

CRAFTING FUTURES Central Asia

**Scoping visit reports and
pilot project proposals in
Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan
and Kyrgyzstan**

**University of Leicester and Royal College
of Art (UK)**

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UZBEKISTAN - CRAFTING FUTURES SCOPING REPORT

Research team

Marta Gasparin (University of Leicester School of Business)
Martin Quinn (University of Leicester School of Business)
Steve Conway (University of Leicester School of Business)
Alan Ashton-Smith (RED)



Key themes and findings

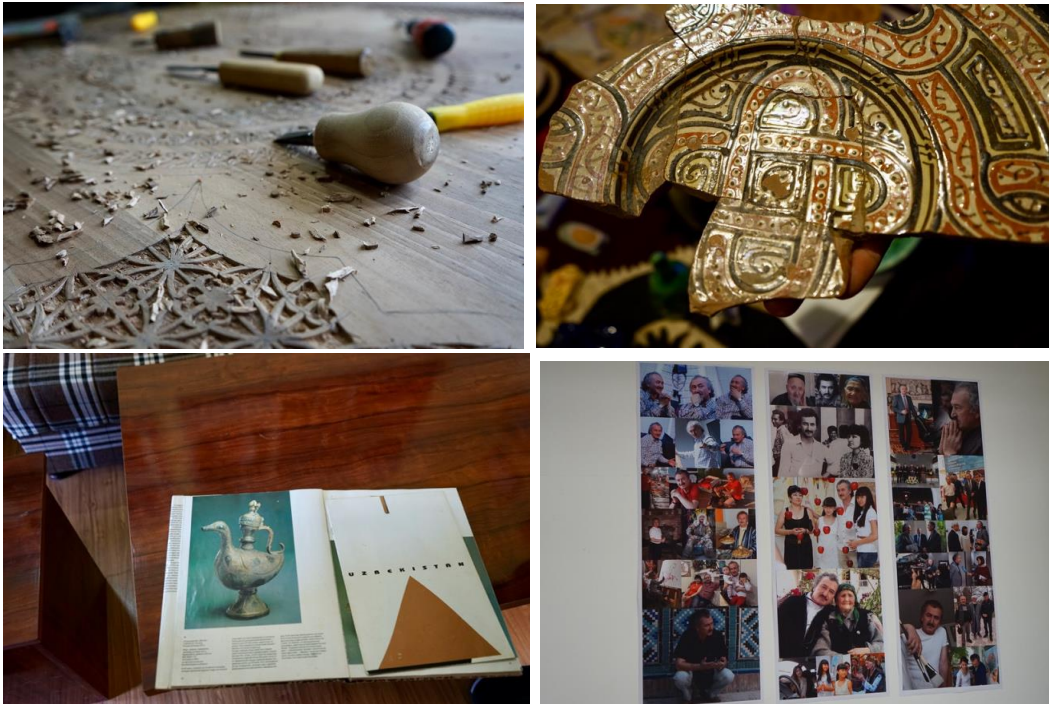
The following key themes and findings emerged from a scoping visit to Uzbekistan between 26th and 31st October 2019, which involved a series of visits and meetings in and around Tashkent, Kokand and Margilan in Fergana, and Bukhara, with craft-makers (including a number of 'Masters'), designers, art historians and academics, craft business owners, local mayors and officials from the Ministry of Culture, Chamber of Commerce, the World Craft Council etc. (please see attached itinerary for full list of individuals and organisations where visits, demonstrations and interviews were conducted)

1. Organising Craft and Craft Knowledge

1.1 Preserving and documenting contemporary and past knowledge – we witnessed a significant commitment to archiving and learning from Uzbekistan's craft history and traditions, uncovering the history of craft that had been hidden during the Soviet era. This was especially true of the Ceramics Masters who we visited; many had libraries as well as examples of pottery dating back several centuries and there was a real desire to locate craft within its historical context. This is potentially very important when dealing with the international market as the www.britishcouncil.org

craft-makers are able to demonstrate the authenticity of their work – this is perhaps something that isn't taken advantage of as much as it might be, however.

One issue here for the next stage of this research would be to establish how connected the various archives are, the extent to which they are recorded digitally, and whether there are any central records of where these materials are kept.



1.2 Transferring knowledge between craft-makers – a key feature that we observed was the strength and efficacy of the personal connections between craft-makers both within and between regions.

