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Lessons learned and recommendations for future coordinated implementation

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Summary

This report corresponds to Deliverable 3.9 CICERONE project and outlines the lessons learnt and experiences gained during the project implementation. This document synthesises and elaborates on the CICERONE outcomes to bring new knowledge and perspectives, identify preliminary lessons learnt, and proposes recommendations on joint programming and coordinated implementation. This deliverable is a reflection of the project's achievements and opportunities identified regarding joint programming and stakeholder engagement.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report corresponds to Deliverable 3.9 CICERONE project and outlines the lessons learnt and experiences gained during the project implementation. This document synthesises and elaborates on the CICERONE outcomes to bring new knowledge and perspectives, identify preliminary lessons learnt, and proposes recommendations on joint programming and coordinated implementation. This deliverable is a reflection of the project's achievements and opportunities identified regarding joint programming and stakeholder engagement.

KEYWORDS

Lessons learnt, Joint programming and implementation, Circular economy, Recommendations, Programme owners, Stakeholders engagement, Joint development of the platform.

1 INTRODUCTION

The state of the various circular economy initiatives and action in 2017, such as the Circular Economy Action Plan (published in 2015) [I] and a new Circular Economy Action Plan [II] highlighted challenges. The First Action Plan included actions on specific priority themes (waste, plastic, food, chemicals, water, construction and demolition, biomass, food, raw materials) and cross-cutting issues such as instruments (measuring framework and indicators, industrial symbiosis and eco-design), guidelines and regulation (GPP and CAM criteria, interface product/chemicals and waste), and financing programmes (Cohesion funds, Horizon2020 and LIFE Programmes, and others). Furthermore, the EC package's launch in Circular Economic spurred vast initiatives focused on resource efficiency in the Member States. While these initiatives were implemented and running, the European Commission and the Call "CE-SC5-05-2018: Coordinated approaches to funding and promotion of research and innovation for the circular economy" and the circular economy expert community listed challenges that emerged:

- Fragmentation of scarce resources, difficulties in implementing international synergies without a joint platform and lack of institutionalised outreach throughout Europe
- Progress made in research and innovation underpinning circular economy varies throughout the EU
- A missing strategic approach to the coordination of objectives and programming of the regional, national and European funding programmes throughout the area of research and innovation for a circular economy
- Lack of international synergies among programme owners as well as weak dissemination of lessons learned and new solutions for the circular economy resulting from currently isolated national programmes and funding

The H2020 CICERONE project brings together programme owners, research organisations and other stakeholders to create a platform for efficient Circular Economy programming in the European Union. The priority setting and the future platform's organisation was driven by Programme Owners (POs), involved either as project partners or via a stakeholder network.

This deliverable D3.9 "Lessons learned and recommendations for coordinated implementation" represents an output of the activities within the Work package 3. Work package 3 is at the core of the project, its purpose being to build a lasting platform for policy-makers and POs that cooperates to speed up the transition to a circular economy, including joining forces in funding and application of research. This WP3 has ensured that the future platform is strategically designed by building on

consultation of POs in WP4, defining the key role and adoption drivers, and services to be delivered by the platform. Based on this, the platform's governance was defined, within deliverable D3.4 (Governance models and statutes for the platform). Its future implementation as a pilot is proposed complemented by the institutional capacity-building scheme and by a MOOC, a policy roadmap for programme owners and presenting lessons learnt and recommendations recognised and identified during the project implementation.

This Work Package addresses the high-level objective 3, namely to build and test a lasting organisation and pathways to reach the desired impact, and precisely the following individual objectives:

- Define the strategic role of a European CE R&I joint programming platform, taking into account the expectations of all relevant stakeholder types
- Design an institutional capacity-building strategy
- Design a joint pilot programme and identify preliminary lessons learned
- Define an organisation to ensure the sustainability of the platform post-project

Deliverable D3.9 synthesises and elaborates on the CICERONE outcomes to bring new knowledge and perspectives, identify preliminary lessons learnt, and proposes recommendations on coordinated implementation. This deliverable is a reflection of the CICERONE project's achievements and opportunities identified regarding joint programming and stakeholder engagement.

