

Research Dialogues

- Elena Bocchi -

Different Systems, Different Errors: How Recycling System Design Influences Consumer Disposal Decisions

Recycling systems worldwide adopt two approaches: one bin for all recyclables (single-stream) or separate bins for different materials (multiple-stream). Despite billions of people using them daily, their behavioural consequences remain poorly understood. Preregistered experiments across countries and contexts reveal that single-stream systems require abstract recyclability judgements that reduce self-efficacy, leading consumers to discard more recyclables as general waste. Multiple-stream systems enhance self-efficacy through concrete material identification but encourage overgeneralisation, leading more non-recyclables into recycling bins. Specifying recyclable categories reduces single-stream wasting, while accessible sorting guidelines reduce both error types. These findings reveal how minor infrastructure choices create predictable errors and offer scalable solutions to support environmental goals.

University of Milano-Bicocca

Via Bicocca degli Arcimboldi, 8
- 20126, Milano

14/10/2026

h. 11.00 - 12.00

In person: Room 4096 (U7, 4th
floor)

Online: Webex

