

**ST. ANGELA'S COLLEGE, SLIGO
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND GALWAY**

A Case Study of textile upcycling in an educational setting

BY

Aoife Ryan

15347866

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF PROFESSIONAL MASTERS IN EDUCATION (WITH
HOME ECONOMICS)**

Summer 2020

Professional Masters in Education (with Home Economics)

2019 - 2020

Dissertation Declaration Sheet

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

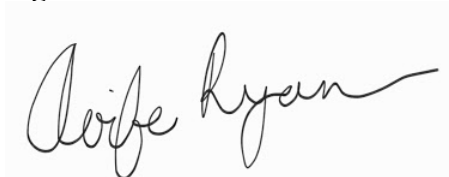
This work is the result of my independent work / investigation, except where otherwise stated.

Other sources are acknowledged giving explicit references. A reference list is appended.

The word count starts with the Introduction and ends with the Conclusions and Recommendations excluding abstract and bibliography / reference list and appendices.

The word count for this assignment/dissertation is **10997**

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Aoife Ryan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Aoife" written in a larger, more prominent script than the surname "Ryan".

Date: **06/05/2020**

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	6
Abstract.....	6
Chapter 1: Introduction	8
Chapter Two: Literature Review	10
Introduction.....	10
Sustainability/Sustainable Fashion	10
Closed Loop System in a Circular Economy	12
Upcycling.....	13
Irish Context.....	15
<i>Textile Upcycling Pilot Project.....</i>	<i>16</i>
Criteria for Success	17
Conclusion	18
Chapter Three: Methodology	20
Introduction.....	20
Paradigm Chosen	20
Methodology	21
Participants.....	22
Research Methods	23
<i>Interview</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Focus Group Interview</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Questionnaire.....</i>	<i>24</i>
Data Collection	25
Data Analysis	26
Conclusion	27
Chapter Four: Presentation of Findings.....	28
Design of the Product.....	28
Interview with Tutor	28
<i>Previous skills/experience brought to the project as a tutor</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>Opportunities/strengths of the project</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>Limitations of the project</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>Recommendations from the tutor</i>	<i>29</i>
Focus Group Interview	29
<i>Participants attracted to join the project.....</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>Previous textile experience</i>	<i>30</i>

<i>Skills developed since joining the project</i>	30
<i>Awareness of textile upcycling prior to project</i>	31
<i>Most challenging part of the project</i>	31
<i>Changes suggested to be made to the project</i>	32
Questionnaires	32
Email correspondence with project coordinator	32
<i>Product Design</i>	32
<i>Strengths of the project</i>	32
<i>Limitations/challenges arising from the project</i>	32
Chapter Five: Discussion	34
Interview with Tutor	34
<i>Previous skills/experience brought to the project as a tutor</i>	34
<i>Opportunities/strengths of the project</i>	35
<i>Limitations of the project</i>	36
<i>Recommendations from the tutor</i>	36
Focus Group Interview	38
<i>Participants attracted to join the project</i>	38
<i>Previous textile experience</i>	38
<i>Skills developed since joining the project</i>	39
<i>Awareness of textile upcycling prior to project</i>	39
<i>Most challenging part of the project</i>	40
<i>Changes suggested to be made to the project</i>	40
Questionnaires	40
Email correspondence with project coordinator	41
<i>Product Design</i>	41
<i>Strengths of the project</i>	41
<i>Limitations/challenges arising from the project</i>	42
Chapter Six: Conclusion	42
Summary	42
Main Conclusions	43
Limitations	44
Strengths and Recommendations	45
References	48
Appendix 1: Blank Consent Form	51
Appendix 2: Recorded interview transcript with group's tutor	53

Appendix 3: Recorded focus group interview transcript	60
Appendix 4: Questionnaires	65
Appendix 5: Email correspondence with project coordinator	65

Acknowledgments

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge and thank my dissertation tutor, Ursula O'Shea for her knowledge and communications with Roscommon Women's Network. This dissertation would not have been possible without her exceptional support and guidance. Second, I wish to thank the Roscommon Women's Network's particularly the project coordinator, Nora Fahey, in allowing me to research the Textile Upcycling Project and the group's tutor, Michelle Fallon, who assisted me when conducting the research. Finally, I would like to thank fellow classmates and friends for their continual support and advice.

Abstract

The world is facing a growing environmental epidemic due to quick, cheap unsustainable practices. There has been key research into the need and demand for more sustainable practices to reshape the gross habits we as consumers have formed from reckless consumption on an industrial level. As the textile industry plays a major role, it is imperative that we investigate, develop, and teach a more sustainable use of textiles in order to abolish the "throwaway culture" that has become a habit within society.

This dissertation aims to investigate the growing concerns and interests in using sustainable practices specifically within the textiles area. While focussing on upcycling, a method which promotes sustainability and reuses wasted fabric, in Irish society, this research will investigate the work and development of an Irish textile upcycling training project within the Roscommon Women's Network. The project involves training participants in the skill of upcycling to reuse the wasted textiles accumulated from the local charity shop to produce new, upcycled and marketable products. The project hopes to reduce the wasted textiles as well as provide an additional revenue to the charity shop. Qualitative research involving interviews and questionnaires was carried out and analysed under an interpretivist scope. Research from the

case study provided insights into the success and limitations of the project, offering recommendations to the project, should it run again, and lessons we can learn from it.

Chapter 1: Introduction

As the world enters a new geographical epoch, the Anthropocene from our reckless consumption of the earth's resources and rapid production rates, we need to question our habits and reevaluate what is wasted (Steffen et al, 2011). Our journey towards the Anthropocene is a result of crossing three out of nine planetary boundaries which has caused detrimental effects to our natural environment (Rocktröm et al., 2009). The textile and clothing industry is the world's second-largest economic activity, therefore, the processes used, and products made have a great impact on the world's natural environment. In response to the increasing global epidemic humans have found themselves in, 'sustainability' and 'sustainable fashion' have become possible solutions to our gross consumption and production, particularly within the textile and fashion sector. Sustainable *production* has become a more pressing issue, as it has become apparent that regardless of increased awareness and better understanding, consumers will continue to purchase goods (Kawamura, 2005 cited in Ruppert-Stroescu et al., 2015). Therefore, the methods and resources used must become sustainable in order to reduce the harmful consequences from our current production.

Strategies which aim to reduce the harmful waste associated with the textile and fashion industry involve the use of open or closed loop systems within an implemented circular economy. Within the textile and fashion industry, the unsustainable processes are not limited to production and consumption, but also include the vast number of wasted products due to 'fast fashion' which are either landfilled or burned.

Upcycling has emerged as a potential production process in which the waste products can be reused and revitalised, prolonging the life of the garment/textile and, if done correctly, prevent the garment/textile ever being wasted as it would be continuously upcycled (Singh et al., 2019). As well as being a method which prevents waste and does not require additional new resources, upcycling can lead to further benefits such as; providing jobs for disadvantage groups of

people, improvement of psychological wellbeing and development of interpersonal skills (when carried out as a group effort). It can be a rewarding hobby and it can be a successful business.

This research aims to investigate the growing concerns and interests in using sustainable practices specifically within the textiles area. Subsequently, the study will focus on upcycling in Irish society, investigating the work and development of an Irish textile upcycling training project run by Roscommon Women's Network (RWN) as part of their environmental initiative. The pilot project ran in June 2019 and from its success it sought funding to run a second project in autumn 2019. This study focuses on the work and success of the second project. Qualitative research, in the form of an interviews, a focus group and questionnaires, were administered to gather the experiences and opinions from the group participants, project tutor and coordinator.

As this data was collected, it was analysed from an interpretivist perspective in order to determine the following research questions; how successful is the RWN at training its participants in textile upcycling and what recommendations can be made to ensure the continued success of this upcycling project.

The dissertation is comprised of six chapters. Within chapter two, I will review the literature pertaining to the subject matter, textile sustainability and upcycling. In chapter three, the qualitative research methods; are discussed and justified. Within chapter four, the findings of the research are presented. In chapter five the results are discussed in greater detail. Finally, chapter six includes summary, recommendations, overall conclusion.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

With the world facing an increase in climate change consequences due to the rapid depletion of our natural resources, there is also a slow yet steady increasing trend towards ‘sustainable living’. This concept, ‘sustainable living’ needs to rise above trend setting and become a way of life, which encompasses every part of our day to day lives, including fashion. Ruppert-Stroescu et al. (2015) argue that sustainability within the fashion sector is one of the most pressing contemporary issues as, according to Gardetti and Torres (2013) it is a very significant sector within our economies. There is a strong need to research, develop and implement more sustainable methods within the textiles and fashion industry to ensure the safeguarding of our planet for the future and, to maintain economic stability

Within this literature review, I will examine; the effect of human processes on the natural environment; the understanding of the concept of ‘sustainability’ in contemporary society and how efforts are being made to move towards a more sustainable design, production and the use of textiles and fashion; the benefits of a closed loop system within a circular economy in an effort to reduce the consequences humanity is facing due to climate change; the role of upcycling within the sustainable fashion market; how sustainable fashion practices are being implemented within an Irish context; and, finally, how is success within craft businesses determined.

Sustainability/Sustainable Fashion

The activities and demands of humans have led to the exhaustion and depletion of the earth’s natural resources. These demands have exploited the earth resulting in great damage to the natural environment, and in some cases irreversible consequences. To understand the environment and its limits, Rocktröm et al (2009) propose a planetary boundaries framework.

This framework outlines nine systems or boundaries that must not be exceeded and serve as the “degree of risk global community is willing to take” (Rocktröm et al, 2009, p.6). In addition, Rocktröm et al (2009) note that the duration in which boundaries can be transgressed before catastrophic effects are seen is alarmingly uncertain, and a change in production and consumption of materials and goods is required now. Due to the unethical and unsustainable methods humanity has used, Steffen et al. (2011) suggest that we have entered a new geological epoch, the Anthropocene. In this regard, human activities are exceeding global geophysical processes causing irreversible damage to the global environment (Steffan et al, 2011).

Change is of utmost importance in order to combat the global problem humanity have caused. The term ‘sustainability’ has emerged throughout environmental investigation and research. It is a term which opens new ways of thinking towards a ‘greener’ future with less dependence on natural resources. It is a difficult concept to define as it incorporates many disciplines and can be explored through different areas (Gardetti and Torres, 2013). Gardetti and Torres (2013) explain that the definition changes due to its nature as an open process, allowing objectives and priorities to change continuously. Sustainability is concerned with the safeguarding of our environment. (Gardetti and Torres, 2013).

When applied to the textile and fashion sector, sustainability relates to production, distribution and consumption of textiles and fashion. Ruppert-Stroescu et al. (2015) comment on sustainable consumption, stating it involves the changing of human behaviours and patterns to help reduce the depletion of earth’s natural resources for current and future generations, and assert that promoting sustainable practices within the fashion industry is one of the most pressing contemporary problems.

Additionally, Rahman and Gong (2016) highlight the importance of sustainable practices in order to meet the demands from consumers and reduce the detrimental impact textiles and

fashion has on the environment. It is noted that the wants of the consumer have changed, aesthetics and trends take precedence over longevity and durability (Rahman and Gong, 2016). In contrast, Kawamura (2005, cited in Ruppert-Stroescu et al., 2015) argues that consumers continuously purchase new clothing and apparel, regardless of any other factors such as need, want or trends. Therefore, as the consumer continues to purchase new textiles and clothing, it is the method of producing textiles that needs to change in order to strive towards sustainability.

