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# Emerging DIY activities to enable well-being and connected societies

## Keywords

DIY  
sustainable  
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## Abstract

*In recent years we have witnessed an emergence of various do-it-yourself (DIY) activities in urban spaces. This article aims to shed light on these DIY activities in Helsinki, particularly within the textile and garment sector. Six DIY groups were selected, their organizers interviewed, and their respective activities were examined. The aims of this investigation are to understand these activities, the motivations behind them and the implications of making for well-being. The research interest focuses on the collectives and communities Doing It Together (DIT) and Doing It With Others (DIWO) more than individual activities. The main findings indicate that these activities aim to influence well-being at individual, community and*

*societal levels by activating and integrating individuals into the community and society. DIY activities in the current study are based on sustainability-oriented values; they indicate how consumers enter into slower fashion consumption and how designers exercise more meaningful and fluid expertise in design practice. We argue that DIY activities, while niche, are strongly embedded locally, can drive change towards enhanced sustainability and well-being in urban contexts and can even contribute to the aspect of more connected societies.*

## **Introduction**

In recent years we have witnessed the emergence of various do-it-yourself (DIY) activities mushrooming in Helsinki, the capital city of Finland. From bicycle repair to knitting cafés, the city has provided incubation grounds for many DIY communities to take root (Hernberg 2012; Bujdosó 2019) and for such local urban ‘activism’ to be regarded as a positive innovative, capacity-building, citizen-led force (Schulman and Mäenpää 2015). There is therefore growing research interest in active DIY communities in urban areas, but studies often focus on a particular position: from wider political-economic concerns about local sustainability (Schlosberg and Coles 2016), to the conception of citizens redefining their role as passive ‘consumers’ via handicraft and hands-on projects (Campbell 2005; Ratto and Boler 2014), to the empowering and enriching impact of DIY upon individuals and their sense of well-being (Gauntlett 2011; Levine and Heimerl 2008).

However, for the actual organizers of DIY groups, many of these interests and motivations combine and intertwine, in the context of city culture: well-being and sustainability concerns extend from the individual to the collective and in spaces or urban events that are alternative to civic centres as well as private commerce. This study aims to shed light on DIY groups in Helsinki, particularly within the textile and garment sector. Six DIY groups were selected, their organizers interviewed, and their respective activities were examined. Our particular interest is on what these activities provide to individuals, the community and society with regard to well-being. The study focuses particularly on the DIY group organizers: their motivations, activities and their perceived influence on community building.

Well-being can be approached through three levels: the individual, the community and the society (Niinimäki 2013: 22). Participating in shared activities can stimulate new friendships, but it can also change our own understanding of ourselves and our identities: we begin to become members of the community. This feeling of connectedness builds well-being in the community (Niinimäki 2013: 22). In turn, as social cohesion and mutual respect build in communities, this can be reflected as a sense of deeper well-being in the greater society (Niinimäki 2013: 22). Likewise, Keyes (1998) argues

that social integration grows from the trust we have in each other, which fosters care-taking actions and feelings of commitment to our own neighbourhoods. Well-being can thus be seen as a process where individuals' own actions form the starting point for how individual-level, community-level and even societal-level well-being can develop (Niinimäki 2013: 24).

In research on DIY communities, craft has been found to foster feelings of self-managing and skill development (Pöllänen 2015), subjective 'happiness' through creative flow (Collier and Wayment 2017; Gauntlett 2011), and senses of communality, sociability and connectedness (Adams-Price and Steinman 2007). Researchers have also examined the impacts that textile and garment DIY groups have on members' identity and self-image in certain locales, such as the effect of hand-craft on women's understanding of their own cultural heritage and gendered identities (Collier 2011; Creighton 1995).

