

CRAFTING FUTURES

**Craft Research and Education Development Projects
in the South Caucasus 2019-2022**

Programme Report by Arts University Plymouth, supported by British Council



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Programme Report: Craft Research and Education Development Projects in the South Caucasus 2019-2022, Arts University Plymouth

This report describes the research and education project undertaken by Arts University Plymouth as part of the British Council's Crafting Futures programme which examined the craft sector and craft education in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan between 2019 and 2022. The report provides a summary overview of the entire project. It consists of an introduction and separate sections on our work in each country. It is available in English in hard copy and as a downloadable PDF. In addition, the individual country sections are available online in translation. For those who wish to read further, our full research findings for each country are available separately online on the British Council website in each country.

We would like to thank the British Council for their generous financial support for this project, and for the considerable commitment of time and expertise made by their dedicated staff in each country. We would also like to thank all our partners in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan including government ministries, national organisations, education institutions, arts and cultural bodies and individual craftspeople and makers, whose advice, support, hospitality and enthusiasm made the project possible.

Foreword

It is a great privilege to introduce this report on the British Council's Crafting Futures project developed in collaboration with Arts University Plymouth. First established in 2019, the project set out to establish a framework from which an understanding and appreciation of craft and manufacture could be situated within the context of creative education.

As a small specialist university, Arts University Plymouth embraces creativity through solution focussed teaching and research, and a commitment to impactful social justice and ecological change through its people, culture and place. With a research pedigree built around our international research platform Making Futures, an important part of our work on this project was to encourage and enhance the appreciation and understanding of craft production and its relationship to creative education within each country with whom we partnered. In particular, our challenge was to help support the viability and sustainability of the craft sector in each country through the provision of increased production, business and marketing skills for practitioners.

This report provides evidence of an invaluable relationship between the British Council and its project partners in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan; and highlights the international impact of working in close collaboration to achieve new learning opportunities and produce enduring relationships. This work is testament to the dedication of all participants, and I am particularly indebted to colleagues from the British Council, Arts University Plymouth and all those working in local partner organisations in the arts and cultural, education, tourism and related sectors in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan to achieve our goals. Working together works.

Professor Paul Fieldsend-Danks BA(Hons) MA SFHEA FRSA
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Introduction

Arts University Plymouth is a small, specialist higher education institution in South West England that provides pre-degree, degree and postgraduate courses covering a wide range of art, media and design disciplines, with a recognised expertise in the crafts and allied maker and design practices. The University's core philosophy is one of creative education offered within a context of social and climate justice and sustainability. It aims to educate its students to become thoughtful, reflective creative artists, makers and practitioners, who will not only make work of the highest quality, but who will also make a positive contribution to the world in which they live. Its international research platform, Making Futures, examines the practice and philosophies of craft and maker cultures, and brings together a worldwide community of makers, researchers, thinkers and others to share expertise and ideas and develop new ways of designing and making that will benefit our rapidly changing world.

In 2019 the University was awarded financial support through the British Council's Crafting Futures programme to work for three years with a range of partners in the craft and education sectors in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan in the South Caucasus on a wide-ranging project that encompassed research into craft and the development of new education initiatives in each country. The project involved a large number of very different partners and organisations in each country. It was carried out in a spirit of mutual understanding and respect and proved to be a vitally important learning and creative opportunity for all involved. It has led to important new initiatives and sustained creative partnerships, and we hope that it will facilitate the further development of the craft and maker sector and associated education provision across the South Caucasus. This report summarises the project and its outcomes.

For Arts University Plymouth, Dr Kim Bagley was appointed Making Futures Fellow and lead researcher on the project, and Associate Professor Judith Noble (Head of Academic Research) assumed overall management of the project. When we embarked on the project, our knowledge of the Caucasus was very limited. The British Council proved to be a highly effective partner. Its Arts Managers in each country provided us with access not only to partner organisations, but also to an extraordinary range of knowledge and expertise about their countries and their cultures, and to the crafts, arts and education sectors. Their enthusiasm for our project and their commitment to it, were, we feel, a major factor in its success. They were ably supported by their Country Directors and other key British Council staff.



Georgian, Armenia and Azerbaijani delegation to Arts University, Plymouth. From left: Ana Chkhikvadze, Ministry of Education and Science Georgia, Maya Darchia, British Council; Varazdat Khachumyan, Romanos Melikyan Music College, Yerevan; Narek Tovmasyan, British Council; Tamta Shavgulidze, Arts Academy Tbilisi; Dr Stephen Felmingham, Arts University Plymouth; Dilara Ibrahimova, British Council; Tigran Tadevosyan, Lori Regional State College, Vanadzor, Anna Mnatsakanian, P. Terlemezyan State College of Fine Arts; Matias Shortcook, Arts University Plymouth; Asmer Abdullayeva, Asmart Creative Hub/Azerbaijan State Academy of Fine Art; Daviti Papashvili, Aisi Vocational College, Georgia; Natia Trapaidze, Georgian Arts and Culture Centre; Jeyran Mammadova, National VET Agency, Azerbaijan; Ashkhen Khudaverdyan, Smithsonian MyArmenia Project. Photo: Arts University Plymouth

When the project began in 2019, it was structured as a series of in-person exchange visits, face-to-face research visits and teaching and learning workshops in the Caucasus and in Plymouth. When Covid struck, we were forced to completely re-design the project so that much of it could take place online. This was a new learning experience for all of us, but in the event it became an important factor in the success of the project, because we were able to have many more conversations and meetings online and to meet many more individuals and organisations than would have been possible in time-limited personal visits. The British Council played a crucial role in ensuring that access to digital technology and online resources was available equally to all project participants.

The project took place during a period of rapid change for each of the countries involved. The after-effects of the Soviet period were still apparent, especially in the education sectors, but in each country our partners were developing new, creative ways of working, and we found there was a great willingness to try out new ideas and methods. It is also important to

recognise that the political situation in the Caucasus continues to be a difficult one. We are grateful to all our partners in each country who helped us to understand this and, we hope, to develop a way of working that recognised the complexities of the situation and the varying sensitivities of all concerned.

