# EVENT DESCRIPTION SHEET

| PROJECT | |
|---|---|
| **Participant:** | Regionalna agencija za razvoj istocne Srbije (RARIS) |
| **PIC number:** | 933647020 |
| **Project name and acronym:** | Rural communities' engagement bringing green solutions — Rural Green |

| EVENT DESCRIPTION | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Event number:** | WP3 | | |
| **Event name:** | "Circular Economy in Manufacturing Industry"- World Cafe | | |
| **Type:** | conference | | |
| **In situ/online:** | in-situ | | |
| **Location:** | Nova Gradiška, Croatia | | |
| **Date(s):** | 26.- 28.02.2025. | | |
| **Website(s) (if any):** | https://rural-green.raris.org | | |
| **Participants** | | | |
| Female: | 17 | | |
| Male: | 32 | | |
| Non-binary: | 0 | | |
| From country 1 [Bulgaria]: | 2 (1 man and 1 women) | | |
| From country 2 [Bosnia and Herzegovina]: | 2 (1 man and 1 woman) | | |
| From country 3 [Croatia]: | 41 (27 men and 14 woman) | | |
| From country 4 [Serbia]: | 2 (2 men) | | |
| From country 5 [Slovenia]: | 2 (1 man and 1 woman) | | |
| Total number of participants: | 49 | From total number of countries: | 5 |
| **Description**<br>*Provide a short description of the event and its activities.* | | | |
| International project event "Circular Economy in Manufacturing Industry"- World Cafe, was organized in Nova Gradiška, Croatia, in period 26.-28. February 2025. | | | |

First day of the event was dedicated to the Steering Committee meeting, which was organized in “Pansion As”, Nova Gradiška on February 26th. During the Steering Committee meeting, the partners has discussed overall project management, monitoring of results and all other issues considering project implementation.

The main event – World Cafe “Circular Economy in Manufacturing Industry” was organized in Nova Gradiška in conference hall of CEKOM NING on February 27$^{th}$.

After the welcoming speeches by Mrs. Jelena Pirovic from CEKOM NING d.o.o.- hostess of the event, Mr. Vinko Grgic- Mayor of the City of Nova Gradiška, Vladan Jeremic- Director of RARIS- lead partner of the project and other participants discussed the role of local authorities in circular economy.

The objectives of the World Cafe were:

▪ To raise awareness on EU green policies, greening of rural economy and introducing circular economy in rural areas.

▪ To create transnational framework for more inclusive policymaking process in greening rural economy and faster transition to circular economy

During the “Circular Economy in Manufacturing Industry” – World Cafe, participants discussed and presented the challenges, achievements and future perspective in following areas:

1. European values of rural sustainability
2. Sustainable transition in rural areas
3. Role of local communities in shaping policies in manufacturing industry
4. European models of the circular economy in manufacturing industry

1. European values of rural sustainability

Introduction:

Rural sustainability is a core aspect of European values. The European Union promotes policies that balance agricultural productivity with ecological responsibility, fostering sustainable rural development.

These efforts highlight the EU’s dedication to harmonizing economic growth with environmental protection, ensuring that rural areas remain vibrant and sustainable for future generations.

Challenges:

- **Climate Change Impacts** – Rising temperatures, unpredictable weather, and extreme conditions threaten agriculture, biodiversity, and water resources.

- **Economic Pressures** – Small farms struggle to compete with industrial agriculture, leading to rural depopulation and economic decline.

- **Social and Demographic Challenges** – Many rural areas face aging populations, labor shortages, and youth migration to cities, reducing innovation and sustainability efforts.

- **Balancing Food Security and Sustainability** – Ensuring sufficient food production while reducing environmental impact remains a complex challenge.

Achievements:

- **Growth of Organic Farming** – The EU has significantly expanded organic farmland, with some member states surpassing 25% organic agricultural land.

- **Smart Rural Development** – The EU has supported digitalization in agriculture, precision farming, and rural broadband expansion, improving efficiency and sustainability.

- **Sustainable Agri-Food Systems** – Efforts to reduce food waste, promote local food production, and encourage sustainable supply chains have gained momentum.

