A LASTING LEGACY IN CIRCULAR ECONOMY
Circular economy is the future. Raw material reuse, sustainable products and CO₂ reduction have become an essential part of our society.

Your association plays a key role in these important developments. Your conference in this field guarantees the transfer of crucial expertise and know-how, necessary to take the next steps towards a fully sustainable society.

Flanders is rolling out the red carpet for your association’s conference. The northern half of Belgium is a leader in the field of circular economy. Here, your association will find all the necessary ingredients for a successful conference: world-famous experts, innovative companies, renowned research institutions and, last but not least, a government that understands the importance of the domain in which your association operates.

This e-brochure introduces you to Flanders as a location for your conference. A location that is easily and sustainably accessible. That likes to help build your association’s legacy. And that guarantees your delegates an experience they will never forget. Because indeed, the heritage, gastronomy and cycling culture of Flanders also have a circular dimension.

VISITFLANDERS Convention Bureau, the official convention bureau of Flanders, warmly offers you this e-book. On behalf of all my employees, I hope you enjoy reading this, and I give a warm welcome to your association and your delegates.

Evelyn Bardyn
Head of Convention Bureau
What are the trends of the future in Circular Economy – and therefore burning hot topics for your conference? Why do you make an excellent choice with Flanders as a venue for this conference? And how come this region, which is no less than 700x smaller than the USA, is at the world’s top in your field?

In this video you will find fascinating answers to these questions. Speaking is Karl Vrancken, research manager sustainable materials management at VITO and associate professor at the University of Antwerp, Dept. Bio-engineering. He is also scientific chair of the circular economy track of the Global Sustainable Technology and Innovation Community (G-STIC), chairman of the European Circular Economy Research Alliance, member of the International Advisory Board of the Wuppertal Institute and of the Scientific Committee of the European Environment Agency. In short, Karl is a worldwide respected expert and speaker on circular economy.

The setting for the interview is one of Europe’s most fascinating venues: A Room with a ZOO, a state-of-the-art convention center attached to Antwerp Zoo. All proceeds from conferences held here go to the protection of endangered species. Another nice detail: during the breaks of your conference, your delegates can walk among the elephants, tigers and flamingos – an unforgettable experience. On page 36 you can read more about this venue.
Circular economy is of fundamental importance for the future. Circular Flanders translates the ambitions of our region into specific actions. We are looking at six working agendas: circular construction, the bioeconomy, circular chemistry and plastics, the manufacturing industry, food chain and water cycles.”

The words of Brigitte Mouligneau, Transition Manager Circular Economy, show the strong efforts that Flanders is making in terms of the circular economy. Companies, midfield organisations and knowledge institutions combine their knowledge, expertise and commitment to tackle the bottlenecks related to circular entrepreneurship and production. Major steps will be taken in the coming years to close sustainable cycles via the node and inspirer, Circular Flanders.
WELCOME TO THE WORLD’S LARGEST CHEMICAL CLUSTER

“Our region has a lot to offer. Not only are we the frontrunner in terms of chemistry, we’ve also come a long way in circular construction. Two aspects will receive extra attention in the coming years: how to maximise the reuse of materials from demolished buildings, how to recycle high-quality materials, and how to ensure that buildings last longer and can change their function more easily. Certainly the latter requires a different understanding of how we develop and design buildings. Companies such as Facadeclick, which developed a fast-build system for seamless circular façades, or Juunoo, which creates circular partition walls with which office buildings can be quickly divided differently, are good examples of this.”

Flanders is home to one of the largest chemical clusters in the world. Brigitte Mouligneau: “Currently, chemistry still mainly works with primary raw materials, but more and more work is being done on high-quality recycling, a second life of raw materials and how these materials can then be reused in the manufacturing industry.

Our Flemish research centres, such as the universities and VITO, have an important role to play in this sector, investigating which recyclates are suitable for safe reuse and how we can reprocess them. For this, close cooperation with foreign companies is essential: we can recycle the raw materials and bring them back into the economy via an international sales market.”

“Flanders has a lot to offer in terms of circular economy.”

