

TOWARDS CIRCULARITY: MAPPING THE LEVEL OF UNDERSTANDING AND ADOPTION OF CIRCULAR ECONOMY STRATEGIES

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Abstract:

This article examines the level of understanding, implementation, and perception of circular economy (CE) principles among public and private organisations in the Republic of Moldova, based on empirical evidence collected through the Erasmus+ PubCirEco project (No. ERASMUS-EDU-2024-CBHE-101179344). The study employs a quantitative approach, utilising a structured survey of 106 organisations, comprising 63.8% from the private sector and 36.2% from the public sector. Results reveal that over three-quarters of the organisations either apply CE principles (partially or extensively) or intend to implement them, with resource efficiency and waste reduction emerging as the most common practices. Nevertheless, implementation remains uneven, with advanced strategies such as industrial symbiosis and reverse logistics being rarely adopted. Respondents associate CE adoption with multiple benefits, including an improved reputation, enhanced organisational learning, cost reduction, and a positive social impact. However, they also highlight financial constraints, a lack of knowledge, and limited technological capacity as key barriers. The findings suggest that Moldova is at an early stage of its transition towards circularity, yet possesses significant potential that can be unlocked through targeted policy support, managerial engagement, and increased alignment with EU regulatory frameworks. By linking empirical evidence with conceptual debates, this study enhances our understanding of the dynamics of circular economy adoption in emerging contexts. It offers valuable insights for policymakers, businesses, and academic stakeholders.

Key words: Circular economy, sustainability, organizational practices, policy alignment, barriers and benefits.

JEL classification: Q01, Q56, O44

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the circular economy (CE) has gained significant visibility in both academic literature and international public policy, being presented as an alternative to the traditional linear economic model. Interest in the circular economy has grown rapidly, but the lack of a clear consensus on its definition and theoretical framework has led to fragmentation and intense debate. The circular economy is seen as a solution for sustainable development, but interpretations vary significantly among researchers, practitioners, and policymakers. To better understand this conceptual diversity, it is useful to analyse the evolution of definitions and interpretative frameworks proposed in the literature.

Literature reviews show that the circular economy is defined in extremely varied ways, with several hundred formulations. The most common are based on the basic "3R" principles – reduce, reuse and recycle – but more comprehensive frameworks have recently emerged, such as the "10R" model, which also includes advanced practices such as remanufacturing, reconditioning or repurposing (Kirchherr et al., 2023), (Alhawari et al., 2021), (Nosková, 2025). These extensions highlight that the transition to circularity requires a more complex approach than simple waste management. This transition from a simplified approach to a more comprehensive one emphasizes that the circular economy is not limited to waste management, but involves a profound transformation of economic processes.

The circular economy is described as an economic system that replaces the concept of "end of life" for products with the reduction, reuse, recycling, and recovery of materials in production, distribution, and consumption processes (Kirchherr et al., 2023), (Alhawari et al., 2021), (Geisendorf

& Pietrulla, 2018). There is a very clear difference between a linear and a circular economy, with an emphasis on the transition from the "take – make – dispose" model to closed systems, where resources are reused, recycled, and regenerated to minimize waste and environmental impact (Dabija et al., 2024).

Definitions of the circular economy vary, ranging from a narrow perspective focused on resource efficiency and waste reduction to more complex visions that propose profound transformations in supply chains and business models (Kirchherr et al., 2023), (Montag, 2022), (Bressanelli et al., 2022). This development shows that the circular economy is not just a resource management strategy, but a systemic approach aimed at reconfiguring economic processes and relationships between actors across the entire economy (Montag, 2022), (Geissdoerfer et al., 2020).

The conceptual complexity is further reinforced by the fact that circular principles are rooted in older theoretical paradigms that inspired the development of the current framework. The circular economy has its origins in several theoretical and practical paradigms, including industrial ecology, the cradle-to-cradle concept, performance-based economics and the principles of regenerative design (Geisendorf & Pietrulla, 2018), (Reike et al., 2018).

Although the circular economy is promoted today as an innovative framework, many of its concepts have their origins in older theories on resource cycles and industrial metabolism. This continuity shows that the transition to circularity is based on well-established theoretical foundations, but reinterprets them in a modern context of sustainability and economic transformation (Reike et al., 2018), (Blomsma & Brennan, 2017). In this way, the circular economy can be understood both as an evolution of previous thinking and as a necessary adaptation to current challenges, providing a more coherent framework for reconciling economic and environmental objectives.

The development of the circular economy can be interpreted as a historical trajectory unfolding through distinct stages. In its early phase, attention was directed primarily toward waste management and mitigating ecological damage. Over time, the perspective expanded into a more systemic framework, embedding circular principles within supply chains and corporate strategies. At present, circularity is progressively converging with digital innovation, leading to the emergence of the "smart circular economy," where data-driven tools and technological solutions are employed to enhance resource efficiency and sustainability (Alhawari et al., 2021), (Reike et al., 2018). This historical evolution reflects not only the maturation of the concept but also its adaptation to new technological and social conditions, which explains the growing role attributed to the circular economy in contemporary development strategies.

The circular economy constitutes not only a common challenge but also a significant opportunity to construct a more sustainable and resilient economic framework. By fostering active collaboration among governments, businesses, civil society organizations, and individuals, it becomes possible to mobilize resources and coordinate initiatives that can accelerate the shift toward circularity and contribute to a more just and inclusive future (Perciun et al., 2023). These actors need to collaborate, share their experiences, and contribute to achieving the objectives of the circular economy, benefiting both society and the environment. The relevance of these transformations is also reflected in recent European policies, where the circular economy has been established as a central element of the ecological transition.

