

**Project Acronym: Cradle-Alp**

**Project number: ASP0100003**

## **D.2.2.1**

### **Peer-based monitoring and coaching activities for the pilot in each industrial sector**

**WP n°:** 2  
**Task n°:** A2.2  
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## Executive Summary

Deliverables D2.2.1 and D2.2.2 outline the outcomes of task A2.2 “Testing the relevance of the industrial C2C transformation roadmap and the C2C toolbox for promoting C2C in some industrial sectors in selected project regions”.

While D2.2.2 describes in detail how SMEs were supported using the toolbox assembled in WP1 this deliverable D2.2.1 reports on the coordination of the pilot action process in the five separate sector groups, the Transnational Sectoral Working Group (TSWG).

Initially, the TSWGs were formed for the roadmapping process. The consortium partners proceeded to regularly meet in these sector groups to coordinate all of the individual and collective activities with each other, as well as to discuss challenges and solutions for proceeding.

Each TSWG monitored the progress of the activities and regularly exchanged on the experiences, challenges and learnings made by applying the different tools in the support services for SMEs.

In general, two kinds of support services were used for pilot actions to support SMEs: individual support using specific coaching tools to discuss internally with a single company and collective support services offering workshops for knowledge transfer, to boost innovation activities and to bring together corresponding business and/or development partners.

The biggest challenge for each project partner was to raise interest in the individual services. SMEs using the support offers benefited from the knowledge transfer and the discussion about sustainable and circular approaches, guided by the various tools. Collective activities turned out to be very useful to connect SMEs with research and development partners as well as alternative partners in value chains to reach the individual sustainability targets of the companies. Collective activities helped to strengthen the collaboration between project partners to stimulate transregional and cross-border matching of companies.

## 1. Introduction to the Cradle-Alp project

Cradle-ALP aims for mainstreaming cradle to cradle (C2C) approaches, circular design and circular substitutions (from the alpine region) for linear products in industrial processes, in different industrial sectors. The Alpine Space has many natural resources and the technologies to substitute fossil raw materials and toxic substances from production with circular and environmentally friendly alternatives. This should lead to the fact that materials and products can be led back into a healthy cycle after use. The focus of this project shall be on the substitution of chemical and fossil based/unsustainable materials with more circular, sustainable and bio-degradable ones.

In a first step, the partners addressed the public, relevant industries and stakeholders from policy and innovation intermediaries to build broad awareness and understanding for the opportunities and challenges of the transformation towards circular value chains. This comprises the future manufacturing of industrial products by means of C2C approaches, using circular design principles and substituting conventional materials with renewable alternatives.

Building on a thorough multidimensional (technology, policy, economy, etc.) roadmapping exercise, transnational groupings of stakeholders developed roadmaps for each of the five focus sectors including chemistry, polymers, packaging, textile and furniture/wood-based materials. These transformation roadmaps give guidance to SMEs for current and future technological, regulatory and economical aspects on the way to transform their industrial value chain.

Based on this information the consortium partners will test different service offers and tools to support SMEs implementing C2C approaches, circular design and circular substitutions along their specific value chains.

Finally, the partners will work towards ensuring a transnational policy convergence towards transnational S4 strategies in the priority sectors of the project and initiate common cross border funding instruments for the industrial C2C transformation.

## 2. Objective of regular TSWG meetings

The objective of task A2.2 is to test the relevance of the transformation roadmap and the C2C toolbox to directly support SMEs in their transformation efforts to build circular value chains.

Through transnational as well as local and collective as well as individual activities, project partners provide support to SMEs in the Alpine space region. Their role includes mentoring SMEs, assisting in technology adoption, and facilitating collaboration between businesses to establish new value chains.

To ensure the success of the pilot activities in every of the five sectors, project partners continue the exchange in the sector-specific Transnational Sectoral Working Group (TSWG). Initially, the TSWGs were formed to coordinate and organize the roadmapping

process in each sector. During the consortium meeting in Lyon it was decided that these TSGWs will be used to further coordinate the pilot and coaching activities in at least three regular meetings per TSWG. These meetings will serve as a platform to review the pilot process, exchange experiences, assess challenges, and identify necessary corrective actions.

### 3. Report of activities carried out at TSWG group meetings

In the following subsections the activities of the five TSWG groups are described in more detail. The single meetings of each TSWG are documented and the conclusions of each group on the process of conducting the pilot actions describing the challenges in the testing of the pilot tools and actions undertaken to be able to support companies.

#### 3.1. TSWG Chemistry/Materials

For internal organization and coordination of pilot and support activities the Transnational Sectoral Working Group for Chemistry/Material met on a regular basis once per month starting in September 2024.