Closed Loop System in a Circular Economy

The textile and clothing industry are the world's second-biggest economic activity; therefore, it is paramount that industry looks to production and distribution in order to reduce their global imprint (European Commission, 2013). One proposed strategy in transforming the fashion sector, is the idea of the circular economy (Franco, 2017). This approach was devised from a multiple of disciplines from environmental ecology to industrial ecology (Franco, 2017). The circular economy moves away from the linear production concept of 'take-make-dispose' and reshapes how a product can be reused once it has fulfilled its purpose, or how materials can be reused during the production line (Smith, Baille and McHattie, 2017). Principles such as 'renewal', 'restoration' and 'regeneration' are the pillars on which a circular economy stands on (Smith, Baille and McHattie, 2017). Today, the textile linear system global imprint vastly extends beyond the use of raw materials, which are made up of 98 million tonnes of non-renewable resources per year (Morlet et al., 2017). Furthermore, the annual water use from textiles production is estimated at 93 billion cubic metres (Morlet et al., 2017). Consequently, it is apparent that the linear model is no longer feasible and must be replaced by a circular method which strives towards zero waste.

Two methods can be used to integrate a circular method within the textile and fashion industry; open-loop recycling and closed-loop recycling. Open-loop recycling refers to the process in

which a garment has reached its purpose and enters a new life cycle, one where the original fibre is reclaimed, or recycled in the production of other products (Payne, 2015). If the new product in the open-loop recycling method is of lesser economics value it can also be termed ‘downcycling’ (Payne, 2015, p.206). Payne (2015) recognises the need for open-loop recycling but argues that closed-loop “holds greater potential for systemic change towards a more sustainable fashion industry” (p.206).

Closed-loop recycling textiles are remade into a new fibre and return in the original production circle, therefore continuously being used and never leaving, hence the term ‘closed-loop’. While the open-loop system prolongs waste from landfill or incineration, the closed-loop system ensures that the recycled fibre is repeatedly used. For the closed-loop system to be successful, careful planning and preparation must exist as the design of the product must allow it to be easily recycled back into the original supply chain, a common obstacle for many industries trying to implement this method (Woolard, 2010). Payne (2015) comments that there are several different approaches to integrating a closed-loop system, including the use of upcycling.

Upcycling

Sung, Cooper and Kettley (2019) claim that the term ‘upcycling’ is a relatively new term, thus the definition and practices vary. Singh et al. (2019) explains that upcycling is a process by which materials that are no longer in use or about to be disposed of have their value increased by processes which repurpose, recondition, upgrade and remanufacture the original material. While the term ‘upcycling’ is relatively new, Singh et al. (2019) argue that the notion of repurpose and repair has long been a part of human life. These actions were used to preserve items, to extend the lifeline and make the most out of each product (Singh et al., 2019). The development of industry has led to the rapid and unsustainable production of many items,

specifically textiles and clothing. The mass turn out of new designs and textiles to the ever-demanding consumer has been labelled ‘fast fashion’ (Morlet et al., 2017). The term ‘fast fashion’ is used to describe the speedy turnovers and mass consumption of clothing and apparel that follow recent trends (Henninger et al., 2017). ‘Fast fashion’ has left society without the skills or knowledge to maintain what they already own, leaving them to dispose of them rather than to upcycle them. Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017) report that it is estimated that more than half of fast fashion products are disposed of in under a year. As a result, it is estimated that over 150 million tonnes of clothing would be landfilled or burned in 2050 (Morlet et al., 2017).

Upcycling could prolong the life of a product before it ends in landfill or incineration, which is ultimately the goal of closed-loop recycling (Payne, 2015). By incorporating design techniques and discarded materials, a product of higher value can be produced, thus extending the lifeline of the original product (Han et al., 2016). Additionally, upcycling reduces the use of raw materials as it requires already-made products to create something new, which leads to less industrial energy consumption as the processing of raw materials is not required (Sung, 2019). Sung (2019) notes more benefits for integrating upcycling within the textile and clothing industry; to increase employment rates by providing jobs for people to carry out upcycling, especially disadvantage groups of people; or as hobby which is linked to the improvement in psychological wellbeing due to gaining experience, skills, and success. Furthermore, Han et al. (2016) note the opportunity for additional training and education with the textile sector within upcycling.

While upcycling provides many opportunities, it must be used successfully for these benefits to be recognised. Singh et al (2019) note the challenges that upcycling businesses face, specifically with the UK context. It is noted that if textile and clothing businesses chose to use upcycling, they face challenges such as; the sourcing of material to upcycle, the cost of renting

premises, time as a resource; and marketing (Singh et al, 2019). Singh et al (2019) also astutely note that many consumers would not purchase upcycled items, and if they do, expect the product to be lower in price as they are not aware of the extra skill and time it takes to create an upcycled product.

Irish Context

Within Ireland, there is a small but growing uptake of businesses using sustainable methods, circular economies and even upcycling. The Rediscovery Centre is prime example of a thriving Irish business noted for being the “national centre for the circular economy” (Rediscoverycentre.ie, 2020). Located in Dublin, the Rediscovery Centre uses unwanted materials for new product development and design (Rediscoverycentre.ie, 2020). In addition to creating their own products, on the first floor of the Centre, the Eco Store sells sustainably made products from other independent Irish suppliers, thus encouraging and supporting sustainable businesses.

Funded by the Government of Ireland, the Environmental Protection Agency and Dublin City Council, the Rediscovery Centre supports greener low-carbon living (Rediscoverycentre.ie, 2020). Its educational courses for primary, secondary and third-level students help to promote a sustainable way of life and offer within these workshops skills to implement greener steps within the students’ lives.

In 2008, the Rediscovery Fashion was established with the aim to redesign and repurpose clothing (Rediscoverycentre.ie, 2020). In addition, to creating these sustainable, redesigned, upcycled pieces, the Rediscovery Centre also markets these pieces in their on-site Eco Store, mentioned above (Rediscoverycentre.ie, 2020). Thus, providing a stable economy from upcycled, redesigned fashion products.

Another Irish project which promotes sustainability and a circular economy is the Roscommon Women's Network (RWN) (Roscommon Women's Network, 2020). Based within Co. Roscommon the RWN is a local community project and charity dedicated to supporting women and families, especially those most marginalised (Roscommon Women's Network, 2020). Led by Nora Fahy as Project Coordinator and a team of volunteers, the RWN aims to support the progression of women from engagement to active participation in sustainable development and achieving individual and communal goals. The RWN has sought and secured funding from the National Collective of Community Based Women's Networks (NCCWN) and are one in seventeen projects that the NCCWN has funded. The NCCWN is funded from the Department of Justice and Equality as they support women's empowerment and community development work. Additionally, in 2011 the RWN received funding for its first Training Centre from Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board (GRET) (Roscommon Women's Network, 2020). This centre has housed and hosted many projects such as Textile Upcycling Pilot Project (Roscommon Women's Network, 2020).

Textile Upcycling Pilot Project

The aim of this project was as follows:

The Pilot Project's aim was to show that textile waste from the RWN Charity Shop can be repurposed into beautiful, useful, saleable items, therefore preventing unsold items going to landfill and in turn contributing to the circular economy.

The pilot project consisted of the following learning outcomes:

- Participants will learn new skills or upskill in sewing and design.
- Learn how to turn used clothing into raw material for new household or fashion items.
- They will also gain knowledge of what fabrics are suitable to producing quality upcycled products.

- Participants will have an increased awareness of the issue of textile waste, an understanding of the effects of this waste on the environment and knowledge of what can be done to address the issue of textile waste.
- Participants will learn to work as a team, understand the importance of quality control and grow in confidence in their abilities for the workplace or for self-employment.
- Participants will be offered other workshops of interest during the pilot phase e.g start your own business, train the trainer.
- High quality, affordable and marketable products will be produced by the participants by the end of the pilot project.

The Textile Upcycling Pilot Project was established as part of RWN's Environmental Strategy. In 2019, the RWN secured ten volunteer participants from different backgrounds. Led by Michelle Fallon, this eight-week project taught the participants many skills such as; sewing, pattern making and design, which enabled them to redesign, upcycle and market unused fabric. The design of their own brand, 'CycleUp' led to their success and complete an order of upcycled bags for The Courtyard Farmers Market in Boyle (Roscommon Women's Network, 2020). The success of the eight-week pilot project in summer 2019 led to the renewal of the project in fall 2019 with a new cohort of volunteers.

Criteria for Success

The above Irish projects both rely on their success in their products so as to sustain themselves and/or expand their business. In any project, it is crucial to understand, recognise and success as it helps to achieve the set goal (Gorgievski, Ascalon and Stephan, 2011). Paige and Littrell (2002) explore that success can be defined in two ways; tangible extrinsic outcomes such as increased personal income and wealth; and intrinsic factors such as developing and growing

within oneself, being one's own boss, and freedom and independence (Gorgievski, Ascalon and Stephan, 2011). Gorgievski, Ascalon and Stephan (2011) compiled a list of ten criteria of business owners' success. Of these factors included "personal satisfaction", "contributing back to society" and "innovation" (p.209).

Additionally, Paige and Littrell (2002) note that within many small craft projects other factors such as improving creativity or elevating a craft tradition determine the success. Furthermore, Paige and Littrell gather that crafters who saw success in being allowed to express their opinions experienced a stringer craft product orientation, while other craft business who saw success in increased income experienced frustration and disappointment.

Conclusion

While it is evident that our current production, distribution and consumption of textiles and fashion apparel have left devastating effects on our ecosystems, change is slow. The recognition of how our human processes have led us into a new age; the Anthropocene, has led to proposals on how we should best manage the remaining planetary boundaries yet to meet (and hopefully never meet). With 'sustainability' increasing not only on an industrial level, but consumer levels too, has led to discussion on the benefits of implementing closed looped systems in systemically developed circular economies. Upcycling has emerged as a viable solution in applying sustainability, closed loop system and circular economy. Irish business such as Rediscovery Centre and RWN's Textile Pilot Project are already seeing the success from educating its participants and marketing their upcycled pieces. The criteria for success was discussed as it is important to understand how various craft business determine their success from personal growth to economic gain.

More scope is needed in terms of how these settings, particularly RWN's Textile Project as it pertains to this dissertation, can sustain their current projects and how can they become viable

forms of education and businesses. With all the research into the causes and effects of unsustainable practices, there needs to be further analysis into the solutions and how these solutions will succeed within contemporary society.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of chapter is to introduce the research methodology which was undertaken for this dissertation. A qualitative case study method allowed for a deeper understanding of the RWN Textile Upcycling Project allowing investigation of the context in which it is set, the skills being developed in the participants, the products being developed and its overall success. In this chapter, the author will analyse and discuss the case study and interpretivist approach examining the strengths and justifying the choice of this methodology. Additionally, the research methods; interviews, focus group interviews and questionnaires are explored. Finally, the collection and analysis of data are discussed, providing an overview of how the content gathered was reviewed.

Paradigm Chosen

For the purpose of this dissertation, I have chosen to observe this study through an interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivist research aims to understand the world of human experience by allowing the researcher to “view the world through perceptions and experiences of the participants” (Thanh and Thanh, 2015, p.24). This suited the case study method chosen as it was important to understand the experiences and opinions of the participants to further enrich the research. Additionally, Pham (2018) highlights that with an interpretivist perspective, researchers gain a deeper understanding of the topic in its unique context, thus avoiding generalising the phenomenon. This approach suited the research for this study as a specific group were being analysed, as opposed to a larger population. Furthermore, Thanh and Thanh (2015) argue that the understanding of the context is critical for interpretative research. Within this study, it was important to understand and to consider the background and experience of the participants as this had an impact on the outcome of the project.

