



**Community Projects
on Circular Economy**

Guidelines

for

Workshops

Prepared

for Youth Workers

by Youth Workers



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the European Union

Foreword

This manual provides practical guidance, activities, and templates to support the facilitation of workshops on circular economy, where young people learn about the circular economy and design community projects that put its principles into practice.

These guidelines are designed to support youth workers in running workshops that enable young people (at least 20) to understand the circular economy, explore how it applies to their lives and communities, and design projects that bring these principles into action. The workshops combine theory with practice: young people first learn the key concepts, then experiment through interactive activities, and finally apply their knowledge in the design of their own community projects.

Workshops will take place in Slovakia, Greece, Bulgaria, Slovenia. However, we encourage the use of these guidelines when making workshops for community projects anywhere in Europe.

The approach is based on non-formal education, experiential learning, and design thinking. Workshops are meant to be participatory, playful, and practical. The youth worker is not a lecturer but a facilitator who creates a safe and inspiring space, encourages participation, and guides the group through reflection and action.

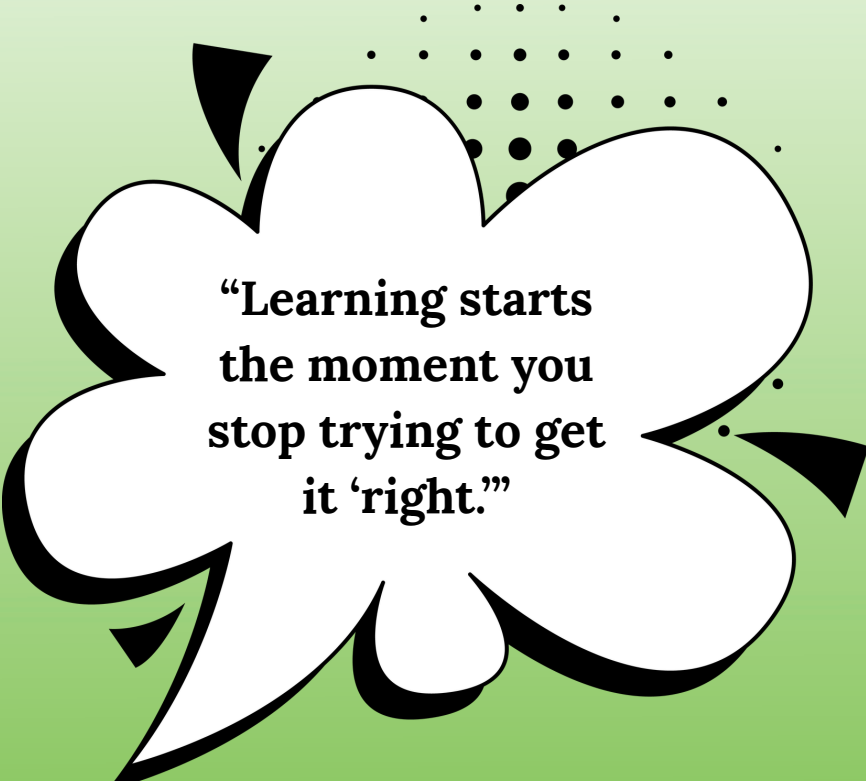
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**“Learning starts
the moment you
stop trying to get
it ‘right.’”**

Methodology of Implementation

The methodology for Community Projects builds on three complementary pillars: experiential learning, participatory design, and community-based project development. These principles guide youth workers through a structured yet flexible process that allows young people to gradually move from learning about the circular economy to designing locally grounded solutions.

To support this process, each workshop follows a progressive arc. Participants first explore key ideas conceptually, then examine real-life examples, and finally translate these insights into project ideas that respond to needs in their own communities. This approach ensures that learning does not remain theoretical; instead, it becomes the foundation for practical innovation.

