

# Craft and sustainable development: reflections on Scottish craft and pathways to sustainability

By Emilia Ferraro, Rehema White, Eoin Cox, Jan Bebbington and Sandra Wilson

*Dr Emilia Ferraro* is a social anthropologist; a self-taught jeweller, and a Lecturer in Sustainable Development, School of Geography and Geoscience, University of St. Andrews.

*Dr Rehema White* is a Biologist and a Lecturer in Sustainable Development, School of Geography and Geoscience, University of St. Andrews. *Eoin Cox* is a craft practitioner and the owner and a director of Buy Design Gallery Ltd.

*Jan Bebbington* is Professor of accounting and Sustainable Development, and the Director of St Andrews Sustainability Institute at the University of St Andrews.

*Dr Sandra Wilson* is a contemporary jewellery practitioner and Programme Director of the Jewellery & Metal Design department at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design, University of Dundee.

**Abstract:** Sustainable development is more than a concern with climate change and/or recycling. It is a concern for the longevity of all forms of life, for social equity and for the environment conceived as a context of relationships that exists and take on meaning in relation to the beings who inhabit it. It thus calls for the explicit acknowledgement that the transition to more sustainable societies requires a major change and reorientation of ways of thinking; lifestyles; consumer patterns and values.

This paper, based upon data from Scotland identifies a number of “leverage points” where, through the application of theories on the nature of craft and philosophies underlying strong modes of sustainable futures, links between craft economic and educational models, and pathways to sustainability through building resilient communities, emerge. In this way, it contributes to current debates on the “persistence” of craft in “modern” societies (cf. Greenhalgh, 2006) not against or in spite of modernity but, on the contrary, as “a modern way of thinking otherwise” (Adamson, 2010:5).

## Paper

### 1. Introduction

This paper discusses the potential contributions of craft to the transition to more sustainable societies. Craft, we argue, offers a number of leverage points where links between its economic and educational models and pathways to sustainability emerge. The paper, thus, contributes both to alternative and more creative definitions of “sustainability”, and to current debates on the “persistence” of craft and its role in “modern” societies (cf. Greenhalgh, 2006). Craft, we believe, can be seen no longer as existing against or in spite of modernity; on the contrary, in the context of sustainable development, it clearly emerges as “a modern way of thinking otherwise” (Adamson, 2009:5).

We begin with an introductory debate on the definitions of craft and the changing meaning of sustainable development over time. Using the data of a scoping study we undertook on the craft sector in Fife, East Scotland, we then discuss the common ground and leverage points between craft and sustainable development and make some concluding comments.

A remark about the authors is in order here. ‘We’ are three scholars in sustainable development, one scholar in art and design and the owner of a craft gallery. ‘We’ are at the same time two professional craft practitioners (one in jewellery and metal design and the other in furniture design), one ‘novice’ and two ‘hobbyists’. All of us share interests in and multiple engagements with sustainable development and craft that range from mainly theoretical to very practical involvement. It is this interdisciplinary background and array of different personal experiences that inform the discussion of both craft and sustainability put forward in this paper.

### 2. Definitions of craft and sustainable development

Definitions of what constitutes “craft” have given rise to a large body of specialised literature that debates its nature over time and across disciplines (e.g. Adamson, 2009). In this paper, we define craft as “the application of skills and material-based knowledge to relatively small scale production” (Adamson, 2009:3). The craft objects which arise from such production, however, “may or may not be culturally embedded in the country of production, and which is sold for profit” (McAuley & Fillis, 2002, p. 10).<sup>1</sup>

Craft has increasingly been discussed as a trope that is, as an idea that includes several different threads creating a heady mix of romantic idealism, the politics of work and notions of the vernacular (Dormer, 1997; Venkatesan, 2006). It

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<sup>1</sup> Craft as discussed in this document does not include traditional or heritage crafts such as thatching, greenwood working or masonry, which imply a different set of issues and thus require a different discussion.

is important to acknowledge this within the context of this study if we are to recognise that there are often significant differences between the idea of craft as conceptualized by key actors who command power in shaping craft practices and the diverse realities of life as experienced by individual craft practitioners.<sup>2</sup>

The recent resurgence of interest in ideas about craft and its role in modernity (e.g. Greenhalgh, 2006; Sennett 2009; also the “Making Futures” 2009 and “Neocraft” 2007 Conferences), are only just starting to pay attention to the possibilities that craft and craftsmanship represent for sustainability at least in the West (cf. Ferris, 2010). Yet both craft and sustainable development are intricately connected with the way human beings create and interpret life; with culture and social relations; with use of and relationship with natural materials; and with livelihood and broader economic opportunities.<sup>3</sup>

As with craft, sustainable development is also subject to contested definitions. It emerged as a theoretical concept and field of practice from the merging of the interests and actions of the environmental and the social justice movements (e.g. Dresner, 2002). Concerns for the environmental integrity of the planet and the need to achieve equitable development outcomes for all humans alive today and for future generations are inextricably linked. While sustainable development is a notoriously contested term, common aspects of existing definitions include:

A concern for the longevity of the planet and of Life in its multiple forms (hence the capital “L”);

- A concern to live in an ecologically sustainable manner, within environmental limits;
- A commitment to equity and socially just outcomes;
- A concern with the needs of future generations;
- A commitment to democratic and inclusive processes that allow all people to have a say in decisions and actions that affect their present and future life.

