P/REFERENCES OF DESIGN
CUMULUS BUDAPEST 2024
15-17 MAY 2024
MOHOLY-NAGY UNIVERSITY OF ART AND DESIGN BUDAPEST

ENABLING CROSS-CULTURAL DIALOGUES AS A TOOL FOR CO-DESIGN – BUILDING EQUITABLE KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE THROUGH CREATIVE TEXTILE CONNECTIVITY.

Authors: Anne Marr, Rebecca Hoyes, Stephanie Rolph

ABSTRACT | In May 2022 rural women weavers from the Jaipur Rug Foundation and BA Textile Design students from CSM, embarked on a design project exploring new channels of knowledge exchange and remote co-creation.

This paper reflects on the project's aim to facilitate non-hierarchical creative dialogues between international design students and artisan-weavers from the Global South to co-design a collection of handwoven rugs. Participants challenged existing stereotypes and hierarchies, through a process of mapping textile skills and design methods as well as inviting storytelling, gaining a richer understanding of the material and social networks afforded by their diverse contexts. Together they negotiated different cultural starting points towards the development of twelve co-designed rugs using visual, material-based and digital communication methods.

The authors discuss future skill sets for designers and artisans to effectively navigate a rapidly changing global design culture, to reposition themselves within complex power dynamics. Challenges and opportunities for cross-cultural co-design and creative dialogues are identified as connected to existing Western-centric design school thinking such as individual authorship and a linear generic design development process. If textiles can become a tool for social connectivity, how can design educators enable their students to learn non-hierarchical communication and design facilitation methods to develop inclusive and diverse design mindsets?

The paper concludes by proposing new evolved pedagogies including the ethics of design collaborations, visual storytelling, empathy building as well as connecting local heritage to post-colonial contemporary global design culture as key considerations to move towards more inclusive teaching approaches.

KEYWORDS | INTERCULTURAL CO-DESIGN, FUTURE ARTISANS, GLOBAL DESIGN CULTURE, TEXTILES

1.0. Introduction

In 2022 artisan-weavers from the Jaipur Rug Foundation [JRF] and BA Textile Design students from Central Saint Martins [CSM], part of the University of the Arts London [UAL] embarked on a design project exploring knowledge exchange and co-creation. The project was funded by the British Council Crafting Futures India programme.

JRF is an NGO, adjunct to the Jaipur Rugs design company, working with over 40,000 artisan rug weavers across 660 villages in five Indian states. Their aim is to revive hand-weaving techniques and provide access to social and financial support. Over two thirds of the JRF artisan-weavers are female, collectively weaving rugs from home. Central Saint Martins is a renowned art and design college with a creative community of over 5000 British and international students.

The intention of the collaboration was to provide artisan-weavers with design tools, access to international knowledge resources and opportunities to translate their creative capabilities into economic potential. The project addresses the skill-gaps experienced in marginalised communities in rural Rajasthan, India, where 90% of the artisan-weavers live below the poverty line. For CSM students, the focus was to explore different approaches of global design communication through a diverse and intersectional experience.

The JRF team recruited 25 artisan-weavers and set up a community learning space including digital access and a translator. CSM academics co-delivered 12 lectures, ranging from ethics of inter-cultural collaboration to sustainable design practices and regenerative leadership. Through online workshops students and artisan-weavers learnt together, exchanging design insights, technical expertise and personal stories. The collaboration led to a collection of co-designed hand knotted rugs which encapsulate the multi-facetted journey of this project (figure 1).

Figure 1. Two female JRF artisan-weavers with several co-designed rugs from the final JRF X CSM collection.

2.0. Background

2.1 Global Design Context

Globalisation of the textile industry has led to a decline in manual labour in the West, a gap filled by the exploitation of cheap labour in the global South. With this structural shift the artisan is losing direct connection to their customer and market, and subsequently adopts the role of the invisible maker, whilst the designer is, in many cases, increasingly detached from the process of hands on making. Dr Kevin Murray, World Craft Council Asia Pacific Region, states that:

“Globalisation has impacted negatively on traditional crafts... this has left many traditional crafts in an unsustainable position” (2010, p.5).

This detachment and change in working structure have led to a hierarchical situation whereby the designer, holding the market knowledge, strongly influences both the power dynamics and economics. This power inequity is particularly felt by female artisans, often invisible in craft production, who work in craft production largely because it offers them flexibility in terms of both schedule and work location. Readdressing the power imbalance between artisan and designer is a means to tackle the issues of gender equality and women’s empowerment.

A shift in the craft landscape is emerging, with a new breed of designers looking to rebalance the hierarchical dynamic between artisan through equitable knowledge exchange. Digital platforms such as that created by The Anou Cooperative offer opportunities for direct market access connecting artisans to potential clients. These new platforms allow artisans to navigate the complexity of global commerce and gain market insights resulting in increased economic opportunity. These platforms of democratisation give the artisan greater agency, positioning them to initiate external design collaborations. Artisans, together with designers, are now addressing the systems through and by which products are developed, skills exchanged, and communities and knowledge systems regenerated and shared.

Educators have a key role in equipping students with the skills needed to navigate these new territories of collaboration as future designers. Building new skills of empathy, knowledge exchange and equity. Textiles are now being used as a tool for connectivity and as a catalyst to changing ideas and system innovations.
Over recent years, driven by global environmental challenges, we have seen the emergence of a more politicised ethical consumerism and consequently a renewed interest in global artisanship and transparency in supply chains. Fashion Revolution, established in 2013, is a key player in this field with a belief "in a global fashion industry that conserves and restores the environment and values people overgrowth and profit." (Fashion Revolution Website, n.d.).

Advocating for citizens everywhere to demand greater transparency in the supply chain and enabling the consumer to connect more closely with the people who produce the fabrics and raw materials used in textiles has led to artisans becoming more central to this conversation. Whilst this movement goes a long way in promoting greater transparency, these narratives highlight technical, material and making skills rather than focus on "design" or other knowledge bases. Digital platforms are increasingly used to reinforce the role of the artisan as maker, whilst increasing the profile of the artisan these gestures frequently mask the deeper inequities.

The project JRF X CSM seeks to challenge this hierarchical narrative and disrupt power dynamics between artisans and designers through a model of learning together and knowledge sharing, challenging the "Designed By" and "Made By" narrative.

