

Conceptualizing the Circular Economy: An Analysis of 114 Definitions

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WORKING DRAFT

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Our research aims to create transparency regarding current circular economy understandings in the discourse

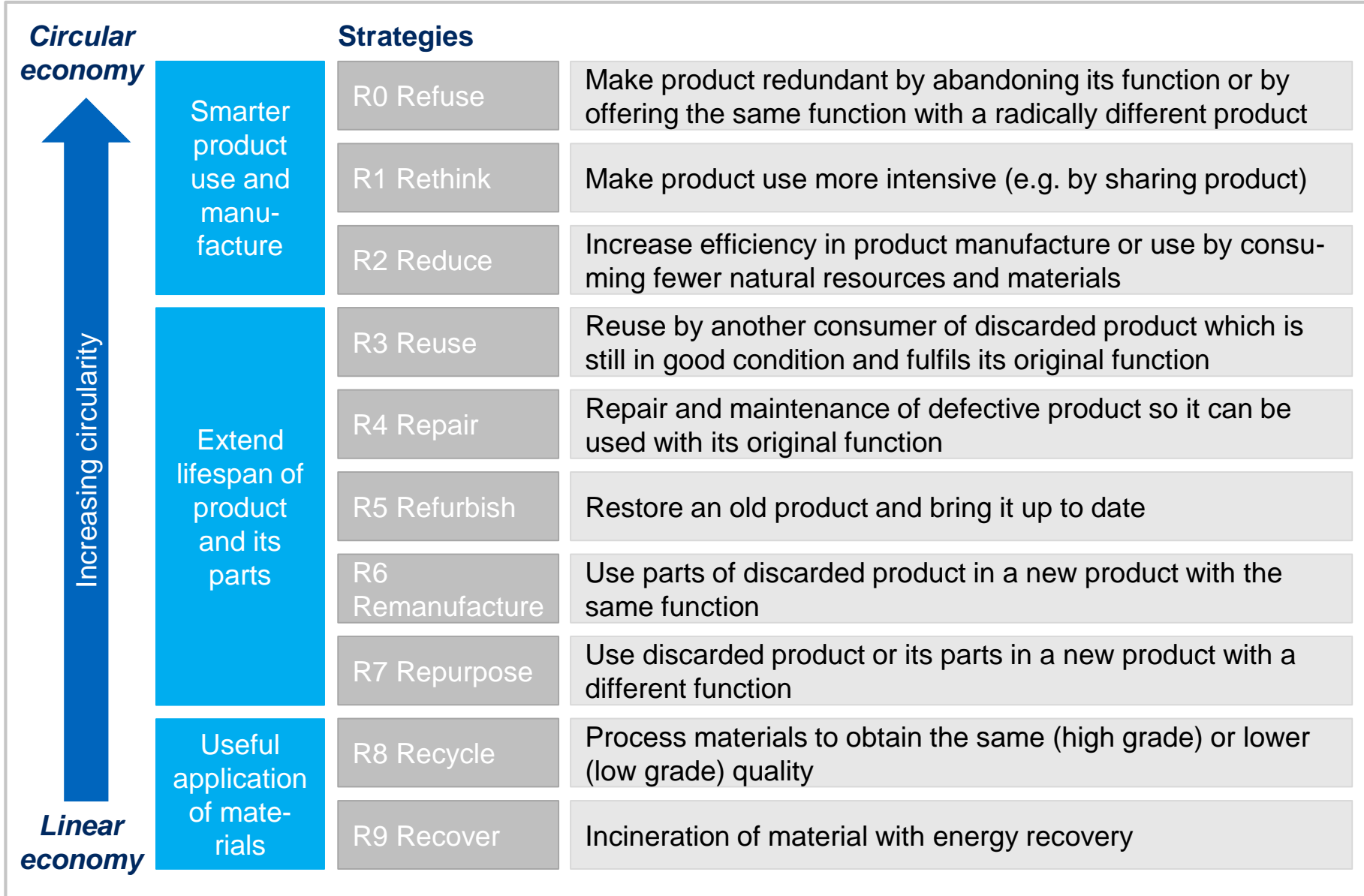
Research question

What are current understandings of the **circular economy (CE)** concept among scholars and practitioners?