Methodology

A qualitative study is appropriate when the goal of the research relates to experiences, opinions and feelings of the chosen cohort of participants (Toloie-Eshlaghy, Chitsaz, Karimian and Charkhchi, 2011). Holloway and Wheeler (2002) explain that qualitative research is a form of social enquiry, as the experiences and the world in which people live in is the centre of the research. Therefore, this type of research could not be collected in quantitative methods, rather it seeks to understand individuals, groups or communities by delving into their behaviours, experiences and emotions. Additionally, Toloie-Eshlaghy et al. (2011) state that qualitative methods encompass a broad range of methods and techniques, excluding data collected numerically and statically. These methods include interviews and focus group interviews, which will be discussed later in the chapter.

This type of research was chosen as the study was to investigate the experiences of a specific group. Qualitative research involves deductive analysis unlike quantitative research which is comparative in nature (Toloie-Eshlaghy et al., 2011). Thus, this study allowed for the investigation of the group in a specific approach, rather than to generalise the whole population involved. Another key feature of qualitative research which suited this study was its epistemological nature. With qualitative research, researchers interact with the participants on a close interpersonal level. As it was important to gather the experiences and feelings from the specific group chosen, a quantitative study, in which researchers are independent from the participants when collecting data, would not have suited.

Within this research, a qualitative case study approach was implemented. A case study observes a particular group, usually no more than one case, in regards to a specific phenomenon (Toloie-Eshlaghy et al., 2011) Within research, Toloie-Eshlaghy et al. (2011) argue that there is no set definition of a case study as many researchers develop their own understanding of this type of

research. One such definition I have found to suit this study is Yin's explanation (1994), whereby the case study is described as "an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context" (p.13). Additionally, Toloie-Eshlaghy et al. (2011) further explains that a case study can be experimental when observing the contemporary phenomenon. This research method is appropriate to this group as they have a unique objective; "to show that textile waste from the RWN Charity Shop can be repurposed into beautiful, useful, saleable items, therefore preventing unsold items going to landfill and in turn contributing to the circular economy", was an experimental project. Another key feature of case study was the ability to use several resources (Toloie-Eshlaghy et al., 2011). This allowed the research to be conducted through an interview, a focus group and questionnaires which provided a holistic collection of data about the specific phenomenon.

Participants

As this research was a case study of a textile upcycling project within an educational setting, the sample size consisted of the participants from the group I was researching. During the proposal process, I became aware of a project in Co. Roscommon. This project was facilitated under Roscommon Women's Network (RWN) and was an eight-week workshop in which the ten participants, all of which were middle aged women from different backgrounds, met together once a week for eight weeks to learn basic sewing, pattern making and design skills. The project ran in June 2019 and arising out of its success a second project was facilitated in September 2019. For the purpose of this research, the author will call this the RWN Textiles Upcycling Project (2). The author became interested in the project and contacted the project's coordinator and the project's tutor; Nora Fahy and Michelle Fallon respectively.

Eight trainees participated with in the research. The author contacted the group in week five of the eight-week programme. The author conducted an interview with the group's tutor, Michelle

Fallon, a focus group with the project's trainees and distributed a questionnaire to the group trainees. The questionnaire had been devised and administered previously to the first cohort and as it was well devised and appropriate to the research, the author used the same questionnaire with RWN TUP (2). The project's coordinator, Nora Fahy, was contacted through email

Research Methods

In order to gain an understanding of the case study being researched three forms of research tools were implemented; an interview, a focus group interview and questionnaires. The research methods listed will be discussed and justified in this next section.

Interview

Within qualitative research, the most used method of collecting data are interviews (Doody and Noonan, 2013). Interviews have the ability of gathering the participant's opinions and feelings about experiences and events on a much deeper level. They are valuable research methods as they provide insight and context to the phenomenon while allowing for the generation of quotes from the study (Doody and Noonan, 2013). The interview which was implemented was semi-structured. Semi-structured interviews allow for elaboration from the participant's point while focussed on a specific area (Gill et al, 2008). The semi-structured interview took place in the centre where the project was taking place as this was convenient for the interviewee, a recommendation (McGrath, Palmgren and Liljedahl, 2018) suggests when conducting interviews.

An interview was chosen as the first research method as it was important to contact the tutor of the project. Her role as a tutor for this project and her experiences were vital in gaining an understanding into the project. As research took place during the project's working hours, it

was important that the interview would not impact their ongoing work. Therefore, only one interview was recorded with the project's tutor on a day in which suited the project.

Focus Group Interview

Another research method used when conducting qualitative research are focus group interviews. While one-to-one interviews have many advantages, the focus group interview allows for the mass gathering of data in one sitting. This method of research is appropriate where the topic is "benign and not embarrassing" as participants would be less inclined to share personal opinions in a group setting (Frey and Fontana, 1991, p.179). This research method should include between eight to ten people and organised within a location convenient for all participants. The role of the interviewer, or researcher, is to keep the group 'focussed' on the topic of interest, thus there are planned questions to give structure and the interviewer takes on a directive role (Frey and Fontana, 1991).

A focus group interview was chosen as it was important to interview the trainees of the project. This research method was the most convenient as it allowed for the bulk collection of all the trainees experiences and opinions to be collected in one setting. Additionally, the focus group was completed in one day and did not disrupt the work of the project. A focus group interview was not possible with the first group due to time management at the time of the interviews. The focus group interview was chosen as the topic itself was not sensitive and therefore, the group setting would allow for the discussion of opinions.

Questionnaire

The final research method was questionnaires. As previously stated, the first group which ran in June 2019 were given questionnaires, termed 'evaluations' after the duration of the project in order to collect feedback for further funding should the project to continue. As a result, it was deemed appropriate to distribute the same questionnaire to the second group.

Using a series of questions and other prompts, questionnaires are used to gather information from the participants (Kabir, 2016). There are accessible forms of research as they are cheap, require minimal effort from the participant and data compilation is easier compared to other forms of research (Kabir, 2016). Leong and Austin (2006) note that as the questions are pre-set, participants cannot fully explain their answers and so data may be lacking.

The questionnaire used was a mixture of closed-ended and open-ended questions. While questionnaires generally measure quantitative data, in this case the questionnaire was used to further enhance the qualitative data gathered from the focus group interviews as well as gaining an insight into RWN TUP (1) participants' experiences since it was not feasible to conduct an interview with them.

Data Collection

After the proposal process, contact was made with RWN's project coordinator, Nora Fahy in order to request permission to research the RWN's Textile Upcycling Project. Consent forms (Appendix 1) were drawn up prior to the first meeting with the RWN group. The author travelled to the centre in Castlerea, Co. Roscommon to meet Nora Fahy, Michelle Fallon and the upcycling groups; RWN TUP (1) and RWN TUP (2). The purpose and context of the research were explained to each group followed by consent forms being distributed so that the first group consented to sharing their completed questionnaires, and the second group consented to partaking in the research. A date and time to revisit the centre in order to conduct the interviews was agreed upon.

In the second visit to the centre, the one-to-one interview, focus group interview and the administering of the questionnaires to RWN TUP (2) was carried out. The interview with the project tutor, Michelle Fallon was conducted in a distraction-free room while the RWN TUP (2) filled out the questionnaires in another room.

The focus group interview took place in the textiles upcycling work-room. Both interviews were recorded using a password locked mobile phone on which the recording quality had been previously checked. Interviews were transcribed and stored within a password locked folder accessible only to the researcher. Questionnaires were collected from each group and kept within a safe hard folder. Furthermore, information from email correspondence with the project's coordinator was utilised and analysed as it provided additional information.

Data Analysis

According to Elbardan and Kholeif (2017), within qualitative research, data analysis can be difficult to analysis or are often not well formulated. Within quantitative research, there is numerical data to analyse and code, however, as there is no such 'data' within qualitative research, the 'data' gathered can be referred to as 'content' (Elbardan and Kholeif, 2017). Qualitative content analysis has been defined as "any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meaning" (Patton, 2002, p.453, cited in Elbardan and Kholeif, 2017).

Schutt (2014) comments that content analysis occurs in real time unlike quantitative analysis which studies the gathered numerical data after it has been collected.

An interpretivist approach was used when analysing data as it allowed for the research is to be focused in nature as in the case study (Elbardan and Kholeif, 2017). Furthermore, interpretivist analysis does not set out to prove a hypothesis, which was irrelevant within this case study, but to explore and explain how all factors are related and connect to the setting being analysed (Oates, 2006, cited in Elbardan and Kholeif, 2017)

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to outline the research method and tools used to explore the given case study. A discussion of the research methods and tools, participants, data collection and analysis outlined the details of how the study it was conducted and who was involved. An interpretivist qualitative methodology was used to explore the case study and to document its perceived successfulness. All research participants contributed to this study by offering their experiences and opinions from their participation upcycling project. Within the next chapter, the case study results will be examined from the research methodologies set out within this chapter.

Chapter Four: Presentation of Findings

Within this chapter, the findings of the research are presented.

Design of the Product

The design RWN TUP (2) settled on was Christmas decorations as it was stated that it would be less complicated to create, more affordable when sold within the local charity shop, and more marketable during that time.

Interview with Tutor

Previous skills/experience brought to the project as a tutor

It was found that the tutor brought various skills, experiences and understandings to the project from her background in sewing, green cleaning (knowledge in regard to sustainability), and managing her own business.

Opportunities/strengths of the project

While new skills such as sewing, pattern drafting and marketing were explored, the tutor identified the primary strength of the project was its capacity to develop the trainees' interpersonal skills and their confidence.

Limitations of the project

The tutor acknowledged two limitations within the project. First, she questioned the lifeline of the project, asking "where does it go from here?" (Appendix 2). At the end of RWN TUP (1), it was decided to run another project with a new cohort of trainees. Therefore, the tutor questioned what will be decided upon at the end of RWN TUP (2). She felt the uncertainty of the project's future actions limited its growth.

Secondly, the tutor acknowledged, trends within the market are a huge limitation to the project as the design of the project is confined to what is available from the wasted fabric in the charity shop.

Recommendations from the tutor

The tutor suggested four recommendations to the project as follow;

1. To bring back trainees that wanted to return from both RWN TUP (1) and RWN TUP (2) in order to build on their existing knowledge and skills developed within the first projects.
2. To provide more time to the project. The tutor stated four hours once a week was not sufficient time to build a marketable business.
3. To acquire more and better space. The work-room was small, cramped and not completely appropriate for practical work.
4. To hire two tutors; one for sewing, and practical skills, and one for business, marketing knowledge. This would allow both tutors to oversee the workload and ensure a high standard in all products made as well as the continual upskilling of the trainees.

Focus Group Interview

Participants attracted to join the project

4/6 participants mentioned the ‘upcycling’ component appealed to them and this was a concept they wanted to understand better, however, only 2 participants were not aware initially that the upcycling would involve textiles and fabric upcycling. One participant saw this project as an opportunity to upcycle home apparel in order to repair and revitalise them, “I got very enthusiastic because I thought we could bring something in from home.” (Appendix 3). The other 2 participants were aware of the textile component in relation to upcycling and wanted to add to their sewing skills by delving into the skills of upcycling, “I’ve done course before on

clothing construction and, pattern cutting. But [upcycling], that's something I really hadn't done and that really interested me because I like crafts" (Appendix 3).

2/6 participants mentioned their background with environmental concerns which led them to apply to the project. One participant is a climate ambassador with An Taisce in which she needs to show actions and communications with environmental projects by the end of the year. The other participant's career is involved with environmental science and with waste enforcement which includes minimizing the waste produced by households.

