

Salvage Accumulation and the South African Wastescape: Preliminary Reflections

Nate Millington

African Centre for Cities

University of Cape Town

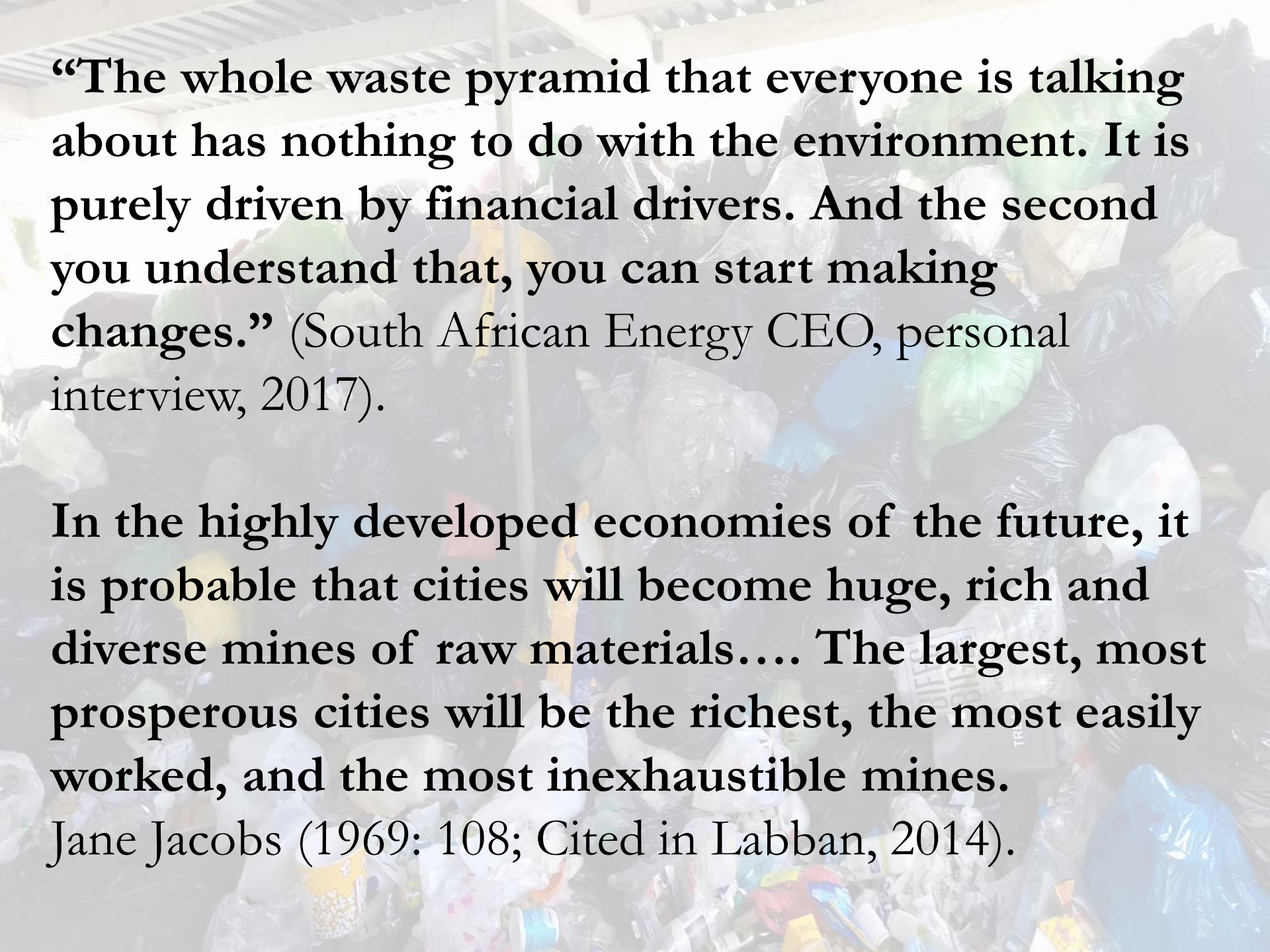
natemillington@gmail.com

[@nate_millington](#)



Research jointly supported by the ESRC and DFID

MANCHESTER
1824



“The whole waste pyramid that everyone is talking about has nothing to do with the environment. It is purely driven by financial drivers. And the second you understand that, you can start making changes.” (South African Energy CEO, personal interview, 2017).

