



**Manchester
Metropolitan
University**

Orchestrating Place-Based Circular Ecosystems

(OPCE) Toolkit

Using the GROW Framework: Goal – Reality – Options – Will
Orchestrate Project – Manchester Metropolitan University

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Introduction

How to Use This Toolkit

Using the GROW Framework: Goal–Reality–Options–Will

This toolkit is a participatory guide for mapping, imagining, and strengthening local circular ecosystems. It draws on the GROW model — Goal, Reality, Options, Will — to support inclusive, place-based circular ecosystem building.

You can adapt this guide for different sectors of the circular economy, such as textiles, construction, food, electronics, and more. Prompts can be adjusted to suit your local context, geography, and stakeholder mix.

How to Navigate

Each stage of the GROW model corresponds to one section of this toolkit:

Stage	Focus	Guiding Question
G — Goal	Clarify your circular ambition	Where do we want to go?
R — Reality	Understand your current system	Where are we now?
O — Options	Explore new possibilities	What could we do?
W — Will	Commit to action and learning	How will we make it happen?

Our Shared Intention

The purpose of this toolkit is not to prescribe solutions but to spark meaningful conversations about circular change in your local context.

Use it to:

- Surface shared values and tensions.
- Identify opportunities for collaboration.
- Design actions that are bold, inclusive, and grounded in place.
- Circular ecosystems thrive when everyone has a role — this toolkit helps you discover yours.

You Can Use the Toolkit To:

- As a stand-alone workbook to guide a small team or organisation through reflection and planning.
- In workshops or community forums, where participants fill in prompts together.
- To facilitate ecosystem mapping, uncovering who is involved, who is missing, and how local flows (materials, knowledge, or funding) connect.
- The toolkit is adaptable: modify the examples and questions to suit your sector (textiles, construction, food, electronics, etc.) or scale (neighbourhood, city, or region).

G — Goal Setting: Clarify Your Circular Ambition

Identify Your Current Reality

To begin, it's important to get clear on what success looks like in your local circular ecosystem. Reflect individually or as a group on questions such as:

What does a thriving circular economy look like in your neighbourhood, city, or region?

Which values and impacts matter most to you — regeneration, community wellbeing, local jobs, environmental restoration?

Are you aiming for incremental improvements or a systemic transformation that reshapes the way resources flow?

Which principles or ethics guide your decisions in developing the ecosystem?

How does your ambition align with broader agendas such as Net Zero, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), or the Just Transition?

Tip: Use this stage to be ambitious but realistic. Dream big, but also consider the resources, capabilities, and partners you have today.

Confront Tensions

Every ecosystem has inherent dilemmas. Use these prompts to reflect on potential trade-offs:

Ambition vs Capacity: Are your goals bold yet achievable?

Local Identity vs Global Fit: Are global sustainability goals grounded in your local context?

Innovation vs Tradition: Can you introduce new circular practices without losing the strengths of existing systems?

Collaboration vs Competition: How do you balance shared vision with individual organisational priorities?

Get Started: Mapping and Reflection

Here are practical ways to turn reflection into actionable planning:

Draft a Place-Based Circular Purpose Statement: Summarise in one or two sentences why your ecosystem exists and what it seeks to achieve.

Facilitate a Visioning Session: Ask your team: "What does success look like here in 5–10 years?" Encourage participants to draw, map, or describe the ideal state.

Use Imagination Prompts:

- What if we had shared repair hubs or community material libraries?
- What if peer-to-peer reuse platforms were widely adopted?
- What if local reverse logistics allowed materials to flow efficiently between businesses?
- How could collaborative networks between households, local enterprises, and councils transform our resources?

Confront Tensions — Working Space

Use this space to consider your tensions and dilemmas.

Write your reflections here...

