

Global Artisanship Models for the Craft Sector:

Brown, Sass^{*a};

^a Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, United Kingdom

* sassbrown@mac.com

The burgeoning slow fashion world has grown alongside that of eco activism, resulting in a renewed interest in global artisanship. Yet models for sustainable development in the craft sector are varied, with a wide range of strengths, weaknesses and motivations. Through a qualitative multiple case study, grounded theory approach, this paper constitutes part of a greater research project that evaluates the successes, weaknesses and challenges of the various models of sustainable development, with the overall intent of building a database of best practices, and in an effort to propose business models supportive of the craft and artisan sector in the developing world.

The three main categories of sustainable development in the craft sector were identified as; 'Market Access', 'New Skills' and 'Artisanal Partnerships', each with different missions and models. This research seeks to establish the connections between the levels and types of intervention, the tier of market distribution, and the long-term support for the sustainment of traditional craftsmanship.

Keywords: craftsmanship; artisanship; sustainable development; heritage craft, luxury fashion; Sustainable Development; IASDR

1 Introduction

The relatively recent revaluation of DIY and local maker communities has grown in visibility and reach with eco-activism, and the exposure of the hidden price tag of fast fashion (Riddselius 2011, Clean Clothes Campaign 2012). The popularity of magazines like *Selvedge*, and *Hand Eye*, honoring the authenticity of making, has been bolstered by a multitude of blogs, websites, E-zines, and documentaries (*Handmade Nation* 2008, *Sweatshop* 2014). On shared, open source platforms, the world of slow fashion has used the digital environment to like, share and learn in a collaborative environment (Luckman 2012).

The massive growth of the luxury branded landscape is simultaneously reaching saturation, with the same product available from Mongolia to Milan (Kingsnorth 2009, Walker 2018) The over exposure of the 'bling-bling' culture of hip hop, anorexic models, excessive photo shopping in the media, a single, narrow ideal of beauty, youth and celebrity culture, are all at saturation point, causing a backlash from consumers and designers alike. The onslaught of garment factory disasters has drawn attention to the true cost of fast fashion (True Cost 2015, Fashion Revolution 2017), and nothing but distaste for over-consumption (Worldwatch 2013). As diverse as all these

topics seem, they culminate in a revolution of our collective value systems. The result is a re-evaluation of authenticity, of value and what constitutes luxury, guiding a renewed focus on ethical sourcing, sustainable materials and the re-evaluation of craft.

An appropriate strategy and method are needed for the preservation of traditional craft. (Nugraha 2018) The current models that support sustainable development in the craft sector are diverse, with a variety of focuses, strengths, weaknesses and intents. They include those that facilitate market access whether that is local or global, physical or digital (Cohen 1989), those that facilitate market access with business, logistical and other supports, as well as those that offer minimal design intervention, all the way through to complete imposition of aesthetic and process on tradition. There are models that teach a new skill, and those that partner with artisans, that are sensitive to their material culture, who work together to develop new products that appeal to a new market. The product outcomes of each of these models are sold through a range of tiers of distribution and price points.

2 Sustainable Development

2.1 The History

The original models for sustainable development in the craft sector was the exclusive domain of government agencies, NGO's and faith based organizations, with a mission to help the disadvantaged in the developing world, and craft merely a means to an end. As a result of that, neither the craft nor the final product was considered as important as the social mission to raise standards of living, and to lift people out of poverty. Undertaken predominately from a charitable perspective, this approach often meant that the longevity of market development was never fully realized (Holroyd 2018). In great part, it resulted in a product without major market traction. In some instances selling was never even considered as part of the model, while with others it was simply not the main focus (Johnson 2018). The consequences of this model, has often resulted in an undervalued global craft item, or the "trinketization" of crafts (Urry and Larson 2011). In many cases, the result is a watered-down version of a traditional artifact, made with inferior materials, and less skill, an item with only monetary relevance to those producing it, and only geographic relevance to those purchasing it (Howes 1996, Nugraha 2018). A phenomena called the Carved Giraffe Theory by Stacey Edgar (2011), and 'Field of Dreams thinking' (Ingram 2017), where NGO's fund products without an end market in mind.

