



LESSONS LEARNT & YOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS!

HOW TO SYNC-IN YOUTH INNOVATION POTENTIAL IN THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

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1. Introduction

1.1. About this report

The SYnC project has risen from the current global emphasis on sustainability, particularly within the European Union where a significant proportion of the youth regard environmental and climate protection as paramount. Our objective is to harness this momentum by introducing young people and youth workers to Circular Economy concepts through a non-formal educational framework.

This report specifically aims to facilitate youth workers and trainers in the field of adult education who wish to utilise the SYnC project outputs to promote the concept of circular economy and entrepreneurship among youth learners. It outlines the project's objectives, the methodologies employed in gathering data, and the scope of our analysis. The report showcases the project's outcomes and lessons learned, and highlights recommendations for youth in the context of circular economy and entrepreneurship, providing a comprehensive resource for those committed to fostering sustainable development and entrepreneurial skills in young individuals.



1.2. About the SYNC Project

According to a recent Eurobarometer, protecting the environment and climate change was considered the highest priority for the EU by 67% of young respondents. Youth participation in various social movements for climate and environmental protection as well as consumption habits towards sustainable food and clothing further manifests the turn of the youth towards sustainability and alternative models of economic development. COVID-19 devastatingly also underlined the need to turn towards sustainable production and consumption and for alternative economic models in the future.

Based on this reality, SYNC aims to develop a non-formal educational framework to introduce young people and youth workers to the Circular Economy concepts and values and to unleash the innovation and entrepreneurial potential of young persons in this field.



To achieve that, the specific objectives of the SYNC project are to:

Inform and raise young people's awareness on circular economy entrepreneurship.

Build the capacity of youth organisations to be able to inform and guide youth towards circular economy concepts and values and to explore youth's entrepreneurship and innovation potentials.

Strengthen the entrepreneurial skills of young people to play an active role in the circular economy.

Provide a digital environment for innovation and support the design of business ideas.

Reinvigorate cross-national and cross-sectoral knowledge transfer to build momentum towards increasing the availability of educational resources to foster youth entrepreneurship in Circular Economy.



SYNC is a 24-month transnational cooperation of six (6) organisations in five (5) different European countries, namely Greece, Portugal, Romania, Germany, and Belgium:

[KMOP Education & Innovation Hub](#), Greece

[Amazing Youth](#), Greece

[Inova+](#), Portugal

[European Association for Social Innovation](#), Romania

[KMOP Policy Centre](#), Belgium

[Bupnet](#), Germany

To find out more information about the project and access its results please visit:

www.sync-project.eu



2. Project Overview and Methodological Approach

The SYnC project aimed to develop a non-formal educational framework to introduce young people and youth workers to the circular economy and to unleash its innovation potential, to forge an enabling environment for young people especially those with fewer opportunities to capitalize on the circular economy entrepreneurship opportunities and towards the development of new business ideas that are youth-led and youth tailored.

Its approach has three pillars:

Assist youth workers to discuss, analyse and promote circular economy and sustainable development concepts and offer examples and testimonials that will show the potential of circular economy for youth;

Make available novel resources to youth workers and activate and prepare young people for circular economy, knowing more about what it entails, shaping business ideas tailored to its characteristics;

Address the macro, systemic levels with recommendations and educational strategies to contribute to paving the way for the intensification of policy initiatives and interventions to promote circular economy to young people.



During its 24-month duration, SYnC delivered the following activities and results:

At the beginning of the project, partners created the [“How to? Toolkit for Youth and Circular Economy Entrepreneurship”](#) which is available in digital format and 5 languages. The SYnC project developed this comprehensive toolkit tailored for young individuals and youth organizations, promoting circular economy entrepreneurship. This toolkit is part of our broader educational framework designed to inform, inspire, and invoke action among Europe’s youth.

At the same time, SYnC partners developed the [project website](#) as well as a [Facebook page](#) and a [Twitter/X account](#) to provide information on circular economy and give access to project results. Furthermore, partners in Greece, Portugal, Romania, Germany, and Belgium, developed video testimonies from youth entrepreneurs in circular economy that can act as a source of inspiration for young people around Europe. The video testimonies are available on SYnC’s [YouTube channel](#).

