

Governing Plastics Use and Management
28th and 29th June 2021
University of Surrey

Symposium Report
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The Governing Plastics Use and Management online symposium was held on the 28th and 29th June 2021. The event was co-organised by Prof. Chanaka Jayawardhena (Surrey Business School) and Prof. Rosalind Malcolm (co-director of the Governing Plastics Network, Surrey Law School), with research support provided by Elizabeth Wamae. The symposium was attended by delegates from different countries, including academic researchers as well as practitioners. The event consisted of keynotes, parallel sessions, a panel discussion, and networking sessions. The Governing Plastics Network currently comprises four projects on aspects of plastics waste and has a membership approaching 300.

Symposium Aims

The objective of this symposium was to bring together scholars as part of a programme to re-design the governance and management of plastics to achieve an effective reduction in pollution of the environment and the impact on public health caused by plastic waste. The workshop provided an opportunity to engage with groups of researchers who are part of the Governing Plastics Network and provide a platform to analyze the discourses around plastic pollution including communication engagement strategies and governance issues on how to reduce consumption and the waste of plastic.

Through the symposium, we were able to facilitate conversations surrounding conceptual, empirical, and practical developments in the field of Governing Plastics research, and included issues such as.

- The use, consumption, reduction and governance of plastics in a sustainable form, with particular attention to the developing world
- Voluntary initiatives, business models taken by individuals/groups to lessen the burden on the environment
- Legal mechanisms governing plastics and plastic products such as environmental taxation, extended producer responsibility, eco-design, and product impact assessment, etc.
- Regulatory opportunities and challenges for fostering circular plastics economies (in which plastic waste is prevented and plastic reused, recycled or recovered with the aim of sustainable development)
- Contractual and intellectual property implications of designing products for circular plastics economics

- Communications issues around the story of plastics and their impact on governance

Event Themes and Presentations

Day One

Day one was structured around four interrelated talks. The first talk was titled: *The 2021 Basel Amendments' shortcomings on the regulation of the transboundary movements of plastic waste*, and was presented by Dr Michael Hennessy Picard. The presentation scrutinized the core assumptions of the Basel Amendments and questioned whether their aim is the reduction of plastic released into the environment, or rather the management of the global multi-billion-dollar plastic waste trade. This presentation highlighted that there is still no ban on waste transfer, rather a regulatory platform for the exchange of the "right to pollute". The presentation was finalized by suggesting policy recommendations to overcome the shortcomings of the Basel Amendments.

Delivered by Prof. Jane Frecknall-Hughes, the second talk with an apt title, *Stakeholder engagement in controlling plastic usage: a case study of a UK university experience* highlighted the increasing importance of the sustainability agenda. The speaker emphasised that while organisations are under pressure to demonstrate that they contribute to improving sustainability, such organisations by themselves do not deliver such outcomes. It is however an organisation's employees, working as a collective, who ultimately meet organisational objectives and targets. This research shed insights into how employees encompass sustainability in their daily activities and how they interact with control systems, either formal or informal, which are ultimately responsible for the delivery of sustainability in a Higher Education organisation.

The third talk, titled *Building collective ownership of single-use plastics waste in youth communities: A Jamaican Case Study* by Dr. Andrea Clayton illustrated how plastic pollution is affecting the day to day lives. Taking the case of Jamaica, she was able to demonstrate how plastic pollution is a global environmental challenge that extends boundaries and impacts terrestrial and marine ecosystems.

Isabela Ribeiro de Carvalho delivered the fourth presentation titled *Strategic action field perspective about single-use plastics governance in Brazil*. Isabela highlighted how the destination of single-use plastics remains one of the main problems concerning solid waste management. She noted that only 1% of plastic production is recycled. Her research showed the importance of understanding the stakeholders involved in single-use plastics governance in Brazil and the strategies and tactics present in their discourses.

In addition to the four themed presentations and discussions, the delegates also got an opportunity to listen to Yvaine Sun, Managing Editor of the Journal of *Social Sciences* and

Dr Itziar Castello Molina (University of Surrey), a guest editor for a special issue in the Journal of *Business and Society*. The objective of this special session was to educate the delegates on how they could improve their manuscripts so that it enhances their opportunities for publishing in one of these journals.

Day 2

In keeping with the pattern set on the first day, proceedings of the second day revolved around four further themed presentations. The first presentation of the day delivered by Dr Sue Farran, illustrated the problems of the use of plastics in the Pacific islands. Dr Farran's work highlighted the wicked problem of plastics: on one hand, Pacific island governments and communities are increasingly aware of the problem of plastic pollution and are taking steps to address this, but, on the other hand, there is also a considerable appreciation that plastics are integral to the way that economic activities are currently carried out. The problem needs not only a legislative enforcement but also a greater assumption of responsibility by all stakeholders, especially trading partners.

