

# **The influence of regional NGO lobby for circular economic municipal policy**

A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY IN THE PROVINCE OF UTRECHT

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## Colophon

<b>Title</b>	The influence of regional NGO lobby for circular economic municipal policy
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## Preface

Since I started studying, I have developed the desire to contribute to a more sustainable world. This is also why I enrolled for the Environment & Society Master program. The subject of a circular economy came on my path and I was lucky enough to be able to combine it with another interest of mine: lobby. Although the circular economy and its implementation are pretty complex topics, I feel this thesis helped me understand the topic much better and I am grateful to be given the chance to contribute to research in this field.

This thesis would not have been possible without a couple of persons. I would like to thank my internship organization for giving me the opportunity and space to conduct this research. Peter, Sonja and Tim helped me tremendously in developing a deeper understanding of the practical side of a circular economy as well as lobby for this. The fact that they saw value in this research throughout the whole process was extremely motivating and I am grateful for all the follow-ups this research is getting within the organization.

Likewise, I sincerely thank all respondents that cooperated in this research and were willing to spare some time to talk to me, even though most of them were extremely busy. The conversations were very insightful and made it possible for me to carry out this research project which I hope helps contribute to the transition to a circular economy.

Last but absolutely not least, I would like to thank my supervisor Ingrid Visseren-Hamakers. She believed in this project and thanks to her sharp and honest feedback I was able to lift this research to a higher level than it would have been without her support.

I am proud of the result and I hope you enjoy reading it.

Nienke Mijnlief

Utrecht, July 2022

## Summary

The consequences of climate change call for societal transformations that bring back humanity within social and ecological boundaries (Meadowcroft, 2009; Raworth, 2012). A transition to a circular economy (CE) is considered a way forward, leaving the linear model of extract-produce-dispose behind (Cramer, 2020; Upadhayay & Alqassimi, 2018). National governments are increasingly paying attention to CE implementation. However, actual application in cities and regions is lagging and research on local implementations of circular economic systems is still limited (Cramer, 2020; Hobson & Lynch, 2016). Additionally, the role of mediating actors that can push for policy change has not yet been extensively studied in light of the transition towards a CE (Cramer, 2020).

This qualitative research aims to fill this gap by giving insights into how regional NGOs working on circularity can effectively lobby for political adoption and implementation of circular economy measures in municipal policy. This is done through the assessment of political influence and lobby effectiveness of a regional NGO during the 2022 Dutch municipal election and formation processes. For this, the method of Ego-perception, Alter-perception, and Causal analysis (EAC method) is used. Data is collected through semi-structured interviews and an extensive document analysis. Furthermore, this research aims to formulate practical recommendations for the local circular economy lobby.

A small amount of lobby influence is observed. The majority of lobby activities are considered relevant, resulting in CE being mentioned more often and known better than if lobby would have been absent. Lobby influence can be achieved through the performance of lobby activities such as delivering texts; offering practical solutions that are locally relevant; and the provision of missing knowledge, information and capacity. However, lobby influence depends on the personal interests and knowledge of people within political parties, and might thus be lower or higher depending on the persons involved. These differences in lobby sensitiveness of local politicians increase the difficulty of carrying out an effective lobby, especially when lobby activities are targeted at a broad group of actors. Furthermore, lobby effects are shared with many other explanatory factors that might be at least as important as lobby efforts, like national trends and municipal capacity.

This research has its limitations, one of which is the ambiguous results. Despite that, it has contributed to the existing body of literature on the implementation of a circular economy by creating insight into the effects and influence of lobby actions. This can be used by local lobbyists in the future.

**Keywords:** Circular economy; non-governmental organisations; municipal lobby; political influence; policy implementation

### Abbreviations

CE:	Circular Economy
NGOs:	Non-governmental Organisations
UN:	United Nations
NMU:	Nature and Environment federation Utrecht
EAC-method:	Ego-perception, Alter-perception, and Causal analysis method

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# 1. Introduction

Climate change increasingly dominates the public debate. These debates have induced the realization that transformations of socio-technical systems underpinning production and consumption patterns are essential to bringing back human activities within ecological boundaries (Meadowcroft, 2009). Also, almost complete scientific consensus exists on the statement that the Earth's climate is changing due to human activities (Oreskes, 2004). As one of the results of these debates and trends, the linear economic model that focuses on an extract-produce-dispose philosophy is increasingly seen as an insufficient and inappropriate model to continue with in the future (Ghisellini & Ulgiati, 2020; Upadhyay & Alqassimi, 2018). Consequently, there has been a growing interest and demand for new policies and business models (Tiozzi, Simon, & Milan, 2019). One concept that has gained attention among policymakers, scientists, consultants and advocacy groups is that of the 'circular economy' (CE) (Cramer, 2020; Reike, Vermeulen, & Witjes, 2018). The CE aims to make the linear economic process redundant by suggesting *"a circular system in which the value of products, materials, and resources is maintained within the economy as long as possible"* (Cramer, 2020, p. 1; Korhonen, Honkasalo, & Seppälä, 2018). The concept is promising in that it can attract both business and policymaking communities to work towards sustainability (Korhonen, Honkasalo, & Seppälä, 2018). Advocacy and consultancy groups have been particularly active in framing the circular economy as the best way forward. This framing seeps through to policymakers (Reike, Vermeulen, & Witjes, 2018).

## 1.1 Problem statement

National governments, including the Netherlands, are increasingly paying attention to CE implementation (Korhonen, Honkasalo, & Seppälä, 2018). Underlying assumptions of sustainable development and climate policies are that urban areas are key players to bridge gaps between national goals and actual requirements needed to reduce emissions and keep temperature changes under 1.5 degrees (Broto, 2017). Additionally, cities are seen as *"critical hotspots for socio-technical system transitions towards sustainability"* (Wolfram, 2018, p. 11). Further, the European Union wants to achieve a circular European economy. The EUs' views on a CE are, among others, *"1) a closed cycle of material flows, 2) a shift from consumer to user and 3) growth through circularity and decoupling"* (Lazarevic & Valve, 2017, p. 60). Local governments have committed themselves to support and accelerate the transition to a circular economy. Their direct interests are to stimulate regional employment and economy and to prevent stress on nature and the environment stemming from, for example, greenhouse-gas emissions and the dumping and incineration of waste (PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, 2021). However, the actual application of CE in cities and regions is lagging and research on local implementations of circular economic systems is still limited (Cramer, 2020).

The province of Utrecht is – just like the rest of the Netherlands – far from circular. Most products lose their value and are thrown away after use. However, attention to circularity is growing. Local initiatives discover new business models but struggle with obstructive legislation and complicated bottlenecks (Nature & Environment Federation Utrecht, 2022). Established (regime) actors are often change-averse and won't take the lead in a circular economy. Newcomers (niche actors) with ambitious CE plans or initiatives often lack the support and resources for a (fast) breakthrough. Given these barriers, mediating actors – also called transition brokers – are needed to connect activities and institutions (Cramer, 2020).

Regional parties in Utrecht collaborate within the Circle Region Alliance to work towards a circular region (Nature & Environment Federation Utrecht, 2022). This involves efforts to counter obstructive legislation and to cause a systemic transformation. Regional actors such

as, but not limited to, the Nature and Environment Federation Utrecht and the Circle Region Alliance could fulfil a lobbying role for local politicians to adopt circularity in their policy plans.

## 1.2 Internship organisation

This research was carried out in parallel with an internship at the Nature and Environment Federation Utrecht (NMU). NMU is a non-governmental organisation that strives to make Utrecht a province where people can sustainably live and work. It also seeks to put the vulnerable values of nature, environment and landscape in the spotlight (Nature & Environment Federation Utrecht, 2021). For 2022, NMU had the following CE objectives:

- The development of circular procurement at governmental bodies, ensuing concrete objectives to circular procurement in all municipalities, the province and regional water authorities.
- All municipalities mention the promotion of a circular economy in their municipality as a part of their local economic policy. The role of NMU is to lobby for the formation of municipal authorities and boost the implementation of local ambitions.
- The circular economy is becoming better known and more supported in society.
- Companies are increasingly acting circularly and are more likely to adopt a circular policy (Nature & Environment Federation Utrecht, 2022).

Especially the second objective is of importance for this research since it focuses on municipal policies, municipal elections and formation processes.

## 1.3 Research aim and questions

This research aims to explain how transition brokers can effectively influence local political processes to reach the adoption of CE in municipal policy. Additionally, this research aims to formulate practical recommendations. Reaching the aims will help to fill the knowledge gap on how CE can be locally stimulated and implemented. As such, the **research question** is: *How does the lobby of regional environmental organizations influence the adoption of CE in local election- and coalition programs and how can this influence be explained?*

**Sub-questions** derived from this are: 1) *Which interventions for adoption of CE are currently used?* And 2) *Are these interventions effective in establishing a focus on the circular economy within local election and coalition programs and how can this be explained?*

## 1.4 Methods and case study

This research is a qualitative case study. To answer the research question, the EAC-method is used, which assesses political influence and lobby effectiveness through ego-perception, alter-perception, and causal analysis. NMU and its lobby activities within the province of Utrecht are used as a case. Semi-structured interviews are carried out with NMU representatives (ego-perception); a selection of local aldermen and political party leaders of municipalities in Utrecht (alter-perception); and other local or regional NGOs within the province lobbying for a CE (alter-perception). Additionally, as part of the causal analysis, both NMU lobby documents, as well as local election and coalition programs of 2018 and 2022 are analysed.

## 1.5 Scientific relevance

This research contributes to the scientific body of knowledge on the (local and regional) function of transition brokers. Research on transformative change and the role of actors,

interventions, and actions within such processes has been carried out by multiple authors. For example, de Haan & Rotmans (2018) explain transformative systems change through actions and interventions of actors and alliances. Mintrom & Norman (2009), as well as Renner & Meijerink (2018), studied the role of policy entrepreneurs in achieving policy change. Cramer (2020) in turn has studied the roles of transition brokers for the implementation of CE in light of regional governance. She states that empirical research on the function and roles of transition brokers has not yet been carried out extensively in light of the regional implementation of CE. Moreover, research on the local implementation of CE systems is still limited (Cramer, 2020). The concept of CE has been embraced, developed, and increasingly researched by policymakers, consultants, and researchers. However, scientific research on CE is still considered to be in its infancy (Araujo Galvão, de Nadae, Clemente, Chinen, & de Carvalho, 2018; Korhonen, Honkasalo, & Seppälä, 2018).

Studies on (environmental) lobby influence and effectiveness are manyfold (e.g. Hofman & Aalbers, 2017; Wolton, 2021; Vavtar, 2014). Lobby influence is often looked for in research, but the results of these studies remain undistinctive. Evidence for lobby effectiveness is not that often found since it is a highly complex concept to measure (Lowery, 2013). Although both lobby influence and CE are frequently researched topics, an inquiry using scientific search engines for local lobby effectiveness/influence for CE adoption in municipal policies did not deliver many results in terms of research clearly and primarily focussing on this combination. This thesis thus contributes to the scientific body of research and knowledge by combining the topics of lobby effectiveness, CE, and transition brokers for regional and local (policy) implementation of CE in empirical research.

## 1.6 Societal relevance

From a societal perspective, the relevance of this research lies in the need for societal sustainability transformations. Humanity is consuming beyond the planet's means, while at the same time millions of people live in horrid deprivation. Mainstream economic policy has not been able to deliver inclusive and sustainable development (Raworth, 2012). National governments are increasingly paying attention to CE implementation, but actual application in cities and regions is lagging (Cramer, 2020; Hobson & Lynch, 2016). The CE has been presented as an outlook and solution to overcome challenges such as economic stagnation and environmental degradation (Barrie, Zawdie, & João, 2017). It is thus important for societal actors to know how to effectively influence local political processes to be in favour of such societal transformations. NGOs are seen as important intermediaries in the advancement of transitions. They operate on many different (institutional) levels and during different transition phases. Their roles range from support for experiments and articulation of needs, to *“the aggregation of knowledge, pooling resources, network building and stronger institutional support, and capacity building”* in accelerating and stabilizing transitions (Kivimaa, et al., 2019, p. 110; Raszkowski & Bartniczak, 2018). The role of NGOs in sustainability transitions has been studied extensively (Kivimaa, et al., 2019; Durrant, 2014; Gliedt, Hoicka, & Jackson, 2018; Kundurpi, Westman, Luederitz, Burch, & Mercado, 2021). Research on the role of NGOs in transitions toward a CE has also been carried out (Melles, 21; Ho, Böhm, & Monciardini, 2021; Avdiushchenko, 2019) however, not specifically with regards to the local implementation of CE and regional NGO lobby efforts to achieve this.

## 1.7 Practical relevance

Lobbying to influence the contents of municipal election programs is common practice. However, where the election period is known for its openness, the formation period is characterized by its closed doors (Dröge & van Drimmelen, 2014). Only locally very influential

actors can obtain a seat at the formation table (Actiz, 2017; Vahl, 2018). The practical relevance of this research is thus that it is useful for organisations like NMU to know how to have an effective lobby during the open election period and, besides, to know which strategies can be employed during the more closed-off formation period.

### 1.8 Reading guide

This research starts with some contextual background information, after which an introduction to relevant literature and scientific theories is given. This literature review will lead to a conceptual framework and operationalization that can help to answer the research questions. After this, methodological choices within this research will be elaborated on. Hereafter results from interviews and the document analysis will be discussed, from which a conclusion, discussion and practical recommendations will follow.

## 2. Context

Before diving into the literature, some context is addressed. Local policy agenda-setting in the Netherlands is discussed first, followed by CE efforts on the national level; the role of municipal policies for a circular economy; measurements for circularity and lastly, the position of NMU within the governance field on circular economy.

### 2.1 Local policy agenda-setting in the Netherlands

In the decentralised unitary state of The Netherlands, local governments have democratic legitimacy. Thus, municipalities can set their local policy agenda. Executive political coalitions mostly consist of two or more political parties on all levels of government. These conditions make negotiations of (local) executive coalition programs an important venue for local policy agenda-setting. Executive coalition programs are made between the parties that form a new municipal coalition, setting the agenda for their 4-year term in office (Breeman, Scholten, & Timmermans, 2014). In contrast to the national level, local politicians and administrators are often informed by informal contacts (Public Matters, 2021; Rietig, 2016). Only a third of all information that comes in flows from official communication canals (e.g. planned visits, appointments, and consultations). A lot of opportunities for (local) businesses and interest groups thus exist to start conversations with politicians and policymakers (Public Matters, 2021). The main focus of research on agenda-setting has been on (inter)national and intragovernmental policy agendas. This has contributed to a broad understanding of how governments allocate attention across topics; how this allocation can change; why this allocation changes; and the effects of allocation and allocation changes on policy output. However, since these studies did not focus on the local level, there is room for further research on this level (Breeman, Scholten, & Timmermans, 2014).

### 2.2 Circular Economy on the national level

The Dutch government-wide program for CE focuses on the development and realisation of a CE by 2050. It states that a CE offers an answer to the great challenge to use raw materials more efficiently. It promotes an economy that provides for needs, without causing unacceptable pressure on the environment and without exhausting natural resources. The government states that the need to strive for a CE arises from three developments in particular: an explosive demand for resources; dependency on other countries; and the emission of CO<sub>2</sub>. Seven barriers that hinder the transition toward a CE are identified (Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management, 2016, p. 19):

1. Legislation is insufficiently focused on enabling the transition;
2. External effects are not internalized;
3. Knowledge of technical, social, and system innovations is lacking;
4. Civilians and professionals do not behave circularly;
5. Alignment problems within chains;
6. Established interests and investments;
7. Limited influence on the international playing field.

Five interventions that can support the transition are identified (Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management, 2016, p. 25):

1. Stimulating legislation;
2. Smart market incentives;
3. Financing;
4. Knowledge and innovation;
5. International cooperation.

Next to the government-wide program for CE, a national implementation program for CE 2021-2023 is in place. The goal of this program is to implement activities leading towards a circular country in 2050. The program commits to five transition agendas, ten cross-cutting themes, and the region (Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management, 2021). It focuses on projects that deliver valuable experiences and lessons for governmental policy and a good mix of instruments. Plans and activities are categorized into five sectors (with corresponding transition agendas) that are thought to have the most impact on the environment and are important to the economy:

1. The manufacturing industry;
2. Plastics;
3. Circular construction economy;
4. Consumer goods;
5. Biomass and food.

The ten cross-cutting themes are:

1. Producer responsibility;
2. Laws and regulations;
3. Circular design;
4. Circular procurement;
5. Market incentives;
6. Finance instruments;
7. Monitoring, knowledge and innovation;
8. Behaviour and communication, education and labour markets;
9. International commitment;
10. The Circular Economy Accelerator portal.

These themes are aimed at broadening the playing field for a circular transition; removing barriers; stimulating the market; stimulating new forms of financing; bringing parties together; and building knowledge and experiences. This happens on international, national and regional levels (Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management, 2021).

### 2.3 The role of municipal policies in the Circular Economy

Municipalities and other governments are responsible to create the needed conditions for a CE (Bolger & Doyon, 2019; Circle Economy, 2019; Christensen, 2021). Municipalities can do this by employing regulatory, economic, and soft instruments (e.g. facilitating networks and information campaigns) that push for socially beneficial effects and help reach sustainable and inclusive towns and cities. Such municipal policies can also help to generate employment. Clear municipal strategies and targets can encourage businesses to collaborate and let long-term thinking pervade over short-term budgeting. Municipal loans and subsidies can help reduce or overcome financial barriers for businesses working on CE (Circle Economy, 2019). Also, *“networks and information sharing facilitate ongoing circular activities and boost social capital of the circular business community”* (Circle Economy, 2019, p. 2). According to Christensen (2021), cities and local governments are crucial in the transition toward a CE for multiple reasons. First, they are mostly responsible for managing waste streams and are located at the end of linear material flows. Thus, they have a *“natural interest in the fate of these flows”* (Christensen, 2021, p. 2). Local governments often have to meet recycling targets, which typically involves them with CE activities. Second, CE activities cut across many other policy domains and objectives of cities. Third, cities and local governments often form a strong link between citizens, the private sector, knowledge institutions and other stakeholders (Christensen, 2021). Regional cooperation between municipalities is crucial. Regional parties are close to the raw material flows and have close regional contacts, making it easier to

establish the required networks for circular initiatives and innovations (Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management, 2021). Local political parties that get elected into office will influence future municipal policy, so they must get familiarized with sustainability concepts such as the CE.

## 2.4 Measurements for circularity

Measurement of circularity is important since it enables informed choices for processes, products and businesses. A universal measurement method is not yet in place, but a large array of tools – like scans and databases that map circularity qualitatively or quantitatively – is available (Het Groene Brein, 2022). The so-called *R-ladder*, or *ladder of circularity*, lies at the root of most measurement tools. The higher a circular strategy is located on the ladder, the more circular it is considered to be (Het Groene Brein, 2022; Reike, Vermeulen, & Witjes, 2018). Thus, R0 is considered the most circular, while R9 is considered to be the least circular strategy (Het Groene Brein, 2022; Kishna, Rood, & Prins, 2019). The r-strategies will be elaborated upon in the next chapter.

