

Crafting Futures

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# Kazakhstan Crafting Futures Report 2019–2022

May 2022

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# Programme Overview

- **What this programme in Kazakhstan is about:** Crafting Futures connects heritage and contemporary culture; builds awareness of the crafts sector as one of the main drivers of economic, social and regional development; supports economic diversification; and supports youth employability (particularly for young women and girls).
- **Theme and what Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) the programme responds to:** The work in Kazakhstan responds to SDG 8: Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all. SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. SDG 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries. SDG 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns. SDG 17: Revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development.
- **Who our core audience is:** Our core audience in Kazakhstan consists of the individual enterprises and practitioners who have attended the workshops. Our partners in Kazakhstan (Union of Artisans and British Council Kazakhstan), and policy makers.

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# Scoping and Pilot Visits 2019–2020

## Research Team

- **Joseph Pochodzaj (Royal College of Art) Pilot Visit**
- **Peter Oakley (Royal College of Art) Scoping Visit**
- **Martin Quinn (University of Leicester) Scoping and Pilot Visit**

The scoping visit took place between the 20 and 24 October 2019 when the visiting academics joined a team including representatives from the Union of Artisans (UoA), Chamber of Entrepreneurs, British Council Kazakhstan and Multimedia Company Adamdar, who filmed and photographed the trip. The trip was led by Aizhan Bekkulova, who runs the Union of Artisans. This group was founded in 2012 although their roots go back to a meeting in 1995 following a regional event that was held in Almaty, hosted by Aid to Artisans. The Union of Artisans was formed in response to a lack of support for crafts people in Kazakhstan, especially when compared to other Central Asian states.

The team spent two days in Almaty meeting with key stakeholders from the British Council, other agencies and then touring craft workshops across woodworking (musical instrument making), ceramics, textiles, metal working and jewellery making. We then moved to Shymkent for more visits and spent a day in Turkestan, where we visited museums, workshops, an archaeological site and a proposed cultural centre which has subsequently been repurposed for the local University.

The pilot visit took place between 1 and 7 March 2020. The UK team worked with the Union of Artisans, the British Council and Adamdar (media company) to host three workshops over the course of five days. We are grateful to the British Council for providing their office space for the Almaty workshops and to the Union of Artisans for sourcing the hotel and workshop space in Shymkent. Thank you also to Malika and Timur of Adamdar for their incredibly hard work in recording the outcomes of the workshops and discussions.

Kazakhstan is a huge country but sparsely populated and we only visited the South-Eastern corner of the country, however, this did include the two biggest cities in Almaty and Shymkent (although Nur Sultan is the capital it is much smaller than Almaty). We raised these issues in the Scoping Report. The workshops of the pilot visit were attended by some crafts people and policy makers from other parts of Kazakhstan. However, following discussion with the British Council it was decided that the focus should remain on these areas of the country.

## The Pilot Workshops

Over the course of the week, three workshops were held. A one-day workshop for policy makers and craft leaders in Almaty on 2 March, which was followed by two two-day workshops for crafts people, one in Almaty (3–4 March) and one in Shymkent (5–6 March). In each workshop we sought feedback on the main findings of the scoping visit and have refined our summary of the main challenges and issues below as a result. The workshops were split into sessions on the scoping report, discussing issues in the sector, mapping the sector and then for

the practitioner workshop the second day involved creating an exhibition of craft products and tools and constructing narratives about craft.

In the conception of the pilot workshops in both Almaty and Shymkent we were mindful of our position as representatives of two UK higher education institutions, acknowledging and discussing inherent power relations and potential biases actively with the group of participants.

To account for and mitigate this, the workshops were designed to be participant-led – actively seeking democratic and participatory research methodologies that engaged participants in a process of co-creation and not one of harvesting data and information. The idea of *Knowing With* (De Santos (2018, 2016) not *knowing about* directly informed both how we positioned our role as facilitators of a process of co-design. The methods and approaches we used arose directly from discussion with craft leaders prior to and practitioners during the workshops – actively responding to insights as they emerged during the five days.

