



Policy Proposal on

Urban Sustainability in the EU

Bridging the gap between the EU and its municipalities to
promote the Zero-waste movement

Brussels, April 23rd 2017

Authors: Anna Becker, Andrea Finesso, Alexandra Gronnier, Alexandra Gronnier, Johanna Harings, Fatemeh Imanifardazar, Hannah Lea Sanchez Gellert, Julien Lesachey, Phillip Lugmayr, Anna-Marie Millerova, Sean Schmitz

Tutor: Lukas Zielinski

Topic Manager: Lijuan Klassen

STUDENT FORUM MAASTRICHT

Student Forum Maastricht (SFM) is an annual student conference held at the Maastricht University Campus in Brussels. The conference is organised by students from Maastricht University in cooperation with different partner organisations. The participants are post- and undergraduate students from all over Europe with diverse academic backgrounds. Based on problem statements provided by European Commission representatives, they develop policy proposals for pressing topics within the Commission. In this process the students receive input and insights from experts from NGOs, academia and the business sector working in Brussels. The 2017 edition of SFM took place from April 19th to 23rd. For more information on Student Forum Maastricht, please visit: www.student-forum.eu

Content

Executive Summary.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Policy Proposal.....	4
Background.....	4
Problem Statement.....	5
Objectives.....	5
Policy Recommendations.....	5
Introducing the Zero Waste City Label.....	5
Framework.....	6
Implementation.....	6
Case Study and Further Benefits.....	8
Conclusion.....	9



Executive Summary

As more than 70% of the population in Europe lives in cities, they are important hubs for the EU to achieve its goals of sustainability and climate change adaptation. Currently there is a gap between the commission and the local authorities that prevents a joint effort of the EU and European metropolises in enacting policies for a transition towards sustainability. One necessity of promoting urban sustainability is the radical reduction of residential, institutional, communal, and industrial waste, expressed in the Zero Waste movement. The EU can encourage cities to join this movement by introducing a EU-approved label of *Zero Waste Cities* without exceeding its legal scope of competencies.

The implementation of such a label should aim to a) enhance environmental sustainability b) improve the quality of urban life in European metropolises specifically by tackling the issue of waste c) bridge the gap between the EU and urban municipalities d) establish the role of the EU as a facilitator of the transition towards a circular economy and sustainable metropolises.

In a nutshell, the label would be awarded to cities based off a pre-established list of criteria and includes a membership in the *Zero Waste Cities* community, which offers a platform for communication and knowledge exchange between member cities. The implementation framework recommends that the EU establish a competent body, potentially through the approval of a regulation, that would deal with the facilitation and implementation of these awards. Here it could make use of existing networks on the EU level such as URBACT and follow the structure of existing EU labels such as the EMAS labelling scheme. The role of the EU would not only be to monitor progress of municipalities but also to provide support for cities that want to acquire the *Zero Waste Cities* label.



Introduction

Since 2014, more than half of the world population lives in the cities, a proportion that is expected to reach 66% by 2050. This dramatic expansion and densification of urban centres is paralleled by the increasing production, consumption and generation of municipal solid waste. Collection and transformation of municipal waste presents considerable costs, poses threats to health and the environment, and can result in a permanent loss of valuable materials. On the one hand, measures for the management of waste are most effective when designed and implemented at the local level, and on the other there is a recognised need for standardised and homogenous action across borders, due to the transnational nature of environmental issues.

In this context, the European Union is presented with the opportunity to act as a promoter and a coordinator for waste reduction and reuse, in both large and small European cities. A gap exists between environmental regulation at the EU level and effective implementation within municipalities: the proposed policy aims at filling this gap, and thereby improving the EU involvement in one of the most pressing issues of our time.

Policy Proposal

Background

Almost 40% of all materials used in Europe turn into waste. With only 36% of it being recycled, the EU is staying behind its potential for recycling and reusing. This means that the EU does not yet meet the criteria of a circular economy. With the establishment of the Urban Agenda in Amsterdam in 2016 the EU formally acknowledged the importance of refocusing priorities towards cities. Sustainable consumption and production was one of the priority challenges of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy and is related to the “EU Action Plan for the Circular Economy” regarding waste management and recycling.