## 2.5 Nature and Environment Federation Utrecht

The Nature and Environment Federation Utrecht (NMU) is a foundation that works towards a healthy and sustainable province. NMU is part of a bigger network of Nature and Environment Federations across the Netherlands (one in every province). NMU works on multiple topics. Examples are an energy-neutral province, circular economy, healthy mobility, diverse landscapes and nature, and sustainable agriculture. NMU works in topic-focused networks consisting of, for example, governments, companies, and professionals. With regards to the CE, NMU aims for Utrecht to become a circular top region. A multitude of interventions and actions is taken to achieve this. For example, at a special online CE service desk, companies and individuals can obtain information and ask for help with circular initiatives and activities. Additionally, NMU is chairman of the Circle Region Alliance Utrecht: a multi-helix partnership consisting of actors like the province, municipalities, businesses and other network organisations involved with CE. NMU constantly seeks to stay in contact with companies and governmental bodies to achieve and mainstream a CE. For this, it also makes policy recommendations (Nature & Environment Federation Utrecht, 2022). This includes recommendations to local political parties for stimulating CE through election programs and recommendations for coalition negotiators (Nature & Environment Federation Utrecht, 2021). Lobby activities, such as policy recommendations, also take place in name of the Circle Region Alliance Utrecht.

In the next chapter, relevant theories and concepts to this research will be discussed.

### 3. Theoretical framework

In this chapter, relevant theories to the research topic are discussed. First, the concept of the CE is discussed since this is the main concept of this research. Second, attention will be given to sustainability transitions since these are needed to reach a circular economy. Hereafter, the concept of policy development is discussed given this is the desired outcome of the lobby focused on for this research. After this, the concepts of NGOs and policy entrepreneurs for CE are consecutively touched upon since these are essential in the sense that NMU is, for this research, seen as such.

### 3.1 The Circular Economy

Over the years, attention to the concept of a circular economy has increased significantly in different circles (e.g. science, advocacy, policymaking and consultancy) (Cramer, 2020; Geisendorf & Pietrulla, 2018; Reike, Vermeulen, & Witjes, 2018). The CE is seen as a way to conquer the prevailing linear extract-produce-consume-dispose pattern of production and consumption processes based on continuous growth, which results in environmental degradation and exhaustion of natural resources (Cramer, 2020; Upadhayay & Alqassimi, 2018). CE proposes “*a circular system in which value of products, materials, and resources is maintained within the economy as long as possible*” (Cramer, 2020, p. 1; Korhonen, Honkasalo, & Seppälä, 2018). It also refers to an economy that “*aims to rely on renewable energy; minimises, tracks and eliminates the use of toxic chemicals; and eradicates waste through careful design*” (McArthur, 2013, p. 22). Figure 1 shows what a CE would look like. The CE follows the example of ecosystems. This is done through closed loops of materials, where the demand for raw materials is lowered, just as the need for waste disposal (Desing, et al., 2020). It also focuses on slowing down loops by “*extending the life of materials and products*” (Bolger & Doyon, 2019, p. 2187). The concept builds on systems thinking and acknowledges the interconnectedness of human activities and environmental support systems (Bolger & Doyon, 2019).

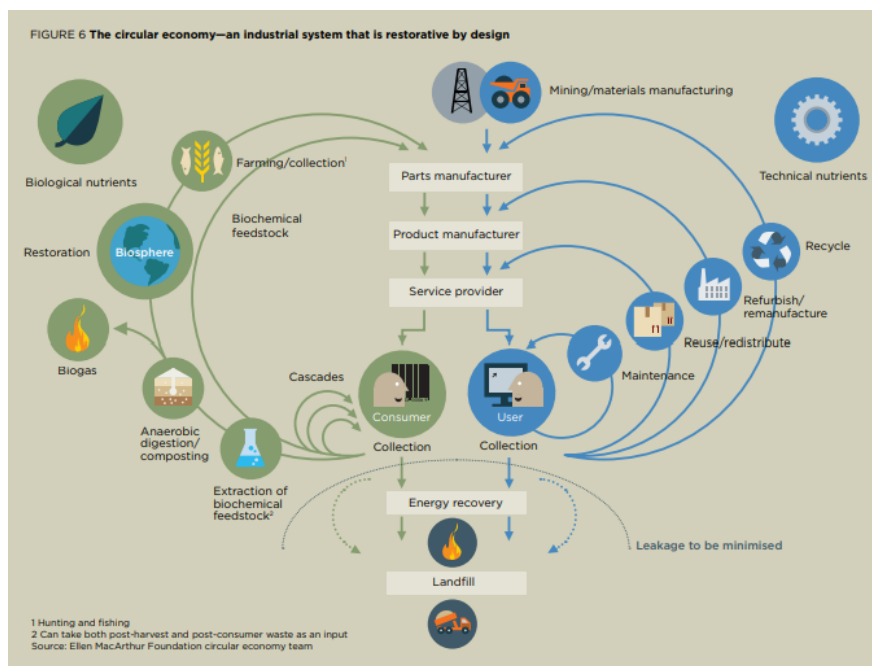


Figure 1: the circular economy (McArthur, 2013, p.24). A step missing in this figure is the 'refuse' step, which would lead to fewer materials being needed in the first place.

CE is supposed to contribute to the environmental, economic, and social dimensions of sustainable development, causing a win-win-win potential as illustrated in figure 2 (Korhonen, Honkasalo, & Seppälä, 2018; Desing, et al., 2020). It has many links to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), for example to goals such as responsible consumption and production (SDG12); sustainable cities and communities (SDG11); inclusive and sustainable industrialization and innovation (SDG9); and decent work and economic growth (SDG8). The CE could increase resource productivity; increase the gross domestic product of countries, also resulting in employment benefits; and could help cut back greenhouse gas emissions and biodiversity loss, thus bringing environmental as well as socio-economic benefits (Schroeder, Anggraeni, & Weber, 2018; Berg, et al., 2018; Rodriguez-Anton, Rubio-Andrada, Celemín-Pedroche, & Alonso-Almeida, 2019).

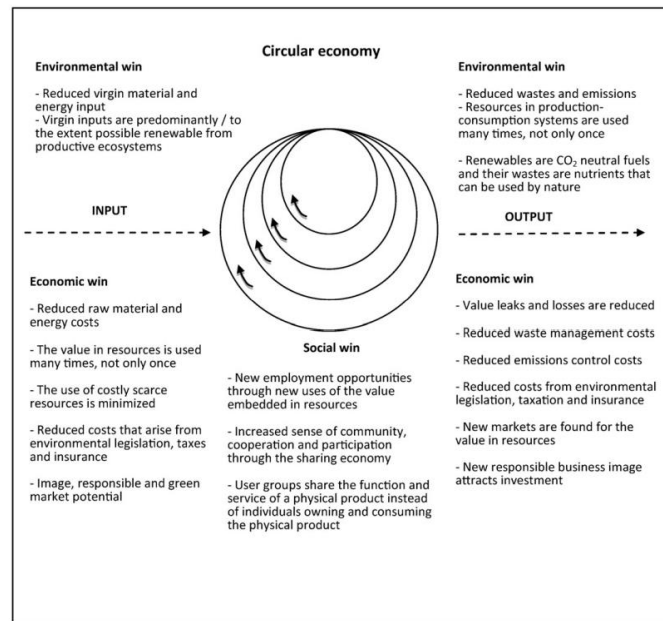


Figure 2: The win-win-win potential of circular economy (Korhonen et al. 2018, p.40)

Possibly the most well-known principles of the CE are the 3R's: reduce, reuse & recycle. However, CE encompasses more than these 3R's alone. The earlier mentioned *R-ladder* is an instrument to define the degree of value retention and gives ten strategies for this (10R-typology). The higher an r-strategy is on the ladder, the more circular its approach (Reike, Vermeulen, & Witjes, 2018; Morsetto, 2020). The different strategies can be categorized into "short loops (where product remains close to its user and function), medium loops (where product gets upgraded, producers are again involved), and long loops (where products lose their original function)" (Reike, Vermeulen, & Witjes, 2018, p. 10). The ten strategies are: refuse (R0), reduce (R1), resell/reuse (R2), repair (R3), refurbish (R4), remanufacture (R5), repurpose (R6), recycle (R7), recover (R8) and remine (R9). R0-R3 represent the short loops. R4-R6 represent the medium loops. R7-R9 represent the long loops (Reike, Vermeulen, & Witjes, 2018;

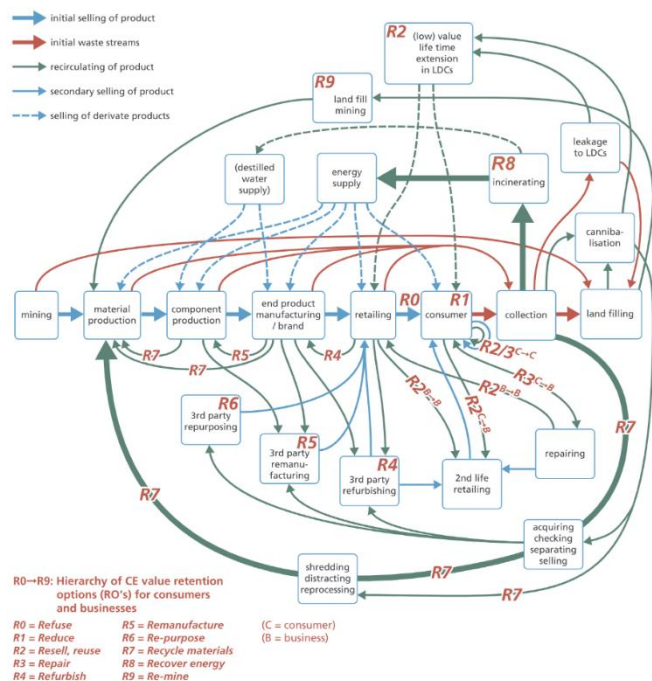


Figure 3: Mapping Circular Economy Retention Options (Reike, Vermeulen & Witjes, 2018, p. 258)

Khaw-ngern, Peuchthonglang, Klomkul, & Khaw-ngern, 2021). Figure 3 shows these loops. Figure 4 displays a more simplified picture (with slightly different loops).

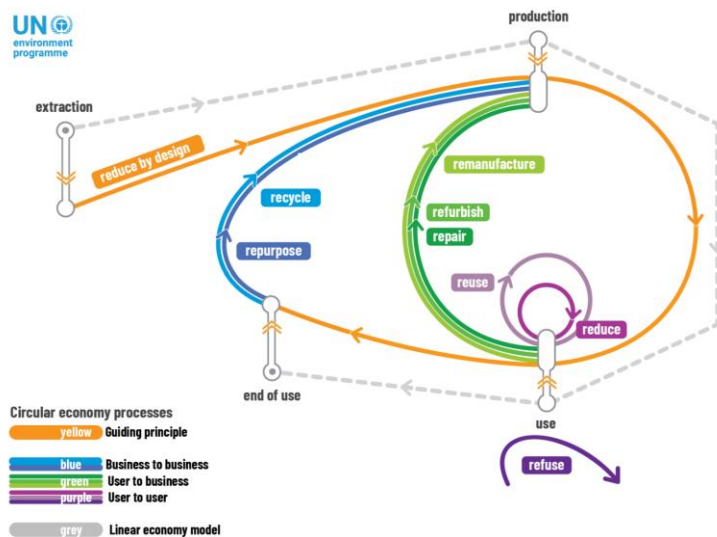


Figure 4: The UNEP Circularity approach using the 9-R concept (UN Environment Programme, 2022)

Although the CE is presented as an element of the win-win-win discourse (Korhonen, Honkasalo, & Seppälä, 2018), critiques on the concept are raised as well. One of the main critiques is that the concept itself remains fuzzy due to an abundance of conceptions, resulting in many different interpretations and discourses (Geisendorf & Pietrulla, 2018; Kirchherr, Reike, & Hekkert, 2017; Lazarevic & Valve, 2017). Additionally, political, economic, technological, managerial, and legal barriers to implementation persist. The governance and management of CE initiatives within and between organisations thus remain challenging. Think of, among others, path-dependencies; lock-ins; spatial and temporal boundaries; (lack of) transparency on corporate social responsibility; social conceptions of waste; and consumer behaviour (Araujo Galvão, de Nadae, Clemente, Chinen, & de Carvalho, 2018; Korhonen, Honkasalo, & Seppälä, 2018). Besides, material flows already exceed man-made boundaries. When new uses for existing flows are implemented, complexity increases. Additionally, the CE depends in part on the use of biofuels and bio-based materials. Calculations of the environmental impacts of these products face multiple unresolved methodological issues (Korhonen, Honkasalo, & Seppälä, 2018). Besides, where the main aim of the CE is economic wealth and environmental quality, issues of social equity within and between generations are hardly mentioned (Kirchherr, Reike, & Hekkert, 2017). As such, *“the roles of people, class relations and power asymmetries, indigenous people, women, plants and animals are generally overlooked”* (Genovese & Pansera, 2021, p. 105). The CE narrative is devoted to neo-classical and conventional economic thought. This maintains the focus on a growth-based economy that encourages capitalism and does not demand radical change to institutions, infrastructures and markets (Corvellec, Stowell, & Johansson, 2021; Lazarevic & Valve, 2017).

### 3.2 Sustainability transitions for a Circular Economy

CE calls for substantial changes in economic structures and production and consumption behaviour (Ghisellini & Ulgiati, 2020). Transition literature gives insights into how such changes could come about. The field of transition studies seeks to better understand large-scale systemic changes within societal systems. It does so by combining insights from different

research domains, such as sociology, environmental science and innovation studies (Loorbach, Frantzeskaki, & Huffenreuter, 2015). In essence, a transition is ‘a *nonlinear shift from one dynamic equilibrium to another*’ (Loorbach, Frantzeskaki, & Avelino, 2017, p. 600). Sustainability transition research offers multiple approaches and lenses into how unsustainable practices and regimes persist and what strategies could be used to escape such lock-ins. Governments can play a role in transitions by guiding the needed structural changes (Loorbach, Frantzeskaki, & Avelino, 2017; Rotmans, Kemp, & Asselt, 2001). Tackling current environmental problems can only be done through deep and structural changes in different sub-systems of society. Such changes are often labelled as socio-technical transitions because adjustments in the arrangement of societal sub-systems (such as transport and energy) are needed. This involves shifts in ‘rules of the game’, dominant societal practices, technologies, “*policy, markets, consumer practices, infrastructure, cultural meaning and scientific knowledge*” (Geels, 2011, p. 24; Meadowcroft, 2009). Such components are (re)produced, maintained and transformed by many different societal actors, which causes transitions to be complex and long-term processes (Geels, 2011). Sustainability transitions are different from other transitions in four ways. First, they are goal-oriented and purposive instead of emergent (Geels, 2011; German Advisory Council on Global Change, 2011). Second, environmental innovations do not provide clear advantages to users and thus cannot replace current dominant systems without the help of policy change. Power struggles will occur when vested interests hinder these policy changes (Geels, 2011). Third, the domains in which sustainability transitions are needed most (e.g. transport and energy) are characterized by large firms with stronger market positions than the pioneers opposing current systems and regimes (Geels, 2011). Fourth, for sustainability transitions to truly make an impact, they have to be taken up at a global level, which requires cooperation on a global scale (German Advisory Council on Global Change, 2011, p. 91). One way to look at transitions and how they come about is through the Multi-Level Perspective (MLP). This theory “*views transitions as non-linear processes that result from the interplay of developments at three analytical levels: niches (the locus for radical innovations), socio-technical regimes (the locus of established practices and associated rules that stabilize existing systems), and an exogenous socio-technical landscape*” (Geels, 2011, p. 26).

When looking at transitions through the MLP, a general dynamic between the analytical levels can be seen where: “a) *niche-innovations build up internal momentum, b) changes at the landscape level create pressure on the regime, and c) destabilisation of the regime creates windows of opportunity for niche-innovations*” (Geels, 2011, p. 29). This process causes regimes to change – as shown in figure 5 – thus changing existing practices and rules and making a transition possible. In light of this research, NMU can be seen as an actor creating momentum and

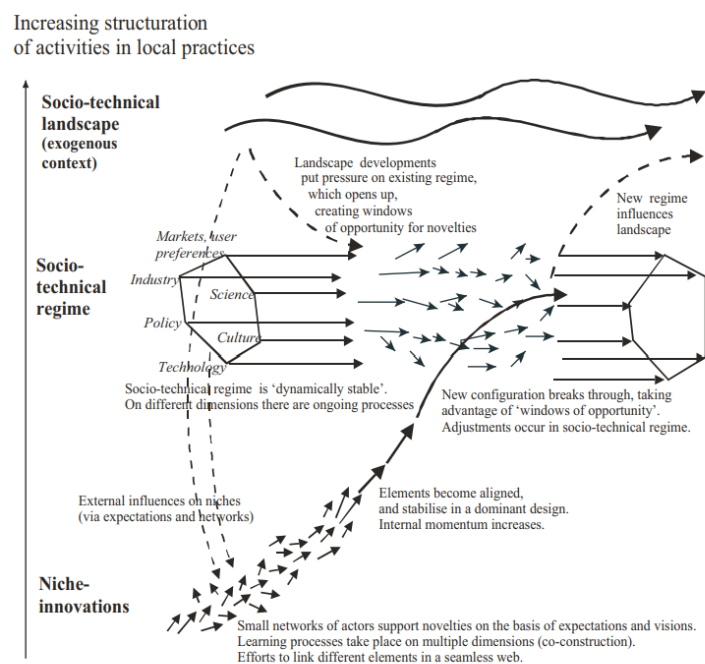


Figure 5: Multi-Level Perspective on transitions (Geels, 2011, p.28)

pushing for CE as a niche innovation to break through and replace the established linear regime. NMU performs lobby activities targeted at the regime level to create room for CE in different parts of society (policy, culture, industry, markets, etc.). Landscape pressures could for example be the growing national and global attention to CE and the felt consequences of climate change.