Within the European Green Deal and the EU Strategy for Circular Transition, the circular economy is positioned as a cornerstone of sustainable development. Its core purpose is to decouple economic growth from models of consumption that rely heavily on resource use, while at the same time easing ecological pressures by fostering more prudent and efficient management of materials. In this way, the circular economy becomes not only an environmental tool, but also an economic strategy designed to support long-term competitiveness and resilience (Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: A New Circular Economy Action Plan For a Cleaner and More Competitive Europe, 2020). The overarching ambition of the European Green Deal is to guide the European Union toward becoming a climate-neutral, sustainable, and globally competitive economy by the year 2050. Within this vision, the circular economy is acknowledged as a central mechanism, since it supports the rational use of resources, the minimization of waste, and the integration of

innovative industrial practices (*European Green Deal*, n.d.). Through these mechanisms, circularity becomes not only a strategy for protecting the environment but also a driver of economic modernisation and technological innovation.

The European Union's circular economy strategy constitutes a comprehensive policy framework aimed at facilitating the shift toward an innovative and sustainable model of economic development. First and foremost, it provides for the introduction of strict regulations on the eco-design of products, so that they are designed to consume fewer resources and be easier to reuse, repair, and recycle, thereby reducing waste generation throughout their entire life cycle. Another fundamental pillar of the strategy is investment in innovation and digitization, supported by monitoring tools based on performance indicators and detailed analyses of material flows, designed to enable transparent and efficient resource management. The document also highlights the importance of involving all relevant actors - industry, public authorities, communities - in the adoption and implementation of circular models, with a particular focus on the responsible use of critical raw materials (*Circular Economy Strategy - European Commission*, n.d.).

Among the main difficulties in implementing the circular economy at European level are the significant differences between Member States, both in terms of infrastructure and available resources. Additionally, the absence of clear incentives for industry, combined with complex and fragmented legislative barriers, hinders the widespread adoption of circular models. Added to this is the need for extensive cooperation between governments, the business community and civil society, without which the transition to circularity risks being slowed down and unevenly (*European Green Deal*, n.d.), (Calisto Friant et al., 2021), (Pinyol Alberich et al., 2023).

The challenges facing the circular economy justify the emergence of approaches that directly link the circular economy to risk management, highlighting the importance of anticipating and managing obstacles to the success of the transition. Some scientific research shows a close association between the circular economy and risk management (Dabija et al., 2024). Implementing circular principles is not without its challenges, as it can generate technological, financial, legislative, or operational risks that directly influence the sustainability and competitiveness of organizations. In this context, the systematic assessment of these risks becomes essential, as it allows companies to anticipate potential obstacles, adopt preventive measures, and develop adaptive strategies. Thus, risk management is not only a protective tool, but also a key factor for the successful transition to circular economic models.

In broad terms, the EU Strategy for the Circular Economy brings together regulatory initiatives, targeted investments in innovation, and financial instruments intended to speed up the move toward a sustainable economic system. Through the integration of these elements, the European Union seeks to establish a consistent framework capable of safeguarding the environment while strengthening economic competitiveness over the long term.

While at the European level the framework is well defined and supported by policies and financial instruments, in the Republic of Moldova the transition to circularity is at an early stage and requires applied assessments to identify the actual level of understanding and adoption of circular principles, although there is growing interest in aligning with European standards and regulations. Despite the developing regulatory framework and some pilot initiatives, applied studies measuring the level of knowledge and application of the circular economy at the organizational level are almost non-existent. This gap justifies the need for empirical research to capture how organizations - both in the public and private sectors - understand, apply, and perceive circular economy principles.

Therefore, the purpose of this article is to assess the level of understanding, implementation, and perception of the circular economy in organizations in the Republic of Moldova, based on data collected within the Erasmus+ PubCirEco project (No. ERASMUS-EDU-2024-CBHE 101179344). In addition, the article aims to place the results in a comparative framework with the specialized literature, thus providing both an empirical and theoretical contribution to the debate on the transition to circularity. Through this approach, the article answers both practical questions about the obstacles and benefits perceived by organizations and theoretical questions about how circular economy concepts and strategies are understood and adopted in emerging contexts.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research was conducted as part of the Erasmus+ PubCirEco project (No. ERASMUS-EDU-2024-CBHE 101179344), whose main objective is to strengthen the capacity of universities in the Republic of Moldova and other partner institutions to promote and implement the principles of the circular economy. In this context, the present study aimed to provide an overview of the level of knowledge, degree of implementation, and perception of the circular economy among public and private organizations in the Republic of Moldova.

The methodology used is based on quantitative empirical research, conducted by applying a structured questionnaire. The research tool was developed based on conceptual frameworks established in the literature on the circular economy, adapted to national specificities. The questionnaire included questions regarding:

- level of knowledge of circular principles and concepts;
- degree of implementation of these principles and concepts in organizations;
- concrete circularity actions and practices;
- perceived benefits and barriers encountered;
- level of familiarity with European and national policy documents.

The sample consisted of 106 organisations active in the Republic of Moldova, of which 63.8% were from the private sector and 36.2% from the public sector. Respondents were selected based on their availability and interest in participating in the research, which enabled a representative picture of organisational diversity. Data collection was conducted electronically, ensuring the confidentiality of responses and the comparability of the data. The data were analysed using descriptive statistical tools. Responses from the survey were consolidated and expressed in percentage terms, while the outcomes were displayed through visual representations such as charts and graphs, in order to capture the distribution of opinions as well as the degree of engagement among organizations. The descriptive approach was selected as it enables a straightforward portrayal of perceptions and levels of implementation, making it particularly suitable for exploratory studies.

