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TOWARDS A GREEN CIRCULAR ECONOMY

EPR and its role for post-consumer plastics



Conference Report



BACKGROUND

The year 2015 will see a fall full of events setting the course for European and global environmental and climate policy, culminating in the 21st Conference of the Parties in Paris (COP21). Turning towards a circular economy ranks high on the political agenda in Brussels and in many European capitals. Bold steps will undoubtedly be necessary to make notable headway and increasing resource efficiency will play a crucial role.

Today however, Europe still wastes a large majority of valuable resources: nearly 50% of plastic waste in the European Union (EU) still go to landfill. More sustainable management of post-consumer plastics at all stages of the value chain is key to tackle the manifold challenges. Studies show that Europe could significantly enhance resource efficiency and environmental protection by developing a circular economy for plastics. Over the last decades, the principle of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) has proven to be an effective policy tool to foster the recovery of plastic waste and the eco-design of products.

The development of a circular economy for post-consumer plastics is no easy task, as it requires changes throughout the whole life-cycle of products and a constructive dialogue of all actors involved. Hence, a number of fundamental questions need to be answered in order for the involved players to come to a common understanding and vision.

What is the role of consumers regarding sustainable management of plastics? How are retailers, recyclers and producers getting involved? What are the major barriers to the eco-design of plastics materials and products? How can high quality recycling be achieved? What is needed to boost the European market for secondary raw materials? Which political framework is required to fit post-consumer plastics into a circular economy?

Against the backdrop of the relaunch of the EU Circular Economy Package, this conference jointly organised by the Association of Cities and Regions for Recycling and sustainable Resource management (ACR+) and Duales System Holding (DSD) brought together experts from industry, politics, NGOs and science to discuss these questions, present best-practice examples and elaborate on the potentials of EPR implementation and sustainable management of post-consumer plastics. Around 100 participants attended the high-level keynotes and participated in lively and fruitful panel discussions.



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*Michael Wiener,
DSD Group*

In his opening remarks, Michael Wiener, CEO of DSD Group, greeted the participants and stressed the importance of jointly discussing how to make better use of the tremendous potential of plastics recycling and closing the loop for post-consumer plastics. The conference's topic was "at the heart of our business at the DSD Group", Mr. Wiener said.

In her keynote, Françoise Bonnet, Secretary General of ACR+, joined Mr. Wiener in highlighting the importance of dialogue.



*Françoise Bonnet,
ACR+*

Developing a circular economy was "a matter of multi stakeholder involvement", Mrs. Bonnet said, adding the need "to activate all actors in the value chain of products, particularly citizens and consumers – the citisumers – but also municipalities".

After the two co-hosts had set the framework for the conference, moderator James Crisp introduced the morning session, which was dedicated to discussing the practical challenges to and opportunities of turning post-consumer plastic waste into a valuable resource.

In his keynote, Peter Heydasch, Corporate Account Executive of DOW Europe, accentuated the importance of furthering attractive economic models through design-for-sustainability rather than design-for-recycling.



*Peter Heydasch,
DOW*

"Our focus should be on generating the highest impact with the available investments", Mr. Heydash said and highlighted the key role of improving sorting quality for "eco-logic acceleration" – leapfrogging recycling in Europe.



*Frank Böttcher,
DKR*

Frank Böttcher, CEO of DKR Deutsche Gesellschaft für Kreislaufwirtschaft und Rohstoffe GmbH, reminded participants of the conference that the recycling sector was still a young industry but provided hands-on insights into what recyclers can achieve already today thanks to innovative approaches.

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Introducing DSD's recyclate initiative, Mr. Böttcher also concretely depicted the potentials of investing in sorting technology and recycling processes. "A functioning market for secondary resources is essential", Mr. Böttcher said, adding that "customer-tailored recyclates have to create a market pull" while a framework was needed that "facilitates and enables long-term investments".

