



EDITORIAL

Everyday circularities: rethinking consumption in circular transformations

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This editorial article introduces the Special Issue (SI) ‘Everyday Circularities: Rethinking Consumption in Circular Transformations’. It begins by situating the contributions within the sociology of consumption and growing critiques of dominant Circular Economy frameworks, which have traditionally prioritised consumer acceptance and market-driven solutions. The SI challenges these assumptions by foregrounding the complex, embedded and uneven nature of circular transformations in everyday life. The discussion of the SI contributions is structured around five key cross-cutting themes: systems of practice and provision; affectivities and relationalities; materialities; spatialities; and inequalities. Each article is positioned within and across these themes, illustrating how circular participation is shaped by broader social-material, institutional and political-economic conditions. The editorial concludes by reflecting on the broader implications of these findings for advancing research, policy and practice on circular consumption transformations.

Keywords circular consumption • social practices • sufficiency • inequalities • everyday life

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Introduction

Circular Economy (CE) frameworks have gained significant traction in recent years as a key socioeconomic agenda among policy makers, industry leaders and scholars across disciplines such as sociology and environmental studies. While definitions of the CE vary (see [Kirchherr et al, 2017](#); [Camacho-Otero et al, 2018](#)), it is broadly

understood as an economic and industrial ecology model that reduces resource inputs, minimises waste and preserves ‘the value of products and materials for as long as possible’ (Haase et al, 2024: 1). Over the past decade, the CE has become a prominent policy framework at subnational, national and supranational levels (Sahakian et al, 2022), with its logics influencing sustainability policies, resource use strategies and debates on sustainable consumption.

At the same time, dominant interpretations of the CE, such as those in EU policy, have been criticised for their overemphasis on technological and market-driven solutions, including product redesign, material recirculation and industrial efficiency (for example, Fitch-Roy et al, 2020; Calisto Friant et al, 2021). While these aspects are undoubtedly important components of an effective CE, this techno-economic focus has often sidelined the social, cultural and everyday dimensions of circularity (Hobson, 2021; Greene et al, 2024). Critiques argue that this narrow focus risks overlooking the deeply embedded, relational and systemic nature of circular consumption, failing to consider how circular participation unfolds in the routines, infrastructures, relationalities and inequalities of everyday life (Georgantzis Garcia et al, 2021; Rabiú and Jaeger-Erben, 2022; Greene et al, 2024).

A key part of this critique – and the focus of this Special Issue (SI) – is the role of everyday life in CE transformations. CE policy and research often frame consumers as passive ‘end users’ of technological and market-based solutions, positioning ‘consumer acceptance’ as the primary driver of change (Hobson, 2021; Lane et al, 2024). Within these framings, the ‘consumer challenge’ is largely conceptualised as shifting individual preferences towards more ‘circular’ products and encouraging the uptake of business models such as repair services, sharing platforms and remanufactured goods. However, while shifting consumer purchasing patterns has a role in addressing transgressed planetary boundaries (Rockstrom et al, 2023), such framings fail to capture the lived realities and complexities of circular participation in everyday life (Greene et al, 2024).

Building on this, an emerging body of scholarship suggests that circular transformations need to be understood through the lens of everyday practices: that is, the routinised and systematically situated activities through which consumption, resource use and disposal occur (Jaeger-Erben et al, 2021; Hobson, 2021; Greene et al, 2024). From this sociologically situated perspective, practices – understood as dynamic and socially contingent activities deeply embedded in socio-material systems of provision – serve as the mechanisms through which circularity is enacted, negotiated and constrained in everyday life. Such practices are shaped by social norms, material infrastructures, institutional arrangements and power relations. Recent work has thus called for deeper engagement with the ways in which circular practices depend on these broader structural and relational conditions, rather than being reduced to matters of individual acceptance, technological innovation or market incentives (Hobson, 2021; Greene et al, 2024).

