



***Educational material for the training seminar in the framework of the project
EnvironmentYou - Environmental Management Enhancement by Youth-run SMEs***

Educational Thematic

ECOFRIEDLY BUSINESS

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Unit 1: Auxiliary Terminology for ECOFRIEDLY

Purpose

The purpose of this training unit is to inform and explain to the trainees the terminology that concerns the whole spectrum of green entrepreneurship. There are many concepts in this field that need to be clarified by the participants in the training program. This clarification needs to be done in the original section so that the other sections can be more easily understood.

Expected Results

Upon completion of the training unit the trainees will know:

- What is Biodiversity and why it is important
- What is an environmental footprint and how is it measured
- What is Green Marketing

Key Concepts

- Biodiversity
- Environmental Footprint
- Green Marketing

Subsection 1.1. Biodiversity

The word "biodiversity" is an abbreviation of the term "biological diversity". According to Article 2 "Definitions" of the Convention on Biological Diversity, "biological diversity means the diversity of living organisms of all origins including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and ecological complexes of which they are a part. It also includes diversity within species, between species and ecosystems." In a few words, biodiversity is defined as the diversity of life in all its forms (plants, animals, fungi, etc.) and at all levels of its organization (genes, organisms, ecosystems).

The concept of biodiversity therefore embraces all life on Earth. It includes the way of expressing or appreciating the diversity that exists at the various levels of the organization of life. It reflects the number, variety and variability of living organisms and the systems that make them up.

Biodiversity is usually considered at three levels:

Genetic diversity: It expresses the range of inherited characteristics of a particular species.

Diversity of species: It expresses the number (amount) of species (plants, animals, fungi, etc.) that can be found in a specific area or ecosystem. Species diversity affects the ecological balance, stability and function of the reactive mechanisms of an ecosystem.

Diversity of ecosystems: It expresses the number (amount) of ecosystems that can be found in a particular area.

Sustainable use means the use of components of biodiversity, in a manner and proportion that does not cause long-term shrinkage of biodiversity, thus maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of present and future generations.

The term also includes the concept of sustainable use of natural resources, so that the environment gives the maximum sustainable benefit to current generations, while maintaining the potential to meet the needs and expectations of future generations.

Why is biodiversity important?

Biodiversity is essential for the preservation of life on Earth, as it is the foundation of the vast range of goods and services provided by ecosystems that make a decisive contribution to human well-being. Human decisions that affect biodiversity, affect the well-being of humans themselves along with other organisms.

Biodiversity:

- Is important for our health and well-being
- Improves our quality of life and enhances our standard of living
- contributes to social well-being and cohesion and offers new opportunities for investment and employment

Ecosystem services are defined as the processes and functions that are provided by the natural environment and benefit humans. The services provided by natural ecosystems are classified into four categories:

Productive, such as the production of food, fuel, fiber and medicine

Regulatory, such as regulating the quality and quantity of water, air and climate

Supportive / Protective, such as maintaining soil fertility and nutrient cycle, primary production

Cultural / Spiritual, such as education, ecotourism, outdoor recreation

Ecological benefit

- Trees - bushes: capturing CO₂ from the atmosphere, oxygen production, soil formation, provision of habitat and food for other plants, animals, fungi and microorganisms.
- Insects, bats, birds (and other animals): important for plant fertilization (pollinators).
- Parasites - predators: natural control of populations.
- Earthworms - bacteria: recycling soil organic matter, preservation of soil fertility and productivity.
- Forests: retention of gaseous pollutants (key factor in reducing global climate change), modification of flood and erosion phenomena, noise suppression, and support of food networks, etc.

- Wetlands: water storage, support of food networks, enrichment of underground aquifers, trapping of sediments and toxic substances, modification of flood phenomena, etc.

Financial Benefit

- Food: species are hunted, caught, harvested (eg berries, mushrooms, grasses, snails), farming and aquaculture.
- Fuels: wood and coal are just two examples of natural resources used for energy production.
- Housing/Protection: timber and other forest products are used as building and construction materials, fibers (eg wool, cotton) and leathers meet clothing/footwear needs.
- Medicine: natural/traditional or as a processing product come from biodiversity, e.g. penicillin is produced from mold, codeine is derived from poppies, aspirin is made from the bark of White Willow (*Salix alba* - salicylic acid).

Social benefit

- Research, education, monitoring: There is still a lot to learn about what and how many species exist, how to make the best use of biological resources, how to maintain the genetic basis of the species, how to restore degraded ecosystems, etc. Natural areas are extremely vibrant laboratories for valuable research in various fields of biological sciences (ecology, evolution, etc.).
- Leisure & tourism: Biodiversity is a hub for tourism and leisure activities, which have already expanded rapidly into natural environments and are often the main source of income for the local population. People value these areas in a variety of interests: videotaping, painting, photography, bird watching, ecological fieldwork and other scientific activities.
- Culture: The conservation of biological diversity is of particular importance for the formation of cultural identity as human cultures evolve together with

their environment. It also covers many of the human needs for inspiration, aesthetics, meditation and education, for all the cultures of yesterday, today and tomorrow.

The real value of biodiversity, however, is incalculable, as it enables us and all living organisms to survive and adapt to a changing environment.

International studies and research agree on the fact that we are wasting the earth's natural resources and endangering the ability of ecosystems to support future generations. Whatever short-term benefits arise, they will undoubtedly be reversed by massive long-term losses. The deterioration can only be addressed if there are substantial changes in policy and practice.

Subsection 1.2. Environmental Footprint

The environmental footprint is a way of measuring the effects that human activities have on Earth. It is the measure of demand and consumption that estimates the coverage of the needs of a society, as well as the waste and greenhouse gases that it produces daily in areas of productive sea and land surface. It also estimates all the natural resources needed to support the material needs of a population or an individual based on the technology, lifestyle and habits of each country. The unit of measurement of the ecological footprint is 1 hectare, which is equal to 10 acres or 10,000 square meters respectively.

For the year 2013, the total environmental footprint of humanity was estimated at 1.5 Earths. In other words, it took one and a half Earths to meet the needs of the total human population (in food, clothing, housing, etc.), in a renewable way (that is, for nature to be able to regenerate and continue to produce at the same rate). Both biocapacity and ecological footprint are measured in global hectares, gha, a common unit that comprises the average productivity of all biologically productive land and sea on the planet in a given year.

It has been calculated that, in order to strike a balance between the productive capacity of the planet and the needs of its inhabitants, the environmental footprint for every human being on Earth should not exceed 1.8 gha, which occurs in only a few, extremely poor countries, mainly in Africa and Asia. But globally, the average environmental footprint per capita in 2010 was about 2.2 gha. Based on these figures, we estimate that the current needs of the world population in productive land are 18 billion gha. But our planet, unfortunately, has only 12 billion gha! This difference represents in quantitative terms the "environmental problem" of our time and the impasse to which it leads if no action is taken.

