



# Design 4 Innovation

Design Action Plan:  
Flanders Innovation and  
Entrepreneurship (VLAIO), Belgium



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# Regional Context

## **Partner organisation**

Flanders Innovation and Entrepreneurship (VLAIO)

## **Other partner organisations involved**

Flanders DC (main stakeholder)

## **Country**

Flanders, Belgium

## **NUTS2 region**

Provinces of Flanders: Antwerp, East Flanders, Flemish Brabant, Limburg, West Flanders

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# Flanders

# Policy Context

## **The Action Plan aims to impact**

Other regional development policy instrument

## **Name of the policy instrument addressed**

The Flemish innovation policy 2019-2024

The current Flemish ERDF funds are almost completely depleted and there is no room for change. This is why Flanders has chosen to influence the regional innovation policy instead. The Flemish innovation policy is formalized by several official documents (coalition agreement, agreements with third parties, etc.). The entire product portfolio of the Flemish innovation and enterprise agency (= VLAIO) is the most important

instrument (0.75 billion annually) of the Flemish government to put this policy into practice.

Close alignment with this policy gives us the opportunity to draw attention to design for innovation and to provide a structural share in the policy for this purpose: more detailed data collection on the value of design for innovation, better guidance of companies and designers to existing instruments, exploring the possibility of new calls, promoting the use of design for mission driven policy, gaining more insight into the strengths and needs of the design sector among policymakers.

The actions are shortlisted and approved by VLAIO's management.

The project D4I is important to convince our government that design can play an important role in innovation for SMEs. The other regions in this project are a benchmark to which reference can be made to underline the importance of a design action plan and to encourage them to support and work with the action plan.

The general Flemish innovation policy 2019-2024 of the new Flemish government is making innovation and digital transformation into a spearhead of its policy. Flanders must be a trendsetter and a pioneer. The government values entrepreneurship and wants to stimulate the entrepreneurial culture in Flanders and the growth of our SMEs by:

- further removing any barriers to innovation and entrepreneurship that SMEs face.
- giving particular attention to broadening the innovation base to include small businesses,

An important precondition for achieving this objective is the availability of sufficient resources. Flanders is continuing the ambition of previous legislations and is increasing the research, development and innovation (R&D&I) budgets in order to achieve, by the end of the

year, the benchmark objective of 3% for the joint R&D investments of government and companies.

In recent years, Flanders has been building a co-creative and transformative R&D&I model in which the four actors within the quadruple helix - knowledge institutions, enterprises, public authorities and citizens - cooperate actively in order to maximise economic and social impact. Flanders will continue to build on this in the next legislature, with a policy approach that will deploy on three strategic axes;

- Giving companies room to do business, innovate and internationalise;
- Continue to invest in favourable conditions for a strong R&D&I system;
- Investing further in the interaction between the actors of the R&D&I system.

The Flemish government will continue to pay attention to easy access to its services, in particular for SMEs, and examine whether and how to provide support.

Design can play an important role in increasing SME competitiveness with innovation, customer satisfaction,

translate research and innovation into new and improved commercial products, processes and services. We believe design can be an important factor in bridging the so-called "Valley of Death".

Over the last few years, Flemish innovation policy focused on providing industry with very general and broad support instruments, open to enterprises of all sizes and coming from all kinds of sectors. This helped in lowering the threshold for companies to seek (financial) support, but on the other hand, the opportunities for very specific interventions - such as design - were underutilized. This was remedied by launching specific calls for specific interventions (AI, VR, etc.)

However, we feel that design should be more highlighted in the general Flemish innovation policy 2019-2024 and that it should be used as a general and structural method by businesses. There are sufficient funds available to subsidize all kinds of design interventions. We believe existing subsidy schemes also support design in the innovation efforts of individual companies. However, we feel that the design sector has difficulty finding its way to these instruments.

Within the Flemish government there is a keen interest in the "Scandinavian" model of "mission-oriented innovation", in which innovation is only considered a means to an end, viz. to realize societal goals such as wellbeing, etc. In order to this, our government will need the tools to investigate these kinds of 'systemic' challenges. We believe design plays an important role in this.

One of the reasons why design has received little or no attention in our regional innovation policy, is that policy makers lack a 'conversation partner' to bounce their ideas off. It has proven difficult to organize the design sector and let them speak "with one voice", in order to get their needs heard by policy makers.

Since the project application, the Flemish region has looked for ways to create the most impact on current innovation policy. This has not always been easy, because of a constantly changing environment: existing subsidy schemes have been redesigned, new government has been installed, etc.

