

Craft as Resilience in a Changing World

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In this article, we explore how creative expressions within the course *Sloyd, Design, and Sustainable Development* at Umeå University can function as a form of eco-cultural resilience. Eco-cultural resilience describes a society's or culture's ability to maintain its traditions and ecological methods despite environmental and social changes, often through sustainable and locally adapted solutions (Barthel et al., 2013). Craft is practiced globally but is also deeply local, as social, cultural, economic, and ecological contexts shape and define each community and its individuals through craft (Black & Burisch, 2020).

In this part-time, distance-based course, we aim to create opportunities for students to engage, resist, or use activism to explore issues related to climate change and social justice. We want students to recognize how craft can shift positions and boundaries, influence politics and engage society. By integrating Fry's vision of "Design Futuring", we demonstrate how craft can be a driving force for creating sustainable futures in a rapidly changing world (Fry, 2009). Craft and design not only describe how things are but also show how they ought to be.

We highlight two examples of how students use craft or design as tools for activism and social change.

Project: The Butterfly Effect

The Butterfly Effect is a craft-based project by Sophia Fredriksson that raises awareness about the threat to native butterflies, particularly the critically endangered butterfly *Reverdin's blue*. The project consists of embroidered butterfly brooches sent to well-known Swedish politicians, accompanied by a plea to prioritize biodiversity in politics. Additionally, a pattern is offered to spread the message further, including information about the plight of butterflies and a call to action.

The project *The Butterfly Effect* exemplifies how craft can serve as a tool for resistance and activism by raising awareness and mobilizing action to protect endangered species. By using a traditional technique in an innovative way, the project challenges norms and conventions around what craft can be and achieve. It illustrates how art and craft can be central in driving eco-social change.



Figure 1. *The Butterfly Effect.* Reverdin's blue butterfly (*Plebejus argyrognomon*) in stump-work embroidery. Photo: Sophia Fredriksson, 2024.



Figure 2. *The Butterfly Effect.* Pattern and embroidery kit to create your own Reverdin's blue butterfly using stump-work technique. Photo: Sophia Fredriksson, 2024.

By sending these artefacts to politicians with a plea, the project fosters a direct dialogue with decision-makers, challenging them to act in defence of biodiversity. The brooches serve as physical manifestations of activism. They are not merely decorative objects but carriers of an important message, a medium to communicate and reinforce the project's purpose, which is to make the recipients reflect on and act in line with sustainability demands.

Project: Dear Plastic

In the project *Dear Plastic*, Ami Olin Nordenmarker explores the role of plastic in our society from a sustainability perspective that connects both local and global issues. Based in Öland, Sweden, Olin Nordenmarker uses collected plastic waste to create a

christening gown—inspired by a traditional garment from the 1800s. The project has a strong connection to the UN's Global Goal 12 for sustainable consumption and production and aims to change our perception of plastic, from a disposable material to something more valuable and lasting. By recycling plastic and refining it through careful craftsmanship, Olin Nordenmarker seeks to elevate the material's status and evoke a deeper reflection on our consumption habits.

While highlighting plastic's long-lasting nature and its negative effects on both the environment and wildlife, *Dear Plastic* also showcases the potential of treating plastic with respect, seeing it as a resource. By combining local cultural heritage with a modern sustainability discourse, the project demonstrates how small



Figures 3–4. Child in christening gown made of plastic waste and a close-up of embroidery of endangered local flowers. Photos by Ami Olin Nordenmarker, 2021.

actions, such as collecting and reusing plastic, can contribute to broader social and ecological changes. The project reminds us that generations born into a world filled with plastic waste deserve a better future, and it calls for action through sustainable and respectful choices.

Discussion

By opening up for critical perspectives within an educational context, students are encouraged to focus on and reflect on the impact their artefact has on the environment and surrounding society. They also have the opportunity to test what they have created in a societal context. This, we believe, broadens the view of how small actions can spark large movements. Von Busch (2022) describes how we can reorganize the physical world, thereby breaking power positions and creating more sustainable systems.

The initiative *The Butterfly Effect* uses handmade butterfly brooches to raise awareness about biodiversity and call for political action. Similarly, the project *Dear Plastic* shows how traditional craft can be a powerful tool for activism. By transforming recycled plastic waste into valuable objects, *Dear Plastic* highlights our relationship with plastic and consumption, emphasizing plastic's potential to gain new life through mindful reuse. The butterfly brooches carry a symbolic message about the importance of biodiversity, while *Dear Plastic* demonstrates how plastic can become a resource rather than waste, if we approach the material with mindfulness and responsibility.

Both projects combine traditional craft techniques with modern sustainability goals and illustrate how small, handmade objects can play a significant role in shaping the public discourse on environmental issues. Through

direct actions—such as sending embroidered brooches to politicians or raising awareness about plastic's potential both locally and globally—these projects show how craft can function as a force for both social and ecological change. They inspire reflection and call for action, underscoring the role of craft as a medium for influencing our views on sustainability.

At Umeå University, craft is taught not only as a technical skill but also as a dynamic practice that combines the preservation of traditional techniques with innovation to meet contemporary sustainability goals. Through the two examples in this article, we want to show how artefacts not only highlight problems but also create tangible impact. We find that students develop an expanded view of their own ability

to influence, persuade, create debate around, or contribute to an alternative future for both local communities and the world at large through these types of projects. This reflects how craft education at Umeå University, through critical thinking and practice, provides students with the tools not only to shape their own reality but also to change it. •

References:

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Figure 5. Part of the process, material experimentation and embroidery. Photos: Ami Olin Nordenmarker, 2021.