In 1987 the United Nation's Brundtland Report defined sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987, pp.8). The Earth Summit of Rio in 1992 moved the debate farther along with the release of the Agenda 21 programme of actions for Sustainable Development. Since then, a wide academic debate and a variety of environmental initiatives from around the world - from NGOs, corporations, international agencies and governments - have taken place. The parameters of the debate have become more complex as

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2 Whilst not considered within this study, exploration of the nature of this trope as a reflexive phenomenon merits further study.

3 Discussions of links between craft and sustainability have occurred before. In the global South, craft is often still a part of everyday life as well as a livelihood opportunity. The intersections between craft and sustainability discussed there tend to focus around sustainable utilisation of natural materials, financial benefits as part of livelihoods, particularly for tourism markets, and debates on culture and craft e.g. in South Africa see Cawe and Ntloko (1997); Shackleton and Shackleton 2004; and Cocks et al (2006). For India see Venkatesan, 2006 & 2009.

scientific knowledge demonstrates more clearly human impacts on the planet and as high levels of poverty remain. In 2002 the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development acknowledged the interdependence of the three pillars of society, the economy, and the environment, and encouraged us to see sustainability as a long-term, strategic thinking that promotes effective stewardship of the world's resources. Over the past thirty years debates on "sustainability" have shifted from "weak" interpretations, in which natural capital can be exchanged by other forms of capital, to "strong" conceptions of sustainability, in which absolute environmental constraints are acknowledged but the importance of social and human aspects are also highlighted (Dresner, 2002).

Scholars and practitioners in sustainable development are in agreement about the evolution of sustainable development as a fundamental recognition of the interconnectedness of environmental integrity and social justice. However, there is a growing body of debate suggesting that this concept also challenges our perceptions of the role of humanity. As the global ecological crisis accelerates at an unprecedented rate and despite the huge governmental and private investments in the past five years, a number of emerging voices within the field of sustainable development are pointing at the urgent need to widen the terms of the debate on the sustainability of the Earth to include critical analyses of the economic, social, and humanistic project that lies at the core of this crisis (Orr, 2002; Speth, 2008; Jackson, 2009; Assadourian, 2010). These voices insist that together with major changes and reorientation of lifestyles; consumer patterns; modes of engaging with one another, and societal values, the transition to more sustainable societies in the North of the world can be achieved only in the context of a new understanding of human existence on Earth (Speth 2008; Orr, 2002 among others).

In this paper, we adopt David Orr's definition of sustainability as "the arts of longevity" (Orr, 2000), that is, as both an enquiry and a course of action into the meaning, making and maintenance of Life in the long term. Compared to more conventional notions of "sustainable development", we understand that the "arts of longevity" emphasise the irrevocable interconnection of both the natural and human worlds, and of theory and practice. In fact, it postulates that the need to research and theorise the "whats" of life (e.g. what are the causes of climate change?) cannot be separated from neither the "whys" (e.g. why we have reached this crisis point?) nor the more practical search for the "hows" (e.g. how to maintain a decent level of livelihood for all in the long term without further depleting the planet's resources?). Thus, it challenges us to think about Life in radically different terms. An essential part of this "new" thinking is the explicit acknowledgement of the need for a deep change of the kind Albert Einstein was referring to when he said that it is impossible to solve a problem within the same framework of thinking that gave rise to it in the first place (Orr, 2002).

Defined in such terms, sustainable development is more than a concern with climate change and/or recycling. It is an emerging field of studies that pushes

the boundaries of our thinking and action towards a paradigmatic shift in the way we look at the world, at nature and at humankind, raising awareness that the physical, social and intellectual worlds are interconnected and interdependent. It calls for a redefinition of the “environment” no longer narrowly defined as “nature” but instead conceived as a context of relationships that exists and takes on meaning in relation to the beings who inhabit it, with the awareness that these beings are human and non-human entities who, through their presence and activities, contribute to its shaping (Gibson, 1979; Bateson, 1973; Ingold, 2000, pp.20-21). This broad view of sustainable development compels us to see our lives and ourselves as a part of a larger entity, and to look at the world in a holistic way.

