

## Regional project development assistance for the uptake of an Aragonese circular economy

### D4.2 Best Practice Selection

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Abstract	This deliverable outlines the methodology and process for the selection of best practices to be benchmarked within the RESOURCE project, spanning from months 12 to 24. Led by EBN, the selection process aims to identify 25 exemplary practices for comparison with chosen projects under T4.1. and the final selection of 5 best practices that will be implemented in the methodology.
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This deliverable aims to describe the methodology used and outcomes of the Best Practice Selection deliverable 4.2 conducted as part of the RESOURCE project between months 12 and 24. Led by EBN in collaboration with all project partners, the objective was to identify 25 best practices for benchmarking against projects under T4.1, focusing on Mapping Successful Circular Economy Projects across Europe.

The methodology and process for selecting these practices are outlined, highlighting the structured approach undertaken to ensure alignment with project objectives and standards. Leveraging the extensive network of EBN members, sessions were organized online gathering EBN members and non-members from various countries, featuring presentations of projects and the subsequent selection of best practices. From a methodology perspective, the selection process was collaborative and rigorous, employing established criteria to evaluate practices effectively.

This activity provides valuable insights and guidance for implementing and assessing the impact of the RESOURCE project. By filtering these efforts into five benchmark best practices, the deliverable emphasizes its role in informing strategy and driving sustainable development within the project.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

**CCRI** .....Circular Cities and Regions Initiative

**CE**.....Circular Economy

**EBN** .....European Business and innovation centre Network

**EU** .....European Union

**PDA** .....Project Development Assistance

**SIG** .....Special Interest Group

**SMEs**.....Small and medium-sized enterprises

**WP** .....Work Package

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Context and background

Circularity is an essential aspect of the industry transformation towards resource-efficiency, climate neutrality and long-term competitiveness.

The RESOURCE project is currently studying the private funding opportunities needed in circular projects and facilitating their development. RESOURCE's overarching objective is to develop new Project Development Assistance (PDA) services to fund regional circular economy investment projects. More precisely RESOURCE is:

- building an integrated expertise pool to support technically, economically, and legally the regional circular economy pilots SMEs,
- developing innovative financing schemes and business models,
- launching concrete investments.

The methodology developed for the RESOURCE project ensures the sustainability of those circular economy projects by potentially completing their private funding with other sources of financing (European, national, and regional public funds).

The RESOURCE methodology consists of seven steps:

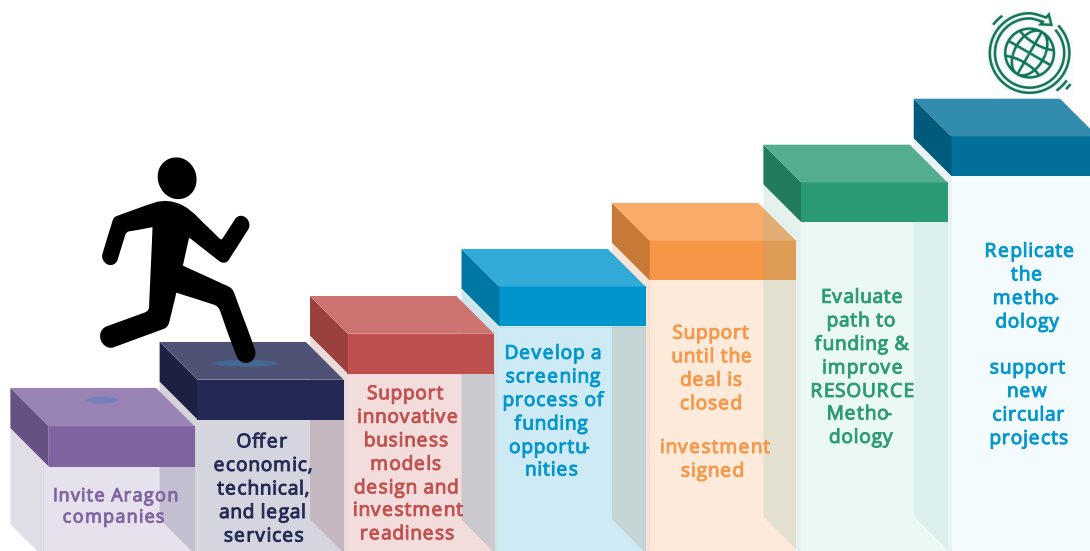


Figure 1 - The RESOURCE methodology in 7 steps

Circular economy is a priority for the Region of Aragon. The Region has launched a manifestation of interest and identified a portfolio of circular projects in need of funding. Nine of these projects will serve as pilots in the RESOURCE project.

