



**Engaging Informal Recyclers in Europe: Status
and Report of a Consultation**

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Structure of this Presentation

1. Introduction: recycling, puzzle or promise
2. Service chain and value chain
3. The power of a *valorisation framework*
4. Discussion on two levels

What?



There are informal recyclers in Europe??

Well, I suppose we will have to “solve that problem” quickly

Structure of this Presentation

- 1. Waste Picking in Europe**
- 2. Consultations with informal recyclers**
- 3. Service Chains and value chains (side trip)**
- 4. Occupations in your countries and cities**
- 5. Global Waste-Picker Organising Modalities**
- 6. Socio-economic information**
- 7. Initiatives researching /supporting informal recycling in Europe**
- 8. Lessons from outside of Europe**
- 9. EPRIS in Europe: some proposals**

Background: Informal Recycling EU Accession and EU Waste Directives

Results of the Consultations –

1. Goals for improvement and motivation for organising
2. Preferences for organising modalities

What we don't know: the research agenda in Europe

1. Waste Picking in the Europe/the Balkans

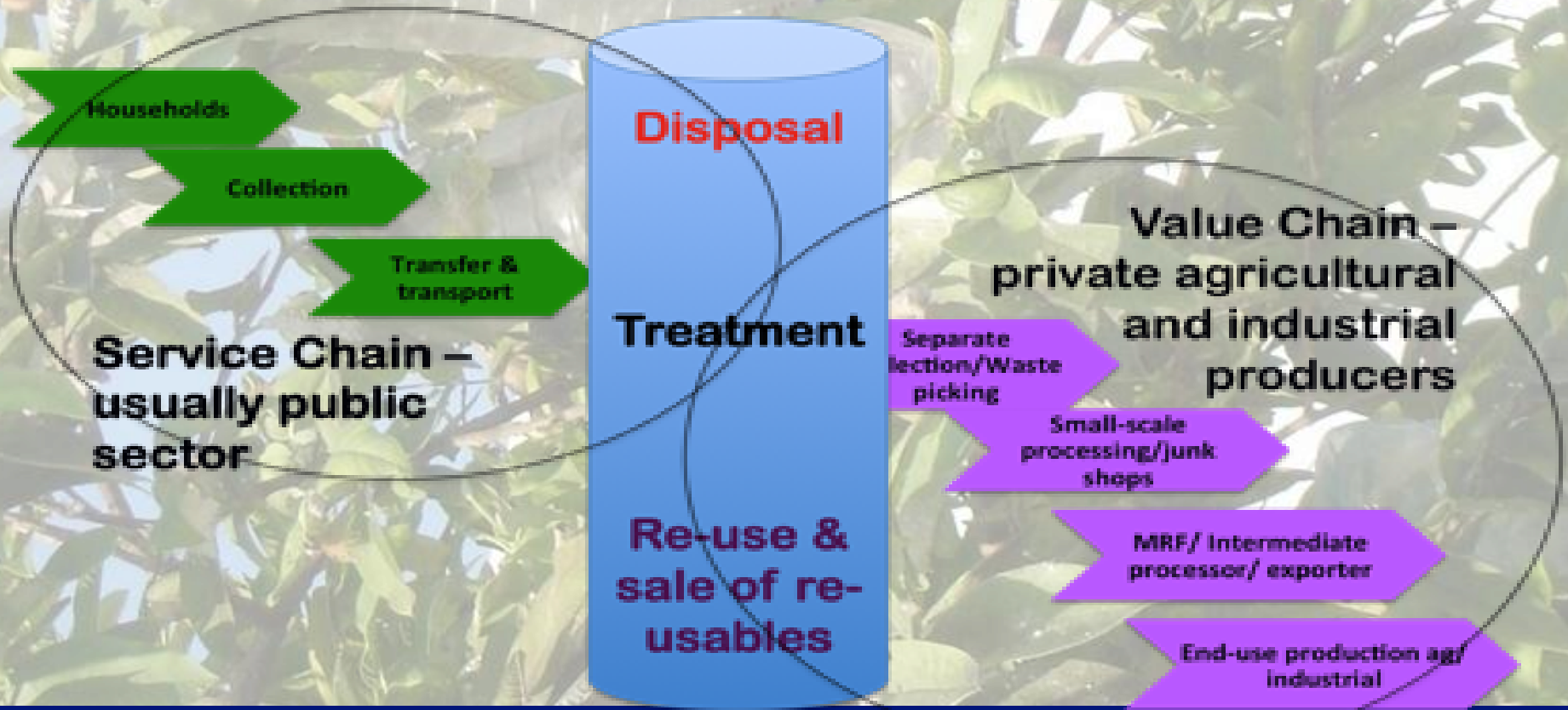
1. As many as a million persons supported by informal recycling within or at the gates of the European Union
2. Informal private sector recyclers and re-use traders - - mostly of Roma ethnicity -- dominate the re-use and recycling sector in Southern Europe and the so-called “new EU.”
3. The economic crisis is also reported to have driven many other persons to extract value from the “urban commons” of waste, which they see as their only option for supporting themselves and families.