### 3. A study of the Scottish craft context

There was a lack of empirical study on the craft sector in Scotland, and a need to understand perspectives of craft makers and policy makers on potential links between craft and sustainable development. We thus conducted a scoping study to explore this topic, obtain baseline data and provoke questions for future research.<sup>4</sup>

Beside gathering basic data on the demographics and economic parameters of the craft sector in Fife, our objectives in the scoping study were to identify the current policy context of sustainable development and of craft in Scotland; explore the understandings that individuals involved in the craft sector in different capacities have of sustainable development; and understand some makers’ perceptions of craft as a social, economic and cultural contributor to Scotland and Scottish cultural identity(ies). We used a mixed method approach that combined the review of relevant policy documents with informal conversations and semi-structured interviews. We reviewed existing grey literature that addresses issues of craft, culture and sustainable development, as well as craft demographics in Scotland and in Fife. We held meetings with policy makers in the Scottish Government, in order to test the ideas being developed and investigate if an interest in sustainable development could be usefully translated to craft concerns. We attended various craft meetings where the present and future of craft were discussed, as well as makers’ events (such as the North Fife Open Studios<sup>5</sup> and Fife Contemporary Arts and Craft Forum)

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4 To date, the only such study is McAuley & Fillis, 2002. However, their definition of craft is problematic in so far as it conflates with definitions of “creative industries”, thus leading the debate towards a different (although related) pathway that would look at the evolving definitions of “creative industries” over time, and the limits and links with “craft”, both of which are beyond the scope of this paper.

5 The Open Studios Fife is a periodical event throughout the year when makers of the region open their studios to the public. The event is partly self-funded and partly financed by public (Fife Council) and private funds. Fife Contemporary Crafts & Arts is Fife’s leading visual art and craft agency supporting makers’ events, exhibitions and residencies. It organises the annual Fife makers Forum.

where we held informal conversations with makers. We conducted informal semi-structured interviews with 28 makers and 18 institutional representatives, who were identified through the snowball technique.

We focused on the region of Fife, in East Scotland, for a number of reasons. Fife is clearly defined by the river Tay in the North and by the Firth of Forth in the South; it is predominately rural with small concentrations of population in towns such as St Andrews, famous for being the birthplace of golf and site of Scotland's first University. Its relatively small size would allow us to achieve both a good spread of data, enough to reach general conclusions, as well as some individual cases. The area presents a wide array of social and economic situations, thus providing a good representation of the inequalities of income, health and wellbeing associated with Scotland as a whole. Last but not least, the area has a well established 'craft community' with a developing infrastructure of craft development programmes created by national and regional government agencies providing training and access to resources in addition to some umbrella organizations created by craft practitioners themselves to address their own needs. This is an important distinction to make if we are to acknowledge, as Venkatsan (2006) has identified, that notions of what constitutes a 'craft community' are constructed in both 'the state and public sphere', often in 'idealised' ways and based on 'romanticism', and therefore may bear little relationship to the lived experience of craft practitioners.

The most relevant results of the scoping study for this paper's argument are provided in the sections below. The analysis, of course, has been influenced by our academic understandings of sustainable development and by our own individual experiences.

### 3.1 Policy context

The craft sector in Scotland has been characterised by confused surveys and strategies, and the question arises as to how, if at all, debates in sustainable development can provide support and strategic alliance in such an environment. Part of the reason for a confused national strategy is due to the varied make up of craft businesses as discussed below. Further, a great deal of activity in the craft sector is supported by subsidies and the 'control' of craft still remains in the hands of the administrators.

Creative Scotland (based on the recent merger of the Scottish Arts Council and Scottish Screen) is one of the main financial supporters of professional craft practice. Through grants for business start up and creative development awards, it plays an important role in dictating what is considered the 'best' in Scottish contemporary craft, most often servicing an 'elite' audience. The total Scottish craft budget for 2009/2010 was £740,000. Very little exists by the way of financially supporting what might be considered more traditional or vernacular craft.

Policy on sustainable development is proliferating. The UK Government recognises a framework for sustainable development (DEFRA, 2005), which is meant to guide but is not binding. The critical aspect of this framework is that a sustainable economy, good governance and responsible use of science are seen to be enablers to achieve the overall goals of living within environmental limits and ensuring a strong, healthy and just society (Fig. 1). There have been numerous legislative acts related to sustainable development, for example, the Climate Change (Scotland) Act (2009) which demands ambitious changes, but each addresses only a part of the overall goals.

### 3.2 Demography of craft in Scotland and in Fife

Whether producing traditional or more contemporary work, in Scotland the craft sector is now significant in its own right, with annual turnover of approximately £150 million (McAuley & Fillis, 2002)<sup>6</sup> and makes an important contribution to other areas of government policy including regional development, tourism and social policy.

Studies on the craft sector in Scotland are scarce and fragmented. The only comprehensive study is McAuley and Fillis (2002), commissioned by the Scottish Arts Council, Scottish Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise Glasgow. Table 1 outlines the key findings from this study. The data supports the contention that the craft sector has structural issues to address with regard to economic viability.