CHALLENGE CURRENT BUSINESS MODELS

“Reuse and high-quality recycling are also high on the agenda in the manufacturing industry. We will focus on two sectors in the coming years: textiles and electronics. Producing, maintaining and recycling high-quality textiles can ensure the re-emergence of a strong textile industry in Flanders. Good ecodesign, a longer life span and recoverability could also close the loop there.

We should not only look at the products themselves, but also question the current business models. Can a product be repaired? Or does the manufacturer ensure that the consumer has to buy a new product? We are already doing well here in Belgium, and there are still many opportunities in a lot of sectors. Think about
batteries: how can we design them better, make them last longer or use them for other projects and give them a second life.

Speaking of this second life, the second-hand shops in our country are a unique concept. There we buy and sell used clothes, electrical goods, furniture and other items that are still in good condition, and you can also go to some of those stores for household electronics repairs. In this way, we ensure that people, through the social economy develop skills that are important in a circular economy.

“We our food production must be more sustainable, with the short chain as standard. Are the current business models still sustainable? Can we use the parts of the food we don’t eat in a different way? Consider maize: the small cobs require a giant plant. Can’t we use those stems for anything else? Or hemp, which has a highly insulating function. That can offer opportunities to build more sustainably.

In the coming years, Flanders is investing a great deal in the bioeconomy. Demand for sustainable products is rising, especially in the construction sector. The research is ongoing at the moment, we need to test these results further in practice. The Scientific and Technical Centre for the Construction Industry (WTCB) and VITO play an important role in this.

The water cycle also deserves attention. Take a look at our breweries, for example: should we be cleaning the plants on the outside with potable water? Or can we use purified water? We also want to close water cycles for the construction sector, so that drainage water, for example, goes to a good destination and does not just flow away into the sewer system. We can also appeal to strong partners such as Aquafin and Waterleau for this.”

We can use the parts of the food we don’t eat in a different way.

To truly design and produce in a circular way, we need support from Europe. We must pursue product standardisation and eodesign. The right to repair is extremely important. This requires a legal framework, across national borders, soon.”
Circular economy is at the top of the agenda in Flanders. In many areas, government, science and business join forces. This immediately creates strong support for the organisation of your conference in this field. In Flanders, your association or PCO will find the experts and partners necessary for a successful organisation.

This organisation is also supported by an extensive free service. Tuya Beyers, Circular Economy expert at VISITFLANDERS Convention Bureau, will be happy to tell you more about this service.

› meet interesting new partners
› create legacy with your conference
› get the technology needed for a hybrid conference
› organise a corona-safe conference
› receive a tailor-made experience programme
› get support with your project proposal
› provide an inspirational visit for your decision-makers

TUYA BEYERS
Circular Economy Expert
VISITFLANDERS Convention Bureau

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The construction sector is a large consumer of energy and raw materials. Nevertheless, the sector is trying to make the transition to more energy, material and environmentally conscious working. In this circular construction, Flanders belongs to the best students in the class. Get inspiration, exchange knowledge and discover innovative building materials: your delegates can do it all during your conference in the northern region of Belgium.
A COMPLETE CHANGE OF DIRECTION IS NEEDED.

The construction sector consumes around 50% of all raw materials and one third of all water worldwide. This needs to change to take the step towards future-oriented construction. The sector is trying to reduce its environmental footprint and save money and raw materials. This transition to a circular construction economy is far-reaching. The process requires far-reaching innovation and a complete change of direction in design, services and business models.

The construction sector is also aware of this crucial task, says Marc Dillen of Embuild, the organisation that brings together all construction companies in Flanders. “The circular construction economy is one of the most important issues we need to work on, because efforts in this area can help us achieve our climate goals and reduce our environmental impact.”

THE DIGITISATION OF THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR IS AN OPPORTUNITY.

Many research centres and companies are trying to identify which materials were used in the past, how these high-quality materials can be recycled or reused and how we can develop new materials in a future-oriented way.

The Public Waste Agency of Flanders (OVAM) sees many opportunities in this transition to circular construction. Or as Roos Servaes, circular economy facilitator at OVAM, puts it: “The digitisation that the construction sector faces is an opportunity to support circular construction, facilitate coordination between different actors and find a connection with other policy areas to shape the construction and living in the future.”

