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**Social craftsmanship. Exploring the intersection  
between creative making and community  
building between Devonshire and Veneto**

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation analyses a new role that handicrafts have taken on in recent decades: from a manual practice aimed to produce objects of artistic value, to a social practice that manages to unite communities through the “use of hands”. The objects created are no longer the purpose of an artistic creation but became the means of social aggregation. Groups of enthusiasts and amateurs form, in order to learn new craft activities and create shared social moments. Historical, economic, sociological causes, and ongoing social changes play a key role in understanding this transition.

Together with the use of face-to-face interviews, and analysis of different case studies, the theme will be compared through an analogy between two different countries and culture: the Italian and the British one, trying to replay to some of the most interesting question raised. How has social handicraft developed, and which paths has it taken in the two different nations? Which are the historical reasons? How the protagonists experience this fundamental change within craft practice? What has changed in the minds of consumers who demand this type of craft? What is the aim of social handicraft in the communities and in the lives of those involved? Why is this trend rising? What will the future trends be? It is necessary, due to a lack of specific bibliography on the subject, to investigate and shed light on this new reality that is becoming increasingly popular.

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# 1. Introduction

What do you imagine or what comes to mind when you think of the word craftsman or *Artigiano*?

Probably a dusty atelier where a lonely, silent master luthier carves a very expensive violin from wood, or that precious Murano glass chalice you bought on your first trip to Venice and is on your shelf as an ornament. Perhaps you think about that chalice, which you saw while strolling through the *calli*, and you would have liked to buy it, but you feared it would break in your suitcase on the return journey.

The images that come to mind are often stereotypical, but normally reflect the reality of artistic craftsmanship. However, there are also different realities that weave those of the artistic craftsman in a modern, renewed key.

In English cities, away from the high street, there are usually avenues with independent shops, where you can find different kinds of activities selling objects or services, as in any shop, but with a substantial difference from the Italian shopping streets: the workshops. Specific workshops spaces inside the actual shops, related to the activity in question, necessary to practice manual arts. In haberdasheries, gift shops, bakeries, oratories and churches, recreational places where the community meets for different reasons, manual workshops are also held. This feature immediately jumps out at you, because the shops have a space that is unrelated to sales, but used for these activities and is noticeable. You can enter a shop selling wool, for example, and in the middle of the space, you find a large table with lots of chairs around it. The table takes up space that could, instead, be used to put displays with other merchandise. Why the table is there? All it takes is a little research on social media or websites to find out what services a shop offers, and you immediately notice in the list of services or in the pictures: workshops.

Interesting is the fact that in the canonic master craftsman's shop, a passerby looks out of the window, and does not enter. You are scared to disturb those who are working, it is almost anxiogenic to approach the shop, something might break in an instant. Instead, in these shops, one is urged to enter and feels himself welcomed, wanted,

encouraged to discover, almost pampered. If you are not used to this approach, but you were raised with the imperative “look and don't touch” it is strange, you feel bewildered. Despite the disorientation, it's likely to get the impression that the shop is often very busy, that it is a living, breathing place. There is, definitely, something new to discover.

The curious person comes in, wants to understand and starts asking questions: why do you have a table in the middle of the room? why do you do workshops?

The answer is as powerful as it is simple: because people like it.

Customers love to learn how to do something with their hands, in the company of others or alone with the master/teacher. In addition, in the shop they can buy raw materials and objects to remake what they have learnt to create at home. Workshops are an extra income for the owners, beyond to the classic buying and selling.

In addition to the shops, there are also handicrafts fairs where you can find a wealth of gift shops from different cities, which you would not be able to visit otherwise, and reserved large spaces for workshops. Amateurs come together to buy, practice, learn about other handicrafts and meet other enthusiasts.

Exchange of ideas, opinions, and sociability are the main reason why people want to learn something new, along with curiosity and the desire to get involved.

In Italy, the change is taking place more gradually, the country still very attached to the great history of artistic craftsmanship that forged it. Nevertheless, recreational craft fairs are becoming more numerous and famous all over the peninsula.

Standpoint of this antithesis in nature of craft, it's the different expectations placed on the objects produced: no exclusive importance is attached to the aesthetics of the result, or its market positioning, but on the ability of the production practice to bring people together.

Craftsmanship becomes social, a bond between human beings. This is a radical shift, that alters the business model of craftsmanship and broadens its future prospective.

What are the sociological, psychological and economic causes of this change? Why is it interesting to investigate them? Through a historical excursus, will be traced the causes that have led numerous individuals to approach this type of practice. Subsequently analyzing the consequences on public and cultural policies. The research will focus on the current historical period, and new trends that are affecting handicrafts.

The hope for the future is to investigate this topic not just through a magnifying glass that prioritizes Western culture or its relations, but intertwining these with other ideas, visions, scales of value and cultures. Starting from these.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Craft revival**

During the Christmas period, food-related advertisements increase. This year, on Italian television, two globally famous food brands constructed two craft-related stories for their advertising. One allied to knitting and the other to embroidery. The reference to handicrafts is certainly used to create in the imagination the idea of home, family, warmth, intergenerational interests, but it is also a symbol of a revival that is affecting the world of non-artistic handicrafts. Advertisements create new interests but also mirror or accelerate the current interests of the viewers.

Since the middle of the last century, we have witnessed a rediscovery of non-artistic, non-designed craftsmanship, unrelated to the craft expositions in museums or craftsmen in the studio creating and selling their work. It differs from the artistic craft because is recreational, whose protagonists are ordinary people, who have the desire to create with their hands, out of passion or hobby, for the sole pleasure and interest of spending time doing something they love to do, without the need to sell the final product. The main objective seems to be the encounter between people who share the same passions. It's a social craft. The handcrafted object is no longer the main purpose, but a *medium* used to create a network of acquaintances, friendships, help and



comparison between enthusiasts. This is the main difference and interesting part of the confrontation. A definition or an image that groups these figures in the common imagination is not easy to find. It is almost impossible to enclose them in a single box or a single pre-packaged recipe. There are so many variables.

The causes that have led to a rift within the craft world are on the first hand historical, but also intrinsic to the nature of human beings: we all love to make, to create with our hands, it's instinctive. Not all of us can do a job that involves manual labor, but we can make it a passion, a pastime. If you disagree, maybe it's because you have never tried or found a manual practice that is related to your interests. There are so many, it's difficult to not be surprised. Handicraft binds the 5 senses, intrigues, excites, awakens creativity, creates conversations and consequently relationships, gets you out of your comfort zone. Hardly leaves you indifferent.

But before exploring all the possibilities linked to playful handicrafts, it is necessary to understand why today this rediscovery is taking place and what are the causes that have allowed us to have the current *status quo*. The motivations lie not only in the history of art, design and craftsmanship, but there are also implications related to sociology, anthropology, psychology, economic history, geopolitics, geography. Like all major social changes involving new fashions and trends, there is not just one cause but a set of causes that are interconnected.

## **2.2 Social crafts in history**

If we think about the history of artistic craft, we could start to reconstruct it from the ancient Egyptian civilization, when they were already able to create jewelry, furniture, decorations for buildings. This population also knew the art of weaving and embroideries, but craftsmanship was artistic or utilitarian, not recreational. To shed light on the roots of the latter one, we must investigate the non-mainstream history. Different perspective of the past, particularly made by woman, whom historians have relegated to the "side history". The non-artistic craft is made for and by woman. It's necessary to use the preposition "for" because women were always

forced to keep away from what art historians considered artistic. In past centuries, women were not considered artisans or artists. During the Middle Ages, the greatest blossoming period of craftsmanship, there were male craftsmen and male apprentices in the workshops. Women were not allowed to enter craft guilds and be recognized as professionals. From 1200s to 1600s there were only men in the guilds. These restrictions derived from an idealized vision of the preindustrial family economy in which the master was a male family head, who simultaneously directed the labor of his wives, children, journeymen, and apprentices. Male composition of the guild system, and its patriarchal vision of the social order, were common threads across western Europe (Crowston, 2008).

Women were allowed to work, but not in environments protected by corporations. It's surprising to discover that embroidery originated as a male art in the guilds, and then become a female job, thanks to the creation of small portable looms, like today's hoops. At the beginning, it required a lot of strength to move the ancient looms and loading fabrics to work on it. Things began to change with the fashion of laces on clothes and as a furniture. The origin of lace is still disputed by historians. Since lace evolved from other techniques, it is impossible to say that it originated in a particular place. Laces were a part of vestments in religious ceremonies, but quickly turned into an art made by women, also because the prevalence of the clients were women. From 1400s onwards, the fashion for lace on noblewomen's dresses explodes, regardless of that, craftswomen were not protected by guilds, but gained visibility and credibility within the craft sector. In Venice, lace making was originally the province of leisured noblewomen, using it as a pastime. Giovanna Malipiero Dandolo, wife of doge Pasquale Malipiero (reign 1457-1462), supported lacemaking in the republic with a law for protecting them, it was enacted in 1457.

In the late eighteenth century, people started constructing domestic handicrafts because new consumer goods, especially cheap textiles, became available. The hobby allowed them to relate themselves to aristocratic embroiderers while simultaneously fulfilling the emergent ideology of middle-class women's domestic duties (Schaffer, 2011).

Women where housewife and man where in the factory working and producing goods. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, handicraft gets infected by Victorian enthusiasm for industrial production, eagerly emulating the new values of inexpensive, easy reproducibility. Manual skill was prized over creativity. This is one of the historical circumstances that create a rift between artistic and ludic craft. During the Victoria era, a particular sphere of craftsmanship was linked to a home practice. The factory was the place of men, instead the home and the objects that populate it were linked to women. In the house, one cannot have large looms or ovens for glassmaking or other types of work, the space limits you to have simple tools such as needle thread and small looms. Homemade handicrafts imitated those of wealthy noblewomen, or men in factories. Women, who did not belong to these two categories, found their utility in producing handcrafted furniture. It was the handicraft's ability to satisfy competing imperatives simultaneously that helped make it popular (Schaffer, 2011).

Handicraft, at that time, signified the moral, the managerial virtues of the bourgeoisie, not just an aristocratic leisure. Members of lower classes were emulating these middle-high class ideals when they were doing craftwork.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the handicraft's most visible and urgent function was to signify womanhood (Brontë, 1853). Queen Victoria gave an important boost to this new trend defined "domestic industrialism". She loved decorative arts, particularly embroidery, and published books and guides about it. The Queen opened the great exhibition in 1851 where handicraft were present in large quantities and she got married in a lace dress, influencing the wedding dress style until now.

During the same years, embroidery had one of its greatest peaks of fame thanks to Berlin patterns: a technique used to reproduce image or famous masterpieces back in the Victoria era like in today's kit.

Developed in Germany, it consisted in the upon hand-painted charts from which cross-stitch patterns could be worked in a very soft embroidery wool spun at Gotha and dyed in Berlin, where the charts were printed and painted. The city gave its name to the technique. The first chart was issued in 1804, and between 1810 and 1840 no

fewer than 14,000 different designs were published. By the latter year they had practically superseded all other embroidery patterns in England and the United State (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica Article History, 2024).

Ornamental manufactures expressed women's emulation of the mainstream industrial economy, confirmed by their prominent place in the Great Exhibition. Salvage arts showed that women could act like factories in turning raw waste products into desirable goods, while Berlin-wool work demonstrated that women could produce swiftly replicated, perfectly identical objects. Such production rendered the women themselves "industrious" (Schaffer, 2011).

The habits of industry and personal exertion thus women acquired, gave them strength and dignity, a power of usefulness, and a capability of doing good, which the higher theories of modern education fail to impart (Ellis, 1843). It should be emphasized that historians have not sufficiently investigated and reported on these dynamics.

But the bifurcation between artistic or non-artistic craftsmanship is rooted in an earlier and fundamental distinction, which still fuels the debate today, and is not related to female labor: the discrimination between art and craft during the renaissance.

Since the fifteenth century, one of the biggest questions related to the applied arts had arisen: what is the difference between art and craft? and consequently, who is the artist and who is the craftsman? Can the craftsman be considered an artist; can the artist also be a craftsman? Where does the boundary between the two figures lie?

Why is it necessary to draw a boundary? The line of differentiation is very thin. Intellectuals of all ages have debated this issue, especially in the last century, up to the present day.

### **2.3 Social craft according to major intellectuals**

Numerous treatises of Leon Battista Alberti, created a clear division between art and craftsmanship, claiming that painting was an intellectual ability showcasing creativity, originality, and higher knowledge (Barasch, 2001). Art, in the narrowest sense of the

term, was soon considered a higher pursuit, because the artist showed a godlike ability to create out of nothing, while the craftsman was simply a mechanic, reproducing traditional forms (Wittkower,1963).

In the late renaissance period, Giorgio Vasari with his treatise *Le Vite* (1550), created a biographical system of the most important artists, sculptors, and architects in Florence, at the time. The manual represented an indispensable model through art-historical literature was compared for the rest of the sixteenth century, and throughout the following centuries. His historiographical work determined, in many cases, the critical fortune or misfortune of the artists mentioned or excluded. Even today, it represents the main biographical source for many artists lacking documentation preserved. The treatise seals the difference between art and craft, because only sculptors and architects are mentioned. Crafts are considered a minor activity, serving the main arts. In the following centuries, the treatises influenced the most important intellectuals until the second industrial revolution in the nineteenth century.

A turning point was the birth of the Arts and Crafts movement, founded by William Morris and other intellectuals at the end of the nineteenth century. It was an artistic movement for the reform of the applied arts, a kind of cultured reaction of artists and intellectuals to the galloping industrialization of the late nineteenth century. The movement was a milestone in the history of craftsmanship, because it represented the second split within craftsmanship itself after the one that occurred during the Victorian era. For Morris, the final aim was to consider craftsmanship as an expression of man's work and his needs, but above all, as a lasting value, to despite what he considered bad products, the low quality of materials and the confused mixture of styles mirrored by industrial production. The products they wanted to deviate from, were those represented during the great exhibition of 1851, which portray a summation of the trends born during the Victorian era: objects created mainly by women with low-quality materials, which "imitated" factory works. Morris's intention was to elevate the idea of craftsmanship and depart it from factory work, the use of low-quality materials and others applied or visual arts. He laid the foundations for the principles of modern, eclectic and elitist design.

As William Morris wrote about in *News from Nowhere and Selected Writings and Designs* (1834) « there once was a peasant art ... and it clung fast to the life of the people, and ... still lived also in many a quaint pattern of loom and printing-block and embroiderer's needle.... Such was the English art, whose history is in a sense at your doors, grown scarce indeed, and growing scarcer year by year». This narrative constructs craft as antiquarian, rural, and threatened by modernization, the opposite of the contemporary, urban, thriving practice of domestic craft. Even if the socialist political tendencies that inspired the movement, women posed a threat to their new fragile artistic insurgency and were debased. Morris and his circle did not much appreciate the messy realism and part-time, domestic handicraft.

For John Ruskin, the craftsman served as a romantic trope to counterweight the romanticism embodied in the emblem of the artist as a technical *virtuoso*. The craftsman's hesitations and mistakes, has nothing in common with the *virtuoso*, but he sought to assert the claim of what is in between the amateur and the virtuoso: craftsmanship. The figure of the artisan both defiant and doomed has passed down until today, with a romantic label that refers to the idyllic, unpolished, fictional, not real scenario (Sennett, 2008, p.117). This doctrine, inspired William Morris with a new form of interior design that promoted craftsmanship as a new way to counter mass production and restore man's dignity. Nevertheless, domestic handicraft did not disappear, but it became even more unfashionable, reactionary, and oppositional. Those who participated in the continuing domestic handicraft industry were the most disaffected from the contemporary art scene (Schaffer, 2011, p.52). By the late nineteenth century craftsmanship has become the subject of real and pseudo-medieval symbols, a currency of European monarchical state propaganda. German emperors dressed up and proudly displayed medieval costumes in public or rebuilt the great medieval castle. The Middle Ages were revisited, and along with the historical period, handicrafts, the main occupation of the time, were also reconsidered in a new way. Many legends were invented; for example: castellan who embroidered or knitted while waiting for a knight, or cloistered nuns spending their time embroidering. Legends were taken as absolute truths, stigmatizing the work of craftswomen as something secondary, unimportant, limited (Personal Interview,

November 2023). Consequently, middle-class women increasingly rebelled against domestic labor, and the Arts and Crafts movement began stressing the need for professional training to be a connoisseur with a craft production.

As aesthetic fashions brought new tertiary hues into prominence, the handicraft began to look clumsy, amateurish, and old-fashioned. Domestic handicraft tenets have retained a strong public following, but the practice was not recognized as a separate paradigm with its own history. The discipline has thus continued to provide an alternative for those disaffected from contemporary aesthetic and economic norms, making it inevitable that it would acquire a countercultural following in the twenty-first century (Schaffer, 2011, p.58).

During the twentieth century, the separation of the two spheres continued, amplified by some of the most important scholars. The predominant idea in the imaginary, still that practicing crafts allows for a simpler, more authentic experience, closer to the uncomplicated relationship between humans and nature and pre-civilization, child-like innocence. This *cliché* reinforces the two poles of craft: the idyllic, artistic one or the childish non artistic. Nothing, on the surface, seems to be in the middle.

## **2.4 Homo faber, the only creator of his own destiny?**

The leading conceptual barrier elaborated on the particular experience of amateur craft is, once again, the intellectual discourse that venerates the *homo faber* as the only ideal producer, alone in his studio. Anything that does not belong to this category or is placed in the opposite category does not seem to be of interest or important. John Ruskin, William Morris, Carl Marx, Martin Heidegger, Hannah Arendt and, more recently Richard Sennett, all in their various ways, privilege the idea that making if done properly, which means following strict aesthetic rules, can lead to an unalienated, atemporal relationship between a person his object and the public (Knott, 2015). Also, Adorno and the Frankfurt School made publications on the subject.

Marx investigates the amateur conditions in *The German Ideology* (1932). He used the term amateur in a pejoratively way to describe a political opponent to the work in the factory, in contrast to his own professionalized doctrine. Marx's definition of amateur or amateurism seems to confirm its unimportance in his wider theories of human labor, a distraction from the macro-level socio-economic convulsions of different classes (Knott, 2015, p. 50). In *The capital* (Marx, 1867) there is a domestic, hobby-like quality to Marx's vision of a utopia of freely undertaken, or non-factory labor: «Once the necessity of human subsistence was taken care of by socialized forms of labor organization, an individual could hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming a hunter, fisherman, cowherd or critic». It's a "non-necessity" labor, corresponding with the notion of surplus labor. Surplus labor is a concept developed in the nineteenth century to describe the production of surplus value and profit. It refers to the labor that produces a value beyond that which is needed for the subsistence of the worker or workers who perform it. Workers in all kinds of societies perform surplus labor under a variety of economic conditions. It existed in pre-modern societies but this division of labor, that both Karl Marx and Adam Smith described, exponentially increased the productivity of labor-power from the late eighteenth century onwards (Smith, 1776). Marx and many of his followers have studied surplus labor extensively, interested in how it is channeled to ever more sophisticated means of capital accumulation. However, less has been said about how excess productivity flows into amateur labor, certainly within Marxist theory at least (Knott, 2015, p. 62).

The negative characterization of amateur labor was most clear and comprehensive in Hannah Arendt's theories of work, as outlined in her book *The Human Condition* (1958), a critique to Marx's study of labor, work and productivity. Central to her theories of labor is the division between two categories of manual workers: the *animale laborans* who is occupied with the endless satiation of everyday needs, or the labor of the body, and the *homo faber* the fabricator of the world whose ideals are permanence, stability, and durability (Arendt, 1958).



The spare time of the *animale laborans* is never spent in anything but consumption, and the more time left to him, the greedier and more craving his appetites. These appetites become more sophisticated, so that this consumption is no longer restricted to necessities but, on the contrary, mainly concentrates on the superfluities of life (Arendt, 1958, p. 133).

This characterization of the *animale laborans* is very different from the idealism of Marx expressed in *The German Ideology* whereby individuals freed from the necessity to work voluntarily. It is reflective of Arendt's belief that she was living in a «laborer's society», where man was in thrall to the theoretical glorification of labor, unable to discern the difference between work – allied to the *homo faber* – and working – the biological repetition of the *animale laborans*. For Arendt, the *homo faber* «added new objects to the human artifice». His question, before starting working on a new object, focuses on “Why?”: Why I'm starting this new project? What is the purpose? He has a sophisticated thought. While the *animale laborans* «produces objects only incidentally and is primarily concerned with the means of its own reproduction». His main question is “How?”: How can I produce or produce more? He has a mechanical thinking (Arendt, 1958, p. 88).

Objects that result from amateur labor could not be considered genuine additions to the human artifice according to her schema, but incidental results, the unimportant detritus of an individual's cycle of perpetual consumption and production. (Arendt, 1958, p. 117). For Arendt, that things produced in free time are largely superfluous, unnecessary and unproductive. Thinkers who followed her trajectory see no evidence to back up this divisive and negative viewpoint. Amateur production was considered to be imitative, and subsidiary.

Arendt built up a discourse around the adulation of the *homo faber*. This positive estimation of the skilled maker who makes genuine additions to the human artifice, has its roots in the Arts and Crafts romanticism of John Ruskin and William Morris. Ruskin's prescriptions on how to combat the degradation of work in the nineteenth century anticipate Arendt's later crotch between *animale laborans* and *homo faber*. Ruskin pronounced in *The Nature of the Gothic* (1892, p. 15) «never encourage

manufacture beyond what is necessary, (except for the purposes of education), or demand an exact finish for its own sake».

Theodor Adorno, one of the leading exponents of the Frankfurt School, who distinguished himself by a radical critique of society and advanced capitalism, criticizes amateurism in his book *Culture industry, a series of Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (1991). The author developed the concept of free time. He was born after the second industrial revolution, when workers lived a time punctuated by work in the factory, and consequently a time at home. The time that was not dedicated to these two moments is considered free time. This definition was new, because follows on from what Adorno defined a previous definition of free time: leisure time. This one denotes the privilege of an unconstrained, comfortable lifestyle, that of the rich bourgeoisie who did not need to work in factories or wherever to survive. By contrast, free time only gets its meaning in not being work time. Leisure time denotes the lifestyle of a particular social class. Free time does not imply a specific social class, it will become more prominent in the future as it increases in parallel with the increase of workers' rights in factories. However, Adorno's suspects were that free time was tending toward its own opposite, becoming a parody of itself. Thus, unfreedom is gradually annexing free time, and most unfree people are as unaware of this process as they are of the unfreedom itself. They think they are acting in their own free will, but free time is shaped by the same forces they are escaping in the hours without work (Adorno, 1991, p.188). A hobby is not the rigid distinction between labor and free time, but another form that production takes. This statements, constitute an approximate parallelism to Arendt's thesis: in the process of succumbing to the cyclical biological necessity for endless production and consumption, the *animale laborans* spends free time engaging in activity that ensures further entrapment rather than escaping the conditions of capitalism.

Adorno echoes Marx's thoughts on alienation, adding that free time is only given once the imaginations of workers are sufficiently quashed, rendering them incapable of using this time effectively.

Under prevailing conditions, it would be erroneous and foolish to expect or to demand that people should be genuinely productive in their free time, or able to bring forth something that was not already there. At best, what they produce in free time is scarcely better than the ominous hobby. This superfluousness makes known the inferior quality of the product, which in turn vitiates any pleasure taken in its production (Adorno, 1991, p.193). It is within this context that Adorno criticizes hobbies as an engagement with mindless infatuations that exist in order to kill the time. He promptly declared: «I have no hobby» (Adorno, 1991, p.188). He makes music, listen to music, read books, but calling these activities hobbies would be a joke in Adorno's opinion.

Instead of leading to a possible utopia, amateur labor confirms the capitalist colonization of all aspects of life, as the labor undertaken in free time mimics the alienated conditions of normative capitalist work. This is the sophistication of late capitalism, according to Adorno. The abundance of free time made possible by increased productivity is neutralized by convincing individuals that they are in control of how this excess time is used, whereas in fact their desires wants and longings are shaped by the institutional and social expectations underpinned by capitalist production.

What if the question were reversed? Philosophically, self-reliance represented a reaction to the pressures of modernization and not a way to succumb to existing impositions (Knott, 2015, p. 70).

Johan Huizinga, one of the most important historians of the twenty-century, set out in 1950 his work entitled: *Homo Ludens*. According to the author, culture is a product of play and not the other way around. Play, recreation and socialization through play, are inherent in human nature and have always been practiced. Culture presupposes human coexistence and arises in playful form, which is why play creates culture. The only game that for Huizinga is fertile for culture is «social play», in which there is the orderly action of a group or two groups in competition. How can the many cultural forms we see today be traced back to the single root of play? Through play an assimilation and accommodation of the things of the world takes place, consequently,

humans interpret the world playing. Huizinga picks up on the studies of Jean Piaget, a Swiss psychologist, biologist, pedagogue and philosopher, who stated that through games the community expresses its interpretation of life and the world (Nicolopoulou, 1993).

This seems to reflect the experience of amateur craft. But Huizinga resolutely denies that there is any play in the practice of plastic arts, stating that «the artist's inspiration may be free and vehement, but in its execution, it is always subject to the skill and proficiency of the forming hand» (Huizinga, 1955, p. 166). The separation of play from the objecthood inherent to the plastic arts, conforms to the expectation that play occupies the realm of immaterial human interaction, whereas craft, or the making of things, involves the relationship between a person and a resulting object for the public exploitation. The question is no longer focused on the difference between art and craft, but on what can be considered true craftsmanship or not. Why does there have to be a difference? What is done for pleasure can be considered craftsmanship or art? Why does it not fit into the canons but what are they and who decides them? In reality, playful approaches to the creation of art pieces, has always been present in the works of important artists over the centuries. It helped to break new artistic visions and currents. The availability of ready-made or do it yourself kits in the late in the late eighteen hundreds, provoked several responses in addition to the democratization of skills (Knott, 2015, p. 3). At the beginning of the 20th century, the artists of the movement desecrated the canonical concept of art by creating works with ready-made everyday objects. In the 1950s, the first paint by number kits were sold on the American marketplaces, an accessible, easy commercially produced, inexpensive art kit, reflecting a particularly American model of participatory consumerism of the economic period, in which individuals were invited participating as protagonists. (Knott, 2015, p. 33). Many artists questioned the rapid rise of these kits and their role, as these tools could create works of art in everyone's home, the individual painter plays a proactive and provocative role in the modern world image driven. It was immediately considered a marginal art form, but artists like Andy Warhol utilize paint-by-number as a way to interrogate artistic labor, the paradigms of co-authorship. *Do It Yourself* series (1962) series utilize paint-by-number technique. Another example

where we find a point of union between canonical art and manual DIY is the outreach work of the American artist Bob Ross. He is famous for creating the television program *The Joy of Painting*, which was broadcast on Public Broadcasting Service in the United States between 1983 and 1994, and was also aired in Canada, Latin America and Europe. In the half-hour show, Ross taught viewers how to paint natural scenes in oils. He is defined today as an internet celebrity before the internet actually existed. In the years while the program was broadcast, he succeeded in bringing the idea into viewers' homes that everyone could recreate aesthetically pleasing paintings, and that everyone could engage in artistic practices. The artist died prematurely in 1995. Despite this, his post-mortem social debut made him famous worldwide. The episodes were published on the YouTube channel @bobross\_thejoyofpainting receiving millions of views, the other social media and channels, including the streaming platform twitch, also swarmed with admirers. The official site sells painting materials of all kinds, bob ross branded kits, books, DVDs and CDs with the original episodes, along with numerous other gadgets. There is a podcast about the artist and numerous YouTube videos featuring his works in a modern key. From the website you can book a painting workshop with more than 1500 Bob Ross Teachers holding local workshops every day. Only Certified Ross Instructors (CRI®, CRFI™, CRWI™ and CRPI™) are trained to provide guidance you can count on.

CRI®= certified to teach Ross Landscape Method, CRFI™ = certified to teach Ross Floral Method, CRWI™ = certified to teach Ross Wildlife Method, CRPI™ = certified to teach Ross Portrait Method.

The success of the program, and subsequently of the franchise, is due to Bob Ross, who was able to democratize and bring people closer to the world of DIY. His calmness, patience, his funny figure but able to evoke confidence together with his calm and set voice precursor of what will depopulate in the 21st century as ASMR Autonomous sensory meridian response, a unique condition characterized by tingling sensations along the scalp neck and shoulder when triggered by certain sounds. All these elements made him a friend of the spectators who, even not knowing him, trusted his advice and made it their own. This is why his face, or his name is on every item for

sale; he has become a symbol in the common imagination that leads back to hobbies, home, workshop, relaxation, motivation, artistic vein (Eordogh, 2016) (Bob Ross, *The joy of painting with Bob Ross*, 1985).

Damien Hirst in 2001 recreated the bob ross effect. He sold a limited number of paints by number to autonomously reproduce one of his renowned *spot paintings*. The complete set comprised of a stretched canvas with 90 enamel paints and brushes, with the original cardboard box. The artist ironically challenges the view of artist and what is considered to belong to the art world or not, limiting the number of pieces sellable to a few people, for a kit that could make anyone an artist like him (Damien Hirst, *Painting-By-Numbers*, 2001). Examples of the democratization of the artistic sphere are many over the centuries.

## **2.5 New visions on craft**

Only the recent craft theoreticians like Glenn Adamson and others, has challenged these dominant anti- modern, pastoral, nostalgic and romanticized expectations that are placed on craft and in the figure of homo faber. Proposing new prospective on craft, amateurism, communities and craft, and new ways to exhibit craft in museum.

Adamson has an extensive bibliography on craft, presenting topical texts like: *Fewer, Better Things: The Hidden Wisdom of Objects* (2018) along with historical ones like *Craft: An American History* (2021) or *The Female Gaze: Women Artists Making Their World* (2012).

In *thinking trough craft* (2007), Adamson emphasizes the importance of craftsmanship, especially in the field that is defined as purely artistic, and which in the common imagination remains detached from the field of manual work. Visual works of art are also works of craftsmanship made by the artist/craftsman, it is impossible and reductive to distinguish the two worlds. Craft's centrality to contemporary art has received little serious attention from critics and historians.

The book consists of an overview of various aspects of this second-class identity attributed to craftsmanship. It also provides historical case studies analyzing craft's role in a variety of disciplines, including architecture, design, contemporary art, and the crafts themselves. This act of projection involves not only a deeply conservative set of assumptions about art, but also hostility to artistic discourse itself. A chapter is devoted to amatorial craft, the amateur figure and the practice itself. He emphasizes that amateurism practices are not limited to being a Sunday hobby like sports, but a broader and more varied issue full of contradictions, with various economic, sociological and psychological implications on the individuals who's practicing it.

