

**WASTE PICKERS' COOPS IN
BRAZIL**

MIT CLASS

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Content:

- Waste pickers: naming and definitions.
- Brief overview of main drivers of creation of coops in LA.
- Case study - Coops in Belo Horizonte city: creation; integration in SW systems; focus on challenges; inside a coop: types of workers; day-to-day; main challenges faced by coops.

Naming and Definition

- **Naming:** binners; scavengers, trash pickers, waste pickers
- **Provisional consensus:** avoidance of derogatory terms (scavengers); use of the term “waste pickers” in English and preferred local terms when talking about specific contexts.
- **Broad definition:** people who *reclaim reusable and recyclable materials from what others have cast aside as waste* (Samson, 2009). Some can be found collecting household waste from the curbside, commercial and industrial waste from dumpsters, and litter from the streets, as well as canals and other urban waterways. Others live and work in municipal dumps. Some work as sorters in recycling warehouses (either at conveyor belts or else) or as processors in recycling plants owned by MBOs. Some may be involved in cross-border picking such as Mexicans pickers across the US border.
- **Who are the Waste Pickers in LA?** Specificities aside, in the latin american context WP are those involved mainly in the collection/sorting of recyclables at open dumps, in the streets and/or in their cooperatives; Some are involved in semi-processing.
- **Known as:** *Recicladores* in Colombia; *Cartoneros* in Argentina, *Clasificadores* in Uruguay, *Catadores* in Brazil.
- **Numbers:** not reliable since in most countries they do not appear on official data basis. Exception for Brazil – included in official stats: 240,000 (PNAD 2007). Number by MNCR Br: 500 -800,00