Nonetheless, the study is subject to certain limitations. To begin with, the relatively limited number of participants restricts the extent to which the outcomes can be generalized. Moreover, the reliance on self-reported information may introduce bias, since participants' answers are more likely to capture their perceptions than to fully reflect actual practices. Nevertheless, the data collected provides a solid basis for comparative analysis and for formulating recommendations on expanding circularity in the Republic of Moldova.

The small scope of the sample, together with the dependence on self-reported information, can restrict the general applicability of the results and may also generate a degree of bias. Even so, the outcomes remain valuable for interpreting the national situation and serve as a reliable foundation for cross-country comparisons as well as for formulating policy recommendations in the area of the circular economy.

3. RESULTS

The presentation of the research results aims to provide a clear picture of how organizations in the Republic of Moldova perceive and apply the principles of the circular economy. This section summarizes the data obtained through the survey conducted within the PubCirEco project, taking into account several analytical dimensions: level of knowledge, degree of implementation, types of practices applied, perceived benefits, barriers encountered, as well as the degree of familiarity with the main national and European strategic documents.

The structure of the section follows the logic of the questionnaire, allowing the reader to observe both the general trends and the particularities of each aspect investigated. The first part presents data related to the level of knowledge of the circular economy, which is essential for understanding how organizations are prepared to adopt and develop circular practices. Subsequently, the analysis focuses

on implementation, i.e., the extent to which circular principles have been integrated into the activities of organizations and the nature of the concrete actions already implemented.

Another important dimension examined is that of perceived benefits and obstacles. These results enable a comparison between the recognised potential of the circular economy and the real difficulties that can slow down or even hinder the transition to a circular economic model. Additionally, to assess Moldova's alignment with European trends and policies, questions were included regarding the level of familiarity of organisations with relevant strategic documents at the European Union level.

The data analysis is presented descriptively, using graphs and tables that summarize the respondents' answers. This approach allows for a visual understanding of the distributions and facilitates the identification of significant patterns. The results are interpreted not only numerically, but also contextually, in relation to the literature and European trends in the field of the circular economy. In this way, the study provides not only a snapshot of the situation in the Republic of Moldova, but also a basis for comparison with international experiences.

It is essential to note that the presentation of the results is integrative in nature: each dimension is analysed not in isolation, but in correlation with the others, to obtain a holistic understanding of the degree of knowledge, application, and perception of the circular economy at the organisational level. This structure is also relevant for formulating conclusions and recommendations, as it enables the identification of both strengths and gaps that require intervention.

Assessing the level of knowledge of circular economy principles among organisations is a crucial step in informing public policies and sustainable development strategies. In the context of transitioning to a circular economic model, where resource efficiency, waste reduction, and the reintegration of materials into the production cycle are becoming major priorities, understanding the degree of institutional preparedness is of strategic importance.

As part of the Erasmus+ PubCirEco project (No. ERASMUS-EDU-2024-CBHE-101179344), relevant empirical data were collected from a sample of 106 entities in the Republic of Moldova, comprising both the private sector (63.8%) and the public sector (36.2%). This data allows for a comparative analysis of the perception and level of knowledge of circular economy principles between the two institutional categories.

The results provide a detailed picture of the level of awareness and understanding of this concept, identifying both the strengths represented by organizations with a good and excellent level of knowledge, as well as areas where additional interventions are needed through training, information campaigns, and the development of partnerships. Thus, the analysis presented below contributes to understanding the potential and challenges of implementing the circular economy at the organisational level in the Republic of Moldova.

To highlight respondents' perceptions of the level of knowledge of circular economy principles within organisations in the Republic of Moldova, Figure 1 presents the detailed structure of responses, expressed as percentages, by assessment categories ranging from "Non" to "Very good".

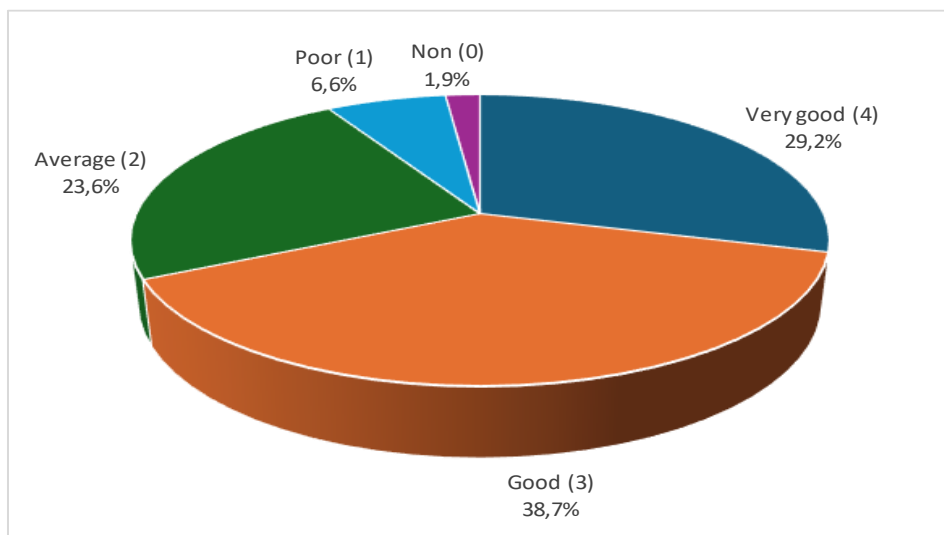


Figure no. 1. Self-assessed knowledge of circular economy principles among surveyed organizations

Source: Own elaboration based on survey data collected within the PubCirEco Erasmus+ project (No. ERASMUS-EDU-2024-CBHE 101179344)

The results for the question "The organisation's knowledge of the principles of the circular economy" show a predominantly positive distribution of perceptions. The highest percentages are recorded for the answers "Good" (38.7%) and "Very good" (29.2%), which means that more than two-thirds of respondents consider their organisation's level of knowledge to be good or very good. This suggests a favourable basis for initiating and implementing policies and projects specific to the circular economy.

