

Press Release | Bologna | October 2024

CIRAN held its 3rd Consortium Meeting in Bologna, Italy: Insights and Future Directions

From September 30th until October 3rd, 2024, the CIRAN project team gathered in Bologna, Emilia-Romagna, Italy, for the 3rd in-person Consortium Meeting. An engaging opportunity for project partners to share the progress and results with the External Experts and the European Commission's Project Officer, the team reviewed the project implementation and planned the next steps for the second half of CIRAN. This four-day event brought together key stakeholders and provided valuable insights to shape the project's future direction.

A strategically structured meeting to address various project objectives

The first two days, September 30th and October 1st, were dedicated to maximising the time with CIRAN External Experts, whom we last met during the Lisbon Consortium Meeting in January. The starting point was a **workshop** initiated with an engaging parliamentary hearing exercise, focused on key assumptions for permitting a mine in an environmentally protected area. This set the stage for partners to present the latest updates on their respective Tasks, with expert feedback proving invaluable in reckoning results from the project's first half. The afternoon session featured a **group exercise** aimed at refining a **permitting decision tree**. Participants, comprising both external experts and project partners, were divided into four groups to discuss one of the following priority areas:

1. Safeguarding environmental protection
2. Increasing social acceptance
3. Enabling fast permitting times
4. Fostering long-term economic development in the local community

These discussions were aimed at reaching a **consensus** on the permitting decision-making process based on each of these priorities, further enhancing collaboration between partners and experts. The day concluded with a delightful **city tour of the historical sites of Bologna** led by a local guide, followed by a group dinner to continue engaging in insightful conversations and further the connections among the CIRAN community.

Further on the activities planned with the External Experts, the second day included a **field trip** to the **Vena del Gesso Romagnola Regional Park**, recognised as a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** since 2023. The group met with park authorities at Rocca di Riolo Terme, where presentations covered the park's protected area designations, sustainability efforts, and the extraction activities of the **Saint-Gobain group** at the Monte Tondo Quarry. A **guided tour of the active quarry and the Saint-Gobain production facilities** focused on plasterboard



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manufacturing from the extracted gypsum helped illustrate the balance between biodiversity preservation and economic activities for regional and national development. Following the previous example discovered in the [Vale de Meios recovering area in January \(Portugal\)](#), this represents **another insightful case study** where the needs of the local and regional community members, the naturally and biodiversity-rich environment, and the market trends were balanced, where the industry and the park authorities actively collaborate to ensure compliance with regional regulation on permitting and nature preservation. The Italian newspaper La Stampa published an [article](#) about CIRAN's visit to Monte Tondo.

After bidding farewell to the external experts and expressing gratitude for their collaboration and insights, the **third day** focused on the **Project Review Meeting with the European Commission's Project Officer (PO)** and an academic external evaluator. CIRAN's results from the first half of the project were presented in detail, highlighting milestones achieved and ongoing key strategic objectives. The project received overall approval and commendations from both the PO and evaluator, who encouraged the Consortium to maintain its momentum. For this reason, on the **last day**, October 3rd, the Consortium partners discussed the **next steps and strategies** to achieve project objectives by December 2025, ensuring effective implementation of the remaining tasks for the completion of CIRAN as well as identifying the open opportunities to continue working on this complex balance.

To conclude, another successful Consortium Meeting would not have been possible without the great involvement of our hosts, the **partner Regione Emilia Romagna (RER)**, and the active engagement of the External experts, the Vena del Gesso Romagnola park authorities, the Saint-Gobain group, and all other local and regional collaborators.



CIRAN Consortium and External Experts in Riolo Terme (Italy). @CIRAN



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CIRAN Consortium and External Experts with the Saint Gobain team in Monte Tondo (Italy). @CIRAN

About: CIRAN is a project funded by the European Union that will develop, test and validate processes to arrive at systemic policy-making, balancing environmental protection and societal needs for accessing critical raw materials (CRMs). This will be achieved through: 1) streamlined permitting procedures in environmentally protected areas; 2) modern policies and social contract frameworks that reconcile the protection of environmentally sensitive areas and domestic sourcing of CRMs in the EU; and 3) the development of a community of practice to support the uptake of the CIRAN recommendation and that will remain active after the project funding period. CIRAN proposes a logical framework that justifies extraction on the basis of a system-oriented assessment and the co-creation of knowledge (i.e. tested and validated by communities located in or nearby environmentally protected areas). It will create novel social contract models identifying rights, obligations and responsibilities of governments (national/regional), communities and mine operators, capable of dealing with transformations and challenges due to climate change. As a distinctive feature, CIRAN brings together 25 external experts on the environmental, political, social, economic, and technological factors that will shape the energy transition responses and the demand for CRMs. These experts, organised in four Expert Groups (EGs), will work with the Consortium, conveying insights on policy-making and -implementation, economic drivers, technologies, mining, local governance, social capital, nature conservation and biodiversity. The EGs will actively engage in CIRAN through synergetic processes combining analysis and deliberation, and participation in project workshops and structured consultations (e.g., focus groups, foresight analysis). The Consortium is geared to develop inclusive policy-making instruments that support the EU Green Deal and UN-led reforms to reach the climate commitments and sustainable development goals.

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Website: www.ciranproject.eu

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Media contact:

Project Coordinator, International Raw Materials Observatory: INTRAW
Vitor Correia - vcorreia@intraw.eu

Outreach and Dissemination Leader, La Palma Research Centre (LPRC):
Ariadna Ortega – ariadna.ortega@lapalmacentre.eu

Helena Robert i Campos – helena.robert.campos@lapalmacentre.eu



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