This deliverable is structured as follows: Section 2 introduces the methodologies employed for developing this deliverable. Section 3 derives lessons learnt from joint programming, Section 4 represents lessons learnt on joint development of the platform and implementation, Section 5 focuses on the coordination mechanisms and finally Section 6 presents lessons learnt regarding stakeholder engagement. Each section also highlights the recommendation regarding the themes mentioned. Section 7 presents final conclusions from the analysis undertaken.

2 METHODOLOGY

To gain a holistic overview of the knowledge and lessons and extract them from the project, several quantitative and qualitative methods were applied, see Figure 1.

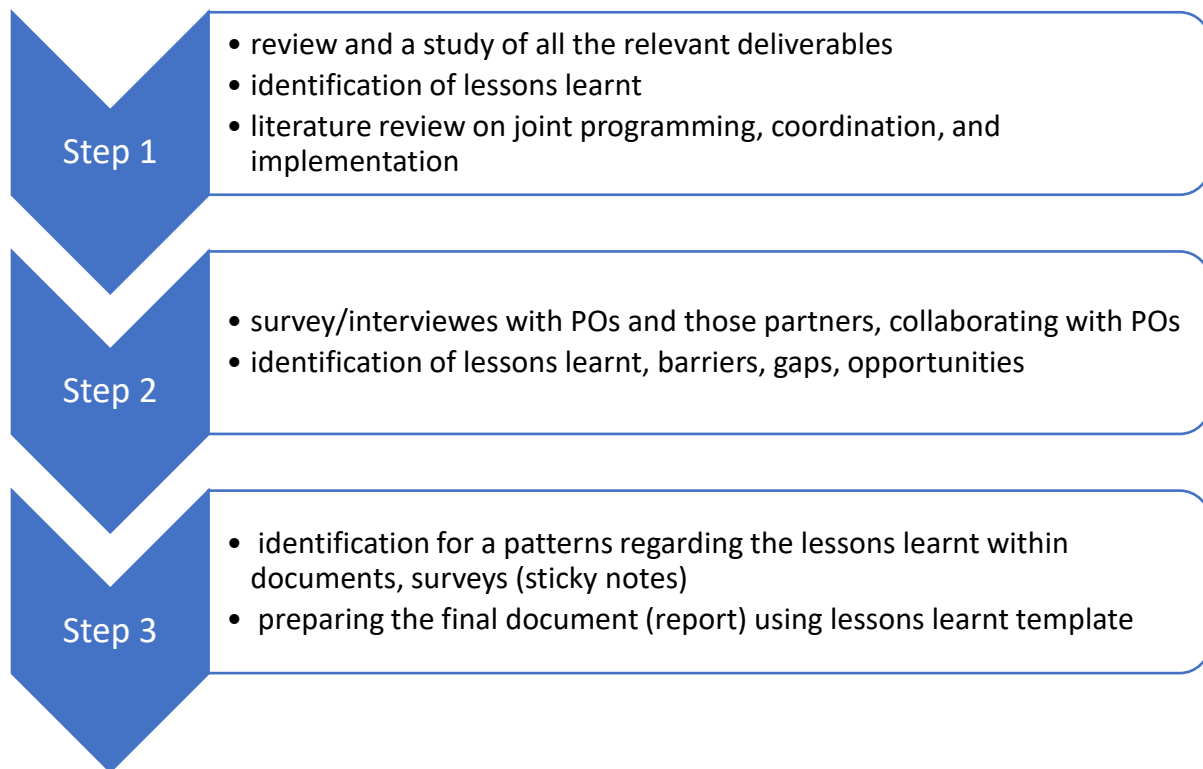


Figure 1: Methodology employed for preparing deliverable 3.9

Firstly, desk research was carried out, where all the deliverables were studies and reviewed. However, special attention was given to the deliverables from the WP3 and SRIA, because they were crucial deliverables to design lessons learnt. The information from the mentioned deliverables was extracted and analysed. Furthermore, a literature review focusing on scientific and expert papers was accomplished regarding joint programming and co-creation of strategic research and innovation agendas to deepen the knowledge and information from joint programming.