### 3.3 Policy development for a Circular Economy

Fundamental policy development is essential for a transition towards a circular society. New policy instruments and mixes are needed that focus on upstream phases like product design and service development (Berg, et al., 2018). Many theories exist on how policy develops (Kelly & Palumbo, 1992). One of the most pervasive theories is that of the policy cycle (figure 6). It was established as a tool to organize the complex process of policymaking (Capano & Pritoni, 2020) and has five stages: *agenda-setting* happens when a problem is originally noticed by policy actors and a broad range of solutions is introduced; *policy formulation* happens when specific policy options are developed after the choices put forward at the agenda-setting stage are narrowed; *decision making* then refers to the stage in which a particular course of action is adopted. Consequently, *policy implementation* holds that decisions are put into effect by the usage of combinations of tools. Lastly, *policy evaluation* entails that results are monitored, often leading to a reconceptualization of the policy problem and suitable solutions, thus leading back to stage one (Howlett, McConnell, & Perl, 2016; Howlett & Giest, 2015). In all these stages, opportunities exist for actors in the field to influence the process of policy development. Lobby for election and coalition programs can help to get problems on the municipal agenda (agenda-setting) and into municipal policy (policy formulation and decision making). The primary critique on the model is that it shows an oversimplified and unrealistic view of the policymaking process and has a hierarchical top-down perspective (Jann & Wegrich, 2007, p. 56). However, it has remained the main heuristic for public policymaking (Howlett, McConnell, & Perl, 2016).

### 3.4 Lobby for a Circular Economy

To understand lobby for CE, it is important to define 'lobby'. The most important component of lobby is the interaction between a lobbyist and the government. Lobbyists as such go by a variety of names, including *pressure groups* and *interest groups* (Sheehan, 2012). Research on lobby influence is central to "*research on the role of organized interests in democratic politics*" (Lowery, 2013, p. 1). Biliouri (1999) defines lobby as "*a pressure groups' medium- and long-term strategic perspective of creating a favourable legislative framework for their activities*" (p.173). Lobby is also stated as "*the provision of information to policymakers by individuals representing the firms' interests*" (Hillman & Hitt, 1999, p. 834). Biliouri (1999) differentiates between social and commercial lobby, with social lobby being executed by pressure groups with non-commercial, and essentially political and ideological motives. Environmental lobby fits into social lobby when environmental NGOs primarily advocate the innate and incalculable values of the environment (Biliouri, 1999). There are roughly four phases of municipal election lobby that are all characterized by different dynamics and thus have different possibilities for lobby intervention (Stichting Lobby Lokaal, 2021):

- *Phase 1*: about 1,5 years before municipal elections, political parties start their campaign. Scripts are drawn and writing committees are appointed. Stories and plans can be shared with the writing committee (Stichting Lobby Lokaal, 2021; Kennispunt Lokale Politieke Partijen, sd).

- *Phase 2*: during this phase (usually 0,5 - 1 year before elections), most political parties are writing their election program (Stichting Lobby Lokaal, 2021; Kennispunt Lokale Politieke Partijen, sd).
- *Phase 3*: shortly before the elections (about one or two months), the visible and outward-focused campaign starts. Political parties are looking for ways to distinguish themselves from others and be as visible as possible (Stichting Lobby Lokaal, 2021; Kennispunt lokale politieke partijen, sd).
- *Phase 4*: After elections, new councillors will get to work and negotiations on coalition programs start. Political parties are looking for specific ways to implement their plans (Stichting Lobby Lokaal, 2021).

### 3.5 Policy entrepreneurs for a Circular Economy

How particular policy ideas catch on is an often studied topic. With this, the role of policy entrepreneurs as “*highly motivated individuals or small teams that can do much to draw attention to policy problems, present innovative policy solutions, build coalitions of supporters, and secure legislative action*” (Mintrom & Norman, 2009, p. 649) is useful. A study by Cramer (2020) showed that such ‘systemic intermediaries’ – which she calls *transition brokers*- can fulfil an important function within the regional governance of CE. These intermediaries can enhance change processes; establish coalitions; help create essential requirements for CE; and realize circular projects (Cramer, 2020). According to Mintrom & Norman (2009), policy entrepreneurs should possess some main characteristics or display certain behaviours to be successful:

- *Displaying social acuity*: policy entrepreneurs must utilize relevant policy networks and engage actively within them. They should understand and react effectively to the ideas, intents and interests of other actors (Mintrom & Norman, 2009).
- *Defining problems*: policy entrepreneurs have to present evidence that suggests policy change is needed. They have to establish support for these ideas from actors within and beyond the direct scope of the problem (Mintrom & Norman, 2009).
- *Building teams*: successful policy entrepreneurs work in teams with members from different and complementing backgrounds; utilize personal and professional networks; and develop coalitions that promote policy change (Mintrom & Norman, 2009).
- *Leading by example*: policy entrepreneurs have to obtain credibility and develop momentum for transformations. They lead by example and turn their ideas into action.

According to Cramer (2020), transition brokers (or teams of them) are expected to:

- Be entrepreneurial: step out of their comfort zone, persist, and pursue contacts;
- Be enthusiastic and able to inspire others to participate and collaborate;
- Be pragmatic, but at the same time operate from a system perspective;
- Be able to get CE ideas accepted within a variety of organisations;
- Be able to stand above parties and act in the collective interest;
- Know about the topic of CE, as well as the local business setting and political culture (Cramer, 2020).

Since the main elements of successful policy entrepreneurs and transition brokers show quite some overlap, the terms will be bundled for this research and used for regional NGOs pushing for policy change and measures on CE topics in municipal politics.

### 3.6 The political influence of non-governmental organisations

The term 'non-governmental organisation' (NGO) was initially introduced by the UN after the Second World War. They take a multitude of shapes and forms, and consequently, their goals and activities vary. The rise of NGOs can partly be explained by the idea that they can fill in gaps in service delivery left by states and markets. Besides, the general idea of NGOs is that they pursue transformative agendas and are capable of challenging unequal relationships between (groups of) people (Banks, Hulme, & Edwards, 2015). On environmental topics, NGOs have played an important role in, among others, input for standards, monitoring, education, lobbying, campaigning, information sharing, and offering vital support to regional authorities (Martens, 2002; Raszkowski & Bartniczak, 2018; Church & Lorek, 2007). Environmental NGOs have been described *"as activists raising awareness and calling for action; as diplomats working with governments to craft climate policies; and as governors developing new mechanisms for steering society towards a low-carbon future"* (Betsill, 2015, p. 251). NGOs can be defined as organizations that are *"characterized primarily by humanitarian or co-operative, rather than commercial, objectives that pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services, or undertake community development"* (Asproudis & Weyman-Jones, 2020, p. 3). Arts (2004, p.500) adds to this that NGOs can broadly be defined as *"any non-profit, non-violent, organised group of people, not established by governments, and not seeking government office"*. For this research, these definitions are combined, focussing on non-profit, non-violent organised groups that are not seeking government office and are acting to protect the environment. Generally, NGO participation within the policy-making process is perceived as essential for the process itself as well as for policy implementation (Klugman, 2000). Often, NGOs' major goal is to influence political decision-making and to obtain policy outcomes that resemble their ideals. For this, NGOs engage in lobby activities. NGOs can have political influence by e.g. putting issues on the agenda, setting meanings, building consensus, and enabling negotiations (Klugman, 2000; Raszkowski & Bartniczak, 2018). However, the recognition of NGOs as essential actors does not automatically result in the effective fulfilment of this role. Some groups will fail while others succeed, and some groups succeed in one area while failing in another (Klüver, 2011). The political influence of non-state actors can be defined as *"the achievement of (a part of) one's policy goal with regard to an outcome in treaty formation and implementation, which is (at least partly) caused by one's own and intentional intervention in the political arena and process concerned"* (Arts, 1998, p. 58). Policy change, however, does not solely come about because of NGOs. Factors like the political, economic, and social context play an important role in accommodating or hindering policy change, thus influencing the work of NGOs (Klugman, 2000).

## 4. Conceptual framework

Based on the literature review, a conceptual framework is established. The framework assesses the political influence of NGOs through the EAC-method and explains outcomes based on different levels using explanatory factors.

### 4.1 Assessing the political influence of NGOs

The EAC-method (**E**go-perception, **A**lter-perception and **C**ausal analysis) is used to assess the political influence of NGOs. **Ego-perception** is understood as how regional NGO representatives perceive their lobby influence. As NGOs will probably overestimate their influence, perceptions of others have to be taken into account as well to form a better picture. **Alter-perception** is understood as how municipal and political representatives, as well as other regional and local organizations lobbying for CE, perceive the political influence of NGOs (first control of the NGOs' claims). The **causal analysis** in turn entails the check if cause and effect are linked (second control of the NGOs' claims). This check is based on a comparison between an NGO's policy goal and the eventual policy outcome. The NGO's policy goal is deduced from organisational documents and interviews (Arts, 1998). In this case, the policy outcome is deduced from local election and coalition programs. As such, the analysis is based on interview outcomes and a paper trail. The causal analysis consists of the following checks:

- Have the NGOs involved fully or partially achieved their initial goal?
- Is the goal-achievement of NGOs caused by their own interventions, or is it caused by other actors? For this, one should look at:
  - the possible goal-achievement of other players;
  - the NGO's access to the political arena;
  - the interventions of both NGOs and other players on the studied topic;
  - the number and intensity of interventions;
  - the adoption of viewpoints by governments (Arts, 1998, p. 81).

When ego-perception, alter-perception and causal analysis are all affirmative, an NGO was successful and thus has political influence. Reversed, an NGO has no political influence when ego-perception, alter-perception and causal analysis are all dismissive. When the results between the three are not in line, a choice is made on which tool prevails. Generally, the causal analysis prevails over the alter-perception since the causal analysis is grounded on documents instead of the views of respondents (the latter seen as less constant). However, this choice depends on the quality of data collected through both alter-perception and causal analysis (Arts, 1998).

### 4.2 Explaining political influence

The assessed level of the political influence of NGOs can in turn be explained on three levels: the political arena; the policy outcome; and the context (Arts, 1998).

#### *Political arena: arena-level factors*

Political arenas are characterized by the agents operating within them. The political influence of an NGO can be partly explained by *the players that are present*. Some NGOs might for example be more experienced or viewed as more legitimate than others, increasing their chances of success. Besides, people within the target groups of lobbyists might be more or less interested in, and open to, the lobby topic in question and accompanying lobby efforts. The *nature of interventions* also plays a role. Not all strategies will be equally effective. The

effectiveness depends on which actors are approached, how they are approached, how responsive they are, if other players intervene, and if the strategy used catches on (Arts, 1998). Besides, the *nature of the policy issue* creates different opportunities to intervene. Different issues can “mobilize different players, constitute different arenas, and produce different policy processes” (Arts, 1998, p. 90). Groups representing diffuse interests generally experience more difficulty in achieving successful lobby in comparison to groups representing more concentrated interests (Klüver, 2011). Lastly, different phases of the policy cycle raise different intervention opportunities, and the different *nature of the negotiations* at hand will also create different opportunities and roles for NGOs (Arts, 1998). For example, closed-off negotiations create different opportunities to intervene as opposed to more open negotiation processes. Negotiations focused on gathering knowledge and expertise will create different opportunities to intervene as opposed to power games characterized by tense relations (Arts, 1998).

### Outcome level factors

The expected or likely outcome and effects of policy negotiations have an impact on interactions between the actors involved. Soft law and customary rules are generally seen as easier to influence by NGOs in comparison to hard law and rules since less direct action is needed for the former (Arts, 1998).

### Context level factors

Context level factors exist of regimes, resources, rules of the game, and relevant trends and events. First, *regimes* are an important explanatory factor of NGOs’ political influence. When existing regimes enable certain players’ interests, their chances of reaching policy goals increase (Arts, 1998; Klüver, 2011). For example, regimes (e.g. governments) that regard environmental problems as urgent produce different opportunities for environmental lobbyists as opposed to regimes that do not regard environmental problems as urgent. Second, NGOs are often constrained in *resources* (money, time, etc.) compared to states and businesses. However, NGOs can have an advantage in this regard, e.g. when they have the right expertise, contacts, and/or support from public opinion (Arts, 1998). Generally, groups with more resources are more successful lobbyists (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Klüver, 2011). Third, *the rules of the game* matter. These determine if and how NGOs can participate in negotiations and decision-making, which is often essential for political influence (Arts, 1998; Bolman & Deal, 2013). Finally, certain *trends and events* (e.g. the environment, economy and politics) may enable or constrain NGOs (Arts, 1998).

I. Arena level	a. players involved (experience, legitimacy, persuasiveness) b. players' interventions c. nature of policy issue d. nature of negotiations
II. Outcome level	a. nature of policy outcome (status, soft/hard law) b. likely policy effects
III. Context level	a. nature of relevant regime b. distribution of resources c. nature of rules of the game d. relevant trends and events

Figure 5: factors of political influence for NGOs (Arts, 1998, p.90)

This leads to the conceptual framework below. Within this framework, the EAC-method is used to assess the degree of political lobby influence. Thereafter, the assessment of political influence is *explained* through the arena, outcome and context level factors.

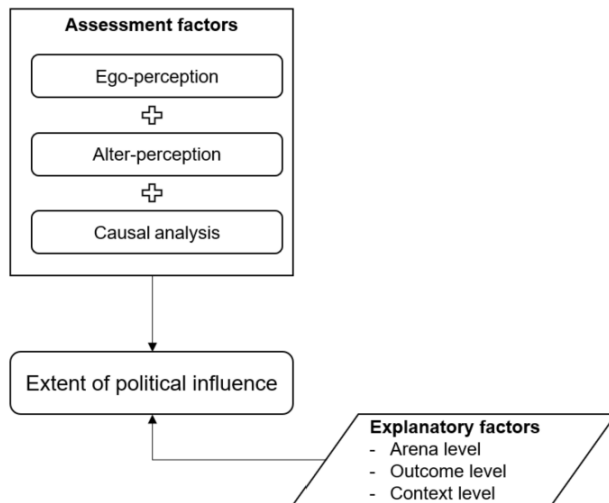


Figure 6: Conceptual framework (established by author, based on Arts (1998))

- **Ego perception** is used to assess the NGO's view on its political influence. Answers of respondents about their influence and goal achievement are categorized into 'no', 'little', 'some', and 'great' effects. 'Little effect' is used for answers that indicate there is/can be an effect of lobby, but it's too small to be distinguished on its own. 'Some effect' refers to an effect that is substantial enough to be distinguished on its own. 'Great effect' is used when respondents think lobby has had a big effect. A counterfactual question will be asked, *assessing* if, when all NGOs had been absent during the process, the outcome would have been the same or different, categorizing answers into 'similar' or 'different' outcomes (Arts, 1998).
- **Alter perception:** is used as a first control to assess the NGO's influence through the views of local politicians (the target group) and other lobbyists within the province. Answers of respondents about the influence of lobby on CE will be categorized into 'no', 'little', 'some' and 'great' effects. 'Little effect' is used for answers that indicate there is/can be an effect of lobby, but it's too small to be distinguished on its own. 'Some effect' refers to an effect that is substantial enough to be distinguished on its own. 'Great effect' is used when respondents think lobby has had a big effect on election and coalition programs. A counterfactual question is asked to assess if, when all NGOs had been absent during the process, the outcome would have been the same or different, categorizing answers into 'similar' or 'different' (Arts, 1998).
- **Causal analysis:** is used as a second control to assess the political influence of the NGO. The earlier explained checks (on p.15) for this analysis are used.

The *assessment* of lobby influence will help to answer the first part of the research question on how lobby influences the adoption of CE in election and coalition programs. The followed *explanation* on the three levels (arena, context and outcome) will help to answer the second part of the research question on how the influence can be explained. Based on these answers, recommendations will be made to enhance lobby influence where needed and possible.

## 5. Methodology

For this project, empirical research is carried out. In this chapter, methodological choices made are elaborated on. First, the research strategy and philosophical perspective are discussed. Thereafter, the methods used for data collection and analysis are discussed. Finally, the validity and reliability of the research are addressed.

### 5.1 Epistemology, ontology, theoretical- and philosophical perspective

This research builds on a postpositivist perspective, accommodating objectivity and generalizability of results as ideal. As such, the researcher tries to capture reality while simultaneously accepting that all methods and measurements are imperfect. Thus, multiple methods need to be used to come as close to reality as possible (Harrison, Birks, Franklin, & Mill, 2017; Moon & Blackman, 2014). The research rests on the belief that there is one reality that however, cannot be perfectly understood, pointing towards an ontological perspective of critical realism (Moon & Blackman, 2014). Results of the research will be – where possible – generalized to the field of NGOs working on the political adoption of CE practices. However, it is recognized that insights into reality are constrained due to complex social and political contexts. From an epistemological perspective – referring to both the knowledge assumptions of the researcher and methodology, as those researched (Williams, 2016) – it is acknowledged that the researcher cannot be completely objective. However, this is still pursued, pointing towards objectivism (Moon & Blackman, 2014). The philosophical perspective of the researcher as “*a set of assumptions that structure the approach to research*” (Moon & Blackman, 2014, p. 1173) influences how meaning is extracted from data. This research is carried out through a pragmatist lens, meaning that truth claims, cultural values, and ideas are evaluated by their consequences and use-value, aiming to formulate practical outcomes and recommendations (Moon & Blackman, 2014).

### 5.2 Research design

As mentioned in the introduction, this is a qualitative research. A case study is used, in which the subject(s) of study are investigated in a real-life setting. Qualitative data gathering is considered the main tactic of data collection for case studies and can be used to get a better understanding of the complex reality in which the subjects of study operate (Thiel, 2014). This fits the goal of this research to understand how lobby can be effective in the complex political context in which actors under study operate. The data will be used to find patterns that can be generalized to the field of regional NGOs working on the local political implementation of CE measures. This fits the earlier mentioned post-positivist view (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

### 5.3 Data collection

#### 5.3.1 Semi-structured interviews

The main mode of data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews. This allows the interviewer to gain a deep understanding of the research issue (Thiel, 2014). Interview questions were distilled based on the operationalization of variables in the conceptual framework, which makes this deductive research (Thiel, 2014). Nevertheless, when explanations/factors occurred that could not be deducted from the literature, these outcomes were not ignored but seen as relevant findings that could contribute to the existing body of literature. Semi-structured interviews cause the researcher to be the most important measurement instrument since he/she asks the questions and interprets the answers. To ensure a sufficient amount of reliability and validity of results, the questions were closely related to the theoretical framework and the interview guide ensured a certain amount of

replicability since the conversations followed a semi-fixed pattern (Thiel, 2014). Interviews were all carried out in Dutch since all participants were Dutch. Thus, quotes were translated into English.

This research coincided with the Dutch municipal elections of 2022, increasing the relevance of the research and the practical recommendations for the internship organization. This, however, did cause difficulties in the planning of interviews with local politicians. Local politicians were busy with their election campaigns and had little time to cooperate. As a result, the case selection changed multiple times. In the end, a total of 46 political parties were contacted (most of them multiple times), of which 17 were local parties, and 29 were local branches of national parties. Of the 13 interviews carried out with local political representatives, 6 were with local parties, and 7 were with local branches of national parties. These parties were active in 7 different municipalities. 8 organizations lobbying for CE within the province were contacted (NGOs, governmental initiatives & local initiatives). With 4 of these organisations, interviews were carried out. 3 interviews with NMU representatives and 1 expert interview was carried out. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and practical reasons, the majority of interviews were carried out through online meeting tools. Interviews were recorded with the permission of the respondents. Due to political sensitivity and to counter conflict of interest between the internship and the research, respondents were anonymised unless they indicated not wanting to be anonymised.

