

A woman with glasses and a striped shirt is working on a bicycle wheel in a workshop. The background is filled with various tools and equipment. The image has a teal overlay.

Social and circular business strategies work!

Final report of the Circular Work(s)' learning network (2020-2023)

by Möbius on behalf of the King Baudouin Foundation, Circular Flanders and Department of Work and Social Economy

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1. Preface

Dear reader,

In 2020, Circular Flanders and the Department of Work and Social Economy (WSE) joined forces to accelerate social circular entrepreneurship in Flanders. Both organisations had picked up on signals that social and circular economy can potentially reinforce each other. To realise this, there was a need for connectors to bridge the gap between different actors who were not really aware of each other. This was the genesis of the idea of a social-circular hub.

Specifically, the Department of WSE and Circular Flanders supported 12 social-circular hubs across Flanders, with the objective of giving the circular and social transition more clout. Through the hubs, they introduce bridge builders who spot opportunities, bring the right people around the table and transform an idea into action.

“With this call for proposals, we wanted to go beyond a living lab or a learning network and actually set up a partnership that could address the current societal challenges while realising specific actions.” - Gert Van Eeckhout, Department of Work and Social Economy

“A successful hub brings together different players acting in the social interest. Together, they address current societal challenges via local solutions. That’s how they accomplish action on the ground.” - Brigitte Mouligneau, Circular Flanders



To get the most out of the results of the social-circular hubs, the King Baudouin Foundation undertook to set up a learning network among the hubs. For the past three years, this learning network has been organised by Möbius, which has provided individual and collective guidance to the hubs. This allowed them to learn from and inspire each other.

“The hubs are unique partnerships, each with a different local context and way of working, and yet there are various parallels between them. As a Foundation, we were therefore convinced that we could enhance the impact of these partnerships by enabling them to learn from each other, and supporting them through the learning network. It’s nice to see that we’ve planted the first seeds for more structural long-term cooperation.” - Anneke Ernon, King Baudouin Foundation

At the King Baudouin Foundation, Circular Flanders and the Department of WSE, we would like to congratulate the various social circular hubs for the results they have already achieved. Even though it was challenging at times to set up specific social-circular pilot projects, each hub has created tremendous social-circular momentum and brought about a mindshift at the local level.

We hope readers can learn about and find inspiration from the collaboration in the social circular economy in this final report! Happy reading.

King Baudouin Foundation,
Circular Flanders,
Department of Work and Social Economy.



2. The learning network Circular Work(s)! at a glance

entrepreneurship



- 12** recognised social-circular hubs, 2 additional hubs joined
- 10** thematic meetings
- 3** training courses on social and circular economy and project management
- 9** hours of collective coaching
- 90.5** hours of individual coaching from different hubs
- 72** participants in the learning network Circular Work(s)!
- 14** thematic experts share their experience
- 4** social and circular entrepreneurs share their experience
- 4** inspiring example hubs outside of Flanders

- 13** interventions to exchange knowledge on specific challenges in the different social-circular hubs
- 14** sessions to share knowledge on different value chains (construction, textiles, food, electronics, plastics and packaging)
- 10** sessions with working groups on collaboration and funding
- 6** flanking partners involved in the learning network



3. "A social-circular hub?"

3.1. What is a social-circular hub?

Social and circular economy need each other. Circular economy offers enormous potential in terms of job creation. This is due to the fact that, given the nature of its activities, a circular economy is labour-intensive and resource-efficient. The social economy can provide the manpower to maintain, repair, disassemble products and so much more. Nevertheless, the social economy also requires demand and expertise from circular entrepreneurs. But these organisations are currently only aware of each other to a limited extent.

A hub **boosts social and circular entrepreneurship at the local level**. Thanks to the hub, social and circular entrepreneurs, normal companies, supported employment companies, knowledge institutes and financiers can meet, explore concrete collaborations and work out pilot projects.

“Initially, we started the hubs to connect and strengthen social and circular economy. During the project call, we noticed that strong local networks were forming that could achieve significant added value, filling an unmet need in the landscape. We therefore subsequently paying more and more attention to local anchoring.”
- Brigitte Mouligneau, Circular Flanders



HUBS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Repair zkt HUB(s) is the only one of the twelve hubs which is active Flanders-wide, focusing specifically on one value chain, namely reusing and repairing electrical and electronic devices. They work towards enhancing recovery capacity at supported employment companies and try to overcome the challenges that emerge in the process.

In a circular economy, collaboration is necessary and this requires a broad range of competencies and expertise. For this reason, a social-circular hub is set up as a **partnership between different actors**. At a minimum, the core partners in a hub are a local government, the mainstream economy (through entrepreneurial networks, for example) and the social economy (through, e.g., the social economy director, supported employment companies, etc.). Moreover, the hub is open to additional support from other relevant partners, such as knowledge institutes, inter-municipal organisations, regional authorities, etc. This collaborative model, which includes a range of stakeholders with their own competencies and their own skills and individual network, is essential to support an equitable circular transition.

Different types of organisations have taken on the leading role with the hubs.

An overview of the coordinating organisations in the 12 hubs



Civil society

- Repair zkt HUB(S)



knowledge institute

- SCHOUDER
- Social-circular hub Ghent



Regular entrepreneurial network

- C3000 Leuven
- CICO Hub



Local or regional government

- Hub Bruges
- CE Hub region Mechelen
- De Keet
- Smart Loops
- Hub Hasselt



Social economy business

- Hub Genk
- Hub Kempen+

Each type of organisation has its advantages and disadvantages for taking on a coordinating role in the social-circular transition. Because a project leader never works in isolation, cooperating with other types of organisations in an equal partnership, the different organisations reinforce each other and ensure that the partnership works neutrally and objectively.



The partnership consists of doers (entrepreneurs) and thinkers (knowledge institutes and local governments). You need both to ensure the hub functions successfully. In the beginning, the doers felt a bit left out. Specific pilot projects simply take a little longer to get off the ground, first you need to do the preparatory work towards the vision, community building and exploring opportunities, and this is where the thinkers are strong.” - Johannes Rumbaut from De Keet



Local government

A local government knows the local fabric best and can safeguard the social interest. In particular, the social economy director within a local government can contribute expertise on social entrepreneurship and the various local supported employment companies.



Knowledge institutes

Knowledge institutes contribute the right expertise and look into (substantive) questions that are raised from among the entrepreneurs or other partners in the hub.



Entrepreneur networks

Entrepreneur networks are critical to understanding the needs of entrepreneurs and connecting with them, both mainstream and social.



Partners with expertise in financing

Partners with expertise in financing refer entrepreneurs to appropriate subsidy channels, or support them in working out the business case.



Civil society and citizens

Civil society and citizens were less represented in the partnerships of the various hubs over the past three years. The hubs are aware of the potential added value that this partner can also bring to the operations of the hubs, by providing demand for circular products and services.

3.2. What do social-circular hubs do?

The hubs pursue the following objectives:

- Organising networking for actors in the social and circular economy;
- Creating awareness among citizens and businesses around circular and social economy;
- Providing front-line advice to businesses on circular and social economy;
- Helping realise specific new circular initiatives with a social impact;
- Helping realise new circular services or contracts for recognised social economy businesses.

How do the hubs do this?

Even though each hub has its own identity and different focal points, they operate in the same way. We give an outline of these activities below.

Creating awareness around circular and social economy among citizens and businesses

- Communicating via social media, newsletters, LinkedIn, etc.
- Organising inspiration events
- Organising a physical experience site where circular economy is made tangible
- ...

Organising networking among actors from the 'social pentagon' around social and circular economy

- Organising networking events
- Organically matching different players in the local ecosystem based on supply and demand
- ...

Providing front-line advice on circular and social economy

- Physical counter
- Online social and circular counter
- Personal referrals from entrepreneurs and other local players
- ...

Helping realise the implementation of specific new circular initiatives with a social impact

- Identifying parties throughout the value chain
- Bringing different organisations together
- Searching for the missing links
- Matching entrepreneurs
- Providing space and facilities for experiment
- Supporting entrepreneurs in developing a business model
- Referring them to appropriate sources of funding
- ...

Helping realise new circular services or contracts for recognised social economy businesses

- Communicating via social media, newsletters, etc.
- Matching the social, mainstream and circular economy
- Organising events to put the social economy in the spotlight
- ...



