

Crafting Futures: Final Project Report

August 2022

Dr Marta Gasparin¹, Dr Steve Conway² and Dr Martin Quinn²
Copenhagen Business School¹ and University of Leicester School of Business²

1. Introduction

Following the scoping and pilot phase projects, a number of aspirational medium and long-term objectives were posed:

In the medium term the programme would seek to:

- Contribute towards empowering local communities by bringing together diverse individuals, genders and community groups through arts and culture, contributing to more open and sustainable societies.
- Contribute towards the creation of an enabling environment for inclusive participation and leadership in public life, by developing skills for employment and creative enterprise, and reducing barriers to participation in creative sectors.

For the longer term, we envisage the programme would seek to:

- Help increase individual creative expression of craft-makers and communities, contributing to more open and inclusive societies, building social capital and sharing economic growth equally across society to address global inequalities.
- Increase recognition of the value of craft culture in a sustainable development context, in order to address local and global challenges, as well as supporting the protection and promotion of cultural diversity and expression.
- Contribute to building more sustainable inclusive businesses and ecosystems for the creative and cultural industries and support long term policy change.

There were many potential actions that came out of the analysis of the data obtained during the scoping and pilot phase projects. However, with major constraints on the nature of activities brought about by Covid-19 restrictions in Uzbekistan and on international travel, alongside more constrained project funding, we sought to be selective and creative in the

implementation of the actions pursued. We were, however, able to source additional funds from other sources to undertake some of the actions and help leverage Crafting Futures project funding. For example, GCRF funding was secured that enabled the development of a training programme for the use of digital social media and an initial survey of the impact of Covid-19 on craft maker businesses in Uzbekistan.

Summary of Key Project Activities		
Project Phase	Activity (all supported by British Council staff and funding)	Description
Scoping Phase	Fieldwork (including site visits and discussions) – October 2019	A series of site visits and meetings in and around Tashkent, Kokand and Margilan in Fergana, and Bukhara. These were undertaken by Dr Marta Gasparin, Dr Martin Quinn, Dr Steve Conway and Dr Alan Ashton-Smith.
Pilot Phase	Fieldwork (including site visits, discussions and interviews) – March 2020	Site visits carried out in Shahrisab and villages in the rural area of this region (Saroy, Taragay, Varganza, Uchuyli, and Dungqishlok), Samarkand, Bukhara, Tashkent, Urgut and Fergana. These were undertaken by Dr Marta Gasparin and Dr Steve Conway.
	Business Model Workshop for Hunarmandlar – March 2020	Two-day workshop with craft-makers. Workshop led by Dr Marta Gasparin.
Phase 1	Craft maker Survey concerning impacts of Covid-19 on Craft Sector – April and May 2020	With the support of the Craft Association, a large-scale survey was undertaken by Dr Marta Gasparin, Dr Martin Quinn and Dr Steve Conway, with craft makers from across the regions of Uzbekistan.
	Dyeing Workshop – March 2021	Three-day dyeing workshop run by the Craft Association.
Phase 2	Craft Exhibition / Fair and Marketing Training Event	Three-day exhibition / fair with a range of craft exhibitors and demonstrators was organised by the Craft Association. A number of training events for craft makers (connected to the exhibition) were organised, including one focused on building marketing knowledge, run by Dr Steve Conway and Dr Martin Quinn.
	Story-telling Salon for Women Craft maker Business Owners.	Event to support women craft business owners took place on 15–16 October 2021 in Tashkent.

2. Scoping Phase of Project

The following key themes and findings emerged from a scoping visit to Uzbekistan between 26 and 31 October 2019 by Dr Marta Gasparin, Dr Martin Quinn, Dr Steve Conway and Dr Alan Ashton-Smith. This phase involved a series of visits and meetings in and around Tashkent, Kokand and Margilan in Fergana, and Bukhara, with craft-makers (including a number of 'Masters'), designers, art historians and academics, craft business owners, local mayors and officials from the Ministry of Culture, Chamber of Commerce, the World Craft Council etc.

