

# Sustainable Innovation 2016

21<sup>st</sup> International Conference

'Circular Economy' Innovation & Design

7<sup>th</sup> – 8th November 2016

University for the Creative Arts

Epsom, Surrey, UK

[www.cfsd.org.uk](http://www.cfsd.org.uk)



## The Anatomy of Sustainable Innovation within Studio Craft and Design.

R Nicol

Australian National University, Australia

This paper outlines the unique and enduring contribution of Studio Craft and Design (SCD) as a location for practice and research into sustainable innovation. The argument is established and contextualized through cases studies to identify how SCD provides a blueprint for sustainable innovation.

'Sustainable innovation' is motivated by the various crises currently being experienced across the globe. These are complex and interconnected, prompting calls for the necessity of a great transformation through multi-disciplinary responses in order to achieve meaningful solutions (H. Rittel). In this context, designers are increasingly aware of their wider responsibilities 'beyond the object' (N. Morelli) including the economic, social, environmental, technological and political dimensions of problems that lie beyond the object.

Research, commentary and government policy related to the innovation agendas are predominately framed in relation to disciplines of the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics sector (STEM) (T. Cuttler). However, innovation is indisputably and inextricable linked to and enabled by wider more connected thinking and contexts encompassing the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences sector (HASS) (S. Cunningham). There are considerable benefits to be brought by inclusion of the HASS sector within innovation agendas. This is particularly the case for sustainable innovation. It has been widely established that sustainable innovation systems that recognise the cultural, emotional, and sacred dimensions of innovation promise authentic connections to people and place and therefore also enjoy increased chances of success in commercialization (R.Nicol).

The studio-based craftsperson and designer operates outside the usual problem framing paradigms or fixations (N. Cross) and exercises a proactive approach that could be described as "alterdisciplinary" or "undisciplined" in approach (C. Bremner & P. Rogers). Key features enabling this include the fact that the studio craft operates in a partially unbranded manner. As a result SCD is distanced from mainstream conventions and business models and ridged disciplinary fixations. SCD firms or practices are relatively small by nature and therefore remain relatively flexible, speculative and entrepreneurial.

This paper presents case studies that evidence sustainable innovations achieved through the SCD sector in Australia. I will identify how these exciting outcomes were achieved and what elements are potentially transferable or scalable to other disciplines, locations and times. Case studies will focus on the work of internationally successful Australian designers including Robert Foster, John Goulder and Henry Wilson.

This paper contributes to highlighting the significance and impact of HASS sector and specifically SCD to the global innovation agenda, in particular towards sustainable innovation. The case studies illustrate the role of SCD in disrupting established and dominant business models by sharing risk and intellectual property rights. In this paper, I demonstrate how sustainable innovations form the basis of a unique offering and competitive advantage in the market place.