Whilst we met a number of individual craft-makers during our scoping visit and got a sense of the informal organisation of craft within and between the regions in Uzbekistan, it was less clear how this was supported and sustained by more formal mechanisms, such as craft associations etc. This would be something interesting to discuss during the pilot via the policy-makers workshop.

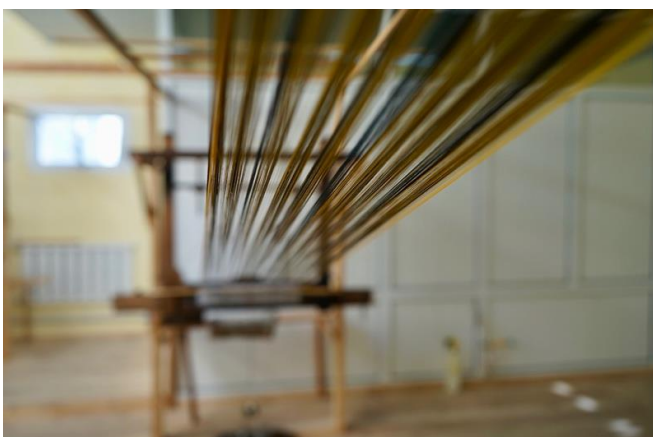


1.3 Educating the next generation of craft-makers – the apprenticeship appears to have been the dominant mechanism of educating the next generation of craft-makers, with the Master craft-makers we visited typically training up a number of young apprentices of various ages. What was particularly notable and interesting was the inter-generational transfer of craft knowledge from one generation to the next, and the respect and pride that was exhibited to prior generations of craft-makers within the family, sometimes stretching back five or six generations. In addition to the master-apprentice model, there appears to be a growth in the provision of formal education in a variety of craft areas through the education system.

One area that would be interesting to explore further in the pilot is the trajectory, balance and interconnections between the master-apprentice model, vocational and the college course model of educating the next generation of craft-makers. It is important to understand how interconnected the various educational systems are in order to ensure timely interventions directed at young people, which are likely to yield a greater return for sustainable development. This would also be something interesting to discuss during the pilot via the policy-makers workshop.



1.4. Experimenting and innovation in craft – we came across a number of examples of Masters, business owners and designers who were innovating in designs, raw materials, and processes and techniques. Such innovation arose through a variety of mechanisms, for example, through sharing ideas, experimentation, travelling and exhibiting abroad, and collaborating with those from different crafts, regions and countries. One fashion designer we met (Markhamat Umarova) drew upon her knowledge and experience gained during her degree in Japan.





It would be useful to explore this dimension of craft during the workshop with craft-makers during the pilot. This theme could be focused more specifically to innovation that promotes sustainability and that which is aimed at opening up new international markets.

2. The Role of Policy Makers and Institutions in Promoting Craft

2.1 National, regional and local policy and support – A distinction is made between Applied Arts and crafts within the policy framework. We met with a number of agencies and Government Departments involved in the support of arts and craft including; the Academy of Arts, Chamber of Commerce, Association of Handicrafts (Hunarmand), Ministry of Culture, Arts Universities, Museums, a Kokand City Mayor and others. Craft appeared to be very much linked to the attempts to strengthen and emphasise a national identity in the independence era.



2.2 The inter-play between economic, heritage, culture and educational policies – Two different pressures appear to co-exist between the desire to maintain quality and protect the reputation of craft through the Masters and their extensive training, and the desire to increase the contribution the craft sector makes to the national economy. We met many Masters who had trained for over twenty years to achieve their status within their particular field, but there is now a pressure from the Chamber of Commerce (and others) to move to a faster method of training (sometimes as little as three months) which could dilute notions of expertise. This distinction was also evident between the Ministry of Culture. Also there is a tension between a desire to maintain small scale production (at times this felt like a reaction to the forced mass production of the Soviet era where Masters were not permitted to work at home in their own workshops) and a move to a more mass produced product with higher levels of employment. The risk here is that skills get watered down, the employment created will not pay well, and that environmental problems are not addressed or worsen.

It would be useful to explore these apparent tensions a little more within a workshop setting with policy-makers.

3. Policy issues

3.1 Gender roles in craft – The sectors we saw appeared to be split on gender lines with the ceramics and woodcarving Masters all being male and the embroidery and textiles being largely (but not exclusively) female. We spoke to a few female designers that are working with women from the rural areas, creating socially innovative supply chains and empowering women that are often left behind by the traditional market from. However, there is a need to develop training to support the drive for social innovation and alternative modes of organising that empower women. Models for managing craft organisations are typically agnostic about sources of social, ecological and cultural values; yet we have witnessed these values are as inherent as economic value.