CLOSING THE LOOP: A FINE EXAMPLE

Juunoo produces adjustable and modular interior walls, which can change the layout of an office space in no time. These walls are sustainable, both in material and in reuse. The company buys back walls that are no longer in use from customers, giving them a second, third, fourth – even infinite – life.

The reusable walls of Juunoo were awarded the renowned Red Dot Design Award.
EVEN ENJOYING ART CAN BE CIRCULAR IN FLANDERS

Flanders really is the ideal location for your conference in circular economy. Not only because this region is leading in this field, but also because your delegates will experience an unforgettable time here. Your delegates will be able to admire the works of artists such as Rubens, Van Eyck and Bruegel. They will be amazed by the groundbreaking architectural highlights. They will discover the innovative creations in the Fashion Museum.

Did you know that even visiting the museum here can be a circular discovery? The Design Museum Gent is currently developing DING, a new wing that is being built as circularly as possible. They are paying extra attention to the substitutability of the building materials used. Waste is processed into circular facing bricks. The skeleton with multifunctional ceilings, floors and walls is adjustable, making DING a circular building.

Speaking of museum visits: compiling an exciting social programme is a free service from VISITFLANDERS Convention Bureau. Do you want to know how we can support your association or PCO even more in organising? You can read more about this on page 7.
INNOVATIONS FROM EUROPE’S “BIOTECH VALLEY”

The need to make the economy and industrial production sustainable presents a major challenge to the world. Revaluing secondary flows and developing new production methods are essential.

Flemish biotech companies assume a leading position in this evolution. Innovative research institutions, universities of international level and locally specialised clusters are one of the driving forces behind this transition.
TREATING DISEASES WITH CELL, GENE, AND TISSUE THERAPIES

For example, in the northern region of Belgium there is unique expertise in cell, gene and tissue therapies (Advanced Therapy Medicinal Products). TiGenix, for example, was the first company in Europe to market such an ATMP product. Many spin-offs follow this example, which means more and more diseases can be treated or cured.

This pioneering role is no coincidence, says Tineke Van hooland, Deputy Secretary-General of bio.be/essenscia, the Belgian federation of companies active in biotechnology and life sciences. “I like to call this region the biotech valley of Europe.

THE AMAZING POSSIBILITIES OF MUSHROOMS

Mycelia is also a good example of Flemish expertise in biotech. The company produces all stages of mycelium from fungi: mother cultures, master spawn and spawn – both from edible mushrooms and from fungi to create myco-materials. So not just mushrooms, but exceptional species with specific characteristics.

Mycelium is the underground, root-like network of fungi that can also be produced in a small environment and in controlled conditions. Mycelium grows on waste like coffee crush or grain chaff. It is also biodegradable, making it an interesting raw material for packaging, as an alternative to polystyrene.

According to CEO Kasper Moreaux, Mycelia also has the expertise to use mycelium as a biological pesticide. “For example, a fungus can tackle the overpopulation of voracious insects and thus secure the harvest.”

The substance extracted from pycnoporus sanguineus is used, among other things, for medicinal applications.
FROM CARBON TO NEW RAW MATERIAL

The reuse of secondary flows and waste streams is also a crucial aspect of the entire chemical and life sciences sector, says Saskia Walraedt, director of essenscia PolyMatters. “The steam emitted by one company can be an interesting raw material for another company in the vicinity. Flanders has really taken on a pioneering role in this area. Take for example the Antwerp@C project, an initiative of Air Liquide, BASF, Borealis, ExxonMobil, INEOS, TotalEnergies, Fluxys and the Port of Antwerp. This explores how carbon can be captured and stored, and then turned into new raw materials. Together with the company, the Flemish knowledge centre VITO developed a process to make clinkers of collected CO₂. These so-called “carbon capture and storage” (CCS) and “carbon capture and utilization” (CCU) are real technologies of the future.”

SASKIA WALRAEDT
Director
essenscia PolyMatters
WELCOME TO GHENT, THE LARGEST AGRO AND BIOTECH CAMPUS IN EUROPE

Nowhere else are top science and industrial entrepreneurship as closely intertwined as in Ghent. Through cooperation between partners such as the University of Ghent, the Research Institute for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (ILVO), the Flemish Institute for Technological Research (VITO), the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology (VIB), Inagro, CAPTURE (Centre for Advanced Process Technology for Urban Resource recovery) and Bio Base Europe Pilot Plant, the largest agro and biotech campus in Europe was created. This is where successful industrial companies such as Plant Genetic Systems, CropDesign, Devgen and Aphea.Bio are emerging.

