



RURAL GREEN

RURAL GREEN PROJECT

**BEST PRACTICES AND POLICY
RECOMMENDATIONS**



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

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Level Up Your Rural Sustainability Game!

Dive into the "Rural Green Project" eBook & discover actionable strategies to boost circular economies in rural Europe!

We're talking real change: from empowering local communities & women, to turning waste into resources!

Inside, you'll find:

- Project summary
- Highlights from 5 International Events
- Impactful Local Event summaries
- 10 Inspiring Best Practices (2 per country!)
- Key insights from 5 Policy Papers

Ready to build greener, more resilient rural regions?

Let's go!

#CircularEconomy

#RuralDevelopment

#Sustainability

#GreenSolutions

#BestPractices



Project Summary

Project Title: Rural Green - Rural communities' engagement bringing green solutions

The "Rural Green" project addressed the critical need to integrate circular economy principles into rural communities in Eastern Europe, fostering biodiversity preservation, climate change mitigation, and sustainable food production. Recognizing that circular economy practices were underutilized in local policies and that rural populations, particularly women, had limited participation in policy-making related to greening the rural economy, this project aimed to empower rural communities to drive a more inclusive and sustainable transition.

Focused on five Eastern European countries – Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, and Serbia – "Rural Green" sought to enhance the participation of rural populations in shaping policies and practices that promote a greener rural economy. The project facilitated the exchange of knowledge and experiences, encouraging the adoption of innovative business models and environmentally friendly practices. By creating stronger bottom-up approaches and fostering inclusive policy-making processes, the project ensured that rural communities were at the forefront of the transition to a circular economy.

Project Objectives:

- Enhanced awareness among rural populations about EU green policies, the greening of rural economies, and the implementation of circular economy principles in rural areas.
- Boosted participation of rural populations, especially women, in policy-making processes related to greening the rural economy.
- Fostered stronger bottom-up approaches to support the faster transition to the circular economy at the local level.
- Developed resources and tools for rural communities to actively engage in the transition to a circular economy.

Main Activities:

- International Events: Organized five international on-site events and one online event to promote inclusive policy-making in greening the rural economy. These events brought together 182 participants from the 5 partner countries to share experiences and best practices. Details of the events are as follows:
 - Event 1 (Serbia): Focused on EU green policies, greening of rural economy and introducing circular economy in rural areas. Event was held in Knjaževac, Serbia and brought together 48 participants.
 - Event 2 (Bulgaria): Addressed opportunities and barriers for circular economy in rural areas, European environment preservation models and business models. Event was held in Vidin, Bulgaria and brought together 48 participants.
 - Event 3 (Croatia): Explored circular economy in manufacturing industry. Event was held in Nova Gradiška, Croatia and brought together 49 participants
 - Event 4 (Slovenia): Discussed digitalization and circular economy. Event was held in Topolšica, Slovenia and brought together 37 participants.

- Event 5 (Bosnia and Herzegovina): Centered on circular economy in tourism. Event was held in Banja Luka, BIH and brought together 64 participants.
- Final Online Conference: A final online conference was held, consolidating the key learnings and outcomes from the international events and discussing future steps for promoting circular economy principles in rural areas. The Final conference brought together 255 participants from the 5 partner countries.
- Local Participative Events: Conducted five participative local events to create a stronger bottom-up approach, supporting a faster transition to the circular economy at the local level. These events brought together 135 participants from the 5 partner countries: 24 in Serbia, 25 in Bulgaria, 18 in Croatia, 43 in Slovenia and 25 in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These events engaged local stakeholders in identifying and implementing sustainable solutions.
- Digital Platform Development: Established a Digital Platform to facilitate policy-making processes in greening the rural economy. This platform provided tools and resources to boost rural population participation in the transition to a circular economy.
- Working Group Creation: Formed a Working Group dedicated to introducing circular economy principles in rural areas. This group fostered ongoing dialogue and cooperation among project partners and stakeholders after the project's conclusion.
- Policy Papers: Developed a series of policy papers that provided recommendations for integrating circular economy principles into regional and national policies. These papers were based on the findings and insights gathered during the project and were disseminated to relevant stakeholders and policymakers.
- Best practices. Project partners identified 10 best practices (2 per country) Those best practices are real-world examples of businesses and communities embracing sustainability.
- E-book Publication: An e-book “Rural Green Project: Best Practices and Policy Recommendations” was published summarizing the project's activities, outcomes, and best practices. This e-book served as a valuable resource for rural communities and policymakers interested in promoting circular economy principles.
- Dissemination Activities: Implemented a comprehensive dissemination strategy to share project results, best practices, and lessons learned with a wider audience.

Project Outcomes:

- Increased awareness and knowledge among rural populations regarding EU green policies and circular economy principles.
- A functional Digital Platform that enhanced rural population participation in the transition to a circular economy.
- An established Working Group that ensured continued dialogue and cooperation on circular economy initiatives in rural areas.
- Published eBook summarizing the project's activities, outcomes, and best practices.
- Enhanced capacity of rural communities to implement sustainable solutions and promote a greener rural economy.
- Developed policy papers providing recommendations for integrating circular economy principles into regional and national policies.

Project Partners:

The "Rural Green" project was implemented by a consortium of five partners from five countries:

- RARIS - Regional Development Agency Eastern Serbia, Serbia
- CEKOM - Competence Center for Advanced Engineering Nova Gradiška, Croatia
- VDCCI - Vidin Chamber of Commerce, Bulgaria
- SAŠA - Development Agency of the Savinjsko-Saleška Region, Slovenia
- CERD - Center for Economic and Rural Development, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Impact

The "Rural Green" project had a significant impact on rural communities by empowering them to actively participate in the transition to a circular economy. By fostering collaboration, providing resources, enhancing awareness, and disseminating knowledge through this eBook, the project contributed to creating more sustainable, resilient, and prosperous rural regions.



For more info visit <https://rural-green.raris.org/>

1. Circular Economy

What is the Circular Economy and why do we need It?

In today's world, driven by the traditional "take-make-waste" linear model, we face increasing challenges: limited resources, environmental pollution, and climate change. In response to these global concerns, the circular economy emerges – a revolutionary concept that represents not only a smart approach to business but also a complete paradigm shift in the way we produce, use, and dispose of products.

Unlike the linear model, which treats resources as if they are infinite, the circular economy aims to close the loop of production and consumption. It encourages the design of products that are easy to repair, refurbish, and recycle, transforming waste into resources. This approach implies giving new life to old things – through repair, reuse, remanufacturing, and recycling – thereby saving money, fostering innovation, and, most importantly, protecting our planet. The essence of the circular economy lies in creating a system in which nothing is wasted, and everything is continuously used, thereby minimizing the impact on the environment and achieving long-term economic sustainability.

This concept is an integral and key part of the broader framework of global efforts towards sustainable development. This is confirmed by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted at the United Nations General Assembly in 2015. This universal call to action aims to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure peace and prosperity for all people by 2030. The Agenda, with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), represents a comprehensive plan for achieving a better and more sustainable future for all, focusing on key areas such as education, health, economic growth, and addressing climate change.

The implementation of circular economy principles directly contributes to the achievement of as many as seven Sustainable Development Goals, highlighting its vital role in this global movement:

- Goal 7 – affordable and renewable energy,
- Goal 8 – decent work and economic growth,
- Goal 11 – sustainable cities and communities,
- Goal 12 – responsible consumption and production,
- Goal 13 – climate action,
- Goal 14 – life below water, and
- Goal 15 – life on land.



Therefore, the circular economy is not just a trend but a necessary and strategic direction of development that brings us closer to achieving the vision of a sustainable and prosperous future for all.

Key Differences Between Circular and Linear Economy

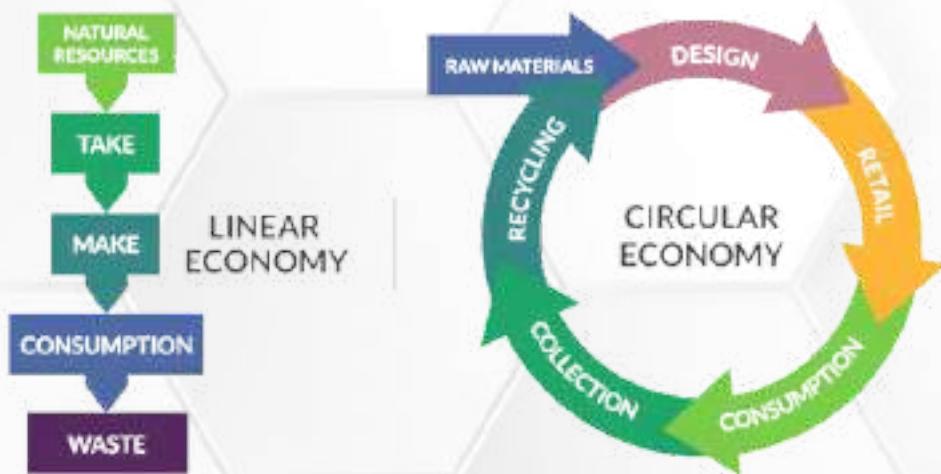
At the heart of the "Rural Green" project lies the idea of transitioning from the traditional, linear economic model to a more sustainable, circular model. But what exactly is the difference?

The linear economy operates on a simple but exhaustive principle: raw materials are taken from nature, converted into products, used, and ultimately – discarded. This approach leads to:

- Resource depletion: Unsustainable use of natural resources such as water, forests, fertile land.
- Pollution: Waste from agriculture, households, and limited waste management infrastructure pollute the air, water, and soil.
- Limited opportunities: Dependence on primary industries with limited diversification stifles economic growth and job creation.

The circular economy offers a completely different approach: instead of discarding, products and materials are designed to last, repair, recycle, or reuse. Key principles include:

- Smart design: Products are designed to last longer, to be easily repaired and upgraded.
- Recycling and reuse: Waste is transformed into new resources, such as compost, recycled materials.
- Renewal: Materials are returned to the production cycle through recycling and reuse, closing the loop.
- Sharing economy: Promoting models of shared consumption reduces the need for new resources.



1. Linear Model: "Take – Make – Waste"

The linear economic model, which has dominated the global economy for decades, is based on a principle that treats natural resources as if they are infinite. This simple but deeply unsustainable approach consists of three phases that generate huge amounts of waste and lead to resource depletion.

- Phase 1: **TAKE** The first step involves the intensive extraction of raw materials from nature – logging forests, digging ores, pumping oil. This phase is characterized by short-term thinking, with little or no regard for the long-term consequences for the environment, such as habitat destruction, loss of biodiversity, and soil degradation.
- Phase 2: **MAKE** Raw materials are processed into products, the life of which is often intentionally shortened (planned obsolescence). The "buy-again-buy-again" culture encourages consumers to replace functional but "obsolete" products with new ones. This phase generates a large amount of waste even during the production process.

- Phase 3: **WASTE** When a product becomes boring, breaks down, or becomes obsolete, it ends up in a landfill or incinerator. This is the end point of the linear model – the creation of waste. Landfills pollute the soil and groundwater, and incineration of waste contributes to the emission of harmful gases and climate change.

Why is the linear model problematic? This model treats the planet as an infinite storehouse of resources and an underground dump. It is inherently wasteful and leads to:

- Depletion of natural resources
- Huge amounts of waste that pollute land and oceans
- Instability due to dependence on limited and often geopolitically unstable sources of raw materials
- Loss of biodiversity and disruption of ecosystems



2. Circular Model: "Reduce – Reuse – Recycle"

- The circular economy is a sustainable alternative model that mimics natural cycles, where nothing is thrown away. It is restorative by design and aims to minimize waste and maximize resource value through closed loops.
- Phase 1: **SMART DESIGN** Everything starts at the design stage. Products are designed to be durable, easy to repair, modernized, and, at the end of their life, easily disassembled into parts. The design focuses on the use of harmless and renewable materials.
- Phase 2: **PROLONG USE** Instead of disposal, products are maintained, repaired, refurbished, or adapted for a new purpose (e.g., turning an old pot into a flower pot). This principle of "reuse" keeps products and materials in use for as long as possible.

- Phase 3: **TRANSFORM & REGENERATE** When a product can no longer be used, it is not considered waste but a valuable resource. Its materials are recycled and returned to the production cycle as raw materials for new products, closing the loop. Organic waste is composted and used to regenerate the soil.



Why does the circular model make sense (especially for rural communities)?

- Less waste and lower costs: Reduces the need for expensive waste disposal, and smart resource management reduces operating costs.
- Resource conservation and self-sustainability: Rural communities can better utilize local resources (agricultural waste, wood), reducing dependence on external, expensive raw materials.
- New opportunities and "green" jobs: New economic activities are created – repair, processing, recycling – which fosters local economy and employment.
- Environmental protection and biodiversity: Reduces pressure on natural resources and pollution, thereby protecting the unique rural landscape and ecosystems.

Conclusion: Why is the transition to circular principles crucial for rural development?

For rural communities, which are often the first to face the consequences of environmental degradation and economic instability, the circular economy is not just a theory but a practical path towards a more resilient and prosperous future. The "Rural Green" project promotes precisely this transition – from a model that consumes and pollutes to a model that saves, renews, and regenerates. Through support for small businesses, knowledge exchange, and the inclusion of local communities in decision-making, we are building a common bridge towards a more sustainable and greener rural area.

2. International Events

Project organized five international on-site events and one online event to promote inclusive policy-making in greening the rural economy. These events brought together 246 participants from the 5 partner countries to share experiences and best practices. Details of the events are as follows:



Serbia

- Event 1 (Serbia): "Circular Economy is a New Industrial Revolution" Kick-off Conference



The Rural Green project's kick-off conference, titled "Circular Economy is a New Industrial Revolution," took place in Knjaževac, Serbia, from April 22-24, 2024.

Organized by RARIS, the conference aimed to promote EU green policies, green rural economies, and introduce circular economy (CE) principles, fostering inclusive policy-making. Around 48 participants from Serbia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, & Slovenia attended.

The Steering Committee met on April 22nd, discussing project management and partnerships. "Alfa Klima" presented energy-efficient solutions.

The main conference, opened by Vladan Jeremic (RARIS) and Mayor Milan Đokić, featured an expert presentation by Dušan Vasiljević on CE in modern society.

The main conference, opened by Vladan Jeremic (RARIS) and Mayor Milan Đokić, featured an expert presentation by Dušan Vasiljević on CE in modern society. Discussions explored challenges and achievements in European Values/Green Environment, CE Approaches, Rural Areas, & Ecological Values. The EU Green Deal and CE Action Plan were highlighted. Strengths of rural areas, like local resources and community bonds, were discussed. The conference included a "Coffee with Journalists" event.

Partners showcased good CE examples.

Study visits to "IZVOR" (traditional crafts) and "DEMETRA" (sustainable food) were organized.

Inputs were gathered for a policy paper for a greener rural economy in Serbia.

Participants rated the conference objectives (4.93), content (4.80), speakers (4.87), and effectiveness (4.67-4.93) highly.

Bulgaria

- Event 2 (Bulgaria): "Opportunities and Barriers for Circular Economy in Rural Areas" Creativity Marathon



The Rural Green project's "Opportunities and Barriers for Circular Economy in Rural Areas" - Creativity Marathon occurred in Vidin, Bulgaria, from October 8-10, 2024.

Organized around Work Package 2, the event gathered 48 participants (29 women, 19 men) from Bulgaria, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia. The first day featured the Steering Committee meeting, focused on project management.

The main event, hosted at Hotel "Impuls", began with speeches from Krasimir Kirilov (VDCCI), Deputy Mayor Desislava Todorova, and Vladan Jeremic (RARIS). Participants discussed challenges, achievements, and future prospects related to EU green policies, greening rural economy, women in circular economy, and environmental preservation. The Creativity Marathon sought to raise awareness of EU green policies and promote transnational policymaking. Presentations covered women in CE, circular projects in Vidin Municipality, integrating CE into education, CE financing, and circular economy businesses (Energy Trade 2009).

