

IMPLEMENTATION OF
THE TERRITORIAL AGENDA 2030

Thinking Circular, Acting Local

*How regional public policy
and administration enable
circular economy*

Publication of the pilot action
Circular Rural Regions



Federal Ministry
for Housing, Urban Development
and Building



Circular
Rural Regions



#TA2030
PILOT ACTIONS

Thinking Circular, Acting Local

How regional public policy and administration enable circular economy

Public policy and administration are central shapers of the regional circular economy. They lead operationally, set priorities and create the conditions that enable businesses, civil society and academia to act.

This online publication shows how public administrations in rural regions actively drive the circular economy – through their own action, coordination, strategic initiatives and the ability to bring actors

together. Practical examples from German model regions and European partner regions make clear which instruments work, how networks are built and how the circular economy can be embedded for the long term.

The findings show: circular regions emerge where public policy and administration jointly provide direction – and consistently move into action.



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The circular economy in rural regions: the Pilot Action Circular Rural Regions

The Pilot Action Circular Rural Regions uses various examples to explore how rural regions can be strengthened through circular approaches. Within the framework of the Territorial Agenda 2030 and as a contribution to implementing the German National Circular Economy Strategy (NKWS), the project connects regions, businesses, public administration and research to build regional cycles together. The circular economy means making the best possible use of raw materials and materials. They should be shared, reused, repaired, refurbished and recycled for as long as possible. The aim of the project is to enable knowledge transfer, provide impetus for practice and foster regional transformation.

To implement the project, the model regions of Bergstraße, Chiemgau and Berchtesgadener Land, Goslar, Lüchow-Dannenberg and Mittelsachsen are supported, accompanied and researched. In doing so, insights are drawn from the European partner regions of Fribourg (Switzerland), Međimurje (Croatia), North Karelia (Finland), Pärnu (Estonia) and Pillerseetal-Leukental-Leogang (region³ for short) (Austria), which already have experience in building a regional circular economy. Cooperation between German and European regions enables trans-regional learning and the exchange of proven methods.



Figure 1: Map of the ten regions involved in the project; German regions shown in green, European regions in blue

INFO BOX



Pilot Action Circular Rural Regions

The project (duration: 2023–2027) is carried out by the Federal Ministry for Housing, Urban Development and Building (BMWSB) and the Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (BBSR). It is part of implementing the Territorial Agenda 2030¹ and is funded under the «Region gestalten» programme.

Objectives

- Strengthen circular approaches in rural regions
- Establish an understanding of the circular economy as a regional field of action
- Foster cooperation and knowledge transfer with model regions in Germany and Europe
- Provide impetus for the regional implementation of the National Circular Economy Strategy

Target group: rural regions

- Regional development actors: rural districts, municipal and regional administrations, economic development agencies
- Businesses, municipal enterprises and business associations
- Citizens and civil-society initiatives
- Education and research

More information:

➤ [BBSR – Projektseite](#)

“The circular economy holds enormous potential for regional value creation. Rural districts and economic development agencies can unlock this potential if they connect actors and understand the circular economy as a regional task – an important step towards a sustainable transformation of the economy and society in rural areas.”

Sina Redlich, Project Lead, BBSR



Figure 2: Participants at the 4th partner meeting of the Pilot Action Circular Rural Regions, March 2026, Heppenheim (Bergstraße)

This publication is the second issue of a publication series: each issue focuses on one of the four central stakeholder groups for building and implementing a regional circular economy (see Figure 3).

This issue focuses on public policy and administration – as shapers and enablers of the regional circular economy. The further issues examine businesses, civil society and academia. The online publications offer practical examples, inspiration and impetus.

