**Co-creating circular innovations for the Utrecht region**

***Seed funding Urban-Rural Circularity***

***Call for pressure cooker and proposals***

**Pressure cooker: 29 May 2024**

**Deadline proposal: 14 June 2024 5 pm.**

**Introduction**
The Institute for a Circular Society (i4CS) is excited to introduce the next round of Seed Funding. Are you a researcher at TU/e, WUR, UU or UMCU and passionate about advancing circular solutions through inter- and transdisciplinary collaboration and innovative research? Then this is your opportunity to team up with EWUU colleagues, develop collaborative projects and drive impact in the pursuit for a circular society.

**Aim and approach of the seed cal**l
This seed call is a co-production between i4CS's new theme **Urban-Rural circularity (URC)** and the **province and city of Utrecht**. Researchers can apply for a seed fund after attending a 1-day pressure cooker session at 29 May (see details below).

URC's mission is to stimulate the development of circular systemic solutions for future proof regions. This means that we are looking for solutions that close loops, take planetary boundaries as a precondition and contribute to social inclusion and justice. For more information about the [URC theme see here.](https://circularsociety.ewuu.nl/research/urban-rural-circularity/)

With this seed call i4CS wants:

* to initiate and support innovative ideas and perspectives on developing circular systemic solutions for future proof regions;
* to facilitate and stimulate collaboration with (relevant) societal stakeholders;
* to stimulate inter and transdisciplinary collaboration including researchers of the four EWUU partners.

The approach for this call is to zoom in on the Utrecht region and challenge researchers to address knowledge gaps encountered by the province and city of Utrecht. This way we aim to inspire academic research with direct societal impact. In a co-creation between academia and stakeholders we hope to identify solutions which are - preferably - also transferable to other regions.

**Knowlegde gaps and questions from the Utrecht region**
Both the province and the city strive for a circular society. Various projects have been carried out in recent years. Results have been achieved, but questions have also emerged, and knowledge gaps have been identified. Academic knowledge addressing such questions is important for both city and province because it can provide input for new policy, implementation programs and projects to realise a circular region. Relevant knowledge gaps and questions include:

* ***Spatial claims that arise from the ambition for a circular region***
	+ What will be the spatial demand for a 100% circular region compared to today, considering e.g new regional partnerships for closing loops, circular agriculture for food/biobased materials, water management, processing industry, storage, logistics etc.
	+ How can the city and province anticipate spatial demand in relation to spatial policies, also considering competing claims for scarce space (circular economy, biodiversity, housing etc.)? Integrated considerations are necessary, but how can the city and province put this into practice, e.g. are there approaches for combining multiple uses of space?
	+ What regional partnerships can contribute to closing loops and reducing material use in and around the Utrecht region? And how much space is needed to accommodate these regional partnerships?
	+ How can the space requirement for a circular city and region be realised at the lowest societal costs? What is the role of the city and province in this?
* ***Digital innovations that support the transition to a circular region***
	+ The city wants to scale up the reuse of building materials in the city and region by facilitating collaboration and exchange of materials between different stakeholders (project “de grondstoffencorridor”). Can the reuse of building materials be better / further facilitated with digital tooling and how can this be designed?
	+ How to organise the storage required for released building materials that cannot be used immediately?
	+ How to better match supply and demand for those materials – especially on the regional scale?
	+ How to deal with the legal hurdles, such as certification and responsibility for safety, when reusing materials?
* ***Biobased materials: from farm to construction***
	+ Can future proof regional supply chains for biobased construction materials – “from farm to construction” - be developed in the Utrecht region? What could such supply chains look like? Which actors are required? What are the potential obstacles and how can governments reduce or remove these? What (other) role can the province and city play to support the development of these supply chains?
	+ On the production side: which crops (for biobased materials), and which biobased construction materials can be manufactured regionally and in what quantities – considering future development of regional food production and water management? Can the region manufacture enough biobased materials for its own building demand? What are growth paths for expanding production into the future?
	+ On the demand side: How can the construction sector be encouraged, by the city and province, to increase the use of biobased materials in construction projects – especially regionally produced ones? What public and what private instruments do city and province have at their disposal to accelerate the use of biobased materials in construction projects? How can these instruments be put to optimal use? How to deal with new-build, renovations, tenders, social housing, offices, etc.
	+ At what points in the process of a construction project are the ‘moments of intervention’? i.e.: When should the city and/or province act to embed biobased building materials into a project? Does this differ per project type?
	+ What percentage of the total material use (construction and otherwise) in the province could consist of biobased or secondary materials in 2030, 2050 and beyond?
	+ Which (policy) interventions are required to reach the 2030 target of 50% and 2050 target of 100% fewer abiogenic and virgin material use in the building construction sector and which obstacles can be identified that prevent or hamper the acceleration towards these targets?
* ***Upcycling in the Utrecht region***
	+ A part of discarded products from households is suitable for upcycling. This is done in secondhand shops, repair cafes, etc. Is there potential to increase the amount of upcycling in the region and how can this be achieved?
	+ What are the obstacles in terms of legislation/business models and how to overcome them?
	+ How can the region contribute to the central government's objective of developing nationwide circular craft centers (“circulaire ambachtscentra”)?
* ***Measuring and monitoring circularity in a regional context***
	+ There is a need for monitoring at various levels and scales of the circular transition (determining progress/effectiveness of circular economy policy/accountability, determining the effect of measures/interventions, etc. Which goals should province and city measure, what are good monitoring indicators to do so and how can these be measured? Which (standard) data should the province and city collect for this purpose, in the context of data (already) collected by other actors?
	+ What standard definitions and policies are needed to facilitate joint monitoring on a national, regional and local scale?

