



Fit for a circular future

Promoting **Competitiveness and Innovation** of Mediterranean SMEs for a Circular Economy



Project co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund

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About the Circular Economy White Paper

This White Paper is part of a series of thematic Circular Economy White Papers presenting the contributions of the Interreg MED Green Growth community and their efforts in transitioning towards a circular economy, in the areas of:

- 1) Resource Efficiency
- 2) Green and Smart Public Services
- 3) Waste Prevention and Management
- 4) Competitiveness and Innovation.

A circular economy is 'where the value of products, materials and resources is maintained in the economy for as long as possible, and the generation of waste minimised'.

European Commission 2015¹

The thematic White Papers are complemented with a transversal White Paper and accompanied by a set of Policy Recommendations and Legal Recommendations in the same thematic areas. The elaboration of the White Papers was led and developed by the SYNGGI project based on contributions from modular projects of the Interreg MED Green Growth Community², through dedicated Thematic Working Groups on the four thematic areas.

1. European Commission (2015). Closing the loop - An EU action plan for the Circular Economy.

2. <https://green-growth.interreg-med.eu>

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4. SME United (2019). Cluster Help SMEs Become More Innovative and Create More Jobs.

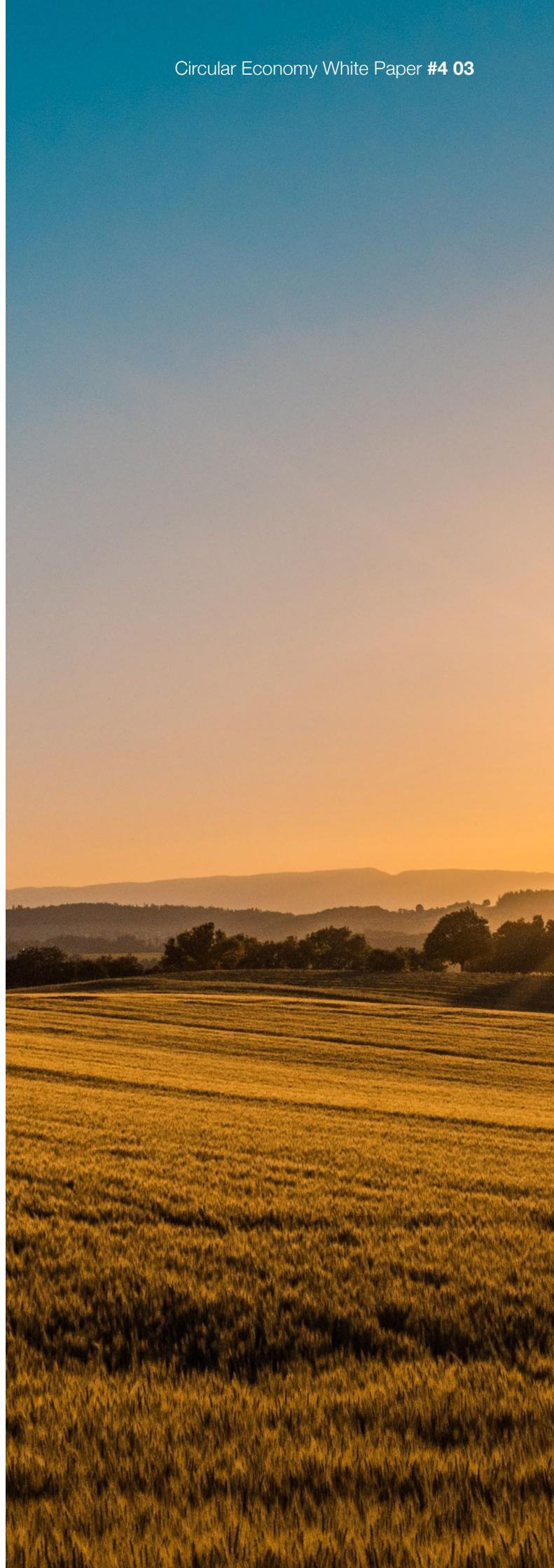
Competitiveness, Innovation and the Circular Economy

Innovation and competitiveness are fundamental elements for the transition towards a circular economy in Europe. On the one side, innovation is needed to realize the necessary systemic changes in this transition. On the other, the circular economy itself is regarded as a key driver for enhanced competitiveness, reducing the dependency on scarce resources with volatile prices and creating new business opportunities and innovative, more efficient ways of producing and consuming³. New business models, technologies and changes in production systems are required to implement a circular economic model. Therefore, both industries and SMEs must adopt innovative solutions to achieve a successful transition.

‘Clusters are groups of specialised enterprises – often SMEs – and other related supporting actors that work together in a particular location. Due to such close cooperation and peer learning, SMEs become more innovative, create more jobs and register more international trademarks and patents than they would alone.’

SME United 2019⁴

Clusters have an important role to play as drivers for innovation. Furthermore, linking industrial sectors and public bodies is needed to create industrial symbiosis. Moreover, consumers need to be empowered to adopt sustainable consumption patterns.



“The transition to a circular economy is a systemic change. [...] Innovation will play a key part in this systemic change. In order to rethink our ways of producing and consuming, and to transform waste into high value-added products, we will need new technologies, processes, services and business models which will shape the future of our economy and society.”

European Commission⁵

With the EU Circular Economy Action Plan, adopted in 2015, the European Commission stresses the economic case for increasing resource efficiency as an opportunity to generate new and sustainable competitive advantages for the EU. Transitioning from the current linear economy model towards a circular economy by ‘closing the loop’ of product life cycles through greater reuse and recycling has benefits for the environment and the economy.



