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ERCE Agenda 2026-2027

ENGLISH VERSION

The ERCE Agenda 2026-2027 provides a shared starting point for accelerating the circular transition in Limburg. Based on the insights of *Captains of Circularity 2.0*, the agenda focuses on seven interconnected development pathways, including strengthening the regional knowledge base, developing circular resource centers, advancing biobased materials, fostering circular value chains, increasing citizen engagement, addressing critical material flows, and enhancing regional collaboration. At its core is the ambition to strengthen connections between public authorities, businesses, knowledge institutions, and civil society initiatives, with the goal of turning circular opportunities into tangible regional change and broader societal prosperity.

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ERCE Agenda 2026-2027

The transition to a circular economy requires close collaboration between governments, businesses, knowledge institutions, and societal organisations. During *Captains of Circularity 2.0*, held on 11 June 2026 in Heerlen, participants jointly explored the key opportunities and challenges for Limburg. These discussions form the foundation of the seven priorities outlined below.

This agenda is explicitly intended as a shared vision and ambition of the participants of *Captains of Circularity 2.0*. The seven priorities provide direction for further collaboration and development. ERCE's role differs across topics and, depending on the context, includes developing and connecting knowledge and stakeholders, supporting regional initiatives, placing key issues on the agenda, and working with partners to explore, investigate, and develop concrete courses of action.

As such, the agenda is not only focused on academic knowledge development, but above all on accelerating the emergence and dissemination of circular initiatives that contribute to broad regional prosperity and well-being.

Verdiepen en verbreden van het databeeld dat regiospelers helpt om de circulaire transitie in Limburg te versnellen

We have already developed an initial understanding of material flows, key actors and their connections, innovation capacity, and performance on broad prosperity indicators in Limburg (see website). We will further refine this picture and make it accessible to collaboration partners. This will not be carried out as a standalone activity, but in parallel with the support of ongoing initiatives and projects (see the following agenda items). We will also make these insights available to interregional initiatives at the provincial level (IPO and the CE Regions Network) and at the national level (ICER, Extended Producer Responsibility schemes, and product- and material-focused collaborative platforms).

Shared ambition

A shared regional information base that helps the Province of Limburg, municipalities, and other regional stakeholders to set priorities, monitor developments, and collaborate more effectively. In addition, the potential for the database to evolve into a monitoring system for Limburg's circular transition will be explored.



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ERCE contributes to this development together with municipalities, the Province of Limburg, and other partners by generating knowledge and facilitating agreements on data access, use, and application.

Supporting the Development of Circular Craft Centres (CACs)

At the local level, efforts are being made to implement the national ambition of establishing a network of Circular Craft Centres (CACs). The work carried out by ERCE together with Zuyd University of Applied Sciences on behalf of Afval Samenwerking Limburg (ASL) forms the basis for concrete next steps in two parallel tracks: (1) an ASL working group that supports the realization of CACs, and (2) a collaboration among the larger municipalities in Limburg, where ERCE facilitates discussions on where supra-municipal activities, such as material-specific sorting centres, can add value.

Shared ambition

To work towards a coherent regional perspective on CACs and other circular hubs: which functions are needed, at what scale, with what division of responsibilities, and under which organisational conditions?

This requires looking not only at infrastructure and governance, but also at the social and economic significance of these facilities. Particular attention is given to the connection with education, vocational training, and labour market development.

Contributing to the Utilisation of Limburg's Innovation Potential in Biobased Materials

Limburg performs strongly in the development of innovative applications of biomaterials. The province has a relevant ecosystem of knowledge institutions, businesses, and feedstocks related to biobased materials, but both the scale and quality of this innovation potential, as well as its economic translation, require further support.

Additional attention is also needed to ensure that innovation translates into sustainable regional economic activity. A deliberate distinction is made between bulk applications and high-value specialty applications. Regional biomass volumes appear insufficient for large-scale bulk chemistry, but applications where smaller volumes create greater value, such as biobased coatings, materials, textiles, and construction applications, show more immediate potential.



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Shared ambition

To develop a more robust evidence base on promising development pathways in which businesses, knowledge institutions, governments, and agricultural stakeholders can collaborate on concrete applications.

Economic feasibility, regional added value, feedstock availability, and the appropriate scale of production and application are key criteria in this assessment.

