

Donation Programme

Social value instead of waste

How can we recognise value and prevent valuable raw materials, products and materials from becoming waste in the first place?

How can we show stakeholders that our exhibitions result not in waste, but materials looking for a new purpose?

RAI's Donation Programme offers an answer to these questions, while helping us reduce waste and make it more socially valuable.

RAI Amsterdam

11 May 2020

Ufi Sustainable Development Award

inspiring
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The power of connections: Seeing something special in everyday items

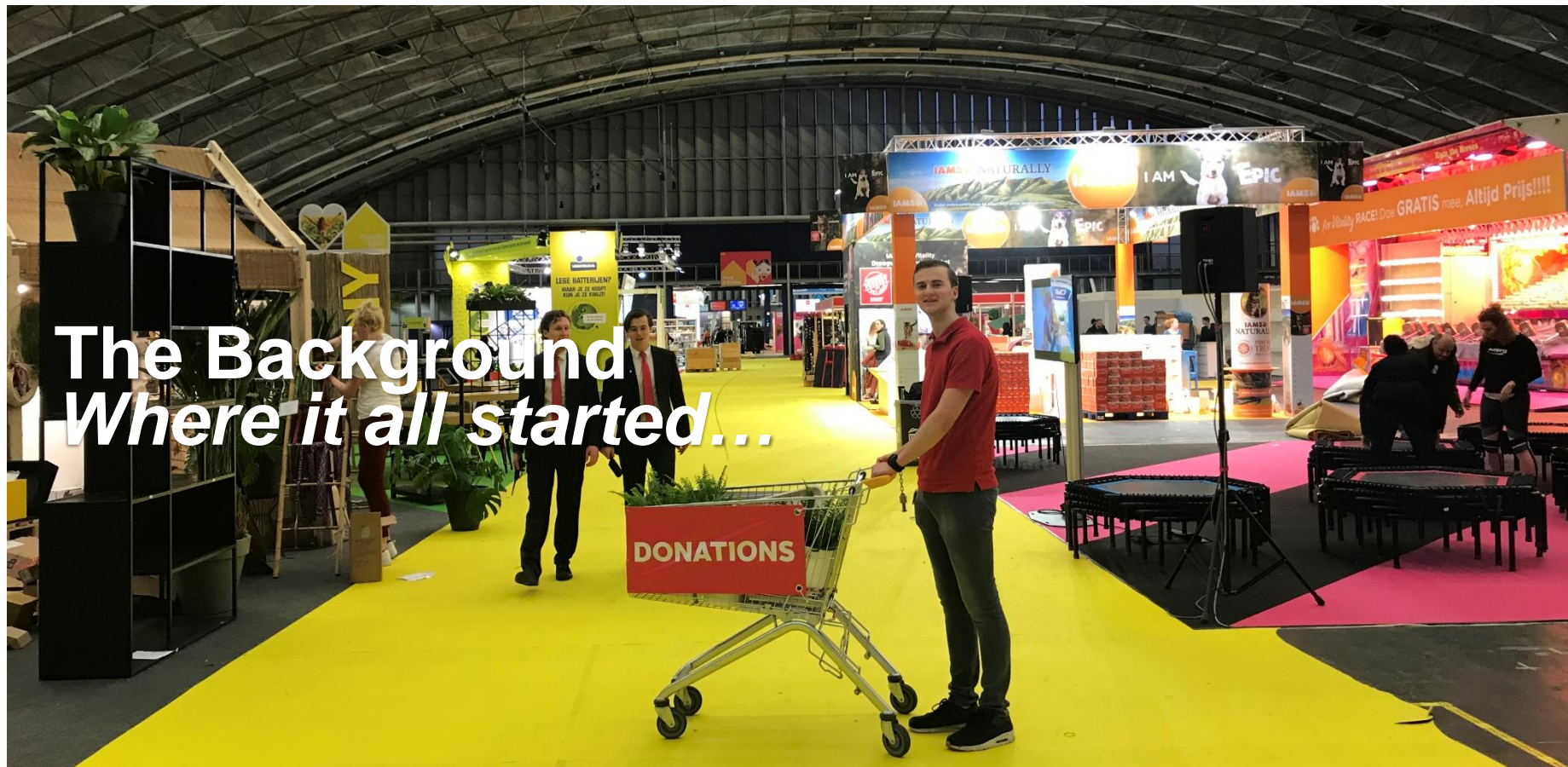


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The Background *Where it all started...*