Richard Sennett's praised the *homo faber* in his book called *The Craftsman* (2008), as someone who combines head and hand to respectfully treat materials in the world. He defined craftsmanship as an «enduring, basic human impulse, the desire to do a job well for its own sake» (Sennett, 2008, p.9). Because of this «impulse», good craftsmanship is a quality that every person has: «there is an intelligent craftsman in most of us» (Sennett, 2008, p.11). All skills are developed through practice, and one's own imagination, which must not lead to an obsession with perfection and competition. Handicraft is defined as a social experience. For the ancient Greeks, handicrafts brought people out of their isolation. Communities were linked to craft practices: «The craft of making physical things provides insight into the techniques of experience that can shape our dealings with others» (Sennett, 2008, p.289). He draws a connection between human relationships and making things by looking at the difficulties and possibilities of both social experiences. The Autor does not talk about amateurism, but lays the foundations for it, emphasizing the importance of sociality and the figure of the sociable craftsman, capable of being in contact with people into neighborhood and around people to teach, passing on his knowledge and skills to others. Stefano Micelli in *Futuro artigiano* (2011), describes the increasingly evident phenomenon of a return to craftsmanship in Western knowledge-based societies. This demonstrates the need and desire to return to manual skills in a world crushed by modernization. Those who have jobs that require a lot of study and intellectual effort,

find themselves disappointed at a certain stage of their life and look for concreteness and satisfaction in craftwork. All this is possible thanks to the increasing fluidity in the working environment, and the rediscovery of many positive effects that handicrafts give. Hence, there are many cases of people abandoning intellectual work in order to concentrate on manual labor. In the book, he presents a series of success stories of converted artisans, who devoted themselves to these practices. *Homo faber* is always the main subject. A man, as the architect of his own destiny, the Anthropocene leading master. It became a political definition, the metaphor of artistic craftsmanship and the history behind it. There are not many rooms left for social craftsmanship and differentiation within it. Is it producing, inventing, creating our only goal as inhabitants of this earth? What are the consequences? What can be the alternatives? The elevation of the ideals connected with the *homo faber*, inherently marginalizes the amateur labor as imperfect. The values of amateurism do not depend just on the quality of the results, but on the making process and other related variables. A set of steps that increase the human capital: the ensemble of knowledge, skills, abilities, emotions, interpersonal skills, acquired during an individual's lifetime. These are also called soft skills, elucidated in their full richness. These specific skills are increasingly in demand in various fields of work, unrelated to manual work. This is why more and more people are approaching playful craftsmanship.

Charles Leadbeater and Paul Miller create the definition Pro-Am through the crisis between the two words professional and amateur, and named their publication *The Pro-Am Revolution, how enthusiasts are changing our economy and society* (2004). Pro-Am made up a space between amateur and professional, but not only. Today Pro-Am political campaigners are driving single issue and pressure group politics. The massive growth in non-governmental organizations around the world in the last decade is largely due to Pro-Am political campaigners. They are reshaping the way democracy works (Leadbeater, Miller, 2004, p. 9).

Getting a fix on the scale of Pro-Am activity is tricky. It is a hybrid category, not acknowledge by standard research techniques. The importance of amateur activities is not sufficiently recognized by public opinion, institutions and the academia.



About 23 million adults a year undertake some form of volunteering, contributing close to 90 million hours a week. Volunteering has almost doubled in the last decade (European social survey, 2002). Family history is one of the fastest growing activities on the internet and local history rooms. Public libraries are overflowing with members of the do-it-yourself history movement. Family history societies or clubs, cover every geographical area in UK. These are places where to meet historian, researcher, and do workshops. Clubs run by churches or city council, who hold the information needed to reconstruct the genealogy of the inhabitants of the cities in which they are located. They are not related to handicraft practices but have a common denominator with social handicrafts: they bring people together, holding them closer to a new passion or hobby related to their family. The massive presence of clubs and societies dedicated to hobbies, sports, current affairs, interests of all kinds from school age up to university and then into civil society since high school and university, can be one of the reasons that facilitates the spread of social handicrafts in England. In Italy, the reception process has been slower for historical issues, and very different social network construction. The Family Record Centre in London estimates there are 387,000 active members of family history societies in the UK. A recent survey of more than 6,000 people conducted for the Arts Council England, found that 14 % regularly were engaged in painting or drawing, a further 14 % had craft hobbies and 9 % played musical instruments. In the North-East, to take one example, about 6,000 clubs and voluntary associations organize cultural activities. About 138,000 people are members of the UK's Making Music societies, which put on more than 8,000 Pro-Am concerts a year, 550 workshops and 180 educational events. About 9 % of people play a musical instrument for pleasure, 2 % play to an audience at least once a year and 5 % sing to an audience at least once a year, according to Arts Council research. Research commissioned by the Crafts Council found that 2 % of adults take part in Pro-Am drama, 4 % ballroom dancing, 2 % sing in choirs, 6 % write poetry or short stories, 8 % paint or draw, 19 % undertake photography, 14 % undertake some kind of creative work involving wood or metal and 11 % engage in needlework and textiles. 58% of the British population engage in some kind of activity that could be described as Pro-Am. That is the proportion of the population who engage in an amateur activity

regularly, rating their skills as reasonably good: they see themselves as Pro-Ams. (Leadbeater, Miller, 2004, p. 30). The more we learn, the more confident we become about an activity and so the more pleasure we are likely to get from it. Consumption becomes a knowledge-intensive activity. Pro-Ams enjoys acquiring cultural capital: they enjoy immersion in a body of knowledge held by a community. But it's not just one way. They also like passing it on, being part of a flow of knowledge through a community. Many of the Pro-Ams teach others, or informally pass on skills to peers. As Jeremy Rifkin put it in *The Age of Access* (2002): «In an era where cultural production is becoming the dominant form of economic activity, securing access to the many cultural resources and experiences which nurture one's psychological existence becomes just as important as holding onto property». Psychologist Graham Privette, in his study about satisfaction resulting from leisure, found that people who have pursuits are more likely to feel more focus, powerful, joyful, valuable, and worthy than those who consume by shopping. Participation in serious leisure improves health and well-being. The presence of people with similar passions in the same place is fundamental. Individual's time use choices are contingent on the time use choices of others because the utility derived from leisure time often benefits from the presence of companionable others inside and outside the household. Propensities to engage in associative activity depend on the availability of Suitable Leisure Companions outside the household (Jenkins, Osberg 2003).

From a MORI survey of 2,189 British adults completed in June 2004, participants had to choose from a list of 20 activities what they did regularly, ranging from gardening and DIY to volunteering and nature conservancy. Those people who reported doing an activity regularly were then asked whether they had a good level of skill at the activity. Men seem more likely to say they are good at something than women. DIY is an activity mainly undertaken by men and 74 % of those doing DIY rate their skills as good. Women dominate gardening and only 61 % of those doing gardening regularly report their skills as good (MORI Political Monitor, 2004).

Men are far more likely to be Pro-Ams than women: 66 % of men claim some kind of Pro-Am skill compared with 50 % of women. Women are more likely to engage in Pro-

Am activities that revolve around the home: gardening, writing and the arts. Men are more likely to engage in activities that take them away from home, sports, for example, as well as doing some home-based activities, such as DIY. In some areas there is a rough gender balance: family history, pets, nature conservancy (Leadbeater, Miller, 2004, p. 35). Indeed, for some women the intensity of their partner's Pro-Am activities is likely to be an additional strain in their lives. This imbalance is rooted in gender stereotypes reinforced over the centuries and, in particular, during the Victorian Era, but the trend is clearly changing direction. Participation in Pro-Am activities is heavily slanted towards well- educated, middle-class people with incomes above £30,000 per year. Those who engage in activities as a Pro-Am are likely to be wealthy and better educated. Once working-class people participate in an activity, they are as likely as middle class people to become Pro-Am by acquiring the necessary skills. The issue is not acquiring the skills, but access and participation in the first place. If more working-class people were able to participate more would become Pro-Am. All ages participate as Pro-Ams, but their activities tend to be age specific: older people garden, while younger people tend to be drawn to sports and arts. Some regions seem to have A strong Pro-Am culture: the East, Yorkshire and Southwest in particular.

If we think about Devon and Cornwall, these two shires have strong attachment to craft linked to their history, and many craftsmen are moving from the big cities to the countryside, in order to find workshops with adequate space and lower rents. While in other regions, particularly Scotland and the East Midlands, Pro-Am culture is far less developed. London is relatively weak in Pro-Am activities.

## 2.6 Crafts for leisure

Free time and consequently self-reliance or self-time, it's a revolution of modern age, a conquer of our recent lifestyle. If we think about it, from the handicrafts point of view, we have gone from a need for production, such as the creation of woolen garments to be sent to the troops on the war fronts, or objects and necessities for one's subsistence and survival to leisure craft today. As the society evolves, new roles new needs and problems become priorities. We have Free time, more economic possibilities to invest during that specific interval and, therefore, we started experience boredom. «Boredom is a function of life which is lived under the compulsion to work, and under the strict division of labor» (Adorno, 1991, p. 192). Adorno claims boredom not as a primitive or innate emotion, affect or disposition in humans but instead, as the result of historically contingent organizations of society. Are we driven to create out of boredom? is boredom imposed on us the moment we stop working? how many reasons have led us to the leisure craft today?

After the two world wars, the link between necessity and handicrafts was lost. In Italy, artisan knowledge was used in the reconstruction of national identity. Handicraft objects were an Italian flag in the world and a magnet for tourists and foreign investors. Americans, who had stayed in Italy after the end of the war, were fascinated by doilies, textile in general, and the Italian home care. Everyone had decorated and embroidered tablecloths, curtains, set of bed linen. It was a lifestyle and a business. The textile tradition in Italy is centuries old. Starter from Caterina De Medici and the Venetian lacemakers who also brought their teachings to France. But during the 1960s and 1970s, the emerging feminist movements, rejected arts and crafts that employed women in their homes, branding craftswomen as negative examples of housewives forced by society canons to stay at home and work. The issue was one of the main points of the feminist protests. This change of perspective, which was welcomed and favored by public opinion, was also taken up in the ministerial sphere, leading to the elimination of manual arts subjects in schools of all levels. Obviously, when a practice is not taught, its importance is not perceived and the need of it is not felt. That's why today there is a big generation gap as far as

social handicrafts are concerned. We have different categories of amateur differentiated by age. On the one hand, there are people from fifty to ninety years old who have learnt, for example how to knit, at home with grandparents and mothers or at school before the manual arts were removed from the curriculum. And younger individuals from six to twenty-five years old, who, thanks to social media or fairs courses and workshops, have discovered handicraft. The generation in the middle is difficult to intercept (Personal Interview, March 2024). From the 1960s until the late 1980s, handicraft subjects were totally neglected by public opinion and Italian public institutions. The new wave comes after the explosion of social handicrafts in the United States and northern European countries. Crucial in driving the rush of renewal were newspapers and magazines like *RAKAM*, the only medium at the time to connect people together. This prompted the outgrowth of informal schools in haberdashery shops or community centers, where women gathered to learn. Inside the magazine you could find paper patterns and various designs to be traced on the fabric and then recreated with cross-stitch or other embroidery techniques. The easy processes of transferring the designs onto the fabric gave anyone the opportunity to decorate, which is why many amateurs became enthusiastic. People were, again, eager to learn and follow a new trend.

Since it was a fashion and a cool trend, it wasn't seen as a household necessity but as good hobby, for the sheer pleasure of doing it and spending time together enjoying it. *RAKAM* magazine was founded in 1930 as an embroidery magazine, in the 1950s it sold almost 400,000 copies, then suffered a drastic drop in sales and several new editors followed. At the beginning of the 2000s, it regained its luster thanks to a new graphic design, while maintaining the content and columns that made it famous. Over the years, it has managed to remain a historical monthly magazine that treats embroidery as a technical and, above all, a part of the cultural heritage to be protected and enhanced (RAKAM, 2021).

The revaluation of the manual arts occurred earlier in UK than in Italy for several reasons. The first is historical: after the industrial revolution in the 19th century, any connection with manual skills was erased. A lot of knowledge related to the processing

of wool like the mills used to spin it, the tools, dyeing and sheep shearing processes, was not handed down and consequently forgotten. The Italian entrepreneurial fabric, on the other hand, is rich in small companies that, despite the industrialization process of the last century, remained contained in size, and with a production process dependent on craftsmanship. Additionally, handicrafts and the resulting objects are strongly codified by historical and legislative factors. Another reason is related to the acceptance of new fashions coming from abroad, particularly from the USA. In England, due to linguistic and cultural affinities with the United States, new trends take hold more easily. The biggest brake on change is the connection between Italy and artistic craftsmanship, as it is part of the country's identity. For many reasons, social handicrafts are seen as an enemy, an opposition a devaluation of artistic handicrafts. It struggles to become an interesting topic, because in the imagination it remains a hobby for housewives. The revival of cross-stitch was fundamental, thanks to the possibility of photocopying designs, tracing designs, or creating them with software. This process made it possible for more and more people to come together and practice, as it was the case during the Victorian era with Berlin wool patterns. The rediscovery of group activities and socialization were and, still today, fundamental.

## **2.7 Lockdown with crafts**

Covid pandemic has completely changed the rules of the game. Not being able to go out and enjoy our usual hobbies, has prompted many people to take up new ones. These include handicrafts using easy-to-find materials. First and foremost: thread arts. The most iconic image that has been a watershed between what was before and after the pandemic and manages to sum up all the changes taking place during the last two decades was: the videos of Tom Daley, the British diver originally from Devon, knitting during the Tokyo 2021 Olympics. These images went viral, and the sportsman, who is very active on social media and YouTube, started posting his creations. Daley won the gold medal in the 10-metre synchronized dive and created a handmade medal holder for him and his diving partner. The videos and posts on Instagram immediately went viral, making knitting cool and bringing many young people closer to the

practice. Daley became passionate about this type of handwork, because he declared, it helps him manage stress and anxiety between competitions. After his Olympic successes and the hype surrounding his passion for knitting, he published several books and manuals on the subject. He also opened an online shop. Daley's social pages are growing steadily. Instagram is the medium that most pulls and inspires amateurs of all kinds.

@embroidery\_tutorials have 460,000 followers, @jessicalongembroidery 318,000.

Account on pottery like @Loveinpottery reach 1 million followers.

The most varied are those of upcycling home decor and DIY: @Victoriasvenssonn has 215,000 followers, @annikamarieeee 757,000, @IKEAHack 1,3 million. The latter example is part of a series of popular profiles that transform standard Ikea furniture into unique customized pieces.

On YouTube, you can find video tutorials of all kinds of craft and for all type of audiences that get thousands of views. TikTok is also becoming populated with craft passionate.

## **2.8 Positive connotation of social crafts**

Apart from the historical implications and the latest trends, what are the motivations that make amateur or social craft interesting? What are the causes, the implications and consequences that deserve to be investigated and studied?

- Craft as a social glue.

The ability of craftsmanship to be not only an artistic practice, but also a social one. Consequently, ludic craft create sociality, community and identity. This reversal perspective gives the opportunity to undertake a new kind of conversation around craft, in particular: what is considered craft, what are the aims of the practice, who can

be interested in this type of practice and more. Favoring a confrontation that is not only related to aesthetics but to different cultural perspectives, habits, ideals, visions.

- Mental health awareness and wellbeing.

Manual dexterity enhances one's own thinking and reasoning skills, boosts your confidence because it proves to yourself that you can have the ability to create objects, achieve results, have improvements in subsequent creations. In addition, it improves concentration, and has a calming power. It can help children who have difficulty in studying, people who have suffered severe trauma to deal with their emotions, or people who have lost manual dexterity due to illness or serious accidents. Ludic craft can be a medicine for your brain, blessing factors are varied and constantly in discovery.

- Climate change issues.

Craft brings a new awareness about current climate issues. Thanks to amateur crafts, more and more people are practicing activities such as: recycling, upcycling, secondhand shopping, and consequently taking an interest in the politics involving climate change evolutions and global changes awareness. Climate change has put us at a crossroads: find solutions that can stem the damage or surrender to the impending devastation. Those who have taken up the first one, have found an ally in craftsmanship. One of the first causes of climate change is the fast fashion industry, handicrafts go against the mainstream teaching us to make things ourselves. The easiest things in terms of knowledge and manufacture are textile or wool garments. This pushes one away from contemporary fashions and invites you to create one's own style while helping the planet. Along with production, a new trend is repair or mending. Learning to repair one's own clothes means having a new manual skill, save on the purchase of new clothes, extend its life giving it a new meaning, or donate it later as a second-hand garment for charity or resell. Upcycling is also very useful.



Known as creative reuse, it is the process of transforming by-products, waste materials, useless, or unwanted products into new materials or products perceived to be of greater quality, such as artistic value or environmental value.

Opposite to Upcycling, there is downcycling, the recycling of waste where the recycled material is of lower quality and functionality than the original material. This process, give materials a new life involving manual labor, chemical and mechanical transformations.

- Cultural district.

Social craft can be a medium, an impetus for the creation of cultural districts with the aim of regenerating degraded urban areas or repopulating suburbs or small hamlets uninhabited due to the displacement of masses into cities. In Exeter, the city center provides substantial shopping facilities. The High Street is mainly devoted to branches of national chains. A NEF survey in 2005, rated Exeter as the worst example of a clone town in the UK, with only a single independent store in the city's High Street, and less diversity, in terms of different categories of shop, than any other town surveyed (Conisbee, Kjell, Oram, Palmer, Simms, Taylor, 2005). Clone town is a term used for towns where the High Street or other major shopping areas are significantly dominated by chain stores, making that city indistinct from other town centers. The term was coined by the New Economics Foundation (NEF). In 2010, a similar survey reported again the city as one of the worst clone towns (Exeter city center - boring and bland? 2005), (Finch, 2019). In 2019, the last independent store on the high street was closed, but a significant renovation has taken place at the end of the high street, in the direction of the river Exe, on the so-called Fore street.

The street is characterized with a large number of independent shops including bakeries, pizzerias, handicraft shops and gift shops. These places are shops but also meeting places for citizens to do workshops and connect with the community. Flea markets are organized periodically. This renovation was possible thanks to the commitment of private and public investors.

- Reevaluation of what is considered craft.

There is a market for everything, enthusiasts for a variety of practices or objects. There are, mainstream or niche passions, but in both cases, we find numerous stakeholders and shareholders, dedicated fairs, meetings, books, conferences, and interested parties. Craftsmanship is a passion or a job that puts you in a niche that identifies and classifies individuals concerned. Despite this, it is not a static world. On the contrary, craft has many differentiations and actors involved, with different or opposing purposes. To summarize handicrafts, we would say that the red thread that unites the issue it's to make with one's hands, but at the same time there are other ways forward.

Craft can be referred to the creation of new handicraft's types or reinforcing timbers with existing practices. Some examples might be reevaluation of old craft practices in a contemporary way, and perspective. Rescuing a craft practice that is disappearing or has disappeared, but still can have important historical and economic implications. Creation of a new type of craftsmanship that reflects the needs and interests of the current historical time or strengthening and marketing of activities already in place but in need of a new urge. These processes reposition craftsmanship by rejuvenating it, innovating it, bringing in new skills. Novelty gets people closer, together with their stories. This is one of the reasons why craftsmanship is back on trend and is driving many workers to distant from intellectual jobs to approach manual practices. The crafted objects are not only useful but also a means to construct one's own personal history. There is a strong attachment to the intangible cultural heritage allied with crafts.

- Global economic impact.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a mixed effect on consumption. Some categories and distribution channels for essential goods and services – from food and mass retail to e-commerce and online services – saw record growth; while non-essential products, like

the creative manufacturing and handmade (CMH) sector, saw much of their business come to a standstill. Artisans are vulnerable workers.

The overall long-term growth outlook for CMH still is very positive. With more than \$500 billion in annual revenue last year, the global CMH sector is set to grow by 20% per year reaching \$1 trillion by 2024. But the sector has been chronically under-served by a lack of investment, digitization, access to business finance and global markets.

After the pandemic the questions are multiple: how to reframe CMH business models? How to ensure supply chains? How to create more inclusive e sustainable products?

For many of us, the lockdown has provided an opportunity to rethink what we buy and how much we consume, as well as to reward purpose-driven brands. Consumers demand an inclusive e resilient grow, for the products and the makers.

By facilitating the creation of effective and sustainable jobs for small and medium-sized enterprises CMH has the potential to be a driver for socio-economic equality by keeping a larger share of earnings in the hands of artisans.

A connected, distributed workforce has proven value. Closing the gap between intent and action will require a new model of consumption that reframes legacy buying processes, traditional compliance requirements and mindsets. The rise of the conscious consumers depends on a new breed of conscious buyers.

Etsy.com marketplace platform is an example of the impact that craftsmanship has on the global economy. Etsy is an American e-commerce company focused on handmade or vintage items and craft supplies. These items fall under a wide range of categories, including jewelry, bags, clothing, home décor and furniture, toys, art, as well as craft supplies and tools. The company is committed to a sustainable growth by aligning the mission with the business strategy, and help creating economic impact through entrepreneurship and, therefore, value for all stakeholders and shareholders. In 2022, Etsy.com sellers contributed almost \$13.5 billion to the U.S. economy by harnessing their creativity and bringing unique products to market. The site created the equivalent of nearly 3.4 million jobs in the independent worker economy, enough jobs

to employ all of the city of Chicago (population 2.7 million) and generated approximately \$3.6 billion in income (Etsy ESG Overview, 2024).

- New law impacts today and for the future.

On October 18<sup>th</sup>, the Regulation on the protection of geographical indications for craft and industrial products was approved ([EU Regulation 2023/2411](#)), coming into force less than a month later, on the November 16<sup>th</sup>, its effects will not be visible until 2025 (Official Journal of the European Union, 27/10/2023). Geographical Indications are a particular type of intellectual property which identify a product as originating from a specific geographic location and possessing qualities, characteristics or a reputation attributable to that place of origin. They exist in various forms: as Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographical Indications (PGI) and Geographical Indications (GI), all of which have essentially the same function but vary in the intensity.

What is missing in Europe is a regulation on handicraft production and reproduction. A specific legislation for the protection of handicraft objects already exists in other countries. Individual craftsmen or groups of craftsmen, amateurs producing specific objects or groups interested in the conservation of specific crafts or practices can obtain a geographical indicator. The application to obtain it must include a list of specifications related to the product, including at least:

- The name of the geographical indication;
- The specification of the relevant regional area where the goods are manufactured and the link between the region and the quality, reputation or characteristics of the product in question;
- Evidence that the product originates from the region described;
- A description of the product and production methods.

Regulation 2023/2411 introduces the new mechanism which will allow producers of craft and industrial products to obtain GI certification and protection for these goods. This marks a significant widening of GI protection at EU level since until now. Geographical Indications could only be obtained EU-wide for agricultural products and foodstuffs, wine and spirit drinks. Some Member States already provide GI protection and registers for non-agricultural goods at national level, but this did not exist at EU level. Manufactured and industrial goods will therefore also be able to be protected as Geographical Indications. Regulation 2023/2411 will be followed by an implementing regulation which will provide more details on the practical aspects of the registration mechanisms.

The registration and protection of Geographical Indications for craft and industrial goods will be under the supervision of the European Intellectual Property Office. Craft products are those which are either entirely made by hand or with the aid of manual or digital tools, or by mechanical means, whenever the manual contribution is an important component of the finished product. Industrial products are goods which are produced in a standardized way, including serial production and using machinery. In other words, both goods which are either made by hand or via industrial means are capable of being protected through GI certification. The mechanism described in Regulation 2023/2411 provides for a two-step procedure, with a “national phase” and a subsequent “Union level decision”. Each Member State will designate one competent authority who will be in charge of receiving applications and their examination. Where the substantive requirements are met, the competent authority will then publish the GI application allowing third parties to file an opposition if they believe the GI should not be granted. These national mechanisms will cease to exist by December 2nd, 2026, and national registers will have to communicate which of GIs already registered through their national systems are to be registered at EU level.

The law presents some objectives that must be pursued in order to implement the process of obtaining a protection, but there are no references to the differentiation between artistic and non-artistic crafts or other types of manual work. The quality level, or defined geographical origin, and reputation, can belong to different categories

of objects and processes. Murano glass or Japanese ceramics used in the tea ceremony are perfect examples of GI certification, but protection could also be activated on objects not produced by professional craftsmen. This new law could open many new fronts for non-artistic and/or social handicrafts. Also, for craft process in decline or forgotten, to revitalize or to be repositioned in the market (The New EU Regulation on the protection of craft and industrial products, 2023).

## **2.9 Italian legislative impositions**

In Italy, a group of thread arts teachers, are trying to reposition their work in the artisan scene, both economically and in terms of image through the use of the law. The idea started from a necessity: there are no specific rules in the field, anyone can profess to be an embroidery or lace teacher as it is not a recognized profession, with a professional register or order. The lack of rules or limitations, creates confusion and lowers the teaching quality. For this reason, they decided to take advantage of law No. 4/2013: the regulation for unrecognized professions, i.e. professionals without a professional register or order, to create a professional association. Law 4/2013 constitutes the reference legislation on «professions not organized in orders or colleges», or «professional associations», providing the possibility to form associations of a private nature for professions without a register. This type of association, are not bound to exclusively represent the profession in question like orders of categories, thus leaving the possibility of several associations for the same figure or profession. The unorganized professions must not intervene in matters falling within the exclusive competence of the professions structured in orders or colleges, such as, for example, lawyers, accountants, land surveyors or artisans. Violating these requirements calls into question the offence of abusive exercise of a profession.

The list of unregulated professions is provided by the Ministry of Economic Development for information purposes only.

There are 3 sections into which the list of unregulated professions is divided, depending on the requirements they can have: associations that do not issue the certificate of quality of services, associations issuing the service quality certificate (ex art. 7, L. 4/2013), aggregations of professional associations. After the great surge at the end of the Second World War and the fashion of the 1960s and 1970s, the wire arts were sinking into oblivion. That law was enacted and for years ignored, because it was not publicized or well known, in any sphere involving not organized professions. One of the teachers has decided to exploit its potential to create an association (Corporazione delle arti, 2022). Through the support of an information exchange group on Facebook, all the teachers scattered around Italy, started to discuss about this law, and the possibilities arising from it. Subsequently, they meet in Valtopina (Umbria region), where there is a very high-quality yarn arts exhibition that takes place cyclically. In 2019, eight thread teachers founded the guild of the arts, with the purpose to promote and protect the arts of thread in general. Not only embroidery but also lace weaving and non-tailoring sewing. The law is strict on certain points, namely that this type of trade association, must not include or accept persons who are artisans or who are members of ordained professions. For example: tailoring is part of the artisan category, so it cannot be part of the trade association. However, there would be no advantage for a craftsman to join a trade association, because craftsmen have more legal protections and are viewed differently in the imagination of the consumers due to the protection. To become a member, there is a complex and very rigid process. When a new member is accepted, it's because he or she meets certain requirements: it is necessary to take an art test and obtain a certificate of quality and a qualification. Together with CNA and *Confartigianato*, the largest representative artisan's association distributed throughout the Italian territory, they are trying to make this possibility known to artisans who cannot be recognized by an artisan guild. But there is an all-Italian dichotomy between the powers available to a trade association for unregulated professions: they can release attestations but not certification. Certification can be issued by training organizations, which are schools with adequate classrooms and spaces to teach, certifications have no time limit and are valid for the entire life of the person obtaining them. Instead, the guild of the arts is authorized to release

attestations, that are valid for a limited period of time, as long as the member is active in the guild. They can teach at craft fairs or in small groups, but they do not own schools. This still guarantees the quality of the final product. Training agencies issue certifications and professional associations issue certificates. The certification is like a diploma, it lasts a lifetime. The certificate, on the other hand, is only valid as long as the member is part of the trade association. It is, nevertheless, a step towards legal recognition of the work done by teachers. Thanks to this law they can now issue certificates recognized by the ministry. The ultimate goal for the guild of the arts is to have professional recognition by the Ministry of Business and Made in Italy, and consequently to reintroduce manual arts (technical applications) into schools, which have been eliminated from compulsory schools in Italy since 1979 and consequently activate courses in universities. In the USA, for example, there are universities of applied arts in every state. This means taking courses to deepen manual techniques but also theoretical courses on the other aspects that concern the craftsman's work and are now fundamental: marketing, website, social media, customer relations, supplier relations, market segments to focus on. This is a big deficiency because the whole entrepreneurial sphere is often left out for artisans or artist in art applied schools.



### 3. Methodology

Active observation of the dynamics involved in craft, in Exeter and Venice. After having identified the most interesting topics concerning craft, the issue concerning social craft was chosen, because it was considered appealing, topical, and not sufficiently researched. Ethnographic research in the city of Exeter and Devonshire, along with the research in Venice and Veneto region were the basis for the data search. These have led to the completion of face-to-face interviews done with the owners of craft shops, museum, foundations and craftspeople both in Devon and Veneto. More than 30 interviews, on a variety of handicraft practices were collected, particularly on textiles and wool processing. The creation of questionnaires was based on bibliography research, operating observation, word of mouth, participation to the workshops, visit to crafts fairs, crafts shops, craft guild and art or craft museums. In many interviews, the questions were adapted to the moment, based on the most interesting topics that emerged during the interview itself. Several craftsmen were known and interviewed thanks to the advice of other craftsmen or those interested in the work. Interviews are the focus of the thesis, as there are no interviews or previous research related to social craft in the geographical areas concerned. In addition, literature is scarce, so direct intervention in the field was necessary to collect information. The process based on analyzing and writing the interviews on the thesis, took place through a cross-comparison of the themes identified in both Italy and UK. The themes identified touch on issues common to both countries, while maintaining their own identity. After the interviews, differences in the cultural policies related to craft in both countries were identified and conclusions were drawn accordingly.

## **4. Linking through craft**

In the next section of the thesis, the results obtained during months of research and face-to-face interviews in England and Italy will be presented. The chapter titles and contents are divided according to common themes that have been traced crosswise, to emphasize to the reader the complexity and depth that manual practices can touch. The reader will find macro themes that frame and encapsulate the work, goals, ideas and ideals that drive social artisans. Issues like sociality, stereotypes around artisans and singular practices, emotiveness, climate change, emphasize the potential of this type of craftsmanship in inserting itself within debates that touch on major current issues such as social changes, loneliness prevailing in our society, empathy and mourning. This first part is dedicated to the English craftsman interviews. Chapter five is a second snapshot of the current state of playful craft in 2024, which echoes the first snapshot in the literature review dedicated to the 2020 and lockdown. Chapter six, features interviews with Italian craftspeople. Again, macro-themes that were identified during interviews and first-hand experience in the field are grouped together. The themes touched upon in the Italian and English interviews mirror and echo each other, while still managing to preserve cultural characteristics and differentiations.

### **4.1 A red knitted thread that binds us**

Conducting interviews on a topic activates a chain of knowledge. Like when you throw a stone into a pond and circles drawing each other in the water get bigger and bigger. The same thing happens in the social craft world, especially because is a sector where there is almost no competition. Everyone seems to know each other; at least as far as large numbers and specific areas are concerned, and people involved are happy to recommend or show works or projects made or designed by other colleagues. Those who do thread arts know those who do patchwork, those who focus on quilting know those who do embroidery, it is a very tight network. Craftswomen and Craftsman know and recommend shops where you can go to buy or discover new things. Even

those who own shops recommend other retailers to find suitable materials. Textiles is the perfect example, where you can clearly see these dynamics, because with needle and thread you can really do anything, so there are many branches and activities besides simple knitting. They all seem to be linked, pursuing the ultimate goal of enhancing manual skills, while having fun, meeting new interested people and making oneself known, without too many ulterior motives. There does not seem to be any fear of being copied or replaced, they all coexist in a friendly manner, exchanging ideas and meeting at fairs, association meetings, shops, haberdasheries, leisure centers or medieval guilds. Associations are created to enhance activities also through legislative protections. This way of experiencing ludic craft is common in both England and Italy. The enthusiastic, or those who have made a career out of it or a full-time job, together with shop owners who resell the necessary materials, exude passion dedication love for what they do, appreciating and warmly welcoming those who are approaching manual arts of any kind for the first time. They are happy to direct you, guide you, helping to understand what might be best for you, what activities might be interesting. As already mentioned, there is no rivalry within a specific play activity or between different play activities. Even between two nations with different cultures this peculiarity is perceived. This is because the dynamics within specific microcosms are similar, even when everything outside is different. The first substantial difference between England and Italy lies in the geographic location of the social craft hotspot. What does this mean? In English cities it is very easy to find yourself in front of the windows of a non-artistic craft shop unlike in Italy, where the only craft windows are the shops or workshops of master craftsmen. In Italy, it is necessary to attend fairs or to know someone who is already in the ludic art and craft field to be able to approach and see what's behind. Even those who are part of the artistic world, have studied artistic subject or frequent cultural venues, are often unaware of these operations. This difference hides a set of different minks rooted in the cultural, historical, economic and social policies, distinguish the identities of the two countries. Consequently, results of policy decisions and investments are mirrored in the streets of the big cities or small towns concerned.