Accelerating the Formation of Circular Value Chains

The heart of the circular transition lies in businesses that together form the links of circular value chains. To accelerate the development of these chains, ERCE works with partners such as InduSym to make detailed industrial estate-level data available to municipalities.

In collaboration initially with Keyport, concrete steps are then being taken to enable companies either to establish these value chains or to become an indispensable link within them when the chain extends beyond the region.

Shared ambition

To position circularity more strongly as an economic opportunity and to support businesses in developing new circular connections, business models, and value chains.

This involves not only identifying opportunities but, where possible, also supporting the transition towards implementation.

The role of entrepreneurs is essential in this process. Their questions, ambitions, and market opportunities help determine which cases and development pathways deserve further attention.

Achieving Structural Citizen Involvement in the Circular Transition

Citizens are a critical component of the circular transition. Ultimately, this transition should contribute to improving citizens' prosperity and well-being. In addition to playing an active role in extending and circulating materials and products, citizens should also have a voice in shaping how circularity is implemented.



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Over the coming year, an intermunicipal process supported by ERCE will further strengthen the role of citizen participation and community-led initiatives in accelerating the circular transition. Particular attention will be given to making visible and recognising their contributions to social cohesion, awareness raising, skills development, and local ownership within policy frameworks, implementation practices, and funding mechanisms.

Shared ambition

The ambition is to provide residents and communities with a structural and meaningful role in the circular transition, thereby contributing both to circular development and to broader societal well-being.

This requires a deeper understanding of which forms of citizen involvement and community initiatives are effective, under what conditions they can make a sustainable contribution, and how their societal value can be better recognised and utilised.

Together with municipalities, community initiatives, and other partners, ERCE can contribute by connecting experiences, generating knowledge, and facilitating comparisons between different approaches. This also includes investigating barriers and enabling conditions within policy, implementation, and financing arrangements.

At the same time, attention must be paid to existing initiatives and to the impacts that new circular economy policies may have on these actors.

Critical Materials and Supply Security Potential Scan

Available data provides the opportunity to estimate in detail the potential of critical materials that currently leave the region as waste. This potential will be mapped, at a minimum in cooperation with Limburg's six largest municipalities.

The purpose of the assessment is to determine which material streams are strategically relevant for Limburg from the perspectives of supply security, circular value chains, and economic development. The scan is therefore not an end in itself, but rather a basis for making informed choices about where regional collaboration and investments can create added value.

Criteria will be developed in advance to determine what constitutes promising potential, for example based on material volume, criticality, economic value, regional availability, and opportunities for high-value utilisation within Limburg or the wider region. A prioritisation will then be established based on these criteria.



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To develop an evidence-based prioritisation of material streams that offer strong opportunities for regional collaboration, together with a clear view of potential follow-up actions to strengthen supply security, circular value chains, and economic value creation.

Exploring “Circular Limburg”

Limburg hosts a rich and diverse landscape of circular initiatives involving businesses, governments, citizen-led organisations, knowledge institutions, and coalitions among these actors.

There is a need to showcase this diversity, activate untapped potential, and establish strategic connections where they do not yet exist. Together with regional knowledge institutions, governments, businesses, and societal partners, ERCE is exploring how Limburg’s circular strengths can be better connected and leveraged.

The objective is not to create a new organisational structure for its own sake, but rather to determine which functions are needed to strengthen connections between existing initiatives, networks, and capacities for development.

Shared ambition

To develop a shared understanding of where regional coordination can add value: which connections are missing, where joint programming could help, and how different groups of stakeholders can contribute more structurally to priority setting and implementation.

Interconnections

The seven agenda priorities are not isolated themes but are closely interconnected. The purpose of this agenda is therefore not to implement seven separate programmes, but to strengthen the region’s capacity to recognise circular opportunities, connect stakeholders, and, where possible, achieve tangible change.

For example, the material flow analysis provides a basis for identifying promising material streams and value chains. Circular Craft Centres and industrial estates can function as regional hubs. Biobased materials create opportunities for new value chains, while citizen initiatives can contribute simultaneously to circularity and broader societal well-being.