Increased market understanding and design confidence through effective partnerships and material knowledge can support the artisan towards more sustainable livelihoods and agency. Through collaborative knowledge sharing new roles for both designer and artisan are evolving. Woven rugs offer an authentic tool for storytelling

and collaboration, through materials, images and techniques social stories are played out and diverse world views rooted in culture, place and time are brought together.

> “The rural arts of India are the arts of settled villages and countryside, of people tuned to the rhythm of nature and its laws of cyclical change ...” (Jayakar,1989 quoted in Chatterjee, 2016)

Design and craft making have the material power to challenge traditional arrangements of agency and domination and foster empowerment (von Busch, 2022).

2.2 Knowledge Systems

Examination of the knowledge systems held by both artisan and designer offer insights into the potential new working relationships which can be achieved through knowledge sharing and the re-evaluation of existing power dynamics.

Traditionally artisan knowledge draws on skills of making and materiality, these haptic skills offer insights into both sustainability and local economics. The approaches traditionally adopted by artisans whereby materials are sourced locally, used efficiently with minimal waste and products are developed to commission, embody key sustainable approaches. For textile artisans, knowledge is embedded in the system of the artisan-community as a whole. Mazzarella, Mitchell and Escobar describe this:

> “The holistic contribution of textile artisan communities can be seen to support sustainable development through social engagement, environmental stewardship, boosting the creative economy and preservation of cultural heritage” (Mazzarella et al., 2017, p.1)

Artisan knowledge includes not only how a material might be selected, sourced and prepared, but how it might be coloured, woven, and repaired. Material innovation and deep technical knowledge of the specific craft is key and applied to all stages of the production process (figure 2). Artisans typically work collectively with organisation taking place at a familial or village level to navigate the various structures and dynamics within a community.

Figure 2. Close-up of an artisan-weaver hand-knotting one of the co-designed wool carpets

Most frequently the artisan learns through generational, direct knowledge transfer. Approaches to making are held within families and communities. The artisan-weavers working with JRF evidence a specific collective identity through their rugs. This collective identity is known as *Manchaha* (expression of the heart). Through the approach of Manchaha, artisan-weavers are:

> "given the opportunity to express themselves through their rugs with a mix of personal stories and elements of their own culture and surroundings..." (Jaipur Rugs Website, n.d.)

Both artisan-weavers and textile designers have knowledge required to facilitate the sustainable development of a product, inputting their knowledge at specific stages of the value chain. Textile Designers evidence a "specific blend of knowledge" (Igoe 2010, p.3) a way of thinking which allows them to assimilate various stimuli. This tacit knowledge which brings together thinking, knowing, and making equips the designer to challenge existing patterns of creation and production.

> "Tacit knowledge can be defined as skills, ideas and experiences that people have in their minds and are, therefore, difficult to access because [they] … may not necessarily be easily expressed" (Chugh, 2015, p. 128).

Textile designers have knowledge in relation to research skills, visualization and communication. Tangible tools essential for collaboration.

These varied and complimentary knowledge systems evidenced by artisans and textile designers, supported by a risk-taking approach from textile students can support effective co-creation. New channels of knowledge exchange and "collective creativity" (referred to as acts of creativity that are experienced jointly by two or more people) are emerging. Sanders identifies a move towards Co-creation rather than individual authorship (Sanders, 2013; Sanders and Stappers, 2014).

2.3 Co-design

The concept of co-designing has been widely discussed and multiple definitions have been published since the 1960s. Fundamentally creative agency is shared by the involved researchers, designers and the participants, which can be consumers (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2000), urban stakeholders (de Koning et al., 2016) or medical patients (Vargas et al., 2022). Whilst the principle of participatory design and co-designing is based on knowledge sharing, the understanding of process dominance and empowerment (Wang, 2023) has shifted to question hierarchies and stereotypes of 'non/expertise'.

For this paper the authors aim to focus on the unique context of co-designing with artisan-weavers situating the process in a distinctive area between design and craft, education and industry, digital and physical, and intercultural communities of practice (Wegner, 1998). The following is a glossary of terms relevant to the nuances and differences to the specific context of the JRF x CSM Co-design project.

In *Participatory design* participants are seen as beneficial contributors to the design process by offering their expertise and knowledge as a resource (De Koning et. al., 2016). Ehn describes participatory design as design "with a special focus on people participating in the design process as co-designers" (2008, p.93).

Co-design is defined as the creativity of "designers and people not trained in design working together in the design development process" (Sanders and Strappers, 2008, p.6) whilst Brant, Binder and Sanders outline the three key components of this process as a multi-circular triad of making, telling and enacting (2012).

Co-creation is often seen as a more extensive process ranging from conceptual to spiritual – with Vargas et al. describing it as:

> **"**the collaborative approach of creative problem solving between diverse stakeholders at all project stages. It emphasises diverse stakeholders at all parts of an initiative process, beginning with determining and defining" (2022, p.2).

Sanders and Strappers see co-creation as the collective creativity of collaborating designers ranging from the physical to the metaphysical and from the material to the spiritual (2008, p.6). In contrast some designers use co-design to describe the process of collaboration in which co-creation can take place, so they see co-creation as subordinate to co-design. (De Koning et al., 2016)

Cross-pollination is a craft community specific term introduced by Dhaundiyal and Pant (2020), who define a more fluid and open process between designers and craftsmen as consisting of four different collaboration stages: Sharing, Connecting, Framing and Cascading.

The concept of *'boundary objects'* was first introduced by Star and Griesemer in the zoological museum context and defined as both "abstract and concrete" (1989, p.393) and are used to enhance the interaction with members from different social groups. Zamenopoulos and Alexiou expand on this in relation to co-design and linking different communities:

> "shared material objects and processes arise at the boundaries across different 'social worlds' defined as the wider contexts as a set of shared practices, ideologies and norms" ((2018, p.140).

Whilst the closely related pedagogic practice of object-based-learning is defined as multi-sensory experiential learning (Chatterjee and Hannan, 2016) involving collective material culture.

