

# Place-Based Missions for Circular Economy Transitions

## Capacity Building Modules

Project No. 101161155. Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.



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# Learning Journey

This module builds on and adapts the learning architecture and methodological foundations developed by the Joint Research Centre (JRC) under the Preparatory Action *Territories in Action – Innovation for Place-Based Transformation*.  
The content of the modules has been created and adapted by **Climate KIC Academy**.

## Module 1

Introduction to Place-Based Missions in the Circular Transition

## Module 2

Engaging and Orchestrating for Mission Mobilisation in Circular Economy

## Module 3

Shaping a Shared Mission Direction in the Circular Transition

## Module 4

Designing Mission Portfolios in Circularity

## Module 5

Implementing and Learning through Experimentation in Circular Economy

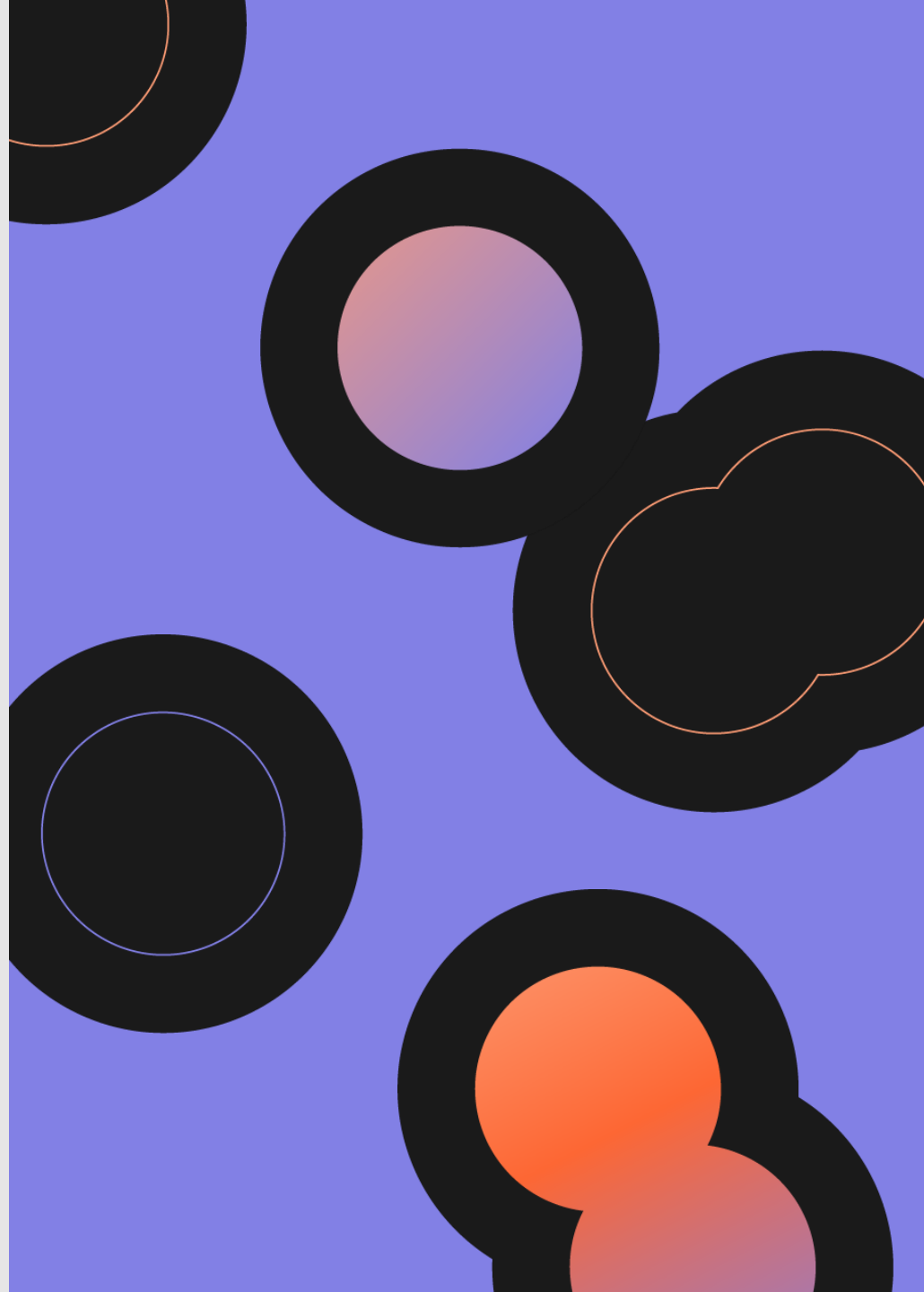
# Module 1

## Introduction to Place-Based Missions in the Circular Transition

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# Learning Outcomes

By the end of the module, participants  
Will have strengthened their capacity  
to:

**Develop a systemic understanding of  
circular economy challenges as place-  
based missions.**

In this module, you will work towards the program-level  
outcome by learning to:

**A**

Explain why circular economy transitions are complex and why linear, project-based approaches are insufficient.

**B**

Apply a systemic lens to analyze a circular economy challenge in the learners' regional context.

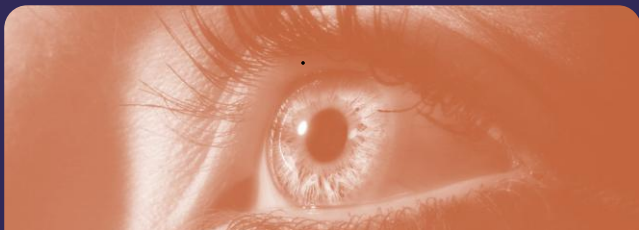
**C**

Differentiate between generic policy approaches and place-based strategies shaped by territorial conditions.

**D**

Articulate how mission-oriented approaches provide strategic direction for systemic circular transitions.

# Structure of the Module



I

## Conceptual framing

Introduction to **key new concepts** related to circular economy transitions, place-based missions, and systemic approaches.



II

## Guided practice

A **self-guided activity** using a systemic lens to reflect on a circular economy challenge in the regional context.

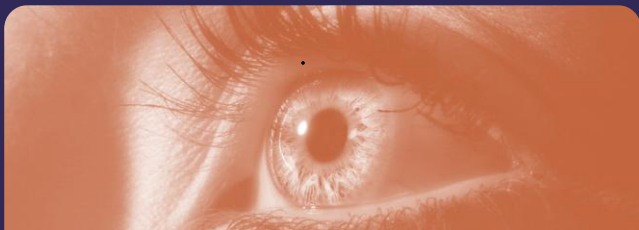


III

## Seeds of change from regions

Short **examples** offering inspiration from regional practice and early experiences with place-based and systemic approaches.

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Short **examples** offering inspiration from regional practice and early experiences with place-based and systemic approaches.

# Our approach

## Place-Based Missions for Circular Economy Transitions

### **Circular economy transitions are complex by nature.**

They involve many interacting actors, policies, incentives, and infrastructures, evolving over time and shaped by uncertainty.

This means that change cannot be fully planned in advanced or delivered through linear solutions, isolated projects, or single policy instruments.

For regional authorities, working with **circular transitions therefore requires a different way of approaching change**, one that accepts complexity and focuses on alignment, coordination and learning over time.



# Circular Transitions

## From waste management to system transformation

Circular economy is often associated with waste management and recycling . However, the greatest impact comes from acting earlier in the value chain, by preventing waste, and retaining value over time. These are strategies at the top of the R-Ladder (refuse, rethink and reduce).

Frameworks such as the R-Ladder help visualise this shift, showing how different strategies contribute to circularity at different stages of the system.

Lower down the ladder, strategies like reuse, repair and refurbish help extend the life of products and materials. At the bottom, recycle and recover focus on managing materials once they have reached the end of their life.

Circular transitions require **shifting focus upwards**, from recycling and recovery to refuse (avoiding the use of unnecessary products), rethink and reduce.

### R-Ladder



# Our approach

## Place-Based Missions for Circular Economy Transition

To work with this complex reality, our approach is grounded in four core **principles**:

1

### **Complexity-Aware**

Recognizing that circular transition involve many actors, uncertainties and interactions, requiring experimentation and learning rather than rigid plans.

2

### **Systemic**

Looking at relationships, dynamics, and root causes across circular value chains, to identify leverage points for action rather than isolated activities.

3

### **Place-Based**

Recognizing that each region's economic structure, value chains, and institutional capacities shape circular transitions, and the importance of the territory involvement.

4

### **Mission-Led**

Providing a shared direction of travel that aligns actors and initiatives around a common circular ambition, rooted in place-based realities.

## 1

# Complexity-Aware

Working with uncertainty, interdependence, and evolving challenges.

# Complexity-Aware

## Embracing the Unknown

Circular economy challenges are complex by nature. They involve multiple actors, interacting policies, joint markets, social norms, infrastructures, and environmental dynamics.

Because of this, cause-and-effect relationships are often unclear, and interventions can lead to unexpected outcomes.

**Recognising complexity in the circular transition** means accepting that **uncertainty** is not a failure of planning, but a characteristic of the challenge itself.



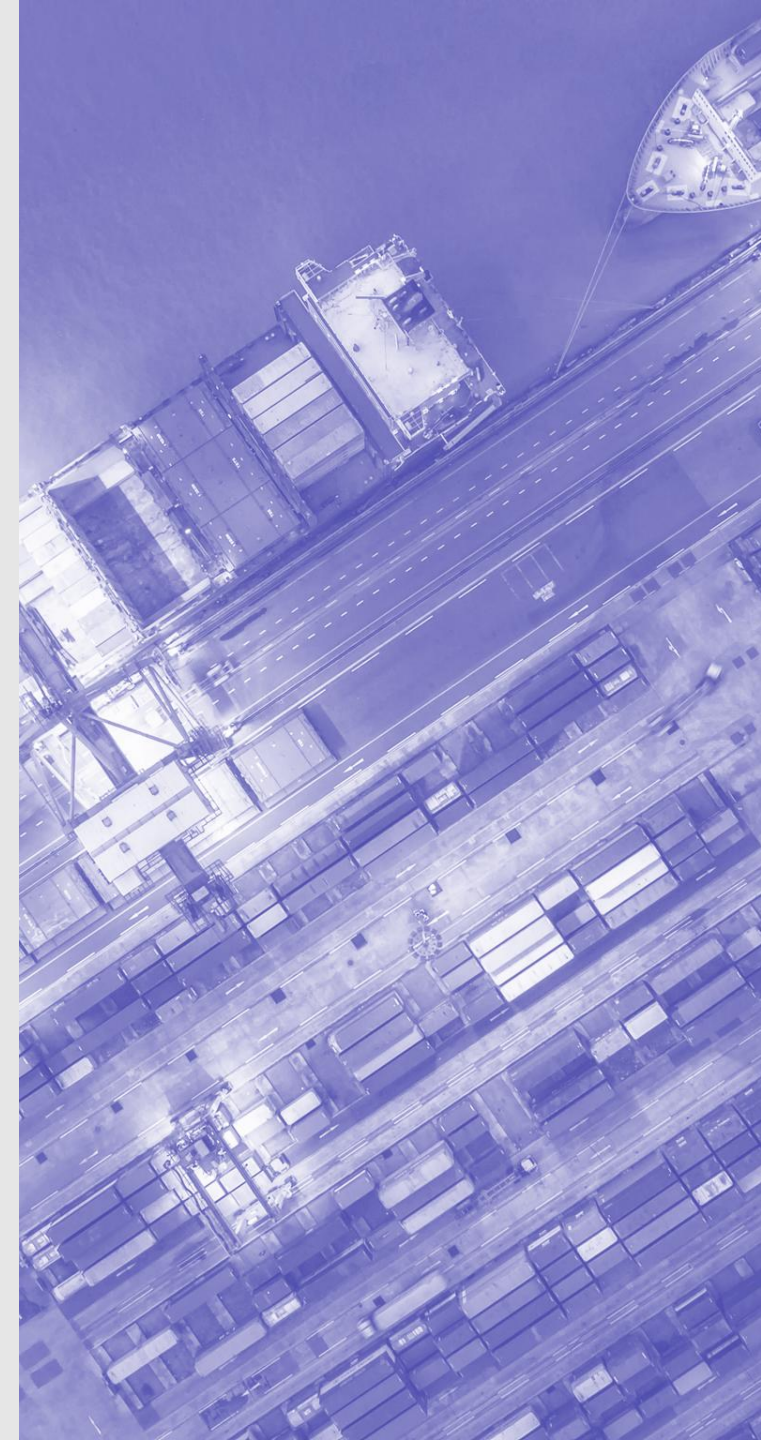
# Complexity-Aware

## Embracing the Unknown

### What does this mean in my territory?

In circular economy transitions, this complexity may be visible in:

- **Fragmented value chains:** e.g. materials are collected locally, but processed, reused or remanufactured elsewhere, limiting opportunities to retain value and create local circular demand.
- **Misaligned incentives:** e.g. virgin materials cheaper than recycled ones, short-term cost savings outweighing long-term circular benefits.
- **Overlapping responsibilities:** e.g. Circular economy strategy, industrial plans, waste directives, procurement and climate policies managed by different departments.
- **Market that still favour linear solutions:** e.g. limited demand for secondary materials or repaired products.



