

RESOURCE

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

D5.3 Ecosystem Relations & International Networks

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Deliverable lead	Joanna Abi Abdallah (EBN)
Authors and Contributing partners	Joanna Abi Abdallah (EBN)
Reviewers	Geraldine Quetin, GAC Eva María Elena, ANCES Lucas Riviera, Aitipp
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This deliverable presents how the RESOURCE project built strong connections with key European and international networks focused on the circular economy. By working closely with initiatives like CCRI and the EU|BIC community, RESOURCE promoted knowledge sharing, collected feedback, and encouraged wider use of its support model.

Through joint webinars, conferences, and capacity-building sessions, the project raised its visibility and involved over 30 EU|BICs in developing and improving the methodology. These members shared their best practices and expertise, which helped shape the project's tools and recommendations.

Key activities included collaborations with other EU projects, organisation of Demo Days, and participation in major events like the EBN Congress and EU Industry Days. These efforts helped align RESOURCE with EU priorities and fostered valuable exchanges across regions.

Several EU|BICs have shown interest in using or adapting the RESOURCE approach in their own programmes. The deliverable ends with recommendations to build on this momentum and support the long-term adoption of RESOURCE results across Europe.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- CCRI**Circular Cities and Regions Initiative
- CE**.....Circular Economy
- EBN**European Business and innovation centre Network
- EU**European Union
- KPI**.....Key Performance Indicators
- LCA**.....Life Cycle Assessment
- PDA**Project Development Assistance
- SIG**Special Interest Group
- SMEs**Small and medium-sized enterprises
- SUs**.....Startups
- TRL**.....Technology Readiness Level
- WP**Work Package

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:

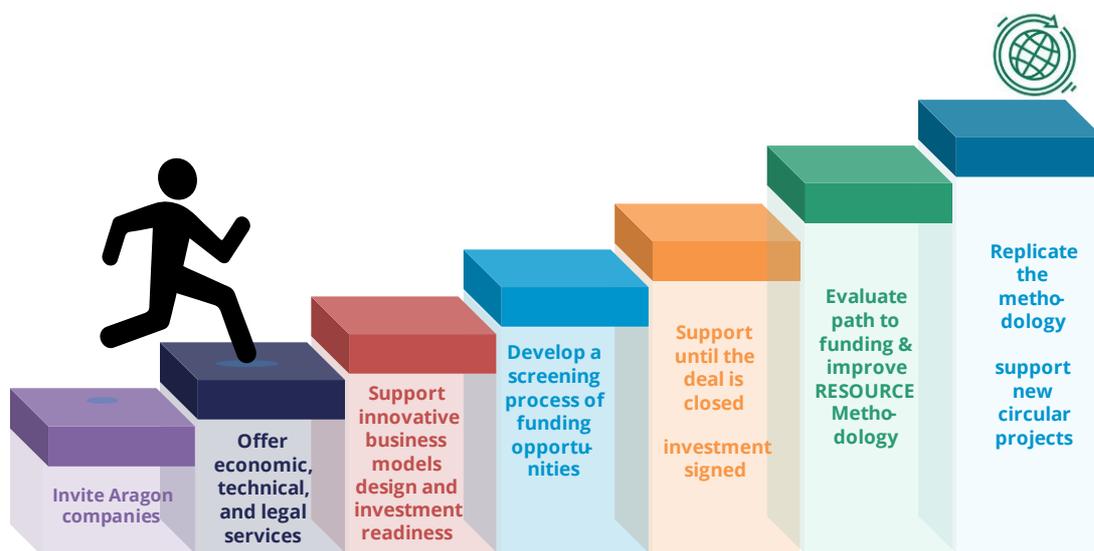


Figure 1 - The RESOURCE methodology in 7 steps

1.1 Purpose of this report

The objective of ecosystem relations and networks within the RESOURCE project was to boost visibility, foster collaboration, and enable knowledge exchange by engaging with key European and global stakeholders in the circular economy ecosystem. These efforts aimed to strengthen the project's support methodology by exposing it to a wide range of practices, generating synergies with related initiatives, and establishing long-term partnerships to support the replication and scaling of circular business models. Through active participation in networks such as the CCRI and the EU|BIC community, RESOURCE facilitated peer learning, cross-regional cooperation, and better positioning of both pilot projects and support tools within broader innovation ecosystems.