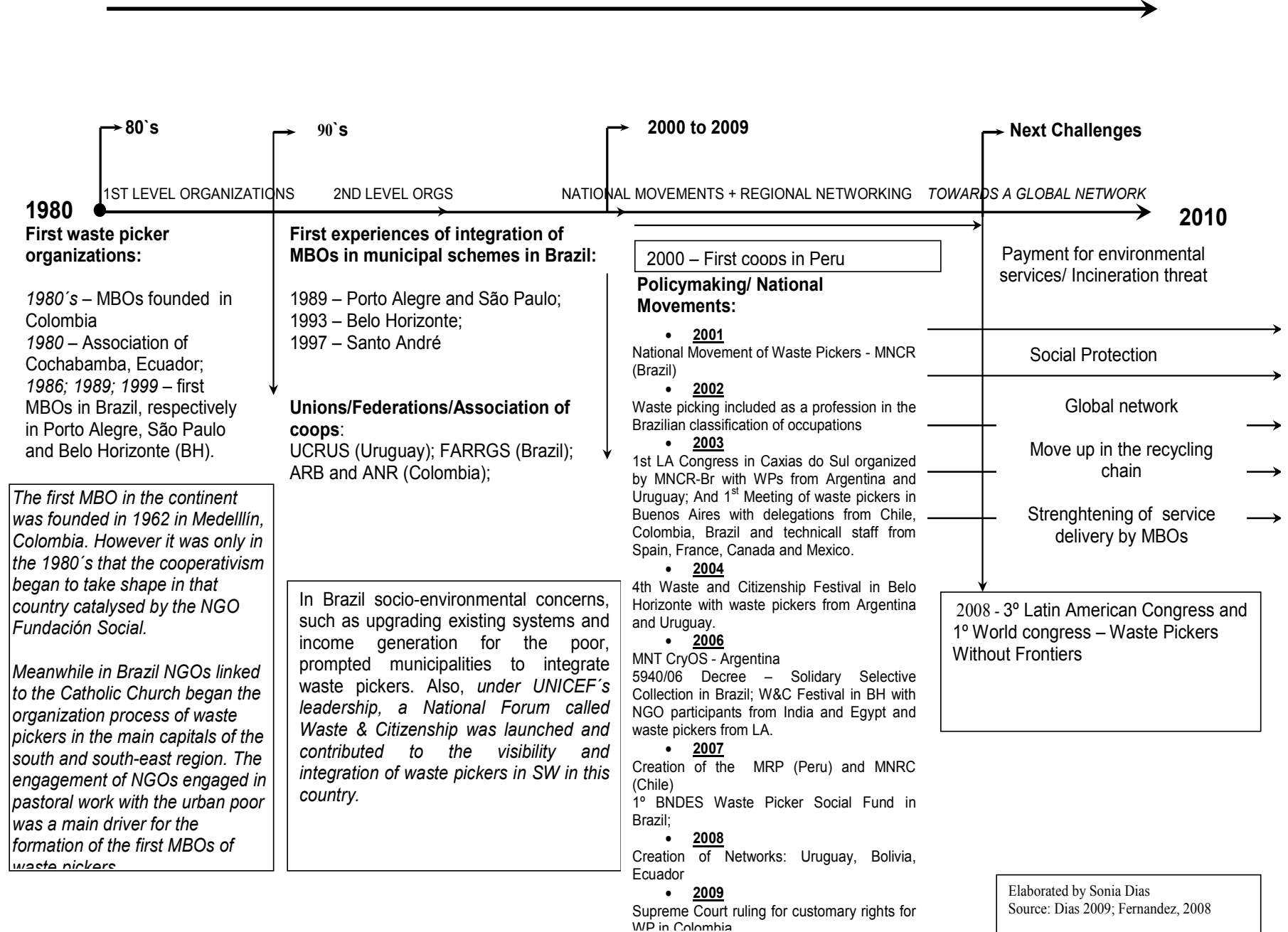
Waste Pickers' Coops

First Developments

- **Work under poor working conditions, without recognition and very often harassed.**
- **First coops LA:** social work developed, in the 1980's, by NGOs like Fundación Social in Colombia or Catholic NGOS like Pastoral de Rua and OAF in Brazil.
- **In other countries** like Argentina, Peru, Chile and Uruguay the boom of organizing begins in the late 1990s early 2000 also with support from external agents such as the Instituto de Fondos Cooperativos in Argentina or the NGO San Vicente in Peru.

ORGANIZATIONAL PROCESS OF WASTE PICKERS IN LATIN AMERICA

MAIN DRIVERS AND CHALLENGES



FORMS OF ORGANIZATION IN LA

- **1st Level Organizations:** associations, cooperatives, micro enterprises.
- **2nd Level Organizations:**
 - Federations: FECyR, Argentina (2006); FARRGS, south of Brazil (1999);
 - Unions: UCRUS, Uruguay (2002);
 - Associations of cooperatives: ARB, Colombia (1990);
 - Networks (bulk commercialization) - in Brazil: CATASAMPA, 11 cooperatives from São Paulo (2006); CATAUNIDOS, 8 cooperatives from the MR of Belo Horizonte (2006); CATABAHIA, REDESOL, CATAVIDA. In Bolivia: Red de Santa Cruz de la Sierra, (2008);
- **National Movements:** ANR, Colombia (1993); MNCR, Brazil (2001); MNT CryOs, Argentina (2006); MRP, Peru (2007); MNRC, Chile (2007).
- **Regional Movements:** Latin American Network, 15 countries amongst them: Colombia, Brazil, Uruguay, Peru (2007)
- **Towards a Global Alliance:** Interim Steering Committee with WPs from LA, Asia, Africa.