On the final day, participants visited local circular economy projects like High School Arsen Zlatarov and a pellet/solar energy company.

Evaluation showed the event achieved its goals with high scores (4.85-5.00) across areas like event objectives, content, speakers, and knowledge gained.

Croatia

- Event 3 (Croatia): "Circular Economy in Manufacturing Industry" World Cafe



The Rural Green project's "Circular Economy in Manufacturing Industry" World Cafe was held in Nova Gradiška, Croatia, from February 26-28, 2025. WP3 brought together 49 participants (17 women, 32 men) from Bulgaria, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia.

Day 1 was dedicated to the Steering Committee meeting. The World Cafe, held at CEKOM NING, commenced with welcomes from Jelena Pirovic (CEKOM NING), Mayor Vinko Grgic, and Vladan Jeremic (RARIS). Discussions focused on the role of local authorities in circular economy.

Participants explored challenges, achievements, & future perspectives on European values of rural sustainability, sustainable transition, the role of local communities in manufacturing policies, and European CE models. Key topics included climate change, economic pressures, and social/demographic challenges.

On the final day, visits to Clarum Ltd, Klimaoprema Ltd, and Bošnjak Distillery & Brewery highlighted CE practices.

The event was evaluated positively, with high scores for objectives (4.64), speaker competence (4.72), & materials (4.84), but lower scores for expectations met (4.16) and relevance to professional development (3.44).

Slovenia

- Event 4 (Slovenia): "Digitalization and Circular Economy" World Cafe



The Rural Green project's "Digitalization and Circular Economy" World Cafe took place in Topolšica, Slovenia, from June 3-5, 2025.

Organized as WP4 by RA SAŠA, it brought together 37 participants (22 women, 15 men) from across Eastern Europe.

The event explored the intersection of digitalization and the circular economy in rural development. Keynote speaker Katarina Ostruh (CPP SAŠA) addressed "Just Transition", emphasizing social fairness. Ana Marinčič (RA SAŠA) presented the TUR-KROG project merging sustainable tourism with circular practices. Ivica Orešnik discussed the LEADER/CLLD approach for community-led development. Dr. Edita Jasiukaitytė-Grojzdek focused on digital tools for sustainable chemistry. Stanko Blatnik (IPAK) explored AI's role in human-centric innovation.

Participants visited successful local examples, including Biomasa Nazarje (biomass energy), Camp Menina (eco-tourism), Komunala Velenje (wastewater treatment), and Velenje Beach (reclaimed space).

Feedback showed high relevance and interest in circular economy (100% positive).

Bosnia and Herzegovina

- Event 5 (Bosnia and Herzegovina): World Cafe “Circular Economy in Tourism”



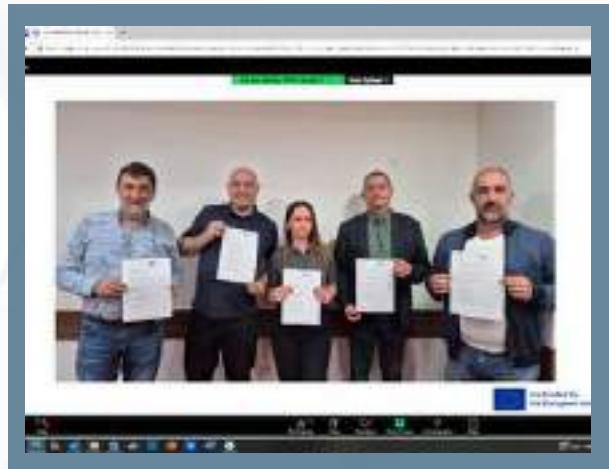
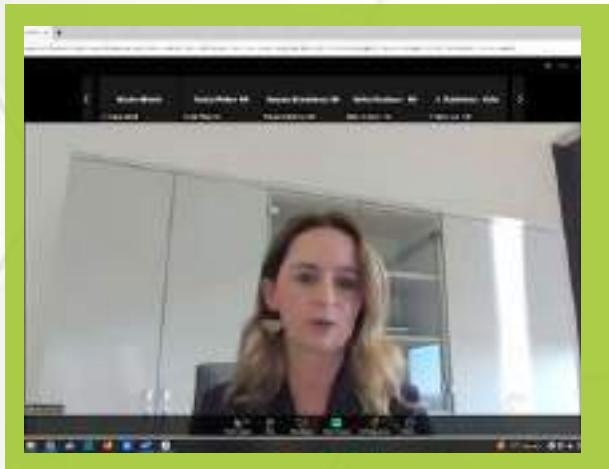
The fifth transnational partner meeting was held from 6 to 8 October 2025 in Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and organized by the project partner CERD – Center for Education and Rural Development. The event, named “Circular Economy in Tourism” consisted of steering committee meeting, site visits, conference and world cafe, accompanied by « coffee for journalists ». The event brought together 64 participants from 9 European countries, including project partners, rural tourism businesses, ministries, and NGOs.

The three-day programme was designed to combine project management discussions, practical learning through field visits, and an international conference and world cafe focusing on circular economy approaches in rural tourism. The event contributed significantly to the exchange of experiences among participants, deepened the understanding of sustainable development opportunities in rural areas, and created a foundation for new cross-border initiatives.

Key outcomes of the event included the identification of training and funding needs, policy recommendations, and the formation of a Working Group to support continued collaboration and practical implementation of circular economy approaches in rural areas. The event successfully fostered knowledge exchange and strengthened partnerships across Europe for greener, more resilient rural communities.

Online event

- Event 6 (Online): Final Conference “Practical Solutions for Circular Economy and Citizen Participation”



The online conference “Practical Solutions for Circular Economy and Citizen Participation” was successfully held on 13 November 2025. The event attracted remarkable interest, gathering 255 participants from Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Bulgaria.

The objective of the conference was to help stakeholders better understand and practically apply circular economy principles in rural areas through real examples and proven solutions from across the region.

The conference successfully fulfilled its goal of sharing knowledge, encouraging cooperation, and promoting practical and replicable circular economy solutions for rural communities. The high level of engagement confirmed that the Rural Green project has generated strong regional momentum toward building a more sustainable future.

This Conference was also streamed on the lead partner official Youtube channel and is available on the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wu-urjEQPT0&t=228s>

3. Local Participative Events

Project conducted five participative local events to create a stronger bottom-up approach, supporting a faster transition to the circular economy at the local level.

These events brought together 135 participants from the 5 partner countries: 24 in Serbia, 25 in Bulgaria, 18 in Croatia, 43 in Slovenia and 25 in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These events engaged local stakeholders in identifying and implementing sustainable solutions.

Here is the summary of each of Local Participative Events:





Serbia (Zaječar, 13 May 2024)

A local workshop titled “Circular Economy is the New Industrial Revolution” was held in Zaječar, Serbia. Organized by RARIS – Regional Development Agency of Eastern Serbia, the event gathered local stakeholders, civil society representatives, and community members to explore how circular economy principles can shape the future of rural development.

The program included an introduction to the project’s objectives, followed by presentations and a panel discussion on the circular economy as a new business model and its environmental implications for Eastern Serbia. Participants engaged actively in a workshop session dedicated to formulating recommendations for advancing circular practices in rural areas, focusing on sustainable entrepreneurship, waste reduction, and community-driven green initiatives.

The event concluded with a moderated discussion that summarized key ideas into practical recommendations for rural Serbia’s circular future. The workshop created valuable opportunities for dialogue and networking, strengthening local commitment to sustainable solutions. It also reinforced the role of Eastern Serbia as an active contributor to the wider European transition toward a greener, circular economy.

During the workshop, the Policy Paper, with concrete measures to accelerate the transition to a circular economy was discussed and formulated.





Bulgaria (Vidin, 17 October 2024)

The local workshop in Vidin, Bulgaria, gathered 25 participants, including representatives from rural municipalities, NGOs, community centers, and institutions, as well as five international guests from Serbia and Slovenia. The event focused on sharing outcomes from previous international meetings and exchanging good practices in promoting a greener rural economy and advancing circular economy principles.

Participants engaged in discussions on challenges and opportunities for rural communities, with special emphasis on improving the situation of rural women. The workshop resulted in a jointly prepared Policy Paper, proposing concrete measures to support rural development and accelerate the transition to a circular economy in line with local needs.

The event also highlighted successful examples from Bulgaria and partner countries, encouraging cross-border learning and collaboration. According to evaluations, the workshop met its objectives and received very high ratings from participants, who appreciated the clarity of content, the expertise of speakers, and the networking opportunities. The positive feedback indicates strong potential for future initiatives, ensuring continued momentum in fostering greener and more resilient rural economies.





Croatia (Nova Gradiška, 25 August 2025)

As a follow-up to the international World Café on Circular Economy in Manufacturing Industry held in Nova Gradiška in February 2025, a local workshop brought together 18 stakeholders to continue the discussion at the community level. Participants included representatives of local producers, family farms, NGOs, and institutions, who explored how global and European perspectives on the circular economy could be translated into concrete actions in Croatia's rural and industrial context.

The event provided an overview of results and best practices shared at the international conference and opened dialogue on challenges specific to Croatian rural areas, such as lack of infrastructure, financial limitations, fragmented production, and demographic decline. At the same time, participants highlighted achievements, including successful bioeconomy projects, short food supply chains, research-industry collaboration, and the use of EU funds to foster innovation.

Discussions focused on future perspectives for strengthening circular practices, emphasizing regional hubs for recycling and bioenergy, producer cooperation, digital solutions, knowledge transfer, and stronger incentives from national and EU policies. The event concluded with a consensus that the circular economy offers unique opportunities for revitalizing rural communities in Croatia. With active local engagement and strategic investment, it can become a driving force for sustainable economic and social transformation.





Slovenia (Velenje, 28 August 2025)

Within the framework of the Rural Green project, a local workshop was held at Ljudska univerza Velenje, bringing together 43 participants, including local stakeholders, experts, and community members. Organized by the Development Agency of the Savinja-Šalek Region (RA-SAŠA), the event highlighted the importance of circular economy principles for sustainable regional development and the future of rural areas.

The program opened with a presentation of the project's main objectives, followed by insights from international meetings and experiences shared by partner countries. Speakers addressed the role of circular practices in shaping resilient communities, while a Q&A session and open discussion gave participants the opportunity to contribute their perspectives and ideas.

The event concluded with informal networking, fostering new connections among participants and encouraging cooperation across sectors. The positive response confirmed strong regional interest in applying circular economy models in practice. By combining international knowledge with local expertise, the workshop strengthened momentum for sustainable development in the Savinja-Šalek Region and beyond.





Bosnia and Herzegovina (Banja Luka, 20 November 2025)

On 20th of November 2025, the Center for Economic and Rural Development (CERD) organised a local participative event – workshop under the title: “Development of Circular Economy and Sustainable Food Systems in Local Communities (with focus on rural tourism)”. This event represented a continuation of policy efforts from the international conference organised in Banja Luka on October 8th, 2025.

The event gathered 23 participants from 3 European countries, including project partners, rural tourism businesses, ministries, and NGOs.

The local event focused on the circular economy as a key driver for sustainable rural tourism and development and it was aimed to enable participatory discussions about policy recommendations which were compiled during the abovementioned conference

The following sessions were conducted during this local event:

- Presentation of key policy recommendations from policy paper and conclusions from the international conference
- Presentation of good practices in relation to operations of Domestica and CERD as a model of circular economy in agriculture and local food system
- Participatory discussion of participants regarding the policy recommendation and verification of the policy paper conclusions
- Presentation of a new initiative – development of a platform called B2GreenHub by ONEX Digital Innovation Hub.

The main result of the local event organised in Banja Luka was acceptance of the policy paper which was prepared as a follow up of the international event and it was an opportunity for local stakeholders to discuss green economy model in sustainable food systems and tourism and to propose their views and recommendations to local decision makers based on local needs.



4. Best Practices

Discover inspiring Circular Economy solutions!

Explore real-world examples of businesses and communities embracing sustainability. Learn about their goals, implementation strategies, innovative approaches, and the impact they're making (environmentally, economically, socially!).

Take a look on those 10 best practices and find out how these practices can be scaled and replicated in your region!



1. “Gorski konak” Knjaževac



“Gorski konak”, Village of Zubetinac, Municipality of Knjaževac, Serbia

<https://www.gorskikonak.com>

Gorski Konak is a rural tourist household that has 5 rooms with 14 beds. It is located in the village of Zubetinac, municipality of Knjaževac, Serbia.

Rural tourist household Gorski Konak not only provides its visitors with accommodation, but also with various contents and activities, including hiking and cycling tours in nature, SPA and wellness services, as well as a restaurant with a capacity of 24 seats indoors and 36 seats in the garden during the summer season.

Gorski Konak has implemented several circular economy measures and activities:

- The building has published posters promoting sustainable energy use. It is the only printed material; all other promotion is done exclusively through digital channels and online
- Gorski Konak, in principle, does not prepare food for its guests. It allows guests to get local products from local producers in the surrounding villages and have a kitchen available for guests to prepare their own food. Gorski Konak, for group visits, organizes traditional gastro evenings - where only local food and drinks are prepared and served. Guests are traditionally welcomed with honey, homemade juice without added sugar, a glass of homemade brandy or wine.
- Solar panels for heating the hot technical water for showering and washing - a total of 3 panels that heat the 330-liter tank. The investment was put into operation in 2021. With this, it was achieved that now hot water for showering and washing is provided for eight months without additional costs for electricity.
- Photovoltaic panels for electricity production – 32 panels with a total power of 10 KWh were installed with an approximate production of 12,500 KW per year. The investment was put into operation in 2023. This investment enables the production of electricity in sufficient quantity to enable the building to be heated via a heat pump during five winter months.
- Air-water heat pump, with the power of 32KW, which heats 150m² during the winter months. The investment was put into operation in 2023. This achieves greater heating efficiency compared to solid fuel burning, does not emit CO₂ and uses electricity generated from photovoltaic solar panels.
- Since 2023, the building has motion sensors for lighting in the corridors and uses low-energy LED lights. This enables lower consumption of electricity.
- The facility has its own well. A drop-by-drop system is used for watering the garden and orchard.
- As of 2022, the building has 5 electric bicycles. They are used by guests for cycling tours but are also used by the owner and his workers and family for local movement. A reduction in fuel consumption was achieved compared to car transport.

Gorski Konak is also a socially responsible tourism facility and supports the activities of the local Mountaineering Association. Every year, it prepares a free lunch for hikers who climb the nearby peak of Tupižnica.



SUSTAINABILITY IN GORJANI KONAK

Welcome to a place where nature and hospitality go hand in hand. Your stay helps the local community move forward and make a real difference.

Over 70% of the electricity consumed in Gorjani Konak is generated here from solar panels.

Save energy for your stay.
Enjoy the use of energy efficient solar panels. This can help us to keep costs and emissions to a minimum. Please turn off lights when not in use.

Save water - reduce waste.
Our laundry comes from natural sources. Laundry is the last remaining water-hungry element, and has a terrible impact on the environment.

Get water. Hand to the sun.
The water in your bathrobe is heated by solar panels. Sustainable, clean, and natural - just like nature itself.

Wines for ecofriendly adventures.
Explore the country's top ecofriendly vineyards on our electric bicycle route leads you to scenic routes and delicious local wines.

Sustainability is our choice, and you are part of it.
Your stay in Gorjani Konak supports the use of renewable energy and a lower ecological footprint. Thank you for choosing Gorjani.



2. “Demetra” Knjaževac



“Demetra”, Branka Radičevića 2, Knjaževac, Serbia

<https://demetra.co.rs/>

Demetra is a company owned by Mr. Milovan Đurić, specializing in the processing of fruits, vegetables, and meat. Established in 2018, Demetra was founded in response to the owner's need to provide high-quality nutrition for residents and staff in his two retirement homes.

Mr. Milovan Đurić owns two retirement homes—one in Knjaževac (operating since 2010) and another in Bor (since 2018). These facilities accommodate around 180 residents and over 60 employees daily, meaning meals must be provided three times a day for more than 240 people, year-round.