Creating awareness

The hubs make circular economy tangible so that local entrepreneurs know exactly what it means and how they can get started. For example, this includes highlighting local circular entrepreneurs and projects on their website, in a newsletter or on their LinkedIn page, or organising inspiration events for the local network. Inspiring local cases and best practice can be focused on a specific value chain, or be more generic. Some hubs have a physical experience site where the circular economy can actually be seen.



HUBS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Hub Kempen has a strong focus on webinars, to raise awareness among their local fabric about social and circular economy. In these webinars, they also focus on several specific value chains, such as wood or plastics.

SCHOUDER has its own LinkedIn and Facebook page to continually highlight excellent examples from the region. They also provide information on current subsidy calls, relevant legislation, and much more, to raise awareness and inform their followers in the region.



Organising networking

The hubs position themselves as directors of the chain. They match and connect the local social pentagon both across different value chains and within specific value chains. They organise events ranging from inspiration events to working tables on a specific value chain (e.g. construction) or a challenge (e.g. eco-design). In addition, the hubs also connect the entrepreneurs in their network through one-on-one contact based on the various questions put to them.



HUBS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

De Keet brought together different players to explore implementing social and circular award criteria in specifications for textiles.

SCHOUDER organised several 'shout out' sessions, where local entrepreneurs asked pressing questions and helped each other out with solutions. In this way, **SCHOUDER** identified the social-circular questions in their network and subsequently matched the entrepreneurs through co-creation sessions.



Providing first-line advice

The hubs profile themselves as the local contact point for social circular business strategies, acting as a sounding board for local organisations. They help entrepreneurs deepen their grasp of social-circular business strategies and see their own challenges more clearly. In this regard so, the hubs refer them to suitable partners or experts if they do not have sufficient knowledge themselves. Some hubs take a structured approach in this regard, such as through a physical or online counter; while others take a more organic approach through events and the questions put to them in person.



HUBS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

At **CE Hub Mechelen's** (online) circular enterprise counter, local entrepreneurs can schedule an introductory meeting, for all their questions about social circular business strategies. Based on the nature of the question, they will be referred to the right partner, or the hub will take up the challenge with them.

Hub Hasselt's (physical) circular counter, based in the city centre, welcomes entrepreneurs by appointment or during the monthly walk-in day. Hub Hasselt also uses this physical destination to showcase exemplary circular projects and inspire entrepreneurs.





Helping realise specific new circular initiatives with a social impact

The hubs are motivated to provide long-term support to entrepreneurs in developing socially circular solutions and scaling them up. This is via comprehensive guidance that takes the form of:

- Bringing together the ecosystem (parties throughout the value chain and across value chains, parties from different segments of society, etc.) with the aim of spotting possible collaborations and/or pilot projects;
- Finding and matching the right partners to realise partnerships in the chain;
- Providing space and facilities for experimentation, to explore and test innovative ideas



HUBS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

CE Hub region Mechelen has an annual "Close the Circle" call. The selected entrepreneurs are given individual coaching from a partner in the hub to develop their entrepreneurial idea into a valid business model. They are subsequently followed up and are given support if there are any challenges that arise while their idea is being put into practice.

CICO Hub organised a design challenge for designers, in which they had to address a waste stream, namely banners, in City of Kortrijk. The designers took the entire life cycle of the products and also came up with recommendations on how to redesign the city marketing, to avoid the waste streams.



Helping realise new circular services or contracts for recognised social economy businesses

In setting up and operationalising new circular initiatives, the hubs always have the reflex of looking to see where there is a possible role for the supported employment companies in the process. Complementary to this, the hubs highlight local supported employment companies and social entrepreneurs and their services through the various events, communication campaigns, advice over the counter and so much more. For example, a mainstream or circular entrepreneur can look for a supported employment company that can help them with their challenges, for example unpacking, sorting, (simple) repair work, making reused products store-ready and so much more.



HUBS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Smart Loops launched the website "doeners.be" which lists supported employment companies and other social entrepreneurs from all over Flanders. As such, a mainstream or circular entrepreneur can easily find a partner to work with a supported employment company.

Social Circular Hub Ghent organised a speed date in 2022 between mainstream and social entrepreneurs looking to get started in the circular economy, with the aim of highlighting the operations and services of the local supported employment companies. In this regard, they match the mainstream and social economy, and generate new leads for supported employment companies. As there is a significant impact on jobs and turnover with each new lead, the hub plans to refine this formula and repeat it in the coming years.

While all hubs work towards the above-mentioned objectives, they always maintain their individual approach in this regard and work in accordance with their specific context. The hubs have also evolved over the past three years from primarily inspiring, communicating and bringing people together, to actually helping realise concrete pilot projects.

A recent survey¹ also revealed that entrepreneurs owners have a need for these services from the hubs, and primarily the following:

- Sharing good practices and experiences of failed projects
- Support in drafting subsidy applications
- Referral to appropriate experts in the circular and/or social economy
- Matchmaking between companies
- Process assistance in setting up circular chains



3.3. For whom?

The hubs primarily focus on pre-starters and startups, smaller companies such as SMEs and social entrepreneurs, and supported employment companies.

Some of the hubs have also managed to attract larger companies. These companies often have the resources and personnel themselves to invest in the circular transition, meaning that the hubs are of more limited added value to them. They are however generally interested in solutions relating to legislation. They also get involved by participating in or sponsoring local initiatives.

As the operations of the hubs continues to evolve, we see that they are expanding their target groups and also exploring how to engage and serve citizens and students.

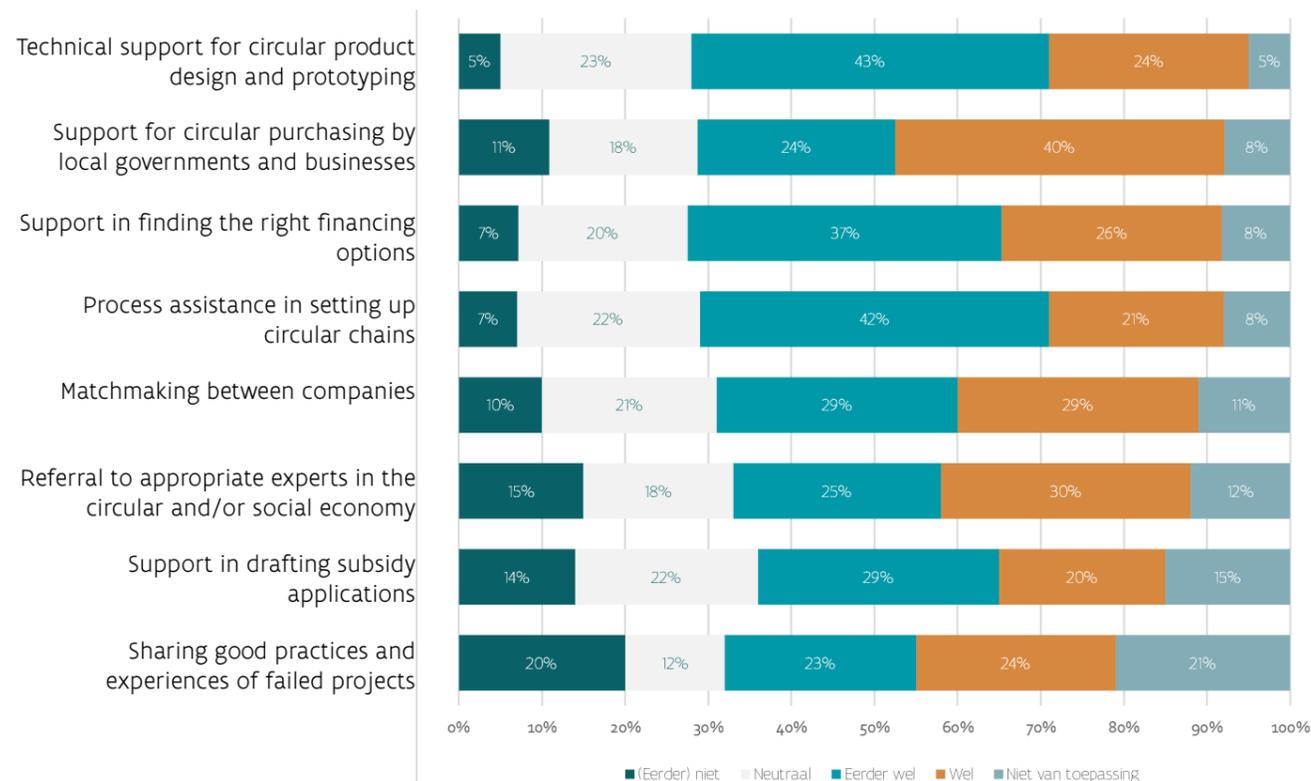


HUBS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

In late 2022, **De Keet** hosted "circulawadde?", a civic event where citizens could visit an ongoing circular exhibition, hear testimonials from circular entrepreneurs and get a tour of the local circular store. In this way, De Keet wanted to bring social circular economy closer to citizens.