##### Overview of TSWG meetings

Following, the dates and participants of all TSWG Chemistry/Material meetings are listed:

- **1. Meeting, Sept. 6th, 2024**  
Partners: PP2-TZHorb, PP3-CCB, PP5-BizUP, PP7-CCIS, PP9-HEIA-FR  
Not attended: -
- **2. Meeting, Oct. 22nd, 2024**  
Partners: PP2-TZHorb, PP3-CCB, PP5-BizUP, PP9-HEIA-FR  
Not attended: PP7-CCIS
- **3. Meeting, Nov. 29th, 2024** (Joint Meeting with TSWG Polymers)  
Partners: PP2-TZHorb, PP3-CCB, PP5-BizUP, PP7-CCIS, PP8-POL, PP9-HEIA-FR;  
Not attended: -
- **4. Meeting, Jan. 31st, 2025** (Joint Meeting with TSWG Polymers)  
Partners: PP2-TZHorb, PP3-CCB, PP5-BizUP, PP7-CCIS, PP8-POL, PP9-HEIA-FR;  
Not attended: -
- **5. Meeting, Feb. 28th, 2025** (Joint Meeting with TSWG Polymers)  
Partners: PP2-TZHorb, PP3-CCB, PP5-BizUP, PP7-CCIS, PP8-POL, PP9-HEIA-FR;  
Not attended: -
- **6. Meeting, Mar. 28th, 2025** (Joint Meeting with TSWG Polymers)  
Partners: PP2-TZHorb, PP3-CCB, PP5-BizUP, PP7-CCIS, PP8-POL; Not attended:  
PP7-CCIS, PP9-HEIA-FR
- **7. Meeting, April, 25th 2025** (Joint Meeting with TSWG Polymers)

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Partners: PP2-TZHorb, PP3-CCB, PP5-BizUP, PP7-CCIS, PP8-POL, PP9-HEIA-FR;  
Not attended: -

Overview on pilot actions and activities coordinated and carried out through **TSWG Chemistry/Material**:

| Pilot action/activity (individual/collective)             | Description of activity  | Applied by partner      |
|---|--|-------------------------|
| Advertising services to SMEs                              | Via website, newsletter, email, LinkedIn, phone call                             | PP2, PP3, PP5, PP7, PP9 |
| Direct matching of SMEs                                   | Personally connecting two SMEs to discuss & build circular value a chain         | PP3                     |
| Individual SME advice using one of the pilot action tools | Individual consulting using QuickScan, Circularity Compass, SBMC, VCG, LCA guide | PP2, PP3, PP5, PP7, PP9 |
| Company visits  | On site visit at a   | PP3, PP5                |
| Lego Serious Play Workshop                                | Innovation workshop with up to 10 SMEs   | PP3, PP5                |
| Online match making event                                 | Bilateral match making using b2match platform                                    | PP2, PP3, PP5, PP7, PP9 |
| Onsite match making event                                 | Bilateral match making at a trade fair/ conference                               | PP2, PP3, PP5, PP7, PP9 |
| LCA Workshop  | Regional workshop/seminar  | PP3, PP5, PP7,          |
| Trade fair/conference                                     | Joint booth offered to SMEs at trade fair/conference (Cirplex 2025)              | PP2, PP3, PP5, PP7, PP9 |

### **Conclusion and lessons learnt**

At the second TSWG meeting of Chemistry/Material and the TSWG meeting for Polymers it was decided to merge both sector group meetings because there was only a difference in one partner, namely PP8-POL.

All partners used a variety of channels to communicate and advertise Cradle-ALP offers and services based on the individual and collective support actions. This included information on the partner's websites, newsletter articles, posts on LinkedIn (partner channels and Cradle-ALP channel), announcements at external events (including exhibiting the roll-up), dedicated information events, advertising/invitations at non-project events of the cluster (i.e. webinar), direct emailing to companies of the target group (SMEs/start-ups in chemistry, material development, recycling etc.), and calling network members individually by phone to explain the services and offers.

Despite the use of these different communication channels/approaches it turned out soon in the process that only a very low number of SMEs respond to the provided information and offers. Mainly for the individual support activities including the tools QuickScan, Circularity Compass, Business Model Canvas and direct matching of companies for collaboration it was not easy to raise interest. Presumably, one reason is that the offered services require a high need of thorough explanation.

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Therefore, most partners started to individually contact single companies to explain how they could benefit from the individual consulting services as well as from participating in the collective activities, i.e. workshops and seminars which were held online or in person to address regional stakeholders.

Realizing that only a low number of SMEs responds to the offer of individual services, the partners decided together in the TSWG to set a stronger focus on collective actions. These offers comprised online and onsite match making events, innovation workshops (Lego Serious Play, Life Cycle Assessment, Value Chain Generator) and joint booth at a conference/trade fairs. Following this strategy, the partners succeeded in involving SMEs and start-ups to participate in the offered collective activities and even in individual consulting services.

The individual tools tested in the pilot actions are described in the toolbox D1.4.3 and briefly summarized in D2.2.2. End of period 4 and beginning of period 5 for each tool there were introductory trainings held for all project partners in order to provide basic information on the tools. This way each project partner was able to decide which tools are most suitable to the SMEs in their own network and region.

