

Craft for care, Design for life.

Heritage contemporary enhancement and Communication Design tools as a resource for social changes, fostering diversity and inclusion.

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Abstract

Local identity vs global standardization, participatory vs authorial, kairos vs chronos, dichotomies that global change has brought to the reality we live in today, are emerging strongly both on a national (Italian Recovery and Resilience Plan PNRR, 2021) and on a European level (European framework for action on cultural heritage, 2019). The world we live in and how we relate to it is changing by those categories, both individually and synergistically.

Within the framework of enabling and inclusive design tools to fight stereotypes, social exclusion and loss of cultural treasures, craft could be intended as a lever for inclusion, care for the social environment and a key asset to guide heritage to contemporary goals. Reading those topics under the craft lens means relaunching local economies by enhancing the territory's products, knowledge and techniques, putting craft at the centre of the contemporary social debate.

Global challenges, such as the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, massively stimulate the cultures of the project, the design for the real world (Papanek, 2019), in which design moves to foster social innovation (Manzini, 2015), but perhaps there is still too little craft exploited in order to have the strategic capacity to narrate local territories, including different identities and excellences that characterize them.

As the main attitude of design is to guide behaviours, objectify tastes, through the concretization of images capable of synthesizing form, function, meaning and value (Celaschi, 2016), also the craft can take on a new value linked to global challenges, by stimulating its inner relational attitude. This could be determined by embracing a flexible approach to the contemporary culture by making adaptations to other disciplines, as the design has done so deftly (Rawsthorn, 2022).

In recent times, craft has benefited from the injection of modern thinking driven by technology or by the support of design thinking and social innovation purposes. This crossing of knowledge is detectable, for example, in the work of Iris van Herpen, the first fashion designer to incorporate 3D printing technology into the fashion industry, mixing them with traditional handmade methods such as embroidery, knitting and spinning. Also, the enabling co-design and participatory methodologies can witness how craft can be supported by design thinking and social innovation methodologies, as in the work of

the collective Droog Design or the duo Formafantasma, both recognized for a desire to incorporate the design methods with craft symbolism and techniques into their work.

Instead, it is debatable whether there has been the same experimentation in the more established craft practice, traditional by definition, that can suffer from its being strongly tied to work done to perfection and strictly close to its context of belonging. The aim of this paper is therefore to investigate, through the description of cases and polar comparisons, forays into adjacent worlds as art or design shifting into social, economic and cultural areas of interest, what is contemporary craft, what happens when new technologies and contemporary expressive methods are associated with it and how it can act as a guiding resource for a sustainable and inclusive transformation concerning global challenges.

Author keywords

Contemporary Craft; Communication Design; Attitudinal design; Social Inclusion; Local enhancement.

Introduction. Craft for care: heritage contemporary enhancement and social sustainability, between artifice and nature.

Our identity is defined in our relationship with others, in how we show and tell ourselves verbally, but also through the objects we use, or with which we dress and surround ourselves. Deyan Sudjic, in his essay "The language of things", talks about objects as elements through which we define ourselves to understand who we were and who we were not, to measure the passing of our lives. Things allow us to observe the quantitative flow of time (*Cronos*), but also to indicate its qualitative nature (*Kairos*): an indefinite period in which "something" special happens and, by happening it modifies the context, the places and the people. And things.

Design is the language with which we give shape to those objects and with which we model the messages they bring with them. The role of the designer, in addition to solving formal and functional problems, is that of a storyteller: to shape objects to communicate messages effectively and engagingly (Sudjic, 2008).

The contemporary debate about the sustainability of the Western lifestyle has favoured the acquisition of awareness



by consumers. People have learned to purchase more consciously and to be more demanding with the market, to obtain products that reflect ethical principles. Initiatives such as the Fashion Revolution, whose slogan is *"who made my clothes?"*, demonstrate the need for consumers to know the production process, expecting sustainability from both environmental and social points of view. From this perspective, the craft practice stands as one of the possible alternatives to trigger virtuous processes of social sustainability which, in parallel with ecological, is inserted within the environmental debate with a specific focus on human beings and the relationships between communities, and therefore on sustainable relationships, as well as on resources: *"a life-enhancing condition within communities, and a process within communities that can achieve that condition"* (McKenzie, 2004). This definition of social sustainability suggests an interpretation of how the process of contemporary heritage enhancement should be centred on local communities and the relationships between them.

