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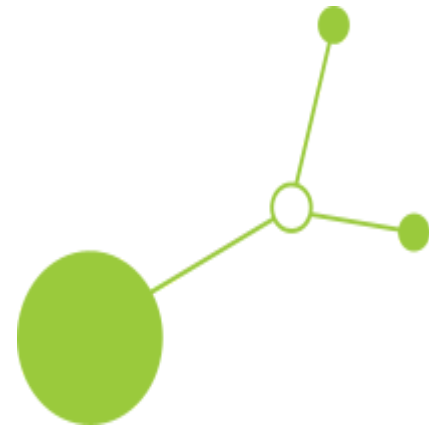
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SYMCRAFT

SYMCRAFT PROJECT

D.1.3.2

SYMCRAFT Strategy



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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The **SYM-CRAFT Strategy** defines a shared framework for activating, supporting, and scaling industrial symbiosis processes that involve the craft sector as a key actor in circular transition. It provides both a conceptual vision and an operational roadmap to connect small-scale, design-driven craft enterprises with industrial producers through the creative reuse of by-products. By doing so, it responds to **critical ecological, economic, and territorial challenges across Central Europe**.

Structured around a place-based and multi-actor approach, the strategy **builds on sectoral analyses, stakeholder engagement, and co-design processes carried out in six European regions**. It focuses on three material domains, **textile/fashion, agro-food, and wood/furniture**, and proposes a differentiated strategic focus for each, based on feasibility, regulatory conditions, and innovation potential.

The core objective is to move beyond isolated experiments and enable a stable ecosystem where circular practices can take root and evolve. To this end, SYM-CRAFT introduces a **five-phase collaboration pathway**: from readiness assessment and engagement, to activation, co-design, value creation, and systemic consolidation. Each phase is supported by dedicated services, legal frameworks, and enabling tools, detailed in the Strategic Service Portfolio.

The strategy also integrates a **transversal system of governance and monitoring**, anchored in the Symbiosis Readiness Level (SRL) framework proposed by the European Commission. SRL provides a consistent methodology to assess and support the readiness of both organisations and regions to engage in material reuse and circular partnerships. Monitoring is not only evaluative, but developmental, used to reinforce learning, adapt interventions, and ensure strategic coherence throughout implementation.

Aligned with the European Green Deal, the Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP), Horizon Europe, and the principles of the New European Bauhaus, SYM-CRAFT offers a **replicable model of industrial-craft collaboration that combines sustainability with cultural identity and local resilience**. The strategy concludes with a set of policy

recommendations, dissemination actions, and scaling pathways designed to support its transferability to new sectors, territories, and institutional frameworks.

In sum, the SYMCRAFT Strategy is a **strategic instrument for embedding circular innovation within regional economies through collaboration, creativity, and systemic design.**

2. STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

2.1. PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGY WITHIN SYMCRAFT

The **SYM-CRAFT Strategy** defines a shared framework for **activating, supporting, and scaling industrial symbiosis processes** that involve the **craft sector** as a key actor in **circular transition**. It provides both a **conceptual vision** and an **operational roadmap** to connect **small-scale, design-driven craft enterprises** with industrial producers through the **creative reuse of by-products**. By doing so, it responds to critical **ecological, economic, and territorial challenges** across Central Europe.

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Aligned with the **European Green Deal**, the **Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP)**, **Horizon Europe**, and the principles of the **New European Bauhaus**, SYMCRAFT offers a **replicable model** of **industrial-craft collaboration** that combines **sustainability** with **cultural identity** and **local resilience**. The strategy concludes with a set of **policy recommendations**, **dissemination actions**, and **scaling pathways** designed to support its **transferability** to new sectors, territories, and institutional frameworks.

In sum, the **SYM-CRAFT Strategy** is a **strategic instrument** for embedding **circular innovation** within **regional economies** through **collaboration**, **creativity**, and **systemic design**.

2.2. CONTRIBUTION TO INTERREG CE PRIORITIES AND EU POLICY GOALS

The SYMCRAFT Strategy directly contributes to the objectives of **Interreg Central Europe's Priority 2 (A greener Central Europe)**, with a specific alignment to **Specific Objective 2.3**, which focuses on supporting the **transition to a circular economy**. The project addresses this objective by proposing an **innovative and place-based model of industrial symbiosis**, centred on the creative reuse of industrial waste by the craft sector. Through this model, SYMCRAFT seeks to bridge gaps between formal industrial systems and local, often underutilized, craft capacities, thereby unlocking value in production residues while fostering **local resilience, ecological innovation and cultural continuity**.

At the European level, the strategy reinforces key strategic frameworks. It aligns with the **European Green Deal**, contributing to waste prevention, local resource loops and climate-neutral practices. It supports the **Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP)** by advancing the principles of **reuse, industrial symbiosis**, and the **extension of product life cycles**. SYMCRAFT is also strongly positioned within the vision of the **New European Bauhaus**, which seeks to connect sustainability with culture, aesthetics and inclusion. The project reframes crafts not as marginal traditions but as **drivers of eco-social innovation**, capable of turning sustainability into a culturally meaningful and economically viable reality.

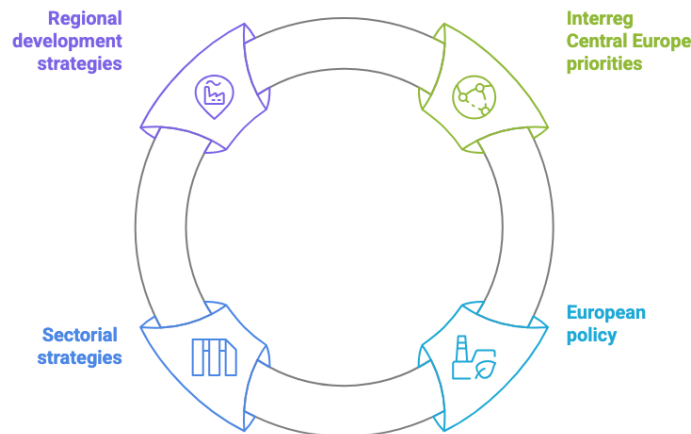
The strategy intersects with several sectoral EU strategies. It contributes to the **EU Strategy for Sustainable Textiles**, by enabling material reuse and small-scale innovation in textile design and production. It reflects the goals of the **Farm to Fork Strategy**, particularly through the valorisation of agro-food residues into craft-based products and packaging. It supports the **EU Bioeconomy Strategy** by promoting circular and creative applications of organic by-products, especially in food, wood, and natural fibers.

Crucially, SYMCRAFT also aligns with the **regional development strategies** of the participating partner areas, many of which are already advancing **regionally specific pathways toward green and circular transition**. For example:

- **Upper Austria**, through its strong industrial base and cultural heritage in textiles and crafts, is actively investing in the circular economy via the Upper Austrian Sustainability Strategy and the Green Deal Upper Austria, focusing on eco-innovation, bioeconomy, and eco-design.
- **Leipzig Region**, with its dynamic positioning in sustainable manufacturing, circular food innovation and smart specialisation in environmental technologies, provides fertile ground for industrial-craft collaboration. The region is also a key player in European climate-neutral urban innovation.
- **Trenčín Region** is a manufacturing-intensive area with growing awareness of the circular economy, linked to national innovation strategies and regional actions on sustainable materials and textile reuse.
- **South Bohemia**, though less industrially dominant, is developing circular agriculture and resource recovery initiatives, and SYMCRAFT contributes by unlocking value from agro-industrial and wood and furniture processing activities, also leveraging its vibrant traditional crafts network.
- **Vas County** presents strong potential in agro-food waste valorisation and micro-enterprise development, supported by Hungary's national circular economy roadmap and the emphasis on regional craft traditions and tourism.
- **Central Slovenia** hosts urban and peri-urban hubs where design, creative industries and sustainable innovation are being integrated into regional policies, in line with the Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3). SYMCRAFT contributes to these ambitions by anchoring circularity in the material culture and production identities of each territory.

By connecting these local strategies with European policy goals, SYMCRAFT reinforces the **multi-level governance approach** that is central to the success of the green transition. The project thus offers a model of how **circular economy principles can be operationalised through context-aware, culturally grounded and economically viable approaches**, creating bridges between local realities and transnational ambitions.

FIGURE 1



2.3. INTENDED USE AND TARGET AUDIENCES

The **SYMOCRAFT Strategy** is first and foremost intended to support **project partners and their regional ecosystems** in laying the groundwork for a new model of circular collaboration between **industrial actors** and **craft enterprises**. It provides a **comprehensive, flexible framework** that not only outlines the strategic rationale behind these collaborations, but also offers **practical guidance** on how to activate, sustain, and expand them across diverse territorial contexts.

Acting simultaneously as a **strategic compass** and an **operational toolkit**, the strategy guides partners through the **coordination of pilot actions**, the development of tailored services, and the alignment of local initiatives with broader **EU priorities**, particularly those relating to the **Green Deal**, the **Circular Economy Action Plan**, and **Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3)**. At its core lies the ambition to create **durable and replicable models of cooperation** that make the most of industrial by-products, transforming them from waste into resources for innovation, value creation, and social impact.