There are also appropriative elements and subversive reasons to initiate and join DIY groups. Several studies have attributed the rise of craft and DIY to people's need for increased agency in the face of perceived anonymous mass production and passive consumption (Pöllänen 2015; Ratto and Boler 2014; Campbell, 2005). For Gauntlett (2011), craft removes our focus from consumerism towards slow, more thoughtful processes of making. DIY fosters a greater appreciation of things, slowness and experiences of pleasure in everyday settings (Gauntlett 2011). But communally it can also be conceived and mobilized as shared expressions of anti-capitalism (Hemphill and Leskowitz 2013) and as specific enactments of a local economy (Luvaas 2013). For Manzini and M'Rithaa (2016), such expressions take on relevance for a design community, who should support and enhance the 'slow, local, open and connected' character of distributed DIY activities and small-scale, socially innovative production communities – for reasons of social resilience and environmental responsibility. Fletcher (2013) regards community-based local actions to be an 'antidote to unsustainability' within the garment and textile arena (2013: 167). She acknowledges the potential impact of local actions, be it through producing garments locally or allowing users to be makers through DIY activities, in terms of reducing the scale of production, strengthening ties among communities and improving sensitivity towards people and the environment (2013: 167). Furthermore, local action holds within it opportunities to foster creativity when facing problems with only the available resources and expertise at hand (Fletcher 2013: 168).

However, making is not always about connecting. DIY groups, particularly the most radical ones, have been identified as being insular and isolationist (Hemphill and Leskowitz 2013), and DIY groups and individuals who claim ecological and normative motivations for pursuing their activities are more likely to be from high-income social groups (Williams 2008; Campbell 2005). These are important considerations for researchers wishing to examine local DIY activities and their potential links to 'sustainability'.

In this section, we have used the terms DIY, making and craft rather interchangeably. While the concept of 'DIY' in Anglo-Saxon cultures emerged particularly from activities relating to home maintenance and hobbies in the face of labour shortages and lack of money (Atkinson 2006), our interest here relates less to individual activities in homes than to collectives and communities such as Doing It Together (DIT) and Doing It With Others (DIWO). DIWO is a term arguably with political nuances attributed to the art collective Furtherfield (Garrett 2006). Today, DIY communities include textile handicraft advocates, arts and crafts practitioners and technology-oriented 'makers' and hobbyists (Collier and Wayment 2017; Kuznetsov and Paulos 2010). We embrace this inclusive definition in our use of the term DIY, but we restrict our examination to groups working with clothing and textiles. We describe the groups and their activities in our study in the following section.

## **Data and methods**

Data collected for this case study consists of six in-depth interviews conducted from February to April 2017 in Helsinki, Finland. The duration of the interviews varied from 40 minutes to two hours, covering a range of topics including history, underlying motivations, activities, challenges faced and future plans of the selected six DIY groups. These groups were selected based on the relevance and link to DIY activities involving the use of textiles and apparel. The selected groups well represent the current DIY phenomena, ranging from grassroots peer initiatives to educated designer-led, and activities from mending to re-designing new products for sale (see Table 1). The authors also participated in the events organized by some of these groups to gain a better understanding of their practices and to observe the participants. These field observations were not analysed as such, but they worked as secondary data to understand the phenomenon.

The interviews also touched upon the challenges and future aspirations of these activities. After the interviews, the data were transcribed and analysed where the key themes were defined using principles of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006).

## **Case background**

(1) The Martha Association was established in 1899 with the aim of improving standards of living and fostering well-being of families through home economics education. The focus at the time was to help families learn skills related to housekeeping, gardening and cooking. Over the years, the organization has grown from the grassroots to a national-level association and currently is nationwide in Finland. It receives support from a ministry, and it therefore can be seen as a political act to support sustainable well-being through home economics-related and small-scale local activities. The organization is also involved in advocacy work (Martat).

One campaign focuses primarily on textiles management within homes, called 'Garderobe' or the Wardrobe. The project began in response to the changing nature of the global textile industry and the growth of fast fashion. Through the campaign, the organization's focus has been on educating people on sustainable fashion consumption practices. The community gatherings involve both teaching and working together and sharing knowledge with each other. Tutorial videos have been shared through YouTube (Tanja Rantanen, Martha Association, 3 April 2017).