*Table 1: respondents*

	<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Municipal size</b>
R1	Locally rooted party	A	Small
R2	Locally rooted party	B	Small
R3	Nationally rooted party	C	Big
R4	Nationally rooted party	D	Big
R5	Nationally rooted party	D	Big
R6	Locally rooted party	E	Middle-sized
R7	Locally rooted party	F	Middle-sized
R8	Nationally rooted party	G	Middle-sized
R9	Locally rooted party	G	Middle-sized
R10	Nationally rooted party	G	Middle-sized
R11	Locally rooted party	E	Middle-sized
R12	Nationally rooted party	A	Small
R13	Board member (expert interview), Foundation Lobby Lokaal	-	
R14	Living Lab Regio Foodvalley Circular	-	
R15	Municipal sustainability employee	-	
R16	Kirsty Mulder, Zero Waste Groene Hart	-	
R17	Nationally rooted party	C	Big
R18	Jelmer Vierstra, Program Lead Circular Economy, Natuur & Milieu	-	
R19	Tim Bulters, Project Lead Circular Economy, NMU	-	
R20	Peter Smit, Project Lead Circular Economy, NMU	-	
R21	Sonja Sars, Deputy Director, NMU	-	

Political representatives (R1-R12 & R17) were interviewed about their views on the lobby effectiveness for CE. Their opinions were asked on processes of the creation of election- and coalition programs; if they were interested in CE; their contacts with lobby organizations and their contact needs on the issue of CE; their experiences and opinions on the lobby

interventions carried out by NMU; which other interventions they regarded relevant/useful; the general influence of lobby on CE; and the lobby influence of NMU/the Alliance specifically. Lobbyists (R14, R16, R18-R21) and one municipal employee (R15, not a lobbyist) were interviewed about stimulating CE; getting the topic integrated within election and coalition programs; the role of partnerships in their influence; how they assessed their own influence; how they assessed lobby influence for CE in general; and how they assessed the lobby influence of NMU/the Alliance.

### 5.3.2 Municipal and political party case selection

Not every municipality within the province of Utrecht could be included in this research for reasons of time and capacity constraints. Thus, a selection of municipalities was made based on population size and geographic location.

**Population size** is used as a selection criterion because it can influence a municipalities' ability to deal with a broad scope of topics. For local political parties and their election programs, municipal size does not directly matter since political parties are outside of the municipal organizational system before elections. However, when political parties get elected into office, the size of the municipality can influence the abilities to focus and act on a broad range of (sustainability) topics. The bigger (metropolitan) areas are seen to offer a great opportunity for a CE (Het Groene Brein, 2022). Small municipalities generally have less capacity, meaning that they are often less capable of attracting specific expertise and are often dependent upon other actors for the execution of plans (Dam, et al., 2020). This could affect whether or not CE can be incorporated into coalition programs (depending on if a municipality will or will not have enough knowledge, capacity and resources). Additionally, the number of municipal councillors depends on population size and can range from 9 (smallest municipalities) to 45 (biggest municipalities) (VNG, 2022). With fewer municipal councillors but equally as many municipal topics, less capacity remains per topic. This might mean municipal size can influence which strategies can be employed for achieving a CE, which in turn might mean that lobby efforts are received differently. As such, municipal size can influence if there is enough manpower, knowledge, resources, room, and other contextual factors available to work on the CE next to other sustainability issues, pointing to the explanatory factors of *regimes*, *players involved* and the *rules of the game*. In this way, population size also influences if CE as a policy issue in general can be focussed on within the municipal organization or if it is too much of a niche issue to allocate attention to. This points to the explanatory factor of *nature of the policy issue*. When looking at the population sizes of municipalities in the province of Utrecht, numbers fall between approximately 5.000 to 360.000 residents. Within this range, three groups can be made: big, middle-sized, and small-sized municipalities.

- Big municipalities: from 100.000 - 400.000 inhabitants;
- Middle-sized municipalities: from 30.000 - 1000.000 inhabitants;
- Small-sized municipalities: < 30.000 inhabitants (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2021).

Given the above considerations on population size, a case selection was made that represents small, middle-sized and big municipalities within the province.

**Location** is used as a selection criterion since a wide dispersion of cases is more representative of conclusions about a region than a smaller dispersion of cases. It is argued that to be able to say anything about lobby influence within a province, one should broadly look at policy outcomes within the province in a geographical sense. Location can also be of

importance for contextual factors since municipalities might be influenced by their neighbouring municipalities; they might differ in their degree of rural or urban profile; and they might also differ in the degree in which they are represented within certain (rural and/or urban) networks, resulting in different ways of working, different topic focus (Dam, et al., 2020) and thus overall different *rules of the game*.

Table 1 on page 23 shows the case selection. The selection of **political parties** is based on national parties operating on the local level (such as D66, VVD) as well as independent local parties. This distinction is made because –to say something about the effects of the local lobby in general – you should look at local parties that do not get help or input ‘from above’ as well as at parties that are related to and influenced by their national umbrella party (Ostaaïjen, 2014). Political parties that also operate nationally are more sensitive to national trends and thus might focus on different subjects compared to local parties (Peters, Stipdonk, & Castenmiller, 2014). This points to the explanatory factor of *relevant trends and events*. Additionally, it is important to take these differences between parties into account because independent political parties have won most council seats in the Netherlands since 2002 and thus fulfil an important role within local democracies (Peters, Stipdonk, & Castenmiller, 2014; Ostaaïjen, 2014). Capturing different political parties in the case selection also points to the explanatory factor of *players involved*, since different parties exist of and attract different people with different political ideas, which also means that some players might have more and some might have less or no interest in the topic of CE. They thus might be more or less open to the influences of NGOs working on this topic. This also relates to the explanatory factor of the *nature of the relevant regime*, where different parties and combinations of parties within a coalition create different regimes and thus different opportunities for CE lobby. As such, the cases are selected to generalize findings over the province, and not for the sake of carrying out a comparative analysis.

### 5.3.3 Document analysis

Both official government documents and company documents can reveal a great deal of potentially significant information (Bryman, 2016). Election programs form the basis for coalition negotiations, and coalition programs are perceived to hold together local executive agendas, making them “*the most institutionalized type of policy agenda at the local level*” (Breeman, Scholten, & Timmermans, 2014, p. 22). Besides, they are an influential source for further policy-making during the 4-year term in office (Breeman, Scholten, & Timmermans, 2014). Thus, such documents are of interest to analyse for lobby influences. Lobby documents from the internship organization were analysed to see if inputs were adopted into election and coalition programs. The analysis of election and coalition programs focused on the magnitude and ways in which the circular economy was mentioned, while at the same time comparing documents from the elections of 2018 with the ones of 2022. This way, possible changes could be identified.

- 13 document analyses were carried out on local election programs of 2018;
- 13 document analyses were carried out on local election programs of 2022;
- 26 document analyses were carried out on local coalition programs of 2018;
- 26 document analyses were carried out on local coalition programs of 2022;
- 5 document analyses were carried out on lobby documents of NMU.

### 5.4 Validity and reliability

For qualitative research, comprehensibility of analyses, transferability, and plausibility of conclusions are important. Comprehensibility refers to whether or not the research can be

repeated (reliability). Transferability refers to whether or not results can be generalized (external validity). Plausibility refers to whether or not the researcher measured what was meant to be measured (internal validity) (Bryman, 2016; Thiel, 2014). To further ensure validity and reliability, triangulation can be applied by using multiple ways of collecting data (Thiel, 2014). Within this research, different methods of data collection were exploited: qualitative interviews with three different target groups and document analyses originating from these different target groups.

#### *Comprehensibility*

For a research project to be repeatable, concepts have to be used consistently (Bryman, 2016). The comprehensibility of this research is ensured through the establishment of topic lists for all forms of data collection to make sure concepts are used consistently. Besides, the researcher is transparent about which kind of sources, documents and respondents have been utilized and consulted, making it possible for others to conduct similar research.

#### *Transferability*

This research aims to come to generalizations of outcomes for regional NGOs in general. Rich accounts of data are delivered through interviews, transcripts, and document analyses, providing others with the option of examining the data to make judgements about transferability to other contexts (Bryman, 2016; Harrison, Birks, Franklin, & Mill, 2017).

#### *Plausibility*

A couple of measures were taken to ensure the outcomes of the gathered data will answer the research question. First, the interview guide and questions were based on a literature study and theoretical framework underpinning the research question. Second, interviewees were interviewed using the same interview guide to ensure unity in data. Last, data was structurally analysed using Atlas.ti to find patterns between answers.

## 6. Analysis

In this chapter, results from the causal analysis, interviews with NMU lobbyists, other lobbyists and political representatives are elaborated upon. First, some background on the goals of the lobbyists is given. Thereafter, the lobby input will be elaborated upon. Consequently, the results from the document analysis are shown. Then, the lobby interventions and their effectiveness according to the respondents will be elaborated upon. Last, the results are placed in the light of context, arena and outcome level factors.

### Goals NMU

To be able to estimate lobby influence, it is important to know what goals were set by the lobbying organisation. In the case of NMU, no direct goals were set for election programs. In contrast, a goal was set for coalition programs: to get CE adopted into all coalition programs in the province. More was expected from big municipalities than from small municipalities in terms of elaboration and plans: *Especially with smaller municipalities, I will already be happy when they mention a circular economy at all, that they are aware that it entails something different than continuing in the current manner... And especially for the bigger municipalities, I would find it very valuable if specific goals are matched to the topic. And also that they think about how those goals can be reached. So it differs per municipality. We just know that small municipalities are a bit behind, simply because they have less capacity.* - Sonja Sars, NMU

### Goals other lobbyists

Zero Waste Groene Hart did not have an explicit lobby goal for election or coalition programs but wanted to generally increase focus on the topic. They organised an election debate and thought along with two election programs. They are active in Woerden and its surroundings. Outcomes in election and coalition programs of Woerden thus cannot solely be attributed to lobby efforts of NMU/the Alliance. Living Lab Regio Foodvalley Circulair only focused on coalition programs (letter send to negotiating parties) and also had no explicitly stated goals. However, they hoped that the eight partnering municipalities would adopt CE in their coalition programs. Of these eight municipalities, three are also located within the province of Utrecht (Renswoude, Rhenen, Veenendaal) and are thus also within the target group of NMU/the Alliance. When CE is represented within coalition programs of these municipalities, this outcome cannot solely be attributed to lobby efforts of NMU/the Alliance.

### 6.1 Lobby input

NMU and the Circle Region Alliance (also referred to as 'the Alliance') have delivered multiple lobby inputs to be adopted within election and coalition programs. In May 2021, a manifesto with input for municipal election programs was distributed to all political parties within the province. This document provided nine points on CE that could be adopted in chapters on economy and/or sustainability within local election programs (see Appendix 1 for link to full document). This document also states practical recommendations for local implementation of CE policy (Alliantie Cirkelregio Utrecht, 2019). The nine recommendations included, in short:

- 1) Think circular: incorporate circular principles into municipal purchasing policy;
- 2) Act circular: use the ladder or circularity within municipal projects;
- 3) Cooperate circularly: make explicit and guarantee attention for CE in the municipal executive board by appointing an alderman with CE in its portfolio;
- 4) Provide a municipal raw materials strategy: let raw materials produced by the municipality (clippings, residual wood, etc.) be processed at the highest quality possible;
- 5) Develop and monitor regional indicators for CE;

- 6) Develop areas in your municipality as circular as possible, preferably together with future residents and entrepreneurs;
- 7) Initiate and support the development of zero waste buildings and areas and make a circular craft centre out of the municipal yard;
- 8) Develop a municipal circular building agenda for 2030;
- 9) Make regional agreements on sustainable construction (Alliantie Cirkelregio Utrecht, 2019).

Another lobby document distributed in name of the Alliance states six bullet points on CE to take up in coalition programs (see Appendix 2). This document was sent to coalition negotiators in April 2022 and (in short) consisted of the following:

- 1) Guarantee attention to the circular economy in the municipal executive board: appoint a portfolio holder (alderman) on CE in the municipal executive board;
- 2) Procure circularly;
- 3) Build and develop circularly: join the covenant Sustainable Construction where regional agreements on construction are made;
- 4) Support circular entrepreneurs;
- 5) Have raw materials produced by the municipality (clippings, residual wood, etc.) be processed as high-quality as possible: secure this in contracts with contractors;
- 6) Turn the recycling centre/municipal yard into a circular craft centre.

Next to these documents, activities were organized to stimulate and inspire local politicians and aldermen to work on CE and incorporate it into their election and coalition programs. These activities can be categorized into actions carried out before the elections and afterwards. Interventions carried out before the election were:

- a reminder of the manifest in October 2021 (email);
- a circular information tour for aldermen in November 2021 (event). During this event, the focus was on how municipalities can stimulate circular entrepreneurship. Besides, attention went to how CE could be adopted into coalition programs;
- a sustainability-focused election debate in March (which also focused on CE) for political parties within the municipality of Utrecht.

Interventions carried out after the elections were:

- a meeting for newly elected council members in April (event). This meeting focussed on what municipal councillors can do to stimulate CE within their municipality. Presentations on various themes were held by professionals in the field, also leading to questions and discussions. The themes were circular procurement and tenders; circular construction and area development; circular entrepreneurship; and collaboration for CE. Councillors were also asked to incorporate CE within their coalition negotiations (if they participated in these).

The above lobby inputs form the basis of this analysis, considering if the inputs were relevant, timed well, and maybe adopted into election and coalition programs.

Direct interventions of the other CE lobbyists within the province to influence election and coalition programs were:

- the organization of an election debate on sustainability and CE in Woerden (R16);
- letters sent to the coalition negotiators to get CE into the coalition programs (R14, R16).

More indirect actions that were not specifically targeted at election and coalition programs, but that might have had an influence, were:

- to deliver the right information at the right place and time for it to be taken up in programs (R15);
- the organization of informative events for municipal councillors throughout the year (R14);
- the organization of a tour along CE initiatives and businesses (R14).

### *Lobby strategies*

The lobby input and interventions were targeted toward multiple groups using multiple instruments. Timing and choice of intervention were deliberately chosen: *All those actions have their role. An election program is the responsibility of the local party board... Not that of the party representatives, not that of the alderman. And of course, there are mutual connections in a municipality... So on the one hand, it is very targeted in trying to influence the people that hold the pen at a certain moment. On the other hand, it is more unfocused, trying to stir up such a theme within the network.* – Peter Smit, NMU

Certain interventions are tied to the size of the target group and the expected output: *The instrument depends on the size of your target group. I mean, those party representatives, that are more than 300 people. I don't need to have all of those in a room together... We wanted to influence their texts. So either way, you will send a text to the people that have to write. Text for text. And a gathering with ambassadors, a vulnerable conversation, that fits better in the setting of a small venue... So yes, form and function belong together. And we definitely think about that.* – Peter Smit, NMU.

Different approaches in the lobby for election and coalition programs were used. For election programs, the target group was as broad as possible, whereas the lobby for coalition programs was targeted at a much smaller group: *See, for election programs, that's a long shot, you send it to as many people as possible. For coalition programs, especially with the bigger municipalities, I can imagine that.. when it's people at the table that we know, that we will call them and send them an extra email.* – Sonja Sars, NMU

## 6.2 Document analysis

As part of the causal analysis, an extensive document analysis is carried out based on a comparison between the NGO's policy input and the policy outcome. As such, lobby inputs are compared with the election and coalition programs. 13 election programs for 2018 and 13 election programs for 2022 (corresponding to the political parties in the case selection) are compared to lobby inputs of NMU/the Alliance to see if and how texts/themes correspond with each other and if there is an increased or decreased focus on CE. Since NMU's goal was to get CE in all coalition programs, all 26 programs within the province are analysed. Here as well, programs of 2018 and 2022 are analysed to see if there was and increased/decreased focus on the topic.

Lobby inputs of NMU/the Alliance are categorized into the following CE themes:

- Waste (waste separation, recycling centre, clippings, residual wood, biomass)
  - Design a circular recycling centre/municipal yard;
  - Process raw materials produced by the municipality (clippings, residual wood, biomass) as high-quality as possible;
  - Initiate and support the development of waste-free buildings and areas, and set a good example within the City Hall.
- Construction and area development

- Develop areas circularly;
- Develop a circular municipal construction agenda for 2030;
- Make regional arrangements for sustainable construction.
- Indicators and monitoring
  - Develop and monitor regional indicators for CE.
- Procurement and tenders
  - Circular procurement and tenders: buy products that retain the value of raw materials; that use energy from renewable sources and are repairable.
- Cooperation
  - Assign an alderman on the topic of CE and develop circular municipal policies;
  - Cooperate regionally
- Support entrepreneurs and residents to act circularly.
- Use the ladder of circularity for municipal projects.

To be able to search for resemblances in CE themes and lobby themes, a couple of search words are used. These are (translated from Dutch): circular/circularity, waste, procurement, tenders, biomass, biobased, recycle/recycling, reuse, reduce (residual) wood, thrift shops, cycles, and clippings. For every hit on a search word, an assessment is made if the hit relates to CE themes. For example, reduction of waste and recycling of materials is included in coding, while hits on how many times a month household waste would be collected is not (more practical and not related to what happens with the waste afterwards).

### 6.2.1 CE in election programs

To influence election programs, NMU/the Alliance delivered input to take up into the programs (see p. 27-28). Generally, attention to CE increased on the themes that were lobbied for by NMU as can be seen in figure 7 (political parties within case selection that mention CE in coalition program) and figure 8 (total amount of times CE is mentioned within selected election programs). Overall attention to CE increased as well, also on themes NMU/the Alliance did not lobby for (category 'other'). Direct adoptions of lobby input are not found. Indirect adoption is observed in the form of resemblances in lobby input and textual output in programs.

