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*Cooperatives and Social & Solidarity Economy initiatives as means to achieve
Circular Economy objectives for Sustainable Development*

Vangelis Vragoteris, PhD Candidate in School of Spatial Planning and Development,
Faculty of Engineering, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
vragotee@plandevel.auth.gr

Giorgios Gritzas, Associate Professor in School of Spatial Planning and Development,
Faculty of Engineering, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
ggritzas@auth.gr

Abstract

The Circular Economy (CE) stands as the economic model that responds to the ever-increasing environmental degradation, while simultaneously presents economic advantages and offers social benefits, thus being a means / tool of sustainable development (European Commission, 2014; 2015; Webster et al., 2017; Rodriguez, et al., 2020). However, in practice, the goals of the CE are achieved only fragmentally (Ritzén and Sandström, 2017; Clube and Tennant, 2020; Schroeder et al., 2020). CE strategies, policies and practices that are in line with the principle of reducing resource use are incompatible with the goals of economic growth (George et al., 2015; Murray et al., 2017; Hickel and Kallis, 2019; Bauwens, 2021). Allwood (2014) also suggests that as long as economic growth plays a key role in the transition to CE, the CE's main goal of human well-being cannot be achieved. According to the latest Policy Brief of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the conventional profit-oriented economic paradigm regards environmental sustainability as a superfluous cost (Alimandi et al., 2021). Hence, achieving sustainable development through CE requires alternative modes of production and consumption. The article seeks to answer the question: which could be the alternative forms of socio-economic organization to offer an economic, environmental, and social viable solution to the current CE implementation? Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) principles are based on a set of values that priorities human well-being and environmental protection over profits and blind growth (Kawano, 2018). Thus, by integrating SSE principles into the CE concept, social and environmental goals could be addressed (Moreau et al., 2017). As the core members of the SSE (Alimandi et al., 2021) and as a form of enterprise driven by human-centered values rather than profit (ICA, 2021), cooperatives are well positioned to respond to the challenge of sustainable CE implementation. Focusing on a local CE implementation, the establishment of community cooperatives is suggested to support local communities in their own sustainable development projects via managing their common resources (Bianchi and Vieta, 2019).

Keywords: Circular Economy, Sustainable Development, Social and Solidarity Economy, Commons, Post-development