PRESS RELEASE

Wallonia, heart of Creative Europe

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WALLONIA, HEART OF CREATIVE EUROPE

A road trip connecting Liège, Namur, and Mons – 2015 Cultural Capital of Europe – was organized to show the real-life achievements of the European project 'Wallonia, European Creative District'. Not only did this project reveal the potential of the region's cultural and creative industries; it also revitalised the region's economy thanks to an approach revolving around creativity, hybridisation, and transsectoral initiatives.

The European Commission representatives and European experts who went on the trip were able to discover the actual projects set up to develop a creative economy in Wallonia. In 2013 the European Commission conferred the title of 'European Creative District' on Wallonia and Tuscany from a pool of more than forty candidates from all parts of Europe. The success and originality of the Creative Wallonia programme had a preponderant influence on this decision. Wallonia is now presenting the actual projects born of the creative entrepreneurial ecosystem that Creative Wallonia set up. 'Wallonia, European Creative District (WECD) is the European demonstrator of Creative Wallonia,' Vincent Lepage, Economic Policy Director at the Public Service (ministry) of Wallonia (DG06), explains. 'We participated, for instance, in the work of the European Alliance for the Creative Industries. Wallonia is now at the heart of many international networks operating in the creative economy; eighty-five partnerships are under way, and 132 international actions have already been conducted with Walloon players in the sector.'

'THE CREATIVE ECONOMY: THE RECIPE FOR SUCCESS'

The project's partners — the Operational Directorate-General for the Economy, Employment, and Research of the Public Service of Wallonia (DGO6), Wallonie Design, St'Art Invest, Wallonia's digital agency *Agence du Numérique*, and ID Campus — , working with the TWIST and Infopôle TIC (media and ICT) clusters, concocted an itinerary through Wallonia for the delegation. Liège, which is currently hosting the international triennial of design, rechristened 'Reciprocity Design', was the delegation's first stop.

The specific object of the visit was the Design Station of Wallonia, a centre dedicated to promoting design and the region's economic development. In his speech, Wallonia's Minister of the Economy, Jean-Claude Marcourt, recalled the Walloon Government's goals for 2019: '*Creative Wallonia was an ambitious programme right from the start, one that made it possible to reach and connect up all the components of society, from citizens to entrepreneurs, with students and researchers in between. By 2019 we are going to continue to promote a cultural of creativity and to position Wallonia as a land of creativity on the international stage,' he concluded.*

REAL RESULTS

Several beneficiaries of the WECD programme were on hand to share their experiences. These entrepreneurs shared a common denominator, that of innovation through creativity. 'Student and go' is a professional social network where students and businesses can interact. 'Let's go city' has developed an application that carries local information linked to happenings, tourism, and current events using intelligent connected tools. 'Made and More' has developed a site for selling ethical 'slow fashion' items online. The 'DOM'UP' suspended shelter is an economical, environmentally responsible alternative to treehouses that leaves no traces on the trees. 'HSTRY' is an interactive web platform that lets students and teachers recreate historical events in real time. These interactive timelines offer a new way of teaching history. More than 5,500 schools around the world use this tool and the start-up already has offices in the United States.







Various means were made available to these enterprises to enable them to pool their expertise: Thanks to creativity cheques, 'Homeco' and 'Speculooz' developed innovative architectural structures to improve the energy performance of listed buildings without affecting their appearance, whilst 'With In' worked with 'Contes de Fèves' to develop a 'mobile chocolate (work)shop', expanding the concept of a chocolate factory housed in a lorry to create a movable, modular pop-up shop. 'Mahusaca' and 'Global Design' teamed up to create an ergonomic carrying case and wheelchair/bed attachment for uninterrupted use of a self-powered IV drip system during patient transfers and transport. Easier access to financing enabled 'Fishing Cactus' to grow from eight to twenty-five people in one year and to invest in its own video game products. 'Wrapsodi' took advantage of co-working: To develop her application for sending a personalised video message with a gift, its founder was able to collaborate with a graphic artist, developers, and a translator.

Through 'Wallonia, European Creative District', Wallonia has set itself up as an example, revealing its creative potential to dynamise its economy. This example should now inspire change in other regions of Europe.