Through the road of Exeter and neighbouring villages in the Devon region, it's easy to find shops selling wool and other items necessary for textile work. Along with haberdasheries, one can also find craft and scrap stores. In Italy, these merchants are very rare to find. These kinds of shops are considered old-fashioned and out of fashion. In general, independent or single-brand shops of any kind, which are not part of fast fashion or large foreign chains, are disappearing. Italy's small villages and districts are dying out. In contrast, in many English cities, the streets are repopulating with independent shops of all kinds. In Exeter city center, you can find 3 shops selling wool and wool accessories. These are in three different areas, so it is possible to stumble into at least one of them. All three are beautiful shops with great care for the space they occupy in the city, website, social pages and blogs for sharing information among the online community. But one in particular, has made a great impact on the actual Exeter community. The shop called Wool on the Exe, has built a solid reputation in the city over the years, thanks to its active engagement in the community. «Wool on the Exe is a community fiber arts space designed to provide local people with a place to learn, be creative, make new friends and connect to their community. The idea grew out of two successful projects we started and have been running for the last few years: "Neighbourworks" and "The Knit-Stop"» (Wool on the Exe, 2024). Neighbourworks is a no profit community company, a social enterprise that supports people who want to use their time knitting to raise funds for local charities. This way of operating reflects the shop's policy and mission: earnings on sales should remain and be reinvested as much as possible, within the community, by buying local or national wool, favoring local retailers and wholesalers, selling the creations of local textile artists. The shop also came up with a second project called The Knit-Stop, funded in 2014 by the Peoples Health Trust.

The knit shop is an Exeter community project that uses knitting to help keep people and communities healthy and happy. Through knitting groups, it's possible and easier to encourage strangers to get together and learn new skills, make new friends, feel good about themselves and their neighborhoods. Knitting in groups can help combat loneliness, isolation, low self-esteem. Building a support group outside family and friends or in the absence of points of reference in the personal sphere can help or

alleviate the negative consequences of a physical or psychological illness, not only in older people but at every stage of life. Consequently, this can bring benefits and good things in the communities. Social knitting during amicable knitting circles means learn a skill, learn about each other, support each other, and work towards more ambitious shared goals (UKhandknitting, 2024). Anyone is welcome to join the groups: from those who have never knitted, to knitters who have lost skills or confidence, or simply don't want to knit alone. The pillars of the groups are based on: Inclusion, creativity, caring for comrades and fun, all together while learning, connecting, feeling good, giving back to other knitter and community. The craft of making physical things provides insight into the techniques of experiencing that can shape our dealings with others. Both the difficulties and the possibilities of making things well apply to making human relationship. Working with resistance or managing ambiguity are instructive in understanding the resistance and ambiguities people harbor between oneself and others. Sennett in *the craftsman* stresses the importance of playing that is related to the development of human relations. Playing is the best strategy for practicing a skill, the same thing happens in relationships, anticipating and reviewing one's skills to improve, not just in term of technique. Who we are, arises directly from what our bodies can or cannot do. Social consequences are built into the structure and the functioning of the huma body, and are finalized in the work of our hands, there is continuity between the organic and the social. Once again, the pragmatics and fatigue of having to learn and learn is emphasized, in contrast to the over-romanticization of creativity together with the mystery of inspiration and the innate capacities of genius. Creating implies knowledge, life experiences, skills learned over time, nothing comes from nothing (Sennett, 2008, p.290). If you don't have talent, you got to have tenacity. Retracing the structure of the workshops that the shop offers, each member of the groups will follow an 8-week course where everyone will get the materials and guidance needed to knit a complete project from scratch. Usually, are realized simple project that can be knitted by anyone, from complete beginners to more experienced knitters. Everyone will be free to personalize his piece in whatever way your creativity, and skills, allow you. YouTube, Instagram, TikTok are full of tutorials to learn to knit, social platforms are great to improve capabilities and be influenced by other people's

projects, but the best way to learn is face-to-face. You'll be amazed at what you pick up along the way. Expert knitters are encouraged to become group ambassadors and lead new groups. It's a fun innovative and alternative way to gain teaching and organizing skills and the confidence you need to start teaching to mixed skills knitters. Is a reason, an excuse, to put yourself out there.

The entire cost is just £5 for 8 weeks. Teacher, wool, needles and patterns will be provided. Each session is 1- 1/2 hours. Pro-Am leisure activities generate more social benefits than passive and casual leisure. This has been proven through a study on of more than 5,000 Scottish teenagers. Young women were significantly more at risk than young men in being victims of depression and low self-esteem because of the caring and homely role in which women from a young age are often indoctrinated to follow. Young people who see serious leisure as central to their lives are more likely to have a high sense of self-esteem. Another study by psychologist Michael Argyle found that people who described their leisure activities as stressful and challenging, were more likely to be absorbed and satisfied by them (Argyle, 1989) (Donovan, Halpern, 2001). As the investment is significant, the benefits to the individual have to be durable: a lasting sense of identity, achievement and satisfaction. Pro-Ams gets far more intense, pleasurable and satisfying experiences from their activities than they do from work, formal learning or passive consumption. They feel more themselves and more fulfilled when they engage in these activities (McCarthy, Wright, 2004).

The web site and the Instagram page @Woolontheexe, indeed, reflects the shop's focus on the community, results, sense of identity and satisfaction. Most of the photographs and posts depict customers who frequent the shop proudly displaying their finished creations, made during social projects or at home, with great pride and happiness. In addition, a lot of media space is given to the table in the shop, the place where enthusiasts get together to do workshops and knit between chats, exchange of ideas and cups of tea. Pride and satisfaction can be felt through the photographs. Craftsmen, and in this case knitters, are aware of the frustration that there may be behind a manual artefact. When a garment must be undone after long hours of labor, because it has

holes and imperfections, the disappointment is huge. A hole if not promptly fixed will then be impossible to cover later when the work is finished, it will stand out among the well-made stitches and it would be impossible not to notice, therefore, even if it is annoying, it is necessary to rearrange. A woolen jumper can be a metaphor for life: if problems are not addressed but ignored, they will come to the surface later. This can happen for any kind of handmade object, that is why craftsmen are wise. The same thing can happen with ceramics: if holes or air bubbles are left in the fresh clay, the object in question will burst when fired. It is not always possible to notice every detail, but those who do manual work must always be ready for change. If something goes wrong, it must be rearranged, replaced, or you will need to start again. When creating, it's easy to find yourself immersed in a feeling of defeat, maybe because the result does not come or is not what one desired. That is why, when the work is finished, and you look at the result, a beautiful and pure feeling of satisfaction and pride pervades you. At that moment, confidence, respect, appreciation, love for yourself and what you have been able to achieve grow. Confidence arises in crafters, and one's initial vision of the result, pushes the craftsmen to experiment again with the creation of new objects. Through craftsmanship, it's possible to allow yourself to experience countless emotions. Not surprisingly, from the photos on the Instagram page of the shop, some people seem to want shouting through the screen «I made myself this jumper, I made this little sock I will give away to my niece. This scarf or this blanket are a source of great effort but now they give me a lot of pride. It's not perfect but it's personal and I love it». They seem very happy to show the world their creations, they made it they exist as crafters and persons with passion and ambitions. Moreover, creating is a bonding agent not only between oneself and those who attend the workshops, but also with outsiders. Gloves, a cap, a jumper can be a very powerful bonding agent between individuals. They imply a long meditation on what you want to make and for whom you want to make it. Giving something handmade means not only handing over an object to someone but also making it clear that you have thought about that person, and when they will wear a balaclava during a freezing winter or look at the beautifully decorated vase, they have placed in their living room, they will think about the creator. Happiness, satisfaction and pride makes one forget the hard work standing behind.

These are some of the reasons why the work that is done for the community is valuable, the shop becomes a home, an extension of one's living room. Visitors feel welcomed, seen, called by their name, grounded, part of a group or a project, at the right time and in the right place. It is not uncommon for someone to come in just for a chat with the excuse of a jumper that they would like to make, or for some advice to ask about scraps leftover that could become maybe a blanket, and then end up talking about matters that have little or nothing to do with wool. The ability of the craftswomen and owners is also to be a point of reference beyond the sole figure of the shopkeeper. It doesn't happen in any other kind of shop that the owner knows the personal story of a customer, not out of curiosity or gossip, but because she has been told. The place, the atmosphere, the workshops organized, the events, create a safe place in which to be yourself and open up to others. There is a strong emotional investment between craftswoman and apprentice, and vice versa. All this extra time and energy in our capitalist economic system are, on the surface, useless because not monetized, but are so important for the communities and human beings. How can empathy, care, attention, time and caring for others can be valued today? Is it necessary to be valuable? Does empathy have to come at a cost? A safe place, a point of reference must not have barriers of any kind, but we cannot ignore the fact that running a business of this kind implies a huge investment of time and energy that is often unpaid. Everything involving human emotions, needs, passions and interests, is complex and difficult to evaluate. Because of this classification, what is created by women, often elderly or marginalized, is not easily taken into account. This passage opens a very important parenthesis which reveals an issue that has been going on for centuries but is still very relevant today. The association between home - women - handicrafts made in familiar places, because the practice does not require cluttered machinery, or a studio collides with the figure of artisans or artists working in ateliers. This inherent difference still creates a big economic gap. It is not easy to recognize an economic value to any craft object, the hours of work are countless, the human and emotional value cannot be calculated. This paradox manifests itself even more when it comes to non-artistic handicrafts. As soon as an object is linked to a homely, superficially regarded



as easy, feminine, and emotional aura, it does not attract economic interest, hardly finds a market segment to fit into, it is not appealing.

Consequently, in today's economic and social system, ludic craft still do not gain credibility, it's denigrated and not taken as a serious issue, but just as a sterile pastime. The objects in question are associated with volunteers, charity auctions, fairs. This mechanism continues to perpetrate a distorted view of craftsmanship, dividing it into categories. «I am not an artisan, I can't call myself that because I don't have a shop and I don't sell my creations, only those who make money out of it are artisans» (Personal Interview, 24 April 2023). These are words spoken by a woman who has been knitting for forty years and owns perfect technique, but she always did it as a pastime. Why is it always clear how not to define oneself and never the other way around? Is one afraid of being inappropriate? Why, if you have the skills, if you invest the time practicing and teaching to others, if you are moved by great passion and work ethic, you can't be considered a craftsman? or you not feel to belong in the category? When is there a clear difference? Is it necessary to own a physical or online shop to be considered a true craftsman or to be able to claim oneself as such? People have in mind a precise definition of who can be or not be craftsmen, and above all, they tie the profession mainly based on earnings not skills and results, or the influence they can have on other people.

During the Victorian era, what was considered playful crafts had to remain a personal emanation of their producer, given as sentimental tokens, irreducibly and inalienably part of the private world of the home self's capacity to generate worthiness (Stewart, 1984). Because of this intimate connection with women's lives, crafts stay firmly in the category of what Annette Weiner has called "inalienable possessions" (Weiner, 1992). In other words, they were sacred enough to be accumulated rather than traded. Their value lies in their emotional message, not their monetary worth. Homemade objects were an antidote to the mass-produced commodities of the industrial Victorian era, but in a complicated way, they also emulated those commodities (Schaffer, 2011, p.7). The paradox still influences us today.

Ludic Craft objects are too valuable for trade but also too worthless to find a market, thus flying both over and under the radar of commodity culture. These are considered but also consequently eliminated from commodification processes in the two ways Igor Kopytoff has described. In one hand fetishes are “sacralized”: ascribed a value beyond price and reserved for royals or priests. In the other: these are cheap and ubiquitous enough to be virtually worthless, like a single match or a tissue (Kopytoff, 1986). Objects may be profitable, but for all these reasons and claims, not traded. Craft’s often devalued status as both an artistic field and a serious occupation has long been challenged by the predominance of women as craft makers (Parker, 1984). Nonetheless, alongside wider governmental policy encouragement for individualized risk-taking via self-employment, women’s craft micro-enterprise is very much on the rise. «No longer a sequestered and quaint domestic leisure activity, like crafts and DIY, have redefined their images and social stigmas with progressive agendas of emancipation, individualization, sub-cultural identification and anti-commercialism as well as emerged as a multibillion-dollar industry» (Jakob 2013, p. 127).

That is, «Crafts are currently being rediscovered not only as a hobby but also as a desirable enterprise» (Jakob 2013, p. 127). And not only for women, as Banks has observed craft labor appears «to be becoming more, rather than less, significant to creative industry production and policymaking» in an economic climate where creation chains are increasingly constituted by smaller, contingently linked sites of production (Banks 2010, p. 306). As Lefebvre stated, «we might bemoan the poverty of vocabulary and a clumsiness of expression» that results from people’s inhabitation of everyday life, but that does not preclude «the relevance of the testimony». We must be alert to the characteristics of amateur labor – its idiosyncrasy, its uniqueness and how it stretches conventional notions of work, even if the final product contravenes notions of quality or seems unimportant (Lefebvre, 2008, p.21). There is much more behind what is considered a simple hobby or pastime.

## 4.2 Stereotypes around craft

Manual dexterity in the field of textiles is predominated by women. Even though, during the two world wars, especially in England and Germany, all those who had not gone off to fight learned to knit, to send socks and warm clothes to the troops at the front. Although during the last century everyone, as a matter of necessity, learnt to knit, in the general imagination it remained a woman's job. "Stitch 'n Bitch" is a name that has been used to refer to social knitting groups since at least World War II (Macdonald, 1988) (Brightman, 2009). The definition originated to describe women's circles in a negative way, as places where people create but at the same time spend time gossiping, assuming that the women involved are superficial, rude or mean. Today, the term is used by women themselves to connect with each other by mocking negative comments, but it denotes a stereotype related to female craftsmanship that is reduced to something childish, stupid, and superficial.

Have you ever heard the term spinster? Indicates, in a depreciative manner, a single woman who is old enough to be married but isn't and will not be likely to get married anymore. Derived from the term spinner: a person who makes thread by spinning. During the Middle Ages, it was one of the only jobs where women were prevalent. When spinster first entered English in the mid-1400s, it referred to a woman spinning yarn and thread. The fact that most spinners in the Middle Ages were women, and it was common in legal documents to use one's profession as a kind of surname, to women who spun yarn or thread were given the title spinster in legal documents. The jump from the use of the term spinner as a job, to a personal a private meaning is probably economic. Some scholars suggest that during the late Middle Ages, married merchants had greater access to raw materials through their husbands, than unmarried women, and therefore unmarried women ended up doing lower status, low-income jobs such as combing, carding and spinning wool. These jobs did not require access to expensive tools such as looms and could be done at home. In the seventeenth century, spinster was used in legal documents to refer to unmarried women. Married tradeswomen had an easier time obtaining higher-status, higher-income work than their unmarried peers. Unmarried women ended up with lower-

status, lower-income, doing jobs like combing, carding, and spinning wool (Merriam-webster dictionary, 2024). Crafts have influenced and still influence our language. An English craftswoman, during an interview, recounted a personal episode related to the spinster definition. She was at the bus stop, it was dark. While she was waiting for the bus knitting a jumper, a man approached her in a threatening manner, shouting and calling her a spinster. These are, unfortunately, common episodes, habitual in a woman's life, which indicate how stereotypes influence our culture, and the history of craftsmanship lingers in today's language and society. Millennial definitions, words and habits influence our decisions and visions of life. These drives many women to limit themselves in craft practices that are wrongly considered feminine. Things are changing and more and more women are taking an interest in different types of handicrafts considered by men and vice versa. But the road to considering every manual job or hobby without preconceptions and superficiality is still a long one.

Too often, gender stereotypes and “social orders” dictate how we live, what we do, what passions we have, how we occupy our time. There have always been jobs considered to be women's or men's jobs, especially in the manual sector. In contrast, manual dexterity is an intrinsic ability in human beings, it does not belong to a particular gender. In the construction world, the gap is accentuated. We are not talking about artistic or social handicrafts, but what comes before and it's fundamental for any type of craft: fabrication. In Exeter, there is a place that offers courses and workshops to learn how to build things, it's called Co create: a «community of makers, builders, learners and teachers, using making as a tool for recovery». This is how they define themselves on the bio of their Instagram page @cocreteexeter. They offer a set of manual workshops ranging from jeweler making, leather objects making, pottery, wood making and power tool education. The last one is very significant because they devised woodworking courses specific to introduce women, who survived abuse or struggling with issues in their life, in craft makers workshops. Learn a manual skill can grow you in confidence to complete DIY tasks, at the same time empowering self-esteem and support independent living, selling resulting artefacts. The report entitled *“Wow, I did this!” Making Meaning through Craft, Disrupting the craft canon* by the center for cultural value of the crafts council, underline this aspect (Radclyffe-Thomas,

Bennett, Anjum, Currie, Roncha, 2023), (Crafts council-stories, 2020). The skills learnt in these courses could lead the participants to earn money for themselves in their free time. In addition, they can repair objects or build new objects needed in their home without the necessity for strangers or repairmen to enter the house.

During the workshops are also invited speakers and guests who give free advice on finances, freelance business and social media marketing for wood creations. The positive results on the mental and physical wellbeing of those involved, and the transformative power that craftsmanship can have on individuals with past traumas or unresolved personal issues, is reported directly by those involved on the community website (Cocreateexeter, 2024).

Community is the key word; it reflects and defines what is inside the Co create walls and outside. Community it is the red tread of the whole project. As written on their website: «Building community is a foundational part of who we are as Co Create and how we can sustainably work in the city to reduce social isolation and support people in recovery». «Making does make a difference. Working together around a table enables connection, conversation and respite. We focus on wellbeing and community as outcomes for our creative courses».

With manual work is possible to recover and overcome mental health issues, addiction, homelessness, criminality, adverse childhood experiences, refugees' critical problems, low self-esteem, abuse in general. They work with organizations who represent individuals currently recovering from one of these situations, supporting recovery through making and creativity in a safe and welcoming environment. The project receives funds from Co Op, the Devon Community Foundation, and private donation. They also offer craft courses for general public open to everyone interest in learning new skills and meeting new people. There are always two different types of courses run every week. Their average workshop cost about £35. Free courses are also organized. At the moment (beginning 2024), it is possible to participate in woodwork skills to learn basic woodwork skills and growing in confidence in mathematics and numeracy. The course is fully funded for learners and is part of the

Government's Lifetime Skills Guarantee, helping everyone gain skills for life. Age average vary from 20-60. Men and women participate depending on the course. They also teach lots of art and crafts courses in Exeter schools varying between cooking, art class, design, technology and woodwork (Personal Interview, November 2022). Co create is a project in continuous renewal, to offer a better service to the community in more and more places in the city, creating a circular economy from which the city at large and individual citizens can benefit. Pro-Ams, undertake activities for the love of it but with a professional standard in mind, and they invest a great deal of power in this categorization. They can destabilize large hierarchical organizations through distributed organizational models that will be innovative and adaptive (Leadbeater, Miller, 2004, p.9). Groups of people can change economic balances. A few Christmases ago, the famous English supermarket chain Sainsburys gave away for the holidays an embroidery hoop with a Christmas tree drawn on it. It was a simple plastic made hope, that you might find in kits at fairs or in specialist shops. This indicates a reversal of consumer interest and the new economic balance that social craft is imposing. The supermarket gives away the base to encourage consumers to buy other items needed to complete the work (Personal Interview, November 2022). It's difficult to think and talk about something concerning everyday life and "normal people" and find the right definition about a phenomenon without fall into stereotypes. With social craft is necessary to capture the general while emphasizing the specificity. And abandon standard beauty conventions, without being influenced or believing stereotypical images on the subject. What we learn with craft is: never trust a stereotype.

### **4.3 Different facets of manual arts**

After the two world wars, there was no longer needed to create clothes ourselves, economic prosperity gave us the opportunity to buy all the other necessary goods. We happily moved away from a lifestyle based on reuse, recycling and care for clothes to a disposable consumerist *modus vivendi*. In the last 50 years, there has been a change of

perspective on the whole sphere of clothing through the emergence and consolidation of fast fashion. Clothes are cheap, it's easy to buy them, then throw everything away, buy again and use them for a short time. The life cycle is very short. This consumption model has started to make us think about our environmental impact. Many have criticized and abandoned it. In recent years, consumers have become more aware of the negative impact of this clothing industry processes on the environment, and the inhuman exploitation situations to which workers in weaving factories in Africa, Asia and Latin America are subjected. Consequently, for several reasons, conscientious consumers started to consider several activities that can extend the life of clothes. People prefer to buy recycled or upcycled clothes. Secondhand resellers and vintage stores invaded our cities. But there is another low-impact environmental practice that is making a comeback: mending. This practice has returned to center stage, highlighting the complexity and variety of craft productions that can be practiced, and how there is a clear differentiation in the perception of some of these to the detriment of others. In different historical moments marked by different needs, the perception of craftsmanship can and must change.

Darning or mending has always been a humble textile practice, out of the spotlight, hidden. By its nature, the repair work must be low-profile which consists of conceals a tear or break on a garment, solving the problem without anyone noticing the intrusion. Even in the world of fashion, if we imagine a seamstress, we think of a dressmaker who is creating not mending. The comeback of mending shows how many different manual activities can exist or co-exist, how many faces the manual arts have, and how some are often wrongly considered more important than others.

In England, darning is making a comeback for various reasons. The Guardian has devoted several interesting articles to the subject. The journal crated an *how to mend?* series starting with the first chapter *how to sew.....a button*. In the first article of the series, Lisa Comfort, founder of the "Sew Over It sewing café", gives easy step-by-step instructions and stitching tricks. You may need: tape measure, needle, thread, scissors, toothpick or matchstick and with the clear explanations and image on the article, anyone can sew on a button (Comfort, 2014). The Guardian also published an article

on how to make a sewing kit to keep at home reuse buttons, needles or threads we already have and to always arrange an emergency kit (Tonti, 2022).

There are several reasons why many English people have taken up the practice of mending. The first is: the rising cost of living. When the recession hit, people became more conscious of cost and started valuing their clothes more. Good clothes are like old friends, it's beautiful and inexpensive to extend the life of a garment. As after the 2008 financial crisis, even today, after the pandemic and the war in Ukraine that have raised the general cost of living, individuals moved towards a more make/do and Mend mentality (Purvis, 2014). A growing environmental awareness is making people more conscious of where their clothes come from, this is the second reason. People are trying to be less disposable. They would rather buy something high quality and keep repairing it. Research by the waste charity wrap has found that extending a garment's life by just nine months can reduce its carbon, waste and water footprints by 20%-30%. With that in mind, some retailers including Zara and H&M, have begun offering repairs in selected stores, promoting the idea of reusing and recycling items. *The Great British Sewing Bee* is television show reflecting this trend. It's a BBC reality show that began airing on BBC Two on 2 April 2013. In the show, talented amateur sewers compete to be named Britain's best home sewer. The series is a spin-off of the format of *The Great British Bake Off*. Episodes still airs in 2024. After the launch of the first season, John Lewis has seen a 22% increase in sewing machine sales. The series gave a good boost to the practice of sewing and creative repair, but reflected and channeled a change in the vision of one's own garments that was already underway. Another tv show broadcasting It's called *The Repair Shop*, a daytime and primetime television programmed aired since 2017, in which family heirlooms are restored for their owners by numerous experts with a wide range of craft specializations. Dressmaking and refashioning have also seen a huge upsurge in interest, according to sewing blogger Rachel Pinheiro, thanks to the internet and social media. «The techniques of sewing are the same now as they were 100 years ago. There is nothing new when it comes to making things. But over the last few years people have begun to find each other and share ideas as they have never been able to before. There are fresh ideas in terms of design and color, and a change of aesthetic. It's



brought a whole new audience to the hobby». Sewing and mending communities are springing up and forming networks via Twitter or Pinterest, through innovations like #makedoandmendhour, where every Thursday evening Jen Gale of the *My Make Do and Mend Year blog*, hosts a hashtag-based hubbub of ideas, jokes, and requests for mending advice. This is another reason that has shone a spotlight on mending; the possibility of doing it as a pastime, passion and hobby, not out of a specific need. The social, psychological, emotional benefits resulting from it are comparable to those of any other manual practice. In 2023, The department store chain John Lewis sold out of darning needles at various times of the year, while sales of darning wool had doubled year-on-year, and sales of repair products such as patches and repair tape were up 61%. Susan Kennedy, the head of haberdashery at John Lewis, said: «Whether they're looking to rejuvenate their clothes, or have been inspired by the likes of Tom Daley's knitting efforts last year, we're seeing more and more customers turn to sewing, stitching and knitting». Sales of dressmaking accessories, such as thimbles, dressmakers chalk and pattern-making accessories were up 15% year-on-year. Making or altering clothes may seem like a humble pursuit. But research by the Craft & Hobby Trade Association (CHA-UK) shows that the entire crafting industry (which also includes knitting, cake decorating, painting and other handicrafts) is worth a whopping £3.1bn to the UK economy. It is also, as if from nowhere, wildly popular. About 3.5 million people in the UK are involved in making their own clothes with a sewing machine according to CHA-UK, and of that number 433,000 only started sewing in the last 12 months (Hammond, 2014), (Butler, 2023).

Another reason that has contributed to the growth of the trend is: the artistic factor that repair brings with it. This is the most innovative and countercultural reason; indeed, repairing is no longer done only in the classic manner, which logically implies filling a hole or tear in the fabric with a patch or thread of the same color to cover the job done, on the contrary, many are now using the technique of visible repair. It is defined as visible mending (Tonti, 2022).

With a colorful patch or tread you can construct or reconstruct a part of your personal history through what you wear, establishing a conversation and interests around your

mended clothes. Imagine being at a dinner party, wearing a jumper with a hole in it that you have repaired with threads of different colors. Someone might ask you: « why have you mended your jumper using a type of wool with a texture and color that has nothing to do with the wool baseline? ». The answers can be varied. «I did it because there is no need to buy new clothes, there is already too much fabric in the world, the dumps in developing countries are full of fabrics and clothes thrown away by the big chains ». Another answer could be: «I don't want to throw away this jumper that my grandmother made for me, she is no longer with us today, for me it means carrying on the memories of my family». Or: «During the pandemic I didn't know what to do, I had a lot of free time, staying at home made me feel seasick because I'm not used to it, I've always worked too much. I saw YouTube tutorials on darning, and I started darning socks. Once the pandemic was over, I did a workshop in attendance. I had a lot of fun and met some interesting people, that's why I learnt how to darn my jumper. Now friends and relatives ask me to mend their clothes. it is a pleasure and an honor for me ». If one gets more personal, the answer given could be: «my therapist advised me to start a manual course to relax and meet new people» These kinds of answers arouse curiosity and give the opportunity to open conversations on interested topics ranging from geopolitics to psychology or personal lifestyle and habits. Of course, not everyone who visibly wears a mended garment must have some particular and specific motivation for doing so, but it still sends out a message, makes those who see it curious, positions the wearer in a niche, in a particular and specific view of the world around us. Even fashion magazines, such as Vogue, have repeatedly mentioned visible mending in various articles. Another possible answer one might receive from an eccentric lady wearing an unusual jumper might be: «I wear visible mended trousers because it is fashionable, I am an eclectic person who follows the most interesting trends». Mending becomes a way to talk to each other, to strike up a conversation with a stranger in a room, to tone down awkwardness, to pay a sincere compliment, to talk freely about someone's passions and what one believes in or the small acts of activism or altruism someone did, or the big global issues that worry us together with the more personal and intimate problems. Again, when practice breaks away from utility, it becomes social. Since the 19th century, when the first kits for self-building and

repairing everyday objects begin to appear on the market, the importance of one's manual autonomy was emphasized. Samuel Smiles in 1866 published the book called *Self-Help*, a series of lectures complete with illustrations, given by Samuel Smiles to a group of young English working class people to urge them to improve their social position idea that things are better when done under one's own volition through processes of self-education. He explains how to count on one's own labor and intellect rather than relying on external bodies. For Smiles, self-reliance was not just a quirky, entertaining aside to everyday life, but integral to an individual's moral virtue and social standing aiming to re-configure what it meant to be a gentleman with moral worth and virtue in labor. Gentlemanly work did not exclude manual labor (Smiles, 1866). Even today, there are many artisans who have approached manual labor by learning self-helping or self-teaching themselves in their spare time, as a hobby or as a second job. This allows them to learn at their own pace, needs and interests, and to step outside the norm sometimes invent new ways to approach the subject. Kate Sekules, assistant professor of fashion history at Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, is conducting transdisciplinary research on the intersections of material culture, archaeological anthropology, and dress history, with particular focus on the history and theory of textile mending. On her site, she briefly reconstructs the history of visible mending. @tomofholland Dutch-born, UK-based Tom van Deijnen's alter ego, is the inventor of visible Mending, or at least coined the hashtag #VisibleMending on Instagram. He's a self-taught textiles practitioner, highly skilled knitter, and master craftsman no longer into mending. Deijnen nor wishes to be in any way associated with mending, but still, he is a part of visible mending history. After the invention of the hashtag on social media and the photographs posted, the visible mending started to spread. There are many facets to mending, Deijnen has revolutionized it adding a new one. What may seem to be only a minor practice instead has many outlets. It can be a hobby a social trend, craft, social craft, art, or a political manifesto. Celia Pym, a British artist specialized in mending defined this art as «a work builds on what is left behind. It's not replacing, or remaking, or cutting apart and putting back together, instead it is slow work that makes things better. It conjures an unhurried recovery or change. In textiles, the act of mending wear-and-tear, thinning cloth or

accidental damage builds on what already exists, anchoring threads and yarn into the robust healthy fabric and filling in the holes or reinforcing the areas that are weak» (Pym, 2022).

Practicing a textile art forces you to rethink the great mechanisms that move the world economy from a political perspective. Clothes became a political tool. Mending, for example, goes against many of today's ingrained habits, and consequently proposes a different perspective on the world, society, the economy, and the socio-economic dynamics that drive it. Forces you to slow down, to train critical thinking, to do things with your head and your own rules (Kay, 2022) (Fisher, 2023). Just like the wives and women in the American colonies gave a major push towards American independence by knitting clothes for their families without depending on the motherland raw materials, or the hippies during the summer of love who rebelled against the establishment, and western consumerism by knitting their own clothes (Napoleoni, 2019). Even darning can lead to great awareness and change. "Menditation", which happens when you apply attention and mindfulness, has the power of manipulating time, creating makes you master and conscious of your time during the day, without making you succumb by it. The changes implemented, cross the personal sphere with the social/global sphere. For this reason, like any social and political movement or party, artistic or religious current, there is a manifesto of mending that defines the principles and consequently the aims and usefulness of the practice. Each point touches nerve centers of our existence.