# Complexity-Aware

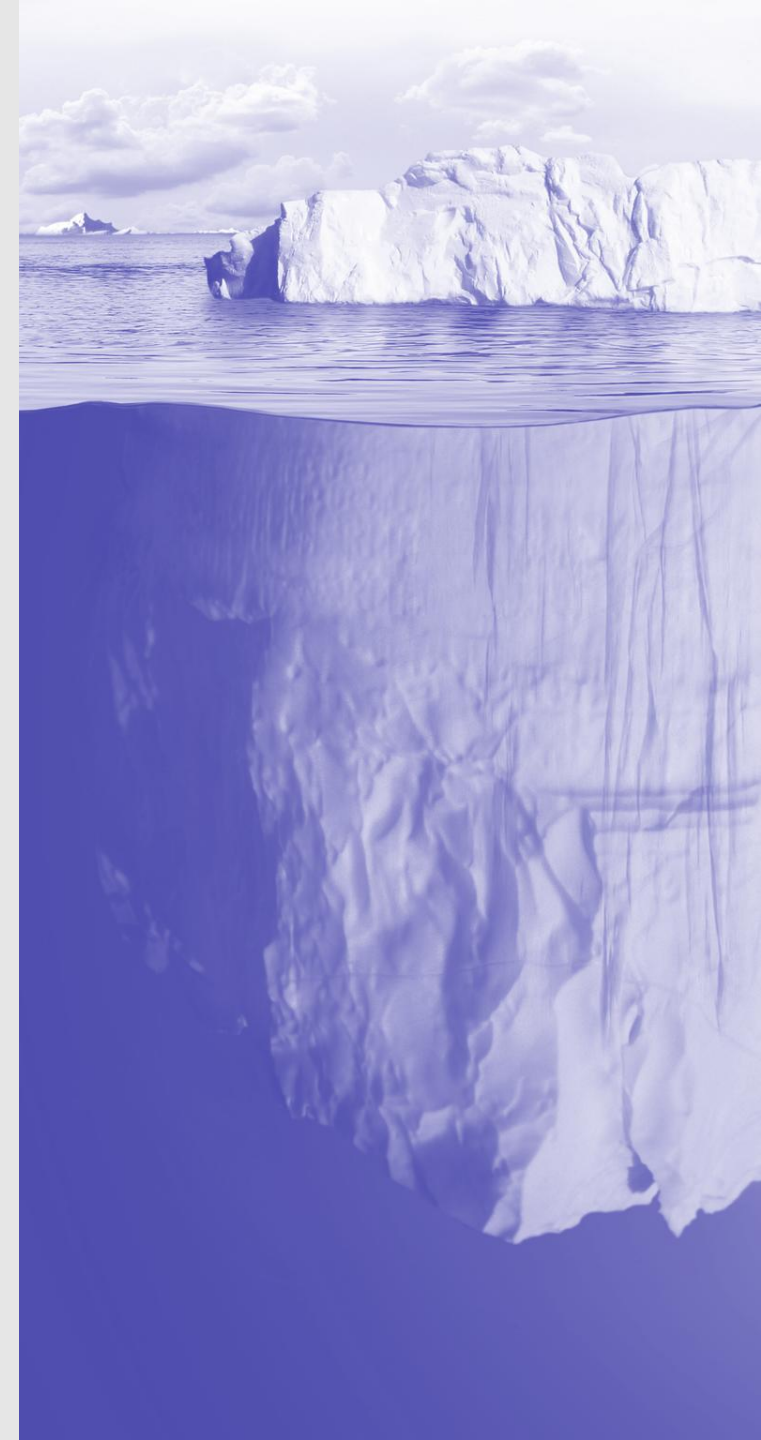
## Navigating the Mess

Because circular economy challenges cannot be addressed through traditional linear solutions, regional authorities need to move away from fixed, rigid plans.

A fixed plan created today may no longer work in two years.

A complexity-aware approach requires remaining flexible and open to learning as territorial conditions evolve.

By acknowledging that no single actor is in control, **regions can create the conditions** to encourage experimentation and pilot projects, bring stakeholders together to co-create solutions, and support the sharing of knowledge and good practices across the territory.



# Pause and Reflect

Choose **one circular economy challenge** you are currently involved in (or that regularly appears in your work).

## Examples:

- How may we transition from single-use to reuse and refill systems for packaging?
- How might we revalorize sub-products within the region?
- How might we design buildings for reuse, adaptability and bio-based materials?
- How might we enable water reuse and circular water systems?
- How might we repair and remanufacture renewable energy components?

**Tip:** choose a challenge you can describe in one sentence.

For the purpose of this training, we will “pause and reflect” on the following challenge: ***“how can we scale reuse systems for packaging across our regional value chain?”***

# Pause and Reflect

## What makes this challenge **complex** in your territory?

As you think about your challenge, you may notice...

- Different **technology and processes** involved in the circular value chain... (e.g. sorting, recycling, reuse technology,...)
- **Business models and market incentives** that shape how materials are used, reused, or discarded ... (e.g. product-as-a-service, procurement rules,...)
- **Infrastructure and production systems** enabling or limiting circular practices (e.g. collection systems, logistics, industrial symbiosis networks,...)
- **Policies, laws and regulation** influencing how the system operates (e.g. waste regulations, public procurement rules, regional strategies, funding schemes,...)
- **Culture, behaviours and values** shaping everyday practices and acceptance of circular solutions (e.g. waste separation habits, trust in reused materials,...)

**Example:** *if your region aims to scale reuse systems for packaging, the challenge may go beyond introducing reusable options to include return and collection logistics, cleaning and redistribution systems, coordination across producers and retailers, cost competitiveness with single-use packaging, regulatory requirements, and consumer participation.*

**"My challenge is complex because ....."**

## 2

# Systemic

Looking at relationships, root causes and leverage points for change.

## 2

# Systemic

## Seeing the Whole System

Once we accept complexity, the next step is to decide **how we look at the challenge**.

A systemic approach helps regional authorities look beyond individual projects or technologies and understand how different elements of a circular economy system of a given territory interact. In a socio-technical system, five key dimensions influence the capacity to transition towards a circular economy: technology and systems, culture and norms, policy and regulations, business models and incentives, and infrastructure.

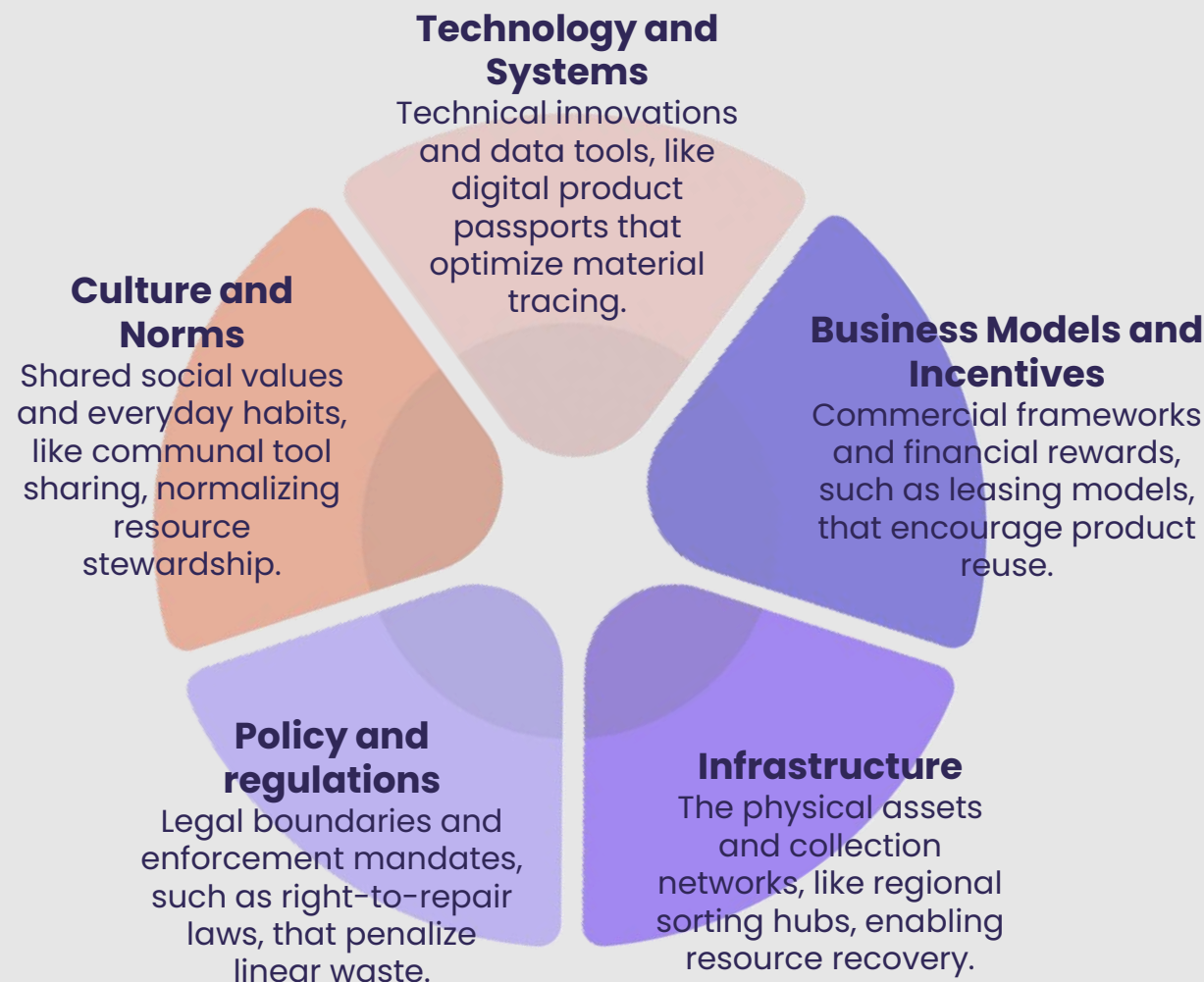


Figure: Based on the five dimensions in a socio-technical system (Source: Ramboll)

## 2

# Systemic

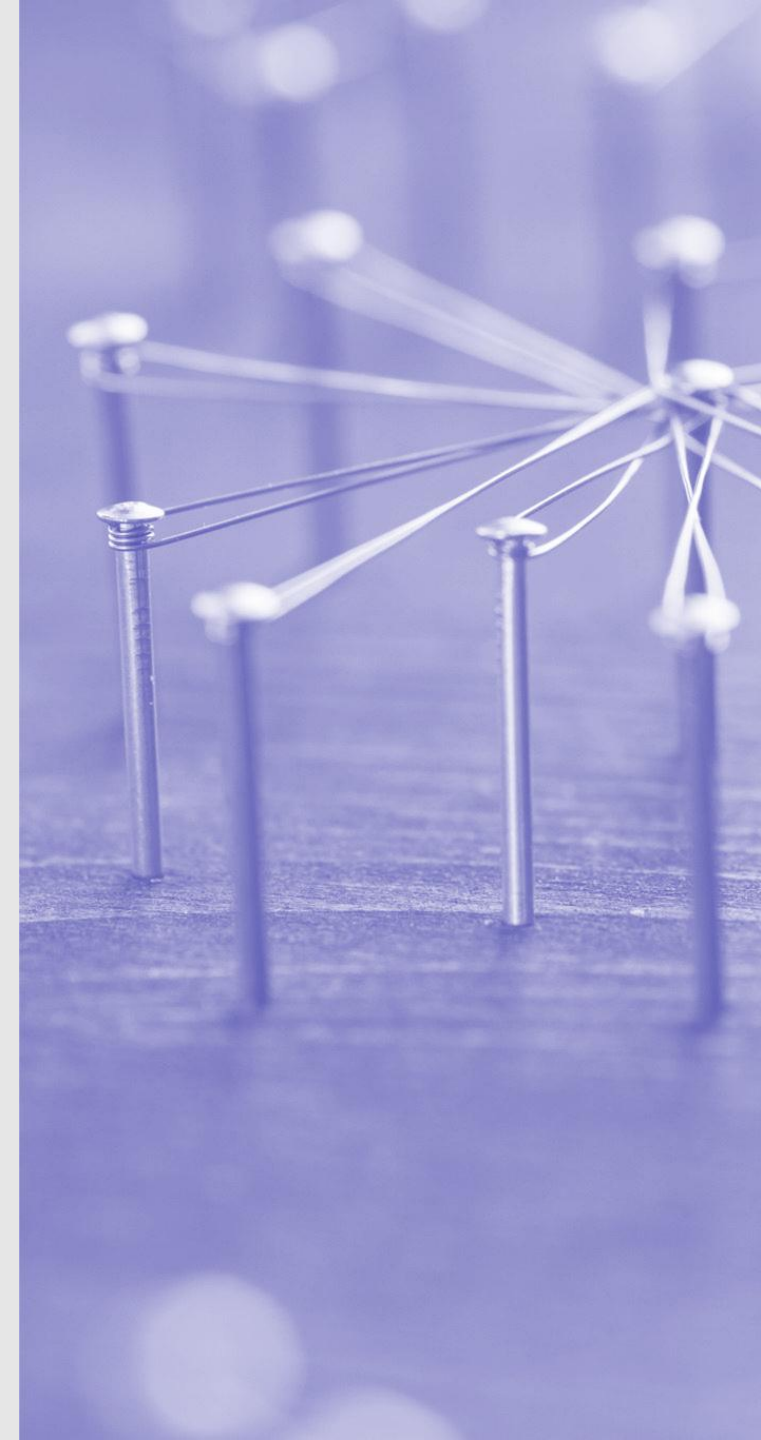
## Seeing the Whole System

### What does this mean in my territory?

Instead of asking “What solutions should we implement?”, a systemic lens asks:

- How do different parts of the circular value chain connect, or fail to connect? *(e.g. reusable packaging is introduced, but return, cleaning and redistribution systems are not yet in place or connected across the region).*
- Where do policies or responsibilities unintentionally work against each other? *(e.g. procurement or business practices still favour low-cost single-use packaging, while circular goals require reuse, return systems and long-term value retention).*

This perspective is essential for regional teams working across departments and sectors, where no single actor controls the whole system.