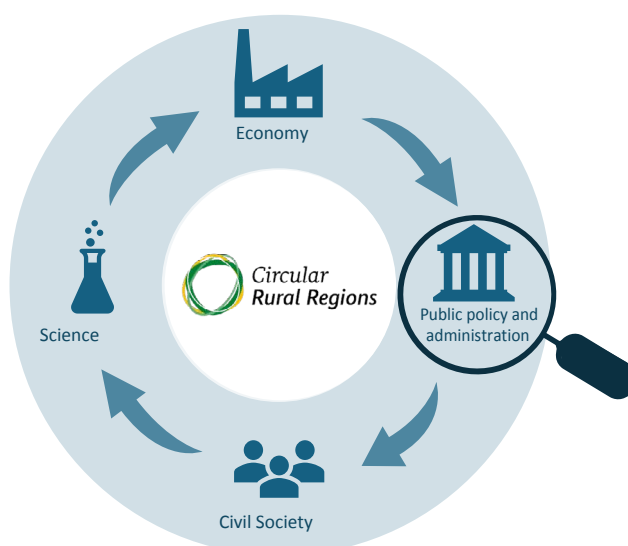


Figure 3: The four key stakeholder groups of the project – focus: public policy and administration

¹ The Territorial Agenda 2030 is the joint strategy of European states and institutions for balanced and sustainable spatial development – with a focus on cooperation between urban and rural areas and place-based solutions.

Public policy and administration as key actors of the regional circular economy

The circular economy is often understood as a technical or business-management topic – a question of materials, technologies or business models. Yet regional practice reveals a broader picture: decisive levers lie in the concrete, strategic and cooperative sphere. Especially in rural regions, shaped by short distances and established networks, it becomes clear how strongly the creative power of municipalities, rural districts, regional policy and regional associations determines whether the circular economy actually reaches the wider area.

Public policy and administration perform different but closely interconnected tasks in this process. Politics sets priorities, defines goals and thereby creates room for action. Public administration translates this direction into concrete action: it initiates processes, coordinates actors, shapes structures and creates the conditions that enable businesses, initiatives and regional partners to become active. This insight emerged clearly in the Pilot Action Circular Rural Regions across all participating model and partner regions.

Municipal administration is not a homogeneous actor. It consists of different departments, responsibilities and working logics that, at best, act together to advance the circular economy. In rural regions, where teams are often smaller and tasks more broadly defined, this diversity becomes particularly visible: the environment, construction, procurement, district development and political leadership interlock, often with more scope for direct coordination than in larger administrations and in close exchange. It is precisely this proximity and versatility that open up special opportunities for regional transformation.

Businesses and other regional actors can develop innovative solutions – but they need reliable framework conditions, clear signals and an administration that provides direction and brings processes together. Only when public administration, policy and regional actors act together does an environment emerge in which the circular economy can be embedded for the long term. Experience from the Pilot Action Circular Rural Regions shows that regions are particularly successful where the administration takes on several roles at once and policy actively supports this work.

The specific roles of public administration are explored in more depth in Chapter 4.

Policy as enabler: priorities, mandates, resources

From the EU to the rural district

The circular economy is anchored at all political levels: with the European Green Deal and the Action Plan for the Circular Economy (CEAP), the European Union has set binding targets; the German National Circular Economy Strategy (NKWS) and its Action Programme set the framework at federal level; and the Territorial Agenda 2030 makes the circular economy a core theme of regional development policy in Europe. At federal state (Land) level, dedicated strategies are increasingly emerging: with its circular economy plan and the complementary state strategy “Circular economy instead of a throwaway society”, Saxony has already set strategic priorities; Bavaria is currently developing the Bavarian Circular Economy Strategy (BayKWS). For rural regions, however, much is decided at the municipal level – in the rural district, the district administration and the district council. This is where it is determined whether overarching goals are translated into lived practice or not.

