

Circular business innovation program

Handbook

for

Designing a coaching program on how to develop a circular and sustainable business



**A GREEN
TRANSITION**

Interreg
North Sea



Co-funded by
the European Union

CIBIP

Lead authors



BLENDERS
INNOVATION BY ALL, FOR ALL

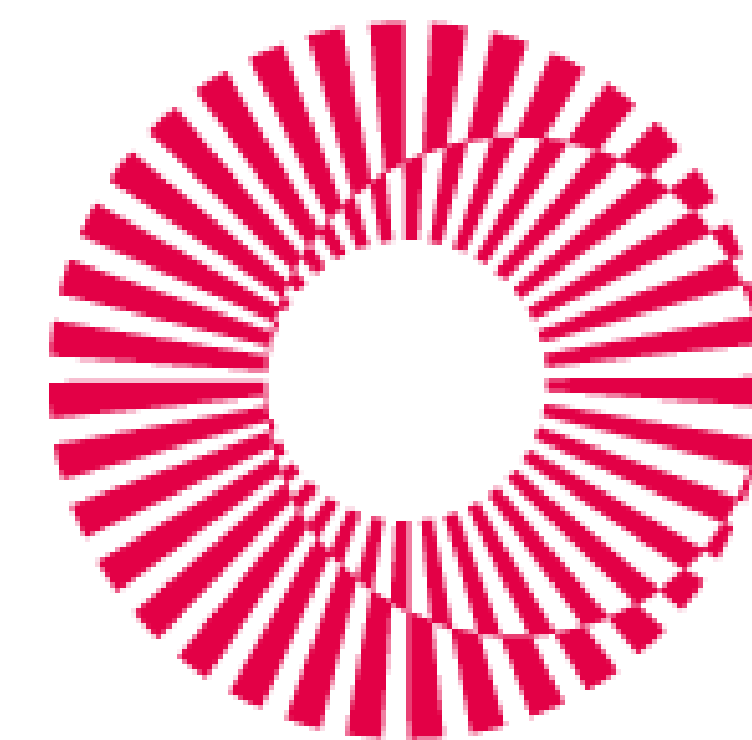
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TRANSITION**

**Interreg
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CIBIP

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1. Introduction to the CIBIP Handbook

a. Target group

This handbook is designed for BSO, Business support organizations that want to help SMEs and starters to develop circular and sustainable business models in a group setting.

b. Purpose

This scaling handbook is based on the results and experiences gained from the Interreg North Sea project Circular Innovation Business program (CIBIP).

The purpose of the handbook is to provide you as a BSO with the necessary knowledge, tools and methods to be able to recreate and further develop the program that was developed in the CIBIP project. Furthermore, the handbook will contribute to you as a BSO, to have the knowledge and methods to help SMEs work and act in a more circular way.

The handbook contains a detailed introduction to "Circular Economy and Circular Business Strategies" as well as information on what problems can be associated with working circularly and how to identify these problems. The handbook also contains a detailed description of the process developed in the CIBIP project, as well as a presentation of the results and experiences gained in the project. In the appendix you can find the template and tools used throughout the program as well the overall program presentation.

d. Approach

The CIBIP project aimed to evaluate a transnational Circular Business Innovation Programme tailored for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) across both rural and urban areas seeking to develop sustainable business models. To ensure inclusivity and accessibility, the program was conducted entirely online through collaborative digital platforms.

The participating companies could be both start-ups as existing companies, both product-driven or service-driven from different sectors. The program emphasized the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and networks among participating companies from partner countries through structured group discussions and breakout sessions.

Facilitating the exchange of knowledge, experience, and contacts was a key objective of the program. To achieve this, participation from companies across all partner countries was deemed essential. Consequently, workshops were structured to allow ample time for group discussions and break-out sessions, enabling participants to engage with peers from different countries and share their ideas.

The program emphasized the development of a sustainability mindset and skills, alongside traditional entrepreneurial skills, recognizing the importance of both when establishing a successful and sustainable circular business model.

Participants were encouraged to articulate their personal drive and purpose, focusing on generating positive societal and environmental impacts while considering the needs of customers and stakeholders. Additionally, they were prompted to adopt a broader systems thinking approach, considering their entire value stream and the necessity of collaborating within their ecosystems.

To enable participants to focus on developing their own circular ideas, the workshops were designed to be highly practical and action-oriented. A balance was sought between providing sufficient theoretical context and allowing time for participants to create and collaborate on their ideas. During the workshops, partners adopted a coaching approach, guiding participants through questioning to facilitate idea development and encourage ownership. Additionally, homework assignments were provided between sessions to expedite progress, with the level of effort left to the discretion of individual participants. Individual coaching sessions were available upon request between sessions to address any challenges participants encountered, with the initiative for seeking assistance resting with the participants themselves.

To enhance tangibility, efforts were focused on preparing participants to deliver a pitch detailing their circular business idea to selected internal and external stakeholders. This involved consistently emphasizing the connection between the core tools employed, namely the Value Creator, Circular Business Model Canvas, and Pitch, throughout the program.

Throughout the program, emphasis was placed on utilizing core tools such as the Value Creator, Circular Business Model Canvas, and Pitch. Prior to commencing the initial iteration of the program, a problem discovery exercise was conducted internally to ensure alignment with identified needs. Subsequently, two iterations of the program were implemented to facilitate testing, learning, and refinement of the approach. For instance, in the first iteration, optional master classes were offered, focusing on theoretical aspects of sustainability, logistics, supply chains, and marketing. In the second iteration, these master classes were provided as recorded support, with sessions concentrating more on practical application.

Furthermore, as a partner in the project, networking opportunities with regional manufacturers were expanded. Additionally, masterclasses and workshops contributed to enriching educational content aimed at future young entrepreneurs.



It is important that when initiating the circular transition, companies have various options to consider or initiate, including:

- Clarifying their level of circular ambition
- Designing circular products or services
- Innovating their business model to incorporate circularity
- Enhancing collaboration within their ecosystem
- Expanding "circular" job roles and skills
- Developing supporting (digital) technology
- Elaborating on (reverse) logistics
- Optimizing resource management

It's essential to acknowledge that a company cannot pursue all avenues simultaneously and must prioritize to make progress. When implementing a program, it's necessary to choose an approach and focus. In this case, we opted to prioritize "business model innovation" and the development of a "new circular product/service" as starting points, while also seeking to incorporate other elements where feasible (facilitated by the Circular Business Model Canvas). The emphasis on a "new" circular business idea versus adapting an existing product/service influences the types of participants attracted. Established SMEs often concentrate on their current offerings and are more inclined to explore circularity within these existing products/services. On the other hand, circular business model innovation is more accessible when starting from scratch, making it more appealing to startups and less so to existing SMEs unless they identify an opportunity to pilot a new circular business idea alongside their ongoing operations.



2. Introduction to Circular economy

a. What is Circular economy?

To illustrate the basic principles of a Circular Economy, the below infographic from Circular Flanders can be used.

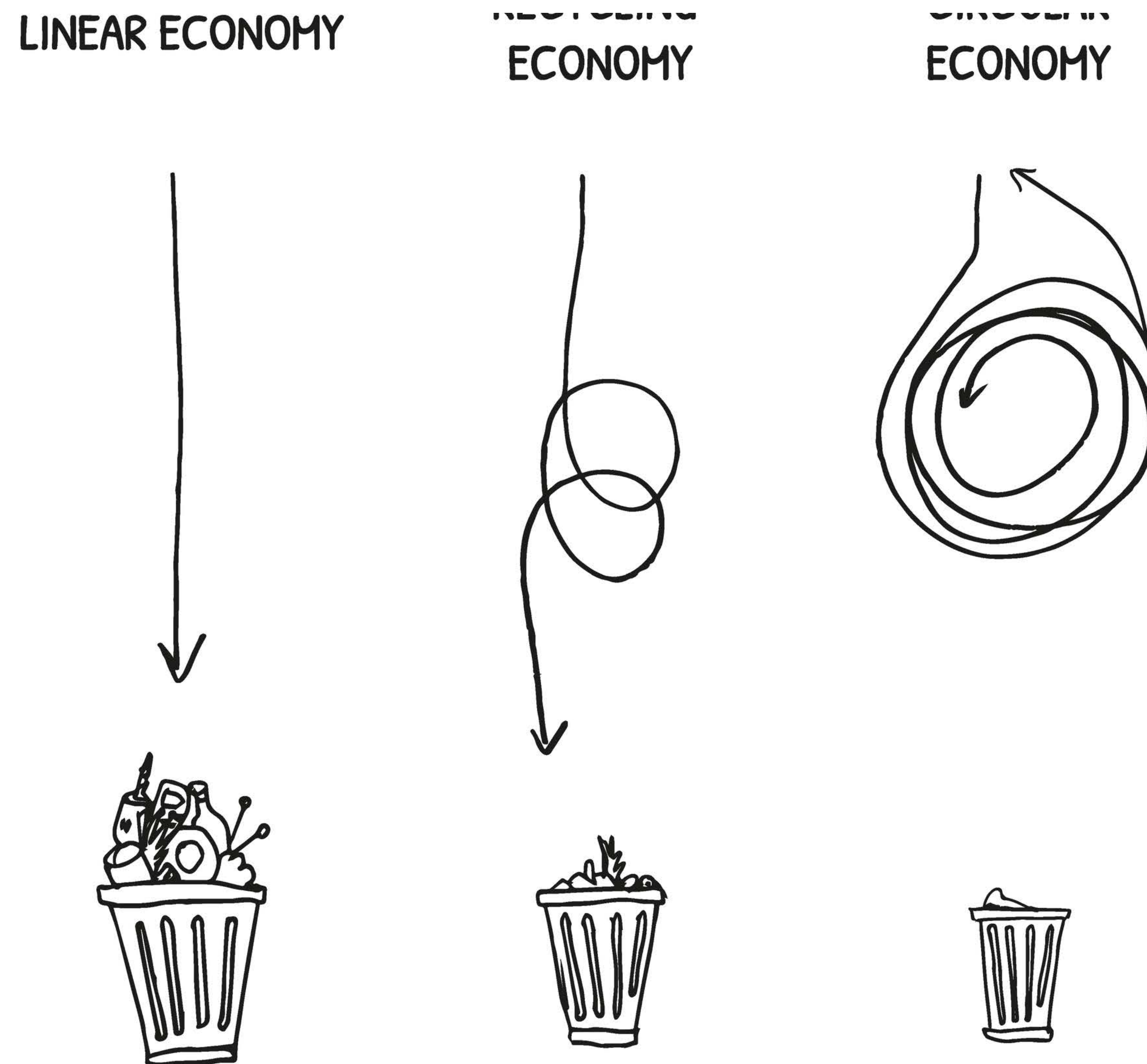
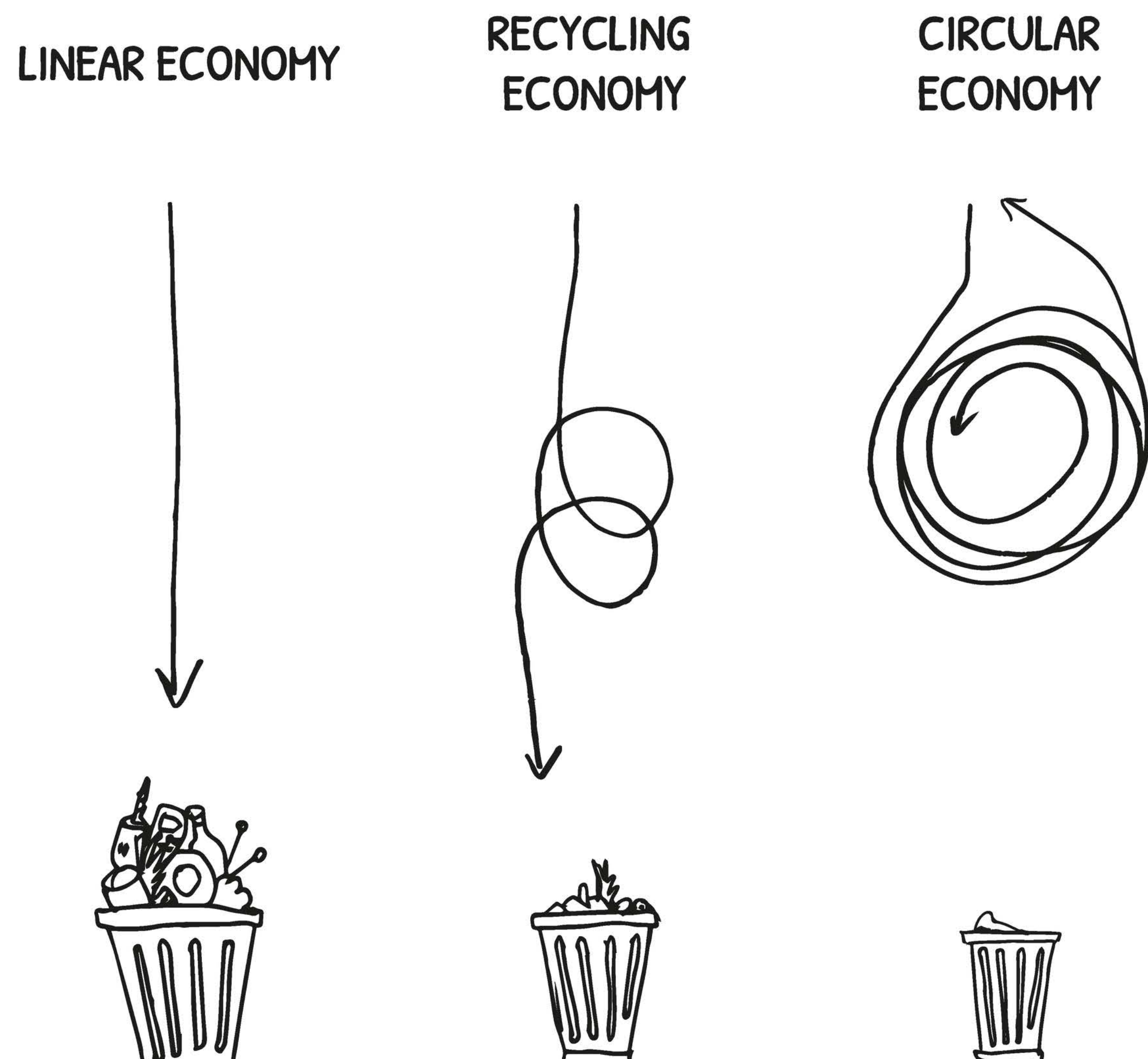


