

EXEMPLAR BRIEFING REPORT:

REDUCING PLASTICS THROUGH CIRCULAR PRACTICES:
SHARING, REUSING, AND REPAIRING IN SOUTH WEST ENGLAND

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Introduction

This briefing report examines contemporary activities to reduce plastic waste through circular economy practices and behaviour change. We write this as the UK (and most of the world) are still coping with the Covid-19 pandemic. The unexpected and unprecedented effect of the pandemic has demonstrated how quickly behaviours and environmental, social, and economic conditions can change. The triple emergencies of Covid-19, global heating, and ecological collapse makes our ExeMPLaR research into more socially and ecologically sustainable circular economies more urgent than ever. Calls for a 'green and just' transition are shifting from the margins to the mainstream, as the government, private sector and civil society consider pathways to socio-economic recovery. The UK government's cross-party *Reset Report*, published in September 2020, found that two thirds of those surveyed wanted the government to focus an economic recovery on social and environmental wellbeing. The climate and ecological emergency has been shown that action is needed immediately and the research undertaken by the ExeMPLaR contributes to these conversations through a focus on civil society led initiatives that are motivated by social and ecological wellbeing to address waste and resource management through core circular economy practices of sharing, repairing, and reuse within Cornwall, Devon, and Somerset. Here, we build on our first briefing report, which demonstrated that public concern around plastic waste and pollution is high within the region, with an emergent constituency of individual and collective initiatives and actions (Burton and Smith 2019).

Departure points

Our research examined the motivation, opportunities, and barriers to behaviour change to reduce plastic waste through circular economy transitions. We approached this by addressing some notable gaps within existing studies of the circular economy. Firstly, we offer important insights on **civil society contributions** to the transition to a circular economy through an investigation into existing and emergent **circular practices**. Dominant circular economy models fail to engage with the role of the citizen/consumer, an absence that assumes consumers to be

rational actors. This follows a policy and business trend that focusses on individual behaviour change through the nudging¹ of citizens/consumers to make more eco-friendly choices. Our stakeholder workshops established that whilst motivation to act was high, a multitude of barriers to behaviour change exist. Our primary objectives, therefore, were: 1) to examine how and where citizens can participate in and contribute to the circular economy for plastics 2) what circular practices are being made, undone, and reclaimed through these and 3) what are the opportunities and barriers to replicating practices and infrastructures more widely.

Wider ExeMPLaR research, through Life Cycle Assessment data, has demonstrated that the majority of plastics in the region are ubiquitous to everyday living: TVs, fridges, computers, clothes, car tyres etc. (see Kaloumpis et al, 2020)². These difficult plastics pose particular problems as they are often embedded within items containing multiple materials that could be reclaimed and reused but are too difficult or costly to do so. Whilst companies are now legally bound to offer end of lifetime return services (through the collection of old goods when new ones are delivered (mattresses, fridges etc) or via freepost return services (for small items such as routers, mobile phones, and TV boxes)) there is a gap in understanding what solutions are happening from the bottom-up. At the very least, practices of shared access and repair will need to become more normalised. Where the avoidance or purchasing goods might be the most ecologically sound option, for many household items this is an option that limits capabilities. However, sharing, reusing, and repairing items are options that enable use and longevity of items, reducing overall consumption and keeping items in circulation for longer. Our focus on bottom-up initiatives that facilitate diverse practices of sharing, repairing, and reuse addresses key elements of the circular economy framework and responds to concerns regarding a failure to address *the* core problem of climate change: consumption³.

The regional emphasis of the ExeMPLaR project has enabled us to address another gap in understanding, the performance of **circular places** beyond large cities. Whilst an emerging body of work has examined the 'circular city', very little research has been undertaken to investigate the barriers and opportunities beyond the urban setting.

Key insights

Innovative and emergent infrastructures have become part of the regional waste management landscape. Plastic is viewed within a wider social, ecological, and economic sustainability concerns around over consumption, *unsustainable* resource management, climate change, and local wealth building and increased capabilities. Governance and operational models are almost entirely non-profit based and include community and social enterprises, charities, voluntary and donation based informal groups. They offer benefits and opportunities beyond waste reduction, through social innovation, skill sharing, training, paid and voluntary employment. In this sense, we can understand the initiatives as disruptive to the economic status quo, as they follow a social economic model that focusses on social and ecological wellbeing rather financial profits.

The majority of initiatives have emerged from informal groups of concerned citizens and receive little or no public funding. This raises questions about responsibilities and inclusion. Where place-based clusters of initiatives are becoming established social and material infrastructures (Frome, Totnes, Chagford), they can now make tangible impact on reducing carbon emissions, creating employment and training opportunities, and enabling equitable access to the services goods provide without the cost (environmental and financial) of purchasing new items.

Keeping goods in circulation contributes to a circular economy. However, the barriers to creating these infrastructures currently inhibit their replicability across the region and beyond. A lack of policy and financial support means that initiatives following social and circular economic models face the dual problems of competing with new 'cheap' and 'disposable' goods and a reliance on voluntary labour. A lack of regulatory barriers enable low cost production that doesn't reflect externalised costs of ecological and social harms, which often makes problematic goods cheaper to purchase new than to repair, buy second-hand, or share. The initiatives we studies also serve to offer people an entry point into sustainability action.

Take away messages:

It is clear that **citizens want to participate in more sustainable practices** but the social and material infrastructures to mediate green and circular practices are not available to all. Where these do exist people are keen to participate.

The circular economy needs to be as ubiquitous as the problems. The amount of initiatives across the South West region is high in comparison to other non-urban areas of the UK. However, these are predominantly bunched within a limited number of place-based clusters. Whilst these clusters are serving their direct constituency well, understood through per capita access to community level initiatives in the region illustrates the barriers that still exist, with approximately 1 project per 15,000 residents and 1 cluster per 250,000 residents.

