

## Frank Vahstal – Smits Vastgoedzorg

### From graduation research to sustainability accelerator

Frank Vahstal began his career at Smits Vastgoedzorg during his graduation research into the SUMoptoppen concept. What started as a study project quickly grew into a serious quest to see how this concept could be applied on a large scale. An important part of this was making the impact measurable. “In my second week at Smits Vastgoedzorg, we already started the process at Alba, searching for a suitable tool to make that impact visible. That’s how we ended up with the BCI Gebouw tool.”

In his role as project developer, Frank focuses, among other things, on making the SUMoptoppen concept as biobased as possible. But how does the organization as a whole view circularity and sustainability? “We are slowly but surely moving in the right direction,” he says. “The demand from clients is increasing and internal awareness within the company is also growing. At the same time, it can sometimes be difficult to actually get plans realized, especially in communication with chain partners. It helps enormously to have a tool at hand that allows you to demonstrate the benefits. It makes the conversation with both management and clients much more concrete.”

According to Frank, the biggest challenge often lies with the chain partners themselves. “There is sometimes some suspicion towards innovative products. But we also see that this is changing. For example, we work with an insulation company that really made a turnaround last year.” The financial aspect is often decisive for clients as well. “That’s why it’s so valuable that we can use data to show what the impact is. Data is truly key, but it has to be understandable. A figure about CO<sub>2</sub> often means little to people. That’s why I work with comparisons: a baseline measurement with traditional materials like PIR, compared to our biobased alternatives. Then you can show in percentages how much impact you save. That works.”

Smits Vastgoedzorg works exclusively for housing corporations and Frank also sees a clear shift there. “The demand is definitely changing. Building Balance also plays a stimulating role in this. At first, I thought they mainly focused on contractors and suppliers, but they also motivate corporations. That was a nice surprise.” Still, there is a world to be won. “We have filled in our own BCI environment, including our sustainability ambitions. You see that reflected at some corporations, but at many others it still remains vague. They want to focus on circularity, but that is not always translated into concrete MKI or CO<sub>2</sub> targets.”

The biggest challenge, according to Frank, remains the financial consideration. “Especially in the social housing sector, where we are very active, there is no legal requirement like an MPG standard for renovation. If it’s not required, it’s often the first thing to be cut. The prices of biobased materials also haven’t structurally decreased yet, which makes it difficult. But if you can show what you gain, that always helps.”

For the future, Frank hopes for more standardization and clear agreements. “I would like to see guidelines for renovation projects: what data do you record, what exactly do you compare? For example: if you overlay a roof, do you compare that to a completely new PIR roof? Such details make the difference. By now, I know my way around BCI Gebouw and choose the data I want to show. But if the sector as a whole works more standardized, it will be easier to compare data and move forward together.”