

BEYOND CIRCULAR DESIGN



SKILLS FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE

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General Information

Title: Circular Design Training Module

Programme: Erasmus+

Action Type: Small-scale partnerships in adult education

Period: 01/09/2024 - 31/08/2025

Grant: 60 000 EUR

Aim of the Project

- The main goal in “Circular Design Training Module” project is to develop **educational content** that strengthens designers' ability and readiness to apply circular economy principles in their work.
- The curriculum of the materials aims to equip designers to evolve into **circular design leaders** within their respective industries. It focuses on understanding the **interconnectedness of systems**, the shifting role of designers, learning from those already implementing circular design principles, and effectively integrating circularity into specific design fields.

Target Group

Designers **currently on the job market** who didn't have a chance to study circular design at their academic institutions.

- Especially vulnerable are **young designers** who have just entered the job market
- **Older product and graphic designers** who have long since graduated, haven't had access to the upskilling possibilities
- Entrepreneurs- product owners

Outcomes

- Study of the **current European practices** related to circular design and foresight trainings
- **Creation of a training module** (15 ECTS) of circular design and future foresight that includes the script of the module (**literature lists, canvases, tools, tasks, tests** etc), courses with descriptions and teaching materials, available online.

Why? Barriers and Opportunities

Main barriers for Circular Design

(inhibitors to integrate CD into the design process/practice)

- Lack of knowledge and understanding of circularity, LCA, **systems thinking** and regulations
- Lack of transparency and clarity of information of data and expectations
- **Consumers** willingness and ability to navigate the information and choices
- **Financial** barriers to entering the market
- Lack of understanding of the **value** of design overall

Main opportunities for Circular Design

(drivers enabling CD into the design process/practice)

- Development of articulating the value of design (Revolution in the **meaning of "designer"**)
- Exposing the data and making transparency and accountability the norm (such as data availability through DPP)
- New **business models** and approaches to developing design solutions
- Opportunity for a **new field of design** or practice approaches that legitimize design

Why? Barriers and Opportunities



Workshop led by Leyla Acaroglu at Estonian Design Centre

Course development: Methods & Approach

1. **Identifying the barriers and opportunities**
2. Study of current circular design courses
3. **Defining key drivers** derived from the needs & co-creating a module model (course structure) and themes based on identified needs in a joint workshop in Lahti, Finland
4. **Iterative development** through workshops in both partner organizations (Tallinn, Estonia & Lahti, Finland)
5. Joint online **co-development** among partners
6. Feedback and reflection from design professionals and stakeholders for further development (individual meetings)
7. **Joint development workshop** in Tallinn with partners and stakeholders
8. Finalizing and visualizing the overall concept
9. Next -> piloting the model

Course development: Methods & Approach

A summary of the current situation of available circular design study materials and the role of designers as change makers:

- Numerous e-learning platforms and courses have made the principles of circular design more accessible.
- Courses often focus on business development and sustainability practices
- There are materials targeted for designers, but it's still limited and emerging
- Circular design practices have not yet been fully integrated into mainstream design education
- Circular design practices have not yet become an integral part of designers' practical work
- **Circular design focuses on improving the linear model**

Course development: Methods & Approach

While existing circular design courses offer valuable insights into the circular economy, they should be complemented with specialized, up-to-date content that directly supports the practical needs of professional designers.

Course development: Methods & Approach



Workshop for co-creating the module model (course structure and defining the drivers) at LAB Institute of Design and Fine Arts

Course development: Methods & Approach

- Supporting designers in a significant leap in **circular and sustainable design competence** requires a holistic approach
- Circular design expertise should be developed from **the designer's perspective**
- Improving the linear model and **just adding circularity is no longer sufficient**
- Simply increasing knowledge is not enough, **systems thinking** and future-oriented skills must be built
- A fundamental shift in mindset is needed
- The approach must start from an environmentally responsible position
- It must also **respect the ecological limits of our planet**

