

D2.2 Transformative Innovation Programme

ECIV's Joint Interregional Innovation Strategy for
Circular Transition

A framework for mission-oriented collaboration and
circular innovation across European regions.

Region of Dalarna / North Middle Sweden (Lead)

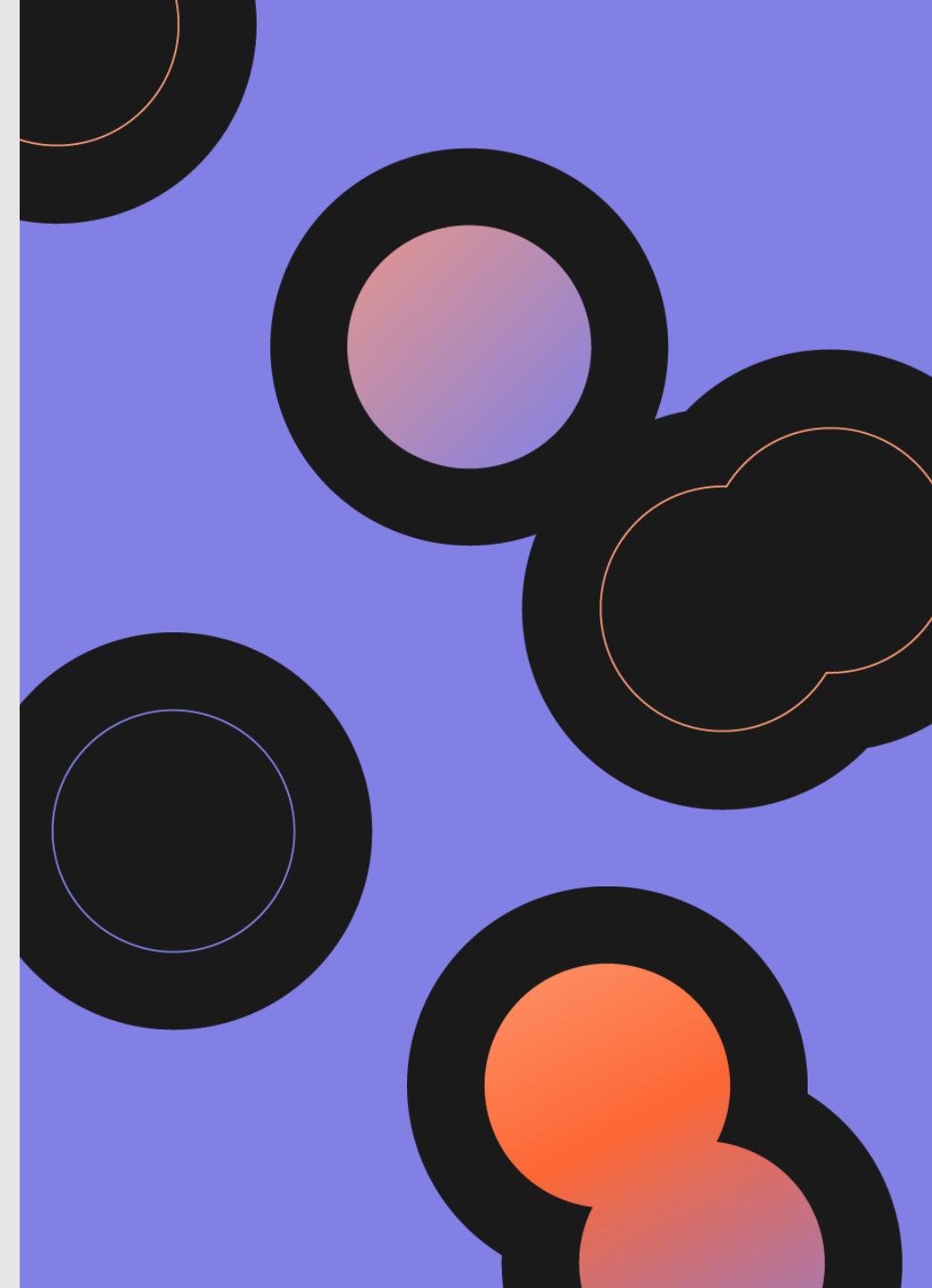
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1	Government of Navarra	GN	C	ES	PB
2	Society for the Development of Navarra	SODENA	B	ES	SME
3	Northern Netherlands Alliance	SNN	B	NL	PB
4	Province of Groningen	GRO	B	NL	PB
5	Province of Friesland (Fryslan)	FRY	B	NL	PB
6	Province of Drenthe	DTH	B	NL	PB
7	University of Groningen	UGRO	B	NL	UNI
8	Friesland Innovation Foundation	IPF	B	NL	NGO
9	Region of Dalarna	DAL	B	SE	PB
10	Region of Värmland	VÄR	B	SE	PB
11	Region of Gävleborg	GÄV	B	SE	PB
12	Region of Normandy	NOR	B	FR	PB
13	Public Service of Wallonia	SPW	B	BE	PB
14	Innovation Agency Lithuania	IAL	B	LT	PB
15	Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Council	HURC	B	FI	PB
16	Scottish Enterprise	SE	B	UK	PB
17	Industrial Biotechnology Innovation Centre – University of Strathclyde	IBioIC	B	UK	UNI
18	Association of Cities and Regions for Sustainable Resource Management	ACR+	B	BE	OTH

*Legend = Role in the Project: C – Coordinator // B – Beneficiary // AP – Associated Partner // Organization Type: RTD – Research and Technological Development // UNI – Higher or secondary education establishment // SME – Small and medium-sized enterprises. // NGO – Non-Governmental Org // PB – Public Body // OTH – Other

WORK PACKAGES AND LEADERS

Work Packages Name	WP Leader
WP 2	Design of Transformative Innovation Programme and Regional Action Plans for circular for interconnected Regional Innovation Valleys

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Description
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
ECIV	European Circular Innovation Valley
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPSI	Observatory of Public Sector Innovation (OECD)
TIP	Transformative Innovation Programme, ECIV's interregional innovation strategy
RAP	Regional Action Plan(s)
KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
MS	Member State
NGO	Non-governmental organization
RIV	Regional Innovation Valleys
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SMEs	Small and Medium-sized enterprises
WP	Work Package
MOI	Missions oriented Innovation
DDC	Danish Design Centre
JRC	Joint Research Centre
CE	Circular economy

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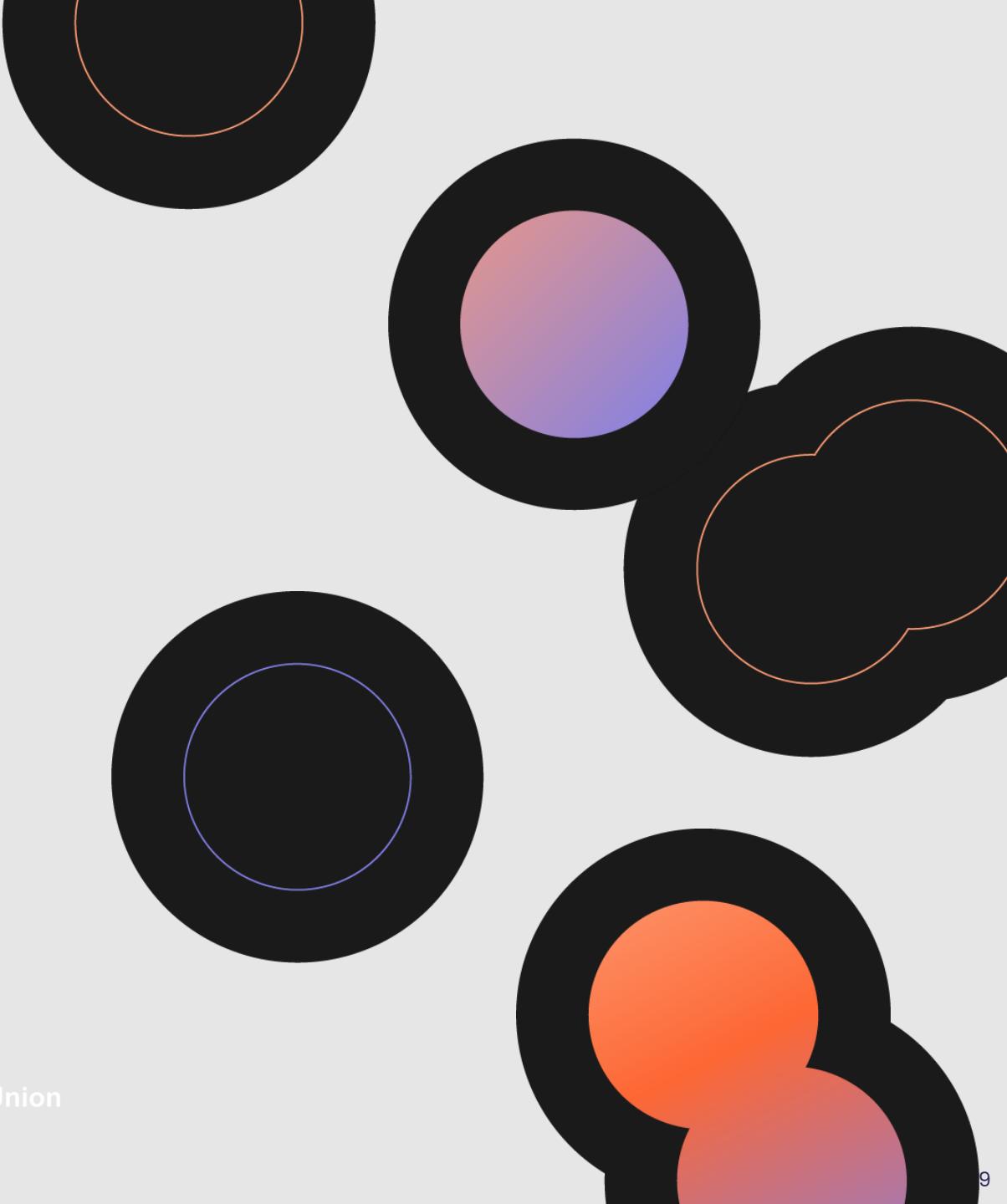
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The European Circular Innovation Valley – ECIV



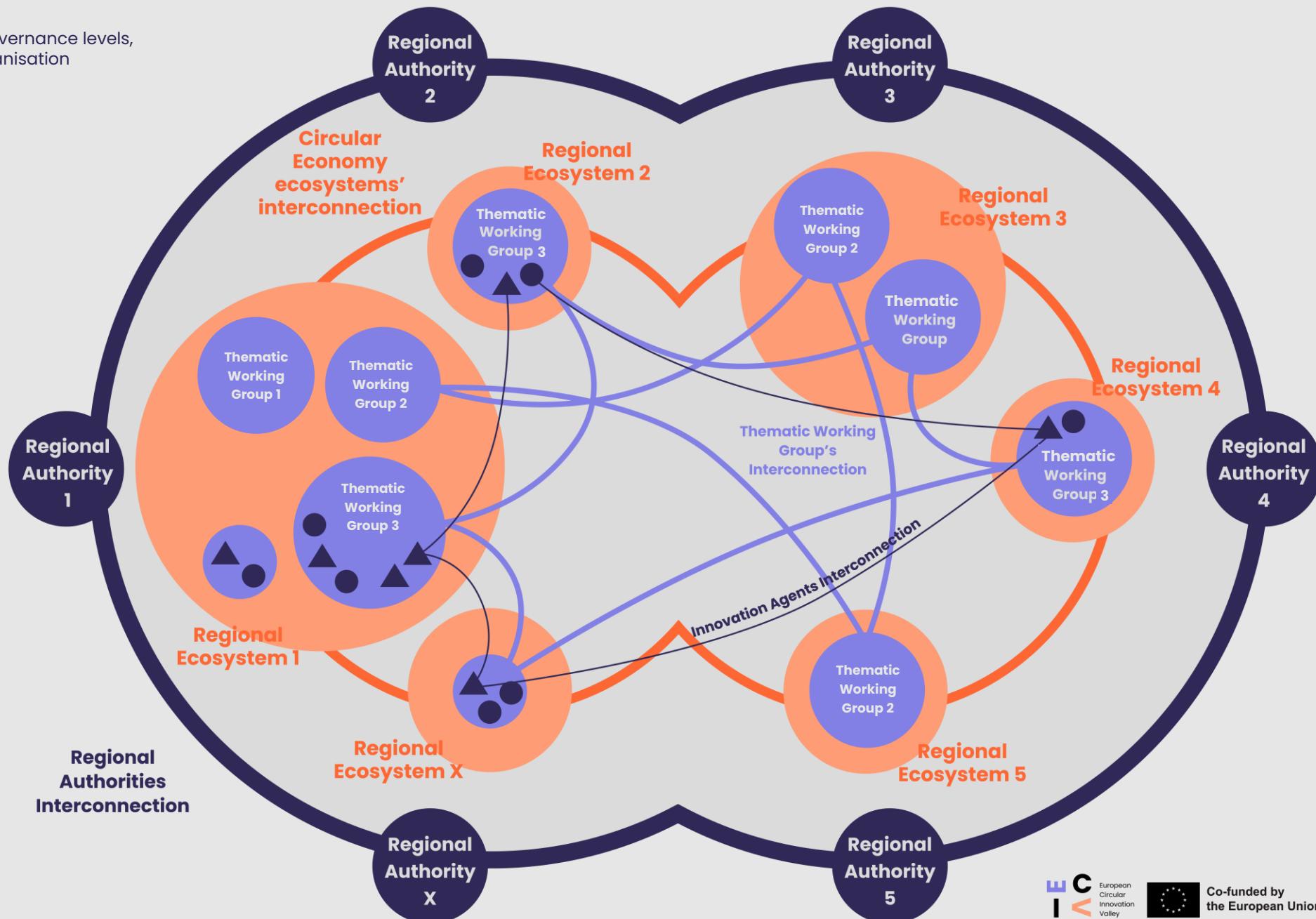
ECIV represents both a five-year project and the vision of a lasting interregional ecosystem.

As a project (2024–2029), ECIV focuses on creating the structures, tools, and partnerships needed to enable long-term collaboration on circular innovation.

As a valley, ECIV aspires to evolve into a self-sustaining ecosystem – a connected space where regions, businesses, and research actors continuously collaborate to design, test, and scale circular solutions across Europe.



Figure 1. ECIV governance levels, Dance floor organisation



ECIV project organisation

The ECIV project is organized in six interlinked Work Packages (WPs) forming the project's operational backbone. Each WP contributes to the shared goal of building a connected, mission-driven network of circular innovation ecosystems across Europe. The WPs are interdependent and collaborative, ensuring that activities reinforce and complement each other throughout the project lifecycle.

- **WP1 – Project Management (Lead: GN)**
Oversees coordination, quality assurance, financial management, and communication with the European Commission. Ensures alignment between partners and supports the effective delivery of all WPs.
- **WP2 – Design of the Transformative Innovation Programme and Regional Action Plans (Lead: DAL/NMS)**
Develops the strategic and methodological framework for interregional and regional collaboration, defining missions, sub-missions, and key intervention areas.
- **WP3 – Creation of the Circular Economy “Dance Floor” (Lead: SNN)**
Connects regional and thematic ecosystems to foster interregional cooperation. The Dance Floors act as learning communities where stakeholders collaborate, exchange insights, and translate strategic missions into concrete challenges and innovation opportunities.
- **WP4 – Competitive Selection and Funding of Interregional Innovation Projects (Lead: NOR)**
Manages open calls for circular innovation projects and funds

the most promising interregional initiatives responding to identified challenges.

- **WP5 – Exploitation, Replication, and Expansion of Results (Lead: ACR+)**
Scales and transfers successful solutions, ensuring the sustainability and broad uptake of ECIV outcomes across Europe.
- **WP6 – Dissemination and Communication (Lead: IAL)**
Leads communication and outreach at regional and European levels, strengthening visibility and stakeholder engagement.

