CRAFTS, DEVELOPMENT POLICIES AND FAIR TRADE: CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES THROUGH THE LENS OF DESIGN

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INTRODUCTION

Crafts belong to the family of applied arts, just like their cousin, design. Craft trades are characterised by the art of bringing practical, aesthetic and symbolic constraints together and giving them form through the mastery of a technique, in order to meet needs that are experienced. Crafts are also the expression of a culture that connects members of a community. The latter change them as they are handed down from generation to generation, according to the social and societal phenomena of the time.

Crafts require time for the transmission of knowledge, for imagination, experimentation, the mastery of hand movements – an amount of time that is very far removed from that dictated by the ideal of modernity. The latter, set according to an economic understanding of progress and development, has long driven out craft practices in favour of industrial design. Crafts are not profitable enough. Too slow, too costly. Not perfect enough... Any cultural expression departing from modernist aesthetic values and representations has long been associated with what is "poorest" and most "under-developed", opposing innovation and change.

Yet crafts play a part in creating wealth not only economically, but also socially and culturally, by enabling the affirmation of human dignity and the recognition of values such as diversity and solidarity, or even equity when they form part of a social and solidarity economy approach. It is from this perspective that players in cooperation and development, including the fair trade movement, have become progressively involved in the craft sector.

However, everywhere you turn the latter is confronted with declining handicraft sales and a weakening of its image, which calls into question the scope of its impact in improving the quality of life of craftspeople's communities. Its economic model must be reinvented, brought up to date in light of the new challenges posed by changes in contemporary society.

In the face of these issues, can design – or more precisely participative or co-design, in the sense of a horizontal collaboration between craftsperson and designer – provide possible solutions? That is the central question of this study, which is composed of three parts:

- The first two parts explore the concepts and challenges briefly mentioned above, on the strength of international literature and reflections on these subjects;
- The third part is based on practical experimentation which brought together craftswomen and workers for the organisation Aj Quen, a local designer and a research officer for Oxfam-Magasins du monde.

This co-design experiment aimed to find joint solutions to the decline in orders of fair trade handicrafts. These solutions had to strengthen craftswomen's autonomy in their business projects and reinvigorate the supply of fair trade handicrafts, while reconciling cultural transmission with adapting products to the market. So, one of the challenges consisted, with the help of a tailored methodology, in transferring design tools and knowledge making it possible to build the creative capacities of the craftswomen.

Numerous lessons can be drawn from this experiment. It allowed all involved to gain a better understanding of cultural and socio-economic reality at both ends of the handicraft value chain. It demonstrated that this better understanding resulted in a renewed creativity and a greater efficiency, and therefore allowed producers' autonomy in their business projects to grow.

The avenues for reflection and action to be drawn from the study are developed in the section "Possible formulae for the future". These can of course feed into or serve as a basis for reflection in other contexts and other areas of craft, design and fair trade.

1. CRAFTS IN THE MODERN WORLD

1.1 DEFINING THE TRIBE OF CRAFTSPEOPLE

Two elements are commonly associated with crafts: being made by hand, and tradition. The former involves a set of know-how inherited through the latter.

The handmade element, first of all, seems to be what defines crafts *a priori*. It is found in most definitions of crafts. One of the most often cited definitions is that offered by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), for whom craft or artisanal products are those "produced by artisans, either completely by hand or with the help of hand-tools or even mechanical means, as long as the direct manual contribution of the artisan remains the most substantial component of the finished product."[1]

Now this element results from a tradition, itself passed on by a cultural community which gives the craft object a meaning and a value in use that is symbolic, aesthetic and functional, such that it reflects the community's way of seeing and interpreting the world. The craft object gives shape to the intangible heritage of a community.

Every culture has its own form of craft. Furthermore, we are seeing new forms of craft emerging in modern societies, which explore the possibilities that new technologies can bring to craft techniques. "Artisan 2.0", for example, merges digital technologies with manual practices. This term alludes to the infinite possibilities opened up by the internet from the 2000s onwards: possibilities to solve and share production problems through collaboration and the sharing of knowledge within communities of "connected" users. The latter freely and spontaneously teach themselves about subjects, problems or common issues. Artisan 2.0s are building the foundations of a new tradition which marries handiwork and digital technology, in an area where everything in the collective imagination is against them.

In this context, in his work *The Craftsman*[2] (2008), the philosopher Richard Sennet suggests a broadened definition of craftsmanship. He readily takes inspiration from the ancient ideal of craftsmanship to analyse professions that are very far removed in appearance, such as pottery, programming of *Linux* open-source software, and medicine.

What the professions of potter, doctor and Linux programmer have in common is, on the one hand, **the acquisition of a skilled proficiency** of their practice, **through the transfer of knowledge as well as through repetitive concrete experience in applying this knowledge**. This is what defines tradition, according to the author.

On the other hand, it is their **ties with a community of reference**, the very community that transfers the knowledge and sets standards for the quality and excellence of work. That of the ancestors and fellow citizens with whom the craftsperson is connected. This community could be the medical community (also including patients), or the users of the pottery and the open-source software.

As its name indicates, what makes a "community" is the sharing of common elements and property between the members of a group, such as natural resources, values, practices, myths and beliefs. The community collaborates in a direct or indirect manner in the evolution of its crafts.

Furthermore, a fundamental aspect of craft work is the **iterative nature of the technique**. Through constant exchanges with the reference community, between theory and practice, concept and technique, the craftsperson is led to identify and solve problems simultaneously, in order to guarantee the required quality and excellence. In doing so, they contribute to a knowledge base that is open, changing and evolving. Experimentation plays a major role

1 Definition adopted by the UNESCO/ITC Symposium "Crafts and the International Market: Trade and Customs Codification", Manila, 6-8 October 1997.
2 This work is available in French translation under the title "Ce que sait la main, la culture de l'artisanat" (Albin Michel, 2010).

in craftsmanship.

Indeed, even when a series is produced, each piece of hand-made pottery will have a distinguishing mark. Its design will evolve with time and the uses to which it is put by the community of reference. Similarly, for the same operation a surgeon will follow an identical technical procedure on different patients, but will get a variation in the results. He will perfect his expertise as advances are made in the medical community's knowledge. Linux open-source software, to continue the example of the author, is itself the result of a process of experimentation based on the principal of reciprocity[3]. It is free to use for web 2.0 users, who help to adapt the software and correct bugs and security holes through their use, thereby helping to perfect the operating system. In this way, as with pottery but in a very different context, the open-source software is continually evolving and adapting as it is contributed to, reviewed and corrected by a community of amateur and professional users. Equally, for the author, "the experimental rhythm of problem solving and problem finding makes the ancient potter and the modern programmer members of the same tribe" (Sennett, p.41), namely that of craftspeople.

Thus, while the parallel that the philosopher draws between the Linux programmer and the craftsperson may seem convoluted (the programmer a priori making nothing by hand), it serves to better establish what defines craftsmanship for him: **the practice of skill acquired through the transmission of knowledge within a community to which the practitioner belongs, and forming part of a system of open knowledge that evolves through experimentation**.

For the art historian Surnai Benítez Aranda (2009) too, the concept of crafts goes beyond the craft object taken in isolation. It is an activity in which "economic, technical, productive, commercial, social, aesthetic and cultural elements of great complexity are involved. Crafts are usually integrated or share spaces with other expressions of art and culture and even with industrial production itself". **Crafts are part of the family of applied arts, like design and architecture, which are characterised by the art of marrying form and function through technique, in order to meet practical needs**. She adds that crafts are located at the boundary between the unique work of art and the industrially mass-produced item. They share features and characteristics with both of these groups of objects. **Their practice is intrinsically creative**.

Three functions can be distinguished in the craft object:

- **The practical function**, which determines its usefulness;
- **The aesthetic function**, which gives it coherence. It translates into formal characteristics (such as materials, textures, colours, contrasts, etc.);
- **The symbolic function**, which reflects the beliefs of the cultural community of reference through symbols and meanings.

These three functions are interdependent. The aesthetic and symbolic functions and necessary to understand the use that must be made of the object, and vice versa.

The functional nature of crafts makes them a human-centred practice. They can be the product of individual or collective work, and they encompass the cycles of design/production, distribution and consumption.

The predominance of manual techniques is fundamental in the definition of crafts proposed by the author, which is what differentiates them from the serialised and impersonal production of industry.

Moreover, current social phenomena have an influence on craft practices, including problems linked to the exhaustion of natural resources.

On this subject, UNESCO states that craft products are made "**using raw materials from sustainable resources**". Indeed, there is a reciprocal relationship between crafts and the environment. Different types of craft production generally draw on resources made available by the environment, whether rural or urban, natural or industrial. This means that crafts are inclined towards the preservation and renewal of all elements useful for production, and are consequentially in greater solidarity

3 The Linux experimentation process is led by the North American Richard Stallman, a programmer and activist in the free software movement.

with natural resources, common property, and the different generations between which they are shared.

At a time when new forms of craftsmanship are emerging (such as Artisan 2.0 described above, or even artisanal seed growing[4]), embracing a broadened vision of what characterises craft trades helps to redefine them in the light of the issues and challenges facing contemporary societies. The vision of Nicola de Barquin, the founder of Open Fab in Brussels[5] and coordinator of the "Artisan 2.0" project[6], sums up well the different elements discussed above. For him, craftsmanship is mainly a question of know-how, scale and biodiversity. Know-how is acquired through experimentation and practice, in dialogue with a community of reference, and linked with contemporary social and societal issues. Production methods are carried out at a more sustainable and adaptable scale (according to available resources, orders, etc.), which also makes them more vulnerable. He therefore highlights the importance of devising and creating mechanisms for protecting the status of craftspeople. Organising craftspeople into cooperatives, for example, is a current issue for him. While the handmade element does not seem to be what defines crafts for him, contrary to the definitions of UNESCO and Benítez Aranda, it remains very much present in his idea of crafts, and varies according to the combinations he produces with new technologies.

1.2 CRAFTS IN THE SHADOW OF INDUSTRY

The modernisation of technology and the globalisation of trade have rocked the world of expertise. They have led to the emergence of new forms of craft, just as they have undermined older trades. Different categorisations have appeared in order to differentiate forms of craft according to their relationship to "modernity". **Thus, n*eocrafts or artistic crafts* are terms used to designate a more modern, more urban type of craft, which follows aesthetic criteria equated with those of art and design, whereas traditional crafts are equated with rural practices, inherited from local traditions and ancient trades**.

The ties between traditional crafts and their community of reference seem to have been weakened as their practice has been "dissociated from so-called nobler quests", and as "technical competence has been cut off from imagination", regrets Sennett (2008). At various moments in Western history, the practice of crafts indeed seems to have diminished in favour of industrial design.

Industrial revolutions have dramatically affected production patterns and the organisation of work. They have displaced the traditional artisanal production of many societies and communities. Benítez Aranda (2009) highlights that this displacement has caused a breakdown in the unity between aesthetics and usefulness inherent in craft objects. The ties within communities have been weakened and urbanised, proportionally to the speed at which trade has been globalised. Communities have mutated to the point of no longer being able to interpret the values and functions of crafts.

Let us take two examples, drawn from the Colombian handicraft sector: the masks and weaving of the Sibundoy valley, situated in the Amazonian region of Putumayo.

Hand-carved then hand-painted by the Inga and Kämentsá communities living in the region, these coloured masks tell with a certain black humour the story and the position of communities in the face of foreign invasion since the colonial period. So they traditionally have a communicative function between members of the same community, and carry a message of cultural resistance. While the community of origin remains keeper of the practical, aesthetic and symbolic function of these masks, today it is easy to acquire them outside of this context, in craft fairs and markets, in exchange for a sum considered equivalent to the value of craftwork provided, without necessarily understanding the symbolic value of the purchase. In the hands of people outside the community (often tourists), the object acquires a folkloric and decorative value. The trader,

4 The profession of artisanal seed grower consists in producing a quality farmers' seed, adapted to the diversity of rural or urban soils, the changing climate and high taste and nutritional requirements. See: https://blogs.mediapart.fr/minga-faire-ensemble/blog/130616/pour-une-reconnaissance-du-metier-d-artisan-semencier
5 http://openfab.be/
6 "Artisan 2.0" is a project backed by Open Fab as part of the Maelbeek Sustainable Neighbourhood Contract for the Ixelles municipality. It brings together a community of craftspeople who wish to explore the possibilities that technology can bring to handicraft techniques, in order to carry out their projects more efficiently and to innovate.

who is rarely himself the craftsman of the objects he is selling, often offers a limited, incomplete and sometimes even erroneous interpretation of the symbolic message the object holds.

Likewise, the personal accounts of two weavers from the Kämentsá community, taken from a filmed report[7], provide a good illustration of the question of the function and value of their crafts.

One of them, Mamá Narciza, was taught how to weave by the wife of a cousin in exchange for gardening services. She makes clothes and accessories for daily use aimed above all at members of her community: "the daughters, the nieces", she states. Her work is carried out entirely by hand. She works to order for the families of the village, when she has time. The symbolism of these pieces of weaving was transmitted to her by an old woman, a member of her community: "*the volcano, the grass snake which ate people, for me it is the story of Sibundoy... I would never have believed that what she taught me could one day have a value*" she says in the documentary.

The other weaver, Mamá Carmela Agreda, recounts: "*when I was a child of six years old, I used to look at what my mother and grandmother were weaving, and ask them 'why are you weaving?'. They would answer 'this is a belt to hold up a skirt, here we are weaving our thoughts: our food, our traditional medicine... [...] Black represents Mother Earth, white says we are a peaceful people, blue represents water sources, and red the blood spilt by our ancestors'*". Like Mamá Narciza, this weaver professes that she "*never would have thought these stories had a value*".

What is the value that these weavers are talking about? It is startling to hear them wonder about and even be surprised by the "value" of their handiwork. As if, by trading with the outside, they were discovering the importance their craft holds through the technical processes involved and the symbolism it contains. The outside means the urban and Westernised consumer market. The bridge between the two is established by handicraft development programmes financed by governmental or non-profit organisations. In this specific case, the organisation is *Artesanías de Colombia*[8], a joint enterprise of national importance whose mission is to strengthen the work of Colombian craftspeople, to promote the development of the handicraft sector in Colombia and incorporate it into the national system of production.