In each country we were met with great enthusiasm and also with kindness. Craftspeople opened their studios to our researchers and shared their work and ideas with a great generosity of spirit. Teachers shared their methods with us and were prepared to test new pedagogies and learning methods, and to travel to workshops and events.

In each country we conducted research into the craft sectors. With the support of local education and cultural partners, we were able to appoint and train local research assistants who interviewed craftspeople about their work, with particular reference to the marketing of their work, and also to their relationship to formal and informal craft education.

In Georgia and Azerbaijan we worked with the Vocational and Educational Training (VET) sector to create new online teacher training modules in Creative Learning. In Armenia a module in Creative Entrepreneurship was created. These modules were designed in response to research to meet the specific needs of each country and encouraged a student-centred approach. The modules were trialled with groups of teachers and are now freely available for use. We hope that they will be used extensively and that they will develop further in response to the changing needs of teachers and the VET sectors.

This project has been a rewarding experience of real cross-cultural collaboration. We have learnt new ways of working, and lasting creative friendships and working relationships have developed over the course of the project that we hope will be sustained and lead to the growth of new partnerships and projects between our institutions and countries.

The project began with a series of scoping visits by Arts University Plymouth staff to the South Caucasus, late in 2019. These visits specifically considered craft and creative education in each country. We met many people and visited colleges, museums, craft studios and other organisations. They were the start of plans, ideas, friendships and working relationships that would develop over the next three years, linking institutions and students, craftspeople and teachers in the UK and South Caucasus. Craftspeople understand the complex cultural and social value of their practices, and the importance of developing education within the sector. Consequently, the core areas for development and collaboration were research and education.



UK and Georgian delegation to Aisi VET College, Kachreti region, 2019. From left: Dr Kim Bagley, Arts University Plymouth, Kendall Robbins, British Council, Matias Shortcook, Arts University, Plymouth, Maka Dvalishvili and Tamar Kiknadze, Georgian Arts and Culture Centre, Daviti Papashvili, Aisi VET College. Photo: Giorgi Ramadze

Delegations from the South Caucasus visited Arts University Plymouth in March 2020. This enabled officials, education professionals and craftspeople and makers to get a feel for the Arts University and its teaching and learning methods. Delegates participated in activities with Arts University Plymouth teaching staff on the pre-Degree and Higher Education programmes covering student personal character development, interdisciplinarity, ideation, play, research and practice, and thinking and making. Just as the Arts University Plymouth staff were invited to observe classes in the South Caucasus, delegations to Plymouth observed our pre-degree teaching (vocational education) and Higher Education provision, and visited our facilities. Highlights included creating shadow puppet shows in the pre-degree centre and enjoying meals of local Devon seafood together.

At the time of these visits to Plymouth, there was a sense that a major global shift was beginning. However, none of us really understood at that point how the Covid pandemic would impact all our lives. Subsequently there was conflict in the South Caucasus itself and in the surrounding region that also could not be ignored. These challenging circumstances required everyone working on the project to work hard to maintain momentum, not least our British Council colleagues who worked tirelessly to keep everyone motivated and involved using whatever means were possible or necessary. We are very grateful to the British



Tonirs of different sizes by Gegham Gharibyan lined up along the road outside his workshop in Arinj Village, Kotayk Region, Armenia. Photo: Diana Hovhannisyan

Council for continuing to support our work together when it would have been far easier to simply cancel the project. The Arts Managers at the British Council worked closely with us to reformulate the initial project proposals and plans. We all developed strong working relationships that kept many of us going through the longest lockdowns.

As the pandemic progressed, by April 2020 it had become clear that no further international travel would be possible for the foreseeable future, and that it would be necessary to move the entire three year long international project online. We had very fruitful collaborations working almost entirely remotely and achieved our main objectives. Nevertheless, this added a layer of challenge to a project about hands-on making practices. Some aspects were enhanced by remote working. In particular, we were able to involve large numbers of people in the project. We were able to maintain flexibility and be adaptive, for example adjusting training sessions to accommodate teachers' availability and to accommodate online events at short notice. We were perhaps able to access people more easily and more frequently online, than we would have done in person. Internet access and digital literacy and infrastructure did pose issues for some participants in the project and revealed that more work is needed to maximise the potential of the internet for professional and educational practices in the crafts. However, there was always a way through these issues; a way to get people connected, ranging from using mobile phones and borrowing tech to hiring a venue or pre-recording presentations to

work with time and tech differences. Our research with craftspeople revealed that internet use was much higher than we had expected, even in very rural locations, emphasising the relevance of the digital learning we established through the Crafting Futures Programme to South Caucasus craft practices.

There are strong traditions of craft practices throughout the South Caucasus, characterised by excellent technical skills and technical skills education evident in both colleges and informal teaching environments. In our assessment of the craft and craft education sector at the beginning of the project, we identified that it was not the craft technical skills that primarily needed development, but rather, that there were opportunities to develop a wider range of educational practices in the region in response to the soviet legacy within the education system and its impact on social and economic conditions.

We hope that through the project we have shown teachers and craftspeople some different ways of teaching and learning, and given people opportunities to share what they do in the studio and the classroom. We learnt an enormous amount about collaboration, international working and intercultural communication.

We also noted that there was scope to explore and better understand the craft sector in general, and in particular to focus on intergenerational and informal teaching. The timing of our project presented us with an important opportunity not only to research the wider global issues facing the craft sector, but also to record the stark changes to people's lives and livelihoods precipitated by the pandemic, especially in 2020 and 2021, and what it was like to be a maker during this extraordinary time. We hope that our work will enrich craft scholarship and build research capacity in the region.