- **PP2-TZ Horb** used the Sustainable Business Model Canvas (SBMC) coaching start-up companies of their network to optimize their business model and direct match making activities to bring companies into collaboration.
- **PP5-BizUp** offered LCA expert workshops and guidance, individual coaching using the Sustainable Business Model Canvas and organizing the joint Lego Serious Play workshop on sustainable innovations in plastics and packaging in collaboration with PP3-CCB. In addition PP5 was the main organizer for the joint booth and on-site match making event at the CIRPLEX - Circular Plastics Experience Summit in May 2025 in Klagenfurt.
- **PP3-CCB** focused on direct, personal matching of SMEs with relevant solution providers and conducted several individual coaching activities using the QuickScan tool. This opportunity was taken by a SME and several start-ups. CCB was involved in Lego Serious Play workshop and co-organizing online match making events. In addition, an expert workshop on life cycle assessment was conducted reaching more than 10 companies of the CCB network and providing the “Cradle-ALP LCA guide” prepared by BizUp.
- **PP9-HEIA-FR** used the VCG – Value Chain Generator organizing a public training workshop for this tool and a series of closed workshops for five SMEs/start-ups to identify and develop novel approaches for value chains based on unused residues. Additionally, HEIA-FR approached Suisse companies to participate in the Cirplex conference and match making.

A first conclusion is that individual support services are good to discuss status quo, demand and challenges of SMEs in the transformation to circularity although it takes a lot of effort to make initial contact. SMEs profit best from matching them personally with putative collaboration partners/solution providers. Offering tailored matching making events helps SMEs to get to know possible partners. A major conclusion is that the collective activities were more useful to improve transregional and cross-border matching of companies. In addition, it strengthened the cooperation between project partners.

### 3.2. TSWG Polymers

The TSWG Polymers met every month starting from September 2024 to coordinate activities toward SMEs in the frame of Period 5, with a total of 7 meetings among which 5 were conducted jointly with TSWG Chemistry/Materials.

#### Overview of TSWG meetings

Following, the dates and participants of all TSWG Polymers meetings are listed:

- **1. Meeting, Sept. 20th, 2024**  
Participants: PP2-TZHorb, PP3-CCB, PP8 POL, PP9-HEIA-FR  
Not attended: -
- **2. Meeting, Oct. 22nd, 2024**  
Participants: PP2-TZHorb, PP3-CCB, PP8 POL, PP9-HEIA-FR  
Not attended: -
- **3. Meeting, Nov. 29th, 2024** (Joint Meeting with TSWG Chemistry/Materials)  
Participants: PP2-TZHorb, PP3-CCB, PP5-BizUP, PP7-CCIS, PP8-POL, PP9-HEIA-FR; Not attended: -
- **4. Meeting, Jan. 31st, 2025** (Joint Meeting with TSWG Chemistry/Materials)  
Participants: PP2-TZHorb, PP3-CCB, PP5-BizUP, PP7-CCIS, PP8-POL, PP9-HEIA-FR; Not attended: -
- **5. Meeting, Feb. 28th, 2025** (Joint Meeting with TSWG Chemistry/Materials)  
Partners: PP2-TZHorb, PP3-CCB, PP5-BizUP, PP7-CCIS, PP8-POL, PP9-HEIA-FR; Not attended: -
- **6. Meeting, Mar. 28th, 2025** (Joint Meeting with TSWG Chemistry/Materials)  
Partners: PP2-TZHorb, PP3-CCB, PP5-BizUP, PP7-CCIS, PP8-POL; Not attended: PP7-CCIS, PP9-HEIA-FR
- **7. Meeting, April 25th 2025** (Joint Meeting with TSWG Chemistry/Materials)  
Partners: PP2-TZHorb, PP3-CCB, PP5-BizUP, PP7-CCIS, PP8-POL, PP9-HEIA-FR; Not attended: -

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Overview on pilot actions and activities coordinated in and carried out through TSWG Polymer:

| Pilot action/activity (individual/ collective)            | Description of activity  | Applied by partner |
|---|--|--------------------|
| Advertising services to SMEs                              | Via website, newsletter, email, LinkedIn, phone call                             | PP2, PP3, PP9, PP8 |
| Direct matching of SMEs                                   | Personally connecting two SMEs to discuss & build circular value a chain         | PP2, PP3, PP8      |
| Individual SME advice using one of the pilot action tools | Individual consulting using QuickScan, Circularity Compass, SBMC, VCG, LCA guide | PP2, PP3, PP9      |
| Collective consulting/advice using the pilot action tools | Collective workshops using Circularity Compass tool                              | PP2, PP8           |
| Company visits  | On site visit at a company   | PP2, PP3, PP8      |
| Lego Serious Play Workshop                                | Innovation workshop with up to 10 SMEs   | PP2, PP3           |
| Online match making event                                 | Bilateral match making using b2match platform                                    | PP2, PP3, PP9, PP8 |
| LCA Workshop  | Regional workshop/seminar with up to 30 SMEs                                     | PP3, PP8           |
| Trade fair/conference                                     | Joint booth offered to SMEs at trade fair/conference (Cirplex 2025)              | PP2, PP3, PP9, PP8 |

### **Conclusion and lessons learnt**

The initial two meetings were exclusively internal to the TSWG Polymers, allowing the participating partners to discuss and prioritize the industrial sectors of interest, given the wide-ranging applicability of polymer materials. Through discussions, the group identified the polymer-based composites sector as a common area of engagement for their SMEs and strategic interest among all partners and within the Alpine Space industry. Consequently, the TSWG Polymers decided to concentrate its efforts on polymer-based composites industry and SMEs. Following those two meetings and after discussion with PP03 CCB, the lead partner for TSWG Chemistry/Materials, it was decided to organize joint meetings between TSWG Polymers and TSWG Chemistry as they had partners in common and similar topics.