In the second step, a survey/interviews were carried out with partners engaging in close collaboration with the stakeholders, more specifically POs. Individuals were consulted on the identification of the following issues i) difficulties faced when engaging with POs during the entire process, e.g. SRIA, WP4, policy-toolkit, policy group; ii) opportunities perceived for further development of the EU Circular Cooperation Hub; iii) lessons learnt in engaging with the POs and defining a level of collaboration iv) strategies or innovative approaches behind PO engagement v) defining/creating an approach for a long-term commitment and not a short-term stakeholder response/feedback to improve engagement in the future. The outcomes of this survey are an integral part of this deliverable.

To collect a comprehensive and holistic view of the lessons learnt, all the information and data obtained in step 1 and step 2 were: a) identified, b) reviewed and synthesised, c) clustered. Then common patterns were identified, which led to the identification of the lessons learnt and based on

that recommendations were proposed. For such an approach, a simple a “post-it” method was used for identification, synthesis, brainstorming and clustering (see Figure 2).

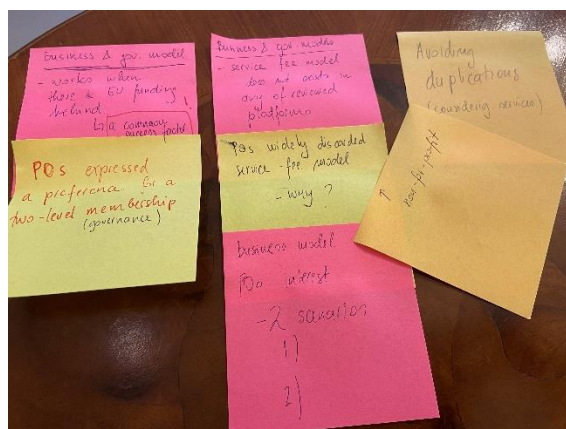


Figure 2: “Post-it method” example.

To extract the lessons learnt and prepare recommendations, "a lesson learned template" has been used, see Figure 3. Lessons learnt provide a retrospective view of the project, including feedback and ideas for improvements. The "lessons learned template" is organised into several sections i) high-level topics identified ii) issue (what has specifically happened); iii) problem/success; iv) impact v) recommendations. It is crucial to describe the lessons in details and provide recommendations for future work. Lessons learned represents knowledge gained from experience in CICERONE.

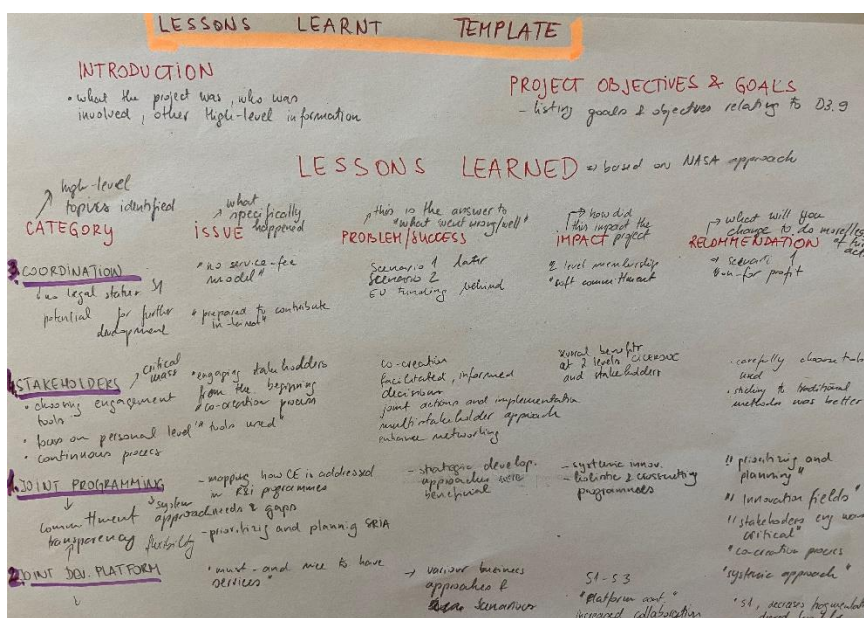


Figure 3: Lessons learned template

Following Step 3, 4 categories or high-level themes for lessons learnt were identified:

- Joint programming
- Joint development of the platform
- Coordination mechanisms
- Stakeholder engagement

Furthermore, lessons learnt have been translated into recommendations and suggestions for efficient joint programming and implementation, which is comprehensively elaborated within the deliverable 3.8 – Implementation plan 2021–2022.