- First comprehensive and systematic **analysis of CE definitions** in the discourse
- Variety of CE understandings can result in **CE concept eventually collapsing**



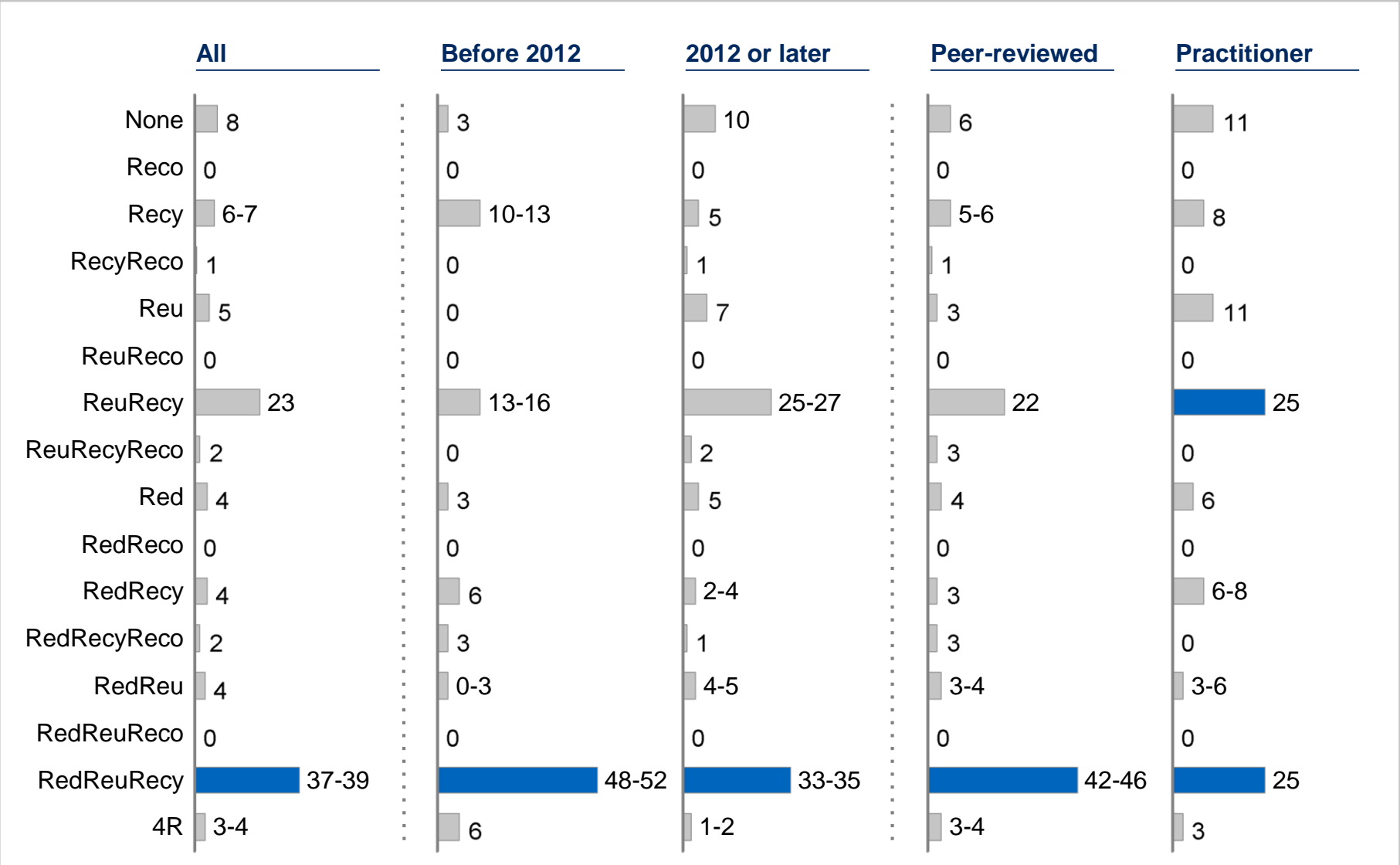
The most comprehensive definition identified conceptualizes CE via 10Rs