Having traversed from one end of the globe to the other in the previous presentations, the remainder of the symposium stayed very much in the African continent. The inquiry began with a presentation titled *Investigating the knowledge and attitudes towards plastic pollution among the youth in Nairobi, Kenya* by Nicholas Oguge, Francis Oremo and Salome Ondigo. Salome (from the Centre for Advanced Studies in Environmental Law and Policy, University of Nairobi which partners with the University of Surrey in running the Governing Plastics Network) stated that Kenya has made various attempts to regulate and control the production of single-use plastics through partial ban and imposition of hefty taxes on plastic carrier bags and flat bags. In Kenya, the government imposed a ban on single-use plastics just in national parks, national reserves and conservation areas to protect wildlife resources from deadly plastic pollution. There is now a nationwide ban since 2017 on the use, manufacture and importation of all plastic carrier bags and flat bags used for commercial and household packaging. The study set out to investigate knowledge and attitudes towards single-use plastics among the youth in Nairobi, Kenya. Specifically, the study identified knowledge and information gaps in single-use plastics pollution among the youth; assessed attitudes towards innovative practices in plastic waste management; and assessed communications processes and sources important for sustainable management of single-use plastics.

Yohannes Geleta presented his team's work titled *Analysis of communication, policy, and legal instruments on governing plastics in Ethiopia*. Yohannes and colleagues showed the need for new regulations specific to plastics and a new governance approach, a market-based instrument. Their work also highlighted the potential impacts of plastic pollution on the environment and the role of recycling plastics in the circular economy. They postulated that the circular economy can be seen as the base for developing effective

policies, and management strategies. In this regard, the role of international stakeholder's support in the capacity development of local researchers was seen to be very significant.

Last but not least, Isabelle Zundel presented a talk *titled Legal and policy strategies for phasing out single-use plastics in Malawi: A regime assessment*. Drawing on the experience of Malawi, Isabelle highlighted how Malawi imposed a ban on thin plastics in 2015 and in so doing, it became one of the first African countries to take up such a measure as a key policy to tackle plastic waste. These researchers highlighted that such a move was indeed long overdue given the amount of thin plastic waste that was choking its myriad ecosystems largely due to poor waste management in both rural and urban localities. Malawi's many rivers, lakes as well as landmass are littered with thin plastics which cause damage to livestock and aquatic organisms. The paper outlined the possibilities available in the current legal framework for facilitating the ban on plastics.

Panel Discussion

To draw together the multitude of themes examined in the symposium, a concluding panel discussion was chaired by Prof. Rosalind Malcolm, Prof. Chanaka Jayawardhena and Dr Itziar Castello Molina (University of Surrey). The Panel reiterated the importance of the research findings and facilitated discussions and questions between the participants and the presenting researchers. These conversations were lively and led to a fruitful exchange of ideas and served to bring together like-minded researchers to work on collaborative projects in the future.

The panel thanked all the participants for their contributions as well as the delegates who joined in on the session. It was very noteworthy that the symposium was able to convene researchers working on projects spread across the world: with contributions from Brazil, Jamaica, Malawi, Kenya, Ethiopia, Pacific islands, Germany as well as the UK. It was interesting to note that as a global community, despite the differences in economic, social as well as political conditions, we all experience common and similar issues and specifically the need to control the use of plastics in a sustainable manner. Therefore, the onus is on us as academics and experts in this field to bring together our knowledge and expertise in these areas so that we can highlight these issues surrounding the control and governance of plastics for a better and more sustainable future.

Next steps – Outcomes

Given the importance of the topic under discussion, the organisers have secured guest editorships of three special issues to coincide with the symposium, specifically:

1. *Social Sciences*, titled "The Governance of Plastics" guest-edited by Prof Malcolm and colleagues
2. *Sustainability*, titled "Retailing and Sustainable Marketing" guest-edited by Professor Chanaka Jayawardhena and colleagues
3. *Business & Society*, titled "Stakeholder engagement: opening up Participation, Inclusion and Democracy" guest-edited by Dr. Itziar Castelló and colleagues

Selected presentations from the symposium were invited to submit their work to the special issues.

The workshop stimulated many discussions around shared interests and the presenters as well as delegates were encouraged to join the Governing Plastics Network.

Acknowledgements

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