



REGENALYZE



HOW CAN DOUGHNUT ECONOMICS HELP YOUR CIRCULAR CITY?

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Introduction

This short article suggests how cities may use the concept of Doughnut Economics to enrich their circular economy strategies. It is based on an exchange between the author and the [Let's Go Circular network](#), that unites **nine** cities to learn from each other's circular economy approaches.

The circular economy

In recent decades, the traditional linear economic model of "take, make, dispose" has been increasingly challenged for its unsustainable environmental impact. This model depends on a continuous input of finite resources and results in excessive waste, environmental degradation, and growing resource dependency. By contrast, the circular economy (CE) presents a transformative approach that prioritises resource efficiency, waste reduction, and value retention. Recently, many cities have developed CE strategies to make their economies more circular.

What is the Doughnut Economy?

In 2017, "renegade economist" Kate Raworth introduced the Doughnut as a compass for human prosperity in the 21st century. The two-ring doughnut shape (see Figure 1) symbolises a balance between essential human needs and the planet's ecological limits. The inner ring of the Doughnut represents the social foundation that ensures no one falls short of life's essentials, like food, housing, education, and equality. The outer ring signifies the ecological ceiling that we must not exceed to avoid harming the planet's critical systems, such as the climate, biodiversity, and ocean acidification. The space between these rings, the Doughnut, is where humanity can thrive, meeting social needs without exceeding environmental limits. Beyond the rings lie human deprivation and ecological degradation; outside the inner ring we observe shortfalls and outside the outer ring overshoots. Kate Raworth sketches 7 design principles for an economy that moves towards the Doughnut (see Figure 2).

Figure 1 The Doughnut elements

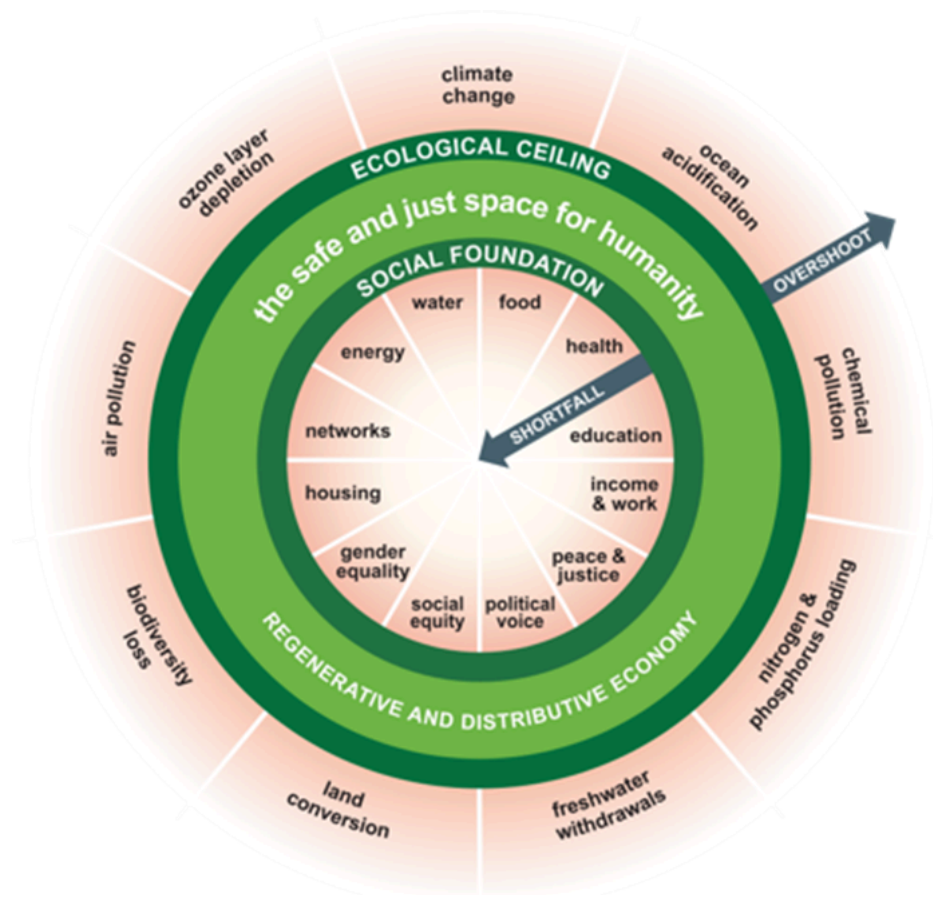
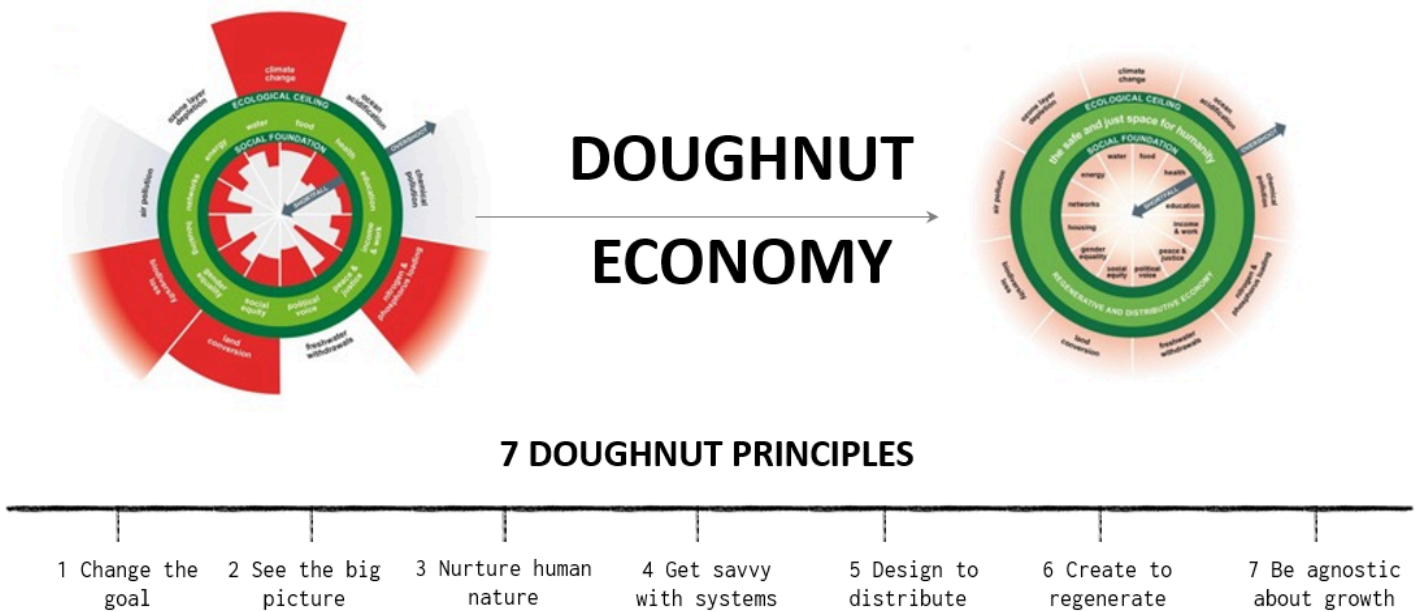