SOURCE: Potting et al. (2017)

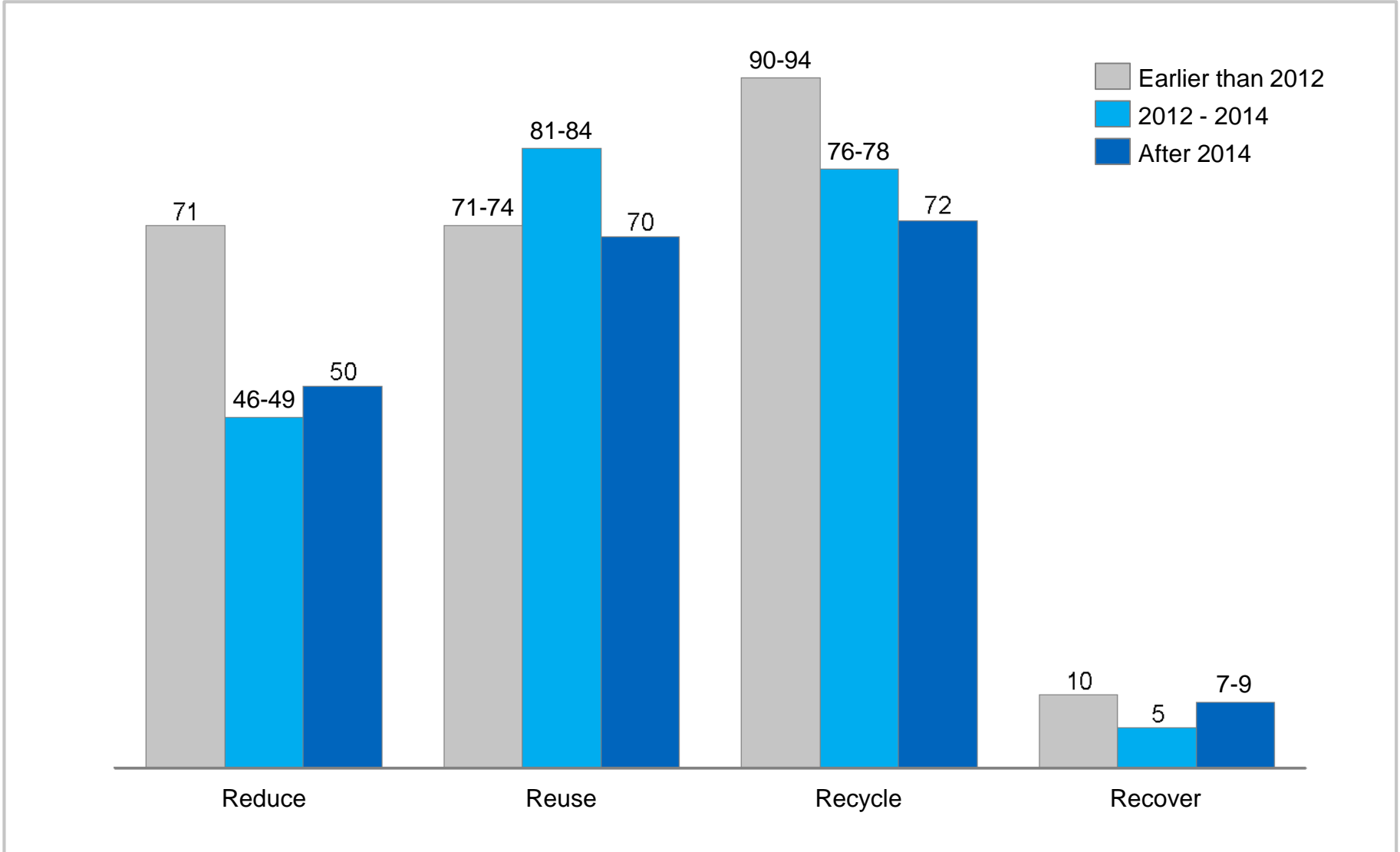
Most CE definitions feature the 3R framework

