

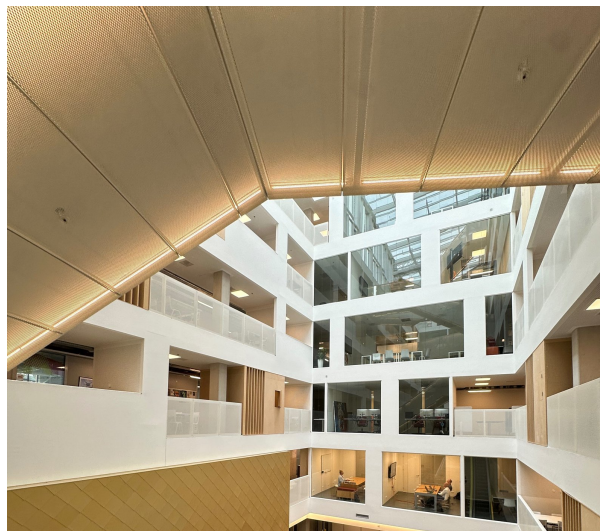
Utrecht Summer School 2026 Return Report

The Transition to a Circular Economy: A Business Model Perspective

1. Introduction

I took part in the Utrecht Summer School at HU University of Applied Sciences Utrecht in the Netherlands from 6 July to 10 July 2026. The course I attended was “The Transition to a Circular Economy: A Business Model Perspective.” It was my first time studying in Europe, so I felt both excited and nervous. All lectures, discussions, and presentations were conducted in English, and I was worried about whether I could follow the classes and communicate with students from other countries.

As a business administration student, I chose this course because sustainability is quickly becoming a core issue in management, not just a topic for environmental science. The week was made up of lectures, workshops, an online module, a management game, a team exercise, and short presentations. It taught me how sustainability connects to business strategy, digital technology, supply chains, and cooperation between companies.



<The atrium of the campus building where our classes were held>

2. Course Content

Before this course, I thought the circular economy simply meant recycling. I soon learned that recycling is only one small part of a much larger system. A circular economy aims to keep products and materials in use for as long as possible through better design, repair, reuse, remanufacturing, and, only at the end, recycling. This idea returned in almost every session, and it helped me connect the topics of different lectures into one picture.

(1) Circular Supply Chains and the Management Game (Monday)

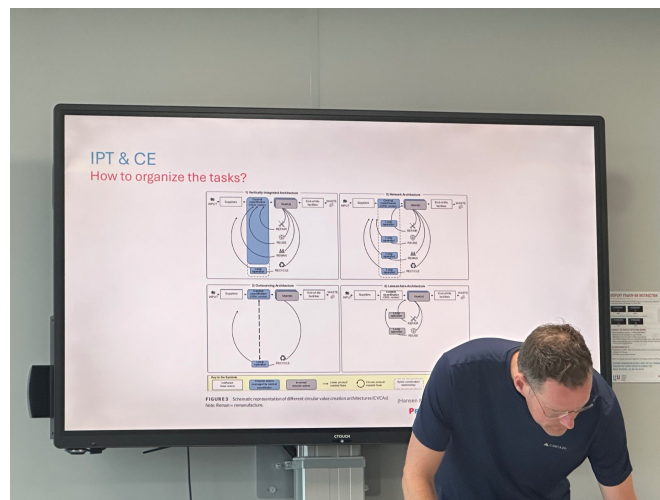
After a short introduction to the course, we played a management game and learned how to develop a circular supply chain strategy for competitive advantage. As homework, we completed an online module with an assessment, which covered EU sustainability legislation, international sustainability standards, and ESG reporting. This gave me the basic vocabulary that I needed for the rest of the week.

(2) Systems Dynamics and Digital4Sustainability (Tuesday)

In the morning workshop, we learned to model circular processes using systems dynamics. It taught me to see a supply chain not as a straight line but as a system of connected loops and feedback. In the afternoon, the Digital4Sustainability session explained the twin transition, in which digitalisation and sustainability influence each other in both directions. This session was followed by our team exercise, which I describe in the next section.

(3) Information Processing and Postgrowth (Wednesday)

The morning lecture asked a very practical question: how should the tasks of a circular business be organized? We studied four types of circular value creation architectures: vertically integrated, network, outsourcing, and laissez-faire. In each one, a central coordinator, such as a manufacturer or retailer, shares the tasks of repair, reuse, remanufacturing, and recycling with other “loop operators” in a different way. I found this very relevant to my major, because it shows that the same circular goal can need very different organizational structures. In the afternoon, the postgrowth session discussed how a postgrowth perspective can complement circularity and what chances and challenges it brings. It made me question my assumption that economic growth should always be a company’s main goal.



<Lecture slide on four ways to organize circular tasks>

(4) Circular Fashion and Circular Maturity (Thursday)

The circular fashion session introduced how the fashion industry is moving toward circularity and how its business models must adapt. Since clothing is so close to our daily lives, it made me reflect on my own shopping habits and on the value of repairing and reusing clothes instead of throwing them away. In the afternoon, we learned how to measure the circular maturity and performance of organizations, which showed me that a circular strategy needs clear indicators, just like any other business goal.

