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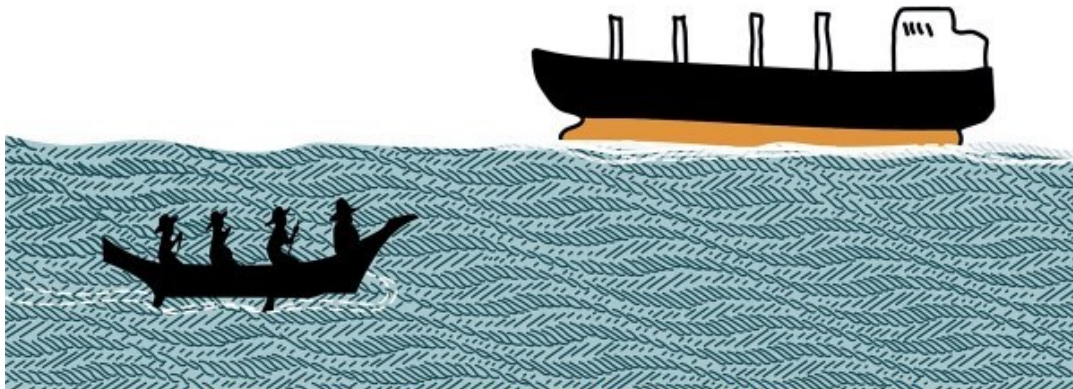
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The Social Fabric: Deep Local to Pan Global



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Co-creating Craft; Australian Designers meet Artisans in India

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Abstract

There is no word for design in India, creativity and making are intertwined. Craft and culture are inseparable, yet craft practice has become both a cultural and increasingly financial activity. The income from crafts in India is estimated to be only second to agriculture, yet many artisans still live in poverty. Precedents for designers working with artisans in India to develop products for both local and global markets have proven successful. Different types of co-creation (sometimes called co-design) activities have been documented between both local designers and local artisans, and, between foreign designers and local artisans. Although the outcomes of such collaborations may be new products, few of these projects considered the development of long-term livelihood opportunities for the Artisans. Fewer still propose respect for the skill and identity of the artisan as key objectives. This paper will discuss findings from a study investigating opportunities for different types of designer and artisan engagement via co-creation. The study was comprised of a review of Designer-Artisan co-design precedents and a series of interviews with Artisans in India. Findings from the juxtaposition of the precedents study to the interview results, revealed a series key objectives and concerns the Artisan's held that had been previously under reported in literature. Including, but not limited to, recognition and respect of their skill, desire for creativity and intrinsic relationship between a sense of self-identity, cultural-identity and craftwork. Therefore, based on these findings, a new framework for understanding the potential co-creation opportunities for Designer-Artisan collaboration was developed. Inspired by Human Centered (HCD) and Socially Responsible Design (SRD) approaches, this model identifies different types of co-creation interactions, each requiring the designer and artisan to play different roles in developing livelihood opportunities through craft practice without sacrificing artisan empowerment or culture.

Introduction

Craft is considered in India as an important cultural and in contemporary times, source of income. There has been a significant shift from craft as a cultural pursuit to something more, a means to earn a living. Interesting, the handmade historically was significantly valued in Indian culture, with artisan and client relationships being a lifelong engagement.¹ However increased markets sizes, competition from mass produced products, middle men and increasing distance from direct interaction with the urban consumer is causing a disconnect between artisan's knowledge of their end consumer and their work.

Historically Artisans had a clear connection to their "market" or the consumer of their goods and they used this understanding to make products that they intrinsically knew their customers would like. In a village to village transaction this knowledge was easily transferred

¹ Katherine Bissett Johnson and David Moorehead, "Field Notes, Kutch India," (2014).

and incorporated into the innovation process in generating new craft products.² Crafts also result from a direct knowledge transfer from generation to generation and are the result of innovation through making.³

In India the crafts developed from the production of utilitarian objects that were then ornamented for aesthetic appeal.⁴ Historically crafts were handed down through family units, almost three quarters of artisans work as family units, and as many attribute their occupation to family learnt skills. Artisans were historically chartered with the need to create designs and motifs that were of significance to their communities, however this direct relationship between artisan and consumer has been broken down and replaced by traders.⁵ These middle men which provide access 'to market knowledge, to design and technology, to finance and to channels of distribution. [However] each function can be exploitive or supportive.'⁶