Place-based initiatives are shown to be providing context sensitive opportunities that serve the local population through increased capabilities to access used or shared items and repair. Where support networks exist to support these they can have environmental and social impacts. **Financing the transition to circular economy, through green bonds etc., could be effectively invested to support place-based networks and social enterprises.**

Social and material infrastructures are crucial to facilitating the circular economy. More emphasis needs to be placed on incorporating communal spaces within neighbourhood planning and development to facilitate circular practices. For instance, public laundry facilities are referenced in the Feminist Green New Deal as a means through which cultural shifts can be made toward nappy laundering and exchange – addressing the barriers of domestic labour and household space. Car sharing, active travel, sharing initiatives, bulk buying etc are all shown to reduce plastics and other materials and should facilitated and normalised within planning.

Circular economy knowledges and practices are being co-produced within the interstitial spaces between formal and informal infrastructures. Citizen participation is central to the transition to a circular economy and policy makers and industry should pay more consideration to how, where, and why circular practices are performed.

Research Methods

This report builds upon our initial phase, which used stakeholder insights, network mapping, action typology, and social media analysis to get a broad picture of plastic action across Cornwall, Devon, and Somerset. We examined national trends and then analysed the regional picture then adopted a case study approach to explore the contribution of initiatives toward a circular economy. We selected initiatives that were place-based (located within and service a particular named location) and had a presence (understood as tangible social or material infrastructure with measurable impact).

We had planned to undertake multi-sited ethnographic case-studies. Visits started in the spring of 2020, but these were soon stopped with the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown measures. We also participated in a network of groups and individuals attempting to start a sharing library in Exeter, which has also been parked whilst restrictions on face to face meetings are in place. For initiatives where data exists, we used a number of factors to create snapshot case studies, systematically examining their motivations, actions, funding, governance, and impacts. The snap shot case studies are included at the end of this report and include information on motivations, actions, and impacts :

- **Political** – Relating to the government, public affairs and policy, but also relating to matters concerned with power dynamics and organisation/governance, for example some groups there is an element of campaigning. Some will be funded or run by local authorities. Some will be run as co-operatives or may mention commons/collective ownership.
- **Economic** – methods of redistributing or exchanging goods and/or labour. Generating income or jobs. Creating or keeping wealth in the local area.
- **Environmental** – Directly or indirectly reducing waste, reducing carbon, reusing or sharing goods, saving goods from disposal.
- **Wellbeing** – Psychological health and wellbeing benefits (for individuals and community) from access to items and services. Volunteering and educational

opportunities to access to learning new skills for personal and societal resilience and regeneration.

- **Social** – Building community, inclusion, diversity, social integration, community cohesion, making friends.

Sharing Initiatives

Sharing is inherently collective endeavour and forms an important node on the circular economy cycle (see figure X), as it reduces the amount of items in circulation whilst retaining or increasing access to the services they provide. Emerging circular practices are becoming established across sectors, including formal life-time rental schemes, where you lease equipment for its lifetime and the manufacturer, who provide replacement parts, upgrades, and repairs as needed, car-sharing schemes managed by local authorities and social enterprises, sharing libraries and online neighbourhood sharing platforms, such as streetbank.com. Interest in the social practices and infrastructures of sharing is on the increase. Interest in sharing (mainly in cities) is growing. *Shareable*, an online network for sharing initiatives, documents examples from across the world⁴, from shared community assets, such as urban farms and solar gardens, to street level shared fridges⁵ and McLaren and Agyeman (2016) present city case studies examining how sharing initiatives are contributing to social and environmental just-sustainability⁶ from Amsterdam to Singapore. Civil society initiated sharing schemes necessitate a shift in practice from consumer to user and from individual ownership to shared assets. These require high levels of trust and active participation to keep items within circulation and an ethics of care to items and other users. Research on natural resource management has already shown that resources held in-common (through commoning) can be effectively managed for environmental and social benefits.

The value (to the owners/user) of most household items is the service they provide, primarily the capability of undertaking one or more tasks⁷. Outside of the service that items provide they are redundant and spend most of their life being stored. For instance, in 2014 the average UK household spent £110 on tools⁸, many of which will be used for a small amount of time. Sharing, rather than owning, items has social and environmental benefits. The environmental benefits of sharing libraries are in the reduced impacts at the extraction, manufacture, and disposal stages through a reduction of items needed for purchase. Many household items, such as electronic tools and kitchen gadgets, constitute a diverse range of natural, man-made and precious resources. The mix of materials used to

make electronics are often difficult and expensive to recover at the end of a product's life. Social benefits are also at the forefront of the sharing library ethos, enabling individual and collective wellbeing through increased capability to undertake tasks such as cooking and DiY, enjoy leisure activities, sports and social events, initiate small businesses, play and educational development. For many individuals and households purchasing non-essential items is prohibitive, particularly those on low incomes, or problematic due to living in rented, shared, or small properties where storage space is limited. Sharing libraries enable people to access equipment, and the services therein, for a low one-off charge or monthly subscription (or for free in some of the initiative we studied). Sharing, therefore, has equity benefits, increasing the capabilities of all community members access to services and activities that in turn contribute to the cultivation of thriving places. Sharing libraries are also important mechanisms to keep wealth within the local area, which is beneficial for social and environmental wellbeing.

Sharing libraries in the UK include specialist equipment loaning, such as the Edinburgh Tool Library, which hold over 1000 tools and workshop space (LINK), and more general items. Our research identified and analysed UK sharing libraries through publicly available data, to establish how they were funded, when they started and any historical trajectories, type and amount of items held, user levels, membership types and costs, governance, and any support from partnerships and/or wider networks. Libraries held between 37 and 1000 items, with an average of around 300. Whilst some had received small amounts of support from local authorities the majority had relied on online crowdfunding and community fundraising activities for start-up costs and a mixture of purchased and donated for the initial stock. Very few had their own premises, which includes two within our research area. Most sharing libraries are located within other community hubs, including a public library, a co-working space, and within a community centres. New models are emerging to meet needs. The first mobile sharing library in the UK started in August 2020 (Totnes) and the Crystal Palace LoT has pioneered a new model for the UK, which uses a self-service system via lockers, which people can access via an online platform. The following section looks at the sharing libraries within our research area of Cornwall, Devon, and Somerset.