Fazail Allahverdiyev's hammer at his workshop in Lahic. Photo: Adalat Hajiyev

Georgia

In Georgia we developed and tested a Creative Learning module. We are extremely proud that our module has been accredited for national use across the vocational education system, a really significant outcome of this project. We also completed a research project into craft production that contributed data and information about this under-researched sector. The research projects in all three South Caucasus countries were inspired by the Georgian Arts and Culture Centre's 2012 study 'The Heritage Crafts in Georgia'. Our findings suggest that support for generic and transferable skills, related to the approaches to creative thinking that we encouraged through the module project, will be really useful to the craft sector especially in a time of global uncertainty. Through the Georgian Arts and Culture Centre's (GACC) highly effective Ethnofest platform, we were able to share our work regularly with the craft community in Georgia and across the South Caucasus, increasing the overall connectedness of craft practice and research in Georgia, and enabling us to participate in the growing craft community. We also made a short video about the project. The ubiquity of online video calls that came with the Covid-19 pandemic played a particularly important role within Crafting Futures in Georgia, with online presentations at Ethnofest about our research and the Creative Learning module. We all had to use our creativity to adapt our teaching and research methods to the online environment. Though we were able to conduct much of our research fieldwork in person, a few research interviews were conducted online due to unpredictable weather and pandemic restrictions. The hard work and enthusiasm of the indomitable Georgian Arts and Culture Centre team, and the dedication and skills of our colleagues at the National Centre for Quality Enhancement made our work together in Georgia very fruitful and creative.

The Context

This project began with a visit to Georgia at the end of October in 2019. Our introduction to Georgia included a visit to one of the renowned 'secret' restaurants in Tbilisi. The simple, unassuming building without signage provided delicious food, excellent hospitality and our first social encounter with a most wonderful group of people. These restaurants are publicised through word of mouth, and are part of a highly social culture built on human relationships, familiarity and a deep pride in the thriving Georgian food culture that we found throughout our time in Georgia and working with Georgian colleagues. Travelling across the city and country we saw VET colleges and craft workshops with the same easy familiarity and pride. Despite general problems with material sourcing, and especially local material sourcing, there is real hope and progress for the craft sector in Georgia. Impressive examples included the small wool factory we visited in Kachreti, and investigations into natural dyeing of wool and silk within the professional, vocational and higher education sectors.



Snow covered Kvervis at Zaza Kbilashvili's workshop in Vardisubani, Telavi Municipality, Kakheti region. The project researchers faced some extreme weather during the fieldwork. Kvervis are large ceramic vessels which are buried below the ground, filled with grapes which are left to ferment, to make wine in Georgia. Photo: Makuna Gotsadze

Cultural Confidence

There is a strong sense of cultural and national confidence within Georgia, but this country and its craft community also face the world, drawing on global craft practices, especially in relation to governance and research.

We finished our scoping visits with a regional forum for the crafts sector at Fabrika Tbilisi, where we spent time with colleagues from Central Asia and across the South Caucasus in Autumn 2019. Fabrika is one of many unassuming locations full of cool Georgian businesses, and a youth hostel attracting young travellers to this ancient city for music, food, nightlife and craft. Its position within the Caucasus region, and the range of wonderful Tbilisi venues makes Georgia a great cultural meeting place. The Fine Arts Academy is a central hub of creativity in the capital with a long history and some very interesting contemporary research and practice. It is unsurprising that Georgia has a national network of craft practitioners and a growing practice of craft scholarship. While it is not without its contradictions and difficulties, the overarching impression is that Georgia looks out to the world. This permeates through culture, government and society and is in part due to some very strong institutions including the Georgian Arts and Culture Centre and the National Centre for Education Quality Enhancement (LEPL) who we worked with closely. These institutions are open-minded and committed to improving their practice, and to making Georgia a great place to learn and practice crafts.



Raw wool awaiting processing at the Tusheti Wool Factory in Alvani. Photo: Kim Bagley

Craft in Georgia

Georgian craft has a long history, with particular strengths in wood carving, textiles and ceramics. There has been a more recent resurgence of felting and cloisonne enamel work. Many crafts have an association with Georgia's strong food and agricultural traditions such as viticulture. The craft sector is growing, though the pandemic has slowed this down. We learnt from our research project (see below) that there is a mix of traditional and contemporary design practice being undertaken by craftspeople in Georgia, but in general they employ traditional making techniques.

Research development

In the summer of 2020 we trained two research assistants and one project manager from Georgia via an online series of workshops: Mariam Kakniashvili and Salome Gviniashvili, together with Natia Trapaidze, Craft programmes coordinator at the GACC. Makuna Gotsadze joined the project later to help with photo documentation. The research project was an opportunity to examine the sector, and also to develop local research capacity through the involvement of new researchers. The deep commitment and experience of these researchers should not be underestimated. Mariam is now working permanently for the GACC, and Salome, through her work as a teacher, will pass on her interest and experience of craft research to young people. The craft sector is complex, and has a range of involved stakeholders, beyond the makers and their buyers. The network of researchers, both local and international, writers and journalists, teachers and facilitators, museum professionals and collectors, amongst many others, all have an important role to play in the development of a strong craft sector, and our work acknowledges this. Our particular focus was on research and education.

Our research report adds to the growing sector research, and was presented online at Ethnofest 2022, in a panel that included other research and development projects that indicate that research and educational development are moving forward despite the setbacks of the pandemic and regional conflicts.

Our research team interviewed fifty craftspeople whose ages ranged from twenty-eight to eighty-eight years across seven regions of Georgia and the capital, Tbilisi. Women remain over-represented in the textile crafts and men in metalwork, ceramics and woodwork. This

is the case across the Caucasus region and in many craft practices globally. Georgian craftspeople get their materials mostly from local retailers, though much of the material used is imported. Tourism remains important to the sector, but the majority of makers have some form of local market for their work. Most craftspeople use the internet in some way, though this is usually primarily for communication and informal direct selling rather than formalised e-commerce.

In addition to questions about their craft and educational experiences, we also asked key questions about Internet use and interest in environmental sustainability, because these are global concerns in the crafts from makers, buyers, collectors and other stakeholders. Craft practices are often by nature sustainable from an environmental perspective because of their small scale and high emotional and personal value. However, many craftspeople don't yet know the global language of sustainability and may not know how to avoid the traps of greenwashing. Craftspeople instinctively understand the value of their work, but might not have acquired the necessary vocabulary or confidence. Our respondents told us that they care greatly about the environment. In many cases the nature of their craft (for example, wood carving) makes them active custodians of their landscape. Our findings indicate that a positive contribution to the craft sector would be support and empowerment for people to tell the story of their craft with integrity, and this would include the environmental narrative of their practice. In addition, support for material supply development, to encourage enterprises such as the wonderful wool factory we visited in Kachreti, would improve local supply chains. This in turn would give craftspeople more control over the provenance of their work. The positive, engaged and entrepreneurial mindset that the AUP team found in Georgia suggests that this is possible with support and capacity building.