Although developed primarily to steer internal implementation, the strategy also functions as a **reference document** for a wider community of actors that play essential roles in enabling and scaling circular transitions. Among them are **regional intermediaries**, such as innovation agencies, local development bodies, business support organisations, and vocational training institutes, who operate at the interface between policy, enterprise, and territory. These entities are vital in **facilitating dialogue, ensuring legal and logistical feasibility**, and **embedding collaboration into regional policy frameworks**. To these actors, the SYMOCRAFT

Strategy offers a **structured methodology** for identifying material flows, assessing readiness for circular initiatives, and designing context-sensitive partnerships grounded in local realities.

For **craft enterprises**, the strategy responds to concrete challenges they often face when entering industrial cooperation, such as irregular supply of materials, lack of infrastructure, or difficulties in market positioning. It provides **step-by-step guidance** on how to engage in **structured, scalable reuse collaborations**, offering insights on operational planning, material transformation, branding, and business model development. At the same time, it empowers **industrial SMEs** to explore **innovative reuse opportunities**, enabling them to **valorise waste, reduce disposal costs, and generate new revenue streams** through collaborations that also enhance their environmental and social credentials.

The strategy further positions itself as a **knowledge and learning platform**. It supports **researchers, training providers, and innovation hubs** in their efforts to bridge the gap between theory and practice, encouraging them to co-develop **educational pathways, skill-building programmes, and experimental spaces** that reinforce circular thinking. In doing so, it contributes directly to the goals of the **European Skills Agenda** and initiatives such as **Green Skills for a Sustainable Europe**, helping to address current gaps in competences and capacity.

Crucially, the SYMCRAFT Strategy does more than connect individual actors, it provides a **shared reference point** and a **common language** for all involved. By doing so, it ensures that **local efforts are not isolated**, but rather aligned with **transnational objectives and regulatory frameworks**, enabling synergies across regions and sectors. This connectivity makes the strategy a powerful driver for the **scalability and transferability** of circular models beyond the original project consortium.

Ultimately, by weaving together creativity, industrial efficiency, and territorial embeddedness, the SYMCRAFT Strategy promotes **systemic change**. It not only helps stakeholders act, but also **think differently** about how production, reuse, and collaboration can be reimagined for a more sustainable and resilient future.

2.4. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The development of the SYMCRAFT Strategy followed a **composite methodological approach**, combining **desk-based analysis, sectoral diagnosis, and stakeholder engagement** with moments of **creative co-design and transnational exchange**. The goal was to construct a framework that is both **anchored in evidence and shaped by practice**,

ensuring it responds to real-world challenges while remaining adaptable across diverse regional contexts.

At the analytical level, the strategy builds upon the **SWOT assessments** conducted across the project's three core sectors (fashion/textiles, agro-food, and wood/furniture). These analyses highlighted structural and operational conditions for circularity, identifying sector-specific opportunities, and constraints, as regulatory complexity. Complementing this, a **capitalisation exercise** reviewed more than fifteen European and national initiatives relevant to circular economy, creative reuse, and industrial symbiosis. These included Interreg, Horizon 2020, LIFE and national programmes. From each, **strategic insights were extracted in terms of collaboration models**, product development pathways, and institutional support structures. This allowed SYMCRAFT to position itself within an emerging policy space and as part of a community of practice. The strategy also draws on **stakeholder mapping and consultations**, including local workshops involving artisans, SMEs, intermediaries, and public authorities. These interactions enriched the understanding of **local governance systems, the ecosystem supporting the project**, and **readiness levels for the industrial symbiosis**, parameter proposed by European Union.

In a second phase, the process incorporated the **Transnational Experts Workshop**, designed to consolidate the emerging strategic lines and test them through cross-regional exchange. This workshop, held in a hybrid format, gathered project partners and external specialists and adopted a **design-led approach**, integrating selected **design thinking techniques** to stimulate systems-level reflection. Participants co-explored key dimensions of the strategy: from the definition of **buyer personas** to the mapping of the **material trajectory of waste**, from identifying **collaboration bottlenecks** to imagining **service typologies** that could support industrial-craft partnerships. Particular attention was given to the point at which a material exits a company and becomes legally defined as **waste**, a status that triggers complex and often rigid regulatory mechanisms. This legal transformation represents a **critical juncture** in the circular chain, one that needs to be addressed both strategically and operationally, especially at the **local governance level**. While detailed recommendations will be developed in the following deliverables, the strategy acknowledges this barrier and proposes it as a focal point for future interventions.

Overall, the methodological approach adopted balances **diagnostic depth, comparative learning**, and **co-design taking inspirations by best-practices**, allowing the strategy to emerge not just as a static plan, but as a **living framework**, ready to support the dynamic and creative pathways that circularity requires.

The SYMCRAFT Strategy is situated within a broader paradigm shift currently underway across Europe and beyond: the progressive transition from **linear production models**, based on extraction, production, consumption and disposal, toward **circular economies**, where value is preserved, materials are recirculated, and production systems are reimagined in regenerative terms. This shift responds not only to environmental imperatives such as resource depletion and climate change, but also to economic and social challenges, including rising material costs, supply chain vulnerabilities, and the need for more inclusive and resilient local economies.

2.4.1 PARTICIPATORY FOUNDATIONS OF THE SYMCRAFT STRATEGY

A defining feature of the SYMCRAFT Strategy is its foundation in **participatory processes and co-creation activities** that were carried out both at the local and transnational levels. These moments of engagement were not mere stakeholder consultations or information sessions, they were **highly focused, purpose-driven encounters**, carefully structured to serve as opportunities for **learning, testing, and collaborative design**. They played a crucial role in shaping the strategy's priorities, validating its assumptions, and tailoring its tools to real operational needs.

Across the project's implementation, **more than 260 participants** were involved in workshops held in **each partner region**, ensuring a broad and diverse input base. The composition of these events was deliberately designed to reflect the project's dual focus on **industrial and craft collaboration**. Participants included **small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)**, particularly from the **textile/fashion, agro-food, and wood/furniture** sectors, alongside **craft makers, innovation intermediaries, business support organisations, and public authorities**. The predominance of SMEs across the events confirms their centrality in regional value chains, while the textile sector stood out in visibility, thanks in part to a large-scale workshop hosted in Austria, which became a key moment for stakeholder mobilisation.

The **format of the local workshops** was carefully curated to facilitate meaningful interaction and practical exploration. Sessions combined **best practice sharing, roundtable discussions, design thinking exercises, and matchmaking activities**, all geared toward the identification of sector-specific constraints and the co-development of feasible collaboration models. These engagements helped surface the real-world operational, legal, and cultural barriers faced by stakeholders, while also enabling trust-building across traditionally siloed sectors.

In parallel to these regional efforts, a high-level **Transnational Experts Workshop** was organised in Venice, bringing together SYMCRAFT partners and external specialists from across Central Europe. Conducted in a **hybrid format**, the workshop adopted a **co-design methodology**, using cross-regional comparison to test and refine the emerging strategic framework. Participants included experts in **circular economy, design and sustainability**, as well as **regional policy officers**, and representatives from both the **industrial** and **craft** domains. This diversity of expertise proved essential in validating the project's conceptual architecture and in adapting key instruments to different territorial realities.

What distinguishes SYMCRAFT's participatory activities is their **methodological rigor**. Far from being ad hoc or anecdotal, they represent a **scalable model of engagement** that can serve as a reference for other regions and initiatives seeking to foster circular collaboration between diverse economic actors. They show that **co-creation, when properly facilitated**, can align divergent interests, uncover structural bottlenecks, and build the foundations for actionable, locally grounded strategies.

In this sense, the participatory workshops may be considered **part of the logic of the methodology**. They demonstrate how structured engagement processes can be instrumental in translating **system-level ambition** into **concrete, context-aware solutions**.

3. THE SYMCRAFT VISION FOR CIRCULAR TRANSFORMATION

3.1. BACKGROUND: TOWARD A CIRCULAR ECONOMY TRANSITION

Traditional industrial systems have long relied on linear models of growth, characterised by a take-make-dispose logic. While effective in supporting rapid economic development, these models have resulted in unsustainable levels of resource extraction, energy consumption and waste generation. The European Union has responded to this challenge with increasingly ambitious frameworks, most notably the **Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP)** and the **European Green Deal**, which call for systemic changes across value chains and promote circular principles such as **reuse, repair, remanufacturing and recycling**. In this evolving context, the circular economy is not merely a technical or environmental agenda, but a **strategic opportunity to rethink industrial relations, regional development, and innovation pathways**. It opens the possibility of revalorising underused capacities, decentralising production, and reconnecting local resources with local actors. However, achieving this transition requires not only new technologies and infrastructures, but also **new forms of collaboration** and **a reconfiguration of the roles played by different economic and cultural agents**, including those traditionally seen as marginal, such as artisans.

Crafts represent an often overlooked but potentially transformative component of the circular economy. Rooted in **manual expertise, contextual knowledge and material sensitivity**, craft practices inherently value **durability, repair, low-impact processes and creative adaptation**, principles that align strongly with circularity. Moreover, craft-based production often operates on a **small scale**, in **flexible and localised settings**, making it particularly suited to the transformation of irregular, heterogeneous and small-volume waste streams.