In the highly developed economies of the future, it is probable that cities will become huge, rich and diverse mines of raw materials.... The largest, most prosperous cities will be the richest, the most easily worked, and the most inexhaustible mines.

Jane Jacobs (1969: 108; Cited in Labban, 2014).



Polyco

Making waste work





1375kg NET

REFINED SUGAR
1000 kg

GESU 593831 9

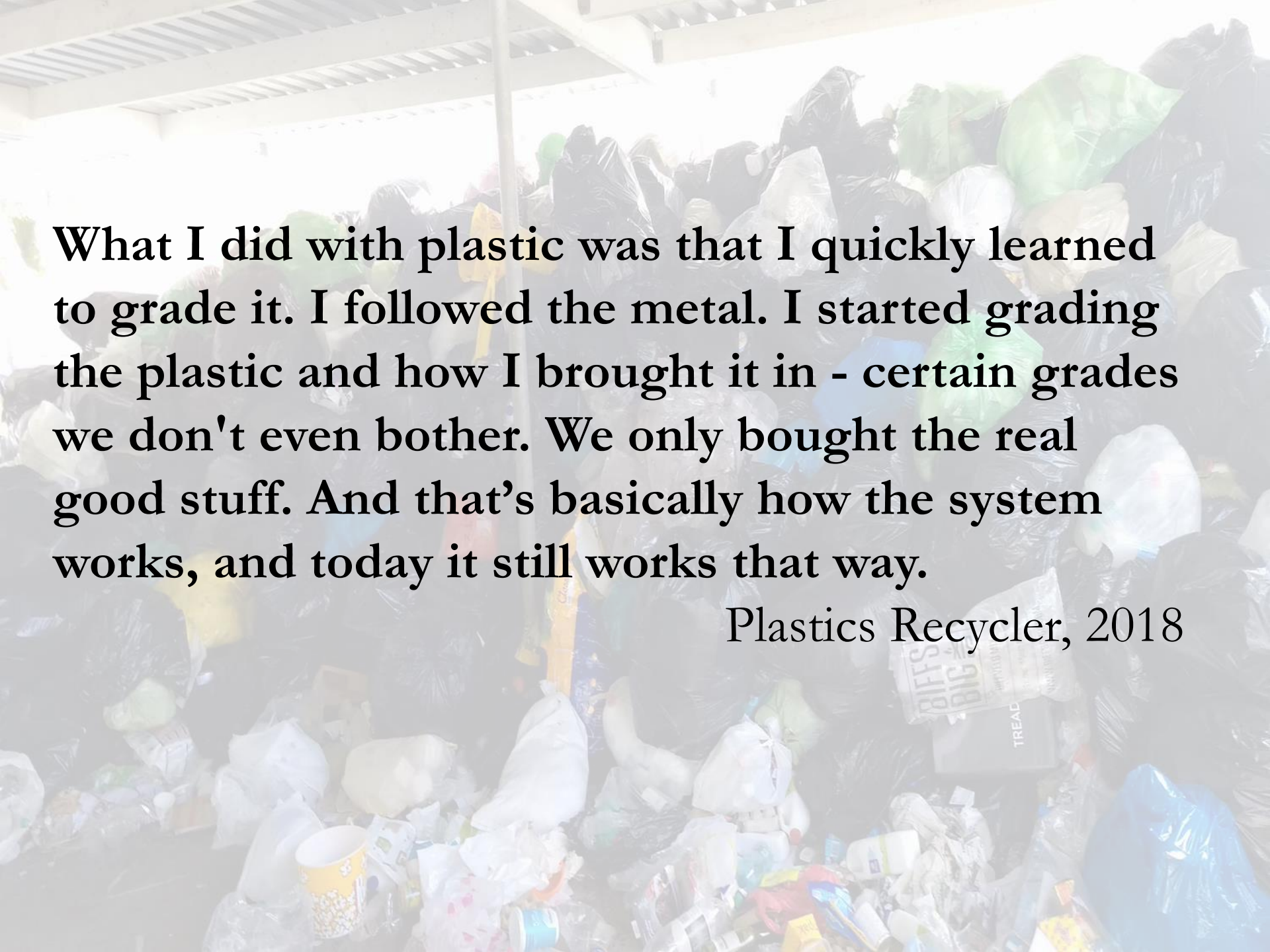
45G1



70

2.9m
9'6"



A large pile of plastic waste, including bags and containers, under a metal structure. The waste is piled high, with various colors of plastic bags (black, green, white, blue) and some cardboard boxes visible. A yellow cup is in the foreground. The background shows a metal structure, possibly a conveyor belt or a sorting system.

What I did with plastic was that I quickly learned to grade it. I followed the metal. I started grading the plastic and how I brought it in - certain grades we don't even bother. We only bought the real good stuff. And that's basically how the system works, and today it still works that way.