The environmental footprint can obviously refer to different environmental impacts (eg carbon dioxide emissions, drinking water consumption, etc.) and be direct, ie it results directly from the operation of the business (for example carbon dioxide emitted by the operation of a company's factory) or indirect, ie it arises from third party resources used by the company. In any case, nowadays, carbon footprint measurement (CO₂) - and in particular carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) emissions measurement - has been accepted as the global unit for measuring global warming and it summarizes all the individual gases associated with the greenhouse effect.

In any case, the current bad economic situation is obviously creating obstacles for the provision of sufficient funds which with proper use will contribute in the context of the mitigation policy and adaptation of our country and businesses to what should be done to address climate change.

Therefore, the ecological footprint described below is a resource management tool, which measures the impact of human activities on the natural environment and in extension can measure the environmental impact of various products. This tool assesses the productive area needed by an individual, a product or a total population, to meet its needs for consumption and absorption of generated waste. Thus, the ecological footprint can be measured (quantified) in "surface units" per inhabitant.

Subsection 1.3. Green Marketing

The idea of environmental protection first appeared in the mid-1960s in the United States. This movement led to the creation of the Council on Environmental Quality, the Department of Environmental Protection, and the creation of many environmental laws during the 1970s. All of the above have resulted in the US becoming a pioneer in environmental reform since it was the first to show the necessary interest and sensitivity.

The second attempt to reconcile the public with the idea of green marketing began in the late 1990s, much more organized and with more positive results. These efforts led to the creation of a global "green" movement, which exists up to this day. Society, citizens, social groups and businesses have begun to increasingly consider the impact and issues of the environment and to prioritize their actions in order to find a solution to this problem. But we must not forget the Kyoto Protocol, which entered into force on 16 February 2005. This Protocol is an agreement between 183 countries, including Greece, which aims to reduce the harmful pollutants that contribute to its creation of the ozone hole, to a point that these pollutants are environmentally sustainable. Through various processes and mechanisms, each of the 183 countries must control and ultimately reduce as many environmental pollutants as possible. Since 2005, Europe has reduced its total emissions by 8%, the US by 7%, Japan by 6%.

According to the American Marketing Association, "green marketing" is the marketing that designs and creates environmentally safe products. Green marketing includes a series of actions based on the following steps: product design, alternative production line, environmentally friendly package and of course the re-evaluation of the advertising process. There is no single definition for green marketing because it simply could not contain all the elements that surround it.

Marketing contributes to the creation of trends that will include ecology and ecological awareness. Everyday life has reached such a point that it is necessary for everyone to follow these trends, without exception.

It is necessary for companies to have constant access and knowledge of the latest and most attractive market trends. Such trends are discovered by continuous research on consumer buying behavior. After all, the products and services provided by companies follow the trends. Today's consumers are more concerned about the destruction of the environment and the negative consequences in the long run, than about the products they consume. For this reason, companies meet the demands of their consumers by using "green" promotion and production strategies, while at the same time gaining ground over their competitors but also a larger, more satisfied, and loyal customer base. The idea of green marketing pushes businesses to follow renewed ecological practices when dealing with consumers, traders, suppliers and employees. Until today, the percentage of companies that appear to be "environmentally friendly" is growing rapidly.

Unit 2: What is ECOFRIENDLY? Current situation in the EU

Purpose

The purpose of this training unit is to inform and explain to the trainees what Eco-friendly Business means while at the same time present in detail the current situation in the European Union regarding this field.

Expected results

Upon completion of the training unit the trainees will know:

- What an Eco-friendly Business is
- What a circular economy is and what are its prospects
- What the biodiversity strategy is and how it is related to the restoration of nature in our lives

Key concepts

- Eco-friendly Business
- Circular economy

Subsection 2.1. Eco-friendly Business

In recent years, terms such as "green" and "environmentally friendly", have become very popular in shows, advertisements and product packaging. The term "environmentally friendly" has been used for so many products and practices, that its meaning is in danger of being lost. By understanding the true meaning of "environmentally friendly", we can apply practices that will lead to a healthier life for the planet and its inhabitants, both young and old.

Definition

Eco-friendly literally means earth-friendly or not harmful for the environment. This term usually refers to products that contribute to green living or to practices that help preserving resources such as water and energy. Eco-friendly products also prevent air, water and soil pollution. They can engage in environmentally friendly habits or practices with a greater awareness of how to use resources.

Product qualifications

The construction of a truly environmentally friendly product keeps in mind both environmental and human safety. At least the product is non-toxic. Other environmentally friendly features include the use of sustainable cultivated or augmented ingredients, produced in ways that do not damage the ecosystem. Organic ingredients or materials are grown without toxic pesticides or herbicides. "Recycled" products contain glass, wood, metal or plastic that is recovered from waste and made into something new. Biodegradable products are broken down by natural decomposition, which puts less on landfills and the ecosystem as a whole.

With this as a given, in a relevant Eurobarometer survey, 94% of citizens in all EU Member States state that environmental protection is important to them. In addition, 91% of citizens said that climate change is a serious problem in the EU. European legislation must necessarily protect the environment, according to 83% of respondents. The Eurobarometer research shows that citizens want more to be done to protect the environment, and that they believe that large companies and industries, national governments and the EU, as well as the citizens, are responsible for that. Citizens asked believe that the most effective way to deal with environmental problems is to "change the way we consume" and "change the way we produce and conduct our business".

Climate change, air pollution and waste are the three most important environmental issues, according to the research findings. More than three quarters (78%) of respondents believe that environmental issues have a direct impact on their daily lives and health. More than eight in ten people are concerned about the effects of chemicals on everyday products.

Citizens recognize that fundamental change may be needed. From the answers given by more than 27,000 respondents, there is firm support for all the proposed measures aimed at reducing plastic waste and waste generation. The findings also show that citizens believe that products should be designed to facilitate the recycling of plastics, industry and retailers should make efforts to reduce plastic packaging, individuals should be trained in ways to reduce plastic waste, and local authorities should provide more and better collection facilities for plastic waste.

The research also examined attitudes towards the clothing industry and found high levels of concern about environmental issues and working conditions. Respondents express a desire for longer-lasting clothing made from recyclable materials.

Finally, support was expressed for other measures, such as investment in research and development, better information and education, encouraging businesses to engage in sustainable activities and stricter legislative control.

Subsection 2.2 Circular Economy

There is only one planet Earth, however, by 2050 people will be consuming as if there were three planets. Global consumption of materials such as biomass, fossil fuels, metals and minerals is expected to double over the next 40 years, with annual waste production projected to increase by 70% by 2050.

