

# “CLOSE THE LOOP”, LET’S OPEN THE DISCUSSION

THROUGH ITS LAW ON CIRCULAR ECONOMY, EMILIA-ROMAGNA REGION STARTED SEVERAL FORMS OF INVOLVEMENT TO ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION BY ALL STAKEHOLDERS. A PERMANENT FORUM WAS SET UP AND THE SHARING ACTIVITIES WERE CARRIED OUT THROUGH A VIRTUAL SQUARE CALLED “CLOSE THE LOOP”.

With the regional Law on circular economy, Emilia-Romagna Region was the first regional government to enact a specific Law resulting from a bottom-up process that involved citizens and different city councils that had already submitted their own draft laws. The regional government promoted a shift towards a new waste management model, in which waste is regarded as a resource for a sustainable economic growth as it helps moving from a linear to a more circular economy model. The focus is no longer limited to waste management, but it has now been extended to the whole life cycle of goods, starting from the design phase. This change involves regulatory, production, organizational and distribution issues, it requires innovation and a new cultural approach with significant effects on citizens’ everyday life and on consumers’ habits.

The goals of the regional Law 16/2015 were included in the Regional waste management plan to further specify them. They are very ambitious, more stringent than those proposed by the European Union in the so-called *Circular economy package*: this is a crucial challenge to guarantee the competitiveness of the regional economic system.

In order to support this process and pursue the goals that we have set ourselves, it is important to ensure an ongoing exchange of information with those who play different roles in the economic system, dealing with products’ design, manufacturing, use and end-of-life phase. The regional Law 16/2015 established the setting up of a *Permanent circular economy forum*, which helps the Region promoting its own strategies and actions on circular economy and allows various stakeholders to give their contribution to public decisions. The Forum gathers local institutions, civil society representatives, the business



1 intermediary organizations and environmentalist associations. Its purpose is to define participation modes, also using specific IT tools.

In particular, this tool is intended to keep the dialogue alive with those who promoted the circular economy law and with other people dealing with the waste cycle in different capacities such as citizens, enterprises, public service managers, bodies in charge of service planning and regulation, and the research community.

The regional government set up the Forum with its Resolution 1442/2016 and established that, in the first phase, activities should be carried out through the participatory process called “*Chiudi il cerchio*” (“Close the loop”), which was conceived in collaboration with the regional department of the environment and the statistics, communication, Gis and participation regional office.

The communication project features various and complementary activities, including attendance of events (conferences and workshops) and on-line participation tools published on the ioPartecipo+ platform.

A first cycle of meetings took place in December 2016: in particular, a number of events and working groups were held for different target groups (citizens, associations, enterprises, research world) depending on the covered topics and goals to be reached. As a whole, the events involved more than 350 participants.

The ioPartecipo+ platform and, in particular, the so-called “Close the loop” virtual square, are boosting the

- 1 Workshop 6 Dicembre 2016, “Innovation experiences on circular economy”, Bologna. Activities of Lego Serious Play.
- 2 Workshop in the participation process “Close the loop”.

participation process through forums, surveys, questionnaires. The virtual square also aims at disseminating and making the process more transparent thanks to the document sections and multimedia galleries, where all the process-related materials are published. The on-line platform contains and makes available information, actions and documents concerning the circular economy with the additional purpose of registering and integrating all activities dealing with the topic at regional level, making them visible and accessible within just one venue: the “Close the loop” virtual square.

The Permanent circular economy forum and “Close the loop” virtual square were presented on 16th September 2016 by the regional councillor Paola Gazzolo on the occasion of “*The circular economy model in Emilia-Romagna*” conference. During the event, the regional and European contexts were analysed and the experience of some local enterprises that succeeded in turning waste into a resource was described, showing that environmentally-friendly good practices can be adopted and transformed into successful ideas from a market perspective.

On 20th October, during the second “Close the loop” event, the Region met those who promoted Law 16/2015, one year after its approval, to take stock of the implementation of the policies that have been launched in the field of waste production prevention and punctual pricing: the circular economy law and the Regional plan are working well and are beginning to yield tangible results. For the first time, citizens and enterprises in the municipalities with the best waste management were rewarded through the “incentive fund”. The second part of the conference addressed the topic of punctual pricing that is already in place in a few municipalities that took part into the event to share their experience.

On the same day, the first “Close the loop” workshop about waste reduction, re-use and punctual pricing was held, gathering more than 30 representatives of environmentalist associations and municipalities.

At first participants worked on a few proposals to encourage implementation of the prevention actions envisaged by the regional Waste management plan and the improvement of guidelines for municipal re-use centres. Later on, they developed a few proposal prototypes for the Permanent forum and explained their



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own idea creating images with the “idea boxes” method.

On 10th November, on the occasion of Ecomondo trade show in Rimini, a second workshop about “Circular economy and resilient city”, open to the educators of the sustainability education centres (Ceas - Centri di educazione alla sostenibilità), was held. It allowed to start a shared educational project in support of Law 16/2015 as provided by the same law. As a matter of fact, the circular economy requires not only new enterprise strategies and a new management, but also training for new consumers and the adoption of sustainable ways of living, that means investing in the education of all citizens.

The last workshop, entitled “Innovation experiences on circular economy”, was organized on 6th December 2016, with the purposes of highlighting the needs of enterprises and the research world and of identifying conditions that favour the implementation of circular models with a special focus on industrial symbiosis. Participants were involved into the prototyping activities by using Lego® Serious Play® to build the industrial symbiosis process stressing the elements that stimulate innovation and create greater added value.

The work done so far allowed us to

share knowledge and points of view with different stakeholders, favouring the implementation and achievement of actions and goals laid down by Law 16/2015 and by the regional Waste management plan.

In the next months, the participation process will continue with an educational project based on Law 16/2015 that will be shared with the “sustainability education” group. This action includes training activities as well as specific initiatives to be carried out across the Region through Ceas, in particular during the European Waste Prevention Week. The “Close the loop” virtual square will be continuously updated by posting notices, surveys and forums. Public meetings will also take place to illustrate the results of the first phase of the participatory process.

We conceived the “Close the loop” initiative not just as a regional square, but also as a square belonging to all those who care about the principles of circular economy and are willing to meet challenges and work together to find the best solutions for its full implementation.

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