The focus of this paper is therefore on the exploration of intercultural co-designing with artisans as a form of non-transactional creative exchange between design students and artisan-weavers. There is a fine line between design influence which "happens organically" (Altbach, 2013) and employing an outside perspective that is not culturally sensitive (Janzer and Weinstein, 2014, p.338–339) which could at worst become as a form on neo-colonial design intervention. Mamidipudi identifies the following three scenarios for designers co-working with artisans: intervention, in which designers plan while artisans implement to develop a commercially driven outcome; interaction, in which designers "constrain their agency" and involve different craft communities to produce a socially concerned craft outcome; as well as mediation, in which designers:

> "act as translator and mediator of cultures and leave room for artisans to actively shape culture, exhibiting a cultural concern" (Mamidipudi, 2018, p.44).

In the context of intangible power dynamics between indigenous artisans and art school-trained designers it is helpful to recognise Barcham's (2023) recommendation of using new design approaches involving storytelling as an equitable co-design methodology, which brings Brant, Binder and Sanders' model of "making, telling and enacting" into a different global context. Whilst the "empowerment" of artisans as part of the co-design process has been widely documented the authors aim to amplify and reflect on the powerful creative assets and craft skills of artisan-weavers and how these can inform future design-craft exchanges.

2.4 Educational Perspective

Students taking part in the co-design project were Year 2 students who had specialised in Woven Textile Design. The cohort comprised of 25 students from diverse cultural, class and creed. In the context of teaching international cohorts within a western institution "the world of practise in art and design, higher education in the UK means understanding its western context and traditions," both tutors and students are being asked to

> "review and interrogate your own culture and values… actively pursuing intercultural engagement (...) seeking opportunities to learn about the national and cultural perspectives of others" (Austerlitz et al., 2008).

The JRF X CSM Co-design project provided a unique opportunity for staff and students to pursue "intercultural engagement" both across the student cohort and with participants in Jaipur.

Within *Art & Design Pedagogy in Higher Education* Orr and Shreeves outline the "pedagogy of the project" (p.109) as an alternative model to traditional academic pedagogies. At CSM the students are often exposed to "brief based or project centred learning" (p107). The JRF X CSM Co-design project tapped into an emerging type of project, an evolution of the "Live Brief" defined by Orr and Shreeves as: "Projects set by, or in conjunction with, an external party" (p.111) where traditional power dynamics between industry and students typically play out. Live briefs aim to improve employability of students through experiencing scenarios aligned to employability credentials within traditional industry models.
Live projects have traditionally been focused on equipping students to work within established sectors and industries. Co-design projects can build on the traditional notions of professionalism but challenge the transactional nature of work live projects (Orr & Shreeves, 2017, p.111). Co-design as defined "a practise where people collaborate or connect their knowledge, skills and resources in order to carry out a design task" (Zamenopoulos and Alexiou, 2018, p.10). Unlike live project, where students work individually to briefs set by external stakeholders, the co-design project seeks to foster engagement between the internal and external stakeholders. If we accept bell hook's notion that:

> "the decentring of the West globally, embracing, multiculturalism, compels educators to focus attention on the issue of voice. Who speaks? Who listens? And Why?" (bell hook, 1994, p.40).

Then the co-design project model encourages both educators, and learners, to question this.
UAL's "Creative Attributes Framework" (UAL, n.d.) was put in place with the aim "develop ethical and wide-ranging qualities, abilities and behaviours" in students with a view to improve their employability. The Creative Attributes Framework is embedded into curriculum at CSM to support the development of key skills, behaviours, and abilities. The JRF X CSM Co-design project developed student knowledge and skills across all three capabilities with a particular focus on Showcasing Abilities and Navigating Change.

3.0 Methodology

> "People do action research as a way of helping them understand how they can influence social change. This commitment is contained in Marx's idea that it is not enough only to understand the world; the intent is to change it for the better." (McNiff, 2002, p. 25)

We applied an Action Research Project methodology [ARP] as defined by Jean McNiff in *Action Research for Professional Development* as

> "identifying a problematic issue, imagining a possible solution, trying it out, evaluating it (did it work?), and changing practice in the light of the evaluation." (Jean McNiff, 2002, p.7).

Within this framework the JRF X CSM Co-design project identified the problematic issue of traditional artisan/designer collaborations reinforcing colonial mindsets of exploitation and hierarchy. The Co-design project typology provided a possible solution and the JRF X CSM Co-design project provided an opportunity to apply, evaluate and inform future practise. This was a course wide ARP, requiring the authors and members of the wider BA Textile Team to reflect on their own practise with a view to advancing the holistic course practice.
As part of the ARP qualitative research approaches were employed, collecting data from multiple sources including student artisan-weavers and design-student interviews, object analysis, questionnaires, photographs and WhatsApp exchanges. Thematic data analysis was carried out, taking into consideration the authors positionality and aligned to Braun and Clarke's notion that:

> "Themes do not passively 'emerge' from data but are actively produced by the researcher through their systematic engagement with, and all they bring to, the data set" (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p.8).

4.0 Case study

The Design intervention was set up to offer a unique and innovative collaborative learning opportunity for both artisan-weavers and design students focusing on the sharing of personal stories, skills and life perspectives. The intention of the collaboration was to build on design skills and creative confidence of rural artisan-weavers and to build on design and communication skills and cultural capacity of design students.

The content of the workshops was co-developed by the CSM BA Textile Design team and JRF team and covered a range of skill building workshops. Over a series of weeks and conducted through online teaching platforms the design workshops covered a range of topics including design and storytelling, market awareness, materials and sustainability and a technical session led by JRF. The focus was on creating non-hierarchical creative dialogues through shared practical workshops and design experiences. The practical design aspects were complimented by an innovative and participatory workshop on female leadership (figure 3). For a meaningful and personal exchange of ideas, artisan-weavers and design students were partnered: 2 design students working with 2 artisan-weavers. This medium group approach intended a more meaningful and personal exchange of ideas and invited storytelling in a safe environment where each participant felt able to contribute.

Both tangible and digital approaches were used to promote connectivity between artisan-weavers and design students throughout the project. Tangible approaches included the exchange of "cultural parcels" - boxes containing inspirational and technical materials, objects, and personal items at the outset of the project and tangible mood boards and design inspiration to support the artisan-weavers in the final stages of design. These boundary objects (Star and Griesemer) formed creative toolkits that were essential for facilitating object-based learning, knowledge sharing and co-design.