Currently existing European labels support green enhancement, energy saving, and environmentally friendly products. One such example is the EMAS (Eco-Management and Audit Scheme) label which can be awarded to institutions that implement sustainability strategies. Another, more locally focused example on Brussels is known as BATEX (Batiments Exemplaire), which promotes exemplary buildings that utilize modern, passive design to reduce their environmental footprint. A European-scale label for urban waste management, however, does not yet exist.



Targeting cities, as they are the main producers of waste, will increase the effectiveness of European goals to shift towards a circular economy. There currently exists a Zero Waste movement across European municipalities that aims to drastically reduce waste production at the residential, commercial, and industrial scale. The Zero Waste International Alliance defines Zero Waste as “designing and managing products and processes to reduce the volume and toxicity of waste and materials, conserve and recover all resources”. The movement thus not only addresses the problem of overflowing landfills and excessive incineration of waste, which produce massive amounts of greenhouse gases such as Methane, but assists European goals of climate change mitigation. As a bottom-up movement, there is room for greater coordination from the EU, which has the organizational capacity to facilitate knowledge transfer between European metropolises.

Problem Statement

How can the EU facilitate a transition to a more circular economy in European cities? What mechanism could they use to do this, given their limited role in engaging directly with metropolises?

Objectives

In response to environmental challenges and the increasing production of waste, this proposal aims to:

- a) Enhance environmental sustainability;
- b) Improve the quality of urban life in European metropolises specifically by tackling the issue of waste;
- c) Bridge the gap between the EU and urban municipalities;
- d) Establish the role of the EU as a facilitator of the transition towards a circular economy and sustainable metropolises.

Policy Recommendation

The Zero Waste City label

As a measure to address the aforementioned objectives, we propose here the *Zero Waste City* label. It is a classification that can be offered by a competent body of the European Union to certify cities that are sustainably managing their wastes. The label would recognize efforts made by cities of all scales on reducing, reusing, recycling, and composting municipal wastes. To achieve recognition, a series of criteria would be decided upon by the competent body with which municipalities would comply in order to sustain their *Zero Waste City* designation. Using its role as a large governmental institution, the European Union would then facilitate communication and knowledge transfer to and between cities that would enter the *Zero Waste City* network.

Framework

Legal Basis

The Union has shared competence to enact legislation on environmental issues under **Article 4(2)(e) TFEU**.

The relevant legal basis for a *Zero Waste* label regulation, setting up a competent body managing the *Zero Waste* label, is **Article 192(1) TFEU**. Accordingly, the European Parliament and the Council shall, after having consulted the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, act in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure.

Due to the voluntary nature of the *Zero Waste* label, the principle of subsidiarity is respected.

Funding

According to **Article 192(4) TFEU**, without prejudice to certain measures adopted by the Union, the Member States shall finance and implement the measures under the zero-waste label regulation.

Implementation

This section of the proposal will provide a possible approach to implementing the label.

A competent body managing the *Zero Waste* label could be set up, possibly composed of independent representatives of the member states. Its tasks might include approaching cities and encouraging them to participate in *Zero Waste City*, as well as facilitating knowledge transfer and communication between cities. This can be done through a variety of channels such as the Zero Waste Municipalities Network in Europe, the Covenant of Mayors, URBACT, or direct contact. In addition, it provides support and monitors the compliance with the criteria outlined in the paragraphs below.

After registering for *Zero Waste City* they are provided with information material and access to an online platform and a *Zero Waste* network. This network shall serve as an exchange platform, including conferences, meeting and other helpful events, thereby facilitating communication between the participating cities and the EU.



