

Summary PlanC Community Night – Clash of ideas

Tuesday 18 October 2016

PlanC, the organisation that empowers circular futures, organised a clash of ideas about our future in a circular economy. The event followed a very original and well-received format. The clashes were organised as a boxing match. For each clash, 2 speakers entered a boxing ring. Each was allowed 7 minutes to make a statement and convince the audience of her/his opinion. Francesca Vanthielen made sure there were no real uppercuts given and triggered the speakers with some critical questions. The audience had the opportunity to decide who was the winner of the debate.

Veerle Spaepen (PlanC) and Anthony Baert (economist) discussed whether circular economy can be considered a new economic paradigm, or rather should be considered as a only a new aspect of capitalism. The experience with new consumer concepts, and the openness of entrepreneurs in the circular economy to collaborate and share insights, was confronted with examples of large platform organisations that earn lots of money at the expense of the middle class and keep small initiatives outside the market.

Rogier De Langhe (UGhent) and Hidde Boersma (science journalist) discussed the limits to growth and confronted their visions on whether societal change or technological innovation are the drivers for the circular economy. The full belief in the capacities of human creativity and engineering were countered with ideas about the power of the commons and need for human networking in order to adopt the change.

Dirk Fransaer (VITO) and Michelle Wyart-Rémy (MinPol) debated about securing the supply of materials for Europe. Europe was depicted as the small child facing the Asian giant and trying to stand up for access to materials. While Dirk Fransaer saw circular economy as the necessary and only viable option, Michelle Wyart-Rémy pointed at the opportunities for mining of critical raw materials in Europe.

Participants were left with a whole range of smart arguments that showed 2 sides of the coin. It left them a bit puzzled about what is wrong and what is right. Nevertheless, all speakers and debates clearly demonstrated that circular economy will be unavoidable. It may base itself on new and old economic concepts, it may surf on technological innovation and societal change, it will be built with primary and secondary raw materials, but overall it will be unavoidable. We all need to make sure that it does not come as a punch in the face.