



Mainstreaming Circular Lifestyles in City Spaces

The NiCE Model Action Plan

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1 WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT - ABOUT THE NiCE PROJECT AND THE MODEL ACTION PLAN

European city centres used to be busy resource-intensive centres of consumption, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic and a shift towards online trade, numerous shops had to close. At the same time, sustainable consumption models leading to more circularity do exist. But due to the current framework conditions, these models usually only remain in their niche. Citizens therefore lack a central and easily accessible offer of alternative forms of consumption.

The 'From Niche to Centre - City Centres as Places of Circular Lifestyles' (NiCE) Project focuses on two main challenges: a transformation of central places in cities that make it easy for their inhabitants to implement circular lifestyles and at the same time to (re)animate centres in a more circular way. By circular lifestyles we mean ways of living that prioritise sharing, reusing, repairing, and regenerating rather than owning, disposing, and over-consuming.¹ In modern cities, circular lifestyles are not only compatible with urban life but essential to creating resilient, liveable, and resource-efficient communities.

This NiCE Model Action Plan serves as a practical tool for local governments, urban planners, policy-makers, and community leaders who are motivated to integrate circular lifestyle initiatives into their urban development strategies. Whether you come from a large metropolitan area or a smaller municipality, this model action plan offers a structured approach to initiate or strengthen your city's path toward circularity.

Within the NiCE project, a wide range of innovative and participatory solutions have been developed and tested in eight pilot cities across Europe². These include:

- the re-use of spaces in city centres for circular offers via the implementation of a Pop-up store for sustainable products in Graz (AT) and a reuse centre in Kosice (SK),
- the implementation and running of multifunctional resource centres in Ptuj (SI) and Brzeg Dolny (PL),

¹ For the definition of circular lifestyles, we refer to Reike, Vermeulen & Witjes (2018) and their 9R framework for circular construction. See also Szabo et al (2024).

² All developed solutions can be found at the NiCE Circular Lifestyle Knowledge Platform www.circularlifestyle.eu. You can also find a detailed description of all 8 local pilot implementations in the annex.



- the link between sustainable e-commerce with city centres using AI for sorting at a reuse centre in Jihlava (CZ) and implementing a bicycle delivery service for rented and repaired goods in Würzburg (DE), and
- the activation of users for circular lifestyles with a circular water living lab in Bologna (IT) and a co-creation-course at the university where students cooperated with businesses to develop circular lifestyle solutions in Budapest (HU).

This Model Action Plan outlines the most important steps for cities that want to implement circular lifestyle initiatives in their centres as well. It provides a step-by-step framework that guides cities and other involved actors from initial visioning to concrete implementation and scaling. All steps are numbered and equipped with a checkbox. This makes it easy to refer to specific steps. The plan is designed to be flexible and adaptable:

- You can use it from scratch as a roadmap to design a brand-new initiative, project, strategy, or programme focused on circular living.
- Or you can cherry-pick specific parts, using selected ideas or methods, to update your existing circular economy strategies.



2 THE NICE MODEL ACTION PLAN

2.1 Relevance: Setting the course for what you want to achieve

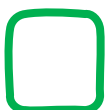
This is the start of your Action Plan! Starting with the relevance of your future project, you will **define a clear goal or (pilot) project that reflects your specific context and ambition to foster circular lifestyles in your city.** Whether it's lowering resource use, revitalising premises in the city centre with circular offers or fostering sustainability education – you should select the activity that best fits your local needs and potential (see also next chapter).

This step is crucial because clearly defined short and long term goals help cities focus resources, tailor their approach, engage stakeholders, and measure success effectively. By setting a concrete goal, you can ensure that your project is strategic, achievable, and relevant, laying the foundation for lasting impact. The main purpose of the action plan should coincide with the vision of your city.

Examples from NiCE pilot projects and solutions:

- Lowering resource use
- Enabling citizen engagement in circular lifestyles
- Revitalise your city centre in a sustainable way with circular offers/ services
- Support water reuse
- Fostering education about sustainability
- Support innovation for implementing digital tools (e. g. at a reuse centre)

1. Introduction



Step 1.1: Background

Describe the framework in which you would like to implement/ develop the action plan (e. g. Third-Party funding, evaluation of an existing strategy, legal obligation, voluntary basis, etc.).