Within SYMCRAFT, the focus is placed not on purely artistic or one-off craft practices, but on **business-oriented craft makers**, small enterprises or micro-enterprises with sufficient continuity, operational capacity, and market orientation to engage in **structured collaborations with industrial actors**. These craft makers can serve as **material “digesters”**, capable of absorbing by-products from nearby industries and transforming them into new functional or aesthetic goods. Their contribution goes beyond the environmental: by embedding sustainability into **products with cultural meaning, place identity and design quality**, crafts can help make the circular transition more **visible, tangible and socially rooted**. Crafts also offer an avenue for **local economic regeneration**, especially in rural or deindustrialised areas, where they can bridge tradition and innovation. In this sense, the circular economy is also about **opening new connections** between sectors, scales, and histories. SYMCRAFT recognises this potential and seeks to operationalise it through targeted services, collaboration models, and governance frameworks.

The integration of craft into circular value chains is explored within SYMCRAFT through the lens of **industrial symbiosis**, a concept that refers to the exchange of materials, energy, water and by-products between different organisations in order to achieve mutual benefit. Industrial symbiosis is a key pillar of the circular economy, enabling companies to **reduce waste, lower costs and create new revenue streams**, while also supporting environmental goals. At the European level, industrial symbiosis has been promoted through several initiatives and platforms, as **CircLean, European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform, CIRCE2020, CIRCULAR4.0**, and is increasingly recognised as a strategy for **decarbonising industry**, enhancing competitiveness and supporting regional smart specialisation. However, most industrial symbiosis models to date have focused on **large-scale exchanges** between heavy industries, or between firms operating in similar sectors or business environments.

SYM-CRAFT expands this logic by introducing a new layer of complexity and opportunity through the **involvement of small-scale, craft-based actors**, who operate under different constraints and logics. This hybridisation brings important advantages: it increases the flexibility of reuse models, expands the typology of potential materials and outputs, and enriches the cultural and aesthetic dimensions of circular production. At the same time, it

introduces specific challenges, such as regulatory mismatches, asymmetries in scale and organisation, and the need for active facilitation. In addressing these challenges, SYMCRAFT builds upon both **policy frameworks** and **field experience**, proposing a set of strategies that are **responsive to contextual conditions, stakeholder needs, and broader system implications**. It positions craft-industry collaboration not as a niche experiment, but as a viable and replicable model for fostering circularity in diversified, decentralised and creative ways.

3.2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STRATEGY

The SYMCRAFT Strategy is built around three core objectives, each addressing a different but interrelated dimension of the circular transformation process, while also responding to the need to **redefine the role of crafts within contemporary production ecosystems**:

- 1) The first objective is to **activate industrial circularity** through the creative and structured reuse of industrial waste and by-products by **business-oriented craft enterprises**, with a specific focus on the textile/fashion, agro-food, and wood/furniture sectors. This means enabling stable, traceable, and context-sensitive flows of materials from industrial SMEs to craft makers, supporting the creation of new products and semi-finished goods that extend the life of materials and reduce resource extraction. These exchanges are not conceived as isolated or anecdotal, but as **repeatable, adaptable, and economically viable models for regional material loops**;
- 2) Secondly, the strategy aims to **equip both craft makers and industrial SMEs** with the tools, services, and enabling environments required to effectively participate in circular collaboration. For craft makers, this involves support for accessing and working with industrial waste—from regulatory compliance to technical transformation, as well as for the **market positioning of their work within circular and sustainable economies**, through branding, storytelling, and design strategies. This objective also addresses the role of **aware intermediaries**, able to involve other professional figures in the co-design of tailored collaboration pathways, such as legal experts specialised in waste and sustainability, as well as designers and communication professionals. For industrial suppliers, the strategy introduces the possibility of engaging with **creative and regenerative reuse practices**, highlighting how collaboration with the craft sector can add **symbolic, functional, and environmental value** to their production waste and by-products;
- 3) The third objective is to **foster cross-sectoral and cross-institutional frameworks**, supporting the work of intermediaries, facilitators, and public bodies—such as chambers of commerce, business support organisations, vocational institutes, and local administrations. These actors are crucial in building the **infrastructures for**

cooperation, mediating between very different organisational cultures, aligning legal instruments, and embedding circular craft-industry collaboration into regional development plans, **smart specialisation strategies**, and innovation ecosystems;

Beyond these three levels, the strategy responds to a deeper motivation: the deliberate inclusion of the craft sector within SYMCRAFT is an attempt to **reintroduce creative, localised, and human-scale logics into the heart of industrial production**. Craft makers, when appropriately supported, offer not only hands and skills, but also **methods of working, thinking, and valuing** that are inherently aligned with circularity: small-batch production, attention to material origins, openness to experimentation, and narrative-based product identities. Their inclusion challenges industries to reconsider not just how to dispose of materials, but how to imagine their **transformation, value, and meaning**. Taken together, these objectives outline a **multi-scalar, multi-actor vision**, where material circularity goes hand in hand with **cultural and organisational transformation**. The ultimate aim is to move beyond fragmented practices and toward the formation of **regional and European ecosystems** capable of sustaining **creative, inclusive, and regenerative industrial symbiosis** over time.

3.3. TARGET GROUPS AND BENEFICIARIES

As reported before, the primary beneficiary of the SYMCRAFT Strategy consists of **business-oriented craft enterprises** operating in the textile/fashion, agro-food, and wood/furniture sectors. These are typically micro- and small-scale producers with creative, technical and territorial knowledge, who can contribute to the circular economy by transforming industrial by-products into functional, marketable goods. Their ability to work with irregular and low-volume materials makes them ideal actors for valorising industrial waste that cannot be absorbed through traditional reuse chains.

A second key group includes **industrial SMEs**, especially those generating reusable by-products and seeking sustainable, localised strategies for resource optimisation. These companies stand to benefit from improved waste management options, reputational value through circular collaborations, and the creation of high-value outputs from discarded materials.

Additional target groups include **territorial intermediaries** who play a critical enabling role by facilitating cooperation, supporting compliance, and anchoring partnerships in the regional ecosystem.

Finally, the strategy addresses **local authorities and public institutions**, whose engagement is essential for scaling up circular craft-industry partnerships through procurement, policy alignment and integration into Smart Specialisation Strategies. These actors benefit from SYMCRAFT's model as a vehicle for sustainable development, local value creation and cultural resilience.

3.4. KEY PRINCIPLES: SUSTAINABILITY, COLLABORATION, LOCALISATION

The SYMCRAFT strategy is built upon **the interdependent guiding principles of sustainability, collaboration, and localisation**, which define its direction. These principles are not abstract values, but **concrete orientations for action**, derived from both the challenges and the opportunities encountered across the regions and sectors involved in SYMCRAFT. Together, these three principles ensure that the SYMCRAFT Strategy is **aligned with European and regional policy frameworks** and capable of generating **lasting impact**:

- **Sustainability** is understood not only in environmental terms, but also as **economic resilience and social inclusivity**. The reuse of industrial waste and by-products must generate tangible value for all actors involved (craft makers, industrial SMEs, intermediaries) and must support production models that are economically viable, culturally rooted, and environmentally responsible. Achieving this requires more than technical fixes: it demands **supportive ecosystems**, including legal clarity, access to material and infrastructural resources, and services that make circular practices realistically implementable at small and medium scale;
- **Collaboration** lies at the heart of the SYMCRAFT vision. Circularity cannot be realised within sectoral or institutional states, but it requires **openness, trust, and mutual learning** between actors with different languages, rhythms, and motivations. The strategy promotes collaborative innovation through mechanisms such as **joint prototyping, co-design processes, and inter-organisational exchange**, recognising that cooperation is valuable **resource in itself**, one that must be facilitated and sustained;
- **Localisation**, finally, refers to the grounding of circular strategies in **specific territories, supply chains, and cultural practices**. SYMCRAFT calls for approaches that are **tailored to local contexts**, leveraging available materials, situated knowledge, institutional structures, and heritage-based skills as building blocks for transformation. This is not only a strategic choice, but also a **practical necessity**. The circulation of industrial waste and by-products is constrained by **regulatory, infrastructural, and logistical barriers**, sometimes also at the infra-regional level. In this context, local

reuse loops are often the most feasible, effective, and sustainable option, enabling **shorter supply chains** and place-based branding.

4. MAPPING CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The integration of craft into industrial symbiosis processes is a complex undertaking, requiring a granular understanding of the conditions that enable or hinder such collaboration across different sectors and regional contexts. In this section, SYMCRAFT consolidates analytical insights gathered from cross-sectoral SWOT analyses, stakeholder dialogues, and capitalization activities conducted during the early phases of the project. The aim is to map both the sector-specific entry points and the systemic frictions that influence the potential for circular transformation through craft.