Plastics Recycler, 2018

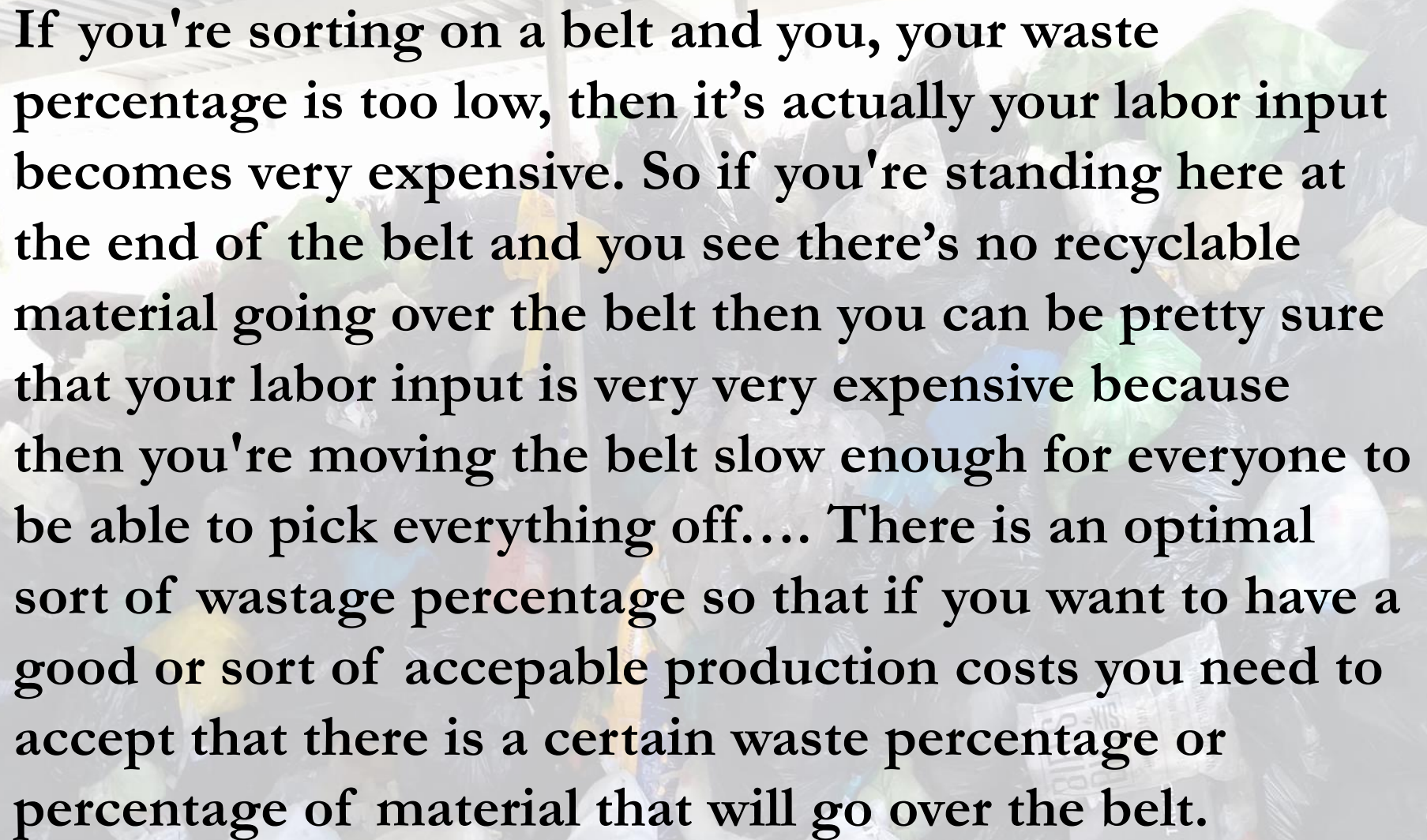


G.W.: 81 KG
N.W.: 113
Measurement: 50
CAPE TOWN, S.A.
MADE IN CAMBODIA

UHD TV





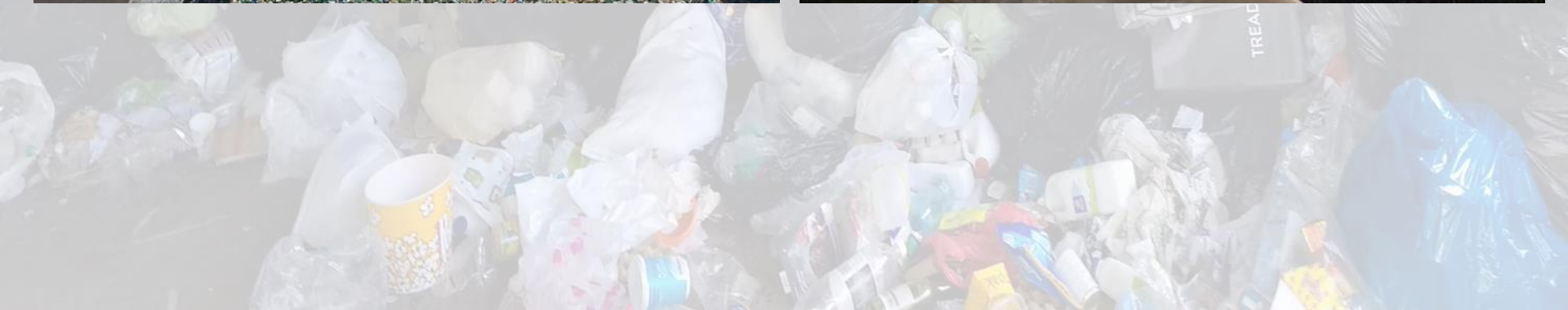
The background of the slide is a photograph of a waste transfer station. It shows large piles of various types of waste, including plastic bags, cardboard boxes, and other debris. In the foreground, there are some specific items like a yellow and white striped cup and some crumpled paper. The overall scene is one of a busy waste management facility.

