

# Sustainable Gelderland connects Europe

**Being the most entrepreneurial region of Europe, the Province of Gelderland organized the International Conference 'Empowering Sustainability'. Speakers from various disciplines talked about empowering sustainability from different perspectives. Participants learned about sustainable projects, innovative companies and remarkable locations in Gelderland during inspiring Health, Food, Industry and Energy Tours.**

## **Inspire everybody**

In 2019, the Province of Gelderland may call itself the most entrepreneurial region of Europe, because of its policy towards innovation and promoting entrepreneurship. It is the Province's ambition that everybody who visits Gelderland during this Award year or who works together with the Province, will return home inspired. The two-day conference in Papendal focussed on accelerating sustainability in innovation in which the importance of cooperation with European partners was emphasized. Executive member of the Province of Gelderland Michiel Scheffer: "Working together creates a bigger impact and accelerates innovation. We still have to figure out how to use our financial means to be able to continue to support our sustainable entrepreneurs. And how to cope with scalability."

## **European support for Dutch e-mobility transition**

The European Investment Bank (EIB) invested 40 million euros in Allego, a Dutch supplier and operator of electric vehicle charging infrastructure. Els Sweeney-Bindels, head of EIB Netherlands: "Our support to Allego shows Europe's commitment to support the transition towards clean mobility." CEO Anja van Niersen is happy with the loan and the quality approval. "This made us realize that we were doing the right thing. If I could start over, I would focus on scalability from day one though. We started with eight people. At this time we have a staff of 280 people in eight countries. We had to restructure the company three times."

## **Taking consumers towards a sustainable living**

Alberic Pater, sustainability manager IKEA, wants to take his consumers towards a sustainable living. According to Alberic talking too much about the topic is not the way to get this done. "Instead of telling buyers about the sustainability of a product, we emphasize its usability and price advantage." IKEA also wants to become a circular company. Alberic admits this is a challenge. "If your business is doing well, it's hard to unlearn. But you shouldn't be afraid of piloting. Be brave, just do it. Think big, start small."

## **40,000 energy-neutral homes**

The four Dutch towns of Apeldoorn, Deventer, Zutphen and Zwolle cooperate in an area-oriented approach to make 40,000 homes energy-neutral. Together with housing associations, network companies and water authorities, they created a closed business case. With Transform, the cities want to make sure that especially homeowners with a tight budget can transfer from natural gas to sustainable energy by pre-financing the necessary investments. Alderman Harry Matser: “An area-oriented approach of the energy transition offers economies of scale, for example regarding the necessary adjustment of underlying grids and the procurement and installation of the necessary equipment.”

## **Sustainable companies, innovative projects and remarkable locations**

To show what is actually being done in Gelderland in respect of innovation and sustainability, participants could join a Food, Energy, Industry or Health Tour. On-site they could see and learn from sustainable projects, innovative companies and remarkable places in Gelderland. One of the locations was the Industrial Park Kleefse Waard, an award-winning business park that accommodates, facilitates and connects sustainable energy-related businesses. Together with entrepreneurs, the authorities and education institutes they work on becoming the cleantech campus of the future. Geanne van Arkel, head Sustainable Development at Interface and MVO-manager of the year 2018, presented their interesting transition from a traditional business to sustainable future-proof company. In FoodValley participants could enjoy the pitches of the most promising agrifood start-ups and innovative companies.

## **Technological innovations in Healthcare**

The inspiring Health Tour went to Novio Tech Campus (NTC) in Nijmegen where knowledge, business and innovation come together. The campus offers state-of-the-art research infrastructure and accommodation for entrepreneurs and researchers in the Life Sciences, Health and HighTech sectors. This is also the beating heart of Health Valley. Health Valley fosters and supports technological innovations in healthcare. CEO NTC Rikus Wolbers: “Around our campus we organize all the knowhow needed to be able to grow as a company. We are able to realize crossovers between Health and HighTech, which helps us make an impact on human lives.”

## **The key to successful innovation**

According to Louise Fresco, president of Wageningen University & Research, the EER Award is well-deserved. “Our secret to successful innovation is being able to make the connection between practical reality and fundamental science. Also, we work in a ‘golden square’ in different parts of the world. There is a constant dialogue between entrepreneurs, the authorities, science institutes and society. That is the key to success. I am optimistic about the future, because we are making progress. And we have technology on our side. We learn how to use to world while making as little impact as we can.”