Workshops follow a consistent structure, enabling facilitators to focus on the unique needs and dynamics of their group. The introduction helps participants connect new knowledge with their existing understanding, while the main activity provides space for exploration, creativity, and group problem solving. The reflection stage is essential in non-formal education methodologies: it turns experience into insight by encouraging participants to recognise what they learned, how they learned it, and why it matters. The application stage moves them further by inviting them to imagine how these ideas can shape a real community project. In total we will create 15 workshops (3 per partner, among 5 partners) and create 5 community projects. In which we will have at least 20 young people involved that will implement their projects.

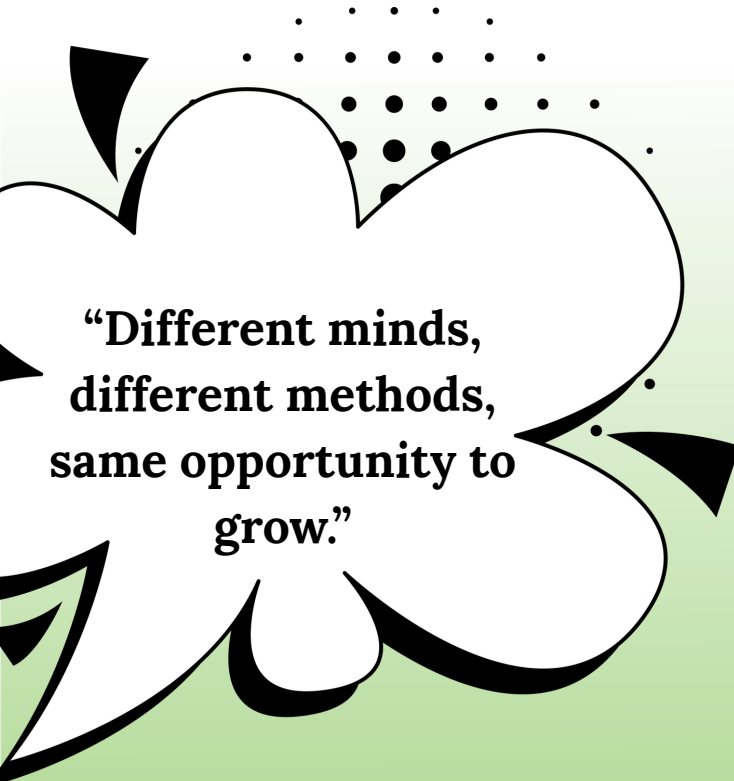
A strong methodological element in Community Projects on Circular Economy is the integration of visual tools, such as canvases, empathy maps, mind maps, and circular diagrams. These tools help young people externalise their ideas, analyse systems, and make more informed decisions. They also support different learning styles, ensuring that the workshops remain inclusive and accessible to all participants.

To support facilitators, the guidelines emphasises predictability and clarity in workshop flow, while still allowing room for improvisation. Each activity is designed so that youth workers can adapt timing, group size, and complexity. This flexible structure allows the workshops to work equally well with a 15-year-old from rural areas, a 22-year-old university student, or participants with fewer opportunities.