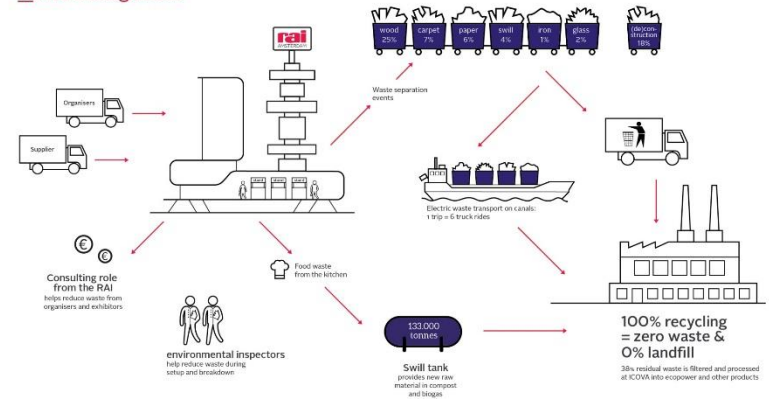


No time to waste!

For more than ten years, RAI Amsterdam has devoted considerable attention to waste management from a sustainability perspective. The results have been impressive and include a key focus on waste separation on the exhibition floor. Close cooperation with our waste processing company has enabled us to recycle the waste streams from the RAI, and we have a zero rate of landfill rubbish. Nonetheless, there are many other social challenges today and there is indeed no time to waste!

A sustainable future requires a new perspective... How can we recognise value and prevent valuable raw materials, products and materials from becoming waste in the first place? How can we show stakeholders that our exhibitions result not in waste, but materials looking for a new purpose? RAI Amsterdam's Donation Programme offers an answer to these questions, while helping us reduce waste and make it more socially valuable.

Waste management



Recognising value

It's now more than a year since RAI Amsterdam started proactive discussions with social initiatives in the region based on the question: How can we add even more social value to our commercial business activities? We asked various local community groups what needs they had and what we could provide to help people in their lives. Then we looked at ways for the RAI to do something to meet these needs.

One of the initiatives was Stichting Heen en Weer, a charitable foundation which helps local residents with reduced mobility get around in four small green cars. They asked us if we could provide parking spaces for their cars to facilitate this service. The RAI does of course have parking spaces, but these are needed for our commercial activities. Seeing the size of the foundation's vehicles we realised that they would fit in a corner of one of our garages that is inaccessible to normal cars. The green vehicles were a perfect match, allowing us to create social value in what had previously been unused space. The social need we learned about in

conversation with Heen en Weer helped us recognise and realise this unused potential, ensuring that valuable space was utilised rather than wasted.



A Donation Programme is born...

Our conversations with social initiatives in the region taught us that there was also significant social demand for a variety of items and materials that are currently being processed and recycled within our waste streams. Realising that such items can be converted from waste into socially valuable items, we started developing a Donation Programme to link this social demand to the supply provided by our business.

Scope of the entry

The resulting Donation Programme is the scope of this entry. Our programme prevents the generation of unnecessary waste while also creating multiple types of environmental, economic and social value for both social initiatives and all the commercially involved parties. In addition, the programme provides very useful insight into the mechanisms which generate waste and the ways we can act to prevent it. This, in turn, makes it possible to find uses for items and products before they become waste. Here's how.



General objectives of the programme

The RAI's Donation Programme arose from two questions:

1. How can we increase the social added value of the RAI?
2. Where can we prevent waste and, in doing so, reduce any negative social impact?

The answer to question 1 was sought in dialogue with various social initiatives in our region. What do they actually need? This resulted in the insight that many of the leftover items that result from our business need not be wasted, but can instead be valuable for social initiatives in the region. The simple answer was to develop a programme linking this demand to the supply within the RAI. This then provided an answer to question 2, namely how best to prevent waste. It also made it clear which of the streams arising after an exhibition are not useful or needed from a social point of view, helping us prevent such waste wherever possible.

