Co-producing scale in visions of the circular economy

Imagining circularity beyond the national level

Department: Sustainable development
Research group: Innovation Studies
Supervisor: Abe Hendriks
Email address: a.hendriks@uu.nl

Project description

The circular economy is often understood as a way to deal with contemporary issues related to the economy, society and environment. The concept is gaining traction in multiple spheres, from business to academia, from policy makers to NGOs, in brief: different actors engage with the concept in different levels of governance (e.g. Bauwens et al., 2020; Calisto Friant et al., 2020). In this study, we focus on how the transition to a circular economy is being imagined as a desirable future as a sociotechnical transformation to sustainability (Beck et al., 2021) on, and between different scalar levels. Whereas most research on how the circular economy is being imagined has been focusing on the national level of governance, there is an increasing attention on how circularity is imagined on different levels of governance, such as the sub-national (e.g. regions or municipalities) or on the supra-national level (e.g. the EU or global/UN). Given differences between the scalar levels, what is understood to become circular in the different scalar levels? What is exactly part of the scalar level, and what does not belong to the scalar level? And, how do these different scalar levels relate, and where do they exactly differ?

The main task for the Bright Minds Assistant is twofold, being

(1) to construct a corpus of a variety of relevant and diverse visions,

Collecting a variety of visions that explicitly express a circular future that is formal, document and published, whereas also having a material effect (for instance, as in infrastructure projects), sampling to maximise a diversity across scalar levels, where it is expected to find different conditions of framing and different actors to be involved.

(2) to conduct an in-depth case study (on a particular non-national context of the assistant's interest)

Collecting empirical data on a particular case study within the circular economy for comparative analysis, such as regional innovation strategies (RIS3), or documents published by the European Commission.

Methodologically, the visions will be subject to a qualitative textual analysis, structured around a coding system based on a relational co-productionist approach (Chilvers & Longhurst, 2015; Longhurst & Chilvers, 2019) exploring the *meanings, knowings, doings* and *organizings* that are expressed in the different visions. You will have weekly or bi-weekly meetings with the supervisor, depending on timeline and on-going activities.

For any enquiries about this position, send an email to a.hendriks@uu.nl

Job requirements

I am looking for an applicant with a strong interest in the circular economy, who is highly motivated and well-organized. The assistant is expected to work relatively independently on systematic document research, but in close methodological collaboration with the supervisor. Excellent communication skills in Dutch or English are required, and proficiency in another (European) language is a plus.

References

Bauwens, T., Hekkert, M., & Kirchherr, J. (2020). Circular futures: what will they look like?. *Ecological Economics*, *175*, 106703.

Beck, S., Jasanoff, S., Stirling, A., & Polzin, C. (2021). The governance of sociotechnical transformations to sustainability. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, *49*, 143-152.

Calisto Friant, M., Vermeulen, W. J., & Salomone, R. (2020). A typology of circular economy discourses: Navigating the diverse visions of a contested paradigm. *Resources, Conservation and Recycling*, *161*, 104917.

Chilvers, J., & Longhurst, N. (2015). A relational co-productionist approach to sociotechnical transitions. *Science, Society and Sustainability (3S) Research Group Working Paper, University of East Anglia*

Longhurst, N., & Chilvers, J. (2019). Mapping diverse visions of energy transitions: co-producing sociotechnical imaginaries. *Sustainability Science*, *14*(4), 973-990.