Craftmaking Designers
Creativity and Empowerment Through Craft Workshops

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1. Introduction

This work is constructed so that this chapter, Introduction, includes the frame of
reference of the study. The starting point to my research was the relationship between
design and craft making as well as the inspirational power found in communal craft
making. From there I moved on to forming an action research project which involved a
series of craft workshops.

1.1 Community Craftmaking as a Source for Designers (Tokuji Workshops)

During my exchange at Yamaguchi Prefectural University, I got involved in a project
created between the Yamaguchi Prefectural University and Tokuji, a small town nearby
Yamaguchi city. The town faces the same problems that many small towns near bigger
cities; the population is aging, businesses are going down, and all cultural activities
cease to exist. This leads to less community action, thus weakening the sense of
community in younger generations, making it easier for them to leave for work in big
cities. The project is a long term collaboration between the university and townspeople,
and the aim is to preserve and enrichen the cultural activities in the area, as well as get
students familiar with the local area and people.

As a part of my master studies, I took part in a course developing the cultural activities
in Tokuji. In the course, we divided into teams and designed something with Tokuji
local resources, using the area as a source of inspiration. We were also involved in a
workshop activity; each of us taught the townspeople some craft. The course
participation had a big impact on me, and I ended up taking part during my free time
as well. I later took part in arranging and helping at a kid’s summer art workshop
during the annual summer festival, and I also painted murals to brighten up an area
near the town hall.

Interconnected activities with the local community and the university were extremely
inspiring, and they got me to thinking of communal art and craft making as a source of
inspiration. This was the original spark for my research. As I started to look more
closely into what it actually was that I had been involved in, I realized that all the
projects I participated in Tokuji were a series of Community Arts projects. I wanted to
find the reason why these activities had been so stimulating. Intuitively I deducted that one part of it was the making by hand, and another was the interaction between people while learning and teaching new things. From these two ideas, I started to form my research. I tried to recreate similar project within my own social group, and see what comes out of it. This was a fairly vague starting point for a study, but it turned out to be an interesting project.

1.2 Craftmaker or Designer?

Another point of interest in this project is between craft and design. The actual processes are very similar. My interest towards the relation between craftmaking and design has a lot to do with my own process of defining professional identity. I have a bachelor degree in both fine arts and design, and I’ve always held a clear distinction between what I intent as art, and what is design. In course of design studies, I’ve come across several views on the subject, but my personal experience is that art is a form of self-expression, and has no other function but to relay the idea of the artist. Design, on the other hand, is a process in which something that is meant to aid some kind of action is created or improved. I’ve been looking for similar divider between craft and design, but have yet to find it. Victor Papanek describes design as conscious effort to achieve a meaningful order\(^1\). I see craftmaking as situated in between art and design, or more precisely overlapping both of them. It is a tool for self-expression, but most times the result is a practical object, intended for use. Designers might be involved in only forming a concept for a new product, or execute a project from plans to the final product. Similarly, craftmaker can finalize a product, but can also share their patterns to others, who produce basically the same product en masse.

The discrepancy in this is that some hold a designer-craftsman ideal, whereas others feel that handicraft is not what designers are supposed to do\(^2\).

The image of Finnish Design relies heavily on the image that was built after the World War II. In an article on *Finnish Modern Design* (1998), Harri Kalha describes the perception of Finnish designers at that time as natural, child-like artists\(^3\).

\(^{1}\) Papanek, 1973, p. 22


\(^{3}\) Finnish Modern Design, 1998, p. 29-45
functional design of Alvar Aalto and his followers has also given a great impact to designers today. Aalto was also described as an artist. I feel this to be somehow wrong, that a designer should not be an artist. However, I have no answer as to what, then, should we be. The legacy of children of nature and functionalists has never really appealed to me. Although I appreciate it in a way, it is not something I can imagine myself striving towards to. In short, I am not sure what kind of designer I want to be, or am supposed to be.

1.3 Action Research in a Workshop

As a research tool I chose Action Research, as it is a method often used when researching communities or actions. The idea is to study the existing environment by changing it. This is called intervention, and it is often done in a form of a workshop or series of workshops. The action can be used for improving the method of working, but this is not necessarily the case. Sometimes the result can be a new viewpoint, a new way to think.\(^4\)

In this study, I wanted to find out if looking at communal craftmaking more closely could give me a new viewpoint or inspiration towards design. I chose to do a series of workshops with other designers, and see how we work with craftmaking. I wanted to find out were my experiences just individual, or would others benefit from this type of activity as well. Action Research provides framework for generalizing the process and action. As Aaltola and Syrjälä describe, the result is not a new way of working, it is a better understanding of the process.\(^5\) Furthermore, Greenwood and Levin stress that there are no limits to what kind of research technique should be used in an action research process, as long as the way they are used does not oppress the participants.

1.4 Themes

Community Arts

Community Arts is a theme related to my study mostly because of the idea of empowerment. Craftmaking itself can be an empowering action. I see craftmaking as a creative task and furthermore; it can be a very rewarding. As several researchers

\(^4\) Heikkinen & Jyrkämä 1999, 44-46
\(^5\) Aaltola & Syrjälä, 1999 18.
suggest, people express and build their identity through the use of objects⁶. Therefore it could be claimed that making objects for your own use is like making your own identity-building blocks. The founding idea in Community Arts is that everyone is able to create, to be creative, and Community Arts can help people find their own creativity and thus a way to express themselves. This leads to a feeling of empowerment. I agree with Mirja Hiltunen as she points out in her Doctoral thesis that she sees a lot in common in the approaches of Community Arts and Action Research⁷.

I use both Action Research and Community Arts practices as a base for my study.

Communal Craftmaking

Communal Craftmaking comes into focus as it is involved in this project and historically linked to making crafts in general. In rural communities, craft making was a family effort, and it served the purpose of providing the members of the family what they needed. Etienne Wenger has studied learning from the viewpoint of communities of practice, and his view is that they are common human action, and a part of our everyday life⁸. In other words, people form communities in terms of family, work and hobbies. Rather than providing for the necessary goods, the need for socializing has become the most important factor of communal craft making. Stitch’n’Bitch communities became a phenomena in the U.S. in the early 2000 with the publication of a book with the same title⁹, and with the aid of internet, the communities spread out around the world. One cause for this popularity could be the need for slow time, as Thomas Hylland Eriksen describes in his book Tyranny of the Moment: Fast and Slow Time in the Information Age. Eriksen suggests that with fast processing of information, we do not save any time. In contrary, we loose the time we actually need for tasks that require deep concentration and reflection. I assume we can re-create slow time for ourselves by choosing to do things that force us to go slow, like the craftmaking in the Tokuji workshops or in the workshops of this project.

⁷ Hiltunen, 2009
⁸ Wenger, 1998, p. 3-7
⁹ Stoller, 2003
**Workshop**

The research material was collected during a series of workshops. Workshopping is a usual method of Community Arts and Action Research, but in this case it also supports our goal to teach and learn. Craft communities are common, and in a way it describes well what I’m trying to achieve. Workshop is one type of community, we’re helping each other out while realizing our own goals. In short, a workshop is a gathering where people work together to achieve a common or individual goals working with the same medium. It is common, shared working towards an objective or objectives.

To define what our objectives in the workshops might be, I looked into what craftmaking in general is, and what kind of objectives different groups might have. Leena Kaukinen has looked at craftmaking in Finland from the institutionalized viewpoint, and divided it into six different types of institutional genre. These are family, school, church, cultural venues (theater, ballet, opera), arts&crafts industry and mass production. These genres have different profiles, of which one relates to the workshop group. The goals for making crafts in families are the need for some object, strengthening the sense of togetherness, self-control or life control. Furthermore, the end result is a unique piece of work. Even though we are teaching and learning, we all have full control of our goals. Goals for craft in school are defined usually not by the student, but by guidelines from the Board of Education.

**The Process of Craftmaking**

The workshops involve not only making but also learning and teaching craftmaking, so the process of it becomes important in the study. I was also interested in the similarities and differences in the processes of craft, art and design. Jari Kupiainen suggests that craftmakers and artists deal with different institutions, and the way of doing things are different, designers are involved at least partially in both fields and works as an intermediate system. He also raises a question whether or not it is a good idea to have designers who do not have command of a craft process, meaning that in craft process one person is involved in the making from the initial ideas to making the final product.

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10 Kaukinen, 2004
11 Kupiainen, 2004
I have similar opinions about design. Throughout my studies, there were only a few courses in woodwork. Sometimes I had the chance to make a final prototype by hand in the product design process. These hands-on experiences aided the understanding of theories presented in lecture classes.

**Meaning of Making Crafts**

I wanted to know how the skill of knitting and crochet is passed on, and how our group feels about their abilities. I’ve always taken it for granted that especially women all know how to knit, and only lately realized that it is a sum of many things, and actually a unique trait of northern cultural heritage. Jari Kupiainen problematizes the gap between art and craft making, as all art is handmade, and all craft products have the potential to be initiated as art\(^\text{12}\). I think this way too, and see both art and craft made as an independent project initially as ways of self-expression and interpretation of the surrounding world.

Furthermore, the meaning of making crafts is linked to the meaning of objects in general. If the objects around us reflect who we are, making those objects can also be self-reflective and lead to a better understanding of ourselves.

**Creativity**

There are many different theories about what creativity is. The most common conception is probably the one Sternberg, Kaufman and Pretz describe as the *Mystical Approach*\(^\text{13}\). This is the view that creativity is a gift from some deity(God) or otherwise included only in some individuals since birth. Although I agree that what is called *the creative leap* by Nigel Cross can feel like a godly intervention, I think that the analysis provided by Cross is more accurate. He suggests that creative problem solving is more like bridging the gaps between the problem and possible resolution.\(^\text{14}\) Furthermore, Vähälä has pointed out that creativity is original to the maker herself\(^\text{15}\), meaning possibly that creativity is a subjective experience.

In my opinion, creativity is often involved in daily life, usually in learning processes,

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\(^{12}\) Kupiainen, 2004  
\(^{13}\) Sternberg, Kaufman and Pretz, 2002, p. 97  
\(^{14}\) Cross, 2007, 65-81  
\(^{15}\) Vähälä, 1999, p. 130
and always in design processes if the result is satisfactory. In craft processes, creativity can be used, but is not always necessarily needed to produce a satisfactory result. It is a part of our thinking, and it can be practiced on and improved just like any skill.

In any case, creativity is a part of our workshop experience. In order to understand the role of creativity in our workshop I asked the workshop participants what they think of creativity, and attempt later on to connect these answers to existing concepts of creativity.

**Empowerment**

Empowerment is a key issue in Community Arts and Workshop methods. In this study, it is a background element in all of the other themes. As I read about craftmaking, this theme was evident in especially Vähälä's study about the connection between creative craft processes and well-being. Csikszentmihalyi describes the need for autonomy in a person as such:

"To overcome the anxieties and depressions of contemporary life, individuals must become independent of the social environment to the degree that they no longer respond exclusively in terms of its rewards and punishments."

Action Research workshops and Community Arts projects both aim for understanding and taking control over social situations, whereas Csikszentmihalyi seems to suggest that a person can rise above these situations by their own will, with creativity as a tool. Juhani Räsänen has researched the concept of empowerment, and his view is that empowerment starts from within the self, and can be supported by others. I think all of these views are applicable within the context of this work.

**1.5 Research Data and Analysis**

The data in this study was collected by taping conversations and keeping a journal during a series of action research workshops. There were four workshops. Pertti Alasuutari points out that taping only records the verbal part of communication, but also that it is up to the researcher to decide as to what extent the information is needed.

In this study, the choice of taping the meetings led to an interesting set of data. There

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16 Vähälä, 2003
17 Räsänen, 2006
is rich verbal communication, and on the other hand the action of making the crafts is often marked by long silences. The research resulted mainly in two types of data. Firstly, there were comments and dialogue that reveal the process of craftmaking, and how it relates to design process. With the teach-and-learn method of the workshop, the process of craftmaking becomes somewhat visible through the comments made during the process. These comments reveal a lot about the learning process in craftmaking in the sense that it is truly passed on by non-verbal means, and underline the existence of tacit knowledge of arts and crafts. The comments are short, and directions for doing something are always accompanied by: “look, like so” or some similar comment.