Throughout the project and the interregional learning that took place, we have been able to focus our attention on a limited number of very concrete actions that could be taken by our organization. The project meetings and study visits were instrumental in gaining more insight into our own needs as a region. It became clear that most project partners have similar needs, or have had them in the past and are now able to present us with a best practice for us to learn from. These interregional learnings have been listed in the next section, under each action.

At the same time, we have been confronted with a very broad landscape of stakeholders in the design sector. At the start of the project, it became clear that it would be near impossible to engage all of them in the project. This is why we sought help from Flanders DC, an organization with which we have very strong ties and that is responsible for the creative industries in Flanders. They have lots of experience in addressing the design sector, and have proven to be crucial in developing the Flemish action plan, and in delivering the action plan in the near future.

To conclude, we can say that the project has helped us to develop a feasible action plan and to collaborate with a strong strategic partner that will help us to transform these actions into tangible results.

# Actions



# Action 1

## Improve the focus on design in the Flanders Innovation policy

### 1. Background

In Flanders we have recently gathered new insights with regards to quantitative studies, but we still lack a qualitative understanding of the (potential) role of design in innovation.

The Flemish region is always on the lookout for ways at getting better at bringing innovation (or rather “R&D”) to the market. We believe design can be an important factor in bridging the so-called “Valley of Death”. Several partners from the project Design4Innovation have experience with impact studies as an important means in designing new innovation policy. Investigating those methodologies and impact indicators for design was the main theme for the ultimate knowledge exchange workshop of the learning phase of Design4Innovation project. Over two and a half days at

the beginning of October, Barcelona Centre de Disseny (BCD) hosted project partners and their stakeholders at their impressive premises in Disseny Hub in Catalan capital.

We discussed studies that contributed to the development of the Policy Framework for Design in Enterprise in Ireland (“The ‘Irish Design Footprint’: Economic Value and Characteristics”, “A Study of the Role and Importance of Design in Firms based in Ireland in Non Design-intensive Sectors” and “An overview of a Workshop on Design in Ireland”) as well as the impact evaluation of the year of Irish Design 2015 and The ‘Irish Design Footprint’: Economic Value and Characteristics. This example has inspired us to undertake the next stage of design research through in-depth surveys and analysis in collaboration with our colleagues from EWI, the Department of Economics, Science and Innovation.

Their approach to Defining and Measuring the 'Irish Design Footprint' offers us a benchmark for tackling the further elaboration of our impact study.

This impact study should ultimately result in a more elaborate focus on design in the Flanders innovation policy. It would also recognize design as a tool for innovation across all sectors and raise the awareness that design has to be involved in the designing of the Flanders innovation policy.

## 2. Action

- Benchmark studies from other organisations
- Develop a methodology
- Collect data and produce impact case studies
- Formulate policy recommendations for the Flemish government
- Communicate the results of the study

### 3. Players involved

- Flemish Innovation & Enterprise Agency: benchmark studies from other organisations
- EWl: develop a methodology, collect data and produce impact case studies
- Flanders DC: collaboration on all actions, communication of the study

### 4. Timeframe

- 1<sup>st</sup> half of 2020 - Benchmark studies from other organisations
- 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2020 - Develop a methodology
- 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2020 - Collect data and produce impact case studies
- 1<sup>st</sup> half of 2021 - Formulate policy recommendations for the Flemish government
- 1<sup>st</sup> half of 2021 - Communicate the results of the study

### 5. Costs

- VLAIO:  
Staff costs: 1.000 euro  
External expertise: 30.000 euro (consultancy)
- EWl:  
Staff costs: 1.000 euro
- FDC:  
Staff costs: 1.000 euro  
Communication costs: 1.000 euro  
Website / addaption: 3.000 euro

### 6. Funding sources

- All costs will be paid from own resources of all involved parties (VLAIO, EWl, FDC)

## 7. Indicators

### Output indicators:

- Impact report on the impact from design

### Impact indicators:

- Increased body of knowledge on design
- Improved policy for design and innovation
- Improved funding for design-driven innovation in SMEs

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- office staff in design awareness
- or design in business support

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# Action 2

**Increasing the take-up of generic support instruments by companies for design interventions, in order to encourage them to cooperate and innovate more**

## 1. Background

There are sufficient funds available to subsidize all kinds of design interventions. We believe existing subsidy schemes also support design in the innovation efforts of individual companies. However, we feel that the design sector has difficulty finding its way to these instruments. And companies should be made aware of the benefits of design for their companies, for their growth and innovation.

Business and innovation advisors, as the front line of communication with SMEs, need to have a good understanding of design to be able to explain its value and convince business owners/managers to take up a new project. SME owners can have limited experience of working with designers or even be sceptical about their services. It is important to position design as an investment rather than cost and be able to present the possible impact for a specific company.