Many informally educated and self-taught craftspeople were included in our study. In general the craftspeople we spoke to want to share their skills, and young people are interested, though they probably need some encouragement to become more involved. Many craftspeople teach from home workshops, and most teaching is to people outside of their family group. The study also suggests that creating more workshop spaces for people to teach from will support informal learning within the sector. With informal education in the crafts developing and expanding in Georgia, there may be future opportunities to support informal teachers and learners through mentorship and training.

The study revealed that a very large proportion of respondents lost income from craft as a result of the pandemic, and very few changed or adapted their practice during it. This suggests that enhancing creative thinking, imagination, and creative entrepreneurship is a really valuable way to improve the sector and build its resilience going forward. This was

interesting and appropriate to note, considering that the other main part of the Crafting Futures Programme in Georgia had an educational focus.



Bowls and a lidded dish await glazing at Roland Tsartsidze's pottery workshop in Jalaurta Sachkere, Imereti Region, West Georgia. Photo: Makuna Gotsadze

Education Module Development

There is a strong sense of urgency within the craft sector in Georgia to improve professional practices, and to keep up with global developments, especially in education. This provided the catalyst for collaboration with Nino Khitarishvili of the National Centre for Education Quality Enhancement (LEPL) to develop a Creative Learning module. This module, aimed at vocational education students studying creative subjects, but potentially other subjects too, gives learners an opportunity to develop their skills in ideas generation, ideation and perhaps most importantly, self-reflection. Developing a creative and imaginative approach to problem solving is very useful within a creative career, but also helps every learner to develop their reflective, and therefore critical capabilities. While we offered Creative Learning as a stand

alone module, it can be understood as a learning and teaching approach that offers teachers the opportunity to experiment and be playful in their teaching, within a framework that has been ratified for national use in vocational education colleges. We hope it will be a starting point for further educational development in Georgia.

The other significant benefit gained through developing and testing the module was the series of online workshops and sessions for teachers from across Georgia. Desk research at the outset of the project had highlighted the importance of supporting and enhancing the growing connectedness within the craft community. A small community of craft teachers had the opportunity to come together regularly, first in the module development workshops run by Kim Bagley, supported by Nick Crawley, and then in the module pilot with Nino Khitarishvili and Dr Natalia Ernstman. The module pilot enabled teachers to try the newly developed module in their classrooms in a supportive environment with regular peer discussion sessions. We hope this might be the seed of a future network of teachers, many of whom are craft practitioners themselves.

Research Recommendations

Craft and business practices

The positive trajectory of growth in the craft sector has been negatively affected by the pandemic, and may continue to be affected by wider political instability in the region. Consequently, future initiatives should focus on the resilience of small businesses, including building the local market. Building on existing internet literacy will support this, as will creative educational initiatives that promote adaptability, imagination, and creativity alongside technical teaching. Both are opportunities for intergenerational knowledge transfer, and sharing between formal and informal sectors. Mentorship and peer learning could also work well.

Our respondents were clear that the home studio/workshop or individual workshop setting outside of the home were important not only to making, but also to selling work. Consequently, some help and support for those wanting to enter the sector in the form of access to shared workshop spaces, or opportunities to work in other people's workshops could help more young people to get into craft as a career.

Teaching and learning

We recommend that the Creative Learning Module developed as part of the Crafting Futures programme for use in the VET formal sector, is offered as an elective or additional semi-

formal programme for professional craftspeople too via arts and culture centres or other venues. Its' emphasis on reflective learning may also help informally educated craftspeople and their students to develop a reflective practice.

As observed during both the research and module projects, it would be valuable for those teaching, whether formally or informally, to have more opportunities to learn from one another, strengthening their community and improving their practice. Considering the amount of informal teaching and learning taking place, it would be useful for those in formal educational environments to learn from makers outside colleges and universities to increase the depth of their practice.



Natia Trapaidze interviews George Niparishvili in his wood workshop, in Kaspi, Shida Kartli Region. Researchers worked carefully during fieldwork due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Photo: Makuna Gotsadze

Sustainability

Craft and business practices

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Tariel Zakashvili, carpenter and teacher, at his workshop in Kachreti, Kakheti Region East Georgia. Photo: Makuna Gotsadze



Unwoven willow and basket bases in progress at Zura Kosashvili's workshop in Kvemo Gomi, Shida Kartli. Photo: Makuna Gotsadze



Zaza Aladashvili, blacksmith, heats metal for shaping in his workshop in Arboshiki, Desoplis Tskaro Municipality. Kakheti Region, East Georgia.
Photo: Makuna Gotsadze



Leather saddles in progress at Nugzar Zedgenidze's leatherwork studio in Akhaltsikhe, Samtskhe-Javakheti. Photo: Makuna Gotsadze

Armenia

In Armenia we developed a module on Creative Entrepreneurship for individual craftspeople and other creative professionals. We worked with teaching staff and leaders from three excellent colleges in Yerevan and Lori, specialising in art, design, music and fashion, to develop the module, followed up with training and feedback sessions. Through the hard work and persistence of the local team, the module was developed for specific use within the Armenian education system, and was subsequently awarded official approval for national use in vocational colleges. We hope that it will complement the existing business and studio practice modules offered by the VET sector, and that it will enable students to make a closer connection between their creative practice, and how their work enters the market.

We also ran an experimental digital project entitled Super Vessel for vocational education students at Art College Terlemezyan and undergraduate students Arts University Plymouth. The students worked with photogrammetry and digital online collaboration methods, using the facilities and expertise of FabLab Plymouth at AUP. FabLab Plymouth is AUP's own digital fabrication facility which enables both students and members of the public, including businesses, to have access to digital fabrication machinery and technical expertise. It forms part of a global network of comparable facilities that champion open design and manufacturing. Terlemezyan students were able to scan and create a 3D printed model of a museum object and visited a local university to learn more about digital manufacture. The Terlemezyan students were particularly adept at working with digital technology. While we were unable to have a final event within the timeframe of this project, it provided an important opportunity for students and staff in both Yerevan and Plymouth to collaborate with each other and to learn different ways of working in the digital realm. We hope there will be opportunities to continue this model of collaborative working between our institutions in the future.