**Pressure cooker – May 29, 2024**
Researchers from the four EWUU alliance universities are invited to develop transdisciplinary research proposals that contribute to bridging the described knowledge gaps. To facilitate the development of relevant research proposals, i4CS will organise a 1-day pressure cooker session where researchers are facilitated to interact with representatives of the city and province of Utrecht, find other researchers from the four institutes to collaborate with and develop research ideas together.

During the pressure cooker:

* The province and city will present their goals and action plans for a circular society and the questions and knowledge gaps that they encounter;
* Practitioners and researchers together can discuss research questions and ideas related to the presented knowledge gaps. Researchers from the different alliance partners are invited to join forces, develop transdisciplinary project ideas and do some groundwork to develop their research proposal.

**Main conditions of the seed fund grant**

* Proposals are eligible to receive a grant if:
	+ At least two researchers from the submitting team have participated in the pressure cooker;
	+ Scientists from different disciplines and from at least two EWUU institutions are involved. Involvement of more EWUU institutes and more disciplines will be rated higher in the evaluation.
	+ The proposal includes how the province and municipality will be involved in the research project.
* The maximum budget is 40 k€ per proposal; four grants are foreseen. The grant money may be used for:
	+ Hiring temporary researchers or other relevant staff;
	+ Extending research time of existing staff (financing substitution of teaching);
	+ Activities such as organising dialogue or scenario sessions, network building, action research, citizen science and stakeholder events.
* The deadline for submission of proposals is 14 June, 5 pm. Details will be provided at the pressure cooker session.

The proposals will be evaluated by a panel with members of at least three EWUU partners on added value of the collaboration, research quality and impact potential. We aim for a decision before 1 July.

For more additional information see the Terms and Conditions Call for Projects URC. Should you have any further questions at this point, please do not hesitate to contact Sacha Tensen, program manager Urban-Rural Circularity: s.tensen@uu.nl

***Feel free to share this announcement with your colleagues.***

*This call is organised by the Institute for a Circular Society, an initiative of the alliance of Eindhoven University of Technology, Wageningen University & Research, Utrecht University, and the University Medical Centre Utrecht (EWUU). We aim to do groundbreaking research relevant for practical solutions contributing to a circular society.*