2

# Systemic

## Identifying Leverage Points

Understanding the system helps regions **identify leverage points**, places where a small, well-targeted change can influence wider circular economy outcomes.

For regional authorities, these leverage points often sit in:

- Policy frameworks and regulatory conditions
- Funding and procurement criteria
- The creation of a **Transition Team** (or equivalent coordination mechanisms across departments or sectors). A dedicated cross-departmental group that can coordinate actions, translate strategy to implementation, and ensure continuity across initiatives. It acts as a bridge between policy, industry, and innovation actors, helping to scale and align efforts.

By acting on these leverage points, regions can reduce fragmented interventions and avoid unintentionally strengthening the *take-make-dispose* model, the existing linear patterns.



# Pause and Reflect

**Looking at your challenge as a *system*, what is not working well?**

As you keep the same challenge in mind, you may notice...

- Points where action gets **stuck** or **slows down** in practice.
- Situations where **good efforts don't add up** to real change.
- Rules, procedures, or habits that make it **hard to do things differently**.
- Actors doing their part, but still **not getting the expected results**.

**Example:** *reuse systems for packaging exist, but return and cleaning infrastructure is limited, and single-use packaging remains cheaper and easier to implement, so adoption stays low.*

***"The challenge gets stuck because ....."***

# Pause and Reflect

**Looking at your challenge as a **system**, where could a leverage point exist?**

A leverage point is a place in the system where a small but well-targeted change could influence wider circular outcomes. As you reflect on your challenge, you may notice....

- Rules or incentives that **shape behavior across many actors.**
- Decisions that **influence demand in the market.**
- Policies that **affect several parts of the value chain at once.**

**Example:** *a leverage point in our circular packaging challenge could be procurement, regulatory criteria or market incentives to favor reusable packaging systems, helping create demand and align actors across the value chain, and scale adoption.*

***“A possible leverage point in my territory could be .....”***

## 3

# Place-Based

Grounding circular transitions in the realities of each territory.

## 3

## Place-Based

Territorial reality as the primary driver of change

Systems and circular transitions do not exist in the abstract. They are deeply embedded in the unique institutional, economic, and cultural fabric of a region or place.

A place-based approach recognizes that while different regions may share common challenges, the specific capacities, resources and constraints of each territory shape **how** circular transitions can realistically unfold in that specific place.

In essence, it means taking into account the reality of each place in the innovation process.



## 3

## Place-Based

Leveraging local conditions for circular success

Place-based innovation is about how **this region**, with **these conditions**, can move forward, rather than applying generic, “one-size-fits-all” solutions.

### What does this mean in my territory?

For regional transitions to be truly place-based, they must be shaped by **local actors** who understand the specific geographic, social, and economic conditions of their territory.

This helps ensure that circular transitions are not only technically sound, but also socially and politically legitimate.



# Pause and Reflect

## Who needs to be involved to understand this challenge in your region?

To work place-based, the key question is “who holds the knowledge of local conditions”. As you think about your challenge, consider:

- Who experiences the issue on the ground?
- Who understands the practical constraints?
- Who influences decisions or implementation – even informally?
- Who is not usually in the room, but should be?

**Example:** *Scaling reuse systems for packaging may require talking not only to policymakers and large companies, but also to retailers, logistics providers, packaging producers, cleaning and service operators, local SMEs, and importantly, citizens and consumers.*

*Citizen and consumer engagement could include neighborhoods pilots to test return points, short feedback sessions on convenience and barriers, or consumer panels to explore what would make reuse easy and attractive to adopt.*

**“To understand this challenge in my region,  
we need to talk to .....”**

## 4

# Mission-led

Aligning actors and actions around a shared direction of change.

## 4

## Mission-led

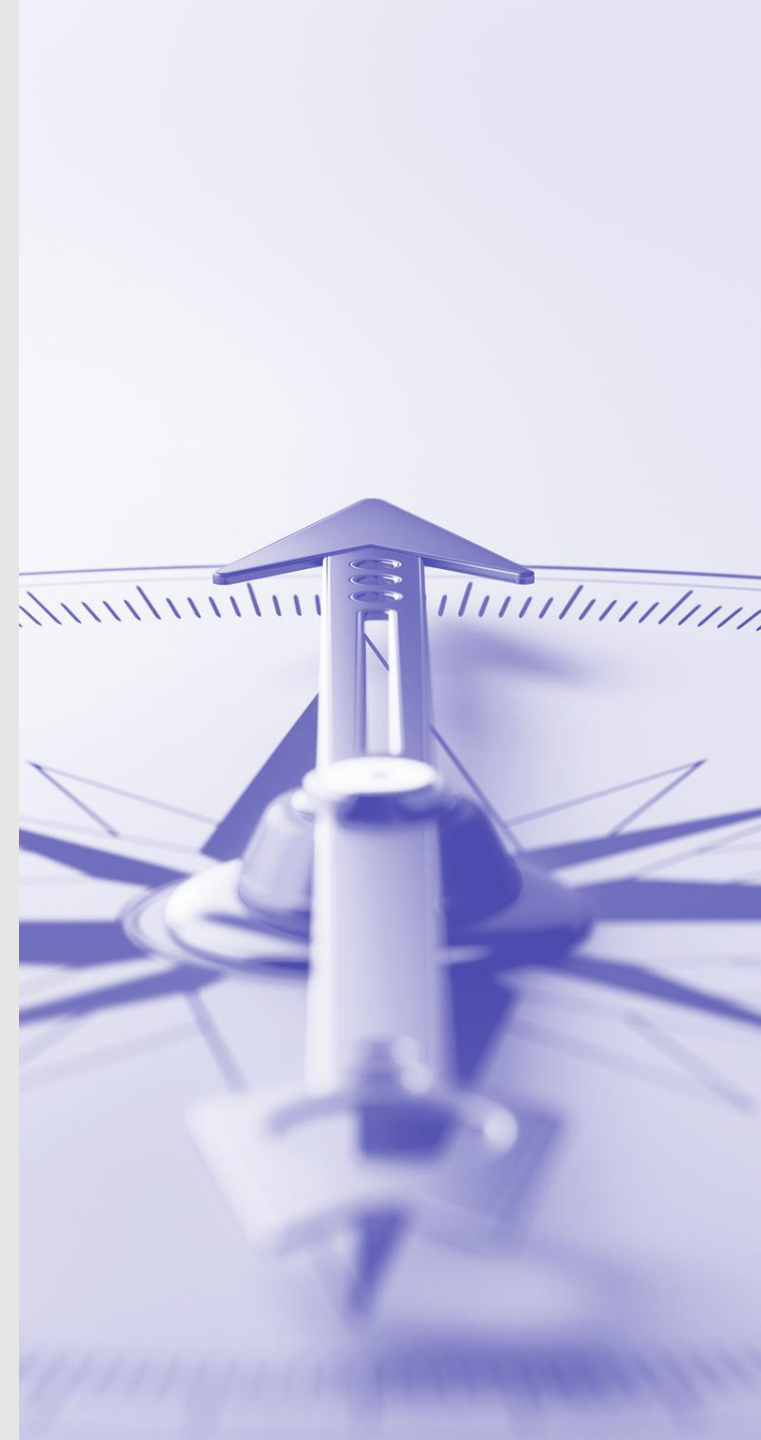
### Strategic direction over Fixed Plans

Building on this understanding of complexity, systems, and territorial realities, **mission-oriented innovation** provides a way to set a shared direction for change, without prescribing every solution in advance.

Instead of defining a fixed set of projects, a mission sets **a clear goal** and enables multiple solutions to emerge and evolve over time.

*For example, a region may aim to develop and scale a new generation of bio-based material construction products (such as engineered timber panels, hemp-based insulation, or low-carbon modular façade systems) by 2035, enabling different initiatives, from material innovation, to certification, to market uptake, to evolve along the way.*

**Missions act as a compass**, rather than a detailed map.



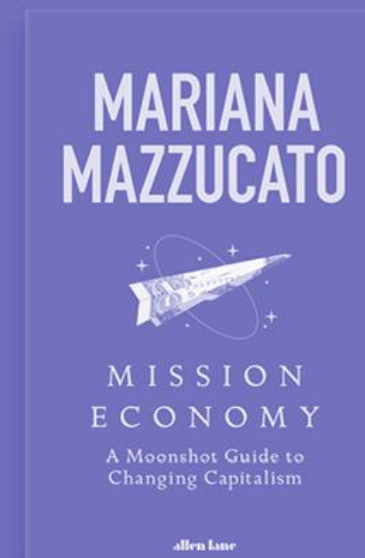
4

# Mission-led

## Key Elements of a Mission-Oriented Approach

1. **Clear and Ambitious Direction.** Missions define a specific societal challenge and set a measurable direction for change (e.g. reducing construction waste, or increasing circular material use)
2. **Multiple Solutions and Experimentation:** Rather than prescribing one solution, missions enable different actors to test and develop multiple approaches.
3. **Cross-sector collaboration:** Complex challenges require coordination across governments, industry, research and civil society. It involves a multi-actor, multi-sector and interregional approach.
4. **Portfolio of Actions:** Missions are implemented through a portfolio of projects, policies and experiments, rather than a single intervention.
5. **Learning and Adaptation:** Because systems are complex, missions evolve over time through experimentation, feedback, and learning.

If you would like to explore this concept further, see below a key reference book about Missions.



[Missions: A beginner's guide.](#)

4

## Mission-oriented Industrial Strategy (UK)

A policy approach to mobilize innovation around societal challenges

A well-known example of a mission-oriented policy approach comes from the United Kingdom's **mission-oriented industrial strategy**, developed with the UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose.

The UK Mission-Oriented Industrial Strategy proposes a shift from traditional industrial policy focused on sectors towards missions addressing major societal challenges.

Rather than supporting individual industries, this approach defines clear directions for innovation and investment, encouraging collaboration across sectors, institutions and actors.

# MISSION-ORIENTED INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

## Global Insights

by Mariana Mazzucato, Sarah Doyle and  
Luca Kuehn von Burgsdorff

July 2024



Institute for Innovation  
and Public Purpose

[UK'S mission-oriented industrial strategy](#)

# From Grand Challenges to Mission Projects

How mission-oriented policy translates challenges into action

The UK mission-oriented industrial strategy **identifies four Grand Challenges** that set the direction for innovation and policy.

Within each Grand Challenge, **missions define clear goals** that mobilize action across sectors and actors.

To achieve these missions, a **portfolio of projects, experiments and investments** is developed across different domains.

This structure enables:

- Cross-sector innovation
- Collaboration between public, private and research actors
- Experimentation and learning through multiple initiatives

Together, these mission projects contribute to advancing the mission and addressing the broader societal challenge.

## 3.1 Mission-oriented policy design

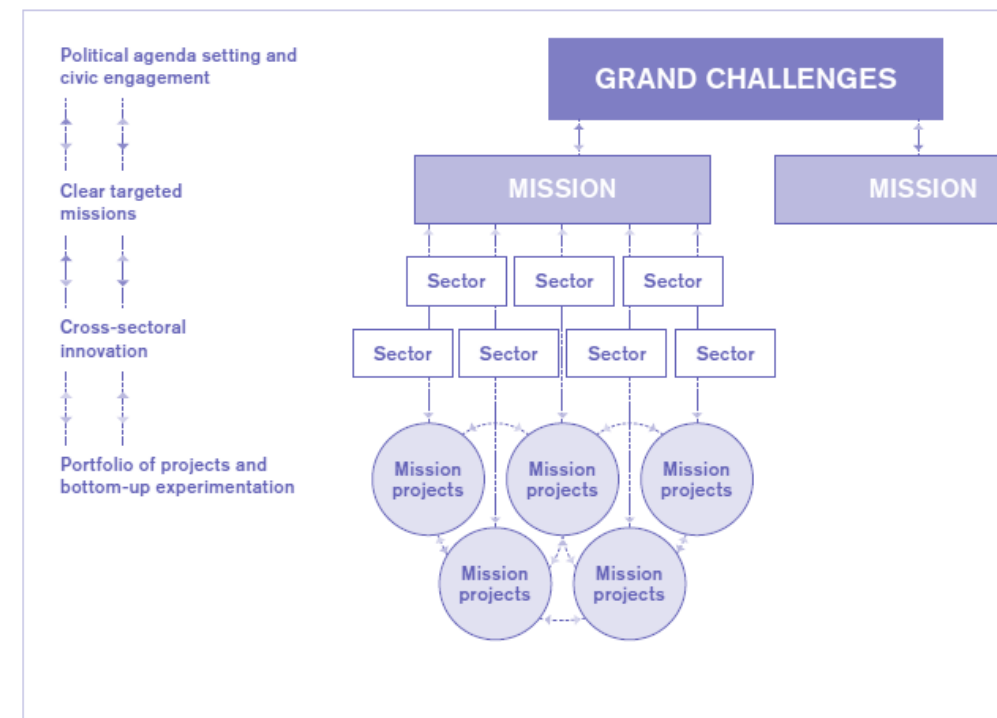


Figure 2: A mission map (Mazzucato 2018; 2019).