In the early years of running the retirement homes, the owner faced challenges with product quality and price fluctuations due to market seasonality. To address these issues, he founded Demetra, a company dedicated to processing fruits, vegetables, and meat. Over the past few years, he has acquired additional land for self-sustained farming. Agricultural products from Demetra's own 7-hectare farm are partially used to feed residents in the retirement homes, while the rest is sold commercially.

Annual Production Capacity is around 15,000 liters of juice, 5 tons of savory products (pickles, preserves), 2 tons of sweet products (jams, compotes) and 10 tons of dried meat products.

Circular Economy Principles Applied by Demetra:

- Processes and preserves fruits and vegetables primarily from its own farm —over 60% of raw materials are self-produced.
- Produces 100% natural juices — no added sugar, preservatives, artificial colors, or flavors.
- Traditional production methods for jams, fruit spreads, compotes, brandy, ajvar (roasted pepper spread), and winter preserves. For example, ajvar is made using wood-fired stoves ("Smederevac") for authentic flavor.
- Produces dried meats from pigs raised on the farm, fed with food scraps from the retirement homes.
- Uses short supply chains — most products are sold through two company-owned stores (in Knjaževac and Bor) or directly to bulk buyers, avoiding middlemen.
- Encourages resident engagement — retirement home residents can participate in light gardening activities (e.g., tending to their own trees or tomatoes) if they wish.
- Utilizes renewable energy — biomass for heating and solar panels for hot water.
- Demetra combines traditional food processing, self-sufficiency, and sustainable practices to ensure high-quality nutrition while minimizing waste and environmental impact.



3. "Bošnjak Distillery and Brewery", Sičice, Nova Gradiška



"Bošnjak Distillery and Brewery", Sičice, Nova Gradiška

<https://bosnjak.shop/>

Bošnjak Beer & Gin is a family-run agricultural estate (OPG) from Sičice, near Nova Gradiška, founded by Mario and Marijana Bošnjak. Starting from humble beginnings in 2000, when they brewed beer in their home kitchen, they have evolved into pioneers of the Croatian craft beer scene. They are an example of a successful blend of tradition, innovation, and sustainable business practices, contributing to the development of the local community and the promotion of Croatian craft products.

The Bošnjak Brewery from Sičice, a family farm, applies several principles of the circular economy in its operations:

- **Use of local raw materials and closing the production loop**

Bošnjak Brewery grows its own brewing barley on its own fields, eliminating the need for imported raw materials and reducing greenhouse gas emissions associated with transportation. The barley is then sent to nearby Nova Gradiška, where it is turned into malt - a key beer ingredient. This process creates a local, closed production chain: from field to glass. ➔ This practice not only reduces the ecological footprint but also strengthens the local economy and enables greater control over product quality.

- **Innovative use of surplus – gin made from beer**

One of the best examples of circular economy at Bošnjak is the production of MB 72 craft gin made from beer. Instead of discarding unsold or surplus beer, it is used for gin distillation, to which aromatic herbs and spices are added. ➔ This reduces waste, expands the product range, and maximizes resource utilization. It's a concrete example of "upcycling"—transforming a product into something more valuable.

- **Using production residues as animal feed or fertilizer**

Although not detailed in public sources, most small craft breweries (and possibly Bošnjak as well) use brewing residues (known as "spent grain") as livestock feed or compost. If they do, it represents another example of closing the loop within their own agricultural estate. ➔ Instead of organic waste ending up in landfills, it is returned to the system as a resource—either for feeding livestock or as fertilizer.

- **Development of sustainable tourism and community education**

Bošnjak Beer & Gin is not only a producer but also an educational destination. They organize guided tours, tastings, and workshops on beer and brandy production, all set in an authentic Slavonian environment. ➔ This creates added value: promoting local culture, educating consumers on sustainable practices, and developing year-round rural tourism—which is rare in Eastern Croatia.

- Collaboration with local and regional partners

As part of the EU project "Shared Cultural Heritage – A Foundation for Connecting People and Places", Bošnjak took part in an initiative that connects producers from Slavonia and Vojvodina. Through such projects, mutual exchange of knowledge, raw materials, and markets is encouraged—another form of circular thinking in a regional context. ➔ Instead of competition—cooperation, resource sharing, and joint growth.

Conclusion

Bošnjak Beer & Gin applies several key principles of the circular economy:

- Sustainable production: local raw materials, reduced transport.
- Minimal waste: beer used as a base for gin.
- Education and tourism: creating added value through experience.
- Fostering local value chains: through cooperation and integration.

This shows how even small family farms can become leaders in sustainability and innovation in rural areas.



4. Slavonski dućan (Slavonian Shop), Nova Gradiška



Slavonski dućan (Slavonian Shop), Nova Gradiška

<https://slavonski-ducan.com/>

Slavonian Shop in Nova Gradiška is a unique place that combines tradition, local production, and the tourism offer of Slavonia. It was opened with the goal of promoting and selling domestic products made by small producers from the Nova Gradiška area and the wider region.

The shop was established as an initiative of the Cooperative "Community of Producers of the Nova Gradiška Region," with the support of the City of Nova Gradiška and the municipalities of Cernik, Okučani, Nova Kapela, Staro Petrovo Selo, Davor, and Rešetari.

The Slavonian Shop offers a wide range of local products, including:

- Dried meat delicacies such as kulen, sausages, and čvarci (pork cracklings)
- Various types of locally made cheeses
- Slavonian cakes, jams, ajvar, and blackberry-based products
- Homemade pasta and beekeeping products
- An authentic dish from the Nova Gradiška area – Cernički čuptet
- Quality wines and fruit brandies
- Souvenirs and handicrafts such as gold embroidery (zlatovez), traditional embroidery, ethnic clothing, jewelry, and bags

The shop also includes a tasting room, where visitors can sample wines, brandies, and meat platters.

The Slavonian Shop in Nova Gradiška applies circular economy principles through various aspects of its operations:

1. Support for Local Production

Rather than relying on industrial, mass-produced goods, the shop brings together over 70 local producers of food, drinks, and crafts. This:

- Reduces transport costs and CO₂ emissions (a smaller environmental footprint)
- Keeps the economic cycle within the region – a core principle of the circular economy
- Encourages the self-sustainability of villages and family farms

2. Use of Natural and Biodegradable Materials

A prime example is the "Slavonian Basket," hand-woven from willow – a local, renewable material. This:

- Replaces plastic and other waste-generating packaging solutions
- Promotes the use of environmentally friendly materials

3. Extending Product Lifespan through Traditional Methods

Products such as dried meats, jams, and ajvar are preserved using traditional methods (drying, smoking, cooking without additives), which:

- Reduces food spoilage and waste
- Extends shelf life without the need for cold chain logistics

4. Creating Value from Local Resources

Handicrafts and ethnic items (gold embroidery, bags, souvenirs) are made by processing leftover textiles, leather, and natural materials. This:

- Increases the value of materials that would otherwise be discarded
- Supports reuse and creative recycling (upcycling)

5. Education and Promotion of Sustainability

Through the tasting room and direct contact with customers, the shop educates consumers about the value of local, sustainable products, which:

- Encourages more sustainable consumer habits
- Fosters a culture of responsible consumption, essential for a circular economy

The Slavonian Shop implements circular economy principles not through high technology, but through local wisdom, sustainable production, and responsible consumption. Its operations serve as a model for how the circular economy can be successfully integrated into small communities and rural areas.



5. Aurubis Bulgaria AD



Aurubis Bulgaria AD, Industrial Zone, 2070 Pirdop, Bulgaria

<https://www.aurubis.com/en/bulgaria>

Aurubis Bulgaria is part of Aurubis AG, one of Europe's leading copper producer and one of the world's largest copper recycler based in Hamburg, Germany. The company is the largest industrial taxpayer in the country and has a structural importance for the economy of Bulgaria. Aurubis Bulgaria main activities are processing of copper concentrates, production of cathode copper registered on the London Metal Exchange as Pirdop brand, of copper anodes and co-products such as sulfuric acid and iron silicate.

Aurubis Bulgaria plant is located in the Srednogorie region. From its establishment in 1958 to nowadays the copper plant near Pirdop and Zlatitsa is inseparable part of region's history and the development of Bulgaria. There is hardly a family from the Srednogorie that has not been in any way part of this journey throughout more than six decades.

Aurubis Bulgaria is also a R&D hub that develop solutions and improvements for copper extraction and environmental protection. The company carries out a sustainable policy of social responsibility at national and regional level focused on support of education, healthcare, culture, local communities, young talents, people with disabilities.

Facts & figures

- The largest industrial taxpayer in Bulgaria. Structural significance for the Bulgarian economy.
- 7.5% of total exports, 4.4% of Bulgaria's imports (2022).
- Over 750 million euros of investments in the period 1998-2023, focus: modernization, environment.
- Current investment program in the amount of EUR 400 million, 2024-2027.
- Over 1,000 direct jobs, 2,500 indirect jobs in the subcontractor chain.
- Long-term programs for corporate social responsibility for the region and Bulgaria.

Circular Economy Principles Applied by Aurubis Bulgaria AD:

- Industrial Symbiosis: Utilizes waste heat from copper production to supply energy to nearby facilities, reducing overall energy consumption.
- Resource Efficiency: Processes secondary raw materials, such as recycling copper scrap, to produce new copper products, minimizing the need for virgin materials.
- Waste Minimization: Implements advanced technologies to reduce emissions and manage by-products effectively, aligning with sustainable production goals.
- Energy Recovery: Invests in systems that capture and reuse energy within the production cycle, enhancing overall efficiency.
- Sustainable Practices: Engages in continuous improvement initiatives to align with environmental standards and promote sustainable development.



6. EL BAT AD

 EL BAT AD, Dolna banya Sarameshe, quarter 121 / PK 2040 Headquarters at EL BAT and Sofia, Bulgaria Boulevard "Bulgaria" 81 B / PK 1404

<https://elbat.bg/>

EL BAT is a Bulgaria-based company with a wide reach. They operate mainly in Central Europe, but also have many partners in Asia. One of their key advantages is the location.

The factory of EL BAT is located in the town of Dolna banya, and for the past 3 decades has been an integral part of the economic and social development of the region.

EL BAT gives new life to old batteries. They are one of the biggest plants in Europe for processing and recycling various types of lead-containing waste and discarded lead-acid batteries.

With the solutions they have created, they help mitigate the environmental impact of various anthropogenic factors.

Almost every existing vehicle is powered by lead-acid battery, and every battery has a limited lifespan.

Once exhausted, it transforms from a power supply to hazardous waste, and this happens with every vehicle's battery worldwide every 4-5 years. At EL BAT, have developed technology that allows to recycle every part of the battery, granting it not just one, but multiple lives.

The main job of the company is to give efficient solutions for one of today's most concerning issues that we face as humans, while promising the world a better tomorrow.

Circular Economy Principles Applied by EL BAT AD:

- Closed-Loop Recycling: Specializes in collecting and recycling used lead-acid batteries, recovering lead and other materials for the production of new batteries.
- Resource Recovery: Processes thousands of tons of battery waste annually, extracting valuable materials and reducing the need for virgin resources.
- Environmental Protection: Implements strict environmental controls to prevent pollution and ensure safe recycling processes.
- Energy Efficiency: Invests in modern technologies to enhance energy efficiency in recycling operations.
- Economic Contribution: Exports recycled materials to European markets, contributing to the circular economy on a broader scale.



7. Local Food Vending Machines – Farm-to-Consumer Circular Distribution



Savinja-Šalek Region, Slovenia

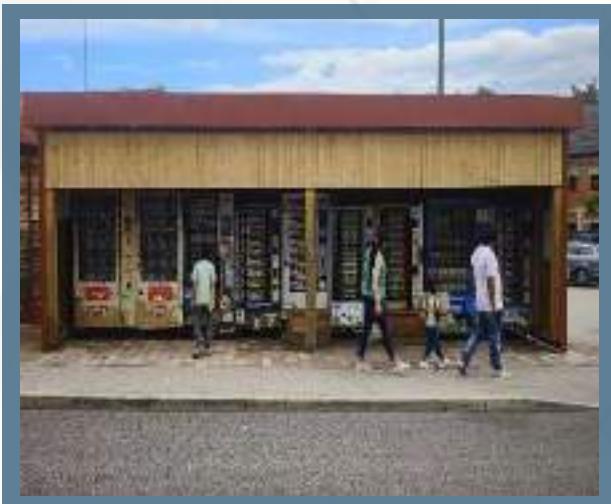
<https://ra-sasa.si>

In the Savinja-Šalek Valley of Slovenia, a growing network of smart vending machines is changing how people access local food. Available 24/7 in both urban and rural areas, these machines offer fresh, locally produced items such as milk, yogurt, sausages, salami, eggs, honey, and pickled vegetables. The system connects farmers directly with consumers, reducing food miles and supporting small-scale producers while promoting circular economy principles like reduce, reuse, regenerate, and relocalize.

First introduced in 2019 and expanded after 2020, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, this innovative model ensures product freshness through temperature-controlled storage and encourages sustainability through the use of reusable glass bottles and jars. Consumers can make cashless purchases via card or mobile app, and usage data helps optimize restocking and reduce food waste.

The vending machines are restocked regularly by local farmers and cooperatives, with support from RA SAŠA (Development Agency of Savinja-Šalek Region) and municipalities. The initiative reduces emissions, minimizes packaging waste, and strengthens local economies by creating direct-to-consumer sales opportunities and jobs in logistics and maintenance. It also improves access to healthy food and fosters trust between consumers and local producers.

Although this model is gaining popularity in Slovenia, it remains largely absent in other countries like Serbia, Bulgaria, and Croatia, suggesting strong potential for transfer and replication in other rural and semi-urban regions.



8. Biomasa d.o.o., Nazarje, Slovenia

<https://biomasa.si>

Biomasa d.o.o., based in Nazarje, Slovenia, has developed an innovative and sustainable energy model that harnesses the power of local forests to provide clean, efficient, and carbon-neutral heating solutions. By converting wood waste and forestry residues into high-quality biomass fuels—such as wood pellets, chips, and firewood—Biomasa promotes a circular economy while contributing to climate goals and energy independence. Since its inception in the early 2000s, the company has expanded significantly, offering a full-service approach that includes fuel production, installation of advanced biomass boilers, district heating network development, and long-term maintenance and servicing. Their systems are used in private homes, public institutions, and businesses, delivering both environmental and economic benefits.

Biomasa's model is rooted in circular economy principles: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, and Regenerate. Through local sourcing and high-efficiency processing, the company reduces reliance on fossil fuels and minimizes waste, while regenerating forest landscapes and creating economic opportunities in rural areas.

Key Features:

- Sustainable biomass sourcing from certified local forests
- Energy-efficient production of wood pellets and chips
- Installation of Fröling high-efficiency biomass boilers
- Deployment of district heating systems
- Long-term fuel supply and servicing partnerships

Biomasa collaborates with local municipalities, certified forestry suppliers, and EU-funded projects to enhance sustainability and technological innovation. Advanced boiler technology helps address air quality concerns, while long-term contracts ensure a stable and renewable fuel supply.

Impact Highlights:

- Environmental: Significant reduction in CO₂ emissions and fossil fuel use; support for forest regeneration
- Economic: Lower heating costs, job creation in forestry and energy sectors, improved local resilience
- Social: Increased energy security, promotion of green awareness, and strengthened community ties.

Biomasa's approach is adaptable and scalable to other regions with forestry resources. It presents a strong case for how local, circular, and sustainable solutions can meet global energy and climate challenges.



9.“Visitor Centar Pecka”, Mrkonjić Grad

<https://greenways.ba/>

The Visitor Center Pecka is located in the village of Pecka, municipality of Mrkonjić Grad, in the heart of the Krajina nature where the river Sana springs. It was opened in 2015 as an initiative of the Greenways Association, with the aim of revitalizing the neglected village and creating new value through sustainable tourism, nature conservation, and rural economy development.