The biotech ecosystem in Ghent also develops new solutions for Life Sciences to improve the lives of patients and citizens. It makes Ghent the place to be for conferences in industrial biotech, agro and foodtech and life sciences biotech.

Would you like to know more about your conference in Ghent in these areas? GentCongres is at your service.

www.visit.gent.be/en/gentcongres
3. CIRCULAR CHEMISTRY
DISCOVER AN INTERNATIONAL HOTSPOT FOR INNOVATION IN SUSTAINABLE CHEMISTRY

INTERVIEW WITH LISEBET BOOGAERTS, MANAGER AT BLUECHEM

Few places in the world have such a high concentration of chemical companies, research institutions and sorting centres as Flanders. This offers many opportunities in the field of innovation. For example, a great deal of future-oriented research and production takes place in plastics and chemistry.

THE FIRST INCUBATOR FOR SUSTAINABLE CHEMISTRY

Spearheading this evolution is BlueChem, one of the first incubators for sustainable chemistry in Europe. Since 2020, start-ups in the sector have found here a network, support and work and research space for the roll-out of promising projects and products.

The location in Antwerp is no coincidence, according to manager Liesbet Boogaerts: “Antwerp has the largest chemical cluster in Europe and that is very interesting economically. Companies specialising in CO₂ capture and reuse, among others, are keen to establish themselves here. It is a prime location for innovation and knowledge exchange. BlueChem brings promising start-ups and big players together, thus encouraging cooperation and cross-pollination. BlueChem also offers start-ups practical help. For example, we rent out equipped or yet to be furnished laboratories and there are meeting rooms and a post and reception service.”

Antwerp has the largest chemical cluster in Europe.

Watch this short video for an introduction to BlueChem.
FROM START-UP TO SCALE-UP VIA A UNIQUE RELOCATION SYSTEM

“But especially for strategic advice, start-ups at BlueChem are in the right place. This advice comes from partners such as BNP Paribas Fortis, Deloitte, the Port of Antwerp-Bruges, SAS and SGS. Close contacts with Catalisti (Flanders’ Spearhead Cluster for Chemistry and Plastics), research partners such as the Flemish universities and VITO, and partner companies BASF, Air Liquide, Vopak, Borealis, INEOS and ExxonMobil are leading the way in circular chemistry and feedstock use.

Anyone who has outgrown the start-up phase can find new accommodation at scale-up locations such as the NextGen District in the port of Antwerp. BlueChem therefore works with a relocation system in which we continue to encourage and maintain close contacts between all parties. By the end of 2022, we expect all our labs to be fully occupied. The relocation system ensures that growing companies that want to scale up are again making room for the next batch of innovative starters.”

TOWARDS AN INTERNATIONAL LEARNING NETWORK

“BlueChem doesn’t just receive requests from Belgian start-ups and spin-offs. Phone calls and emails are also increasingly coming from abroad. In the coming years, BlueChem wants to further expand and develop into an important international hotspot for innovation within sustainable chemistry. We also dream of a learning network, in which we can bring our own partners, research institutions and incubators from other sectors together and share our best practices. Nationally and internationally. And we notice that there is interest from all corners of the globe.”

FROM INCUBATOR TO CONFERENCE PARTNER

A national and international learning network. Surely that is what your association aims for with the organisation of your conference? This is why innovators like BlueChem are your ideal partner, as are the knowledge institutions, governments and companies active in your sector. As an official convention office for Flanders, VISITFLANDERS Convention Bureau is happy to put your association in contact with these parties. Because they have the same mission as you: to promote international knowledge exchange on circular economy.
ANTWERP, BREEDING GROUND FOR NEW IDEAS AND INITIATIVES IN THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Second-hand shops are a phenomenon in Flanders. You can buy second-hand clothing, electronics and household goods for a friendly price. The Antwerp second-hand shop Circuit goes a step further in circularity, bringing together sustainable entrepreneurs under one roof in Nieuw Zuid, a district that is developing into a true circular hub.