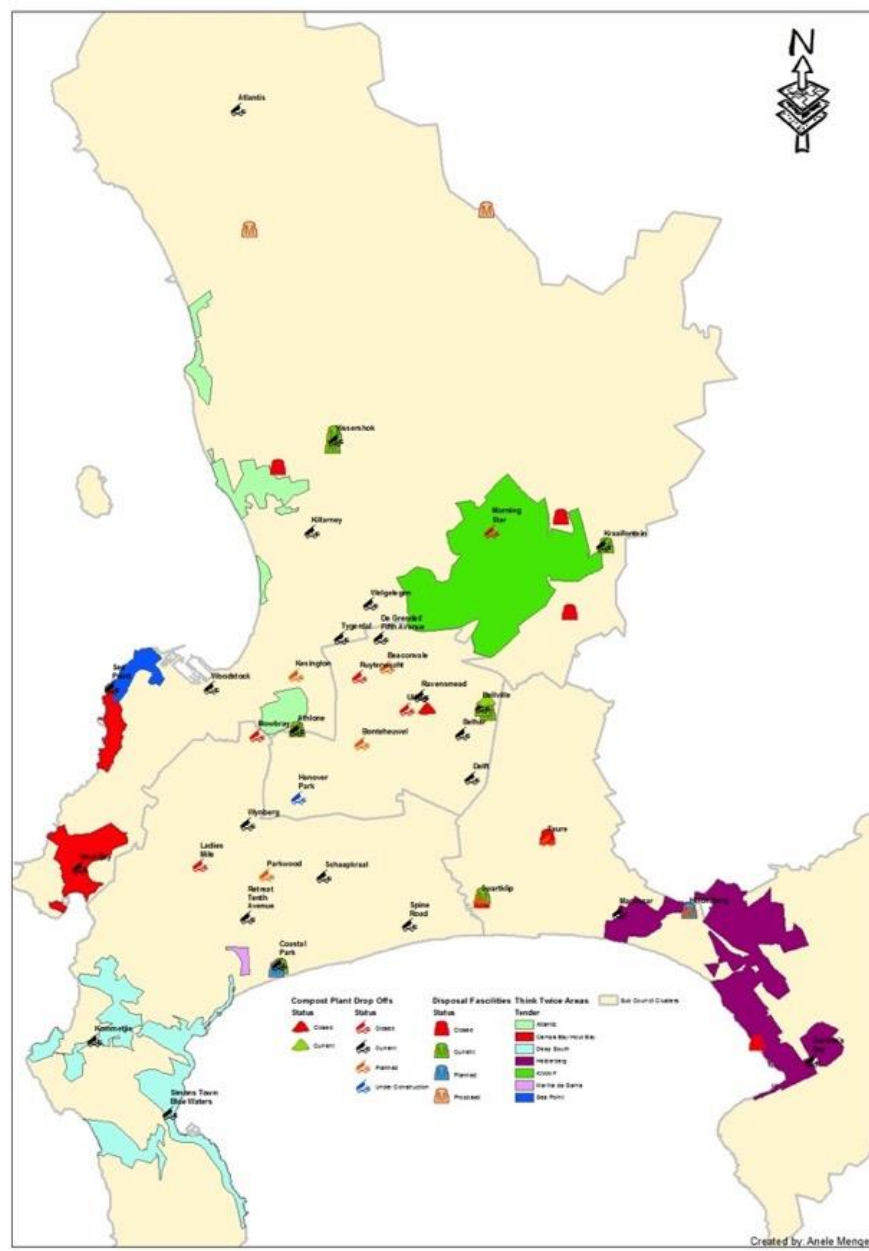
If you're sorting on a belt and you, your waste percentage is too low, then it's actually your labor input becomes very expensive. So if you're standing here at the end of the belt and you see there's no recyclable material going over the belt then you can be pretty sure that your labor input is very very expensive because then you're moving the belt slow enough for everyone to be able to pick everything off.... There is an optimal sort of wastage percentage so that if you want to have a good or sort of acceptable production costs you need to accept that there is a certain waste percentage or percentage of material that will go over the belt.