2. Consultation 2013-2014 in the following cities and countries:

- ✓ Belgrade, Serbia (DTI)
- ✓ Podgorica, Montenegro (DTI)
- ✓ Bijelina, Bosnia and Herzegovina (DTI)
- ✓ Athens, Greece (EcoRec)
- ✓ Skopje, Strumica, and Kochani, Macedonia (MDC TI.net)
- ✓ Tunis, Tunisia (information added later)
- ✓ Information from TransWaste in Hungary

3. Short Side-Trip: Service chain & value chain

Service Chain and Value Chain Separate but connected

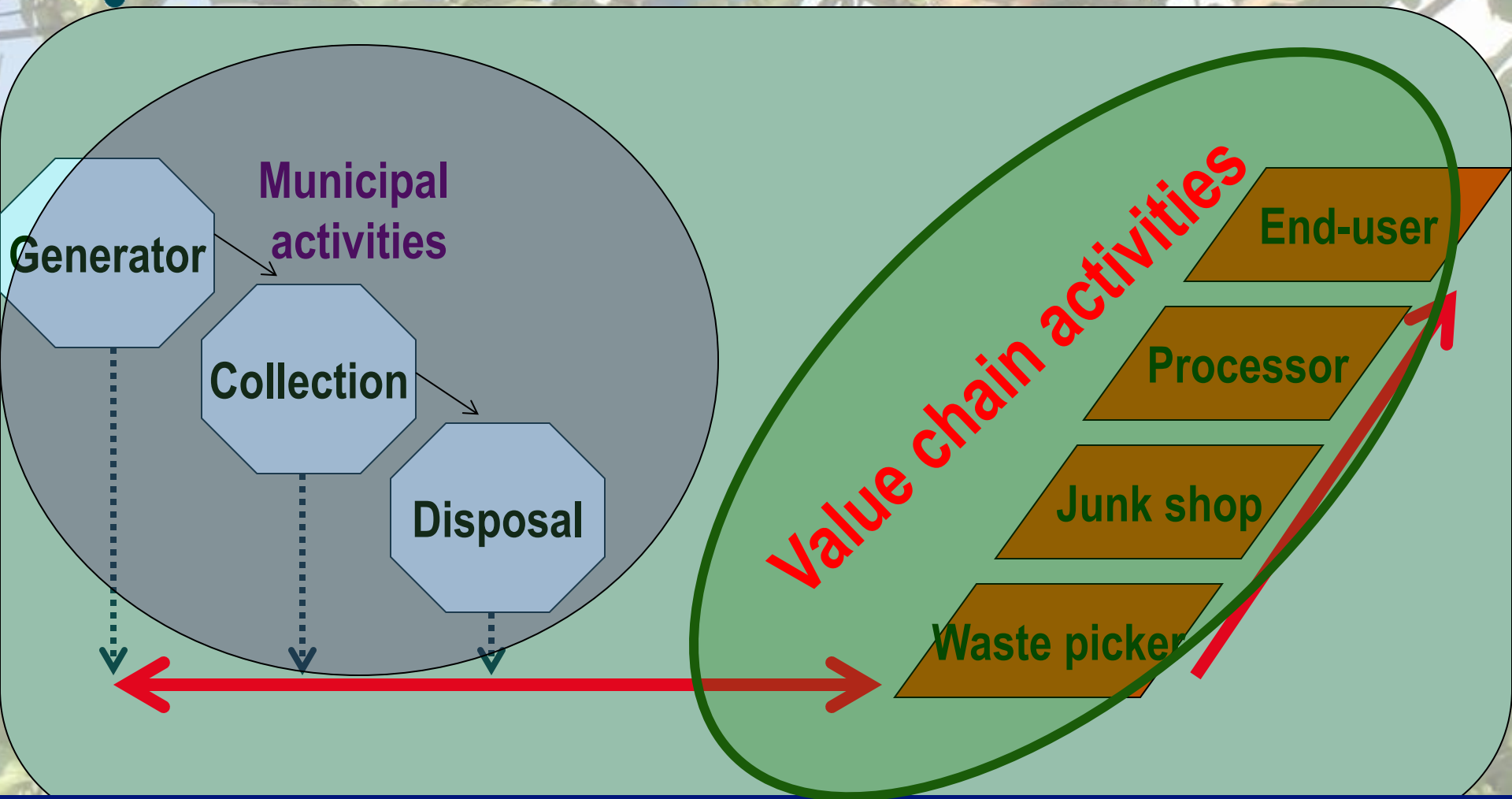


Note: the municipal solid waste and private value chain recycling systems are separate.

