



Recycling, Zero Waste, Remote and Rural Communities, Community Development



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Research Question

Is there a Sustainable Future for Recycling in Remote and Rural Communities?

Zero Waste Policies

Zero Waste policies set out government visions for zero waste societies. These are societies that deal with all types of waste through policies of prevention, re-use, recycling and recovery.

Such policies recognise that adopting zero waste approaches means changing the way we look at waste so that we see it as a resource, not a problem.

Recycling in Remote and Rural Communities

Recycling and recovery in remote and rural places is difficult compared to recycling in urban places, where large populations all living in close proximity result in big economies of scale for collection and recycling.

Low density populations in the remote and rural can lead to time consuming and expensive collection costs. Additionally, as most recycling processors are positioned to take advantage of the large economies of scale of urban centres, household waste recycling in the remote and rural has to travel long distances to be recycled, sometimes being shipped over water.

The additional costs and transport emissions required to recycle in the remote and rural, brings into question the overall benefits of centralised recycling policies for remote and rural communities.

Future Options

Currently, specific studies into recycling in remote and rural locations are limited. A recent feature in the Waste Management World publication, January 2013 does present the issue (see references), and recognises that currently the range of options for managing waste in remote communities are much more limited, with experience across the globe showing the most likely options to be adopted are:

- Landfill
- Thermal Processing through incineration.

Whilst thermal processing through incineration provides a carbon neutral option as it offsets fossil fuel use, it still raises questions for future sustainability as it involves the burning of valuable resources, which could be brought into better use through recycling.

It is clear the landfill option is a heavy CO₂ emitter, which again raises questions of sustainability.

As the recycling and recovery options in remote places are limited at present, this suggests that there should be a greater emphasis around policies of prevention and reuse in remote and rural communities.

Research Aims

The aims of this research are:

- To investigate the specific barriers for recycling in remote and rural places
- To explore what options exist for a sustainable recycling future in remote and rural locations.
- To explore the potential for small-scale local closed pipe recycling solutions in remote and rural places.
- To explore the potential for strengthening waste prevention and reuse policies in remote and rural settings.



Issues and Questions

The following questions will be explored in this research:

- 1) Is it cheaper to bury or incinerate waste in remote and rural places as opposed to sending it off to be recycled, and is this a feasible option for these areas due to their small populations?
- 2) If waste continues to be transported to central locations for recycling, to what extent will tax payers in remote and rural communities be burdened by increasing fuel costs for transportation?
- 3) Are there options for packaging policies to take cognizance of the difficulties for recycling in remote and rural places, and provide measures to cope with the waste burden in these areas?
- 4) Are there ways that waste material coming into a remote and rural place can be utilised in the remote and rural area so that it doesn't have to leave, and can potentially generate local revenue?
- 5) Is there potential for increasing social and creative capital in remote and rural locations, through the development of small-scale local closed pipe recycling and the strengthening of waste prevention and re-use policies in these settings?

Hypothesis

It is the hypothesis of this research that there is room to expand recycling capacities in remote and rural areas to the benefit of these communities.

Methodology

1) **Interviews – Key Waste Personnel** - Local Authority waste collection and recycling teams; Recycling Facility Managers; Recycling Businesses

2) **Analysis of Potential Prevention, Re-use, Recycling options in the Remote and Rural** Interviews, desk-based research, surveys

3) **Analysis of European/National Legislation:** Desk-based Research

4) **Data Analysis:** Work alongside local authorities to analyse material flows and associated financial costs

Weinberg, Pellow and Schnaiberg (2000) conducted a study of urban recycling programmes in the United States, observing the relationship between politics and markets as they first created and later destroyed recycling programmes in Chicago. They note two shifts in the history of recycling:

- 1) a shift away from the focus on waste as a panacea (saving the environment and providing jobs for the poor) towards a focus on waste as a commodity that could generate revenues
- 2) a shift away from recycling as an activity in which marginalised social groups and community-based organisations engaged towards its control by large firms, many now operating in global markets.

Their research takes a critical look at recycling, differing from popular views of recycling as an activity generated by the goodwill of people trying to save the environment. It approaches the recycling debate as a site of conflict among a variety of social actors who are using political arenas to control a resource in order to meet their different economic agendas. In a similar vein, this research takes a critical approach to understanding the waste dynamics in remote rural locations.

Zero Waste means changing the way we look at waste so that we see it as a resource, not a problem. Are rural communities able to adopt this attitude to waste? Are revenues generated from waste in rural settings? Or are they being drained out of remote and rural communities to the benefit of large firms operating in the global market? If the latter is the case, is there potential in localising recycling capacities and empowering remote and rural communities through waste?

References

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