An accessible research theme 'everyday journey' was identified. Both artisan-weavers and design students shared personal and cultural stories through the identification and documentation of everyday objects of personal interest from their journey, either around their village or to college.

These images, videos and sounds were shared through WhatsApp groups, each artisan-weavers/student designer group were assigned a specific visual icon to facilitate communication and navigate language and literacy barriers. WhatsApp enabled an easy exchange of content, facilitating a visual dialogue of design inspiration. Through regular weekly online meet-ups artisan-weavers and design students shared and discussed stories relating to the WhatsApp images, videos and sounds (figure 4). Artisan-weavers contextualised the images of village celebrations, harvesting tools, food items and rural landscapes they had shared. Design students shared images and narratives of their commute through urban environments, reflecting the contrasts of the city and differing cultural and material starting points.

Figure 3. Screen shot from one of the online workshops where artisan-weavers are enacting their notion of collective sustainable leadership.

Collaborative visual design resources through the digital platform Padlet were set up to create opportunities for sharing imagery and sound. Artisan-weavers and design students were represented on the Padlet page through profiles and examples of previous work encouraging connection between group members. Design resources were co-created including a glossary of technical words and inspirational images of weave and dye processes.

The environment and wider issues around sustainability including material provenance and life cycle were discussed in workshops where design students and artisan-weavers learnt alongside each other in the digital space. The artisan-weavers shared innovative sustainable approaches to dye techniques and the repurposing and coloration of waste yarns.

Sketchbooks and experimental ideas were developed by design students combining artisan-weavers' images and materials with their own research journeys. Artisan-weavers further develop these sketches through group discussion in collaborative teaching sessions moderated by a translator.

Tangible mood boards offering additional inspiration for final rug development were shared with artisan-weavers to facilitate a collaborative design approach (figure 5). Design "spaces" were created with design students leaving space in their designs to encourage spontaneous design adaptation by the artisan-weavers during the making process. This was a conscious decision between CSM team and JRF to ensure artisan-weavers familiar design approach could be applied, whilst looking to avoid control over methods of designing.

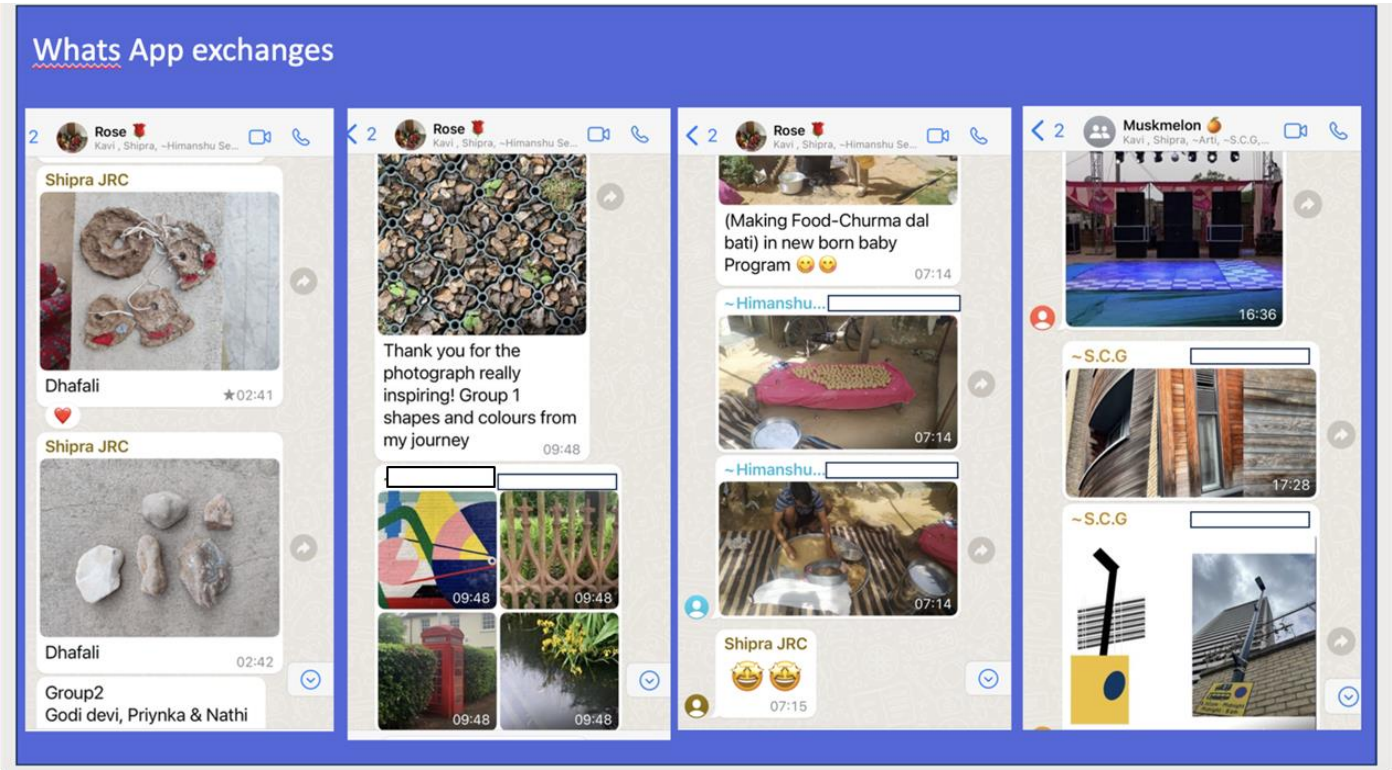

Figure 4. Co-produced Padlet board showing imagery shared by artisan weavers and student designers through WhatsApp

The artisan-weavers, whilst tasked with the interpretation of the co-created design, also had the freedom to reinterpret, change and modify the design. In some cases, adding authorship to the final woven pieces through signatures, demonstrating confident ownership of the co-created design. The final outcome, a collection of rugs, was effectively shaped by both the craft skills and deep material knowledge of the artisan-weavers, the risk-taking and image making approach brought to the project by the students and the specific tools built in to facilitate the co-creation/co-design process.