We undertook a research project that investigated the craft sector in Armenia from the perspective of the craftspeople themselves, exploring craft practices and informal education. Our partner for this work was the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, National

Academy of Sciences, and we worked specifically with researcher Ruzanna Tsaturyan. Working together, we appointed two research assistants for the project. Field trips across the country provided inspiring opportunities for our research assistants to develop their interviewing skills and learn more about their national culture, and we hope that our report will be a useful resource on Armenian craft.



Tonir maker Gayane Aslanyan and her husband amongst her unfired tonirs. The tonirs are slowly drying at her home workshop in Gegharot, Aragatsotn Region. Photo: Diana Hovhannisyan

The Context

In Armenia, we made many friends and connections, and so had many opportunities to involve others in our work and extend our network. This made us aware of the potential benefits of more extensive coordination and networking in the craft sector in Armenia. A useful next step for the sector and its supporters would be a review that would bring together all the studies, interventions and initiatives that have taken place in recent years, so that the sector can be better understood in the round, and that complementary efforts can be coordinated better.

Our best example of this coordination was our work with colleagues from the Smithsonian MyArmenia programme. In both the module development and research aspects of the

project we were able to learn from or extend the reach of the work undertaken for the Smithsonian MyArmenia programme. MyArmenia is funded by USAID and implemented by the Smithsonian Institution. It is a collaborative cultural heritage tourism programme that empowers Armenians to develop sustainable tourism based on research, documentation and storytelling. For example, we were able to bring some of the enterprise training that MyArmenia brought to professional crafts people into the vocational education sector.

We visited Armenia first and were struck by the material culture of Yerevan, with its distinctive tuff buildings of pink stone. The design of the Tufenkian Hotel in Yerevan, themed around Armenian craft work and filled with many beautiful pieces of work by craftspeople, provided a vision of what craft-oriented tourism in Armenia could achieve.

There is a range of strong and interesting private institutions within the craft sector in Armenia, many of which we were able to visit before the pandemic limited travel. From recreating historic ecclesiastical clothing at Teryan Cultural Centre in Yerevan to creating contemporary jewellery and fashion at Tumo Studios, new craft and design work drawing on tradition and history is strong, especially in Yerevan. Informal and community learning is growing within the craft sector. It is vibrant and interesting and indicates a hopeful future for craft in Armenia. The relationship between private and state institutions however, was an area we identified for development. Consequently, we focused on the state education sector in our module project and on informally educated craftspeople in the research project.

Armenian Craft

There is a very strong sense that the cultural value of craft is well understood in Armenia. Certainly for the craftspeople themselves, and also on a wider level, craft is intertwined with Armenian identity. Armenian craft receives both patronage and funding from Armenians living all over the world. There is a viable internal market for craft and a growing local interest in private teaching and learning of craft skills. Connections between craft and food are strong; the production of ceramics and tonir (traditional bread oven) making flourish. Carpet and rug making are popular crafts and carpets are present everywhere in homes and buildings, and can frequently be seen in the open air, drying after a good wash. Wood and stone carving continue unabated, with intricate Khachkars (cross stones) in many public spaces across Armenia. In decorated crafts, common iconography includes ecclesiastical designs and symbolic fruit, such as the ubiquitous pomegranate. There are a growing number of festivals and events throughout the country that facilitate the buying, selling and experiencing of craft, supporting a small but growing industry.



Ani Umrshatyan, carpet and rug weaver, checks her loom at her workshop in Yerevan. Photo: Diana Hovhannisyan

Research Project Development

Working with experienced local researcher and specialist in intangible cultural heritage, Ruzanna Tsaturyan, from the Institute of Archeology and Ethnography, provided a supportive experience for our two local research assistants in Armenia, Margarit Harutunyan and Diana Hovhannisyan. Ashkhen Khudaveryan, Senior Enterprise Specialist from the myArmenia project also shared her local experience of working with Armenian craftspeople during the online training sessions we undertook. Foregrounding local experience and knowledge was essential to a project with a relatively short period of fieldwork. In this instance, for UK partners to work remotely analysing data supplied from the field, rather than conducting interviews (due to the pandemic) was a positive and appropriate outcome. The strength of research in Armenia and the dedication of Ruzanna was of great benefit to this project. The research assistants' backgrounds in anthropology complemented the project well, and research participants demonstrated a pervading sense of pride in their national culture. Craft as a subject is an excellent area for interdisciplinary working, and enriching the broad and inclusive craft network in Armenia will be an important aspect of the legacy of this project.

Margarit and Diana, supported by Ruzanna, selected and shortlisted interviewees. They then tested out their questioning strategy in Yerevan, before travelling across the country to interview over fifty craftspeople, documenting this process effectively through writing and photography. They visited the Aragatsotn, Armavir, Gegharkunik, Kotayk, Shirak, Syunik, Tavush and Vayots Dzor regions before interviewing craftspeople in Yerevan. Our research assistants learnt about craft and the daily lives and working conditions of craftspeople across the country, and also developed valuable research and communication skills that can only be learnt through experience in the field. They learnt the practicalities of time management and how to adapt their vocabulary and question formulation in order to communicate effectively. They learnt to reassure people that what they had to say was valid and interesting, and that there were no 'right' answers to the research questions. They spent time to gain the trust of participants and listen genuinely about their work, their interests, their political opinions and moving personal stories. They spoke to a wide range of practitioners of traditional handcrafts from tonir makers in remote villages, to lace makers in Yerevan. This was an intense and challenging process, but also rewarding and enjoyable. Margarit described the research fieldwork as 'unspeakably interesting, beautiful and memorable days, very funny, funny moments, which I am sure we will never forget.' The richness and value of Armenian craft was highlighted in the research, but also the vulnerability of rural craftspeople, particularly in the current economic and political circumstances.