The strong interest coming from Aragon companies to shift towards circular practices will guarantee a sustainable pipeline of projects to test the RESOURCE methodology. The final and overall objective of the RESOURCE project through the creation of a portfolio of project development assistance services, is to accelerate the development of the circular economy in Aragon and to reach €20M direct private investment in circular projects over a period of 36 months, until end of June 2025.

RESOURCE will in particular **reach out to and gather a circular economy community to develop an innovative regional** process and ecosystem to remove the technical, economic, legal, regulatory, and financial barriers the circular economy projects face.

The innovative RESOURCE solution will be co-created with **public institutions, intermediary organisations, finance stakeholders and beneficiaries**. A specific **outreach and communication campaign** will be conducted from the beginning of the RESOURCE project and throughout its entire duration **to engage the largest possible number of regional stakeholders** in the community. A set of **market intelligence and awareness-raising materials** (factsheets, publications, informational videos, etc.) and **knowledge and capacity-building activities** (including online training webinars, exchange of good practices and peer experiences, etc.) will be specifically developed. A similar campaign will be conducted to reach out to and engage with other circular economy ecosystems in the EU interested in replication.

## 1.2 Purpose of this report

This document, Deliverable D4.2 Best Practice Selection, is developed as part of the RESOURCE project funded by the European Union under the Horizon Europe research and innovation(R&I) programme under grant agreement N° 101060142. It is part of Work Package 4 (WP) – Replicability on the EU scale: best practices and benchmarking.

A former deliverable, the D4.1 “Map of Circular Economy projects implemented across EU countries” that identified 25 best practices from which we selected five key ones. This current D4.2, now outlines the final five best practices that will be used to be benchmarked with the RESOURCE selected pilot projects. A first section explains the methodology employed to select those final five best practices, in sections 3 and 4 the best practices are detailed, and finally in the section 5, 6 pillars are extracted from those best practices to serve as benchmarking pillars for the RESOURCE pilot projects.

## 2 Methodology for Selecting Best Practices in Circular Economy projects' support

The methodology employed by the consortium for selecting the best practices in Circular Economy projects within the framework of the EBN Activities and tasks involved a meticulous and multi-faceted approach. The process spanned across two key tasks:

### 2.1 The mapping and selection of best practices

#### Task 4.1: Mapping Successful Circular Economy Projects across Europe (M5–M12)

Led by EBN, Task 4.1 focused on identifying and mapping similar CE initiatives and investment projects across Europe. The methodology encompassed various steps:

- Online Questionnaire: EBN members, particularly the Special Interest Group (SIG), were engaged through an online questionnaire to gather insights into existing CE projects.
- Desk Research: All consortium partners conducted extensive desk research to supplement the data obtained from the questionnaire and identify relevant projects.
- Online One-to-One Meetings: Further insights were gathered through online one-to-one meetings with stakeholders involved in CE projects.
- In-presence One-to-One Meetings: Meetings were held at EBN Congress in Brno in June 2023.

The overarching objective of Task 4.1 was to ensure a comprehensive coverage of CE projects implemented across Europe, considering factors such as participation in European projects, business support methodologies and private funding, while ensuring geographical balance. Findings from this task are found under deliverable 4.1.

#### Task 4.2: Best Practice Selection (M12-M24)

Building upon the findings of Task 4.1, Task 4.2, led by EBN, focused on the selection of 25+ best practices to be benchmarked within the RESOURCE project. The selection process comprised the following steps:

- Organizing Best Practice Knowledge Sharing Sessions: five sessions were organized online and gathered stakeholders included in the mapping from different European countries and beyond leveraging the EBN pool of members across Europe.
- Presentation and Evaluation: projects presented their organisations, projects, activities, and lessons learned in each session. Project partners evaluated them based on pre-established criteria, including adherence to CE principles and geographic coverage. Those sessions were highly practical focusing mainly on activities and lessons learned.
- Selection of Best Practices: when the five sessions were completed, a compilation report of sessions minutes and findings was developed. Out of this report, a table of 25+ best practices were summarised and grouped as per the pillars of the project. It can be found in the next section. The identified pillars were:
  - Capacity Building and Training
  - Access to Funding Components
  - Networking and Collaboration
  - Technical Support to SMEs