Consumers of craft are broad and distant and the challenge for artisans is not the market threat but capacity of artisans to negotiate markets effectively whilst protecting their own interests.⁷ Globalization has eroded the local markets for crafts, as cheap mass-produced imports offer cheaper alternatives to the local consumer. Supply chains too have become less direct, so the connection between the maker and user is indirect, they no longer know each other and understand each other's needs and values. One remedy to address the decline of crafts is to look for alternative markets for craft objects, where they will be valued for the symbolic importance. This however also requires a modification of the craft object to appeal to the tastes of a urban consumers in predominantly western cities.^{8 9}

There is no doubt that there is a resurgence for the respect for the handmade in the west, some authors suggesting that this is a search for authenticity in a mass-produced world, supported by a shift to ethical purchasing balanced with a desire for knowledge about the maker of the craft artefact.¹⁰ However there are two issues for artisans in India in engaging with this new market. Firstly, many of the craft-based products are by their very nature *too traditional* in their aesthetic to appeal to a broad global market. Secondly by changing the aesthetic to a more westernized aesthetic, the connection to the cultural history (the tradition) of the artefact may be lost. Additionally, the artisan is subverted to making products with which they may have little emotional connection.¹¹

² Harita Kapur and Suruchi Mittar, "Design Intervention & Craft Revival," *International Journal of Scientific Research Publications* 4, no. 10 (2014): 2.

³ Ken Botnick and Ira Raja, "Subtle Technology: The Design Innovation of Indian Artisanship," *Design Issues* 27, no. 4 (2011): 43.

⁴ Kapur and Mittar, "Design Intervention & Craft Revival," 2.

⁵ Ibid 3.

⁶ Ashoke Chatterjee, "Can Our Future Be Handmade?" 5th Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay Memorial Lecture, October 29, 2014," (2014): 17.

⁷ Ibid 19.

⁸ Kevin Murray, "Outsourcing the Hand: An Analysis of Craft-Design Collaborations across the Global Divide," *Craft and Design Enquiry* 2 (2010): 62.

⁹ Kapur and Mittar, "Design Intervention & Craft Revival," 1.

¹⁰ Mary Littrell, "Fair Trade and Artisans," in *Handbook of Research on Fair Trade*, ed. Laura T. Reynolds and Elizabeth A. Bennett, Cheltenham, UK Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar, (2015): 458.

¹¹ Littrell "Fair Trade and Artisans," 459.

This paper will firstly review some of the design interventions found in literature that focus on co-design/co-creation, or collaboration between designers and artisans as a way to generate livelihood opportunities for the craft sector (predominantly between western designers and Artisans in developing countries) that are intended to address the issue of the decline of craft. Secondly, it will describe the perceived respective roles identified in these precedents for both artisan and designer in co-creation of craft as a source of livelihood. Thirdly, the paper will discuss the findings from a series of semi structured interviews with Artisan-Designers in India. Finally, the paper will discuss the juxtaposition of the precedents study to the interview results, proposing a new framework for understanding the potential co-creation opportunities for designer-artisan collaboration. Inspired by Human Centered (HCD) and Socially Responsible Design (SRD) approaches, this framework identifies different types of co-creation interactions, each requiring the designer and artisan to play different roles in developing livelihood opportunities through craft practice without sacrificing artisan empowerment or culture.

Precedents for artisan designer collaborations

As a remedy to the decline of craft in many countries, Craft Revival Trust/ UNESCO publication, *Designers meet Artisans* outlines several projects that are examples of where designers and artisans develop or co-design new products for new markets.¹² This publication suggests several different models for designer-artisan collaborations in both India and South America, concluding with a list of guidelines in how to undertake collaborations. These types of projects, whilst successful in the creation of new craft objects, go some way in the preservation of crafts and consider livelihoods but neglect the system of sales and markets required for the provision of real livelihood opportunities.