“Eco-innovation refers to all forms of innovation – technological and non-technological – that create business opportunities and benefit the environment by preventing or reducing their impact, or by optimising the use of resources. [...]”

It encourages a shift among manufacturing firms from ‘end-of-pipe’ solutions to ‘closed-loop’ approaches that minimise material and energy flows by changing products and production methods – bringing a competitive advantage across many businesses and sectors.”

European Commission⁷

5. European Commission (2015). Closing the loop - An EU action plan for the Circular Economy.
6. European Commission (2017). European Semester Thematic Factsheet - Resource Efficiency.
7. European Commission (n.d.). Eco-innovation - the key to Europe's future competitiveness.
8. Eco-Innovation Observatory (20



“Eco-innovation is the introduction of any new or significantly improved product (good or service), process, organisational change or marketing solution that reduces the use of natural resources (including materials, energy, water and land) and decreases the release of harmful substances across the whole life-cycle.”

Eco-Innovation Observatory⁸



The private sector, particularly SMEs, plays a key role in the circular economy transition. SMEs are the backbone of the European economy: they represent 99% of businesses, account for 85% of new jobs created and employ at least two thirds of the European workforce. While their individual impact on the environment may be relatively small, the cumulative impact is significant. Resource efficiency is a key driver for SMEs' innovation and competitiveness and their contributions to the circular economy transition (see also Circular Economy White Paper No. 1 on Resource Efficiency). The Green Action Plan of the European Commission aims to help SMEs take advantage of the opportunities offered by the transition to a green economy with the objective to raise SMEs' awareness of resource efficiency improvements and the potential of the circular economy for productivity, competitiveness and business opportunities.



The Interreg MED Green Growth Community and its contribution to enhancing competitiveness and innovation for a circular economy

The objective of the Interreg MED Green Growth community is to promote sustainable development in the Mediterranean area, based on sound management of natural resources and by fostering innovation through an integrated and territorially based cooperation approach. Several projects, form part of the Interreg MED Green Growth community and strongly contribute to promoting competitiveness and innovation:

- **finMED** (*Boosting the financing of innovation for green growth sectors through innovative clusters services in the MED area*) aims to boost the financing of innovation in green growth sectors through improved delivery of policies and strategies and the introduction of innovative cluster services.
- **REINWASTE** (*REmanufacture the food supply chain by testing INNovative solutions for zero inorganic WASTE*) promotes the adoption of greener innovative concepts by SMEs in the agriculture and food industry with the aim to prevent waste generation in the agro-food sector. The project enhances transnational network competence, selects and tests the best available solutions and quickly transfers this knowledge.
- **ARISTOIL** (*Reinforcement of Mediterranean olive oil sector competitiveness through development and application of innovative production and quality control methodologies related to olive oil health protecting properties*) aims to reinforce the competitiveness of the Mediterranean olive oil sector through the development and application of innovative production and quality control methodologies related to olive oil health protecting properties.

- **GREENOMED** (*Mediterranean Trans-Regional Cooperation for green manufacturing innovation*) has the objective to test a trans-regional cooperation methodology to design and implement a European network of pilot plants to facilitate the uptake of green manufacturing technologies by companies (especially SMEs). The GREENOMED methodology is implemented and tested by clusters and intermediary organisations as the orchestrators of the regional ecosystem.

- **Green mind** (*GREEN and smart Mobility INDUstry innovation*) has the objective to strengthen the transnational activities of clusters and agencies to support SME systems in exploiting the market opportunities of the raising demand for green and smart mobility products and services.

- **Creainnovation** (*Create sustainable Innovation in SMEs using creative methods and processes*) aims to promote the adoption of a creative entrepreneurship approach to sustainable innovation by SMEs so that they can tackle, cost effectively, many of the challenges faced in growing their business and boosting their competitiveness.

- **EMBRACE** (*European Med-clusters Boosting Remunerative Agro-Wine Circular Economy*) develops a model and implements a toolkit for the establishment of two circular economy oriented transnational meta-clusters in the wine and agro-food sectors, two of the leading sectors of the Mediterranean Economy.

- **GRASPINNO** (*Transnational model, strategies and decision support for innovative clusters and business networks towards green growth, focusing on green e-procurement in EE/RES for energy refurbishment of public buildings*) provides innovative green procurement solutions for energy savings/efficient refurbishment of public buildings, focusing on smart cities and communities. Its goals are to (a) improve the capacity of Public Authorities to manage the energy efficiency of buildings, moving towards nearly zero energy buildings; and (b) strengthen SMEs to enter the green energy market.

Challenges and opportunities addressed by the Interreg MED Green Growth Community projects