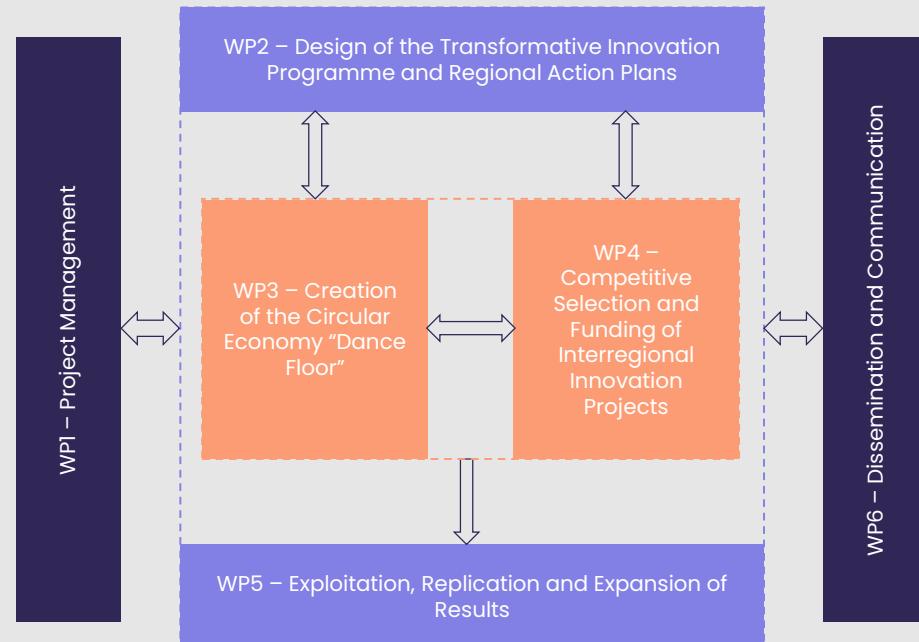
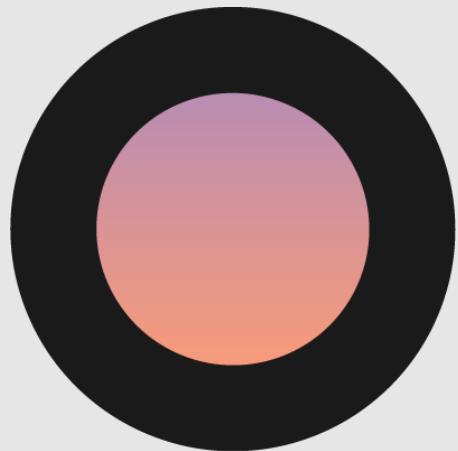


Figure 2. Work packages

Introduction to ECIV's Transformative Innovation Programme (TIP)

Purpose



This TIP outlines how the European Circular Innovation Valley (ECIV) partners will collaborate to accelerate the transition towards a circular economy through mission-oriented innovation (MoI).

It serves as a shared framework for interregional cooperation and regional transformation, guiding the development of joint missions, project portfolios, Dance floors, interregional networks and learning processes that connect short-term progress with long-term systemic change.



Development Method

The TIP was developed through a conscious and inclusive design process, ensuring that the strategy reflects the diversity, perspectives, and ownership of all ECIV partners. A dedicated strategy design team engaged in discussions around the content of the strategy, developing a shared understanding, common language, and collective commitment to ECIV's long-term vision.

The "Building the Valley I & II" workshops, held during consortium meetings in Groningen, focused on anchoring and reflecting on the Mission-oriented Innovation (MoI) method, strengthening the consortium's shared approach to innovation.

In parallel, stakeholder workshops within ECIV's Dance Floor dialogue space engaged regional actors in system mapping for the sub-missions, helping to identify key

challenges, opportunities, and interconnections across regions.

The coming year will focus on advancing and completing key elements of the TIP, including:

- Developing and testing ECIV's portfolio of processes and tools for interregional collaboration,
- Applying, testing and validating these tools during Dance Floor sessions,
- Formulating Theories of Change based on the sub-missions, including modules for capacity building and policy innovation, and
- Building the Valley's organisational model, grounded in the mission-oriented principles set out in this strategy.

The Strategy Design Team

The Strategy Design Team plays a key role in shaping and maintaining ECIV's innovation strategy.

It serves as a safe space for creative and in-depth discussions within and across work packages, helping to align perspectives and strengthen ECIV's collaborative culture.

The team was established to:

- enable joint reflection and dialogue during the strategy design phase,
- build a shared understanding of the Mission-Oriented Innovation (MoI) method and a common working language,
- ensure that the strategy is well-anchored, drawing on the consortium's collective knowledge,
- capture diverse perspectives and harness the energy of cultural differences,
- support and connect innovation activities across work packages, and
- provide a space for creative experimentation and safe exchange of ideas.

Purpose and responsibilities:

- Define and develop the ECIV Interregional Innovation Strategy based on the MoI approach.
- Design and refine ECIV's iterative innovation process.
- Assess and recommend design and system innovation tools (e.g. scenario design, innovation workshop methods, models).
- Support coordination of overlapping activities across Work Packages 2, 3, 4, and 6.

The team brings together up to seven members per session, including WP leaders (1, 2, 3, 4, and 6).

Members combine deep understanding of project logic with expertise in:

- Design processes and innovation management
- Business and industry perspectives
- Governance and policy processes
- Behavioural, social, and cultural perspectives

The Strategy Design Team

Guiding Framework – “Navigating the Mess”

To nurture an open, creative, and reflective working culture, the Strategy Design Team applied a set of guiding principles inspired by **Pernilla Glaser’s “Navigating the Mess”** (Vinnova, *Designing Missions*). These principles act as a practical tool for collaboration and dialogue, encouraging curiosity, empathy, and collective exploration during the strategy design process.

Guiding Principles:

- Get comfortable with the fact that you don’t know what you don’t know.
- Think about the questions you want to ask, not the answers you want to give.
- Be kind to yourself and others. Experiment but don’t judge.
- Invite as many perspectives as you can.
- Speak and act from a personal standpoint. Express what you feel and think, not what “everyone” thinks.
- When confronted with something you don’t understand, react with joyful curiosity.
- Appreciate the detours for their scenery.
- View everything as potential material for your exploration.



Structure of the Transformative Innovation Programme

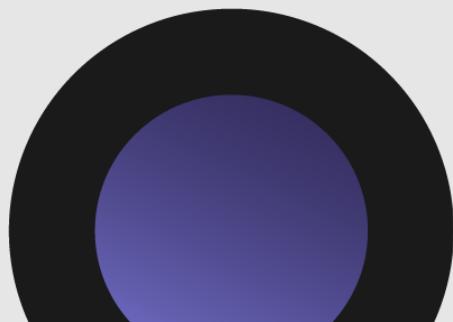
The strategy is structured in two main parts:

Part 1 – Mission-oriented Innovation

Outlines the ECIV's organisational setup, governance model, and mission-oriented innovation method.

Part 2 – Transition to Circular Economy

Explores the theories of change derived from the ECIV missions and sub-missions, describing how interregional and regional actions jointly contribute to circular transformation.



Part 1:
Mission-oriented innovation

ECIV Organisation, Governance and
mission-oriented innovation
method

Introduction to ECIV's Mol approach

The ECIV project applies a **mission-oriented innovation approach** to guide how the Transformative Innovation Programme is developed and implemented.

This approach starts by setting a **clear direction**—a mission—that mobilises people, organisations, and resources around a shared goal. Rather than addressing isolated issues, it looks at the **whole system** of factors and relationships shaping a challenge, and identifies where change can have the greatest impact.

Mission-oriented innovation is **iterative and experimental**: it combines clear goals with continuous learning and adaptation. It helps regions move from vision to action by connecting strategy, experimentation, and policy development.

Within ECIV, this process consists of **four interconnected activities**, which also structure the strategy itself:

- **Directing and Designing** – Setting transformation goals and aligning efforts towards shared objectives that enable collaboration and diverse solutions.
- **Mobilising and Engaging** – Bringing together actors from different sectors to create a shared understanding of challenges and opportunities.
- **Orchestrating and Implementing** – Managing and coordinating a portfolio of initiatives that contribute to achieving the mission.
- **Learning** – Adapting based on results, sharing insights, and expanding successful approaches across regions.

Mission oriented innovation

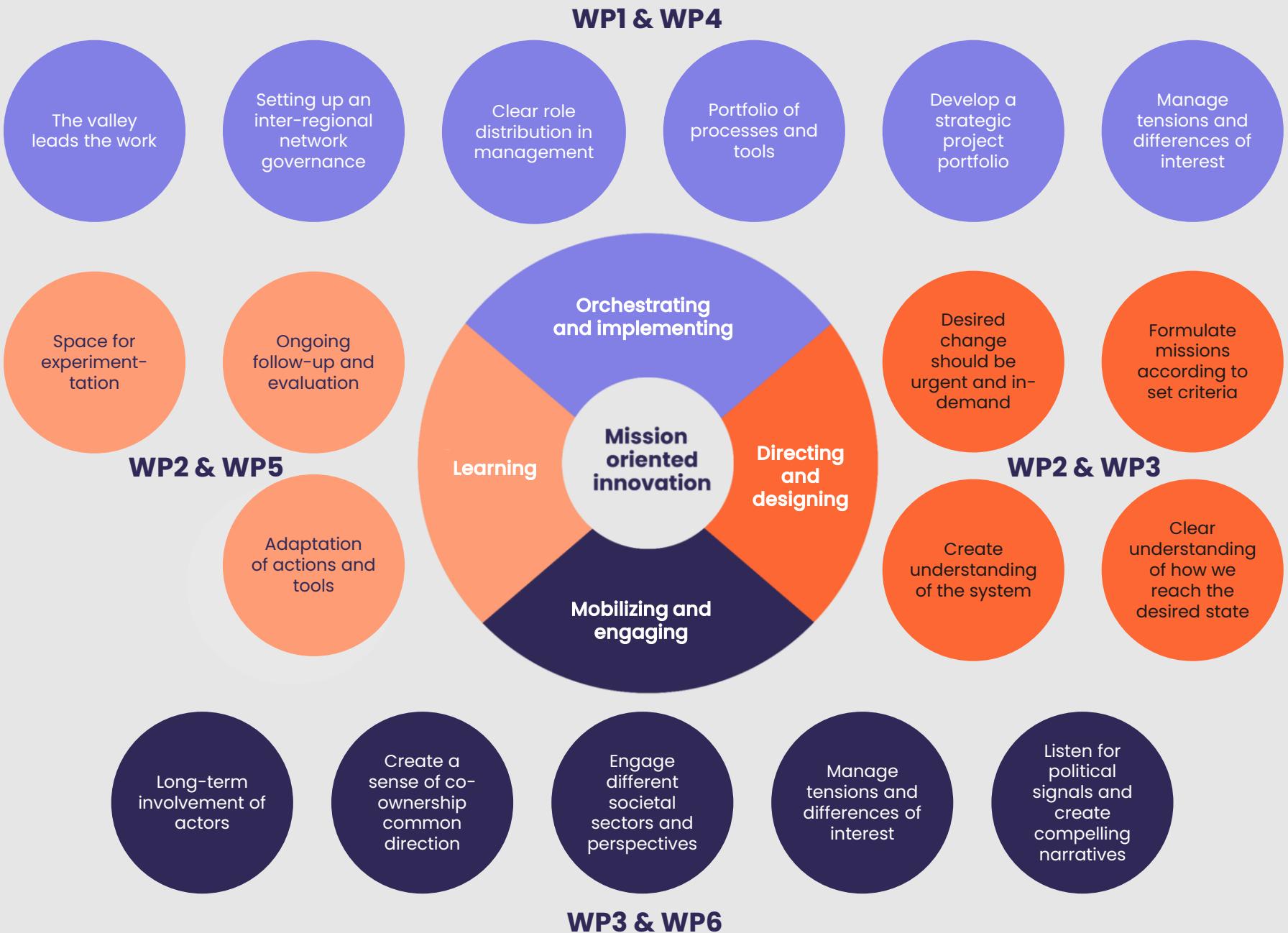


Figure 3. The four fundamental parts of the missions-oriented approach adapted by ECIV.
(Source: <https://www.isi.fraunhofer.de/content/dam/isi/dokumente/>)

Inclusive innovation

WHAT

In ECIV, inclusive innovation means integrating diversity, gender perspectives, norm critique, and relevant expertise into every step of the process. It is not only about who is in the room, but also about how knowledge, power, and assumptions are addressed. Different experiences, identities, and organisational visions shape how we frame problems, develop solutions, and share value. Inclusion is not an add-on—it is at the core of how we define quality, sustainability, and relevance in innovation.

WHY

Inclusive innovation is essential for fair and lasting transitions. If we ignore inequalities or reinforce existing norms, we risk blind spots, weak solutions, or even harmful outcomes. By working inclusively, we build legitimacy, reduce risks, and create solutions that last. This strengthens ownership and the foundation for long-term system change and value creation—by making sure no group of individuals, public authorities, companies, or civil society organisations is excluded from the benefits, or the decision-making, of the transition.

Follow-up and evaluation through ECIV's learning process for ECIV Organisation and Governance:

- On a scale from 1 to 5, how well do you think ECIV has succeeded with integrating inclusive innovation
- Give examples of how you have ensured inclusive innovation within ECIV?
- What barriers or challenges have you faced in ensuring inclusive innovation?

Inclusive innovation

HOW

How do we ensure an inclusive innovation process:

Aim for diversity to ensure competence, experiences, perspectives, and networks regarding:

- Equal gender balance
- Age
- Diversity
- Roles / functions
- Backgrounds

Include specific skills, networks, experiences, and perspectives for the challenge being addressed:

- Project participants
- Competence outside or inside the technical domain
- Social and solidarity economy actors — such as cooperatives, social enterprises, and community-led organisations that combine economic activity with social or environmental objectives

Include internal (hidden) competence within the ECIV project group that contributes to the implementation of the ECIV process:

- Enablers

Include external (hidden) competence and specialists from outside the ECIV project group for effective implementation of the ECIV process:

- Policy makers
- Enablers (e.g. OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation, Danish Design Centre, or citizen-driven initiatives)

Note: *Hidden competence* refers to expertise or experience found in unexpected places — beyond the “usual suspects.” It means identifying

and valuing people, roles, and perspectives that may not typically be associated with innovation processes but can provide fresh insights or bridge important gaps.

Include possible current and future professional roles and actors:

- Policy makers
- Civil society actors
- Innovation cluster managers
- Innovative businesses
- Circular economy experts

Protect and support different innovation models:

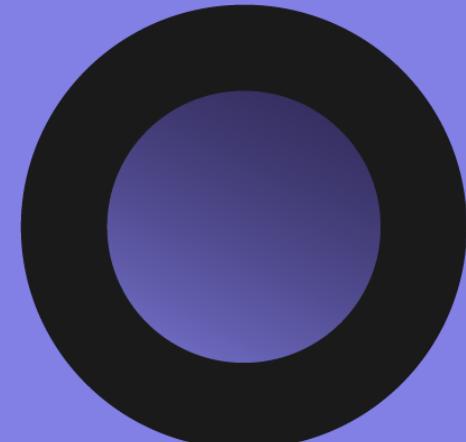
- Recognise and enable social, organisational, and societal innovations that do not rely on patents or traditional business models.
- Provide safeguards so these models can scale without losing their ethical or value-based foundations

Strengthen inclusivity with methods and tools:

- Use systematic methods for mapping, analysis, and engagement to avoid blind spots.
- Apply VUCA awareness (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity) to design resilient processes that adapt to shifting contexts.
- Explore the **responsible use of Artificial Intelligence** to support inclusive data analysis, decision-making, and scenario building — ensuring **human oversight, transparency, fairness, accountability, and the protection of personal and sensitive data**.



