

## Konstfack's research strategy 2016 - 2018

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### Introduction

#### **Views on research. Konstfack's direction and structure**

Research is a cornerstone for the development of society whereby new knowledge is created and developed. Through research the untested is examined, new methods are tried out and new forms of cooperation between knowledge areas are established. The 2014 government policy statement stated that society needs “not only economic growth but democratic growth as well. This requires arts and culture that are open and outspoken, and independent artists”. Artistic exploration is therefore an important component in the sustainable development of society.

Art's creative force, with its capacity for imagination, experimentation and examination, challenges human perceptions and senses. Research on artistic grounds has something in common with all research in that it establishes chains of questions; that every question posed opens up new questions. The freedom of art is intimately connected to its insistence on interpretability and freedom of interpretation – that the public discourse is open and moves forward without closure.

Konstfack's research seeks greater understanding and deeper knowledge in terms of practices within the realm of design, art, crafts, visual communication, visual arts education and other aesthetic forms of knowledge. The overall goal is to, through uniting the practices of making and creating with advanced epistemological perspectives, contribute to a radical rethinking of the relationship individual-society-environment, something that the transition to a more sustainable society requires.

Konstfack's research on artistic grounds is based on the power of imagination – artistic, practical, social and political. The power of imagination is a key quality and driving force in all artistic activities and is tied to both imaginative zeal as well as critical thinking and the ability to propose solutions. For research, this capacity is key in the rethinking of concepts, methods, norms and contexts and can give rise to alternative expressions, models, relations and visions. Research thus has the ability to provide new perspectives on societal challenges and thereby clarify and propose options for the future. These must be sustainable from a social, planetary, economic and cultural standpoint, which places high demands on cooperative ability given that many of our contemporary challenges are by nature open, complex, dynamic and interconnected.

Research at Konstfack is pursued based on a view of knowledge and learning in which methods and theoretical perspectives are based on both artistic and scientific research practices. This collaboration provides access to theoretical and methodological resources with exceptionally diverse perspectives which makes Konstfack particularly suited to formulate and work with research issues and contexts beyond traditional boundaries. The fact that theoretical and practical knowledge *do* different things

and can be used in *different* ways to examine one and the same issue is central to Konstfack's overall research and knowledge production. A focus on making and rethinking entails an opening for experimentation, alternative narratives and untried actions, which in turn connects the research with theories and practices in other fields, such as the humanities and social sciences, the natural sciences and society as a whole.

In the practices of making and creating, thought and action are united. There is a major challenge in contributing to the development of practical knowledge, where aesthetic knowledge and artistic methods are articulated, explored, verbalised and theorised. These forms of knowledge emerge and are made available – both for development and for critical scrutiny – not least in collective learning situations.

This radical rethinking means that Konstfack's research critically examines both the foundation on which Konstfack's subjects lie as the expression they take on. An in-depth, thorough knowledge of the subject provides a better preparation for cooperation with other research fields, both nationally and internationally, which is a prerequisite for well-articulated and relevant teaching and research. This endeavour encompasses both a deeper understanding of subject-specific problems and the implementation of projects with a direct link to society.

Active between and beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries and therewith driven by a strong social and cultural commitment, research at Konstfack is carried by a strong innovative force. This research works openly and exploratively with other disciplines. Part of this development is the establishment of relationships with other research cultures and collaborations with actors within culture, science, business and within the public sector and organisations. One absolute prerequisite for these partnerships and relationships is that the freedom and integrity of the research is not compromised by short-sighted and simplistic utilitarian perspectives.

## **Organisation of research directions**

In order to consolidate Konstfack's current research and to allow larger, more focused endeavours, the research has been organised into thematic directions. They relate to the main subjects at Konstfack, but are department-wide in nature. The directions are formulated based on the competence and interests that exist among the researchers and provide a framework for research projects on both artistic and scientific grounds. Currently, the research areas are *Design Driven and Creative Knowledge Production*, *Material Culture*, *Narrative Processes* and *Visual Culture and Learning*.

## **The relationship between education, subject development and research**

The relationship between research and education at the first and second-cycle levels at Konstfack are mutual and multifaceted. Subject development within the study programmes is necessary for the research at Konstfack. It should be strengthened, while at the same time the research shall have a greater influence on the education. Research influence in the education can mean that theories and methods are able to be implemented in investigative processes and that research opens up new questions and investigations within the education. Subject development within the education finds itself in a continuum with respect to research, for example through the development of methods in workshops, conceptual innovations and aesthetic strategies which research can help to explore and understand.

