

Maribor part of Podravje Region, Slovenia



*A Circular Economy strategy for the region and
the city of Maribor*



Podravje Region, Slovenia



Inhabitants: Podravje region appr. 325.990
(2021), City of Maribor appr. 96.300



2.170 km² area of Podravje, 41 km² area
city of Maribor



147,5 per km² population density

Baseline situation and objectives

As part of an integrated strategy of sustainable urban development, the Wcycle project was launched in 2016 supported by the city of Maribor. With the aim of closing material cycles, the “Wcycle Institute” was founded - a platform for bundling regional research and investment activities.

The objective is to discuss cross-sectoral cooperation in handling, processing, re-use and development of resources. The focus in Maribor is on selected sectors:

- **Natural resources:** to save non-renewable natural resources by circular practices.
- **Sustainable development:** Circular approaches help to reduce the region’s environmental impact and to follow the guidelines for sustainable development.

Characteristics of the region

- The region consists of 7 administrative units and 41 municipalities.
- The regional council consisting of representatives of all 41 municipalities is responsible for the distribution of funds.
- The largest urban areas are Maribor and its surroundings, and Ptuj. The lowlands are subject to immigration and an increased level of urbanization, while the hilly areas are depopulated.
- 69 % of the area is agricultural land.
- The average gross salary is 91.5 % of the Slovenian average, 40 % of the workers are commuting into the city.
- **Key industries:** agriculture, chicken and meat production, cultivation for animal feed, supplier for automotives, Henkel research center, industrial park

- **International integration:** The European Union promotes the transition to a circular economy and Wcycle carries out circular projects with partners across member states to jointly find solutions.
- **Collaborative economy:** Wcycle is committed to development and research activities across sectors as well as to finding partners, projects, and sources of funding for different types of actors, including science, businesses and public administration.

Focus of the project

“Podravje region is a pilot region for bio circular economy in the CCRI initiative until 2025 which shows our commitment and the importance for this transition to take place. We continue our work through this process and will involve more stakeholders in our activities.”

Igor Kos, project member

The aim is to develop regional circular economy structures. In this case the Wcycle Institute was founded that helps to institutionalise networking activities.

Wcycle focuses on the research and investment activities of founders and other partners, development in the field of circular economy. It assists in finding partners, projects and funding sources. Professional support and basic information (technical, legal, financial and others) in project preparation and applications for tenders are provided. It coordinates cooperation between partners. In the meantime, the Wcycle Institute has been merged into the Maribor Regional Development Agency that coordinates cooperation between partners.



The city of Maribor © Matej Vranic

Which leverage points have been addressed?

The project is based on the following strategic project areas that support the city's transition to a circular economy:

- Treatment of municipal waste and associated services
- Use of processed construction and demolition waste and soil in urban construction
- Managing surplus heat and renewable energy
- Sustainable mobility, urban transport and joint service
- Reuse of recycled water and alternative water resources
- Sustainable management of land and regeneration of degraded areas
- Collaborative economy network

Stakeholders involved

- Companies of the waste management sector
- Non-governmental organisations
- Research institutes
- Citizens

Financing

All projects are EU funded e.g.

- Integrated Territorial Investment over EU funding – based on the urban agenda in 2015 within the Cohesion Fund.
- Urban Innovative Actions (Initiative of the EU promoting pilot projects for sustainable urban development)
- Interreg Europe, Alpine region and Central Europe program
- Climate-KIC (Knowledge and Innovation Community)
- Horizon 2020, Horizon Europe

Outlook

With a focus on biowaste, the main new focus lies on the regional food industry that has high economic relevance for the region. Accordingly, the next strategy will address the food sector more specifically. To date (summer 2023), Slovenia has no strategy on bioeconomy or circular economy on federal level yet. The region of Podravje is planning to develop such a strategy in the close future.

Spotlights

Several projects have been initiated, such as:

- **GreenCycle – Interreg Alpine Space:** Manifesto for Circular Economy – 12 key principles for a transition towards a circular economy

“Greencycle was the starting point. The aim was to develop a strategy for Maribor which helps to transfer it to a circular economy. This was the key to enable all other steps and projects.”

Igor Kos, project member

- **Winpol – Interreg Europe:** New automatic sorting plant for municipal solid waste
- **Cinderela – Urbact (EU funding):** New Circular Economy Business Model for More Sustainable Urban Construction
- **CWC – Interreg Central Europe:** adopting urban rainwater harvesting and utilization as well as grey water recovery measures on city level, urban circular water management
- **Future Cities of Southeast Europe – ClimteKic:** Achieve circular and net-zero greenhouse gas emission economies by 2030
- **URBAN SOIL 4 FOOD:** Stocktaking and assessment of typologies of Urban Circular collaborative Economy Initiative, Strategic Research and Innovation Partnership

Key learnings and replicability

The positive consequences of the different activities include the emergence of new business opportunities for the region, the creation of high-quality, predominantly green jobs, added value and a new economic boost.

A major success factor has been the visibility of Wcycle project in Slovenia and the EU and that circular economy is working.

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- Different strategic research and innovation partnerships for circular economy have been initiated.
- A centre for the circular economy transition within the region and within Slovenia has been established with high potential to upscale the achieved results.

The example of Maribor shows that networking is key to develop regional circular economy structures. Building a platform, or in this case founding an institute, helps to institutionalise networking activities. The integration of these activities into regional and political structures is important and ensure acceptance among relevant stakeholders. By bundling knowledge on financing and investment, the capacity of private actors to support the transformation can be increased. This can create incentives for new businesses, create new jobs and support regional transformation processes.

Challenges and barriers

There are still some challenges in the region, e.g. to get politicians on board and motivate the public procurement for circularity. For the future the wish is to obtain better funding, improve regulations and work on a broader knowledge pool and investment in information technology.

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