As trade has expanded and manual work has been marginalised, communities have mutated. So has the meaning and value given to crafts, as a consequence of trends in consumption. A separation has occurred between the craftsperson and the user of the manufactured product, which represents a major difficulty in this sector. Indeed, the development of industry has established patterns of consumption that are governed by a modernist aesthetic associating comfort with immaculate and minimalist environments, lauding technology and industrial products as a mark of progress. Under the pretext of development, production systems have gradually supplanted traditional craft products, considered insufficiently modern. These products thereafter find their niche in versatile markets, like the tourist market for example, which has developed proportionally to the speed of the globalisation of trade.

Mamá Narciza clarifies in her account that what she produces depends on the individual order. Now in traditional societies, orders are made between families, on a community scale. There is a direct link between the producer and the person placing the order. The craftswoman takes on the role of designer as fully as that of maker and price-negotiator, in accordance with the order placed. The two people linked by the transaction are bound by the same values, making the design and negotiation process all the easier.

In modern societies, however, the explosion of the scale of trade tends to separate the craftsperson from their customer. With globalisation the figure of the merchant intermediary has appeared, offering a ser-

7 "Tejeduria Kämentsá", directed by Andrés F. Velasco for Artesanías de Colombia (2017). Accessed on 2 October 2017 at: https://www.facebook.com/oficiosancestrales/videos/502424896758262/

8 To find out more visit: http://artesaniasdecolombia.com.co/PortalAC/General/template_index.jsf

vice that has become indispensable for a large number of craftspeople, whose role is often reduced to simple production: to the repetition of hand movements, to refer to Sennett's analysis. The craftsperson has difficulties responding assertively to the needs of a consumer audience foreign to their culture, for example by adapting their designs or their technique.

Lastly, the writer and feminist Silvia Federici points at another unprecedented separation caused by the development of industrialisation and the globalisation of trade: that between humans and nature. For Federici, "globalisation has created a world where people no longer understand the forces that determine their daily lives. Some become richer and others poorer, but decisions being taken in London or New York seem more mysterious each time... and of all this can dislocate the family or the community in so far as the earth's transmission chain is broken".[9]

The author is worried about the breakdown of bonds within communities, and between communities and their environment, through the globalisation of trade and sexual division of work. Benítez Aranda agrees with this point, highlighting the role that women traditionally occupy in the transmission of craft knowledge and of the environmental awareness linked to it. By preserving craft know-how, women have indeed long played – and still play in some communities – an important role in the management and protection of the commons. This has been harmed by the progressive incorporation of women into the labour market without roles being redistributed in parallel between men and women, in both the private and public sectors.

1.3 A QUESTION OF SCALE AND SPEED

The craftsperson's loss of momentum in the national production system has increased with the industrialisation of technologies, and market economies that aim to produce ever more, ever faster, while reducing production costs. Increasing profitability is the rule, to make phenomenal economies of scale towards infinite markets.

Going hand in hand with neo-liberal thinking, this economic model drives out any marginal production, and dares to do the absurd, like going to track down the cheapest possible workforce thousands of kilometres away, distancing production units from consumer markets, and bringing in consumer goods from elsewhere that could have been produced at home.

Multinational businesses can take this liberty as they dominate the market. They make the rules, create the demand to ensure that they consequently meet it, with substantial profit margins to boot. The craftsperson functions at another speed, another scale, as we have seen in the points above. They do not play by the same rules on the chessboard of international commercial trade, and find themselves all the more vulnerable.

The process of globalisation has developed as technologies and production processes have been modernised. Technical, technological and computing advances have thus helped it to spread, by reducing distances between countries through faster transportation and means of communication, and by replacing certain manual processes with high-performing mechanical machines with a minimum margin for error, etc.

In this way, local markets in both the handicraft sector and the industrial sector have found themselves in competition with imports of less expensive alternatives. In the case of crafts, a whole tangible and intangible heritage is at stake.

The case of the Colombian *sombrero volteado* [10] (turned hat) is one glaring example among many others. This object, made of hand-woven reeds, is an integral part of the cultural heritage of the Zenú indigenous community, native to the Caribbean region of Colombia. More than that, it has become a national symbol, and was recognised as such in 2004, when the Colombian state declared it a Cultural Symbol of the Nation, and in 2011 when it received Designation of Origin status.

These two mechanisms, intended to protect craftspeople from imita-

9 https://elsaltodiario.com/feminismos/silvia-federici-entrevista-vivimos-una-nueva-caza-de-brujas. Accessed 7 October 2017
10 "Turned hat" in Spanish.

tions or plagiarism of their products by recognising the exclusivity of the product to its geographical environment, have not been sufficient to prevent low-priced competition.

Plastic "Made in China" imitations of the *sombrero volteado* are found today in Colombia's tourist towns for the price of US$7, whereas the handmade version of the turned hat is sold for between US$30 and US$800, according to the complexity of the weaving. The production cost of an imitation is estimated at US$0.55, to the profit of the company that incurred it.

Neither have traditional Chinese crafts escaped from this sad scenario. This is the case for craft items made from woven rushes, described by the designer Fangwu Tung (2012). This type of handicraft is characteristic of the ancestral know-how of the Yuan Li region, handed down orally for centuries, from one generation to the next. It became popular towards the end of the Qing Dynasty, exported to Japan under "Japanese law" during the occupation of a part of China by the latter (1895-1945), and even reaching peak production when the Chinese government regained Taiwan, between 1945 and 1949. The craft of rush-weaving became a prosperous sector and its export brought it into a golden age, to the point where nearly every Chinese and Japanese household owned at least one rush-woven item.

However, the handmade rush-weaving sector declined as the industrialisation of manufacturing processes developed, and as alternative materials appeared on the market. These materials allowed the same objects to be produced at extremely competitive prices, and new designs were created where ancestral techniques had limited the range of possible forms for hats, bags and rush mats. Handmade production has suffered to the point where today craftspeople have become marginalised in the Chinese production system, despite their skill and mastery of the manual technique. Sales prices of rush-woven handicraft objects are underestimated in relation to the effort that goes in to making them, and yet remain uncompetitive compared to the rest of the market. To provide an example, a large (king-sized) rush mat is 3 weeks' work for two people, and has a retail price of US$500. A mat of the same size produced by machine has a retail price of US$70[11].

This second example reflects the fact that "Made in China" represents much more than just products which come from China. It is the mark of a globalised production model characterised by a ruthless race towards economies of scale, causing disloyal competition at the price of cultural heritage, human rights and the environment.

Faced with the challenges of industrial competition, many craftspeople, like those in the Chinese rush-weaving sector, make a choice to devalue the price of their practice or to reorient themselves towards an agricultural or industrial economic activity, often more profitable for themselves and their families, forcing them to migrate to cities in the second case. In this way, ties with the community are broken, and the transmission of ancestral knowledge is no longer certain.

Machines are often blamed for the rapid industrialisation (and in certain cases the disappearance) of craft trades. Yet it is not so much machines themselves as the use to which human beings put them which places crafts in peril, and the mechanisation of certain artisanal production processes could be a solution for updating skill-sets or reinvigorating the sector. For the philosopher Sennett, the problem arises when industrialisation disconnects technical skill from imagination. The misuse of machines is a use which induces a "mechanical" (in the sense of "unchanging") repetition of hand movements, when this should accompany the imagination and experimentation of the craftsperson, as we have mentioned in the first point of this chapter. The misuse of machines, exploited by industry, is a use which separates an individual's head from their hands, and therefore prevents any understanding of the process in place. The individual is no longer autonomous in his manufacturing process. The appearance of CAD (Computer Aided Design) [12] in architecture – to return to the example of the philosopher – provides a good illustration of this last point. Em-

11 Fang-Wu Tung, Weaving with rush: Exploring craft-design collaborations in revitalizing a local craft. Ed. International Journal of Design Vol.6 No.3 (2012)
12 CAD is software that allows architects and engineers to rapidly and precisely design and model objects and buildings.

ployed in place of manual drafting, CAD tends to bring about a loss of design experience in its user, when this expertise is acquired through an appreciation of space, materials and volumes, in a circular and iterative relationship between design and construction.

Faced with the loss of momentum in the handicraft sector, the challenge is twofold: to incorporate it into the global production system in a way that makes the activity economically viable, but without losing the tradition of a set of know-how.

2. INCORPORATING CRAFTS INTO A GLOBALISED WORLD

2.1 MAKING CRAFTS A LEVER FOR DEVELOPMENT

Culture has long been perceived as an obstacle to "development". Cultural differences and particularities have often been denigrated on the pretext that they stand in the way of countries' path towards modernisation, towards the ideal of modern progress and closer relations between nations. In his work Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World (1995), the researcher Arturo Escobar describes with a lucid eye the extent to which the discourse of "development" is the product of a social construct, a story entirely invented by the United States of America followed by Western Europe after the Second World War, in order to enter an ideological struggle against the Soviet bloc, and impose capitalist thought and the capitalist model on the world. From the time of President Truman's positioning speech in 1949 onwards, development was heralded as the process by which it became possible to "bring about the conditions necessary to replicating the world over the features that characterized the "advanced" societies of the time – high levels of industrialization and urbanization, technicalization of agriculture, rapid growth of material production and living standards, and the widespread adoption of modern education and cultural values"[13] (Escobar, p.4).

In this "dream" of development, the world was divided into North and South, into developed and underdeveloped countries, into rich and poor, into first, second, third and fourth world. In the face of the discursive and institutional arsenal deployed to bring this project to life (the creation of the World Bank in 1944, the UN in 1945, the Inter-American Development Bank in 1959, etc.), any cultural expression departing from modern values was associated with what was "poorest" and most "underdeveloped", opposing innovation and change. Also, from this perspective of development based on an economic criterion alone, culture is often perceived as an expense, an entertaining or decorative element, more than as a necessary investment for an inhabitable world, or a wealth to be preserved. Crafts, a material expression of the immaterial know-how of communities and their culture, have not escaped this destructive treatment.

In the face of this binary, linear and universalist notion of development, which gave legitimacy to one type of knowledge only: modern scientific knowledge, and to a single model: the capitalist model, led from the top by the so-called developed countries of the North, it was (and still is) urgent to construct alternative and peripheral models of development coming from below, in other words from communities and territories.

Like agro-ecology, which, in the agricultural domain, advocates the

13 Escobar Arturo, Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World, Princeton University Press, 1995. Available online at: http://voidnetwork.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Encountering_Development-The-Making-and-the-Unmaking-of-the-Third-World-by-Arturo-Escobar.pdf

practice of a diversity of cultivation techniques rather than a single intensive crop (monoculture) which weakens the soil, the sociologist Boaventura da Sousa Santos (2010) suggests applying ecologies to the field of knowledge. Among these ecologies, he suggests reclaiming and valuing a great diversity of knowledges, of temporalities and of practices, including those from the South, or rather from the periphery, i.e. which are formulated outside of the context of hegemonic thought (from a background that is white, patriarchal, urban, capitalist and Judeo-Christian).

De Sousa Santos proposes taking the local out of hegemonic globalisation, and constructing what he calls a counter-hegemonic reglobalisation, in other words creating new articulations between the local and the global.

Finally, he invites us to reclaim, strengthen or create alternative forms and systems of production and division of wealth, like cooperatives, fair trade, local currencies and social and solidarity economy, for example, discredited by the global economic system in force[14].

This agroecology of knowledges and practices is necessary to rein in the orthodox capitalist monoculture, to limit the excessive importation of propositions from elsewhere, and to reinvent these in more native versions.

Over time, the discourse on development has moved slightly in this direction, to incorporate other interdependent dimensions of the economy, namely the social, community, environmental and cultural dimensions. Preserving the lives of the generations to come has also been taken into account. Indeed, the post-war development model has not been as virtuous as the promises it made: poverty has not been reduced, and the gap between rich and poor has widened. The eight Millennium Development Goals, adopted in 2000 by 193 UN member states and at least 23 international organisations, have not succeeded in eradicating extreme poverty in 15 years[15]. It is now a question of "sustainable development", in order to "end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all". In this new agenda, adopted in September 2015 and consisting of 17 goals, the focus is on ending poverty and hunger in the world, reducing inequalities, gender equality, decent work, responsible production and consumption, and the preservation of aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, among other things[16]. It is recognised that this agenda cannot be successfully implemented without the active participation of communities.

Cultural particularities have also been taken into account in how development is considered. In the introduction of its 1996 report entitled Our Creative Diversity, Unesco states: "*It had long been clear that development was a far more complex undertaking than had been originally thought. It could no longer be seen as a single, uniform, linear path, for this would inevitably eliminate cultural diversity and experimentation, and dangerously limit humankind's creative capacities in the face of a treasured past and an unpredictable future. [...] Clearly, there was a need to transcend economics, without abandoning it. The notion of development itself had broadened, as people realized that economic criteria alone could not provide a programme for human dignity and well-being.*"[17]

Bringing to the table the question of the link between culture and development, UNESCO uses this report to ask new questions and reformulate old ones: "*What are the cultural and socio-cultural factors that affect development? What is the cultural impact of social and economic development? How are cultures and models of development related to one another? How can valuable elements of a traditional culture be combined with modernization? What are the cultural dimensions of individual and collective well-being?*"

Thus, the institution maintains that culture is not an instrument for development in the sense of material progress, but that it is the goal and aim of development, in the sense of ensuring the flourishing of human existence in all its form and as a

14 De Sousa Santos, Boaventura. Decolonizar el saber, reinventar el poder (2010), Ed. Trílce, Uruguay. Accessed 20 October 2017 at: http://www.boaventuradesousasantos.pt/media/Descolonizar%20el%20saber_final%20-%20C%C3%B3pia.pdf
15 To find out more visit: http://www.un.org/fr/millenniumgoals/
16 See the Sustainable Development Objectives defined by the UN from now until 2030: http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/fr/objectifs-de-developpement-durable/
17 UNESCO, Our Creative Diversity, Paris, 1996. Accessed 20 October 2017 at: http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0010/001055/105586fo.pdf

whole. The definition of culture is emancipated from the mere macro-economic sphere; it represents the practice and imagination of community life, regaining its value in the service of communities and commons. This new vision of culture invites us to consider development starting from pluralistic cultural identities, like an "inter-cultural conversation", as proposed by the researcher German Rey[18].

