



Sustainable raw materials management:

Open multi-stakeholder dialogue launched!

The new FP7-funded project COBALT addresses needs and opportunities to foster sustainable raw materials supply and use in Europe. More than 80 participants from all over Europe start dialogue on future options.

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The challenges ahead for sustainable raw materials management

Europe's increasing import dependency on raw materials and the associated impacts for its supply and use are addressed by the European Union's European Innovation Partnership on raw materials. Environment Commissioner Janez Potocnik referred to these challenges in his opening message for the COBALT opening conference : He pointed out that in an era marked by increasing resource scarcity, a strong industrial base that can continue to contribute to wealth and job creation in the future will depend on our ability to find efficiencies along the raw materials value chain. In this context, the coordinator of COBALT, Dr. André Martinuzzi from the Institute for Managing Sustainability at the Vienna University of Economics and Business, argued that "addressing broader issues in the policy debate on sustainable raw materials management is very important: " (i) taking a life cycle perspective by considering both production and final consumption systems, and (ii) going beyond security of supply, addressing the fundamental issue of the limits ecological boundaries impose on raw materials use."

COBALT: Open dialogue for mutual understanding

The COBALT Opening Conference, held on 28-29 November 2013 in Brussels, brought together more than 80 participants from 15 European countries to engage in an open dialogue and to increase mutual understanding for opportunities towards sustainable raw materials management in Europe. "Providing a platform for open and fair exchange is the main objective of COBALT. In a policy field where not all stakeholders share the same interests, a dialogue platform is key in order to achieve mutual understanding and trust, and to ultimately achieve sustainable raw material management in Europe," says Dr. André Martinuzzi.

The conference encouraged different stakeholder groups (incl. representatives from business and industry, environmental NGOs, consumer organisations, policy making, and research) to share their common as well as different views on sustainable raw materials management. In this context, representatives from the European Commission's DG Enterprise and Industry stated that European Raw Materials Policy, e.g. through the European Innovation Partnership (EIP) on Raw Materials, fosters sustainable use of European mineral resources to reduce import dependencies and increase competitiveness of the European economy. Contrasting perspectives called for fighting growing social inequalities and respecting planetary limits at the global level by reducing virgin material consumption within Europe, both of domestic and foreign sources, in the context of globally sustainable development.



Mining activities and their social as well as environmental impacts in a local context were among the rather contentious and emotional topics addressed. Exemplified by concerns raised in the case of the Rosia Montana gold mine in Romania, participants called for improving social and environmental standards and their compliance for mining activities. According to a European Commission's DG Enterprise and Industry representative, current activities under the EIP on Raw Materials tackle more socially and environmentally sustainable, alternative mining technologies and frameworks.

Promoting pillars of a circular economy: one mutually shared avenue of collaboration

Fostering a circular economy through closing material cycles, improving recycling, urban mining and also substitution of raw materials plays a prominent role and receives attention and calls for commitment under the EIP. During the conference discussions, a circular economy emerged as one mutually shared hot topic for further action. While fostering the use of secondary raw materials through recycling and urban mining practices seemed much more within reach of joint action in the shorter term, the issues on planetary boundaries and sustainable mining seem to require a longer-term debate.

The COBALT opening conference was only the first step to create the space for an open and continuous dialogue between various stakeholders. COBALT future activities will engage with stakeholders to create European and regional dialogues and explore future avenues for collaboration on the issues discussed at the first COBALT Opening conference!

In case you are interested in getting involved in future COBALT activities and events, please to the project's homepage <http://www.cobalt-fp7.eu/> or contact us at cobalt@cobalt-fp7.eu

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