

“The strength of the VMO lies in working together with the companies instead of for them.”

**– Petra Deterink
Director at VMO**

The constantly developing manufacturing industry in the east of the Netherlands is an economically and technologically strong sector.

The industry is increasingly positioning itself on the international stage, while locally remaining strong and vibrant. Verenigde Maakindustrie Oost (VMO), a union for the East Netherlands' manufacturing industry, plays an important role, being committed to increasing professionalism, competitiveness, and visibility within the manufacturing industry. The aim of the VMO is to future-proof the local manufacturing industry and they achieve this by stimulating collaborations between companies. It has been proven that companies that are open to connection and cooperation with each other are more resilient, perform better, and achieve more. The entire industry benefits from these collaborations, becoming stronger in numerous ways.

How does this work in practice? Lucien Perizonius, Chairman of the Verenigde Maakindustrie Oost, explains:

“In order to improve the professionalism and competitiveness of the East Netherlands' manufacturing companies, it is important that they remain at the forefront of developments such as automation and robotisation: trends that are clearly visible in the industry.”

Furthermore, increasing external representation and generating awareness in Europe are important goals for the organisation. “This is done by visiting trade fairs in the Netherlands and in Germany, and via various channels such as social media and the VMO website. Moreover, we increase our reach by using the collaborations we have created with other associations in the region, thereby gaining more publicity,” says Petra Deterink, Director of the VMO.

The manufacturing industry is a dynamic sector: technological improvements and innovations follow each other in rapid succession. “The most important challenges in the manufacturing industry at the moment are digitisation, robotisation, and energy transitions arising from the climate goals and environmental regulations. Attracting and retaining staff and new talent are also crucial, because, in coming years, a lot of knowledge and experience will flow out in this region by the loss of who are reaching retirement age,” says Deterink. “Also,

we have recently been struggling with a scarcity of (raw) materials, which has caused some challenges.” Lucien adds: “Because of these developments, digitisation and automation are important themes to tackle. Labour productivity must increase, you must do more with fewer people. This process must be shaped.”

The VMO supports in this digitisation process. “We have our own digitisation programme. Experience has shown that people benefit from working in small groups with a personal focus, therefore, we have adopted this approach. The process starts with information; looking at where a company stands and determining which stage of the digitisation process they have reached. Then we look at how each team member can be individually guided to take the next step in this process. In the initial phase, the VMO takes care of this. In more advanced phases, expert VMO members join in. The most important aspect in this process involves the “doing”. If, after adopting the digitisation process, companies want to develop further, they can connect with knowledge institutions such as Saxion and the University of Twente, with whom we also have a collaboration.”

The VMO plays a connecting role in knowledge sharing. Moreover, being a member of Techniekpact Twente, the organisation trains, recruits and retains new talent. They also work closely with initiatives such as Techwise, to better align technical education with industry demands - thereby offering improved training for the talent for the future.

In short, the VMO forms the link between the East Netherlands’ manufacturing industry, education, the government, and advisory bodies such as OostNL and the Twente Board. It is because of these links that the manufacturing industry is sufficiently seen, heard, and prepared for the future. Offering a network for manufacturing companies to use among themselves is also a distinguishing factor. Petra states: “At the VMO, we find it very important to meet with people from within the industry, instead of mainly networking with consultants, accountants, or lawyers. It is important that we, as fellow manufacturing companies, learn from each other, so that we all may benefit.” “Experience shows that companies want to be connected within the industry,” Lucien adds.

“ We have the connections, we know where the bottlenecks are, and we respond to them by bringing in the necessary expertise. ”

– **Lucien Perizonius**
Chairman at VMO

“It seems as if technology is in the genes in this region!”

**– Petra Deterink
Director at VMO**

Business growth

The VMO not only facilitates and guides taking the next step in automation and digitalisation; they happily offer support for business growth. Export, especially to Germany, is an important topic. In the context of the Go4Export programme, meetings are organised in Germany and advice is given on the business climate and business opportunities that exist there. Markets in other countries, such as Scandinavia and England, are also being investigated. Companies that would like to grow, but not necessarily outside the Netherlands, are also offered the required assistance. “I do this mainly in my role as Innovation Advisor at NovelT. This allows me to act quickly, using the expertise that is present at NovelT,” says Petra.

Eastern Netherlands

The Verenigde Maakindustrie Oost, located in Hengelo, is committed to manufacturing companies in the east of the Netherlands, which is defined as Overijssel, Gelderland – mainly de Achterhoek -, a part of Flevoland and Drenthe. Are there differences between the east of the Netherlands and the rest of the Netherlands? “Surely,” Lucien begins:

“Historically, large companies such as Stork and Holec have played an important role in the development of the region, and many companies have emerged from this. At some point, that kind of gets into the culture. Moreover, the mentality of the people who live here plays an important role; the straightforwardness, the ‘go-getters-mentality’: this makes the manufacturing industry a natural fit with the mentality here.”

Future

When asked what the future for the VMO looks like, Petra and Lucien are unanimous: an organisation like the VMO will continue to be needed and will therefore continue to grow. Providing a relevant network within the industry is the most important factor for growth. The VMO is still growing and can bring more companies together. “We can make the manufacturing industry future-proof by stimulating collaborations, developing it into a leading industry in the eastern Netherlands and Europe. For this, it is important to work smarter, increasing labour productivity so that we can do more with fewer people.” They hope to help their members get in the right direction and take that next step.

Lucien concludes:

“Keep thinking together about how you can do more with fewer people. Go and look behind someone else’s scenes. Talk to each other. Give each other ideas and get started with them.”