## Mapping Craft

The workshop participants were asked to produce two maps – one of Kazakhstan as a whole and one of the cities where the workshops took place. This was an initial exercise to demonstrate how mapping might be possible, rather than an attempt to produce a definitive craft map of Kazakhstan. For each map participants were given a series of coloured stickers each representing a different sub-sector of craft and asked to place one for each location on the map where they felt those sub-sectors existed. Each map produced was slightly different (as expected), however, there were stark differences between the maps produced by the policy makers, and the practitioners back up the findings from the previous visits that policy makers aren't fully aware of the extent of the spread of the craft sector across the country.



Figure 1: Craft Map of Kazakhstan by Craft Practitioners

These maps also provided an opportunity for a discussion on how the sector might draw on examples from crafts people in other cities and countries to do some simple self-promotion and marketing. Using the maps in Figures 2 and 3 the participants agreed to work on creating 'craft walks' of Almaty and Shymkent that could be published on Google maps for tourists to explore the craft in those cities when visiting. A further possibility here is that the Union of Artisans could embed Google maps of the main cities and towns in Kazakhstan on their website and invite local crafts people to pin their workshops on the maps. This would create a valuable resource both for tourists who are looking for local craft but also the start of a database of crafts businesses.

The activity was designed to allow practitioners the space to record their own individual understanding of where craft histories and activities are situated. The agenda was not to create a definitive map of craft in Kazakhstan, but to introduce the value of mapping, of building sustainable networks and an understanding of communities.

This was important, that it was not an 'official' or state-sponsored map, but about building the foundations of a bridge between the individual practitioners, local cultural organisations and the potential policy tools that could emerge from this process. Co-designing a community-led mapping process methods at local, regional and national levels will be crucial to produce both an accurate, useful and purposeful outcome. The question of who this map is for, how it is to be used and the audiences it seeks to engage will require further investigation and research.



*Figure 2: Craft Map of Almaty by Practitioners*



*Figure 3: Craft Maps of Shymkent by Practitioners*

## Story Telling

The second substantive part of the practitioner workshops focused on the craft produced by the participants and sessions aimed at constructing narratives and stories about their work. This formed part of the discussions we had on marketing to customers (domestic and tourists) but also in getting messages across to stakeholders (banks, policy makers etc.) about the support that was needed to protect and grow the sector in Kazakhstan. These sessions involved the participants bringing examples of their craft products along with the tools they used to make them and producing an exhibition on the second day of the workshops (see Figures 4 and 5).





Figure 4: Craft Exhibition in Almaty

The intention of this part of the workshop was for us to listen and understand – to observe how the craftspeople displayed, handled and described their products; the processes, tools and materials they used; and the histories, traditions and values at the centre of their practices.

To map and structure these stories, the following framework/matrix was provided during the morning sessions:

- The Economic value – *What (the objects, products, outcomes)*
- The Social value – *How (methods, tools, contexts, locations)*
- The Cultural value – *Why (histories, traditions, stories and values)*

This framework was presented not as form, but as a matrix of considerations and factors – challenging existing marketing and communication output that tended to focus on only the objects and methods (the economic and social) – with much less of an emphasis on the cultural value that many practitioners felt so deeply. Sharing this framework within the storytelling part of the workshops allowed participants to start to weave together more complex, nuanced narratives that both articulated the value of their objects, but also of their wider practices.



Figure 5: Exhibition in Shymkent

Having produced the exhibition we then asked participants to write short pieces of text to explain their work (Figures 6 and 7) – both from the point of view of what they were but also what inspired them to make them. The passion and creativity of the participants came to the fore here and we worked with them to think about how this could be translated into marketing campaigns and pitches for funding and support.

Aware of the performative nature of presenting their work (particularly being mediated by a translator from Russian/Kazakh into English), we also provided space for practitioners to directly annotate and label the work that they displayed in the session. This was to capture specific details and nuances of how individual practitioners describe and articulate their work, tools and experience.