The Mending manifest (Sekules, 2020) (Sekules, 2024):

1. TIME: Sewing slows it.
2. EARTH: Every mend helps.
3. MONEY: Costs little. Is priceless.
4. FASHION: Mending is truly trending.
5. RESPECT: Honor the clothes makers.
6. HISTORY: Domestic drudgery reborn.
7. SECURITY: The pleasant feeling of fixed.

8. UNIQUENESS: Makes every garment special.

9. CONNECTION: Mending with friends is bonding.

10. MENDFULNESS: Out of your mind, into your hands.

In Exeter is possible to do a workshop on visible mending. @DarnGood studio offer mending workshops of all levels throughout the year. Molly Rook, the owner, it's an artist, educator and self-taught mender. She set up Darn Good after teaching herself how to darn during the 2020 lockdown, founding real joy and love for mending and repair. Her business it's an excellent example of glue between independent shops in the city. In fact, workshops are often held in other shops or haberdashers or mills, to create a network of knowledge between seller and interested buyers, teachers and new pupils who can find in their trust shops the possibility of learning different activities (DarnGood studio, 2024)

#### **4.4 The revenge of scraps**

Where do some of the wastes that cannot be recycled end up? or unsold items from department stores? They are often thrown away but, in many cases, recovered. This question leads us to analyze another unusual and interesting activity that is found on the streets of British cities: scrapstores. These are different from the specific scrapstore shops selling items for scrapbooking, even if the name it's the same. These are not shops selling paper, tools, utensil, for scapbooking but mainly deal in the resale of discarded or second-hand objects salvaged from other processes, mainly from big companies. It is also possible to find stationery, greeting cards, wrapping paper, unsold from shops and department stores and then salvaged.

There is an English national network website of scrapstores, resource and creative reuse centers which shares information about barriers and opportunities involving good practice, achievements, promotions and publications. Anyone can open a scrapstore, but there are quite precise rules and issues at the legislative, logistical, management level that must be followed. Particularly, environmental regulations and documents. These specific shops distribute clean and reusable business waste for

creative play or artistic purposes, to community and children's groups in their towns across the UK. Businesses invariably reduce their waste costs, recycling materials that are hard to eliminate, improving their environmental credentials by ensuring that their waste is reused for community benefit rather than being landfilled. ReusefulUK.org website has been set up by members of the scrapstore community to support the reuse of unwanted resources for the benefit of children and communities and find out if there is a store in your city. It is a voluntary led organization with several objectives to pursue; facilitate the growth and sustainability of scrapstores and resource centers nationally through the provision of a network for advice, information, support and funding for projects that would further their charitable objectives. Advance the education of the public concerning scrapstores and resource centers through a program of teaching, training, publishing, exhibitions, seminars and any other means for providing public knowledge and information. Promote the effectiveness and efficiency of scrapstores, resource centers and other charitable organizations in the community reuse sector by providing best practice principles for initiating, developing and sustaining community reuse projects. If children are provided with the facilities the means and materials to practice their manual skills and learn through play, it is possible to develop many skills in them that just reading books or learning alone cannot or fail to provide. Those can be communication skills, creativity and problem solving, team working and collaboration, ability to explore textures and colors, willingness to experiment new things and experience. Children who are exposed to cultural experiences - visiting museums, galleries, the theatre - are more likely to build up their cultural capital in later life. Youngsters who take part in volunteering programmes at school are far more likely to continue volunteering later in life (Leadbeater, Miller, 2004 p.62).

«The capacity to work well is shared fairly equally among human beings; it appears first in play, is elaborated in the capacities to localize, question and open up problems at work». (Sennett, 2008, p.285). Sennett as opposed to Huizinga, states that play increases cognitive skills, self-control and the ability to create with one's own hands, without differentiating on the quality of the final product. Often it is the stimuli received during one's life, motivation and passion that carry more weight in creation

than talent. There are many studies showing the correlation between children's exposure to artistic stimuli and museums. Those who are accompanied in school age on visits to museums or art projects will then be more likely to attend them in adulthood. Scrapstores are a fantastic resource for community groups who are in need of specific high-quality or uncommon art and craft materials for their members. The range of materials in a store changes from day to day and could include card, paper, textiles, paint, corks, wool, cardboard tubes, netting, gauze and a thousand other things. All scrapstores have different means of accessing their scrap materials. In some you need to pay an individual membership fee, at others you simply pay for the scrap you take on the day. More than 80,000 community groups are already benefitting from the exciting and varied resources offered by their local scrapstore (ReusefulUk, 2024). Examples of community groups are children's centers, early years settings, registered childminders, out-of-school clubs, activity clubs, scouts, cadets, Arts and Crafts Club, mainstream and specialist educators, home educators, art and design student groups, family support groups, day and residential care centers, adult further education settings. Exeter scrap store it's part of ReusefulUK. It's a safe space in the city where people are free to create and find material for their creation, at affordable prices. It's a colorful and fun place managed by an attentive and helpful staff, with whom it's nice to talk, discuss, ask for information. You feel comfortable and it's nice to spend your time there. The most beautiful thing is that you are free to touch the different objects there, the textiles, the scraps, and you are free to move around without restriction. A playground for children and adults.

It is also a place full of contradictions, because waste materials are items that cannot be recycled, but if every company will manage to become a totally green zero waste business, there would be no need of scarp store anymore? this is what makes this type of creative recycling interesting and complex. But not everyone feels completely free to be themselves in these environments. Even within this type of shop, there is a predominance of female customers. It often happens that women enter with their husbands, and those behave in an aloof manner, they seem afraid of the colorful space, the objects around and the use of these objects. They tend to specify that they are only there to accompany their wives or because they were simply walking down the street

and came across the shop (Personal Interview, November 2022). It is sad to see the consequences that stereotypes propagated for centuries have created in us. We should all give ourselves the chance to explore our creative and empathic-sensitive parts, without judgement.

#### **4.5 The depth of social craftsmanship**

This is precisely what manual work does: putting us in touch with our most creative and empathic parts, prompting us to abandon blocks or preconceptions about ourselves and the practice. This is why manual labor can come to our rescue in times of great pain and in times of happiness. Craftsmanship can be a trustworthy companion in every situation in life, as it is itself an instinct of vitality. A wedding, a birthday, a promotion at work, a new birth, a graduation, all beautiful moments that can be sealed with a handmade gift that brings closer and strengthens the relationship between two or more people. The same thing happens at the most difficult and painful moment that everyone experiences in their life: the death of someone dear or close to us. In times of grief, people come closer, and families are reunited. Despite disagreements between relatives, it is necessary to come together to say goodbye to a deceased loved one. Handicrafts can help lighten the weight and speed up the healing process.

In Chagford, a small town of one thousand five hundred inhabitants in Devon, stands the studio of craftswoman Yuli Sommer in art @bellacouche. She devised a new way to create funeral coffins, making them out of wool and wood. The idea is not entirely new but inspired by The Burying in Woolen Acts 1666–80. Acts of the Parliament of England which required the dead, except plague victims and the destitute, to be buried in pure English woolen shrouds to the exclusion of any foreign textiles (Rivoli, Pietra, 2005). Like during the period of the medieval English woolen trail, which had mainly affected the south-west England, when the dead were buried in woolen coffins, this practice is making a comeback today.

Yuli and her team can realize a “leafcocoon” soft woolen coffin made of several layers of wool, which can be easily carried with handles or placed on a wooden pedestal also



handmade by a local craftsman. The shroud can be also decorated with a final layer which is a cover on which motifs dear to the deceased or the family of the deceased are embroidered with wool felting process (Bellacouche, 2024). The idea arises from four main needs: to make funerals eco-friendly and sustainable, regaining a connection with the cycle of life, to make the whole process slower and closer to the rhythms of nature, away from the fast-paced ceremonies of crematoria and the classic funeral business. And, at least, to unite the relatives of the deceased in a time of grief by helping them to overcome their bereavement and reunite the community to think and talk about these topics. The first experiments were carried out on dead animals found in nature, later was designed a model that could also be used on humans. The coffins are unique handmade pieces, made to orders within a short period of time. This creates a unique and inimitable connection between the artisan the relatives and the deceased. Knowing it's possible to celebrate a very personal funeral, far from pre-packaged schemes and out of the box, comforts those left behind, because it gives the possibility of a more comfortable and loving ceremony. In the case of sudden death or children who die in childbirth or prematurely, returning the bodies to the earth inside a soft blanket made with love, patience and care can ease the relatives' grief and make it easier to accept the cycle of life, providing a sense of peace. The coffin is reminiscent of a cocoon, which when placed on the wooden frame resembles a cradle. Just as newborn is placed on a cradle as soon as is born; one is also cradled in the moment of death towards a new life.

Reconnecting with the cycle of life is not just a figurative but a real process in this case. After the funeral, woolen coffins are buried within natural burial sites. These sites are not the canonic masonry cemeteries with stone tombs or other stone materials. These places can be a woodland, an existing woodland that needs to get recovered, a future woodland, a wildflower meadow, a regenerative pasture, an urban brownfield, a parkland site for re-generation or an existing but redundant burial site that is designated to become more wildlife friendly, arranging plots for burial. Natural burial sites seek to minimize the environmental impact of a funeral and producing a valuable habitat for natural diversity. In a fast-growing movement to reduce the environmental

impact of everything we do in our lives, natural burial is the simplest solution. Burial depths are shallower to encourage faster decomposition, and the shroud or coffin must be made entirely from natural and compostable materials, preferably sourced from the region. The aim is to use only wool from local Devon or English farms, and to collaborate with local artisans so that the money earned from this business can always be reinvested in small local businesses and benefit the community. Natural burial sites have a very different look compared to conventional graveyards, although different sites will have different management rules. There are no headstones and precision rows of graves. Some sites will allow small wooden plaques either on the plot, a tree or on a nearby remembrance sculpture, wall or building. Synthetic materials of any description are not permitted as they will not biodegrade and can be harmful to the soil. The management of the site itself vary according to its aims. With a leaf cocoon you can bury a loved one on your own land or garden, as long as it is at least 30 meters away from any watercourse, and it must be registered on the Deeds and Land Registry. As more and more councils declare a Climate and Ecological Emergency, one would assume that burial provision in this way should then be considered as part of the councils' obligation to provide carbon zero solutions for burial, just as in the past each village, town or city provided burial sites in the form of cemeteries when cremation wasn't an option. Cremation is a highly polluting process, all coffins in cemetery after a definite number of decades must then be cremated to create new spaces into cemeteries. «Could we see the end of fossil fuel driven cremation? » This is the question that Yuli asked to the Oxford Real Farming Conference (2024). There are 200,000 farms in the UK. If 2.5% (5000) of these farms applied for planning permission to bury 100 bodies each year on one or two of their hectares, we could bury all the 500,000 plus of people who die each year. This could improve farm incomes and help to reduce our environmental impact and climate change. This is an alternative.

Historically, all burials would have used only natural materials, since synthetics weren't available until the twentieth century. This rediscovered definition of «natural burial» requires attention to the details of the environmental impact of a funeral. One of the most interesting things about the whole project are shroud and coffin

covers. These can be hand-decorated with designs related to nature, such as leaves flowers plants or animals of all kinds. Covers became the glue between all those involved in the manufacture, those who commissioned the coffin and the end-user. The decorations can relate to the life, interests, and passions of the deceased. In this way, the relatives tell the deceased's life story to the craftsman, creating a storytelling that emphasizes happy moments. This is another way to limit the burden of a loss. The blanket can also be decorated together among relatives and friends in the workshop, this other moment of connection that helps to remember and greet the deceased person with joy. Decorating the blanket can also support two parents who have just lost a child; it is one of the last acts of love that can be done with one's own hands. Anyone can go to the studio to decorate what will be his personal blanket for the future death, it helps to accept your own personal situation and illness, the fact that you could die in a short time from major causes, while thinking about the past with joy, subliming the beautiful moments you experienced during your life and which you would like to decorate on the wool. Every year, a workshop is organized in the studio to create you can create your own future blanket with Yuli's help and other 4 people. «A unique workshop for anyone open to exploring their relationship with their mortality through the highly creative medium of needle felting. The focus is on decorating a leaf-shaped coffin or shroud cover; something that reflects your life and passions, and that you can continue to work on if you wish. This can be used to cover a coffin or a shroud». Is a cathartic, and revelatory experience. It's possible to decorate blankets meant to small coffins intended for pets. This is an opportunity to introduce children to the subject of death and dealing with grief accompanied by their parents (Personal Interview, January 2023). On the site it's possible to buy the lifetime cover kit, to create a cover at home with different color and material choices. «Whether you choose to work on your own for your personal legacy statement or with family and friends for a loved one, needle felting is an easy and highly creative craft. Like my other kits, there is intention and purpose in this experience, and the process is compelling and often cathartic». On the site you can also find video tutorial to introduce anyone to simple patterns and design. «Once mastered, your ideas will flow, the colors and blends will delight. You,

and perhaps your companions, will achieve quite a lot within a couple of hours, depending on the design».

Sommer was born in Norway and later she moved to Devon. The traditional weaving and knitting heritage of Norway has deeply influenced her since she was old enough to hold needles to knit with. In northern European countries, there is a strong connection to textile handicrafts and a strong involvement in social handicrafts. The nature of Ikea furniture is precisely inspired by the philosophy of handmade or hand-built at home by oneself or with the help of someone else. The handmade habit results in the presence of numerous workshops and social networks built through playful craft meetings. Special bonds are created between people through manual skills. Birgitta Nordström is a Swedish textile artisan. She also creates works for the deceased, weaving ritual textiles for funerals, loss, and sorrow. In *The Role of the Weaver in the Encounter with Life and Death* (Nordström, 2022), she excellently and beautifully exposes her work and the meaning behind it. The project consists of weaving ritual textiles for funerals, loss, and sorrow. Weaving can be a metaphor of our limited lifetime. We build the story of our life every day, living it, like a weaver weaves a new blanket every day. When the work is finished and the thread must be cut from the loom in which it was sewn, the thread changes shape and dies. The same thing happens to every living thing. The thread is cut when the work is finished, symbolizing death. The craft of weaving acts like a symbolic reference and a metaphor for our journey, reminding ourselves that we are limited beings. (Birgittanordstrom, 2024) Louise Cottey and Liz Croft explain the sacrality of this passage. They are the founder of The Loom Shed a hub for all textile activities, and a place to bring the fiber community together, in the heart of Devon. Threads cutting is a step that must be experienced because it is difficult to explain. After having worked a fabric on a loom, cutting means finishing, it is a rite of passage a true celebration of the skills of the person who created it. A personal and social rite, celebrated with all craft partners during the workshops (The Loom Shed, 2024). The commitment, passion, effort and mathematics behind loom weaving are sanctioned by the cutting of the fabric to free the ending result from the iron beaks of the manual loom. It defines a before and an after with pride. The fabric and those who worked it start new life. Two different kinds

of ritual textiles are created by Nordström: funeral palls and infant wrapping cloths for stillborn. Approaching the subject of death by creating personal and unusual objects opens a new perspective, before the creation process, during the process, at the end, in front of the finished work. In the case of death-related themes, it is cathartic, and normalizing on a social level, to talk openly about often painful and uncomfortable issues.

«Craft offers a way to help us comprehend the incomprehensible» (Nordström, 2022, p. 293). Craft could provide a maternity care in situations of loss. Imagining the parents' trauma and trying to empathies with their pain, is fundamental to find ways to improve their situation by small means. The same thing happens weaving a funeral pall. It is necessary to imagine the funeral ceremony, the place where it will take place, the people who will inhabit that place to make it dignified. Turning an idea into an experience that can be a relief to another person. How weaving can become an ease? The draping of a coffin with a funeral pall by a loved one or the gesture of wrapping stillborn in a blanket is symbolically similar to making up a bed. An ordinary everyday gesture we are all familiar with. While there is nothing ordinary about a funeral or having to accept the fact that a newborn child, or one that should have been born, will not return home together with parents, the act of draping the pall and symbolically preparing a bed for the departed can help us to come close to and to be present in the situation. It gives us something to act on in a helpless situation. Funerals are ceremonies based on sociality and encounter. It is probably one of the few social situations in which conversation is not at the center of the encounter; on the contrary, there is a tendency not to talk and just be present. Being busy and using one's hands to arrange a blanket or a shroud gives comfort and peace, because one feels useful, making a last gesture of love for the deceased, without having to speak or make eye contact with others. The softness and delicacy of wool, the sense of protection it exudes, the respect and sanctity of the fabric gives warmth and unites those who handle it. «Sorrow Turns into Social Making and Reflecting» (Nordström, 2022, p.312). The artefacts are unique pieces, tailor-made for each person. The blanket is often cremated along with the body, but the vivid memory of tucking a loved one in for the last time remains forever, reassuring in times of grief. In times of great pain, a

handmade object can become a source of joy and a powerful glue between people. It makes the craftsperson humble, because the object created is not the main subject, but the frame in a major rite of passage.

It is necessary to have uncommon emotional intelligence, humility, strong social skills and great empathy to be supportive in similar situations involving strangers. In downtown Toronto, monthly collective knitting meetings are organized. Amateur exchange ideas and techniques, they divided according to the categories of work they are producing. In the children's clothing category, there are also the premature and stillborn order. Onesies for premature babies cost a lot of money, often parents do not buy them because they experience an unexpected, anticipated birth. Hospitals provide the onesies and caps for families, avoiding awkward or disrespectful situations. Hospitals do not buy them, but usually receive the clothes from knitting groups who create items on a voluntary basis. The handmade clothes are also used for babies who are stillborn or too young to survive (Napoleoni, 2019, p. 111). Being able to dress one's child before saying goodbye gives comfort to the parents, especially knowing that the garment has been handmade. It's the last gesture possible to make before saying goodbye. The artisan prefigures the situation before it actually happens, as she creates and thinks about the most appropriate materials to use. The warmth of the fabric should envelop a child and comfort the parents. The slowness of the creation process allows the craftsperson to prefigure, think and empathies with the person who will receive the onesie, processed with patience and love. Even if we do not know the person who created the dress, knowing that someone is thinking about us, has premeditated our plight, touched and hand-worked the fabric thinking about how to find a better result, gives us comfort and warmth. All steps bring us closer to the creator. Again, a handmade object relieves pain. These projects are an example of how craft can be a source and mediator of empathy in society. Craftsmanship is a perfect mediator. It is not necessary to know who is on the other side of the loom to be grateful, the main subject is the pragmatic result achieved. Creating clothes for premature and stillborn babies or abortions and palls for funerals invites us to pay attention to these topics and talk about issues that still a taboo today. This is also why craftsmanship

becomes a medium, a red thread, a glue, a source of conversation, not only something pragmatic and tangible.

In the final chapters of *The Craftsmen*, Richard Sennett states that «there are three basic abilities that are fundamental to craftsmanship: the ability to localize, to question, and to open up» (Sennett, 2008, p.277). By stating these requirements, Sennett's definition of a craftsman is much more general and inclusive than the definitions we have always been used to. Comprehensively captures the role and capabilities of the social craftsman. The skills a craftsman should have in addition to technical and manual skills should be stepping into a situation and into the shoes of someone learning the subject or interested in his work by locating himself in a specific context, interacting with questions and conversations, being open to others and sharing his skills and getting feedback. In this chapter, the potential of this integrated approach emerges.

## 5. Current framework

If the frame enclosing the picture of the changes taking place and occurring in the years leading up before and during the lockdown in social craft, was represented by Tom Daley. In 2024 this role is filled by Taylor Swift. The era tours, the singer's latest world tour, which started in 2023, differed from its predecessors in the massive use of craft by the participants. What has become synonymous with the tour is making and exchanging friendship bracelets. It is impossible to link this trend back to any particular subject, but the idea came from Swift's song *You're on Your Own, Kid* from her album *Midnights*. The lyrics in the song are, «So, make the friendship bracelets, take the moment and taste it». When the tour was announced, some fans suggested to make friendship bracelets to swap with each other at the show. And thus, a worldwide trend was born (Wind, 2024). There have been reports of craft stores completely selling

out of beads in America and Australia. The concerts are not just concerts but became events where everyone involved can exchange and show one's artefacts. Bracelets are traded with anyone in the stadium, not just fans. On Tik Tok there are videos of fans swapping with workers, cleaners, policemen working at the concert or famous Hollywood stars attending. You can also find tutorials on how to build a memories frame to store them. Once again handmade objects become means to get closer to strangers, make acquaintances and start conversations. Tik Tok is full of video trends like «girls date night to make friendship bracelets», meeting to create is itself a trend (Murphy Kelly, 2023). Swift is the current snapshot of contemporary playful craftsmanship in 2024, not only for the bracelets but also for the clothing, the dress code that fans adopt at concerts. Fans recreate by hand clothes inspired by the singer's albums or outfits at the concert, for example the crystal corset. TikTok and YouTube teeming with hundreds of tutorials and videos showing the finished works. Finance service Klarna.com, has also observed a 915% spike in purchases of friendship bracelet kits in September 2023, while recent statistics from eBay indicate a staggering 15,200% jump in the sale of friendship bracelets. Furthermore, a niche market for Swift-inspired bracelet creations has flourished, luxury jeweler brands started to make inspired friendship bracelets pieces. And crafters are selling their custom design on Etsy and Instagram. Temu, Shein and Amazon marketplaces have also adapted to this trend, selling all the accessories, beads and crystals needed to create together with paint by number poster of Taylor to decorate with crystals (FashnFly, 2024).

## **6. Italian social craft experiences**

On Italian soil, it is not obvious to find haberdasheries or craft shops that organize workshops open to all. Social handicrafts exist, but remain hidden, unknown to many. To find those who are part of this world and to get to know them, it is necessary to attend fairs, which are the meeting point for all craft enthusiasts. At fairs, one discovers that everything that is practiced and experimented in England has existed since



decades in Italy too, but as mentioned above, it is the geography of social craft that changes. It is not to be found in the streets of cities, but in specific places such as fairs or conference centers and private rooms, often in the backstreets or in intimate and private places, that can be in people's homes and living rooms. It is often necessary to be part of a codified and recognized group to be able to practice ludic craft. Several interested parties, join together to create an association with the aim of enhancing their craft practice and welcoming other interested subjects into the association.

## **6.1 A flourishing crop**

Cultivating a field takes time, dedication passion hard work and teamwork, to see the final result as a flourishing crop. The same things are needed to create a passionate group or an association.

ASI (Association Scrappers Italy) is the national association of scrappers. They are scrappers doing scrapbooking, but they have no connection with scrapstores. There are specific scrapbooking shops that sell dedicated material. The idea behind scrapbooking is to create a photo album, a scrapbook, of memories. Scrapped memorabilia include photographs, printed media, and artwork. Albums are often decorated and frequently contain extensive journal entries or written descriptions. This involves sticking pictures in an album and decorating them with stickers, fonts and other accessories. Memories are captured through the crafting of an album. Is a method for preserving, presenting, and arranging personal and family history in the form of a book, box, or card. Scrapbooking is therefore a creative DIY hobby. The association was founded in 2005 in Brescia, by scrap shopkeepers to make themselves known and also the practice. Over the years the name of the association and the people in charge have changed. Since 2013 they are called ASI (Association Scrappers Italy, 2024). Although the name has changed, the final mission remains the same: publicize and protect scrapbooking, being a type of recreational craft scarcely practiced in Italy, unlike in Germany or the United States where scrapbooking is done at school. Everything that is handmade is craftsmanship, so it must be protected. Even in scrapbooking, which on the surface may appear to be an easy task, there are steps

and types of craftsmanship that cannot be improvised and can only be done by experienced hands, e.g.: preparing cardboard to assemble a box or album and carboarding itself from scratch. Album finishes or details often look industrially made instead of being handmade, all these capacities must be protected and implemented. (Personal Interview, February 2024).

The differential qualities of amateur object are elucidated in their full richness when analysis focuses not only on the final object but on the process of making. The concept of beauty is subjective, but the importance of teamwork, which is necessary in the creation process, is inescapable. This is what we are trying to overlook. Its idiosyncrasy, its uniqueness and how it stretches conventional notions of work, even if the final product contravenes notions of quality or seems unimportant. Framing amateur labor as differential helps us to move away from Arendt's clear-cut distinction between the purity of the *homo faber* and the slavery of the *animale laborans*. Unleashing the *homo faber* restriction.

Amateur space is not just the clear opposite of professional space, characterized by regularized and standardized systems of organization, there is a greater sense of "mixture" (Knott, 2015, p. 52). The possibilities for action are numerous, the boundaries are more blurred, not being a legislatively defined context, unlike artistic handicrafts. Amateur space replicates and refracts these forms of organization in unexpected and unusual ways, and mimics and stretches its aesthetic codes. As shown throughout the chapter, the efficiency, portability, profitability and innovation of voluntarily undertaken labor feed into the structuring of professional spaces and broader socio-cultural notions of work. The entrenched polarity between amateur and professional space, dating from the early nineteenth century onwards, has served to mask these strong affiliations in everyday, practiced reality. In ASI you can find scraps that seems professional, perfect designed, with a finish that does not look handmade, or "normal" scraps, without much pretension.

The association has an extensive organization throughout the peninsula. There is a central board of directors, a president together with a vice-president and regional

representatives present in every region of Italy. National and international teachers actively cooperate with the association. Each role is filled on a voluntary basis, the control core does not receive public funds or big private funds. They do not have a physical headquarter location because they meet in venues that are rented for a limited period, that can be hotels, meeting rooms or conference rooms and fairs. The aim is to on bring people together with personal encounters to practice scrapbooking. Meetings are scattered all around the peninsula, that's why there is no need for a single meeting place.

Public assembly are at the heart of the association. Meetings are realized with the help of sponsors, which are usually scrapbooking shops. All sponsors give a contribution for each person attending the meetings, because anyone present can be a customer or potential customer. Physical meeting is fundamental. People who come together to do the same thing sitting close together and help each other not only by exchanging information on how to do things, establish a friendship, then return to the meetings to meet again. Covid pandemic created a lot of problems, no meetings were held for two years. ASI reinvented itself like everyone else with online meetings, and tutorials on Facebook and YouTube. After the pandemic, the restart was difficult because many members,

especially the older ones, were afraid to attend community lunches and workshops. Attendance is still not back to pre-pandemic numbers, but it is growing. There are regional meeting groups and a national meeting group, each region has one or more representative's delegate, depending on the number of members present. Regions with more participants are Lombardy, Veneto, Emilia Romagna and Lazio, which has been growing a lot in the last year. In each region, depending on the size and number of members, there are 1-2 or more sponsor shops. The purpose of having associated sponsor as shops is necessary to be able to organize meetings in the various regions and receive a per capita reimbursement for each participant. Without this method, it would be impossible to continue the association scheme. In each region a sponsor-shop is needed to organize meetings that usually take place in the regional capital city. There are meetings in the largest cities in each region. Sicily is the only region without a

sponsor now. An annual three-day meeting is also organized. Consists of weekend of national meeting with teachers. The last edition recorded 300 attendees, another 60 people on the waiting list were unable to attend because the maximum capacity of the hotel had been reached. Fifteen shops were present. Is an opportunity to meet and have fun, even the president and the board of the association are among people learning. Consequently, to this type of organization, the most effective way of marketing the association is not with social media or advertisements but with the word of mouth. Networking among people and shops is the fastest and most effective way to find market.

The Italian government helps non-profit organizations in the third sector through tax breaks and not through financial subsidies. For ASI the taxation vat is at 11% not 22%, everything varies depending on the organization of the association and the final aims. The third sector, which is where ASI and most of the recreational craft associations belong to being non-profit cultural association, is a sector in disarray. Dozens are the scandals linked to non-profit associations that abused a regulation that, despite being initiated, is still not complete and lacks effective controls. From tax evasion to fraud and abuses in fundraising and money recycling, these are the situation, which has unfortunately characterized the third sector for years, damaging the image of serious associations that were born for a purpose and have become a point of reference for many people in difficulty. There is increasingly less public investment a growing distrust on the part of individuals about third sector associations. For this reason, laws often harm those who act according to the rules, and associations manage to guarantee services thanks to the work of volunteers and the money they can collect. The fact that third sector associations and foundations have been used for personal purposes has caused individuals and investors to move aside from everything related to third sector non-profit associations. Coupled with this occurrence, politics has never established clear rules and controls in the sector. If on a large scale, many are not interested in an issue, neither are political parties, and vice versa. Only those who volunteer or are already part of third sector realities continue to participate actively.

Abroad, however, scrapbooking it's a hobby practiced by different groups of aficionados through unusual activities. Scrapbooking-themed cruises are organized in North America and England. Famous scrappers, influencer on social media, are often employed as the promoting faces of the cruise and brand sponsoring. There are scrapbooking expos on annual basis, and trends on social media concerning scrap. Onboard, passengers can expect lots of crafting time, goodie bags and even an opportunity to create a scrapbook album with photos from your cruise. Fares start at \$734 per person, for an inside cabin, based on double occupancy (Cruise and crop, 2019), (Mayntz, 2019), (Kramer, 2020) (Sailawaze, 2024).

Different historical reasons are behind this differentiation between Italy and Anglo-Saxons countries. Friendship albums became popular in UK during the sixteenth century. These albums were used much like modern day yearbooks, where friends or patrons would enter their names, titles and short texts or illustrations at the request of the album's owner. These albums were also created as souvenirs of European tours and would contain local memorabilia including coats of arms or works of art commissioned by local artisans. Starting in 1570, it became fashionable to incorporate colored plates depicting popular scenes such as Venetian costumes or Carnival scenes. These provided affordable options as compared to original works and, as such, these plates were not sold to commemorate or document a specific event, but specifically as embellishments for albums (Katritzky, 2006). In 1775, James Granger published a history of England with several blank pages at the end of the book. The pages were designed to allow the book's owner to personalize the book with their own memorabilia (Tucker, 2006). Friendship albums, secret diaries, and school yearbooks became a must have during the twentieth century, mainly in England and America. In recent American films and TV series, the yearbook has become a trope, a national symbol. Marielen W.Christensen is an American woman, credited as the founder of the modern multibillion-dollar Scrapbooking industry in USA.