Sharing Initiatives in the South West of England

The growth in interest in sharing libraries means that this is a shifting landscape, in addition to the initiatives that we discuss here there are at least four further initiatives in the early stages of setting up.

Two sharing initiatives that have the longest trajectories research area are nappy libraries and toy libraries. Toy libraries have served individuals and groups since the 1990s, but over the last 10 years as many have closed as have opened. The backdrop of (relatively) cheap toys with short lifespans and lack of funding avenues has created a difficult environment for toy libraries. However, toy libraries still provide a service with new initiatives now on the increase after a few years of decline. Niche sharing libraries also include tool libraries, notably the popular 'Men in Sheds' concept, promoted by Age Concern and the Men's Shed Association to create shared workshop spaces and tools. adopted by communities to share books and other items (see image x). Within the Covid-19 lockdown many of these were put into a new use for sharing food items.

The Library of Things model of sharing libraries, carrying a large and diverse range of items was pioneered by the Share initiative in Frome. The model has been adopted by the Share Shed in Totnes, Share and Repair in Bath, and Borrow Don't buy in Plymouth. A further four known initiatives are in the early stages, with groups established and local consultations taking place. SHARE: A Library of Things in Frome, Somerset, was the first UK based sharing library to carry a wide range of general items. The project started in 2015, as a partnership between Frome Town Council and Edventure, an education and training social enterprise for community entrepreneurs, Sustainable Frome (a member of the Transition Town Network), and the Cheese and Grain, a social enterprise community art and music venue. SHARE has its own premises, a rented shop in the town centre and works closely with Edventure to help young people into enterprise by gaining experience through running the library. SHARE currently has an inventory of 950 items available for loan. Most items are those that would be used less than once a week but have an enabling impact on wellbeing, including kitchen gadgets such as a juicer and dehydrator, DIY tools and accessories, camping equipment, events/party paraphernalia, pressure washers and a cider press. The *Share Shed* in Totnes

started in 2017 and also has its own premises (rented) and is currently converting a lorry into a mobile sharing library to be launched later in 2020. The library holds more than 350 items, ranging from household appliances to events equipment.

Two initiatives are hosted within existing community spaces. *Borrow Don't Buy* was also established in 2017 and is located within a co-worker space (ThinQTanQ) in Plymouth, where regular repair cafes have taken place for . It holds more than 300 general items with a good stock of electronic and digital equipment that would be of interest to creative workers and community groups (such as digital cameras and sound systems). Share and Repair, in Weston (Bath), started in 2018, having run successful Repair cafes beforehand. The library of things is located within a community centre and holds 37 household electrical items, DIY and garden tools.

None of the sharing libraries receive any regular external funding and most of the start-up funding has come from crowdfunding and community fundraising events. Whilst some of the items have been bought new, there is a reliance on donated items. The Share Shed in Totnes is managed by the Network for Wellbeing and keeps a wish list of items that have been requested, so that people can donate items or cash to the project. In August 2020, the Share Shed launched a mobile sharing library, which now serves the small towns of south Dartmoor once a week.

All of the libraries operate through membership, charging between £5 and £30 per year, or monthly subscriptions of less than £5, which gives a (varying) percentage discount off each item. In addition to membership, most have a pay-as-you-go system. The cost of borrowing an item is usually less than £10 per week, with a small amount of expensive items costing slightly more (for instance, bikes).

ReUse Initiatives

ReUse, through disparate forms, has long been a rallying call by green campaigners and sustainability groups, notably as part of the three Rs (Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle). Most recently it has been at the forefront of calls by plastic free and zero waste campaigning. Whilst most of our research has examined the role of place-based community initiatives and social enterprises serving domestic and SME actors in small geographical areas, national commercial enterprises are also growing in response to large scale organisations wishing to reduce waste and financial outputs. Within many neighbourhoods informal reuse initiatives exist through the understanding that unwanted items can be placed on doorsteps, walls, and front gardens and taken for free by others. Neighbourhood scale Facebook groups have become a popular route to advertise these.

Beyond our emphasis on citizen-led initiatives, reuse is garnering attention as a waste management practice, business model, and social infrastructure. Most local authority waste tips now have reuse shops, where good quality items can be salvaged from the waste stream for re-sale. Charities have a long tradition of collecting and reselling clothing and household items, with some, such as Oxfam having schemes that enable them to establish markets to redistribute a high level of donated textiles and material beyond their high street shops, including the sale of rags to garages, and reclaimed materials including shoe rubber and metal from bras for reuse in new products. Local authority and charity partnerships exist in many parts of the country to collect donated furniture for redistribution to people in need. On a national scale, the commercial enterprise WARP IT (warp-it.co.uk) is a redistribution network linking public sector organisations who have and/or need items such as office furniture. WARP IT operates through an online platform and currently works with a large number of local authorities, hospitals and universities and its own data estimates that it has so far diverted more than 3500mt of items that would otherwise be disposed of, with an estimated financial saving of over £25million. Where high street 'scoop and weigh' shops lost favour with the rise of supermarket shopping in the 1980/90s a new wave of shops dedicated to zero waste shopping or offering bring-your-own-container dispensing is now gaining a new customer base. Bring your own bottle milk kiosks are also on

the increase, as customers can buy through shops or at the farm gate. The popularity of plastic free campaigns alongside a shift away from plastic packaged goods, has seen supermarkets trialling food dispensers and allowing customers to use their own containers at deli counters. Supermarkets are also experimenting with reuse schemes. Tesco have initiated a scheme to provide reusable metal containers for customers and Waitrose has been clear that its own trials came in response to an 80% drop in sales of goods in plastic packaging following the Blue Planet II effect⁹. Carrying a reusable coffee cup and/or water bottles are now common practice, though again infrastructures to facilitate wider usage, for instance free water fountains are a point of contention in the UK. Once common place (and still common in some parts of the world), public water fountains went into decline following water privatisation and public health concerns. The ReFill App, introduced by the Bristol based not-for-profit organisation *City to Sea*, is an interactive map where people can tag publicly accessible water sources in shops, galleries, etc. There is also a movement to reintroduce public water fountains as a matter of public health and environmental sustainability. Many events and festivals in our region and beyond have introduced water bars and the RNLI has been trialling water refill stations on beaches.

