

# Waste & reuse in second-hand

## Second-hand Challenges Workshop Series



*Illustration by Efa Blosser-Mason*

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# Waste & Reuse – Workshop Report 1

## Second-hand Challenges Workshop Series

Workshop 1 — 25<sup>th</sup> February 2022

The second-hand challenges workshop series brought together researchers and practitioners working in second-hand to problem-solve together around key challenges in the second-hand economy: waste and reuse, repair, labour, and community welfare.

### 1. Introduction – Why this challenge?

Waste is one of the defining challenges of the present, driving biodiversity loss, pollution, and climate catastrophe, among other problems. Yet we propose that we work with the assumption that waste is only waste if we allow it to be. Indeed, Kevin Lynch (1981) explained that waste is largely defined by the fact that it is not used. In this workshop, we explore how second-hand economies make up a sometimes overlooked but key site where things either become waste, or can be saved from becoming waste. Around the world, what Nicky Gregson and colleagues (2016) have called ‘the dirty work of the green economy’ involves picking, sorting, and sometimes transforming waste. Indeed, there is rising awareness that second-hand economies and cultures will be crucial to any response to the climate emergency, among other problems.

Our project focuses on everyday spaces of second-hand culture, within these global systems – our homes, charity shops, freecycle message boards, makers’ and resellers’ workshops, and all the way to the local tip. As this workshop explores, reusing and transforming waste requires distinct skills and knowledges. Waste and reuse practices are enmeshed in larger systems and infrastructures, too, for sorting, storing, transporting, and disposing of things. In this workshop, we delve into research, practice and industry examples of how waste becomes waste in second-hand spaces. We hear from people and practices resisting this process, transforming trash back into valued treasure, or at least everyday use. We explore how this might involve revaluing devalued skills, practices, and labour, and reimagining second-hand waste systems.

### 2. Defining the challenge - Programme of speakers

- **John Griffiths and Kevin Ford**, Re-Create/ Ail-Greu – Scrapstore

The scrapstore collects stuff that would otherwise go to landfill - from rolls of fabric and flooring to ceramic flower pots, mannequins and toys - and makes it cheaply available to their 10,000 members from their large warehouse shop. In addition to the artists, DIY-ers, schools and community centres who gather materials here, Re-Create runs creative scrap workshops for children, encouraging problem-solving and imaginative play.

To keep their stock varied, they trade van-load for van-load with other scrapstores in Bristol, Swindon, and beyond. John and Kevin describe the existence of the scrapstore

## Second-hand Challenges Workshops

as 'hand-to-mouth', and highlight the huge amount of work that goes into keeping things going.

<http://www.re-create.co.uk/>

<https://www.facebook.com/recreate.vale>

- **Dr Annebella Pollen**, University of Brighton

Annebella's recent research examines the house clearance as a 'microcosm of disposal', a little-acknowledged site where decisions are made about the value, waste status, and the trajectory of goods along local and global routes. Occupying fairly unregulated territory and associated with both death and underhand practices, house clearance companies are 'part dealers, part dustmen, part undertakers'. Objects are disposed of along a staircase of value: sold to second-hand shoppers at progressively lower prices; taken free of charge by people collecting items for refugees or to send to friends and family overseas; and finally incinerated, as some things - for example, a deceased woman's dressing gown - cannot even be given away.

<https://research.brighton.ac.uk/en/persons/annebella-pollen>

- **Violet Broadhead**, University of Bristol

Violet's talk focused on her research into charity shops, and how ideas about professionalism can be a barrier to the reuse and recycling of donated goods. The 'professionalisation' of charity retail has involved becoming more like the 'proper shops' of commercial retail, but donations frequently challenge this ideal. The official policy in the shop Violet researched was 'if in doubt, throw it out', so that imperfect, odd, and low-value items were often disposed of to preserve shop standards and save time and space. Acts of salvage were sometimes seen as a threat to the shop's vital fundraising function. Having acknowledged these tensions, Violet raised the question of whether it is possible for the sector to reimagine professionalism in relation to sustainability and reuse.

