

Circular Solution: **Gothenburg, Sweden**

The Circular Transition Arena: A collaborative platform for co-creating circular solutions

Image Source



Size:

608 993

inhabitants



GDP:

More developed region



Geographical information:

Northern Europe



Urban-rural predominance:

Predominantly urban



Innovation ranking:

Leader



Sectors:

Circular Resource Management



Time frame:

January 2023 – December 2025



Circular strategies:

reduce

reuse

recover

rethink

Contact Person:

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More information:

[Gothenburg | Circular Cities and Regions Initiative](#)



Key facts and figures

Circa 10 new positions

have been created to **directly support circular practices** in the city organisation.

New routines

for **circular operations** have been **developed** in several municipal departments and companies.

Training programmes

for purchasers are being developed to **strengthen circular competencies** in city departments and companies.



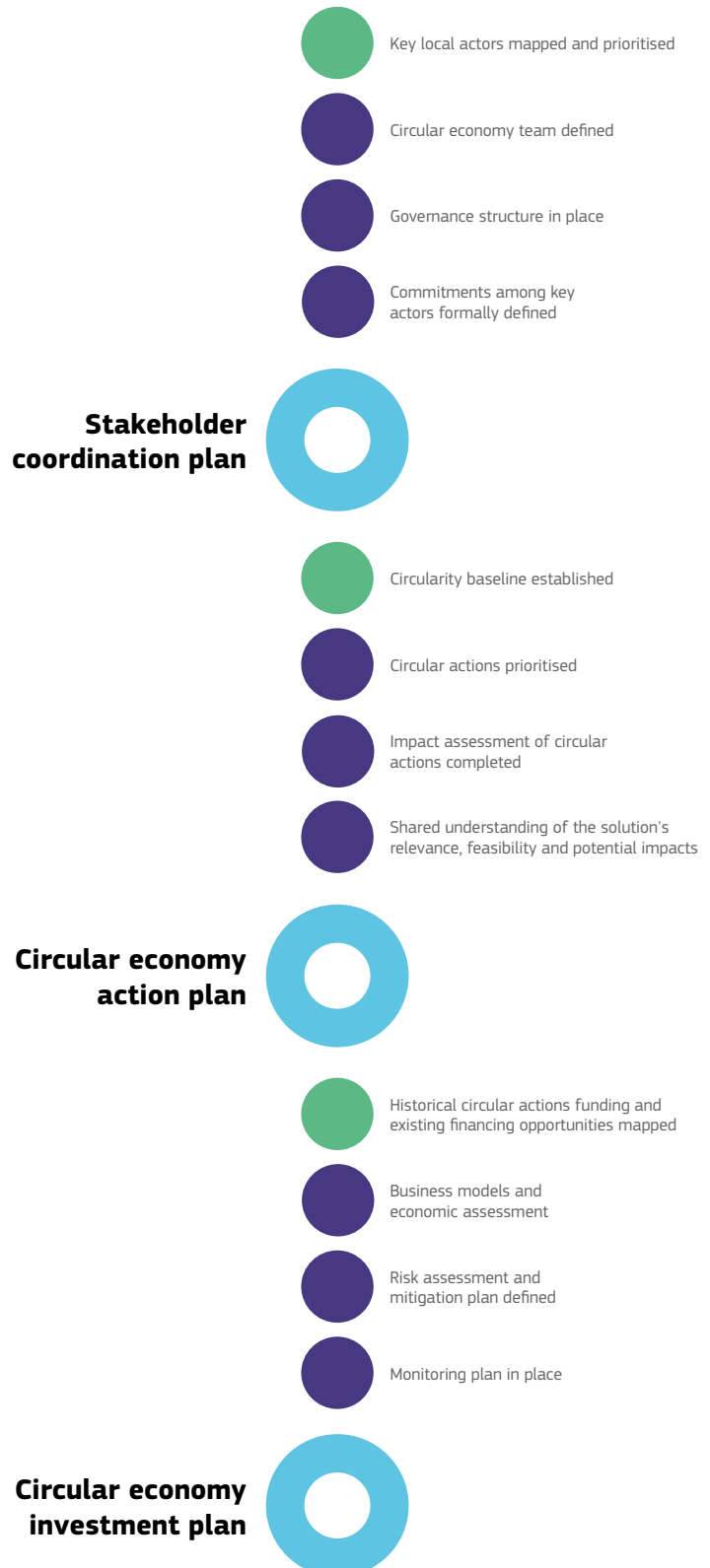
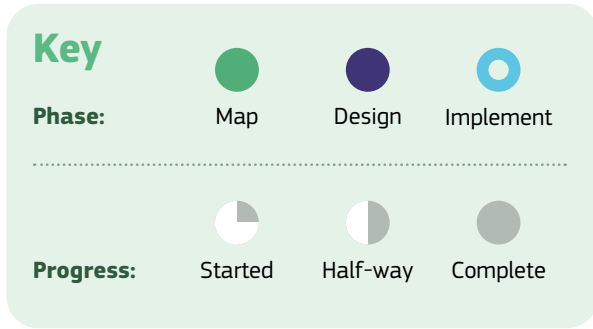
Solution overview