Partners started advertising Cradle-ALP offer of services towards SMEs from September 2024, though a wide range of communication channels including : articles on the partners' website and social media, newsletters, direct emailing & phoning to companies interested in circular economy initiatives, presentations at external events (trade fairs, webinars, partners' events) and presentations to smaller groups of companies members in the frame of the partner's existing corking group or regular collective meeting with their members. However, those communications efforts to promote Cradle-ALP services raised little interest from the SMEs in testing the tools and receiving support. After discussing this issue at the TSWG meetings, partners agreed that this kind of promotional efforts did not allow to have an in-depth presentation of the tools and did not offer SMEs concrete examples or support tailored to their needs, hence the lack of interest from their part. Corrective measures were implemented by partners who started to approach companies individually, making a tailored presentation of the

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Cradle-ALP services adapted to the SME's need, and to organize collective testing sessions on specific topics with a clear presentation of the goal of the session (Lego Serious Play, Circularity Compass, Life Cycle Assessment, Value Chain Generator). Thanks to this corrective measure, the partners succeeded in involving SMEs in the offered collective activities and even in individual consulting services (Lego Serious Play, Life Cycle Assessment, Value Chain Generator).

Another corrective measures decided among TSWG Polymers and TSWG Chemistry partners was to organized matchmaking events on common topics to attract more SMEs and foster meetings and potential collaborations between them. The goal was to organize a conference with key-notes linked to the SME's needs identified in the road mapping process (i.e. : lack of information on regulations and political framework, interest in sharing best-practices and successful circular business cases, state-of-play of the technologies available for circularity in a sector) followed by matchmaking sessions through a dedicated platform. This initiative allowed a good participation from the SMEs and enabled transnational and transectoral matching as the events were organized with the support of several partners involving different expertise linked to a topic. The TSWG Polymers and TSWG Chemistry organized a matchmaking event focusing on Composites recycling and circularity involving the participation of SMEs from the chemistry sector (for example ones involved in chemical recycling processes of polymers) but also from the plastics and polymer-based composites sector.

Some partners that were not members of the TSWG Polymer sector also contributed to this TSWG activities as they gathered among their members SMEs working in the polymer sector and interested in testing the tools. This is the case for PP05 Biz-Up and PP07 CCIS who involved their SMEs in the matchmaking event on composites and also organized collective workshops on Polymers to test tools such as Lego Serious Play or Circularity Compass.

The individual tools tested in the pilot actions are described in the toolbox D1.4.3 and briefly summarized in D2.2.2.

## 3.3. TSWG Packaging

The TSWG Packaging met 4 times from September 2024 to coordinate activities toward SMEs in the frame of Period 5. Bilateral meetings are not included.

### Overview of TSWG meetings

- **1. Meeting, Sept. 27th, 2024**  
Partners: LP-CCAPP, PP4-BOKU, PP6-UniSmart, PP7-BizUP, PP7-CCIS  
Not attended: -
- **2. Meeting, Oct. 30th, 2024**  
Partners: PP3-CCB, PP6-UniSmart, PP7-CCIS  
Not attended: -
- **3. Meeting, Mar. 3th, 2025**  
Partners: LP-CCAPP, PP4-BOKU, PP6-UniSmart, PP7-BizUP, PP7-CCIS  
Not attended: -
- **4. Meeting, May. 9th, 2025**  
Partners: LP-CCAPP, PP4-BOKU, PP6-UniSmart, PP7-BizUP, PP7-CCIS  
Not attended: -

| Pilot action/activity (individual/ collective)             | Description of activity  | Applied by partner     |
|--|--|------------------------|
| Advertising services to SMEs                               | Via website, newsletter, email, LinkedIn, phone call, other social media         | LP, PP4, PP5, PP6, PP7 |
| Individual SME advice using one of the pilot action tools  | Individual consulting using QuickScan, Circularity Compass, SBMC, VCG, LCA guide | LP, PP6, PP7           |
| Collective consulting/advices using the pilot action tools | Collective workshops using Circularity Compass tool                              | LP, PP6, PP7           |
| Company visits   | On site visit at a company   | PP7                    |
| Lego Serious Play Workshop                                 | Innovation workshop with up to 10 SMEs   | PP5                    |
| Online match making event                                  | Bilateral match making using b2match platform                                    | LP, PP3, PP4, PP5, PP7 |
| Trade fair/conference                                      | Joint booth offered to SMEs at trade fair/conference (Cirplex 2025)              | LP, PP4, PP5, PP7      |

### **Conclusion and lessons learnt**

The TSWG Packaging faced challenges similar to those encountered by other sectoral groups, particularly in engaging SMEs. Despite implementing a multi-channel communication strategy (including social media, newsletters, articles, and direct outreach via email) initial interest from SMEs remained low. This experience reaffirmed a key insight shared across TSWGs: broad-based advertising alone is insufficient to capture SME attention.

In response, TSWG Packaging partners shifted to a more targeted and personalized approach, involving phone calls, personal emails, and meetings. By engaging companies individually and tailoring messages to each SME's unique context, project partners were able to clearly demonstrate the tangible benefits of the available support tools. This approach proved more effective, resulting in increased participation in individual piloting activities.

