

## EVENT DESCRIPTION SHEET

PROJECT	
<b>Participant:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. APS ASSOUTENTI (AU), Italy</li> <li>2. SDRUZHENIE BULGARSKA NATSIONALNA ASOTSIATSIYA AKTIVNI POTREBITELI (BNAAP), Bulgaria</li> <li>3. CENTRUL PENTRU PROMOVAREA INVATARII PERMANENTE TIMISOARA ASOCIATIA (CPIP), Romania</li> <li>4. CROMO KOZHASZNU ALAPITVANY (CROMO), Hungary</li> <li>5. DIMIOURGIKI SKEPSI ANAPTYXIS (CRE.THI.DEV), Greece</li> <li>6. ISTITUTO EUROPEO PER LO SVILUPPO SOCIO ECONOMICO ASSOCIAZIONE (ISES), Italy</li> </ol>
<b>PIC number:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. PIC 898166651</li> <li>2. PIC 938217757</li> <li>3. PIC 950602620</li> <li>4. PIC 949523883</li> <li>5. PIC 942801977</li> <li>6. PIC 948848666</li> </ol>
<b>Project name and acronym:</b>	[WE-DEMOCRACY – No one left behind – Empowering citizens to participate in democratic processes]

EVENT DESCRIPTION	
<b>Event number:</b>	[7]
<b>Event name:</b>	[Ideas selection & Policy Formulation & Recommendations]
<b>Type:</b>	[Workshop]
<b>In situ/online:</b>	[online]
<b>Location:</b>	[online]
<b>Date(s):</b>	Bulgaria, 7-8/03/2024 Hungary, 26-27-28/02/2024 Greece, 28/02/2024 Italy, 28/02/2024 Romania, 21/02/2024
<b>Website(s) (if any):</b>	<a href="https://www.wedemocracy-project.eu">https://www.wedemocracy-project.eu</a>
Participants	
Female:	156
Male:	118
Non-binary:	3
From country 1 [Bulgaria]:	57

From country 2 [Greece]:	37		
From country 3 [Hungary]:	60		
From country 4 [Italy]:	80		
From country 5 [Romania]:	43		
Total number of participants:	277	From total number of countries:	5
<b>Description</b>			
<i>Provide a short description of the event and its activities.</i>			
<p>Citizens from the 5 project participating countries met online (using mostly Zoom and Jitsi platforms) to evaluate the solutions proposed in the Problem Solving Phase in order to highlight the most popular ideas and priorities for European policy-makers.</p> <p>The goals of the events were to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform and raise public awareness of the major environmental challenges that lie ahead.</li> <li>• Promote a culture of sustainability through the sharing of best practices and virtuous models.</li> <li>• Establish a constructive dialogue between different stakeholders to identify shared strategies for the future.</li> <li>• Develop concrete proposals to implement the social and productive changes necessary to overcome environmental challenges.</li> </ul> <p>Prior to these events, partners (in the problem solving phase), identified 3 common topics to be discussed with citizens during the online meetings:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Educational campaigns targeting schools and young people on eco-friendly behavior:</b> Discussions focused on identifying essential information for such campaigns and effective messaging strategies.</li> <li>2. <b>Citizens' involvement in online discussions and forums on the circular economy:</b> Participants explored methods for enhancing citizen engagement through online platforms like We-Democracy, discussing keywords for social listening and crowdsourcing ideas.</li> <li>3. <b>Sustainability rating:</b> Defining criteria for granting ratings, assessing social and economic impact, and ensuring European applicability were key areas of discussion. Participants proposed criteria to ensure sustainability and examined broader implications of such ratings.</li> </ol> <p>The partners considered the opportunity to add a 4th topic free of choice among the ones emerged from the problem solving phase as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Improving waste collection and recycling infrastructure:</b> Participants analyzed reasons behind ineffective waste management and suggested proposals to decision-makers for enhancing waste collection and recycling systems.</li> <li>• <b>Artificial Intelligence in support of the circular economy:</b> Participants discussed about Artificial Intelligence emerging as a key technology to accelerate the transition towards a circular economy.</li> </ul> <p>Overall, the events sought to gather participants' insights on core circular economy and e-democracy topics to inform European-level policy discussions and decision-making processes. Participants were actively engaged in discussions and put forth concrete proposals during the event, contributing valuable insights and suggestions to address the challenges and opportunities surrounding the topics of discussion.</p> <p>The presence of experts in the field of circular economy was crucial as they guided ideas and assisted other participants in expressing and shaping their thoughts in a tangible and feasible manner.</p> <p>At the conclusion, participants were reminded to complete the EU survey, ensuring their valuable feedback is captured to further inform policy discussions and decision-making processes at the European level.</p> <p>Events were open to citizens aged 18+ with no gender or age restrictions and carried out in the national language of the organisers. Speakers/moderators were selected by the partners among the academic field, business and decision makers.</p> <p>The promotion of the events took place online, mostly on the partners' social media accounts and via their institutional newsletters. Interested participants were requested to complete an online registration form to guarantee their spot in the event.</p> <p>Specifically, the online events organized by each partner were organized as follows:</p> <p><b>BULGARIA</b></p>			