Source: Dias (2008a); Fernández (2007; 2008)

Case Study Coops in Belo Horizonte



Capital of Minas Gerais State

A planned city located in the southeast of the country

Population: 2,881,945 people (IBGE 2004)

City inaugurated on 12 December 1897
(113 years old)



Coops in BH

- 1990 – ASMARE: first coop. 9 members. Help from the Catholic NGO Pastoral de Rua
- 1993 – ASMARE is *integrated in the municipal recycling program*. 31 members
- 1998 – 3 recycling warehouses; Carpentry workshop; crèche. 350 members;
- 2000 – Other coops were created helped by different organizations: local govt agencies and NGOs.
- 2003 - New coops are integrated in the municipal recycling program.
- 2010 – 8 coops in the city

Informal Workers in Source Segregation Scheme

Mixed System

☞ **Curbside** collection of recyclables in part of the Central and Southern Regions of the city.

- Recyclables collected by municipal trucks are taken to coops warehouses for sorting and further processes.



☞ **Recycling containers** in public areas.

- **156** Voluntary Delivery Sites
(**435** recycling containers)
- Collection by municipal trucks;
recyclables taken to coops warehouses

Informal Workers in Source Segregation Scheme

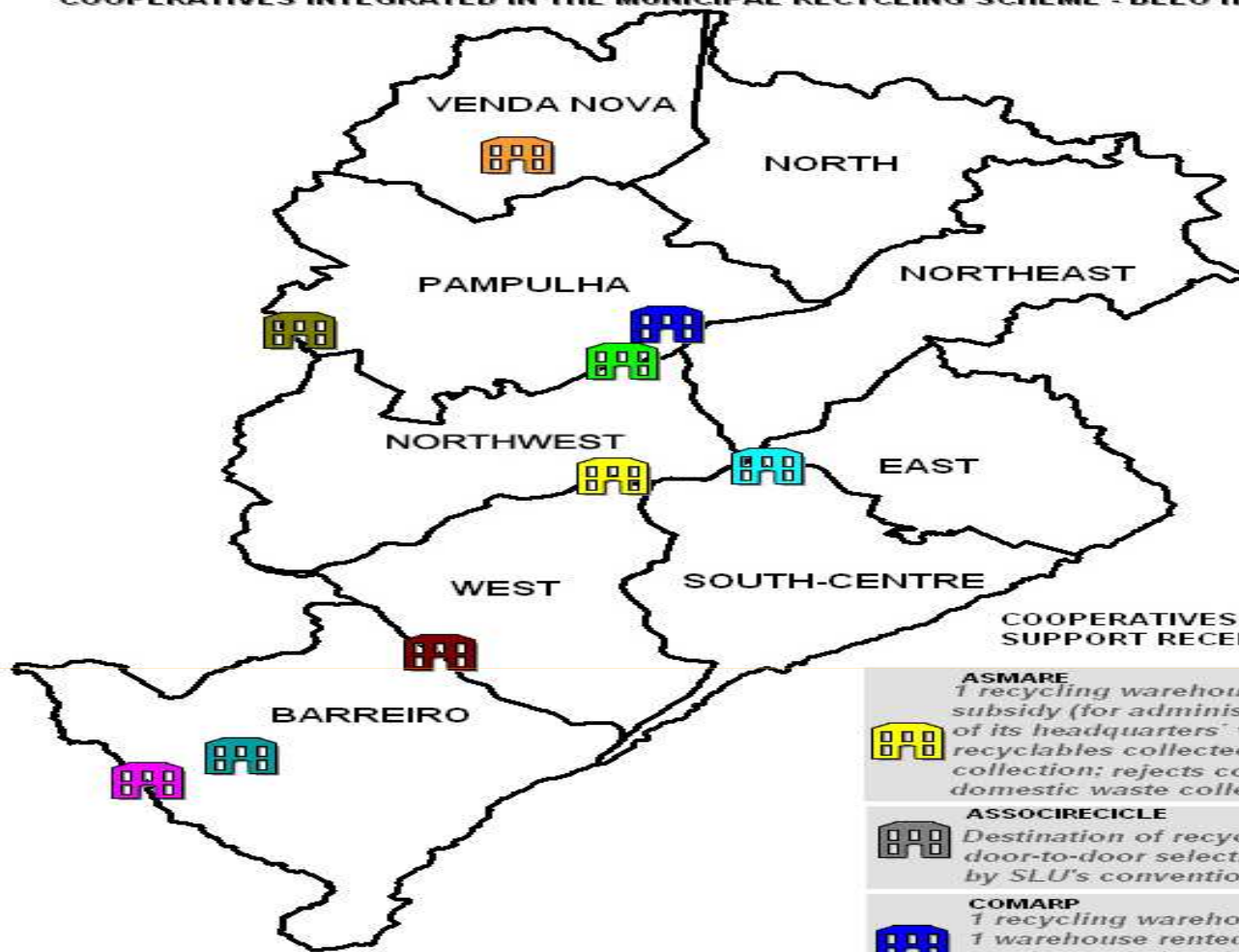
Mixed System

☞ **Coops collect recyclables from larger generators** (industries etc) with their own motorised vehicles





☞ Two of the existing 8 coops collect recyclables in offices downtown using **manual pushcarts**

COOPERATIVES INTEGRATED IN THE MUNICIPAL RECYCLING SCHEME - BELO HORIZONTE CITY PROFILE



COOPERATIVES INCLUDED BY CITY REGION - SUPPORT RECEIVED BY THE MUNICIPALITY:

- 
COOPERSOL - VENDA NOVA
 1 warehouse rented by the municipality; security service, water and electricity bills financed by the municipality; destination of recyclables collected by SLU's door-to-door selective collection; rejects collected by SLU's conventional domestic waste collection