A thematic focus at leadership level

Experience from the Pilot Action Circular Rural Regions clearly demonstrates: where district administrators make the circular economy a political priority, the administration’s scope for action changes fundamentally. In the districts of Lüchow-Dannenberg and Bergstraße, it is visible how a clear thematic focus at leadership level helps different projects, processes and pilots to interlock. The circular economy is not treated as a stand-alone project but embedded as an overarching cross-cutting task. This is neither coincidence nor

automatic – it is the result of political decisions. In Bergstraße, it was the KARMA network – an EU Interreg initiative for industrial symbiosis in the construction sector – that gave the strategic impetus for a circular-economy orientation at district level. In Lüchow-Dannenberg, the project deliberately built on the C2C model region of North-East Lower Saxony – an existing cradle-to-cradle network that brought contacts, experience and project structures which were made usable for Circular Rural Regions.

Political agenda-setting

At district level, political commitment takes effect in various ways. When the circular economy appears in guiding principles, district development plans or district council resolutions, it creates legitimacy for administrative action. When district administrators champion the topic publicly and make it visible in regional networks, this sends a signal to businesses, initiatives and other municipalities. And when budget funds are made available for coordination units or pilot projects, the staffing conditions for lasting impact are created.

Public tendering and procurement

Public tendering and procurement are among the most effective yet most frequently underestimated instruments of municipal policy. When rural districts embed circular criteria in tenders – for example for construction projects, office equipment or catering – they send a clear signal to regional businesses and simultaneously create demand for circular offerings. The Circular Rural Regions region of Bergstraße shows how a district’s

Chapter 3

own construction activity can become a pioneering role: circular construction and a deliberate procurement policy make the administration itself the first customer of circular solutions.

Funding programmes

The federal government, the states and the EU provide funding programmes that can also be relevant to the regional circular economy. The “Future Circular Economy” programme announced under the German National Circular Economy Strategy (NKWS) is aimed primarily at businesses – for municipalities and rural districts, it is worth following the detailed design, identifying entry points early on – and actively making businesses in the region aware of relevant funding opportunities.



Figure 4: Site visit to the construction site of Kappesgärten primary school – district administrator Christian Engelhardt, the school management, the head of the municipal enterprise for schools and building management, with the project lead and the architect.

MODEL REGION LÜCHOW-DANNENBERG



Political agenda-setting by the district leadership

Brief description

In the rural district of Lüchow-Dannenberg, the district administrator's personal prioritisation was decisive in embedding the circular economy as a cross-cutting theme within the administration. She represented the district at the launch of the Pilot Action in Berlin, spoke at an expert event in Brussels on Circular Society in rural areas and actively advocates at state and EU level for the circular economy to be recognised as a strategic theme of rural regional development.

Political levers & impact

- The circular economy embedded as a distinct field of action in the district's Future Development Concept (ZEK)
- Linking the economic development agency, the climate protection staff unit and funding advisors through the ZEK as a strategic instrument

More information:

➤ [Wendland Zirkular](#)

In addition, LEADER, ERDF and Interreg offer funding options through which circular-economy approaches can be financed as part of regional development projects. Rural districts that have prioritised the topic politically are better positioned to make targeted use of these opportunities.

A visible stance

Political support does not always have to be formal. Often it is the visible stance of a district administrator – attending a network meeting, publicly committing to a pilot project, a personal conversation with businesses – that sends the decisive signal. Credibility arises where politics not only formulates goals but takes responsibility and gives the administration the backing it needs.

“The circular economy offers opportunities for rural regions – as an economic topic, an innovation topic and a contribution to resilient development.”

Dagmar Schulz, district administrator of
Lüchow-Dannenberg

Public administration as a shaping actor: roles, tasks, organisation

Public administration is far more than an administrative authority. Experience from the Pilot Action Circular Rural Regions shows: where the circular economy is embedded regionally, the administration actively takes on shaping functions. It acts itself, coordinates actors, puts topics on the agenda and brings different interests together. These four roles are not mutually exclusive – especially in rural regions, where small teams are responsible for broad task profiles, they are often performed simultaneously. What matters is not the size of the

administration but clarity about its own role and the willingness to actively use existing structures.

Leading by example – public administration as a role model

The most convincing form of leading by example is one's own action. When the administration implements the circular economy in its own projects and processes, it creates visibility, builds competence and sends a proactive signal to the entire regional economy.



