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# CraftDesign for entrepreneurship, social innovation and sustainability

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## Abstract

Crafts, under the umbrella of the cultural and creative sector, represent an important contribution to social development and cultural freedom. Entrepreneurship through crafts and design brings a strategy to promote the empowerment of vulnerable communities. Given the challenges our society is and will be confronting in the 21st century, such as the climate emergency, the process of digital automation in the human workforce, emergencies such as natural disasters or protracted crises, as well as the socioeconomic crisis that will follow the COVID-19 pandemic, scientific knowledge on policies and strategies aimed at promoting sustainable development and ensuring the equality and social inclusion of vulnerable communities should be strengthened. This paper reflects upon the role crafts design and entrepreneurship can play in promoting sustainable development.

**Keywords:** CraftDesign, Entrepreneurship, Social Innovation, Sustainability, Women's Empowerment

## Introduction

Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) have their source in individual competencies, creativity and skills and are a potential vector for creating employment and wealth (United Kingdom Crafts Council, 2014). At the European level, CCIs represent around 4% of European GDP and provide jobs to eight million people (Addarii, & Lipparini, 2017). In terms of European policy, important strategies, and programmes such as Creative Europe have been launched to reinforce the belief that culture and creativity are basic factors for personal development, social cohesion, economic growth, employment creation, innovation and competitiveness. The new creative economy opens the door to the recognition of the intangible values of creative processes and new business models. In parallel, entrepreneurship might represent an opportunity to achieve social, cultural, economic and environmental goals, and design might play a strategic role in promoting sustainability by introducing innovative solutions to social problems (Sambade & Ferreira, 2017).

Beyond the contribution to the economy of the CCIs, these sectors trigger spillovers in other areas like education and social inclusion through their contribution to soft innovation (Stoneman, 2011) and bring relevant tools for enhancing intangible cultural heritage and cultural freedom (Sen, 1999). Amongst the activities included in cultural industries, crafts play a key role. The craft economy generated £3.4bn for the UK economy, accounting for 0.3% of its gross value added (United Kingdom Crafts Council, 2014). Also, crafts bring relevant tools for promoting cultural diversity and supporting the social inclusion of vulnerable groups such as women, internally displaced people (IDP), senior populations or communities in development at the local level (OECD, 2018). Although crafts represent an important contribution to the economy and society, less attention has been paid to them by statistics and research in the field of creative industries, except for countries strongly supporting the creative economy like the United Kingdom and Australia where the research on crafts is particularly evident.

One of the objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is to reduce the gender gaps and increase women's participation in the economy globally, as women have less access to the labour market

(United Nations General Assembly, 2015). Women's participation in the global labour force rate is 48.5%, which is 26.5 percentage points below the rate for men (International Labour Office, 2018). Giving them the opportunity of developing their own businesses and empower them at the social and cultural level, other key dimensions of human development, is essential to support human sustainable development.

Across the world and for centuries, women have nurtured cultural heritage (United Nations Industrial Development Organization [UNIDO], 2013) by preserving traditional techniques, generation after generation, and enhancing traditional designs. Nowadays, on the one hand, women are playing an active role in the awakening process of crafts as creative entrepreneurs (Dupon, 2011). For example, craftswomen represent 61% of artisans recognised in Portugal. However, there is a challenging lack of gender-based statistics related to crafts, and it is difficult to find gender-based indicators in terms of equal access and participation in the sector. Some research has focused on crafts as a vehicle for feminism and activism and recognises the voluntary return of women to traditional crafts as the third feminist wave (Offensend, 2012).

At the same time, for some years now, the number of artisan women entrepreneurs making handmade products is increasing, surprisingly. Most of the practitioners of the new craft who are working laboriously and passionately, experimenting with history, vision and feeling to produce high-quality modern and desirable objects of creation, are women. In the context of an economic crisis, the path of crafts may have offered professional opportunities to women who became unemployed or suffered professional discrimination in the labour market (D'Ippoliti et al., 2013).

Moreover, initiatives being implemented worldwide are using entrepreneurship and design as strategies and methods to bring sustainable change and promote the empowerment of communities (Bernarda et al., 2017) and the inclusion of social groups in vulnerable conditions, especially women from rural communities, senior populations, and people who have been forcibly displaced or who are at high risk. Initiatives aimed at strengthening women's cooperatives, promoting women's networks and building women's capacities in community leadership and business management are some examples. In this respect, international organisations such as the UNIDO, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) or the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) are also an interesting source of data and knowledge on how a creative economy can bring development. The report *Gender Equality. Heritage and Creativity*, published by UNESCO in 2014, brings important reflections to how cultural heritage and creativity can carry gender equality.

### **Research questions and hypothesis**

Entrepreneurship through crafts design empowers collectives at risk of social exclusion, such as refugees, migrant women, rural communities, indigenous groups and senior populations. The combination of creativity and social innovation might respond to complex challenges, such as a future of labour automatisisation, increased inequality and global interdependence.

