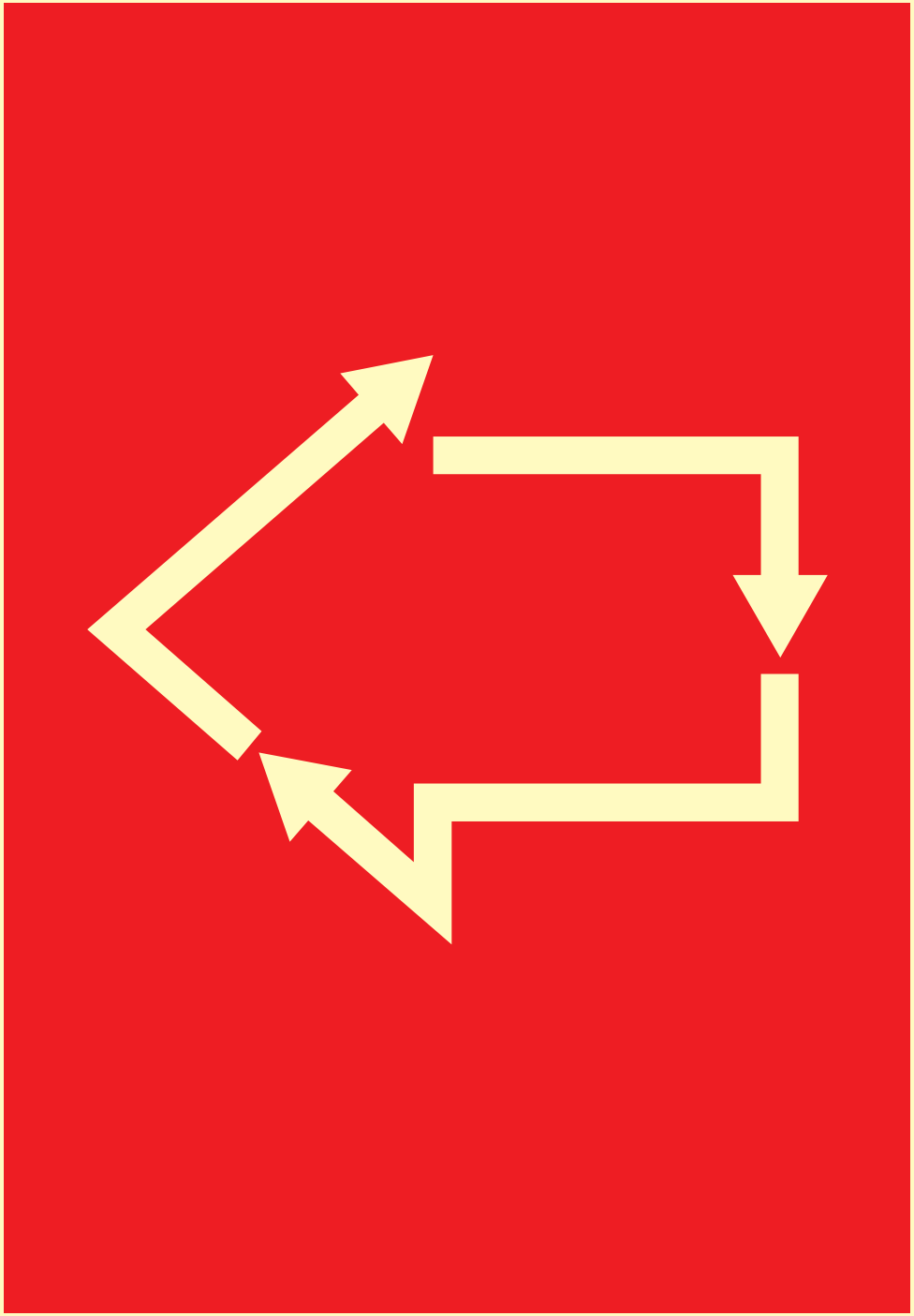
MAKE IT CIRCULAR NETHER-LANDS

WHAT DESIGN CAN DO

WHAT DESIGN CAN DO MAKE IT CIRCULAR CHALLENGE

WHAT DESIGN CAN DO IS LAUNCHING THE MAKE IT CIRCULAR CHALLENGE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH IKEA FOUNDATION. THIS GLOBAL DESIGN COMPETITION FOCUSES ON BUILDING A CIRCULAR SOCIETY IN ORDER TO COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE AND TACKLE THE DEVASTATING EFFECTS OF WASTE AND POLLUTION.