Participants in the online event organized by BNAAC were experts from different fields, like consumer protection, experts from academia, experts from the non-governmental sector, business representatives, experts in the field of circular economy, biomimicry and regenerative development, students, as well as citizens.

During the discussion, answers were sought to questions such as, what would be the most effective way to reduce the amount of waste that households and businesses produce? Could the circular economy replace the traditional linear model of production, use, and disposal that leads to resource depletion, pollution and climate change?

### **GREECE**

The primary objective of the event was to evaluate proposed solutions, prioritize ideas, and formulate policy recommendations concerning the circular economy, guided by expert insight. Participants included both domain experts and citizens about contributing to policy formulation. Official invitations were extended to invited experts and all participants.

CreThiDev underscored the importance of citizen involvement in fostering a circular economy, providing an introductory overview of the project and its objectives for those who hadn't attended in the previous project event. The proposals and recommendations made during the event aim to address key challenges and opportunities in promoting eco-friendly behavior, enhancing citizen engagement, establishing sustainability criteria, and improving waste management infrastructure towards building a more sustainable and circular economy.

### **HUNGARY**

CROMO organised 3 online events for 2 different target groups: the business and the civic sector. As the project is about the circular economy issues affecting both the economic and the civil sector and the events were looking for good practices from both sectors, CROMO decided to organise separate events for the 2 target groups.

For the business sector 2 speakers on topics related to the circular economy were invited: Gyula Szekacs (Greenpact) on Sustainability, and Gyöngyi Egyed (Dorado XXI.) on environmental safety.

For the civic sector participants came from the NGO sector interested in the circular economy, with some already existing solutions that they shared during the event. For this event, the speaker was Ildikó Simon, giving a short input on the importance of the sustainability of organisations (social, economical and societal).

### **ITALY**

The event featured a series of speeches by experts and representatives from the institutional, economic, and social spheres. Participants were citizens, members of Assoutenti and experts in the field.

Speakers included:

- Fausta Chiesa, Journalist for Corriere della Sera
- Chiara Bolognini, Head of Internal Communication (DG-COM) - ISPRA
- Gabriele Melluso, President of APS Assoutenti
- Roberto Spera, General Manager of Amiu Genova Spa and National Head of Blue Green Economy of the Environmental Law Chamber

The event was conducted in three stages: opening plenary session, in which, after an initial in-depth discussion of the topic by Roberto Spera, the project activities, its aims and results were presented.

Following this, the participants were divided into two groups, in virtual rooms in which, with the support of Chiara Bologni, Fausta Chiesa and Gabriele Melluso, the topics as defined were addressed. Finally, the plenary session was reassembled to present the solutions proposed and discussed in the subgroups.

### **ROMANIA**

Attendees included representatives from academic field, companies, as well as democracy practitioners and decision-makers from Timișoara. Additionally, key local experts from CPIP network were invited to share their insights, enriching the discussion and enhancing participant motivation.

The event's agenda was structured into three main parts: an overview of the goals/objectives of the WE-DEMOCRACY project, a brief presentation of activities conducted thus far at the national level, an evaluation session with participants to discuss proposed solutions from the Problem-Solving Phase, and the formulation of policy proposals and recommendations on circular economy initiatives.

