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START AUDIO

Interviewer: I decided to focus on waste, but particularly in whatever happens before the three final destinations how waste are applied. So I'm not interested in developing technologies to improve the efficiency of incineration or landfill or recycling, but rather to devise systems that would allow less materials to be sent to a recycling incinerator or landfills.

So I think there is a natural connection of my research with whatever is being developed in the sense of the circular economy. And what I'm trying to do with this particular study right now is to understand what kind of infrastructure is in place and what kind of interesting community initiatives or projects are being developed and what kind of experiences can we gain and start to use that as a basis to develop systems that would foster the collective stewardship of material objects and second-hand material objects or discarded material objects.

Respondent: Okay.

Interviewer: I think you are one of the most relevant persons to help understand this scenario. What I'm doing now is this ecosystem mapping to understand these kinds of initiatives that allows society to send less things to waste. So I think the three main aspects that I would like to ask you about... I'll just tell you what those three are and then I guess we can spend some time with each one.

The first one is, what kinds of activists do you see specifically in the UK and in Scotland, particularly? What kinds of actors are involved? So charity shops to repair shops and maybe hardware stores, and providers of spare parts and community initiatives. So what kinds of actors are involved?

The second aspect I would like to ask you about is the flow of materials, how things move from one place to the other, or from what types of actors to the other.

And the third it's about, kind of, a more open-ended question about value and how value is perceived, how value is assessed and how value changes along this ecosystem. So what are the changes in value, for instance, when something ends up in a charity shop and then transformed, how we perceive it.

Respondent: Okay.

Interviewer: I think in about 30 to 40 minutes, we can start scratching the surface. Then you will have information about other projects to go about. But maybe we can start there.

Respondent: Yes. I suspect I might have more to say in the first question rather than the second and third, but I can maybe point you at people who can help as well.

Interviewer: Oh, great. So, I guess it's, kind of, also open question about what types of actors, institutional or non-institutional actors do you see working in the space of reuse and repair and repurpose in material objects?

Respondent: Okay. I mean, the ones I tend to deal with are, sort of- a lot of community groups who are a real mixture. There are some who are set up specifically to focus on environmental issues.

So a lot of, kind of, volunteer-led groups like plastic free areas, things like that. They often start with volunteers, but then apply for funding and manage to get some paid staff and the projects get bigger and bigger. And so those, kind of, I think start specifically with an environmental focus.

Then I seem to work with quite a lot who maybe have a broader focus. So, like, a lot of the ethnic minority groups who will be focusing on all sorts of different things from poverty to language skills and to refugees or whatever, but may decide to focus an element of their project on environmental issues.

So they will try and get funding to run waste projects or cookery sessions, things like that, using up leftover foods. So stuff like that... or then, I guess also I work quite a lot with maybe subsets of bigger organisations. So universities, maybe the Student Union will work on an environmental project, with a business there maybe sustainability champions who will get involved with things.

So, yes, these are some of the main ones and educational establishments this year, as well.

Interviewer: What kinds of businesses do you see involved in that?

Respondent: All sorts. So I've had Barclays Bank have a big network of green champions, so we've done some stuff with them. Dell Computers, worked with them. So, yes, a lot of the big ones, I

think, because they are that much bigger, they can afford to spend the time on it.

So it tends to be the big organisations a lot, rather than the SMEs, I guess.

Interviewer: And community projects that you see, do they usually get formalised after some time? Do they start applying for funding? How is that usually done? Is it non-profits, cooperatives?

Respondent: Yes, a real mixture. As you say, a lot of them start off as just a community volunteer organisation, but then if they want to apply for funding, like, the Climate Challenge Fund that I assume you're aware of?

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: So then they have to be constituted in some way. So I think that appears to be quite a big headache that they go through looking at what the best format is. So some of them are charities, community interest companies, social enterprises, all sorts of different things.

Interviewer: Are there any cooperatives? I don't know how are the regulations, you know, but do you see any cooperatives working in the space?

Respondent: Yes. SHRUB, have you come across SHRUB in Edinburgh?

Interviewer: Yes, I heard about them.

Respondent: I believe they're a cooperative. So, yes, I'm not sure how many there are, but that's certainly one. They call themselves the SHRUB Coop. Yes, they have all sorts of different elements and lots of different projects.