Mazzucato, Doyle, Kuehn von Burgsdorff (2024). *Mission-oriented industrial Strategy*. *Global Insights*, p.16.

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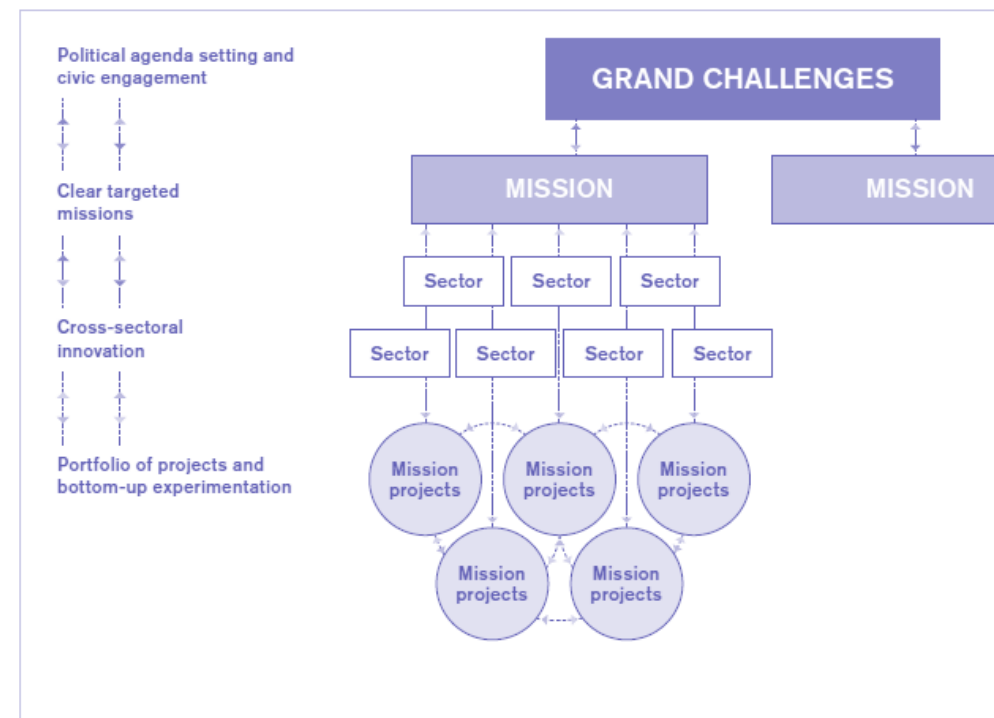


Figure 2: A mission map (Mazzucato 2018; 2019).

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4

## Example Mission: Future of Mobility (UK)

### A mission mobilizing innovation across the transport system

One of the Grand Challenges identified by the Mission-oriented Industrial Strategy is the Future of Mobility. Within this Grand Challenge, the UK defined a mission to place the country at the forefront of **safe, sustainable and accessible mobility systems by 2040.**

Achieving this mission requires coordinated innovation across multiple domains, including:

- Tech and digital services
- Transport systems
- Inclusive design
- Robotics and AI
- Creative industries
- Health and wellbeing
- Financial and legal services
- Energy and battery infrastructure
- Urban planning and design

A portfolio of projects, policies and investments across these areas contribute to advancing the mission.

This illustrates how **missions align actors and initiatives across sectors to address complex societal challenges.**

*An illustration of this mission is shown in the next slide.*

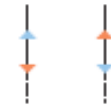
Grand Challenge



Mission



Areas of interest and cross-sector

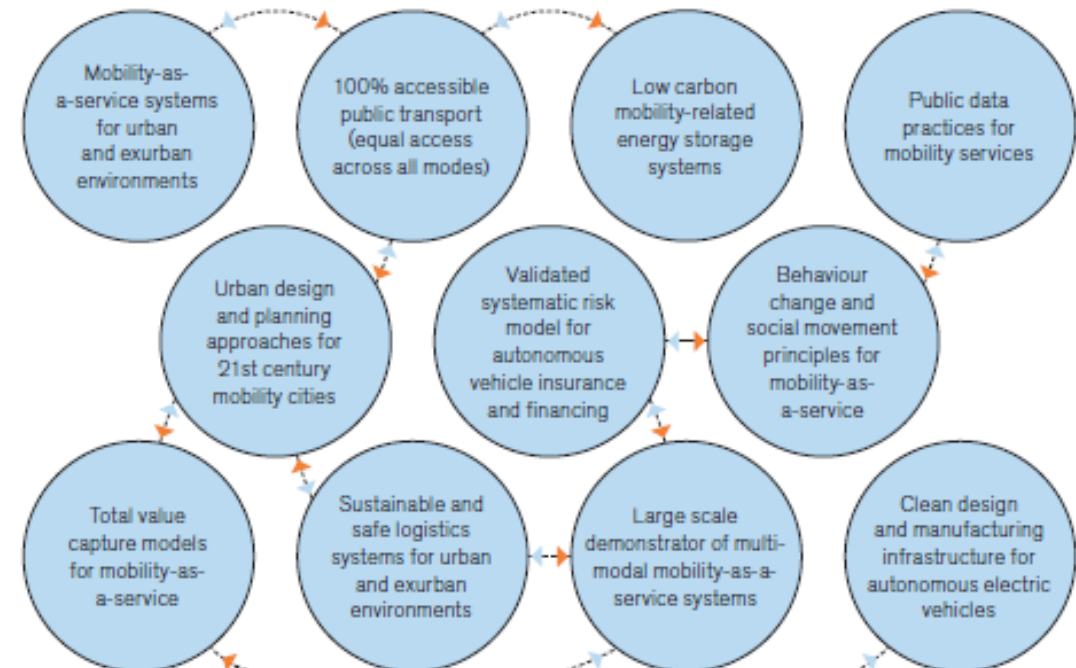
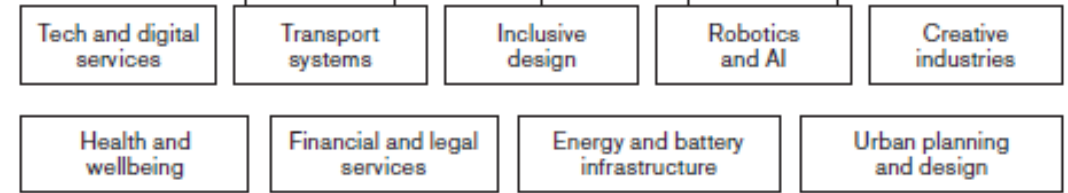


Research and Innovation Projects



# FUTURE OF MOBILITY

By 2040 to put the UK at the forefront of safe, sustainable, universally accessible travel, creating congestion- and emission-free, zero-accident systems



## 4

## Mission-led

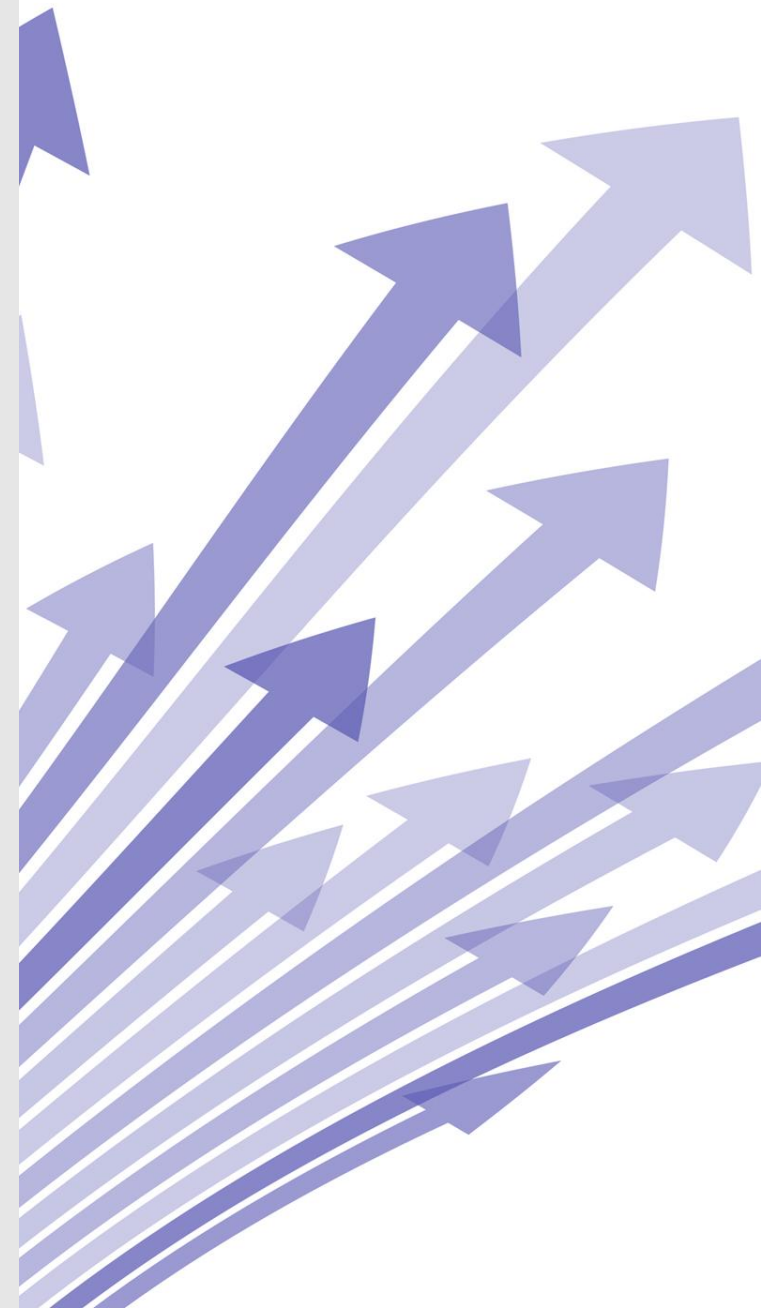
What does this mean in my territory?

Mission-oriented approaches help regions organize action around shared goals.

A mission can help:

- Mobilize actors across sectors, départements, different levels of government.
- Connect different initiatives.
- Align policies and investments.
- Encourage experimentation and learning.

Rather than coordinating isolated projects, missions **focus collective effort on a shared direction of change.**



## 4

## ECIV Missions

What makes a Mission relevant in a territory?

For a mission to work, the desired change must be both **urgent and meaningful** in the territory.

This means a mission should:

- Address **pressing challenges** identified through regional strategies and policy frameworks; and
- Respond **to real needs and priorities** recognized by local actors on the ground.

By combining top-down strategic direction with bottom-up demand, missions create the ownership and legitimacy needed to mobilize actors, sustain engagement and scale solutions over time.



## ECIV Missions

### Overall ECIV Mission:

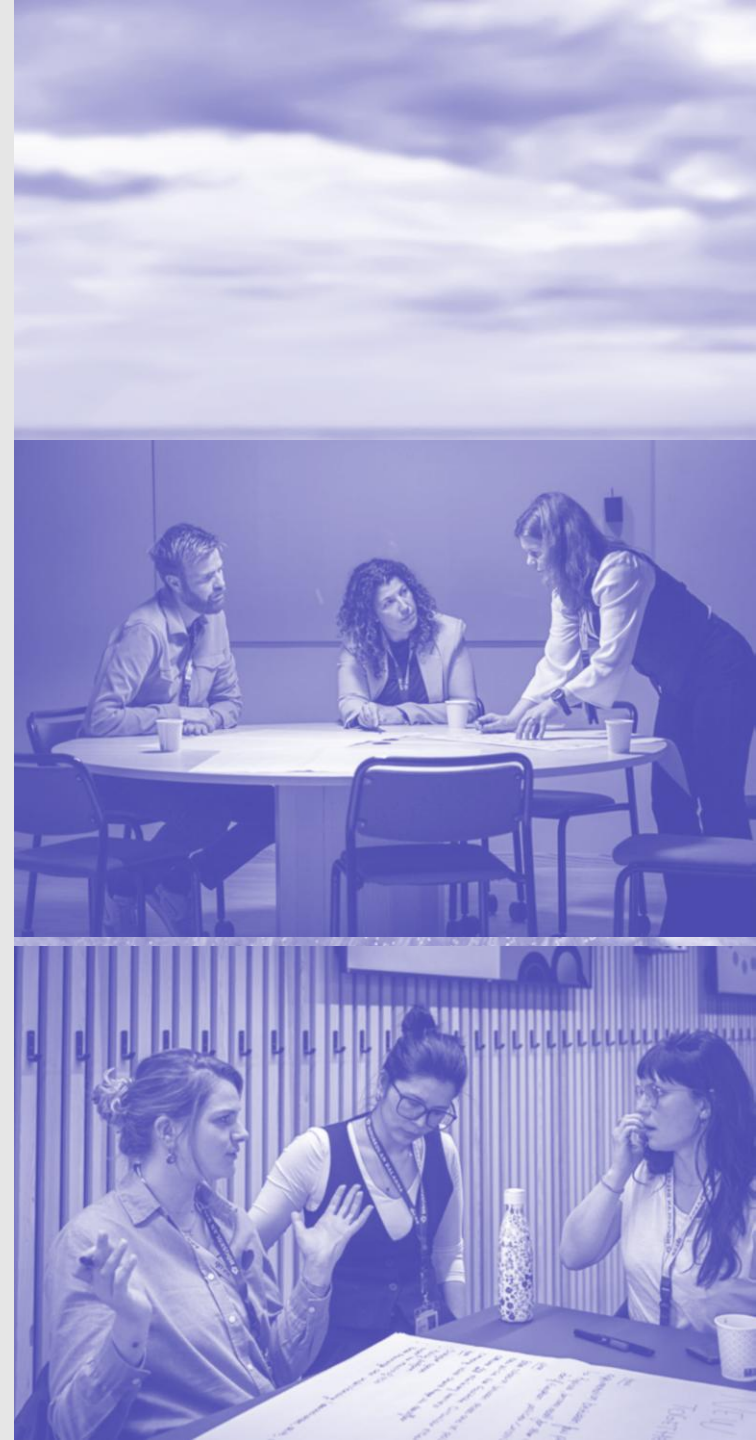
The overall ECIV Mission is the long-term, overarching transformation direction that the networks aims for.