In addition to the toolkit, the SYnC project developed the [“Guidebook for Raising Awareness and Building the Capacity of Youth Workers”](#), available in digital format and 5 languages. The Guidebook for Youth Workers is aimed at equipping them with the knowledge and skills to effectively support young individuals in understanding and engaging with circular economy concepts. This guidebook serves as a vital component of our educational framework, providing structured content and practical exercises that are crucial for active learning and application. In this context, four raising awareness and capacity building seminars

with the participation of 20 youth workers per country, were implemented in Greece, Portugal, Romania, and Germany.

Following the creation of the Toolkit and the Guidelines, the [“SYnC Online Course and Educational Platform”](#) for introducing youth to circular economy entrepreneurship, was developed and piloted in the 4 countries of the project with the participation of more than 80 young persons. The course is available online here: <https://www.sync-project.eu/courses/e-learning/> in 5 languages. The e-learning modules for youth further extend the educational outreach of the project, offering detailed online courses that cover a range of topics from introductory concepts to detailed business planning and implementation strategies in the circular economy.

The final activities of the project include the development of the [“Lessons Learnt & Recommendations! How to SYnC-in youth innovation potential in the circular economy”](#) report and [“The Forward-Looking Educational Strategies”](#) report that are available in digital form in 5 languages. Along with the present report that guides interested organisations and entities to uptake the SYnC paradigm; partners also introduced the “Forward-Looking Educational Strategies” report, which explores innovative educational frameworks and policy recommendations that are designed to further embed circular economy and entrepreneurship within the educational sectors of participating countries.

3. Project Outcomes

3.1. Toolkit for Youth and Circular Entrepreneurship

The Toolkit for Youth and Circular Entrepreneurship serves as a comprehensive resource designed to introduce and immerse young people into the principles and practices of the circular economy. The contents of the toolkit are structured as follows:

Introduction:	Provides an overview of the circular economy, highlighting its importance through recent Eurobarometer statistics and the growing trend among youth towards sustainable practice
Circular Economy and its Benefits:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is a Circular Economy: Defines the circular economy and contrasts it with the traditional linear model. - Benefits of Circular Economy: Discusses the environmental, economic, and social benefits. - Youth on Circular Economy: Explores how young people can and are contributing to the circular economy. - European Commission’s Role: Details the initiatives and support from the European Commission towards a circular economy.
Country-Specific Insights and Best Practices:	Separate chapters for Portugal, Belgium, Germany, Greece, and Romania provide specific background information on each country’s approach to the circular economy, including local initiatives and best practices like Staramaki, Repair Café Lisboa, NextLap Accelerator, and DreamStart . Each chapter aims to offer replicable models and inspiration for new initiatives.



3.2. Guidebook for Youth Workers

The Guidebook for Youth Workers is tailored to empower youth workers with the necessary knowledge and tools to effectively mentor and guide young individuals through the circular economy landscape. The guidebook contains:


Introduction to the SYnC Project and the Guidebook:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Project Overview: Summarizes the objectives and approach of the SYnC project. - Using the Guidebook: Instructions on how to effectively utilize the guidebook in educational settings.
The 4 Ws & H of Circular Economy:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Detailed exploration of the 'What, Why, Who, When, and How' of circular economy, providing a deeper understanding and practical tips for youth workers to convey these concepts.
Engaging the Youth & Facilitation Skills:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focuses on developing facilitation skills crucial for engaging young people in discussions and activities about the circular economy. - Techniques like active listening, empathy, and creativity are covered to enhance the learning experience.
Design Thinking:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduces the design thinking process as a method to innovate and solve problems within the circular economy. - Detailed steps from understanding the problem to prototyping and testing solutions are provided, encouraging a hands-on approach to learning and innovation.
Next Steps & Financing a Circular Economy Business:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offers practical guidance on transitioning from ideas to actual business plans within the circular economy. - Information on funding opportunities, creating stakeholder lists, and understanding the financial aspects of starting a business.

