

## How can the circular approach save our cities?



*The state of the art findings on circular cities and their implementation at an urban level were highlighted in the conference on Circular Cities: Promoting Innovation in Urban Systems.*

On March 12, a one-day conference took place at the Bocconi University regarding the circular economy and its influence on the **sustainable, low carbon and smart cities**. It was organized by Bocconi's [Centre for Research on Energy and Environmental Economics and Policy \(UB-IEFE\)](#) together with the European Commission and the [UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network \(UN SDSN\)](#). The event was attended by around 120 participants from industries, financial institutions, universities, and other research institutions, public officials and students.

Experts shared their findings and experiences regarding the role of circular economy in cities. They also stressed another point, which is often overlooked – **the interdependent relationship or the nexus between resources such as land, water, energy and the climate** when developing policies and actions for circular cities.

In contrast to the linear economy all of us are familiar with, the [circular economy](#) goes beyond the “take, make and dispose” model and looks at re-using the waste to minimize their negative impacts in society. How is this related to cities?

“Cities in this moment are really at the center of attention of international and European policies,” as pointed out by Edoardo Croci from UB-IEFE. “We cannot ignore that **cities are not isolated from their surroundings...** They have become the **centers of consumption and structural resource inefficiencies.**”

The alarming aftermaths seen today around the globe are also caused by the unsustainable growth of cities. These can be mitigated by making cities urban resilient and resource efficient using the circular

approach as stressed in the 2030 [New Urban Agenda](#), in the [EU Urban Agenda](#) and in the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#).

Talks were given by Claudia Fusco from the [EU Commission-Environment](#), Alejandro Gutierrez from [ARUP](#), Wolfgang Teubner from [ICLEI](#), Angelica Monaco from [Climate-KIC](#) and Steffen Lehmann from the [Cluster for Sustainable Cities](#) who all **emphasized the role of governance in promoting resilient, sustainable and circular cities. By pushing for unconventional solutions, policy makers can reduce the waste produced by the cities and promote more livable ecosystems for the citizens to benefit from.**

The importance of establishing unconventional circular policies and actions at a local level in order to initiate a behavioral change between citizens and other stakeholders was also stressed by speakers Holger Kuhle from UN SDSN, Francesco Laera from the EU Commission and Marco Granelli from the [City of Milan](#)

Giovanni Fini from [the City of Bologna-Environmental Quality Unit](#), Jonas Byström from the [European Investment Bank-Urban Development Division](#) and Francesco Biciato from the [Forum per la Finanza Sostenibile](#) presented different financial frameworks, which has helped support large-scale sustainable and resource efficient projects.

“You cannot rely on local funding,” says Fini as most Bologna also sought external help in funding their sustainable projects. In addition, Byström pointed out the risk involved in funding them – making it harder to convince investors to support them. They suggested the use of public-private partnerships (PPP), and joint cooperation with private-public institutions and several forms of sustainable finance such as crowdfunding, which can allow sustainable projects to take place within cities.

To complement these talks, a session was dedicated for several representatives from Italian companies – *AECOM, FS Sistemi Urbani, Falck Renewables, Legacoop Bologna, MilanoDepur and Assimpredil ANCE*- to recall their experience on using the circular approach in the following sectors - mobility, energy, buildings and community building (or social inclusion).

Being one of the leaders in promoting the circular approach in cities, the UB-IEFE also presented to the public their role in two Horizon 2020 projects on urban sustainability, one of which was Urban GreenUP, which aims to develop, apply and validate Renaturing Urban Plans to mitigate the effects of climate change, improve air quality and water management and increase the cities’ sustainability through nature-based solutions.

The main objective of the workshop was to highlight **cities as centres of innovation, ideas and creativity other than being key centres of consumption and environmental challenges**. As Croci pointed out, this can be done by letting **all stakeholders be engaged in transitioning to the circular approach**, which optimizes resource use and flows.

In particular, **the re-use of waste and the redistribution of “unused” resources** can only be effective if a **long-term thinking approach** is adopted. As stressed by Kuhle, this paradigm shift will only come into full circle once more stakeholders share their best practices to people who need guidance and acceptance on the way they approach their own cities.