Interviewer: Do you see them interacting with city waste management?

Respondent: Yes, I think the successful ones do, certainly some of them are very interesting models, like Fyne Futures on the Isle of Bute. I don't know if you've come across them? But they took on dealing with a lot of the waste services, I think, on behalf of the council. And that happens a lot in the Highlands and islands where the council don't provide very good waste management services.

A lot of community groups have stepped up and actually get paid by the council and work with waste management. They'll do household collections or textile banks or whatever. And that tends to work really well.

Interviewer: One thing I couldn't find much information when I moved to Dundee, was whether there were any, you know, regular practices or – I don't know exactly how [say that 0:09:22] – sharing discarded materials. For instance, I'm aware that in Barcelona, there is one day every week in which the collection of big objects is made in different neighbourhoods. And the night before, people just put their things outside [practically 0:09:48]

and just get around their neighbourhoods, collecting stuff. I haven't seen anything like that here in Dundee. Do you know if there's anything like that? Any practice like that in Scotland?

Respondent: Yes. I've seen things like that. Obviously, the Scottish climate isn't very good for people putting things outside. (Laughter) Yes, there's, kind of, collections, have you seen Gate's Church, what they're doing in Dundee? They have their, sort of, collection boxes around Dundee for people to put things in that they can then get reused.

Interviewer: Yes. I have, but I haven't seen any of those boxes.

Respondent: No?

Interviewer: I went to the clothes swapping day and I've seen their community fridge, that is very interesting, but the boxes I haven't seen. I have to, yes.

Respondent: Yes. I think they've got quite a lot of those collection boxes now, about 70 or 80 or something, I'm not sure, but they could confirm.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Yes. So that's a good idea. But yes, in terms of... I haven't seen anything where people put things outside the house, but there

are things like, tool libraries with that- kind of, into what you're saying. So there's quite a few of those now. And people can donate their unwanted tools to that and then they get shared in the community and anyone can borrow them.

So, yes, there's quite a few in Stirling, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Kirkcaldy, a few around. Those are really good initiatives. And like you said, swap shops, I guess, like, Gate Church run a good way of people donating things and the charity shops. There's a lot of organisations, like, Fresh Start that helps to do starter packs for homeless people and things like that, where they ask for donations of, sometimes, food but it could be clothes, could be pots and pans and household items.

Interviewer: Hmmhmm. But there's no, like, established institutional or municipal initiatives that would receive materials and open, you know, forums for communities try to understand what could they want to collect? This is something also that I've seen in France, in Nantes. That they have, what they call, "ressourceries"; places that sell things very cheaply that were donated by others but, I guess, yes, here they're giving it to charity shops.

Respondent: It sounds like charity shop, yes.

Interviewer: Just one second, I have a child situation to deal with.

[Break in conversation 0:12:43 – 0:12:53]

Sorry.

Respondent: No worries. I'm used to that. All our Zoom calls at work normally have children, dogs, cats, everything.

Interviewer: It's a new, kind of, work scenario.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you see any, like, professional repair people getting involved with this, kind of, community effort?

Respondent: Yes, well, I mean, I suppose especially with IT equipment, there are organisations in Scotland, RETECH is one and CCL North who are all about reuse of electrical items. So they will do pickups from various places around Scotland and they try to refurbish and reuse electrical items.

Interviewer: But do they get involved in community efforts as well, or it's like... ?

Respondent: To some extent, yes. I think it varies. We ran a big- every year we run something called 'Pass it On' week. Which is a week where we try to get people reusing, repairing, things like that. And one year, our theme was an electrical amnesty.

So we had about 600 collection boxes around Scotland for people to put electrical items in and CCL North and RETECH went around and collected them on our behalf and tried to use as much as they could. So for that, we linked up- we had

community groups, we had local authorities, anyone could have a collection box and then these companies would come and pick the stuff up.

So that was a nice, sort of, joint effort.

Interviewer: And, so just trying to do a little exercise of one person who has, for instance – I don't know – a home appliance is not working. What do you see are the decisions that are made and what does the person usually do with that or where to find information? It's a little abstract but, for instance, if I have a toaster that is not working, what is the usual behaviour you see here? Because I'm Brazilian and in Brazil, people always try to mend things, more now with the economy downturn. So there is always one in your family who will try to repair things. Do you see that here?