R — Reality: Understand Where You Are Now

Identify Your Current Reality

To design effective circular systems, it's crucial to understand where you stand today. Use these prompts to map your position and role:

- **Your role:** Where do you sit within your local circular ecosystem? Are you a producer, facilitator, connector, or consumer?
- **Connections:** Who do you interact with regularly? Who relies on you, and who do you rely on for information, resources, or support?
- **Flows:** What moves through your part of the system? Consider materials, energy, knowledge, waste, funding, or services.
- **Capacity:** What resources, skills, and influence do you currently have?
- **Reach:** How far do your actions or influence extend within the ecosystem?

Tip: Draw a simple map or list to visualise actors, flows, and relationships — it will help identify gaps or bottlenecks.

Confront Tensions

Every ecosystem has trade-offs and challenges. Reflect on the following tensions:

Formal vs Informal: Are grassroots groups or informal actors recognised and resourced adequately?

Centralised vs Community-led: Who holds decision-making power? Is it concentrated or distributed?

Local vs External Influence: Are external stakeholders dominating, or is local knowledge driving solutions?

Efficiency vs Inclusivity: Are processes streamlined but potentially leaving smaller actors out?

Get Started: Mapping and Reflection

Take action to make the ecosystem visible and understandable:

Map key actors, relationships, and flows: Use a diagram, table, or network map to show connections, dependencies, and resource flows.

Identify gaps:

- Which actors are underrepresented?
- What relationships or connections are missing?
- Which flows are broken, inefficient, or at risk?

Facilitate a group discussion:

- Who is not represented in the ecosystem?
- What is being overlooked or undervalued?
- Which flows, relationships, or functions are critical but fragile?

Confront Tensions — Working Space

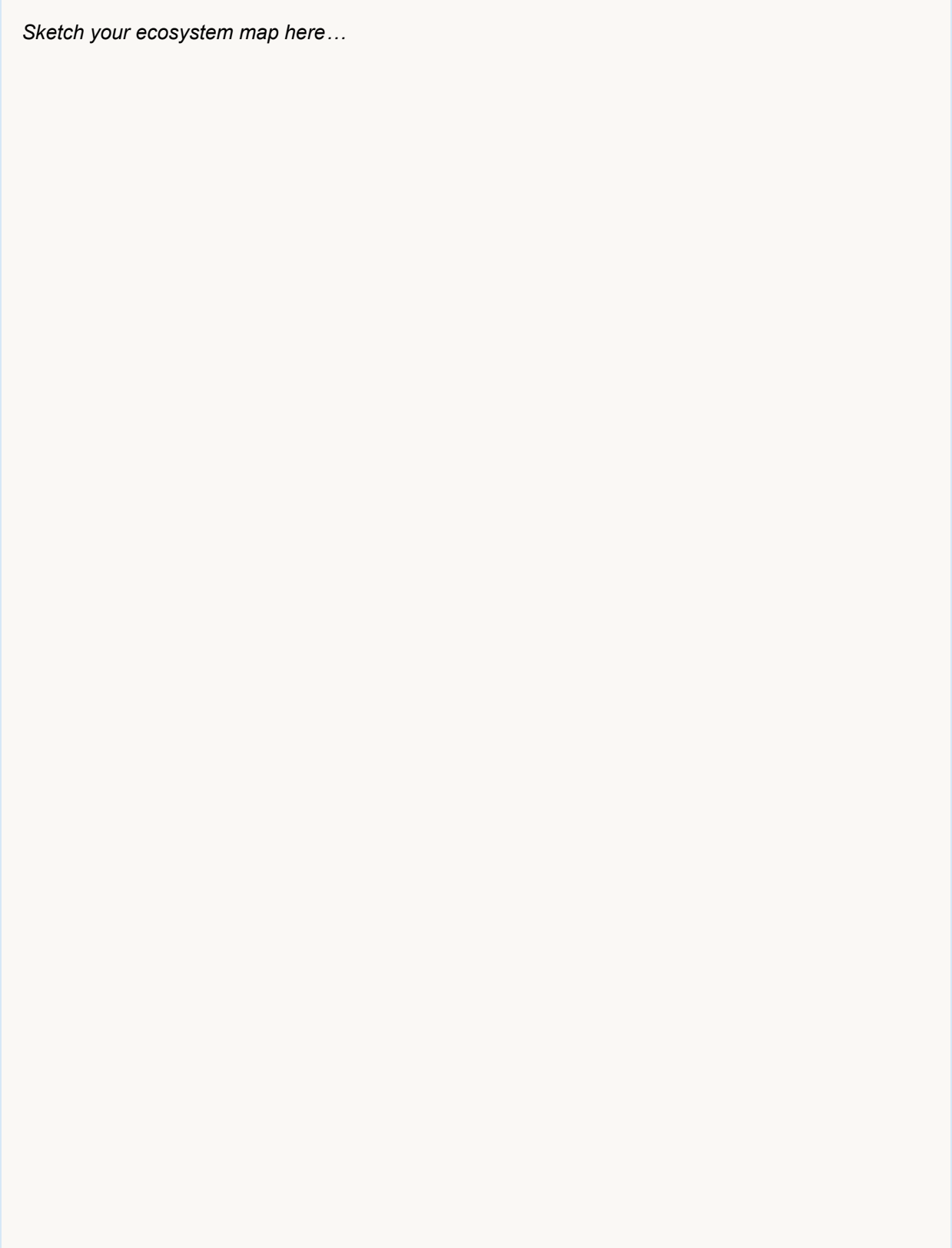
Use this space to consider your tensions and dilemmas.