Nappy libraries are an example of where reuse and sharing overlap. Waste from disposable nappies is significant. An average baby requires more than 5000 nappy changes before they are toilet trained and within the UK more than 3 billion disposable nappies are used and disposed of each year¹⁰. Whilst there has been a lot of discussion about the environmental merits of cloth nappies over disposable nappies, relating to water and energy usages, the desire to reduce plastic consumption and household waste is driving a switch to cloth nappies. The barriers to using more environmentally friendly alternatives have focussed on convenience, labour, and physical space. Local laundry provision has been highlighted by the Women's Environmental Network as a social and environmental service that would help overcome these issues, whilst keeping wealth and employment within communities¹¹.

ReUse initiatives in the south west of England

Many community reuse initiatives in the region are informal and/or too small to have a notable presence. This does not mean they lack any impact, but rather it makes them hard for us to find them. More in-depth, place-based ethnographic research would undoubtedly find many more initiatives that are active on this scale. Lots of these small initiatives demonstrate that reuse can be effectively managed between small groups, such as the Penzance shop owners that have created a packaging reuse service, using a shopping centre store-room where the group saves bubble-wrap and other reusable packaging to be used again. Online networks are also facilitating social infrastructures for reuse. These include peer to peer exchange platforms such as Freecycle, that operates at neighbourhood, town, and area scales through the membership platform or Facebook community groups. Facebook 'zero waste' and 'plastic free' groups are another means through which people are offering and claiming unwanted item.

There are at least 15 active Nappy Libraries across our research area (based on those affiliated to the UK Nappy Library Network). Most hold regular events within public or community premises, such as public libraries and schools. Most of these hold cloth nappy starter kits that can be loaned for a fee, with laundering and care to be undertaken by the user household.

There are at least 30 Men in Sheds groups within our study area, mostly in Devon and Somerset (with two in Cornwall). The groups combine repair, repurposing, and sharing. The link between sharing space, social wellbeing and mental health has been the motivational driver behind the sheds, however, their popularity indicates both a wiliness to participate in such initiatives and a social benefit to doing so. Neighbourhood sharing spaces have emerged from the Men in Sheds work, with post box style community reuse popping up in neighbourhoods. During the Covid-19 lockdown many of these were used to redistribute food items.

Proper Job, based within the Dartmoor National Park, in Chagford, is one of the earliest initiatives we found in the region. Starting in the 1990s, as a community compost scheme, it now a registered charity that manages a large reuse and

recycling centre (with units dedicated to furniture, kitchenware, plumbing and building supplies), garden tools and sundries, a town centre shop selling upcycled and high quality goods, a community café, and runs regular workshops connected to repair and reuse. Proper Job also manages a paint reuse initiative. Whilst paints may not get much publicity as a plastics issue many contain plasticizers and phthalates, contributing to plastic debris and pollution, as the wider ExeMPLar project has been examining. Paint reuse networks have started across the UK, for instance the Dulux sponsored Community Repaint network. As part of the Proper Job Reuse Centre (Chagford) a paint reuse initiative enables the donation and purchase of partially used or unwanted pots of paint, including domestic and commercial brands and quantities.



Repair Initiatives

Interest in repair is having a revival in the UK, with prime time TV programmes dedicated to bringing items back into use. Politically, the right to repair has also gained currency through campaigns that question what ownership means if you don't have the option to repair items. Repair and repair-ability are key to the circular economy, keeping items in use for longer. Whilst the last three decades have seen a societal shift away from repair and toward disposability, the recent growth in political and practical interest in repairing is fostering new interest and social innovation. Despite criticism that some items are better being replaced by newer products with better energy and water efficiency, on the whole it is more energy and resource efficient to keep items in use for longer. Emerging, largely, through maker movements, social innovation centred on repair has seen the emergence of initiatives and movements concerned with a number of material goods that are connected to plastics: electrical and household items, clothing and textiles, mobile phones. The repair group ?? were pivotal in shaping the London Waste and Recycling Board's circular economy route map for ewaste, demonstrating a shift into considerations of systemic change.

The social and environmental politics of repair can be seen within lobbying at national and international scales to legislate against planned obsolescence and legal cases against manufacturer repair monopolies. Until the 1990s, the majority of domestic electrical goods were purchased from high street stores that had their own repair workshops and team of skilled engineers. Planned obsolescence is a major barrier to circularity. The intentional design of products to have a limited lifespan, with no or very limited means of repair to prolong use and making the salvage of recyclable materials difficult or impossible. This can be achieved by design, ensuring there is no means of directly accessing the mechanical features of a product or through the unavailability or discontinuation of components, design features, or services necessary to make an item function. Apple has come under legal and public scrutiny for its fast turnaround of features that render components (such as headphones) unworkable and its monopoly on repair, which can only be undertaken by Apple affiliated repairers. Covid-19 has seen the issue of repair politicised through the awareness that hospital equipment, including

ventilators, were unusable due to a refusal by manufacturers to share repair manuals and a backlog of faulty machinery (ADD REFS).

