IJISEM
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF INNOVATIONS IN SCIENCE ENGINEERING AND MANAGEMENT

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OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 5

Issue: 3

Month: September

Year: 2026

ISSN: 2583-7117

Published: 21.09.2026

Citation:

Dr. T. Manorama Kumari "Integrated Municipal Solid Waste Management (IMSWM): A Critical Review of Sustainable Practices, Optimization and Environmental Review" International Journal of Innovations in Science Engineering and Management, vol.5, no.3, 2026, pp. 688-692

DOI:

10.69968/ijisem.2026v5i3688-692

Integrated Municipal Solid Waste Management (IMSWM): A Critical Review of Sustainable Practices, Optimization and Environmental Review

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Abstract

Municipal solid waste management (MSWM) is one of the rapidly growing urban and environmental challenges, associated with population explosion, rapid urbanization, waste management, population, and changing consumption patterns. Modern MSWM is moving from collection-and-disposal systems to the modern integrated approaches involving source segregation, recycling, resource recovery, optimized transportation, treatment and environmentally sound disposal. This paper critically reviews 26 technical studies covering metropolitan waste management, risk assessment, waste characterization, GIS-based route optimization, recycling, life-cycle assessment (LCA), mathematical modeling, facility-location planning, waste-to-energy, landfill management, environmental monitoring, economic instruments, policy and e-waste. The literature was thematically synthesized to identify major methodological developments, contributions and research gaps. The review indicates that individual MSWM components have been extensively studied, but their integration within a practical decision-support framework remains limited. Through this research an integrated framework combining waste characterization, GIS-based collection planning, route optimization, recycling and resource recovery, environmental assessment and economic evaluation is proposed. Such integration can support evidence-based and resource-efficient MSWM planning in rapidly developing urban areas.

Keywords; Municipal solid waste management; GIS; recycling; life-cycle assessment; waste characterization; transportation optimization; resource recovery; environmental assessment; sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

Rapid urban development has increased both the quantity and diversity of waste generation from residential, commercial, institutional and other urban activities, creating challenges in collection, transportation, treatment and disposal. Poor quality of waste management always leads to hazardous air, water and soil pollution and adversely affects the urban environmental quality.

MSWM has progressively developed from a primary focus on collection and disposal towards integrated management, in which waste prevention, source segregation, recycling, recovery, treatment and final disposal are considered together. The reviewed literature reflects this transition, with studies addressing metropolitan planning, comparative risk, GIS, decision-support systems, LCA, mathematical optimization, recycling incentives and environmental monitoring.

The present study synthesizes 26 supplied technical papers to identify common themes, methodological contributions, limitations and opportunities for integration.

OBJECTIVES

1. To critically analyze 26 selected studies related to MSWM.
2. To identify major methodologies and thematic areas in previous research.
3. To compare the principal contributions of the reviewed studies.
4. To identify limitations and research gaps.
5. To propose an integrated framework combining GIS, optimization, LCA, resource recovery and economic evaluation.

REVIEW METHODOLOGY

A structured qualitative literature-review approach was used. The 26 supplied papers were examined and classified according to their principal research themes. The analysis considered the objective, methodological approach, principal contribution and relevance of each study. The major themes were metropolitan and regional waste management; risk assessment; waste characterization; GIS and route optimization; recycling and waste diversion; LCA; mathematical and decision modeling; facility-location planning; incineration and waste-to-energy; landfill management; environmental monitoring; groundwater impacts; economic instruments; environmental policy; and e-waste management.

CRITICAL SYNTHESIS OF THE LITERATURE

Metropolitan Planning and Risk Assessment

The metropolitan perspective established that waste management should be treated as an urban-planning problem rather than merely a disposal activity. Large urban systems require coordination among collection areas, transportation networks, treatment facilities and disposal sites. Risk-based studies further show that alternatives have different environmental and operational risks. Landfills involve long-term land and groundwater considerations, thermal treatment requires control of emissions and residual ash, and recycling requires suitable collection and processing infrastructure.

Geographical Conditions and GIS

Waste-management strategies are strongly influenced by climate, topography, population density, road networks, waste composition, land availability and institutional arrangements. GIS provides a useful decision-support platform by integrating waste-generation locations, collection points, road networks, vehicle characteristics, transfer stations, treatment facilities and disposal sites. Network analysis can identify efficient collection routes and potentially reduce unnecessary travel, vehicle operating time and fuel consumption.