Figure 1 - Infographic from linear to circular economy. Source: <https://vlaanderen-circulair.be/en/infographics>



It explains in a visual way that in the current, linear economy, we take resources from the Earth, make products from them, and eventually throw them away as waste – the process is linear. In a circular economy we stop waste from being produced in the first place. Materials and products are re-used, re-paired or changed into new products. At the end of the lifecycle they are recyclable or degradable. It is about minimizing emissions, pollution and waste and maximizing the value of products, parts and material. It is a very simplistic illustration of a circular economy, but the end goal is to have an economy that is good for profit, planet and people!

For more information on new economic approaches and circular economy we refer to:
Doughnut economics: <https://doughnuteconomics.org>
Butterfly diagram - Ellen MacArthur Foundation: <https://ellenmacarthurfoundation.org>



© by Circular Flanders



b. Why do companies need to go circular?

Based on the circular economy model, SMEs can find a new way of thinking about how to produce and consume goods. In addition, It offers economic benefits to businesses as well as sustainable benefits for the planet. With an increasing world population, it has become apparent how the linear system results in an overexploitation of the earth's ecosystems, shown in research such as "Planetary boundaries" (Stockholm Resilience Centre).

Another way of looking at the over use of resources is in the concept "Earth Overshoot Day", which marks the date when humanity's demand for ecological resources and services in a given year exceeds what Earth can regenerate in that year. In 2022, Earth Overshoot Day landed on July 28. This means that we take out more resources from the planet, in a faster pace than what the earth can build.

In addition to the increased pressure on the planet, there are also some concrete arguments for going circular. In the program we focussed particularly on the importance of being less dependent on raw materials and regulatory changes.

- **Less dependent on raw materials**

Raw materials are not infinite. The below infographics illustrate how much is left of certain raw materials, and where these are mined, which is mainly outside of Europe.

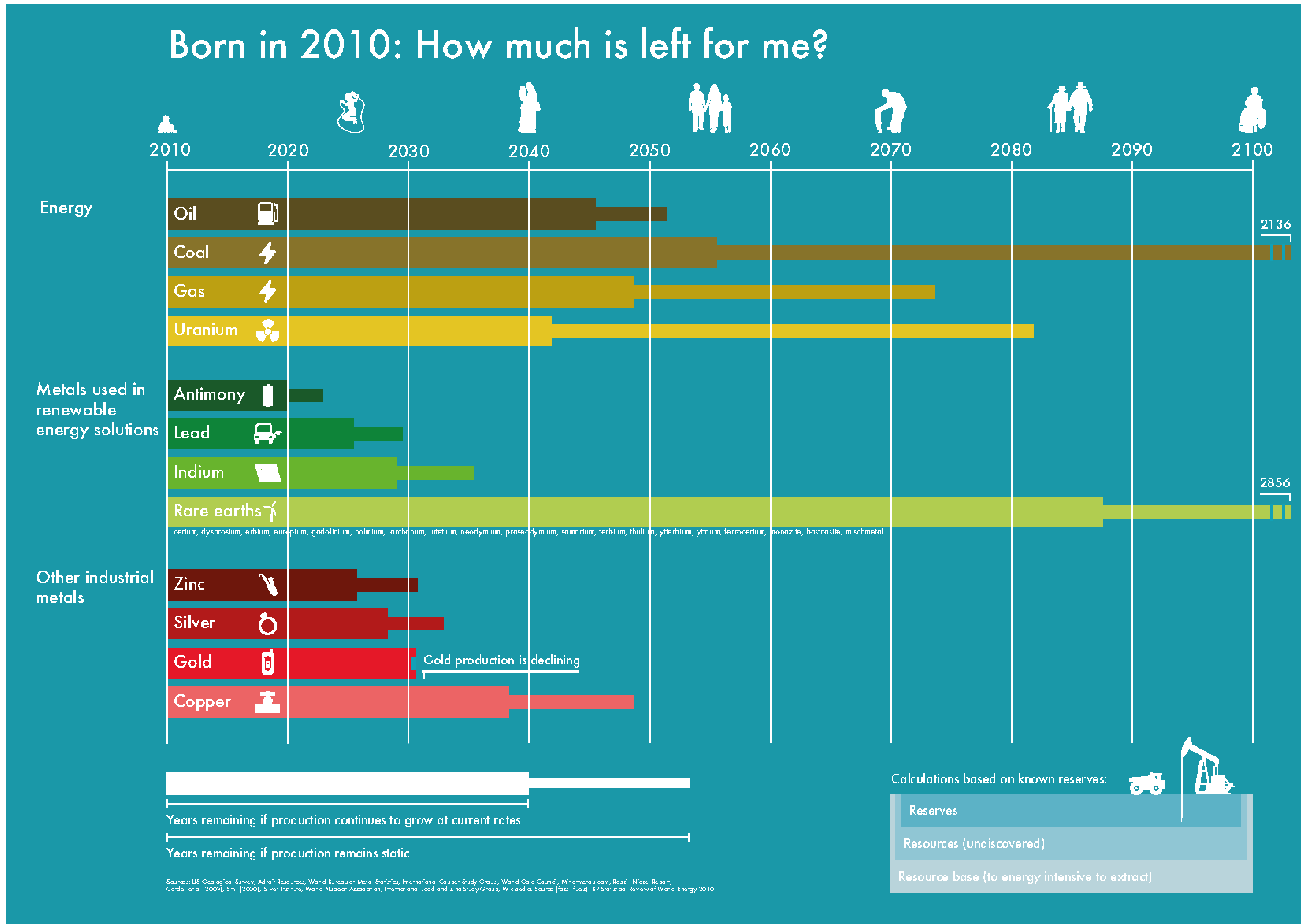


Figure 2: where to find leftovers.
 Source: <https://vlaanderen-circulair.be/en/infographics>

Where to find the leftovers?

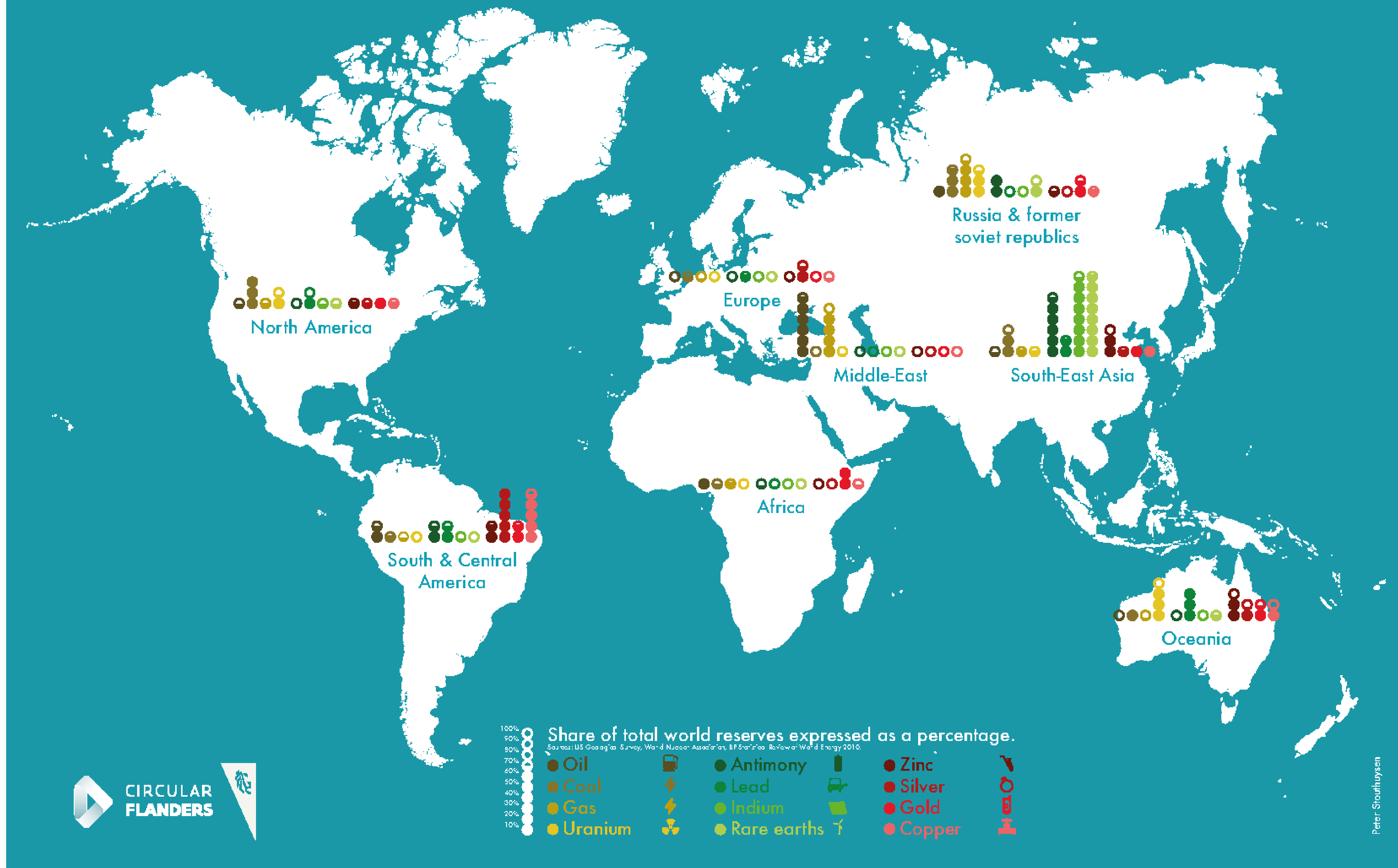


Figure 2: where to find leftovers.
 Source: <https://vlaanderen-circulair.be/en/infographics>



Not only are resources finite, before they are completely used up there comes a period of uncertainty with highly fluctuating prices and delivery times. Relying on raw materials, as in a linear economy, does no longer give guarantees. If your business has other ways of getting resources (through re-using, recycling, ...) it is more resistant to commodity crises.

