

WORLD CLEANUP DAY: THE IMPORTANCE OF CLEANUPS AND FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS

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Abstract

On 15 September, 2018, volunteers and partners worldwide came together to clean the beaches, rivers, forests, and streets of our planet from litter and mismanaged waste. In total, 17 million people from 158 countries participated. The 'Let's Do it' (LDI) movement was born 10 years ago in Estonia, when 4% of the population joined together to clean the entire country from illegally dumped waste. This captured the imaginations of people worldwide, and led to the idea of cleaning up the entire world. This article describes how the global bottom-up civic movement, Let's Do It! World, has grown to be the biggest of its kind in the world, and the way it contributes to addressing some of major environmental issues of today, such as marine litter and shifting to a Circular Economy. The structure of the movement, and the expected effect of main messages is discussed – see it, map it, bag it, move it, learn.

Any kind of waste clean-up action is one-time event. As such, it's not a final solution in itself. The ultimate goal would be contributing to long-term effects and solutions. In this respect, the key benefit of cleanups is 3-fold: it helps fighting the "trash blindness", making people aware of the problem; it feeds into "Citizen Science", i.e. science that builds on data and info gathered by ordinary people: during cleanups and related mapping of trash points, not only do we pick litter, but also we collect valuable information on most common type of litter, related dynamics of dispersion, typology of materials that need targeted policies and practice in order to prevent dispersion and promote better management; and it keeps the issue high on the agenda for media and policy, thereby drawing attention by all concerned actors, as governmental institutions, communities, businesses and industry, civil society and individuals. This is the best precondition in order to define a concerted "roadmap" so as to have the issues around trash and litter sorted out, for good.

To achieve that, the Knowledge Team of LDI developed a *Keep It Clean Plan*, whose key message is to implement strategies, inspired by the "Zero Waste" vision and approach, for sustainable management of resources and discarded materials, harnessing the power of redesigning materials and systems, so as to connect to Circular Economy and prevent waste from being dispersed into the environment.

Keywords: mismanaged waste, trash blindness, cleanup, global civic movement, Zero Waste strategies, Circular Economy.