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Circular Housing in the EU

Strategies, positioning and co-operation

In 2019, Platform31 conducted a short exploratory research on the state of affairs regarding circular housing (construction) throughout the EU. The aim was to identify the current status in different countries, investigate similarities and differences in policy approaches. Finally, we were interested in how these approaches influenced actual projects. The result is an overview that provides insight and inspiration for European countries.

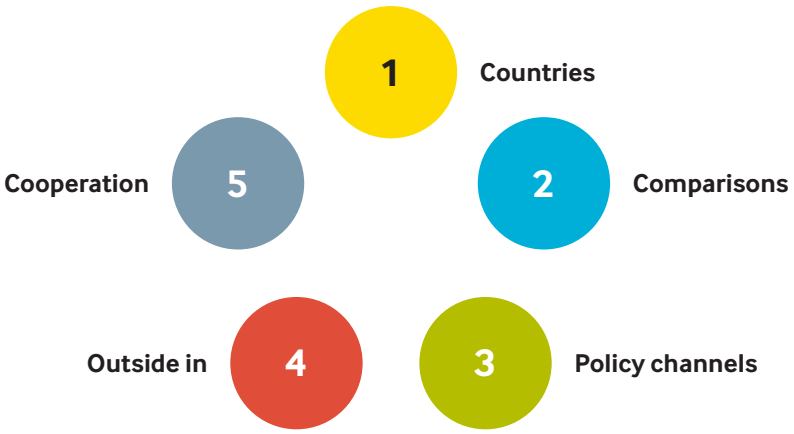
While the report has been compiled from a Dutch point of view, it can certainly inspire stakeholders in other countries to launch a similar investigation based on their situation. Moving towards the future, an open-minded approach and an active interest in the policies of other member states contributes to optimal harmonization on a European level.

Background and scope

Platform31 has undertaken a small exploratory project. The so-called Circular Economy is not only an increasingly common term, it is by now an important policy area within the EU, since the action plan 'Closing the Loops' started in 2015. In the meantime, member states are in the process of choosing their focus areas and time schedule. To speed up this process, it is useful for individual countries and Europe as a whole to look at policies and practices in other countries and determine what stakeholders on the regional and national level of each country can learn from each other. In the Dutch report, this was done from a Dutch perspective. We asked ourselves what the Netherlands might learn from other EU countries in terms of policies and practices. Obviously, 'learning' should not be misunderstood as copying or replicating. Learning can and often should be more subtle: given the differences between countries, careful interpretation of how these differences affect the use of policies and good practices is necessary.

Brief summary of results

The results are presented in five sections that can be read separately, preceded by a general introduction. Below you will find a brief description of the contents, using the visual overview from the document.



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1 **Part 1:** Within the limitations of the short exploratory project, nine EU countries have been included: the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg. Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Finland, Denmark, and Portugal. The selection is based on an expected diversity in terms of policies. For each country several relevant policy documents on a national, regional and local level are shown, as well as examples of actual implementation, i.e. local projects. Based on this some notable differences (and similarities) are discussed. One conclusion is that the policies developed by the various countries are rooted in national circumstances, e.g. a very strong preference for using wood in Finland, the importance of social aspects and community in Luxembourg, and strong intra-regional cooperation in Belgium.

2 3 **Parts 2 and 3:** To gain a deeper insight into the ways the policies – roughly – compare to each other, two comparisons were made. These 'position' the policies in relation to each other but this positioning does not imply a ranking, i.e. better or worse performance. The two comparisons made: 1. To which extent does a country rely more on government policies or on the market to shape the circular economy, relative to the availability of primary (construction) resources? 2. To which extent do governments make use of knowledge sharing, financing schemes and regulatory changes, to stimulate the circular (housing) economy?

4 **Part 4:** The Netherlands is sometimes positioned at the forefront of circular economy in Europe. Independent of whether that is true, the theme is still new as a policy domain. But no country, laggard or trendsetting, can afford to sit back and relax. To stimulate this attitude, three examples are provided of how the Netherlands could open up to learning from practices in other countries and consider applying them in the Dutch context. One of these examples is paying more attention to the use of natural resources like wood.

5 **Part 5:** The circular economy is not primarily about competition but is also an area with huge potential for co-operation, in particular within the EU. Two items are included regarding this angle: 1. The status on the actions points that were outlined in the Dutch circular construction economy transition agenda with regards to international positioning and co-operation, e.g. the initiation of the North Sea Resources Roundabout. 2. An example of how understanding points of special interest, as well as comparative strengths in different regions, – in this case the Netherlands and southern Germany – can be used to forge meaningful co-operation even while the level of perceived urgency varies.

Conducting more of these analyses will provide valuable insights into which areas need intra-EU harmonisation of rules and regulations and which areas are 'softer' (e.g. cultural differences) and therefore require alternative ways to forge respectful inter-personal relationships.

Next steps

This leaflet sets out the main points of the (Dutch) report. You can use it as a guideline while browsing the report. The aim for non-Dutch readers is to find inspiration in its goals, and to encourage starting up similar research in their own country. You can use a specific angle, e.g. focus on selected countries, or dig deeper into one or more themes (differences, similarities, co-operation etc). Alternatively, the 'softer' part can be addressed more in-depth: apart from future, and as yet uncertain, regulatory changes that might facilitate intra-EU co-operation, what aspects need attention as well? Cultural differences, perceived sense of urgency, political climate and ways of doing business are all part of the equation and need to be addressed.

Contact us if you are interested in working together on this!

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