

Worth a Thousand Words: Visualizing Food Waste Through the Lenses of Foodservice Professionals

Carlos Martin-Rios and Julneth Rogenhofer

EHL Hospitality Business School, Switzerland

Abstract

Food waste has become a global issue and a major challenge aggravated by its role in climate change, land, water and biodiversity scarcity, groundwater pollution, and global deforestation. Tackling food waste prevention and recovery is a priority area. Yet, the meaning of food waste is subject to interpretation and is not a universally accepted phenomenon. This is evident across the steps in the food value chain, particularly the downstream levels, where a myriad of businesses operates across a broad spectrum of economic, political, socio-cultural, and technological dimensions. This complex system entails recognition of the professionals' views on what constitutes food waste and the factors that may affect their awareness, sensemaking, and reflection. The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the ongoing debate on the discursive construction of food waste as a "wicked problem" by exploring the broad perspective of 'wastage' from the perspective of professionals in institutional and commercial foodservice and retail food stores. This study applies participatory and visual research methods to achieve a more socially embedded sustainability research that strives to offer solution options to the complex challenge of food waste minimization and management. Food waste management must avoid two decision-making traps: falsely assuming one-size-fits-all solutions and lack of innovative waste prevention management from overwhelming complexity. A food systems approach can help avoid these traps.

Keywords: food waste, foodservices, professionals, visual wisdom, wicked problem