- **Regulatory changes**

Legislation is changing rapidly, and with the European Green Deal, where the European Union is to become the first climate neutral unit by 2050, we can expect a series of changes. This includes new regulations on polluting materials and non-financial reporting under the Corporate Sustainable Reporting Directive (CSRD), etc. These regulations, among others, emphasize a stronger responsibility along the value chain of products and services and life cycle perspective, stricter evidence on how to measure and communicate sustainable values, which all benefits companies who have already changed from linear to circular systems.

c. R-strategies

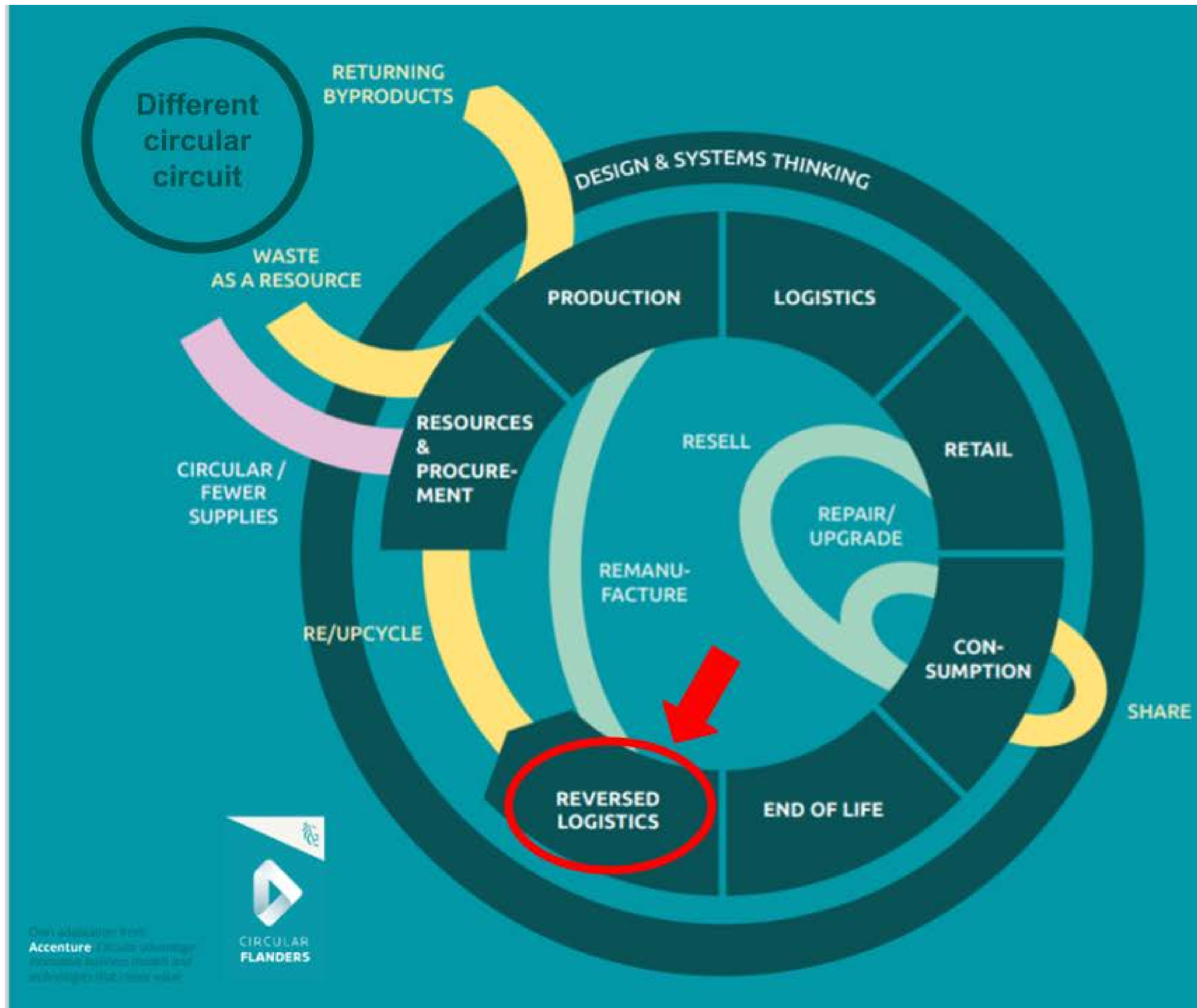
How to get started with circular economy? The R-strategies provide a practical tool for circular entrepreneurship. The strategies are ordered according to the degree of circularity and provide useful guidance to move up the ladder. Consider adding real business example to illustrate the strategies (cf. slides complete program).

Smarter product use and manufacture	R0	Refuse	Make product redundant by abandoning its function or by offering the same function with a radically different product
	R1	Rethink	Make product use more intensive (e.g. through sharing products or by putting multi-functional products on market).
	R2	Reduce	Increase efficiency in product manufacture or use by consuming fewer natural resources
Extend lifespan of product and its parts	R3	Reuse	Re-use by another consumer of discarded product which is still in good condition and fulfils its original function
	R4	Repair	Repair and maintenance of defective product so it can be used with its original function
	R5	Refurbish	Restore an old product and bring it up to date
	R6	Remanufacture	Use parts of discarded product in a new product with the same function
	R7	Repurpose	Use discarded products or its part in a new product with a different function
Useful application of materials	R8	Recycle	Process materials to obtain the same (high grade) or lower (low grade) quality
	R9	Recovery	Incineration of material with energy recovery

Figure 4: R-strategies. Source: Adapted from Potting et al. (2017)

d. Circular Business models

Moving from a linear, take-make-waste model, to a circular economy also means exploring new business models. We looked deeper into 5 business models (see figure below) and used real business examples to bring these business models to life.



5 Business models

- 1 Circular input:**
Renewable energy, bio-based or fully recyclable materials to replace resources with only one life cycle
- 2 Resource recovery:**
Recover usable raw materials/energy from discarded or by-products
- 3 Prolong lifespan:**
Extend the functional life cycle of a product through repair, upgrading and resale
- 4 Sharing platforms:**
Enable more intensive use of products through shared use/access or ownership
- 5 Product as a Service (Paas):**
Offer access to a product and retain ownership in order to enjoy the full benefits of a closed cycle

Figure 5: Circular Business Models. Source: Adapted from <https://vlaanderen-circulair.be/nl/kennis/infografieken>

3. Problems description of SMEs within circular economy

a. Our problem discovery

The project utilized a version of the Value Proposition Designer tool, originally created by Dr. Alexander Osterwalder and adapted by Drivhuset Göteborg, to identify the needs of our target groups. This process is essential to ensure that we create products or services that are valuable not only to ourselves but also to our target audience. The steps involved include:

- **Define the various target groups with sufficient specificity to determine their most significant desires or perceived problems.**
- **Schedule meetings with individuals representing each target group and conduct interviews.**
- **Pose questions to individuals within each target group regarding their desires, problems, and potential solutions (to-do list). Organize the information for each target group separately on distinct pages.**
- **Identify common patterns in the responses gathered from the target groups and compile unified lists of the top three wishes and problems, along with a collective to-do list.**

The problem discovery process revealed that the primary needs of the target groups centered on general business development, circularity, and networking. Key concerns included achieving financial sustainability, attracting customers, securing investors, and expanding networks. To address these needs, the program was designed to incorporate specific teachings on circularity alongside broader business development insights, and networking opportunities were ensured. When communicating the program to attract participants from the target group, alignment with these identified needs was emphasized. Additionally, our overarching purpose—to assist Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in constructing more circular business models—was highlighted. Prioritizing the needs of the target group during problem discovery is essential for tailoring value to their requirements. Subsequently, integrating our purpose into the final product ensures value creation not only for the target group but also for our cause.



4. Methodology/programme

a. Participant recruitment & communication

The optimal number of participants for the program falls within the range of 15-20 individuals, facilitating ample opportunities for group discussions, dynamism, and interaction. We found participants through the following methods, here are some recruitment tips..

Due to the absence of established program branding (Interreg CIBIP), the project's own social media and website lacked the necessary reach to promote the program adequately. As a result, social media channels belonging to project partners were utilized, alongside direct communication methods targeting specific groups. These included email marketing, phone calls, newsletters, events, and communication through local company networks. The majority of applications were received through these direct communication channels.

The projects communication and recruitment of participants have been more difficult in some regions (e.g. Denmark) and a little easier in other regions (e.g. Sweden) depending on the existing reach and contact to the target groups by the project partners. First of all, a clear definition of the target groups was necessary to be defined. We chose two target groups that both focussed on SME's and Startups: 1) Product and 2) Service companies. We had to include both, even though the content of the program did fit the companies with a product best, because of the circularity discussions of the choice of materials.

In Sweden, the two participating project partners both work with startups. The same goes for Norway. In Denmark, the project partner works with existing companies in a smaller municipality. Even though the program is very relevant to existing companies, it showed that mostly startups were interested in making time for learning about circular innovation and business models. Therefore the communication was very different in the different regions.

When considering a new branding for the program, it's important to recognize that its reach may not be sufficient for effective promotion. In such cases, it's advisable to utilize the social media channels of partners and other communication channels to promote the program. Tips on communicating the program

