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Participatory Sustainable Waste Management

Institution	Institute for Studies and Innovation in Community-Based Research
Researchers	Dr. Jutta Gutberlet (UVic , Geography), Dr. Nidia Pontuschka (University of São Paulo, Education)
Location	The metropolitan region of São Paulo, Brazil
Dates	2006—2012
Partners	<p>Partners: Participating recycling co-operatives: Associação Pacto Ambiental – Diadema, Cooperlimpa—Diadema, Cooperma—Mauá, Cooperpires—Ribeirão Pires, Coopcicla—Santo André, Associação Refazendo—São Bernardo de Campo, Raio de Luz—São Bernardo de Campo, Sempre Verde—São Paulo/Zona Sul, Coopercral—São Paulo/Zona Sul, Coopercose—São Paulo/Zona Oeste, Fênix—Ágape—São Paulo/Zona Leste,</p> <p>Participating local governments: Consórcio Inter-Municipal do ABC, Prefeitura Municipal de Ribeirão Pires, Prefeitura Municipal de Diadema, Prefeitura Municipal de Mauá, Prefeitura de Santo André.</p> <p>Other collaborators: Araci Musolino, Instituto GEA, Sergio Marques, Grupo Sta. Luzia, FUNDACENTRO.</p>
Funders	Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)

Project background

The overall purpose of the Participatory Sustainable Waste Management (PSWM) project is to increase the effectiveness, safety, and income generation of organized waste recycling in six

Brazilian municipalities. These municipalities are all located in the metropolitan region of São Paulo and include Santo André, Diadema, Ribeirão Pires, São Bernardo do

Campo, Mauá and parts of São Paulo city. The PSWM project accomplished this by building capacity, strengthening organizational structures, enhancing the dialogue between recyclers and the government, increasing the overall awareness about resource recovery and adding value to the transformation of recyclables. As an indirect outcome, the PSWM project contributes to improving the urban environment of the metropolitan area of São Paulo.

Additionally, the PSWM helps to structure, organize and strengthen the waste management sector through supporting cooperative enterprises, micro-credit and the practice of solidarity economy. The project aims to increase the capacity of the Faculty of Education (FEUSP) at the University of São Paulo (USP) to implement training programs for government agents, leaders from the organized recycling sector and the wider community on technical aspects of the collection of recyclables, health and risk factors, participative resource management, gender awareness and inclusion, small business and cooperative developments, micro-credit, group dynamics and participatory methodologies. Overall, the project also



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helps to increase responsible consumption and reduce the generation of household waste.

The PSWM project, aims to enhance sustainable solutions for waste management in these municipalities through supporting the creation of participatory public policies for waste management that include representatives from the recyclers in all stages of their development, and recognizing the knowledge that recyclers bring to waste management from their day-to-day work—from logistics and organization of selective collection to knowledge of residents' patterns and practices of waste disposal.

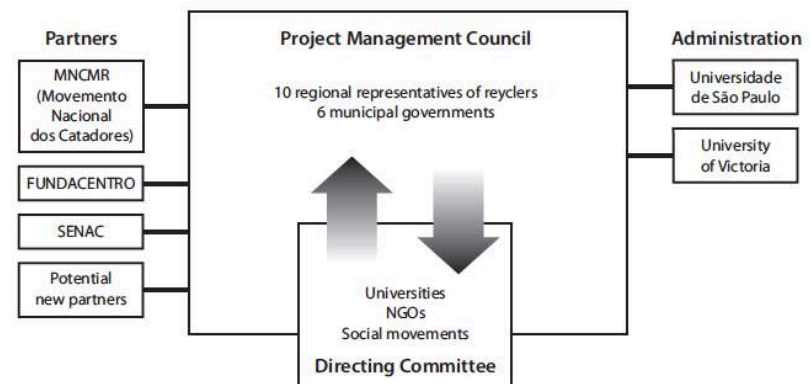
The PSWM project is designed to improve the quality of life and to generate income for marginalized and impoverished populations (e.g., the informal waste recyclers) from the greater metropolitan area of São Paulo (GMSP), and to contribute to environmental sustainability in municipal waste management within the GMSP and other large urban centers. In other words the project purpose is to build the capacity of personnel involved, including USP and MC members Rede Mulher de Educação, Fórum Recicla São Paulo, and the representatives from the recycling cooperatives and the government of the six municipalities. These partners are expected to be able to expand the diffusion of the project's objective. In addition the PSWM project aims to train leaders of recycling groups to improve their socio-environmental and economic conditions and to implement inclusive solid waste management policies. The results of the project have been manifold, including increasing the amount of recyclable material recovered from the waste stream; increasing wages for organized recyclers; increasing the recyclers' bargaining power; and contributing to safer working conditions.