Orchestrating and Implementing



For ECIV, orchestrating and implementing is the core of our mission-oriented approach. It means building a strong and well-resourced organisation, guided by a shared strategic portfolio of projects, actions, and tools. Together, these enable us to deliver on Europe's "dance floor" for circular innovation and form the basis for how we work with **Mobilising and Engaging**.

Instead of relying on traditional management models, ECIV adopts a **distributed leadership approach**—the Valley—where all partners and regional ecosystems share responsibility and ownership.

Our role is to **coordinate and execute actions effectively**, while strengthening trust and legitimacy through **transparent decision-making**, strong regional anchoring, and clear communication.

As we shape the Valley's governance and organisational structure, we focus on **innovation management, leadership culture, and collaborative coordination**—recognising that this is not a fixed design, but an evolving and organic process.

In doing so, ECIV becomes more than a leader in mission-oriented innovation. It acts as a **support system for regional partners and their circular innovation ecosystems**, ensuring that innovative ideas are translated into impactful value and action.



Figure 4. Orchestrating and Implementing activities

The Valley leads the work

WHAT

In its formative years, the Valley organisation steps forward as the central actor to lead and coordinate the transition towards a thriving European circular economy. With a clear decision-making mandate on behalf of its partners, the Valley provides direction, authority, and accountability.

The Valley is an organisation that connects regional and thematic ecosystems across Europe. It acts as both a coordination hub and a learning community, enabling partners to collaborate, experiment, and translate shared missions into tangible circular innovation outcomes.

To succeed, the Valley must be recognised as a legitimate and trustworthy organisation—from the inside, by its partners and regional ecosystems, and from the outside, by external stakeholders, EU institutions, and society. Legitimacy is built through transparent processes, an inclusive culture where knowledge is valued at all levels, and decisions that strengthen collective ownership and benefit all partners.

WHY

A credible and respected organisation at the forefront is essential for building trust, stability, and long-term commitment. Systemic change towards circularity requires the involvement of many actors, yet leadership is still necessary to create direction and coherence.

The Valley can take this role not as a top-down authority, but as a democratic and flexible organisation. Guided by the principles of mission-oriented, challenge-driven, and place-based innovation—knowledge creation, experimentation, and iteration—it ensures that the work is both impactful and sustainable.

The Valley leads the work

HOW

The ECIV Valley brings together partners from different countries, each contributing diverse experiences, knowledge, and perspectives. In this early phase, establishing Valley leadership requires moving from working in silos towards genuine collaboration. This means sharing ongoing work openly, inviting partners into each other's processes, and co-developing the ECIV way of working with mission-oriented innovation.

To create a strong and trusted Valley, our approach is guided by the following principles:

Transparency – ensuring decisions, processes, and results are open and accessible to all partners.

Collaboration – sharing ongoing work and inviting one another into processes to break down silos.

Inclusiveness – valuing knowledge and contributions from all levels, across regions and disciplines.

Trust and commitment – building confidence through joint ownership of results and mutual accountability.

Iteration and learning – testing, adjusting, and evolving our practices step by step.

Within ECIV, **WP1** leads this development—by setting an example and supporting other work packages to adopt these principles and foster an inclusive, collaborative mindset.

Processes and tools:

- ECIV principles for inclusive innovation
- Sharing platform
- Conscious design process

Follow-up and evaluation through ECIV's learning process for ECIV Organisation and governance:

- On a scale from 1 to 5, to what extend do you think that the valley takes ownership and leads the work to support the regions and ensure transparency and collaboration?
- Give examples of how you have successfully ensured leadership through the valley.
- What barriers or challenges have you faced in leading from valley level?

Setting up an interregional network governance

WHAT

The ECIV ecosystem is built on collaboration across diverse regions, sectors, and actors.

To function effectively, this ecosystem requires a form of **network governance** that enables partners to connect, coordinate, and learn together over time. Network governance is not about centralised control, but about establishing the capacity and resources –people, processes, and tools—that make distributed leadership and collaboration possible.

This includes everyday but vital functions: facilitation, transparent communication, documentation, and knowledge-sharing, supported by platforms and spaces where actors can exchange and co-create. Though often invisible, these functions ensure that diverse contributions can be aligned, trust can grow, and collective progress can be sustained.

Within this framework, roles and competences are defined – as outlined in the document *Methodology & Structures WP3* – to clarify responsibilities, support coordination, and ensure effective collaboration across regions and themes.

WHY

Without dedicated governance capacity, collaboration risks becoming fragmented, knowledge is lost, and momentum is difficult to maintain. By investing in governance as a shared function, ECIV ensures that the ecosystem is not only coordinated but also a **generator of learning and innovation** across regions. Governance in this sense is more than oversight—it becomes a dynamic structure that holds together diverse efforts, enables adaptation, and supports scaling of what works.

Setting up an interregional network governance

HOW

To succeed with our mission, we dedicate time, competence, and infrastructure for network governance. Our guiding principles are:

Keep administration light but effective – structures should enable collaboration, not bureaucracy.

- **Use clear meeting formats** – create purposeful spaces for dialogue, exchange, and learning.
- **Build facilitation skills** – equip people to connect perspectives across regions and sectors.
- **Share learning openly** – designate responsibility for capturing and sharing insights.
- **Be transparent** – make processes and decisions open to strengthen trust and accountability.

At the heart of this work lies the **Dance-floor method**, which provides the practical way of creating a *networked structure across different levels of the ecosystem*. It is the central mechanism for bringing actors together, fostering cross-regional collaboration, and ensuring that governance remains dynamic, participatory, and connected to real-world challenges.

Within ECIV, **WP3 leads the development of the Dance-floor method**, while **WP1 coordinates the overall governance structure** by organising dialogue, documentation, and cross-package alignment. **Each work package contributes by embedding coordination, transparency, and knowledge-sharing into their own activities.**

Processes and tools:

- [Dance floor method](#)

Follow-up and evaluation through ECIV's learning process for ECIV Organisation and Governance:

- On a scale from 1 to 5, how well do you think that ECIV has succeeded in establishing the capacity and resources needed to make distributed leadership and collaboration possible.
- Give examples of what you have done that has supported a network governance
- What barriers or challenges have you faced in forming a network governance

Clear role distribution in management

WHAT

Shaping Valley leadership is not only about taking responsibility, but about making sure that the right part of the organisation takes the lead in a given area—while staying well coordinated with the rest. Leadership in ECIV is **dynamic**: sometimes one actor leads, another follows, and a third enables the process.

Across the wider ecosystem, this means recognising that different types of responsibility—**strategic, operational, and enabling**—must all be aligned.

Clear role distribution makes this possible by providing transparency, defining decision-making authority, and clarifying how roles connect within the governance model.

WHY

In complex, multi-actor missions, unclear roles quickly lead to inefficiencies, duplication, gaps, or even conflicts.

By contrast, **clarity in management** helps us act with purpose, build trust, and ensure that the right capacities and competences are activated at the right time. Well-defined roles allow actors to focus on their strengths while maintaining strong coordination and accountability. This provides the stability needed for sustained collaboration and consistent progress toward the mission.

Clear role distribution in management

HOW

ECIV's organisational structure is built on collaboration, where different functions complement each other:

Some actors **set strategic direction**,

Others **involve stakeholders** in the process,

Others take care of **implementation**,

And still others handle **communication, learning, and monitoring**.

Not all roles and responsibilities are fixed in advance. It is the role of **WP1** to facilitate dialogue and clarify roles, responsibilities, and mandates when uncertainties arise.

In addition, the **Dance-floor methodology**, led by **WP3**, provides a structure for the extended version of ECIV. It clarifies roles and responsibilities for involvement and knowledge-sharing not only within the Valley, but also across the broader ecosystem of stakeholders.

Processes and tools:

- ECIV project organisation work package structure
- Dance floor organisational structure

Follow-up and evaluation through ECIV's learning process for ECIV Organisation and Governance:

- On a scale from 1 to 5, how well do you think ECIV has succeeded in defining and maintaining clear roles and responsibilities within management?
- Give examples of how role distribution in management has been clear
- What barriers or challenges have you faced in shaping clarity around role distribution in management

Manage tensions and differences of interest

WHAT

Managing tensions means recognising that actors in the ecosystem have different goals, values, mandates, and priorities. Agreeing on the problem does not guarantee agreement on the solution. Differences may show up as varying levels of innovation capacity, different stages of development in circular economy ecosystems, or uneven speeds of progress. Instead of avoiding conflict, we set up structures and practices that help us work through disagreements and keep collaboration purposeful.

WHY

Missions bring together diverse actors, which naturally creates competing interests, power imbalances, and institutional constraints. If these tensions are ignored, collaboration can break down, momentum is lost, and outcomes become unbalanced. Handled well, however, tensions can become a source of inclusive innovation: fast movers can pioneer while slower actors adapt and build resilience. Constructive conflict management is therefore essential for legitimacy, long-term cooperation, and shared progress.

Manage tensions and differences of interest



HOW

We manage tensions by working proactively and constructively:

Detect early – use regular check-ins and feedback loops to surface differences before they escalate.

Create safe spaces – use workshops and learning labs for open exchange and common ground.

Facilitate resolution – address conflicts directly through dialogue, ensuring all perspectives are heard.

Learn and adapt – document lessons so the network becomes better prepared over time.

Share responsibility – work package leaders manage tensions in their activities, while WP1 supports them and facilitates dialogue across the Valley.

Processes and tools:

- Project forums
- Strategy design-team rules for approaching complex challenges. By Pernilla Glaser in "Designing Missions", Mission-oriented innovation in Sweden - A practice guide by Vinnova

Follow-up and evaluation through ECIV's learning process for ECIV Organisation and governance:

- On a scale from 1 to 5, how well do you think ECIV has managed to address and balance different interests, perspectives, and tensions among partners?
- Give example of how tensions and differences of interest has been successfully managed
- What barriers and challenges have you faced in managing tensions and differences of interests?

Portfolio of processes and tools

WHAT

To drive systemic transition towards a circular economy, ECI4 is developing a coherent portfolio of processes and tools. Instead of relying on scattered practices, we work with a structured and interconnected set of methods that guide how we collaborate, innovate, and learn.

The portfolio is not about standardising everything, but about providing shared foundations that allow partners to experiment in ways that are still connected. It ensures that everyone in the Valley can access appropriate, adaptable tools, making collaboration more transparent, efficient, and mutually reinforcing across the ecosystem.

WHY

The circular transition requires diverse perspectives, skills, and knowledge to come together. Without a common portfolio, efforts risk becoming fragmented, duplicated, or misaligned. A well-aligned portfolio:

- Creates **continuity and coherence** across partners,
- Provides **practical tools** that align efforts and support experimentation,
- Helps us **learn systematically** from both top-down direction and bottom-up initiatives,
- Strengthens our **capacity to navigate complexity** and deliver impact.

By working with a shared portfolio, ECI4 makes sure that partners can test, adapt, and innovate locally—while still contributing to a collective European framework for change.

Portfolio of processes and tools

HOW

The portfolio of processes and tools will be co-developed at the Valley level, with all work packages contributing their methods and remaining open to joint development. This ensures that tools stay adaptable to different contexts while supporting a common framework.

WP1, as coordinator, is responsible for maintaining the portfolio, keeping it visible and transparent for all ECIV partners. In developing and updating the portfolio, WP1 will build on and align with the instructions, reporting formats, and guidance provided through WP3, ensuring methodological consistency across the project. In this way, the portfolio becomes a shared resource that strengthens coordination across the network and supports regions in their collaboration with local stakeholders.



Processes and tools:

Instructions, reporting formats and guidances in WP3

Follow-up and evaluation of the process and tool portfolio are integrated into the monitoring of their areas of application. All evaluation processes include assessments of outcomes, ways of working, and the adequacy of the tools used.

Develop a Strategic project portfolio

WHAT

We aim to build a **strategic portfolio of projects**, meaning that the initiatives we fund, lead, or support are not isolated efforts but deliberately connected and aligned with our overarching mission and sub-missions.

A strategic portfolio ensures that projects **complement rather than compete**—filling gaps, avoiding duplication, and reinforcing each other across different phases of the mission. Projects can take many forms, from funded innovation actions and policy platforms to capacity-building initiatives and targeted experiments. Each contributes in a different way: by exploring new approaches, testing solutions, enabling conditions, or scaling proven models.

WHY

A strategic project portfolio directs resources toward initiatives with the **highest potential for impact, creating societal impact and long-term value**. By distributing funding strategically, we can balance projects across phases, scales, and thematic areas—maximising impact while minimising risk.

This approach supports innovation by fostering **experimentation, research, and deployment of solutions**, while strengthening collaboration between government, academia, industry, and civil society. It also provides a framework for **clear goals, systematic evaluation, accountability, and value creation**. By seeing projects as part of a coherent whole, we build a stronger innovation ecosystem and collective capacity for systemic change.

Develop a Strategic project portfolio

HOW

The development of a strategic portfolio is an evolving process, rooted in ECIV's mission-oriented innovation approach:

- **Missions and sub-missions** are formulated top-down but anchored bottom-up.
- **System mapping** identifies core challenges and leverage points — first at Valley level, later refined with stakeholders through the Dance Floor method. It provides a deeper understanding of the system as a whole, highlighting interrelations and interdependencies between materials, industries, markets, recycling flows, and enabling conditions. This creates the foundation for where to direct ECIV's funds and initiatives.

The portfolio is executed through a **strategic funding model** based on open calls that:

- Encourage partnerships and joint initiatives,
- Target focus areas identified through gap analysis,
- Prioritise projects aligned with ECIV's mission, with high potential for impact, value creation, and measurable results.



Processes and tools:

- Open Calls
- Strategic funding model
- B2Match platform
- Theory of change
- Regional action plans
- Dance floor
- ECIV's KPIs

Follow-up and evaluation:

- ECIV project evaluation process, KPIs

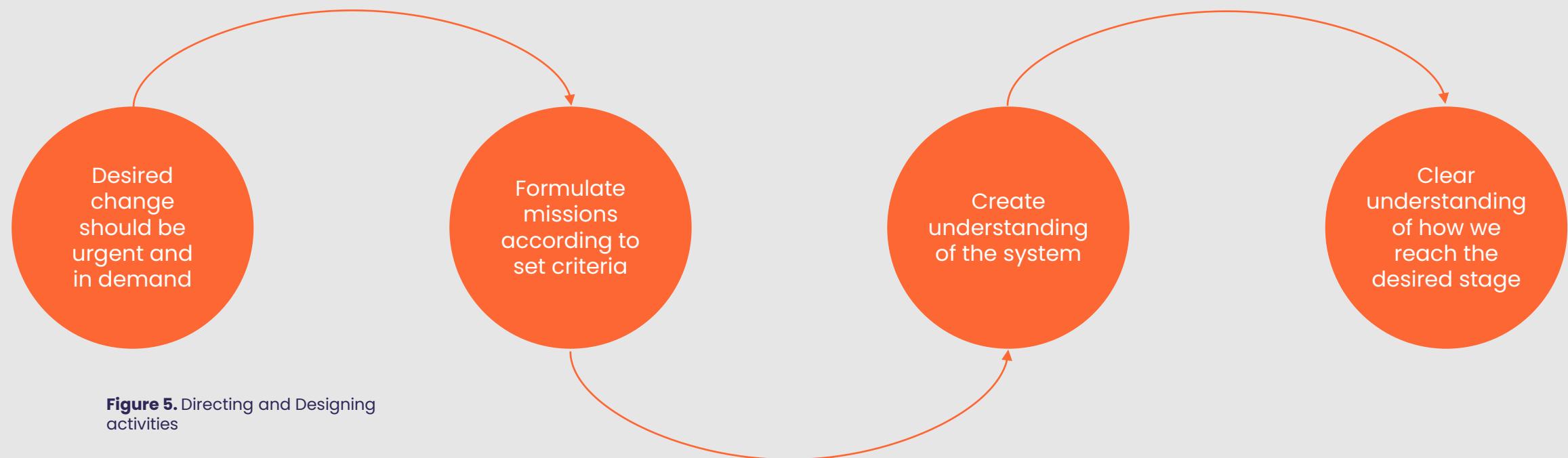
Directing and Designing

Directing and Designing in ECIV is about shaping the collective path toward a shared strategic portfolio of actions and projects. It is the process through which we, together with partners and stakeholders, define what matters most for advancing circular transformation across regions.