Initially I had assumed that the data would reveal more of the actual craft process, as I had planned the workshop to be a teach-and-learn venue. In this case, the choice of data recording by tape directed the course of the study. Although the workshop was what I planned it to be, very soon in the workshop process I realized that the real point of interest was in the interpretation of the meanings and the themes that underlay in the conversation about craftmaking and creativity. The actual learning was interesting from the viewpoint of the emotions aroused in the learners.

Secondly, there was conversation on meaning of craftmaking and creativity. I attempt to interpret this material with discourse analysis. I also handed out a short questionnaire to answer after all the workshops. This was used to confirm and recognize some of the themes. I go through the themes mentioned before by means of discourse analysis, and try to find out how the themes relate to the comments of group members.

I conducted the analysis of the data by comparing the texts to what came out of the data collected during the workshop period. I went back and forth between the literature and the write-out of the tapes, or to express it more accurately, I went around again and again, to look at the subject from different angles.

1.6. How the Research was Conducted and the Expected Result

I chose to conduct the research by means of action research, and through the process found out that I will also need to do discourse analysis on the conversation tapes

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18 Koivunen, 1997
collected during the workshops. Simply put, I used Action Research to collect the data, and Discourse Analysis to analyze it. The idea was to find out if craftmaking has an impact on us as designers, as it is stated commonly that craftmaking in general is good for mental health and boosts creativity. Scientific research backs up this common belief. For example Eija Vähälä has studied the possible tools for measuring the mental benefits of craftmaking as a hobby\textsuperscript{19}. She suggests that craftmaking increases creativity in an individual, offers a tool for self-impression and can improve self-confidence. The ability to control your process of making craft can reflect on your feeling of control in general, and empower you to take control also in other areas of life.\textsuperscript{20} I am basing my research on an assumption that the creative process in craftmaking is similar to a design process, and thus when learning to control the process of making crafts, we can learn to control the design processes as well. Therefore there could be an extra benefit for designers in craftmaking.

I invited a few of my fellow students to participate in a series of workshops, in which we met to knit and crochet together, and to teach and learn from each other. I prepared some topics on the theme in form of open interview questions\textsuperscript{21} for our meetings, but mostly the conversation was free. I taped the meetings, but in one case the taping failed and I lost some of the comments. I also made notes after each meeting and took photos of the work that was made. On the final meeting I had the participants answer a written questionnaire\textsuperscript{22} on creativity and crafts and the workshop. I arranged the data into themes, and analyzed them by means of discourse analysis. This means that I looked into texts about these subjects as a comparison point to the data collected. I aim to find out what kind of effect the workshops have on us, and what kind of benefits there could be in forming such craft communities. I expected to find similar results to what Vähälä’s study\textsuperscript{23} shows. I was also hoping someone in the group would report similar experience as to what I had had previously in my participation in the Tokuji workshops.

\textsuperscript{19} Vähälä, 2003
\textsuperscript{20} Vähälä, 2003
\textsuperscript{21} See appendix A
\textsuperscript{22} See appendix B
\textsuperscript{23} Vähälä, 2003
1.7 The Structure of this Work

In 1.2 and 1.3 I have introduced my motivation and position as a researcher, and how the research questions were formed. The questions are as follows:

*Can designers benefit from community craftmaking?*

*What can we learn from community craftmaking that can help us become better designers?*

In 1.4 I describe shortly the connection of this study and Action Research, and the connection to the research. The themes that were discovered during the process are introduced in 1.5. 1.6 describes the data and the way it was analyzed. In 1.7 I go through shortly the practicalities of how the research was conducted, and what kind of results I expect from this study.

In addition to Action Research, there were two other additional tools that I used in this research. In Chapter 2 I first explain how all these research approaches were applied, in which stages they were needed during the process and why they were used. Then I provide a more detailed description of each approach. Chapter 3 reveals the research process and the results that were produced. Following this, in Chapter 4 I go through the research data in discourse with the theorems of the themes that emerged within the context of the workshop discussions. In Chapter 5 I reflect on the possible answers I've found to my questions, and the effect of the process on me as a designer.
2. Research Approaches

I chose initially one tool for research, Action Research. As the research went on, I realized that what I need is a set of research approaches, a tool for each phase of the research. In this chapter I explain the role of each approach and how it contributes to the study.

2.1 Application of the Research Approaches

I used three research tools in different phases of the research. Action Research was the main tool of investigation. I chose this method because it is an appropriate tool for creating understanding about action. Originally I was interested in what it was about workshops that was so invigorating to me, and whether or not this effect was applicable to others besides myself. Action Research is used to investigate action by means of action. In short, in order to understand workshops, I arranged a set of workshops.

Within the main frame of Action Research, there were two tools to help me with different steps of the process. During the workshops, I used Practice-Led Research Dialogue to produce information about themes connected to craftmaking. In this phase, the craftmaking and conversation during craftmaking brought forth ideas that developed into themes within a cycle of repetition. Finally, in the analysis phase, I used Discourse Analysis for interpreting the meanings within the themes discovered during the process. The workshop conversations form one part of the discourse, while another part consists of texts about the themes.

The image on the following page is a representation of how the different research approaches relate to one another.
Action Research is the main tool, moving in a circular motion from reflection (presumption and planning) to action (workshops) and back to reflection (analysis). Practice-Led Research Dialogue provides a framework for extracting the information about the themes related to craftmaking by means of making crafts. Discourse Analysis is a device for understanding the information that has been produced.

This research is qualitative by nature, but I used quantitative tables when looking at the questionnaire to document it more clearly. The means for gathering data was taping group conversations. Alasuutari states that the value of a group conversation is in the point that in these situations, people in the group talk about things they would not normally talk about\textsuperscript{24}. The questions I posed in the workshop are not of the nature of our groups normal conversation. When listening to the tapes, I noticed there was a change in the way of speech when I asked the questions. Comments were made in a clearer voice. This made me notice that there were three types of conversation appearing during workshop. The questions and the conversation about them is in a way as its own layer, on top of the usual casual conversation, just like the advice and questions on the craft techniques. One way of looking at these bits of conversation is to consider the point of view they are made from.

The most “normal” conversation would be the daily chitchat about what we did or see etc. The conversation about the questions is in a more professional, collegial level. It overrides the casual conversation, but not the comments that are made within the

\textsuperscript{24} Alasuutari, 1992, p. 153
action of craftmaking. The comments on craft techniques are very clinical, instructive in a way. Oftentimes conversational approach is thought to bring forth a “natural” situation. I think that the “naturality” of the group situation is important because of what I’ve understood on mostly Csiksentmihalyi theory of flow. It occurs when people are not occupied with how they are seen by others, and can concentrate on the task at hand.

2.2 Action Research

The aim of action research is to change the reality by studying it and study the reality by changing it. The information gained is used to improve practices, or even "help us build a better, freer society". Action research is concentrated especially on social action, which is furthermore based on interaction. The view of the world is holistic; humans are understood to exist only within social systems. Action research stems from the ideas of the construction of social action by social psychologist Kurt Lewin. At its smallest scale, action research can start from improving ones’ own methods of working. In this project the goal is set on our personal level. The main idea is to work in a group and share our knowledge with each other. As well as the goals for the workshop, I have very subjective goals for this study, easiest described by a modification of the quote above: To help me build a better designer out of myself. With this study, I hope to understand better the way we work, and the possibilities of what could be done.

The position of the researcher in action research is subjective, whereas in traditional research approaches an objective position is the ideal. The subjective position of the researcher in action research is understandable, as the object of the study is not natural laws, but human action. Human action can not be explained by cause and consequence, the motives and goals of the people need to be reflected on. The research concentrating on causal relations is called Galilean research tradition, and research

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25 Csikszentmihalyi, 1992
26 Greenwood&Levin, 1998, p. 3
concentrating on intention is called Aristotelian tradition.

Action researchers believe that if the social reality is changed, something new about it will be revealed. By intervening with the way things are usually done, a new, possibly better way of doing things can be found. Social action tends to structurise in time, and routines are formed. Routines are formed to make working easier, but they don’t always change when the situation is changed, thus becoming unconventional. This type of inconvenience is hard to spot, because people are used to working as they always have. This is why intervention is needed.

Kurt Lewin described intervention with terms from thermophysics. Firstly, the action in the group researched is examined and the basis for routines is reflected on. This is what Lewin calls unfreezing. Second phase is changing, the way that things are done is changed. When the new action is tried and tested, new routines are established(freezing). Action research is often used in organizations and companies to promote efficiency and to improve quality. In such cases, (and also in Community Arts projects), the intervention is a short-term project. Greenwood&Levin view such position as limiting and mistaken. Heikkinen states that the ideal is that the action is constantly monitored and developed, but the researcher needs to find a logical point to end the report.

My research is focused on design and craftmaking, and the connection these two actions have. In terms of action research, my own revelation about the way I get motivated started the phase of reflection. I noticed that when making things by hand and with other people, I’m most motivated. I wanted to know if this is true to other designers as well. This led to applying action research methods into communal craft making process. I started by thinking about people around me. I thought of what kind of things we usually do together, and what kind of creative things we might do in general outside of the sphere of design studies. I had had the experience of the workshops in Tokuji, and this led me to think of working together. Originally the idea was to work together to make some kind of artwork, but after talking with some of my friends about knitting, I realized that we could learn more from each other if each

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28 Heikkinen, 2010
29 Greenwood&Levin, 1998, p.18
30 Heikkinen, 2010
person would define some goals themselves. Usually a common goal is established, and this is also the case here. Our common goal was to learn and teach in collaboration with each other. The individual goals were set by each person according to their motivation and skills. In this study, action research is applied to communal craft making.

This way of applying action research is very similar to what Mirja Hiltunen describes in her doctoral dissertation. She finds a lot in common in between Action Research and Community Arts, and sees that:

"Action Research emphasizes impact and influencing, whereas in Community Arts concentrates on creating a situation. Both approaches strive towards an increased understanding of self and the world."

I couldn't agree more. Both Action Research and Community Arts give an insight to our own action. This creates an insight to our thinking, as well. Working on a project together with others gives you an understanding of not only the strengths and weaknesses of yourself and the others, but of ways to make the collaboration easier.

2.3 Practice-led Research Dialogue

Maarit Mäkelä is describing her research in an article on the book Art of Research as an upward cycle around the question, the process passing through art and research in phases following each other. She calls this Practice-led Research Dialogue. A similar circular image is used to describe the cycle of action research in the book Toiminnasta Tietoon.
Part of my research is conducted in a similar way. The process started by reflection on previous action, the workshops in Tokuji and the feeling of achievement and development I felt as a result. This was then mixed with my high motivation for craft making, and resulted in the idea for workshops. In planning the workshops, there was a similar roundabout action, as I tossed around the idea of workshops in casual conversation to find out what kind of workshop would interest the participants, and then looked into ideas of what we could do together. I then conducted the workshops to realize this idea. The data collected during the workshops gave the body of data for this study and as such, material for further reflection. After reflection on the material, I compared what I got from the workshops to what has been written about the themes.

2.3 Discourse Analysis

Discourse Analysis is based on the idea that social reality is produced through discourses, and in order to understand social interactions we need to understand the discourses that give them meaning. Phillips& Hardy summarize their view on discourse as follows:

"Without discourse, there is no social reality, and without understanding discourse, we cannot understand our reality, our experiences, or ourselves." 34

Discourse analysis explores the relationship between discourse and reality, and how texts are made meaningful through their interconnection with other texts. The concept of discourse always includes the idea of language as correspondence between people. 35

Discourses as such do no posses any meanings, but the meaning is emanated from interaction between the social groups and societal structures in which the discourse is embedded. It is not sufficient to just analyze the text, the social context has to be taken into consideration as well. Phillips&Hardy 36 introduce a distinction on distal and proximate contexts made by Wetherell. The distal context includes

34 Phillips&Hardy, 2002, p 2
35 Anttila, 2005, 407
36 Phillips&Hardy, 2002, p.19
37 Wetherell, 2001, p. 388
sites where discourse occurs and the ecological, regional and cultural settings."