The **Genk Hub** brings together the local socio-economic fabric through events such as, 'ESG: the turbo for your growth'. The aim is to reach primarily large companies in this regard. ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) encourages partnerships that are both profitable and socially responsible. The Hub is convinced that the European obligations create circular and social growth opportunities.

Needs for guidance in the circular transition



¹ Van Opstal, W. (2023). Roles for social-circular hubs in a social-circular transition: results of a survey. VITO. Mol.



3.4. What makes a social-circular hub successful?

Various elements are crucial in working towards a thriving social-circular hub. The learning network Circular Work(s)! supported the hubs in their further development.

Below is a summary and more insight into some of these success factors.



Working together with partners

- Mutual professional trust; doing what you say and saying what you do
- Corresponding values and norms
- Clear agreements (roles and cooperation)
- Finding new partners and persuading them to come on board



Governance of the hub

- Clear organisational structure (incl. roles and responsibilities)
- Clear agreements and trust between members of the hub



Interpersonal skills

- Being able to have an open dialogue, even in difficult situations
- Building bridges inside and outside the hub
- Having an entrepreneurial mindset and not being afraid of risk
- Daring to go off the familiar paths and being able to deal with change
- Social and circular ambassadorship



Communication & knowledge sharing

- Communication strategy within and beyond the hub (which message for which target group through which channel?)
- Communication plan to realise this strategy (communication actions)
- Raising awareness among and inspiring the various customers and by extension the general public
- Database of best practices and inspiring examples



Sustainable value proposition

- Ambitious vision translated into concrete objectives
- Distinctiveness, recognisable identity and unique offering
- Clear understanding of the needs of the local fabric
- and entrepreneurs
- Attractive offering of activities and/or products
- Identified customer segments
- Good project management



Funding

- Knowledge of existing funding channels (subsidies and investments)
- Expertise with possible business models
- Attractive pitch for funders
- Solid business case



Monitoring

- Well-defined indicators to measure the impact of the hub
- Measurement system and follow-up (at the right time and level)



Interpersonal skills

1. The coordinator of the hub has a strong entrepreneurial mindset

The social skills of the hub's promoter are essential in creating a dynamic and innovative hub. This coordinator must be able to inspire, motivate and lead - both internally in the partnership and externally vis-à-vis the local fabric. Becoming aware of social circular economy and realising concrete new social circular initiatives is a challenge. It requires a promoter with an entrepreneurial mindset, who is innovative, sees opportunities, takes the risk to act on them and who can persevere in order to overcome obstacles.



“Everyone brings something to the table in our collaboration,” explains Peggy Van Acker from the Social Circular Hub Ghent. **“One person has expertise in entrepreneurship; another has a large network and communication skills, while someone else has expertise in social entrepreneurship. What connected us all was the fact that we were working for the social interest and wanted to promote social-circular entrepreneurship.”**



“We are looking for a strong coordinator who can coordinate the hubs,” explains Gert van Eeckhout of the Department of WSE. **“Hubs need driven people with a broad range of entrepreneurial skills to bring an ecosystem together and keep it alive.”**

2. Complementary skills in the partnership

The convergence of diverse talents in the hub partnership creates a constructive dynamism, in which each partner makes a unique contribution. A hub definitely has to have technical skills and expertise in, for example, circular economy, social economy, entrepreneurship, etc. A hub also needs a healthy dose of interpersonal and communication skills, in addition to organisational skills, creativity and innovation talent.



Cooperation with partners

3. Varied partnership with representation from across the social pentagon

The hubs that are well represented by the social pentagon can achieve the most impact. Having a knowledge institution, entrepreneurial network, a partner with expertise in funding, a local government and a social economy partner (e.g., a supported employment company or social economy director) on board ensures that social circular entrepreneurship is realised faster and more effectively.



When we get an inquiry via the Mechelen Hub from an entrepreneur where there is potential for a supported employment company, we forward it to all the supported employment companies in the region,” explains Daphne Storms from CE Hub Region Mechelen. **”The choice of supported employment company therefore lies entirely with the entrepreneur and we play a neutral role as a hub.”**



“The sense of urgency around circular economy is still too limited among companies, they are mainly focusing on reducing their waste and to a lesser extent with circular design of products,” explains Sébastien Hylebos, coordinator of CICO Hub. **”For us, having partners like Voka West Flanders, Leiedal, Howest and WAAK on board and working together to raise awareness and activate our local businesses was a huge added value.”**

4. Neutrality of the different partners in the hub

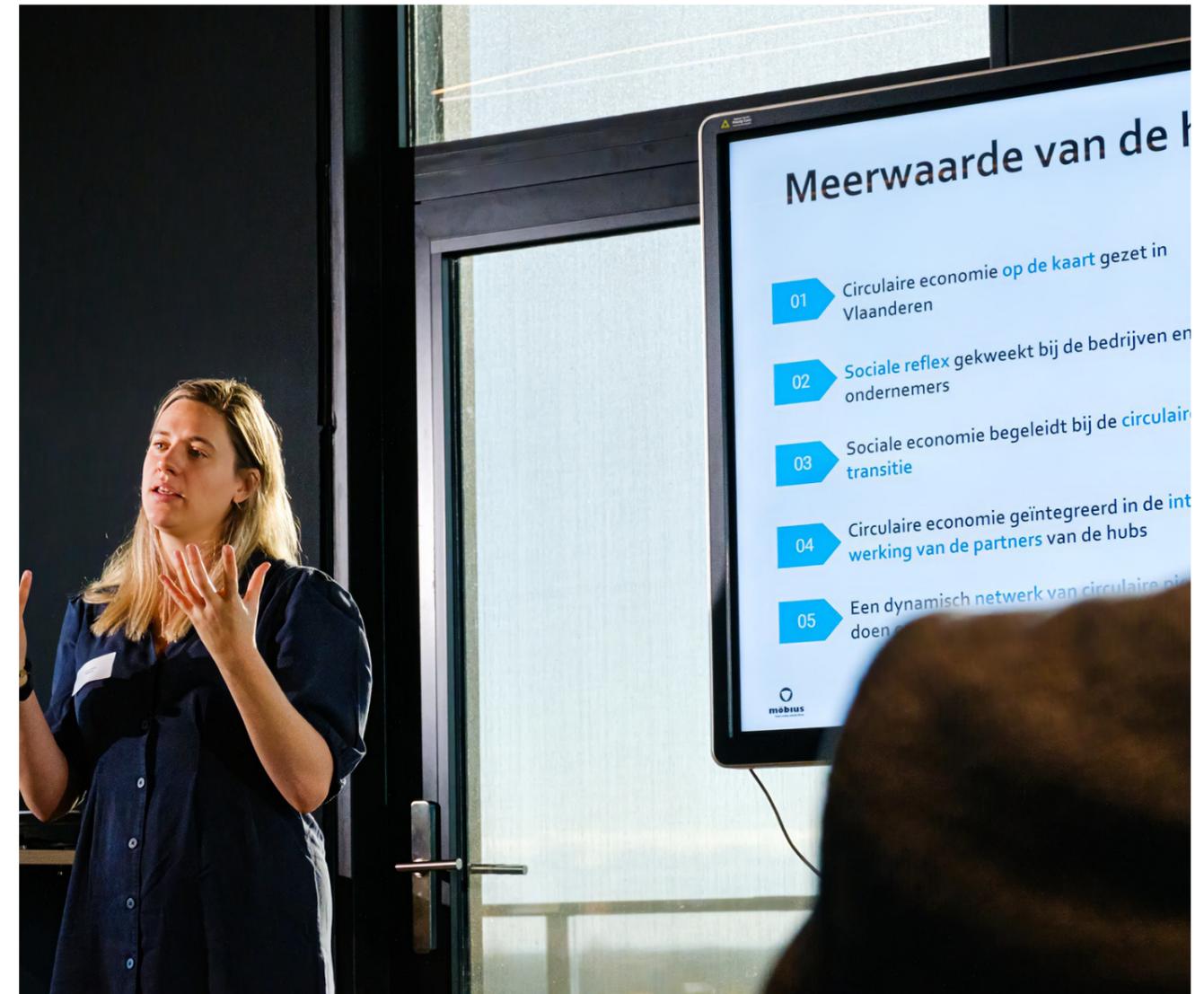
The local fabric has an interest in the hub operating for the benefit of society and not giving preferential treatment to certain partners or organisations. For this reason, it is positive that the hub's partners are intermediary organisations, e.g. an entrepreneurial network instead of one mainstream company, or a social economy director instead of one social economy company. This fosters constructive collaboration, given that local organisations are then treated equally and there are no tensions between them.