Over time this model has given rise to a range of for-profit, mission-driven businesses that expanded on the mission of the developmental aid agencies by facilitating greater market access for artisans. The original mission driven businesses merely facilitated market access without any intervention in the production of the final product, much as their progenitors, the aid agencies did before them. With a business focus as the means to facilitating change, many of these mission-driven for-profits' do intervene in quality control and material standards, as well as logistics and curated content, in an effort to gain greater market acceptance. Both of these types of for-profit mission-driven businesses however, do not intervene in the designing of the product in any significant way, and focus on the mainstream market as the one that affords greater profits, and thereby results in greater impact on artisans' lives.

2.2 Need for Sustainable Development

Women overwhelmingly constitute the majority of the world's artisans and craftspeople, with 65% of artisan activity taking place in the developing world, and constituting a \$34 billion market (Artisan Alliance, 2014). Women do 66% of the world's work but earn only 10 percent of the

income, and own only 1% of the property (UN Women 2014). The impact is especially great for disenfranchised women artisans from developing countries, where artisanal work is second only to agriculture in terms of employment (UN Sustainable Fashion Alliance 2015).

The aim of this paper is to evaluate one model of sustainable development that promotes and markets craftsmanship and artisanship from the developing world to the Western market with minimal intervention: the market access model. The greater aim of my research, of which this paper represents the formative stage, is to evaluate the range and types of sustainable development models in the craft sector. To propose a theoretical, customizable framework that effectively serves to sustain traditional craftspeople and their material culture. And to evaluate and compare what is meant by success, whether that is the number of artisans reached, or the retention of traditional craft, and the balance between the two.

2.3 Participant Recruitment

A broad range of mission-driven for profits, not-for-profits, NGO's, governmental agencies and faith-based missions were evaluated. The case studies were chosen to represent a variety of craft skills, and end products as it pertains to apparel and accessories, and to cover a range of businesses from small to large in scale. A broad global spread was sought in the selection of the case studies, intended to explore the connection between the type of intervention, the market placement, and its relationship to success.

A long list of potential brands and institutions were compiled from a variety of resources (Artisan Alliance; Ethical Fashion Initiative; Common Objective; the Artisan Resource; the International Folk Art Market exhibitor list; and Aid to Artisans). Entities were prioritized to represent a breadth of material expressions, craft techniques, and levels of intervention that ranged from minimal to maximum, type of organization, geographic location, market served and price range. The list was then subdivided into the main identified themes of; Market Access; Skill Imposition; and Design Partnerships, referred to by Nugraha (2018) as 'preservation', 'revitalization', and 'transformation'. There were very few pure cases that fell neatly into one category, resulting in a sliding scale of the various types of intervention, rather than a simple categorization, something referred to by Murphy (2018) as 'interconnections, interdependencies and messiness'.

3 Methodology

This cluster of case studies evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of a range of enterprises that provide market access to artisans, focusing on those that exert little or no design intervention. The six case studies are: Global Girlfriend, Ten Thousand Villages, the Santa Fe International Folk Art Market, Threads of Life, Centro de Textiles Tradicionales del Cusco and KUR Collection.

This study is qualitative in nature, and based in Grounded Theory, reflecting the constant comparative nature of the multi-case study methodology (Cassidy 2018), with the intended result being a study that is useful in practice (Glaser and Strauss 2000). The types of data collected included in-depth interviews, observations, product evaluations, the entities own website, blog, annual or impact report where produced, as well as articles in the public domain.

The case studies began with common interview questions focused on market positioning, curation of product, range of crafts represented, and levels of intervention, as well as respect for the tradition of craft practiced. The organization and analysis of data helped identify areas of

