



Recap: RETRAKT Conference „Join the circle“

(16 March 2026) On 25 February 2026, the RETRAKT Conference titled “Join the Circle” took place at forum M in Aachen. A total of 70 participants attended the event, contributing with their strong interest in the conference and the accompanying exhibition of various partners.

The RETRAKT Conference 2026 primarily addressed the profound transformation from a linear to a circular economy currently taking place in the textile and fashion industry. A key focus was placed on the EU’s legal agenda and its role in promoting resource efficiency and circular production principles for consumer goods such as textiles. This transformation requires not only technological and economic changes but also people who are willing to implement these new regulations. Within the framework of “Resilience Engineering”, the RETRAKT research project adopts a human-centered perspective in order to support and realize this transition. This approach became evident during the project’s opening event.



An exhibition provided a platform for several project partners and associated stakeholders to introduce themselves and present their work. During an interactive break, exhibitors represented the following focus areas: Euregio Meuse-Rhine and the City of Aachen showcased ideas and projects related to the circular economy and cross-border cooperation, the Human Technology Center of RWTH Aachen University presented its work on circular innovation systems, information on topics related to the Digital Product Passport were provided by Global Textile Scheme GmbH. In addition, the DATIpilot Innovationscommunity Circular Textiles was present, as well as Performance Days, representing trade fairs relevant to the topic.

Opening of the RETRAKT Conference, Keynote and Project Presentation

The conference was opened by Christoph Hohoff, Vice Chancellor for Research Organization and Head of Research Management at FOM University of Applied Sciences in Essen. He welcomed the participants and delivered the opening remarks.



He emphasized: “With RETRAKT, FOM University of Applied Sciences strengthens the connection between research, teaching and business practice. Together with strong partners, we analyze and optimize work and process structures in the textile and apparel industry so that companies can produce in a resource-efficient, circular and recycling-friendly way in the future.”

An important keynote was subsequently delivered by Jana Hrckova from the European Commission (Directorate-General for Environment) in Brussels, titled “EU Textile Strategy and European Sustainable Product Regulation (ESPR)”. In her presentation, she addressed the legal framework of the ESPR, explained the requirements of the EU Eco-design Regulation, and identified key product aspects that must be regulated. This provided the audience with an excellent introduction to the EU Textile Strategy and the European regulation on sustainable products.

Following this keynote, Professor Thomas Mühlbradt (FOM University of Applied Sciences in Essen), Nicole Espey (ITA – Institute for Textile Technology of RWTH Aachen University) and Marcel Völko (Human Technology Center of RWTH Aachen University) presented the RETRAKT research project under the title “Circular Textiles. Resilient Future.” They provided an overview of the project, its partners, and the research approach addressing EU legislation, compliance management, resilience engineering, and innovation transfer. They explained that the transformation towards circular processes – as required by EU legislation – leads to increasing complexity. This complexity can be addressed by building compliance management structures, process resilience, and team resilience.



Interactive Networking Lunch Break

After the project presentation, a longer interactive lunch break allowed participants to actively exchange ideas with each other and with the exhibitors. This extended networking opportunity was very well received, as the most valuable ideas often emerge during informal conversations over coffee. Many participants later highlighted this interactive exchange as one of the most positive aspects of the day.



Presentation Program

The first presentation was given by Carlotta Queirazza from the apsus Institute for Applied Sustainability in Berlin, titled "The Future of Textiles and Waste Management: Extended Producer Responsibility in Europe." In Europe, recycling and waste management are primarily the responsibility of national governments, resulting in highly diverse collection and disposal systems. This poses significant challenges for companies distributing products across multiple countries, as they must comply with different national systems of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR). In her talk, Carlotta Queirazza explained why the discussion about EPR is necessary, outlined the concept of extended producer responsibility for textiles in the European Union, and described the existing and emerging EPR systems across Europe.



The following presentation, "New Technical Perspectives on Textile Recycling," was given by Laura Barbet from the ITA – Institute for Textile Technology of RWTH Aachen University. She explored why textile recycling is essential, presenting various existing approaches such as mechanical, thermomechanical, enzymatic, and chemical recycling methods. She emphasized that research into technological recycling solutions and their industrial implementation plays a crucial role in establishing a truly circular textile economy.

The final presentation of the conference was delivered by Michael Dejozé from the EGTC Euregio Meuse-Rhine, titled "Circular Economy in the Euregio Meuse-Rhine – Best Practice Examples." He highlighted the unique characteristics of the border region between Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands, emphasizing both the great potential and the occasionally humorous challenges of cross-border cooperation. His presentation clearly demonstrated that circular economy initiatives and collaborative projects are key drivers for the economic development and future of the region.



All presentations generated strong interest and numerous questions from participants, resulting in lively discussions after each session.

Closing of the RETRAKT Conference and Save the Date

At the end of the event, Nicole Espey and Marcel Völkei from RWTH Aachen University summarized the key insights of the day in a final discussion round, during which participants actively contributed their reflections.

This concluded a very successful, informative, and well-attended first RETRAKT Conference 2026. The organizers look forward to continuing the RETRAKT event series on 19 November 2026 in Brussels.



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