- 
ASTEMARP
 Rejects collected by SLU's conventional domestic waste collection



DP-PRE - JUL/2009
Escala 1:155.000

- 
ASMARE
 1 recycling warehouse (public building); monthly subsidy (for administrative and operational expenses) of its headquarters' warehouse; destination of recyclables collected by SLU's door-to-door selective collection; rejects collected by SLU's conventional domestic waste collection
- 
ASSOCIRECICLE
 Destination of recyclables collected by SLU's door-to-door selective collection; rejects collected by SLU's conventional domestic waste collection
- 

COMARP
 1 recycling warehouse (public building); 1 warehouse rented by the municipality; security service and electricity financed by the municipality; destination of recyclables collected by SLU's door-to-door selective collection; rejects collected by SLU's conventional domestic waste collection
- 
COPEMAR
 Destination of recyclables collected by SLU's door-to-door selective collection; rejects collected by SLU's conventional domestic waste collection
- 

COOPERSOLI
 1 recycling warehouse (public building); 1 warehouse rented by the municipality; security service, water and electricity bills financed by the municipality; destination of recyclables collected by SLU's door-to-door selective collection; rejects collected by SLU's conventional domestic waste collection

Inside a Cooperative

Collected recyclables are brought to the recycling warehouses of the waste pickers' cooperatives, where the materials are sorted by types



Sorting Practices

Processing Recyclables

- Recyclables are weighed, shredded, baled, stored for further commercialization by coops
- Revenues are split amongst members according to internal rules established by each coop