Recycling and Resource Recovery

Recycling is a fundamental component of sustainable MSWM. Recoverable materials include paper, cardboard, plastics, glass, metals and organic materials. Source segregation is important because mixing recyclable and organic materials can reduce material quality and increase processing requirements. The reviewed literature also indicates that economic instruments, such as disposal charges and unit-pricing systems, can influence waste-generation and recycling behavior. Effective recycling therefore requires segregation, collection infrastructure, material recovery, market demand and appropriate policy support.

Life-Cycle Assessment and Decision Modeling

LCA evaluates environmental impacts across stages of the waste-management system rather than considering only final disposal. The relevant system can be represented as: Waste generation → Collection → Transportation → Processing → Recovery → Treatment → Disposal. Results depend on system boundaries, assumptions, waste composition, transportation distances, treatment technologies and energy-recovery assumptions.

Mathematical and decision-analysis methods can support choices concerning facility location, vehicle numbers and routes, treatment capacity, recycling rates, transfer stations and landfill capacity. Multi-criteria approaches can incorporate environmental impact, economic cost, technical feasibility, social acceptability, land requirements, energy recovery and resource recovery.

Treatment, Landfill and Environmental Monitoring

Thermal treatment can reduce the volume of waste and potentially recover energy, but it should be evaluated with respect to emissions, cost effectiveness, residual ash, waste composition and environmental controls. Landfilling remains necessary for residual waste, while diversion should maximize the recovery and treatment of suitable materials. Key landfill concerns include leachate, groundwater contamination, methane, odour, land requirements and long-term supevision.

Environmental monitoring should be incorporated into planning and operation. Important indicators include groundwater and surface-water quality, air emissions, methane, leachate and soil quality.

Waste Characterization, Policy and E-Waste

Reliable waste quantity and composition of data are fundamental to system design. Waste characterization influences collection requirements, vehicle capacity, recycling potential, composting, treatment technology, landfill requirements and energy-recovery potential. The literature also demonstrates that technology alone cannot solve MSWM problems; legislation, economic instruments, institutional arrangements and public participation are also very important. E-waste requires specific management because it contains both valuable materials and hazardous substances.

RESEARCH GAP

The principal research gap identified through a careful analysis of 26 studies is the limited integration of major MSWM components within a single practical decision-support framework. Existing studies commonly focus on route optimization, facility location, recycling, LCA, risk assessment, landfill diversion, economic instruments or environmental monitoring as separate components. The research further emphasizes on a comprehensive approach in waste characterization, GIS-based collection planning, route optimization, recycling and resource recovery, treatment, residual disposal, environmental assessment and economic evaluation.

PROPOSED INTEGRATED FRAMEWORK

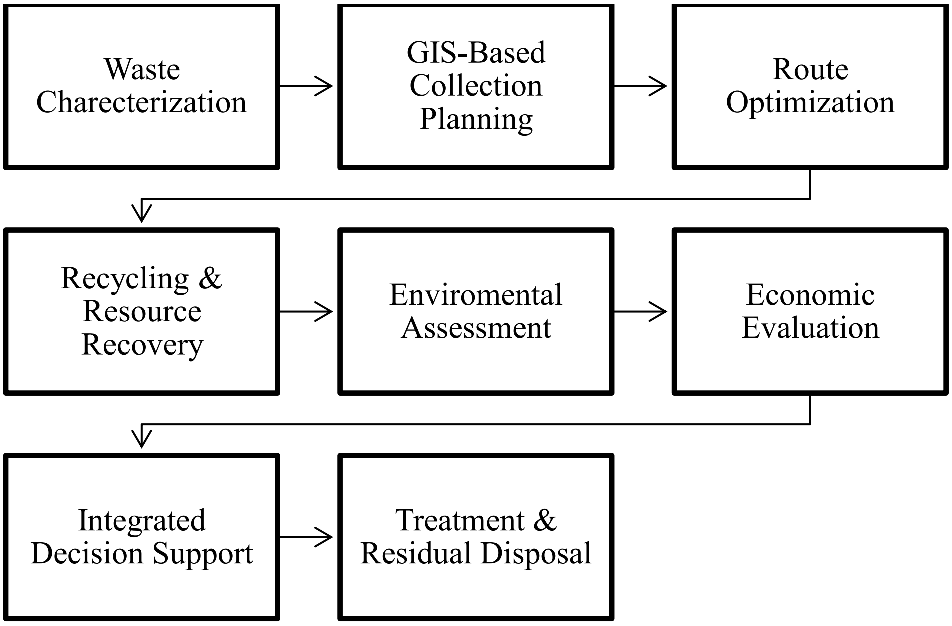

Figure 1. Proposed Integrated MSWM Decision-Support Framework.