Each component of the Toolkit and Guidebook is designed to be interactive and comprehensive, ensuring that both the knowledge providers (youth workers) and the learners (young people) are equipped to engage deeply with circular economy. The Toolkit and Guidebook complement each other, with the Toolkit providing fundamental knowledge and the Guidebook offering methodologies and practical applications to implement this knowledge effectively.




3.3. E-Learning Modules for Youth


The SYnC online course and platform on circular economy entrepreneurship addressed to youth aims to serve as an integrated and tailored course to equip them with knowledge and competences relevant to the circular economy and nurture the youth innovation capital towards new green and sustainable business ideas. The online course covers the following topics:




Module 1 – Circular Economy Introduction: Covers foundational concepts, the importance of youth involvement, and the connection between the circular economy and sustainable development goals.



Module 2 – Circular Economy Business Ideation: Guides learners through the process of ideating and planning new business ventures within the circular economy framework.



Module 3 – Business Planning & Marketing: Discusses the assessment of business ideas, the creation of business plans, and marketing strategies specific to circular economy businesses.



Module 4 – Practical Application, Regulation, and Funding: Provides practical guidance on navigating regulations, accessing funding, and applying circular economy principles in various national contexts.



3.4. Lessons Learnt & Forward-Looking Educational Strategies

The two reports, namely “Lessons Learnt and Youth Recommendations! How to SYnc-in youth innovation potential in the circular economy” report and “Forward-Looking Educational Strategies” report; are pivotal outputs of the SYnc project, that comprehensively provide:

a systematic review and assessment of the effectiveness of existing educational strategies within the partner countries.

innovative educational frameworks tailored to enhance and modernize the teaching of circular economy and entrepreneurship concepts.

a set of comprehensive policy recommendations, focusing on embedding sustainability and entrepreneurship deeply within school curriculums and higher education courses, aimed at youth involvement and educational reform.

advocating for a shift towards interactive and experiential learning environments that can adapt to the dynamic nature of the circular economy, ensuring that students not only learn about sustainable practices but also apply them in real-world scenarios.

This strategic approach is designed to prepare future generations to tackle environmental challenges innovatively and effectively through circular economy projects.



4. Youth Engagement and Innovations

Youth engagement has been a cornerstone of the SYnc project. The Toolkit and E-Learning modules have collectively enhanced the practical understanding and application of circular economy principles among youth. The e-learning modules highlight examples and practical applications of new business models or improved existing practices. The Toolkit disseminates knowledge and presents innovative business ideas and initiatives developed by young entrepreneurs across Europe.

These include:

Repair Café Lisboa and NextLap Accelerator in Portugal, focusing on practical repairs and startup acceleration.

Circular Economy Boo(s)t Camp in Belgium, which aids in circular economy understanding and application.

Innovative platforms like Dycle – Diaper Cycle in Germany and Circle-in Web Academy in Greece, which push the boundaries of traditional business models towards more sustainable alternatives.

Testimonials and feedback from participants underline the practical impacts of these initiatives, highlighting how the project has influenced their views and participation in the circular economy.

Moreover, the Guidebook’s emphasis on facilitation skills and design thinking processes has enabled youth workers to implement more interactive and participatory learning experiences for young learners. This approach has not only increased youth engagement but also enriched the quality of their contributions to developing circular economy solutions. The chapter on the practical next steps in the guidebook can directly support the development of new business ideas and innovations by providing a clear pathway from concept to implementation, including accessing financing and understanding market dynamics within the circular economy.

The strategies discussed in the Forward-Looking Educational Strategies report emphasize the creation of new pathways for youth engagement. This includes developing educational policies that support entrepreneurial education in sustainability, thus fostering a proactive approach among youth towards circular economy initiatives.



5. Recommendations and Future Directions

From the SYnC project, we've gleaned significant insights that inform several recommendations for youth workers and organisations working with youth or circular economy as well as future directions in the Circular Economy field.

5.1. Recommendations for Youth Workers & Youth Organisations

Enhance Engagement: Continue developing engaging and practical tools that not only educate but also empower youth to start their entrepreneurial journeys in the circular economy.