In addition to the environmental benefits of repair, the social benefits of repair as a community activity are shown in the repair café movement and targeted initiatives such as the Age Concern network of Men's Shed, which offer shared spaces and workshop facilities. Community workshops are starting to come back into the public domain, including a woodworking workshop in Edinburgh and upholstery workshop space and community bike workshops in Bristol.

The Repair Café movement has grown in recent years, from a lone initiative in Amsterdam run by Martine Postma stated in 2009 to a global network including almost 2000 registered groups within Europe and many more informal groups running their own spaces based on their model (ADD REF). Repair Cafés are managed and run by volunteers. Using a pop-up format the Repair Cafés bring a team of voluntary repairers to a site within a town or village (often in a community centre) where they will undertake repairs – mostly electrical domestic items and clothing – for a donation and sometimes a small fee if replacement parts are required. Repair Cafés are framed in circular narratives that situate repair as a means to avoid waste and save carbon. As a snapshot, the Bix Fix provides a useful picture of Repair Cafés in practice. On the 15th of February (2020) 70 Repair Cafés took place across the UK. Despite the day being one of severe storms across the UK 2,253 repairs took place for 1,974 customers. This has been estimated at £100,000 worth of goods saved from disposal and more than 55 tonnes of carbon saved from waste processing emissions (Recycle Devon).

An international survey into the Repair Café network by Charter et al (2016, 2020) illustrate the environmental and social benefits of the events and also the barriers encountered. Whilst the cafes are becoming important hubs bringing people together, sharing skills and enabling continued use of goods they are reliant on voluntary labour and donations to continue, with only 12% of responding groups receiving any form of government or public funding. The majority of groups are formed by small informal groups (many of whom then join international networks) and whilst the majority now have a social media presence (mainly

Facebook) there is still a heavy reliance on word of mouth promotion and community board posters. Premises are also a problem for many groups, meaning that regularity and consistency are often difficult to achieve. The demographic of the volunteers is also a factor that concerns many groups, with most over 60 and a lack of younger volunteers coming forward to support the groups. Impact monitoring is low across Repair Cafés, with most relying on paper and pen to record items mended, despite access to international calculators that can assist with impact assessment, through calculating carbon savings.

Repair Initiatives in the South West of England

The regional trend echoes the wider trends within repair initiatives. The most popular form is the community based repair café events with a number of physical spaces dedicated to community access to repair and workshop facilities and niche projects aimed at specific sectors (such as bikes and textiles).

Regular Repair Cafés take place across the study area, in both rural and urban areas. As of Autumn 2019, there were at least twenty-eight active groups: 12 in Devon, 6 in Cornwall, and 10 in Somerset. The sharing libraries in Plymouth, Frome, Totnes, and Bath are all connected to active repair cafés. Some of the repair cafés are linked to transition groups (including Crediton and Blackdown Hills).

The Remakery, in Frome, is now an established “shared workshop equipped with tools to enable making, fixing and up-cycling in Frome. People can use it for their hobbies, projects or to incubate a making business”. This social enterprise model, a hybrid of sharing and repairing space, is becoming popular in other parts of the UK and offers both skill-sharing and facilities to empower people to mend and create their own items. The Exeter based Ride On social enterprise offers workshop facilities, tools, and support for those wanting to fix their own bikes in addition to offering low cost bikes - that have been donated and repaired – for people on low incomes.

Textiles initiatives TeX and The Mend Assembly are promoting the reuse and repair of textiles and clothing. The Mend Assembly are a recently formed textile enterprise located in Totnes. They describe themselves as a hub for “Circular fashion made real and local”¹². The group current has a workspace that is open to

members and run regular face-to-face and online workshops on repair techniques and skills for specialist items (such as raincoats). TeX, based in Truro, upcycles and repurposes textiles and clothing, whilst enabling social benefits through training.



(Image: Devon Live)

Case Study Snapshots of South West Exemplars

Name: Borrow Don't Buy **Focus:** Sharing

Summary: Borrow Don't Buy is a sharing initiative based in Plymouth with a library in the town centre, within the co-working space, ThinQTanQ. Established in 2017, after successfully crowdfunding to set up Plymouth's first sharing library, a place for the community to borrow items they may need to use but didn't own. It has a diverse inventory, majority being used or donated goods, from power tools to camping equipment. All items are available for members to borrow on a PAYG basis or for a set annual fee. The library's inventory now consisting of over 400 items and a total of 879 borrowing loans have been completed. In addition to their library, Borrow Don't Buy also runs a free Repair café every two months.

Stated Goals: By 2020, Borrow Don't Buy hopes increase its membership to 1000, have 600 items in its inventory and run a minimum of 6 educational events. It is also committed to developing a "borrow-it-forward" scheme to support free loans for people in need/community groups.

Stated Motivation: To extend the life-cycle and use of products, whilst also strengthening the local community. Its vision is to "assist everyone to have access to the stuff they need, without it costing the earth." They also "want to help our members save money, reduce clutter and reduce our carbon footprint while strengthening our community".



| Objectives | Motivations | Impacts |
|---------------|---|---|
| Economic | Providing access to goods for all, at a fair price. | Borrowing rather than buying, has saved the people of Plymouth over £91k in the past 2 years. Attendees to the Repair Café have also collectively saved £5,503, benefiting from further use of their repaired items. |
| Environmental | Keeping resources in use/circulation for longer and reducing excess purchasing | Borrow Don't Buy only purchases new goods for its inventory as a last resort or out of safety concerns. Therefore, the majority are either repaired items or second-hand donations which helps extend the items' lives and this, in turn, makes them more carbon efficient. The Repair Café has also helped prevent a further 122 items from going to landfill. |
| Wellbeing | Volunteering and community resilience | Its dedicated team of volunteers have collectively given 1,296 hours to set up and run Borrow Don't Buy, 440 of which have been devoted to offering assistance in the Repair Café. |
| Social | Building social cohesion, resilience and providing an inclusive tool to reduce inequalities | Borrow Don't Buy provides a space for the knowledge, skills and tools of Plymouth to be shared promoting inclusivity and actively encouraging participation for all. If it did not exist, 28% of their members say they would not have completed the task the item borrowed was required for. |