During the pilot workshops with craft-makers, it would be useful to explore existing novel practices from Uzbekistan and elsewhere, and explore and co-create models that might promote socially innovative craft supply chains that empower women within Uzbekistan.



3.2 Sustainability – Sustainability was found to be embedded in some of the craft practices, but it was not often brought to the forefront in discussions, nor was it used to promote the craft objects. We found that there are quite few textile craft-makers that are working with natural materials and natural dyes, which are attractive for Western markets, however, these

sustainable practices are not properly supported by business models or marketing strategies. For example, some textile makers were found to produce ecological and sustainable products, but these were then wrapped in plastic and as a result they are not able to tell a sustainability story on the process.

We recommend exploring with craft-makers through a workshop setting the best form for training on a sustainable marketing approach and storytelling.



3.3 The Need for New Business Models – A longer term objective would be to help develop and instil "glocalised business models". These would ensure long-term economic sustainability for slow innovators and will determine models for design and innovation practices to reduce the exploitation of natural and human resources, whilst increasing product lifespans by driving innovation based on quality, local traditions, and sustainable values.

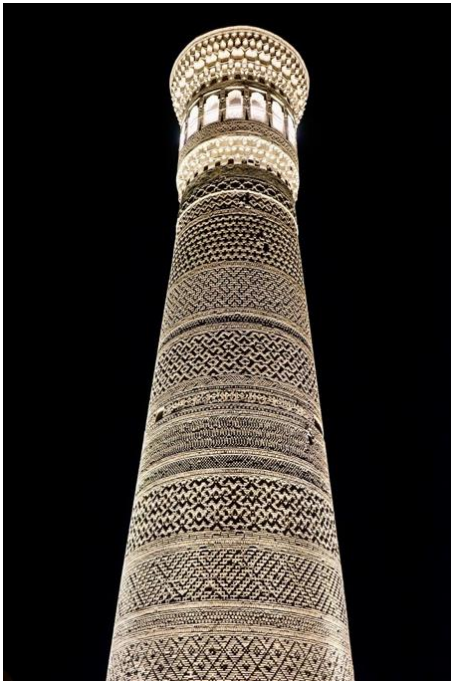
The idea would be to explore and build on the concept of 'slow design' during the craft-maker workshops. Slow design driven innovation celebrates local resources' values and it aspires to an alternative model of consumption to confront the current paradigm of "more and cheaper is better" and is an emerging but yet to be established ethical practice, using handcrafted materials from artisans.



3.4 The balance between heritage and tourism – A number of the workshops we visited opened their doors to tourism whilst operating as fully functioning craft manufacturing spaces. Many of those who do this reported that they could easily fill their diaries with more tourist visitors, but were concerned that they must protect the time they have to concentrate on their www.britishcouncil.org

craft. At a broader scale this debate was played out between the ministries we visited with the Tourism Officials / Mayor's Office being keenly aware of the potential for more tourism based around craft (especially in Bukhara and Kokand), whilst the Culture Ministry and Academy of Arts were concerned about the potential impact on quality. There is also a very strong sense of connection between food as cultural heritage and craft, which has not been exploited yet in the touristic offer nor in the research practices.

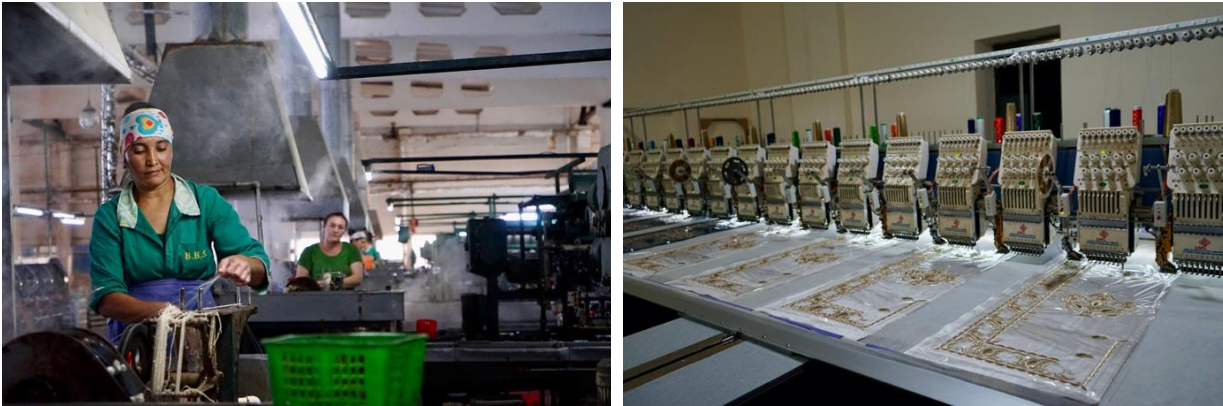
Pilot: work with sustainable business models for tourism development and create a networked system integrating sustainable development of eno-gastronomic tourism and craft. It would be interesting during the craft-makers workshops to explore sustainable business models for tourism development and the possibility and opportunities for creating a networked system that integrates sustainable development of eno-gastronomic tourism and craft