2.1 Organising Craft and Craft Knowledge

Preserving and documenting contemporary and past knowledge – We witnessed a significant commitment to archiving and learning from Uzbekistan's craft history and traditions, uncovering the history of craft that had been hidden during the Soviet era. This was especially true of the Ceramics Masters who we visited; many had libraries as well as examples of pottery dating back several centuries and there was a real desire to locate craft within its historical context. This is potentially very important when dealing with the international market as the craft-makers are able to demonstrate the authenticity of their work.

Transferring knowledge between craft-makers – A key feature that we observed was the strength and efficacy of the personal connections between craft-makers both within and between the regions of Uzbekistan.

Educating the next generation of craft-makers – The apprenticeship appears to have been the dominant mechanism of educating the next generation of craft-makers, with the Master craft-makers we visited typically training up a number of young apprentices of various ages. What was particularly notable and interesting was the inter-generational transfer of craft knowledge from one generation to the next, and the respect and pride that was exhibited to prior generations of craft-makers within the family, sometimes stretching back five or six generations. In addition to the master-apprentice model, there appears to be a growth in the provision of formal education in a variety of craft areas through the education system.

Experimenting and innovation in craft – We came across a number of examples of Masters, business owners and designers who were innovating in designs, raw materials, and processes and techniques. Such innovation arose through a variety of mechanisms, for example, through sharing ideas, experimentation, travelling and exhibiting abroad, and collaborating with those from different crafts, regions and countries. One fashion designer we met drew upon her knowledge and experience gained during her degree in Japan.

2.2 The Role of Policy Makers and Institutions in Promoting Craft

National, regional and local policy and support – A distinction is made between Applied Arts and crafts within the policy framework. We met with a number of agencies and government departments involved in the support of the applied arts and craft including the Academy of Arts, Chamber of Commerce, Association of Handicrafts (Hunarmand), Ministries of Culture and Tourism, arts universities, museums, a city mayor and others. Craft appeared to be very much linked to the attempts to strengthen and emphasise a national identity in the independence era.

The inter-play between economic, heritage, culture and educational policies – Two different pressures appear to co-exist, between the desire to maintain quality and protect the reputation of craft through the Masters and their extensive training, and the desire to increase the contribution the craft sector makes to the national economy. We met many Masters who had trained for over twenty years to achieve their status within their particular field, but there is now a pressure from the Chamber of Commerce (and others) to move to a faster method of training (sometimes as little as three months) which could dilute notions of expertise. This distinction was also evident between the Ministries of Culture and Tourism. There also appears to be a tension between a desire to maintain small scale production and a move to a more mass-produced product with higher levels of employment. The risk here is that skills get watered down, the employment created will not pay well, and that environmental problems are not addressed or worsen.

2.3 Policy Issues

Gender roles in craft – The sectors we saw appeared to be split on gender lines with the ceramics and woodcarving craft makers being male and the embroidery and textiles craft makers being largely (but not exclusively) female. We spoke to a few female designers that are working with women from the rural areas, creating socially innovative supply chains and empowering women that are often left behind by the traditional market from. However, there appears to be a need to develop training to support the drive for social innovation and alternative modes of organising that empower women.

Sustainability – Sustainability was found to be embedded in some of the craft practices, but it was not often brought to the forefront in discussions, nor was it used to promote the craft objects. We found that there are quite few a textile craft makers that are working with natural materials and natural dyes, which are attractive for Western markets, however, these sustainable practices are not properly supported by business models or marketing strategies. For example, some textile makers were found to produce ecological and sustainable products, but these were then wrapped in plastic and as a result they are not able to tell a sustainability story on the process.

The need for new business models – A longer term objective would be to help develop and instil 'glocalised business models'. These would ensure long-term economic sustainability for slow innovators and would determine models for design and innovation practices to reduce the exploitation of natural and human resources, while increasing

product lifespans by driving innovation based on quality, local traditions, and sustainable values.