Name: SHARE **Focus: Sharing and Repairing**

Summary: SHARE was the UK’s first ‘Library of Things’ opening in 2015. It is based in Frome, Somerset and offers a place for the community to loan items instead of having to purchase them new. The sharing social enterprise was initially set up by eight students as part an ‘edventure: START-UP’ course in community entrepreneurship and in association with Frome Town Council and the Cheese & Grain. Now running for five years, SHARE employs two part-time paid managers and a team of dedicated volunteers. The inventory holds over 950 items, mainly sourced from local donations that range from DIY and power tools to events bunting and wine glasses. In total over 1,480 items have been loaned for an averaging fee of £2.40. SHARE also runs various upcycling workshops and a monthly Repair Café both helping the community to further reduce their personal consumption.

Stated Motivation: SHARE is motivated by getting people “to spend less, waste less and connect more”. SHARE aims to instigate a “shift from an economy founded on individual consumption and ownership to one based on community sharing and use”. Recognising their unique position, as UK’s longest running ‘Library of Things’, they offer guidance and support to others wanting to launch similar initiatives. Driven by this motivation to promote a community of sharing, in 2019 they came together with SHARE Oxford and London Library of Things to set up first ShareFest – an annual conference for Libraries of Things.



| Objectives | Motivations | Impacts |
|---------------|---|---|
| Political | Challenging the status quo promoting a shift towards a community of sharing | SHARE lends resources to other local social enterprises e.g. Incredible Edible’s and the Community’s Fridge and their ToolKit has helped other towns open their own ‘Library of Things’. |
| Economic | Bringing employment and offering affordable alternatives to traditional hire services | Employs two part-time paid managers and 10+ regular volunteers. The SHARE shop also hopes to provide access to items for all - the equivalent retail value of items borrowed is £66,800 compared to only £4,108 being spent on borrowing in total by SHARE’s customers. |
| Environmental | Encouraging a reduction in consumption of new items and the shared use of already existing products | In 2018/19, if all borrowed items were instead purchased new, an additional 92 tonnes of greenhouse gases would have been emitted, 117 tonnes of raw materials used and 10 tonnes of manufacturing waste produced. The Repair Café has also inspected over 200 items. |
| Wellbeing | Employment, volunteering and community resilience. | SHARE’s workshops are highly attended and they offer a space for exchange of knowledge, advice, skills, ideas, conversation and friendship. |
| Social | Prompting the sharing of skills and sustainable education, community cohesion and resilience. | SHARE’s association with edventure: START-UP has directly involved many students in the running of the shop. This has also helped provided a space for inter-generational collaboration. |

Summary: Share & Repair is a volunteer-led, community project in Bath and North East Somerset currently applying for charitable status. Share & Repair launched in April 2017, with its first Repair Café event in Bear Flat, Bath. Since then, they have set up regular monthly cafés in Larkhall, Weston, Southdown and Peasedown St John with pop-ups in Foxhill and at the University of Bath. These have all encouraged local repair volunteers to use and share their skills for the benefit others and the environment. More recently, Share & Repair have also opened a permanent ‘Library of Things’ in Bath (at Weston Hub) which has just under 100 items in its inventory and has launched several ‘HOW to workshops’ on power tool usage, sewing skills and bike repairs. In 2020, Share & Repair also secured a four-month council lease for a pop-up shop in Bath town centre offering them a centralised place to house a bigger Library of Things, Repair Café and HOW TO workshops. Unfortunately, they were unable launch in March but are hopeful the council will extend their lease once they are able to open again.



Stated Motivation: Share & Repair is motivated by encouraging a community of sharing and helping to reduce levels of personal consumption. Share & Repair’s vision is that: “By sharing 'things' in our community, we can reduce the environmental impact of purchasing and owning items, as well as saving money”.

| Objectives | Motivations | Impacts |
|---------------|---|---|
| Economic | Providing a space for repair volunteers to share their skills and help the community save money | Share & Repair employ one paid member of staff responsible for social media and marketing and have involved over 160 volunteers in their Repair Cafés. In total 1000 items have been inspected and 559 repaired. |
| Environmental | Keeping resources in use for longer | Since, October 2019 it is estimated Share & Repair have prevented 1,196kg of CO2 emissions from being released and saved 218kg of additional waste from being produced. |
| Wellbeing | Making retired individuals feel valued by the skills they can offer | Share & Repair has hosted 56 cafés all offering an opportunity for volunteers to feel valued, share their skills with others and develop relations. |
| Social | To become a charity educating for sustainability | Share & Repair goal for 2020 is to become a charity. Share & Repair has worked with students from the University of Bath opening a pop-up store to help students repair their items and educate on sustainability |

Name: The Share Shed **Focus: Sharing**

Summary: The Share Shed is a ‘Library of Things’ based in Totnes Devon, where people can borrow items at nominal cost. Inspired by SHARE (the UK’s first Library of Things), the Share Shed was opened in 2017 by the Network of Wellbeing, with the help of Totnes town council and Lottery Fund support, in a premise beyond Totnes’ town centre. Since launching, the Share Shed has been greatly received by people of Totnes. Now operating within a shop on the main high-street, the Share Shed has over 600 members and has developed an inventory of over 350 donated items. Significantly in 2019, the Share Shed successfully won £50K from the National Lottery Community Fund. This funding has enabled the Share Shed to become the first mobile sharing library - extending its service to Totnes’s surrounding villages. Looking forward The Share Shed, hopes to widen its mobile library service and continue supporting communities in becoming more sustainable and collaborative.



