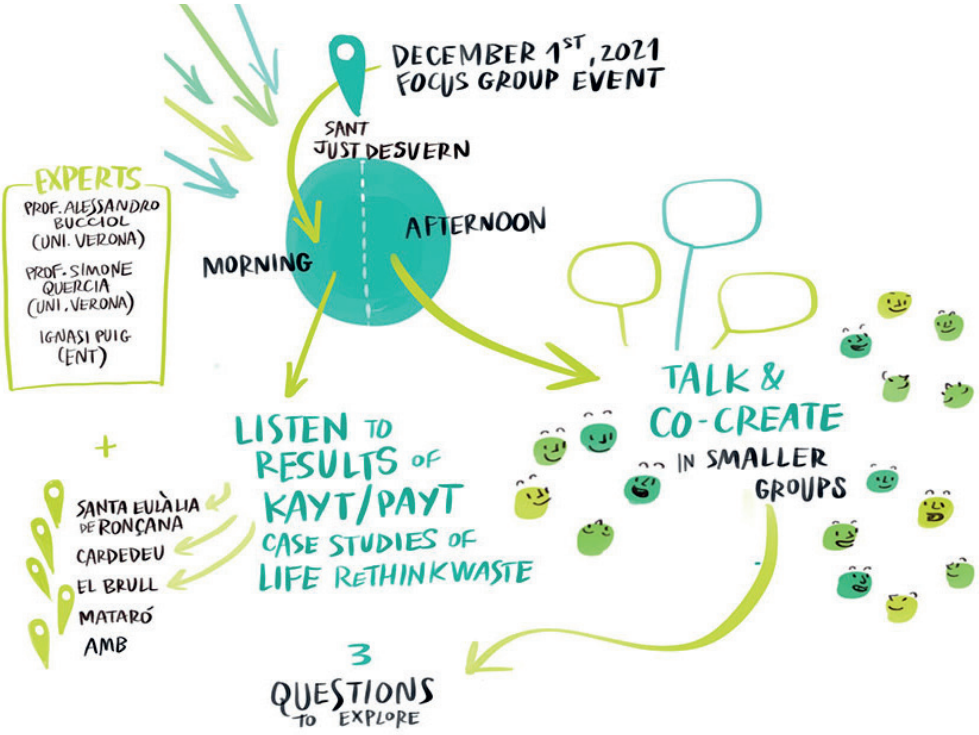
Designing a strategy

Focus group workshop

LIFE REthinkWaste is a project funded by the EU LIFE programme. The project's main goal is to **increase the separate collection of waste**, **reduce residual waste per capita** and **boost the recovery rate**, whilst simultaneously cutting the average household waste bill. It also aims to provide tools to public administrations through governance models that pursue the main goal.

Pay-as-you-throw (PAYT) tariff schemes are based on the **polluters-pays principle**. Through the application of a fair tax with variable tariffs according to the amount of waste produced, it is an efficient tool to increase the recycling rate. Although it counts several initiatives in Europe, there are still some implementation difficulties. For instance, lack of clear guidance, difficulties in big data management, economic uncertainties and poor knowledge about the best technologies to support the shift to PAYT. In this context, the concept of **Know-as-you-throw** (KAYT) emerges. Providing personalized information, with the right detail and frequency, combining social media, personal meetings and various economic and social incentives, citizens are encouraged to change their habits concerning waste management.



On 1st December 2021 a focus group workshop among project partners was held to present the preliminary results of **REthinkWaste** case studies. Themes such as **patterns**, **obstacles**, **challenges**, **opportunities**, and **communication** headed the discussion with the aim to support the diffusion of KAYT and PAYT. This paper presents the resulting conclusions.

Pay-as-you-throw (PAYT)

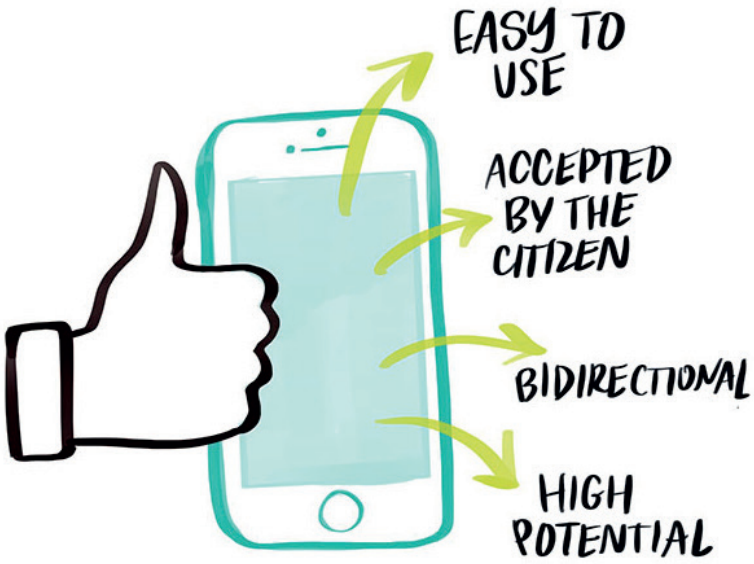
One of the most important obstacles detected is the **fear** of politicians and technicians to implement a **PAYT** approach. Often municipalities, are afraid to lose the support of citizens in applying a dynamic tariff. Furthermore, also citizens are not willing to change their habits and customs, and prefer to avoid **uncertainties** that any change and innovation generates.