Future Perspectives:

- **Strengthening the Circular Economy** – More emphasis on reducing waste, recycling agricultural byproducts, and promoting bio-based materials in rural industries.

- **Greater Support for Rural Communities** – Policies will focus on attracting young farmers, improving rural infrastructure, and ensuring vibrant local economies.

- **Expansion of Renewable Energy** – Rural areas will play a key role in scaling up solar, wind, and bioenergy projects, integrating energy production with farming practices.

2. Sustainable transition in rural areas

Introduction:

The transition to sustainability in rural areas is essential for balancing economic development with environmental responsibility. Across Europe, rural regions are embracing green innovations, renewable energy, and sustainable agriculture to adapt to climate change and ensure long-term resilience. However, challenges such as depopulation, economic viability, and climate adaptation remain. A successful sustainable transition requires collaboration between governments, local communities, and businesses to create thriving, resilient rural economies that preserve natural resources for future generations.

Challenges:

- **Climate Change and Environmental Stress** – Rural areas, particularly those dependent on agriculture, are highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, such as extreme weather events, droughts, and floods, which threaten crop yields, water availability, and ecosystems.

- **Lack of Infrastructure and Digital Connectivity** – Limited access to high-quality infrastructure, such as broadband, transportation, and energy networks, hampers the development of sustainable industries in rural areas and prevents rural communities from benefiting fully from technological advances.

- **Rural Depopulation and Aging Populations** – Rural areas face significant demographic challenges, including youth migration to urban centers and an aging population. This reduces the workforce, undermines innovation, and diminishes the social fabric necessary to drive the sustainable transition.

- **Balancing Economic Growth with Environmental Protection** – Striking a balance between maintaining traditional agricultural productivity and adopting sustainable, eco-friendly practices can be complex, especially when short-term economic pressures may conflict with long-term environmental goals.

Achievements:

- **Expansion of Renewable Energy** – Many rural areas across Europe have successfully integrated **wind, solar, and bioenergy** projects, reducing reliance on fossil fuels and creating green jobs. Some regions are now energy self-sufficient.

- **Sustainable Rural Tourism** – Eco-tourism and agritourism have become vital economic drivers in many regions, promoting local food, culture, and conservation efforts while reducing over-tourism pressure on urban areas.

- **Circular Economy Initiatives** – Many rural areas have implemented **waste reduction, biogas production, and sustainable forestry** projects, turning agricultural byproducts into energy and reducing environmental footprints.

Future Perspectives:

- **Stronger Circular Economy Models** – Rural areas will increasingly adopt **waste-to-energy systems, sustainable forestry, and bio-based industries**, reducing waste and improving resource efficiency.

- **Strengthening Rural Communities** – Efforts to **attract young farmers, improve rural infrastructure, and promote eco-tourism** will help counter rural depopulation and economic decline.

- **Policy and Funding Support** – The evolution of EU policies will provide further financial support for rural sustainability initiatives.

3. Role of local communities in shaping policies in manufacturing industry

Introduction:

Local communities play a crucial role in shaping policies within the manufacturing industry. Their involvement ensures that industrial development aligns with social, environmental, and economic needs.

Challenges:

- **Lack of Awareness and Engagement-** many community members may not be aware of their role in influencing manufacturing policies and limited participation in policy discussions due to lack of information or interest.
- **Conflicting Interests-** communities may prioritize environmental concerns, while manufacturers focus on economic growth and profit. Also, government entities may struggle to balance industry needs with community demands.
- **Limited Access to Resources and Expertise-** local communities may lack technical knowledge about manufacturing processes, making it difficult to propose informed policy recommendations.
- **Short-Term vs. Long-Term Interests-** some community members may focus on immediate job creation, while long-term sustainability might be overlooked. Also, policymakers may prioritize short-term economic gains over long-term community well-being.
- **Political Influence and Corruption-** Industry lobbying and political pressure can sideline community concerns.Corruption in decision-making processes may lead to policies that favor manufacturers over local populations.
- **Social and Economic Inequalities**- Marginalized groups within communities may struggle to have their voices heard.