MODEL REGION BERGSTRASSE

Circular construction as an administrative task

Brief description

The district of Bergstraße has established circular construction as a strategic field of action for the district administration. Building on a potential study (Concular GmbH, 2025) and the EU Interreg network KARMA, the municipal enterprise for schools and building management develops concrete solutions for its own building stock and new builds. The district's Integrated Climate Protection Concept, adopted by district council resolution (2021), forms the strategic framework – the circular economy was not introduced there as a new topic but integrated as a natural extension of existing climate protection goals.

Circular aspects & impact

- Building resource passport and digital building component catalogue for the new Bensheim school centre – a new build planned and documented circularly from the outset (completion 2026)
- Pre-demolition audits at further district buildings record material stocks before conversion or deconstruction

- Adjustment of procurement standards: circular criteria are incorporated into tenders; a corresponding draft resolution is in preparation
- Webinars, a material-scouting tour and cooperation with the Circle business network activate external target groups
- Collaboration with the Bensheim vocational school and youth forums on textile cycles anchors the topic in education and youth work

Challenge

The structural tension between the long-term goals of the circular economy and short-term municipal budget cycles remains a challenge. That the district of Bergstraße has nonetheless pursued the topic consistently for years shows: with the right strategic framework and political backing, the circular economy can be embedded even under real-world administrative conditions.

More information:

➤ [Kreis Bergstrasse Circular Rural Region](#)

The district of Bergstraße has consistently embraced this role. The focus is on the construction sector: as the district's client, the municipal enterprise for schools and building management is advancing the creation of an urban material depot and testing instruments such as building resource passports, pre-demolition audits and building component catalogues. An accompanying design project with Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences combines concrete application, knowledge transfer and the development of young talent. In parallel, the district is working to embed circular requirements in procurement standards and specifications of services: public tenders are to require circular competence in future – and thereby strengthen the market for corresponding offerings.

Coordinating – public administration as a hub

The circular economy is a cross-cutting task – it touches economic development, climate protection, waste management, procurement and regional development. These areas need to be coordinated – internally and externally. In rural regions with small teams, coordination is often more informal and direct than in urban structures. When this strength is used deliberately, an effective hub emerges.

The Međimurje region in Croatia demonstrates this impressively: the regional development agency REDEA has coordinated actors from business, municipalities and educational institutions since 2009, thereby creating the institutional basis for circular projects. In the Interreg project FBI4EU, REDEA specifically supports the regional timber industry in building circular value creation – from funding advice to the development of tailored measures.



PARTNER REGION MEĐIMURJE (CROATIA)

Coordination through a regional development agency

Brief description

The rural region of Međimurje in northern Croatia has been active in the circular economy since 2009. The regional development agency REDEA acts as a central coordination point that connects municipalities, businesses and educational institutions and opens up access to EU funding programmes.

Circular aspects & impact

- CIRCLabs as experimental spaces for industrial symbiosis and eco-innovations
- Targeted support for the timber industry by processing production residues into wood pellets (Interreg FBI4EU)
- Educational project “Waste as Value”: raising awareness in schools and municipalities
- Strategic anchoring in the regional development plan 2021–2027

Model region profiles

↗ bbsr.bund.de/EN/research/programs

Further information:

↗ redea.hr

Setting the agenda: top-down and bottom-up

Bringing the circular economy onto the political and strategic agenda is a leadership task – but not only a task for the political leader. In practice, agenda-setting can equally emerge from within the administration: through strategic initiatives that bring together expertise and networks and thus prepare and enable political decisions.

North Karelia in Finland shows how the circular economy can be strategically embedded through broad regional cooperation: within the EU programme CIRCWASTE, the regional council, municipalities, research institutions and businesses jointly developed a circular economy roadmap. This work fed into the climate strategy “Climate-Resilient North Karelia 2030”, which the regional council – as the democratically legitimised body of the 13 municipalities – developed together with the regional centre for economic development. The anchoring of the circular economy as a distinct policy field is thus the result of a collective process spanning many years.