4.1. SWOT ANALYSIS AND EVOLVING PRIORITIES: TEXTILE/FASHION, AGRO-FOOD, AND WOOD/FURNITURE

The textile/fashion, agro-food, and wood/furniture sectors constitute the main industrial domains addressed by SYMCRAFT for the activation of circular practices through craft-based collaboration. These sectors are not only structurally diverse in terms of material flows, production cycles and industrial intensity, but also show highly differentiated potentials and constraints with respect to the feasibility of reuse and symbiosis. Through a combination of SWOT analyses (Deliverable 1.1.1) and participatory workshops held across partner regions (Deliverable 1.2.1), the project has generated a composite portrait of how craft may intervene in each domain, and under what conditions such intervention can be meaningful, feasible and replicable.

In the **fashion and textile sector**, there is a convergence between rising consumer awareness of sustainable fashion, an established tradition of small-scale artisanal production, and the growing regulatory push for circularity, notably through Extended Producer Responsibility directives. These structural strengths are reinforced by a cultural orientation towards aesthetics, storytelling, and material experimentation, which aligns well with the values and competencies of the craft sector. However, critical weaknesses persist: fragmented supply chains, lack of standardisation in textile recycling, and the dominance of fast fashion models create substantial barriers to systemic integration. Moreover, technological constraints and legal definitions of textile waste complicate its direct uptake by artisans. It is in this context that project partners and stakeholders have expressed a strategic preference to focus more precisely on the **fashion sub-sector**,

where the link between creativity, sustainability, and market positioning is more pronounced. The workshop discussions confirmed that this segment presents a higher readiness level for circular collaboration, especially where branding, customisation, and high-value transformation are involved.

The **agro-food sector**, while theoretically rich in available organic residues, presents a more ambivalent profile. On the one hand, the sector generates a wide array of biological by-products with potential applications in craft, from biomaterials and natural dyes to eco-packaging. On the other, workshop participants highlighted significant challenges in accessing these materials in a usable and consistent form. Issues of perishability, seasonality, and complex health and safety regulations strongly limit their adoption in artisanal processes. The SWOT analysis has further shown that in some regional contexts, such as Hungary or Croatia, economic and infrastructural conditions do not favour the emergence of direct collaborations between agro-industries and craftspeople. While some promising cooperative models exist, particularly in the form of shared processing facilities or community-based valorisation of food waste, these remain isolated and dependent on strong local institutional support. For this reason, the agro-food sector cannot be considered a universally “ready domain” for circular craft intervention, but rather one where **selective and context-specific approaches should be prioritised**.

The **wood and furniture sector**, often perceived as inherently circular due to its historical practices of repair and reuse, reveals a more complex scenario. Although the sector produces significant volumes of wood residues, such as sawdust, offcuts, or surplus furniture components, these are often repurposed internally, for example for heating or secondary processing, leaving little material available for external reuse. This is particularly evident in countries like Croatia, where wood waste is almost entirely valorised within the industrial cycle itself. Even when materials are technically available, access by artisans is hindered by a lack of redistribution infrastructures, uncertain quality, and regulatory constraints related to chemical treatments. These factors limit the possibility of standardising upcycled production. Nevertheless, the furniture offers relevant entry points, especially in those regions where design culture and local craft traditions intersect. Stakeholders have emphasised that **design-oriented, small-scale furniture production**, when supported by digital matching tools or material libraries, can effectively incorporate high-quality residues into marketable outputs.

Across all three sectors, a cross-cutting pattern has emerged: while **opportunities for collaboration exist**, they are highly dependent on enabling conditions such as material availability, legal clarity, technical infrastructure, and intermediary support. The workshops also confirmed that larger industrial actors remain difficult to engage at this stage, often due to a lack of immediate economic incentives or concerns over regulatory compliance. This reinforces the project's orientation toward small and medium-sized producers, and the need to design strategic interventions that are modular, adaptable, and territorially grounded.

In conclusion, the SWOT analyses and participatory findings underscore the **necessity of adopting a flexible and differentiated strategic posture**. Rather than identifying a single sector as the universal carrier of circular potential, **SYM-CRAFT proposes a selective focus on the most responsive sub-sectors, namely fashion within textiles and furniture within wood**. This approach ensures both the scalability of effective practices and the responsiveness to regional diversity, which are essential for the long-term sustainability and transferability of circular craft-industry collaboration models.

4.2. KEY OBSTACLES TO COLLABORATION AND CIRCULARITY

Although collaboration between industrial and craft actors holds clear potential, it has yet to be fully recognised or operationalised across most regions. While many of the conceptual and policy frameworks promoting circularity point to the value of cross-sectoral cooperation, its practical implementation remains limited, hindered by a series of entrenched structural and systemic barriers.

A fundamental obstacle is the **operational and cultural misalignment** between the two domains. Industrial systems tend to operate according to logics of standardisation, predictability, and cost optimisation, while craft practices are often rooted in flexibility, creative adaptation, and small-batch or bespoke production. These divergent approaches create tensions in terms of workflow synchronisation, production volumes, and quality expectations, making coordination inherently challenging. The SYM-CRAFT workshops consistently highlighted these mismatches as a key friction point, especially when attempting to scale up local pilot collaborations.

Compounding this misalignment is a critical **legal and regulatory gap**, particularly in relation to the classification and handling of materials. The current regulatory framework in many partner countries imposes strict distinctions between **waste** and **by-products**, often rendering reuse processes bureaucratically complex or even legally restricted. In several

cases, once a material is classified as “waste,” it becomes subject to environmental and safety standards that are extremely difficult for small-scale actors to meet. This results not only in compliance burdens but also in **legal uncertainty** for both parties: industries are hesitant to release materials without clear liability protection, while artisans are unsure of what they are legally allowed to work with. Moreover, in certain regional contexts, waste streams are **monopolised or centralised**, leaving little room for decentralised reuse models such as those proposed by SYMCRAFT. These constraints significantly reduce the feasibility of craft-based symbiosis unless specific legal clarifications or exemptions are developed.

From an infrastructural perspective, there is also a **notable absence of intermediary systems** capable of supporting such collaboration. At present, most interactions between craft and industry remain informal, experimental, or opportunistic. There are few shared platforms or service providers that facilitate material exchange, manage transport and storage, or help navigate regulatory obligations. Without these enablers, potential partnerships often remain one-off or short-lived, lacking the structural foundations to become durable or replicable. Furthermore, **asymmetric access to information** exacerbates the issue: craft actors often lack visibility on the types and quantities of available industrial by-products, while industrial SMEs may be unaware of the creative and market potential of reuse through craft.

Beyond operational and regulatory barriers, one of the most frequently cited concerns among both industrial and craft actors is the **economic viability** of collaboration. From the perspective of artisans, adopting circular practices implies a reconfiguration of their existing business model, often without an immediate or guaranteed return. Using the framework of **circular business model innovation**, this challenge can be unpacked across three critical dimensions: the **value proposition** (is the collaboration socially, environmentally, and culturally desirable?), the **value creation and delivery** mechanisms (are the resources, logistics, and partnerships in place to make it work?), and the **value capture** logic (can the model generate financial and non-financial returns?). In many cases, one or more of these elements remain underdeveloped or misaligned, especially in early-stage collaborations. As such, SYMCRAFT recognises the need for **tailored business modelling support** and the co-design of adaptive strategies that can evolve alongside the partnerships they aim to sustain. This challenge is exacerbated by **material-related constraints**: the quantity, quality, and regularity of reusable by-products are often insufficient to ensure continuous craft-based production. In sectors such as textile and wood, materials may be unavailable in suitable condition or are already internally valorised by industry (e.g. for energy recovery), limiting external redistribution opportunities.

Lastly, the **issue of trust and mutual perception** continues to pose a barrier to systemic collaboration. Craft actors may view industrial partners as rigid, inaccessible or uninterested in inclusive models, while industrial stakeholders may regard craft as marginal, inefficient, or insufficiently scalable. This reciprocal scepticism, combined with the lack of shared vocabulary and mediating figures, creates a relational distance that undermines the conditions for co-creation.

In light of these challenges, the success of circular collaboration depends not only on material compatibility, but on the emergence of a **supportive enabling ecosystem**. This might include attention to the regulatory constraints, particularly with regard to the status of secondary materials, legal and technical guidance for small actors, intermediaries capable of managing logistics and compliance, and incentive structures that recognise the environmental and cultural value generated by reuse. Only through such integrated, cross-sectoral strategies can circularity move from experimental practice to a viable socio-economic model.

4.3. CONSTRAINTS IN REGULATION, LOGISTICS AND CULTURE

In addition to operational and economic challenges, the development of circular synergies between the craft and industrial sectors is significantly constrained by systemic barriers that operate across three critical dimensions: regulation, logistics, and culture. These barriers are deeply embedded in the legislative architecture of waste governance, the material infrastructures of production, and the symbolic narratives that define value, legitimacy, and innovation. SYMCRAFT therefore proposes to approach these constraints as **critical leverage points for transformation**.

The most prominent and frequently cited constraint is **regulatory**, particularly in relation to the legal classification of materials as *waste* or *by-products*. According to the **EU Waste Framework Directive (Directive 2008/98/EC)**, any substance or object which the holder discards, intends to discard, or is required to discard is legally considered *waste* (Art. 3.1). However, Article 5 introduces the possibility for certain materials to be classified as *by-products*, and not as waste, if four cumulative conditions are met: (a) further use of the material is certain; (b) it can be used without additional treatment beyond normal industrial practice; (c) it is produced as an integral part of the process; and (d) it complies with all relevant environmental, health, and product safety standards. In practice, these conditions are difficult to satisfy, particularly for small producers, and their interpretation varies significantly across Member States, leading to **legal uncertainty and administrative complexity**.