This deliverable contributes directly to the overall objectives of the RESOURCE project by supporting the visibility, replication, and long-term impact of its outcomes. As part of Work Package 5 – Impact Maximisation – international networking and ecosystem relations play a strategic role in embedding RESOURCE's tools, methodologies, and lessons learned into wider circular economy and innovation frameworks. It ensures broader dissemination of results, promotes adoption beyond the original project scope, and strengthens cross-border collaboration.

1.2 Purpose of this work package

The objective of this work package was to achieve a wide visibility by establishing relationships between the project and associations focusing on circular economy and innovative finance areas, and further embedding the project in Aragon and EU key stakeholders' networks, by taking advantage of the 140+certified EU|BICs: (i) Collaborating with other circular economy relevant projects, notably through the CCRI's working groups, (ii) Exchange, (ii) Exchanging with national/ international networks and relevant organizations (such as the wide members, etc.) within workshops, events, and online dissemination activities (iii) Information on common initiatives, aims, ongoing economy initiatives, and showcasing RESOURCE's contributions to these efforts.

This report details the actions taken under this work package, highlighting the partnerships formed, events attended, and knowledge-sharing activities conducted to strengthen RESOURCE's presence and impact within European CE ecosystems. It also reflects on the role of EBN and EU|BICs in amplifying the project's reach, supporting replication, and fostering synergies with other EU-funded initiatives and innovation communities.

2 Engagement with European Networks

The RESOURCE project was mainly engaged with two networks, the EBN network and CCRI network.

2.1 EBN – European Business and Innovation Centre Network

EBN is a pan-European network of over 140 certified EU|BICs (European Business and Innovation Centres) and 40 associate members that support the development and growth of innovative startups, scaleups, and SMEs. Each EU|BIC adheres to a strict quality certification that ensures a high standard of business support services, ranging from incubation and acceleration to access to finance and internationalisation. Through its members, EBN reaches thousands of innovative companies annually and is recognised as a key player in regional and European innovation ecosystems.

In the context of the RESOURCE project, EBN played a dual role. First, it mobilised the EU|BIC community to contribute to the mapping of circular economy initiatives and to disseminate project

outcomes. Second, it acted as a multiplier by fostering connections between RESOURCE pilot projects and other innovation actors across Europe. The EBN network also served as a source for identifying best practices, benchmarking case studies, and promoting the replication of the RESOURCE support model in new regions.

2.2 CCRI – Circular Cities and Regions Initiative

The Circular Cities and Regions Initiative (CCRI), launched by the European Commission, aims to support cities and regions in their transition towards a circular economy. It focuses on enabling systemic change through pilot projects, cross-regional collaboration, and knowledge sharing. The initiative is part of the EU Circular Economy Action Plan and aligns closely with the European Green Deal and the EU Industrial Strategy.

Within RESOURCE, CCRI served as a key reference point and collaboration platform. Participation in CCRI events and alignment with its framework allowed RESOURCE to position its methodology and pilot actions within the broader European circular economy agenda. Engagement with CCRI enabled RESOURCE partners to access tools, policy guidance, and peer networks that informed the development of more coherent, policy-relevant circular support schemes. The collaboration also enhanced the visibility of RESOURCE at the European level and provided opportunities to showcase project outcomes in a high-level policy and innovation context.

3 Involvement of EBN Members

The network of EBN played an important role throughout the RESOURCE project. The expertise of members, their own networks, their methodologies and services served the activities of RESOURCE. It allowed to have real-world business support practices and ensured that the methodology developed could be effectively scaled across regions.

3.1 Initial engagement and mapping

At the early stage of the project, EBN mobilised its network of EU|BICs to support the mapping of existing circular economy initiatives across Europe. EBN and project partners conducted a desk research exercise, and members were invited to participate in a structured questionnaire aimed at identifying ongoing circular economy programmes, tools, and services within their regions. This information formed the foundation of the mapping activity conducted under WP4.

Following the questionnaire phase, several EU|BICs were selected for in-depth, structured interviews. These interviews provided richer insights into specific support models, governance frameworks, and stakeholder engagement approaches, which helped shape the benchmarking pillars and criteria used later in the project.

