

A Life Tangled in Yarns – Leisure Knitting for Well-Being

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The main aim of this study is to discuss how craft, and especially yarn techniques, as knitting and crocheting, can provide a meaningful leisure activity, enhance mental well-being and help to untangle demanding situations in life. The theoretical frame for the study is built around craft as a cultural phenomenon in society and education. The starting-point is in literature and research ranging from historical craft skills and industrial manufacturing to learning craft skills, and crafts as a leisure activity for well-being. The empirical data was gathered during a local event in connection to a World Wide Knit in Public Day. The research questions deal with reasons for having knitting and crocheting as a leisure activity, contexts for learning of yarn techniques, and views on mediating yarn technique skills to others, as well as the role of social contexts for crafting as a leisure activity. Research results indicate that reasons for engaging in a crafting activity vary from social affinity to meditative solitude and from creativity and aesthetic experience to a lifeline in personal crises. As a leisure activity craft can be a counterbalance to a stressful job, hectic lifestyle or other demanding situations in life. Even though knitting as a craft is a solitary act, many knitters still enjoy each other's company. The social events that are arranged around the activity, e.g. courses, knitting cafés, knitting camps and events like World Wide Knit in Public Day, fill an important social role in today's society and for the individual well-being for the participants of the events.

Keywords: Leisure, Well-Being, Craft, Knitting, Learning

Introduction

Many people in today's society experience their life entangled and entwined due to expectations and demands from work, family and friends as well as from social media. Different leisure activities are often seen as counterbalances to a hectic and stressful lifestyle based on high hopes, competition and consumption.

The main aim of this study is to, from a socio-cultural perspective (Säljö, 2013), discuss how craft, and especially yarn techniques, as knitting and crocheting, can provide a meaningful leisure activity, enhance mental well-being and help to untangle demanding situations in life. A therapeutic perspective of craft as a leisure activity and its meaning for well-being have over time become more and more central (Heikkinen, 1997; Pöllänen, 2015a; 2015b). The focus of the study is contextualized within the Finnish society and educational system, both in a historical perspective and in present time. With craft as a cultural phenomenon in society and education we have built a theoretical frame for the study with a starting-point in literature and research ranging from historical craft skills and industrial manufacturing to education in crafts, and crafts as a leisure activity for well-being, especially knitting. We also discuss how craft activity can contribute with a feeling of social togetherness when taking part in for example knitting cafés and knitting communities, both in real life and virtually, as the empirical part of the study is implemented as an inquiry study at a Finnish local event during the The World Wide Knit in Public Day in 2013.

Many researchers and research projects (e.g. Clave-Brule et al., 2009; Corkhill, Hemmings, Maddock, & Riley, 2014; Craft Yarn Council of America, 2014; Dominick, 2014; Knit for Peace, n.d.; Riley,

Corkhill, & Morris, 2013; Pöllänen, 2006; 2015a) have focused on craft as a leisure and well-being enhancing activity. Based on research within the area (e.g. Clave-Brule, Mazloum, Park, Harbottle, & Birmingham, 2009; Collier, 2011; Dominick, 2014; Horhagen, Fostvedt, & Alsaker, 2014; Kenning, 2015; Kouhia, 2016; Lyttbacka, 2014; Petrovski, n.d.; Pöllänen, 2006, 2015a, 2015b; Pöntinen & Ylhäisi, 2015; Vähälä, 2003) four reasons for crafting have crystallized. For one craft maker the reason can be *social affinity*; for another, *meditative solitude and the possibility to screen off oneself* make the activity important. For somebody, *creativity and aesthetic experience* are the reasons for crafting, while for someone else, craft can be the *only lifeline, the therapeutic help in crises*.

In the 21st century some of the crafters have found new ways to use craft skills to express themselves. The hobby textile handcrafters have broke out from their homes and brought their activities to streets and market squares. Trendy people around the world knit socks in buses and crochet granny squares in cafés. (Peltola, 2019). In Finland public knitting events as Neulovaasa (Ekroos, 2018) and Knittingcamp Finland (2019) or events and activities organized by Anarkistimartat (n.d.) are popular. Also knitting cafés with various programs have found their place in the Finnish society (e.g. Lähetkangas, 2015). Globally the World Wide Knit in Public Day is an annually recurring event started by Danielle Landes in 2005. As knitting is such a solitary act, the aim of the worldwide day is to arrange an event where knitters can come together and enjoy one another's company. (Salling, 2019). The Knit in Public Day is said to be the largest knitter event in the world, in 2019 440 events in 33 countries were arranged, of which four were held in Finland. Even if the name of the event, Knit in Public, suggests that it is all about knitting, the organizers of the local events also invite the participants to enjoy different yarn and textile techniques including crocheting, embroidery, spinning, felting and many more. (World Wide Knit in Public Day, 2019).

During The World Wide Knit in Public Day in 2013 a local event in Finland, called *Stickfrossa* (knitting revel) in Swedish and *Neuloosi* (a combination of the Finnish words *neuroosi* = neurosis and *neulos* = knit) in Finnish, was held. The organizers describe the event as follows:

Now on Saturday we celebrate the *World Wide Knit in Public Day* with a knitting party in [...]. The idea behind the *Stickfrossa – Neuloosi* event is that we will knit together in town. The Upper Market-square will be closed off from traffic, and there will be inspiration points, a yarn sale, and areas where you can sit down to take part in the knitting community. There will also be a yarn ambulance present to calm down a potential knit neurosis. We will start at 10 AM with an opening speech, a ribbon-cutting ceremony (knitted, of course), and brass music. At 11 AM there will be a lecture, *A Life without Needles and Yarn – is that Possible?*, and at 2 PM a live talk show, *Knitting + Internet = True?*, with Lindas Lantliga as one of the guests. You can donate knitted products for charities, enjoy exhibitions, and take part in the lottery, where the prize is a children's knit graffiti bike. It is the first time that this event will be held here and we hope that it will be as fun as we have imagined. Everyone is welcome, and the event is completely free! (Hannas Virrvarr, 2013.) (Translated by the authors).

