

## Sofie worked as a visiting scientist in New Zealand



Sofie De Regel (VITO) was a ‘visiting scientist’ at Scion in New Zealand for 1 month. Scion is a Crown Research Institute (CRI) with 320 employees that specialises in research, science and technology development for the forestry, wood product and wood-derived materials and other biomaterial sectors.

Sofie worked closely with Scion’s Sustainable Architect, Andrea Stocchero (*see picture above*) to examine to what extent the market in New Zealand is ready for Environmental Assessments of building materials and whether there is potential for VITO to become involved in the future.

“Just as VITO, Scion’s focus is on multiple interesting innovative domains. Sustainable construction and urban development is a research topic on which their focus is increasing and on which VITO already has a lot of experience. Scion’s primary research center is located in Rotorua on the edge of the world famous ‘Whakarewarewa Forest’.”



After 2 weeks of extra travelling in New Zealand, Sofie got back to business in Belgium and continues the work initiated with Scion while exploring further potential cooperation opportunities.

“Scion is an impressive organization, employing staff from over 20 different countries. There is great attention to work-life balance and a large offer of sports programmes. Staff health and wellbeing is a priority and a strength of their working culture. Interaction between teams is encouraged and can occur formally or informally during breaks at the cafeteria over a cup of tea (with a bit of milk, like in Great-Britain). This gave me the opportunity to get to know many of the colleagues from a variety of different teams.”

During her visit to Scion, Sofie has been introduced by Andrea to a wide range of wood and building material manufacturers and various industry and research associations.

### WHERE WAS SOFIE STAYING AT?

Sofie was hosted by Bruce Davy, another Scion employee, as a ‘homestay’, which offers numerous benefits; a temporary warm home, a family that can show you the most beautiful sites, getting familiar with a different culture, getting in touch with the locals and so on. Something you miss out on when staying at a hotel. Rotorua is surrounded by beautiful lakes, forests, geysers, boiling mud pools, hot springs and vulcanos.

Together with her ‘kiwi’ family, she saw a lot of New Zealand during her stay. “New Zealanders call themselves ‘kiwis’, named after the ‘kiwi bird’. Thus, when you are in a store you will have to ask for ‘kiwi fruit’ if you want to buy a kiwi, or else they will presume you are asking for a bird.”



“The New Zealand English is quite difficult to understand. ‘Kiwis’ have their own ‘slang’, peculiar vowel sounds, accents and a mumble talk. It takes some time to get used to this for someone with - Belgian roots. The culture of New Zealand is relaxed and friendly, with a ‘no worries’ and ‘can do’ attitude. You can never pass someone without saying ‘hello!’.”

#### WHAT DOES SOFIE DO AT VITO ?

Sofie works in the unit SEB, more specifically in team MACS (aka ‘Sustainable living and building’). She works in the two subteams of ‘Assessment of building products and concepts’ and ‘Energy district Design and Renovations’, which offers her plenty of variety.