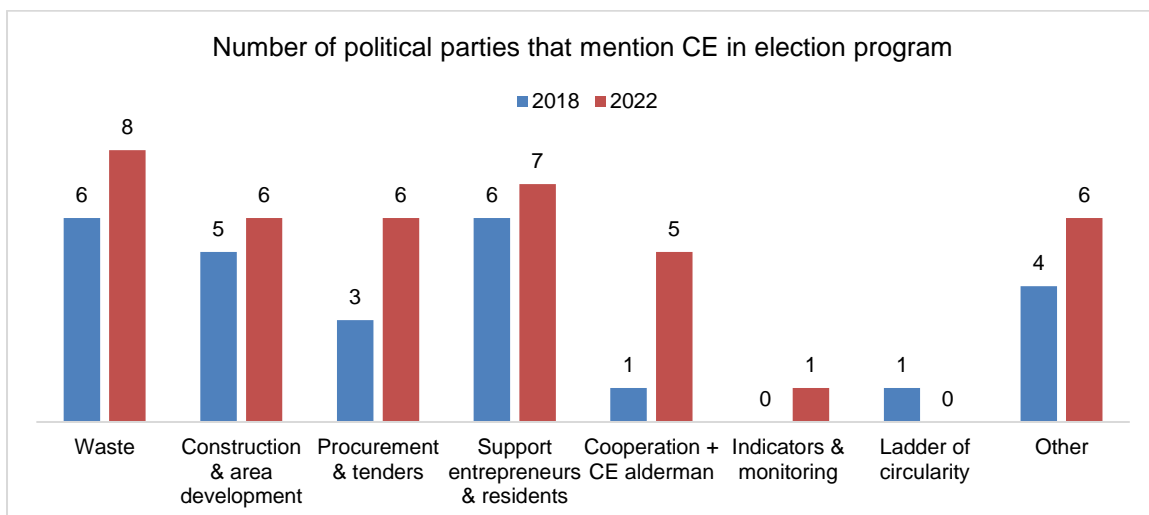


Figure 6: Number of political parties that mention CE in election program (regardless of how many times they mention it)

The table below shows how often a CE lobby theme is mentioned in election programs of 2018 and 2022, what kind of parties (nationally or locally rooted) mention this, and in what kind of municipalities these parties are located (B = big, MS = middle-sized, S = small).

Table 2: CE in election programs

	Programs mentioning	National parties	Local parties
<b>Circular procurment &amp; tenders</b>	2018: 3 2022: 6	2018: 3 (2B, 1 MS) 2022: 6 (3B, 2 MS, 1S)	2018: 0 2022: 0
<b>Ladder of circularity</b>	2018: 1* 2022: 0	2018: 1 (B) 2022: 0	2018: 0 2022: 0
<b>Cooperation/CE Alderman</b>	2018: 1 * 2022: 5 *	2018: 1 (MS) 2022: 5 (4B, 1 MS)	2018: 0 2022: 0
<b>Waste</b>	2018: 6 2022: 8	2018: 4 (3B, 1 MS) 2022: 5 (4B, 1 MS)	2018: 2 (1 MS, 1S) 2022: 3 (1 MS, 2S)
<b>Monitoring &amp; indicators</b>	2018: 0 2022: 1	2018: 0 2022: 1 (B)	2018: 0 2022: 0
<b>Construction &amp; area development</b>	2018: 5 2022: 6	2018: 3 (2B, 1 MS) 2022: 6 (4B, 2 MS)	2018: 2 (1 MS, 1S) 2022: 0
<b>Support business &amp; residents</b>	2018: 6 2022: 7	2018: 5 (3B, 2 MS) 2022: 6 (4B, 2 MS)	2018: 1 (MS) 2022: 1 (MS)
<b>Other</b>	2018: 4 2022: 6	2018: 2 (1B, 1 MS) 2022: 5 (3B, 1 MS, 1S)	2018: 2 (1 MS, 1S) 2022: 1 (S)

\* *Ladder of circularity*: this program mentioned the R-imperatives of reduce, reuse and recycle, 'closing loops' and also 'minimizing loops'.

\* *Alderman with CE portfolio*: no programs mentioned appointing an alderman. Numbers show how many parties mentioned collaboration for CE. However, in 2018, 6 municipalities did have an alderman with CE in their portfolio. In 2022, 7 municipalities appointed an alderman with CE in their portfolio.

Two things stand out here. First, nationally rooted parties (within case selection) mention CE within lobby themes of NMU more compared to locally rooted parties. Second, for nationally rooted parties a higher increase is visible in amount of times CE is mentioned on lobby topics of NMU as compared to local parties.

When looking at the total numbers of codes made on CE topics in election programs (instead of how many parties mentioned it), an overall increase is visible in the number of times CE is mentioned in almost all categories NMU/the Alliance delivered input on (except waste and the ladder of circularity). The decline in the category of waste could indicate a shift in focus towards a broader understanding of circularity than just waste reduction and recycling. The highest increase is visible in the categories of circular construction and area development; support for entrepreneurs/residents; and cooperation. There is also an increase in the category 'other', indicating an overall increase in focus on CE, also for categories that were not mentioned within the lobby input of NMU/the Alliance.

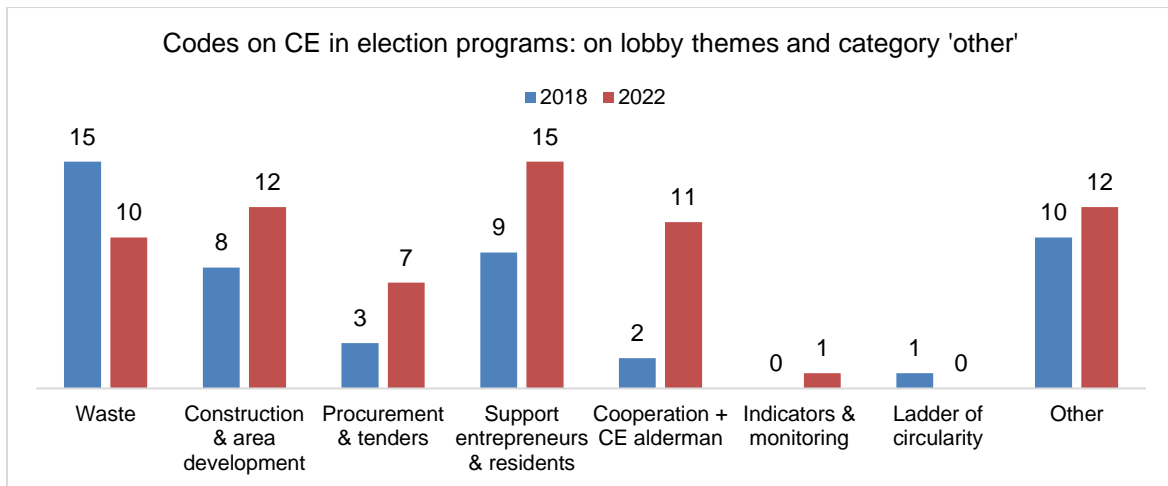


Figure 7: total of codes on CE in election programs

### 6.2.2 CE in coalition programs

In coalition programs of 2018, by far the most focus went towards waste separation, reuse of materials out of waste and reducing waste. Thereafter, the most focus was directed to construction & area development, cooperation, and support of entrepreneurs and residents. In coalition programs of 2022, focus is more dispersed over circular topics. Overall, CE is mentioned more often. Waste; construction & area development; support for entrepreneurs & residents; and 'other' themes are mentioned most often. Direct adoptions of lobby input are not found. Indirect adoption is observed in the form of resemblances in lobby input (themes/categories) and textual output within programs.

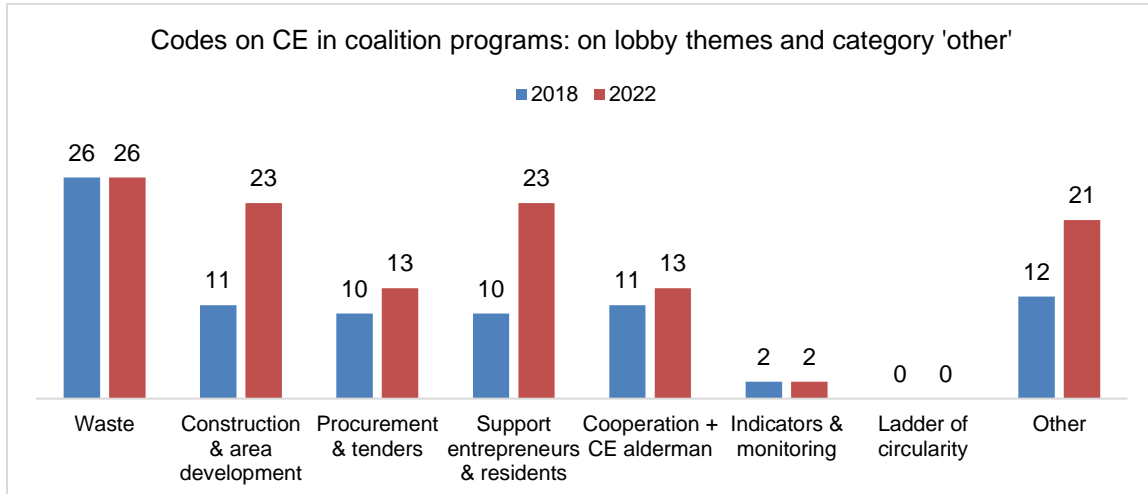


Figure 8: total of codes on CE in coalition programs

To influence coalition programs, NMU/the Alliance send out a lobby document with six bullet points to take up in these programs (see p. 28). When comparing coalition programs from 2018 and 2022 with these six points, coalition programs of the municipalities mentioned below showed resemblances with the lobby input.

#### *Circular construction and area development*

2018: Amersfoort, Eemnes, Leusden, Montfoort, Utrecht, Wijk bij Duurstede

2022: **Amersfoort**, Baarn, **Bunnik**, **Houten**, Montfoort, Nieuwegein, **Oudewater**, **Rhenen**,

**Stichtse Vecht, Utrecht, Utrechtse Heuvelrug, Vijfheerenlanden, Woerden.**

\* Municipalities in **bold** explicitly mention the covenant for sustainable construction, which also entails circular construction (and which is explicitly mentioned in the lobby input).

#### *Circular procurement & tenders*

2018: Amersfoort, Baarn, Houten, Lopik, Montfoort, Utrecht, Utrechtse Heuvelrug.

2022: Amersfoort, Baarn, De Bilt, Houten, Nieuwegein, Oudewater, Utrecht, Woerden, Woudenberg, Zeist.

#### *Support local circular businesses and residents' initiatives*

2018: Amersfoort, Houten, Rhenen, Utrecht, Utrechtse Heuvelrug, Veenendaal, Vijfheerenlanden, Woudenberg.

2022: Amersfoort, Baarn, De Bilt, Nieuwegein, Utrecht, Utrechtse Heuvelrug, Veenendaal, Woerden, Woudenberg, Zeist.

#### *Appoint alderman with CE portfolio*

2018: Amersfoort, De Bilt, Houten, Utrecht, Veenendaal, Zeist.

2022: Amersfoort, Bunnik, Utrecht, Veenendaal, Woerden, Wijk bij Duurstede, Zeist.

*Have raw materials produced by the municipality (clippings, residual wood, etc.) be processed as high-quality as possible and secure this within contracts about such processing*

2018: 0      2022: 0

#### *Circular municipal yard*

2018: Wijk bij Duurstede

2022: Oudewater, Rhenen, Utrecht, Vijfheerenlanden

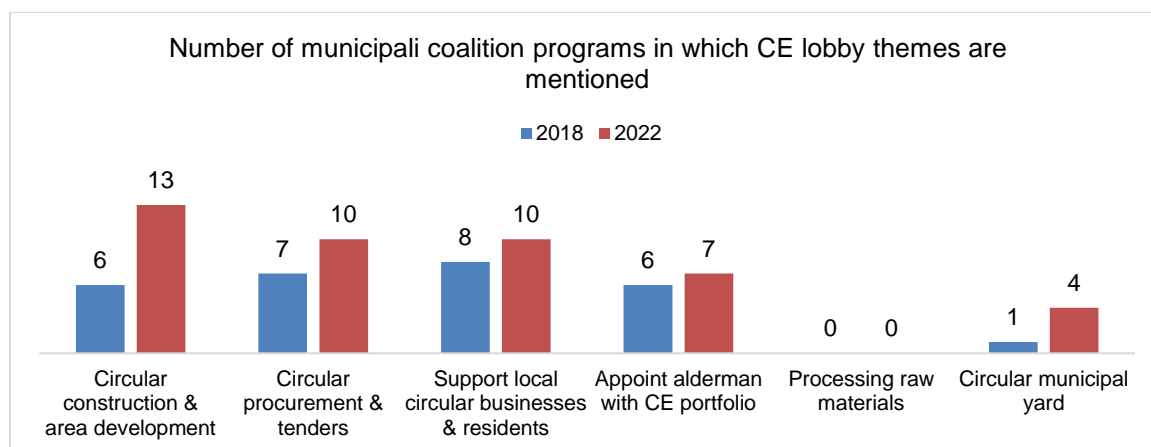


Figure 9: number of municipal coalition programs in which lobby themes are mentioned

In 2018, 13 out of 26 municipalities mentioned CE on the topics NMU lobbied for. Amersfoort, Houten, Montfoort, Utrecht, Utrechtse Heuvelrug, Veenendaal and Wijk bij Duurstede mentioned multiple lobby topics of NMU. This does not mean that the other 13 municipalities did not mention CE as a topic (all 26 mentioned something that could be categorized under CE), just that they did not mention CE within the lobby topics of NMU specifically. In 2022, 18 out of 26 municipalities mentioned CE on the topics NMU lobbied for. Of these 18 programs, 16 programs mentioned CE on more than one of the topics NMU lobbied for.

### Goal-achievement

In 2018, CE themes were mentioned in all coalition programs. However, in seven of these, only waste separation was mentioned. So more explicit focus on CE as a topic was present in 19 out of 26 programs. In 2022, CE themes were mentioned in 22 out of 26 coalition programs, which is a decrease of 4 compared to 2018. This also means the goal to get CE adopted into all coalition programs is not met. In only 3 programs the focus did not substantiate the level of waste separation. However, since 4 programs did not mention something on CE at all, the total of programs not substantiating the level of waste separation is still seven (same as 2018). This means that a more explicit focus on CE as a topic was present in 19 out of 26 programs, which is the same as in 2018. However, the overall amount of times CE is observed in programs of 2022 exceeded the level of 2018. Besides, in programs that did mention CE, the overall focus is broader than it was in 2018 (on more CE categories).

The decrease in programs in which CE was observed can partly be explained by the kind of coalition program that is used. For example, Leusden and Lopik used formats that demand briefer programs in 2022 as compared to 2018 (e.g. only on general outlines of plans or a general agenda). For other municipalities using such briefer formats, a decrease in times CE was mentioned is observed as well. For the other two municipalities where CE disappeared from the program (Eemnes & IJsselstein), no reason is found other than a change in coalition parties.

This part of the causal analysis showed results from an extensive document analysis comparing lobby inputs and textual outputs. The following paragraphs will focus on results from the interviews with lobbyists and political representatives. The other elements of the causal analysis are woven into these next paragraphs.

### 6.3 Lobby interventions and their effectiveness

Political respondents shared their views on how lobby interventions carried out by NMU/the Alliance could affect political parties in general and more precisely, if they had affected their own party programs. Below, this will be elaborated upon per lobby intervention. Hereafter, the effects of lobby in general and the effects of the specific NMU/Alliance lobby according to political respondents and lobbyists themselves will be discussed.

#### Manifest

In May 2021, the Alliance send out a document (manifest) with nine points of action for CE that could be adopted into municipal election programs. Opinions on the timing of the distribution differ between parties. Some think it was sent too early (R8, R9, R11), and others think it was sent out too late (R3, R4, R5). For others the timing was fine (R1, R2, R6, R10, R11, R17).

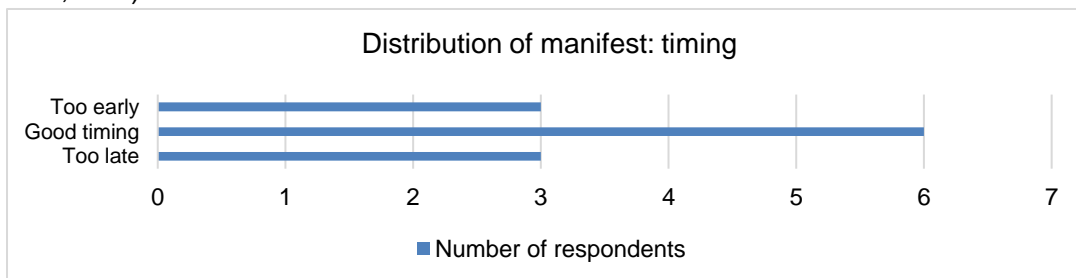


Figure 10: views on the timing of the distribution of the manifest

What stands out here is that generally, parties that think the manifest was sent out too late, are nationally rooted parties in big municipalities. Parties that think the timing was fine, are

generally locally rooted parties in small or middle-sized municipalities.

Regarding the contents of the manifest, opinions between respondents are more aligned. Generally, sending a compact document to political parties with specific points of action that can be adopted into election programs is seen as a good lobby strategy. However, oftentimes, only sending a document or letter will not suffice. To make your message stick, you should also organize something around your message. A personal approach and possibly teaming up with local organisations are seen as most effective: *But I always think, but that will cost you more time, to make personal contact. I think that is more effective. Or to, for example, let people sign something. To create an official moment of signing etcetera. Parties are willing to commit themselves to such a thing. Because it is also a nice moment of publicity. Those are more effective things than sending a letter.* – R5

Although the idea and contents of the manifest are overall considered quite effective, it still depends on the priorities of political parties whether or not the information is adopted into an election program. For some parties, CE is just not a priority and focus is directed towards other topics: *We probably thought: that's nice and good, but we have other priorities. We will do what is imposed upon us nationally and that's it.* – R11

#### *Circular tour*

In November 2021, an event was organised as part of a 'circular tour'. This event primarily focused on stimulating circular entrepreneurs within municipalities and was aimed at aldermen. Some focus also went to the incorporation of CE in coalition programs. Views on the timing and focus of this event are quite aligned. It is seen as too late for election programs (R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R11) and too early for coalition programs (R1, R3, R5, R7). As such, this intervention is seen as ineffective for getting CE adopted into election or coalition programs. However, the organisation of such an event is seen as positive and beneficial for trying to exercise lobby influence more in general (so outside of elections). Despite that, the target group is seen as a bit too narrow (R12) and aldermen are usually not involved with the creation of election programs, which makes them a less logical target group if your goal is to influence these programs.

*The event is targeted at aldermen. Well, that means that if you're lucky, of all municipalities, one alderman participates. You have 26 aldermen in Utrecht. They represent only one political party within the municipal council. So with a little bit of luck, if you get to that person, you will see it back in the election program of that party. But it is.. you reach too few people.* – R12

#### *Interventions right before the elections (election debate)*

Interventions carried out right before the elections (February or March), are not seen as effective for influencing coalition negotiations. Coalition negotiations are based on election programs so, to influence coalition programs, election programs should be influenced (R9, R11). Another reason is that CE as a topic in itself is not seen as politically tense. An event organised right before the elections thus won't influence if the topic will be taken into account during coalition negotiations (R9, R12, R17). Not all respondents share this view. Some state that, for example, an election debate could highlight what topics are locally important. This way a debate can still have an effect on local political parties (R5, R10). Besides, such debates can be used to make politicians speak up on topics, making them more accountable to live up to their statements (R17). However, the period right before the elections is very busy, thus political parties might not be open to new events.

