

## Hybrid organizations and the circular transition: A scoping review of the social and solidarity economy

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**Abstract. Objective:** The article investigates how hybrid organizations operating within the social and solidarity economy (SSE) help drive the shift toward a circular economy. Situated at the intersection of work on organizational hybridity, the SSE, and the circular economy, a junction that remains theoretically fragmented, this scoping review synthesizes current scholarship and develops an integrated analytical framework. The inquiry is structured around four questions: (RQ1) How does the literature define and position hybrid SSE organizations in relation to the circular economy? (RQ2) Which organizational forms and practices are most prevalent? (RQ3) Which theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches underpin existing studies? And (RQ4) Which gaps and blind spots set priorities for future research?

**Method:** A scoping review was conducted following Arksey and O'Malley (2005), with refinements by Levac et al. (2010) and PRISMA-ScR guidelines (Tricco et al., 2018). Searches across Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar covered peer-reviewed publications in English and French from January 2016 to March 2026. An initial set of 45 records was identified; following systematic screening and full text review, 10 peer-reviewed studies were retained. The synthesis combined descriptive mapping and qualitative thematic analysis.

**Findings:** The field is recent, largely European, and dominated by qualitative case-based studies. The literature converges around recurring practices such as reuse, repair, recycling, work integration, participatory governance, and community empowerment. Three analytical streams dominate the field: internal hybrid organizing, ecosystem coordination, and social outcomes. Hybrid SSE organizations appear as distinctive circular actors because they link material recovery with social inclusion and territorial embeddedness. Yet the field remains conceptually dispersed and methodologically uneven.

**Conclusion:** The article structures an emerging field, proposes an integrative multilevel framework linking hybrid mission orientation, organizational circular capabilities, and ecosystem governance to inclusive circular value creation, and identifies future research priorities concerning governance quality, outcome measurement, contextual diversity, and blended-value assessment. »

**Keywords:** *Circular economy; Hybrid organizations; Social and solidarity economy; Social enterprise; Circular transition.*

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### 1. Introduction

The circular economy has become a central reference point in contemporary sustainability debates because it promises to reduce resource depletion, waste generation, and environmental degradation by rethinking how materials are produced, circulated, recovered, and reused (Geissdoerfer et al.,

2017; Kirchherr et al., 2017). A sustainable CE must, however, do more than close material loops: it must also ensure equitable value distribution, social justice, and democratic participation in the governance of resource flows (Velenturf & Purnell, 2021). As this agenda has expanded, an important limitation has become increasingly visible: circularity cannot be understood only as a technical or industrial matter. A growing body of studies argues that the social conditions of circular transition are equally important, including questions of inclusion, work, territorial coordination, and the distribution of value across actors and communities (Monciardini et al., 2024; Padilla-Rivera et al., 2020; Wronka-Pośpiech & Twaróg, 2025). From this perspective, the circular economy is seen as a socially embedded transformation whose outcomes depend on the kinds of organizations, institutions, and governance arrangements through which it is enacted (Padilla-Rivera et al., 2020). Once the social dimension of circularity is taken seriously, the question of which organizational actors can carry such a transition becomes unavoidable. This is where hybrid organizations within the social and solidarity economy (SSE) become analytically important (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Defourny & Nyssens, 2017). Unlike conventional organizations driven primarily by shareholder value, hybrid SSE organizations combine economic viability with an explicit social purpose and often extend this dual orientation toward environmental commitments (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Defourny & Nyssens, 2017; Wronka-Pośpiech & Twaróg, 2025). Recent research shows that social cooperatives, social enterprises, work-integration social enterprises (WISEs), reuse centers, and other SSE actors engage in reuse, repair, recycling, redistribution, short-loop production, and community-based circular initiatives while simultaneously pursuing inclusion, territorial development, and collective benefit. SSE organizations therefore appear as organizational vehicles through which more inclusive forms of circularity are made operational (Monciardini et al., 2024; Wronka-Pośpiech & Twaróg, 2025). However, recognizing the relevance of these actors does not mean that the literature has produced a coherent understanding of their role. Research on hybrid organizations and the circular economy has developed through several partially disconnected streams (Costanza, 2023; Monciardini et al., 2024; Van Opstal et al., 2025). A first stream focuses on internal hybrid organizing, examining how organizations combine circular business activity and social mission. For instance, Zaccone et al. (2022) show that hybrid organizations adopt circular economy models through organizational dimensions such as faith, care, "do with," and pedagogy, while Costanza (2023) demonstrates that in clothing recycling, the circular commercial business and the social mission reinforce one another through a dynamic process of organizational development. A second stream shifts attention to ecosystems, networks, and hubs. Monciardini et al. (2024) argue that the social and solidarity circular economy develops through social circular innovation, networked action, and participatory scaling. Pusz et al. (2024) show that socially integrative circular transitions depend on territorial networks, trust, and inter-organizational coordination. Van Opstal et al. (2025) further highlight the role of social circular hubs, emphasizing sustainable governance and ecosystem-level value propositions. A third stream examines social outcomes, especially work integration, green jobs, and job quality. Van Opstal and Borms (2024) identify a positive relationship between circular strategy implementation and work-integration ambitions among startups, while Alagy et al. (2026) show that job quality in the social and solidarity circular economy is heterogeneous and difficult to attribute uniformly to SSCE-specific features.

Although this expanding body of research is valuable, it also exposes a clear gap. Despite rising interest, work on hybrid SSE organizations and the circular economy has developed along three distinct lines: internal hybrid organizing, ecosystem coordination, and social outcomes. To date, these lines have not been brought together into a coherent synthesis that spans them all (Battilana

& Lee, 2014; Pache & Santos, 2013; Wronka-Pośpiech & Tworóg, 2025). Closely related notions, including hybrid organizations, social enterprises, WISEs, and the social and solidarity circular economy, are discussed in overlapping debates that remain only weakly integrated. The result is a field rich in individual insights but lacking a structured map of how its core concepts, organizational forms, theoretical frameworks, and outcome categories connect with one another.

As pressure mounts to reconcile economic activity with planetary boundaries, attention has turned to hybrid social and solidarity economy (SSE) organizations as potential catalysts for sustainable transformation. These entities may enable circular, inclusive, and locally rooted value creation, though current research remains fragmented in both theory and evidence (Monciardini et al., 2024; Pusz et al., 2024; Zaccone et al., 2022). This article addresses the disconnect by advancing three interrelated contributions. First, while earlier analyses have often isolated specific organizational levels or outcomes, this review unpacks the interplay between hybrid internal structures, ecosystem-level governance, and social impact as intrinsically linked dimensions of one coherent dynamic. Moreover, a key breakthrough lies in recognizing these as mutually constituting aspects rather than separate domains. Second, the article offers an integrative multilevel framework that connects hybrid mission orientation with circular capabilities, ecosystem coordination, and inclusive value creation. Such an approach fills a critical void. Existing literature either explores hybridity without integrating circular economy principles (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Ebrahim, Battilana & Mair, 2014), investigates the circular economy without a focus on hybrid organizing (Velenturf & Purnell, 2021), or relies on individual case illustrations without broader synthesis (Monciardini et al., 2024). Here, the framework bridges these divides. Third, through a systematic scoping review of ten peer-reviewed articles sourced from Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, this study delivers the first structured mapping of hybrid SSE in relation to the circular economy. It traces how these organizations are conceptualized, identifies dominant organizational forms and practices, analyzes underlying theoretical and methodological trends, and defines pressing knowledge gaps. The result is a clearer, more cohesive understanding of what remains a diffuse but vital field. A research agenda emerges.

This scoping review addresses four research questions: RQ1. How are hybrid SSE organizations conceptualized in relation to the circular economy? RQ2. Which organizational forms and circular practices dominate the field? RQ3. Which theoretical and methodological frameworks structure current knowledge? RQ4. Which gaps define the future research agenda for hybrid circular organizing within the SSE?

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. The next section presents the review method. The following section reports the results of the scoping review. The paper then develops an integrative framework of hybrid circular organizing within the SSE and discusses the main theoretical implications and research gaps. The final section concludes with the article's key contributions, limitations, and directions for future research.