The Center is housed in a renovated elementary school building constructed in 1931. Once empty and abandoned, today it has been transformed into a modern and lively hub for tourists, volunteers, and the local community. In its first years it functioned as a hostel, and later a settlement with 11 mobile homes and a campsite was built nearby, while five rural households across the village were arranged and opened for visitors.

Pecka is now recognized as one of the most significant natural climbing areas in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with more than 120 climbing routes of varying difficulty. The Visitor Center provides support to climbers and guests, but the development of the climbing site itself is led and maintained by the climbing community. In addition to climbing, the Center offers cycling and hiking tours, excursions to the source of the Sana river, educational programs for schools and volunteers, as well as team-building programs for companies and outdoor schools. Among the newer activities are the BioAwaking program and the Cinema Parallels film festival. Each year, Pecka is visited by between 14,000 and 15,000 people, with the central event being the Pecka Outdoor Festival, which gathers nature, sports, and ecology enthusiasts from across Bosnia and Herzegovina and the wider region.

Thanks to the development of the Visitor Center, more than 80 houses in the village have been renovated, road infrastructure has been improved, the springs of the Sana river have been protected as a Natural Monument, and Pecka has been declared one of the 14 most beautiful villages in Bosnia and Herzegovina within the Altermural Association initiative. The Center has become a catalyst for the development of the entire area.

Circular economy principles applied by the Visitor Center Pecka:

- Energy self-sufficiency – through the “Solar Pecka” crowdfunding campaign, solar panels were installed to generate electricity for the Center’s needs; the goal is to cover 100% of energy needs from renewable sources.
- Support for local production – visitors are offered local products (cheese, honey, brandy, juices, handicrafts) exclusively from local producers.
- Short supply chains – no intermediaries; local producers sell their products directly through the Center.
- Restoration and preservation of resources – the old school was repurposed and renovated, giving new life to an abandoned building.
- Education and events – through festivals, workshops, and new programs, awareness is raised about ecology and the opportunities the village provides.
- Volunteering and community involvement – young people, volunteers, and residents actively participate in the work of the Center and the development of new activities. The Visitor Center Pecka is an example of how a combination of local initiative, sustainable tourism, and circular economy can transform a village and create new value, not only for the local community but also for the entire region.



10.“Ideal Comerc d.o.o.”, Bosanski Petrovac

<https://idealcomerc.com>

Ideal Comerc is a company from Bosanski Petrovac, specialized in the production of wood products for heating and energy efficiency, including pellets, briquettes, fire starters, and pallets. The company has more than 20 years of experience in the wood industry and has been operating under its current name since 2021.

All of the company's products are made from wood residues from forestry and wood processing, thereby contributing to the circular economy and reducing waste. The pellets they produce are certified with international ENplus A1 and A2 standards, while raw materials come from FSC-certified forests, confirming sustainable management of natural resources. Products are packed in 15 kg bags, with a diameter of 6 mm, and meet the highest quality standards on the market.

Ideal Comerc is oriented towards both local and international markets. More than 40 permanent clients across Europe (Germany, Italy, Slovenia) have recognized the company's product quality. Alongside exports, the company also serves domestic customers, thereby contributing to the stability of the local energy supply.

The company employs more than 150 workers from Bosanski Petrovac and surrounding areas, directly impacting the economic development of this rural region. During the war years, Petrovac was affected by conflicts and changes in its ethnic structure, but today it stands as a place that shows cooperation is possible. Ideal Comerc, by example, contributes to social cohesion, reconciliation, and well-being—offering jobs and secure livelihoods to people of different nationalities.

The company also owns a certified truck weighbridge (capacity 1–60 tons), which significantly facilitates logistics and confirms high business standards. Production is organized on a “zero waste” principle—all wood residues are reused in the process, either as fuel or for secondary products.

Circular economy principles applied by Ideal Comerc:

- Use of wood waste – all products are made from processed wood residues.
- Sustainability and certification – FSC and ENplus confirm sustainable management and high quality.
- Energy efficiency – products (pellets, briquettes) represent a renewable energy source and reduce the use of fossil fuels.
- Export orientation – placing products on EU markets brings economic benefit and promotes the BiH industry.
- Local community development – the company employs local people, strengthens economic life, and contributes to social cohesion in post-war Petrovac.

Ideal Comerc demonstrates how the wood industry in Bosnia and Herzegovina can drive circular economy and social renewal—using waste as a resource and creating added value not only for the local community but for society as a whole



Policy Papers

Project developed a series of policy papers that provided recommendations for integrating circular economy principles into regional and national policies. These papers were based on the findings and insights gathered during the project and were disseminated to relevant stakeholders and policymakers.

Each of the Policy papers was prepared for the International Event, discussed on the International Event and finally discussed and adopted on Local Event.

On following pages, you can find main Recommendations from all five Policy papers.

Serbia

Recommendations for a Circular Future for Rural Serbia

Introduction:

These recommendations aim to support a faster transition towards a greener rural economy in Serbia, with a particular focus on empowering women as one of the key actors in this transformation. They are based on the principles of circular economy and address the specific needs and opportunities of rural communities.

Recommendations for a Green Rural Economy:

- **Promote Circular Economy Practices:** Encourage rural actors to adopt circular practices like:
 - 1) *Waste Reduction and Resource Efficiency:* Support investments in technologies and processes that minimize waste generation and maximize resource use (e.g., composting food scraps, repairing machinery, etc.).
 - 2) *Product Life Extension:* Provide incentives for businesses to offer durable, repairable products and services (e.g., repair shops, second-hand markets, etc.).
 - 3) *Sharing and Joint Consumption:* Support initiatives such as community gardens, tool libraries, and sharing of farm machinery or cars to reduce duplication of resources.
- **Develop Green Infrastructure:** Invest in infrastructure that supports circularity, such as:
 - 1) *Composting Facilities:* Establish accessible composting facilities to manage organic waste and create valuable fertilizer for local agriculture.
 - 2) *Repair and Recycling Workshops:* Set up workshops equipped for repairing and recycling used materials and products, extending their lifespan.
 - 3) *Collection and Sorting Systems:* Implement efficient collection and sorting systems for recyclable materials in rural areas.
- **Support Sustainable Agriculture:** Encourage the adoption of environmentally friendly agricultural practices like:
 - 1) *Organic Farming:* Provide non-financial and financial support for farmers to transition towards organic production methods, reducing reliance on synthetic fertilizers and pesticides.
 - 2) *Agroforestry:* Promote integrating trees and shrubs into agricultural landscapes for improved biodiversity, soil health, and sequestration (retention and storage) of carbon in soil.
 - 3) *Water Conservation Techniques:* Support the implementation of water-saving irrigation systems and support rainwater harvesting practices.
 - 4) *Education and Training:* Provide training programs for farmers on sustainable techniques and soil management.
 - 5) *Financial Support:* Offer subsidies or microgrants for farmers transitioning to sustainable practices.
 - 6) *Market Access:* Facilitate access to green markets, short supply chains and certification schemes

- **Strengthening the Capacity :**

- 1) *Develop educational programs and training workshops* for farmers, entrepreneurs, and local authorities on:
- 2) *Circular economy principles* and their application in rural contexts.
- 3) *Sustainable agricultural practices*, including organic farming and soil conservation techniques.
- 4) *Green business models* and eco-tourism development strategies.

Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing:

- *Facilitate knowledge exchange:* Encourage collaboration between rural communities in Serbia and neighbouring countries to share best practices in green businesses and women's empowerment.
- *Promote Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships:* Foster collaboration between local governments, civil society organizations, research institutions, and the private sector to support the green transition in rural areas.
- *Raise Public Awareness:* Launch public awareness campaigns highlighting the benefits of circular economy, green businesses, and women's leadership in environmental sustainability.
- *Dissemination of Best Practices:* Establish a knowledge exchange platform to share successful circular economy initiatives and women-led green businesses across rural Serbia and the Danube Region.
- *Information Accessibility:* Develop information resources and communication materials, targeting rural areas and communities. These materials should cover:
 - 1) Opportunities and benefits of circular economy practices
 - 2) Available resources for education, training, and financial support for green enterprises.
 - 3) Success stories in green businesses.

Empowering Women in the Green Economy:

- **Education and Training Programs:**

- 1) Develop targeted training programs for rural women on circular economy principles, green business models, and sustainable agricultural practices.
- 2) Offer capacity-building workshops on business management, marketing, and access to financing specifically for green agricultural holdings or women-led businesses.
- 3) Digital Literacy: Bridge the digital divide and train women with ICT skills to access online resources and markets.

- **Financial Support Mechanisms:**

- 1) Allocate microgrants or loans specifically for women entrepreneurs launching or expanding green businesses in rural areas.
- 2) Simplify access to existing financial instruments for rural women entrepreneurs by providing information, assistance, and mentorship opportunities.

- **Networking and Mentorship:**

- 1) Facilitate the creation of women's networks and mentorship programs to share knowledge, experiences, and best practices in green entrepreneurship.
- 2) Connect rural women with successful female entrepreneurs in the green sector to provide guidance and support.

- **Gender-Inclusive Decision-Making:**

- 1) Establish gender-inclusive platforms for dialogue between rural women, policymakers, and other stakeholders on environmental issues and green economy development.
- 2) Increase women's representation in local decision-making bodies related to rural development, environmental protection, and resource management.

- **Communication and Awareness Campaigns:**

- 1) Launch public awareness campaigns highlighting the role of women in environmental stewardship and green businesses as role models for other women.
- 2) Develop information resources and communication materials targeted at rural women on circular economy opportunities, available support mechanisms, and success stories of women-led green businesses.

Implementation and Monitoring:

- Encourage collaboration between local governments, civil society organizations, research institutions, and rural communities to implement these recommendations.
- Establish monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track progress in greening the rural economy and empowering women.
- Advocate for policy changes that incentivize and enable a circular transition and empower women's participation in the green economy.

Bulgaria

Recommendation for development and implementation of circular economy, prototyping and co-building of innovate models

These recommendations aim to accelerate the transition toward a circular economy in rural areas in Bulgaria, focusing on environmental sustainability, economic resilience, and social inclusion. The proposed measures emphasize collaboration among local authorities, businesses, civil society organizations (CSOs), and citizens to build a regenerative economic system.

Recommendations to a local authority:

- *Infrastructure Investment:* Build and maintain facilities for composting, recycling, and green infrastructure, facilities for joint use of electric bicycles or electric scooters
- *Educational Programs:* Organize training and awareness programs for the general public and businesses in order to stimulate it to apply a circle economy in their business and everyday live.
- *Financial Incentives:* Offer grants and other financial stimulations to support green businesses, green infrastructure and sustainable farming.
- *Artificial intelligence* – using the tools of AI for minimize the impact of businesses on the environment.
- *Public-Private Partnerships:* Collaborate with businesses and CSOs on development of green businesses
- *Recovery of natural systems:* Applying circular economy in economic activities

Recommendations for Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):

- *Awareness Campaigns:* Run educational campaigns on environmental sustainability and resource efficiency.
- *Community Engagement:* Mobilize communities for environmental projects like cleaning campaigns, planting a trees
- *Advocacy and Policy Support:* Advocate for environmentally friendly policies and support local authorities in drafting them.
- *Capacity Building:* Provide training on green entrepreneurship, eco-tourism, and sustainable farming.
- *Research and Innovation:* Conduct research on local environmental issues and suggest innovative solutions.

Recommendations for Businesses:

- *Sustainable Production:* Implement eco-friendly production processes and reduce resource use, building a solar system for own use
- *Product Life Extension:* Offer repair, reuse, and recycling services for products.
- *Partnerships:* Collaborate with NGOs and local authorities on environmental initiatives.

Recommendations for Citizens:

- *Active Participation:* Join environmental programs, workshops, and public forums.
- *Sustainable Practices:* Reduce waste, recycle, compost, and conserve water and use a solar energy

- **Community Projects:** Participate in community-driven sustainability projects like urban gardens and tree planting.

Recommendations for overcoming barriers to a circular economy in rural areas

Transitioning rural areas to a circular economy can unlock economic, social, and environmental benefits. However, rural regions face several barriers, including financial, infrastructural, regulatory, and social challenges. Below are key recommendations to address these obstacles and foster a successful shift toward a circular economy in rural communities.

1. Financial Support and Incentives

- **Tailored Funding Programs:** Provide targeted funding for rural areas through grants, subsidies, and low-interest loans to finance circular economy initiatives such as sustainable farming, recycling, and renewable energy projects. Rural SMEs and cooperatives often lack access to capital, so specialized funding mechanisms can help overcome this challenge.
- **Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs):** Encourage partnerships between local governments, private companies, and civil society to share investment risks. PPPs can finance infrastructure for waste management, bioenergy production, and sustainable agricultural practices.
- **Tax Incentives and Subsidies:** Introduce tax breaks and financial incentives for farmers and rural businesses that adopt circular practices, such as reusing agricultural waste, recycling, and using renewable resources.

2. Improved Infrastructure for Waste Management and Recycling

- **Decentralized Waste Collection Systems:** Establish decentralized waste collection and recycling hubs that cater specifically to rural areas, where waste volumes are often low and dispersed. Smaller-scale, community-led recycling facilities can be more cost-effective and easier to manage in rural settings.
- **Invest in Bioeconomy Infrastructure:** Support the development of bioenergy facilities, such as biogas plants that can process organic waste from farms. This can create a circular loop by turning agricultural by-products into energy or compost, benefiting local communities.
- **Shared Logistics and Resources:** Encourage cooperation among rural municipalities to share waste collection, recycling services, and renewable energy infrastructure to reduce operational costs and improve efficiency.

3. Capacity Building and Education

- **Training and Knowledge Transfer:** Provide training programs for farmers, local businesses, and communities on circular economy practices, including waste reduction, composting, renewable energy production, and sustainable agriculture. Collaborations with educational institutions, NGOs, and international bodies can bring best practices to rural areas.

- **Raise Awareness:** Launch awareness campaigns to educate rural populations about the benefits of the circular economy, such as job creation, resource efficiency, and environmental sustainability. These campaigns should be tailored to local contexts and cultures to maximize their impact.
- **Access to Digital Tools and Technologies:** Promote the use of digital tools for resource management, such as apps that help monitor waste streams, track energy usage, or optimize crop yields. Providing rural areas with access to new technologies and training on their use is crucial for the circular transition.

4. Policy Reform and Regulatory Simplification

- **Simplified Permitting Processes:** Streamline and simplify the permitting process for renewable energy projects, waste recycling facilities, and other circular economy initiatives. Reducing bureaucratic delays and making the regulatory framework more transparent will encourage investment in rural circular projects.
- **Incentivize Sustainable Agriculture through CAP Reform:** Advocate for stronger alignment of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) with circular economy objectives, emphasizing the adoption of sustainable farming practices, organic farming, agroforestry, and biodiversity conservation.
- **Rural-Specific Circular Economy Policies:** Develop rural-specific circular economy policies at the national and regional levels that address the unique challenges faced by rural communities. This can include adjusting environmental regulations to the capacities of rural infrastructure and recognizing small-scale, local solutions.

5. Fostering Local and Regional Cooperation

- **Rural Cooperatives and Community-Led Initiatives:** Encourage the formation of cooperatives and community groups that focus on circular economy projects, such as community-owned renewable energy or shared composting schemes. These initiatives empower rural residents to take ownership of their local economy and resources.
- **Regional Circular Economy Hubs:** Develop regional hubs that connect rural and urban areas, facilitating the exchange of knowledge, resources, and services. Rural areas can supply renewable resources (e.g., biomass), while urban areas can provide technologies and expertise for circular practices like advanced recycling or upcycling.

6. Leveraging Digitalization and Innovation

- **Smart Agriculture and Precision Farming:** Promote the adoption of digital solutions, such as precision farming technologies that reduce waste and optimize the use of water, fertilizers, and pesticides. This contributes to a more efficient, circular approach to agriculture in rural areas.
- **Innovation and Research Grants:** Provide grants for research and innovation projects focused on circular economy solutions tailored to rural needs, such as bio-based materials, sustainable packaging, or low-cost renewable energy technologies.