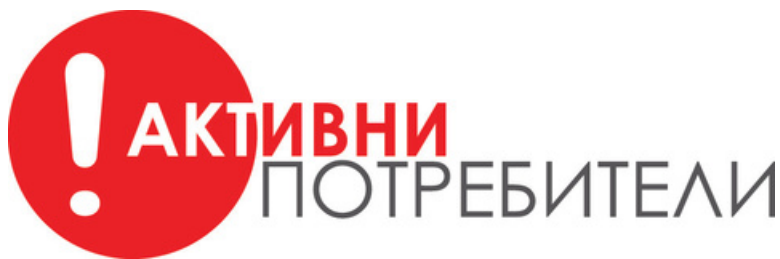
Throughout the presentation, the key topics above were explored in depth to start formulating policy proposals and recommendations. These topics were discussed in detail, with participants engaging in brainstorming sessions and sharing best practices in the field.

# D13. IDEAS SELECTION & POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



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With this document we conclude Phase 1 of We-DEMOCRACY project (CROWDSOURCING ON CIRCULAR ECONOMY).

The consortium has initially carried out a Problem Mapping during which citizens have been requested to identify problems related to circular economy that they encounter in their daily life through an online survey.

Then, the consortium has requested citizens to propose solutions to the “circular economy” problems mapped in local events (Problem Solving).

Finally, this document presents the results of the evaluation made by citizens of the solutions proposed in the Problem Solving events in order to highlight the most popular ideas and priorities for European policy-makers. During online events, citizens have formulated policy proposals and recommendations on circular economy with experts in the field that we present here below.

Project partners identified 3 common topics emerged from the Problem Solving events that have been debated in all the online events with the possibility to discuss additional topics.

## **Common topics discussed in Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Italy and Romania**

### **Topic 1. Educational campaigns targeting schools and young people on eco-friendly behaviors**

Instilling eco-friendly habits in young people is essential for ensuring a sustainable future. Educational campaigns within schools can be incredibly effective in achieving this goal. By teaching them about environmental issues, these campaigns can foster a sense of responsibility and encourage young people to make positive changes. Engaging in activities like schoolyard cleanups and planting trees will allow infants and students to see the immediate impact of their actions.

So, what to do?

**Develop curriculum materials:** Integration of environmental education into various subjects in order to ensure consistent exposure to sustainability principles throughout the academic journey. This approach emphasizes the relevance of eco-friendly practices across disciplines and reinforces their importance in daily life. The establishment of partnerships for school visits, internship opportunities, and guest lectures to expose students to diverse career paths aligned with circular economy principles, equip them with practical skills for green jobs and promote sustainable entrepreneurship.

**Find a “mascot”:** In order to attract and involve younger children, aged 8-14, finding a “mascot” represented by an artistic installation with zoomorphic features designed to collect a specific type of waste, possibly directly impacting the animal's ecosystem or habitat: plastic fish; bird-light bulbs; turtle-paper, etc...would then increase younger children

involvement. The mascot should be installed at the main points of public interest (schools, public parks, beaches, municipalities, etc...) and through an agreement with local authorities and the company responsible for recycling collection or with recovery associations, ensure the continuation of the purposes even after the end of the project.

**Offer teacher training and support for delivering eco-friendly education:** Professional development programs and resources for educators to enhance their knowledge and skills in delivering eco-friendly education.

**Interactive workshops:** Hands-on activities and interactive workshops engage students actively, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation for eco-friendly behaviors by using for example interactive questionnaires (quizzes), challenges, educational videos, and visits to a waste separation center. This learning approach facilitates behavior change by making environmental concepts tangible and relatable.

**Incorporate Local Examples:** Highlighting local environmental issues and solutions makes educational content more relevant and actionable for young people. By showcasing successful initiatives within their communities, students are inspired to adopt similar practices and contribute to local sustainability efforts.

**Engage through Technology:** Leveraging digital media and social platforms expands the reach of educational campaigns, ensuring broader audience engagement and providing dynamic ways to explore environmental topics.

**Interactive Learning Platforms:** Implementing online educational platforms and mobile applications that offer interactive modules, quizzes, and games to educate students about eco-friendly behavior. Platforms like "Eco-Schools" in the UK and "Eco-Schools International" provide resources and guidance for schools to integrate sustainability into their curriculum effectively.

**Green Ambassador Programs / Peer-to-Peer Education Programs:** Empowering students as sustainability advocates fosters peer-to-peer learning and promotes sustainable practices within schools and communities. Also it was suggested the implementation of peer-to-peer education programs where older students mentor younger ones on sustainable practices. This approach, seen in programs like "EcoMentors" in Germany, creates a supportive environment for behavior change.

