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Introduction

Traditional craft has been marginalised within a modern context as it is perceived to be contrary to advancement in technology, commerce and society (Zhan and Walker, 2019, p. 484). However, Zhan and Walker argue that craft can significantly contribute to transition as a force for achieving sustainability and draw attention to a multiple ideas and pathways that contribute to the understanding of sustainability. Despite tensions between craft and sustainability in the current complex technical and social situation, craft's strong connections to sustainability, with roots in ecological, authentic, and existential meaning, provide a broad environment for connecting people to the values and reality of the natural world. Craft is generally considered to be of low impact to the environment in comparison to technology-driven industrial processes. Ecological mechanisms and materials are often used, and many of the materials used in traditional crafts are renewable. Manual skills and human power are significant parts of the process as are smaller machines. Craft objects also tend to last for longer, for example, some stained-glass windows have remained in-situ for millennia and the materials used can be recycled and re-used

even following their near total destruction during the bombing raids of the Second World War.

The author has previously been criticised during the design and making of a traditional craft piece (specifically a leaded stained-glass panel) in fulfilment of an 'eco-materiality' student project and guided to produce something 'Eco-'.

Definition of 'eco-':

"A prefix derived from the Greek word for house". (Park and Allaby, 2017a.)

...but understood to mean in this context: *'Ecological'* (Park and Allaby, 2017b.)

To be able to successfully navigate the 'eco-' landscape, realise the potential contribution of design and traditional crafts, to truly *Design for Planet*, craftspeople as designers need improved education and training on sustainability and regenerative design as well as a better understanding of their impact on the environment. Craftspeople will also need access to conceptual tools to enable them to measure the value of their contribution holistically across interconnected socio-cultural, environmental, democratic and economic domains and to support the rapid extension of sustainable design into regenerative design (Design Council, 2022).

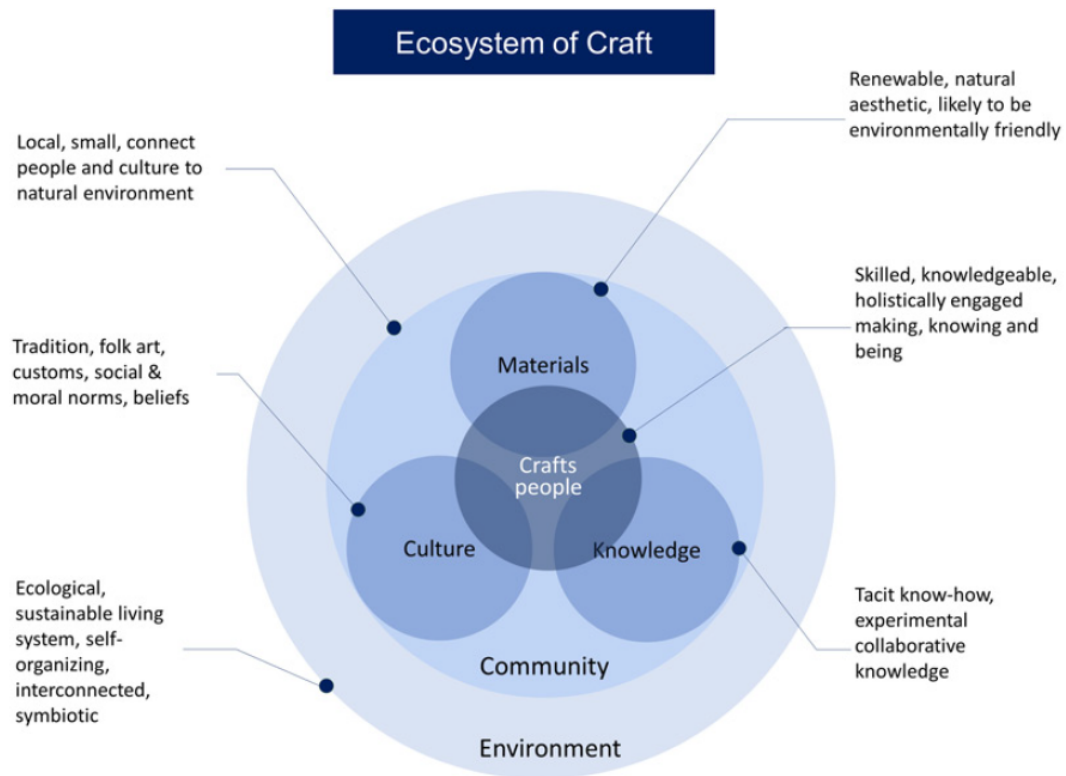


Figure 1: The ecosystem of craft (Zhan and Walker, 2019)

What is Sustainability and Why Does it Matter to Craftspeople?