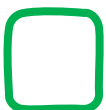
Step 1.2 Aim of the action plan

Describe the overall aim of the action plan, i.e. what you intend to achieve through its implementation. This section should explain the main purpose of the plan and the change it is expected to generate in the local context. The aim may relate to improving specific processes, strengthening cooperation among stakeholders, testing or scaling up solutions, or embedding circular lifestyle approaches in city centre development. Depending on the context, the action plan can serve several functions. It may provide practical guidance for the team responsible for implementation, support better coordination between partners, or help translate strategic goals into concrete, operational steps. The plan can also contribute to achieving higher level objectives defined in existing policies, strategies, or development programmes at local, regional, or national level.

2.2 Analysis of status quo: Understanding your city for a circular future

The analysis of the status quo in your city helps to get a **structured overview of your city's key characteristics: its location, demographics, political landscape, existing strategies, challenges, stakeholders and their needs**. It also includes a SWOT analysis to **assess your city's position regarding circular lifestyles**. This groundwork is essential to ensure that your action plan and the involved activities are relevant, targeted, and aligned with local realities. It will help you to identify where change is most needed, who should be involved, and how to build on what already exists.

2. Analysis of status quo



Step 2.1: About the city

Introduce your city's unique character: Describe its location, size, demographic structure, political setup, and local institutions that shape its identity. Keep in mind the context: highlight specific features that make it an ideal place for circular innovation.



Step 2.2: Existing resources

Consider the resources available to support the initiative. Reflect on whether there is access to a dedicated budget or external funding, and assess the existing infrastructure that can be utilised. Evaluate the level of staff capacity available for implementation, as well as the expertise and know-how that can be mobilised. Additionally, identify any spaces or venues that could be used to host network meetings or related events.



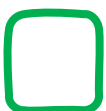
Step 2.3: Strategic documents

Build on what's already there: Outline current strategies, policies, and programs related to circular economy, sustainability, climate action, environment, and energy efficiency. This creates a foundation to connect new actions with existing goals. Keep in mind that sustainability and related topics may also be addressed within broader, non-thematic documents, such as a city development strategy.



Step 2.4: Stakeholder identification

Identify the key stakeholders who are relevant for the development and implementation of your action plan. This includes local authorities, civil society organisations, businesses, property owners, service providers, educational institutions, and other actors who influence or are affected by circular lifestyle initiatives in the city centre. Consider both direct stakeholders, who will be actively involved in activities, and indirect stakeholders, who may be impacted by the results or have the power to support or hinder the implementation.



Step 2.5: Needs analysis

Identify, evaluate and define the needs of your target groups and other involved stakeholders and actors, such as citizens, systems, and sectors. You can implement a needs analysis via interviews, group-discussions, workshops and desk-research. Analyse how can you link diverse needs with your idea for circular lifestyles.



the action plan and help focus efforts on the most important priorities. An example for a strategic objective could be: "Reduce city waste by 20% by 2030."

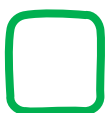
Each strategic objective should be supported by several operational objectives. Operational objectives are specific, short-to-medium-term goals that are set to implement the broader strategy effectively. Operational objectives are practical, actionable, and measurable steps. They should be designed in a SMART way (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound). An example for an operational objective with regard to the city waste topic could be: "Implement a composting program in 50% of public schools by 2027, reducing organic waste by 10%."

Together, strategic and operational objectives form a coherent framework that links long term ambitions with practical steps, ensuring that the vision can be systematically implemented and evaluated. This step sets the foundation for planning concrete activities, allocating resources, and engaging stakeholders, making the action plan both actionable and results oriented.

2.4 From strategy to impact: Plan activities

Now, you translate your circular lifestyle vision and objectives into a coherent set of concrete activities. The aim is to **define what will be done, where, when, by whom, and with what resources in order to achieve the strategic and operational objectives** set earlier.

4. Concrete activities and resources



Step 4.1 Activities

Plan your journey step by step: Plan concrete actions that deliver on your objectives, while also considering how to avoid potential negative effects. Link the activities with objectives and make sure that the activities you planned allow for meeting all objectives. In big or long projects, it might be useful to define key phases with deadlines and milestones to keep your project on track. Define Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for each action that will allow for evaluating the progress. With regard to the city waste operational objective mentioned above the following concrete activities could be planned:



- "Conduct a survey of 20 schools to assess interest in composting by June 2026."
- "Train 10 school staff members on composting best practices by September 2026."
- "Purchase and distribute compost bins to participating schools by December 2026."
- "Launch a pilot composting program in 5 schools by March 2027."