<https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/en/persons/violet-broadhead>

- **Anne Yendell**, Sam's Place Charity Shop, Southsea, Portsmouth

From the stockroom of the Sam's Place charity shop she manages, Anne talked about her passion for reuse and recycling, and the constant challenge posed by waste management in charity retail. In contrast to her previous role as director of fundraising for a local hospice, where stock could be circulated among 24 shops, at Sam's Place 'everything that is donated, we have to find a home for it'. What's more, the shop has very limited storage, and much of what is donated is sheer rubbish – for example, very soiled clothing. Anne described the lengths she and her staff go to in order to promote reuse, repairing some items and giving others away for free. As second-hand spaces often do, Sam's Place acts as a community hub, hosting clubs for repairing and crafting with reused materials.

<https://www.samsplace.org.uk/>

## Second-hand Challenges Workshops

- **Dr Andy Rees**, OBE, Resource Efficiency and Circular Economy Division, Welsh Government

Andy outlined the Welsh Government's policy commitments around waste, reuse, and circular economy, which are grounded in the Well-being of Future Generations Act and the UN's Sustainable Development goals. They intend to achieve Net Zero carbon emissions and have 'nothing in the black bag' by 2050, and are pursuing this through four key lines of action: upscaling reuse and waste prevention; 're-thinking all the re's' (including re-manufacture, re-purpose, refill, repair); enabling communities to take collective action; and driving innovation. Andy highlighted some of the 180 projects and enterprises that have been funded through an unusual budget surplus of £43 million, including the Llandidrod Wells 'Repair and Reuse Hub' and The Green Shed Re-users project in Pembrokeshire.

<https://www.missionzeroacademy.eu/webinars/transitioning-a-nation-to-zero-waste-by-2050/>

- **Dr Kersty Hobson**, Cardiff University

Kersty's research explores critical questions around both systemic change and individual behaviour in relation to waste and reuse. She described how optimism around the circular economy as a 'win-win' solution can miss some important issues, for example rebound effects and perverse outcomes. Participating in the circular economy also requires a considerable amount of consumption work, as well as time, skills, knowledge, and access to resources. Kersty pointed to research which highlights limits to what individuals and small organisations can achieve, as bigger structural systems stymy their progress. She is currently working with Bentyg Library of Things and Repair Café Wales, and emphasised the importance of collaboration between academics and practitioners in the circular economy.

<https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/people/view/363246-hobson-kersty>

- **Jane Mason**, salvage artist and educator

Jane shared how she has been using salvaged materials her entire life, from childhood days out to the local tip, through the DIY ethos of punk rock, 'making our own homes' as squatters, and her present-day creative practice. She described the cultural shift towards disposability that has taken place during her lifetime; Jane learned to repair things both at school and through 'make do and mend' practices at home - "if you have the skills and knowledge, there's no need to go shopping" - but this is less common now. Despite the frustration of continuing to shout about the same issues as she has since she was a teenager, Jane told us that she remains hopeful that positive change could come within her lifetime too.

<http://www.janeartmason.com/>

- **Rhiannon Craft**, Cardiff University

Rhiannon's research follows the everyday home-making practices of New Travellers,

and considers the skills and knowledge involved in reusing and reimagining waste. She offered examples of participants modifying their mobile homes, installing shelves, cupboards, insulation, brackets, handles, and in one case, building the entire vehicle, from materials that other people have discarded. Whether they are motivated by a lack of financial resources, environmentalist values, or some combination of the two, these makers show that waste is a product of how we look at and interact with things. Since waste is socially constructed, Rhiannon asked, how can new forms of social organisation create new ways of understanding and using materials, and dismantle systems of waste? <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jols.12270>

