

FROM 'HERITAGE ADEPTS' TO HISTORICAL
RECONSTRUCTIONISTS: OBSERVATIONS ON
CONTEMPORARY ESTONIAN MALE HERITAGE-
BASED ARTISANRY

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ABSTRACT

On the basis of ethnographic fieldwork, conducted between 2007 and 2013, the authors analyse the communities of male artisans that have had the most significant impact on the development of contemporary Estonian handicraft. A wide range of artisans were surveyed in the course of this research, from professionals who earn a living from handicraft to amateurs, small enterprises and handicraft instructors. The authors concentrate on the motifs and background of different categories of handicraft agent. Details of handicraft practice such as mastering specific items, local peculiarities and materials used will be also explored. The analysis is predominantly based on the artisans' views on proper ways of making handicraft items, their marketing strategies and the needs of developing their skills. The study* demonstrates that artisanal initiatives support the material reproduction of cultural locations through constant renewal of heritage ideology and practice.

KEYWORDS: crafts • artisans • heritage • hobby • woodwork

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INTRODUCTION

Men's artisanal work and crafts have constituted an important domain of traditional peasant culture in Estonia. Although today crafts have lost their former central function in folk culture, they still exist and develop, covering new areas of cultural practice. Many fields of local traditional knowledge are characteristic of certain societal groups, often distributed between gender and generation. Specialists in certain areas have above average experience in a given field (Ellen and Harris 2003: 4–5). Artisanal work and the traditional skills related to it thus change their functional perspective and are adapted to contemporary social practices in a characteristic way. Contemporary artisanal work reproduces locality as a relational and contextual phenomenon instead of the traditional understanding of it simply as a scalar or spatial entity. Maintaining specific elements of cultural diversity enables locality to “survive in a dramatically delocalized world” (Appadurai 1997: 178). At the same time, crafts maintain certain functional patterns as specific knowledge transmission, communal networking, recognising a certain set of rules and forms of reciprocity (cf. Applebaum 1987). Negotiating traditions is related not only to communication of awareness among the artisan community but also to “shaping the character and quality of tourist experience” (Silberman 2013: 213).

Crafts as part of cultural heritage are related to problems of the tourist industry and sustainable development. In the domain of heritage, sustainable development goes beyond economic consideration and focuses on cultural as well as social continuity as it relates to local communities (Silberman 2013: 216–219; Labadi and Gould 2015: 196–199, 202–204, 210–211). The idea of crafts as resource for culture-specific, heritage-bound development was also an implicit trope of early Estonian ethnographers.

Estonian handicraft began to be deemed valuable and culturally noteworthy in its own right from the beginning of the ethnographic and folklore collecting campaigns of the 19th century. State support for these efforts was received thanks to the home interior design movement of the 1930s. Folk crafts were seen as a national romanticist effort, while economic arguments were viewed as secondary. The Estonian National Museum (ENM) influenced society significantly by its initial and primary focus on handicraft-related items. ENM collections and research efforts departed from an ideology that focussed on traditional material culture; yet, at the same time, they became the basis for the realisation that artisanal skills had heritage value (Manninen 1925; 1931; 1933; Ränk 1934). In 1929 the Central Association for the Promotion of Estonian Home Economics was founded. By the end of the 1930s, the idea of using handicrafts as part of school programmes and in youth work had become ingrained; a number of manuals and guidelines for practitioners were also published.

In the Soviet era, the study of old-fashioned material culture and the closely related artisanal and handicraft sphere were still the backbone of ethnography (see Viires 1993 for more on this). However, amid the scarcity of post-war life, making one's own handicrafts also became a practical need. One could not get by without homemade clothes and other items. Handicrafts started developing new aesthetic value only in the 1960s

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and 1970s. The women's handicraft movement kept on expanding, and a great many handicraft circles were formed. Their activity and the advent of an active post-war generation of artists gave the basis for the creation of the Uku enterprise in 1966. Uku produced items that were inspired by traditional handicraft. Uku employed many amateur craftswomen and made it possible for them to work at home, which suited artisans with children well. Those who had perfected their skills were called masters. Uku's products became rapidly popular because of their high quality. (Puusemp 1996)

Meanwhile, male artisanal work focused on fashioning household implements and repairing and improving factory-made products. As interviews conducted in Viljandi County between 2008 and 2010 showed, male handicrafts were seen as located in a unique economic sphere based on the distinctive work of a single skilled artisan, a field pursued separately from a person's day job. Many professions that might be viewed as artisanal or specialised manual labour today – furniture makers, masons, well construction, etc. – were not seen as such but rather as simple and natural 'men's work'. At the same time, this work was in high demand, governed by oral agreements between individuals; the hourly wage could often be many times higher than working for the state (see Shlapentokh 1989; Rennu 2007; Parts et al. 2011). Ethnologist Kirsti Jõesalu (2004) has described how niche work became engrained, i.e. the focus of activity spread beyond the main day job. In this context such private income became financially even more important than a day job for an adept craftsman (apart from earning the artisan social capital). Such work began to be equated often with one's main line of work (FM Rennu 2012: E. K.). Niche activity took place in the public social sphere and preconditions for working in the area were often created by the state and with state funding; however, the goal of taking part in such activities was often self-centred and did not conform to the communist social ideal (Jõesalu 2004: 160). Cases of primary job materials and equipment being used elsewhere for private interests were not unusual and the bosses at the main job always accepted this practice, up to a certain point (FM Tomasberg 2010: A. V.; Parts et al. 2011).

Soviet ideology had a role to play here. Old-fashioned work methods were considered inefficient and out-dated, and this kept the relevant skills from being passed on to the next generation. Examples of the contrary can be found in the Estonian Swedish community, where heritage skills were considered important outside the traditional cultural context. Respondents with Estonian Swedish roots said that the men who moved from coastal Swedish villages in western Estonia to Swedish cities during World War II continued to fashion wooden spoons and other kitchen utensils themselves. These skills were passed on to their sons and the relevant wooden utensils are still kept as family heirlooms from times long past. The family oral storytelling tradition is also a clear identity marker – older people are glad to describe how handicrafts were made and an unabashed sense of pride can be discerned. (FM: Tomasberg 2012: S. A.; E. H.) Although in earlier decades research on male handicraft was a major topic within ethnographic studies, during recent decades the theme has almost been abandoned by Estonian ethnologists and anthropologists. There is no research on post-Socialist developments of male handicraft although this period constitutes a unique era of practical folk culture. A few insights into the topic might be useful for understanding some aspects of grass-roots cultural developments in Estonia. A number of researchers have called the European boreal forest-belt cultures up to the watershed era of the 19th century the Wood

Age. Wood was used for construction, heating, tools and much more, for example tar making, conveyances, fence posts, etc. Woodworking was a universal handicraft skill. People tried to make most of their everyday tools and items by themselves. (See Viires 2000: 9) In this article, we will look primarily at woodworkers because wood-related handicrafts have traditionally constituted the core of Estonian male artisanal practice. We consider it illuminating to explore the current state of affairs in this formerly prominent domain of folk culture. We will deal with the use of other natural materials insofar as it serves the purpose of describing a specific artisan movement or its context.

Woodworking skills have also been handed down to today's generations in a few places in Estonia. Such an example is Avinurme in Ida-Viru County, where woodworking has been an important livelihood even as times have changed. In this region, handicraft skills have survived to such an extent that the Estonian Ministry of Culture has nominated Avinurme's woodworking as a candidate for the UNESCO list of intellectual heritage (see Elulaadikeskus).

Based on the notion of Roy Ellen and Holly Harris (2003), we, too, see the boundaries of male artisanal activity as being linked to experience recognised at the community level, including certain types of manual labour that have been regarded in the social consciousness as being male areas of activity. Although we know that today there are no longer clear gender roles with regard to working different materials or fields, this article will discuss men first and foremost. Women's handicrafts – due to their popularity, the teaching of textiles within vocational and higher education and community support – have become institutionalised forms of local handicraft. Men's areas have for various reasons not been included in the sociological sphere of interest and the relevant linkages have generally not been developed.¹ This led us to the idea of documenting the experience and observations of recent years in the field of male artisanal activity. The situation is also an intriguing one because women have been involved prominently in a number of areas of male artisanal work.