Traditional craft techniques are an integral part of what makes up humanity's Intangible Cultural Heritage, alongside oral traditions and expressions, performing arts, and rituals and festivities, among other things. The Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005) emphasises that the preservation of cultural diversity – of which crafts are one incarnation – is a challenge in the face of the globalisation process. It also emphasises respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, state sovereignty, and international solidarity and cooperation as guiding principles in the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions.

Culture was thus slowly recognised as a factor in development at the beginning of the 2000s, and hence so were crafts. The 2005 convention represents a guidance document in the formulation of policies for cultural cooperation. Harmed for a long time by the race for "progress", crafts have progressively been the object of cooperation projects aiming to integrate craftspeople into a globalised world, and to improve their quality of life.

In this vein, two approaches draw our attention: one which aims to open international export markets to crafts on criteria of fairness, and one which aims to introduce crafts into the national production system with an added value. Two opposite approaches, but ultimately complementary. Indeed, these programs seek to preserve the intangible cultural heritage of communities left on the sidelines of the mass commercial trading system, while offering them a niche market alternative which allows them to improve their standard of living and quality of life.

By accommodating the rules of the global market, craftspeople have the opportunity to fill ethnic product niches with their own traditions, and to offer a unique object to individuals who wish to assert themselves in a homogenised world.

The only disadvantage is that in doing so they have to comply with the rules of the fashion market, whose extreme versatility and very short life cycles are characterising features. This obliges them to have constant knowledge of the changing tastes of consumer markets and to be capable of periodically developing new designs, while preserving the characteristics of their cultural know-how.

In addition to this, the market for crafts and interior decoration is closely linked to countries' economic conditions and households' purchasing power. It is also particularly vulnerable in the face of imitations, as we have seen in the first chapter. Fighting for copyright is not cost-effective, as product life-cycles are extremely short.

Lastly, this market is subject to fierce competition due to the variation in the price of labour between craftspeople in different areas of the world. The rapid expansion in Asia has changed the situation considerably in global trade. Asia now dominates the market through its cheap labour, even in the fair trading of handicrafts (Macconway, 2017 pp73-74).

The remainder of this chapter will examine the logic which the two cited approaches follow in their goal of strengthening handicraft communities' position in the global production system, how much they are affected by difficulties linked to the fashion and interior decoration market, as well as strategies employed to overcome these difficulties.

2.2 OPENING FAIR TRADE CONSUMER MARKETS IN WESTERN COUNTRIES

Fair trade appeared very soon after the Second World War, in the form of citizens associations[19]. It gained momentum during the 1960s and 70s, simultaneously with the development of the United Nations Con-

18 Rey German, Industrias Culturales, Creatividad y desarrollo. AECID, Madrid, 2009. Accessed 20 October 2017 at: http://www.lacult.unesco.org/docc/2009_Ind_Cult_ CreativyDes_AECID.pdf

19 As early as 1946 the pioneer association Ten Thousand Villages was created in the United States to import and distribute handicraft products from Puerto Rico, using a fair trade approach. It is still an important player in fair trade today. See: https://www.tenthousandvillages.com/

ference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). This United Nations body was created in 1964 on the initiative of "non-aligned" countries, with the goal of encouraging trade to become a factor for development, and to transform the economy towards a more inclusive and redistributive model[20]. Furthermore, it was at the 1968 UNCTAD conference that the slogan "Trade not Aid" was launched, later taken up by fair trade players. Through this message the idea was supported that fairer trade, rather than financial aid, would be more effective for improving living conditions of the poorest populations, and would bring with it a solution to the abuses of conventional trade.

Fair trade was created in response to, and as a reflection of, the prevailing context: an alternative to development measured on the calculation of wealth alone, in which a globalised, urban and Western North imposed the rules of commercial trade on a rather rural, but also globalised, South. The latter pays the price for the unequal rules of international trade, defying the theory of free-trade and comparative advantage of the two British economists Adam Smith and David Ricardo (1817)[21]. Although they are limited and limiting, these notions of North and South have historically been used by players in fair trade and development cooperation to allude to an imbalance of power: those who govern the economic power, and those who are governed by it. As the balance of power takes multiple and diffuse forms at different levels – ranging from local to global – it would certainly be more appropriate today to talk of the Centre and the Periphery, as proposed by Boaventura da Sousa, rather than North and South. This opens the way to solidarity and co-operation between peripheries, allowing relationships with the centres of power to be reinvented.

Fair trade's strategy consists in countering market forces by acting on them from within. Indeed, it involves using the channels and means of conventional trade (distribution, communication, marketing, etc.) to create a new distribution channel for consumer goods produced in transparent conditions that respect human and environmental rights.

In the Charter of Fair Trade Principles, published in January 2009 by the World Fair Trade Organisation (WFTO) and Fair Trade International[22], we find the economic mission of fair trade, coupled with a political vision, which aims to make the international consumer market accessible to communities that are disadvantaged by conventional trade. Trading is negotiated on the basis of a fair partnership[23], directly established between the local producing or marketing organisation and the foreign importing organisation. The number of intermediaries in the value chain is limited in comparison with conventional trade. In this way, fair trade recreates the link between the producer and the final consumer and ensures that sales profits are better divided. It thus becomes a lever for development for the producer and their community.

The advantages that fair trade holds for communities (compared with the conventional market) can be measured at different levels, according to the organisations, players involved with them and their context: strengthening of producers' self-esteem, building of their capacities and know-how through training, facilitated access to credit and other sources of finance in order to acquire diverse and more efficient work equipment, better access to healthcare and education services: all of these are benefits made possible by fair trade. These advantages are based on a fundamental rule: the longevity of the business relationship. By guaranteeing trade over the long term, fair trade is a lifeline against the conventional market crisis. It ensures producers' organisations a source of revenue over time, which allows them to better plan for the future.

In parallel to commercial trading, importing organisations raise awareness among the consumer audience of the issues of responsible consumption. This is, at least, the mission adopted by "World Shop" member organisations of the WFTO[24],

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20 On this subject, see a recent interview conducted by Oxfam with the Deputy Secretary-General of UNCTAD, Isabelle Durant: https://www.oxfammagasinsdumonde.be/blog/2017/09/09/oxfam-et-la-cnuced-deux-organisations-au-service-du-commerce-comme-outil-de-developpement/#.Wem40xPWyRs
21 According to this theory, countries which specialise in what they are best able to produce, using the resources they have the most of, participate in international transactions on a win-win basis.
22 See: https://www.wfto.com/sites/default/files/Charter-of-Fair-Trade-Principles-Final%20(EN).PDF
23 According to the WFTO, 10 principles regulate and govern a fair trade partnership (see: https://wfto.com/). Both trading partners must adhere to them, put them into practice and respect them.
24 Among the importing organisations who make up the fair trade movement, some invest fewer means in public awareness campaigns, and focus rather on the jobs of importing and distributing, with respect for fair trade criteria.

the pioneer fair trade associations created in Europe in the 1960s. Furthermore, the latter work to put pressure on key players in global economic politics, mainly in Western countries, through advocacy and/or by mobilising the lifeblood of civil society as does Oxfam-Magasins du monde, with a view to promoting a more equal model of society.

The fair trade movement has therefore positioned itself as an alternative of organised civil society, to support forms and systems of alternative production for disadvantaged communities in the areas of agriculture and crafts, as advocated by Boaventura da Sousa Santos (2010). These production systems have been marginalised in the game of global trade because they are too small, too antiquated, not profitable enough, and yet they respect human rights and the environment, as they are based on a model of social and solidarity economy.

Fair trade put to the test by today's new issues

While the fair trade associative movement saw a golden age in the 1980s and 90s, it was then threatened with being overtaken in its own market towards the end of the 1990s and in the 2000s, by the profusion of responsible consumer shops, and by large-scale distribution which was able to take advantage of the fast-developing niche.

The economic and solidarity model on which it is based seems to be faltering, and must be reinvented in the light of the new issues in society. The handicraft sector is suffering the most from these changes, due in part to the versatility of the fashion and interior decoration markets.

Indeed, for several years fair trade associations have seen a steady decline in sales of fair trade products, particularly in the handicraft sector.

In 2010 a SAW-B study announced the alarming economic situation of the fair trade handicraft sector[25]. For its authors, "*fair trading of handicrafts is faced with a deep structural problem. Without professionalisation and the development of specific means, most existing projects appear [to us] to be threatened in the fairly near future, and no significant and lasting access to markets through classic distribution channels seems realistic to us, despite its theoretical possibility.*" (SAW-B, 2010 p. 90).

A more recent report from WFTO Europe, published on 20th October 2017[26], sets out the worrying situation faced by historic "World Shop" associations such as Fair Trade Scotland, Oxfam Intermòn, and the Swedish Organisation of Fair Trade Retailers. Whether in the Czech Republic, Denmark, Sweden or Spain, all associations report a reduction in the number of retail outlets on their territory in the last ten years, and the difficulty experienced by the remaining "World Shops". Yet the sale of fair trade products is the engine for the economic model of these European associations, and for the producer organisations who are their partners. In the face of this trend, we must ask ourselves about this change in the market, and its impact on the quality of life of communities.

Today, although fair trade is a well-known alternative among the European public, the concept is still perceived as "exclusive" by part of the population, as the often-higher prices of fair trade products still represent a disincentive.

Furthermore, the supply in handicrafts no longer seems to match the demand. It does not correspond sufficiently well to the expectations of the audience already won over, and does little or nothing to win over the potential audience. This is the finding that the SAW-B's study highlights based on the statements of people interviewed. Fair trade handicrafts suffer from a "low-end image that is hard to shake off", still strongly associated with being "ethnic" (2010, p77-78).

This same finding is highlighted by a study published in May 2015 by the market research company DEDICATED for the Belgian Technical Cooperation[27], carried out among

25 Commerce Equitable d'Artisanat. Quels outils pour développer le secteur ? (2010). SAWB asbl, accessed 09 October 2015 at: http://www.saw-b.be/Publications/RapportFinalInteractif.pdf
26 Worldshops in Europe: what is the trend? Webinar of the Working Group on Worldshops and Retailers. 20 October 2017.
27 Attractivité des produits équitables non alimentaires et comportements d'achat, May 2015, accessed 13 April 2017 at: http://befair.be/drupal_files/public/all-files/brochure/Rapport_QUANTI_complet_FR_FINAL.pdf

1015 men and women in Belgium, equally divided between 6 age brackets (from 18 to 79 years old), and across different socio-professional categories. This study reveals that while 84% of the people interviewed have already heard of fair trade, 42% are not able to spontaneously name a non-food product that they associate with fair trade. The concept is consequently linked more to food products than to crafts. It is also more familiar to older people (aged 54 to 79) than to younger audiences (aged under 35).

The latter, who have more "reservations" about buying fair trade, recognise the relevance of the initiative without being convinced of its effectiveness or its favourable impact on the lives of the partner producers. Neither do they see the advantage of buying non-food products, such as handicrafts, and deplore the mismatch with their tastes and expectations. Yet they represent a target group which fair trade associations in a process of profound change wish to reach.

However, this young audience expresses their inclination to buy fair trade if it does not impose constraints on them, meaning for example that they do not have to spend more money for a fair trade product than for the same product sold in the conventional sector.

The qualitative part of this survey, whose results were drawn from a focus group, highlights moreover that among the people interviewed, most would wish to see fair trade handicrafts being sold through the distribution channels they use habitually, as is the case today for food products.

In her 2017 thesis, Manush McConway analyses the limitations of fair trade after 40 years of activity[28]. She draws on a case study of a Peruvian craftspeople's association, Allpa[29], for which fair trade with Western associations represented a stepping stone in the 1980s and 90s, by allowing it to move into the conventional market without losing sight of its social commitment.

Indeed, in the face of difficulties experienced in European markets, the organisation was obliged to reinvent itself by diversifying its marketing channels and investing in innovation. The source of income from fair trade with European associations had become insufficient to ensure a decent standard of living for the craftspeople's communities[30].

However, many historical partners of the fair trade association movement (most of them) were not able to negotiate this change of direction, and today are still heavily dependent on the slumping European market. This is the case for example for the Guatemalan organisation *Aj Quen*, whose turnover in 2017 was still 80% dependant on the European fair trade export market[31].

In its 2010 study, SAW-B cites other examples of organisations who have suspended their export activity, or who have failed to regain their budgetary balance since their main customer (European NGOs most of the time) decided to suspend direct imports of their products. They specify that without fair trade orders, groups of craftspeople are forced to work for the conventional market, which means for local intermediaries, often for low earnings (SAW-B, 2010 p53-61).

These cases provide food for thought, and illustrate one of the main criticisms directed at the fair trade model: it perpetuates producer organisations' dependence on the marketing of products with poor sales prospects, whereas the initial mission of the movement started with the opposite desire (Macconway, 2017).

Giovanni Gerola, director of the European Fair Trade Association (EFTA), agrees with this criticism, and wishes to change the rules of fair trade partnership[32]. Indeed, he believes that they create new dependencies on Western importing organisations, and ultimately harm the capacity for innovation and autonomy of producer organisations.

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28 MCCONWAY, MANUSH (2017). Pp 13-16. Southern Fair Trade Organisations and Institutional Logics, Durham theses, Durham University. Available online from Durham E-Theses Online: http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/11988/

29 See: http://allpaperu.com/

30 In the handicraft sector, the cost of labour is usually set by the number of pieces produced. For more information, read the study of the Artisans du Monde Federation (2015), Enquête filières : les prix et les salaires équitables au sein des filières d'artisanat Artisans du Monde.

31 Data obtained directly from José Victor Pop Bol, manager of the association. The case of Aj Quen is analysed in detail in the third chapter of this study.