Respondent: I think we have a tendency to, well, we are a disposable society and a lot of people will throw it away. So they don't see the value in things like toasters. They're so cheap. So a lot of people either throw them away or they will take them to the council recycling centre and they will put them in the recycling bin for electrical items, thinking that that's the best thing to do with it.

Obviously, we'd prefer it to be repaired, if possible, but there's not that many repair shops around. I know some organisations like Greener Kirkcaldy have done a repair and share guide for their area. So to try to make it easier for people to find repair facilities. And I think, Changeworks may have done one in Edinburgh as well.

So just trying to encourage repair and, obviously.

Interviewer: What is this one in Edinburgh?

Respondent: Changeworks. They're a big environmental agency and they have lots of useful tools on their website for what to do with various things. There's also, obviously, more and more repair cafes being set up. And so with the repair cafes, the idea is ideally you go along and you learn how to repair the things.

But some of them will take things on and repair them for you, like, Transition Stirling have a tool library and they offer a repair service. And that is a community, not for profit group. And you can take your item in and actually ask them to repair it for you.

Or we direct people to online resource. Like, iFixit is a great resource for guides on how to fix just about anything. And, actually, I went on a webinar last week that was for repair cafes. And they were sharing ideas for how to run repair cafes during COVID-19, even offline.

Interviewer: I was about to ask what the impact that you see in this scenario.

Respondent: Yes. They were finding it quite positive in some ways because normally a repair cafe, they might have 20 people. They've done them online and had 100 people. The ethos is that they want the householder to do their own repairs. But when you take something to a repair cafe, it's tempting just to hand it over and make someone else do it. But when you're remote and locked down, you've got to do it yourself.

So actually it makes you learn the skills. But then they said the other benefit was at a repair cafe, you can only take small items. If you're doing a remote repair cafe, you could have a car, a

door, big furniture and so you're not limited by size. So, yes, they said actually, there's quite a lot of benefits of doing it remotely.

Interviewer: Yes. And I imagine there is a perceived necessity of dealing with one subject, maybe because of the economic effects of COVID-19 and repair and maintaining the object more. It's one of the things that I've been wondering. I guess, yes, I have a very decent picture.. This is... (Laughter) Fortunately, I can move them around, later. But then about the flows. I think I've asked you a bit already about how do things circulate, but I think when this first layer is done this, kind of-

Oh, no, I was about to ask you whether you know of any municipal projects in which, for instance, the electronic recycling bin, there would be someone looking at what shows up and deciding whether or not those things should be recycled?

Because this is one very specific thing that I've seen in France that I was excited about, that they have this role and the person whose job is called a "valoriste" and the job of that person is to see whatever was among everything that was discarded, what amongst those things could be still reused, instead of recycling.

Is there anything like that here in Scotland?

Respondent: Yes. Yes. So there are some of the... Sorry, I'm just making some notes so I don't forget. There are a few projects at council recycling centres where they will have what they tend to call a reuse cabin.

So when you take your things in, they will say – have big banners up saying – 'could this actually be reused? Put it in this cabin.' And such-and-such community group will come and

collect those things. So, like, a couple of really good ones, there's one called Moray Waste Busters, up near Inverness and they have a big site at the council recycling centre. So you go in and the first bit you come to is Moray Waste Busters.

So if you've got anything that you think could be reused, you give it to them and then they have an onsite shop as well. So they will put stuff in the shop. So while you're there getting rid of stuff, you can also park up and go in and do your shopping.

And they've got a section for books and a section for electrical items and a section for bikes and all different things. So, they're really trying to push reuse. So it's only if they can't reuse it, then you move on to the recycling or the landfill bin.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: So theirs is really good. This one at Stranraer, as well, in Dumfries and Galloway.

They've got a massive big warehouse there as well. And, again, they're trying to push, can it be reused first?

Interviewer: Can you repeat the name of this one?

Respondent: Stranraer. So it's S-T-R-A-N-R-A-E-R.

Interviewer: Hmmhmm. Okay.