Based on the description of the event and the literature overview, the following research questions for the study were formulated:

What are the respondents' reasons for having knitting and crocheting as a leisure activity?

What are the contexts for the respondents' learning of yarn techniques, and what are the respondents' views on mediating yarn technique skills to others?

What is the role of the social context for knitting and crocheting as leisure activities?

During the event, questionnaire forms were publicly available for the participants to fill in. This means that those participants, who filled in the questionnaire, form the respondents in the empirical study reported in this article.

Learning Craft Skills in Finland

Lifelong learning in crafts is possible in Finland as crafts are available at all educational levels: in early childhood education and care (Finnish National Board of Education, 2016), pre-primary education (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014a), basic education (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014b), general upper secondary education (Finnish National Board of Education, 2015), vocational institutions (Finnish National Board of Education, n.d.), as well as at bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degree levels at universities (Porko-Hudd, Pöllänen, & Lindfors, 2018). Craft studies are also offered in liberal adult education (Haltia, 2015).

It all started with Uno Cygnaeus who is claimed to be the father of the Folk School and is recognized internationally as the founder of school craft. At his initiative craft, with a content that was divided into textile craft and technical craft based on gender, has been a compulsory subject in basic education in the Finnish Folk School since 1866. (Kantola & Rasinen, 2006, p. 57; Rönkkö, Mommo & Aerila, 2019).

As explained by Cygnaeus, the aims of the craft subject were to develop dexterity and basic handicraft skills, use tools, and acquire basic knowledge of materials. The target of craft teaching in school is the acquisition of useful general skills, not to obtain a vocational craft education. According to Cygnaeus, craft activities in school could form the main pillars in the education about attitudes, as practical work could develop both the physical, spiritual and technical skills, (Kantola & Rasinen, 2006, p. 61). In contrast to the decline of textile handcrafting, which was regarded as a result of the Industrial Revolution in mid-1800s Europe (Collier, 2011, p. 104), the tradition of learning craft in school and doing craft at home has been in progress as an unbroken chain in Finland.

The division of the craft subject into textile work and technical work was valid up to the end of the 1990's after which the contents of the crafts were connected into one subject called craft. Since the curriculum reform in 2004 (Finnish National Board of Education, 2004), craft has been a combined, single compulsory subject for all students. The curriculum discusses the holistic craft process and common craft, which includes contents from the earlier school subjects *technical work* (e.g., wood, metal, plastic, electronic work) and *textile work* (e.g., sewing, knitting, crochet, weaving, embroidery, textile printing, felting).

According to the Government Decree (2012) on the distribution of lesson hours in basic education, students have altogether a minimum of 11 annual hours of craft during grades 1 to 7, in general about 1.5 hours per week. This means that all Finns gain basic knowledge of different crafts and skills, such as problem solving, strategic planning, responsibility for the environment, and encouragement of creativity and cultural competence, that they can build on later in life (Kouhia, 2016). Regarding yarns and knitting, the teaching starts from the first grades and is regarded as highly important for motor development, among others (Virtanen, 2006, p. 10). According to Lönnqvist (2017, p. 33) and Virtanen (2006, p. 66), grade 4 is the most common grade for introducing knitting to pupils in school. Some pupils have learned to knit before reaching school age (Kinnunen, 1999, p. 54). In Virtanen's (2006, pp. 52, 65–66) study many craft students at the university level, state that they have learned the basics of knitting at home from their mothers, grandmothers, or older sisters, and some respondents had learned knitting even before they started school.

Kaukinen (2009, pp. 7–8) emphasizes that the craft subject in school is important from three perspectives: preparedness for work life, for coping with everyday life, and for going through crises in life, which she summarizes as life competence. The latter two perspectives form the basis of the present study's topic. Preparedness for coping with everyday life means that the basic skills acquired in school craft can in the future assist a person's development as a thoughtful consumer who can solve practical problems and be aware of Finnish culture and traditions. The outcome of learning crafts and enjoying the fulfillment that a creative activity provides, already in childhood, is that it can develop into a

stimulating lifelong hobby in adulthood. Preparedness to go through crises in life is the ability to find a lifeline and therapeutic help by means of craft activity (Kaukinen, 2009).

Craft as a Leisure Activity and a Source of Well-Being

Crafts can be defined as knowledge and skills handed down from one generation to the next (Craft Museum, n.d.; Ihatsu, 2002, p. 36; Säljö, 2013; 2015, pp. 11–19). In the old days craft skills were vital for survival. Every article for daily use was made by hand starting with the manufacturing of tools to process raw materials and to produce artifacts, and the whole process was usually undertaken by one person. In this respect, crafts are historically universal and closely connected to cultural development. (Heikkinen, 1997, p. 7).

The history of modern craft starts in the 19th century with the Industrial Revolution, which caused a change in the individual craft activity (Ihatsu, 2002, p. 40). The industrial manufacturing released people from the necessity of making everything themselves, but during the first half of the 20th century, especially in Finland, craft was still an important source of income for many households. Craft skills were also essential on an individual level. At lower social classes the production of utility articles, for example, clothes and bed wear for the household was a necessity, higher up in social classes the skills were of importance as craft served as leisure activities. (Heikkinen, 1997, pp. 7–9; Ihatsu, 1996, pp. 30–31; Kokko, 2007, pp. 6–7).

