

## How we became circular? Institutionalisation of the CE concept in Polish regions

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**Abstract:** In 2015, the European Commission designated the idea of a circular economy (CE) to all member states. A country's adoption of the guidelines implies pressures of public policy creation at all levels: national, regional and local (Zeitlin et al., 2019). Regional governments adopting CE had to incorporate this idea into their strategies. Research subject - CE does not have one widely accepted definition (Lieder & Rashid, 2016), and is an example of conceptual blurring. Conceptual blurring in the implementation of ideas in social or economic practice becomes a visible barrier (Loiseau et al, 2016). Effective communication between stakeholders is a prerequisite for the effectiveness of achieving the objectives of public policies, especially those related to social or environmental sensitivity (Sartori et al., 2014).

A recent study by Calisto Friant et al. (2020) found that 'different actors and sectors articulate closed-loop discourses that align with their interests and that often under-examine the ecological, social and political implications of closed-loop' and highlights the timeliness of the issue. Similarly, Alvarado et al. (2021) points to the importance of a coalition of discourses in shaping the new concept. Therefore, the research question of this study is: how has the idea of CE been understood by the regions in Poland?

By applying the discursive institutionalism approach proposed by Vivien A. Schmidt (2017), it is possible to capture the path of creating the CE in regional policy. The records of 16 regional strategies in Poland (NUTS 2) and the central document of the Polish CE policy "CE Road Map" were analysed. Convergence (definitional compatibility), place of CE in the strategy, correlations of CE with the regions' own tasks were analysed. Preliminary results indicate a wide divergence in the way the ideas are defined and treated - some regions consider the ideas as a strategic action goal, some as an addition to the region's environmental policy. These results indicate a significant divergence between central and regional policies in the way CE is understood, and a high autonomy of regions in the implementation of the idea.

This topic was considered important and fitting for the indicated panel because of the role that Polish regions (voivodeships) play in shaping Polish policy, including the disposal of EU funds.

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