This SI builds on these arguments by positioning ‘the everyday’ as a critical site of circular transformation. To this end, the contributions capture the social, material and institutional conditions that enable or constrain circular practices in everyday life. By centring analysis on the deeply social spaces of the everyday, this issue extends Yates’ argument in this journal (2022: 146) that ‘[t]he types of observation and attention associated with everyday life shed new light on social phenomena, revealing angles and facets that are often invisible in conventional policy approaches’. In this sense, a core provocation of this SI is the question: *What happens when the CE ‘comes home’* (Greene

et al, 2024)? That is, how do individuals, families and communities navigate, adapt or even resist the imperatives of circular consumption, such as reducing, reusing or repairing goods in their daily lives? How do existing consumption practices interact with new demands for circularity, and what happens when established household routines are recalibrated towards greater material circularity? What role do socio-material conditions – including infrastructural access, social norms and inequalities, and political-economic arrangements – play in facilitating or hindering circular participation? By focusing on these questions, this SI highlights the significance of everyday life as a critical site where circular transformations are enacted, contested and negotiated across a range of geographical and socioeconomic contexts.

This SI builds on discussions that emerged from an all-day conference session, ‘Everyday Circularities’, chaired by the SI editors, Kersty Hobson and Mary Greene, at the Sustainable Consumption Research and Action Initiative (SCORAI) and European Roundtable on Sustainable Consumption and Production (ERSCP) conference at Wageningen University in The Netherlands in July 2023. This session brought together scholars working across diverse contexts and regions to explore conceptual and empirical perspectives on the challenges and opportunities of ‘Bringing the Circular Economy Home’ (Greene et al, 2024). Discussions focused on issues of power, inequality and systemic change, exploring how existing consumption practices intersect with CE imperatives and how everyday routines can be reconfigured to incorporate principles such as repair, reuse and the reduction of material consumption.

While most contributions in this SI emerge from this conference session, others extend and build on these debates through complementary empirical and conceptual perspectives. The resulting collection consists of seven research articles, one conversation and one commentary. Conceptually, these articles draw on and develop perspectives and concepts from theories of social practice, political economy, systems of provision, social learning theories and feminist perspectives on care, consumption work and socioeconomic inequalities, among others. Methodologically, the SI contributions employ qualitative and mixed methods approaches, allowing for in-depth explorations of socio-material and experiential dynamics of everyday practices. And empirically, the contributions span a range of Global North and Global South contexts, examining circular transformations across formal and informal provisioning systems in diverse household, domestic and community environments.

The SI is structured around five cross-cutting themes that together illuminate the complexity of circular transformations in everyday life. First, systems of practice and provision examines how households’ participation in circularity is shaped by broader infrastructures and institutional arrangements, as well as how interconnected practices, such as food storage, repair and plastic reuse, are embedded in everyday routines. Second, relationalities and affectivities foreground the role of social relations, emotions and care in shaping circular practices, highlighting tensions between sustainability ambitions and everyday responsibilities, as well as the labour and gendered dimensions of repair and maintenance work. Third, materialities explores how objects, infrastructures and material flows shape, and are shaped by, circular consumption, drawing attention to systemic inefficiencies and unintended consequences such as material rebound effects and accessibility barriers. Fourth, spatialities considers how digital and physical infrastructures influence circular engagement, revealing uneven geographies of accessibility, spatial frictions and the contrast between local and global circular provisioning systems. Finally, the theme

of inequalities asks how socioeconomic, political and institutional structures create differentiated capacities for circular participation, both within and across societies in the Global South and the Global North.

In what follows, we introduce the SI contributions in detail, discussing the cross-cutting themes and positioning each article within these themes to highlight their central main arguments and contributions. The final section reflects on the broader outlook and implications of these findings for advancing policy, research and practice on circular consumption transformations.

Cross-cutting themes in this special issue

This section highlights key themes running through the SI, positioning the contributions within these themes while recognising that many articles address multiple, interconnected dimensions of everyday circular consumption.

Systems of practice and provisioning

A central focus of this SI is the dynamic and heterogeneous nature of household participation in circular transformations. Several contributions challenge conventional understandings of households as discrete, passive units of consumption, instead demonstrating their function as dynamic systems of practice and provision. These systems are internally complex and shaped by broader infrastructures of acquisition, use and disposal that extend far beyond the household itself (see also [Krog Juvik and Halkier, 2024](#); [Samson, 2024](#)).