- (2) The Repair-a-thon garment repair workshop is the brainchild of fashion designer Sasa Nemec, who moved to Finland from Slovenia. She had long had the inclination to address clothing consumption and to work against the current mainstream pattern of producing fashion. As she had moved to a country where she did not know anyone, she decided to contact the Fashion Revolution organization in Helsinki and local libraries in the city, looking for space to provide garment repair platforms. She has now been collaborating on a regular basis with libraries, local cafes and university art spaces where she has repair workshops. Nemec offers to repair garments for people herself and gives advice on how to do basic mending. The Repair-a-thon workshops are slowly growing and becoming a regular event in the city (Sasa Nemec, Repair-a-thon, 23 February 2017).
- (3) REMAKE, a fashion design label owned and run by two expert designers and certified seamstresses, began in 2008. The company has branched out over the years and, as a response to the rapid growth of the fast fashion industry, began running workshops where they inform the public on the harmful impact of the textile industry. Their workshops were a response to website posts from the public asking for workshops on garment repair. Owing to a social entrepreneurship spirit, what started off as an outreach programme quickly transformed into a paid service provided through these workshops. Each workshop covers different aspects of garment use and maintenance (Outi Pyy, REMAKE, 4 November 2016).
- (4) FinnBrit knitting is a knitting group that began with the aim of helping single mothers, women who did not have a job, or those who were new to the country to find a way through which to meet others. The group began in 2009 and grew over the years. Membership to the group is free, and every Thursday members meet and knit, crochet or do other handicrafts together. Tips are often shared, and both the members and the organizer have formed friendships over the years and meet outside the group for other social events. The group attracts beginners, hobbyists and knitting enthusiasts from all walks of life and ethnicities, and it is a source of learning and sharing knowledge on the practice of knitting (Cynde Sadler, Finnbrit, 3 February 2017).
- (5) Helsinki Upcycling Center, run by designer Isabella Haas, began as a three-month social development project aimed at helping immigrant women find jobs in Helsinki. The project also aims at reusing post-consumer waste textiles in order to re-create new products. Through workshop training on upcycling skills, the project hopes to inspire women to start their own businesses.

Any receipts generated from the sale of the products, which are currently sold under the brand name Edel City, go directly to the makers of the products. Sometimes skilled volunteers act as trainers for the participants, while at other times participants themselves lead the workshops, having reached the level of trainers after successive experiences with the upcycling workshops (Isabella Haas, Helsinki Upcycling Center, 7 March 2017).

- (6) Korjaussarja is a self-organized repair group of six craft education students who began a collective in 2014 as part of a Fashion Revolution event at the University of Helsinki. The idea is to gather together and learn from one another, spreading knowledge of repairing through social engagement practices. Therefore, they do not believe in providing a repair service in the sense of repairing others' clothing but rather encourage people to do it themselves. By providing a space that is open and accessible, they aim to change the current overconsumption of clothing. Through the practice of repairing together, the group wishes to instil feelings of warmth and care towards garments and slowing the pace of consumption (Kristiina Tergujeff, Helena Hämäläinen and Anu Kaarina Hämäläinen, Korjaussarja, 15 February 2017).

## Findings

The organizations selected for this study share one common value – to promote slow living and sustainable development. All interviewees spoke strongly about current unsustainable clothing consumption patterns and textile waste issues. They addressed the topic by offering alternative ways of thinking about the clothing consumers own. Some of the DIY groups can be seen as (or explicitly state they are) working against the current capitalist system of mass consumption and large-scale textile waste practices at grassroots level.

In order to provide alternatives to throwaway consumption, these DIY groups work towards encouraging people to make with their hands and thereby gain different understandings of their own garments through these activities.

What we have been doing with this Garderobe, we put together this very long tradition of taking care of your family and knowing your way, and having those skills, and then we connect it with the global ideas of consumerism and textile production which has changed a lot in the last 20 years. [...] We want to raise awareness in many different aspects of sustainable development, and this is one of those issues.

