

Applying an Island Mentality on Waste

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Despite the economic problems that currently beset Greece, the Greek people rest assured that even if politics and economics fail them, they have a country that has a unique natural beauty of its own. It would be a total tragedy if the uncontrolled dumping of waste destroyed even this. Yet that is a possibility. There are reports of waste – even treated and baled that has been dumped and now producing leachate that is polluting the natural environment. The islands in particular face a major challenge due to lack of resources, low population and no infrastructure.

The UK, although today in a different economic place than Greece, has much in common. Within the working lifetime of the author, the UK was once a country with high unemployment, rapid inflation, industrial and social unrest and no waste management infrastructure to talk of. It is also a country that is itself an island, with many smaller islands within its geographic domain. The UK is still in the process of developing its island waste management strategy, but now waste is generally well managed and as a whole, the country is arguably meeting the targets set it by Brussels.

This paper reflects on the “island mentality” of the UK and describes how it has dealt with the isolation of being an island of islands where many of the assumptions that lie behind mainland European waste regulation do not readily apply.

The paper looks at the approaches that have been taken by the UK as a whole, but in particular places such as the Shetland Isles, the Isle of Wight and the Isle of Man. It considers the challenge of low population and how technologies in collection, bioprocessing and energy recovery are now developing that will help island communities to deploy modern waste management practices.