At the same time, a significant percentage, 23.6%, indicated an "Average" level of knowledge, which reveals the existence of a segment of organisations that have basic knowledge but would need to strengthen their skills through training and the exchange of good practices. Low levels of knowledge ("Poor" – 6.6% and "Non" – 1.9%) are marginal, but indicate that there are still entities where the circular economy is not sufficiently understood or known.

The analysis of the dataset was carried out using descriptive statistical approaches. Survey answers were compiled and expressed in percentage form, and the outcomes were depicted visually through graphs and diagrams, thereby illustrating both the spread of opinions and the level of organisational involvement. In particular, the "Average" and "Low" segments are priority targets for training, awareness-raising, and cross-sector partnerships, which could help reduce knowledge gaps and increase the capacity to implement circular economy principles.

The findings suggest that there is a strong basis for advancing the circular economy in the Republic of Moldova, with more than three-quarters of organisations either applying (partially or extensively) or planning to implement the principles. However, the high degree of partial application suggests the need for further consolidation, including through training, experience sharing, and the integration of favourable economic and legislative instruments.

The degree of adoption of circular economy principles by organizations in the Republic of Moldova is shown in Figure 2, which reflects the degree of application, from partial implementation to no action in this regard.

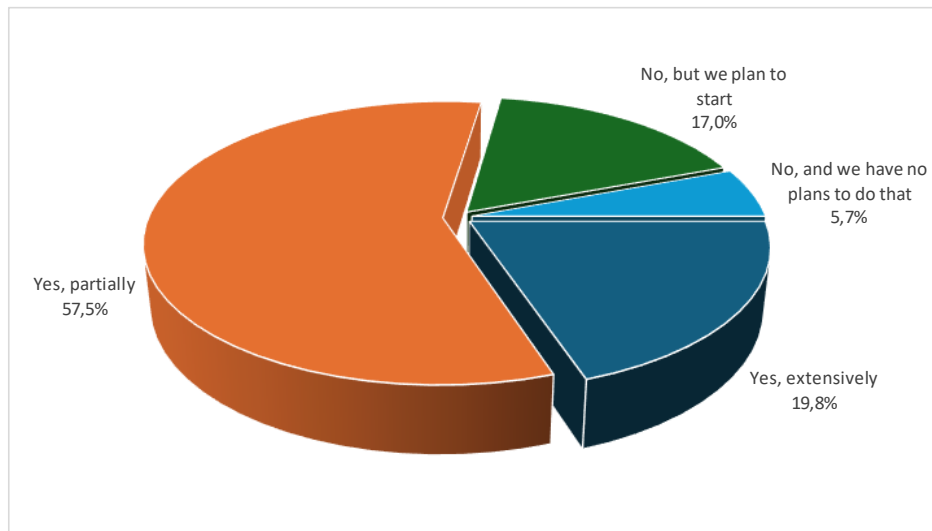


Figure no. 2. Implementation level of circular economy principles in organizations

Source: Own elaboration based on survey data collected within the PubCirEco Erasmus+ project Source: Own elaboration based on survey data collected within the PubCirEco Erasmus+ project (No. ERASMUS-EDU-2024-CBHE 101179344)

As shown in Figure 2, most respondents (57.5%) reported applying these principles only to a limited extent. This outcome reflects a willingness to embrace a circular transition; however, the current level of implementation remains partial and not yet fully consolidated. A significant percentage, 19.8%, said that their organisations apply the circular economy extensively, reflecting the existence of a core of more advanced entities in this area, capable of serving as models of good practice. At the same time, 17% of organisations mentioned that they do not yet apply the principles, but intend to start in the near future, which indicates additional potential for expanding the degree of implementation through incentive policies and institutional support.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, only 5.7% of entities stated that they do not implement and do not intend to implement the principles of the circular economy. Although the percentage is relatively low, it reveals the existence of structural barriers or a lack of interest among a limited number of organisations.

Figure 3 highlights the concrete circular economy actions implemented by organisations, showing the areas in which respondents reported the most initiatives.