%, n = 114



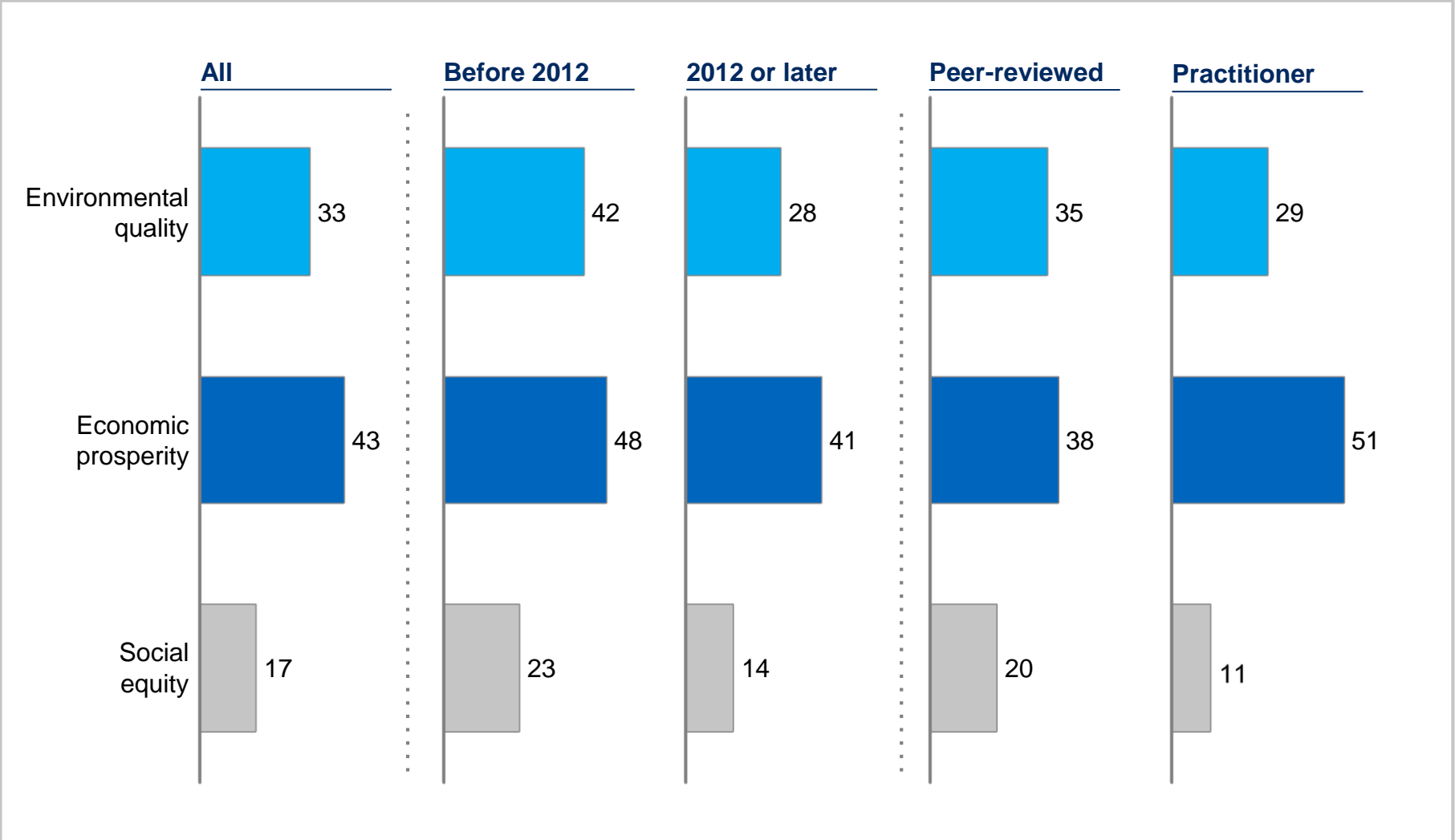
There is no convergence of CE definitions over time