### *Interventions after the elections (event for council members & letters to coalition negotiators)*

Opinions on the effects of interventions right after the elections vary. In April 2022, NMU hosted an event for newly chosen council members to inform them of possibilities to work on CE. Councillors were invited to also include the topic in coalition negotiations and following programs. According to some respondents, this time right after the elections is too busy to effectively organize and influence coalition negotiations. They suggest to wait for these kinds of events until after summer (R7, R9, R11). Others think an event during this time can be useful for new council members to gather information and possibly inform their colleagues involved with coalition negotiations: *Well, if you organize it for new council members to show it is very easy to act in the field of sustainability, then I think it is very interesting. And then there will also be people whose colleagues are present during negotiations, and they can pick it up. So I think that is a relatively good strategy.* – R12

Sending out letters to coalition negotiators is seen as effective (R5, R11, R17). The negotiating parties are often actively looking for information that can be easily adopted into a coalition program. Sending in a document such as the one of NMU/the Alliance is seen as the most effective and relevant activity that can be taken here. Such actions, however, are considered most effective if lobby was also carried out beforehand.

### *Other possible interventions*

Next to the interventions of NMU that were discussed, some other interventions are suggested that can possibly be effective for getting CE adopted into election and coalition programs.

- One suggestion is to contact civil servants that write the transfer document for new municipal councillors. This document is often used during negotiations. Thus, getting CE into these documents can be very effective: *Look, I think you will achieve much more if you contact the municipal employees on sustainability around January or February and say: 'you will be making the transfer document from the old to the new council, this is a good idea for the next years, can you include it?' Then it will get to the people that will form a coalition. Well, if it's in there and it is something that doesn't threaten anyone, so everyone can easily say 'yes I want to join this'. I think you would have the most effects via such a document.* – R12
- Another suggestion is to contact the national umbrella parties (R1, R8, R12). These national parties often send their local branches a guideline for their local election program. When CE is included in existing guidelines, the chances of local branches adopting this topic increase. This does however mean that your lobby activities have to start earlier and have to take place on a different (national) level.
- Yet another suggestion is to present your lobby topic during a municipal council meeting (R5). This way, all municipal councillors are directly addressed and can learn more/ask questions about the topic.

### *Perspectives on CE lobby influence in general*

Generally, **lobbyists** believe that lobbying for CE results in the topic being more well-known and visible in election and coalition programs. However, they recognize that national attention and focus on CE is also growing, resulting in CE being more present in election and coalition programs. Thus, the regional and local lobby does not account for all presence of CE in these programs: *I expect that the general interest for circularity ensures that it is already seen more as a priority for some parties. But it's almost a national development in which municipalities simply participate... But yeah, such a lobby letter that we send, I do hope that helps to make the topic more explicit for political parties.... So I think that the topic would be equally present without our lobby, but that you still have to try and do something.* – Living Lab Regio Foodvalley Circulair

All lobbyists believe that their lobby has at least some kind of influence, but also find it difficult to assess the exact degree of their part: *Yes, I want to believe that the answer is that our work has an effect. But I don't know... I can't estimate it, because I can't read their minds. Nor do I know how they work... It is also nice to see that CE is now mentioned a bit more broadly throughout the political spectrum, also at VVD and CDA, but I don't know if that's because of us.* – Tim Bulters, NMU.

*Well, almost all municipalities in [region] had something on CE in their coalition agreement. In [place] it was very focused on procurement... In [other place] it also got an impulse, money was allocated to it, and they got a coordinator within the municipality. The alderman became portfolio holder for CE in the entire region, so it has been put on the agenda here. In [other place] they got a program manager on CE... And I do think that's because we were quite visible. Maybe also because we sent a letter, but also just because we have a network and we do it together and it is an important theme. That does help to get it translated into ambitions.* – Living Lab Regio Foodvalley Circular

Other possible factors of influence are observed as well. One is that of societal development in general: *Well, just social development. Ministries that pay more attention to this. The research bureaus of the political parties themselves. That kind of sources.* – Tim Bulters, NMU.

Personal preferences and activities on CE are also considered as important for CE to appear in programs: *I think that more generally the case is that the province has a very active official working on CE. And that person is also working and pushing in name of the Alliance. And I think that that does affect a lot of municipalities as well.* – Sonja Sars, NMU.

Views of **political respondents** on the general effect of CE lobby vary. Some do not see effects of lobby on their election programs. Others feel like there can be an effect, but it is too little to be distinguished on its own. Others do see some small effects. One respondent was unsure (no answer). Two respondents answered more loosely, stating that they felt like CE would be mentioned less in election and coalition programs without lobby (R8, R9).

Table 3: general lobby influence

Degree of general CE lobby influence on own election program	Respondents
None	R1, R3, R4, R17
Little (not substantial)	R5, R6, R12
Some (substantial)	R2

### *Perspectives on CE lobby influence of NMU/the Alliance*

Views on the effect of NMU's lobby specifically vary as well. For some **political respondents**, there is no effect to be distinguished as a result of lobby efforts. Others feel like there can be an effect, but that it is little and not substantial enough to be distinguished on its own. Some think an effect can be distinguished: *I think there is an influence there, yeah. I also don't know another organisation that is working on it for example.* – R10

Table 4: lobby influence of NMU

Degree of NMU lobby influence	Respondents
None	R4, R6, R11
Little (not substantial)	R1, R5, R7, R8, R12
Some (substantial)	R2, R10, R17

Overall, input for election programs is welcome and useful. The effect however depends on the interests of the party and committee: *All that input is always very welcome for the election program committee because they can't know everything, so they will read all of it. So in that sense, it*

*might not be fair to say that there is little influence. But my own opinion is that what ends up in there [election program] depends on the people that write it and the members that co-read. More than all input we receive. – R8*

**Other lobbyists** within the province (next to NMU/the Alliance) have varying opinions on the influence of NMU/the Alliance. Some think NMU/the Alliance has a greater influence on CE within programs than other (more local) lobbyists, due to their way of working and their organisation in a partnership: *I do believe that the Circle Region Alliance has the most influence on decision-making because they have a strong presence in the administrative network. A lot of partners have signed up and a lot of energy goes into the network... So I think NMU has the best feeling for how to influence through the right messages and through being present at the right tables. – Living Lab Regio Foodvalley Circulair*

Others believe that NMU/the Alliance has less influence because they are further removed from the local situation: *Locally here in [place], I don't think they have such a great deal of influence... What you see is that, because NMU is located in Utrecht city, they did organize an election debate there, not here in [place]. Where lies your influence? Right there... So to cut it a bit short: they would have had to do that not only for the city of Utrecht but 26 times... – municipal employee sustainability.*

Teaming up with local organisations is seen as a way to possibly expand local influence. Local organisations are believed to have more local influence than regional organisations. This also means that the local influence of NMU/the Alliance is seen as less substantial: *I think that if NMU wants to do something and they support us and we are the face of the message, together with them, we might have more impact. Because people in Woerden already know us. But when NMU does something, people think, what is NMU?.. So I think you can support each other in that sense. – Kirsty Mulder, Zero Waste Groene Hart.*

**Ego-perception respondents** (from NMU/the Alliance) believe that NMU/the Alliance has a somewhat bigger influence than lobby organizations in the province outside of the partnership. Important here is that lobby effort is deliberately bundled within the Alliance, so not many lobby organisations within the province operate completely separated from this partnership. Besides, quite some CE organisations have limited lobby options since they are primarily government-led. Lastly, the difference between regionally and locally operating lobbyists is pointed out. Regionally operating lobbyists have better oversight and more (regional) policy influence, whereas locally operating lobbyists have better local contacts and ties, thus heightening their lobby influences: *Well, I think we are more focussed. So we work in all municipalities within the province... So I think we have a bit more influence in that sense. But they are more closely located, more zoomed in. So then you have better contact with all actors. – Tim Bulters, NMU.*

Given all of the above, a small degree of lobby influence for NMU can be observed. The differences and ambiguity in results indicate that national trends, personal opinions and personal circumstances of respondents seem to be of great importance in determining whether or not lobby interventions are effective and thus whether or not lobby influence can be observed. Views on the effectiveness of lobby interventions and on NMU's overall lobby influence can be better understood by looking at explanatory factors. In the paragraphs below these factors are elaborated upon.

## 6.4 Explanatory factors

The above outcomes of the EAC method can be put into perspective by looking at the explanatory factors at the context, arena, and outcome level.

### 6.4.1 Context level factors

Context level factors involve the nature of the relevant regime; the distribution of resources; the rules of the game; and relevant trends and events. The most important findings are the following:

- No real obstacles to lobby are found within the *nature of the relevant regime*. However, some players do not regard NMU as a lobby organization, which might weaken political influence. Besides, local lobby carried out by a regional organization is regarded as illogical by some. This can hinder lobby efforts as well.
- Most *resources* lie with national lobby organisations, which are mostly not active on a local or regional level. This leaves fewer resources for lobby and thus influence at these local and regional levels.
- As for *rules of the game*, the process of creating election programs is more open and accessible than that of coalition programs. This might also depend on the players involved and if they are open to lobby efforts.
- Lastly, the explanatory factor of *relevant trends and events* is of importance. The (inter)nationally growing attention for CE might decrease the need for regional and local lobby. However, it can also mean that there is more need for local translations of (inter)national goals, leaving more space for local lobby.

#### *Nature of relevant regime*

The nature of the relevant regime determines if existing rules enable certain players' interests. Rules can constrain the influence of government-led lobby organisations since governments generally do not partake in lobby activities targeted at their own organisation. Within the Alliance, there are some governmental bodies present. This can make lobbying a bit trick. However, in these instances, the Alliance is divided into subgroups of which some actors can still perform lobby activities. It is believed that partnerships such as the Alliance are beneficial for the effects of lobby since it shows that the lobby message is shared among actors in the field. Besides, in allying, all lobby efforts are bundled, resulting in greater influence: *Generally, I think it is beneficial for every message to be distributed in name of multiple actors instead of one... We call that triple helix: that you try to get different actors together. When they say something collectively it carries more weight.* – Tim Bulters, NMU

Some players within the regime do not regard NMU as a lobby organization (R8, R10, R15). This might lessen their lobby influence. But overall, no major obstacles exist within the regime.

#### *Distribution of resources*

Generally, organisations with more resources are more successful lobbyists. At the local level, there are not many actors present with a lot of (monetary) resources. The actors that do have these resources, often only operate on a national level, thus leaving fewer resources and lobbying power on a local level: *But the national organisations that focus on topics that are also of decentralized importance don't pay a lot of attention to the municipal elections, it's a side issue... And it keeps surprising me how few organisations with a lot of power operate within the local playing field... Whether it's Greenpeace or Friends of the Earth, none of them did something concerning the elections... I don't want to say it's less efficient, but what remains are organisations with way less budget that are involved in influencing local policy. That's a shame.* – expert interview.

### *Nature of rules of the game*

Rules of the game determine if and how organisations can participate in negotiations and decision-making. The accessibility of the process depends on the willingness of political parties and representatives to participate in discussions on CE, and their interests in general on this topic (see *players involved* under arena-level factors).

### *Relevant trends & events*

Certain trends and events enable or constrain lobby efforts. Multiple respondents point out that the national focus on CE is growing, and the urgency is also articulated nationally. This can make regional and local lobby easier since the lobby message is backed-up by national authorities. However, it can also decrease the efficiency of local lobby efforts when the national focus and lobby trickle down to the local level and influence local activities directly without needing interventions from regional or local lobby organisations. Multiple respondents state that CE is more of a national topic and that frameworks of national political parties might be the quickest way to get CE into local election programs. However, respondents also point out that they need local translations on topics such as CE, indicating the need for organisations that can make these translations. This leaves room for local lobby and indicates that national and local lobbies reinforce each other.

### 6.4.2 Arena level factors

Arena-level factors involve the nature of the policy issue; the nature of negotiations; players involved; and players' interventions. The most important findings are the following:

- The *nature of the policy issue* is of importance. The transition towards a CE is regarded as being in its early stages. On the one hand, this leaves a lot of room for lobby. On the other hand, this makes lobby more difficult, given that local politicians sometimes still need to be convinced of its local relevance. Besides, CE is often seen as a national rather than a local topic. This points to the need for local translations mentioned earlier.
- For the *nature of negotiations*, the process of election programs is seen as more accessible than the process of coalition programs.
- For the *players involved*, the interests and knowledge of local politicians are often decisive for whether or not CE is adopted within programs. Furthermore, the political processes of locally rooted parties are often harder to trace and these local parties demand more local translations of national goals, increasing lobby difficulty. Besides, the position of regional organisations for local lobby is questioned. It might be better to team up with local organisations that have direct ties to local politicians and parties.
- Lastly, the *interventions* were generally regarded as good. Timing is more often a problem than content.

### *Nature of policy issue*

The nature of the policy issue creates different opportunities to intervene. Different motivations and reasons can be distinguished when looking at how and why CE appears in election and coalition programs. One reason to include the topic is that the concept is rooted within sustainability focussed views of a party (R1, R3, R4, R5 & R8). Another reason is that the interests of the people within the party are aligned with the topic (R8, R12, R17), or input is given from other local branches or the national umbrella party. Another reason is that in general, input and attention for the topic are growing within society, the municipality and/or the political party (R10, R17).

*We are a liberal and entrepreneurial party, so we are looking at ways to ensure that those sustainability ambitions are achieved in a way that also benefits the economy instead of just from regulation. The CE*

*is of course a very good example of this because there is simply money to be made with it, so we think it's important. And because of that, we see it as a chance to move to a new kind of economy, we've been saying that for years. – R5*

Reasons not to focus on CE are the prevalence of other priorities, or CE being a too niche or difficult sustainability subject (R9, R10, R11). Besides, CE as a topic or transition is not that far along yet, resulting in the lobby being primarily focused on displaying initiatives. Furthermore, with the transition toward a CE being less far along than other sustainability transitions, more and different lobby activities are needed. Getting circularity on the agenda at all is still relevant, while other transitions are more about acceleration and scaling. This leaves room for local lobby because politicians oftentimes still need to be made aware of the issue, or need to be convinced of its local urgency and local perspectives to act. Getting people involved and active can be an issue, making lobby influence more difficult to achieve. As mentioned earlier, multiple respondents perceive CE as more of a national topic: *With circularity I noticed, and I have quite some knowledge on sustainability, that circularity is still kind of a black box. It can go in all directions and there are so many initiatives. – R1.*

*The transition to a CE, as far as we are concerned, is enforced mostly at the European level and in The Hague. And ultimately, we should make linear models that produce more environmental pollution less competitive and thus give the associated environmental damage a higher price. That's something you typically manage through tax systems, which you simply regulate through The Hague. – Jelmer Vierstra, Natuur & Milieu.*

Furthermore, circular businesses or initiatives are often held back by barriers in national legislation or are simply not rewarded enough to act circularly. This points out the need for action on a national level. Here as well, the role of municipalities within a CE is regarded to be smaller, decreasing the chances and possible effects of local lobby: *For CE, the role of municipalities is even more open-ended. So you have to get lucky that there is a hobbyist within the municipal council that thinks it's important, or a civil servant or alderman. And that makes the lobby much more difficult. Because when you only have to say: 'you have to act either way and we have some ideas on how you can best to that'. That's way easier than saying: it's important for the world but you're not obliged, but it would be cool if you could do something with it. And to be honest, that's the case for CE. Except for waste, because municipalities are obliged to make separate waste collection possible. – Jelmer Vierstra, Natuur & Milieu.*

### *Nature of negotiations*

The nature of negotiations can create different lobby opportunities. The process and timing of the creation of **election programs** vary between parties. However, some general processes can be distinguished. National parties with a local branch often begin about a year before the elections. For local parties, this process often begins a few months later with some starting in September/October and others in December (with elections in March). Most of the time, a committee of members is composed that writes the program. The old election program is often a source of information; the party delivers input; and information is drawn from residents, local businesses and organizations. Around autumn most parties officially establish their election program through the approval of members during a general meeting. Especially for nationally rooted parties, but often also for locally rooted parties, lobby information from organisations often is sent out too late for it to be adopted into election programs: *Especially in the run-up to the municipal elections, we get all sorts of emails from people that think we should pay attention to something. And my tip is to do that very early. Because the election program is written during summer... And in September, October it is already finished. And very often, we get emails in October or November. Even now. Well, the election program has long been determined. And you can still hand us things to*

*consider if we get elected into the municipal board, but if you want something to be adopted into an election program, you have to start earlier than most emails we receive. Then you have to email us in August. – R8*

Overall, the process of creating election programs is regarded as open and accessible. The expert interview endorses this view: *So it's quite easy to deliver a brief piece of text that fits well with the party you send it to. And when you have a bit of authority on that topic or can show that there are more interests and it's a serious message that should be taken into account, in general, things can be quite literally adopted within election programs. – expert interview.*

The process of creating **coalition programs** is generally the same between municipalities. Parties negotiate to discover if they can form a coalition. Election programs are leading within this process. Besides, current local, regional and national topics are considered. When a coalition is formed, an agreement is written. Based on this, aldermen and municipal councillors are appointed to the municipal board. Overall, creating a coalition program is seen as a more closed-off process compared to the process of election programs. There is less room for new insights or topics and there are fewer people at the table that can influence the negotiations. Besides, during this process, there is generally less need for contact with organisations. However, in some instances, contacts with residents, experts or organisations still occur: *That is a very select group that usually consists of the party leaders and a plus one. And there are very confidential circles around them that think along with them. But there is certainly also interaction with the city, conversations with the city, invitations of experts from in- and outside the municipal organisation are of course also part of that. – R3*

The expert interview endorses the above view on coalition negotiations: *But that is way more difficult for coalition programs because they are much briefer. Many topics are not discussed within a coalition agreement, and especially not elaborated on... So it's quite difficult to deliver something that fits within the writings of a coalition agreement. And I think it helps when you have been present during the full process. So if you've influenced election programs, but have also been present during all campaigns. That you made sure all parties were aware of the urgency of your topic, that maybe you organized a debate where they had to state they would include the topic in coalition programs and that you also handed them something to be able to do so. You need all of that for [influencing] coalition programs. – expert interview.*

### *Players involved*

The political influence of an NGO can be (partly) explained by the players that are present. Adoption of the topic within programs in part depends on the interests and knowledge of political representatives. For this, municipal size can also play a role. Multiple respondents state that small municipalities have less capacity to focus on a broad range of (sustainability) topics. This also means that CE as such is often seen as too much of a niche subject for political actors within small municipalities. Besides, there are differences between nationally and locally rooted parties. It might be easier to influence the programs of nationally rooted parties since these often rely less on local translations of broader topics. Locally rooted parties ask for more local translations of topics, thus indicating the need for a more personal lobby approach, taking up more time and resources: *You for sure can notice that with themes that are not exclusively tied to a certain municipality, that those are much more likely to be included in election programs of the local branches of national parties... It does not matter that much if it's not specifically about their municipality. While for local parties you have to make [your topic] very locally applicable. – expert interview.*

Additionally, locally rooted parties might be harder to reach since their processes are often harder to trace and they all differ a great deal: *With local parties, it differs how easy it is to find their processes. They are generally a bit later with writing an election program, and a bit later with publishing a list of candidates. They are all very different, so you would have to look into that... But they should*

not be underestimated in terms of influence within municipalities, so it would be good to invest time in these parties. – expert interview.