Still, it needs to be pointed out that many businesses, both large and small, already had clear sustainability plans. Particularly in the packaging sector, companies are highly focused on sustainability due to intense market pressure. This has influenced the piloting as well.

Nevertheless, partners still recognized the value in organizing and attending broader activities promoting the Cradle-ALP project, the cradle-to-cradle concept, and other individual activities like the CIRPLEX conference and the online matchmaking event. These events allowed SMEs to explore new ideas and connect with potential partners from across the Alpine region. Such formats fostered knowledge exchange and aimed to stimulate transnational cooperation.

The key lessons learned included the importance of direct, personalized communication and the need to clearly articulate the value of tools in improving each SME's operations. This required a deep understanding of the targeted SMEs.

An important point to add is that, since PP4 – BOKU does not have direct access to companies, their Austrian partner, PP5 – BizUp, supported them in targeting packaging companies. In addition, PP3 – CCB also collaborated with the TSWG Packaging group, both by helping to identify relevant companies and by actively participating in the matchmaking event. CCB also invited one of the speakers, the company Gruber-Folien. TSWG group leader CCIS collaborated with both LP and PP6 (as well as PP3 and PP4) regularly on a bilateral level and discussed status quo and challenges.

## 3.4. TSWG Textile

For internal organization and coordination of pilot and support activities the Transnational Sectoral Working Group for Textile met up four times. The decision was made to skip a December meeting due to the project partner meeting that was held in Munich.

### Overview of TSWG meetings

- **Kick-off Meeting, Sep. 23rd, 2024**  
Participants: PP5- Biz-Up, PP7 - CCIS, PP8- POL; Support from PP4 - BOKU  
Not attended: PP2 – TZ Horb
- **2. Meeting, Nov. 08th, 2024**  
Participants: PP2- TZ Horb, PP5- Biz-Up, PP7 - CCIS, PP8- POL; Support from PP4 – BOKU  
Not attended: -
- **3. Meeting, Dec. 17th, 2024**  
Participants: PP2- TZ Horb, PP5- Biz-Up, PP7 - CCIS, PP8- POL; Support from PP4 - BOKU  
Not attended: -
- **4. Meeting, Jan. 30th, 2025**  
Participants: PP5- Biz-Up, PP7 - CCIS, PP8- POL; Support from PP4 - BOKU  
Not attended: PP2 – TZ Horb

Overview on pilot actions and activities coordinated in and carried out through TSWG Textile:

| Pilot action/activity (individual/ collective)  | Description of activity  | Applied by partner   |
|---|--|--|
| Advertising services to SMEs                    | Via website, newsletter, email, LinkedIn, phone call                             | PP5, PP8, PP7, PP2   |
| Direct matching of SMEs                         | Personally connecting two SMEs to discuss & build circular value a chain         | PP8 (Biomerieux & Geneomat on recycling personal security equipment (including textile) but discussions are on-hold as partners did not agree over the price), PP2 |
| Individual SME advice using a pilot action tool | Individual consulting using QuickScan, Circularity Compass, SBMC, VCG, LCA guide | PP5, PP8 (Circularity Compass, 2 Textiles SMEs attended the workshop)  |
| Company visits                                  | On site visit  | PP2  |
| Innovation Workshop                             | Innovation workshop with up to 10 SMEs   |  |
| Online match making event                       | Bilateral match making using b2match platform                                    | PP2  |
| Onsite match making event                       | Bilateral match making at a trade fair/ conference                               | PP2  |

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|-----------------------|---|--|
| Trade fair/conference | Joint booth offered to SMEs at trade fair/conference (Cirplex 2025) | PP5 (in collab with BOKU: Vienna Textile Lab as one Austrian participating company at the booth) |
|-----------------------|---|--|

### **Conclusion and lessons learnt**

In order to not repeat the contents too much, a lot of similarities can be observed between the experiences of the chemistry group and the textile group in terms of activities and response: a wide variety of channels has been employed to address potentially interested SMEs but despite efforts employed across different channels, finding interested SMEs proved itself to be more difficult than expected.

A significant contributor to this was the fact that unlike in other TSWGS, the textile group consisted of four partners that all had very little prior contacts in the respective industry. While PP8 was bound by an agreement with another cluster to not overstep too much into the textile industry, PP2, PP5 and PP7 struggled to extend their network within the time set to fulfil the tasks of A.2.2. The lack of existing contacts made it difficult to find suitable companies to carry out the activities initially planned.

This also led to the decision that collective activities will likely not be a good strategy to follow, as planning and organisational efforts are rather high with no guarantee that suitable participants can be found. Instead, the focus was on individual activities and getting to know ones own industry landscapes first.

