

DTA Scotland

GRASS-ROUTES

COMMUNITY PATHWAYS TO SUSTAINABILITY

Case studies:

1. Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust
2. Garmony Hydro, Mull & Iona Community Trust
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4. Newlands Community Development Trust

**NEWLANDS COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT TRUST**



NEWLANDS COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT TRUST

Newlands Community Development Trust (NCDT) serves the small parish of Newlands in the Tweeddale area of the Scottish Borders and the surrounding area. This rural area has grappled with isolation and limited local services and employment opportunities. NCDT's work in tech and the circular economy is hoping to tackle these challenges through direct service-provision, supporting local businesses, organisations and households, and generating good-quality skilled jobs and learning opportunities. It has also distributed hardware and tech support to those facing digital exclusion and financial hardship during the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as to local third sector organisations.

CIRCULAR ECONOMY & E-WASTE

Material consumption accounts for over two thirds of Scotland's greenhouse gas emissions.¹ Without decisive action to change our consumption-patterns, net-zero therefore appears unrealistic.

Of particular concern globally is electronic waste and manufacturing. UK emissions from the production of electrical goods stood at 732,000 tonnes in 2017,² and it has been estimated that ICT-production could

exceed 14% of greenhouse gas emissions by 2040.³ As a planet, we accumulate 50 million tonnes of 'E-waste' every year and, far from abating, this is the fastest growing source of waste in the world.⁴ The UK is the world's second largest producer of e-waste at 23.9 kilograms per person in 2019.⁵ A paltry 17% of this is properly disposed of and recycled.⁶ That which is not recycled is largely shipped overseas to developing countries, where it is often broken up and burnt, releasing toxic pollution with disastrous environmental and health-related consequences.⁷

With these damaging patterns of production, consumption and disposal in mind, the 'circular economy' is gaining traction and interest in environmental, as well as economic, circles. Zero Waste Scotland has estimated that transitioning to a fully circular economy could reduce Scotland's greenhouse gas emissions by 11 million tonnes per year by 2050.⁸

The Scottish Government defines a circular economy as one in which "products and materials are kept in high value use for as long as possible" with environmental benefits of reduced waste and emissions, economic benefits of new jobs and improved productivity, and community benefits of affordable repairs.⁹ This is seen as a viable model by which to create and sustain value within an economy

¹ (Zero Waste Scotland, 2015)

² (Statista, CO2 emission from electrical equipment manufacturing in the UK 1990-2017, 2019)

³ (Belkhir & Elmeligi, 2018)

⁴ (World Economic Forum, 2019)

⁵ (Global E-waste Monitor, 2020)

⁶ (Virogreen, 2016)

⁷ (Ethical Consumer, 2019)

⁸ (Zero Waste Scotland, 2015)

⁹ (Scottish Government, 2016)

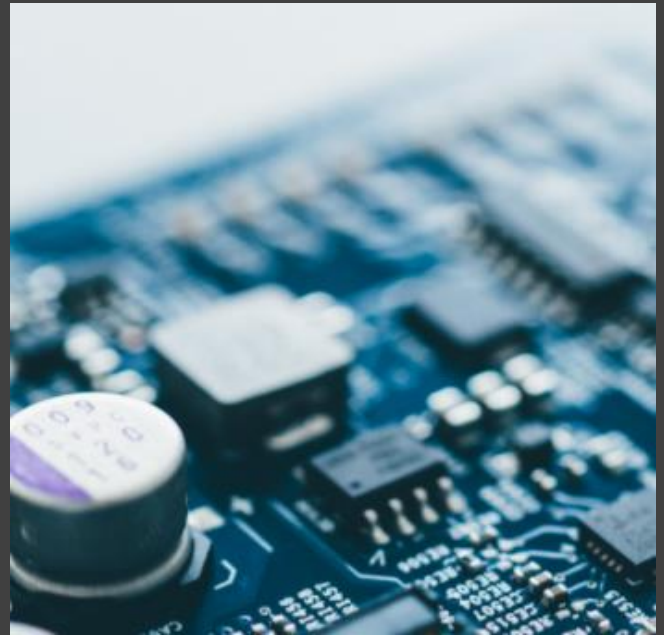
while reducing greenhouse gas emissions and living within planetary limits,¹⁰ and as a sustainable model for socio-economic development.¹¹ For these reasons, this cross-disciplinary idea has garnered attention from academics and researchers in business, economics, sustainability, and development, among others.