3.5 The balance between scaling up craft and quality of craft outputs – In the touristic offer, it is important to create a balance and a networked approach between large scale and small enterprises to provide a sustainable touristic and commercial offer.

The balance here has to take into account both the economic potential of upscaling and also the reputational risks. Although the facilities in the factory we visited are very modern and using advanced technologies (e.g. in the factory uses new machinery which have an impressive

aspiration system), more attention needs to be paid in training personnel in health and safety measures, such as using gloves, headsets and rubber shoes.



4. Internationalisation and Uzbekistan craft

4.1 International collaboration – International collaboration was seen as a worthy pursuit by both policy makers and crafts people. All saw the value in trying to work with international partners to share practice and learn new techniques.

The Academy of Arts, the Chamber of Commerce and the University we visited were very keen to work with UK partners to put on events and training sessions for their staff and for crafts people, especially in designing patterns for textile and sustainable marketing. The nature of such events could be explored more specifically in a policy-makers workshop.

4.2 International exposure: exhibiting and showcasing at International Events in Uzbekistan – The Kokand Festival had clearly been a success, and developed with smaller scale festivals and exhibitions in Tashkent. The period under President Shavkat Mirziyoyev has seen a significant increase in the frequency of these events and they are successful in attracting international participants (not just from Central Asia).

4.3 International exposure: exhibiting and showcasing abroad – In addition to the above a number of the people we met with had exhibited abroad themselves and were very keen to build on this with further visits.

We discussed the possibility of putting on an event on at the next Leicester Design Season in 2020. However, this would not be feasible within the limited activities and budget of the pilot.

KAZAKHSTAN - CRAFTING FUTURES

SCOPING REPORT

Research team:

Peter Oakley (Royal College of Art)
Martin Quinn (University of Leicester)

The visit took place between the 20th – 24th October 2019 when the visiting academics joined a team including representatives from the Union of Artisans, 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 (UoA). This group was founded in 2011 although their roots go back to a meeting in 1995 following a regional UNESCO event that was held in Almaty. The UoA was formed in response to a lack of support for crafts people in Kazakhstan, especially when compared to other Central Asian States. Every crafts person we met on this trip was a member of UoA and knew Aizhan personally. 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 and metal working and jewellery making. We then moved to Shymkent for more visits and spent a day in Turkestan where we visited museums, an archaeological site and a proposed cultural centre which is currently under construction. Kazakhstan is a huge Country but sparsely populated, 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). One point to consider as we move forward is whether to keep the project confined to the Silk Road region of Kazakhstan (and increase cross over with Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan) or whether to expand to the rest of the Country. We heard of interesting craft in the West of Kazakhstan from both representatives of Chevron/Smithsonian and the Chamber of Entrepreneurs.

KEY THEMES AND FINDINGS

1. 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.

1.1 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 UoA reported there may only be around 15 crafts people near enough to make use of the facility and most had their own workshops already.

1.2 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 'Kazak' (both in terms of design but also the materials) and this could impact on the price international collectors are willing to pay for good 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 'Kazak' are now being used and marketed internationally by other Central Asian countries as being native to their States.

2. Training/Education in Craft and Arts

There is a well-established education system in Kazakhstan with pupils choosing a pathway at 14, either via a vocational or academic route.

2.1 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 subsectors (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.

The Chamber of Entrepreneurs is running a 'legends' scheme whereby they are attempting to preserve craft skills in danger of dying out by matching 'Masters' to apprentices. In some cases, the Chamber feared there were fewer than 5 people left with a particular skillset although they acknowledged that this could actually be a result of the lack of records – they don't know what's there.

2.2 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.

2.3 Education System

As mentioned above 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 while it was suitable for some craft/arts sub-sectors it wasn't for theirs as people could get better training by using YouTube as a source for materials and knowhow.