5.0 Findings

During the JRF X CSM Co-design project there were hidden power dynamics at play such as tutor-students and employer-artisan as well as apparent, noticeable differences between Global West- Global South, rural-urban, educational, gender as well as ethnic and economic differences. The authors acknowledge the limitations of the above findings as they themselves are intrinsically embedded in the power structure of the project's setup, potentially preventing them to fully capture authentic responses from all participants.

Key to the perceived success of the collaboration was the co-development of the programme from the initial funding application stage to making time to understand the different work cultures, physical and economic restrictions, existing expertise, and knowledge gaps to plan meaningful interventions. The starting point of the collaboration was an emphasis on horizontal team structures allowing consensus in decision making through deep listening, inclusive language and clear communication.

Students and artisan-weavers successfully developed a culture of mutual trust and a sense of belonging enabling participants to take micro-risks within a safe online space and embrace the encounter of unfamiliar cultural perspectives and textile approaches. Holley and Steiner propose a safe classroom space which allows students:

> "To feel secure enough to take risks, honestly express their views and share and explore their knowledge, attitudes and behaviours. (…) Being safe is not the same as being comfortable. To grow and learn, students must confront issues that make them uncomfortable". (2005, p.50)

Agreeing on shared ethics and values from the outset of the project helped to set a framework around celebrating unique identities and having an equal voice. JRF artisans-weavers commented in their project feedback: “They [CSM tutors] emphasised the significance of love in collaborative work a principle that became integral to infuse the essence of our carpets”.

Many micro-risk steppingstones were built into the project, enabling participants to unlock and mobilise their knowledge and creativity. For example, during the first shared lecture, CSM students and staff were challenged on their preconceptions of female artisans as defined by excellent craft competence, rural lifestyle and raising a family – instead of associations with entrepreneurial or design skills. Highlighting unconscious biases demonstrated to staff and students a need to actively and reflectively engage in the co-design process to ensure equity or ideas and input was maintained. For the students this was a new consideration to their usual curricula but an important skill to take through into all forms of collaborative working.

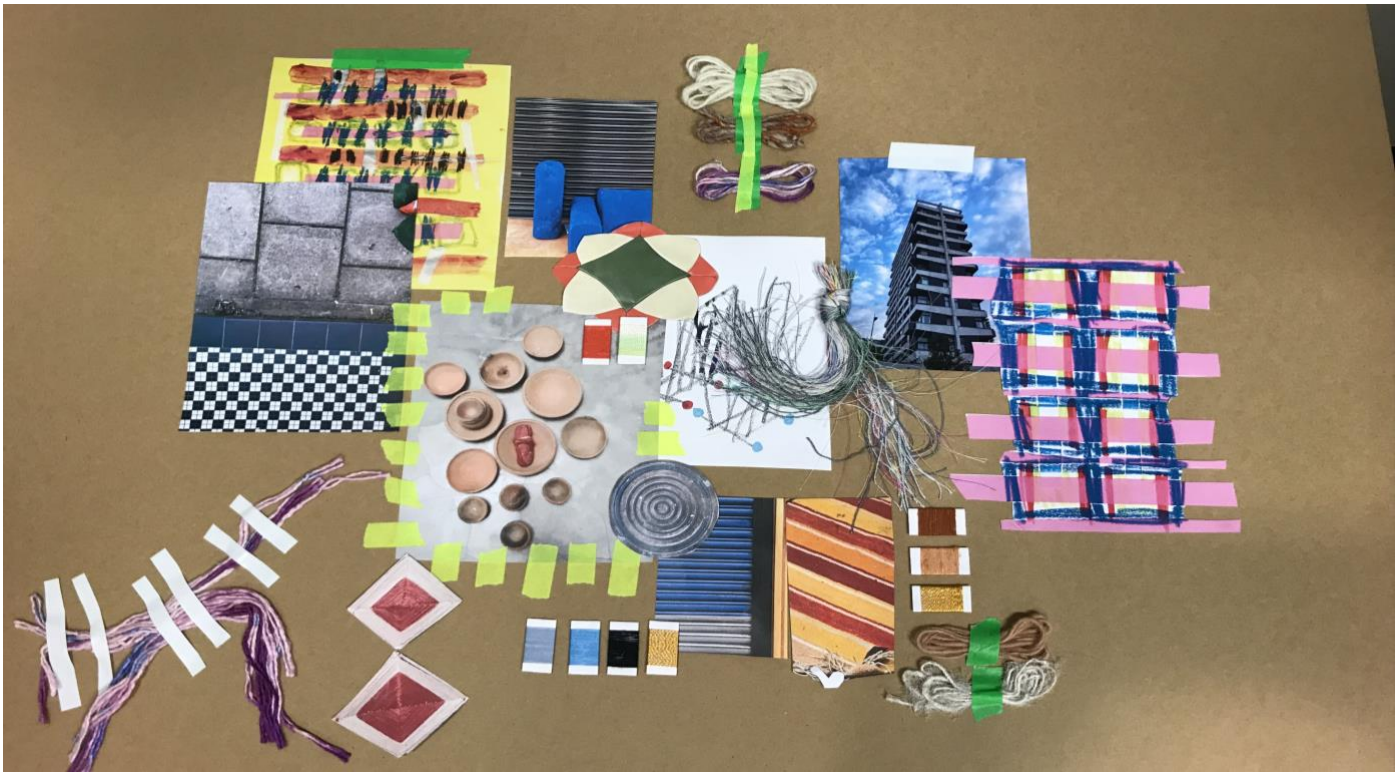

Figure 5. A co-designed mood board and colour palette for a rug - bringing together visual representations of ‘everyday journeys’ including photographs of Jaipur artifacts and London shop front textures.

Working towards the same accessible design theme 'everyday journey' worked as a connecting point and led to some inspiring visual storytelling as part of the co-design process. Tutors specifically encouraged personal contributions, valuing differing individual and collective identities. Carefully selected medium size groups fostered a sense of personal responsibility and shared ownership. Knowledge sharing through digital Show & Tell workshops expanded the “telling” component of co-design. Working within a group context, through digital mediums, pushed students to be accountable, both to their group members, but also to the wider participatory process, turning on their cameras and engaging visually when unable to communicate verbally.