## **2. Method**

### **a. Stage 1 — Identifying the research question**

This study adopts a scoping review design to map and synthesize the literature on the role of hybrid organizations in advancing circular economy practices within the social and solidarity economy (SSE). Methodologically, the review follows the framework proposed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) and the subsequent refinements of Levac, Colquhoun, and O'Brien (2010). The former

established the foundational stages of scoping reviews, whereas the latter clarified the need for stronger alignment between review purpose, study selection, analytical synthesis, and reporting transparency. Reporting was structured in accordance with PRISMA-ScR, while the review flow was organized using the selection logic formalized in PRISMA 2020 to improve transparency in identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion (Levac et al., 2010; Tricco et al., 2018; Page et al., 2021).

#### **b. Stage 2 — Identifying relevant studies**

A structured search strategy was designed to identify studies located at the intersection of three domains: organizational hybridity, the social and solidarity economy (SSE), and the circular economy. Following guidance on when scoping reviews are preferable to systematic reviews, the search strategy was intentionally broad at the identification stage and progressively narrowed during screening to capture conceptual variation without sacrificing analytical coherence (Munn et al., 2018). Three complementary sources were used: Scopus, Web of Science Core Collection, and Google Scholar. Scopus and Web of Science were selected because they provide broad and high-quality coverage of peer-reviewed journals in management, social sciences, sustainability, innovation, and development studies. Google Scholar was used as a supplementary source to identify interdisciplinary or recently indexed work that might not be fully captured by the two principal databases.

Between March 16, 2026, and April 16, 2026, database searches were carried out. Publications from January 2016 to March 2026 were included in the temporal scope. The European Commission's first Circular Economy Action Plan (European Commission, 2015) accelerated institutional discourse on the circular economy and sparked a wave of empirical and conceptual research across management, social sciences, and sustainability studies, which is why 2016 was chosen as the starting point. Furthermore, an early contribution to the literature on hybrid circular organization was made in 2016 (Gorissen et al., 2016), indicating the beginning of academic interest in the junction of SSE and CE. A decade of emergent literature on this intersection will be nearly fully covered if the terminus is set at March 2026. To strike a compromise between linguistic range and analytical coherence, the search was limited to works written in both English and French. Only the title, abstract, and author keyword fields were searched in Scopus and Web of Science. The top 200 relevance-ranked Google Scholar results were filtered.

An initial set of 45 records was identified across the three sources.

This multi-source strategy is consistent with the logic of scoping reviews, which aim to map the breadth of the field before applying tighter relevance criteria (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Pollock et al., 2021). As shown in Table 1, the search strings were structured around two complementary keyword blocks, one related to the organizational dimension and the other to the circular dimension and were adapted to the specific search architecture of each database.

**Table 1. Search string structure and database application**

Component	Content	Application across databases
<b>Keyword block 1: Organizational dimension</b>	"hybrid organization", "hybrid organisation*", hybridity, "social enterprise*", cooperative*, "social and solidarity economy", SSE, "work integration social enterprise*", "community enterprise*", mutual*, "nonprofit organization*"	Applied in combination with the circular dimension using Boolean operators
<b>Keyword block 2: Circular dimension</b>	"circular economy*", recycling, reuse, repair, "waste valorization", remanufacturing, "resource recovery", "industrial symbiosis", "product-service system", "closed-loop", "sharing economy*"	Applied in combination with the organizational dimension using Boolean operators
<b>Boolean logic</b>	Combination of the two keyword blocks using Boolean operators	Used across all selected databases, with syntax adapted where necessary
<b>Scopus and Web of Science</b>	The search was applied to titles, abstracts, and keywords.	Full search string applied to title, abstract, and keyword fields
<b>Google Scholar</b>	More focused queries derived from the two keyword blocks	Screening restricted to the most relevant results

*Source: Authors*

### c. Stage 3 — Study selection

Eligibility criteria were defined a priori and applied consistently during screening. Studies were included if they were peer-reviewed publications in English or French, focused on organizations combining economic activity with a social mission or clearly situated within the SSE, addressed at least one circular economy practice substantively, and contained an identifiable organizational or institutional perspective relevant to the review question. Studies were excluded if they dealt only with technical aspects of the circular economy, addressed SSE without a meaningful circular dimension, examined the circular economy without an SSE or hybrid organizational focus, or lacked analytical value. This delimitation is consistent with the purpose of scoping reviews, namely to map a field while preserving conceptual focus (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Levac et al., 2010).

Study selection followed the four phase PRISMA 2020 logic of identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion, as illustrated in Figure 1 (Page et al., 2021).

**Identification.** Database searches yielded a total of 45 records across the three sources: 20 from Scopus, 15 from Web of Science, and 10 from Google Scholar. Of these, 12 duplicate records were identified and removed prior to any screening, while no records were removed for other reasons at this stage. This left a pool of 33 unique records carried forward for screening.

**Screening.** The 33 records were screened on the basis of their titles and abstracts. Records that clearly fell outside the review's thematic boundaries, for instance, purely engineering focused circular economy articles or SSE studies with no engagement with circularity, were excluded at this stage. Following this initial screening, 19 records were excluded and 14 were retained as potentially eligible. Of these 14 reports sought for full text retrieval, 1 could not be obtained, resulting in 13 reports available for full text eligibility assessment.

**Eligibility assessment.** Each of the 13 retrieved reports was read in full and assessed against the pre-defined eligibility criteria. Three records were excluded at this stage for the following specific reasons: one fell outside the SSE or hybrid organization focus; one addressed topics outside the scope of the circular economy; and one lacked sufficient organizational analysis to be analytically useful for the purposes of this review.

**Inclusion.** After applying the eligibility criteria consistently across all 13 assessed reports, 10 peer-reviewed studies were retained and included in the final corpus. The selection decisions were made by the lead author, documented systematically, and revisited iteratively to ensure conceptual coherence. Where borderline cases arose, the guiding criterion was the review's primary objective: to map the organizational and institutional dimensions of the circular transition within SSE contexts. These procedures are consistent with standards for methodological transparency in scoping reviews (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Levac et al., 2010; Pollock et al., 2021).

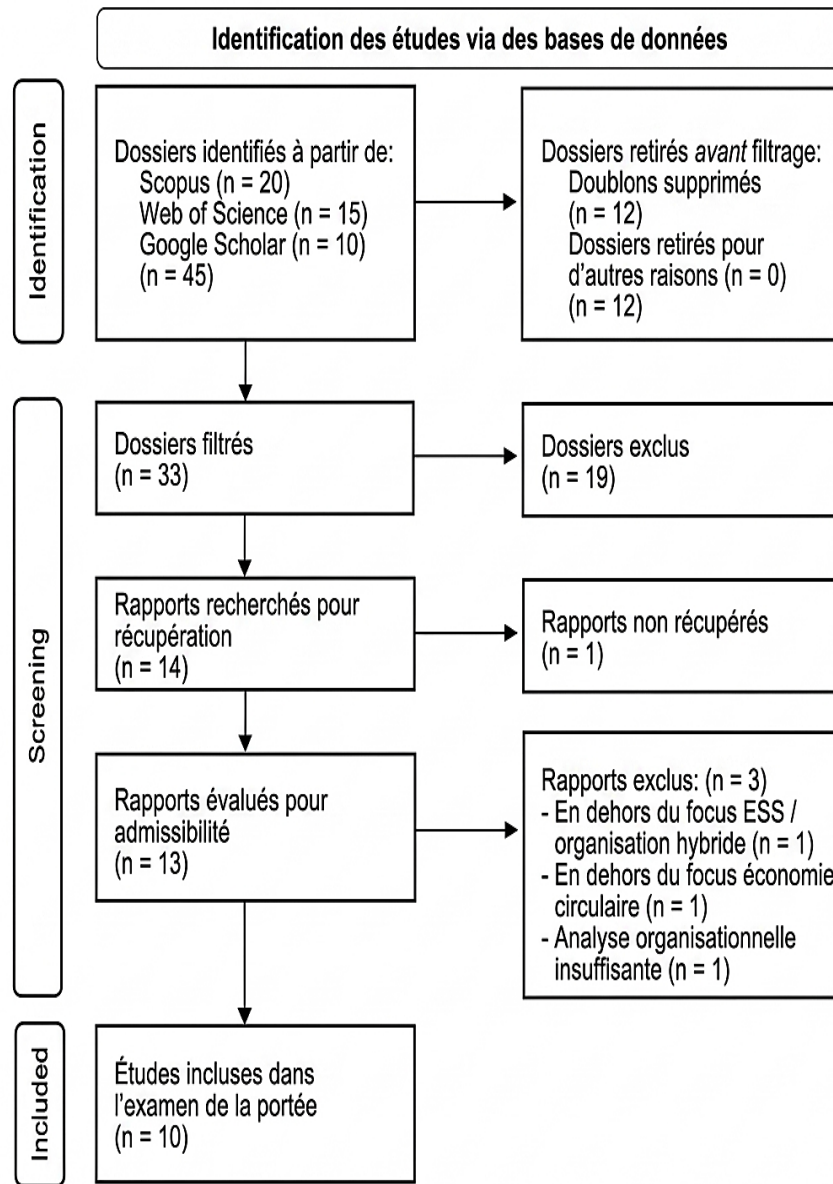
#### **d. Stage 4 — Charting the data**

A structured charting framework was used to extract comparable information from each study, including bibliographic details, context, organizational form, circular practice, study objective, theoretical lens, method, key findings, form of hybridity, reported tensions, and value dimensions addressed. This process supported both descriptive mapping and cross-study comparison of how hybridity, circularity, value creation, and organizational tensions are conceptualized, consistent with the purpose of scoping reviews (Tricco et al., 2018; Pollock et al., 2021).