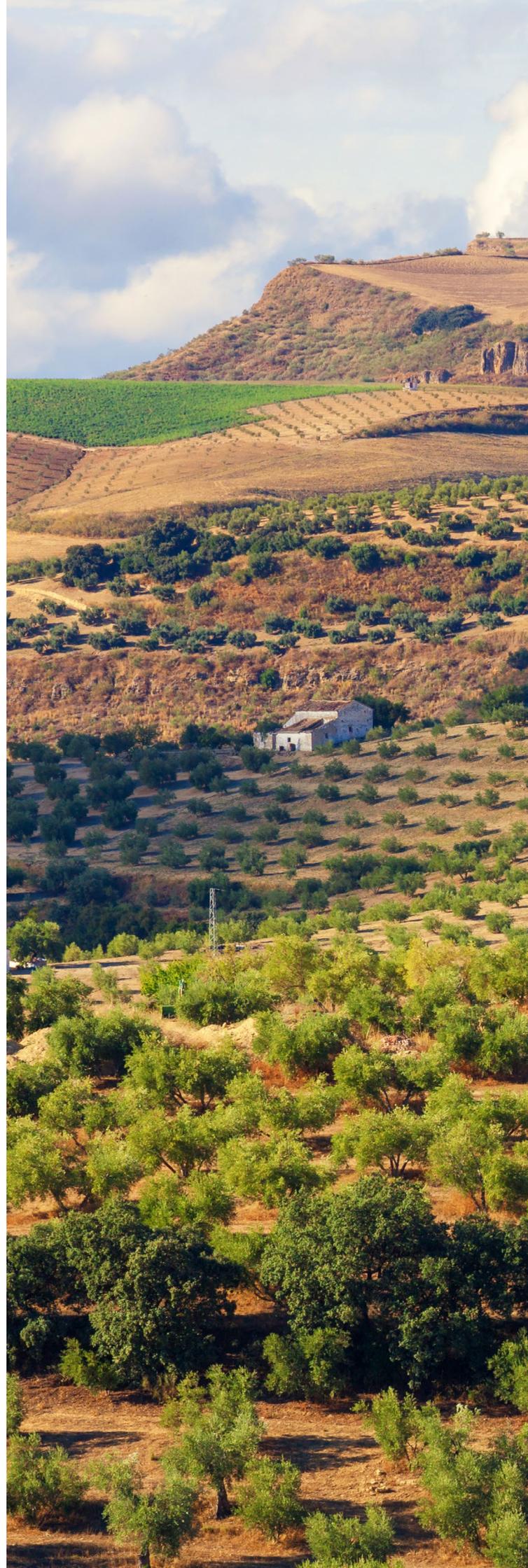
The overall challenge addressed by the Interreg MED Green Growth Community projects focusses on the limited innovation capacity and competitiveness of Mediterranean companies – particularly SMEs – when it comes to “green” and “circular” products and services.

According to the European Innovation Scoreboard 2018 , the share of SMEs introducing innovations has decreased over the past decade, and similarly, the Global Innovation Barometer 2018 concludes that “SMEs are losing their reputation as a driver of innovation in developed economies – particularly in Europe”. These findings especially highlight the Mediterranean regions, many of which rank among the ‘moderate’ and ‘modest’ innovators in Europe. The Mediterranean regions also rank lower in the latest European Regional Competitiveness Index , suggesting a strong link between regional innovation performance and competitiveness. Hence, investing in “green” and “circular” economic and business models presents an opportunity for Mediterranean regions and companies to enhance their competitiveness.

The following are the specific challenges that the community projects are tackling:

- A lack of effective clusters for companies and stakeholders to connect, work together and transfer innovations
- The limited access to tools and services for SMEs to drive innovation coupled with a lack of awareness among companies regarding existing innovation opportunities and market demand for “green” and “circular” products and services in their respective sectors, including green public procurement by local authorities
- Limited access to financing for SMEs to invest in innovation
- Limited consumer awareness and interest in “green” and “circular” products and services
- Lack of legislation that encourages, supports and also obliges, in certain cases, the public authorities to carry out tenders that promote green products even if they are more expensive, thus avoiding the race to the “least down” which leads to the use of poor and non-innovative products because they cost less

11. European Commission (2018).
European Innovation Scoreboard 2018 – Executive summary.
12. GE (2018).
Global Innovation Barometer 2018 Summary Report.
13. European Commission (2017).
Regional Innovation Scoreboard.
14. European Commission (2016).
European Regional Competitiveness Index.



Solutions provided by the Interreg MED Green Growth Community Projects

To address the challenges and opportunities, the Interreg MED Green Growth Community projects provide a number of concrete solutions that promote innovation in green and circular business models across the Mediterranean region. These solutions are:

Innovation tools and services

E-LABS FOR CREATIVE INNOVATION

The Creainnovation project designs, launches and tests e-Labs for Creative Innovation where product, process, marketing and organisational innovation is produced using creative processes, tools, techniques and methodologies. The Creative Workshops and Sessions undertaken in the e-Labs project involve SMEs, managers and young people working together to target real business innovation problems and opportunities by developing sustainable innovative ideas that will catalyze, shape and drive competitiveness for the SMEs. At least 36 National (Italy, Portugal, Spain, France, Croatia, Greece, Montenegro, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Slovenia) and 3 International Creative Workshops and Sessions will be delivered, involving 72 SMEs.

A cluster, incorporating SMEs and Regional and Transnational Stakeholders, will be built and will focus on the adoption of processes and methodologies to foster

creativity for business innovation at all levels (product, process, marketing and organisation) by using:

- the e-Labs for Creative Innovation
- the skills acquired and the resources of creativity identified during the project
- the process of strategic planning for regional/transnational development defined together with the stakeholders
- The Ciset Tool, a tool developed for the assessment of the economic, social and environmental sustainability of innovation projects (see below)

CREAINNOVATION SUSTAINABILITY EVALUATION TOOL (CISSET)

The Ciset tool has been developed to be used both as a tool for the qualitative assessment of economic, social and environmental sustainability of innovation projects, and as a checklist on sustainability to be used in the generation of innovation projects, stimulating reflections on important areas to be able to focus them on a perspective of attention to sustainability criteria. For those who are preparing to generate new ideas of innovation, be it product, process, marketing or organizational, leafing through the Ciset evaluation sheets could direct their attention to the relevant criteria to ensure the sustainability of their ideas. The simplicity of use of the tool allows all those who wish to pursue a sustainable innovation to evaluate it both in the design phase and in the implementation phase.





