



**TOWARDS
CIRCULAR CITIES &
REGIONS:
A behaviour-informed
Circle Scan approach**

CONCEPT NOTE



About Circle Economy

Circle Economy is driving the transition to a new economy. In this circular economy, we help businesses, cities, and nations leverage business opportunities, reduce costs, create jobs, and inspire behavioural change. As a global impact organisation, our international team equips business leaders and policymakers with the insights, strategies, and tools to turn circular ambition into action.

Circle Economy has been at the forefront of the circular economy since 2011. Our annual Circularity Gap Report (CGR®) sets the standard for measuring progress, and we manage the world's largest circularity database, encompassing data from over 90 nations, 350 cities, and 1,000 businesses.



About The Behaviouralist

The Behaviouralist is a leading behavioural science consultancy based in London. We help organisations and local authorities tackle complex social and environmental challenges, including waste reduction, energy efficiency, public transport use, and health and wellbeing.

Our multidisciplinary team combines behavioural science, data, design, and communications to diagnose barriers, synthesise research, and design and evaluate scalable interventions. Through evidence-based strategies and tested solutions, we equip leaders to create more effective policies and services, deliver measurable change, and better outcomes for people and the planet.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The **City Scan**, developed by **Circle Economy**, has supported **over 39 cities worldwide** in their journey from linear to circular by helping them uncover where they are, envision where they can go, and understand how to get there. In collaboration with **The Behaviouralist**, this new iteration of the City Scan brings together the strengths of circular economy expertise and behavioural science to ensure that circular **opportunities are designed not only for impact, but for uptake**. While circular strategies often focus on materials, infrastructure, and policy, their success ultimately depends on people: how citizens, businesses, and institutions make decisions, form habits, and respond to incentives. By integrating behavioural insights, the City Scan explores how human decisions, social norms, and contextual cues shape material flows, helping cities design interventions that align with real-world behaviours.

This collaboration is particularly crucial as cities consume 75% of global natural resources, generate more than 70% of greenhouse gas emissions, and produce two-thirds of all waste. Yet, despite growing awareness of sustainability challenges, there remains a persistent gap between intention and action—**while 92% of people express a desire to live sustainably, only 16% change their behaviour accordingly**. The Behaviouralist's research-based approach provides the tools to bridge this gap, identifying psychological, social, and structural factors that drive or hinder sustainable choices. Combined with Circle Economy's data-driven analysis of resource flows and systems, the integrated City Scan enables cities to prioritise, visualise, collaborate, and take action more effectively.

Through this approach, cities can not only identify leverage points for circular interventions but also understand how to activate behavioural change across government, business, and community actors. Grounded in both behavioural research and circular urban practice, the partnership between Circle Economy and The Behaviouralist represents a vital step in translating circular economy principles into concrete, sustained urban transformation—ensuring that cities don't just design for circularity, but live it.

This project aims to accelerate cities' transition to a circular economy by combining systemic analysis with behavioural insights. Building on Circle Economy's proven methodologies—such as the Circle Scan, Material Flow Analysis (MFA), and circular strategy development—it integrates behavioural dimensions to ensure that circular opportunities reflect real-world practices and are designed for uptake.

DELIVERY APPROACH

Structured in four phases, the project will generate actionable insights and co-develop solutions with local stakeholders. Each phase includes workshops, interviews, and validation checkpoints to guarantee that strategies are context-specific and feasible. Behavioural insights will be used to map citizen and organisational behaviours, identify bottlenecks, and design interventions that bridge the gap between circular ambitions and sustained action. Cities will be involved at various stages throughout the project.

Objectives

- **City Baseline and Behavioural Understanding:** A comprehensive overview of the city's material flows, key sectors, and current citizen and organisational behaviours that influence circular economy adoption.
- **Identification of Circular Hotspots and Behavioural Friction Points:** Data-driven identification of priority sectors, high-impact interventions, and behavioural barriers that need to be addressed for successful implementation.
- **Co-developed Circular Strategy:** A strategic roadmap of circular economy opportunities tailored to local priorities, including interventions designed to shift behaviours and increase uptake.
- **Actionable City Plan with Behavioural Integration:** Step-by-step plans for circular initiatives, co-created with stakeholders, including monitoring indicators and behavioural interventions to ensure sustained adoption.
- **Enhanced Capacity and Awareness:** Strengthened capabilities among city stakeholders to integrate behavioural insights into future policy-making and project design.