#### **e. Stage 5 — Collating, summarizing, and reporting the results**

The synthesis combined descriptive mapping with iterative qualitative thematic analysis. The descriptive component captured the distribution of studies across years, contexts, organizational forms, and methods. The thematic analysis focused on five dimensions: conceptualizations of hybrid organizations within the SSE, organizational forms and governance, circular practices and business models, tensions between economic, social, and environmental aims, and reported outcomes such as inclusion, green jobs, territorial embeddedness, and ecosystem innovation.

**Figure 1. PRISMA flow chart**



Source : <https://www.prisma-statement.org/prisma-2020-flow-diagram>

### 3. Results

#### a. The characteristics of selected studies

Table 2 summarizes the main characteristics of the studies retained in the review, including authorship, year of publication, journal outlet, study context, research design, analytical focus, and principal findings.

**Table 2. Summary of selected studies**

Authors	Year	Journal	Study title	Context	Design	Main focus	Key findings
Monciardini et al.	2024	Business Strategy and the Environment	Virtuous circles: Transformative impact and challenges of the social and solidarity circular economy	Italy: CAUTO network of social cooperatives	Case study	SSCE model	Defines SSCE through hybrid practices combining waste valorization and social inclusion; highlights social circular innovation, networked action, and participatory scaling
Wronka-Pośpiech, M., & Twaróg, S.	2024	Resources	Social Economy Organizations as Catalysts of the Green Transition: Evidence from Circular Economy, Decarbonization, and Short Food Supply Chains	Portugal, Italy, Hungary, Belgium, and Poland; 16 good practices	Qualitative multi-case study	SEOs in green transition	Shows that social economy organizations combine economic, social, and ecological goals; reports reduced resource use, lower emissions, green jobs, and stronger local cooperation
Van Opstal et al.	2025	Business Strategy and the Environment	Unlocking the Social Circular Economy: Value Propositions and Organizational Design of Social Circular Hubs	Flanders and European circular hubs	Mixed methods	Social circular hubs	Shows that WISEs and circular hubs can support a just circular transition; stresses ecosystem value propositions and sustainable governance
Reddy & Basha	2025	Journal of Marketing & Social Research	Circular Economy and Social Entrepreneurship: A New Frontier for Sustainable Development	Conceptual / global	Conceptual article	CE and social entrepreneurship	Argues that combining CE and social entrepreneurship can generate inclusion, jobs, and resilience; identifies regulation, finance, and awareness as major barriers
Costanza	2023	Journal of Cleaner Production	When the business is circular and social: A dynamic grounded analysis in the clothing recycle	Clothing recycling sector	Qualitative case study	Circular-social business model dynamics	Shows mutual reinforcement between circular commercial activity and social mission; emphasizes stakeholder participation and educational work
Van Opstal & Borms	2024	Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics	Work integration ambitions of startups in the circular economy	Startups with different circular strategies	Survey-based study	Work integration and circular startups	Finds a positive relationship between circular strategy implementation and work-integration ambitions; identifies collaboration potential with WISEs in repair, redesign, and recycling
Alagy, Bernard & Raufflet.	2026	Journal of Circular Economy	Examining Job Satisfaction in the Social and Solidarity Circular Economy	SSCE organizations / workers	Mixed methods	Job satisfaction and work quality	Shows that job quality in SSCE is heterogeneous and varies by organization type, circular strategy, and position
Zaccone et al.	2022	Sustainability	How Hybrid Organizations Adopt Circular Economy Models to Foster Sustainable Development	Italy: hybrid organizations	Qualitative study	Internal hybrid circular organizing	Identifies four dimensions of hybrid circular organizing: faith, care, doing with, and pedagogy
Pusz, Jonas & Deutz	2024	Circular Economy and Sustainability	Knitting Circular Ties: Empowering Networks for the Social Enterprise-led Local Development of an Integrative Circular Economy	Hull, United Kingdom; social enterprise ecosystem	Social network analysis + interviews	Ecosystem-level circular coordination	It shows that trust, local ties, resource flows, and inter-organizational coordination are central to socially integrative circular transitions.
Gorissen, Vrancken & Manshoven	2016	Sustainability	Transition Thinking and Business Model Innovation—Towards a Transformative Business Model and New Role for the Reuse Centers of Limburg, Belgium	Limburg, Belgium; reuse centers	Case study	Transformative business model innovation	Shows that reuse centers can evolve through co-creation, reflexive design, and transition-oriented business model innovation

### b. Publication years

The retained studies show that the field is recent and still consolidating (see Table 3). Although one earlier study dates back to 2016, the corpus is mainly concentrated between 2022 and 2026. The years 2022 and 2024 appear particularly important, marking the emergence and expansion of research on hybrid circular organizing, SSCE, ecosystem coordination, and work integration. The years 2025 and 2026 extend this trajectory through work on social circular hubs, green transitions, and job satisfaction in SSCE. This temporal distribution suggests that the field remains emergent rather than mature.

**Table 3. Evolution of the field by publication year**

Year	Main contribution
2016	Early contributions to reuse centers and transformative business model innovation
2022	Emergence of studies on hybrid circular organizing and circular-social business model dynamics
2024	Strong expansion of the field through SSCE, networks, and work-integration studies
2025	Broadening toward social circular hubs and green transition organizations
2026	Extension toward worker-centered analysis and job satisfaction in SSCE

*Source: Authors*

### c. Authors

The retained corpus is not authored by a highly dispersed community; rather, it is organized around a small number of recurring research streams. A first stream is led by Van Opstal and collaborators, whose work spans circular startups, work-integration social enterprises (WISEs), and social circular hubs. This cluster contributes most directly to the organizational design and labor-inclusion dimensions of the field. A second stream is associated with Monciardini, Rocca, and Veneziani, who develop the concept of the social and solidarity circular economy (SSCE) through the case of the CAUTO network of Italian social cooperatives. A third stream includes Zaccone, Santhià, and Bosone, who focus on the internal organizing dynamics of hybrid organizations adopting circular business models. A fourth stream is represented by Pusz, Jonas, and Deutz, whose contribution lies in explaining how socially embedded circularity is enabled by local networks, trust structures, and territorial relations. Additional contributions come from Costanza on clothing recycling; Alagy, Bernard, and Raufflet on job satisfaction in SSCE; Gorissen, Vrancken, and Manshoven on reuse center transformation; and Wronka-Pośpiech and Twaróg on social economy organizations in the green transition.

### d. Countries

The geography of the retained studies is highly uneven. The evidence base is overwhelmingly European, with particularly strong empirical anchoring in Italy, Belgium/Flanders, and the United Kingdom. Italy is central in both the CAUTO social cooperatives study by Monciardini et al. (2024) and the hybrid circular organizations study by Zaccone et al. (2022). Belgium/Flanders appears as

a major laboratory for research on WISEs, startups, and social circular hubs in the work of Van Opstal and colleagues. The United Kingdom is represented through the Hull-based network study by Pusz et al. (2024), while Wronka-Pośpiech and Twaróg (2025) extend the geographical scope slightly through 16 practices from Portugal, Italy, Hungary, Belgium, and Poland. This geographical concentration has two implications. First, the current evidence reflects contexts where the SSE is already institutionally visible and where circular transition discourse is relatively mature. Second, the literature remains weakly equipped to explain whether the same mechanisms hold in contexts characterized by weaker social economy infrastructures, higher informality, or less institutional support for circular transition.