The proximate context refers to the immediate context of the interaction, for example the situation,

"the sort of occasion or genre of interaction the participants take an episode to be (e.g. A consultation, an interrogation, a family meal-time), the sequences of talk in which particular events occur and the capacities in which people speak (as initiator or instructor or respondent)"

The theoretical ideal of discourse analysis is to always include text and context into analysis, but in actuality researchers are forced to limit the amount of data and make choices. Wetherell suggests that the local context is always relevant, but the broader social context can be included according to the interests and motivations of the researcher.

Phillips & Hardy identify four main perspectives within discourse analysis, divided by two key theoretical dimensions. The first dimension concerns the relative importance of text versus context. The second dimension concerns the degree to which power dynamics form the focus of the research.

Modified from Figure 2.1, Different Approaches to Discourse Analysis, in Discourse Analysis-Investigating Processes of Social Construction by Nelson Phillips and Cynthia Hardy, 2002, p. 20

This figure shows four perspectives that are used in empirical studies: social linguistic analysis, interpretive structuralism, critical discourse analysis and critical linguistic analysis.  

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38 Wetherell, 2001, p. 387
39 Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 21
All research does not fall clearly into one category, but these categories allow researchers to identify different types of empirical research.⁴⁰

In this research discourse analysis happens within a wide context of the workshop conversations, literature and the interaction both during the workshops and at other times. As Anttila point out, analyzing of research material is not an unambiguous and clear process, but that the discourse between the body of data and the researcher will determine what will be called forth⁴¹. Päivi Ruutiainen uses Discourse Analysis in her doctoral dissection on modern jewelry, and she describes that it is a cluster of procedures, from which the researcher chooses the ones suitable for the task at hand. In my work the way I apply the method of Discourse Analysis is similar to hers, as she uses it to analyze the image of modern jewelry as it is represented in the conversations, and I use it to analyze the conversation during the workshops within the context of the related themes.

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⁴⁰ Phillips&Hardy, 2002, p.21
⁴¹ Anttila, 2005, p. 412
3. Research Process

In this chapter I go through the process of preparing the workshops and implementation of the plan step by step. There were several aspects to consider both from the viewpoint of the study as well as the fluency of the workshop action.

3.1 Preparation of Workshops

I started out by narrowing down the different possibilities for the workshops. I aimed for a small group activity that could be relatively easy to organize and not too extensive to fully tape and type out. I thought 3-7 people would be enough to create a conversation, but to keep it at a level that is still easily audible with not too much overlapping.

As for participants, I needed people from my area, preferably from my own social groups. This was fairly easy, as I already had a presumption on who could be interested in such activity. I probed for possible interest and ideas for action in casual conversation with friends, and then sent a message on Facebook to possible participants, asking if they are interested, and/or know someone who might be. Another requirement for participants was that they would be available for the period of time I planned for the workshops. I made sure that this was informed clearly in my invitation.

Four people showed interest. Including me, this made the total of participants five persons, and even if two would not make it, there would still be three, enough to have a conversation instead of a dialogue. I also contacted a local cafe, and asked them if it's OK to do such activity at their place, and make a table reservation for that. I also asked about their evening activities to figure out the quieter evenings, to make sure conversation was possible to tape. I created a new conversation with the participants.

We used this conversation thread initially to figure out an appropriate time frame, and throughout the workshops for communication and information. Using the conversation board, we agreed on a time for a first meeting. During this first meeting we agreed on all the times for the workshops, to make sure we all had time to
participate.

We met five times, during a six weeks period. The meeting time was from 17.00 to 18.30-19.00. I had initially planned to meet for at least an hour at a time, and this goal was achieved, the average was a little bit over an hour. The place for meetings was the local cafe. I chose it because it was one of the few with opening hours late enough (one of the participants was working office hours) and spacious enough to have us sitting at the same table. Our meetings were on Monday or Tuesday evenings from five pm., and this cafe was usually relatively quiet at those times.

Another option could have been to have these meetings at my own home, but because of the lack of space this was impossible. Third option would have been to ask participants to host one meeting at a time, but I feared it would have caused unnecessary strain on the hosting person. This could also have been too risky in case of illness etc. One participant noted later that the track of conversation might have been different (maybe more private) if we had been meeting at someone’s home.

3.2 Workshops

The workshops were not concentrated on the end result as a finished craft product. In this aspect the project is very different from art projects. Textile artist Nithikul Nimkulrat describes how she usually starts a project with an idea, and looks for an appropriate material for realizing it. The works during this project started with the techniques that were more or less familiar to the participants. I wanted the emphasis to be on sharing what we do with no pressure or deadlines. Most participants only continued a bigger craft project or made several small ones. Only one person had one project with a goal to get it done during the time we met for the workshops. She also expressed most stress and frustration during the workshops, but concluded in the end that it was needed in order for her to accomplish her goal. There was a ”guest” participator at one meeting, she did not join another time and did not fill in the final questionnaire. Her comments are used where applicable in the theme chapters. In addition to taping these meetings, I also took some photos of participants’ crafts and the workshops in general. These photos are not a part of the research data, but work as

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Nimkulrat, 2009, p.28
reminders for myself about some aspects of the activity.

I chose knitting and crocheting for the workshop activity because of the mobile quality of these crafts, my own interest in them and the traditional characteristics they have. I also knew I’d find people who do them as a hobby. In addition to all this, knitting and crocheting proved to be low-effort and low-cost, as all participants could choose how much money (if any) they wanted to use on the materials. Most participants already had what they needed in terms of tools. Only one of the participants was planning on borrowing something from others, but ended up buying it when she found out that the thing needed was not costly.

An important factor in the setting of the workshops was comfortable seating and enough light. Both of these were compromised from time to time. The cafe workers reserved a table that was empty at the time just before our meetings, so we didn’t always have the luxury of choosing the most appropriate table, but we did move over if we had the chance. They also had quite dim lighting, so sometimes it was a bit too dark, even though they provided us with extra lamp. I had prepared questions to spark up conversation. I chose the questions by my own interest and later on to get comparison to what I had read or understood from previous sessions. I did not always have questions prepared, but we would always have two- three conversations overlapping. The types of conversation can be divided into three categories:

1. Conversation in a interview-type of frame, when I asked the questions. This usually happened in the beginning.

2. Conversation on work, giving and receiving instructions on how to make some part of the craft work.

3. Conversation on daily level, normal chitchat on ideas or daily activities.

Things I would do differently concerning the workshops would be few, I think the workshops worked out well and the overall atmosphere was relaxed and casual. For a bigger project, if there had not been time limitation and the need to tape and write out the conversations for research, I would have changed the participation style to an open invitation on some social media or the website of the cafe, and keep it going for as long
as participants keep showing up. This could have brought out an effect on local community level. This type of participation would have required a different method of gathering data, and the study would have exceeded the limits of master studies. On practical level one improvement point would be the lighting issue. In case of continuing the workshops in the same cafe, it would be necessary to bring our own lamps to ensure sufficient lighting during the wintertime.

I expected there to be difficulties in the parts where teaching was involved. I remembered trying to learn to knit in elementary school, and it being extremely hard because I am left handed, and the teacher was not. In the end, I learned both knitting and crochet at some point just like that, as it was a natural thing waiting to happen. Because of this, I felt I had no idea how to teach someone knitting, and I was not sure if I could learn anything. Kaija Heikkinen\textsuperscript{43} has studied about the learning of craft skills, and many of her interviewees have described the learning process as something that just happened. The workshop group did not have anyone who had no skills to begin with, so the teaching and learning was a fast and easy process, where we usually just showed how to, or just said how many and what type of stitches were needed. The fact that we did not verbalize the craft making in itself proved to be a deciding factor as to what type of research this turned out to be.

The group size was just right for this type of action. This way it was possible to hold two conversations at a time, and I was still able to follow them both in the actual situation and on the tape. If the group had been bigger, there would probably have been several conversations overlapping and making the taping impossible.

On the first meeting, I didn’t give any directions, I just started asking the questions I had prepared. Some of the participants took out their craft immediately, while others were concentrating on the first questions, and then taking up the work after getting into the conversation. After this the flow of the workshop settled quite naturally into the form of casual meetings among peers. I think this was very important, as the comments made became very natural. When people are aware of being ”examined”, for example interviewed for a study, they might change their answers according to what they believe the researcher wants to hear. This might be a problem, but on the other

\textsuperscript{43} Heikkinen, 2004
hand it might reveal something of social norms in the target group. I feel that the conversation during the workshops is earnest because of the relaxed atmosphere. On the other hand, since I am a part of the group, what I see as earnest and natural might just be the commonly accepted norm. The questionnaire answers and comments turned out to be of value, because it is apparent from the answers that participants really thought about their answers. This shows in the variety of answers given to a rather leading set of questions. Some of the answers support my ideas, some of them near deny it. I think this shows the subjectivity in the experience of creativity, and also shows that there is no simple answer to my question about the effect that craftmaking has on designers.

3.3 Results of Workshops

During the conversation the non-successful and most successful projects come up. The fact that others have struggled with same issues creates a feeling of unity, and it made us feel more comfortable with the unfinished work. As I mentioned before, making a finished craft was not a common goal in this workshop. In order to document the actual craftwork, I made a chart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st meeting X 6.2.2013</td>
<td>Granny Squares</td>
<td>Woolen Socks/Granny Squares</td>
<td>Headband</td>
<td>Granny Squares/wristwarmers</td>
<td>Crochet Collars</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Woolen Socks</td>
<td>absent</td>
<td>absent</td>
<td>&quot;-&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd meeting 26.2.2013</td>
<td>&quot;-&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;-&quot;</td>
<td>Phone Bag</td>
<td>Granny Squares</td>
<td>&quot;-&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th meeting X 4.3.2013</td>
<td>&quot;-&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;-&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;-&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;-&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;-&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>5th meeting Q 11.3.2013</td>
<td>&quot;-&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;-&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;-&quot;</td>
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In the chart, I am represented by the letter M(me), other participants are given letters randomly from the start of alphabets. On second meeting there was a random participant (E), luckily filling in for the absent two. She was making a crochet scarf,

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44 Alasuutari, 1997, p. 90-113
which she had modified from a collar pattern similar to what (D) was making. On the fifth meeting participants were supposed to come just for chat and to fill in the questionnaire, but me and participant (A) and (D) had our work with us.

The meetings I had question prepared are marked with X, the Q on the fifth meeting marks the questionnaire, and (E) is for the one-time participant.

On the first meeting I wanted to find out what the participants relation to knitting and crocheting is. I had three sets of questions. First I asked when and where they had learned the crafts, and from whom they had learned them from. This question was of interest for me, because I had the impression that some girls still learn crafts from their mothers or grandmothers before they go to school. I wanted to find out if this was true. This was the case with participant (E). (A) and (B) had learned one of the crafts from their grandmothers, and the other at school. (C) and (D) had learned both crafts at school, and (D) mentioned that she had gotten advice from her mother later on. I learned by trial and error by looking at several people, and I also remember getting advice from my mother.

The fact that knitting and crochet are still often viewed as feminine crafts was evident in the following conversation. (C) remembered that in her school all girls were doing textile craft and boys were in woodwork, and she had felt this to be unfair. I had a faint memory of making something at the woodwork some time during elementary school. I also remember that the attitude (amongst students) in junior high school towards girls doing woodwork or boys doing textile work was somewhat unaccepting. (B) and (D) said they had had both textile and woodwork classes.