Marketing Director Louise Vrints explains: “With Circuit we want to create a circular meeting place, a sustainable DIY hotspot where people are inspired to live more consciously and in a more circular way. Antwerp residents can have their bicycles or electrical goods repaired here. The permanent employees will then take care of the repair or explain how you can do it yourself. This moves employees from behind the scenes to the front, and also brings the circular economy to the forefront.”

A breeding lab for new ideas in the circular economy is an ideal location for your conference. With your conference in this city, your delegates will definitely go home inspired. Would you like to know more about your conference in Antwerp? Antwerp Convention Bureau is at your service.

www.antwerpconventionbureau.be
The manufacturing industry is firmly anchored in Flanders and has a strong link with a well-developed social economy. Renowned knowledge institutions, the extensive logistics network and numerous citizen initiatives focus on circular strategies, a relatively broad network of collection and sorting and an accessible market.

Flanders wants more than half of the manufacturing companies to actively work in a circular manner by 2030. Therefore, circular business models and new forms of cooperation are supported. Circular design is also supported, as are initiatives with which products and textiles can be made, repaired and reused sustainably and qualitatively.

This support also comes from the sector federations. confirms Patrick Van den Bossche, Sustainability Lead at technology federation Agoria. “A recent study by Agoria shows that the manufacturing industry is an essential cornerstone and engine of our economy and prosperity. Circular entrepreneurship is a catalyst for innovation, among other things in product design and business models. New circular income models create many new markets and income. And a circular manufacturing industry offers employment opportunities: new forms of entrepreneurship are emerging and locally anchored jobs will be added, also for disadvantaged groups.”
Circular entrepreneurship is a catalyst for innovation in product design and business models.
THE MOST SUSTAINABLE JEANS IN THE WORLD COME FROM FLANDERS

A great example of the circular manufacturing industry is HNST. This Mechelen-based company has been producing clean jeans since 2018, most of which are made from clean denim sourced from more than six thousand discarded jeans collected from the second-hand shops, recycled cotton, Tencel and organic cotton. The trousers have inside pockets of old T-shirts and the metal buttons are removable, which means they can also be recycled. Painting with indigo – the typical denim colour – is done with electricity, which means that HNST does not dispose of harmful waste materials and uses much less water.

Not only with its production does HNST take a clear stance against the throw-away society and fast fashion. The brand also refuses to take part in peak mass consumption days such as Black Friday and follows the same water-saving line in its washing advice. HNST recommends its customers wash their jeans less and even launched a Morning After Spray, which removes bad odours without using water, electricity or chemicals.

Painting the jeans using electricity significantly reduces the impact on the environment.

THE GOVERNMENT IS ALSO DOING ITS BIT.

Flanders Innovation and Entrepreneurship (VLAIO) is more than happy to support these initiatives. Companies can count on advice and subsidies when developing sustainable, circular products and processes, says Leo Van de Loock, transition manager at VLAIO. “Flanders has the ambition to reduce the material footprint and greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. The Flemish Government is therefore fully committed to the transition from a linear to a circular economy. We do this, for example, with subsidies, with which we support living labs in the circular economy and life-extending initiatives in the manufacturing industry.”
Conferences in the circular economy create a unique kind of legacy. Your association has a reusable positive impact on society. Not only the next generation will reap the benefits of your organisation, but also many generations later.

Flanders attaches great importance to this legacy of your conference. Your social relevance is crucial for our region. That is why we support your association with a unique service, in which the experts at VISITFLANDERS Convention Bureau define and develop the legacy of your conference together with you.

This guidance is carried out according to a specially developed methodology, which consists of four phases:

› **FASE 1**: what sustainable impact do you want to achieve with your conference?
› **FASE 2**: which parties within government, education, business band residents can help support your conference and your legacy?
› **FASE 3**: how do you tell the story of your conference and the impact you want to create?
› **FASE 4**: what parameters show that your conference achieves its sustainability goals?

Together with the experts of VISITFLANDERS Convention Bureau, you define the legacy of your conference.