WE INVITE DESIGNERS, CREATIVE ENTREPRENEURS AND STARTUPS FROM AROUND THE WORLD TO SUBMIT IDEAS AND INNOVATIONS THAT RADICALLY RETHINK OUR WAY OF LIFE: FROM WHAT WE EAT AND WEAR, TO WHY WE BUY AND HOW WE BUILD. USING THE POWER OF DESIGN, WE CAN MAKE A CIRCULAR FUTURE MORE ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL.



01 BRINGING BACK OLD VALUES FOR A NEW ECONOMY

The Dutch are known for their efficiency. This also translates in how people in the Netherlands consume and produce. As a wealthy country by global standards, citizens are generally able to afford goods and services without the economic need to be frugal or maintain their belongings for a long time. If something breaks, buying new is often easier and faster. In some cases it is cheaper or even the only option.This has resulted in a culture where waste is seen as natural and is collectively accepted. Responsibility for this waste is not assumed by the consumer/discarder. This is exacerbated by an advanced infrastructure for waste collection and processing, in which even plastics are separated automatically, thereby eliminating the need for the consumer to think about recycling.

People prefer to own their own products. Sharing goods and services is not standard in the Netherlands, though there are movements towards this kind of living with the adoption of popular car, bike and moped sharing services.

OPPORTUNITY:
The Dutch culture values innovation. This gives authority to designers to think outside the existing systems and test their initiatives and interventions in real life.

02 GLOBAL AMBITION, LOCAL ACTION

There is clear momentum and increasing awareness about the circular economy among stakeholders in the sector, catalyzed by the European Green Deal and circular action plans developed by national, regional, and municipal governments. Furthermore, the built environment is one of the sectors with the highest potential to reach circularity, according to the World Economic Forum.

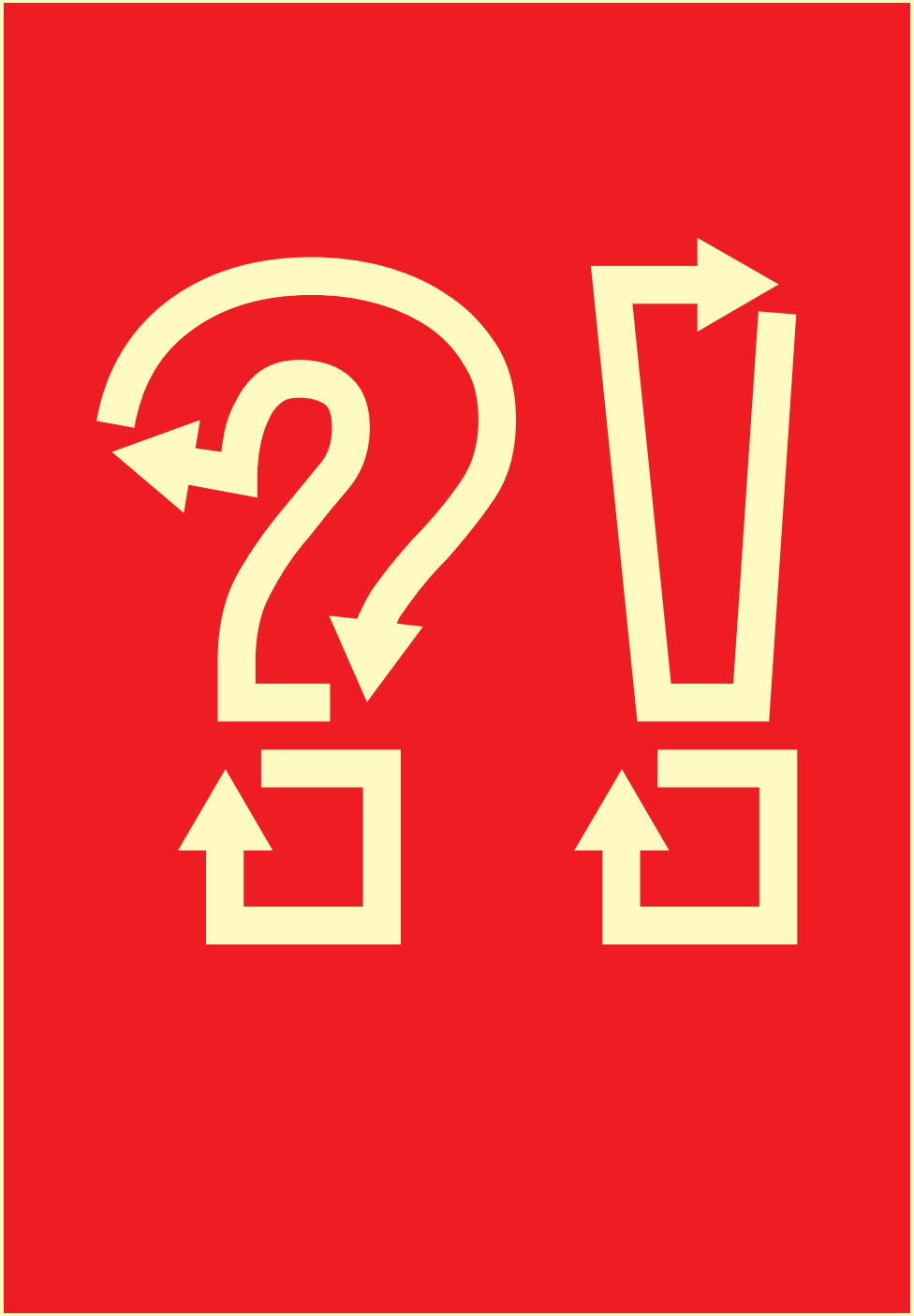
The Netherlands even officially made it an ambition for the country to be fully circular by 2050. With cities being responsible for their own waste management, Rotterdam, for example, has set a ambition to become circular in 2040 and has started creating collaborations to define circular strategies for the city. Amsterdam aims to halve the use of new raw materials by 2030 and to achieve a fully circular city by 2050.