Building connections through digital platforms and shared learning resources was important to bridge varying levels of language, digital and material literacy. The authors’ model of co-designing between artisan-weavers and design-students (figure 6) identifies the access to shared digital and physical tools as vital to navigate different learning environments and enabling an equitable creative process. The WhatsApp groups were successful as an accessible tool to share visual storytelling through images and films. The glossary of design terms and the session on local rug weaving approaches helped spark further co-creativity and understanding. Artisan-weavers stated, “This was the first time we have seen such design references” whilst students had not heard “knot counts” and other rugmaking vocabulary before.

The exchange of boundary objects such as yarn samples, cultural objects, everyday snacks and gifts was a pivotal moment in the project, creating tangible representation of both design cultures. CSM students enjoyed the personable, joyous aspect stating: “It is very exciting to work with artisans with such knowledge and to work with a community that experience things in such a different way, to laugh and learn together”.

Each group of students collaboratively developed collaged textile design outcomes which represented collected ‘everyday journey’ references from Jaipur and London. These were presented on paper by the students who learnt how to negotiate different elements and to be less precious about a preconceived design language. Artisan-weavers were confident in expressing themselves further as part of the co-design making process, specifically when adding spontaneous motifs to the blank ‘design spaces’ as an open invitation to add a final layer of dialogue into the physical rug design. Each maker added their signatures to the rugs to amplify their role as both co-designer and weaver.

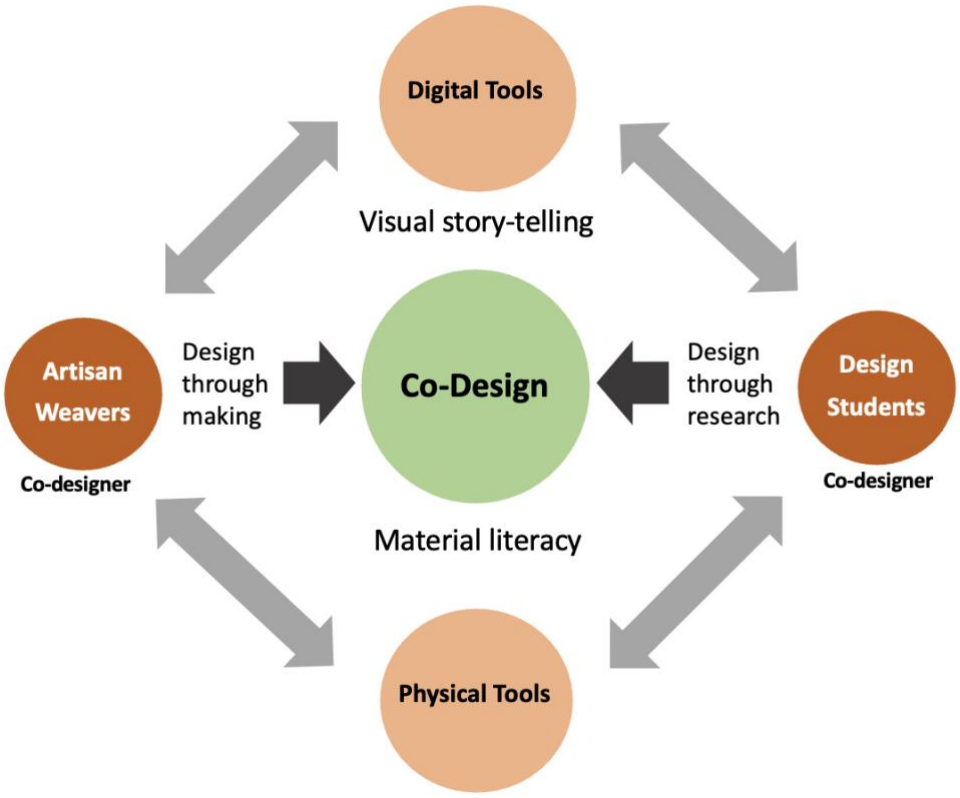

Figure 6. Co-designing between artisan-weavers and design students

Alongside the practical skills such as active listening and empathy building the students also expressed a wider impact of the project was their engagement in the topic of equitable design systems. For a predominantly white student cohort, asked to actively engage in challenging and deconstructing traditional hierarchies, this project enabled students to engage in de-colonial conversations around their work. The feedback evidences new threshold levels in learning, as one of the design students' comments: “This project gives us the opportunity of discovering what is really design and designing in the real world – how it works, working with other people, collaboration.”

Challenges were inevitably numerous. Logistical hurdles in bringing together artisan-weavers from distant villages had to be overcome. Practical challenges included time difference, translation, communication and internet connectivity. Wider challenges related to the learning experience and the realities of the differences in life situations. Both artisan-weavers and design students had different expectations and motivations; the artisan-weavers were salaried as part of their engagement and the design students were being assessed, the fact that the collaboration activities were non transactional between artisan-weavers and design students facilitated a more open, safe place. Additionally, ownership of Intellectual property [IP] presented a challenge due to the

collaborative nature of the outcomes. For the purpose of this project a collective decision was made to assign all IP rights to the charitable foundation (JRF).

CSM Staff were challenged as to how best to accommodate intercultural collaborative experience within the constraints of an already loaded curriculum and industry expectations. Initial concerns around how to create equitable environments of shared learning and co-creation were dispelled once design students and artisan-weavers became unified in their aims and personal connections formed between group members. A lack of a shared spoken language, whilst initially perceived as a hurdle, soon became the catalyst for a more visual and in turn richer learning experience. The cultural unfamiliarity as experienced by both design students and artisan-weavers became a tool to facilitate engagement and curiosity, the navigation of cultural unfamiliarity contributed to the interest, humour, and shared learning on all sides.

6.0 Discussion

When we establish an enabling environment and materials to support and provoke collective creativity (Sanders 2013) we create a design studio space that supports the exploration of innovative ideas, even in wicked problem situations Sanders (2015). Mazzarella et. al proposes that designers have the ability to trigger micro-transformations (2016), the authors extend this notion to say that artisans can equally trigger micro-transformations in designers. The project's embedded co-creation process enabled micro-transformations in the design and making approaches of both artisans and design students and their tutors.