The proposed framework consists of five interconnected components:

- Component 1 – Waste Data: daily generation, per-capita generation, seasonal variation, physical composition and collection-point information.
- Component 2 – Spatial Analysis: GIS mapping of waste-generation locations, collection points, roads, transfer stations, treatment facilities and disposal facilities.
- Component 3 – Optimization: vehicle routes, collection frequency, vehicle allocation, transfer-station selection and facility location.
- Component 4 – Environmental Assessment: greenhouse-gas emissions, fuel consumption, landfill emissions, leachate impacts, resource recovery and LCA indicators.
- Component 5 – Economic Evaluation: capital, vehicle, fuel, labour, treatment and disposal costs, together with recycling revenue and energy-recovery benefits.

ALTERNATIVE SCENARIOS AND PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Figure 2. Proposed Progression of MSWM Alternative Scenarios.

The application of the framework in future combines the following five scenarios: (1) existing system; (2) optimized transportation using GIS-based routes; (3) increased recycling through improved segregation and material recovery; (4) integrated recovery combining recycling, organic-waste treatment and energy/resource recovery; and (5) an integrated sustainable system combining optimized collection, recycling, treatment, recovery, environmental assessment and economic optimization.

Performance can be evaluated using waste generation, per-capita generation, collection efficiency, recycling rate, landfill diversion, vehicle distance, fuel consumption, transportation emissions, treatment cost, total MSWM cost, resource recovery, energy recovery and environmental indicators.

DISCUSSION

The synthesis indicates that sustainable MSWM should be considered a system-optimization problem rather than a single-technology problem. A system may have sufficient collection vehicles but inefficient recycling facilities, improper routes, inadequate source segregation, less treatment capacity and poor waste characterization. Similarly, a low-cost alternative may create higher environmental impacts. GIS can identify where waste is generated and transported; optimization can determine how it should be collected; LCA can assess environmental consequences; and economic analysis can evaluate feasibility. Their integration can therefore improve the basis for municipal decision-making.

IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPING URBAN AREAS

- Establish reliable waste-generation databases and conduct regular waste characterization.
- Improve source segregation and material recovery.
- Digitize collection networks and apply GIS to collection planning.
- Optimize vehicle routes and reduce unnecessary travel.
- Treat biodegradable waste appropriately and minimize uncontrolled disposal.
- Monitor environmental impacts of landfills and treatment facilities.
- Evaluate alternatives using life-cycle principles.
- Adopt economically and socially appropriate policy instruments.

LIMITATIONS

This review is based on the 26 papers supplied for the study rather than an exhaustive search of all publications. The supplied reference list is a scanned document and some bibliographic information further requires verification against the original publications. The studies also differ in its geographical settings, methodologies and time periods, limiting direct quantitative comparison. The further research work in this area requires using systematic database searches and clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Future research should examine real-time GIS-based collection, IoT-enabled waste-bin monitoring, artificial intelligence for waste classification, dynamic route optimization, integrated LCA and life-cycle costing, multi-criteria decision analysis, circular-economy approaches, material and energy recovery, digital waste-management platforms, and city-specific sustainable MSWM models.

CONCLUSIONS

The critical review of 26 technical studies demonstrate that MSWM has been evolved from collection-and-disposal practices toward integrated systems involving GIS, optimization, recycling, resource recovery, LCA, environmental monitoring and decision support. No single technology provides a universally applicable solution because of varied waste characteristics, geographical conditions, infrastructure, environmental sensitivity, economic conditions and policy frameworks.

The principal research gap is the limited integration of these approaches into a single practical framework. The proposed framework combines waste characterization, GIS-based collection planning, transportation optimization, recycling, resource recovery, environmental assessment and economic evaluation. Its application can provide municipal authorities with a more systematic basis for selecting sustainable and resource-efficient waste-management alternatives.

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