This is defined as helping build a European circular economy ecosystem by 2050, where regional value chains become more interconnected, innovative and circular.

This is the “big mission”: long-term, ambitious, systemic.

### ECIV Sub-Missions:

Because the 2050 mission is long-term and broad to guide action within the ECIV Project timeframe (2029), ECIV defined a set of sub-missions.



## ECIV Sub-Missions

17 sub-missions

The sub-missions translate the overall mission into more concrete, measurable goals for 2029. They act as stepping stones: specific enough to guide action now, while still contributing to the wider circular economy transformation.

They were developed through a collaborative mission-design process, combining analysis of regional circular economy conditions, stakeholder input, a shared 2050 vision, and a co-design workshop with ECIV regional representatives.

1a – By 2029 the level of industrial symbiosis should have increased by X % from starting point.

1b – By 2029 every region has identified or developed at least 3 new opportunities for industrial symbiosis.

2 – By 2029 "to design out waste" is an integrated policy in all ECIV Regional action plans.

3a – By 2029 the extraction and import of virgin raw materials should be decreased by X% from starting point.

3b – By 2029 the use of secondary raw materials should be increased by X% from starting point.

4 – By 2029 X% of products manufactured in the region should be based on product-as-a-service business models.

5 – Agrofood systems or Food production should have reduced waste by X% from the start-point by 2029.

6 – Circular metals and minerals should have increased the reuse of critical strategic materials in EU by X% from starting point by 2029.

7a. In 2029 packaging should be X% circular (or 100% circular in 2040)

7b – In 2029 packaging in food production and consumption should be 100% circular

8 – By 2029, the use of biobased materials in construction (or building?) should have increased by X% from starting point.

9a – By 2029 Valorization of by-products should have increased by X% from starting point.

9b – Increased Valorization of by-products from steel production by x% from starting point by 2029.

10 – By 2029 the use of fresh water in industrial processes should be reduced by X% in ECIV regions.

11 – In 2029 waste from textile production will be reduced by X% from starting point.

12 – In 2029 we have developed net innovative Electric & Electronic waste processes for an efficient to reuse, reduce, recycle, refurbish, repair-replicable at local scale.

13 – In 2029 revenues from circular business has increased by X% from starting point.

## 4

## Priority Areas

### Selected sub-mission areas under development

The original sub-mission proposals provide a broad set of possible directions for ECIV.

Building on this, a number of areas are being further developed to guide innovation activity, stakeholder mobilization and future portfolios of action.

Selected areas currently being refined include:

#### Water – Crosscutting

Reduce and recirculation of water in industrial processes.

#### Reduce waste

We will have (by the end of 2029) proven Innovative circular solutions for waste elimination in industrial processes Note: connect all solutions to other Sub-missions = proof .

#### Packaging

By 2029, develop innovative solutions that accelerate packaging circularity to significantly reduce the use of virgin oil-based raw materials.

#### Agrifood

We accelerate the transition toward regenerative and circular agrifood systems that minimize waste & losses, close nutrient loops, and strengthen regional food resilience and value creation.

#### Construction

We accelerate the use of sustainable, circular biobased materials in construction; to show how circular principles create more sustainable, healthy, and regenerative built environments.

#### Wool/textile/ fibers

By the end of 2029 the role of wool and other natural fibers and recycled synthetic fibers is increased in clothing and other regional value chains.

#### Metals

Accelerate the use of circular steel and other base metals, and increase circular use of materials.

# Pause and Reflect

What **shared direction** could help mobilize the right people around the circular economy challenge?

Keeping the same circular economy challenge and actors in mind, consider:

- What **challenge** feels urgent and meaningful in this region?
- What **direction** could connect different efforts without prescribing specific solutions?
- Which **actors** would need to be involved to move in this direction?
- What kind of **timeline or objectives** could help align efforts across sectors?

**Example:** *Instead of “improve packaging recycling rates”,... a grand circularity challenge for my region could be moving up the circularity ladder by refusing unnecessary packaging, rethinking delivery models and reducing dependency on single-use packaging in the first place.*

*A shared direction to achieve this (one of the missions) could be to ensure that **at least 50% of packaging in priority sectors is avoided, reusable or refillable through coordinated return, refill and redistribution systems across the regional value chain by 2035.***

**“A grand challenge for my region is .....”**

**A shared direction to address this could be:**

**“Achieve ..... by 20\_\_”**

**Mobilizing a mission rarely starts  
with a decision – it starts with  
recognizing where **a shared  
direction** is already trying to emerge  
in the territory**

# Place-Based Missions

A coherent approach for Circular Economy Transitions

Taken together, the four elements introduced in this module define a place-based mission approach for circular economy transitions that is **complexity-aware, systemic, place-based,** and **mission-led**.

Rather than offering certainty or predefined circularity solutions, this approach provides a shared way of working with circular economy challenges: from fragmented value chains and isolated projects or solutions, to markets, policies and actors that need to align around a common direction for change.

**1****Complexity-Aware****2****Systemic****3****Place-Based****4****Mission-led**

# Structure of the Module

I

## Conceptual framing

Introduction to **key new concepts** related to circular economy transitions, place-based missions, and systemic approaches

II

## Guided practice

A **self-guided activity** using a systemic lens to reflect on a circular economy challenge in the regional context.

III

## Seeds of change from regions

Short **examples** offering inspiration from regional practice and early experiences with place-based and systemic approaches.

**The first step in mobilizing a mission  
is not acting differently – it is  
thinking differently**

# From Learning to Action

What can **I** start doing in my region – **now**?

In the following slides you will find **practical entry points** you can activate immediately to frame challenges, ask questions and convene conversations to start mobilizing a place-based mission mindset in your context.



# Practical Actions You Can Take

## 1. Apply a Complexity Lens

- Use tools like the **Iceberg Model** to look beyond symptoms and uncover deeper patterns, structures, and mindsets in your regional challenge.
- When new issues arise, ask: *What's the system behind this event?*

## 2. Map the System Around Your Challenge

- Identify actors, policies, incentives, infrastructures, and relationships influencing the issue.
- Look for areas where small interventions could create large systemic shifts (leverage points).

## 3. Anchor Your Work in Place-Based Realities

- Start from your region's specific strengths, constraints, and cultural norms.
- Ask: *What makes our territorial context unique, and how does this shape our transition pathway?*

# Practical Actions You Can Take

## 1. Apply a Complexity Lens

- Use tools like the **Iceberg Model** to look beyond symptoms and uncover deeper patterns, structures, and mindsets in your regional challenge.
- When new issues arise, ask: *What's the system behind this event?*

## 2. Map the System Around Your Challenge

- Identify actors, policies, incentives, infrastructures, and relationships influencing the issue.
- Look for areas where small interventions could create large systemic shifts (leverage points).

## 3. Anchor Your Work in Place-Based Realities

- Start from your region's specific strengths, constraints, and cultural norms.
- Ask: *What makes our territorial context unique, and how does this shape our transition pathway?*

#### **4. Start Building a Shared Mission Mindset**

- Frame your challenge in terms of direction, not predefined solutions.
- Begin conversations internally about a bold but realistic mission aligned with regional needs and stakeholder demand.

#### **5. Create or Support “Safe-to-Fail” Experiments**

- Encourage small pilots, prototypes, or tests that help your team learn about the system quickly.
- Document what each experiment teaches you, not just whether it “succeeded”.

#### **6. Broaden Who You Involve in the Work**

- Identify and invite “hidden competence” (cooperatives, community groups, repair networks, social economy actors).
- Build more diverse working groups that challenge assumptions and increase legitimacy.

## 7. Break Silos—Connect Across Departments

- Proactively initiate cross-departmental conversations (e.g., waste + procurement + education).
- Ask: *Who else needs to be involved for this to succeed?*

## 8. Shift From Control to Learning Orientation

- Replace long, fixed plans with **adaptive roadmaps** that evolve based on feedback.
- Make reflection moments part of your project routines.

## 9. Keep Asking Systemic Questions

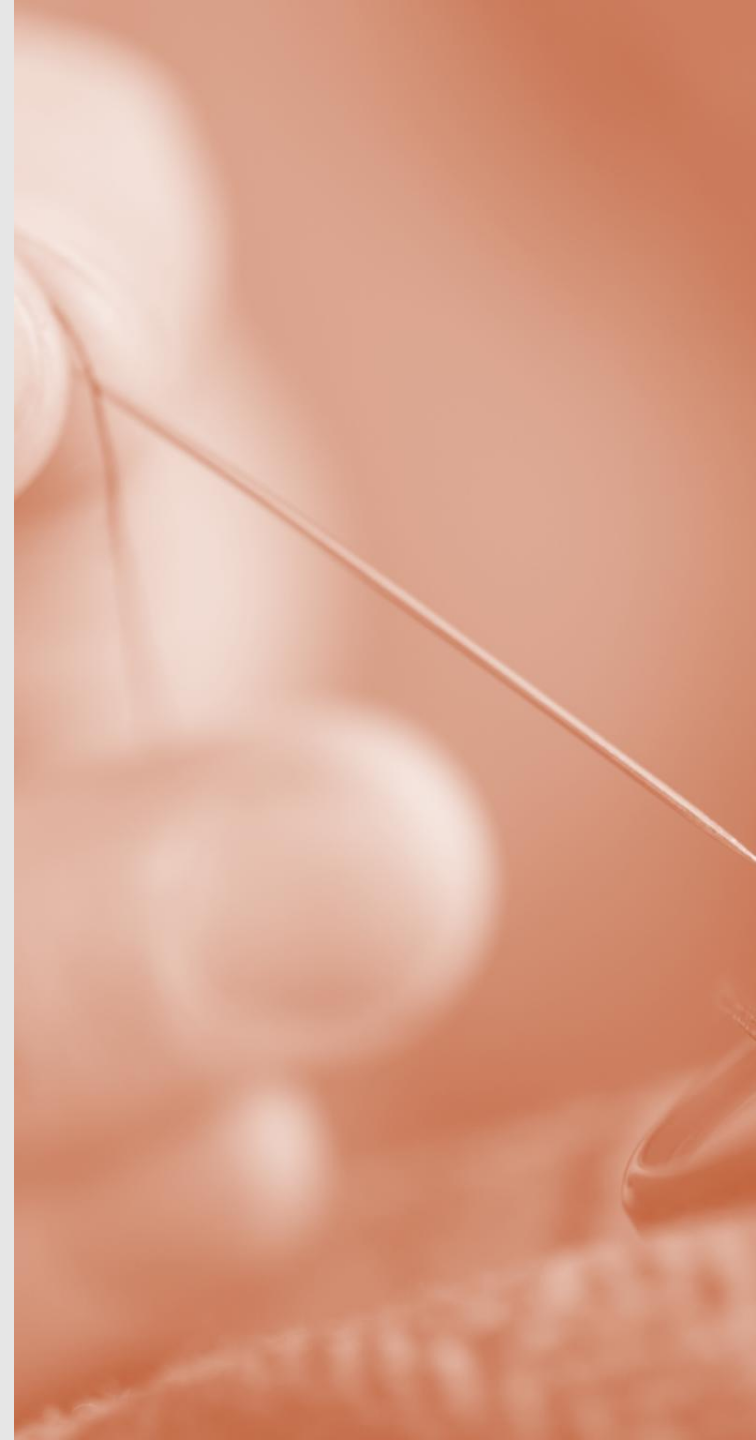
- What root causes are we not yet addressing?
- What mindsets are shaping our policies?
- Who is missing from the table?
- How do local conditions shape the challenge?

# From concepts to Practice

So far, this module has introduced a place-based mission approach for working with complex, place-based circular economy transitions across European regions.

This short practice introduces a **simple systemic tool** to deepen your understanding of a real challenge in your region: the **Iceberg**.

The purpose is not to design solution, but to better understand the dynamics shaping a real circular economy challenge in your region.