- Policy, Advocacy, and Regulatory Frameworks

Partners were then requested to score the best practices as per the criteria identified below:

- **Alignment with Circular Economy Principles and Project Pillars:** Assessing the extent to which the practice embodies core principles of circular economy, and how much they are in line with the project pillars, i.e. how much they will contribute to the methodology of Resource.
- **Scalability and Replicability:** Assess the scalability and replicability of the practice across different industries, regions, and contexts. Considering factors such as ease of implementation, adaptability to diverse settings, and potential for widespread adoption.
- **Long-Term Sustainability:** Considering the practice's potential for long-term sustainability and resilience, including its ability to adapt to changing circumstances, and maintain positive impacts over time.

The following grading was used from 1 to 4:

- **Poor (1):** The practice does not adequately address the needs of the methodology
- **Fair (2):** The practice has some effectiveness but could be improved significantly.
- **Good (3):** The practice is effective and meets the basic requirements for supporting SMEs
- **Very Good (4):** The practice is highly effective and demonstrates a strong impact for the methodology and supporting SMEs

The identification of five best practices were intended to serve as benchmarks for the RESOURCE project support methodology. The methodology adopted ensured a rigorous and inclusive approach to selecting best practices in CE projects, thereby facilitating knowledge sharing and fostering innovation across European regions.

## 2.2 Five Best Practice Sharing Sessions organised

Sessions & dates	Speakers
<b>Best Practices #1</b> November 20, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apostolos Tsolakis, Q-Plan Company - Pop Machina project - Greece</li> <li>• Jessica Hajjar, Berytech – various projects - Lebanon</li> <li>• Lukas Jasiunas, Ecorbio, Part of Cyric Incubator– (Startup) Cyprus</li> </ul>
<b>Best Practices #2</b> December 5, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elisa Gambuzzi, HOOP project (CCRI)</li> <li>• Malen Otero, ICLEI - Circular Invest project (CCRI)</li> </ul>
<b>Best Practice #3</b> December 19, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pietro de Martino, Filse Spa - Ecofishent project (CCRI) – Italy</li> <li>• Homero Cardoso, Tagus Valley – Portugal</li> <li>• Raquel Galante, Fibrenamics Azores- Portugal</li> </ul>
<b>Best Practices #4</b> February 14, 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alain Kieber, RITLENG (SME in CE – Construction) France</li> <li>• Consuelo Monfort Belles, Beauvaisis communauté d’agglomération (transversal missions among regional and local governments) - France</li> <li>• Andrea Guerra, iTerra Incubator – Beauvais, France</li> </ul>
<b>Best Practices #5</b> March 19, 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Silvia Gambi, Prato ecosystem - Italy</li> <li>• Leonardo Borsacchi, PIN Incubator – Italy</li> <li>• Niccolò Cipriani, Rifo startup in textile – Italy</li> </ul>

### 3 Best Practices Selected

The table presented below summarises a comprehensive compilation of best practices gathered from five distinct online sessions, gathering different EU stakeholders from EBN members or non-members and each representing a wealth of expertise and insights. These sessions, aimed to map out projects and initiatives, identifying strategies that effectively align with Resource methodology and support services within Resource. Through the mapping analysis, five pillars emerged, serving as guiding principles for the review of the best practices.

During the best practice sharing activity, a need emerged on the necessity for an additional pillar or topic, coming from the recognition of a crucial requirement for enhanced project management capabilities, the need to improve project management practices.

