

## **Sustainable Innovation 2021**

*Accelerating Sustainability in Fashion, Clothing, Sportswear & Accessories*

23<sup>rd</sup> International Conference

Online Conference: 15<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> March 2021

Business School for the Creative Industries

University for the Creative Arts

Epsom, Surrey, UK

## **Sewing Box for the Future: Upskilling the Next Generation**

### **J Ballie, V&A Dundee, Scotland**

Across the UK, approximately 30-40% of clothing in our existing wardrobe is unused – this equates to £1K per household or £30 billion nationally (Warp, 2017). The consumption and use of clothing are at odds. Each time we invest in a new garment, we are making another obsolete. As a result, £140 million worth of clothing (350,000 tones) is landfilled in the UK each year (Wrap, 2017). Within a world of resource scarcity, ready-to-wear clothing bears the air of shop finish and finality and doesn't call for repair, alteration or unpicking. Further research is required to challenge this status quo and encourage healthier habits around how we care for, use and maintain our wardrobes in the future.

Due to the low cost of fast fashion combined with a lack of service offers post consumption, it has become more cost effective to dispose and replace a garment once it has served its purpose. However, there are garments that physically wear out and no longer function and those that are made obsolete by economics that is where it is cheaper to buy a new piece rather than mend an existing one (Fletcher, 2012). These garments are currently designed in response to regularly changing trends that enable quick profit, rather than radically re-thinking new ways of designing (Niinimäki & Hassi, 2011).

This paper discusses 'Sewing Box for the Future', a live research project and pop-up exhibition produced by V&A Dundee in partnership with the University of Dundee (2020). Using the idea of the sewing box as a metaphor, it raises awareness about diminishing sewing skills and explores what materials, skills and knowledge the public need to help them take proactive steps towards reducing their own fashion waste. There is a crisis of waste in the global fashion industry, but what can we, as individuals, do about it?

By focusing on three themes: care, repair and customisation, Sewing Box for the Future aims to illustrate that by collectively making small changes, we can make a big difference – we have the power to effect change. The pop-up exhibition was used to demonstrate projects that are already re-thinking how clothes might be designed, used and cared for in the future. Alongside producing a deck of instructional cards as a resource to educate, upskill and inspire repair practices.

As a live research project, this intervention has enabled ideas, as well as practical instructions and activities, to be tested in a museum with a captive audience. The project has had to pivot in response to the Covid-19 global pandemic and has been re-designed to incorporate an interactive takeaway kit for visitors and online digital resources to support individuals to continue making at home. The impact has been evaluated using observation, a live questionnaire and interviews, and this will continue. This paper will present findings and make recommendations for future research to build upon the insights gathered and methods employed through this pilot to deepen fashion theory, knowledge and practical understanding of how we might encourage the public to re-think clothing care, repair and customisation in the future.