3 LESSONS LEARNT ON DESIGNING JOINT PROGRAMMES

Joint programming represented high-level objectives 1 and 2 of CICERONE and one of identified themes or categories within the lessons learnt.

Challenge

The Call and CICERONE proposal's challenges were related to the joint programming in terms of fragmented resources, lack of international synergies effects, and isolated national programmes and funding, to define the joint pilot programme.

Lessons learnt from CICERONE

CICERONE was implemented to overcome the above-mentioned challenges. In the project implementation, a mapping of circular economy topics in existing funding programmes was critical, as it provided in-depth knowledge and a shared understanding of the level of integration of circular economy within research and innovation programmes of Member States, as well as evidence-based reliable input to determine further course of action. This state-of-the-art analysis highlighted the needs and gaps of the current research and innovation programmes and provided an improvement option, which has been realised within SRIA. The systemic approach showed to be essential for identifying priorities and leverage points, defining a systemic perspective or goal, corresponding it with a challenge and tackling the impacts, which has led to the definition of innovation fields. Identifying priority areas (innovation fields) revealed a very suitable approach because it allowed to tackle EU region-wide issues and facilitate the circular economy transition. Furthermore, innovation fields manifested a coherent system in developing four joint programmes linked to challenge areas within the SRIA: 1) Circular Cities, 2) Circular Industries, 3) Closing the Loop, and 4) Resource Efficiency Territory & Sea. Furthermore, the identification of innovation fields was strategically combined to

develop sub-programmes and activities, ensuring that the joint programmes are transdisciplinary and trans-sectoral by linking together synergetic innovation fields between the themes.

The strategic development approaches and methodologies used in the development of SRIA proved to be efficient and suitable. It enabled a well-structured research and innovation programme, with consistent cross-cutting contents and synergies, avoiding duplication and achieving more significant sustainability impacts. Because POs were jointly preparing CE research and innovation programmes under the EU policy directives, this has led to a better coherence of programming and has increased visibility.

It is also essential to mention that collaboration represented a critical success factor for joint programming. PO engagement was a vital component for the SRIA development process when considering a co-creation process, which increased the effectiveness and R&I actions legitimacy.

Recommendation

Joint programming requires a strategic approach: an in-depth analysis, identification of synergies and needs, which should be built on the narrative that it is politically influential and aligned with the EU's circular economy strategic objectives, as well as prioritising of innovation fields with direct identification of research and innovation impacts.

Due to the pandemic, a survey to identify if and how PO priorities and strategies may have changed, how changes relate to the circular economy and whether and how their work and area of focus have changed concerning circular economy research and innovation was carried out. POs mostly indicated that the pandemic has not created specific changes to their circular economy priorities and programmes but has blurred a line between human health and sustainability, where one can affect the other. The pandemic has also resulted in a rethinking of current systems' shortcomings, which call for systemic change and the need to strengthen domestic supply security and self-sufficiency. Full details of the findings can be found in the entire report [III], which is available as a supplement to the SRIA. The work undertaken resulted in an additional lesson learnt for the SRIA update, which is intended to be a living document.

4 LESSONS LEARNT ON JOINT DEVELOPMENT OF THE PLATFORM AND IMPLEMENTATION

The design and implementation of a joint platform, driven by European, national regional and local Programme Owners, pursues joint programming and capacity-building objectives, corresponding to the high-level objective no. 3.

Challenge

Challenges of the Call and CICERONE proposal were related to the joint platform and joint implementation of circular economy research and innovation programmes, in terms of defining a strategic role for the joint programming platform, considering expectations of POs.

Lessons learnt from CICERONE

During the implementation of CICERONE, the EU Circular Cooperation Hub (EU CCH) as a future platform for circular economy Programme Owners (POs) at the national, regional and local level has been proposed, with aims to share best practices, co-create and collaborate on joint programmes for circular economy research and innovation. Based on the benchmarks of existing platforms as well as both internal and external consultations with stakeholders when defining the platform's value proposition, four main lines of services were identified:

- Joint programming (multi-level, cross-regional)
- Policy recommendations and advocacy through community management
- Training and capacity building
- Knowledge sharing & capacity building