3.2 Best practice knowledge sharing sessions

Selected EBN members also actively participated in the Best Practice Knowledge Sharing Sessions. These interactive sessions brought together leading organisations from the network to present, compare, and discuss successful approaches to supporting circular economy SMEs. The insights gathered informed the RESOURCE methodology and reinforced the importance of adaptability, capacity building, and access to finance as key pillars. CCRI projects were also invited to participate in the Best Practice Knowledge Sharing Sessions and contributed to the methodology (HOOP, Circular Invest, EcoFishent, etc.)

3.3 Deployment of experts for pilot projects support

In end 2024, a Terms of Reference was issued to identify and recruit qualified business and technical experts from within the EBN network to support the RESOURCE pilot projects. The objective was to provide tailored assistance through a comprehensive 360-degree assessment of each pilot, covering areas such as business strategy, environmental impact, and investment readiness. One organisation from the EBN community was selected to carry out this task, providing direct coaching and feedback to the pilots and developing a comprehensive report for each pilot project. In the end, 7 pilot projects performed this assessment.

3.4 Support methodology benchmarking exercise

In the later stages of the project, in April 2025, EBN coordinated the involvement of a new pool of senior experts from its network to conduct a formal benchmarking of the RESOURCE support methodology. Experts were selected based on defined criteria, including experience in circular economy, innovation policy, and business acceleration. Their role was to evaluate RESOURCE's model in comparison with leading European practices and to identify gaps, strengths, and opportunities for improvement.

The benchmarking exercise included a review of project deliverables, participation in dedicated online assessment sessions, and presence at the EBN Congress, where experts engaged directly with pilot projects during pitching and matchmaking activities. This hands-on interaction ensured that feedback was grounded in practice and that the recommendations made were actionable and aligned with the realities of circular startups.

4 Activities Conducted

4.1 Joint events & webinars

As part of RESOURCE's outreach and collaboration strategy, several joint events and webinars were organised in partnership with other CCRI-related projects, including Circular Invest, InvestCEC, HOOP, and Deciso. These sessions aimed to exchange insights, promote active calls, and foster synergies across initiatives.

An example was the April 2025 webinar co-hosted with InvestCEC, titled *"Inspiring Policies to Boost Circular Economy Investment!"*, which attracted over 50 participants. The session highlighted the sector's untapped investment potential, the importance of political support, and recent legislative advances like the EU's "right to repair" framework. Discussions highlighted the urgency and opportunity to scale circular financing across Europe.

4.2 Organisation of Demo Days

Resource Final Demo Day: As part of the project's final dissemination and engagement efforts, RESOURCE organised a dedicated Demo Day on June 17, 2025, bringing together circular economy pilot projects, investors, and project partners. The event served as a platform for the pilots to showcase their solutions, pitch to investors, and receive real-time feedback from them. It also facilitated visibility for the pilot projects and encouraged matchmaking opportunities to support future growth and financing. The Demo Day was a concrete outcome of the RESOURCE support methodology and demonstrated the investment-readiness journey of the participating projects.

4.3 Participation in conferences

Participation in Transfiere 2025: From March 12 to 14, 2025, the RESOURCE project was represented at Transfiere 2025 in Málaga—one of Europe’s premier forums for R&D, innovation, and technology transfer. The event gathered over 5,000 professionals from 50+ countries, with 600+ companies and institutions and more than 100 innovation intermediaries. RESOURCE partner ANCES showcased the project's activities, results, and methodology, engaging with stakeholders from across sectors to promote collaboration and visibility. This participation aligned with RESOURCE’s mission to foster cross-sector innovation and scale circular economy solutions through strategic networking and international outreach.