The second set of questions was about how much and how often the participants do knitted or crocheted crafts, is there something more they would like to learn, and whether or not they do some other crafts as well. Most participants said that the craftmaking is seasonal in an on-off way. Usually the desire to make the crafts comes during the fall, and during an on-period the working is constant. During off-periods the craft is not touched at all. (D) mentioned that she has started some projects she never finished and never will, because the time lapsed in between the on-periods had been so long that her taste of colors and style had changed, so the craft that was started no longer felt relevant. (C) said the same thing, and she also said that she has thrown
some unfinished work away when she moved houses. E said nothing about the seasonality. She mentioned knitting regularly, and that she had recently re-taught herself crocheting to finish off a triangular scarf she had knitted. She also seemed to have the habit of modifying any ready made pattern to suit her needs. The things participants wanted to learn were new techniques like pattern-knitting or a certain type of knit or crochet. (C) also mentioned she would like to learn patience, to make bigger work like sweaters. We all agreed with her on this.

As for the other crafts, (A), (B) and (D) make crafted jewelery in small batches and sell them at events. (D) also said that she likes to read craft blogs online, and sometimes gets ideas from these and realizes them. (C) told that making crafts has been a big part of her identity before, that she thought of herself as a craftmaker, but nowadays she has lost interest in most of it, and only does some origami sometimes. I do origami sometimes too, and I’ve made some sets of jewelery, some for sale but mostly for myself. (E) said that she doesn’t really do much other crafts, but has some basic skills for sewing and suchlike.

The answers seem to imply that craftmaking can be a part of a persons identity and that it is tied to shifting trends in one’s life. There is also a wish of improving along the way, some kind of a goal.

The third question was about memories related to knitting or crocheting. (A) had warm memories of learning to crochet from her grandmother, sitting side by side on the sofa and making little clothes for her teddy-bears. (D) had a memory of making some kind of doll, she remembered filling up a knitted head and attaching “hair” to it. She also remembered that her mother used to fix all the school crafts that had gone wrong. (C) had memories of her grandmother doing all kinds of crafts and providing all family members with woolen socks and mittens every year. She felt that she has a special emotional attachment towards woolen socks, it felt that they were the physical form of feeling safe. Her most important memory concerning crafts was the only time she felt she had a choice. It was whether to make a pair of woolen socks, or to make just one and make it into a stick-horse. My memories were of the irritation I had with the teacher for trying to learn knitting, and the feeling of discovery when I finally figured it out by myself. My most important memory was a recent one, during
the first exchange to Yamaguchi I took part in a fashion design course, and designed and made a whole outfit by knitting. I didn’t have any pattern, and the work was big, consisting of a one-piece dress and socks, gloves and a hat to match. Because of the course deadline, I was able to finish the work all the way, and I was really happy that the result was as I had imagined in the beginning. (E) remembered that it was fun to do crafts in elementary school, and she was one year ahead with the work, so she got to choose herself what to make on the sixth grade. She described vividly how the scarf she decided to make was huge with many colors and tassels, made of a yarn that was a bit too rough for a scarf, and how much fun it was to make it. She also had a recent memory of making many hooded scarfs in different colors to fit any outfit.

The memories were of successful projects and failures, and emotional situations around the subject, like (C)’s realization of differences between what boys and girls did and her frustration, or (A)’s relationship with her grandmother.

On the fourth meeting, I asked the participants what they think creativity is, and how it can be seen in their everyday lives. (C) said at one point towards the beginning of the conversation that in her opinion it is somewhat elitist to define what is creative or not. I think this comment rose from the acknowledgment of a common (mis)conception that people think creativity is a gift, a trait of only talented people. I will introduce this and other approaches on creativity and the conclusions on what creativity is according to our group later on in the following chapter 4 in the sub-chapter on creativity.

In the course of conversation there were some comments on whether craftmaking is creative or not, and the dividing point seemed to be if one is following the instruction to the point or not.

There were seven open answer questions in the questionnaire. First question was about what was made during the workshops (see Table 1) Two points on the questionnaire were not actually questions, one was titled “Free feedback” and another was titled “Describe your working during the workshops with some kind of picture.” The idea for this came from a conversation I had with participant (A) about motivation levels. To illustrate the way her motivation had swayed during the process, she drew a small chart on my notebook. I was reminded that a picture can tell more than a hundred words.

The four actual questions on the questionnaire are shown on the following page.
2. Did you get ideas for other works during the workshops? What kind of ideas?

3. Did you find it useful to work with others?
   In what ways (social interaction, advice from others)?

4. Did you feel creative when making crafts, what was the situation?

5. Do you feel that making crafts has an impact on your creativity? If so, how?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question no</th>
<th>Y</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>X</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
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</table>

The table shows how answers divided in the group. Y and N are for yes and no, and since the questionnaire was an open answer sheet, X is for answers that can not be defined clearly as one or the other. In the fourth column I included the comments on the answers shortly. As this table shows, the most appreciated quality of the workshops was the company, or community. Most participants did not feel so creative while doing crafts, but found it stimulating, and someone mentioned it as a way to train for creativity. The answers seem to suggest that craftmaking is viewed as a reloading action, even when struggling with work. I will refer more in detail to the comments and answers in the questionnaire later on in context to the themes. In the images made of the process, different dimensions of craftmaking can be discovered. (A) and (D) were learning some new techniques, and their pictures of the process contain ups and downs. (D) started out with initial excitement, and she used videos from internet to re-teach herself the crocheting basics before our first meeting. After the first high, she felt indifference towards the craftmaking, but in the end she appreciated her new-found crocheting skills. (A) had been wanting to learn how to make woolen socks, and she felt that this was a good chance to concentrate on achieving this goal. Her expectations were high in the beginning, and she started with enthusiasm. She struggled and was irritated with the making of the heel in the sock, and similarly happy when she solved the issue. The same pattern repeated with the pair for the sock. She continued by
making another pair of socks at home, and the realization that she has learned the
techniques made her content, and she was planning to make socks also as gifts to her
family. (B) is skilled in both crocheting and knitting, and she gave advice to others.
During the workshops, I did not notice her struggling at all, and her picture reassures
my assumption of ease. The materials are depicted as shining their own light on the
table, seen from between two bits of knit. The picture (C) made emphasizes the
meditative quality of craft making, and the importance of our conversation. She marks
the participants as individuals with circles of their own thoughts and making, and the
conversations flowing in free, organic way around us. I pictured the work as little
squares popping out at fairly regular intervals, as I was making the crochet squares.
There were ideas and thoughts popping out seemingly from nowhere in between, aided
by the conversation. I was writing the tapes out in between the workshops, and
organizing material, so there is a list to represent the organizing of information. For
the pictures of the workshop flow, see appendix C.
4. Related Themes

The themes related to this study were drawn from the action and conversations during the workshops. It is these themes that bring forth the different dimensions of craftmaking in a group, and craftmaking in general.

4.1 Community Arts

Community Arts stem from an idea that Art institutions enforce an image that only the ones chosen by their criteria are capable of producing Art, which is then consumed by the common people (who are unable to participate in the creation). This basically means that Community Arts is a statement against the Art establishment. The founding idea is that everyone is creative and capable of making art.\(^\text{45}\)

Loosely defined, Community Arts is term describing all activities which involve groups of people doing creative things together. Community Arts is an attempt to re-establish the connection between people and culture, to enable and encourage people to take an active role in culture. Projects often consist of workshops that are aimed to produce an event or a product. The level of skills and talent are disregarded, and the emphasis is on participation. These projects are usually done by a group who have the same collective identity. The group identities are usually defined by geographical, social or cultural criteria, or by shared interest in some issue or art form. Community Arts prioritizes people who due to social or economic circumstance have little chance to participate in artistic activities. Due to the interests of Arts World, Community Arts is often not recognized as "real" art.\(^\text{46}\)

The connection between Community Arts and this project is empowerment. We have a common interest, so we share an art form. It could be questioned if traditional crafts are an art form, but I do see it as such. It requires skills, and in similar fashion as in traditional education in fine art, we copy the work of others to learn the basic

\(^{45}\) Webster&Buglass, 2005

\(^{46}\) Webster, 2005
techniques. In this project, the process is more important than the result. One difference is that usually Community Art projects involve larger groups of people, and the aim is to develop the community or even make an impact on surrounding communities or local politics. I assume we do not necessarily need to aim so high.

DeBruyne&Gielen suggest that the relationship with people is the defining idea of community art. They also present quite heavy critique towards usual Community Arts projects, because they claim that an artist doing such project is always first and foremost an artist, and therefore in the first place aims to realize an artwork, rather than tries to make a political statement. Another of their concerns is that temporary community arts projects cannot really tackle serious issues such as social deprivation and disintegration. Also Heikki Lehtonen contradicts the idea of communities being some kind of a counter-power against capitalism, and suggest that they are instead representations of different types of social interaction. These definitions bring the concept of community closer to this project. The goal is not set for making an impact on a big community, it is just a small-scale tryout of forming a small community for a restricted period of time. I’m not aiming to tackle any big social problems, either. The main idea is to see if working in a group can boost the outcome of the craft projects, and whether or not this has an impact on our creativity in general. Lehtonen also defines the aspects that form a community. According to him, the empirical concept of community has different dimensions, forming of three units: 1) Area, 2) Social Interaction and 3) Togetherness and Symbolic Connectedness. The image on the next page shows how these three field can merge into each other and form seven different dimensions of connections that are commonly perceived as community.

47 De Bruyne&Gielen, 2011
48 De Bruyne & Gielen, 2011, p.17
49 Lehtonen, 1990 p. 10
50 Lehtonen, 1990 p. 18
Lehtonen problematizes the concept of Community with these different areas of definition. I do not wish to go into the problematics of the definition of the term itself, I would consider areas from four to five in this chart as a community, so I'm using the term in the widest possible interpretation. Our group falls into the category in the middle(7). We live in the same area and share a common ground of ideas and concepts through our university life, and we are in social interaction also outside of the institution.

4.2 Communal Craftmaking

As I've mentioned before, in the end of the project I had the participants to fill out a form of open questions. One of the questions was if working together had been an advantage, and all participants, including myself, agreed on this. The main reason seems to be that because we agreed on certain dates to meet and work together at the beginning of the project. To me it seems that this gave everybody the justification to relax and knit at a cafe, and in a way this freed us. The fact that other group members were able and willing to help was also considered important. All of us thought that we were more motivated to work on our crafts during the group meetings. It would seem that working together was considered just as(if not even more) rewarding as the actual
process of learning crafts or craft making. In the questionnaire, it seemed to be the most important feature in the project:

C: "I got a few tips concerning the work. In general, it was nice to see what others are doing and how. The most useful, or the finest thing, was to experience the atmosphere of concentration, of peace."

D: "When you have a problem, you can ask someone right away. Other participants' work and ways of working were also inspiring."

A: "I believe that working together gave a rhythm to the work, and also I became persistent. I took apart the first sock many times, and I don't think I would have gotten back to it on my own after the second try, when I took apart the whole sock. I did not touch the yarn for two weeks, but when we met, I started all over again."

B: "I would not have started this on my own. --Working together motivates and gets you going when you have agreed on something and everybody else is doing something as well."

Etienne Wenger describes different types of communities of practice as 1) potential, 2) active, 3) latent. Potential communities are possibilities among people who are connected in some way, and who would gain from sharing. Active communities are functioning groups, and latent groups consist of people who share past histories. During the study, our group moved through all of these categories, as I recognized the potential benefits of making crafts together, and by joining me in this pursuit, the participants made the community active. As the data gathering was done, we all had more pressing issues and the group was disbanded, becoming a piece of shared history.

Wenger believes that communities of practice are vital to our learning, and he defines three dimensions of the relationship between community and practice: mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire of ways of doing things. In this project, participants had a mutual engagement in terms of friendships and sphere of interests, a joint enterprise in the terms of learning, and a shared repertoire of doing things in terms of both previously shared experiences and sharing the craft techniques. Although we did not work on one single project together, the previous comments link...

