



Work, Health and Organization in Recycling Materials Collectors (Street Waste Pickers) of Fortaleza, Brazil

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Waste Management and Recycling

- ④ How to solve the problem of waste production?
 - Educating towards the production of less waste, separation and selection
 - Legislation
 - Recycling
- ④ Recycling materials approach dimensions
 - Environmental (decrease of use and abuse, less pollution)
 - Economical (recycled materials less expensive)
 - Social



The Social Dimension

- ④ Provide work and income for the poor/excluded from formal jobs
- ④ Viable because large population unemployed, ready to live on very low earnings
- ④ In 2005: one million people occupied with waste picking in Brasil (IBGE)
- ④ In Fortaleza, Ceará: 8 to 10 thousand people (estimate IMPARH, 2006)
- ④ In general, these people are below the poverty line with no formal education




Macro organization and policies

④ Private sector

- Small deposits of recycling materials privately owned

④ Associations

- Incentivized by Governments, ONGs and Church
- Kind of cooperatives with 5 to 25 waste pickers
- 16 associations in Fortaleza
- Net of associations (enterprise to sell materials)



Policies (debate)

- ④ Is it possible for waste pickers to organize and manage such associations?
- ④ Is it possible to constitute a self regulated association?
- ④ Do associations create a sense of social inclusion and dignity?



Objectives

🌀 Investigate

- Work activities and conditions
- Health conditions of waste pickers



Main questions

- ④ waste pickers associations can be an organization model leading to an effective autonomy and participation of workers
- ④ the model is beneficial in providing an improvement of work and living conditions of its members compared to the “jobs” provided by deposits in Fortaleza, with its particular cultural background



Method

- ④ Qualitative research: Collective Work Analyses
 - Five focus groups of associated and independent (deposit) workers: 30 waste pickers
 - Interviews: deposit owners (2) and associations managers (2)

Participants

Focus Group	Age (years)	Type of organization	Sex	Time on the job (years)
FG1	31-65	Independent	1 woman 5 men	12-20
FG2	30-66	Associated	1 woman 5 men	2-12
FG3	25-59	Independent	3 women 3 men	-23
FG4	26-47	3 Independent 3 associated	4 women 2 men	8
FG5	23-44	Associated	3 women 2 men	1-12



Work activities

📍 General

- Take a cart at the association or deposit
 - Special cases: own a cart; pick in a bag
- Select or pick recyclable materials from garbage cans or bags (residences and streets)
- Go to the deposit or association
- Weight separated materials
- Get the payment



The cart is the only link between worker and the “company”

It represents the work contract: materials have to be sold to the owner (deposit or association)





Main differences

Ⓢ Independent workers

- Subjected to the deposit owners
- Violence
- No social protection
- “Autonomy”: “Nobody says what I have to do, when and where I have to work”

Ⓢ Associated workers

- Better pay
- But payment can be delayed
- Subjected to the association rules and “authorities”



Health Conditions

- ④ “Thanks God I am healthy to work”
- ④ They report musculoskeletal disorders: back pain mainly
- ④ Fatigue: due to heavy cart, exposure to heat and lack of food
- ④ Infections, dermatites
- ④ Accidents: traffic, falls
- ④ Cuts due to perforate-cutting objects found in garbage cans and bags



Conclusions

- ④ working and living conditions are precarious in both types of organizations
- ④ workers in associations, in general, perceived the work as a simple occupation and not as a mean to achieve social and political participation
- ④ the associative model, however, can be positive:
 - reflects some effective gains in participation, even small
 - provides the formalization of informal activities (visibility)
 - are managed by workers, independent of its economical effectiveness
 - contribute to the construction of occupational alternative
 - provide some kind of identity to workers
- ④ Workers are subjected to accidents, fatigue, muskuloeskeletal problems and infection diseases