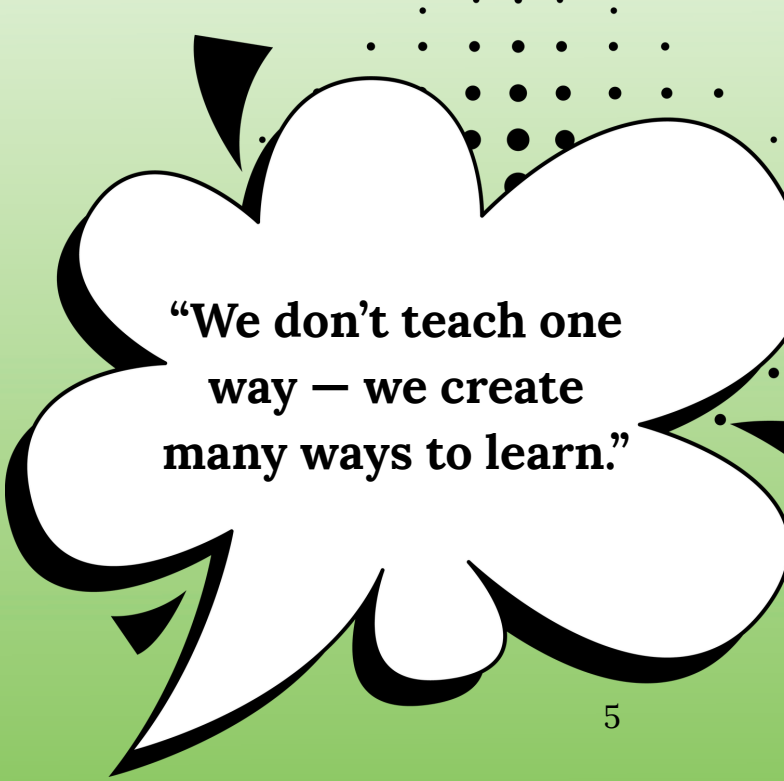
Inclusivity remains a central methodological principle. The workshops encourage multiple ways of expressing ideas: drawing, writing, speaking, performing, or building quick prototypes. When needed, facilitators can adjust the pace, offer quieter spaces, translate instructions visually, or break tasks down into smaller steps. This supports participants with disabilities, neurodivergent youth, or anyone who may benefit from more structure.

An additional layer of the methodology involves connecting our competition with the wider project outputs. Examples from the CycleQuest video game (WP2) can be used to introduce challenges or solutions based on circular economy logic. Concepts and activities from the curriculum (WP3) can clarify terminology or deepen understanding. In this way, the community projects act as the practical bridge between learning and doing.

Finally, throughout the workshops, youth workers document progress using simple templates: attendance sheets, observation notes, photos, and short reflections. These contribute to both local impact assessment and the final community projects reporting process. This method ensures transparency, comparability across partners, and a clear record of achievements. In the registration form we will note if there are any physical disabilities that would need catering, therefore an appropriate venue will be chosen. We will also contact organizations that work with people with disabilities and reserve at minimum 2 spots for those participants.



**“Different minds,
different methods,
same opportunity to
grow.”**



**“We don’t teach one
way – we create
many ways to learn.”**

Example of Workshop 1: Understanding Circular Economy



The slide features the 'Circles Project' logo in the top left corner. The main title is 'Workshop 1: Understanding the Circular Economy' in a large green font, with the subtitle 'An introduction to linear vs circular systems' in a smaller orange font below it. A central photograph shows a diverse group of people, including children and adults, participating in a recycling activity with blue, green, and yellow bins. Below the photo, two models are compared: 'Linear Economy' (Take-Make-Dispose) represented by three right-pointing arrows, and 'Circular Economy' (Reuse-Recycle-Renew) represented by a circular arrow icon. The footer text reads 'Training for community workshops | The Circles Project'.

This first workshop introduces participants to the **basic concepts of the circular economy** in a simple and engaging way. The purpose is to help young people understand the difference between the traditional “take–make–dispose” model and circular systems that keep products and materials in use for as long as possible.

Youth workers begin with a short warm-up activity where participants draw or write the first word that comes to mind when they hear “circular economy.” This helps surface existing associations and sets a relaxed, creative tone for the session. The activity also encourages openness, discussion, and recognition of diverse perspectives already present in the group.

The facilitator then introduces the Linear Economy using a simple visual explaining the flow from natural resource extraction to production, use, disposal, and waste. This is followed by a discussion on why this system is problematic, focusing on waste, pollution, resource depletion, and short product lifespans. Youth workers are encouraged to use the icons and diagrams provided in the slides to keep the explanation accessible.



Next, the Circular Economy is presented as an alternative model that eliminates waste, circulates products and materials, and regenerates nature. This section highlights environmental, economic, and social benefits, always linking back to everyday life. Youth workers can use the simplified **Butterfly Diagram** to illustrate how biological and technical materials circulate in different loops (reuse, repair, recycle, remanufacture).