The balance between heritage and tourism – A number of the workshops we visited opened their doors to tourism while operating as fully functioning craft manufacturing spaces. Many of those who do this reported that they could easily fill their diaries with more tourist visitors but were concerned that they must protect the time they have to concentrate on their craft. At a broader scale this debate was played out between the ministries we visited with the tourism officials / mayor's office being keenly aware of the potential for more tourism based around craft (especially in Bukhara and Kokand), while the Culture Ministry and Academy of Arts were concerned about the potential impact on quality. There is also a very strong sense of connection between food as cultural heritage and craft, which has not been exploited yet in the touristic offer nor in the research practices.

2.4 Internationalisation and Uzbekistan Craft Sector

International collaboration – International collaboration was seen as a worthy pursuit by both policy makers and crafts people. All saw the value in trying to work with international partners to share practice and learn new techniques.

International exposure: Exhibiting and showcasing at international events in Uzbekistan – The Kokand Festival had clearly been a success and developed with smaller scale festivals and exhibitions in Tashkent. The period under President Shavkat Mirziyoyev has seen a significant increase in the frequency of these events and they are successful in attracting international participants (not just from Central Asia).

International exposure: Exhibiting and showcasing abroad – In addition to the above, a number of the people we met with had exhibited abroad themselves and were very keen to build on this with further visits.

The above themes that emerged from the scoping phase fed into the formation of the project objectives laid out in the introduction of this report.

3. Pilot Phase of Project

3.1 Extended Fieldwork

Following the initial scoping visit in October 2019, an extended visit was undertaken as part of the pilot phase by Dr Marta Gasparin (26 February to 17 March 2020) and Dr Steve Conway (26 February to 4 March 2020). During this visit, fieldwork was carried out in Shahrisab and villages in the rural area of this region (Saroy, Taragay, Varganza, Uchuyli, and Dunggqishlok), Samarkand, Bukhara, Tashkent, Urgut and Fergana. In-depth interviews were conducted, and in-depth discussions were held during a two-day workshop with craft-makers (see section below). From this extensive data collection, an extended project report was produced as an output of this phase of the project.



Women in a rural community working with a craft maker on an order

3.2 Bukhara Workshop on Value Creation, the Business Model Canvas, Sustainability and Slow Design in the Uzbekistan Craft Sector

At the two-day training workshop for Hunarmandlar, held on 13–14 March 2020, the attendees were introduced to a number of concepts and frameworks, in particular, those of value creation, the business model canvas, sustainability and slow design.



Bukhara workshop attendees

The attendees also discussed the initial effects of Covid-19 and this is led to a survey (funded by GCRF) of the impacts of Covid-19 among craft makers in March 2020, with a follow-up survey (part of Phase 1 of this project) in April–May 2021 (see a summary of these findings below).

4. Phase 1 of Project

4.1 Dyeing Workshop

A key activity during this phase of the project was a three-day practical dyeing workshop, held on 26–28 March 2021 in Margilan, Uzbekistan. Workshop participants included embroiders, carpet weavers, designers and knitting weavers from Kokand, Tashkent, Syrdarya, Bukhara, Navoiy, Khiva and Shakhrisabz. The workshop was organised by Aziz Murtazaev of the Craft Association.



Aziz Murtazaev (Craft Association) and workshop participants

The training during the workshop included the following activities:

Day 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Explanation of local and imported types of natural dyes, fixatives and additives – Preparation of silk, cotton yarn and wool for natural dyeing – Dyeing with madder roots, pomegranate peel, walnut skins, onion peel
Day 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Dyeing with indigo, cochineal, shellac, alizarin – Dyeing with petals, zok – Fixation of threads
Day 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Dyeing of woven fabrics – Creating colour combinations



Practical dyeing training in action

All of the participants indicated that they had been very happy to have the opportunity to have the practical training in a range of dyeing methods, to exchange experiences and generate ideas for collaboration. Follow-up sessions were suggested by participants as a way of sharing outcomes from applying the new knowledge as well as updating their knowledge.

Due to pandemic restrictions, the workshop was limited to 13 participants, but many other artisans who saw Facebook posts of the workshop training contacted Aziz Murtazaev showing interest in participating. It was suggested that a periodic running of the workshop could produce a growing network of slow artisans using sustainable products in their crafts.