Previous textile experience

4/6 participants they had some sewing experience before. Of these four participants, only one seemed very confident in her ability beyond basic sewing skills. Two participants mentioned previous participation in sewing classes, while one participant admitted to being self-taught. 2/6 participants had no sewing skills prior to the project.

Skills developed since joining the project

3/6 participants mentioned the development of their interpersonal skills such as "teamwork", "how to chat to everybody" and "cooperation and interaction" (Appendix 3). As the participants had different experiences and backgrounds joining the project, this enhanced the project and led to peer teaching, "when people were stuck, other people helped them out on sewing machines..." (Appendix 3).

2/6 participants commented on their learning about marketing. The participant who had a good level of sewing prior to the project, developed her marketing skills. She commented that the project gave her the skills to be able to analyse a project and ask "is it going to sell? Is it worth it?" (Appendix 3). From her comments on how her creative and marketing thought process developed, she values her time more in analysing a project before starting it. Additionally, the other participant commented on her newfound knowledge of marketing and the importance of

documenting and valuing your own time. This participant had previous experience with voluntary work and noticed how easy it is to be taken advantage of and recognised the importance of documenting the time spent doing a task.

1/6 participants who had no prior sewing experience said the biggest skill she learned was understanding how different fabrics sew together and thus a learned basic understanding of textiles.

Awareness of textile upcycling prior to project

This question and following discussion prompted some interesting ideas that the participants developed since their introduction to textile upcycling. One participant could identify a market for plus size garments within the upcycling industry as many of the garments made from upcycled fabrics tend to be for small sizes.

Most challenging part of the project

From this question, three answers were agreed upon collectively with the group.

1. The participants stated transport was a big issue and limitation. At the time of the project, roadworks were ongoing throughout Co. Roscommon which affected participants who relied on public transport and those who had their own transport as the roadworks caused delays and alternate routes had to be taken.
2. One of the participants commented that a difficulty was “staying within the upcycling requirements”, which was agreed in unison as a challenge for the group. As the products made were 3D in nature, and stuffing was required. While many ideas were researched and discussed, no suitable stuffing was found. thus, staying within the upcycling requirements was commented to be “virtually impossible”.
3. Time was an issue as the participants felt they did not have enough time to complete the tasks they wanted to do.

Changes suggested to be made to the project

3/6 participants mentioned they would have liked to bring in something from home and apply upcycling techniques to “revitalise” the object, as well as using the waste fabric from the charity shop.

Questionnaires

Information gathered from the questionnaires of both RWN TUP (1) and RWN TUP (2) mirrored what was discussed with the focus groups. The only different answer was that, one participant commented that there was “lots of talking” within the “I benefitted least from” question (Appendix 4)

Email correspondence with project coordinator*Product Design*

The products of RWN TUP (1) were reviewed and changed with the commencement of RWN TUP (2). The products changed from complex aprons and tote bags to smaller Christmas decorations as they were less complicated, could be priced cheaper and manageable in the time given.

Strengths of the project

Five of the RWN TUP (2) have since joined with RWN TUP (1)’s continuation group, “CycleUP Club” who met on Fridays to participate in a Textile Upcycling course which is currently running.

The development of participants’ confidence was recognised as a strength of this project also.

Limitations/challenges arising from the project

The coordinator felt that the environmental protection aspect of the project was not as important as learning the basics of sewing and design to half the group (Appendix 5)

Within RWN TUP (2), some trainees lived approximately an hour away from the centre. This limited communication and potential group gatherings outside of the group.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Interview with Tutor

Previous skills/experience brought to the project as a tutor

The tutor expressed that the biggest skill that she brought to this project was her understanding of how to work with upcycled fabrics. Upcycling requires additional skills and goes beyond knowing how to sew (Hans et al, 2016). She asserts that the class is “not a sewing class-”. The project was marketed as an Upcycling Project, and while sewing aids in the upcycling process, key skills such as innovation, creativity and understanding of materials showcase within this project, “You must have the skills of sewing but you also have to have that imagination and design.” (Appendix 2). The tutor used this prior knowledge of, but how to upcycle waste fabrics to help benefit both groups within this upcycling project.

Additionally, it is more difficult to teach someone how to upcycle than to teach basic sewing skills. The tutor is not convinced that you can teach someone to have “the creativity to reimagine” (Appendix 2) within a few short weeks, “So, the project is eight weeks, So, we’re in our seventh week and it’s four hours a week” (Appendix 2). This is a very short time to try and change someone’s creative outlook. If this project wants to move further and develop a successful educational and business aspect, there needs to be more time given to the tutor and the participants. Additionally, there needs to be a clear focus on what the project hopes to achieve, to have a specific end goal, either educational or business related, would improve the success of the project. The tutor can see the potential for this project to grow as “businesses are looking for [upcycling] now” (Appendix 2), however only with a full time-person managing it. Here, the tutor compares the potential for this project with another Irish upcycling project, ‘The Upcycle Movement’ (The Upcycle Movement, 2020). She highlights that this project succeeds as it uses time efficiently and has effective management and recommends the RWN TUP requires the same dedication for it to meet its potential success.

The author agrees with the tutor that the time frame is very short to achieve the aim of the project. While it is difficult to teach someone the skills of upcycling, it can be an inspiring process to see the participants' minds adapting to more sustainable methods. It can give them the confidence and basic skills to look at waste fabric in their own lives and ask themselves how they can give new life, as Sung (2019) notes when exploring the additional benefits of upcycling.

Opportunities/strengths of the project

The tutor acknowledges the greatest strength of the project is not in the upcycling or products created, but in the confidence, it has given to the women who are involved. The tutor noted how the participants' communication skills have improved considerably during the course. Furthermore, the development of additional skills from upcycling was also noted in Sung (2019) who identified the improvement in psychological wellbeing due to gaining experience, skills and success. We can see this phenomenon occurring within this small, Irish, all women group.

Additionally, the tutor noticed the development of interpersonal skills and the "camaraderie" (Appendix 2) that has grown since the beginning of the project, another aspect Sung (2019) explores in regard to upcycling. This is not a surprising development, as this project involved women coming together and sharing in their learning. Peer teaching and community learning influenced the development of interpersonal skills. This enhances the products made and skills learned as each participant can offer new skills or insights into the project.

Furthermore, the tutor noted that the second group depended more on her and sought her approval more than the first group. The tutor noted that at the beginning of the project the participants were hesitant and self-conscious. Whereas towards the end of the project they had

begun to harness their creative abilities. Therefore, the tutor wants more time to further develop and challenge the participants whose “creative juices are coming but we’re coming to an end.”.

Limitations of the project

At this point, the tutor stated that the biggest limitation of this project is, “where does it go from here?” (Appendix 2). The goal of the project was to reduce the unsold textiles that are generated by the local charity shop by upcycling these textile items into different products for sale (RWN, 2020). If this project only runs for eight weeks, the time frame to train and produce the products to resell is short. The Rediscovery Centre (2020) are able to product upcycled pieces on a bigger scale as they more time, funding and support to do so. Therefore, if this project received similar support, it could root itself within the market and stand alongside similar businesses i.e. Rediscovery Centre or The Upcycle Movement.

Furthermore, the tutor comments that trends in textile products are a big challenge this project faces. From a business perspective, it is vital to design products while will be marketable in order to maintain consumption. In terms of textiles and clothing apparel trends, within ‘*The Fashion Detox*, Ruppert-Stroescu et al. (2015) found that their participants shaped their existing wardrobe to suit the trends of the day. Additionally, Ruppert-Stroescu et al. (2015) noted that trends take precedence over other attributes the item may have such as sustainably made, Irish-made. When fashions change, the clothes we own become ‘obsolete’, thus adding to the waste in the charity shops. The tutor noted that the products produced were limited by the discarded clothing waste which mainly consisted of brown, black and beige coloured clothing.

Recommendations from the tutor

The tutor provided recommendations throughout the interviews, some which are mentioned above, if this project were to run again. Firstly, the tutor recognised the project, needs

participants from both groups who are willing to return. The tutor stated that when starting a new group, basic sewing, marketing, textile skills have to be taught, however, this takes away from the time that could be used for successfully developing a business.

Secondly, the tutor would like to see a balance between sewing and business skills being taught in order to meet the upcycling component, “What’s the point of just upcycling if you can’t sell it.” (Appendix 2). The tutor would like to equip these women with the knowledge and skills to create profit from the products made or an income for the charity shop. The goal was to reuse charity shop waste to transform them into new products, however, if the business component is non-existent, the newly made products re-join the charity shop waste. The products need to have value and be marketable in contemporary society.

Thirdly, the tutor recognises the need for more adequate space for the project. The room in which the project is ongoing in is quite small and cramped. Within the Rediscovery project, a refurbished building was sought and improved in order to house the work this project carries out (Rediscoverycentre.ie, 2020).

Fourthly, the tutor recognises time as an issue. The group only meet for four hours once a week. Both factors impact on the productivity and learning of the group. The tutor comments four hours is a long period of time at once for beginners when they are trying to learn so much in such a small room. It can be overwhelming and is, “not an ideal situation” (Appendix 2).

Finally, the tutor recommends a second subject of business be taught within the next project. The tutor can see the potential of the project but was frustrated by the lack of time available for it, “I don’t think so, not for just the four hours because I just feel it frustrates me. There’s so much I can give” (Appendix 2). While the sewing aspect is a big component of this group, it is not just a sewing class and thus, requires a “start-you-own-business” (Appendix 2) tutor/lessons along with tutor who can teach the basic sewing skills. There is so much more to this project

than needing a sewing tutor. As the tutor states, “sewing is the last thing and the easiest thing” (Appendix 2) about this project.

Focus Group Interview

Group interview took place Tuesday 22/10/2019 with six participants.

Participants attracted to join the project

Although, the project did not meet the expectation of participant interested in refurbishing furniture, it did provide the skills and knowledge for this participant to carry out textiles upcycling in her home. This project gave her experience of working on an environmental project as it reused waste fabric, prolonging its life and preventing it from entering landfill, (Payne, 2015). One participant mentioned her career in eco-management. The combination of hobbies and studies led to this participant joining the project.

From this question, I gathered that each participant brought something different to the group from new ideas (upcycling objects from home), knowledge of environmental concerns and previous sewing skills. Furthermore, all participants conveyed an eagerness to be involved in the project and anticipated learning something new. All respondents stated that having participants from different backgrounds with multiple experiences behind them enriched the project further.

Previous textile experience

It was noted that two women who initially joined the group later left because their sewing skills were beyond that of a beginner. Therefore, having no previous textile experience, or at least a basic understanding would be more suitable as the project intended to provide basic sewing skills. Additionally, upcycling encompasses a variety of skills which can be utilised for further training and education in the fashion and textile industry, as is noted by Han et al (2016).

Skills developed since joining the project

This project took place among a group of participants; therefore, it is unsurprising that interpersonal skills were used and thus, developed. This is a big component of upcycling, combining different waste fabrics together, this skill and understanding is vital for the upcycling process. Sung (2016) notes that within upcycling it provides an opportunity to bring other together, which was observed within this group.

Overall, the skills learned and mentioned by all participants are elements needed within upcycling. It is interesting to note that the participants who hadn't previous sewing experience did not comment this aspect as a skill they learned, and chose different aspects such as communication, teamwork and cooperation. Therefore, this project used the medium of sewing to develop further skills within the process.