Respondent: So, yes, they're the two best ones I'm aware of. And those are ones where you can drop the thing off on site, but you can also buy things at the same place. There are a lot of other ones where you can drop stuff off, but you can't buy things. So they will have just a reuse cabin. It tends to be mostly for things like bikes. A lot of the recycling centres will have a cabin for bikes and a local bike project will come and pick those up and take them away. So it's good for the council because they don't have to dispose of them, but it's good for the community group because they don't have to be there to pick. They can just come once a week and pick things up.

Interviewer: And it's usually up to the person who is taking the object to decide whether they think it can be reused?

Respondent: Yes. I think sometimes there are staff at the site will- Well, yes, there's always staff at the site and they will try and direct things to reuse where possible. Some are better than others.

Interviewer: And this too, they are somehow related to the council?

Respondent: Yes, they set up a contract with them and they agree it between them.

Interviewer: Yes. Exactly the, kind of, reason I'm looking for.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer:

I think there's this... There's even data showing that the least impactful solution for waste is just to reuse. But I see...

Whenever I see, you know, the literature about smart cities, it's never even mentioned, it's only about smart bins and how those use these applications of technology. But I guess, yes, this is the focus of my research, to actually understand how to create these new things and even somehow find a way to apply technologies. So one of the possibilities I'm looking for the future is trying to devise technologies that would help access a, sort of, database of the repair ability and spare parts of any object.

So one of these groups, for instance, could easily understand what's the value and how much effort should be put into trying to repair those things and then try to evaluate and decide. And, I guess, this is leading right into the last aspect that I'm trying to cover that is about value and how is value assessed and how is value perceived.

And whether these operations of repairing and repurposing objects can bring... Can actually show the potential value of these objects. And if you see any initiatives that work in sense... I have to spend more time on that.

I guess one of my main criticisms about how people understand a circular economy is that the mainstream discourse about the circular economy is usually about providing less friction for the rest of your production to reuse the materials it has used in the past. This, kind of, circularity that tends to [____ 0:26:26] is... from where I see, is feeding back materials to the very monster that produced the problem, in the first place.

And, my discussion with the circular economy gurus is whether we can think of, not necessarily a circular shape, but instead a rhizome that understands the potential value of discarded

materials. And instead of feeding these materials back to reverse the production, tries to redistribute wealth for people or communities who need them.

So I guess these initiatives that you mentioned, for instance, a cooking project using food waste and things like that, that address poverty and all the social challenges and not only, you know, environmental sourcing of raw materials. I guess, I think there is a very interesting potential in that, in the sense of, you know, not only lessening the impact of industrial production, but also addressing why the social issues that are sometimes indirectly generated by a, kind of, disposable [____0:27:53] society.

Oh, yes, the question is whether you see these initiatives that fight inequality as, perhaps, benefiting from these other shapes of flowing materials and second-hand or other materials in the city. And what kinds of specific cases that you see. For instance, this, you know, cooking with food waste, I guess, is one very clear use. Also, because food waste is not necessarily, you know, eligible to be put in a circular economy project, if you think about the shape.

So it's not about bringing it back to the industry, but with other kinds of objects, if you see this is, you know, being experimented with? So reusing materials that could be recycled and sent back as a production, but re-using them to fight social inequality?

Respondent:

Yes, not 100% sure on the question there, but I suppose one thing that came to mind when you were talking about that was there was a bit of criticism that actually with... I mean, I work a lot with organisations that are funded by the Climate Challenge Fund and so a lot of the projects seem to focus on poverty and

poor areas and it is, like you say, about saving money and food waste and things like that. But, actually, saying maybe some more of the funding should be targeting the wealthy areas because actually when people have too much money, they can afford to go out and buy new stuff all the time and don't see the value in reusing or repairing.

And maybe we should be targeting them a little bit more. I think it works in the very rural areas, like, the Highlands and islands people have to be more resourceful. And I found, like, I've been doing workshops around textiles and I've been getting people to darn socks and in most of Scotland, often, people don't even know what the word 'darn' means.

They would never consider darning a pair of socks. But I went to the Isle of Skye and every single person darned their socks because they don't have sock shops on every corner. So they have to be more resourceful. But, you know, a wealthy person who stays in the middle of Glasgow or Dundee will probably just buy new crap all the time because they can. So, for them, they don't see the value in any of this.