Achievements:

- **Stronger Environmental Regulations-** community advocacy has led to stricter environmental laws and pollution control measures. Many manufacturers now adopt eco-friendly practices, such as waste reduction, renewable energy use, and carbon footprint reduction.
- **Balanced Economic Development-** Some policies now focus on ensuring that manufacturing growth benefits local economies rather than just large corporations.
- **Improved Labor Rights and Working Conditions-** local pressure has led to better wages, improved working conditions, and enforcement of labor laws.
- **Increased Community-Industry Partnerships-** many manufacturing companies now collaborate with local communities on job training programs and educational initiatives. These programs help ensure that local workers have the skills needed for modern manufacturing jobs.

Future Perspectives:

- **Stronger Emphasis on Sustainability and Green Manufacturing-** communities will push for stricter environmental policies, leading to cleaner production methods, waste reduction, and carbon neutrality. Governments and manufacturers may collaborate more on circular economy models, where waste materials are recycled back into production.
- **Greater Use of Technology for Community Engagement-** digital platforms and AI-driven analytics will allow communities to participate more effectively in policy discussions.
- **Stronger Regulations on Ethical Manufacturing-** governments may introduce stricter labor laws to prevent exploitation, ensuring fair wages and ethical treatment of workers. Community-driven activism will likely influence policies around human rights in supply chains.
- **Enhanced Public-Private Partnerships-** more collaboration between governments, manufacturers, and communities will shape policies that balance economic growth with social well-being.

4. European models of the circular economy in manufacturing industry

Introduction:

The circular economy is a transformative approach that aims to reduce waste, enhance resource efficiency, and promote sustainability in the manufacturing sector. European countries have been at the forefront of implementing circular economy models, setting global benchmarks for sustainable industrial practices. Unlike the traditional linear economy—where resources are extracted, used, and discarded—the circular economy emphasizes **recycling, reusing, and remanufacturing** to minimize environmental impact. The European Union (EU) has introduced various policies and frameworks to support circular manufacturing, including the **EU Circular Economy Action Plan**, which promotes sustainable product design, waste reduction, and the use of renewable materials..

Challenges:

- **High Initial Investment Costs-** circular manufacturing requires new technologies, infrastructure, and redesigning products, which can be costly. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) may struggle to afford the transition without financial support.
- **Technological Limitations-** Many recycling and recovery processes are not yet fully developed or cost-effective for all materials. Advanced sorting, remanufacturing, and upcycling technologies need further innovation.
- **Consumer and Cultural Barriers-** it includes: **Resistance to Change-** consumers and industries are accustomed to linear economy models, and changing mindsets takes time; **Perceived Lower Quality of Recycled Products**: Some customers and businesses still perceive recycled or remanufactured goods as inferior; **Lack of Awareness**: Many businesses and consumers do not fully understand the benefits of the circular economy.
- **Supply Chain and Material Challenges**- material Sourcing Issues: ensuring a steady supply of high-quality recycled materials can be difficult. Many existing products are not designed for easy disassembly, reuse, or recycling. Setting up efficient systems to collect, sort, and return materials to production cycles remains a challenge.

Achievements:

- **Policy & Legislative Successes- EU Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP) 2020** – Set ambitious targets for waste reduction, eco-design, and sustainable production. **Eco-design & Right to Repair Laws** – Ensured that electronics and appliances are more repairable, with spare parts available for longer. **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)** – Forced manufacturers to take responsibility for the end-of-life stage of their products. **Plastic Strategy & Bans on Single-Use Plastics** – Boosted demand for recycled and biodegradable materials.

- **Material Recycling & Waste Reduction- Europe leads in recycling**: The EU packaging waste recycling rate exceeded 64% in 2022. Also, **closed-loop systems**: Companies increasingly use secondary raw materials.

And **Industrial Symbiosis**: Waste from one industry is used as a raw material in another.

- **Reduction in Resource Use & Carbon Footprint-** EU reduced industrial waste per GDP unit over the last decade. Circular economy practices saved over €600 billion for EU businesses.Increased use of renewable materials in production, reducing reliance on virgin resources.

Future Perspectives:

- **Stronger Policies & Regulations- Stricter EU Circular Economy Laws** – The European Green Deal aims for a climate-neutral, fully circular economy by 2050. **Expanded Right to Repair** – More industries (beyond electronics) will be required to make products easier to repair and upgrade. **Mandatory Recycled Content** – New EU rules will **require minimum recycled content** in plastics, batteries, and packaging. **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) Expansion** – More manufacturers will be responsible for collecting, recycling, and reusing their products.