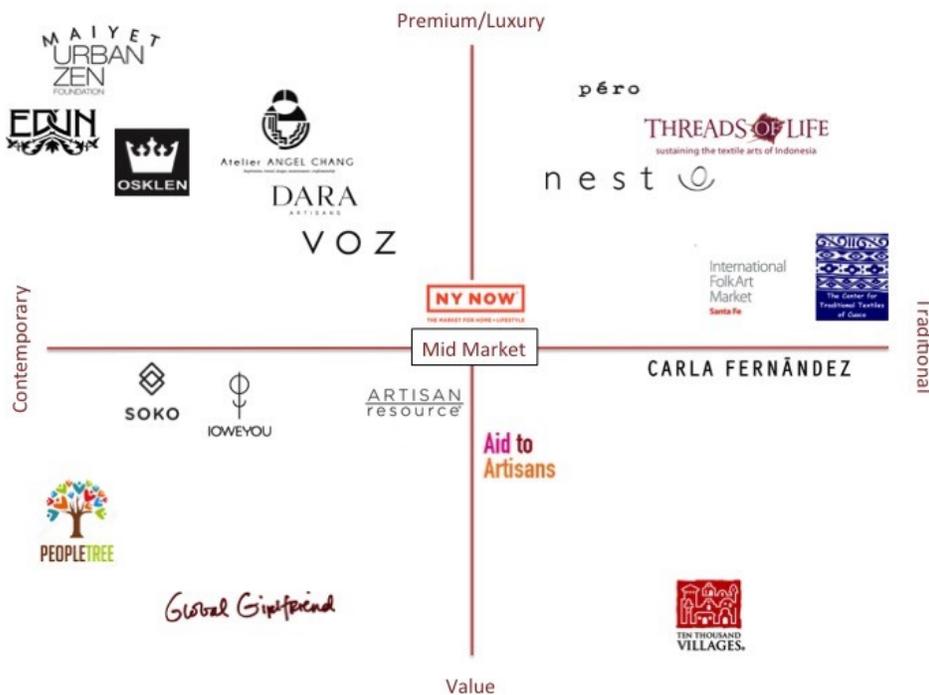
missing information, prompting follow up questions, additional research and directing the selection of further case studies. The analysis of data was divided into three phases. Data Reduction, which helped to keep the project manageable by limiting the amount of data, and which was supported with the use of coding software NVivo. The coding process required the attaching of concepts to data, and the building of relationships between concept codes (Urguhart 2013). The second stage of Data Display helped with the organization and display of data with the use of charts, and matrices (Robson 2014). The final stage of conclusion drawing and verification began at 'the start of data collection, with material analysed for a general sense of data content, important themes, impressions, emergent patterns and areas of contradiction (Miles and Huberman 1994) and to generate theories. The overarching categories identified were: Artisanship, Developmental Aid, Intervention, Motivation, Philanthropy, Problems, Product, and Reporting, with most harbouring sub-nodes and relationships between concepts, creating clusters around categories.

4 Data collection and Analysis

The criteria for evaluation of collected data are the effectiveness of artisanal empowerment, the respect for the culture and heritage of the craftspeople, and the ability to sustain or regain the craft traditions in the long-term. The perceived value of the end products was assessed through the tier of market penetration (mass through luxury).

4.1 Data Display

The charts developed were: Levels of Intervention, Empowerment Measures, and Range of Artisanship. Organizational charts were recorded, and a brand matrix was developed to record market placement. The development of these charts helped to present my research and identify emergent themes as I continue to develop frameworks to evaluate concepts that lead to insights and understanding.



The Levels of Intervention chart is intended to record and compare the various types of intervention on the artisans from a variety of perspectives. Design intervention is defined as the level of imposition made on an artisan to produce something that is not part of their aesthetic tradition, with 'no intervention' implying the final product is entirely the product of tradition, and 'total design intervention' the complete imposition of an external design. Product Development is listed separately from Design Intervention to separate the developmental processes used. Quality Control is understood as a system of maintaining standards of production from a technical perspective. The criteria of Business Intervention is intended to record the level of support given to the artisans on business development, and the Design Curation criteria is intended to record the level of influence exerted through the selection of products purchased.

Table 1 Levels of Intervention Comparison Chart.

Measure	None	Minimal	Significant
Design Curation	TOL CTTC	KUR	I FAA GG 10,000
Design Intervention	I FAA TOL KUR	GG CTTC	10,000
Product Development	I FAA TOL CTTC KUR	GG	10,000
Quality Control		TOL	I FAA GG 10,000 KUR
Business Intervention	CTTC KUR	I FAA 10,000	TOL GG

Legend:

10,000 = Ten Thousand Villages
 CTTC = Centro de Textiles Tradicionales del Cusco
 GG = Global Girlfriend
 I FAA = Santa Fe International Folk Art Market
 KUR = KUR Collection
 TOL = Threads of Life

Artisanal Empowerment is defined as the level of autonomy granted to the artisans. Respect for Culture is intended to evaluate the level of appreciation for traditional material cultural.

Table 2 Levels of Intervention Comparison Chart.

