Statistical analysis of solid waste composition data: Arithmetic mean, standard deviation and correlation coefficients - DTU Orbit (14/04/2019)

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Data for fractional solid waste composition provide relative magnitudes of individual waste fractions, the percentages of which always sum to 100, thereby connecting them intrinsically. Due to this sum constraint, waste composition data represent closed data, and their interpretation and analysis require statistical methods, other than classical statistics that are suitable only for non-constrained data such as absolute values. However, the closed characteristics of waste composition data are often ignored when analysed. The results of this study showed, for example, that unavoidable animal-derived food waste amounted to 2.21 ± 3.12% with a confidence interval of (−4.03; 8.45), which highlights the problem of the biased negative proportions. A Pearson’s correlation test, applied to waste fraction generation (kg mass), indicated a positive correlation between avoidable vegetable food waste and plastic packaging. However, correlation tests applied to waste fraction compositions (percentage values) showed a negative association in this regard, thus demonstrating that statistical analyses applied to compositional waste fraction data, without addressing the closed characteristics of these data, have the potential to generate spurious or misleading results. Therefore, compositional data should be transformed adequately prior to any statistical analysis, such as computing mean, standard deviation and correlation coefficients.

General information
Publication status: Published
Organisations: Department of Environmental Engineering, Residual Resource Engineering, University of Girona
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Number of pages: 11
Pages: 13-23
Publication date: 2017
Peer-reviewed: Yes

Publication information
Journal: Waste Management
Volume: 69
ISSN (Print): 0956-053X
Ratings:
BFI (2017): BFI-level 2
Scopus rating (2017): CiteScore 4.94 SJR 1.456 SNIP 2.059
Web of Science (2017): Impact factor 4.723
Web of Science (2017): Indexed yes
Keywords: Waste composition, Compositional data analysis, Isometric log ratio, Variation array
DOIs: 10.1016/j.wasman.2017.08.036
Source: FindIt
Source-ID: 2373584099
Research output: Contribution to journal › Journal article – Annual report year: 2017 › Research › peer-review