Given that 50% of total greenhouse gas emissions and more than 90% of biodiversity loss and pressure from water resources are due to resource extraction and processing, the European Green Deal has launched a coordinated strategy for a climate-neutral approach, resource efficient and competitive economy. Upgrading the cyclical economy from the pioneers to key economic players will make a decisive contribution to achieving climate neutrality by 2050 and decoupling growth from resource use, while ensuring the EU's long-term competitiveness without leaving anyone behind.

In order to fulfill this ambition, the EU must accelerate the transition to a model of regenerative development that returns more to the planet than it takes away from it, move towards maintaining resource consumption within planetary limits and, therefore, make efforts to reduce the consumption footprint and double the rate of use of circular materials over the next decade.

As far as businesses are concerned, working together to create a framework for sustainable products will offer new opportunities inside and outside the EU. This progressive but irreversible transition to a sustainable economic system is an integral part of the EU 's new industrial strategy. According to a recent study, the application of the principles of the circular economy in the EU economy provides the possibility of increasing the EU GDP by an additional 0.5% by 2030, creating about 700,000 new jobs. There is clear business interest in individual businesses as well: as manufacturing companies in the EU spend on average around 40% on materials, closed-loop models can increase their profitability by protecting them from resource price fluctuations.

The circular economy - by taking advantage of the single market and the potential of digital technologies - can strengthen the EU industrial base and promote creation and entrepreneurship among SMEs. Innovative models based on developing a closer relationship with consumers, mass adaptation to customer needs, sharing economy and collaborative economy, enhanced by digital technologies such as the Internet of Things, mass data, the chain Arrays and artificial intelligence, will accelerate not only the cyclicity but also the dematerialization of our economy, reducing Europe's dependence on raw materials.

In terms of citizens, the circular economy will provide functional, safe and high quality products that are cost-effective and affordable, last longer and are designed for reuse, repair and high quality recycling. A whole new set of sustainable services, product models as a service and digital solutions will create better quality of life, innovative jobs and upgraded knowledge and skills.

Europe will not achieve transformational change on its own. The EU will continue to show the way to a global cyclical economy and will use its influence, expertise and financial resources to achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. It also aims to ensure that cyclical economy works for citizens, regions and cities, fully contributes to climate neutrality and offers opportunities for research, innovation and digitization. It envisages actions for the further development of a strong monitoring framework, which will contribute to the measurement of prosperity beyond GDP.

Design of sustainable products

Some EU initiatives and legislation already cover, to some extent, aspects of product sustainability, on a mandatory or optional basis. In particular, the European Ecodesign Directive successfully regulates energy efficiency and certain cyclic characteristics of energy-related products. At the same time, instruments such as the EU Ecolabel or the EU criteria for green public procurement (GPP) have a wider scope but a reduced impact due to the constraints of optional approaches. In fact, there is no complete set of requirements to ensure that all products placed on the

Union's market become more and more sustainable and meet the conditions of circularity.

In order to make products climate-neutral, resource-efficient and cyclically economical, to reduce waste and to ensure that pioneering performance in sustainability is progressively common practice, the Commission will present a legislative initiative for a sustainable product policy.

The Commission, as part of the legislative initiative and, where appropriate, through complementary legislative proposals, will consider establishing sustainability principles and other appropriate ways of regulating the following aspects:

- Improving durability, reusability, upgradeability and repairability, examining the presence of hazardous chemicals in products and increasing energy efficiency and resource efficiency
- Increasing the recycled content of products, while ensuring their performance and safety
- Creating the possibility of reconstruction and high quality recycling
- Reducing the carbon footprint and environmental footprint
- Limiting disposable products and addressing early depreciation
- Imposing a ban on the destruction of unsold durable goods
- Encouraging the "product as a service" model or other models in which producers retain ownership of the product or responsibility for its performance over its life cycle
- Mobilizing the opportunities offered by the digitization of product information, including solutions such as digital passports, labeling and stamps
- Rewarding products based on their different sustainable performance, including linking high performance levels to incentives.

VALUE CHAINS OF BASIC PRODUCTS

The challenge for sustainability of key value chains requires immediate, integrated and coordinated action, which will be an integral part of the sustainable product policy framework. These actions will help tackle climate emergencies and feed into the EU's industrial strategy, as well as the forthcoming Biodiversity Strategy, the "Farm to Plate" Strategy and the Forestry Strategy. In the context of the management of sectoral actions, the Commission will work closely with stakeholders on key value chains to identify barriers to the expansion of circular product markets and how to address these barriers.

Electronic products and ICT

Electrical and electronic equipment is still one of the fastest growing waste flows in the EU, with current annual growth rates of 2%. It is estimated that less than 40% of electronic waste is collected and recycled in the EU. There is a loss of value when fully or partially functional products are discarded because they cannot be repaired, the battery cannot be replaced, the software is no longer supported, or when the materials embedded in these devices are not recovered. Nearly two-thirds of Europeans would like to continue using their digital devices for a longer period of time, provided their performance is not significantly affected.

To address these challenges, the Commission will present an "electronic product circularity initiative" to mobilize existing and new media. Under the new Sustainable Product Policy Framework, this initiative will promote the extension of product life and will include, inter alia, the following actions:

- Regulatory measures for electronic products and ICT such as mobile phones, tablets and laptops, in accordance with the Ecodesign Directive, so that these devices are designed with energy efficiency and durability in mind, repairability, upgradeability, maintenance, reutilization and recycling. Further details on this issue will be provided in the forthcoming Ecodesign Working Plan. Printers and consumables such as printer inks will also be covered, unless the sector reaches an ambitious optional agreement within the next six months.

- Focus on electronic products and ICT as a priority area for the implementation of the "right to repair", including the right to update outdated software.
- Regulatory measures for mobile phone and similar device chargers, including the introduction of a common charger, improved charging cable durability, and initiatives to disconnect the charger market from the market for new devices
- Improving the collection and treatment of electrical and electronic equipment waste, including by exploring options for a system for returning or reselling old mobile phones, tablets and chargers at EU level
- Reviewing EU rules on restrictions on hazardous substances in electrical and electronic equipment and provide guidelines for improving coherence with relevant legislation.

Electric batteries and vehicles

The future of transportation is based on sustainable electric batteries and sustainable vehicles. In order to make rapid progress in improving the sustainability of the emerging value chain of batteries for electromobility and to strengthen the cyclical ability of all electric batteries, the Commission will propose a new regulatory framework for electric batteries this year. This legislative proposal will make use of the evaluation of the Battery Directive, taking into account the following elements:

- recycled content rules and measures to improve collection and recycling rates of all electrical batteries, to ensure the recovery of valuable materials and to provide guidance to consumers,
- examination of the issue of non-rechargeable electrical batteries with the aim of phasing out their use in cases where there are other alternatives,
- sustainability and transparency requirements for electrical batteries taking into account, for example, the carbon footprint of the batteries, the ethical supply of raw materials and security of supply, as well as the facilitation of reuse, readjustment and recycling.