A noteworthy number of artisans in the field of male artisanal activity in Estonia are involved in woodworking (carpentry, joinery, log construction, boatbuilding, tar distilling), and to a lesser extent in working with metals, clay, leather, stone and other materials. Where possible, we gathered information by participatory observation, through open surveys, and semi-structured interviews. Interviews and conversations were conducted primarily at various public events – handicraft fairs and workshops where craftsmen sell their products and experiment with different techniques. Between these activities they found a few moments to discuss the contemporary practices of craftsmen. In recent years Liisa Tomasberg has been one of the organisers of St. Martin's Fair² and other handicraft festivals, competitions and workshops. Madis Rennu has organised several handicraft workshops through the Estonian NGO the *Haabjas* Society (*Eesti Haabjaselts*)³ and the University of Tartu Viljandi Culture Academy (VCA). He has conducted regular ethnographic fieldwork on this topic. Thus, the information for this article was gathered during the normal work process. During the 2009–2012 period, almost 100 short interviews were made in fieldwork organised by Rennu in the framework of the natural materials' project⁴ in different parts of Estonia. The majority of information concerning the craftsmen from Avinurme village was collected during a joint Estonian National Museum and University of Tartu fieldtrip in July and August of 2012. We have also used field data gathered by VCA students between 2008 and 2013 in various regions of Estonia where they interviewed 50 craftsmen.

In order to find information about the interviewees, we used community channels, including recommendations from master artisans and organisers of artisanal events. In many cases, information from the websites of the masters, companies and organisations was used as an additional source. If necessary, the information was also double-checked with the respondents by interviewing the relevant people by telephone or email.

In this paper, we follow several research questions. Firstly, we are interested in identifying male artisanal groups. We aim to explore the possibilities for amateur and professional artisans to make a living from their artisanal activity. We also take a selective look at the structure of certain individual artisans' and companies' products. In addition to this, we investigate the local particularities of our notional map of artisanal activity in Estonia and analyse the appearance of the most noteworthy artisans in various parts of the country. Our research also touches upon feedback from consumers and the potential sales success of products at the fairs, as well as the success of sales to foreign markets. We also study the prospects of the handicraft work, a need to pass on one's skills and to improve expertise through training. We will provide a general map of contemporary male artisanal activities in Estonia, and thus it will be possible to delve into the peculiarities of handicraft practice. Taking into account the state of the art in the field, we consider this approach appropriate in order to postulate an overall vision of this area of explored practice.

Our research methods are related to the increasing popularity of artisanal products in Estonia. In addition, the number of people involved in this field has increased rapidly over the last decade. This trend started with the spread of an eco-friendly ethos and as a protest against the influx of cookie-cutter, mass-produced products. Consumer interest in natural materials has inspired artisans to make more use of local materials. Several new organisations support sustainable renovation as well as traditional or ecological construction-related projects (for example, the Information Centre for Sustainable Renovation, and the Traditional Construction Society). New artisanal education opportunities have arisen in the state education system (among many others VCA, Olustvere School of Service and Rural Economics, and Haapsalu Vocational Education and Training Centre), as well as in the field of informal education (for example the Training Centre of the Estonian Folk Art and Craft Union, the Folk Costume Union NGO, Tartu and Tallinn Folk Universities). Organisations that study and promote traditional artisanal fields have also been established, such as the Haapsalu Coastal Swedish Museum, the Emajõgi River Barge Society (*Tartu Lodjakoda*), FDN Avinurme Cultural Heritage Centre (*Avinurme Elulaadikeskus*), the Historical Skills NGO (*Ajaloolised võtted*).

At first glance it seems that Estonia's modern handicraft movement has considerable momentum behind it. In order to remain aware of the problems in this field, we must first try to make an account of our research object and define its most characteristic qualities. The general timbre of this overview is accompanied by an effort to examine the structure of the artisanal landscape. We have notionally divided the subjects into three large groups: hobbyists, entrepreneurs and teachers/trainers; we have tried to find the most characteristic examples and the most active and distinctive trends in each group. We expect that these definitions and groups will be refined during future research, just as we cannot provide an exhaustive and final list of the people active in the field of male artisanal activity. We must acknowledge that this treatment will not come even close to covering all of the manifestations on the Estonian artisanal scene.

The fieldwork materials used in the article (denoted as FM) include longer interviews as well as data obtained in the course of personal correspondence. The name of the person who gathered the information, and the date and the initials of the source are given in the references in brackets (for example, FM Tomasberg 2012: E. H.). The fieldwork materials are in the possession of the authors.

HOBBYISTS

We define the hobbyists as amateur artisans whose main occupation and source of income stay outside the domain of handicrafts. We have distinguished four groups for analysis: chainsaw sculptors, individual master artisans, boat builders and historical reconstructionists. We aim to demonstrate that the social range of hobbyists is rather wide. In addition, we plan to sketch the different motivations and ideologies that support these hobbyist movements.

Chainsaw Sculptors

Chainsaw sculpting had become rather popular by 2010. The field remains in a blurred borderland of tradition-based handicraft and contemporary artistic expression. Although it seems that only the material – wood – connects sculptors vaguely to handicraft, we consider that they employ shared ideology with other hobbyists on the scene. In Estonia, people perceive a link between wood and cultural traditions as rather natural.

Enthusiasts meet each year in August at Varbola stronghold.⁵ Two men are considered the founders of the Wood Days festival (*Varbola Puupäevad*), the Vardi forest district head Toomas Ehrpais, and then Rapla County governor Kalle Talviste. The first part of Varbola Wood Days festival is a three-day sculpting event that ends on Friday evening and is followed by a fair on Saturday.

Ly Teder, who works near Olustvere Village in Viljandi County, learned her skills from her spouse, Raul, and the rest, says Ly, is pure artistry. The most important, she says, is to identify what motif is best suited for the particular piece of wood. Use of the natural form of the piece – knots, fissures, etc. – is a good idea, if not a direct requirement. She says that the work is so exciting that it forces the sculptor to test new motifs and species of wood. The most outstanding work by Ly and Raul Teder is a sculpture that is more than two-metre high and one-metre wide *Mulgi Man* (*'Mulgi Mees'*), in Abja-Paluoja on the Valga–Pärnu road. (FM Rennu 2010: L. T.) Chainsaw sculpting is also becoming a popular hobby among women on Hiiumaa island. Ivo Mänd has been sculpting wood since the mid-1990s. His daughter Triinu Mänd is also a well accomplished chainsaw sculptor who was initiated into the arcane world of wood sculpture in 2009.

There are a surprising number of women among the sculptors, which may appear unexpected at first glance. Although male artisans constitute the main trends of chainsaw sculpting, women have also become involved in the development of the craft in Estonia. Access of women to the field has increased over time, as chainsaws have

become lighter and more easily manageable. This also enables elaboration of more nuanced styles of sculpting. At the same time, male and female sculptors represent different approaches to the craft. Female masters design and finalise their sculptures more carefully while male masters primarily emphasise powerful messages that are often expressed through rough execution.

Individual Master Artisans and People with Heritage Skills

The ranks of artisans include many outstanding individuals whose skills are sufficient to operate as an entrepreneur but for whom their craft is nevertheless just a hobby or sideline. For instance, Andres Oreshkin from Valga County has won several Estonian artisan competitions. He makes mainly intarsia wood items.⁶ He works with several imported species and also makes his products without the use of machinery. Judging panels that have adjudicated his work have lauded his precision and exemplary design (FM Rennu 2010: L. T.). Oreshkin's other area of expertise is connected to making his own invented rhythmic instruments, and he has also presented the prototypes of these at competitions. (Pärändihoidja... 2012)

The term *pärandoskaja* (which translates roughly as 'heritage skill adept') was coined in 2008 by a working group in the native craft department at the VCA, who were carrying out research on male artisanal activity. The term indicates that an artisan has a high level of skill in some craft, recognition from the local community from where the skill originates, as well as a certain spark in the artisan's personal traits, and a social sustainability that goes hand in hand with interesting and distinctive master-level work but which is hard to put into words (Parts et al. 2009a). Why are adepts listed among other hobbyists? The adept does not need to be a master, but it is essential that he is proficient in the given skill, familiar with some segment of traditional technology to the point that he can utilise and pass on knowledge in practice. The most important component in recognition of an artisan as a heritage skill adept is the approval of the surrounding community. A prototypical meeting with an adept is characterised by the following excerpt from an interview with a resident of the Nõmme district of Tallinn:

An old man around 80 sits in front of the store and sells his wares, a broad smile on his face; he isn't a drunk or anything. He is a nice scrubbed-up elderly person selling brooms for a very low price. I have not used them, but I have a friend and he does this all the time. This old man has a little garden path made of paving slabs and he is always selling brooms and demonstrating them. He knows how to sweep and extols the virtues of his wares. And now this man also makes kids' brooms, tiny ones that are just right for a child, and he does a brisk business, for how can any adult buying a full-size broom say no to their kids? (FM Rennu 2010: L. T.)