(Rantanen, Martha Association, 3 April 2017)

DIY groups not only activate people to learn new skills, but the organizers themselves believe in giving people a sense of joy in making while also helping to build relationships with others.

I try to bring fun into learning [...], and it doesn't matter if you make a mistake, I think that is the most important thing. You can do it over and over again. Open it up or start a new one or do something else, just don't be scared of doing [something] wrong, that is part of the learning process. [...] [I]t's a creative process. [...] [P]eople have said things in the workshop like, 'oh, now I know what I could have done', with a material they threw away. And next time they may keep it and not throw it away. They become aware just by working with the material and talking to each other, and after the workshop they will be aware of what materials there are at home and what could possibly be made out of them. They learn about the importance of reuse and through the fun, they remember what can be done.

(Haas, Helsinki Upcycling Center, 7 March 2017)

Organizer	Type of organizer			Aims			Activity			Contribution						
	Association	Designers	Craft teachers	Hobby activists	Activating	Educating	Skill sharing	Alternative Business	Societal impact	Repairing	Knitting	Redesigning				
Martha Association	x					x			x	x						
Repair-a-thon		x			x			x		x			Active community			
REMAKE		x				x		x		x				Alternative design practices		
FinnBrit				x	x		x				x					
Helsinki UpCycling Center		x			x			x	x			x				
Korjaussarja			x			x	x			x						
																Well-being in individual, local and societal levels

Table 1: DIY organizer types, aims of actions and contributions.

By embedding values related to slow living, the activities of the groups have touched upon several areas of people's lives. Amongst the groups in this study, we see how remaking and repair activities serve as a means to foster experiences of belonging and inclusion within communities. In some cases, DIY activities also encourage creating alternative business models that may have favourable societal impacts. The following sections elaborate on the key themes generated from the findings of this study (see Table 1).

### **Activating and opening ways into a community and society**

DIY actions in the city environment can be seen to emerge from the need to connect oneself to a community. Some groups have a strong aim to motivate people to be socially active and thereby participate in a community and even in society. In some cases, this may have stemmed from the organizer's own experience of being foreign to Finland.

I moved to Finland one and a half years ago, [...] when you come to a new country you don't know anyone, and it's difficult to meet people and become part of society. And because I'm not enrolled in school or working, it's even more difficult for me to be part of anything.

One day I met this young mother who had just moved to Finland and had a newborn with her, and was miserable about moving here because, you know, it was December. This was nine years ago. And she saw me knitting some place and said, 'Oh, I just wish I knew how to do that'. And I was like, 'I'll teach you, let's meet somewhere and I can show you how to do it'.

[...] Obviously, you can't learn to knit in just one sitting, so she wanted to meet me again with some problems, so I said, okay, we can meet at the library because it's easy to sit there, and it is quieter, and you can have a corner. And suddenly I had a lot of people coming to me asking, could they come too.

(Sadler, Finnbrit, 3 February 2017)

Through their practices, the members have grown closer to one another, forming friendships and personal relationships. Furthermore, the groups have also grown based on word of mouth, where existing members have brought in their friends to join the group. The DIY activities have thus had such a positive impact that members feel the desire to share the benefits with their friends. The groups provide a platform for both the organizers and the members to meet new people. This has resulted in the inclusion of those who have just moved to the city or those women who were stay-at-home mothers with no outlet for meeting people (see Figure 1).





Figure 1: M. Durrani, 9 February 2017. Members of FinnBrit knitting.

It really enriches our life to meet these people. And you know, I always say, you don't have to knit if you don't want to, that's not the point, but you can learn. And a lot of people do want to learn to knit and crochet. So there is the spiritual side and the practical side. And I feel it has really enlightened my life and improved my life. I don't know what I would I do if I didn't come here every Thursday.

(Sadler, Finnbrit, 3 February 2017)

In these interviews, a strong sense of subjective, individual happiness was highlighted, as organizers reflected on what the groups meant to them. The DIY groups have not only been (and still are) important networking grounds for people but also strongly affect their personal, individual sense of well-being.