Packaging

The amount of materials used for packaging is constantly increasing, and in 2017 packaging waste in Europe reached an unprecedented level — 173 kg per capita, a level higher than ever. To ensure that all packaging on the EU market is reusable or recyclable in an economically sustainable way by 2030, the Commission will strengthen the mandatory essential packaging requirements for the EU market, and will consider other measures, focusing on in the following:

- reduction of (excessive) packaging and packaging waste, including through the setting of targets and other measures to prevent the generation of waste,
- promotion of packaging reuse and recyclability design, taking into account, inter alia, restrictions on the use of certain packaging materials for specific applications, in particular when alternative reusable products or systems can be used or when consumer goods can be transported safely without packaging,
- consideration of the possibility of reducing the complexity of packaging materials, including the number of materials and polymers used.

Plastics

The EU strategy on plastics in the circular economy has led to a comprehensive set of initiatives to address a problem of serious public concern. However, as plastic consumption is expected to double over the next 20 years, the Commission will take further steps to address the sustainability challenges of this widespread material and will continue to promote a coordinated approach to address pollution from plastics worldwide.

In order to increase the utilization of recycled content and to contribute to a more sustainable use of plastics, the Commission will introduce mandatory recycling requirements and waste reduction measures for commodities such as packaging, construction materials and vehicles, also taking into account the activities of the plastics recycling alliance.

In addition to measures to reduce plastic waste, the Commission will examine the presence of microplastics in the environment, taking the following steps:

- Restriction of intentionally added microplastics and control of agglomerates, taking into account the opinion of the European Chemicals Agency,
- Development of labeling, standardization, certification and regulatory measures for the unintentional release of microplastics, including measures to increase the binding of microplastics at all relevant stages of the product life cycle,
- Further development and harmonization of measurement methods for microplastics unintentionally released, in particular from rubbers and fabrics, and providing harmonized data on microplastics concentrations in seawater,
- Eliminating gaps in scientific knowledge about the danger and presence of microplastics in the environment, drinking water and food.

Textile products

Textiles are the fourth highest pressure category in terms of raw material and water use, after food, housing and transportation, and the fifth in terms of greenhouse gas emissions. It is estimated that less than 1% of all textiles worldwide are recycled into new textiles. The EU textile industry, which consists mainly of SMEs, has begun to recover after a long period of restructuring, with 60% of the value of garments sold in the EU being produced in third countries.

Given the complexity of the textile value chain, the Commission will respond to these challenges by proposing an integrated Union strategy for textiles, based on industry and other stakeholder input. The strategy will aim to boost industrial competitiveness and innovation in the sector, boost the EU market for sustainable and cyclical textiles, including the textile reuse market, tackle fast fashion and promote new entrepreneurship. This will be achieved through a comprehensive set of measures which include:

- Implementing the new Sustainable Product Policy Framework in the textile industry, including the development of eco-design measures to ensure that textiles

are suitable for cyclicity, by ensuring the utilization of secondary raw materials, combating the presence of hazardous chemicals and encouraging private consumers to choose sustainable textiles and having easy access to reuse and repair services.

- Improving the business and regulatory environment for sustainable and cyclical textiles in the EU, in particular by providing incentives and support for “product-to-service” models, cyclical materials and production methods, and enhancing transparency through international cooperation.
- Providing guidance on achieving high levels of separate collection of textile waste, which Member States must ensure by 2025.
- Strengthening the collection, reusing and recycling of textiles, including through innovation, encouraging industrial implementations and regulatory measures, such as extending producer’s responsibility.

Constructions and buildings

The structured environment significantly affects many sectors of the economy, the local job market and quality of life. It requires huge amounts of resources and represents about 50% of all mined materials. The construction sector accounts for more than 35% of the total waste generation in the EU. Greenhouse gas emissions from the extraction of materials, the production of construction products and the construction and renovation of buildings are estimated to represent 5-12% of the total national greenhouse gas emissions. Increasing the efficient use of materials can save up to 80% of these emissions.

The Commission will launch a new integrated strategy for a sustainable structured environment to take advantage of the potential to increase material efficiency and reduce climate impact. This strategy will ensure coherence in the respective policy areas, such as climate, energy and resource efficiency, construction and demolition waste management, accessibility, digitization and skills. It will promote the principles of cyclicity throughout the life cycle of buildings, through the following measures:

- Examining the sustainability performance of construction products in the context of the revision of the Construction Products Regulation, including the possible introduction of recycled content requirements for certain construction products, taking into account their safety and functionality.
- Promoting measures to improve the resilience and adaptability of structured assets, in line with the principles of the circular economy for building design and the development of digital registers for buildings.
- Using the Level(s) framework to integrate life cycle assessment into public procurement and the EU Sustainable Finance Framework, and explore the feasibility of setting carbon reduction and storage targets.
- Possibly reviewing the Material Recovery Targets set out in EU legislation on construction and demolition waste and the fractions of each material in them.
- Promoting initiatives to reduce soil sealing, recovering abandoned or contaminated industrial areas and increasing the safe, sustainable and cyclical use of excavated soils.

HORIZONTAL ACTIONS

Circularity as a precondition for climate neutrality

In order to achieve climate neutrality, the synergies between cyclicality and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions must be enhanced. The Commission will:

- analyze how the impact of circularity on climate change mitigation and adaptation can be systematically measured,
- improve modeling tools to make use of the benefits of the circular economy in reducing greenhouse gas emissions at EU and national level,
- promote the role of cyclicality in future revisions of national energy and climate plans and in other climate policies, as appropriate.

Proper financial management

Accelerating the green transition requires careful but decisive measures to orient funding towards more sustainable production and consumption patterns. The Commission has also proposed a new resource for the EU budget, which is based on the amount of non-recycled plastic packaging waste. In addition, the Commission will take the following steps:

- Strengthen the disclosure of environmental data by companies in the forthcoming revision of the Non-Financial Reporting Directive
- Support business initiatives for the development of environmental accounting principles that complement financial data with circular economy performance data
- Encourage the integration of sustainability criteria into business strategies, by improving the corporate governance framework
- Integration of the objectives related to circular economy in the context of the forthcoming reorientation of The European Semester and in the context of the forthcoming revision of the state aid guidelines in the field of environment and energy

Promoting the transition through research, innovation and digitization

Through digital technologies it is possible to track the route of products, components and materials, and the safe disposal of the resulting data. The European Data Portal for smart circular applications will ensure that the architecture and management system provides applications and services such as product passports, resource mapping and consumer information.

Subsection 2.3 What is biodiversity strategy and how is it linked to the restoration of nature in our lives?