When looking at contacts between lobbying players and targeted players (local politicians), results vary. Some political parties have no connections with lobbying organisations, while others have some direct or indirect connections.

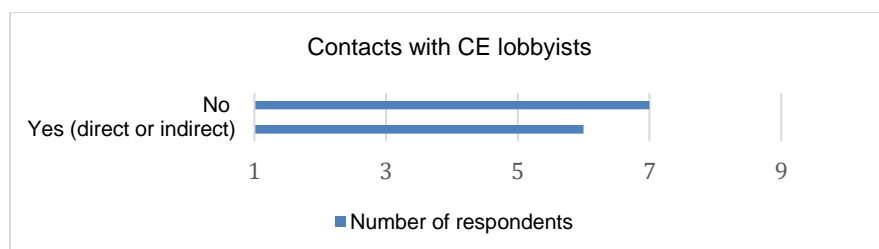


Figure 11: contacts between lobbyists and politicians

Contact about CE with organizations, entrepreneurs, NGOs, etc. (not specifically with NMU/the Alliance) is considered relevant by politicians under certain conditions:

- First, contact is considered relevant when an organization can deliver information that is helpful and realistic within the local context (R5, R6, R10, R11, R17). This means that the organization should be up to date on the local situation. In light of this, some respondents see more value in contact with local organisations because these are more embedded in the local situation (R5, R6, R10 R12): *We are inclined to always look more locally...I have to admit that that is not always the most useful thing to do because larger organisations have more expertise than local organisations. But with local organisations, they know how it fits within the area they live in.* – R6
- Second is the need to connect information to topics that are relevant to the target group. A personal and practical approach is often preferred over a theoretical approach (R2, R5, R9, R17). It is crucial to know what politicians need during campaigns and elections. Visibility is often important. Creating visibility can be an effective strategy to make and sustain contacts with local politicians, heightening the chances they act on the topic you're addressing. However, mirroring the language of targets is not always seen as an effective strategy: *I see that a lot of lobby focuses on some sort of persuasion strategy. Like: 'VVD focuses on economy, so I will tell them an economic story'. And I'm not saying that's a bad thing, I just personally have never seen it work out... And overall, contacts with these parties are quite good. But when it comes to it... it's not like they don't know it. There's another reason why they don't adopt it... You have to find ways to make them tick, and find where your power and coercion lie locally.* – expert interview.
- Lastly, contact is considered relevant for the provision of missing knowledge, capacity, input, instruction and solutions (R1, R2, R6, R8, R9, R12): *Furthermore that it's realistic. You can have a whole dream about a fully circular economy. But if you can precisely say: what does it mean here and now? Or you, for example, have immersed yourself in local programs and what budgets are available and you have a suggestion for how it fits into the situation as a whole. That makes it more interesting because then we can propose it more quickly to the municipal council.* – R17

NMU has no official ties to political parties. Some aldermen from different municipalities are tied to the Alliance as ambassadors. They promote the alliance and CE within their network, thus strengthening the message for a CE. Furthermore, contacts with more 'leftist' political parties are more frequent than with other parties. It is recognized that the influence on these parties concerning CE in election- and coalition programs is limited, given that these parties

are already intrinsically motivated to work on the issue: *The funny thing with a topic like CE is that, and that is also what you saw with the election programs: what you influence most are the programs of VVD and CDA. Because wherever you look for CE in programs of GroenLinks, in 95% of the cases it will already be in there. We can at most help them with information. But with CDA and VVD this is not the case at all.*— Peter Smit, NMU.

When looking at contacts between lobbying players, lobbyists generally like to work together in partnerships. Reasons are to avoid double work; to share knowledge and capacity; to increase visibility, and to get a shared and strong message across. Partnerships between organisations working on different levels (nationally, regionally, locally) are also considered valuable. For example, nationally operating organisations can lobby for favourable national legislation. In turn, regional and local organisations can lobby for the actual implementation of this legislation: *I do see a partnership with the Nature & Environment Federations there. Look if we, on a national level, together with VNG, have arranged a model for regulation or a model for municipal purchasing regulation, then after that it might be the federations' job to push municipalities to copy it into their municipal purchasing policy.* – Jelmer Vierstra, Natuur & Milieu.

Furthermore, regional organisations might not have the best position and connections for local lobby. Local politicians prefer contact with local organisations (first bullet point above). Teaming up with local organisations can increase lobby influence. The wish to team up is also mentioned by local organisations (R16). For local organisations, partnerships with regional actors are perceived as valuable because they can back up their relevance as a local organisation. Besides, contacts and networks can be shared between partnering organisations. Some local organisations even have direct political contacts and thus possibly also a more direct influence.

#### *Players' interventions*

When looking at players' interventions, the contents of lobby interventions are generally viewed as sufficient and relevant. Timing can be an issue, especially when different parties prefer different timing. Being on time is of special importance in trying to influence election and coalition programs. Interventions between lobby organisations do not seem to hinder each other and generally look alike.

#### **6.4.3 Outcome level factors**

The expected outcome and effects of policy negotiations have an impact on interactions between the actors involved.

#### *Nature of policy outcome and likely policy effects*

Election programs are less binding and have fewer direct policy effects as compared to coalition programs given that with coalition programs, political parties make a four-year plan and allocate money, time, capacity and other resources toward certain topics. However, election programs form the basis of coalition negotiations. Thus, to heighten the chances of getting CE adopted into coalition programs, the topic should also be adopted into election programs. Election programs are quite elaborate and abstract, making it easier to mention a broad range of topics, but harder to get a high degree of substantiation. Coalition programs are more detailed and once a topic is adopted, there is a higher chance that actions will follow. However, it's more difficult to influence this process, which is in line with the earlier statement that more binding agreements are more difficult to influence.

Now that the lobby interventions and their effectiveness are better understood through the use of explanatory factors, the results can be used to formulate answers to the research questions in the following chapter.

## 7. Conclusion

After analysing the findings an answer to the research question can be formulated: *How does the lobby of regional environmental organizations influence the adoption of CE in local election- and coalition programs and how can this influence be explained?* To answer the research question, two sub-questions were formulated:

- 1) *Which interventions for the adoption of CE within election and coalition programs are currently used?*
- 2) *Are these interventions effective in establishing a focus on the circular economy within local election and coalition programs and how can this be explained?*

The EAC-method is used for results from the assessment factors for lobby influence: **ego**-perception (the lobbyists' perspective on their own lobby influence), **alter**-perception (politicians' and other lobbyists' perspective on lobby influence) and the **causal** analysis (in part consisting of an extensive document analysis). The results from these assessment factors are compared with explanatory factors (arena, context & outcome level). Both assessment and explanatory factors are used to see how the effectiveness of lobby interventions and the resulting lobby influence can be understood. Sub-questions are used to help formulate an answer to the research question. Thus, a concise answer to the sub-questions is given using table 5. Consequently, a concise answer to the research question is given. This is followed by an elaboration on the assessment and explanatory factors to form a deeper understanding of the answers to the above sub- and research questions.

Table 5: interventions and possible effectiveness

Intervention	Content	Timing	Effectiveness
<b>Manifest:</b> nine recommendations for adopting CE in election programs	Good. To the point, good length, could directly be adopted if wanted.	Depending on personal and party preferences. Generally a bit late for nationally rooted parties. Generally fine or a bit early for locally rooted parties.	Effective for election programs of parties interested in the topic. Less relevant and effective for parties with no interest.
<b>Circular tour for aldermen:</b> on how to stimulate circular entrepreneurship + how to adopt CE in coalition programs	Informing aldermen not a bad thing to do. Target group too small, Thus little to no effects.	Bad. Too late for election programs, too early for coalition programs.	No effective direct lobby for either election or coalition programs. Possibly some small indirect results.
<b>Election debate Utrecht:</b> on sustainability topics, including CE	Depends. Could increase visibility of the topic, but not a politically tense topic.	Good.	No effective lobby for province as a whole. Only possibly effective for coalition program of Utrecht city.
<b>Event for new municipal council members:</b> focus on what they can do to stimulate CE	Good to inform new council members. Possible trickle down to coalition negotiators.	Depending on personal preferences.	Possibly effective lobby for coalition programs.
<b>Email to coalition negotiators:</b> six recommendations for adopting CE in coalition programs	Good.	Good.	Possibly effective lobby for coalition programs.

## 7.1 How regional lobby influences adoption of CE in election- and coalition programs

A small amount of lobby influence can be observed when looking at the results from ego-perception, alter-perception, causal analysis and explanatory factors. Lobbyists themselves see some influence of their actions. Politicians sometimes see some small influence, but do not regard the lobby effects as big as lobbyists do themselves. The document analysis shows an increase in focus on CE categories mentioned in the lobby input (e.g. construction, procurement, entrepreneurship, etc.) as well as on other CE categories that were not mentioned in the lobby input. Lobby activities of regional environmental organizations can influence the adoption of CE in local election and coalition programs through:

- delivering texts for such programs;
- offering practical solutions that are locally relevant;
- the distribution of missing knowledge, information and capacity, all at the right time.

In doing so, lobby influence can become visible through growth in focus on CE categories in programs of target groups. However, lobby influence is shared with many other explanatory factors like personal interests and knowledge of politicians, national trends, and municipal capacity. These factors might be at least as important as lobby efforts. As such, these factors can increase or decrease local attention to CE, thus strengthening or weakening lobby efforts of regional environmental lobby organizations. Below, an elaboration is given on the assessment as well as explanatory factors to form a deeper understanding of the above answer to the research question.

## 7.2 Assessment factors

### *Ego-perception*

When looking at ego-perception, all NMU representatives believe that their lobby activities have at least some kind of influence, but they are also aware of the broader context, alluding to, for example, the growing national attention for CE. No direct adoptions of texts are observed, but indirect adoptions of lobby inputs are detected.

### *Alter perception of other lobbyists within the province*

Lobby interventions between lobbyists within the province of Utrecht overlap (in timing and/or content). All other lobbyists (Zero Waste Groene Hart & Living Lab Regio Foodvalley Circulair) that participated in this research perceived themselves as having influenced either election or coalition programs, which is in line with the overall view that CE lobby, in general, is effective. However, all respondents also recognize the relevance of other factors. Views on the lobby effects of NMU differ. Some respondents regard the effects of NMU as higher than their own (mostly because of regional oversight and established name), while others believe the opposite to be true, seeing a bigger effect in their own lobby efforts (mostly because of more direct contacts and local knowledge).

### *Alter perception political respondents*

The majority of lobby activities are generally considered relevant by political respondents, resulting in CE being mentioned and known better/more than if lobby would have been absent. When looking at the assessed lobby influence for CE, politicians mostly perceive general lobby influence for CE (not tied to any particular lobby organization) as little to non-existent. For NMU specifically, an equal number of respondents do not experience any influence to the number of respondents that do experience some amount of influence. Personal interests and knowledge on CE of people within political parties greatly influence whether or not a lobby activity is relevant and if actions/adoption of CE within programs result from these lobby

activities. For politicians that already know a great deal about CE and are intrinsically motivated to act on the topic, lobby activities are little relevant and little effective. These politicians will act and adopt CE within programs anyway, regardless of the presence or absence of lobby. For politicians that have no interest in the topic at all, lobby activities are little relevant and little effective as well since they will not attend such activities or act on lobby input. Their priorities lie with different topics and they will direct their attention to those other topics. Most possible effects and relevance thus lie with politicians that are or might be interested in the topic but are not yet fully engaged, informed or aware. Again, the personal preferences of politicians for certain lobby approaches and activities influence the effectiveness of lobby. These different preferences increase the difficulty of carrying out an effective lobby, especially when lobby activities are targeted at a broad group of actors (e.g. 'all political parties within the province').

### *Causal analysis*

The lobby goal of NMU/the Alliance was to get CE topics adopted into all coalition programs. There were no goals set for CE in election programs. However, since election programs form the basis of coalition negotiations, they are still important to consider. In 11 out of 17 **election programs** of 2022 within the case selection of this research, some kind of focus on CE is observed. The difference between nationally and locally rooted parties is notable here. Overall, nationally rooted parties within the case selection mention CE more compared to locally rooted parties. Also, a higher increase over time is observed for nationally rooted parties as compared to locally rooted parties when looking at the number of times CE is mentioned in programs. This possibly means that: 1) national parties are easier influenced on this topic, meaning most lobby possibilities lie with these parties, 2) national parties get their focus on CE from national trends or umbrella parties, and/or 3) there is a lot of opportunity for lobby at locally rooted parties, but they may be less interested in the topic and thus less open for lobby.

When looking at **coalition programs**, 22 out of 26 coalition programs of 2022 had some kind of focus on CE. Although the lobby goal for coalition programs was thus not met, overall, it can be observed that circularity is mentioned more often and over a broader range of subjects related to circularity (e.g. construction, procurement, waste, entrepreneurship, etc.) in programs of 2022 as compared to programs of 2018. This increase in the times CE is mentioned, and the focus on a broader range of subjects related to circularity holds for both election and coalition programs. Lobby input was given on multiple categories related to CE. An increase within these categories of lobby input as well as an increase outside of these categories (so on other CE-related categories) is observed. The increase in the categories outside of the lobby input indicates an overall increase in attention to the topic. This increase might be unrelated to lobby since it cannot be traced back to the lobby input of NMU/the Alliance.

Given the above, the causal analysis is supportive of results from ego-perception, based on increased attention to the topic in lobby categories of NMU/the Alliance. It is harder to say if the causal analysis is supportive of the alter-perception. Some (3) politicians do see a substantive influence of lobby, others (3) do not, and some (5) see little influence, but not substantial enough to be distinguished on its own. Other lobbyists within the province also have different opinions on the influence of NMU/the Alliance. Some think NMU/the Alliance does not have much influence locally because they are too far removed from the local situation. Others think NMU/the Alliance does have an influence due to their regional presence, well-known name, and organisation within a partnership. Thus, the causal analysis is partially supportive of the alter-perceptions.

### 7.3 Explanatory factors

Explanatory factors are used to explain the lobby influence on different levels. Context and arena-level factors were of most importance to this research and are elaborated upon below.

#### *Context level factors*

Context level factors exist of regimes, resources, rules of the game, and relevant trends and events (see p.20 for an elaboration). The most important context level factor for this research is *relevant trends and events*: (inter)nationally growing attention for CE has an influence on local attention for the topic, which might decrease the need for, and effects of, regional and local lobby. However, it might also mean that there is more need for translations of (inter)national developments and goals on how to locally adopt/implement CE, leaving more space for local lobby to provide such translations.

#### *Arena level factors*

Arena level factors exist of players involved, nature of interventions, nature of the policy issue, and the nature of negotiations (see p.19 for an elaboration).

Given the *nature of the policy issue*, the circular transition is regarded to still be in its early stages. On the one hand, this leaves room for lobby. On the other hand, it makes lobby more difficult since local politicians sometimes still need to be convinced to act on the topic. Besides, local politicians often see CE as a small fragment and/or difficult topic within the broader sustainability debate (with topics such as energy, mobility, biodiversity, etc), which increases lobby difficulty. This perceived difficulty of the topic and the fact that CE is only seen as a small fragment of broader sustainability debates might also originate from the absence of national coercion to implement CE measures. Where municipalities are forced to implement measures on, for example, renewable energy, implementing CE measures is oftentimes not compulsory. Furthermore, CE is often regarded as a national rather than a local topic, which points to the need for local translations on how to adopt the topic within programs and how to locally act on it. Thus, local lobby opportunities do exist. However, lobby effects are, for now, still small due to the nature of the policy issue and accompanying views on the topic. Since national attention for CE is growing, local lobby efforts could become more effective when they are supported by national trends. National and local lobby messages, for now, support each other at least partially, both focussing on themes such as circular procurement, biomass, circular construction, and monitoring.

Given the *players involved*, the interests and knowledge of local politicians are often decisive for whether or not the topic is adopted within programs. Furthermore, political processes (like the establishment of an election program) of locally rooted parties are often difficult to trace. Where national parties often have clear timelines and processes, local parties differ greatly in how they organize and time their political processes. This makes it harder to carry out an effective lobby for groups of local parties since there is no uniform timing and no uniform way of effectively approaching them. Besides, local parties demand more local translations of topics, meaning that lobbyists need to make clear what the actual local importance and urgency of topics like CE is. This increases lobby difficulty since it demands a very personal approach, which takes up a lot of time and resources if applied to all political parties. Besides, the position of regional organisations for local lobby can be difficult. Local elections focus on local situations, resulting in preferences of politicians for contact with local organisations. This can decrease the influence of regional organisations.

This research has found some, although ambiguous, results for lobby influence of regional lobby organisations. Some spaces for improvement could be identified. These are elaborated on within the chapter on practical recommendations. But first, a discussion will follow.

## 8. Discussion

### 8.1 Interpretation of results

This research led to some expected as well as some unexpected results. As became clear, most lobby effects can be achieved with political parties that are interested in the topic of CE, but don't have the knowledge, are not up to date, or are just not prioritizing the topic yet. This research showed that nationally rooted parties within the case selection increasingly focused on CE within their programs. This was not the case for locally rooted parties. This outcome is to be expected since the literature points out that nationally rooted parties are more sensitive to national trends (Peters, Stipdonk, & Castenmiller, 2014). Literature also pointed out that the economic, politic and social context plays an important role in accommodating or hindering policy change and the work of NGOs (Klugman, 2000). This research showed that in theory, there can be a good lobby in terms of timing and content with still only a small amount of influence due to other factors. Contextual, arena level and outcome level factors might be just as important as the lobby itself. Literature also pointed out that bigger cities and metropolitan areas have a greater potential to foster a CE as opposed to smaller municipalities and cities (Dam, et al., 2020; VNG, 2022; Het Groene Brein, 2022). This research showed varying results for this statement. When comparing coalition programs, it can be observed that 9 out of 11 small, 11 out of 13 middle-sized, and 2 out of 2 big municipalities mention something on CE. In theory, these numbers support the literature. However, small and middle-sized municipalities still score quite high in the overall number of municipalities that mention CE, indicating they are also actively looking at ways to foster a CE.