### 3. Themes in the discussion

- **Creativity, artistry and pleasure can be involved in making something out of discards/waste/leftovers**
  - Children can experience more open and imaginative forms of play through making from waste materials.
  - Sometimes making something out of unwanted things is born of necessity, but this can also be a choice, a set of values or ethics people live by: from clothes, to music and art, to housing, to a job.
  - There is pleasure and creativity in salvage and scrounge.
  - Anyone can do it, but it takes skill, knowledge, opportunity, and practice.
- **We need to share and pass on reuse knowledge and skills, but these links are often broken**
  - Why is this not happening in schools anymore? Reuse and repair skills like sewing should be part of the curriculum at all stages, for everyone.
  - Where else are these skills being shared, and where else could they be shared?
- **What do we do about unvalued or unwanted things, like nuisance objects?**
  - We have too many things, and people don't know what to do with unwanted objects and materials. Recycling options are often limited and also flawed (and materials travel too far).
  - Sometimes this means unsuitable unwanted things get 'dumped' on charity shops and other second-hand sites, passing on the problem.
  - Sometimes the problem is too much stuff; sometimes it's the wrong kind of stuff; sometimes it's that things are too worn or damaged; and sometimes things show up in the wrong place or time to be reused easily.
  - We need to be re-valuing problem stuff.
- **How do we manage the storage and transport of unwanted things/waste, which is an ongoing problem?**
  - What should intermediaries like charity shops do with the material they can't sell or pass on?

## Second-hand Challenges Workshops

- Different organisations and sites in the second-hand economy have different roles to play. We need stronger local networks and local transport options to find the right home for the right things.
- **Resourcing and funding the vital labour of salvaging and reusing waste is an ongoing problem**
  - Skilled, important work, but it isn't paid well.
  - People need enough money to live on and do this work, if we value it the way we say we do.
- **Safety and insurance**
  - How do we deal with the safety and liability issues involved in sharing or teaching different skills?
  - What about accessing and using tools?
  - How do we deal with the safety and liability or insurance issues around reusing things and materials, which might be toxic or hazardous?

### 4. Ideas responding to the challenge... How might we reduce waste in the second-hand economy?

- **Mandates for manufacturers for durability and reuse**
  - Design for repair/disassembly/long life.
  - Mandate the right to repair.
  - Mandate product life labelling. Require tracking codes on products and materials throughout their whole lifecycle.
  - Transform the way manufacture works, to expand the lifespans of objects, and make durability a model that is attractive to manufacturers.
  - Incentivise recycling through financial reward more broadly (on the model of return payment on glass bottles in the 1960s and 1970s).
- **Get away from 'buy new stuff' model**
  - All parts of chain involved (designers, marketeers, manufacturing companies, retailers, consumers etc).
  - Design new business models around lending, leasing, repair, remanufacture, product durability - and sell/market those new models to businesses. Government to encourage a voluntary approach (fund pilots/R&D etc) - and to mandate if not enough action taken. More jobs in servicing, repair, remanufacturing, reuse, repurposing etc.
  - End planned obsolescence and designed-to-buy new (such as iPhones, GDH hair straighteners).
- **Design for disassembly**
  - Mandate design for disassembly from makers/manufacturers.
  - Manufacturers to provide disassembly instructions.

## Second-hand Challenges Workshops

- Accessible how to disassemble guidance. Manufacturers required to provide disassembly instructions and descriptions of what parts are made of, so consumer can break up item and knows where to take parts for recycling and how to reuse different components.
- Mandatory design for disassembly education at all levels, w/ knowledge of life cycle of components and the impact of different materials.
- Consumers buy with knowledge of repair, final disassembly guides.
- Financial incentives for disassembly.
  
- **Creativity, art and enjoyment**
  - After-school workshops to teach people repair/making skills.
  - Sculpture classes with scrap/found objects.
  - Workshops in up-cycling etc. to help give people confidence to undertake re-use/re-creation. Scrap/art workshops encourage kids to experiment creating art from scrap.
  - High street locations.
  
- **Skills – learning and sharing repair and reuse**
  - Part of mandated core curriculum in schools.
  - Repair and re-use skills during secondary education: basic skills such as soldering, sewing, basic wood and metal work etc.
  - Sculpture/art from salvage materials part of curriculum.
  - School trips to scrap shops.
  