Awareness of textile upcycling prior to project

One participant showed a basic understanding of marketing and identified a gap within the market for niche upcycling. Another participant saw the value in reusing waste fabric for different situations, the example given here was young people moving into a new home. These two observations displayed to a developing awareness of how to reuse waste fabrics in practical ways. Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017) noted that people do not have the skill to repair or maintain what they already own. Within this project, this awareness is being explored and developed within the trainees, which can be seen from the suggestions above.

One participant recognised that the stigma around purchasing second-hand clothes over new and fast fashion clothes is a big factor which leads to the build-up of waste within charity shops and may prevent consumers from purchasing upcycled products. This may be a limitation to the future of upcycling business and reusing what is already available, as noted by Singh et al

(2019). Changing the consumer's perceptions is a massive challenge upcycling businesses will face.

Most challenging part of the project

While transport was identified as a limitation to the project, ultimately time was a challenge. As the roadworks and RWN TUP (2) participants not being as local as RWN TUP (1) (Appendix 5), this impacted on their time on the project. Upcycling, in all its components and aspects, requires time to understand and implement. Sing et al (2019) notes "time as a resource" is a leading challenge upcycling businesses and projects face.

Additionally, Sing et al (2019) states the sourcing of material to upcycle poses a challenge. This can be seen within this project as the participants found staying within the upcycling requirements "virtually impossible" (Appendix 3). Core materials, i.e. stuffing, were a challenge to source and upcycle. The lack of materials available can make it difficult for any business or project to progress. Within the Rediscovery Centre (2020), materials are donated to help this centre stay within the upcycling requirements.

Changes suggested to be made to the project

From the suggestion to bring in objects from home to revitalise, it is evident the participants would have liked a tangible product/object to take home with them demonstrating their skills and knowledge from the project. It might be desirable that the skills learned could be transferred to upcycling projects for the home.

Questionnaires

The questionnaires from RWN TUP (2) reflected what was discussed in the focus group. As I did not meet with RWN TUP (1), the questionnaires gathered from this group gave me an insight into how they perceived the pilot project. The same points reoccurred within RWN TUP (1) as in RWN TUP (2). Participants' feedback was were positive overall and they felt that they

benefitted greatly from engaging with this project. The greatest area of development appeared to have been the participants' interpersonal skills. RWN TUP (1) participants concurred with RWN TUP (2) in stating their greatest learning moments were; working as a group, basic sewing skills, upcycling, use of sewing machine and exploring their creativity (Appendix 4).

Email correspondence with project coordinator

Product Design

The decision to change the design of the upcycled products was appropriately decided upon. The project coordinator commented that RWN TUP (1)'s products were of a complex nature in design and construction. This resulted in a higher price when sold in the charity shop. Consumers would not pay the price of the products as they did not understand the work and effort within creating these products. This limitation is noted by Singh et al (2019) and is a challenge upcycling businesses must combat. Additionally, given the time the RWN TUP (2) ran, Christmas decorations were coming into the market and therefore increased their chances of sales. As noted by both the tutor and project's participants; they faced challenges sourcing the waste fabric to suit the Christmas decorations design.

Strengths of the project

The project coordinator explained that five members from RWN TUP (1) and five members from RWN TUP (2) came together and formed "*CycleUP Club*". The project brought these women together through shared interests and passions, leading them to continue to develop skills taught within the project. Upcycling brings people together as this concept works best with a group, a concept noted by Singh et al (2019). Furthermore, this group could have further implications of promoting and influencing additional upcycling as a viable business.

The project coordinator confirmed that the participants grew in confidence, as was noted by the tutor and participants themselves, thus, reaffirming that this project was developed more than basic sewing skills and awareness of textile waste.

Limitations/challenges arising from the project

The environmental aspect of the project did not seem as important to half the group as the development of their sewing skills. Kawamura (2005, cited in Ruppert-Stroescu et al., 2015) explained that consumers continue to indulge in fast fashion regardless of external factors, i.e. awareness of its impact on natural environment. The project coordinator stated these participants were more interested in gaining sewing skills and did not fully engage with the environmental aspect. It may be suggested that this attitude limited the group in fully understanding the necessity for upcycling as a method of reducing textile waste (Payne, 2015). It may be that more environmental awareness should be taught within the project.

Additionally, as was noted by the participants, transport was a limitation to the project. The project's coordinator went on further to suggest this affected the work outside of the designated hours. As some participants from RWN TUP (2) were an hour from the centre, this limited their time to stay after the four hours or meet up outside of this time with one another. The project's coordinator noticed a difference between RWN TUP (1) as they were local. Once again, time was against RWN TUP (2) as transport and travel affected their further progression.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Summary

The study sought to explore a case study of textile upcycling within an educational setting. Relevant literature was reviewed in order to develop an understanding of 'sustainability' and 'upcycling', and the implications they have within contemporary society. RWN's Textile Upcycling project was a prime research project for this study. Through its participants, the

project aimed to reuse the waste textiles available from the local charity shop, creating new, marketable products. The project secured a tutor to educate the participants in basic sewing textile upcycling, and marketing skills. Through qualitative research, both the tutor and the participants were interviewed to gather their experiences and opinions from their time throughout the project. The data was then analysed through an interpretivist perspective to determine the success of the project from an educational and businesses perspective.

Main Conclusions

Within the literature review, it was found that our current production methods, specifically within the textile and fashion industry, need to change as we are dangerously close to crossing more planetary boundaries and suffering the consequences of our reckless, unsustainable actions (Rocktröm et al, 2009). It was also discovered that as consumers are slow, or reluctant to change their shopping patterns and habits, it is has become imperative for industry to take responsibility to reshape its production methods, preventing further damages to our environment (Kawamura, 2005, cited in Ruppert-Stroescu et al., 2015)

Having analysed the experiences and opinions of the RWN TUP (2) participants, and gathered the tutor's perceptions of the overall project, the project was a success from an educational perspective. It encompassed many elements from sewing skills, understanding of textiles to business skills and environmental awareness. While, at times the balance between theory and practical could have been revised, the participants learned many different skills throughout the project. The participants each stated they gained a new skill or outlook from the project such as improved interpersonal skills or developing their creativity. Time and resources for upcycling limited the project outcomes. It can be seen from the project coordinators comments- further consideration of the choice of product produced increased the sales from the second run of the project. (Appendix 5).

From analysing key literature in the criteria for success, this project could be deemed to have successful features. It provided intrinsic factors, noted by Gorgievski, Ascalon and Stephan (2011) as developing and growing within oneself. Additionally, the project meets several criteria listed for business owners feedback, i.e. “personal satisfaction” and “contributing back to society” (Gorgievski, Ascalon and Stephan, 2011). Overall, the group was an educational success as it provided time, space and the opportunity for the women to grow individually, and as a unit in a variety of ways. It educated the participants on the need for more sustainable practices within production and provided the participants with the basic tools and skills to carry out upcycling. This could be further developed if given more time.

Limitations

From the research, three main limitations were identified by both the participants, project tutor and project coordinator. Firstly, time was a great limitation to the project. It was stated in both interviews that time was against the project as it was difficult to fit the multitude of skills involved with upcycling into four hours once a week for eight weeks. Sing et al (2019) notes time is great limitation to businesses utilising upcycling, thus, was seen with this project.

Second, the resources available posed a challenge to the project, particularly RWN TUP (2) who changed the design to suit the upcoming Christmas market. While the project coordinator affirms this was a necessary and successful change, both the tutor and participants note the difficulty in upcycling core elements, such as stuffing, thus, exceptions had to be made to the sustainable nature of the products. Additionally, the choice of colour and textile fabric available limited the participants in their creative journeys.

Finally, an ongoing limitation with any start up business is challenging consumer’s perceptions, as noted by Singh et al (2019). Consumers are not aware of the time and work that is involved within upcycled products and cannot justify the price. This limitation challenged the project as

it was beyond the project's control. Consumers need to be educated as to the extra time and effort which is involved in designing and creating upcycled textile products.

The author noted there were limitations that affected the scope of the research. The research was gathered and established in the final weeks of the project. If communication with the RWN was made earlier, the research could have followed throughout the project studying the work of the group and following their progress. It was not convenient to meet with group one for a focus group interview. Having interviewed both groups would have allowed for greater analysis and discussion from the contrasting or similar points of each group. It was necessary to contact the project's coordinator again, however due to the ongoing pandemic of COVID-19, this was only possible through email correspondence.

Strengths and Recommendations

From the research, three main strengths were identified within this case study into a textile upcycling project. Firstly, the core idea of the project is applicable and accessible. Within our contemporary society, we are producing and consuming more than is necessary, as noted by Ruppert-Stroescu et al. (2015). This project recognised the growing concern with fabric waste accumulating in a local charity shop. It saw potential in the upskilling a group of trainees in textile upcycling to transform this waste into revenue. From both the theory and practical aspects of the project, the participants gained awareness, understanding and new transferrable skills that they can use in all aspects of their lives. The project's idea could be accessed by any charity shop looking to find a sustainable method in reusing their waste fabric in conjunction with an educational project and provide an additional source of income for the shop/charity, and therefore, applicable within the wider community.

Secondly, the size of both groups worked to the project's advantage. Between eight to ten participants is a manageable group size as it allows for a) enough participants to carry out

upcycling work and orders taken, and b) the tutor can help individuals or access peer teaching to assist in key skills. The project's coordinator noted that as the participants from RWN TUP (1) were local, it was easier for them to meet outside the project's hours and continue their skills, therefore, the locality of the participants should be taken into consideration.

While the project's focus was primarily on the upskilling of trainees in textiles upcycling, it provided other opportunities for the participants to grow in other areas such as interpersonal and communication skills. The participants all stated that they grew in confidence and learned to work as a team. The tutor stated that within the group she saw their confidence and pride for their work beginning to grow. Sung (2019) notes this as a key benefit of upcycling as provides a sense of community and a feeling of being empowered. The participants expressed how their ability to work as part of a group increased as they depended on one another for peer teaching. Finally, as the participants were upcycling the waste fabric, their creativity grew and strengthened, opening their minds to reimagine what lay before them

Furthermore, three recommendations can be made from analysis of the results. Firstly, more time is needed for this project to progress and succeed further. Both the tutor and the participants commented that the time frame was rushed, and the goal could be better reached if more time was allocated. More time would allow for additional upskilling and fine-tuning of products while providing additional time for planning and production.

Secondly, as was recommend by the group's tutor, two subject areas/tutors are required for this project. If two tutors were involved, this would relieve the work and stress for one tutor and ensure both sewing and upcycling skills and business areas are targeted. Each tutor would have a section they are responsible for within the project. In this regard, it was envisaged the participants would benefit more from the project.

Finally, if this project were to run again, it was recommended from the current tutor to ask previous, willing participants to return as opposed to recruiting new participants for the project. In this way, the returning participants would have learned the basic skills and already possess an understanding of the project and its goal. The project could then proceed at a faster pace and produce tangible measures of success. The project has the potential to succeed as a sustainable business. It needs the time, tutor and dedicated participants to help it succeed further and have more far reaching benefits.