The same informant says that his appearance does not indicate that he has been engaged in woodworking all his life, but that he is just a rural dweller who in his old age has brushed up on broom-making skills that he originally learned while herding animals in his youth (ibid.). A typical male adept tends to be very reticent and speaks modestly about his skills, deprecating them as just "being handy", which all males are, and not claiming that it is artisanry. Yet this skill very much involves specific foreknowledge

and experience that it would be valuable to record and share with the broader public (Parts et al. 2009b; Parts et al. 2011).

At the same time, an adept can be an active participant and trainer in the artisan and crafts movement. Margus Rebane is proficient in techniques of weaving reeds and “cutting fieldstone” (as he asks that the artisanal stone engraving be termed), and he also has a keen interest in leading various workshops. Margus’ workshops have become popular among artisanal aficionados because of his open and candid communication style and exciting ideas for merging recycling and natural materials. Information about courses spreads by word of mouth, through satisfied customers. Margus is not a professional artisan; he makes his living serving in the Estonian Defence Forces. Over time, Margus has been drawn more and more to the artisanal world and he does not rule out the possibility that when he retires from active duty this will be his main line of work (FM Tomasberg 2012: M. R.). The community of heritage adepts is a scholarly conceptual construction that refers to a group of people who are distinguished by their qualifications in different specialities. At the same time, heritage adepts do not advertise their practices and do not evaluate their skills as something remarkable or related to traditional heritage. Heritage adepts consider their practice as simple everyday work. They do not arrange staged performances during public events and may not be well known because their actions are rather discreet. For this reason heritage adepts are usually surprised by researchers’ interest in them.

Boat Builders and Wooden Ship Societies

In the early 1990s, wooden boats were constructed for fishermen in a few small workshops, the best-known being Liu Boat (*‘Liu Paat’*) in Pärnu County, and a few workshops in Saaremaa. In the years that followed, a number of various traditional ship builders started up, along with the founding of several societies to implement the knowledge. The revival of single-log *haabjas* boats in the 1990s is just one example of artisanry as a social activity. One of the first experimenters was well-known politician Kaido Kama, who learned the skill as apprentice to old boat master Jaan Rahumaa, who lives in Kõpu near the Soomaa National Park. There in the forests of Pärnu County, under Rahumaa’s instruction, a group of university students led by Priit-Kalev Parts began experimenting with construction of a *haabjas* in autumn 1995. By spring 1996, three boats were finished, and in summer of that year various public workshops and camps were held. Tourism entrepreneur Aivar Ruukel gathered the group in the Soomaa National Park, with their first camp held in June 1996 (Rennu 2004; FM Rennu 2010: A. R.). The dugout boat camps were rather popular thanks to the direct guidance of a few master builders from the older generation and today Estonia has ten new master boat builders who could operate independently launching between them two or three new boats each year. A master’s degree thesis on the practical construction of a *haabjas* has also been written (Keerdo 2011).

The Soomaa region can be considered the frontrunner in popularising old-fashioned wooden boats and the *haabjas* traditions survive there because of tourism. Visitors to the national park are taken on boat trips during the spring flood and attend boatbuilding camps and demonstrations.

The Võrtsjärv lake area has a *Kale* Society (*Kaleselts*) dedicated to local watercraft – the *kalepaat* – led by Ants Leiaru and Marko Vahtra from Valma village on the western shore of Võrtsjärv. The Society has completed two such boats, both being used in the tourist industry. According to one member of the Society, Ivo Leiaru, anyone with some carpentry skills, tools and a place to work can build a small boat, he has even put together online instructions to aid those interested in building their first Võrtsjärv boat. (See Leiaru 2010; FM Rennu 2010: I. L.)

The case of single-log boats demonstrates how the identity marker of a single region is connected to handicraft and becomes a tourist attraction. A considerable number of the visitors to the Soomaa National Park are especially interested in ‘the fifth season’ (the flood season) in the area and the *haabjas* boat (see SNP) used during this period of the year. The same can be noted in regard of the *Kale* Society and the Emajõgi River Barge Society – their activities are of remarkable interest for tourists visiting Tartu city and Tartu County. Social recognition, achieved through tourism, motivates more people to test their skills in handicraft.

Historical Reconstructionists

The Tarbatu club and other Estonian reconstructionists, such as *Lonkavad Hundid* (‘Limping Wolves’), Rotelevik, REAS and others, have done a lot in studying and popularising traditional artisanal work. Their focus lies on thorough mastery of the cultural and material legacy of a specific era. Many high school students who participate in a club choose their university major based on their interest in heritage arts, including history, archaeology, native crafts, folklore and literature.

As the field data indicate, the Tarbatu and REAS societies are rivals in their own circle. Their mutual competition sometimes takes place over the level of authenticity of reproductions. Members of REAS are purists: they proceed strictly from archaeological data and are pedantic about detail. Women work with textiles and earth-fired ceramics, while men are smiths, woodworkers, leatherworkers and parchment makers, and glass blowers. If a given type of stitch, spiral decoration or brooch has not been excavated and documented, then as far as REAS is concerned it does not exist in the list of items worthy of reproduction. Hypotheses are out of the question; the focus is on what has been proven to have existed. According to one informant, their club has a tradition that all the objects used by the reconstructionist – tools, weapons and household items – must be made by hand as that it is not possible to buy them. The particularity and uniformity of the set of objects is an important consideration, i.e. they must be findings made in one area, and time-wise no more than 50 years apart. (FM Tomasberg 2012: K. K.)

The REAS club conducts experiments in smelting iron ore the old-fashioned way; these were led by smith Karmo Kiivit and chemist Toomas Mägi. Participants said the experiment was based on research by archaeologist Jüri Peets and his book *Power of Iron* (2003). The furnaces used for smelting were built with human hair added to the potter’s clay – the masters say that these left essential additional air capillaries after the organic matter had burned away. The compound used to make the furnaces comprised sand and crushed and fired clay and fibres that helped the wet compound retain its shape. Hair was selected above all due to the fact that it had been cut to a proper length before-

hand and it would have been much more labour intensive to prepare straw or flax for the same purpose. Hair, such as horsehair or wool, has been used before in ceramics. (FM Tomasberg 2012: K. K.)

Long-term member of Tarbatu Meelis Säre (2012) has stressed that historical credibility does not require the findings to be automatically copied, and he cites a simple example: the Estonian archaeological record lacks all manner of information to confirm that pantaloons or trouser-like leggings were worn in prehistoric times. Yet no one can rule out completely that nothing similar ever existed, as such materials do not survive. Thus, sometimes, in the interests of reconstructionism, a looser interpretation of archaeological findings is necessary.

Several informants have noted that there is a conspicuous internal division of labour used by the reconstructionists: different people have different skills and each one strives to work on the appropriate segment of work. There are also master artisans who are capable of performing all operations ranging from procuring or growing the raw material to finishing the artefact. The process is quite long and complicated in the case of textile and metal items. (FM Rennu 2011: T. A.)

Among the reconstructionists one can find experienced and professional craftsmen and many club members are very much interested in handicraft skills. Experimenting with different crafts and collecting relevant know-how is a part of their everyday activities leading reconstructionists clubs to become increasingly involved in the process of studying and promoting archaic craftsman's skills.