**Green School Certifications:** Introduction of a green school certification program. Schools can earn recognition for achieving specific sustainability goals, such as reducing waste, conserving energy, and promoting biodiversity see for example the Ecoschool network in Hungary: <https://ofi.oh.gov.hu/en/eco-school>.

**Outdoor Education:** Using country's natural beauty and diverse ecosystems as outdoor classrooms for experiential learning. Field trips to local parks, coastal areas, and organic farms can enhance students' appreciation for nature and foster a deeper connection to environmental stewardship.

**Partnerships with NGOs and Businesses:** Partnerships with environmental NGOs, businesses, and government agencies to sponsor educational campaigns and provide resources such as educational materials, guest speakers, and field trip opportunities. Collaborative initiatives like the "Green Flag Program" in Ireland engage multiple stakeholders to support schools in becoming more sustainable.

Such partnerships belong to "Social campaigns" category represent an innovative and virtuous model to combine environmental protection with social growth. Through collaboration between public entities, associations, and citizens, it is possible to transform waste into valuable resources for the community. A concrete example of this philosophy is the use of recycled tires to create urban furniture and children's playgrounds. Tires can be cut into smaller parts and worked to create safe and fun structures such as swings, slides, or even mazes, or they can be transformed into benches, flower pots, waste bins, and much more.

another examples:

- production of wheelchairs for the disabled with recycled steel;
- production of bags and accessories with waste materials;

To ensure that citizens are fully involved and aware of the importance of recycling and reusing, it is essential to ensure that they are informed about what happens in their community. This need for information not only educates about recycling practices but also informs about the positive transformations that occur thanks to everyone's efforts. Communication campaigns thus become an indispensable necessity since it is through them that citizens can learn about concrete actions carried out in the territory. Without effective communication, these initiatives could go unnoticed and fail to garner the necessary support and participation to have a significant impact. This direct involvement and awareness of the actions taken in the territory can inspire a change in attitude towards recycling and reusing, encouraging citizens to become active participants in protecting the local environment.

A concrete example would be the placement of informative plaques near the "new" product or the organization of practical workshops at reuse centers, where citizens can learn to transform waste materials into new objects. These workshops would offer a practical opportunity for participants to experience the recycling process and creative reuse and understand the value of recovered resources

As a result of the discussions, it was also highlighted what information should be included in these actions: Composting, slow fashion, waste reduction, zero waste lifestyle, gardening, reuse, garbage collection, recycling. These competences should be part of the national curricula and thus part of the different subjects, like Technique, lifestyle and practice, Environmental education, Visual culture, History, social and civic studies, Biology-Health, Geography.



## Topic 2. Citizen's involvement in online discussions and forums on the circular economy

The involvement of citizens in discussions through online platforms and forums is important for a modern democracy. It fosters a more inclusive and participatory form of civic engagement. Traditionally, public discourse was limited to physical spaces and official channels, often excluding those with busy schedules or limited mobility.

Online platforms break down these barriers, allowing citizens from all walks of life to voice their opinions, share experiences, and engage in discussions on matters of public interest. This fosters a more informed and diverse range of perspectives in decision-making processes.

So, what to do?

**Establish Dedicated Spaces:** Creating dedicated sections or channels within the platform specifically focused on the circular economy. Providing clear explanations, visuals, and multimedia content to engage a diverse audience and facilitate understanding. These spaces should serve as hubs for citizens to exchange ideas, share insights, and propose solutions related to sustainable practices and circularity.

**Implement Gamification Features:** Introducing gamification elements within the platform to incentivize participation and reward valuable contributions from citizens. Features such as badges, points, and leaderboards can encourage active engagement and motivate users to contribute regularly to discussions.

**Organize Virtual Events and Discussions:** Hosting virtual events, discussions, and workshops on the platform to facilitate direct interaction between citizens and experts. These sessions can cover various aspects of the circular economy, providing opportunities for informed dialogue, knowledge-sharing, and collaboration. Provision of translations, subtitles, and language support to promote inclusivity and accessibility for all users.

**Promotion through social media:** Promoting discussions and events through social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Using targeted advertisements, hashtags, and influencer partnerships to raise awareness and encourage participation among diverse audiences.

**Social Media Campaigns:** Social media campaigns to raise awareness and foster dialogue on circular economy topics. Campaigns like the "Circular Economy Challenge" by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation use hashtags, videos, and user-generated content to engage a wide audience and inspire conversations about sustainability.

