

## CROSS-REIS

### CROSS-disciplinary network for research excellence in Regenerative Economy Innovation eco-Systems Funded by the European Union

Co-PLAN, Institute for Habitat Development

Rr. Bylis 12, Autostrada Tiranë-Durrës, Km 5, Kashar Kodi Postar 1051, Kutia Postare 2995, Tirana, Albania.

Tel: +355 4 240 74 23

Fax: +355 4 240 74 25

Mob: +355 (0)694050545

E-mail: co-plan@co-plan.org

## CROSS-REIS INFO-Day

### CROSS-REIS Hosts Roundtable Discussion on Bridging the Gap: Challenges and Opportunities in Advancing Circular Economy for SMEs and Academia in Albania

Tirana, September 27, 2024 – As part of Tirana Architecture Week 2024, CROSS-REIS organised an INFO-Day and a roundtable discussion titled “Bridging the Gap: Challenges and Opportunities in Advancing Circular Economy for SMEs and Academia in Albania.” The event brought together experts and stakeholders to address critical issues related to the regenerative economy and circular economy in Albania.

The event was inaugurated by a welcoming address from Mrs. Anila Bejko, Executive Director of Co-PLAN, and was followed by the presentation of the CROSS-REIS project. During the presentation, Ms. Rea Muka presented the project's main goal, the consortium, the main areas of study and the activities of the project's first period.

This opening then allowed for an interesting discussion among our five panellists and the audience on the main roundtable theme. Representing different and crucial actors discussing circular economy efforts in the academia sector and SMEs, each panellist brought with them their perspectives and recommendations on the matter.

The roundtable discussion was moderated by Ms. Kejt Dhrami, expert and researcher at Co-PLAN, Institute for Habitat Development. She presented the broader focus of the roundtable, the intersection of academia and small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in advancing the circular economy in the Albanian context, opening the floor for the insightful perspectives of the panellists.

During the roundtable, Ms. Valbona Koçi from EU4Innovation discussed how the program is enhancing access to innovation and funding for academic and research institutions in Albania. She noted that while the start-up ecosystem shows promise, there's still a gap between these initiatives and the R&D capacities of universities. Highlighting the quadruple helix approach—which fosters collaboration between academia, industry, government, and civil society—Ms. Koçi explained how it drives innovation and sustainability, particularly in the circular economy. She also mentioned key opportunities for universities and businesses through EU4Innovation's capacity-building and funding schemes.

Ms. Marsela Robo, Director of NASRI, discussed the challenges of creating effective links between research institutions and the private sector in Albania, particularly within the context of the circular economy. She highlighted issues such as limited collaboration and insufficient resources, which hinder progress in this area. Ms. Robo also emphasised NASRI's role in promoting scientific research and innovation, which supports projects related to environmental issues, including circular economy initiatives, aiming to enhance research and foster sustainable practices.

Ms. Jona Haxhialiu, Advisor on Circular Economy & Private Sector Engagement at EU 4 Circular Economy and Livable Cities, discussed the challenges faced by SMEs in Albania's early stages of adopting the circular economy. She highlighted obstacles like limited resources, low awareness, and regulatory hurdles, but also mentioned successful models where businesses have started integrating circular practices. Ms. Haxhialiu explained how the CCL project actively collaborates with Albanian businesses and academic institutions to promote research and innovation in this field. She also shared insights on the Circular City Labs initiatives in Tirana and Shkodra, which aim to create sustainable urban solutions and have already achieved promising results in promoting circular economy practices.

Mr. Edvin Zhllima, researcher at DSA and professor at the Agriculture University of Tirana, highlighted key opportunities for implementing circular economy principles in Albania's agricultural sector. He pointed out that improving access to information and financial literacy is crucial for enabling farmers and SMEs to adopt innovative, sustainable practices. Zhllima also discussed Albania's progress toward aligning with EU agricultural policies, noting that while advancements are being made, there is still a gap compared to other Western Balkan countries. He emphasized the Agriculture University's collaboration with the private sector, particularly SMEs in agribusiness, sharing successful projects that have fostered innovation and integrated circular economy solutions.

Ms. Merita Toska, Vice Rector at Polis University, discussed the challenges and achievements of the circular economy in Albania compared to the broader Western Balkans. She highlighted the need to integrate the circular economy concepts into academic curricula, such as the master's program in environment and planning, and shared successful experiences like the W2E project and Montenegro's GreenFORCE initiative. However, she noted that despite progress, businesses in Albania remain largely unprepared for adopting circular practices. Ms. Toska also emphasized Polis University's collaborative approach with businesses and society to support innovation but pointed out that many challenges remain in fostering this collaboration. Regarding the Circular City Labs Tirana project, she discussed expected achievements, including promoting sustainable urban practices, while acknowledging the implementation challenges related to limited resources and stakeholder engagement.

After the roundtable discussion, Ms. Fiona Imami made a brief presentation of what's to happen in the future in the CROSS-REIS project. She highlighted the upcoming opportunities for trainings, events and activities that target different actors.

CROSS-REIS, an EU Horizon project, is dedicated to fostering collaboration between higher education and scientific research organisations in eight countries: Serbia,

Montenegro, Albania, Croatia, Slovenia, Spain, Norway, and Italy, to support the shift towards a regenerative economy paradigm. Through capacity building, R&I strategies, cooperation and networking, databases and tools, the project aims to foster excellence in research and institutional learning. CROSS-REIS's research focuses on three crucial sectors of the regenerative economy, which are urban biodiversity, circular economy and waste management.

For further information about CROSS-REIS and its research, please contact:

**CROSS-REIS**

Email: [info@crossreis.com](mailto:info@crossreis.com)

Webpage: <https://crossreis.com/>