# What is the Iceberg Model

## Seeing below the surface

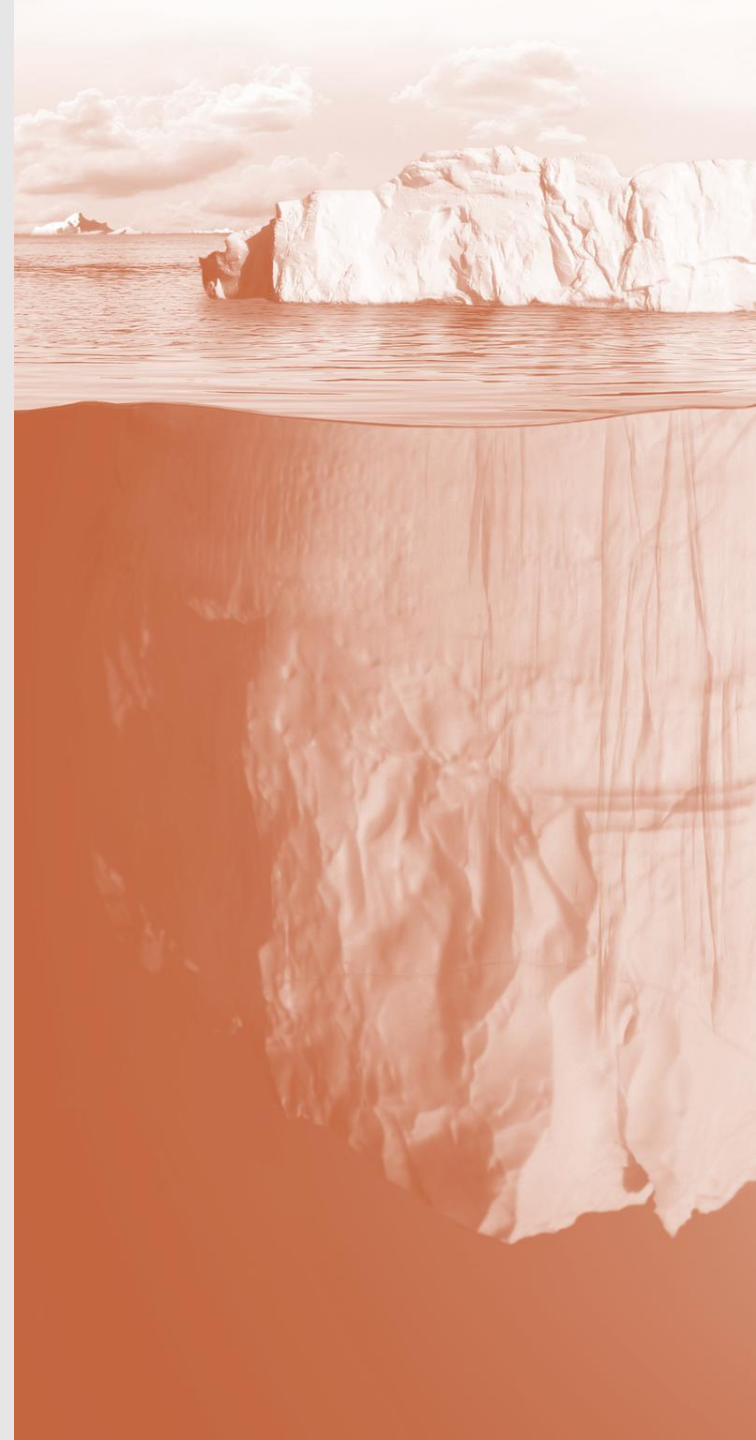
In complex systems, what we observe on the surface is often only a small part of what shapes outcomes.

The Iceberg Lens helps distinguish between what is visible and the deeper dynamics that keep a problem in place.

Instead of asking “*What is happening?*”, the Iceberg invites us to explore:

- What keeps happening over time?
- What structures and rules shape these patterns?
- What assumptions or mindsets underpin those structures?

This shift is essential for systemic and mission-oriented work.



# From Concept to Practice

You will now apply the Iceberg Lens to a real circular economy challenge in your region.

The aim is not to analyze everything in detail, nor to design solutions.

It is to practice **seeing the challenge systemically**, by moving step by step below the surface.

Work through the following steps at your own pace.



# The Four Levels of the Iceberg

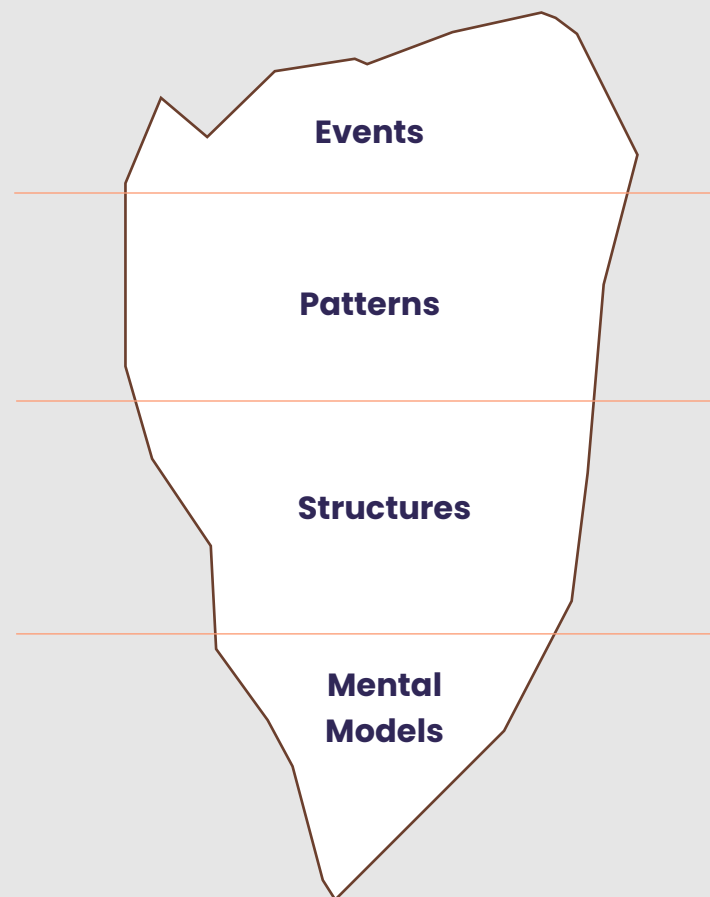
## Understanding the Four Levels

The Iceberg Lens distinguishes four levels of analysis:

- **Events:** the visible symptoms or issues we observe today.
- **Patterns:** trends or recurring behaviors over time.
- **Structures:** policies, incentives, institutions, infrastructures, or power relations that shape these patterns.
- **Mindsets:** dominant assumptions, beliefs, or norms that influence how the system is designed and governed.

Most interventions focus on events.

Systemic change requires **attention to deeper levels.**



# Step 1: Anchor your challenge

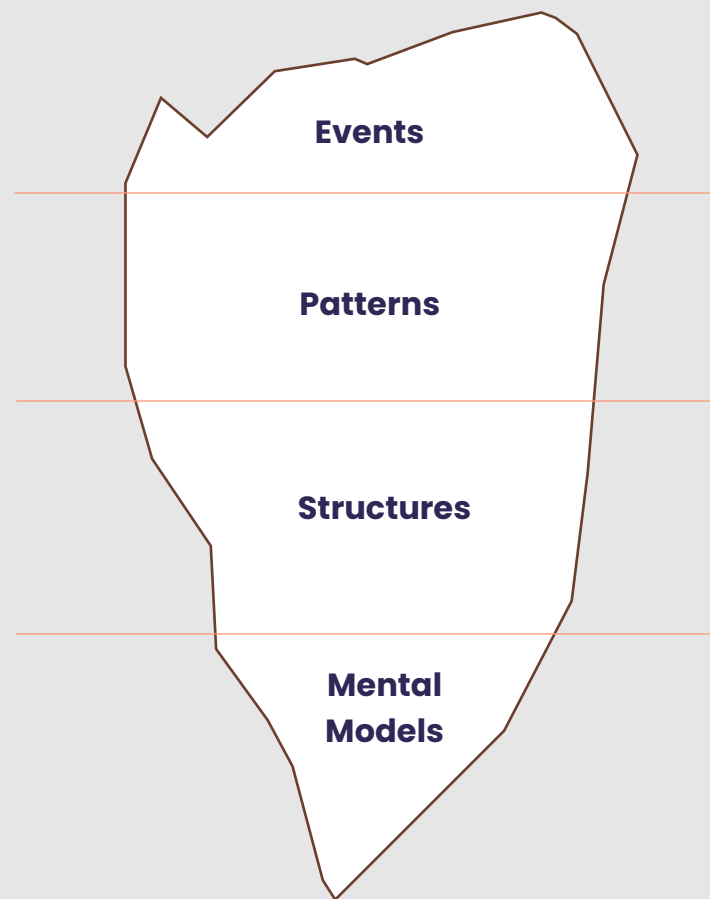
Start from issue you already identified

Return to the circular challenge you reflected on earlier on in this module.

Keep this challenge in mind as you work through the Iceberg.

The aim is not to redefine the issue, but to **look at it more deeply**.

[Access the template in Miro.](#)



## Step 2: Describe the visible events

What do we see happening today?

Start at the top of the iceberg.

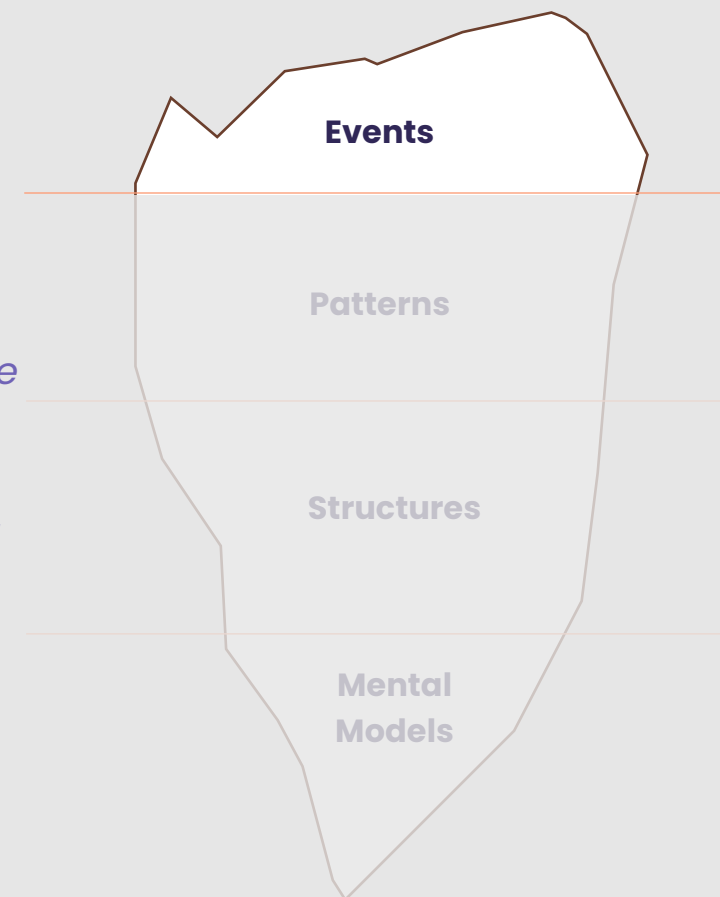
Using your regional challenge, describe what is **currently visible**. Focus only on what can be observed or reported, on or causes or explanations yet.

*If we look at the example of scaling reuse systems for packaging, visible events could include single-use packaging remaining the default in shops, events or public services; reusable packaging options being available only in a few places; or return points being limited, unclear or underused.*

### Ask yourself:

- What do we currently observe?
- What data, indicators, or complaints make this issue visible?
- What is most often discussed in policy or public debates?

At this stage, stay close to **facts and observations**.



## Step 3: Identify recurring patterns

What keeps happening over time?

Now look just below the surface.

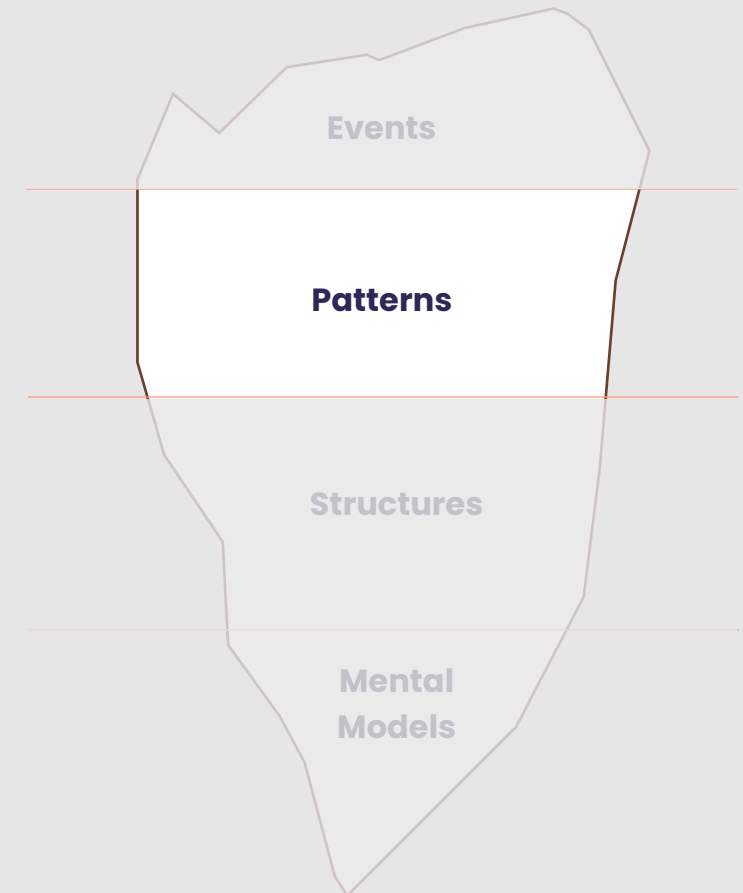
Think about how this challenge behaves over time, not just today.