BIODIVERSITY — NEED FOR URGENT ACTION

Biodiversity is the great variety of life on Earth: from the world's largest rainforests to small parks and gardens, and from blue whales to tiny fungi. We humans are part of this tissue of life and are completely dependent on it: it gives us the food we eat, it filters the water we drink and it provides the air we breathe. Nature is equally important for our mental and physical well-being, as well as for our society's ability to cope with global change, health threats and disasters. We need nature in our lives.

By giving nature the space it needs, we will have healthy and resilient societies. The recent COVID-19 pandemic makes the need for nature protection and restoration even more urgent. The pandemic raises awareness of the relationship between human health and ecosystem health. It demonstrates the need for sustainable supply chains and consumption patterns that do not exceed the limits of the planet. This reflects the fact that the risk of developing and spreading infectious diseases increases as nature is destroyed. The protection and restoration of biodiversity and the proper functioning of ecosystems are, therefore, crucial to strengthening our resilience and preventing the emergence and spread of future diseases.

Investing in nature conservation and restoration will also be vital to Europe's economic recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. When restarting the economy, it is vital to avoid falling behind and obsessing over destructive old habits. The Europe Green Deal - the EU's growth strategy - will be the compass for recovery, ensuring that the economy serves citizens and society and returns to nature more than it receives. The business argument for biodiversity is imperative. Industry and business rely on genes, species and ecosystem services as critical inputs for production, especially for medicines. More than half of the world's GDP depends on the nature and services it provides, with three key economic sectors — construction, agriculture, and food and beverages — relying heavily on it.

Conserving biodiversity has potential direct economic benefits for many sectors of the economy. For example, conserving marine stocks could increase the seafood industry's annual profits by more than EUR 49 billion, while protecting coastal wetlands could save the insurance industry around EUR 50 billion a year by reducing

losses from flood damage. The total benefit / cost ratio of an effective global wildlife conservation program worldwide is estimated to be **at least 100 to 1**. Investment in natural capital, including the restoration of carbon-rich habitats and climate-friendly agriculture, is recognized as one of the five most important financial recovery policies, which offer high economic multipliers and have a positive impact on the climate. It will be important for the EU to make use of this potential to ensure prosperity, sustainability and resilience to recovery.

Biodiversity is also vital to safeguarding EU and global food security. Biodiversity loss threatens our food systems, endangering our food security and nutrition. Biodiversity also supports a healthy and nutritious diet and improves agricultural livelihoods and agricultural productivity. For example, more than 75% of the world's food crops depend on animal pollination.

Despite this urgent moral, economic and environmental need, nature is in a state of crisis. The five main immediate causes of biodiversity loss —change of use of the soil and the sea, overexploitation, climate change, pollution, and invasive alien species — are causing the rapid extinction of nature. We see changes in our daily lives: concrete blocks are being erected in green spaces, wildlife is disappearing before our eyes and more species are in danger of extinction than at any point in human history. In the last four decades, the world's wildlife populations have shrunk by 60% due to human activity. Nearly three-quarters of the Earth's surface has been altered, squeezing nature into an ever-shrinking corner of the globe.

The EU's action in this direction is linked to the adoption of a Global Framework for Biodiversity after 2020, which aims to ensure that Europe's biodiversity is restored by 2030 for the benefit of people, the planet, the climate and the economy.

The current strategy, adopted in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, will also be central to the EU's recovery plan. It will be vital to prevent and develop resilience to future epidemic outbreaks of animal diseases and to provide immediate business and investment opportunities for the recovery of EU economy.

All new initiatives and proposals will be supported by Commission tools for better regulation. Impact assessments, based on public consultation, and environmental, social and economic impact assessment, will help ensure that all initiatives achieve their objectives in the most effective and least burdensome way and abide by the green oath of “doing no harm”.

NATURE PROTECTION AND RESTORATION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

The EU has legal frameworks, strategies and action plans for nature conservation and habitat and species restoration. However, protection is lacking, remediation is small-scale, and enforcement is inadequate.

Nature conservation and restoration must be intensified in order for biodiversity to recover by 2030. This must be done by improving and expanding the network of protected areas and by developing an ambitious nature restoration plan of the EU.

A coherent network of protected areas

Biodiversity performs better in protected areas. However, the existing network of legally protected areas, including those under strict protection, is not sufficiently extensive to protect biodiversity. The data show that the objectives set out in the Convention on Biological Diversity are not sufficient to adequately protect and restore nature. Global efforts are needed, and the EU itself must do more and better for nature and build a truly cohesive trans-European network on nature.

Member States will be responsible for defining additional protected and strictly protected areas. The designations should either contribute to the completion of the Natura 2000 network or be made in the context of national protection systems. All protected areas should have clearly defined objectives and conservation measures.

Protection of nature: key commitments by 2030

1. Legal protection of at least 30% of the EU land and 30% of the EU marine area and integration of ecological corridors, within a genuine trans-European nature network.

2. Strict protection of at least one third of the EU protected areas, including all remaining EU primary and old-growth forests.
3. Effective management of all protected areas, with clear objectives and conservation measures set and appropriate monitoring.

EU Nature Restoration Plan: Restoration of Land and Sea Ecosystems

The protection of nature that we have will not be enough to bring nature back into our lives. To reverse the loss of biodiversity, people must be more ambitious about restoring nature. With a new EU Nature Restoration Plan, Europe will take the lead.

The project will help improve the condition of existing and new protected areas and restore the diversity and resilience of nature in all landscapes and ecosystems. This means reducing pressures on habitats and species and ensuring that all uses of ecosystems are sustainable. It also means supporting nature recovery, limiting soil sealing and reckless urban sprawl, while tackling pollution and invasive alien species. The plan will create jobs, harmoniously combine economic activities with the development of nature and will help ensure the long-term productivity and value of our natural capital.

Strengthening the EU Legal Framework for Nature Restoration

Restoration of nature is already – partly – a requirement for Member States in existing EU legislation. However, significant implementation gaps and regulatory gaps hinder progress. Stronger support and enforcement is needed. In order to ensure that land and sea restoration strengthens EU's resilience and helps to mitigate and adapt to climate change as a key nature - based strategy, this strategy proposes two lines of action:

- Firstly, and subject to an impact assessment, the Commission will present a proposal for legally binding nature restoration targets in the EU in 2021, for the restoration of degraded ecosystems, especially those with the greatest carbon capture and storage potential, and for the prevention of and reducing the effects of natural disasters. In this context, the conditions under which the objectives must be

achieved will be determined, as well as the most effective measures to achieve them. Impact assessment will also examine the possibility of a pan-European methodology for mapping, assessing and achieving the well-being of ecosystems so that they can bring benefits such as climate control, water regulation, soil health, pollination, disaster prevention and protection.