#	BEST PRACTICE	DETAILED BEST PRACTICE	SOURCE
<b>PILLAR 1: CAPACITY BUILDING AND TRAINING</b>			
1.	Comprehensive Program Components and Support Services	For Circular Economy Startups and SMEs, it is particularly important to provide well-rounded and comprehensive programs that integrate various components such as capacity building, market access, investment access, incubation, coaching, mentorship, financial support, regulatory compliance and eco-innovation challenges. This holistic approach ensures startups receive diverse and a holistic support. The programs include technical as well as well as generic topics.	Berytech/ Ecorbio/ EcoSwitch HOOP, Circular Invest, Itterra Pop Machina Tagus Valley
2.	Hand-on learning	The program offers diverse platforms for knowledge exchange, different delivery approaches, including direct services, peer-to-peer support, and multi-stakeholder engagement, ensuring that project beneficiaries receive customized assistance according to their specific needs and preferences. The use of interactive and practical methods such as serious games to engage participants and facilitate understanding of complex concepts like circular economy is in place.	Pop Machina Tagus Valley
3.	Recognizing the uniqueness of the entrepreneur	Recognizing and developing the entrepreneurial potential while assessing the needs of unique individuals and organizations. Also, addressing commitment challenges: work on strategies to help entrepreneurs clearly see the opportunity that the project represents 'what's in it for them?'.	Pop Machina/ Berytech iTerra
4.	Toolkits and Publications	By producing and releasing toolkits and guidebooks like the Toolkit for Green Incubation and the Green IPR guidebook, Business Support Organizations (BSOs) gain essential resources for navigating circular entrepreneurship and intellectual property rights. Additionally, offering supportive tools such as self-assessment resources like the HOOP circular bioeconomy tool enables project developers to evaluate feasibility and impact, thus improving project quality and effectiveness. Also, facilitating a digital transition of materials and tools enhances accessibility, engagement, and scalability of project resources where feasible.	Berytech HOOP. Tagus Valley
5.	Assessment, roadmaps and templates	Establishing clear expectations through grant agreements, reporting templates, and milestone development ensures transparency and accountability throughout the program. SMEs begin with a structured roadmap after an initial assessment, providing clear direction and focus for their growth and development. Recognizing the time-intensive nature of research development and product development, realistic timelines and forecasts are emphasized to ensure accurate planning and progress tracking.	Berytech / Ecorbio

#	BEST PRACTICE	DETAILED BEST PRACTICE	SOURCE
6.	Soft landing/ Access to markets	Soft Landing encompasses a variety of activities designed to facilitate the transition and integration of SMEs into new markets or ecosystems. They involve guided visits or immersive experiences in target markets or ecosystems. These missions allow SMEs or startups to gain firsthand insights into local business practices, regulatory frameworks, and market dynamics. By engaging in soft landing missions, they can better understand the target market, identify opportunities for collaboration or adaptation, and establish meaningful connections with local stakeholders. These programs support the internationalization and growth of startups and SMEs in the green and circular economy sectors.	Berytech
7.	Provide strong support for networking	Effective networking is crucial for startups and SMEs. It should be done by individuals who have a passion for it or with strong skills. It also suggests that startups/SMEs should consider training or hiring individuals with strong networking skills and BSO's should be providing guidance on effective networking strategies and empowering businesses to maximize opportunities for growth and collaboration.	Ecorbio
<b>PILLAR 2: ACCESS TO FUNDING COMPONENTS</b>			
8.	Mixed funding	Maximizing project impact requires leveraging both public and private capital. The HOOP project exemplifies this by securing substantial funding, exceeding its initial budget and attracting additional investments. Effective financial planning entails securing funding from various sources such as public subsidies, equity investment, and private funding. Diversifying funding streams ensures stability, fostering long-term project sustainability and expansion.	HOOP iTerra
9.	Engagement with Investors	Engaging investors in advisory capacities and facilitating matchmaking opportunities with circular economy project developers fosters deeper investor involvement, thereby encouraging project funding and scalability within the circular economy framework.	HOOP Circular Invest
10	Including Funding within Incubation Programs	Establishing dedicated funds for innovation within the BSO or the project/program while providing comprehensive incubation programs are essential strategies to support startups, SMEs and innovative projects. It ensures targeted investment in sustainable and impactful ventures. With iTerra the fund was part of the support organization.	iTerra, Prato (Avanzi)
<b>PILLAR 3: TECHNICAL SUPPORT TO SMEs</b>			
11	Providing training and technical support	Programs comprehensively address technical assistance needs by conducting needs assessments, developing roadmaps, and assigning consultants to tackle technical challenges. Additionally, they provide training and support to help SMEs transition to circular economy practices, encompassing education on circular economy principles, technical skills training, along with business skills development.	Berytech
12	Facilities and Spaces	Recognizing the need for space and facilities and providing the space to test technical aspects of the projects. An example of the Entrepreneurship Labs that are providing both business and environmental support and demonstrate a holistic approach to nurturing circular SMEs.	EcoSwitch PopMachina
13	Measurement and Impact Assessment	Implementing robust measurement tools and methodologies to assess environmental and social impacts along the value chain. Conducting life cycle assessments, data mapping analyses, and chemical analyses to quantify the positive effects of circular initiatives and identify areas for improvement.	Prato
14	Confidentiality Measures	Understanding the confidentiality issues and adapting methodologies, accordingly, implementing confidentiality agreements (NDAs) between	Berytech Circular Invest CIMPA