Bergstraße shows a different path: the KARMA network – which emerged from an EU Interreg initiative on industrial symbiosis – provided the

impetus for a circular-economy strategy in the construction sector, which is now to result in a district council resolution. Here the administration created the space for political action through networking and strategic groundwork.

Not everything has to be reinvented: existing networks, ongoing strategy processes and available funding programmes offer concrete entry points. Those who use them arrive at visible results more quickly – and at the same time strengthen the legitimacy for further action.

Key insight: agenda-setting succeeds more quickly when existing networks, ongoing strategy processes and available funding programmes are used.

Facilitating and mediating: public administration as a bridge-builder

The circular economy requires cooperation between actors with different interests and logics. Here, public administration can take on a decisive mediating role – not as a decision-maker but as a facilitator that creates space for joint action.

In the district of Goslar, this role is evident in the interplay between the economic development



Figure 5: The Bergstraße Model Region project team in discussion with the head of the Department of Policy and Regional Development at the inter-German exchange meeting of the model regions, March 2026, Heppenheim (Bergstraße)

agency WiReGo as project lead and the district: WiReGo contributes networks and business contacts; the district provides political backing and institutional connection. In Mittelsachsen, too, the project is located in the “Economic Development and District Development” department. The department combines both areas under one roof and thereby enables short coordination channels to businesses and economic actors – a decisive lever for implementing the circular economy. In both cases the same applies: this structured coordination cannot be taken for granted – it must be actively built and maintained.

Facilitation work is most effective when it connects to existing structures – to existing networks, established exchange formats and familiar faces. Public administration does not have to reinvent the wheel; it has to keep it turning.



Figure 6: Representatives of the Central Saxony Model Region at the intra-German exchange meeting of the model regions, March 2026, Heppenheim (Bergstraße)

MODEL REGION GOSLAR



Circular economy through economic development – the question of mandate

Brief description

In the district of Goslar, the economic development company Wirtschaftsförderung Region Goslar GmbH (WiReGo) runs the Circular Rural Regions project. It contributes networks, business contacts and economic-policy expertise – and is a member of REWIMET e.V., an established recycling network in which members of the Goslar district council are also represented. At the same time, experience shows: building a lasting circular-economy structure requires a clear mandate from the district – and a structured connection to administration and policy.

Coordination & impact

- Monthly exchange with the district of Goslar, quarterly with municipal economic development officers and climate protection management

- Building a multi-stakeholder network with stakeholder mapping and four concrete flagship projects: a tool library, a building materials exchange, places for the circular economy, and an escape game
- First annual workshop with a welcome address by the district administrator as a signal of political backing
- A planned “Repair Council” as a lasting structure after the project ends

Challenge

Locating project leadership at an economic development company enables pragmatic implementation and business contacts – but requires a clear political mandate to have an impact.

More information:

➤ kreislaufwirtschaft-landkreis-goslar.de

Implementation in the region: instruments, networks, long-term institutionalisation

Embedding the circular economy regionally is not a one-off act. It requires an interplay of concrete instruments, viable networks and a long-term perspective that goes beyond individual funding projects. Experience from the model regions shows what this process looks like in practice – and where the decisive course is set.

Instruments: what administrations can do in concrete terms

The toolbox for the circular economy in public administration is broader than often assumed. Alongside strategic anchoring in guiding principles and district development plans, operational tools are available that take immediate effect.

Potential analyses and stocktaking are often the first step: they make visible which material flows, materials and actors exist in a region – and where entry points for circular solutions lie. In the district of Bergstraße, such an analysis formed the basis for the entire circular construction strategy. In the

Chiemgau and Berchtesgadener Land region, a business survey with 196 participating companies provided the data basis for building a regional circular economy network.