In ECIV, this process builds on a deep understanding of regional contexts and conditions for circular economy, developed through joint analyses, stakeholder engagement, and collaborative reflection. It is grounded in the principle that meaningful change must be both urgent and in demand – responding to real needs and opportunities identified within and across regions.

Through participatory design processes, such as workshops and collaborative sense-making sessions, we translate this understanding into **missions and sub-missions** that give direction to our work. These missions are supported by a **Theory of Change**, which describes the pathways through which ECIV's activities and interventions are expected to lead to circular transformation – clarifying the links between actions, outcomes, and system-level impact.

The outcome is not a static plan but a **strategic framework** – one that evolves as we learn, experiment, and refine our understanding of what drives circular transformation.



Directing and designing

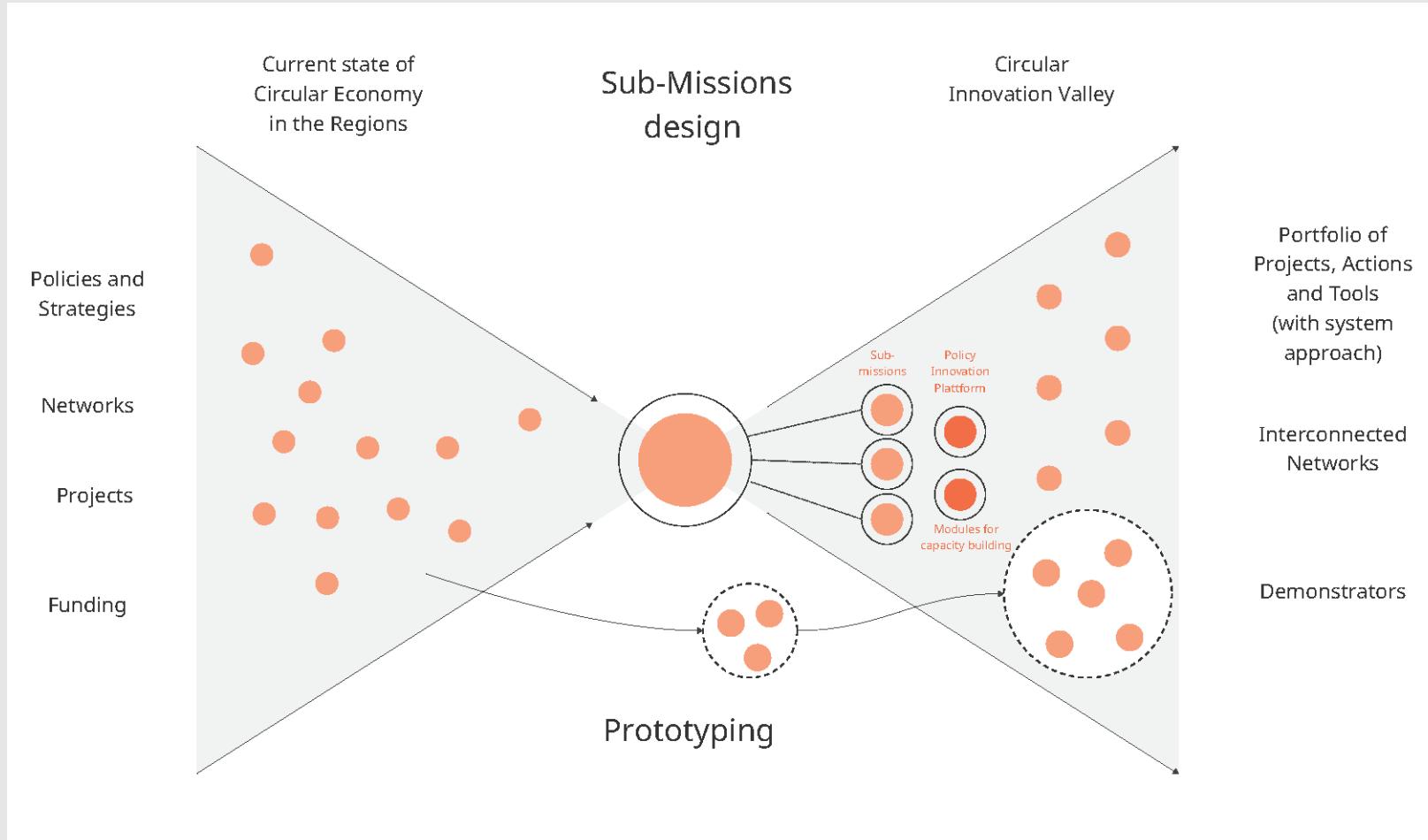


Figure 6. Model describing the ECIV top-down Sub-missions design process. (Source: adaptation of an innovation funnel based on "The Impact Entrepreneur: Building a New Platform for Economic Security in Work" Rowan Conway, Charles Leadbeater & Jennie Winhall, The RSA, 2019)

Directing and designing

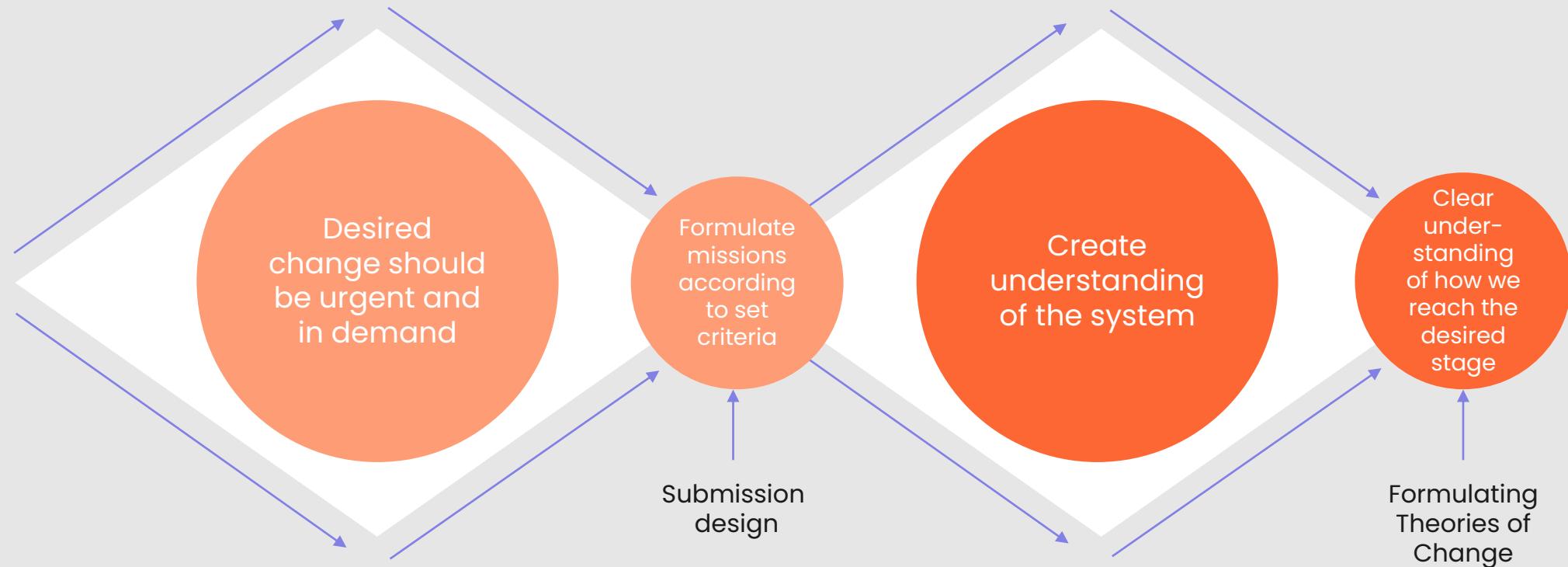


Figure 7. Directing and Designing process based on the “Double Diamond” model, developed by the UK Design Council – a design framework for divergent and convergent thinking in innovation processes.

Desired change should be urgent and in demand

WHAT

In ECIV, mission-oriented innovation means bringing partners and stakeholders together around a shared goal for circular transformation that is both urgent and in demand.

Urgent, because it addresses pressing circular economy challenges identified across our regions and reflects priorities set out in European policy frameworks such as the European Green Deal and the Circular Economy Action Plan.

In demand, because it responds to real needs and opportunities recognised by regional actors through analysis and dialogue.

By combining these two dimensions, ECIV ensures that its missions and sub-missions are not only relevant in policy terms but also supported and valued by those who will make the change happen.

WHY

Focusing on what is urgent and in demand helps ECIV direct its energy and resources where they can have the greatest impact.

Missions that lack urgency risk losing momentum, while those without stakeholder demand may lack ownership or practical traction.

When both are present, change becomes possible at scale — ECIV can mobilise collaboration, investment, and innovation across regions.

This approach ensures that ECIV's work builds on shared motivation and legitimacy, increasing the chances of achieving lasting transformation.

Desired change should be urgent and in demand

HOW

To ensure that ECIV's missions and sub-missions are both urgent and in demand, the process includes:

1. Detailed analysis of conditions for circular economy and industrial symbiosis

- **Self-assessment survey and SWOT analysis** to identify synergies, barriers, and shared patterns across regions.
- **Regional stakeholder workshops** to explore challenges, opportunities, and local capabilities.
- **Results of the analyses and workshops compiled in a joint report**, forming the foundation for ECIV's strategic direction.

2. Diagnosis of gaps and opportunities

- Review of **existing Circularity Gap Reports** at regional, national, and EU levels, including analysis of key European value chains.
- Identification of shared challenges and leverage points for innovation, documented in a consolidated insight report.

3. Continuous learning and adaptation

An iterative process ensures that ECIV's focus remains relevant over time – allowing missions to evolve as new insights, needs, and opportunities emerge.

Within this framework, ECIV is conducting an experimental collaboration with *Professor Ron Boschma* to explore how interregional cooperation can strengthen regional innovation capacity and competitiveness. The experiment aims to demonstrate how collaboration between regions with complementary strengths can enhance both innovation and long-term competitiveness.

Processes and tools:

- Self assessment survey
- Stakeholder workshops
- Existing Gap analysis of strategic European value chains
- European and national GAP analysis, circular economy country profiles by EEA
- [D2.1 Analysis and Diagnosis report](#)

Follow-up and evaluation:

- ECIV evaluation of capacity building modules (*to be developed in alignment with the forthcoming capacity building activities described in Part 2*).
- ECIV evaluation of policy innovation platform (*to be developed in alignment with the policy innovation activities described in Part 2*)
- D3.1 Circular innovation ecosystems engagement whitebook
- D3.2 Circular innovation challenges on industrial value chains paper

Formulate missions according to set criteria

WHAT

It is paramount for ECIV that we formulate relevant, actionable, inspiring, and engaging missions that enable us to mobilise stakeholders and build project portfolios that drive circular transformation in practice.

Missions are developed according to set criteria to ensure legitimacy and coherence across regions and within ECIV. The criteria are that missions should:

- **Be bold and ambitious** (and inspiring)
- **Be timebound and measurable** – with achievable goals (until 2029)
- **Engage actors across sectors** (broad enough to attract collaboration, focused enough to direct resources toward measurable impact)

WHY

A shared and transparent framework clarifies what qualifies as a good mission – and what does not – ensuring that missions are neither too general nor misaligned with systemic challenges.

Clear criteria promote quality and comparability, help distinguish ECIV missions from other initiatives, and ensure they are actionable, inclusive, and capable of mobilising collaboration and learning over time.

In ECIV, this approach supports **inclusive innovation**, allowing diverse regional actors – from policymakers to SMEs and civil society – to co-create missions that reflect shared priorities and values, ensuring both ownership and relevance across the ecosystem.

Formulate missions according to set criteria

HOW

Designing effective missions requires a **conscious and participative design process**.

Within ECIV, this means creating a safe and trusting environment where partners and stakeholders can explore ideas, align perspectives, and shape common goals.

On-site workshops and physical meetings play an essential role in this process. They provide the space and atmosphere needed to build trust, foster creative collaboration, and strengthen the relationships that make co-creation possible. These moments of in-person interaction are crucial for cultivating psychological safety — a key condition for innovation and shared ownership.

This involves dedicated time and resources for **in-person collaboration**, enabling participants to build trust, share insights openly, and engage in creative problem-solving.

“There is always a design phase; the issue is whether it is done consciously or not. An unconscious design phase is likely to be full of assumptions, missed opportunities and limited engagement... We must instead define and engage an active and participative design process for missions.”

(Designing Missions – Mission-oriented innovation in Sweden, Vinnova 2022)

A conscious and inclusive design process ensures that missions are not only well-structured but also **reflective of the diverse voices within ECIV’s ecosystem**, turning shared understanding into coordinated action for circular transformation.

Processes and tools:

- Mission criteria
- Design workshops

Follow-up and evaluation:

- ECIV project evaluation process (see KPIs and expected results)
- ECIV evaluation of capacity building modules (*to be developed in alignment with the forthcoming capacity building activities described in Part 2*).
- ECIV evaluation of policy innovation platform (*to be developed in alignment with the policy innovation activities described in Part 2*)
- ECIV evaluation of prototyping track

The Mission

To drive the creation of a more sustainable and prosperous Europe by transforming traditional EU value chains into **interconnected, innovative, and circular value chains**, ultimately establishing a thriving **circular economy ecosystem by 2050**.

Create understanding of the system

WHAT

In ECIV, creating a shared understanding of the system means developing a collective picture of *how* the system works – not only identifying its parts and key actors, but also understanding their **relationships**, feedback loops, and interdependencies.

This includes exploring how current structures, behaviours, and power relations shape outcomes, what drives existing patterns, where bottlenecks and lock-ins occur, and how different parts of the system reinforce or hinder circularity.

This systemic understanding provides a foundation for identifying where and how change can happen most effectively within and across regions.

WHY

Without a shared understanding of the system, actors risk working from different assumptions, targeting symptoms instead of root causes, or even counteracting each other's efforts.

A common view of the system helps align strategies around where interventions can make the greatest difference – especially in circular transitions, where value chains, norms, and policies are tightly connected.

This understanding also helps reveal what capacities, skills, and enabling conditions are missing and supports the development of grounded assumptions for the next step: understanding how we reach the desired stage.

Create understanding of the system

HOW

To build system understanding in ECIV, we work at the *sub-mission* level, recognising that circular challenges differ between regions, value chains, and institutional settings.

We combine internal analysis with active stakeholder engagement to ensure that our system maps are not only analytical, but also grounded in real contexts and experiences.

Whether developed within ECIV or in collaboration with regional actors, system mapping follows structured and comparable methods, typically including five key steps:

- **Framing the system** – Translating the sub-mission into a clearly defined and bounded system: clarifying what is problematic about today's situation and where system boundaries lie.
- **Exploring the system** – Investigating the system's components, relationships, and influencing factors, and identifying the key stakeholders who shape outcomes.
- **Mapping system dynamics** – Visualising feedback loops, connections, and flows to create a shared picture of how the system behaves.
- **Defining the desired state** – Describing the future system we aim for, and what shifts are needed to move toward it, through narratives and road maps.
- **Analysing leverage points and interventions** – Identifying where small, targeted actions can have large effects and help trigger system transformation.

