

Assessment of circular economy practices in SMEs in Burgenland: Identification of training needs and opportunities

by *Thomas Kreamsner | Christian Horvath | Sophie Weidinger | Forschung Burgenland GmbH | Forschung Burgenland GmbH | Forschung Burgenland GmbH*

The REUSE project investigates the current state of implementation of circular economy aspects in companies in Burgenland and aims to select and train regional mentors. These mentors will develop mentoring programmes for interested small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and will train them in pilot projects.

In order to tailor the training content as much as possible, two online questionnaires were created, one analysing the knowledge of different circular business competences and the other assessing digital and green initiatives such as the distribution channels of their own company.

The research question addressed by these questionnaires was "How advanced is the implementation of circular economy aspects in companies from different sectors in Burgenland?" These two qualitative questionnaires were sent to companies from different sectors in Burgenland. While 29 people responded to the questionnaire on knowledge of various business skills, only 9 people responded to the questionnaire on digital and green initiatives. To add empirical value to the project, ten qualitative interviews were also conducted with companies in Burgenland that have already successfully completed the transition to a circular economy. The aim was to identify opportunities, risks and potential challenges, and to use these experiences to provide valuable content for the training courses with the mentors.

The results of the study show that many companies have only basic knowledge, particularly in the 'green transition' area of expertise, which includes categories such as 'water and waste management' and 'supporting the development of circular business models'. More than half of the respondents in the 'Technology transfer' competence area also reported only basic knowledge in the 'Defining appropriate performance indicators' category. The second questionnaire showed that there was a particular need for development in the digital initiatives in the area of 'promotional activities' and in the green initiatives in the areas of 'data analysis & automation', 'promotional activities' and 'production planning systems'.

It should be noted, however, that these results are of a qualitative nature only and that they should also be investigated in quantitative studies in the future.