In 1976, Christensen began making creative pages to put her family photos on. She then put them in sheet protectors and three ring binders. By 1980 she had made over 50 albums and was asked to display them at The World Conference on Records in Salt

Lake City, Utah. Interest in creating “memory books” was immediate and she began teaching classes and giving seminars. In 1981, she wrote the first how-to book on scrapbooking *Keeping Memories Alive* (Christensen, 1981) and opened the first scrapbooking supply store in Spanish Fork, Utah. By 1994, demand for their products grew and later that year, the shop needed to move to a larger location. Her business was called “Keeping Memories Alive” and was also the first company to launch a scrapbook Internet site for the industry to spread throughout the world. In addition to preserving memories, the hobby is popular for the strong social network that scrapbooking can provide (Murphy, 2003). Hobbyists, known as "scrappers" or "scrapbookers", get together and scrapbook at each other's homes, local scrapbook stores, scrapbooking conventions, retreat centers, and even on cruises (Strauss, 2001). Paik Felicia, in 2006, with an article on the New York Times called *A Cruise for Glue and Scissors*, described the social phenomenon of scrapbooking cruises (Paik, 2006). The term “crop”, a reference to cropping or trimming printed photographs, was coined to describe these events (Bellafante, 2005). The act of cutting can be combined with numerous manual activities. Crop is a perfect metaphor because it also means cultivation or harvest. It describes playful craft workshops or meetings in an interesting way, and perfectly renders the atmosphere that is created. As in a cultivated field, it takes love passion, union, dedication and care to grow and harvest what has been sown, the same thing happens in workshops. It takes care, passion, attention, time, coalition to create. The scrapbooking industry doubled in size between 2001 and 2004 to \$2.5 billion in America (Walker, 2004). An object that, more than any other, establishes and explains the predominance of scrapbooking in England and America in contrast to other countries are greeting cards. In USA and UK, there is a big culture of handicrafts cards and handicrafts in general. Not only of artistic handicrafts but also as hobby crafts. The massive presence of scrapbooking as a hobby explains why there is a passion for homemade greeting cards. There are shops dedicated solely to the sale of greeting cards, and supermarkets have rich compartments for them. You can buy cards for every event, not only birthdays and weddings, but also breakup for the end of a romantic relationship and cards or funeral cards, to be given to those going through a

period of mourning. Cards accompany every occasion in life and are consequently kept as heirlooms or memorabilia.

When you walk past the large windows of English workhouses in the evening, you can glimpse cards displayed as ornaments on furniture or the windowsill. Gifting a card is a much-appreciated act, even more so if these are handmade. In Italy there is not the same attention. When a scrapper gifts an album or a card handmade, the work done is not appreciated, and often objects are thrown away or forgotten. Cards are purchased in the big Chinese shopping stores. There is still a strong prejudice against what is handmade by those who do not fall into the category of artistic craftsman or craftswoman.

It does not mean that, who receives this gift, doesn't understand the value, but instead doesn't appreciate it. We all know that a handmade manufacture takes time, financial and emotional investment to make, but there is a lack of concrete understanding. Perhaps, not everyone can understand? Is it necessary to have a special sensitivity to understand? It can be easier if we try to get involved with a manual activity. Scrap card makers in Italy, usually give what they produce to people who are in the scrap field, because they are sure that the items are appreciated and cherished, not thrown in the bin (Personal Interview, February 2024).

One thing is to disseminate a hobby, another this to disseminate a culture or change the general mindset, the latter takes decades to happen. Not only single and private conduct are responsible for this, but also the media, big chains that selling merchandise, marketing, Ad on social media and cultural policies. All together they send messages about what is acceptable what objects are considered beautiful, what should be kept and what should be thrown away. Everything is linked but obviously if politics decides to initiate a change and invest in a social shift, the change happens faster, and the media follow the trends. Mediums reflect changes and interests in people, which are often not clear to our eyes, but have been decided by political moves. (Personal Interview, January 2024).

## 6.2 Multidimensional networks

Craft associations are multidimensional networks. In network theory, multidimensional networks, are special type of multilayer network, because they have multiple kinds of relations (De Domenico, Manlio, 2023). These are usually schemes used in the study of science subjects but can also be fundamental in the study of social sciences. Is a good metaphor to describe the number of activities that are run by the associations propose. Recent advances in digital technologies invite consideration of organizing as a process that is accomplished by global, flexible, adaptive, and ad hoc networks that can be created, maintained, dissolved, and reconstituted with remarkable alacrity.

ASI is an example of the many ramifications that can exist within a single association, another is Quilt Italia (QuiltItalia, 2024). Quilt Italia is the Italian national association of patchwork, quilting and needlework. Its aim is to bring together individuals practicing the arts of patchwork, quilting and related Needlework. A quilt is a multi-layered textile, traditionally composed of two or more layers of fabric or fiber. These layers normally include a woven cloth top, a layer of batting or wadding, and a woven back combined using the techniques of quilting. This is the process of sewing on the face of the fabric, and not just the edges, to combine the three layers together to reinforce the material. Stitching patterns can be a decorative element on in the upper front or the deck. A single piece of fabric can be used for the top of a quilt, creating a whole-cloth quilt, but in many cases the top is created from smaller fabric pieces joined, or patchwork. The pattern and color of these pieces creates the design. Quilts may contain valuable historical information about their creators, often represent a personal story or an event. In the twenty-first century, quilts are frequently displayed as non-utilitarian works of art, but historically were often used as bedcovers and home furnishing accessories; this use persists today (World quilts The American story, 2013).

The Association's main objective is to represent the work of Italian quilters in various national and international contexts such as the European Quilt Association, Quilt Expo Europe, and Quilt Expo World. On



a national level, Quilt Italia acts as an organ for the co-ordination of the above-mentioned arts through the collection and dissemination of information, opinions and experiences relating to them: offering technical advice and recalling the vast tradition of the Italian art in the field of patchwork and quilting, as well as all other activities that can promote awareness of it.

In pursuit of these objectives, Quilt Italia publishes the magazine and newsletter «Quilt Italia News» four times a year, corresponding to the seasons and the material used. All members can send publishable material such as articles, reviews of books on the subject, photographs, exhibition reports, contest, suggestions or any requests to the editorial office of Quilt Italia news. A national exhibition is organized every year, where all members are invited to exhibit their work. The association has a president a vice-president, members of administration and control and delegates found in each Italian region. They carry out activities of general interest for non-profit pursuit of civic, solidarity and social utility purposes. The Association aims to contribute to the social, cultural and creative development of its members and the community: in particular, it has the aspiration to bring together, at a national level, groups or individuals who practice the art of patchwork, quilting and thread and needle arts. Coordinating, for knowledge and marketing purpose, the work of Italian quilters, in different national and international contexts. The community does not intend to overlap or interfere in the activities of other associations that have already been established, instead hoping for an intense and fruitful collaboration to develop the objectives with others ludic craft group. In Italy, they receive sponsorships from creative equipment, fabric and patchwork shops, necessary for the success of the magazine or events. These also became social places to take courses and workshops. Retailers are located throughout the territory; all associates are entitled to discounts on each partner shop. The meeting between enthusiasts to learn, improve technique and get to know each other in private house or shops is, again, essential. Meetings between private individuals are considered informal, then there are numerous official meetings at fairs, exhibitions, creative charity events, where the association's executive members also present. Quilters are referred to as “old quilting bees”, or as in the case of scrappers crops. They

work in groups, exchanging information efficiently and quickly like bees in their hive to facilitate and implement the successful outcome. «The working human animal can be enriched by the skills and dignified by the spirit of craftsmanship» (Sennett, 2008, p.286), rescuing the *animal laborans* from the Arendt's perspective or the useless «surplus labor» as described by Marx.

The association may organize on its own, or with the participation of third parties, meetings, assemblies, study meetings, exhibitions, events of a public nature, to disseminate the work carried out by its members, everything that happens at public moments is reported on the website and in the official magazine. The areas of activity where the association intends to operate in favor of its members, their family members or third parties, thanks to the prevalent voluntary help of members, are emphasized in the statutes that quilters must sign. It refers to the art. 5 of Legislative Decree 117/17 reporting objectives for third sector associations:

- Education and vocational training within the meaning of Law No 53 of 28 March 2003, as amended, and cultural activities of social interest with an educational purpose.
- Organization and management of cultural, artistic or recreational activities of social interest, including activities, publishing, promotion and dissemination of the culture and practice of voluntary work and activities of general interest.
- Collaborate with other associations, institutions, public and private entities and-or third parties in general to pursue the main targets. The Association may also implement any other initiative deemed useful for the achievement of the social purposes described above, in compliance with the law and the regulations governing the places in which it will operate, all in the conviction that through culture and socialization it is possible to improve the lives of members and the community.
- Activities other than those of general interest, secondary and instrumental to the latter, according to criteria and limits defined with a specific Decree of the Ministry and Social Policies of 19 May 2021, n. 107 and subsequent

amendments. Their identification is carried out by the Board of Directors with specific minutes.

- Fundraising activities and other initiatives for charitable purposes, in compliance with the principles of truth, transparency and correctness with supporters and the public, in compliance with the provisions contained in the art. 7 of Legislative Decree 117/2017 and the guidelines on fundraising by third sector entities.

All these aims promote active engagement in society that brings significant changes for the better. Third sector activities bring social benefits for those involved increasing horizontal social mobility. Vertical social mobility, measured by income and wealth, has not become markedly easy to define in modern Britain also because it takes a long time for this kind of social changes. Horizontal social mobility, in the opposite trajectory, that is the opportunity for people to adopt different lifestyles according to their interests, is more easily measurable and has increased a great deal, at all levels of income, and society found positive consequences. Limited vertical social mobility, combined with massive horizontal social mobility, creates a society that is simultaneously more fluid and open than it was in the past centuries, while being just as stratified. Pro-Ams are horizontally moving through their acquisition, deployment, and development of cultural capital (Savage, 2000). In some cases, the associative bonds created within play craft associations become an active part of one's life, an extension of one's biological family. Pro-Am tribes could become more important as the traditional family and local communities' decline. As local community has dwindled as a source of common identity, so knowledge has become more important. Six out of ten people say they have more in common with people they share a hobby with than their neighbors, according to the Henley Centre study done for the Discovery Channel (*Curiosity, the questions of our life*, tv series, 2000). Local communities thrived not just on proximity but shared viewpoints. With social media we engage with people who share our view of the world without having to live next door to them or rely on the community. Sharing Pro-Am knowledge and interests is the new basis for community. Social Pro-Ams help to build social capital: networks

of relationships that allow people to collaborate, share ideas and take risks together. Social capital can help glue a society together and allow people to trust one another more easily, thus helping them to adjust to change collaboratively and share risks. Bridging social capital helps to bring together people from different backgrounds (Leadbeater, Miller, 2004, p.49). This directional change was confirmed and accentuated during the lockdown. When we were forced indoors, we made extensive use of cultural products of interest to us, often on online platforms, binding us together as communities of interested and passionate people.

### **6.3 Selling a vision**

Ludic craft fairs are places characterized by contradiction. Visitors must pay to enter, and when inside, you will find shops selling craft items, which you pay to buy products. Visitors may ask; «how does it make sense? » These are a place that feed the phenomenon of compulsive shopping. If we take into consideration the creative craft show in Exeter (The creative craft show, 2024), a traveling craft fair throughout the United Kingdom, or Abilmente and Creattiva, the Italian version of these fairs, between the shelves, we come across numerous people with travel suitcases that are filled with material for the jobs they are currently creating or for the future. «I bought everything I need for retirement, I have a full wardrobe, as soon as I retire and have time I will start creating» (Personal Interview, February 2023). This is one of the many motivations for visitors to buy. The economic impact of trade fairs is constantly growing. Abilmente is organized by the Italian Exhibition Group, a leading company in the trade fair sector (Abilmente, 2024) (Creattiva, 2024).

However, fairs are necessary places, because in one spot you find everything you need for any hobby or manual practice, which is difficult to find even in large shopping centers or cities, especially in Italy. Haberdasheries or wool shops are closing or have limited quantities of goods. Finding everything you need in one place, with different price ranges and qualities allows people with different financial possibilities to pursue

their hobbies. Often, there are also bargain offers. All that is necessary for crafting can be found online, but not everyone is able to order on platforms, especially older women. That's why the fairs also became a way for enthusiasts to meet, get to know each other, get to know the latest trends and buy. You can reach the exhibition centers by bus or public transport. There are numerous private buses that leave from the Italian provinces. Many elderly women who do not have a driving license or struggle to drive, have the possibility of participating reaching the fair independently, without their husbands or companions.

The occasion pushes them to leave the house and spend a day with other crafters getting engaged. Artistic director Marco Chiarello, decided to have a commercial part coexisting with a creative part in which creatives can demonstrate their work and not sell. He was one of the first to create this interaction at fairs and to sell not only objects but ideas, visions, processes, colors, thoughts, innovation. Shops and crafters show you and sell a vision, and ideal, a vibe of your future work. You feel it, there is a common frequency.

The same thing happens on the sites of the artisans themselves; they manage to advertise and sell the sensations that their personal stories related to craftsmanship manage to create in the beholder. For example, the sale of wooden objects, a family history linked to family habits in the kitchen in which the objects are used, together with the history of the production are reconstructed, which establish in the buyer a sense of belonging, familiarity, dreaming, a vision of a particular object in his own life, in his everyday life, or a vision of his own handmade work. What is ever-present, in pop-up initiatives as or at fairs, festivals, open studios, trade shows, online shops or virtual exhibitions, is the maker, with attention placed on their skilled labor, and often an opportunity to witness in real life or online the process of making. «The symbolic value of crafted objects that have come to be associated with specific places, perhaps through the quality of the product, the dogged determination of generations of makers, the rarity of the process or the cachet associated with it has resulted in associations of place that are entangled with the product itself. These associations have long histories supported by “industrial atmospheres” noticed by

economist Alfred Marshall in 1919 that have enabled the interdependencies between competing firms or makers to generate a sustained presence that secures a places' reputation for quality of a product and the associated market over many generations». (Luckman, Thomas, 2017, p.9), (Marshall, 1919). Not by accident but because is it fundamental the *aura*, the process the intangible history that makes an object, UNESCO has raised the profile and value of ephemeral work through its 2003 *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (United Nations Intangible education science and Cultural Organization, 2003). For this reason, Abilmente attracts more visitors than other craft fairs. Trade fair visitors always want and look for new proposals.

One of the best-selling items are kits. Haberdashery shops prepare kits to make bags or clothes handmade at home. The kit is suitable for everyone, even those who are learning, there are many models, and the taste of the general public can be met. Furthermore, these are a safe source of income for shops. It's hard to estimate the cost of a handmade bag, calculating the actual price of the time and effort put into creating a garment makes it economically unaffordable for fair visitors, and consequently unsold. Instead, the kit allows you to sell the materials without having to ask for a contribution for the workforce and time spent. Quality-price match, consequently many kits are sold. The kits are already decided, the patters are easy, they have become fundamental tools for beginners, just by following the instructions you learn how do crochet, for example. But you don't delve into the technique, and you are limited in creativity. A cross-section of today's society can be found at trade fairs. The largest number of visitors are female, but there is diversification of people whit distinct needs and passions. The air is buzzing, everyone is busy in their personal search for materials, interested in the exhibitions and shops, passionate, enthusiastic, sociable. They have preferences with regard to some specific handicrafts that they practice or would like to experiment with, but in reality, they are passionate about the whole sphere of creative and playful handicrafts, they also attend fairs to discover the latest trends on the subject.

These economic mechanisms that dominate fairs, are some of the motivations that pushed the artisan Ilaria Quadranti to create emotional stitching art, and sell not just a workshop but an experience, a mood, a new way of spending your free time. Ilaria was born in Lugano, she has a long career behind her as a teacher of plastic arts, a compulsory subject in Swiss schools. Numerous manual activities are practiced at school with different materials, from paper to wood to painting, sewing, ceramics and embroidery. In class, students are also taught to use tools such as the electric fretwork and the drill or the clay lathe. The teachers can range between the objectives they want to achieve and the techniques they want to use, the organization of classes, the planning of a work, the choice of materials they can use, and the level of creativity students want to achieve. At first, the teacher explains and gives indications regarding safety, then proposes a simple activity to understand the student's level, and finally assigns tasks. A great space is given to personal creativity (Quadranti, 2024). Ilaria has always been a passionate crafter, she attended craft fairs and bought many items for crafting, until she felt estranged and distant from this selling system. She finds herself with a huge wealth of knowledge in many manual fields, but with an emptiness, because none of the existing artistic manual practices satisfied her anymore. For this reason, in 2021, after returning home from a trip, she decided to recreate a photograph taken during her journey with the fabrics and objects she had at home. In this way, almost by chance, what she later christened «Emotional stitching art» was born.

An artistic project, which aims to (re)give value to emotions. In an era where everything flows too quickly and the memory of the experiences we live tends to fade in the vortex of routine. Emotional Stitching Art is a break, a cuddle, time to give back to yourself. The name and the logo are created by Ilaria, the march is registered internationally, because it is a novelty in the field of craftsmanship. She decided to use the word emotional because with this technique she's able to touch emotions rather than technique. And she brings her idea of craft to the stands at fairs, where she skillfully offers workshops without selling materials.

She only uses recycled materials to make the works, from the tailor's shops and those who make curtains obtains and recycles leftovers. Each material has precise characteristics and can be used to represent particular features in photographs. There is also an ecological reason. This awareness comes at the end of a journey, where Ilaria realize that it's easy to limit the number of new materials purchased. There are plenty of textile scraps in haberdasheries and fabric shop, using them helps lower our general environmental impact. During fairs she does workshops and resells a small part of her completed works. She does not resell raw materials.

Her work consists in recreating a photograph of one's choice, usually representing an exciting and important moment in one's life, with a variety of materials that can be buttons, fabrics, metals, beads, wire, sequins, wool. Everything is sewn around a support of glue and fabric, to recreate the image according to the eyes and emotions of the crafter. The aim is retracing the emotions you experienced in the moment you took the photo. During the workshops, all materials are spilled on the table or on the floor so that participants have an overview of everything available. Materials are chosen based on the emotions and symbols they arouse and their similarity to the details of the photograph to give shape to your emotions.

The choice is participative, Ilaria helps and watches over every process without interfering, she only comes into play when called upon. She is a guide, a support, she's able to put people at ease and help them get into the project. During the workshops she teaches the basic stitches for sewing, but does not impose techniques or teachings, she leaves total freedom to those who are creating.

Her long career in the world of manual creativity enabled her to realize how powerful can be freedom while creating. When people are free from the constraints of technique and impositions of beauty aesthetic canons or grades, they create with pleasure and joy, surprising themselves with work they did not think they could do or had never allowed themselves to try. Participants must also be ready to get involved and do their part: participating with sensitivity and propensity to be enthusiastic. Concentration, tranquility and contact with your inner word are fundamental to



recreate the image and flow the emotions. The workshop can be done either with a photo or the weaving of a word evoking an imaginary. It's an activity in which you immerse yourself in the textile world with your knowledge, and no possibility of making mistakes or be judged. You start with the photo, and then create a small, unique, almost intimate textile work that captures your feeling. At fairs, there are many people who stop by her desk to compliment her work but don't want to experiment. Ilaria immediately feels when someone is interested or not. The empathy and relationship she's able to establish with participants or onlookers is essential, it is not like selling a kit to work at home. The presence of the craftsman it's fundamental for the successful exit of the creative process, she's the essence of the project, part of the experience, and has a package of knowledge and techniques with a personal and intimate filter that it's heard and perceived from the outside. The emotions, the words and interactions exchanged with the artisan make the conception and creation of the work possible.

You can create only when you have strong emotions to be channeled, otherwise nothing comes of it. Feelings arise when you have a personal story behind the picture. When these comes during a group session, became a shared pleasure, a way to connect through story and experience. Tell each other personal stories often got you very emotional. Is a surprise and a gift from the participants to the artisan and vice versa. You get to know others and yourself better. The workshop can also be more intimate and personal. Participator who wants to stay apart in silence can do it, while still remaining part of a group.

It's like to demystify a situation, make it concrete, to see it from the outside, to lighten a load due to a difficult situation. Representing a happy or sad moment, it's like talking about a problem, you don't solve it but telling or representing it lightens you up. Practicing a manual skill is also useful for those who have physical problems, which cannot be healed but can be alleviated. All manual activities have this advantage, you are concentrated, you detach yourself from problems finding a space to relax, at the end you also have an object of your own. It makes you feel good. Kits do this too, but in a restricted way. The kit ties us to something known, prepacked, it does not help us

face the fear of the unknown, or discovering new parts of ourselves. When the work is finished, two emotional planes overlap: the emotion triggered by the resemblance in the photographs and the memory of a special moment, and the thrill of seeing what you are capable of, together with amazement contentment and pride.

This practice enriches Ilaria's emotional and social skills. Participants together with their personal life always bring with them new stories, it is impossible to be prepared and predict what will happen, each time the workshop is a challenge, a discovery, a surprise. You immediately sense the great empathy and preparation that characterizes Ilaria. She is a fundamental part in the development of the project. The idea may be copied and re-proposed by others, but it is her preparation, the great passion for manual work, the years spent teaching in contact with students, the way she makes you feel, the welcoming with warmth, the non-judgement, the attention, the choice of materials she makes available, the quality time you spend with her, the experiences of her life that have led her to this point and shaped her as a person which she shares with us, that can be felt and make the difference. As Richard Sennett said in *the craftsman* (2008, p.268): «The better you are at something the fewer of you there are. This view has been applied not only to innate intelligence but to the subsequent development of abilities: the further you get, the fewer of you there are». This is what distinguishes social craftsmanship from other practices: the craftsman always puts something of himself into her projects, which is part of her life and distinguishes her as an individual. All this adds up together with her ideals, communication and social skills. This specificity is impossible to copy, or reproduce, also to quantify economically. It is not a repetitive production technique that can be amortized with economies of scale, we are talking about limited skills obtained over the years, depending on the periods of life the craftsman is experiencing. It is also difficult, and almost impossible, to pass them on from generation to generation, as is the case with artistic handicrafts.

In social handicrafts, the presence and personality of the craftsman supporting the group is the engine of the working group that is being formed. The group, on the other

side, is fundamental for the craftsman. It is an exercise in sociality, a balance that needs the two poles to function, you need to be in the same spot with the craftsman to function. Around a table, a business manager, a postman, a war refugee can sit close and socialize while crafting. The common passion flattens the differences and makes them speak the same language. For a few hours, social differences are eliminated, and a social net is created.

It must be recognized that, nowadays in our increasingly individualistic and fragmented society, the ability to form group and create bonds, through empathy, love, respect for others is a power to be, preserved and valued. Workshops are organized for different occasions and places. No specific or even particular technical knowledge is required, these are open to all. You can find your place at Ilaria's home studio, where she keeps all the necessary materials, in schools, libraries, or other business. Workshops can also be organized in companies to strengthen team building. All art experiences are customizable to meet specific individual or group needs and requests. Before the start, participants must leave their cell phones in a box, preferably turned off or silenced. An apparently difficult and questionable choice in a time when being connected 24 hours a day seems has become essential. However, it is an excellent way, perhaps one of the few, to be able to really get in touch with people's emotions and to (re)find a space to take time with yourself without distractions and sense of guilty.

## **6.4 Rule-breaking**

Bassano Del Grappa, Angarano e Nove are Town located in the province of Vicenza, Veneto area. These are defined as "ceramic lands" because represent the tangible history of a specific production in the Italian ceramics' geography, that has characterized these territories for centuries. Since the 17th century, Nove and Bassano have developed a flourishing production of ceramics, that have led to a refined and valuable artistic activity with over 300 years of history. There are three main reasons that have enabled the development of a ceramics pole. Geographical advantage: the strategic position of the two riverside towns, arisen on the river Brenta bathing

Bassano and river Roggia Isacchina in Nove. Riverbeds are rich in quantity of calcium, silica and quartz pebbles that helped create the perfect raw material; furthermore, the river channels allowed the mills to function, as did the transport of wood for the kilns. Political momentum: during the reign of the Venetian Republic, the increasing spread of Chinese and Dutch ceramics in Europe prompted the Serenissima to encourage domestic production of ceramics in order to limit imports. Great concessions were granted to anyone who could produce high quality porcelain and majolica. Political scalping created a situation of economic prosperity. Ceramic manufacturers received tax concessions, these tax privileges made the fortune of Giovanni Battista Antonibon, who founded the oldest ceramics factory in Italy, still in operation today. Thanks to the typical floral majolica, French-inspired porcelain and revolutionary *terraglia popolare* that means popular soil or popular topsoil used to create ceramics with more affordable raw materials that could be sold on larger markets, to buyers of modest needs, the ceramics hub in Vicenza has become world famous (Nove, 2023), (Viart.it, 2022).

What does the history of artistic ceramics in north-eastern Italy have to do with playful handicrafts? In the ceramic triangle which includes the territories of the three cities, a recreational ceramics group called “SbittArte” has been operating for many years. It is a group that meets weekly on Fridays to paint on majolica. A cycle of appointments that has been warmly welcomed from the community. According to SbittArte, the activity of painting on majolica not only constitutes an important part of the artistic history of the area, but also confirms itself as an extremely cutting-edge subject for experimentation. The group therefore takes advantage of the ancient techniques inherited from the popular and local artisanal knowledge, to use it by re-appropriating their communicative value in a new and innovative way. Majolica is painted in complete creative freedom, without rules or limitations it’s a rule-breaking activity.

The philosophy of the group is based on non-competition and no judgment about the craft, no trading of the final artefact afterwards, but experiment, have fun, learn in company with others. *Sbittare* in Veneto dialect means the desire to remove the bollard

(the mooring), expel, ejaculate, pollinate. That is why the color is thrown freely onto the ceramic (Buongiorno ceramica, 2024).

Laboratory practice moves the creativity of the individual who acts and works together with others and allows everyone a free and liberating expression. The main vehicle of this artistic flow is precisely painting on majolica practiced collectively, and also working with several hands on the same object, especially for those who are not professional ceramists. During the meetings, participants can express their need to create objects and paintings, expressing their thoughts in an urgent, free, creative way. From the core group of founders, there are ten artists left, but at each event and demonstration, dozens and even hundreds of people interested in experimenting with majolica painting are added. From master's to neophytes, amateurs or merely curious, all materials are provided, and booking it's not necessary.

SbittArte has not a physical headquarter. It is an itinerant workshop, taking temporary roots where they find fertile ground. They can meet in the most diverse public contexts, including villas, trendy venues and sometimes even in support of charitable causes. On 17 March 2023, it was inaugurated in Palazzo Bonaguro (Bassano del Grappa), the exhibition «SbittArte - Twenty years of collective painting on majolica», in was open until Sunday 16 April. The event was sponsored by the City Council's Culture Department and was a participatory exhibition. They displayed an impressive selection of the group's collective works created over the past two decades by the members. More than 7,000 visitors saw the exhibition.

The visitors could also find hundreds of small tiles decorated during the workshop organized in the exhibition spaces, by the visitors of the exhibition themselves, and displayed in various corners of the palace, including the floor of the *piano nobile* (Tich, 2023). «These bottom-up, Pro-Am forms of organization are cheaper, more agile and more fun than formally structured parties. The fact that people can pursue amateur hobbies and interests without state censorship or interference is a good measure of freedom. People with passions that draw them into civic life are more likely to have a stake in a democratic process that defends this freedom of association» (Leadbeater, Miller, 2004, p.54). The emergence and growth of Pro-Am culture has less to do with

public policy than a set of underlying social and demographic factors: leisure spending is rising as a proportion of total consumer spending. Pro-Am activity thrives in an open, liberal, well-educated, affluent and democratic society, in which people have enough time outside work and the resources they need to cultivate their Pro-Am activities. Public policy interventions such as the expansion of higher education will matter but only in the context of these larger social trends. These disparities matter because participation in Pro-Am activities, and social Pro-Am activities in particular, bring important benefits, over and above individual satisfaction. They can build community spirit, capacity for cooperation, spread skills and promote trust, as well as provide participants with a sense of self-worth and fulfilment. Creating programs that help people turn their hobbies into small businesses would also help, perhaps by offering in-kind support or preferential treatment (Leadbeater, Miller, 2004, p.61).

## 6.5 The Italian style

Italian style, or what is called Italian-ness related to fashion, design and art, makes Italian culture world-famous. This makes Italians very attached to their habits, making it difficult to change or introduce something new. The next two craftsmen interviewed demonstrate how craftsmanship is a very strong glue between Italians and their past culture, but despite this, it is necessary to shake things up and introduce innovations in the *Bel Paese* to embrace all potentialities that different types and visions about craftsmanship can offer.

@48filimatty is an experienced knitting duo born from the encounter of Fabio Quarantotto and Mattia Godeassi. Together they travel around Italy to do textile arts workshops, and make their craft known. Fabio Quarantotto approaches the world of yarns at an early age of just 5 years old, and immediately showed a strong propensity for manual skills. Over the years, he honed his practice with great Italian and international yarn masters and knitters. He founded the association *Magliumini* (union between the word knit and men in Italian) to introduce more men into the world of yarns. He worked for a period as a golden expert in the world of astrophysics, always

pursuing his passion for wool in parallel. The scientific world and the threads one, are not as distant and seconded as one might think. Scientific subjects are not only schematic but also very creative. Many scientists know how to knit because it helps them better understand the world around. In nature, there are many objects made with the same method, for example bird's nests and shells. They are defined as additive productions; a new thread is added to another thread schematically as in a jumper. Thanks to this analogy, knitting can be used to create physical models of any surface, helping to understand mathematical formulas. Creating an object from scratch makes it easier to understand (Belcastro, Yackel, 2007) (Belcastro, Yackel, 2016) (Napoleoni 2019, p. 129). Fabio has been teaching courses for 15 years. He has been participating in Abilmente craft fair for 10 years with strands for courses or artistic installations.

Today workshops are his sole and main job.

It was during these courses that he met her future colleague Mattia, who after an initial knitting workshop immediately demonstrated his great manual skills. In just a few months, he was able to learn what is usually understood after years. Together they decide to start 48filimatty, travelling around Italy doing courses in haberdasheries, knitting cafe or knitting club, trade fairs, associations, or private groups. They do not own a physical shop, but they sell kits or recommend shops for a sale aimed at creating products. The idea for their name and logo is very intelligent and interesting, is the union of Fabio's surname, and Mattia's nickname "matty" joined by the word *fili* meaning thread in Italian. 48 threads and as many people coming together to create.

They jokingly define meetings as sect, because when you work with your passions you share very personal ideas, interests, issues and themes, interacting a lot on any subject. The group becomes almost territorial, and it is often difficult for outsiders to join groups that already work with a defined number of subjects. Limits and spaces become more defined and determined in the Italian context with Italians participants. Italy is a magnificent country with a great history that shaped the nation until today with several limitations and great possibilities. But not all periods that have dotted the Italian history were magnificent, for example the decades

following the two world wars in which Italy was rebuilt on a moral, economic and cultural level.

As highlighted in the literature review, knitting was very useful, because the sale of handmade goods to Americans allowed families to earn money, attract tourism, until it becomes also a part of the culture in the typical furnishings of the Italian home. Many women who created clothes to send to the front reinvented themselves by creating designer objects. After the war, men who returned, used to left home every day to work in factories and women stayed in domestic environments. Those who learned to knit received teachings thanks to relatives in the family who passed down their knowledge, or through women who met in the common areas of the condominiums to work. These conditions and organization of family and work have left an indelible mark on the Italian mentality regarding manual work, which still reflects today. There are two main differences that Fabio and Mattia notice between the Italian enthusiast and the foreigner. The first concerns the personal sphere: those who have learned to knit thanks to a grandmother or a relative do not want to open their horizons to other techniques and expect to work with the classic long and shared needles kept under the armpits, and with the technique that the grandmother had taught them, because that is how they were taught, and they are convinced that it is the best technique. Visible mending is an example of the split and the different vision between Italy and England on manual skills. English artisans experiment with colors and fabrics and accept novelty with curiosity, while in Italy this technique is defined as something that is done «by those who do not know the real technique and have clearly never seen true Italian artisanal mending» (Personal Interview, October 2023). It's just a question of style and personal aesthetic, not just technique.