*If we look at the example of scaling reuse, recurring patterns may include small pilots that do not scale, low return rates when systems are inconvenient, and separate solutions that fail to connect across regional value chains.*

### Ask yourself:

- What keeps happening again and again around this challenge?
- Do similar initiatives repeatedly get stuck at the same point?
- Are there trends, behaviors or barriers that have persisted over time?
- Are there cycles of attention, action and neglect?

These patterns suggest that the issue is **not isolated**, but part of how the system currently behaves.



## Step 4: Explore underlying structures

### What shapes these patterns?

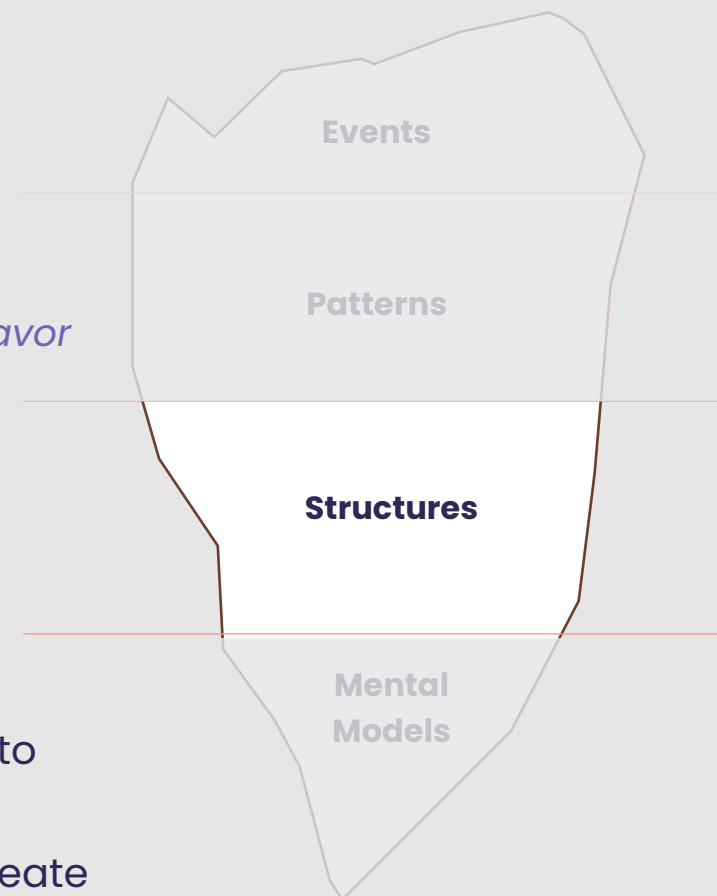
Next, reflect on the structures that influence these recurring patterns. Structures are the **rules of the game, incentives, infrastructures and arrangements** that make certain behaviors easier or harder.

*In the packaging reuse example, structures may include limited return, cleaning and redistribution infrastructure; procurement rules that still favor single-use packaging; fragmented responsibilities across waste, retail, logistics and consumer policy; or a lack of shared standards.*

#### Consider:

- What rules or incentives make the current pattern continue?
- What infrastructure or coordination is missing or not connected?
- Where are responsibilities split?
- What funding, procurement or market conditions make reuse harder to scale?

These structures often explain why well-intended projects struggle to create lasting change.



## Step 5: Question underlying mindsets

What assumptions keep the system in place?

Finally, explore the deepest level of the iceberg.

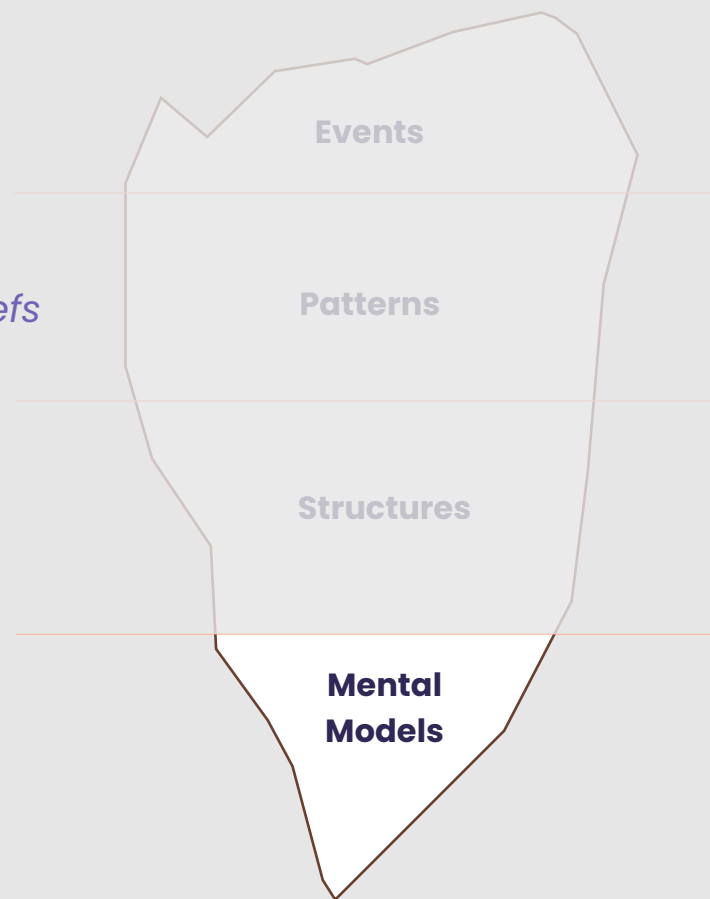
Mindsets are often implicit, but they strongly shape decisions and priorities.

*In the packaging reuse example, underlying mindsets may include beliefs such as: “convenience should be immediate and effortless”, “new and sealed means clean and safe”, “if I recycle properly, I am already doing my part”, or “reuse is too complex to become mainstream”.*

### Ask yourself:

- What is considered “normal”, “realistic”, or “too risky”?
- What assumptions shape decisions around this challenge?
- Whose knowledge or experience is trusted, and whose is overlooked?

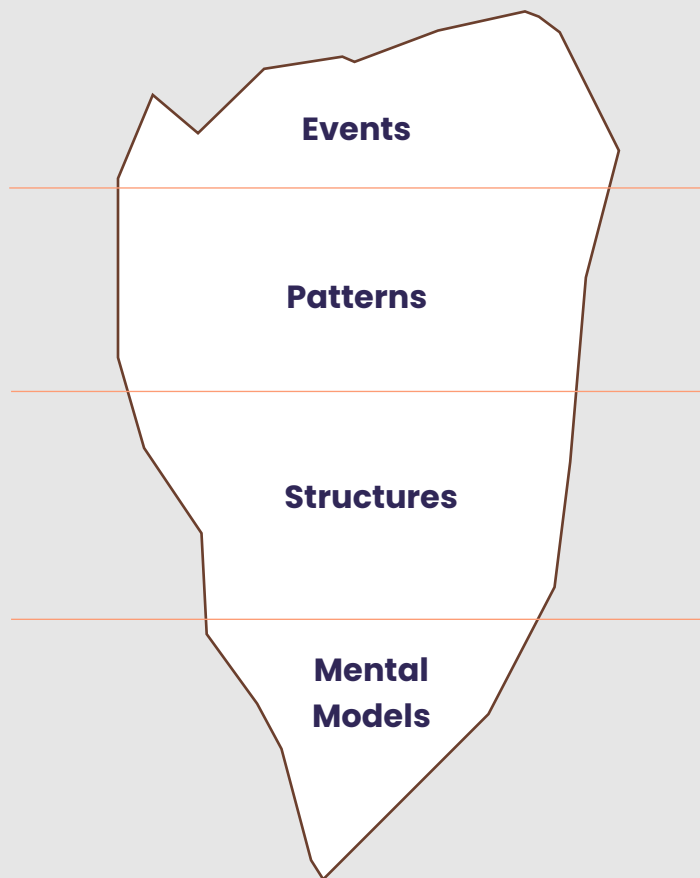
These assumptions influence **what is seen as possible** in your territory.



# Step 6. Making sense of what emerged

What does this tell us?

Take a moment to look across your Iceberg as a whole.



## Top: What is visible and urgent

- Where attention and pressure concentrate
- What tends to trigger immediate responses
- Where action is often short-term

*(This is where regions are pushed to react)*

## Middle: What keeps the pattern in place

- Where coordination, incentives and infrastructures matter.
- Where efforts either support each other – or cancel each other out.

*(This is where change needs to connect to last.)*

## Bottom: What shapes what feels possible

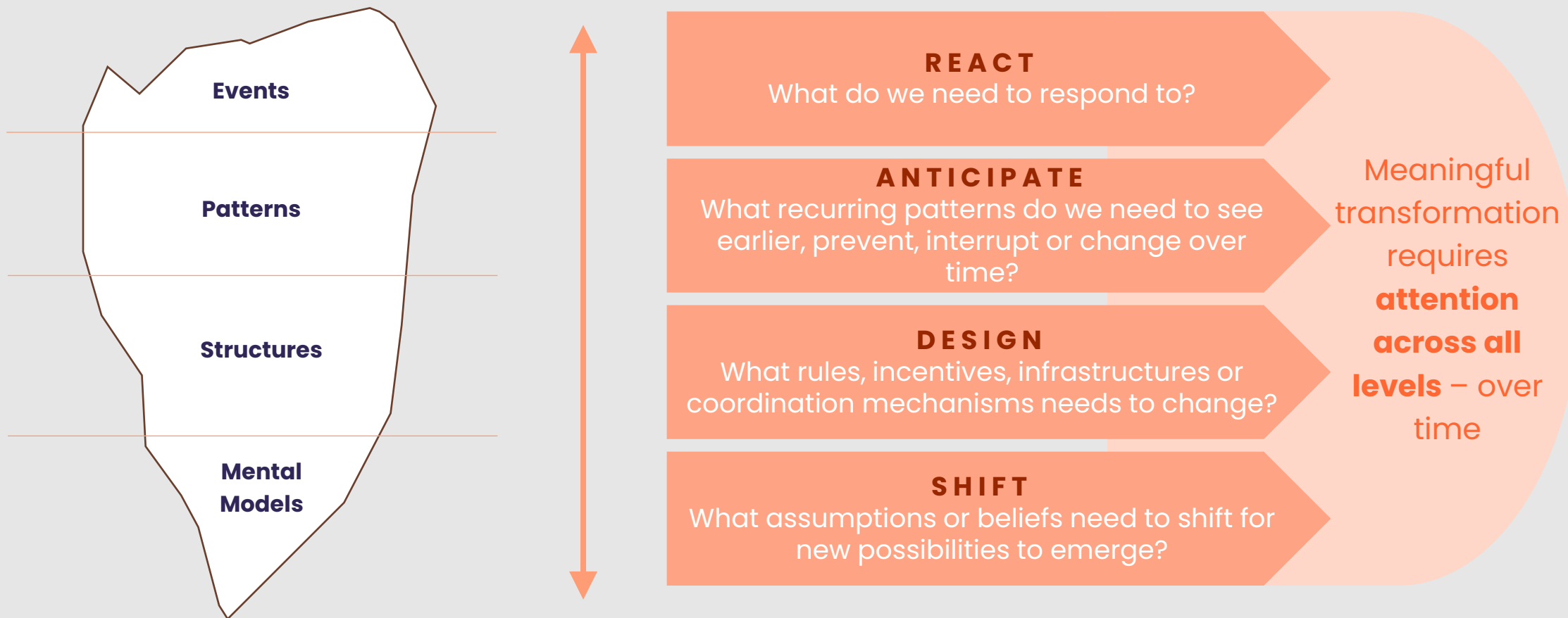
- Where assumptions and beliefs shape decisions.
- Where shifting perspective can unlock new pathways.

*(This is where change needs to be imaginable to begin!)*

## Step 6. Making sense of what emerged

What does this tell us?

Take a moment to look across your Iceberg as a whole.



# Circular Economy Example

## Packaging: From single-use dependency to regional reuse systems

Take a moment to look across your Iceberg as a whole.

- Small reuse pilots do not scale.
- Return rates stay low when systems are inconvenient
- Separate solutions fail to connect across regional value chains.