32 Giovanni Gerola: « Les associations de commerce équitable doivent quitter leur zone de confort », Oxfam-Magasins du monde, 14 September 2017: https://www.oxfammagasinsdumonde.be/blog/2017/09/14/giovanni-gerola-les-associations-de-commerce-equitable-doivent-quitter-leur-zone -de-confort/#.WjjtxVXiblU

Furthermore, he deplores the guilt-inducing discourse on which fair trade has been based since it began. He is joined in this by Kevin Murray, vice-chairman of the World Craft Council of the Asia-Pacific Region, for whom the economic model of fair trade is built on the guilt of the Western consumer. For Murray, in fair trade the responsibility for a purchase and consciousness in this purchase comes back to the consumer, which is limiting, for example for sections of the population with insufficient purchasing power[33].

2.3 STRENGTHENING THE PLACE OF CRAFTS IN THE NATIONAL PRODUCTION SYSTEM

In a 2005 study, Unesco warns that urban export markets are transitory markets. They tend to distance craftspeople from their known customer-base, and moreover are affected by changes in trends with an alarming frequency.

Access to external markets consequently represents a real challenge for small producer organisations, even in fair trade. Murray agrees with these remarks, underlining that although it represents an alternative niche market, fair trade entails producers being able to produce in considerable volume in order to reach the international market, which is difficult for more precarious groups, and even more so in the handicraft sector.

The conditions necessary for producers to reach a stable market fall into 4 categories: an understanding of the consumption marketplace along with its trends and players on the one hand, the way the structure is organised on the other, the communication and transportation methods employed, and lastly an appropriate environmental and gender policy (Macconway, 2017).

To this is added the fact that the demanding (and often costly) certification processes used in certain niches of the market – like fair trade and organic[34] – once again exclude a large number of small and more precarious producing communities.

In this context, the national market seems more accessible for handicrafts, as much in terms of transportation and logistics as in production capacity and knowledge of the consumption marketplace (Murray, 2017).

Additionally, the second approach which draws our attention in this study – this time backed to a greater extent by government institutions – consists in making the national market accessible to craftspeople. It aims to strengthen local markets, preserve heritage and cultural diversity while recreating the link between the producer and their community of fellow citizens.

From the 1960s onwards, UNESCO would play an important role in this area. It would set up and promote programmes aiming to help countries integrate their craftspeople into the national production system, and thus to improve communities' standard of living, putting them in a better position to subsequently move into international markets. The goal of this type of programme is to combine the efforts of governmental and non-governmental organisations, regional and local economic communities, associations and development agencies who promote crafts (Benítez A., 2009).

Training and human capacity-building being central ideas in the concept of human development, these programmes would focus on the training of communities in areas which shape the development of their know-how, like the strengthening of and acquisition of new technical knowledge, the features and requirements of the market, and forms of protection for the items they produce, among other options aiming to preserve and disseminate their production in a local, national, and (why not?) international market.

In 1964 UNESCO set the tone by supporting the creation of the World Crafts Council. This non-governmental organisation declared its main objective to be the strengthening of the status of craft trades in countries' cultural and economic life. To do this, it encourages collaboration between craftspeople and fosters the exchange of expe-

33 Comments taken from an interview with Kevin Murray, conducted by Estelle Vanwambeke on 3 August 2017 as part of the study.
34 Unlike the food sector, where it is the product that is certified, in the case of the handicraft sector it is the organisation of individuals that is certified, by becoming a member of international associations which evaluate their practices, like for example the World Fair Trade Organisation (WFTO). The membership procedure for the WFTO is easier for producing organisations who have a certain volume of business, financial stability and a good knowledge of the market. However, it constitutes a real barrier for smaller and more precarious organisations.

rience and knowledge through conferences, visits, workshops, exhibitions and research. It provides craftspeople with help and advice.

Its mission is equally to promote a greater awareness of and recognition for craftspeople among the general public, in terms of their cultural specificities and traditions.

The World Crafts Council has the structure of a federation divided into sub-regions, each with its own independent organisation: Africa, Asia-Pacific, Europe, North America, and South America. Over time offices have been opened at the country level (as in Belgium, for example[35]), these working in collaboration with the regions.

The World Crafts Councils work in dialogue with the governments of countries and regions.

In the ensuing period, many governments seized on the idea of crafts as a lever for economic development, and tried out various forms of initiatives and programmes.

In 1964, for example, Colombia inaugurated *Artesanias de Colombia*, a semi-public company, whose declared objective is to "*increase craftspeople's participation in the national productive sector, in order to achieve sustained integral development, which is reflected in the improvement of standards of living*". To this end, the body encourages the participation of territorial entities and regional entrepreneurship in the development of the handicraft sector, creates programmes and projects for improving quality and innovation, provides technical support for production, offers support with training for cooperatives, associations and any other form of craft organisation which helps crafts to be more competitive on the national market, and advises these organisations in their marketing strategy. It carries out studies and promotes the exchange and dissemination of information about the sector. Lastly, it establishes links between craftspeople and national and international cooperation agencies and programmes.

In 1980, Japan led the way in Asia by launching its original programme "One Village One Product", driven by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry. This movement encourages local producers (and above all small entrepreneurs) to manufacture distinctive products in order to assist the development of their economic region. Among other aspects, the programme facilitates the link between craftspeople and various experts, including designers, and promotes public awareness of the know-how of different regions of the country. This programme was subsequently replicated in several Asian countries.

Initiatives of this type attract attention because of their scale. Unlike the fair trade movement, which is part of organised civil society, this second approach is a "top-down" one, which explains its wide territorial coverage.

These approaches put less emphasis on the benefit for communities in organising themselves and standing together, or on the issues of fair and just trade – for which they could be criticised – than on the need to use research, quality and innovation to make production stand out in a highly competitive and versatile market.

They nonetheless guarantee the protection and dissemination of their country's cultural diversity in a globalised world.

Another specific feature of these programmes is the appearance of the designer as a facilitator between tradition and modernity, between preservation of intangible heritage and competitiveness in the handicraft sector.

Here, again, UNESCO set the tone in 2005 with its Section for Arts, Crafts and Design, by trying out a crossover cooperation programme between craftspeople and designers in two countries: Colombia and India[36]. In the programme, run in collaboration with the Indian association Craft Revival Trust[37] and the Colombian organisation Artesanias de Colombia[38], designers were invited to engage in dialogue with craft-

35 See http://www.wcc-bf.org/
36 Designers meet artisans: a practical guide (2005). UNESCO, Paris. Accessed 23 May 2017 at: http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001471/147132F.pdf
37 http://www.craftrevival.org/
38 http://artesaniasdecolombia.com.co

speople's communities around their practices and know-how, and to experiment with solutions to overcome the difficulties in production and trade experienced by the latter. The designers acted as a "bridge", as facilitators, between the consumer market (mainly urban and aspiring to modern products) and the production (a mainly rural activity, embodying a tradition). This initiative culminated in the publication of a Practical Guide often referred to by designers interested in getting involved in social innovation projects.

2.4 RECREATING THE LINK THROUGH DESIGN

Crafts and design have more than one element in common, which explains the recent convergences between the two professions, especially in the context of improving craftspeople's quality of life and their economic opportunities in a globalised world.

Both belong to the family of applied arts, which are characterised by the art of marrying form and function through technique, in order to meet practical needs[39].

Design professions developed during the various industrial revolutions. Modern design emerged with the mission of creating functional objects that were accessible to everybody, and that were intended to be produced serially and in large volumes, mechanically, facilitating economies of scale. Each development of a new material (metals, wood, plastic, etc.) represented an opportunity for its deployment.

The importance given to an economic ideal of progress and development[40] explains why design gained the upper hand over crafts, as a corollary to technological advances. It also explains why it is commonly associated with technological innovations, as well as their abuses. Indeed there can be little doubt that design has in one way or another played a role in many modern crises, including humanitarian and environmental crises[41].

Some designers have chosen to distance themselves from the model of mass-production and mass-consumption, to create objects close to the unique art object or as part of a limited series (often sold at exorbitant prices). The designer Olivier Gilson, coordinator of the laboratories for design and social innovation at MAD in Brussels[42], explains: "*Our job, originally, was to find industrial solutions for mass-producing objects at prices people could afford. In parallel, there was development in the commercial, economic and marketing areas of design which drew it towards expensive luxury production, of which Stark was the model.*" [43] [44]

In these two cases, design can be seen as an object-centred practice, more than being centred on humanity and its needs. Design is often employed to create new consumer needs based on marketing criteria, rather than to meet recognised needs.

For Arturo Escobar, "*there is no doubt about the fact that design was fully integrated into the neoliberal model of capitalism, dominant during the 1980s*". Yet the author remains optimistic regarding the role of design, thanks to the theoretical, ethical and practical migrations which many designers have made in recent decades towards a more human-centred design. In his work Autonomy and design, the realisation of the commons [45] (2016), he suggests that if we suppose the contemporary world can be considered as a massive design failure, is it not possible to design our way out of the crisis? (Escobar, pp. 49, 51).

That is the fundamental question asked by the practical alternatives in the design world in recent decades, calling themselves participative design or co-design, social innovation or transition design, which the author analyses fully in his work. These offer alternative ways of designing to those inherited from industrial tradition, in order to participate in the creation of a more just, more equal society. They

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39 See chapter 1
40 See chapter 2
41 According to Thackara (2004), cited by Escobar, 80% of the environmental impact of products and services is determined at the conception stage, therefore the design stage.
42 Olivier Gilson coordinates workshops in design for social innovation at MAD, the Brussels Fashion and Design Platform. See: http://new.mad.brussels/fr
43 Olivier Gilson: social design "does not exist to make something beautiful, but to make something just". Revue Atler Echos, 24 August 2017. Accessed 5 September 2017 at: https://www. alterechos.be/olivier-gilson-le-design-social-pas-la-pour-faire-du-beau-mais-pour-faire-du-juste/
44 See: http://www.starck.com/fr
45 Escobar A., "Autonomía y diseño. La realización de lo comunal" (2016). Editorial Universidad del Cauca, Cali

practice a committed design, centred more on humanity than on the market, in order to "*return to the basis of our profession, which is to work for society, and in connection with it*", to quote Olivier Gilson.

Their approach questions the purpose of design and its function in society, as well as the method used. At the heart of this questioning we find the distribution of roles between designers and the subjects or users concerned with the design. To what extent does the person or community concerned with the product or service take part in the decision-making process? What role can they play in designing (and even in some cases in producing) the solution to a problem that directly affects them?

For the designer Ezio Manzini, a pioneer in issues of design and social innovation for sustainable development, and founder of the DESIS[46] network, the world in its current state invites everybody to design or redesign their way of life. Therefore, the goal of design should be re-centred on support for individual and collective life projects. In order to do this, he champions initiatives and organisations based on collaboration, where people with design expertise help to create the conditions for social change, acting as a driving force in the collaboration.

On this subject he offers a useful distinction between diffuse design and expert design. The first idea refers to the inherent capacity of human beings to design, that is to create practical and functional solutions to a given problem, whereas the second refers to professional knowledge about design. It is through collaboration between these two types of designers that a new model of design for social innovation centred on humanity and biodiversity can take shape.

It is with this in mind that players in economic and cultural cooperation have progressively relied on design as a facilitator to turn crafts into a genuine economic lever for communities[47]. Through this collaboration, the person with expert design knowledge is led to re-establish the link between the urban consumer market and the production context[48]. They are also led to (re)activate and strengthen the creative capacities of craftspeople.

However, Escobar warns of the risk of leading a design initiative where the criterion would be to help poor countries and communities adopt strategies for their modernisation (Escobar, p.78). The line between human-centred participative design, and design for development or paternalistic humanitarian design is sometimes blurred. The model of intervention and the method used are therefore crucial in this type of initiative, and they should be set using careful judgement.

In his article "*Outsourcing the hand: an analysis of craft-design collaborations across the global divide*" [49] (2010), Kevin Murray analyses the limitations of collaboration between designers and craftspeople. He brings a critical eye to the analysis of three projects and their different approaches to collaboration with craftspeople's communities. What the three initiatives have in common is that they are backed by Western designers with support and funding from associations and cooperation bodies, and they outsource all or part of the craft production process.

The question Murray raises through his article is more concerned with the degree to which craftspeople participate in the collaboration than with the outsourcing of the craftwork. In his opinion, the latter offers a significant potential for development in the handicraft sector.

Modes of participation, he highlights, sometimes take the form of an order from a designer being placed with a community of craftspeople (as with the designer Sara Thorn for her World Weave collection[50]), sometimes the form of a creative development (as with the brand polly&me[51]), or even that of a business development (as with the

46 Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability: http://www.desisnetwork.org/
47 See: http://www.unesco.org/new/fr/culture/themes/creativity/creative-industries/crafts-and-design/
48 See chapter 2,3
49 Outsourcing the hand: an analysis of craft-design collaborations across the global divide. Article by Kevin Murray, Craft + Design Enquiry (2010), accessed 17 April 2017 at: https://press.anu.edu.au/publications/journals/craft-design-enquiry-issue-2-2010%EF%BB%BFcross-cultural-exchanges-craft-and-design/download
50 http://www.worldweave.com.au/
51 https://www.pollyandotherstories.com/

designer Martina Dempf[52]), the latter being the form of participation that would offer greater independence to craftspeople. For him, none of the three forms of collaboration are ideal, as the project rests mainly on the person expert in design. Whether at the level of market access or at the level of decision-making regarding the design, all information passes through the person external to the community of production. Murray questions the global inequity which characterises this type of relationship between designers and craftspeople, however well-founded they may be.

The fair trade sector has experimented with similar initiatives, without providing a sustainable solution that strengthened the autonomy of craftspeople and their production chain. Within EFTA for example, associations like Altro Mercato have promoted collaboration between craftspeople and European designers in order to work on new product ranges. The initiative was more in the form of the first scenario described by Murray. Indeed, the partners produced new products on the orders and advice of designers, without gaining autonomy in their understanding of how the market functions or in their capacity to better comprehend its changes. The case of the Guatemalan association *Aj Quen* is striking. After receiving support from an Italian designer employed by Altro Mercato between 2010 and 2015, the association still does not feel sufficiently equipped today to cope with the new changes in the market[53].