The word *leisure* is in the Cambridge Dictionary (2019) defined as “the time when you are not working or doing other duties”. The concept as we understand it today is closely connected to wage work in the sense that leisure is a counterbalance to a stressful job and that leisure include meanings of qualitative relaxing activities (Liikkanen, 2005, p. 7–10). Another way of defining leisure is the time of the day that remains after sleeping, eating, doing wage work or homework, studying or doing other kind of daily routine chores. This definition is wider and includes leisure time for students, unemployed and retired people (Hanifi, 2005, p. 171; Pääkkönen, 2012). According to Statistics Finland (2011) leisure time is roughly 44 hours a week. Most of this time is spent watching television, as social interactivity with family and friends, doing sports or as outdoor recreation, only a small part of the day is used for craft activity (Pääkkönen & Hanifi, 2011). In spite of this, craft is a hobby of approximately 50% of the Finnish population, ranging from 10 to over 75 year olds (Craft Museum, n.d.; Statistics Finland, 2018).

A recent study by Taito Group Finland (2018) shows that 34% of the Finnish population aged 18 or older engage in crafts several times per month, 7% do so every day, and 77% do it occasionally. Knitting and crocheting are the most popular craft activities among women, while men prefer woodworking, building things, and making miniatures. (Statistics Finland, 2018; Taito Group Finland, 2018). Part of the craft activities are performed within courses offered by government-funded liberal adult education. (Haltia, 2015).

Pöllänen (2015a, p. 59) refers to several researchers when stating that creative leisure activities contribute to well-being and the feeling of empowerment for persons of all ages. For this reason, it is essential to develop an understanding of why and how craft making can contribute to craft makers' well-being. The reason for crafting as a leisure activity varies. It can be social affinity, meditative solitude and the possibility to screen off oneself, creativity and aesthetic experience, or therapeutic help in crises (Clave-Brule, Mazloun, Park, Harbottle, & Birmingham, 2009; Collier, 2011; Dominick, 2014; Horhagen, Fostvedt, & Alsaker, 2014; Kenning, 2015; Kouhia, 2016; Lyttbacka, 2014; Petrovski, n.d.; Pöllänen, 2006, 2015a, 2015b; Pöntinen & Ylhäisi, 2015; Vähälä, 2003).

Horhagen et al. (2014), Kenning (2015), and Pöntinen & Ylhäisi (2015) indicate that *social affinity* and the possibility to make crafts at a special meeting place, to share experiences, and to be part of craft networks, make the activities important. Kouhia (2016) summarizes this fact as follows:

The social dimension clearly characterizes hobby craft making: hobby craft making encourages connectivity through shared, casual craft activities. Almost as important as making, such activities provide occasions for sharing stories, skills, and knowledge in and through hobby crafts. Such activity forges connections between people and materials by resonating with their lives and bringing them closer together through sharing. Hobby craft makers might feel a strong need to share their experiences with people they expect have equivalent ideas and experiences about crafts (p. 55).

Other research results indicate that it is the possibility to *screen off* oneself that makes the activity stress relieving and a basis for well-being. In Pöllänen's (2015b) study, many of the participants stated that craft activity allowed them to break free from other roles, take care of their own needs and organize their thoughts and feelings. Craft activity in solitude also helps clarify problems as it allows the crafter to analyze the relations among different events and situations in life (Collier, 2011). In Collier's (2011, p. 110) study, most of the respondents emphasized *creativity and aesthetic experiences*: 'it was because of their aesthetic love of textiles: the beauty of it, the feeling that it was part of their identity, and the sense that it was a vital means of expression'. Clave-Brule et al. (2009), Dominick (2014), Draxl et al. (2017), Horhagen et al. (2014), Kaukinen (2009), Pöllänen (2006, 2015a), and Vähälä (2003) highlight the connection between crafting and well-being and point out that craft activity has a *therapeutic* and healing effect on crises in life. These findings are in line with the research results of Collier (2011) and Corkhill et al. (2014) who report that textile handcrafters have come up with a constructive, practical way to deal with difficult moods.

The four reasons for making crafts show that social relationships and engagement in meaningful, creative leisure activities are central elements for physical, mental, and social well-being. Research conducted in the first two decades of the 21st century, show a relationship between physical activity and mental health. Several studies find that creative and craft-based activities influence our mental well-being (Clave-Brule et al., 2009; Collier, 2011; Dominick, 2014; Horhagen et al., 2014; Kaukinen, 2009; Kenning, 2015; Kouhia, 2016, p. 23; Lambert, 2008; Lyttbacka, 2014; Pöllänen, 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2015a, 2015b; Vähälä, 2003).

Knitting for a Better Life

Knitting seems to be one of the most popular among all textile craft techniques (Pöntinen & Ylhäisi, 2015; Statistics Finland, 2018; Taito Group Finland, 2018). In Collier's (2011) survey, based on a convenience sample of female textile handcrafters (N = 821), the respondents on average had tried 11 textile techniques: among these, the overall mastery was highest for knitting.

The low threshold for the activity can explain the popularity of knitting. The technique is easy to learn and portable, it is inexpensive, easily taught and produces concrete results that can provide the feeling of accomplishment (Clave-Brule et al., 2009, pp. e2–e3). Furthermore, knitting is an activity that requires only pins or needles and a ball of yarn and it can be done anywhere, at any age and throughout life. The projects can vary in size, difficulty, colours, and materials. There are innumerable knitting stitches and countless variations of patterns. Mistakes in a knit can easily be untangled and reknitted without leaving a trace. The knitted products can be functional for specific purposes, artistic and expressive, or even pieces of art.

This study focuses on knitting and crocheting with the *Knit in Public Day* as its area of concern. In the 21st century, the culture of knitting has developed through knitting cafés and knitting communities, both in real life and virtually. Additionally many researchers and research projects (e.g. Clave-Brule et al.,

2009; Corkhill et al., 2014; Craft Yarn Council of America, 2014; Dominick, 2014; Knit for Peace, n.d.; Riley, Corkhill, & Morris, 2013) have specifically focused on the relationship between knitting and well-being.

