PRACTICE

DESIGN&
TECHNOLOGY
ASSOCIATION

Electrical item waste, also known as e-waste, is a growing problem in today's world. As technology continually advances and maintains prevalence in our daily lives, the number of electronic devices that we use and discard also increases. E-waste encompasses any electronic device or component that is no longer wanted or needed which includes laptops, smartphones, televisions, and appliances.

E-waste: Repair, reuse and restart

E-waste is a significant environmental concern as many of these devices contain hazardous materials such as lead, mercury, and cadmium, which can leach into the soil and water supply if not disposed of properly. In addition, the extraction and processing of the raw materials needed to manufacture these devices can have a negative impact on the environment.

Recycling

While recycling is an important way of disposing of these products, it isn't a complete solution to the growing issue for a number of reasons. There is a lack of regulations and standards for e-waste recycling. This means that it is difficult to ensure that it is being recycled in a way that is safe for the environment and for workers. In some cases, e-waste is shipped to developing countries where it is recycled under dangerous and unhealthy conditions.

In addition to this, there is a lack of incentives for manufacturers to design their products with recyclability in mind. As a result, many electronic devices are made with a variety of materials that are difficult or even impossible to actually recycle, which adds to the problem.

Restart

The **Restart Project** is a London-based social enterprise started in 2012 that sets out to help people learn how to repair their broken electronics, and rethink how they consume them in the first place. The scheme aims to encourage and empower people to use their electronics longer, by sharing repair and maintenance skills. While recycling is still important, the company intervene before disposal – inspiring people to buy for longevity and to divert electronics from waste.

Through their community and workplace events, called 'Restart Parties', they create opportunities to extend the lifespan of electronics and electrical equipment. These repair events and workshops are comprised of volunteers who help individuals and businesses to fix their broken electronic devices. These provide a space for people to learn about repair and gain practical skills, as well as get the chance to meet others who are interested in sustainability and repair. The committed repair volunteers and professionals come from all over London, from all ages and walks of life.

In its first years, with only small grants, donations, and limited sponsorship, the Restart Project continued to organise community events while responding to the demand for paid services. Funding from Esmee Fairbairn, The Shuttleworth Foundation, Nesta, Interreg (EU), and Joseph Rowntree Foundation have allowed them to deepen outreach and promote system change by engaging the media and creating its own, building new tools and software. In 2019, the project co-founded the European Right to Repair campaign and its campaigner is part of Restart's team.

Resources

In addition to hosting repair events, the project also provides resources and support for individuals and businesses who want to learn more about repair. This includes a website with information about how to fix common problems with electronic devices, as well as a network of repair professionals who can provide more specialised assistance.

Restart project: Homepage
https://therestartproject.org/

Right to Repair

The Right to Repair policy refers to the idea that individuals and small businesses should have the right to repair their own electronic devices and appliances, as well as the right to access the information and parts needed to do so. This includes the right to purchase replacement parts, repair manuals from the manufacturer or a third party, and the right to access diagnostic and repair tools. The policy is supported by consumer advocacy groups and environmental organisations, as it promotes sustainability by allowing products to be repaired and reused instead of being thrown away and replaced.

Roadblocks

Opponents of the Right to Repair policy argue that it could compromise the safety and reliability of repaired products, as well as the intellectual property of manufacturers. For example, some may argue that by providing repair information and parts to third parties, they are exposing their trade secrets or proprietary technology. Opposition may also arise from the belief

that it could increase competition and reduce their market share. By allowing individuals and small businesses to repair their own products, manufacturers may worry that they will lose customers who would otherwise purchase replacement products or pay for repairs from the manufacturer.

Manufacturers may also be concerned about liability issues if they provide repair information and parts to third parties. If a repair is performed improperly or results in injury or damage, the manufacturer could potentially be held responsible.

Repair Together strikes

Strikes took place in Berlin in 2020, organised by a group called Repair Together, which is a network of repair professionals and advocates who are calling for the Right to Repair. This was organised in response to a proposed European Union (EU) directive that would have made it more difficult for individuals and small businesses to repair their own electronic goods. The proposed directive would have required manufacturers to make spare parts and repair information available only to authorised repair centres, which would have made it more difficult for individuals and small businesses to repair their own products.

The strike was successful in drawing attention to the issue of the Right to Repair and the proposed EU directive. After the protests, the EU decided to drop the proposal and instead focused on promoting the repair and reuse of electronic goods. This was seen as a victory for the Right to Repair movement and for the repair professionals and advocates who participated in the protests.

Links

Restart Parties: Upcoming events

Restart Project: Laptop Donations

Restart Radio

Right to Repair Policy

BBC: Right to Repair Policy News

Repair Together