In combination, this data and the data in Figure 2 reveal the highly unequal distribution of the average annual turnover, and suggest that for many craft practitioners in Scotland, turnover is not sufficient to sustain someone who has no other source of income or support (either from other family members, additional personal income streams or via subsidy). This data would lead to the suggestion that the very small craft businesses are likely to lack the capacity to make a significant impact in the Scottish economy either in turnover or employment terms. This would explain why individual craft enterprises are often perceived as not making much of an economic contribution

within the enterprise landscape.<sup>7</sup> However, such small, flexible businesses, often not requiring significant capital, may have the capacity to contribute to incomes, providing a safety net (cf. Shackleton and Shackleton 2004) which can support individuals, families and communities at critical times. In addition, the existing data on the buying audience for Scottish craft suggest that the sector contains considerable opportunities for business growth (McAuley & Fillis, 2002).

In terms of demographics and spread of craft practice, our study shows that Fife is broadly representative of Scotland as a whole (Figure 3), with a predominance

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<sup>6</sup> The combined turnover in England and Wales £450 million (see Oakley, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Likewise, looking at averages only also masks the existence of a small number of makers who have extremely high turnovers, normally associated with leading edge, high-tech companies, and who become internationally renowned.



of women makers over men in all the main discipline. <sup>8</sup>Figure 3 also shows that both in Scotland and in Fife textiles and ceramics are major contributors, with jewellery and glass (especially in Fife) and wood (especially across Scotland) also being significant contributors.

**Table 1: Summary of the demographics of the Scottish craft sector**

Category or parameters	Craft sector
Mediums	Ceramics, textiles, wood and jewellery dominate total activity
Gender of craftspeople	Female 61%, Male 39%
Age of crafts people	35% aged 45-54 years old
Employment pattern	77.6% of participants only work in craft
Business start up dates	11% began in last ten years, 50% in 90's, 23% in 80's
Business longevity	24.8% males and 12.6% females working for > 20yrs in their craft
Previous occupation	68.6% had previous occupations before working in craft
Education	70% of makers have a further education qualification
Ethnicity and disability	2.1% other than white, 2% recorded disability
Methods of training	50.7% self taught, 34.7% arts schools, 21.4% learning on job
Turnover (but see Fig. 2)	£44,000 p.a. (average)
Size of business	83% 1-2 person businesses
Business form	77.5% sole traders
Premises	68% from workspace at home
Growth aspirations	73% wish to grow
Market channels	64.9% commissions, direct from workshop 51.3%, trade fairs 43.7%
Promotion	65.6% via leaflets, 57.8% personal selling, 44.6% registers/directories

Table elaborated using data from McAuley and Fillis (2002: 10-13)

The scoping study revealed that despite the perceived lack of economic contribution, the craft sector in Fife has a functioning multi layered approach and is dynamically active. For a small geographical area, craft in Fife has a relatively high number and range of craft practitioners who make a significant cultural contribution to the region. This is largely due to a willingness between the governing bodies and practitioners to find ways of making craft more viable. However, little debate emerged in our study about the 'nature of craft' or the relationship between craft practice and 'nature' and consequently any understanding of how 'nature' is conceptualised within the craft community. Environmental issues did not feature highly and, for example, there were few

<sup>8</sup> For example, in the 271 makers mailing list of FCA&C, women figure in the following numbers: 91 out of 145 visual artists; 18 out of 21 ceramicists; 15 out of 19 jewellers; 23 out of 24 textile artists; 11 out of 13 glass artists.



comments about the sustainable sourcing of natural materials. Practitioners' concerns were overwhelmingly about livelihood issues and the economic needs of the sector.<sup>9</sup>

## 4. Intersections between craft and sustainable development

In studying the theoretical and practical intersections between craft and sustainable development, we adopt Donella Meadows' "leverage points" perspective<sup>10</sup>. "Leverage points", this author explains, "are places within complex systems where a small shift in one thing can produce a big change in everything else" (Meadows, 1999: 1). Within this framework, we now look at the mutually beneficial leverage points between craft and sustainable development.

As revealed by our scoping study, despite the presence of a concern about sustainability, the craft sector in Fife lacks a clear understanding of what sustainable development means and of its possible benefits and opportunities for the craft sector. Nonetheless, we have identified a number of points of leverage where the economic and educational models of craft practice and pathways to sustainability merge.