In a survey by Corkhill et al. (2014, p. 37) the majority of the sample of 3,545 respondents from 31 countries, who were members of a virtual knitting community, reported knitting more than three times per week. The analysis revealed a significant relationship between the frequency of knitting and the respondents' perceived moods and feelings, specifically calmness, happiness, sadness, anxiety and confidence. Feelings of happiness and improved mood were significantly associated with more frequent knitting. Knitting in a group also had a perceived impact on happiness (Corkhill et al., 2014). Similar results emerged from a survey involving 1,053 respondents, conducted by the charity organization Knit for Peace (n.d.) in the UK, as well as from another survey involving over 3,100 respondents, conducted by the Craft Yarn Council of America (2014).

Riley et al. (2013) carried out a study based on the same online questionnaire as Corkhill et al. (2014). In Riley's study, the respondents' main reasons for knitting were commonly related to the perceived psychological benefits of the activity, such as relaxation and relief from stress, together with therapeutic and meditative qualities, which were associated with the activity's rhythmic and repetitive nature. Knitting was regarded as productive while engaging in passive activities, such as watching television or traveling, or during an unproductive time, such as queuing or waiting for appointments. It provided tactile engagement, which offered a sense of accomplishment, a creative outlet and a connection to tradition. Knitting was also considered a personally and socially valued, creative, skilled, and rewarding occupation.

Besides the contribution to well-being and mental health at an individual level, knitting can also be a collective activity and a means for charity, with the aim of making someone else happy, thus bringing satisfaction and a feeling of usefulness that have an effect on the benefactor's well-being. The survey made by Knit for Peace (n.d.) in the UK showed that knitting improved the respondents' mood and sense of well-being and reduced feelings of isolation and loneliness. Notably, 70% of the respondents were over 60 years old. The ability to volunteer diminishes with older age, but Knit for Peace enabled the respondents to knit by providing an outlet for their products that gave them an opportunity to help others, in turn enhancing their sense of usefulness.

In Finland, knitting has often been used as an activity around which people come together to implement social knitting projects, where the knitters usually do not know who the receivers of the knitted products will be. During the Second World War, the Lotta Svärd women's organisation for voluntary defence set up collections of knitted woolen socks for the soldiers on the frontlines. Another charitable activity is knitting the so-called Mother Teresa blankets donated to children's homes in India, a trend that has continued for over 30 years. In 2015, in connection to the increase in refugees reaching Europe, the craft people in Finland took up their needles and pins to welcome the refugees to the country with woolen socks, mittens, and scarves (Kraatari, 2015).

Besides its sport achievements, the Finnish Olympic team has become famous for its members' knitting sessions during the games. The idea initially came from Hannaleena Ronkainen, the sports psychologist of the Olympic team, as a way for the team members to know one another, build up camaraderie within the group, and relax between the contests. During the 2014 winter games in Sochi, the Finnish Olympic team worked on a communal project by knitting a scarf that was intended as a gift and a symbolic baton for Finland's Summer Olympic team in Rio de Janeiro in 2016 (Litman, 2018; Parkkinen, 2014). During the 2018 winter games in Pyeongchang, the Finnish team members brought their knitting needles again, this time working on a knitted blanket for the Finnish president's newborn child (Belam, 2018).

In 2017, Finland's 100th years of independence, many nationwide knitting projects started, of which the *Woolen socks for everyone born in the centenary year 2017* and *Woolen socks for war veterans* earned the most publicity (SuomiFinland 100, 2016). Collective projects are easy to implement in Finland, as, due to the Finnish school system almost everyone knows the basics of knitting (Kouhia, 2016; Litman, 2018; Lönnqvist, 2017; Virtanen, 2006).

According to the survey by Knit for Peace (n.d.), older people's achievement of health benefits and a sense of well-being would depend on whether the knitting skill had been learnt early in life. The respondents thought that it was unlikely that people would take up knitting in their old age. In this survey the majority of the respondents said that they learned to knit as children, most of these were taught by family members or self-taught, only a few at school. A minority of the respondents had learnt the technique as adults. (Knit for Peace, n.d.). Kenning's (2015) study also showed that the majority of the respondents reported being taught to knit, crochet, sew, or tat by family members, usually their mothers, grandmothers, or aunts.

Rebmann (2008) studied the use of knitting as an activity for empowerment in group settings. She concluded that when knitters helped and taught one another, they shifted the role of power between teacher and learner, which could improve the knitters' sense of empowerment. Lyttbacka (2014) arrived at a similar conclusion in her study concerning hobby crafters in craft courses in liberal adult education.

Empirical material

The empirical data concerning the World Wide Knit in Public Day participants' interests in knitting and crocheting were gathered using a questionnaire. During the local event the questionnaire forms were publicly available for the participants to fill in. The questionnaire started with questions regarding the respondents' background information, such as gender and age. The actual questions consisted of four close-ended multiple-choice questions (both checklist and ranking types) and three open-ended questions, each asking the respondents to complete a sentence. Answers from each questionnaire question, can be used to answer several of the study's research questions.

Answers to the first research question *What are the respondents' reasons for having knitting and crocheting as a leisure activity?*, are compiled from questionnaire question 2 where the task was to rank the statements about reasons for knitting/crocheting; from question 4 where the task was to rank statements concerning the importance of the activity, and from question 7, an open-ended question where the respondents were asked to describe the driving force behind their personal knitting/crocheting commitment.

Answers to the second research question *What were the contexts for the respondents' learning of yarn techniques, and what are the respondents' views on mediating yarn technique skills to others?*, are compiled from questionnaire question 1 where the respondents were asked to mark where they had learnt to knit/crochet; from question 2 where the task was to rank the statements about reasons for knitting/crocheting; from question 3 where the respondents were asked to select an option corresponding to their way of performing the activity, and from question 5, where the respondents' task was to complete the sentence *An excellent way to pass on knitting/crocheting traditions to future generations is to....*

Answers to the third research question *What is the role of the social context for knitting and crocheting as leisure activities?*, are compiled from questionnaire question 3 where the respondents were asked to select an option corresponding to their way of performing the activity, and from question 6 where the respondents were asked to complete the sentence *I participate in the World Wide Knit in Public Day because....*

The results of the empirical inquiry are in the article reported under the heading *Results*, and discussed in relation to the theoretical background under the heading *Discussion*.

