



ESTONIAN ACADEMY OF ARTS
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BMAT20

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COLLECTIVE MODULARITY

BA final project

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Research

When starting my thesis research I decided to look into designs of the past and present to see what are the similarities and where is the design world developing. As a designer I have been intrigued by the product design from the Mid-century modern era. From the simple lines in aesthetics to the quality that has stood the test of time. I have felt a sense of recognition in the ideas from that time – **designs have to be functional, work for different occasions and most importantly use only quality materials that are crafted by hand to make the final product.** Crafting something from a sketch to the final product keeps me grounded and strengthens the bond between me and the design, as I feel more responsibility about the outcome and what happens to it after I send it out to the world. It seems to me that this human touch of craftsmanship is something that we have lost in the world of mass production.

Another issue with mass producing is that big productions contribute largely to post-consumer waste, by manufacturing items that don't last, are not mendable, use low-grade or non-recyclable materials and so on. Unfortunately the amount of materials being recycled every year is decreasing, whereas material consumption is rising rapidly.¹ Just like in material consumption we are growing in every other aspect. In fact the growth is faster every year and probably won't ever stop. Fast developments are partly caused by the Red Queen Effect, which means that in order to stay relevant and compete with your competitors you will have to always search and develop the next best thing, standing still is like going backwards.²

This pressure of competing with other people and now even machines is causing a lot of new problems. When only thinking about growth in innovation, wealth, status and so on, we sacrifice a lot to keep up. People are working longer hours and resting less which in return keeps them away from families and friends. This mindset

¹ Circle Economy. (2022). *The Circularity Gap Report 2022*. Used 24.05.2023
https://assets.website-files.com/5d26d80e8836af2d12ed1269/62d9614cd746aa35cf599100_1.%20Report_%20CGR%20Global%202022.pdf

² Simmons, M. (2021). Google Director Of Engineering: This is how fast the world will change in ten years. *Medium*, Feb 16, 2021. Used 24.05.2023
<https://medium.com/accelerated-intelligence/google-director-of-engineering-this-is-how-fast-the-world-will-change-in-ten-years-6f1e653b5374>

is pressuring us to be more, achieve more which instead of giving us the gratification it promises, leaves us with even more dissatisfaction because we are never enough.³

With this short summary of why growth is not as great as it might seem I try to raise a question of is this what we truly want and need? We want meaningful lives, but what gives life a meaning? In my opinion meaning doesn't actually come from a big house or your position at work, it comes from internal values like connecting with others, expressing empathy, being creative, being in touch with nature.⁴

Understanding this linked me to the idea of **degrowth**. Degrowth defined by Ecological Economics and Political Ecology Professor Giorgos Kallis is “**a process of political and social transformation that reduces a society's throughput (of material and energy) while improving the quality of life**”.⁵ In simpler terms it is living our lives in harmony with our planet's boundaries, with emphasis on wellbeing. That means reducing polluting and overproducing industries, ending exploitation and competition to live simpler lives with less.

³ Parrique, T. (2020). *The political economy of degrowth*. Université Clermont Auvergne [2017-2020]; Stockholms universitet, 2019. Economics and Finance. Used 24.05.2023. <https://theses.hal.science/tel-02499463/document>

⁴ Hickel, J. (2020). *Less is More*. United Kingdom: Penguin Random House. Used 24.05.2023. <https://blackbooksdotpub.files.wordpress.com/2021/08/jason-hickel-less-is-more-random-house-2020.pdf>

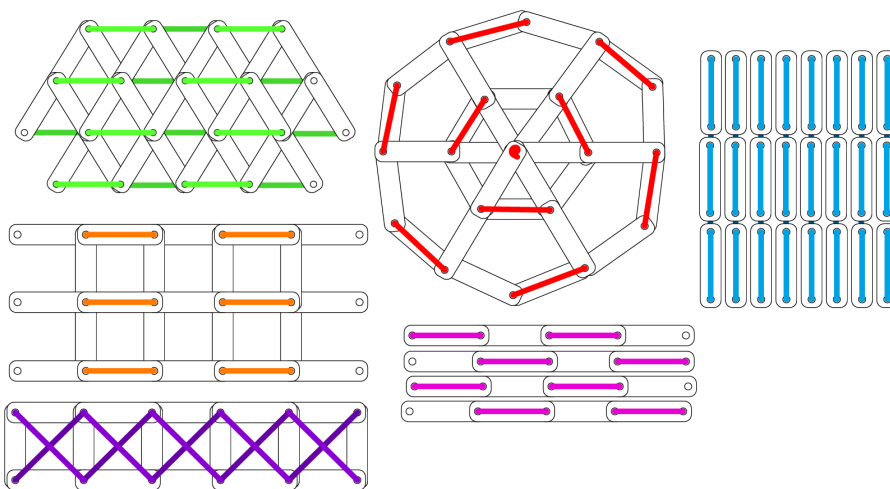
⁵ Parrique, T. (2020). *The political economy of degrowth*. Université Clermont Auvergne [2017-2020]; Stockholms universitet, 2019. Economics and Finance. Used 24.05.2023. <https://theses.hal.science/tel-02499463/document>