Participation in Transfiere 2024: Transfiere is one of the R+D+I events in Southern Europe which mission is to improve business competition to create business opportunities, with productive networking days. It brings together, at the international level, the main players of the innovation ecosystem, with space for networking and for presentation of prototypes, while focusing on funding opportunities for innovative projects, calls for entrepreneurship, investment and talent. With the 4th edition of the Open Call for Startups, emerging deep tech companies from different countries to presented their project to a crowd of national and international investors. From March 20 to 22, 2024, RESOURCE pilot projects presented their innovation and project partners presented a session on ‘Private Investment Opportunities in Circular Economy in Europe’. [Resource article](#)

Participation in the EBN Congress: The RESOURCE project was actively featured at the EBN Congress 2024 and 2025, a flagship event bringing together innovation actors, certified EU|BICs, investors, and Business Support Organisations from across Europe. In June 2025, RESOURCE activities included dedicated sessions such as the pilot project pitching, and an investor and experts’ matchmaking meeting, showcasing the progress of its pilot initiatives. These sessions facilitated direct engagement between circular SMEs and the investment community, strengthening visibility, accelerating funding opportunities, and promoting peer learning. The Congress served as a key dissemination platform to position RESOURCE within the broader European innovation ecosystem.

Participation in EU Industry Days 2023: RESOURCE was represented at EU Industry Days 2023 in Málaga (4–6 October 2023) by EBN, which actively promoted the project’s objectives, results, and regional impact. As a major platform for shaping EU industrial policy and fostering green and digital innovation, the event attracted over 1,800 participants from more than 60 countries. EBN highlighted RESOURCE’s role in supporting circular economy startups and SMEs, particularly emphasizing the work led by the Government of Aragon. Participation included engagement in the on-site matchmaking activities, where more than nine targeted meetings were held with entrepreneurship organisations, regional development agencies, EU institutions, and related EU-funded projects. RESOURCE visibility was further enhanced through materials distribution and strategic follow-up meetings, contributing to future collaboration opportunities, webinars, and publications.

4.4 Capacity building

Cascade Funding Session in Aragon – June 2024: In June 2024, RESOURCE organized a dedicated Cascade Funding Session held in person in Aragon, with the aim of presenting concrete funding opportunities to the pilot projects. The session brought together financial experts, project developers, and representatives from relevant EU funding initiatives to explain cascade funding mechanisms and explore how they can be leveraged to support circular economy innovation. The event provided practical guidance on application processes, eligibility criteria, and examples of successful use cases. Several RESOURCE pilot projects actively engaged during the session and followed up with the experts afterward to explore funding pathways aligned with their development stage and needs. This session

significantly contributed to raising awareness among SMEs and startups about underutilized financial instruments and improving their preparedness for future funding applications. Later several pilot projects expressed interest in getting access to cascade funding and one of them worked with experts to develop the application form to apply for funding.

As part of its comprehensive capacity-building approach, the RESOURCE project ensured that pilot projects had access to targeted training opportunities throughout the project's duration. In particular, ANCES, Spain's national association of business innovation centres and a project partner delivered a series of tailored training sessions aligned with the evolving needs of circular SMEs.

These sessions addressed both foundational and strategic topics crucial for early-stage circular economy ventures. For example, pilots were invited to attend workshops on "How to make an attractive business plan for investors", "How to approach growth in a startup", and "Developing a high-impact pitch deck", all designed to strengthen business and investment readiness. Additional sessions tackled practical and legal issues, including "Legal considerations for startups in Spain", providing vital insights for navigating local compliance frameworks.

To support region-specific financing awareness, a dedicated session titled "Funds to support companies in the circular economy sector of Aragon" was also delivered, helping pilot projects better understand the local funding landscape. These training programmes were offered in a hybrid format, combining online accessibility with in-person engagement to maximise participation and effectiveness.

5 Key Outcomes

5.1 RESOURCE project visibility

The RESOURCE project was able to achieve visibility and engagement across the EBN network, benefiting from its extensive community of 140+ certified EU|BICs. The project was actively promoted through various EBN-led activities, including the annual EBN Congress, Special Interest Group (SIG) meetings, thematic webinars, and direct outreach to members. These platforms enabled regular updates on project progress, the sharing of lessons learned and facilitated connections with circular economy actors across Europe.

A core strength of RESOURCE's visibility strategy was the deep involvement of EBN members in shaping and refining the project's support methodology. Over 30 EU|BICs actively participated in the initial mapping phase, contributed to structured interviews and surveys, and shared their local circular economy support models. These inputs were crucial for identifying best practices and challenges, ultimately enriching the methodology of the project. Many EBN members took part in the Best Practice Knowledge Sharing Sessions, some of them offered tailored advice to pilot projects during EBN Congress 2025 and contributed to validating the methodology. Their engagement ensured that the tools developed were grounded in practical experience and aligned with real-world business support needs.