Preliminary Concluding Remarks about Hobby-Based Handicraft

The boundary between hobby-based and income-related handicraft activities is blurry and hardly recognisable. Social recognition and social capital, obtained through hobbyist activities serves as a significant motivation for further development of corresponding practices. The hobbyist movement is rather large and provides a variety of opportunities for self-expression and the development of particular technical skills, as well as serving as supporting ground for the consistent advent of new professional craftsmen. Joint activities produce group-specific social norms but also set examples for less experienced craftsmen. Several leading figures in the hobby-based handicraft movement are well-known and widely recognised professionals, with heritage adepts playing a particular role in this group of craftsmen. Elderly handicraft masters remember a number of old traditional handicraft skills. Re-actualisation of these skills depends heavily on publicly manifested interest in implementation of relevant knowledge and specific practices.

ARTISAN INDUSTRY

The professional craftsman earns most of his income by artisanal work. The artisanal industry incorporates a number of different streams and directions of action. In this paper we concentrate on the two most significant practices in the Estonian context: artisans who have joined guilds, and artisans who have set up microenterprises. The

difference in these two groups can be traced to their marketing strategies. While a guild master sells his products predominantly in his workplace, microenterprises use special handicraft shops and sell their items, as well as using fairs. Competition in this market is tough and the only way to succeed involves top level marketing, adequate detection of consumer taste and the ability to produce regular large numbers of products while maintaining an acceptable level of quality.

Artisans in Guilds

We are going to provide only a brief sketch of the most prominent Estonian handicraft guilds. This small but significant part of the overall field of artisanal work fulfils an important niche of professional involvement. The guilds are rather well established and thus less dynamic than other fields on the Estonian handicraft scene. In addition to which the guilds are related to men's handicraft only to a minor extent. We decided to list these communities as well, in order to get the whole picture of the development of modern handicraft in the country.

Professional artisans trained in art are the dominant force behind the Tartu-based St. Anthony's Guild. The use of natural materials is a characteristic feature of the pottery shop, although it is not clear whether local clay is used. The rest of the workshops use recycled and reused materials, for example tanned leather and various textiles and glass.

At the Mary Magdalene Guild in the city of Pärnu, all of the artisans work with natural materials, meaning that this centre can be considered an example for other centres to follow. Male artisans in the guild include ceramic artist Eddi Leet, who experiments with many different ceramic glazes, Jüri Soo, who makes glass ornaments and miniature stained glass objects, and Heini Soobik, who is a woodworker and repairs psalteries and instruments. The guild is characterised by a supportive atmosphere and public events. Artisanal work is a lifestyle for these people, and offers a way to make a living or earn money on the side. In order to make a living as an artisan, one must come up with new ways of reaching customers. The public can meet guild members on the streets of Pärnu in summer, when Jüri Soo puts on a small mobile open-air workshop. For him, as for most of the members, artisanal work is a lifestyle, and for Jüri Soo, his livelihood: "Artisanal work is like any other work. One just has to expend more effort to master the skill. Plus, it takes energy to be accepted and train the surrounding community. The primary thing: it's alive!" (Dudarenko-Link 2012: 48)

Tallinn's Old Town is home to the Katariina Guild, which incorporates more than ten artists, artisans and journeymen. The materials used are textile, leather, glass, ceramics and metal. Natural materials used include wool, silk, flax, cotton and many other textile fibres, leather and ceramics. (FM Tomasberg 2012: K. J.)

In the current situation, guilds involve predominantly women's crafts and men's handicraft is loosely related to this development (although this short overview may leave a different impression). As a characteristic domain within the modern processes of the handicraft industry, guilds embody a potential arena of development for local male artisans. Local municipalities provide support for local guilds and this also attracts male artisans to join guilds.

Making wooden household utensils – interior design elements and furniture, toys, baskets, barrels, kitchenware – is problematic because the volumes required by the market, and product development, mean mechanised production will have the edge. Thus, in putting together such an overview, it is reasonable to proceed from use of material and handicraft techniques. There are many smaller players in the market who work alone at home or who have a workshop and a few workers. Generally they try to offer something with a clear practical value, highlighting the decorativeness of the natural material. Many artisans are also lifestyle entrepreneurs who integrate crafts with tourism, the environment or with some other enhancement. Although most parts of the economy suffered significant decline in the 2008–2013 period, in handicraft business employment remained stable throughout the period, and some enterprises even succeeded to increase their sales (Susi et al. 2011). The main market for these products is Tallinn because of the high numbers of foreign tourists. Because of this, there are 21 handicraft shops in Tallinn Old Town alone.

Meeting popular demand, many artisanal entrepreneurs have updated their selection with some products bearing folk motifs; there is even a boom in the use of national and folk patterns in both product development and advertising. On the one hand, artisans stand to make a good return at the crest of such a boom, but on the other there is a risk of going overboard with folk content. It would be appropriate to quote long-standing design and product development teacher Kadi Pajupuu (2011: 2), who hits at a problem that artisans may encounter: “Estonia has patterns and symbols that spread like a disease: at one point the octagram is everywhere, then a striped pattern or over-use of old-fashioned embroidery.”

This argument illustrates the issue of the relationship between artisans and professional designers, i.e. that fashion and folk aesthetics are complicated and perceived ambivalently. However, this critique does not bother artisans who consider folk ornaments of secondary importance. Craftsmen evaluate more highly the authenticity of craft technology. At the same time, production for tourists is not always designed according to high traditional technological standards.

Puupank (“Timber Bank”) LLC has over 1,000 m³ of wood in storage, which is a noteworthy amount. The company focuses on species diversity and special natural forms. As comments from project leader Valdur Tilk illustrate, woodworking traditions must be approached by taking into account contemporary production interests: “We are striving toward extreme flexibility in selecting raw material and extreme perfection in the finishing of the work” (FM Rennu 2008: V. T.). Original lights and sinks and other interior design elements hollowed out of wood have started gaining in popularity thanks to their work. The stakeholders in *Puupank* have participated in different artisanry-related discussions, from which they conclude that the main problem is difficulties exporting their products. In general, their message has been that it is relatively easy to make a level of turnover that is enough to live on in Estonia. Some starting capital is necessary along with interest and initiative, as well as business acumen and the ability to create interesting products. But it is hard to continue development as one must become a manager, not an artisan, and actively investigate export opportunities. (FM Rennu 2009: M. B.)

Today the owners of *Puupank*, who are among the founders of the Union of Estonian Professional Craftsmen (*Eesti Elukutseliste Käsitöömeistrite Liit*, see EEKL), are actively involved in the resale market for handicraft products. The EEKL administers several handicraft shops in the centre of Tallinn. Customers are primarily foreign tourists who can afford to purchase authentic handicraft items. This chain of shops is jointly run by the handicraft masters, with the artisans receiving the sale price of their products minus only the administrative costs of the shops (see also Käsitöömeistrite...). The founder of this chain, Martin Bristol, noted that in order to sell local handicraft masters' wooden spoons, spatulas, wooden buttons or crochet hooks one must catch the attention of a customer with significant size, an original form or an author-specific design. Stories about the way in which, from what, and by whom a particular object was crafted help to sell small and simple utility objects, which are rather important for shop business and the income of the masters. (FM Rennu 2013: M. B.) As experience shows, tourists who have no pressing need to purchase wooden spoons from Estonia, like to buy something from a shop where they become personally acquainted with original works and where they can hear interesting stories.

Tartu Tünnitehas ('Tartu Barrel Factory') LLC has been in the wooden barrel business for nearly 15 years. Their products feature a good number of bathing and immersion barrels as well as traditional casks and kegs for the maturation of alcoholic beverages. The barrel factory team has become an annual fixture in the Estonian TV media thanks to savvy marketing and their custom of hosting a hot tub at the Otepää World Cup ski event. Skilful media work has paid off for this artisanal product. (Vedler and Ranne 2004; FM Rennu 2012: K. P.)

Meelis Michelson, a cooper from Tartu town, has said that in the last two years, six women have given birth in barrels. He has made already four 'birthing barrels' and he continues to improve his product. The first three barrels were delivered into the good hands of the birthing barrel enthusiasts, and the Tartu Toy Museum. It should be noted that recently domestic master coopers have entered the Finnish market to make traditional barrel-shaped saunas – there are at least ten such microenterprises across Estonia according to web research. Exporting immersion tubs to Scandinavia is a good source of income. (FM Rennu 2012: M. S.)