All of this fits very well within the objectives of the RAI to:

- Limit the production of waste (through prevention, reduction and reuse) to contribute to a circular economy.
- Further embed CSR in the RAI's activities.
- Increase the social added value of the RAI by providing valuable contributions to social initiatives.



A group of five people, four men and one woman, are posing for a photo in a large, modern indoor space, likely a trade show or exhibition hall. They are all wearing red polo shirts with the "rai AMSTERDAM" logo. The woman on the far left is giving a thumbs up. The man next to her is also giving a thumbs up. The woman in the center is smiling and giving a thumbs up. The man next to her is smiling. The man on the far right is smiling and giving a thumbs up. They are standing behind a shopping cart filled with cardboard boxes and food items, including a large bag of white rice. The cart has a red sign that says "Food & Drink Donation" and logos for "DE REGENBOOG GROEP" and "Leger des Heren". In the background, there are other people, a staircase, and a blue carpet. A large orange balloon is visible on the right side of the image.

The Donation Programme *Description, implementation and results*

The four flows within our Donation Programme

We have built a network with social initiatives in the local area of our venue which can make use of the products and materials that are regularly left over as a result of our business activities. This network has grown within a year from just two partners to a structure of 20 social initiatives in the region. There are four flows within our Donation Programme:

- 1. Continuous
- 2. Spontaneous
- 3. Project-based
- 4. Event-specific

Each flow is described in detail on the following pages, including the achieved results.

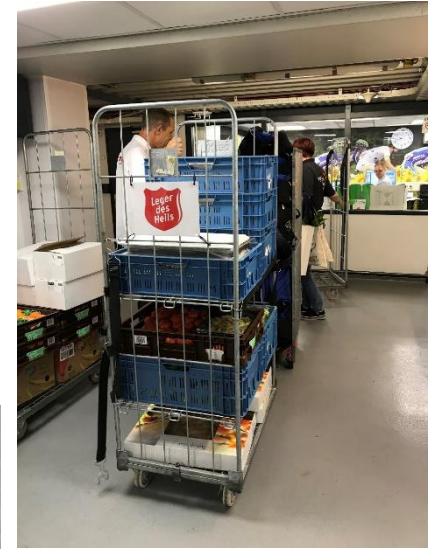


1. Continuous

This is activated when there are continuous residual streams or we can collect streams that meet the needs of one or more social initiatives. There are many examples of how we do this, each unique in form and impact. For instance, a three-course lunch consisting of a residual stream of food is sent to a community centre run by the Salvation Army where 50 people eat every week. We also make a weekly donation of hot meals for the homeless to the Salvation Army soup bus. In this way, we offer people in need a tasty meal while fighting food waste.

The result?

Having now partnered with the Salvation Army for two years, the RAI kitchen team has provided 8,000 guests in the community centre with a quality hot meal (750 grams of reclaimed food per person, 50 people per week). In addition, the cooperation with the soup bus, which started a little later, has so far resulted in hot meals for 1,000 homeless people in Amsterdam (400 grams of reclaimed food per person, 100 homeless people per week). All of this was compiled from the return streams from our catering, allowing us to combat food waste.



Yvonne van Lambalgen, Captain of the Salvation Army's Goodwill Centres in Amsterdam

“We think this is a fantastic initiative by the RAI. Not only are stomachs filled, but people get to meet, enjoy a meal together and make valuable friendships. The 50 or so people who come to eat with us would not normally interact with one another. They are often lonely and have little money. The initiative has the positive effect of combating loneliness, and therefore has a positive effect on society at large.”



2. Spontaneous

When products are spontaneously left over or replaced in our organisation, we now have a local network in place to immediately link them to local social initiatives that can benefit from them, preventing the products from being wasted.

The result?

We maintain lists of everything that has been donated instead of going to waste, which are available upon request. They include 600 leftover packets of orange juice with a shelf life that was too limited for our business which found a valuable new destination within organisations like the Regenboog Group (homeless shelters). Hundreds of leftover lunch packages have been donated to the Salvation Army, and 200 bananas that were uneaten due to a lower than expected visitor turnout at an event were gifted to the Food Bank to pass on to clients living below the poverty line in Amsterdam. The list of examples is extensive.