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51 Wenger, 1998, p. 228
52 Wenger, 1998, p. 49
to ideas on motivation in creative collaboration presented by Seana Moran and Vera John-Steiner. They propose that collaboration generates a special type of motivation which they call *connective motivation*. Working together provides a mutually satisfying experience similar to friendship. They also suggest that this type of motivation could be more common among groups of women in western cultures.\(^5\)

In the case of this research, participants were already on friendly terms with each other, so one could assume the communal craftmaking also provided assurance of friendship. As for the connective motivation in groups of women, there could be a historical reason. Before industrialization, knitting and other crafts were not just hobbies, but an important part of daily housework. The only way to have tools and clothing was to make it at home.\(^4\) The work was gender-divided, men would work with wood, metal and leather, while women were working with textiles.\(^5\) Women of one household or even a village would gather together to do their work, and daughters were learning by watching and trying to produce their own work. Also some members of our group had learned some or all craft skills from their female relatives:

B: "...and my granny taught me to knit potholders, and that’s where it all started.”

A: "...I remember sitting on the sofa at my granny’s, and we were crocheting. I don’t think I was even at school yet…”

E: "I learned at first at home, my granny or mum taught me, first crocheting and then knitting, some time before I started school.”

Although nowadays it is not necessary to make your own sweaters, knitting is a popular hobby, and the knitting groups never disappeared, they just took over new forums. One example is the Stitch’n’Bitch\(^6\) community that operates online and encourages people to start their own (real-life) knitting communities. They have provided guidelines for establishing a community, and run a bulletin board where people can look for others interested in knitting. On their website they announce:

"We have 1431 groups in 289 locations listed on this site! Knit on, everyone! "\(^7\)

The term Stitch’n’Bitch is fairly old, it has been in use in America at least since World

\(^5\) Moran and John-Steiner, 2004  
\(^4\) Kaukinen, 2004  
\(^5\) Heikkinen, 2004  
\(^6\) http://stitchnbitch.org/  
\(^7\) http://stitchnbitch.org/ on 28th Jan, 2013
War II. The modern phenomena of these modern knitting communities was started by a series of books by Emily Stoller.

The communities provide craftmakers similar support as a writers’ workshop for writers, but with the specific focus on the process of craftmaking. One participant of my workshop was commenting on a social media conversation on the topic of the workshop:

"I don’t know what I’ve gotten myself into again, but at least I can get some of the "stuff left hanging" done with this."

I think this comment hits the point of getting together to do something. Once you’ve promised others to participate, you have also allowed yourself to take the time to do the thing you actually wanted to do. I find this to have a connection to the way our society works nowadays, and the idea of slow time and fast time as described by Thomas Hylland Eriksen. 58 According to Eriksen, our way of life is becoming faster and faster, and our time is consumed in fast moments. Everything is accelerated, and this leads to everything becoming simplified and fragmented. This leads to our thinking becoming fragmented as well. There are, however, things you cannot do in fragmented time. Things like studying and research, family life and friendships, require what he refers to as slow time. Kupiainen refers to Eriksen as he writes about the meaning of craft skills in information society. He states that slow time is needed for craft, and craftmaking is a statement on behalf of the slow time. 59 Also socializing with others requires slow time. Communal craftmaking combines these two activities. This might be the very reason craft communities are so popular these days. Wenger states that communities of practice are not a relic of the past, but not an idyllic promise either, but a fact of life, and to see these processes as being part of interactions between the local and the global. 60 I experienced such action during the workshop where I taught the Tokuji people the making of traditional Finnish Christmas decoration, himmeli. I showed the group the basic form, and soon everybody was consulting their neighbor over this and that detail. I realized that they were learning together. Everybody was sharing their own view to figure out how to reconstruct what had been said and seen,

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58 Eriksen, 2002
59 Kupiainen, 2004
60 Wenger, 1998, p. 133
and if they couldn’t find the answer within the group, they asked me for clarification. I
was in similar situations all the time in Japan. I’m used to reading or listening to an
instruction, and then following it according to my own understanding. In most classes I
took in Yamaguchi Prefectural University, there was always a conversation after class
about the work given by professors. The main idea was to reach a mutual
understanding about what was to be done.

4.4 Workshop

A workshop can be defined as an event in which people gather to make something
together. Sometimes this is for a common goal, for example making something for a
community event. It can also be a place where each individual has their own goals, but
a common medium. A good example of this is a writers’ workshop. Alan Ziegler claims
that participating in a workshop empowers you. He also defines that workshops should
be places for work, not for display. This was another reason for not having a common
goal to finish what we were making during the workshop. He describes the benefit that
can be provided by a workshop as follows:

“Writing is a process of discovery, and your understanding of what you discover in
solitude can be deepened by hearing thoughtful people comment on your work.”

Craft communities provide similar support to their members. I expected to understand
the creative process in a deeper way by having other people along in the process.
Workshops are often used in action research for intervention. It is based on the idea
that you can find out about communities by trying to change them.\(^\text{62}\) In this case, the
community I am intervening is one that I belong to, since the participants are students
from the same department. With the workshop, I changed the way we usually interact
with each other. The goal was to consciously learn from each other, and through this
learning, maybe understand better the creative processes we are involved in not only in
our studies, but also through our hobbies. At the last meeting, (A) said that when she
was struggling with her work, she only kept trying because of the workshop. The fact
that other members were there to help her or just to let her voice out her frustration
about the work, gave her the motivation to finish the work. In the questionnaire she

\(^{61}\) Ziegler, 2007, p.97
\(^{62}\) Heikkinen, 2010
commented further on group work in the free feedback section:

"This was nice, I got so much more done than I would have on my own. This inspired me to work, and my enthusiasm lasted longer than before. I usually get into crafts when I see other doing it. For example a visit to my aunts’ drives me to a craft-frenzy, because she does so much crafts. This time my frenzy has lasted for longer than just one project."

This shows how much the support of the group can help and inspire an individual to overcome the obstacles in their work.

4.3 The Process of Craftmaking

Craftmaking and design can be seen as separate disciplines, but in the end the process of both craftmaking and design are similar, and in many cases it is hard to tell whether an object is art, craft or design object. Often craft and design objects are separated from art by function. In other words, if an object has a function or purpose, it is not defined as fine arts. As for craft and design, the difference is more ambiguous, but what usually sets them apart is that a craft process is done by one person from initial ideation to finishing the final product.

In Designerly Ways of Knowing, Nigel Cross writes about “a third culture”, the culture of the artificial world. He contrasts this third culture with sciences and humanities, and defines it through the following points:

Phenomenon of Study: the artificial world

Appropriate Methods: modeling, pattern-formation, synthesis

Values: practicality, ingenuity, empathy, and a concern for appropriateness

If viewed through this definition, both crafts and design fall into this category of the “third culture”.

Craftmaking is a creative process, similar to a design process or an artists creative process. The common trait in all creative processes is the discourse between action and reflection on the action. The creative process has been described first by Graham Wallas, and most descriptions of creative processes derive from his model. He defines four stages in a creative processes.

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63 Ihatsu 1996, p.23
64 Kojonkoski-Rännäli 1995, p.92-93
65 Cross, 2006
These stages are:

*Preparation*

*Incubation*

*Insight/Illumination*

*Verification/Elaboration*

In the stage of preparation, individual assesses their plan and acquires knowledge. Incubation is a break from the creative activity, which is needed for processing thoughts. Insight is the point of revelation, the solution is found. Verification is the stage where the solution is tested and completed.\(^66\)

Anttila defines crafts and the process of designing and making crafts as such:

"The process of designing and manufacturing is the making of an artifact which sensitise different personality aspects of the maker, cognitive, senso-motorical, emotional and social aspects.

The craftmaker will use their previously acquired know-how to realize their ideas. These ideas can be realized in either a convergent way, by using approaches already known, or a divergent way, by looking for new solutions, thus requiring creative problem-solving skill.

The craft making process is done one item at a time, or in small set of items. The maker can evaluate the process at any point and direct it in the desired direction."\(^67\)

She also introduces a spiral model of design by John Zeisel (1984), which is based on an idea by Barry J. Korobnik (1972). The process goes around the solution, closing in on every step of the process. The result becomes more defined with every circulation. The suggested result is tested, and the plan is compared to previous experiences, the knowledge at hand and the goals of the project.

\(^{66}\) Wallas, 1929  
\(^{67}\) Anttila, 1992, p.32
In most of our craft processes, this kind of structure was evident. Participant (A) was making woolen socks, but the instructions on the yarn belt were too vague so she relied on advice from other participants and trying out solutions. The continuum of acceptable solutions would include a wearable, warm pair of woolen socks in her size. She started out with acrylic yarn in a color that she liked, but realized later that the material is not warm enough, and that she didn’t have enough yarn for a pair of socks. The yarn was something she had bought a few years ago, so the same color wasn’t available anymore. She took apart the sock she had started and decided to use the pink yarn for something else. This was one phase of testing possible solutions. Alongside this, another series of testing started. One problem was in making the patent-knitted heel part. If the heel was done according to the instructions, the result was unsatisfactory; there was a series of holes along the line where stitches were reduced. (A) redid the part a few times, until she had figured out a satisfactory result for eliminating the appearance of holes. A piece of conversation reveals the reluctance of starting over once more. This was when (A) was starting her sock again from the beginning for the third time:

A: “This was somehow such a let down to take apart the whole sock, so I didn’t even
M: "But I haven't touched my work ever since the last time either!"

A: "I couldn't even start, it was so depressing that I had gotten it so far, and somehow managed to make the heel, so it felt like I can't stop (making) it, maybe it will be OK, but it was just too big."

D: "You should have made it onto one of those Christmas stockings!"

A: "Then I noticed that I would not have had enough yarn for another sock, so that was also discouraging, that I can't have two different colored socks."

As she finished one pair of socks, she later mentioned having made another pair, as her stitch size was apparently a lot more loose than the one assumed in the instructions. The first pair was a little bit too big, so it was good for using around the house, but she needed to make another pair to wear with shoes. She had initially aimed for socks that fit perfectly, but during the process she changed her vision, and accepted the loose socks as an end result. She also learned from the first process, and could successfully make a new pair that matched her needs by using the previous experience.

Another participant, (B) made several small projects during the workshop. She knits regularly, and her processes both in knitting and also other craftmaking seem to follow the steps Wallas has described. (B) likes to read blogs on craftmaking, so this can be seen as her way of acquiring information. She may see knitting patterns and techniques she likes, but she will probably not make the exact thing she sees on the blog. When she later gets an idea to make something, she will use the pattern or technique to realize her own plan.

Creative activity feeds itself, because realizing one project gives the maker experience for future projects. This leads to creative process being a constant cycle as well. The image on the next page describes this process as I understand it.
4.5 Creativity

Creativity is commonly thought of as an attribute of only talented people, and especially artists. This is a very narrow view, and when given some time to reflect, anyone can probably notice creativity in some of their own daily actions. I think that creativity is a common human trait. Scientists of many fields have studied the question of what creativity is, producing several theories on creativity. In the book "The Creativity Conundrum- A Propulsion Model of Kinds of Creative Contributions" a total of eight different views on creativity are introduced.68

The first one they call the Mystical Approach. This approach is possibly the oldest one, and it's core idea is that creativity is a gift from god or other inhuman source. This idea is very relatable, even though is scientifically nonsensical. In the flow situations described by Csikszentmihalyi69, forgetting yourself in the action during the experience can lead to a feeling of being connected with something divine.

Rather than trying to figure out where creativity comes from, Pragmatic Approaches to creativity are geared towards developing it and understanding how it works. These approaches tend to be somewhat unscientific as well, as they have not been proposed or

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69 Csikszentmihalyi, 1992
fully studied in a scientific context. There are, however, some self-help books that claim
to help you replenish or free your creativity.\footnote{Ayan, 1997, Cameron 1997}

The *Psychodynamic Approach* is based on Freud’s proposal that writers and artists
produce creative work as a way to express their unconscious wishes in a publicly
acceptable fashion.

*Psychometric Approaches* concentrate on measuring creativity, and in this field different
kinds of tests are used to measure the creative thinking ability in a person. *Torrance
Test of Creative Thinking* is the most known.

*Cognitive Approaches* aim for understanding of the mental representations and
processes underlying creative thought.