The process of refining and testing these system maps happens through ECIV's **Dance Floor**, which combines a **Dialogue Space** – for sense-making and shared reflection – and a **Challenge Space** – for identifying concrete opportunities, barriers, and interventions that can drive systemic change.

WP2

WP3

Processes and tools:

- Value chain mapping
- System mapping
- Stakeholder mapping
- AI clients compiling fact-based knowledge
- Dance floor method
- Balland – Boschma experiment

Follow-up and evaluation:

- ECIV project evaluation process (see KPIs and expected results)
- ECIV evaluation of capacity building modules (*to be developed in alignment with the forthcoming capacity building activities described in Part 2*).
- ECIV evaluation of policy innovation platform (*to be developed in alignment with the policy innovation activities described in Part 2*)

Clear understanding of how we reach the desired stage

WHAT

Having a clear understanding of how we reach the desired stage means that we define and regularly revisit our intended direction, the pathways that can lead us there, and the resources needed to make progress. It involves articulating intermediate outcomes, identifying key steps and conditions for change, and clarifying how available capacities, assets, and enablers can be mobilised.

In ECIV, this understanding is captured through **Theories of Change** developed for each sub-mission. These sub-mission Theories of Change are aligned within a shared ECIV framework, ensuring that individual pathways contribute to the overarching mission of advancing circular transformation across European regions.

WHY

The transition to a circular economy is complex, systemic, and long-term by nature. Without a shared understanding of *how* change is expected to happen – and *what resources and capabilities* are required – we risk disorientation, misalignment, and scattered efforts.

Developing Theories of Change for each sub-mission enables ECIV to connect context-specific actions with a shared strategic direction. This creates focus, supports prioritisation, and helps track progress over time.

By formulating and regularly revisiting our assumptions about what capacities, partnerships, and projects are needed, we strengthen our collective learning and our ability to adjust as conditions evolve – moving step by step toward the desired stage and the overall ECIV mission.

Clear understanding of how we reach the desired stage

HOW

We build understanding by moving from system mapping to a shared Theory of Change to decide what belongs in our strategic portfolio. The process follows these steps:

- 1. Translate challenges from system mapping** – Identify the key challenges and leverage points that emerged and use them as the starting point for change.
- 2. Identify resources** – Map what capacities, assets, and enablers are available or need to be mobilised.
- 3. Design activities** – Develop concrete activities that apply resources directly to the challenges. These can be carried out either through project funding or through activities within ECIV.
- 4. Define results** – Specify the outputs and short-term outcomes that each activity should deliver.
- 5. Clarify expected impact** – Show how the results link to broader system effects and movement toward transformation.
- 6. Align with the desired stage** – Ensure that the chain from challenges to impact connects clearly to the desired future.

Theories of Change shape the strategic portfolio. Based on these, regional action plans are developed as local versions, tailored to regional conditions and needs. They also define what the regions themselves can do as organisations within the identified challenges. This makes the pathway to change clear, shows how contributions fit together, and enables alignment across levels.

Processes and tools:

- System mapping
- Desired futures
- Theory of change
- Regional action plans
- Dance floor method

Follow-up and evaluation:

- ECIV project evaluation process (see KPIs and expected results)
- Regional Action plans (KPIs)
- ECIV evaluation of capacity building modules (*to be developed in alignment with the forthcoming capacity building activities described in Part 2*).
- ECIV evaluation of policy innovation platform (*to be developed in alignment with the policy innovation activities described in Part 2*)

Mobilizing and Engaging

Systemic change can only happen if we mobilise and engage a broad spectrum of actors across the quadruple helix: government, academia, business, and civil society. This requires strong stakeholder management that addresses both the internal dynamics among programme partners and the external relationships with regional and ecosystem actors—ensuring alignment and engagement across all levels. Managing tensions and differences of interest is an inherent part of this work and is addressed across several dimensions of the strategy; a detailed description of this process can be found in *Orchestrating and Implementing*. Our activities under *Orchestrating and Implementing* are essential for the success of *Mobilising and Engaging*.

At the core lies the Dance Floor method, a structured process that creates spaces where collaboration and joint knowledge creation can take place. The method unfolds in three phases, each anchored in a dedicated space:

- **Dialogue** – sub-missions are anchored and directions clarified.
- **Challenge** – actors build a shared understanding of obstacles to overcome.
- **Development** – concrete projects are shaped to deliver potential solutions.

Through these spaces, we:

- enable broad participation and bring in diverse perspectives,
- generate knowledge that becomes the basis for innovation and value creation,
- build a sense of co-ownership of the common direction,
- stay attentive to political signals and narratives, and
- secure the long-term involvement of actors.

Mobilising and engaging is therefore not only about inclusion, but about creating the shared knowledge and commitment needed to drive innovation and achieve system-level transformation.

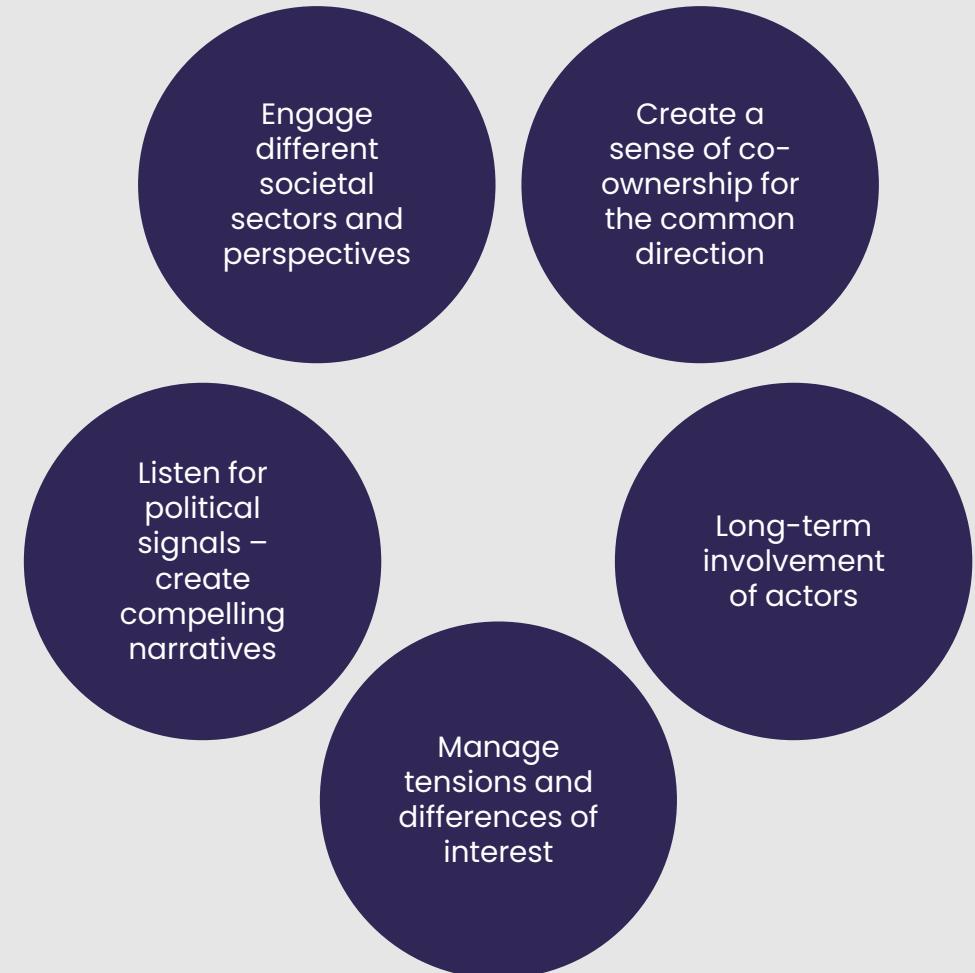


Figure 8. Mobilising and Engaging activities

Engage different societal sectors and perspectives

WHAT

Engaging different societal sectors in ECIV means actively involving actors from the **Quadruple Helix**—government, business, academia, and civil society—across all 13 partner regions and beyond. In ECIV, engagement goes beyond representation; it is about creating meaningful roles where actors help **shape and drive ECIV's mission and sub-missions**. This includes:

- Involving diverse actors in defining priorities and shaping the portfolio of circular economy projects.
- Building collaborations that connect sectors and regions, enabling joint innovation and scaling of solutions.
- Reducing risks by integrating multiple perspectives, including those from smaller actors, social enterprises, and citizens who are often overlooked.
- Maintaining a whole-system view that reflects how circular economy challenges cut across sectors and governance levels.
- Turning interactions into shared knowledge and new competences that strengthen regional ecosystems while contributing to ECIV's collective capacity.

WHY

Circular economy transitions touch all parts of society. If engagement is too narrow, we risk blind spots, weak solutions, and low legitimacy. Broad engagement:

- Reveals the full picture of the system.
- Makes solutions more robust, inclusive, and relevant.
- Builds trust and co-ownership of ECIV's mission.
- Strengthens the knowledge base needed for innovation and lasting change.

Engage different societal sectors and perspectives

HOW

Dance floor method (WP3): Provides the central structure for engaging stakeholders at the right time and level, using system mapping and stakeholder analysis to identify who to involve, when, and for what.

Submission groups: Mobilise regional stakeholders and connect them to interregional groups, with moderators ensuring flow between local actors (companies, universities, knowledge centres, public bodies) and the wider ecosystem.

Structured process: Engagement always has a clear purpose and value, whether anchoring missions, co-building system understanding, or shaping projects.

Tools and guidance (WP3): Instructions, reporting formats, and facilitation tools steer submission groups and make sure all perspectives are systematically captured.

Inclusive principle: New actors can join at any stage, ensuring openness while maintaining structure and coherence.

Processes and tools:

- Dance floor method
- A set of instructions, reporting formats, and guidance documents to steer submission groups.

Follow-up and evaluation:

- D3.1 Circular innovation ecosystems engagement whitebook
- ECIV project evaluation process, (see KPIs and expected results)

Create a sense of co-ownership for common direction

WHAT

Creating a sense of co-ownership for **ECIV's mission and sub-missions** means actively engaging relevant actors in shaping, committing to, and taking responsibility for the direction of the work. It is not just about informing or consulting, but about:

- building **shared knowledge, purpose, and alignment** across regions and stakeholders,
- ensuring that stakeholders have the **mandates, competencies, and knowledge** needed to act—so that they are truly enabled to drive the circular transition,
- creating the conditions for stakeholders to **take initiative and lead parts of ECIV's mission and sub-missions** within their own domains while staying connected to the common direction.

WHY

ECIV's mission and sub-missions cannot be achieved by one actor or sector alone. They require collaboration across organisations, perspectives, and responsibilities. If co-ownership is missing, engagement often stays shallow, actions risk becoming fragmented, and important perspectives may be left out.

When people and organisations feel true ownership, they are more likely to stay engaged, contribute actively, take initiative, and keep working towards the mission even when things get challenging or uncertain.

Create a sense of co-ownership for common direction

HOW

Co-ownership in ECIV is built and maintained through the **Dance-floor method**, which provides a structured process for engagement:

- **Dialogue** – stakeholders anchor ECIV's sub-missions and clarify directions together.
- **Challenge** – actors co-create a shared understanding of the obstacles and system barriers to overcome.
- **Development** – concrete projects and actions are shaped collaboratively to drive solutions.

This method ensures that stakeholders are not just invited to listen, but to **co-create knowledge, align perspectives, and take shared responsibility**.

To strengthen co-ownership further, ECIV will:

- Use **system mapping and stakeholder analysis** to ensure the right actors are engaged at the right time.
- Provide **shared tools** such as the strategic project portfolio and common processes to make work transparent across regions.
- Establish **feedback loops and reflection spaces** so contributions remain visible and relevant, and actors see how their input connects to the larger whole.
- Adapt engagement to **regional conditions**, acknowledging that co-ownership must be flexible and anchored locally to be meaningful.

Through this combination of **method (Dance-floor), tools, and continuous alignment**, ECIV turns diverse perspectives into collective progress and strengthens the sense of working together towards a common mission and sub-missions.



Processes and tools:

- Dance floor method
- Mission and submission development process
- System mapping process
- Co-creation of desired futures
- Co-creation of Theories of change
- D6.1 Communication and dissemination strategy

Follow-up and evaluation:

- D3.1 Circular innovation ecosystems engagement whitebook

Long term involvement of actors

WHAT

Long-term involvement of actors means that stakeholders—both within ECIV and in the wider circular economy ecosystem—stay engaged beyond individual projects or funding cycles. It is about creating continuity in relationships, learning, and collaboration so that contributions are not lost, and ensuring stakeholders have the mandate, resources, and knowledge to keep shaping ECIV's mission and sub-missions over time.

WHY

The transition to a circular economy in Europe is a long-term process that cannot be achieved within a single project or funding cycle. Without sustained involvement of actors, ECIV risks losing the knowledge, trust, and momentum needed to drive systemic change across regions. Long-term engagement ensures that experiences from pilots, project calls, and interregional exchanges continue to shape ECIV's mission and sub-missions.

For internal stakeholders (the ECIV partners and regional organisations), this means continuity and alignment in steering the interregional ecosystem. For external stakeholders (businesses, public authorities, academia, and civil society), it is about recognising the ongoing value of participation — by seeing how their contributions lead to tangible progress in the circular economy both within the Valley organisation and across the regional and thematic ecosystems it connects. In this way, long-term involvement sustains both the legitimacy and impact of ECIV as it evolves and grows.

Long term involvement of actors

HOW

ECIV fosters long-term involvement by creating conditions where actors both **want to stay engaged** and **are enabled to do so**. This involves:

- **Shared ownership:** The Dance Floor methodology ensures that actors see how their inputs connect to ECIV's mission and sub-missions, anchoring their role in shaping the common direction.
- **Clear value:** Engagement is tied to visible outcomes—new projects, access to networks, opportunities for collaboration, and shared resources across regions.
- **Flexible pathways:** Mechanisms such as open calls, pilot projects, and strategic project portfolios allow actors to join, re-engage, or scale their involvement depending on their capacity over time.
- **Supportive conditions:** ECIV works to secure mandates, resources, and knowledge for stakeholders, ensuring that they are not only invited to participate but also able to contribute meaningfully.

Through this combination, ECIV maintains a **living circular economy ecosystem** where actors remain involved not just for the short term, but as part of a growing interregional movement for circular innovation.

Processes and tools:

- Dance floor method
- D6.1 Dissemination and communication strategy

Follow-up and evaluation:

- D3.1 Circular innovation ecosystems engagement whitebook
- ECIV project evaluation process (see KPIs and expected results)

Listen for political signals – create compelling narratives

WHAT

Listening for political signals and crafting compelling narratives in ECIV means staying alert to shifts in EU, national, and regional policies—such as updates in the Circular Economy Action Plan, the proposed Circular Economy Act, or evolving frameworks like Industry 5.0—and linking them to ECIV's mission and sub-missions. In an interregional ecosystem spanning 12 regions and 8 countries, this also means translating diverse political contexts into shared stories that give direction and legitimacy across borders.

WHY

Missions are not developed in isolation. They are shaped by political priorities, regulatory frameworks, and societal debates at EU, national, and regional levels. For ECIV, operating across multiple regions and countries, the challenge is even sharper: what is politically timely in one region may not yet be on the agenda in another. Without attention to these dynamics, ECIV risks fragmentation, weak legitimacy, or missed opportunities. By systematically listening to political signals and building compelling narratives, ECIV can identify common ground, seize windows of opportunity (e.g. regulatory changes, funding programmes), and sustain commitment across diverse political landscapes.