Figure 2 The 7 principles of the Doughnut



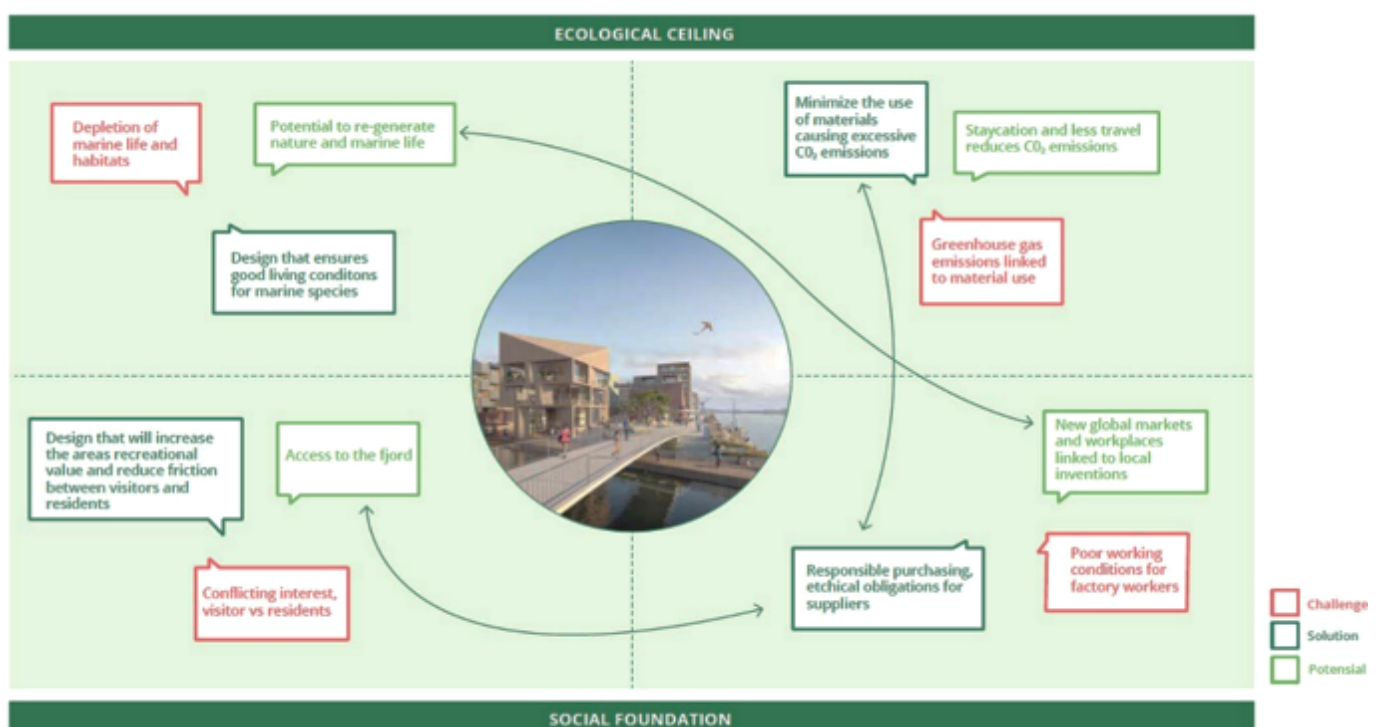
How can the Doughnut enrich cities' circular economy approaches?