- PP8- POL: As there is another cluster dedicated to textile sector (Techtera) operating in the same region as Polymeris, PP8 could not organise events or promote support on tools specifically focusing on textile as there is an agreement between those two historic partners to not overstep on the other cluster's sectoral activities. However, Polymeris managed to reach SMEs from the textile sector through the organisation of a Circularity Compass workshop during a recycling event co-organised by Polymeris and TECHTERA to which SMEs from The Textile and Plastics sectors contributed. Polymeris also did direct matching between 2 of its members SMEs on the recycling of plastics and textile equipment.
- PP7- CCIS tried their best through advertisements in order to generate attention in regard to the activities and the potential for collaboration with textile companies. Due to their lack of an existing textile network, finding interested companies was rather difficult.
- PP5-Biz-up: PP5 advertised the potential of the toolbox in various ways, through a broad online webinar that was also addressed to the textile industry as well as other publication channels in order to reach the right target audience. Within the frame of an on-site event around textiles, a circularity compass was carried out with one of the participating textile companies. Another compass was done with Tech2B, an Upper Austrian start-up consultancy. The team chose to fill in the compass for textiles as well, as they have close connections to textile start-ups in Upper Austria.

Likely the biggest lesson learned for the TSWG Textile was that a six-month time frame is a rather short period to both build a network and service said network. While in

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theory the idea of exploring the textile industry through the Cradle-ALP project sounded rather interesting, the goals that were set were rather high considering the amount of groundwork that still needed to be done before even being able to address the topic of piloting with companies.

Another contributing factor that was already mentioned within the chemistry chapter as well was the high complexity of the toolbox. Explaining the different offers in a short and easily understandable way while also being catchy and grabbing the interest of SMEs.

### 3.5. TSWG Wood/Furniture

The Transnational Sectoral Working Group (TSWG) for the Wood/Furniture sector was composed of the following partners: LP – CCIAA Padova and PP6 – UniSMART Fondazione Università di Padova and the external experts of “t2i – trasferimento tecnologico ed innovazione.” The TSWG held a total of four meetings between September 2024 and April 2025 to coordinate pilot and support activities aimed at SMEs operating in the furniture and wood-based materials sector.

#### Overview of TSWG meetings

- **Kick-off Meeting** – *January 22nd, 2025*  
Participants: LP–CCIAA Padova, PP6–UniSMART, t2i, SustainME External Expert  
Focus: Kick-off meeting; alignment on sector-specific roadmap, identification of relevant SMEs in Veneto region, and discussion of applicable tools.
- **2. Meeting** – *February 15th, 2025*  
Participants: LP–CCIAA Padova, PP6–UniSMART, t2i, SustainME External Expert  
Focus: Review of outreach efforts; discussion of first feedback from contacted SMEs; identification of potential obstacles in the wood-based industry.
- **3. Meeting** – *April 10th, 2025*  
Participants: LP–CCIAA Padova, PP6–UniSMART, t2i, SustainME External Expert  
Focus: Verification of the progress of pilot actions and status of SMEs involved, planning of QuickScan meetings and definition of data collection methods, preparation of an artificial intelligence tool to support the implementation of the QuickScan.
- **4. Meeting** – *May 5th, 2025*  
Participants: LP–CCIAA Padova, PP6–UniSMART, t2i, SustainME External Expert  
Focus: Verification of the progress of pilot actions and status of SMES involved, update of the status quo of the QuickScan meetings planned, first resume of the activity realized until the date.
- **5. Meeting** – *June 16th, 2025*  
Participants: LP–CCIAA Padova, PP6–UniSMART, t2i  
Focus: Final evaluation of pilot actions; discussion on lessons learnt; planning dissemination of results and contributions to cross-sectoral matchmaking.

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Overview on pilot actions and activities coordinated in and carried out through TSWG Wood/Furniture:

| Pilot action/activity (individual/ collective)  | Description of activity   | Applied by partner          |
|---|---|-----------------------------|
| Advertising services to SMEs                    | Promotion via direct emails, website, newsletter, LinkedIn, phone call  | CCIAA Padova, t2i, Unismart |
| Direct matching of SMEs                         | Personally connecting with SMEs introduction of companies with complementary needs in circular furniture value chains                     | CCIAA Padova, t2i, Unismart |
| Individual SME advice using a pilot action tool | Use of QuickScan tool, and QuickScan AI tool for tailored consulting  | t2i                         |
| Company visits                                  | On-site visits  | t2i                         |
| Innovation Workshop                             | Participated in joint innovation workshop with focus on design for disassembly and reuse  | CCIAA Padova, t2i           |
| Online match making event                       | SMEs invited to b2match platform to explore collaboration with polymer and textile sectors, Bilateral match making using b2match platform | CCIAA Padova, t2i           |
| Onsite match making event                       | Participation in CIRPLEX 2025   | External expert of t2i      |
| Trade fair/conference                           | Promotion of Cradle-ALP services at local fairs and cross-sectoral EU events, Joint booth offered to SMEs at Cirplex 2025                 | CCIAA Padova, t2i           |

### **Conclusion and lessons learnt**

The work carried out by the Transnational Sectoral Working Group (TSWG) for the Wood/Furniture sector throughout the Cradle-ALP project represents a structured and replicable example of how transformation roadmaps, if adequately monitored and dynamically implemented, can catalyze tangible change toward circularity in traditional manufacturing sectors. From the initial conception of the roadmap - developed collaboratively by CCIAA Padova, UniSMART, and the innovation experts of t2i - the group positioned itself as a coordination platform not only for aligning strategic goals but for actively testing the practical implementation of circular economy principles across a representative group of SMEs.