Hand-embroidered cloths by Lilit Melumyan hanging at the Vernissage (open market) in Yerevan. Photo: Diana Hovhannisyan



Duduk maker, Mikhail Sadoev in his workshop in Yerevan, showing us his lathe. Photo: Diana Hovhannisyan

Creative Learning Module Development

We were particularly struck by the high quality of technical skills in the vocational education colleges we visited, ranging from clay modelling to garment making. The vocational education sector in Armenia has an existing general entrepreneurship module and has careers advisors in VET colleges. However, entrepreneurial activities within VET colleges are still quite limited due to the Soviet legacy and legislation. To complement the progress being made in the VET sector, we developed a Creative Entrepreneurship module that would enable learners to combine their practical making and creative skills with transferable entrepreneurial learning. For teachers this provided an opportunity to run what is described in UK art colleges as a 'live brief'. The module was developed by Rachel Darbourne, a Craft and Material Practices Lecturer at Plymouth, based on professional practice teaching at AUP. Rachel formed a working group of teachers from our three partner colleges, Romanos Melikyan State Music College, Panos Terlemezyan State Fine Arts College and Lori Regional State College, complemented by essential contributions by Tatevik Gasparyan, the Director of National Centre for VET Development, who was a keen supporter of the programme from the beginning. Training sessions were then held with a wider group of colleagues in Yerevan,

supported by Armine Bachachyan, an independent arts professional, and Narek Tovmasyan, Arts Manager at the British Council. Rachel Darbourne and Nick Crawley from Plymouth joined online, and Ashkhen Khudaveryan from The Smithsonian MyArmenia programme joined in person to deliver a costing and tax session appropriate to the Armenian context, and to continue our reciprocal connection with the myArmenia programme, so as to share rather than duplicate resources. It was an energising series of workshops, with each college group expressing different elements that they found most useful.

After the workshops, the module was refined by Rachel and the working group. It was then written up by local experts in a format appropriate to the Armenian education system. Through these collective efforts and interactive processes, the module was approved for use in Armenia by the Ministry of Education; a significant achievement that demonstrates the commitment of our colleagues in Armenia to developing their educational practice.

Research Recommendations

Recognition at government level of the cultural and social value of craft would enable craftspeople to have more opportunities to tell their stories and be in control of how they are told.

Young people should be encouraged to learn craft skills and persist with them. A clear understanding of the difference between formal and informal learning would be helpful, as would proximity and exposure to craft practices.

Craftspeople could be supported to enable them to increase their confidence and build existing skills in online communication. This could support craftspeople to tell their stories, to build communities and learn new things.

Support for craftspeople with e-commerce and export is a developing area but represents a small percentage of current sales. This is a form of selling where makers have direct control over their narrative, though there is a trade-off as it is time consuming, so facilitation by a third party or family member might be more helpful. Craftspeople asked directly for help with e-commerce including website creation, product photography and social media management.

Facilitating support for local material sourcing and preparation e.g. natural dyes would help the sector to develop.

Overall, our work in Armenia suggested that there are many projects and initiatives seeking to develop the craft sector in different ways, and that there is room for improved networking and collaboration amongst them, in order to make the most effective use of resources and to facilitate real capacity building. We met a range of extraordinarily creative and dedicated people in Armenia; finding increased resources for them to work together would be a very productive development. Given the centrality of craft to national culture and identity, finding some financial resource at national level to enable craftspeople themselves to form a representative organisation to lead and network would be of great value.

Our work also indicated that enabling more effective public-private sector partnerships would be of immense benefit, both to the public education sector and to the growing entrepreneurial activities based on craft; each has much to offer the other.



Detail of carpet weaving by Hasmik Markaryan, photographed at the Telik Centre in Ijevan, Tavush Region. Photo: Diana Hovhannisyan



Saribek Saribekyan carves a Khachkar at his workshop in Gyumri. Photo: Diana Hovhannisyan



Lavrenti Tadevosyan in his home in Artik, Shirak region, alongside his work and tools. Photo: Diana Hovhannisyan

Azerbaijan

In Azerbaijan our main partners were Asmart Creative Hub, and the State Tourism Agency. We are very grateful to the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the State Agency on Vocational Education who provided essential support for our work. Working with Asmart and the Tourism Agency, we created a research report that detailed the research efforts of our two very capable research assistants, supported by Kim Bagley and Asmer Abdullayeva, Director of Asmart and Dean of the Sabah programme. Asmer's experience and support were central to the success of our work in Azerbaijan. Sadagat Davudova, Deputy Chairperson, Reserves Management Center under the State Tourism Agency lent much appreciated support.

Kim and Asmer also developed a Creative Learning module for use in the vocational education sector. This was developed in parallel with a similar module in Georgia. It was then tested by teachers and students in Azerbaijan with support from Asmart Creative Hub, overseen by Dr Natalia Eernstman, a specialist in creative education at Arts University Plymouth. We also hosted a series of online Craft Talks by Arts University Plymouth specialist staff and practitioners in March 2021 on Facebook, in partnership with the State Development Centre for Youth which were very well attended by teachers across Azerbaijan.

The Context

There is a strong sense of change and development in Azerbaijan. The country has a long cultural history and many craft traditions. The sense of newness we experienced derives from the immense and transformative changes that have taken place in the country since the Soviet era. Our work in Azerbaijan was characterised by the enthusiasm and determination of the professionals we worked with. There was an overriding impression that individual teachers in particular were continually striving to improve their practice. They worked hard through all our initiatives and collaborations to engineer change for themselves. It was also

really interesting to see the long term benefits to culture and society in Azerbaijan of very high quality educational programmes that are carefully positioned within their cultural context and operating environment, such as the Prince's School of Traditional Arts in Baku, and the Sabah programme at the State Academy of Fine Art. These projects have helped to train and give sustainable employment to young designers and designer-makers who will continue to develop cultural practices, especially in Sheki and Baku. While the scale of these programmes is necessarily limited, they appear to be highly effective. There is potential to disseminate some of the wider benefits of these programmes into the vocational sector.