Altogether, 41 questionnaires were handed in. This is a small sample which means that the results cannot be generalized, however, they give a rough picture of attitudes to different dimensions of knitting and crocheting as a leisure activity. The participants of the event can be regarded as a non-randomly chosen group of respondents because of their common interest in crafts, especially the yarn techniques knitting and crocheting, which brought them together for the event. One reason for choosing both knitting and crocheting for the questionnaire is based on the fact that the research conducted by Taito Group Finland (2018) shows that knitting and crocheting are the most popular craft activities among women. The other reason is the fact that even if the name of the event, Knit in Public, suggests that it is all about knitting, the organizers of the local events also invite the participants to enjoy different yarn and textile techniques also including crocheting (World Wide Knit in Public Day, 2019). In their answers, the respondents were not asked to differentiate the two techniques.

The background information shows that most of the respondents are aged 60–69, closely followed by those aged 50–59 and 40–49. Just a few are younger than 40 or older than 69 years old. Of the 41 respondents, 40 are female. The respondents' age and gender distributions are in line with those of previous studies (Collier, 2011; Knit for Peace, n.d.; Riley et al., 2013; Taito Group Finland, 2018).

When analyzing the empirical material the problem of manually filled-in questionnaires appeared, as some questions had been left unanswered or not answered in line with given instructions. Another area of concern consist of the possible difficulty in understanding the nuances of the questions. In hindsight, this kind of inquiry and considering the relatively high age of the majority of the respondents, interviews might have given a more reliable result.

Results

The 41 questionnaires were analyzed with regard to the three research questions. The close-ended questions were directly compiled and visualized as figures, whereas the open-ended questions were first categorized, and then compiled and visualized as figures.

Question 1, a checklist multiple-choice item (*I have learned to knit/crochet...*), offers the possibility to choose more than one of several alternatives (*in school, at home, from my grandparents, or in another place*). Figure 1 presents the distribution of all the answers (total 57) by the 41 respondents.

I have learned to knit/crochet

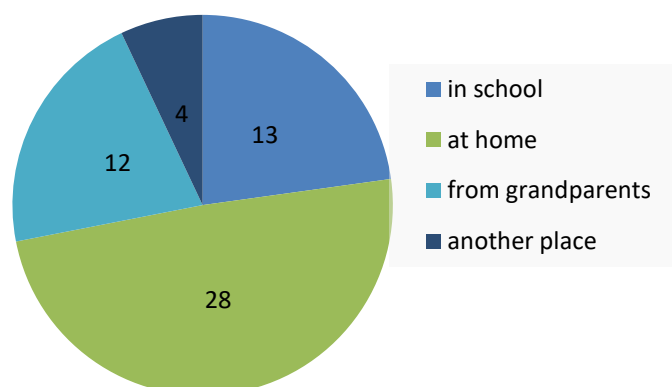


Figure 1. The distribution of the answers to question 1.

13 respondents indicate having learnt to knit or crochet in school, 28 have learnt the skills at home, 12 from grandparents and 4 in another place with comments such as in a *craft club for children*, *by trial and error at the age of six* and *together with a friend*.

Of the 28 respondents choosing *at home*, 8 also selected *in school* and make thereby up a majority of the total amount of 13 who had learnt the skill in school. 4 of the 28 respondents choosing *at home* also chose *from grandparents*.

Question 2 is a rank-order, multiple-choice item, where the respondents' task is to rank the statements about reasons for knitting/crocheting. Figure 2 summarizes the question and the set of answers. Because the number of answers to the multiple choices differ (ranging from 30 to 32), and with only nine in the last choice, they are presented as percentages instead of number of respondents.

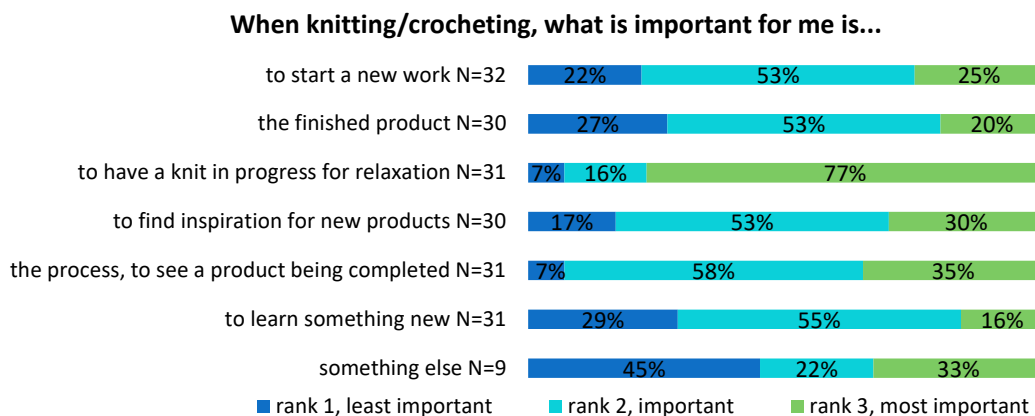


Figure 2. The distribution of the answers to question 2.

The importance of the activity varies among the respondents. The statements *...to start a new work*, *...the finished product*, *...to find inspiration for new products*, *...the process, to see a product arise being completed* and *...to learn something new* all have an almost uniform distribution; just over half of the respondents think that these statements are important. *To find inspiration* and the *process* are most important for about one third of the respondents. Only 16% of the respondents think that it is most important *to learn something new*. The possibility *to have a knit in progress for relaxation* is of the greatest importance; for 77% of the respondents, this statement has the highest priority for the activity, while only 7% regard it as having less priority.