Co-design and Human Centered Design

Co-creation, in the discipline of design, is defined as a creative act that is shared. Co-design is defined as collective creativity as applied across the whole design process.¹³ Across all of the steams of co-creation (business, design and marketing), user-centricity is an essential parameter but is most evident in the design stream.¹⁴

In the artisan-designer co-design/co-creation relationship both stakeholders bring different roles to any collaboration, the designer bringing innovation and the artisan bringing a knowledge of tradition.¹⁵ Generally the literature suggests that designers act as the bridge between rural artisans and urban consumers and markets and there is a translation of values across cultures and communities where craft traditions are interpreted in new ways.^{16 17}

¹² Craft Revival Trust, "Designers Meet Artisans, a Pratical Guide," New Dehli: UNESCO, (2005): 20-111.

¹³ Elizabeth B. N. Sanders and Pieter Jan Stappers, "Co-Creation and the New Landscapes of Design," *CoDesign* 4, no. 1 (2008): 6.

¹⁴ Rex Degnegaard, "Co-Creation, Prevailing Streams and a Future Design Trajectory," *CoDesign*, 10, no. 2 (2014): 104.

¹⁵ deNicola and deNicola, "Rescue and Redemption, Design Schools, Traditional Craft and Nation-State in Contemporary India," 791-794.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Trust, "Designers Meet Artisans, a Pratical Guide," 4.

Review of precedents of designer-artisan co-creation in literature

We reviewed precedents of designers-artisan co-creation and identified several different types of engagement and correspondingly different and emerging roles for the both collaborators Artisan and Designer. These are summarized in Table 1 below.

Type of engagement	Description of project	Designer role	Artisan role	Citation
Straight Commissioning	Use Machine Embroidery to develop products for the west, artisan taught new skills	Creative control and specification of what and how to make the craft object	Skilled- producer	(Murray 2010)
Creative Development	Projects that encourage artisans creativity through ongoing engagement	Shared and collaborative creativity in what to make combined with ways to earn a livelihood	Artisan-producer	(Murray 2010)
Business Development	Re invigoration of a lost technique by the development of new products	Preservation of craft traditions and connection to ways to earn a livelihood	Artisan- creator-producer	(Tung 2012, Murray 2015, 2010, Trust 2005)
Up skilling	Previously unskilled people are taught craft techniques to produce craft objects	Education and income are linked in the production of craft objects	Semi- skilled producer	(Littrell and Frater 2013)
Creation of greater community links and artisan status through co-creation projects	Development of new glass bead products did not translate to new markets but did create better community links and engagement with youth	Designer- researcher	Community member and teacher	(Zulaikha 2015)
Development of new products through collaborations with Design Schools	Design students are mandated to work with crafts people to develop new craft objects whilst learn about socially responsible design.	Designer learns about traditions and Artisan learns about new designs and/or markets	Artisan- teacher-collaborator	(Ghai , Trust 2005)
Kala Raksha Vidhalya	School to teach artisans to be designer Trust to record and preserve traditions and be a source of inspiration	Designer as teacher and mentor	Master artisan- designer-sample maker-innovator Artisan is innovative within the tradition of their craft	(Vidhyalaya 2016, Littrell and Frater 2013)
Somaia Kala Vidya	School to teach artisan-designers to be business people	Designer as the bridge to the market	Master artisan- designer-innovator- business person artisan run business	(Vidya 2016)
Ongoing Business Development	Ongoing collaboration between professional designers and block printing community	Designer as co-collaborator, access to the market	Artisan- producer	(deNicola and deNicola 2012)
Khamir NGO supported design of new products with associated retail outlet	Support and strengthen the artisan craft traditions of Kutch, provide a source of income, ongoing support from the organisation	Creative control and specification of what and how to make the craft object, primarily related to the traditions of the region	Artisan-producer	(Kachhh Heritage)
Industree Crafts (Social Enterprise blended from For Profit retail and Not-for Profit Artisan capacity building	Artisans are organised into Self Help Groups that received capacity building support., trade and produce. Industree buys direct from SHG to ensure they maximize their margin. Targets local urban markets	Products are designed for Artisans based on price point and market analysis to maximise direct payment to the artisan, targeting repeat purchases in home wares, apparel and food for local Urban Markets.	Artisan-producer-self-help – group forms mini enterprise	(Miller et al. 2009)
Rope International Centralized Manufacturing in rural areas, working with skilled artisans who are then encouraged to study and up skill.	Use technology and professional management to control production for international markets	Designer	Artisan-producer	(International 2016)