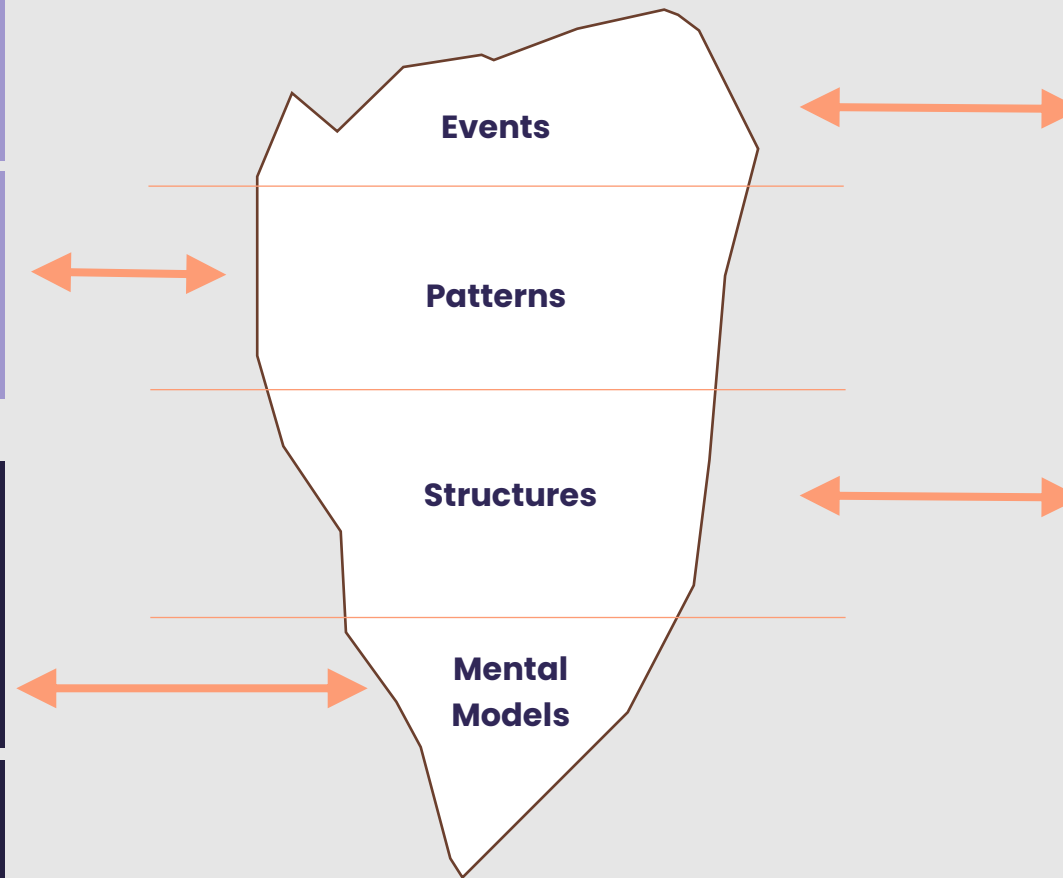
### ANTICIPATE:

Plan for scale from the start: use pilot learning to identify where return rates drop, where actors disconnect, and what needs to be in place before expanding.

- Convenience should be immediate and effortless
- New and sealed means clean and safe
- If I recycle properly, I am already doing my part
- Reuse is too complex to become mainstream.

### SHIFT

Make reuse feel normal, safe and easy: shift the narrative from “extra effort” to a trusted everyday system that is hygienic, convenient and part of mainstream consumption.



- Single-use packaging remains the default in shops, events and public services.
- Reusable options exist, but only in a few places.
- Return points are limited, unclear or underused.

### REACT:

Create immediate clarity and access: make return points visible, explain how the system works, and ensure reusable options are available where people already shop, work or gather.

- Limited return, cleaning and redistribution infrastructure.
- Procurement rules still favor single-use packaging.
- Fragmented responsibilities across waste, retail, logistics and consumer policy.
- Lack of shared standards for reusable packaging systems.

### DESIGN

Build the enabling system: connect return, cleaning and redistribution infrastructure; align procurement and pricing incentives; and agree shared standards across actors.

# Why this matters for place-based missions

## From lenses to action

The Iceberg exercise helps surface how a challenge behaves in your territory.

**Place-based Missions** turn these insights into a way of working overtime – not a one-off plan or project.

The next four modules introduce the core process regions use to mobilize place-based missions: engaging actors, envisioning direction, designing portfolios, and learning through implementation.

Each step builds on the previous one – and remains connected to the territorial reality you explored here.

Module 2  
**Engaging and Orchestrating**

Module 3  
**Envisioning**

Module 4  
**Designing Portfolios**

Module 5  
**Implementing and Learning**

# Other activities and resources

## Resources

### On Circularity:

- **The Circular Economy in Cities and Regions of the European Union** (OECD, 2025). A territorial overview of circular economy practices, challenges and policy recommendations for EU cities and regions. Read [here](#).
- **9R Framework** (CE Grow Circular). A clear introduction to circular economy strategies, from refusing and rethinking to recycling and recovery. Read [here](#).

### On Systems Thinking:

- **Systems Thinking Resources** (The Donella Meadows Project). A short collection of tools to understand systems, patterns, structures and mental models. Read [here](#).

### On Mission-oriented Innovation:

- ACTIONbook (JRC, 2025) [ACTIONbook: Innovation for place-based transformation](#).
- **Mission-oriented innovation** (OECD). An overview of how missions can help governments direct innovation towards complex societal goals.
- **Mission-oriented innovation – a handbook**. (Vinnova, 2022). A practical handbook for designing and implementing mission-oriented innovation processes. Read [here](#).
- **Mission-oriented innovation and industrial strategy** (Mazzucato, 2018). A foundational paper explaining how governments can use mission to direct innovation and investment towards major societal challenges. Read [here](#).

## Complementary Activities

- Pentagonal Problem (Climate KIC. [Visual Toolbox for Systems Innovation](#)).

# Structure of the Module

I

## Conceptual framing

Introduction to **key new concepts** related to circular economy transitions, place-based missions, and systemic approaches

II

## Guided practice

A **self-guided activity** using a systemic lens to reflect on a circular economy challenge in the regional context.

III

## Seeds of change from regions

Short **examples** offering inspiration from regional practice and early experiences with place-based and systemic approaches.

**Transformation** does not happen in  
abstraction. It happens in places,  
through people.

# Case Example: Circular Flanders

## Illustrating mission-oriented innovation in practice

The concepts introduced in this module are already being applied by regions working on circular economy transitions.

*Circular Flanders* shows how a region can move beyond isolated projects by acting as a hub and connector, aligning stakeholders around a shared long-term circular ambition.

This example is not presented as a model to replicate, but as an example of how place-based mission logic can take shape in practice.



## Case Study:

# Circular Flandersç

## *Vlaanderen Circulair*

### Key Information

- **Region:** *Flanders*
- **Country:** *Belgium*
- **Promoter:** *Flanders Regional Government*
- **Partnership:** *public authorities, private sector, NGOs and knowledge institutions, coordinated with support from OVAM*
- **Time-framework:** *2030*
- **Contact person:**  
Veerle Labeeuw:  
[veerle.labeeuw@ovam.be](mailto:veerle.labeeuw@ovam.be)

# Circular Flanders

Circular Flanders is the hub and source of inspiration for the Flemish circular economy. It is a partnership of governments, companies, civil society and the knowledge community that take action together.

## What does Circular Flanders do?

*Circular Flanders* functions as a **coordination platform** that aligns multiple actors and initiatives across policies, sectors and initiatives under a shared long-term circular ambition in Flanders (Belgium).

Watch a [video](#) here.



# Circular Flanders

## Shared Direction:

The shared direction of this initiative is to position Flanders as a leading circular economy region by 2030 by reducing material use, extending product life and creating new economic opportunities for innovation, resource efficiency, job creation and resilience while lowering environmental impact.

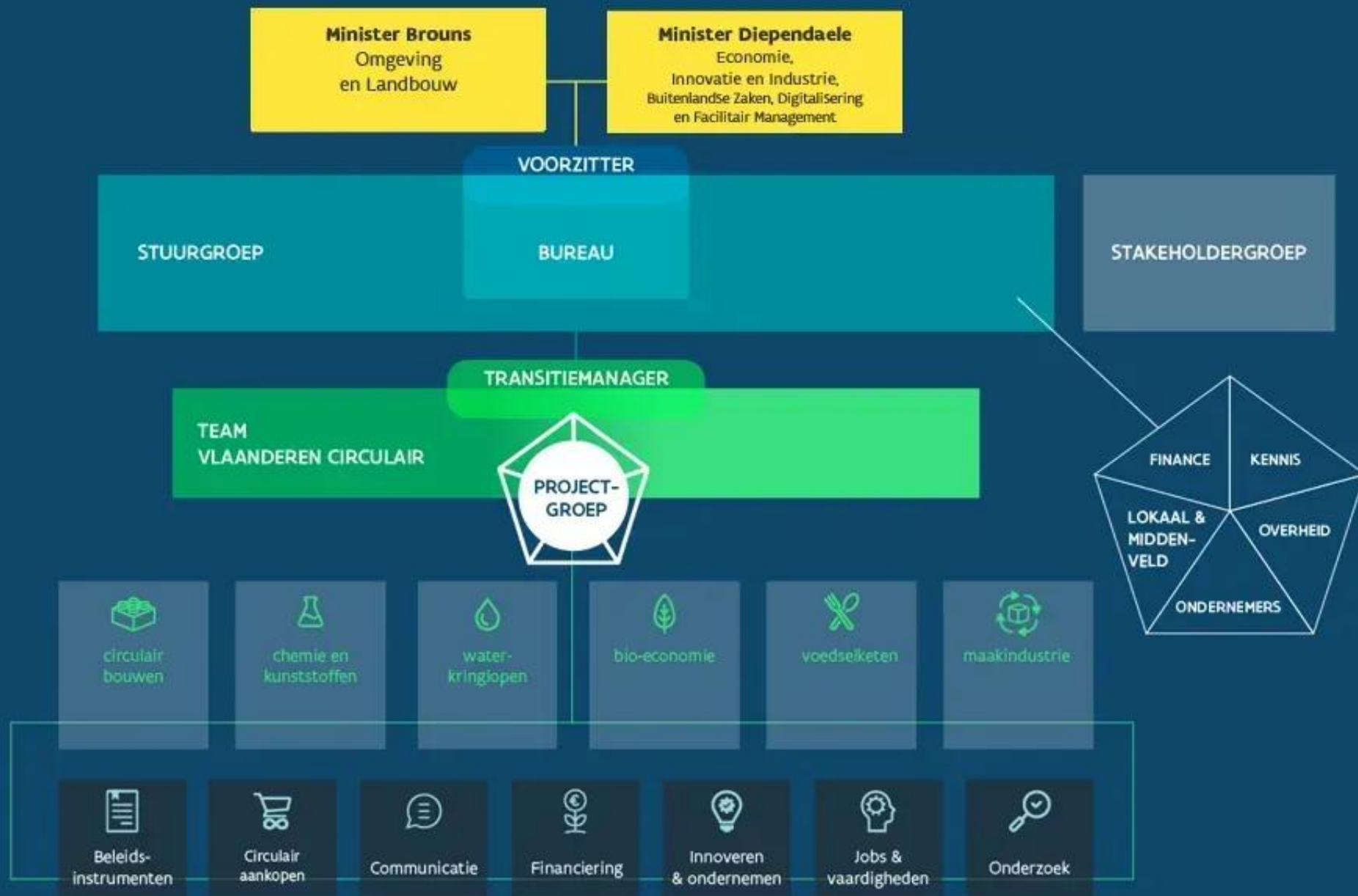
## Collaborative approach:

The initiative functions as a governance and coordination platform. The hub is structured as a partnership involving public authorities, private sector actors, NGOs and knowledge institutions, with coordination support provided by OVAM (the Public Waste Agency of Flanders).

In addition to this partnership, Circular Flanders is a broad multi-stakeholder network that brings together governments, businesses, civil society organizations, knowledge institutions and financial actors to accelerate the transition towards a circular economy in Flanders.

See governance structure in the next slide.

# GOVERNANCE



## 6 WERKAGENDA'S

6 x Thematic Working Agendas

## 7 HEFBOOM-WERKINGEN

7 x Strategic Levers

# Circular Flanders

## Thematic Focus: Six Working Agendas

Action is organized around six thematic working agendas that are supported by seven levers.

Working agendas are collaborative efforts that address the circular economy in six themes. For each theme, the partners draw up a flexible plan that includes ambitions, work paths and actions. The working agendas are guided by a public and private leader, supported by a core group.

### Six thematic working agendas:

- Circular Construction
- Food chain
- Water cycles
- Manufacturing Industry
- Chemical / Plastics
- Bio-economy



Circular Construction



Food chain



Water cycles



Manufacturing industry



Chemicals/Plastics



Bio-economy

# Circular Flanders

## Seven Strategic Levers

Levers act as **accelerators** that help move work agendas forward. Each lever addresses shared challenges and opportunities through a focused approach, guided by leaders from government and the private sector, and supported by a core group of partners from society, business, finance and public administration.

### Seven strategic levers:

- Policy Instruments
- Circular Procurement
- Innovation & Entrepreneurship
- Jobs & Skills
- Funding
- Research
- Communication



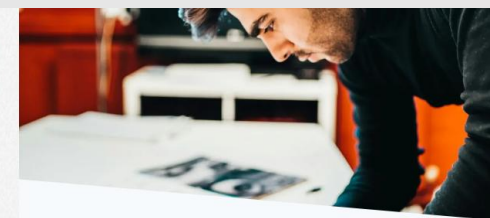
Policy instruments



Circular procurement



Innovation & entrepreneurship



Jobs & Skills



Funding



Research



Communication

# Circular Flanders

## Learnings:

- A circular economy transition can be supported through a coordination platform, not only through individual projects or policy instruments.
- Shared long-term direction can help align actors, policies, sectors and initiatives.
- Thematic work agendas can provide focus and coherence across multiple circular economy efforts.

## Tips for other peers:

- Define a clear shared direction for circular economy transitions.
- Create a coordination space that connects actors, sectors and policy domains.
- Use thematic priorities to organize action without reducing the transition to one Project.
- Combine vision with practical support mechanisms, such as tools, research hubs, etc.

# Circular Flanders

## What makes this mission-oriented?

- **Long-term** directional ambition (2030 leadership)
- **Coordination** of multiple policy domains and actors
- Structured **portfolios** and experimentation across sectors and levers.

Click [here](#) to learn more about this example





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