The project was funded through a grant from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), through the Association of University and Colleges Collaboration (AUCC) as a Tier II project under the University Partnership Collaboration and Development programme (2004–10). The PSWM project has also been able to leverage a number of smaller grants including one from the state oil company Petrobrás to finance a number of income generation projects.

Research design and methodology

The research process is participatory and action oriented and therefore in itself rich in generating knowledge and stirring social change among the participants. Recyclers or Catadore/as suffer from widespread stigmatization and social and economic exclusion. Being able to tell their stories, listen to others' experiences and question the causes for economic exclusion and social stigmatization are important ways to empower these individuals. The research took a qualitative approach, confirming and valuing previously neglected knowledge and ultimately contributing to a better understanding of the complex social, cultural, economic and political conditions that shape the work of these people. The methodology was based on participatory, action oriented and community-based research grounded in an epistemology of knowledge co-creation and feminist theory. The research process of inquiry was combined with capacity-building strategies, helping overcome knowledge gaps, and empowering and making participants visible as agents for social change. It was guided by the ideal of understanding the research process as a contribution to the development of skills, knowledge and capacities that facilitate the use of the results by the participants themselves.

The project is governed by a Directing Committee made up of the original project partners (University of Victoria, University of São Paulo, Forum Recicla São Paulo, Rede Mulher de Educação) and a Project Management Council. The Project Management Council was responsible for operational and deliberative aspects (including yearly planning) of the PSWM project and is made up of the members of the Directing Committee.



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This Project Management Council includes representatives from six municipal governments and representatives from ten recycling cooperatives. This Directing Committee meets every three months. The project brings together university, community and government representatives in a participatory governance model. Supportive participatory management of the project is integral to long-term success and has helped the PSWM project to be responsive to the needs and interests of the recycler groups.

Domains of research excellence

The project exemplifies all of the four domains of excellence.

Community relevance

Community relevance is clearly a key priority and was the foundation in many ways for the other three domains. Equitable partnerships and a participatory framework were the drivers for the research and allowed for the community to work on issues that are important and relevant to them. The PSWM project tackled serious socio-economic challenges by putting the community in control of their urban environment and strengthening the resources they required to improve it. The PSWM project has made material improvements in the lives of the recyclers by helping them make infrastructure improvements and buying new equipment for their work facilities; by improving their income levels through collective commercialization of recyclables; by helping to strengthen their voice; and by contributing to a more positive image of recyclers. Many participating recyclers have said that their participation in the project has made their lives easier and increased their incomes. Many also speak about the personal impact of their participation, noting that the project has contributed to their empowerment and confidence. The direct impact for these change areas can be difficult to measure, however, it is safe to say that the project is contributing to changing attitudes about recyclers and sustainable resource management, and, in turn, this contributes to positive environmental, economic and social impacts. As academic PI Jutta Gutberlet notes, "Organized recycling programmes provide an opportunity to enhance public environmental awareness with the recyclers performing the role of environmental agents."

Equitable participation

Equitable participation is embedded in the research design. The participatory approach to the project enables active and equitable engagement for stakeholders in decision-making processes, in ownership of local development, and in the research process. Transparency and equal participation throughout project planning, implementation, funding, and evaluation is fundamental to the participatory management of the PSWM project.

