

Towards a European Observatory on Recycling Performances Conclusions from roundtable discussion

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Nowadays there is a growing interest across Europe to better understand the data management of municipal waste as it proves valuable for internal monitoring purposes. It not only allows for the measure of performance, but can also act as a benchmark for comparisons between regions and cities of similar typologies as well as different member states.

Despite the availability of waste data that is regularly published at an international level, particularly by the European Environment Agency, Eurostat or OECD, there are significant limitations identified on this type of data presentation. Such limits include the heterogeneity of raw waste data, the variability in terminology to define municipal waste, the lack of detailed municipal waste data on a regional and local level, the variability depending on the data source, the lack of information provided at an operational level and lastly, the lack of finance data.

It is of great interest and importance to all European regional and local authorities to create an Observatory on municipal waste management due to the target obligation to achieve household recycling at a rate of 50 per cent by 2020, based on the EU Waste Framework Directive 98/2008. ACR+ launched the Observatory at the final roundtable discussion "**Call for a European Decentralized Observatory for municipal waste recycling performances**", as part of the ACR+ International Conference '**Towards a European Observatory**' in September 2010 in Paris.



The Observatory will initially focus on the analysis of municipal waste and recycling performances across Europe and will be developed by ACR+ members in partnership with key waste management expert organisations. The main objective for the European decentralized Observatory is to create a more transparent and effective collection of waste and recycling data

via a pioneer group of regional and local authorities of similar categories and through a simple shared methodology of compatible benchmarking.

The roundtable discussion was led by Jean - Pierre Hannequart (President of ACR+) and involved the participation of: City of Odense, Denmark (Svend Poulsen), Brussels Administration (Francis Radermaker), EUROSTAT (Karin Blumenthal), ORDIF (Observatoire Regional de Dechets d'Ile de France, Jean-Benoit Bel) and NL Agency (Dr Adrie Veeken).

JPH commenced the dialogue by raising three key questions to the panelists:

- Why are you interested in the Observatory?
- What do you think of the proposed structure/methodology?
- What cooperation and links with the observatories at national and EU levels?



ACR+ highlighted the importance of future in depth discussions amongst waste experts to identify the reason for carrying out this activity, and the need for classification of those regions or cities that will be participating in the Observatory. National administrations are aware that there is lack of waste and recycling benchmarking at a regional and local level. The recycling performances of each country depend on data collected by their respective regional and local authorities. In order to develop the Observatory and identify the steps towards the most effective collection of recycling data, ACR+ is proposing to form three focused working groups and 1 technical support working group that will act as project partners:

Group 1: Megacities (high density urban territory, more than 1 million inhabitants)

Group 2: Medium cities (urban characteristics, about 500,000 – 1 million inhabitants)

Group 3: Semi –urban areas (low density, semi-urban/ semi –rural characteristics)
Technical Support Group: ACR+ secretariat, co-leaders of the working groups and experts from inter (national) statistical bodies and business federations.

The following are examples of data that will form the core part of this statistical collection:

1. Production of municipal solid waste (kg/inh/year; total amount of MSW produced; composition analysis of this waste flow)
2. Recycling rate of municipal solid waste (capture rate per material and per collection source; amount sent for recycling)
3. Methodologies of data collection and presentation.

Svend Poulsen, from Odense pointed out that one of the current limitations they face is the methodology used to collect statistical data on recycling performances. He raised the question as to what common indicator could be established to measure the recycling performance of a region or city in order to improve its performance. Odense highlighted the importance of developing a tool to learn from each other and avoid any competition amongst regions on a benchmarking level.

“ACR+’s role is to increase the expertise of its network (and specifically of its members) as the management and handling of waste has now become very complex”, Francis Radermaker, from the Brussels Administration stated. Brussels is currently developing a composting plant of 30,000 tonnes capacity. Therefore, they would be interested to hear from other regional and local authorities and receive recommendations on the methods used, the exact amount of bio-waste collected and treated.

ORDIF expressed its optimism about the development of the Observatory and highlighted that it’s necessary for regions and cities to have a common language when sharing data and best practices. He explained that Paris is a large capital City with a great diversity of housing stock and at the moment there is lack of comparative data for similar housing type amongst different cities. The terminology of ‘similar waste’ is also yet to be defined better. Regarding the methodology, he also agreed in the creation of specific thematic indicators that will be key factors to the success of the observatory. He highlighted the need to develop shared ‘observation’ criteria in partnership with ACR+.

The NL Agency has been running benchmarking waste analysis for the past 8 years, and can clearly state that data comparisons improved the performance in fifteen municipalities. Dr Adrie Veeken, from the NL Agency indicated that it’s very important to be in a position to ‘translate’ recycling data and interpret how the waste is collected while at the same time identifying best practices on a regional or local level.

Karin Blumenthal from EUROSTAT is very interested in the Observatory specifically in clarifying definitions on municipal waste and classifying the geographical areas. Also it was pointed out that there is a need to clearly identify the recycling performance of regional and local authorities based on the amount of waste: recycled, incinerated, composted, and/ or land filled. We need to acknowledge that there are different objectives and therefore needs for every single regional or local authority and each case will need to be looked on an individual basis.

Other comments from the audience included the significance of developing a simple methodology and even commence the data collection by focusing on one waste stream at a time such as food waste or residual waste.

Roberto Cavallo (Director of ERICA) insisted on placing more emphasis on the institutional level. Regional or local observation of waste data could also assist National Authorities and European Institutions such as EUROSTAT.

The flexibility in the different options given by the European Commission for Member States to calculate the 50% target of municipal waste will assist certain member states to reach their target however it may not allow for a common calculation methodology.



Through the development of the European Decentralised Observatory, ACR+ in partnership with local and regional authorities and key waste management expert organizations will prioritize in providing user-friendly tools in order to overcome the local and regional authorities concerns on waste management. The Observatory will also aim to act as a platform to share experiences and demonstrate best practices amongst different cities and regions in order to: achieve higher recycling rates, improve communication with citizens, reduce the negative impacts on the environment (including climate change) and optimise financial aspects.

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