The two key notes provided a fruitful setting for the subsequent panel discussion, bringing together stakeholders from all over Europe and the entire value chain. After a lively debate between Stéphane Ardit, Policy Manager: Products & Waste at EEB, Françoise Gerardi, General Manager at Elipso, Paulo Correia, R&D Director of LOGOPLASTE, Per Stoltz, Sustainability Developer at IKEA and Alexandra Lange, Public Affairs Officer at Eco-Emballages, there was consensus among all panellists that recycling is an attractive business model. Per Stoltz underscored IKEA's commitment to closing material loops by focusing on recycled plastics and making customers ambassadors for circularity.



The panel comprising actors from the entire value chain

He further called for harmonised regulation in Europe. Paulo Correia stressed the importance of rewarding consumers for contributing to a circular economy while Alexandra Lange highlighted that an extension of producer responsibility was the minimum requirement for a functioning circular economy. Stéphane Ardit demanded ambitious targets and described his vision of making plastics the symbol of the circular economy. Eventually, all panellists agreed that input and impetus from policymakers were now required to create an environment in which all actors could finally walk the talk.



Lunch Break

The desired political impetus was then delivered in the afternoon session of the conference. Prof Dr Helmut Maurer, policy officer at the DG Environment's Unit for Waste Management and Recycling, pointed out the rapid growth of plastics production and the imperative to make post-consumer plastics fit into a green circular economy. "We need to completely rethink our economic model", Mr. Maurer said and spoke out in favour of extending producer responsibility before calling EU institutions and member states for more ambition when it comes to closing material loops.



*Helmut Maurer,
DG Environment*



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The panel discussion following Mr. Maurer’s keynote comprised Dr Reinhard Büscher, Head of Unit Chemicals Industry at DG Grow, Dr Teresa Barrés Benlloch, Head of Unit at the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Environment and Dr Thomas Rummler, Deputy Director-General for Circular economy at the German Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety. Mr. Büscher demanded a level playing field between recycled and virgin materials. “We need to turn recycling into an attractive business model and hence go beyond environmental protection,” Mr. Büscher said. Mrs. Barrés and Mr. Rummler provided insights on Spain’s and Germany’s experiences and advocated for more efforts into fostering eco innovation and the prevention of waste.



Q&A Session

In the lively Q&A session, participants fired questions at the panel and discussed the prospects of a European wide landfill ban, expectations concerning the Commission’s imminent Circular Economy Package and other potential political measures to accelerate closing material loops. Mr. Maurer reminded all participants of the conference that the process towards a real circular economy had virtually just begun and that the Circular Economy Package will only be “the first cornerstone we then need to build on”.

Helmut Schmitz, Head of Public Affairs, DSD, wrapped up the conference stressing that the keynotes and discussions had shown “the importance of openly sharing concerns and constructively engaging in dialogue”. A lot can be achieved today”, Mr. Schmitz said, “but it is still a long way to go which is why we need innovation, future-oriented thinking and ambitious targets”. The interesting discussions were then continued in an informal get-together at the gallery of the Palais des Académies.



*Helmut Schmitz,
DSD Group*





ACR+ - Association of Cities and Regions for Recycling and sustainable Resource management - is an international network promoting sustainable resource management through prevention at source, reuse and recycling. Through its activities, ACR+ strives to develop the expertise and skills of public authorities in effective waste-product-resource policies. It also provides support to regional and local authorities in their new challenges when adopting circular economy strategies and promotes cooperation and partnerships to develop eco-efficient solutions.

More information on: www.acrplus.org

DSD - Duales System Holding GmbH & Co. KG synergizes the entrepreneurial activities of Der Grüne Punkt (The Green Dot) for a sustainable economy, one that keeps recyclables in closed circuits. Der Grüne Punkt is the market leader of dual systems in Germany and a provider of other intelligent take-back systems. Other group companies include DKR Deutsche Gesellschaft für Kreislaufwirtschaft und Rohstoffe mbH which supplies the international business community with high-quality secondary raw materials, The Systec Plastics GmbH, Systec Plastics Eisfeld GmbH and Systec Mixed Plastics GmbH companies that produce high-quality recyclates under the Systalen brand and DSD Resource GmbH which provides consultancy in all questions relating to corporate disposal management.

More information on: www.gruener-punkt.de