The City of Gothenburg faces operational challenges that limit its ability to implement circular practices at scale. The Circular Transition Arena (CTA) addresses this by providing a collaborative, hands-on platform where city departments, municipal companies, and experts work together to develop practical circular solutions. Through structured workshops and practical support targeting material flows such as furniture, workwear, and IT, the CTA helps participants develop measures that extend product lifespans, increase reuse, and embed

circularity into procurement and operational routines. The CTA also fosters cross-departmental collaboration and organisational capacity-building, helping the city accelerate its circular transition.

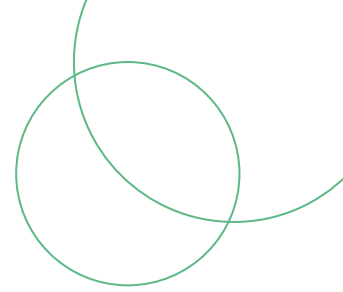
✓ CCRI Methodology Step Completion Status:

The [CCRI Methodology](#) is a guidance tool for policy and decision-makers in local and regional government. It describes key activities and milestones in the successful development of a Circular Solution, divided into three phases – Map, Design, and Implement. The visual checklist provides an at-a-glance view of how Gotherburg’s circular solution is progressing towards these outputs.





Background and objectives



i Policy context:

Sweden's [Circular Economy – Action Plan for Sweden's Transition](#) provides the national framework guiding the country's shift to a circular economy. Building on this, the [City of Gothenburg Environmental and Climate Programme 2021–2030](#) sets out Gothenburg's circular strategy and its overarching goal of becoming ecologically sustainable by 2030. The programme includes a target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from municipal purchases by at least 90 per cent compared to 2020 levels. These ambitions are reinforced by the [Waste Management Plan 2021–2030](#), which targets a 40 per cent reduction in waste from city operations relative to 2019, as well as the [Business Strategy Programme 2023–2035](#), and the [City Budget 2025](#), which integrate circular principles across business development and city-wide operations. Practical guidelines and reports translate these plans and strategies into action: the [Final Report: Preconditions for Transition to the Circular Customer](#) outlines the necessary preconditions for the city to act as a circular procurer, while the [Final Report: How Circular Economy Can Help Reduce Climate Impact by 90%](#) clarifies circularity's role in reaching emission goals. Complementary guidance on procurement, circular IT, and the [reuse or donation of moveable property and materials](#) provides operational frameworks that help embed circular practices across the organisation.

x Problem:

Shifting to circular operations presents significant challenges for municipal departments and companies in Gothenburg. Necessary preconditions such as coherent routines and organisational support are largely missing, while short-term budgeting and a continued reliance on linear practices hinder long-term thinking. Environmental considerations are often deprioritised in favour of immediate operational needs, and overall awareness of how circular operations contribute to the city's climate and sustainability goals remains limited. At the same time, managers of city departments and companies face growing responsibilities without sufficient guidance or support, making it difficult to translate circular ambitions into action.

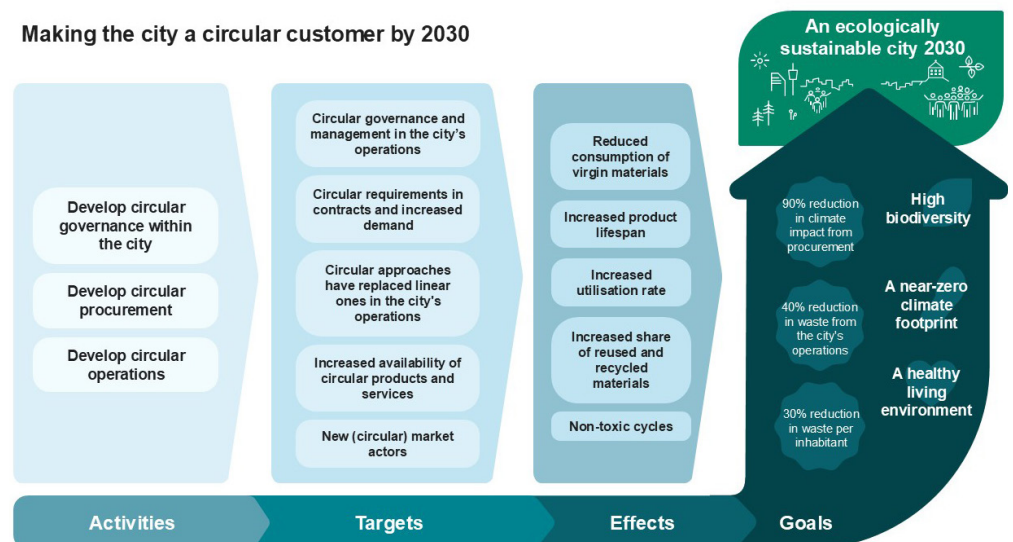
o Objectives:

Through digital and physical meetings and workshops, the Circular Transition Arena helps participating employees to:

- Understand what the circular transition encompasses and how it relates to the city's climate and environmental targets.
- Assess their organisations' current state, identify needs, and define concrete measures to address them.
- Begin implementing actions that advance the shift towards circular operations in their departments or organisations.

Figure 1. Visualisation of the City of Gothenburg's strategy to become a circular customer by 2030. The CTA is part of the third activity group, Develop circular operations.

Making the city a circular customer by 2030





Stakeholders

Solution Leader(s):



Public Authorities

The Circular Transition Arena is coordinated by Gothenburg City Leasing AB (GSL), a municipal company that serves as the city’s expert function for leasing and circular asset management.

GSL is responsible for leading and coordinating the city’s circular strategy and manages both the overall work of the CTA and its steering group. Several key municipal departments participate in and support the initiative, including the Administration for Sustainable Waste and Water, the Administration for Purchasing and Procurement, the Environment Administration, and Intraservice, which provides internal services such as IT, communications, HR, and finance to the City of Gothenburg. Together, these departments form the steering group and contribute strategic and operational support to the CTA.

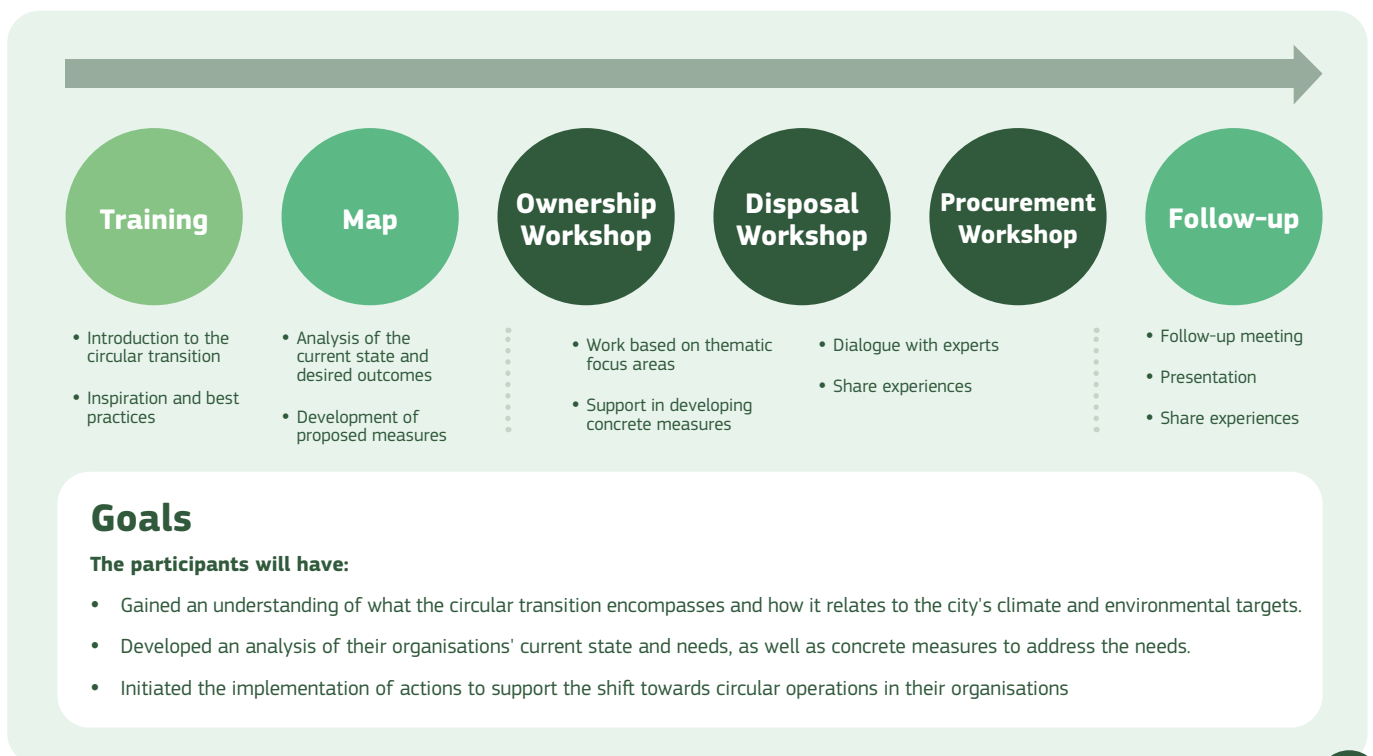
Supported by:



Funding & Advisory Bodies

The CCRI has provided funding for a feasibility study on circular IT, mapping the purchasing process for mobile phones, computers, and tablets, and developing an action plan for the circular handling of IT devices. Insights from this study have shaped the CTA’s thematic focus on circular IT in autumn 2025.

Figure 2. Visualisation of the CTA process.





Results and Impact

Since its inception in 2024, the Circular Transition Arena has demonstrated significant progress in promoting circular practices across the city. Three thematic areas have so far been covered: furniture, workwear, and IT. Semi-annual workshops and occasional mini-sessions allow participants to explore high-demand topics, while new themes continue to emerge in response to city needs.

CTA initiatives are expected to contribute to delivering significant environmental benefits across the City of Gothenburg's operations, including higher utilisation rates and extended lifespans for products within the city's departments and companies. The initiative will also create the conditions needed for greater reuse of products across municipal operations. Together, these efforts support Gothenburg's overarching climate and environmental targets.

Beyond environmental gains, the CTA is shaping procurement and purchasing practices, as well as the product and service requirements within the city. This, in turn, is anticipated to affect external market actors and their business models in the long term.



Main results and impact

Participation in the CTA has grown steadily—from six organisations in the first round to fourteen between September 2024 and December 2025 – including the Preschool Administration, Rescue Services, City Properties Department, and the Elderly Care and Health Administration, with several organisations participating in multiple rounds.

The CTA has also led to **new job creation directly supporting circular practices**, including citywide reuse coordinators, a Preschool Administration reuse manager, and new positions linked to the city's furniture reuse platform, [TAGE](#). These roles strengthen circular operations across departments and municipal companies.

New routines and processes are now being implemented in several departments. Intraservice has developed procedures for circular furniture flows, while Social Services is introducing QR-tagging of furniture and creating circular pattern offices. The Department of Disability Support, which manages around 400 properties, has centralised its purchasing and now provides units with procurement templates that combine reused and new items. To support knowledge sharing, the CTA team has also created a citywide knowledge bank collecting best practices for circularity.

Training and pilot projects are driving further progress. Social Services Centrum is developing a training programme to strengthen circular competence among purchasers. Pilot initiatives have demonstrated concrete results—for example, the Elderly Care and Health Administration has worked with two of its nearly fifty care homes as frontrunners, successfully reusing available items and donating surplus equipment through established reuse channels.

Finally, the CTA has **laid the foundation for new circular requirements** across departments and municipal companies. In the 2026 budget, all companies and boards have been tasked with introducing circular management of workwear and furnishings. With successful examples already in place from CTA pilots, the city is well-positioned to broaden these requirements and embed circular practices more deeply into its governance and operations.



Challenges and Lessons Learnt

Enablers to implementation

- **Governance:** Strategic responsibilities are clearly designated, and goals are aligned with central policy instruments, including, for example, the Waste Management Plan.
- **Political:** The City of Gothenburg's circular strategy (part of the Environment and Climate Programme 2021-2030) and circular principles embedded in local policy instruments provide strong political support.
- **Economic:** The city's size and financial capacity offer potential for systemic circular-economy efforts. Positive relationships with the local business sector provide the right preconditions for innovation.
- **Technical:** Existing technical structures help drive the transition forward by showcasing successful examples. Since 2013, the city has had an internal reuse and sharing system, [TAGE](#), for furniture and furnishings. Since 2021, the digital reuse site has been supplemented with a physical intermediate warehouse and free transport of related items for the City of Gothenburg's administrations and companies.
- **Social:** A broad alliance within the city organisation and motivated frontrunners create momentum and help scale potential.
- **Legal:** Several regulatory instruments, such as repair agreements and furniture reuse contracts, support the circular transition.