The roadmap, tailored specifically for the wood and furniture sector in the Veneto region and extrapolated for Alpine-wide application, identified priority themes including: modular design, product disassembly, reverse logistics for bulky goods, sustainable material sourcing (e.g., FSC/PEFC-certified wood, bio-based finishes), and traceability through the entire life cycle. These priority areas guided both the identification of SMEs to be involved in the pilot actions and the selection of appropriate tools from the Cradle-ALP toolbox.

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### Regular verification of status

A core value added by the TSWG was the structured, periodic verification of the **advancement status** of each roadmap milestone. Five coordination meetings were held between January and June 2025. Each meeting served not only as a checkpoint for activities underway, but also as an opportunity to re-evaluate assumptions, identify emerging needs, and refine tools in an agile, iterative process. This helped to avoid a static or overly prescriptive roadmap and instead allowed for the emergence of what can be described as a **living roadmap**—updated based on field data, SME feedback, and cross-sectoral stimuli.

### Adaptation of QuickScan tool

One of the most notable innovations introduced was the **AI-enabled QuickScan** tool developed by t2i, which provided a semi-automated pathway to assess SME readiness and map their alignment with roadmap objectives. Through Natural Language Processing and rule-based algorithms, the tool was able to collect data from SME responses, identify gaps (e.g., in waste tracking or modularity practices), and suggest next steps in alignment with the roadmap pillars. This not only reduced the time required for qualitative analysis by experts but also ensured standardization across evaluations, increasing reliability and comparability of assessments.

Moreover, the AI component allowed for predictive insights by cross-referencing the SME's status with benchmark data from other sectors or regions. For example, an SME lagging in reverse logistics infrastructure could be matched—via the TSWG—with solution providers operating in the textile or polymer sectors who had already developed traceability platforms or modular packaging systems. These cross-sector insights were a direct result of roadmap monitoring and were enabled by the collective intelligence built across the project.

### Implementation of SME assistance with QuickScan

An equally important dimension of the TSWG's work was the planning and **facilitation of QuickScan meetings**, which were not treated as one-off diagnostic sessions but rather as engagement milestones within a broader learning journey for SMEs. Each meeting was preceded by a preparation phase, during which SMEs received tailored pre-assessment materials. The data collected through QuickScan tools (traditional and AI-supported versions) was then used not only for evaluation but also to co-design next steps, such as participation in innovation workshops (e.g., Lego Serious Play on design for disassembly), technical visits, or matchmaking with R&D partners.

The integration of these activities allowed the TSWG to act as an **enabling infrastructure** for experimentation, rather than a passive monitoring body. By aligning the operational tempo of the pilot actions with the strategic directions of the roadmap, the group ensured that no action remained isolated but was instead clearly nested within a longer-term transformation logic.

Another central aspect was the **monitoring of sectoral alignment over time**. Rather than limiting itself to SME-level diagnostics, the TSWG used cumulative data from

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QuickScans, workshop participation, and event engagement to produce sector-wide trend analyses. For instance, preliminary aggregated results indicated that while many companies had made progress on sustainable procurement (e.g., certified wood), significant gaps persisted in lifecycle design integration and reverse logistics planning. These insights were directly fed back into roadmap refinement discussions and shared with policymakers and cluster managers to inform broader support strategies.

### Additional Cradle-ALP activities

Cross-sectoral collaboration also played a key role in lessons learned. Participation in the CIRPLEX 2025 event and in b2match online matchmaking sessions enabled companies to explore synergies not only within the furniture sector but also with actors in adjacent industries. The roadmap proved to be an excellent reference tool during these exchanges, enabling SMEs to articulate their transition journey and positioning themselves within a clear transformation narrative. These encounters revealed new opportunities: for example, one Veneto-based furniture manufacturer started a design partnership with a polymer company working on recyclable bio-resins, which could replace current thermosetting adhesives in panel assembly.

Throughout the implementation period, the TSWG became increasingly aware of the importance of building **capacity for systemic thinking**. The complexity of transforming furniture production from linear to circular cannot be addressed through isolated tools or superficial awareness campaigns. It requires integrated planning, iterative reflection, and the alignment of actors around shared objectives. In this sense, the TSWG functioned as a governance node, managing stakeholder expectations, operational feedback loops, and strategic foresight in a way that modeled what future public-private innovation ecosystems could look like.

Furthermore, the data collected and processed during the roadmap monitoring will serve as a legacy asset for future projects. The TSWG recommended that the current roadmap be updated annually, using a blended methodology that combines expert focus groups, AI analytics, and company self-assessments. This would ensure that the strategic direction for the wood/furniture sector remains relevant, measurable, and shared among regional actors.

**Key lessons learned** from the experience include:

- **Strategic Monitoring Matters:** A transformation roadmap without real-time feedback mechanisms risks becoming obsolete. Regular TSWG meetings served as essential checkpoints for agile adaptation.
- **AI Tools Accelerate Learning:** The integration of intelligent tools such as the QuickScan AI reduced the workload of experts and increased the depth and breadth of SME analysis.
- **Inter-sector Synergies Are Catalysts:** Many breakthroughs (e.g., in materials, logistics, and product design) emerged from exchanges with non-wood sectors, underlining the value of cross-pollination.