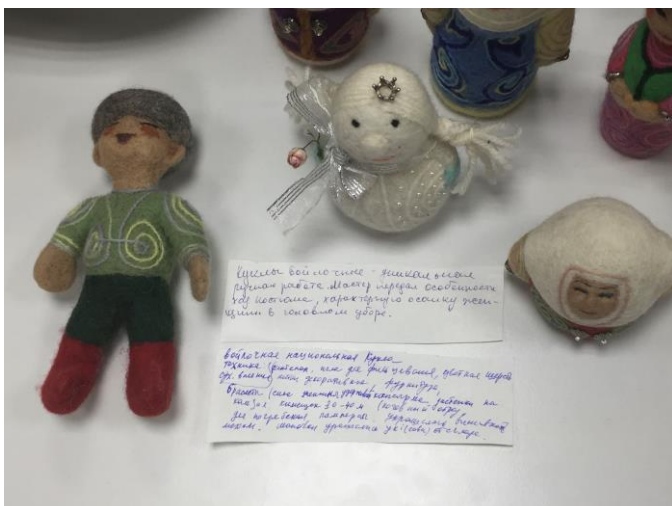


Figure 6: Story Telling in Almaty



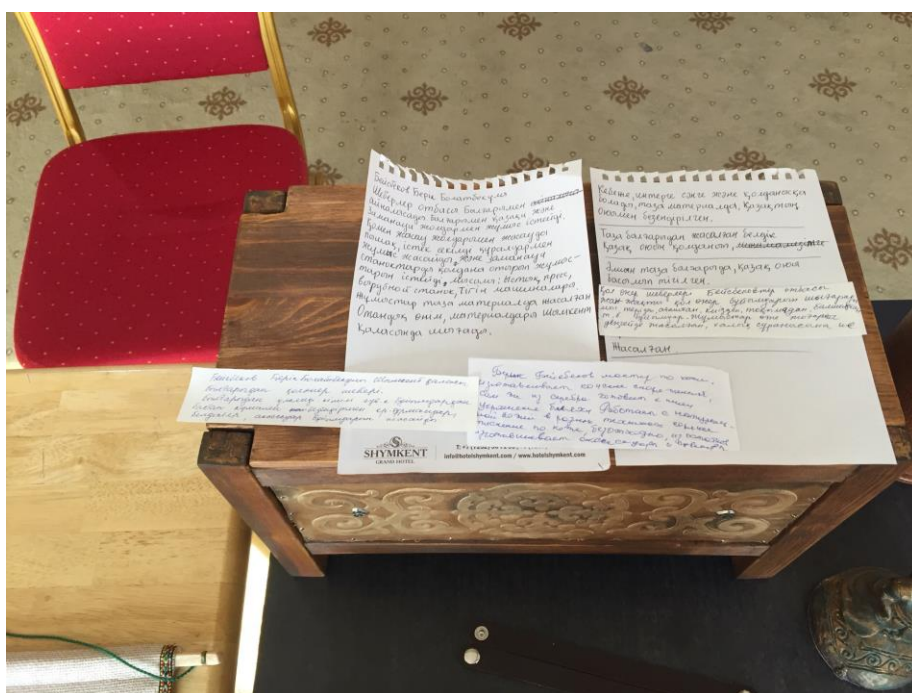


Figure 7: Story Telling in Shymkent

## Online Workshops Spring 2021

### Research Team

- Joseph Pochodzaj (Royal College of Art)
- Martin Quinn (University of Leicester)
- Rathna Ramanathan (Royal College of Art)

After the successful pilot visit in March 2020 and further to discussions with our local partners, we proposed a series of workshops focusing on the themes emerging from the scoping and pilot visits in 2019 and 2020. The intention was to have a further visit by the UK team to carry out these workshops but, clearly, the global pandemic meant that we first had to delay and then ultimately alter our plans.

We ran two sets of workshops in collaboration with our partners the British Council and the Union of Artisans. These took place in February and March 2021 and on both occasions we

