

THE URBAN OPPORTUNITY FRAMEWORK

URBAN ISSUES THROUGH THE LENS OF THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

WHY DO YOU NEED IT?

Whilst there are many frameworks and definitions of the circular economy, there are currently few that relate circular principles to the urban environment, and present tangible circular opportunities to those responsible for shaping the circular transition in cities—urban changemakers. Without a theoretical background in circular economy, they often struggle to translate these principles into tangible opportunities for their city.

A circular economy requires integrated and systemic thinking. The driving force for this change can stem from any urban changemaker, be it policy makers or consultants within a city department or a business. This can then permeate through the city with others working towards the same goals.

These urban changemakers think in terms of the provision of services for citizens, such as Mobility, Healthcare and Housing, or common utilities like Water and Electricity. It is within the boundaries of these services that changemakers strive to create change, and it is, therefore, where we must offer suitable circular opportunities.

This framework aims to support urban changemakers to start their journey towards circularity in cities and create a shared understanding by presenting city level interventions across pertinent urban themes based on principles of the circular economy.

Fig. 1 Opportunity Radar in the Circle City Scan Tool.



WHAT IS IT?

v2. Urban Opportunity Framework

Circular opportunities are clustered by “urban themes” in The Urban Opportunity Framework. Urban themes concern either utilities—such as water, or energy; the provision of societal needs through value chains such as buildings; or, the focus on particular value chains such as organics.

Each cluster contains an indicative and practical selection of related circular opportunities, based where appropriate on theoretical frameworks of the circular economy. In time, clusters will be expanded on in breadth and depth.

Urban themes:

- Thematic area: Water

Circular opportunities: Activities related to the provision of water to citizens and enterprises without waste, or destruction of natural resources; the management and maintenance of water infrastructure, and the conservation and management of natural water systems in the area including rainwater, freshwater and saltwater systems.

- Thematic Area: Solid Waste

Circular opportunities: Activities related to the collection, handling and management of solid waste from households and enterprises such that waste is diverted from landfills, valorised and re-enters value chains.

- Thematic Area: Energy

Circular Opportunities: Activities related to the utilisation of energy generated from waste streams.

- Thematic Area: Organics

Circular opportunities: Activities related to the generation, sourcing, management, manufacture or end-of-life handling of organic and biological material and product streams.

- Thematic Area: Buildings

Circular opportunities: Activities related to the planning, design and financing of buildings for a circular built environment, as well as activities related to mapping and monitoring the building stock, reutilisation of building stock and preparation for reuse and recycling.

- Thematic Areas: Consumables

- Electronics

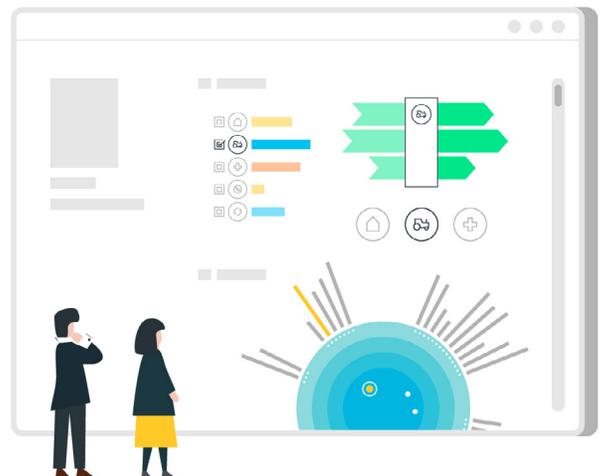
Circular Opportunities: Activities related to the establishment and management of a circular value chain for electronic components, products and related materials, including sourcing, manufacture, retail and end-of-life handling.

- Textiles

Circular Opportunities: Activities related to the establishment and management of a circular value chain for textile streams, including extraction, manufacture, retail and end-of-life handling for pure and mixed products.