**Table 4. Distribution of the papers by country**

Country / region	Representative studies	Main empirical focus
Italy	Monciardini et al. (2024); Zaccone et al. (2022); Costanza (2023)	Social cooperatives, hybrid circular organizations, clothing recycling
Belgium / Flanders	Van Opstal and Borms (2024); Van Opstal et al. (2025); Gorissen et al. (2016)	WISEs, circular startups, social circular hubs, and reuse centers
United Kingdom	Pusz et al. (2024)	Social enterprise ecosystem in Hull
Portugal	Wronka-Pośpiech and Twaróg (2025)	Good practices in the green transition
Hungary	Wronka-Pośpiech and Twaróg (2025)	Good practices in the green transition
Poland	Wronka-Pośpiech and Twaróg (2025)	Good practices in the green transition
Multi-country Europe-wide	Van Opstal et al. (2025); Wronka-Pośpiech and Twaróg (2025)	Circular hubs, cross-country good practices.

*Source: Authors*

#### e. Methods

Methodologically, the retained literature is dominated by qualitative and case-based designs, confirming that the field remains primarily oriented toward mechanism discovery, conceptual refinement, and contextual explanation rather than generalized causal testing. As shown in Table 5, the strongest contributions rely on in-depth qualitative inquiry, while mixed-method, survey-based, and conceptual studies remain comparatively limited. This methodological profile reveals a clear asymmetry: the field is richer in interpretive depth than in comparative breadth, and stronger in explaining organizational processes than in measuring variation in outcomes.

**Table 5. Methodological profile of the retained studies**

	<b>Representative studies</b>	<b>Main methodological characteristics</b>
<b>Qualitative case study</b>	Costanza (2023); Monciardini et al. (2024); Gorissen et al. (2016)	In-depth case-based inquiry focused on organizational processes, mission dynamics, business model transformation, and social-circular innovation
<b>Qualitative interview-based study</b>	Zaccone et al. (2022)	Based on six in-depth interviews with social entrepreneurs
<b>Qualitative multi-case study</b>	Wronka-Pośpiech and Twaróg (2025)	Analysis of 16 good practices across several European countries
<b>Social network analysis combined with interviews</b>	Pusz et al. (2024)	Combines social network analysis with semi-structured interviews across 31 social enterprises
<b>Mixed methods</b>	Van Opstal et al. (2025); Alagy et al. (2026)	Combination of survey data and interviews, or quantitative and qualitative evidence
<b>Survey-based study</b>	Van Opstal and Borms (2024)	Quantitative survey of startups with varying levels of circular strategy implementation
<b>Conceptual article</b>	Reddy and Basha (2025)	Non-empirical conceptual discussion

*Source: Authors*

#### **f. Most cited theories**

A theory-based reading of the corpus shows that the field has not yet consolidated around a single dominant framework. Instead, it is structured by complementary but only partially integrated perspectives, each capturing a distinct dimension of hybrid circular organizing. This plurality is analytically valuable, but it also explains why the literature remains fragmented: some studies privilege internal mission and organizational identity, others emphasize ecosystem coordination, and others focus on business model transformation, while a smaller stream foregrounds labor and justice concerns. The result is a field that is conceptually rich, yet still short of a cumulative explanatory architecture.

Hybrid organization theory provides the main conceptual anchor. Zaccone, Santhià, and Bosone (2022) show that hybrid circularity is enacted through care, pedagogy, and relational embeddedness rather than through the simple coexistence of social and commercial aims. Monciardini, Rocca, and Veneziani (2024) similarly mobilize hybridity to frame the social and solidarity circular economy as an organizational bridge between social inclusion and material valorization.

A second strand introduces institutional logics and legitimacy. Wronka-Pośpiech and Twaróg (2025) show that social economy organizations balance social, environmental, and economic logics while remaining embedded in trusted community contexts. This suggests that circularity in the SSE gains traction not only because it is operationally useful but also because it becomes institutionally intelligible and locally legitimate, even if this perspective remains less developed than the hybridity lens itself.

The literature then extends toward social innovation and the emerging concept of SSCE. Monciardini et al. (2024) provide its strongest formulation, showing how social circular innovation, networked action, and participatory scaling redefine circularity as an inclusive and solidaristic mode of coordination. This marks a clear shift in the field, although SSCE remains an emerging rather than stabilized paradigm.

A further extension appears through network, ecosystem, and intermediation perspectives. Pusz, Jonas, and Deutz (2024), together with Van Opstal, Bocken, and Brusselsaers (2025), show that hybrid circularity is not only an intra-organizational phenomenon but also an ecosystemic accomplishment shaped by trust, coordination, and intermediary structures. This meso-level view is important but remains weakly integrated with organization-centered accounts of hybridity.

The literature also introduces a dynamic reading through business model innovation and transition theory. Gorissen, Vrancken, and Manshoven (2016), as well as Costanza (2023), show that hybrid circular organizations evolve through redesign, experimentation, and stakeholder mobilization, bringing temporality into a field otherwise dominated by static descriptions. Finally, a smaller but important stream centers on labor, job quality, and circular justice. Van Opstal and Borms (2024), together with Alagy, Bernard, and Raufflet (2026), show that the social value of hybrid circularity cannot be inferred from mission statements alone, but must be examined through work integration, job quality, and inclusion outcomes. This perspective offers a necessary corrective, although it remains insufficiently connected to governance and business model research. Critical and comparative reading of these theoretical strands reveals both productive tensions and significant gaps. The hybrid organization lens is analytically powerful because it highlights plural logics and mission complexity, but it tends to underspecify the environmental dimension and treats circularity as a backdrop rather than a constitutive organizational challenge. Institutional logics theory adds explanatory depth by showing how legitimacy and embeddedness shape circular action but remains weakly connected to ecosystem dynamics and outcome measurement. Social innovation and SSCE frameworks are promising because they connect organizational hybridity with collective coordination and territorial development, yet they remain empirically nascent and conceptually underspecified. Network and ecosystem perspectives offer a corrective to firm-level analysis, but their integration with organizational theories of hybridity is still partial. Business model transformation approaches usefully introduce temporality and process, but rarely connect to the governance or labor dimensions of circular organizing. Finally, the labor and justice stream provides an indispensable empirical corrective, challenging overly optimistic framings of SSCE, but it remains isolated from the broader theoretical conversation. What the field currently lacks is a framework capable of linking these perspectives across levels of analysis, from organizational mission to ecosystem governance to differentiated social outcomes. The multilevel framework proposed in Section 3.8 responds to precisely this theoretical need.

#### **g. Overview of the main practices identified in the reviewed literature**

Table 6 shows that the reviewed literature converges around a relatively stable set of circular-social practices. The most recurrent patterns combine material loop-closing activities—such as reuse, repair, refurbishment, recycling, and upcycling—with socially oriented practices, notably work integration, skills development, partnership building, participatory governance, and community empowerment. Overall, the table indicates that circularity in hybrid and social economy organizations is not treated as a purely technical or environmental process; rather, it is framed as an organizational model that integrates resource recovery with inclusion, territorial embeddedness, and collective value creation.