- **Advancements in Circular Manufacturing Technologies-** it includes: Digital tracking of materials for better transparency & waste reduction; **Advanced Recycling Technologies** – New chemical recycling methods for plastics, textiles, and electronics; **3D Printing with Recycled Materials** – Enabling localized production and reducing raw material dependency.

- **Increased Corporate & Consumer Adoption-** more companies will integrate circular principles into their core business strategies. **Consumer Demand for Sustainability** – Younger generations will push brands towards circular, low-waste products.

Conclusion: Connection to the Project

The **circular economy (CE)** plays a crucial role in transforming the **manufacturing industry** by reducing waste, reusing materials, and creating sustainable production models. In rural areas, adopting CE principles can provide **new economic opportunities, increase resource efficiency, and promote environmental sustainability**. This project focuses on integrating circular economy principles into rural economies, with a particular emphasis on **women in rural areas, the wider rural population, and local policymakers**.

During the “Circular Economy in Manufacturing Industry“- World Café, exhibition of partners posters with a good examples on circular economy was set-up for visitors.

For the “World Café”, several presentations were prepared:

- Presentation: "Engaging Local Communities: Shaping Policies for a Circular Economy within EU Priorities" – prof.dr.sc. Nataša Drvenkar

- Presentation: "From Local Voices to EU Policies: Empowering Rural Communities in the Circular Economy Transition"- prof.dr.sc. Darko Tipurić

- Best Practises: "Sustainable Innovations in Manufacturing: A Circular Economy Success Story" – Marko Ivković – Industrial Park Nova Gradiška

Panel discussion: Empowering Rural Communities: Driving the Transition to a Circular Economy was also held as a part of the World Café.

The World Café “Circular Economy in Manufacturing Industry“ has gathered 49 participants from 5 countries (Serbia, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia), out of which 17 were women and 32 were men.

On the third day of event – 28.02.2025., the participants had opportunity to visit several good examples of circular economy projects around the city of Nova Gradiška – Visit to Clarum Ltd as a, visit to Klimaoprema Ltd, visit to Bošnjak Distillery & Brewery: Craft Beer and Spirits

According to the evaluation, the goals of the World Cafe were reached and the participants have rated it with a high score. Asked to rate specific issues from 1-5 (5 is the highest rank), average scores were the following:

EVENT CONTENT:

The event objectives were achieved - 4,64

The content of the event corresponded to my needs and expectations - 4,02

The materials and presentations provided enough information, are clear and easy to use – 4,84

ASSESSMENT OF THE QUALITY OF EVENT:

The speakers are competent for the topics covered in the event – 4,72

The speakers' attitude towards the participants is fair and focused on their needs – 4,48

Event space and logistical support were adequate – 4,60

The total duration of the event was appropriate – 4,04

My knowledge and skills, after this event, have been improved and enriched – 4,12

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EVENT:

I have learned something new about circular economy – 4,28

I was able to get answers to my questions during the event – 3,96

Event didn‘t only cover only basics but offered new information – 4,44

International experiences provided new ideas that can be useful in my country – 4,28

Event met my expectations? – 4,16

I would be interested in additional training sessions similar to this one – 4,00

Content of the event is relevant to my professional development needs – 3,44

I am satisfied with the networking opportunities provided – 4,20

This document is also published on the web site:

https://rural-green.raris.org

| HISTORY OF CHANGES | | |
|---|---|---|
| VERSION | PUBLICATION DATE | CHANGE |
| 1.0 | 13.03.2025 | Initial version |
| | | |
| | | |

RURAL GREEN

Co-funded by the European Union

Nova Gradiška, 14.01.2025.