7. Fostering Social Inclusion and Equity

- **Engage Marginalized Groups:** Ensure that circular economy initiatives are inclusive of marginalized and vulnerable groups in rural areas, such as women, youth, and ethnic minorities. Specific programs can target these groups to provide training, employment, and entrepreneurship opportunities in the circular economy.

- **Support Youth Engagement:** Encourage younger generations to participate in circular economy initiatives by offering vocational training, apprenticeships, and mentorship programs in green industries such as renewable energy, recycling, or eco-tourism.

8. Cross-Border Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing

- **International Partnerships:** Promote cross-border cooperation between rural regions in different countries to share knowledge, best practices, and innovations in the circular economy. EU programs such as INTERREG can facilitate this collaboration, bringing together stakeholders from different regions to tackle common challenges.
- **Harmonized Circular Economy Standards:** Advocate for harmonized standards and regulations across countries to enable rural areas to participate in broader circular economy networks, facilitating trade in circular products and services and reducing barriers for rural businesses.

By addressing the barriers to the circular economy in rural areas, governments and stakeholders can unlock significant economic and environmental benefits. Tailored financial support, infrastructure investment, capacity building, regulatory reform, and collaboration are all critical components of a successful transition. Empowering rural communities to embrace circular practices will not only contribute to sustainability goals but also enhance their resilience and prosperity in a rapidly changing world.

Croatia

Recommendations for development and implementation of circular economy in local production as a tool for strengthening rural areas of Croatia

There are some recommendations that provide a comprehensive roadmap for embedding circular economy into local production in Croatia's rural regions. By combining local value creation, innovation, supportive policies, infrastructure, skills development, digital tools, community engagement, and strong monitoring, Croatia can transform rural areas into resilient, sustainable, and competitive regions aligned with EU green ambitions.

1. Strengthen Local Value Chains

- Encourage local processing of agricultural products (dairy, fruit, vegetables, wine, olive oil, honey, herbs) so that added value remains in rural communities rather than being lost through raw material export. This helps farmers earn higher incomes and fosters regional branding.
- Support the development of cooperatives and producer clusters that allow small producers to pool resources, share infrastructure (e.g., packaging plants, storage units), and gain bargaining power in markets.
- Foster short supply chains and local markets (farmers' markets, "from farm to fork" programs, online marketplaces for local produce) to directly connect producers with consumers, reducing intermediaries, transport costs, and food waste.
- Promote certification and branding (e.g., "Circular Rural Product of Croatia") to highlight sustainable local production and build consumer trust.

2. Promote Innovation and Circular Business Models

- Stimulate upcycling and by-product valorization: grape pomace → cosmetics or animal feed; olive husks → bio-packaging; whey → protein powders or beverages. This diversifies income streams.
- Support bio economy solutions such as small biogas plants, composting units, and biofertilizer production, turning waste into renewable energy and soil nutrients.
- Encourage service-based models (e.g., equipment sharing or renting platforms for agricultural machinery; cooperative repair workshops for tools and equipment).
- Foster industrial symbiosis in rural areas where waste from one production process becomes a resource for another (e.g., brewery grain used for livestock feed).
- Promote eco-tourism and circular gastronomy by integrating sustainable food production into rural tourism experiences..

3. Policy and Institutional Support

- Develop clear national and regional CE strategies that explicitly include rural areas, aligned with the EU Green Deal, Circular Economy Action Plan, and Farm-to-Fork Strategy.
- Simplify access to EU funds and grants (CAP, Horizon Europe, LIFE, Interreg) through advisory services, training, and digital one-stop shops for rural SMEs.
- Introduce targeted financial incentives: tax reductions for circular practices, preferential loans for green innovations, subsidies for renewable energy and waste management projects.

- Ensure policy coherence by linking rural development, environmental policy, and industrial strategy into one coordinated CE framework.
- Strengthen local governance: empower municipalities and counties to design and implement CE projects adapted to their local contexts.

4. Infrastructure and Logistics Development

- Invest in small-scale bioenergy and composting facilities to process agricultural residues locally and return nutrients to soils.
- Improve waste collection and recycling infrastructure tailored to rural food processing and agriculture (e.g., systems for plastic mulching films, greenhouse materials, or packaging waste).
- Develop shared logistics systems for transportation and storage, including cold chains for perishable goods. This reduces food loss and opens access to larger markets.
- Establish rural recycling and upcycling hubs where SMEs can transform agricultural by-products into value-added products.
- Promote renewable energy infrastructure (solar panels on farms, small wind turbines, biomass plants) to lower energy costs and carbon emissions.

5. Capacity Building and Education

- Provide training programs for farmers, SMEs, and cooperatives on CE opportunities (e.g., waste valorization, renewable energy use, eco-certification).
- Establish knowledge transfer platforms linking universities, research institutions, and local producers to exchange best practices and innovations.
- Launch awareness campaigns at community and school levels to build a culture of circularity and highlight local success stories.
- Support vocational education programs in green skills such as composting, renewable energy maintenance, eco-design, and sustainable packaging.

6. Digitalization and Smart Tools

- Implement digital platforms for resource sharing (machinery, storage, transport services, energy) to lower costs and improve efficiency.
- Introduce product traceability systems (blockchain, product passports, QR codes) to build consumer trust in local, sustainable products.
- Use precision agriculture and smart farming technologies (IoT, sensors, drones, AI) to optimize water, fertilizer, and pesticide use, reducing waste and environmental impact.
- Promote e-commerce solutions to help rural producers reach broader markets, especially in sustainable and organic product niches.

7. Community and Stakeholder Engagement

- Involve municipalities, local communities, and farmers in planning CE projects to ensure ownership, acceptance, and long-term success.
- Support public-private partnerships (PPPs) that combine government support, private investment, and community participation in shared CE infrastructure projects.
- Encourage youth and women's participation in CE projects through targeted grants, entrepreneurship programs, and training.
- Promote community-led initiatives such as repair cafés, cooperative energy projects, and local food hubs.
- Create networks and associations for CE in rural areas to share knowledge, advocate for supportive policies, and promote collaboration.

8. Monitoring and Evaluation

- Define Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) such as waste reduction, recycling rates, renewable energy use, new jobs created, added value retained in rural areas, and CO₂ emissions reduced.
- Establish regional Circular Economy Observatories to collect data, monitor progress, and provide evidence-based policy recommendations.
- Promote pilot projects in selected rural communities to test CE solutions (e.g., bioenergy hubs, circular food clusters) and scale up successful models nationally.
- Encourage transparent reporting so communities can see how CE projects deliver tangible benefits.

Slovenia

Empowering Circular Economy and Inclusive Participation in Rural SAŠA Region

Executive Summary

This policy paper presents strategic directions for enhancing circular economy (CE) models and participatory governance in rural areas of the Savinjsko-Šaleška (SAŠA) region. Drawing from the region's development priorities under the ORP SAŠA 2021–2027, RRP Savinjske regije, and the ONPP for Just Transition, the document proposes actions to include women and small-scale rural actors in green transition efforts. This aligns with RA-SAŠA's role in the EU co-funded Rural Green project and builds on existing regional strategic frameworks.

1. Introduction

The SAŠA region, anchored historically in coal mining and heavy industry, is now at the forefront of Slovenia's just transition. However, while high-level energy and infrastructure projects dominate the regional transformation landscape, rural communities often remain on the margins of this shift. Leveraging circular economy models as part of broader sustainability efforts offers rural areas a path toward regeneration, employment, and environmental stewardship.

The region's development documents (ORP, RRP) emphasize sustainability, innovation, and cohesion—but implementation still skews toward large enterprises and public institutions. This paper offers policy directions to ensure smaller, rural stakeholders—especially women—are not left behind.

2. Problem Identification

2.1 Structural Gaps

Despite the ORP SAŠA's objective of a “trajnostna, nizkoogljična in vključujoča družba”, several shortcomings are evident:

- Micro-entrepreneurs and women-led initiatives are underrepresented in key circular economy projects.
- Pilot investments (e.g., Plastika Skaza, TEŠ energy transition projects) focus on large-scale actors.
- Local circular solutions, like repair cafés, reuse cooperatives, and food waste valorisation, remain unsupported in policy mechanisms.

2.2 Regional Inequalities

- ORP identifies disparities between urbane in podeželske občine, especially in terms of digital access, skills, and access to finance.
- There is no dedicated mechanism for integrating gender-inclusive CE entrepreneurship into regional programs like RP 2.5 (prehod na krožno gospodarstvo) or RP 3.5 (socialna aktivacija).

3. Project Background: RA-SAŠA's Role in Rural Green

As part of the Rural Green project (EU Grant GAP-101138179), RA-SAŠA:

- Organizes dialogue events on CE and digital participation at the regional level.
- Supports the creation of a digital tool for participatory policymaking.
- Contributes to transnational policy learning and working groups.

These activities position RA-SAŠA to bridge strategic gaps in local policy by linking EU green priorities with local implementation.

4. Regional Policy Context

4.1 ORP SAŠA and Circular Economy

RP 2.5 of the ORP explicitly lists the transition to CE as a regional priority. However, its implementation has:

- Focused on municipal waste management and industrial symbiosis,
- Not included rural civil society, family farms, or local initiatives in funded CE pilot projects.

4.2 RRP and Social Inclusion

The RRP Savinjske regije 2021–2027 defines inclusive transition and sustainable innovation as key goals, but recognizes that:

- Smaller municipalities and vulnerable groups face structural disadvantages in accessing program tools.
- Gender-specific measures are generally absent from CE or innovation funding streams.

5. Strategic Goals of the Policy Proposal

The policy aims to:

1. Integrate circular economy principles into rural development across SAŠA.
2. Strengthen participation of women and micro-actors in strategic planning and funding access.
3. Promote place-based, community-led circular solutions, aligned with existing regional instruments (e.g. CLLD, RP 3.5, RP 4.5).

6. Proposed Measures

Measure 1: Rural Circular Economy Micro-Grants

Create a micro-grant mechanism (max 25k EUR) targeting:

- Women-led initiatives in food, tourism, reuse, and eco-crafts.
- Community repair cafés and reuse programs.
- Grounded in RP 4.5 (lokalna samooskrba in vitalno podeželje).

Measure 2: Local CE Participation Hubs

Set up pilot “CE hubs” within existing public spaces (libraries, TICs) to:

- Run workshops on reuse, composting, and local CE models.
- Use existing facilities in Luče, Ljubno, and Solčava where rural cohesion is strong.

Measure 3: Gender Mainstreaming in Regional Calls

Revise regional project calls (especially under RP 2.5 and RP 3.5) to:

- Include scoring bonuses for women-led or inclusive CE models.

Require basic gender and inclusion impact statements in applications

Measure 4: Digital Access and Skills Support

Build on ORP's priority RP 1.5 (digitalizacija) to:

- Provide training in digital tools for rural project participation.
- Ensure accessibility of the Rural Green participation platform for low-connectivity areas.

7. Stakeholders and Implementation Partners

- RA-SAŠA (coordination and strategic alignment),
- Municipalities (grant disbursement, CE hubs),
- NGOs and rural associations (co-creation and outreach),
- Educational partners (IPAK, Ljudska univerza Velenje) for training and pilot testing.

8. Expected Impact

Area	Expected Change
Policy inclusiveness	Rural and gendered voices embedded in CE strategy
Local development	Uptake of grassroots CE practices in rural SAŠA
Economic impact	Economic impact
Strategic alignment	Better use of RP 2.5, RP 3.5, and RP 4.5 mechanisms

9. Conclusion

The SAŠA region possesses the strategic architecture for an inclusive, circular future—but it requires targeted mechanisms and cultural shifts to activate the potential of rural and female actors. By building on the Rural Green initiative and grounding reforms in the ORP and RRP frameworks, RA-SAŠA can lead this transformation.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Unlocking Rural Potential: Accelerating the Green and Circular Economy through Inclusive Tourism and Women's Empowerment in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Executive Summary

This policy paper outlines a comprehensive pathway for accelerating the green and circular economy in rural Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a particular emphasis on sustainable tourism and the empowerment of women. Grounded in the practical insights of the Banja Luka conference and reinforced by desk research, the paper diagnoses persistent challenges—such as inadequate infrastructure, low awareness, fragmented regulation, and limited access to finance—that inhibit the transition to circularity.

It also highlights the substantial opportunities that exist: from valorising bio-waste and developing responsible tourism to building new business models and leveraging EU and national funding streams. Central to all recommendations is the recognition that local knowledge, community cooperation, and the active participation of women and youth are essential drivers of change.

A set of targeted strategic goals and solutions is presented, addressing education, infrastructure, finance, institutional support, and the scaling up of successful practices. The integration of women's leadership and entrepreneurship is positioned as a cross-cutting priority to ensure an inclusive and sustainable transformation while specific chapter on women empowerment is also provided.

1. Introduction

Rural communities across Europe are at a pivotal moment, facing both the urgent need and unique opportunity to accelerate the transition to greener, more circular economies. The “Rural Green” project, co-funded by the European Union through the CERV Programme, seeks to address these challenges by fostering innovation, knowledge exchange, and practical collaboration among stakeholders in rural regions in targeted countries. The Center for Economic and Rural Development (CERD), as a key partner, has played a central role in advancing these aims in north-western Republika Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

A cornerstone of these efforts in Bosnia and Herzegovina was the international partner meeting and conference organized by CERD in Banja Luka from October 6 to 8, 2025. The event—gathering 64 participants from 9 European countries—offered a vibrant platform for sharing experiences, showcasing good practices, and jointly formulating new initiatives to support sustainable rural development. The highlight was the international conference and world café, “Circular Economy in Tourism,” which brought together representatives of ministries, local governments, rural tourism businesses, NGOs, universities, and the media.

The programme combined project management discussions, field visits to examples of circular and sustainable rural entrepreneurship, and intensive stakeholder dialogue.

Through this process, participants identified pressing challenges and concrete opportunities for rural businesses to adopt green and circular economy models. Special emphasis was placed on empowering rural women—particularly regarding access to education, control over resources, participation in decision-making, and adapting to climate and technological change—as well as on the role of youth and innovation in rural entrepreneurship.

This policy paper is grounded in desk research conducted by CERD within the Rural Green project, stakeholder engagement throughout the project cycle, and the outcomes of the Banja Luka conference and local event. While its focus is on the wider Banja Luka region and north-west Republika Srpska, the findings and recommendations are relevant for rural communities across Bosnia and Herzegovina. The paper identifies the main challenges, highlights key opportunities, and proposes strategic directions and practical solutions for advancing a greener, more inclusive, and circular rural economy—with a dedicated focus on sustainable tourism and women's empowerment.

2. Problem Identification

2.1 Main Challenges and Barriers

- Low Awareness and Insufficient Education:

There is a persistent lack of awareness and targeted education among rural residents, entrepreneurs, and even local authorities about the practical benefits and opportunities of the circular economy. Desk research confirms that stakeholders—including farmers, businesses, and public sector actors—often lack understanding of circular economy concepts, resource efficiency, and sustainable business models. Many are unaware of available support schemes, good practices, or the potential of adopting circular principles in rural tourism and production.

- Inadequate Infrastructure and Support Ecosystem:

Many rural areas lack basic infrastructure for composting, recycling, waste management, water treatment, and valorisation of local materials—making the implementation of circular solutions difficult. It is highlighted that deficiencies in waste collection, composting plants, water conservation systems, and logistics limit progress, and that this weak infrastructure discourages youth engagement in rural entrepreneurship and tourism.

- Financial Constraints:

There are limited financial resources and few accessible funding streams for rural circular initiatives. Conference and research findings agree that a lack of grants, tax incentives, and tailored investment instruments means most rural businesses and agrotourism operators struggle to invest in sustainable innovation. Local authorities and businesses often lack capacity for grant writing and for accessing EU or national funding.