As a result, many industrial residues that are clean, usable, and potentially valuable for creative reuse are automatically treated as waste, triggering a cascade of obligations related to transport, storage, traceability, and authorisation. These requirements are often disproportionate to the scale of craft-based activity, and inaccessible for micro-enterprises or informal operators. Moreover, the lack of clear and harmonised *end-of-waste criteria* (Art. 6) for key material streams, such as textiles, wood composites, and agro-industrial residues, further exacerbates the ambiguity, discouraging both industries and artisans from experimenting with new reuse models. In several SYMCRAFT regions, the problem is compounded by centralised or monopolised waste management systems, where secondary materials are channelled into industrial valorisation (for example biomass or energy recovery), leaving little opportunity for decentralised, small-scale reuse.

In parallel, **logistical constraints** present significant barriers to practical collaboration. Craft production is inherently decentralised and frequently located in peri-urban or rural areas, where access to industrial material streams depends on the presence of well-functioning infrastructures: decentralised collection hubs, pre-treatment services, transport coordination, and platforms for matching supply and demand. However, as revealed in SYMCRAFT's regional workshops, such infrastructures are often absent or underdeveloped. Even when industrial partners are willing to share materials, the cost and complexity of logistics, combined with the irregularity and non-standardised nature of the waste, render material uptake by artisans logistically and economically unviable.

The third layer of constraint is **cultural and symbolic**. Despite the growing legitimacy of circular economy discourse, there remains a widespread hesitation, both in industry and among consumers, toward materials explicitly labelled as *waste*. Products made from reused materials are often perceived as lower in quality or aesthetic value, unless rebranded through compelling narratives of design, heritage, or innovation. Simultaneously, the craft sector continues to be framed in certain policy and market contexts as marginal or nostalgic, rather than as a dynamic contributor to industrial symbiosis and sustainable material innovation. This dual stigma, toward both waste and craft, limits the emergence of new models that combine creativity, ecology, and production resilience.

Addressing these constraints requires **multi-level, integrated action**. At the regulatory level, this could mean clarifying and streamlining the procedures for recognising *by-products* and *end-of-waste* status, with particular attention to the scale and material flows relevant to craft. At the infrastructural level, it entails investing in territorial logistics, shared pre-treatment services, and digital platforms for material exchange, particularly tailored to the needs of SMEs and micro-enterprises. At the cultural level, it demands targeted storytelling, design-led

communication, and public education efforts to reposition circular craft not as an exception or niche, but as a legitimate and strategic form of sustainable production.

5. ACTIVATING INDUSTRIAL CIRCULARITY AND COLLABORATIONS THROUGH CRAFT

In addition to the findings gathered during the preliminary phase of the project, numerous studies and strategic frameworks confirm that the transition to a circular economy is not solely a technological or regulatory challenge, but a deeply systemic one. It requires the **emergence of new collaborative ecosystems** in which industrial firms, craft enterprises, public authorities, research institutions, and communities work together to rethink how value, materials, and knowledge circulate across regions and sectors. Within these ecosystems, actors traditionally perceived as peripheral, such as craft enterprises, are called to play a proactive role in the regeneration of material flows and production logics.

SYM-CRAFT proposes to activate industrial circularity by enhancing material recovery and by reshaping the relationships between industrial producers and local craft ecosystems, fostering mutual benefit, distributed value creation, and long-term sustainability. This section outlines the strategic preconditions, enabling mechanisms, and tested approaches that support this transition across diverse territorial and institutional contexts.

The five phases outlined in the SYM-CRAFT Strategy are not intended to unfold in parallel or as isolated actions. Rather, they constitute a **progressive and interconnected sequence**, designed to guide industrial-craft collaboration from its initial exploration through to consolidation and replication. Each phase builds on the outcomes of the previous one, while maintaining **strategic flexibility** to adapt to diverse regional contexts.

To better reflect this structured progression, the strategy adopts a **phased temporal framework**, assigning each stage a primary time horizon, while acknowledging areas of overlap and iteration. This revised structure replaces the initial, static classification of short-, medium-, and long-term goals uniformly applied across all phases, which did not sufficiently communicate the logic of progression inherent to the strategy.

5.1. READINESS AND ENGAGEMENT

The starting point for activating circular collaboration between craft enterprises and industrial actors lies in the careful preparation of the conditions that make such cooperation viable, strategic, and beneficial for all involved. In SYM-CRAFT, this means approaching **collaboration**

as a structured and context-sensitive process grounded in mutual readiness, shared interest, and aligned expectations.

To support this approach, the project adopts and adapts the concept of **Symbiosis Readiness Level (SRL)**, originally introduced in the European Commission's *Study and Portfolio Review on Industrial Symbiosis*. This multidimensional framework allows for the assessment of organisational, technological, ecological, and managerial maturity of potential partners. Within SYMCRAFT, the SRL becomes a practical tool for evaluating both industrial SMEs and craft enterprises in terms of their capacity to engage in creative reuse partnerships. Rather than functioning as a filter to select only the "most ready" actors, the SRL is used as a **roadmap for growth**, helping identify where targeted support is needed to bring actors into collaboration. This approach is consistent with the project's inclusive ambition: rather than rewarding only those already equipped, it provides guidance for raising readiness over time. The preparation involves four interdependent actions:

- a) In parallel with organisational assessment, the project undertakes a **mapping of material flows** within each partner region, identifying industrial by-products with adequate quality, consistency and volume for potential reuse. These mappings are not limited to quantitative analysis; they also explore regulatory, symbolic and functional dimensions. Materials are analysed not only in terms of physical characteristics, but also in terms of **legal status**, particularly whether they can potentially be reclassified from "waste" to "by-product" under **Article 5 of Directive 2008/98/EC**. This distinction is critical, as it determines the regulatory pathway for material transfer and reuse. The mapping process also allows for the strategic prioritisation of sectors. Across several SYMCRAFT regions, it has become clear that **furniture by-products offer more viable conditions than raw wood**, while the **fashion sub-sector provides more flexible entry points than general textiles**, due to the smaller volumes and stronger link with design and circular branding.
- b) Once potential actors and materials have been identified, the process shifts toward **exploratory engagement**. Initial dialogues, conducted in bilateral or small group formats, help uncover interests, motivations, constraints and preliminary compatibilities. These conversations, often supported by intermediaries, are essential for **building mutual understanding and trust**. They allow participants to express their visions for collaboration, clarify their needs, and surface any structural or relational barriers. These early moments of encounter are not only diagnostic: they are formative, shaping the narrative and social architecture of the emerging partnerships. Trust does not arise spontaneously: it is constructed through **repeated, transparent and facilitated interaction**.

- c) Where gaps in readiness are identified, whether due to organisational limitations, legal uncertainties, or lack of equipment, SYMCRAFT activates **targeted support measures**. These may include the provision of legal information and guidance on material classification, access to prototyping or pre-treatment spaces, or capacity-building sessions on key themes such as co-design, storytelling, or waste valorisation. These supports are conceived to be **modular and adaptable**, recognising the diversity of starting points across partner regions and actors. The goal is not to enforce a uniform standard, but to foster a baseline of operational feasibility and strategic alignment, from which co-creation can emerge.
- d) By the end of this first phase, the project aims to deliver a set of concrete and actionable outputs. These include **regional maps of material flows, SRL profiles** of potential actors, and a first round of **strategically matched partnerships** between industrial and craft-based players. In some cases, these initial pairings may already lead to draft collaboration outlines or informal agreements on future co-design. Most importantly, this phase ensures that the move toward structured collaboration is grounded in **real capacity, aligned expectations, and the first steps of trust** elements without which no circular partnership, however well-intentioned, can thrive. Readiness, in this perspective, is not a gate to be passed, but a **process to be nurtured**, a space of possibility in which collaboration can take root and grow.

This is the foundation-building phase (Months 0–6), focused on identifying potential actors, assessing their readiness for collaboration, and mapping available material flows using tools like the **Waste Material Reuse Sheet**. Activities such as **Exploratory Talks, Initial Events**, and early stakeholder engagement are central here. This phase corresponds to the **Exploratory Phase** of the SYMCRAFT methodology and closely aligns with **Pilot 1**. It establishes the trust, data, and understanding required for the strategy to move forward effectively.

5.2. ACTIVATION AND FACILITATION

Activating a circular collaboration does not happen automatically once partners have been identified. It requires a deliberate effort to build shared structures, deepen engagement, and create the conditions for stable, operational cooperation. This second part of the process focuses on **establishing trust, defining working relationships, and facilitating the first concrete steps toward implementation**. While the previous phase set the stage, this one brings the actors into action, through structured interaction, guided negotiation, and coordinated activation.

