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## A Database for the Circular Economy

by [Daniel Hiestand](#)

***A new database that aims to help circular economy advocates better coordinate efforts on a global scale.***

**As the founder of the Circular Economy Club (CEC), it's safe to say that Anna Tarí is as well placed as anyone to keep her finger on the pulse of what's happening in the circular economy movement.**

**Helping to connect circular economy professionals and organisations around the globe, through a membership organisation, has been her passion for several years now.**

"We are coming together to help transform the existing economic system," Tarí claims. "The 'take-make-dispose' model is not working, and a transition to a circular economy is an inevitable change we would like to accelerate."

In 2012, when Tarí started the CEC as a Website, the movement was only beginning to gain a following. Since then, individuals, businesses, educational institutions, governments and organisations (such as The Ellen MacArthur Foundation) have contributed significantly to advancing public awareness.

Along the way, the CEC – headquartered in London – has grown into a non-profit international network now boasting more than 2,600 circular economy members representing more than 60 different countries.

“The club is open to all, and free for anyone to join,” says Tarí.

### **“Mapping” the Circular Economy**

In 2017, as the Circular Economy Club continued to grow, Tarí came up with a challenge for the club: “We realised that, in order to truly understand what circularity means in practical terms, and inspire collaboration between circular economy professionals, we first had to understand how everyone was contributing to the cause. We needed more specifics.”

Hence, the concept for the “Circular Economy Mapping Week” was born.

The idea was ambitious yet simple: to document – in one centralised location – as many existing circular economy initiatives as possible. To make this happen, CEC members would help organise workshops in cities around the world, gather information from workshop attendees, and then pass that data back to the CEC so they could “map” results in an open-source database.

“We had a good feeling about the project, but there was so much out of the club’s direct control,” Tarí says. “It was a genuinely member-driven effort.”

In the end, between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> of February 2018, nearly 3,000 initiatives were documented, after workshops were conducted in more than 65 cities and 40 countries.

Tarí remarks that: “The CEC organisers did an exceptional job marketing the effort, conducting the workshops and gathering the data. It was very exciting.”

### **Circular Show and Tell**

Bangkok. Real Estate. Buenos Aires. Fashion. Cape Town. Packaging. Madrid. Agriculture. Montreal. Furniture. New York. Office supplies. London. Finance. São Paulo. Electronics. Singapore. Beverages. Taipei. Home decor.

In the end, the database reveals a diversity of ideas and places, that paint a vivid and compelling snapshot of the circular economy movement, even if it’s just a small fraction of the larger picture.

In just a week, more than 2,100 participants contributed with their knowledge. Along the way, the effort garnered 80 press mentions and over 650,000 social media references.

In addition to hard data, organisers were also happy to report another important outcome: enthusiasm.

“The session had an overwhelming response,” says Marialine Verdickt, Founder of CircleWerkz and a CEC organiser in Singapore. “It sold out twice on Eventbrite [...] The enthusiasm in the room was palpable.”

Verdickt highlights how the variety of sectors represented at the workshop helped maintain a high level of energy:

“We had representation from the educational sector, the government, corporations, startups, and individuals interested in the topic. The biggest takeaway for most people was that there is already so much more happening in this field than initially anticipated [...] although we need to dive deeper into the different aspects of implementing the circular economy, there certainly is the enthusiasm and the momentum to do so.”

Some of the key data revealed from the week includes:

Of the 3,000 circular economy initiatives highlighted in the database approximately 70% were based in Europe. The remainder came from North America (12%); Latin America (10%); Asia (6%) and Africa (2%).

A quarter (25%) of the circular economy initiatives cited in the database, involved using waste as a resource (e.g., recycling, compost, energy from waste, etc.), which was the most common circular economy strategy reported.

City projects (buildings, infrastructure, mobility, logistics, energy, water, waste management) utilised circular economy strategy implementation most often (25% of respondents identified with this sector), compared to other sectors (including food and beverages, which came in at 18%).

Most participants (47%) identified themselves as members of the private sector, while the fewest participants (9%) registered as representing educational institutions.

Tarí believes that the mapping week exercise is just the beginning.

With data in hand, the CEC is currently planning a post-mapping week project. It is hoped that the follow-up event, with dates and activities still being defined, will generate space for local organisers and participants to establish the next steps for their cities.

### Key Takeaways

Looking back to plan the future, Tarí highlights four primary takeaways from the mapping week effort.

1. There is a willingness to build on the current momentum.
2. It is important to provide a platform for circular economy advocates to gather and share thoughts.
3. There is a need for clarity when it comes to defining what makes something “circular” and/or “not circular.”
4. Circular economy advocates want to collaborate.

The third takeaway – clarifying the definition of “circular” – seemed to generate the most confusion for organisers and workshop attendees. However, this is to be expected – especially considering the fact that the circular economy movement is a movement that is still trying to define itself.

“If we start naming everything as ‘circular,’ we risk becoming complacent and using different words for the same old things,” says Tarí. “For a real change in system, we need to understand what we mean (specifically) when we use the word circular.”

Overall, the effort will be remembered for bringing together thousands of circular economy proponents from around the world for a common goal and exchange of ideas.

And that’s not something to be taken lightly.

Beatriz Luz, CEO from Exchange4Change and a CEC organiser in São Paulo claims that: “Mapping week has shown us that when you get together with like-minded people in a multi-disciplinary and collaborative environment, you can find matching tools, create new solutions and truly accelerate the transition.”

Circular economy club, [www.circulareconomyclub.com](http://www.circulareconomyclub.com)

Ellen MacArthur Foundation, [www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org](http://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org)

Circular Economy Mapping Week, [www.circulareconomyclub.com/gd-home/cec-global-database](http://www.circulareconomyclub.com/gd-home/cec-global-database)

CircleWerkz, [www.circlewerkz.com](http://www.circlewerkz.com)

Exchange4Change, [e4cb.com.br](http://e4cb.com.br)

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