**Table 6. Most recurrent circular-social practices identified in the reviewed literature**

<b>Practice category</b>	<b>Specific practices observed</b>	<b>Analytical meaning in the literature</b>	<b>References</b>
Resource recovery and loop-closing practices	Reuse, repair, refurbishment, recycling, redesign, upcycling	These are the most visible operational practices at the intersection of the circular economy and social enterprise. They represent the material dimension of circularity through which organizations retain value, reduce waste, and create locally embedded activities.	Costanza (2023); Monciardini et al. (2024); Pusz et al. (2024); Van Opstal and Borms (2024)
Social inclusion through circular activity	Work integration, employment of vulnerable groups, labor-market reintegration, inclusive jobs	Circular practices are framed not only as environmental solutions but also as mechanisms for the inclusion of marginalized populations in productive activity. This dimension is especially central in the WISE and SSCE literature.	Monciardini et al. (2024); Van Opstal and Borms (2024); Van Opstal et al. (2025); Alagy et al. (2026)
Skills development and capability building	Training, reskilling, upskilling, operational capability strengthening	Several studies show that circular-social models require workforce development. Capability building appears both as a condition for circular transition and as a social outcome, particularly for disadvantaged workers and partner organizations.	Van Opstal and Borms (2024); Van Opstal et al. (2025); Wronka-Pośpiech and Twaróg (2025)
Networked and partnership-based organizing	Cross-sector collaboration, partnerships, ecosystem coordination, and interorganizational ties	The literature consistently shows that circular-social initiatives are network-dependent rather than firm-isolated. Value creation relies on cooperation among social enterprises, public actors, firms, civil society, and knowledge institutions.	Monciardini et al. (2024); Pusz et al. (2024); Van Opstal et al. (2025); Zaccone et al. (2022)
Participatory and democratic governance	Participatory scaling, democratic governance, stakeholder engagement, community participation	Beyond technical circularity, several studies emphasize governance arrangements as a defining feature of social and solidarity circular economy models, distinguishing them from purely corporate circular approaches.	Monciardini et al. (2024); Van Opstal et al. (2025); Zaccone et al. (2022)
Awareness raising and educational work	Consumer education, spreading knowledge, environmental awareness, pedagogy	Many organizations do not only process materials; they also seek to transform behaviors, values, and public understanding of sustainability. This educational role is treated as part of the social mission of hybrid circular organizations.	Costanza (2023); Wronka-Pośpiech and Twaróg (2025); Zaccone et al. (2022)
Community empowerment	Community support, local	Several studies stress that social-circular practices are strongly embedded in local	

and local embeddedness	development, neighborhood-level circular initiatives, territorial anchoring	settings. Their contribution lies not only in waste valorization but also in strengthening local resilience, solidarity, and place-based development.	Monciardini et al. (2024); Pusz et al. (2024); Wronka-Pośpiech and Twaróg (2025)
Organizational hybridity and mission integration	Combining commercial logic with social mission, linking environmental and social value creation	A recurrent pattern across the literature is not simply a set of practices but a mode of organizing in which circular and social goals are deliberately integrated. This hybridity is presented as a defining characteristic of social enterprises and SSCE organizations.	Costanza (2023); Monciardini et al. (2024); Zaccone et al. (2022)

*Source: Authors*

### **h. Conceptual Framework**

The reviewed literature indicates that the relationship between hybrid organizations and circular economy practices cannot be adequately explained through a single-level lens. At the organizational level, Zaccone, Santhià, and Bosone (2022) show that hybrid organizations develop circular business models through internal mechanisms such as care, pedagogy, relational embeddedness, and collaborative engagement. At the ecosystem level, Monciardini, Rocca, and Veneziani (2024) argue that social and solidarity circular economy initiatives are enabled by social circular innovation, networked action, and participatory scaling, while Pusz, Jonas, and Deutz (2024) demonstrate that local circular development depends on trust, socio-spatial positioning, and cross-sector network constellations. At the governance level, Van Opstal, Bocken, and Brusselsaers (2025) show that social circular hubs require sustainable governance and ecosystem-level value propositions. Finally, at the outcome level, Wronka-Pośpiech and Twaróg (2025) show that social economy organizations can generate blended economic, social, and ecological value, while Van Opstal and Borms (2024) and Alagy, Bernard, and Raufflet (2026) highlight work integration, job creation, and heterogeneous job-quality outcomes.

However, these insights remain theoretically dispersed. The current literature tends to separate the organizational articulation of hybridity, the ecosystemic conditions of coordination, and the social consequences of circular transition. The conceptual framework proposed here addresses that fragmentation by organizing the findings into a multilevel process model. Its central claim is that a hybrid SSE mission does not automatically produce inclusive circular outcomes. Rather, hybrid mission must be translated into organizational circular capabilities; these capabilities must be reinforced by ecosystem coordination and mission-consistent governance; and only then can organizations generate inclusive circular value creation that is environmentally substantive, socially embedded, and economically viable (Zaccone et al., 2022; Monciardini et al., 2024; Van Opstal et al., 2025).

#### ***Theme 1: Hybrid mission orientation***

The first construct is hybrid mission orientation, understood as the integrated pursuit of economic viability and social purpose within SSE organizations. This idea is strongly supported by Wronka-Pośpiech and Twaróg (2025), who describe social economy organizations as entities that combine economic objectives with explicit social and environmental missions rather than privileging profit

maximization alone. In a similar vein, Battilana and Lee (2014) conceptualize hybrid organizations as entities that pursue multiple institutional logics simultaneously, while Defourny and Nyssens (2017) show that social enterprises are structurally defined by the articulation of entrepreneurial activity and social purpose. More specifically, Wronka-Pośpiech and Twaróg (2025) note that social enterprises combine non-profit and for-profit characteristics while reinvesting surpluses toward social, environmental, and economic objectives. This interpretation is also consistent with Zaccone et al. (2022) and Monciardini et al. (2024), whose analyses suggest that the social and environmental commitments of hybrid organizations shape the meaning and direction of circular action.

Within the proposed framework, hybrid mission orientation is treated as the foundational antecedent because it shapes how organizations define value, select partners, and interpret circular opportunities. However, the framework does not assume that a mission is self-executing. The findings instead indicate that hybrid mission is a strategic orientation, not a direct generator of outcomes. In other words, the coexistence of economic and social purpose creates the conditions for circular and inclusive action but does not in itself guarantee that such action will be effectively operationalized. This distinction is important because it separates mission orientation from organizational capability and helps explain why not all hybrid organizations generate the same circular or social outcomes.

### ***Theme 2: Organizational circular capabilities***

The second construct is organizational circular capabilities, defined as the internal mechanisms through which a hybrid mission is translated into operational circular practice. This construct is grounded first in Zaccone et al. (2022), who identify four enabling dimensions of hybrid circular organizing—faith, care, "do with," and pedagogy. Their analysis shows that circular action in hybrid organizations depends not only on technical redesign but also on relational commitment, human-centered responsibility, and educational work. This interpretation is reinforced by Costanza (2023), whose study of clothing recycling demonstrates that circular commercial activity and social mission evolve through a dynamic process of mutual reinforcement rather than as parallel logics merely coexisting within the same organization. In a complementary way, Gorissen et al. (2016) show that transformative business model innovation in reuse centers requires reflexive design, co-creation, and systems-oriented organizational adaptation, while Van Opstal and Borms (2024) suggest that circular implementation is also linked to concrete operational capacities in areas such as repair, redesign, logistics, and recycling.

Organizational circular capabilities therefore include relational embeddedness, care-based organizing, pedagogical action, collaborative business model innovation, and the operational ability to implement reuse, repair, refurbishment, remanufacturing, and recycling practices. These capabilities are not treated as generic technical competencies but as mission-shaped organizational resources that mediate between normative orientation and actual practice. Their analytical role is central because they explain why hybrid mission alone does not automatically generate inclusive circular outcomes. Mission provides direction, but capabilities determine whether that direction can be translated into stable organizational action. In this sense, organizational circular capabilities constitute the mediating layer between hybrid mission orientation and value creation outcomes.

### ***Theme 3: Ecosystem coordination and governance***

The third construct is ecosystem coordination and governance. The retained studies repeatedly show that hybrid circularity is not solely an intra-organizational achievement but depends on the

relational and institutional environment in which organizations operate. Monciardini et al. (2024) demonstrate that the CAUTO network's social and solidarity circular economy strategy emerged through social circular innovation, networked action, and participatory scaling, thereby showing that circular-social value creation is sustained through collective coordination rather than isolated organizational effort. In a complementary way, Pusz et al. (2024) show that a socially integrative circular economy depends on cross-sector relationships, knowledge spillovers, resource flows, and differentiated levels of trust within the local ecosystem. Extending this ecosystemic perspective, Van Opstal et al. (2025) conceptualize social circular hubs as intermediating structures that connect businesses, civil society, governments, and knowledge institutions, while stressing that their effectiveness depends on sustainable governance and ecosystem-level value propositions. This interpretation is also consistent with broader work on collaborative and territorial dimensions of circular transition, which emphasizes that circular outcomes are often conditioned by inter-organizational coordination rather than firm-level intent alone.

