

THE STANDING FOREST · CHAPTER FIVE

A City Draws Its Ring

Chapter Five of The Standing Forest

Ammanuel Santa Anna

Santa Anna, A. (2026). A City Draws Its Ring. In The Standing Forest (ch. 5). Luminous Prosperity Inc. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23989548
Luminous Library Licence 1.0 · business.hautelumiere.life/library/the-standing-forest

THE LICENCE

A City Draws Its Ring
Chapter Five of The Standing Forest

The Standing Forest · Chapter Five. The Haute Lumière edition, 2026. © 2026 Ammanuel Santa Anna.

Released under the Luminous Library Licence 1.0 (hautelumiere.life/library-licence): free to read, share, quote, translate and teach, non-commercially, for ever. The Author keeps every other right, including every commercial right.

Published by Luminous Prosperity Inc. for Haute Lumière. Author ORCID 0009-0008-3244-0306.

DOI 10.5281/zenodo.23989548 · this record's page: business.hautelumiere.life/library/the-standing-forest/05-a-city-draws-its-ring/

Please cite as: Santa Anna, A. (2026). A City Draws Its Ring. In The Standing Forest (ch. 5). Luminous Prosperity Inc. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23989548

Chapter Five of The Standing Forest. The whole book, with every chapter, is at business.hautelumiere.life/library/the-standing-forest (DOI https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23989542).

A NOTE BEFORE YOU READ

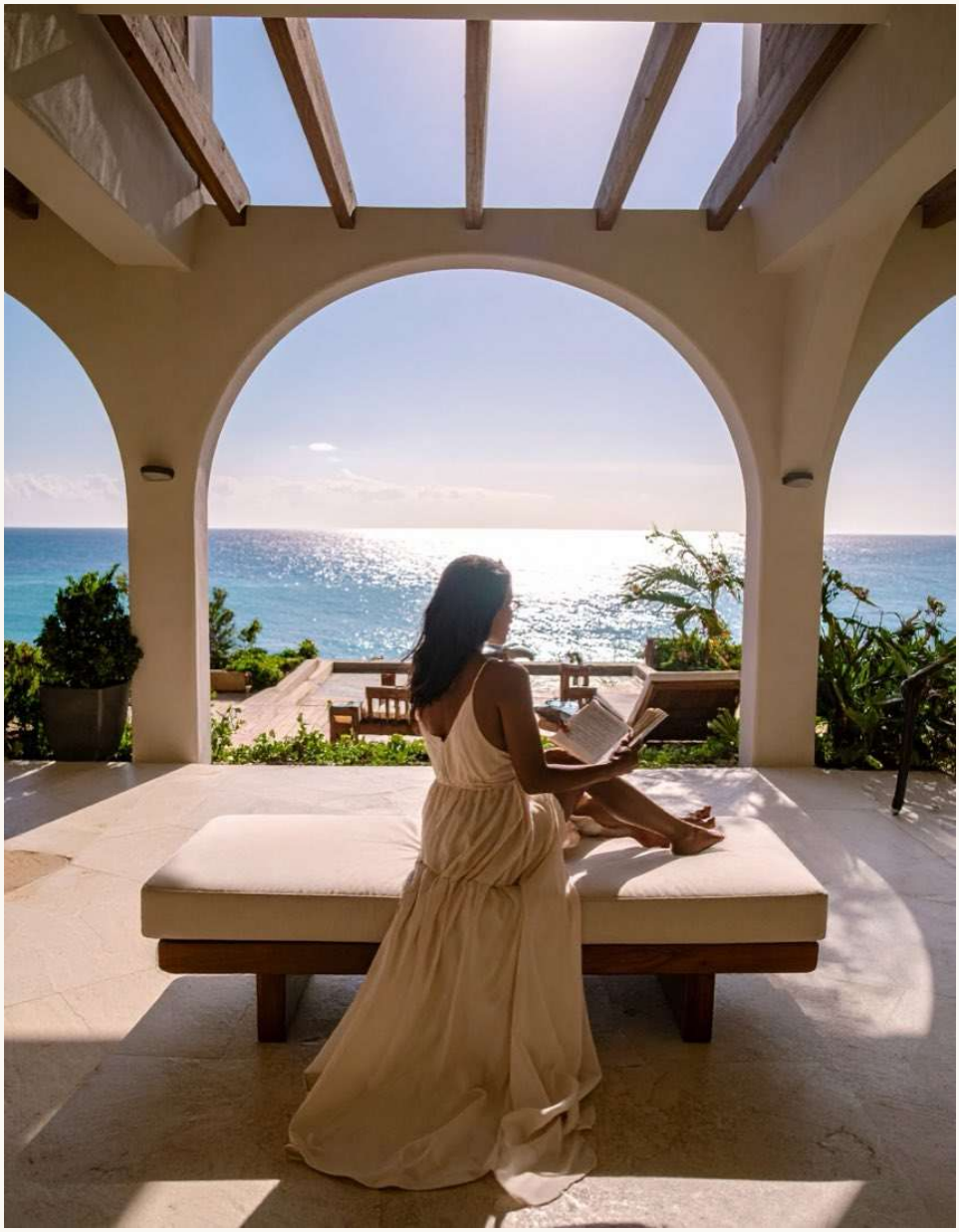
This work is offered for education and leadership development. It is not legal, financial, accounting, investment, medical or psychological advice; take the advice of a qualified professional who knows your circumstances. Companies and events are described from the public record as the author understands it; characterisations are the author's analysis. Examples are illustrative, and no particular outcome is promised to any reader.

