

Abstract

The deteriorating effects of climate change have defined an imperative paradigm shift towards a circular economy. However, although it has experienced a significant growth, the scientific research on circular economy is moving slower than it should. Using a systematic literature review, this study explores the circular economy literature in the policy context from 2007 to 2022, identifying the research patterns and key elements of the literature, including the growth of the concept, research streams, topical focuses of the research, and geographical distribution. To analyze the socio-spatial complexities, the diversity of research in high- and low-income economies is further investigated. From a total of 86 articles retrieved from Scopus, this study discovers four key research streams in the literature: 1) strategy and policy initiative; 2) energy and resources efficiency; 3) urban environmentalism; and 4) sustainable innovation. The thematic focuses of interest are summarized by six general themes, which continue to evolve over time and demonstrate continued relevance for researchers. This study highlights that the research on countries with lower income is outnumbered and highly required due to the socio-spatial conditions that are particularly challenging in these nations. Research implications for policymakers using the quadruple helix approach are also provided, emphasizing the importance of integrated sectoral approach. Based on the literature, 30 future research questions are suggested.

Keywords: circular economy, circular economy policy, systematic literature review, sustainability, sustainable development