Ecosystem coordination and governance are therefore treated not as a passive context but as an amplifying and stabilizing mechanism. Organizational capabilities may exist internally, but their actual impact depends on whether the surrounding ecosystem provides trusted territorial networks, intermediation spaces, cross-sector partnerships, and governance arrangements capable of preserving mission coherence while enabling collaboration, scaling, and legitimacy. In this sense, ecosystem coordination explains why similar organizational missions and capabilities may produce different outcomes across contexts. It functions as the relational layer through which hybrid circular initiatives become durable, credible, and territorially embedded.

#### ***Theme 4: Inclusive circular value creation***

The fourth construct is inclusive circular value creation, which represents the main outcome of the framework. The review supports a three-dimensional view of value. First, hybrid SSE organizations generate environmental value through reuse, repair, recycling, lower resource consumption, and reduced emissions (Wronka-Pośpiech & Twaróg, 2025; Costanza, 2023). Second, they generate social value through work integration, green jobs, inclusion, and community resilience (Van Opstal & Borms, 2024; Alagy et al., 2026). Third, they create economic value through viable circular business models and stable value propositions (Van Opstal et al., 2025; Gorissen et al., 2016). The term "inclusive circular value creation" is preferred to conventional performance language because the retained studies show that the distinctiveness of hybrid SSE organizations lies in the co-production of environmental, social, and economic value.

#### ***Theme 5: Feedback effects***

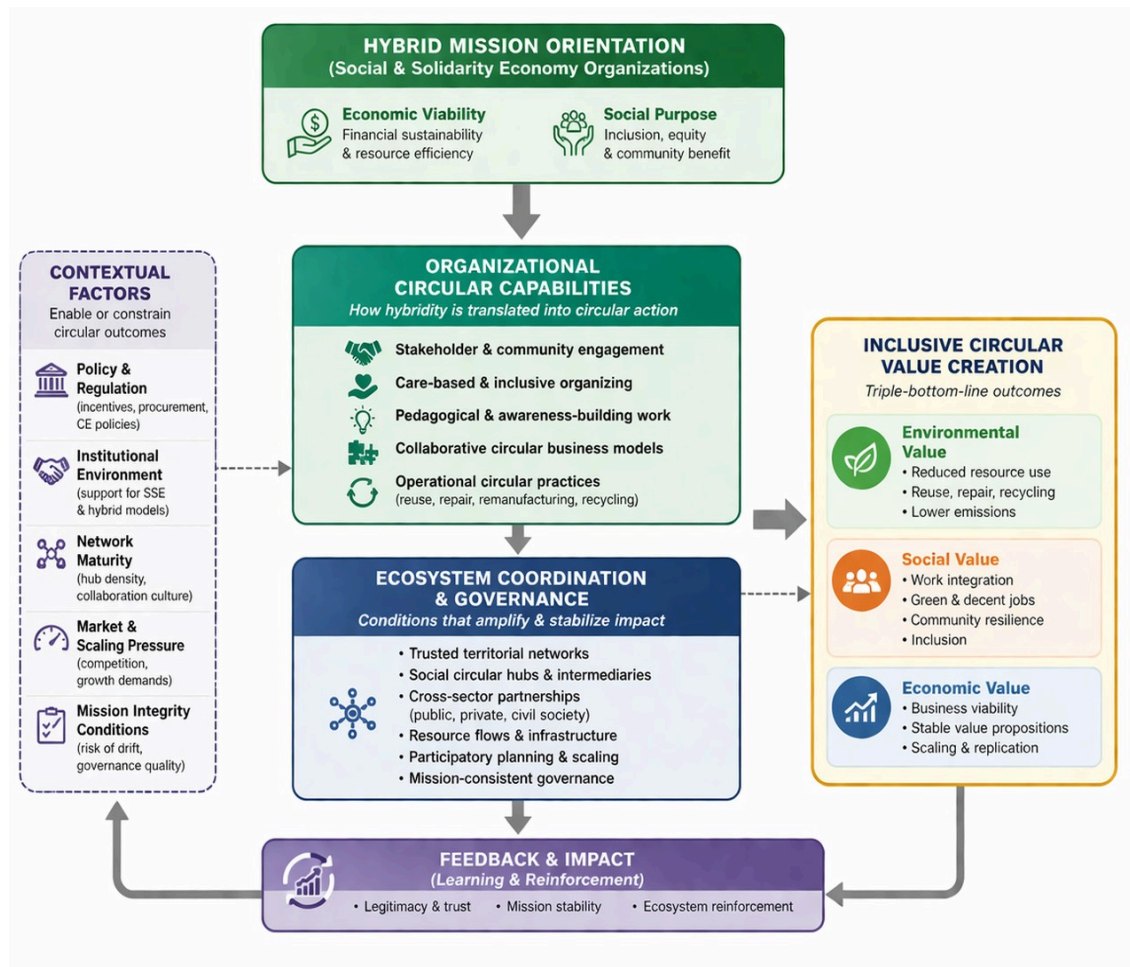
The fifth construct is feedback effects. The reviewed literature suggests that successful inclusive circular value creation can strengthen the very organizational and ecosystemic conditions that made it possible. Van Opstal et al. (2025) show that durable social circular hubs depend on governance arrangements and value propositions that remain stable over time, while Monciardini et al. (2024) indicate that participatory scaling is part of a reinforcing process through which SSCE becomes more established and effective. In this framework, outcomes such as legitimacy, mission stability, stakeholder trust, and ecosystem reinforcement feed back into future organizational capacity and relational strength. This makes hybrid circular organizing a recursive and cumulative process rather than a linear sequence.

***Theme 6: Boundary conditions***

A major strength of the framework is the explicit inclusion of boundary conditions. The findings suggest that hybrid circular organizing is shaped by policy support, institutional context, governance quality, scaling pressure, mission drift risk, and job quality conditions. Governance quality is particularly critical: the risk of mission drift in hybrid organizations, whereby commercial imperatives gradually displace social objectives, has been extensively documented in the hybrid organizations literature (Ebrahim, Battilana, & Mair, 2014), and this risk applies with particular force to hybrid circular organizations operating in competitive markets for recovered materials, green services, or remanufactured goods. Van Opstal et al. (2025) stress the importance of sustainable governance and appropriate value propositions, while Alagy et al. (2026) show that job quality outcomes remain heterogeneous and cannot be attributed automatically to SSCE. Similarly, Van Opstal and Borms (2024) highlight barriers that require tailored enabling policies, including reskilling and upskilling support. These conditions do not simply surround the model; they influence the strength of the relationships between mission, capability formation, ecosystem coordination, and outcomes. For instance, supportive regulation and procurement may strengthen capability development, whereas scaling pressure may intensify tensions between mission protection and economic survival.

The theoretical logic of the framework can therefore be summarized as follows (Figure 2). Hybrid mission orientation creates the strategic basis for circular and inclusive engagement. This orientation is translated into practice through organizational circular capabilities. These capabilities are enabled, stabilized, or constrained through ecosystem coordination and governance. When alignment occurs across these layers, organizations generate inclusive circular value creation across environmental, social, and economic dimensions. These outcomes, in turn, produce feedback effects such as legitimacy, mission stability, and ecosystem reinforcement. The strength and durability of these relationships depend on boundary conditions, including institutional support, governance quality, scaling pressures, and labor conditions (Zaccone et al., 2022; Monciardini et al., 2024; Van Opstal et al., 2025; Alagy et al., 2026).

**Figure 2. Proposed conceptual framework**



*Source: Authors*

## 2. Discussion

This scoping review set out to examine how hybrid organizations within the social and solidarity economy are positioned in relation to the circular economy, which organizational forms and practices dominate the field, which theories and methods currently structure knowledge, and which gaps should orient future research. Organizing the discussion around these objectives makes it possible to move from descriptive synthesis to a more cumulative interpretation of the field.

### Objective 1: Understanding how hybrid SSE organizations are conceptualized in relation to the circular economy

A first major result is that the literature no longer treats hybrid SSE organizations as peripheral actors in circular transition. Instead, they are increasingly conceptualized as organizational vehicles through which circularity becomes socially embedded, territorially coordinated, and inclusion-oriented. This is an important shift. Earlier circular economy scholarship largely privileged technical efficiency, material recovery, and business model innovation, while the social dimension remained secondary or weakly specified. By contrast, the studies retained here show that hybrid SSE organizations connect circularity with social purpose, local anchoring, and collective benefit.

This finding is consistent with recent work arguing that the circular economy must be understood not only as a system of resource loops but also as a socially mediated process shaped by justice, inclusion, and value distribution (Mies & Gold, 2021; Valencia et al., 2023).