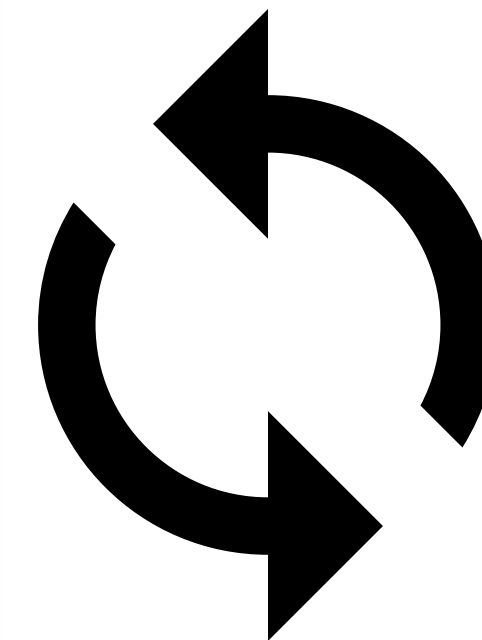
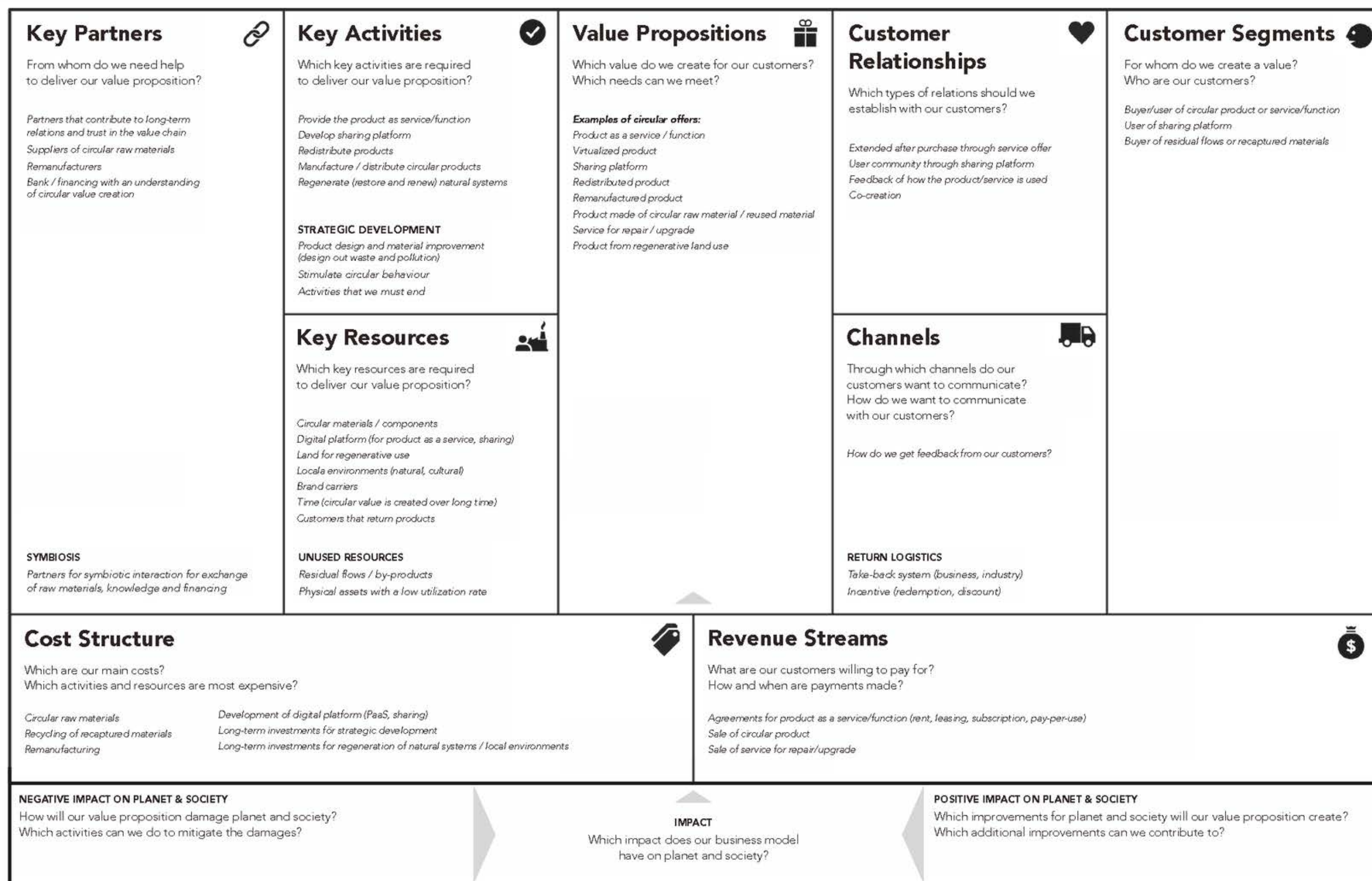
Focussing on the value that the target group is getting from participating is always a good idea. On social media we also posted some testimonials with previous participants explaining their expectations and what they got out of the program.



b. Program

Through a series of 6 workshops we worked towards the final pitch presentation. In between the workshops, the participants had the option to schedule free one-on-one coaching sessions with the coaches.

Circular Business Model Canvas



PITCH STRUCTURE



Version 1.0 English, June 2020



DESIGNED BY: Strategyzer AG
The makers of Business Model Generation and Strategyzer



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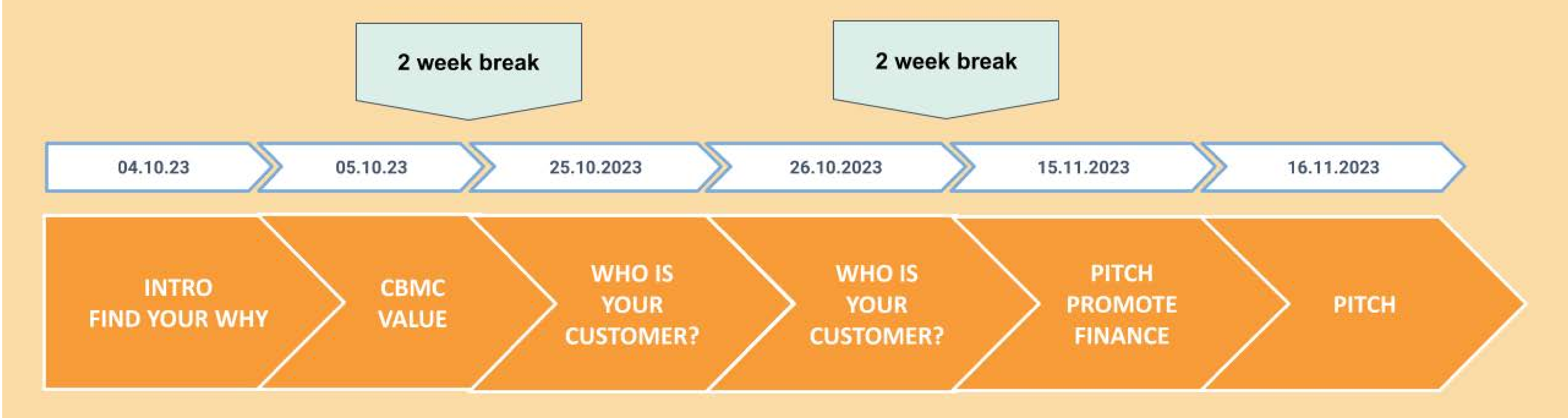
CIBIP

In the below chapters (iii) Program Roadmap and (iv) Workshops & Tools, we offer you an overview of the overall program structure and the structure of the individual workshop days (duration, content covered, tools used and expected homework). Ideally you look at this in combination with the overall program presentation (see appendix) as we do not transcribe each workshop in detail, which you have already in the overall program presentation.

Over the course of six workshops, participants progressed towards the final pitch presentation. Between these workshops, participants had the opportunity to schedule one-on-one coaching sessions with the coaches.

In the following sections (iii) Program Roadmap and (iv) Workshops & Tools, you will find an overview of the program's overall structure and the layout of individual workshop days, including duration, content covered, tools used, and expected homework. It is recommended to review this information in conjunction with the overall program presentation (see appendix), as detailed workshop descriptions are provided there, eliminating the need for transcription in this document.

i. Program Roadmap



Day 1: link between Tools and CBMC

Day 1:
your
why?

Day 1: Circular business models

5 Business models

- Circular input:** Companies supply, manufacture or sell products using circular inputs.
- Resource mobility:** Companies make their manufacturing processes more flexible by providing resources to other companies.
- Proving Resilience:** Companies produce all parts of a product in-house, ensuring quality and resilience.
- Sharing platforms:** Companies make use of their own production capacity to provide services to other companies.
- Product as a Service (PaaS):** The system is owned and operated by the provider, who is responsible for maintenance and repair.

Circular Business Model Canvas

Key Partners: From whom do we need help to deliver our value proposition?

Key Activities: Which key activities are required to deliver our value proposition?

Value Propositions: Which value do we create for our customers? Which needs does it meet?

Customer Relationships: Which types of relationships should we establish with our customers?

Customer Segments: For whom do we create a value? Who are our customers?

Key Resources: Which key resources are required to deliver our value proposition?

Channels: Through which channels do our customers want to communicate with us?

Cost Structure: Which are our main costs? Which activities and resources are most expensive?

Revenue Streams: What are our customers willing to pay for? How and when are payments made?

NEGATIVE IMPACT ON PLANET & SOCIETY: How will our value proposition damage planet and society? Which activities can we do to mitigate the damages?

POSITIVE IMPACT ON PLANET & SOCIETY: Which improvements for planet and society will our value proposition create? Which additional improvements can we contribute to?

Day 1: R-strategies

Resource	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8	R9
Smarter product use and manufacture	Reduce	Reuse	Repair	Refurbish	Remanufacture	Repurpose	Recycle	Recovery	
Extend lifespan of product and its parts									
Useful application of materials									

Day 1: SDG's

ECONOMY

SOCIETY

BIOSPHERE

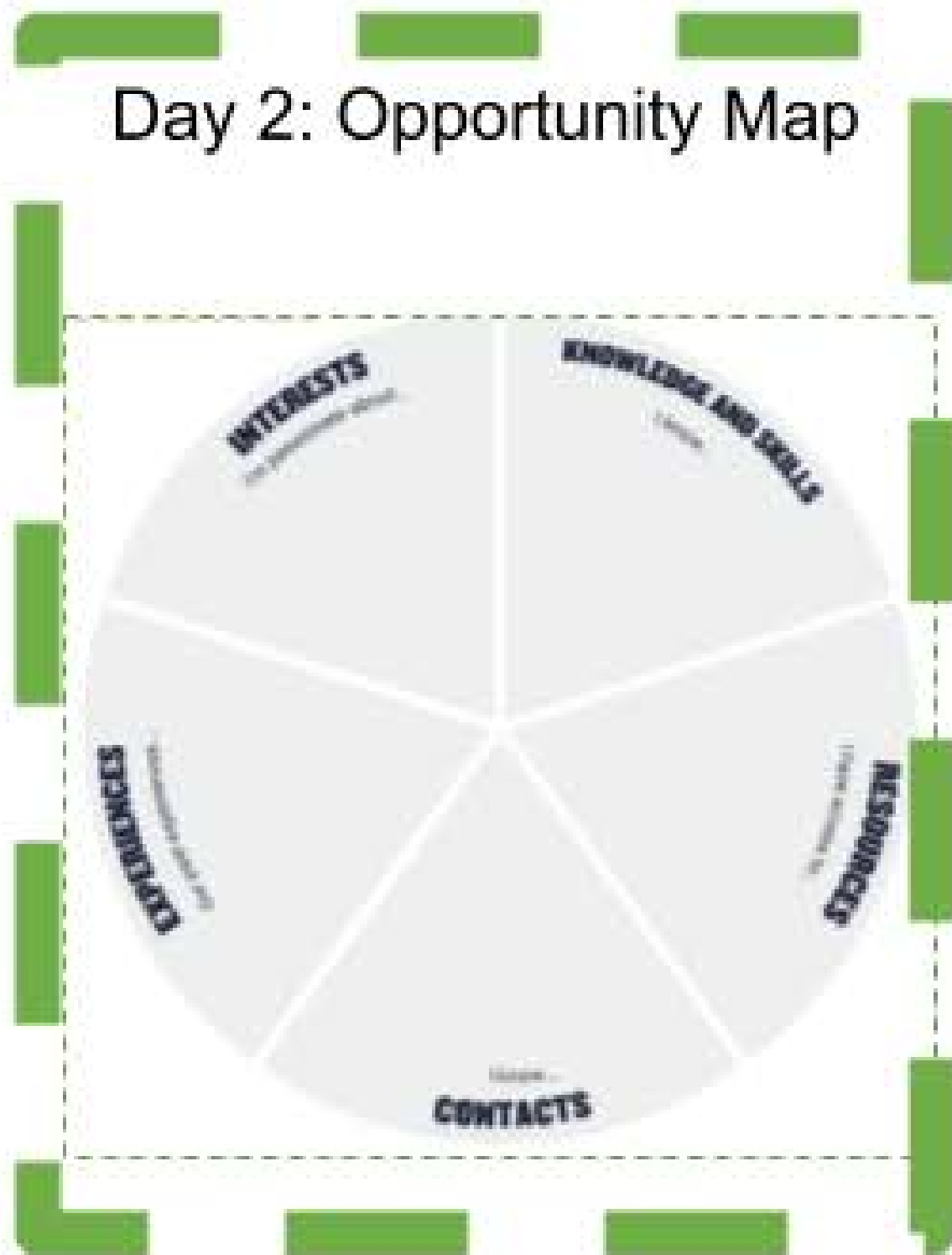
ii. Workshops & Tools

Program	Day 1 - Intro & Find your why
Duration	9.00h - 16.00h
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Who are we?- Circular economy- Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)- Introduction to the platform- Who are you?- What is your WHY?
Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Circular Business Model Canvas- 5x Why (Simon Sinek)- Circular Business Models diagram- R-strategies ladder
Homework	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Watch <u>Videoclips</u> with extra information on circular strategies, business models, materials & sustainable development goals