In order to receive the *Zero Waste City* label, cities must compose a strategy plan in which they explain their adherence with the following criteria. These were developed using the Zero Waste International Alliance principles and the membership requirements of the Zero Waste Municipality Network of Europe:

Example Criteria for *Zero Waste City* Approval

1. Adopt Zero Waste International Alliance definition of Zero Waste.
2. Establish benchmarks and a timeline i.e. 10-yr and 20-yr goals (and longer).
3. Conduct audits on reasonable time intervals to measure success and progress.
4. Report progress annually and collect data monitoring progress.
5. Enact new rules and incentives for moving the municipality towards Zero Waste.
6. Establish a Zero Waste Advisory Board or committee that involves all stakeholders in the community.
7. Engage the entire community by mobilizing and empowering citizens, actively pursuing a local paradigm shift concerning waste, and providing education where necessary.
8. Expand Zero Waste infrastructure within the municipality.
9. Require the redesign of products that cannot be reused, recycled, or composted.
10. Develop a comprehensive Zero Waste strategy detailing the long-term implementation of these initiatives.
11. Aim for the goal of diverting more than 90% of waste from landfills and incineration as fast as possible with a further goal of reducing residual waste per capita to less than 75 kg per person per year.

Side note: In order to produce a continuous incentive for well performing member cities, it is suggested to add additional levels of the labels, such as silver, gold and platinum label. These might require additional criteria, such as set percentages of waste reduction or the achievement of a certain maximum of waste production per capita per year.



Case Study

The following case study is aimed at illustrating how the Zero Waste policy is financially achievable at the municipal level. As a part of the Zero Waste Municipality Network of Europe, the waste reduction policy in the French city Roubaix is a remarkable instance of how successful these initiatives can be.

Roubaix is a small town contained within the Lille metropolitan area. The Zero Waste approach in this instance has been able to reduce poverty in the poorest town in France. Considering the city as an ecosystem that citizens are a part of, the municipality strategy has been to turn waste management into a “way of living”.

Many actions have been taken in Roubaix so far to engage the community in reducing waste and the goals of the Zero Waste movement. For example, at the individual scale, a one-year voluntary challenge has been organized by the Roubaix town-hall and local associations that aims to introduce the participants to homemade cleaning products, food waste reduction, and composting. Another example at the municipal level is a 150€ voucher that has been given to households to consume in the local cafes, shops, and restaurants certified under the Zero Waste guidelines. Specific attention has been given to education as 150 school staff members have been trained, 15 school canteens are involved in waste reduction actions, and many have their own composting site. The positive effects on the city are visible, as 70% of households have reduced their waste over 50%, and 1/4 of households have reduced their waste by over 80%.

This example is evidence that local initiatives which are promoted by municipal authorities, foster bottom-up actions to significantly reduce municipal waste. Thus, the proposed *Zero Waste City* label, applied at the municipal level, would allow cities to embrace the various aspects of sustainability. It can increase the sense of community as well as promote the circular economy among local businesses, increase health conditions, and ensure a higher degree of environmental quality. These initiatives should not be viewed as a means of fragmentation, but rather as a channel to harmonize European city network.

Further Benefits

In light of the objectives mentioned above, the implementation of the *Zero Waste City* label as proposed in previous sections further benefits existing EU goals:

- Environmental goals as defined under Article **191(1) TFEU** and laid down in several multilateral environmental agreements, such as the Paris Agreement;
- Shifting from a linear economic model to a circular economy Europe-wide, as outlined, for example, in the Circular Economy Package;
- Comparable to the European Capitals of Culture, the label brings the EU closer to its citizens.



Conclusion

A *Zero Waste City* label would have a variety of impacts on the European Union. Primarily, it would assist in the transition of European metropolises to sustainability and to circular economies. Indirect positive benefits of this policy would also be the increased prosperity of urban life, due to greater job creation and permanence in the circular economy, as well as more effective communication between the European Union and its cities. Furthermore, with a *Zero Waste City* label the EU could be offering a tool to facilitate the reuse and recycling goals set in the 2008 Waste Framework Directive while simultaneously encouraging prevention strategies to reduce waste in European cities.

