

Chapter 13

The Global Waste Trade: A Decade in Review

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ABSTRACT

The global waste trade refers to the movement of waste materials across international borders for disposal or recycling. This trade has grown rapidly in recent years as countries seek to capitalize on the economic benefits of exporting waste while also addressing the challenges of managing increasing volumes of waste at home. This chapter will provide an overview of the global waste trade over the past decade, including key trends and developments, major players and destinations, and this rapidly growing industry's environmental and economic impacts. The chapter will also explore the challenges and opportunities presented by the global waste trade and offer insights into the future of this complex and dynamic field.

INTRODUCTION

The past decade has seen unprecedented growth in the global waste trade, driven by increased global consumption and the need for effective waste management. The world population is constantly growing, leading to a corresponding increase in consumption and related waste. The non-stop consumption activities, where people crave more and more products, regardless of their origin, lead to more production and hence more waste. This endless cycle has resulted in the global circulation of products and waste, with globalization making the circulation of waste just as essential as the circulation of domestically produced products.

The international trade of waste materials has emerged as a rapidly growing industry over the past decade, allowing countries to manage their waste effectively, either by processing it within their own borders or by exporting it to other countries equipped to do so. This trade has become a vital component of the global economy. Its growth is driven by the increasing demand for waste management solutions and the need to regulate waste flows, protect the environment, and ensure social equity in distributing waste management responsibilities. Since the commercial circulation of waste is a valuable research

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opportunity, especially in terms of bioeconomics and international trade, this book chapter is written on the basis of the following research questions:

- What theoretical foundations explain the global flow of waste?
- What conclusions have been reached in the empirical studies conducted regarding the theory?
- What topics do the studies conducted in the last ten years and indexed in respected journals focus on?
- From which aspects will it be more beneficial to look at the waste trade in the coming years?
- Which countries are the largest global exporters of waste banned or restricted by China?
- Which countries are the biggest importers of these wastes?

The following objectives have been achieved to answer these questions.

1. The pollution haven theory and its opposing views are explained.
2. In particular, empirical studies testing the pollution haven are cited.
3. Articles written in the last ten years and indexed in the Web of science database and containing the words “waste trade” in the title were examined.
4. The results of the research and empirical studies were interpreted and the issues that are important in the future were emphasized.
5. With data from important statistical databases, major players and major destinations have been revealed.

In conclusion, this chapter will provide a comprehensive overview of the past decade of global waste trade, examining the academic trends, challenges faced by importers, and opportunities that have emerged for exporters in this rapidly evolving field. By providing valuable insights into the current state of international waste trade, this chapter will serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, researchers, and practitioners working in waste management and international trade.

BACKGROUND

Pollution Haven Theory

The reality of waste trade, which researchers have also observed, has become an area of study that has been theorized on. Of course, researchers are not the only side of the issue. Governments have started to set new rules for waste in their policies. In addition, non-governmental organizations are also drawing attention to this issue and seeking to raise awareness. Whichever way one looks at it, waste becomes a problem at some point. Firstly, from a scientific approach, thanks to Pethig’s (1976) work which brought forward pollution haven theory, and Walter and Ugelow’s (1979) tracking study of ecology and economy sciences paid attention to this topic. Antweiler et al. (2001) draw attention to two theories regarding the direction of the flow of waste in the world. According to the first of these theories, the “pollution haven” theory, wastes move toward low-income countries.

On the other hand, the second theory emphasizes the opposite. In other words, it argues that countries with abundant capital also have significant waste. Empirical research on both approaches will be presented

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