#	BEST PRACTICE	DETAILED BEST PRACTICE	SOURCE
		experts and participants adds a layer of security and trust, especially when dealing with sensitive information. Providing Legal Clarity: establish clear contracts and non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) between partners and clients to safeguard intellectual property and manage legal risks.	
<b>PILLAR 4: NETWORKING AND COLLABORATION</b>			
15	Building networks	Establishing a network of organizations committed to supporting circular entrepreneurs at both local and regional levels is pivotal for achieving broader impact and scalability in sustainable endeavours. Encouraging robust collaboration and partnerships among a wide spectrum of stakeholders, including municipalities, government agencies, industry players, community organizations, citizens, waste management companies, and technical partners, enhances project effectiveness by tapping into a diverse pool of expertise and resources. Such collaborations not only reinforce the success of initiatives but also ensure comprehensive engagement and sustainable growth within the circular economy ecosystem.	EcoSwitch /HOOP Beauvaisis/ Berytech
16	Online Presence and Visibility	Maintaining a website and highlighting success stories of SMEs increases visibility for entrepreneurs while celebrating achievements and through events like presentations or competitions to motivate participants and showcase the impact of the project.	EcoSwitch/ Valley Tagus
17	Flagship events	Organizing flagship events like annual festivals that incorporate virtual and physical networking, expert panels, and inspirational talks cater to a diverse audience and provide valuable opportunities for engagement and learning.	EcoSwitch
18	Open Innovation Challenges	Corporate Engagement/ Open Innovation challenge: involvement of corporate partners in networking activities enriches the startup/SME ecosystem and provides valuable opportunities for collaboration and growth.	Berytech
19	Cross-Sector Collaboration	Engage multiple stakeholders across sectors and regulatory bodies to address complex challenges and promote innovative solutions. Foster collaboration between public and private entities, academia, and industry partners to leverage diverse expertise and resources.	FILSE
20	Mapping / databases	Resource Mapping: mapping experts, laboratories, equipment, and regional opportunities helps identify available resources and potential areas for collaboration and growth. Also develop processes for Data Collection and Metrics: develop robust data collection methods and metrics, especially for waste valorisation projects. This ensures accurate assessment of progress and outcomes.	EcoSwitch/ CIMPA
21	Opportunities for collaboration and networking	Increase collaboration opportunities among makers/entrepreneurs and facilitate networking opportunities with other stakeholders, including investors and industrial partners. This collaboration fosters innovation and opens avenues for partnerships and growth.	Berytech/ Machina Pop
<b>PILLAR 5: POLICY, ADVOCACY, AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS</b>			
22	Policy Engagement and Advocacy	Policy Engagement and Advocacy: engaging policymakers and providing relevant content and recommendations promotes alignment with policy objectives and supports broader impact and sustainability.	HOOP
23	Regulatory Engagement	Proactively engage with regulatory bodies at both EU and national levels to navigate regulatory complexities and overcome legal barriers. Advocate for policy changes or propose new regulations that facilitate sustainable practices and enable innovation in the bioeconomy and fisheries sectors.	Berytech/ Machina / FILSE Pop