ABSTRACT

In April 2020, with the streets of Amsterdam emptied by the first lockdown of the pandemic, the city's government presented a document that had been in preparation for more than a year. It was called the Amsterdam City Doughnut. It was, in the words of the Doughnut Economics Action Lab, which helped to make it, "the first public presentation of the City Portrait approach to downscaling the global Doughnut to the city scale". The timing gave the document a public life that its authors had not planned. A city facing the sharpest economic shock in living memory had chosen, as the frame for its recovery, a picture that put human needs and planetary limits on the same page. Reporters around the world wrote about it. The story most of them told was simpler than what had happened, and the simplification matters, because the real story is more useful to a leader than the legend.

CHAPTER FIVE

A City Draws Its Ring



A City Draws Its Ring

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE STANDING FOREST · CHAPTER FIVE

A spring with the streets empty

In April 2020, with the streets of Amsterdam emptied by the first lockdown of the pandemic, the city's government presented a document that had been in preparation for more than a year. It was called the Amsterdam City Doughnut. It was, in the words of the Doughnut Economics Action Lab, which helped to make it, "the first public presentation of the City Portrait approach to downscaling the global Doughnut to the city scale".[48]

The timing gave the document a public life that its authors had not planned. A city facing the sharpest economic shock in living memory had chosen, as the frame for its recovery, a picture that put human needs and planetary limits on the same page. Reporters around the world wrote about it. The story most of them told was simpler than what had happened, and the simplification matters, because the real story is more useful to a leader than the legend.

This chapter sets out what Amsterdam did, using the published record; what the record can and cannot show about results; and how a single firm can draw the same kind of portrait of itself. Chapters 2 to 4 gave the idea, its critics and the house's living-systems reading. This one works it, and the two chapters after it follow two governments and a forest.

What actually happened

The record, as the Doughnut Economics Action Lab (DEAL) gives it, runs as follows.[48] Dutch officials and civic groups had been engaging with the doughnut since Kate Raworth's book was translated into Dutch in early 2018. In 2019 the city worked with Circle Economy, a consultancy and one of DEAL's local partners, in a series of workshops to design the Amsterdam Circular Strategy, whose stated aim is for the city to be fully circular by 2050. Building on that work, the city joined the Thriving Cities Initiative, a collaboration between Biomimicry 3.8, C40 Cities, Circle Economy and DEAL, and with them produced the first Amsterdam City Doughnut portrait. The city then included an updated version of the portrait's results in its biennial *State of the City 2020–2021* report, with plans to continue the monitoring in-house. The circular strategy carries the city's two published material targets: to halve its use of new, primary raw materials by 2030, and to be fully circular by 2050. Some summaries render the 2030 aim as fifty per cent circularity; the city's own monitor tracks the raw-material form.[54] Alongside the city's own work, a civic network, the Amsterdam Donut Coalition, took the idea up independently among residents, businesses and community groups.

Three corrections to the common story follow from that record.

It was not a sudden conversion. The doughnut did not arrive in a crisis and replace the city's economic policy overnight. It grew out of a circular-economy strategy that was already in preparation, and it was adopted as a lens for that strategy and for recovery planning.

