

Altruism behind recycling: A substitute for an environmental policy?

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Abstract

The issue of waste management has recently emerged in the developing world. This paper examines household recycling behaviors in an urban area of Vietnam, where a recycling policy is yet to be implemented. Based on primary data collected from 755 Hanoi households, we find that majority of the sample households recycle all the recyclable materials they consume, even though such recycling is not obligatory. Half of recycling households sell their recyclables to informal junk buyers, whereas the others provided recyclables with no compensation. Regression analyses show that recycling behavior is driven by altruism, as measured by a modified version of the self-report altruism scale. Recycling of paper products, which are worth little as recyclables, is particularly altruistically driven. These results suggest that public goods can be provided, in the form of reduced environmental costs, even in the absence of government intervention. We also find that, unlike in the developed world, household income is negatively associated with recycling behavior, suggesting that pro-environmental behavior in Vietnam does not reach the downward part of the environmental Kuznets curve.

Keywords: Altruism, Household recycling, Junk buyers, Solid waste, Vietnam

JEL classification: D64, H41, O13, Q53, Q56

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