Which topics, cases, and forms of collaboration are ultimately developed further will depend on the specific questions, needs, and opportunities of regional partners, as well as on developments that emerge in the coming years. This agenda provides a shared starting point for that process.



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Insights and Next Steps from the Parallel Breakout Sessions

Session 1: Circular Craft Centres and the Role of Citizens

How can we collaborate to establish circular hubs at the appropriate scale?

In collaboration with Danielle Twardy-Duijsters (Zuyd University of Applied Sciences) and Onno Stofberg (Afval Samenwerking Limburg).

This breakout session focused on the conditions required to successfully organise regional circular hubs or Circular Craft Centres at the appropriate scale. Following a brief presentation on Limburg's material flows, mapped using the R-ladder framework, participants discussed opportunities, challenges, and necessary forms of collaboration.

The discussions highlighted that strong regional cooperation is essential and should ideally be supported by an overarching network that connects existing local initiatives.

Participants also stressed the importance of clearly distinguishing between the roles of material recovery parks and Circular Craft Centres. While material recovery parks focus on the collection and high-quality processing of materials, Circular Craft Centres additionally facilitate reuse, repair activities, sharing initiatives, education, and social employment opportunities.

Participants further emphasised the need to raise public awareness of waste separation, reuse, and repair in order to keep products in circulation for longer periods. Achieving this will require not only regional initiatives but also supportive national framework conditions, including appropriate policies, legislation, and public awareness campaigns.

Finally, collaboration among educational institutions, municipalities, local entrepreneurs, the furniture sector, community initiatives such as repair cafés, and other circular networks, together with training programmes in repair and circularity, was identified as essential for strengthening the regional circular value chain.

Next Steps

Afval Samenwerking Limburg (ASL) will continue developing the conditions required for establishing and operating Circular Craft Centres through a dedicated working group, including governance arrangements, collaboration models, and operational requirements.



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Secondly, participating municipalities will continue this work through ERCE's intermunicipal programme. Since material flows and value chains transcend municipal boundaries, the programme provides a platform to jointly explore governance models, spatial organisation, opportunities, and barriers associated with Circular Craft Centres, while also identifying how intermunicipal cooperation can facilitate peer-to-peer learning and strengthen regional circular value chains.

Session 2: Unlocking Limburg's Innovation Potential in Biobased Materials

How can a circular economy around biomaterials be developed across sectors such as construction, chemistry, and manufacturing?

In collaboration with Yvonne van der Meer (AMIBM), Björn Koopmans (Chemelot), and Patrick Lemmens (LLTB).

This session focused on Limburg's substantial innovation efforts in biobased materials, both regarding the processing of biomass into chemical building blocks and the cultivation of feedstocks for biobased materials.

Discussions explored how these innovation pathways could be connected more effectively.

A key question concerned the extent to which Limburg's available land area positions the region primarily as an innovation hub, given that large-scale production would require biomass imports from outside the region.

As an alternative pathway, participants explored a stronger focus on high-value specialised biobased materials, where relatively small production volumes can generate substantial added value.

Next Steps

Over the next twelve months, the objective is to translate this theme into a limited number of concrete case studies and development pathways.

A deliberate distinction will be maintained between bulk applications and high-value specialty applications. Regional biomass volumes appear insufficient for large-scale bulk chemistry but remain highly relevant for applications where smaller volumes can create significant value, including biobased coatings, materials, textiles, and construction applications.



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Session 3: The Contribution of Circular Construction and Housing to Well-being in Limburg

How can regional strategies for circular construction and housing be differentiated across Limburg, and what does this imply for renovation, new construction, logistics, and regional coordination?

In collaboration with Paul Consten (Parkstad Limburg) and Bas van Westerlo (Future Proof Building).

The session focused on the continued development of a Limburg-wide covenant for circular and biobased construction and cultivation.

Discussions centred on stimulating demand, expanding and facilitating supply, and enhancing knowledge sharing and collaboration regarding regulations and certification of biobased construction materials.

Next Steps

On 29 September 2026, Parkstad Limburg will organise a follow-up meeting to further discuss and enrich the draft covenant through stakeholder input.

During this meeting, participants will discuss the covenant's content, shared ambitions, and implementation agenda with the aim of producing a broadly supported final version.

Following incorporation of final feedback, the covenant will be submitted for signature by representatives of municipalities, businesses, market actors, knowledge institutions, and other involved organisations.