Measure	None	Minimal	Significant	Extensive	Total
I FAA Artisanal Empowerment				Extensive	
I FAA Respect for Culture				Extensive	
GG Artisanal Empowerment			Significant		
GG Respect for Culture		Minimal			
TOL Artisanal Empowerment					Total
TOL Respect for Culture					Total

CTTC Artisanal Empowerment				Extensive	
CTTC Respect for Culture				Extensive	
TOL Artisanal Empowerment			Significant		
TOL Respect for Culture		Minimal			
KUR Artisanal Empowerment			Significant		
KUR Respect for Culture				Extensive	

5 Results

Cross comparison between the levels of Intervention and the brand matrix, revealed that the enterprises that exert the least Intervention are those that produce more traditional products.

A comparison between the levels of Empowerment and levels of Intervention reveal a defined correlation between the highest levels of Empowerment and the lowest levels of Intervention. Similarly a comparison between the Brand Matrix and the Levels of Intervention reveals high levels of intervention corresponding with lower Market Value.

A comparison between the Empowerment Chart and the Brand Matrix reveals that those that empower the artisans the most, predominately sell in the 'Premium to Luxury' marketplace, producing a 'Traditional' product, while those that produce contemporary products, tend to sell in the value or mass market, and rank significantly lower in empowerment measures.

There is a long reverence for traditional indigenous art, and world craft, but predominately through the lens of historic artefacts, ethnography and curation. Contemporary efforts to revalue traditional craft is often viewed through well-meaning trade-not-aid undertakings, training disadvantaged communities a new skill. Many designer collaborations overstate the developmental component of their undertakings, while underplaying the material culture by introducing new skills, instead of working with traditional ones. This has resulted in the dumbing down of tradition (Edgar 2011, Harrod 1999).

There are a large number of the well-meaning NGO's that work with heritage craft skills, but whose complete lack of intervention in the final design, results in an undervalued product that cannot gain traction in the sophisticated luxury market, ultimately, the market best placed to appreciate artisanship (Johnson 2018). Preliminary analysis has resulted in a broad alignment of type of intervention and market value. Those with minimal intervention in the end product are most often sold in local markets to aid workers and tourists, at a moderate price point. Those that impose a Western technique or aesthetic are mostly sold in the contemporary market at a mid-range price point. Those that collaborate with artisans in long-term design partnerships that respect tradition while infusing Western design sensibilities are mostly sold in the premium market.

6 Conclusion

The need for companies to embrace sustainable development practices, combined with the loss of traditional hand-crafted techniques around the world (Walker 2018), potentially positions global artisanship as the future of luxury. Culture, history and heritage, are priceless, something the luxury fashion industry was based on, but lost sight of, as it shifted from family owned to corporate conglomerate (Edgar 2011). The authenticity of products made with heritage craft skill are a means of reinvigorating the over-exposed branded luxury fashion market (Murphy 2018).

Global craft needs more than a global audience for its long-term retention, it needs re-contextualization through collaborative partnerships (Holroyd 2018). It needs the tradition, the craft and the authenticity, reinterpreted through a collaborative process with a sophisticated aesthetic. It also needs the support of external agencies; a respect for traditional culture, the recognition of institutions such as museums as a component of national culture heritage, political and legislative support, not to mention the need for logistics in transportation and communication, often not a given in a remote artisanal population. Part of my ongoing research will be to evaluate the need for these supports, and to align them with the success of the entities studied, as well as review and evaluate the embedded values in the use of terms such as progress, and development.

The intent of my research is to consider whether global artisanship can be completely re-contextualized and valued through an equal partnership of traditional skills and sophisticated design. The partnering of design and craft can honor and value the tradition, the history of the craft, the context and the people, while simultaneously re-contextualizing it, through partnerships with sensitive and accomplished designers, to re-value the artisanal work with cutting edge, sophisticated designs (Walker 2018).

Few have yet to achieve the careful balance of contemporary design, artisanship and tradition that values each in equal measure, though some have come close. The success of brands such as Maiyet and Donna Karan's Urban Zen, who honor the heritage of indigenous craftsmanship, are helping to establish global artisanship in the luxury tier of the fashion industry, as well as the means to retain traditional material culture.