Some of the groups, such as the Helsinki Upcycling Center, host their events with the aim of even greater social impact:

The idea is to inspire others and the public to think about these waste problems and the unemployment of immigrant women, and the public doesn't know [about these issues]. Even I was surprised that almost 50% are unemployed. Highly educated people and not employed!

(Haas, Helsinki Upcycling Center, 7 March 2017)

Here the motivation to organize these actions is not only environmental (re-designing from waste, extending the garment's use phase) but also aimed to open ways into society. Through skills training, these women are given the chance to actively participate in society. This aim touches upon all three levels of well-being. Women are trained to attain a skill (individual); the gatherings allow for bonds among immigrant women to build and strengthen (community), all the while opening doors for them to enter the workforce (societal). This allows for greater social inclusion of these marginalized groups. Furthermore, by using waste textiles to create new products, the environmental impacts on a societal level are also addressed by making them visible and rendering 'waste' usable'.

DIY groups are also an easy way for individuals to test the community socially, as permanent commitments are not needed to participate. These groups are not always static, as people usually come and go. Despite the transience, they still serve a purpose of integration and well-being:

We have some people who been coming in from the start, but most people come and go. They live here for a couple of years and then move on. Also a lot of times, when people start speaking Finnish a lot better, they find their own friends and dissolve into a Finnish life. But this is great, to come out and meet other people.

(Haas, Helsinki Upcycling Center, 7 March 2017)

It can be interpreted that DIY activities may have helped people to integrate into society, and when this need is fulfilled, some may no longer participate in these activities. Easy access and temporality are characteristic of many of these DIY activities.

### ***Educating and learning for sustainability, creativity and for the future***

The organizers of the groups featured in this study have a professional background in design and a strong focus on guiding people towards more sustainable practices in clothing consumption.

When you organize a workshop, for organizers it's very important to understand what kind of people are coming into the workshop and how you meet their expectations. And how you are able to give them a positive experience, and teach them small things, and give them that nice feeling of them outdoing themselves. That's the most important thing. It doesn't matter what you do, but if you are able to give people this positive experience and they learn new things that have a fact base, that's the most important thing.

(Pyy, REMAKE, 4 November 2016)

Korjaussarja, which is run by craft teachers, emphasizes the dialogic aspect in education: as much as the organizers are 'transmitting' knowledge to workshop participants, they are themselves also gaining knowledge.

We see it as education for others, and that doesn't just happen in the workshops. We also do it in the social media and blogs. But it is also an education for us, because we learn about mending and the techniques when we meet people. Usually some elderly people come and like to talk to us and tell us how it has been done earlier. I think right from the beginning, although we are craft teaching students, we still would like to think that we are not always the experts, but that we are learning as well. And the participants learn from us, and we learn from them.

(Hämäläinen, Korjaussarja, 15 February 2017)

Craft teachers are open to collaboration and new proposals:

We are approximately six people, and the core group is us, and people are welcome to be organizers with us. And sometimes people just join us for a project and that's it.

(Hämäläinen, Korjaussarja, 15 February 2017)



Figure 2: M. Durrani, 3 April 2017. Martha Association's Easter felting event.

The craft teachers also had a more open approach to skills training, knowledge sharing and education compared to the design professionals. This openness is evident in the following excerpt:

We are all experts, but it doesn't somehow come from this top-down, or that we wouldn't be teachable, or that we know it all, or that we couldn't discuss. Because there are different ways of doing things, so if the participant wants to do it in a certain way, then go ahead and do it. And the important stuff is not that it is repaired according to how a teacher would like it to be, but that it is repaired, and you can use it afterwards. And the people who have repaired it use it afterwards, and they are happy, and the other stuff comes after that. I think one of our main philosophies is threaded through everything, and that is, once you do something by yourself, even with a sewing machine, that you have taken the step to handle your clothes in some way. Like [you have] repaired it or done something so that it won't break easily in the future. You have invested something of yourself in it, and therefore the piece of clothing becomes more valuable to you, hopefully.