**Virtual Town Hall Meetings:** Hosting virtual town hall meetings or webinars where citizens can interact directly with policymakers, industry leaders, and sustainability experts. Encourage open dialogue, active listening, and collaborative problem-solving to empower citizens in shaping circular economy policies and initiatives.

**Youth Engagement Initiatives:** Creating dedicated online spaces for youth engagement, such as youth forums or virtual youth councils, where young can discuss and propose solutions to circular economy challenges. Empowering youth to organize campaigns, events, and peer-to-peer education initiatives aimed at promoting sustainable behaviors among their peers.

**Hackathons and Co-creation Workshops:** Organisation of hackathons and co-creation workshops where citizens, policymakers, and experts collaborate to develop innovative solutions to circular economy challenges. Events like the "Circular Economy Hackathon" in Belgium bring together diverse stakeholders to brainstorm ideas and prototype solutions.

**Online Deliberative Polling:** Conducting online deliberative polling exercises inspired by the work of organizations like "Healthy Democracy" in the United States.

**Digital Storytelling Campaigns:** Launching digital storytelling campaigns that showcase sustainable tourism initiatives. Encouraging citizens and tourists to share their experiences, photos, and videos on social media using designated hashtags, promoting positive examples of responsible tourism and encouraging others to follow suit.

Key features of these platforms:

- Ensuring that are accessible and inclusive to accommodate diverse audiences. Design platforms with user-friendly interfaces, easy navigation, and multilingual support to enhance engagement and accessibility.
- Providing accessible and engaging educational resources, such as webinars, tutorials, and informational videos, to empower citizens with the knowledge and skills needed to participate effectively in discussions.
- Collaborating with non-profit organizations, businesses, academia, and civil society in general o students to co-create and co-manage online platforms and forums, ensuring diverse perspectives and expertise are represented.
- Using multimedia formats, such as videos, infographics, podcasts, and interactive quizzes, to present complex concepts in an accessible and engaging manner. This helps enhance understanding and encourages active participation from citizens.
- Using data analytics and insights to inform decision-making and tailor engagement strategies to the preferences and needs of citizens. Monitor online discussions, analyze user behavior, and gather feedback to identify trends, opportunities, and areas for improvement in circular economy engagement efforts.

### Topic 3. Sustainability Rating: Definition and criteria for granting, Social and economic impact, European applicability

Sustainability ratings have become a tool for assessing a company's commitment to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) practices. These ratings analyse a company's impact on the planet, workforce, and ethical conduct.

By evaluating these factors, sustainability ratings offer insight into a company's long-term viability and potential exposure to ESG-related risks.

During the discussion, participants commented on the pros and cons of ESG. Here are some highlights:

- Just like fingerprints, strong ESG strategies are unique to each company. The absence of a universal ESG approach presents a significant hurdle for both companies implementing these initiatives and investors analyzing them. Since what works for one company in a particular industry might not translate well to another, crafting and managing effective internal ESG programs becomes a complex task.
- Implementing ESG practices can lead to cost reductions in areas like energy consumption, waste disposal, and regulatory compliance. Embedding ESG practices into an organization's DNA fosters long-term cost reductions in operating expenses, energy consumption, and other areas.

A strong ESG focus can be a powerful magnet for new customers. Consumers and businesses increasingly prioritize ESG factors when making purchasing decisions, and companies demonstrating a commitment to sustainability are more likely to attract this growing segment of the market.

So, what to do?

**Community-driven Sustainability Assessments & Mandatory Reporting Requirements:** Establishment of community-driven sustainability assessments, involving local communities to evaluate businesses' sustainability practices and enforce mandatory reporting on environmental and social performance, promoting transparency, accountability, and improvement.

**Incentivizing Green Investments & Support for Green Innovations:** Tax incentives and subsidies for businesses investing in sustainable practices, while providing support and funding for green innovation and research, fostering a transition towards more sustainable business models.

**Collaborative Supply Chain Initiatives & Promote Local Supply Chains:** Collaborative supply chain initiatives to promote sustainability by working together suppliers and businesses to identify and implement greener practices. Support to local farmers, artisans, and small businesses by prioritizing sustainability, sourcing locally, promoting fair trade, and protecting biodiversity to boost local economies and communities.

**Certification and Labeling Programs & Eco-Labeling Schemes:** Creation of certification and labeling programs to identify sustainable businesses, helping consumers make informed choices. These programs also encourage businesses to improve their practices to earn certification. Promotion of consumer awareness and education about sustainability criteria. They also suggest establishing eco-labeling schemes, such as the "Nordic Swan Ecolabel," to certify products and services based on their environmental and social attributes.