Write your reflections here...

Ecosystem Mapping Space

Use the space below to sketch your local circular ecosystem. Include actors, relationships, material/knowledge flows, and missing connections.

Sketch your ecosystem map here...



O — Options: Explore New Possibilities

Identify Opportunities and Barriers

Once you understand your current reality, the next step is to explore what could be possible. Reflect on these questions:

Barriers: What is preventing your circular ecosystem from thriving? Examples include:

- Lack of funding, infrastructure, or tools
- Policy or regulatory gaps
- Skills or knowledge shortages
- Cultural or behavioural barriers

Enablers: What existing strengths could accelerate progress? Examples include:

- Motivated community groups or entrepreneurs
- Strong local networks
- Access to space, materials, or technology
- Supportive policies or initiatives

Missing actors: Which roles are absent, underrepresented, or disconnected? Why are they missing, and how could they be engaged?

Circular actions: What specific initiatives, processes, or systems could unlock value in your local ecosystem?

Examples:

- Shared repair hubs or material libraries
- Take-back schemes or peer-to-peer reuse platforms
- Local composting or recycling networks
- Education, training, or awareness campaigns

Tip: Don't limit yourself — list both small quick wins and long-term possibilities. Even ideas that feel ambitious are valuable.

Confront Tensions

As you explore options, consider potential dilemmas:

Scalability vs Local Fit: Can actions grow without losing local relevance or value?

Equity vs Efficiency: Are smaller actors and communities included, or are benefits concentrated?

Bold Change vs Practical Steps: Are solutions ambitious yet feasible?

Group Exercise

For each R-strategy on the following page discuss and record:

Who is needed? Designers, educators, repairers, sorters, manufacturers, distributors, policymakers, or campaigners.

What relationships must be built or strengthened? Networks, collaborative logistics, peer-to-peer platforms, take-back schemes, or local authority support.

Is this R-strategy already happening locally? Who is doing it? Can it be scaled, supported, or connected to other initiatives?

Confront Tensions — Working Space

Use this space to consider your tensions and dilemmas.

Write your reflections here...

Options — The 9 R-Strategies

Use the R-strategies to explore circular possibilities in your context. Consider each one and conduct the group exercise.

R#	Strategy	Key Question
R0	Refuse	Can we avoid creating the product or service entirely by meeting needs in other ways?
R1	Rethink	Can we design smarter — making products more durable, modular, or shared?
R2	Reduce	Can we use fewer materials or produce less waste through efficiency and behaviour change?
R3	Reuse	How can we extend product life through redistribution or second-hand use?
R4	Repair	What do we need to make repair accessible, visible, and valued?
R5	Refurbish	How can we bring used products back to “as new” quality for resale or donation?
R6	Remanufacture	Can we recover components and use them in new products with the same function?
R7	Repurpose	Can we use old parts for new functions — creatively or industrially?
R8	Recycle	Are there robust systems to sort, collect, and recycle locally — with minimal value loss?
R9	Recover	Can we capture residual value through composting, bioenergy, or other recovery methods?