References

- Bocken, N., Ritala, P., Albareda, L. and Verburg, R. (2019). Introduction: Innovation for Sustainability. *Palgrave Studies in Sustainable Business In Association with Future Earth*, pp.1-16.
- Doody, O. and Noonan, M., 2013. Preparing and conducting interviews to collect data. *Nurse researcher*, 20(5).
- Elbardan, H. and Kholeif, A., 2017. An Interpretive Approach for Data Collection and Analysis. In: *Enterprise Resource Planning, Corporate Governance and Internal Auditing*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
- Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017). *A new textiles economy: Redesigning fashion's future*,. [online] Available at: <http://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/publications> [Accessed 30 Dec. 2019].
- European Commission (2013). Sustainability of textiles. *Retail Forum for Sustainability*, [online] (11), pp.1-7. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/environment/industry/retail/pdf/issue_paper_textiles.pdf [Accessed 28 Nov. 2019].
- Franco, M. (2017). Circular economy at the micro level: A dynamic view of incumbents' struggles and challenges in the textile industry. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 168, pp.833-845.
- Frey, J.H. and Fontana, A., 1991. The group interview in social research. *The Social Science Journal*, 28(2), pp.175-187.
- Gardetti, M. and Torres, A. (2013). *Sustainability in Fashion and Textiles*. New York, USA: Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, pp.1-13.
- Gill, P., Stewart, K., Treasure, E. and Chadwick, B., 2008. Methods of data collection in qualitative research: interviews and focus groups. *British dental journal*, 204(6), pp.291-295.
- Gorgievski, M.J., Ascalon, M.E. and Stephan, U., 2011. Small business owners' success criteria, a values approach to personal differences. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 49(2), pp.207-232.
- Han, S., Chan, P., Venkatraman, P., Apeagyei, P., Cassidy, T. and Tyler, D. (2016). Standard vs. Upcycled Fashion Design and Production. *Fashion Practice*, 9(1), pp.69-94.
- Henninger, C., Alevizou, P., Goworek, H. and Ryding, D. (2017). *Sustainability in fashion*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Holloway, I. and Wheeler, S., 2002. The nature of qualitative research: Development and perspectives. *Qualitative Research in Nursing*, pp.3-25.
- Kabir, S., 2016. *Basic Guidelines For Research: An Introductory Approach For All Disciplines*. 1st ed. Chittagong: Mohammad Javed Rahim Book Zone Publication, pp.201-211.
- Leong, F. and Austin, J., 2006. *The Psychology Research Handbook*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, pp.114-116.
- McGrath, C., Palmgren, P. and Liljedahl, M., 2018. Twelve tips for conducting qualitative research interviews. *Medical Teacher*, 41(9), pp.1002-1006.

- Morlet, A., Opsomer, R., Herrmann, S., Balmond, L., Gillet, C. and Fuchs, L. (2017). *A new textiles economy: Redesigning fashion's future*. Ellen MacArthur Foundation.
- Paige, R.C. and Littrell, M.A., 2002. Craft retailers' criteria for success and associated business strategies. *Journal of small business management*, 40(4), pp.314-331.
- Payne, A. (2015). Open- and closed-loop recycling of textile and apparel products. *Handbook of Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) of Textiles and Clothing*, pp.103-123.
- Pham, L.T.M., 2018. A Review of Key Paradigms: Positivism. *Interpretivism & Critical Inquiry, School of Education, The University of Adelaide*.
- Rahman, O. and Gong, M. (2016). Sustainable practices and transformable fashion design – Chinese professional and consumer perspectives. *International Journal of Fashion Design, Technology and Education*, 9(3), pp.233-247.
- Rediscoverycentre.ie. (2020). *About Us / Rediscovery Centre*. [online] Available at: <http://www.rediscoverycentre.ie/about-us/> [Accessed 7 Mar. 2020].
- Roscommon Women's Network. (2020). *Roscommon Women's Network / Local Community Project & Charity / Roscommon*. [online] Available at: <https://rwn.ie/about/> [Accessed 7 Mar. 2020].
- Roscommon Women's Network. (2020). *Textile Upcycling Pilot Project - Roscommon Women's Network*. [online] Available at: <https://rwn.ie/textile-upcycling-pilot-project/> [Accessed 7 Mar. 2020].
- Ruppert-Stroescu, M., LeHew, M., Connell, K. and Armstrong, C. (2015). Creativity and Sustainable Fashion Apparel Consumption. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 33(3), pp.167-182.
- Schutt, R.K., 2014. *Investigating the social world: The process and practice of research*. Sage Publications.
- Singh, J., Sung, K., Cooper, T., West, K. and Mont, O. (2019). Challenges and opportunities for scaling up upcycling businesses – The case of textile and wood upcycling businesses in the UK. *Resources, Conservation and Recycling*, 150.
- Smith, P., Baille, J. and McHattie, L. (2017). Sustainable Design Futures: An open design vision for the circular economy in fashion and textiles. *The Design Journal*, 20(sup1), pp.S1938-S1947.
- Steffen, W., Persson, Å., Deutsch, L., Zalasiewicz, J., Williams, M., Richardson, K., Crumley, C., Crutzen, P., Folke, C., Gordon, L., Molina, M., Ramanathan, V., Rockström, J., Scheffer, M., Schellnhuber, H. and Svedin, U. (2011). The Anthropocene: From Global Change to Planetary Stewardship. *AMBIO*, 40(7), pp.739-761.
- Sung, K. (2019). Upcycling for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: Literature Review. *World Sustainability Series*, pp.371-382.
- Sung, K., Cooper, T. and Kettley, S. (2019). Factors Influencing Upcycling for UK Makers. *Sustainability*, 11(3), p.870.
- Thanh, N. and Thanh, T., 2015. The Interconnection Between Interpretivist Paradigm and Qualitative Methods in Education. *American Journal of Educational Science*, [online] 1(2), pp.24-27. Available at: <http://www.aiscience.org/journal/ajes> [Accessed 23 March 2020].
- The Upcycle Movement. 2020. *The Upcycle Movement*. [online] Available at: <https://theupcyclemovement.com/> [Accessed 1 May 2020].

- Toloie-Eshlaghy, A., Chitsaz, S., Karimian, L. and Charkhchi, R., 2011. A classification of qualitative research methods. *Research Journal of International Studies*, 20(20), pp.106-123
- United Nations (2019). *Sustainable Development Goals ∴ Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform*. [online] Sustainabledevelopment.un.org. Available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300> [Accessed 31 Dec. 2019].
- Woolard, R. (2010). *Logistical model for closed loop recycling of textile materials*. Masters. North Carolina State University.
- Yin R.K., (1994), *Case study research: design and methods*, 2nd ed. Sage, pp. 13

Appendix 1: Blank Consent Form

Consent to take part in research

- I _____ voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from the research within two weeks after the research, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had opportunities to ask questions about the study.
- I understand my participation in the research involves my involvement with the Roscommon Women's Network (RWN) and my perception and opinions on upcycling.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I agree to the focus groups that I attend being audio-recorded.
- I agree to photos being taken of my work for the RWN project thus far and understand that these photos will only be used as evidence of the work the project is carrying out and will not be used anywhere else.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. Anonymity will be ensured by using coded names such as 'Participant A'.
- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in separate locked files only to be accessed by the researcher, Aoife Ryan.
- I understand that I am free to contact any people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Aoife Ryan (researcher)

St. Angela's College, Co. Sligo

Email: 15347866@stangelas.nuigalway.ie

Phone: 083 3839714

Signature of research participant

Date

Signature of researcher

Date

Appendix 2: Recorded interview transcript with group's tutor**Interview with Michelle (tutor) Tuesday 22/10/19****I: How did you hear about the Textile Upcycling Project? (0.00-1.20)**

M: I did [the upcycling project] from the beginning, so I had already done a lot of work with Suzanne Dempsey and the Roscommon county council. We did a lot of green cleaning and upcycling projects with her already. It's something I've done all my life. I've worked with Suzanne and she was the one who told me about this project and she's the Environmental Officer at Roscommon County Council. She was part of the panel and I believe as part funded this project along with the Roscommon County Council and the Rediscovery centre, I'm not sure [who else was involved in the funding]

I: And what influenced you in joining the group as a tutor as opposed to like a participant? (1.21- 2.15)

M: OK. Well I teach sewing and that's my job. I have like since I came home to Roscommon, so I came home about 12 years ago. And I've been teaching upcycling classes since then in sewing. It was really Suzanne who basically asked me to apply. So, I do adult sewing and I do kids camps and then I used to make or my own products and sell them, a lot of dolls, and I still do that but not as much as I did.

I: What previous experience/skills did you bring to the project as a tutor? (2.28-6.25)

M: So, sewing was a big one was a sewing, but not so much. It's interesting since I've been doing it. The biggest skill I would say is understanding how to work with upcycle fabrics. And it's that's the biggest hurdle that I'm still finding even in the second group. Yeah, I like it it's just very difficult to get across to people who you know, like even this morning one lady said that you know "I haven't really been into the whole green thing, but it all started to click into place now". And like each week when we talk about doing a project there's so much involved upcycling as you know from yourself from sewing. You must have the skills of sewing but you also have to have that imagination and design.

I: The creativity to reimagine.

M: Yeah. And that's very hard to teach someone. You either have that, I think you can teach it to a certain degree but that's what I'm really finding is the big hurdle in these projects. It's the understanding the envisioning of turning like that tweed coat into an elephant doorstop and what you can do to us to make it look different. It's kind of like if you bring someone into an art class and you tell them "OK, we've got a vase of flowers here and a wine bottle I want you to draw that". Like a lot of people are just looking at the vase of flowers and the bottle and they want to draw the flowers on the bottle whereas I as someone who would do art is just looking at the shapes. So, there's a [creativity] a huge thing. Like design, pattern drafting like there's just so much to try and teach. Whereas what I've discovered from both projects now is that like we'll see the likes of Nora and Martina and they wouldn't be sewers or whatever they just see this as teach them sewing. But it's not a sewing class. And, how it's been marketed I think a lot of people just into the whole it's going to be sewing. Things that I'm really finding is it's getting

people to look at that as a piece of fabric not as what it is like a sheet or a jacket, you know it's fabric. And then thinking about colours well what could I do with grave and I immediately thought in my head I thought of a whale. [referring to a grey sheet near Michelle] People are very much like "it's a sheet". And it takes it's taken a long time to try and get over that hurdle. So, the project is eight weeks. So, this we're in our seventh week and it's four hours a week.

I: that's a very short time to change someone's-

M: Yeah, absolutely. Like you're totally changing someone's way of thinking. And then the other thing is like working with upcycled fabric. I'm just looking at this coat here like how to dismantle it and to make the best use of the fabric. So, a lot of people will just cut into it like teaching people how to cross in the seams and how to get a whole piece. And you know you must learn all about pattern piecing if there's pattern on it.

I: What is your understanding of upcycling and its importance within society? Why do you think it's important to have cycling within society? (6.28- 10-17)

M: Well you see I'm going I'm coming at it from both ends. I was born this way. [laughing] melt into Lady Gaga. Like I was brought up my nan was a dressmaker and my mom would done sewing. So, when we were younger, we were always brought round charity shops and reimagining clothes. So, this is me. This is in me. But then also in later years I have become more into like I do a lot of green cleaning and things like that and I would do a lot of DIY upcycles of like reinventing furniture and interiors and stuff. But one thing I've noticed is like I've started to really look at what I'm using all the time. So, it started off with green cleaning initially because I would get a rash from the cleaning products and I was asthmatic. And I started looking at things but then I've now started looking at what I'm using at home like glue guns I'm trying not to use a glue gun anymore and I'm trying not to use like spray paint. I'm really looking at the paint I'm buying so that's where I got into the environmental side more so for that and then because I did all the sewing anyway I didn't pass any head but then I started to see that actually the more I looked into statistics on plastic waste so I did a campaign last year "30 days Greener" And it was all about things we can do to reduce plastic and things going into landfill. And it was through that I discovered, fabric is one of the biggest culprits. That's how I got more into the fabric upcycling.

So even at the minute I am working on a Christmas TV show and I'm really trying and so it's all Christmas craft and I'm really trying to get them to focus on being upcycled. It's amazing. I'm like trying to get everyone so I had a meeting in Dublin yesterday with six people and we were talking about the crafts and they were like suggesting things when one of them is slime and I was like "What are people going to do with that?". Just like if you become a totally over passionate.