#	BEST PRACTICE	DETAILED BEST PRACTICE	SOURCE
24	Multi-Level Coordination	<p>Coordinate efforts between regional, local, and national government entities to ensure alignment of initiatives with overarching goals and strategies. Establish a convergence point to facilitate communication and collaboration between stakeholders.</p> <p>Develop comprehensive circular strategies that encompass multiple sectors, including textiles, construction, waste management, and others. This integrated approach ensures that sustainability efforts address various aspects of the local economy and environment.</p>	Beauvaisis Prato
25	Strategic Planning and Roadmapping	Develop clear roadmaps and strategies for transitioning to circular economy practices at regional and local levels. These roadmaps should outline specific objectives, actions, and timelines to guide implementation efforts.	Beauvaisis, Prato
26	Incentive Alignment	<p>Align subsidies, aids, and regulatory frameworks with circular economy objectives to incentivize sustainable practices and investments. Ensure that projects and initiatives receiving support contribute to energy transition and environmental sustainability.</p> <p>Leverage Public Support: utilize available public aid, subsidies, and funding opportunities to support ecological transition projects. Public support can significantly alleviate the financial burden of implementing circular economy initiatives.</p>	Beauvaisis iTerra
27	Adherence to National Strategy	Ensure alignment with national-level strategies and priorities for economic growth, environmental protection, and sustainable development. Adhere to regulatory requirements and eligibility criteria for subsidies and support programs.	Beauvaisis
<b>PROJECT MANAGEMENT</b>			
28	Flexibility and Adaptability on the PDA	Maintaining flexibility in project scope and methodology is crucial for adapting to evolving needs and challenges, ensuring ongoing relevance and responsiveness. Continuous improvement and learning are integral, acknowledging that project development is dynamic, requiring ongoing adaptation for sustained effectiveness. Recognizing diverse project needs and timelines underscores the importance of flexible service delivery, adjusting approaches and timelines as needed. Moreover, designing projects with scalability and replicability in mind facilitates broader impact, enabling methodologies, technologies, and business models to be easily adapted and implemented across various contexts, regions, or countries.	HOOP/ Circular Invest / FILSE
29	Simplified Application Process and Transparent Selection Process	Streamlining the application form and adapting questions to suit the target audience, such as small businesses, can improve completion rates and reduce barriers to entry. Implementing a clear and transparent selection process, involving eligibility criteria assessment by expert teams and final selection by a committee, ensures fairness and objectivity in project selection.	Circular Invest

## 4 Selection of the 5 Best Practices

In the selection process of the five best practices, rigorous evaluation criteria were applied to ensure that only the most impactful and relevant strategies were chosen. These practices were the ones that were showcased in the Best Practice Sessions and were chosen as per the established criteria.

### 4.1 Pillar 1: Capacity Building and Training

The identified Best Practice for supporting circular economy SMEs from the category Capacity Building and Training is described below and is the **provision of comprehensive capacity building and training programs, specifically tailored to the needs of circular economy businesses**. This practice addresses the unique challenges and opportunities inherent in transitioning from a linear to a circular model through:

- **Tailored Knowledge Exchange:** Circular economy principles often require a fundamental shift in mindset and operational practices. By offering diverse platforms for knowledge exchange, including direct services, peer-to-peer support, and multi-stakeholder engagement, SMEs receive customized assistance. This tailoring ensures that they grasp the intricacies of circular economy concepts and can apply them effectively within their business contexts.
- **Structured Assessment, Roadmaps, and Templates:** They are required within comprehensive support programs. This approach ensures transparency, accountability, and realistic planning, crucial for navigating the unique challenges of circular business models. Clear expectations through grant agreements and reporting templates, along with structured roadmaps, provide SMEs with guidance and focus, while realistic timelines and forecasts help them manage resources effectively amidst the uncertainties of circular innovation.
- **Toolkits and Guidebooks:** Providing toolkits and guidebooks specifically designed for circular entrepreneurship equips SMEs with practical resources for navigating the challenges of circular business models. These resources, such as the Toolkit for Green Incubation and the Green IPR guidebook, offer guidance on key aspects like intellectual property rights, which are especially crucial in the circular economy where innovation and resource optimization are paramount.

By focusing on comprehensive capacity building and training programs tailored to circular economy principles, support organizations or programs can empower SMEs to navigate the complexities of circular entrepreneurship, accelerate their growth, and maximize their positive impact on the economy and the environment.