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- **Tailored SME Engagement Works:** One-to-one coaching, supported by toolkits and hands-on workshops, was significantly more effective than general promotion campaigns.
- **Roadmaps Must Be Living Documents:** The ability to revise and adapt roadmap content in light of field data was critical for maintaining alignment and sector credibility.
- **Governance Structures Matter:** The TSWG itself, with its regular cadence and clear mandate, was key to maintaining momentum, integrating feedback, and connecting dots across the ecosystem.

In conclusion, the TSWG Wood/Furniture's experience in Cradle-ALP confirms that sector transformation toward circularity is not only feasible but can be systematically supported and accelerated when grounded in a collaboratively built roadmap, actively monitored, and enhanced by smart tools. As the wood/furniture sector moves toward a more circular future, the methods, data, and partnerships forged within the TSWG offer a strong foundation for scaling impact across the Alpine region and beyond.

### 4. Overall Conclusions

To ensure the success of the pilot activities, including individual SME assistance and collective offers, the sector-specific Transnational Sectoral Working Groups (TSWG) were continued to coordinate these activities between all project partners. The meetings were used to review the pilot process, exchange experiences among project partners, to discuss challenges and possible solutions and alternative procedures.

The single TSGWs met between four and seven times during project period 4 and 5. Early on in the process and across all TSWG, the project partners encountered low interest and engagement of SMEs despite using diverse communication efforts and channels (social media, newsletters, direct email invitations, websites, webinars, etc.) to promote the support services. This issue was consistently reported in all five groups and led to the shared recognition that broad outreach efforts alone were insufficient. An important conclusion was that for the majority of SMEs a highly individual approach is necessary to involve the companies into the individual assistance and coaching offers or to participate in collective activities. Precise explanations clearly showing the benefits were needed by the project partners to be able to generate interest in the support services. This meant additional effort and slowed down the entire process. Finally, it was only possible to generate interest by personally approaching selected company representatives.

Since all project partners had very similar experiences, it can be assumed that the challenge actually lay in communicating the benefits of participating in the coaching activities or in the attractiveness of the chosen support methods, and was not due to other factors.

Another major challenge was the complexity of the tools in the Cradle-ALP toolbox chosen for individual assistance of SMEs. Although not very complex per se, the tools often required significant explanations for project partners being able to assist SMEs.

In order to train the project partners, training on each single tool was planned and organized within the consortium using a 'train the trainer' concept. This training on the tools for individual assistance is important to enable the project partners to effectively support SMEs and make the assistance a success. However, most of the time this training consisted of a short 1 to 3 hour online explanation of the theory of each of the tools, carried out by the partner who proposed the tool. Only for the Circularity Compass a hands-on training was provided during one of the consortium meetings.

Therefore it was a big challenge and effort for the project partners that were not familiar with a specific tool or had only little experience with individual coaching/ consulting of SMEs, to familiarize and get started. Most project partners even did not feel sufficiently empowered to independently use the various tools when coaching SMEs. In consequence most project partners used the tool that was familiar to them.

In order to gain sufficient confidence in using the tools for coaching SMEs, more time for practice would have been necessary. An alternative way to be more effective during a project would be that every project partner engages a professional advisor for coaching.

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For example, this was the case for the lead partner who hired experienced coaches of t2i, the non-profit innovation agency in Northern Italy.

In conclusion, it seems to be more efficient to select and agree on only one or two tools for individual assistance that provide a benefit for the assisted SMEs and are easy to handle for the project partners. In the best case, this decision is already taken by the consortium in the very early stages of a project.

This learning was accompanied by the growing insight that SMEs would benefit more from joint activities organized through the whole consortium or between several project partners that would bring SMEs together and enable them to network directly.

Similarly, every project partner experienced that it was more effective to engage SMEs when offering knowledge on topics currently important for SMEs. Regional workshops and seminars in the local language organized through each project partner could be tailored to specific SME needs, challenges and interests of the SMEs. Interestingly, some topics, such as life cycle assessment, were mentioned from different companies in the different regions. This showed that SMEs in the different regions/countries have the same challenges. They had the best benefit when the project partners involved experts to carry out a workshop.

To initiate collaboration across regional borders collective activities such as match making turned out to be best suited because they allow the personal contact between company representatives. In contrast to individual coaching and regional workshops it is an effective format to bring various stakeholders in touch. An onsite format is more personal, online has the advantage of stimulating first contacts between participating companies that are geographically far apart and otherwise would not have an opportunity to meet.

However, the success strongly depends on the close cooperation of the organizing project partners and their ability to activate the individual members of their network to participate in this offer. A close coordination is necessary to offer an attractive program including expert presentations on innovations, novel technologies and R&D project ideas tailored to the addressed industry sector. This worked very good for the online match making on polymers and chemicals where a mix of French and German SMEs talked about their innovations.

In summary, it can be said that the collective activities were more goal-oriented to stimulate and improve transregional and cross-border collaborations of SMEs.

Key lessons learnt:

- SMEs respond better when tools are linked directly to their needs or business challenges.
- Sectoral matchmaking and transregional events can significantly boost SME collaboration.
- Close collaboration between organizers involving stakeholders from all participating regions makes match making more successful.

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- Existing networks are crucial; building new sectoral connections within a limited timeframe is difficult.
- Tool complexity limits uptake unless accompanied by expert guidance and/or intensive training.