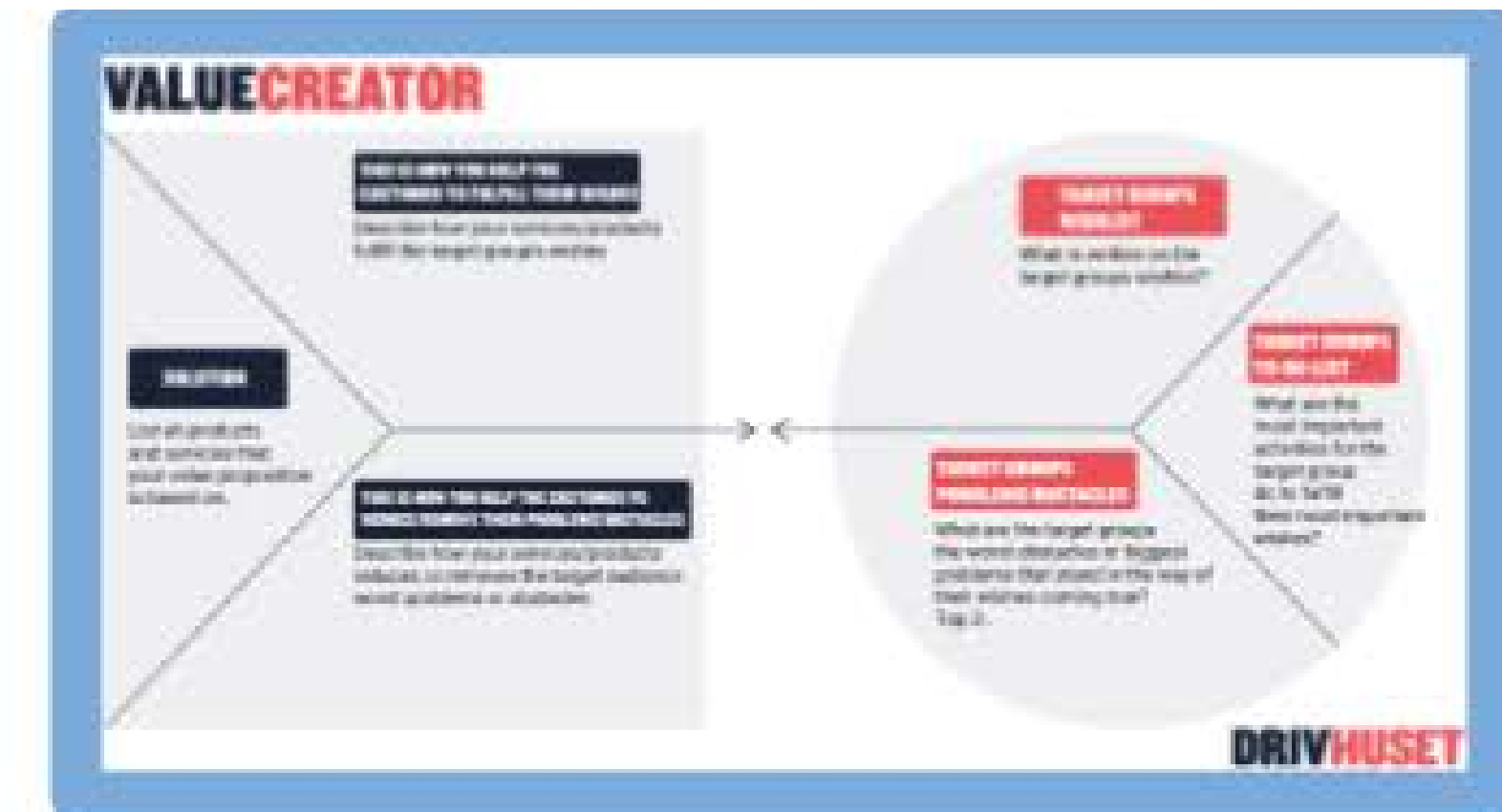


Day 2: link between Tools and CBMC

Day 2: Opportunity Map



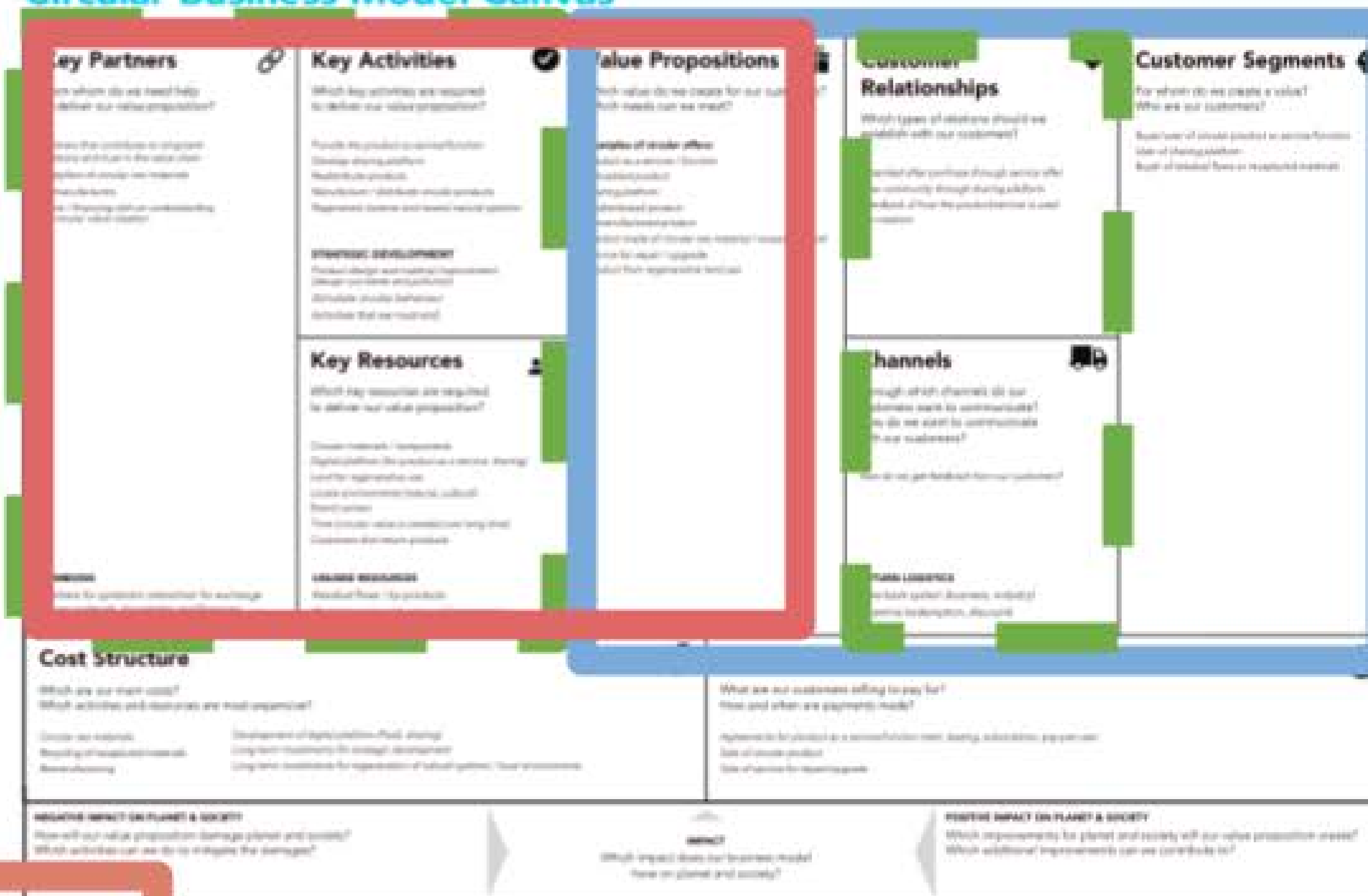
DAY 2



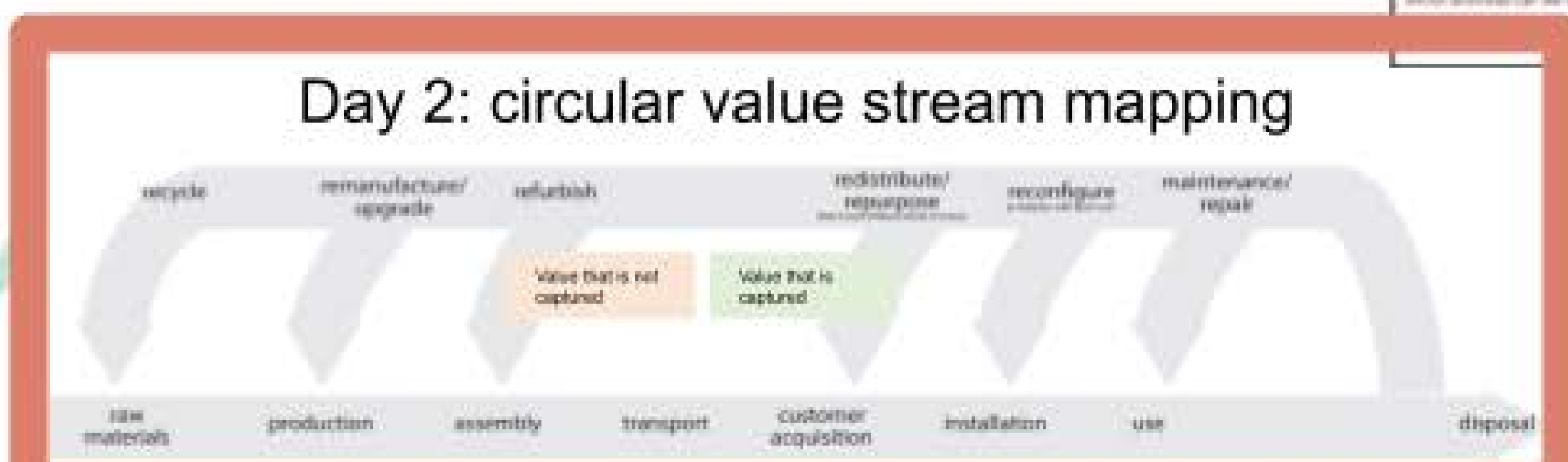
Day 2: value creator + think beyond customer value