3. Project-based

Sometimes we are contacted by community initiatives for support that demands a more project-based approach. An example from 2019 involved Vivium Torendael, a care facility for people with dementia, which asked us to help realise a theatre on location. The initial request was for a financial contribution and, when asked what they would use the funds for, they provided a list of items that we often see enter our business and eventually end up in the bin. By learning what they needed, we were able to identify the items in our business whenever they were left over and repurpose them. We also approached specific suppliers and asked whether they had some of the required items left over so that we could forward them to the facility. Items needed a quick repair were fixed by our Technical Services department before being repurposed in the theatre of the facility for people with dementia.

The result?

The theatre was created in 2019. As well as providing technological support, we donated a red carpet, table decorations, separation walls and a programme sign, all collected from the RAI's waste streams and with the aid of our suppliers.

Other comparable examples include collecting Sinterklaas gifts for children living in poverty in Amsterdam last December. This led to a van full of second-hand toys way being repurposed. We also helped furnish a group home for refugees with items from our business, such as a dining table, plates, an oven, chairs, a football table and a computer.



We have started a new project for 2020 in partnership with our supplier Expoflora: furnishing nine walk-in homeless shelters in Amsterdam with materials and items from the exhibition floor. In addition to supporting social initiatives, we also help prevent items from becoming waste and save the associated costs.

4. Event-specific

We started experimenting with a Donation Room programme to repurpose usable items left after events – targeting specific things that social organisations have previously indicated would be useful. The first occasion was in September 2019 during the world's largest media, entertainment and technology exhibition, the International Broadcasting Convention (IBC). Exhibitors were given the opportunity to donate leftover items (in line with the wishes of the associated social organisations) to the Donation Team on the final exhibition day. Coordinated by the RAI, this team consisted of volunteers from the associated initiatives who walked around the exhibition on the final day from just before closing to just after with a shopping cart to collect items. The items were then divided and repurposed among the participating initiatives. We have now had six successful Donation Room programmes during events and each has had unique results. The social demand changes constantly, while the surplus from exhibitions depends on the exhibition and time period. This means that we analyse how we can connect the supply and demand per exhibition, and organise the Donation Room programme on that basis.

