

## **Development of theoretical underpinning to Circular Economy Programmes: comparative in-depth qualitative analyses between Poland, Italy, and Ireland**

### *Description for general public*

The European Union has been seeking to improve the economic and social conditions for country members, and, at the same time, to avoid worsening the environmental situation, not just in Europe, but for the planet. This is not an easy task, especially because the traditional “way of doing” profitable commercial activities involves the consumption of resources that are disappearing everywhere and the emission of pollutants that are changing the climate, globally. Combined with this, valuable material is still trashed together with things we think “have no use anymore”, and throw them away. What if we could put all this material back in the production of new goods? That is what science is trying to do, and what we call “Circular Economy”, but it is also not easy. Scientists are convinced this not only “makes a lot of sense”, it became our last chance to survive, as human beings, before the planet collapses. Climate catastrophes are increasingly happening, as we see in the news, putting crops at risk and people’s life in danger, even directly. Therefore, the EU decided to commit all efforts to put Circular Economy into practice in all EU countries, and as soon as possible.

Our project comes to help the EU and country members, assisting them in achieving this important objective. By researching factors that influence the performance of the implementation of Circular Economy plans in Europe, the project goal is to develop propositions based on these factors that will facilitate the understanding of reasons why countries succeed better than others in their Circular Economy strategies.

The research starts with the search and identification of these factors. We will get information about them from different sources: reading documents (including scientific publications), observing activities carried out by people working in Circular Economy initiatives and during events related to such programmes, talking to and interviewing these persons, who can tell us about the influences some factors have on their work and things that have relationship with it. This way we will be able to organise different types of effects the factors have on people’s actions and thoughts, influencing their decision, and in many phases of the implementation, both in the production operations and commercial practices. Consumers are also very important. They decide, by their choices of buying recycled or remade products, if the production of those goods will succeed. Doing this search in three very different European countries will help us to compare how the culture, but also social and economic conditions, infrastructure, technological development, political and educational strategies, among other aspects, in each country, affect the influences we discover during this study. Therefore, we used results from scientific studies to decide in favour of Poland, Italy, and Ireland. The propositions we will develop can be tested and will show if they fit real situations in these three countries. And they will be improved, by revising the information we collect for almost two years, so their possibilities to explain why the plans work better (or not) in certain regions can be optimised during the period of the project.

We started studying ideas and projects that gave birth to today’s Circular Economy plans and programmes over twenty years ago, and, according to our experience, the difficulties the EU has to succeed in attempts to implement them are associated with the complexity of these initiatives. They involve many dimensions besides the economic and socio-environmental ones, depend on changes of behaviour that are not simple to explain, and their results are highly uncertain. The scientists that published evaluations of the EU countries’ progress in Circular Economy programmes indicate such complex aspects and recommend deeper studies on the roots of these challenging riddles. The reasons for our attempt to investigate this topic are: we see its importance, globally; it needs support from theoretical propositions that still do not exist; the development of theories for it requires more complex foundations that correspond to its complexity; our previous studies verified the utility of philosophical principles (a concept named Complex Thinking) that have not been employed in the research of this topic; and we realise the high potential this project’s approach has to contribute to the topic.

Among the relevant results we expect with this project are (i) a system of the mentioned propositions, and (ii) the capacity it will have to help scientists to analyse Circular Economy programmes, and to assist governmental staff in planning and implementing Circular Economy strategies and plans. Business advisers will also benefit from these results. In this project we will collaborate with both, government and consultants, in the three countries, and they will help us testing our propositions, while also having the opportunity to examine them in their projects. The expertise gathered from this research will enable us to engage in studies with further countries, expanding the capacity of the system we intend to develop. The governmental partners in Italy are official members of the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform, which represents a concrete possibility to establish immediate collaboration with other EU countries and fulfil this aspiration.