5. Trust between the partners

Building a strong partnership is a slow process, and trust is a necessary condition in achieving specific outcomes. Building trust therefore requires time, whereby the partners in the hub gradually get to know each other. Consistent contributions and transparent communication create a foundation of trust that strengthens the operations of the hub.



“Open communication is what has made our partnership so strong,” enthuses Julie Poppe of CE hub Region Mechelen. **”The trust that exists between the partners is a key factor for the operations of our hub. This takes time and grows over the years.”**





Governance of the hub

§6. Importance of a central hub coordinator

When the hubs are first set up, they need a 'neutral' coordinator to manage their operations. This coordinator ensures that the various tasks are not too scattered among different partners, that there is sufficient time and resources to work out actions from A to Z, and that there is an overview. The coordinator primarily has a director's role, and is surrounded by other individuals with substantive knowledge who take on specific tasks.

“

In the beginning, a project stands or falls with the efforts of a few pioneers and a central contact point. They give the local circular operation a face. The local fabric can therefore address any questions or ideas about circular economy in an accessible way. When these faces are no longer there, for whatever reason, some of this effect immediately falls away. This means that things are vulnerable in the beginning,” explains Geert Vaes of C3000 Leuven. **“There is now a healthy critical mass of circular change agents working on a wide range of themes in Leuven from different organisations. This provides the continuity a hub needs in the long run. Going down that path obviously takes time.”**

7. Clear agreements and a division of roles between the various partners

Working together is at the heart of smooth operations in a hub. In this regard, it is important to make clear the expectations and interests of each organisation and ensure a good cooperative structure that promotes common interests. Each partner needs to make their role explicit. In addition, there need to be clear agreements about the governance and operational functioning of the hub, as well as agreements on the desired leadership and how conflicts will be handled. These roles and agreements will also evolve over time and need to be continuously evaluated and adjusted as needed.

“

In the learning network, the explanation of the different roles and arrangements prompted a lot of reflection within our hub,” explains Pieter Werrebrouck, partner in De Keet and the Social-Circular Hub Ghent. **“This ensured that our roles were more precisely defined, and the cooperation went more smoothly after that because we had made sure everything was clear.”**



Sustainable value proposition

8. Neutrality of the different partners in the hub

The local fabric has an interest in the hub operating for the benefit of society and not giving preferential treatment to certain partners or organisations. For this reason, it is positive that the hub's partners are intermediary organisations, e.g. an entrepreneurial network instead of one mainstream company, or a social economy director instead of one social economy company. This fosters constructive collaboration, given that local organisations are then treated equally and there are no tensions between them.

9 A clear vision with room for bottom-up energy

One obvious success factor for the hubs is focus. Within various hubs, local government provides direction via a social-circular vision. This allows the hubs to focus on a few promising sectors and value chains in the local socio-economic fabric. At the same time, the hubs do not have to stick exclusively to this vision, and also need to respond to 'the input' of the local network and start where the energy is.



HUBS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

De Keet conducted a quantitative analysis to identify which value chains were priorities in the Aalst region. They then engaged with local entrepreneurs about their needs and the role De Keet could play in this. This allowed them to develop initial services based on the needs of local entrepreneurs.

Thomas More conducted a baseline measurement for **CE Hub region Mechelen** in late 2020, to find out to what extent local entrepreneurs and companies are engaged in circular economy and what barriers they experience. Hub Mechelen repeats this survey every two years to continually adjust their services. At the end of 2022, they already saw a shift in terms of circular knowledge in the Mechelen economy, as well as more applied strategies and embedding in companies' strategic agendas.

“

The hub was a catalyst to develop a circular vision for the City of Bruges. We were urgently looking at the role a local government could play in circular business. By drawing up the circular vision and action plan together with our local stakeholders, we were able to pinpoint the focus areas and our role,” explains Elke Renders of Hub Bruges.



Communication

10. Using existing networks combined with an in-house communication channel

The hubs using the existing communication channels of the partners in the hub manage to reach more people to raise awareness about social circular economy. This has the disadvantage that the message sometimes gets drowned out and is not tailored to the target group. When a hub starts up a new communication channel, it takes more time and effort to build and reach a target group. However, the communication via these channels is more focused and tailored to the target group. A combination of the two approaches seems ideal for both broad awareness raising and targeted communication of a concrete message.



HUBS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

From Designregion Kortrijk, most of the current partnership already existed and each partner also had an existing newsletter, LinkedIn page, etc. **CICO Hub** used all these existing communication channels to share the various events and inspiring cases from the hub.

Leuven MindGate is a partner in **C3000 Leuven** and decided to use circular economy as the common thread in all their events. As such, companies are made aware on a permanent basis of the importance of the sustainability transition.

4. Added value of hubs in Flanders

4.1. What have the hubs achieved in the past 3 years?

Circular work(s)

12 hubs for circular and social entrepreneurship

201 events with 7,500 participants

153 organisations having received guidance

162 launched prototypes or pilots

10,011 LinkedIn followers

87 subsidy applications with companies, of which ...

45 were approved

77 testing pathways between CE and SE



4.2. What added value have the hubs realised in the social circular economy over the past 3 years?

In addition to the many tangible results, the hubs have created a great deal of other - sometimes less tangible - value. Both for the local fabric in which they operate and for Flanders.

Based on several interviews with entrepreneurs, supported employment companies, knowledge institutes and government agencies, we analysed the impact the hubs have made in recent years. They have provided substantial added value in the areas below, although at the same time there is an opportunity to go further in the future:



1. Circular economy put on the map in Flanders

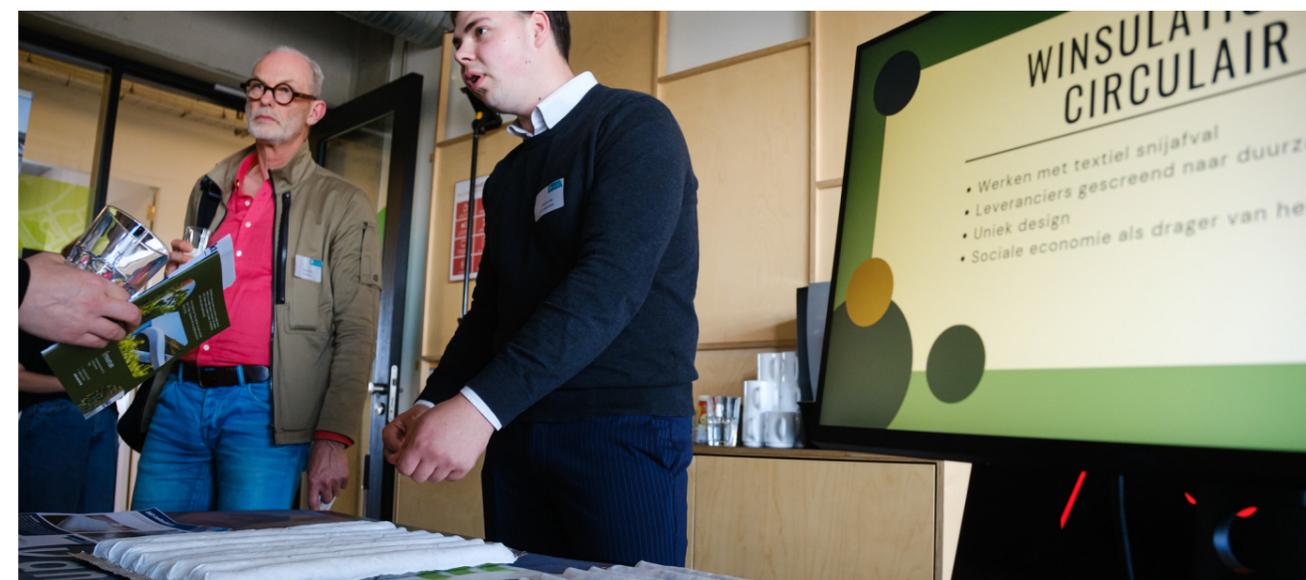
In recent years, the hubs have put a lot of effort into raising awareness among entrepreneurs, supported employment companies, knowledge institutes and various other organisations about what circular economy is and how to get started with it. Even though there is still much work to be done in the circular transition, the hubs have helped build knowledge and generated a lot of enthusiasm among the local fabric to be part of it.