Another aspect of the relationship between education, subject development and research has an education policy dimension: ensuring that all individuals being educated on artistic grounds also have the opportunity to develop artistically at a high level.

## **The doctoral student programme Art, Technology and Design (KTD)**

Since 2014, Konstfack, together with the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH), run the doctoral student programme Art, Technology and Design (KTD). This doctoral programme subject is formed in dynamic meetings between both artistic and scientific approaches and between three different perspectives: art, technology and design. The programme is fundamentally interdisciplinary through

its focus on perspective meetings and concrete materialisation. A critically analysing approach is applied in both material and performative experiments as well as in discursive investigations. The transdisciplinary potential is strong and is further strengthened through cooperation with external actors.

The KTD programme's overall objective is in line with Konstfack's direction and goals: uniting research and education in respect of sustainable societal development and the transition required by such a development, with a radical rethinking of the relationship individual-society-environment. A broad international network of contacts contributes to international perspectives, and courses from other universities can be integrated into the doctoral student's study plan.

### **Strategy for a strengthened and expanded research environment**

Research today represents an important and vital part of Konstfack's activities. The research environment provides a common framework for research projects at Konstfack that have their focus areas/affiliations within the humanities and artistic research. The research environment shall reflect Konstfack's unique potential – its combination of unique workshops and vibrant intellectual environment. The environment shall be characterised by openness and a continuous exchange between the projects and the research specialisations.

In the coming period, we primarily want to strengthen the research profile that has been established and is expressed in this strategy and implement it in a stronger and expanded international research environment. The KTD programme will continue to be a key part of this environment.

An increase in Konstfack's basic funding for research is the single most important factor in building a stronger, expanding and integrated researcher and research environment. In anticipation of such a notification from the government, the following activities are prioritised within the framework of current financing:

- provide doctoral students a prominent role in the research environment and the opportunity to make an impact both in the education and in higher seminars
- link several externally funded research projects to Konstfack
- ensure that more of the current employees are given support and encouragement to contribute to research
- increased participation in international research projects and networks
- strengthen the seminar culture at Konstfack in order to further stimulate the individual programmes
- strengthen the relationship between education at the first and second-cycle level and research in order to keep abreast of the artistic and research developments within each subject/area (and utilise the research in first-cycle studies)
- strengthen the peer review culture at the school, for example, through invited experts and external assessors, and establish various forms of seminars where ongoing research projects are presented and discussed
- expand the internal supervision competence for our third-cycle studies with an increased number of senior researchers and internal continuing professional development
- maintain the current level of doctoral students and admit new ones to the KTD programme
- in order to allow for the extension of fixed-term appointments in accordance with clear criteria and, where necessary, for Konstfack's research environment, offer transition to permanent positions for the purpose of maintaining researcher expertise.

In the event of increased basic funding, we also want

- research time to be introduced in both existing appointments and in the case of new recruits as a natural part of most positions.
- to increase the number of doctoral students

- to invest in and provide support to employees' high-quality research proposals and establish research networks.
- to strengthen research communication and relations with other research cultures as well as increase partnerships with other actors within education, culture, science, business and within the public sector and other organisations, nationally and internationally.

## Own degrees

Konstfack wants to work to ensure that the basic funding for research increases substantially. These grants are important to the national development of artistic research and critical to the building and profiling of the research environment at Konstfack. An increase would enable an expansion of doctoral education with the unique subject breadth and artistic cutting-edge offered by Konstfack. This in turn strengthens the relationship between education at the first and second-cycle level and research, provides greater scope for cooperation and will eventually lead to our own degree-awarding powers.

Awarding our own doctoral degrees is a necessary part of Konstfack's efforts to create a unified education and research environment in order to maintain a high national and international level within our subject areas. The research environment would then adequately support and develop the university's study programmes, while at the same time Konstfack can contribute to Sweden's international appeal for creative and innovative people within the field of visual art and design.

## Conclusion

Konstfack's strategy for the development of our research is in line with what is described as desirable in *Designed Living Environment: A New Policy for Architecture, Form and Design, SOU 2015:88*, and *the Swedish Research Council's Artistic Research – A Subject Overview 2014*. Both emphasise the importance of the development of research within the fields of visual art, design and form.

Konstfack's hope is to, through uniting the practices of making and creating with advanced epistemological perspectives, essentially be able to contribute to a radical rethinking of the relationship individual-society-environment, something that the transition to a more sustainable society requires.