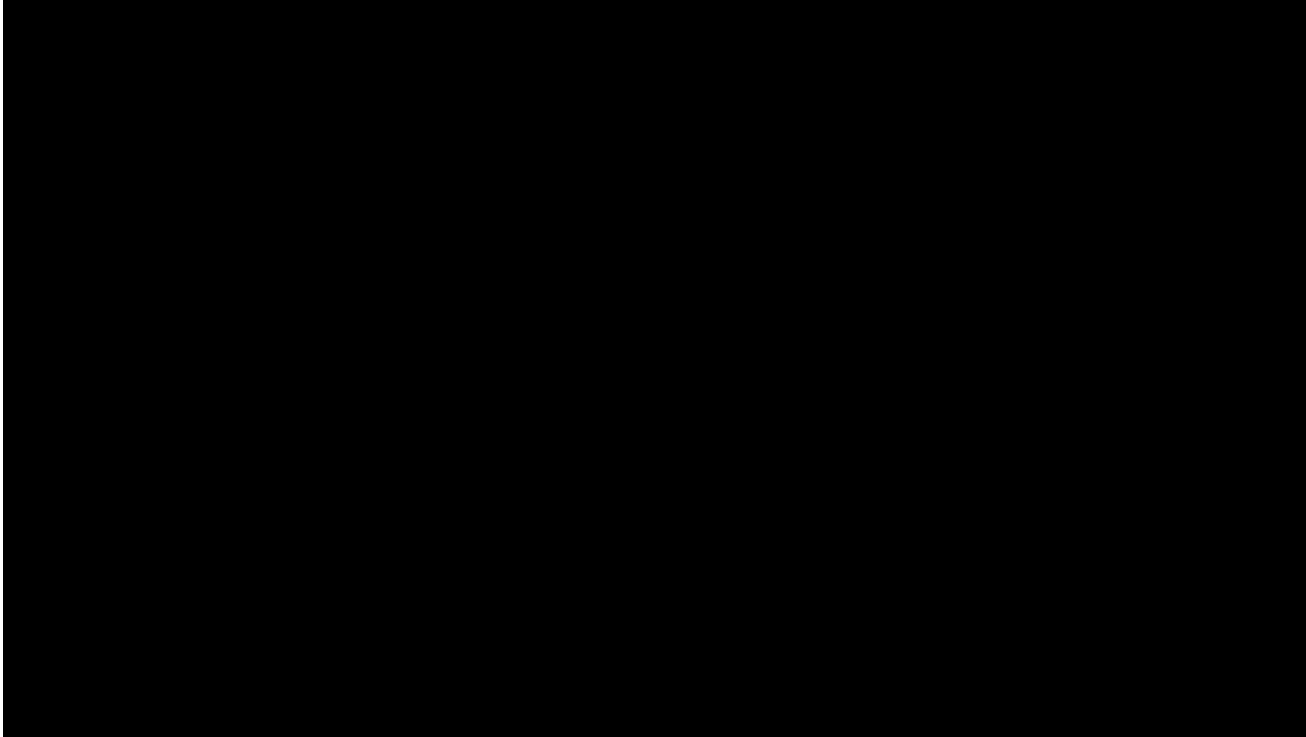


Stephanie Mathas, CSR & Sustainability Manager RAI Amsterdam

“We have seen that we can help many local initiatives with what we have in leftover items,” says Stephanie Mathas, CSR Manager at the RAI. “So why wouldn’t we? It allows us to ensure that no value goes unused. Whereas exhibitors who didn’t want to rent items would previously throw out a chair after the event, seeing it as waste, this item is now linked to a party that has already indicated that it could make good use of it. This process is enabling the RAI to increase our social (added) value while simultaneously preventing the waste of unused value.”



An impression of our most recent Donation Room during the Huishoudbeurs, a consumer event focused on shopping.



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The result?

Six Donation Room programmes have been organised during events to date and more are on the agenda for when our business is up and running again after the Corona crisis. They have helped dozens of social initiatives from the region with usable items and materials. The results vary per exhibition and are available upon request. The results of the most recent Donation Room programme during the Huishoudbeurs consumer exhibition included the following:

- The Salvation Army received four vans full of food and beverage items, a refrigerator, three tables, clothing, games, books, personal care items, cleaning products and much more. These all went to the organisation's neighbourhood centres for distribution among clients.
- Two locations of social services provider Puur Zuid were provided with two cars full of food and beverage products for its neighbourhood cooking project.
- Food Bank Amsterdam was supplied with many litres (think metres-high pallets) of soup and drink yoghurt, shopping trolleys of humus

and chicken kebab salads, and boxes of apples, tomatoes and stevia, which were distributed to clients at various city-wide locations.

- We supplied the Regenboog Group with litres of drinking yoghurt and scores of protein peanut butter bars for the homeless served by the organisation's various day-care facilities.
- Vivium Torendael was provided with a box of costumes for the theatre in its care facility for people with dementia.
- The Friendship Sport Centre received hundreds of protein peanut butter bars to distribute among disabled athletes.





While the social impact of all the above is self-evident, the items we save in this way are also prevented from being thrown away. This means that the programme saved lots of waste and waste-related costs (economic and environmental). Exhibitors have also enthusiastically welcomed the initiatives as they now have a place to donate valuable items without having to pay waste costs or organise transport. We repurpose items locally, which means that the transport movements of the items are much smaller than when, say, a table must be transported back to the UK.

An additional result is that the programme has also given exhibitors and organisers the opportunity to change how they deal with valuable items. This also applies to the RAI's suppliers and employees. Where these parties previously had no option but to throw items out, they're now offered the choice of creating social value. This has led to all those involved starting to see what was previously considered waste as value.

