

From a linear to a circular economy!

Meet the areas with most entrepreneurship potential in a Circular Economy context

The project U-Eco (“Upskilling for more creative circular Economy”) focuses on the process of transition towards a Circular Economy (CE), addressing the need for a specific Circular Economy training that is able to boost employability, self-employment, and meet the new labor market demands.

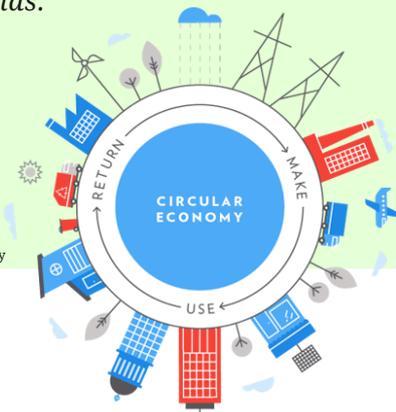


Image source: KTH Royal Institute of Technology

FROM A LINEAR TO A CIRCULAR ECONOMY

The current socioeconomic system is based on a linear economy. This means that companies make products from virgin materials, consumers use them and finally dispose them. Hence, this system is based on consumption rather than on a restorative use of resources, resulting in losses on different levels.

There is still a low involvement towards smart resource management, and a lack of governmental support towards the implementation of a Circular Economy (CE). Furthermore, the imbalance between environmental protection and economic development is strong, and many non-renewable resources are being used. A significant limitation is found in the failure of innovating or adapting to new technologies.

Those are just a few of the linear economy's limitations, which do not pose a fertile ground for the implementation of a CE. By definition, a Circular Economy is an industrial economy that is restorative by intention and design, and it can be beneficial under many aspects (World Economic Forum, Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2014).

For this purpose, different CE models have been proposed in recent times. Just to list a few examples, the "Technology and Internet of things (IoT)", which allows the Circular Economy to develop at a much faster pace by, e.g., providing easy access to information. "Product as a service / platform sharing,

model", instead of selling products, companies can offer products as a service. Types of product service systems can include – pay per service unit, product renting or sharing, product lease and product pooling (most common car-pooling). "Resource recovery model", it focuses on remanufacturing, refurbishment and repair; this is the model of prolongation of the useful life of the product.

CIRCULAR ECONOMY AND THE FUTURE LABOUR MARKET

The transition to a Circular Economy is projected to lead to employment increases throughout the next years: around ~700,000 new spots in the EU by 2030 (European Commission, 2018). However, the green labour market will demand a whole new series of skills able to fulfill the new requirements.

The initial part of the research carried out for the project lead to the identification of five main areas (listed on the top right) with entrepreneurship potential and adequate business strategies to close the future gap between demand and entrepreneurial business solutions based on the U-eco approach.

Facing this upcoming transition and future potential, we are elaborating a catalogue of 15 job profiles that will be demanded in the next decade to meet the new labour demand in the five identified areas with highest growth potential. The elaboration is being executed through an analysis of different reports and a survey addressed to experts in the future affected sectors.

FIVE MAIN AREAS WITH THE GREATEST ENTREPRENEURSHIP POTENTIAL IN A CE CONTEXT

This result was obtained through a research that started from the limitations of the linear economy, and the analysis of the possible application and benefits of a CE. After analysing the existing small and medium enterprises and their potential in a CE context, a detailed SWOT analysis of the identified business solutions and the assessment of investment opportunities was elaborated, leading to the identification of the following five areas:

1. Biomass and bio-based products (agriculture, food, energy).
2. Water treatment and reuse.
3. Plastics, secondary materials and innovation.
4. Digitalization, sharing platforms and services (product as a service).
5. Construction and demolition.



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