The interest of research on the role of crafts and design in supporting social innovation and change aims at identifying strategies to invent meaningful value and solutions to solve the wicked problem (Buchanan, 1992) of the social exclusion of vulnerable groups. The proposed research will apply a design-oriented research approach to allow the investigation to integrate design as part of the research process and develop research through design.

*“... Craft has a huge potential to contribute to sustainable development in developing countries. It is labour intensive, it comprises a substantial part of the economic fabric of developing countries, and it has the potential to dovetail with the information revolution’s knowledge and creative economy to access new and lucrative sustainability-aligned markets. For these reasons, it provides developing countries with the opportunity to side-step the generic development paradigm, provided it can dovetail with the innovation-led, value-added, and manufacturing-oriented paradigm...”*  
 (Reubens, 2019, p. 99)

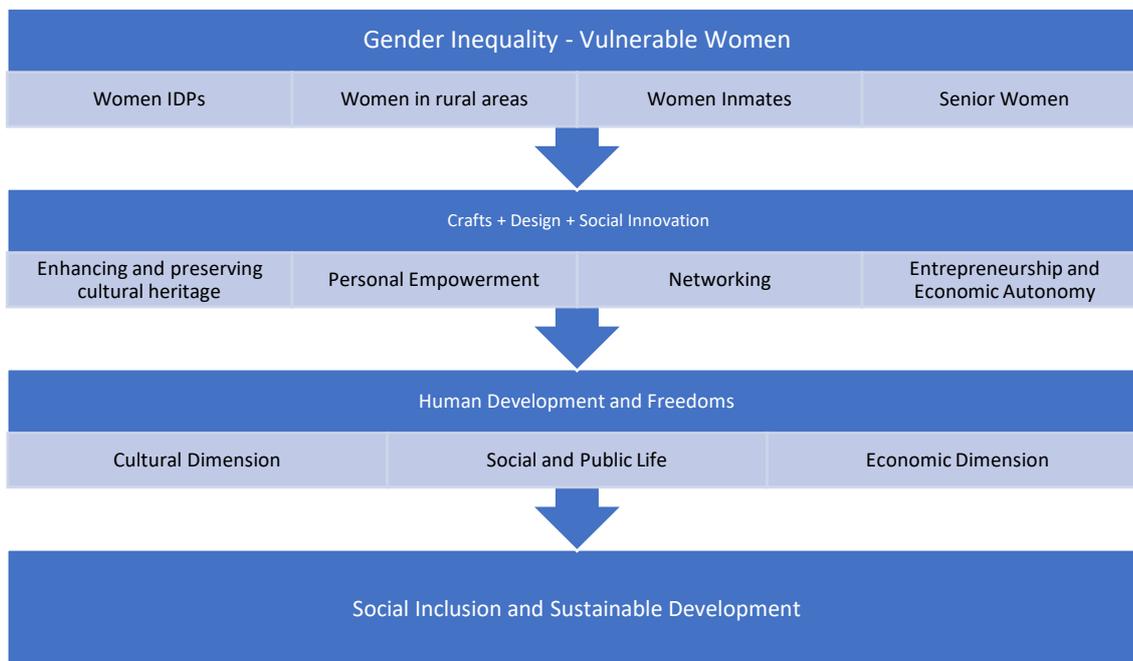


Table 1: Problems | solutions tree process analysis.

Taking these challenges into consideration, the research aims at finding responses to the following questions and project interests.

- Are crafts a powerful vector of social empowerment and economic autonomy?
- Are women at risk of social exclusion one of the groups that might benefit the most from this sector? If yes, why and how?
- Which role should design play in the development of artisanship as a strategic sector? What about information and communication technologies?
- What are the best practices or social innovation methods to follow in this process?
- Which stakeholders should be involved?
- What are the cultural impacts of promoting crafts as a strategic sector?

Other specific questions considering the interdisciplinary nature of this research that might allow the development of the study are:

**a) The concepts of crafts, design and craft design:**

- What are the more relevant disciplines of crafts being used by women? Is there a mutual understanding about the perception of crafts?
- How is the role of design perceived by craftswomen?
- Have craftswomen the same status, legal or informal, and social recognition everywhere?

- How do craftswomen perceive themselves: as makers, crafters, designers, artisans, entrepreneurs or artists? Is there any distinction related to their social status, cultural identity or geographical location?

**b) Social leadership and participation in the community:**

- What tools are used by craftswomen to promote their work?
- Do crafts strengthen women's social leadership? If yes, on what terms?
- Is there an informal network of craftswomen being developed on social media platforms?
- What mechanisms are used by craftswomen to participate in the community of crafters?

**c) Conciliation of professional and family life, economic independence, business sustainability and skills:**

- How do women get the necessary training to work as artisans?
- What is the spatial-organisational format used by craftswomen?
- Under which labour conditions do craftswomen develop their work?
- Are we talking about a full-time job or a part-time job? Or becoming a crafter in second life?
- Are crafts providing a professional career and long-term economic autonomy to craftswomen?
- What are the challenges craftswomen face in terms of sustainability, marketing, market and internationalisation?