In question 3, *When I knit/crochet...*, the majority of the respondents (n=35) have considered whether *...for me, it is most relaxing if I do it alone*, *...I prefer to take part in a course to learn something new* or *...I prefer to do it in a group because of the social togetherness*. In this checklist multiple-choice question, visualized in figure 3, the respondents should select only one option.

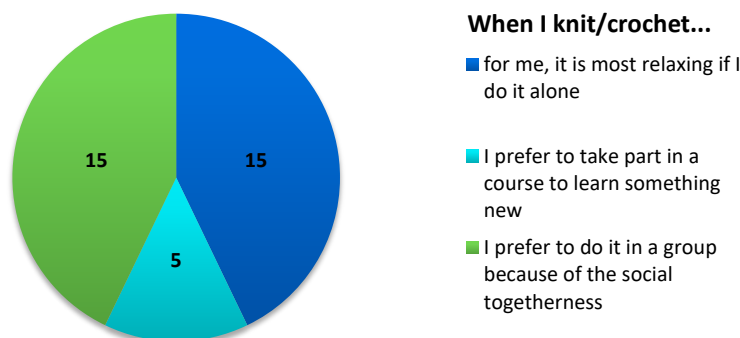


Figure 3. The distribution of answers to question 3.

Fifteen respondents had filled in the alternative *...for me, it is most relaxing if I do it alone*, 5 had selected *...I prefer to take part in a course to learn something new* and 15 had picked *...I prefer to do it in a group because of the social togetherness*.

Question 4 (*For me, it is important that...*) is a rank-order multiple-choice item. The respondents' task was to rank these four statements: *...I feel that I have succeeded with the product*, *...I have created a useful and usable product*, *...somebody else appreciates my work* or *...I can help, encourage, or instruct someone else* (Figure 4).

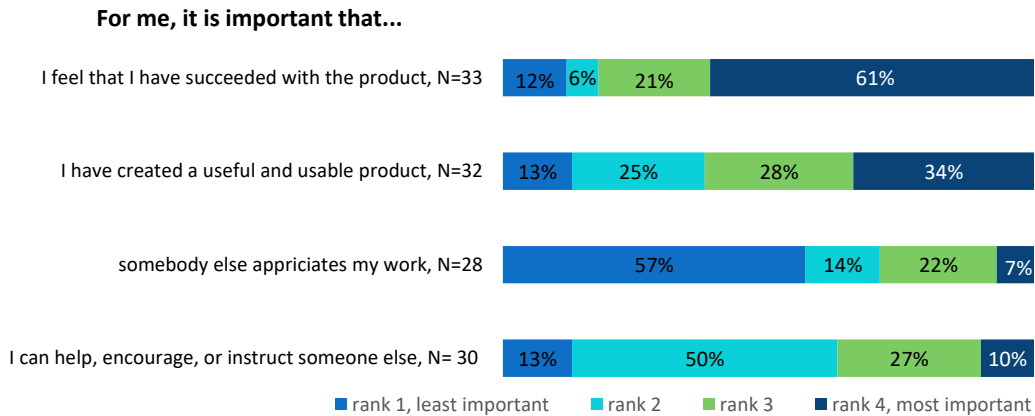


Figure 4. Rank order from least to most important in question 4.

For 61% of the respondents, their feeling of *success in relation to the creation of a product* is of greatest importance. The rankings of *...I have created a useful and usable product* seem to be quite uniform, from 34% of the respondents who are of the opinion that the product is the most important to 13% who think that the product is the least important. *Somebody else appreciates my work* seems to be of minor importance; 57% of the respondents rank it as the least important, and only 7% think that it is the most important. *To help, encourage, or instruct someone else* also does not seem to be very important, with only 10% ranking it as the most important and 50% placing it on rank 2.

In the open-ended question 5, the respondents' task was to complete the sentence; *An excellent way to pass on knitting/crocheting traditions to future generations is to...* 36 respondents have answered the question. Some respondents have given several alternatives to pass on the traditions. The answers are classified under four categories (Figure 5).

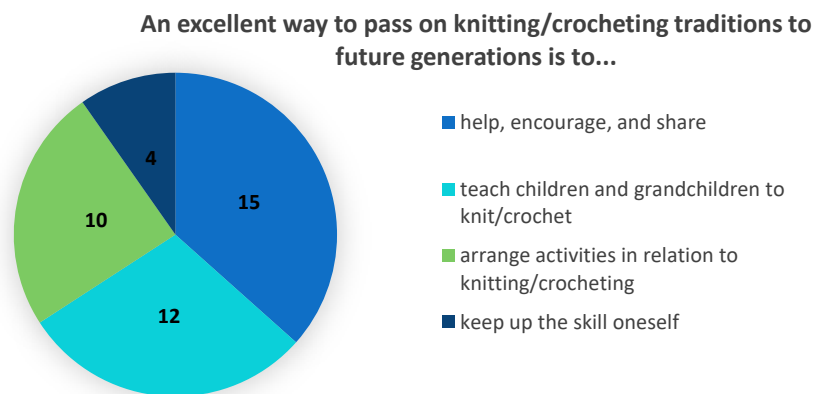


Figure 5. Categorization of answers to question 5.

The 15 comments in the first category are all about the respondents’ wishes to *help* and *encourage* others, *share* skills and ideas, and inspire others to take part in the activity. The second category consists of 12 comments where the respondents emphasize the importance of passing on traditions by *teaching children and grandchildren to knit/crochet*. In the 10 comments in the third category, the respondents propose some *arrangements and activities* including knitting cafés, courses, and events such as the World Wide Knit in Public Day. In the fourth category, the four comments point out the importance of *keeping up personal skills* to be able to keep the activity alive.

