

Adopting a Stakeholder Perspective to Profile Successful Sustainable Circular Business Approaches: A Single Case Study

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Abstract : The circular economy concept is often framed by politicians, scientists and practitioners as being the solution to sustainability problems of our times. However, the focus of these discussions and publications is very often set on environmental and economic aspects. In contrast, the social dimension of sustainability has been neglected and only a few recent and mostly conceptual studies targeted the inclusion of social aspects and the SDGs into circular economy research. All stakeholders of this new circular system have to be included to represent a truly sustainable solution to all the environmental, economic and social challenges caused by the linear economic system. Hence, this empirical research aims to analyse, next to the environmental and economic dimension, also explicitly the social dimension of a sustainable circular business model. This inductive and explorative approach applies the single case study method. A multi-stakeholder view is adopted to shed light on social aspects of the circular business model. Different stakeholder views, tensions between stakeholders and conflicts of interest are detected. In semi-structured interviews with different stakeholders of the company, this study compares the different stakeholder views to profile the success factors of its business model in terms of sustainability implementation and to detect its shortcomings. These findings result in the development of propositions which cover different social aspects of sustainable circular business model implementation. This study is an answer to calls for future empirical research about the social dimension of the circular economy and contributes to sustainable business model thinking in entrepreneurial contexts of the circular economy. It helps identifying all relevant stakeholders and their needs to successfully and inclusively implement a sustainable circular business model. The method of a single case study has some limitations by nature as it only covers one enterprise with its special business model. Therefore, more empirical studies are needed to research sustainable circular business models from multiple stakeholder perspectives, in different countries and industries. Future research can build upon the developed propositions of this study and develop hypotheses to be tested.

Keywords : circular economy, single case study, social dimension, sustainable circular business model

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