More specifically, the review shows that hybridity is conceptualized less as a static organizational category than as an organizing logic. In this literature, hybrid mission does not simply coexist with circular activity; it shapes the meaning, direction, and legitimacy of circular action. This interpretation extends classical work on hybrid organizations, which focused mainly on plural institutional logics and mission tensions, by showing that hybridity can also function as a productive mechanism enabling socially meaningful circular practice (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Pache & Santos, 2013). Recent contributions on SSCE reinforce this view by demonstrating that social inclusion and material valorization are often co-produced rather than separately pursued (Monciardini et al., 2024; Ziegler et al., 2023).

### **Objective 2. Identifying the dominant organizational forms and practices in the field**

The second objective concerned the organizational forms and practices that dominate the literature. Here, the review points to a relatively stable empirical profile. The field is mainly structured around social enterprises, social cooperatives, work-integration social enterprises, reuse centers, and social circular hubs. These forms are associated with short-loop, labor-intensive, and territorially embedded practices such as reuse, repair, refurbishment, recycling, redistribution, and community-based circular initiatives.

This finding is theoretically important because it suggests that the circularity most visible in hybrid SSE settings differs from the dominant corporate and industrial model often emphasized in mainstream CE literature. Rather than large-scale technological optimization, the reviewed studies highlight forms of circularity that depend on proximity, trust, labor mobilization, and collective coordination. In that sense, hybrid SSE organizations do not simply apply circular economy principles in a different setting; they enact a more socially embedded form of circularity. This interpretation is consistent with critiques of mainstream CE frameworks that have pointed to their limited treatment of labor, justice, and social allocation (Korhonen et al., 2018; Reike et al., 2018).

The review also shows that these practices are not self-explanatory. What matters is not only that organizations engage in reuse or repair but also how those activities are organized. Recurrent practices such as work integration, partnership building, participatory governance, and community empowerment indicate that the distinctiveness of hybrid SSE organizations lies in their ability to combine operational circularity with social inclusion and territorial value creation. Recent studies on social economy organizations in green transition and on social inclusion in CE support this interpretation by showing that circular practices can generate broader social effects when embedded in mission-driven and community-based organizational settings (Souza Piao et al., 2023; Wronka-Pośpiech & Twaróg, 2025).

### **Objective 3. Examining the theories and methods that structure current knowledge**

The third objective was to identify the theoretical and methodological foundations of the field. The review shows, first, that the theoretical landscape remains plural and only partially integrated. Hybrid organization theory remains the main conceptual anchor, especially in work focused on plural mission, value tensions, and organizational identity. At the same time, recent studies extend beyond this lens by incorporating social innovation, ecosystem coordination, business model transformation, and circular justice. This plurality is intellectually productive, but it also

contributes to fragmentation. Internal hybrid organizing, ecosystem governance, and social outcomes are often treated as adjacent rather than integrated dimensions.

From this perspective, the review suggests that the field is moving toward a more multilevel understanding of circular transition but has not yet fully consolidated it. The emerging literature on SSCE and social circular hubs is especially important because it begins to connect organizational hybridity with ecosystem coordination and inclusive value creation. Compared with earlier work that tended to isolate organizational mission from broader system dynamics, recent studies increasingly show that circular outcomes depend on the interaction between internal capabilities and external governance conditions (Monciardini et al., 2024; Van Opstal et al., 2025).

Methodologically, the field is still dominated by qualitative and case-based designs. This is unsurprising in an emergent research area, and it has been useful for mechanism discovery, contextual explanation, and conceptual refinement. However, it also creates a clear asymmetry: the literature is richer in interpretive depth than in comparative breadth. Mixed-method and survey-based studies remain limited, and the comparative measurement of social outcomes is still weak. This mirrors a broader issue in circular economy research, where conceptual expansion has often outpaced empirical standardization (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017; Kirchherr et al., 2023). In the present field, this problem is compounded by the coexistence of overlapping labels such as hybrid organization, social enterprise, WISE, and SSCE.

#### **Objective 4. Identifying the main gaps and defining a future research agenda**

The fourth objective concerned the gaps that define the future research agenda. The first major gap is theoretical integration. The field has generated valuable insights, but these remain distributed across three partially disconnected conversations: internal hybridity, ecosystem coordination, and social outcomes. One of the main contributions of this review is therefore to show that these dimensions should be linked within a common explanatory architecture. Hybrid mission shapes organizational circular capabilities; these capabilities are enabled or constrained by ecosystem governance; and only under certain conditions do they generate inclusive circular value creation.

The second major gap concerns the measurement of outcomes. Although the literature consistently associates hybrid circular organizing with work integration, green jobs, community resilience, and environmental benefits, these outcomes remain insufficiently operationalized. Recent studies already caution that job quality and social value are heterogeneous rather than automatic effects of mission-driven circularity (Alagy et al., 2026; Luthin et al., 2023). Future research therefore needs stronger designs capable of distinguishing between aspirational claims and demonstrated outcomes.

A third gap concerns contextual diversity. The reviewed literature is overwhelmingly European, especially concentrated in Italy, Belgium/Flanders, and the United Kingdom. This means that current theory is built primarily from contexts where SSE infrastructures are relatively visible and where circular transition discourse is already institutionally supported. The field remains poorly equipped to explain whether the same mechanisms apply in contexts marked by weaker social economy infrastructures, greater informality, or lower institutional support. Expanding the geographical scope of research is therefore essential not only empirically but also theoretically.

Finally, the review highlights the need for stronger attention to governance, scaling, and mission protection. If governance and ecosystem coordination are central explanatory variables, then future work should examine more closely how hybrid circular initiatives scale, how they avoid mission drift, and how they manage tensions between social purpose, economic survival, and labor quality.

This implies moving beyond descriptive documentation toward more comparative, longitudinal, and multilevel research designs.

Tensions, contradictions, and limits of hybrid circular organizing. The reviewed literature is often read as a confirmation of the potential of hybrid SSE organizations in circular transition. Yet a more critical reading reveals a set of structural tensions and documented limitations that deserve explicit acknowledgment. First, mission hybridity is not inherently stable. Research on hybrid organizations has long shown that the coexistence of social purpose and commercial activity generates ongoing governance tensions, accountability dilemmas, and the risk of mission drift (Ebrahim, Battilana & Mair, 2014; Pache & Santos, 2013). In circular hybrid organizations, this tension takes a specific form: as circular commercial revenues grow, the social mission, particularly around work integration and territorial development, may be progressively subordinated to economic imperatives. Neither the Costanza (2023) study on clothing recycling nor the Gorissen et al. (2016) study on reuse centers fully resolves this tension; they illustrate coexistence and mutual reinforcement under favorable conditions but do not address what happens when those conditions erode. Second, job quality in SSCE settings is heterogeneous rather than uniformly positive. Alagy et al. (2026) demonstrate that the social value associated with hybrid circular organizing does not automatically translate into quality employment: outcomes vary considerably by organizational form, circular strategy, worker position, and sector. The gap between circular employment creation and quality employment remains empirically underdetermined. Third, ecosystem coordination, while presented as an enabling factor, is itself fragile and resource-intensive. Pusz et al. (2024) show that trust-based local networks require sustained maintenance and that their effectiveness depends on power asymmetries and resource distribution patterns that the literature has yet to systematically examine. Fourth, the scalability of hybrid circular models remains largely untested. The reviewed studies focus predominantly on single organizations or small networks in specific European contexts; generalization to larger organizational forms, less institutionally supportive environments, or contexts with weaker SSE infrastructure cannot be assumed. Recognizing these limitations does not undermine the value of hybrid circular organizing; rather, it strengthens the case for more rigorous, critical, and longitudinal research that moves beyond documenting successes toward explaining the conditions under which hybrid circular models succeed, stagnate, or fail.

#### **a. Study limitations**

Our study is not without limitations. First, the field is marked by terminological instability: relevant studies may refer to social enterprise, cooperative innovation, social circular economy, or community-based circular initiatives without explicitly using the language of hybridity, which creates a risk of omission despite the iterative search strategy. Second, although the review used multiple databases to widen coverage, the inclusion of Google Scholar required additional manual filtering because of lower bibliographic standardization and greater noise in retrieval. Third, as a scoping review, this study was designed to map concepts, empirical patterns, and research gaps rather than to assess causal effects or synthesize commensurable outcomes. Accordingly, no formal quality appraisal or risk-of-bias assessment was conducted, which limits the possibility of drawing conclusions about the methodological strength of the included studies. Fourth, the retained corpus remains small and geographically concentrated, requiring explicit discussion. The retention of only 10 peer-reviewed studies reflects the genuine scarcity of work at the precise intersection of organizational hybridity, SSE, and circular economy, a finding that is itself analytically significant as a marker of field immaturity. However, this small corpus size entails three concrete limitations.