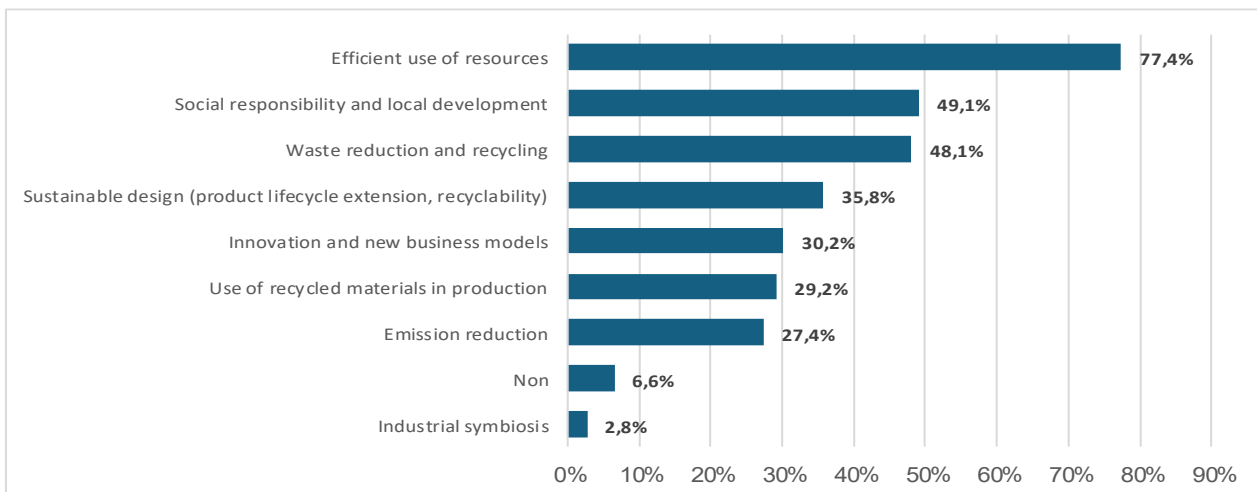


Figure no. 3. Specific circular economy actions implemented by organizations

Source: Own elaboration based on survey data collected within the PubCirEco Erasmus+ project Source: Own elaboration based on survey data collected within the PubCirEco Erasmus+ project (No. ERASMUS-EDU-2024-CBHE 101179344)

The data presented in Figure 3 reveal that the most common practice implemented by organisations is the efficient use of resources, mentioned by 77.4% of respondents, which highlights

the primary concern for optimising consumption and reducing waste. The following two important areas are social responsibility and local development (49.1%) and waste reduction through recycling (48.1%), reflecting a balance between economic, social, and environmental objectives.

Other measures, such as sustainable design (35.8%), innovation and development of new business models (30.2%), use of recycled materials in production (29.2%) and reduction of emissions (27.4%), were reported at a moderate level, indicating a gradual expansion of concerns to more complex areas of the circular economy. At the same time, a small percentage of organisations (6.6%) stated that they do not yet implement such measures, and only 2.8% mentioned practising industrial symbiosis, suggesting that this concept is still underutilised in the Republic of Moldova.

The distribution of responses confirms that the implementation of the circular economy is primarily focused on resource efficiency and waste reduction, while innovative and collaborative aspects, such as industrial symbiosis, remain at an early stage and require additional policies and The adoption of the circular economy at the national level must involve all sectors of the economy, as the interdependence between production, trade, and consumption is key to the efficient use of resources. In many developing countries, and especially in the Republic of Moldova, addressing the challenge of limited waste processing is crucial, as the loss of secondary raw materials, combined with increased energy consumption, hinders both economic growth and environmental progress (Ganea et al., 2022), (Oberst, 2024).

The benefits perceived by organisations as a result of applying circular economy strategies are shown in Figure 4, which outlines economic, social, and organisational advantages.

The results highlighted in Figure 4 show that organisations in the Republic of Moldova associate the implementation of the circular economy with multiple benefits, both economic, social and organisational. The most frequently mentioned advantage is improved reputation (75.5%), which indicates that image and public visibility are strong motivating factors for adopting circular practices. A similar proportion of respondents (75%) emphasised the importance of minimising environmental impact locally, underscoring the role of these measures in preserving natural assets and enhancing community quality of life.

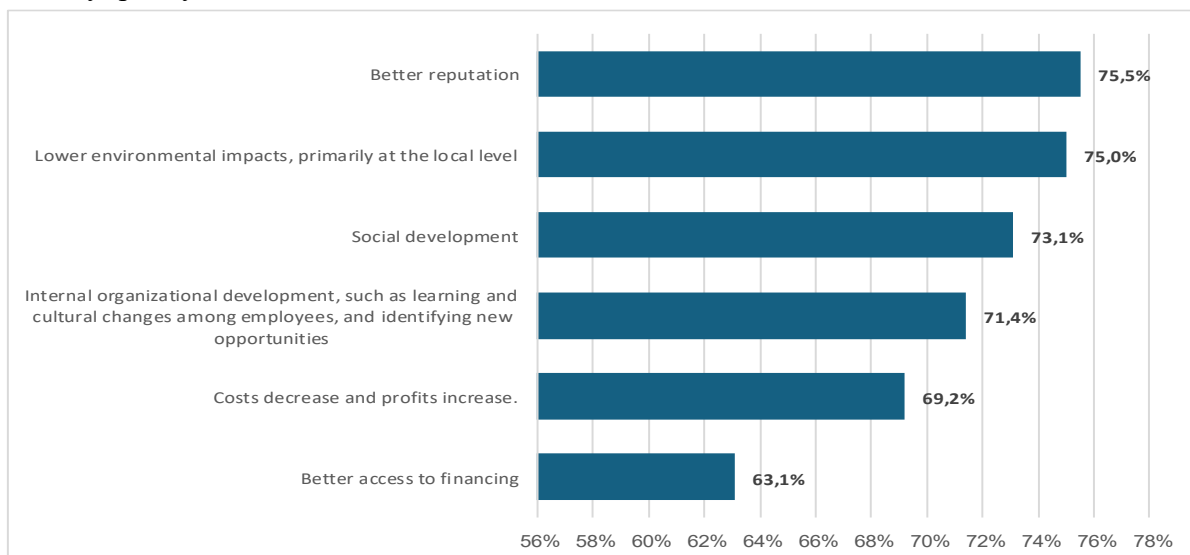


Figure no. 4. Perceived benefits of implementing circular economy strategies by surveyed organizations

