

THE DETERMINANTS OF EXCESSIVE AMOUNT OF WASTE

Waste comprise one of the most difficult ecological problems of the modern world. Its characteristic feature is excessive amount of waste produced by human. It is influenced by many factors we are more or less aware of (Figure 1.).

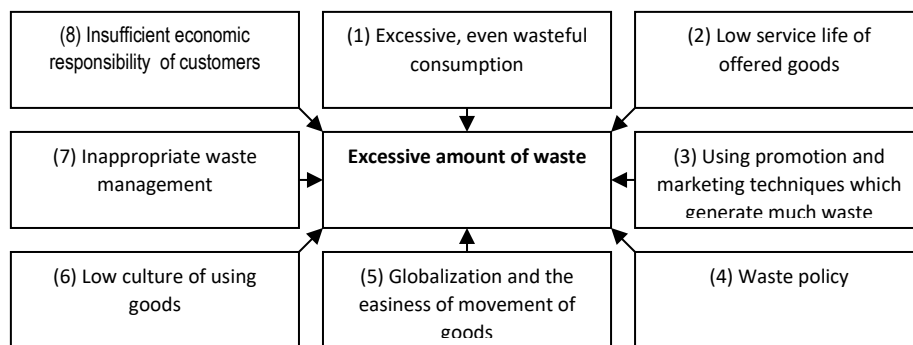


Figure 1. The determinants of excessive amount of waste [1, p. 5]

The first factor is excessive, even wasteful consumption. Modern models of life consist of having and consuming more and more products, including tangible goods. Artificially-created needs of humans are strongly stimulated next to natural needs, resulting from human physical construction, their social and mental needs. Artificial needs create those needs, which were created by the market and its mechanisms. Fulfilling those needs means an excessive burden for natural environment and other ecological resources.

The second determinant generating the excessive amount of waste is low service life of offered goods. It results from the adopted sales policy, according to which the consumers should relatively quickly make decisions on the acquisition of new goods. It can be obtained by two methods: (1) by cheap goods which quickly get broken and are expensive to repair or (2) by offering new generations of products, which make the older ones, although still good, obsolete and out-of-date. It results in a quicker turnover of goods or in other words compression (shortening of time) of a lifespan of particular items of goods and their whole generations.

The following factor, is the usage of promotion and marketing techniques which generate much waste. As a result, huge amounts of packaging and used materials occur, in particular paper ones. Very often these materials are made of paper, which cannot be recycled, for example multilayer materials joining paper, plastic foil and metal. Their production comprises a significant branch of modern economy, whose revenues and profits often exceed the size of industries, manufacturing the same products packed with those materials. It means a peculiar production “for packaging”, not packaging for products.

The above phenomena are the outcome of management policy, which is based on the basic assumption, that socio-economic development consist of systematic increase of indexes, that is the sizes of production, revenues, profits, etc. The necessity to obtain increasing income and profits of companies and distribution entities (chains of shops) creates their attitude to the systematic increase in production and sale. Such issues as: burden for natural environment, high quality and long service-life become secondary. Moreover, the service of quickly increasing amount of post-production and post-consumption waste is treated as the subject of economic benefits, so called ecological business.

The management policy presented above connects directly with globalization processes, which create a situation of easier movement of goods. They are manufactured in mass amounts in particular countries, and then moved to many other countries. The lack of any serious barriers in the movement of goods, the lack of environmental regulations in countries, where the goods are manufactured, easy access to raw materials and cheap labor force, lower quality and health standards are used here.

Easily accessible and cheap products are accompanied by low culture of using goods, which manifests in insufficient care and carefulness. If these are products of low service life, then they quickly turn into waste. It is particularly visible in developed societies (for example in the United States), and even more in countries quickly developing (for example in China). In those societies we meet two types of barriers restricting excessive or quickly increasing consumption. These are being used to increasing, common and very much waste generating consumption in developed countries and rejecting any attempts of restricting the increasing consumption perceived as endangering the improvement of the quality of life and fulfilling the needs (for example in China) at the desired level. This desired level is set by societies treated as consumption models (the imitation effect).

The following factor of excessive amount of waste is inappropriate waste management. It is characterized for example by:

- the disposal of majority of waste;
- low level of waste management;
- insufficient or no recycling systems;
- the lack of impulses for self-perfection of the system of the disposal and use of waste;
- low participation of people in the waste management;
- frequent occurrence of NIMBY¹ syndrome.

The last determinant of the excessive amount of waste is insufficient responsibility, especially the economic one, of the final waste manufacturers, that is the consumer of goods. Many national systems of waste management does not make use of any instruments affecting the entities generating waste or apply solutions which are not effective enough (for example too low fees).

References

1. Becla A., Czaja S., Zielińska A., Good practice in waste management - a manual. The Foundation – the Centre of Supporting Entrepreneurship, Zgorzelec 2012, Copied material.

¹ NIMBY syndrome or „not in my yard”, describes the attitude of people, who express their objections against some investments in their neighbourhood.