The fifty-seventh International Art Exhibition, *Viva Arte Viva*, curated by Christine Macel and organized by the Venice Biennale in 2017, addressed the theme of the individual responsibility of the artist in contemporary debates, reaffirmed the growing importance of the craft within the visual arts. The words of the curator Christine Macel are a call to reconsider a *"new humanism"* that can stimulate a worthwhile debate in terms of social change, inclusion and care: *"A humanism not focused on an artistic ideal to pursue, nor characterized by the celebration of man as a being capable of dominating his surroundings; if anything, a humanism that celebrates man's ability, through art, not to be dominated by the forces that govern what happens in the world, forces that if left alone can greatly condition the human dimension in a reductive sense. It is a humanism in which the artistic act is a gesture of resistance, liberation and generosity."*

Even Michelangelo Pistoletto, with the project *"The Third Paradise"*, imagines a *"third phase of humanity, realized as a balanced connection between artifice and nature. The Third Paradise is the passage to a new level of planetary civilization, essential to ensure the survival of humanity. To this purpose, we first need to re-form the principles and the ethical behaviours guiding our common life. The Third Paradise is the great myth that leads everyone to take personal responsibility for the global vision. The term "paradise" comes from the Ancient Persian and means "protected garden". We are the gardeners who must protect this planet and heal the human society inhabiting it."* (Pistoletto, 2003)

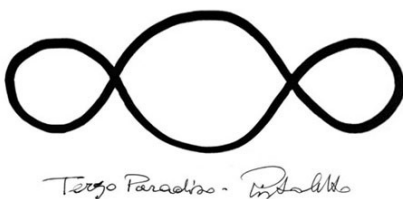


Figure 1. Third Paradise, Michelangelo Pistoletto (2003). The symbol of the Third Paradise, a reconfiguration of the mathematical infinity sign, is made of three consecutive circles. The two external circles represent all the diversities and antinomies, among which nature and artifice. The central one is given by compenetrating the opposite circles and represents the generative womb of a new humanity.

Background. Design for life: relations between art, craft and design.

While it is true that from prehistory to the industrial revolution all manufacturing processes took place through manual processes, it is equally true that the crafter barely attracted any attention for a long time. Only starting from the Late Middle Ages, the crafts-practitioner has come to represent the economic backbone of European society. In the Renaissance, Italian craft *ateliers* enjoyed great fame, and it is precisely in these places that the greatest artists were trained. Over the years, and thanks to the gradual industrialization, the two worlds separated clearly, with the consequent differences between hand-made and industrial products. In the 19th century, the idea of *art pour l'art* began to spread: a theory attributed to the French philosopher Victor Cousin, based on the assumption that art, visual or literary, is self-sustaining and does not need a moral or social purpose. It was the Bauhaus movement that restored importance to the craft sector. Walter Gropius in 1919 stated that there is no essential difference between the artist and the crafter, but that the artist is an elevation of the crafter. Artists are also technicians and technicians are artists because in both cases their actions involve a method. Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, another great exponent of the Bauhaus, theorized the attitudinal design, untying it from the discipline and open to everyone. The essay *"Vision in Motion"* (1947) proposes a democratic vision of self-expression, that emphasizes the necessity of integrating art with life. His proposal that we learn to utilize all our sensory capacities and to see everything in a relationship, emphasizes simultaneity and motion through the interconnection of space and time. In doing so, Moholy-Nagy proposes a theory of perception and change, which is dynamic and fitting for the modern age.

In the contemporary era, characterized by the rediscovery of doing it yourself, we have entered a new phase, in which craft is compared with digital technology. From the pages of the US magazine *"Make"*, in 2006 the *"makers"* defined themselves for the first time as digital artisans: sharing processes, resources, means and costs on the web, based on an open-source sharing logic where products are developed by a community by adding spontaneous contributions, in a free and participatory way, contrary to the innovation model of traditional companies which envisages industrial secrecy, copyright and patents.

Just as there is a craft defined as creative (Micelli, 2011), there is a design that has an artisanal expressiveness (Micelli, 2016). In the twentieth century, it was found in Ugo La Pietra, who managed to intersect the world of art with artistic craft, or Piero Fornasetti, who had the typical Italian mindset for integrating the arts: artist's head, the eye of a designer and hands of a crafter. In the contemporary panorama, we observe designers who make the material and technical research as one of the main characteristics of their work, with a marked artisan aptitude: from experimentation between industrial design, craft work, self-production, social design, limited editions for galleries of the Italian designer Francesco Faccin, up to the also Italian Formafantasma design studio, which bases its research on the ecological, historical, political and social forces shaping the discipline of design today. Max Lamb and Martino Gamper carried out experimental studies on the concept of seating, with the projects at *Garage Sanremo* during the Milan Design Week in 2015 (Faccin) and the *100 Chairs in 100 Days* project, started in 2009 by Gamper. He made a new chair a day, for a

hundred days, by collaging together bits of chairs that he found discarded on the street or in friends' homes. Blending found stylistic and structural elements, he generated perverse, poetic, and humorous hybrids. The project combined formal and functional questions with sociological and semiotic ones. The Dutch collective Droog Design, since the early nineties, shows a critical approach towards consumerism, with particular attention to the reuse of material for the creation of unique pieces, among which emerge the *Chest of Drawers* (1991) and the *Rag chair* (1991) by Tejo Remy. Interaction is at the heart of the work of the Droog collective, as well as the use of unusual materials and different types of craft practices and material experimentation, to synthesize the dilemma between industrial production and art.