Collaborative making through the telling, making and enacting process supports an understanding of potential power dynamics at play whilst micro risk-taking by both designers and artisans create confidence to navigate diverse voices. A shared textile co-design mindset can break down cultural boundaries and explore new intercultural outcomes.

Barriers such as language and digital literacy have less impact on co-designing textiles, as a significant part of the process is through visual materials and thinking through making. Noticeably design students apply a more controlled design lens to the process rooted in Western Bauhaus and Arts and Crafts education, which puts individual authorship at the centre. In contrast artisan-weavers have usually been generationally trained by family and operate in a local community context. Interestingly artisan-weavers do not use sketch books to draw their layout ideas before weaving, following a more intuitive, spontaneous, design process developed from within the hand knotting process, often resulting in a series of linear figurative motifs on small scale.

With the artisan-weavers as creative partners in the development process the design students were positively challenged to find new methods to communicate design intentions– such as leaving open blank layout spaces to be filled in during the making process as well as negotiating collective design ownership (figure 7). At the same time the initial co-research phase was new to the artisan-weavers, this encouraged them to establish colour palettes, sketchbooks and small material samples. Zooming out and creating a large-scale layout meant that the co-designed rugs displayed a mix of macro abstract textures and micro motif patterns.

The navigation of unfamiliar scenarios approaches led to increased confidence and a more effective co-design process. Design students and artisan-weavers were supported to develop 'listening' and 'sharing' skills through specific storytelling sessions and open-ended questions. Digital literacy and accessibility limited the possibility of synchronous designing through online platforms. In future scenarios this could be overcome.

Collaborative textile making between artisan-weavers and designers offers the possibility to share stories and create new sustainable material solutions through collective inter-cultural narratives. Where students are active players in their learning experience and step outside their comfort zone, the learning experience is more transformative.

Figure 7. One of the co-design rugs with a ‘free-style’ artisan-weavers motif strip was added into one of the blank layout spaces during the final making process.

7.0 Conclusion and recommendations

What could artisan knowledge and designer approaches look like in the future?
How best to build equitable knowledge exchange and creative connectivity into the curriculum?

The authors propose evolving new pedagogies including the ethics of design collaborations, visual storytelling skills, recalibrating creative attributes such as empathy as well as understanding local heritage and how this relates to post-colonial contemporary design culture as key considerations to move towards globally inclusive teaching approaches.

Western art schools should actively engage with local and global communities to permeate teaching silos and reconnect with the making process, supply chain and materials**.** Much can be learnt from other global educational practices around reversing power dynamics by employing artisans as design tutors. At the same time, it is important to develop resilient future design knowledge to go beyond craftsmanship and amplify the cross-pollination of local knowledge and traditional making skills with critical design thinking, digital literacy, and open-ended research approaches:

> “… to activate craft communities to gain critical insights into local contexts, collaboratively develop a sustainable mindset to envision alternative futures, and reframe craft sustainability into actual actions” (Wang et al., 2023, p.65).

Future designers will be playing a broader role requiring collaborative, communication and facilitation skills. What will the essential design knowledge for future students be?

At a personal level, the authors recognise the benefits to their own skills and knowledge in intercultural facilitation, through the engagement, planning and delivery of the co-design workshops. A future design curriculum should support students in understanding the ethics of collaboration as well as how to effectively facilitate co-creation and connectivity. Developing workshopping skills alongside active listening and observation

skills will support both the artisan and design student to navigate these new roles within a changing global design culture.

Future artisans, designers and educators will require intercultural communication skills to build confidence and agency to establish effective and sustainable partnerships. The role and value of future artisan and craft practices is shifting, and the global artisan will play a key role in rebalancing the dynamic between design, artisanship, and market. This paper concludes that through co-creation and non-hierarchical design dialogues artisans and designers can positively challenge the top-down power dynamics towards a more equitable future.

References

Altbach, P. G. (2013). “MOOCs as Neocolonialism: Who Controls Knowledge?” The Chronicle of Higher Education. Posted December 4, 2013. Retrieved February 1, 2024, from hhronicle.com/blogs/worldwise/moocs-as-neocolonialism-who-controls-knowledge.

The Anou Website. Retrieved January 9, 2024, from https://www.theanou.com/about.

Austerlitz, A., Blythman, M., Grove-White, A. Jones, B.A., Jones, C.A., Morgan, S.J., Orr, S. Shreeve, A. and Vaughan, A. (2008). ‘Mind the gap: expectations, ambiguity and pedagogy within art and design higher education’ in Drew, L. (ed.) The student experience in art and design higher education: drivers for change (pp.125-148). Cambridge: Jill Rogers Associates Limited.

Barcham , M. (2023). Towards a radically inclusive design – indigenous story-telling as codesign methodology, CoDesign, 19:1, 1-13, DOI: 10.1080/15710882.2021.1982989.

Brant, E., Binder, T. and Sanders, B.-N. (2012). Tools and techniques: Ways to engage telling, making, and enacting (pp.145-181) in Simonsen, J, & Robertson, T (eds) 2012, Routledge International Handbook of Participatory Design, Taylor & Francis Group, London. Retrieved December 4, 2023, from ProQuest Ebook Central.

Chatterjee, H.J and Hannan L. (2016). Engaging the Senses: Object-Based Learning in Higher Education; London: Routledge.

Chatterjee, A. (2016). Can Our Future be Handmade? Journal of Heritage Management, 1(1), 1-11. https://doi.org/10.1177/2455929616636447.

Chugh, R. (2015). Do Australian universities encourage tacit knowledge transfer? *International Conference on Knowledge Management and Information Sharing* (Vol. 2, pp. 128-135). Scitepress.

Dhaundiyal, D., & Pant, R. (2020). It takes a village: Community based participatory research as a design research tool. DISCERN: International Journal of Design for Social Change, Sustainable Innovation and Entrepreneurship, 1(1), (pp.12–26). Retrieved February 2, 2024, from https://www.designforsocialchange.org/journal/index.php/DISCERN-J/article/view/21.

de Koning JI, Crul M.R., Wever R. (2016). Models or co-creation. In: Service Design Geographies, editor. Proceedings of the serv des. Conference: Linköping University Electronic Press; 2016. (p. 266–278). Retrieved January 19, 2024, from www.researchgate.net/publication/303541138_ Models_of_Co-creation.