OPEN INNOVATION LABS

The REINWASTE Open innovation Labs (OiL) have been conceived to spark a new paradigm for mutual exchange and use of innovation across companies and organisations dedicated to R&D. It consists of a “know-how exchange space” in order to mainstream innovation trends and foresight in the prevention and minimization of inorganic waste in the agro-food and agricultural sectors.

OiL represents an opportunity to improve innovation capability and to confront business challenges by encouraging companies to acquire outside sources of innovation in order to improve product lines and shorten the time required to bring products to the market. As many companies cannot afford the technology/processes required to carry out their research, they should instead “buy or license” processes or inventions from other companies or innovation performers. This can be done through: tech scouting (allocating dedicated or part-time staff to search for technology licensing opportunities relevant to a defined strategic area of interest); vertical collaboration (innovation partnerships formed with customers or suppliers within the value chain of the firm); horizontal collaboration, which generally involves technology collaborations from outside of the value chain with competitors or companies in adjacent markets; and technology sourcing (investment in or outright acquisition of a technology partner).

PILOT PLANTS FOR GREEN MANUFACTURING INNOVATION

The GREENOMED project tests a cooperative inter-regional methodology enabling regions in the Mediterranean to cooperate in the collaborative design and implementation of pilot plants for green manufacturing under the logic of Smart Specialization. GREENOMED contributes to establishing the required trans-natio-

nal cooperation, leveraging on the role of clusters as orchestrators and intermediaries of regional ecosystems and creating the institutional framework that can support this process.

In the GREENOMED project, pilot plants are conceived as innovation infrastructures and open facilities accessible to companies, including SMEs, where they can find innovative technologies, multi-disciplinary competences and a network of innovative technology and service suppliers. In this regard, pilot plants help SMEs to understand, test and set-up innovative technologies and methods for their businesses. Pilot plants therefore offer companies the opportunity to tackle challenges related to the uptake of innovative green technologies that companies, especially SMEs, face due to new, unknown technologies and the difficulties in estimating benefits linked to their introduction.

The GREENOMED methodology contributes to the conceptualisation and implementation of a European network of pilot plants on green manufacturing through inter-regional collaboration between advanced and emerging regions in the Mediterranean. Advanced regions that have already experienced the implementation of the methodology through a so-called ‘Vanguard Initiative’ can coach emerging regions to support them in using the tools and services developed through the GREENOMED project. Additionally, the methodology will also be transferred to clusters that are external to the project consortium.

SUPPORT SERVICE TOOL ON ACCESS TO FINANCE FOR SMES

The finMED project develops a “support service tool” to aid entrepreneurship in the access to finance. The “support service tool” will be provided to SMEs by Clusters and Business Support Organisations (BSOs) that are members of the project consortium. It has

been conceived as a software tool that plays the role of a Decision Support System to help clusters and BSOs assist SMEs that are engaged or plan to be engaged in research activities for innovative solutions in the green growth field.

The focus companies should preferably be SMEs that are already active in the sector of green technologies, as well as those companies that are in search of technical adaptations for a “green” transformation of their products, processes or services. Therefore, both the supply and demand side of the green growth sector is covered. The concerned SMEs should have a core business, R&D or innovation potential in the following sectors: energy efficiency, renewable energy sources, waste and resources management, clean technologies, eco-innovation and smart technological solutions.

PILOT SERVICES FOR SMES IN THE GREEN AND SMART MOBILITY INDUSTRY

The GREEN MIND project develops transnational pilot services for SMEs in the green and smart mobility industry with the aim of fostering their competitiveness and innovation capacities. These pilot services cover three key areas of: 1) Market intelligence—helping SMEs understand the needs of the green and smart mobility market, assess their current position within it, and re-position themselves by exploiting its needs and new openings; 2) Public funding screening—researching the accessible funding sources of the available EU, national and local funds and guiding SMEs in the process of applying and accessing these funds; and 3) B2B matching—developing a structure that allows SMEs to match their needs and disseminate their innovations at regional and transnational levels.



TESTING, CERTIFICATION AND MARKETING OF “HEALTHY” OLIVE OIL

The ARISTOIL project supports the competitiveness and innovation of the Mediterranean olive oil producers by developing a commonly accepted method for measuring olive oil ingredients related to a standardised procedure for an olive oil “Health Claim” certification.¹⁵ The development of a Mediterranean olive oil cluster and transnational effort to produce olive oil with officially recognized and certified healthy properties can lead to a higher market demand for high quality olive oil and adoption of standards by international organisations such as the International Olive Oil Council.

TOOLKIT FOR CIRCULAR ECONOMY-ORIENTED INDUSTRY CLUSTERS

The Toolkit developed in the EMBRACE project is an innovative, user-friendly instrument addressed to SMEs, Intermediary Organizations, Clusters and Policy Makers in the agro-food and wine sectors engaged in transforming their businesses or “ecosystem” work streams in a circular way.

It relies on existing experiences, tools and models but represents a totally new and original methodology and product that is fine-tuned and ready for use.

The Toolkit consists of 18 main tools and a User/Facilitator’s Guide, and allows them to respond to the following question of “How the toolkit can adapt and finalize the existing methodologies and tools (Eco-Canvas) required to give support to SMEs in the design and implementation of their eco-innovation processes and business models compliancy with a Circular Economy model which eventually allows them to get funds for their projects.”

15. A health claim is any statement on labels, advertising or other marketing products that health benefits can result from consuming a given food, for instance that a food can help reinforce the body's natural defenses or enhance learning ability (European Food Safety Authority, n.d.)