The results are growing organically, with the number of organisers looking to start a Donation Room programme rising from zero to at least 20 within a year. We will continue to carefully consider whether organising a Donation Room is valuable to the social initiatives. After all, demand is the basis for the programme. The selfless contribution to the initiative from other stakeholders is also increasing. For example,

suppliers are volunteering to participate in the collection and transport of items, and the group of volunteers for the Donation Team is also growing each time we set up a room. The same goes for the level of engagement among employees supporting and participating in the success of the programme. From the sole contribution of the CSR team to the participation of at least 150 colleagues, there has been a heart-warming degree of involvement for these heart-warming initiatives in Amsterdam.

Last but not least, an unexpected outcome is the way that the Donation Room programme is bringing different worlds together, with various social initiatives working together within a single Donation Team. This allows them to get to know each other and generate interesting new collaborations. We are also bringing the local community into contact with international trade exhibitions, which is much appreciated by both sides. Exhibitors enjoy knowing where their donated items end up and the initiatives are keen to learn more about commercial business and the generosity of the companies involved. The programme genuinely helps all walks of life and is entirely in line with the vision of the RAI to focus on organising and facilitating valuable encounters.

A RAllation with impact

The Donation Programme as a whole works thanks to cooperation with the various social initiatives, which we describe as 'heart-warming RAllations'. We are getting to know each other better and becoming more aligned. Where previously it took a week to link leftover items to a new destination, now we only need one day. This speed allows us to repurpose more items and further increase our impact organically.

"On Friday morning, our people from Burger in Nood (Civilians in Need) picked up a shopper full of donated food from the Horecava," says Hannie van Schaik from Community Events Almere. "Everything was ready within 45 minutes and, thanks to the RAI and all participating organisations, we were able to put a smile on many faces."

"The RAI keeps surprising us with every Donation Room! On the Monday after the Huishoudbeurs we were able to treat 50 neighbourhood residents to a menu that consisted almost entirely of donated ingredients for our 'eating and cooking together' lunch. We also help other donated items find their way to local people with little money to spend. Things that would otherwise be thrown away are repurposed and gratefully received."

Wouter Plaatsman, Puur Zuid.

Conclusion



By looking at what the organisation has left through the lens of social demand, we are discovering a wealth of opportunities to generate social value and prevent the value already present in our organisations from becoming waste. This approach is something we aim to continue, especially as the results are directly showing why it is so meaningful. Everyone wins: we prevent waste, the programme enhances the embedding of CSR in the RAI's activities, and the social added value of the RAI and our business is increased. In turn, all the associated social initiatives see this contribution from the RAI as valuable.

The approach is also helping us gain an insight into where surpluses (waste) originate and how they can be prevented. For example, we collect furniture via a Donation Room because various initiatives can use them. But what happens when their needs have been met? It means that we have to stagnate the outflow where possible and create a better balance with the social demand. The Donation Rooms at several exhibitions featured a lot of IKEA furniture. Talking to various exhibitors, we discovered that some feel that the RAI's furniture rental rates are too expensive, and that's why they go to IKEA. We are now consulting with IKEA to see whether we can develop a rental option with the company to prevent furniture from being left over after the event.

What we've also seen in a Donation Room is that many bottles of water are left over which have been purchased from supermarkets rather than the RAI – some exhibitors feel the latter are too expensive. We are looking to see if there is a way to address this or facilitate a return option for unused bottles of water. Can we perhaps collect unused items and return part of the costs to stimulate reuse in the organisation and prevent items from being left after an event?

Moreover, the Donation Room programme also pinpoints streams that are not in line with the social demand and which are, in fact, waste. These are streams we must try and prevent. For example, at the end of the Horecava many exhibitors wanted to give food to the Donation Room that had a shelf life of just two days. This is too short for the social initiatives to repurpose, which means it loses its value. For the next edition, the event organiser will proactively encourage exhibitors to bring products with a shelf life of at least five days from when the exhibition closes so they can be donated if unused. The fact that donating saves waste and transport costs is a good motivation, enabling us to translate a stream without value into a valuable stream with a new impactful destination.

In conclusion we can say that being involved in the Donation Programme, including the Donation Room, has offered us many tools to continue increasing the sustainability of our business and prevent waste. It helps us talk about and act in accordance with social value rather than waste. It has also established an excellent foundation for organising and facilitating events in an even more socially responsible way.