Pilot projects are another central lever: they test new approaches under real conditions, make the circular economy visible and create learning processes for everyone involved. In the district of Goslar, for example, four concrete flagship projects were developed – a tool library, a building materials exchange, places for the circular economy and an escape game – which show how low-threshold offerings can have an impact.

Tendering and procurement are underestimated instruments: those who embed circular criteria in tenders create demand and give businesses planning certainty. The district of Bergstraße is working to integrate these criteria systematically into specifications of services.



The process is iterative – steps can occur in parallel or be repeated

Figure 7: From analysis to long-term institutionalisation – an iterative process for administrations on the path to a regional circular economy.



INFO BOX

From analysis to long-term institutionalisation: instruments and resources for each step

Analysing: the basis for all further steps: what is available in the region, where does the potential lie?

- Mittelsachsen: potential analysis with 27 expert interviews, an online survey (150 responses) and three thematic workshops.
➔ nestbau-mittelsachsen.de/kreislaufwirtschaft
- Chiemgau/ Berchtesgadener Land: regional material flow analysis in cooperation with Rosenheim University of Applied Sciences, focusing on two to three residual material streams.
➔ region-gestalten.bund.de/modellregion-traunstein-berchtesgaden
- Bergstraße: potential study by Concular GmbH (2025) as the basis for the circular construction strategy.
➔ kreis-bergstrasse.de/themen-projekte
- BMWStB/BBSR (2023): Circular economy for rural development ➔ [Potential in Germany and Europe \(English summary\)](#)

Networking: the circular economy succeeds through the interplay of businesses, public administration, civil society and academia. Low-threshold, regular formats that connect to existing structures have proven effective.

- Chiemgau/Berchtesgadener Land: “Circular Talks” – facilitated business roundtables, 25–35 participants per session.
➔ region-gestalten.bund.de/modellregion-traunstein-berchtesgaden
- Bergstraße: cooperation with the Circle business network and the KARMA network (EU Interreg).
➔ kreis-bergstrasse.de/themen-projekte
- Lüchow-Dannenberg: multi-stakeholder network with SMEs, municipalities and three universities; C2C Lab Dannenberg as a physical point of contact.
➔ wirtschaft-dan.de/wendland-zirkular

Testing: pilot projects make the circular economy tangible and create learning processes for later scaling.

- Bergstraße: Bensheim school centre as a pilot building with a building resource passport and a digital building component catalogue.
➔ kreis-bergstrasse.de/themen-projekte

- Goslar: four flagship projects: tool library, building materials exchange, places for the circular economy, escape game.
➔ kreislaufwirtschaft-landkreis-goslar.de
- Mittelsachsen: pilot projects on circular procurement and deconstruction; SAMSax real-world laboratory.
➔ nestbau-mittelsachsen.de/kreislaufwirtschaft
- - KOINNO: competence centre for innovative procurement
➔ koinno.de

Embedding: the circular economy as a permanent task – integrated into existing strategies rather than as a new stand-alone topic.

- Lüchow-Dannenberg: circular economy as a distinct field of action in the Future Development Concept (ZEK).
➔ region-gestalten.bund.de/einblicke/CRR_Luechow-Dannenberg
- Bergstraße: climate protection concept (district council resolution 2021) as the framework; draft resolution on circular construction in preparation.
➔ kreis-bergstrasse.de/themen-projekte
- Chiemgau/ Berchtesgadener Land: the circular economy is being integrated into the economic development strategy; further anchoring at district level is in preparation.
➔ chiemgau.bayern.de/kreislaufwirtschaft
- German National Circular Economy Strategy (NKWS)
➔ bundesumweltministerium.de/en/topics

Sustaining: what remains after the project ends? Structures and financing must be considered from the outset.

