



Engaging industrial stakeholders in circular practices: lessons from the REUSE2030 project

Report by Session host: *Isabella Forchini, ECOLE Enti Confindustriali Lombardi per l'Education*

Further actively involved people/ organisations: Elena Galletti (ECOLE) and project partners

Number of Participants: 22

Short introduction:

The session explored how SMEs and industrial stakeholders can be effectively engaged in the circular economy, building on insights from the REUSE2030 project. The workshop focused on identifying key barriers and drivers influencing SME behaviour, as well as the role of cities, regions and intermediaries in enabling circular practices. Attention was given to the use of digital tools and capacity-building approaches to support long-term adoption. Participants were invited to share experiences and co-develop practical recommendations to strengthen collaboration between SMEs and public authorities and to foster circular ecosystems.

Participants:

The session gathered 22 participants from diverse backgrounds, including public authorities, regional development agencies, research institutions, and project partners from different European countries.

Summary:

The workshop followed an interactive format combining project insights, live polling and group discussions. After a short introduction by Isabella Forchini from ECOLE, Elena Galletti (Sustainability expert) presented key lessons learned from the REUSE2030 project, highlighting that SMEs engage in circular practices when solutions are economically viable, easy to integrate into daily operations, and supported by trusted intermediaries.

Participants were then engaged through a Mentimeter session. Results showed that the main challenges for SMEs include financial constraints, complexity of processes, and lack of knowledge or internal capacities. The most relevant drivers identified were cost reduction and reputational benefits, while regulation and public support were perceived as less decisive. A strong consensus emerged that engaging SMEs requires a combination of actors, including cities, regions, intermediaries and SMEs themselves. Digital tools were considered effective only if simple and well-integrated into business operations, while peer learning and collaboration were highlighted as the most valuable forms of support.

The group work was organised into two groups, each addressing two thematic areas. The first group focused on drivers and barriers for SME engagement together with capacity building approaches. Discussions highlighted financial risks, lack of knowledge and low perceived benefits as key barriers, while motivation is driven by clear economic benefits,



mindset change and visibility of results. Participants emphasised the importance of peer learning, transparency and practical training formats to support long-term engagement.

The second group explored the role of cities and intermediaries alongside digital tools. Participants stressed the need for cities to act as facilitators of collaboration rather than only regulators, supporting the creation of networks and safe spaces for experimentation. Digital tools were considered valuable but only when easy to use, integrated into daily operations and supported by adequate guidance. The discussion also highlighted that many tools already exist but require better visibility and coordination.

The session concluded with a final reflection exercise, where participants identified “trust”, “motivation” and “collaboration” as key elements for successful circular transition.

Specifics from the Session:

The session fostered strong interaction between participants from different backgrounds, encouraging exchange between policy-makers, practitioners and project partners. A key aspect was the integration of different perspectives within the two discussion groups, allowing participants to connect topics such as SME behaviour, governance, tools and capacity building. The workshop also created opportunities for cross-project learning within the NiCE Conference context, highlighting shared challenges and approaches across Interreg initiatives and opening the door for future collaboration.

Key insights of the session:

The session confirmed that SMEs engage in circular practices primarily when there is a clear and tangible business case. Financial constraints, complexity and lack of knowledge remain key barriers. Circular transition requires a multi-actor approach, where cities and regions act as enablers rather than regulators. Digital tools are effective only when simple, practical and embedded into daily operations. Capacity building should focus on peer learning, collaboration and practical application. Overall, trust, motivation and cooperation emerged as essential conditions for building effective circular ecosystems.

Links to further information:

Links to websites, presentations, videos, social media of projects, organizations, people or other events

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/reuse2030_interregce-circulareconomy-reuse2030-activity-7439589118524710912-

[TvET?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAAC18t0QBAOXCcb_QwmN6FXlonJwh-ms1O-U](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/reuse2030_interregce-circulareconomy-reuse2030-activity-7439589118524710912-TvET?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAAC18t0QBAOXCcb_QwmN6FXlonJwh-ms1O-U)