A more unexpected outcome is that the position of regional lobby organisations within local lobby contexts is seen as difficult. The importance of informal and personal contact was pointed out by the literature (Public Matters, 2021; Rietig, 2016). This literature did however not point out that this contact would favourably be between local (and not regional) actors.

While literature points towards the importance of cities and regions for the successful implementation of CE (Bolger & Doyon, 2019; Christensen, 2021; Circle Economy, 2019), local politicians involved with this research sometimes felt that CE was predominantly a national topic. As such, the need for regional and local translations might be higher than expected in the first place. However, the focus on *regions and cities* might obscure lobby efforts that are predominantly *locally* focused (not only on metropolitan cities/areas but also on smaller cities and municipalities).

### 8.2 Limitations of research

This research has some limitations. First, interviews with political respondents were carried out in part before the municipal elections of March 2022 and fully before the publication of coalition programs. As such, the effects of the lobby on coalition programs as viewed by respondents were harder to assess, given that lobby activities targeted at coalition programs were often not carried out yet. Such effects mostly had to be derived from the causal analysis. Besides, subjective opinions and personal preferences and experiences of respondents make it hard to state 'fixed' or entirely unambiguous results. Third, the full context of this research has to be taken into account when interpreting the results. There are many factors outside of the lobby activities of NMU/the Alliance that might have influenced whether or not CE was adopted into programs. Factors of great importance such as national trends, personal interests of people involved and the presence of other lobbyists were taken into account in the analysis.

#### *Critiques on method*

The framework used for this research is derived from Arts (1998) and his work on the political influence of global NGOs. This thesis focuses on regional NGOs. It is, however, estimated

that the EAC-method is not bound to a specific spatial level of NGOs and can thus be used for the assessment of the political influence of regional NGOs as well. Furthermore, Arts (1998) uses a multiple case study design. This research has a single case study design. It is again, however, argued that the EAC-method is not bound to a minimum of cases and can thus still be used. Yet, this does mean that the results cannot be as broadly generalized with the same amount of certainty. Generalizations of this research can therefore not be stretched beyond the field of regional NGOs working on the local political implementation of a CE.

The EAC-method is a good fit to assess the political influence of players in a single, but complex policy process. However, there are some drawbacks to the method. The main drawback is that the method does not produce unambiguous results. Rather, by taking all assessment and explanatory factors together, the method can be used to come to a nuanced, substantiated but ambiguous *estimation* of political influence and lobby effectiveness. This ambiguity is often present with methods that assess political influence (Arts, 1998) since it is a highly complex concept to measure. Lobby influence is often looked for in research, but unambiguous evidence for it is not often found (Lowery, 2013). Also, the researcher is in control of crediting and categorizing the answers of respondents. This categorization is thus dependent on the researcher's interpretations of the results (Arts, 1998). Additionally, the method is oriented to recognize success. However, failures can be detected when alter-perception and causal analysis do not support ego-perception (Arts, 1998). Lastly, the method does not assess structural power (im)balances. However, by taking into account the indicators of resources, rules of the game, and regimes this aspect is not forgotten (Arts, 1998).

### 8.3 Theoretical reflections

This research contributes to the broader scientific debates on sustainability transformations by giving insights into how sustainability advocates can reach politicians to develop favourable sustainable policies; how politicians react to such efforts; and how the transition towards a CE is viewed from the local level. Different lenses for looking at the effects of local lobby can also be highly relevant. Some theoretical reflections will follow in the next paragraphs.

Since this research pointed out that circularity is sometimes deemed an (inter)national rather than a local issue, it is interesting to take the effects of decentralisation of environmental policy into account. Environmental policy performance in part depends on the distribution of power and authority between local and national levels of government (Kim & Yoon, 2018). Cities and regions might be seen as perfect places to implement a circular economy (Het Groene Brein, 2022), but what does the decentralization of responsibilities from national to local governments in the Netherlands mean for the implementation of a circular economy? Especially in light of the systematic budget cuts from national to local governments, questions may arise about whether or not local governments are still (financially) equipped to take up the extra responsibilities that come with implementing a circular economy (Allers, 2013). How to prepare and support local governments for these extra responsibilities remains a topic of interest.

One of the main critiques on the concept of a circular economy is that it is still greatly embedded within the growth narrative (Corvellec, Stowell, & Johansson, 2021; Lazarevic & Valve, 2017). Many circular initiatives cannot compete in the dominantly linear system, and the focus is on how these alternatives can and should increase economic growth. A degrowth perspective, where the focus lies on enhancing wellbeing while simultaneously decreasing the importance of economic growth (Cosme, Santos, & O'Neill, 2017), might enhance local implementation of circular initiatives and policies.

When zooming out, it becomes clear that the CE and energy transition are inextricably connected. A circular economy has to operate on renewable energy for it to be circular. The energy transition requires the use of many rare metals, such as dysprosium (needed for wind turbines), and metals for magnets in electric cars and wind turbines (Ballinger, et al., 2020; Pavel, et al., 2017). When materials are not sourced and handled circularly, the security of supply will hinder the energy transition. Where municipalities already have a clear focus on the energy transition – also seen in election and coalition programs – this focus is often much smaller (if not non-existent) for the transition toward a CE. Since transitions do not operate in a vacuum it is needed to explicitly link them. Academic research and debate have recently started to focus on this and are needed to spur the creation of such linkages in practice (Su & Urban, 2021; Watari, Nansai, Nakajima, & Giurco, 2021; Visseren-Hamakeres, et al., 2022).

Placing this research in the field of policy change points to the question of how environmental lobby contributes to policy change, leading to policies (more than just election and coalition programs) that act in favour of the environment instead of against it. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, policy entrepreneurship (Mintrom & Norman, 2009) provides insights into the characteristics of lobbyists that cause them to be successful in achieving policy change. Future research could be carried out in more detail on how (local) lobbyists use collaborations, coalitions, networks, and knowledge/expertise to win credibility and build momentum for change in light of circular transitions. In doing so, the Advocacy Coalition Framework could be helpful. Here, research into dialogues could provide insights into (dis)alignments in core and policy beliefs between different lobby groups and their different target groups to see if messages have a chance of coming across or if there is a '*dialogue of the deaf*' where well-intended lobby messages won't convince target groups with fundamentally different beliefs (Wiering, Liefferink, & Crabbé, 2018). In light of the transition towards a CE – and sustainability transitions in general – this could be used to see how uninterested parties can be taken aboard. Another dialogue-focused approach is that of crisis exploitation, which could provide insights into how environmental lobby groups utilize a rhetoric of crisis to increase levels of (regional and local) political support for public environmental policies (Boin, 't Hart, & McConnell, 2009).

The lens of discursive institutionalism could be relevant for creating insights into how ideas for a CE emerge within society and get institutionalized over time, also focussing on the role of lobbyists and their actions to promote such institutionalization through (new) narratives, meanings and discourses (Arts & Buizer, 2009). An approach to carry out such research could be through the Policy Arrangement Approach which could be used to develop a better understanding of the interplay between (contextual) factors and lobby interventions. This could help to unravel somewhat more clearly if adoptions of CE into municipal policy are caused by lobby interventions or are more likely to be the result of other factors (Wiering, Liefferink, & Crabbé, 2018). This also accounts for the Multi-level Perspective by Geels (2011), which could help unravel where, for example, landscape pressures (e.g. national attention), cause CE to be adopted into municipal programs and/or where this is caused by successful lobbying.

Since (inter)national attention for CE is growing and local implementations are needed to achieve goals, the need for local translations will not disappear. Different forms of data collection could also help to achieve new insights. For example, longitudinal research could map focus on circularity and resemblances between lobby input and practical outputs over a longer period to see if lobby influence is increasing, decreasing or remaining the same. Besides, quantitative research could be carried out to grasp the full target group, for example, all political parties active within a province. Comparative research between areas could also provide insight into differences in lobby effectiveness for CE between provinces or regions.

## 9. Practical recommendations

Several practical recommendations for NMU/the Alliance, and more broadly for regional CE lobby organisations, can be distilled from this research. These are:

- Cooperating with local organisations and/or initiatives can heighten local lobby influence for regional (or national) lobby organisations. Regional lobby organisations might not have enough manpower to personally lobby in all municipalities within the province and to apply a personal approach in doing so. This, however, is needed to get CE adopted into municipal election and coalition programs, given that local politicians prefer personal contact and information that fits the local context. Teaming up with local organisations and initiatives can thus heighten the effectiveness of lobby. The people operating within these local organisations often know the local context well and might have direct personal relations with political representatives. Besides, these people are often residents of the municipality in question, and thus are voters, meaning that politicians might rather want to hear what they have to say instead of someone 'without a vote'. When a regional lobby organisation like NMU supports local organisations and initiatives, both sides can strengthen each other. Starting to build up such networks in multiple municipalities right away could help to strengthen local lobby for the next municipal elections, but also for lobby outside of election timelines.
- In line with the first recommendation, creating a regional lobby agenda for CE could be beneficial for the adoption of CE in municipal programs within a certain region. When all regional lobby organisations pushing for CE work on the same topics and/or speak the same 'language' within their lobby, lobby targets keep hearing the same, coherent message. This can heighten the chances of adoption in programs since it shows that the lobby message is carried by a broad coalition of (regional) actors. Besides, such a regional agenda will also help to avoid that organisations (on accident) counteract each other's effects through their activities.
- Influencing the guidelines of national umbrella parties that are used by local branches might be the quickest way to influence local election programs of nationally rooted parties. If a lobby topic gets incorporated into such national guidelines, chances are high that local branches will incorporate the topic within their election program and coalition negotiations. This will not only have an effect within one but also in other provinces. Influencing such national guidelines does mean that lobby has to take place on a national level, targeted at national political parties. Investigating timelines for this is crucial to be on time with lobby messages. To do so effectively, teaming up with nationally operating lobby organisations might be a good starting point since they will likely have contacts and know relevant timelines and actions. However, not all national parties work with guidelines for local branches. It is needed to figure out in advance for which parties this strategy could possibly make a difference.
- Next to influencing national guidelines, it could also be effective to try and influence municipal transfer documents. Such documents are made by civil servants and are used to guide newly chosen council members and negotiating parties in creating a coalition agreement. If CE gets incorporated into such documents, chances are high that the negotiators will copy this into coalition programs. This would require lobbying at the municipal organisation itself (and not at political parties), which requires that the regional lobby organisation in question has warm contacts within municipalities. Here again, cooperation with local organisations could help to effectively work in all municipalities within the province.

- Combine lobby messages/documents with an event. This is important to make a message stick with targets groups. If an important lobby document is distributed, the visibility increases when an event is organised around it. Options could be to let political parties sign the distributed document and create positive visibility (and commitment). This could be appealing for political parties, also because they can refer to it again during their election campaign and show their involvement with the topic (good for their image, might attract voters). Such commitment can also be created at more practical lobby activities like an election debate by letting political parties speak up on a topic, make statements to get involved, etc. This can be used to make them more accountable.
- In line with the above recommendation is the option to give a presentation on CE during a municipal council meeting. This way, *all* municipal councillors are directly addressed and can learn more/get involved/ask questions about the lobby topic. When such an activity is paired with the distribution of a lobby document, this could increase the chances that municipal councillors remember to include the topic in their election and coalition programs. This activity can also be carried out outside of election periods, during the full four years a municipal council is in office. Once again, in case of lacking capacity to do this in all municipalities, collaborations with local organisations can be fruitful.

## Appendix 1 – Documents analysed

Document type	Author	Amount
Election program 2018	Locally rooted political party	6
Election program 2018	Nationally rooted political party	7
Election program 2022	Locally rooted political party	6
Election program 2022	Nationally rooted political party	7
Coalition agreement 2018	Small municipality	11
Coalition agreement 2018	Middle-sized municipality	13
Coalition agreement 2018	Big municipality	2
Coalition agreement 2022	Small municipality	11
Coalition agreement 2022	Middle-sized municipality	13
Coalition agreement 2022	Big municipality	2
<a href="#">Manifest CE for municipal elections 2022</a>	Circle Region Alliance	1
<a href="#">Pamphlet sustainability input municipal elections 2022</a>	NMU	1
E-mail to coalition negotiators (see Appendix 2)	Circle Region Alliance	1
<a href="#">CE inspiration guide for municipalities</a>	Nature & Environment Federations	1
<a href="#">Pamphlet municipal elections 2022</a>	Nature & Environment Federations	1

Utrecht, 20 april 2022

Geachte formateur, geachte fractievoorzitters,

Van harte gefeliciteerd met de verkiezingsuitslag, die u naar de formatietafel heeft gebracht. U staat voor de mooie en uitdagende taak om het lokale beleid voor de komende 4 jaar te formuleren. Wij – de Alliantie Cirkelregio Utrecht – roepen u op om daarbij duidelijk en expliciet aandacht te besteden aan de circulaire economie. Gemeenten spelen een bepalende rol in de lokale economie, en maken het verschil bij de ontwikkeling van de circulaire economie. Deze [animatie](#) maakt duidelijk dat we op lokaal / regionaal niveau weliswaar niet alle knoppen in handen hebben om de economie circulair te maken, maar wel een wezenlijke bijdrage kunnen leveren. Juist de globale problemen als corona en de oorlog in Oekraïne laten ons nu zien hoe belangrijk lokale economie is, niet alleen voor verduurzaming, maar ook voor leveringszekerheid.

In de lokale verkiezingsprogramma's binnen de provincie Utrecht was veel aandacht voor circulaire economie, meer dan in andere provincies. [Zie dit nieuwsbericht](#). Utrecht heeft op dit moment een unieke kans om samen daadkrachtig te innoveren en ook echt koploper in circulaire economie te worden. Aan ons vermogen te innoveren danken we in Utrecht onze positie als één van de meest concurrerende regio's in Europa.

U werkt nu aan een coalitie akkoord voor uw gemeente. Wij brengen graag zes concrete mogelijkheden onder uw aandacht om als gemeente een duurzame en circulaire economie te stimuleren. Cirkelregio Utrecht heeft eerder [dit manifest](#) gepubliceerd, waarin staat op welke punten gemeenten echt het verschil kunnen maken voor circulaire economie. Hoe dat in praktijk kan is – vooral ten behoeve van lokale ambtenaren – uitgewerkt door de natuur- en milieu federaties in een [inspiratiegids voor gemeenten](#).

### **1. Borg de aandacht voor circulaire economie in het college van B&W**

Voor de lokale transitie naar een circulaire economie is aandacht nodig vanuit het college van B&W. De wethouder economie kan nieuwe samenwerkingen in lokale ketens stimuleren, dat kan ook een gezamenlijke verantwoordelijkheid van het college zijn. Circulaire economie raakt aan de economische portefeuille, maar ook aan bouwen, wonen, ruimte, mobiliteit en duurzaamheid. Circulaire economie vraagt om bewust anders organiseren, het gaat niet vanzelf; daarom is het goed dat er in uw college een portefeuillehouder circulaire economie komt.

### **2. Koop circulair in**

Circulair inkopen geeft het belastinggeld dat uitgegeven wordt een dubbele impact: de gemeente koopt wat nodig is én werkt aan behoud van grondstoffen, minder CO<sub>2</sub> uitstoot en een eerlijke, meer inclusieve samenleving. Fair trade inkopen doen vrijwel alle gemeenten in de provincie Utrecht. Circulair inkopen gaat om kopen van producten die de waarde van grondstoffen behouden, energie gebruiken uit hernieuwbare bronnen en repareerbaar zijn. Ook hier kunnen gemeenten het goede voorbeeld geven. Maak de inkopers en projectleiders van de gemeente duidelijk dat deze dubbele impact belangrijker is dan (altijd) gaan voor de laagste prijs. Zorg ervoor dat deze ambtenaren de weg naar het [regionale overleg over circulair inkopen](#) weten te vinden, daar vinden ze alle kennis en de collegialiteit om goed circulair in te kunnen kopen.

### **3. Bouw en ontwikkel circulair**

Utrechtse gemeenten hebben veel bouwprojecten op stapel staan, met substantiële aantallen woningen. De woonwijk en het bedrijventerrein van de toekomst zijn klimaatadaptief, circulair, biodivers, voorzien in hun eigen energiebehoefte en zijn ontsloten door met duurzame vormen van mobiliteit. Wat we vroeger het “stapelen van ambities” noemden, wordt het nieuwe normaal van bouwen, wonen en werken. In het [Regionaal convenant Duurzaam Bouwen](#) worden op provinciale schaal de afspraken

opgenomen die nodig zijn om dit nieuwe normaal uit te voeren. Sluit u aan bij dit convenant en maak werk van deze afspraken.

#### 4. Ondersteun circulaire ondernemers

Er zijn in Nederland duizenden ondernemers begonnen met circulair ondernemen in een lineair systeem. Dat is niet eenvoudig. Ondersteun deze ondernemers zo goed als kan. Zet als gemeente de voordeur open en probeer met hen mee te denken als het gaat om bijvoorbeeld vergunningen, wet- en regelgeving en locaties. Zorg ervoor dat uw gemeente mee werkt met de ondernemers die bijdragen aan de overheidsdoelstellingen op klimaat, grondstofreductie en sluiten van kringlopen. Heeft u nog vragen? Maak gebruik van het regionale [Servicepunt Circulair](#).

#### 5. Laat grondstoffen die de gemeente produceert zo hoogwaardig mogelijk verwerken.

Gemeenten produceren zelf grondstoffen zoals het maaisel van bermen en plantsoenen en het snoeihout uit bossen en parken. Het is mogelijk om hiermee quitte te spelen, in plaats van te betalen voor 'afval'. Om dit voor elkaar te krijgen kan bij de aanbesteding in het contract met de aannemer opgenomen worden dat het maaisel en het hout op een duurzame en zo hoogwaardig mogelijke manier verwerkt moet worden of er kan worden opgenomen dat deze grondstoffen niet langer vervallen aan de aannemer en de gemeente kan zelf op zoek naar regionale afnemers.

#### 6. Maak een circulair ambachtscentrum van de milieustraat / gemeentewerf

Gemeenten zijn verantwoordelijk voor de inzameling en verwerking van het huishoudelijk afval. Iedere gemeente heeft een milieustraat. Deze kan ook ingericht worden als circulair ambachtscentrum, waar het afval dat binnenkomt zoveel mogelijk als grondstof wordt benaderd. Werk in deze ambities samen met gemeenten uit de regio en leer van bestaande projecten, zoals die in Amersfoort, Wijk bij Duurstede en Utrecht (Lunetten).

Ook de provincie Utrecht roept u op om circulaire economie een concrete plek te geven in uw college programma. Zie daarvoor dit [filmpje van gedeputeerde Robert Strijk](#).

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<sup>1</sup> Wij zijn de [Alliantie Cirkelregio Utrecht](#): een netwerk van professionals die toewerken naar een regionale circulaire economie.



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