In ‘Circular plastic consumption in everyday life: a nexus of practice perspective’, [Åberg and Greene \(2025\)](#) advance a ‘nexus of practice’ approach to explore how plastic use is embedded not only in singular household routines but in the interconnectedness of practices across everyday life. Through qualitative research with Dutch households at different life stages, they show how single-use and reusable plastics are tightly woven into socio-material arrangements of food provisioning, preparation, storage and consumption, shaping and being shaped by temporal, spatial and institutional constraints. Their findings challenge reductionist approaches that frame plastic use as an issue of individual consumer responsibility, instead emphasising how circular participation is contingent upon provisioning infrastructures, work schedules, time pressures and the availability of alternatives. Their findings challenge reductionist approaches that treat plastic consumption as primarily a matter of individual choice and responsibility, arguing instead that it is fundamentally shaped by the ‘socio-material orchestration of daily practices, not just individual choices’.

In a similar vein, [Middha et al \(2025\)](#) in ‘Freezing time, freezing in time: reconfiguring freezing practices for reducing meat waste and energy consumption’ explore how food waste and cold storage practices relate to, and are shaped by, broader socio-material infrastructures. Drawing on qualitative data from 20 Australian households, they employ a social practice lens to illustrate how household meat consumption is embedded in broader systems of food production, distribution and storage. Their findings highlight a critical tension in CE discourse. While policy often frames household food waste as a problem of individual behaviour, their study reveals how domestic freezing and waste practices – a key part of the CE ‘biological loops’ (see [Ellen Macarthur Foundation, 2021](#)) – are constrained by infrastructural and

supply arrangements beyond household control. By tracing how domestic freezing connects to industrial and retail supply chains, the article highlights the structural dependencies that shape everyday resource flows and the limits of voluntary change in household CE participation.

Affectivities and relationalities

Shifting the focus to the affective and relational dimensions of circularity, [Tölg and Fuentes \(2025\)](#) in 'Care and circularity: how the enactment of care enables and shapes the circular consumption of clothing' illustrate how acts of care are central to circular practices. Through ethnographic research with 24 Swedish households, they demonstrate how the repair, maintenance and the 'thoughtful' passing on of clothing is underpinned by a sense of responsibility and care for both unknown future users and wider environmental concerns. However, their analysis also highlights tensions between care and circular ambitions, conceptualised as 'care dilemmas'. Here, competing responsibilities such as work, childcare and domestic obligations create constraints that limit engagement in circular consumption. [Tölg and Fuentes' \(2025\)](#) analysis extends debates on the CE by positioning care as both an enabler and a possible constraint, highlighting how circularity is not just a matter of individual motivation for technical solutions but is enmeshed in complex social and material landscapes of care work.

Extending the focus on care as a form of consumption work, [Lane et al's \(2025\)](#) article, 'Repair and maintenance in Australian households: what drives this critical consumption work in the circular economy?' examines how repair and maintenance in households function as critical, but often invisible, forms of work in circular transformations. Based on a survey of 2,717 households, they explore the socio-demographic factors shaping participation in repair and maintenance across three product categories: clothing, furniture and appliances. Their findings reveal that while repair and maintenance take place in some households, participation is far from uniform. Instead, it is highly stratified according to life stage, gender and economic resources. Older and higher-income households are more likely to engage in repair, either out of necessity or as a choice, while younger and lower-income households often face barriers due to limited financial resources, time constraints or lack of access to repair skills and services. By positioning repair and maintenance as forms of critical consumption work, the article highlights how households' engagement in circular practices is shaped by intersecting socioeconomic, temporal and material conditions. In doing so, it challenges policy frameworks that assume that capacities are common to all households.