3. Marketing Craft & Business Planning

Throughout the trip 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.

3.1 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 Kazak products owned by households – for example the wood workers and instrument makers made a lot of ornamental traditional Kazak 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.

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.

3.2 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.

3.3 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. Noone we spoke to was aware of the potential advantages of a more sustainable approach to their supply chain model.

4. 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.

5. 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 UoA 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 CSR activities. Alongside Chevron, US Aid, the Soros 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.

6. Role of Union of Artisans

The roots of UoA are in a meeting in 1995 when UNESCO, some American companies and agencies (American 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 Kazak 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 growing concern in the sector in Kazakhstan that they weren't growing and needed help as well. Aizhan was involved in the creation of UoA with support of American Embassy, BC, Chevron and some local businesses. The Government was not interested and gave no money during the UoA's formative years. However, the Government has become interested in the past 12 months and are now asking what they need – UoA are very keen on aligning with them to get official status as it will help with UoA's credibility in the sector. The UoA provide members with support, networking, training and advice in running their businesses. They also liaise with local authorities on events and represent the sector overseas. What we could not determine from this visit was the extent of the sector outside of the UoA's membership and it would be useful to be able to talk to a sample of

crafts people who are not members (if indeed they exist) to see how they operate outside the support structure provided by UoA.

KEY ISSUES EMERGING FROM THE SCOPING VISIT

1. 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.
5. We cannot state that this scoping report represents the whole of Kazakhstan, just the South East Region.

KYRGYZSTAN – CRAFTING FUTURES SCOPING REPORT

Research team:

Rathna Ramanathan (Royal College of Art)
Eleanor Dare (Royal College of Art)
Tom Simmons (Royal College of Art)

‘Crafting Futures creates new networks and opportunities for shared learning between the UK and other countries around the globe. The programme supports research and education in craft, ensuring projects are relevant and the quality of creative practice is preserved and continues to develop. Crafting Futures offers designers and artisans access to knowledge and expertise, new markets and new audiences, ensuring the value of craft is appreciated more broadly and knowledge can continue to be shared within the sector.’ (design.britishcouncil.org). RCA School of Communication researchers Tom Simmons and Eleanor Dare visited Kyrgyzstan in Central Asia between November 9th and November 15th 2019.

Kyrgyzstan is about the size of Great Britain and has a population of 6 million people. It is a mountainous country, bordering Tajikistan, China, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Unlike other countries in the region, it is a liberal democracy, indeed, we were often told this by people we met - that it is the only free country in Central Asia. With its absence of significant oil reserves, Kyrgyzstan is also one of the poorest locations in Central Asia. Data is hard to find, but it seems the country’s main export is minerals (extraction), agricultural produce, followed by a range of craft products, including fashion and clothing. The country is beautiful by any criteria, with snowy mountains and blue lakes. There is clear scope for a significant tourist industry (craft markets do have a relationship to tourism according to the practitioners we met on the south shore of lake Issyk-Kul, for example) though the infrastructure might need to be improved to support aspects of that industry. There is a tourist industry, with summer visitors from nearby Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. However, many roads are untarmacked and hotels quite small-scale, at least in the areas we visited, which were Bishkek (the capital), the Tul district on the south shore of Issyk-Kul, and Osh and the Alay region, in the South.

Over five days we met scores of people, from elderly felt makers to young entrepreneurs. The majority of people in Kyrgyzstan are ethnic Kyrgyz, but there are also Russians, Kazakhs and Uzbeks. Craft is clearly entangled with national and regional identity. This was often articulated by the diverse people we talked with, with, in particular, what we think is a strong position relating to a construct of craft countering 'Islamisation', which is beyond our capacity or remit to address.

Throughout the trip we were accompanied by translator and guide Iskander Osmoev (OCMOEB in Russian), filmmakers AdamDar - Timur Nusimbekov and Malika Autalipova and were provided with British Council support from Diana Tsoi as well as Oxana Kononova, and in Tblisi, Dianara Chcochunbaeva, Galina Koretskaya, Aizhan Bekkulova and Alisher Rakhimov. The purpose of this document is to summarise what we saw, who we met, and our key findings, including an analysis of what we think are the key opportunities for collaboration with the UK and ways forward. We also include a proposal for a small pilot activity. The research trip unfolded as follows:

Kyrgyz National Museum of Fine Arts

This is a vast, modernist building from the Soviet Era which contains many examples of both craft and soviet era realist paintings. The collection contains 18000 items. The director of the museum was very keen to include children and families in activities such as drawing. Though low on materials there were some families enjoying drawing projects and the director said the minister for culture had recently committed to restoring the museum. Crafts took pride of place and this was a good way to start our research. However, subsequent meetings with practitioners frequently brought up the theme of audiences. The development of a knowledgeable audience for craft seems imperative, in particular, the development of audiences who can appreciate the skill and time invested in Kyrgyz craft, so that makers can get the remuneration and recognition they wish for.

