

The Designer as Green Change Agent *- fostering circular competences in practice*

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Hello...

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Entrepreneurship and Design program:

Two year AP-program combining design, business, and entrepreneurship

Students work with real companies and challenges

Practice-based, hands-on learning

84 students start each year

*Why are we talking about **the designer** as a green change agent?*

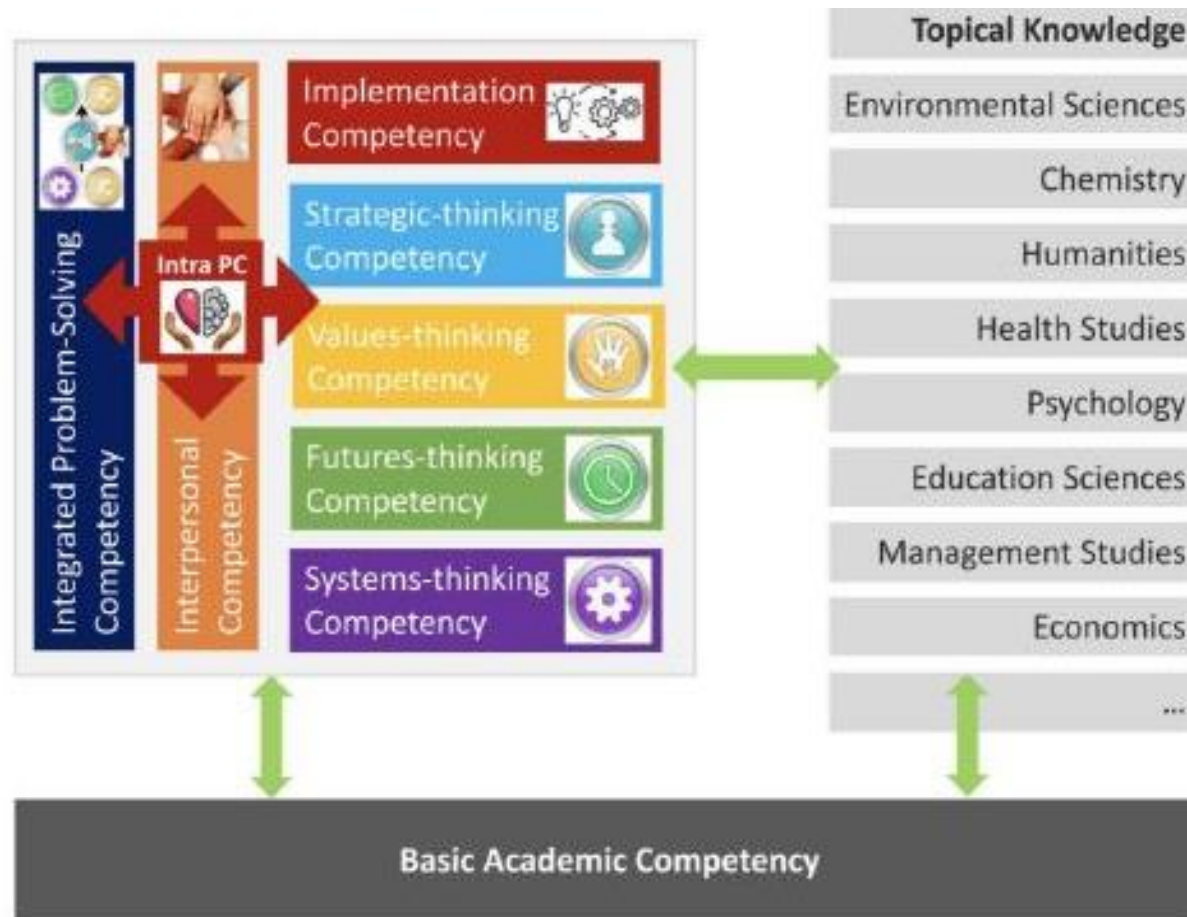


*And why **Green Change Agents?***

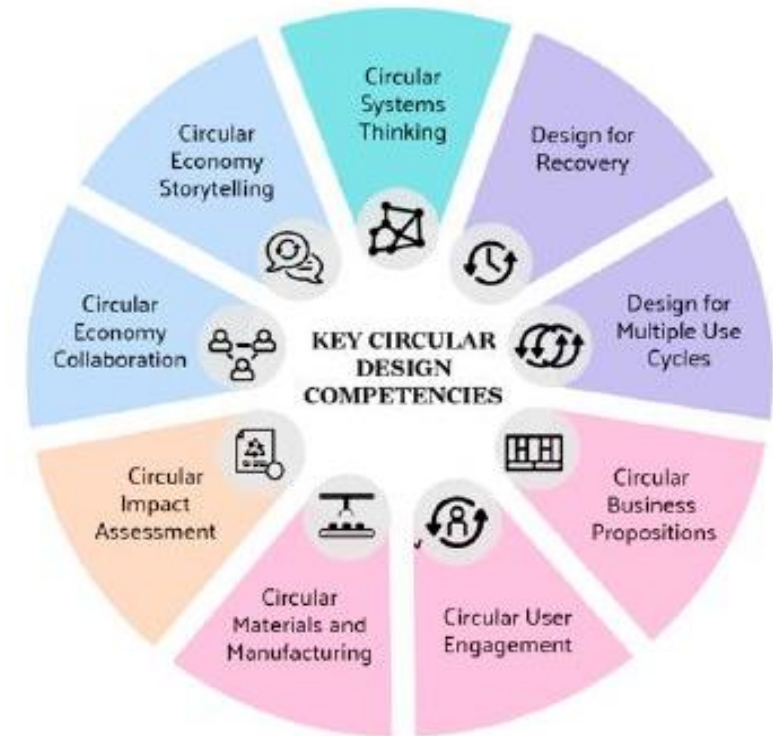


*Which **competencies** does a green change agent need?*

- frameworks that shaped the elective



Brundiers et al., 2020, (building on Wiek et al., 2011)



Sumter et al. (2021)

...and which competencies did we focus on to (the most)?

Brundiers et. al:

Intrapersonal Competency →

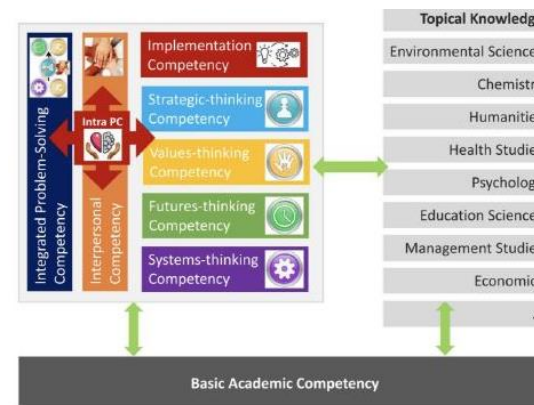