Stated Motivation: The Share Shed is motivated by helping people to “save money, space and resources.” The Share Shed aims to help Totnes develop a “more resourceful community whilst also reducing the town’s impact on Earth’s precious resources.”

| Objectives | Motivations | Impacts |
|---------------|---|--|
| Political | To challenge the status quo inspiring people to engage in social change | Over 800 people attended the first ShareFest– a day celebrating repairing, sharing, and making, organised by the Share Shed. More broadly, The Share Shed is also part of the global transition town movement to reduce our impact on the Earth’s resources. |
| Economic | To make items available for people to borrow at a low cost | The membership fee is between £5 and £30 annually. It is estimated members have saved £28,000 in borrowing rather than buying since launch. |
| Environmental | Keeping resources in use/circulation for longer | Only three items in the inventory have been purchased new. The Share Shed has also prevented the production of 268kg of plastic and 7.5 tonnes of CO2 from being produced. |
| Wellbeing | To support a more collaborative lifestyle | A bench sits outside the Share Shed saying ‘Share a Conversation’ encouraging social interaction even for those not borrowing. |
| Social | To build a more resourceful community | Employ a large team of local volunteers that share their skills with the community. In January 2020, set up mobile ‘Library of Things’ to improve accessibility for members of the community who are unable to access the town centre shop. |

Name: The Remakery Focus: Sharing and Re-use

Summary: The Remakery: Frome is a shared workshop at the Welsh Mill Hub, equipped with tools that allow locals to make, fix and up-cycle items. It offers a shared space for people to engage with their hobbies, come together and for some to incubate a ‘making’ business. The community enterprise was launched by a student team on the Edventure: Frome’s Start-Up Course in May 2017. As well as offering an open workshop space for its 70 members, The Remakery also houses many inspiring local initiatives including both the Men’s and Women’s Sheds and Frome Light The Night. More recently, the workshop has also launched the Edventure: Frome’s MAKE Course that is specifically aimed at young adults, helping them to develop their employability skills whilst working as a team to design and make ethical products to sell at Frome Independent Market. In the future, The Remakery hopes to run even more workshops that help encourage material reuse and tackle loneliness.



Stated Motivation: The Remakery: Frome is motivated by empowering the Frome community providing a space for new skills to be learnt and to encourage the re-use of materials. Their projects also aim to “help local people improve their mental and physical health, combat loneliness and increase their confidence, whilst bringing diverse people in the local community together”.

| Objectives | Motivations | Impacts |
|---------------|---|---|
| Economic | To provide access to an affordable workshop space | Membership is £15 a year plus £3 each visit. The Remakery also rents the space to local makers so they can host workshops – cost of hire is based on a percentage cut of the profits made - reduces risk compared to a fixed renting fee. |
| Environmental | To encourage re-use of materials | Run up-cycling workshops, reduces consumption through shared resources and tools. |
| Wellbeing | To help local people improve their mental and physical health and combat loneliness | Encourage people to use the workshop as a place just to come and sit for a while and have a chat over a cup of tea. Inclusive venue – run women only and men only workshops. |
| Social | To help the community learn new skills | In partnership with local job centre run a course to develop employability skills for local unemployed adults, during Covid 19 they have run 3 free online workshops teaching individuals how they can make their own face masks at home. |

Name: TeX

Focus: Textile Re-use

Summary: TeX, Textiles with a difference is a project run by the Cultivate Cornwall social enterprise that aims to help businesses re-purpose their textile waste and implement ideas surrounding a circular economy. The project has worked with numerous companies, regional and national, helping them in reaching zero waste on textiles whilst also supporting their local communities. As part of this process, they assist businesses to identify ways they could re-purpose their textile waste. Sometimes this has involved helping them to develop new partnerships with local businesses, that can use their waste to manufacture products for them that they in turn buy back. Integrating these circular economy principles into business models, often has a myriad of positive outcomes for the environment, as waste is reduced and socially as further employment opportunities are created making the local community more economically resilient. As well as individualised support for businesses looking to reduce their textile waste, TeX also run free sewing and textile workshops, from their high-street store in Bodmin, that helps with social inclusion, generational skill share and community engagement. Their future aims are to continue working with textiles in ways that bring the community together.



Stated Motivation: TeX, Textiles with a difference project is motivated by encouraging ideas surrounding a circular economy to benefit the community. They aim to help create sustainable communities by recycling, reusing and re-purposing new and used textiles.

| Objectives | Motivations | Impacts |
|---------------|---|---|
| Political | | |
| Economic | To create job opportunities and allow businesses to make more efficient use of their material resources | Helped to create employment opportunities in areas of deprivation. Host events in their high-street shop that involve no cost to participate. |
| Environmental | To implement ideas of circular economy | In 2018, TeX diverted just over 6 ton of textiles from landfill. This was enabled through their events, workshops, sales and activities run throughout the year. |
| Wellbeing | To provide free workshops that bring the community together | Run Social Monday met ups that give a chance for those suffering from isolation to come together at least once a week and to be with like-minded people. |
| Social | To increase community resilience | Host BiG Lunches – have fed over 600 people and provided free books, clothing and entertainment at these events. Cross generational skill exchange through their textile workshops. |

Name: Community Action Groups Devon Focus: Networking, capacity building, and waste reduction

Summary: Community Action Groups (CAG) Devon is a local network of sustainability groups in Teignbridge and Mid-Devon local authority areas. Established in 2016, and funded by Devon County Council, CAG Devon now has 14 members groups directly tackling waste reduction and reuse in Devon and is co-ordinated by environmental consultancy Bristol Futures. CAG Devon aims to support its members helping them to develop projects, organise events, secure access to funding and insurance, publicise events, and encourage the sharing of skills, resources and ideas between the different sustainable groups within the network. In order to provide these services, CAG Devon hosts several networking events throughout the year that encourage all members to come together, collaborate and share ideas, as well as offering specialised help on a one-to-one basis. Some of the projects CAG Devon have helped support include: food surplus cafes, repair cafes, clothes swaps, composting workshops and skill share events helping people to share, swap, mend, reduce, re-use and recycle. In the future, CAG Devon hopes to expand its network further and continue to support groups in offering exciting and informative sustainable workshops to the communities of Devon.