The interconnected environmental, political, social and economic issues that surround the subject of sustainability and sustainable development have led to difficulties in definition and there is no unanimous agreement on the concept of sustainability. The most widely recognised definition is to be found in the so-called Brundtland Report (Fischer *et.al.*, 2023).

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs
(Brundtland and World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987)

Walker (2006) posits that “*No one knows what a sustainable society will look like, we can only speculate on the possibilities*”, but Walker suggests that knowledge and understanding will expand, and that a vision of sustainable development will evolve.

Research relating to sustainability emerged since the 1970's, arising from concerns about use of the World's resources that stretch back over centuries. Through the book *Silent Spring* (1962) Rachel Carson spearheaded sustainability research when spoke out about the use of ecologically damaging pesticides and their residual effects on humans and the environment. Described as an “*ecological bombshell*”, the book raised awareness of environmental issues and is credited with beginning the debate about how our living environment should be cared for (Walker, 1999). Keitsch (2012) points out that the Gaia hypothesis of Lovelock and Margulis (1974) inspired design, and other disciplines, to seek an appropriate balance between industry and nature.

Paraphrasing Waze founder Uri Levine's book about entrepreneurship (Levine, 2023), Idris (2025) asserts in his speech to *Design Swansea* that creative designers often avoid staying “in the messy world” with the problems for long enough before jumping to solutions. This is a relatable statement in the context of regenerative design as there is a seemingly messy and confusing array of terminology and

theoretical literature highlighted by Collet (2021 p. 46) as 'sub-disciplines' of environmentally focussed design.

Collet highlights the glut of labels used to describe environmentally engaged design emerging since 1992 when the Rio Earth Summit was held. The terms '*Green*', '*Eco-design*', '*environmentally friendly*', '*nature positive*' have become common terms and have been followed by:

sustainable design – considering the impact of creating a product on natural resources. The key ideas driving Sustainable Design Theory are based on the balance of artistic innovation and ecological responsibility. Walker and Giard (2013) flag sustainability as a central issue for contemporary societies and the world community, drawing attention to the direct and indirect role of design in the environmental concerns embodied in the term 'sustainability'.

transition design – promoting societal and environmental shifts led by design (Irwin, 2019)

autonomous design – realignment with collaborative and local approaches, linking to ecofeminist theory (Gusman and Noronha, 2019)

circular design - anticipating how products and artifacts function and evolve throughout their whole lifecycle, their design, production, use, and end-of-life phases (Daae and Chamberlin, 2019)

regenerative design – an emerging new field prioritises a co-evolutionary, 'partnered' liaison between humans and the natural world, rather than a managerial relationship that builds, rather than diminishes, social and natural capitals (Cole, 2012)

Furthermore, just some of the plethora of other terms relating to sustainability include: Cradle-to Cradle (C2C) Theory; Post-Humanism and More-than-Human Design; New Materialism; Actor-Network Theory; Speculative and Critical Design (SCD); Ecofeminist Theory; Indigenous Knowledge Systems & Indigenous Futurisms; Biomimicry; Systems Thinking; Planetary Boundaries Framework; Industrial Ecology; Net-positive Design; Climate positive Design; Post-Anthropocentric Design; Intergenerational Design ; Doughnut Economics (ChatGPT, 2025)

Collet (2021) argues that despite this profusion of labels and designers' commitment to environmental values, climate and bio-diversity degeneration has accelerated. They assert that artists, designers and other craftspeople with knowledge about ecology and materials and innovative making skills, are powerfully placed to steer our culture away from exploitation to holistic and regenerative practices, creating a world in which we contribute actively through the way we live to restoration and regeneration of our earth and communities.

Current Environmental, Political, Or Social Design Issues That Urgently Require Addressing (Design Council, 2020-24)

- Improving health and wellbeing, sustainable living and design skills

Design's Role

Considering the wider set of issues that determine our health; reconstruct places by reviving the environment and improving people's skills in caring for their environment and community.

- Increasing Design Skills

Design's Role

Contribute to a resilient and productive workforce; using design skills across the economy; tackling the biggest challenges; evidence and influence

- Enabling Sustainable Living; Climate emergency; climate action; global warming; ecosystem impact

Design's Role

Enabling meaningful change; re-designing systems and infrastructure; supporting a wide range of stakeholders; embrace sustainability; social sustainability; "reimagine materials, re-use waste and create a fair, circular economy".

How can craftspeople adapt to regenerative design and evaluate their practice?