**GEMMEKE DE JONGH**
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A CIRCULAR PLATE PLEASE

Flanders is internationally renowned for its excellent cuisine. From beer to chocolate, to chicory and shrimp, incorporated into innovative recipes and experimental techniques – our chefs do it virtuoso style. They are also innovative in terms of sustainability and circularity. The chefs opt radically for local products or cook with parts and leftovers that would otherwise be discarded. This sustainable approach pays off, helping the food sector to turn challenges into opportunities.
YOUR DELEGATES ARE GUARANTEED TO LICK THEIR LIPS WHEN THEY THINK ABOUT FLANDERS

If you are organising a conference in Flanders, you can rest assured that your delegates will enjoy all the tasty things that this region has to offer. Flanders has been a hotspot for foodies for decades. Not only do our chefs have all the tricks of traditional cuisine at their fingertips, they also dare to experiment. This is done not only to surprise the dinner guest with innovative cooking skills, but also partly out of necessity. Because in the food sector too, the call for more sustainable use of ingredients and products is growing.

A circular food chain is the ultimate goal of a partnership set up by the Flemish Government, Fevia (Federation of the Belgian food industry), Circular Flanders and partners from the knowledge world and social profit. To bring the food chain to a higher level, secondary flows of our food production are processed into animal feed. However, the circle is not completely closed, and too much food still disappears in the bin. More research and action are needed, and the standard bearers of Flemish cuisine are taking the lead in this.

The innovation of Flemish chefs stems from the pursuit of more sustainable use of ingredients and products.
Michelin awarded Het Hofke van Bazel the “green star” because of its own vegetable garden and the vegetarian alternative on the menu.

A MICHELIN-STARRED RESTAURANT WITH ITS OWN VEGETABLE GARDEN

“Het Hofke van Bazel” in Kruibeke is a Michelin-starred restaurant that cultivates its top-quality vegetables and herbs in its own enormous vegetable garden. Chef Kris De Roy cooks in a green and inventive way, with pure taste as the absolute starting point. To this end, the famous Michelin Guide awarded him a “green star”, a prize for restaurants dedicated to sustainable gastronomy.

DON’T PAY FOR YOUR FOOD, PAY FOR THE FUTURE

Another example is Stormkop in Antwerp, which describes itself as “an exuberant sanctuary for young and less young adventurers”. There, top chef Seppe Nobels has his pop-up restaurant Instroom. Although the word restaurant is not entirely appropriate, Instroom is more of a training academy, offering refugees a springboard to a new future. The recipes are all inspired by the cuisine of their home country. You do not pay for your meal, but you pay for the training of these people.

King Filip of Belgium (m) visits the Instroom Academy of chef Seppe Nobels (l).
BEER TASTING ON THE PROGRAMME OF YOUR CONFERENCE ON CIRCULAR ECONOMY? WELCOME TO FLANDERS.

Flanders is not only a pioneer in the circular economy. The northern half of Belgium is also the absolute world leader in beer. In fact, with your conference in Flanders you can combine both trump cards.

For example, you can visit Hof ten Dormaal with your delegates. This brewery has a concept that is unique in Europe and goes back centuries.

Brewing takes place on a farm. All the ingredients, from grain to hops, are grown on the farm itself. After the brewing process, the used grain is not thrown away, but used as feed for the farm animals.

Hof ten Dormaal produces the malt itself, which has become very unusual in contemporary brewing. Bottling of the beers also takes place on the farm. This last step completely closes the production circle. It makes Hof ten Dormaal one of the most ecological breweries in the world.

Would you like to know more about visiting this circular brewery, or about an exciting social programme in Flanders? Expert Tuya Beyers is at your service. You can find her details on page 7.
CIRCULAR WATER CONSUMPTION: NO DROP IN THE OCEAN

The circular economy aims for closed cycles, also in water use. How can we use less water and reuse the water that is still needed as much as possible? Is it necessary to wash cars with potable water? Can crops also be sprayed with purified water from another application? Climate change, the many demographic and socio-economic evolutions and spatial planning challenge us to think about our water consumption. And that across national borders.
SCARCITY AS AN ENGINE FOR INNOVATION

As a low-water region, Flanders wants to take the lead in circular water use. The Flemish Government, Flanders Environment Agency and the Flemish Employer Platform are joining forces for this. Together they investigate how circular water can be the vehicle for sustainable water use. With the Blue Deal, the Flemish Government is encouraging innovation and initiatives in the fight against water scarcity and drought.