The issue of independence is crucial in the collaboration between designers and craftspeople, and, for Kevin Murray, a mechanism is necessary that allows the nature of stakeholders' participation in outsourcing crafts, and in the process of co-design generally, to be authenticated.

"*Designers meet artisans: a practical guide*" published by UNESCO in 2005 was developed to this end, offering a framework and methodological tools to prevent the risks of the craftspeople's work being subordinated under the influence of the designers[54]. It addresses in detail the methodological steps which designers can take in order to build a balanced relationship with the craftspeople which does not result in harm. Nevertheless, it only touches superficially on the structural reasons for their marginalisation.

Yet, to set up a fair and emancipating process, designers must themselves be warned of the structural issues linked to societal phenomena. Unfortunately, academic training in design still only dedicates a limited part of its courses to history and social and political science, subjects which should allow future designers to have a critical, structural and systemic interpretation of a phenomenon.

This is what is found by the article "*Designing Reintegration with Prisoners: The Limits of a Design Process with Women from the San Diego Prison of Cartagena of Indias, Colombia*" (E. Vanwambeke, J. Blackburn, 2015), which retraces and analyses the co-design initiative led in a Colombian prison environment between a group of university students and people who had broken penal law[55]. In spite of efforts made to ensure a horizontal and participative transfer of knowledge between the parties involved in the initiative, the authors question the critical understanding that prisoners would have been able to construct regarding the mechanisms of injustice or oppression of which they themselves have been the object within society. They believe that without an understanding – as much on the part of the designers as of those imprisoned – of the structural mechanisms of violence, and their intersection with the dimensions of culture, gender, race, etc., the autonomy of the subjects is limited, and non-recidivism is endangered.

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52 http://www.martina-dempf.de/en/ruanda/
53 According to feedback collected from members of the association Aj Quen in November 2017. See chapter 3.
54 This manual is aimed at "helping everybody involved in the promotion of handicrafts to ask themselves the right questions, rather than to provide explicit ready-made answers".
55 The project "Popular Design and Production Chains for the Construction of Peace", run between 2013 and 2015, set out with the intention of strengthening the life project of women and young people who have broken penal law, through design and from a perspective of restorative justice. Beyond the development of products, the team offered to work on the economic project as a whole, in order to guarantee "self-management of alternatives by the community as a factor guaranteeing sustainability" of the process. The transfer of the designers' knowledge to the craftspeople had to ensure a complete autonomy of the latter in their continuation of the process after the designers' departure. At the end of the collaboration, a tool-box recapitulating the various knowledge worked on together (colours, shapes, market, establishing prices, etc.) provided a summary of the work accomplished together, for a better continuation of the process, and to ensure the sharing of knowledge between the craftswomen themselves. https://dpcpcpcartagena.wordpress.com/ about/

The politico-economic understanding of the contexts in which people are immersed is necessary in order for human-centred design processes to result in the construction of solutions that move towards a greater social and economic justice.

To solve this equation, we must continue to promote a wider inter- and transdisciplinarity in degree courses and design projects, taking design out of the studio and into dialogue with other disciplines, in particular critical political and social sciences.

The challenge in supporting human projects through design is, in the words of Escobar, to pass "*from 'dumb design' to 'just design'*" – to practise a design for autonomy and transitions oriented towards more sustainable horizons for the community. Design that is committed to transitions should take into account the critical and theoretical contributions on social change, as well as norms that are more respectful of biodiversity.

3. CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES OF FAIR TRADE HANDICRAFTS THROUGH THE LENS OF DESIGN: CASE STUDY OF THE ASSOCIATION AJ QUEN (GUATEMALA)

In the third chapter of this study, the theoretical framework developed in the previous two chapters confronts a practical situation, that of the craftspeople's association *Aj Quen* located in Guatemala, Central America.

In light of the analysis carried out in the first two chapters using the sources listed in the bibliography, the third chapter examines the current difficulties encountered by the association in export markets and the local market. From this examination it formulates the problems, as well as possible solutions for tackling them from a design perspective.

3.1 THE CONTEXT: AN ECONOMIC MODEL IN NEED OF REINVENTION

Aj Quen is a fair trade organisation founded in 1989, and a partner of the Belgian fair trade association Oxfam-Magasins du monde since 1992. Its core business is textile handicrafts. Through its headquarters, located in the town of Chimaltenango, it centralises production and handicraft orders: it creates a link between groups of craftswomen from the region on the one hand, and fair trade buyers, mostly international, on the other. *Aj Quen* counts 4 employees in its coordinating team: a manager, a training coordinator, a production manager and a secretary. The manager and the production manager are responsible for monitoring the orders and the production between the two ends of the chain. The association had a staff of a dozen employees just 5 years ago.

Furthermore, between 1989 and 1994 handicraft orders provided work for 40 groups of organised producers. The number of groups benefiting from fair trade fell to 26 from 1995 onwards. There are 16 today. The manager of *Aj Quen*, José Victor Pop Bol, states there would be 21 today "if the work was there". We will analyse this point in the third section of the chapter.

Each group represents a specific ethnic community with its own language and traditions. It comprises a board of directors and an assembly, who meet whenever necessary. The direct beneficiaries of revenue from handicrafts are predominantly women (around 95% according to the organisation's figures).

The commercial relationship between *Aj Quen* and Oxfam-Magasins du monde is long-standing and goes hand in hand with a relationship of trust, in accordance with the committed vision held by the Belgian fair trade association. Unfortunately, the orders the latter has placed with *Aj Quen* have been in constant decline in recent years. The same scenario is seen with all of the fair trade operator members of the European Fair Trade Association (EFTA) who have a partner relationship with *Aj Quen*.

It must be noted that this trend does not affect *Aj Quen* uniquely, but also other partner producers in the network, such as the Peruvian Allpa since the 1990s (Macconway, 2017), for example, or the Indian Pushpanjali.

In the case of *Aj Quen*, 80% of revenue currently still comes from the international fair trade market. The viability of the Guatemalan association's economic model is therefore called into question.

Among the findings of the Belgian importer, the drop in sales is considered to be due to two main factors:
• The cost of handicraft products
• The mismatch between the products and consumer tastes.

Why is the price that *Aj Quen* asks for its products considered to be too high today? Was this not the case previously? In what way do the products no longer meet the expectations of consumers? What has changed in the last twenty years? Is it due to changes in fair trade consumption? Does the economic model upon which the fair trade of *Aj Quen* is based need to be revised? All these are questions which guided the case study of *Aj Quen*, and Guatemalan textile handicrafts generally. They undeniably echo the discrepancy found between handicraft production and the expectations of consumer markets, developed in the 2nd chapter, namely a mismatch between the supply and the current demand for fair trade handicrafts in the Belgian consumer market, and more generally in the European market. The (potential and current) European consumer audience for fair trade places value on its ethical and cultural worth, as well as on its original nature, but is not (or is no longer) satisfied by the quality and the designs on offer. The prices charged do not seem justified to it, except for to customers who are already won over.

Added to this is the fact that although fair trade has succeeded in positioning itself in a specific market niche, today it has to share the "ethical and responsible" market with other commercial projects (committed to varying degrees), offering alternatives in response to the challenges of the current time: transition projects, short supply chains, local crafts, do-it-yourself, etc. Their supply combines design, functionality, solidarity, and a low-energy footprint in production as well as in marketing, which represents an added value strongly appreciated by the audience of committed citizens.

In the face of this growing discrepancy, it is urgent to propose solutions which take four aspects into account:

1 **Product strategy**: producer groups must formulate strategies which allow them to develop their products by taking the expectations and trends of different markets (local and export) into account, while maintaining their cultural added value.

2 **Sales strategy**: marketing associations must devise alternatives which allow them to diversify sales channels, and, in the case of importers, to revitalise their existing points of sale.

3 **Educational strategy**: from the theoretical framework, a necessity emerges to pursue the educational work backed by European fair trade players among the general public, in order to raise its awareness of the issues and impacts of fair trade, and its complementary nature with the emerging alternatives of production and consumption. Educational work must also be initiated or strengthened among the consumer audience located in the producing countries.

4 **Political strategy**: European fair trade organisations must renew or strengthen their political message, in light of contemporary European issues (transition, mi-

gration policies, interculturality, etc.). Moreover, fair trade producer organisations must strengthen their capacity to put pressure on their government in order to ensure policies that protect their cultural heritage.

Bringing together all the questions and problems posed, the field study focused on the start of the value chain, namely handmade textile production and manufacture, in order to answer the following question: How can we produce attractive, contemporary products while preserving the Guatemalan identity, at accessible prices for the current and potential consumer audience?

This allowed light to be thrown on the way the other links in the chain function, especially that of marketing in Europe. Indeed, the specificity of fair trade is very much that the players at both ends of the chain are equally responsible for the success of the economic model.

For a 10 day period, the work revolved around:
- analysing strengths and weaknesses, threats and opportunities at different stages of the handicraft production chain;
- identifying the opportunities for development;
- formulating realistic scenarios to reinvigorate the supply of fair trade handicrafts produced by *Aj Quen*.

These objectives were used to test and confront two hypotheses made at the outset, consistent with the theoretical framework developed in the preceding chapters:
- design can play a facilitating role in understanding the issues surrounding the production chain, and in correcting the discrepancy between the production and the consumption market.
- product development must be conducted in tandem with work to diversify marketing channels within the international and national markets.

3.2 THE METHOD: AN APPROACH BASED ON CO-DESIGN

The hypothesis of design as a facilitator between the two ends of the value chain requires a tailored method of fieldwork, based on an iterative and creative approach. A linear model (in which the person with design expertise transfers their knowledge of trends and markets to the craftspeople in a vertical and unilateral way) would have gone counter to the theoretical framework developed earlier.

Additionally, the suggested methodology for the fieldwork is concerned with **co-design** or **participative design**, drawing equally on both the knowledge of designers and the knowledge and practices of local communities. It banks on the joint responsibility of the parties involved throughout the design process, as much as on the result, and gives as much importance to the first as it does to the second. It is intended to be highly emancipatory.

The co-design process conducted as part of this study was jointly orchestrated by Estelle Vanwambeke, research officer for Oxfam-Magasins du monde, and by Maria José Saenz, a Guatemalan designer. It brought together a group of 11 craftswomen from different communities, selected based on their interest in the initiative, their availability and their capacity to propagate their learning within their group afterwards. The intention was for the craftswomen to strengthen their knowledge of the entire production chain as well as their capacity to propose creative autonomous solutions for the latter, and to do this at different levels: as much within their community (to develop new marketing opportunities, for example) as at the AGM of *Aj Quen* (in order to be a stakeholder in the search for marketing solutions), or even within their family (to transmit their knowledge to their children, for example).

Each of the steps of the methodology was punctuated by creative activities linked to the task in hand, facilitating decision-making. Tools were created and adapted to meet the desired objectives, according to the results obtained in the previous step. Changes of methodological or strategical direction were made as the process of co-design unfolded, on the basis of the craftswomen's contributions. The process unfolded as follows:

1. Analysing and understanding the context

With the help of teaching aids, the craftswomen were invited to speak freely about various aspects of their daily lives – both their family lives and their professional lives – thus enabling the design researchers to:

a. Get to know the organisation and its ecosystem; the way the mem-

bers are organised, hierarchised, connected; their dependencies and interdependencies;
b. Get to know the sociodemographic and cultural profile of the craftswomen; understand the place they hold within the production chain, how their days are organised between their craft work and their domestic, community and social activities; learn how their families are composed, the role they play within them, the place they hold within them, and likewise within their households and their communities; discover their beliefs and know-how;
c. Diagnose the state of the production chain: identify the players and resources that it comprises; reconstruct the value chain, from the acquisition of raw materials and their transformation to the marketing of the handicraft products;
d. Identify and synthesise the problems and opportunities.

Among the tools used by the researchers was a stakeholder map[56], an empathy cube[57], and a card game about the stages of the value chain[58].

2. Co-design: creating joint solutions to the difficulties experienced

The activities proposed aimed to stimulate the imagination and the creation of new solutions to the problems posed. To do this, it was necessary for the team to:

- Understand the defining elements of Guatemalan cultural identity, and how to transpose them onto products (colours and symbols);
- Understand the cultural functioning and trends of different markets (mass-culture and sub-cultures, niche markets, use of colours according to cultures and lifestyles, etc.), and take greater ownership of them in order to go from conceptualisation to inspiration to design;
- Understand how a product is structured (morphology, dimensions, proportions, functions, etc), to be in a position to create new forms;
- Understand and take greater ownership of the costing structure across the entire value chain, in order to offer products tailored to each customer;
- Design a new product line.

Among the activities and tools employed for this step were a brainstorming activity and a collective mood board[59], drawings, sketches, and prototypes in two or three dimensions (using paper and fabric).

3. Evaluation of the process and transfer of the methodology

Just as crucial as the two previous steps, the evaluation of the process aims to measure the extent to which the craftswomen have taken ownership of the design knowledge, and feel capable of putting it into practice again without the participation of the researchers. It's the methodology as a whole which is put to the test of evaluation in this third step. It was therefore a matter of:

- Validating the understanding and the transfer of the jointly constructed knowledge;
- Analysing the difficulties and doubts relating to the process and seeking to resolve them;
- Making a commitment: looking at how the craftswomen could apply the process in daily life, with their group.

3.3 THE RESULTS OBTAINED

1. Analysis and understanding of the context

WOMEN, HERITAGE OF IDENTITY AND TRANSMISSION OF ARTISANAL KNOW-HOW

The co-design process brought together eleven craftswomen from different regions of the country, mainly from the south-west region of Guatemala. Each craftswoman represented a group, which itself is the expression of a community. Five groups were represented among the eleven participants:

- The group Cmdec from the town of Comalapa,

56 The stakeholder map took the form of an archery target. The organisation studied was in the centre of the target, then described and positioned around it were the stakeholders with whom they maintain relationships (commercial, political, etc.), on circles whose distance from the centre varied according to their degree of influence.
57 The empathy cube is a tool adapted by Maria José Saenz for the study, which encourages participants to share their life story in a fun way through visual and oral accounts. Each surface of the cube represents a research question: what characterises the personality of the craftswoman, how her working time is organised, the composition of her family, the activities she undertakes, what she likes best, her dreams for the future.
58 Each card corresponds to a link in the value chain. The craftswomen are invited to position themselves on one or several cards, according to the place they occupy in the value chain, and to explain their role. They can move according to the roles they like or would like to have. The movement of the people around the cards reveals the relationships, dependencies, deficiencies and opportunities throughout the chain.
59 The Mood board defines the universe in which the consumer lives, and the universe in which the product is found.

