Addressing climate change and biodiversity through network governance and circular diplomacy

OVERVIEW
The ambition of the workshop was to present the role of network governance and circular diplomacy to embrace climate change and biodiversity.

Moderator (Ladeja Godina Košir, Founder Circular Change, Co-chair ECESP), keynote speaker Janez Potočnik, former EU Commissioner, Co-chair IRP UN, Partner Systemiq) and representatives of circular hubs, active in network governance and circular diplomacy, Laura Cutaia (ENEACICESP), Hubert Bukowski (Innowo), Vesna Lavtižar (IGES HCH), Luca Polidori (VELTHA, HCH) and Cathrine Barth (NCH) discussed topics such as:

- Climate change and biodiversity in the context of much needed eco & societal paradigm shift
- network governance vs. public governance – shaping joined agenda for the resilient future of the EU (and beyond)
- value and impact of circular economy (CE) hubs – co-creation of ecosystem where system change solutions can be implemented
- cases – national / regional / global activities of CE networks and hubs, new coalitions, knowledge co-creation and concrete actions (ICESP, Innowo, HCH, Veltha, NCH)
- circular diplomacy – EU as the lighthouse of green and circular transformation
- mapping opportunities for bridging global north and global south
- conclusions and next joined steps of CE networks & hubs

CHALLENGES
- Not enough cooperation among stakeholders
- From a nature- to a human-dominated planet
- No global governance structure (shared sovereignty - like COP or chemical/plastic alliance), for instance a convention, for the natural resources sector or for CE

KEY MESSAGES
• CE is critical to meet environmental challenges and should be seen as an instrument for decoupling economic growth from resource use and environmental impact and as part of a bigger cultural, economic and societal transformation to deliver Green Deal and its strategies.

• All the same, climate policies focus only on supply side efforts and on cleaning the energy system, which - however important – will not deliver climate targets. Material consumption footprint should be reduced.

• Need for increased sense of responsibility at all levels, from citizens and consumers to municipal and regional authorities, from policy makers to producers and global powers.

• Circular diplomats should ask how to meet human needs and maximise human wellbeing by optimizing use of energy and materials, which – for certain countries – means using both less.

• Success of energy transition depends on security of access to critical material needs – Europe is fragile in both aspects of energy and materials.

• Good examples (such as Gacere) should be praised and imitated, but they shouldn't be taken as excuses not to undergo a systemic transformation.

• According to ICESP, CE hubs, platforms or hotspot main functions are as follows:
  o connecting the 4 key groups of stakeholders (government, businesses, knowledge community, consumers)
  o connecting top-down and bottom-up movements and accelerate process
  o being "networks of networks", multi-level, multi-sector and multi-actor entities
  o having a transformational impact
  o having strong CE competences
  o being typically "not-for-profit"

• They perform the following activities:
  o Networking and joint advocacy
  o Mapping potential, identify priority
  o Sharing best practices
  o Knowledge sharing and capacity building
  o Access to finance

• Problems to reach CE can be different, but solutions might be the same, hence the importance of circular hubs.

• No organization can do it alone, hence the importance of cooperation.

• Importance of snowball effect, that is finding partners on the way.

• Innowo's Circular week is now spreading beyond EU borders.

• CE hubs are important to harness circular potential, unique to each country, at local level.

• In Africa, circular principles are intrinsic to its culture (waste management and recycling), but they are not common knowledge or institutionalized. Circular hubs could contribute to communicating CE across sectors. However, Global South premises could be different from EU premises. Even realities within Europe are different.

• Unlike Global North, Global South is implementing CE out of need, not out of choice.

• A lot of confusion reigns around the meaning of three very different concepts: Circular Hubs, Hubs for Circularity and European Digital Innovation Hubs (see recent event One Mission, Several Hubs organized by Veltha), also because circular hubs do not communicate sufficiently among them, hence the need for more circular diplomats, which, like transition brokers, should be recognized as proper professions in themselves.
- Need for interconnected hubs in formal systems, although they are more present in informal systems. Praise to Italy and its link between government and circular hubs.
- "We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them" (Einstein), hence the need for a systemic change.
- Circular diplomacy can significantly contribute to the implementation of the Green Deal in EU by engaging different stakeholders on the ground, since circular diplomats have strong networks of circular change makers as well as an overview of relevant “entry points” for the co-creation of circular solutions. At the same time, they represent a bridge between EU and other countries / continents for dissemination of knowledge and expertise in the context of systemic circular transformation.
- “Circular literacy” is an important part when engaging stakeholders in circular transformation – informing, educating, communicating and creating new narrative is where circular hubs may serve as initiators and disseminators.