In addition, the Belgian division of the International Water Association (B-IWA) and the European Water Association (EWA) want to create a network in which partners exchange ideas in the field of water technology and water management. That is necessary, says Ilse Smets, president of B-IWA. Together with VLAKWA and watercircle.be, B-IWA forms the “Fluid Crew,” a collaborative partnership committed to the future of water. “International knowledge sharing and the exchange of ideas and research results are indispensable. Water scarcity is not only a Flemish problem, but will be felt all over the world in the future. The water expertise that Flanders has built up is extremely useful in this regard.”

SUSTAINABLE WATER USE CONCERNS EVERYONE

“Water use will have to be sustainable in the future”, continues Smets. “A robust water system is a link in the approach to the drought and water scarcity problems the world is facing. Water is too precious to be used only once.”

Citizens are already doing their bit by softening their garden or flushing the toilet with rainwater.

Cities and municipalities soften the public space and reuse water. Companies – or even entire industrial clusters – purify their own waste water and reuse it as cooling or production water.

FLEMISH KNOW-HOW FOR THE REST OF THE WORLD

A company at the top of innovative water use is Waterleau. Among other things, this Flemish company offers solutions for the treatment and purification of sewage and waste water, the production of customised water for industrial applications and the provision of drinking water in regions with water scarcity.

Waterleau uses this know-how and technology to build and manage water purification and drinking water production facilities worldwide. In Morocco, for example, the potable water of 2.5 million people is purified. The company also built the water purification plants for the Heineken and AB Inbev breweries.

Flanders therefore has plenty of water expertise. The experts of the knowledge institutions, the government and the business world will be happy to share this know-how with you when you organise your association’s conference here.
Cycling is also circular in Flanders

Flanders is a cycling country, also for your delegates. Venues and sights can often be reached by bike. This is more than a footnote to the story of your conference, because cycling is also a circular event in Flanders. The use of shared bikes is widely established, and new initiatives are appearing all over the place.

For example, there is the organisation Groeispurters, which offers families a subscription for children’s bicycles. Parents can rent a bicycle starting from four euros a month. When the children have outgrown the bike, it is collected and the parents receive a larger model in return. The small bike is then completely repaired and rented out for a lower price.
Another good example is Cycloop. As the name suggests – a contraction of “cycle” and “loop” – this company wants to extend the life of bicycles. Written-off bikes are not just repaired, but completely upgraded to gems with unique accessories. Cycloop even offers a “Mix my ride” service, where a recycled bicycle is put together entirely to the customer’s taste.

Circular cycling obviously goes beyond the means of transport alone. Sustainability was the decisive criterion when tendering for a new bicycle bridge in Antwerp. As a result, a circular bicycle bridge was built in the city, using reusable materials and construction techniques. The bridge can be reused later somewhere else.
World-class speakers like to connect with the strong brand of Tomorrowland.
HOW DO YOU HIRE A GLOBAL STAR FOR YOUR CONFERENCE?

Flanders is the ideal location for your conference in Circular Economy. In the summer of 2022, the northern region of Belgium was even the backdrop for a very remarkable organisation: the Love Tomorrow Conference, organised by Tomorrowland, the largest dance festival in the world, which takes place every year in Flanders.

The first edition, dedicated to climate innovation, was an instant hit. With 3,750 participants, the conference was filled to the brim. What's more, a big name emerged as a keynote speaker: none other than Yuval Noah Harari, the author of the bestseller “Sapiens”. Click on the video below to review the account of the world-famous historian and futurologist.

Yuval Noah Harari, the author of “Sapiens,” at the Love Tomorrow Conference

DIETRICH VAN DER WEKEN
General Manager
G-STIC

THE MOST INFLUENTIAL CONFERENCE IN THE WORLD?

One of the driving forces behind the Love Tomorrow Conference is the Flemish knowledge centre VITO. This prime research and technology organisation on clean-tech and sustainable development is also the driving force behind G-STIC, the global sustainable technology and innovation community that wants to accelerate market-ready integrated technological solutions for the Sustainable Development Goals.