MRF Operations Manager, 2017

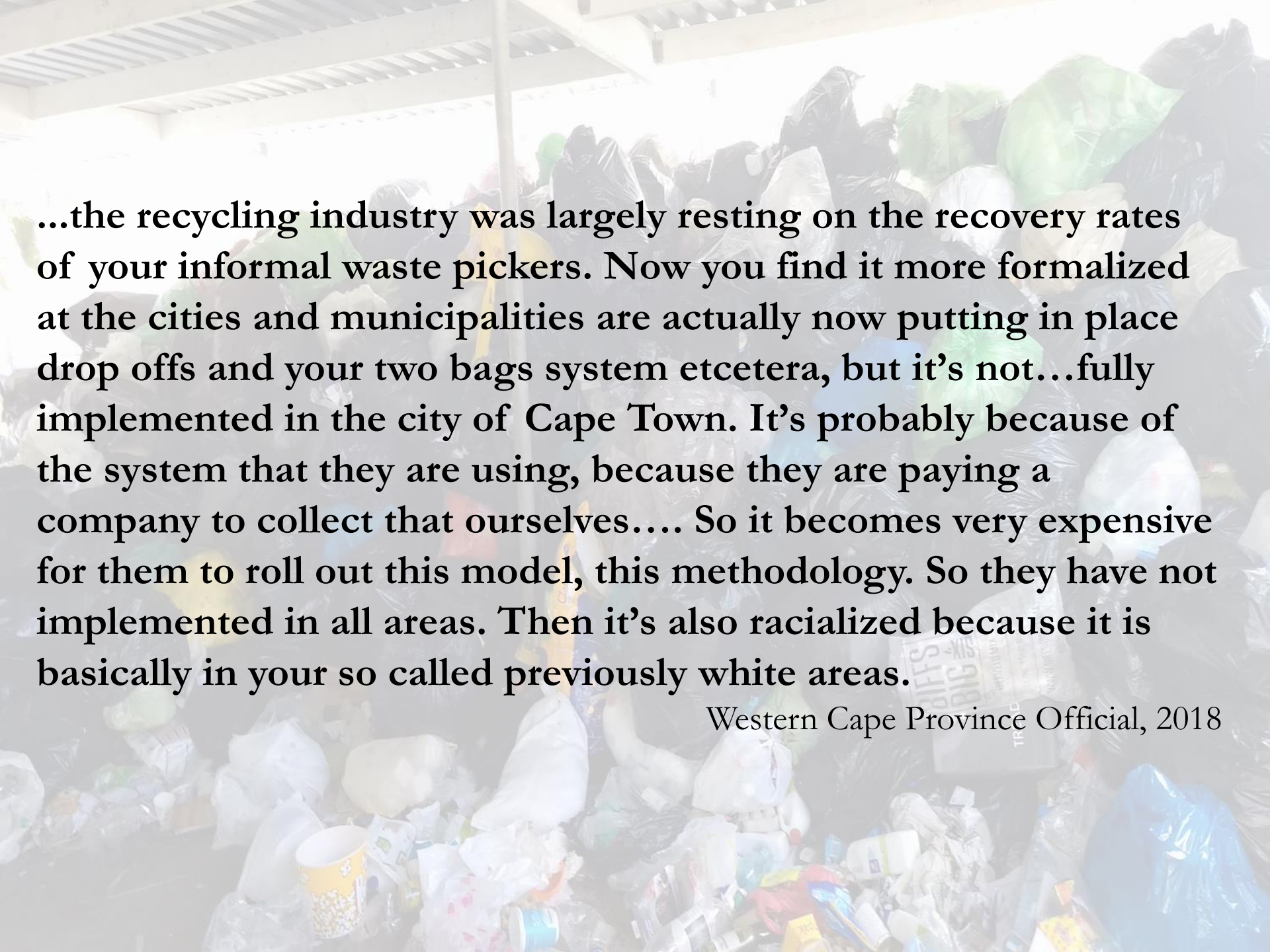
To-Be Pelletizing







Cape Town: Think Twice

The background image shows a large, disorganized pile of plastic waste. There are many black, white, and green plastic bags, some of which are full. In the foreground, there are various plastic containers, including a yellow and white patterned cup and several white plastic bottles. The waste is piled up under a metal structure with a slatted roof, possibly a recycling or waste collection point. The overall scene suggests a significant volume of discarded plastic waste.