We took inspiration from the second workshop in Thessaloniki – Mapping OP and the third workshop in Santiago de Compostela on Financial support mechanisms, realising that funding for design is available but hidden in Flanders. Using design training to improve innovation services might be a solution. We were inspired by PDR projects with Scottish Enterprise, where design training was used for innovation advisors to improve innovation services, presented at the partner meeting in Santiago de Compostela.

Also, the Service Design Programme by PDR is a scheme offering support for both businesses and design sector. The business offer stimulates demand for design-led service innovation through awareness raising and pilot actions: events, Telephone Advisory Service, Service Essentials Workshop and the Service Strategy Programme aiming to introduce companies to principles of service design and train staff in its methods. It was

co-designed by the team from Design Wales with companies in the design and manufacturing sectors to best respond to their support needs.

During a study visit in Riga (30–31 October 2018), we heard about design thinking training that LIAA (Investment and Development Agency of Latvia) organised for their staff. The course consisted of three two-day sessions, during which lecturers introduced the following topics: understanding of the design process, ideation, prototyping and testing with users, and implementation.

We believe that by completing the training among Innovation advisors, we would increase their professional capacity to effectively advise SMEs on type of design project that would benefit them most and clearly explain the benefits of working with designers. That would help to be better prepared to promote design for innovation and to point out how the available funding can be used. That would increase the use of design by companies.

## 2. Action

- Discuss the training and other needs with the front and back office staff from VLAIO and its network of partner organisations.
- Co-design the training, workshops, ...
- Produce a document outlining how design can help to achieve business goals.
- Drawing up a design audit for companies,
- Prepare the training programme tailored to their needs
- Deliver training
- Measure the increased professional capacity of Innovation advisors and prepare the potential rollout among all advisors.
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### 3. Players involved

- Flemish Innovation & Enterprise Agency
- Flanders DC

### 4. Timeframe

- 1<sup>st</sup> half of 2020 - Discuss the training and other needs with the front and back office staff from VLAIO and its network of partner organisations.
- 1<sup>st</sup> half of 2020 - Co-design the training, workshops, ...
- 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2020 - Produce a document outlining how design can help to achieve business goals.
- Drawing up a design audit for companies,
- 1<sup>st</sup> half of 2021 - Prepare the training programme tailored to their needs
- Deliver training
- 1<sup>st</sup> half of 2021 - Discuss the training and other needs with the front and back office staff from VLAIO and its network of partner organisations.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2021 - Co-design the training, workshops, ...
- 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2021 - Produce a document outlining how design can help to achieve business goals.

### 5. Costs

- VLAIO:
  - Staff costs: 6.000 euro
  - Co-design the training, workshops: 12.000
  - Prepare the training programme: 5.000
  - Produce manual outlining how design can help to achieve business goals: 5.000
  - Printing training materials & workshop tools: 500
  - Deliver first test training: 1.000
  - Deliver train the trainer training: 1.000
  - Catering: 1.000
- FDC:
  - Staff costs: 2.000 euro
- TOTAL: 33.500,00 €

### 6. Funding sources

- All costs will be paid from own resources of all involved parties (VLAIO, FDC)

## 7. Indicators

### Output indicators:

- Number of advisors trained
- Number of training hours

### Impact indicators:

- Increased professional capacity
- Growth of the use of available funding for design support



# Action 3

## Incentivize the creation of an umbrella organization or representative body for the design sector

### 1. Background

One of the reasons why design has received little or no attention in our regional innovation policy, is that policy makers lack a 'conversation partner' to bounce their ideas off. It has proven difficult to organize the design sector and let them speak "with one voice", in order to get their needs heard by policy makers.

At the Knowledge Exchange Workshop in Valletta (11-12 April 2018), several partners presented their good practices in non-financial support. Some of these will guide us.

The Polish partner, Marshal's Office of Silesia Region, presented observatories as their good practice. The aim of the Observatories is to create a platform for communication and cooperation of organisations involved in the sector, as well as facilitate data

exchange between business environments and the scientific and research community, business environment institutions and local government units.

The Maltese partner, Valletta Cultural Agency, presented the Valletta Design Cluster aiming to bring together the creatives.

The lead partner, PDR presented the Design Wales Forum, a network for designers in Wales, established in 2010 by Design Wales. A key aim of the Design Wales Forum was to create activity which supports the maintenance and capacity growth of the Welsh design community. The Design Wales Forum actively promoted the economic benefits of design to the business community. Design Wales has significantly raised the profile and increased the use of design within the Wales' economy.

These examples will serve us as inspiration for the creation of an umbrella organization or representative body for the design sector in Flanders.

