



Policy Brief 2 Public Perception Tackling the ‘yuck factor’



SUWANU EUROPE is a H2020 project aiming to promote the effective exchange of knowledge, experience and skills among practitioners and relevant actors on the use of reclaimed water in agriculture. These policy briefs belong to a total of 4 factsheets aimed to overcome the identified challenges/barriers and facilitate take-up of innovative technologies and organizational solutions. These policy briefs set the basis for a future application for the “Innovation Deals for a Circular Economy Initiative”.

1. The task

Farmer and the general public perceive benefits of water reuse regarding water saving, climate adaptation and sustainability value it positively. But the benefits for the next generation appears abstract and distant by individual and are compared with the perceived short-term health risks that seems close and present. Acceptance grows when water scarcity is present.

Public opposition to recycle water is still a barrier to increased adoption of water reuse. The approach to water reuse is in danger of focusing in technological a solutions and problems minimising the importance of social issues, which can be a serious mistake. The risk of consumer refusal to food irrigated with wastewater has been mentioned as a critical factor in the process of the Regulation design and has been also a frequent concern of farmers and agri-food chain as mentioned by stakeholders in the consultation process.

Analysis of public perceptions regarding alternative uses of recycled water where water reuse is a relevant source have found that there is strong support for using recycled water for crops, fields and trees and resistance to use it for drinking or domestic purposes.

Another result of the research of consumer attitudes found that those people with a positive and active attitude towards environmental concerns and conservation were more likely to be accepting of wastewater reuse and higher levels of trust in the water authority were associated with lower perceptions of risk.

2. The user point of view

The general conclusion of empirical analysis is that consumer generally perceives reused water with lower value compared to fresh water. The terminology used is important with the label recycled preferred to reclaimed water for example, it is important to use a common terminology adapted to local condition reinforcing the positive elements such as ‘advanced purified’ or similar avoiding ‘treated wastewater’ that have negative connotations.

According to evidence for successful projects, part of the psychological resistance can be overcome with public education Although the more critical point is the trust in all institutions (government, quality assurance).

3. Communication system

The experience of successful projects shows that risk perceptions were not more dominant in influencing behavioural intentions regarding consumption of products irrigated with reclaimed water

The critical question was to increase trust in the authorities and the existing level of environmental values of the population.

The communication should be adapted to gender (e.g. some studies show that females may have more negative emotions about the schemes than use of reclaimed water than men, level of studies influence trust in the authorities.



4. Recommendations

Stakeholder involvement must be maintained at every step. Transparency and monitoring should be included in the planification process.

- Terminology is important, use terms that emphasize the positive aspects of the reclaimed wastewater.
- Consumers prefer 'not to know' as there is a general disgust to food grown with reclaimed water provided authorities guarantee safe use and risk management.
- Public trust in authorities reduce risk perception.

5. Suggested links and readings

Goodwin, et al. (2019). Collaboration on risk management: The governance of a non-potable water reuse scheme in London. *Journal of Hydrology*, 573, 1087-1095.

Kelly S. Fielding, Sara Dolnicar & Tracy Schultz (2019) Public acceptance of recycled water, *International Journal of Water Resources Development*, 35:4, 551-586, DOI: 10.1080/07900627.2017.1419125 Kelly S. Fielding, Sara Dolnicar & Tracy Schultz

Menegaki, et al. (2009). What's in a name: Framing treated wastewater as recycled water increases willingness to use and willingness to pay. *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 30(3), 285-292.

Po, et al. (2005). Predicting community behaviour in relation to wastewater reuse. What drives decisions to accept or reject?. *CSIRO Land and Water*, Melbourne (2005)

WWAP, U. N. W. W. A. P. (2017). *Wastewater: The Untapped Resource*. Retrieved from Paris.

CONTACTS:

Coordinator

Rafael Casielles (BIOAZUL SL)

Avenida Manuel Agustin Heredia nº18 1º4 Málaga (SPAIN)

Mail | info@suwanu-europe.eu Website | www.suwanu-europe.eu

CONTACTS:

Responsible for Policy Brief

Enrique Mesa-Pérez (emesa@uco.es) | Julio Berbel (jberbel@uco.es)

Universidad de Córdoba, Campus de Rabanales, Edificio Gregor Mendel

Website |



THIS PROJECT HAS RECEIVED FUNDING FROM
 THE EUROPEAN UNION' HORIZON 2020 RESEARCH
 AND INNOVATION PROGRAMME
 UNDER GRANT AGREEMENT N. 818088



UNIVERSIDAD DE CÓRDOBA