- Poor Collaboration and Networking:

There is insufficient cooperation between municipalities, the private sector, academia, and civil society, resulting in fragmented and isolated efforts. Findings stresses that existing partnerships are often localised, and that there is a lack of institutionalised platforms for knowledge sharing, B2B networking, and scaling up good practices.

- Labour Shortages and Demographic Trends:

Rural areas face difficulties retaining and attracting a workforce—especially among young people—resulting in abandoned households, neglected resources, and limited capacity to launch new circular initiatives. It is also noted that negative demographic trends undermine sustainability and innovation in rural regions.

- Market and Visibility Gaps:

Many rural producers and circular initiatives lack access to markets and visibility among tourists and buyers. Conference participants point to under-promotion of sustainable, circular, and traditional products, with branding, eco-certification, and digital marketing tools rarely used to full advantage.

- Social Attitudes and Behaviour:

Resistance to change, passive attitudes, and a focus on negative trends undermine the transition to a circular rural economy. Limited public awareness around responsible packaging, overuse of plastics, and recycling further weakens progress.

2.2 Specific Institutional and Legal Barriers

- Fragmented or Outdated Regulation and Weak Institutional Support:

Laws and regulations are often outdated, inconsistent, or misaligned across sectors (agriculture, tourism, environment), leading to confusion and inaction. There is no clear legal framework linking tourism, waste management, and rural sustainability. Bureaucratic obstacles complicate business registration and access to incentives. Desk research corroborates that regulatory and policy gaps are a major challenge, with municipalities lacking the enabling environment for circular investments.

- Unclear Competencies and Overlapping Jurisdictions:

Conference groups highlighted the frequent misalignment of responsibilities between ministries and institutions (e.g., agriculture, tourism, environment), which blocks or slows reform. Many rural businesses struggle with unclear or duplicative registration requirements when operating across sectors.

- Minimal Monitoring and Sanction Mechanisms:

Weak monitoring, limited enforcement, and low penalties for unsustainable practices lead to slow uptake and poor compliance with circular economy initiatives—another point strongly supported by both field and desk research.

3. Opportunities

- The Banja Luka conference highlighted a wealth of practical and strategic opportunities for accelerating the green and circular transformation of rural communities and rural tourism. These opportunities were identified through intensive group work by stakeholders—producers, civil society, policymakers, and academia—and are supported by desk research and best practices identification.

3.1. Better Use and Valorisation of Local Resources

- Bio-waste as Resource:

There is major untapped potential to collect and repurpose bio-waste from households, bakeries, and restaurants for composting or as animal feed, reducing environmental burden and providing low-cost inputs for local agriculture.

- Promotion of “Ugly but Good” Food:

Consumer campaigns to valorise non-standard fruits and vegetables (“Ugly is healthy, delicious and good”) can reduce food waste and open new markets for local producers.

- Agro-residues to New Products:

Rural businesses can convert agricultural and food residues into biogas, compost, animal feed, or value-added products (e.g., soaps, cosmetics), diversifying income streams.

- Restoration and Green Use of Rural Assets:

Identifying and restoring existing rural buildings for green tourism—using local and recycled materials—leverages both heritage and sustainability and can attract visitors seeking authentic experiences.

3.2. Development of Circular and Responsible Tourism

- Responsible Tourism Practices:

Opportunities abound for restaurants and tourism businesses to offer flexible, right-sized portions, reduce food waste, and promote “responsible consumption” through education and differential pricing.

- Integrated Local Value Chains:

Linking agricultural producers with rural tourism, hospitality, and artisans (e.g., woodworkers, craftspeople) enables the creation of local supply chains that are both sustainable and add value to the visitor experience.

- Mapping and Digital Visibility:

Mapping rural households, producers, and sites—combined with digital marketing—can increase visibility, connect rural providers with tourists, and support the development of new tourism routes.

- Hub-and-Spoke Models:

Rural communities can use “hub and spoke” models to systematically link smaller providers with urban centers and major tourism flows, creating more balanced regional development.

3.3. New Business Models, Entrepreneurship, and Youth Engagement

- Support for Agrotourism and Youth Involvement:

Revitalizing agrotourism through support for young people, “urban–rural” migration (weekend volunteering, new settlers), and targeted entrepreneurship programs increases both the innovation and long-term viability of rural economies.

- Business Model Innovation:

Creating food outlets for surplus or “ugly” produce, offering “mixed baskets” of local goods, and establishing direct marketing platforms are all scalable business opportunities.

- Digitalisation:

Adopting digital platforms and e-commerce can further enable rural entrepreneurs to reach broader markets and to share best practices in circular solutions.

3.4. Education, Knowledge Exchange, and Capacity Building

- Structured and Continuous Education:

Establishing regular training, peer learning, and public awareness campaigns—drawing from European and regional best practices—will equip rural communities and businesses with the knowledge to apply circular economy principles.

- Permanent Networks and Knowledge Platforms:

Setting up permanent local action groups, networks, or clusters (e.g., using LEADER methodology) facilitates ongoing exchange, joint project development, and the spread of innovative solutions.

3.5. Policy, Regulatory, and Institutional Opportunities

- Clearer Policies and Incentives:

There is scope to develop harmonised legal frameworks, clarify responsibilities, and provide tangible incentives (tax breaks, grants, vouchers) for circular initiatives and green rural tourism.

- Public-Private Partnerships:

Fostering partnerships between local government, business, academia, and civil society (e.g., for shared composting or waste management projects) can unlock investment and expertise otherwise unavailable to small communities.

3.6. Branding, Certification, and Market Positioning

- Eco-certification and Local Branding:

Rural products and tourism experiences can achieve greater recognition and market access through eco-certification schemes, digital storytelling, and coordinated branding campaigns.

- Direct Sales and Local Outlets:

Supporting dedicated outlets and markets for local and sustainable products (including online) ensures producers receive fair value and that circular principles reach consumers.

3.7. Funding, Regional Cooperation, and Scaling of Best Practices

- Access to EU and national funding:

By aligning local strategies with European priorities, rural communities can access funding for circular infrastructure, green tourism, digital transformation, youth initiatives, and training.

- Regional and inter-municipal cooperation:

Opportunities include shared infrastructure, joint promotional campaigns, cross-municipal tourism routes, and collaborative waste management or composting initiatives.

- Piloting and scaling best practices:

Successful examples—such as community-based tourism models, composting systems, or circular product development—can be piloted in selected areas and then replicated across the region using structured peer learning networks.

4. Strategic Goals of the Policy Proposal

This policy proposal sets out three interlinked strategic goals to guide the green and circular transition of rural areas in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a focus on sustainable tourism, social inclusion, and community-led innovation:

- *Greening the Rural Economy and Strengthening Circularity*

The policy aims to accelerate the adoption of circular economy principles across rural areas by promoting efficient resource use, reducing waste, supporting regenerative and sustainable production practices, and enabling access to EU and national funding. Strengthening circular value chains, fostering innovation, and improving infrastructure will help rural communities transition toward resilient, future-oriented green economies.

- *Empowerment of Rural Women in the Green and Circular Economy*

Women are essential agents of change in rural development, and this strategic goal seeks to enhance their access to knowledge, training, financial instruments, and leadership opportunities. By supporting women's entrepreneurship in agriculture, tourism, crafts, and circular business models, the policy promotes gender equality while unlocking new drivers of local economic development and social cohesion.

- *Circular Economy and Sustainable Tourism Development*

Applying circular economy principles in rural tourism offers significant potential to reduce food waste, promote responsible hospitality, and strengthen local supply chains. This goal focuses on developing sustainable tourism models that integrate local products, cultural heritage, digital visibility, and eco-certification, positioning rural destinations as examples of sustainable, innovative, and circular tourism development.

Together, these strategic goals provide a framework for action that is both ambitious and practical—supporting an inclusive, green, and innovative future for rural communities and tourism in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

5. Solutions for Greening the Rural Economy

A faster and more effective transition to a circular economy in rural areas requires tailored solutions that address local realities, leverage existing assets, and respond to the needs identified by communities and stakeholders. Drawing from the Banja Luka conference and expert analysis, the following solutions are proposed:

- *Strengthen Education, Awareness, and Knowledge Transfer*

Expand targeted education and training programs on circular economy principles for local authorities, entrepreneurs, youth, and farmers. Implement campaigns to raise awareness of the benefits of resource efficiency, waste reduction, composting, regenerative agriculture, and circular business models. Foster peer-to-peer learning and exchange of good practices, including the adaptation of successful European models to local contexts.

- *Develop and Upgrade Infrastructure for Circular Practices*

Invest in basic infrastructure such as composting plants, recycling facilities, waste collection and sorting systems, and water management solutions. Support the creation of on-farm composting operations and small-scale bio-gas plants to valorize agricultural residues. Facilitate digital infrastructure to improve the visibility and marketing of rural circular initiatives and products.

- *Promote Supportive Regulatory and Institutional Frameworks*

Work with authorities to clarify and harmonize regulations across agriculture, environment, and tourism, reducing administrative barriers for circular initiatives. Develop incentive schemes such as vouchers, tax breaks, and grants for businesses and households that adopt circular practices. Encourage local action groups, public-private partnerships, and stakeholder platforms to coordinate and drive the circular transition.

- *Facilitate Access to Finance and Funding*

Enhance access to EU, national, and local funding for circular economy projects by improving information, technical assistance, and project development capacity among rural stakeholders. Support microfinance and social enterprise funding tailored to small businesses, agri-tourism, and community-based circular ventures. Prioritize pilot and demonstration projects that can be scaled up and replicated regionally.

- *Foster Networks, Collaboration, and Market Access*

Build permanent networks and clusters connecting rural producers, processors, tourism operators, and knowledge institutions. Support the mapping and digital promotion of rural households and circular initiatives, and facilitate entry into new markets through branding, eco-certification, and joint sales platforms. Promote cross-municipal and regional cooperation for resource sharing and scaling of innovative practices.

- *Encourage New Business Models and Entrepreneurial Innovation*

Stimulate the creation of new business models—such as food outlets for surplus or non-standard produce, mixed local product baskets, and circular agri-tourism packages—that valorize local resources and minimize waste. Provide support for youth and women-led entrepreneurship, integrating digital tools, storytelling, and hands-on learning into business development.

By prioritizing these solutions, rural communities can accelerate their transition to a green and circular economy, ensuring economic resilience, environmental sustainability, and inclusive local development.

6. Empowerment of Rural Women in the Green Economy

Empowering women is not only a question of equality and rights—it is an essential driver of sustainable rural development and a resilient green economy. Conference discussions and research confirm that rural women play a pivotal role in local production, entrepreneurship, food systems, agri-tourism, and community cohesion, but still face structural barriers and under-recognition.

Despite their central contributions, women in rural areas often have limited access to land, financial resources, education, and leadership positions. Social norms, administrative hurdles, and lack of targeted support frequently constrain their ability to innovate and benefit from green and circular economy opportunities.

To fully leverage the potential of rural women in the green transition, the following priorities and solutions are proposed:

- *Ensure Equal Access to Education and Training*

Integrate circular economy, sustainable production, and entrepreneurship topics into all education and training initiatives for rural communities, with special outreach to women and girls. Support peer-learning, mentoring, and leadership development programs that encourage women's participation in green business models.

- *Facilitate Access to Finance and Resources*

Improve women's access to grants, micro-finance, technical assistance, and land ownership, through targeted funding schemes and by simplifying administrative requirements. Promote women's cooperatives, business associations, and their role in managing community resources and circular initiatives.

- *Recognize and Promote Women's Entrepreneurship*

Highlight and support successful women-led businesses and initiatives in agriculture, agri-tourism, sustainable crafts, and circular solutions—showcasing them as role models at local, regional, and European levels. Ensure gender-sensitive criteria in public procurement, funding calls, and eco-certification schemes.

- *Encourage Participation in Decision-Making*

Actively involve women in rural governance structures, local action groups, and stakeholder platforms. Provide pathways for women to contribute to policy formulation, strategic planning, and management of rural development and environmental initiatives.

- *Address Social Norms and Visibility Gaps*

Implement awareness campaigns to challenge stereotypes and raise the profile of women as agents of innovation and sustainability in their communities. Utilize digital media, storytelling, and local events to celebrate women's achievements and broaden their access to networks and markets.

Empowering rural women in the green economy is a key lever for unlocking inclusive, innovative, and sustainable rural development. By focusing on these priorities, Bosnia and Herzegovina can accelerate its transition toward a circular and resilient rural future—ensuring that women's knowledge, leadership, and creativity are recognized and fully utilized.

7. Conclusions

The transition to a green and circular rural economy is both an urgent necessity and a major opportunity for Bosnia and Herzegovina. To succeed, rural communities must adopt a holistic, action-oriented approach—combining policy reform, investment, education, and collaboration across sectors.

Policymakers, donors, and rural actors should focus on:

- Rapidly closing infrastructure and knowledge gaps;
- Removing administrative and regulatory barriers to circular initiatives;
- Prioritizing women's participation and entrepreneurship in all green economy interventions;
- Piloting and scaling up proven models for circular rural tourism, resource valorisation, and community-led innovation;
- Leveraging EU and international funding by aligning local strategies with European priorities.

Without decisive action, rural areas risk falling further behind in sustainability and competitiveness. With the right leadership and targeted investment, however, Bosnia and Herzegovina can become a model for inclusive, resilient, and circular rural development—delivering economic, social, and environmental benefits to all.

ANNEX

Policy paper Croatia



*Policy Paper o kružnom gospodarstvu
u lokalnoj proizvodnji:
Put prema otpornim ruralnim
zajednicama u Hrvatskoj*

KORISTI KRUŽNOG GOSPODARSTVA U LOKALNOJ PROIZVODNJI U RURALNIM ZAJEDNICAMA HRVATSKE

Hrvatska se suočava s kontinuiranom depopulacijom ruralnih područja, osobito u regijama poput Slavonije, Like i Dalmatinske zagore. To je rezultat kombinacije niskog nataliteta, starenja stanovništva te migracije mladih prema urbanim centrima ili inozemstvu u potrazi za obrazovanjem i zaposlenjem.

Ruralne zajednice karakterizira starenje radne snage, što ograničava uvođenje inovativnih poljoprivrednih i prerađivačkih tehnika. Mladi često odlaze, što stvara manjak radne snage i smanjuje poduzetnički potencijal.

Nedostatak radnih mesta i suvremene infrastrukture dodatno smanjuje atraktivnost ruralnih područja za ulaganja, što usporava gospodarski razvoj i modernizaciju lokalnih industrija. Javljuju se i socijalni izazovi, uključujući slabiju dostupnost obrazovanja, zdravstvene zaštite i društvenih usluga, što povećava ranjivost lokalnih zajednica.

Također, mnoge ruralne regije nemaju potrebnu infrastrukturu za recikliranje, obradu otpada ili proizvodnju bioenergije, što otežava primjenu kružnog gospodarstva. Logistički sustavi za prikupljanje, transport i ponovnu uporabu poljoprivrednih nusproizvoda često su fragmentirani ili nepostojeći, što vodi do otpada i gubitka gospodarskog potencijala. Ruralni proizvođači često ovise o udaljenim centrima za preradu, što povećava troškove, potrošnju energije i emisije stakleničkih plinova te smanjuje profitabilnost.

Unatoč tome, ruralna područja Hrvatske sve više uvode kružno gospodarstvo, a koristi njegove primjene u lokalnoj proizvodnji postaju sve vidljivije.

Prednosti uvođenja kružnog gospodarstva:

1. Jačanje lokalnog gospodarskog razvoja

- Dodana vrijednost kroz lokalnu preradu poljoprivrednih proizvoda: preradom poljoprivrednih proizvoda na lokalnoj razini (mljek, voće, povrće, meso, žitarice), ruralne zajednice mogu zadržati više gospodarske vrijednosti umjesto da izvoze sirovine.
- Razvoj malih i srednjih poduzeća te zadruga: kružne prakse potiču stvaranje malih prerađivačkih pogona, čime se povećavaju poduzetničke prilike.
- Diversifikacija prihoda korištenjem nusproizvoda za energiju, stočnu hranu ili bioproizvode: korištenjem poljoprivrednih nusproizvoda za energiju, stočnu hranu ili biološke proizvode, poljoprivrednici i lokalna poduzeća stvaraju dodatne izvore prihoda.