- Lüchow-Dannenberg: anchoring via the Future Development Concept (ZEK) and economic development as a lasting supporting structure.
➔ wirtschaft-dan.de/wendland-zirkular
➔ region-gestalten.bund.de/Region/DE/einblicke
- Funding programmes for the next step: “Future Circular Economy” (BMUKN, from late 2026), BMBF REGION. innovativ. EU programmes such as LEADER, ERDF/ Structural Funds, Interreg, EU LIFE.
➔ foerderdatenbank.de

Networks: cooperation as a precondition

The circular economy does not emerge in individual administrative units but in the interplay of different actors. Networks are not an end in themselves – they are the organisational basis for knowledge to circulate, projects to emerge and resources to be pooled.

Successful networks are low-threshold, targeted and tied to concrete concerns:

- In the district of Bergstraße, a close partner structure that pools expertise and contacts emerged, building on the existing KARMA network.
- In Lüchow-Dannenberg, an economy-for-the-common-good network meeting was made usable for the circular economy. The European exchange within Circular Rural Regions broadens this horizon: the partner regions Međimurje, North Karelia, Pärnu, Fribourg and regio³ contribute many years of experience that provide valuable impetus to the German model regions. Transnational learning is not an add-on here but a structural advantage of the Pilot Action.
- In the district of Goslar, a ‘Repair Council’ is being planned – a lasting format that brings together businesses, initiatives and public administration around repair and reuse and is intended to embed the circular economy beyond the end of the project.

Networks are effective not only within a region but also between regions. The exchange among the German model regions shows how valuable mutual learning is: regions at different stages of development advance one another, share successes as well as failures and jointly develop new approaches.

Long-term institutionalisation: what remains when funding ends?

The most pressing question in all model regions is: what remains when external support falls away? The participating regions reached a clear conclusion: long-term institutionalisation succeeds on three levels.

Regional anchoring: the circular economy must be embedded in guiding principles, district development plans or economic development structures. This creates connectivity and enables further development beyond project durations.

Vertical anchoring: coordination between the municipal, regional, state and federal levels increases legitimacy and room for action. State strategies – such as the Bavarian Circular Economy Strategy – provide orientation.

Institutional anchoring: lasting impact requires clear responsibilities and sufficient staffing resources. In several regions it became apparent: long-term institutionalisation often fails due to a lack of continued financing for staff positions.

Figure 8: Working group on the question of long-term institutionalisation at the exchange meeting of the model regions, March 2026, Heppenheim (Bergstraße).



A common pattern became visible everywhere: the circular economy succeeds not as a special topic but as a cross-cutting task. At the same time: there is no single right way. Every region has different points of connection – this is not a weakness but a strength of rural structures.

The regions also identified concrete points of entry over time: in the short term, existing formats can be used, networks integrated and best practices made visible in a targeted way. In the medium term, existing strategies should be expanded and funding programmes used in a targeted manner. In the long term, a political mandate, clear responsibilities and regions that position themselves as visible pioneers are needed.

“What changes when the circular economy becomes not just a project but a mandate?”

Guiding question of the model regions’ exchange, Heppenheim, March 2026

Challenges, recommendations and outlook

Experience from the model regions shows: the circular economy in rural regions is possible – and it is effective. At the same time, it becomes clear where the limits lie and what is needed to overcome them.

Typical challenges

Similar patterns emerge in almost all model regions:

- Human and financial resources are scarce: the circular economy as a cross-cutting task requires coordination capacities that are lacking in many rural administrations.
- The long-term nature of the circular economy versus the short-term nature of municipal budget planning: measures whose benefits only become visible after years have a hard time in annual budget rounds.
- A lack of political mandate: without a clear remit, the circular economy remains a marginal topic, carried by committed individuals.
- Legal uncertainties, for example in circular procurement or deconstruction, make concrete projects more difficult.
- Engaging external target groups: businesses often have little capacity or no concrete interest yet.

The preceding examples from the model regions point to ways of addressing these challenges.