Circular Business Model Canvas



Day 2: circular value stream mapping



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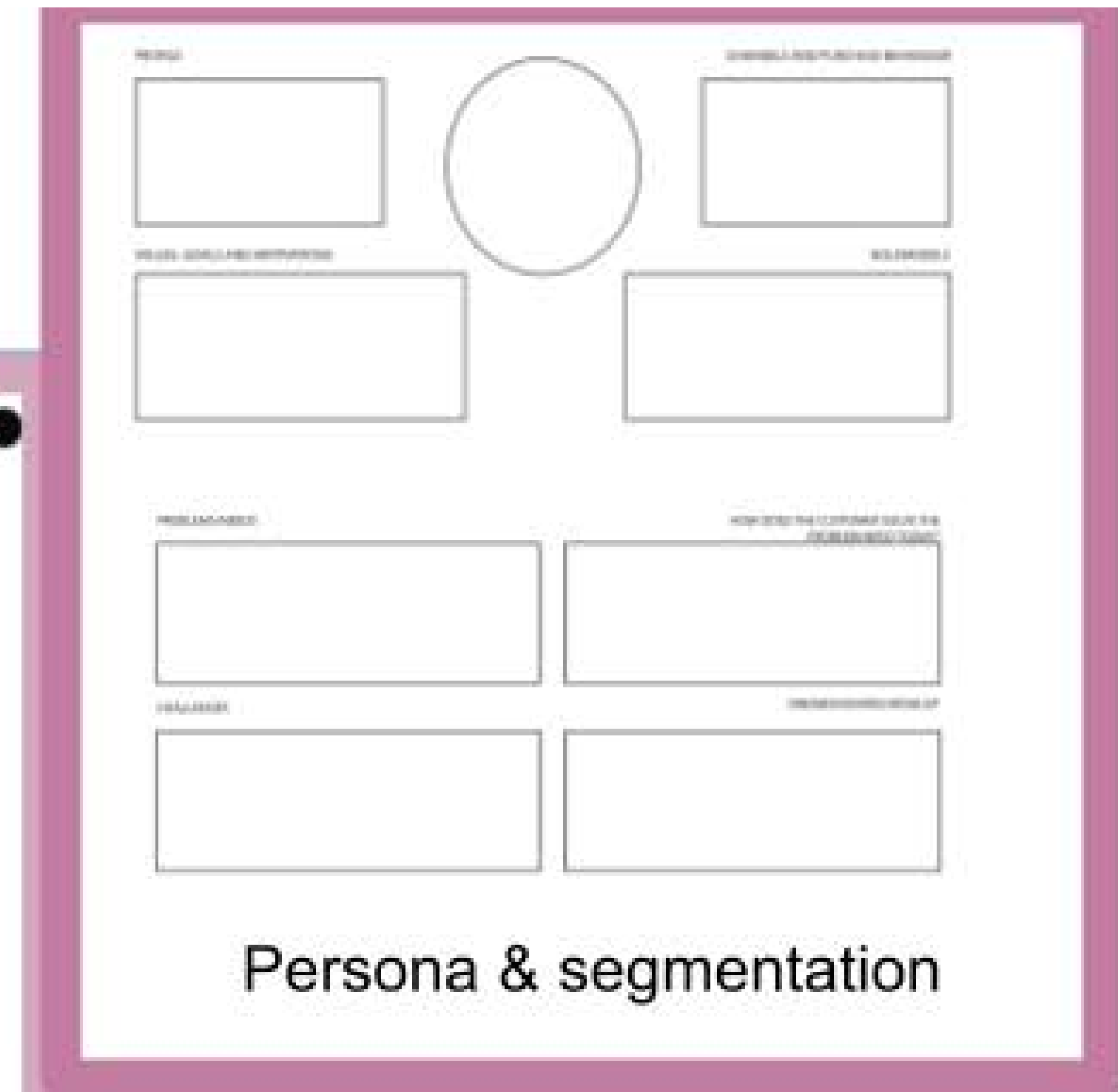
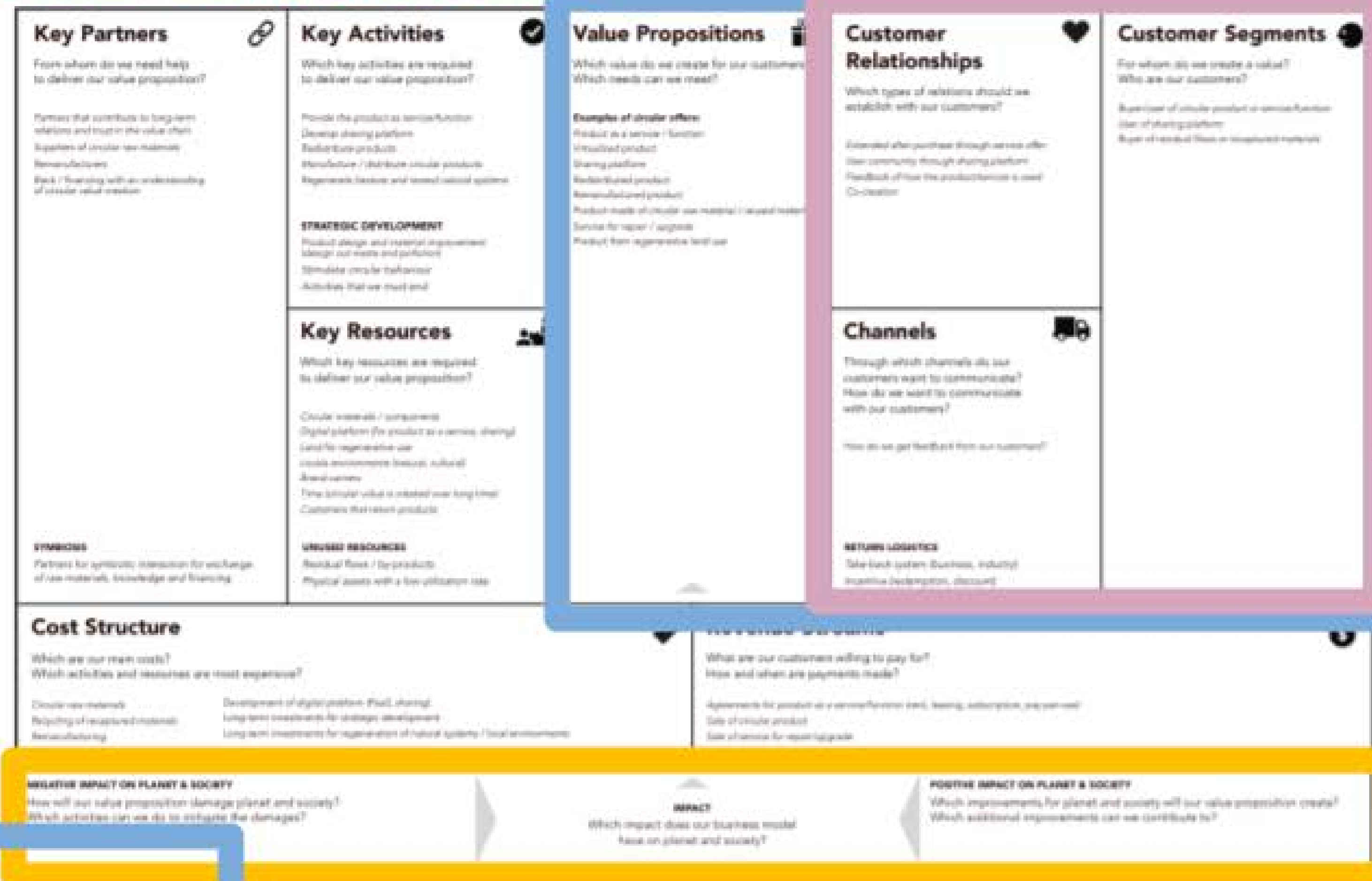
Day 2: link between Tools and CBMC

Program	Day 2 - Circular Business Model Canvas & Value
Duration	9.00h - 16.00h
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Intro to agile- Map and Merge your assets: opportunity map- Value proposition designer- Circular business model canvas- Circular Value Stream Mapping
Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Opportunity map- Value Creator (left side)- Circular Business Model Canvas
Homework	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Loop with your customer segment to understand their needs (Right side Value Creator)- Identify the circular strategies to implement in your business- Finalize first version of CBMC



Day 3: link between Tools and CBMC

DAY 3 Circular Business Model Canvas



Day 3: link between Tools and CBMC

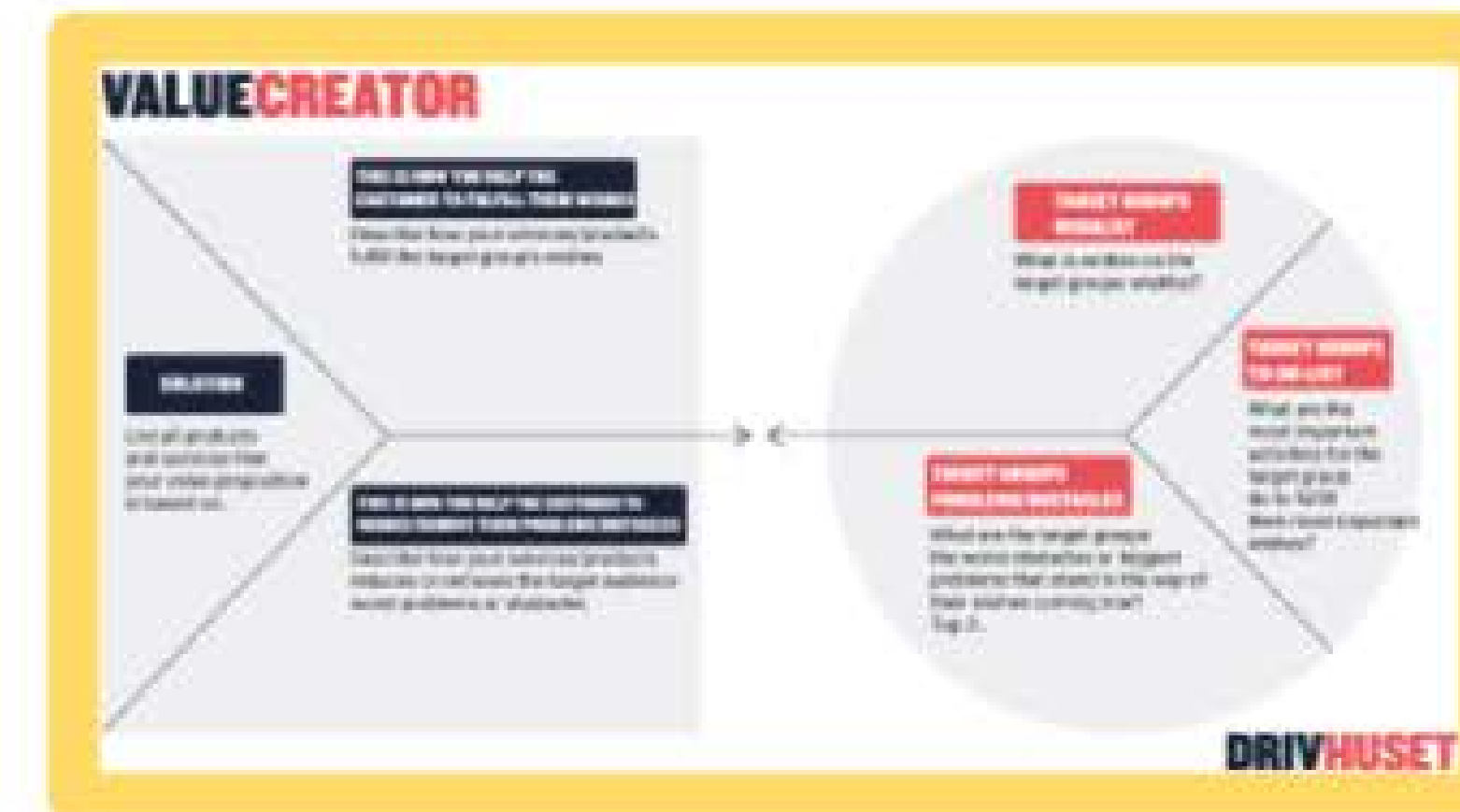
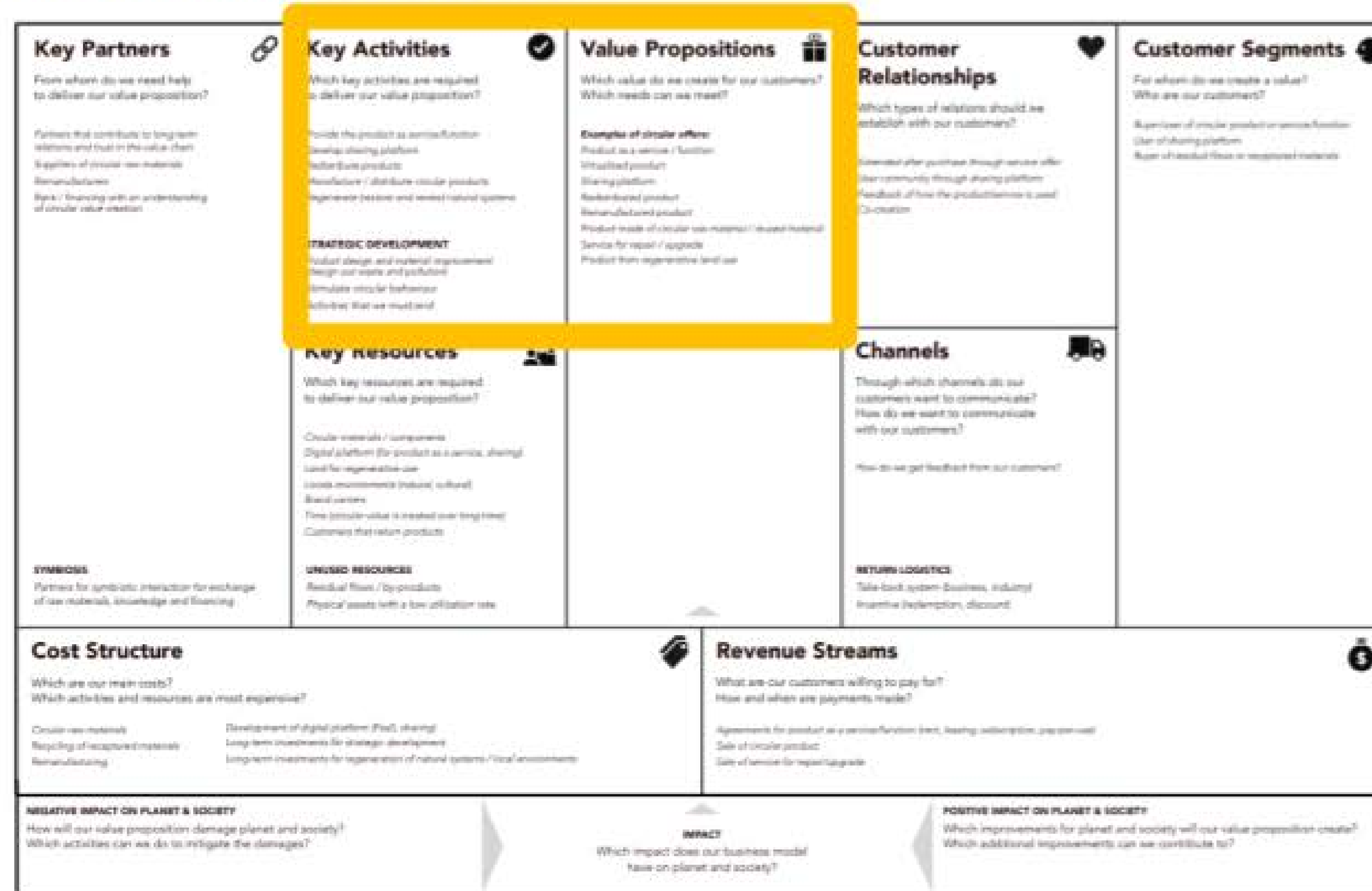
Program	Day 3 - PIVOT & Customer
Duration	9.00h - 16.00h
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Recap of day 1 & 2. Present customer needs- Pivot- WHO is your customer (segment -persona)- <u>SDG's</u>- Create persona- Who are your competitors
Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- SDG Impact Assessment Tool- Persona & Segmentation- Competition- Circular Business Model Canvas
Homework	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Create persona- How can you contribute to the <u>SDG's</u>?- Analyze your competitors/partners