The circular and sharing economies have, at their heart, a commitment to decoupling economic development and value from finite resource-consumption, and seeks to build prosperity without depleting the natural world. It challenges the false dichotomy between jobs and the environment, and offers a model of sustainable and inclusive local development. However, as the RSA have argued, it requires a network of local facilities and services where repairs can be made to reduce our patterns of replacement and consumption.¹² The necessary mind-set change will only come about with the necessary infrastructure in place.

THE RENEW CREW

One such example of the local circular economy in practice is NCDT's work in technological 'remaking'.

In 2019 Newlands became involved in the Restarters Network, running 'Restart Parties' where local residents could drop in to have their broken electrical appliances repaired and/or to learn how to fix them. These services were offered 'at cost', giving local residents a cheap and convenient way to have



appliances repaired, rather than purchasing a new one. This covered any electrical appliance from hair straighteners to food processors, reducing expenses for residents and minimising waste from an environmental perspective. The Restart network operates on an 'open-source' basis, sharing a database of appliances, known faults and repairs across its practitioners, and residents are invited to help in the repair work so as to establish new local skills and share knowledge.

A newly-established 'Renew Crew' is building on and cementing this experience and legacy, with specific investment in new workspaces, workbenches and professional equipment. Currently running as a pilot project, the Renew Crew works to refurbish local residents' unused hardware, and distributes it to local non-profits and families facing financial hardship, either for free or at cost. This investment and professionalism have allowed NCDT to scale up its work, and in a matter of weeks, this new initiative has

¹⁰ (European Commission, 2015)

¹¹ (Sauvé, Bernard, & Sloan, 2016)

¹² (RSA, 2016)

secured 30 laptops from local households to refurbish and redistribute.

As the programme develops, its operations will widen: there are plans to introduce a tool library for local residents, and to expand its activities into clothes-repairs, among others. Using a newly-acquired electric vehicle, Newlands intends to take its services to other surrounding areas using the minibus as a travelling workshop. Given their rural location, many of the surrounding villages and towns lack these services and skills. NCDT is therefore in conversations with local community hubs to serve as drop-off areas where residents can dispose of hardware securely and sustainably.

LOCAL IMPACT

Local residents more widely have benefitted from affordable repairs of a variety of home appliances that have saved them the much larger expense of replacement. NCDT's work also provides them with a way to dispose of old personal tech and hardware in a secure and sustainable way.

More broadly, however, in addition to its environmental benefits, the Scottish Government recognises the positive social and economic impacts of the circular economy.¹³

NCDT follows a social enterprise model that seeks to strengthen the local labour market and provide new employment opportunities. The new Renew Crew already employs a technician, and hopes to expand

this to 3 or 4 full-time staff as the programme beds in. NCDT also offers ample opportunities for local residents to learn how to fix appliances themselves and acquire new skills. For young people and school-leavers in the area there are limited occupational options short of moving to a larger town or city. To stem this drain of productive and talented young people, Newlands intends to offer apprenticeships to build the skills, experience and employability of young residents. This social enterprise model appears an effective strategy for local development, with the Remade Network calculating that repairs generate ten times as many jobs as recycling.¹⁴

NCDT also has an implicit ethos of tackling local disadvantage and digital exclusion, especially through the Covid-19 pandemic. With local families facing digital exclusion, the demands of home-schooling, and financial adversity, NCDT distributed laptops to local families and provided tech support.¹⁵ Covid has highlighted and exacerbated the digital divide in the UK. A fifth of the UK population, of all ages, suffers from digital exclusion, and this figure rises for those in lower earning brackets. Lacking basic digital skills incurs an income penalty of up to 10%, and hinders one's chance of finding work. Thus, digital exclusion replicates and entrenches socioeconomic disadvantage, all of which has been heightened by the present pandemic.¹⁶

More recently, NCDT has also used its skills and position as a local community anchor organisation to support local third sector organisations to ensure this ecosystem can survive and thrive through adverse circumstances. It is currently working, for instance, to

¹³ (Scottish Government, 2016)

¹⁴ (Remade Network)

¹⁵ (Burgess, 2020)

¹⁶ (Baker, Hutton, Christie, & Wright, 2020)

provide two laptops to a local foodbank and a PC to local social services.

CONCLUSION

As the RSA has argued, the practical realisation of the circular economy will require networks of 'remakeries' and repair shops at a community-level to see through a sustained shift to a low-consumption society.¹⁷ Changes to behaviour and consumption patterns cannot occur without the necessary infrastructure and services in place to facilitate this. The move to a low-waste society and a circular economy therefore relies on services like NCDT's, especially in rural and disadvantaged areas where they may otherwise not take root.

These services are tackling waste and environmental degradation, while also strengthening the life-chances of local residents, through the creation of skilled jobs, offering apprenticeships and training, and tackling digital exclusion.

¹⁷ (RSA, 2016)