Pilots, results and key success factors

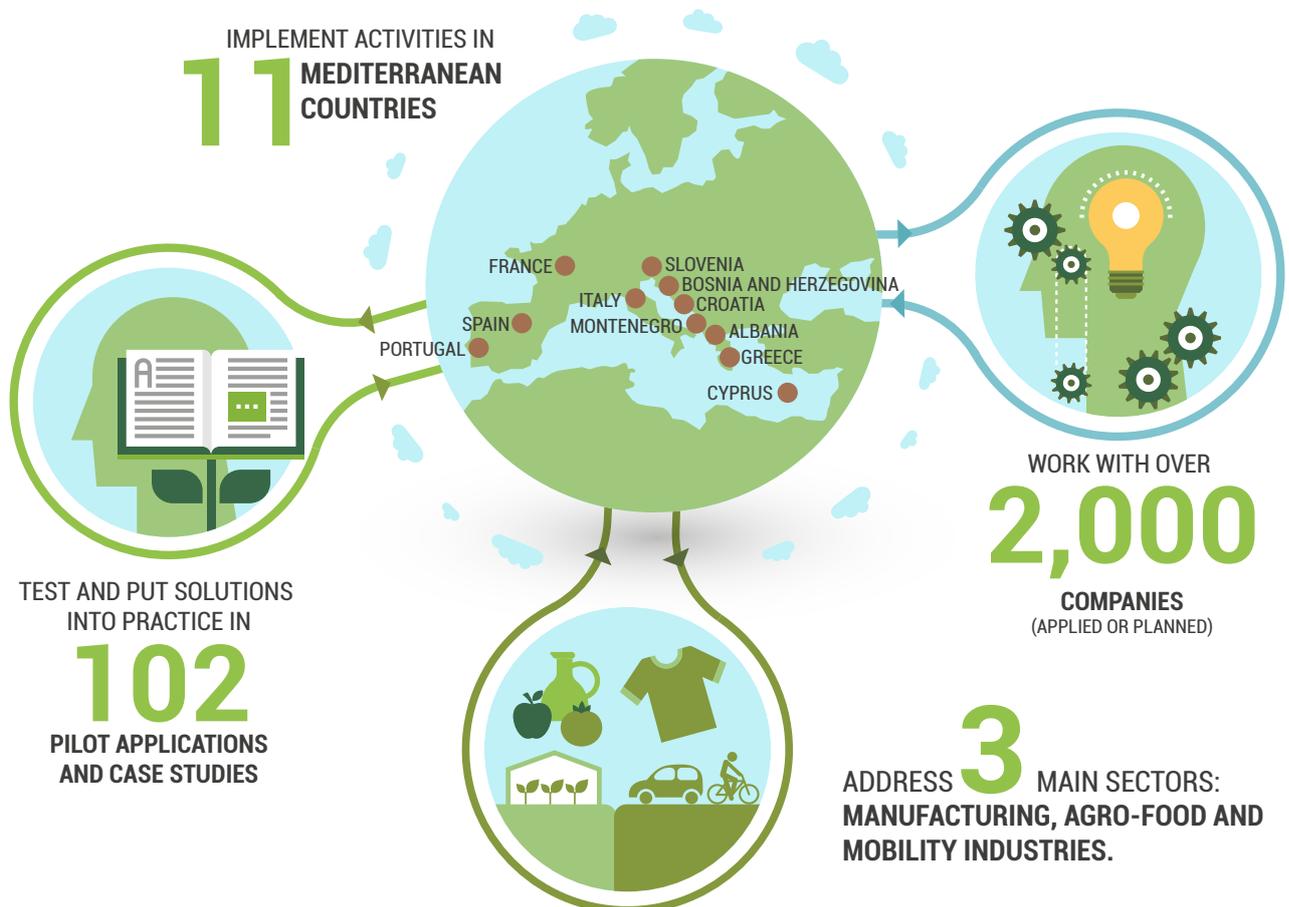
A common approach of the projects of the Interreg MED Green Growth Community is to apply, test and validate solutions in sectors and regions, and thus provide evidence for what works best in terms of promoting innovation for green growth in the Mediterranean region.

