

O'NEILL, Kate. *Waste*. Polity, 2019. ISBN 978-0-745-68739-1.

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## Kate O'Neill: Waste

*Reviewed by Adéla Hofmannová*

This book explores the globally ever-increasing amount of waste from three different angles: waste as unintended by-products, as a resource and as a livelihood. The author, an environmental science professor at the University of California Berkeley, shares a powerful insight into the scene behind the waste processing and explains what really happens after you dump the garbage – where it ends up and how it affects our planet in the long-term, from deadly waste slides, ocean acidification and marine life decay, to the increased amounts of toxic substances in the soil and air, adding to the rapidly speeding climate change. Almost every page offers facts and figures to portray both the severity and importance of this topic.

The international trade with waste is invisible for the consumers as wastes are typically disposed of far from the points of use, often shipped overseas to developing countries and forgotten about. Kate O'Neill does her best to raise the curtain. There are the interests of the brokers, multinational corporations and even individuals who try to capture the profits by exploiting this source rather than caring about the planet, the value is may still hold or the health consequences.

The three largest categories of waste discussed are used electronics (e-waste), food waste and plastic scrap. All of these are different in its nature, in terms of value they may contain, the ways of discarding them, the amount of time they last in the environment before their half-life and the sort of hazards they pose to the waste pickers and to environmental health overall.

The author believes that better waste governance initiatives and mechanisms can help us deal with both the risks and the opportunities associated with the billions of tons of waste we generate each year. This can be achieved through

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stronger relationships between society and government and greater attention to the growing voices of informal waste pickers, environmentalists and civil rights activists.

Throughout the book there are examples of the companies, small businesses or communities across the world who have an exemplary approach to waste management.

A global circular economy with a new waste infrastructure is the ultimate mission as well as updated international treaties and agreements on Waste Disposal. If governments examine this complex problem carefully and implement new strategies and policies, there is hope that waste processing can become safer, preserve jobs for small businesses and ultimately lead to more sustainable life on the planet.

I found the book fascinating and insightful, sparking a fire in me to follow the journey of the products we throw away and think deeply about what could be done better. Although it seems almost like a research paper, an everyday reader can find the read easy and gets a chance to peep at the once invisible scene of waste management. For me it presents a valuable contribution to public awareness, showing ways to make more sustainable lifestyles both as individuals and as a society.