A number of considerations can shed light on the relation between Doughnut Economics and a circular economy:

A goal versus a means. The Doughnut sets a goal, moving towards the green zone in which human needs are met within the means of the living planet. Circular economy is not a goal in itself but rather a means that can serve several ends: environmental ends (less material use, emissions, waste, resource extraction, pollution), political ends (resource independence) or even economic ends (efficiency of production, innovation, new jobs). The Doughnut can be used by cities to assess how their circular policies contribute to moving in the right direction. For instance, the city of Amsterdam frames its circular strategy in the Doughnut.

The Doughnut, a policy yardstick. It can serve as a yardstick to identify the effects of cities' circular policy initiatives. How does a policy or action affect the social dimension of the Doughnut (locally and globally) and the environmental aspects (locally and globally)? Where can we improve? For example, the city of Oslo used the Doughnut framework, in collaboration with stakeholders, to explore how a new waterfront development could become regenerative. They identified challenges, potentials and solutions (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 Oslo's application of the Doughnut for its waterfront development



The Doughnut to identify circular trade-offs. Circular economic activities may have negative side effects: excessive energy use, disruption of labour markets, increased pressure on land use, and pollution elsewhere. These trade-offs of circularity could benefit from greater visibility to ensure activities have mainly a positive contribution both environmentally and socially. The Doughnut can be used as a visual tool to plot these effects and make better choices.

A strategic compass to navigate the green policy labyrinth. Over the last decade, European cities have built ambitious programmes for climate adaptation, circular economy, just energy transition, and biodiversity promotion. Each program has its own goals and rationale, and they often compete for funding and policy attention, which can lead to a risk of tunnel vision. The Doughnut framework allows cities to take a step back, and analyse how all these programmes and policies contribute to the bigger goal of staying within the planetary boundaries while meeting all human needs. Plotting each programme on the Doughnut helps to identify overlaps, white spots, and potential synergies, and hence can help to rethink your cities' policy portfolio.

A discussion starter with citizens. The circular economy can be difficult to explain to citizens and the concept is somewhat fuzzy. Safeguarding resources and reducing waste can feel abstract to citizens, while the Doughnut speaks directly to them by focusing on their well-being and a healthy environment, which are more relatable. The Doughnut is simple and clear, and can serve as an easier conversation starter with citizens about the "Why?" of a circular economy: staying within the planetary boundaries while serving the needs of all people. Citizens can discuss their social needs, explore ways to meet them, and discover the impact local actions have on the environment.

An eye-opener on local and global responsibilities. A Doughnut City Portrait can be a good starting point: based on available data, it identifies how the city is faring locally (environmental and social) but also how it is complicit in global problems such as overshooting the planetary boundaries and bad social circumstances elsewhere. The Doughnut goes beyond circular economy and advocates a regenerative economy: beyond "doing less harm" (by reducing negative environmental and social impacts of our economic activities), a regenerative economy actively restores degraded ecosystems and makes people thrive.

Finally...

- For much more about the Doughnut, the Doughnut Economics Action Lab (DEAL) is the best resource: <https://doughnuteconomics.org/>
- If you are interested to organise an interactive workshop to apply doughnut economics in cities, companies or other organisations: at Regenalyze we can help you, we are registered as DEAL consultancy partner:
<https://doughnuteconomics.org/organisations-and-networks/regenalyze>