The second reason extends the first, involving also stereotypes issues that are reflected in the social and economic sphere, perpetrating what the two craftsmen call “the cultural heritage of the neighbor on your landing”. The belief that since there are many elderly women who work as a hobby, or volunteer and continually create garments that are sold cheaply or donated, it is not necessary to pay professionals in the sector with a fair wage corresponding to the work done and new ideas and patterns created,



because there will be always the neighbor on the landing who can teach you or create items in exchange for just a favor. Along with the belief that old ladies work as grandmothers did, with the same techniques that are considered the best. Often not only private individuals but also companies struggle to understand this concept, for this reason the value of goods on the market drops dramatically. Furthermore, female work done at home is often linked to a need for subsistence, recycling, and economic poverty, out of fashion issues, made from simple craft items and simple materials even if this has not been the case for a long time, consequently, is denigrated and not paid. All producers suffer from these bad economic choices. In all types of crafts there are internal differentiations, and they must be recognized. Volunteering is important but different from work and should not be confused. For these reasons, many Italian high skilled techniques and designs have been lost, and these differentiations still reinforce walls and barriers. Italian patriotism, in some cases, may result in into nationalism.

Knitting has always been a proletarian art. It was born to satisfy two basic human activities: to get food through fishing, and to clothe ourselves. It is a humble, pragmatic, without extravagance practice. We must wait until the 1400s to come across the English verb «to kit», the expressions «to spin» and «to weave» were born first because they have always been celebrated in ancient poetry and literature as noble arts.

Before the invention of weaving and spinning, our ancestors devised a technique for making fishing nets with a rudimentary one-iron knitting technique called *nalebinding*. The word is of Danish origin and means to tie with a needle. A net fragment was found in a Danish fishing village dating back to 4200ac.

The Egyptians invented the revolutionary two-needle method. They ran a flourishing hosiery trade and had to find a faster method of production. The two-needle process later opened the door to the spinning jenny, a multiple spindle spinning machine developed around 1765 in England, the technological breakthrough paved the way for the English industrial revolution.

Danish fishermen, slaves in the time of the ancient Egyptians, proletarians in English factories. It was always people from the lower social classes who knitted. That is why the history is smoky and often unclear, it is a practice that has never interested the elite. Penelope, the wife of Ulysses, did not knit because it was the art of the poor and slaves. She was a noblewoman; she did not work out of necessity but wove to create magnificent shawls and shrouds. She could not have knitted a garment for years, creating it during the day and undoing it at night, knitting is practical and fast, no one would have believed her. Knitting belonged to the slaves of the kingdom. Later, with the economic wool routes, men ran the business over the centuries. In the sixteenth century, a revolutionary discovery took place: straight and reverse stitches were invented. Knitting became more fluid and the results more elegant. Italian merchants saw a great opportunity for trade and started to establish markets in Flanders, England and France. European royalty and aristocrats wore knitted silk garments in the late 1500s. Underwear, stockings and jackets were produced in workshops run by the new elite: the merchants. All the workers employed were all men. Women were at home minding the family. Men were responsible for textile work, even today this is still the case in Peru, North Africa and India (Napoleoni, 2019).

Women have always been engaged in the role of mothers and home weavers, to create clothes or objects necessary for the subsistence of the home and family. Only in times of severe economic hardship and when the men were not working, usually because they were at the front, items were resold. These have always been the balances that have enshrined the roles of knitters over time, the differentiation between female and male labor served to be able to protect the family unit and the lives of the children after years of war and devastation. Today, this rigid division is no longer needed, and the lockdown has accelerated the change.

The lockdown has pushed towards a new vision about manual labor, persuading us to think and try other techniques thanks to the large amount of time available. Many have found themselves at home with material and plenty of time to work and realized that they are not great connoisseurs of the technique. YouTube videos help a lot, but nothing like a live lesson. The moment we were free to leave home, enrolment in the

in-person courses increased. When one gets stuck, the best thing to do is to ask a yarn expert for help. Taking courses does not classify you as ignorant or incapable of working independently, but as a person who knows how to get involved and experiment. More men are approaching the art. The fact that they are two male knitters' teachers does not frighten but intrigues. Fabio has always knitted in public, as a pastime but also as a challenge. Public spaces are spaces of ordinary act of resistance. He feared judgement, a fear that turned out to be unnecessary, because working in public allowed him to create many conversations with strangers, who often confessed that they also knit, but it in private, within their own homes, both men and women. In Italy it is not yet completely normalized, Fabio and Mattia still hear, especially in northern Italy including Veneto region, comments such as «they work like women» or «they work better than women, it is surprising». These are rude comments, but they denote strong ignorance not malice, people and future interested parties must be guided towards knowledge, not judged. In Italy, the emotional attachment to long needles makes it almost impossible to carry one's work in a small bag. The power of yarns, on the other hand, lies in the ease of being able to carry wherever. Any place can become your studio: the bus, the doctor's waiting room, the airport, the public park. Your mind is the office and the studio, every place where you can find the concentration to do manual things it's potential. Amateur space is not unimportant or superfluous, «a permitted triviality within context of alienation» as codified by Theodor Adorno (1964), but neither is it an anti-modern space, or secure refuge from the idea of capitalist dominance. Instead, it is integral and embedded in the experience of daily life, particularly in relation to modern labor and production, in a number of surprising and unexpected ways. Amateur space is complex and ambiguous: it seeps into other categorizations of space and cannot be easily sidelined as the marginal, unimportant, trivial aside to everyday life. (Knott, 2015, p. 47). It is a space of critical thinking allowing forms of practice that are freer than most forms of labor or work organization, yet at the same time does not constitute a complete threat to the interests of capital, is a permeable category within capitalist production, feeding normative modes of production whilst essentially demonstrating unique characteristics. Amateur space is heterogeneous, complex and

should not be reductively classified as unadulterated distraction or escape from the ordinary. It relates to other spaces of capitalism like professional space and the spaces of everyday life.

With its roots in nineteenth-century self-help, the professional amateur represented a new model of productive leisure, using free time to engage in tasks that were deemed morally, functionally and socially worthwhile. Amateur spaces mirror other spaces of everyday life while simultaneously stretching or quietly subverting these structures. This challenges the notion articulated by Hannah Arendt that things produced in free time are unnecessary and unproductive (Knott, 2015, p. 71). People started to populate playful workplaces again in a more massive way after the lockdown. Being in a group to work manually has always been normal. In southern Italy even today, many women meet outside their houses in the streets during the evening to work.

Working groups also becomes therapy, welfare groups. Scientific research about these micro words dynamics has been done in recent years. The Italian association *Gomitolorosa* promotes knitting for the wellbeing of patients undergoing medical therapies and chemotherapy in hospitals, leveraging the recovery of native wool and environmental protection. The association was born in June 2012 from an idea of Dr. Alberto Costa, recognized internationally for his contribution to the advancement of breast cancer treatment and innovative ideas in the field of scientific communication raising the standards of medical care. In April 2014 it was established as a non-profit association with the aim of promoting knitting in hospitals as a tool for reducing anxiety in patients, especially cancer patients. They offer four activities. Social solidarity: promotion knitting for the creation of products intended for the weakest members of society: children, patients, disabled, disadvantaged. Wool therapy: knitting for therapeutic purposes in hospitals and health facilities with the aim of improving life quality of patients and their families, restoring the well-being of the body and mind, reducing the state of anxiety while waiting for diagnosis or during treatment (Mayo Clinic Press Editors, 2023). Knitting in public: in place of aggregation, public spaces or remotely through online

meetings, to create, share, socialize and combat loneliness, also creating awareness campaigns.

*Gomitolorosa* supports knitting as a therapeutic tool for the individual recovery of psycho-physical wellbeing, donating therapeutic balls of yarn to hospitals, associations and amateur knitting groups (Gomitolorosa, 2023). There are many testimonies of appreciation for knitting and the numerous beneficial effects that derive from it. Alongside the anecdotal story, *Gomitolorosa* combined scientific research to explore the effects of knitting on human minds with an EEG (electroencephalogram) study, involving forty people. The doctors observed, through the scan, the activities of the brain, before and after knitting. With an innovative diagnostic tool called MEG, acronym for MagnetoEncephalography (which shields magnetic signals), the neurologists and neurophysiologists of the Besta Institute have recorded the magnetic and electrical activity of the cerebral cortex of forty experienced knitting volunteers aged between 27 and 63, before and after a twenty-minute knitting session. The aim was to scientifically determinate and measure any benefits for mental health, sustained attention and well-being resulting from this activity. The experiment was also repeated on a "control" group, subjects who do not habitually practice knitting.

«This research allows us to observe for the first time how knitting is an effective tool to support the empowerment of patients» observes Dr. Alberto Costa, «It promotes patient awareness and enables them to more fully understand their health, disease and treatment options, increasing adherence to treatment. When patients are actively involved in decisions regarding their health, they are more likely to follow medical advice and proactively engage in treatment pathways, knitting is an effective tool to support patient empowerment and improve the quality of care. Informed and engaged patients can collaborate more effectively with healthcare professionals, leading to a better understanding of patient needs and more personalized and targeted care, reducing anxiety and fear. With greater knowledge and control over their health

situation, patients can reduce the anxiety and fear associated with the disease, improving their overall emotional well-being».

Data revealed after the experiment identify that crochet is associated with an increase of the alerting and the orienting networks even after a brief, single work session and that this behavioral effect seems to have a counterpart in the modification seen in the global functional connectivity of the brain, where an increased speed of the information exchange between different brain areas have been seen. Moreover, we discuss the hypothesis that these effects on attentional networks are dissimilar from those determined by meditation, where an improvement in the executive control was previously demonstrated as the main effect. The results provided for the first time that crochet is associated with an increase in the attentional networks, and in alerting and orienting networks, paving the way for the use of textile-related arts in the neurorehabilitation. For a more complete picture, you can read the steps of the experiment and the results obtained in the article entitled *Crochet... a little hook to improve attention?* (Rossi, Muscio, Duran, Bonfoco, Dotta, Anversa, Tiraboschi, Visani 2022).

## **7. The conscious craftsman**

The origin of craftsmanship is one of life's great mysteries. It is unclear, it is not known when exactly it came into being, it could coincide with the big bang and the origin of the world. This fact increases its fascination and the desire to investigate it. Everyone can interpret it as they wish, which makes the first approach to the craft even more personal and individual. You don't think about how or who started it, but firstly how you started it yourself. The heyday of craft practices was during the Middle Ages, in Italy. The earliest guilds date back to the 10th century in Italy, and 13th century in England. The craftsman's workshop remains a place of creative solidarity, a place open to others and to dialogue. Three were the mediaeval pillars: church, empire, workshop. Guild membership was compulsory to operate, the organization descended from the

Roman *collegia*. The need to organize derives from the need to defend the laborer and its secrets, to feel united and part of a community. Core values were equality and solidarity, religiosity, love for your country and a taste for a job well done. The workshops modelled the town planning of cities, creating quarters or streets of artisans, to favor the exchange of goods ideas and facilitate surveillance. The artist and the craftsman were not separate figures because in the workshop all commissioned requests were fulfilled. This is still reflected today in the identification problems of artists who did not sign their names. The most famous artists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries began working as apprentices in workshops. The guild also provided education. Three-quarter of the Italian population in the last century was illiterate, the same thing did not happen in the fourteenth century. The breakdown of medieval structures occurred after the year 1000 due to the inability of workshops to contain and expand the phenomena of economic growth and cultural changes. Artisans main aim was not on personal accountability or profit but on the beauty of the objects produced, in contrast to the *principes* of politics and economics of the year 1000 who charted the path of today's capitalist economic system based on the individual's capacity and financial gain. The cultural revolution of humanism has its socio-economic reflection in individualism and not in communal and egalitarian corporatism. Occurred the decline not only of an economic system, but of a lifestyle of a collective mentality. The beauty and pleasure of producing beautifully crafted objects made way for a sense of business and profit at the expense of quality (Storia dell'artigianato italiano, 1979).

There was a strong spirit of cooperation, which is why works were created collectively by craftsmen and apprentices together with a personal awareness of the figure of the craftsman. This individual and collective consciousness is what still distinguishes social artisans today. The expert craftsman has since the Middle Ages figured as a master craftsman who is perforce a sociable expert. The civic and religious rituals that that organized the guild formed a social bond with the community surrounding, in which it was the master duty to participate creating ritual for social bonding. Due to industrialization, this link with the community was lost, which today is being rediscovered with hobby crafts. Elliott Krause in *Death of the guilds* (1999) emphasizes

how professional associations wakened in the last century under the pressure of the global impersonal market. What went missing is community, but the associations, the groups, the communities that craftsmen are creating bring the community back to the center.

How can a craftsman be part of a social group if guilds are missing? Work alone in a solo studio can make craftsmanship a social practice? Treating a person like a whole is a mark of sociable expertise. Social craft expertise doesn't create a community in an ideological or self-driven sense, they will encourage mentoring of the whole human beings and communication between members and non-expert subjects, not individual comparison isolation or shame (Sennett, 2008, p.249). Good craftsmanship implies socialism. To work well, people need freedom from means-ends relationship, curiosity, experience. Social craftwork turns the craftsman outward from the loneliness of his studio (Sennett, 2008, p.288). Glenn Adamson dedicates a chapter called *Amateur in thinking through craft* (2007). He criticizes the amateur figure affirming that: in the moment craft manifests itself as an expression of amateurism, it becomes troublesome. The problem begins with the word itself. Amateur means lover, from the Latin verb *amare* (to love), and one of the hallmarks of a lover is a lack of critical distance from the object of desire. If modern art, is grounded in searching self-awareness, then amateurism is a form of creativity that can never be integrated into this model. Craft hobbies are activities done in a spirit of self-gratification rather than critique, amateur pursuits their own worlds of reference. Such closed worlds are easily dismissed from the outside. The amateur mindset implies a complete indifference to the self-critical values of the *avant garde*. The problematic concept of "the outsider" art is only the most extreme version of this way of thinking (Adamson, 2007, p. 139). Adamson continues by grasping that hobbyists tend to be quite passive in social terms, in its modern form, amateurism should be seen first and foremost as a result of the surplus economy. Sewing in the living room or woodworking in the garage are activities that reflect a culture of prosperous excess. The hobbyist is the positive mirror image of the worker who has been made redundant at the factory. The unemployed and free time craft workers are described by Zygmunt Bauman as "wasted lives," the leftover human products of modernity, referring to Marx's concept of surplus labor (Zygmunt, 2003).



The successful displacement of unused time into harmless leisure activities has been vital to the project of capitalist expansion. In this sense, hobbyism is the antithesis of an *avant garde* (Adamson, 2007, p. 140).

Craft is undoubtedly also part of the capitalist production system in which we are all immersed, but this does not mean that there are only negative meanings attached to this practice. Right now, we are faced with a situation that is the opposite to the one described by Adamson and other scholars who criticize the theme. Social craft it's not an escape from the reality or a passive activity, surplus labor or an antithesis of the *avant garde*, but an exercise in physical and psychological presence. A moment of extreme consciousness. While you are manipulating you are grounded in present time, with other people and your master. Participants learn about the habits of others, share parts of one's life. The masters are assistants in these exchange processes, for this reason they are conscious craftsmen. They are extremely aware (also in a critical way) of the world around them because they know it by experiencing it first-hand and through others, they are constantly immersed in the community and the groups they work with. «Before leaving for a community meeting with members and associates, I call the hotel to make sure the food is good, and the portions will satisfy the participants. I know them and I know what they eat and how much they want to eat » (Personal Interview, February 2024). A detail that may seem silly, but it really struck me, underlining the depth knowledge between people in craft groups. I think the teachers are aware of many private and sensitive facts that people confess to them. Not out of gossip but because they have the capacity to receive. Furthermore, social artisans are firmly aware of the economic, social and political mechanisms that govern the globe. They have knowledge about the mechanisms concerning climate change, recycling, material recovery, mental well-being, active community maintenance, education, volunteering..... the future. Craft is litmus test for social changes and innovations. The social craft workshop mirrors the medieval one being an active presence in the communities' fabrics.

The reappraisal of social craft is certainly the result of a new sensibility linked to leisure, mental well-being, social, and the change in lifestyles taking place in this last

century. Every change or modification in daily life, leads to a chain of other changes, how is the academy dealing with them?

There is still a stigma in academia and in the artistic world that downplays anything that is not considered art or canonical craftsmanship. What ordinary people like and are interested in, is not interesting on an economic or exhibition level, especially if is related to a predominantly female audience, it still struggles to find space in publications. Perhaps the revival of social craft is a very topical issue, and the consequences are yet to be seen. Are we not used to shining a beacon on what is not openly revolutionary, but it moves in the rear?

There are critical and stigmatizing texts about amateurs, but also very positive texts, emphasizing the power of recreational craft. What is missing are the first-person interviews and experiences, an objective vision that breaks away from the concept of canonical aesthetic beauty but goes to glimpse what lies behind an object that may not be considered and defined craftsmanship by most people.

In addition, there is a lack of research focusing on the figure per se of the recreational craftsman who is not just a person who enjoys hobbies but is an individual with numerous practical and social skills, capable of teaching, being with people, listening to them, communicating, being present and being fully aware of social and even global dynamics. Amateur space needs to be studied with the same sensitivity as everyday life. We cannot just describe amateur space and expect its full richness to be revealed; the goal is to develop a sensitive theory that encapsulates its essence. Investigation of amateur craft demands a departure from judging the quality or content of production and a greater consideration of the alternative temporal experiences that arise in the course of making (Knott, 2015 p.91).

## **8. Varieties of capitalism**

Why are there differences when dealing with the subject of handicrafts between Italy and England? Why, despite the rich and grandiose history of Italian handicrafts, are

those who do social handicrafts often discredited or taken for granted? Why in Italy it is more difficult to turn a passion into a job? Why English people, who are considered reserved, shy and sometimes cold, like to get together to work in groups and the same thing does not easily happen in Italy? The peculiarities of social handicrafts and the differences between the two cultures, which emerged in the interviews, can be traced back to the different economic evolutions of the countries, which have led to different economic, political and social developments. Geographical differentiations are also involved.

Capitalism is an economic and political system in which property, business, and industry are controlled by private owners rather than the state, with the purpose of making maximum profit. Capitalism globalized national economies around the world, cancelling out the differences of individual countries, but even within capitalisms there are differentiations. Peter A. Hall and David Soskice in 2001 wrote *Varieties of Capitalism: The Institutional Foundations of Comparative Advantage*. The book explains a representative scheme of the two existing types of capitalist economy, taking Germany as an example as opposed to the US and the UK ones. Essentially, most other advanced capitalist countries can then be slotted into one of these categories, even if some are ambiguous. Starting from this premise, the book then purports to explain not just why a whole range of political-economic factors have taken the shape they have now in different countries, but also expects to be able to predict which measures are going to succeed or failing in the future. Two types of economies are identified: *CMEs*, coordinate market economy in which institution encourage cooperation between economic actors and specific assets. Germany and Italy are part of it. *LMEs* liberal market economies, in which free market institutions are there to encourage competitive market- based relationships between economic actors and switchable assets. Anglo Saxons, and commonwealth nations are part of it. *CMEs* will often have centralized bargaining regimes on national level. Firms are more likely to coordinate their training expectations in the longer term. Employers in a *CME* sector might collaborate to develop a list of skill requirements, and then cooperate with governments in developing specific economic program. Firms are expected to cultivate corporate governance that furthers these norms. Hence in the stereotypical *CME*, firms

are also more likely to cooperate to develop industry-wide standardization. LMEs tend not to provide for collective bargaining on a sectoral or national basis and instead rely on more decentralized, adversarial and voluntarist industrial relations systems. Britain is a good example here, where the key figure in the trade union is arguably the shop steward at workplace level rather than any peak-level bargaining institution. LMEs are left with highly generalized systems of education and weak apprenticeship programs.

Because firms are more directly answerable to shareholders in LMEs and not under state supervision, firms are governed by powerful CEO figure who are appointed and dismissed by the board. There are strong hierarchies in LME corporate governance, Inter-firm relations are competitive. «Economic coordination in Britain's LME is secured primary in the market mechanism and it is generally by maintaining that mechanism, and the discipline it enforces on individual actors in a deregulated setting, that superior levels of coordination are achieved» (Hall, Soskice, 2001 pp. 229-230)

## 8.1 Italian capitalism

Capitalism is modern life, modern economy, it is a practical phenomenon that influence life of people, an economic instrument influencing and being influenced by people. For this reason, capitalism is used in different modes in all around the world. Italian Academics uses to make another kind of division of capitalism, based on the structure of companies, model of gesture, balance of power between State and economy, culture, historical reasons, role of banks.

There are three kind of capitalism (Campa, 2015). In *The Nature and Evolution of Capitalism in Italy*, Antonio Campa identifies them:

- Personal/Individual capitalism: typical of Italian factories, characterized by the presence of small companies, with less than 20 workers, a few investments, and a small board of directors with a limited number of managers or none at all.

Generally, managers are also owner of company. Companies are usually small family businesses.

- Managerial capitalism: typical of Anglo-Saxon nations (UK and USA); in this model power is decentralized, company are usually big multinational or corporate, indeed they can be shared business. The governance is composed by a lot of investors that control shares of the society. The managerial figure it's fundamental, their roles govern the business and get the results that shareholders expect.
- Rhenish/Japanese capitalism: typical of some northern regions of Germany but especially of Japan. This kind of capitalism is characterized by big companies as in managerial capitalism, but governance has a fundamental and detached role from managers. The power is not decentralized as into the previous model, indeed in Rhenish/ Japanese capitalism governance is controlled by few important and big shareholders, generally Banks, companies of investment funds, or bigger companies.

Italian capitalistic system hasn't got very big companies, as in other countries, but is characterized by the presence of many micro centers of production. This economic system started during the 1970s. In that period Italian capitalists created small companies connected with each other's. Production was selective and characterized off high quality final products. Production chain was central, indeed Italian companies has always been famous for creating outside the scheme products using creativity, good raw materials linked and produced in the territories where the factories were located. Products were designed and created to be sold on limited segment of market. This organization of work started with manufacturing, in particular the textile sector and the fashion industry in general. Subsequently production focused also on furniture or technological products, following the same mode of production (Vasapollo, 2008). Italian artistic and high-quality craftsmanship production has its roots in this context.

The historian Franco Ramella has made an important contribution with his book *Terra e telai: sistemi di parentela e manifattura nel Biellese dell'Ottocento* (Land and Looms:

Kinship Systems and Manufacturing in Nineteenth Century Biella) (2022) about the history of Italian capitalism, which intersects with the history of craftsmanship. Economic changes completely overturn the traditional view of the Italian countryside in the nineteenth century mainly based on textile manufactures. Industrial capitalism imposed a much harder regime of exploitation and new forms of precarity, bringing misery into the lives of both peasants and factory workers, destroying the family balances that kept the working world on its feet.

With the industrial revolution production was moved out of the family house. An ever-larger quantity of workers was assembled into new dedicated establishments: the modern factories. The impact on productivity was huge: human work became faster, as it was progressively subdued to the rhythm of production, altering both the nature of the traditional manufacturing process, the labor itself and the quality. The life of the new factory workers had drastically changed, as they were periodically pushed into precarity by the unstable nature of industrial products and their presence on the market. Whenever trade slumped and factory production stopped, peasant-manufacturers were laid off by their employers. In the absence of industry, farmers and their families went back to their traditional occupation, from which they derived the basic income for their survival. The textile industry was the most active, in Italy it developed mainly in the north: in the Altomilanese, Biella, Bergamo and Upper Vicenza areas, the remains of some flourishing textile industries remain as traces of industrial archaeology; for example, the workers' villages of Crespi d'Adda, Nuova Schio, the Marzottos' Valdagno, the Olcese's Campione sul Garda and the Leumann Village in Collegno. Since the fourteenth century, Italy has been the focal point of the textile industry. Processing took place in the countryside and the organization was similar to that of the medieval workshop, the development was mechanized but also strongly manual, being Italy a nation that has never been totally invested by the industrial revolution and has never lost the thread that binds it with its ancient history of craftsmanship. What caused a definitive end to production was the process of delocalization that began last century. The third industrial revolution, that of the large hi-tech multinationals, found the Italian economy unprepared due to pre-existing historical and economic habits. Italian industrial districts are very much tied

to the places where they are born, there are social and territorial balances that cannot be useful or reflect the principles of multinationals that nullify differences by making globalization their flag and their warhorse (Tedesco, 2024).

Economic and consequently social globalization made worldwide economy to take another way, in which production is acceptable only if it generates big profits with less costs. China, that can be considered the anti-Italian capitalistic system, today is considered the big factory of world.

Luciano Vasapollo, wrote *Storia di un capitalismo piccolo piccolo. Lo stato italiano e i capitani d'impresa dal '45 a oggi* (History of a small small capitalism. The Italian state and the captains of enterprise from '45 to today) (2008). In the title he emphasizes the limitedness of Italian capitalism, using the adjective small twice, and in the body of the text retraces the birth and subsequent the landing of modern capitalism in Italy, retracing the stages of the birth and liquidation of state capitalism, replaced by the cheerful management of privatizations in the last decade. While in other countries capital has continued to make productive investments capable of creating good jobs, the great industrial fortunes of the *Belpaese* have soon been converted into financial investments, banking and stock market maneuvers, artful purchases and bankruptcies that do not generate social wealth, but progressively eroding employment levels in industry, public administration and services. Financialization, the continuous recourse to state subsidy and the illegality that pervades economic-political practice in Italy, are the asphyxiating responses of an entrepreneurial group today more than ever incapable of confronting foreign markets, the challenge of exports, and international competitors. Everything suggests that the current phase of crisis in the industrial system and, more generally, in the Italian economic system goes beyond the level of contingencies and has deeper roots. As stated earlier, Italy is characterized by a coordinate market economy. An economy based on small and medium-sized enterprises, with a promiscuity of ownership and management roles. A human capital that appears inadequate for the complexity of a globalized world, and a social capital that is too often disregarded. In 2019 Beniamino Andrea Piccone wrote *L'Italia: molti*

*capitali, pochi capitalisti (Italy: many capitals, few capitalists)*. The book deals with various topics but is mainly about the decline of Italian big business capitalism. But the main question we probably need to ask is: have there ever been large capitalist companies such as in the liberal market economy in Italy? And what are the historical reasons that led to the development of a certain economic model? Large capitalist private and Italian born enterprise has never existed in Italy, but if the analysis may appear pitiless, some distinctions must be made. The Italian medium-sized enterprise works and is often a driving excellence. The so-called NEC model (North-Eastern and Central Italy) has, especially in the 1980s, restored oxygen to our industrial system. «The reason why interest in this type of enterprise has grown is that they have performed better throughout the period from 1996 onwards, and particularly during the crisis, becoming the most dynamic part of both the industrial districts and the Italian manufacturing industry tout court» (Zamagni, 2018). Italian business culture has been influenced by the very long tradition of craftsmanship, which combines pride in creative and well-made work with the desire to keep the workplace friendly and human, this working climate still characterizes the NEC model. But parties in power since the 1970s, made a huge contribution in slowing down change and the Italian entrepreneurial mentality. The PCI (Italian communist party), always believed that large enterprises should be managed by the state like the Soviet model, and the DC (Christian democracy party), always favored family businesses with reference to the values of the Catholic Church. As a result, the Italian entrepreneurs gradually became disinterested in big business, with few exceptions, and cultivated excellent talents for SMEs (social market economies), producing an entrepreneurial dualism that is difficult to overcome today (Zamagni, 2018). The main weaknesses of Italian capitalism include the political control of public bodies with a central mediating role of the governing parties; strong tensions between labor and capital; conspicuous compensatory subsidy interventions by public finances; rigidity of the banking system and enterprises, again with an active mediating role of the parties. Relational entanglements have prevented the formation of a capitalist class ready to face the challenges of the European single market and globalization (Barca, 1999). The amazing performance of medium-sized companies is not enough, however,



if they lack the support of big business. And what has happened to the latter? What are the causes of its decline?

According to Amatori and Brioschi, large companies have never developed due to the abnormally large state-owned industry and consequently the extraordinary development of small and medium-sized enterprises with a family-based board organization (Barca, 1999). The role played by Mediobanca in Enrico Cuccia's time, during the twentieth century, was fundamental. He excessively protected the system perpetrated by the institution, to protect the capitalistic families, preventing or slowing down the development of a new managerial classes (Piccone, 1983). A system that has been repeated over time (Bruno, 2019), (Cattani, 2016).

The economic fragility of Italian capitalism is more than a problem, to the point that rather than fragility we should first speak of Italy's "economic identity". Italy has economic peculiarities that distinguish it from other European countries, in fact it is difficult to place it in a particular position.

The relationship between the state and the market, between small and medium-sized enterprises and large ones, makes Italy different from most western countries. Therefore, constantly faces an identity crisis dictated by its nature which puts it at an economic disadvantage compared to other nations. To understand the reasons, we must investigate the economic history of the country. Italy circumvented the modernization of the 1970s through cultural production districts. This has led to strong criticism of the craftsman because it's seen as a ballast. The great condemnation and fortune of Italy is the immense culture that has characterized its history but always seems to keep it stuck in limbo, from a conservative force that is afraid of innovation and while we are watching, to abroad everything changes (Micelli, 2011, p.55). Giuseppe Berta in *Che fine ha fatto il capitalismo italiano?* (What has happened to Italian capitalism?) (2016) uses car production as an example. On the one hand, we have an Italian and European market that is struggling to keep up to date, and on the other, the American or Asian market, which has long since invested in electric cars and a new vision of public and private transport. The reasons of this stagnation are to be found in the Italian country's economic history.

In 1933, during fascism regime, the Institute for Industrial Reconstruction (in acronym IRI) was founded. It was an Italian economic public body with industrial policy functions, with the intention of preventing the bankruptcy of the main Italian banks and companies, avoiding the collapse of the economy, already tried by the world crisis that exploded in 1929. Since the post-war period, the Institute has been a protagonist first, of reconstruction, and then of the Italian economic miracle. After the second world war IRI progressively expanded its areas of intervention and became the focus of public mediations in the Italian economy. In 1980, IRI was a group of about 1,000 companies with more than 500,000 employees. It was one of the largest non-oil companies outside the United States of America; in 1992 it closed the year with a turnover of 75,912 billion lire and a loss of 5,182 billion lire. Still in 1993 IRI was the seventh largest conglomerate in the world, with a turnover of about 67 billion dollars. (Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale S.p.A., 2024) The IRI model normalized state help in maintaining large Italian companies, which without public funds struggle to survive. One of the most striking cases is FIAT. A cheque for 220 billion was drawn by the Italian state from 1975 to 2012 to support Fiat. 37 long years in which Italy helped one of the country's excellencies. This is a downward estimate because it does not take into account the contributions of recent years: the incentives to buy cars and the periods of redundancy paid by the system (Carinci, 2024). IRI was not born out of a precise plan, but instead for the survival of Mussolini's regime. Through IRI, the Italian state managed a large grouping of companies from such important production sectors as war steel, shipbuilding, telephony, including companies such as Alfa Romeo, Finmeccanica, Fincantieri and RAI. During the post-World War II economic boom, IRI and ENI were the major players in Italy's mixed economy, where state and market intertwined formed an "interdependent relationship".

However, roughly from the 1970s onwards, IRI entered a slow process of decline, which would culminate in its liquidation thirty years later. Berta traces the reason for this decline to the lack of systematic rules as a barrier and a boundary between politics and business, which party militancy itself continually induces people to cross, with economic risks that are accentuated as positions, personal and group's interests, are strengthened and extended.

