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Design Support – experiencing a more sustainable well-being through material engagement and communal learning?

Critical assessment of consumer culture suggests that people can find increased well-being through intrinsically motivating activities while decreasing environmental throughput (Jackson 2011). In this regard, maker activities such as “Sewing Cafes”, might provide an entry point to a more sustainable well-being model. They appear to enjoy a much more favourable social position in comparison to other, somewhat stigmatized repair practices. Therefore, the focus of this research is to explore how participation in different maker and repair activities impacts the feelings of relatedness and competence, both of which have been linked to well-being (Ryan and Deci 2001). Furthermore, it is examined how aspects of locality and temporality impact the attractiveness of such workshops. In so doing, this paper seeks to further explore the notion of “Design Support”, which can be described as a hybrid between classic “Social Support” groups and “Design Activists” (Hector 2016). “Social Support” groups or other self-help initiatives support creating new habits through their regular interventions (Verplanken and Wood 2006) and thus hold a strong capacity for personal reorientation. “Design Activists” groups on the other hand manage to make alternative practices visible to a wider audience due to the public nature of their interventions (Fuad-Luke 2009) (Thorpe 2012).

Using qualitative research methods, the author collects data from 6 existing cases in Germany, Slovenia and Finland. The data to be analyzed consists of participant observations, field notes as well as interviews with the respective facilitators and participants during maker and repair workshops.

In accordance with similar inquiries (Hirscher 2013), it is expected to see a change in participant's feelings of competence and relatedness. However, the level of commitment is likely to differ between different locations and age groups. Furthermore, only genuine attitude shifts might be seen, while a longitudinal study could subsequently better examine the impacts of such workshops for personal re-orientation towards a more sustainable well-being.

By highlighting the joyful aspect of learning skills, such experiences might have a potential to “foster a sense of self” (Cohen 2017). Although it remains uncertain how deeply transforming they are, this “alternative hedonism” (Soper 2008) could help to render sustainability topics more attractive for the average consumer.

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Design Activism /Make and Repair / Communal Learning/ Sustainable Well Being / Practice Theory