4.2 Survey of Craft Association Members on the Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic

As part of this stage of the Crafting Futures programme in Uzbekistan we undertook a survey in April and early May 2021 of Uzbekistan craft makers to assess the impact of the pandemic on the craft sector. This survey followed up on our earlier survey in the spring of 2020 on the initial impact of the lockdown giving us longer term perspective on both the impact and the responses to the pandemic among crafts people. The survey had 940 responses. A full report was produced outlining the findings from the survey. Some of the key findings are outlined below.

In the latest survey just 18% of respondents reported they were able to sell internationally at that moment with tourist markets cut off. 20% were unable to even sell to the domestic market at that time. In terms of impact of the pandemic, more than a third of respondents said they had suffered from reduced sales in the past year, while 18% said they were struggling to access supply chains and employees. 76% said they had seen a decrease in their income during the pandemic. A quarter of the sample said they could only continue

trading another four weeks on current resources and a further third said they could only last up to three more months.

In our previous survey, a significant number of respondents had been forced to close their operations due to the initial lockdown. Pleasingly, by April 2021 three quarters said they were now able to deliver their products as normal and only 4% remained closed. Another significant change from the previous survey was that 63% now reported they used social media or digital platforms in their business – up from just 10% of the first sample.

By far the most common platform in use was Telegram which was used by 74% of those using social media. Despite this, only 7% had an online shop and a similarly small proportion said they could access international payments. A quarter of respondents said they had had to make people redundant as a result of the Covid-19 crisis, a number which continues to be low compared to international experience. However, 355 said they were currently unable to pay their staff and 43% had cut wages – suggesting that the findings from 2020 that wages rather than jobs were the main loss in the craft sector in Uzbekistan.

5. Phase 2 of the Project

A number of options for Phase 2 activities that built on Phase 1 activities, were discussed with project partners and Uzbek craft makers. The two key proposals that emerged were:

- Pilot a mentorship programme for women craft makers and women running craft businesses; the concept of a storytelling salon where women craft makers could share their experiences was muted. It was felt that this would contribute toward empowering women in the craft sector in Uzbekistan and help contribute to one of the key objectives identified earlier in the project.
- Stakeholders and participants expressed the desire to learn more about the heritage of the region through a collaborative event and to create an original exhibition for the Crafting Futures project. Initially this was envisaged to be multi-country (both from across Uzbekistan, but also in association with the Crafting Futures projects in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan), as well as across multiple crafts and inter-generational. However, constraints on funding and continued Covid-19 restrictions limited this to within Uzbekistan. It was felt that promoting the inter-generational and inter-craft element of such an event would contribute toward developing the sustainability of the craft sector.

5.1 Craft Exhibition / Fair and Training Events

This three-day event (3–5 December 2021) was organised and run by Aziz Murtazaev of the Craft Association and Lola Saify from the Human House art-gallery. While day 1 was focused on B2B and B2G, days 2 and 3 were orientated towards B2C. The key objective of the event was to create a platform for the development of practical skills for artisans to participate in international exhibitions. More than 70 masters from different regions of Uzbekistan (Andijan region, Bukhara region, Kashkadarya region, Navoi region, Namangan region, Samarkand region, Surkhandarya region, Khorezm region, Ferghana region, Tashkent region, Tashkent) participated in the fair.

In addition to the display of a variety of crafts, there was a marketing training event for participants (predominantly women) on day 1, delivered by Dr Steve Conway and Dr Martin Quinn. This training event introduced marketing concepts such as market segmentation. There were further workshops on ceramics, puppet making, calligraphy, embroidery and knitting on days 2 and 3.

5.2 Networking Event for Women Craft Business Owners

An event run by Lola Saifi of Human House to support women craft business owners took place on 15–16 October 2021 in Tashkent.

Nowadays, many artisans know how to produce unique products and sell them to end consumers (B2C). But they don't know how to work in the B2B sector.

The main goal of the training was to teach business skills and prepare women artisans to participate in international wholesale exhibitions and receive orders, and at the same time maintain the quality and principles of Slow Design, thereby developing and expanding their business. Fifteen women artisans took part in the workshop and also presented their work during the Crafts Fair in December 2021.