

Art, Craft, Sustainability and the Local: Issues, Opportunities and Challenges

A Student Co-Organised Public Seminar

UWE Bristol, in Partnership with BRICKS (<https://bricksbristol.org/projects/st-annes-house/>)

Location: St. Anne's House, St Anne's Rd, Brislington, Bristol BS4 4AB

March 8th, 18.00-20.30, 2023

Organised by:

In partnership with BRICKS and in conjunction with *Sustainable Futures: Society and Environment in an Age of Crisis* (UZSY6W-30-3), *Social Science in the City*, and *Social Science Research Group*. Funded by the School of Social Sciences, UWE Bristol

The student co-organised public seminar, *Art, Craft, Sustainability and the Local: Issues, Opportunities and Challenges* (March 8th, 2023) enjoyed a highly successful evening despite severe weather conditions. The event was organised by Dr. Jon Mulholland and Beth Benker (UWE Bristol), and Shona Bordoni, Morgan Creed, Daniel James, Billie Landry (BA Sociology, UWE Bristol), and in partnership with BRICKS (<https://bricksbristol.org/projects/st-annes-house/>). "Bricks is a social enterprise with the mission to support local & creative communities to thrive in Bristol". Bricks believes "in the civic role of artists and that through collaboration we can have a strong collective voice for inclusive growth in the city". The seminar brought together academics, practitioners, organisations, policy makers, and the interested public to explore the sustainability-related experiences, potentials, opportunities and challenges associated with making in the art and craft sectors, addressing the question, 'How might art and craft-making positively contribute to a sustainable present and future?'

The event was comprised of a range of activities. A number of highly engaging presentations laid a foundation for subsequent small group discussions. Dr. Jon Mulholland (Associate Professor in Sociology, UWE Bristol) outlined *Key Issues of Sustainability in the Context of Art, Craft and the Local*. Jack Gibbon (BRICKS) outlined the *Sustaining the Civic Role of Art: Opportunities and Challenges – the BRICKS Experience*. Jo Chalkblack - (Social Practice Artist and Creative Producer) considered how we might



establish *Connected Futures: What Makes Space a Place?*. Ani Stafford-Townsend (Milliner, Lecturer in Alternative Materials (UAL), Green Party Councillor) reflected on how we might be *Sustainably Creative*. Following presentations attendees enjoyed the opportunity to discuss in depth their thoughts on how we might enable art, craft and creativity to further support a sustainable future, and with a focus on sustainable local ecologies. The seminar also innovated in inviting local makers to present their work, to discuss the sustainability dimensions of their practice, and to particulate in the small group discussions. The contributions of the makers added significant value to the event, providing a platform

for embedding broader issues of sustainability with concrete, applied and local experiences. The event also built invaluable opportunities for attendees to mingle in a shared space with the makers. The makers included: *Lost and*

Grounded Brewers - <https://www.lostandgrounded.co.uk/>, *Phil Root* (Ceramicist) - <http://philrootstudio.com/2021>,
These Two Hands: Inspired by Nature, Made by Hand - <https://thesetwohands.co.uk/>, *The Deli* -
<https://deliatsandypark.co.uk/>

All participants received a written summary of the findings of their small group discussion as an outcome of the event, and as a potential platform for future opportunities.

The Deli@Sandy Park provided excellent food for all those present, celebrating artisanal vegan cooking at its best.

Thanks go to Beth Benker (UWE Bristol), Shona Bordoni, Morgan Creed, Daniel James, Billie Landry (BA Sociology, UWE Bristol), Jack Gibbon, Erin Gilles-Langdon, Ruby Turner (BRICKS) for their support in organising the event, to Jack Gibbon, Jo Chalkblack, and Ani Stafford-



Townsend for their presentations, to all the makers present: *Lost and Grounded*, *Phil Root*, *Naomi Evans (These Two Hands)* and *Vicky and Giorgio (The Deli@Sandy Park)*. Thanks also goes to Prince at Latent Pictures for filming the event in support of UWE Bristol's forthcoming new video content featuring the University's commitment to real world education for sustainable development.



Art and Craft as Levers for Sustainability: Opportunities and Challenges: Group Discussion Outcomes

Opportunities and Potentials

- Opportunities for craft and art associated with alternative forms of high street regeneration
- The value of artistic license – creativity
- Art and Craft have the capacity to bring communities together
- Supporting Wellbeing
- Supporting Upskilling
- Art and craft as spaces of o-operative business models and practices
- Repair/re-use/circular economy functions

- System change!
- Art, craft and aspirational values
- Skills transfer
- Craft and art as a platform for make and repair shops
- Art as platform and support for campaigns
- The value of social enterprise models
- Enabling self and collective expression
- Working with diverse communities
- Art as a vehicle for dialogue
- Art and Craft as Activism
- Art and craft produce tangible outcomes
- Good city-region examples – Knowle West Media Centre, Civic Square (Birmingham), Sparx (Broadmead, Bristol), Bristol Textile Quarter, Scrapstore Networks, Bristol Materials Network
- During Lockdown – Online art projects as a vital link
- Challenging dominant models of ‘efficiency’ and value
- Handmade objects invite care and appreciation, embody important meanings, and create social connections
- Craft re-connects us to the physical/material, and the qualities and characteristics of these material elements
- Challenging the devaluation of the personal and individual act of creating
- The democratic potential of craft and art – little or no formal ‘expertise’ required to engage
- ‘Slow’ principles – craft and art invite a slowing down, against quantity-driven productivity and the ‘turnover’ of things
- The potential of a public/external valuing
- Art and craft bring people together in times of hardship
- Value in reconnecting with communities
- Community-facing craft and art classes for inclusion and accessibility
- Art and Craft communicates stories and challenges assumptions
- Creating value in the things we make
- Quality, longevity and durability
- Impact of Covid – thinking differently
- Home repair as a catalyst for craft

Challenges and Obstacles

- The undervaluing of art and craft in mainstream education
- The detrimental impact of COVID on freelancers
- Costs associated with craft and art production, particularly in the context of the cost-of-living crisis
- Challenges associated with establishing viable business models
- Can we make craft and art equitable?
- How can we make consumption more sustainable?
- The need for more grant support
- Need for Community and artist spaces
- Issues of access to tools and materials – need for more sharing approaches
- The cost of sustainable materials, against the unethical/unsustainable alternatives
- Art and Craft spaces need to be grown, and protected from developers
- Cost of living crisis as threat to more sustainable consumption patterns, and a reduced willingness/ability for consumers to pay a surplus for craft/art goods
- Art and craft may not always be sustainable – products on Etsy and Amazon reveal this
- The intensity of people’s lives can be an obstacle – finding time and energy for craft and art
- The challenge of communicating ‘value’ – craft products as more expensive
- The problem of righteous/smug consumption – ‘better-than-you’ foods
- The problem of inequality – impacting on available choices

- Need for societal and economic change – 4-day week, fair pay, more time for creativity
- Exploitation of craft within corporate marketing seeking to ‘craft-wash’ their mass produced products
- The pressure on citizen-consumers – challenging the expectations placed on consumers to have comprehensive knowledge of the goods they consume.
- The need to facilitate/support consumer choices – the responsibilities of government for making some choices more difficult and other choices easier
- Crafting at home – loss of intergenerational skills sharing
- Lack of valuing of craft and art at school – tech