Table 1; Review of precedents of artisan-designer collaborations identifying the type of engagement and roles for designers and artisans.¹⁸

Although all of the precedents sought to the improve the prospects for craftspeople, only a few were taking what is called a Human Centered Design (HCD) approach in tackling the

¹⁸ The references for the citations in Table 1 can be found in the bibliography.

issues of poverty from the perspective of the person at the center of the issue, seeking solutions that were desirable, viable and feasible.¹⁹ Hence our research question was to seek to better understand the artisan's view of engagement with designers, specifically co-creation and how they saw such collaborations in relation to their own work, innovation and future livelihood. We speculated that by applying an HCD approach and thus viewing the problem from the artisan's perspective, new types of co-creation settings would be able to be identified.

The Study - Semi Structured Interviews with Master Artisans in Kutch, India

The authors travelled to Kutch and visited the 10 Interviewees in their homes with a translator who was well known to the artisans. All of the interviewees had previously undertaken a design course at Kala Raksha (KRV) and were completing a business course as Somaiya Kala Vidya (SKV). All of the interviewees were broadly categorized as textile artisans. For a large part of their business course they had worked for 11 months with a mentor-designer on the conceptualization and making of a collection of textile pieces. They were 'living the experience' of co-creation with a designer.²⁰ There were four men and six women interviewed. The age range of the women was from approximately 17 to 40 years, the men ranged in age from 20 to 40 years. Three of the men had run a business with some success previously, prior to undertaking the course at SKV. All of the women were in the process of developing their business and developing an understanding of how a business worked, although 2 interviewees had worked to develop samples at KRV.

The variants of age and gender and craft, older men had run a business previously whereas for women this was a new transition from craft as cultural pursuit to a business. Gender differences were significant in relation to craft as a business, culturally men were seen as income generators, whilst the women were seen as generating supplementary income.²¹ The sample size was small as these were the first group of artisans to undertake the SKR business course. The study was not intended to represent all artisans but rather investigate the opinion of the Artisan-Designers, those master artisans who had completed a design course, were engaged in learning about business, and had recently worked with a designer, in either a co-creation project or had the experience of being mentored to complete a textile collection. Although the authors acknowledge that gender differences impact upon work, the interview data was not separated into gender categories.

Findings

As the interviews were semi structured, many of the original questions were dynamically revised and adapted as the discussions progressed, enabling broader conversations and engagement with emergent relevant topics. When the interviews were completed, the notes from the interviews were transcribed, reviewed and tabulated into four categories derived from key words and emergent themes. The title and description of the categories are as follows:

¹⁹ Ideo.org, *The Field Guide to Human Centered Design*, USA, (2015): 14 <https://www.ideo.com/post/design-kit>

²⁰ Bissett Johnson and Moorehead, "Field Notes, Kutch India."

²¹ Ibid.

Category 1 - Designer Artisan Co-creation/Collaboration Attributes

All of the interviewees spoke about the relationship with the mentor, their expectations and issues. They identified that co-creation with a designer could be inspirational, that they could help selling craft and advise on marketing, branding and inspire confidence.

Category 2 - Aspirations for Craft Business

All of the interviewees had aspirations for craft as a business. These findings focused on the application of knowledge from the business course. Things such as production management, ordering materials, working with a theme, developing a collection and pricing based on costing. How to build ownership and motivation for the workers and the importance of learning English and tailoring were also considered as important.

Category 3 - Selling Crafts

How does the artisan approach the market now and how would they like to do so? The degree of experience of selling crafts varied across the interviewees as some were new to the experience, whilst others had been running a business. Generally, there were gender differences in that the male interviewees had the expectation of earning, whilst the women were more modest in their expectations of making a living from craft. E-commerce was considered an option, however there were concerns about Intellectual Property, copying and importantly lack of attribution and connection the Artisan's personal brand identity.

