

**Handbook of the circular economy:
Transitions and transformation**
Book review

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[Alexander, A., Pascucci, S. & Charnley, F. (eds., 2023). *Handbook of the circular economy: Transitions and transformation*. De Gruyter, Berlin/Boston. 504 pp. ISBN 978-3-11-072322-9]

Since the term “circular economy” emerged in the economic and environmental literature at the beginning of the 2010’s, an ever-growing number of articles, papers, reports and books have been published on this new concept that aims at the ending of the so-called linear economy and ushering into a new economic paradigm. The circular economy’s foundations lay on several schools of thought of the past almost sixty years which promote closed-loop systems and nature-inspired metabolisms in the economy, starting from Boulding’s seminal work “The Economics of the Coming Spaceship Earth” (1966) through Stahel’s “Product-Life Factor” (1982) and Pearce and Turner’s “Economics of Natural Resources and the Environment” (1994), until McDonough and Braungart’s „Cradle to Cradle” (2002) or Gradel and Allenby’s “Industrial Ecology” (2003) – just to name a few. Since the term “circular economy” was born in the past decade, this concept has been a popular subject of the economic, business, environmental, technical and even popular literature (Freed & Ritchie, 2021). If you just search on Amazon for circular economy related books you will get 278 results and 10(!) handbooks² on this topic, which apparently shows that there is a quickly growing choice of publications on this subject. Out of these publications I chose one book for review, titled *Handbook of the Circular Economy* (Alexander et al., 2023), as it provides a wide and multi-perspective insight for the interested on this new and continuously developing notion, called circular economy.

The *Handbook of the Circular Economy* was edited by three researchers and received contributions from 48 authors from all over the world. The

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² Amazon.com: <https://tinyurl.com/56drt8fa> (Downloaded on 7 May, 2024)

editors (Allen T. Alexander, Fiona Charnley, Stefano Pascucci) are all scholars of the University of Exeter Business School (UK) and have an impressive academic background in sustainability and circular economy research. The contributors are also mostly researchers from various universities, while the others are thought-leaders, practitioners, policymakers, and business owners who share their views and findings.

The handbook's main objective is to explore the various circular transitional activities and to present the transformed circular economy, therefore all three sections' title of the book contain the word transformation or transition, like "Introducing transformation" (Part 1), "The state of the transition" (Part 2), and "Industrial vignettes: exploring industry transition" (Part 3). In the first section seven circular economy thinkers, activists, and practitioners share their ideas and opinions – in a transcript of an online interview – on how they see the transition to a circular world and what they consider as the major challenges. Out of the several interesting and thought-provoking views, I would highlight Walter Stahel's, one of the "godfathers" of the circular economy and the inventor of the term *performance economy*, who explains the importance of the necessary framework conditions for the remanufacturing and the danger of cannibalising the sales of the non-remanufactured products.

The second section covers the empirical works of the most renowned researchers in various fields related to circular economy, including design, innovation, accounting, resource management, and social impacts. The chapters of this section provide a host of perspectives and a deep-dive insight into the theoretical background, as well as the practical implementation of the circular economy tenets in different segments and sectors of the economy and society. I found a chapter dealing with the social aspects particularly interesting and relevant: it deals with the circular society activism, showcasing grass-root initiatives like collecting waste from local companies and upcycling them into reusable lunchboxes or backpacks, or the other example of the Repair Cafés where anyone can bring its broken or faulty items to be repaired with the help of volunteer repairers.

The final section consists of brief descriptions of business and industry innovations, like the RASA car, fitted with fuel cell technology and light-weight engine, the Rype office furniture which takes full product responsibility, guaranteeing customers to take back any furniture at end-of-use at no additional cost, or the Packshare that created a digital platform to facilitate the reuse of packaging with local communities. Each example in this section consists of a rational, leadership, approach and reflection part, which

helps to understand better the motivations and drivers, the actual implementation and the challenges these innovations have encountered.

In summary, the book provides a good research-oriented overview of the status quo and the future prospects of the circular economy transition, collecting a diverse and multidimensional view of authors, and showcasing business, design and social innovation examples. The handbook is ideal for students, researchers and experts, but in my opinion it is somewhat too long and theoretical for practitioners or managers, therefore its potential practical impact will probably be limited.

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