Project overview

Phase 1 — City baseline analysis

Build a clear picture of the city's current economic activities, policies, and stakeholder behaviours to identify the most promising sectors for advancing circularity.

Duration: 1-2 months

Phase 2 — System Mapping

Understand how materials, behaviours, and institutions interact within the selected sectors to pinpoint where interventions can create the greatest circular impact.

Duration: 2-3 months

Phase 3 — Development of a circular strategy

Transform insights from system mapping into a focused, evidence-based strategy by prioritising high-impact circular initiatives and designing behavioural interventions.

Duration: 1-2 months

Phase 4 — Circular city action planning

Translate the strategy into concrete action through pilot projects, policy recommendations, and capacity-building programmes that mobilise local actors to implement circular solutions.

Duration: 3-6 months

Activities

Phase 1 — City baseline analysis



Purpose

When faced with the task of developing a circular economy strategy, many cities ask us, “**Where do we start?**”. In Phase 1, we build a clear picture of current economic activity and stakeholder behaviour to **choose the sector(s) to carry forward into subsequent phases**. We compare the city’s sectors and their impacts (jobs, emissions, value-added) and map existing policies and initiatives. In parallel, we run a targeted **behavioural diagnosis** focused on how key actors (citizens, businesses, public bodies) currently operate—what they do, why they do it, and what helps or hinders change. We bring these insights to a stakeholder workshop to **co-select the priority sector(s)** for deeper analysis and the city’s circular transition.

Activities

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION
1.1 Sector and Policy Scan	Identify key economic sectors, existing policies, and initiatives relevant to circularity.
1.2 Behavioural Diagnosis	Assess how candidate sectors are performing across a defined set of circular behaviours and their readiness for scaling.
1.3. Stakeholder Workshop 1	Present findings and co-validate priority sectors for deeper analysis.

Outputs

OUTPUT	DESCRIPTION
1.a Summary presentation	A documented decision naming the sector(s) to progress into Phase 2, with rationale based on economic impact, feasibility, policy landscape and behavioural readiness.
1.b Dataset	A compiled dataset presenting key information collected during this phase.

Phase 3 — Development of a circular strategy



Purpose

Building on Phase 2's long-list, we refine and prioritise the most impactful circular initiatives using the Material Flow Analysis and Behavioural Systems Mapping, reconvening stakeholders in a focused workshop to co-create a shortlist aligned with the city's context and behavioural dynamics. Drawing on Circle Economy's extensive experience and a database of over 3,000 real-world case studies, we support the city in selecting the most relevant and feasible initiatives. For each prioritised opportunity, we recommend evidence-based behavioural interventions from established behaviour change techniques and case studies from parallel contexts. Scenario analysis and impact estimation quantify outcomes. As an outcome, the city receives a strategy for pursuing the most impactful circular opportunities, supported by data, best practices, and co-developed with core stakeholders.

Activities

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION
3.1 Opportunity Impact Analysis	Analyse the long list of circular opportunities identified in Phase 2, assessing their potential environmental, social, and economic impacts.
3.2 Stakeholder Workshop 4 – Opportunity Prioritisation	Conduct a participatory workshop with city stakeholders to review the long-list and co-create a shortlist of high-impact opportunities based on feasibility, relevance, and ambition.
3.3 Behavioural Intervention Design	For each priority circular opportunity, identify and design internal and external targeted behavioural interventions using the BCT taxonomy.
3.4 Stakeholder Workshop 5 - Co-design and Validation	Engage stakeholders in co-designing interventions, ensuring they are acceptable, practical, efficient, affordable, have no side-effects, and are equitable (APEASE criteria). Potentially sequence near-term pilots.

Outputs

OUTPUT	DESCRIPTION
3.a Circular Strategy Document	Strategic roadmap including prioritised initiatives, impact estimates, and proposed behavioural interventions.
3.b Workshops	Two workshops conducted to prioritise circular opportunities and co-design interventions for implementation.

Phase 4 — Circular city action planning



Purpose

This phase focuses on transforming the prioritised circular opportunities and behavioural interventions from Phase 3 into concrete, actionable initiatives. We create neutral collaboration spaces where public authorities, businesses, and civil society can jointly address systemic challenges and design locally grounded solutions. Together with city stakeholders, we co-develop practical steps that bring the strategy to life, tailored to the city's needs, resources and level of readiness — whether through pilot projects, policy recommendations, or capacity-building programmes.