The evolution of post-industrial culture has brought advantages to both design and craft, which in some cases has acquired expert methods and techniques typical of design, showing itself in a new guise. As in the Renaissance an interesting dialogue between art and craft practice was observed, today we notice the artisan profession dealing with design, a production method that does not only look at the industry but which develops an intermediate production scale between the one-of-a-kind and the large-scale industrial projects. The creations of the fashion stylist Antonio Marras, made of a deep connection with the Sardinian manufacturing tradition, his homeland, as much as the experiments of the Dutch fashion designer Iris Van Herpen, who was the first to combine 3D printing with traditional manual processes, are further examples of how artisanal experimentation, with both traditional or digital methods, often crosses the methodologies and practices of design. Not just experiments by individuals: the demand for professionals in the handmade sector is increasingly high even in the big luxury *maisons*, which have set up various training courses dedicated to manufacturing talents. They range from the LVMH group, which in 2014 founded the IME (*Institut des Métiers d'Excellence*) to various initiatives such as the *Brioni Haute Couture School* and the *Gucci Haute Couture Leather School*.

Recently, *Making Knowing: Craft in Art, 1950–2019*, an exhibition held at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York between 2019 and 2022, has unequivocally established the great importance of the relationship between art and artifice. The works selected by curators Jennie Goldstein and Elisabeth Sherman demonstrate that crafts practices, which have long been defined in opposition to the "fine arts" can be, like art and design, also conceptual in their forms of expression, and strategic in a vision of promoting new perspectives on topics that have been central to artists, including abstraction, popular culture, feminist aesthetics and recent explorations of identity and relationships.

The reasons for the recent craft revival (Rawsthorn, 2022) are many and could be read as a response to the consequences of the leap that cultures have made from a local to a global scale, from a dimension of adaptation to expansion. First, today we are better acquainted with the dark side of globalization: we are aware of its possible consequences and therefore more inclined to make purchases whose we know the origin and actual quality. A second reason arises from the fascination with matter and the spontaneity of craft –frequently made up of small imperfections– which contrasts with the rigidity and perfection of industrial products or digital screens. Furthermore, the evolution of 3D printing systems has facilitated and made cheaper the prototyping, and therefore the experimentation,

of new objects or the repair of old ones, in a circular economy framework of recycling and upcycling practices. Finally, craft endorses participatory processes, it has a long tradition of handing down knowledge behind it. Allowing these traditional techniques to be shared, with a design-driven approach where narration and storytelling are central, is proving to be a lever of success for the entire craft sector (Rawsthorn, 2022).

Contrary to what is claimed by the posthuman thought (Hayles, 1999), which eliminates sharp demarcations and essential differences between humans and machines, between cybernetic mechanisms and biological organisms, contemporary craft endorses the words used by Lazlo Moholy-Nagy to describe his point of view on design. *"The idea of design and the profession of the designer must be transformed from the notion of a specialist function into a generally valid attitude of resourcefulness and inventiveness which allows projects to be seen not in isolation but in relationship with the need of the individual, and the community. Ultimately all problems of design merge into one great problem: a design for life. In a healthy society, this design for life will encourage every profession and vocation to play its part since the degree of relatedness to all their work gives to any civilization its quality"* (Moholy-Nagy, 1947).

Argument. Storytelling and communication design tools for heritage enhancement: key resources for social change.

To correctly frame which resources are used to promote and enhance heritage today, and how to interpret in an interdisciplinary way and under the synergistic lens of contemporary design key concepts (once faced only by the humanities) such as identity, belonging and authenticity, it is important to observe the evolution of the global social context, the current situation of the economic crisis that began in the first decade of the twenty-first century then resulted in the pandemic crisis of 2019, and the global consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in the recent 2022. Among the goals of the Italian Recovery Plan presented in January 2021, is explicit the focus on the enhancement of the identity of places. The text reads as follows: *"Increasing the attractiveness of the country's tourist and cultural system through the modernization of tangible and intangible infrastructures, the formation and strengthening of accommodation facilities through investments in infrastructures and strategic tourist services and the financing of municipal projects for investments on identifying places in one's territory"* (PNRR, National Recovery and Resilience Plan, Component M1C3: Tourism and Culture 4.0, 2021). Already since the 2008 recession we have become more attentive to the quality, sustainability, and origin of products. The crisis has forced many countries, after years of relocation, to reflect on the future of manufacturing and the importance of keeping production processes on the national territory. With the first lockdown of 2020, there was a strong increase not only in the use of technologies but also in growth in a feeling of belonging, an identification within a group. The web has brought out a new culture of consumption, which asks to know the history of who manufactured the products. For example, in the luxury sector, an important shift in purchase motivation has been noticed: customers have begun to seek more authenticity in the objects purchased. While on the one hand neighbourhood life in cities has been reborn assuming new value, on the other the daily home-alone practices as remote working, streaming, and online shopping, continue to be very topical. Social rela-