But the fashion thing, it drives me crazy. And one thing as well since I come to Ireland I find and I did work with all the charity shops in Roscommon with Suzanne on another project a couple of years ago and I just feel there's so much wasted in charity shops like I was horrified to learn that bags of stuff just get [wasted] like that broke my heart because I was thinking just

give me the stuff and I'll make stuff out of this. So, I love this idea of a project, the upcycling project but I do worry about how it can, there's so many skills you need.

It needs a full-time person to manage it like you know that website it was just showing you the "Upcycle Movement". That is her job and she does it all the time and that's what you need. You need someone that's on it all the time promoting it is on social media because businesses are looking for it now. And they want people to recycle for them like I'm always getting people ask me to do stuff. I'm just one person and I can't do it. So, it be great to have a group where I can say "But you know what. There's a group in Castlereagh. They could do that vegetable bags for you in a few weeks". Yeah. So, any idea where it is, and you say since I've come to Ireland where are you based usually.

10.20-11.05 Michelle talks about where she has been

I: What are the opportunities/strengths of this project? (11.09-14.00)

M: So obviously the best thing is looking out all the ladies who do it and seeing them change their mindset. So even this morning that lady saying, "oh I totally look at it in a different way now, it's the whole upcycling" And you know more she's more into the environmental issue as opposed to just coming for a sewing class so that's good. I just, you know, people see behind the scenes even at what goes on in like in a charity shop like what happens to the clothes that you're-

I: opening people's perception.

M: Yes. Exactly. And you know it really gets everyone thinking about how much clothes we do buy that's unnecessary. You know what I mean like it really there's nothing more eye opening to people than cutting up clothes for them to really think "Oh my God I just went to Penney's and spent 50 quid on a load of stuff here I am cutting it all" but really I think it's really good it really makes you question what you're doing and buying clothes that you really do look at it differently. Well I do. And it's great for the ladies themselves. Like it, Confidence like I know there were some ladies that would be quiet in the beginning wouldn't say anything, so I definitely think social skills like so that's a huge thing.

I: Communication is a big thing.

M: Yeah. Just being together. Absolutely. And you know the camaraderie. Like I didn't really, I think about that at all taking this all on. I was more focussed on you know teaching the skills and stuff. It's nice now how people have gotten to know each other. It's nice not to have formed. They're planning on doing more things together and even I've noticed with this group, more so than the other group, this group have started they're keen to show me what they've done. So, they all take stuff home when they come in. So today they were coming in and going "So I did these trees at home what do you think of this?" "And it's really funny I know why they do that and the other group they didn't like. I never told them. Yeah but this group are [really seeking approval and praise]. And they're pleased with what they're doing. In the beginning they're all like "Oh I haven't sewn since school." Or "Oh God look that's crooked". Whereas now they're also suggestion ideas and they're saying, "So I saw this at the weekend, and I was thinking

about it and they bring it in magazines”. It's like now the juices are going and the creative juices are coming but we're coming to an end.

I: What are the limitations of this project? (14.12- 17.10)

M: The limitations as in like where does it go from here? Who, you know, who's going to market the stuff, who's going to project managers where are they going to be sold? How are they going to get enquiries? And one thing like I was just talking to Nora about before is this it concerns me that the women themselves aren't like not necessarily selling it, but you know they need to be confident it to tell people about it and if they're not going to look at something they've made and think “Oh yeah I'd pay 30 euro for it” how do they expect someone else. So that's a skill like I know myself for making things and selling things here like it's hard to. There has to be either a couple of people in the group almost go on training for that and really work on that-

I: kind of realize the worth of their product.

M: Yeah. Yeah. Like at the end of the day this is now going to be a competitive area. There's a lot of people do this now the whole recycling and there's going to be a lot of price competitiveness and then there's people who are only doing this for publicity. You know there's a lot this is a competitive market for upcycling like. It's you know it's not just a you know a nice, what we say are, thoughtful conscientious little group you know.

I: So, one of the biggest limitations is marketing I think then all like the same factors that come underneath

M: well managing the project going forward. Like I just I don't see I'd like even the two groups, they're very segmented like I you know I think with the project going forward it would be better like you need more time as well. I think you almost need a sewing class but then a design and almost like a business class. You know because there's so much more to it like that each week I'm trying to tell them about marketing so that you saw me showing them the website. So, I'm trying to explain to them about how everything must have a story behind it. So, on nationwide there was a lady a couple of weeks ago making bags and she used denim jeans as a lining. So, I showed them that video and I said “What did you think? Did you notice anything about her selling and stuff?” “and they said, “well she didn't sell” and I said, “but she did” And I'd written things down and I said, “so listen to this now after what I tell you” and then they were like “oh yeah oh yeah”. It was like yeah it was subliminal things where she was making all these points like “yes I upcycle, and I sell them locally”. But it's about getting them to think about it differently-

I: as opposed to just a class coming in.

M: Yes yeah.

I: And have you enjoyed being a tutor to the project? (17.15-22.30)

M: Yeah. No, I do enjoy it. I love working with the ladies but it does frustrate me that I there's so much more I could give to it but I only got four hours and that really frustrates me like I just want to you know set up a Facebook page, to set up the website like I can see so much potential.

But at the same time then I'm also I would also be concerned with you know quality and the design aspects.

I: Yeah, like last week you were saying about stuffing.

M: Oh yeah stuffing is a huge issue and we're still struggling with that. So, trying to find stuffing. So, we've tried shredded paper which is fine for like the little birds we were making for Christmas but then there's the fire concern and then we have this constant battle between a couple of us about using old cushion inserts and duvets which I just think is grim. And then yeah there's only one apparently one fabric shredder in Ireland and that's at the head of the guards like why there isn't another one?

I: that is be so handy for you

M: It would be amazing. And then the whole aspect of wool like we have the highest percentage of sheep per person in Roscommon. Seriously for you know Ireland, the farmers aren't even getting money for their fleece it's costing them more to shear the sheep than what they're getting for the fleece and it's being exported and then we're importing it in cheap wool. It's insane. It's a completely natural hypoallergenic. It's fire resistant naturally. So, wool would be perfect. There's so much to [the project], we're just scratching the surface.

Yeah just you know this a lot of stuff I just take for granted. It's been an eye opener doing that with a group of people like where I probably, I've thought "gosh, I know more than I thought" you know like I said even just the design like imagining something and even pattern making so they'll see something, they'll look in a magazine and they'll come in and say "oh yeah I want to make that" and straightaway in two seconds I can say "that won't work that won't work" or I can say "yeah we could do that but that would be more tricky" because they just don't know about pattern drafting and finishing seems like you can you can show so much but I'm sure you know yourself like you're making anything 3D, it's a lot more.

And then also you must be on top of trends as well. There's no point making stuff if it's not on trend, you're totally restricted then colours of fabrics. Here it's very beige, brown, dark fabrics. But trends I would say is a big thing. Like I would be saying like you have to see what's really on trend and so I know at the minute with the Christmas stuff I'm doing with the craft TV, I was only saying this yesterday that we need to have something that's on trend so that's why they want slime. But I would say like everything is rainbows at the minute. Last year it was all unicorns. I can't remember what it was the year before but every year there's something that you see or even this year or last year was like a lot of pineapples and flamingos and they're still coming through, even at Christmas. But rainbows still seem to be quite a big thing. So, you have to be aware of trends. Yeah because you must just and like what celebrities want. So, there's a lot of things as well people say "oh I don't like that when" we've talked about making things and like I wouldn't need like it myself. But I think I know that's what sells.

I: But the trend is definitely one to follow because as you said there "if you don't buy it how do you expect someone to?" that is the biggest thing.

M: that is the biggest thing. I used to have that written on the board in the first couple of weeks and like you know when the minute you finish selling something look at it and say, “would I buy that?”. And if your immediate answer is “no” then it's not getting put into the next pile.

I: Do you think a textile cycling group arising from this project for a successful textile up cycling business. (22.30- 23.58)

M: Not on their own. Not without a project manager. Like you need a few people. You need someone that understands up cycling but also understands business. It's kind of like you know like marketing sales.

I: Do you think that like with your skills and your knowledge around business and upcycling that you could manage it?

M: Yeah you could say you need some someone like me, I'm not saying me, but they need someone that would have their own business and has worked in the area. But has the design, the selling, the business. You know what I mean. You need all these you going forward.

I: Do you think another group would come around say summertime?

M: I don't know. Nora said if she gets funding, she'll do another one.

I: And then are there any changes do you recognize the project if it was to run again say for next year.

M: I don't think really you need to stop getting new people. I think you need to maybe if there was another project, I'd nearly choose who wants to come back out of both groups and really train them properly. Because I think if you're just bringing new people it's just, you're constantly only getting halfway up the ladder and then sliding back down. So, I think the people that I've done it and are passionate about it like to stay on help them go to that extra level and do us. But also, I just I still like their sewing skills to be learned but also business skills. It's not just have sewing. There's so much more to it. What was the point of just cycling if you can't sell it. Yeah like Yeah it's fine for yourself but the idea of this project I believe is that it makes an income for the charity shop. So you know they do need skills like more than

I: And like more than 4 hours in the week?

M: I think they need a day a week if not more. Just getting people little that will commit to that like it is a tiring like you know. Yeah like even after 4 hours here I find even sometimes half an hour before we finish they're like “I'm wrecked Michelle” like it's not ideal situation where we are

I: Yeah, it's a small room. Yeah, I'd be nice if [storeroom with lots of space] was turned into-

M: That's exactly what I suggested but there isn't the window even still it's a bigger space. Yeah in just think to do it in just four hours really works.

I: And would you like to return as a tutor or not?

M: I don't think so just as the four hours along of it because I just feel it frustrates me so much I can give. So, changes I would say, you know you think you can't just. it's not just a sewing class. So, it's not just a sewing tutor, you need it is kind of like a "start your own business". The sewing is a big part like this so much that they need to know like its pattern drafting and design and sewing and anyone who you know I get this all the time when people ring me up they say I bought a sewing machine in Michelle and I'd love to make my own clothes and self. And I'm like OK come to me and I'll show you how to use the machine first. And they don't get that there's a whole different skill set needed sewing is not just so yeah it is design pattern drafting sewing that's the last thing and the easiest thing it is.

Appendix 3: Recorded focus group interview transcript**I: So what attracted you to apply to join the Roscommon Women's Network Textiles cycling project?(0.14- 3.18)****Speakers (Each indentation is a new speaker)**

1: Well, initially I didn't hear the textiles part of it. I just seen the upcycling part. So, I got very enthusiastic because I thought we could bring something in from home. Something that needed repairing or something. That's what I thought was about. But then I came in and I realized it was nothing to do with it at all, it had to do with upcycling old material

I: And that's when, you stayed on?

1: Oh yeah!

2: I'm a climate ambassador with An Taisce for the year and it's a voluntary position and they're actually recruiting for next year. We need to show actions and communications by the end of the year but the year is flying bye fast. So by getting about this, I was learning about fashion and upcycling. It was good to have something practical.

3: I like crafts and sewing and all that kind of stuff. You know, I've done courses before on clothing, you know, pattern cutting and that kind of stuff. So I saw this and thought that's something I'd like to do. But [upcycling], that's something I hadn't really done. That really interested me because I like crafts.

4: I'm a bit like [other participate] I saw the upcycling part and didn't see the textiles part but it turned out very good.

5: For me, I like fashion and I wanted to scrub up on my sewing skills again. And, I'm kind of environmental in what I study is very good.