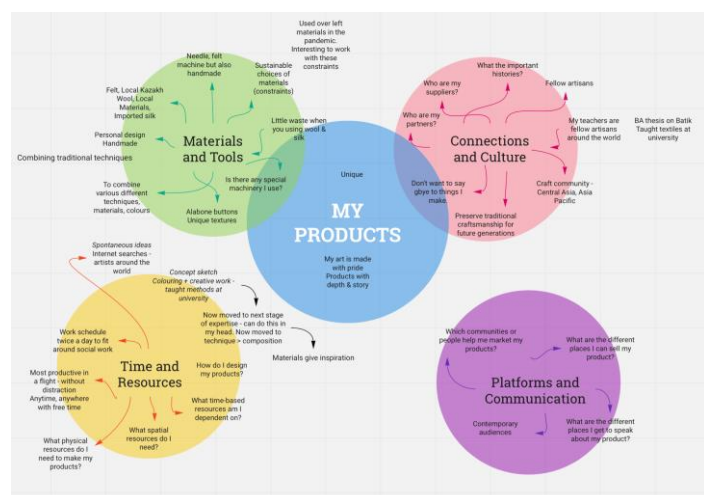
repeated the workshops in Almaty and Shymkent to reach as many of the participants from the earlier visits as possible. Prior to the workshops, as a team we sent the participants some preparatory work about locating their practices within the pandemic. These were received via the Telegram app, ensuring that all practitioners, no matter what their connectivity was, had the opportunity to contribute.

The workshops were designed to run in a 'blended' format with tasks and videos from the UK team being worked on in groups in the morning before the UK team joined for the afternoon via Zoom for presentations and reflections both individually and in a group. This allowed the participants to come together and work in groups and share ideas, feedback, and maintain a sense of community. We are very thankful to our partners in Kazakhstan for working with us to make the sessions a success and especially to the participants for engaging with the sessions and pre-session 'homework' so enthusiastically.

## The Workshops

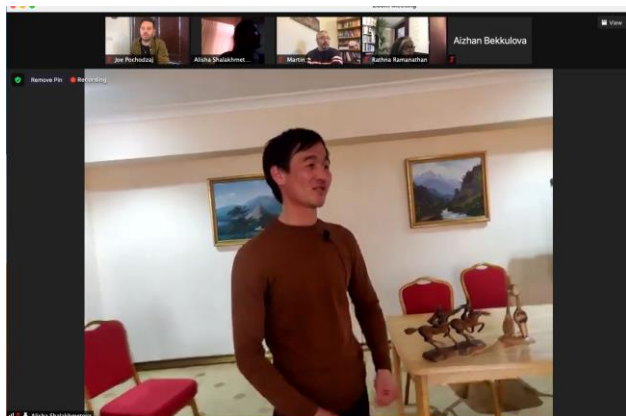
For the first workshop we took the participants through the Business Model Canvas and set them a task of mapping their connections and networks. This included formal business partners, fellow craftspeople, suppliers, buyers, financiers and support organisations like the Union of Artisans and the British Council.

This process was designed to map the ecosystem of each of the practitioners, centred around the following themes: materials and tools, time and resources, connections and culture, and platforms and communication.



### 'Mapping your Ecosystem' – Day 1 Workshop Activity

The workshop focused on craft communication strategies and language, and the participants were asked to construct narratives of their practices and work on forming pitches for their position and products. Over the two days of the workshop, we worked with the crafts people to narrow down their pitch and identify the core messages that they needed to communicate in a range of contexts, and to different potential audiences. Participants worked in the mornings on preparing their pitches (even literally filming them in an elevator at one point!) and then presented to the whole group in the afternoons.



*Zoom and documentation set up for Workshop in Shymkent*

## **Key findings and themes that emerged**

Across both core workshop activities in both Almaty and Shymkent key themes and findings emerged that will underpin the next steps outlined for phase 3 of the Crafting Futures work in Kazakhstan.

### **1. Impact of the Pandemic**

The challenges created by the pandemic over the past 12 months forced craft practitioners to establish new networks and connections in order to share and exchange resources, tools, materials and information. These formal and more informal networks (supported by the Union of Artisans) reinforced the sense of community across the craft sector and established new ways of communicating and exchanging information – using social media and online messaging platforms to build those channels of communication.

The scarcity of certain metals and materials during the pandemic also created an opportunity for practitioners to try new ways of working and innovate new techniques and develop new skills. It allowed practitioners to reflect on what they do and find new ways to create, design and make.

### **2. Sharing of Knowledge and Education**

The sharing of knowledge within the craft community was discussed both in Almaty and Shymkent by practitioners.

There is a common desire to share the skills, techniques, stories and traditions with the wider public in Kazakhstan as well as with tourists from overseas. Initiatives such as opening up workshops to visitors, organising craft classes for tourists, establishing gallery spaces and developing tourist maps were all cited as initiatives that had either been attempted or would be valued by craft practitioners in the future.