## 2. Action

- Exploratory talks and meetings with relevant stakeholders
- Analysis of best practices
- A systemic design process with relevant stakeholders
- A feasibility study for establishing the chosen blue print without implementation
- Support the creation of the chosen platform if feasible
- Present the platform to the Government

### 3. Players involved

- Flemish Innovation & Enterprise Agency
- Flanders DC
- Flemish government

### 4. Timeframe

- 1<sup>st</sup> half of 2020 - Exploratory talks and meetings with relevant stakeholders
- 1<sup>st</sup> half of 2020 - Analysis of best practices
- 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2020 - A systemic design process with relevant stakeholders
- 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2020 - A feasibility study for establishing the chosen blue print without implementation
- 1<sup>st</sup> half of 2021 - Support the creation of the chosen platform if feasible
- 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2021 - Present the platform to the Government

### 5. Costs

- VLAIO:
  - Staff costs: 1.000 euro
  - Stakeholder meeting/workshop: 2.000 euro
- FDC:
  - Staff costs: 2.000 euro

### 6. Funding sources

- All costs will be paid from own resources of all involved parties (VLAIO, FDC)

## 7. Indicators

### Output indicators:

- Willingness of the Flemish design companies to establish a representative body for the design sector

### Impact indicators:

- Project success reported by participating companies



# Action 4

**Promote design driven techniques, such as systemic design, service design and social design, for mission driven policies within the Flemish government**

## 1. Background

During a study visit in Riga (30-31 October 2018), we heard about design thinking training that LIAA (Investment and Development Agency of Latvia) organised for their staff. In order to increase the quality and efficiency of public services. The Design Thinking Course was a cross-departmental training project that included practical learning of multiple design thinking techniques, in order for employees to be able to use them in their daily work in the future.

The course consisted of three two-day sessions, during which lecturers introduced the following topics: understanding of the design process, ideation, prototyping and testing with users, and implementation. Apart from developing new skills, the training resulted also in improvement of the existing processes and fresh

ideas on what can be done differently in the future.

We believe that by promoting design driven techniques and creating a manual, we would increase their understanding of the benefits of working with designers and involving stakeholders. That would help to improve the design of policies and to increase the success rate of government projects.

Within the Flemish government there is a keen interest in the “Scandinavian” model of “mission-oriented innovation”, in which innovation is only considered a means to an end, viz. to realize societal wellbeing, etc. In this view, all kinds of partners from the quadruple helix need to cooperate in order to come up with solutions to important societal challenges. This means also that private companies’ innovation efforts are aligned with policy priorities and social goals.

In order to this, our government will need the tools to investigate these kinds of 'systemic' challenges and to see what the role of private sector innovation will be in each of these challenges. We believe design plays an important role in this.

The innovation policy in Flanders is based on the believe that entrepreneurship and innovation can offer creative solutions that are initiated bottom-up. The government has a maximum connecting role to play here, between knowledge institutions, companies and even citizens. The promotion of design driven techniques should result in a more elaborate focus on design as a mediator and connector and thus result in a better design and uptake and also in better results of the Flanders innovation policy.

## 2. Action

- Exploratory talks and meetings with relevant stakeholders
- Map design relevance in the context of mission driven policies
- A systemic design process with relevant stakeholders
- A feasibility study for establishing the chosen blue print
- Present the platform to the Government
- Co-create a manual for government agencies and companies on how design can help to achieve business and government goals and how to provide answers to wicked problems and societal challenges in Flanders

### 3. Players involved

- Flemish Innovation & Enterprise Agency
- Flemish government
- Flanders DC

### 4. Timeframe

- 1<sup>st</sup> half of 2020 - Exploratory talks and meetings with relevant stakeholders
- 1<sup>st</sup> half of 2020 - Map design relevance in the context of mission driven policies
- 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2020 - A systemic design process with relevant stakeholders
- 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2020 - A feasibility study for establishing the chosen blue print
- 1<sup>st</sup> half of 2021 - Present the platform to the Government
- 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2021 - Co-create a manual for government agencies and companies on how design can help to achieve business and government goals and how to provide answers to wicked problems and societal challenges in Flanders

### 5. Costs

- VLAIO:  
Staff costs: 3.000 euro
- FDC:  
Staff costs: 2.000 euro  
External expertise: 3.000 euro (blueprint, designers tool, workshops)

### 6. Funding sources

- All costs will be paid from own resources of all involved parties (VLAIO, FDC)

## 7. Indicators

### Output indicators:

- Number of projects in the Flemish government conducted design driven techniques

### Impact indicators:

- Increased success of government projects
- Increased collaboration between government officials, companies and other stakeholders.





Project Team

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