Developing self-awareness, reflection, and resilience

Interpersonal Competency →

Collaborating, communicating, and facilitating across differences

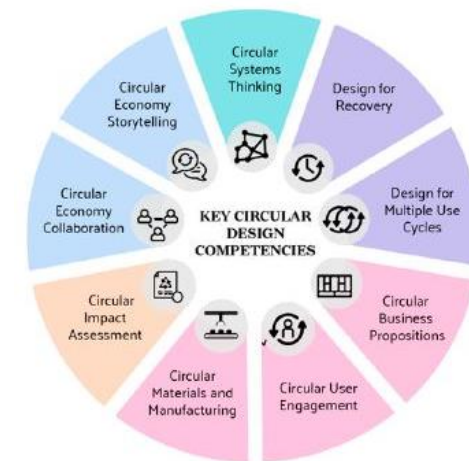
Values Thinking → Integrating ethics, justice, and sustainability values into decisions

Futures Thinking → Envisioning and assessing possible futures to inform today's choices



Sumter et. al:

Circular Economy Storytelling → the ability to communicate and frame circular design ideas, processes, and impacts in compelling narratives that engage stakeholders



The Elective at a Glance

23 third-semester students
6-week course
Practice-based, partner-
driven learning

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
CE and urgency	Student-led research	Systems Thinking	Being change agent	Co-design workshop	Exam

Close collaboration with 2 **carefully chosen start-ups** that both have the ambition to scale up while strengthening sustainability in value chains