Ehn, P. (2008). Participation in Design Things; Conference: Proceedings of the Tenth Conference on Participatory Design, PDC 2008, Bloomington, Indiana, USA DOI:10.1145/1795234.1795248
Retrieved December 4, 2023, from
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/221631329_Participation_in_Design_Things.

Fashion Revolution Website (n.d.). Retrieved February 12, 2024, from https://www.fashionrevolution.org/.

hooks, b. (1994). Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practise of Freedom. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Holley, L. C., & Steiner, S. (2005). SAFE SPACE: STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT. Journal of Social Work Education, 41(1), (pp.49–64). Retrieved December 10, 2024, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/23044032.

Igoe, E. (2010). The tacit-turn: textile design in design research. *Duck Journal for Research in Textiles and Textile Design*, *1*. (pp.1-11).

Jaipur Rugs Website (n.d.). Retrieved January 9, 2024, from https://www.jaipurrugs.com/uk/collections/manchaha.

Janzer C.L. & Weinstein L.S. (2014). Social Design and Neocolonialism, Design and Culture, 6(3), 327-343. DOI: 10.2752/175613114X14105155617429.

Mamidipudi, A. (2018). Constructing Common Knowledge: Design Practice for Social Change in Craft Livelihoods in India. Design Issues 34 (4), 37–50. Retrieved January 30, 2024, from https://doi.org/10.1162/desi_a_00510.

Mazzarella, F., Escobar-Tello, C., and Mitchell, V. (2016). Moving Textile Artisans' Communities towards a Sustainable Future – A Theoretical Framework, in Lloyd, P. and Bohemia, E. (eds.), Future Focused Thinking - DRS International Conference 2016, 27 - 30 June, Brighton, United Kingdom. Retrieved January 12, 2024, from https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2016.140.

Mazzarella, F., Mitchell, V., and Escobar-Tello, C., (2017). Crafting Sustainable Futures. The Value of the Service Designer in Activating Meaningful Social Innovation from within Textile Artisan Communities, The Design Journal, 20:sup1, S2935-S2950, DOI: 10.1080/14606925.2017.1352803.

McNiff, J. (2002). Action Research for Professional Development. Retrieved from February 9, 2024, from https://www.jeanmcniff.com/ar-booklet.asp.

Murray, K. (2010). 'Outsourcing the hand: An analysis of craft-design collaborations across the global divide.' in *Craft + Design Enquiry*, vol.2. 1-24.

Orr, S. & Shreeve, A. (2017). 'Realising the Curriculum in Art and Design: The role of the Project' in Orr, S. & Shreeve, A. Art & Design in Higher Education: Knowledge, Values and Ambiguity in the Creative Curriculum (pp.107-124). Oxford, Taylor & Francis Group.

Prahalad C.K. and Ramaswamy V. (2000.) Co-opting Customer Competence; Harvard Business Review 78 (1). Retrieved January 30, 2024, from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/245678054_Co-Opting_Customer_Competence.

University of the Arts London (n.d.) The Creative Attributes Framework. Retrieved January 21, 2024 from https://www.arts.ac.uk/about-ual/teaching-and-learning-exchange/careers-and-employability/creative-attributes-framework.

Louise Valentine, Jen Ballie, Joanna Bletcher, Sara Robertson & Frances Stevenson (2017). Design Thinking for Textiles: let's make it meaningful, The Design Journal, 20:sup1, S964-S976, DOI: 10.1080/14606925.2017.1353041

Sanders EB, Stappers PJ. (2008). Co-creation and the new landscapes of design. CoDesign. 2008;4(10) 5–18.

Sanders, E.B.N. (2015). Oxymoron? In Resnick, E. (2019). The Social Design Reader. 1st edn. (p.393-401). Bloomsbury Publishing.

Star, S., & Griesemer, J. (1989). Institutional Ecology, `Translations' and Boundary Objects: Amateurs and Professionals in Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907-39. Social Studies of Science: An International Review of Research in the Social Dimensions of Science and Technology, 19(3), 387-420.

The Anou Website. Retrieved February 8, 2024, from https://www.theanou.com/about .

Vargas C, Whelan J, Brimblecombe J, Allender S. (2022). Co-creation, co-design, co-production for public health – a perspective on definitions and distinctions in Public Health Research and Practice Volume 32(2). Retrieved February 9, 2024, from https://www.phrp.com.au/issues/june-2022-volume-32-issue-2/co-creation-co-design-co-production-for-public-health-a-perspective-on-definition-and-distinctions/.

Wang, B., Ji, T., and He R. (2023). Empowerment or Disempowerment: The (Dis)empowering Processes and Outcomes of Co-Designing with Rural Craftspeople. Sustainability 2023 (15) 4468. Retrieved February 1, 2024, https://www.mdpi.com/journal/sustainability .

Wenger, E. (1998). Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zamenopoulos, T. and Alexiou, K. (2018). ‘Co-Design as Collaborative Research’ in Facer, K. and Dunleavy, K. (eds.) Connected Communities Foundation Series. Bristol: University of Bristol / AHRC Connected Communities Prog.

About the Authors:

Anne Marr is the Programme Director for Jewellery, Textiles and Materials at CSM. Her research is based around the socio-cultural context of textiles and materials, exploring interdisciplinary creative knowledge exchange to respond to societal needs and co-create more empathetic communities.

Rebecca Hoyes is a textile designer and an Associate Lecturer at CSM. Her research interests lie in material narratives, sustainable practices, and the interplay between digital and craft processes. Rebecca has extensive experience in cross-cultural knowledge exchange through textiles and materials.

Stephanie Rolph is a woven textile designer with expertise in circular and regenerative material innovation. Over the past decade, she has collaborated with prestigious global brands across diverse industries. Stephanie is a Senior Lecturer at CSM and a UAL postdoctoral research fellow.

Acknowledgements: The authors would like to thank to thank everybody at the JRF for their generosity and continued support for the collaboration. All figures have been included with the participants consent. We would like to thank our colleagues and students at CSM for their engagement, enthusiasm and flexibility to make the project happen.

We would also like to acknowledge the funding provided by the British Council India Crafting Futures India as well as in-kind support from the Jaipur Rugs Foundation as well as UAL.