Activities

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION
4.1 Pilot Project Design	For each prioritised circular opportunity, co-design a pilot project. Define objectives, partners, implementation steps, and success indicators.
4.2 Policy Brief Development	Develop a concise policy brief recommending governance, regulatory, or incentive changes to support the enabling environment for circularity.
4.3 Capacity-Building Programmes	Depending on the city's needs, select one of the following capacity-building tracks.
“Designing with behaviour in mind” Track	Provide training for city officials, including a brief introduction to key tools from behavioural science and their application, how to design and run trials, and how these approaches can be used to work towards a circular economy.
Local Circular Business Accelerator Track	Support local SMEs and start-ups to become drivers of the circular transition. Training covers 3-4 workshops on circular business principles, identifying linear risks, and exploring real-life case studies.

Outputs

OUTPUT	DESCRIPTION
4.a Pilot Project Concepts	Pilot project briefs, ready for further development, funding applications, or immediate testing.
4.b Policy Brief	Evidence-based document outlining practical recommendations to strengthen the city's enabling environment for circularity.
4.c Circular Project Pipeline	Training materials, outcomes and summary of sessions from either track.

THE IMPACT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE

Cities across Europe are under increasing pressure to deliver on ambitious EU agendas — from the Green Deal and the Circular Economy Action Plan to Fit for 55, Mission Cities, and the Waste Framework Directive. Yet most cities lack the tools to translate these targets into grounded, actionable, and widely adopted solutions. Existing approaches focus on technical systems or policy frameworks, but overlook the factor that determines whether circular strategies succeed or fail: **people's behaviour**.

By merging Circle Economy's City Scan with The Behaviouralist's applied behavioural science, cities gain a **strategic compass** that aligns spatial, economic, institutional, and behavioural realities. The project delivers a set of **holistic outcomes** that no existing programme provides:

- **A system-wide understanding of the city as both a material and behavioural ecosystem**, revealing how flows, decisions, norms, and institutional logics interact—and where strategic leverage sits.
- **A behaviourally informed circular strategy**, closing the gap between intention and implementation.
- **Concrete action plans and pilot projects** ready for funding, scaling, and alignment with major EU programmes (Horizon, LIFE, ERDF).
- **Improved institutional capacity** to integrate behavioural insights into future circular policies, procurement, and public services.

This is not another strategy that sits in a drawer. It is a practical, evidence-based pathway that enables cities to **achieve circularity goals faster, more effectively, and with higher citizen and business adoption**.

Knowledge sharing and dissemination

We are fully committed to open research and to actively sharing the knowledge generated through this project so that cities, practitioners, and policymakers worldwide can benefit from it. Because a major barrier to circular economy implementation is the lack of accessible data, tools, and practical insights, we prioritise transparent communication and broad dissemination as an integral part of the City Scan approach.

Throughout the project, we will work together to determine how key findings can be communicated publicly while respecting confidentiality and IP requirements, and we will jointly produce co-branded materials—including a launch article and social media assets—that highlight the project's collaborative nature.

Where relevant, we can further amplify the results through optional communication efforts such as editorial content, press outreach, digital campaigns, interviews, and launch events, helping ensure the project not only delivers impact locally but also contributes meaningfully to the wider circular economy transition.

BUDGET

This budget provides an indicative breakdown of project expenses. The final cost may vary substantially because all activities are fully modular and can be tailored to the city's needs and priorities. Cities can choose which phases, components, or depth of analysis they want to include, and the scope—and therefore the budget—will be defined jointly during project framing.

In other words, the project is flexible by design, allowing cities to select only the activities that are most relevant to them, integrate additional elements where needed, or scale down to match available resources.

ACTIVITY	BUDGET (€ EXCL. VAT)
Workshop per unit price	4,000
Phase 1 — City baseline analysis	10,000 - 20,000
Phase 2 — System Mapping	15,000 - 25,000
Phase 3 — Development of a circular strategy	15,000 - 25,000
Phase 4 — Circular city action planning <i>(depending on the activity chosen)</i>	
4.1 Pilot Project Design	5,000 - 10,000
4.2 Policy Brief Development	2,000 - 5,000
4.3 Capacity-Building Programmes	
“Designing with behaviour in mind” Track	20,000 - 30,000
Local Circular Business Accelerator Track	20,000 - 40,000

For further inquiries regarding this project, please reach out to:



Claudia Alessio

Cities Strategist | Circle Economy

claudia@circle-economy.com | www.circle-economy.com



Rahel Kiss

Senior Behavioural Scientist | The Behaviouralist

rahel@thebehaviouralist.com | www.thebehaviouralist.com