Participants then work in small groups to map the journey of a familiar product (e.g., phone, T-shirt, bottle) under both the linear and circular models. They draw the life cycle on paper using arrows, symbols, or the templates shown in the slides. Groups compare their two maps and identify what changes when a product becomes part of a circular system. This activity enables participants to apply abstract concepts to real objects they use daily, making circularity concrete and relatable.

After presenting their maps, participants engage in a reflection round where they consider what surprised them, where they already see circular ideas in their surroundings, and what challenges exist locally. These reflection questions help participants connect the content of the workshop with their everyday experiences and begin thinking about opportunities for change in their communities.

This workshop sets the foundation for the next two sessions, preparing participants to explore circular practices in daily life and cities, and later design small community solutions. The tone of the workshop is exploratory, supportive, and participatory, ensuring accessibility for young people with diverse backgrounds and learning styles.

Examples of video:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lhMooyLGWkc>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cbm1MCTobVc>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=heIXdS7Gs7c>



Example of Workshop 2: Circular Practices in Everyday Life and Cities



The second workshop helps participants move from basic understanding into practical observation. While Workshop 1 introduces circular economy principles, this session examines how those principles already appear in everyday life, neighbourhoods, and cities. The goal is to help young people recognise circularity around them and develop a sharper eye for opportunities, challenges, and potential interventions in their own communities.

The workshop opens with a short warm-up activity, “**My Circular Day.**” Participants think through their typical day – from morning routines to school, travel, and leisure – and identify one moment where they already practice circularity, such as repairing something instead of buying new, using a reusable bottle, sharing items, or choosing second-hand clothing. This activity gently shifts participants into a reflective mindset and grounds the discussion in lived experience. Youth workers can guide the warm-up by offering small prompts or examples, ensuring all participants can contribute regardless of prior knowledge.

After this, the facilitator introduces the concept of a Circular City using clear visuals from the presentation. A circular city is explained as a place where systems are redesigned so that materials stay in use, waste and pollution are reduced, and nature can regenerate. Emphasis is placed on collaboration: citizens, businesses, and local authorities all play a role in making cities more circular. Simple examples help maintain accessibility – such as shared mobility systems, community gardens, repair spaces, reuse centres, and efficient waste sorting systems.

The workshop then explores why cities matter, with youth workers guiding a short input on resource use, waste generation, transport systems, building design, and public services. This section highlights that cities, while resource-intensive, also offer some of the best opportunities for circular transformation through urban planning, policy, infrastructure, and community-led initiatives. Participants are encouraged to connect these insights with local examples from their own environment.

The facilitator then presents everyday circular practices, using concrete examples such as repairing electronics, using refill stations, cooking with leftovers, second-hand shopping, and sharing tools through community libraries. Next, participants explore community-level circular practices, including repair cafés, reuse and upcycling centres, compost hubs, food redistribution initiatives, and sharing schemes. Real examples from European cities – including Amsterdam’s circular strategy, Copenhagen’s waste-to-energy innovations, and Leuven’s urban mining approach – help participants see circularity as an active movement, not just a theoretical idea.

The central activity of this workshop is the **Circular City Map**. Participants split into small groups and draw a simple map of their neighbourhood, marking:

- **Linear spots in red** – places dominated by waste, single-use items, fast consumption, or inefficient systems
- **Circular spots in green** – places where reuse, repair, sharing, refill, recycling, or regenerative practices already exist



This mapping exercise encourages participants to look critically at their surroundings and identify gaps, opportunities, and areas with strong potential for improvement. In the second part of the activity, groups brainstorm one idea for each red “linear” spot that could make the area more circular. These ideas are kept small, practical, and realistic, supporting the future transition to Workshop 3.

Groups then share their maps and ideas in a short discussion round. Youth workers use guiding questions from the presentation to facilitate deeper reflection: Which areas have the most circular potential? Which ideas feel easy to start with? Which ideas excite the group the most? This allows participants to recognise collective patterns, common challenges, and shared priorities.

The workshop closes with a **reflection** block focusing on personal practice, local opportunities, and inspirations from circular city examples. Participants consider what small circular habit they might try themselves, and what small change could be imagined for their school, youth centre, or neighbourhood. This prepares them for Workshop 3, where they will use design thinking tools to turn selected ideas into youth-led mini projects.