It was not only a government project. The coalition of residents and organisations that formed around it is, on DEAL's account, as much a part of the story as the city's own documents.

It was a portrait, not a plan. The City Portrait is a description of where a city stands, inside and outside its rings. It does not, by itself, choose policies. The plans that followed drew on it, but the portrait's value lay in what it made visible.

Since then, DEAL reports that in 2025 more than fifty local governments around the world have brought doughnut economics into their policies and processes, with published portraits from cities and regions including Barcelona, Brussels, Geneva, Melbourne, Birmingham and London.[48] These are DEAL's own figures, reported by an organisation that promotes the approach, and they count adoption, not outcomes.

The four lenses

The method behind the portrait is the part a leader can borrow, and it is simpler than its reputation. The global doughnut has one floor and one ceiling. A city has two sets of each, because its people live in one place while its consumption reaches across the world. The City Portrait therefore looks through four lenses, built around a single guiding question which, in paraphrase, asks how the city can be home to thriving people in a thriving place, while respecting the wellbeing of all people and the health of the whole planet.[49]

- Local and social. What would it mean for the people of this city to thrive? Housing, health, income, education, voice, belonging.
- Local and ecological. What would it mean for the city to thrive in its own place, as generous as the wild ecosystem it replaced? Water, air, soil, shade, habitat.
- Global and social. What would it mean for the city to respect the wellbeing of people elsewhere? The workers in the supply chains for its clothes, phones and food.
- Global and ecological. What would it mean for the city to respect the health of the whole planet? Its consumption-based emissions and material footprint, measured where the goods are made, not only where they are used.

The second lens comes from Biomimicry 3.8's work on ecological performance standards, which asks how a built place compares with the wild ecosystem that would stand there without it. It is the most unusual of the four, and the one most likely to change how a leader sees a site.

The structure answers one of the objections from Chapter 3. It does not pretend that the city's local goals and global responsibilities are the same, or that meeting one meets the other. A city can be a good home for its own people while exporting the cost of its comfort, and a portrait drawn through only the local lenses would miss that entirely.

Santa Anna's *Ecstatic Economics* praises Raworth's picture for exactly this quality, describing it as "refusing the false choice between human development and ecological sustainability".[50] The four lenses are that refusal made into a method.



What the record can and cannot show

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE STANDING FOREST · CHAPTER FIVE

What the record can and cannot show

Here a careful reader has to slow down. The Amsterdam portrait is a widely admired document. It is not, on the evidence available to this book, a demonstrated success in the sense an economist would use. Three

things are missing from the public record, and their absence is not a criticism of the city; it is the honest state of the evidence.

There is no counterfactual. Nobody can know what Amsterdam's housing, emissions or material use would have been had the city not adopted the doughnut, because the city also faced a pandemic, an energy-price shock and a housing market shaped by national policy.

The time is short. A circular strategy aimed at 2030 and 2050 cannot be judged on five years of data. Material flows in a city change at the pace of building stock, which is measured in decades.

The portrait describes, it does not cause. A portrait can change what a council discusses. Whether it changes what a council decides is a different question, and answering it would require a study of the decisions themselves.

What the record does show is narrower and real. A major European city published a description of itself that put its social shortfalls and its ecological overshoot on one page, built a method others could copy, and kept monitoring. That is a change in what the city looks at. Santa Anna's book argues that this is where structural change starts, because what an economy measures, it gradually becomes. In its starkest form:

> *A forest standing contributes zero. Cut it down, and GDP increases.*[51]