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WECD IN A FEW KEY POINTS

WECD PROJECT RESULTS

The WECD project is a sort of European 'laboratory' of what creativity can do for innovation and the economy of a region. With a budget of one million euros (funded 50/50 by Wallonia and the European Commission), the project was able to finance a series of pilot actions in four complementary directions.

Here are the results of the project:

Creative skills:

- A prototype Master in Co-creative Innovation was developed and tested on a group of employees working in SMEs and micro-enterprises.
- An academic study of young employees was carried out in order to develop a matrix of the creative skills that the labour market currently requires.

More information + videos and publications on www.wecd.eu/skills

Collaboration:

• Ten 'creativity cheques' worth 6,000 EUR each were awarded to some 'conventional' SMEs searching for more creativity for their products.

These cheques enabled them to make use of the services of enterprises in the creative sector (graphic artists, designers, architects, etc.).

More information + videos and publications on www.wecd.eu/collaboration

 The eight co-working centres set up in Wallonia's main cities were used as hybridisation tools between creative industries and SMEs from other sectors.

More information + videos and publications on www.wecd.eu/coworking

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT





Funding for creative industries:

- A prototype training course on 'How to and why invest in creative and cultural industries?' designed for investors and number-crunchers (bankers, accounts, auditors, etc.) was developed and tested to get a better grasp of the value of creative sector enterprises' intangible assets.
- In parallel, twenty-five SMEs from the creative industries sector were coached on presenting themselves to potential investors more professionally.

More information + videos and publications on www.wecd.eu/finance

Networks and clusters:

- Two Walloon clusters in the creative and cultural industries sectors (TWIST for media technology and Infopôle TIC for digital tech) were labelled 'European reference clusters' in their respective fields: TWIST got a 'silver' label and Infopôle TIC a 'bronze' label. These labels will enable them to engage in new industrial partnerships in the coming months and years.
- These same two clusters conducted several rounds of matchmaking between twenty Walloon SMEs in the transmedia sector and twenty SMEs from similar clusters in Europe. Sixty-six B2B meetings came out of this and the first trade and innovation partnerships are already under way.
- Systematic matching between creative industries and the priority strands of Wallonia's six competitiveness clusters (BIOWIN, MECATECH, SKYWIN, WAGRALIM, LOGISTICS in WALLONIA, and GREENWIN) was undertaken, as a result of which eighteen areas for trans-sectoral collaboration were identified. Six competitiveness cluster projects are already relying on inputs from enterprises in various creative sectors (design, architecture, imaging technology, etc.).

More information and publications on www.wecd.eu/clusters

AND AFTERWARDS?

With Creative Wallonia and the WECD project, Wallonia has shown that an ecosystem of innovation can grow, provided that sufficient financial means (European and regional funds, redirected aid, etc.), appropriate skills, and the political will to succeed are entered into the equation.

The movement is continuing on the European level...

- Wallonia has been recognised a number of times for its creative economy-based development strategy. Over the past few months,
 - 1) Wallonia was included in a shortlist of fifteen exemplary creative cities and regions in Europe (under the 'Culture for Cities and Regions' proiect).
 - 2) Wallonia and four other European regions developed a strategy to internationalise creative industries beyond Europe's borders. This project Clusters go International of the COSME programme found favour with the European Commission and received the 'European Strategic Cluster Partnerships' (ESCP) label. That gives the consortium access to support for the communication and dissemination of its activities but, most important, will enable it to lay the foundations of new projects.
 - 3) Wallonia has been one of the driving forces of the European Alliance of the Creative Industries, a platform of ten European cities and regions that have put the creative industries at the heart of their economic development strategies.

...and in Wallonia

- The Creative Wallonia programme has been so successful that it has just been continued for another five years (2015-2019). Four strategic priorities have been chosen: creative people, creative networks, creative SMEs, and creative industries. http://marcourt.wallonie.be/actualites/~la-wallonie-unlaboratoire-innovant-et-creatif-reconnu-internationalement.htm?lng=fr
- The programme has a total five-year budget of close to 100 million euros, part of which is being channelled through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to set up 'creative hubs' in Wallonia's major cities.