Craft in Azerbaijan

Craft in Azerbaijan has a long history and strong connection to culture. Some aspects of craft have really benefited from research and institutional development, such as carpet and rug making. Other craft practices would benefit from further development, and were therefore more of a focus for us in our work. From our observations and desk-based research, we applied a broad approach to creative educational development in schools and colleges, developing skills around creativity and imagination rather than addressing specific craft and



Research assistant, and textile designer, Vafa Gurbanova, applies wax to silk cloth using traditional hand-carved stamps at the Kalaghai workshop in Basqal under the instruction of Kalaghai master, Abbasali Talibov. Photo: Adalat Hajiyev

technical skills and competencies. This enabled us to work with a wide range of teachers on the creation of the module and with craftspeople on the research project.



Gunel Macidova with her Takulduz embroidery display at the Craftsman's House in Sheki. Photo: Vafa Gurbanova

Research Project Development

Two research assistants, Adalat Haliyev and Vafa Adalat, with advice and research support from Asmer Abdullayeva of Asmart, and travel support from the Tourism Agency, undertook research trips to four locations of Azerbaijan: Sheki, Shamaki, Lahic and Basqal. These locations were chosen for their strong craft communities, regional specialities and histories, and links to domestic and international tourism. We also decided not to focus on Baku because of the significant economic and social differentials between the capital and the regions; the regions are in need of support and development to a much greater extent than the capital.

Our researchers spoke to forty-seven craftspeople across the regions of Azerbaijan covering a wide range of crafts and a great diversity of practices. In Shamaki craft practices included

painting, textiles, woodwork, ceramics, hat making and carpet making. In Basqal we visited the Kalaghai makers who worked with silk dyeing and creating patterns with wax resist for which the area is noted. In Lahic many coppersmiths were interviewed, along with blacksmiths, leatherworkers, carpet makers and a hat maker. Sheki is well known for its ceramics, and we spoke with a number of people working with clay - both lower fired red earthenware pottery and highly decorated higher fired white wares. We also spoke with Takulduz embroiderers, Kalaghai makers, costumiers and even a Halvachi sweet maker.

Vafa and Adalat, who both came from craft backgrounds, and who had interests in design and entrepreneurship respectively, had an inspirational experience. They not only asked the craftspeople the prepared interview questions, collecting vital demographic and statistical data for the research report, but also were able to observe them at work in their workshops and spend time learning about their lives and craft. The generosity of the craftspeople, and enthusiasm they had for their work led to impromptu studio tours, demonstrations of wheel throwing and visits to wood stacks and kilns, studios, homes, and workshops. The human and creative endeavours of these craft communities were shared with sincerity and passion. Despite economic uncertainty (both general and also pandemic related), and the challenge for some practitioners of not having anyone to pass their skills on to, the love and care our participants had for their craft and their willingness to share with others was extremely impressive and bodes very well for the sector. It was also heartening to learn that many



Potter, Araz Huseynov, in his shop in Sheki. Photo: Vafa Gurbanova

are engaged in teaching their craft within their families, to outsiders, and in formal settings such as vocational schools, and that there are opportunities to develop certain specific skills that have been in decline in recent times, such as natural dyeing. The increased focus on the domestic tourism market post pandemic has created an important opportunity for Azerbaijanis to learn more about their local craft traditions and practices, and to develop the internal market for craft. During the research fieldwork we were reminded time and time again that people love to tell the story of their own craft, and that they are the best advocates for their own practice. A positive outcome from this project would be the creation of more opportunities for the voices of craftspeople themselves to be heard across the country. Craftspeople could also be supported to undertake their own research to further develop historic techniques for contemporary use, and to create more opportunities for local materials sourcing. Many craft materials are currently imported, but Azerbaijan has very good natural resources that could be better developed for small scale production, and then leveraged by craftspeople to tell interesting provenance stories.

Creative Learning Module Development

In order to promote creativity, problem solving and self-reflection within students of craft and creative subjects we developed a Creative Learning Module. Development was parallel to similar module development in Georgia, and was an enriching experience for AUP staff who were able to learn different things from working with groups of teachers in both countries. The development format included a series of online workshops with a group of teachers to try out different exercises and activities in drawing, making and reflecting, and to experience a different method of teaching. Teachers came from diverse subject backgrounds from stage makeup to textile design, and from both vocational and school teaching, which made for dynamic interactions via translator Khalida Khalilzade. There were teachers from the vocational college associated with the Fine Arts Academy, colleges under the State VET agency, along with two teachers from Republican Children and Youth centre and two craft teachers from Bilasuvar and Shemakhi. The teachers enthusiastically embraced the packaging design brief they were given, and didn't hold back with their ideas, despite teaching for a full day before joining our three hour sessions in the evening. They also embraced the challenge of being online students, sharing photographs on padlet and even making videos to show their process. This was followed by workshops of a similar nature with students, who engaged with our activities in an open and curious manner.

A group of teachers then worked closely with Dr Natalia Ernstman to trial the module themselves with a group of students. There were opportunities to feed back on and improve the module and teaching materials throughout. This experience was met with enthusiasm and a genuine openness to learn new things from the participating teachers. Their thirst for learning and interest in trying something different in the classroom or studio was evident throughout. Peer support, and a sense of learning together gave a strong sense of togetherness to the sessions. The module pilot enabled teachers to try the newly developed module in their classrooms in a supportive environment with regular peer discussion sessions.



Coppersmith Kebleyi Aliyev's display in his shop in Lahic. Photo: Vafa Gurbanova

Online Craft Talks

Billed as a professional development activity for teachers across the country, we held three online talks on different subjects via the British Council Azerbaijan's Facebook page in March 2021. This initiative was undertaken in partnership with the highly respected Republican Centre for the Development of Children and Youth (under the Ministry of Education), whose teachers attended in large numbers from across the country, to learn something new. This

organisation has centres that provide extracurricular learning across an array of subjects all over the country, with dedicated and creative teachers. It was also supported by Asmart Creative Hub. Three creative education specialists from AUP's Pre-degree and Higher Education areas presented talks. Charlotte Warren, a textile lecturer, spoke about using boundaries effectively to enhance creativity; Natalia Eernstman, Senior lecturer in Creative Education spoke about creating a learning environment that promoted creativity, and Maddy Blyth, a curriculum manager from our Pre-Degree centre shared her experiences on learning through making and getting students to take creative risks. We had excellent attendance and engagement from across Azerbaijan. There were over eight thousand viewers in total for the three talks. During the first talk, we received more than five hundred comments from craft teachers working across Azerbaijan. This exceptional response demonstrated the interest teachers across the country had in developing their practice and their willingness to engage with different methodologies.