Materialities

Building on discussions of the affective and relational dimensions of circularity, another key theme running through the SI is the *materiality* of everyday circular practices. That is, how objects, infrastructures and material flows shape and are shaped by circular consumption. This theme foregrounds not only the physical properties of goods but also the ways in which materials circulate, accumulate and transform through everyday practices of use and disposal. [Lane et al \(2025\)](#) discuss the concept of 'material churn' ([Lane, 2023](#)) to describe the continuous movement of goods

through repair, reuse, maintenance and disposal. They argue that circular practices are rarely linear or straightforward substitutions. Instead, they are complex, recursive processes embedded in broader systems of provision. These dynamics raise critical questions about the extent to which households can meaningfully become active participants in supply and demand chains (see [Rabiu and Jaeger-Erben, 2022](#)): and what the ‘hidden costs’ of circular practices might be, particularly in terms of time, consumption work and rebound effects (see also [Greene et al, 2024](#)).

In their article ‘Rethinking replacement, rebound and environmental impact in reuse practice’, [Isenhour et al \(2024\)](#) extend these discussions by critically examining the environmental assumptions of reuse. In doing so, they challenge dominant CE narratives and environmental impact models that portray reuse practices as inherently sustainable, arguing that it does not always lead to a reduction in material demand. Through qualitative research with active reuse participants in Maine, United States they illustrate how second-hand purchases do not always displace new products but instead contribute to ongoing material flows. These findings highlight the everyday dynamics of material rebound effects, where goods remain in circulation but do not necessarily translate into lower overall consumption. Rather than assuming that reuse is an inherently circular act, [Isenhour et al \(2024\)](#) emphasise the importance of understanding how reuse practices unfold in real-world settings. They argue that the environmental benefits of reuse should not be taken for granted as participation in reuse practices is shaped by diverse motivations, consumption patterns and economic incentives that may not always lead to net reductions in material use.

Furthering the discussion on reuse, [Süßbauer et al \(2025\)](#) in ‘The social life of packaging’ examine how disposable food packaging, typically designed for single use, can take on an extended life within and between households. Through ethnographic work in Brazil, a country with one of the lowest national recycling rates in the world, they explore how 28 households creatively repurpose food packaging. Their analysis highlights the affective, cultural and material factors that shape these practices, demonstrating that reuse is not only an environmentally motivated act but is also strongly dependent on the material properties of the packaging itself (see also [Åberg and Greene, 2025](#)), as well as being embedded in everyday routines, sensory experiences, and economic and social necessities.

The theme of materialities is further developed in [Greene et al’s \(2025\)](#) commentary on the CE and rebound effects, which explores how material rebound in the CE is better understood as a systemic outcome rather than as a failure of design or individual decision-making (see [Zink and Geyer, 2017](#)). That is, so-called circular practices, such as repairing or buying second-hand goods, can shift material unsustainability to other spaces and practices rather than preventing or reducing it. [Greene et al \(2025\)](#) argue that a social practice perspective provides a deeper understanding of how rebound effects emerge not as isolated behavioural shifts, but through interconnected everyday practices, infrastructures and provisioning systems. The commentary illustrates the potential of a practice-inspired framework, the to capture the emergent, relational nature of rebound effects, particularly through its role in facilitating interdisciplinary collaboration – an essential component of holistic rebound research. This is grounded in reflections on the ShaRepair Practices project, a newly launched initiative exploring rebound effects in sharing and repair practices in The Netherlands. Here, a shared social practice lens provides a unifying framework for interdisciplinary research, enabling scholars from diverse disciplinary background, including sociology, design,

environmental sciences and economics, to examine rebound effects from their own vantage points while working within a common theoretical approach. Rather than presenting empirical findings, the commentary considers how this shared framework is shaping research design and advancing interdisciplinary engagement in ShaRepair, inviting further dialogue on embedding practice-based perspectives into CE transitions.

Spatialities

Where materialities and systems of provision shape households' engagement with circularity, spatial dimensions are equally critical in determining where and how circular practices unfold. Contributions in the SI illustrate how digital and physical infrastructures create distinct spatialities that shape patterns of circular participation, contributing to uneven geographies of accessibility and engagement. Rather than being neutral or incidental, the spatial configuration of circular systems, whether online or offline, actively enables and/or constrains participation, highlighting the need for place- and space-sensitive approaches to CE transformations (see also [Holmes et al, 2021](#); [Baumgartner et al, 2024](#)).