2. Stvaranje radnih mesta i zadržavanje mladih

- Nove mogućnosti zapošljavanja: kružne prakse u preradi, recikliranju i proizvodnji bioenergije stvaraju radna mesta u ruralnim područjima.
- Uključivanje mladih: inovativne inicijative kružnog gospodarstva (npr. bioplinski start-upovi za recikliranje, proizvodnja zanatske hrane) mogu privući mlađe generacije i smanjiti iseljavanje.
- Razvoj vještina: primjena održivih tehnologija i digitalnih alata potiče mogućnosti osposobljavanja i profesionalnog razvoja.

3. Učinkovito korištenje resursa i smanjenje otpada

- Minimiziranje otpada: Poljoprivredni i industrijski nusproizvodi ponovno se upotrebljavaju umjesto da se odbacuju.
- Industrijska simbioza: Otpad jednog proizvođača (npr. voćna pulpa ili piljevina) postaje resurs za drugog, čime se smanjuju troškovi i utjecaj na okoliš.
- Održivo korištenje prirodnih resursa: Voda, energija i sirovine ponovno se koriste ili recikliraju, smanjujući ukupnu potrošnju resursa.

4. Koristi za okoliš

- Smanjenje emisija stakleničkih plinova: Lokalna prerada smanjuje potrebu za transportom, a bioenergija ili kompostiranje smanjuju emisije iz otpada.
- Očuvanje tla i vode: Kružne prakse, poput kompostiranja poljoprivrednih ostataka, poboljšavaju plodnost tla i smanjuju potrebu za kemijskim gnojivima.
- Zaštita bioraznolikosti: Održiva proizvodnja i upravljanje zemljištem pomažu u očuvanju lokalnih ekosustava.

5. Otpornost i sigurnost opskrbe hranom

- Ekonomska otpornost: Lokalna proizvodnja i kružne prakse smanjuju ovisnost o uvozu sirovina, stabilizirajući lokalna gospodarstva.
- Otpornost prehrambenog sustava: Kraći lanci opskrbe osiguravaju lokalnu dostupnost prehrambenih proizvoda čak i tijekom kriza ili globalnih poremećaja u opskrbi.
- Prilagodba klimatskim promjenama: Diverzifikacija proizvodnje i sustavi ponovne upotrebe otpada čine ruralne zajednice otpornijima na klimatske šokove

6. Pristup financiranju i inovacijama

- EU i nacionalna potpora: Projekti kružnog gospodarstva u ruralnim područjima mogu se financirati kroz CAP, inicijative Zelenog plana i druge EU potpore.
- Poticanje inovacija: Iz kružnog razmišljanja mogu proizaći novi proizvodi, ambalaža i metode prerade, čime se poboljšava konkurentnost.
- Integracija digitalnih rješenja: Tehnologije poput IoT-a, blockchaina i precizne poljoprivrede podržavaju sljedivost, učinkovitost i transparentnost lokalne proizvodnje.

7. Društvene i zajedničke koristi

- Jačanje lokalnih mreža: Suradnja proizvođača, zadruga i lokalnih prerađivača potiče društvenu koheziju i angažman zajednice.
- Očuvanje kulture i tradicije: Lokalna prerada podržava tradicionalne prehrambene proizvode, obrnštvo i ruralnu baštinu, stvarajući mogućnosti za turizam i brendiranje.
- Obrazovanje i podizanje svijesti: Uvođenje kružnih praksi povećava znanje o održivosti i zaštiti okoliša među članovima zajednice.

STRATEGIJE ZA BOLJU PRIMJENU KRUŽNOG GOSPODARSTVA U LOKALNOJ PROIZVODNJI U RURALNIM ZAJEDNICAMA HRVATSKE

Bolja primjena načela kružnog gospodarstva u hrvatskim ruralnim područjima zahtjeva višedimenzionalni pristup:

1. Razvoj lokalne prerade i povećanje dodane vrijednosti

- Uspostaviti male prerađivačke pogone (mlječni, voćni, povrtni, mesni, žitni) kako bi se vrijednost zadržala u ruralnim zajednicama.
- Promicati zadruge i klastere radi udruživanja resursa, dijeljenja infrastrukture i optimizacije proizvodnje.
- Potaknuti diversifikaciju proizvoda razvojem novih proizvoda iz poljoprivrednih nusproizvoda (npr. sokovi, džemovi, bio-ambalaža).

2. Industrijska simbioza i dijeljenje resursa

- Povezati farme i prerađivačku industriju kako bi se otpadni tokovi koristili kao ulazni materijal (npr. voćna pulpa za stočnu hranu, piljevina za biomasu).
- Podržati multisektorsku suradnju radi smanjenja troškova i okolišnog utjecaja te stvaranja zatvorenih petlji.
- Mapirati regionalne tokove resursa za prepoznavanje mogućnosti kružnih razmjena.

3. Ulaganje u infrastrukturu

- Razviti bioplinska postrojenja, kompostane i reciklažne centre za preradu nusproizvoda.
- Poboljšati logistiku i sustave prikupljanja nusproizvoda i materijala za recikliranje.
- Ulagati u skladišne kapacitete i hladni lanac kako bi se smanjilo kvarenje i produljio rok trajanja lokalnih proizvoda

4. Obrazovanje, osposobljavanje i prijenos znanja

- Provesti programe obuke o praksama kružnog gospodarstva za poljoprivrednike, MSP-ove i zadruge.
- Osigurati savjetodavne usluge za tehničku podršku, optimizaciju procesa i pripremu za financiranje.
- Provoditi kampanje za podizanje svijesti o gospodarskim, ekološkim i društvenim koristima kružnih praksi.

5. Politička i institucionalna potpora

- Pojednostaviti pristup EU i nacionalnim programima financiranja za male ruralne proizvođače.
- Osnovati regionalne centre kružnog gospodarstva za koordinaciju politika, obuke i provedbu projekata.
- Uspostaviti poticaje za održive prakse (porezne olakšice, bespovratna sredstva, programi priznanja).

6. Digitalizacija i tehnološka primjena

- Uvesti IoT i pametne poljoprivredne sustave za nadzor resursa, optimizaciju proizvodnje i smanjenje otpada.
- Koristiti blockchain i sustave sljedivosti radi transparentnosti lanaca opskrbe.
- Potaknuti automatizaciju u preradi i recikliranju radi veće učinkovitosti i nižih troškova rada

7. Uključenost zajednice i umrežavanje

- Promicati lokalne suradničke mreže između proizvođača, zadruga, prerađivača i općina.
- Podržati javno-privatna partnerstva za provedbu CE projekata na razini zajednice.
- Uključiti škole i sveučilišta u istraživačke i pilot-projekte radi poticanja inovacija.

8. Praćenje i evaluacija

- Razviti ključne pokazatelje uspješnosti (KPI) za praćenje učinaka CE inicijativa.
- Potaknuti donošenje odluka temeljenih na podacima.
- Dijeliti najbolje prakse među ruralnim regijama radi ubrzane primjene

MOGUĆI PROTOTIPOVI I PRIMJERI PRIMJENE KRUŽNOG GOSPODARSTVA U RURALNOJ HRVATSKOJ

1. Mobilne kompostne jedinice za mala gospodarstva

Koncept: Mobilne jedinice koje se prevoze na farme radi obrade organskog otpada i proizvodnje komposta. Prednosti: Smanjuju troškove i emisije transporta, omogućuju kvalitetan kompost i potiču održivo gospodarenje otpadom.

2. Digitalne platforme za dijeljenje resursa

Koncept: Online platforme koje povezuju proizvođače radi zajedničkog korištenja strojeva, skladišta i prijevoza. Prednosti: Smanjuju troškove ulaganja, potiču suradnju i optimiziraju korištenje resursa.

3. Upcycling poljoprivrednih ostataka u bioproizvode

Koncept: Korištenje ostataka poput kukuruznih listova ili tropa grožđa za proizvodnju biorazgradive ambalaže, tekstila ili biogoriva. Prednosti: Povećava vrijednost otpada, potiče inovacije i smanjuje plastični otpad.

4. Centri za popravak i ponovnu upotrebu u zajednici

Koncept: Prostori gdje stanovnici popravljaju i prenamjenjuju predmete. Prednosti: Promiče kulturu popravka, smanjuje troškove i jača zajednički duh.

PREPORUKE ZA RAZVOJ I PRIMJENU KRUŽNOG GOSPODARSTVA U LOKALNOJ PROIZVODNJI KAO ALATA ZA JAČANJE RURALNIH PODRUČJA HRVATSKE

Postoji nekoliko preporuka koje pružaju sveobuhvatnu mapu puta za uvođenje kružnog gospodarstva u lokalnu proizvodnju u ruralnim regijama Hrvatske. Kombiniranjem lokalnog stvaranja vrijednosti, inovacija, poticajnih politika, infrastrukture, razvoja vještina, digitalnih alata, angažmana zajednice i snažnog praćenja, Hrvatska može transformirati ruralna područja u otporne, održive i konkurentne regije usklađene s europskim zelenim ambicijama.

1. Jačanje lokalnih lanaca vrijednosti

- Potaknuti lokalnu preradu poljoprivrednih proizvoda (mljeko, voće, povrće, vino, maslinovo ulje, med, ljekovito bilje) kako bi dodana vrijednost ostala u ruralnim zajednicama umjesto da se izgubi izvozom sirovina. Ovo pomaže poljoprivrednicima ostvariti veće prihode i potiče regionalno brendiranje.
- Podržati razvoj zadruga i klastera proizvođača koji omogućuju malim proizvođačima udruživanje resursa, dijeljenje infrastrukture (npr. pogoni za pakiranje, skladišta) i jačanje pregovaračke moći na tržišta.
- Potaknuti kratke lance opskrbe i lokalna tržišta (tržnice, programi „od farme do stola“, internetske tržnice lokalnih proizvoda) radi izravnog povezivanja proizvođača i potrošača, smanjenja posrednika, troškova transporta i bacanja hrane.
- Promicati certifikaciju i brendiranje (npr. „Kružni ruralni proizvod Hrvatske“) kako bi se istaknula održiva lokalna proizvodnja i izgradilo povjerenje potrošača.

2. Promicanje inovacija i kružnih poslovnih modela

- Potaknuti upcycling i valorizaciju nusproizvoda: komina grožđa → kozmetika ili stočna hrana; maslinove koštice → bioambalaža; sirutka → proteinski prašci ili napitci. Ovo diversificira izvore prihoda.
- Podržati bioekonomski rješenja poput malih bioplinskih postrojenja, jedinica za kompostiranje i proizvodnje bio-gnojiva, pretvarajući otpad u obnovljivu energiju i hranjive tvari za tlo.
- Potaknuti modele temeljene na uslugama (npr. platforme za dijeljenje ili najam poljoprivredne mehanizacije; zadržne radionice za popravak alata i opreme).
- Poticati industrijsku simbiozu u ruralnim područjima gdje otpad iz jednog proizvodnog procesa postaje resurs za drugi (npr. pivarski trop koristi se kao stočna hrana).
- Promicati ekoturizam i kružnu gastronomiju integriranjem održive proizvodnje hrane u iskustva ruralnog turizma.

3. Politička i institucionalna podrška

- Razviti jasne nacionalne i regionalne strategije kružnog gospodarstva koje izričito obuhvaćaju ruralna područja, uskladene s Europskim zelenim planom, Akcijskim planom za kružno gospodarstvo i strategijom „od polja do stola“.
- Pojednostaviti pristup EU fondovima i potporama (CAP, Horizon Europe, LIFE, Interreg) kroz savjetodavne usluge, edukacije i digitalne „one-stop-shop“ sustave za ruralne MSP-ove.
- Uvesti ciljane finansijske poticaje: porezna smanjenja za kružne prakse, povoljne kredite za zelene inovacije, subvencije za projekte obnovljive energije i gospodarenja otpadom.
- Osigurati uskladenost politika povezivanjem ruralnog razvoja, okolišnih politika i industrijske strategije u jedinstven okvir kružnog gospodarstva.
- Ojačati lokalnu upravu: osnažiti općine i županije da osmišljavaju i provode projekte kružnog gospodarstva prilagođene svojim kontekstima.

4. Razvoj infrastrukture i logistike

- Ulagati u male bioenergetske i kompostne objekte za lokalnu obradu poljoprivrednih ostataka i povrat hranjivih tvari u tlo.
- Poboljšati infrastrukturu za prikupljanje otpada i recikliranje prilagođenu ruralnoj preradi hrane i poljoprivredi (npr. sustavi za plastične malč-folije, materijale za plastenike ili ambalažni otpad).

- Razviti zajedničke logističke sustave za transport i skladištenje, uključujući hladne lance za lako pokvarljive proizvode. Ovo smanjuje gubitke hrane i otvara pristup većim tržišima.
- Uspostaviti ruralne centre za recikliranje i upcycling gdje MSP-ovi mogu pretvarati poljoprivredne nusproizvode u proizvode više vrijednosti.
- Promicati infrastrukturu obnovljive energije (solarni paneli na farmama, male vjetroturbine, postrojenja na biomasu) radi smanjenja troškova energije i emisija ugljika.

5. Jačanje kapaciteta i obrazovanje

- Osigurati programe obuke za poljoprivrednike, MSP-ove i zadruge o prilikama kružnog gospodarstva (npr. valorizacija otpada, uporaba obnovljive energije, ekocertifikacija).
- Uspostaviti platforme za prijenos znanja koje povezuju sveučilišta, istraživačke institucije i lokalne proizvođače radi razmjene najboljih praksi i inovacija.
- Pokrenuti kampanje podizanja svijesti na razini zajednica i škola radi izgradnje kulture kružnosti i isticanja lokalnih uspješnih priča.
- Podržati strukovno obrazovanje u zelenim vještinama poput kompostiranja, održavanja obnovljivih izvora energije, ekodizajna i održive ambalaže.

6. Digitalizacija i pametni alati

- Implementirati digitalne platforme za dijeljenje resursa (mehanizacija, skladištenje, transportne usluge, energija) radi smanjenja troškova i povećanja učinkovitosti.
- Uvesti sustave sljedivosti proizvoda (blockchain, produktne putovnice, QR kodovi) radi izgradnje povjerenja potrošača u lokalne, održive proizvode.
- Koristiti preciznu poljoprivredu i pametne tehnologije (IoT, senzori, dronovi, umjetna inteligencija) za optimizaciju uporabe vode, gnojiva i pesticida, smanjenje otpada i utjecaja na okoliš.
- Promicati e-trgovinu koja pomaže ruralnim proizvođačima dosegnuti šira tržišta, posebno u segmentima održivih i organskih proizvoda.

7. Angažman zajednice i dionika

- Uključiti općine, lokalne zajednice i poljoprivrednike u planiranje projekata kružnog gospodarstva kako bi se osigurali vlasništvo, prihvaćenost i dugoročni uspjeh.
- Podržati javno-privatna partnerstva koja kombiniraju državnu podršku, privatna ulaganja i sudjelovanje zajednice u zajedničkim projektima CE infrastrukture.
- Potaknuti sudjelovanje mladih i žena u CE projektima kroz ciljane potpore, programe poduzetništva i edukacije.
- Promicati inicijative koje vodi zajednica, poput popravljaonica, zadružnih energetskih projekata i lokalnih centara hrane.
- Stvoriti mreže i udruge za kružno gospodarstvo u ruralnim područjima radi razmjene znanja, zagovaranja poticajnih politika i promicanja suradnje.