Step 4.2 Resources

Secure resources you need to succeed: Plan your financial, human, and physical resources, and explore diverse funding opportunities which could help to ensure sustainability of your project.



Step 4.3 Responsibilities and participation

Build strong alliances and define clear roles: Identify who will lead, support, and deliver the activities you planned. If necessary, select local implementation partners, like volunteer initiatives or NGOs. It is also recommended to initiate a local advisory board or steering committee to support your project.

Engage your target group(s), partners, institutions and communities throughout the process to share ownership and strengthen collaboration. Create opportunities for feedback, participation, and co-creation. Active involvement creates trust, networks, and long-term commitment.

2.5 Monitoring: Measuring success along the way

Each project or activity needs monitoring to ensure good results. Therefore, you need to **set up the tools to collect data, measure and understand your project's impact from immediate results to long-term change**. By defining clear evaluation objectives, selecting a monitoring/ evaluation framework, and choosing the right indicators, you ensure your progress is tracked accurately. Ongoing monitoring helps you stay on course, learn, and adapt, making sure your circular lifestyle initiative/ project truly delivers the results you aim for.



5. Monitoring



Step 5.1: Evaluation framework

Choosing a suitable evaluation framework: Use an evaluation framework (e.g. NiCE CC-PEM – see section 3.5 for more info) that provides a clear structure for your monitoring activities, aligns your objectives with defined KPIs, and enables you to measure progress systematically. A well-designed framework ensures consistency in data collection and supports evidence-based decision-making.



Step 5.2: Monitoring schedule

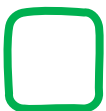
Set a timeline for monitoring and evaluation activities. Keep track regularly and consistently. Plan who, when and how collects the relevant data, to ensure your monitoring process is realistic, ongoing, and well-documented.



Step 5.3 Corrective measures

Adapt when needed: If the evaluation process reveals gaps, delays or unexpected challenges, adjust your Action plan accordingly to stay on track and improve outcomes. (Corrective measures may include revising timelines, reallocating resources, refining activities, strengthening stakeholder engagement, etc.)

Regular reflection and timely adjustments help ensure that implementation remains effective, responsive to changing conditions, and focused on achieving measurable results.



Step 5.4: Wider impact

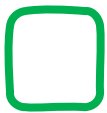
Connect the project to the bigger picture: What is the impact of the pilot on the city's circular performance? Assess how your project/ initiative/ pilot contributes to the city's overall progress toward circularity and sustainable urban development.



2.6 Risk management: Staying flexible and planning for the unexpected

With good risk management you **anticipate the challenges that could impact your project and prepare smart strategies to navigate them**. Risk is the effect of uncertainty on your objectives. It can be negative (threats) or positive (opportunities). By identifying risks early, assessing their significance and probability, and preparing both preventive and adaptive actions, you build resilience into your circular lifestyle initiative. Staying flexible and ready to respond ensures that your project can overcome obstacles, seize opportunities, and continue progressing toward lasting success.

6. Risk Management



Step 6.1: Risk analysis

Identify uncertainties that could influence your planned activities. Consider financial, organizational, political, social, and environmental risks. Assess their likelihood and potential impact on your activities. Determine whether a risk is more of a potential threat or a potential opportunity.

Develop preventive measures to lower the probability of negative risks occurring, and create buffers (financial, time, or resource-based) to reduce their potential impact.

Turn uncertainty into potential gains: Some risks may create unexpected chances. For example, new funding streams, policy changes, or shifts in citizen behavior. Be proactive in identifying these opportunities and design strategies to capture their benefits for your planned activities.

Plan for worst-case scenarios: It is always possible that a worst-case scenario occurs, despite good preparation. Think about what this would be in your case and which measures you could initiate if it happens. Sometimes it helps to approach the project by thinking from the end goal backwards.



Step 6.2: Risk monitoring

Describe how risks related to the implementation of the action plan will be systematically monitored over time. Risk monitoring should be treated as a continuous process that supports timely decision making and helps prevent minor issues from developing into major obstacles.

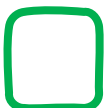
Clearly define who is responsible for monitoring different types of risks. Explain how risks will be monitored in practice. This can include regular review meetings, progress reports, risk registers, internal evaluation procedures, and feedback from stakeholders or target groups.