- The group Asomadi from San Andrès Semetabaj,
- The groups Chaquijya, Xajaxac and Chuacruz from the town of Solola,
- The group Pan de vida from the town of Santa Catarina Ixtahuacan,
- The group Ri itxam from the town of Coban.

Each community is defined by a territory, a language and its own customs. Some of them do not speak Spanish, although they understand it for the most part. Some communities do not understand each other's language. The use of the visual and graphic language favoured by design research was therefore all the more justified.

These women, aged between 30 and 60, have been practicing textile crafts from a very early age, and according to the know-how passed on to them by the women of their communities: their mothers, their aunts, their grand-mothers, their neighbours.

They weave fabrics destined mainly for the manufacture of traditional clothing, still widely customary in Guatemala. The weaving technique has evolved over time: the traditional "backstrap" weaving technique has made way for the "foot" loom or "treadle" loom, imported by Spanish colonists in the 16th century. More ergonomic, faster and so more profitable, but more demanding in terms of physical effort, the treadle loom was for a long time the reserve of men. This can be seen in the representations in the Ixchel Museum, dedicated to traditional costumes, in the Guatemalan capital. There was a massive appropriation of the treadle loom by women in the 21st century.

Aj Quen chose moreover to make this technical leap, training the craftswomen who were members of the association in the use of the treadle loom in the 1980 and 1990s, in order to increase the association's productivity.

Their textile handicrafts are endowed with a practical, symbolic and aesthetic function, as we have seen in the first chapter. Indeed, the fabrics they produce are destined for the manufacture of traditional clothing, fashion accessories and other decorative accessories for the house (like table runners, for example). Through the symbols and colours they display, they also reflect the way in which their communities read and interpret the world, their stories, their aspirations and frustrations. These formal characteristics assign a complementary aesthetic function to the manufactured product. Moreover, each community is set apart by the specific colour tones and motifs found on the costumes of the women and men. Very bright tones of red and blue are characteristic of the village of Santa Catarina de Polopo's community, for example, while large coloured flowers embroidered on a black background are characteristic of the community of Comalapa.

The four-petaled flower is furthermore a recurrent theme in popular representations of the Guatemalan communities. At the Ixchel Museum, we can read that the flower "*has had a multiple meaning in the ancient and contemporary cultures of Central America"*. Beyond their decorative function, in different styles and forms, "*in the Maya region the flowers seem to carry more specific meanings, like the relationship with the ancestors. [...] It can be said that for women, the flowers were and still are an important element in the decorations during ritual festivals or sacrifice offerings*".

During a brainstorming session on the elements which compose Guatemala's identity, the flower emerged unanimously in the drawings of the craftswomen, alongside birds, volcanos and other natural elements.

While the practical function of Guatemalan textile handicrafts has remained unchanged, given that traditional costume is still customary in these communities, its symbolic and aesthetic functions, guardians of the communication between generations of the same community, have been gradually eroded by history, time and the globalisation of trade.

The co-design workshops served to demonstrate on the one hand that few craftswomen were able to give an interpretation of the shapes and motifs on their costumes. It was difficult for them to recall the meaning of something that forms a part of their graphic identity. "*Our elders have not passed the knowledge on to us*", one of them relates. "*Everything has a meaning, but we are in the process of losing all the knowledge of our ancestors. I don't*

know why – perhaps because we were ashamed, or because they didn't pass it on to us. Or maybe because we don't know how to value all that our ancestors have left us. Now it is time to reclaim it".

On the other hand, changing trends and technology threaten the preservation of handicraft traditions. As an example, the huipil, the upper part of the traditional costume, which covers the torso, is the part most laden with symbols. It is the huipil that sets communities apart and communicates their beliefs. It is also the most demanding part of the costume in terms of handiwork, because hand embroidery is worked on top of a canvas woven on a treadle loom. Depending on the complexity of the motifs, and on the occasion, producing a huipil can take up to 3 months. Today, the huipil is the handicraft piece which has been harmed the most by industrial competition.

These days huipils display "fashionable" motifs, adapting to the tastes of the women who wear them. With time they are losing their function of symbolism and communication between the generations. It is even possible to find huipils bearing motifs in the shape of cats or Father Christmas for example, at markets, as well as at the Ixchel Museum which documents the "modern" influences on the handicraft sector. "*If I see a figure that I like on another person's huipil, I embroider it on mine*", admits Lidia, with a smile. "*If I like a certain shape of neckline, or a certain flower on another huipil, I'll copy the shape*", she adds.

The laborious construction of a huipil means the object is expensive and uncompetitive in the market. New techniques have burst onto the scene in recent years, like sublimado, an industrial textile printing technique. The principle is to simulate embroidery. The motifs are no longer embroidered, but printed. This does not prevent some women from customising their sublimado by adding embroidery or an accessory to it. The cost price is drastically lower[60], and certain models even come from China, which threatens the preservation of the handicraft tradition of making the huipil. "People don't want to spend more,

Photo 1: "Backstrap" weaving technique. Santa Catarina de Polopó, Guatemala.
Photo 2: "Treadle" loom. Chaquijya group from Solola, Guatemala.

60 For reference, a huipil made entirely by hand costs 150 quetzales on average (equivalent to approximately 172 euros). It costs 70 quetzales (8 euros) if it is made by industrial machine.

they no longer look at the quality but at the price", worries one craftswoman.

Consequently, the younger generations are not interested in perpetuating handicraft tradition, which does not offer prospects for their future. "*If there is nobody to buy at this price, why would I do what my mother does?*" says Lidia, 37 years old and mother of two children, quoting the words of the young girls in her community. Margarita, 56 years old and the mother of three girls, herself says "*I don't want my daughters to do the same thing as me*".

Given this situation, how can the transmission of culture and the need to adapt to changes in society and markets be reconciled? Between an identical reproduction of ancestral messages or the symbols of mass-culture, is the challenge not to perpetuate the culture of origin, and reinterpret it in the light of the current time? Just as the ancestors communicated their messages and beliefs in resonance with the events of their time, is not the challenge of contemporary Guatemalan handicrafts to communicate the thinking, challenges and beliefs of the women and men of today's Guatemala?

Brainstorming session on the elements which make up Guatemalan identity, and construction of the mood board.

WOMEN, DECENT WORK AND AUTONOMY

Craft work, when carried out in a context of decent work, often represents an economic, social, political and psychological lever for craftswomen, as explored in the study *Gender and fair trade handicrafts: the impact of fair trade handicrafts on women's empowerment in India and Bangladesh*[61] (Veillard, 2014).

Its impacts are multiple and interdependent. When a craftswoman earns a stable income that is fair in relation to the work carried out, she is also able to take a greater part in economic decisions affecting her married life, her family life and her life within her community. In this way she also gains in confidence.

During an ice-breaking activity, the craftswomen were invited to recount how their family is composed, their everyday activities and how their time is organised between craft work, domestic activities and community life. They were invited to share their future aspirations as well.

Whether it was a matter of paid craft work or non-paid domestic work, the 11 personal accounts made it obvious that the day of a Guatemalan textile craftswoman is composed almost exclusively of work activities. Leisure time is virtually non-existent. Television offers a brief escape from daily life in the evening. One of the craftswomen, Lidia, even tells us they discovered that they spend their days working through the ice-breaking activity, "*and that a lot of this work is not paid*".

For these women from a rural background, craft work often offers an income complementary to domestic tasks or agricultural work, which enables them to ensure a quality of

61 Veillard P. Gender and fair trade handicrafts: the impact of fair trade handicrafts on women's empowerment in India and Bangladesh. Oxfam-Magasins du monde, November 2014. Available online: www.omdm.be/blog/etude/artisanat-et-genre-impact-de-lartisanat-equitable-sur-lempowerment-des-femmes-en-inde-et-au-bangladesh/ (English version also available).

life for their family through food, clothing, and health care. When it is carried out in a fair trade context, it can become a real lever for autonomy. Indeed, by earning a fair payment in exchange for the work provided, in addition to supporting her family the craftswoman can plan for the future.

In the 1980s, the period during which *Aj Quen* was founded, fair trade handicraft sales were at their highest. They helped several families to "*get out of difficulties*", like the family of Cristina for example, 34 years old, living in Sololá, whose father died in 1983 as a victim of armed conflict.

Margarita, 56 years old, from Comalapa, also tells us: "*in the 1980s, there were a lot of orders, and with this money I paid for my daughters' education. I was able to fund their studies as far as college. After that they had to work to fund their studies. How I would love them to be professionals, not to work like me!*".

At this time, some women lived only on their handicrafts. Furthermore, several groups became independent from *Aj Quen* in the 1990s in order to set up family businesses, associations or cooperatives, as is the case for the *Tejido de Guadelupe* cooperative, for example. These groups maintain collaborative relationships with *Aj Quen* and exchange good practices.

Work is regarded as a lever all the more important for women who are single, victims of domestic violence, or whose husband is alcoholic. Lidia, 37 years old and the mother of two children recounts: "*Some men work when they're sober, others don't. My father couldn't care less about the family, he doesn't care about knowing whether we have milk, corn, wood... He works for himself, for his consumption [of alcohol]. He even goes as far as taking things from the kitchen to sell, for his consumption. He has gone as far as taking napkins, chicken...*". Some women, like Luciana, 30 years old, also consider it better to be a single mother than married to an alcoholic husband, "*who comes home to hit you*".

When they expressed their aspirations for the future, all the women expressed in their own words that they wished to "*have more work*". They bear witness with nostalgia to the glorious years of fair trade, in the 1980s and 1990s, when "*foreign customers" were buying sufficient volumes of production for all of them to work all week, and to improve their quality of life. But "the foreign customers no longer buy from us like they did before*" regrets Cristina. "*I hope the world economy will improve*" adds Estela, 37 years old.

Others dream of being independent, like Margarita, 56 years old, who aspires to greater financial autonomy, of working on a self-employed basis so that she does not have to go a long way from her house to work.

The facts are glaring: the number of active groups of craftswomen has gone from 40 at the time of *Aj Quen*'s launch to 16 today. Currently, handicraft orders are no longer sufficient to give a continual flow of work to the 16 groups of craftswomen. Most of them continue to produce bit by bit, in response to orders from families of the community, as they did before becoming members of *Aj Quen* and entering into fair trade.

The fair trade model from the 1980s no longer seems to be a success for the groups of craftswomen affiliated with *Aj Quen*. While it is clear that it represented a lever for most of the women who saw their quality of life and that of their families improve between the 1980s and the year 2000, as shown by the participants' personal accounts, it also appears that the model has not been able to endure over time, and that it no longer adequately responds to the current needs of the women and their families.

A gap seems to have widened between production and the consumption market (see chapters 1 and 2). Furthermore, the personal accounts of the craftswomen give the impression that they have no control over their economic fate, which raises concerns regarding the question of their autonomy. The global economy escapes them, they do not understand why sales have dropped in Europe, they have no knowledge of the markets, and do not seem to be formulating any alternative scenario. This finding is confirmed by José Victor Pop Bol, the manager of *Aj Quen*, when he states that "*the craftswomen want work for the whole month, otherwise they lose hope*".

Faced with this situation, is the international fair trade market still a viable and lasting option for the groups of producers? Has *Aj Quen* invested in other markets? Is the

local market ready to place value on local handicrafts sold at a fair price? What alternative scenarios can be imagined? How can the autonomy of the craftswomen in their economic life plan be strengthened?

INTERDEPENDENCIES WITHIN THE PRODUCTION CHAIN

The development of a "stakeholder map"[62] was useful in order to understand the role and influence of the stakeholders in *Aj Quen*'s ecosystem, and to retrace the path of handicrafts within it:

1. *Aj Quen* centralises the orders of international and national clients with whom it negotiates timescales and prices, while being careful to maintain a fair income for the producers, proportional to the work time invested;
2. *Aj Quen* passes orders to the groups of craftswomen. The number of groups involved will depend on the nature and size of the order: not all the craftswomen are skilled in the same techniques, and some groups are more specialised in two-handed weaving, others in four-handed weaving, and others still in embroidery or knitting, for example. The craftswomen are provided with the raw materials by *Aj Quen*, who sources them from two wholesalers located in the capital: Algodones Maya[63] and Doña Cruz. The cotton is imported from Asia[64], and dyed in Guatemala. The dyes used are certified heavy-metal free (AZOfree) and non-toxic.

Margarita and Cristina tell their life story through the "empathy cube" adapted by Maria José Saenz.

3. Once the fabric is manufactured and delivered by the craftswomen to *Aj Quen*, the latter takes charge of transforming the fabric and manufacturing the finished product on its premises, according to the model ordered by the customer.

Several points emerge from this flow along the production chain:
On the one hand, the centralising and managing role adopted by *Aj Quen* makes it possible for a considerable volume of production to be taken on. Rather than scattering business opportunities among the different groups of craftswomen,

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62 The stakeholder map took the form of an archery target. The organisation studied was in the centre of the target, then described and positioned around it were the stakeholders with whom they maintain relationships (commercial, political, etc.), on circles whose distance from the centre varied according to their degree of influence.
63 http://www.algodonesmayas.com
64 National production of cotton began to decrease from the end of the 19th century (at which time industrially spun North-American cotton appeared on the market), to be totally replaced these days by the importation of Asian cotton.

their being grouped around *Aj Quen* guarantees a capacity for production and negotiation which is valued by the various customers. Moreover, this guarantees the preservation of decent work conditions and a fair remuneration for craftswomen, who are freed from any activity related to marketing and sales. In their personal accounts, the craftswomen explain that just in order to have work, they often come to accept small orders negotiated directly with the customer, who has no hesitation in paying them half the fair price established with *Aj Quen*. In any case, most of the time orders come from the direction of outside. The same is true for the product designs. There is little or no time invested in finding new customers.