First, it constrains the statistical and comparative power of the synthesis: patterns identified across 10 studies should be treated as indicative rather than definitive, and findings cannot be generalized beyond the organizational and national contexts represented. Second, it reflects a strong European geographic bias, particularly Italy, Belgium/Flanders, and the United Kingdom, which means that the conceptual framework proposed is grounded in SSE-rich, institutionally supportive contexts and may not transfer directly to settings characterized by weaker social economy infrastructures or different circular economy regulatory frameworks. Third, the dominance of qualitative and case-based studies within this small corpus means that the evidence base is structurally unsuited to measuring the magnitude or generalizability of outcomes. Future reviews with an enlarged corpus will be necessary to test the robustness of the analytical framework proposed here. This restricts the broader transferability of the review's conclusions. Finally, the evidence base itself is dominated by qualitative and case-based studies, which provides rich contextual insight but limits comparative generalization and robust measurement of social outcomes. These limitations do not undermine the value of the review, but they indicate that its contribution is primarily conceptual, mapping-oriented, and agenda-setting rather than evaluative or predictive.

#### **b. Implications for future policy, practices, and research**

The review shows that hybridity operates as an organizational mechanism through which circularity becomes socially embedded, territorially coordinated, and translated into blended value creation. This implies two shifts. First, the field should move beyond static definitions of hybrid organizations toward a processual perspective centered on capability formation, governance alignment, and ecosystem intermediation. Second, explanations remain incomplete when internal hybridity, ecosystem dynamics, and social outcomes are treated separately. The field, therefore, needs multilevel frameworks explaining how hybrid missions become circular capabilities, how these capabilities are stabilized through governance and networks, and how they generate differentiated outcomes.

For practitioners, the findings suggest that the effectiveness of hybrid circular measures depends less on circular practices alone than on the organizational conditions under which they are governed and sustained. Circular strategies should not be treated as peripheral extensions of social mission but as activities requiring mission-consistent governance, stakeholder alignment, and clear value propositions. The review also shows that partnerships, trust-based coordination, and ecosystem positioning are not secondary supports but central operating conditions. At the same time, circular activity does not automatically produce inclusion or quality employment; such outcomes require deliberate design, resources, and monitoring.

#### **c. Direction for future research**

Table 7 outlines a structured agenda for future research derived from the main gaps identified in this scoping review. Rather than calling simply for more studies, the agenda emphasizes the need for theoretically integrated, multilevel, and methodologically stronger research on hybrid organizations, SSE, and the circular economy. In particular, it highlights three priorities: connecting organizational, ecosystem, and outcome-level explanations; improving the measurement of social and blended-value outcomes; and extending the evidence base beyond its current European concentration. It also points to the importance of examining governance, capability formation, financing, labor conditions, and evaluation frameworks as core explanatory dimensions. Taken together, these directions are intended to support a shift from a fragmented and largely case-based literature toward a more cumulative, comparative, and analytically robust field.

**Table 7. Future directions based on research gap**

<b>Research theme</b>	<b>Priority research questions</b>	<b>Recommended designs/methods</b>
Multilevel explanation of hybrid circularity	How do hybrid SSE organizations translate dual economic-social logics into operational circular capabilities? Under what ecosystem conditions do these capabilities generate inclusive outcomes?	Comparative multi-case studies; process tracing; mixed methods
Governance mechanisms and mission-consistent scaling	Which governance arrangements enable hybrid circular initiatives to scale without mission drift? How do boards, legal forms, and accountability systems shape durable circular value creation?	Comparative organizational studies; qualitative comparative analysis (QCA); longitudinal case research
Measurement of social outcomes	What social outcomes are actually produced, for whom, and under what organizational conditions? Which indicators best capture job quality, inclusion, and territorial resilience in hybrid circular settings?	Indicator development; survey designs; mixed-method impact evaluation
Job quality and circular justice	When does hybrid circular organizing improve job quality rather than merely create employment? How do organizational form, circular strategy, and labor position shape differentiated worker outcomes?	Worker-level surveys; comparative ethnographies; embedded case studies
Territorial ecosystems and network coordination	How do local networks, trust structures, intermediaries, and public actors enable or constrain hybrid circular initiatives? Which territorial configurations are most supportive of inclusive circular transitions?	Social network analysis; place-based comparison; governance mapping
Beyond Europe: contextual diversity	Do the same mechanisms hold in contexts with weaker SSE infrastructures, higher informality, or lower institutional support? How does context reshape hybrid circular organizing?	Cross-country comparison; Global South case studies; institutional analysis
Organizational capabilities for circular action	Which organizational capabilities are most decisive for translating mission into circular practice? How are such capabilities developed, maintained, and transferred across contexts?	Longitudinal qualitative studies; capability mapping; cross-case comparison
Business model transformation over time	How do hybrid circular business models evolve over time? What triggers reinforcement, redesign, or breakdown in the coupling between social mission and circular activity?	Longitudinal studies; historical process analysis; panel case comparison
Financing and resource mobilization	Which funding structures best sustain hybrid circular organizations? How do grants, trading income, public procurement, and blended finance affect mission stability and circular performance?	Comparative financial models; case-comparison; mixed methods
Legal form and organizational design	How do legal forms, ownership models, and decision rights shape the ability to combine circularity and inclusion? Are some forms more resilient than others?	Comparative legal-institutional analysis; typological studies
Comparative sectoral analysis	Do the same organizational mechanisms operate in food systems, textiles, construction, mobility, or digital platforms? Which sectors are more conducive to hybrid circular models?	Cross-sector comparative studies and multi-site case research
Evaluation frameworks for blended value	How can blended value be assessed without reducing social and environmental contributions to narrow financial proxies? What evaluation frameworks are appropriate for SSE-based circular models?	Framework development; indicator testing; mixed-method validation

*Source: Authors*

### 3. Conclusion

This scoping review examined how hybrid organizations within the social and solidarity economy (SSE) contribute to the circular transition. By synthesizing ten peer-reviewed studies published between 2016 and 2026, the review addressed four research questions concerning: (1) the conceptualization of hybrid SSE organizations in relation to the circular economy, (2) the dominant organizational forms and circular practices, (3) the theoretical and methodological foundations of the field, and (4) the principal research gaps that should guide future inquiry.

The review demonstrates that hybrid SSE organizations are increasingly recognized as key actors in enabling a more inclusive and territorially embedded circular economy. Unlike conventional organizations focused primarily on profit maximization, these entities combine economic viability with explicit social and environmental objectives. Through practices such as reuse, repair, refurbishment, recycling, work integration, participatory governance, and community empowerment, they create environmental, social, and economic value simultaneously.

The findings also reveal that the literature remains conceptually fragmented and methodologically uneven. Research has developed through three main but only partially connected streams: internal hybrid organizing, ecosystem coordination and governance, and social outcomes such as employment and job quality. To address this fragmentation, the review proposes an integrative multilevel conceptual framework in which hybrid mission orientation is translated into organizational circular capabilities, reinforced through ecosystem coordination and governance, and ultimately generates inclusive circular value creation.

From a theoretical perspective, the article contributes by structuring an emerging field and clarifying the mechanisms through which hybridity supports circular transition. From a methodological perspective, it highlights the need for more comparative, longitudinal, and mixed-method studies capable of measuring social and environmental outcomes more rigorously. From a practical perspective, it underscores the importance of governance quality, ecosystem partnerships, and mission protection in sustaining hybrid circular initiatives.

Several limitations should be acknowledged, including the relatively small corpus of studies, the predominance of European contexts, and the absence of formal quality appraisal. Consequently, the conclusions are primarily conceptual and agenda-setting rather than predictive.

Overall, this review shows that hybrid organizations in the SSE represent a distinctive organizational pathway for achieving a more just and sustainable circular transition. Their capacity to combine material recovery with social inclusion and territorial development positions them as essential actors in the construction of economic systems that are not only circular but also equitable and socially transformative.

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