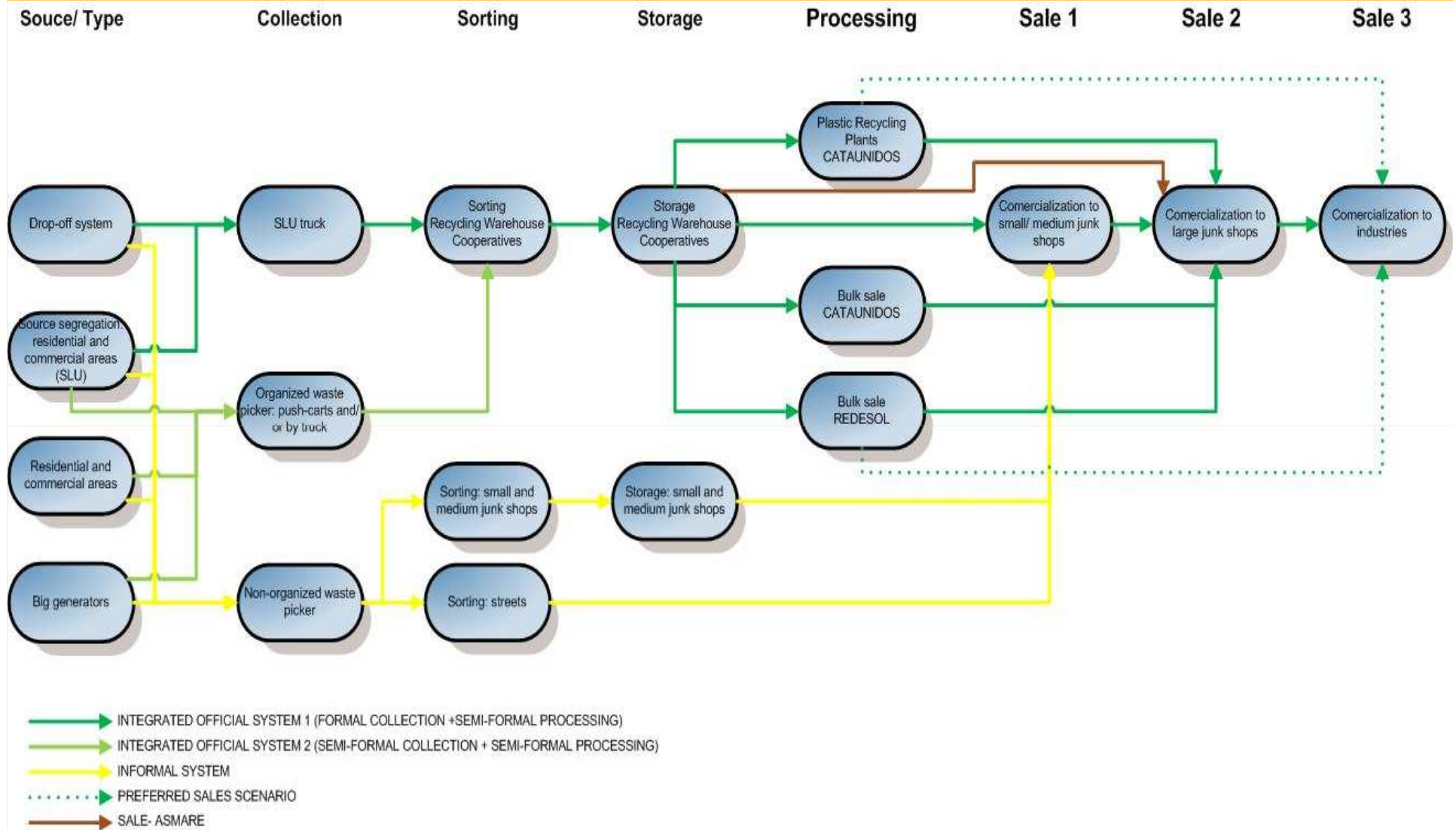
Work Specialization

- *Street waste pickers*: reclaim recyclables from mixed wastes disposed in garbage bags placed on the streets or dumpsters. Some pickers may have arrangements with commercial and office buildings and be able to access previously segregated material
- *Motorised pickers*: collect recyclables as part of door-to-door selective waste collection scheme run by municipalities in partnership with waste pickers MBOs. Some cooperatives may enter into direct agreements with commercial and office buildings to collect large quantities of recyclables by truck or other vehicles.
- *Sorter*: work picking and sorting by type recyclables disposed either on a conveyor belts or other sorting area or devices.
- *Operational*: Coops members who processing sorted recyclables- weighting, baling, shredding, storing and other operational activities.
- *Workshop*: Some coops run special workshops such as carpentry, crafts and therefore have members allocated in these special activities.