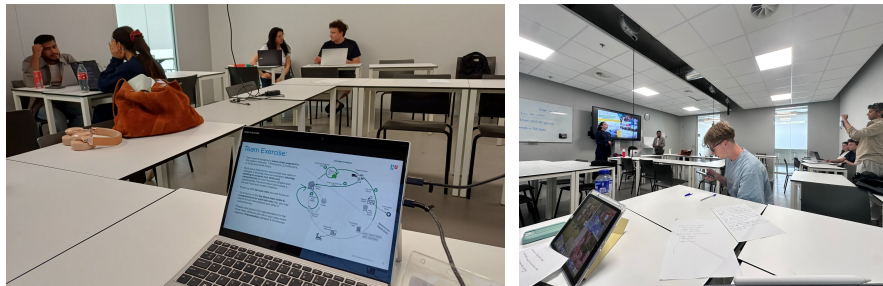
(5) Strategy and Wrap-up (Friday)

The last lecture dealt with how to develop the sustainable strategy of an organization. It brought together the earlier sessions on supply chains, digitalisation, organization, and performance, and the week ended with a wrap-up and the hand-out of certificates.

3. Team Project and Presentation

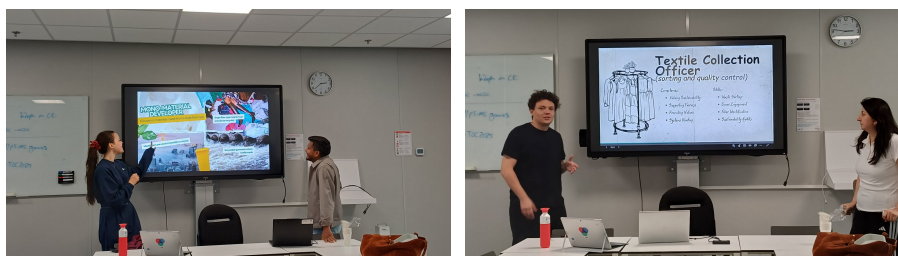
The main group activity was a team exercise on Tuesday afternoon. Each team was assigned one segment of the fashion value chain: producers, collectors, or second-hand shops. The task was to think about which new or changed job roles are needed for the twin transition, and to create a circular business model in fashion. We had to choose two job roles, identify the top three skills for each, and present our arguments in 5 to 10 minutes.

Our group worked with the second-hand shop segment. After discussing many ideas, we decided to focus on two roles. The first was a Digital Resale Manager, responsible for marketing and online sales, whose key skills are digital platform management, customer communication, and knowledge of the circular economy. The second was a Quality and Repair Coordinator, who checks and repairs second-hand items, and whose key skills are product assessment, repair knowledge, and attention to detail. These two roles cover both sides of a circular second-hand business: attracting customers through digital channels and making sure that products are good enough to be used again.



<Team exercise instructions and our draft notes on the two job roles>

The other teams presented very different ideas. A team working on the producer segment proposed a Mono-Material Developer, because mixed fibers are nearly impossible to recycle while single-fiber garments can actually be recycled. A team working on the collector segment proposed a Textile Collection Officer in charge of sorting and quality control, with skills such as waste sorting, donor engagement, and fiber identification. Listening to them showed me how one value chain can be seen from completely different points of view.



<Other teams presenting the Mono-Material Developer and Textile Collection Officer roles>

Preparing a presentation in such a short time was one of the most challenging parts of the course. At first I was worried because speaking English in front of many people was not easy for me, and there were many business and sustainability terms that I had never learned before. To follow the lectures better, I used a real-time translation tool during class to check important vocabulary, while trying not to depend on it too much. As the week went on, I became familiar with the key terms and needed less help.

When we finished our presentation, I felt proud because I realized that I could communicate and work with others in English, and this gave me much more confidence than before.

4. International Experience and Life in Utrecht

One of the best parts of the summer school was meeting people from many different countries. The participants were not only university students of my age. Some were older and had different careers and life experiences, so their opinions were often based on real workplaces. Because English was not the first language for many participants, everyone communicated patiently and helped one another, which made me less afraid of making mistakes. Through group work, I learned how important it is to listen carefully, respect different opinions, and combine them into one shared result.

Staying in Utrecht also allowed me to experience everyday life in the Netherlands instead of only visiting tourist attractions. The city was peaceful and beautiful, with canals, bicycles, and historic buildings. I also noticed how naturally sustainability fits into daily life there, for example in the widespread use of bicycles, and this made the ideas from class feel more real.



<My Utrecht Summer School certificate>

5. Conclusion

Overall, this summer school was one of the most meaningful experiences of my university life. In only five days, I moved from a narrow view of the circular economy as recycling to an understanding of it as a business model issue that involves supply chains, digital technology, organization, growth, and strategy. I also gained confidence in communicating in English, working with international teammates, and presenting my ideas within a limited time. Although the week was sometimes challenging, overcoming those difficulties made me proud of myself.

Most importantly, this experience broadened my perspective, not only on sustainability but also on different cultures and ways of thinking. I believe that what I learned at the Utrecht Summer School will be very helpful for my future studies and career, and I would like to thank the University of Seoul for giving me this valuable opportunity.