The signing will mark the beginning of a collective Limburg movement to further scale up biobased construction and cultivation and strengthen the regional value chain from land to building.

The signing should not be viewed as the endpoint, but rather as the starting point of a shared development pathway in which each organisation contributes, according to its own role and capabilities, to the growth of biobased construction and cultivation in Limburg.



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Session 4: Circular Innovation and Business Ecosystems

How can Limburg's innovation capacity be optimally leveraged, from the Brightlands campuses to industrial estates?

In collaboration with Timo Versteegen (LIOF), Lisette Tilmans (LIOF), Mattijs Bouwmans (InduSym), Imke Welzen (Keyport), and Mirjam van Laarhoven (SOW Sustainability).

This session explored the next phase in the circular economy transition for Limburg's business clusters and industrial estates.

Participants emphasised that circularity should be presented as a logical and attractive business opportunity rather than an additional burden.

At the same time, relatively few entrepreneurs participated in the session. While many businesses increasingly recognise the importance of circularity, they often do not yet experience a sense of immediate urgency. Many prefer to observe market developments or focus on day-to-day business operations.

This highlights the need for intermediary organisations to play a stronger facilitative role by helping businesses navigate the complexity of the circular transition, demonstrate its strategic value, and lower barriers to action.

Building on this perspective, participants explored a practical four-step approach for setting the "wheel of circularity" in motion:

1. Bringing together organisations with similar material or waste streams to identify shared opportunities.
2. Organising a challenge-driven briefing around a common issue.
3. Facilitating a strategic session to identify collaboration opportunities and concrete actions.
4. Supporting participants through a multi-week implementation trajectory to translate insights into practice.

Industrial estates and their management organisations were identified as particularly promising entry points because they can engage multiple businesses simultaneously while strengthening collaboration within local circular ecosystems.



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Following the session, the coordinators organised an online follow-up meeting to develop a concrete roadmap for further collaboration.

InduSym will begin by engaging municipalities through workshops focused on the circular dashboard jointly developed by InduSym and ERCE. These workshops will identify opportunities relating to regional material flows, critical raw materials, and shared circular priorities.

Building on these experiences, the partners intend to expand the approach to industrial estates as strategic locations for accelerating business engagement and collaboration.

Further opportunities will be explored to use industrial estates as primary entry points for creating greater urgency and supporting companies in implementing circular practices, building on existing initiatives such as the Keyport Circularity Programme.

Session 5: The Role of Citizen Participation in the Transition to a Circular Economy

How can Limburg residents be structurally involved in the transition towards a circular economy?

In collaboration with Manuel Gaertner (Municipality of Weert) and Eef Middendorp (Municipality of Sittard-Geleen).

This session focused on the role of community-led initiatives and citizen dialogues in the transition towards a circular economy.

The central question concerned how such initiatives can be structurally supported and sustained so that their societal impact can be maintained and continue to grow.

Drawing on insights from the CitiDem citizen dialogue and inspiring examples from representatives of Voedselbank Maastricht, Parkstad in Transitie, and Goede Morgen, participants engaged in an active discussion about the opportunities and obstacles faced by community initiatives and what is needed to better align them with policy, implementation, and funding arrangements.



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An important insight from the session was that the value of these initiatives frequently extends beyond directly measurable or financial outcomes. They also contribute to social interaction, awareness raising, social cohesion, skills development, and local ownership.

The question of how these non-monetary societal benefits can be made more visible and more systematically recognised therefore deserves further exploration.

Next Steps

In the next phase of the intermunicipal process, several municipalities, together with ERCE, will further strengthen the role of citizen participation and community-led initiatives in accelerating the circular transition.

Particular attention will be given to exploring how the broader societal value created by these initiatives, including social cohesion, awareness raising, skills development, and local ownership, can be made more visible and systematically recognised in policy frameworks, implementation practices, and funding mechanisms.

This will help strengthen the long-term contribution of community initiatives to regional circular development.

Closing Panel

The event concluded with reflections from Frank Boons (ERCE, Maastricht University), Nancy Bocken (Maastricht University), and Casper Gelderblom (Municipality of Heerlen), who highlighted the most important insights and outcomes emerging from the breakout sessions.