In relation to the theme of spatialities, [Korsunova et al \(2025\)](#), in 'Digital platforms for nurturing circular neighbourhood spirits', explore the role of digital platforms in mediating access to circular sharing and reuse practices at the neighbourhood level. Drawing on 40 interviews with eco-activists and eco-influencers in Finland and St Petersburg (Russia), they show how locally embedded platforms, such as neighbourhood-based sharing apps, leverage existing social networks. As such, these apps have the potential to effectively support the uptake and routinisation of circular sharing and reuse practices. This finding counters the dominant narrative that large scale 'global' platforms, such as Uber and Airbnb, are the most effective scale for 'scaling up' sharing practices. By operating within existing social networks and community trust structures, the article argues that localised digital infrastructures are more closely aligned with everyday consumption patterns, suggesting that circular platforms need to be spatially located rather than designed for universal scalability.

Moving from digital to physical infrastructures, [Åberg and Greene \(2025\)](#) show how the spatial configuration of circular provisioning systems – such as zero-waste stores, repair shops and second-hand markets – significantly affects households' engagement with circularity. Unlike linear consumption infrastructures that are designed for accessibility and convenience, circular provisioning systems are often more dispersed, require additional travel or operate during limited hours. This 'spatial friction' creates barriers to participation, particularly for those with limited time or mobility. [Tölg and Fuentes \(2025\)](#) extend this discussion by illustrating how spatial accessibility shapes care in circular practices, as individuals must navigate infrastructural and service constraints when engaging in repair, maintenance and second-hand exchange.

Inequalities

The fifth and final cross-cutting theme explores the ways in which everyday circular practices intersect with and contribute to multi-scalar inequalities. While CE policies often present circularity as a neutral or universally beneficial transition, contributions to the SI illustrate how circular transformations are embedded

in existing socioeconomic and political structures that can both reproduce and exacerbate inequalities. A central piece in this discussion is ‘Everyday circularities: perspectives from the Global South’, a conversation piece between Sonia Dias, Manisha Anantharaman and us, the SI editors, Mary Greene and Kersty Hobson (Dias et al, 2025). This exchange foregrounds perspectives that are often overlooked in mainstream CE discourse, highlighting how everyday circular transformations take place within Global South contexts (see also Morais et al, 2022; Anantharaman, 2024). In particular, the conversation draws attention to the different relationships between households, markets and provisioning systems in Global South contexts. While some higher-income urban Global South households exhibit consumption patterns that increasingly mirror those of consumers in the Global North, others – particularly those engaged in informal labour practices – rely on circular practices such as recovery, repair and reuse to provide essential livelihood income. This creates a form of double inequality: not only are (some) households exposed to the inherent risks of precarious work – such as low pay, income insecurity and hazardous working conditions – they are also made vulnerable to the shifting dynamics of global CE markets. As waste and resource flows become increasingly formalised, these workers risk exclusion from the very systems that sustain them.

This conversation piece thus raises urgent questions about the socioeconomic consequences of CE interventions, particularly the risk that transitions to circularity may reinforce existing inequalities or generate new forms of socioeconomic injustice. Addressing these challenges requires a critical reckoning with what Brand and Wissen (2021) describe as the ‘imperial mode of living’, whereby unsustainable consumption patterns in affluent regions are enabled by the continued exploitation of labour and resources from marginalised places and populations. As Sahakian et al (2022) and this volume argue, CE transformations must be approached not merely as technical or efficiency-driven projects but as deeply political projects that necessitate a commitment to redistribution, justice and global welfare.

Beyond North–South inequalities, the articles in this SI also highlight a range of socioeconomic inequalities within Global North contexts, demonstrating how circular engagement is shaped by intersecting factors such as life stage, socioeconomic status, gender and access to provisioning systems. As discussed earlier, Lane et al (2025) and Åberg and Greene (2025) illustrate how participation in circular practices depends on these broader structural conditions rather than on individual motivations or intentions alone. Isenhour et al (2024) examine how gender, age and income mediate engagement in reuse economies, revealing how access to second-hand markets and participation in resale practices are deeply stratified. Similarly, Åberg and Greene (2025) show how everyday institutional constraints, such as the demands of paid work and the accessibility of provisioning services, create significant barriers to household participation in circular practices. As such, it is apparent that household engagement with circularity is far from uniform. Rather, it is shaped by socioeconomic, material and institutional systems that produce highly diverse experiences and capacities for participation.