The mixed economy has been an important pillar of Italian capitalism for more than 50 years, it is natural to ask what remains after this season. For Berta, the answer is: not much. Two faces of Italian capitalism can be found right now. The first, and the most worrying, is that part of Italian industry which is undergoing a process of disintegration. Berta gives the examples of Ilva in Taranto, once the cornerstone of the Italian steel industry and now suffocated by more than 900 million in debt, but also of the Piombino steel hub, whose fate is linked to an acquisition process by part of an Algerian group. Pirelli also, was recently acquired by ChemChina, ending up directly under the control of the Chinese state. Fiat is also included in this list because we must never forget that Fiat Chrysler Automobiles (the only case of aggregation that was inspired by the Italian industrial experience) had attempted a merger with General Motors, which was then rejected by Detroit group. If GM had not rejected FCA's proposal, it is likely that its path would have become much more similar to the Pirelli's one.

Even important publicly controlled groups have shown a clear are decaying in their performance: Eni, Enel and Telecom have in fact recorded a drastic decrease in their profits. The other facet of Italian capitalism after the mixed economy season is less visible and more rooted in an opaquer band of everyday life: intermediate enterprises. These prove to be more solid than large companies, and rooted in the territories where they were born and subsequently branched out. Made in Italy has been able to do very well, also showing excellent results in some companies in the South. What economic reality can define Italian capitalism today? Berta proposes the NEC model highlighted by Giorgio Fuà (Fuà, 1983). This model indicates a phenomenon of industrialization based mainly in the North-East and Centre, made up of local, family-run businesses, spread across the territory and mainly linked to the countryside and small and medium-sized towns (Berta, 2016). The Italian capitalisms is a capitalism of relations on two levels, between companies and between the company and the founder. This company organization has a limitation that can later turn into a problem: the hallmark of a small company, often family-oriented, is the personality of the artisan entrepreneur and founder. The enterprise is identified with the particular talents of its creator and then becomes a company. When the creator is no longer there, the identity

is lost, and this can create many problems in the future succession. The core, the spirit, of the founder it's usually a figure that is impossible to restore in equal parts. This also causes many problems in the generational transitions. Often small companies close because of family issues. A survey on the Lombardy craft industry promoted by the Lombardy regional council's craft department in 1973 showed that in 82% of cases the current owners of craft businesses had personally started the business, 8% corresponded to cases of family transfers, 3.9% transfers between strangers and only 5.7% were cases of inheritance of the business (Storia dell'artigianato Italiano, 1927, introduction).

The difficult generation transition that takes place in a shop or an enterprise becomes more cumbersome when talking about handicrafts. In handicraft enterprises, the real distinguishing feature is a production structure that can be fully modern but with an original and predominant personal imprint. This character must be continually taken into account for the understanding of the craft sector and the correct formulation of an economic policy for the craft field. According to ISTAT, the majority of our industrial fabric is made up of micro businesses that have fewer than 10 employees, although different from each other, even if not all of them produce customizable objects. The objects that are produced require different valorization policies even if the companies are small. How do you valorize companies that are categorized as artisan but produce different objects and effects for the buyer? Are they destined to remain in the niche? (Micelli, 2011, p.47). What is called the Italian "economic identity" is a consequence of historical facts but also a productive choice.

## **8.2 Made in Italy**

Italy would have an advantage over the rest of the capitalist world due to the strong interconnections between small business, arising in the middle among cities and the countryside?

Industrial relations are muffled by the social networks in which they are embedded? Should the other regions follow the NEC model? Would a further north-south economic division occur?

Notwithstanding the historical events that have shaped Italy's economic history and the questions about a possible change in the country's future that arise spontaneously what is repeatedly emphasized is that artistic craftsmanship has been alongside Italian industry for centuries, always being a fundamental part of it in different forms and in different historical periods. There has never been in Italy a totalizing industrial revolution as happened in England, because of the strong links between the state monetary aids and industry development. For this reason, the roots of Italian manufacturing and craftsmanship have never been torn up. This makes "Made in Italy" a flag of quality in the world since time immemorial, but also an uncompetitive country. Italy still remains strongly linked to a number of classic craft productions, even in today's industry.

The current situation is not conducive to the introduction of new practices such as recreational and social crafts. There are many associations that protect the figure of the artistic craftsman at the guild on different legislative levels all around the peninsula. Organizations like: the National Confederation of Craftsmen and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (CNA), *Confartigianato*, craft unions in the different provinces, territorial associations, regional federations, trade associations, reinforce the differentiation between artistic craftsmanship and all other practices, putting artistic craftsmanship on a prevailing higher level of consideration. For this reason, it is difficult to turn a manual practice from a passion into a job, because you do not enjoy subsidies and economic or legislative protection. One is recognized as a craftsman if supported or protected by a corporation, only those who have dedicated their whole life to the practice, or studied to become an artisan can be considered a craftsman. There are also geographical and social issues related to the Italian imagery of craftsmanship. Italian climate is usually characterized by hot summers and mild winters, which is why it is normal to leave the house during free time. Outdoors activities are not about craftsmanship. Probably the strongest glue between people the Italian food. Italians

get together to eat and cook in the company of friends in houses or in restaurants. Cooking can be considered a manual practice; chefs, pizza makers, cooks are also protected by *Confartigianato* and professional associations that distinguish between those who cook amateurishly and those who do as a job. Through Italian food, right now probably the traction of made in Italy if we evaluate the impressive numbers that many influencer chefs have today on social networks or in the numerous cooking program and channels airing, the history and culture of Italy is represented and sold to the world. Here again, the differentiation is well delineated and difficult to cross, with the aim of protect the «Italianness» (CNA, 2024), (Confartigianato, 2024), (Unione artigiani, 2024).

Kate Devine in *Selling Italy: Craft and Italianness in Italy at Work: Her Renaissance in Design Today (1950–53) (2022)*, emphasizes how Italian craft was used for changing the reputation of the Italian nation after the fascist period and the two world wars.

CNA was the successor to two earlier bodies, the *Comitato Assistenza Distribuzione Materiali Artigianato* (Committee for the Assistance and Distribution for Artists' Materials), and Handicrafts Development Inc., both set up by Jewish-Italian émigré Max Ascoli and his wife. Together they organized an Italian arts and crafts exhibition in America in 1952. Spreading the Italian artefacts in North America was made possible by the presence of completely different objects on the American market; for this reason, artefacts were valued and there was no competition. Americans have also undergone a strong industrialization that has moved them away from small-scale or handcrafted production, making Italian objects even more interesting.

In 1949, a letter from the US Undersecretary of Commerce, C.V. Whitney, to Meyric Rogers suggested the idea of an exhibition of Italian handicrafts, underscoring that craft items «not only represent an important Italian industry, but do not compete directly with similar American product» (Devine, 2022 p.262).

*Italy at Work: Her Renaissance in Design Today* was opened in 1952 at the Museum of Fine arts Houston. It was a way of positioning Italian products and Italians in the hearts of Americans. In America, Italians and Italian Americans were a target of considerable hostility during and after the Second World War. With this kind of

cultural events, the American State were not investing in a former enemy nation's economy but encouraging its citizens to buy Italian things.

American support of Italian craft industries has been a strong instrument in teaching men who had lived a short lifetime under totalitarianism, the desirability of democracy and American style, like they knew the power of craft as strong bulwark against communism (HANDICRAFT LINES RECOVER IN ITALY; Senator Brewster Tells Italian Chamber Here of Amazing Gains in Short Time, 1948). (Italy at Work: The Italian Lifestyle on Display, 2021)

Mady in Italy was useful for highlighting the difference between an industrial model of Fordist origin typical of the American and English economy, and an Italian model deeply rooted in the artisan tradition and culture of the territories. Italy does not have hegemony in the scientific and technological field but has been able to create companies producing new original objects and often in limited series continuously aligned with the evolution of taste, with quality levels that stand out completely from mass-produced objects. Mass production and craftsmanship cannot dialogue (Micelli 2011, p.156).

The Italian state continues to use today the self-determination of its craft culture as a mark of recognition in the world even today. There are many campaigns in favor of "Made in Italy" objects made by artisans in various ways.

With the Ministry of Enterprise and Made in Italy (established in 2006), a new campaign called @officialbe.it on Instagram and madeinitaly.gov.it on their site was born in 2021. For the promotion of the brand in the world the ministry, collaborates with ICE - Agency for the promotion abroad and internationalization of Italian companies (established in 1926), and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Italian republic (established in 1848). On the Instagram page, they promote Italian food, design, sports, architecture, manufacture and car engineering, reporting Italian export results of niche but also affordable products. Made in Italy is associated with the word gov, government, a reminder of how Italian products from small and medium-sized enterprises are still the driving force behind the country's economy, and businesses are tied to the promotion of their products by the Italian state. Those who followed the

last Giro d'Italia, in May 2024, a sporting event followed by hundreds of millions of fans worldwide, could not fail to notice the presence of the sponsor [madeinitaly.gov.it](http://madeinitaly.gov.it) during interviews or the award ceremonies on the stages. A certainly coherent choice of presence, in one of the most famous and followed sporting events in the world, which through cycling promotes the Italian territory and culture. (Made in Italy, simply extraordinary, 2024). Can these choices be limiting and stereotypical or topical?

### **8.3 Third sector**

If artistic handicrafts can be placed in the second sector of the Italian economy, the one concerning industrial production, where do we place the social craft?

Playful crafting is not seen as a steppingstone that could encourage new people to take up crafting as a profession, or a slice of the market that can move large sums of money, but only as a hobby. Social craft groups are included in the third sector of the economy, also known as the non-profit sector: the set of those private entities that pursue non-profit, civic, solidarity and socially useful purposes promoting and implementing activities of general interest through forms of voluntary and gratuitous action, mutuality or production and exchange of goods and services. As defined by Law 6/2016, no. 106, article 2, on «Delegation to the Government for the reform of the Third Sector, social enterprise and for the regulation of universal civil service».

Seven years ago, the Code of the Third Sector (Legislative Decree No. 117/2017) came into force. The regulatory plan of the reform was completed a year earlier, with the aim of regulating and enhancing that vast socio-economic sector to which associations, voluntary organizations, social enterprises and other types of non-profit entities belong. Despite the progressive and important growth, both in numerical and economic terms of the non-profit sector in our country (according to ISTAT, there are over 360,000 organizations, accounting for about 5% of GDP), the regulations concerning the Third Sector were fragmented, disorganized, partial and incomplete. The reform needs other measures to be fully operational.



First of all, the one concerning taxation: the third sector is waiting for the authorization by the EU of some rules concerning the new tax regime. In addition, there are other uncertainties, such as the actual implementation of the change in the VAT regime (European Union value-added tax, a value added tax on goods and services within the European Union EU) from excluded to exempt for all non-commercial entities. And a whole series of administrative simplifications are currently the subject of parliamentary discussion.

Moreover, even though the implementation of the Single National Register of the Third Sector is certainly positive, and more than 122,000 organizations are now registered, the platform still requires several major simplification and usability interventions by organizations. The third sector is often discredited because it has been the scene of many scandals involving successful people and Italian politicians, taking advantage of the sector's lack of legislative clarity. This way of approaching the third sector has contributed to create a negative reputation and in the common imagination, being considered an area with useless activities. This is also the reason why relational craft struggles to gain a foothold in Italy.

The third Sector is recognized as having a specific aptitude to participate together with public actors in the realization of the general interest.

This recognition it's not happening on a regulatory level, which is, however, struggling to take off within the Italian administrative system. Although, the active and proactive involvement of the third sector in the definition and implementation of public policies, as well as in the implementation of the PNRR (National Recovery and Resilience Plan after covid pandemic), would certainly ensure that important social and economic development objectives in the territories would be effectively achieved. In fact, it would seem legitimate to believe that the third sector has a preponderant function, rather than being a mere executor of projects, a co-leader in the implementation of public policies.

There are administrative realities that effectively involve the Third Sector, but many others that choose to operate in solitude, despite the presence of active organizations capable of making the right contribution in the elaboration of effective solutions that

meet the needs of communities. There is no doubt that shared tools between administration and social associations, where effectively practiced, can be a guarantee of greater success in the implementation of public policies. It is now more crucial than ever to enhance co-programming and co-planning between the public administration and the Third Sector. Only joint action, in terms of skills, vision and experience, can in fact offer an effective and valid response to social needs, in line with the rationale of the reform. (Meoli, 2024)

#### **8.4 Define yourself**

The Italian legislative codification of craftsmanship and third sector, is also reflected in the common imagination and spoken language. During interviews, hobbyists' craftspeople struggle to define themselves as artisans, but in general, struggle to give themselves a definition. Artistic handicrafts have much more structured boundaries than social handicrafts, which intersect with many different activities and purposes. Therefore, it is certainly more difficult to identify. But in addition to this structural fact, there is a sense of awkwardness, often shame and a limitation in finding a definition of oneself as a craftsman in Italian social craft sphere, especially for older subjects. Even if one has years of practice and numerous completed works behind, it is not obvious to call yourself *Artigiano*. Is legitimate, when the word is codified and refers to a well-defined figure. An artisan is only one who sells, exhibits, has a shop, is a member of *Confartigianato*, discovered himself as an artisan at 16 and not at 45, who has the courage to define himself as such. Of course it is, but can it be a unique dedication for everyone? How should everything else be defined? Should we find new words? A person who offers recreational handicraft courses out of passion, and has been practicing his or her art for decades despite having had a working life outside the handicraft or artistic sphere, can be defined as an artisan, a craftswoman or a craftsman?

## 8.5 British capitalism

Britain should be treated as the prototype project of state capitalism in the world economic system (Silverwood, Berry 2023). England is considered the first capitalistic nation in the world. The establishment of a capitalist economy was preceded by a long-drawn-out process of commercialization and socio-economic changes in the country. The available evidence suggests that the market sector of the Domesday economy in 1086 (Domesday is the name of the manuscript collecting the results of a large census completed in 1086, covering most of England and part of Wales) could not have been more than 25% of England's GDP (Britnell and Campbell 1995). Between 1086 and 1600, the dominant labor relations changed from a combination of subsistence production; production mainly for the immediate consumption of the producers, with a limited market exchange, tributary labor and slavery, to self-employed labor, producing mainly for market exchange (Inikori, 2002 pp. 28-33), (Inikori, 2020). The ending of slavery in England left the figure of the serfdom, somewhere between a slave and a free man, as the dominant labor relation. By the mid-fifteenth century, serfdom also ended, setting the stage for the intensification of the commercializing process. Contrary to the Marxian schema, in which capitalism followed the ending of serfdom, it took more than three centuries after the ending of serfdom for a capitalist economy to be established in England. What followed the demise of serfdom was the development of production mainly for market exchange by self-employed labor (organized in families) freed from serfdom. By the seventeenth century, the English economy was fully commercialized, but not yet capitalist. In 1525 out of a total population of roughly 2,4 million in England, there were 600,000 free wage workers and 1.65 million peasants (Flinn, 1982), (Levine, Kehoe 1980). Estimates for 1688 show there were 227,440 self-employed families in the agricultural sector and 284,997 wage-earning families in all sectors of England's economy (Lindert 1980, pp. 685-712). Family farmers still outnumbered wage-earning families in English agriculture in the late seventeenth century. Mingay pointed out the timeline and the market conditions for the capitalist transformation of English agriculture in his argument that the transformation of copyholders and freeholders into wage laborers occurred largely after 1660, caused mainly by more than a hundred years of low and fluctuating

agricultural prices that hit the small cultivators disproportionately hard (Allen 1992, pp. 1-21), (Mingay 1968, pp. 29). Prolonged low agricultural prices made wage incomes in the capitalist sector more attractive to self-employed small cultivators. Family farmers were displaced as the numerically dominant producers in English agriculture in the mid-eighteenth century by tenant farmers employing wage labor. The growth of large farms employing wage labor was very much aided by the growth of manufacturing and commerce, which increased non-agricultural employment. The growth of manufacturing and commerce gave rise to expanding non-agricultural employment, which provided non-agricultural incomes for young men and women to marry early and raise families, thereby reducing the age at first marriage for women, and at the same time reducing the number of women remaining unmarried for life. The resulting increase in birth rate was the main source of population growth in England from the mid-eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth (Wrigley 1983). Industrialization in England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries largely created its own labor through the demographic response of peasant and proletarian families (Families dependent mainly on wages) demanding for industrial labor. As David Levine has demonstrated, expropriated peasants (peasants who lost their lands) contributed less than 50% of the increased number of proletarians in England from 2.5 million in 1700 to 14 million in 1850 and 16.5 million in 1871, the rest coming from population growth among peasant families and the proletarian families themselves, as they both responded to employment opportunities in the expanding non-agricultural sectors, particularly industrial employment (Levine 1984, pp. 104-15; 1985, pp. 170-1). Free wage earners were the numerically dominant workers in the economy. Of the total 2,759,083 adult males employed in the national economy, 1,558,563 (56.5 %) were wage/salary employees. Of the 980,750 employed in agriculture, 744,407 (75.9 %) were wage earners, 141,460 (14.4 %) employers and 94,883 (9.7 %) self-employed owner cultivators and tenants. Factory workers constituted only 24.6% of the 1,278,283 employed in manufacturing, handicraft and retail trades; the remaining 964,177 (75.4 %) were in the latter category. The major components of the service sector (import and export, shipping, internal transportation, finance, education, government), employed in all certainty, the 500,050 wage earners unassigned by the census enumerators to the

listed sectors. But the industrial sector was still dominated numerically by self-employed handicraft producers.

The national economy, therefore, was yet to achieve the modern industrial capitalism, as we know it today. Economic development varied from region to region. The economy of southeast England was far from that of industrial capitalism, with handicraft production and retail trades overwhelmingly dominant. Same were for the economies of the other southern regions. The regional distribution of capitalist industry points to the main causal factors in the process of capitalist development in England. From 1086 to 1650, population grew thanks to the wool trade: raw wool production for export, and woolen textile production for export and for the domestic markets. (Inikori 2002, pp. 24-33). Southeast England was a major beneficiary of the developments of this period, trading with continental Europe, at a time when Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire were among the most backward counties in England. Population growth and raw wool production raised the value of land to the advantage of large sheep owners and-intensive agricultural production, reducing earnings of self-employed, small landholders; while proto-industrial, woolen textile production and commerce offered wage employment incomes higher than those from small family farms.

From 1650 to 1850 a dramatic geographical change in the markets for English manufactures happened, in particularly woolen textiles. For several centuries, northwest Europe (Germany, Holland, Flanders, and France) and northern Europe (Norway, Denmark, Toeland, Greenland, and the Balric) were the main export markers for English woolen textiles. But from the second half of the seventeenth century, English producers lost much of those markets. While English woolen cloth exports to northwest and northern Europe decreased, exports to Atlantic markets (West Africa, the Americas, Portugal, and Spain) grew phenomenally following the mercantilism economy. Lancashire moved from being among the lowest wage county in 1767-70 to being among one of the three highest. Thus, the domestic market in both regions also experienced considerable expansion during the period. It was this combined expansion of export markets and the regional domestic markets that created

market conditions for the growth of the factory system and the development and diffusion of new technologies in Lancashire and Yorkshire (Gregory, 1982). Lancashire overwhelmingly dominated the mechanization of cotton weaving from the 1830s. 56.5% cent of power looms employed in cotton weaving in Great Britain in 1835 were in Lancashire; in 1850, the proportion was 70.9% (Timmins, 1993). This is why Lancashire and Yorkshire West Riding dominated wage, salary employment in manufacturing in England in the first half of the nineteenth century. The growth of the factory system and technological innovation greatly reduced manufacturing cost per unit of output and rendered self-employed, small-scale handicraft production uncompetitive in other regions.

This passage is very important, because it laid the foundations for the English industrial revolution. The industrialization process wasn't fast, the development of capitalism in England was a lose drawn-out process. Starting from the ending of tributary labor like slavery and serfdom, the growth of production for market exchange by family business forced from the burden of feudalism, and the diminution subsistence production leading to the growth and geographical expansion of the market economy. The development of market conditions that led to the loss of ownership by the vast majority of legally free producers and their concentration in a few hands, build-up competing interest groups with conflicting interests and institutions over time. Lancashire and Yorkshire West Riding were the first regions whose manual labor was mechanized. In its initial regions, the Industrial Revolution made self-employed handicraft production less economically rewarding than wage/salary employment in the Factories. Lancashire, the fast Riding, and the West Midlands, in particular Stafford, which dominated the Atlantic markets, were the first to achieve industrial capitalism.

The southern English counties that had benefited from the trade with continental Europe and were technical ahead from the Midlands and northern counties by 1660, suffered a severe setback in their production fell significantly behind, because they lost much of their European and were relatively less competitive in the Atlantic markets. Like England's national economy as a whole, they had become capitalist, by definition,

in the fourth decade of the nineteenth century, but had not yet achieved industrial capitalism (Inikori, pp. 251-276).

Woolen and textile craftsmanship are a red thread in the economic evolution of England and Italy. Both nations have, throughout history, been landmarks for textile processing. England for its multiple breeds of sheep producing raw wool, Italy for its technical capabilities. Even in England, the processing skills during the medieval routes were of a high standard, but the techniques were lost during the strong industrialization process that took place over the centuries. In Italy this totalizing and completely transforming process never took place, which is why there is still a strong link between industry and craftsmanship today. At that time, all processing was done by hand or on manually led yarns. England produced the raw material, and thanks to the vast green spaces it was possible to house large numbers of sheep. The breeds and fleece varied according from region to region. Italian merchants imported the material into the peninsula. Italy has always been a point of reference for the processing of wool and textiles in general, especially in the northern and central regions. In the middle of the fourteenth century, Italy and Flanders were faced with English competition, which produced highly valued textiles. The English industry became increasingly flourishing until the decline of Flemish and Italian wool products in the sixteenth century. In the seventeenth century, English woolen cloth cost less than Italian cloth due to the mercantile economy that dominated the colonies, from which the raw materials came. From the seventeenth century, the wool industry spread to all regions in England; the mills took on the appearance of real factories, with a very advanced division of labor and acute socio-economic problems (Top 20 Best Native British Sheep Breeds, 2023). Textile industry dominated UK after the woolen trails but also during the industrial revolution. During the Industrial Revolution (1760-1840), textile production was transformed from a cottage industry to a highly mechanized one, where workers were present only to make sure the carding, spinning, and weaving machines never stopped. Driven by the desire to cut costs, a long line of inventors ensured that machine factories were cheaper, faster, and more reliable than ever before.

In 1810, Great Britain established the first mechanical spinning mills and in the middle of the same century, combing processing began. The first machines powered by water wheels and then steam engines invented by English engineers during the industrial revolution in the eighteenth century, were used to process the raw wool, spin it and then create the final product. Wool business gave a strong impetus to the revolution. In Italy, on the other hand, processing has always remained manual, linked to small family businesses or individual artisans who could not produce large quantities. This explains why over the centuries, there has been a strong development of Italian made in Italy products and consequently of luxury fashion brands, that have made craftsmanship their strong point (Cartwright, 2023).

## **8.6 Craft policy in United Kingdom**

Today, English cultural policies are trying to re-establish the existing link with manual craft practices, investing in the creation of theoreticians and practical courses for future craftsmen and new jobs in which they will then be placed. Re-establishing a culture of handmade and handcrafted with home production linked to the history of the country, is something that the British, being a patriotic nation, like very much. This change of direction is also reflected on leisure and hobbies, which is why Britons are more inclined to cultivate a manual passion and are facilitated in turning this passion into a job.

Doreen Jakob and Nicola J. Thomas wrote in 2015 an article called Firing up craft capital: the renaissance of craft and craft policy in the United Kingdom. The paper engages with policy debates around the place of craft in the United Kingdom from 2010 in organizational contexts, paying attention to the role of individuals in driving agendas. Legacies of past practice often inform contemporary agendas, the advocacy of craft in the recent past has shaped and placed craft in contemporary UK politics. In recent decades craft and craft practices have apparently experienced a renaissance within the UK public imagination, government policies and in the value placed on craft in the creative sphere. In the common imagination the idea of craft is changing, distanced from the twentieth century associations of an outmoded



form of manufacturing, a parody of the contemporary art, or as a sequestered domestic leisure activity. Consequently, it is legitimate to ask: where craft and everything related to it should be placed? «The role and identity of craft in modern and postmodern society are probably the most important issues facing the field today» (Risatti 1998, p. 34). Hence, how important is craft in our society? As craft regains an importance within the society, professional and amateur craft makers are exploring new modes of production and consumption with the fusion of digital and handmade technologies (Jakob 2013), (Luckman 2015). Manual practices are increasingly associated with progressive agendas of emancipation, individualization, environmental sustainability and locally rooted ethical production and consumption (Levine, Heimerl 2008). This revitalization has seen craft reemerging in the UK as a valued industry with associated cultural, educational and economic development policy agendas (Jakob, Thomas, 2015 p. 496).

UK Crafts Council and the UK Heritage Crafts Association (HCA), Sector skills councils (SSCs) and Creative and Cultural Skills (CCSkills) are some of the bodies discussing the roles of craft in English society. (About the Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), 2024), (Creative and Cultural Skills, 2024). The HCA is a not-for-profit organization whose primary concern is to be «the advocacy body for traditional heritage crafts. Working in partnership with Government and key agencies, it provides a focus for craftspeople, groups, societies and guilds, as well as individuals who care about the loss of traditional crafts skills, and works towards a healthy and sustainable framework for the future». Their work in recent years has drawn attention to crafts which are at risk in the UK, particularly those with skills being held in the hands of an ageing population with no visible route for being passed on to another generation. The Red List of Endangered Crafts lists extinct crafts, which are no longer carried, and critically endangered crafts, where there is serious danger of them no longer being practiced. (Red list news, 2024), (Red list of endangered crafts, 2021), (Luckman, Thomas 2018, p.3). This review of heritage craft sits alongside the work of the UK Crafts Council in taking stock on a regular basis of the health of contemporary craft. While these different forces are sometimes held in tension (Jakob, Thomas 2015). Heritage Crafts Association and the Crafts Council, the national charity for crafts, are

advocating strong government interventions to support the UK craft economy and education of children or craft students to enhance education of making skills. As universities and technical training facilities in countries that have prioritized the knowledge economy, have cut back practical training in the face of decreased economic demand, and thus funding for graduates with practical making skills are halved, it is salutary to give thought which kinds of craft skills may become “the cultural heritage” in the near future. Without makers not only keeping certain skills alive or transmitting them to the next generation will be difficult, but all craft can also potentially become at risk.

De-skilling of craft makers, as education providers seek to cut costs by diminishing back expensive supervised studio-based training, it’s a process bringing craft students into more conventional theory- based classrooms together with visual arts, architecture and/or design students. Despite its ambiguous status as a recognized creative industry, craft has long been an iconically precarious form of work, which in its emphasis on the need to piece together multiple income streams, making identities and jobs difficult to identify in a standard manner (Bridgstock 2005). The shift to a focus on entrepreneurial creative industries does indeed enable a different set of possibilities today.

Craft enters political and geopolitical agendas for the positive social change it can bring about, not only in terms of school education. In the Global North, for example, it provides socio- economic inclusion to displaced peoples, in minor economic/social classes or problematic situations, including migrant and refugee communities (Luckman, Thomas 2018, p.8). Recent economic policy focused on the creative industries emphasizing the vital nature of craft and technical skills, ensuring its organizations and practices are tailored to the demands of creative economy (Banks 2010, p. 306). Craft skill schemes introduce and insert new broader economic and educational goals. For long marginalized, the diverse roles of craft and skills have recently re-entered creative industries, social wellbeing, education, and economic development agendas. Mainly because an attempt is being made to give a clearer

positioning to craft, by identifying in which areas of society it can be found and can bring benefits.

This change of course came after an awareness of the non-creative sectors about the potential of craft in the people who practice it, finding a policy audience in craft, not just as a form of heritage and culture (not to minimize but because culture can be many things and serve many purposes), but also a tool for the revitalization of local economies, practices lost in the past, new trends, new hot topics. Craft is a practice made by multiple training mechanisms that put the focus back on using peoples' hands skills and creativity (Jakob, Thomas 2015 p. 497).

Craft and craft organizations have, in various forms, consistently been bound up with national economic development policies (Thomas, Harvey, Hawkins 2012). While a relationship between craft and economic development policy is not new, there is an observable shift in the engagement of policy makers with craft, from attracting and protecting craft production and skills, to an active involvement in the structural setup of the craft sector, with new training and apprenticeship models. Recent articulation of craft policies reconnects craft to the national political agendas of economic development and skill training. In the English interview section of this thesis, Cocrete, a center for the promotion of craftsmanship that organizes workshops in Exeter, mentioned and makes use of state aid reserved for craft. Some of their courses open to the public are free of charge because they are funded by the government's Lifetime Skills Guarantee. The Lifetime Skills Guarantee is a government initiative designed to support the economy and help adults develop their job prospects by gaining in-demand skills. The initiative includes full funding for almost 400 level 3 qualifications. Any adult aged 19 and over, who doesn't already hold a full level 3 qualification (A-Level or equivalent), can access the funding. An estimated 11 million adults now have the opportunity to gain a new qualification for free, designed to help them to gain in-demand skills and secure great jobs. Almost 400 qualifications are available backed by £95 million in government funding in 2021/22, as part of the government's Lifetime Skills Guarantee.

The qualifications on offer range from engineering to social care to conservation skills. The roll out marks a major milestone in the delivery of the landmark Lifetime Skills Guarantee, announced by the Prime Minister in September 2020. The Guarantee aims to transform the skills system so everyone, no matter where they live or their background, can gain the skills they need to progress in work at any stage of their lives. It will also ensure employers have access to the skilled workforce they need, and more people are trained for the skills gaps that exist now, and in the future (Lifetime skills guarantee, 2024) (Department for Education, Department for Work and Pensions, The Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey, The Rt Hon Boris Johnson and The Rt Hon Sir Gavin Williamson CBE, 2021).

Aid also comes from private organizations. YTKO West of England, for example, is a positive enabler of social, financial and economic growth. They support entrepreneurs at every stage of their business journey, accessing money and markets to assist business growth. They worked for over 40 years to support the creation and growth of businesses, increasing revenues and ultimately contributing to economic prosperity also through craft small/medium business. They bring a wealth of combined private and public sector experience in supporting new entrepreneurs, established businesses and corporates. YTKO set an ambitious social mission, targeting to support 20,000 businesses, raising £50m in finance and create 10,000 new jobs. The target was reached in 2019.

YTKO has now helped over 22,500 businesses, with an estimated collective sales of £2.16 bn. They raised over £71 million in finance for clients, and through unlocking their growth potential, helped create over 10,300 jobs for the British economy. An independent evaluation of this body of work calculated a financial, economic and social return of more than £423 million, and a return of £10.30 for every pound invested. YTKO operates nationally and sectorially in specific regions (YTKO west England, 2024).

In Exeter city and Devon there are other economic and social incubators that enhance craft and small business. "In-Exeter" can be another example of private aid for the development of craft. It is an Exeter's business improvement district (BID). A not-for-

profit organization run by businesses for businesses. Their mission is to celebrate Exeter, support local businesses, and drive positive change. As a community of businesses, collectively they can make a positive difference to the city. The aim is to bring benefit to businesses by investing in projects, services and initiatives that enhance the city's appeal to create an environment where business can flourish (In-Exeter, 2024).

