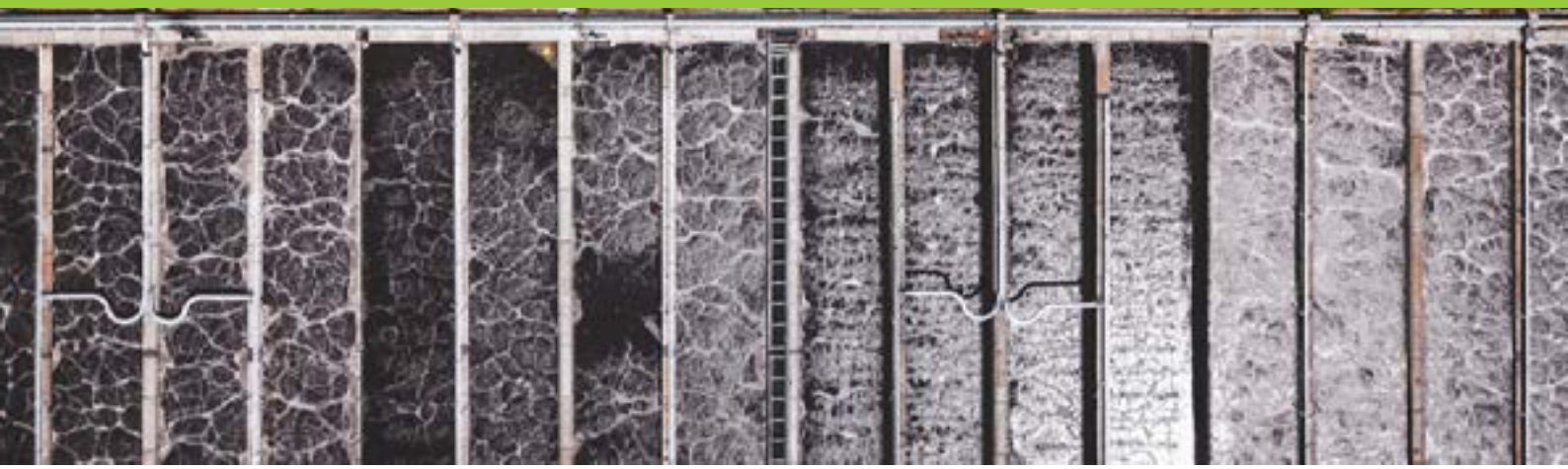
Interreg North-West Europe WOW!

EUROPEAN UNION

European Regional Development Fund

RESOURCE RECOVERY FROM SEWAGE

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS FOR VALORISATION ROUTES



Partners within the WOW! team wrote a report that describes critical success factors for the recovery of raw materials from sewage and bringing these resources to the market based on lessons learned in EU subsidy projects. Why have some recovery techniques been successfully implemented while others are still in the pilot phase or did not succeed?

Sewage contains valuable substances that can be used as raw materials for biobased products. Different EU projects such as the Interreg NWE project WOW! – (Wider business Opportunities for raw materials from Wastewater) have shown that recovery of raw materials from sewage is technically possible and that there is a potential market opportunity for these raw materials. However, to date this potential has hardly been exploited to its full potential in Europe resulting in loss of valuable materials, CO2-emmissions and less efficient use of natural resources.

Based on the information gathered, two important drivers can be distinguished that determine whether resource recovery from sewage becomes a success in the EU:

ACCEPTANCE OF RAW MATERIALS FROM SEWAGE

Sewage has always been linked to unhygienic and pollution. To accept raw materials from sewage, first of all the organizations that are responsible for treating sewage (suppliers) need to realize that sewage is actually a valuable resource and not waste. For the acceptance of products from sewage by the customers (businesses and consumers), it is important that the hygienic and environmental safety can be assured. A promising option to achieve this is the development of a EU-Standard to assess the quality of new products from sewage and the introduction of EU-sustainability certification for all products.

POLICIES RELATED TO USE OF PRODUCTS FROM SEWAGE

The current European regulatory framework considers products made from sewage as waste. This means that for the application of these products it is needed to obtain an end-of-waste status. This is not an easy task since the requirements described in article 6 of the European Waste Framework Directive a) have a focus on minimising risks instead of maximising recovery of resources and b) can be interpreted in different ways.

This leads to different interpretations of the European Waste Framework Directive between member states and therefore differences in costs, procedures, acceptance and practice of resource recovery around the EU.

A solution to overcome this is an update of the existing European regulatory framework on waste and harmonise it with the Circular Economy Package to provide harmonised, clear and transparent guidance on preferred End-of-Life options and to facilitate optimal resource use (including waste). The latter can be stimulated by implementing favourable tax systems or by making a certain percentage of recovery mandatory, similar to what exists for biofuels.

Looking at the critical success factors for the recovery of raw materials from sewage, it is difficult to distinguish generic success factors. However, as a rule of thumb projects tend to be more successful if there is regular consultation with regional and national authorities and if a project is not afraid to take a next step in (legal) acceptance of a product if not all sign are green yet.

The drivers and critical success factors will be elaborated further in the National Policy Action Plans and the European Roadmap which are drafted as part of the WOW! project.

MORE INFORMATION

Download the complete report

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