### 4.1 Craft Economic Model

Many of the concerns raised by interviewees in our study related to livelihoods and to the economic power of the craft sector. However, if we consider in new ways the (now old) concept of *prosperity* currently under debate in the field of sustainable development (Jackson, 2009), craft has the potential to

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<sup>9</sup> Makers' main concerns with respect to their businesses were largely practical in their nature. They relate to: (i) a need for creative and professional skills development, (ii) the availability of low cost workshop space, (iii) the availability of advice and funds for business development and (iv) a desire to reduce isolation. In general, makers felt they had no control over the supply or demand for craft; believed there is a lack of a wholesale market for craft and a weak commercial market; and that there is little sense of the worth of craft as collectable in the UK. Pressure coming from central buyers of 'visitor attraction' retail outlets for high volume, low value products that increase retail profits and also arises from/feeds into cultural expectations of craft being relatively affordable. The weak commercial sector is further compounded because of the dominance of subsidy in the sector in combination with a generally high level of risk aversion. The craft sector is generally perceived to be conservative in its approach to developing new markets. Exposure to markets and greater market penetration were seen as key to raising the income of makers and increasing the turnover of the sector as a whole. These actions would require a greater focus on design and marketing skills for the individual businesses, the cost of which would need to be recovered through greater income and product placement opportunity. Likewise, there is a need to create greater cross fertilization of existing successful business models, practices and organizations within the designer/makers, craft, heritage, arts and community sectors. At the same time customers/visitors could be made more aware of the worth of what they are buying. All this needs to be underpinned by market structures that create more robust business models as well as educational programmes that allow for craft practitioners to make products that are culturally appropriate and commercially viable. It was manifested by makers and institutions representatives that taken together, this may create a more resilient sector

<sup>10</sup> We thank one of the anonymous reviewers for drawing our attention to this perspective.

contribute to redefining and shaping a new economic model based not only on economic growth but also on notions of self actualisation, fulfillment and levels of happiness.

The current crisis has only reaffirmed the awareness that the economic model based on continually increasing growth is not only unsustainable, but it has already exceeded the ecological limits of the planet (Jackson, 2009). The sustainable development framework recognises that our well-being and survival ultimately depend on transforming the profit-driven model of the economy based on growth/consumption into a more equitable model of relations among people, between people and natural resources, and between society and nature. It puts forward an alternative model of society in which people do not relate to the environment in an extractive way but on the contrary are an integral part of the environment. It is this perspective from 'within' and the relational mode of engagement that lies at the core of craft practice that can contribute to a new way of conceiving of the economy as a *means* rather than as an end in itself. The end being the satisfaction of the human need of self-realisation and finding a balance between 'making a living' and 'living a creative life'.

The data reported above for both Fife and Scotland more generally, show that a person who works in the craft sector will normally work for themselves or within a small organisation, and may be in a network of collaborators and associated practitioners. They will probably be working on several different things at the same time and many of these projects and products will be one-offs. Despite the small size of many craft organisations, and the fact that the Scottish craft sector is economically subsidised, the concept of people living in a vibrant society where the goal is wellbeing rather than economic growth suggests that the existing economic structures of craft acquires more value. At a more conceptual level, craft can therefore contribute to theorising a new model of "social" economy, of an economy embedded *within* society and social relations rather than detached from it.

#### 4.2 Craft models of knowledge and education

Where craft contribution is perhaps more evident, is in the debate and practice of education for sustainable development (ESD), especially in promoting transformative learning and thus contributing to the paradigm shift that is part of what UNESCO (2010) call 'learning to transform oneself and society'. In the interviews in our study, the need for the education of practitioners and of buyers, and issues such as apprenticeships emerged as important concerns of both crafts practitioners and policy makers alike.

Education is also a critical aspect of sustainable development thinking. "[Education] enables people to develop the knowledge, values and skills to participate in decisions about the way we do things, individually and collectively, locally and globally, that will improve the quality of life now without damaging the planet of the future" (UNESCO 2011). Education can be described as an open ended process that helps people to make sense of an increasingly complex

world (Sarkissian et al., 2009). In its simplest form, it raises awareness but it can also be related to the transfer of skills and the production and sharing of knowledge. In its most radical form, it is a transformation of paradigms. In order to build capacity for a shift towards sustainability, the UN launched the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) (2005-2015), which defines ESD as aiming “to help people to develop the attitudes, skills and knowledge to make informed decisions for the benefit of themselves and others, now and in the future, and to act upon these decisions” (UN DESD-UNESCO 2010). According to the UN, ESD supports five fundamental types of learning that provide quality education and foster sustainable human development: learning to know; learning to be; learning to live together; learning to do; and learning to transform oneself and society.

For craft practitioners, learning a craft, that is, the practice of a manual skill embedded within a creative process, intimately bound up with its materials and tools, and located within an established tradition, entails more than the acquisition of a set of techniques. It is a training of the mind as well as the body, indeed of a person’s entire way of being and knowing (Harris, 2005; Marchand, 2001 and 2007; Kondo, 1990; Herzfeld, 2004). Hence, craft is also a “way of knowing” in its own right that contributes to opening new ways of reconfiguring the relationship around knowledge while at the same time expanding the debates on the nature and modes of the learning process.