There was a hope that by opening up the processes and traditions held by the craft community to others a better understanding of the cultural and social value of the craft community could be demonstrated (and experienced) by both Kazakhs and visitors alike.

These forms of outreach were framed in the spirit of generosity – where every visitor is ‘considered a potential apprentice’.

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There was a desire articulated by practitioners to not only sell their products, but also to teach their histories, values and stories to others through what and how they make their products.

Particularly in Shymkent, there was a sense that the way the products are sold was not a 'one-way' financial transaction but seen as an investment in the family of craftspeople and their futures. It was felt that this story, of a different type of value/exchange (not just the financial dimension), needed to be better communicated and explained to customers and policymakers.

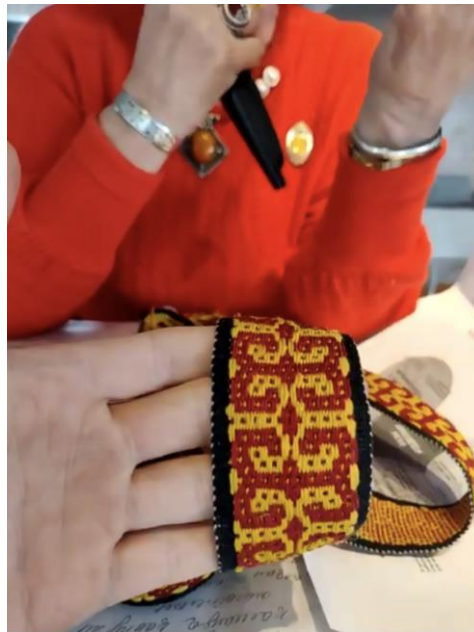
### **3. Intergenerational Exchange**

Repeatedly across both cities the desire to pass on the knowledge, skills, methods and stories held by the older generation to the younger generation was strongly expressed.

This desire was met with equal determination by younger craft practitioners to learn from previous generations and traditions but also to innovate new techniques, embrace new technologies and create new and more international markets and opportunities.

The apprentice model plays a significant role in being able to exchange knowledge between generations – this model is under strain from a lack of intergenerational engagement and economic pressures of workshop space (that can host trainees and apprentices).

The main value at the heart of the apprentice model is the affordance of time and the sense that the development of an individual's craft is a lifelong mission, 'a journey of continual learning'.



### **4. History and Identity**

Both from the scoping visit and in the latest workshops in phase 2, the desire for visibility and recognition was strongly felt by the craft community. Recognition in policymaking, effective official certification and platforms to promote their products were seen as important parts of establishing a clear identity and voice for craft within Kazakhstan.

When asking practitioners to 'pitch' their products and value to key markets, it became clear that 'value' is articulated in specific ways by the practitioners.



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As well as explaining that they see themselves as holders of the 'National Code', it became clear that the intimate relationship between the craft practitioner and the way that they make, the materials they use and the stories they are telling weaves together not only the values of the community but the value of the products they create.

These stories are woven into the ways fabrics are created, marks are made, the types of tools used, the colours and patterns selected, the images created. The stories are also embedded into the way products are presented – the packaging used and methods of display created.

History was seen as something to be understood, but not something to hold us back. This was particularly important to younger craft practitioners who stated that they wanted to find a balance between their history and to create products relevant to contemporary life (with purpose).

## 5. Ecology and Sustainability

The strong connection between the land, nature and their craft came through many of the practitioners' presentations. Their concern for their surrounding environment, the use of environmentally sustainable materials and working ecologically (without waste) was noted as a significant value held by many.

It was said that practitioners wanted to respect nature whilst being inspired by it – connecting to wider discussions around sustainability and environmental conservation.



## 6. Customers and Scale

The balance between scaling up production for larger orders and maintaining the quality and authenticity of the hand-crafted products was raised by many practitioners. The need to respond and scale up quickly is a pressure faced by most practitioners we spoke to.

Whilst there was a desire to be able to reach new markets and scale up production when needed, real value was placed on close long-term customer relationships – providing the space to develop bespoke commissions and unique products.