So if that fits with what you were saying, at all?

Interviewer: I guess it's a good example. Also, the idea- because this is very early in my research and this is something I'll be trying to progress over the next years, is this understanding of the potential wealth of discarded materials, as a resource that should be explored in a collective fashion instead of just being- I guess one of my complaints is that even if you start understanding the potential value of things that are discarded every day, it will often end up in the hands of, you know, the corporations that are involved with recycling and they may end

up giving all this potential value back or make it- either make it disappear or giving it back to the industry.

And I think there should be strategies put in place in order to make sure that society appropriates this potential value. So, yes, you have created, for instance, community repair shops in which- and that's a great, great aspect that you brought. You know, in which material is collected in wealthy areas and can be redirected to poor areas and that can be incorporated in, I don't know, local policies or infrastructure or methodologies to understand what is there and how can it be redistributed.

Sorry, this is still very loose and wide. This is one of the things I'm trying to do.

Respondent:

I mentioned Fyne Futures earlier, on the Isle of Bute and they've set up about four or five social enterprises now which, you know, you think on Bute, there's not a lot of employment, there are not a lot of jobs and they're managing to actually make some money from some of their waste projects and employ people and keep items in use on the island. And I think that's a really good example where people can see local benefits and it's not just about waste, you know. So I think they're quite a good example.

And in Dunbar, I've forgotten what they call themselves now... I'll come up with a name and I'll email you. But they've done some- sort of, set up these massive zero waste shops and it's all about reuse. Again, they're actually managing to make it pay financially and really reuse all sorts of things.

The other thing I was going to say, I think you mentioned a little bit about, sort of, producer responsibility, about stuff going back to people. I'll try and find some links to some of the stuff some of my colleagues are doing. We've got people working on producer

responsibility, especially about some things like mattresses, where they're really difficult to re-use and recycle.

Yes. I'm struggling a bit more with this question, but...

(Laughter)

Interviewer: Do you have an estimate of how many zero waste shops there are in Scotland, that you are aware of?

Respondent: It depends on your definition of zero waste shops, doesn't it, really? I can send you some links to some I'm aware of.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: Yes. Who would you call a charity shop, a zero waste shop?

Interviewer: Yes. I don't know. It may be, right?

Respondent: So, yes, I know certainly... One thing we do is run a quality standard for reuse shops called Revolve. And so the idea is, you know, trying to make reuse have more higher quality. So it's about quality standards in the shops, safety checks, staff training, visual merchandising, all of this.

And I think we've got 100, nearly 150 stores are registered with that now. And that's probably only a small percentage of charity shops in Scotland. So I mean, there are hundreds and hundreds. But then, yes, there are all sorts of different models. Like, this one in Dunbar is a bit different.

There are shops that call themselves zero waste shops, but they're not about second-hand stuff. They're about reducing plastic packaging, so refill stores and things like that. So, yes, a bit of a mixture.

Interviewer: Do you know of any specific support schemes for these kinds of initiatives right now because of COVID? For instance, all the shops are closed and, okay, charity shops are usually... they have a lot of volunteer involvement. So I don't think it's much of an impact, but for other shops and places, for instance, like the Tayside ReUsers here in Dundee. I've been waiting for them to open because I need to replace my kids' bikes because they have outgrown the other ones. But, I assume there may be a huge economic impact for them being closed. Do you know if there's anything specifically targeted to this?

Respondent: Yes... I'm not an expert in this. I think the Social Enterprise Network or something, they're called, were doing some stuff or Volunteer Association. I'll have a look and see what I can find. And the Charity Retail Association might be worth asking as well. I'll just make a note.

Interviewer: I know that bike repair shops are considered essential, so...

Respondent: Yes. Some of them are still open, aren't they?

Interviewer: But the others, no. Well, I guess, this is already a lot and I think as I go through the recorder here, I may have other questions. So I guess I'll send you more emails.

Respondent: Yes, that's fine. And I'll make a note of some things and send you some links. (Laughter) Very colourful.

Interviewer: (Laughter) Yes, [it won't work 0:38:24]. Different colours for each question because it's [____] trying to sort them out. But, yes, that's it. Thanks a lot.

END AUDIO