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## A framework for a just circular economy



This study, in which Mario Pansera from the Department of Business of the UAB participates, proposes to modify the circular economy approach by also including the perspective of social justice. This new paradigm, the just circular economy, would put the focus of the transition to this model by putting the principles of social and environmental justice first instead of approaching it as a mere technocratic challenge.

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A Circular Economy (CE) can be summarised as an economic system designed to minimise waste and optimise resource use by keeping materials in use for as long as possible, reducing the amount of waste produced, and preserving the value of products and materials. The CE model aims to create a closed-loop system in which materials are reused, repaired, and recycled, rather than being thrown away after their initial use.

This approach to the economy has gained significant attention in recent years due to its potential to address environmental and economic challenges, but it has also faced criticisms from various fronts. Critics have raised concerns that the CE may not address the root causes of environmental degradation, the main drivers of class and gender inequalities, and may not be economically viable in the short term. Moreover, ecological economists provided robust evidence that any economic activity is subjected to the laws of entropy and dissipates irreversibly energy and material. Therefore, total circularity is scientifically impossible.

In this article we argue that we need to acknowledge these limitations and move towards a Just Circular Economy. In order to do that we need to adopt an approach which deems stakeholder knowledge and agency as central. Under this paradigm the transition to a CE is

conceived not as a technocratic challenge, but as a process of socioeconomic transformation grounded in principles of social and environmental justice.

We suggest that Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI), as an approach for considering the relation of science to wider society, in particular the constituent concepts of anticipation, inclusion, reflection, and responsiveness, presents itself as a lens through which we can embed considerations of justice within CE practices. In exploring these dimensions with a critical view to how the CE discourse has often failed to consider who will benefit from the transition to a CE, we present a framework for supporting the design of responsible CE practices.

We argue that such a framework can provide a starting point for future refinement and enrichment of the decision context faced by the relevant groups in the course of the transition to a just CE. A just a responsible transition to circularity doesn't merely mean to change the way we produce and organise our economies, but it also implies reflecting about who is entitled to decide, how we implement a democratic governance of technology and how we address the potential harmful impacts that such a transition might have on the powerless in our societies.

Finally, we argue that any initiatives based on the idea of circularity is bound to fail if it's not going to seriously question the impossibility of having endless economic growth in a finite planet. We suggest that CE proponents should embrace a post-growth paradigm, that means reflecting about an economic organization that is no longer based on maximising economic growth, but it is focus on addressing human needs.

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#### **References**

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