8. Praćenje i evaluacija

- Definirati ključne pokazatelje uspješnosti (KPI), kao što su smanjenje otpada, stope recikliranja, korištenje obnovljive energije, broj novih radnih mesta, zadržana dodana vrijednost u ruralnim područjima i smanjenje emisija CO₂.
- Uspostaviti regionalne opservatorije kružnog gospodarstva za prikupljanje podataka, praćenje napretka i davanje preporuka za politike temeljene na dokazima.

- Promicati pilot-projekte u odabranim ruralnim zajednicama radi testiranja rješenja CE (npr. bioenergetski centri, kružni klasteri hrane) te nacionalnog širenja uspješnih modela.
- Potaknuti transparentno izvještavanje kako bi zajednice mogle vidjeti konkretnе koristi CE projekata.

WORLD CAFÉ “KRUŽNO GOSPODARSTVO U PROIZVODNOJ INDUSTRIJI”, NOVA GRADIŠKA, HRVATSKA, 27. VELJAČE 2025.

Tijekom World Caféa „Kružno gospodarstvo u proizvodnoj industriji“, sudionici su raspravljali i predstavili izazove, postignuća i buduće perspektive u sljedećim područjima:

1. Osnaživanje ruralnih zajednica: poticanje tranzicije prema kružnom gospodarstvu

Ruralne zajednice jedinstveno su pozicionirane da postanu predvodnici tranzicije prema kružnom gospodarstvu. Osnaživanjem tih zajednica resursima, znanjem i poticajnim politikama, one mogu pretvoriti sadašnje izazove u prilike za inovacije i otpornost. Za Hrvatsku, usvajanje CE-a u ruralnim područjima može ojačati lokalna gospodarstva, očuvati kulturnu baštinu i doprinijeti nacionalnim ciljevima održivosti. Ključ leži u poticanju suradnje, izgradnji infrastrukture i osiguravanju uključivog sudjelovanja. U konačnici, osnaživanje ruralnih zajednica nije samo usvajanje kružnih praksi — ono znači stvaranje živih, otpornih i održivih ruralnih regija koje mogu napredovati u 21. stoljeću.

2. Uključivanje lokalnih zajednica: oblikovanje politika kružnog gospodarstva u okviru EU prioriteta

Tranzicija prema kružnom gospodarstvu unutar EU prioriteta zahtijeva više od ambicioznih strategija; zahtijeva ljude. Uključivanje lokalnih zajednica nije samo dopunska aktivnost, nego preduvjet za učinkovitu, pravednu i održivu provedbu. S oblikovanjem politika kroz sukreiranje, izgradnju kapaciteta i uključivo upravljanje, zajednice mogu postati pokretači inovacija i otpornosti. Za EU, osnaživanje lokalnih aktera osigurava da kružno gospodarstvo nije samo vizija iz Bruxellesa, već stvarnost u ruralnim selima, gradskim četvrtima i regionalnim središtima. U konačnici, uključivanje lokalnih zajednica predstavlja most između visokih prioriteta i praktične transformacije — osiguravajući da je kružno gospodarstvo izgrađeno od strane i za ljude kojima služi.

3. Od lokalnih glasova do politika EU: osnaživanje ruralnih zajednica u tranziciji prema kružnom gospodarstvu

Europska unija (EU) postavila je kružno gospodarstvo (CE) kao temeljni stup svog Zelenog plana i dugoročnih strategija održivosti. Iako EU institucije oblikuju krovne okvire i direktive, uspjeh tranzicije CE-a u konačnici ovisi o tome kako politike odjekuju na lokalnoj razini. Ruralne zajednice, koje se često zanemaruju u visokim političkim raspravama, imaju ključnu ulogu u ovoj transformaciji.

One upravljaju velikim prirodnim resursima, proizvode hranu i čuvaju tradicionalna znanja koja su izuzetno kompatibilna s načelima CE-a. Ovaj esej istražuje kako se ruralni glasovi mogu integrirati u kreiranje EU politika, izazove s kojima se suočavaju i mogućnosti za osnaživanje ruralnih zajednica da postanu aktivni akteri tranzicije prema CE-u. Osnaživanjem ruralnih zajednica, EU može osigurati:

- Učinkovitost resursa: pretvaranje poljoprivrednih ostataka u energiju, kompost ili bioproizvode.
- Stvaranje lokalne vrijednosti: lokalna prerada proizvoda radi zadržavanja prihoda i radnih mјesta.
- Društvenu koheziju: jačanje zajedničkih veza kroz zadruge, lokalna tržišta i zajedničke inicijative.

4. Održive inovacije u proizvodnji: primjer uspješnog kružnog gospodarstva, Industrijski park Nova Gradiška

Industrijska evolucija 21. stoljeća čvrsto je usklađena s održivošću. U njenoj srži nalazi se kružno gospodarstvo — paradigma koja naglašava učinkovitost resursa, smanjenje otpada i regenerativne procese. Značajan primjer toga je razvoj sposobnosti Industrijskog parka Nova Gradiška (IPNG) usmjerenih na kružno gospodarstvo, što obogaćuje proizvodni sektor regije. Kroz naprednu infrastrukturu, istraživačke inovacije i stratešku implementaciju, Nova Gradiška pokazuje kako ruralne industrijske zone mogu postati modeli održive proizvodnje. Ovaj esej istražuje CE inicijative parka, ističući kako one predstavljaju napredak prema otpornom, zelenom industrijskom razvoju u Hrvatskoj.

Unutar CEKOM-a i IPNG-a nekoliko suradničkih istraživačko-razvojnih inicijativa naglašava pomak prema načelima kružnog gospodarstva:

- Lagana optimizirana auto-dijelovi Razvoj ekološki prihvatljivih materijala korištenjem generativnog dizajna — stvaranje visokoučinkovitih, laganih automobilskih komponenti, minimizirajući uporabu materijala i povećavajući učinkovitost.
- 3D printani injekcijski kalupi s poboljšanim hlađenjem Ovi kalupi smanjuju broj prototipnih iteracija, potrošnju energije i količinu otpada — ubrzavajući proizvodne cikluse uz poboljšanje kvalitete.
- Elementi protupožarne zaštite od prirodnih materijala Fokusirani na ventilacijske komponente, projekt uključuje prirodne materijale (npr. kalcijev silikat) i koristi automatizaciju — naglašavajući nisko-impaktne pristupe dizajnu i proizvodnji
- Robotski sustavi za više sektora Automatizacija u automobilskoj, obrambenoj i prehrambenoj industriji ima cilj minimizirati potrošnju resursa i energije u proizvodnji. Prilagođeni robotski alati smanjuju otpad i poboljšavaju dosljednost proizvoda.

Ove inicijative usklađene su s načelima kružnog gospodarstva — optimizirajući uporabu resursa, poboljšavajući učinkovitost i smanjujući otpad u proizvodnim ekosustavima.

PRILOG 1

Pregled događaja „Kružno gospodarstvo u proizvodnoj industriji“ – World Café Nova Gradiška, Hrvatska; 26.–28.02.2025.

Međunarodni projektni događaj „Kružno gospodarstvo u proizvodnoj industriji“ – World Café, organiziran je u Novoj Gradiški, Hrvatskoj, u razdoblju od 26. do 28. veljače 2025.

Prvi dan događaja bio je posvećen sastanku Upravnog odbora, koji je održan 26. veljače. Tijekom sastanka Upravnog odbora partneri su raspravljali o cjelokupnom upravljanju projektom, praćenju rezultata i svim ostalim pitanjima vezanima uz provedbu projekta. Rasprava je bila sadržajna, s mnogo dobrih prijedloga i ideja vezanih uz provedbu projektnih aktivnosti.

Glavni događaj – World Café „Kružno gospodarstvo u proizvodnoj industriji“ održan je u Novoj Gradiški u konferencijskoj dvorani CEKOM NING-a 27. veljače.

Nakon pozdravnih govora gospođe Jelene Pirović iz CEKOM NING d.o.o. – domaćina događaja, gospodina Vinka Grgića – gradonačelnika Grada Nova Gradiška, te Vladana Jeremića – direktora RARIS-a, vodećeg partnera projekta, sudionici su raspravljali o ulozi lokalnih vlasti u kružnom gospodarstvu.

Ciljevi World Cafáa bili su:

- Podizanje svijesti o europskim zelenim politikama, zelenoj tranziciji ruralnog gospodarstva i uvođenju kružnog gospodarstva u ruralna područja.
- Stvaranje transnacionalnog okvira za uključiviji proces oblikovanja politika u zelenoj tranziciji ruralnog gospodarstva i bržem prelasku na kružno gospodarstvo.

Tijekom World Cafáa „Kružno gospodarstvo u proizvodnoj industriji“ sudionici su raspravljali i predstavili izazove, postignuća i buduće perspektive u sljedećim područjima:

1. Europske vrijednosti ruralne održivosti
2. Održiva tranzicija u ruralnim područjima
3. Uloga lokalnih zajednica u oblikovanju politika u proizvodnoj industriji
4. Europski modeli kružnog gospodarstva u proizvodnoj industriji

1. Europske vrijednosti ruralne održivosti

Uvod:

Ruralna održivost predstavlja temeljnu komponentu europskih vrijednosti. Europska unija promiče politike koje uravnotežuju poljoprivrednu produktivnost s ekološkom odgovornošću, potičući održivi razvoj ruralnih područja.

Ovi naporci naglašavaju predanost EU usklađivanju gospodarskog rasta s očuvanjem okoliša, osiguravajući da ruralna područja ostanu vitalna i održiva za buduće generacije.

Izazovi: utjecaji klimatskih promjena, ekonomski pritisci, društveni i demografski izazovi, balansiranje sigurnosti opskrbe hranom i održivosti.

Postignuća: rast ekološke poljoprivrede, pametni ruralni razvoj, održivi agro-prehrambeni sustavi.

Buduće perspektive: jačanje kružnog gospodarstva, veća podrška ruralnim zajednicama, širenje obnovljivih izvora energije.

2. Održiva tranzicija u ruralnim područjima

Uvod:

Tranzicija prema održivosti u ruralnim područjima ključna je za usklađivanje gospodarskog razvoja s ekološkom odgovornošću. Diljem Europe ruralne regije prihvaćaju zelene inovacije, obnovljivu energiju i održivu poljoprivredu kako bi se prilagodile klimatskim promjenama i osigurale dugoročnu otpornost.

Međutim, izazovi poput depopulacije, ekomske održivosti i klimatske prilagodbe i dalje su prisutni.

Uspješna održiva tranzicija zahtijeva suradnju vlada, lokalnih zajednica i poduzeća kako bi se stvorila otporna ruralna gospodarstva koja čuvaju prirodne resurse za buduće generacije.

Izazovi: klimatske promjene i okolišni stres, nedostatak infrastrukture i digitalne povezanosti, depopulacija i starenje stanovništva, balansiranje gospodarskog rasta s očuvanjem okoliša.

Postignuća: širenje obnovljive energije, održivi ruralni turizam, inicijative kružnog gospodarstva – mnoga ruralna područja provode projekte smanjenja otpada, proizvodnje bioplina i održivog gospodarenja šumama, pretvarajući poljoprivredne nusproizvode u energiju i smanjujući ekološki otisak.

Buduće perspektive: snažniji modeli kružnog gospodarstva, jačanje ruralnih zajednica, podrška politika i financiranja.

3. Uloga lokalnih zajednica u oblikovanju politika u proizvodnoj industriji

Uvod:

Lokalne zajednice igraju ključnu ulogu u oblikovanju politika unutar proizvodne industrije. Njihovo sudjelovanje osigurava da se industrijski razvoj uskladi s društvenim, okolišnim i ekonomskim potrebama.

Izazovi: nedostatak svijesti i angažmana, sukob interesa, ograničen pristup resursima i stručnosti, kratkoročni naspram dugoročnih interesa, politički utjecaj i korupcija, društvene i ekomske nejednakosti.

Postignuća: jače ekološke regulative, uravnotežen gospodarski razvoj, poboljšana radna prava i uvjeti rada, povećano partnerstvo između zajednice i industrije.

Buduće perspektive: snažniji naglasak na održivosti i zelenoj proizvodnji, veća uporaba tehnologije za angažman zajednice, strože regulative o etičkoj proizvodnji, unaprijeđena javno-privatna partnerstva.

4. Europski modeli kružnog gospodarstva u proizvodnoj industriji

Uvod:

Kružno gospodarstvo predstavlja transformacijski pristup koji ima za cilj smanjiti otpad, povećati učinkovitost resursa i poticati održivost u proizvodnom sektoru. Europske zemlje predvodnici su u implementaciji modela kružnog gospodarstva, postavljajući globalne standarde održive industrijske prakse.

Za razliku od tradicionalnog linearнog gospodarstva — gdje se resursi izvlače, koriste i odbacuju — kružno gospodarstvo naglašava recikliranje, ponovnu uporabu i remanufakturu radi minimaliziranja utjecaja na okoliš.

Europska unija (EU) uvela je razne politike i okvire za podršku kružnoj proizvodnji, uključujući EU Akcijski plan za kružno gospodarstvo koji promiče održivi dizajn proizvoda, smanjenje otpada i korištenje obnovljivih materijala.

Izazovi: visoki početni troškovi ulaganja, tehnološka ograničenja, potrošačke i kulturne barijere, izazovi u lancu opskrbe i materijalima.

Postignuća: uspjesi u politici i zakonodavstvu – EU Akcijski plan za kružno gospodarstvo, recikliranje materijala i smanjenje otpada, smanjenje uporabe resursa i ugljičnog otiska.

Buduće perspektive: snažnije politike i regulative, stroži EU zakoni o kružnom gospodarstvu, napredak tehnologija u kružnoj proizvodnji, povećano prihvatanje od strane industrije i potrošača.

Kružno gospodarstvo (CE) ima ključnu ulogu u transformaciji proizvodne industrije smanjenjem otpada, ponovnom uporabom materijala i stvaranjem održivih modela proizvodnje.

U ruralnim područjima usvajanje CE načela može pružiti nove gospodarske prilike, povećati učinkovitost resursa i poticati održivost okoliša.

Ovaj projekt usredotočen je na integraciju načela kružnog gospodarstva u ruralna gospodarstva, s posebnim naglaskom na žene u ruralnim područjima, širu ruralnu populaciju i lokalne donositelje odluka.

Tijekom World Caféa „Kružno gospodarstvo u proizvodnoj industriji“, postavljena je izložba plakata partnerskih organizacija s dobrim primjerima kružnog gospodarstva.

Za „World Café“ pripremljene su sljedeće prezentacije:

- Prezentacija: „Uključivanje lokalnih zajednica: oblikovanje politika za kružno gospodarstvo u okviru EU prioriteta“ – prof. dr. sc. Nataša Drvenkar
- Prezentacija: „Od lokalnih glasova do politika EU: osnaživanje ruralnih zajednica u tranziciji prema kružnom gospodarstvu“ – prof. dr. sc. Darko Tipurić
- Primjeri dobre prakse: „Održive inovacije u proizvodnji: uspješna priča kružnog gospodarstva“ – Marko Ivković, Industrijski park Nova Gradiška

Održana je i panel-diskusija: „**Osnaživanje ruralnih zajednica: pokretanje tranzicije prema kružnom gospodarstvu**“ kao dio World Caféa.

World Café „Kružno gospodarstvo u proizvodnoj industriji“ okupio je 49 sudionika iz 5 zemalja (Srbija, Bugarska, Bosna i Hercegovina, Hrvatska i Slovenija), od kojih je 17 bilo žena, a 32 muškarca.

Trećeg dana događaja – 28.02.2025., sudionici su imali priliku posjetiti nekoliko dobrih primjera projekata kružnog gospodarstva u okolici Nove Gradiške – posjet poduzeću Clarum d.o.o., posjet Klimaopremi d.d., te posjet Destileriji i pivovari Bošnjak: craft pivo i žestoka pića.

Prema evaluaciji, ciljevi World Caféa su ostvareni, a sudionici su ga ocijenili vrlo visokim ocjenama.

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