There is a growing awareness that at the core of our current environmental, social, and financial crises lies a worldview that has established a radical discontinuity between humans and non-humans; that considers nature as resources to be exploited; that justifies the bestowal to humans of all rights over them. This is a concept of the human being that is segmented to fit into a segmented society and a segmented model of knowledge.

The view of knowledge entailed within craft education and practice overcomes a series of classical divisions between teaching and research; theory and practice; and intellectual and practical knowledge, showing the artificiality of such hierarchy that Western modernity has established between intellectual and practical knowledge; that lies at the core of the traditional division between craft and art, and that grants craft no intellectual authority. Here we advocate that practice and theory can only go hand in hand, and that one does not necessarily precede the other.

Craft therefore has the potential to contribute significantly to the theory and practice of ESD. On the other hand, ESD offers a framework in which the different forms of education required in the craft sector can be conceptualized and integrated within and beyond craft. Within craft, this broad view of education offers the opportunity to recognise and encourage specific skills training; sharing of knowledge; the learning of craft to such a level of skill and expertise that it promotes a change in the craftsperson. The principle of sustainable development that promotes democracy and inclusiveness also promotes a respect for different kinds of knowledge. Interviewees in our study indicated

a need for both recognition of crafting skills and marketing and business skills. They also manifested the need to improve communication, including educational discussions, between makers and buyers.

## Building Resilient Communities

The craft education model also proves relevant in relation to the emerging discussions within sustainable development contexts about building resilient communities. Building resilience is an essential aspect of this transition. The concept of resilience has been borrowed from the discipline of botany, but its use has been modified within sustainability debates. More recently, it has been utilised in relation to social change (Adger et al. 2001), institutional diversity (Ostrom 2005) and social- ecological systems (Folke 2006). Social-ecological resilience acknowledges adaptation, learning and self-organisation within a system (Carpenter et al 2001). If we take craft production and distribution to be a complex system, this offers a mechanism for understanding how the promotion of craft and the pursuit of sustainability may connect.

There is clear evidence that 'building communities' at a local level lies at the core of channeling action for change towards sustainability (Thackara, et al 2008). Re- localisation, therefore, is increasingly recognised as fundamental in building resilient communities, and 'localism' has become part of the current political discourse (cf. LGA, 2008; The 'Coalition', 2010). Craft in Scotland (including Fife) is dominated by home-based production practices, with 68% of crafts people working from their home (Table 1). This not only helps reduce the carbon footprint of travel but also potentially creates the conditions for socially connected and sustainable places, connecting and strengthening local communities.

In Fife many practitioners can be perceived as relatively autonomous individuals, however, their connection to their geographical community is strengthened through initiatives such as the Fife Open Studios, organised by local practitioners themselves and supported financially through Creative Scotland as part of their audience development strategy. Interviewees in Fife reported thinking of themselves as key players within their local community in terms of making an artistic, cultural and aesthetic contribution to its social fabric (cf. also Douglas & Freemantle, 2009). Some of the practitioners also felt that they were making a contribution to the local economic and community regeneration. It should be acknowledged here, that much of the work that contributes to building the profile of craft is generally undertaken by volunteers.

Regeneration in the East Neuk of Fife over the last decade has been stimulated by active support of art and craft in the region, with the explicit promotion of craft by the local government. Regeneration in this sense implies the development of resilience as 'adaptability', but can also be interpreted as stimulating a positive feedback response within the socio-ecological system. For example, the emergence of more craft and art enterprises in the area have promoted

marketing of the area as a tourism destination for art and craft; the East Neuk Open Studios weekends; the East Neuk Art Festivals, which have in turn led to more craft activity in the region.

The emphasis on building resilient communities and re-localising has brought to the fore the importance of skills and skills-training. Craft education is based upon a model of “engagement” with the materials, the tools and the wider context where the creative process takes place (e.g., Ingold, 2002 and 2007). In the process, both the raw materials and the practitioners are transformed. Hence, as in education for sustainable development, craft education is also transformative rather than “transmissive”.

## Concluding remarks

Craft, then has the potential to contribute to more sustainable futures. Craft offers a fertile alternative way of thinking about the world, and could be a catalyst for the re- assessment of how we chose to relate to the natural environment and with each other. In this sense it can challenge our current concepts of the role of humanity. It is this kind of consciousness, the awareness of one’s own humanness that is essential to achieving the transformation that sustainability requires.