- Fast moving consumer goods

Circular Opportunities: Activities related to the establishment and management of a circular value chain for fast moving consumer goods, including extraction, manufacture, retail and end-of-life handling.



WHO IS IT FOR?

This framework is designed for urban changemakers who are keen to understand how the circular economy applies to cities. These are, namely, policymakers, city officials or project developers working in areas directly relevant to the circular economy, or areas that could benefit from the circular economy, such as ecosystem services, product life extension, waste management or water management. It is also relevant for consultants working on sustainability, policy, innovation, and strategy and who are eager to explore circular economy opportunities.

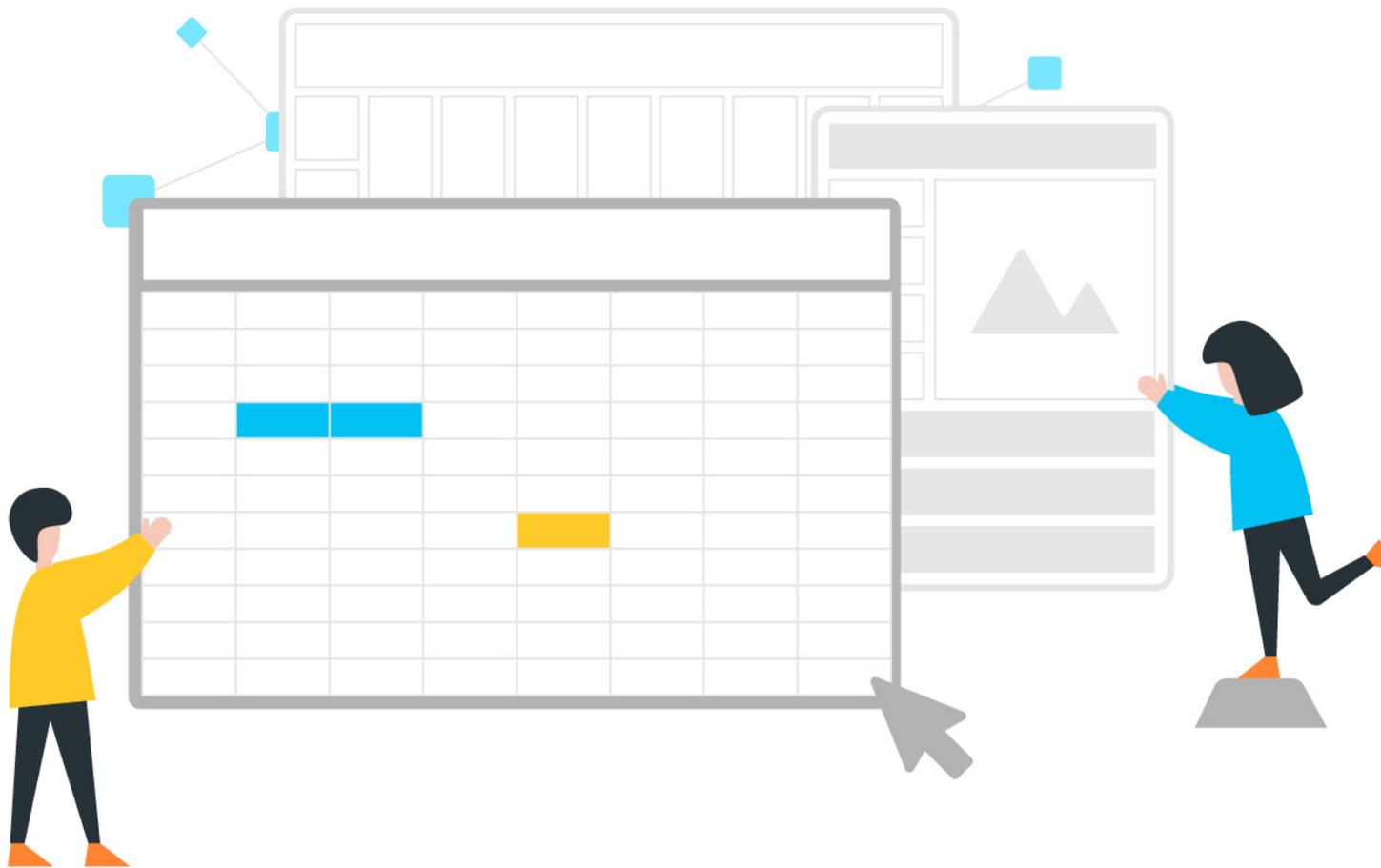
The framework is designed to be flexible, modular and accessible. It is suitable for those who have beginner and intermediate knowledge of the circular economy.