The concept of regenerative design gained traction in the in the field of buildings design where the idea has developed of a "*partnered relationship between social, cultural and ecological systems, requiring explicit engagement with the implications and consequences of future design decisions*" (Cole, Oliver and Robinson, 2013).

The Design Council (2025) sets out their strategy to create a shift from a consumer economy to a regenerative society in its organisational mission for a 'new era of

design' by first transitioning from a 'degenerative' consumer-orientated economy to a sustainable society which draws on only the resource that the environment can produce. The 1.97million people working in the design sector are seen as contributors to good design, to be championed, supported, given a voice, access to knowledge and enabled with new skills for creation of new markets.

To achieve the aim of a regenerative society, all designers will need the skills and education to 'design for planet' and to do so as part of their core practice. Fan (2025) observes that education is crucial in shaping behaviours and attitudes which are environmentally responsible. Fan's study revealed that embedding ecological principles within educational programmes significantly enhanced awareness of environmental issues amongst students.

Pigott, Jones and Barry (2023, p.3) refer to the current era as one of 'ecocide'. Whilst Ecocide is defined by Stevenson (2015) as '*destruction of the natural environment, especially when deliberate*' however Pigott, Jones and Barry equate ecocide to the eradication of cultural and individual difference and creativity. Using multiple case studies they highlight alternative approaches to creativity and develop the concept of creativity as an anti-ecocide endeavor, invoking a concern with 'feeling, experience and embodiment' as opposed to works of 'eco-art'. This is understood to mean that artists and designer will need to immerse themselves in a new kind of design culture rather than create one-off 'eco-art' projects.

The author has been conscious of, and concerned about, environmental issues during his design and make journey, but has often been sceptical of knee-jerk

reactions, confused by the plethora of approaches and lack of clarity on expectations. Implicit criticism for not producing 'eco' art works or those using 'natural' materials (despite having using recycled, re-used and up-cycled materials in his work) have inspired him to explore ways of reducing his own impact on the environment and employ more environmentally engaged practices.

In their examination of how architectural education programmes in the United States are addressing environmental issues through their curricula, Domenica Lulo *et. al.* (2013) find that whilst some consistency exists in the approach to sustainable education it is a speciality undertaking, mainly at graduate level and advocate a more composite approach is advocated. As with other design disciplines, Domenica Lulo *et. al.* consider architecture to be well positioned to support core principles in environmentally conscious design and foresee the need for new skills and thinking and collaboration with other professions.

The strategy set out by The Design Council (2020) to urgently move beyond sustainable design into a regenerative design paradigm, provides a framework in which the author and other designers can work to check their practice. The design principles set out in the strategy urge designers to:

Design deeply - understanding the root causes of a problem and the wider context, tackling causes not symptoms

Design disruptively – being bold and provocative, re-imagining the status quo

Design collaboratively – recognising that there is more than one solution to a problem

Design democratically – shifting power to help communities develop their own design skills and create positive change

Covid-19, Black Lives Matter and the climate crisis have reinforced the value of environmental and social benefits as well as economic benefits. Design has significant impacts on society, culture, environment and democracy and this can be directly through its impacts on society and the planet, especially when included explicitly as part of the design brief (Design Council, 2022). Measuring the value added through design is crucial.

The Design Council's Design Value Framework (2022) is a conceptual tool that those involved in design across all sectors can use to evaluate and measure value in their work, including designers, their clients, partners and commissioners (Cooper, 2022). Whilst conceived to work at a macro level, the framework can be used by designers as a self-assessment tool to measure or reflect on design value at a project's beginning, or throughout the project to its end. It can also be used as a device for communicating with clients or colleagues.

CONCLUSIONS

If craftspeople are to lead change and play their part in reducing environmental impact through design, creation of 'eco-art' is not enough. They need to be enabled with the skills and knowledge to be able to recognise their potential contribution in the first place, to practice in a less exploitative and a regenerative way, and to be able to measure the impact and value of their practice across multiple domains. Manifestos are often used by artists and designers as a form of commitment, or declaration of intentions – 'a public self-justification' (Baldick, 2015). Murray, 2020 outlines the development of a manifesto for regeneration in their thesis on the exploration of regenerative methodology in education for the built environment. Murray theorises that regenerative methodology applied to the design of a school, of architecture could spark change towards a more sustainable and resilient architectural industry. Whether or not the same approach could spark meaningful change towards a more sustainable and resilient art and craft design education could be an area for further research.

A starting point for the author to change his behaviours towards a more regenerative approach would be to review his 2022 manifesto to include a clear intention to move towards a more sustainable and regenerative craft practice with a better understanding of the issues and potential solutions and to begin using the available tools such as the Design Council's Design Value Framework to assess his own impact and value.

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