Source: Own elaboration based on survey data collected within the PubCirEco Erasmus+ project Source: Own elaboration based on survey data collected within the PubCirEco Erasmus+ project (No. ERASMUS-EDU-2024-CBHE 101179344)

A significant percentage (73.1%) mentioned social development as a benefit, indicating that organisations are aware of the connection between the circular economy and their responsibility towards the local community. Internally, 71.4% of respondents appreciated the role of the circular economy in organisational development through learning, cultural change, and the identification of new opportunities. Direct economic outcomes, including cost reduction and profit growth (69.2%),

while not at the very top of the hierarchy, still serve as an important driver for embracing circular strategies. In addition, 63.1% of organisations believe that applying circular principles facilitates access to financing, suggesting significant potential for mobilising external resources to support green transition projects.

Respondents' perceptions show that the circular economy is seen not only as a technical approach to resource optimisation, but also as an integrated sustainable development strategy capable of generating reputational, social, organisational, and economic benefits.

The key challenges reported by organisations in implementing circular economy principles are shown in Figure 5, emphasising financial, technological, and institutional constraints.

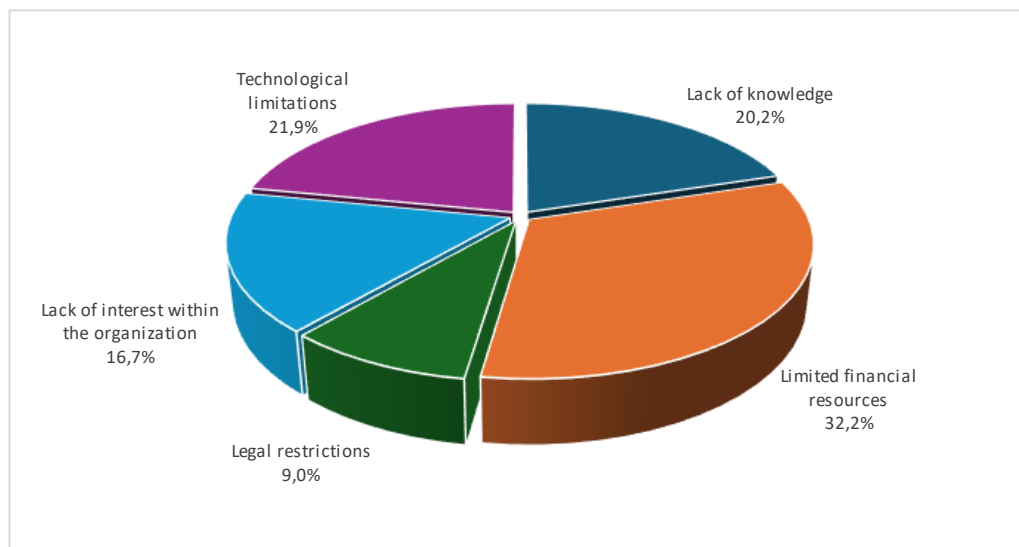


Figure no. 5. Main obstacles identified in the implementation of circular economy principles

Source: Own elaboration based on survey data collected within the PubCirEco Erasmus+ project Source: Own elaboration based on survey data collected within the PubCirEco Erasmus+ project (No. ERASMUS-EDU-2024-CBHE 101179344)

The data in Figure 5 highlight that inadequate access to funding (32.2%) is considered the most significant barrier, showing that investment viability still limits the expansion of circular practices. Other issues noted were a lack of expertise (20.2%) and technological barriers. This fact is followed by a lack of knowledge (20.2%) and technological limitations (21.9%). These two interdependent issues suggest a clear need for training and access to modern technologies to enable the transition to more sustainable production and consumption patterns. Other obstacles identified include a lack of interest from the organisation (16.7%) and legislative restrictions (9%), which, although less common, can significantly slow down the pace of implementation when present. These results indicate that the barriers are not only financial or technological in nature, but also organisational and institutional, reflecting a combination of structural and cultural factors.

The analysis reveals that integrated policies are necessary to accelerate the application of circular economy principles in the Republic of Moldova, including financial support for green investments, education and training measures, stimulating managerial interest, and revising the legislative framework. Thus, reducing barriers can contribute to expanding and consolidating the transition to a circular economy.

At the same time, one must recognise that financial vulnerabilities in industrial enterprises have a tangible effect on the national economy's stability and competitiveness, shaping levels of investment, job creation, and ongoing production activities (Stratila & Polcanova, 2022). These financial constraints are also among the primary Barriers to the shift toward a circular economy in the Republic of Moldova, including limited financial resources, technological constraints, and insufficient expertise, which companies identify as the main factors hindering broader adoption of circular practices.

The degree of familiarity of organisations with key concepts of the circular economy is illustrated in Figure 6, which shows the levels of knowledge for different theoretical and applied notions.