Action and change

Action and change is also at the forefront of the PSWM project. The participatory governance structure enabled a dynamic opportunity for change to participants, process and policy. The project created active partnerships between local governments and the recyclers, and demonstrates the wide-ranging social, economic and environmental benefits from organized, participatory recycling. There are a number of examples where the project has directly participated in policy discussions or has supported the participation of recyclers in policy discussions by providing valuable evidence-based research. The project is now widely recognized and has been invited by other municipalities to advise on waste management strategies. In Ribeirão Pires, Santo André and Diadema, the PSWM project's Directing Committee and the field team arranged meetings and visits with representatives from the municipal governments. In São Paulo, the focus has been upon building relationships with some of the regional offices (sub-prefeituras). Seminars on participatory research methodologies were organized in partnership with municipal governments.

In 2008 the project further enhanced a close working relationship with the complementary project (Rede ABC Gerando Renda) and the Regional Consortium of Municipalities in the ABC region of São Paulo. This relationship was key to achieve the project purpose of implementing participative management within the design of sustainable and equitable public policies on solid waste management.

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The project significantly contributed to strengthening the Brazilian partner institutions and project beneficiaries, particularly professors and students from USP, members from Rede Mulher de Educação, Fórum Recicla São Paulo, and recycling cooperatives. Based on a learning by doing approach, the project is helping its beneficiaries to apply organizational and management knowledge. Moreover, Brazilian and Canadian partners are systematically sharing knowledge, such as in the areas of organizing recyclers' groups, gender equity awareness and overall research activities related to waste management.

The project initiated a working capital fund managed by eight women in the metropolitan region of São Paulo. The fund provides small loans, allowing groups to survive until payment from industry arrives. This eliminated the need to sell to intermediaries and maintained income within the network. The initiative has also contributed to empowerment outcomes for women.

More generally, the PSWM project has significantly contributed to the empowerment of project participants who have taken on larger roles in regional and national organizations.

The PSWM project has produced a wide range of academic and popular publications, including the video *Beyond Gramacho*, which documents recyclers' struggles and the benefits of collective commercialization and co-op development.

The PSWM project has contributed to many positive legislative and policy changes by providing information and documentation to the recyclers' movement and by directly participating in policy discussions.

By working together in management committees and making collective decisions about project priorities and resources, the PSWM project has resulted in increased solidarity among participants.

The project has resulted in improvements in working conditions, wages and infrastructure for the recyclers.

The project has also made a number of contributions to theorizing the social and solidarity economies, areas of research that remain relatively under-theorized, while also contributing to the critical discourse on collective commercialization and microcredit. Further, the research has helped to expand the body of theory about community-based research

and empowerment concepts. Lastly, researchers involved in the project are interested in contributing to the body of knowledge and practice about sustainable production and consumption.

Research design

The project is run by a Project Management Council (MC), in which the recyclers are the main stakeholders. Other stakeholders included local government, universities and NGOs. Participation in the MC means active engagement in decision-making processes and ownership in local development. The researched become participants, and the production and control of knowledge by these participants becomes a means of challenging existing power relations and thus generating opportunities for change. Transparency throughout project planning, implementation, funding, and evaluation is fundamental to participatory project management. The participatory process itself has been transformative, has been a learning process for all participants and has built skills and capacity to make decisions, engage, interact and build relationships—all defining conditions for empowerment.

Conclusion

The project employed a mixed-method approach, including interviews, surveys, focus groups, photovoice, participatory video, community mapping and participatory observation (i.e., researchers participate in the work processes of the recyclers). Capacity building was an important element of the research approach. Activities took place with individual recyclers throughout the recycling associations and cooperatives. Specific activities included participatory video workshops with recyclers; financial management workshops with cooperatives; pilot projects to build capacity for livelihood diversification, such as the collection of organic (food) waste; and information technology skills workshops to help recyclers become more autonomous in the digital world and to use computers for co-op administration and collective commercialization.

Links

www.pswm.uvic.ca