On a larger scale, the European Union recently planned a proposal for the “Right to Repair” legislation, seeing it as an important step in achieving a circular economy by placing responsibility in the hands of companies.

Households and companies produce mountains of waste. The waste production per inhabitant amounted to 2500 kilos in 2016. This waste includes all waste materials such as food waste, packaging, iron, paper, plastic, glass, chemical waste and construction waste.

Some of that waste is incinerated for energy generation, some is recycled, some is landfilled and some is exported. There has been hardly any development in the reuse of materials in recent years. Landfilling has decreased in recent years, while incineration is increasing.

On average, in the 28 countries of the European Union, this amount is almost 1.8 thousand kilograms per inhabitant. The Dutch score relatively high, but the Netherlands also belongs to the European countries where a lot of waste is recycled. With 1.7 thousand kilos of recycled waste per person in 2016, the Netherlands is in third place in the European Union (EU-28), behind Luxembourg and Belgium. (CBS: NL IN CIJFER IN 2020)



03 TAKING RESPONSIBILITY, BUT WHO'S RESPONSIBLE?

People generally are environmentally aware, and designers living in the Netherlands know that circularity is important, but it is not clear how to get there. Within and across industries, there is no clear definition of what sustainability is or what it looks like. The long and complex supply chains that exist behind products, food, homes, etc. are hidden from the public. Transparency about how things are made and where they go "after use" is needed in order to enable action.

