

Opening Speech by Carlo Polidori



Good morning,

My name is Carlo Polidori and I am the project manager of the SCREEN Project, coordinated by the Lazio Region; I have the task of introducing you to the morning session of our final conference.

I will give a brief introduction to the SCREEN project and its results, which will be presented in greater detail in the technical afternoon session.

What is SCREEN? It is a Horizon 2020 project that has as partner 17 Regions of 12 different European countries, coordinated by the Lazio Region with the technical-scientific support of the University of Tuscia. These regions worked together for two years to define a common and replicable methodology for a transition to the circular economy.

So it is a project made by the Regions for the Regions, with a "bottom-up" approach, very practical, generated where the circular economy actually takes place and where the problems, barriers and research gaps that hinder sustainable development are generated.

It is a project that, through a continuous comparison between the partners and several adjustments raising from the discussions carried out, has produced tools that can facilitate the planning and management of projects for the development of a circular economy in the regions.

This project makes its results available and invites other European regions to use them, in order to define common value chains and start interregional cooperation in the circular economy.

The project has developed along four different axes, all related to each other:

The first axis fundamental and preparatory for the following ones, concerns a common procedure for mapping both real and potential value chains in each region. For "potentials" I mean value chains with still a "missing link". Here the effort of all the regions was really great, both to define a common language and terminology (on which we will return in detail in the

technical session tomorrow), and to use in practice the mapping tool with common procedures.

Such a procedure has been amended several times as a result of the indications given by those actors operating on the territory. It must be considered that the SCREEN project is participated by regions with extremely different characteristics and therefore the identification of a common methodology is the first success of the project.

The second axis is the synergistic approach that, based on the results of the first axis, produced a method of comparison between the various regions in order to find common value chains and in particular find in a certain region that "missing link" allowing the development a value chain still in the potential state in another region. So it is a method of cooperation between the regions, developed starting from the needs of the economic actors of each region, whose application will allow a considerable strengthening of the cohesion policy, thanks to its "bottom-up" approach generated by the real needs of the territories. Also in this case it was not just a desk job, but the result of continuous interaction between the regions.

The identification of interregional value chains has as a natural consequence the development of projects with participants belonging to different regions, and that should be financed with the structural funds of the concerned regions. But this is prevented by an administrative barrier, which makes it very difficult if not impossible to use the structural funds to finance projects with participants from different regions, even in the same country.

On this aspect the "Laboratory on Policies" (Policy Lab) of the SCREEN project has worked hard, by analysing the existing tools with their characteristics and their limits and by proposing an innovative one that allows to use in a truly synergistic way both the structural funds and the European research funds. After a year of internal discussions and thanks the external support of DG REGIO that showed to believe in this initiative, an instrument called "Common Pot" has been defined -based on Art. 70 of the structural funds - to overcome this barrier.

Such an instrument has been defined through a "Memorandum of Understanding" having as first signatory Lazio and at the present already signed by further 9 European regions; others regions are going to sign, too.

Furthermore, this new instrument goes beyond the barriers formed by the "Seal of Excellence" of the European Commission, that can actually be exploited in very few occasions and for projects with only one partner; we will give more details in the technical session of tomorrow.

The procedure defined by the Memorandum of Understanding is open to any other European region and is also a valuable instrument for cooperation with regions and economic actors of the United Kingdom after its exit from the European Union . The first contacts in this sense are already underway.

The agreement on the joint financing of projects by several regions necessarily implies an agreement on how the "circularity" of these projects is evaluated. This is in fact a necessity for every single region that intends to finance initiatives linked to the transition to a circular economy through its structural funds: in fact, since the circular economy is a new and completely "transversal" matter, the ordinary tools for evaluating projects cannot determine if and how much a project is more "circular" than another one.

The European Commission in January of this year issued a document on the monitoring framework for the circular economy, providing 10 indicators which, however, do not yet have a quantification to provide a precise comparison parameter for specific projects. The SCREEN project elaborated a comparative methodology with the "bottom-up" approach, tested on some already financed regional projects and then discussed and refined for the next 10

months; the result was really consistent (even if elaborated in a completely independent way) with the indicators contained in the European Commission document.

This version has been submitted to the judgment of the main European actors through an online questionnaire also hosted by the Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform: we got over 160 replies with over 40 optional comments, all very positive, which allowed us to develop a further version, complete with instructions for both applicants and assessors, as well as a practical example of its application. (already available on the project website).

We are awaiting further feedback from the European Commission (DG ENV) and the Coordinating Committee of the Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform before submitting the final version in the project deliverable. This evaluation grid has been specifically conceived to be used as an additional criterion for the evaluation of projects, allowing to compare projects that are very different from each other in a transparent and objective way.

We will also propose to the European Commission to adopt the same grid as an additional evaluation criterion for European projects related to the circular economy; we have already declared our availability, even after the end of the project, to continue a discussion on these issues.

All the results obtained constitute the "Methodology for cooperation between regions" that we will present tomorrow, while all the difficulties and barriers encountered are reported in a manual with recommendations for policy makers at regional, national and European level, which will also be presented tomorrow. An appendix of this manual also contains the research gaps detected during the identification of some value chains and suggestions to the European Commission for some research topics able to overcome such gaps.

Considering the results obtained, which went far beyond what was expected at the beginning thanks also to the enthusiasm and determination of the participating, the end of the SCREEN project coincides with the start of a cooperation network between European regions in the circular economy, which has already gathered other adhesions and aims to become an advisor of the European Commission in this challenging matter.

I thank you for your attention and give the floor to our Keynote speaker Joan Prummel.