**Support for Green Innovation:** Supporting and funding for green innovation and research. By investing in sustainable technologies and solutions, businesses are better equipped to address environmental challenges and transition towards more sustainable business models. Share best practices, and collectively raise the bar for environmental and social responsibility.

**Harmonization with European Standards:** Aligning sustainability rating criteria with European standards to ensure consistency and comparability, advocating for harmonized sustainability standards and certification schemes at European and international levels.

**Promotion of Circular Business Models:** Encouraging circular economy models through incentives like tax breaks and grants, facilitating a transition to more resource-efficient operations.

**Cross-Sector Collaboration and Triple Bottom Line Assessment:** Encouraging circular economy models through incentives like tax breaks and grants, facilitating a transition to more resource-efficient operations, and adopt a triple bottom line approach considering environmental, social, and economic impacts in sustainability evaluation. Utilizing tools like the SASB.

**Public Consultation and Co-creation:** Involving citizens in the development of sustainability rating criteria through participatory workshops, focus groups, and online surveys to ensure that the criteria reflect societal values and aspirations.

**Sector-Specific Guidelines:** Developing sector-specific sustainability guidelines tailored to industries with significant environmental and social impacts, such as agriculture, manufacturing, and tourism. Drawing inspiration from initiatives like the "Better Cotton Initiative" (BCI).

**Tourism Sustainability Standards:** Developing comprehensive sustainability standards and certification criteria specifically tailored to the tourism industry. Considering factors such as carbon footprint reduction, water conservation and cultural heritage preservation.

**Eco-Tourism Labeling:** Introducing an eco-tourism labeling scheme identifying and promoting destinations and tour packages committed to environmental conservation and community development, aligning with global best practices.

**Education and awareness:** Initiatives to increase understanding of sustainability concepts and the importance of sustainability ratings. It would be a key element to implement educational programs targeting businesses, consumers, investors, and policymakers to raise awareness about the benefits of sustainability ratings and their role in driving positive environmental and social outcomes.

### Topics discussed only in some events

#### Topic 4. Improving waste collection and recycling infrastructure (discussed in Greece and Romania)

Recycling is the only mainstream waste management operation preventing valuable resources in our waste from being destroyed. Using recycled material for new product manufacturing avoids the enormous environmental impacts associated with the extraction and processing of natural resources.

So, what to do?

**Enhanced Municipal Waste Collection Systems:** Investing in modernized waste collection systems equipped with separate bins for different types of waste (e.g., recyclables, organic waste, non-recyclables). Implementing automated collection methods, such as RFID technology or smart bins, can improve efficiency and accuracy in waste sorting.

**Community Recycling Centers:** Establishing community recycling centers in neighborhoods and municipalities can provide convenient drop-off points for recyclable materials. These centers could offer incentives such as discounts or vouchers for residents who bring in recyclables, encouraging participation and diverting waste from landfills.

**Education and Awareness Campaigns:** Organisation of education and awareness campaigns to promote proper waste sorting and recycling practices. Implementing educational programs in schools, workplaces, and community centers can help instill habits of recycling and reduce contamination in recycling streams.

**Incentives for Recycling:** Introducing financial incentives, such as deposit-return schemes for beverage containers or cash rewards for recycling participation, can encourage citizens to recycle more effectively. Additionally, offering tax breaks or subsidies to businesses that invest in recycling infrastructure and practices can stimulate private sector involvement in waste management.

**Integration of Technology:** Using technology solutions like waste management apps or online platforms to facilitate communication between citizens and waste management authorities. These tools can provide real-time updates on collection schedules, recycling guidelines, and disposal options, improving transparency and accessibility for residents.

**Expansion of Recycling Programs:** Expanding recycling programs to include a broader range of materials, such as electronic waste (e-waste), textiles, and construction debris. Experts suggest collaborating with industry stakeholders to develop specialized recycling facilities and processes for handling these materials, reducing landfill dependence and promoting resource recovery.

**Public-Private Partnerships:** Fostering partnerships between government agencies, private waste management companies, and non-profit organizations to improve waste collection and recycling infrastructure collaboratively.

