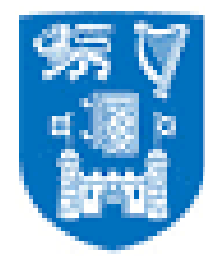


Leadership in Action: A Policy Investigation Into Single Use Plastic Cups in Marseille, France

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make_sense

Introduction

Single-use plastic cups fall into a legal gap. France has banned straws, cutlery, and polystyrene containers outright, but cups are only subject to a vague EU requirement for “measurable reduction.” Microplastics have already been found in Marseille’s waters and seabed, much of it arriving via rivers and stormwater rather than direct beach littering. Cup usage is pushed higher than existing collection systems can handle. Other cities (Freiburg, Tübingen) show reusable systems work; France even allows customers to bring their own cup, but almost nobody knows this.



Objectives

What laws apply to single-use plastic cups in Marseille, and do they go far enough?

Why do businesses still rely on plastic cups, and what harm do they cause across their lifecycle?

What measures from other cities could reduce plastic cup use in Marseille?

Regulatory Context

- EU SUP Directive: Plastic cups targeted through reduction measures.
- PPWR (2025/40): Reuse and Deposit Return Schemes from 2027–28.
- Loi AGECE (2020): Bans some plastic cups; requires reusable containers, but enforcement is limited.
- 2021 French decree: Plastic content in paper cups phased down, with full elimination delayed to 2030.

Environmental Cost

- 601 kg waste/person/year vs 517 kg EU average
- 5.79 microplastics/m³ in surface water
- 865 particles/kg in seabed sediment
- PP cup lifecycle: 25–80 g CO₂e
- 60–80% of small plastics may be rejected by sorting facilities

Activities and Impact

- Literature & policy research: Marine plastic pollution, EU/French legislation and policy gaps.
- Case studies: Compared reusable cup initiatives across European cities.
- Fieldwork: Beach clean-ups, café/bar observations and engagement with local businesses.
- Policy development: Collaborated in a team of three to develop recommendations.
- Key outputs: Reusable cup deposit scheme, refill infrastructure and public awareness measures.
- Impact: Produced an evidence-based policy briefing to support Wings of the Ocean’s future advocacy and engagement with policymakers.



Examples of amount of waste collected from a 1 hour clean up

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)



Identified gaps in Marseille’s waste infrastructure and policy, proposing ways to build a cleaner, more sustainable city.



Linked single-use plastic cups to marine microplastic pollution in Marseille’s coastal waters, highlighting a key land-to-sea pollution pathway.



Through a life cycle assessment and reuse-based alternatives like deposit return schemes, the project promotes a shift away from single-use consumption.

Conclusion

Reducing single-use plastic cups in Marseille requires more than legislation alone. Combining effective policy, reusable systems, refill infrastructure and community engagement can support a practical shift towards a more sustainable and cleaner city.

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