G-STIC’s annual conference is one of the most influential in the world. The 2023 session will include António Guterres, Secretary General of the United Nations. On this global stage,
Circular Economy receives a lot of attention. This is no coincidence, says Dietrich Van Der Weken, General Manager of G-STIC.

“Circular economy is crucial to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, and in different ways. People often think only of the classic waste paradigm, reusing raw materials as much as possible. But circular economy also has many spillovers to other sustainability compartments, such as climate. For example, we can realize a huge CO₂ gain by using materials sustainably. Even for rare resources - used in renewable energy applications such as wind turbines and batteries - it is vital to create a closed loop. So we are facing a crucial transition for the climate, which will also have a major impact on the competitiveness of our industry.”

“Another aspect, of course, is financial” continues G-STIC’s General Manager. “You can’t convince anyone with just a big budget, but it does help. Take Yuval Noah Harari, for example. That’s an investment that basically pays for itself, because profiles like this bring more participants but also additional partnerships. For example, we were able to secure a media partnership linked to Harari’s presence, which brings in new revenue. But you don’t have a guarantee of success, which is why not every organizer can or wants to take that risk. But as I said before, it’s not just financial space that is important, but also a strong story. Harari also came mainly because sustainability is a hot topic, and because the link to Tomorrowland has great appeal. Even speakers of his level are happy to be there.”

HOW DO YOU GET A WORLD STAR AT YOUR CONFERENCE?

G-STIC’s annual conference is one of the most influential in the world. The 2023 program features for example António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations. How does Dietrich Van der Weken manage to bring such a big name to his conference?

“A good network is very important. Our organization has very good relations with UN headquarters in New York. Through personal contacts you can appeal to the right people. The message of the conference itself also plays a role, because important people don’t just respond to any question. We especially emphasize the importance of technology and innovation in the context of sustainable development. We do this through a consortium of independent research institutions, which spread knowledge about interesting concepts and solutions from a scientifically based position. That independence is important, because within the United Nations you quickly end up in a geopolitical story. This is how we have built up a nice track record and credibility, which is why we manage to bring top profiles to our conferences.”

BUDGET PLAYS A ROLE, BUT IS NOT DECISIVE

Circular economy has many spillovers into other sustainability spheres.
Circular economy is all about sustainability. So your conference in this field is nowhere more at home than in a venue that passes that criterion with flying colours. An important touchstone for this is the Green Key label, which is awarded worldwide to conference venues that go all out for a sustainable world.

Flanders has several locations that meet this quality label. In fact, three of these places hold another award: that of Flanders Heritage Venue. Each of these architecturally exceptional buildings has its own soul, which adds an extra dimension to the theme of your conference and raises the conference experience of your delegates to a higher level.

On the following pages we introduce you to the three Flanders Heritage Venues with a Green Key label. Would you like to learn more about this network of selected conference venues? Sam Versele, Meeting & Congress Infrastructure Expert at Visit Flanders, is at your service.
A Room with a ZOO is a unique and inspiring location in Antwerp, next-door to an actual zoo and the magnificent Central Station. If you choose this conference center for your next meeting or conference, you support nature and biodiversity: all revenues are used to foster animal welfare, nature education and awareness building.

www.aroomwithazoo.com
The Faculty Club is located in a UNESCO World Heritage site: the Grand Beguinage, a place that hasn’t changed much over the last five centuries. The fairytale houses, the cobbled streets, and the meandering river Dijle make the Grand Beguinage one of the most beautiful and serene spots in Leuven.

www.facultyclub.be
Maison de la Poste is a truly inspiring place, decorated by international top designers. The congress centre is at the top of its field in terms of rooms, infrastructure, service, and sustainability. When you open the tap, out pours filtered ground water; the caterers only use locally sourced bio produce.

www.tour-taxis.com/meet-and-organise/all-our-venues/maison-de-la-poste/
FLANDERS: EASY TO REACH FOR DELEGATES FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD

Want to know more about Circular Economy?

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Flanders is number one worldwide in the **sorting of waste** and the processing of organic waste and plastics.

70% of the world-leading biotech companies are **based in Flanders**.

Flanders is home to the **largest R&D centre** for plant biotech and industrial biotech in Europe.

Flanders has the best integrated **bioenergy production complex** in Europe.