**Community Engagement and Participation:** Encouraging community involvement in waste management decision-making processes through citizen advisory boards, public forums, and volunteer programs. It's fundamental to engage residents in shaping local waste management policies and initiatives, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility for environmental stewardship. Launch public awareness campaigns using traditional media channels (such as radio, television, and newspapers) and social media platforms to raise awareness about the importance of the circular economy and encourage citizen participation.

**Demonstration Workshops:** Implementing small-scale demonstration projects that showcase practical examples of circular economy practices in action. For example, set up a community composting system or a clothing swap event to illustrate the concepts of waste reduction and resource reuse.

**Collaborative Initiatives:** Encouraging collaboration between local businesses, community organizations, and government agencies to launch initiatives promoting circular economy principles. This could include initiatives like repair cafes, where people can learn to fix broken items instead of discarding them.

## **Topic 5. Improving product selection and labelling, crucial to educating consumers about the sustainable characteristics of goods (discussed in Bulgaria)**

Improving product selection and labeling is of huge importance for educating consumers about the sustainable characteristics of goods. Introducing detailed information on labels can empower consumers to make more informed and sustainable choices.

So, what to do?

**Using Clear and Understandable Language:** One of the biggest drawbacks of the current labeling is the use of jargon and technical terms that might confuse consumers. If manufacturers use simple and straightforward language to describe the used materials and highlight their sustainability attributes without making use of false green claims, the label of the products will be easier to understand and consumers will know what exactly is their product made of.

**Sustainable Features:** It is good to produce sustainable products but with the rise of popularity of false green claims, manufacturers need to clearly highlight the sustainable features of their products on the labels. This is possible through providing information about recycled content, renewable energy usage, carbon footprint, and the eco-friendly certifications the product has obtained and why it is sustainable.

**Including QR Codes for Additional Information:** Great ways to provide more information on the products is through the use of QR codes. A lot of consumers shared their experience with using QR codes during the event and said that they would check what the QR code links to and read the information provided. Through the integration of QR codes on labels that link to additional information, consumers can learn more about the product's characteristics

**Choosing Legible Fonts and Colors:** The selection of a suitable font that is easy to read, even at small sizes, and choose colors that provide good contrast for readability is essential for gathering consumer's attention and making the label easier to understand for consumers. Very often manufacturers use difficult to read fonts in order to make consumers give up on reading the description of the product and rely on its visuals when making a choice. That is why several consumers said that using too many different fonts or colors can make labels appear cluttered and confusing.

**Organising Information Clearly:** Another issue with labeling is how chaotic the information is arranged on some products. Consumer share that they want labels, on which the information is arranged in a logical and organized manner to guide consumers' attention by the use headings, bullet points, or sections to break up text and make it easier to digest.



**How to make the business sector improving** product selection and labeling to educate consumers about sustainable characteristics?

- Determining beforehand who the key decision-makers are within the business that would be responsible for implementing changes to product selection and labeling.
- Communicating directly with them through inviting them to forums or seminars, that are focused on discussing this topic. It is also possible to target them by organizing a campaign dedicated to improvement of labeling and selection.
- Throughout the potential events or campaigns, it should be clearly articulated what the benefits of improving product selection and labeling are for the business. That can be done through emphasizing how it can enhance brand reputation, attract environmentally conscious consumers, drive sales, and differentiate the business from competitors. It would be better to propose specific solutions for improving product selection and labeling, such as introducing clearer definitions of materials, incorporating QR codes for additional information, or highlighting reuse options. The easiest way to influence the business is through providing information on ROI - the potential return on investment for implementing these changes. All of these measures come to hand if NGOs work collaboratively with stakeholders to refine and finalize any proposed changes to product selection and labeling.

#### **Topic 6. Eco-sustainable products (discussed in Italy)**

The growing awareness of the environmental impact of products throughout their lifecycle requires a rethink of design and development towards eco-sustainability.

It is evident how the material with which an object is produced entails a certain impact on the environment both during its extraction, cultivation, breeding, and during the end-of-life phase, recycling or reuse. For this reason, it is necessary to think about the product according to a diversification of levels of use for which it is intended depending on the materials of which it is composed. Therefore, thinking of the "pen" product as a product intended for writing only for the first level of use, followed by at least a second level already planned in the design both with and without transformation, until the final moment when the product and/or its components can no longer be used.

So, what to do ?

#### **Digital identity card**

Create a digital "identity card" for each product, including information on the materials used, the production chain, the environmental impact, and instructions for reuse and recycling. The certification of the card can be ensured by Blockchain, which can be used to certify the digital identity card and ensure the transparency and immutability of information.