Action Space

For each R-strategy, discuss and record your actions, who is needed, partnerships required, whether it is already happening, and any notes or reflections.

R-Strategy	Actions	Who's Needed	Relationships / Partnerships	Already Happening?	Notes / Reflections
R0 Refuse					
R1 Rethink					
R2 Reduce					
R3 Reuse					
R4 Repair					
R5 Refurbish					
R6 Remanufacture					
R7 Recycle					
R8 Recover					

W — Will: Commit to Action, Coordination & Learning

Identify Responsibilities and Structures

Once goals are set, reality mapped, and options explored, the next step is turning ideas into action. Reflect on these questions:

Coordination: Who will take responsibility for leading, holding space, or driving momentum in the ecosystem?

Rituals and Routines: What regular meetings, forums, or review sessions will keep the ecosystem connected, learning, and evolving?

Celebrating Success: How can you recognise progress, share stories, and build public trust in your work?

Adaptability: Are you and your team prepared to pivot if something doesn't work as expected?

Shared Ownership: How will responsibility be distributed so no single actor is overburdened?

Tip: Assigning clear roles and routines early prevents confusion and keeps energy focused on impact.

Confront Tensions

As you commit to action, consider the following dilemmas — these are for reflection, not obstacles:

Action vs Avoidance: Are difficult decisions being delayed due to discomfort?

Ownership vs Stewardship: Is momentum driven by an individual or shared across the ecosystem?

Boldness vs Caution: Are you willing to exit legacy systems that no longer serve the ecosystem?

Timeframe Action Plan

Plan actions across short, medium, and long-term to ensure continuity and scalability.

Timeframe	Focus	Examples of Activities
Quick Wins (0–1 year)	Pilot projects and small-scale action	Community mapping, small prototypes, storytelling, local repair events
Mid-Term (1–3 years)	Strengthen shared infrastructure	Recurring repair/reuse days, circular training hubs, collaborative logistics systems
Long-Term (3–10 years)	Structural change	Policy frameworks, permanent circular hubs, cultural and curriculum shifts, scaling successful pilots

Action Space

Timeframe	Focus	Activities
Quick Wins (0–1 year)		
Mid-Term (1–3 years)		
Long-Term (3–10 years)		

Confront Tensions — Working Space

Use this space to consider your tensions and dilemmas.

Write your reflections here...

Learning & Reflection Loop

Create a simple table or diagram to capture experiments, lessons learned, and next steps. Continuous learning is key to a resilient ecosystem. Use this loop to track progress, adapt, and scale impact:

What did we try?

What worked well?

What didn't work — and why?

What should we do next?

Record your learning loop here...

Closing & Notes: Next Steps for Your Place-Based Circular Ecosystem

Congratulations!

You've now worked through the GROW framework:

G — Goal: Clarified your circular ambition.

R — Reality: Mapped your current ecosystem and roles.

O — Options: Explored new possibilities and R-strategies.

W — Will: Committed to action, learning, and coordination.

This toolkit is a starting point — circular ecosystem building is iterative and evolving, so continue to revisit each stage as your community, city, or organisation develops.

Reflection Prompts

Take a moment to capture key insights and next steps:

- What three insights are you taking away from this process?
- Which actions or projects will you prioritise first?
- Who do you need to connect with or engage next?
- Which lessons or successes can you share with your broader network?

Next Steps & Resources

- Schedule review points every 6–12 months to check progress.
- Use the Learning & Reflection Loop to continuously adapt your strategies.
- Share your success stories and challenges to inspire collaboration locally and beyond.
- Explore additional resources, toolkits, or case studies to enhance your ecosystem.

Remember: Circular ecosystems thrive when everyone has a role, every action counts, and learning is continuous. Keep this toolkit handy, revisit it often, and use it to guide both small wins and long-term transformation.