The negative aspect of the current model is that the craftswomen are highly dependent on the association, which is itself experiencing a decline in orders for handicrafts, and professes a lack of financial means, human resources, and time for prospecting and canvassing new markets and investing in the study and innovation of new products.

This lack of resources is in turn explained by the decline in sales which the association has seen in recent years[65], and the end of the subsidies they had received for several years from international development cooperation, in particular from the Belgian organisation Oxfam Solidarité[66]. For a long time, these subsidies allowed the salaries of employed staff and the association's running costs to be covered. José Victor Pop states regarding this that "*customers are demanding ever cheaper prices. Previously, that didn't worry us, as we were receiving subsidies from international cooperation which allowed us to cover our running costs, even if our trade balance was in the red. We were doing it so that the craftswomen could still have work*".

Today 80% of the association's sales revenue come from the international fair trade market (Oxfam-Magasins du monde, Oxfam Australia, Eza Austria, Triumph Import, Vamos Alemania, and Vessel Atelier in Mexico[67]). Unfortunately, the international market for fair trade handicrafts is slumping (see chapter 2) and José Victor Pop worries that "*all the fair trade organisations today want inexpensive things, for less than 1 euro*".

Paradoxically then, today *Aj Quen* finds itself forced to diversify its markets, and consequently its product lines. This requires investing efforts and resources which *Aj Quen* does not currently have in marketing, research and innovation. Furthermore, the association manufactures products according to the designs ordered by its customers. The staggering versatility of the fashion market seems to place it in a difficult position, with a limited capacity to continually adapt to the changing tastes of consumer markets in order to develop new designs of their own, while preserving the characteristics of Guatemalan handicraft expertise.

How can this vicious circle be broken? How can the craftswomen's dependence on the commercial management of *Aj Quen* be broken, without breaking up the relationships of collaboration and solidarity across the production chain? How can *Aj Quen*'s dependence on international markets be broken, with the resources it currently has? Must the value chain be redesigned? Is it conceivable to develop the fair trade consumer market locally?

2. Co-design: creating joint solutions to the difficulties experienced

The context analysis enabled two overriding issues to be formulated, a response to which had to be found through the co-design process:

1. The need to strengthen both the craftswomen's and the employed staff of *Aj Quen*'s autonomy in their business projects, through an understanding of the handicraft value chain and the markets, in order to develop it with the resources available;
2. The need to invigorate the supply of fair trade handicrafts by reconciling cultural transmission with adapting to changes in society and the markets.

The activities centred around the design of a new line of products which meet the criteria set by Oxfam-Magasins du monde, namely

65 Between 2008 and 2009 the association's exports fell by 35%, according to José Victor Pop Bol. Since this year of recession, the downward trend has been maintained.
66 https://www.oxfamsol.be/
67 http://vesselatelier.com/boutique/

products that are:
- an embodiment of Guatemalan identity
- contemporary
- functional
- cost-efficient

By participating in the exercise to create a line of products for a specific customer – from its design to its price structuring to its manufacture – the craftswomen, who usually limit their scope of action to producing fabric and embroideries, were led to make decisions about the whole production chain. In addition, by confronting problems which they are not used to encountering (like designing a product intended for a use which is unfamiliar to them, or designing a product with a production price limit set by the sponsor), the craftswomen had to work together to find viable solutions, using accessible resources (drawing, 2D and 3D prototyping in paper).

In this way, they gained in understanding of the entire textile handicraft value chain, and hence in autonomy. This process was structured in such a way as to allow them to continue and reproduce the approach independently at different levels: the group level and the level of *Aj Quen*.

Using a product specification put together with the marketing department of Oxfam-Magasins du monde, highlighting which products are most successful, and confronting needs with current constraints in terms of products and budget, the researchers decided to work the process around a product range comprising a bag, a wallet and a computer sleeve. The group explored fashion trends in European and Guatemalan markets, examined them, then analysed the profiles of the consumers targeted by these products.

Activity to reconstruct the value chain with the manager and the production manager of Aj Quen.

The first stage of co-design was to build a mood board relating to Guatemalan identity. Through a brainstorming exercise, the craftswomen described individually the elements which, in their opinion, make up Guatemalan cultural identity. Elements of nature like flowers, the sun, lake waters, volcanos, birds, etc., emerged unanimously. These elements were then illustrated on paper in order to construct the collective mood board, in the colours representative of local culture. Next, the craftswomen looked for the textile materials which best represented these constituent elements of Guatemalan culture.

Through a role-play, the craftswomen were then made aware of the tastes of the European customer-base. They discussed the functions attributed to each product according to the actual uses expected by the customer-base, and visualised the shapes and materials which could be suitable for these. At this point, the facilitators tackled the issue of the gender stereotypes transmitted by objects (depending on colours, shapes and the uses attributed according to whether the user is a man or a women), and how to deconstruct them at the product design stage. Giving shape to this discussion through drawing, then three dimensions with the help of paper, formed the second stage in the co-design of a new product line.

The next step was producing a fabric prototype. The flower, an identifying element of Guatemala, was chosen as the basic element in order to explore the different graphic representations of one figure, its composition, its size, its position on the designated object, and the dif-

ferent possible combinations of all of these ideas.

Each stage was concluded with a joint presentation and discussion of the work of the two groups. This moment allowed the craftswomen to take a step back from their creations, and to assimilate the corrections or adaptations necessary, on the basis of contributions from the other group and the two researchers in design.

3. Evaluation of the process and transfer of the methodology

The result of the creative process described above, spread over four days of workshops, is almost exclusively the work of the group of craftswomen. The two facilitators chose to intervene as little as possible in the decision-making at the different stages of the design process, in order to better assess the information taken on board by the craftswomen about the entire production chain and the difficulties they were encountering with it. The craftswomen were led to solve the major part of these difficulties within their group, by confronting their opinions, experiences, knowledge and know-how. The facilitators orchestrated problem-solving in the situations of creative and technical block that arose, through the exchange of experiences and of expert and diffuse knowledge in design, to use the expression of Ezio Manzini (2015)[68].

To evaluate the process of knowledge transfer, the two researchers wished to assess the craftswomen's capacity to reproduce and implement the knowledge autonomously, as part of a quick exercise. The exercise consisted in the craftswomen creating a new product within a two hour time limit, by passing once again through all the stages of product design: imagination, conception, producing a prototype, testing, correction, manufacture. The result had to meet the criteria of Oxfam-Magasin du monde, namely it had to be representative of Guatemalan identity and at the same time contemporary, functional and cost-efficient. The object chosen for this exercise was the multi-purpose case (for make-up, pencils, paint brushes, etc.). The cost of production (i.e. from design through to manufacture) had to be no more than four dollars, in order to meet the criteria established by the Belgian importer.

Despite the misgivings of the craftswomen considering the low production cost suggested, they entered into the spirit of the exercise and in subgroups went through the different design stages to arrive at the proposal of a collection of four new models of case, without the intervention of the facilitators. It was important that production cost did not limit creativity, but rather was a criterion to take into account in order to offer a suitable design to the customer, without compromising the criteria of fair trade, namely first and foremost a fair remuneration for the work provided.

Two tools were constructed by the researchers in design to support the exercise:

- a table identifying all the materials that are found in Guatemalan textile handicrafts and their price by unit of measure (metre, hank, piece, etc);

Exercise to reconstruct the handicraft production chain

68 See chapter 2.4.

- a table going over the basic ideas of graphic design: the composition of a figure, its figurative/abstract representations, its size, the choice of its position on the object or the chosen support.

The quick exercise proved very effective. It confirmed the transfer of design knowledge transmitted between the researchers and the craftswomen. The craftswomen did indeed demonstrate that they had taken ownership of the tools and knowledge that enabled them, using the available resources, to develop new products capable of meeting the expectations of a customer-base, without negotiating the principle of fair renumeration.

Out of the creative work came four prototypes for cases made with the help of sheets of paper, meeting the criteria of Oxfam-Magasins du monde, and enabling a new collection to be created. The determining criterion in this exercise was the price. Nevertheless, by autonomously reproducing the entire design process they demonstrated they had the capacity to propose new products in different price ranges.

Presentation of the mood board tool, comparison of European and Guatemalan trends

Development of a mood board representing Guatemalan cultural identity

One of the difficulties encountered remains finding a balance between identity and modernity, in designing the shapes and symbols for the product. Indeed, an overload of colours and motifs may be seen in some of the paper models presented in the photo above. What position should be taken between the minimalist and uncluttered trend of current Western markets, and the colourfulness and high concentration of motifs of traditional designs? The group presentation of the new models resulting from the exercise was an opportunity to exchange ideas with design professionals regarding the improvements to be made.

The final prototypes were manufactured in textile material afterwards, using the fabrics available in *Aj Quen*'s workshop. The facilitators wished them to be as faithful as possible to the models created by the craftswomen. The working time had been calculated in the price during the quick exercise.

They were officially presented to Oxfam-Magasins du monde at the meeting of the Partner Commission[69] on 7th December 2017, at which three employees from the marketing department were present, as well as nine

69 This body is composed of volunteers, who numbered 14 in 2016. It determines the choice of and the selection criteria for partner organisations, in collaboration with Oxfam-Magasin du monde's Partnership Department which gives it information on all subjects relevant to its tasks. The Commission's role includes monitoring the evaluation of existing partners and making decisions about accepting new partners and terminating partnerships. It also has an advisory role and one of transmission towards the rest of the Movement. It reports its activities to the Board of Directors via its Chairperson, who is a director. (Annual Report 2016 of Oxfam-Magasins du monde, p.31)

volunteers. Their feedback was unanimously positive, and as a result the marketing department initiated the purchase of the products resulting from this co-design process for the Winter 2018 collection.

At the end of 4 days of co-design, it could be seen that design had functioned as a real enabling factor for solutions and for autonomy in the textile handicraft production chain.

Indeed, on the basis of the method and results described above, it is possible to state that with the transferred design tools, and with the help of non-costly materials, the craftswomen now have a strengthened understanding of the handicraft value chain and the markets, and are in a position to autonomously continue the design approach to gain in economic autonomy. They have the capacity to explore new forms and uses of products, with different price variations, in order to propose them to a current or potential customer-base (at least at the scale of their town), independently from and complementary to the commercial management of *Aj Quen*. Their enthusiasm and their commitment to pursue the approach, and to spread it within their respective groups, was unanimous at the end of the meeting.

Among the 11 craftswomen who took part in the co-design process, two work in manufacture at the headquarters of *Aj Quen*, and one of them is Head of Production. The representation of *Aj Quen*'s coordination and production team was indispensable in order to fulfil the objectives set for the process. The

Discussion on the form of the new product range

Exploration of flower shapes as a representation of Guatemalan identity

Design and paper prototyping

Producing a fabric prototype and solving formal and functional problems

association is thus also in a position to reinvigorate its economic project and its supply of handicrafts by reconciling the transmission of culture with adaptation to markets without the help of designers, provided that they invest time in this. Indeed, time remains the indispensable resource for studying and prospecting new markets, as well as for developing new products.

In order to facilitate the continuation of the initiative in this direction, an educational tool-box has been designed by the researchers, and will be distributed to the management of *Aj Quen* as well as to each group of craftswomen at the beginning of 2018. In the form of practical factsheets, this box goes over the information and steps relating to the design of a product and their illus-

trated explanations (taking into account the limited use of Castilian by some craftswomen), as well as the tools employed as part of the co-design exercise, including the table of materials.

Through the methodology employed, it is not a question of ousting designers from craft and industrial value chains, but making them allies when solving a problem in a sustainable way. It was not the legitimacy of intervention through design that was put to the test in this study, but the way of intervening through design in order to support community projects that place people at the centre of their economic mission.

It has been demonstrated, through both the theoretical context and the practical experimentation of this study, that dialogue between handicraft communities and designers can take place provided that the latter act as peers, agitators of know-how and passers-on of knew knowledge (for instance between cultural tradition and market trends), for a greater autonomy of the players involved. It is in this way, and only in this way, that the co-design approach takes on its full meaning.

3.4 POSSIBLE FORMULAE FOR THE FUTURE

This research and experimentation in design has given rise to a series of findings and relevant questions, as much about the viability of the fair trade association's economic model as about the autonomy of different stakeholders across the production chain. It has also brought to light the difficult negotiation between preserving ancestral know-how on the one hand, and adapting to trends in the consumer market on the other.

Calculation of the (fair) price based on material costs and working time

Rather than presenting a list of recommendations, to answer these questions we wished to imagine a vast array of possibilities for the organisation *Aj Quen*, forming a potential basis for reflection for other handicraft organisations facing the same difficulties. These opportunities are formulated in the form of interdependent questions, opening up new avenues for research:

1 What if the different players in the value chain were to become more autonomous?
2 What if *Aj Quen* were to diversify its markets?
3 What if *Aj Quen* were to invest time in research and innovation?
4 What if *Aj Quen* were to present itself and its story in a different way?
5 What if *Aj Quen* were to increase its participation in spaces for South-South and South-North cooperation?

1. What if the different players in the value chain were to become more autonomous?

This was the entire purpose of the experiment led by the design researchers in collaboration with *Aj Quen*. By gaining in autonomy across the value chain, each player can act independently from the others, but in collaboration with them.

This is not about scattering *Aj Quen*'s ecosystem (*Aj Quen*'s administrative team having valuable experience in the commercial sector), but rather making each stakeholder in the production chain more autonomous, and therefore better able to bounce back individually or as a group in case of economic difficulties.

Through the co-design approach we demonstrated that both *Aj Quen*'s, as a fair trade organisation, and the craftwomen producers' capacities were strengthened to autonomous-

Design and paper prototyping

ly develop new products and to better understand local and international markets.

Aj Quen has the capacity to gain independence from its historical customers located internationally,

Presentation of the 4 paper models of cases, resulting from the quick exercise to design a product line.

and to expend new energies in new markets (local and regional) with which it is better acquainted.