- A small fashion brand
- A furniture company

Highlights: Two Learning Approaches

- Student-led research week
- Co-design workshops with Start-up founders

Student-Led Research Week

- 23 Third-semester students took leadership roles guiding 84 first-years

- Aim: investigate how consumers understand and act on sustainability. Take leadership.
- Students documented and reflected in journals and class discussions
- Outcome: Leading others built ownership, confidence, and empathy — preparing for real-world facilitation later

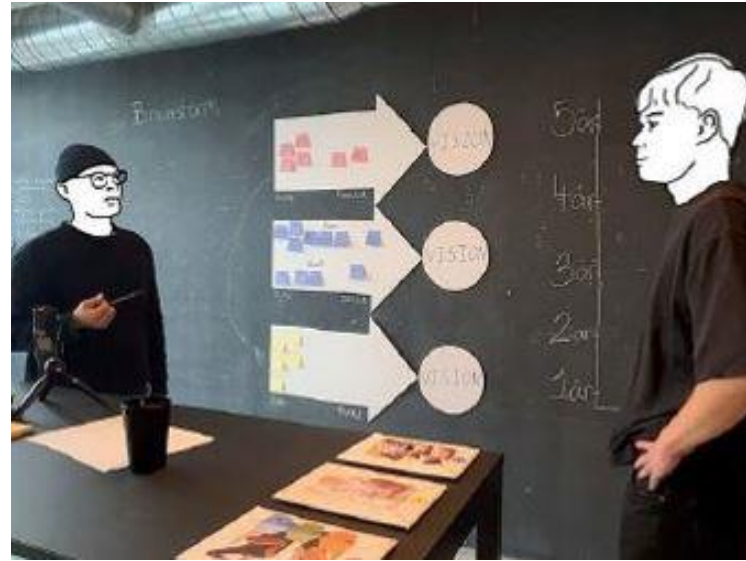
Methods:

- Pop-up street interviews with consumers
- Qualitative interviews with circular design practitioners and shop staff
- Short surveys on sustainable habits
- Observation during company visits
- Desk-top research



Source:

Source: EF Teacher Zone



Co-Design Workshops

- Student teams designed and facilitated workshops for the two start-ups
- Tested and customized workshops specifically for each start-up
- Guided founders through visual mapping, ideation, reflection, and discussions
- Documented and presented results



Stills from students' video documentation of workshops with founders

Tools in Workshops: Circular Strategies Wheel (DDC)

- Developed by the **Danish Design Center (DDC)**
- Part of the *Circular Design Toolkit* (DDC, 2021)
- Framework for identifying strategies across the product life cycle
- Used in our workshops to open up circular opportunities