In question 6, the respondents were asked to complete the sentence *I participate in the World Wide Knit in Public Day because...*The categorization of the 38 respondents answers is visualized in Figure 6.

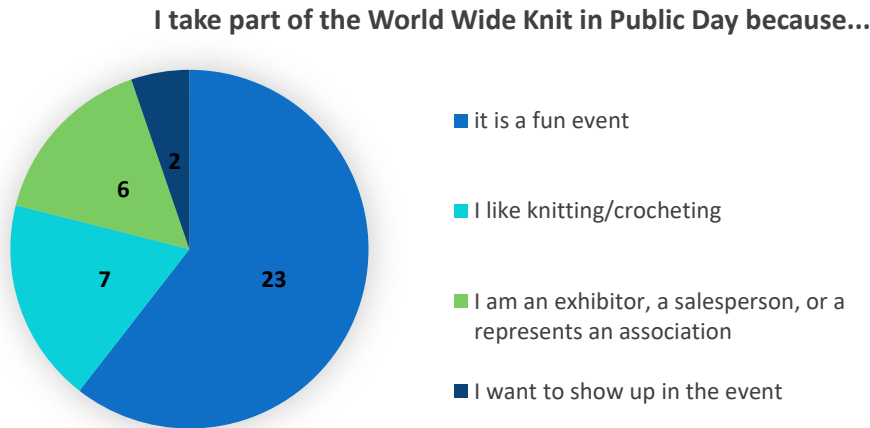


Figure 6. Categorization of answers to question 6.

The first category indicates that the World Wide Knit in Public Day *is a fun event* where attendees can meet like-minded persons, and it is interesting and inspiring to participate in. This can be summarized in one respondent’s comment, ‘*Knitting is excellent therapy and social togetherness for me.*’ In the second category, *I like knitting/crocheting*, a person’s own interest in the activity is emphasized, and some expect to acquire new ideas for their own activities. As mentioned in the third category, some respondents have taken part in the event as exhibitors, salespersons or as representatives of different associations. Lastly, the fourth category cites the respondents who find it important to show up in the event, which enhances their well-being.

In the last open-ended question (7), the respondents were asked, *Describe the driving force behind your personal knitting/crocheting commitment.* The 40 open answers given by 34 respondents are grouped under the four categories listed in Figure 7.

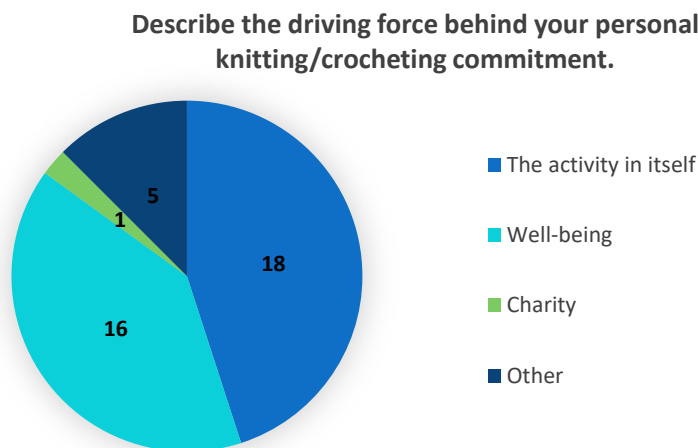


Figure 7. The categorization of answers to question 7.

The first category shows the activity's essential value; many of the respondents mention creativity and knitting/crocheting as a hobby where they can make personal and unique products. In the answers that form the second category, the respondents describe how the activity promotes relaxation and well-being and at the same time, gives new energy. Charity is classified as the third category; although cited by only one respondent, it represents an important commitment. The fourth category consists of different kinds of comments concerning the respondents' engagement, for example, taking advantage of time spent in a car or a bus or growing up in an environment where knitting/crocheting is a central activity.

Discussion

In this section, the results from the empirical inquiry are discussed in relation to the theoretical background presented in the article and the study's three research questions are answered.

RQ1: What are the respondents' reasons for having knitting and crocheting as a leisure activity?

Answers to the first research question are compiled from questionnaire questions 2, 4 and 7.

According to the respondents some of the main reasons for having knitting and crocheting as a leisure activity are the sense of relaxation that the repetitive motion brings, the feeling of success in creating a tangible and unique artefact, and the possibility to express one's creativity.

These results mirror the results of other studies where knitting is viewed as relaxing and calming. Riley et al. (2013) mention the technique's rhythmic and repetitive nature as a reason, helping people unwind from everyday stress and creating a positive mood. In the study by Knit for Peace (n.d.), the tactile engagement offered a sense of accomplishment, relaxation, and relief from stress. In its survey, the Craft Yarn Council of America (2014) includes the following top benefits of the activity: feeling of accomplishment, reduced stress, improved mood, and sense of confidence. Clave-Brule et al. (2009), Dominick (2014), Draxl et al. (2017), Horhagen et al. (2014), Kaukinen (2009), Pöllänen (2006, 2015a), and Vähälä (2003) highlight the connection between crafting and well-being and point out that craft activity has a therapeutic and healing effect on crises in life. These findings are in line with the research results of Collier (2011) and Corkhill et al. (2014) who report that textile handcrafters have come up with a constructive, practical way to deal with difficult moods. In a survey by Corkhill et al. (2014, p. 37) the analysis revealed a significant relationship between the frequency of knitting and the respondents' perceived moods and feelings, specifically calmness, happiness, sadness, anxiety and confidence. Feelings of happiness and improved mood were significantly associated with more frequent knitting. In Riley's study (2013), the respondents' main reasons for knitting were commonly related to the perceived psychological benefits of the activity, such as relaxation and relief from stress, together with therapeutic and meditative qualities, which were associated with the activity's rhythmic and repetitive nature.