Listen for political signals – create compelling narratives

HOW

Monitor across levels: track not only EU initiatives (Green Deal, Circular Economy Act, Industry 5.0, Smart Specialisation) but also national policies and regional agendas in each participating country and region.

Translate diversity into shared narratives: craft stories that respect local contexts while anchoring them in ECIV's mission—for example, showing how a regional initiative contributes to EU-wide Green Deal goals.

Use the Dance-floor methodology: in Dialogue, Challenge, and Development phases, bring political signals to the table so that sub-missions and projects are grounded in both EU frameworks and local realities.

Coordinate interregionally: WP6 ensures a coherent overarching communication strategy, while regions adapt messages to their own contexts, creating both unity and flexibility.

Prepare for scale: as more regions join ECIV, build processes to continuously integrate new political contexts into the shared mission, avoiding dilution while strengthening reach.

Processes and tools:

- D6.1 Dissemination and communication strategy
- ECIV website
- ECIV social media channels

Follow-up and evaluation:

- ECIV project evaluation process (see KPIs and expected results)

Learning

Driving the transition to a circular economy requires more than implementing projects – it requires *learning how to transform systems together*. For ECIV, learning is not a by-product of action, but a consciously designed process that connects experimentation, reflection, and adaptation across all regions and actors.

In the short term, this allows the project to stay responsive – to test, adjust, and evolve its methods, partnerships, and portfolio based on evidence and insight. In the long term, it builds the collective intelligence and adaptive capacity of the ECIV ecosystem – strengthening its ability to navigate change, align investments, and scale innovation beyond the lifetime of any single project.

Learning in ECIV combines two complementary dimensions:

- **Learning in the transition** – exploring how we organise ourselves, build trust, and engage others through mission-oriented and place-based innovation.
- **Learning about the transition** – understanding the systemic changes required for circularity in regional economies, including new business models, policy instruments, and value chains.

This dual perspective draws on the work of Vinnova, the Danish Design Centre, and the JRC's *ACTIONbook*, which emphasise iterative and place-aware learning, the use of modular and adaptable tools, and the importance of collaboration across levels and sectors. Learning therefore becomes both a compass and a driver of progress – guiding ECIV's journey toward a regenerative, circular Europe while continuously improving how we work together to get there.

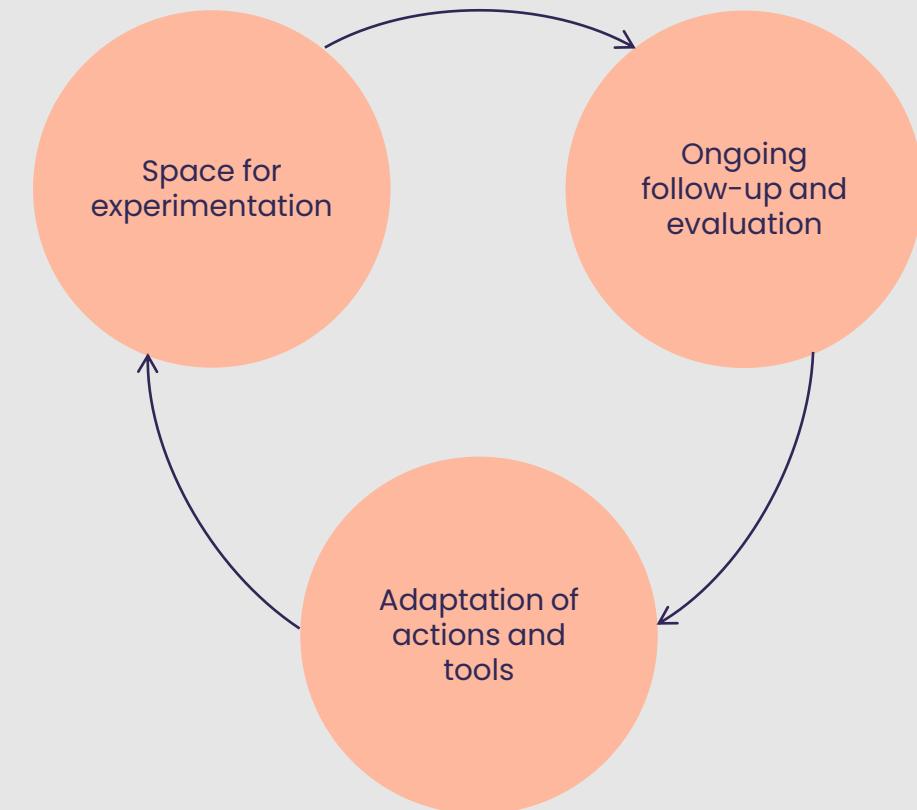


Figure 9. Learning activities

Space for experimentation

WHAT

In ECIV, creating *space for experimentation* is a core way of advancing mission-oriented innovation for circularity.

It means building a culture where testing, learning, and adapting are central to progress—not optional.

Experimentation allows both ECIV as an organisation and its funded projects to explore new circular solutions, governance models, and practices under real conditions.

These spaces generate the insights and evidence needed to guide ECIV's mission and sub-missions, helping us understand what works, for whom, and under which circumstances.

WHY

We work with complex challenges that cut across sectors, regulations, and behaviours—and for the circular transition, there are no ready-made solutions.

That is why experimentation is not a side activity; it is the way we discover what works, what does not, and how to adapt.

By creating space for experimentation, ECIV enables low-risk exploration and shared learning, helping us test circular ideas before full-scale implementation and strengthen systemic coordination across the ecosystem.

Experimentation also builds legitimacy and engagement—it helps actors co-own results and shape the direction of change together.

Through continuous reflection and evaluation, we capture and analyse insights in real time, turning each pilot and policy test into a contribution to collective learning.

In this way, experimentation not only accelerates innovation but also strengthens ECIV's capacity to govern and adapt as a connected interregional ecosystem.

Space for experimentation

HOW

ECIV deliberately reserves *safe-to-fail* experimental space in regions and across regions to try new ideas, observe outcomes, and adapt.

Partners co-design experimental methods; it's not only about technology, but also about testing new forms of collaboration, governance, business models, and behavioural approaches.

To make this concrete, ECIV's **experimentation fund** supports different types of activities:

- **Exploratory activities** – creating a solid foundation for collaboration by identifying shared ambitions, assessing logic and quality, and building trust and confidence between partners.
- **Feasibility activities** – testing how an idea can be developed into a joint initiative, overcoming practical barriers, assessing risks, and ensuring alignment with ECIV's mission and sub-missions.
- **Collaborative experiments** – small, higher-risk projects that put circular solutions or partnerships into practice, generating insights that can evolve into larger innovation actions or contribute directly to ECIV's long-term goal of building stronger interregional collaboration and circular value chains.

Social innovation and behavioural change are an integral part of this process, since the transition to circularity depends as much on how people and systems act as on what they produce.

Insights from all experiments are systematically captured and fed back into ECIV's annual reflection and planning processes, where they inform the evolution of the strategic portfolio, tools, and governance.



Processes and tools:

- Balland – Boschma experiment
- Strategy design team
- Dance floor method
- Experimentation fund
- ECIV project

Follow-up and evaluation through ECIV's learning process for ECIV Organisation and Governance:

- On a scale from 1 to 5, how well do you think ECIV has succeeded in creating an open and supportive space for experimentation and testing new ideas?
- Give examples of how you have ensured space for experimentation
- What barriers and challenges have you faced in providing space for experimentation?
- D3.3 Circular Innovation Valleys boosting programmes review
- D2.11 2XInternational cooperation experiments output report
- D4.2 Evaluation templates
- ECIV project evaluation process (see KPIs and expected results)

Ongoing follow up and evaluation

WHAT

Ongoing follow-up and evaluation in ECIV means continuously tracking progress, capturing insights, and reflecting on results in relation to ECIV's mission and submissions. It is not a separate or final activity, but a built-in process that supports adaptive learning, accountability, and improvement across all levels – from projects to the interregional partnership. Follow-up happens through regular dialogue, check-ins, and systematic reflection, ensuring that both progress toward circular transition and the effectiveness of our collaborative methods are assessed and refined along the way.

WHY

Circular transitions unfold over time and across layers of governance and impact, making it impossible to predict outcomes from the start. Without structured, ongoing evaluation, we risk losing learning, duplicating efforts, or failing to adapt to changing contexts. Continuous follow-up allows us to see what is working, what needs adjustment, and how different actions contribute to systemic change. It builds transparency and trust among partners and stakeholders by showing that ECIV takes reflection and accountability seriously – and that learning is a shared responsibility in driving circular innovation forward.

Adaptation of actions and tools

WHAT

Adaptation of actions and tools in ECIV means continuously evolving how the mission is pursued—adjusting methods, activities, and collaborations as new insights and circumstances emerge. While ECIV’s overall direction remains clear, the pathways towards circular transformation are flexible and responsive. Ongoing evaluation provides the foundation for this adaptation—by capturing lessons, analysing progress, and identifying where change is needed. In this way, adaptation ensures that both the five-year project and the longer-term ecosystem can adjust to shifting contexts, knowledge, and capacities while maintaining coherence across regions and partners.

WHY

The circular transition unfolds in complex and changing environments—technologies, policies, and social dynamics evolve over time. If ECIV’s tools or actions remain static, they risk losing relevance or impact. Linking ongoing evaluation with adaptation allows ECIV to stay responsive and forward-looking: learning from evidence, seizing emerging opportunities, and refining actions based on what works. By embedding this feedback loop into how we steer the mission, we strengthen resilience, maintain momentum, and ensure that ECIV’s strategies remain effective both during the project period and as the ecosystem continues to grow beyond it.

Ongoing follow-up and evaluation and adaptation of processes and tools

HOW

Ongoing follow-up and evaluation and adaptation of processes and tools is done through three separate learning processes that will be described in more detail in the following pages. In short, they focus on:

1

ECIV's learning process for Organisation and Governance

includes follow up and evaluation of aspects in the TIP that are related to how the ECIV project works with internal coordination, knowledge sharing and learnings

2

ECIV's learning process for The transition to circular economy

focuses on those aspects of the TIP that relates to what needs to be done to transform from a linear to a circular economy, including all steps of that process.

3

Follow up and evaluation of the aspects of the TIP that links to Mobilizing and Engaging is done through the yearly **follow up and evaluation of the dance floor method**, through which Mobilizing and engaging is executed.



Processes and tools:

- TIP

Follow-up and evaluation:

- ECIV's three separate learning processes

ECIV's learning process for Organisation and Governance

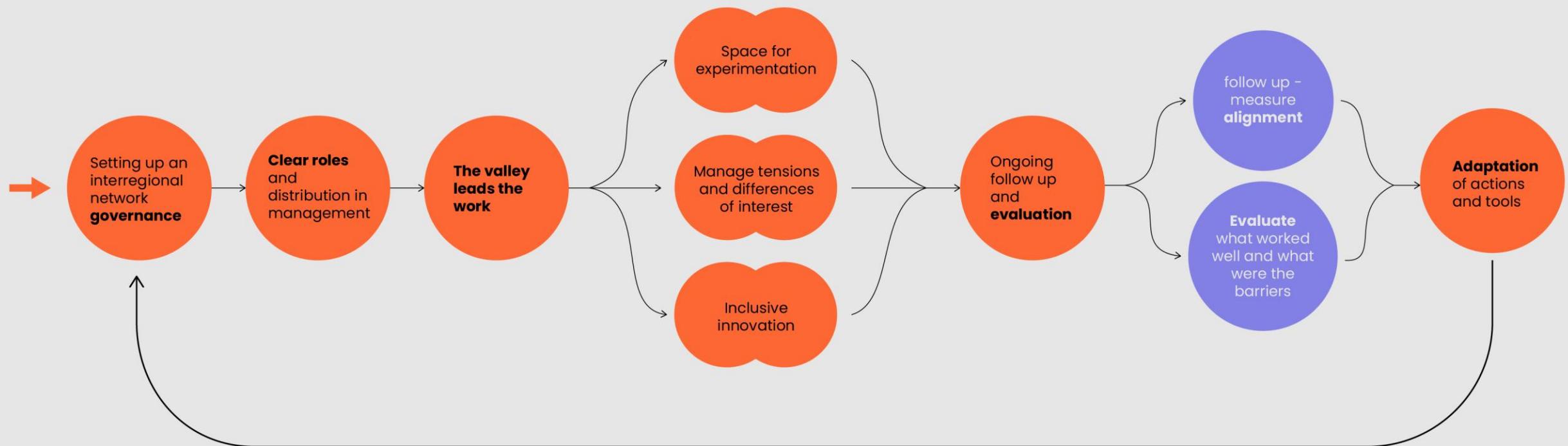


Figure 10. ECIV's learning process for Organisation and Governance

ECIV's learning process for Organisation and Governance

HOW

Ongoing follow-up, evaluation, and adaptation are core to how ECIV develops its organisation, governance, and mission-oriented innovation method—ensuring that learning from practice leads to real improvement over time.

Annual survey – Each year, ECIV gathers feedback from partners and activities to capture lessons, challenges, and opportunities across regions.

Evaluation report – Results are compiled into an *Annual TIP Evaluation Report*, giving a clear overview of progress, patterns, and key insights for ECIV and its circular innovation ecosystem.

Work package responsibility – Insights are shared with the *work package (WP)* responsible for the relevant strategy area. Each WP analyses findings and identifies what should be adjusted or improved.

Adaptation and feedback loop – Based on this analysis, the WP proposes changes and reports them to WP2, ensuring that follow-up directly informs development.

Strategy update – WP2 integrates agreed adaptations into the overall strategy and tools, keeping ECIV responsive to new knowledge and regional realities.

This creates a continuous feedback loop—learning is collected, analysed where it matters most, and reintegrated so that both actions and tools evolve over time.

Processes and tools:

- ECIV's learning process for Organisation and Governance
- Evaluation form

Follow-up and evaluation through ECIV's learning process for ECIV Organisation and Governance:

- On a scale from 1 to 5, how effective has ECIV been in ensuring continuous monitoring, reflection, and learning throughout the process?
- Give examples of how you have collected and reflected upon learnings throughout the process
- What barriers or challenges have you faced in collecting and reflecting on learnings
- On a scale from 1 to 5, how well do you think ECIV has adapted its processes and tools in response to learning and changing needs?
- Give examples of how you have ensured that learnings lead to adaptation of actions and tools
- What barriers or challenges have you faced in adopting processes and tools based on learnings?
- D3.3 Circular Innovation Valleys boosting programmes review
- D2.11 2XInternational cooperation experiments output report
- D4.2 Evaluation templates

Follow up and evaluation of ECIV Organisation and Governance

Guiding principle	Inclusive innovation	Scale	On a scale from 1 to 5, how well do you think ECIV has succeeded with integrating inclusive innovation
		Qualitative	Give examples of how you have ensured inclusive innovation within ECIV?
		Qualitative	What barriers or challenges have you faced in ensuring inclusive innovation?
Orchestrating and implementing	Setting up an interregional network governance	Scale	On a scale from 1 to 5, how well do you think that ECIV has succeeded in establishing the capacity and resources needed to make distributed leadership and collaboration possible.
		Qualitative	Give examples of what you have done that has supported a network governance
		Qualitative	What barriers or challenges have you faced in forming a network governance
	Clear role distribution in management	Scale	On a scale from 1 to 5, how well do you think ECIV has succeeded in defining and maintaining clear roles and responsibilities within management?
		Qualitative	Give examples of how role distribution in management has been clear
		Qualitative	What barriers or challenges have you faced in shaping clarity around role distribution in management
	The valley leads the work	Scale	On a scale from 1 to 5, to what extend do you think that the valley takes ownership and leads the work to support the regions and ensure transparency and collaboration?
		Qualitative	Give examples of how you have successfully ensured leadership through the valley.
		Qualitative	What barriers or challenges have you faced in leading from valley level?
	Manage tensions and differences of interest	Scale	On a scale from 1 to 5, how well do you think ECIV has managed to address and balance different interests, perspectives, and tensions among partners?
		Qualitative	Give example of how tensions and differences of interest has been successfully managed
		Qualitative	What barriers and challenges have you faced in managing tensions and differences of interests?