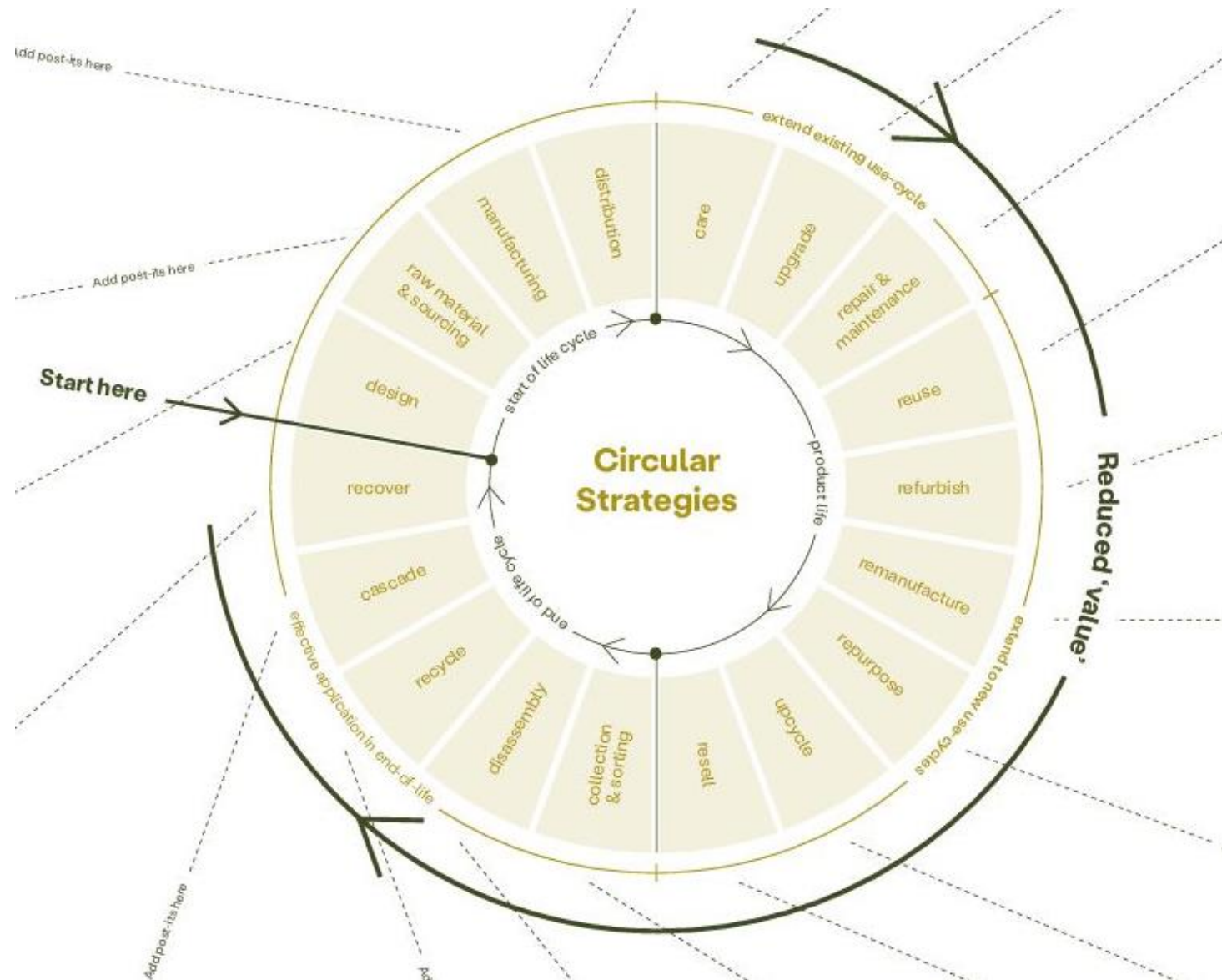
Source: Danish Design Center (2021). *Circular Strategies Wheel*. Circular Design Toolkit, Copenhagen: DDC.

Tools in Workshops: Circular Strategies Wheel (DDC)

(zoomed in)

Questions for founders to consider:

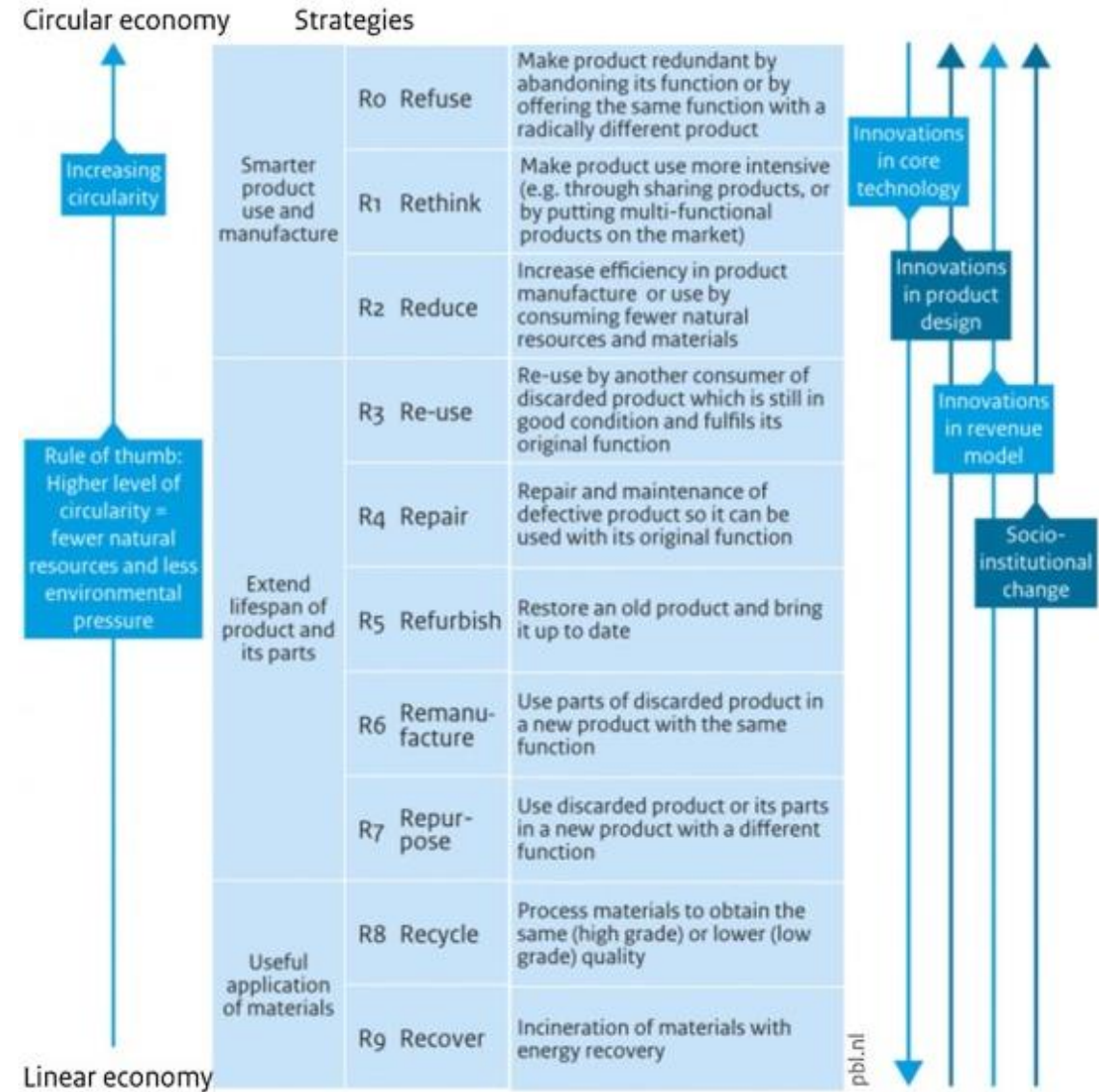
- Where do we create the most waste or have unused potential?
- Which strategies could extend product life or add new value?
- Who would we need to collaborate with to make it happen?



Adapted from: Danish Design Center's *Circular Strategies Wheel*. Circular Design Toolkit (2021)

Tools in Workshops: *R-ladder*

- Framework outlining strategies to keep materials and products in use
- Helps put circularity strategies within the production **chain in order of priority**
- Used by students to analyse company practices and propose improvements



(Source: Potting et al., 2017)

Feedback From Start-Ups

- Students were professional and could have been consultants
- Well prepared
- Useful research
- Left with new ideas



Student Learnings

“I was worried about the environment before the elective, and I doubted my actions could have any notable influence [...] but the elective has made me realise that **small interventions can make an actual difference**, especially when being part of a larger context.”

Student, written assignment, 2024

“The most important learning about being a change agent is **the significance of being able to motivate others and mobilise action** towards sustainable initiatives. I have learned that being a change agent is not just about having ideas but about **presenting these in ways that engage others.**”

Student, reflective journal, 2024

How Competencies Were Fostered

Intrapersonal Competency

- Reflective journals, self-awareness
- From eco-anxiety to agency
- Confidence to act on values

Interpersonal Competency

- Guided 84 first-year students
- Motivated and involved others
- Facilitated start-up workshops



Values Thinking

- Consumer and designer interviews
- Exposed diverse sustainability views
- Company visits broadened perspective

Futures-Thinking Competency

- Circular scenario exploration
- Tools: strategies wheel, future letter
- Envisioned sustainable pathways

Framework linking key sustainability competencies with learning approaches and activities. Brundiers et al. (2020).

Circular Economy Storytelling

- Narratives and visuals in workshops
- Framed circular opportunities
- Built shared understanding with founders



The Circular Design Competency Wheel illustrating nine key circular economy competencies for design. Sumter et al. (2021).

Insights From Research – From Anxiety to Agency

- Real-world practice makes **sustainability tangible**
- Competency **frameworks enable** deliberate course design
- **Competencies reinforce each other** – best developed together
- **Fostering intrapersonal growth builds** confidence and agency
- **Small, concrete actions help** transform anxiety into meaningful change





Stay in touch:

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