*Social-Personality Approaches* are parallel to the cognitive approach, and it focuses on
personality variables, motivational variables and the socio-cultural environment as
sources of creativity.

*Evolutionary Approaches* start from an idea that there are two basic steps in the
creation of creative ideas. First one is *blind* variation, in which the person creates as
many ideas as possible, with no comprehension on if the idea is successful or not.
Without this comprehension, the best way to produce good ideas is to produce as
many ideas as possible. The second step is *selective retention*. The selection happens in
the field in which the creator works, the idea is either retained or forgotten. The
selected ideas are judged to be of value, and thus creative.

*Confluence Approaches* hypothesize that multiple components must converge for
creativity to occur. For example, Amabile\footnote{Collins&Amabile, 1999} suggests that creativity is confluence of
intrinsic motivation, domain-relevant knowledge and abilities, and creativity- relevant
skills.

I asked the participants during one workshop how they would define creativity, and
how it is apparent in their lives. The image on the next page is based on our
conversation of creativity. It is somewhat in line with what Csikszentmihalyi has
theorized. Margaret A. Boden explains that creativity is grounded in common human
abilities like conceptual thinking, memory, perception and reflective self-criticism.
Boden lists three forms of creativity. First is combining usual ideas in an unusual way,
like combining ice-cream and garlic. Second is exploring conceptual spaces, meaning that you notice something because you take a different point of view. The third type of creativity is transforming the conceptual space. This means changing the existing rule. An example of this is thinking that the earth could actually be something else than a flat surface.\textsuperscript{72}

We also agreed on that creativity is a common human trait, not a special attribute that comes from a higher power. I made the following image in attempt to visually describe the process of creativity as it was conveyed in our conversation. Restrictions are represented as black, and new way of thinking or a problem solving situation gives a start and the driving power to a process that circles around between the inner and outside restrictions until a satisfactory result is found. In this chart creativity is represented with gray. Gray brings a new dimension into what is black and white, and similarly we can find new possibilities with creative approaches to usual situations.

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.8\textwidth]{chart.png}
\end{center}

I assumed that all participants were familiar with some theories on creativity based on our field of study and work. Everyone had at least heard of, if not read Csikszentmihalyis work, that also falls into the last mentioned confluence approach category. This approach definition is also closest to the ideas we had about creativity. I suggested in the beginning that creativity is a state of mind, and others commented that it is also the ability to look at things from a different angle, or to have a different way of thinking. We all agreed that creative moments are usually ones that require

\textsuperscript{72} Boden, 2004, p.1-6
problem-solving and/or working with limited resources (of e.g. money, ingredients, time) Another important point was this:

M: But I think... for example wallpapering can be a creative thing for someone, in a way even if you are doing it according to the directions but if you’re doing it for the first time it can be a challenge, and in a way, a creative task...

D: Is it creative if it’s not something new...?

C: There is kind of like you can think about it from two aspects, there is the creativity in relation to humanity, or creating something outside of yourself, or then creating within yourself for yourself.

M: Yeah or that the process of it is creative, like a flow-experience of sorts.

(C)’s suggestion was that people can be creative in relation to themselves, for example when learning new skills, or creative in relation to the society, when creating new ideas or works of art that have impact on others. If the task is new to the individual, they are likely to be creative while learning the task on their own, but the creativity does not benefit the society in large scale. On society level, the idea is, or is not, commonly accepted as creative, much like in the evolutionary approach. The creative process is somewhat the same in both cases, the only difference is the level of impact. This is something we all agreed upon. The two types of creativity are also described by Boden. She calls the two types of creativity P-creative (psychologically) and H-creative (historically). P-creative ideas are new to the specific individual, and H-creative ideas are new in regards to the whole human history.73

As for how creativity was apparent in our lives, the main focus was on the choices made over day-to-day tasks like cooking or what to wear or how to fix something, or the ability to create something beautiful within the confinements of work. In Bodens terms, P-creativity is apparent in everyday life. For example, at one point of conversation on how creativity is apparent in our lives, (C) said “I like to draw with permanent ink, because you can’t erase it, so if there is a mistake... Those are lovely moments, when it can be turned to strength and you can change the outcome according to that so that the picture is successful anyway. For me personally those are sort of nice creative moments when you can overcome the plan you had.” In the end we agreed that

73 Boden, 2004, p. 2
you need to be aware of the rules, have some boundaries and sufficient skills to have a creative experience.

This goes hand in hand with Csikszentmihalyi’s theory on flow. He explains that in order for a person to stay in a state of flow, the task at hand needs to develop along with the development of the skills, keeping the level of the challenge sufficient. He points out that art, play and ritual are a big part of every culture, and have a structure that supports the occurrence of flow experiences. Making crafts also meets these requirements. In conversations about creativity, craftmaking was seen somewhat non-creative, especially when repeating patterns. Painting or making music seemed to be thought of as more creative, even though we repeat learned patterns in these two activities as well.

4.6 Meaning of Making Crafts

We are surrounded by artifacts, man-made products. Some of these are factory-made, some are handmade. Some of the handmade artifacts are made by the users themselves. Anna-Marja Ihatsu writes about the division between these two. She says that a common view is that as we interact with technological interfaces that provide us only with artificial experiences, we start to feel alienated from our bodies. As opposed to this, making crafts is believed to be therapeutical in that it strengthens our connection to the world we can touch and feel, and so provides us with a refreshed sense of physicality. She claims that the technological world is not so far from the craftmakers as these presumptions lead to believe, as craftmakers have always adopted the new technologies to their own benefit.

I agree with this, but I also recognize the feeling of connectedness with the body when making crafts. A common conception is also that handmade things are more personal, that they embody something of the maker and are nearly soulful. In group conversation, (C) told us that her grandmother has always made woolen socks to her children and grand-children. “I have like a strong emotional bond to woolly socks, they mean that, they are made by grandma, even if they are not, but there’s a sense of

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74 Csikszentmihalyi, 1992, p.71-77
75 Ihatsu, 2004
76 Heikkinen, 2004
security.” The interesting point in this comment is that the meaning extends to all hand-made woolen socks, not just the ones actually made by her grandmother. Luutonen says that objects keep memories. In this case, the objects have become a symbol of something, so there is no one particular pair of woolly socks. This kind of symbol-creating interpretation of our environment is called connotation. Also Csikszentmihalyi says that: “Past memories, present experiences, and future dreams of each person are inextricably linked to the objects that comprise his or her environment.”

Man-made or machine-made, all objects have some kind of meaning to us, and these meanings can be used to communicate for example our values and personality. The most common tool used for interpreting the meanings of artifacts is the semiotic approach by Charles S. Peirce. He describes the relationship between human and reality through three categories, Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness. Firstness describes unanalysed, immediate and passing feeling, like pain, pleasure or smell. Secondness embeds an idea of something else, and it is based on the dynamics of interaction and action. We are connected with reality through Secondness. Thirdness represents intellectual action and logical deduction, that creates order, law and routine into chaos.

This type of coding could also be used as a tool to find what kind of meanings craft process has for the maker. In a knitting process, the Firstness would be the physical sensation of the material, the color of the thread and the movement. Secondness would be the memories associated with the craft. Thirdness would be the practical use intended, the counting of stitches and the techniques used in the work. Thirdness would also include the planning of a craft project.

**Firstness**

All members of the group were interested in the color combinations and the feel of the thread. One participant had made scarfs with a same model and stitch in many different colors. It was fairly obvious that her main enjoyment had been in the physical sensation and the colors. When talking about seasonality of crafts, (B) pointed out that

“-- And in springtime, you get the spring color range, so that’s also a trigger--”. Three

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77 Lehtonen, 1996, p. 110
78 Csikszentmihalyi, 1981, p.9
79 Tarasti, 1992, p. 25-27
people in the group, including myself, were making granny squares with a vague plan of making something out of them in some later point in time. I found the making to be pleasing especially on the sensational level. I chose deep colors that reminded me of water in the wintertime, or the northern sea.

Secondness

Most members of our group had someone, mother, grandmother or aunt(or all of them) who is fast and skilled in either knitting or crochet or both, and also in other textile crafts. Knitting and other textile craft was strongly associated with close female relatives, with admiration towards the skill and the practicality of it. The craft skill was considered to mark a proper woman in previous generations.

Even though we supposedly have moved a long way from the pre-industrial times, it seems textile crafts are still women's work. One participant in our workshop told that when she had been in school, they had had girls doing textile work and boys doing woodwork in craft classes, and she felt it was not fair. Two participants commented on this that they had had both. In my junior high school only one girl in my year chose the woodwork class, and none of the boys chose the textile work. I remember wanting to choose the woodwork, but being too timid to do it alone, since all my friends were girls, and obviously chose the "girls crafts".

This is correlative to the results Sirpa Kokko got when interviewing women about their experiences of handicraft classes at schools. None of the women interviewed seemed to remember choosing textile work, and there were never any boys in the textile class. Despite the gender-role enforcement, it seemed that the craft was a tangible connection to the past generations of women, and as such a source of warm memories.

One meaningful reason for making crafts could be the connection between different generations.

One participant had especially warm memories of learning crochet from her grandmother when she was very young, and I felt her comment indicated that crocheting was strongly associated with her grandmother:

"I have a memory of sitting on the couch at my granny's, side by side with her and crocheting...I think it's(crocheting) more closer to me, more familiar."

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80 Helo, 1994
81 Kokko, 1994
Another thing common was the seasonal urge to knit. The participants who had done several knitting or crocheting projects agreed that the projects are usually started in the fall:

(B) "I have these phases, always in the fall when you start wanting everything warm and woolly hats and scarves..."

(C) "Me too, I have had these autumn booms, but last time was like two years ago, and these have been unfinished since then(points at legwarmers). I did this one last fall and the other the year before that..."

(A) "It's also pretty seasonal for me too, in the fall-time you get the urge to wrap yourself into a blanket and----every winter I make a scarf, or something"

This seasonal urge connects the sensation of color and the practical need for warm clothing when the weather gets colder. Also springtime was said to be inspiring, because of the new colors of thread in the stores. It seems that craftmaking can also be linked connotatively with natural cycles, and somehow it can even be a ritual to mark the new season.

Thirdness

There were obvious points in conversation where the techniques and stitch counts were explained, and there were in a sense the "driest" parts of conversation. While the other two layers of conversation were rich and descriptive in their language, the comments on the action were short:

(A) "make six in a chain and loop it." "then do semi-columns, three at a time."

(M) "semi-columns are with one loop, right?"

(A) "yes"

(M) "and two, and two"

(A) "and three in a row"

Written out, this conversation makes no sense. Information was passed on as quickly as possible, and others carried on more interesting conversation at the same time. Although it was our aim to learn, actual information exchange on technique was secondary in the course of conversation. Many times we showed each other how something was done.

In conclusion, the firstness and secondness levels of the craft process were more
expressionally shared with others, whereas the practicalities were passed on by showing. The actual plan for the craft was seldom shared with others. I found this very enlightening. There is so much talk about tacit knowledge in the study of art and craftsmanship. Robin Nelson describes the tacit knowledge as more than just a set of motoric skills. The idea of tacit knowledge is easy to understand, but the scarcity of verbal instruction when teaching something in the workshop really made the theory tangible to me.

Nowadays there are cheaper and faster ways to get a sweater, but many people seem to find the act of knitting appealing, and the hand-knitted artifacts are appreciated. This may be due to the fact that craftmaking is a rewarding creative process, in which a person uses both their mental and technical abilities to create something concrete.

Csikszentmihalyi describes the human-object relation as follows:

“*Humans display the intriguing characteristic of making and using objects....Man is not only homo sapiens or homo ludens, he is also homo faber, the maker and user of objects, his self to a large extent a reflection of things with which he interacts.*”

Kaija Heikkinen has studied the modern motivations for craftmaking and she sees that the ones who despise craft making have a slight upper hand in our society. She connects this to the otherness of the feminine life sphere. Heikkinen also mentions a comment from a male colleague, who had stated in conversation about her study topic that women do crafts to enhance their low self-esteem. I do not want to take a stand on the feminist issues involved in the appreciation of feminine crafts, or why he sees women in general having low self-esteem, but I’d like to bring forward the fact that he interpreted craftmaking as something that could enhance our self-esteem. This leads us to the next theme, empowerment.