Value was placed not only on financial transactions but also on the exchange of experiences and building of new networks. Particularly with practitioners from the Turkistan region, it was stated that engagement with customers was also an opportunity to learn – ‘educating ourselves about their culture and where they are coming from’. It was said ‘we always find common points that make us closer’.



At the conclusion of the second workshop, we held a group discussion to agree on the next steps for the third year of the Crafting Futures project. Whilst we are mindful that budgets are reduced and that we still have to work around the pandemic, we hope to create a meaningful programme that meets our obligations to the local communities.

The pandemic also forced a situation where we worked differently with technology, adapting to the requirements of the situation and the context in both Shymkent and Almaty. As noted above, we worked with Telegram, which was really successful. Forming a group where practitioners could upload work and texts. The workshops, which took place both online and onsite, required trust, understanding and co-ordination between local and UK partners. As we were on Zoom we were also able to document the workshop using screenshots and building a collective sense of practice, needs and requirements using Miro. The stage 2 delivery relied on both asynchronous and synchronous working.

At the end of the workshop, through discussion and reflection with participants, and working with the Union of Artisans, we identified the following key areas for the next stage:

- Deployment of creative and business skills that enable and articulate collective creative leadership ambitions of the craft practitioner communities in Kazakhstan
- Mapping and making more visible the practices, work, artifacts of individual practitioners in order to bring international and national visibility, i.e. using Open Street Maps as a framework
- Using the Business Canvas Model, to enable the individual and independent approaches to entrepreneurship and business

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# Concluding Online Workshops Autumn 2021

## Research Team

- Joseph Pochodzaj (Royal College of Art)
- Martin Quinn (University of Leicester)
- Rathna Ramanathan (Royal College of Art)

For the final set of workshops, the ongoing pandemic meant that, once again, we had to deliver the content and workshop using a combination of offline and online sessions, with the offline sessions being led by colleagues from the Union of Artisans using materials developed by the UK team. The workshops ran in both Almaty and Shymkent and many of the participants from the previous stages of the programme returned. The workshops were split into two components. On day one, in response to requests from our partners and participants, we ran a session on conflict management and negotiations based around a series of exercises designed to consider the ways in which the craft sector might deal with conflict and where it may arise. The second day of the workshops dealt with communication and built on the spring workshops.

As with the previous online workshops each day began with sessions led in person by the Union of Artisans before the academics from the UK joined online in the afternoon. Both events in Almaty and Shymkent were attended by 15 people, plus the Union of Artisans team, and the discussions built on the work done across the whole project. There was clear progression in the presentations given by the participants on day two and we were delighted to see some of the results published on the Union of Artisans Facebook page.

## Concluding Thoughts – Challenges and Issues

In terms of the key challenges and issues facing the sectors, the pilot visit and subsequent online workshops confirmed and embellished the findings of the scoping visit in October 2019. Therefore, we have developed these themes further below, but briefly the main themes to be taken forward were 1. That there is a lack of business training for craft organisations (business models, marketing, product development, supply chain management); 2. There is a need to increase the understanding of policy makers of the needs of the sector and the important contribution craft can make to a national economy; 3. The lack of a national record or archive is harming the sector; 4. Overseas money has stepped in to replace Government funding.

## Organising Craft

Overall, we found the support for the sector to be rather fragmented with little in the way of government support apparent in any of our meetings.

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## 1. Support Structure

The government in Kazakhstan does not recognise the contribution that craft can make to the national economy. Kazakhstan is comparatively wealthy but much of this wealth comes from the oil industry (especially in the West of the country) and the focus of economic/industrial policy is on supporting the energy industry.

There are support programmes for the sector, but these are run (and funded) by the oil and gas industry.

The organisations we met were all keen on the idea of creative hubs but felt that the geography meant these would be difficult to achieve. The Cultural Centre due to be opened in Turkestan will have a capacity of 100 workshops but the Union of Artisans reported there may only be around 15 crafts people near enough to make use of the facility and most had their own workshops already.

Throughout both visits, concerns were expressed about the lack of policy support for the sector, especially in relation to neighbouring countries such as Uzbekistan. Their government diktats had led to a range of policies on financing the industry, protecting the integrity of the craft and ensuring supply chains where serviced. Without this kind of support the Kazakh craft makers felt they were at a disadvantage in the international market.