Creative sector meetings

We had a series of meetings with craftspeople including the president and vice-presidents of the Crafts Council of Kyrgyzstan and designers and entrepreneurs in material and non-material cultural heritage. At these meetings we encountered predominantly senior women, all of whom are driving the development and/or resurrection of crafts such as felt making and yurt band weaving. We also met an academic who is a craft-maker, called Dr Burul Mambetova. She has a PhD from Bishkek University and urged us not to replicate the myriad projects which have come and gone over the years, and not to end our project without a longer-term legacy. These meetings encompassed conversations with representatives of the creative professional unions of Kyrgyzstan. We also met with the director and makers of the Bishkek National Union of Folk Art & Crafts State Enterprise, an organization which produces craft items in a scale production environment and sells/exports work created by Kyrgyz craftspeople for local/international customers and tourists alongside special gifts, state insignia and other items for official purposes and inter-governmental events.



Traditional felt carpet making, Bishkek

Public Foundation Kiyiz Duino and art-group Seventh Sky



Above, Seventh Sky, Bishkek, a project combining indigenous knowledge with well-being, below, Bishkek based Kiyiz Duino.



Both of these groups are seeking to preserve and evolve a cultural heritage through craft, in particular indigenous knowledge and, in the case of Seventh Sky, a form of well-being and connectedness to non-urban imperatives. Both groups have run workshops with young women, both in Bishkek and in the high summer pastures of rural Kyrgyzstan. With the Seventh Sky group we discussed approaches to sustaining and transferring (intergenerational) skills and knowledge, selling courses, preparing masterclasses, yurt camping, workshops in food, fairy tales and crafts, and also a gap associated with younger generations (in relation to their involvement with young entrepreneurs via the Creative Spark programme and summer schools developed for young people that have become very successful). Alongside organising summer camps for traditional livelihoods and crafts, Kiyiz Duino have researched knowledges involved in making traditional clothes, jewellery and shoemaking, documenting conversations with older craftspeople and holding masterclasses with museums across Kyrgyzstan.

In our talks with younger crafts people, at the **Art Gallery in Bishkek, the State University in Osh** and the **Ololo co-working space in Bishkek**, it was clear that the individuals we met craved contact and/or collaboration with international peers, opportunities to explore new directions for traditional crafts and also an international profile. They were ambitious for their work and wanted to see it on an international stage. Many of the older craftspeople do sell their work within the international market

Their success includes strong storytelling skills and evident media savviness, with well-presented materials – booklets, web sites, logos, narratives and professional photography. However, at the Ololo co-working space we also heard about concerns that successful young Kyrgyz photographers typically leave the country to develop careers internationally, that past attempts to establish a crafts magazine in Kyrgyzstan had been unsustainable, and that young Kyrgyz designers have issues accessing expensive design and trend resources available to designers in other parts of the world. We were urged to video/record any and all workshops we might develop for Crafting Futures so that others can catch up with them or watch them in their own time. We were urged not to replicate the work that had come before, **we wondered if a mechanism for curating past and current projects would be helpful?**

South Shore of Issyk Kul

The south shore of Issyk Kul has a regional focus on traditional Kyrgyz culture oriented around clusters of cultural enterprises and regional development initiatives involving e.g. Manas narrators, yurt makers, craftspeople, farmers, healers, eagle hunters, ornithologists, shepherds, traditional and shamanic knowledge bearers. It is also known for traditional music, film (locations), small scale museums & local crafts products, traditional regional food/cooking, sacred sites/ settlements including petroglyphs and anthropological, and traditional games. We met with the owner of the Almaluu yurt camp, the Head of State Administration of the Ton district, and the founder of the Altyn Oimok (Golden Thimble) Foundation to talk about the craft and tourism strategies/projects that are being developed in the region, opportunities for inter-generational learning and international exchange and collaboration. The volume of activity in the area is impressive and includes a significant number of festivals, tourist activities run by guesthouse owners, events, workshops, school-based learning activities and masterclasses for local people and visitors. We heard about significant plans to upgrade local infrastructure for increasing numbers of visitors.



