

Multiple faces of contemporary hand knitting

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Abstract. Knitting and crocheting are traditional textile techniques with great significance both in history and modern times. Similar to other textile techniques, knitting has developed into a diversified industrial sector, comprising the production of knitted fabrics, knitwear, hosiery and fashion accessories. At the same time, contemporary knitting and crocheting became hobbies as well as arts-and-crafts activities, extending to various areas of work and leisure. Historical and traditional ethnic knitting and crocheting patterns keep inspiring designers' collections and also other industrial products. Not so long ago, knitting was seen as an ordinary and unchanging indoor activity and, in its domestic history, it was the preserve of older women making products of dainty work and taste. Today, knitting deals with urban population of all classes. The popularity of leisure hand knitting is increasing; moreover, hand knitting is becoming more and more widespread among young people. With the emergence of artistic and handicraft markets, hand-knitting and crocheting developed into a profitable market activity. Positive effects of hand knitting have become increasingly important - from generating creativity and innovativeness, through knitting and socializing in groups, to medical and therapeutic effects as well as social and global connections. Yarn bombing, yarn storming or graffiti knitting has been used to describe urban social practices of knitted objects placed, or tagged, in public spaces. Knitting became means of communication, artistic and social expression and statement. The advantage of hand knitting is its mobility. One can knit almost everywhere, and for hand knitting, only a ball of yarn and knitting needles are required. Hand-knitted products have nice touch, they are custom-made and therefore personalized.

1. Introduction

Knitting and crocheting are traditional textile techniques with great significance both in history and modern times. Similar to other textile techniques, knitting has developed into a diversified industrial sector, comprising the production of knitted fabrics, knitwear, hosiery and fashion accessories for clothing as well as for non-clothing purposes. At the same time, contemporary knitting and crocheting became hobbies as well as means of artistic expression and arts-and-crafts activities, extending to various areas of work and leisure. Historical and traditional ethnic knitting and crocheting patterns keep inspiring designers' collections and also other industrial products.

Not so long ago, knitting was seen as an ordinary and unchanging indoor activity and, in its domestic history, it was the preserve of older women making products of dainty work and taste [1]. Today, knitting deals with rural and urban population of all classes. The popularity of leisure hand knitting and crocheting is increasing; moreover, hand knitting is becoming more and more widespread among young urbans. With the emergence of hobby and artistic handicraft markets, hand-knitting and crocheting developed into a profitable market activity.



Positive effects of hand knitting have become increasingly important - from generating imagination, creativity and innovation, even humor, through knitting and socializing in groups, to medical and therapeutic effects as well as trade, social and global connections. Knitting became means of communication, artistic and social expression, statement, trend, way of life....

The advantage of hand knitting are its flexibility and mobility. One can knit almost everywhere, at home, in a park, in a café or public transportation. For hand knitting, only a ball of yarn and knitting needles or a crochet are required. Hand-knits are colorful, they have a nice touch, they can be 3D knitted/shaped, they are custom-made and therefore personalized.

2. Leisure knitting and knitting in groups

In the last decade, there has been a resurgence of interest in knitting as a form of leisure. From ‘stitch n bitch’ groups and pub knitting circles to fiber festivals and knit meets, new public sites for participating in knitting have emerged as part of a contemporary craft movement. Accompanying this renaissance is a growing presence of “craftsters” on the web, with blogs, podcasts, social networking sites and folksonomies like Flickr and YouTube connecting a global community of knitters and providing them with a wealth of resources and support. Knitters photograph and blog about their projects and yarns, chat and plan face-to-face knit festivals via forums, search for podcasts to learn new skills, follow “celebrity” knit bloggers and sell and exchange patterns and yarn via knitting networking sites [2].



Figure 1. Hand knitting at Abilmente hobby fair (Vicenza, Italy 2015)

The growth of do it yourself (DIY) craft culture, of which knitting is a part, itself has a history that encompasses professional and leisure practices, diverse forms of production and consumption, fine art, performance and fashion with activities spanning public and private spheres [2]. Knitting, along with a number of other lifestyle activities like gardening and cooking, is seen as providing an alternative temporality which allows individuals to create meaning outside of the spheres of domesticity or employment [3]. This nostalgic reclaiming of craft is understood as a response to mass consumerism, globalization and the homogeneity of the high street, reflecting a desire for individualization and a playful and ironic trend for celebrating domesticity in popular culture [4,2]. On the other hand, it was proved that knitting in a group impacts significantly on perceived happiness, improved social contact and communication with others [5]. In 2012, Slovenian group launched the project Connections. Connections was a textile installation in progress. Project offered moments of calm engagement, creative expression, healing remembrance, relaxed socialization to regular people. Visitors were invited to take off shoes, sit down, inspect, touch, and learn simple textile technique, how to make a rug with their fingers. The project connected people by working together on the symbolic textile field – carpet [6].



