



Transitioning to Circular Economies in a Transnational Legal Order

Call for Papers

Theoretical, empirical, and doctrinal contributions are invited on circular economy and the law with the intention of submitting a Symposium Collection for publication in [Transnational Environmental Law](#), a journal dedicated to the understanding of the distribution of authority beyond the State, which play a role in environmental legal formation. This Symposium Collection aims to contribute to the emerging field of circular economy and the law by focusing on its transnational dimensions.

The deadline for paper submissions (8,000 words) is set for 13 January 2025.

Rationale

There is only one planet Earth, yet by 2050, humanity, primarily the elite and those in the Global North, will be consuming as if there were three.¹ Global extraction and consumption of materials such as biomass, fossil fuels, metals, and minerals are expected to double while annual waste generation is projected to increase by 70% by 2050. These concomitant resource and waste crises are transnational: resource use and waste pollution transcend sovereign state boundaries. A new economic model is urgently needed if planetary boundaries are to be preserved. One recent alternative proposal – a circular economy – has received significant attention amongst law and policy makers as well as business and civil society worldwide.

A circular economy moves away from a linear take-make-dispose model to one in which resource use and waste generation prevented or alternatively wastes are reused, recycled, or recovered. The concept is now widely advocated as a means by which the triple planetary crises could be addressed.² In 2023, an estimated 2800 circular economy policy initiatives ranging from specific circular economy laws to roadmaps and other private sector voluntary initiatives

¹ United Nations Environment Programme, *Global Resources Outlook 2024: Bend the Trend – Pathways to a liveable planet as resource use spikes*. International Resource Panel (UNEP, 2024).

² M. Giampietro & S. O. Funtowicz, 'From elite folk science to the policy legend of the circular economy' (2020) 109 *Environmental Science and Policy*, pp. 64-72

existed globally.³ The resulting circular economy policy landscape resembles a complicated, unfinished jigsaw puzzle that shows little resemblance to any coherent transformational plan towards a waste-as-resource system of governance. Despite the growing number of circular economy initiatives the global economy remains wedded to the take-make-waste model; only 9% of the global economy was deemed to be circular in 2023.⁴

All circular economy initiatives have implications for law, regulations, and standards across sectors ranging from textiles to industrial manufacturing (glass, steel, cement) as well as agriculture. Nascent academic literature does recognize that environmental law, trade and investment law, and other branches of transnational law – both public and private – have a role to play in enabling the transition to a circular economy. However, the scope and scale of the impacts to law is not as yet reflected in current academic legal research scholarship, particularly the transnational dimensions that transitioning from a linear take-make-waste economic order to a circular one will have. More research is needed on the potential design and impacts that law will have on a future global circular economy legal order including the distribution of burdens and benefits across material life cycle chains.

Call for Papers

Papers might explore, for example, but are not be limited to the following:

- Multi-level governance dimensions of transitioning to a circular economy;
- Balancing net zero legal objectives with a transition to a circular economy;
- How global value chains and trade law will need to change to facilitate a transition to a circular economy;
- The impacts on informal material economies of circular economy law;
- How global standards help or hinder a transition to a circular economy globally;
- Why epistemological diversity is integral achieving a just and resilient global circular legal order;
- Contribution of non-state actors to shaping and regulating circular economy;
- Transnational impacts of circular economy policy proposals compared to existing regulatory frameworks on the protection of the environment;
- Whether the (proposed) circular economy approaches change the emphasis or, more importantly, effect a substantive transformation of legal tools and techniques;
- How circular economy principles could improve a legally binding plastic pollution treaty;
- Tensions between globalization and localization of circular economy governance; and
- Environmental justice issues raised by circular economy legal initiatives issues.

Instructions

- Authors must first submit their manuscripts to the Symposium Convenors: f.lesniewska@surrey.ac.uk, m.picard@ed.ac.uk and katrien.steenmans@jur.ku.dk

³ UNIDO, *National Circular Economy Roadmaps: A global stocktake for 2024* (UNIDO, 2024), available at: https://www.unido.org/sites/default/files/unido-publications/2024-05/UNIDO_National%20circular%20economy%20roadmaps_v07.pdf.

⁴ Circle Economy Foundation, *The Circularity Gap Report 2023*, available at: <https://www.circularity-gap.world/2023>.

- Upon successful internal review by Symposium Convenors, submissions are sent out to at least 2 external TEL peer reviewers (double blinded);
- The time between submission and peer review results is typically around 8 weeks;
- In the event that the symposium collection does not ultimately materialize (e.g. due to not meeting the minimum of 3 accepted papers, excl. Foreword), any of the contributions that were accepted for will be published as stand-alone papers.
- Once all the symposium contributions have been accepted, the symposium convenor(s) will draft a symposium Foreword, to introduce and briefly discuss the contributions to the symposium, as well as the overlapping themes and connections and complementarity between the pieces, and to provide some theoretical framing in which the respective symposium articles can be situated.
- Authors are encouraged to carefully review TEL's [Instructions for Contributors](#) when preparing their manuscript for submission.

Timeline

Action	Deadline
Paper submission deadline	13 January 2025
Convenor Feedback to authors together with notification of decision	17 March 2025
Submission to <i>Transnational Environmental Law</i> for publication	12 May 2025

Symposium Convenors

Dr Feja Lesniewska, University of Surrey, UK

Dr Michael Picard, University of Edinburgh, UK

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