Day 4: link between Tools and CBMC

DAY 4

Circular Business Model Canvas



Left side of the value creator - what is your solution?

What is your MVP/MVC?

Day 4: link between Tools and CBMC

Program	Day 4 - Minimum Viable Concept/Product (MVP) How to Pitch
Duration	9.00h - 16.00h
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Available resources- <u>Recap</u> <u>day 3</u>. Present persona- Finalize the right side of the BMC- How to pitch- What is your solution now? MVP / MVC- Communicate sustainability/circularity vs. Greenwashing
Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Value Creator (right side)- Pitch structure- Circular Business Model Canvas
Homework	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Finalize your MVP/MVC- Pitch MVP/MVC



Day 5: link between Tools and CBMC

Day 5

Revisit day 2 opportunity map



Project plan - map out steps to take

Circular Business Model Canvas



Partner	Value contribution	Strategic fit	Status
Partner1	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	Agreed
Partner2	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	Contacting
Identify partners that will be needed in order to achieving the mission, especially in term of competency need.	Explain what value that each partner bring to the partnership. What is unique contribution derive from each partner? Are they highly competent, experienced, connected? Why do your social enterprise need them.	Why will they need or want to work with you? Do your mission/activities fit with theirs? What is the value your social enterprise have for each of them? What is the synergy between you and them?	Describe the status of partnership. Did you contact them? Did they agree to work as partner? Do you have their management support?



Day 5: link between Tools and CBMC

Program	Day 5 - Circular Business Model Canvas (left side) Practice Pitch
Duration	9.00h - 16.00h
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- CBMC left side:- Key partners & Systems Thinking- logistics & funding- Practice Pitching circular ideas
Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Circular Business Model Canvas- Mapping partners
Homework	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Finalize pitch

Day 6: link between Tools and CBMC

Program	Day 6 - Grande Finale
Duration	13.00h - 16.00h
Content	Pitch for external jury

Additional Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Country Profile with information and useful references on circularity & business support- optional one-on-one coaching
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iii. Network / Alumni

The objective of the alumni initiative was to facilitate mutual learning among participants and serve as a support tool for founders to maintain focus. Throughout the duration of the program, international alumni were offered follow-up events at regular intervals, including a marketing workshop on 14.12.2023 and a sales workshop on 10.01.2024. The partners also provided follow-up coaching for participants requiring additional guidance in their business models. Following the conclusion of the program, international alumni were invited to join the Startup Preschool alumni, granting access to startup services and international programs like the First Customer program. The national components of the alumni network will be overseen by national partners.

Moving forward, it is recommended that the program be integrated into an existing alumni program, enabling participants to seamlessly join an established framework.

5. Learnings (Recommendations)

a. Key outcomes

Communication

One challenge with the programme was recruiting participants. We believe the main problems was that we were trying to establish a new brand but CIBIB as a brand did not show the intention as well as Circular Innovation Camp. In the future, we would recommend that the programme is branded differently in different regions: “Drivhuset” branding in Sweden, Startup Migrants branding in Germany and Norway, and UCLL & Blenders in Belgium.

1. Program branding:

- a. avoid acronyms that only mean something for yourself
- b. if you have an existing brand - use or link to this brand

Engagement

We noticed different levels of engagement in each country. Where in Sweden many entrepreneurs signed up for the program, interest was lower in other countries. A reason might be similar programs that are already existing in these countries. To not have an imbalance with too many Swedish participants, we applied a first come, first serve rule in Sweden to decline some participants.

- For the recruitment of the second round we paid attention to:
- Change the program name from CIBIP to Circular Business Camp
- Changed the duration from weekly half day workshops to concentrated bootcamp days
- Highlight the mix of knowledge and practical guidance to apply learnings on own business
- Highlight the international network in Northern Europe and additional information such as country profiles and an overview of circular hubs in Northern Europe
- Leverage testimonials from round 1 to promote the program

Program

1. Make it easy to attend: Companies have a busy schedule. For startups a programme with 4 blocks divided into 3 focussed training sessions of two days with time for homework between the sessions is easier to handle, than a spread out programme of consecutive weeks.
2. Keep it practical. Businesses want to solve their own problem, so it is important to find the right balance of theory and practice in workshops/breakouts: Limit theory to the minimum, but use circular examples in the theory part to make it tangible.
3. Income versus values. Balance business innovation skills with circularity related skills
4. Give companies new perspectives: The idea is that the participants should learn from each other through cooperation.

Discussions with others were highly appreciated and several also pointed out that they liked the international focus, as this gave new perspectives.



6. Break-out sessions:

- a. Smaller groups based on similarities work well
- b. Allow for some rotation as well to provide additional perspectives
- c. Keep time: give every participant the possibility to present and discuss their ideas
- d. Not all personalities match, allow flexibility to change groups
- e. Groups of three or more can mitigate the above and enrich the discussions

7. Digital set-up: works well, but do not assume that everyone is equally digitally skilled - allow sufficient time for support

During the Circular Business Camp participants worked together in groups to develop their business. In some groups the development, and the homework, was really impressive, while in other groups the progression was weaker. The facilitator needs to be flexible to align with the varying levels of assistance required by the participants.

Many participants, when returning to their everyday lives/work, did not work on their models/homework in between the camps. There are several possible solutions to this:

8. Homework in between sessions

- a. More time in between sessions helps
- b. Clear workbook can help to keep track and link with prior work
- c. Provide clear instructions and sent a reminder via email about the tasks
- d. In the end, the homework is just an enabler to support their own drive/commitment (perhaps consider not calling it “homework” due to possible negative experiences for the participants)
- e. The pitching at the end of each program was definitely the best motivator for the participants to do their homework.

9. Pitch as final deliverable:

- a. A concrete end presentation is the best best motivator - suddenly a lot of progress is shown
- b. Another motivation with the final pitch was that we invited external actors as a “jury” to give feed-back to the participants on how they could continue their work.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCALING

For our pilot we had too many facilitators. To be able to scale this model the cost should be reduced to about 10,000 euro or /500 euros/participant.

There are in our opinion two ways to scale this programme.

- 1.The first way is to use the methodology on site in a local setting and inviting in guest speakers with special knowledge for certain slots.
- 2.The program is run as a digital seminar - but with one main facilitator, guiding the participants through the program, plus a student intern assisting, in addition to guest speakers.

We believe that both these models will create additional value - as the participants will get a main facilitator who they can build a relationship with, in addition to inspiring guest speakers. Startup Migrants have had considerable success with this approach



6. An in depth guide to The Value Creator

The purpose of the “target group loop” is to understand the target group's needs, challenges, problems and wishes. This loop is not about your solution at all. Identifying someone's needs is difficult and the process is diffuse in several different ways. It is difficult in this way that people are not always aware of the underlying needs that guide their preferences and behaviors.

But our needs and values guide our decisions and behaviors whether we are aware of them or not. Instead of asking questions about needs, you can ask questions about someone's wishes and problems. Desires and problems are something that most people perceive as more concrete.

Compare for example:

"What do you need when you travel by train?"

and

"When you go by train, what do you want from the train journey?"

It is important to stop and take inventory of all the wishes and problems that someone may experience and not to move on too quickly. The first answers that come might be automatic answers, i.e. answers that come without the person having reflected on why they answer in that particular way. The initial responses may be influenced by what that person has experienced that particular day. Research into decision-making, refers to this phenomenon as availability heuristics. But it does not always mean that that particular desire or problem is the most important for the person if they were to look at the overall picture. Therefore, it is important to identify many wishes and problems first and let the interviewee prioritize between them then when you have made the alternatives visible and the person can contrast them in a clearer way.

To help you facilitate this process, we use the value creator tool. The right side of the value creator tool specifies what information you are looking for about your target group in the target group loop.



