



Faculty of Design

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Circularity as Unifying Concept in Systemic Design for Sustainability?

Luthe, Tobias, Lamar, Angel, Sevaldson, Birger, Hegli, Tine, Storen Berg, Marianne and Hemmersam, Peter

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RSD9 dialogue session proposal

Facilitators: Tobias Luthe, Angel Lamar, Birger Sevaldson

Co-authors: Marianne Storen Berg, Tine Hegli, Peter Hemmersam, Erik Fenstads Langdalen, Einar Sneve Martinussen, Lisbeth Iversen, Janike Kampevold Larsen, Even Smith Wergeland, Hakan Edeholt, Andrew Morrison

TITLE:

CIRCULARITY AS UNIFYING CONCEPT IN SYSTEMIC DESIGN FOR SUSTAINABILITY?

This project seeks to incubate a fresh discourse to build mutual understanding across The Oslo School of Architecture and Design (AHO) by using Circularity as one potentially unifying concept, amongst other sustainability frameworks.

A suggested definition in short: **Circularity is creation with the intention of building mutual social benefits while closing resource loops.**

To account for Circularity, one may start with asking the questions: Are we designing to utilize the full potential of a given resource? Further, being physical, social or financial, do we see and understand the larger systems where the resources are included? And finally, how can our design decisions impact these systems both in the short and long run?

Cooperation for Sustainability through Circular Design

The UN has launched the campaign for this decade as the «Decade for Action» to mobilize society for the transformation towards more sustainable societies via the Agenda 2030 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 17 SDGs already are of high priority in European and national policies for research, innovation and societal transformation; they are becoming increasingly important since the timely urge to speed up and create more effect through new types of cooperative action is globally evident. Education and science play a fundamental role in this transformation, since advancing knowledge generation and distribution are the spearheads of societal development for sustainability. The interlink with the professional world is what makes the actual changes happen, and here the creative disciplines – architecture, landscape design, urbanism, product/service/communication design - are of specific relevance.

The architecture and design professions are instrumental to these changes necessary to meet the SDGs. As examples, SDG No.11, 12 and 13 call for sustainable cities, responsible (circular) production and climate action, and are thus relating to the core of the creative disciplines.

Though the way the professions often are being taught and practiced today, they are part of the problem promoting overuse of resources, a linear economy, and inequality in society. There is a need to develop such disciplines more strongly anchored in systemic and circular thinking, leading to regenerative systems and societies.

Such endeavors are only possible based on mutual understanding and interest, on cooperative action, by building new connections between disciplinary organized traditions. It starts within AHO to be able to create more effective action outside.

In the ongoing strategy process for AHO, sustainability has emerged as one of the strategic themes that are overarching and shared across the school. To some extent, sustainability challenges and circular design already are recurring foci in teaching and research activities at most AHO programs, both for course and student projects as well as a growing body of research activities. This exemplifies that sustainability and i.e. circular design are themes with existence at many levels and many shared interests across the school. Coupled with the climate crises and the societal call for action towards

systemic transformation, it is time to work more systematically across the school and develop a more interdisciplinary approach to circular design.

A call has also come to AHO from the professional design and architect communities, to take a leading role to support their knowledge building on circular design, and discussions on a possible executive Master program on systemic design have started. We understand this both as a timely reminder on our responsibility as public school for society, and as a chance for action and new partnerships with the industry.

Tying to what has already started, this proposed incubator project aims to develop an AHO- internal collaboration practice and culture to stimulate circular design across all disciplines. As a first step, it resulted in a systemic assessment of ongoing “circular” activities at AHO through Gigamapping, a joint open “brown bag” lecture series, a new cross-institute elective teaching course, and a joint research application on circularity themes bridging across urban and landscape planning, architecture and design. Further steps in institutionalizing systemic, circular, regenerative thinking and doing across AHO, our partners in Oslo and Norway, and on a European scale, will be part of a following second initiative, once this first step has advanced.

The project stimulates, pilots and practices more collaborative interdisciplinary understanding and action on circularity. In this first project state for the year 2020, the following elements and tools (four step approach) were designed to achieve these goals:

1. Systemic assessment of ongoing “circular” AHO activities in research, education, by people, and with partners, through Gigamapping. Everyone is involved in collecting data and in the presentation of the results as “working tool”.
2. A joint open “brown bag” lunch lecture series, with initially five (5) 1/2 h lectures in 2020, where the three main AHO institutes plus one academic partner and one professional partner present their circular design activities for a joint discussion; the talks can be recorded and spread via social media.
3. A new cross-institute elective Master teaching course on circular design, for autumn term 2020, comprising lecturers and students from all AHO institutes – as stimulator for a self-standing Master program on systemic/circular/regenerative design.
4. A joint research application on circularity themes bridging across urban and landscape planning, architecture and design, to a major Norwegian/European funding scheme.

Overall, this proposed initiative will be the start for a research and teaching program over multiple years, engaging multiple themes, partners, and additional funding. It involves (more) professional partners (better) to harvest their knowledge, to provide them research tools and results, and to offer critical academic discourse as well as highly qualified work force to them.

In this **dialogue session**, we intent to develop with participants a shared vision of what circularity in design may mean to everyone, and whether circularity may be equipped to better bridge between the different creative disciplines, with science, and practice? Is circularity in its various kinds a feasible and applicable bridging concept that would allow “us” to become better systemic designers, and hence to advance sustainable solutions to societal challenges?

Key **take-aways** for participants will be to develop an enriched picture of circularity, and reflect how its implementation at AHO in multiple ways could be useful in one’s own institution, group, or work.

Plan (90min)

00:00-00:05 Welcome and context of this dialogue session

00:05-00:15 Get to know each other in a circularity related icebreaker round – what types of circularity exist?

00:15-00:45 Guiding through the AHO project of circularity using a Gigamap (which same time is part of the exhibition)

00:45-01:05 Inviting participants to comment and co-design their perspectives and reflections on circularity onto a new layer of the Gigamap, using Miro, in break-out groups

01:05-01:25 Break-out groups report back and comment on suggested usability of circularity for their own professional context – moderated dialogue with Q&A

01:205-01:30 Final wrap up by facilitators

Number of participants: maximum 30 over 6 break out rooms

Technical support: online meeting system with virtual break-out rooms, virtual whiteboard Miro

Expected outcomes: an advanced understanding of circularity in systemic design for sustainability