“When we started the hub, circular economy was not a hot topic in our region,” recalls Vicky Franssen from SCHOUDER. “As a result, we first had to look for organisations that were already involved in it, and we also put a lot of time and effort into raising awareness among entrepreneurs, supported employment companies, and local governments around circular economy.” “We noticed in our hub that there was a strong ripple effect and after 3 years we had built a large network and were able to reach many organisations,” adds Leen Lippens from SCHOUDER.

2. Social economy reflex inculcated among businesses and entrepreneurs

The hubs have had a strong focus on making the social economy known and appreciated. They have made huge efforts in creating partnerships between the social and mainstream economy. In setting up circular projects or developing entrepreneurial ideas, they have also made sure that the most suitable process steps are looked at.

“If mainstream businesses don't know what we do, they won't work with us either,” explains Tom Wauters, general director at the Ateljee re-use shop. “Thanks to the hub, we've been able to reverse the 'out of sight, out of mind' phenomenon. We are now actually known for our potential impact in collaborations.”



“Social economy companies can drive the transition to a circular economy by promoting sustainable production, reuse and inclusive employment,” stresses Danny Martens of the hub in Genk. “They have very specific expertise in reconciling social goals with environmental concerns, but can also be very flexible vis-à-vis start-ups or larger companies.”

3. Supported employment companies guided through circular transition

Supported employment companies are making calls to get started with circular economy. As such, they have a headstart over the mainstream economy. They are looking for new circular opportunities, although a successful business model proves to be a challenge. The hubs have played an important role in exploring new markets and opportunities and guiding supported employment companies in developing new, circular activities.

4. Circular economy integrated into the internal operations of the partners of the hubs

Thanks to their role in the hubs, the partners in the hubs have also got the topic of circular economy on their own organisation's agenda. As a result, various organisations have taken steps to structurally envisage resources and staff, and further work towards the circular transition.

“ Smart Loops has brought about a serious change in mindset within the various services of the Province,” according to Mieke Frans of Smart Loops. “Via Smart Loops, we have made the administration familiar with circular economy, and have embedded it in the policy agenda. Even within the different services, you notice that the circular reflex is now much more in evidence.”



“ As hubs, we provide Flanders with a circular army,” asserted Koen Windmolders of Hub Hasselt, at one of the theme days. “If we put together the network that the different hubs have built locally, we have more than 500 circular experts, pioneers and ambassadors. Many small parts make one big picture.”

5. Creating a dynamic network of circular pioneers in Flanders

Each hub is building a network in its region around social-circular entrepreneurship, in which they focus on the entire social pentagon. This network has also systematically gotten bigger over the years. The hubs ensure that this network stays active and that local actors know each other and how they can find each other.

“ Through our physical hub, we have given circular economy visibility and integrated it into the daily streetscape,” enthuses Lien Beck from the City of Hasselt. “This has made circular and social highly visible to citizens and entrepreneurs, as well as to our administration and politicians.”

§6. Circular economy made tangible for citizens, entrepreneurs and politicians

Through the various concrete pilot projects and cases the hubs collected from the various local entrepreneurs, they are managing to make circular economy tangible. This is tailored to citizens, entrepreneurs, and politicians.



7. Collaboration as the new normal

Organisations are not always used to collaborating with others and can sometimes be very protective of their own knowledge, services and products. But collaboration is seen as a necessary condition for the circular economy. Thanks to the hubs, the realisation that working together is essential has dawned on many entrepreneurs.





8. Social circular actions realised

By bringing the network together locally and across value chains, various circular entrepreneurial ideas have emerged in which the social economy can also play a role in each case. The hubs ensured that these ideas were effectively developed into a concrete business case. To make this a reality, they provided guidance to go from idea to case, as well as continuous follow-up since circular economy is not yet in the core business of the vast majority of companies.

“ This year, we strengthened our links to the city of Turnhout, as they also jumped on board the circular train with us,” enthuses Herwin Daniels from Hub Kempen+. **“Since they’ve participated in the active network Local Circular and created a circular vision and action plan, this gives them a good basis to embed circular economy in their upcoming multi-year planning. As a hub, this also gives us guidance on where we can strengthen the action plan.”**

“ You can see that many organisations want to effectively work towards new social-circular projects, but often still lack time and personnel,” explains Leen Lippens from SCHOUDER. **“At SCHOUDER, we really had to act quickly to make sure things were actually moving forward, and we sometimes even had to take matters into our own hands to make a new circular project a reality.”**

9 Circular economy embedded in local policy

Thanks to the hubs, most of the local governments that are involved in the operations of the hubs have incorporated circular economy in their multi-year planning. Other local governments were encouraged by the hub to create a circular vision and action plan so that they can have a stronger focus on it in the next legislature.

10. Existing services publicised at various government agencies

In recent years, the hubs have put a lot of effort into raising awareness and informing their local network. For example, they direct entrepreneurs to VLAIO or provincial subsidy channels, communicate on changing legislation and help disseminate the available information on social entrepreneurship and circular economy from the Department of WSE and Circular Flanders.

“ The hubs have managed to set up various collaborations in the chain and bring together an ecosystem around it,” explains Rik Candries, Business Advisor at the VLAIO business pathways team. **“This was real added value for VLAIO and resulted in an interesting influx of consortia into our Living Labs Circular Economy project call.”**



11. Local needs and challenges translated into supralocal policy

The hubs act as a canary in the coal mine, so to speak, by communicating the challenges they detect locally during the social-circular experiments to the supralocal levels. As such, they ensure that any barriers will be addressed.

For example, a recent survey² found that entrepreneurs primarily need standardisation and tax measures to encourage circular goods and services. These are levers that supralocal policy can pull.

“ The hubs are our ears, eyes and hands on the ground,” explains Brigitte Mouligneau, transition manager at Circular Flanders. **“They detect the levers and sticking points where we ourselves are unable to be, on the ground, with the people who make the difference. Circular Flanders can then use this in the various Work Agendas and Levers.”**

² Van Opstal, W. (2023). Roles for social-circular hubs in a social-circular transition: results of a survey. VITO, Mol.



5. How have the hubs learned from each other?

From the start of the hubs' operations, the promoters and partners of the hubs met in the learning network "Circular Work(s)!. Every three months, they came together in person at a themed meeting, and in between had online meetings for shorter sessions on diverse challenges, and each hub also took advantage of individual coaching sessions.

Whereas the first meetings of the learning network were mainly focused on bringing in inspiration from outside (e.g. from similar initiatives in the Netherlands, from experts on a sub-theme or existing cases), this evolved into exchanging experiences, up to and including building together on the success factors for successful operations within a hub, or discovering opportunities in a given value chain. The mutual exchange also meant that challenges could be shared, participants could learn from each other and others, and build on each other's best practice.

We are 100% convinced that the learning network has increased the hubs' chances of success.

- The learning network pulled all the hubs forward with it. It ensured that less mature hubs grew faster and took bigger steps forward and that the more mature hubs easily found each other and took initiatives together.
- The learning network meant that the hubs could mature, both in terms of expertise in social circular economy and around the topics linked to the hubs' operations (such as the business model, programme management, etc.).
- The learning network created a community across the hubs. It meant that the people within the hubs could find like-minded people, share recognisable issues and motivate each other personally, whereas as forerunners in their organisations, they often stood alone with these themes.



- The learning network created a community across the hubs. It meant that the people within the hubs could find like-minded people, share recognisable issues and motivate each other personally, whereas as forerunners in their organisations, they often stood alone with these themes.
 - The learning network provided breathing space. Running a hub involves a lot of day-to-day activities which makes it challenging for the hub to zoom out and reflect on their operations. The regular moments of the learning network obliged them to devote time and space to more strategic thinking exercises.
 - The learning network successfully fostered cooperation among the hubs. It helped generate ideas and projects which the hubs were able to get behind (some of which were even supported through subsidies), it provided a platform to address common challenges (in-house operations, value chains, circular strategies, etc.) and created a multiplier effect, with new hubs starting up after the launch of Circular Work(s)!
 - The learning network was hosted in decentralised locations, namely at the hubs or partners themselves. This always guaranteed an inspiring and surprising setting, and also allowed local entrepreneurs to present a case.
- We believe that the following points for improvement could have made the learning network even more effective.