During the consultations with POs it emerged that POs required *must-have services* and *nice-to-have services* as part of the EU CCH offer. This was essential, because it clarifies the services to be implemented first and those that may be implemented later based on future funding opportunities for the platform. The services also influence the EU CCH platform's business modelling approach, which is explained in detail in D.3.3. A co-creation approach carried out by the partners and POs during the services design process showed as essential, because the result was that services are based on the POs' real needs and are aligned with strategic requirements to support national, regional and local governments in their implementation of joint circular economy programmes. Furthermore, it has appeared that a co-creation approach has built mutual trust among various stakeholders, generating a shared understanding of their needs and provided added value and validated services. The co-creation approach spurred honest discussions about dilemmas, challenges and potential conflicts.

However, it resulted in a transparent process of finding appropriate solutions for the platform and further joint implementation of shared ambitions.

Regarding the joint development of the platform and further implementation, the communication and experiences within the project implementation revealed that effectiveness would be increased as well as the quality of the services and programming. A broad collaboration landscape among POs facilitated knowledge and expertise sharing, peer learnings, identification of complementary competencies, and more comprehensive access to the POs' expertise and their capacities, as well as good practices in a particular region or country. To promote and support a transition toward CE, a value has been found in joint development and implementation via collaborative work, mutual understanding, building trust, and fostering coherent, effective and coordinated actions, which supposed to be based on the shared POs objectives. This also increases sustainability and visibility of results.

Recommendation

Joint platform development and implementation should take advantage of the co-creative process, more extensive networks of relevant stakeholders, representing an intelligence knowledge base and pools of good practices, expertise. Collaboration represents an essential element in joint development, implementation and programming, and should be fostered by open and strategic dialogue with stakeholders. However, co-creative process should not be understood as a simple desire of collaboration, but should be interpreted and practiced at deeper level as implemented within CICERONE activities. These comprehend understanding and discussing other partners' issues regarding circular economy programmes and activities, which leads to increased trust and transparency. Furthermore, identifying common denominator and improvement options in designing circular economy programmes, opens up much broader, holistic and systemic perspective. Also, sharing common challenges, reciprocal and complementary working and mutual ownership of results bring comprehensive awareness of a common well-being.

5 LESSONS LEARNT ON COORDINATION MECHANISMS

The governance and financing models of European clusters and platforms benchmarking (D3.2) represented a baseline study for other CICERONE activities, especially business modelling and financial planning and assessment of legal options, which led to the preparation of the governance for the future EU CCH platform.

Challenge

The Call and CICERONE proposal's challenges were related to the definition of a strategic role of a platform and a governance structure to ensure its sustainability.

Lessons learnt from CICERONE

The main lessons learnt on the coordination mechanisms, based on benchmarking of existing initiatives, platforms and clusters, are represented in Figure 1. We have structured them into five sections: governance structure, legal status, business model, stakeholder engagement and sustainability. The primary outcomes were that the governance structure needs to be open and inclusive, have an expert coordinator with several “soft” competencies.