## 2. Record Keeping

There is a lack of archiving and documenting of craft and cultural history in Kazakhstan. Some of this was put down to the Soviet era with concerted efforts by the USSR to 'Sovietise' each member state of the Union and downplay differences. The museums we visited were impressive but many of the crafts people themselves rely on skills and working practices being passed down person to person – as one Master dies out so does that particular skill set.

The result of this was it was difficult for some of the crafts people we met to prove their produce was truly 'Kazakh' (both in terms of design but also the materials) and this could impact on the price international collectors are willing to pay for goods if the authenticity cannot be verified. One example we were given here is that in the period immediately after independence many of the raw minerals and stones were mined and taken to Russia. In some meetings respondents reported that techniques they consider to be authentically 'Kazakh' are now being used and marketed internationally by other Central Asian countries as being native to their states.

This latter point was discussed at length in the pilot workshops. It appears that Kazakh crafts people have been a victim, to an extent, of the relatively late introduction of the term 'Kazakh' into the lexicon with several artefacts being labelled as Kyrgyz up until the 1920s (Wright 2015). This means it is difficult to precisely identify and archive Kazakh products in the manner in which has been possible in neighbouring Uzbekistan.

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### 3. Visibility and Exhibiting

To further this recognition of the craft sector in Kazakhstan support and funding is required to exhibit work both within Kazakhstan and internationally.

Either by providing direct funding or establishing visible workshops/exhibition spaces for craftspeople to display works, organise activities/masterclasses, as well as potential sell their products was seen as critical for enhancing the visibility of craft practitioners within the country.

This process of exhibiting, alongside establishing sites of archiving would aim to establish a visible contemporary craft sector whilst deepening and better understanding the history of craft in Kazakhstan.

## Training/Education in Craft

There is a well-established education system in Kazakhstan with pupils choosing a pathway at 14, either via a vocational or academic route. The Kazakh system of Masters and Apprentices is well embedded within the sector and has been successful. However, this has, inadvertently, led to an issue that is becoming more apparent in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic. Very little of the knowledge possessed by the Masters is written down, codified or archived. At a time when people are unable to meet, the ability of the sector to pass on skills to the next generation is suddenly compromised and without a solution there is a risk that these skills may be lost to future generations.

### 1. Becoming a Master

Everyone we met was introduced as a 'Master' of their particular craft. However, it was unclear precisely what was required to become a Master. Some had started working in the sector relatively recently (2006 in the case of one felt worker) so the process is certainly quicker than in Uzbekistan. In one case we visited a house in Shymkent, where the owner worked across a number of different sub-sectors (we were shown ceramics, felt making, textiles, leather making, weaving and painting) and in each case they identified themselves as a Master of each. We certainly saw a wide range of standards on the trip, most especially within jewellery making/silversmithing.

At the pilot visit we sought to clarify the process further. For some of the participants a Master is someone who is able to pass on their knowledge and craft to the next generations. For others it occurs at the point at which their craft and products become recognised as the highest quality within the craft community. There was some concern expressed about attempts to speed up, or formalise, the process through qualifications that could be achieved in a short space of time. This led to a discussion of the pros and cons of a certification system which, on the one hand could protect masters by giving their work a stamp of authenticity (and thus increase the price), and on the other concerns about how such a scheme could be operated fairly.

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## 2. Apprenticeships

Each of the Masters we visited employed apprentices in their workshops in an effort to increase the number of skilled people working in the sector. In several instances this also involved the apprentice living with the Master and their family. We met some Masters who put their apprentices through college, in other cases the apprenticeship started after completing college. We were also told that in many cases the Master will help their apprentices financially to set up their own business once they have finished their studies. Throughout the visit a real desire from within the sector to retain skills and increase the size of the sector was evident and without central support programmes it appears that the Masters have come up with their own ways of maintaining the sector.

## 3. Education System

The education system in Kazakhstan presents 14-year-olds with two routes (academic or vocational) and they are expected to remain in full time education until at least 18. That said, we did see plenty of evidence of school age children working in the workshops we visited. The art school we visited was rather dated and the techniques we saw in metal working would not be suitable for those going on to jewellery or silversmithing. Our initial meetings with the various support agencies also reported a disconnect between the art school mentality and the needs of the sector itself.