HOW CAN IT BE USED IN PRACTICE?

This framework is currently in testing via the [Circle City Scan Tool](#)—Circle Economy's open access tool that supports the identification and implementation of circular projects in cities. In the Circle City Scan Tool, users are asked to define a focus area by selecting a sector, material and impact, based on the city analytics provided. Having selected a focus area, users are presented with a bespoke Opportunity Radar which prioritises and displays relevant opportunities for their city. The framework is used as the basis for this radar.

The framework is also in use in the [Knowledge Hub](#): a digital repository of case studies for the circular economy. The framework is used to categorise case studies in the urban context, which can be viewed and downloaded for use in both practical and academic research.

Lastly, we plan to link this framework to our upcoming **Action Planner Tool** which supports project developers in the design and implementation of circular projects.



HOW WAS IT DEVELOPED?

The initial framework was born out of a demand to translate our [Circle City Scan](#) service offering—which we have delivered to over 20 cities—into an open access, digitalised suite of tools to guide urban changemakers through a circular transition.

The Circle City Scan service offering takes place over the course of a year. It works to expand the knowledge of the circular economy in the locale by holding workshops with multiple stakeholders and undertaking analytics regarding material flows and knowledge in the city. The ultimate goal is to define a circular pilot project which the project partners can take forward and implement.

In defining the initial framework, we analysed our work and the work of similar organisations and identified that the most pertinent themes to a city, when considering a circular economy, are Construction, Biomass, Procurement, Household Consumption, and Waste Management. These themes echo the themes that are considered relevant to a circular economy at a policy level. We cross referenced these themes with our [Seven Key Elements Framework](#) and did further research within each theme in order to define relevant strategies for the theme.

The framework is in constant development. We work with the users of the Circle City Scan Tool and the Knowledge Hub who apply it in practice and gather feedback through interviews and our digital channels.

DISCUSSION

The simplicity of this framework is also its downfall. Although it is accessible, opportunities should not be studied in isolation. The implementation of a single opportunity may require that others are already in place and a single opportunity can still vary greatly between urban settings in how it is implemented. In future work, we hope to use digital tools to expose the nuances and complexities of combining opportunities in different contexts.

Furthermore, there is generally no clear boundary around what is, or isn't, circular. We have had to draw these boundaries to produce a precise and simple circular framework. But this means that certain adjacent industries and opportunities are excluded. In the case of energy, for example, we would like to include opportunities around electrification and renewable energy as these are instrumental to circularity and part of the insights required to drive circular action, yet they do not explicitly concern circularity and therefore are excluded from this framework.

Lastly, there are other common resources which should be considered in future iterations of the framework—for example, circular strategies for handling land, the extension of waste management to resource management and information flows in the city. There are also other societal needs that should be expanded on, such as Healthcare or Mobility. In addition, the framework could be expanded by providing a method for mapping how opportunities relate across and through value chains.

WE'RE LOOKING TO TALK
TO URBAN CHANGEMAKERS
ABOUT THIS FRAMEWORK.

Contact us here:

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DISCLAIMER

We are striving to continually update our frameworks to ensure they remain relevant and are best suited to facilitate action. To this end, we welcome suggestions and comments on this framework from our Knowledge Community.