Unfortunately, these fears often lead to inertia, preventing the **achievement of the European target** on municipal waste: 65% in weight of preparing for reuse and recycling and maximum 10% sent to landfill by 2035.

However, citizens understand and accept the «**polluter-pays principle**» that is applied with transparency and ethics. Having **courage** and applying it allows to **move forward**, as proved by the good results achieved by the real cases presented during the meeting.

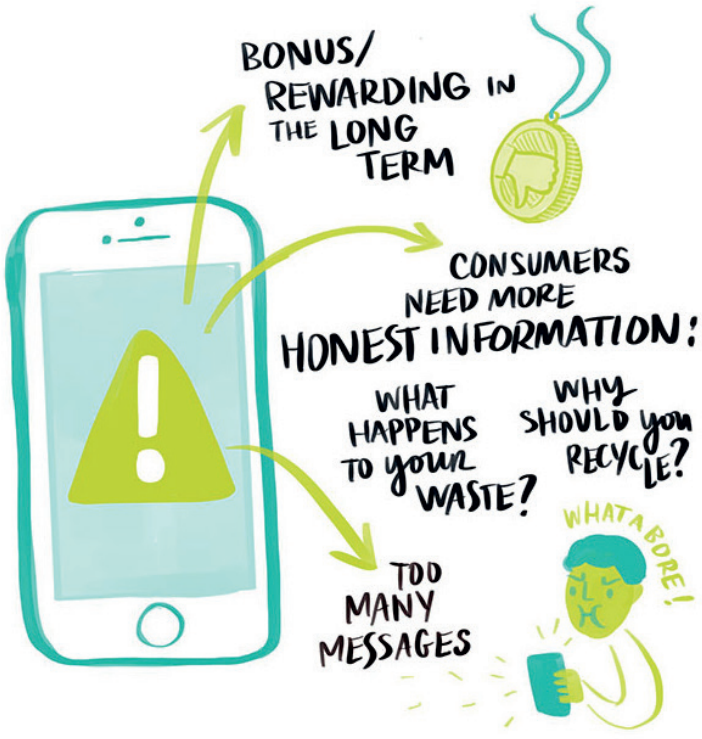
Most have the perception that the **responsibility** of having clean and low-impact cities is, first of all, of the City Council that collects and cleans. Secondly, also citizens, that have the liability to properly separate their waste. But the responsibility of production companies is practically not perceived, although some progress has being done in the European normative framework.

Know-as-you-throw (KAYT)



The KAYT approach can be seen as an **opportunity** to inform users transparently and involve citizens in waste management issues.

Nevertheless, it has been observed that limiting the action to bonus and/or reward the citizen does not have positive results on the long run. Users need honest and transparent information to be motivated in doing effort to recycle more and better. Notwithstanding, the risk is also to annoy with too frequent messages for a long period vanishing the results. It has been pointed out an important communication gap: from the focus on numerical data, it would be more effective moving towards the communication about the ultimate collective goal of a cleaner world for future generations.



To **encourage** citizens with money or prizes can be a short-term strategy with fairly high costs, but its effectiveness in the long run is not yet clear. Furthermore, the question whether the approach of nudging with economic incentives is always ethical, arose. Associating awards to the acquisition of knowledge should be a timely strategy and always keep in mind the need of clear **communication** of the long-term vision, in which we all should recognize.

The creation of **collective incentives**, with clear environmental and social benefits, could create a **team** effect among citizens. Having common goals that benefit everyone, and the environment, can bring people to work together and responsibly.

It is generally observed that a lot of attention is given to figures. But numbers alone rarely lead municipalities and people to strive for changing their behaviours. The desirable collective vision of **greener, cleaner, low-impact cities** should always be present and in the messages spread. This long-term vision should head strategic actions.

To improve strategies impacting the collective level, it would be important to **work together**, exchange **ideas** and **thoughts**. Make a break and take the time to think together before acting.

Although **PAYT** and **KAYT** have the ultimate target to change consumers' behaviour, it is important that municipalities do not limit their action to manage waste, but going beyond and find out solutions to prevent waste generation a priori. Think about what solutions already exist and deserve to be empowered.

Finally, the pilot experiences teach us that there is not a one solution fits all. A suitable combination of **KAYT** and **PAYT** is a good tandem to improve separate waste collection. Keeping in mind the focus on **waste prevention**, moving towards a **zero waste** society in which all actors play a key role.

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