Once the initial groundwork has been laid, through readiness assessments, material flow mapping, and early-stage dialogue, the next step in the activation of circular collaboration involves building a **shared structure** and establishing **working dynamics** between the actors involved. At this stage, the focus shifts from **potential to action**, from individual interest to **coordinated initiative**. A central role in this process is played by **territorial intermediaries**. These can include chambers of commerce, development agencies, design hubs, and public institutions that have the ability to bring actors together, facilitate encounters, and support the alignment of objectives and expectations. Within SYMCRAFT, these entities act as **facilitators** by managing complexity, ensuring transparency, and fostering **constructive communication** across sectors. Their presence helps mitigate differences in language, pace, and culture between industrial and craft actors, making collaboration more accessible and functional.

This phase marks a shift from potential to **operationality**, as actors begin to make commitments, define roles, and set in motion the conditions for circular cooperation to unfold in practice:

- a) To support this transition, the project initiates a series of **structured, multi-actor meetings**. These encounters, facilitated by intermediaries such as chambers of commerce, development agencies, or creative networks, are designed to move beyond informal exchange and into the **concrete negotiation of roles, needs, and possibilities**. Intermediaries help to ensure **inclusive participation** and **balanced interaction**, especially between actors that differ in terms of organisational culture, production scale, or access to resources. Through these sessions, shared goals are clarified and the first strategic alignments are formalised in a working group format.
- b) Within this process, specific attention is given to **identifying and activating motivated individuals or organisations** who can serve as **internal promoters** of the collaboration. These actors may include visionary artisans, SME managers, or public officers capable of linking sectors and building trust. In the early stages, such promoters often come from within the **SYM-CRAFT partnership itself**, particularly among project partners already engaged in territorial mobilisation. Their knowledge of both the local context and the project's objectives enables them to play a **catalytic role**. Over time, however, the aim is to support the emergence of **new promoters from the broader stakeholder ecosystem**, ensuring continuity and rootedness of the process.
- c) As the collaboration deepens, early outlines of a **shared operational structure** begin to emerge. While these arrangements may still be informal, they provide the essential

scaffolding for working together, **outlining roles, clarifying responsibilities**, and setting basic principles for coordination. Rather than applying rigid models, SYMCRAFT encourages **co-designed, flexible formats** that reflect the diversity of contexts and stakeholder profiles. This structural clarity is essential for continuity and helps partners feel secure and recognised within the process.

- d) Legal and regulatory aspects are addressed **as part of the design process**. Issues such as **material classification, responsibility for transport, product liability**, or **intellectual property** are considered not as external hurdles but as **components of a shared operational framework**. Intermediaries support this dimension by facilitating access to legal expertise, co-developing **draft agreements**, and ensuring dialogue with local authorities where appropriate. Legal clarity is not necessarily full formalisation, but it is essential to build **a common understanding that reduces risk** and enables experimentation.
- e) Throughout this phase, attention is given to maintaining **consistency in communication, participation, and follow-up**. Given the diversity of actors and rhythms involved, simple coordination tools, such as **shared calendars, summary documents, and process visualisations**, help to keep the group aligned. These tools not only support logistics, but also contribute to **building mutual reliability and accountability**, reinforcing trust as a working asset.

Overlapping with the end of Phase 1 (Months 4-12), this stage transitions from exploration to structured collaboration. It involves applying the **Symbiosis Readiness Level (SRL)** to assess the viability of potential partnerships, selecting collaboration promoters, and drafting feasibility plans. This phase acts as a bridge to the **Initiating Phase** of the methodology and prepares the ground for co-design. It is essential for setting up the organisational and strategic conditions for the next steps.

5.3. CO-DESIGNING COLLABORATION

Once collaboration has been activated and an initial structure is in place, the next phase focuses on how to **translate this emerging partnership into a working model**—one that connects actors, resources and responsibilities through clearly defined processes. Co-design in this context is not limited to products or services. It includes the construction of shared agreements, the framing of legal and logistical aspects, and the integration of material flows into new forms of production.

- a) The first priority in this phase is to collectively define the **operational model of collaboration**. Partners jointly identify how the relationship should function, who does what, under which conditions, and with what expected outcomes. This includes not only production roles, but also governance, communication, quality control and risk management. SYMCRAFT promotes a participatory design approach in which collaboration models are built from the ground up, adapted to the capacities, rhythms and goals of the involved actors. This flexibility allows for differentiated pathways across regions and sectors, while maintaining coherence with shared circular principles.
- b) Building on this operational base, partners begin to shape the **legal and procedural agreements** that will guide the relationship. These documents formalise the responsibilities of each party and provide a legal framework for cooperation. Intermediaries support this process by facilitating access to legal experts, offering adaptable contract templates, and promoting dialogue with authorities when regulatory clarification is needed. Particular attention is paid to the **classification and transfer of materials**. According to Directive 2008/98/EC, for an industrial residue to be considered a by-product rather than waste, it must meet four conditions, including proof of further use and regulatory compliance. SYMCRAFT proposes that formal cooperation agreements can serve as documentation to support this status, offering a **legally sound basis** for enabling the reuse of materials in craft production.
- c) In parallel, the partnership focuses on the **creative and technical exploration of materials**. Reuse is not only a regulatory challenge, it is a design and production challenge. Artisans and industrial partners are supported in understanding the physical, chemical and aesthetic qualities of by-products. Through testing sessions, material samples, and shared prototyping, they co-develop ideas for how to transform residues into components, objects or products of value. The act of working with materials in a shared space also reinforces trust and deepens the connection between sectors, bringing theory into practice.
- d) These early-stage prototypes serve multiple functions. Technically, they test the feasibility of transformation and product development. Strategically, they provide tangible artefacts around which collaboration can be organised. Communicatively, they help tell the story of the partnership to broader audiences. SYMCRAFT encourages the use of prototypes not only as experiments, but as **tools for engagement and scaling**, whether by showcasing them in regional exhibitions, integrating them into service portfolios, or linking them to local market platforms.
- e) Throughout the phase, **flexibility remains key**. Models may need to be adjusted based on what works and what does not. Legal language may evolve as practices become clearer. Roles may shift as confidence grows. This iterative co-design process

is not a detour, it is the path itself. Collaboration deepens not through fixed systems but through **shared learning and adaptive implementation**.

This phase of the collaboration path shows **how material becomes the site of shared transformation**. Co-production in SYMCRAFT is not simply a division of tasks; it is a **creative process** in which by-products are reimagined, repurposed, and embedded with new value through design, narrative and local identity. These materials are not neutral, they require both technical knowledge and cultural sensitivity to unlock their potential. Craft actors, with their capacity to work with irregular, non-standard inputs, play a key role in turning residues into functional and marketable goods. At the same time, industrial partners learn to see waste not as a burden, but as a resource that, through shared process and purpose, can enter new value chains. By-products thus become the **medium through which collaboration is enacted**, a space of negotiation, innovation, and meaning-making.

This is the core creative and design-oriented phase (Months 10-18). Partners collaboratively define business models, develop prototypes, and co-create value chains around selected material flows. This stage corresponds to the **Concept Phase** and is strongly tied to **Pilot 2**, where theoretical collaboration becomes operational. Co-design sessions, technical validation, and early market testing take place here.

5.4. VALUE CREATION

After the definition of roles, flows and agreements, the partnership turns toward the creation of concrete outputs, **products, services and systems that generate value through the creative reuse of industrial by-products**. At the heart of this process is the craft enterprise, which acts not simply as a user of materials, but as a **catalyst of transformation**, capable of converting raw residues into designed, meaningful and viable products. Through its sensitivity to materials, design awareness, and ability to operate in small, flexible production cycles, **craft functions as a micro-level processor of circular value**, bridging technical reuse with cultural and market relevance.

- a) The first action of this phase involves the **production of functional and marketable prototypes**. Using the material inputs defined in the previous phase, craft makers and industrial partners develop small series or test models that demonstrate the feasibility of reuse. These prototypes are not purely experimental: they are designed to be tested in real production conditions, meet expected standards, and begin to build market awareness. Intermediaries and technical partners may support this process by offering access to tools, feedback loops and testing environments.
- b) At the same time, the collaboration focuses on the **stabilisation of production routines**. This includes defining how materials are delivered, processed, stored, and

transformed on a regular basis. Craft actors are supported in organising their workflows to handle irregular volumes, ensuring product consistency, and maintaining traceability. The ability to handle industrial residues in a reliable, process-driven way is what allows craft to scale up from anecdotal reuse to stable circular practice.

- c) Another key action is the **definition and refinement of business models**. This involves adapting pricing strategies, identifying customer profiles, choosing distribution channels, and planning communication. Craft enterprises are supported in developing models that are economically viable at small or medium scale, often by focusing on high value, limited series or customised products. In some cases, service-based or B2B approaches may also be explored, such as producing components for other industries or offering material transformation as a service.
- d) In parallel, the project supports actions aimed at **enhancing visibility and market positioning**. These may include public showcases, pop-up exhibitions, regional events or digital campaigns. The goal is to connect products to a broader narrative of innovation, reuse and territorial identity, making circular collaboration visible and desirable to end users, institutions and potential partners. Intermediaries may assist in aligning communication efforts with local development strategies or smart specialisation priorities.
- e) Finally, the project encourages the **integration of value creation into territorial systems**. This may include the use of craft-based circular products in public procurement, integration with tourism and cultural activities, or inclusion in sustainability branding initiatives at the regional level. The idea is not just to place products on the market, but to position them within a larger ecosystem that recognises and sustains their value.