### **Clothing:**

- waterproof jacket made from recycled plastic bottles: the jacket is designed to be durable and waterproof and can be recycled at the end of its life. Its "digital identity card" provides information on the number of recycled bottles used for its production and its production chain;
- shoes made from biodegradable materials: the shoes are comfortable and breathable and completely biodegrade at the end of their life. The "digital identity card" provides information on the materials used and instructions for their disposal;

### **Furniture:**

- sofas made from recycled and certified materials: the sofas are made from materials sourced from production waste or urban waste, FSC or GOTS certified. The "digital identity card" provides information on the materials used, their origin, and the production processes;
- chair made from bioplastic: the chair is sturdy and lightweight, made from bioplastic derived from renewable raw materials. Its "digital identity card" provides information on the materials used and their production process.

**Technology:** modular smartphone with interchangeable components: the smartphone is designed to be repairable and upgradeable, extending its useful life. Its "digital identity card" provides information on the components used and instructions for their repair or replacement; solar-powered laptop: the laptop is efficient and sustainable and can be used even in the absence of an electric grid. Its "digital identity card" provides information on energy consumption and instructions for its disposal. Eco-friendly brick: the bricks are made from recycled or low-impact materials, such as raw earth or hemp. The "digital identity card" provides information on the materials used and their environmental impact.

### **Topic 7. Artificial Intelligence in support of the circular economy (discussed in Italy)**

The circular economy is conceived as an alternative development model to the traditional linear economy, based on the principle of "take-produce-dispose". The goal is to create an efficient and resilient production system capable of regenerating materials and minimizing waste. In this context, Artificial Intelligence (AI) emerges as a key technology to accelerate the transition towards a circular economy.

AI can be used to:

- **Identify production inefficiencies:** AI can pinpoint weaknesses in production processes, such as energy, water, and raw material waste;
- **optimize raw material usage:** AI can suggest ways to use raw materials more efficiently, reducing waste and minimizing environmental impact;
- **achieve the "zero-impact AI" goal:** AI can be used to develop technologies and production processes with zero carbon emissions.

For example : A textile manufacturing company can use AI to analyze data on energy and water consumption. AI can then identify areas where resource consumption can be reduced and suggest ways to optimize production processes. This way, the company can reduce environmental impact and improve production efficiency.

AI can be used to:

- **Implement a digital "deposit return" system:** A "remuneration" on the product's base cost is returned to the consumer through a specific app. The amount to be paid is detected by scanning the product's barcode. This system incentivizes recycling, as already happens in some Northern European countries.

The aim would be to promote and extend some best practices present in some territorial realities, for example, in the Municipality of Rome there is the 'Plastic-eating Machine' (Smart box where plastic bottles can be deposited with QR code reading) which provides 'credits' for the issuance of Local Public Transport tickets (Bus, Subway) or in some Shopping Centers there are 'plastic-eating machines' that issue discount vouchers for use at participating stores in the same Shopping Center.

In addition to reward functions, the app should:

- Allow real-time monitoring of dumpster filling status;
- provide data on recycling collection and disposal, recycling, and reuse routes for waste and inform the user about the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> saved through proper disposal.

For example : A citizen can use the app to see in real-time which dumpsters are full in his/her area. The app can also provide information on waste disposal routes and the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> saved through proper disposal. This way, the citizen can be more aware of the environmental impact of his/her choices and do his/her part to protect the environment.

- **Introducing smart dumpsters:** Connected to a central system managed by the waste collection company through the use of AI, data on the average filling time of the dumpsters can be analyzed, defining an optimal collection plan to avoid waste stagnation or dispersion.

## Conclusions

The online events facilitated the exploration of key topics in the WE-DEMOCRACY project field, with focus on the formulation of policy proposals and recommendations from citizens. Through in-depth discussions and knowledge-sharing, participants delved into various aspects of circular economy initiatives, contributing diverse perspectives and expertise.

By drawing on real-world experiences and challenges, participants identified practical solutions that are both theoretically sound and contextually relevant. In the view of the participants, this brief session has increased the effectiveness in driving meaningful change in the field of circular economy.

The solutions discussed are now going to be the protagonists of the next project Phase which is going to be focused on E-Democracy tools, in particular on Crowdsourcing in order to see how citizens can be agents of change in the circular economy sector by using online tools of active citizenship and e-democracy.