(Tergujeff, Korjaussarja, 15 February 2017)

This is a certain philosophical approach to education and skill building. The organizers state themselves that they have an *empowering philosophy*, meaning that teaching people to mend their own clothing will help them to find lost skills and trust their own capabilities. They even encourage mending that is visible or decorative, increasing the potential for creativity in the process, resulting in more unique and meaningful garments.

We also approach mending as if it were somehow a modification of the clothing [...], to use it again and get it to be active from an inactive state.

(Tergujeff, Hämäläinen and Hämäläinen, Korjaussarja, 15 February 2017)

Obviously new skills have been learned in these activities; some skills are more related to craft and producing something new, while some skills are related to mending and thereby extending the lifetime of garments. An interviewee from Korjaussarja described the process thus:

Once people get started, it is maybe not only the confidence, but the enthusiasm that evolves, and once that step is crossed, then it is fine.

(Tergujeff, Hämäläinen and Hämäläinen, Korjaussarja, 15 February 2017)

The Martha Association has perhaps a more explicit educational aim compared to the others, and relies more heavily on conventional knowledge sharing through media campaigns and visits to



Figure 3: M. Durrani, 26 October 2016. REMAKE's garment-mending event.

public schools. For example, they have a social awareness campaign, ‘think, mend, repair’, in which the goal is to encourage more conscious consumers to prevent overconsumption. Before consumers go shopping, they should be able to identify what they need, why they buy and if they truly need what they are buying. Hopefully consumers then invest in high-quality or second-hand products. After purchase, the next step is to take good care of the garment: mend it if it tears to extend its life span and, after its use, recycle it or reuse it. Martha also emphasizes the whole life cycle of the garment in its campaign. They even aim to educate future sustainable consumers by educating school children on how to mend their garments.

Korjaussarja also speaks of learning and education, but in a less formal way. The group prefers to talk in terms of learning about clothing usage and ownership rather than explicitly stating the environmental issues at hand. Through their workshops, they focus more on the wearing of clothing and state that *we wear clothes, we do not consume clothes*. They encourage people to appreciate and celebrate clothing longevity, addressing the problems in the garment industry regarding mass production and rapid material throughput in a more indirect way. They wish to point to the importance of acknowledging the planetary boundaries.

## Discussion and conclusions

Our findings in this case study in Helsinki, Finland, have shown how local DIY garment and textile groups seek to engage people – to turn passive consumers into active and knowledgeable citizens, who are not excluded from mainstream society; to share knowledge on global clothing consumption patterns and ills; to embed this knowledge into hands-on material experiences that raise the value of textiles and apparel as possessions; and, ultimately, to effect a wider positive impact through small, local actions. If these DIY activities manage to foster a more inclusive society by providing integration possibilities for immigrants, even these small-scale initiatives may eventually have societal impact. We suggest the following implications of the study.

### 1. New political stances

Alignment with objectives relating to social inclusion, slow lifestyles, well-being and less negative environmental impact differentiates these types of DIY groups from conventional hobby communities. These are not only knitting circles but circles that aim to integrate the potentially marginalized; not only sewing and mending circles but groups that actively and explicitly educate on supply chains and production issues and discuss them. This means that these groups are open to being critical and political, as they freely discuss for whom they target their activities and why. Such a stance links the groups to certain critical technology communities in the ‘maker movement’ (Ratto and Boler 2014),

as well as to practices by professional artists and artisans in the field known as ‘craftivism’ (Greer 2008; see also Orton-Johnson 2014; Hackney 2013). These organizers are not shy of addressing social marginalization, fashion overconsumption or product obsolescence – rather, they find creative ways to invite other citizens to explore these issues together, and their main objective is to embed, embody and enact this knowledge through active making and doing by hand. The organizers aim to connect participants to these global flows of knowledge and materials. We thus agree with Hackney on the need to recognize, and learn from, through research:

[T]he existence of a new super-connected amateur who, informed by a wealth of on- and offline resources (citizen journalism, community broadband, online forums, social media), as well as their individual life experiences and expertise, are quietly active as they open up new channels of value and exchange by engaging in alternative craft economies and harnessing assets in often surprising, productive ways.