By the end of this phase, the partnership will have produced real outputs, **products, routines, services and models that** demonstrate the potential of circular collaboration between industry and craft. Closely following and partially overlapping with co-design, this phase (Months 14-24) focuses on refining outputs, generating economic value, and anchoring the collaboration in viable production and distribution models. It includes prototyping, branding, and go-to-market planning. It supports scalability, moving from small experiments to potentially replicable models.

5.5. CONSOLIDATION AND LEARNING

After design, activation, and value generation, the collaboration process enters a phase of **consolidation and reflective learning**. This is not simply a closing moment, it is a strategic transition in which the efforts of previous phases are stabilised, evaluated, and adapted. The goal is to transform temporary cooperation into a **reliable, repeatable and territorially**

anchored system. Within SYMCRAFT, this phase is also where **pilot cases** play a pivotal role: not only as demonstrations of feasibility, but as **laboratories for validating, improving and scaling the models** that have emerged.

- a) The first action in this phase is the **implementation of pilot collaborations**. These pilots are carried out in selected partner regions and are based on real exchanges of materials, co-production processes and collaborative governance. Each pilot tests one or more dimensions of the strategy: material feasibility, organisational compatibility, legal procedures, business models, or market readiness. Project partners coordinate these cases, with intermediaries managing logistics and facilitation, while local actors contribute knowledge and context. Pilots are not isolated showcases, they are working systems designed to stress-test the model under real conditions.
- b) In parallel, the project initiates a process of **monitoring and feedback collection**. Quantitative and qualitative data are gathered from all pilot activities, including challenges faced, adjustments made, and results achieved. Particular attention is given to the effectiveness of agreements, material flows, and production outcomes. Monitoring is not limited to outputs, but it includes processes, relationships, and the evolution of trust and capacity. The aim is to produce a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of what works, why, and under what conditions.
- c) Based on this evidence, SYMCRAFT promotes a cycle of **collective reflection and model refinement**. Partners meet to review findings, identify transferable components, and adapt tools accordingly. The emphasis is on adaptation: rather than finalising a single model, the project builds a **portfolio of tested strategies** that can be flexibly applied or recombined in other territories or sectors. This includes refining the Service Portfolio, improving cooperation templates, and integrating learning into future policy recommendations.
- d) Another key action is the **transfer and scaling of successful models**. Learning from the pilots is made accessible to other stakeholders, both inside and outside the project, through workshops, publications, exhibitions and peer-to-peer exchange formats. The goal is to enable replication, but always with sensitivity to local conditions. SYMCRAFT does not export fixed models, it **shares adaptable knowledge** that can support new collaborations elsewhere. This transfer also contributes to a wider ecosystem of initiatives across Interreg and Horizon programmes.
- e) Finally, this phase aims to establish the **governance frameworks and territorial ecosystems** needed to sustain collaboration over time. This may include embedding services in local institutions, aligning activities with Smart Specialisation Strategies, or forming permanent clusters or platforms. Intermediaries play a key role in convening stakeholders, while policymakers are engaged to support long-term

institutionalisation. What began as a project now becomes part of a broader strategy for circular innovation, deeply rooted in place.

By the end of this phase, the collaboration will no longer be temporary or experimental, it will be **anchored in regional systems, informed by evidence, and equipped for future scaling**.

The final phase (Months 20-36) is dedicated to formalising partnerships, for example long-term cooperation agreements), validating business cases, and exploring **scaling and replication** across regions and sectors. It corresponds to the **Realisation Phase** of the collaboration methodology and aligns with **Pilot 3**. Importantly, this phase also integrates feedback loops for learning and continuous improvement, feeding into policy recommendations and capacity-building actions

6. STRATEGIC SERVICES TO SUPPORT CRAFT ADOPTION OF INDUSTRIAL SYMBIOSIS

To translate the strategic vision of SYMCRAFT into **concrete and repeatable action**, the project has developed a dedicated **set of operational tools that support the implementation of local collaborations** between craft makers and industrial actors. These tools are consolidated into the **SYM-CRAFT Service Portfolio**, a practical and flexible **framework designed to enable stakeholders to structure their efforts around the reuse and valorisation of industrial waste, transformed into by-product**.

The Service Portfolio offers an integrated set of instruments that address three fundamental dimensions of industrial-craft collaboration: **legal feasibility, material readiness, and economic viability**. These tools have been co-designed with project partners and reflect the diversity of regional conditions, industrial processes, and artisanal capabilities observed across the SYMCRAFT territories. They are not intended as static templates, but rather as dynamic and adaptable supports, capable of guiding local actors through the complex process of initiating, structuring, and sustaining circular cooperation.

At the core of this approach lies the recognition that effective industrial symbiosis requires not only material compatibility or technical ingenuity, but also clear agreements, mutual trust, and sustainable business models. For this reason, the Portfolio includes: a **legal framework** to help partners navigate regulatory requirements and draft cooperation agreements, a **material reuse tool** that supports the identification, classification and transformation of industrial waste into by-products for potential reuse, and a **business**

model framework that guides the design of sustainable and market-ready circular strategies.

These instruments are conceived to **accompany actors along the entire collaboration process**, from initial material mapping and partner engagement to operational structuring and economic consolidation. Each tool is being **tested in a dedicated pilot action**, which allows for real-world validation and refinement. The pilots will provide insights on usability, transferability and impact, helping to shape the final version of the Service Portfolio as a replicable resource for use beyond the project's lifecycle.

Rather than promoting a one-size-fits-all solution, the Portfolio embraces the **complexity of regional systems**, offering modular tools that can be **adapted to diverse regulatory, economic and cultural contexts**. Its logic is rooted in practice: it aims to reduce the barriers that prevent craft-industry cooperation, to enable informed decision-making, and to create shared value through the creative transformation of industrial residues.

By supporting structured and inclusive collaboration, the Service Portfolio contributes directly to the broader goals of SYMCRAFT, **aligning circular innovation with territorial resilience, ecological responsibility, and cultural relevance**. In this sense, it represents not only a collection of tools, but a **strategic enabler of local circular ecosystems**, linking vision to implementation and policy to practice.

7. GOVERNANCE, MONITORING AND SYSTEM SUPPORT

As the SYMCRAFT strategy progresses from conceptualisation to implementation, the need arises to consolidate its structure and ensure that its impact can extend beyond the scope of individual collaborations. Circular transformation is not driven solely by projects, but by the **systems that support them**, systems that enable actors to connect, learn, adapt, and grow. It is in this broader perspective that governance, monitoring and institutional alignment emerge not as complementary elements, but as the **foundation of long-term viability and strategic scaling**. This chapter addresses the conditions under which industrial-craft symbiosis can be embedded into **territorial innovation ecosystems**, supported through ongoing evaluation, and aligned with multi-level policy frameworks. It considers how roles, responsibilities, tools and knowledge are distributed across regional contexts, and how SYMCRAFT's approach can be sustained, measured and transferred in a coherent and scalable way. By shifting the focus from pilot to platform, from activity to architecture, this final part of the strategy outlines what it takes to **transform isolated practices into an institutionalised pathway for circular transition**.

7.1. MONITORING AND READINESS ASSESSMENT

For industrial symbiosis to become a sustainable and replicable model of circular transformation, it must be supported by a system of **multi-actor governance**, continuous **monitoring of progress and capacity**, and an underlying structure for **learning and adaptation**. Within SYMCRAFT, these elements are not peripheral: they are embedded into the strategic architecture of the project and serve as key enablers for the long-term viability and evolution of craft-industry circular collaborations. The project adopts a **territorial governance approach**, rooted in the activation of regional ecosystems that connect SMEs, craft enterprises, public authorities, and intermediaries. These ecosystems are anchored in existing institutions, such as chambers of commerce, development agencies, and innovation clusters, but are also expanded and adapted through new collaborative formats developed during the project. Their role is to support coordination, reduce transaction costs, and guide cooperation in ways that are consistent with local development trajectories, including Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) and emerging regional innovation policies.

Intermediary actors play a central role in enabling this system. They are not merely facilitators of technical support or logistical exchange, but rather **stewards of continuity and trust**, capable of navigating across organisational cultures, legal frameworks, and sectoral languages. As outlined in SYMCRAFT's core methodology, intermediaries are actively involved in legal facilitation, relationship-building, and the consolidation of shared procedures. Their capacity is further reinforced through structured peer exchange and cross-regional coordination. From a monitoring perspective, SYMCRAFT introduces the **Symbiosis Readiness Level (SRL)** as both a diagnostic and developmental tool. Originally proposed in the *Study and Portfolio Review on Industrial Symbiosis* (European Commission, 2020) and adapted to the craft context, the SRL framework enables the assessment of readiness across four key dimensions: **technical capacity, organisational maturity, ecological alignment, and strategic governance**. This composite indicator is applied both at partnership and regional level, providing a shared methodology to track progress, identify enabling conditions, and support adaptive planning. Initially deployed in the project's early phases, the SRL remains a transversal reference point throughout the implementation process.