- Participation in the learning network was seen as no-obligation, which led to varying degrees of cooperation on the part of the different hubs. We worked with uneven input that was not always representative of the whole group.
- The learning network consisted of a large number of activities, which put pressure on the agendas of the promoters and partners. While all meetings were found to be valuable, it seems advisable to limit the number of meetings.
- The learning network included many highly directed activities. However, there was also great value in building the agenda more organically at meetings and allowing the hubs talk to each other freely.
- The learning network provided a platform for meeting, both physically and online. This was frequently used, although at the same time it was underutilised. The hubs could have shared more information and knowledge on their own initiative and directly with each other.

The learning network was generously supported by Circular Flanders and the Department of WSE. At the same time, there was room to help the hubs more intensively in terms of overarching communication (e.g., by developing a shared and reliable brand for the hubs) and to put even more effort into exchanging information between the local and supralocal levels.

“**If you give things the time to grow and invest in a learning network, you end up with incredible dynamism and driven people,**” enthuses Gert Van Eeckhout from the Department of WSE.

6. What have we learned from the hubs' operations?

6.1. Lessons learned from 3 years of Circular Work(s)!



1. Local anchoring ensure that each hub has an individual character

The hubs set themselves apart by placing their own emphases on the target groups with whom they work, or the value chains in which they work. The emphases arise from the local strengths, the specific context of the city or region in question and the already available network of (the promoters of) the hub. For example, we see a different approach in a region or city with more industry versus a region or city with more service companies.



We have four different hubs in East Flanders, each distinctly individual, and arising from the local fabric. For example, De Keet bases its approach on the social activity in the city of Aalst, COCON is building a physical hub for companies in the Waasland region, SCHOUDER focuses on the network and connections between social and mainstream entrepreneurs in the (broader) region of Oudenaarde and the Social-Circular Hub Ghent is working towards an ecosystem around construction,” explains Lotte Vandermeersch of the Province of East Flanders.



2. When hubs could start from an existing partnership or an elaborate strategy, they developed faster, which meant that hubs had different levels of maturity

Each hub has its own starting point. For some, this was one partner's social-circular vision; for others, a strategy was already waiting to be implemented. Some had several interested contacts; others were able to build on an existing partnership. Existing strategies or partnerships were an accelerator in the startup of the hubs and still account for differences in maturity.



In 2021, we were fortunate enough to build the social-circular hub on solid foundations in Leuven. After all, the city administration already drew up a circular strategy in 2019,” explains Geert Vaes of C3000. **“This strategy was and still is supported by a broad partnership united in the Leuven 2030 consultation platform. From the outset, the main focus of the hub was therefore focused on setting up new pilot projects and supporting the scale-up of projects already started.”**



3. The operations of the hub create an interplay between social economy and circular economy

The hubs have managed to bring together the social economy and circular approach in one project. They are making headway into mainstream businesses, to test and embrace the principles of both in their operations. When a hub starts from a circular principle, it always finds a process step relevant to the social economy. And conversely, we see a hub that starts from the social economy looking for a way to respond to the circular transition.



“At Smart Loops, we put strong emphasis on the social map, and we position ourselves mainly as a social hub, other operations focus more on the circular economy,” explains Pierre Faché from Smart Loops. **“We are convinced that we have all achieved outstanding results that have benefited both the social and circular economy.”**



4. When local policy is behind the social circular economy, it leverages the operations of the hub

Some hubs need to pioneer around the theme of the social circular economy, while others continue to surf on strong policies in the municipality, city or region. The latter can benefit from a policy vision, gain easier access to the local social-circular network and use existing communication channels.



“We find that within the territory of our hub, there is a big difference between cities and towns and what is going on in the area of circular economy,” asserts Vicky Fransen from SCHOUDER. **“When a policy officer has a dedicated circular economy role, it increases our impact and vice versa.”**



5. A physical location makes the hub's operation tangible

A physical location with an exhibition and/or workshop space gives a face to the hub and makes the social circular economy approachable. Such a venue has the power to make circularity visible and integrated into day-to-day life. For some hubs, the location represented excellent added value, although a hub can also operate perfectly fine without a physical location.



“The Social Circular Hub Ghent currently does not have a physical location, but in the future this could offer great added value to the operations of the hub,” explains Tom Wauters from Ateljee re-use shop. **“A physical hub shows what the social circular economy should look like in concrete terms and where there is cross-fertilisation. It forms a hothouse of ideas that inspire, where you can seek advice and benefit from shared use of machines.”**



6. An interaction between building a community and guiding concrete pilot projects drives the operations of a hub

Hubs learn as they go along, to strike a balance between building their community, raising awareness about the possibilities of a social circular economy on the one hand, and guiding entrepreneurs in their pilot project on the other. One activity feeds the other, through new project ideas and knowledge and experiences gained.

“Initially, we mainly focused on the project on circular salmon croquettes. It was rewarding to accomplish something concrete and make the circular economy tangible. But as a result, we started building an ecosystem too late. This is a crucial step that you can't skip if you want multiple cases to slowly emerge,” explains Tina Segers of Hub Bruges.



7. Hubs look to strike a balance between advising individual startups and entrepreneurs and supporting larger projects in the chain

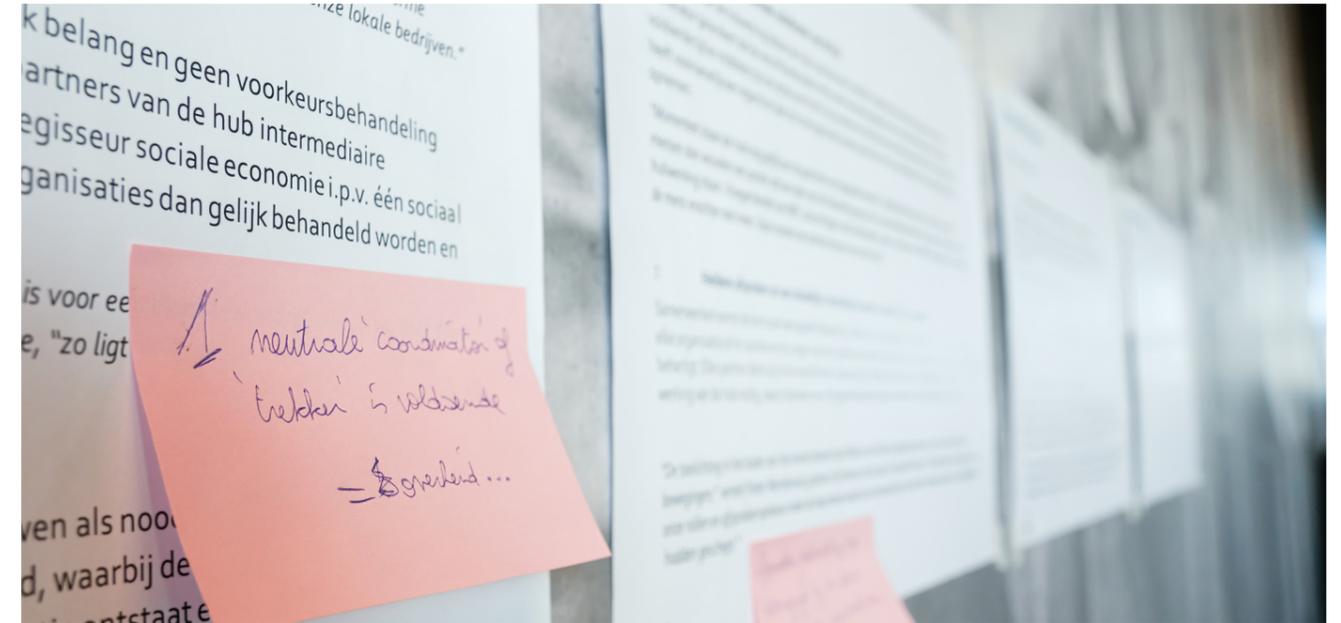
The hubs have seen that they create an impact at different scales. They look to strike a balance between investing time in mentoring sole traders and advancing projects with an extensive consortium.