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82 Nelson, 2013, p. 42
83 Vähälä, 1999
84 Csikszentmihalyi, 1981, p.1
85 Heikkinen, 1997, p.4
4.7 Empowerment

The term empowerment became known in the 1980’s through projects involving well-being. Webster and Buglass write about Community Arts, and claim that participatory arts activity could give people insight about oppressive structures in their society, and give them tools to change this. In other words, empower the individuals. Empowerment is usually connected to Community Arts projects and there is a target group of supposedly oppressed individuals, like minority ethnic groups or women. In this project the participants are all women, but this does not mean that there was any particularly feminist viewpoint. Empowerment through craftmaking is, even when working in a group, essentially empowering on a personal level. After all, the effort is all individual. Juhani Räsänen lists aspects of empowerment as follows:

1: Control over one’s life 2: trust in the ability to function in matters important to oneself 3: Ability to recognize or develop one’s ability to action 4: consciousness about and possibility of choices 5: Independence on others in decision-making and action.

According to Eija Vähälä, craftmaking can create the feeling of control and self-confidence, thus being an empowering action. The craft ability is concrete, it is made visible by the concrete artifacts made in the process. We wish to show ourselves our capability. An old proverb states that seeing is believing. Succeeding in making a usable item gives a strong sense of satisfaction, a feeling that we can provide for ourselves. When (A) had succeeded in making a heel of her liking to the woolen sock, we were talking about how the heel is probably the most difficult thing to learn in the sock. (C ) said: “It’s like when you’ve made a heel, you’re a proper person, a skillful person.”

The comment was made jokingly, but it reveals how the ability to develop is recognized in a craft process. In a craft project the maker has full control over the process, and they can influence their own artificial environment by making objects to their liking.

Judy Weiser has studied and practiced phototherapy, and she sees that photos are footprints of our minds. She describes also how people give individual meanings to all things they see through their own perceptual filters and frameworks of thinking. This

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86 Räsänen, 1998, p. 75
87 Webster&Buglass, 2005, p.9
88 Räsänen, 2006, p. 11
89 Vähälä, 2003
90 Weiser, 1999, p.1
means people create their own interpretation of what they see, a reality of their own. In phototherapy, the mental frameworks and emotions behind these interpretations can be brought up with the client through the use of photography. People can change the way they see themselves.  

Räsänen compares the starting point of empowerment as awakening; most people live their live mechanically and unconscious of their inner dependances and attachments. Only when we realize that we can control our own emotions, we can re-shape our life philosophy and take control over our own existence. He also states that we need a creative contact to reality in order to empower ourselves, and that when a person is empowered, they are more creative. The creative contact with the reality can be formed with the powers of knowledge, emotion, skills and will.

Another aspect of empowerment is described by the term feeling of coherence. According to Räsänen, this includes that an individual feels that 1) the external stimulus is predictable and regular, 2) he/she has the necessary resources ans 3) he/she feels that the external demands are meaningful challenges. A person has to be able to control their own resources and their interaction with social surroundings, they need to feel that they are able to rise up to different challenges, and that their action is meaningful. In this viewpoint, empowerment is seen as something that people can do to find their inner strength, and enjoy their life more. The three points listed by Räsänen start with an important wording: “that an individual feels that”. Marcus Aurelius has been quoted to have said: “If you are pained by external things, it is not they that disturb you, but your judgment of them. And it is in your power to wipe out that judgment now.” Empowerment starts from changing one’s perspective on things, adapting a new point of view, creative thinking.

The most important thing about empowerment is that it has to start from within oneself. Even when there are artists and social workers involved in a Community Arts Project, they can not empower the participants. They are merely there to facilitate, so that the participants can empower themselves. Judy Weiser also implies this as she

91 Weiser, 1999  
92 Räsänen, 2006 p. 14-22  
93 Antonovsky, 1985  
94 Räsänen, 2006 p. 48-49
explains how the meanings in photographs should be interpreted not by the therapist but by the client in collaboration with the therapist⁹⁵.

⁹⁵ Weiser, 1999, p.17
5. Conclusions

In this chapter I compare what I set out to find to what I did find, and reflect upon those results and the effects of that on me as a designer as well as a person. I start with what I expected to find, and how the results of the study connect to and differ from my expectations. Finally, I summarize what is the meaning of these findings for me.

5.1 Creativity in Craftmaking

I have noticed that my own creativity levels go up afterward, if I work on something with my hands. I also feel happier when I take some time to sketch something or knit for a while. It seemed to me, as I described in chapter 1, that being involved in communal craft and art projects was even more rewarding than drawing or knitting on my own. When I first started this work, I was hoping to find clear evidence that making crafts together increases creativity. I had no sophisticated tools to measure body response like in Vähälä’s study\textsuperscript{96}, so I was hoping for a comment or a piece of conversation that would clearly support my idea. However, there were no comments to confirm it in the conversation. Some of the commentary on the creativity was even questioning the creative quality of craftmaking:

"So if you do something according to a pattern it is not creative activity...”

"Is it creative if you are not making something new?"

These comments were made in the workshop during the conversation about what creativity is, and how it is evident in participants lives.

Two of the questions in the end questionnaire sheet also concern this issue:

"Did you feel creative when making crafts(when, what was the situation)?” and “Do you feel that making crafts has an effect on your creativity? If so, in what way?”

In legal terms, I think this would be called leading the witness. Even with this, only two participants admitted to feeling a little creative when making crafts, mentioning especially when learning a new thing and choosing colors. I noticed also myself, that I did not feel especially creative while doing crafts. The answers to the second question

\textsuperscript{96} Vähälä, 2003
were more encouraging. Participant (D) wrote that making things was activating and it
couraged to think of all other projects that could be done. (B) was convinced that
there is a positive effect, and compared craftmaking to drawing as means to keep the
skills fresh. Participant (A) mentioned that it gives boost to other creative tasks to see
the result of your work in the craftmaking. (C)'s opinion was that the patience needed
in the creative processes was developed in craftmaking.

Creativity was in our group connected to problem-solving and challenging situations,
as well as choices. These comments reveal that craftmaking has some sort of a
supportive role in relation to other creative activity. A comment from (C) reveals that
she sees a connection between her past craftmaking and her graphic design work.

"For me it was like, before it was really important part of me, like building my identity,
like: I am a craftperson. But then it just faded away through the work, at work I have to
deal with, or the work is so visual that I don't have the energy anymore, even when it's
totally different when you're working on a computer, somehow there is that something."

(C) seems to imply that the same resources are used for her work and craftmaking, and
now that she works with the visual every day, she doesn't feel the need to do so during
her time off. The connection is hard to describe, but she feels that it is there.

Oftentimes people choose craftmaking instinctively, and maybe find some connections
later on. Vähälä poses the following questions in the introduction to her research:

"Have the people who make craft chosen unknowingly a form of action which gives them
preparedness to cope with various life situations? Does craftmaking have an effect on
their well-being? Can this positive effect be brought out by means of research?"

In the light of her study, I think it is reasonable to assume that some of us benefit from
craftmaking in the sense that it gives us sense of achievement and for some designers,
strengthens our understanding of, and ability to design functional objects. However,
there are people who do not enjoy craftmaking. I am certain there are designers who
belong to this group of people as well. If craftmaking gives a better understanding
about the process, are craftmaking designers better designers than the ones who do not
like crafts? I do not think so. More likely, there are different ways to approach and
understand the creative process, and craftmaking is just one of many tools available. It

97 Vähälä, 1999, 7.
could be that craftmaking enhances certain behavioral patterns needed for creation. Csikszentmihalyi notes that a person who has control over their psychic energy and uses it to achieve goals, grows as a person\textsuperscript{98}. Maybe one of the benefits in craftmaking is that learning new skills and strategies in a comfortable setting makes us more ready to try out new strategies also in challenging situations. This may be close to what Vähälä suggests. It seems to be the logic behind (B)'s questionnaire answer. In some cases, craftmaking is to a designer what sketching is to a painter.

To compress the answer to my question whether communal craftmaking boosts creativity: It might, but the process is more complex than I originally thought. The effect seems to come in a roundabout way. Craftmaking strengthens something within us, be it the connection of body and mind to the task at hand, or sense of achievement as you can see what you are doing. Whatever we create within ourselves making crafts, it seems to work as building blocks to aid other creative tasks. In order to gain these building blocks, it is not necessary to do crafts together, working alone works just as well. It seems that the main impact of community craftmaking is related to creativity, but although important, creativity is not the main issue here. Creativity is possibly the result of a bigger process, empowerment.

5.2 Community of Empowerment

Empowerment is a term used often in relation to social projects and ethnic or other minorities. In Community Arts the goal is to empower communities that are otherwise oppressed by the society. In this project, I consider the empowerment the most important effect of communal craftmaking. Our group is not a group of minority, of course if one would like to look at it from a feminist point of view, we are a group of young women. Although the feminist point of view is clearly visible in some of my references (for example Heikkinen\textsuperscript{99}) I did not include such aspects to this study. A question that remains within the context of this study, who is it that needs empowering, and what is it that is oppressing them?

Hannele Koivunen writes about tacit knowledge, and describes how tacit knowledge has been passed on especially between women, from mother to daughter, in Finland as

\textsuperscript{98} Csikszentmihalyi, 1992, p. 6
\textsuperscript{99} Heikkinen, 1997
recently as after-war years in rural communities. She suggests that the urbanization has weakened this traditional continuum, and that the discontinuation has caused many types of social nausea as symptoms of detachment. She describes the same modern society as Eriksen, who says that the speed of information causes the dis-connectivity in our lives. To dramatize the situation: We live in a fracturized world, where nothing connects to something else, and all things seem chaotic. To answer the questions posed in the beginning of this chapter: We all need empowering, as it is the society we've built that is oppressing us all. The empowering force lies in the very core aspect of craft community. Kaija Heikkinen introduces some studies made of motivations in participating craft courses in community colleges. According to her, these studies belittle the aspect of enjoyment of making things together.

In this project, the theme of making crafts together was an important aspect to all participants, not least to myself. While we were all doing our own thing, we were sharing the process and our thoughts with each other. Albeit it wasn't true with all participants that communal craftmaking was a creative experience, it is safe to say that community craftmaking can work as an empowering tool. I think many things came together and made the experience one of empowerment.

One aspect of it was the participants and their relationships. We didn't need time to form group dynamics, it already existed to some extent. In other words, we had a potential community. I think that communities are a natural way of existing for us humans, and even when faced with new technologies we are still creatures who seek comfort in each other. The future might hold a new step of evolution for us becoming individual units independent of all others, but for now it seems our well-being is connected to our inter-connectedness.

Learning in a community context means that the skills should be passed on in a continuum. In other words, learning is refining the practice and ensuring new generations of members. In this project, we passed through a phase of forming a community, and leaving it behind in a short period of time. The most important information that was shared was not the craft skills, but they gave us a framework for

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100 Koivunen, 1997, p. 112-122
101 Eriksen, 2003
102 Heikkinen, 1997, p. 60
interaction. I suppose craftmaking deepened the conversations in a way that more was said than in a usual meeting over coffee. I do not see the short life of our community as a failure, but I suppose that the longer the communities continue, the better their results. Of course the community has to be kept open to keep it from becoming a strain. Communities can be for the benefit of the individual, but they can also become a harmful entity, if warped power relations start forming within. Despite the dramatization earlier, I do not see us as extremely lost in a chaotic world with only each other to cling on to, and I don’t think communities are the one and only answer to alleviate the anxiety caused by the information society.

I will, however, claim that in this case the assurance that working together gave to the members, worked as an empowering tool, and gave us comfort and confidence even at times of low motivation levels. On my behalf, communal craftmaking allowed me to gain insight I would not have otherwise gained, and helped me to understand and accept aspects of myself that were somehow undefined. I would compare the empowerment in craft community to the granny squares that I made. One piece is complete on it’s own, but if you can combine many, they can form something bigger and become more. We can reflect upon ourselves and come to a definition, but we need others to see the big picture, to understand how we connect to others around us and to the society, and what are all the possibilities of existing within interaction with others.