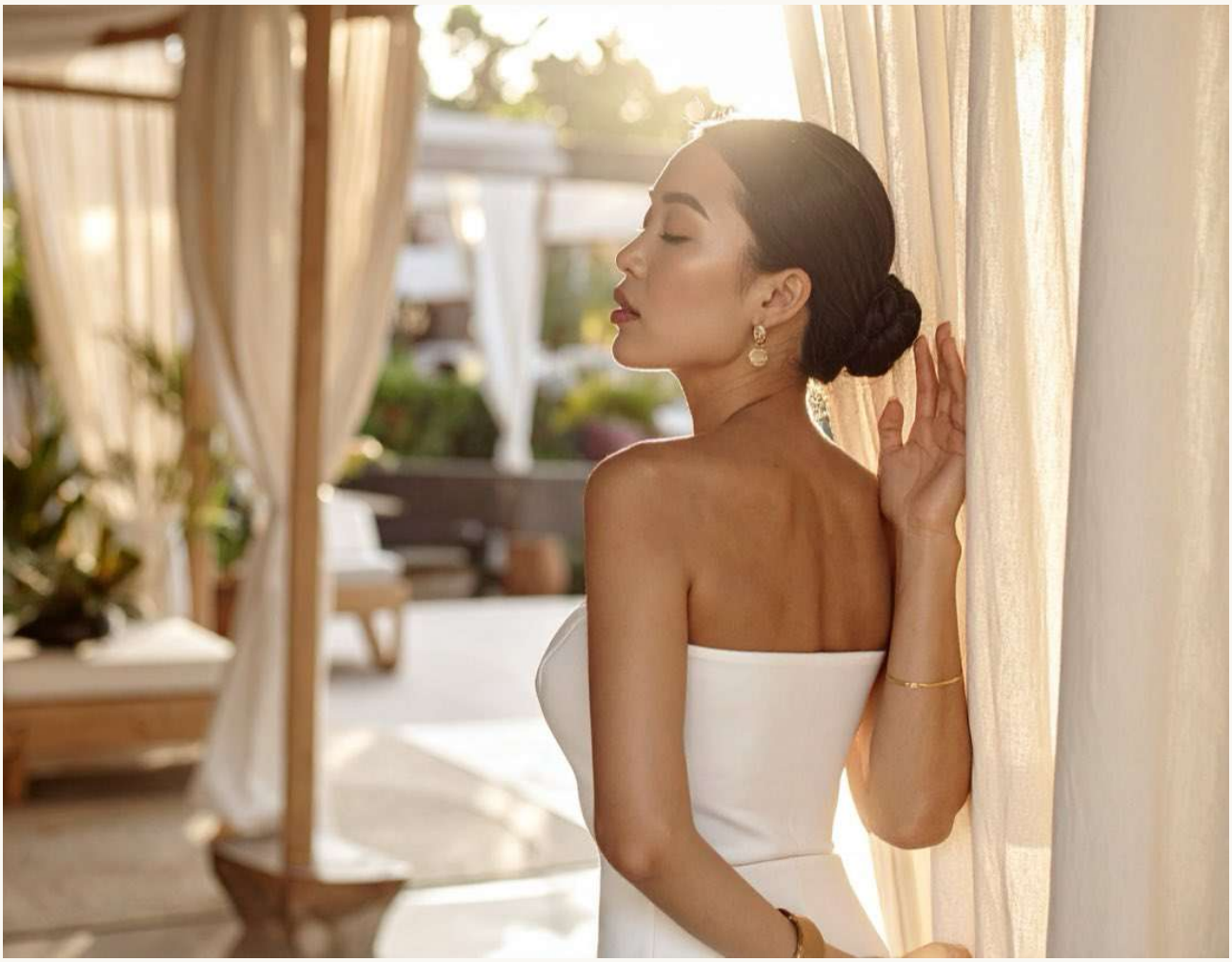
A city that adds the standing forest to its portrait has not yet saved the forest. It has stopped counting the felling as pure gain.

The state's proper role

The Amsterdam case also says something about who does what. The city did not try to direct every business and household into the ring. It drew the portrait, set a circular strategy, and made room for a civic coalition to take the work into neighbourhoods and firms. That division of labour matches a principle Santa Anna sets out in his Developmental Canon, in a passage imagining a mature economy:

> *The role of the state is not to design the economy but to maintain the conditions from which the economy designs itself*[52]

Whether that is the right role for a city is a political judgement this book does not make. It is the role Amsterdam's published record describes, and it explains why the most portable part of the case is not a policy but a method that any organisation, of any size, can use on itself.



Working it: a firm draws its portrait

HAUTE LUMIÈRE · THE STANDING FOREST · CHAPTER FIVE

Working it: a firm draws its portrait

What follows is a composite, built for teaching. The firm is not real; its name and every figure in this section were set by the writer to show the method, and none is drawn from any company's accounts.

Harrow & Vale makes solid-wood furniture in a market town. It employs 140 people, buys most of its timber from three sawmills, and sells through its own showrooms and online. Revenue last year was £18.2 million. Its leadership team, having read about Amsterdam, spends two half-days drawing a portrait of the firm through the four lenses. They use only figures they already hold.