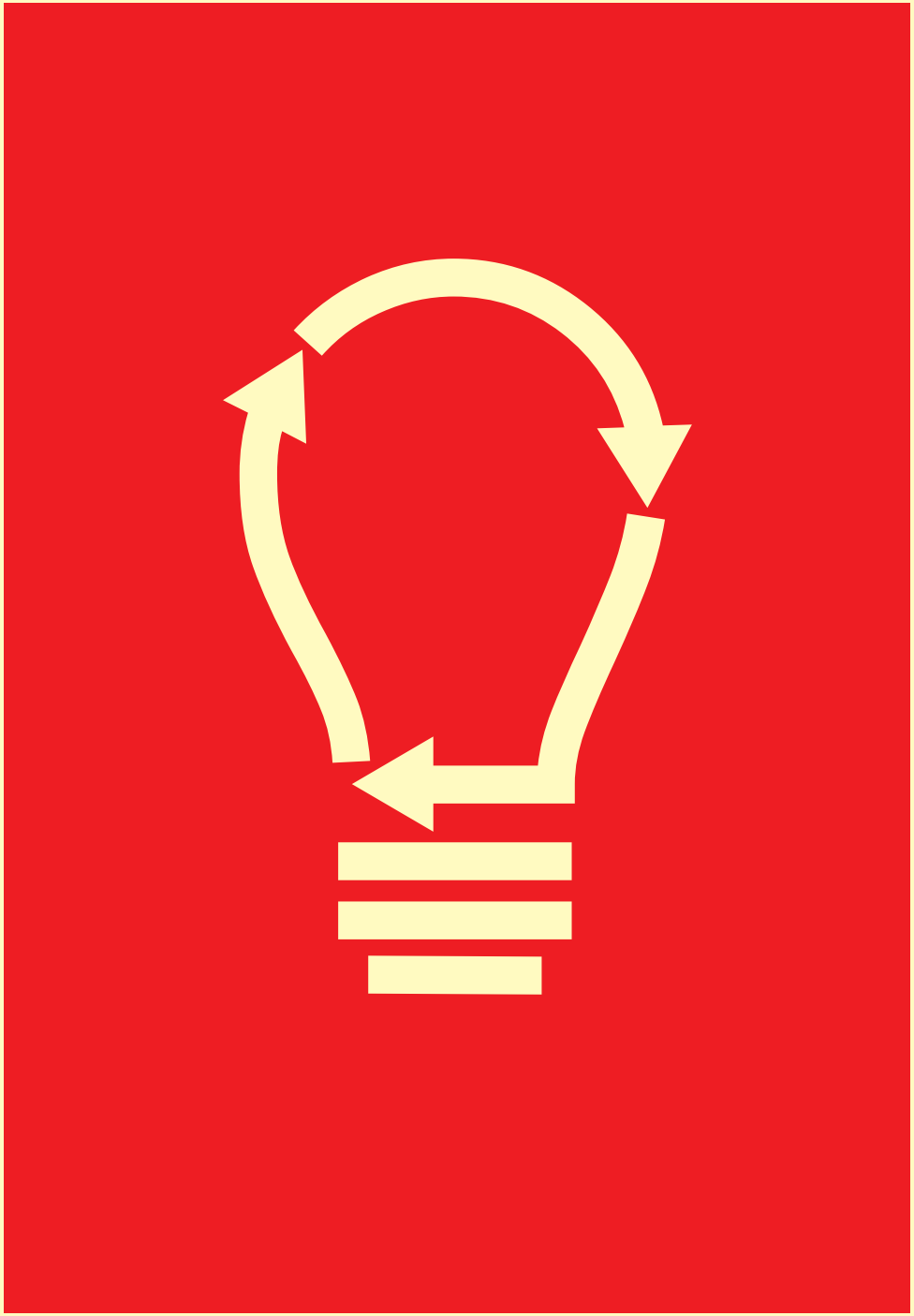
The tax system in the Netherlands needs to dramatically alter its priorities and policies, and to shift the tax burden from labour to pollution and resource use. The current tax system doesn't support an inclusive circular recovery, as it currently incentivizes companies to produce fast-moving products rather than long-lasting and easily repairable ones. Financial adjustments from the government have a strong effect on people's decisions.

OPPORTUNITY:

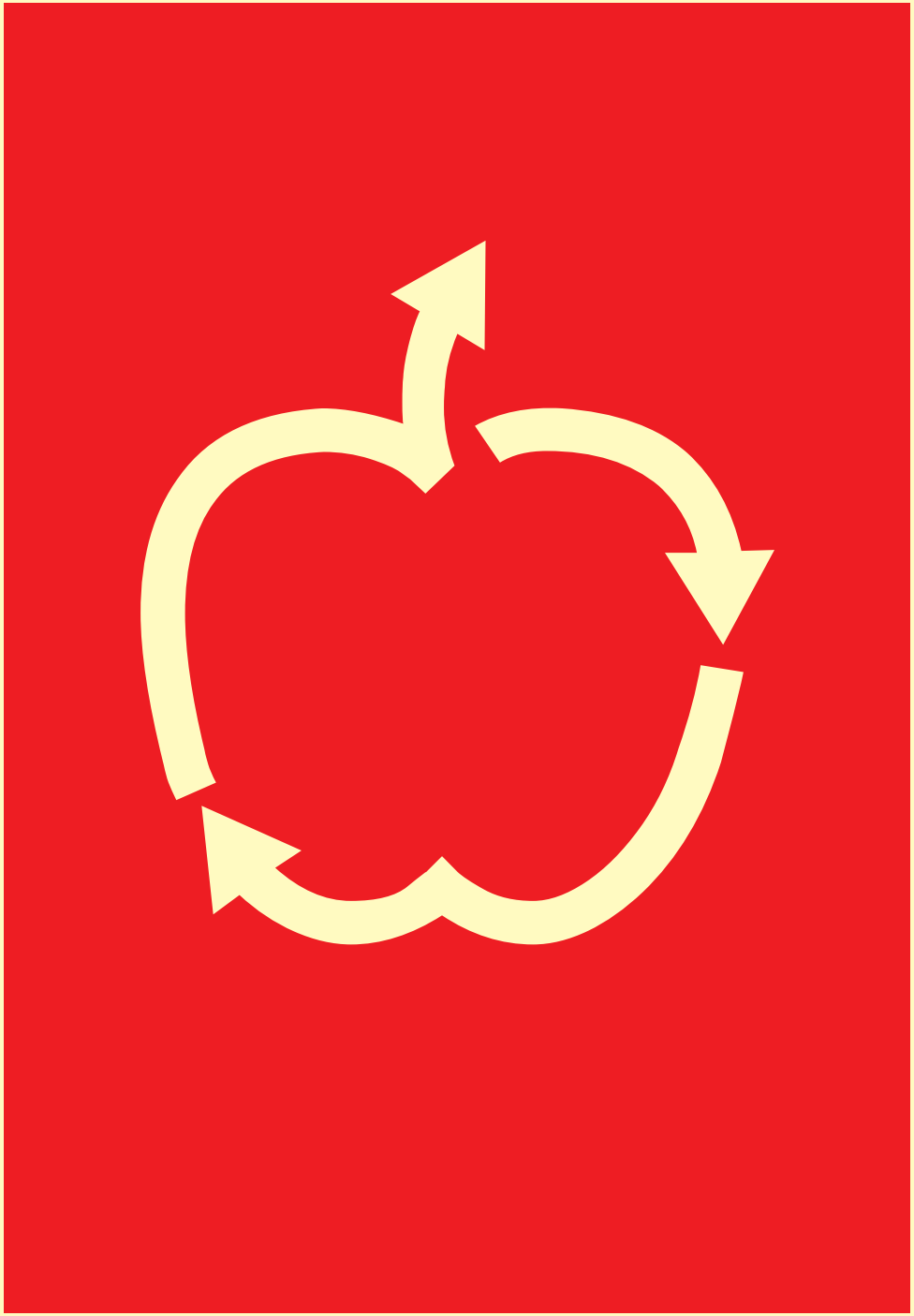
The Dutch are good at thinking holistically and questioning what is important in life. Designers have the privilege to be the translators of public values and make new ways of living a reality through creative interventions. There's also a big local movement of people who want to take action into their own hands, and to decentralize the waste system and to find local solutions.

POWER TO THE PEOPLE

Circular initiatives often arise from the bottom up and as a follow-up to other sustainability initiatives. These are often measures that involve energy (which has a direct effect on people's wallets) and improving of the quality of the living environment (including removal of stray bicycles, improved waste collection, more greenery in the neighbourhood). These initiatives mobilize people, build a local network and this subsequently leads to a new circular initiative, such as sharing and exchange initiatives. (Rapport MilieuCentraal)



WHERE DESIGN IS NEEDED / WHAT DESIGN CAN DO



WHAT WE EAT

After WWII, a food system driven by efficiency was set up by the Dutch to avoid having mass hunger again. Now, after many decades of development, the country's food production system runs on a large and complex scale, importing and exporting food all across the world. Change is difficult in a system this complicated, due to its many rules and regulations. It is challenging for smaller local producers to compete with these massive distributors. There is no clear definition of what sustainability looks like for farming in the Netherlands. For example, some farmers might reduce the number of animals they have, while others may install solar or wind energy on their land in order to become more sustainable. Adopting a circular food system presents a great opportunity to shift towards a more resilient and sustainable way of life.

Consumers are disconnected with how their food is made and where it comes from, resulting in a culture where food is not seen as a valuable resource and can easily be wasted without a thought. In 2019, it was reported that the Netherlands wasted 5 million kg of food per day, 42% of which was by household consumers. It is common for people to judge their food based on aesthetics, even when this does not reflect the quality of the food.

