

Justice, Equity and the Circular Economy

Call for Papers – Special Issue of Local Environment

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Human activities have breached planetary limits – climate change and biodiversity loss are two of the most glaring symptoms of an economic system that is overwhelming the biosphere. A growing number of scholars and practitioners argue that our economic system needs to radically change to enable all life to flourish (Ehrenfeld and Hoffman 2013). They advocate for new business models that do not exploit natural resources for the benefit of relatively few people, but instead regenerate different types of value that equitably benefit human actors, other species and ecosystems (Bocken et al 2016, Murray et al 2015).

The Circular Economy (CE) aims to utilize resources more effectively through sharing, reuse and innovation strategies at micro (e.g., products, firms, consumers), meso (e.g., supply chains, organizational networks) and macro (e.g., cities, nations and world) levels (Kirchherr et al 2017). It has gained much attention in the public, private and academic spheres, offering pathways for increasing efficiency and effectiveness through production-consumption cycles.

How might the circular economy provide sustainable utilization of planetary resources and more equitable distribution of benefits to people? Thus far, the CE literature has had much to say about the former but very little about the latter. With a sharp focus on materials, energy and money, the economic benefits of job creation are touted, but the distribution of differential costs and benefits across social groups is largely ignored (Fratini et al., 2019; Krueger et al. 2019). Power dynamics in choice making for the CE is also overlooked, as the emphasis is often on business and institutions, and increasing profitability from better resource utilization (Isenhour et al., 2019; Krueger et al. 2018; Noguiera et al., 2019). The CE has also been criticized for perpetuating an economic growth paradigm, while failing to address diverse socio-cultural needs across the world (Ghisellini et al., 2016, Isenhour, 2016).

This special issue in the journal [Local Environment](#) aims to address the large knowledge gap in the literature by bringing together the work of scholars in different fields who are examining the role and space for justice and equity in the circular economy. The need for such a compilation emerged out of a global open virtual forum on “An Equitable, Inclusive, and Environmentally Sound Circular Economy” in May 2020, sponsored by the Systems of Sustainable Consumption and Production Knowledge Action Network (SSCP-KAN) of Future Earth, The Greening of Industry Network, International Forum on Sustainable Value Chains, SCORAI, and Worcester Polytechnic Institute. An emergent theme became “What does it mean to build ethics and responsibility into an economic system—that is, what does the CE look like in practice?” (Sarkis et al., 2020a). In particular, we are interested in articles addressing the following topics among others.

- What is the role of humans in the CE, and how does CE affect humans, such as considerations of well-being, environmental justice and uneven distribution of costs, benefits and opportunities for CE? How can the needs of communities be better served by circular economy business models that combine material conservation, ecological regeneration and human upliftment?
- What differences can be found in CE narratives between the Global North and South? Many communities in the Global South have practiced circular economies before the arrival of modern western civilization. What impacts do CE strategies have on the directionality of sustainable development? What can we learn from formal and informal economic practices and what are the contemporary challenges to embracing CE in the Global South?
- How can CE link more strongly with achieving SDGs? What policies at different levels enable actions towards CE and SDGs simultaneously?
- There is a recognized conflict between socio-economic and ecological goals in the SDGs (Randers et al., 2018). How does this conflict play out in the implementation of CE? How is the desire for an increased circularity of resources flows related to the need to create better places to live and work? What competing normativities of sustainability, inclusion and justice emerge through engagements in systemic circularity and how are they negotiated? What scales, processes, practices and actors play a role in the co-production of values, normativities and directionality of circular economy? How do they contribute to (re)making and undoing service systems and networks?
- What opportunities or tensions exist for the CE to address the challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss and pandemics, particularly for the most vulnerable populations in different societies?
- The CE has been criticized as promoting business as usual, with profit and growth at the core of the paradigm. How might alternative, more socially oriented paradigms such as the solidarity economy and anti-capitalist discourses address the deficiencies of the CE?
- Several alternative economic framings, such as the Doughnut Economy, Well-being Economy, Plenitude Economy propose integrating social concerns for development with planetary boundaries that provide a limit on human activities to maintain biospheric health. How are the CE and these alternative framings related, and how might social dimensions provide a foundation for activities in the CE?
- How are the concepts of sufficiency and degrowth related to the CE, particularly with respect to consumer-oriented CE business models?
- What are the lessons from Covid-19 for the CE (Sarkis et al 2020b, Neumeyer et al 2020), and how might these be adopted in organizations and societies across the world to ‘build back better’ rather than ‘going back to normal’?

Submission

Interested authors are invited to submit abstracts, of up to 250 words (1500 characters), by September 15th, 2020 using this [Submission Form](#).

Timeline

Call for abstracts released	August 1 st 2020
Deadline for receipt of abstracts	September 15 th 2020
Selection of abstracts	October 15 th 2020
Deadline for submitting papers	January 30 th 2021
Editors' reviews to authors	March 1 st 2021
Deadline for submitting revisions	April 15 th 2021
Forward papers as package to Local Environment for peer review	May 1 st 2021
Target publication date	December 2021

Further Information

For further information, or to discuss ideas for contributions, please contact the Editors.

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