Lens one: local and social

The question: what would it mean for the people of this firm to thrive here? The team chooses six measures and finds a figure for each.

MEASURE	FIGURE	SOURCE
Staff paid at or above the local living-wage benchmark	128 of 140	Payroll, March
Staff who took their full annual leave	97 of 140	HR system
Voluntary leavers in the year	17	HR system
Hours of paid training per person	11	Training log
Reportable injuries	4	Health and safety register
Staff who sat on a working group that changed a process	9	Minutes

The finding they had not expected: twelve people, all in the finishing shop, sit below the living-wage benchmark, and the finishing shop also accounts for nine of the seventeen leavers.

Lens two: local and ecological

The question: what would it mean for the firm to be as generous to its site as the land it replaced? The site was water meadow before it was a factory.

MEASURE	FIGURE	SOURCE
Share of site area that is sealed surface	71 per cent	Site plan
Surface water discharged to drain in a wet month	not measured	—
Trees on site	14	Walk-round count
Wood waste sent off site	410 tonnes	Waste invoices
Of which burned for heat elsewhere	380 tonnes	Waste contractor's report

The finding: the firm does not know how much water leaves its roofs and yard in a storm, on a site that was a flood meadow. The blank line is the most important on the page.

Lens three: global and social

The question: does the firm respect the wellbeing of people in its supply chain? Timber comes from three sawmills; hardware and finishes from eleven other suppliers, two of them overseas.

MEASURE	FIGURE	SOURCE
Suppliers visited in person in the last three years	5 of 14	Purchasing records
Suppliers paid within 30 days	6 of 14	Accounts payable
Suppliers who could name a wage or safety standard they meet	4 of 14	Supplier questionnaire, sent this year

The finding: the firm pays its largest suppliers fastest and its smallest slowest, which is the reverse of what reciprocity would ask.

Lens four: global and ecological

The question: does the firm respect the health of the whole planet? Here the team works from purchased quantities.

MEASURE	FIGURE	SOURCE
Timber bought	2,300 cubic metres	Purchase ledger
Share from certified sustainably managed forest	64 per cent	Certificates held
Electricity used	1.9 GWh	Utility bills
Of which from the on-site solar array	0.3 GWh	Inverter log
Gas used	2.6 GWh	Utility bills
Delivery vehicle fuel	96,000 litres	Fuel cards

The finding: more than a third of the timber cannot be traced to a certified forest, and the firm buys it from the cheapest of the three sawmills.

Reading the portrait

The finished portrait, pinned on one wall, does what Amsterdam's did. It does not choose policies. It shows the team four things they had not seen together before: low pay and high turnover in one shop, an unmeasured flow of storm water from a flood meadow, slow payment of the smallest suppliers, and a third of the timber with no forest behind it on paper.

The team's response is instructive for what it does not do. It does not set a target on every line. It chooses one line in each lens, and for each it writes a question rather than a goal: what would it take to pay the finishing shop at the benchmark within a year; what does the site discharge in a storm; what would thirty-day terms for the four smallest suppliers cost; can the uncertified timber be traced, and if not, what would it cost to buy elsewhere. Those four questions become the work of the next quarter. The finishing-shop question turns out to be the cheapest: the cost of the pay rise is less than the firm's estimate of what the year's nine leavers cost to recruit and train. That comparison uses the firm's own figures, and it is the kind of finding a portrait makes visible and a profit-and-loss account hides.

The storm-water question produces the most interesting answer. A local engineering student, hired for a summer, fits a simple flow logger to the main drain and records three months of rain. In the heaviest storm the yard sends water to the town drain faster than the drain can take it, and the street below floods for an hour. The firm had never connected the two. Its cheapest response, replacing part of the sealed yard with

planted gravel and a soakaway, costs less than one year of the timber premium it was already paying for certified wood. It also returns a little of the meadow to the site. None of this appeared in any account the firm kept before the portrait; all of it was there to be seen once someone asked what the land had been.

Alpha Value Chain is the instrument in this house that takes the next step, tracing where each of those costs and gains sits in the firm's activities.

Seven generations, at the scale of a firm

Santa Anna's book takes from the Haudenosaunee the principle of considering the effect of decisions on the next seven generations, and is careful about what it does and does not claim for it:

> *Seven-generation thinking doesn't mean we can predict the future perfectly. It means we include the future in our moral horizon*[53]

A firm's portrait is the practical form of that principle at small scale. It does not forecast. It brings the people and places a firm's decisions will affect, including those not yet born, into the room where the decisions are made. The neighbouring books on regenerative economics and on patient capital take up what a firm can then build on it.