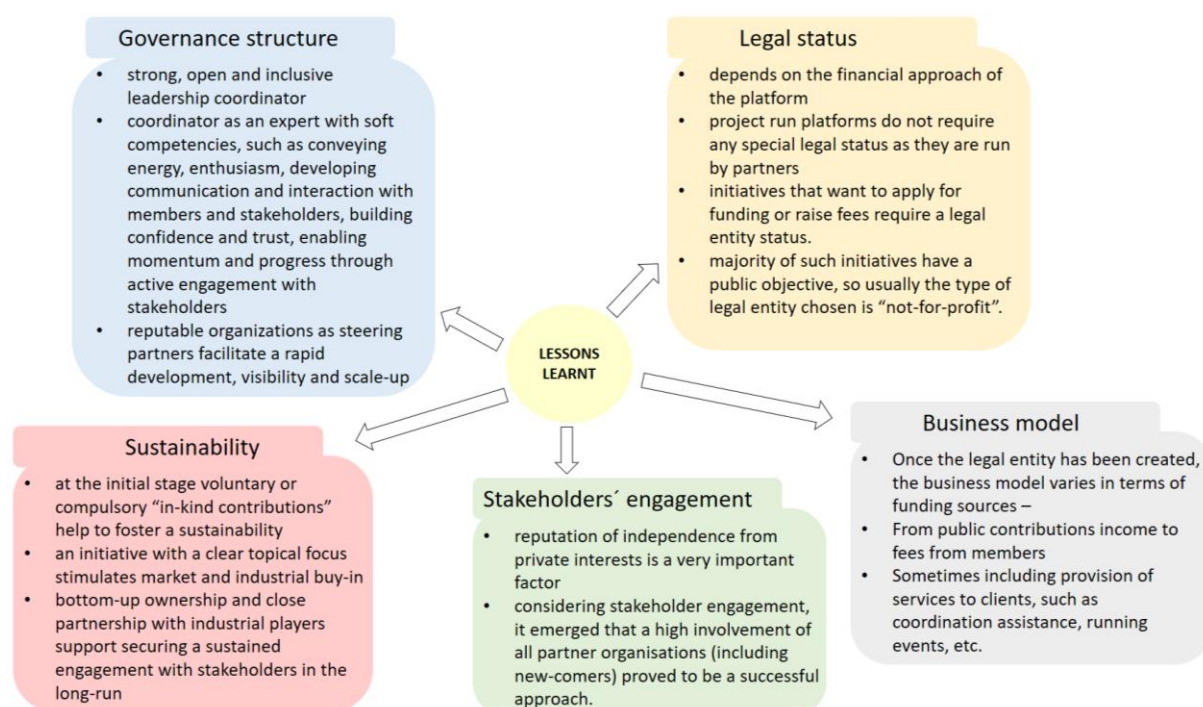


Figure 4: Lessons learnt from the benchmarking activity

Furthermore, POs expressed a preference for a two-level membership. POs will be playing a central role (1st level), and the 2nd level is composed of other stakeholders such as SMEs, research centres, academia, etc. POs, as core members, will decide the content of the joint calls and updating the SRIA, and other stakeholders will be participating in the calls and stakeholder engagement activities. The legal status and business model depend and vary on the financial approach, and the most common legal entity with public objective emerged to be “not-for-profit”. It is vital to notice that the service-fee model does not exist in any of the existing platforms. A service fee also implies an uncontrolled

income, influencing the budget balance, something that, by nature, a “not-for-profit” entity wants to avoid. The consultations and interviews with POs indicated that POs widely discarded the service-fee

Recommendation

The EU CCH should be operating as a consortium-supported initiative and should be sustained by external funding and "in-kind" contributions, decentralised operational management and no legal status. Services should be implemented and supported by the platform's financing as the service-fee model does not provide visibility for the platform finances or reflects "non-for-profit" status.

model, which rejected the a-la-card model but would instead contribute "in-kind" for the services they have an interest in. Independence from private interests showed to be a significant factor, and the high involvement of all the partner organisations indicated to be a successful approach. Sustainability can be assured from various perspectives. Usually, in the beginning, voluntary or compulsory "in-kind" contributions were perceived. Choosing an appropriate funding represents an issue, to fit the requirements of the POs. However, it was found that joint calls usually work better from a top-down funding approach, e.g. European financing, which in many cases represents a key success factor.

6 LESSONS LEARNT ON STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

To assure a co-creation and broad collaborative processes during joint programming and implementation, as well as a wide usage and promotion of CICERONE results, stakeholder engagement has been implemented and highlighted from the beginning of the project. For example, wide-scale international consultations with stakeholders consider all their expectations and needs of all the relevant stakeholder types. During the project implementation, several benefits and opportunities were identified, which can further lead to improved lessons.

Challenge

Challenges of the Call and CICERONE proposal directly emphasise the importance of stakeholder engagement, especially when considering a lack of international synergies among programme owners and weak dissemination of lessons learned and new solutions for the circular economy resulting from currently isolated national programmes and funding.

Lessons learnt from CICERONE

It has been perceived that stakeholders' broad involvement from the project start was of utmost importance (see Fig. 5). It emerged as a backbone of successful project implementation, for example, in the joint development of SRIA, EU CCH services identification, etc.