The emphasis on “making” opens up new channels for transformative educational experience. The uniqueness of the transformative process creates space for practitioners to respond with flexibility and openness to the wider environment, to be “led” by the materials so that the final product *emerges* from the situated relationship between maker, materials and the wider environment of production. It is this capacity to creatively engage with the ever-changing conditions of the wider environment that also lies at the core of resilience. And it is this very inherent characteristic of craft practice that moves it from the margins of modernity (where it was supposedly relegated) to its very core. A new recognition of and respect for different forms of knowledge and skilled practice, if nurtured, could raise the profile

of craft as a ‘way of living’ and potentially improve earning capacities. Education as described above will play a key role in the future shape of craft and its engagement with sustainable development.

Craft can also provide leverage in practical ways towards sustainable development. In our scoping study the concerns of craft practitioners were more in relation to economic issues than to environmental or equality concerns. It provides opportunities to display concerns for material sourcing and the relationship of the maker with the natural world. It also offers the opportunity to build re-localised, resilient communities, thus contributing to the new models of “prosperity” being debated.

The conceptual framework of sustainable development also offers potential support to craft. The potential to reconfigure our economic system towards

a new understanding of prosperity that includes elements other than just the economic ones, provides funding opportunities for craft that aim beyond the development of full time enterprises.

The recognition of the ability of craft practice to increase community and regional identity and resilience in local areas chimes with broader policy goals. We have already seen a focus on the art sector, including the support of craft contributing to regeneration in the North East of Fife. Clearer understanding and articulation of the relationships between craft and sustainable development would enhance the success of such initiatives elsewhere. In addition, with the increased focus on sustainable development, we may see more people at least try craft-making and hence a re- integration of craft into mainstream life, a growing appreciation for craft skills and a consequent increase in the purchase of craft objects. Our data is specific to Fife and Scotland and we use this area as a case study to explore specific points of engagement. The statistics presented in this study, although limited, suggest a pattern of low individual income, income substitution through grant funding and under capitalised businesses. If this is the case, economic sustainability is a key challenge to the sector. While the craft sector is not a large identifiable economic sector from a national perspective, it may still have a contribution to make at a local level, particularly in the building of sustainable communities, as described above. While it obviously makes an important contribution to the re-skilling that resilience requires, craft can offer part time flexible working conditions, possibly home-based. Craft thus occupies a central place in the new debates on 'prosperity', and will be crucial to the debates on scale that are emerging from the focus on re-localisation and devolved, participatory governance.

The new Creative Scotland body brings screen, drama, literature, crafts, arts, dance and theatre activity in Scotland under one roof. This leads to several possible conclusions. First, as craft is gathered up under a broader framework it may suffer from having less access to funding that is specifically focused on its activities. At the same time, a broader framework may allow greater support for the art sector across the board. Second, in a tightening fiscal regime all activities that rely on public funding are likely to be vulnerable to cuts with obvious knock on effects. Finally, subsidy regimes cannot be expected to support activity indefinitely and any subsidy must at some stage translate into a commercially viable craft industry. In this latter context it may well be that there is more public/policy support for some elements of the art sector compared with others. In such a competitive environment craft could lose out; but by linking with the sustainability agenda it has the potential to perform much better in the forthcoming policy context. Such an alliance would require significant conscious effort and communication on the part of policy makers and craft practitioners.

To conclude, it is our belief that craft practice has a role to play in the transition to more sustainable societies. It offers contributions to sustainable development theory particularly in terms of developing an awareness of the role of humanity, (re)gaining of a sense of purpose and connection in life. At a more local level, it

offers opportunities to reduce environmental footprints; enhance social equity; build resilient communities; develop prosperous, vibrant enterprises; and identify new pathways to develop education for sustainability.

Illustrations

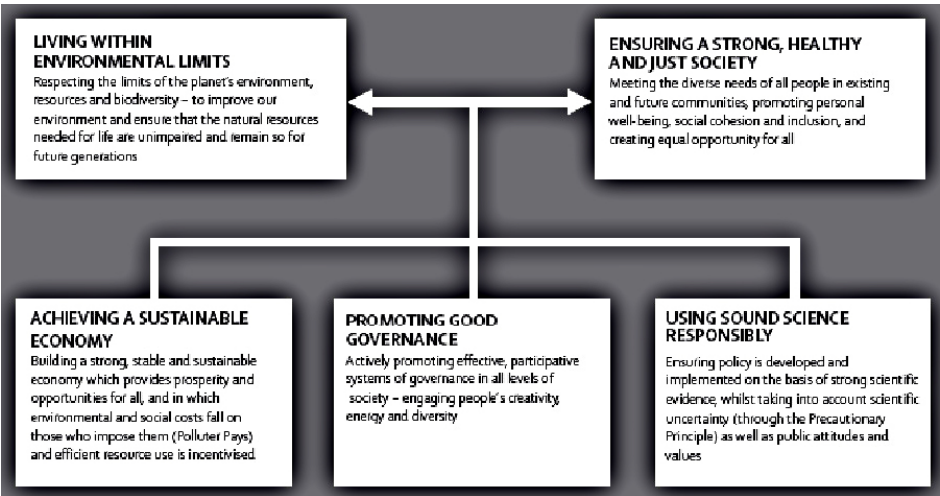


Figure 1: From DEFRA (2005: p16) The shared UK framework for sustainable development.