Figure 2. Group knitting with fingers: project Connections (Ljubljana, Slovenia 2012)
(<http://www.oloopdesign.com/en/projects/connections/>)

3. Therapeutic knitting

There is increasing evidence that engaging in creative and meaningful occupation can impact positively on health and wellbeing. The results of an online survey among more than 300 knitters showed that there was a significant relationship between knitting frequency and feeling calm and happy. More frequent knitters also reported higher cognitive functioning [5]. Knitters control the rhythm of their craft and may change it according to their mood. This rhythm is instantaneously calming [7].

Therapeutic knitting takes the benefits of knitting and enhances them to improve well-being or to treat certain medical conditions. The psychological benefits of knitting alone or within a group range from distraction, refocusing of attention, and enabling feelings of control to providing rewarding occupation and enabling relaxation and contribution. Through knitting, lost emotions associated with anticipation, pride, excitement, and happiness are reawakened. Life circumstances such as illness, retirement, or redundancy can change identity and perception of self. Knitting can enable the knitter to

build a new positive identity through, for example, knitting for charity [7]. Knitting complex patterns can also be beneficial for hand joint exercise and memory training.

4. Knitting art

Because of the nature of the stitch and the use of a continuous thread, knitted fabrics are very strong and can be used to support large structures. Knitting that appears in unexpected environments, knitting that masquerades, as something it is not, knitting that provokes questions – this is when knitting becomes art [8].

The textile that had arisen as a need since the birth of humankind changed over time and managed to get out of everyday use. The knitting that takes place among the textile arts which are emerging together with the cultural history of mankind has proceeded on its way together with the growing cultures and the age without slowing down and has been used in the field of art. Contemporary artists have revealed new forms of art of knitting by getting out of traditions or by reinterpreting the traditional values [9].

For example, Sandra Backlund is a knitting artist that brings architectural forms to knitwear. Her knitted garments are more pieces of art than wearable clothes.



Figure 3. Sandra Backlund: Ink Blot Test (<http://sandrabacklund.com/previous-collection.php?page=28>)

5. Guerilla knitting

Guerilla knitting also named yarn bombing, yarn storming or graffiti knitting has been used to describe urban social practices of knitted objects placed, or tagged, in public spaces. This amusing new trend encourages young urbanites to wrap colorful knitted fabric around lamp posts, trees, and sometimes

entire city buses to brighten the city environment. The fad reportedly started in Texas among young knitters seeking a creative way to use their leftover yarn and unfinished projects. It has since spread worldwide, as the “artists” photograph their installations and share them on the Internet [10].

Guerilla knitting has also spread in Slovenia. In spring 2017, Irena Erzen has dressed street trash bins in Koper and attracted much interest with her temporary urban installations.



Figure 4. Guerilla knitting by Irena Erzen (Koper Slovenia, 2017)

6. Knitting publications

The number of publications on knitting increased more than twice starting from year 2000; 462 books were published between 2000 to 2007, while only 215 were published from 1980 to 1990. These new publications offer a variety of knitting experiences from designs inspired by such staples of knitting patterning as Fair Isle and Nordic designs to books that explore knitting as therapeutic activity equal to meditation. Along with the patterns, many books provide inspirational quotes and descriptions of free flowing train of thought of a knitter while she/he works [11].

Books entitled *At Knit Ends: Meditations for women who knit too much* [12], *Knitting Ephemera* [13] or *The Yarn Whisperer* [14] were published in the last twelve years.

7. Conclusion

It can be concluded that the recent rise of a historical knitting technique and a hobby that was considered old-fashioned until the last few years, has become synonymous with trendy socializing and wellbeing that can reduce stress, tackle depression, contribute to pain management, enhance concentration and memory, and more [15].

Hand knitting can also be a means of art expression or activism as well as profession and a profitable activity. Hand knitting has expanded in all aspects of our lives. Based on the same interlacing principles it represents a counterweight to modern hi-tech industrial knitting.

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