

Draft

Qualification needs SMEs¹

Cradle to Cradle (C2C) is a promising and innovative methodology of circular economy with 100% recycling rate, which corresponds to the objectives of policy and businesses particularly. C2C has been successfully used by individual major enterprises; more than 2.000 C2C products have already proven on the market. In SMEs, there does not currently exist knowledge of the C2C approach. The engagement of SMEs with these issues often lacks due to insufficient knowledge about strategies and measures of implementation or simply financial resources.

During this special further for SMEs, this knowledge gap is to be closed by measures adjusted to the SMEs conditions and needs. Various results resp. levels can be achieved by applying this very innovative approach, e.g. a Quality Statement, an Environmental Health Statement or "Inspired by C2C" or "Certified according to the Cradle to Cradle Certified™ product Standard".

➤ **Need for new effective solutions to maximum economic benefit**

Energy efficiency, climate and environmental protection belong to the EU top priorities and likewise of considerable and growing importance of the economy of the member states. With C2C approach SMEs can make crucial contributions to the achievement of objectives and at the same time strengthen their competitiveness, develop new market segments and create jobs on a large scale.

➤ **Training of SMEs and equipping with new knowledge, skills and experiences**

SMEs are often struggling with fulfilling the demands on the market in order to continue with their existence and work. Hence, there is seldom time and capacity for overthinking their strategies and economic management. According to the SME needs for effective innovative solutions with a maximum benefit (time is money!), the C2C training is time-saving with a maximum knowledge transfer and intense support by coaches.

➤ **“Time is money”**

This aspect affects SMEs in particular due to the very limited time, financial and personnel capacities. Seminars/trainings taking several days are not appropriate for SMEs with less than 10 employees at all, which are the most SMEs in Baltic Sea Region. This is why the C2C training is planned with very short theoretical lessons at the beginning and end of the training. The main part makes a self-study phase in the own enterprise, when applying the theoretical knowledge in practice and developing very concrete individual solutions for own enterprise.

➤ **Need for imparting comprehensive information package on C2C**

In order to become, be and stay innovative and competitive SMEs need to look for new working, production and service opportunities continuously. The C2C design concept allows responding the environmental challenges and at the same time opens new economic opportunities. SMEs should be aware of the C2C design concept and numerous possibilities C2C offers. During the planned further training at least basic knowledge about the Cradle to Cradle (C2C) design and the feasibility of its implementation in individual/own enterprises are

¹ The needs analyses bases on experiences of project partners and analyses of different reliable sources.



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to be gained. So that, completing the training the participating SMEs should know the main aspects of the Cradle to Cradle approach and be able to find innovative solutions in their own enterprise by working closely along the C2C approach. For this an individual project work will be done with the support of coaches.

➤ **Consideration of individual needs by applying C2C**

Since every enterprise brings along different preconditions and capabilities, the C2C approach has to be adapted to the special needs of every single SME. A universal design or approach would only prevent the enterprises from reaching their full potential.

It is important that the trainers examine the different qualification needs of the SMEs during the training in order to ensure a specific and detailed strategy of C2C. Issues like

- financial resources
- capabilities in terms of skilled employees
- sales market conditions
- customer services
- types of sales products

have to be considered while jointly developing a probable scenario.

In order to transform the gained awareness of circular economy, eco-efficiency and eco-efficacy into specific SME-adapted strategies, the initially stated circumstances have to be developed by the SMEs together with the consulting trainers during the seminar.

➤ **Need for high-quality services**

Given the limited time, personnel and financial resources in SMEs, there is a great need for high-quality services, which are tailored exactly to the needs for SMEs: duration of the training, date (in the week or rather at the weekend), relevance of the contents, structure, teaching methods, qualified trainers, etc. The C2C training contents are adapted to the needs of SMEs, the training will be organised concerning SME needs and training program for trainers developed and tested to ensure high-quality services for SMEs.