The director of Sujur LLC, Ahti Parijõgi, who produces various women's handicraft accessories, got the idea to go into business after taking part in the VCA project called Taking Handicraft to Work 2. The essence of the project was to give participants 120 hours of entrepreneurship over the course of a year, and the same amount of product development training. The group teacher in Võru was Kadi Pajupuu, a designer and innovation aficionado who recommended various resources for textile making. Up to this point the niche was covered relatively haphazardly, and the weaving tablets used for making belts, and the shuttles and other tools for loom weaving, needles for needlepoint and much more were simply not available in the form of handmade Estonian goods.

Parijõgi was impelled by the project to apply for a grant from Enterprise Estonia, and received start-up assistance. The trademark chosen was Sujur. He had already become renowned before the training course for his high-calibre woodwork: his wooden flask, which featured very intricate finishing, was the winning work at the Gift from Võru County artisanal competition.

To date Parijõgi has done well selling his products. He said (FM Tomasberg 2012: A. P.) that volunteer cooperation was also taking place because of good customer feedback:

I have reached customers primarily by word of mouth through a broad network of artisan acquaintances, who recommended Sujur accessories to their friends. The online store at kangaspuu.ee and some distributors who offer Sujur products at craft training events have also done their part.

VCA textile students and a number of craftswomen also attest to the superiority of Sujur accessories (FM Rennu 2012: V. V.). If market demand is exhausted, this could be a problem for this niche company, as the more serious aficionados already have the products they need. Parijõgi (FM Tomasberg 2012: A. P.) commented on this situation: "Due to the small size of the Estonian market, the main emphasis cannot be on local sales. Things are made to last for years so repeat purchases are rare."

Based on this fact, the master has reassessed his future plans and sees himself as leaving the craft sphere as it will be critical to reduce production prices and adhere to a strict quality standard when making his products. Like many other artisan entrepreneurs, Sujur, too, has realised that if you want to earn real revenue, you have to enter the international market:

If we continue to look at products for crafts people, and not items made by hand, I do see some development prospects in this area. I am currently making the first batch of various crafts accessories for Finnish company Toika. This could become my main sales channel. (FM Tomasberg 2012: S. A.; A. P.)

General Notes about Artisanal Industry

According to our fieldwork results, all the interviewed handicraft businessmen indicate a rather earnest and creative interest in developing communication networks inside the artisanal community, as well as shaping their public image. Participation in fairs and workshops is essential for new experiences, as well as presenting one's most significant and interesting products, telling one's stories and nurturing public interest in one's business. Concentration on tourism is widely spread in the Estonian artisanal industry and sale of handicraft products constitutes a significant proportion of overall business. Proficiency in narrating a good story in addition to crafting handicraft items is vital in the formation of a successful enterprise. Apart from meeting the expectations of tourists, artisanal businessmen try to be present during the most prominent domestic (handicraft) fairs, for example the St. Martin's Fair, Tallinn Old Town Days, and the Hanseatic Days in Tartu and Pärnu. Craftsmen also attempt to find different possibilities for exporting their products.

REGIONAL HANDCRAFT CLUSTERS: THE ARTISAN AS AN ORGANISED PROMOTER OF INDIGENOUS CULTURE

This section is dedicated to an analysis of the most significant networking initiatives among the craftsmen. We intend to concentrate on regions where the artisanal practices constitute a vital part of local social life. We distinguish several Estonian regions as the most characteristic places for this kind of practice. The entrepreneurs of Avinurme village are the arbiters of ideology in the Estonian regional artisan movement, although a few other local initiatives must be pointed out, for example the Wooden Ship Society Vikan (*Puulaevaselts Vikan*) in Haapsalu, the Emajõgi River Barge Society in Tartu, the Traditional Construction Society, a non-profit organisation in Viljandi, and non-profit organisation *Vanaajamaja* ('Old-Time House') in Räpina. As an example of an emergent local cluster we explore the Kerslet studio on Vormsi Island.

Our decision to distinguish these clusters as significant is based on our fieldwork impressions. We intend to support our choice by demonstrating how these networking initiatives develop both local artisanal cooperation and division of work, as well as illustrating the way these clusters are related to local historical traditions and social conditions. We also investigate the relationship of handicraft clusters to professional and hobby-based artisanal initiatives.

Avinurme

For the general public the name of Avinurme is perhaps most readily associated with the Avinurme Churn Fair (*pütilaat*), newly renamed the Barrel Fair (*tünnilaat*), held annually around Midsummer. The organiser is the Avijõe Society in conjunction with the Avinurme municipal government and the goal is to promote local life and traditional handicrafts.⁷ The community of woodworking companies and individual artisans could be called a woodworking cluster. The region has traditional family business-style contracting that remains economically successful.

Of the various Avinurme companies, Alfrina LLC, led by Riho and Jaan Pärn, stands out for the amount of natural material it processes. The annual volumes are around 10,000 m³ of aspen logs, which are turned into 1.5 million tool handles. There is over 2,000 m³ of manufacturing space and close to 40 workers, and the output is exported primarily to Scandinavian countries. In an interview that took place in summer 2012 during fieldwork at Avinurme, Riho Pärn said that manufacturing could be continued as long as there were enough international contracts and no problems with sales. Yet being engaged in such a high volume of business is risky in a number of ways, as Chinese factories turn out analogous products at far cheaper prices. (FM Tomasberg 2012: R. P.) Thus consumer awareness is an important component in large-scale manufacturing in the consumer–seller–manufacturer communication network, which also directly dictates the material to be used for production, and its origin. (Rennu 2012)

E. Strauss Ltd., led by Enno Strauss, has found a good market niche by producing sauna accessories, for example a variety of buckets and smaller tools. The company has a thorough selection from the Avinurme Wooden Handicrafts Centre (*Avinurme Puiduait*) as well as from various home furnishing shops in Estonia and Finland. As an

active entrepreneur dedicated to constant product development, Strauss has been a participant in a number of traditional handicraft-themed workshops organised by VCA. Strauss repeatedly confirmed the need to train additional workforce, which also occasions active participation in workshops and communication with colleagues. Alongside mechanical work at his enterprise, he has always tried to retain some old-style artisanal elements, such as manufacturing hand bent wood platters. (FM Tomasberg 2010–2012: E. S.) He also attempts to apprehend the taste of today's shoppers, for example his shops have Muhu rubber galoshes with a striking design (see Strauss for examples).

Immersion tubs, barrel saunas and similar products are made by *Puunõu* LLC ('Wooden Vessel'); truly elegant copies of chairs from the Luther^s plant are made by *Isemeistrid* LLC; solid wood furniture is made by Gunnar Simmul; and there are also many individual artisans working from home in this field. It is gratifying to add that Avinurme artisans are optimistic and enterprising, and that they understand the positive impact of advertising and community cooperation (FM Tomasberg 2010–2012: E. S.; FM Tomasberg 2012: R. P.; FM Rennu 2012: J. T.).

In the following, we will provide a more detailed example of a family company in the Avinurme area that uses natural material. In Avinurme manufacturers of wood roofing materials call themselves *pilpameistrid*, 'roofing-shingle masters'. They use the word *pilpad* for their products while in other parts of Estonia roofing-shingles are called *laastud*. However, Avinurme roofing-shingle masters use similar planing machinery to that used by other Estonian roof slate manufacturers. This seems to be a local heritage based on an understanding of what makes good roofing material. Roof-shingles are seen in Estonian ethnography as hand made roofing material (see for example, Tihase 1974: 76). The particularity of old-fashioned roofing shingles lay in the fact that the wood grain was not cut but rather they were split from the edge of a log, meaning that rainwater would not penetrate the grain and the overall lifespan of the roof would be significantly longer.

The interview with master shingle splitter Jaan Toomingas indicates that the modern shingle in the Avinurme area is different from other shingles used in Estonia because it is one-third smaller, making the roofing 50 percent denser because the battens are much closer together and more tiles can be laid per square metre. The more densely lapped structure means that only a small patch of each tile is visible on the roof, and that the roof is longer lasting because when the tiles dry the edges of these shorter and smaller aspen tiles do not warp upward so easily. However, because there are a larger number of tiles per square metre of roof, nail guns are used to speed up the tiling process. As to how the new technology affects the lifespan of the roof, this will be seen over time. Toomingas relies on his spouse to operate the shingle splitting machine, sorting them once they emerge from the machine. Everything else is up to Toomingas. The most difficult part of the job is splitting the log, for which Toomingas uses a vertical-cylinder splitting machine of his own devising. This machine is also well suited to removing knots from the wood and making high quality raw stock to be cut into shingles. This region fared well in the recession – volumes did not drop –, but the master also notes that currently order deadlines are short and that there are enough raw materials on the lot for several large roofs. (FM Rennu 2012: J. T.)

