Circular Economy

Circular Economy is a term that has become incredibly prevalent in our modern lives, whether we encounter it in the work place, on the website of our favourite store or in a friendly discussion. It seems that the world is striving to go into this direction, before it's too late. But is it truly that easily said and done? In theory, a circular economy and the circular, almost infinite life of a product represents a terrific ideology, one that could reduce waste substantially. But do we really have the infrastructure to assure the longevity of a product? For example, looking at a smartphone, there are a myriad ways of adding it into the circular economy, such as creating a design that is made for reuse and disassembly or the general idea of modularity, where each component is interchangeable. Another way of extending the lifespan of a product such as a smartphone is perhaps implementing a variety of programs and appealing offers such as the option to bring back an old phone and get a new one at a reduced price, or bring a phone in to be recycled or to have its components used for a different phone. This is all idealistic, and maybe a tad utopic as unfortunately, most companies do not aim for their products or designs to stand intact in the face of time, their main goal is usually mass consumerism and coming up with something innovative every year. Most Apple users for instance, have noticed over time how their products start lagging or just overall not responding to simple tasks just as a new product is about to come out. Thus, the idea of circular economy is certainly a matter of the present and of the future, but I find it that we have a few more years, perhaps even a decade before we can promulgate it globally and in most domains. Certain domains such as the automotive industry, have been quite successful in the past few years in terms of integrating a circular economy: several automobile manufacturers have been working on recycling and reusing materials in the production process. For

instance, some companies are exploring the circular economy model for electric vehicle batteries, focusing on recycling and repurposing used batteries. But can the same be said about all domains? Certainly not, as, I find it the the interior design/architecture sector has a lot of catching up to do. Two key ways in which interior design could implement a circular economy would be, in my opinion, a durable and modular design. The focus should be on creating interiors that are built to last, that showcase high- quality materials and construction methods and a timeless design look. For instance, we look at 19th century palaces around Europe, where the interiors are almost intact, due to the quality. However, when we look at some of the homes we build today, such as most suburban homes in the US, the most prevalent materials are cardboard, plywood and plastic. These materials are not meant to last. They are cheap and not resistant whatsoever and will require demolition within more than four decades, thus, waste will be produced. The second solution would be relying on a modular approach to design, one that allows for disassembly and reconfiguration. Ikea, in particular, does a fabulous job at creating modular furniture. Products like the Billy bookcase or the Kallax shelving unit consist of interchangeable and stackable modules that allow buyers to costumise the furniture layout to their preference.

Sources: Whiting, P. et al. (2023) A New Retail Interior Design Education Paradigm for a Circular Economy. *Sustainability (Basel, Switzerland)*. [Online] 15 (2), 1487-.

Anjos, M. F. et al. (2021) *Design and implementation of a modular interior-point solver for linear optimisation*.

fig1.- Kallax Shelving unit that can be assembled with other shelving units to create a larger one- www.ikea.com

fig2- Circular Economy Diagram- www.futurecycling.com.au

fig3- Modular Sofa (tiny magnets allow for the pieces to be

- Shelf type
  Hanging Shelf

- Mounting type
  Wall Mount

- Room type
  Hallway

- Material
  Oak

circular economy

raw materials

recycling

residual waste

design

production, remanufacturing

distribution

consumption

repair, reuse