➤ **Intense support for SMEs**

C2C is an innovative, important but also demanding concept; a practical implementation accompanied by intensive coaching by trainers is needed. That ensures that the SMEs make the most possible out of their potential. Together with the trainers who consult and coach the SMEs in every step of the probable C2C implementation, favorable conditions for implementation are created. Thus, an application of C2C is feasible in the long term.

➤ **Practical implementation**

The experiences making and carrying out trainings for SMEs show that the step from theoretical knowledge gained in a seminar or training and its application in practice for the most of the SMEs is difficult. They fail often because of little things e.g. not knowing the proper way of implementation, methods or next steps for own enterprise. For this, the most optimum is if the training contains a practice part; support by coaches during such a practice part and even afterwards is required for successful implementation with sustainable effects. So that SMEs are able to find innovative solutions in their own enterprise.

➤ **Best practices**

Best practices serves best for SMEs to visualise difficult or even abstract contents in trainings. The experiences show that these also often ease the imagination how to use certain measures, approaches, methods in practice. In general, practical examples have proven as relevant and useful methods of teaching and better understanding of contents.



Findings of further needs for SMEs

- Enterprises and their customers must be treated respectfully and regarded as esteemed partners.
- The information exchange can be performed in writing and electronically; however communication in person is especially important.
- The cooperation with SMEs must be arranged in a process-oriented and permanent manner and stand out due to its highest reliability. It is necessary to build and to earn trust.
- Lecturers, trainers and consultants must be familiar with the needs of SMEs. It is ideal to have a constant contact person for an enterprise who also possesses specific knowledge related to corresponding branches and if necessary involves further experts.
- In the most of the cases SMEs have small capacities for information processing and problem solution. It is difficult for SMEs to filter the relevant information from the constantly growing information flow, adjust it to the specific requirements of their enterprise and implement them.

Professional journals are appreciated; also open newsletters with very short articles and references where further information can be obtained if necessary. Especially intensively the information is taken from daily and district newspapers. A very short announcement in a daily newspaper brings more feedback than a long article in a professional journal or a letter.

Letters with long text passages are often not read. At the same time seminars must be announced through mailing actions which arouse interest when they are compiled in short form, communicate information specifically and possibly contain a flyer which makes clear what benefits the seminar brings for the enterprise.
- Follow-up by phone after the training is essential. What matters is the individual contact. It should take place at off-peak hours and all the possibilities must be used, for example, meetings, discussion evenings etc.
- The transfer of information, for example, an announcement of a seminar, is one of the important tasks of the organizer to be successful with the training.
- Coaching of SMEs is the key to successful implementation of new economic practices, integration of new working structures, etc.
- All services and promotion for SMEs must be tailor-made for SMEs. A further training seminar must exactly correspond to the requirements and the problems of the participants to the maximum possible extent. A good preparation work to provide SMEs with specific knowledge or preliminary determination of demands of participants are decisive factors of success.
- Due to limited time SMEs further training and consultations must take place at a time which suits the enterprises best, for example, in the evening, on Friday afternoon and Saturday morning or during less intense working periods (e.g. in winter).
- SMEs require all the services and funding just in time. It is less important to get information or help at some point in time but the fact that they can directly obtain it when they have the need for it.
- For the most SMEs bureaucracy is annoying; they need all the services and funding from a single source. It is the task of the service and further training provider to guarantee it constantly. SMEs may not be loaded with coordination works among various institutions or persons.
- In SMEs the enterprise management is constantly overcharged with plenty of management tasks which must be usually performed by one person. Unlike major enterprises SMEs cannot have internal staff departments. Promoters and further



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training providers must externally perform the required staff functions and thereby offer non-monetary advantages to SMEs.

- The lecturers should be experts or possess profound knowledge in the certain field. They should also have good skills by the transfer of competences through the implementation of various didactic methods.
- It is favorable to shape the training interactive and flexible. It is worthwhile to perceive the expertise of the participants and self-produced findings. These are more present than many other forms of communication. Work in small groups according to the dynamics of the group requires for moderation, however, a high level of competence to use flexible methods.