Workshop 2 reinforces practical awareness and introduces the systemic view of circularity. It creates a bridge between understanding and designing, ensuring participants feel grounded and confident heading into project development in the next workshop.



Example of Workshop 3: Design Thinking for Circular Solutions



The slide features a central photograph of a diverse group of people in a workshop setting, gathered around a table with various materials and plants. The background of the photo includes posters with the text 'GREEN ENERGY SOURCES' and icons for solar panels and recycling. To the left of the photo is a circular logo with the word 'CIRCLES' and a recycling symbol, and a yellow tag with the word 'Circular' and a recycling symbol. To the right is a green circular arrow icon and a light orange circle. Below the photo, the title 'Workshop 3: Designing Circular Solutions' is written in green, followed by the subtitle 'Using design thinking to turn ideas into real mini-projects'. Below the subtitle is a horizontal flow diagram with four steps: 'Empathize' (yellow circle with people icon), 'Define' (green circle with magnifying glass icon), 'Ideate' (blue circle with lightbulb icon), and 'Prototype' (orange circle with hand icon). A green tag with a lightbulb icon and the word 'Ideas' is positioned to the right of the flow diagram. At the bottom, there are three horizontal bars: a grey one, a grey one, and a green one.

The third workshop transitions participants from observing circular practices to **actively designing their own circular solutions**. Building on the understanding gained in Workshop 1 and the neighbourhood mapping from Workshop 2, this session introduces design thinking as a creative, youth-friendly approach for developing small, practical, and user-centred community projects.

The workshop begins with a brief introduction to the **design thinking process**, using the simplified four-step model presented in the slides: Empathise → Define → Ideate → Prototype → (Test). Youth workers emphasise that design thinking is iterative, hands-on, and people-centred. Its purpose is not to create perfect solutions, but to help young people explore ideas, understand real needs, and develop realistic projects they can test and adapt over time.

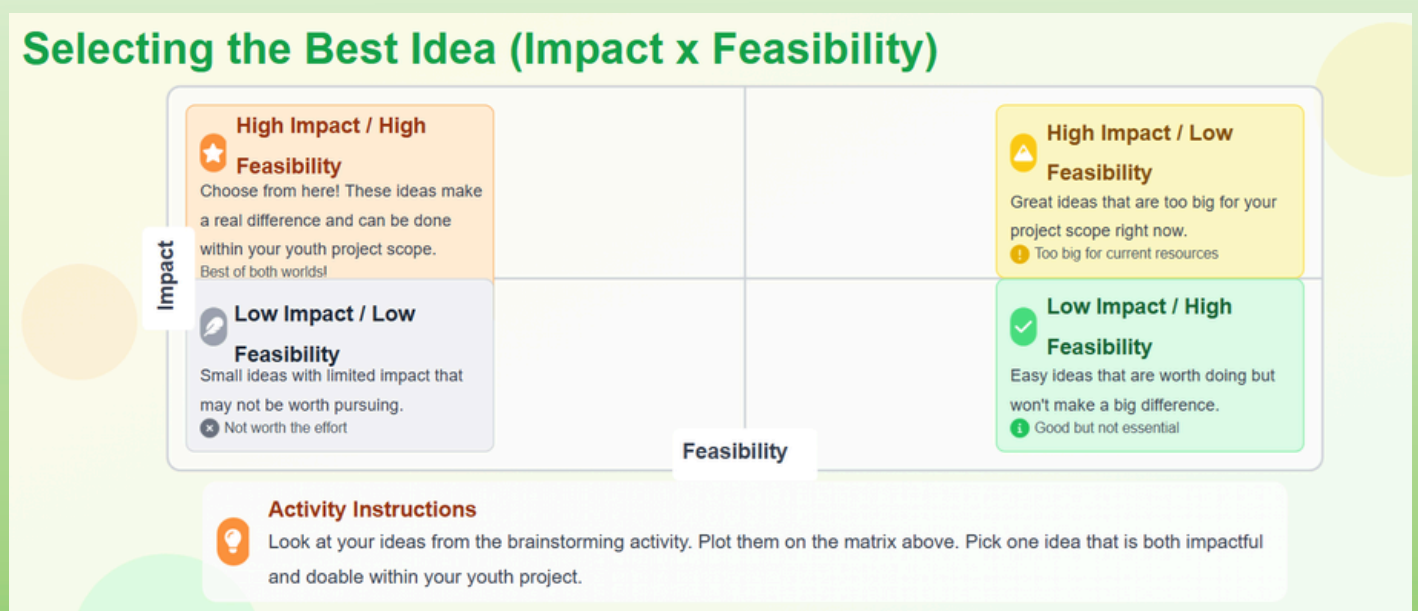
The warm-up activity, “**Who Are We Designing For?**”, guides participants to think about specific individuals or groups who might benefit from a circular solution in their community. This helps ground the workshop in real experiences and encourages participants to consider the diversity of needs present in their everyday environments. Examples from the slides—students facing food waste at school, neighbours in need of repair options, or cyclists navigating mobility challenges, help participants begin thinking concretely.