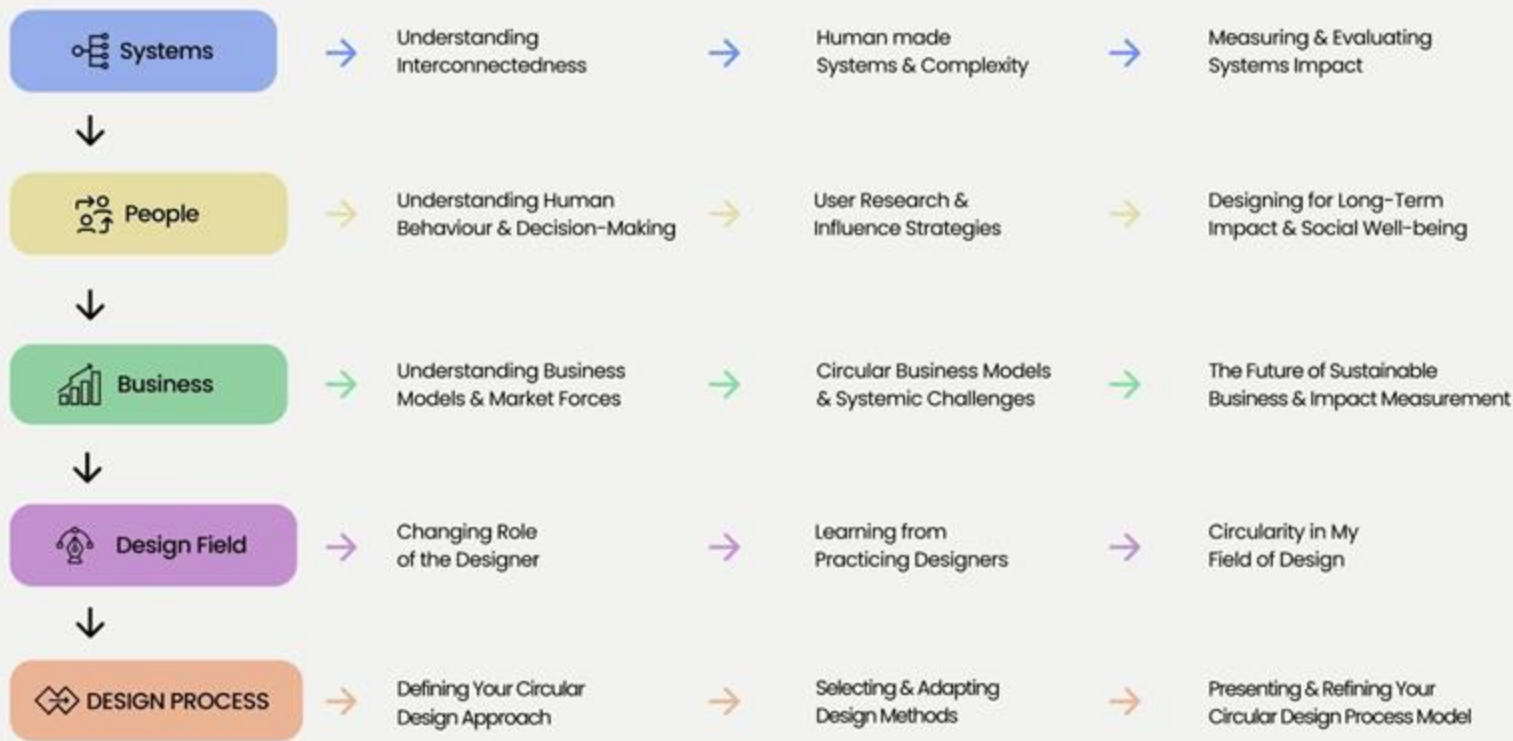
Why is this course different?

- Focus on the needs of the designer's profession
- "Level 2"
- Implementing methods in your own specific field
- Three perspectives: environment, people, businesses
- Systems thinking goes "Beyond circular design"

Learning outcomes

- Understand **systems thinking**
- Analyze complex interconnected **systems** (natural and human-made)
- Apply **circular economy principles** to design
- Develop new **sustainable design strategies**
- Measure and evaluate the environmental and **social impact** of design solutions
- Foster **future-oriented design** solutions
- **Communicate design** ideas effectively
- Adapt to the **evolving role of the designer**

Structure of the Course



Module 1 SYSTEMS

1.1 Basics of Ecology: Understanding Interconnectedness

emphasizing natural systems, interconnectedness, and ecological sustainability.

1.2 Human-Made Systems and Complexity

applies systems thinking to human-made systems, analyzing their complexities, material flows, and unintended consequences.

1.3 Measuring and Evaluating System Impact

provides methods for evaluating the impact of system-level interventions, examining governance, policy, and tools for assessment and adaptation.