Looking forward: implications for policy, research and practice

Research that adopts a broadly ‘practice theory’ approach to consumption often avoids discussions of politics and the political (Yates, 2022). This SI aims to respond to such

critiques by drawing attention to the multi-scalar intersections between ‘everyday’ practices – often misrepresented in policy and research as matters of individual choice, lifestyle and/or personal preference – and the broader socio-material, economic and political systems that shape them. By focusing on everyday circularities, this SI sheds light on how circular consumption practices unfold in the lived spaces of households and communities, highlighting how these sites function as arenas of negotiation, adaptation and resistance. The contributions here also argue for the need to replace the efficiency-driven CE policy frameworks with sufficiency-based approaches. That is, rather than all of us engaging with the CE by ‘consuming differently’ we need to consume less (for example, Åberg and Greene, 2025; Isenhour et al, 2024; Lane et al, 2025; Süßbauer et al, 2025), with an emphasis on the political project of ‘strong sustainable consumption’ (Lorek and Fuchs, 2013). What, then, do the contributions in the SI reveal about where research on ‘everyday circularity’ might go next, and what are the implications for policy, politics and transformation?

The geographically diverse findings in this SI demonstrate the multiple challenges we all face, as everyday citizen-consumers and members of households and communities, in taking up the CE mantle in our daily lives. Yet, there are interesting and hopeful existing practices to be found, such as in the reuse markets of Maine (Isenhour et al, 2024) and the sharing platforms of eco-influencers in Finland and Russia (Korsunova et al, 2025). How can such practices be further supported and nurtured, in ways that take into account and mitigate their possible unintended negative outcomes and rebound effects (Greene et al, 2024)? This is a key question that needs to be addressed, if we are to respond effectively to calls for scaling and mainstreaming of such circular practices (see also Wethal and Hoff, 2024).

The SI articles also highlight how considering inequalities in everyday circularities provokes fundamental questions of labour, power and political economy. That is, while the informal labour in Global South contexts is essential to the effective functioning of multi-scalar CE systems, it is rarely acknowledged or valued in formal strategies. In Global North contexts, CE practices are often framed as ‘good citizen’ behaviour (Lane et al, 2024), undertaken voluntarily, rather than as a form of subsistence or survival so often experienced by those in the Global South. This contrast highlights a key North–South divide in how everyday circularity is lived and experienced, which remains underexplored in the sociology of consumption more broadly.

At the same time, future work should not re-embed a simplistic Global North–South binary. While this binary has been mobilised to critique the uneven geographies of CE interventions (for example, Barrie et al, 2022), this SI highlights how inequalities are present within and across Global South and Global North contexts alike. Dias et al (2025) highlight intra-regional disparities among Global South households in terms of spending power, access to infrastructure and engagement with ‘sustainability’ discourses. Similarly, in the Global North, Lane et al (2025) and Åberg and Greene (2025) show how life stage, gender, access to provisioning infrastructure, and the demands of labour markets and formal education affect how and when households can engage in circular practices.

Taken together, these findings point to a broader challenge for CE interventions, where there is currently little recognition of the differentiated capacities of everyday citizens and households to engage in circular practices (Hobson et al, 2021). If future CE policies and interventions are to be effective across a range of households and daily life situations, serious attention needs to be paid to differentiated barriers

to participation. But many questions remain about how this might be done. For one, can the CE itself – as a ‘headline’ concept driving key environmental policies such as those of the European Commission – be retrofitted and repurposed to fully recognise the complexity of everyday socio-material practices? Or is the concept itself fundamentally flawed, from a sociological perspective (see Jaeger-Erben et al, 2021)? The contributions in this SI do not claim to answer these questions: but they do highlight the urgency of addressing them. What is clear is that if CE interventions have any chance of making a dent in runaway global resource use, the socio-material, political-economic and institutional constraints that shape and co-constitute circular practices must be at the centre of future policies, strategies and interventions.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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