

# EUropainfo

Das Magazin des EU-Umweltbüros



## Österreich auf dem Weg in die Kreislaufwirtschaft

Chancen, Herausforderungen, Strategien, AkteurInnen

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## Creating circular hubs in the EU

*The European Commission is delivering on the Circular Economy Package. Now comes the time for ambitious implementation and preparations for new policies after the 2019 elections. To increase member state support for measures with a real impact, creating circular hubs across Europe is an excellent next step.*

By **Arthur ten Wolde**



Creating a circular economy has risen fast on the EU political agenda over the past five years.<sup>1</sup> A growing number of organizations are committed to the realization of a circular economy. Creating “circular hubs”, i.e. multi-stakeholder initiatives aimed at accelerating the transition to a circular economy by providing support for the implementation of circular models at the local, regional and national levels, is emerging as a key step in making this happen.

Circular stands for much more than recycling. It involves circular measures all the way from design, procurement and manufacturing, to delivery, use and recovery. It also assumes the use of renewable energy and an overall contribution to sustainability. The term “circular economy” proves very appealing because it involves the

improvement of the economy. It is about creating jobs and revenues while contributing to the wellbeing of the planet and its people.

### Measures to overcome the barriers

Pioneering companies need the government to help them overcome structural barriers. Ecopreneur.eu, the European Federation of Sustainable Business, advocates ambitious implementation of circu-

*Pioneering companies need the government to help them overcome structural barriers.*

lar economy policies to achieve systemic change at the EU level and in the member states. The biggest obstacle faced by the companies in their membership, most-

ly green SMEs, is the lack of a powerful demand. A second major barrier is the lack of transparency throughout the value chain. For SMEs, lack of access to finance is a further obstacle. As a member of the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform (“ECESP”), Ecopreneur asks for the creation of circular hubs across Europe, training on integrating circularity into procurement, economic incentives for producers and consumers favoring circular products and services, and minimum requirements for circular design for all end products.<sup>2</sup>

The European Parliament and Commission have been fighting for a strong Circular Economy Package. Indeed, it is built on circular procurement, financial incentives and regulation. The Commission

has also proposed to open up the VAT directive, which would allow member states to give circular incentives to consumers. However, there are not yet any strong measures in place, and few in preparation. For instance, there is still no large EU training program for local and national governments or for companies on how to integrate circularity into procurement. Public authorities alone represent around 14 % of the EU's gross domestic product. There has also been no program initiated to formulate and implement strong minimum requirements for improved extended producer responsibility (EPR) schemes that include ecodesign criteria. This is important, given that purchasing behavior is to a large extent determined by price. The Commission is also reluctant to extend the Ecodesign Directive to minimum requirements for resource-inefficient end products. Finally, we still have to hear from our SME member companies to what extent access to finance is being improved by EU measures.

## Creating circular hubs to break the stalemate

So far, member states have watered down all proposals that have potential for real impact. To break the stalemate, Ecopre-

neur.eu is now asking the EU to foster the creation of "circular hubs" throughout Europe; these will serve to use all relevant existing European Commission structures in an aligned approach to engage stake-

*Only with the support of stakeholders can ambitious implementation to initiate the system's change to a circular economy be accomplished.*

holders in circularity at all levels. For instance, training people of Europe Enterprise Network and DG Regio on explaining the benefits of the circular economy. Only with the support of all stakeholders can ambitious implementation to initiate the system's change to a circular economy be accomplished. The launch of the Circular Futures Platform in Austria therefore comes at an excellent time. A first step to engage businesses and local communities could be to launch a Green Deal for Circular Procurement. This proved an excellent start in the Netherlands as well as Belgium.

## About Ecopreneur.eu

European Sustainable Business Federation Ecopreneur.eu (aisb) sets a course toward sustainable economic policies at the European level. Ecopreneur.eu aims to open solidified structures and bring matters of sustainability to European policy makers. Under the roof of Ecopreneur.eu, more than 2500 businesses are represented – mostly SMEs – that strive to offer sustainable products and services. Through Ecopreneur.eu, the seven member associations strengthen the voice of sustainable business in Brussels. The advocacy work for a circular economy is led by the Dutch member organization MVO Nederland (CSR Netherlands).

Arthur ten Wolde

Circular Economy Expert

Ecopreneur.eu and MVO Nederland /

De Groene Zaak

3511 MH Utrecht / THE NETHERLANDS

E: [tenwolde@ecopreneur.eu](mailto:tenwolde@ecopreneur.eu)

[http://dutchsustainablebusiness.com/case/](http://dutchsustainablebusiness.com/case/project-a)

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[www.ecopreneur.eu](http://www.ecopreneur.eu)

<sup>1</sup> This article is partly based on 'Governments as drivers for a circular economy'. Ten Wolde, Waste and Resource Management Volume 00 Issue WRO, Pages 1–2, Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers, Paper 1600017, ICE Publishing 07/09/2016

<sup>2</sup> <http://dutchsustainablebusiness.com/case/project-a/>



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