

Further reading:

Corvellec, H. (2018) 'Waste as scats: For an organizational engagement with waste', *Organization*, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508418808235>.

Hobson, K. and N. Lynch (2016) 'Diversifying and de-growing the circular economy: Radical social transformation in a resource-scarce world', *Futures*, 82: 15-25.

Valenzuela, F. and S. Böhm (2017) 'Against wasted politics: A critique of the circular economy', *ephemera*, 17(1): 23-60. [<http://www.ephemerajournal.org/contribution/against-wasted-politics-critique-circular-economy>]

Key resources on degrowth: degrowth.info (especially the [Media Library](#)), degrowth.org

Institutet för nerväxtstudier (the Institute for Degrowth Studies) is a non-profit organization working to stimulate discussion around the concept of degrowth and to promote degrowth in practice, through activities such as seminars, workshops and study visits which are open to everyone, as well as collaboration with organizations working on related issues. We are based in the Malmö/Lund area and our work builds on the successful organization of the 6th International Degrowth Conference for Ecological Sustainability and Social Equity, which was held in Malmö in 2018. Please see our website for more information, and if you are interested in getting involved, you are welcome to send us an email or join one of our general meetings held every month in Lund or Malmö.

Website: degrowth.se

Email: info@malmo.degrowth.org

Twitter: [@degrowthsweden](https://twitter.com/degrowthsweden)

CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Question: How does circular economy relate to degrowth?



**Institute for Degrowth Studies
(Institutet för nerväxtstudier)**

This pamphlet stems from the lecture on the 'Sirens of circular economy' by Hervé Corvellec at the Pufendorf Institute for Advanced Studies in Lund, 28 February 2019

Logo by Eileen Laurie

Background painting by Basher Nofal

How does circular economy relate to degrowth?

Institutet för nervätstudier / Institute for degrowth studies

Keypoint 1: Circular economy – focused on business and growth, not sustainability or justice

The European Commission endorsed the circular economy notion and put forward a package to support the EU's transition to it on 2 December 2015. According to them

[https://ec.europa.eu/growth/industry/sustainability/circular-economy_en]: In a circular economy, the value of products and materials is maintained for as long as possible. Waste and resource use are minimised, and when a product reaches the end of its life, it is used again to create further value. This can bring major economic benefits, contributing to innovation, growth and job creation.

A circular economy encourages sustainability and competitiveness in the long term. It can also help to:

- preserve resources – including some which are increasingly scarce, or subject to price fluctuation
- save costs for European industries
- unlock new business opportunities
- build a new generation of innovative, resource-efficient European businesses – making and exporting clean products and services around the globe
- create local low and high-skilled jobs
- create opportunities for social integration and cohesion
- Action at EU level can drive investment, create a level playing field, and remove obstacles stemming from European legislation or its inadequate enforcement.

Keypoint 2: It assumes the possibility of growth without wastefulness and ecological degradation, which is wrong

Environmental issues will not be resolved by another concept operating on these assumptions, no matter how beautiful it sounds. Market or value creation out of environmental crises does not help and is in itself a problem (see our pamphlets on degrowth and degrowth from an economist's perspective).

Keypoint 3: The circular economy does not live up to its promises and is misleading

Using waste for value creation will create more waste.

Presenting it otherwise conceals the reality of how hard it is to recycle many of the materials (e.g. plastics or electronics) and the dehumanising conditions in which this is often done (see our waste prevention pamphlet). Or, practices like carbon capture and usage – presented as dealing with climate change and part of circular economy – even if technologically successful, might address some issues (CO2 emissions) but not others (particle pollution). Finally, a positive frame like circular economy is misleading, by ignoring environmental and social limits of growth, and justifying problematic organisational and consumption practices (e.g. wastefulness as it comes with “value” and the promise of “circularity”).

Keypoint 4: Against circular economy, but for “separating the wheat from the chaff”

Circular economy, as it is currently framed, is not something to support. Economy is to be aligned with ecological sustainability and social justice, not the other way round. Any certification schemes that are supposed to “prove” the businesses' commitments to circular economy should be treated with caution. However, it is important not to discharge everything related to circular economy or using the language connected to it. Say, if zero-waste is told to be practiced by a corporation, we should definitely be suspicious. But your local zero-waste store (despite the impossibility of really reaching this status) – even if it uses a similar language – might be quite different and could be an ally for socio-ecological transformation. Be attentive to language and help the alternatives around you shape it to minimise the possibilities of conflation and co-optation.