Recommendations for municipal and regional administrations

Experience from the model regions can be translated into six concrete recommendations:

1. **Start with a stocktaking.** Those who do not know which material flows, actors and potential exist in the region cannot act in a targeted way. A potential analysis or stakeholder mapping is the first step – and at the same time creates the basis for political decisions.
2. **Use existing structures as door-openers.** The circular economy succeeds where it is integrated into existing strategies, networks and formats – such as climate protection concepts, economic development structures or regional development processes.
3. **Use pilot projects for visibility.** Small, concrete projects make the circular economy tangible, create learning processes, lower barriers and strengthen legitimacy.
4. **Use procurement as a lever.** Circular criteria in tenders create demand and send a clear signal to the regional economy.
5. **Secure political backing.** The circular economy needs a clear mandate from the political level – a district council resolution, anchoring in the district development plan or a public commitment by the district administrator. These create room for action and priority.

6. **Consider long-term institutionalisation from the outset.** The circular economy must not depend on project funding alone. Those who plan for structures, responsibilities and political anchoring from the beginning create the conditions for lasting impact – regardless of whether a funding programme is running or not.

Tailwind from new funding opportunities

With the adoption of the Action Programme for the German National Circular Economy Strategy (NKWS) in June 2026 and the “Future Circular Economy” funding programme announced within it, new momentum is emerging – even if the concrete design for municipalities and regions is still open. Municipal administrations can, however, already play an important role now: by actively informing regional businesses about new funding opportunities and supporting them in gaining access. At state level, strategies such as the Bavarian Circular Economy Strategy or the Saxon circular economy plan offer entry points for regional implementation measures. Municipalities and rural districts that have already prioritised the topic politically and built up initial structures have an advantage here. At the European level, too, the Territorial Agenda 2030, Interreg and ERDF programmes offer opportunities to strengthen the regional circular economy and continue the exchange with experienced partner regions.

Outlook: further perspectives of the publication series

The transformation towards a circular economy in rural regions is a long road – but experience from the model and partner regions shows that the first steps are already successful.

This issue focused on public policy and administration – as shapers and enablers of the regional circular economy. The first issue of this series examined

the role of business: how companies shape change in rural regions. The third and final publication explores the remaining two actor perspectives in more depth in a double issue:

- **Civil society:** initiatives, associations and committed citizens contribute significantly to circular development through participation, self-organisation and local projects.
- **Science:** research, teaching and transdisciplinary collaborations support implementation – be it through methods, knowledge transfer or accompanying research.

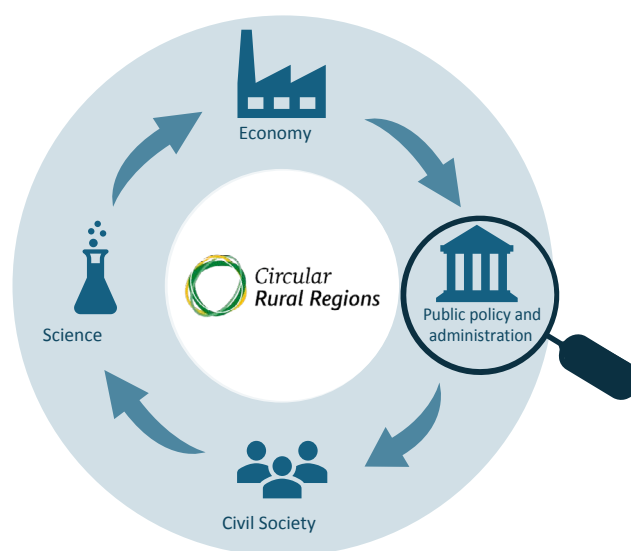


Figure 9: The four key stakeholder groups of the project – focus: public policy and administration

Anyone wishing to find out more will find current news, events and practical examples on the project website “Region gestalten”. The circular economy is not a distant goal – it is a process that is already gaining momentum in the regions today.

Further information

➤ [BBSR – project page](#)

BBSR – Bundesinstitut für Bau-, Stadt- und Raumforschung, 2025: Region gestalten – Circular Rural Regions. Accessed: ↗ www.region-gestalten.bund.de/Region/DE/vorhaben/circularruralregions/node.html [Accessed 17 June 2026]

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