a. Service chain and value chain

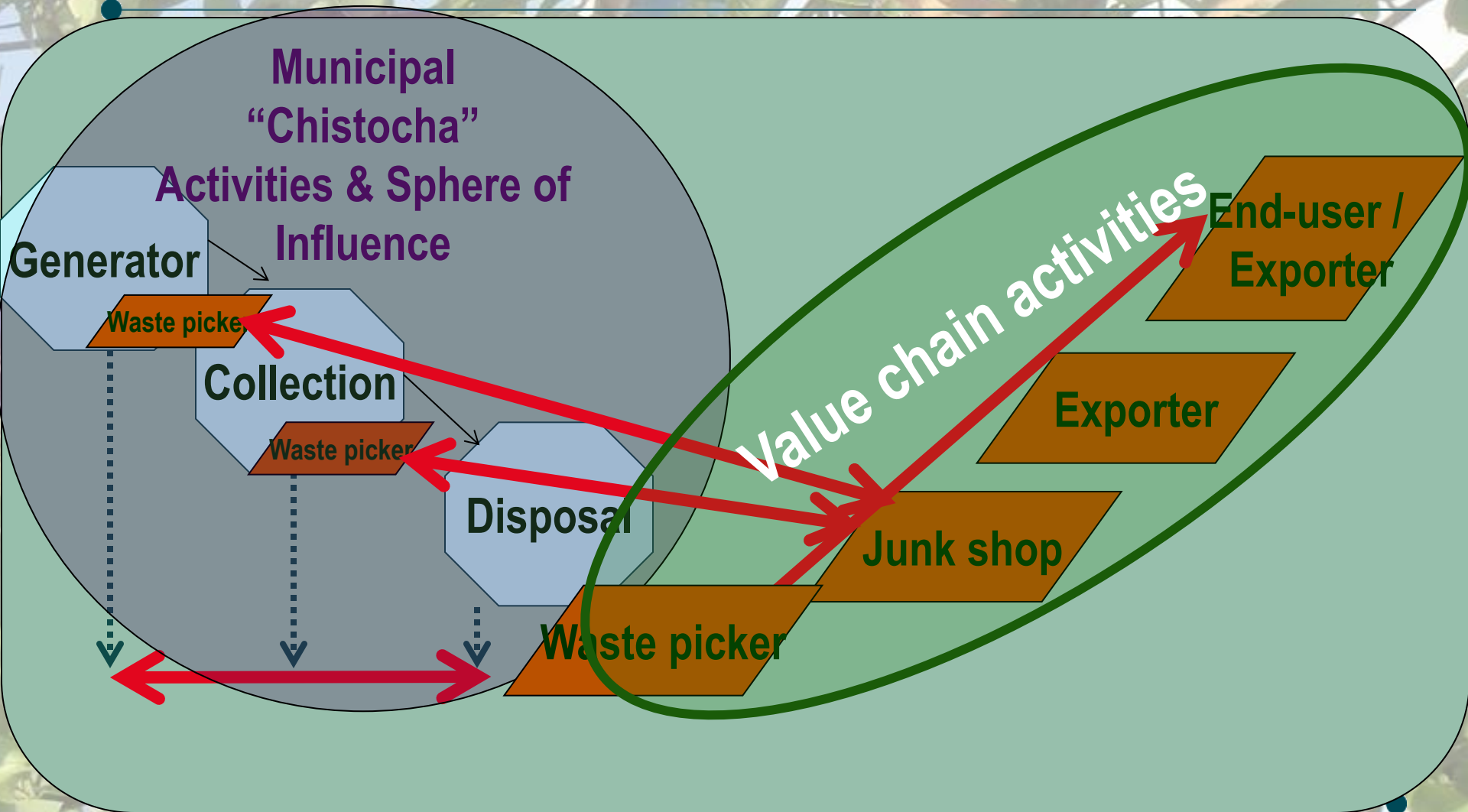
1. The service chain and the value chain are different.
 - The service chain involves removing waste – or other forms of *disvalue*.
 - The value chain involves trading valuable *commodities*.
2. Service chain collection is *always* profitable BUT won't cover trans-fer or disposal costs.
3. Value chains are private, secret, difficult to enter.
4. Informal recyclers are the base of the value chain. they know how to sell recyclables.

b. Value chain recycling – the default framework



Note: the municipal solid waste and private value chain recycling systems are separate.

c. Value chain recycling in the Balkans anno 2005



Waste pickers interfere in the service chain, extract materials and sell to private value chain end-users or exporters.

d. What is going on here?

1. The value chain “pulls” the materials for which there is real economic demand.
2. Waste pickers, junk shops, and intermediate processors pass materials along the value chain to the *end-users*.
3. The local authority benefits by having to dispose of fewer materials, but they often don't know it.
4. This is a case of private commercial activities generating *positive environmental externalities*.
5. The tonnages diverted are seldom counted by the local authority and are therefore invisible.

4. Occupations in European Informal Recycling

- *street, container, and dump pickers*
- *itinerant waste buyers/collectors (IWBs/IWCs)*
- *small dealers, “junk shops”*
- *swill collectors*
- *reuse collectors and transporters*
- *second-hand market entrepreneurs*

5. Global Waste-Picker Organising Modalities

- 1. Classic labour organising, Unions**
- 2. Business-based associations or co-operatives**
- 3. Political organising and lobby groups**
- 4. Residential area, self-help, community organising**
- 5. Capacity development for enterprise creation**
- 6. Better access to value chain and recycling markets**
- 7. Co-operation with environmental movements /green-left coalitions/ anti-incinerator lobbies**
- 8. Savings and micro-credit access and groups**