Stated Motivation: CAG Devon is motivated by being a facilitator of change helping local sustainability groups to run successful reuse and waste prevention events.

| Objectives | Motivations | Impacts |
|---------------|---|--|
| Political | | |
| Economic | To save the public money by enabling them to re-use their items and upcycle materials | In 2019/20 events run by CAG Devon have helped consumers save £32,074 and received £102,205 value of volunteers' time for free. |
| Environmental | Waste reduction and re-use | In 2019/20 CAG Devon have prevented 4.86 tonnes of waste and diverted 2.72 tonnes of waste from landfill or incineration which has avoided 18.54 extra tonnes of carbon emissions from being emitted. |
| Wellbeing | To bring the community together to make positive change | The events run by CAG Devon sustainability groups bring intergenerational groups together and encourage skills and knowledge to be shared between them – combats loneliness and helps develop a sense of community |
| Social | To encourage collaboration and build community resilience | In 2019/20 8,548 attendees at CAG events and 6, 831 volunteer hours were given during these events. |

Name: Surfers Against Sewage **Focus: Campaigning and Networking**



Summary: Surfers Against Sewage (SAS) is a national marine conservation and campaigning charity that “unites, inspires and empowers communities in the fight against plastic pollution”. SAS started in 1990 as a group of Cornish surfers united by their concern for the levels of pollution and sewage contaminating UK beaches and their waters. Over the last three decades, the organisation has grown significantly in scale, influence, scope and size. Its headquarters in St Agnes now employs over 30 full-time staff and the charity has played an extremely influential role in campaigning against plastic pollution within the UK and beyond. Today the organisation represents an ever-expanding supporter base and campaigns on a diverse range of issues. One of their most popular campaigns has been the plastic-free communities’ scheme – which awards accreditation to place-based groups for community-led sustainable action. To date, over 30 groups in the South West have achieved ‘plastic-free’ status and over 100 have pledged to work toward certification. As well as supporting grassroots community-led action, SAS Waves All-Party Parliamentary Group is also influencing top-down change, encouraging politicians to explore and implement policies that tackle the plastics problem.

Stated Motivation: SAS is motivated by protecting our oceans, waves, beaches and wildlife from pollution and plastic waste. They state: “Our priority going forward is to fight the plastic pollution that blights our beaches and strangles our seashores”. They adopt a two-pronged approach; firstly SAS aim to stop the problem at the source and secondly to clean up pollution from UK beaches.

| Objectives | Motivations | Impacts |
|---------------|---|--|
| Political | To campaign against plastic pollution | Set up Surfers Against Sewage’s Ocean Conservation All-Party Parliamentary Group in 2014, published the Ocean Conservation Register - report commissioned to facilitate dialogue between Parliament and those working in the ocean sector, helped campaign for plastic bag levy charge and, collected 225,000 signatures calling for a return system to stop plastic bottle pollution. |
| Economic | To provide employment | Employ 20 full-time workers and 215 regional volunteer reps. |
| Environmental | To tackle society’s throwaway culture and clean up pollution from UK beaches | In 2018, SAS organised 448 beach clean ups in the South West that helped removed 31,235kg of plastic pollution in total from beaches in the region. |
| Wellbeing | To ensure our communities now and future generations can enjoy our UK beaches | 16,826 people in the South West volunteered their time at a local beach cleans ran by SAS in 2018 |
| Social | To provide sustainable education | Launched ‘Plastic Free Schools’ a pupil-led educational programme designed to create positive environmental change – over 1000 schools have achieved accreditation with the first being in Devonshire. |

Name: Proper Job **Focus: ReUse and Recycling**

Summary: Proper Job is a reuse and recycling initiative with a reuse and recycling yard on the outskirts of Chagford, Devon and a shop and café in the centre of the town. The initiative is within the Dartmoor National Park. The initiative started as a community composting scheme in 1993 and has grown into a reuse centre with household good, paints, furniture, plumbing, gardening, clothes, books, bikes, and games in addition to a comprehensive recycling collection points. In 2018 the initiative gained charitable status. The initiative runs regular educational activities and practical workshops. The initiative is now seeking planning permission and financial support for a “permanent site for composting, growing, educational training, recycling and reuse.”

Stated Motivation: Proper Job is motivated by environmental sustainability and the loss of jobs and shops due to economic changes to rural areas. *“Proper Job’s vision is of a protected and preserved local environment; with local people taking active and positive responsibility for their wasted resources, by engaging in waste reduction, repair, reuse, composting and recycling”. “The local natural environment is improved, resources are conserved, the community is healthier and more resilient and the shift in behaviour brings with it positive economic impact”.*



| Objectives | Motivations | Impacts |
|---------------|--|--|
| Political | | |
| Economic | Bringing employment and training to a rural community. | Employs 20 local people and has 7 volunteers, which is substantial for a rural enterprise. Regular collaborations with 15 small businesses and social enterprises in an area where shops and businesses have been closing. The work of the initiative has bought in an estimated £4million in local economic, environmental, and social benefits in the last 10 years. |
| Environmental | Keeping resources in use/circulation for longer and recycling where this isn’t possible. | In the year 2018-2019 Proper Job recycled 34 tonnes of resources, reused 25 tonnes of furniture, and 4000 litres of paint. |
| Wellbeing | Employment, volunteering, social capabilities and community resilience. | Regular workshops engage more than 250 participants every year and the initiative now runs Uptown, a shop selling good quality reusable and upcycled items and a wholefood café. |
| Social | Community cohesion and resilience, education for sustainability. | Town centre café and workshop venue. Local jobs and training opportunities. Collaborations with 15 local SMEs. |

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