- **Space**
  - From warehouses to high street spaces.
  - Storage options connected by local authorities or seed grant.
  - Spaces for sharing materials as well as ideas
  
- **Swap, hire, and borrow on the high street**
  - Swap shops on a community level. Free and fair exchange of items.
  - The “Library of things” (LoT) concept whereby people hire smaller electrical items rather than purchase. Benthg Cymru looking to expand into this space.
  - Repair Cafés, but cafes whereby skills are taught rather than items just repaired.
  - Toy Library style / Tool hire service with 1) tech support and skill guidance, such as sewing machines, with basic user guides and skills tips; 2) making this cheaper and more attractive than owning the object oneself, such as tech support, delivery/pick up, free; 3) bring elements together, such as recycled wood and brackets with drill hire, to align different providers, skills and sources.
  
- **Change attitudes and behaviour**
  - Where did your donations go? Follow the story...

## Second-hand Challenges Workshops

- Second-hand is just as good (or some cases better) than buying new.
- Treating things as heirlooms rather than as disposable.
- Make reuse desirable and appealing to all.
- Put a greater value on resource use: introduce a resources tax.
- Persuade people to buy more expensive, longer life products by educating and providing info on whole life costs.
- How to get away from people's love of buying stuff - behaviour change campaign.
  
- **Access to tools and materials for repair and reuse**
  - Cheap hire services for hiring things, like sewing machines, lawn mowers, etc. with some support/know how on how to use them.
  - Useful stuff trees in common spaces.
  - Mobile tool libraries.
  - School uniform recycling schemes as requirement
  
- **Facilitate collaboration and organise systems**
  - Create greater collaboration between councils.
  - Centralise and streamline waste and reuse locally (rather than ad hoc relationships).
  - Re-design sorting sector to divert waste.
  - Use local connections, local networks.
  - What's in your shed/drawer – take a picture and share it, to share stuff in the picture.
  - Charity shops collaborate with repair cafes and swap shops.
  - Increase easy solutions: door to door collections organised and funded by local government.
  - Service to collect unwanted but usable goods after clearances.
  - Textile scraps and unwanted goods to school art, textiles and drama departments.
  - Local council integrate with scrap stores and others on re-cycling/re-use.
  
- **Address bureaucracy and feasibility**
  - Show that something is feasible.
  - Need for expert knowledge to ensure safety, such as using materials safely.
  - Skill swapping and job swapping as a solution to have essential expert knowledge (safety) without everyone having to learn every skill in depth.
  - Problem with insurance: what to do if someone does a skill swap and something bad happens?
  
- **Funding and money**
  - Need for funding, advice and assistance (not everyone will have time or know how to do this).

## Second-hand Challenges Workshops

- **Networks**

- Networks of assistance and advice.
- Importance of networking and bringing people together.

### References:

Gregson, N., Crang, M., Botticello, J., Calestani, M., & Krzywoszynska, A. 2016. Doing the 'dirty work' of the green economy: Resource recovery and migrant labour in the EU. *European Urban and Regional Studies* 23(4), 541–555. DOI: 10.1177/0969776414554489

Lynch, K. 1981. *Wasting Away. An Exploration of Waste: What It Is, How It Happens, Why We Fear It, How To Do It Well.* Sierra Club Books: San Francisco. ISBN: 9780-871566751

### Additional Resources:

<https://www.reusefuluk.org/>

Cynulliad

Zero-waste grants – WRAP

Just Clear – house clearance company

[www.libraryofthings.co.uk](http://www.libraryofthings.co.uk) – CIC community hub

Llandidrod Wells 'Repair and Reuse Hub'

Remake Newport

Eco Schools Eco-Scolion

Plastic Free Anglesey Surfers Against Sewage

Matt's Café – Feed bellies, not bins!

Mold, a circular town

Naked Takeaway, repair café, community fridge

The Green Shed Pembrokeshire; furniture surgery, reupholstery studio

The Green Shed Re-users project

The Landfill Tax Community Fund

Repair Efficiency Wales – online repair directory REW

ReMakerSpace Centre