The Tool: The Four-Lens Portrait

For a firm, a school, a congregation, a household. Two half-days the first time; one half-day each year after.

Before you start. Write your guiding question in one sentence, adapted from the City Portrait: *How can we be a place where our people thrive, on a site that thrives, while respecting the wellbeing of the people who supply us and the health of the whole planet?*

Lens one · Our people (local, social). Choose five or six measures of whether the people you are responsible for can thrive: pay against a living benchmark, leave taken, turnover, training, safety, voice. One row each: measure, figure, source.

Lens two · Our place (local, ecological). Ask what the land was before you were on it, and choose four or five measures that compare your site with that: sealed surface, water leaving the site, trees and planting, waste leaving the gate. One row each.

Lens three · Their people (global, social). List your suppliers. For each: when someone last visited, how fast you pay them, and whether they can name a wage or safety standard they meet. One row per supplier.

Lens four · The planet (global, ecological). From your purchase ledger: the quantities of your three largest materials, your energy by source, your transport fuel. One row each, in its own unit, with the share that can be traced to a responsible source.

Rules for every row.

1 · Use a figure you already hold. If you do not hold one, write *not measured*. Never estimate to fill a blank.

2 · Name the source of every figure.

3 · Do not set a target yet.

Reading the portrait. Lay the four tables side by side. Mark, in each, the one row that surprised you most. For each marked row, write a question, not a goal, beginning *What would it take to…* Assign each question an owner and a date one quarter away.

The second year. Redraw the portrait from fresh figures before you look at last year's. Then compare. The rows that moved are your evidence. The rows still marked *not measured* are your next questions.

A note on method

Harrow & Vale is a composite built for teaching; it is not a real company, and every figure attributed to it was set by the writer. No peer-reviewed evaluation of the outcomes of the Amsterdam City Doughnut was found for this article; that absence is stated, not inferred.

References

1. Doughnut Economics Action Lab and the Amsterdam Donut Coalition, "Amsterdam City Doughnut", doughnuteconomics.org/stories/1, posted 7 July 2020 and since updated; read 19 October 2026. A practitioner account by organisations that promote the approach; it reports adoption and process, not measured outcomes.
2. Thriving Cities Initiative (Biomimicry 3.8, C40 Cities, Circle Economy, DEAL), *Creating City Portraits* (methodological guide, 2020) and *The Amsterdam City Doughnut* (2020). The four-lens structure is confirmed by DEAL's account (note 1). The guiding question is paraphrased; its exact published wording was not re-read for this book.
3. Santa Anna, A. *Ecstatic Economics*, manuscript `ch03.md`, the section on integral economics. Luminous Prosperity Inc., 2026.
4. Santa Anna, A. *Ecstatic Economics*, manuscript `ch02.md`, "What the GDP Measures". Luminous Prosperity Inc., 2026.
5. Santa Anna, A. *Book 1: Foundations of Living Systems Economics*, Developmental Canon, "Call to Envision: The Self-Creating Economy". Luminous Prosperity Inc. Corpus file `canon/developmental-canon/008-book-1-foundations-of-living-systems-economics.md`. The passage ends without a full stop at the point quoted; the sentence continues with a list.
6. Santa Anna, A. *Ecstatic Economics*, manuscript `ch02.md`, the Indigenous contribution, principle 3. Luminous Prosperity Inc., 2026.
7. City of Amsterdam, *Amsterdam Circular Strategy 2020–2025* and the city's Circular Economy Monitor (launched 2022), as summarised by the Amsterdam Institute for Advanced Metropolitan Solutions and by Circle Economy; read 19 October 2026. These are targets, not results.

A City Draws Its Ring

Ammanuel Santa Anna · Luminous Prosperity Inc. · Haute Lumière

Set in Cormorant Garamond and Manrope.

Read the Business Library at business.hautelumiere.life/library.

Luminous Library Licence 1.0 · hautelumiere.life/library-licence

REQUEST A CONVERSATION

business.hautelumiere.life/book/?kind=gainshare

The Business Library

business.hautelumiere.life/library/

The packages

hautelumiere.life/pricing/