6. Basic Socio-Economic Information

- **Most European (and Tunisian) waste pickers are men, between 20 and 60 years old**
- **Waste picking and recycling is an individual entrepreneurial activity, not (primarily) a family activity**
- **Professional, but often seasonal or part-time, activities**
- **Less economic and social distance between waste pickers and junk shops than in some other parts of the world**
- **The economic crisis: people have to work harder, walk further, exhaust themselves more to get fewer materials**
- **Daily cash needs are a main reason for selling small quantities at (relatively) low prices, rather than negotiating**

7. What we learned: what waste pickers want

1. Improved operations, income and working conditions
2. Better market options for their enterprises
3. Decent, stable, housing close to the city centre
4. Workshops in the residential areas to process and store materials securely and safely
5. (Micro)-credit for transport, processing equipment, premises, working capital
6. Occupational recognition, legalisation, safety
7. Professionalisation and more source separation

Organising European/MENA waste pickers

- **European (and MENA) waste pickers overwhelmingly consider themselves to be entrepreneurs**
- **Little interest in union-style organising, even where social safety nets are a priority**
- **Associations of enterprises or businesses have a generally much higher level of acceptance**
- **Co-operatives are one way for informal recyclers to organise legal contracting relationships with municipal cleaning companies**
- **“Light” forms of organising generally preferred**

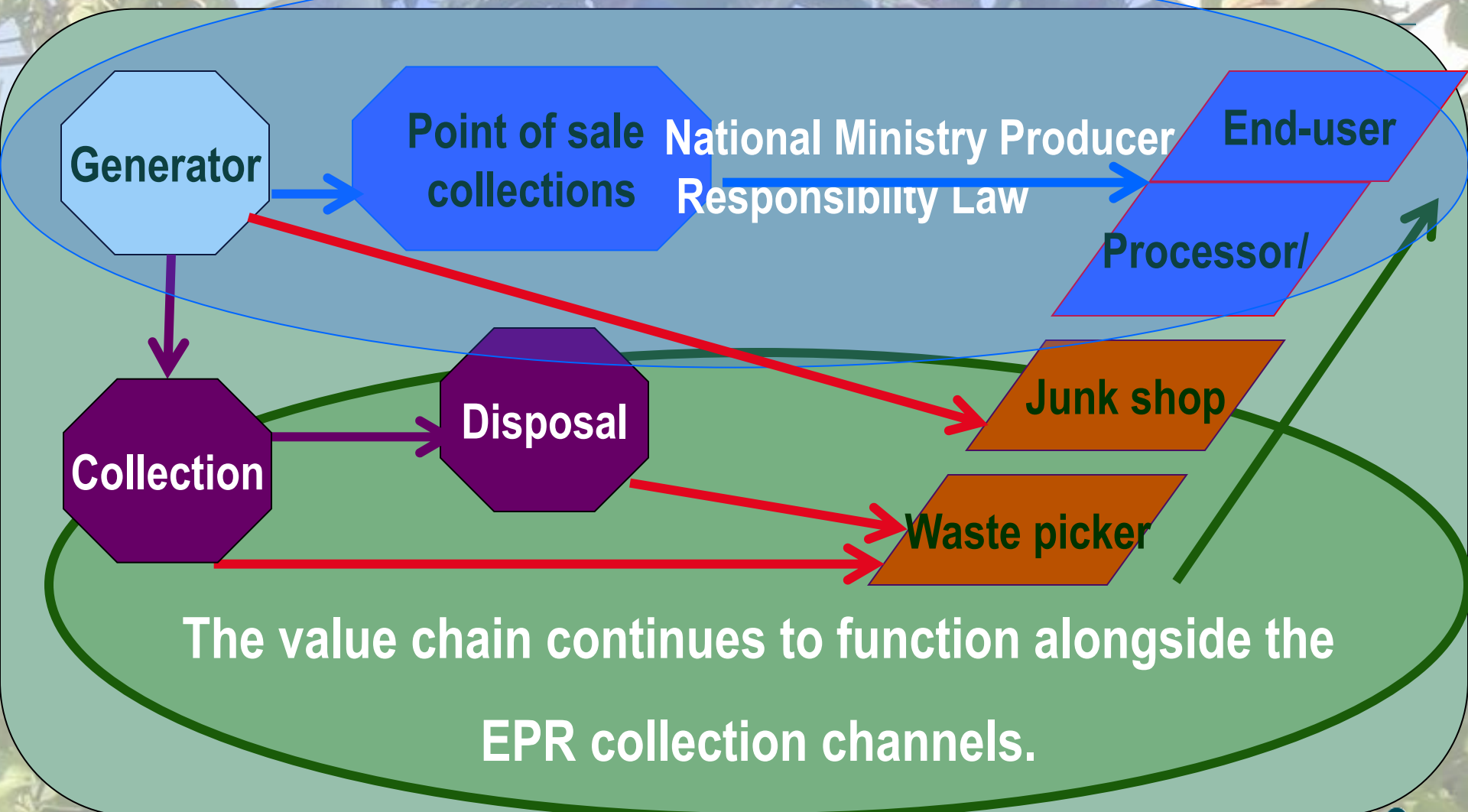
8. What we don't know (and need to)