HUBS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

In Hub Kempen+, they clustered the individual cases in connection with wood and plastics into a mini-ecosystem. Larger projects grew out of this, with more scale, and these were submitted by the Kempen hub together with C3000 Leuven in a VLAIO Living Lab for plastics, and with hub Ghent for wood.

Hub Hasselt partnered with local retailers on a project on circular window displays. The hub aims to provide inspiration to retailers on using and lending out second-hand materials to put together window displays.



8. The tangible effect of the hubs mainly manifests itself in the long term

The hubs test and experiment intensively with their offering before the spark fizzles out. They plant seeds that only generate visible results after several years. After three years of social-circular hubs in Flanders, we are now seeing an acceleration in results and associated impact.

“We need to be realistic in our expectations of the tangible benefits of the hubs. After three years, how many products of companies are actually go-to-market with scalable production?” muses Gert van Eeckhout of the Department of WSE. “At the same time, we shouldn't overlook what some hubs have already accomplished.”

“Sometimes, this kind of hub event doesn't seem to offer much benefit in the short term. Then it seems like we or the participants don't get out of it what we hoped for, but then in the long run or a few months later it turns out that they still find us or each other in a collaboration.” - Vicky Franssen, SCHOUDER



9 Handling the partnership flexibly is crucial to staying responsive to the changing needs and contexts

Hubs invest time in putting together a valuable consortium of partners. Together they are the driving force behind the hub, even though each partner also has its own interests and other possibilities. It is therefore important that the partners have flexibility in their contribution and the partnership takes a different form for each project or activity. At the same time, a core partner or set of core partners ensure(s) continuity in the hub.

6.2. What challenges are the social-circular hubs facing today?



1. Limited funding

The hubs were made operational through external subsidies and the partners' own funding. Many partners experienced tight budgets due to limited subsidisation in relation to the targets they had set for their hubs. Their work was mostly based on their engagement and desire to have a social impact. Given the limited budgets, some hubs therefore struggled with underwhelming engagement by partners, and see a lack of two-way cooperation as unsustainable in the long run.



2. Structural funding mix

The hubs have already made efforts to devise a business model for their operations, although this wasn't straightforward - especially in the start-up phase. Developing a system of structural funding is a continual challenge. Other sources of funding may be found for some of the hubs' activities (e.g., guidance for entrepreneurs, for a fee). Nevertheless, the networking and matching activities, which offer such excellent value to the local network, are very difficult to fund without subsidies. It is also necessary in this regard that subsidies are envisaged for the long term, so that hubs don't have to spend time and energy every year seeking new funding.

“**You cannot build a business model around mere community building,**” underlines Julie Poppe from CE Hub Region Mechelen. **“At the same time, community building is precisely what has been so valuable in the hub's operations in recent years.”**



3. Formal collaboration in the hub

Currently, a hub's partnership is set up via a simple collaboration agreement. Each partner therefore partially represents its own organisation, including its objectives and values. This can create friction in pursuing the hub's mission. Furthermore, as a separate entity, the hub cannot apply for a subsidy project. To formalise the collaboration between different organisations, some hubs are thinking of setting up a legal structure.

“**Collaboration between mainstream businesses, social economy businesses and local governments in one partnership is not a straightforward process. The basic goals and corporate cultures of each of these 3 types of organisations are fundamentally different,**” explains Bernd Bormans from Hub Genk. **“One possible solution in our opinion is to house the services in a separate organisation, away from structures of the organisations involved.”**



4. Anchoring in policy

The hubs see the support and cooperation of Circular Flanders and the Department of WSE as a powerful element in their operations. They believe that the local and supralocal levels can reinforce each other. The hubs need to be anchored in Flemish policy, where their role is clearly defined and it is clear how they fit into existing structures.

“**We have found that great things happen when we work across policy areas and departments. It ensures cross-fertilisation and stronger long-term anchoring,**” confirms Pieter Geladé of the Department of WSE. **“We also use the example of the hubs everywhere, in the literature and for Europe.”**



5. Monitoring the impact of the hub

Every hub wants to make their impact tangible and communicate about it persuasively. However, they find that their effects on social circular entrepreneurship are difficult to measure, both for one-off and structural initiatives. A lot of time and effort is needed to collect information and data on a regular basis to make it possible to monitor quantitative indicators. The hubs see a benefit in agreeing on a joint methodology, in order to have a robust and handy measurement tool. They would then define several overarching indicators in this tool to monitor the impact independently and leave room to incorporate several specific targets per hub.



6. Frequent communication

All hubs believe that communicating about their success stories helps accelerate their impact. At the same time, it is challenging to apply this consistently in practice. Regular communication requires not only a communication plan with several communication campaigns, a well thought-out strategy and discipline are also crucial. With a focus on launching hubs and building the core activities, communication possibilities often remained underutilised. In addition, the common branding "Circular Work(s)!" was not used consistently.

A recent survey³ highlighted just how challenging communicating through different channels was. Most respondents knew about the hub through one of the partners or through word of mouth, but only to a limited extent through social media or an online search. There is therefore still a lot of potential for improvement in raising awareness of the hubs and their operations.



If you followed the hubs from a distance and were not involved in their internal operations, it was not always clear what Circular Work(s)! meant, what the hubs exactly stood for and how they worked together," explains Wouter Ulburghs of Groep Maatwerk. "A unified branding and a shared story across the hubs would be a great strength in this regard."

However, thanks to the hubs, we have a lot of inspiring case studies, and can therefore inspire new social circular entrepreneurs. The hubs can add even more value in the future if they put more effort into communicating and sharing inspiring social-circular stories (via the Circular Flanders 'doers' database, among others), as well as the 'failed' pilot projects, so that the local fabric can learn from them.



7. Professionalising the hubs

Over the past three years, the hubs have set up their internal operations and built up a good service offering, communication strategy, form of collaboration - both internal and external - and business model. In the future, the hubs will benefit from exchanging more about their operations, to learn from each other's best practices. There is still potential to further professionalise the operations of the hubs, for example in the area of marketing, searching for new social-circular projects, teamwork and leadership, financial management, etc. Moreover, the hubs can also enrich themselves content-wise by following new developments and trends in the area of social circular economy. Finally, there is also potential to join forces and further develop and professionalise certain services (e.g., hosting inspiration events or guidance for entrepreneurs) together.



7. The Future of Circular Work(s)!

By setting up a learning network, the King Baudouin Foundation has supported Circular Work(s) for nearly three years. In addition to the help provided by the Foundation to the hubs in the start-up phase, the latter also facilitated meetings and collaboration among the hubs. At the end of 2023, we can assert that the hubs readily find each other, both regarding general challenges in their operations and specific issues about a value chain or a circular strategy. We therefore look positively to the future and believe in the continued path that the hubs - individually and jointly - are taking.

The following prospects give confidence for the future:



1. Sustainable financing

As the initial funding from the ESF, Circular Flanders and the Department of WSE expired at the end of 2023, the hubs worked over the summer on a financial plan to further develop their activities. The focus on **co-financing⁴ and a business model** resulted in a more precise offering for 2024.

As a result, each hub is also more individual. To secure sustainable funding in the future, the hubs either need to organise themselves much more commercially (e.g., following the example of Blue City in Rotterdam) or secure permanent funding from the government (Flanders, provincial and/or local).

At the end of 2023, the existing hubs were given the opportunity to sign up for another project call from the Department of WSE. The explicit aim in this regard is growth, or achieving a new impact. More emphasis also needs to be placed on supporting and developing actual projects/cases. This external funding runs over a year and a half and allows the hubs to continue their operations structurally until new local governments are in place and policy plans are finalised.

The selection of hubs to receive the subsidy was not yet complete at the time of publishing this final report, but interested readers can keep an eye on this via communication from the Department of WSE.

⁴ Co-financing means that the partners invest their own resources in the operations of the hub.



Strengthened cooperation

The hubs are strong advocates for collaboration in a socially circular economy. They are therefore looking forward to seeing the following strengthened at the supralocal level:

- Among themselves, the hubs work on exchanging contacts, sharing best practices and standardising common elements in their operations. Avenues being explored to formalise cooperation include setting up an overarching legal structure and appointing a joint coordinator for Circular Work(s). The joint coordinator should ideally be embedded in an existing structure, such as Circular Flanders or the Department of WSE.

