

Citizen science and food waste



P2CS seed project March 2019

This P2CS project aimed to kick start a network on applying citizen science approaches to the issue of food waste.

The SEI Initiative on Producer to Consumer Sustainability (P2CS) is an SEI-wide research initiative that connects the sustainable production and sustainable consumption agendas. P2CS explores the links and interactions within production-to-consumption systems – encompassing global flows of commodities and the impacts, dependencies and wider dynamics associated with production and consumption – in order to find new opportunities to enhance their sustainability.

The initiative enters its third implementation phase in 2019.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that around 30% of food produced for human production is lost somewhere between the farm and the plate. A significant share of this waste happens around the point of consumption – related to consumer purchasing decisions, food storage, preparation and eating. But to gather reliable data on how and why this food waste is happening is inherently difficult, given its highly distributed nature and the complex mix of factors influencing consumer behaviour.

Given those constraints, citizen science has much to offer the study of food waste. For example, consumers can give unique insights into their behaviours and decision-making, in order to deepen our understanding of why food waste happens. And actively engaging citizens in food waste research can also be an effective way to build relationships and raise consumer awareness about food waste issues.

This project sought to kick start work using citizen science to try and fill the knowledge gaps. In particular, it aimed to establish a network bringing together citizen science and food waste research expertise.



Photo (above):
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According to the FAO, consumers in Europe and North America discard between 95 and 115 kg of food per capita every year © LUCENTIUS / GETTY

Researchers involved

Sarah West
Rachel Pateman
Annemarieke de Bruin
Emilie Hobbs
Evelin Piirsalu

Project lead

Evelin Piirsalu

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Duration: 10 Months

Contact

Helen Saarniit
helen.saarniit@sei.org

Benefitting from innovative research on food waste being done at SEI Tallinn with citizen science expertise at SEI York, the project focused on food waste generated in households and in catering institutions. Its main activities were:

- a literature review on work to date using citizen science to explore food waste issues
- identifying possible members of a citizen science-food waste network
- convening a workshop to explore possible research questions and collaborative projects.

The workshop took place in Geneva on 6 June, following the European Citizen Science Association (ECSA) annual conference. It gathered participants from research organizations and NGOs active in the field, both in person and online.

The network that was created during the project brings together researchers, experts and practitioners in the field of citizen science and food waste, in order to discuss opportunities for cooperation in projects and research. Several collaborative research proposals have already been developed between members of the network.

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Stockholm Environment Institute
Linnégatan 87D, Box 24218
104 51 Stockholm, Sweden
Tel: +46 8 30 80 44

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Around 40% of food losses in industrialized countries occur in shops, homes and restaurants (FAO)

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