- 1. Little data and no benchmarking**
- 2. Outside of Italy, no statistics available on the number of people active in informal recycling and/or reuse, nor has there been any attempt to analyse the impact of EU accession on informal enterprises, and the livelihoods and socio-economic situation of the families that live from it.**
- 3. In terms of the solid waste system, the official statistics on recycling rates in the New EU, Italy, and Greece don't reflect the contribution of the Informal Sector**
- 4. The GIZ case study of EPR in recycling in Bulgaria, one of the best contributions to the literature, hardly mentions informal recyclers or the impact of EU-Accession-driven EPR on the sector**

9. Global EPRIS Experiences /Insights

1. Price supports are emerging as a key – if not the most important – EPRIS inclusivity instrument
2. Interventions within the value chains are more sustainable than projects or subsidies (Kenya)
3. Diversion credits support information management, improving of working conditions, reaching targets (Colombia)
4. New modes of source separation and capture of new streams are possible with informal recyclers (Pune)
5. Some key problem streams remain: biosanitarries, laminates, hazardous materials, light bulbs

Interesting Case: EPR in Costa Rica for E-Waste

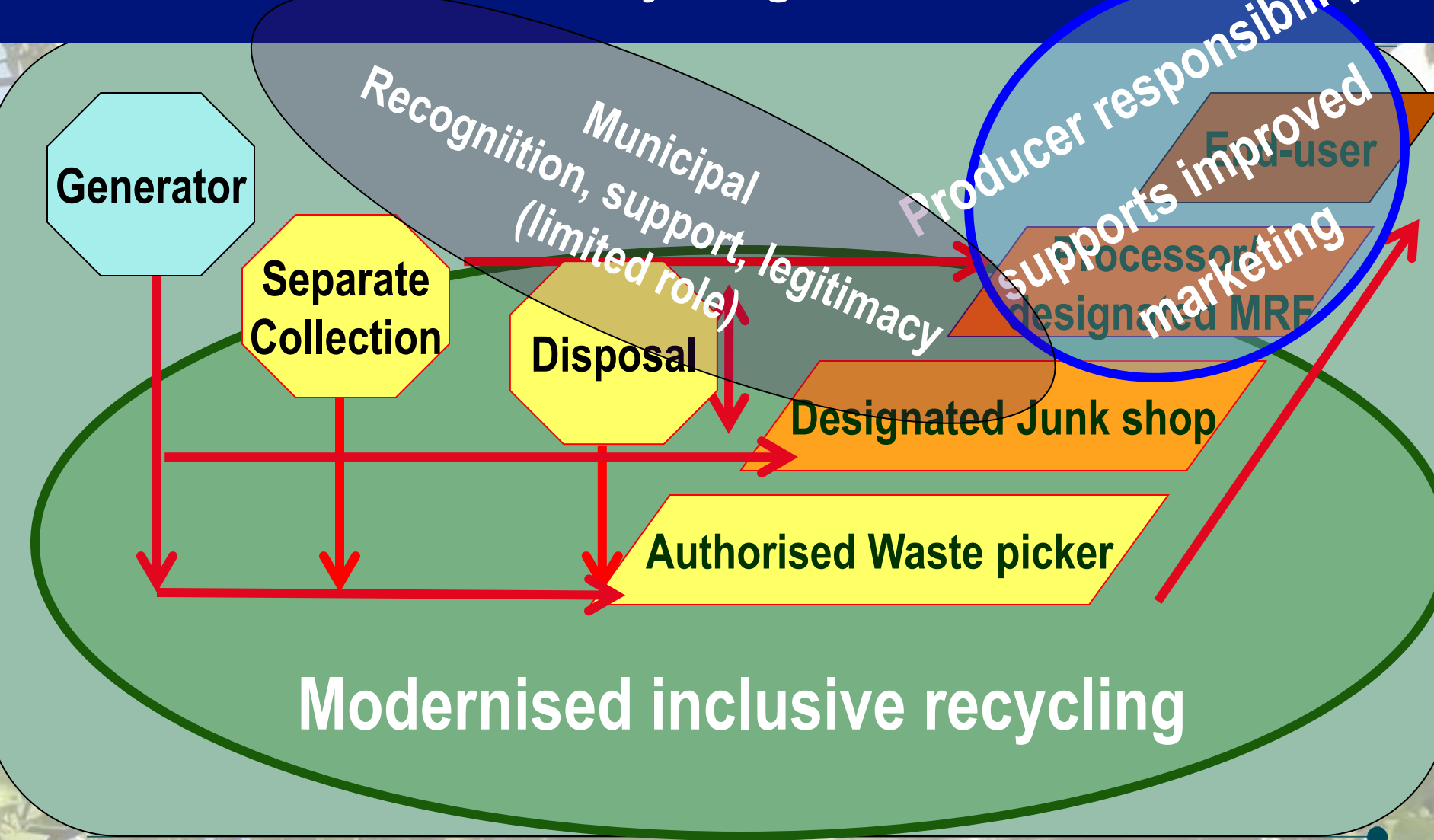


The EPR system creates parallel collection points, finances non-profitable materials, works with value chains where possible

Framework: EPR E-Waste Recycling in Costa Rica

1. The EPR decisions are made by a multi-stakeholder “technical committee” with full participation of producers