Together, the featured projects

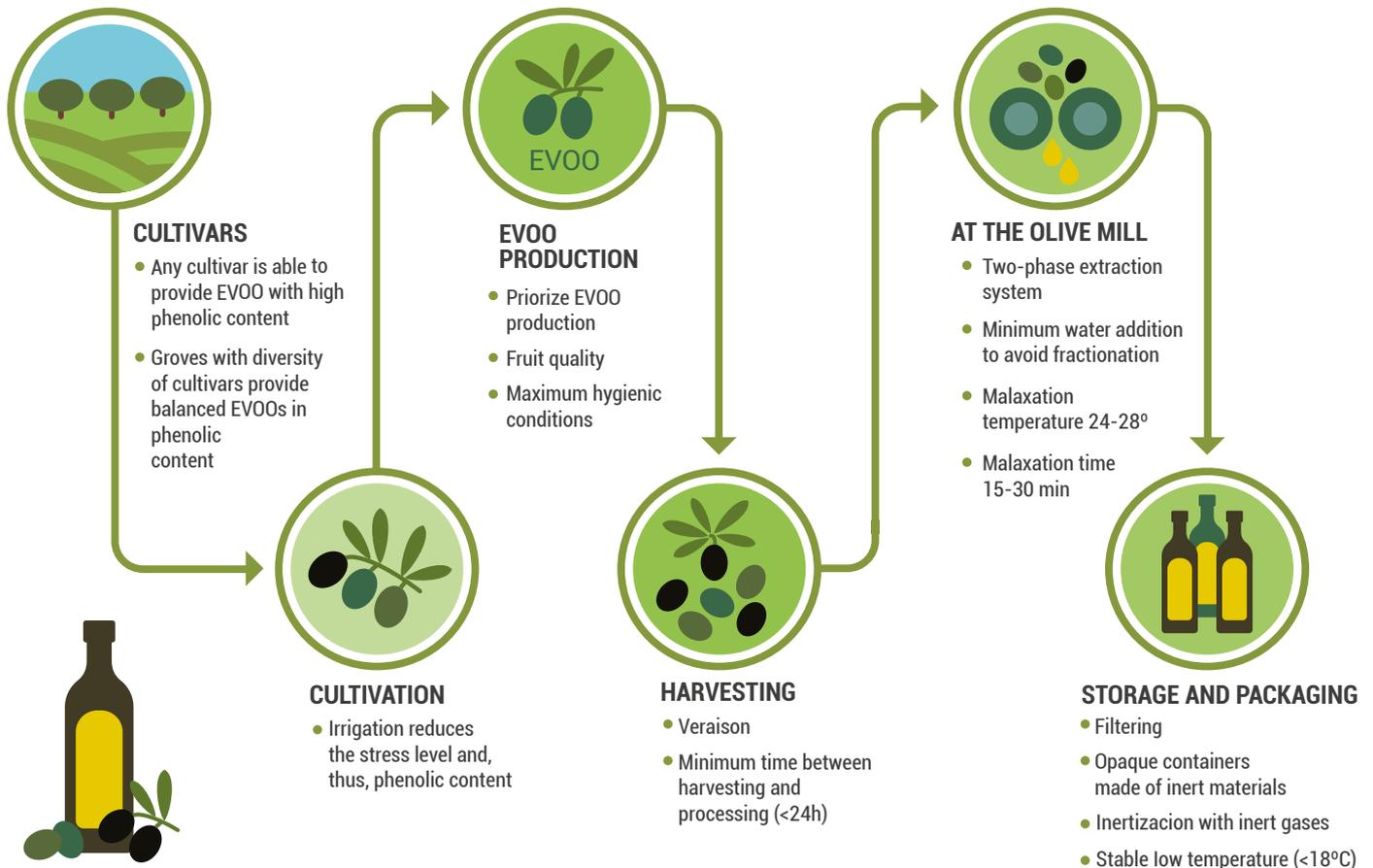
- Implement activities in 11 Mediterranean countries: Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain
- Test and put solutions into practice in at least 102 pilot applications and case studies (applied and planned)
- Address a variety of sectors including manufacturing, agro-food and mobility industries.
- Reach out to and work with over 2475 companies (applied and planned)



TOGETHER, THE FEATURED PROJECTS



SUPPORTING OLIVE OIL PRODUCERS THROUGH PRODUCT TESTING, CERTIFICATION, GUIDANCE AND CLUSTERING



Supporting Olive Oil producers through product testing, certification, guidance and clustering

Olive oil producers were invited to participate in the pilot phase of the ARISTOIL project by sending samples to the laboratories (of the Department of Chemistry at the Cordoba University and the Department of Pharmacognosy and Natural Products Chemistry at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens) in order to have their produce analysed for its polyphenol content.¹⁶ By doing so, they benefit from receiving quantitative and qualitative information concerning polyphenol concentrations, and a certificate on the polyphenol concentrations in their product. At the same time, ARISTOIL university partners were able to carry out their analyses and draw conclusions concerning the

optimal conditions for the production of an olive oil with a health claim in accordance with the EU regulation. Following the analysis of over 2000 samples by the two partner university departments using two different methods (HPLC and NMR), the project compiled a 'guide for producers' and promotional material targeted at the olive oil sector stakeholders and the wider public. In the current final phase of the project, producers are involved in networking and marketing through the ARISTOIL cluster and an online platform, the eHub. Through the cluster and eHub, trained and experienced producers, as well as new ones, are able to exchange ideas and know-how, as well as promote their products.

16. In accordance with the Commission Regulation (EU) No 432/2012 of 16 May 2012 establishing a list of permitted health claims made on foods, other than those referring to the reduction of disease risk and to children's development and health Text with EEA relevance

Supporting the green manufacturing technologies uptake in MED Regions through design of the pilot plants

Through the testing process of GREENOMED methodology, several stakeholders in the partnership regions are mobilized in order to design a European network of pilot plants that facilitate uptake of green manufacturing technologies by companies. To achieve this goal, the testing partners of the project from Aurling-Alpes, Marche, Slovenia, Croatia and the Region of Central Macedonia implemented the GREENOMED methodology through a coaching process by partners from the Lombardy region and Catalonia.

In each region, the key strategic topics for green manufacturing and circular economy were identified through creative workshops organized by the testing partners in

which several stakeholders such as companies, universities, RTOs, etc. participated. The final key topics for each region were selected based on the needs of the companies and the strategic priorities of Smart Specialisation Strategy in the region. 13 Regional Working Groups were created to provide a regular basis for regional stakeholders to initiate collaborations and work jointly to design a pilot plant aligned with the regional priorities and combine the needs and competencies of industry, research and policy.

So far, 14 topics have been identified through testing activities, which can be categorized into 5 main themes including: Smart Plastics, de and re-manufacturing, energy-efficiency, Circular Economy for food manufacturing and bio-economy.

The internationalization of these working groups has been initiated to explore the synergies among different groups and identify potential collaboration opportunities among stakeholders from different regions.