7 References

- Alliance for Artisan Enterprise, (2014). *Impact Report 2014*. Retrieved from <http://www.artisanalliance.org/>
- Cassidy, T., 2018. Research Approaches for Culturally Significant Design. In: S. Walker, ed. *Design Roots Culturally Significant Design, Products, and Practices*. London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 277-289.
- Clean Clothes Campaign. (2012). *Deadly Denim: Sandblasting in the Bangladesh Garment Industry*. Retrieved from <https://cleanclothes.org/resources/publications/cc-c-deadly-denim.pdf/view>
- Edgar, S. (2011). *Global Girlfriends: How One Mom Made it her Business to Help Women in Poverty Worldwide*. New York, NY: St Martin's Press.
- Fashion Revolution (2017, June). *Why we need a revolution*. Retrieved from <https://www.fashionrevolution.org/about/why-do-we-need-a-fashion-revolution/>
- Glaser, B.G & Strauss, A.L. (2000). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. New York, NY: Aldine.
- Levine, F. (Producer) & Levine, F. (Director). (2009). *Handmade Nation* [Motion Picture]. USA: Milwaukee DIY.

- Harrod, T. (1999). *The Crafts in Britain in the 20th Century*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Holroyd, A.T. (2018). Cultural Significance, Revitalization, and Authenticity. In S, Walker, (Ed.). *Design Roots Culturally Significant Design, Products, and Practices* (pp. 25-37). London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Howes, D. (1996). *Cross-Cultural Consumption: Global Markets, Local Realities*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Ingram, W., 5 June 2017. Skype Interview. Threads of Life.
- Johnson, P. (2018). New Caribbean Design. Revitalizing Place-based Products. In S, Walker, (Ed.). *Design Roots Culturally Significant Design, Products, and Practices* (pp. 190-197). London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Kingsnorth, P. (2009). *Real England: the Battle Against the Bland*. London, UK: Granta Books.
- Luckman, S. (2012). *Locating Cultural Work*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Miles, M.B & Huberman, A.M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis: a Methods Sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Murphy, E. (2018). Designing Authentic Brands. How Designerly Approaches Can Craft Authentic Brand Identity. In S, Walker, (Ed.). *Design Roots Culturally Significant Design, Products, and Practices* (331-339). London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Nugraha, A. (2018). Transforming Tradition in Indonesia. A Method for Maintaining Tradition in a Craft and Design Context. In S, Walker, (Ed.). *Design Roots Culturally Significant Design, Products, and Practices* (129-130). London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Riddselius, C & Maher, S. (2011). Labour Behind the Label: Killer Jeans. Retrieved from <http://labourbehindthelabel.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/killer-jeans-report-final.pdf>
- Robson, C. (2014). *How to do a Research Project: A Guide for Undergraduate Students* (2nd ed.). Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons.
- Karlssen, P. Brenna, J. (Producer), & Kleven, J. (Director). (2014). *Sweatshop – Deadly Fashion*. [TV series all episodes]. Norway: Aftenposten TV.
- Thomas, D. (2007). *Deluxe How Luxury Lost its Luster*. New York NY: Penguin books.
- Ross, M. (Producer), & Morgan, A. (Director). (2015). *The True Cost*. [Motion Picture]. USA: Untold Creative.
- UN Women, (2015). *Annual Report 2014-2015*. Available from <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/6/annual-report-2014-2015>
- UN Alliance for Sustainable Fashion, (2015). Available from <https://unfashionalliance.org/>
- Urguhart, C. (2013) *Grounded Theory for Qualitative Research: a Practical Guide*. London: Sage.
- Urry, J & Larson, J. (2011). *The Tourist Gaze* (3rd ed.). London, UK: Sage Publications.
- Walker, S. (2018). Culturally Significant Artifacts and their Relationship to Tradition and Sustainability In S. Walker, (Ed.). *Design Roots Culturally Significant Design, Products, and Practices* (39-50). London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic.
- World Watch, (2013). *World Watch Report: Transforming Cultures to Reduce Consumption*. Available from <http://blogs.worldwatch.org/transformingcultures/>

About the Authors:

Sass Brown: research interest centre on global artisanship and material culture in the craft sector of the developing world. With a background in advising artisan communities and the creative industries, Brown has published two books on ethical fashion.

Acknowledgement: I would like to acknowledge the support of my ever-patient PhD advisors who have helped to guide my continued transition from commercial writer to academic: Thank you David Tyler

and Phoebe Apeageyi, and the latest addition to the team; Joanna Blanco-Velo.