- In this context, the Commission will ask the Member States to increase the level of implementation of existing legislation within clear timeframes and will provide them with relevant support. In particular, it will call on the Member States to ensure that conservation trends and the status of all protected habitats and species do not deteriorate by 2030. In addition, Member States should ensure that at least 30% of species and habitat, currently not in a favorable condition, fall into this category or show a strong positive trend. The Commission and the European Environment Agency will provide guidance to Member States in 2020 on how to select and prioritize species and habitats.

Restoration of nature in agricultural areas

As guardians of our land, farmers play a vital role in conserving biodiversity. They are the first ones to feel the impact of biodiversity loss, but also among the first ones to enjoy the benefits of biodiversity restoration. Biodiversity enables them to provide us with safe, sustainable, nutritious and affordable foods and provides them with the income they need to thrive and grow. European farmers are an essential part of the future of the EU and must continue to be the social and economic hub of many communities throughout the Union.

At the same time, some agricultural practices are a major cause of biodiversity loss. That is why it is important to work with farmers to support and motivate them to move to fully sustainable practices. Improving the condition and diversity of agricultural ecosystems will increase the sector 's resilience to climate change, environmental risks and socio - economic shocks, while creating new jobs, for example in the fields of organic farming, rural tourism or leisure.

In order to support the long-term sustainability of both nature and agriculture, this strategy will work in parallel with the new “Farm to Plate” strategy and the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), including through the promotion of ecological programs and results-based payment systems. In implementing the Biodiversity Strategy and the Farm-to-Plate strategy, the Commission will closely monitor progress and improvements in food security and farmers' incomes. The Commission will ensure that CAP strategic plans are evaluated on the basis of strong climatic and environmental criteria and that Member States set explicit national rates for the relevant objectives set out in this Strategy as well as the “Farm to Plate” Strategy. These plans are expected to lead to sustainable practices, such as precision agriculture, organic farming, agroecology, agroforestry, permanent low-intensity meadows, and stricter animal welfare standards.

Agroecology can provide healthy food while maintaining productivity, increase soil fertility and biodiversity, and reduce the footprint of food production. In particular, organic farming has great potential for both farmers and consumers. The sector creates jobs and attracts young farmers. Organic farming also provides 10-20% more jobs per hectare compared to conventional farms and creates added value for agricultural products. To make full use of this potential, at least 25% of the EU's agricultural area must be organically grown by 2030.

The adoption of agroforestry support measures in the context of rural development should be increased, as it has great potential for providing multiple benefits to biodiversity, people and the climate.

Addressing land takes and restoring soil ecosystems

Soil is one of the most complex ecosystems. It is a unique habitat, which hosts an incredible variety of organisms that regulate and control basic ecosystem services, such as soil fertility, nutrient cycling and climate regulation. Soil is an extremely important non-renewable resource, vital to human health and economic well-being, as well as to the production of food and new medicines.

In order to address these issues in a comprehensive way and to help meet EU and international commitments on land degradation neutrality, the Commission will update the EU's thematic strategy on soil in 2021. These issues will also be addressed in the Zero Pollution Action Plan for air, water and soil, to be approved by the Commission in 2021. Soil sealing and restoration of contaminated industrial areas will be addressed in the forthcoming strategy for a sustainable structured environment. A mandate in the field of soil health and food under the Horizon Europe program will aim to develop solutions for the restoration of soil health and functions.

Increasing the amount of forests and improving their health and resilience

Forests are of great importance for biodiversity, climate and water regulation, the provision of food, medicine and materials, the capture and storage of carbon dioxide, the stabilization of soil and the purification of air and water. It is also a natural habitat for recreation and learning about nature. Foresters play a key role in ensuring sustainable forest management and in restoring and conserving forest biodiversity.

To this end, the Commission will propose a specific EU forest strategy in 2021 in line with our broader ambitions for biodiversity and climate neutrality. It will include a roadmap for planting at least 3 billion extra trees in the EU by 2030, in full respect of ecological principles. This will create significant employment opportunities related to collecting and cultivating seeds, planting seedlings and ensuring their growth.

Restoration of the good environmental condition of marine ecosystems

Restored and well-protected marine ecosystems have significant health benefits and bring social and economic benefits to coastal communities and the EU as a whole. The need for stronger action is growing, as the loss of biodiversity of marine and coastal ecosystems is significantly exacerbated by global warming. Implementing an ecosystem management approach in line with EU legislation will reduce the negative impact of fishing, mining and other human activities, especially on vulnerable seabed species and habitats. To support this goal, the Maritime Spatial Planning to be

implemented by the Member States in 2021 should aim to cover all maritime sectors and activities, as well as area conservation management measures. The Commission will also propose a new action plan for the conservation of fishery resources and the protection of marine ecosystems by 2021.

Ecological orientation of urban and suburban areas

Urban green spaces, from parks and gardens to green roofs and urban farms, provide a wide range of benefits to people. They also provide business opportunities and a nature reserve. They reduce air and water pollution, as well as noise pollution, provide protection against floods, droughts and heat waves, while maintaining a connection between humans and nature. In order to restore nature in cities and reward community action, the Commission calls on European cities with a population of at least 20,000 to develop ambitious urban eco-orientation plans by the end of 2021. These plans should include measures to create bio-diverse and accessible urban forests, parks and gardens, urban farms, green roofs and walls, tree lines, urban meadows and urban hedges.

FACILITATING TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE

New governance framework

In the EU, there is currently no comprehensive governance framework to guide the implementation of national, European or international agreed biodiversity commitments. To address the gap, the Commission will implement a new European governance framework for biodiversity. This framework will contribute to the mapping of commitments and engagements and to the development of a roadmap to guide their implementation.

In this new context, the Commission will implement a monitoring and review mechanism. This will include a clear set of agreed indicators and allow for regular evaluation of progress and corrective action, if necessary. This mechanism will assist in the monitoring of the implementation of environmental policy and contribute to the European Semester process.

The new governance framework will ensure co-responsibility by all stakeholders for meeting EU's biodiversity commitments. It will support administrative capacity building, transparency, stakeholder dialogue and participatory governance at various levels.

The Commission will assess the progress and suitability of this approach in 2023 and consider whether a legally binding approach to governance is required.

Intensifying implementation and enforcement of EU environmental legislation

All environmental legislation is based on the proper implementation and enforcement of legislation. For the last 30 years the EU has implemented a solid legal framework for the protection and restoration of its natural capital. Recent assessments, however, show that, although the legislation is appropriate for its intended purpose, on-the-spot implementation is lagging behind. This has dramatic consequences for biodiversity and entails significant economic costs. Therefore, the full implementation and enforcement of EU environmental legislation is at the heart of this strategy, which should prioritize policy support and financial and human resources.