Participants then use a simplified **Empathy Map** to analyse the needs, motivations, frustrations, and perspectives of their chosen user or group. The empathy map template (See–Hear–Think & Feel–Say & Do–Pains–Gains) supports youth workers in guiding teams to look beyond assumptions and imagine their users’ experiences more deeply. Groups fill the map collaboratively, using short notes, drawings, or symbols. This step ensures that later ideas are anchored in genuine understanding rather than abstract concepts.

After completing the empathy map, the facilitator helps groups translate their insights into a clear and focused problem statement using the “How might we…” framework. This structure enables participants to define challenges in a way that is open, actionable, and directly tied to circular principles. Examples on the slides—such as reducing food waste in school canteens or helping neighbours repair small appliances—model how to frame a specific and grounded design challenge.

With the problem defined, groups move into the Ideation phase, generating as many ideas as possible without judgment. Youth workers remind participants of brainstorming rules: focus on quantity, stay visual, build on others’ ideas, and keep solutions small and local. Circular principles such as reuse, repair, sharing, and reducing waste are incorporated into the ideation prompts. The “**Mini Inspiration Board**” in the slides provides concrete examples—refill stations, repair corners, compost hubs, clothes swap days, libraries of things—that help stimulate creativity and broaden participants’ sense of what is possible.

Once a wide set of ideas is generated, groups use the **Impact vs. Feasibility Matrix** to evaluate their options and select one idea to develop further. Youth workers guide participants to focus on ideas that fall into the “**High Impact / High Feasibility**” category—solutions that are meaningful yet realistic within the scope of a youth-led project. This step is essential for ensuring that the ideas move from imagination toward practical application.




The selected idea is then shaped into a simple, structured **Project Canvas**, covering problem, target group, activities, resources, partners, risks, and expected impact. This tool helps groups translate a conceptual idea into a coherent mini-project that can be implemented locally. Youth workers support participants in keeping descriptions short, focused, and easy to understand. The canvas becomes the foundation for the small circular community project each group will take forward.

Participants then create a low-fidelity prototype to visualise how their idea would work in practice. **Prototypes** can take many forms, such as sketches, step-by-step user journeys, posters, role-play demonstrations, or simple cardboard models. Youth workers emphasise that the goal is not perfection but exploration—prototyping helps reveal potential challenges, clarify how users would interact with the idea, and prepare for constructive feedback. This step is especially effective for younger participants and non-verbal learners, as it encourages hands-on creativity.

The workshop concludes with **one-minute group pitches**, where each team presents their problem, circular idea, intended users, how the solution works, and one foreseeable challenge. These short presentations promote communication skills and help youth workers assess where additional support may be needed. Finally, participants reflect on what they learned, the most promising ideas, and what next steps they would like to pursue in their communities.