Finally, specify how often risk monitoring will take place. This may be linked to key project milestones, quarterly reviews, or other major events. Also describe how emerging new risks will be identified and added to the monitoring system. A clear and structured approach to risk monitoring increases the resilience of the action plan and supports adaptive and responsible project management.

2.7 Long-term sustainability: Perpetuate circular lifestyles in your city

Your activities should not only deliver results during its pilot phase but also create momentum that continues to benefit the city and its citizens in the long run. Long-term sustainability means **embedding circular lifestyles into everyday practices, governance structures, and/ or local culture**. By planning ahead for continuity, scaling, and institutional anchoring, you ensure that your initiative grows beyond its initial scope and remain a lasting, structurally embedded effort rather than a one time pilot.

7. Long-term sustainability



Step 7.1: Integration with existing city structures and strategies

Work closely with municipal bodies, local organizations, and relevant networks to secure long-term support and institutional anchoring of your initiative/project. Align your activities with existing urban strategies, policy frameworks, and governance structures to avoid duplication and create synergies.



Step 7.2: Financial stability

Plan for stable and diverse funding: Combine municipal budgets, regional/national support schemes, private partnerships, and self-financing models to ensure continuity beyond the projected runtime of your initiative.



Step 7.3: Communication

Ensure continuous and meaningful communication with relevant stakeholders throughout the implementation of the action plan. Communication should not be limited to information sharing, but should actively support engagement, transparency, and trust among partners, users, and the wider community.

Use communication activities to foster a sense of belonging, shared responsibility, and long term commitment. By regularly informing, involving, and acknowledging stakeholders, you help integrate the initiative into everyday practices and professional routines, increasing the likelihood that results are maintained and further developed over time.



3 DIVE DEEPER - TOOLS & RESOURCES FOR CHANGE

This chapter presents practical guidance and support for implementing circular economy actions in your city. It introduces a set of ready-to-use instruments, frameworks, and digital resources, all developed within the NiCE project framework and tested in the eight pilot cities. These tools are designed to help cities translate strategies into concrete measures, explore solutions, plan activities, and track progress, ensuring that ambitions for sustainable urban development can be transformed into tangible results.

3.1 NiCE Knowledge Platform

The NiCE Knowledge Platform was created to support knowledge exchange and innovation around sustainable and circular ways of living. Its purpose is to inspire individuals, communities, and organizations to adopt circular lifestyles by providing practical examples, educational materials, and expert insights.

Through the platform, users can

- discover inspiring **best practices** in sustainability and circularity from across Central Europe,
- explore a **virtual exhibition** showing how cities can become more circular,
- access valuable **resources and tools** that help translate ideas into action,
- learn from experts through **online seminars** and
- watch **pilot videos** and read **documentary reports** on how pilot projects have successfully implemented circular lifestyle concepts in real-life conditions.

By connecting knowledge with practice, the platform aims to make circular living more accessible and appealing, helping to build cleaner, more resilient, and more people-friendly cities. Pilots incl videos and doc reports

Link: <https://circularlifestyle.eu/>

3.2 NiCE Strategy framework

The final Strategy Framework shows ways for the promotion and establishment of circular lifestyles in cities / city centres. It serves as guidance for local and regional public authorities that would like to enhance the implementation of circular lifestyle in their cities and regions.

Link: https://circularlifestyle.eu/resources?anchorElement=element_1037&scrollMargin=175



Link: <https://www.interreg-central.eu/projects/nice/?tab=outputs>

3.3 NiCE Solution Guides

The NiCE Solution Box is a practical toolkit designed to help cities, NGOs, SMEs, and citizens transform urban spaces into hubs for circular lifestyles. Based on experiences from eight pilot cities across Central Europe, it provides tested methods, tools, and case studies to reactivate vacant spaces, engage stakeholders, connect online and offline commerce, and promote sustainable behaviour. The Solution Box supports scalable, transferable solutions that make city centres more resilient, resource-efficient, and community-oriented.

