
The Right to Repair

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A man in an informal settlement in Nairobi sells a rusty, beat-up, used yet useful power extension cord. In central London someone drops a still functioning laptop into a recycling skip, smashing the device so that no one will be able to extract data from it – while preventing it from ever being used again.

E-waste is one of the fastest growing streams of waste globally; 62m tonnes were produced in 2022, with only 22% recycled. However, most environmental impact of the devices powering our always-on lives – laptops, tablets, smartphones – occurs before we've ever switched them on, during mining and manufacturing. Yet, in the most affluent societies we've been discouraged from repairing and reusing, to fuel the throwaway economy of convenience and same day deliveries. Even 'circular' economy projects tend to focus on recycling so that overproduction and overconsumption can continue.

For the last 15 years, the community repair movement has shown that there's another way: that it's possible to give devices a second lease of life, to create abundance and digital access out of Big Tech's deliberate attempts to make products obsolete, with extortionate pricing of spares, repair-averse design and increasingly using software as a weapon.

People, not electronics are at the heart of Restart Parties and Repair Cafes: organisers, volunteers, participants, united by the curiosity to learn collaboratively how everyday objects work and how to find alternatives: workarounds, compatible spare parts, Free and Open Source operating systems to counter the constant upgrade cycle. We fight for the universal right to repair – meaning that everyone should have the right to access affordable repair options. The

movement is increasingly respected by policymakers, and laws are slowly starting to change: from design requirements for future smartphones, to user-replaceable batteries in consumer hardware, to consumers' right to repairs at 'reasonable' prices.

Technology and hype cycles are, though, much faster than policy changes, so while in Europe we're busy discussing 'horizontal' repairability requirements to improve eco-design of all products, manufacturers are investing heavily in trying to convince consumers that they must upgrade for new AI features. Elsewhere, in Africa, Asia and South America repair remains vital: a necessity, not a privilege.