### 4.2 Pillar 2: Access to Funding

The identified Best Practice for supporting circular economy SMEs from the category Access to Funding is described below and is **to facilitate access to mixed funding sources**. This practice relies on innovative business models and sustainable practices that may require diverse financial support. It involves the following:

- **Diverse Funding Sources:** Circular economy initiatives often involve pioneering technologies and business models that may not fit traditional funding criteria. By leveraging a mix of public subsidies, equity investment, and private funding, SMEs can access the financial resources needed to support their projects. This diversity in funding sources reduces dependency on any single source and mitigates risks associated with fluctuations in funding availability or changes in government policies.
- **Maximizing Project Impact:** The circular economy aims to optimize resource use and minimize waste, often requiring significant upfront investment in research, development, and infrastructure. By securing substantial funding from multiple sources, projects can achieve greater scale and impact. For example, the HOOP project's success in exceeding its initial budget and attracting additional investments illustrates how mixed funding can enable projects to realize their full potential and drive meaningful change in the circular economy.
- **Long-term Sustainability:** Circular economy initiatives often face challenges related to scalability and long-term viability. By diversifying funding streams, SMEs can enhance project stability and sustainability. Public subsidies may support initial research and development, while equity investment and private funding can enable commercialization and expansion. This mix of funding sources ensures ongoing support for project implementation and growth, fostering long-term sustainability and resilience in the circular economy ecosystem.

In summary, facilitating access to mixed funding sources is a best practice for supporting circular economy SMEs because it enables them to secure the financial resources needed to innovate, scale, and sustain their initiatives. By diversifying funding streams, SMEs can maximize project impact, achieve long-term sustainability, and contribute to the transition to a more circular and resource-efficient economy.

### 4.3 Pillar 3: Technical Support to SMEs

The identified Best Practice for supporting circular economy SMEs from the category Technical Support to SMEs is described below and is **providing technical support for measurement and impact assessment throughout their value chains**. This practice is particularly specific to circular economy because of its emphasis on sustainability and resource efficiency and is strongly required by investors. It involves the following:

- **Robust Measurement Tools:** Circular economy initiatives aim to minimize waste and maximize resource efficiency throughout the product lifecycle. Implementing robust measurement tools, such as life cycle assessments, data mapping analyses, and chemical analyses, allows SMEs to quantify the environmental and social impacts of their initiatives accurately. This enables them to track progress, identify areas for improvement, and make data-driven decisions to optimize their circular practices.
- **Demonstrating Positive Effects:** Investors and stakeholders in general increasingly prioritize projects with measurable positive impacts on the environment and society. By conducting thorough impact assessments, SMEs can showcase the tangible benefits of their circular initiatives, such as reduced carbon emissions, minimized waste generation, and enhanced social welfare. This not only attracts investment but also enhances the credibility and reputation of the SME within the circular economy ecosystem.

- **Meeting Investor Expectations:** Investors play a crucial role in funding circular economy projects. By aligning with investor requests and expectations for impact measurement and transparency, SMEs can enhance their attractiveness to potential investors. Providing comprehensive impact data demonstrates accountability, reduces investment risks, and increases investor confidence in the long-term viability and sustainability of the project.

In summary, offering technical support for measurement and impact assessment is a best practice for supporting circular economy SMEs because it enables them to quantify and showcase the positive effects of their initiatives. This practice aligns with the core principles of the circular economy, fosters investor confidence, and facilitates the transition towards a more sustainable and resource-efficient economy.

## 4.4 Pillar 4: Networking and Collaboration

The identified Best Practice for supporting circular economy SMEs from the category Networking and Collaboration is described below and is **fostering cross-sector collaboration through networking and partnerships**. This approach is particularly specific to the circular economy due to its interdisciplinary nature and the need for diverse expertise and resources. It involves the following:

- Circular economy initiatives often face multifaceted challenges that require collaboration across sectors and regulatory bodies. By engaging multiple stakeholders from different sectors, including government agencies, industry players, academia, and community organizations, SMEs can access a wide range of perspectives and resources to address complex issues such as waste management, resource optimization, and policy frameworks. This collaborative approach enables SMEs to develop more holistic and effective solutions that align with circular economy principles.
- This cross-sector collaboration fosters the exchange of knowledge, ideas, and best practices among diverse stakeholders. By bringing together public and private entities, academia, and industry partners, SMEs can leverage complementary expertise and resources to drive innovation in circular economy initiatives. For example, collaboration with research institutions can facilitate the development of new technologies and processes for waste reduction and resource recovery, while partnerships with industry players can support market access and scalability. This is described for example in the case study of Prato.