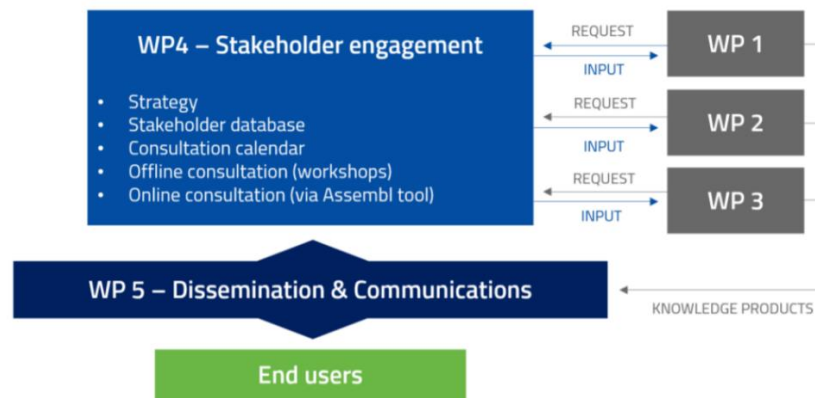


Figure 5: Operationalisation of the WP4. (Source: D4.1, p.5).

The lessons learnt are based on the experiences gained during the CICERONE implementation, and challenges emerged (see Fig. 6)

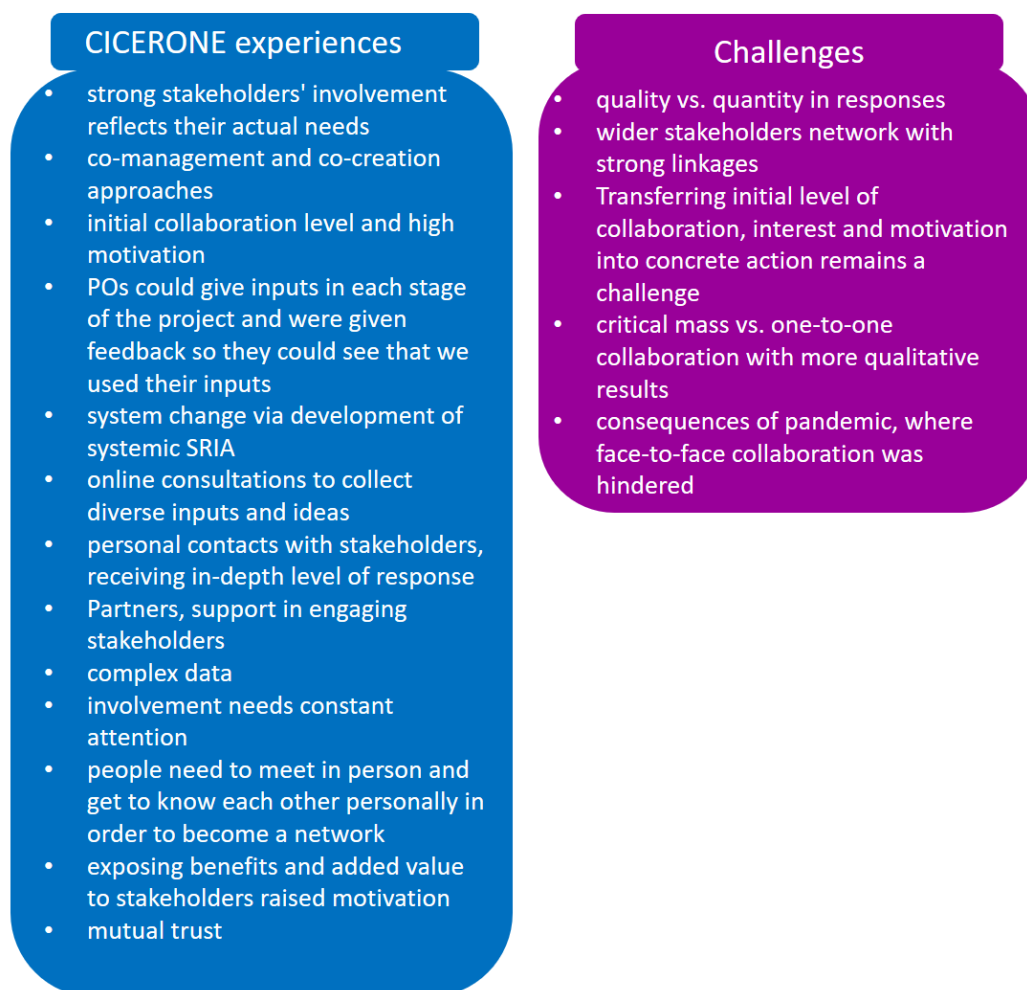


Figure 6: Experiences and challenges during the implementation.