The findings concerning the above-mentioned reasons can also be compared to Collier's (2011) study where she discusses the reasons for handcrafting involving pleasure and enjoyment of the activity. In Collier's (2011, p. 110) study, most of the respondents emphasized creativity and aesthetic experiences: 'it was because of their aesthetic love of textiles: the beauty of it, the feeling that it was part of their identity, and the sense that it was a vital means of expression'.

One respondent in the study mentions charity as a reason for craft making. According to Knit for Peace (n.d.), knitting for charity makes knitters feel more useful and worthwhile as the activity gives them a sense of purpose, which in turn enhances their well-being. The Finnish way of doing charity can be exemplified by nationwide knitting projects providing woolen socks for newborns, veterans and refugees (Kraatari, 2015; SuomiFinland 100, 2016)

RQ2: What were the contexts for the respondents' learning of yarn techniques, and what are the respondents' views on mediating yarn technique skills to others?

Answers to the second research question are compiled from questionnaire questions 1, 2, 3 and 5.

A majority of the respondents have learnt the yarn techniques in informal learning environments such as at home or from grandparents. This has been the case throughout history as craft skills have been handed down from one generation to the next (Craft Museum, n.d; Ihatsu, 2002, p. 36; Säljö, 2013; 2015, pp. 11–19). The respondents regard this way of sharing and mediating knitting and crocheting skills to new generations to be functional even today. Only 13 respondents indicate having learned knitting in school, although Finnish schools have offered craft as a school subject since 1866 (Kantola & Rasinen, 2006; Kouhia, 2016; Lönnqvist, 2017; Virtanen, 2006).

The findings from the study are similar to several studies' results (Craft Yarn Council of America, 2014; Heikkinen, 1997; Kinnunen, 1999; Knit for Peace, n.d.; Virtanen, 2006), where respondents mention that they have learnt the techniques at home or from their grandparents before starting school or before the technique has become topical in school. According to Kaukinen (2009) and Knit for Peace (n.d.) the outcome of learning crafts already in childhood, is that it can develop into a stimulating lifelong hobby in adulthood.

Only a minority of the respondents think that it is important to learn something new, either by themselves or participating in a course, when knitting or crocheting. The reason can be that the respondents feel that they already master the technique on a satisfactory level. This finding seems to be opposite to a previous study's (Riley et al., 2013) finding where the respondents, especially those who knit in groups, emphasize the possibilities to learn new skills.

The respondents feel quite positive towards helping and encouraging others, sharing skills and ideas, and inspiring others to take part in the activity. This can be compared to the studies made by Kenning (2015) and Knit for peace (n.d.) in which learning and sharing craft skills are emphasized. According to Rebmann (2008) and Lyttbacka (2014) knitters who help and teach each other, shift the role of power between teacher and learner, which can improve the knitters' sense of empowerment.

RQ3: What is the role of the social context for knitting and crocheting as leisure activities?

Answers to the third research question are compiled from questionnaire question 3 and 6.

Approximately, equally many respondents of the study prefer to engage in craft making as a leisure activity in solitude as in a social context.

Craft makers preferring to work in solitude appreciate the space of their own, the possibility to be alone and make their own choices, free from timetables and duties. They also appreciate the fact that the craft activity allows them to break free from other roles, take care of their own needs, organise their thoughts and feelings, and help clarify problems (Collier, 2011; Pöllänen, 2015b).

Respondents preferring craft making in social contexts value the togetherness that a group provides, and the feeling of well-being that crafting with like-minded persons bring. This is in line with the studies by Lyttbacka (2014) and Riley et al. (2013), who reveal that crafting in groups, whether face-to-face or virtually, gives the participants confidence and a feeling of belonging, in turn making them calmer and happier (Corkhill et al., 2014). Also Riley et al. (2013) and Knit for Peace (n.d) conclude that knitting in a group promotes social inclusion, improves social contacts for making friends, and connects people from different age groups. The findings of Riley et al. (2013, p. 56) indicate '...that knitting has the potential to promote quality of life and personal and social well-being'.

Conclusions

The main aim of the study has been *to discuss how craft, and especially yarn techniques, as knitting and crocheting, can provide a meaningful leisure activity, enhance well-being and help to untangle demanding situations in life.*

The study provides a picture of how persons who took part in the World Wide Knit in Public Day perceive their knitting and crocheting activities. The results offer insights into the respondents' thoughts about reasons for having knitting and crocheting as a leisure activity, the contexts for the respondents' learning of yarn techniques, and views on mediating yarn technique skills to others, as well as the role of the social context for knitting and crocheting as leisure activities. The results of the study are similar to and supported by other studies within the area, both national and international.

As crafting no longer is essential for survival in the western society, the reasons for the activity have changed over time. Nowadays the reasons for engaging in the activity vary from social affinity to meditative solitude and from creativity and aesthetic experience to a lifeline in personal crises. As a leisure activity craft can be a counterbalance to a stressful job, hectic lifestyle or other demanding situations in life.

Even though knitting is a solitary act many knitters enjoy each others company and the feeling of belonging to a group of people with similar interests. Different ways of coming together around a knit, e.g. courses, knitting cafés, knitting camps and events like World Wide Knit in Public Day, fill an important social role in today's society. Members of a group can make joint projects or each can have their individual project. Regardless of the social context, crafting by oneself or as a member of a group, research show that the activity in itself enhances mental well-being.

The educational structures in Finland and craft as a compulsory subject in basic education have resulted in excellent opportunities for all citizens to achieve well-being through crafting. Basic knowledge and skills (e.g., in knitting) acquired in childhood can be resumed later in life and through the concept of lifelong learning, can be developed into a multifaceted hobby or profession. Basic craft skills are regarded as general competencies of all citizens in Finland. The structures in the society bring out crafting and knitting as sources of self-realization, socialization with others, and well-being, not only as means of producing artifacts for tangible needs. A life tangled in yarns can bring well-being by untangling incidents and events in life.

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