tionships and urban collective actions have also moved online through neighbourhood initiatives on social media. The confinement within our cities has given a boost to the rediscovery of a new type of living, made up of strengthened community relationships and proximity consumption in local shops, but either in a physical and digital way.

Throughout history, human beings have always communicated, conveyed ideas and opinions, and have told stories. The art of storytelling was born almost simultaneously with the appearance of man on earth and has been an important tool for sharing social values (Salmon, 2007). Communication design tools today make use of new methods of participatory communication, essential to guarantee content fruition and sharing without geographical or cultural boundaries.

In this context, the most used communication design tools are user-generated content, or the UX design (Norman, 1990) to outline the man-machine experience which today extends to all aspects of the product or service perceived by users; also, the new transmedia storytelling techniques (Jenkins, 2006) for audience engagement, which use different types of media, to refine and integrate the user experience with new and distinct information not openly connected but in narrative synchrony between them.

These tools are essential to ensure the use of authentic and local content, but projected towards open sharing, without geographical or cultural boundaries. Territories are not only a source of original and authentic raw materials but also a network of human and professional relationships, which can positively influence those who live or work in a place. Concepts such as tangible and intangible are inextricably linked and dealing with what is not physically visible such as belonging, cultural identity and authenticity is essential to support and promote even the most material activities such as crafts.

"The 2019 Future Brand Index reveals that individuals are more likely to buy products or services Made In a specific country are also more likely to recommend that country to visit, would consider it for business, and also consider living in or studying there." (Future Brand Country Index, 2019, pag.42)

The intangible dimension of cultural heritage provides unique identities to objects produced in a specific place; authenticity, as the quality of not being imitable, draws on and expresses the tradition of a city, a region, or a cultural asset. Culture acts here as a key element, a connection engine, and a key point for complex processes, relationships between different actors, industrial processes and cognitive paths.

The protagonists of the story of contemporary craft are designers and producers; sometimes these two figures are the same person, and sometimes instead work together, in symbiosis. But the consumers are also central figures. It is precisely the exchange, the participatory and inclusive dialogue between producer and client/consumer that set the limits of a handcrafted object. Frequently the artisans are unable to pro-

mote themselves correctly due to lack of time, will or ability, therefore, it is increasingly evident how fundamental the role of communication designers is. With a participatory and effective narration, the places of production become the places of the story, opening to the public and thus creating direct contact, a relational, individual, cultural exchange: this approach leads to the birth of a new form of tourism based on knowledge, experience, and relationships.

Conclusion. The relevance of provenance and the role of communication designer.

Contemporary craft is innovative but does not forget tradition. Quite the opposite, it understands it and translates it into something new. Contemporary craft creates connections, and brings different people together, materials, places, and design fields, giving life to communities, groups of creatives and producers who collaborate directly or indirectly and influence each other.

Contemporary craft has many hallmarks, sustainability is one of the first but not merely environmental and economic, though above all social, fuelled by cultural awareness and driven by the need to know and understand the deep heritage that adds value to a handcrafted product.

In 2010 Prada launched the "made in" project to tell the origin of four of its productions from as many parts of the world. Thus, Prada is no longer only made in Italy but also made in Scotland, India, Japan and Peru. It's not (just) about social responsibility, but rather about enhancing the authenticity and provenance of superior skills, as the value of a resource depends on its use and the benefits it can generate. The role of communication design, at this stage of the enhancement process, is overriding for its intrinsic attitude to listen as a preparatory requirement for any design activity, in so far as it acts as a tool for dialogue between people, things, companies, users and between public and private (Piscitelli, 2018).

New technologies are certainly essential tools to improve fruition both from a qualitative and quantitative point of view. Contents and ideas travel horizontally in the virtual and global space of the internet and thus become accessible to many people: participation and knowledge sharing require a balance between the different stakeholders and this balance is made possible by many digital platforms which allow people and places to be connected. The rediscovery of interest in handmade is due to people who fully share the values of craft and making, such as uniqueness and attention to detail. This behavioural change, in addition to an innovative boost towards new methods of communication and digital marketing, has transformed products into experiences that combine the knowledge of places with the discovery of quality manufacturing. As for the design discipline, craft today can no longer be defined only as a profession, but also as an open and inclusive attitude, a renewed approach to everyday life.

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