VALUECREATOR

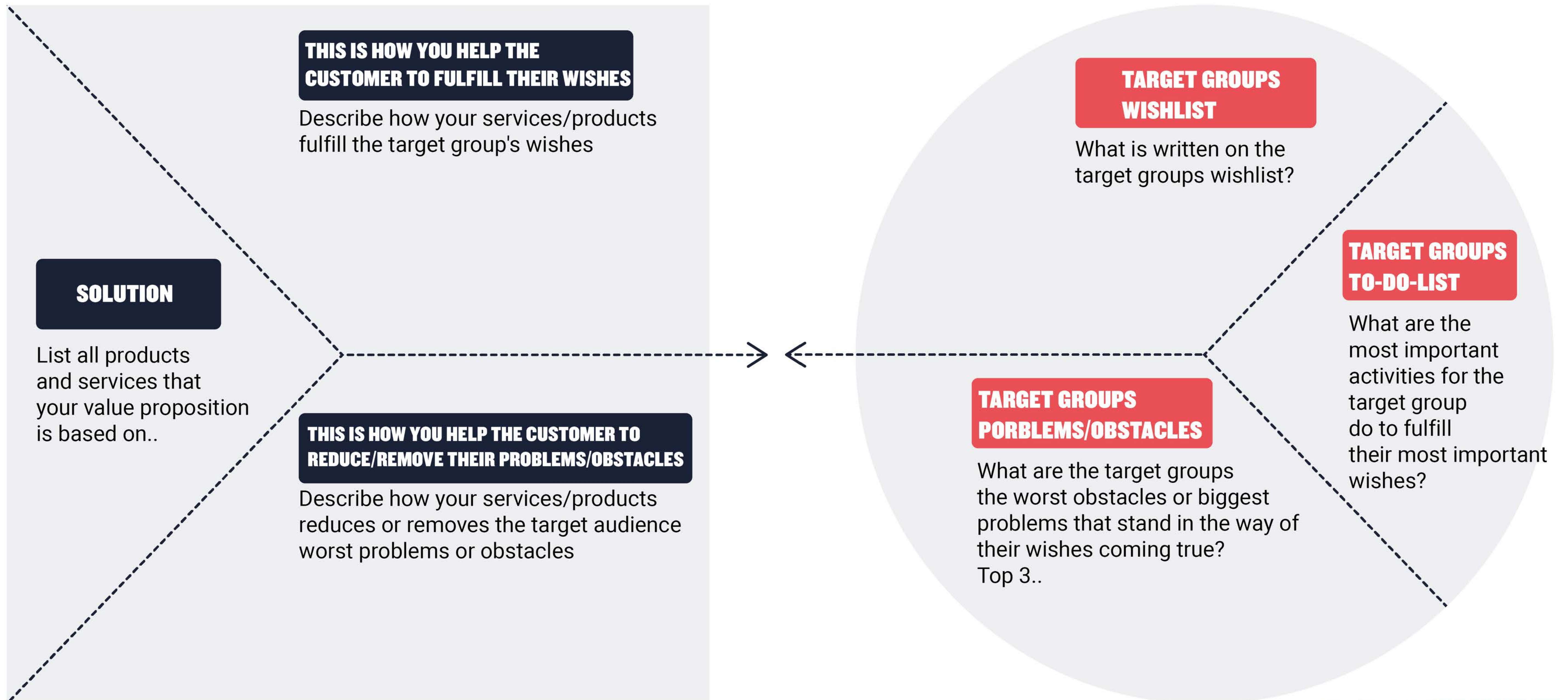


Figure 6: The Value Creator

Step one in the value creator is to find out what the target group wants in the given context that is relevant to your solution. - What is the most important in the specific context?

For example:

If you are developing a solution to get sedentary children to move more and the target group is parents, ask open-ended questions about what they might want for a meaningful leisure time for the family (including the children). It is important that the questions are not designed in such a way that they are too narrowly focused on the solution you are developing, but instead focus on the context regardless of the solution you have in mind.

If you ask questions with your solution as a filter, you run the risk of eliciting answers that are certainly connected to your idea, but may not be the requests that are the highest priority of the parents. List all possible wishes that the target group might have. Don't settle for the first wishes that come up because these can be strongly influenced by what has happened to the person you are talking to that particular day.

Remember to search for functional, social and emotional wishes and also listen for understood and unconscious wishes. When the person cannot think of any more wishes, it is time for the next step – ask the person to prioritize between the different wishes and choose a maximum of three of them.

For example, ask: "Of all your wishes, if you could only choose a maximum of three, which would you choose?"

Step two

is to find out the target group's highest priority problems. A problem is something that prevents the target group from achieving their wishes.

These too can be functional, social or emotional, expressed, implied or unconscious. In the same way as when it comes to wishes, you need to list all conceivable problems and obstacles that stand in the way of the target group's important wishes being fulfilled. When the individual you are talking about has exhausted all conceivable problems and obstacles, you ask him to prioritize the maximum top three, worst problems that stand in the way.

Step three

Once you've got your top lists of wants and problems, it's time to find out what's on the target groups to-do list. What options does the target group see in front of them to either fulfill their wishes or solve their problems? It can be about ideas for concrete solutions, but also about activities that can lead the target group to find solutions.

Returning to the example of activating sedentary children, for example, this could be on the to-do list:

- "I registered my child for a sports association" (idea for solution).
- "I'm googling for different leisure activities" (activity to search for a solution).

The to-do list is important from many perspectives. The target group can sit on exciting ideas for solutions that you can include in your development work. After all, the to-do list is also your competitor analysis where you find out about possible direct competitors, as well as the target group's substitutes, i.e. other ways of solving the problem or fulfilling wishes that differ from your solution. The to-do list can also provide clues to other central building blocks in your business model canvas or public model canvas, such as which channels the target audience uses. When it comes to the to-do list, finding a top 3 list isn't as important. Instead, you must compile a list of information that many of the target group have confirmed and there may be more options than three. You need to develop your solution so that it becomes the best option compared to the options that are on the target group's to-do list at the moment.

"You need to develop your solution so that it becomes the best option compared to the options that are on the target group's to-do list at the moment."



Work at the target group level

In the target group loop, you look for the target group's top 3 lists in terms of wishes and problems. If you only talk to one individual, you get an individual perspective. Individuals can differ even if they are part of the same target group. You need to talk to enough individuals in your target group until you discover a pattern.

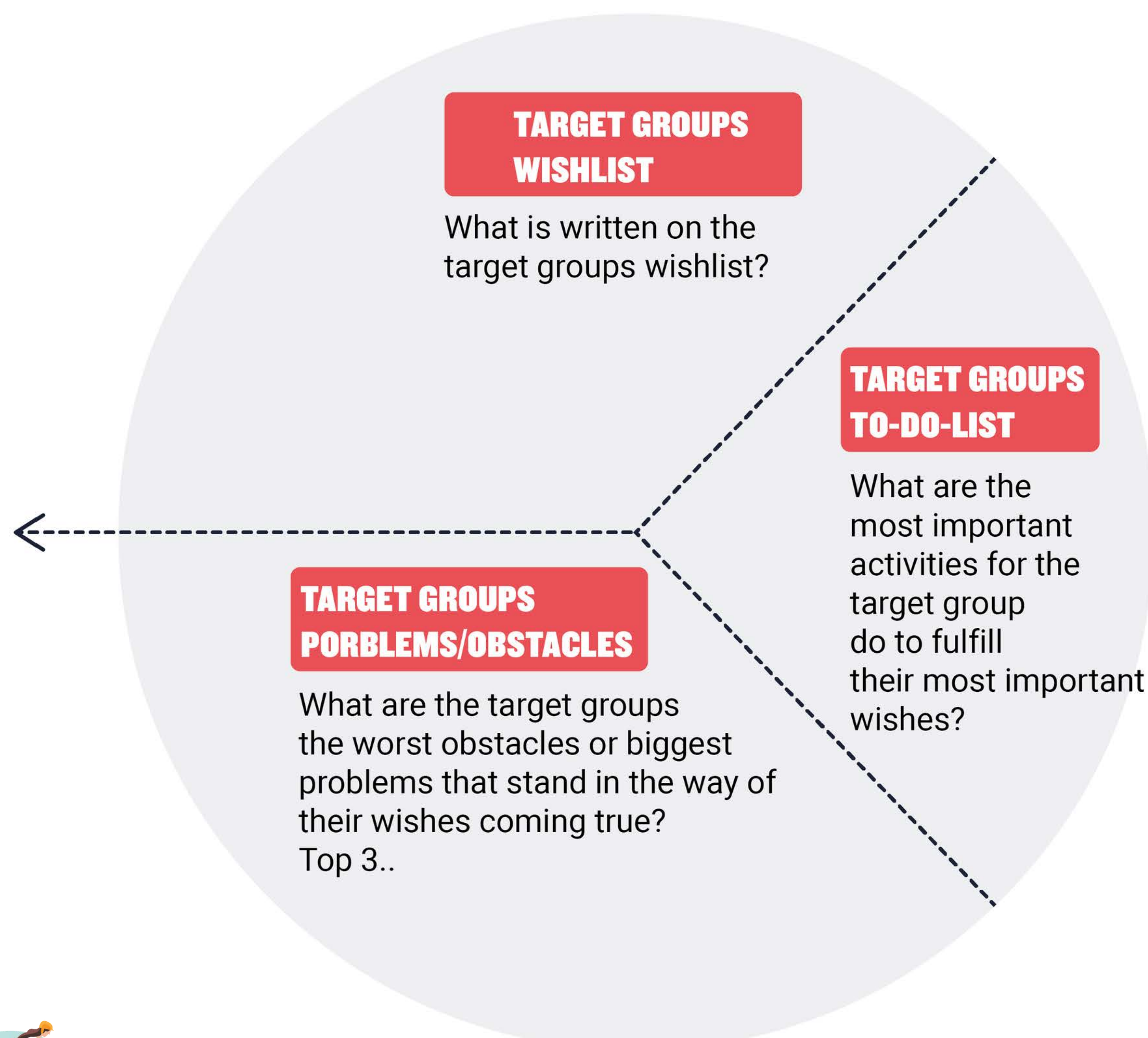
This is called achieving "saturation" in your material - further interviews do not provide much more information. When many individuals from the same target group leave the same answer (even if they probably formulate themselves differently), you can draw conclusions at the target group level and not at the individual level. If you do not find a pattern, despite having spoken to many individuals from your target group, it is because the target group is too broad. There are probably several target groups hidden within your definition, which causes the feedback to spread. Then you need to go back and define your target group more clearly. The same applies if you talk to individuals from different target groups and try to compile the information on a right-hand page in the value creator. It is important that you make a right-hand page for each target group and sort information and feedback in the correct right-hand page to be able to discover patterns and draw conclusions about each target group!



a. Collecting data

Through the target group loop, you have hopefully validated the prioritized needs of your target groups by identifying their top 3 most important wishes, top 3 most important problems and obstacles that stand in the way and what is on their to-do list (activities that they do or options that they see for to either fulfill their important desires or solve their worst problems). You have compiled these in a right-hand page for each target group. Now is the time to develop your solution and ensure that your solution has a clear connection to the needs of your target group. Use the assembled right side as a starting point

You can use this template to collect the data that you and your partners have gathered during the problem discovery and create a common “right side!” to The Value Creator



- What is on the target group's common wishlist?
- What is on the target group's common problem/obstacle list?
- What is on the target group's common to-do-list?

b. Designing the solution with the problem discovery

On the left side of the value creator tool, you describe in the "Solution" field what your solution looks like, what it contains for different parts and functions.



Try to be as concrete and detailed as you can. You need to be so concrete and clear that someone who has not heard of your solution understands what you offer. On the left-hand side.

- You must also describe how you contribute to fulfilling your target group's prioritized wishes **and/or** how you contribute to reducing or completely removing their worst-perceived problems and obstacles (which are on the right-hand side of the value creator). *You don't have to fulfill all three wishes and solve all three problems, but you must find at least one connection between your solutions and the wishes of the target audience.*

- This is where you create VALUE

Do you manage to create that connection with your existing version of your solution or do you need to make one or more pivots (changes) already now? Does it turn out that only part of your solution is creating value for your target group and that you need to zoom in and develop only that part? Is it difficult to create links to the right side with the existing version you have now and need to consider adding new features or parts? Did it turn out that the problem you had intended to solve was not a high priority with your target audience and that perhaps you should rethink and change the problem to solve for them? Or is it perhaps that you still believe you can create value, but not for the target group you have in mind but for someone else.



7. Links to documents



Final words from the authors

As we conclude this handbook, we extend our gratitude for your commitment to helping SMEs move from a linear business model to a circular business model. Rooted in the insights and experiences derived from the Interreg North Sea project Circular Innovation Business program (CIBIP), this handbook equips you, as a Business Support Organization (BSO), with the necessary knowledge, tools, and methods to replicate and advance the program developed within the CIBIP project.

Our aim is to help BSOs to guide SMEs in embracing circularity, thereby catalyzing positive environmental and economic impact. Through a comprehensive exploration of "Circular Economy and Circular Business Strategies," this handbook serves as your compass in navigating the circular business landscape.

The detailed program description, accompanied by the presentation of results and experiences learned in the CIBIP project, offers a blueprint for implementing successful circular innovation initiatives. Additionally, the appendix provides access to templates, tools, and the overarching program structure, facilitating seamless adoption and adaptation within your organization.

Thank you for your dedication and commitment to realizing a circular economy vision.

This program serves as a catalyst for driving a circular transition, tailored to the unique needs of small and medium enterprise entrepreneurs