Barriers to implementation

- **Governance:** Organisational silos and assignment-driven budgets hinder cross-departmental collaboration. The level of ambition still often depends on personal commitment rather than on responsibility based on central policy instruments. All operations are measured by their core activities, and large core operations compete for financial resources.
- **Political:** There is an unclear division of responsibility for the circular transition between regional and local authorities, and not much collaboration across

government levels. A lack of understanding of what needs to be done differently, how to do it, and the necessary level of ambition complicates prioritisation and resource allocation for both the development and implementation of new roles and ways of working.

- **Economic:** Linear solutions remain operationally attractive due to lower upfront costs and simpler implementation. For instance, purchasing high-quality workwear entails higher upfront costs, but since such garments last longer, they result in lower expenses over time. The annual budgeting structure further reinforces short-term decision-making, as many administrations and municipal companies tend to spend remaining funds at the end of the fiscal year. Securing continuous funding for staff involved in development, implementation, and scaling efforts is also difficult, whereas temporary funding, for example, for feasibility studies, is more readily available. To enable a circular transition, business and financing models must be circularly adapted, and additional external financial support is needed.
- **Technical:** Ambitious goals may not align with technology development, materials research, or the market's maturity. The city is requesting services and products that do not yet exist on the market. Early engagement with suppliers is necessary to align products and services with city needs.
- **Social:** Broader citywide engagement and collaboration with the market are needed to stimulate circular business models. The city needs to increasingly challenge, support, and collaborate with the market to stimulate circular business models. Still, there is insufficient city-wide support for transition work related to strategic and operational implementation. Support for circular initiatives varies across and within different administrations and municipal companies
- **Legal:** Legislative incentives are limited, and the interpretation of existing rules is often unclear. Certain requirements—for instance, IT security standards or mandatory branding on clothing—can conflict with reuse objectives.



Lessons learnt

- **Collaboration with participants and flexibility:** Developing the transition arena together with participants has been crucial for success. Involving them, staying flexible, and basing support on real needs, while continually listening and strengthening development, has proven a key strength.
- **Political backing and governance:** Strong political support underpins the CTA, with Gothenburg's circular strategy, goals, and guidelines providing direction. When clearer governance or expectations are needed, there is an opportunity to bring challenging matters to a political steering group comprising representatives from both the governing and opposition parties.
- **Organisational engagement:** Gothenburg's size and complex governance structure make implementation and engagement at the management level difficult. Not all Heads of Department and company managers are willing to engage in the transition. To address this, dedicated manager dialogues are being conducted to understand challenges and offer tailored support. The CTA also helps build understanding of circular economy concepts and encourages cross-departmental collaboration.
- **Norms and motivation:** A key insight is the importance of bringing different organisations together to create visibility and cultivate a culture where circular practices are recognised and scaled. The CTA fosters a shift in norms as participants see that others are working on the same topic, motivating each other to move forward.



Tips for replication

What to replicate?

- The CTA format, which encompasses a mix of online and in-person sessions, with interactive exercises:
 - Online kick-off: introducing the circular transition concepts, with inspiration and best practices.
 - In-person analysis: identifying current material flows, needs, and desired outcomes; and developing proposed measures.
 - In-person thematic workshops on procurement, ownership, and disposal: co-developing concrete measures with experts.
 - Follow-up: assess results and plan next steps.
- Knowledge repository, including good practice examples, timelines for new procurements, etc., to support ongoing implementation.



Who can replicate this?

The CTA model is well-suited for replication by large or mid-sized cities and regions that, like Gothenburg, have complex organisational structures, strong sustainability ambitions, as well as financial or institutional support, yet face challenges in coordinating across departments. The CTA can be scaled and adapted to different local realities, for example, embedded within existing innovation platforms, or adjusted to include external facilitation or stronger educational components, depending on local capacities and needs.



What ingredients are needed to replicate it?



- **Appoint a dedicated team:** This team should lead the work and further develop the format strategically based on evolving needs.
- **Target key stakeholders within local/regional administrations and companies:** Include relevant staff such as IT strategists, environmental coordinators, and administrators, depending on the topic being discussed.
- **Anchor the CTA work within the participating organisations:** Ensure participants secure management support and commit to attending all planned sessions.
- **Focus on high-impact material flows:** Begin with significant material flows, then refine work to specific processes like circular procurement.
- **Progress from internal to external:** Start with an internal focus targeting employees within your own organisation, then assess potential collaborations with external organisations, e.g. the city together with the region.

Resources or contacts available to help?

- PPT presentation/PDF explaining the CTA in more detail (in English)
- Current state analysis checklist used in the second in-person meeting (in Swedish)
- Capabilities and responsibilities for circular handling of IT devices (in Swedish). The content of this PPT is adjusted depending on the current theme (e.g. IT, workwear, furniture).
- All Available here: [Gothenburg | Circular Cities and Regions Initiative](#)