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2s1: What kind of circular society

Making cities circular; advancing a social and spatial approach to circular area development

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The urgency of reducing the environmental footprint of cities is hardly disputed. The concept of circular cities, currently prominent on policy agendas, is seen as one promising pathway towards it. Circularity discourse has come with the emergence of a range of collaborative efforts to further explore its possibilities. However, flows of materials, energy and products dominate in debates, and the attention going to how a 'circular city' might operate socially and spatially, at the level of an area or neighborhood, is largely missing.

Established in 2018, our transdisciplinary research team is part of a program ACCEZ (Accelerating the Circular Economy in Zuid-Holland). Aiming to question the way urban redevelopment efforts shape circular futures, we have zoomed in on what a circular transformation entails at the neighborhood level, focusing on (i) how current and envisioned future communities are connected to debates on the neighborhoods' future; (ii) how the circular transition has consequences far beyond its own boundaries, and (iii) what this means for thinking spatially about circular transitions.

Based on in-depth research engagement in the Binckhorst (The Hague), currently to be redeveloped into a densely built area for mixed-living and working, we found that existing social and entrepreneurial practices are at risk of being displaced from the neighborhoods' future. A dominant residential (re)development, driving up prices and creating greater tensions between current activities and environmental legislation, leads to a narrow materials-focused interpretation of circularity. Questions of scale and responsibility remain an issue: moving existing industrial activities out of the area, such as (re)processing resource facilities that are still in the years to come playing a role in activities in The Hague, will not necessarily promote a circular development at regional scale level. Moreover, we found that - paradoxically - the circular redevelopment of the Binckhorst, with its predominantly residential focus, results in more CO2 emissions and transport movements, and larger distances between consumer and producer. Next, 'new' 'impact-entrepreneurs' and start-ups are encouraged to find a new base in the various

multi-tenant buildings in the neighborhood, but at the same time established businesses representing forms of (social) circularity are at risk of being displaced. Other organizations that are well networked into the area are also in a precarious position, which is potentially disrupting social relations. How the combination of these developments limits the circular possibilities of the agglomeration, and where there is discursive space for debating alternative pathways, are still open questions.

Keywords: circular area development, social-spatial circularity, neighbourhood planning, displacement, densification