- **Understand complex interconnections:** To move beyond linear thinking and recognize how natural, social, and technological systems are interconnected.
- **Apply systems thinking:** To use systems thinking tools and methods to analyze complex problems, identify leverage points for change, and design effective interventions.
- **Make informed decisions:** To evaluate the potential consequences of design decisions across different systems and time scales

Module 2 **PEOPLE**

2.1 Understanding Human Behavior & Decision-Making

Current crises are a human-problem

2.2: User Research & Influence Strategies

How to conduct user-driven research

2.3: Designing for Long-Term Impact & Social Well-being

How to create impactful solutions

This module provides designers with the tools and knowledge to create solutions that are not only effective but also ethical, sustainable, and socially equitable, which are all essential aspects to consider.

Module 3 **BUSINESS**

3.1: Understanding Business Models & Market Forces

Fundamentals of economics

3.2: Circular Business Models & Systemic Challenges

Analyze the challenges and opportunities in transitioning to more sustainable business models.

3.3: The Future of Sustainable Business & Impact Measurement

Comprehend how businesses measure their social and environmental impact.

To equip designers with the knowledge, tools, and perspectives necessary to shape businesses into resilient, sustainable, and future-proof entities, by understanding business models, navigating systemic challenges, and driving the transition towards circular and sustainable practices.

Module 4 **DESIGN FIELD**

4.1 Changing role of the designer

Identify how different industries require different design skills.

4.2 Learning from Practicing Designers

Analyze how different design industries define and implement sustainability.

4.3 Circularity in my field

Develop a future foresight perspective on circularity in one's practice.

To equip designers with the ability to adapt to the evolving role of design, learn from practicing designers, and effectively integrate circular design principles into their specific fields.

Module 5 **DESIGN PROCESS**

5.1 Defining Your Circular Design Approach

How you learn? Comparing design processes

5.2 Selecting & Adapting Design Methods

How you work?

5.3 Presenting & Refining Your Circular Design Process Model

To guide designers in integrating their learning into a unique design process, strategy, and career path that aligns with their individual strengths and values within the context of circularity.

Recommended Learning Methods

ICAP FRAMEWORK



PASSIVE

- reading
- listening
- videos



ACTIVE

- highlighting
- taking notes
- pausing
- understanding videos



CONSTRUCTIVE

- structurizing
- summarizing
- setting relationships
- comparing



INTERACTIVE

- discussing
- question sessions
- answer sessions

Availability of Materials

PDF of the course overview (report) will be sent to the participants after the webinar.

Materials will be available online by the end of September.



Beyond Circular Design™ Report 2025

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BDC: Skills for systemic change

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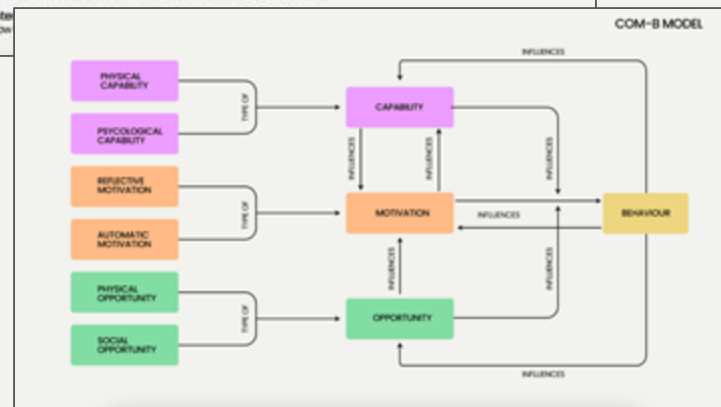
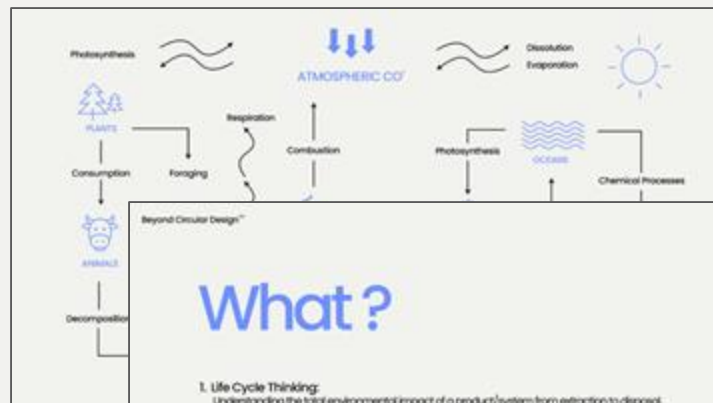


Beyond Circular Design™ Report 2025

(1.1) BASICS OF ECOLOGY

Understanding Interconnectedness

Understanding natural systems, their interconnectedness, and ecological sustainability. The need to shift from linear to circular thinking. The necessity of working with planetary boundaries. Nature as an efficient, self-regulating system.



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