



EU Design Days: Design for a Circular Economy

Action on a more circular economy starts with design: the design of products, the design of business models, the design of services, and the design of processes. We have to learn to think about lifecycles, and designers have a key role to play.

Better design is one of the key aspects articulated in the EU Circular Economy Action Plan, as it can make products more durable or easier to repair, upgrade or remanufacture. The plan proposes a number of incentives to design products that can be more easily recycled or reused, as well as encouraging product design that involves increased recycled material content, and improved durability and disassembly.

As part of EU Design Days 2016, Scotland Europa, in partnership with Cornwall and Greater Birmingham hosted a workshop which brought together practitioners to gather new ideas on how design for a circular economy can be facilitated in Europe's regions to make the circular economy a reality. Through interactive workshop discussions, participants identified a range of ideas and potential design solutions to some of the main challenges faced by Europe's regions on the transition to a circular economy:

- Encourage producers to design for longer life of products through incentives built into economic systems such as:
 - Legislation, including trading standards and consumer protection regulations
 - Economic incentives, such as reduced VAT on circular products and services
- Encourage lifestyle changes to enact a cultural shift in consumer mindset regarding circularity of systems, products and materials. Effective branding will be increasingly important to strengthen consumers' emotional connection with products beyond instantaneous utility. The emerging importance of provenance as a marketing tool offers a good platform for this.
- Introduce new/alternative business models that make access more important than ownership – moving beyond hiring and leasing to models of sharing and exchange (the sharing economy)
- Demand producer transparency, 'designing in values' to facilitate ready repair of products and to defer product obsolescence, moving from single to multiple use: "design for whole life, not one life!"
- Spread skills and value jobs for circularity: changing the way we view and use products will widen the circular economy, increased demand for maintenance, repair, disassembly and remanufacture services and create new business opportunities and



career progression pathways.

- International standards and labelling to enable designers and manufacturers to communicate more effectively with consumers so that they make informed decisions about the products they purchase.
- Reuse buildings through designing for zero carbon retrofit, by:
 - Applying advanced design optimisation based on millions of combinations of design variables for a single building, where every gram of performance counts
 - Combining the advanced design with advanced construction methods
 - Exploring the potential for a complementary currency driven by a natural resource, such as solar radiation landing on roofs of buildings, linking the spare capacity to the unfulfilled needs, and apply it to retrofit, deploying it within a wider economic circuit of a city complementary currency
 - Ensuring that critical mass is achieved through sufficient participation and diversity of local organisations and individuals.
- Ensure transparency and accountability throughout the supply chain, making sure, where possible, that local supply chains are used and producers within them are encouraged and facilitated to collaborate so that they may together achieve scale and reach in the globalised economy.
- Designers need to be empowered and involved at the very outset of the production process and challenged to design for better reusability and recyclability of products. By giving designers experiences of end-of-life processes at, for example, factory disassembly lines, recycling and reclamation facilities the Great Recovery project demonstrated that this can be done, and that there is an appetite.
- Where design begins with a brief, every designer now needs to look beyond that brief towards zero impact, taking into account the effectiveness of products across their lifecycle and the connectivity of the system within which they are used. By adapting circular approaches and considering multiple actors and levels in design processes themselves, design as a discipline will diversify and flourish, attaining ever higher social, environmental and economic value.

#MakeThingsLast

[Read the Storify from the workshop](#)