Above, Altyn Oimok Foundation, a shyrdak and Kyrgyz handicraft workshop and shop. Below, yurt making with Sapar Ismailov and his family and Almaluu yurt camp.



Sary Mogul

The village of Sary Mogul near the border with Tajikistan is at high altitude and is on one of the Silk Roads. It is very cold and hard to farm, but the women of the local craft collective have created a business around the resurrection of ancient craft practices, such as traditional women's clothes and yurt band weaving. The items the group make are based on scientific and historical research and have been presented in fashion shows in Alai and Osh. They have also published a catalogue funded by the Institute of Strategic Sustainable Development using photography provided by a local company. One of the elder daughters associated with the collective is a university teacher at Osh State University and a PhD researcher in traditional

knowledge. They mentioned that they produce stories about the local area to enhance the value of the items they make.



Above, members of the weaver's collective in Sary-Mogol

Many crafts people, both young and old desired to learn skills of photography, for the purposes of documenting and advertising their work. Branding, labelling and understanding market segmentation, also came up as core skills that people wished to acquire. Refining skills of online search within a predominantly English or Chinese speaking world also came up. The most successful craftspeople we met are excellent communicators, they are highly connected, often within a global set of markets, excellent at branding, labelling and explaining their work, they understand the segmented nature of their markets and also engage in educational programmes to promote the future of craft and to create new audiences. Those who felt they were not thriving said they were isolated, out of touch with other practitioners, lacking access to resources, facilities and relevant expertise (particularly in the context of public education, where a lack of effective policies and connectivity between public and private sectors was also voiced as a concern), craving exchange and connection to a wider scene as well as new skills – communication, branding, business, image making and technical skills relating to their specific crafts as well as learning across an interdisciplinary context. Young people in Bishkek craved an animation course / national animation studio.

Scoping Visit Observations

From our discussions, scoping visits and the Tbilisi inter-regional networking forum, we suggest that follow on Crafting Future activities in Kyrgyzstan might focus on the areas outlined below.

- **Regional and inter-regional discussions, roundtables and symposia to deepen research, share knowledge and consolidate the Crafting Futures agenda with relevant stakeholders**
- **Peer support and idea exchange workshops**
- **Global exchange workshops and mechanisms**
- **Practical workshops on animation, photography, storytelling and core business skills**
- **Communication network to promote the excellence of craft in, across and beyond the region and to preserve and document practice while promoting innovation**
- **Youth or inter-generational craft camp/craft assembly, for example at the Yurt Camp on the Southern shore of Lake Issyk-Kul. Capacity 60 overnight.**

Depending on the outcomes of our scoping visits and pilot projects in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, these activities could lead towards the prototyping and development, through exchange, organisation & research, of a Central Asia Craft Encyclopaedia. Subject to the results of the pilot projects this could be developed during the main phase of the Crafting Futures Central Asia programme and engage additional funders such as the British Embassy in Kyrgyzstan e.g. in supporting either the youth/inter-generational craft camp/craft assembly, inter-regional events and/or an international residency-based exchange of some kind. We suggest that action-based research responding to culturally based issues, post-colonial design ethics, intersectional identities and collective ground up action, as discussed during the Tbilisi Crafting Futures Central Asia Networking Forum, is an appropriate method for the wider project. Our conversations with many people suggest that a number of needs analyses have been undertaken in Kyrgyzstan and we must be wary of replicating previous work. This suggests strongly that we adapt an action-based approach which will also provide hands on skills and experiences for, in particular, young craftspeople in Kyrgyzstan. British Council Crafting Futures senior programme manager Kendall Robbins also suggested that we should be specific, for example, running pilot workshops on photography and communication networks for early career and advanced craft makers, possible bringing them together to discuss strategies for identifying and reaching audiences/markets. There is also a strong sense that the pervasive narrative of craft needs to be changed. This might suggest the need to create an advertising campaign or re-branding of craft, so that its complexity, historical importance and skill can be made more visible and be conveyed to relevant audiences, with a view to a culture shift, such that craft can achieve a value that reflects the work, skill and concerns involved in its production. This might serve a double purpose, changing markets but also persuading ministries, such as education and culture, to further support or develop more effective and future facing means to support craft. We were not convinced that there is sufficient data to support quantitative methods of persuasion (an audit for example), the gray economy mitigates against accurate data collection, instead we think a ground up, collective and collaborative storytelling /communication / exchange approach would have more impact. In the long term, the integration of craft into a coherent educational curriculum would be worthy of further exploration, but we did not feel it is a realistic goal for this project, rather (as we heard from many of the practitioners we met) we think it may be more feasible to work alongside state education and related organisations which are subject to constant political upheaval and therefore a lack of consistency.