5.2 New collaboration opportunities

Through this collaborative approach, the RESOURCE project significantly increased its visibility within the EU|BIC ecosystem and created a sense of shared ownership across the EBN network, hopefully preparing for long-term adoption and replication of its outcomes. During EBN Congress 2025, the RESOURCE methodology was presented to a wide audience and sparked interest of 20++ members who expressed interest to know more about the methodology as they are interested in adopting or adapting it within their own support programmes.

While formal collaborations are still being defined, RESOURCE has generated clear interest for future joint work. To support further uptake, the methodology and key outcomes will be featured in the upcoming EBN Impact Report (July 2025), offering the entire network a clear overview of its tools, practices, and results. Members who expressed interest will receive a personalised copy and an invitation for one-to-one follow-up meetings with the EBN team. These conversations will serve to align needs, explore local piloting opportunities, and prepare the ground for future cooperation.

5.3 Leveraging on RESOURCE learnings

We can say that the RESOURCE methodology serves as a useful guide to improve EBN's own support frameworks. By mapping EBN members activities and understanding better their operations, the project has given insights into how organisations deliver circular-economy services. This knowledge proved invaluable during the 2025 EBN Excellence Award, where project partners drawing directly on RESOURCE's benchmarking criteria served as an expert reviewer, evaluating applications on green transition, circular impact, and ecosystem engagement. Looking ahead, the lessons and data gathered will inform the design of new EBN methodologies, shape future Horizon Europe and Interreg proposals, and help position EU|BICs as leading intermediaries for circular innovation across Europe.

6 Strategies to enhance engagement

One of RESOURCE's core strengths has been activating a wide range of EU|BICs and partner networks across Europe. Building on this momentum, the following strategies can deepen engagement and broaden uptake of the methodology:

1. **Targeted communication and storytelling:** Sharing tangible outcomes such as success stories from pilot projects or case studies help other business support organisations see direct value in adopting RESOURCE tools. This was done through the newsletters, website and social media channels and have proven to offer good visibility to the RESOURCE project and the pilot projects (individual videos). The same can be done for the support methodology and its contributors and will be included in EBN Impact report to be released in July 2025.
2. **Peer-led learning opportunities:** Regular "peer learning sprints" or thematic sessions led by experienced EU|BICs can replicate the best-practice exchanges piloted in RESOURCE. Topics such as circular finance, legal alignment, and public-private coordination are particularly well suited to this format. The peer exchange format emerged as one of the highlights of the RESOURCE project as per projects partners and contributors, offering a highly enriching experience for all and fostering deeper mutual learning across the network.
3. **Integration with existing EBN services:** Embedding RESOURCE elements in EU|BIC Essentials training, SIG meetings, and the Excellence Award criteria ensured the methodology can be part of EBN's standard support offer.
4. **Methodology ambassadors:** A group of early-adopter EU|BICs can act as reference points, showcasing how they have integrated RESOURCE tools locally and mentoring peers through the adoption process. This will be developed in coming weeks and presented in dedicated SIG meetings. Following the interest shown at EBN Congress 2025, personalised meetings will explore tailored support packages using RESOURCE templates.
5. **Ongoing collaboration with external networks:** Continued joint events with the CCRI network and similar initiatives keep EU|BICs and project partners informed about new funding calls and cross-network learning opportunities.
6. **Dedicated digital resource hub on RESOURCE website:** A central repository on the RESOURCE website hosting toolkits, templates, investment guides, and case studies will encourage adoption and experimentation.

7 Conclusion

The RESOURCE project has demonstrated the power of ecosystem relations and international networks in scaling circular economy support across regions and sectors. By activating the EU|BIC network, collaborating with European initiatives like CCRI, and engaging diverse stakeholders through joint events, expert exchanges, and knowledge sharing, RESOURCE has created strong foundations. These connections not only increased project visibility but also encouraged a culture of shared learning and collaboration. Moving forward, the established relationships and methodologies will serve as a facilitator for new partnerships, project proposals, and replication of the RESOURCE model in other regions.