They believe in the synergy of their local character with the overarching role of like-minded parties such as provinces, sector federations and departments. Avenues for broad knowledge sharing include the working agendas of Circular Flanders, existing learning networks and European projects.



“For the province of East Flanders, hubs are a hugely valuable tool. Their more personal interaction with both social and mainstream entrepreneurs makes it possible to improve local services. Because while we issue permits and subsidies, we have limited direct contact with entrepreneurs,” explains Lotte Vandermeersch from the Province of East Flanders.



HUBS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

The Province of East Flanders is already currently facilitating cooperation between the four hubs in East Flanders, SCHOUDER, Social-Circular Hub Ghent, COCON and De Keet. In this way, these hubs strengthen each other's networks, exchange best practices and see where they can work together. For example, at the 'Impact Week' in East Flanders, all the local cases from the different hubs were put together in the spotlight.

- The hubs want to cooperate on a structural basis with regional and Flemish actors.



3. Bigger impact

The added value of the hubs is described earlier in this report. Reinforcing this impact at the Flemish level is central to each hub's future plans.

- One avenue is to play a connecting role in current Flemish social circular projects that focus on a specific value chain or material stream. These projects build in-depth knowledge in a specific sector or type of product, where the hubs can ensure suitable implementation on the ground. Some hubs could even evolve into or collaborate with logistics hubs where infrastructure is ready to reprocess key material streams. It is crucial in this regard not to lose sight of raising awareness and networking on social circular economy in general.

- A new activity will be the long-term follow-up of projects so that they can scale up and further grow confidence in their socially circular product or service and progress to the appropriate channels (e.g. VLAIO)
- The hubs themselves are calling for a territory-wide approach so that they can effectively act as local antennas for social and circular economy. In this regard, however, we also need to be mindful of not saturating the landscape of hubs and ensuring the right balance.



“We can ensure that projects at the Flemish level are more locally anchored. With the experience of Repair zkt Hub, we are currently fuelling the Living Lab 'Repair First' which aims to promote the recovery of electrical and electronic devices. By collaborating with the network of hubs, we are rolling out the experiments among local actors. This makes the project more effective,” enthuses Ward Dumon of Repair Zkt Hub(s).





SCHOUDER

SCHOUDER initiated the deco project in which it furnished 2 areas for the University of Ghent completely circular. In this project, all the efforts and connections made came together like pieces of a puzzle, matching different production waste streams from the region (e.g., textiles, slatted beds, carpet tiles, etc.) with pre-starters and 'doers' who showed circular ambitions and with supported employment companies seeking new leads. SCHOUDER and the various local organisations are now exploring how to further scale up this try-out.



8. Projects of the hubs in the spotlight

The hubs have launched 162 pilot projects over the past three years. Here we highlight a few projects that the hubs are very proud of. Interested readers who would like to learn about more projects the hubs have gotten behind can take a look at the Circular Flanders website.

CICO Hub

CICO Hub organises circular road trips that inspire participants and showcase best practices from companies already involved in circular business strategies. In this regard, they do deeper into circular business models, as well as the struggles companies face in implementing circular economy. The road trips help spread useful information and strengthen the network. On 10 November, CICO Hub visited 5 organisations:

- Supported employment company Footstep, where they optimise the processing of food products, with the least possible waste as a result
- Floor mat manufacturer Verimpex in Bruges, which uses worn aircraft tires as the raw material for their floor mats
- Biopack, a pioneer in ecological packaging
- Acasus, the knowledge and inspiration centre for sustainable living, building and renovation
- the Nieuwpoort Marina, where they are looking for sustainable solutions for end-of-life ships.



Hub Leuven

The non-profit organisation Atelier Circuler is the initiator of the Leuven Materials Bank. Together with social economy organisation Wonen en Werken, they recover building elements from renovation and demolition projects in Leuven that find their way back into construction projects through the Materials Bank. In 2023, non-profit organisation Atelier Circuler accounted for nearly 200 tons of reclaimed building materials, 5 FTEs in the social economy and 6 of its own employees (~ 4 FTEs) active in one of the 3 pillars of the non-profit organisation: the open workshop, circular projects and materials bank.



Circular hub Bruges

Through the collaboration Repair zkt HUB(s) in the think tank electro, Hub Bruges joined forces with 't Rad re-use shop in the living lab 'Repair First'. In the context of this, a separate container will soon be installed at recycling parks in Bruges, to collect reusable electro which will be repaired and put back on the market by the 't Rad re-use shop. This is a great example of how the expertise of another hub can help initiate new projects locally.

De Keet

During the first Impact Week in East Flanders, De Keet organised a networking event for and by entrepreneurs on 30 May 2022, together with supported employment company MAAAT. At this event, entitled 'From Waste to Raw Material' no less than 150 participants from 80 different companies and organisations listened to the fascinating circular cases of a large regular company (Tekni-Plex), a supported employment company (MAAAT) and a circular start-up (Woosh). The evening concluded with a tour of MAAAT's brand-new buildings and workplaces and a networking reception, including snacks made from food surpluses. A circular hit!

Keet

CULAIR EN SO



Hub Genk

The non-profit organisation Alternatief, together with the residential care centre ZOG Genk, PSWC (public social welfare centre) Genk and the City of Genk, provides a healthy range of dishes on the Genk well-being campus. The partners provide a democratic, healthy and market-oriented offering. This interplay between workers from the social economy, an enabling local government, interaction with the PSWC and the well-being sector, make for a tasty pilot project with a possible follow-up in 2024.

Repair zkt HUB(S)

Repair zkt HUB(s) has initiated various pilot projects to 'collect and store' appliances from recycling parks. This is always in collaboration with Recupel, intermunicipal waste companies and re-use shops. Thanks to 'collect and store', visitors to the recycling park who want to dispose of an appliance can place a still working appliance in a separate container for reuse, instead of immediately throwing it away in the recycling container. The 'storage containers' are then picked up by the re-use shop, where workers from the target group inspect and repair the appliances, then resell them secondhand in their store. Pilots are currently running at 11 recycling parks. In the short term, 4 parks will be added, and in 2024 we will scale up to additional parks and regions.

Smart Loops

Circular start-up More2Coffee focuses on the high-end valorisation of coffee grounds. One of their achievements is the 'circulatte'. This is a (scented) candle made by supported employment company De Vlaspit using oil extracted from coffee grounds sourced from UZ Leuven, and dried by employment care initiative Oostrem in Herent.





Social-circular Hub Ghent

'Vlaamse Kinderopvang' (Flemish childcare), an initiative with 5 locations in Ghent, is looking to introduce a system of reusable nappies for all childcare centres in Ghent, and they were looking for a flexible logistics partner for the start-up phase. The Social Circular Hub Ghent put the question to suitable companies from the social economy in Ghent, which resulted in a working table with 3 interested supported employment companies and Vlaamse Kinderopvang. 'Groep Intro' proved to be the most suitable candidate, and has been successfully supporting local used nappy collection, sorting, folding and delivery of clean nappies for more than six months now.



Social-circular Hub Kempen+

Since 1990, Ecorub has been making innovative products from recycled rubber. Hub Kempen connected them with experts, intermunicipal waste companies and other companies. The result was an international supply network of car and aircraft tyres as raw material for Ecorub. This led to the launch of new rubber products, creating employment for people at a distance from the labour market. Ecorub was the keynote speaker at an inspiration event and participated in workshops and pilot tests on valorising composite plastic waste streams.

Circular Work(s)! region Hasselt

Build circular and affordable shopfront window displays? It's possible, together with Okazi re-use store and professional window display companies, the windows of 8 retailers in Hasselt were transformed into circular gems. Retailers need to regularly update their window displays. A lot of time, money and energy goes into this. What's more, all the display materials end up in the basement afterwards. Now we're reusing them. When the window display is changed, the material goes back to Okazi.



CE Hub region Mechelen

'Den Brillenatelier' is a collaboration between supported employment company Ecoso and optician Den Brillenman. Glasses are collected in re-use shops and businesses. The frames are refurbished through social employment at Den Brillenatelier before being offered second-hand. In collaboration with social centres, Fedasil, the Red Cross and the social care sector, support is also provided to vulnerable individuals in need of prescription glasses. Den Brillenatelier also works with Yumalabs to recycle frames that are not suitable for reuse, into new 3D printed eyewear. A circular solution is being looked into for the old glasses through student research at Thomas More university college.



Colophon

Social and circular entrepreneurship work(s)!

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