

Social innovation for a circular economy in urban communities

This project explored how residential communities and groups of interest in cities can contribute to the transition to a circular economy (CE).

Resource efficiency in cities is connected to people behaviours, but until now, the CE has placed limited attention on social practices and behavioural change. On the other side, behavioural change for sustainable living shows being effectively encouraged through initiatives of social innovation (SI) that involve residential communities and groups of interest in alternative social practice.

Therefore, this study pointed to understand the phenomenon of SI for resource efficiency and circularity in cities to define the potential contribution of urban communities. Through case study analysis, the project provided an overview of contemporary SI initiatives implemented by residential communities and groups of interest among citizens aiming at promoting alternative production and consumption practices. The developed database was categorized from theoretical knowledge and empirical analysis supporting the identification of seven types of SI for resource circularity. Based on this typology, the study defined potential opportunities, benefits and challenges for urban communities. The findings also identified a complementary role that SI can play in the CE implementation in cities. Therefore, the project suggested the introduction of emerging SI concepts into the current CE approach to support the development of SI opportunities.

Based on these results, the study is exploring the ability of playful practices to engage groups of place and interest in envisioning possible scenarios for a circular community, and it will provide preliminary recommendations for support measures in policymaking.