CENTRAL ASIA CRAFTING FUTURES – PILOT PROJECTS PROPOSAL

Research team:

Marta Gasparin (University of Leicester School of Business)
Martin Quinn (University of Leicester School of Business)
Steve Conway (University of Leicester School of Business)
Alan Ashton-Smith (RED)
Rathna Ramanathan (Royal College of Art)
Eleanor Dare (Royal College of Art)
Tom Simmons (Royal College of Art)
Peter Oakley (Royal College of Art)

CENTRAL ASIA INTER-REGIONAL NETWORKING EVENT

From our discussions with crafts leaders, crafts people and policymakers, we suggest there is scope to convene a Central Asia inter-regional networking event to share insights, concerns and opportunities and deepen understanding of the potential for inter-regional craft initiatives. This could follow a similar format to the Tbilisi Crafting Futures Inter-Regional Networking Event and include a steering group meeting for the Central Asia Crafting Futures projects. The event could be located in e.g. Bishkek, Almaty or Tashkent and be held in conjunction with the workshops with crafts leaders and policymakers we have identified within the country specific pilot activities outlined below.

UZBEKISTAN PILOT ACTIVITIES

From the Uzbekistan scoping visit report that outlines the key findings and themes that emerged from our scoping visit to Uzbekistan, we suggest a number of workshops – one with policy-makers in Tashkent (see also inter-regional networking event suggestion above) and three with craft-makers within the regions (Bukhara, Samarkland and Nukus) – that allow the UK team to explore a number of different models and approaches to address the various issues identified with those involved within the Uzbekistan craft sector. The objective of these workshops is to initiate the process of co-creating potential solutions to these issues, in particular around new business models for sustainability, new modes of organising for empowering women, the interconnection between the different modes of craft training, and the appropriate mechanisms for recording and accessing archived craft knowledge.

KAZAKHSTAN PILOT ACTIVITIES

From the Kazakhstan scoping visit report that outlines the key findings and themes that emerged from our scoping visit to Kazakhstan we similarly suggest a number of workshops combined with roundtable discussions aimed at exploring the above core issues in more depth. We suggest that the pilot activities remain focused on the South East of the Country to allow continuity with the scoping visit but also to provide some overlap with the concurrent activities taking place in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. It would seem appropriate to focus on the broader Silk Road region for this project. In the long-term efforts should be made to link with Chevron and the Smithsonian's work in the West of the Country around the Atyrau Region.

The workshops could be held across one extended visit or two separate trips depending on staff availability. One workshop to be held with policymakers in either Almaty or NurSultan (as deemed appropriate, see also inter-regional networking event suggestion above) in conjunction with UoA (and possibly others) to showcase the importance of the sector and identify policy needs. A second set of workshops held with craft makers within the Almaty, Shymkent and Turkestan regions. These would allow the UK team to explore a number of different models and approaches to address the various issues identified with those involved within the Kazak craft sector. The objective of these workshops is to initiate the process of co-creating potential solutions to these issues, in particular around new business models, supply chains, marketing of the sector and the different modes of craft training, and the appropriate mechanisms for recording and accessing archived craft knowledge.

KYRGYZSTAN PILOT ACTIVITIES

From the findings and key themes identified during our scoping visit we also suggest focusing the Kyrgyzstan pilot project on a series of workshops in urban and rural locations to further explore the issues, topics, models and approaches we discussed with craft leaders and practitioners during the scoping visit. The pilot project workshops will aim to: collaboratively deepen knowledge of key issues identified by/with craftspeople and crafts leaders in Kyrgyzstan (including those relating to interregional concerns and opportunities), co-develop a post-colonial, culturally based and intersectional research methodology to support collective action in the region/inter-regionally, and co-create strategies for addressing issues that have been identified through the scoping visit, in particular around formats/methods for peer support and exchange, transmedia storytelling and communication, sustainable business development, and mechanisms for consolidating and enhancing the visibility of and access to) information about Kyrgyz crafts practice and projects. We suggest the locations for the workshops should be identified through discussions with the wider British Council Kyrgyzstan Crafting Futures team and affiliated experts but might include Bishkek, Osh, Karakol, Naryn or Talas.