Research Recommendations

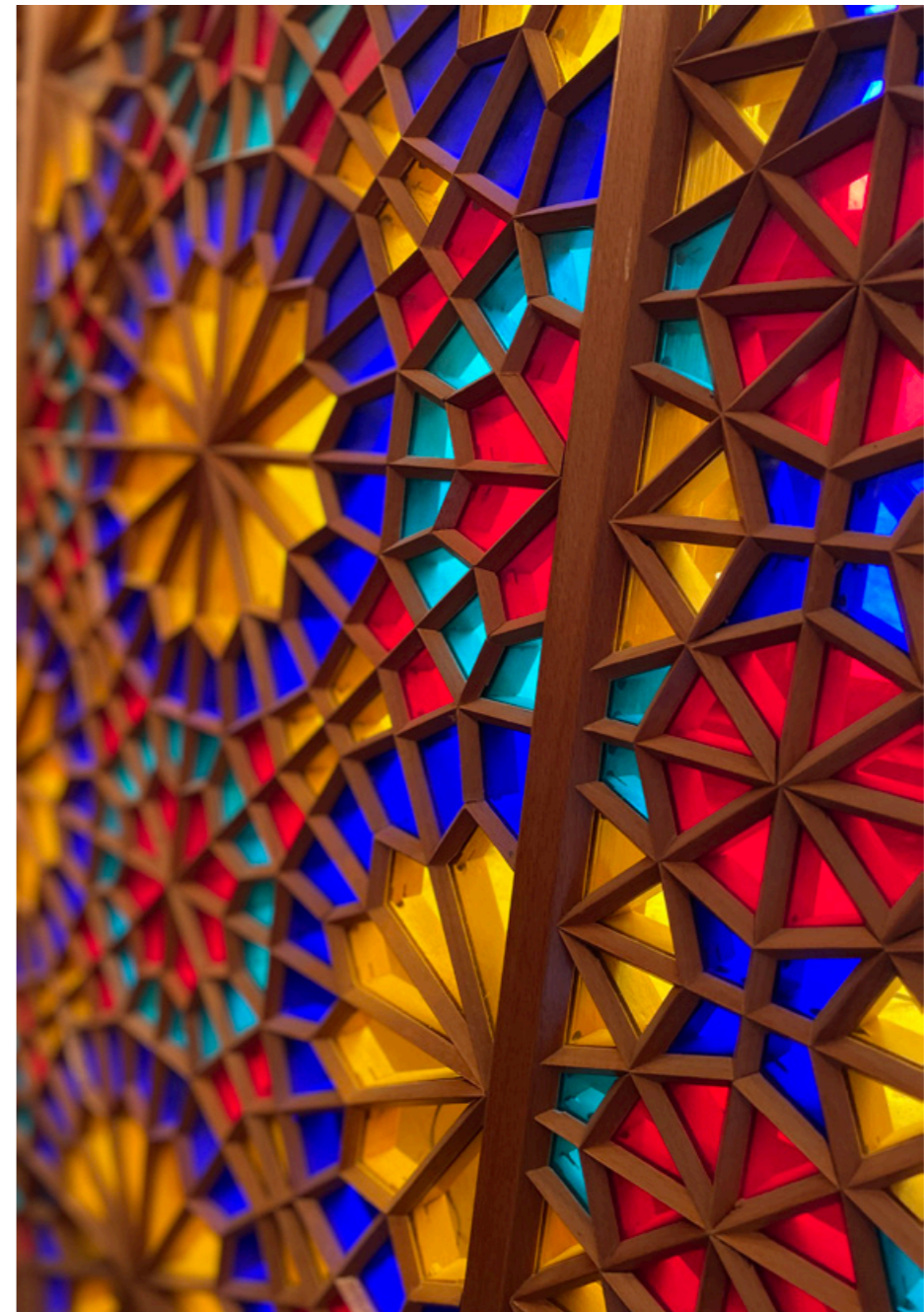
Young people could be introduced to craft practices via short courses or master classes. Interested young people could be linked with experienced and respected craft practitioners. This would support both parties and enable them to understand how informal learning differs from the formal learning environment, and can be a long term approach. Supporting craftspeople financially would enable them to take on a student or apprentice with minimal financial risk, and would help alleviate the challenging circumstances faced by craftspeople due the covid-19 pandemic.

Craftspeople could be further supported through the provision of access to banking services and the internet, emphasising the use of widely accessible phones and phone apps rather than computer software. This would provide an important opportunity for intergenerational learning and relationship building between young people and their older relatives. Community bonds within the craft community could be further strengthened through groups, forums, associations or events. This would develop the established and collegiate community of craftspeople.

Marketing, advertising and educational campaigns about craft could be developed with a focus on internal Azerbaijani tourists and where appropriate, locals, to encourage them to become informed collectors and commissioners of craft work, rather than simply souvenir purchasers. This would usefully complement existing initiatives that promote Azerbaijani crafts to the international tourism sector.

The Creative Learning Module developed as part of this programme should be offered to community centres and community hubs/spaces to develop creative competencies within the community that promote imagination and problem solving. This will help to build confidence and resilience.

All these measures would help build further capacity in Azerbaijan's skilled and wide-ranging craft sector.



Shebeke by Ilgar Rasulzada, in his workshop at Sheki Khan's Palace in Sheki. This is a type of intricate geometric stained glass window made with a combination of marquetry and geometric coloured glass. Photo: Adalat Hajiyev



Ibrahimkhalilov Kamran painting a vase with underglaze pigments at Abad Ceramic Centre in Sheki. Photo: Vafa Gurbanova



The Carpet Museum in Baku. Photo: Kim Bagley

Appendices

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Tamar Glurjidze.
Nona meladze
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Ketevan mamatsashvili

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Ministry of Education Azerbaijan
Ministry of Culture Azerbaijan
National VET Agency
EkoSfera & State Development Centre for Youth
Asmart Creative Hub
Icherisheher Traditional Centre of Arts
Baku State Vocational Education Center for Culture and Arts
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