"Livable Exeter", on the other side, is a public foundation aiming growth the geographical area of ten city as a connected city region consisting of thriving linked communities set within an exceptional environmental setting. This clear vision represents a commitment to strengthen neighborhoods, create new communities, invest in sustainable transport, and deliver the infrastructure needed to attract investment and improve quality of life. Public policies are picking up people's message (LiveableExeter, 2024).

MAKE Southwest (formerly Devon Guild of Craftsmen) is an acclaimed exhibition space for contemporary craft and design as well as a leading charity for craft education, is founded by trustees, with public and private aids. Located in Bovey Tracey on the edge of Dartmoor, the galleries offer a great venue with inspiring exhibitions and events, encouraging people to support, make and learn about contemporary craft. Is a registered charity with educational aims, and profits from its trading ventures help to subsidize crafters work, including exhibition program, projects in schools and community groups, lectures and training. They host the "national Saturday club", where young people across the country are spending Saturday mornings at their local university, college or museum discovering subjects they love. Craft and making is also involved. Saturday Clubs are open to 13-16-year-olds of all abilities and are free to attend. Is a unique opportunity to learn new skills, discover talents, meet new people, and find out more about further education, higher education and rewarding careers.

The Craft&Making Saturday Club gives young people the opportunity to develop their creativity and explore the world of craft and craftsmanship. Club members learn the techniques and hand-making skills required to create practical and decorative

objects in materials such as wood, clay, textiles, metal and stone. Participants will also gain an understanding of why it's important to retain traditional craft skills, and how new technologies, techniques and materials are evolving these traditions, ensuring they remain relevant in the modern world. The clubs are run in partnership with Queen Elizabeth Scholarship Trust (QEST), the support of Howdens: UK's Number 1 trade kitchen supplier, and public funding of lottery funded, department of education, arts council England. Another interesting activity created and enhanced by MAKE Southwest is: "green maker initiative". They are supporting Southwest creatives dedicated to reducing their environmental impact. This project also receives funds from public and private trusts (Makesouthwest, 2024), (Green Maker Initiative, 2024), (The Craft&Making Saturday Club, 2024).

There are also craft appreciation movements in Devon, linked to national and global projects. Fibreshed is a global non-profit organization that develops regional fiber systems that build ecosystem and community health. Their work expands opportunities to implement climate benefitting agriculture, rebuild regional manufacturing, and connect end-users to the source of our fiber through education. Transforming the economic systems behind the production of material culture to mitigate climate change, improve health, and contribute to racial and economic equity. The Southwest England Fibreshed Founded and coordinated by Emma Jane Hague, (SWE Fibreshed) became an official affiliate of the global Fibreshed movement in 2015 (Fibreshed, 2024), (Meet Southwest England Fibreshed, 2024), (Southwest England Fibreshed, 2024).

English mills owners are trying to keep the production in a small scale inside UK, using local raw materials to keep money in circular movements inside the community, ensuring the highest quality by taking care of the animals and the land. Producers and mill owners, the few that are still active Devon, shift their focus to English territory and production as local as possible. They try not to buy wool from China or Australia, where animal welfare standards are not met and consequently. Local Devon mill called John Arbon Textile, a wool processing mill in South Molton, Devon, has a "wool agent", a person who seeks out and selects raw material to be processed as much

environmentally friendly, high quality and local (personal interview, December 2022), (John Arbon Textile, 2024).

The Anglo-Saxon meaning of craft is also geographically oriented, in the sense that it conceives culture as a driver for the redevelopment of degraded urban areas and for the generation of new economies in local communities. The development of the cultural sector, however, it's a part of a broader urban growth project: identifying the parts of the city most suitable to become privileged spaces for the establishment of cultural activities. The creation of a "cultural district", for example within specific areas in the city of Exeter, it's a planning objective where several forces, including the municipality and private individuals, join forces to invest in culture through a project that geographically disqualifies the areas concerned. The meaning considered here is different from the Marshallian concept of industrial district. These are investments that go back into the community without necessarily producing objects, not as in the industrial districts based on general goods or handicraft production for sale, which create an induced income and a social wealth in neighboring geographical areas but mainly enrich the owners of these businesses.

## **8.7 Recent evolutions**

As been said before, craft's reputation has been in a positive development since few decades. Within this discussion UK Crafts Council repeatedly pointed out the need to position craft within a broader context returning the right importance.

The contemporary discourse of craft emerges, establishing new normative understandings of craft; new relations between craft practices and policy and new relationships of power, which define and set future political agendas. Since the introduction of New Labor Creative Industries policies from 1997, craft has been included as one of the 13 creative industries defined by the UK Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). Positioning and analyzing craft, with regard to the rebranding schemes from cultural industries to creative industries and how creative

industries and the creative economy policies move away from cultural towards innovation, social and economic development agendas provide a reference point from which to understand the contemporary discourse of craft. Craft also offers a lens through which to explore the negotiated nature of the creative industries policy. Various commentators have provided varying suggestions on what activities to include in the concept of creative industries, and the name itself has become a contested issue – with significant differences and overlap between the terms "creative industries", "cultural industries" and "creative economy" (Hesmondhalgh, 2013). Lash and Urry suggest that «each of the creative industries has an "irreducible core" concerned with the exchange of finance for rights in intellectual property». (Lash, Urry 1994). This echoes the UK Government Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) definition which describes the creative industries as: «those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property» (Creative Industries Mapping Document, 2001). The 2015 DCMS definition, recognizes nine creative sectors, namely: Advertising and marketing; Architecture; Crafts; Design; Film, TV productions, TV, video, radio and photography; IT, software and computer services; Publishing; Museums, galleries and libraries; Music, performing and visual arts (Creative Industries Economic Estimates, 2015). The economically rationalist way to measure craft can enable the measurement and qualification of the value of a creative practice in economic terms (Luckman, Thomas, 2018, p.1).

The DCMS classifies enterprises and occupations as creative according to what the enterprise primarily produces, and what the worker primarily does. Thus, a company which produces records would be classified as belonging to the music industrial sector, and a worker who plays piano would be classified as a musician. The primary purpose of this is to quantify the number of firms, and the number of workers, creatively employed in any given location, and hence to identify places with particularly high concentrations of creative activities. It leads to some complications which are not immediately obvious. For example, a security guard working for a music company would be classified as a creative employee, although not as creatively



occupied. The total number of creative employees is then calculated as the sum of all workers employed in creative industries, whether or not creatively occupied. This includes people whose second job is creative, for example somebody who does weekend gigs, writes books, or produces artwork in their spare time. Oakley shows that the language of cultural industries has «all but disappeared» and has been displaced with the concept of a “creative economy” in which the cultural sectors themselves, were no longer the sole focus but linked with other businesses and different outcome (Oakley, O'Connor 2015 p. 23).

The shift to a focus on entrepreneurial creative industries, and the “evasion” of this sector in different areas of the society, does indeed enable a different set of possibilities today. Craft work is being championed by individuals, communities and governments as the answer to complex and profound issues of economic and social inclusion. On the plus side, this has seen the rise of various craft-based social enterprises, including many which enable displaced or otherwise marginalized peoples to use traditional skills in new contexts as both a source of income as well as identity and belonging. More concerning, however, are the ways that craft work is part of the wider trend towards increasingly precarious creative employment across much of the Global North.

Thanks to social welfare safety nets, together with many of the grants, allowances, scholarships, apprenticeships, residencies, prizes and other kinds of income support available to craftspeople, we are seeing an increase in the numbers of graduates in manual activities, being produced by the educational sector.

This explains why the employment landscape became come fluid. Where self-employment is encouraged in governmental policy, an increase growing number of career changers are occurring in UK.

Crafts theorists have observed that craft has tendencies to re-enter the political debate at times of economic insecurity. This theory is confirmed by the reconnection to the craft during the pandemic. Craft is a security. The instinct to work with one's hands in front brings calm and stability in the face of life's difficulties and insecurities, like a mediation without external stimuli. There is a link between craft revival, financial

recession, economic stagnation crisis, fear, uncertainty about the future. Craft as a tool for economic regeneration has been present throughout the twentieth century and continues to be turned to in the hope of supporting local and regional industry (Thomas, Harvey, Hawkins 2012).

Moreover, craftsmanship is an alternative to a mechanized and consumerist society, so it seems natural that a cyclical return to manual practice, which reconnects with one's culture, nature and roots, should occur. In recent years, this has come about in a more massive way thanks to social media. The more technology, mass-production and mass-consumption takes people away from tangible experiences, the more craft and crafts communities are galvanized due to their physical and psychological comforts. The craft's ethos lies in its «long history of resistance to both the industrial revolution and the general tendency of technology and capitalism to replace the more genuine and authentic forms of human production, namely, the things made by hand» (Spencer 2023, p. 53), (Jakob, Thomas 2015, p. 501).

«While manufacturing jobs have certainly left our shores to a disturbing degree, the manual trades have not, stressing the significance of manual labor as meaningful work based on self-reliance over job creation» (Crawford 2009, p. 3). Policy makers are increasingly listening to the words of scholars who favor and value craft.

The resurgence in the political interest in craft and crafting is furthered by conservative governments, a retraction towards national and historical identities amidst global capitalism. Craft is also a way of moving away from the typical production style of capitalist countries and defending one's national economic and political boundaries. In this way, craft emphasizes national differences even within a globalized world, in which it would be anachronistic not to admit that the capitalist-industrial mechanisms affected everyone, but there are still production peculiarities limited to specific areas of the globe. England, having cut ties with its own history of craftsmanship, wants now to re-establish a link.

Thus, the 2010 resurgence of craft policy emerged from the context of a struggling economy and shift in the UK government from Labor Party to a Conservative-Liberal Democrat Party coalition leadership. While previous creative industries policies

argued for the transformative and liberating force of creativity (O'Connor 2013), the discourse of craft policy has also emphasized tradition and dignity of labor. There were also particularities, including strong differences, amongst the UK craft representing organizations and craft interested government bodies that opened up additional opportunities for an enhanced craft policy agenda. The appointment of John Hayes as UK Minister of State for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning (2010–2012), one of the eight ministers within the UK Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the Department for Education, introduced a new personal agenda to crafts policy reflecting his own individual investment and passion for the crafts sector. He called for a new arts and crafts movement, determined to re-evaluate the way skills are seen and the value those add to life experiences. Craft is a character in a civil society, as well a facilitator to stimulate and maintain economic growth.

Four are the ways in which the minister says the system can grow thanks to craft: continuing and intensifying efforts to re-establish the apprenticeship as the primary form of practical training; re-evaluating and redefining sector driving skills system with an attention for Guild; continue to support and protect adult community learning and the role it plays in enriching the lives of individuals and contribute to local communities; break down the barriers to progression so the route for any individual from basic skills to higher learning is accessible and effective. The craft and skills that Hayes referred to are not limited to the making of furniture, pottery or textiles but also include growth sectors like advanced engineering, IT and financial services (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills and The Rt Hon John Hayes CBE, 2010). «In many ways this is remarkable. After all, how often is it that a senior government minister talks cogently about craft? It also marks a huge shift in government priorities» (Greenlees, Allen, Jones 2011, p. 85).

This openness to craft has led to a rethinking of old medieval guilds used as wool and cloth workplaces during the medieval period is underway. Today, these places are used as meeting points for those who still practice the yarn arts in a ludic way. In many Devon guilds, weekly or monthly meetings for weavers are organized in the medieval

guilds. Activities vary from knitting, embroidery, wool spinning, textile color dying. Guilds revival interested also social craft. Old medieval guilds around England that have been renovated are usually used today as museums or as meeting places for social crafters. An example is the Peter Tavy guild of weaver, spinners and dyers. Peter Tavy is a small village in Devon. Their aim is to develop members' skills in the three main craft of the guild through the exchange of ideas and knowledge while sharing practical expertise. This happens during monthly meetings in the guild and other informal meetings held in members' homes. Speakers and workshop leaders are invited, also to have in-house demonstrations and workshops, showing members experience in show and tell sessions. They also organize an annual trip to places which would interest weavers, spinners and dyers. From time to time, courses on areas of specialist interest, or courses for those wanting to learn a craft or improve are organized (Peter Tavy Guild of Weavers, Spinners and Dyers, 2024). In the 1990s there was a revival of the old medieval guilds. The government decided to enhance the rural areas, empowering rural places of the English countryside, also by valuing the mansions that housed the artisans' workshops. Make Southwest the museum and workshop for the enhancement of craft in Devon, which in more recent times has become fanatical about artistic ceramics, is the successor of the Devon guild, reactivated in 1954 within the broader empowering rural economic and social project of the Government (Personal interview, December 2022). It's a place open to anyone, a different concept from a club or a real medieval guild. In Exeter city center it's possible to visit Tuckers Hall, The Incorporation of Weavers, Fullers and Shearmen. It's a club and a guild, which has operated in the same way since its foundation. Today it can be visited free of charge, but participants are part of a close corporation group. The Guild and Incorporation have existed in Exeter for nearly 600 years and have occupied Tuckers Hall since 1471. Both the Incorporation and the Hall have a remarkable and glorious history. It's still organized as a proper guild, a medieval one, but the main purpose today is to be a meeting place and a charity (The Incorporation of Weavers, Fullers & Shearmen, 2024).

Rosy Greenlees, the executive director of the Crafts Council, rightly identified that the return to skills and the value of heritage has provided the opportunity for Heritage

Crafts Association (HCA) to open the door to government and capitalize on an ideological connection. Therefore, the change in national government and subsequent appointment of John Hayes, opened up a window of opportunity for the HCA to be included in, shaping crafts policy, finding business support, and research that would accurately understand the dimensions of the sector (Jakob, Thomas 2015, p.502). BIS's first action was to commission a traditional and heritage craft sector-mapping document published by CCSkills in 2012 (Creative & Cultural Skills 2012). Secondly, BIS asked CCSkills to extend its training program and develop a new set of Apprenticeship standards for the crafts sector enabling apprentices to choose to specialize in a specific craft discipline while also learning generic skills. Thirdly the minister introduced a new set of national Craft Skills Awards that, unlike Crafts Council and HCA awards that are focused on craft practice, will reward individuals and groups for «excellence in teaching, maintaining and developing the craft skills of the craftsperson as well as those of others». Fourthly, BIS's £210 million per year budget of Community Learning that supports non-accredited learning that is, personal and community development learning, family literacy, language and numeracy, and neighborhood learning in deprived communities, will be accessible to craft practitioners aiming to teach community workshops (Creative & Cultural Skills 2012), (Jakob, Thomas 2015, p. 505). Certainly, what this minister has done, was to represent craft and highlight many aspects concerning this sphere. Unlike previous creative industries policies within the UK that were channeled through the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the center of the policy delivery has been at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). Both the Crafts Council and the HCA underline the economic importance of the craft sector to give their causes relevance and to make their voices heard.

Banks, O'Connor, Garnham and many others have analyzed the UK policy shift from providing support for the traditional high arts centered on cultural values towards "creatively new" and "cool" activities with prime economic value. Such authors point to the DCMS as a driving force of such a transformation, also signaling a shift from

what was considered a marginality to a serious concern, as a central business of economic policies (Garnham 2005, p. 27).

Political appeal of the creative industries agenda is a driver of economic growth, and economic agencies must oversee its pursuit (O'Connor, Byrne 2015, p. 8). While overall arts and cultural public funding was heavily reduced in the 2010 UK Public Spending Review, the UK Crafts Council survived major cuts, and continued to receive the requested funding from the Arts Council as a National Portfolio Organization in 2014. According to BIS, its interest in crafts was determined by the work of John Hayes forging a new relationship between the UK government, crafts community and the crafts sector, taking advantage of the mobilizing impact of «seeing a minister stand up in public and say something which resonated for them as a community» (Jakob, Thomas 2015 p.508). Hayes public speeches and behind the scenes meetings chimed with a sector eager to make the most of the moment and connected with Hayes personal understanding of benefits of craft: «acquiring skills make our lives, not necessarily wealthier, but definitely fuller. It raises our self-esteem and often also the esteem in which others hold us» (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills and The Rt Hon John Hayes CBE, 2010). More broadly the insecurities of the global financial crisis paired with a UK conservative government, fueled ideologies of the “good old times” and “made in Britain” manufacturing that elevate tradition, crafts and local manual skills.

Conversations which in 2010 appeared to be more based on a sentiment of promoting idealistic notions of manual labor and skills, have slowly being realized through actual policy programs that have the potential to make a tangible different through supporting bench-based training (Jakob, Thomas 2015 p.509).

It is estimated that the crafts industries currently turn over around £400m annually. This figure is more than double what the industry was turning over ten years ago, with a rise of 20% in the number of crafts businesses over the same period. Because of the nature of the sector, comprising a myriad of small businesses and individuals, a precise assessment of its contribution to the economy is impossible to be quantified. Mapping

craft it's not easy, much of the value is hidden within tourism business (Craft Industry revenues, 2024), (Support for the creative economy, 2012).

Craft continues to exist alongside both niche and mass manufacturing: in the car industry, engineering and aeronautics, but also in our houses' furniture or ornaments. In line with neo-liberal capitalism, it's a middle-class or higher-class lifestyles, a consumerism but also a D.I.Y. (do it yourself) tinkering for everyone else. New relationships and alternate understandings of craft in the Global North and in the mainstream economy are happening. Crafts are currently being rediscovered not only as a hobby but also as a desirable enterprise (Jakob 2013, p. 127). Craft enjoys a huge diversity of expression, embracing internationally recognized artists and cutting-edge innovators, alongside increasing engagement in making by amateurs pursuing personal education and artistic pleasure or seeking an additional income stream. Craft businesses are a strong component of the UK's thriving creative industries, contributing £746 million gross valued added (GVA) to the UK economy, rising to £3.4 billion when including GVA generated by craft occupations outside craft industries. GVA of making to be worth between £15.5 and £18 billion to the UK annually (Measuring the Craft Economy, Defining and measuring craft: report 3, 2014). 5.6 million craft pieces are purchased each year; 16.9 million (40%) have purchased a craft object; a further 9.6 million (23%) would consider buying one in the future. A conservative estimate of the total value of these annual sales was £913 million in 2010 (Yair, Schwarz 2011), (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, 2010)

## **8.8 Define yourself (Anglophone's version)**

The title of this sub-chapter is a reference to Taylor Swift. She has already been mentioned in the thesis as a current social craft example, but in this case, she is called upon for a linguistic reason. News of her decision to re-record her albums due to legal problems with her manager who sold the rights to her songs, has bounced all over the newspapers and social media. That is why the old albums are now re-recorded with the same title and the addition of the definition «Taylor's versions». With

«Anglophone's version», I would like (in a joking manner) to refer to the previous sub-chapter on the self-definition of Italian recreational artisans by making a comparison with those in the UK and USA in this one, also linking the topic with an interview of the singer. The interview in question can be found on YouTube and was published by apple music in 2020. The singer talks about the process of re-recording old records, but more generally about determination as a singer and a woman in the music industry. I was very impressed by how at minute 4.38, within a very well-articulated and carried through speech, she describes her songwriting with the words «skill» and «craft». She does not use them at randomly, but in a very specific way to describe writing, the act of doing something with the hands, which is not carving a statue in stone, but “simply” writing on paper (Apple Music, 2020). Journalists also associate Swift's fame with craftsmanship. According to Knibbs, with her second studio album Fearless (2008), Swift had become a «countrified celebrity solidified into industrial-grade American fame due to her craftsmanship» (Knibbs, 2019).

The use of this definition evokes many scenarios in my mind and especially the difference in definition or self-defining of a specific practice in two different cultures. I have never heard, and I do not think it will be taken for granted in the foreseeable future either, an Italian singer describe his art as *artigianato* or craft. These are worlds apart on music industry in Italy, it would be like mixing the sacred of craft with the profane of pop music. A pop singer does not do craft. Instead, in the English context, craft often blends in different context, also in pop music, and it is easier for people to call themselves artisans. In interviews' results this different perspective emerges several times. That is why it is normal to see circles and meeting groups meeting in British restored medieval guilds or in public. Why do they do this? The Britons are “cold” and reserved compared to the Italians, but for all the reasons related to the craft policy and the habits that have been created as a result, it is normal to meet in a group to work and do workshops, in Italy it happens less. Britons feel legitimized artisans also because in the biggest supermarkets, post offices, bookshops you can find the «art and crafts section» where you can buy all materials for recreational craft and become an artisan. It is also easier for a passionate British crafter to turn his passion into a job, thanks to the public subsidies he can receive or the facilitating companies that push



for the creation of new jobs in small businesses. Robert Stebbins in *Amateurs: On the Margin between Work and Leisure* (1979), has demonstrated that amateur pursuits, once initiated, inevitably tend to follow an arc of increasing professionalization. A process that drives stakeholders into turning a passion into a job or a second job. Amateurs are motivated by seriousness and commitment, as these are expressed both in regimentation, such as practice and rehearsals, and in systematization, such as schedules and organization. The life span of the amateur seems to have an end, leading to the professionalization of the practice. It does not happen for most people, but it can happen for the more passionate or skilled. At the time when the change occurs, it is necessary to receive funds and support to enable this transformation, otherwise it becomes difficult. This is why it is easier for the British to professionalize their passion, thanks to public funds that encourage people to create small businesses. There are also geographical reasons creating a rift between Italy and England. The longer British winters compared to the Italian one and the rain. When it rains, it is easier to stay indoors, and it is therefore necessary to find something to do to occupy the time. Winter and rain push you to stock up on materials to retreat during the winter and work. Craft is an alternative to the English social place par excellence: the pub. Imagine winter and rain in the small streets of Devon, craft becomes a meeting point and an alternative to loneliness or meeting just for a drink. The fact that the British are very reserved, polite, and have an individualistic culture, like any stereotype cannot apply to everyone but also reflects sides of reality. Craft also fits in well in this context because you don't have to get together in a group and talk, you can do it without making eye contact with others, without necessarily making friends, without being the puller of the group or the nice one. One enjoys the beauty in the presence of the other but is still autonomous. Shy or reserved people are welcome without the pressure of having to perform, be nice, talk and make friends. They have plenty of time to adapt and choose how to act. This also happens in the school classroom, through craft even the most shameful or lonely children feel part of a cohesive and welcome group. On the other hand, Italians are considered more talkative, friendly and noisy but handicrafts in Italy is an over-codified sector that does not go beyond its limits. It is difficult to play or have fun with what is considered an

untouchable bastion of Italian culture, it is too serious a matter. The artistic Italian craft workshop is limiting, whereas the school and the craft shop is open to all, in the cases of trade schools abroad that manage to revive craftsmanship, in Italy the school does not work because everything is still linked to the workshop. School and *bottega* still divided (Micelli 2011, p.183).

Another interesting consideration on English culture that emerged during an interview concerns the monarchy. A craftswoman was convinced that in England, craft is not considered purely artistic in the canonical form but exists massively together with work groups because the Britons want to break away from the imposed rules of the monarchy. «We want to do what we think and desire, not follow precise style impositions. This is reflected in our clothing, furniture and lifestyle». The monarchy certainly refers to an idea and a precise lifestyle immersed in artistic craftsmanship, if we think of castles, carriages, furniture clothing, wedding ceremonies, or coronation ceremonies, so this could be an interesting interpretation. The royal house ties and bust the English and foreign artistic craftsmanship through the ostentation of a codified, sumptuous and elegant life, with all the rich possessions created by illustrious artisans. The church and the royals have contributed and continue to contribute to the survival of craftsmanship. Like what happens in Italy with the rich Italian history of the past. Does it create the opposite effect? Distancing the English from this lifestyle to look for a different, personal, unconventional one involving lucid craft, or do royals fascinate and bring their audience closer to their lifestyle and everything that revolves around a codified and predetermined life? It is not possible to break away from a model if there is no model to differentiate from.

## 9. Conclusion

The craft revival crosses several themes and motivations, given firstly by the public policy, but more generally by our lifestyle and subjective point of view, those reflect the health of our society.

I have just finished reading an interesting book on love and relationships called *Io, te, l'amore. (I, You, Love.)* (2024) by psychotherapist Stefania Andreoli. I found many correlations and studies that recall some themes related to the thesis. Craftsmanship like love, passion or a life project, becomes a medium, a connector interference between two or more people. Both the book and the thesis talk have a common topic: relationships and connection. Relationships between people, relationships with oneself, relationships with your hobbies desire and interests, relationship with the world around us and the nature. And as we have already said, analyzing relationships, we move from the privateness of our lives to a broader and more general picture. Cultural processes unite populations through the collective unconscious. What happens in the private dimension is also an indicator of larger trends prevailing in the world. In the first pages of the book, the author makes a discourse on critical thinking that restores luster to the essence of life, and the need that she describes as «in danger of extinction at the moment» of asking why things happen, using individual creative thinking that contributes to the understanding and constitution of the context in which we live, without passively suffering it (Andreoli 2024, p.25). Artificial intelligence gives answers but doesn't ask questions. Instead, that's what social craft does: it leads you to questions and questioning, to choices, to situations and problem solving. As we have seen, these can global issues: environmental change, human relations, mental health, our ecological impact, death, how important is beauty and handicrafts; but these are also personal: what do we like, what interests us, what moves us, what color or fabric would we like to use to accomplish the work we have in mind? Our society and consequently our life and thought, no longer promote complexity, this happens in every historical phase characterized by financial and social crisis: fear atrophies us, and we take refuge in homologation, in not feeling or hearing, in not having an opinion, because life is already too difficult. During crisis insensitivity finds

its way paved (Andreoli 2024, p.85). Instead, craft positions you, gives you impulses, makes you make choices based on your opinions and thoughts. Not knowing our dreams, capacities and desires makes us live a more detached life from ourselves and consequently from others. As a result, we are all more afraid and lonelier. Loneliness is defined as an unpleasant emotional response to perceived isolation, it's increasing yearly among people of every age group. There is a need to find new ways to connect people with each other, especially at a time when a whole lot of the human attention is focused on electronic devices, it is a challenge. Some studies have been done on the impact of devices on mental health and human relationships. *Impact of internet use on loneliness and contact with others among older adults* (Cotton, Anderson, McCullough, 2013), is a 2013 study that shows how social facilitates human relationships. Those were the early years when social media were being used, and they were seen as a powerful means of expanding one's knowledge, sharing one's experiences, helping not feeling lonely. Instead, a few years later we realized that this is not the case, social media are powerful means of communication with which we can meet new people but at the same time they make us feel very lonely. It's a contradiction because often social media itself encourages depression, loneliness and fear. Texting, emailing and messaging lack emotional cues that come with face-to-face communication, making it harder to fully connect with others. It's our imperfections, flaws and vulnerability that help us form authentic and deep relationships with others, but we often present a stylized version of ourselves online rather than our authentic self (How our devices fuel loneliness, 2024). Social craft fits very well into the current situation, giving people a new reason to meet, to be creative, to get out of the house, to fight fears, to test themselves, to learn about their skills and passions. Perhaps we take for granted how important it is to be part of a group, the magic of feeling and being a part of something and having a common goal. Not only if you are generally alone or lonely but for anyone, because it helps to create deep relationships, to not feel alone among people, to feel useful and appreciated. In addition, having a fixed weekly appointment in which to be with other people calms the brain, creates a routine a security a constant. The group, the union, the meeting are the goals of social media as well, but without the actual meeting in

person bringing your body into the presence of other bodies, a meeting cannot take place for real.

United States Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy released a new Surgeon General Advisory calling attention to the public health crisis of loneliness, isolation, and lack of connection in our country. Even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, approximately half of U.S. adults reported experiencing measurable levels of loneliness. Disconnection fundamentally affects our mental, physical, and societal health. In fact, loneliness and isolation increase the risk for individuals to develop mental health challenges in their lives, and lacking connection can increase the risk for premature death to levels comparable to smoking daily.

We must prioritize building social connection the same way we have prioritized other critical public health issues such as tobacco, obesity, and substance use disorders. Together, we can build a country that's healthier, more resilient, less lonely, and more connected. The physical health consequences of poor or insufficient connection include a 29% increased risk of heart disease, a 32% increased risk of stroke, and a 50% increased risk of developing dementia for older adults. Additionally, lacking social connection increases risk of premature death by more than 60%. One of the solutions, following the vision of Dr. Vivek Murthy, can be: strengthen social infrastructure. Connections are not just influenced by individual interactions, but by the physical elements of a community (parks, libraries, playgrounds) and the programs and policies in place. To strengthen social infrastructure, communities must design environments that promote connection, establish and scale community connection programs, and invest in institutions that bring people together (Murthy, 2023), (Modern Loneliness, An exploration of the loneliness epidemic and our search for true connection, 2023), (Dean, 2021).

One main issue must be taken into consideration: education. Being educated about these issues and trying to understand the mechanisms that drive craft. Only those who are introduced to sensitive topics can understand the importance of a handmade object and can desire, create or buy it. The mechanisms behind craft or social craft must be understood, and people accompanied and educated. With the question of education

comes the question of social class and economic availability. How can people in a precarious economic situation be helped to understand the importance of craft groups, cultivating a hobby, and mental wellbeing? When there are survival issues to be resolved, everything else takes second place. Sensible economic and social policies can make the difference.

A striking example are Christmas jumpers. This fashion trend that seems to have become a commonplace for many consumers in recent years thanks to social media, consist of wearing Christmas themed jumpers during the festive season. The trend raises one question: how people can be helped to understand that buying a cheap jumper made practically of plastic from high-fashion chains for one day is a choice that can be highly questionable, whereas a handmade jumper or one made of more precious materials may represent a more significant monetary investment at the time of purchase. What is the role of craft across different social strata (e.g. upper vs. lower class or advanced vs. emerging economies)?

Why should a costumer buy a Murano chandelier and not one from Ikea? What is the responsibility of the individual and what is the responsibility of public policy? Of course, everyone is free to do what they want, make choices that may seem more or less sensible to others, and spend their money as they wish. But these are issues and questions that unite us all and affect common global issues. It cannot be taken for granted that every person understands the difference and the impact that a jumper bought for cheap in a fast-fashion chain or a handmade one that costs four times as much can have. Without a specific sensitivity to the materials and the product, the consumer cannot discriminate between different proposals, not recognizing the immaterial dimension of the value of the artisanal proposals. Consumers and their awareness must be prepared (Micelli 2011, p.16). In a capitalist and complex society in which needs are induced and desires are appeased, the important thing is often to fill a hole with the first thing you find, the easiest, the simplest, the cheapest, without thinking too much.

Another issue that makes it difficult to approach craft are often educational program. The fact that the gates of university education have been thrown wide open must have

led to the belief that university can and should be done by everyone, it has now become in the collective mind a kind of compulsory school. In Italy, where universities are predominantly public, many students after high school enroll in university with an idea about their future job in the various fields of our current knowledge society like economics, finance, human science, social works, where manual jobs seem to have become of secondary importance. Especially in Italy, where craftsmanship is very much tied to workshop teaching and there is a lack of specialized schools, this vision reduces craftsmanship to an elitist or boring, old, unimportant subject. University, once an elite education, then seen as an opportunity for those who wanted to continue their studies, has now - in the collective mind - a compulsory stage in the education of young scholar. This increasingly leads young people away from manual jobs, from vocational schools. It's only possible to succeed in doing something with the right means and starting points, filling the path and the final objective with your own meaning, like a good crafter driven by passion, otherwise it is better to leave it and value rejection. The hope for the future, is that craft will be increasingly taken into consideration as a subject of study, a manual practice, a complex and multifaceted subject, because it can be a tool to understand ourselves and the societies in which we are immersed.

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