Pilot tenders considering Life Cycle Costing (LCC)

The GRASPINNO project carried out pilot tenders at the national level, in the countries of project partners, adopting national and European Green Public Procurement criteria and making both preliminary and subsequent analyses of the products put to tender, using a tool that was realized as one of the outputs of the project and which takes into consideration the Life Cycle Costing (LCC). LCC is a methodology that allows for the evaluation of costs along the entire life cycle of the product, from production to the disposal phase. The analysis of the costs of the environmental impacts associated with goods and services makes it possible to choose more innovative and greener goods and stimulates competitiveness among companies (which compete, not only by offering maximum discount) and product innovation. This is a change of mentality that should be encouraged, especially in public administrations. At the same time, adequate regulation is needed to guide public bodies (even the less virtuous ones) in this direction and not in the search for immediate savings that then translates into a higher cost in the long run.

Key success factors for the Interreg MED Green Growth community projects are a focus on user needs, the activation of clusters, a high level of interest and engagement from stakeholders, and the close collaboration among many different partners in the implementation of the projects.



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Circular Economy Monitoring Indicators

The European Commission’s Monitoring Framework for the Circular Economy Action Plan¹⁷, adopted in 2018, aims to assess progress towards circular economy in the EU and its Member States. It includes two indicators on competitiveness and innovation:

- Private investments, jobs (number of persons employed) and gross value added in the circular economy sectors
- Patents (number of patents related to waste management and recycling)

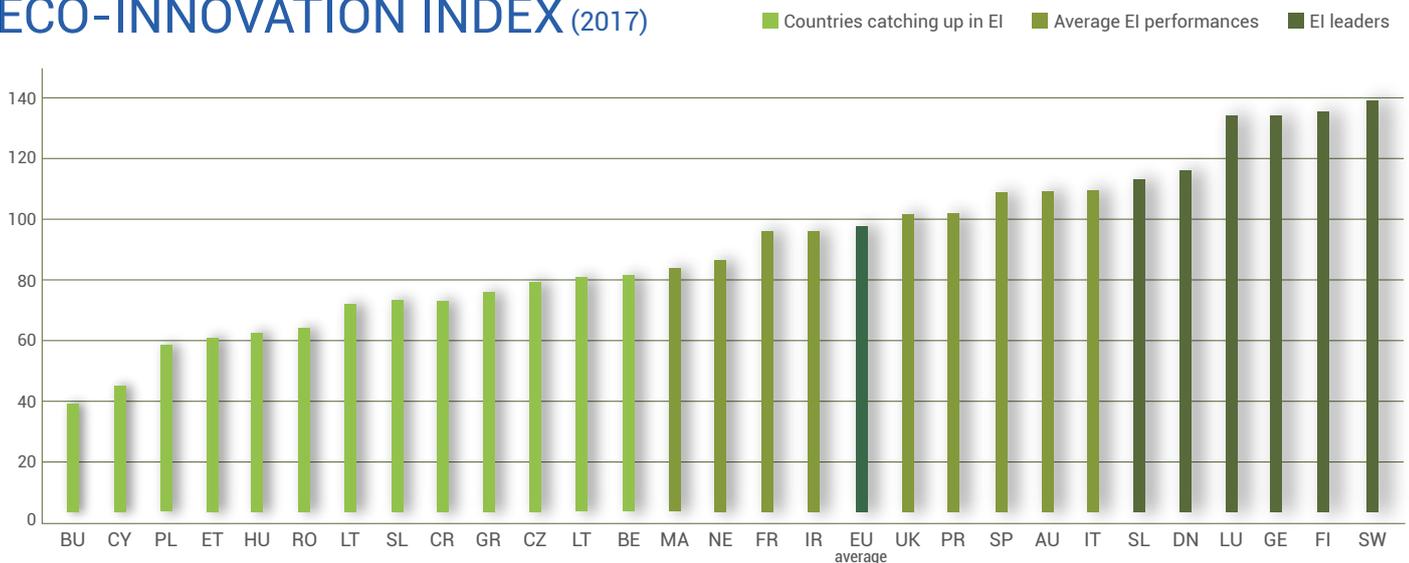
Baseline values for these indicators are available for sub-sectors of the circular economy, particularly reuse and recycling activities, with an estimated private investment of EUR 15 billion in the EU, 3.9 million jobs in 2014, and an increase of 35% in patents on recycling and secondary raw materials between 2000 and 2013.¹⁸



The EU Resource Efficiency Scoreboard includes the Eco-Innovation Index as one of the thematic indicators, which measures the performance of individual Member States on various dimensions of eco-innovation compared to the EU average (EU index=100). In particular, it measures innovations that reduce the use of natural resources and the release of harmful substances across the whole life-cycle of products. As shown in the figure below, none of the Mediterranean EU Member States is among the overall leading countries in terms of Eco-Innovation performance, with four Mediterranean countries among the average performers and four among the countries catching up.¹⁹

Since 2012, the Eurobarometer has been carrying out regular surveys among SMEs assessing 1) the current and planned resource efficiency actions, and the reasons for taking them; 2) barriers when implementing resource efficiency actions; 3) The role and impact of policy in supporting green business initiatives; and 4) the current state of the green market.

Figure 1
ECO-INNOVATION INDEX (2017)



17. European Commission (2018). Monitoring framework for the circular economy.
18. European Commission (2018). Monitoring framework for the circular economy.

19. European Commission (2018). EU Eco-Innovation Index 2017.
20. European Commission (2018). Flash Eurobarometer 456: SMEs, resource efficiency and green markets.