The following are a few examples of the best-known artisanal associations in the Tartu and Haapsalu areas. The Emajõgi River Barge Society NGO was founded in 2004 by *lodi* construction aficionados to revive the tradition of the *lodi* ships that used to ply the waters of the Emajõgi and Lake Peipsi. An honorary member of the society is Hando Kruuv, the owner of the country's oldest wooden ship, Tempo. He is the son of the last *lodi* master in Tartu. The achievements of the barge society in promoting local artisanal culture would deserve a separate article.

Organisers of large events have also taken note of the public interest in artisanal activities, and thus the masters from the river barge society are invited to fairs, summer events and trade fairs to demonstrate their craft. Smithing, woodworking, rope braiding and tar distilling workshops are held in the society's building in Tartu as well as at the events the masters attend. They have also attended foreign festivals from Scandinavia to Austria (see also Lodjaselts). In addition to demonstrating artisanal techniques and materials, there are many show-style elements designed to appeal to the public, for example pancakes are cooked on a blacksmith's forge and there is much loud joking.

Vikan, the non-profit Wooden Ships Society NGO was founded in 2002 at the Haapsalu Coastal Swedish Museum with the goal of maintaining the *jaala* boats and of popularising traditional Estonian maritime culture. Local boat master Jorma Friberg has 15 years experience constructing the old-fashioned boats formerly used by the Swedish community. At first, a traditional single-masted fishing boat was built, similar to the kind used on the Estonian island of Ruhnu. The next one was a *jaala*, a double-masted wooden sailboat, built a hundred years ago for sealing. The *jaala* was christened Vikan ('ringed seal' in the old Ruhnu language). Today a number of different types of boat have been built at the behest of the society. (FM Rennu 2011: J. F.; see also Friberg 2008)

The Vanaajamaja NGO

Many log construction companies in Estonia use unfinished round logs. A particularly good example is the younger generation of log builders around the Seto region and the settlements of Mooste and Rāpina who formed a non-profit organisation called *Vanaajamaja*. *Vanaajamaja* engages in cooperation with organisations and people on several fronts ranging from providing training and information days to personal counselling for customers. Their goal is to teach and popularise traditional construction methods. Many rural homeowners would gladly renovate their properties in a manner fitting for older buildings, using old-fashioned construction materials and methods, but the work of assessing the situation, preparing a detailed plan, finding masters and procuring material is often too much for them. These young entrepreneurs share information on potential customers and try to share work using everyone's particular skills, which is quite rare in our entrepreneurial field. (FM Rennu 2010: A. R.; FM Rennu 2012: A. U.)

Ahto Raudoja, who first produced roofing materials in Obinitsa, Setomaa, and later in Priipalu, Valga County, says that due to the recession, revenue is down to half or a third in the field of traditional construction, while at the same time the cost of materials has continually increased. Blanks for cutting shingles can be made only from knot

free logs selected on the basis of specific criteria. The suitability of the logs depends on the particularities of where the tree grew, factors that become apparent only at the cutting stage. The specific requirements for the raw material presuppose a very good relationship with a log supplier, from whose material suitable logs are culled. The small quantities make the logistics time-consuming and expensive and thus small companies inevitably face difficult choices when looking for material. Raudoja also works closely with the river barge society because it can heat its rooms using cut shingle waste as fuel and diligent helpers for urgent work can readily be recruited from among the students involved there. (FM Rennu 2010: A. R.)

Traditional Construction Society NGO

Since 2005, the Estonian Native Crafts Department at the VCA has developed a native construction study program as part of which the teachers and alumni have developed a centre of excellence in log construction. Graduates are successful as artisans in their field and form a network of independent young and active entrepreneurs with Andres Ansper's Traditional Construction Society serving as an umbrella organisation. The society's activity covers a wide spectrum from log construction (including, under the tutelage of Tarmo Tammekivi, timber frame construction) to the organisation of various artisanal training sessions in cooperation with the State Forest Management Centre's Aimla Nature Centre and the Estonian-Finnish Promoting Natural Material Know-How project. Loodi Manor, situated 10 kilometres from Viljandi, with its workshops, storehouses and construction sites is the centre for field practice operations for students of the Estonian Native Crafts Department. Ansper notes an interesting paradox in the contrast between mechanised and manual craft: often artisanal work on an ancient, high quality object requires a proper and broad-based education. In addition to technical skills, one needs to be aware of aesthetics and ethnography. (FM Rennu 2011–2012: A. A.) The birch bark courses taught by the outstanding Novgorod master Vladimir Yarish, held in 2011 and 2012, were conspicuously popular. Good cooperation with the State Forest Management Centre has yielded the raw material that the workshops need to be successful, i.e. undamaged birch bark that has been harvested from trees that are still growing. It is considered ethical only to collect such bark in areas about to be logged. An approved cutting plan ensures that trees will not be left standing and vulnerable after removal of the bark. In June 2012, a birch bark workshop was organised by VCA master's degree candidate and Palupera Artisanal Workshop developer Andres Rattasepp (see PKK for examples), whose research is focussed on birch bark. Rattasepp is a good example of an active and cooperation-minded artisan who produces high quality decorative metal work and chainsaw sculptures and provides training and leadership for workshops. He has also collected history and source material on techniques and craft development from various masters in the field and in summer 2012 managed to go on expeditions to the Avinurme area, Karelia and Novgorod. (FM Tomasberg 2012: A. R.)

The goal of this studio on the island of Vormsi is to give artisanal aficionados inspiration and encouragement to find new creative outlets. One of the founding members, Andres Koidu (1970–2017), was best known for making everyday items from wood using manual tools and was also familiar with manufacturing dugout boats. He was responsible for completing many dugout and *ruhe* boats. He also made a successful foray into miniature wood sculpture. His exhibition of these sculptures, reflecting lifestyles and dugout boat culture in the Soomaa region, entitled *Ühepuuluul* ('The Dream of the Dugout Boat'), has been on display at the Estonian Handicraft House in Tallinn, the Museum of Coastal Folk in Viimsi and the Kondas Centre in Viljandi. In 2010, he, in conjunction with the ENM, produced a film in which he demonstrates a box with a sliding lid that is part of the ENM collection. To this end, Koidu avoided machinery, adding however that machinery is the key to earning enough money to make a living. He said he wished to make use of certain elements of mechanised work in the future but added that some elements of pure handicraft were a mere façade for many entrepreneurs operating in the field of woodworking, and that they used this to conceal their everyday use of machinery. If he were to use machinery, he said, it would have to be done so that the quality and appearance of the wood would not suffer. He produced wooden household items, primarily utensils hollowed out on one side, made of unseasoned wood, for example spoons, ladles, bowls, mortars, boxes, etc. (FM Rennu 2011: A. K.; FM Tomasberg 2012: A. K.)

The beginning of Koidu's career as an artisan was in his earlier artistic practice as well as in his family traditions:

I originally started with painting, but then I realised I work better in 3D. So I started carving things from wood instead. It is not a family tradition, although my father did woodcarving of sorts. He would take a postcard of Tallinn and copy it using millimetre square paper. He would redraw the scenery in great detail onto a wooden board and then carve it out. It's called intarsia, and because it was very detailed, it was almost good. And why Tallinn? Well, he was from a small village, so the only big city in Estonia fascinated him. (Labora 2017)

After several years of attempting to subsist alone on a small island by handicraft, Koidu initiated collaboration with the Ukrainian Cultural Centre in Tallinn. Because of this cooperation, Koidu started to produce wooden kinetic toys and wooden horses. The Labora School of Monastic Art, which operates in the Cultural Centre also deals with woodworking. Managers of the Cultural Centre and Labora's Anatoli and Nestor Lyutyuk provided Koidu with the opportunity of using their machinery, workspace and marketing channels. In this way the master acquired the opportunity to fulfil his dream of producing items faster by mechanising some phases of production and therefore being able to produce more objects. Koidu took additional inspiration from the Cultural Centre's Wooden Horse Museum.

