

Moving away from a waste-based model

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Photo: Jonathan Kos

There is an idea that recycling will answer the world's trash problems. For example, the European Union has a goal to increase recycling up to 70% by 2030. What if, however, we stopped trash from being created in the first place? While we need to continue recycling for some time, moving the world away from creating more trash should be our main goal.

Recycling

In our current world, we do not consider what happens to things after they are sold to the buyer. Usually, a company's goal is to sell a lot of things at a low price. The more goods a company can make and sell, the more successful it will be. It works like this: we get resources, change them into goods, and use them. Recycling only starts at the throwing-away stage, which is the last step.

Recycling must handle large amounts of trash made of different kinds of materials. Often these materials are not easily changed and end up in smashed-up pieces that again need to be created from start to make the new item. Yet, something that comes back for repair will cost less to fix and sell again, than making it from scratch.

We should, then, think about if recycling is the best answer for dealing with large amounts of throwaway items. We will find ourselves in a never-ending race as we continue to create more trash, rather than avoiding it to start with.

Reusing

There are other ways in which we can live. One way, called a "circular economy" is a system of buying and throwing away where the items are reused instead of creating trash. "Circular" means to shape into a circle, and "economy" involves the movement of things and money. In this system things move in a circle because people reuse them instead of throwing them away. Things also last longer through upkeep, repair, and reuse. In the end, less goods would need to be recycled and it would be cheaper because repairing something is always less pricey than making it from scratch.

Making things local

Making goods closer to the buyer is an important step as well. Buyers could return the item when finished with it to the local company that sold it. The company would then repair it for resell. This could also create many jobs for people in their own communities. All of this makes sense in a world with only a certain amount of natural resources. Agreeing on a circular plan by avoiding the need to recycle is a way forward.

