**Community-based, circular economy social enterprises in mid and north Wales– a case study approach**

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**Keywords**

Circular economy, social enterprise, community development

**Introduction**

The circular economy is becoming increasingly important as a community based response to global sustainability challenges. Three social enterprises were identified as case studies to illustrate the circular economy work undertaken in mid and north Wales. The three case studies chosen for the project are Aber Food Surplus, Y Drefwerdd, and Craft, both Aber Food Surplus and Craft are based in mid Wales and Y Drefwerdd is based in north Wales

## A circular economy may be defined as an ‘industrial system that is restorative or regenerative by intention and design’ (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2013). Similarly, Rosa et al (2020) state, the circular economy may be considered as concept that replaces the linear approach to economic activity. However, the scientific underpinning of the circular economy principle may be stated as being ‘superficial and unorganised’ (Korhonen et al, 2018). Nevertheless, policy makers have becoming increasingly aware of the concept of the circular economy (Geissdoerfer et al, 2017).

**Background information**

Aber Food Surplus is a not-for-profit social enterprise based in Aberystwyth. Its origins are found in the Aberystwyth University Sustainability Society organised and led by students. Three members of the sustainability society became the founding members of Aber Food Surplus. It was established in 2015/16 with the collection of food waste from the Morrisons supermarket in Aberystwyth. The food that is destined to be thrown away is donated (providing it is fit for human consumption) to the community. Aber Food Surplus is run largely by volunteers. It is a provider of volunteering opportunities for people in Aberystwyth and its hinterland. Aber Food Surplus supports the development of a sustainable society. Aber Food Surplus aim is as follows: ‘Our vision is for Aberystwyth to be a pioneering example of food sustainability. A place where food is grown, distributed, and consumed in a fair and environmentally sustainable way. Where people of all ages and backgrounds come together to enjoy tasty and nutritious food. Where food waste is a thing of the past’.

Y Drefwerdd is an environmental community enterprise which was established in 2006 as part of the Communities First project in Blaenau Ffestiniog. The original aim of the project was to protect and improve the local environment in the Bro Ffestiniog area. This has changed over time to not only include protecting and improving the environment but also to look after the people and improving their health. One of the key activities for the circular economy is the food waste that is collected from the large supermarkets in Bangor and re-distributed to the food banks in Blaenau. The activities that are undertaken by Y DrefWerdd are mainly for the Bro Ffestiniog area and the area has been expanded recently to include the Penrhyndeudraeth, Croesor, Minffordd and Llyn areas.

Craft are an independent, not-for-profit enterprise. Its main aim is to reuse household good and stop them being thrown away. A strapline used by Craft sums up their work as being ‘good for the planet, good for you’. From its inception Craft arguably was born as a circular economy enterprise. As Craft evolved it became an enterprise which focused heavily on reducing landfill waste. The most significant element of Craft’s contribution to the reduction of landfill waste is to reduce the amount of furniture going to landfill sites. The furniture is donated to Craft and is then offered to the public as an opportunity to reuse the furniture. Geographically, Craft works within a 25/30 mile radius of Aberystwyth. The geographic extremities of Craft’s range include Newquay, Lampeter, and Tywyn.

**Research approach**

The three case studies have been constructed primarily via semi-structured interviews. The interviews have been held with individuals with similar functions or relationships in each case study organisation. For example, individuals performing leadership and/or management, roles at the circular economy based enterprise have been interviewed. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The interviews were written up in a predetermined format, designed to achieve a common interpretative lens for each case study.

**Conclusions/implications**

The are several aspects of the work undertaken by Aber Food Surplus which contributes to its success. For example, Aber Food Surplus try to be as visible as possible in its community space. The team prides itself on encouraging open dialogue with all of its stakeholders. The is particularly the case with its volunteers, who are a valuable source of both new knowledge and skills. The volunteers help reinforce the core values of Aber Food Surplus and challenge the organisation to go further with its work. The organisation is fully invested in social justice, environmentally focused and being a fun place to be.

One of most important achievements for the DrefWerdd is to build a team of people who she the approach to regeneration and the circular economy. They have very close relationships with the local community in Blaenau Ffestiniog and they respond to what is needed as they are in daily contact with the individuals who live there. The services provided by the DrefWerdd are now ingrained in the community and people know where to go with universal credit applications and developing a garden for the community. Things are changing all the time and the focus for the future is to grow more food for the community and develop alternative sources of energy.

The factors enabling the work at Craft are many and varied. The working environment at Craft is described as being a “a family atmosphere.” An environment where as stated above circular

economy practices are omnipresent. The shared expectation of saving goods going to landfill, repairing and reusing household goods is the driving force behind all that Craft achieve. The location of Craft is a key enabler. Craft is located in Aberystwyth train station in buildings formerly used as part of the train station. As a result rail passengers often shop at Craft. Craft is also a thoroughfare for shoppers visiting local supermarket. Finally, it is close to a large car park and has easy access to its delivery/loading bay. There is ease of access for both inbound and outbound deliveries, and customer visits to the shop. Another enabler is the loyalty of the team members at Craft. Staff members are regularly consulted about decision making which may affect Craft’s operations. This consultative approach contributes to a feeling that we’re all in this together. As stated by an interviewee “I wouldn’t ask someone to do something I wouldn’t be prepared to do myself.”

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