Labora's studio and workshops, and nearby shop, are in Tallinn Old Town where it is easy to sell products. Thanks to a proposed new collaboration, meaning that Koidu no longer had to worry about marketing, he was to have had more time to plan and produce new items. On top of which he was supposed to conduct workshops for children

and adults. This opportunity was really important for the master as it provided him additional income alongside small-scale handicraft production.

Unfortunately, this inspiring and promising collaboration ended because of Koidu's death in spring 2017. The Kerslet Studio was also forced to change its practice and concentrate only on the production of artistic textiles. This case indicates that some handicraft initiatives are sometimes bound exclusively to individuals and depend strongly on the life course of the master.

Indirect Initiators: Workshops and Camps

Experience has shown that special events, organisations or people give a positive impetus to male artisanal activities. There are cases where the engine that sparks cooperation and educational experience is actually a women's organisation. We believe this is due to men's low interest in exhibiting and a reluctance to become organised into clubs and societies and invest time doing things together. Male artisans in general refrain from advertising themselves, marketing and cooperation (Rennu 2009). However, if an event or project with a suitable orientation and agenda is organised, they are pleased to participate.

A good example is the series of traditional woodworking workshops organised between 2009 and 2011 by the Estonian Folk Art and Handicraft Union, and the VCA, specifically by Rennu and Tomasberg. If men are offered artisanal opportunities that are of true interest to them and help them improve their practical skills, turnout for the workshops will be high. The workshops carried out so far have drawn shop teachers, folk handicraft and shop students both from the vocational education system and colleges and universities, high level hobbyists and professional craftsmen, and artists and designers. Unlike standard practice in the organised craft movements it was mainly men who registered for these workshops. The female participants were generally involved with woodworking professionally. They included handicraft instructors, a shop teacher, a sculptor, a master quilter, and so on. The lack of participation fee should also not be underestimated as a factor in the high turnout.⁹ The three official training events evolved into the Traditional Construction Society workshop series, giving a boost to people to continue their work. Members also meet on their own initiative and go out socially outside the scope of their professional interest. Participants have become acquainted with various traditional craft techniques, for example they have made dugout boats, boxes, spoons and other utensils from single blocks of wood as well as making bent chests, hollowed out vessels, tar, and more. Apart from refining their artisanal skills at these meetings, creating a sense of community was equally important. This was accomplished through conversations while scouring the forest for materials, sitting in the sauna, fireside chats and large and memorable dinners.

The woodworking workshops were video recorded and use of the material has two main goals: to gain experience as to the possibilities of visual media in researching, conveying and studying manual skills, and to boost the general popularity of the field. Short video clips that surveyed the goings-on in the workshops and could inspire a wide circle of artisans have been uploaded to the Web,¹⁰ while longer and more exhaustive videos on techniques have been shared with the workshop participants. These longer

clips are also stored in the Estonian Native Crafts Department archive. It is gratifying to add that we received very positive feedback on these documentation and popularisation activities.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

As a result of our research, we identified several male artisanal activity groups as the most distinguished (hobbyists, professionals and craftsmen united into regional artisan clusters). The first group is characterised by dynamic networking attempts and an ambivalent approach to advertising their work. Hobby-based craftwork is introduced and practiced during different special events with craftsmen also participating in training courses. The second group, professionals, attempts to create their own production narratives that enable them to successfully sell their products. Teachers and developers constitute the third group. They aim to integrate the two first groups as well as combining local heritage background and authentic raw materials in order to gain wider recognition for the overall field of local handicrafts.

A significant number of Estonian artisans have found that it is possible to make a living from their handicrafts. Even among the hobbyists increasing numbers of practitioners manage to sell their production leading to a tendency to shift from amateur to professional practice. Simultaneously to the process of merging amateur and professional artisans' groups, another tendency of integration of various regional clusters is under way in Estonia. Firstly, this becomes evident in the course of incorporation of both artisans' groups into the same clusters. Secondly, even the traditional notions of particular handicraft regions become ambivalent in the contemporary situation. Locality in this context often means just a point of initiative for a series of workshops that connect artisans from all over Estonia. These are places where artisans are used to gathering together to reinforce their skills and exchange ideas that relate to a particular handicraft domain. Sometimes these meeting points emerge around centres of handicraft practice (as is the case with the VCA, the Avinurme handicraft cluster, the R apina wooden house initiative and others). The meaning of a handicraft cluster thus becomes relative and the distinction between hobbyists and professionals vague. However, our long-term observation enables us to reveal that contemporary development of Estonian male handicrafts employs the various viewpoints of individuals, communities and localities. Just 6–7 years ago the Estonian handicraft landscape was much easier to understand with divisions between different categories of craftsmen sharper. Over time, amateurs become more skilled, some regional clusters fade and others become stronger. Borders between various divisions in the field turn vague, overall situation turn out to be more homogeneous, and artisans become more interconnected.

The local particularities of artisanal activity in Estonia and the appearance of the most skilled artisans in various parts of the country are influenced by diverse factors. Firstly, geographic distribution of male handicraft practices is related to local historical traditions, the handicraft cluster of the Avinurme region being the most remarkable example of this. At the same time, local historical traditions are also in the focus of handicraft societies that promote study, and construction, of region-specific boat types.

The second factor is related to the proximity of contemporary administrative and business centres. Interconnection between development of contemporary handicraft practices and this factor of influence is ambivalent. In Avinurme and Rāpina it is vital to have the possibility to use local craftsmen who have mastered woodworking skills. However, for the boat societies it is essential that bigger cities have the potential to provide larger groups of participants with interest in regional heritage. In turn, *haabjas* camps in Soomaa are successful because, against a background of nature tourism they provide heritage-related entertainment for people who are tired of stressful city life. In addition to this, particular historically connected local handicraft communities are established as new hubs of artisans emerge. The organisational quality of handicraft is also becoming important today as it provides a feeling of belongingness and gives the possibility that people can negotiate ideas and skills.

The third important aspect that influences local variations in artisanal practice is related to the accessibility of raw materials. This plays a significant role in the domains of handicrafts that need a greater amount of raw material. It is no accident that log house builders are concentrated in southern Estonia, while Puupank is based in central Estonia where species-rich mixed forest can be found in abundance, and on the western islands of Estonia where juniper is widespread.

Selling handicraft products at fairs mainly depends on the personal presence of the artisan and the provision of an attractive activity on site (for example, giving visitors the opportunity to make wooden spoons) because success depends on the visually observable skills of the craftsman. In addition, selling products depends on new and creative ideas. Items must be practical in contemporary conditions (for example, hand-made tools must be usable in a modern kitchen).

In handicraft shops success depends on attractive stories that are related to the items on sale. Even if products are not practical, they must attract people to step into a shop. The aim of shops is to sell a large number of small items, although some large items that would have no real value to consumers can be used as marketing tactics.

Artisans also produce objects on the specific order of individual customers. These kinds of handicraft item primarily fulfil a specific niche and depend entirely on customer needs and aesthetic preference. This area of the handicraft market is harder to document, although it has a specific niche that most resembles the traditional practice of arranging handicraft services.

Handicraft skills are today passed on primarily through training camps and workshops. It depends on the individual interest of people who have become involved in local handicrafts and want to develop their own skills in traditional artisanal work. Public advertising, and shared knowledge transferred by word of mouth, bring together people who want to get acquainted or who want to develop their skills in traditional handicrafts.

Since the 1920s studying Estonian handicraft traditions has been rather popular and continued to attract the attention of ethnographers during the Soviet period. Somewhat surprisingly, investigation of contemporary developments in this field is not at the centre of scholarly exploration today. This may be because of the shared feeling among ethnologists that everything was already done during earlier studies and that the authentic tradition of old heritage adepts has been replaced by entrepreneurially motivated artisanal practice that is not culturally pure enough.

We find that the most intriguing exploration is of aspects of artisanal activity based on natural materials that are related to marketing success and the strategies used to educate craftsmen. Hobbyists producing high quality work or artisanal entrepreneurs who have the chance to succeed in the market can be recognised by their open-minded attitude and curiosity about cultural heritage, society, the environment and innovation. A successful master artisan experiments with materials, trains and teaches, publishes, studies, understands market interests and is acquainted with tradition. (For an analysis of the Estonian labour market in the field of handicraft, see Susi et al. 2011.)