Further development of an integrated approach for society as a whole

Entrepreneurship for biodiversity

Through existing platforms, the Commission will contribute to the creation of a European entrepreneurship movement for biodiversity, drawing inspiration from recent initiatives and making it an integral part of the European Climate Pact. Special attention will be paid to measures aimed at motivating and removing barriers to the adoption of nature-based solutions, as these can lead to significant business and employment opportunities in a variety of sectors and are the key to innovation for economic or nature-based social needs.

Investments, pricing and taxation

Under InvestEU, a special initiative on natural capital and circular economy will be established, with the aim of investing at least 10 billion EUR over the next 10 years,

based on mixed public / private funding. Nature and biodiversity are also a priority of the investment plan under the Europe Green Deal. In order to facilitate the release of the required investments, the EU must provide long-term security to investors and help integrate sustainability into the financial system.

The Commission will promote further tax systems and pricing, which will reflect real costs, including biodiversity loss. This initiative should encourage changes in national fiscal systems to shift the tax burden from labor to pollution, to underpriced resources and other external environmental factors. The "user pays" and "the polluter pays" principles must be applied to prevent and correct environmental degradation.

Measuring and integrating the value of nature

Biodiversity issues need to be better integrated into public and business decision-making processes at all levels. In 2021, taking advantage of the existing work, the Commission will develop methods, criteria and standards for describing the key characteristics of biodiversity, its services, its values and its sustainable use.

These will include measuring the environmental footprint of products and organisms in the environment, including through life-cycle approaches and physical capital accounting. In this context, the Commission will support the establishment of an international physical capital accounting initiative.

Improving knowledge, education and skills

The new skills agenda will play a key role in the transition to a green economy and in the fight against biodiversity loss, with an emphasis on training and retraining the workforce in a wide range of sectors.

The future Horizon Europe program will include a long-term strategic biodiversity research agenda, as well as a scientific policy mechanism for research-based options to gradually and steadily increase the implementation of biodiversity commitments, with increased funding. The mandates of Horizon Europe will make a significant

contribution to bridging knowledge gaps and finding solutions to improve the health of ecosystems and their contribution to human health.

At the same time, the Commission will promote and facilitate partnerships, including a specific biodiversity partnership, to link science, policy and practice and put nature - based solutions into practice. The Commission will also set up a new Knowledge Center for Biodiversity in 2020, in close cooperation with the European Environment Agency. The Center will: (i) monitor and evaluate the progress of the EU and its partners, including in the implementation of international instruments related to biodiversity; (ii) strengthen cooperation and partnership, inter alia, between its scientists on climate change and biodiversity; and (iii) support policy development. In addition, the Commission will increase its support for the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Unit 3 How to make a business ECO-FRIENDLY – Success examples

Purpose

The purpose of this training module is to inform and explain to the trainees the steps that a company must take in order to be classified as eco-friendly. It also presents successful examples of companies that have developed this philosophy in their production process. Finally, the benefits that a company will have from its transformation into eco-friendly will be presented.

Expected results

Upon completion of the training module the trainees will be able to know:

- How to make their business Eco Friendly
- Which well-known companies are Eco Friendly
- What are the benefits for a business to become Eco Friendly

Key concepts:

- Eco Friendly

Subsection 3.1. Steps to create an Eco Friendly business

There are many steps that can be taken in order to make a business Eco Friendly. Whether your business is small or large, there are steps you can take immediately to reduce your environmental impact. See below the ways to make your business more environmentally friendly.

1 - Switch to reusable office supplies

In the United States, more than four million pens are thrown away every day. Simply switching to reusable pens which you can refill with ink, could help your business keep a lot of plastic away from landfills. Taking notes online is another eco-friendly option.

Appoint someone to monitor the static cabinet in an effort to help the office turn green. Having someone to pay attention to what products are used and wasted the most, it may be easier to identify the extra changes you can make.

2 - Practice green procurement eco-friendly business tips

One of the easiest ways to reduce the environmental impact of your business is to practice green procurement. Take a look at your suppliers and look for suppliers that provide products that have been produced in a sustainable way.

Avoid suppliers who use excessive packaging. Make sure the consumables are free of toxic substances that are harmful to the environment and buy only materials that can be recycled or reused. Paying attention to where your supplies and goods come from is a simple way to make your business more environmentally friendly.

3 - Choose Green Web Hosting

By choosing green web hosting, you can ensure that at least some of the energy required to power your site comes from a renewable energy source. This is much more environmentally friendly and very affordable.

4 - Reduce energy consumption

There are countless ways to reduce energy consumption in offices and other workplaces. You can replace incandescent light bulbs with LED bulbs and lights. If possible try to work in your office using alternative energy sources. Wind, solar and geothermal energy are all viable options.

5 - Make recycling a priority

Start by paying close attention to the types of things you throw away. It is possible for your office to generate more recyclable waste than you realize. Paper products, cardboard packaging, beverage bottles, etc. are all items that are obviously recyclable.

Subsection 3.2. Examples of Eco Friendly busines

With climate change being a growing problem and Earth Day being very close, there has never been a more important time to collectively realize how we are impacting the planet - as individuals, companies and businesses.

This was quickly realized by some businessmen. One of them is Elon Musk. He is one of the most successful entrepreneurs in the world. He makes billions of dollars every two minutes almost exclusively through green companies like Tesla and SolarCity. Now other companies are starting to follow.

Let's take a look at environmentally friendly brands that positively impact our planet and have a huge commercial success in the process.

1) Apple

When you hear the words "environmentally friendly", the first thing that comes to mind is not the largest technology company in the world.



In 2015, they signed a nearly \$ 1 billion deal with First Solar, the largest solar farm company in the United States. Using their technology, Apple powers all of its California stores, offices, data centers and headquarters with solar power, making it the largest solar power supply deal for a for-profit company in history.

Apple also focuses on the sustainability of its products and packaging. Apple Renew program encourages the recycling of old or used Apple devices and 99% of the packaging paper is recycled or sustainable.

The deal with First Solar was great news and most companies would feel the need to change their website, design and branding to show it. But not Apple. They know who they are - a highly respected technology company with a sleek, minimalist design - and they will stay that way, no matter how environmentally conscious.



Apple's new solar-powered campus in Cupertino. Via [Apple](#)

How can you be like Apple

There is no rule that says your eco-friendly practices should be at the forefront. Remember, you should not become environmentally friendly just to be noticed. Be "green" to protect the environment. Whatever your business is, do not worry about what others will think of you as "green". Just do it.

2) IKEA

IKEA has invested in sustainability throughout its business activities, including what customers can and cannot see. The Swedish furniture manufacturer's supply chain uses 50% sustainable wood and the cotton used in the furniture comes 100% from farms that meet Better Cotton standards which require reduced use of water and energy as well as reduced use of fertilizers and pesticides.

You can also see their commitment to sustainability in the stores.



IKEA has over 700,000 solar panels that maintain its stores and intends to start selling them to customers in the UK. In 2012, IKEA announced its goal of using 100 % energy renewable resources by 2020 - but just four years later it decided to become a clean energy exporter at the same time.