(2013: 171)

## **2. Free local spaces for creativity enable active community**

It is important to note that the activities in this study are not carried out at home or in traditional teaching environments: the organizers must identify physical spaces that participants feel as free and accessible. Even business premises are opened up for workshops and interaction in experimentation with alternative business models. The organizational work involved in creating free spaces that are accessible, but where citizens also feel protected so they may create and express, is related to people’s identities and expectations, as the organizers in this study explain: how participants become self-confident learners, possibly entrepreneurs, competent crafters and socially networked citizens of the city. Moreover, ‘space’ here means the space of new networks of stakeholders, collaborating with the city authorities, museums and cultural centres, municipal libraries and so on. The Helsinki City Library, for instance, with its many local branches, high visitor rates and innovative range of activities (Jochumsen et al. 2012), explicitly aims to support DIY activities of all kinds (Hyysalo et al. 2014). Urban areas wishing to nurture DIY communities for benefits relating to social inclusion and well-being could note the importance of free, accessible, ‘low-intensive meeting places’ (Audunson 2005).

## **3. Alternative design practices through facilitating DIY activities**

The third key implication of our findings is how designers can – and do – find new professional roles in a responsible, regenerative and resilient industry. The question is less how to *do* slow fashion



than how to facilitate others in designing, making and repairing their own slow textile and apparel projects. Nurturing a 'culture of care', scaffolding peer learning, encouraging debate on consumption and the environment that does not preach but is rather personally meaningful, and simply offering a group and space for those who want to join an activity are sensitive, contingent, embodied processes as our organizers' stories reveal. Their ways and means form part of the desired collaboration among designers, producers and consumers that is seen as vital to more sustainable fashion (Fletcher 2012; Clark 2008), and we agree that 'this collaboration might best occur at the local level where place and scale matter' (DeLong et al. 2013: 60). Importantly, in DIY groups like these, expertise is more fluid: designers provide specialist knowledge when needed, but participants are also 'allowed' to be experts – as processes are as least important as outcomes. Manzini and Mugendi (2016) also remind us that sustainability knowledge and literacy is developed and shared at the local, small scale:

On the one hand, [*small scale*] permits the participating actors to understand and manage complex socio-technical systems (in an open and democratic way). On the other hand, it enables individuals to carry out their activities, to fulfil their needs and to build their desirable futures from within organizations where human relationships remain lively and personal.  
(Manzini and Mugendi 2016: 279)

#### **4. Well-being and connected societies**

Gauntlett (2011) points out how happiness and well-being is tied to 'having meaningful connections with others and meaningful things to do' (2011: 126). Participating in DIY activities offers ways to learn new skills but also much more. Shared activities offer an extra layer of meaning in a person's life, new friendships, connection to one's own community, and they may even open up greater possibilities to enter into society. Therefore, these local activities and connections may even contribute to wider societal-level well-being and the culture of care.

Even if DIY activities are niche, local and small scale, they should not be rendered as insignificant; organizers of these activities and spaces are committed to embedding new practices and new meanings into participants' lives and routines. Organizers of these activities devote themselves to setting up physical spaces in the urban environments for regular gatherings and paying attention to one or more aspects of participant well-being, which is intimately tied to their own senses of satisfaction and well-being.

Moreover, design and fashion practitioners are seeking alternatives to mainstream designing, and facilitating others in understanding slow fashion and textiles is a viable option in open-minded, creative urban locales. These DIY activities thereby act to make visible and doable alternative

pathways to slower consumption, enhanced well-being, community building and even alternative business thinking. Therefore, DIY actions expressly point to (and experiment with) potential alternatives and create meaningful connections in societies.

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