Link: https://circularlifestyle.eu/resources?anchorElement=wSection_89&scrollMargin=175

3.4 NiCE Virtual Exhibition

This interactive online exhibition showcases 30 inspiring circular economy projects from across Europe – brought to you through engaging videos and photos. See how inspiring ideas became real solutions for more sustainable living. The exhibition is divided into four themes:

- Circular centres – from sustainable consumption to pop-up stores
- Methodology – including participatory tools and urban labs
- Sustainable business models – where profit meets purpose
- Sustainable consumption – examples of using resources while minimising environmental impact

Link: <https://circularlifestyle.eu/virtualexhibition>

3.5 CC-PEM Framework

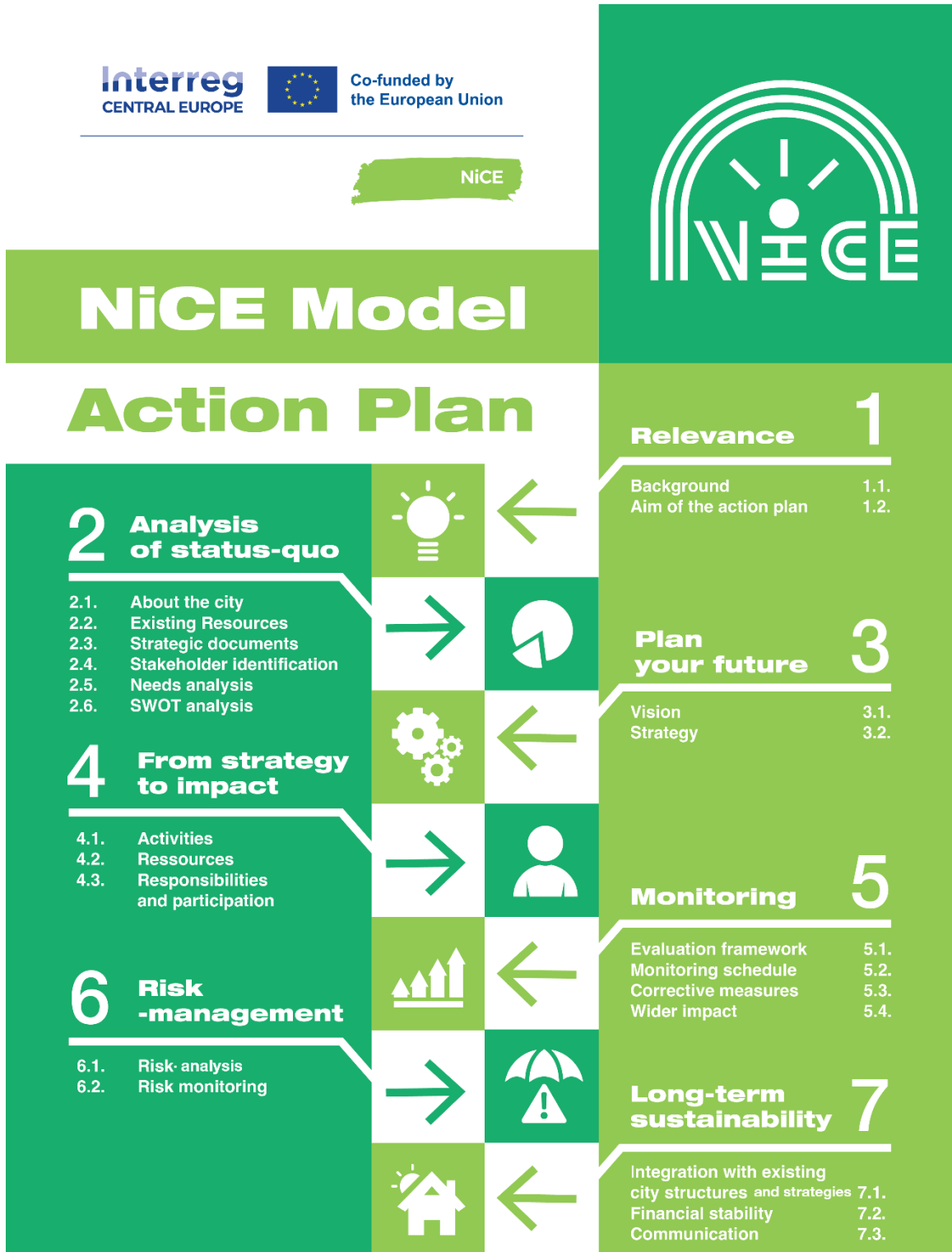
The Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, named Circular Cities Project Excellence Framework (CC-PEM), is a practical tool designed to assess circular lifestyle initiatives by examining enabling factors such as objectives, leadership, stakeholder engagement, resources, and project processes. It also evaluates results, including environmental, social, and economic outcomes, stakeholder satisfaction, and the potential to transfer successful solutions to other cities.