The price for food is not fair or realistic; it does not justify the environmental or social costs incurred during production and distribution. Across the Netherlands, more and more people want sustainable and healthy food, but they don't know what it is or want to pay a high price for it. It is also not fair to make everyone pay a higher price if they cannot afford it.

Food production uses 70 percent of all clean water in the Netherlands. Water purification systems offer a solution, but purification is becoming an increasing challenge. At the same time, drier summers make water scarcer, and therefore more valuable. We need to rethink how we use and re-use the water we have.

LONG & COMPLEX FOOD CHAINS

The production and distribution of food has grown increasingly long and complex. Warehouses with semi trucks haul our food around the country, leaving the consumer in the dark to where the food comes from and what happens to it before it reaches their plate.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Rethink food chains and think of waste streams as a resource
- Communicate the true price of food and distribute it equitably
- Rethink how we use (and re-use) water
- Shift the focus from 'end of pipeline solutions' (such as rescuing wasted food) to solutions earlier in the food chain
- Work with farmers to shift towards more regenerative practices

WHAT WE BUY

The Dutch culture of consumption is based on individual ownership and quick turnover. Advertising and popular brands have created fast consumption cycles, especially for electronic goods. Waste is a normalised concept in the Netherlands. For many people, it is easier to discard “old” products and buy new ones, which happens with fashion. Currently, consumer goods are not designed to be repaired or even last very long at all. At best, they are designed to be taken apart at the end of their lives to reuse the materials. This culture of fast-paced consumption is increasingly exceeding our planetary boundaries.

The Netherlands is highly connected to complex global supply chains to bring in and create new products. These long distribution channels result in high emissions from transportation, and the negative social and ecological impacts in the places of production are often far removed from the consumer. The waste is then exported to other countries, making the consequences of “discarding culture” invisible.

These systems are embedded in the Netherlands’ highly formalised economy, which makes it difficult to change direction. Currently, companies are economically incentivized to produce fast-moving consumer goods, whereas companies that create long-lasting and easily repairable products do not receive these same benefits. Efforts to change policy are limited by a strong linear-economy lobby. Minimal impact initiatives, such as recycling projects, receive the most support. A cultural value shift towards fully sustainable practices is necessary to make change.

FAST FASHION

We are addicted to buying clothes. And it is expected that our clothing consumption will only increase in the coming years. At the same time, the textile industry is the most polluting industry after oil and gas and accounts for about 10% of our global CO2 emissions. Each year, 14,000 tonnes of textiles are thrown away in Amsterdam only. Recycling clothes is one of the solutions. Yet this still only happens with 1% of all textiles, while the ambitions are much higher.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Encourage people to move away from individual ownership and towards collective ownership
- Value long-lasting products more than shortlived products
- Bring awareness to where our products come from and what they’re made of
- Show the impact of wasteful behaviour on people and the planet
- Combine new business models with innovative design, technologies and materials that eliminate waste and pollution and drive positive impact across the fashion value chain
- Shift the culture so that people only buy what they need, rather than what they want

HOW WE BUILD

The built environment consumes about 60 million tons of primary raw materials, more than a third of the Dutch total use. And only 8% of materials are circular. This number isn't going to decrease any time soon: in response to a housing crisis, the government has set the target of building 75,000 new homes annually until 2025, on top of infrastructure, public spaces, and commercial buildings.

Circular strategies that tackle material use, minimise waste, ensure high-value cycling at end-of-life and develop human capital can help the Netherlands reach key environmental targets while meeting the needs of its residents and society as a whole.

The Raw Materials Agreement ('Grondstoffenakkoord'), of January 2017, is the guiding principle for the Circular Construction Economy Transition Agenda.

Now the information is there, it's a matter of keeping up the work. For example, in 2021, Amsterdam began including circular criteria in tenders. Market operators are now challenged to develop new circular building designs on the basis of performance rather than compliance with measures.