Category 4 - Artisan Attitudes to Craft as a Business

What were the opportunities identified for the future or the ambitions? All the interviewees were aspirational in their ambitions for their work, this could be attributed to the fact that they had sought education in business skills to this end. Many saw opportunities for their craft as a business in positive light, whilst recognizing the difficulties of engaging with a broad range of customers, concerns about intellectual property and the restrictions of living and working in remote locations.

All of the interviewees reflected on a change in their work/business practice since commencing the business course at SKV, from planning and costing through the development of a collection of products, innovation through the use of a theme, or a change in the way they used materials and colours. This revealed that the SKV business course had allowed them to change their work practice.

The interview findings showed that these Artisans were empowered to create new products and to approach new markets. They no longer needed the designer as creative collaborator but rather a mentor for business and marketing. All of the interviewees were aspirational in respect to their craft work and their ability to sell larger volumes to a broader client base. This supported the key theme that was repeatedly stated, that the Artisan-Designers wanted to engage with new markets and to find ways to market themselves and their work.

Discussion

Although there are many precedents describing co-creation projects with artisans in India, most involve the design of an artefact for an artisan to make and sell. Few of these projects look at the various actors and stakeholders in the whole value chain from raw materials to customer/user. Although there are various models for artisan-designer collaboration, often as Murray articulated, the voice of the artisan is missing from these accounts.²² Generally the designer's skill/role in these collaborations is interpreting the market and collaboration on development of new products, utilizing the artisans' creativity, conceptualization and making. To act as the bridge between artisan and market requires long term engagement and a deep respect and understanding for tradition and identity.^{23 24}

Findings from the interviews in the study define the artisan's key objectives and concerns, including recognition and respect of their skill, desire for creativity and intrinsic relationship between a sense of self and craftwork. Designers are well placed to collaborate with artisans, but boundaries and respect for the artisan co-collaborator must be entrenched in this process, as roles and skill sets for the respective collaborators change over time. Bringing products to market is a complex system; designing of the product is only one part of the problem in making craft activity a source of livelihood. Textiles particularly are interrelated to fashion and interior trends in both style and colourways, hence new products and collections need to be continually developed.

The issues facing the craft sector decline in India, linked with poverty, need to be considered more broadly than just through the development of new products. A Socially Responsible Design (SRD) approach looks to build 'capacity not dependency' and takes into account the user in their cultural, economic, social and environmental contexts.²⁵ We therefore propose that a way to address the issue of poverty could be to follow the tenets of SRD in seeking to address the needs for both individual and community empowerment.

New framework for artisan-designer co-creation

From a development perspective, the potential for designer-artisan co-creation suggests the possibility for far more than the co-design of new products, it suggests the opportunity for the fostering of an approach that co-creates value for all the stakeholders or actors involved in the business of craft. Additionally, we suggest that the roles of the respective collaborators will change over time due to increased experience and the cyclical process of product development.

A juxtaposition of the findings from precedents and interviews in the study suggest a co-creation framework where designer-artisan collaboration can be many different things. Therefore, there are multiple co-creation settings, each with the respective roles of each participant changing in relation to the co-creation activity. Table 2 shows our framework for

²² Murray, "Outsourcing the Hand: An Analysis of Craft-Design Collaborations across the Global Divide," 71.

²³ deNicola and deNicola, "Rescue and Redemption, Design Schools, Traditional Craft and Nation-State in Contemporary India," 804.

²⁴ Trust, "Designers Meet Artisans, a Practical Guide," 4.

²⁵ Carla Cipolla and Roberto Bartholo, "Empathy or Inclusion: A Dialogical Approach to Socially Responsible Design," *International Journal of Design*, vol 8, 2 (2012): 90

artisan-designer co-creation settings taking into the account the many roles played by both the designer and the artisan in product development and in craft as a business. With this framework we propose taking a step further than the designer as a bridge to market role. Additionally, we argue that the real design problem may be in developing new opportunities for livelihoods which encompasses many different aspects of craft as a business. For example, the master Artisan-Designers that were interviewed viewed themselves as Artisan-designers/business people, as per co-creation activity- C in the table below, thus any co-creation activity with a designer is focused on guidance and alignment with markets and customers, in addition to the development of new products.