Follow up and evaluation of ECIV Organisation and Governance

Learning	Space for experimentation	Scale	On a scale from 1 to 5, how well do you think ECIV has succeeded in creating an open and supportive space for experimentation and testing new ideas?
		Qualitative	Give examples of how you have ensured space for experimentation
		Qualitative	What barriers and challenges have you faced in providing space for experimentation?
	Ongoing follow-up and evaluation	Scale	On a scale from 1 to 5, how effective has ECIV been in ensuring continuous monitoring, reflection, and learning throughout the process?
		Qualitative	Give examples of how you have collected and reflected upon learnings throughout the process
		Qualitative	What barriers or challenges have you faced in collecting and reflecting on learnings
	Adaptation of processes and tools	Scale	On a scale from 1 to 5, how well do you think ECIV has adapted its processes and tools in response to learning and changing needs?
		Qualitative	Give examples of how you have ensured that learnings lead to adaptation of actions and tools
		Qualitative	What barriers or challenges have you faced in adopting processes and tools based on learnings?

ECIV's learning process for The transition to circular economy

HOW

Follow-up, evaluation, and adaptation are carried out across ECIV's portfolio of actions, tools, and projects – including capacity building, policy innovation, the Dance Floor method, experimentation, and cascade-funded projects. The aim is to keep activities connected, mutually reinforcing, and aligned with ECIV's sub-missions.

Each element is monitored through its own evaluation and KPI framework:

Work Package 4 (Experimentation and Prototyping) tracks results of funded projects and experiments, assessing innovation quality, collaboration, and contributions to circular value chains.

Work Package 3 (Capacity Building and the Dance Floor) evaluates engagement, co-creation, and regional uptake, focusing on how the Dance Floor method builds agency, learning, and systemic collaboration.

Work Package 2 (Policy Innovation and Sub-mission Development) monitors policy learning, alignment between regional and interregional initiatives, and integration of circular economy principles.

Findings are compiled at programme level to identify shared insights and new opportunities. WP leaders meet regularly to review progress and suggest improvements across actions and tools.

This creates a **dynamic learning loop**, where insights from one area (e.g. experimentation) shape others (e.g. capacity building or policy innovation). In this way, ECIV's portfolio keeps evolving through shared evidence and experience—strengthening both the circular transition and the interregional ecosystem that drives it.



Processes and tools:

- ECIV learning process for transition to circular economy.

Follow-up and evaluation:

- D3.3 Circular Innovation Valleys boosting programmes review
- D2.11 2XInternational cooperation experiments output report
- D4.2 Evaluation templates
- Based on learnings from above deliverables the Directing and Designing process will be revisited yearly to make sure submissions are relevant, system maps are up to date and the theory of change represents current understanding of how to reach submissions.

ECIV's learning process for The transition to circular economy

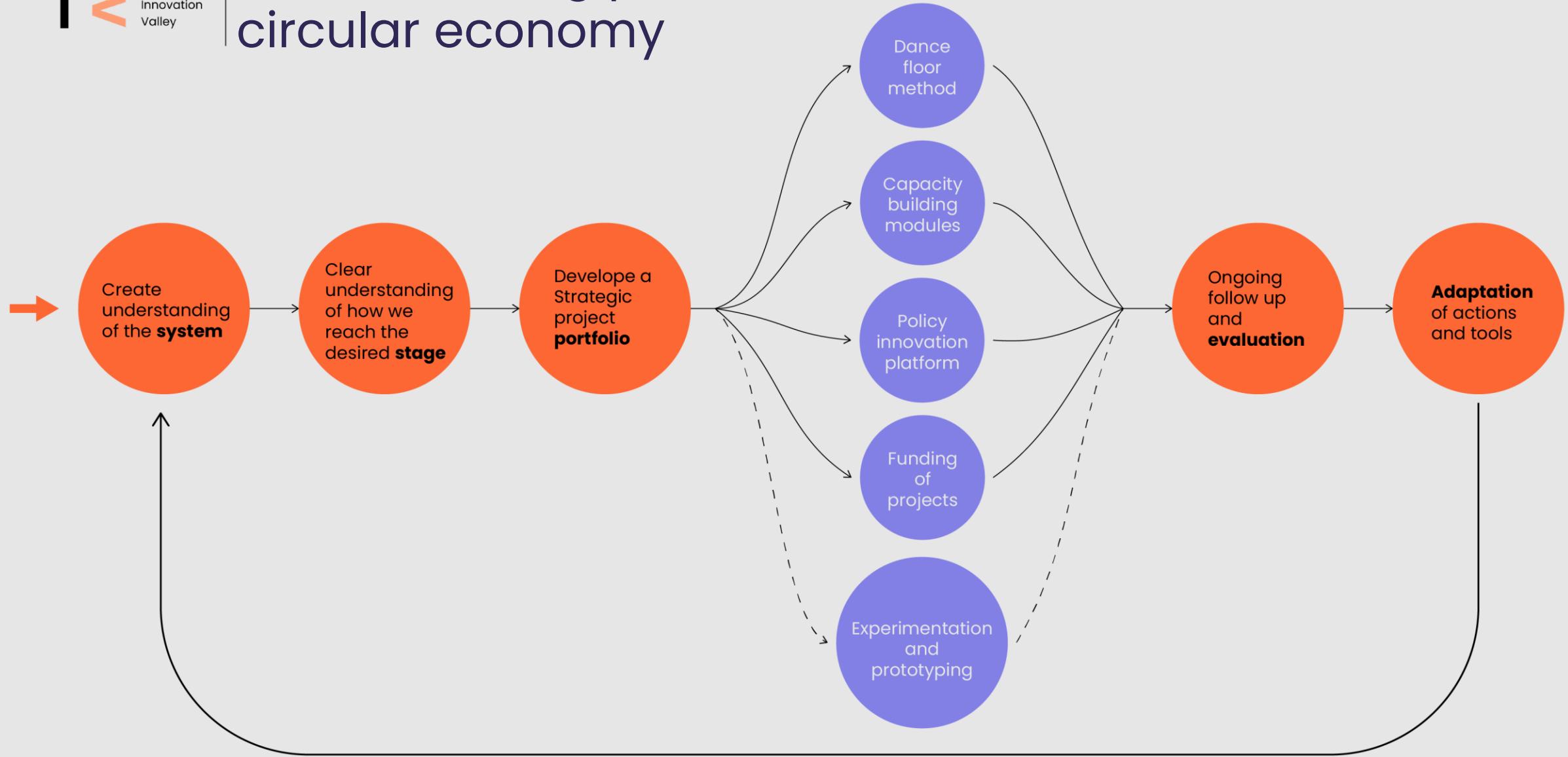


Figure 11. ECIV's learning process for The transition to circular economy

ECIV's learning process for The transition to circular economy

For Regional Level

HOW

At the regional level, follow-up, evaluation, and adaptation ensure that actions stay relevant and aligned with ECIV's sub-missions. The process is anchored in **regional action plans**, which evolve as new insights and experiences emerge.

Each region monitors progress through **defined KPIs** linked to its regional projects and ECIV submissions. Regular reflection and dialogue help identify what works, what needs adjustment, and where new opportunities appear. Evaluation results are shared across the partnership to enable mutual learning and coordination.

Adaptation happens as regions revise their action plans, update priorities, and adjust activities based on monitoring results and interregional feedback—ensuring that regional progress contributes directly to ECIV's overall development and the circular transition across Europe.

Processes and tools:

- Regional action plans

Follow-up and evaluation:

- Regional action plans (KPIs)

Part 2: **Transition to circular economy**

Theories of Change based on ECIIV
missions and Sub-missions

Introduction to Theories of Change

In this part of the strategy, we focus on how ECIV works with and implements the transition to a circular economy in practice. Guided by ECIV's mission – *to drive the creation of a more sustainable and prosperous Europe by transforming traditional EU value chains into interconnected, innovative, and circular value chains, ultimately establishing a thriving circular economy ecosystem by 2050* – this phase translates the strategic direction defined in Part 1: Directing and Designing into collective action.

In the Designing and Directing phase, ECIV partners carry out system mapping to analyse the structures, interdependencies, and dynamics within and across regional circular innovation systems. This process helps identify key challenges, leverage points, and opportunities for transformation, revealing where interventions can generate the highest systemic impact. These analytical insights form the foundation for the next step – the development of Theories of Change (ToCs) for each of ECIV's sub-missions.

Within ECIV, *leverage points* represent the strategic areas where targeted actions can produce broader system change. They act as the connective tissue between analysis and implementation.

Leverage points may relate to technological innovation, policy frameworks, market mechanisms, behavioural and cultural shifts, or data and information flows – each representing a different pathway through which circular transformation unfolds. By identifying and acting upon these leverage points, ECIV ensures that its strategic portfolio is systemically coherent and targeted.

Some parts of the strategic portfolio are carried out directly by ECIV, for example through Policy Innovation Platforms and Modules for Capacity Building.

Other parts are implemented by external actors and supported through project funding. Together, these efforts ensure that ECIV both shapes the conditions for change and enables actors across the system to act on circularity.

Together, the ToCs form the foundation for implementing ECIV's mission – transforming value chains, strengthening industrial competitiveness, and generating measurable progress towards Europe's circular transition.

ECIV Sub-missions – First Wave

The first wave of ECIV sub-missions marks the practical starting point for implementing the TIP.

Developed collaboratively during the first consortium meeting in **March 2025**, they were selected from an initial set of fourteen ideas. The sub-missions outline ECIV's **initial directions of change**. Their detailed design and measurable outcomes will be co-created with partners and stakeholders through the Dance floor process creating **Theories of Change**.

Designing Out Waste

We enable circular design principles to become a standard in regional policy and innovation practice, ensuring that waste is prevented by design and that value is retained throughout product and material lifecycles.

Circular Agrofood Systems

We accelerate the transition toward regenerative and circular agrofood systems that minimise losses, close nutrient loops, and strengthen regional food resilience and value creation.

Circular Metals

We promote the reuse and recirculation of critical and strategic metals through new industrial symbioses and circular business models that enhance Europe's resource security and competitiveness.

Circular Packaging

We transform packaging systems in food production and

consumption toward full circularity, advancing innovation in design, reuse, recycling, and materials management.

Circular Biobased Construction Materials

We advance the use of bio-based and recycled materials in the construction sector, demonstrating how circular principles can build more sustainable and regenerative built environments.

Valorisation of By-products

We support new value chains that turn industrial and agricultural by-products into resources, strengthening cross-sector collaboration and reducing waste generation.

Circular Fibres and Textiles

We foster circular and regional textile ecosystems by reconnecting fibre production, design, and recycling, promoting sustainable materials and value retention in the textile industry.

Among these, the **sub-missions on Circular Packaging, Circular Construction Materials, and Circular Fibres and Textiles** are advancing the fastest. Packaging in particular shows strong interregional engagement and alignment with industry and policy agendas, making it an early frontrunner for experimentation and collaborative project development.

Together, the first-wave sub-missions provide a **shared framework for ECIV's transformation efforts**, guiding the co-creation of Theories of Change, experiments, and policy innovations that bring the circular economy into practice across Europe.

The ECIV Theory of Change Model

Each Theory of Change will be developed using a shared ECIV model that guides partners and stakeholders through the key steps of the transformation pathway:

This model ensures that regional and interregional ToCs are comparable and aligned, while still allowing for local adaptation.

Component	Guiding Question	Purpose
Challenges	What needs to change? What societal needs must we respond to?	Identify key barriers, system dynamics, and leverage points within each sub-mission.
Resources	What do we have, and what is missing?	Map available capacities (skills, funding, infrastructure) and identify gaps that must be addressed.
Activities	What do we need to do to enable the change?	Define enabling actions, pilot initiatives, and policy or capacity measures needed to create system conditions for circularity.
Results	What measurable results do we expect from our actions?	Specify short-term outcomes that can demonstrate progress and learning.
Expected Change / Impact	What long-term effects and transformations do we aim for?	Articulate the desired system-level outcomes at regional, interregional, and European levels.

Impact targets /missions map – Theory of Change

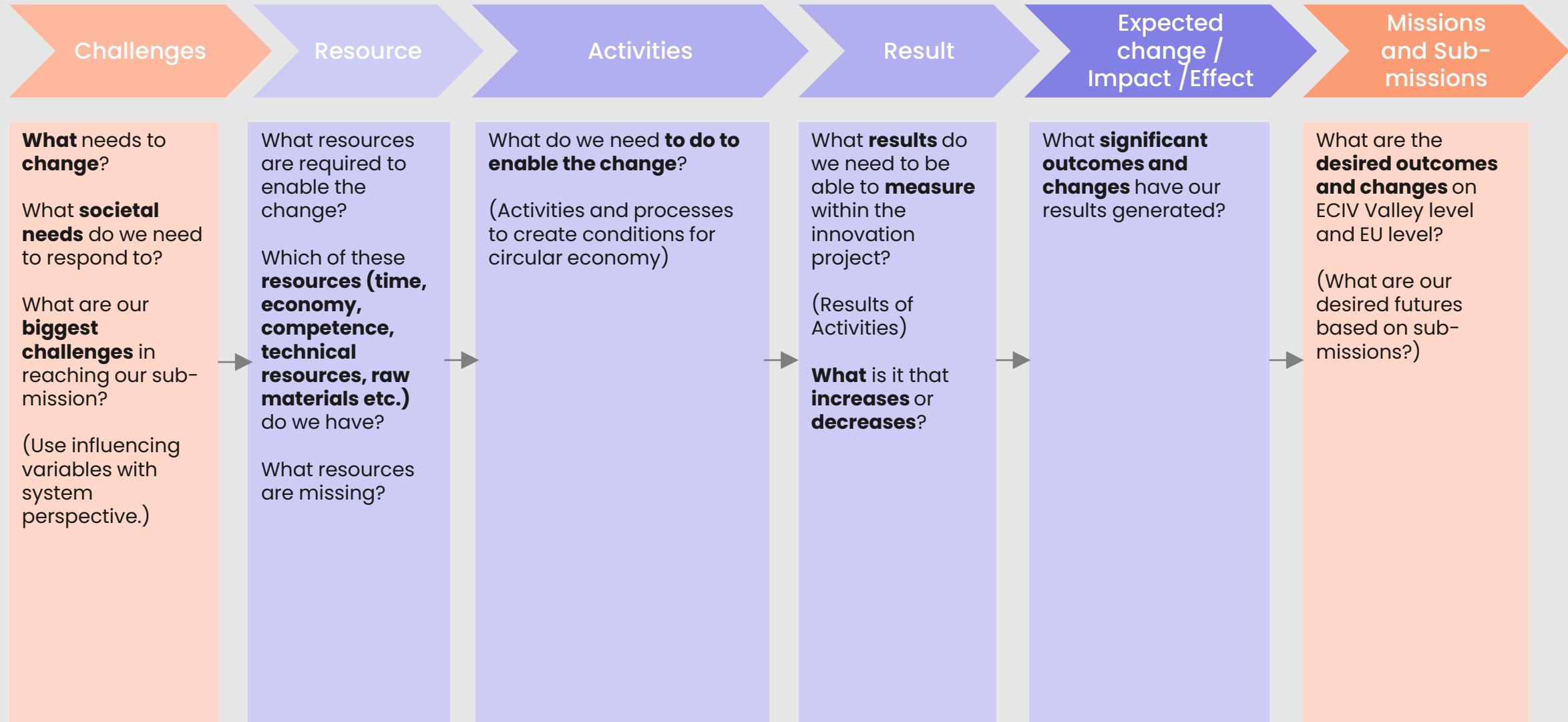


Figure 12. Illustration of an example of an impact target map / Theory of Change

Current status for the theories of change

At the time of completing this first version of the TIP, the processes of system mapping and developing theories of change are still underway. Consequently, this version does not yet include any fully developed theories of change. Instead, it provides initial insights into the system mapping work that forms part of the broader process leading towards them.