Workshop 3 closes the learning journey and prepares participants for the upcoming implementation phase/prototyping . By the end of this session, young people have a defined circular challenge, a feasible idea, a project canvas, and an initial prototype - forming the basis for youth-led circular mini-projects carried out in the next stage of the work package.



**Participants will learn how to
turn ideas into actionable
projects and explore them
through prototyping and
pitching.**

Example of Workshop 4: Prototyping, Research and Validation



Workshop 4 marks the transition from idea development to project readiness. While the previous workshops support participants in understanding circular economy principles, identifying local challenges, and designing initial solutions, this session focuses on **testing, validating, and strengthening project ideas** before they are pitched for selection.

The main aim of Workshop 4 is to help young people move from assumption-based thinking to evidence-informed decision-making. Participants are encouraged to question whether their ideas respond to real needs, are understandable to others, and can realistically work in practice. The workshop introduces testing and validation as positive and creative processes that help improve ideas, rather than as assessments of success or failure.

The workshop begins by exploring why validation matters. Facilitators explain that many promising ideas struggle not because they lack creativity, but because they have not been tested with real people. Participants reflect on the difference between saying “we think this is a good idea” and being able to say “we tested this idea and learned from feedback.” This short discussion sets the mindset for experimentation, openness, and learning.

Participants are then introduced to simple and accessible research methods suitable for youth-led projects. These include short surveys, quick interviews, and basic observation. The focus is on gathering insights from peers, community members, or potential users in familiar environments such as schools, youth centres, neighbourhoods, or online spaces. Facilitators emphasise that this is not academic research, but a practical way to understand perspectives, needs, and behaviours that can inform better project design.

Following the research introduction, participants explore low-cost **prototyping**. A prototype is presented as any simple representation of an idea that others can react to. This may include sketches, posters, role-play scenarios, step-by-step user journeys, mock social media posts, or basic digital visuals. The aim is to make ideas tangible and open to feedback, without requiring technical skills or financial resources.

Digital and AI tools are introduced as optional supports for visualisation, survey creation, or idea presentation. Participants are encouraged to choose tools they feel comfortable with, and facilitators highlight that digital solutions are not mandatory. The emphasis remains on accessibility, creativity, and informed choice.

Once prototypes are created, participants **gather feedback** from peers, mentors, or members of their target group. They reflect on what is clear, what causes confusion, what works well, and what could be improved. Based on this input, teams refine their ideas, adjust their approach, and ensure that circular economy principles remain central to the solution.

The workshop concludes by supporting participants in preparing their ideas for **pitching** and selection. Teams clarify the problem they are addressing, the evidence they gathered, how their solution improved through testing, and what impact they aim to achieve. By the end of Workshop 4, participants have a more robust, realistic, and well-articulated project concept, ready to be submitted for evaluation.

Workshop 4 completes the learning pathway of the guidelines by ensuring that youth-led project ideas are grounded in real needs, shaped by feedback, and developed with confidence. It provides a strong bridge between learning and implementation, supporting young people in presenting proposals that reflect both creativity and responsibility.

Conclusion

This document is more than a set of workshop guidelines – it is a pathway for young people to discover their voice, their creativity, and their power to shape the world around them. Through a structured yet flexible learning journey, youth workers guide participants from understanding the basics of the circular economy to actively reimagining their communities through practical, youth-led solutions.

By combining hands-on activities, reflection, and design thinking, the workshops create a space where ideas can grow, perspectives can be shared, and different ways of thinking are valued. Young people are not just learning about sustainability – they are exploring how their own actions, choices, and ideas can contribute to meaningful change in their everyday environments.

These workshops aim to inspire a mindset shift: from passive observers to active changemakers. By giving young people the tools, space, and support to express their ideas and test them in real life, this approach helps nurture a generation that is not afraid to question, to create, and to lead.

We strongly encourage participants to share their journey, ideas, and community projects with a wider audience. Showcasing your work not only inspires others, but also highlights the impact young people can have in building more circular communities.

Tag us and be part of the movement:

Instagram: @circlesproject2024

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/projectcircles>