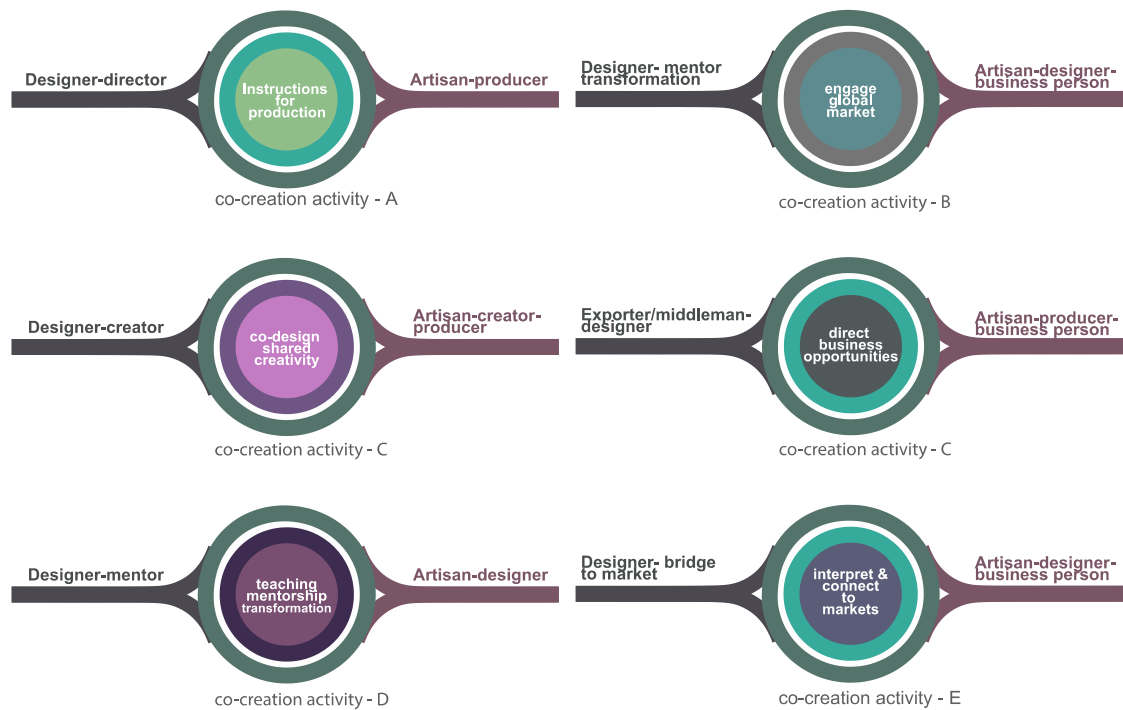


Table 2. Description of the various co-creation settings for designer-artisan collaboration showing the differing respective roles for the designer and artisan (diagram by Katherine Bissett-Johnson © 2018)

Conclusions

Interestingly, despite India’s fame in respect for crafts, many artisans are now living in poverty for a variety of reasons, so hence craft, and the artisans who desire to make a living from craft, became a focus for a study inspired by the premise of Human Centered Design (HCD), seeking to understand artisan’s perspective. There are many precedents in literature describing designers co-designing/co-creating with artisans as a means to sustain craft traditions. Further studies are needed to review long-term co-creation collaborations to determine if they do in fact translate to improved livelihood opportunities. The interviews in this study focused on the co-creation experiences of Artisan-designers, who saw craft as a business and who were also aspirational in respect to what and how they might connect with potential consumers/customers. It would be interesting to see their viewpoints and experience some time after completing their business course.

Our framework for Co-creation suggests that designers participating in co-creation with artisans need to see their role as more than the co- conceptualizer of the craft object, but

instead as a contributor towards empowering artisans to earn a living from craft thus providing knowledge, guidance and support in the co-creation of products and the development of sustainable business practices that can evolve with changing market demands. Further to this, our framework considers the product development process as a series of co-creation settings, and as part of a bigger system of commerce and supply chain, requiring the designer to be a facilitator in the development of livelihood opportunities whilst remaining mindful of the artisan's own culture and tradition. Perhaps the issue of livelihoods from craft is more complex than co-creation with designers alone can solve?

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