I: What did you study?

5: Environmental science. I my job as waste enforcement. So, but minimizing the waste is a big issue. So, yes it's kind of combination of my hobbies and studies, my own passion.

6: Upcycling textiles appealed to me. To become more aware of upcycling and what can be done with the different materials. And I thought I would learn more about sewing as well. But I am learning cut out patterns and learn sewing skills.

I: What textile skills did you bring to the project? (3.18-5.41)

1: Well I used to do patch work but I did hand sewing as well. So, using them, learning to use the machine, I do have a sewing machine at home. But with all these different the stitches and all of the different footwork and all that was shown to us. All the different things. So that that was very helpful.

2: I didn't have any textile skills, but I had work on the charity shop. And so that would involve organizing clothes that were for sale. No, I didn't have any sewing skills. I would have worked

in that shop voluntary, but if it was good learning how to use a sewing machine. I just knew I was upcycling [project]0. I didn't know for sure it was a sewing until I got here.

3: Well I've done sewing before. Went to college in my 20s, went to many sewing places.

4: Absolutely none.

5: And I'm just self-taught on the sewing machine. Very rarely used.

6: I have come to, attempt attempted sewing classes before. I have never made those ornaments like the birds and the Christmas decorations. So that was that was new to me.

I: What skills have you developed since joining the project, so you're on your a week seven now? Is it? And so next week is your last week. So have we developed since joining this project? (5.50-8.43)

1: How to chat to everybody [communication].

2: We did kind of watch like nationwide were they showed a woman, I've forgotten the name of the website, in Clare and she's was using jeans to make bags, recycled jeans with other material to make use of old materials. So, kind of learned about marketing I suppose and to value your time. We learned about valuing your time which is a big thing because if you're doing a lot of voluntary stuff we can actually get to, get taken advantage of. So, if you don't value your time and to price your time so we did learn those types of skills.

1: Appropriately [in relation to valuing your time]. We didn't record a lot, we should've done but we didn't record our time, doing a particular task

3: We really got to analyse is it gonna sell?, is it worth it? You know, you don't just dive and make these you've got to analyse is this going to sell? Cause there were a few things, the ideas were rejected. It might be too complicated or this that and the other. It were like simple things, we're going for simple things.

4: How to look at different fabrics, how they would sew or not sew.

5: We a bit of teamwork because when people were stuck, other people helped them out in sewing machines or with you know, little bits and pieces

6: Cooperation and interaction and also in the past you see handmade items for sale in the sale of work and you'd see the prices and say, "my god that's a ridiculous price.". But, now I realize why they're so expensive, how they're so expensive and all the time and effort. It can be tedious, slow work making all those small things, they're much slower than if you're making a big dress or big curtains or something. So I can see why they are the price they are. And just cooperating and helping each other and social interaction.

I:? How aware of the need of textile upcycling were you before you joined this project? Did you know about the waste of fabric and that fabric waste needs to be upcycled? (8.45-13.10)

1: Well no, but I used to be very much into buying stuff in a charity shop. If I can at all. If I need something at home, I would look first in the charity shop. It wasn't there then, I would probably buy a new. But definitely that would be my first port of call like curtains or cushion covers

2: I don't think I was fully aware of how fast, the impact of the fast fashion industry other than some BBC things on poor countries, the dyes is going into the water and the chemicals and they both those factories have burned down, were making cheap clothes and it was in Bangladesh. Yeah, but I because I worked in Simon, I would do make use of second hand clothes or I might sometimes buy things for children, but I'd make sure I wash it first and there is still a bit of a stigma on buying second but you just get over it.

3: Not really no, You know, you obviously put much thought into it I really enjoyed that trip [to the rediscovery centre in Dublin] yesterday because I think there's a real potential there. You know, for. For, you know, for catering for people who want clothes like that, like bespoke, though, because they only had they could only do like small sizes because they had like ends of rolls. So their own work in small, small amounts of fabric. I think there's a real need for vote for bigger women. Sometimes the clothes [for larger women] are awful, they're not very nice, like big tunics, big tents.

And I think if you could combine the two you'd have a nice little business going.

4: I'm a sucker for fast fashion, and I always thought I was doing my best by leaving my clothes to the charity shop, but it was what Nora said yesterday, that why they needed this project was because they had an awful lot of waste from the charity shop. I never viewed it like that, I presumed it was going to the right place. Yes. I didn't realize. So that that was a big eye opener for me

5: Same for myself. I didn't realise there was so much wasted in a charity shop until I went downstairs and saw it. People just dropped them in they feel guilty throwing them out so they think "well if I leave it into the charity shop, they've got rid of that guilt." But we don't have to think anymore. We don't decide "well am I going to bin that?" or "What am I going to do? Give them to the clothes bank" and we feel then that someone will benefit from that. You look downstairs and there are some very good things that are, you know, curtains, like that curtain [picking one off the table] is perfect. You know, it would do someone moving into a house until they can afford something better or something nicer.

I: Has your understanding of environmental issues grown since participating in the project? (13.12-14.40)

Collectively together: Yes, yeah

6: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, Michelle is explained to us about washing cotton and all the microfibres

1: One thing that suprised me, a pair of jeans, I cant remember how much water just for one pair of jeans but it is a lot so anytime I need jeans I get them from the charity shop. I wouldn't buy a new pair of jeans anymore.

(14.42-17.09) topic got diverted

I: what has been the most challenging part of the project for you and why? (17.09-20.18)

2: Transportation. Just getting here. The public transport and the road works

5: Getting here, getting here on time. And stuffing and using absolutely nothing only stuff from the charity shop, that was the biggest challenge.

6: My imagination

1: I suppose the challenge is, overall is trying to keep within the upcycling requirements, which is virtually impossible.

I: Even your threads. What do you do for them?

Collectively: They're all new.

Michelle: See a lot of the bigger organisations will say, like the Rediscovery Centre, that [their threads] get donated. So they get a lot of thread donated from factories where its end of line and you know that's where its covered. So there very little which can be said that its 100% recycled because when you break it all down it's hard. I still think even though this is the second project, that's the biggest hurdle I'm finding is whether this is like almost like a training course on the ethics of upcycling and creating a business and a sewing class and trying to get that balance right.

4: Yeah its hard to get it all in six weeks. And even the different levels of sewing skills we had, and I hadn't any. But the other two ladies didn't come back, I'd say one of the reasons, I guess is because they were brilliant on the machines. So they would've been bored stiff. Try and balance that.

I: Have you enjoyed participating in the project? (20.17 – 20.20)

Collectively: Yes.

I: And say, if there was another project would you come back to it again? (20.28- 20.38)

Collectively: Yes.

I: And what changes would you make to the project if you were another project was to be run again? (20.39- 22.5)

1: I'd like to bring in something from home and repair it.

5: So like if people had things they were bored of and you would revitalize them and make them love it again.

4: Like with a dress you never wore anymore, and then you could make anything out of it.

I: As opposed to putting into the charity shop?

5: Yeah. But like as an extra why do people put it into the first place. Because they first were bought in a size way too small for them and said "I'll get into that one day". Or just that they grown bored of it and it's out of date.

Collectively: Yeah, to modernize it.

1: You know like, we did cover a good amount of that, you know putting the heart on [a piece of clothing]. But I'm, I'm talking more about. I have a chair and it's quite an expensive but I left the chair out there and left it there over winter and the material got all mildew. Oh, I'd love to be able to read a reupholster it.

I: What skills knowledge do you think you will use after the project is finished? (22.55-

Collectively: Sewing skills.

1: I would like to make some Christmas decorations. Yes, I want to put them, I have an umbrella plant inside so I can use that as a Christmas trees.

2: fixing hem's on my trousers.

I: No that's perfect now. Thank you all so much for your time.

Appendix 4: Questionnaires

Available on request – PDF file

Appendix 5: Email correspondence with project coordinator

The Aim and Learning objectives of the initial 13 week project

AIM: The Pilot Project's aim was to show that textile waste from the RWN Charity Shop can be repurposed into beautiful, useful, saleable items, therefore preventing unsold items going to landfill and in turn contributing to the circular economy.

Learning Outcomes for the Textile Upcycling Community Education Course(s)

- Participants on will learn new skills or upskill in sewing and design.
- Learn how to turn used clothing into raw material for new household or fashion items.
- They will also gain knowledge of what fabrics are suitable to producing quality upcycled products.
- Participants will have an increased awareness of the issue of textile waste, an understanding of the effects of this waste on the environment and knowledge of what can be done to address the issue of textile waste.
- Participants will learn to work as a team, understand the importance of quality control and grow in confidence in their abilities for the workplace or for self-employment.
- Participants will be offered other workshops of interest during the pilot phase e.g. start your own business, train the trainer.
- High quality, affordable and marketable products will be produced by the participants by the end of the pilot project.

Extension

Would you say the pilot project's aim and learning outcomes were used again in the second group?

Yes, we used the same aim and outcomes, however we did make some changes to the method we used to achieve the outcomes as a result of feedback from the tutor and the first group participants. For example, in round 2 we aimed to learn the skills needed by producing simpler items than the more complex Aprons and Tote bags etc of the first course. These less complex to produce items were more easily designed, reasonably easily made, therefore enabled time for increased practice in identifying and sourcing suitable material, sewing and design and quality control skills. Also, the smaller items could be sold at a lower cost and were more affordable to the clientele in RWN Charity Shop and Castlereagh area which is the main outlet for the products at that time. This proved to be a successful change and all the Christmas decorations etc which the group created were sold easily in the run up to Christmas and the group were really pleased with that outcome.

In regard to the success of the project, how would you rate the level of success of group two and why:

Very successful, they took on board and learned from the first group. Five of them joined the First Groups Friday "CycleUP Club" and this friendship and co-operation has supported the learning of the 2nd group and continued learning from each other since the course finished. The 10 women (5 from the first and 5 from the second course) are currently doing a Textile Upcycling Step Up course together.

How was the design of the product made, the birds and trees for Christmas, decided upon?

As I said in my answer to the first question above. They were looking for products that were less complex to create and were more saleable in the market we are currently in.

Can you comment on any limitations or challenges experienced with group two?

The environmental protection part of the project didn't seem as important to 50% of the group members who appeared to be more interested in learning the sewing and design skills whereas the other 50% were more focused on reducing textile waste. The first group started out the same but in my opinion they were all on the same page at the end of the course, the second group didn't seem to find that place or that Gel so much towards the end, however the 5 who were very keen on the textile waste joined the 6 from the 1st group who started the CycleUP Friday club. Also some members of group 2 lived approx. an hour away and had a long way to travel to the course which didn't allow for much chatting or social discussion around the environmental implications prior to or after the course finished every day, I feel that proved very important in the first group who were all local women, and was maybe missed in the second. I also feel strongly that having the Pilot Project Worker supporting the first group and the Tutor was what made the largest difference to the group, the worker kept in continuous communication, reacted and responded when needed to change or move things around, did a lot of the work on environmental awareness, and I feel the presence of the worker was the main cog in the wheel of success and continuity of the first group who grew in confidence and knowledge both in sewing and marketing and an greatly increased awareness of the environmental protection aspect and keen to do their bit to make a positive difference.

What would you say were the strengths in group two?

Seemed a more confident group overall. Ability to take on board, learn and implement the lessons learned from the first group.

Was there any certificate or qualification that the group two trainees received from the project?

Only a certification of completion.

Nora Fahy
Manager

Roscommon Women's Network – NCCWN (*National Collective of Community Based Women's Networks*)
Unit 5, The Old Mill. Castlerea, Co Roscommon