



SHARING EXPERIENCE EUROPE
POLICY INNOVATION DESIGN

Case Studies in Design Policy & Programmes

This case study was developed as part of the SEE project. SEE is a network of eleven European partners sharing experience and stimulating debate on how to integrate design into innovation policies at regional, national and European levels.

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The Public Waste Agency of Flanders Belgium

Every year, approximately 3.4 million tonnes of household waste is accumulated in Flanders (Belgium) and 308 municipalities work together with 27 associations to dispose of this waste. In addition, industrial waste amounts to 32 million tonnes annually. Societal challenges of this nature have become salient environmental and social issues, requiring new thinking in order to find sustainable solutions.

Traditional waste management focuses mainly on the end of life phase, the phase where material becomes waste. However, managing the material chain as a whole, 'from cradle to cradle', is essential for finding sustainable answers to the waste problem. The input of raw materials, current production and consumption patterns and the final stages of material cycles are all related to the waste issue. Therefore, the Public Waste Agency of Flanders (OVAM) has sought to broaden the scope of its approach to materials management by implementing initiatives to promote sustainable consumption and production. The agency has set up almost a

dozen initiatives aimed at behavioural change among citizens, SMEs, industry at large as well as public administration and by setting the following targets to be achieved by 2015, OVAM is leading by example:

OVAM has set the following sustainable consumption and production targets to be achieved by 2015:

For more innovative materials, products and systems to enter the Flemish market and become recognised by consumers

For the retail sector to both offer and sell more sustainable products

For sustainable products and services to represent a larger share of total consumption

For the Flemish government to fulfil an exemplary role in making consumption patterns more sustainable via green public procurement

In order for OVAM to achieve these objectives a series of initiatives have been developed, some of which take advantage of the creative processes used by designers.

OVAM chose to collaborate with Design Flanders, SEE project partner, in developing the Ecolizer, a tool to help designers create more environmentally friendly products by making ecodesign more accessible during the initial design phases. Developed in 2005, the Ecolizer is a set of criteria that is quickly and easily consulted in order for designers or product developers to introduce life cycle thinking into the design processes and assess the environmental impacts of their products. The idea behind the initiative was derived from the fact that despite the availability of academic information on ecodesign, it is rarely applied by Flemish designers or companies. Therefore the Ecolizer was developed to make this wealth of academic information more accessible to designers enabling them to integrate environmental criteria into innovative products. In 2009, the Ecolizer was upgraded to the 2.0 version, which includes an update of all the data and recalculations of the indicators according to 'ReCiPe', the new eco-indicator-method. This method is used to express the environmental impact of the production materials and all the subsequent stages in one eco-indicator number so a designer can assess the sustainability of his creation in a quality score. With the Ecolizer 2.0 OVAM provides a scientific based, dynamic and modern tool that inspires national and international companies to create innovative and environmentally sound products.

For more information visit www.ovam.be/ecolizer/en

To encourage designers that integrate environmental criteria into their design, the OVAM annually hands out Ecodesign Awards, both to students in the field of product development and to professional designers. In promoting eco-design initiatives, OVAM wishes to demonstrate that innovation, the environment and the economy can go hand in hand.

For more information on the Ecodesign Awards see the case study on the Henry van de Velde and Ecodesign Awards in the SEE Case Study Library or visit www.ovam.be/ecodesign

The retail sector, as an intermediary between producers and consumers, has been identified as a key player in making production and consumption patterns more sustainable. OVAM has launched three trial projects, in close co-operation with the retail sector, to stimulate the sale of environmentally friendly detergents, energy saving lamps and energy efficient tumble dryers. A mascot Nelli, a green lizard, is used to identify these products for consumers in the shops.

The aim of the Eco-efficiency scanprogramme is to identify opportunities for eco-efficiency improvements within small and medium enterprises (SMEs). It is analysed whether the amount of waste can be reduced, whether more materials can be recycled, whether the energy and water consumption can be reduced, and so on. An experienced consultant carries out the scan. The OVAM covers the costs. In other words, the scan is free of charge for the participating SME. Over a period of 3 years the programme has reached 1 000 Flemish SMEs.

The initiative MAMBO refers to 'Less waste, more profit'. By means of a software package developed by OVAM, companies are able to calculate the true costs of their waste production. The tool indicates that true waste costs are up to 10 times higher than the visible disposal costs and amount up to 5% of production costs. The objective of MAMBO is to raise awareness among companies and stimulate them to focus on waste prevention.

The inspiration database can also be found on the OVAM website. This database contains more than 300 good examples of eco-efficiency and ecodesign measures and is meant to inspire companies and designers looking for ways to integrate environmental considerations into a realistic approach to good design and competitive products.

The OVAM has developed the web application Producttest that is meant to help local authorities gauge the sustainability of their procurement. It allows them to assess how 'green' the office supplies, cleaning products and electric and electronic appliances they purchase are and also contains ecological criteria that can be integrated into public tenders.

PLAN C is the Flemish Network for Sustainable Materials Management, launched by the OVAM in 2006, in which industry, NGOs, research centres, the government and other organisations participate and reflect on ways to develop policies for managing whole material cycles instead of classic waste strategies. Specific teams are preparing transition experiments on closing material loops, replacing goods by services, raising awareness among the public and greening chemistry.

With regard to sustainable building, the OVAM is developing a tool that offers information on the environmental impact of the use of building materials. This tool is a useful aid for all actors involved in a building project, and especially for owners who commission the building and architects wanting to take into account environmental aspects when designing a building. This ecological assessment of the use of building materials is part of a more general standard for sustainable building and living, which is being developed by the Flemish authorities in co-operation with the industry. With this standard Flanders wants to align itself with the World Green Building Council and with the EU objectives and legislation on sustainable building.

OVAM is responsible for elaborating the input-output model with environmental impacts in Flanders. The model reflects the relations between the structure of an economy and economic actions. It maps money streams between sectors but also the emissions of the sectors. The aim is to map the environmental impact of sectors, materials and products.

In recent decades OVAM and the Flanders Region have taken the lead in Europe when it comes to re-using and recycling waste. Safeguarding this position in the future can only be achieved by renewing the emphasis on sustainable consumption and production and closing material loops. OVAM is an example of applying design methods and creative processes in public sector activities for achieving sustainability targets and lasting behaviour change. OVAM has involved all sectors in the movement (consumers, producers, the retail sector, educators as well as designers) by engaging them through design with targeted initiatives.

For the full list of initiatives visit: www.ovam.be