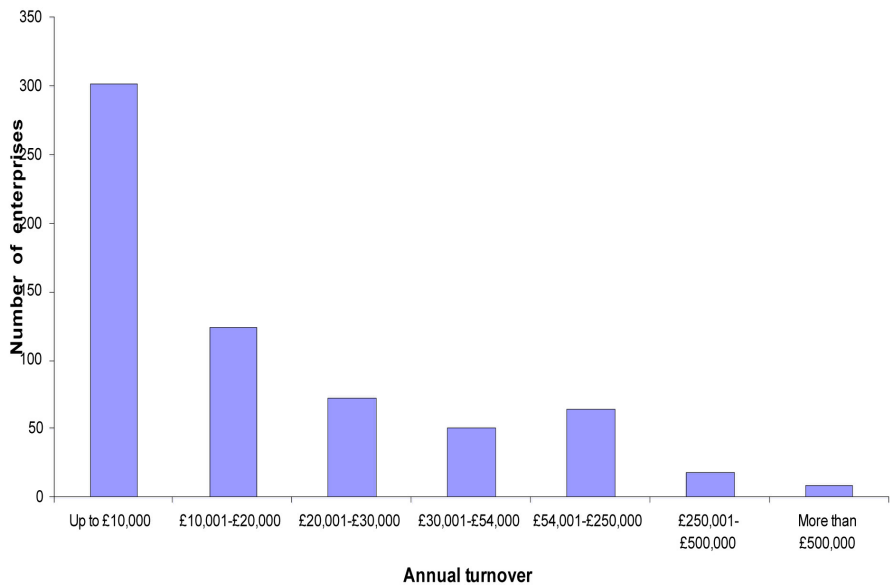
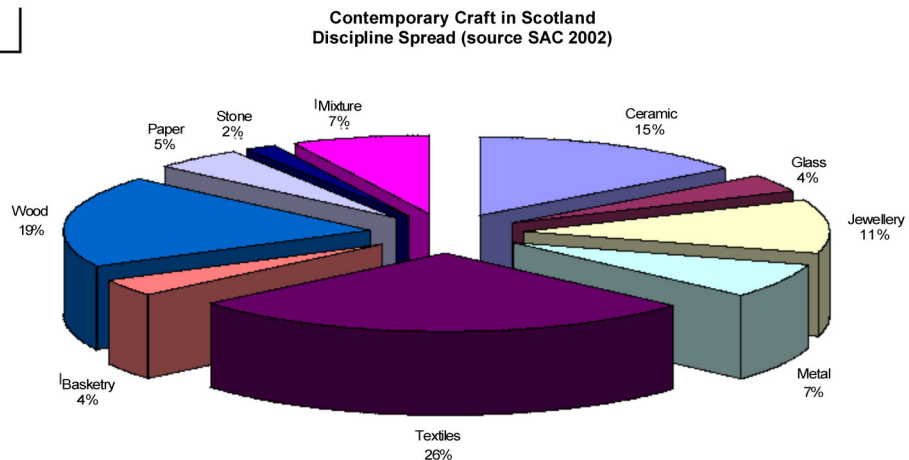


Figure 2: 2002, Scottish Arts Council, *Distribution of turnover of craft businesses in Scotland*



**a**



**b**

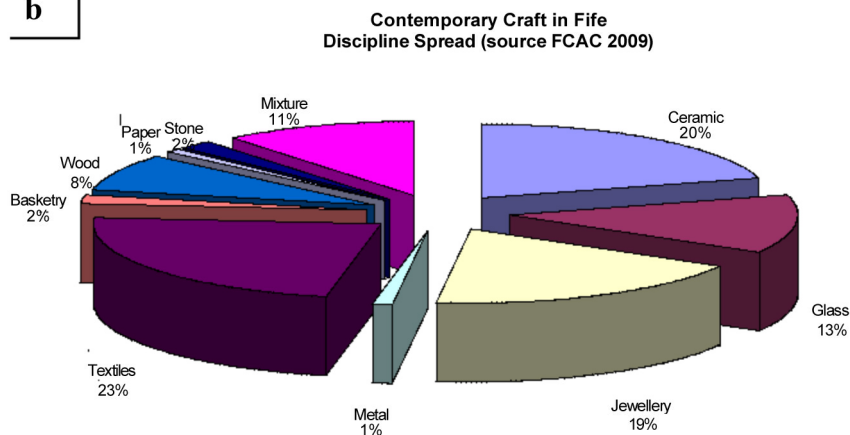


Figure 3: Forms of craft enterprise discipline in Scotland (a) and in Fife (b)

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