

Report on the 2026 Utrecht Summer School

The Transition to a Circular Economy: A Business Model Perspective

2021*****

1. Introduction

I participated in the 2026 Utrecht Summer School in the Netherlands. The course was called **“The Transition to a Circular Economy: A Business Model Perspective.”** It was my first time studying in Europe, so I was excited but also nervous. Since all lectures, discussions, and presentations were conducted in English, I was worried about whether I could understand the classes and communicate with other students.

The program lasted for one week and included lectures, workshops, group discussions, team projects, and presentations. During the course, I learned not only about sustainability but also about business strategies, digital technology, supply chains, and cooperation between companies. It gave me a new perspective on how businesses and society can become more sustainable.

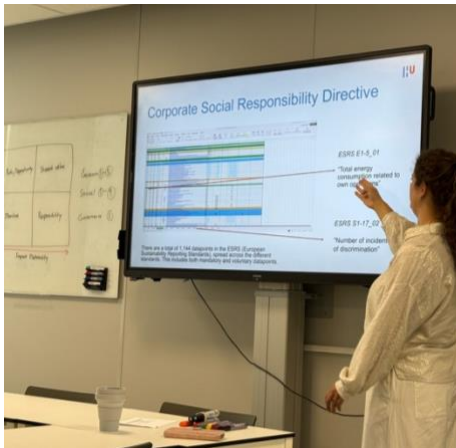
2. Academic Experience

Before joining this course, I thought the circular economy mainly meant recycling. However, I learned that it is a much broader concept. The circular economy focuses on designing products that can be used for a long time, repaired, reused, remanufactured, and finally recycled. I realized that recycling is only one part of the whole system.

The most memorable concept throughout the course was the **Butterfly Diagram** of the circular economy. We saw this framework in almost every lecture. At first, it looked very complicated because it had many different loops and processes. However, as I continued attending the classes, I gradually understood its meaning. Seeing the same framework repeatedly helped me connect the topics from different lectures.

I especially liked how the Butterfly Diagram showed the difference between the biological cycle and the technical cycle. It also helped me understand that keeping products in use for a longer time is often more valuable than simply recycling them. Because every lecture was connected to this framework, I felt that the whole course became much easier to understand.

The lectures covered many interesting topics, including circular supply chains, systems thinking, information processing, Digital4Sustainability, circular fashion, post-growth, ESG, EU sustainability policies, and double materiality. Each lecture explained the circular economy from a different perspective, and together they helped me understand how businesses can become more sustainable.



I was especially interested in the Digital4Sustainability lecture because it showed how digital technology can support sustainability. I also enjoyed learning about circular fashion because clothing is closely related to our daily lives. This lecture made me think more carefully about my own shopping habits and the importance of repairing and reusing clothes instead of throwing them away.

3. Team Project and Presentation



During the course, we worked on several group activities with students from different countries. One of the most challenging parts was preparing a presentation within a very short time.

Our group had to understand the task, discuss our ideas, organize the presentation, and present our results in English. Since everyone came from different countries, we first needed to understand each other's opinions before making one final idea.

At first, I was worried because speaking English in front of many people was not easy for me. Sometimes I needed more time to think in Korean before speaking in English. The classes also included many business and sustainability terms that I had never learned before.

To follow the lectures more effectively, I used a real-time translation tool during class. It helped me understand important vocabulary and the main ideas without missing the lecture. At the same time, I tried not to depend on the translation too much and continued listening carefully to the professors. As the week went on, I became more familiar with the key terms and gradually needed less help.

Although preparing the presentation in such a short time was difficult, our team completed it successfully. After finishing the presentation, I felt proud because I realized that I could communicate and work together in English. This experience gave me much more confidence than before.



4. International Experience

One of the best parts of the summer school was meeting people from many different countries. I became friends with students from Poland, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Turkey, and the Netherlands.

I was surprised because the participants were not all university students of the same age. Some were much older than me and had different careers and life experiences. One Dutch classmate even had two children. Listening to people with different backgrounds made our discussions much more interesting. I learned that people can have very different opinions based on their own experiences.

Since English was not the first language for many participants, everyone tried to help one another and communicate patiently. This made me feel less nervous about making mistakes. As the week continued, I became much more comfortable speaking English and participating in discussions.

The professors also created a friendly and welcoming atmosphere. One day, a professor gave everyone stroopwafels, which are famous Dutch cookies. It was a small gesture, but it made the class feel warm and enjoyable. I still remember eating stroopwafels together with my classmates during the break.

5. Experience in Utrecht and Amsterdam

After class and during my free time, I explored Utrecht and Amsterdam.

Utrecht was a peaceful and beautiful city with canals, bicycles, old buildings, and quiet streets. Since I stayed there during the program, I was able to experience everyday life in the Netherlands instead of only visiting tourist attractions.

I also visited Amsterdam. Compared to Utrecht, Amsterdam was much busier and more crowded. Walking along the canals and seeing the historic buildings helped me understand another side of Dutch culture. Visiting both cities allowed me to experience different atmospheres while learning more about the Netherlands.



6. Conclusion

On the final day, we received our certificates after completing the course. At that moment, I felt very proud because I had successfully finished an English-speaking program in Europe.

At the same time, I also felt a little sad because the week had passed so quickly. During the program, I had become familiar with the professors, classmates, and daily schedule. Saying goodbye to everyone was more emotional than I expected.

Overall, this summer school was one of the most meaningful experiences of my university life. I learned much more than I expected about the circular economy and sustainability. The Butterfly Diagram, which appeared in almost every lecture, was the most memorable framework because it helped me understand how all the topics were connected.

I also gained confidence in communicating in English, working with international teammates, and presenting my ideas within a limited time. Although it was sometimes challenging, overcoming those difficulties made me feel proud of myself.

This experience broadened my perspective not only on sustainability but also on different cultures and ways of thinking. I believe what I learned at Utrecht Summer School will be very helpful for my future studies and career.