In summary, fostering cross-sector collaboration through networking and partnerships is a best practice for supporting circular economy SMEs because it enables them to address complex challenges, promote innovative solutions, and achieve comprehensive engagement and sustainable growth within the circular economy ecosystem.



## 4.5 Pillar 5: Policy, Advocacy and Regulatory Frameworks

The identified Best Practice for supporting circular economy SMEs from the category Policy, Advocacy, and Regulatory Frameworks is described below and is **develop clear strategic planning and roadmaps for transitioning to circular economy practices at regional and local levels**. This approach is particularly specific to the circular economy because it involves comprehensive coordination and strategic alignment across multiple sectors and government entities. It involves the following:

- **Multi-Level Coordination:** Circular economy initiatives require coordination across various levels of government, including regional, local, and national entities. By developing clear roadmaps and strategies, stakeholders can ensure alignment of initiatives with overarching goals and strategies at each level. This multi-level coordination facilitates efficient communication, collaboration, and resource allocation, essential for driving systemic change towards circularity.
- **Integrated Approach:** when implemented for one sector, circular economy strategies then encompass multiple sectors, as for the example of Prato including textiles, construction, waste management, and others, to address various aspects of the local economy and environment comprehensively. This holistic perspective enables more effective policymaking, advocacy, and regulatory frameworks tailored to the specific needs and challenges of circular economy SMEs.

In summary, developing clear strategic planning and roadmaps for transitioning to circular economy practices at regional and local levels is a best practice for supporting circular economy SMEs. This approach facilitates multi-level coordination, promotes an integrated approach across sectors, and provides SMEs with a structured framework for action, essential for driving sustainable and systemic change towards circularity.

## 4.6 Project Management

One best practice that was derived from the knowledge sharing sessions and does not fall under a pillar, but rather is more about project management is **to maintain flexibility and adaptability in project management processes**. This approach is particularly specific to circular economy due to the dynamic and evolving nature of sustainable initiatives. It involves:

- **Flexibility in Project Scope and Methodology:** Circular economy projects often encounter evolving needs and challenges, such as changes in market dynamics, technology advancements, or regulatory shifts. By maintaining flexibility in project scope and methodology, Projects need to adapt their initiatives to address emerging issues and seize new opportunities. This adaptability ensures ongoing relevance and responsiveness, essential for maximizing the impact and effectiveness of circular economy projects.
- **Continuous Improvement and Learning:** Circular economy initiatives require a commitment to continuous improvement and learning. Recognizing that project development is dynamic, project partners should embrace a culture of experimentation and innovation, continually

seeking ways to enhance their processes and outcomes. By incorporating feedback loops and evaluation mechanisms into project management, project partners can iterate on their approaches and learn from both successes and failures, driving sustained effectiveness and innovation in the circular economy space.

In summary, maintaining flexibility and adaptability in project management processes is a best practice for supporting circular economy SMEs. This approach enables SMEs to navigate the dynamic and complex landscape of the circular economy, driving innovation, scalability, and impact across diverse contexts and regions.

## 5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the Best Practice Selection deliverable (4.2) conducted as part of the RESOURCE project has identified and benchmarked 25 best practices in the field of circular economy projects across Europe. Led by EBN in collaboration with project partners, this initiative employed a structured and rigorous methodology to ensure alignment with project objectives and standards.

Through online sessions and collaboration with a diverse network of stakeholders, including EBN members and non-members from various countries, the selection process was inclusive and comprehensive. The use of established criteria facilitated effective evaluation, resulting in the identification of practices in circular economy.

This deliverable provides valuable insights and guidance for the implementation and assessment of the RESOURCE project. By distilling the findings into five benchmark best practices, it serves as a roadmap for informing strategy and driving sustainable development within the project and beyond. Moving forward, the identified best practices will serve as valuable reference points for stakeholders involved in circular economy initiatives, contributing to the advancement of sustainable practices and the achievement of project objectives.

In addition, it is important to note that while the identified practices represent good models, the exclusion of certain practices does not diminish their value or relevance in advancing the methodology. All practices considered during the selection process contribute valuable insights to the development of the RESOURCE project's methodology and may offer alternative perspectives or approaches worthy of exploration in the project activities.