When discussing the education system with the media team they felt that whilst it is suitable for some craft/arts sub-sectors it is less valid for digital creativity and media sectors as people could get better training by using YouTube as a source for materials and knowhow.

## Marketing Craft and Business Planning

Throughout both trips it became apparent that there is a lack of business support for craft organisations and that their marketing was limited at best. Very few of the organisations we spoke with had thought about their supply chains or the impact this might have on their image.

### 1. Who is it for?

A good deal of the craft we saw was being developed for the local market. Partly this was connected to a desire to increase the amount of Kazakh products owned by households – for example the wood workers and instrument makers made a lot of ornamental traditional Kazakh instruments that were for display in homes rather than playing and the textiles workshops were producing traditional clothing for weddings and exhibitions within Kazakhstan rather than an international market.



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If an international market is to be achieved, then more work will need to be done on the authenticity of the products and proving exactly where they have come from.

## **2. Tourism – A missed opportunity**

In part as a result of this, few if any of the organisations we spoke to were aware of the potential tourism market beyond being able to sell a few of their products to visitors alongside domestic customers. The concept of places as craft tourism destinations is very new, although the new Turkestan Cultural Centre, combined with the Yurt Museum and archaeological site could become an exemplar here.

## **3. Supply Chains/Sustainability**

In terms of supply chain, the prime aim of most of the organisations we spoke to was to source cheap materials and hence, particularly in textiles, they were buying in bulk from China and South Korea. No one we spoke to was aware of the potential advantages of a more sustainable approach to their supply chain model.

Another issued raised at length was the support of government procurement processes. It was widely felt that when sourcing craft-based products for national events, souvenirs or other situations that the Kazakhstan government would willingly price-out Kazakh craftspeople and often opt for Uzbek or Kyrgyz alternatives, whose products are often available to higher quantities at cheaper prices. It was felt that government support in this regard would allow Kazakh craftspeople to scale up production processes and allow entry into other markets at a larger scale.

## **Craft vs Mass Production**

In our discussions a distinction was made between being a crafts person and an artist – many of the crafts people we met did not see themselves as artists.

Although we witnessed a fascinating range of skills and products being made during our visit, we also saw a move towards mass or fast production techniques in some places. This inevitably had an impact on the quality of product we saw. There is a tension between the expectation of preserving historic crafts on the one hand and aiming at industrialising the processes and high-volume markets on the other. One concern here is that in the textiles industry for example, aiming at the fast fashion market is aiming for a market already dominated by China. There is a risk, that was not appreciated, of gaining a reputation for cheap, poor-quality goods that could undermine the fantastic craft we saw in Kazakhstan.

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## Role of Chevron/Oil Money

Throughout the trip, the logo of Chevron (US oil company) was ever present. All the artisans we visited had undertaken programmes run by the Union of Artisans which were sponsored by Chevron. On day one of the visit, we met a representative from Chevron who explained it had identified craft and culture as part of its corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities. Alongside Chevron, US Aid, the Eurasia Foundation, and the Smithsonian are also present in the country. However, we saw little evidence of government support or EU money. As we develop the project further, we should ensure that we are not duplicating what Chevron are already doing and that we can tap into their contacts.

## Role of the Union of Artisans

The Union of Artisans (UoA) was officially founded in 2012 with the support of FECA, Chevron, UENSCA and a Public Foundation (Our heritage). However, the roots of the Union of Artisans can be traced back to 1995 when an American Foundation (Aid to Artisans) put on a programme of support for craft in the region – notably though this was for artisans in Uzbek, Kyrgyzstan etc. It was held in Kazakhstan but not aimed at Kazakh artisans as Kazakhstan was already wealthy and it was not felt that they needed support at that time. This was held annually and by 2000 there was growing concern in the sector in Kazakhstan that they weren't growing and needed help as well. The Union of Artisans has official status in Kazakhstan but does not receive any state funding. However, the government has become interested in the past 12 months and is now asking what they need – the Union of Artisans is very keen on aligning with the government to get official status as it will help with the Union of Artisans' credibility in the sector.

The Union of Artisans provides members with support, networking, training and advice in running their businesses. It also liaises with local authorities on events and represents the sector overseas.