We do not weigh the merits of the entrepreneurs discussed in the article on design-related issues, but we can say that they are, in one way or another, trailblazers in the use of natural materials in an artisanal style. They are seen at fairs, and actively selling their goods in craft shops countrywide, and try to find ways to export their goods. How have attitudes toward the relationship between machinery and handicraft changed over time? Depending on the quality and the production volumes required today, it is clear that most natural materials are processed by machine, which also gives a clear competitive advantage in the market. The need for more mechanisation is not generally denied by the professional artisans interviewed, which is a sign of a change in attitudes. A comparison with fieldwork conducted several years ago in Viljandi County shows how attitudes favourable to mechanical work are spreading, or at least are more represented in the context of the rest of Estonia. Of course, the master artisans interviewed in Viljandi County were heritage adepts who almost never used machines. The best examples of this circle are basket weaver Priit Retsep, carpenter Vello Truu and wooden sledge maker Sulev Saarepuu (Rennu 2009). Yet all of the interviewees stressed that they have a serious interest in learning various manual labour techniques, while entrepreneurs and developers add that manual labour skills come full circle and benefit the entire process, i.e. understanding of the material improves, which is a determining factor in improving the quality of machine work. (FM Tomasberg 2010: G. S.; FM Tomasberg 2012: A. K.)

Use of machinery seems to blur the boundaries of handicraft practice. Although the majority of heritage-minded artisans evaluate handmade products as evidence of authenticity, machines are used in order to increase sales. At the same time, use of machines is not a recent innovation. During the early decades of the last century, machinery enabled craftsmen to increase production; and even Estonian classical ethnographies consider it worthy of attention (as, for example, in the case of the Avinurme cluster). Thus, one can see that avoiding machines is not an essential feature of handicraft. The borderline between handicrafts and industrial production makes the most useful difference in this respect, although this differentiation is still problematic and theoretical notions admit the complicated nature of this boundary (see Muthesius 1998: 85–86, 88, 91; Tüür et al. 2017: 28–30).

Another paradox is revealed in the fact that ladies become involved in traditional male handicraft domains. Today women practice different handicraft exercises that both artisans and scholars consider historically and traditionally to have belonged to men. Again, our study determines that a clear gender division is not fundamental for handicraft today. If everyday occupations and social attitudes no longer enforce upon people strict responsibilities, gender roles can easily be transgressed in handicrafts. People pay attention to tangible skills and not to gender division. Despite the fact that

historically the separation of male and female crafts was rather clear, today it is less than essential and also less articulated.

In another case, a number of craftsmen who work with natural materials gain social capital by teaching traditional techniques to aficionados. Interest in specialised training has proven so high and feedback so positive that events held in recent years have shown that there is a clear initiative from recognised masters and teachers to organise workshops. It is critical to continue organising fieldwork, experimental workshops and training events, as heritage technologies cannot be studied solely from direct, existing ethnographical and archaeological sources; it is also important to devote attention to manual skills. And conveying information gathered on expeditions and at events is undoubtedly an effective means of increasing the renown of the field and involving new aficionados in the activity.

Thus continuing to hold artisanal events is vitally important if we bear in mind the wishes of all of the competence centres and interest groups in this field, and in the future it will be possible that all participants will find more personal resources to invest in their leisure time activities so that they are not as dependent on the shelter of grant money. The overall popularity of craft means that members of many at-risk groups in society can find them attractive and socially valued activity. The key ideas could be broad-based youth work, as well as finding a possible exit from unemployment into gainful employment in the interests of rehabilitating people with disabilities. A strong positive impact will come from focusing on old and tried-and-true technologies, especially the dissemination of information on raw materials, including local, unprocessed natural materials.

The research can be developed further by analysing contemporary Estonian artisanal practices concentrating more precisely on functional aspects of handicraft (cf. Applebaum 1987). In this paper we explored how the communal and organisational dimensions of male handicraft, leadership, knowledge transmission, performance of work, prestige, access to raw materials, as well as categories of location and place are determining development of artisanal practices. Narrative communication of handicrafts in the framework of branding and marketing in order to cultivate the emotional engagement of tourists (see Silberman 2013) is also one of the crucial elements in the development of contemporary Estonian artisanal practice. A more detailed investigation may enable us to reveal more specific peculiarities and characteristic trends in dynamics of handicraft traditions.

Artisanal initiatives directly support the material reproduction of location and help to protect its cultural context from erosion. At the same time, this creation of areas is part of the “global production of locality” (Appadurai 1997: 188–199), something that is rather well illustrated in Estonia by the Avinurme handicraft cluster. Thus, it is possible to direct further research into this dialogue on the global and local dimensions of handicraft in order to explore the way global ideologies (for more about sustainable development and tourism, see Labadi and Gould 2015) influence the Estonian handicraft industry and the hobbyist. This would also help to reveal possible locally generated vernacular orientations that do not have direct analogues on the global handicraft scene.

NOTES

1 Smiths are a rare exception here: they had closer mutual ties, even during the Soviet era. The Estonian Smiths Association was established in 1988 (see ESÜ). The scope and orientation of this article impels us to leave out smiths: we focus on types of artisanal activity where cooperation and organisational interest has emerged more recently.

2 St. Martin's Fair is the biggest contemporary handicraft fair in Estonia. It is organised annually at the beginning of November in Tallinn.

3 *Haabjas* – dugout boat, with sides bent using heat from a fire.

4 The Promoting Natural Material Know-How (European Regional Development Fund) Estonian–Finnish co-operation project, and the Central-Baltic INTERREG IVA programme 2007–2013.

5 The Varbola medieval settlement site is situated in Rapla County, northern Estonia.

6 Intarsia involves decorating wooden objects by gluing on veneer of different textures and colours (see also PKP).

7 Avinurme in the eastern part of Estonia is a village of traditional woodwork craftsmen, especially within the barrel industry. In 1868 Dr Georg Julius von Schultz-Bertram wrote that Avinurme municipality (with a working age male population of 1,700) was widely known because of the local woodwork industry, which involved 1,000 workers and produced 50,000 roubles of total annual income. In 1877, 18,000 wooden barrels were produced in Avinurme. During the Soviet period, the Avinurme traditional crafts industry diminished considerably.

8 The Luther factory, producing furniture, was founded in Tallinn in 1880 and named after Alexander Martin Luther. Their first mass-produced item, a chair with a plywood seat, was a successful sales article in the UK.

9 On three occasions, carpentry training took place with support from the information education promotion programme; workshops have also been supported by the VCA and the Promoting Natural Material Know-How project.

10 Video clips are available on the Promoting Natural Material Know-How project's YouTube channel (Pronatmat 2011–2012).

ABBREVIATIONS

ENM – Estonian National Museum

VCA – Viljandi Culture Academy

SOURCES

Madis Rennu's field notes and interviews:

FM Rennu 2008: V. T.

FM Rennu 2009: M. B.

FM Rennu 2010: A. R.

FM Rennu 2010: I. L.

FM Rennu 2010: L. T.

FM Rennu 2011: A. K.

FM Rennu 2011: J. F.

FM Rennu 2011: T. A.

FM Rennu 2011–2012: A. A.

FM Rennu 2012: A. U.

FM Rennu 2012: E. K.
 FM Rennu 2012: J. T.
 FM Rennu 2012: K. P.
 FM Rennu 2012: M. S.
 FM Rennu 2012: V. V.
 FM Rennu 2013: M. B
 Liisa Tomasberg's field notes and interviews:
 FM Tomasberg 2010: A. V.
 FM Tomasberg 2010: G. S.
 FM Tomasberg 2010–2012: E. S.
 FM Tomasberg 2012: A. K.
 FM Tomasberg 2012: A. P.
 FM Tomasberg 2012: A. R.
 FM Tomasberg 2012: E. H.
 FM Tomasberg 2012: K. J.
 FM Tomasberg 2012: K. K.
 FM Tomasberg 2012: M. R.
 FM Tomasberg 2012: R. P.
 FM Tomasberg 2012: S. A.

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- PKK= Palupera Käsitöökoda. <http://koda.palupera.ee/teenused/naidis-tood/> (accessed December 12, 2017).
- PKP = Pärnumaa Kutsehariduskeskus. hariduskeskus.ee (accessed January 19, 2017).
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