Collective Modularity

With the research that I gathered I decided to start a project named “Collective Modularity”. **A project that implements the ideas of degrowth into the design process to create collectivity.** For the purpose of this project I organised craft workshops with the aim of co creating designs that are based around the given material.

Arranging open workshops gave this project a chance to gather participants from different occupations and backgrounds. This in return means that they had a different perspective to craft which made this project really interesting to me, because I could not anticipate the outcome. At the same time these workshops were a place in which participants could slow down from their everyday lives and let their creativity flow. **This project aims to increase the do-it-yourself knowledge, to remove the fear of the unknown.**

Materials for the workshops were collected in collaboration with two Estonian factories – Haine OÜ and Skinexs OÜ, of which the first company manufactures shoelaces and ribbons and the second is a leather tannery. Both companies gave me their production leftover materials. Using leftovers is important in my project because of the reduction of production aspects in degrowth. That means no additional resources were used to create the workshops. Leather leftovers were die cut into small details to have as little scraps as possible. Using identical details gives the workshop participants an opportunity to create their own rhythm in patterns and gives everybody the same starting point. Which could be weaving, knotting or however they see fit.



Possible ways of arranging the details.

These details are like modules that can be added and taken apart again, as there is no glue or stitches used that would prevent it otherwise. This means that participants can later untangle their projects and turn them into something new.

I prepared hundreds of leather details and a few round leather pieces to use as a base to grow their patterns onto. At the time of writing I have held two workshops with 10 participants. The groups were kept small because I was unsure about how much managing this type of workshop needed. Now I can say that the groups could have been bigger but at the same time a small group gives an opportunity for an open conversation without feeling crowded. During the workshops I intentionally did not give the participants any inspiration or input on what they should make, just that their project should fit in the 2,5h timeframe.

As a conclusion every participant made some kind of a piece like a reusable bottle holder, bag, a plant hanger or developed their own pattern out of the modules. To gather all the different techniques that were created during the workshops I constructed a voluminous basket using them. During the workshop I noticed that some of the participants started to overthink and wanted to make something great with their first try. This held them back from really exploring the materials and left them unsatisfied with the outcome in the end. I feel like this realisation goes together with my research as competing with others or ourselves will take away the joyfulness of spontaneity and keep us from being happy.



Outcomes of the workshops.

Kokkuvõte

Minu bakalaureusetöö “Kollektiivne modulaarsus” eesmärgiks oli kanda tasaarengu liikumisest pärit mõtteid edasi disainiprotsessi, et luua kollektiivselt materjalist lähtuvaid disainilahendusi. Selle saavutamiseks korraldasin käsitöö töötubasid, milles osalejad kasutasid jääkmaterjale, et luua väikeaksessuaare kasutades enda kohapeal välja töötatud mustreid. Töötubadega soovisin vähendada isetegemisega seonduvat hirmu ja pakkuda osalejatele hetk, mil olla loovad ja eemalduda igapäeva toimetustest. Kasutatavateks materjalideks olid paelajäägid ettevõttelt Haine OÜ ja nahajäägid ettevõttelt Skineks OÜ. Jääkide kasutamine on selles projektis väga olulisel kohal, sest tasaarengu üheks ideeks on tootmise vähendamine ja olemasolevatele ressurssidele kasutuse leidmine. Nahajääkidest konstrueerisin identsed detailid, mis on justkui moodulid, mida saab seada oma äranägemise järgi, ilma et peaks muretsema tagajärgede pärast – need saab soovi korral lihtsalt lahti harutada.

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