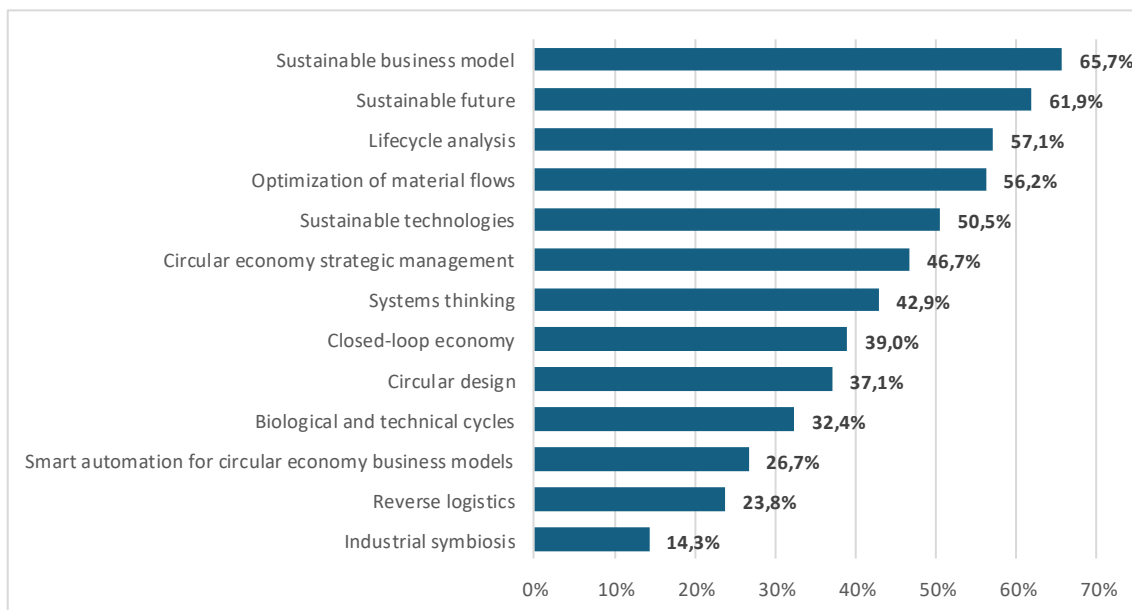


Figure no. 6. Level of familiarity with key circular economy concepts

Source: Own elaboration based on survey data collected within the PubCirEco Erasmus+ project Source: Own elaboration based on survey data collected within the PubCirEco Erasmus+ project (No. ERASMUS-EDU-2024-CBHE 101179344)

The results in Figure 6 show that the best-known concepts are sustainable business model (65.7%) and sustainable future (61.9%), confirming that organisations prioritise new business models based on sustainability and a long-term focus on green development. Equally well recognised are the concepts of lifecycle analysis (57.1%) and optimisation of material flows (56.2%), which reflect a practical understanding of tools aimed at increasing efficiency and reducing waste. Average levels of familiarity are observed for sustainable technologies (50.5%), circular economy strategic management (46.7%), and systems thinking (42.9%), indicating that a considerable proportion of organisations recognise the importance of a strategic and integrated approach; however, these concepts still need to be consolidated. By contrast, more advanced or technical concepts—such as industrial symbiosis (14.3%), reverse logistics (23.8%), and intelligent automation in circular business models (26.7%) - are less familiar to respondents, indicating a considerable gap in their applied knowledge of higher-level circular practices. The results suggest that organisations in the Republic of Moldova are generally familiar with the fundamental aspects of the circular economy. At the same time, advanced concepts remain less well-known and require additional support through training and the transfer of international best practices.

The level of knowledge of Moldavian organisations regarding the primary national and international strategic documents in the field of the circular economy is illustrated in Figure 7, which highlights both significant European policies and local regulatory frameworks.

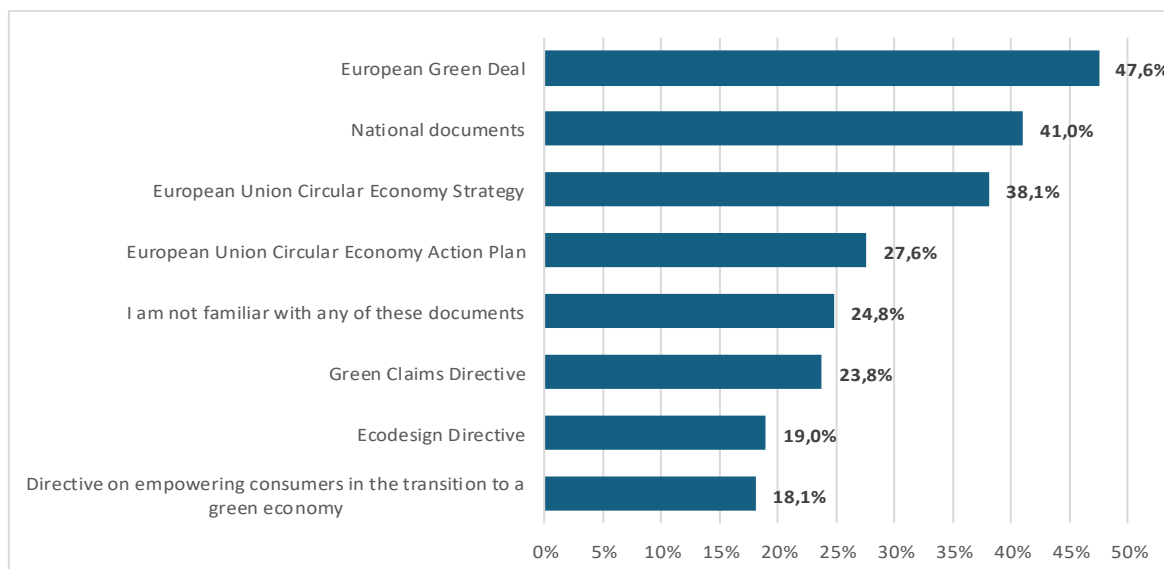


Figure no. 7. Familiarity with national and international circular economy documents

Source: Own elaboration based on survey data collected within the PubCirEco Erasmus+ project Source: Own elaboration based on survey data collected within the PubCirEco Erasmus+ project (No. ERASMUS-EDU-2024-CBHE 101179344)

According to Figure 7, the European Green Deal (47.6%) is the most frequently recognised document, which illustrates how European strategies and policies have achieved considerable visibility within organisations. Additionally, 41% of respondents identified national documents, indicating a relatively strong link between national policy frameworks and European initiatives. Approximately 38.1% mentioned the European Union Circular Economy Strategy, and 27.6% mentioned the European Union Circular Economy Action Plan, indicating an average level of knowledge of European strategic documents specific to the circular economy.