**d) Cultural rights and participation in artistic and cultural life**

- Do craftswomen perceive their work as the transmission of knowledge and heritage dissemination?
- Do women feel that they are promoters of dialogue between cultural heritage and design? And what about cultural diversity and cultural identity?
- Are women playing a key role in craft heritage transmission and enhancement nowadays?

**Research plan and methodology**

The interest of the research on the role of crafts and design in supporting social innovation and change aims at identifying strategies to invent meaningful value and solutions to solve the wicked problem (Buchanan, 1992) of social exclusion of vulnerable groups. The proposed research will apply a design-oriented research approach to allow the investigation to integrate design as part of the research process and develop research through design.

To find responses to these general and specific questions, the proposed research project is structured in three investigation phases that will combine interdisciplinary approaches in the areas of crafts, design, entrepreneurship and women's empowerment and the methodologies of ethnographic research, good practices analysis and applied research. Regarding vulnerable women, the research will consider different challenges confronted by women at risk of social exclusion (unemployed, forcibly displaced and based in rural communities). It will follow collaborative principles and use ethnographic and empirical research (literature analysis, surveys and interviews), fieldwork observation, good practices analysis in cooperation with social innovation initiatives and applied research through collaborative workshops and self-experimentation.

The use of crafts and design as a driver of social change is an approach being used by international organisations such as UNHCR to promote IDP's social integration in several refugee camps, as well as by UNESCO, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and UNIDO in developing

countries. Associations such as La Fabrique Nomade (France), the Refugee Company (Netherlands), Cucula Design (Germany), Ragamuf (Finland-Turkey), Oloop Design (Slovenia), SEP (Jordan) and even the project MADE51 by UNHCR, amongst many others, are using this approach to promote refugees' integration. Initiatives such as Pet Lamp (Spain), Carpet of Life (Belgium), Ishkar (UK-France), A avô their trabalhar (Portugal), Ferramenta (Portugal), Tejiendo la Calle (Spain) and Reklusa (Portugal) also strategically use this approach to support other vulnerable groups such as indigenous communities, people living under protracted crisis, migrant women, senior women, rural women and women inmates. On the other hand, through the analysis of women entrepreneurs in the fields of crafts experiences, we would be able to better understand the challenges and impact at the social, economic and cultural level of developing a career in the crafts sector. Their testimonials will be used together with interviews, focus group reports and questionnaires to complement insights identified with other methods. Finally, collaborations with social innovation initiatives supporting vulnerable communities at risk of social exclusion and women artisans will be implemented to understand the business models implemented, the creative processes followed and the impact achieved.

The findings and outcomes identified from the three phases of hand methods of data analysis used will be analysed and used to elaborate on the role of entrepreneurship through crafts design and how it can contribute to social inclusion and empowerment. The findings will serve as a reference for designers, institutions, organisations and companies who wish to promote the empowerment of collectives at risk of social exclusion through crafts design and contribute to the knowledge in the fields of entrepreneurship, design, crafts and sustainable development.

## **Research plan stages and objectives**

### **1<sup>st</sup> stage**

First, a confirmatory approach will be applied to conceptualise the research and review and confirm the theoretical foundations, the purpose and the research questions (state-of-the-art). Expected timeline: Q1–Q4 | Semester 1 | Year 1.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> stage**

In the second stage, the research will follow exploratory methods to analyse craftswomen's perceptions and collect pertinent data from their experiences as entrepreneurs. In this regard, identification and study of case studies (preliminary case studies identified in the research plan and methodology plan) in Portugal and other countries through residences, travel or participation in international seminars as well as applied research through collaborations and self-experimentation with initiatives and entrepreneurs in Portugal will take place. Expected timeline: Q3–Q8 | Semesters 2–4 | Year 2.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> stage**

Third, the data will be interpreted, and conclusions will be drawn based on quantitative and qualitative indicators reviewed to gain an overview of common findings, challenges and differences. Conclusions will be disseminated as concrete output in the form of a toolkit and/or guidelines depending on the consultations maintained with stakeholders and end-users. Expected timeline: Q5–Q12 | Semesters 4–6 | Year 3.

## **Further research**

To bring entrepreneurship and design to crafts as strategies and methods to promote social innovation and the empowerment of vulnerable communities, the work plan proposed will allow us to achieve relevant

steps for the investigation in terms of boosting social-based and interdisciplinary research in the field of craft design for social change, providing evidence on the association between crafts and women's empowerment, as well as strengthening the scientific knowledge and practice of researchers in the field. In this regard, next to the conclusion of the literature review and the development of the state-of-the-art, exploratory methods and ethnographic research will allow us to identify and analyse case studies. In this phase, the analysis of craftswomen's perceptions as entrepreneurs as well as the development of collaborations with initiatives from a self-experimentation perspective will also be a relevant source of data and information.

Finally, the data and findings will be analysed to share the best craft design-based models of entrepreneurship with institutions or individuals who are involved in the promotion of women's empowerment and crafts development as well as committed to the promotion of social innovation.

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