3) Unilever

Unilever has done much more than just green investments. It has made sustainability part of its corporate identity. The company's Sustainable Living Plan sets targets for sourcing, supply chain and production on everything, from energy and water use to treatment of suppliers and communities where they operate.



When it was first adopted in 2010, CEO Paul Polman said he wanted to double the company's business, while halving its environmental impact in just 10 years. It has taken great steps: three-quarters of Unilever's non-hazardous waste does not go to landfills, and the share of agricultural suppliers using sustainable practices has tripled. The United Nations awarded the CEO of the company with the Champions of the Earth in 2015 for his efforts to achieve this goal.

4) Panasonic

Panasonic doesn't get as many public accolades as many companies (something that Interbrand, which ranks companies on sustainability, calls a "gap"), but consistently wins high marks from experts. Like many companies on this list, Panasonic has ambitious energy goals, both in terms of efficiency and renewable energy, and also focuses on producing environmentally friendly products.



What distinguishes them is the way they have incorporated sustainability into their daily lives. It moved its North American headquarters from the suburb of Secaucus, New Jersey to a LEED-certified building in downtown Newark by Penn Station, a deliberate move to eliminate the need for employees to drive to work and reduce their carbon footprint. They are also working with several companies to launch a Sustainable Smart Town show in Japan focusing on sustainability.

5) IBM

IBM was another early adopter of sustainability and eco-friendly business. Corporate social responsibility and environmental stewardship has been part of the company's mission since the 1960s. Its first sustainability report was published in 1990 and its data centres have received awards from the European Commission for their long-time energy efficiency successes.



Today, IBM's efforts include smart buildings that reduce resource demand, green procurement, water resource management and more for a truly comprehensive approach.

6) Adobe

Adobe systems was the greenest IT company in Newsweek's 2014 rankings, a well-earned distinction. The company has already made some impressive achievements, including obtaining LEED certification for more than 70 per cent of its workspaces, including the restoration of a historic building in San Francisco.



It also has ambitious goals—including getting to net zero energy consumption and reducing its packaging, packaging being a resource drain and big contributor to plastic pollution. Adobe was also a corporate leader in reducing its water use to respond to California's historic drought, even after it had already reduced its water use by more than 60 per cent since 2000 through means like installing environmentally friendly fixtures and landscaping with native plants.

7) Nike

Nike hasn't always had a stellar record when it comes to corporate sustainability, but they've made a lot of change that's doing a lot of good. Nike topped Morgan Stanley's list in 2015 of most sustainable clothing and footwear brands. Key to their success is the company's robust disclosure about its supply chain and production practices. They're also making it easier for designers to make green choices with an app that helps you compare the environmental footprint of different fabrics.



It also uses post-consumer recycled materials in some of its products, including its 2011 World Cup jerseys. It's also redesigned its boxes to reduce packaging, committed to eliminating chemical discharges, invested in energy efficiency in its factories and more. Nike is also partnering with NASA and other government agencies to spark innovation in chemistry to green the processing of raw materials into goods.

Subsection 3.3. Eco Friendly business benefits

Environmental awareness is steadily rising in Europe, both for companies and for citizens.

However, for many businesses and citizens, this environmental attitude has somehow been disconnected from action, even though most people believe they could and should do more. The European Union economy consists almost entirely of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), around 20 million. They create the largest employment in Europe and much of the EU's GDP. Even though their individual environmental impacts are small, their cumulative impact is significant. In

their environmental (or not) action can the real green consciousness be measured and not in their recognition that there is a problem.

That needs to change. Fortunately, businesses in Europe are facing plenty of "environmental offers" that provide a timetable and solutions for reductions in energy use, material waste, water use and recycling efforts. Measures for best environmental practices can be found online with just a few clicks. Small and large companies from different sectors also have access to many training opportunities, workshops, labels, services and products to make the production and consumption process truly "green".

Whether it is eco-innovation funds and capacity building workshops offered by public bodies, public or private organizations, or services provided by associations, companies can ask for green support in most EU Member States at low entry costs. Small businesses can also expand their offerings with environmentally friendly products and services, while larger companies can build new markets with cost-effective resources, eco-designed products and so on.

Why should a business go green?

If you are not convinced of the socio-environmental responsibility that your business has to take on, you may be more receptive to the benefits of having a green attitude with resource efficiency measures, green products and services and a circular economy.

The Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) refers to all the positive results of every EMAS certified organization, small and large, through audited environmental statements. Green is becoming more and more attractive as a business strategy. Many studies show that companies committed to sustainability perform financially better than their competitors.

At EU level, many labels certify that a product or service is green. Among them, the EU Ecolabel promotes excellence in the label industry. With 40,000 products and services, from children's clothing to electronics, this label helps companies and

consumers navigate the green maze. It is a trusted label that identifies products and services with reduced environmental impact.

Recognizing that businesses, governments and consumers are not moving fast enough to protect the environment, a new economic model is emerging rapidly: a circular economy. In a circular economy, the value of products and materials is maintained in the system as much as possible. The use of waste and resources is minimized and when a product reaches the end of its life, it is used again to create further value.

That means local jobs, local products and local benefits in a globalized economy. This new model will affect several businesses, such as the latest EU legislation, which plans to ban disposable plastics by 2021. The food chain will then follow, along with the construction sector, products based on organic products and, of course, critical raw materials.

As it is known, the energy sector is the global strategic pillar of development that primarily concerns the Greek economy, while at the same time it is the strongest sector with the largest, often adverse impact on the natural and cultural resources on which tourism is based.

Consequently, the importance of the energy and environmental issues at national and international level is very high and commonly known as New Energy Finance (Bloomberg, 2006). Especially for Greece, the issue of energy is crucial for its economic development, both because of its almost exclusive dependence on conventional energy sources (SMEs), such as domestic and polluting lignite or imported oil and liquefied natural gas, as well as for the development opportunities offered in a country like Greece, which has the comparative advantage of fundamental geostrategic importance in relation to its energy issues.

It is daily confirmed that "green growth", which is based on sustainable resources, is a great opportunity for the future of our country. It is, after all, a clear and achievable national goal, and more relevant than ever today, and we are called upon to face two key challenges: overcoming the grip of the international economic crisis

and tackling environmental problems effectively (especially in relation to climate change) to the extent that they concern our country. Already in many countries of the world, as well as in Greece, the new environmental economy (RES, recycling, reuse of resources, etc.) has begun to bear fruit. It creates investment opportunities in many sectors, especially in tourism, which is the most comparative and competitive advantage of the Greek economy, while strengthening the overall economic activity and contributing to the creation of new jobs (basic and current problems of our national economy).

If after all this you are still not convinced that your business should go green, beware: your competitors will do just that.



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