

# Setting Priorities for the Circular Economy: Enabling Long-Term Societal Value

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## **Abstract**

Currently there are strong efforts worldwide in developing the circular economy as a part of societies' work toward the global sustainable development goals. However, moving toward the a more circular economy without the guiding support of priorities in resource management, while paved with good intentions, can be inherently risky. We argue that the current split between the governance and priority orders for primary resources and secondary resources needs to be reassessed for an effective (from a SDG perspective) circular economy development. For example, while primary resources are governed by e.g. primary market mechanisms and product standards, the prevalent governance of secondary resources is that of a priority order exemplified by the waste hierarchy.

In this article, we elaborate on a proposal for broadening our focus from end of pipe priorities to general resource priorities. Such priorities need to assess our resource management strategies from generational time perspectives – focusing on the long term functionality of both our general resources stocks (capital) and our resource flows. The proposed broader resource principles are exemplified and evaluated through a few case studies of major impact areas.

In conclusion, we argue that impacts such as toxicity in the anthroposphere, resource criticality, and greenhouse gas emissions can be addressed in a more effective manner via an evaluation of resource priorities through a systems perspective.

**Keywords:** Circular Economy, Waste Hierarchy, Priority Order, Sustainable Development, Resource Management