

# The Role Of Design In The Circular Economy

by Kate Burgess-MacIntosh

**How often do we stop** to consider the lifecycle of the products we purchase? We may think about acquiring an object and its usefulness in our lives, but rarely do we stop to reflect upon the 'life' of the item before it arrives in our possession, and where it goes when its time with us ends. Can new levels of reuse be employed, thus limiting the impact of our current resource use on future generations? The role of designers as the creative spark in transforming production may be the key to unlocking new levels of product reuse and recycling.

[The Great Recovery Project](#) was launched by the Royal Society of the Arts Action and Research Centre in 2012 to build a cross-disciplinary community that can support the development of an economy based on resource-efficient principles. In the circular economy, products are developed in a cyclical manner, with consideration of the past, present, and future of the fabricated object.

Through tear down and build up workshops, exposures to waste management and recycling facilities, and increased dialogue and networking across disciplines, The Great Recovery Project seeks to move production, use, and disposal to a new cyclical structure, embracing the circular economy to lessen our footprint upon the planet.

The full report, along with further information about the RSA Great Recovery Project, can be accessed here: <http://www.greatrecovery.org.uk/>

How can we move to circular thinking with products built upon simple, straightforward means of appropriate second-lives, deconstruction, or discarding? Presently, the UK's Waste & Resources Action Programme (WRAP)

estimates that around 540m tonnes of products and materials enter the UK economy each year but only 117m tonnes of this gets recycled.

We are recycling, in other words, the equivalent of only one-fifth of the materials that enter the UK economy. So

**80% of a product's environmental impact is 'locked in' at the design stage.**

how can this hurdle be overcome? Without thinking more holistically about how elements can be reused, we face an uncertain future in which valuable waste which could have been re-used is lost to us.

The statistics are stark. 90 percent of the raw materials which go into making durable products become waste even before the product leaves the factory, while around 80 percent of what is made



Image: RSA, The Great Recovery

is discarded within the first 6 months of life. When about 80 percent of a product's environmental impact is 'locked in' at the concept design stage, design becomes the key to unlock it. Designing products from a circular perspective empowers all levels, from early raw states to post-life breakdown for reuse. Designing to reduce the product's impact will ultimately save our resources in the long term.

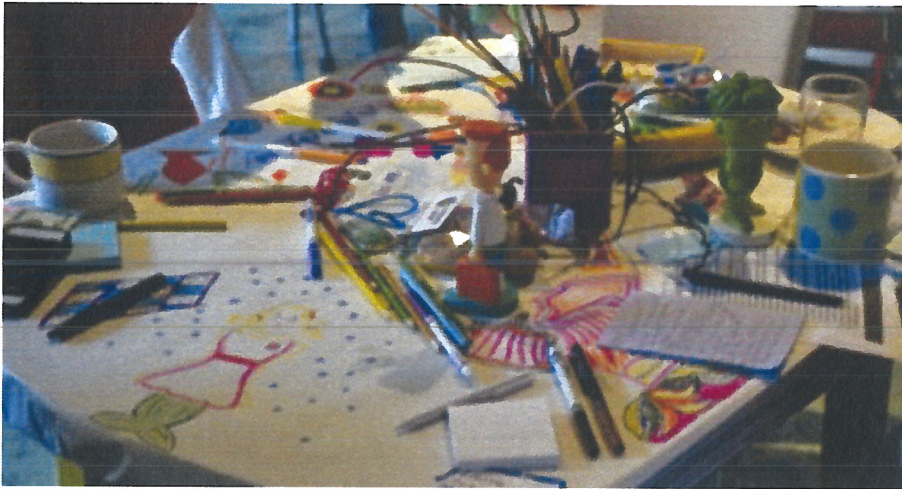
If we stop to consider the life-cycle of a product from early design through to disposal, we can reduce our resource footprint, lessening our impact upon the planet. This could become the enduring legacy that we pass on to our children. **C**

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## ProDev: Who are we? by Heather Schlegel

All photos from ProDev by Josh Lindenger



**The APF spent** a creative and colorful day at Catalyst Ranch in Chicago for the Annual Professional Development Seminar. Between playing with play-doh and pipe cleaners, large and small group discussion we introspected on where we are as a profession and where we want to go.

The morning started with a Casual Layered Analysis exercise, in which two groups explored The Future of The Profession. We discovered our profession includes polarities that both cause transformation and friction. It is both fragmented and integrated. We interact as experts and peer to peer. We are individuals and networked. There is

cacophony and complexity. There is presence and anticipation. We have the Freedom to Explore (The Journey) as well as Questionable Value (The Destination). We braided these values, keeping integrity while we are embedded in organizations, communities and society.

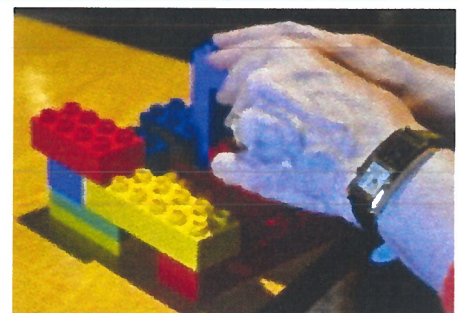
The second session Mapped the Future, by identifying where the



community has done futures work. Together we created a timeline from the Early Years to The Present. The mapping exercise found the early years were scarce with many of us finding inspiration from science fiction. Academic support ebbed and flowed, with interest shifting as academic programs started and closed. Professionalism entered the field in the 1990s, and there was limited representation of government futures work. A graphic treatment and further development of the Map of Futurist Work is planned.

We spent the afternoon with a town hall discussion on The Future of the Profession, covering the recent draft white papers from the APF. We closed the day with a practical discussion on best practices from the field.

While it was an intense day covering many topics, participants found time for casual conversation and play along with focused discussion in the fabulous Catalyst Ranch location.



Heather Schlegel has just launched a Kickstarter campaign as part of her latest project, The Future of Money TV series. It's one of the first foresight projects to be crowdfunded: the [Kickstarter campaign](#) closes October 31, 2013.