2. The collection system is voluntary for households and local authorities are free to co-operate with it or not.
3. The E-waste system supports and co-operates with municipal and NGO recycling centres “centros de acopio.”
4. After a 6-year process, the stakeholders convinced the ministries to pass a law.
5. Unlike the Netherlands, value chain recycling and producer responsibility operate side by side .
6. The recycling is paid for by producers directly and through some type of point-of-purchase fees.

Framework: inclusive recycling with EPR



Quezon City, Philippines, achieves 39% diversion this way.

Framework: Inclusive Recycling (CEMPRE Colombia)

1. Waste pickers have legal access to the materials
2. Sector accords produce agreements about recycling
3. Valorisation “centre of gravity” in private value chain
4. Diversion benefits producers, city, households
5. Each tonne valorised saves the *household* money,
6. Each tonne captured avoids municipal collection costs
7. Authorities gain positive externalities, benefits in jobs, environment & governance
8. Shared responsibility produces recognition, insurance, authorisation, support to the value chain.
9. Producers support recyclers invest in operations, keep materials revenues, secure livelihoods.

Discussion:

1. What can informal recycling mean for sustainable EPR in your countries and EPR systems?
2. How do you think informal recyclers have to change, to successfully integrate?
3. How do you think EPR and compliance has to adapt to accommodate and facilitate integration?
4. What do you both (informal recyclers and EPR stakeholders need from municipalities and national governments?

Thank-you!

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