%, n = 114



Most definitions outline economic prosperity as CE's key aim

Discussion of, %, n = 114





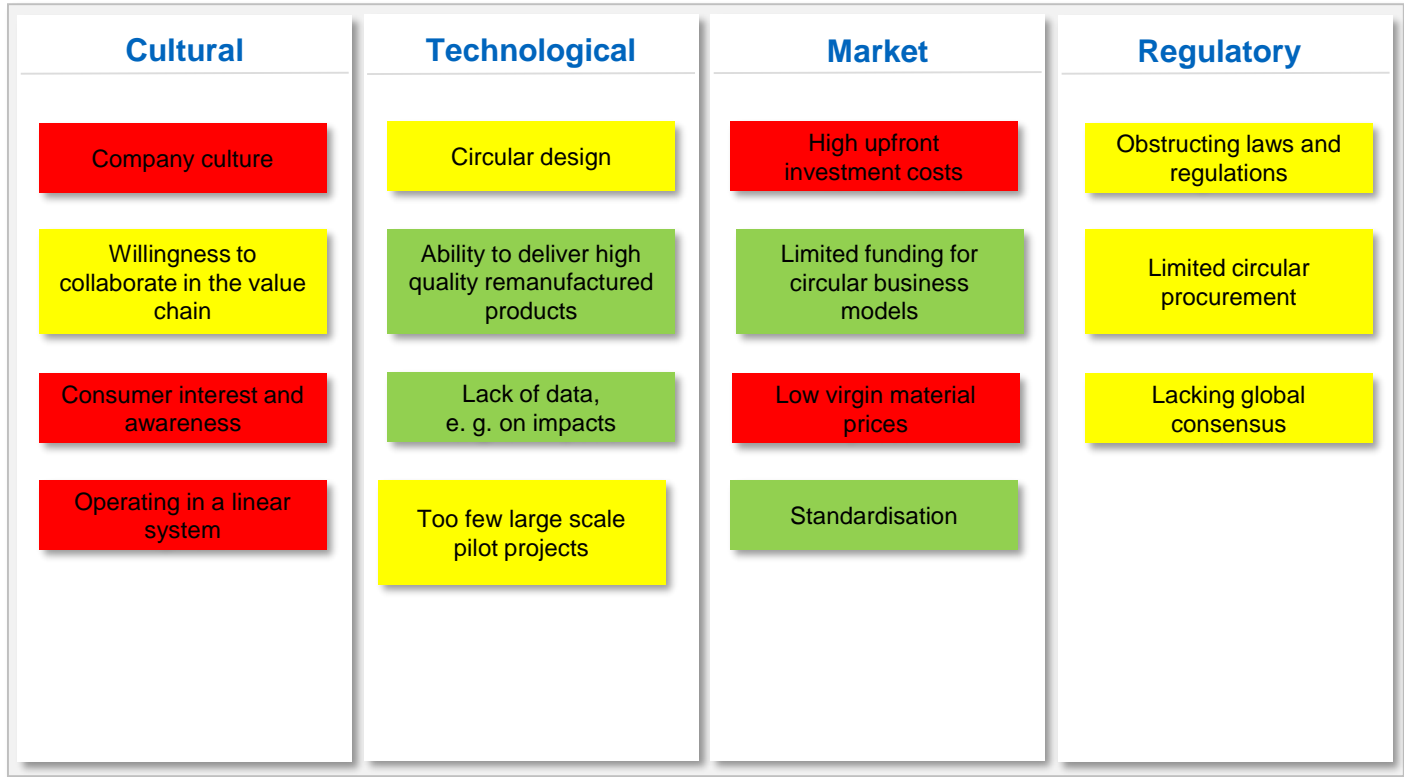
We developed a meta-definition based on the review of 114 CE definitions

Meta-definition

“A **circular economy** describes an economic system that is based on business models which replace the ‘end-of-life’ concept with **reducing**, alternatively **reusing, recycling and recovering** materials in production/distribution and consumption processes, thus operating at the **micro level** (products, companies, consumers), **meso level** (eco-industrial parks) and **macro level** (city, region, nation and beyond), with the aim to accomplish sustainable development, which implies creating environmental quality, economic prosperity and social equity, to the benefit of current and future generations.”

We have also used it for a major study on CE barriers

Barriers to CE



■ Most pressing barriers ■ Intermediate pressing barriers ■ Least pressing barriers