

Turning to the Neighborhood

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circular economy, community building, circular neighborhood, waste, biowaste
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The unrelenting pursuit of economic growth under the linear take-make-consume-dispose model has led to resource depletion, overproduction of waste, and severe environmental crisis. This pressing issue is particularly evident in urban areas, with Papagos - Cholargos serving as a case study. The project "Turning to the Neighborhood" implemented by incommon -a civil society non-profit organization which promotes the circular economy through actions and initiatives that empower and mobilize the community - in collaboration with the Municipality of Papagos - Cholargos and funded by the Green Fund, seeks to address these challenges by accelerating the transition towards a circular model of life in a neighborhood of Papagos - Cholargos.

Neighborhoods are the cells of cities, which is why we are starting from this small scale. In a more circular city, people are aware of making optimal use of resources, extending the life cycle of products, recycling, repairing, using secondary materials and waste as productive resources, using alternative fuels, seeing nothing go to waste while adopting the sharing of services, ideas, and products. Incommon does not mean circularity without the activation of the community, which is informed, trained, actively involved and adopts new daily habits and behaviors by identifying and implementing solutions that ensure the improvement of life in cities, for a sustainable future on a healthy planet. One such solution is the project "Turning to the Neighborhood".

The orientation of the project "Turning to the Neighborhood" is geared towards fostering responsible and sustainable consumption, minimizing waste, removing CO² equivalent emissions and actively engaging citizens in a seamless transition to the circular economy, with a primary focus on enhancing organic waste management practices. The project strategically pursues these objectives through the implementation of targeted actions, collaboration with local actors, citizens, school communities, catering businesses and the standardization of the project model. By promoting awareness and practical solutions at the local level, the methodology seeks to create a blueprint for circular living that can be readily replicated in other neighborhoods.

The societal mindset regarding zero waste is marked by a general lack of awareness and trust in waste management and recycling systems. The sorting and utilization of organic, especially food, residues are still in early stages, underscoring the lack of available data. The project also aims to measure its own carbon footprint. Therefore, as part of each action, we collect data in an attempt to translate our activities, both of qualitative and quantitative nature, into environmental impact, expressed in the CO² eq unit. The data collection effort concerns actions from installing composting bins in school settings to holding workshops on the circular economy.

With organic waste comprising over 40% of municipal solid waste in Greece and every resident of the country wastes 142 kg of food residues annually (Food Waste Index, 2021ⁱ), we attempt to highlight how the proper management of organic waste is not only the responsibility of local government but also the individual responsibility of citizens. In response to this challenge, the initiative proactively involves the community through a range of impactful interventions. Circularity workshops incorporating activities like composting with earthworms, material reuse, and the collaborative creation of interactive food-maps of the neighborhood, function as experiential learning platforms. These sessions provide hands-on, practical knowledge, focusing on the effective sorting of waste and the optimal utilization of the brown bins network – a legal obligation by the Municipalities since January 2023, according to the national law 4819/2021ⁱⁱ. Additionally, events like cultural festivals, street races, walks with guided tours, tree planting, photographic exhibitions, etc. and educational programmes are thoughtfully integrated to create a holistic approach to embedding circularity into daily life.

By cultivating a circular mindset and promoting sustainable practices, the project aligns with Greece's Circular Economy Action Planⁱⁱⁱ and contributes to Greece's long-term strategy for 2050 of the National Energy and Climate Plan^{iv}. Moreover, the project is consistent with the European Circular Economy Action Plan^v and the European Green Deal^{vi}, emphasizing decarbonisation, resilient value chains, and citizen engagement.

"Turning to the Neighborhood" paves the way for a sustainable and circular future. With its replicable model, there is the potential to extend the project to other neighborhoods, fostering a nationwide shift towards circular living. This initiative is a testament to the transformative power of community engagement and grassroots initiatives in achieving circularity in urban settings.

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- ⁱ https://catalogue.unccd.int/1679_FoodWaste.pdf
- ⁱⁱ <https://www.nomotelia.gr/photos/File/129a-21-neo.pdf>
- ⁱⁱⁱ <https://ypen.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Εθνική-Στρατηγική-Για-την-Κυκλική-Οικονομία.pdf>
- ^{iv} https://energy.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-03/el_final_necp_main_en_0.pdf
- ^v https://environment.ec.europa.eu/strategy/circular-economy-action-plan_en
- ^{vi} https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en