Integrate Learning Resources: Strengthen the integration of the toolkit and guidebook within non-formal educational settings to enhance accessibility and effectiveness. Ensure that these resources are utilised to their full potential by training more youth workers in their application.

Expand Practical Learning Components: Build upon the sections of the guidebook that deal with practical business applications and financing to better prepare young entrepreneurs for the challenges of starting and maintaining sustainable businesses.

Enhance Integration of Learning Modules: Strengthen the synergy between the toolkit, guidebook, and e-learning modules to offer a seamless educational experience that caters comprehensively to the needs of both youth and youth workers.

Incorporate Experiential Learning: Enhance educational programs with experiential learning components that involve problem-solving challenges, project work, and competitions focused on circular economy solutions. This approach can help solidify theoretical knowledge through practical application.

Develop & Enhance Support Networks: Develop stronger networks of support among stakeholders, including educational institutions, industry partners, and policymakers, to provide young entrepreneurs with the resources and mentorship they need to succeed.

Strengthen Community Partnerships: Foster collaborations between educational institutions, local businesses, and community organizations to create real-world opportunities for youth to engage with circular economy projects. This includes internships, project-based learning, and community-led initiatives that allow young people to apply their learning in practical settings.

Promote Success Stories: Highlight and promote case studies and success stories of young entrepreneurs who are making significant contributions to the circular economy. This can inspire other young individuals and provide them with relatable role models.

Policy Support: Advocate for policies that support circular economy education and entrepreneurship at both national and EU levels. Tailor policy recommendations to the specific needs and contexts of different EU countries, enhancing the relevance and impact of educational frameworks.



5.2. Future Directions

Monitoring and Evaluation: Establish robust mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of educational initiatives and youth engagement programs. Use these insights to continuously improve strategies and interventions aimed at integrating young people into the circular economy.

Building Scalable Models: Focus on creating scalable and replicable educational models and engagement strategies that can be adapted by other regions and countries. This could involve partnerships with international organisations to share best practices and resources.

Innovation in Funding: Explore innovative funding mechanisms to support circular economy initiatives led by youth, such as green bonds, sustainability grants, and crowdfunding platforms specifically aimed at environmental projects.

Long-term Impact Studies: Conduct long-term impact studies to assess the outcomes of integrating circular economy education into the lives of young people and their communities. This would provide valuable data to inform future policies and educational content.

These recommendations and future directions are designed to create a sustainable and inclusive approach for integrating young people into the circular economy, fostering not only environmental stewardship but also innovative entrepreneurship that can sustainably drive economic growth.



6. Conclusion

The SYnC project has demonstrated the remarkable potential of young people to propel the circular economy forward through innovative and sustainable business models. This report captures the extensive findings and valuable lessons learned, highlighting the critical role of targeted education and active engagement in achieving a sustainable future.

Our insights reveal that by integrating the principles of the circular economy into educational tools and practices, we can significantly enhance young people's capacity to contribute to Europe's sustainability goals. The toolkit and guidebook developed under the SYnC project have not only educated but also actively engaged youth in the circular economy, establishing a robust educational ecosystem that encourages the practical application of learned concepts.

Furthermore, the Forward-Looking Educational Strategies report underscores the necessity for strategic educational approaches that align with current policies and practices. By adopting these innovative strategies, we can ensure that future generations are not only knowledgeable but also skilled in implementing sustainable solutions.

As we look to the future, it is imperative that this project's initiatives are not only continued but also expanded. We call on policymakers, educational institutions, and industry leaders to support and scale these initiatives, facilitating a deeper integration of circular economy practices across Europe. The collective experiences and innovations highlighted in this report offer a hopeful outlook on the role of empowered youth in shaping a greener, more sustainable future.

By building on the project's successes and leveraging the strategic insights from our comprehensive reports, we can better tailor future initiatives to meet the evolving needs of young entrepreneurs in the circular economy. Let us commit to this sustainable trajectory, ensuring that the circular economy remains a cornerstone of Europe's approach to sustainable development.



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