# EMAS Awards winners highlight business benefits of Circular Economy

Across Europe, businesses and public organisations from all sizes are embracing Circular Economy. Realising the scarcity of resources and the need to decrease the environmental impacts of human activities, they are innovating to use resources in a smarter way, with a positive return on investment. In this task they are supported by the European Union, which has recently made Circular Economy a priority and has implemented several programmes that provide funds for organisations getting started on the path to circular economy.

### From hotel rooms to university programmes

Few may have ever thought that a circular economy could start in a print shop in England, a hotel in Belgium, or a university in Germany. Yet these are year's EMAS Awards winners, frontrunners for a greener and more sustainable economy in Europe. The 2017 edition of the Awards, held on 8 May in Valetta, Malta, recognised these three organisations for implementing dozens of actions to increase their sustainability and helping to achieve this year's Awards theme of "contributing to the make the European economy more circular".

A unifying theme for these three sustainability pioneers is the European Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS), an environmental management tool developed by the European Commission to help both businesses and public organisations measure and improve their environmental performance. They can also increase their overall efficiency – a study found that increases just in energy efficiency through EMAS can save organisations up to €400,000 annually, depending on size. The same study also cited a number of soft benefits for companies, including improved reputation. According to Karmenu Vella, European Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, *"As demonstrated by [the] nominees of the EMAS Awards, EMAS can help foster new partnerships, identify new business opportunities, increase employee satisfaction and improve reputation".* These benefits can accrue to many different types of companies.

### Keeping waste out of the family business

**Seacourt Ltd**, a family-owned printing company from the UK, won the EMAS award in the category *Small and medium sized private organisations.* In 2009 Seacourt became one of the first printing company in the world to bring zero waste to landfill, resulting in both a reduced environmental impact and in cost savings for the company. Everything Seacourt prints either ends up as a finished printed product with its clients or goes into one of the company's many recycling streams.

Despite having only 20 employees, Seacourt has invested extensively in the low carbon economy. The factory is powered by 100% renewable energy. The company has also developed a new printing process called LightTouch (waterless and LED printing) which allows them to eliminate water consumption and chemical use while printing.

**Gareth Dinnage**, managing director at Seacourt, highlights the transformation and how it has made his company more successful: "We have been EMAS registered since 1999. In that time, our business has transformed from a resource intensive polluting manufacturer to the most sustainable printing company in the UK - we have been a closed loop production facility since 2009 and are close to becoming a net positive business".

*Bringing circular economy into the service sector*

With 350 employees, the Belgian Hotel Chain **Martin's Hotels** demonstrates circular economy on a larger scale. Winner of the EMAS Award in the category "*Large private organisations*", Martin's Hotels has achieved significant cost and material savings through its purchasing policy (sourcing local and eco-labelled products, leasing equipment) and waste management (preference for rechargeable products, bulk purchases and donation or reuse of furniture). **Gaëlle Mourlon Beernaert**, the sustainability director of Martin's Hotels, is proud of the company's actions: "We have decreased our energy consumption by 12% while still increasing occupancy by 7%. Winning the award provides encouragement to our employees, who are very involved."

The high number of initiatives launched by Martin's Hotels impressed the EMAS Awards jury, and the winner of the "*Public Organisations*" category stands out for the same reason. The campus of the **Hochschule für nachhaltige Entwicklung Eberswalde** (*Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development*) is a model of sustainability, from the energy it uses to the catering in its cafeterias. Built on the idea of offering instruction on sustainable development to its students, the university has gone even further by fully integrating circular economy in its courses and research projects and passing the message of environmental protection and smart business on to the next generation. This concept made the school especially attractive to student Tim Schneider: "A university that offers research and teaching in sustainability without making its own commitment is not very credible or motivating. I am proud that my university has a consistent attitude."

*Image credit: HNEE*

*Cost savings through circularity*

The Italian agricultural company **Acqua & Sole** received an honourable mention at the EMAS Awards because of their contribution to Circular Economy. They can produce 190,000 tonnes of organic fertilizer per year from waste, leading to a **savings of € 2,000,000 for local farmers**.

*Image credit: Acqua & Sole*

Another honourable mention, **WIEGEL Verwaltung GmbH & Co KG**, a steel treatment company, reviewed its processes to create closed material cycles and experienced significant benefits. According to Thomas Happle, WIEGEL's technical director: "**All these positive ecological improvements have an immensely positive effect on our balance sheets**. Creating more money out of ecological improvements instead of spending on them has allowed us to build up to 30 new plants in 30 years and to increase the size of our group by more than factor six."

*Expanding circular economy in Europe*

Circular economy strategies benefit companies as they are able to save resources and costs while at the same time decreasing their impact on the environment. Hans Bruyninckx, head of the European Environmental Agency and Chair of the EMAS Awards jury, stated: "The circular economy concept requires organisations to completely rethink their processes in order to move from a linear model (extract – produce – dispose) to a circular approach where all resources are used and nothing is

wasted. Organisations which have implemented an environmental management system such as EMAS to monitor their processes and constantly reduce their impact on the environment have already taken a first important step towards the circular economy."

The benefits of circular economy from an economic and environmental perspective call for more actions at the EU level. A report by McKinsey and the Ellen McArthur Foundation on the impacts of a switch to a circular economy in the food, mobility and built environment sectors estimated annual savings of primary resource inputs of EUR 600 million in the EU by 2030. Greenhouse gas emissions could be reduced by 48% by 2030 and 83% by 2050 compared with 2012 levels.

### *Funds are available*

In December 2015, the European Commission adopted an Action Plan for the Circular Economy together with revised legislative proposals on waste. Many funding opportunities are available to companies of all sizes from European programmes such as Horizon 2020, LIFE+, COSME, ESIF, and EFSI. In January 2017, the European Commission also launched a Circular Economy Finance Support Platform, bringing together innovators and investors to find financing solutions for circular economy projects. Many countries and regions also offer funding to assist companies in implementing environmental management systems or EMAS.

**Useful links:**

More about EMAS

More about the Awards and the 2017 edition

More about Circular Economy in the European Union