On the other hand, 24.8% of organisations stated that they were not familiar with any of the documents, which signals significant gaps in information and communication. Documents such as the Green Claims Directive (23.8%), the Ecodesign Directive (19%), and the Directive on empowering consumers in the transition to a green economy (18.1%) are much less well known, reflecting both their technical complexity and insufficient dissemination at the national level.

The results show that organisations have a reasonable level of knowledge of the European policy framework on the circular economy. However, familiarity decreases considerably in the case of technical documents and the most recent directives. The situation points to the necessity of more coherent awareness-raising and training programmes to bring the Moldovan economic environment in line with EU regulations and recommended practices.

Research outcomes reveal a rising interest among Moldovan organisations in the circular economy, but the degree of application is fragmented and lacks uniformity. The data also suggest that the concept is interpreted mainly through the lens of resource efficiency and waste minimisation, with innovation and collaboration receiving less attention. At the same time, organisations' perceptions indicate that the transition to circularity is seen not only as a technical strategy but also as an opportunity to strengthen reputation, improve internal performance, and stimulate social and economic development.

The barriers, most notably those related to finance and technology, point to the importance of comprehensive support structures and training efforts to bridge the gap between intention and practice. The comparatively low level of knowledge regarding European directives and documents underlines the necessity of more effective communication campaigns aimed at bringing the national economy in line with international benchmarks. These findings confirm that the Republic of Moldova is at an early stage of transition to a circular economy, but has significant potential that can be harnessed through appropriate public policies and increased cooperation between the public, private, and academic sectors.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This article enriches the academic debate by providing data on how the circular economy is understood, implemented, and perceived in the Republic of Moldova - a context that has so far remained largely unexplored. The evidence underscores the potential of circular practices to drive sustainable development, while also revealing structural challenges that limit their swift expansion. Beyond its descriptive value, the study also has an applied role, providing benchmarks for decision-makers and organisations in identifying directions for action.

The research results indicate that a solid foundation for the development of the circular economy already exists in the Republic of Moldova, with more than three-quarters of organisations either applying the principles or intending to implement them in the future. However, partial application highlights the fact that the process is still insufficiently consolidated and needs additional support through training, exchanges of experience, and the use of favourable economic and legislative instruments.

The findings suggest that organisations apply circular economy principles predominantly in the areas of resource efficiency and waste reduction, indicating attention to the fundamental elements of circularity. In contrast, innovative and collaborative aspects, such as industrial symbiosis, are still underdeveloped and require dedicated policies and incentive mechanisms. At the same time, the perceptions of organisations confirm that the circular economy is seen not only as a set of technical measures, but also as an integrated sustainable development strategy, with benefits extending to reputation, community, organisational performance and economic results.

To facilitate the transition, integrated policy measures are essential—encompassing funding mechanisms for sustainable investments, educational and training programmes, greater managerial commitment, and regulatory adjustments. Such actions would help remove obstacles and foster the broader development of circular practices nationwide. By addressing these barriers, circular practices can be more effectively expanded and consolidated at the national level. Organisations are more familiar with the general and fundamental dimensions of the circular economy. At the same time, advanced concepts are less well known and require additional support through training and the transfer of international best practices. In terms of the policy framework, the level of knowledge is reasonable regarding European strategies and national documents, but decreases significantly when it comes to technical directives and the latest regulations. This situation underscores the importance of more consistent information and training campaigns aimed at aligning the Moldovan economic environment with European standards and best practices. The circular economy is on an upward trajectory in the Republic of Moldova, as well as in other developing countries. However, to achieve a level of implementation comparable to that in Europe, strategic actions, cross-sectoral collaboration, and greater mobilisation of institutional and financial resources are needed.

In conclusion, the results of this study confirm that the transition to a circular economy in the Republic of Moldova is in its early stages but has considerable potential for development. Through its focus on current awareness, applied practices, and reported barriers, the study delivers both a descriptive overview and a practical framework to support policy-making and strategic decisions within organisations. From this perspective, the article helps to fill a gap in the literature and presents solid arguments for intensifying cooperation among the public, private, and academic sectors. With integrated policies and sufficient financial support, strengthening this partnership could turn the circular economy into a concrete model of sustainable development, one that reinforces both the competitiveness and resilience of the national economy in the years ahead.

Future research could broaden the scope by applying comparative international approaches, providing insights into Moldova's standing alongside other nations engaged in the transition to circular economies. At the same time, qualitative studies focused on organisational strategies could highlight the internal mechanisms through which companies adopt or, conversely, delay the integration of circular principles. Combining these research directions would help complete the overall picture presented here and provide a solid foundation for developing public policies and

support instruments tailored to national specificities, but also aligned with European and international best practices.

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