OPPORTUNITIES

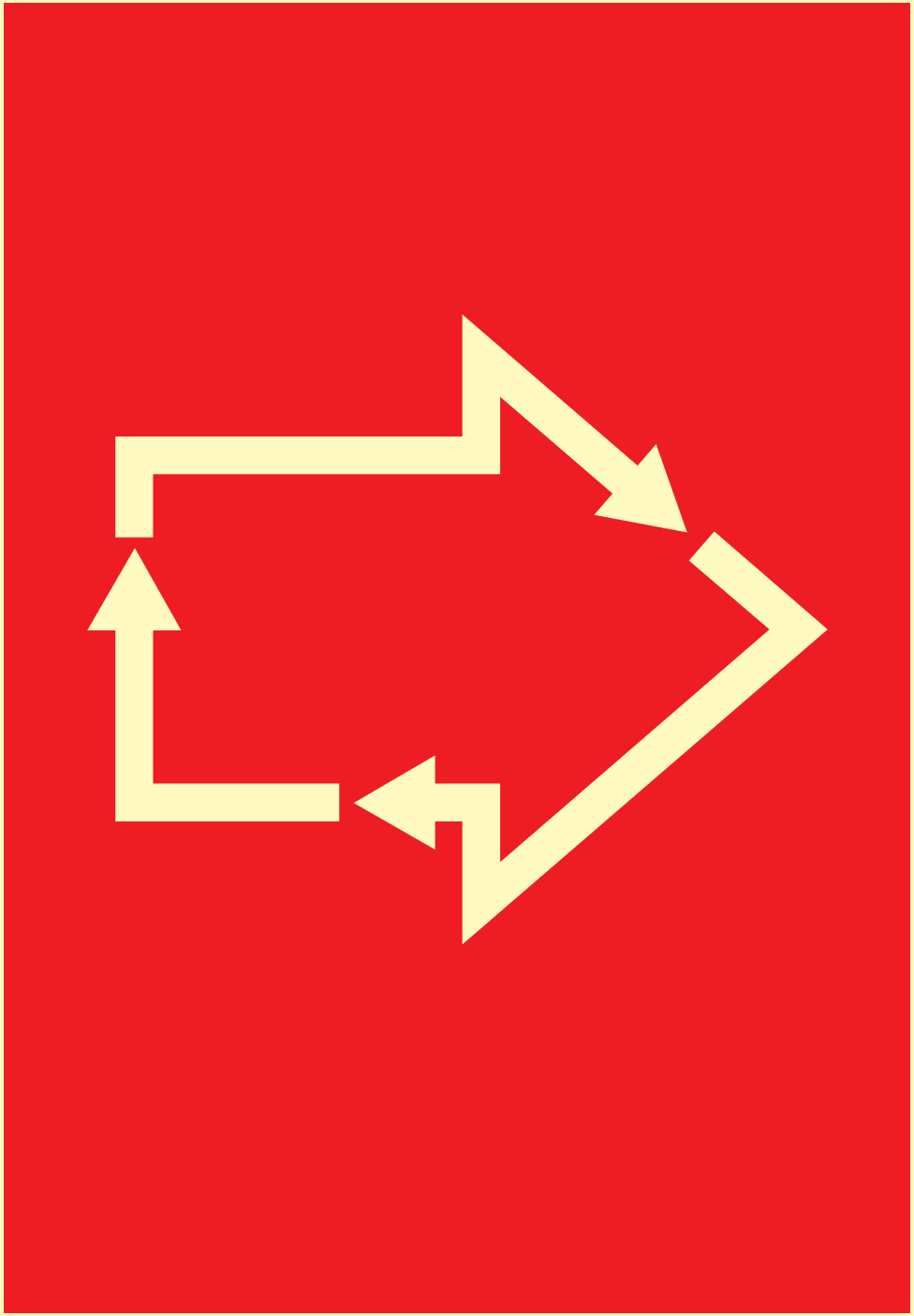
- How might we re-educate consumers that textiles can be repaired and re-used?
- How might we leverage 3D technology to print, knit and recycle textiles?
- How might we guarantee minimum returns for cotton farmers?
- How might design influence the development realistic policies to manage second hand imports?

HOW IT COULD BE DONE

SWAPSHOP

Working against overconsumption and huge waste in the clothing industry, Swapshop saw swapping clothes as a simple (and fun) solution. But they wanted more. They created a reward system in which you can bring in clothes and receive swaps. These swaps are worth money (1 euro a swap) that you can use to "buy" new clothes.
With the reflow program, they researched how long we actually wear our clothes and what happens to them before and after swapping.

TYPE OF INITIATIVE	TRAINING & EDUCATION
CREATIVE APPROACH	MULTIDISCIPLINARY
RE-ACTION	REUSE
VALUE CHAIN(S)	CONSUMER GOODS
KEY STAKEHOLDERS	CITIZENS, MARKET OWNERS AND CONSUMERS
SOURCE	the-swapshop.com



REF./ LEARN MORE

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