Link: https://circularlifestyle.eu/resources?anchorElement=element_1328&scrollMargin=150



4 ANNEX

4.1 The NiCE Model Action Plan at a glance





4.2 NiCE Pilots overview

For further inspiration, you can choose to implement one of the NiCE-project pilots from this table:

Title	What is it about	Perfect fit for cities with the following specifics	More Information
<p>Zero Waste Multicentrum in Brzeg Dolny</p>	<p>The pilot in Brzeg Dolny focused on creating the Zero Waste Multicentre – a 150 m² community hub in the city centre, transforming a former appliance store into a space for education, practical workshops, and social integration. The centre actively engaged citizens in hands-on circular activities, such as upcycling sewing workshops and zero-waste cooking sessions, providing opportunities to learn, experiment, and adopt sustainable practices in their daily lives.</p>	<p>Own vacant spaces, contact to volunteers who would like to lead workshops</p>	<p>Circular lifestyle knowledge platform for cities</p>
<p>Reuse Centre in Košice</p>	<p>The pilot activities in Košice focused on establishing and operating the city's first Reuse Centre, combining the collection and redistribution of second-hand items, education on circular economy principles, and cooperation with local NGOs.</p>	<p>No reuse center exists yet, interest in promoting circular practices</p>	<p>Circular lifestyle knowledge platform for cities</p>
<p>Pop-Up Store in Ptuj</p>	<p>The pilot focused on the implementation of a circular economy-themed pop-up store in a historic city centre in Ptuj, cooperating with local artisans, designers, and small businesses working with upcycled, recycled, or responsibly sourced materials.</p>	<p>Active art/designer scene, touristic city centre</p>	<p>Circular lifestyle knowledge platform for cities</p>



<p>Future House S in Graz</p>	<p>The pilot initiative focused on transforming a centrally located vacant space into a dynamic pop-up store dedicated to circular economy products and upcycling activities. This space served as both a retail and demonstration venue, providing visibility for small-scale entrepreneurs and enabling them to reach a broader audience. The pilot also acted as a testbed for cooperative shop-sharing models, allowing multiple businesses to share resources and operational costs.</p>	<p>Several small-scale entrepreneurs in the city or region, (touristic city centre)</p>	<p>Circular lifestyle knowledge platform for cities</p>
<p>Digitalization of processes of a Reuse-Center in Jihlava</p>	<p>The Jihlava pilot, implemented by the local non-profit Silo Jihlava in cooperation with the city, focused on expanding reuse activities and strategically introducing digitalization into the operations of the local reuse centre Útulek věcí. The Reuse Recognizer tool was implemented to streamline this process, allowing staff to track material flows and generate reliable statistics.</p>	<p>Local reuse centre, an interest in digitalisation</p>	<p>Circular lifestyle knowledge platform for cities</p>
<p>Delivery Service for Repaired and Rented products in Würzburg</p>	<p>The pilot in Würzburg, implemented with adelphi, Zukunftshaus, and the bike courier service Radius, tested how to link sustainable e-commerce with city centres by offering CO₂-neutral bicycle deliveries for rented and repaired goods from the Zukunftshaus.</p>	<p>Local bicycle service, places where citizens can rent or repair things (e.g. library)</p>	<p>Circular lifestyle knowledge platform for cities</p>
<p>Citizens Living Lab for Circular Water Management Solutions in Bologna</p>	<p>The Bologna pilot “Acqua in Circolo”, led by ENEA, promoted the reuse and conservation of water resources through two main strands: the Urban Living Lab (ULL) and the School Living Lab (SLL).</p>	<p>A priority and interest (maybe need) for the topic of circular water management at the administration</p>	<p>Circular lifestyle knowledge platform for cities</p>



		but also at citizens.	
Co-creation for More Circular Cities at a University in Budapest	The Budapest pilot, led by the Department of Environmental Economics and Sustainability at the Budapest University of Technology and Economics (BME) in Újbuda, aimed to connect urban living with circular lifestyles, focusing on “refuse” and “reduce” strategies and sustainable water consumption. The core of the pilot was the launch of the Sustainable Business Model Design course in a University Living Lab format.	Local university, several circular lifestyle businesses	Circular lifestyle knowledge platform for cities