For reasons of volume, production capacity and guarantee of decent work, the producers have every interest in continuing to work with *Aj Quen*, which centralises business opportunities, in an organised way. However, if the latter experiences commercial difficulties or lacks pro-activity, they are no longer dependent, but are rather in a position to propose creative alternatives to *Aj Quen*, as well as to their group.

2. What if *Aj Quen* were to diversify its markets?

Aj Quen is currently in a situation of deadlock: it is 80% dependent on the European fair trade export market, which is itself in decline. Added to this is the fact that it does not have the financial means to invest in researching new markets.

Now, the case study of the fair trade organisation Allpa (Macconway, 2017) demonstrated that the diversification of its markets achieved in the 1990s was vital and reinvigorating (see chapter 2.3). It was able to change direction before the downturn in the European fair trade market, to move into the international conventional trade market of fashion and accessories. Today it juggles the two markets, using separate marketing channels, without compromising the principles of fair trade, including the pre-financing of orders placed with its craftspeople. It is able to carry out semi-standardised production of variable volumes which responds to modern aesthetic trends, while preserving ancestral know-how. It also continues production that places value on more traditional designs, even artistic craft.

What if *Aj Quen* were to change direction by focusing first of all on the local consumer market? This is the avenue which seems to us to present the most advantage and least risk in the initial period. It would reduce dependence on international markets and bring the organisation closer to its nearest audience.

It would contribute moreover to the transmission of Guatemalan know-how and preservation of its cultural memory.

A study of trends carried out in 2017 by the Rafael Landivar University [70] (Guatemala) shows that today the national market is ripe for placing value on local know-how practiced in conditions of decent work.

Generally, the study reveals that among the consumers questioned[71] about their tastes and tendencies in buying handicrafts, two thirds give importance, sometimes a lot of importance, to the fact that the product is produced by hand, using materials and processes that respect the environment, that it represents the identity of their country and that it is produced in conditions of decent work, providing a fair pay to the craftsperson. The price is an important criterion at the moment of purchase, provided that the quality is not sacrificed. They also appreciate a well-packaged and well-presented product.

Furthermore, more than 85% of people interviewed say they buy Guatemalan handicrafts when they travel or receive visitors from abroad.

For the authors of the study, this demonstrates the existence of a significant gift market, to be taken advantage of through quality and innovation. Textile handicraft (fashion and decoration accessories) appears second in the buying preferences, after jewellery.

Final prototypes of the new collection of multi-purpose cases.

There exists another, smaller but growing market, of fashion and decoration products close to artistic craft, which Guatemalans buy for their own consumption. Like everywhere else, this section of the population wants to set themselves apart from mass culture through objects that differentiate them.

These trends allow it to be said that *Aj Quen* has a genuine opportunity to invest in the local market while maintaining its niche of small, functional and high-quality fair trade products. This is all the more justified given that the organisation has been positioned for the last 40 years as a benchmark commercial partner for quality fair trade handicrafts which are more and more in demand among the Guatemalan public. The local market could in this sense subsequently become an excellent stepping stone to the international export market.

This strategy does not remove the responsibilities of *Aj Quen*'s historical importing partners at the other end of the value chain; the reverse is the case. The various studies and interviews carried out in Belgium[72] highlight the urgency of setting up solutions to reinvigorate the fair trade market within the European market. They outline different avenues, such as the importance of constant communication with partners regarding the trends in the markets, reviewing and diversifying marketing forms and channels (e-commerce, large-scale distribution, pop-up shops, etc), pooling resources between import associations (regarding the development and selection of products, for example), etc.

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70 Tendencias. Artesanía 2017-2018 / Instituto de Investigación y Estudios Superiores en Arquitectura y Diseño -Indis-; Coordinación Ovidio Morales y Olivia Arango Guatemala, Universidad Rafael Landívar, Editorial Cara Parens, 2017.
71 The study does not indicate the socio-economic profiles of the people interviewed. It is nevertheless possible to deduce that it mainly concerned a population with an affluent economic profile, in a position to travel abroad and invest part of their purchasing power in fashion and in interior decoration for their home.
72 Cf. 2010 studies carried out by SAW-B, and 2015 study carried out by the market research company DEDICATED.

The entire working group together at the end of the co-design workshops

3. What if *Aj Quen* were to invest time in research and innovation?

The co-design approach demonstrated that the creative process is not costly, but rather that it can be carried out with the help of very economical materials (paper, pencils, fabric offcuts, etc.). Given the lack of resources described by *Aj Quen*, time would be the resource to make available as a priority.

By clearing a time each week for research and innovation, *Aj Quen* could develop new products congruent with its niche with a sound knowledge of current tastes and trends, which it could proactively offer to its current customers as well as to potential new local, regional and even international customers. The tool box systemising the co-design process described above was created for this purpose.

The study carried out by the Rafael Landívar University reveals that more than 80% of people interviewed state that they want good quality, lasting objects, bearing contemporary "fashionable" designs.

The authors of the study warn, however, that efforts expended in developing new innovative and contemporary products must not result in a loss of the cultural and historical essence of Guatemalan handicrafts.

It is therefore crucial, for the local market just as for the international export market, to seek a balance between design, innovation and trends.

It appears appropriate for *Aj Quen* to develop two parallel collections:

- an "*authentic*" line, composed of "classic" products from its current collection of fashion accessories, that it could develop by accommodating the trends of the different markets;
- a "*premium*" line, for fashion and interior decoration, at the border with artistic craft and aimed at a more limited client-base with a greater purchasing power (boutique hotels, for example). The latter would not enable high-volume production, but higher prices would help to balance the sources of income, and it would represent a valuable showcase for *Aj Quen*.

In the short term, it would be helpful for *Aj Quen* to have a bilingual (English-Spanish) member of staff, with training in sales, negotiation and trade, able to manage the organisation's portfolio according to the different markets, and who could promote it in fairs and craft events.

4. What if *Aj Quen* were to present itself and its story in a different way?

Fair trade has positioned itself as an alternative, human-centred commercial model. It was a pioneer in the marketing world in the 2000s, building on the importance of telling the life stories hidden behind products. Communicating the story behind an object is one way of re-establishing the link between producers and consumers, often at opposite sides of the globe. This is done through the packaging, for instance. However, today it is necessary to revise the very way that the story of fair trade is told in order to make it more contemporary, more in step with the challenges of current society, and less guilt-inducing for the consumer (Gerola, 2017)[73].

The survey carried out among the Guatemalan public shows that consumers are sensitive to the story that a product encompasses, and very sensitive to the packaging. It underlines the importance of communicating the intrinsic qualities of the handicraft product which will encourage the consumer to purchase it: quality, conditions of decent work, respect for the environment, etc. The same lesson emerges from the study carried out in 2015 on the Belgian consumer market.

Taking these different elements into consideration, two projects drew our attention as examples.

The Guatemalan business From the Mayan people to you[74] stakes a large part of its business model on storytelling. Moreover, its name displays its colours: Mayan populations are addressing their consumers. The exporter of local handicraft products has indeed made it its mission to offer "design" products which tell the stories of Mayan populations and the culture of Guatemala. It offers added-value services to its customers, like the option of personalising the designs and the packaging.

In the same vein, the project IOU (I Owe You)[75] boasts a modern and interactive web page which stakes a large part of its communication on bringing the producer and the consumer closer together, in the context of the object's journey. The customer can place their order online, know the producer who will make it, and even have a discussion with them. Dialogue windows allow both the producer and consumer to share their story around the manufacture and use of the product.

These two projects gamble on the web interface as the main medium for communication and commercial transactions with their customers. Furthermore, both only trade online. For the designer Kevin Murray, who is interested in the impact of social networks on craft production and consumption, web 2.0 has become an indispensable space for craft production, export and import organisations. But more than a virtual trading platform, web 2.0 must be a tool for preserving handicraft know-how through information and communication about it. Garland Magazine[76], which he launched, uses different narrative forms to explore ways of telling the story of these sets of know-how, the production processes of craft objects and the collaborations between craftspeople and designers.

Today, *Aj Quen* focuses more on production for export than on communication or marketing. Yet, to invest in new markets, and communicate its values while at the same time participating in the transmission of handicraft traditions, it would gain by developing the way in which it tells its story and the media for doing so. *Aj Quen* has nothing to envy in the products made by From the Mayan People to you (even less so as the latter unhesitatingly places low prices on its handicrafts), but could take inspiration from its competitor in terms of communication, in order to tell its own story and that of the know-how of its craftswomen.

5. What if *Aj Quen* were to increase its participation in spaces for South-South and South-North cooperation?

Since its creation, *Aj Quen* has actively participated in various platforms at a national level, such as Agexport[77] and PESA (a strategic platform for the handicraft sector, of which *Aj Quen* was a founder) as well as at a regional level, within

73 See: www.oxfammagasinsdumonde.be/blog/2017/09/14/giovanni-gerola-les-associations-de-commerce-equitable-doivent-quitter-leur-zone-de-confort/#.WlS4Q1XiblU
74 http://www.fromthemayan.com/
75 http://iouproject.com/
76 http://garlandmag.com/
77 http://export.com.gt/

Relacc (a network for the exchange of experience between Latin American countries on issues of marketing in the social and solidarity economy sector), and even within the platform Centro América Unida, which unites the craftspeople of Central America.

Currently, however, this networking is no longer active, due on the one hand to organisations' frustration with the minimal impact which their advocacy campaigns had on the Guatemalan government, and on the other to a lack of time. Yet it would merit being revived in order to cooperate on the contemporary political issues which affect craft trades, among which are: recognition for the status of craftspeople, facilities for accessing credit and banks loans, the protection of intellectual property rights for handicrafts and for intangible heritage, etc. This would also help to construct joint communication and awareness campaigns aimed at the general public on the issues of responsible production and consumption, in order to develop the local and regional consumer market which is today ready to place value on fair trade and local know-how.

The advantage of pooling resources and knowledge no longer needs to be demonstrated, but rather it needs to be encouraged. Given the challenges which craftspeople face at an economic and cultural level (see chapters 1 and 2), it is crucial that they form a community, in other words that they occupy physical or virtual spaces allowing them to share and resolve questions regarding common issues, through collaboration and the sharing of knowledge.

These spaces must not only allow the exchange of experience between craftspeople of different trades and different areas of the world, but also with designers and other professionals with a human-centred practice. Nicolas de Barquin, founder of Open Fab in Brussels and Artisan 2.0, also underlines the need to pool resources, and for craftspeople to organise themselves together. The precariousness of craft trades and the problem of spreading know-how is not a problem limited to the Southern hemisphere.

Such is the mission of Garland Magazine launched by Kevin Murray. This virtual magazine brings together a community of craftspeople and designers from the Asia-Pacific region who exchange their experiences and information concerning the revival of the region's crafts and the preservation of traditional know-how. Do communities of this type exist for Latin American regions?

This is also the approach undertaken by UNESCO in its crossover cooperation project between India and Colombia[78], on strategies for integrating craftspeople into the national production system with the collaboration of designers.

Most of the time, in cooperation initiatives between designers and craftspeople, it is the designer who travels to work in residence with the community of craftspeople. But we consider that the opposite is just as advantageous.

Following the model of the artists' residencies widespread in the field

78 See chapter 2,4

of art, the creation of craftspeople's residencies would allow these professionals to develop a craft project in dialogue with designers and professionals from other disciplines who come from different cultures and regions of the world. The framework of the residency is an ideal place for cooperation around a common theme, and also to learn from other disciplines, and in doing so to open the horizons around an individual's own project.

In terms of fair trade, the project of a Fair Trade House was described in the 2010s as a tool for development for producers and exporters in the fair trade of handicrafts. It has not yet seen the light of day[79].

Among the proposals outlined by *Aj Quen* in the context of PESA, we note the creation of a regional school for handicrafts, which at the current time has not seen the light of day either. In addition to being a place for the sharing of knowledge between different craft trades and different Latin American countries, this school would ensure the intergenerational transmission of the countries' handicraft expertise. Given the risk of losing the traditional culture, the craftswomen of *Aj Quen* would all have a place as propagators of this knowledge. This school would be an ideal place to explore the evolution of traditional handicraft in light of contemporary issues.

79 Commerce Equitable d'Artisanat. Quels outils pour développer le secteur? SAWB asbl: http://www.saw-b.be/Publications/RapportFinalInteractif.pdf

4. CONCLUSION

Embracing a wider vision of crafts allows them to be redefined in light of the issues and challenges of contemporary societies. That is the standpoint of this study, which explores the multiplicity of definitions, practices and forms that crafts take in order to better envisage their future evolution and restructuring, including in the fair trade sector.

Far beyond the object itself, crafts are defined by the practice of skills acquired through the transmission of knowledge within a community of belonging. Craft know-how is part of a system of open knowledge which is developed and changed by craftspeople through creation and experimentation.

Different industrial revolutions led to profound changes in craft trades. The mechanisation of manufacturing processes, coupled with the relentless pursuit of progress and modernity, brought about a shift in the way that populations all over the world live, work and consume. New craft practices emerged, while ancient know-how became marginalised in favour of a single globalised culture. Manual production found itself confined to versatile markets, making handicrafts into a precarious occupation.

It is not machines themselves which are to blame for these shifts, but the use to which human beings have put them for individual and private gain in pursuit of profits.

The issue is not one of making a choice, following a binary view, between local and global, nor between modernity and tradition. To place them in opposition would be unproductive and damaging, as has been demonstrated by the arsenal deployed in support of development policies focused on economic progress.

To the contrary, the issue is to promote an *agroecology* of knowledge and practices allowing traditional know-how to be preserved, and encouraging its interaction with more recent practices, including design.

The latter appears more and more frequently as a facilitator of creative solutions in different sectors of the economy. It is used, for instance, in cooperation projects and programmes aiming to preserve handicraft tradition, and to turn it into a lever for improving communities' quality of life through their integration into the worldwide production system.

Beyond the efforts made around product development – an inevitable short-cut when design is linked to business – it seems more beneficial to examine the role of design in its social and participative forms, in other words when it is removed from the object and refocused on people, to conceive with them scenarios for a future inhabitable world. When design supports projects that serve social justice, autonomy and biodiversity, like fair trade for example, it takes part in the wider movement of transitions taking shape the world over.

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