A broad stakeholder approach was fundamental because it was an essential factor in defining joint and harmonised missions and strategies, collaborative and coordinated approaches in programming and joint and harmonised communication, and facilitates the dissemination and uptake of results POs. In this way, our target audience and other stakeholders participating in the activities "internalised" the project outputs and outcomes and took them as "their own", which significantly contributed to effective and efficient dissemination and exploitation of results. This represents quick wins regarding rapid adaptations.

To facilitate continuous dialogue with stakeholders, it was learned that consulting with POs regularly and keeping them motivated was of utmost importance. Such an approach has assured a constant and balanced co-creation of outputs, available interdisciplinary expertise of POs, facilitated informed and consolidated decisions, and joint activities implementation.

Regarding the tools used with the stakeholder, it was learned that it is essential to carefully choose tools used for stakeholder engagement with user experience adapted to the target audiences. For example, during the project implementation, innovative and attractive approaches have been used (e.g. Assembl by Bluenove) for large scale consultations. Using Assembl brought a lot of useful data and complex information, allowed the project to connect directly with the stakeholder to retrieve information. However, it was not easy to get input from stakeholders to the level of detail needed. Furthermore, it was hard to get POs actually to interact with each other or elaborate on their inputs. Also, when carrying out online surveys this represented a "cold approach" (without having a previously established contact with the stakeholders via general email addresses and website contact and sent them customised messages and survey guides approach had a meagre response rate. To mitigate this, the project relied on partners to engage directly with their PO contacts in order to boost engagement.

Moreover, the low response rate persisted throughout the activity, despite repeated rounds of follow-up emails, reminders, and, in some cases, phone follow-ups, and partners' support has been needed. It is crucial to notice that vital knowledge from the POs has also been gathered via workshops and other personal consultations. It was found out that when detailed and quality information is needed it is better to stick to traditional methods, such as interviews with POs via phone, a personal visit or workshops. However, this approach has taken additional time and persistence, but the inputs provided have had a high quality for further processing. Considering personal visits, this approach decreased due to difficulties that emerged during the Covid-19 as no gathering or individual meetings were allowed.

However, further engagement with the POs is vital to expand the project's impacts and sustainability when the project will formally end. Thus, it is crucial to keep the fruitful collaboration with POs and keep them in the loop, not losing momentum for establishing a strong “circular economy POs” community. The experienced gained highlighted that the key challenge will be to maintain commitment, as further activities are seen voluntarily and not mandatory for POs. Thus, a greater declaration of intent/interest and concrete actions are expected at the project end. However, a lot of individual motivation from POs side has been seen. Thus, a learning lesson regarding the future EU CCH platform could be to "start small" with selected committed POs, which will act as a lighthouse to gather a critical mass in the future based on the demonstration of a clear added value and benefits for them.

Recommendation

To achieve a long-term commitment, stakeholder engagement represented an essential factor and should be maintained after the project ends, where CICERONE partners represent a valuable resource for a more personal (face-to-face) approaches, including regular visits, calls, also engaging them in the future joint projects. Direct stakeholder engagement should be built on the relationships with individual POs, rather than “cold” approaches. Also, tools for collaboration should be carefully considered, keeping in mind aim to achieve and a level of input needed.

7 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CICERONE was an H2020 project implemented to respond to the challenges of joint programming implementation in the circular economy and to establish the future EU CCH platform, led by EIT Climate-KIC.

In general, we can perceive here two levels:

- Raising awareness of the importance of CE joint programming to reach impact, and
- Concrete implementation to be led in collaboration with EU CCH in terms of joint programme development with the SRIA and joint implementation aid.

The CICERONE project has shown good practices in joint programming and platform development, which are transferable and replicable, which can be summarised as:

- Networking, collaboration among all the stakeholders from the very beginning and a critical mass of involved stakeholders was essential

- Transparency and inclusiveness within the multi-stakeholder approach, while designing SRIA and/or platform decreased conflicting interests and needs
- Continuous dialogue shall become an essential premise for further work and will encourage a re-evaluation of services or SRIA in light of new policy directives, research discoveries or innovations

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