

# CIRCLES in Eastern Netherlands

*Business driven Circular Economy network*



## Provinces of Overijssel and Gelderland, Netherlands



3.3 million (2023) inhabitants



8.556 km<sup>2</sup> area



393 per km<sup>2</sup> population density

## Characteristics of the region

- Large parts of the region are rural like Achterhug region, bigger cities with < 200.000 inhabitants (Nijmegen, Arnhem and Enschede)
- “Health Valley” & “Food Valley” – clusters of companies, universities and research institutes in the fields of health, food and agriculture, including leading companies and renowned research centers
- Many family-run small and medium-sized enterprises
- Very diverse economy with high circular economy potential
- Further key sectors: energy and technology

## Baseline situation and objectives

In 2016, two associations launched the CIRCLES project to help local companies obtain funding for circular initiatives and support the local economy. The economic reasons were the starting point, not necessarily environmental ones. The objective is to boost the local economy by knowledge-sharing on circular solutions and support them with financing initiatives.



## Which leverage points have been addressed?

- Analysis and monitoring of available resources
- Waste Management

## Focus of the project

### “Sharing your assets is the main driver of Circular Economy”

Christian Lorist, project manager CIRCLES

CIRCLES is the digital and physical meeting place for everyone who wants to contribute to the transition to a circular economy in the East of the Netherlands.

What CIRCLES does:

- Connecting partners
- Supporting the regional resource exchange
- Facilitating co-creation processes that accelerate the development and implementation of new business models
- Collecting information and facilitating capacity building on circular procurement and tendering

During a strategy session with the CIRCLES partners, the circular roadmap has been created. Five working groups emerged from this, which we will work on with various partners in the coming period:

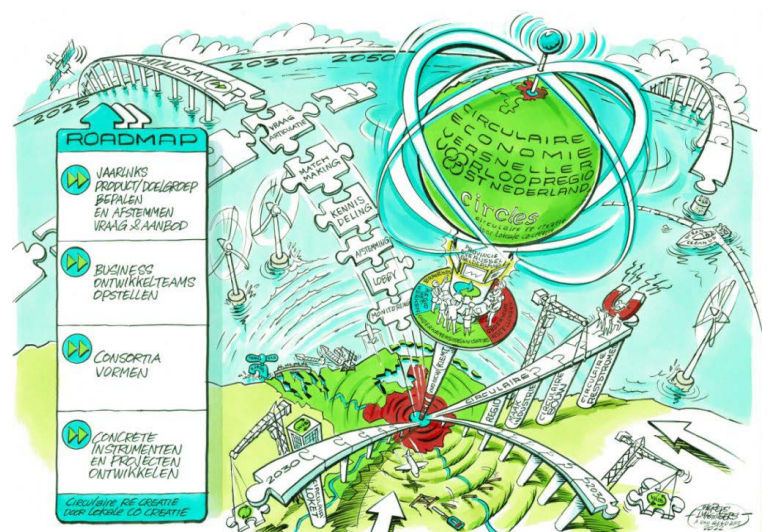
- Circular Region: e.g. supporting capacity building by organising regional workshops and building up regional expertise.
- Circular Manufacturing Industry: accompanying the expansion of the CESI programme, the Circular Factories Programme, the Fieldlab CIM and the realisation of a physical innovation infrastructure for the manufacturing industry.
- Circular Construction: establishing a knowledge centre to support the housing deals and urbanisation programmes.
- Circular Streams: building a hub and data infrastructure for Industrial Symbiosis and the valorisation of residual streams from industry and agriculture.
- Circular Choices: informing governments and consumers about the impact of their procurement and consumption choices and organising knowledge-sharing events around circularity.

## Stakeholders involved

- Initiators: employers association VNO-NCW and non-governmental organisation Kiemt
- Partners: governments, knowledge institutions, industry associations, business associations, environmental organisations

## Financing

Initially, the project has been financed by ERDF fundings. Now, the project is oriented financed by other public money.



Circular roadmap © circles.nu

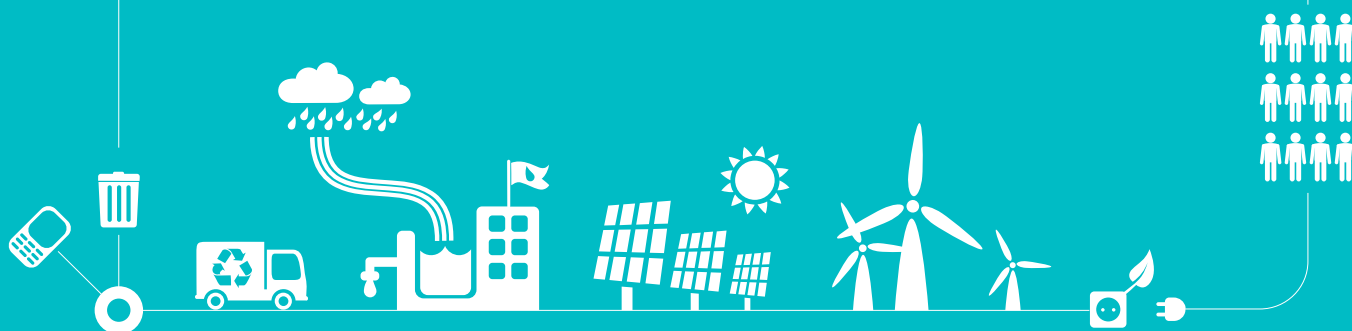
## ★ Spotlight: Circular Business Counter

The Circular Business Counter on the CIRCLES website allows companies to pose questions about their interest and their needs regarding circular business practices. The service is aimed at regional companies registered at chamber of commerce. It covers the following topics: knowledge, network, laws and regulations, financing. This enables knowledge sharing and paves the way for more businesses developing into a more circular direction. Practitioners find it helpful to be able to draw on the experience of many others in their region.

<https://circles.nu/circulair-ondernemersloket-geopend-door-helga-witjes/>



# Samen vooruit in de circulaire economie



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## Outlook

The project team is currently working on the development of a European database, including especially industry relevant materials, for the exchange of resources, combined with the regional approach of CIRCLES. The goal is to connect further companies and to realise synergetic potentials. This shall help to save resources and reduce the overall environmental impact of the region.

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***“If you want a second or third life of a product, the regional level has to be integrated”***

Christian Lorst, project manager CIRCLES

## Key learnings and replicability

- European funding programs like ERDF are successful in supporting initiatives for a circular economy.
- CIRCLES is a good example of how EU funding can be used to further support circular economy initiatives when effectively coordinated. The concept of the Circularity Business Counter where interested companies can find help regarding knowledge or funding can be replicated in other regions.
- Family-run companies tend to apply a long-term perspective and planning which is suitable for the circular economy approach.
- Regional proximity helps to build trust amongst the different stakeholders.
- To develop a circular economy one project is not sufficient – systemic changes in procurement and regulatory are needed to create a fertile environment and to develop a sustainable circular economy.

### Contact person of the initiative

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## Challenges and barriers

- The regulation framework (national, EU) was perceived as a hindering factor, as it was often not suitable for new circular approaches (e.g. in relation to the end of waste regulation).
- Long-term funding to keep the network alive is hard to obtain.

## Imprint

### *Editor*

Federal Ministry for Housing, Urban Development and Building

August 2023

### *Scientific support*

Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development

### *Contracting authority*

Prognos AG, Institut für Ländliche Strukturforchung e. V.

### *Print*

Druckerei Arnold, 14979 Großbeeren

### *Layout*

ecosense – media & communication

### *Photo credit*

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