Complementing the SRL, SYMCRAFT applies a **multi-layered approach to performance monitoring**, which combines **quantitative indicators**, such as the number of collaborations activated, volumes and types of industrial by-products reused, prototypes developed, and services accessed, with **qualitative assessments** of collaborative quality, stakeholder engagement, and capacity development. Rather than functioning as a rigid KPI framework, this system operates as a **flexible evaluation logic**, informed by project implementation and pilot case feedback. Evaluation tools include interviews, surveys, and periodic co-reflection

sessions across the partnership. Monitoring in SYMCRAFT is designed not for compliance, but as a means to **strengthen strategic alignment and collective learning**. To ensure consistency and operational quality, the project has developed a suite of **coordination and management tools**, including shared digital platforms, regular review moments, and internal validation procedures led by the coordination team. These tools provide a backbone for distributed project management and feed into periodic evaluation checkpoints, enabling adjustments based on evidence and lessons learned from practical implementation. Most importantly, governance and monitoring in SYMCRAFT are designed to be **transferable and institutionally anchored**. By aligning collaboration structures and assessment tools with existing regional innovation ecosystems and circular economy strategies, the project ensures continuity beyond its lifecycle. This also enhances scalability, offering a replicable model that can be adapted to other territorial contexts and policy environments, whether through regional green deal frameworks, New European Bauhaus initiatives, or EU programmes such as Horizon Europe and Interreg.

In conclusion, the integration of governance, monitoring, and evaluation provides the structural backbone of SYMCRAFT's strategic framework. It ensures that circular collaboration is accompanied, sustained, and continuously improved, anchored in shared roles, measurable progress, and systemic learning.

7.2. POLICY, UPSCALING AND TRANSFERABILITY

The ambition of SYMCRAFT goes beyond the creation of localised experiments in circular production. From the outset, the project has been designed as a **strategic contribution to European and territorial transition policies**, grounded in the principles of industrial symbiosis, resource efficiency, and the valorisation of local skills and materials. Its implementation generates not only practices and tools, but also insights and governance models that are intended to be scaled and adapted across different contexts, sectors, and levels of decision-making.

At the European level, SYMCRAFT aligns strongly with the **European Green Deal** and the **Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP)**, particularly in relation to waste reduction, eco-design, and the development of short, circular value chains. The project contributes directly to the Green Deal's key action on the circular economy by promoting the transformation of by-products into resources through creative reuse and decentralised production models. This is particularly relevant for sectors such as textiles, food, and furniture, identified by the CEAP as priority areas for circular innovation. The approach is further connected to the vision of the **New European Bauhaus**, positioning craft not only as a production sector, but as a cultural and social driver of sustainable transition. SYMCRAFT also supports the implementation of

Horizon Europe priorities on sustainable industry, eco-innovation, and place-based transformation. The project promotes a form of industrial symbiosis that is accessible, human-scaled, and rooted in existing territorial assets. This enables small enterprises and regions, often excluded from large-scale industrial transition programmes, to participate actively in the ecological transformation. By enhancing the capacity of craft and industry to collaborate through systemic tools, legal clarity, and shared services, SYMCRAFT fosters innovation at the intersection of technology, culture, and policy.

From a policy perspective, one of the key contributions of the project lies in its capacity to **generate actionable recommendations** based on pilot experimentation and cross-sectoral exchange. These include the need to clarify the legal status of by-products and reduce regulatory barriers to creative reuse; support the role of intermediaries through dedicated funding and institutional recognition; facilitate the access of small enterprises to certification schemes and circular economy incentives; embed circularity and reuse into public procurement frameworks; and strengthen regional policy instruments through the integration of place-based circularity pathways. These policy insights are being consolidated into the SYMCRAFT Action Plan and shared through targeted dissemination channels, including policy briefs, stakeholder dialogues, and regional events.

The project also actively prepares for **scaling and transferability**. This occurs along two axes. First, the adaptation of outputs for other sectors and user groups beyond those initially targeted. Although the project focuses on textile/fashion, agro-food, and wood/furniture, the methods and service models developed, such as the cooperation templates and the Service Portfolio, are designed to be applicable to other sectors including agriculture, mechanical industries, and the creative economy. Second, SYMCRAFT promotes geographic transferability. Specific actions are planned to engage territories beyond the original partnership, including regions in Slovenia, Croatia, Austria, Hungary, and Italy. These territories will be involved through strategic partnerships, communication activities, and technical adaptation of the project tools and outputs. Pilot results, toolkits, and policy recommendations will be made available through a dedicated dissemination strategy coordinated by the consortium, ensuring continuity and visibility beyond the end of the project.

In the **short term**, SYMCRAFT will deliver a consolidated **Action Plan** containing operational and policy recommendations; the first version of the **Service Portfolio** and cooperation templates, ready for external use; and a set of **policy briefs and outreach materials** designed to communicate the project's relevance to EU and regional strategies. In the **medium term**, these outputs will support the **replication of service models** in other sectors

or regions; the **engagement of new territories and institutional partners** through strategic outreach; and the integration of SYMCRAFT tools and approaches into **regional policy frameworks**, innovation platforms, and circular economy roadmaps. In the **long term**, the project aims to contribute to the **institutionalisation of circular craft-industry collaboration** as a recognised component of regional and European policy ecosystems. This includes the creation of **financing mechanisms and procurement strategies** that support micro-scale circular production, and the formation of a **transnational community of practice** capable of adapting and scaling the SYMCRAFT model in response to emerging ecological, economic, and social needs.

SYM-CRAFT is therefore not only a project of implementation, but a **strategic platform for transition**, one that demonstrates how circularity can be grounded in collaboration, creativity, and regional identity, and how these dimensions can be embedded in the policies and institutions that shape Europe's future.

7.2.1 POLICIES, FRAMEWORKS AND STRATEGIC REFERENCES

[*CIRCE2020: Circular Economy in Central Europe – Interreg Central Europe*](#)

[*Circular Economy Action Plan \(CEAP\) – New Circular Economy Action Plan for a Cleaner and More Competitive Europe \(COM/2020/98\)*](#)

[*EU Bioeconomy Strategy \(2018\)*](#)

[*EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles \(COM/2022/141\)*](#)

[*European Smart Specialisation Strategies \(S3\) for research and innovation \(R&I\)*](#)

[*Farm to Fork Strategy \(COM/2020/381\)*](#)

Horizon Europe – [*Cluster 4 \(Digital, industry & space\)*](#), [*Cluster 6 \(Food, bioeconomy, natural resources\)*](#)

[*The Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities \(2007\)*](#)

[*New European Bauhaus \(NEB\)*](#)

[*Smart Specialisation Strategy of the Republic of Slovenia \(2014\)*](#)

[*Study and Portfolio Review on Industrial Symbiosis \(European Commission, 2020\)*](#)

[*The Austrian Circular Economy Strategy \(2024\)*](#)

[Waste Framework Directive 2008/98/EC \(especially Articles 3, 5 and 6 on waste and by-products\)](#)

8. CONCLUSIONS

The SYMCRAFT Strategy presents a coherent and modular roadmap for enabling circularity through structured collaboration between craft enterprises and industrial actors. By connecting analytical insight, territorial specificity and operational guidance, it defines not only the rationale and priorities of the model, but also the **legal, material, institutional, and service-based components** that are required to make it effective and sustainable. Developed through cross-sectoral co-design and tested in diverse regional contexts, the strategy is both **grounded in practice and scalable across systems**.

As the project moves toward its consolidation phase, the focus shifts from design to implementation, with three interlinked areas of action:

- 1) **Operational deployment** of the core tools and services developed, including the *Strategic Service Portfolio*, the *Cooperation Tool and legal templates*, and the *circular business models*. These resources will be validated through regional pilot actions, allowing for refinement and adaptation based on real-world collaboration processes.
- 2) **Policy anchoring and strategic dissemination**, aimed at embedding the SYMCRAFT model into regional development frameworks such as Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3), circular economy agendas, and innovation policies. The upcoming Action Plan and associated policy recommendations will serve as instruments for dialogue, positioning, and institutional uptake.
- 3) **Knowledge transfer and cross-regional replication**, supported by structured communication, capacity-building activities, and participation in European networks. The tools and lessons developed by SYMCRAFT are intended not only for partners, but also for other regions seeking to implement circular craft-industry alliances.

To support long-term transferability, SYMCRAFT identifies three core enabling conditions: a) the presence of **intermediary structures** capable of supporting and facilitating cross-sectoral collaboration; b) the **alignment with local and European policy instruments** that can provide regulatory and financial support; c) the **adaptability of SYMCRAFT tools** to different material contexts, production cultures, and governance systems.

More than a prescriptive model, SYMCRAFT offers a **strategic and flexible document** that empowers regions to build their own responses to the challenges of circular transition. Its

value lies in the tangible instruments it provides, and in the new spaces it opens: for connecting material flows with cultural meaning, for anchoring sustainability in local production, and for transforming craft into an active engine of regenerative change. The work ahead lies in **institutionalising this approach**, extending its reach, and embedding its principles into the everyday structures that shape how regions produce, reuse, and innovate.