



Lifestyle Scenarios and the Future of Waste Composition

Presentation Overview

Overview of Project

Brook Lyndhurst undertook research (project ref WR0204) on behalf of Defra's Waste Research & Development division to explore the potential future relationships between UK lifestyles and the volume and composition of household waste. Against the background provided by a range of legislative drivers influencing the nature of UK waste management, major infrastructural decisions on waste treatment may need to take account of potential changes in the volumes of different waste streams such as glass, plastic and garden waste.

The project, complemented by Defra-funded studies undertaken by AEA Technology, the Future Foundation and Henley Centre Headlight Vision, predominantly comprised a qualitative scenario-planning exercise.

Methodological Approach

The study involved a mix of qualitative research (extensive desk research, expert interviews, discussion groups), quantitative research (historic data on time-use, spending, demographics and waste, as well as future-oriented data on household projections, modelled spending and so forth); and analytical work, involving brainstorming, scenario development, lifestyle narratives and deriving waste implications.

Role of Consumption Data

Detailed historic data on consumer spending by category, for different socio-economic groups, fed into both the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of the research.

Results

Three scenarios – “Blinkered Evolution”, “Civic Renewal” and “Strong Government” – explored differing future patterns of consumerism and their consequences for waste. Certain waste streams emerged as particularly significant for the future – and ‘bottom up’ or demand-side solutions emerged as more effective in tackling long-run trends in waste growth compared to ‘top-down’ or supply side measures.

Implications

There is a variety of policy & research implications for waste management; but also in terms of the relationship between qualitative and quantitative analysis at points of ‘step change’. In terms of consumerism, too, the research points towards some very large-scale questions – what, for example, are the limits to ‘de-coupling’?

DF 1/11/07