**To:**

1. **VDCCI - Association Vidin Chamber of Commerce and Industry**
2. **CEKOM - Centar kompetencija za napredno inženjerstvo Nova Gradiška doo**
3. **RA SASA - Razvojna agencija Savinjsko-Šaleške regije, doo**
4. **CERD BIH - Centar za ekonomski i ruralni razvoj**
5. **RARIS - Regionalna agencija za razvoj istočne Srbije**

**Ref:** Invitation for participation on the **World Cafe "Circular Economy in Manufacturing Industry"** - under the project "Rural communities' engagement bringing green solutions", Project acronym: Rural Green under the Call: CERV-2023-CITIZENS-TOWN-NT

**INVITATION**

Dear Partners,

I am pleased to invite you to participate in World Cafe "Circular Economy in Manufacturing Industry" - under the project "Rural communities' engagement bringing green solutions", funded under the GRANT AGREEMENT for the Project 101138179 by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), under the powers delegated by the European Commission, which will be organized in the period of 26-28. February 2025 in Nova Gradiška, Croatia.

We kindly ask you to confirm your participation not later than 15:00h on 12. of February 2025 by phone: +385 (0)97 6127 620, or by e-mail: jelena.pirovic@cekomng.hr

Looking forward to successful cooperation!

Yours Sincerely,

Adam Đanić

Director

CENTAR KOMPETENCIJA ZA NAPREDNO INŽENJERSTVO NOVA GRADIŠKA d.o.o.

NOVA GRADIŠKA, II Industrijski odvojak 2

**AGENDA**

**of the World Cafe "Circular Economy in Manufacturing Industry" - under the project "Rural communities' engagement bringing green solutions", funded under the GRANT AGREEMENT for the Project 101138179**

**Place: Conference hall of CEKOM NING, Industrijska ulica 23/1, Nova Gradiška, Croatia**

**Wednesday, 26.02.2025,**

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|---|---|
| *18.00 – 19.00* | Opening of Steering Committee meeting. Discussion of overall project management. |
| *19.00 –19.30* | Monitoring of results and all other issues considering project implementation |
| *19.30-20.00* | Discussion organization of next project event - World Cafe "Digitalization and Circular Economy" |
| *20.00* | Dinner |

**Thursday, 27.02.2025**

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|---|---|
| *10.00 – 10.30* | Registration of participants |
| *10.30 – 10.45* | Opening of the event.<br>Welcoming speech of Adam Đanić – Director of CEKOM – Partner of the project<br>Welcoming speech of Vinko Grgić – Mayor of Nova Gradiška<br>Welcoming speech of Vladan Jeremic – Director of RARIS – Lead partner of the project |
| *10.45 – 11.00* | Presentation of the project |
| *11.00 – 11.10* | Introduction to the panel discussion on the topic "Empowering Rural Communities: Driving the Transition to a Circular Economy" |
| *11.10 – 12.15* | **Panel discussion: Empowering Rural Communities: Driving the Transition to a Circular Economy** |
| *12.15 – 12.30* | Partner Presentation – RARIS |
| *12.30– 12.45* | Partner Presentation – VIDIN |
| *12.45 – 13.00* | Partner Presentation – RA SASA |
| *13.00 – 15.00* | Lunch for the participants |
| *15.00 – 15.15* | Presentation: "Engaging Local Communities: Shaping Policies for a Circular Economy within EU Priorities" – prof.dr.sc. Nataša Drvenkar |
| *15.15 – 15.30* | Presentation: "From Local Voices to EU Policies: Empowering Rural Communities in the Circular Economy Transition" |
| *15.30 – 15.45* | Best Practises: "Sustainable Innovations in Manufacturing: A Circular Economy Success Story" – Marko Ivković – Industrial Park Nova Gradiška |
| *15.45 – 16.45* | Best practices of partners country - RARIS, CEKOM, RA SASA, CERD |
| *16.45 – 17.15* | Free discussion |
| *17.15 – 17.30* | Closure of the first day |
| *20.00* | Dinner |

**Friday, 28.01.2025**

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|---|---|
| *10.00 – 12.00* | Visit to Clarum Ltd as a Best Practice Example |
| *12.00 – 13.30* | Lunch for participants |
| *13.30 – 14.30* | Visit to Klimaoprema as a Best Practice Example |
| *14.30 – 16.30* | Visit to Bošnjak Distillery & Brewery: Craft Beer and Spirits |
| *16.30 – 17.30* | Free discussion. Closure of the second day |
| *20.00* | Dinner |