



# Implementing circular economy in EU regions – a policy Delphi study

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**ReTraCE**

REALISING THE TRANSITION TOWARDS THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY



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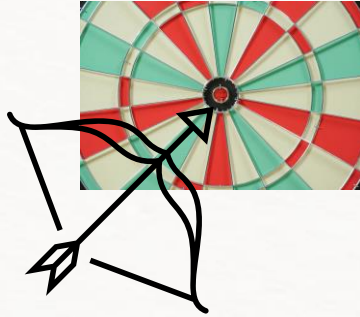


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# Study Objectives



To investigate whether Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) influence the adoption of circular economy (CE) policies at the regional level.

## RQ1

How does S3 influence the adoption of CE policies at the regional level?

## RQ2

What is the corresponding impact on regional performance across a number of economic, social and environmental metrics?

## RQ3

What institutional pressures, (normative, coercive, and mimetic) are influencing the adoption of CE policies at the regional level?

# Policy Delphi Study - process

**Phase 1: Nomination, selection and contacting experts**

(01/10/2021 – 31/08/2022)

**Phase 2: Online Survey**

(12/05/2022 – 12/09/2022)

**Phase 3: Semi-structured individual interviews**

(30/09/2022 – 07/04/2023)

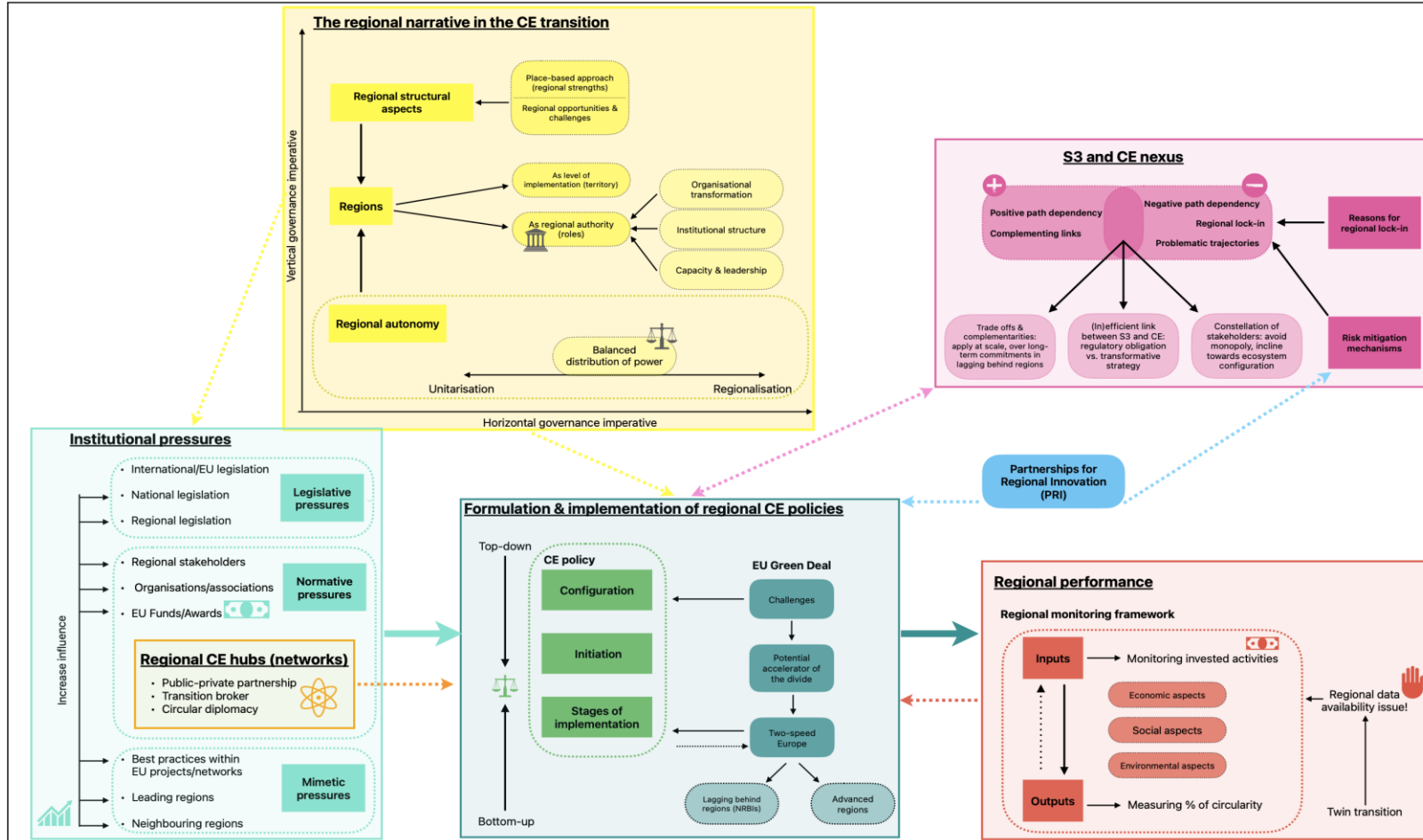
**Phase 4: Policy Brief distribution**

(06/07/2023 – 16/07/2023)

## Phase 4:

- ❖ 10 participants provided feedback, validating the Policy Brief
- ❖ Validate the main emerging findings presented in the Policy Brief
- ❖ Policy Brief including seven main group of findings in a form of policy implications:
  1. The regional narrative in the CE transition
  2. Institutional pressures driving the regional CE policy formulation and implementation
  3. Formulation and implementation of regional CE policies
  4. S3 and CE nexus
  5. Regional CE hubs (networks)
  6. Partnerships for Regional Innovation (PRI) initiative
  7. Tracking the regional performance

# Conceptual Framework



# Main Research Findings (1/3)

## 1. The regional narrative in the CE transition

- Careful consideration of the **regional structural aspects**, entailing a **place-based approach** anchored on regional strengths, but also regional **challenges** and **opportunities**
- Tendency for **organizational transformation** of regional administration, shifting the focus towards challenges and transitioning themes
- The **institutional structure and overall prevailing mentality** in regional authorities proved as vital for the development and adoption of CE policies, along with the importance of having **well developed capacity and leadership skills**

## 2. Institutional pressures driving the regional CE policy formulation and implementation

- **Two-way mechanism/balanced approach**: international and EU legislation (**top-down**) & regional stakeholders (**bottom-up**)