Through a series of internal workshops within ECIV, system mapping has been initiated for three of ECIV's sub-missions. The work builds on the assumption that five key system dimensions influence the capacity to transition towards a circular economy and achieve each sub-mission. These dimensions are:

- Technology and systems
- Culture and norms
- Policy and regulation
- Business models and incentives
- Infrastructure

During the workshops, a range of influencing factors have been identified within each of these dimensions. Going forward, the system mapping activities will:

- Support the identification of relevant stakeholders for engagement
- Be further developed and refined through workshops with external stakeholders
- Be translated into visual system maps that illustrate how different factors interact
- Help identify leverage points that will form the foundation for ECIV's theories of change

In the following pages, examples of system exploration maps linked to three sub-missions are presented.

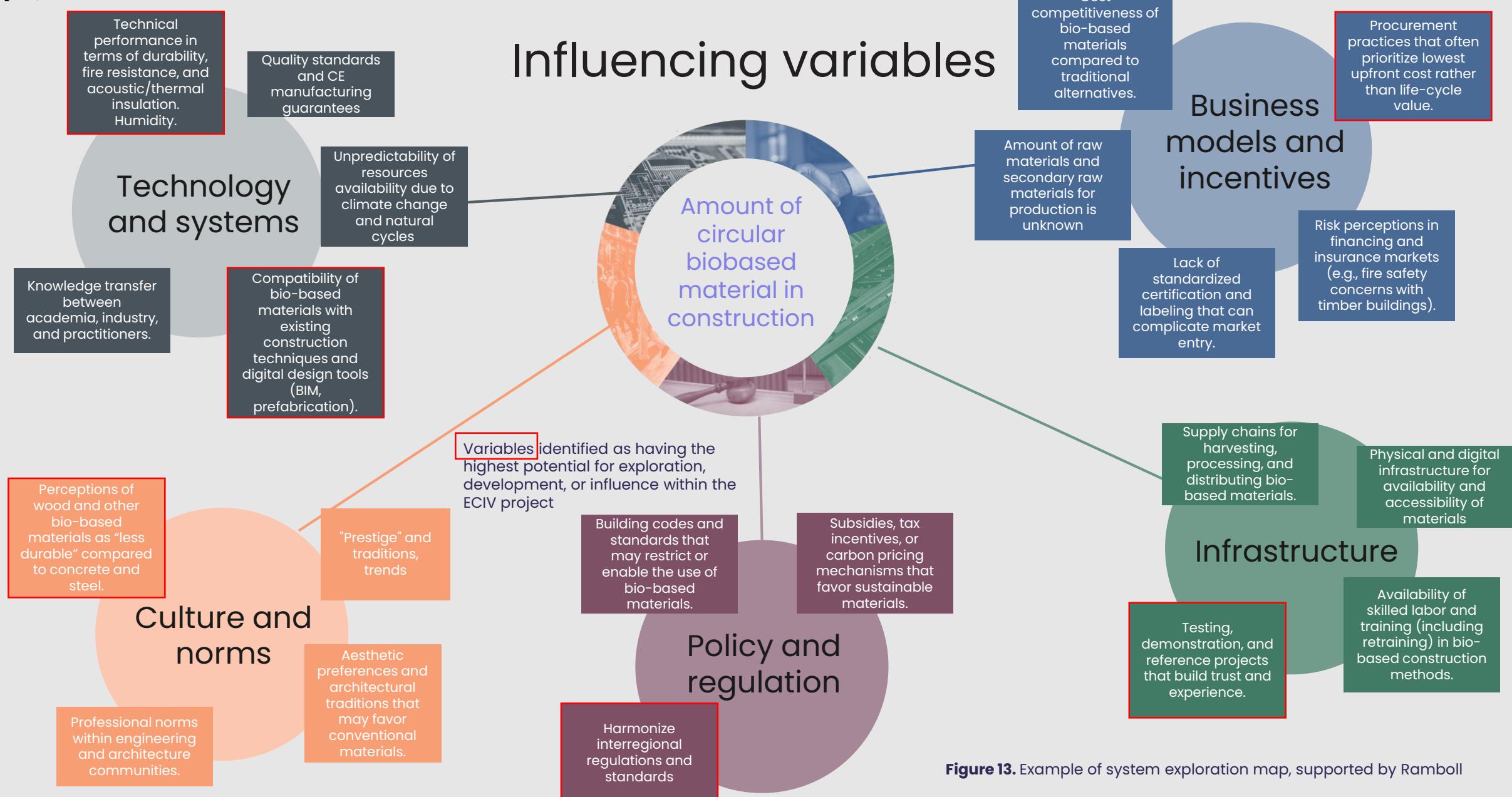


Figure 13. Example of system exploration map, supported by Ramboll

Influencing variables

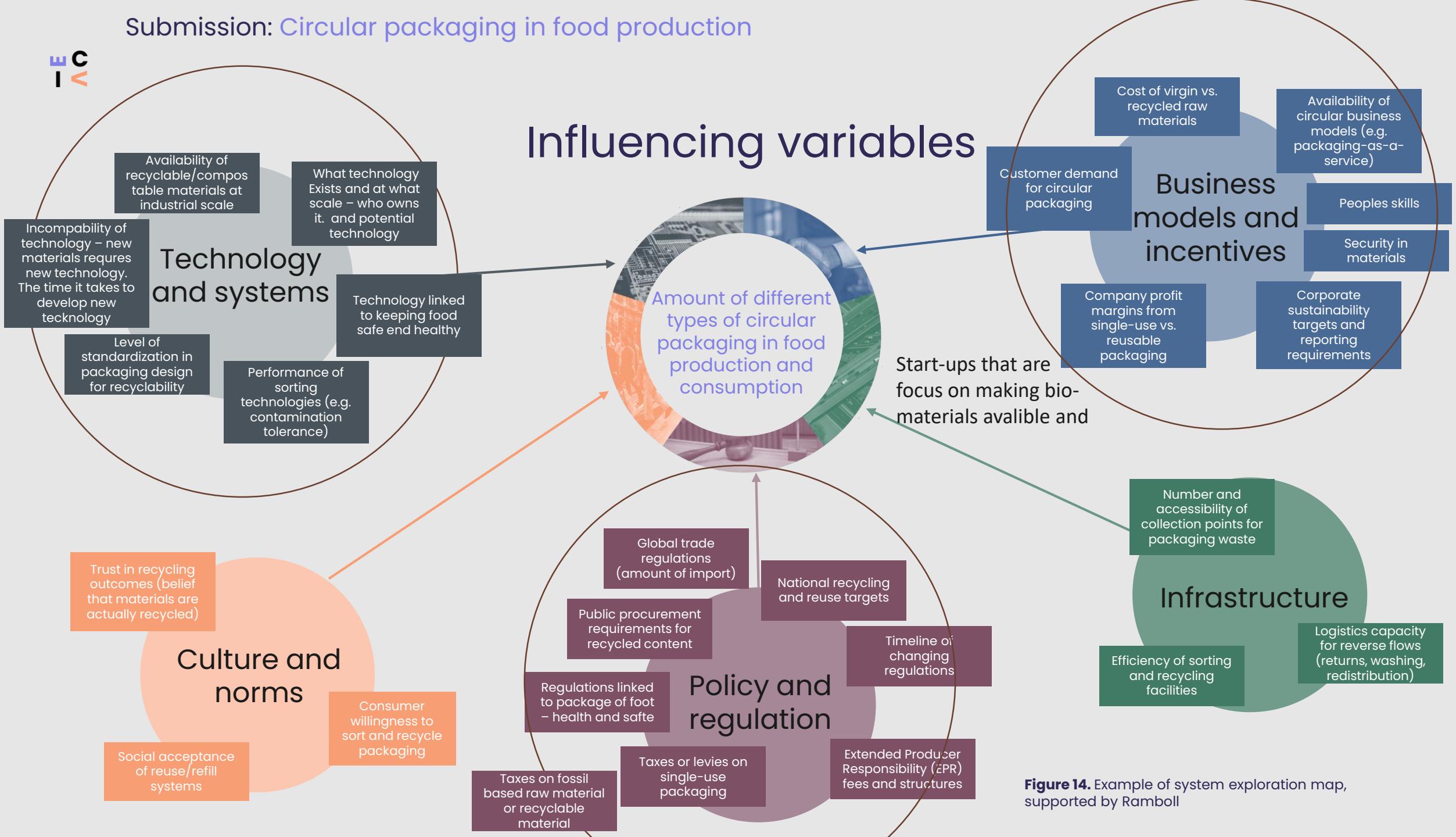


Figure 14. Example of system exploration map, supported by Ramboll

Influencing variables

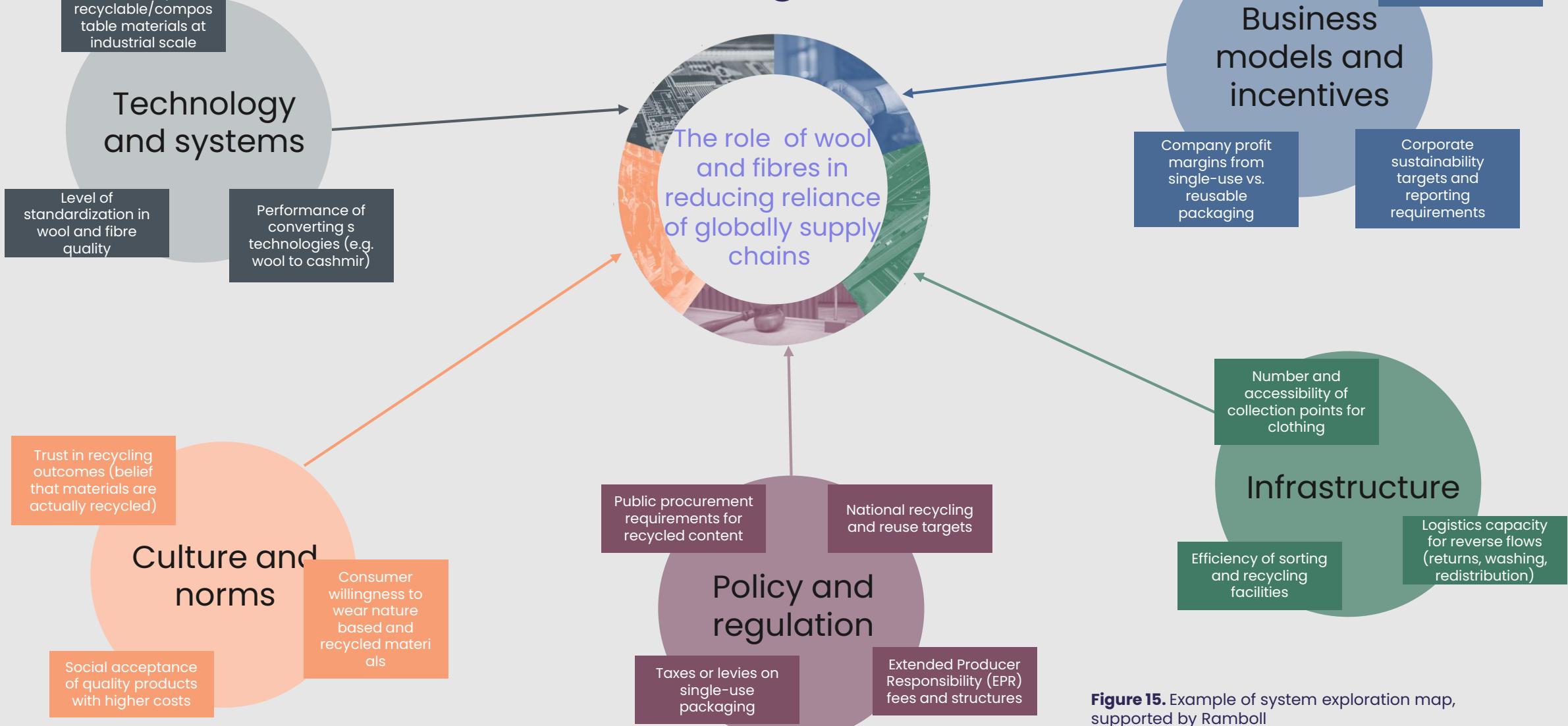


Figure 15. Example of system exploration map, supported by Ramboll

Modules for Capacity Building

Achieving systemic change in the circular economy requires regions to strengthen both **capacities** (knowledge, skills, and resources) and **capabilities** (the ability to apply them collaboratively). The ECIV **Modules for Capacity Building** are designed to help regions and partners understand, develop, and operationalise these abilities in support of the sub-missions.

Working with capacity building in the context of transformative innovation means **creating the conditions for change**—developing the knowledge, institutional structures, and governance practices that allow circular economy strategies to move from vision to implementation. It includes both **individual learning** (e.g., upskilling policy makers, business leaders, and researchers) and **organisational strengthening** (e.g., improving interdepartmental coordination, innovation management, and stakeholder collaboration).

The process begins with a **joint capacity and capability assessment**, using modules and tools co-designed within ECIV. Through surveys, interviews, and workshops, each region

maps its existing innovation capabilities, governance structures, and transformation readiness. This assessment identifies strengths, bottlenecks, and learning needs across the **quadruple helix**—public sector, industry, academia, and civil society.

Based on these insights, partners co-develop a **Capacity Building Manual** that gathers best practices and offers guidance for transformative circular innovation. The manual is a living document—revised iteratively to reflect new experiences and to ensure its relevance to regional contexts. It supports regions in aligning their internal processes, bridging implementation gaps, and embedding the circular economy into everyday practice.

In short, the capacity-building modules enable regions to **turn strategic intent into practical capability**—ensuring that people and organisations are prepared to design, manage, and scale the transitions outlined in the sub-missions

Policy Innovation Platforms

While capacity building strengthens the people and institutions driving transformation, **policy innovation** focuses on **the frameworks that shape their actions**. The ECIV **Policy Innovation Platform (PIP)** provides a structured space where governments, industry, academia, and civil society collaborate to **co-create, test, and implement new policy approaches** that accelerate the circular transition.

Working with policy innovation means rethinking how policies are designed, developed, and delivered—moving from incremental adjustments to **mission-oriented, cross-sectoral approaches**. Within ECIV, the PIP functions as an experimental governance arena where stakeholders can jointly identify policy gaps, test new instruments, and evaluate their transformative potential.

Policy innovation is a critical enabler of systemic change. It increases legitimacy and participation, bridges fragmentation across sectors, and aligns regional

governance models with the ambitions of the sub-missions and Theories of Change. Through the PIP, regions conduct **policy gap analyses** to reveal inconsistencies and opportunities for alignment with **Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3/S4)**. The resulting insights feed directly into recommendations for updating or redesigning policies to support circular economy objectives.

The outputs of the Policy Innovation Platform inform both **regional and interregional policy development**, linking ECIV's experimentation portfolio with the broader European innovation agenda. By promoting a **whole-of-government approach**, the PIP helps embed circular principles into mainstream governance and create the institutional conditions for long-term transformation.

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Impact Innovation "Water wise societies". Innovation programme driving Sweden's transition toward sustainable water for all.

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