...the recycling industry was largely resting on the recovery rates of your informal waste pickers. Now you find it more formalized at the cities and municipalities are actually now putting in place drop offs and your two bags system etcetera, but it's not...fully implemented in the city of Cape Town. It's probably because of the system that they are using, because they are paying a company to collect that ourselves.... So it becomes very expensive for them to roll out this model, this methodology. So they have not implemented in all areas. Then it's also racialized because it is basically in your so called previously white areas.

Western Cape Province Official, 2018



WWW.PACKACHING.CO.ZA

WEIGH & GET PAYED



SWAP TRASH FOR CASH

RECYCLABLE MATERIALS ONLY

INFORMATION

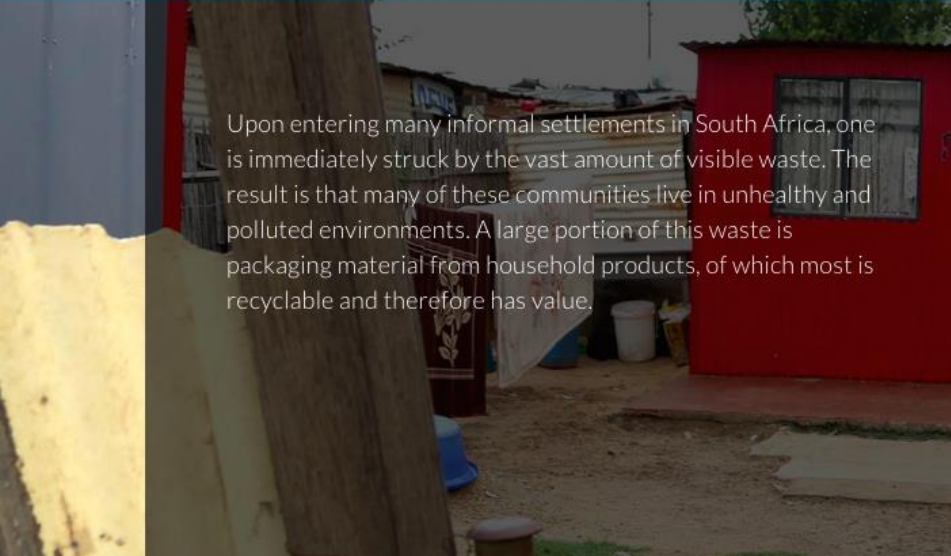


T'S & C'S

Please note that your transaction will be processed and payment made within 24 hours of your drop-off, including all materials with the collection, weighing and compacting equipment and payment of the R10 reward will be issued to you. Terms and conditions, which are available at each participating site or upon request, a copy of which is available on your request.



LET'S IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM



Upon entering many informal settlements in South Africa, one is immediately struck by the vast amount of visible waste. The result is that many of these communities live in unhealthy and polluted environments. A large portion of this waste is packaging material from household products, of which most is recyclable and therefore has value.