- **Need to shift the relative importance of normative and mimetic pressures** in the future, as well as **increase the influence of national and regional legislation** – *what kind of changes might help shift that?*
- Low influence of the pertinent regional legislation > **ring a bell to the transposition process?**

# Main Research Findings (2/3)

## 3. Formulation and implementation of regional CE policies

- CE policies & EUGD facing some common challenges > **Matthew effect?**
- **Bottleneck is being created at the regional level** due to the current sectoral approach of policy implementation
- Green Deal debate is perceived as being a **big city debate and not a regional one**, because **aspects of place and distance are not on the EUGD radar** and regions with production capacities are facing bigger challenges compared to consumption driven cities
- EUGD & CE acting as **potential accelerator of the divide**, creating a **two-speed Europe?**

## 4. Regional CE hubs (networks)

- Ideally **organised as public-private partnerships**, steered by a **'transition broker'** as a professional figure in the middle of the Quadruple helix model
- Promote the **circular diplomacy and internationalization of the region**, keeping the hub connected to the global dimension, but focusing on local implementation.

# Main Research Findings (3/3)



## 5. S3 and CE nexus

- Mutual interaction between the two policies > **less deterministic relationship** appears to exist with several **risks of adverse influence**, including **risks of regional lock-ins in linear supply chains** and **potential negative path-dependency**
- The possibility of S3 and CE having both positive and negative influence depending on i) **trade-offs and complementarities**, ii) **how regions interpreted S3** and iii) **the constellation of stakeholders**
- Main reason for regional lock-in inherited in the **S3 heuristic**, where **prioritization in areas of strengths** is often defined in **unsustainable activities (NRBIs)**

## 6. Partnerships for Regional Innovation (PRI) initiative

- Provide a framework **more receptive to transformation** > **introducing a new heuristic emphasizing sustainable development** that is not based solely on regional strengths, but also on **regional challenges and opportunities to be grasped throughout innovation** > potential mitigation mechanism to address the risk inherited in the S3?

## 7. Tracking regional performance

- An overall **lack of monitoring and measuring framework** for tracking regional CE transition, regional data availability issues > **leverage on the twin transition**



# Thanks!

Do you have any questions?

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