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CITIES



## Be circular - Be Brussels

# Support for innovative enterprises creates jobs and accelerates progress

Brussels has inspired local entrepreneurs to come up with creative business ideas that integrate circular concepts, as part of its regional economic revitalisation programme. Be Circular - Be Brussels supports the most innovative initiatives while also proving the feasibility of the circular economy and giving government valuable insights into its challenges and success factors.

When Brussels launched a regional programme to trigger its transition to the circular economy, it recognised the need to get start up and small businesses involved. Larger companies, it was argued, tend to have the resources and knowledge to instigate their own move towards more sustainable ways of working, whereas smaller firms need financial and business support. To ensure the city capitalised on the creativity and passion of its start ups, self-employed citizens and non-profit organisations, one of the principle measures of the Brussels Regional Programme for a Circular Economy (BRPCE) was directed exclusively at them.

Be Circular - Be Brussels was launched jointly by the city agencies Brussels Economy and Employment, Brussels Environment and Impulse.brussels, which acts as a one-stop-shop for entrepreneurs seeking information, support or funding. It has three goals: to support innovative business ideas, identify projects that would have a lever effect on the development of the circular economy, and advance public support for different models of this new economic exchange and production system, such as the reuse of waste and the collaborative economy.



Be Circular - Be Brussels is not only about supporting entrepreneurs' circular economy projects, it is also for us as agencies to understand the issues and success factors they experience and to follow and learn from the evolution of their projects.



**Catherine Vanderstichelen, head of department  
Economy in Transition, Brussels Capital Region**

### Strong response

Be Circular - Be Brussels is a call for initiatives with a fundamental goal of moving the core business towards sustainability through the application of circular economy principles. Like all BRPCE measures, it combines both top-down and bottom-up approaches, harnessing the business community's insights into needs and opportunities

cities in action

November 2017

where: Brussels, Belgium  
what: Innovation  
when: 2016 - ongoing

plus government assistance, political support and funding. The call seeks ideas in four areas: closing the circle through reuse, repair, remanufacturing and recycling; developing new business models; optimising resource use in production processes; and creating tools and guides to aid the transition to a circular economy.

When the first call was launched in 2016, 85 proposals were submitted - far more than expected. Out of these entries, 41 were chosen related to a diverse range of industries including food, construction, IT, design and retail. Each winning idea received funding of up to €80,000 from the annual €1.7m budget, and privileged direct access to experts from the region's business support services. Those submitting proposals could also ask for free methodological support ahead of submission to make their proposed activity more circular.



and sports equipment via an online library platform. MCB Atelier's Comodu project has created wooden modular structures that can be rented and reused by theatres and businesses as scenery, stands and exhibition walls.

“The call for circular economy projects has a simple framework and is broad enough to allow many different kinds of start ups and small businesses to be innovative and introduce ideas, from collaborative platforms to food brands that make use of unsold produce.”

**Patricia Foscolo, manager green technologies, Impulse Brussels**

## Creative ideas

Among the winning initiatives is Dropstore, where unwanted computers and technological devices are collected, sorted, dismantled, repaired and resold as spare parts or reconditioned equipment. Organic food take-away Au Marché Noir works with local producers to ensure a short supply chain and Belgomarkt is a new kind of supermarket that sells Belgian-only, organic products in bulk. Terre Group has set up a factory shopping outlet selling low-cost clothing recovered from its network of 2,600 textile collection points and has ambitions to open a further four in the region.

Other proposals piloted during the measure's first year include City Depot, which optimises and closes goods flow loops, consolidating deliveries and the collection of waste on cleaner, smaller and more city-friendly vehicles. Usitoo is testing a membership community concept enabling the sharing of DIY, camping, gardening

## Engaged entrepreneurs

Support for initiatives undertaken in the first year has resulted in the creation of 30 new jobs, investment in machines and feasibility studies and a total spend, including companies' own investments and co-financing arrangements, of close to €8m. In response to feedback, the application form and category definitions were simplified for the 2017 call, which elicited even more projects, 110. The Be Circular - Be Brussels team was delighted to see that many of the second year's proposals were collaborations involving businesses from the first, suggesting the measure is creating a vibrant network of cooperative entrepreneurs active in the circular economy.

The team has learned through evaluation that while collaboration between the three supporting agencies is one of the measure's most complicated aspects, it is also the one that makes the greatest contribution to its effectiveness. The team is convinced that encouraging the private sector, such as business associations, to promote the project has given it more credibility among its target audience. Critically, all three agencies are gaining a better understanding of the difficulties faced by enterprises attempting to integrate circular economy principles - and of what they can do to ease these in future.