Capturing
greater
volumes/pro-
portions of
recyclable
material

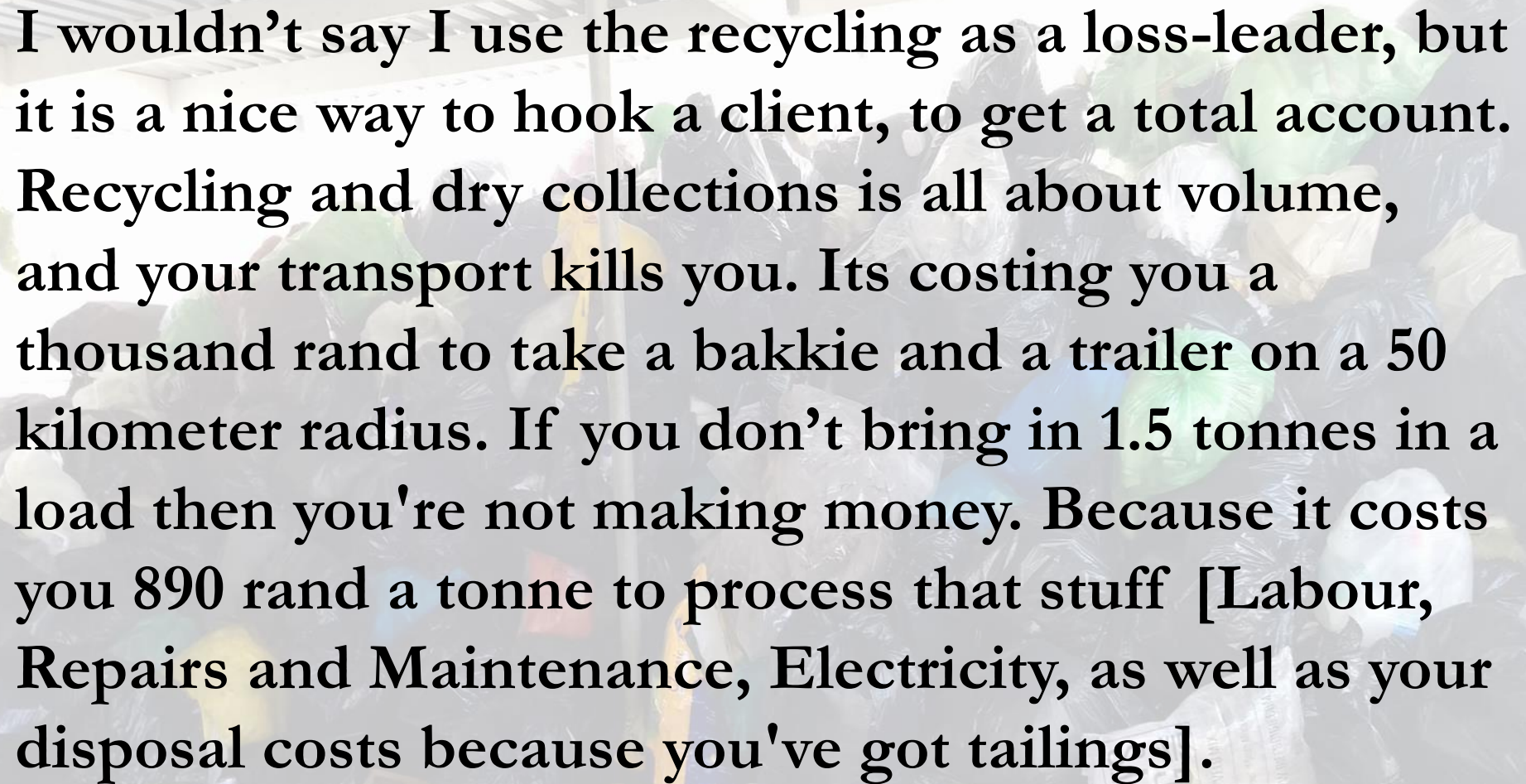
Extracting value from
waste:
Recycling, cleaning,
household waste
management

Incentivising
free, low-paid,
independent
labour

A large pile of garbage bags and trash under a metal grate. The bags are mostly black, with some green, blue, and white ones visible. A yellow bag with the word "Classic" is also present. In the foreground, there is a yellow and white cup, a blue container, and various pieces of trash. The text "Who subsidizes waste?" is overlaid in the center.

Who subsidizes waste?





I wouldn't say I use the recycling as a loss-leader, but it is a nice way to hook a client, to get a total account. Recycling and dry collections is all about volume, and your transport kills you. Its costing you a thousand rand to take a bakkie and a trailer on a 50 kilometer radius. If you don't bring in 1.5 tonnes in a load then you're not making money. Because it costs you 890 rand a tonne to process that stuff [Labour, Repairs and Maintenance, Electricity, as well as your disposal costs because you've got tailings].

Waste CEO, 2018.



E · S · R · C
ECONOMIC
& SOCIAL
RESEARCH
COUNCIL



Research jointly supported by the ESRC and DFID

MANCHESTER
1824

Thank you!

Nate Millington

African Centre for Cities

University of Cape Town

natemillington@gmail.com

[@nate_millington](#)