Call to Action

With several projects, the Interreg MED Green Growth community makes an active contribution to the implementation of the EU Circular Economy Action Plan, as well as to the Agenda 2030, particularly SDG 12 (Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns) and SDG 9 (Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation).

Collectively, the Interreg MED Green Growth Community promotes innovation and competitiveness in the Mediterranean region, covering a wide spectrum of sectors, including the manufacturing, agro-food and mobility industries. Specifically, the projects are contributing in the following ways:

- Higher (eco-) innovation capacity of Mediterranean companies through access to tools and services that allow them to test, develop and market new green and circular products and services
- A shift in the way SMEs
 - adjust to Circular Economy challenges
 - develop sustainable innovative ideas for catalysing, shaping and driving competitiveness
 - challenge conventional and develop new ways of thinking
 - reduce their environmental impact and simultaneously save costs (“go green and save green”)
 - use creativity to tap into hidden capacities for growth and improved competitiveness
- Enhanced performance and development of the private sector through Green Public Procurement by the public sector as a driving force of local development
- Enhanced competitiveness of the Mediterranean region through more effective industry clusters
- A growing market for green and circular products and services in the Mediterranean region through higher levels of consumer awareness and increased public procurement of green products and services

In order to reach the full potential of the presented solutions throughout the Mediterranean region, the Interreg MED Green Growth community calls for action in the following aspects:

The European Commission and EU Member States

- To promote the dissemination, transfer and uptake of the solutions for promoting innovation and competitiveness described in this White Paper.
- To promote investments in and uptake of eco-innovation – eco-innovation product areas such as eco-design, product durability and collaborative consumption that provide important opportunities for both businesses and citizens to participate in the circular economy. However, further support, particularly from policy, could promote the uptake of these concepts.
- To foster green practices to be competitive worldwide.
- To encourage the introduction of circularity-focused criteria along with reinventing the entire procurement system with circular economy needs in mind.
- To promote the procurement of green products and services by public authorities.
- To address consumer perceptions and to raise awareness among citizens to promote sustainable consumption patterns.

Regional and local authorities in the Mediterranean

- To develop action plans and programmes that incentivise the uptake of eco-innovations.
- To develop appropriate incentives and legal amendments to encourage companies to go circular.
- To create a sound business environment and a well-functioning entrepreneurial “eco-system” for business in order to foster companies’ greater innovation, competitiveness and sustainable economic growth
- To mainstream sustainability criteria in public procurement processes and use platforms for connecting to SMEs as suppliers of green products and services.

SMEs

- To invest in eco-innovation, eco-design and business model innovation.
- To meet growing customer demands for resource efficient and eco-friendly products and services, and match the demands of local authorities for green products and services in their public procurement processes.
- To engage in innovation networks and clusters and to share knowledge and experiences on best practices and solutions to make value chains more resource efficient
- To shift towards an ‘open innovation’ paradigm that reduces the need for innovation-related capital investments, making business innovation more accessible to SMEs.

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- Further resources:
- Training materials: <https://aristoil.interreg-med.eu/news-events/news/detail/actualites/important-tools-and-guidelines-for-producers-and-olive-oil-sector-key-players/>
 - Video: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCrxK7RI1I5q1y3io6Vxeb-Mg/videos?view_as=subscriber
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About the Interreg MED Green Growth Community and the SYNGGI Project

The Interreg MED Green Growth community is a thematic community of projects in the framework of the Interreg MED programme, which is a transnational European Cooperation Programme for the Mediterranean area. The Interreg MED Green Growth community counts with 15 projects focussed on different topics related to green growth such as sustainable agro-food systems, eco-innovation, green manufacturing, green public procurement, waste management and smart cities, among others.

The specific objectives of the Interreg MED Green Growth community are:

1. Empowered Green Growth community for Mediterranean and non-Mediterranean stakeholders:

creation of a solid community that acts as a hub to collect project results, disseminate and capitalize them among partners, consortia, stakeholders and countries.

2. Upgrading Green Growth community networks:

the community creates bridges and seeks collaboration with networks, institutions and programmes inside and outside the Interreg MED cooperation area to transfer the knowledge and results of the projects and to promote synergies among initiatives in the Mediterranean region.

3. Capitalization Support: capitalization and transfer activities are performed to outreach the project results and potential replication of projects to other countries. Common policy outcomes are produced to contribute to the vivid legal framework that needs constant revision and input.

It is the first time that in such an extended scale, more than 150 partners from the quadruple helix (public authorities, industry, academia and civil society) from 12 countries are exchanging knowledge in the field of green growth in the northern and eastern area of the Mediterranean region. The Interreg MED Green Growth community has partners from Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Montenegro, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain. The total budget of the funded projects under the Interreg MED Green Growth community is of approximately 34 million Euros.

SYNGGI – “Synergies for Green Growth Initiative – Energising the Impact of Innovation in the Mediterranean” is the project managing the Interreg MED Green Growth community (2016-2019). The SYNGGI project acts as a dynamic network to unify project results, support MED stakeholders and create a fruitful and collaborative environment for all implicated bodies. The methods that are used within that framework aim to stimulate sharing of project results and findings and enhance the cross-sectoral innovation practices among Mediterranean key stakeholders. The community disseminates the projects’ results and good practices to stakeholders and policy-makers from the Interreg MED cooperation areas and beyond. Moreover, strong emphasis is given on the capitalization process, with the objective to create common policy outcomes to contribute to the vivid legal framework that needs constant revision and input, such as the EU Circular Economy Action Plan and other environmental policies.



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