Networks for commercialization and/or recycling

- REDESOL – a network of 3 waste pickers cooperatives for bulk commercialization of recyclables.
- CATAUNIDOS – a network for bulk selling of recyclables and plastic recycling of PET (production of pellets) formed by ASMARE from Belo Horizonte and 8 waste pickers' organizations from cities within the Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte involving around 500 waste pickers in total.

Recycling Chain in BH



SOURCE: Elaborated by Sônia Dias (PhD- forthcoming)

Participatory Planning



The Municipal Waste & Citizenship Forum

- Stakeholder platform with representatives from coops; NGOs, municipal govt and others



Coops & its Dynamics – Key Issues

1. *Low business turnover* - one of the main obstacles for sustainability, with direct consequences on income of coop members (1,5 minimum salaries –MS- on average) when compared to non-organized WPs (3-4 MS).
- *However*, coop members enjoy indirect benefits which make up for this ‘economic disadvantage’, such as: better working conditions, support to schooling to children, housing programs, etc.

Coops & its Dynamics – Key Issues

2. *Difficulty for long term investments* – due to low turnover reserve funds are small and used mainly for emergencies, i.e. is not used as investment K to better the productive process.
- As a result most coops are *caught in a vicious circle of different nature but of all interrelated* factors that affects business growth: low income increases members turnover, and makes the cooperative less attractive to more productive individuals; this increases internal tensions (internal competition or lack of motivation) and the circle goes on...

Coops & its Dynamics – Key Issues

3. Nature of activity as it is today: labour intensive work not K intensive – so productivity depends on direct activities done by the worker (the more efficient his work be more value will be added to the product).

Rationale of waste picking need to be understood in order to help coops escape this vicious circle

4. Average 50% are women: work done at coops are generally more favourable to women as many coops provides child care and are keen on equity issues.
5. Social function: by including women and other vulnerable groups coops have a social function in terms of poverty reduction. And this socially relevant work needs to be value as a by-product.

Coops & its Dynamics – Key Issues

6. Coops as environmental agents: many coops promote and/or take part in joint environmental campaigns in the city.



Waste picker playing in environmental event



ASMARE's Recycling fashion show

Challenges

- Low productivity in manual sorting is considered as a bottleneck as it limits investments and/or improvements in other points of the recycling services performed by coops (Lima & Oliveira, 2008)

Low productivity in sorting can be attributed to: low use of mechanization; no functional internal flow of materials; lack of adequate sorting devices (silos, conveyor belt etc); poor training; low- quality of recyclables (dirty); poor planning of collection (driving away members who could be sorting); difficulties of members deal with work innovations.

CAPACITY BUILDING PLUS INVESTMENTS ON LOGISTICS -ESSENTIAL

Challenges

- Demands for efficiency in service provision (in collection and/or sorting) represents, in some cases, a strain on some individual members. Some members have difficulty in complying with demands for discipline and work schedule (no drinking in the premises; standardization on recyclables; opening and closing hours of warehouses etc). As work becomes more complex (administrative skills required) this may be a strain to people with low educational level, which comprises the majority of the coops.

How to balance efficiency and its social functions is key to sustainability

Challenges

- Payment for environmental service: establishment of indicators for payment of environmental services so that municipalities can switch from subsidies to contracting coops based on service delivery.
- Upgrading of coops in the recycling chain also essential (semi-processing of materials adds value – production of pellets etc)
- Floor prices for recyclables important to fight market volatility.

Conclusions

- By giving incentives to organizations of waste pickers such as associations, cooperatives and unions their social and economical condition can be enhanced.
- These organizations can voice demands of WPs, represent their interests, fight for visibility and validity
- Data from Brazil shows that organized WPs enjoy better work and living conditions (Dias PhD thesis, 2010)

Further Reading

- DIAS, S. 2010. TRAJECTORIES AND MEMORIES – WASTE & CITIZENSHIP FORUMS: UNIQUE EXPERIMENTS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE. (see expanded summary on www.inclusivecities.org)
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