

Circular Economy

THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY AS AN "ALTERNATIVE DISCOURSE TO GROWTH"

WILL IT PROVIDE A SUSTAINABLE PATH FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH?

Faced with the need to redefine a sustainable path of economic growth, the EU has decided to embrace a new challenge in the direction of an ecologically functional economic model.

With this in mind, the concept of **circularity** has begun to be gradually employed and applied to urban regeneration policies in order to reduce the ecological impact in terms of waste, resources and energy.

We speak of **circular economy** as a production and consumption model that implies extending the life cycle of products, helping to minimise waste. This strategy is currently being implemented by means of urban policies in cities such as Paris, Brussels and Copenhagen with the aim of implementing an inclusion and valorisation of waste in the economic cycle.



In its application, circularity includes various interventions. **Common examples** are the incineration of biomass; the reuse of nutrients in the regional agricultural economy; the reuse of light metals in cable production; and the promotion of digital platforms for sharing production and energy extraction from wastewater. It is essential to reiterate that the circular economy does not imply the simple recycling of products but embraces a broader vision in which products are designed with the idea of being repaired, reused and/or transformed, thus promoting a second life.

The adoption of circular practices to redefine the current economic set-up has increased the development of an **articulate debate** within the academic world. Several studies have questioned whether circularity can actually be applied. The complexity of the current socio-economic system increases the risk of calling the circular economy an equally dysfunctional model.

While other, more optimistic studies have argued that the circular economy can help promote initiatives that increase social reciprocity and ecologically responsible consumerism through product sharing and ecological production. Whatever the value and interpretation attributed to the circular economy, it proves to be essential to increase, however imperfectly, initial interventions with the aim of making the entire production and consumption process ecologically sustainable.



Actors involved



The role of industries

With a view to the ecological improvement of production performance, an ecologically correct management of production processes by industries is required more than ever, starting with the use of machinery with reduced emissions/reduced energy consumption. But that is not all. Industries are required to pursue, in total opposition to the current model of planned obsolescence, the creation of reusable and long-lasting products.

The role of households

The popularity of circular economy policy has grown in parallel with a culture of ecological production and consumption in which households are the ones who circulate and reuse (potential) waste materials. Such a view defines the emerging role of households in a new material economy; through consumption, they are both producers of waste and consumers of reprocessed waste materials, which are revalued as new (recycled or upcycled) products.



Priorities for action

One of the objectives to be prioritised in order to achieve an effective dematerialisation of the economy is certainly to intervene quantitatively on the demand side by reducing consumption. The concept of **dematerialisation** of the economy makes its way into the EU's green strategy with the ultimate goal of producing economic growth by limiting, in the long run, the consumption of resources and energy.

An economically counterintuitive practice for the current set-up that places new values such as protection and moderation at the centre through a new market for reuse and repair.

An example of this is the circuit of structures created in France, known as recycleries and ressourceries. They were created with the idea of promoting sharing spaces where a new model of circular economy and solidarity can be applied through the buying/selling of second-hand objects. These events also offer the opportunity to participate in free workshops to learn how to fix bicycles and/or household appliances in total autonomy.

LESS IS MORE



In **conclusion**, the article aims to promote knowledge and awareness of current socio-economic issues.

The circular economy proves to be one of the solutions to reduce human pressure on the environment and provide greater certainty regarding the future availability of raw materials.

Used correctly, the circular economy can become a valuable ally against climate change and, equally, a promoter of environmental protection.