5.3 Iterative Identity Building

During this study I’ve made a realization about the design process. This study was built layer by layer and by connecting action and experiences to existing theory. I read something, wrote about it and we had the workshops. I went back to what I had read, found some more texts, reflected upon what we had talked about in the workshop. Then I wrote some more. It was cylindrical motion, like going up winding stairs. The way I’ve done the study mimics the way that design work is done, going through the same steps over and over again. In Action Research, the cycle of action and reflection is endless, we can go around the same theme over and over and build a layer upon layer of understanding.
I feel as if the whole human existence is in a way this kind of iterative process. We wake up every morning, we eat, study etc. If we eat a lot, it gradually starts to gather up on our bodies. As muscle, if we exercise, as fat, if we don’t. In the same way experience and knowledge gather up in our brain. And just like gathering extra energy from food, it’s up to us if we find the means to use the extra fuel to our benefit. It is eventually up to ourselves how much use we get out of our skills and in how many ways we apply what we learn.

As in life, also in work the methods we use are chosen according to how we interpret the situation, and the variety of methods used depend on the skills and abilities of the person. As Boden says, the quality that differentiates more and less creative persons is *not one special power, but greater knowledge and the motivation to acquire and use it*"103. She also explains later on that creativity uses our normal abilities of noticing, remembering, seeing, speaking, hearing, understanding language and recognizing analogies"104. In a moment of creativity, we use these skills to their best extent.

Csikszentmihalyi describes this process as investing psychological energy. As we focus on a task, we transfer a part of our energy to an object. This invested energy can turn into gain if it helps us gain our goal. Achieving a goal provides positive feedback, and allows the self to grow and strengthen."105 (A) probably experienced such positive feedback after figuring out the tricks to making woolen socks.

Anthony Giddens describes the building of identity in modern society as a continuous process, where the goal is to maintain a coherent, but at the same time continuously revised sense of self"106. I think as we revise our identity continuously, we build it in a similar, iterative way. I think that identity building is a kind of a hidden theme in my study. The timing for the thesis fuses with a period in my life that is considered commonly as one of the turning points in life. It may be due to passing from twenty-something to thirty-something age group, that I reflect upon myself and my personal and professional identity, and am able to see it as a whole. I start to see a bigger picture forming out of what has felt so far a series of unconnected periods of actions.

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103 Boden, 2004, p. 35  
104 Boden, 2004, p. 261  
105 Csikszentmihalyi, 1981, p. 8  
106 Giddens, 1992, 5
In the first chapter I explain about how I have always been able to distinctly tell when my action is design-oriented and when it is art-oriented, but craftmaking has been a bit that doesn’t fit, and it mixes up the clear distinction between the two as well. As in (C)’s description about identity as a craftsperson, my identity is also build on the elements of creative action. Giddens also describes that modern society offers at one hand emancipation, but at the same time structures that oppress the self. Eriksen says that modern society and information leads to fragmentation of time, and of self. For me, it feels as if my whole life has been about fragmented self, and building one’s identity through craft making and art. The further I dig into the subject, the more personal it feels. I think we first feel fragmentation of self when we go to school. There are expectations we are not familiar with, and a schedule we have to follow.

I remember distinctly when I started to draw with conviction. At the age of 6, I was drawing a blue bird from a lullaby on cardboard for a school puppet show, and suddenly had a vision of the scenery of the song, and a strong motivation to realize that vision. The elementary school especially was unpleasant to me, and I think art provided a tool to handle the environment I experienced as hostile. I remember developing a different type of personality around myself to deal with the situations and expectations around me. I have later thought this over-layered personality as some kind of a user interface, and still tend to use it in everyday situations. Behind this user interface I live the way I want to.

The over-layered personality sounds like a psychological disease, but actually it is just one of the iterative layers of identity I’ve gained with interaction with the society. The idea of it is especially familiar in Japan, where they have two aspects of interaction, honne and tatemae. The difference between the two is a familiar concept to all Japanese, and usually explained in simple terms in any practical guidelines to people visiting Japan. Honne represents the true feelings, and tatemae is what the person thinks is expected of them. Another adaptation of mine is the channeling creative energy into art. As for the person inside, it also needs to change in course of time, because we are affected by all our experiences, and do not stop learning at any point.

The learning during this process has added yet another layer to my understanding of

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107 Giddens, 1992, 6
who I am, especially professionally. I see the connections between myself, the identities I’ve built and the profession(s) I have chosen. As Victor Papanek has stated, we are all designers, as design is a conscious effort to achieve a meaningful order.\footnote{Papanek, 1973, p. 21-22}

5.4 A Crafty Designer

In introduction I mentioned the dilemma of the craftsman-designer ideal and the vagueness of designer identity. I started out confused about where craftmaking stands in comparison to art and design. Howard Risatti claims that craft is art.\footnote{Risatti, 2007} Anna-Maija Ihatsu describes that in the 1980s design became values on their own right, and the names of designers on the product became more important than the practicality or suitability of the particular object, so a designers name became the signature of an artist.\footnote{Ihatsu, 1996, p.23} Ihatsu sees craft as sitting in the middle of art and design.\footnote{Ihatsu, 1996, p.24} She also describes how the borders of craft, art and design are being questioned, and people working in these fields might ‘swap’ to another field, which causes mixing of the three entities. Ihatsu calls this gender confusion.\footnote{Ihatsu, 1996, p. 78-84} Her study is from 1996, so the confusion between the fields is nothing new. It is, however, new to me. When I started my art studies, I did not consider my craft skills in the same category with my art skills. They were classified under survival skills along with cooking and starting a fire. It has always been something I’ve taken for granted, a skill everyone should know. I suppose this is the attitude that my parents’ generation generally have towards crafts. I don’t think my mother has ever made a knitted artifact that was not meant for someone to use. I still think knitting is a necessary skill for anyone, but somewhere along the line I’ve come to realize it can be so much more.

When studying fine arts, I noticed the tradition of looking down on craft artifacts within the art institution. This view was different from the practicality-based views I learned as a child. In my opinion, craft skill was in the essential skill set, whereas art was something nice but not necessary. Even though my parents have never said a word about my choices on education, I think I was conflicted between two worlds back then,
the actually very secular art world and my own working-class background. It seems the more I try to define myself, the more aspects I have to consider. Nigel Cross explains that a designers job is to provide a description of a new artifact. He does explain that sometimes it is necessary to make full-scale mock-ups, but in between the lines I can sense that he also means that designer does not provide artifacts, but the descriptions of artifacts. In the craftmaker-designer ideal the craftmaker-designer is seen as one who understands the material through the making, and is therefore able to produce good designs. It is safe to say there are as many opinions as there are practitioners on the field.

I couldn't pass craftmaking as a hobby, as knitting and crochet seemed to withhold something of great importance to myself as a skill. I've felt a great sense of achievement when designing and making knitted clothing. It reassured me of my design abilities. Knitting and crochet also work as a link to my family stories. They pass on the personality and character of my female relatives. Craftmaking links to identity, as I've mentioned before. Csikszentmihalyi claims that the material objects we make and use constitute the framework of experience that gives order to our otherwise shapeless selves.

When combining the comments about the chaotic quality of the society by Eriksen and Koivunen to this thought by Csikszentmihalyi, it makes sense why the modern society is so consumer centered, and many people buy more things than they actually need. Making something to express your identity seems to me to be more beneficial than buying something made to an imagined target group, because it enables us to build our own environment of objects. An interesting point is also the expression used widely on blogs and social media boards: "Knitting keeps me from unraveling." I could not say it any better.

From a professional point of view, hand-made objects have qualities I appreciate in design as well. Crafting an object takes time, so we have to design our crafts carefully so that hey are not outdated when we finish them. Boradkar says that "Designers need to pay close attention to the life spans of their design; their decisions affect individuals,

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114 Csikszentmihalyi, 1981, p. 16
115 Bruno, 2010
116 http://www.pinterest.com/loniluvsnick/knitting-keeps-me-from-unraveling/
I feel that this is one of the guidelines I wish to follow as a designer, and craftmaking enforces this type of thinking in me. If we keep the longevity of the product in mind in craft projects, we could be able to transfer these principles to all design, thus making the life span of our designs longer.

Along the process of this study, I have started to feel that everything I do is so interconnected that there can not be any clear distinctions between art, craft and design, and there need not to be any separation within. During the process of the workshops, I understood how important sharing and listening are in any common human effort. I also came to realize that there are many aspects to art, craft and design that connect to what is universally human. I aim to appreciate the craft abilities as a part of my repertoire as both a designer and artist. I need to understand myself as well as others around me, and create my own point of view based on that understanding.

5.5 The Project in Retrospective

I mentioned in chapter 5.2 that the community formed in this project was short-lived, but that I do not see it as a problem. We have been talking about getting together to knit again sometime, for good old times sake. To me this proves the project has been a good one. However, I would be interested to see how the workshops would develop within a longer time span, for example a year. It would also be interesting to study periods of taping the conversation within even a longer timescale. Assuming that we would have continued the workshops weekly ever since this project started, and then I would tape four or five meetings every six months for a couple of years, the results could show the development and changes in long-term. In the context of a Masters thesis this would not be reasonable, but for a more in-depth study it has a possibility to reveal even more interesting aspects of community crafts, and the participants.

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117 Boradkar, 2010 p.210
In this project, if I could go back and do something differently, I would ask the participants to make a small photo diary of the workshops with some comments. I had this idea at some point in the beginning, but knowing the participants were busy and suspecting that they might feel this being extra work, I gave up on the idea. Now I think it might have been so, but it could have given them some material to reflect upon, just as I had the tapes and my diary. In short, I think I gained a little extra benefit because I was doing the research and had to make a conscious effort to understand our actions. Arriving to the how and what to do in the project took me quite a while, and I’m fairly satisfied with it. I might have wanted to do this in a bigger scale, but I think I was also eager to push on with the writing of the thesis, which gave some rush to the project overall.

If I would do another project like this, I would invite participants who might not be connected to each other, and have them to commit for two or three months, and tell them that they could try to invite friends to visit sometimes. Then I would continue the project as long as there are participants. I suspect the results would be different in some aspects, but I’m curious to know in what ways. Would it be empowering in similar or different ways, could it be perceived more creative by another group of participants? Perhaps an exhibition could be arranged at some point. In short, this project was a short one, and the results of it made me curious as to what other things could be discovered by similar methods of working. Using the experience from this research, I could also aim to study different aspects in more depth, for example the personal creative processes of individuals and how they relate to the theories, or how empowerment happens in the craft workshop context more precisely. I think I’ve learned a lot about research during this process, and it feels like I’ve only scratched the surface of many interesting themes here.
Appendix A

Questions during the workshops:

When did you learn crocheting and/or knitting, and from whom?

How much do you knit/crochet, or have you done it at all? Would you consider it as a hobby?

What new things would you like to learn in relation to knitting?

Do you do any other crafts?

Do you have any memories that are related to knitting and/or crochet? What kind of memories?

What do you think creativity is, and how is it apparent in your own life?
Appendix B

11.03.2013 Kysely

Vastauksia voi jatkaa paperin toiselle puolelle tarvittaessa.

1. Mitä käsitöitä teit neule/virkkaustapaamisten aikana?

2. Saitko ideoita muihin töihin tekemisen aikana, mitä?

3. Koitko yhdessä tekemisen olevan hyödyllistä itsellesi, millä tasolla (esim. sosiaalisuus, muiden neuvot)?

4. Tunsitko oloasi luovaksi tehdessäsi käsitöitä, milloin, tilanne?

5. Koetko käsitöiden tekemisen vaikuttavan luovuuteesi? Jos, niin miten?

6. Vapaa palaute

5. Kuvaa tapaamisien aikaista työskentelyäsi jonkinlaisella kuvalla
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